Charlemagne’s Heir

New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)

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The Epitaphium Arsenii and Opposition to Louis the Pious
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The allusive dialogue in which Abbot Radbertus of Corbie commemorated his friend and predecessor Wala, Charlemagne's cousin, is a central source for the reign of Louis the Pious, and a source decidedly difficult. In choosing to emphasize the difficulty of the Epitaphium Arsenii I may risk a distortion of Radbertus's classical learning, and a diminution of his exegetical subtlety, but I hope to show how the political terminology of the work, seen in terms of its literary antecedents, has shaped our understanding of the reign of Louis the Pious. But if the perspective of the work is misunderstood, our understanding of the reign becomes distorted by a refusal to consider ideology to be evidence at least as important as Realpolitik.

I begin by listing the problems presented by the Epitaphium. The work cannot be securely dated, the characters are concealed by a series of allusive names, the text is known from only one copy, unread and incomplete, made at Corbie in the third quarter of the ninth century but not apparently corrected by the author. Fortunately it was first edited by Mabillon, and then by Dümmler and Traube, and Peter von Moos has identified sources which they missed. The Latin is subtle and allusive. When Radbertus composed the life of Wala's elder brother, Adalhard, he incorporated quotations into his text in untidy gobbets, and many of them have remained unidentified. By the time he wrote the Epitaphium his work as an exegete had taught him to assimilate such quotations with an intensity of feeling closer to the allusive culture of Boethius than to the scissors-and-paste anthologies of quotations of Hrabanus Maurus. The quotation, like a Roman coin in a Carolingian mint, is melted down and

1 The Epitaphium is cited in the edn. by E. Dümmler, Abhandlungen der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, phil.-hist. Klasse (1900), the Expositio in Matthaeum in the edn. by Dom B. Paulus (CC cont. med. 56, 56 A, 56 B).
3 Further quotations from Cicero, Sulpicius Severus, and the Bible are identified by L. Weinrich, Wala Graf, München und Rebell: Die Biographie eines Karolingers (Lübeck, 1963), 97–8. The quotation from Ennius (Dümmler, p. 23) is transmitted by Donatus and Bede; the quotation ‘iam puro etherioque sensu’ (p. 27) is Virgil, Aeneid, vi. 746, transmitted by Ambrose, De excessu fratri, i. 73, the quotation attributed to Virgil on p. 46 is Boethius, De Consolatione philosophiae, ii. v. 10; and the reference to Crisippus on p. 20 derives from Jerome, Epistula, 61. 3, and not from Seneca.
stamped in a new mould. Sentences are transposed, rewritten, expanded, or paraphrased. Consequently many borrowings have escaped detection. But their identification is not merely instructive for the students of Carolingian libraries and their users. The *Epitaphium* deliberately adopts this allusive and impenetrable style. I want to suggest how this was done in order to probe why it was done. The traditional view is that Radbertus had to conceal his defence of Wala from hostile readers, and to say what could not easily be said. But this implies that the work was designed to circulate widely. Yet I have found no evidence that it was known outside Corbie, and recent work on Carolingian historiography has drawn attention to the private nature of texts considered public. Janet Nelson has suggested that both the *Annales Bertiniani* and the histories of Nithard resolved the authors' own uncertainties about the recent past, rather than expressing a public policy. Such texts, like Carolingian annals, might be far more fluid than they appear in print, able to be amended or excerpted as their readers sought fit. To this class the *Epitaphium* belongs, yet modern readers are stamped by its vision of the crisis of Louis the Pious's reign, because it seems to tell us what Carolingian politicians really cared for.

The *Epitaphium* is one of the most original works of Carolingian political literature, and it is all too easy to regard it as no more than a quarry for facts. But any reader of the legislation of the councils of Louis the Pious's reign will recognize that facts were often irrelevant to Carolingian legislators, nor does the diligent reader of ‘mirrors for princes’ discover how a Carolingian *missus* was to be treated, or whether the Carolingian fisc was under threat. I cannot accept the silence of these sources as a sign of the immunity of Carolingian philosophical discourse to temporal concerns: these concerns shaped the specifics of Carolingian ideology, but they could not transform the perspective which that ideology required. It is the conflict between eternal truths and specific needs which creates the dramatic tension of the *Epitaphium*. It can also be pursued through Radbertus's theology and exegesis, and through the writings of Hrabanus, Hincmar, or Prudentius of Troyes, all of whom were forced to write history as well as theology.

