Charlemagne's Heir

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

EDITED BY
PETER GODMAN
AND
ROGER COLLINS

CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD
1990
Bonds of Power and Bonds of Association in the Court Circle of Louis the Pious

STUART AIRLIE

I take my text from Thegan, from the well-known moment in his Life of Louis the Pious when the exasperated chorepiscopus of Trier rounds upon the wretched Ebbo, archbishop of Reims: 'The king made you free, not noble, since that would be impossible.' I am not concerned with what Thegan’s text tells us about concepts of nobility in the Carolingian world. That question has already been well handled by many other scholars, including Jane Martindale and Hans-Werner Goetz. Rather, I intend to consider what Thegan’s text, and others like it, can tell us about power in the reign of Louis the Pious. For while Ebbo remained, in Thegan’s eyes, unable to transcend his origins, a fact that his treacherous behaviour clearly demonstrated, politically (and culturally, one might add) Ebbo towered above his acid-tongued opponent. He was enabled to do this through his possession of the archbishopric of Reims and he had gained this through the largess of Louis the Pious. If neither Louis nor Charlemagne, who had freed Ebbo, could make him noble they could, thanks to the resources of patronage at their disposal, make him powerful, one of the potentes.

It was this misuse, as he saw it, of royal patronage that worried Thegan and it worried him because he thought that the rise of Ebbo was not a unique case. Thegan noted that Louis was not solely responsible for one of the blemishes of his reign: ‘quod ille non incipiebat.’ This was the long-standing bad custom (‘iamdudum illa pessima consuetudo erat’) of appointing the ‘summi pontifices’ from the ranks of the ‘vilissimis servis’3 Other ninth-century writers later than Thegan fretted about social mobility. The mid-century author of the Passio Ragneberti, as Paul Fouracre has recently pointed out, projected back into the Merovingian period, in language that seems to echo Thegan’s, his contemporary worries about men rising from the dust (‘ex infimo genere’) into

1 Thegan, Vita Hludovici imperatoris, ed. R. Rau, Quellen zur Karolingischen Reichsgeschichte, i (Darmstadt, 1955), ch. 44, p. 240: ‘Fecit te liberum, non nobilem, quod impossibile est.’
3 Thegan, Vita Hludovici, ch. 20, pp. 228-30.
a position of power from which they could oppress the old nobility. Adrevald of Fleury, like Thegan, blamed the Carolingians for encouraging such trends. He claimed that Charlemagne was suspicious of his noble following and so had entrusted the cura regni to some of his servi of the fisc.

The picture presented by these sources is interesting but problematical. Are we really to believe that Charlemagne and Louis set out to create a nobility of service in opposition to an aristocracy of birth? Surely not. Any attempt to do so was, as Karl Ferdinand Werner has emphasized, scarcely conceivable at that time. The argument of Jürgen Hannig that such an attempt was doomed to failure is therefore irrelevant. After all, the Carolingians respected the nobility. They felt keenly the misfortunes of their leading followers. When plague swept away Lothar's great men in 836–7, 'quorum recessu Frantia nobilitate orbata', Louis the Pious was grief-stricken. Their death was a blow to an aristocratic community, a community temporarily divided by political dispute but fundamentally united by membership of the noble class, and by sharing similar status of birth, a similar way of life, and set of values.

The great magnates, therefore, cannot have been very troubled at the giving of routine tasks to a small number of court functionaries. Sometimes, in a crisis, a relatively lowly member of the court hierarchy found himself dealing with the great men of the realm. In 839 the venator Dagolfus was responsible for carrying Louis's mobilization orders to Counts Hatto, Poppo, and Gebhard. These counts were being summoned to deal with trouble threatened by Louis the German. In such an emergency Dagolfus, presumably a royal huntsman at court and thus conveniently at hand, was a natural choice for the mission. His selection was no infringement on the rights of a resentful aristocracy, as F. Staab claims. In fact, Dagolfus may have had a perfectly respectable position at court. There is a place, and it is not the lowest, for hunters and falconers in the De ordine palatii. Furthermore, magnates did not shrink from entrusting important messages of their own to such figures.

---


5 Miracula s. Benedicti, ed. O. Holder-Egger (MGH SS 15), ch. 15, p. 486.


7 J. Hannig, Consensus fidelium (Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 27, ed. K. Bosl; Stuttgart, 1982), 260.


10 Untersuchungen zur Gesellschaft am Mittelhein in der Karolingerzeit (Geschichtliche Landeskunden, 11; Wiesbaden, 1975), 341.

11 Hincmar, De ordine palatii, ed. T. Gross and R. Schieffer (MGH Fontes), chs. 16 and 24, pp. 64 and 76.
Magnates at the palace of Charlemagne used Gerricus, the falconer, to convey their advice to Louis the Pious in Aquitaine. Gerricus was a messenger for the power-brokers; he was not a power-broker himself. Gerricus and Dagolfus had a degree of access to the king and it was upon that that their usefulness depended.

It is, however, the role of men like Dagolfus and Gerricus that will be considered in this paper. Beside the great magnates, the natural companions of the king, such men were small figures. But their association with the court, with the person of the king, gave them importance and, crucially, identity. An identity gained almost exclusively through royal service, an identity gained through what one might call the bond of association with the king, meant that such figures shared something with the more exalted of the king's following. At court both the great nobles and the humbler royal servants were the ministeriales palatini. Hincmar in the De ordine palatii shows us a variety of officers of differing rank busily engaged in tasks of differing importance in the palace but all united in that they shared the identity of ministeriales palatini. Recently Johannes Fried has argued that such ministri rei publicae were not the officials of an abstract community, but, very specifically, the servants of the king. Bearing this in mind, and against the background of Thegan's and Adrevald's comments cited above, I intend to explore three aspects of royal service in the reign of Louis the Pious to see what we can learn about the concrete manifestations of royal power. These three aspects are, firstly, the court itself, the community of the palatini; secondly, the administrators of the royal fisc; and finally the career of Ebbo, who combines, as we shall see, the world of the court and the world of the fisc.

First, then, the world of the palace. If the king's courtiers did not see themselves as ministri of an abstractly conceived res publica, did they define their essential identity as consisting in their work for the king? How far did courtiers wear, as it were, the livery of Louis? To begin with, we know that their enemies considered the palace chaplains as a distinct group of men who sought to monopolize the high ecclesiastical appointments in the empire. Walahfrid Strabo denounced such figures in his Visio Wettini and Paschasius Radbertus tells us that Wala also attacked corrupt capellani, a charge taken up

12 '... Gerrico capis praetato, cum in palatio moraretur, ... monitus est tam a Francis quam a Germanis, ut ad patrem rex veniret ...', Astronomer, Vita Hludovici, ch. 20, p. 286.
15 What follows is essentially an impressionistic survey of part of the careers of some of Louis's court personnel; I hope to analyse more fully the relations between court and government in a forthcoming book on Carolingian politics. There is a profile of Louis's