First I want to consider the dating of the *Epitaphium*. The literary conventions of dialogue, which may be interrupted and resumed, and the absence of any evidence that Book I of the *Epitaphium* circulated independent of Book II, suggests that Weinrich's confident dating of Book I to 837–8 and Book II to
851–2 is unprovable.⁹ (Mabillon dated Book I to before 840.¹⁰) To assume that Book I circulated on its own is to assume that the Epitaphium did not need an account of Wala’s death, or an explanation of his rebellions. It is certainly possible that the dialogues about Wala which the work contains may have taken place in the late 830s, and that some of the interlocutors were dead before the work was finished, but the only relevant date for the text in its present form is the date of Book II. There is evidence that Radbertus revised many of his works, and the De corpore et sanguine Domini went through four editions in his lifetime.¹¹ Both Mabillon and Dümmler dated Book II after March 851 because of a presumed reference to the death of Lothar’s queen Irmigard. Irmigard had told the monks of Corbie about how nuns at her convent of Brescia had seen a vision of Wala’s soul taken up into heaven, at the moment when he died. Mabillon held that the convent was only hers after 848, but in fact it was a hereditary Frankish queen’s monastery¹² so that 848 is not a relevant date. The epithet ‘venerabilis’ used of Irmigard, and the imperfect ‘referebat’, need not imply that she was dead. If we take a reference to the ‘finem’ of Bernard of Septimania in Book II to mean his execution in 844, then the work has a terminus post quem.¹³ But the evidence for revision in Radbertus’s other works suggests that the Epitaphium may have been retained by the author and not ‘finished’, that is, turned into a text which could be shared with an audience outside Corbie. If this suggestion is accepted, then the terminus is the date of Radbertus’s death. But here the uncertainty is greater.

Radbertus’s friend Engelmodus, bishop of Soissons from 862 to 864, wrote a biographical verse tribute to his teacher, but it contains no evidence for dating,¹⁴ nor have subsequent scholars offered more convincing ones. Radbertus was replaced as abbot of Corbie by Hincmar’s protégé, Odo, by 851.¹⁵ He retired to St-Riquier, though he was buried at Corbie, where his bones are still on display. Professor Löwe, following Traube, kills Radbertus in 856–9 (Traube was content with one year, 856); Professor Matter kills him in 860, and Professor Brünhölzl in 865.¹⁶ I do not intend to add to the slaughter, but I am prepared to date the Epitaphium to 856, or even later. The second book

⁹ Weinrich, Wala, p. 7.
¹⁰ Mabillon, AA SS OSB (cit. n. 2), iv. 454.
¹¹ De corpore et sanguine Domini, ed. B. Paulus (CC cont. Med. 16; 1969), cf. Paulus on MS Laon 67 of Expositio in Matthaeum, i–iv, with the as yet unpublished Lyell Lectures of T. A. M. Bishop, arguing that the variations are in Radbertus’s hand. Similar alteration is found in the Vita Adalhardi, ch. 55: unlike Mabillon I regard them as authorial.
¹³ Epitaphium, ii. 15, p. 83.
starts by mentioning the death of Severus, one of the interlocutors in Book I, whose real name was Odilman. He was the recipient of Radbertus's commentary on Lamentations, which refers to the Viking siege of Paris, probably that of 846.\textsuperscript{17} The opening of Book II also describes Radbertus's regained peace and freedom of mind after countless cares of office, the huge matters of external business, the various outcomes of affairs and expenditure of life, and the long exhaustion of various journeyings.\textsuperscript{18} This may refer to Radbertus's departure from the abbey and resignation of his abbacy.

The references to contemporary events are harder to specify: the lessons of Wala's life are set in the present unhappy age, but they affirm a biblical typology in which Wala takes his place, rather than detailing distinct events. To be told that the advice of the nation has perished, faith has fled, peace vanished, and prosperity of all things is hopeless today, reveals Radbertus's disillusion, but sets that disillusion in a world of values, not a world of facts.\textsuperscript{19} 'Unde cotidie surgunt civilia bella, ut ita loquar, et plus quam civilia'\textsuperscript{20} suggests a date after 840, and possibly around 858, when Louis the German threatened Charles the Bald's kingdom, and when the Viking invasions were renewed.\textsuperscript{21} But they may be no later than 846, since the speech of Adeodatus affirms that like Jeremiah we should lament, a view which shapes Radbertus's decision to comment on Lamentations.\textsuperscript{22} It seems unlikely that Radbertus would have overlooked Lothar's monastic conversion and death at Prüm in 855, but we cannot be certain that he knew of the conversion. If I am right to assume that the work was kept at Corbie, and not issued to an audience, then it may not have been completed: certainly the apparent division between Books I and II, which has led most scholars securely to date Book I to soon after Wala's death in 836, implies that Book I was kept at Corbie and not completed.

It may seem that this discussion of the date of the work has returned to Mabillon's suggestion of 852. However, I have tried to show why the reasons for his choice of date are unsatisfactory, and to point to the references to Bernard's execution (844), the Viking invasions (846–7), and Radbertus's resignation (c.851) as dates implied by passages in the text. Any attempt to date the work more precisely must assume that it was issued but the lack of any evidence that it was known at Corvey, where Wala had been a founder and abbot, and should have been remembered, suggests that it was not. Consequently it may not have seemed complete. The loss of the conclusion through

\textsuperscript{17} Explanatio in Threnos (PL 120), cols. 1059, 1096, 1152.
\textsuperscript{18} Epitaphium, ii, 1, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. ii, 6, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. ii, 6, p. 67 and n. The quotation is used at the synod of Ver (MGH Concilia, 3), p. 40.
\textsuperscript{21} The silence of the Epitaphium about Wala's role in the conversion of the Danes by Ansgar and his Corvey brethren may be explained by the hostility of Horie to the Christians. This was the subject of complaint in 847, and Hamburg was sacked in 850. I owe this suggestion to Ian Wood, 'Christians and Pagans in Ninth-century Scandinavia', in P. Sawyer, B. Sawyer, and I. Wood (eds.), The Christianization of Scandinavia (Alingäs, 1987), 36–67.
\textsuperscript{22} Epitaphium, ii, pp. 60–2.
damage to the final leaf of the manuscript makes it impossible to ascertain how complete the Epitaphium was. If it was composed at St-Riquier, then it seems probable that Radbertus knew Nithard’s account of the rebellion against Louis the Pious and its consequences, a work composed and preserved at that abbey. It would have had a particular interest for an equally disillusioned abbot, concerned to ‘clean up the blot of error for posterity’ and to explain how God favoured Charles the Bald against Lothar. By detailing the life of Wala Radbertus could explain how the events chronicled by Nithard fitted a more Augustinian scheme than Nithard had allowed. Both writers agreed that the present discontents could only be understood by starting from the rebellions in Louis the Pious’s reign. In contrast to Nithard, Radbertus’s experience of Carolingian politics had been institutional; he had acted as abbot of a major monastery to secure an episcopal privilege defending the rights of that monastery. But his mistrust of the world beyond revealed the impact of the 830s.

To understand this mistrust and its validity, it is important to acknowledge the achievement of the Epitaphium. Its form is unparalleled, as is its network of literary references. Instead of regarding these features as an unnecessary obscuring of history, it is essential to grasp how they reveal as much about the understanding of Louis the Pious’s reign as the royal diplomata. The first problem the work presents are the names which conceal the characters. Arsenius and Antony, Justinian, Justina, and their sons Honorius, Gratian, and Melanius, Justina’s lover Naso, and Phasur set the scene in the lifetime of Ambrose, and reveal that ecclesiastical history was closely studied at Corbie. To determine the author’s intentions we must explore the relation between these bynames and the characters they conceal. In Carolingian literature the letters of Alcuin, known at Corbie, had started a fashion for bynames. The convention can only work in a small and intimate circle, aware of the potential of imitatio, but also alive to the gulf between past and present. The names in the Epitaphium do not offer a specific chronological framework into which the action can be transposed. Adalhard is called Antony by Radbertus, following Alcuin’s example, and Antony died in 356, having founded a monastery and advised an emperor. Arsenius, the tutor of Theodosius’s children, is known to readers of the Vitae patrum and the martyrologies. He left the court in the 390s and died as a monk, asserting ‘non possum esse cum Deo et cum honoribus’. Louis the Pious, however, is not called Theodosius but Justinian, presumably by analogy with Justina, the name used for Judith. Justina persecuted Ambrose, but her son was educated by Ambrose. By casting Lothar as Honorius and Louis the German as Gratian Radbertus not only identifies

13 Vitae patrum (PL 72), cols. 762–4, 771, 801 (the conversion), 850, 912–13, 953–4, 973.
Lothar as Wala’s pupil (‘pedagogus Augusti caesaris’, Ep. Ars. i. 55); he knew that Rome fell under Honorius. We must recognize the implicit word-play on ‘honor’ and the ensuing criticism of Lothar. (It is hard to envisage any account written after 843 in Francia which would not criticize Lothar.) The frequent recurrence of the name of Ambrose, who provides a source for much of the prose of the Epitaphium, reminds us that the statue of Theodoric at Aachen was the Carolingian equivalent of the altar of Victory, and both Prudentius and Ambrose offered the Carolingian reader accounts of that struggle.

Despite recent attempts to show that the name Naso, applied to Bernard of Septimania, proves that he was a king of the Jews, it is clear that the name refers to Ovid, who was known to have loved a queen and to have been deservedly exiled. The oldest extant witness of Ovid’s Tristia was copied at Corbie at the same date as our sole manuscript of the Epitaphium. The most problematic choice of name is Justinian. Louis the Pious is not remembered for his legislation or his reconquests, and the Carolingians knew Theodora from the mosaics of Ravenna, not from the pages of Procopius. But Notker reminds us that Louis had a natural genius for making just legal decisions, and Justinian’s theology was known in the West. By transposing the names of the participants into a Late Antique past, Radbertus deliberately adopted a typological vision of history, able to provide ‘room for the sharpest reversal of all that one could discern as progress’, concerned with the transition from the earthly to the heavenly city.

Such a vision deployed values and not the politics of faction. Close analysis of the traceable interests and statements of Lothar, Louis the German, or Pippin makes the rebels of 833 look very different from Radbertus’s heroes. But the Epitaphium was concerned to provide a memorial to an elder statesman who had failed to form a profitable alliance with the rebels, and so it appealed to biblical values, filtered through a net of pagan and Christian authorities, offering a range and ripeness of continuity in the tradition they had established and Wala had continued. In the most radical transformation of a source, Radbertus describes the foundation of Corvey by Adalhard and Wala as the antithesis to the earthly city founded by Romulus and Remus. It must endure the threats of property, worldly pleasures, and pride, but it is the bastion of true spiritual nobility, that nobility which can make Radbertus the foundling

26 Rufinus, Historia ecclesiastica, viii. 11, ix. 21 (where Justina is a tyrannus), Freculph, ii. iv. 24 (PL 106. 1223-4).
the equal of Wala, Charlemagne’s cousin. Augustine also provides a discussion of the nature of justice which is far more alive to its complexities than most of the mirrors for princes.

Iustitiae partes constat quia plurimae sunt. Alia siquidem est iustitia regni Dei, alia regni terreni, alia inter parentes et propinquos, alia inter externos et alienos, in tantum, quot sunt leges et consuetudines gentium, tot dicantur ex usu iustitiae partes. Properterea ex lege Dei, non minus quam ex lege patriae, de istis colligendus est modus iustitiae, etiam et ex lege naturae.

The source is Augustine’s Civitas Dei, xix. 21, but the reference to lex naturae appears unparalleled in Carolingian thought, and the hierarchy from perfect divine justice to the justice of the family and towards the stranger shows that theological principles were capable of as much refinement in the ninth century as they had received from Jerome and Augustine. Such a text offers a caution to those who dismiss the rhetoric of the Epitaphium as unsubtle and unrealistic.

The most substantial source for the structure and phraseology of the work is Ambrose’s De excessu fratris. Like the Epitaphium, this is a two-part memorial address which movingly seeks to understand death and offer consolation. The Rule of St Benedict provides a norm for Wala’s conduct at Corbie but it is the classical authors who make the Epitaphium a more flexible and sensitive work than any other piece of Carolingian biography. Terence is frequently quoted to supply intimacy of conversation, and also for an important passage contrasting courtiers and honest men. Seneca’s Apocolocyntosis offers a distinction between historia and fabula which transcends Servius and Isidore.

Sed quid ignoti facient, cum a conscio criminamur? aut non legisti, quid nuper attulit gentilium tema, quod quidam Drusillam in caelum euntem viderit? Fortassis idem vidisse Arsenium habentem iter in caelum narrabit. Quapropter eum interrogate, si vobismet non creditis, velit nolitve, quae in celo aguntur, quia divinis non credimus, forsitan se vidisse monstrabit, quem si interroges, vel soli narrabit; coram pluribus, ut estimo, numquam verbum facturus.

The complexity of this borrowing shows how carefully the Epitaphium is constructed. The pagan fable is used to underline the impossibility of pleasing all of the audience, and of being believed. Even Christ’s resurrection and redemption of mankind are doubted by some of Radbertus’s contemporaries.

11 Epitaphium, i. 18, p. 47; i. 20, p. 49.
12 Epitaphium, ii. 17, p. 85.
13 CSEL 73; von Moos, Consolatio, i. 140–2, ii. 100–1.
14 Epitaphium, i. 21, p. 52; i. 22–3, pp. 52–3; ii. 15, p. 85.
15 Epitaphium, pp. 19, 24, 25, 32, 38, 50–2, 58. The Corbie copy of Terence (BN Lat. 7900) had illustrations.
16 Isidore, Etymologiae, i. 49, Servius, in Aen. i. 235 (ed. Thilo, i. 89).
17 Epitaphium, i. p. 21. This testimony is older than the earliest witnesses, St Gallen MS 569 and Valenciennes MS 411, both illustrated in R. Merkelbach and H. van Theil, Lateinisches Leseheft (Göttingen, 1969), 33–9.
The implicit comparison is not an attempt to glorify Wala, it develops an earlier point; Wala’s life is a history which must be read in one’s conscience, the facts require the assent born of grief for the dead man, and understanding of his Christian and exemplary virtues.

But behind the explicit quotations lie implicit ones. Radbertus is describing a world of senators, the heirs of Boethius and Cicero. Both authors offered a vocabulary which could describe the predicament of the intellectual in politics. Alcuin’s reading of the De inventione and of the De consolatione philosophiae had brought to Charlemagne’s court an anachronistic Platonism which was to acquire a particular force in the face of the impossibility which clerics seeking to secure an Augustinian res publica met amid the factions of earthly courts. An autobiographical story sets out Radbertus’s viewpoint:

Hinc sane aliquis ex senatoribus prior, cum contra eum talia ut se corrigeret ferme ante biennium depromeret, ratione superatus et sententiis divinis, Audisne? inquit. Profecto ista que narras, lieet divina, in eo seculo, quo nati et quando nati sumus, locum agende vitae habuere et vim dictorum, nunc autem in isto quo nunc sumus, scias nihil utilitatis et rationis inesse.99

The shift from the age of Charlemagne to the present age, when people know what they want, instead of wanting what they know to be right, means that Radbertus leaves the senator straining after his will. All is tottering, and fides has to be defined afresh. In order to correct such senators, Radbertus turned to classical models: ‘An ignoras, Adeodate, quod vir bonus non plus sibi quam patriae consulit et civibus? Scipionem quoque nosti, et relicuos eiusdem seculi viros, qui pro maximis patriae ac plurimis virtutum beneficiis odia tulerunt et varia mortis discrimina.40 The reference to Scipio probably derives from Augustine, but Radbertus’s wide reading of Cicero shaped his vision of the rhetoric of the memorial dialogue.41 Approaching Cicero from an Augustinian standpoint, he could not readily recapture the world of virtuous eloquence to which the Epitaphium occasionally appeals. For Radbertus, virtue was Christian: ‘Nemo militans Deo implicat se in negotiis secularibus.”

Despite its concealment of individuals, the Epitaphium is explicit about principles. The long discussion about ‘fides’ in Book I starts from Scripture: it requires love (Galatians 5: 6) and to love what is unjust is to hate your own

39 Epitaphium i. 3, p. 25.
40 Ibid. i. 1, p. 22.
41 Radbertus quotes the Cato Maior, the De inventione, the De officiis, and the Tusculans, chiefly in his Expositio in Matthaem.
42 2 Tim. 2: 4 quoted Epitaphium, ii. 2, pp. 63–4, and also at the 829 council of Paris (MGH Concilia, 2), p. 636, and at the 846 council of Meaux-Paris (MGH Concilia, 3), p. 102.
soul, so that fides cannot involve supporting an earthly ruler against God’s laws. Here is Radbertus’s justification of the right of resistance, ‘ut singule fidei partes iustitie armoniam uno concentu precinerent’. Any argument that Book I of the Epitaphium could have been issued alone, because it was less politically subversive than Book II, must explain why this doctrine did not threaten the tactical politics of the last years of Louis’s reign. In Book II, the principles are set out in quotations from Wala’s schedula presented to a court assembly in December 828, and by the articles which Lothar and Gregory IV presented to Louis the Pious in 833. The authenticity of these documents has been challenged by those who regard Radbertus as a fabricator of propaganda, and more recently by those who discern interpolations in the texts, or deny the validity of a conceptual analysis of Carolingian political thought. The first complaint can be easily met: Radbertus was not writing in a tradition of classical historiography in which speeches preceded battles with rhetorical inevitability. He was a Christian historian, trained in a genre founded upon ‘authority and not the free judgement of which the pagan historians were proud’. Authentie documents were the proper source of Carolingian historical accuracy, and Radbertus, like Nithard, could supply them.

The schedula of 828, quoted in Book II, may have been prepared for discussion at the council of Paris in the following year. Wala’s presence at Paris cannot be proved, but it has been assumed by Scharf and Morrison, and Weinrich suggests that Radbertus may ignore the council because he himself was not present. Both Wala and the council quote Wisdom 6: 26 on the role of the king, and quote Julianus Pomerius on the nature of Church property. Julianus Pomerius is not quoted by Radbertus elsewhere, suggesting that Radbertus was reporting Wala’s own words. The discrepancies between the text of the schedula and the acts of the council suggest that Radbertus did not use the acts as his source. Wala defines the human and divine elements in the Church, distinguishing the duties of the king and his bishops. He regarded the bishops as too greedy and reluctant to correct abuses, but he also cautions the king not to intervene in divine affairs by granting ecclesiastical honours to laymen, and he attacks the royal capella. All these features recur in the ‘Rescriptum consultationis sive exhortationis episcoporum’ of 829. But Wala is accused of having been ready to restrict Church holdings of property to what

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43 Epitaphium, i. 3, pp. 24–5.
44 Simson, Jahrbücher (cit. n. 8), i. 336. For a more damaging account, which does not explicitly mention Radbertus, cf. J. Fried, ‘Der karolingische Herrschaftsverband im 9ten Jahrhundert zwischen “Kirche” und “Könighaus”’, Historische Zeitschrift, 235 (1082), 1–43.
48 MGH Capit. 2, pp. 27–51, p. 29 on elections, pp. 37, 39, on capella.
was necessary, and to grant what remained to laymen (*militiae saeculi*). Recently Felten has suggested that this reference to lay abbots is an interpolation by Radbertus, who wanted to make Wala a prophet for his own age. Felten asserts that lay abbots were not a problem before the councils of Yutz and Ver. But he is forced to concede that Tours and Chalon were in lay hands in Louis the Pious’s reign. Radbertus’s concerns are echoed by the *Concilium Romanum* of 826 and the 836 council of Aachen. Felten is certainly right to draw attention to the increased abuses of the 840s, Radbertus himself asserts that ‘quia cum bene coepisset rex de his, in fine crescentibus malis a saecularibus sunt pervasa’, the 'rex' being Charles the Bald, and the subject being the monasteries. Radbertus corresponded with Lupus, as concerned with his rights to the monastery of St Josse as with the pursuit of more philological rewards. He attended the council of Meaux–Paris in 845, and possibly the council of Beauvais, on which it drew. Meaux–Paris also uses the expression ‘ordo ecclesiasticus’ found in Radbertus’s report of Wala’s views. Anton has shown the continuity of thought between the councils of Louis’s and Charles’s reigns. So Felten’s assertions depend on a continuity, and reject the possibility that Wala was privy to discussions of policy which may have been tentative. For Radbertus, Wala’s position conceded that some monastic property might be granted to laymen, but he opposed lay control of monasteries and royal control of episcopal elections.

The second document which Radbertus used was the set of *capitula* presented to Louis the Pious in June 833 by Lothar and his brothers. He reveals the importance of these *capitula* by preceding them with a definition of justice, a definition which draws on *Civitas Dei*, xix. 21. The discussion centres on the obligations which vassals owe to their lord. Lothar’s opposition to Louis depended on his understanding of the 817 *Ordinatio*, which had established his right to the imperial title and his duty to defend the Church, and on his understanding of history. ‘Hoc semper audivi in vestro sacro concilio, et in clarissimorum senatu virorum, hoc semper in vestris recognovi factis, hoc a vobis audivi, hoc legimus in gestis antiquorum, fortes viros, et clarissimos ac bene meritos honorari debere magis et gloria inlustrari, quam depelli.’

The definition of the vassal in terms of his oath of fidelity is shared by Wala and Hildemar of Corbie, as Ganshof noted. When Lothar denies that he had broken that oath, or turned Louis’s vassals away from their oaths, he claims

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50 MGH Concilia, 2, pp. 572, 714–17.

51 *Epitaphium*, ii. 4, p. 65; cf. MGH Capit. 2, p. 434, on Charles the Bald’s treatment of monastic possessions.

52 MGH Concilia, 3, p. 409, cf. MGH Concilia, 2, p. 707 (Aachen 836); MGH Concilia, 3, p. 32.

53 *Epitaphium*, ii. 17, p. 87.

54 F. L. Ganshof, *Qu'est-ce que la féodalité?* (Brussels, 1968), 34–5.
that they are fighting for Louis’s fides. They were not unjust, instead they fought for justice. The text of the capitula which preserve this debate shows how clearly Wala and Radbertus saw that the reign of Louis the Pious involved a challenge to the underlying tenets of Carolingian political theory, in part because of the vagueness of these tenets. The negotiations seemed to offer a hope of success. But the desertion of Louis’s army at the Field of Lies, which was adjudged a miracle by all, and proved that the empire had fallen to Lothar, caused Radbertus to ask Wala if the empire was now changed. Wala replied that he had tried to calm the civil war that was threatening, but that now no one heard them, for all were greedy for honours. In the words of the Epitaphium, ‘Divisum regnum cotidie desolatur et corrumpitur, quoniam ubi non est gubernator populus corruit. Gubernatorem autem Deum hinc inde amiserunt singuli, quando ficto inter discrimina requisiuntur corde.’

But the date of Radbertus’s work must give us pause. In 849 Radbertus left Corbie for St-Riquier, where he may have read Nithard’s History. Like Nithard’s, his work was designed to remind his audience of the relevance of the past. In order to offer the monks of Corbie and Corvey an effective consolation, he had to justify Wala’s stand as their model, even in rebellion. A comparison with Notker may clarify his intention, for Notker also divides his work into a book dealing chiefly with religion, and a book dealing with politics. Notker deliberately inverted Einhard’s authoritative scheme of royal biography, but, like Radbertus, he considered his hero’s political stance as the determining factor in evaluating the merits of his own politics. In the prefaces to his theological writings, Radbertus insists on his activity in the world, and in the Epitaphium he mentions his presence in the rebel camp in 833, when he and Wala provided Gregory IV with proof texts, as well as his attempt to reconcile Wala and Louis the Pious in 831. The privilege which he secured for Corbie at the council of Paris in 847 shows both that he was respected by his ecclesiastical contemporaries and that he was quick to perceive how the problems of rewarding vassals after the division of the empire would imperil Church lands and Church. So the picture of Radbertus as an idealist unaware of the grim realities of Carolingian politics ignores his awareness of the
harshest of these realities: in Leyser’s words, ‘You would spend so much longer in the other world than in this one.’ The non-political sections of the Epitaphium, omitted by the Monumenta Germaniae Historica, cannot be ignored: we must acknowledge that many of the contradictions we choose to find in the Epitaphium result from a desire to instruct the author in the realities of his own age. ‘Ecce iam pene nulla est saecularis vitae actio, quam non sacerdotes Christi administrant, nulla mundi negotia, in quibus ministri altaris se non occupent, nulla rerum improbitas, qua se monasticus ordo non implicit.’

The consequences of this change are clearly expounded throughout the Epitaphium.

Iam rarus qui regibus fidem exhibeat, nullus patriae aut civibus qui recte consulat, nullus qui sociis et amicis debitam caritatem impendat. . . . O misera nostra tempora, O stulte discordiarum nostrarum insidiae que ad tantum civilium debacchationum perduxere pacatissimum regnum.... Idcirco iuxta veritatis sententiam divisum regnum cotidie desolatur et corrumpitur, quoniam ubi non est gubernator, populus corruit.

These passages reveal Radbertus’s regrets at the collapse of the imperial ideal. If my suggestion that the Epitaphium implicitly criticizes Nithard’s attempt to understand the preconditions for 843 is correct, then Radbertus’s loyalty to the idea of empire deserves particular attention. ‘Non inmerito talia contigerunt, immo quia noluerunt recipere spiritum veritatis ad correptionem, receperunt spiritum erroris ad vertiginem. Inde est quod adhuc hodie nemo principum explicare potest reipublicae vias ad iustitiam.’ The Christian empire requires the continual reform of penance, and the adherence to divine laws and the decrees of the Church. The relevance of these decrees is brought out in Radbertus’s treatment of John the Baptist’s reproaches to Herod in his Commentary on Matthew: ‘Quapropter arguendi sunt nunc in tempore quidam qui dicunt non debent arguere reges aut potestates huius saeculi neque durius increpare ne forte atrocius commoveantur ad iram, sicut a quodam audivi episcoporum. Quia rex sub nullius inquit redactus est potestate.’

Radbertus, like the councils of Paris, Aachen, and Meaux–Paris, is aware of the need for the clergy to check royal power. Fuhrmann has linked his intervention in defence of Gregory IV in 833 with the later composition of the Pseudo-Isidorean forgeries, produced with the resources of the Corbie library.
But Radbertus’s vision of a Christian commonwealth was more complicated than the mere statement of Christian virtues necessary for the moral ethos of the aristocracy. He sought to show these virtues functioning in society.

To understand the *Epitaphium*, it is necessary to explore Radbertus’s vision of faith as the crucial social bond. In his treatise on the Eucharist he sought to define the necessity of the mass, the daily remedy for the penitent sinner. The Eucharist offers a bridge from the present world to the eternal community of the elect, and an embodiment of the unity of Christ’s Church. ‘Transeat ergo Christus in nobis de hoc seculo ad patrem. Transeamus et nos in illo, quia cum illo simul omnes, si eius membra connumeramur, una persona et unum corpus sumus.’ Just as the sacrament offers a unity of figure and truth, so, in the *Epitaphium*, present events can be seen as figures, Wala is another Arsenius, a Jeremiah, a Columbanus, to whom Ambrose’s phrases about his dead brother are the correct tribute. For the dominant tension of the *Epitaphium* is that between the eternal values of any Christian community and the political manoeuvres of Louis’s reign. After the division of the empire in 833 Wala recognized that eternal values had been defeated:

Unche cum quadem die primi ac consules palatii secretius insisterent ac vigilarent, cum augusto filio totum sibi diviserunt imperium, non attendentes prerogativa parentum nec coequalitates magnorum, non innumerisatam nobilium, non bene meritum retro fidelium, non ecclesiaram (quod maus est) dignitatem, non Dei ex corde reverentiam... Concitantur hinc inde sediones et augentur discrimina, in tantum ut nulla sit domus, nulla civitas nullumque municipium, nullus pagus et nulla provintia, in qua non regnet actenus discordia.

In such a context, the pessimism of the *Epitaphium* is not misplaced. Radbertus had seen a Christian empire as the defence of the freedom of the Church and of the state, a bastion of concord, stability, and the honour and glory of the Christian religion. Charles the Bald shared this vision: ‘Lothar hielt an der Reichseinheitsidee bis zu seinem Tode fest.’ The Astronomer had objected to Lothar’s attempt, in 833, to divide the empire. In 843 the assembled bishops of Charles’s kingdom affirmed that there was such sense of discord ‘that we clearly lack divine grace and we all burn from the contagion of the first evil by which we were prevented from seeing our own ill’. In 845 Prudentius of Troyes, in the Annals of St Bertin, could affirm that ‘the justice of divine goodness was so greatly offended by our sins that he laid waste

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68 *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, ed. Paulus, p. 130.
69 *Epitaphium*, ii. 19, p. 90.
70 Ibid. ii. 10, p. 76.
72 Vita Hludovicii, ch. 48, p. 636.
73 MGH Concilia, 2, p. 254.
Christian kingdoms’. To ignore Radbertus’s contemporaries is the surest way to convict him of naiveté.

The politics of the reign of Louis the Pious cannot be depicted in terms of the supposed affiliations of the presumed members of important noble families alone. To do so is to risk ignoring the more noble households which members of these families resolved to enter or to endow, where masses were said for the repose of the souls of many loyal families. The households of St Nazarius of Lorsch, St Martin of Tours, St Remigius and St Denis and St Gallen, St Peter at Corbie or St Peter at Rome, were not solely concerned with temporal rewards. And the Epitaphium is addressed to the members of such a family. It establishes an opposition to Louis the Pious based upon a rejection of the temporary goods of this world. As such, it offers a testimony to the force of Carolingian ideology. And to study the Carolingians without mastering their ideology is to risk ignoring the strengths, both of Louis the Pious and of his opponents.74

74 I would like to express my gratitude to Dr S. Airlie and Professor H.W. Goetz for their suggestions during the discussion of this paper.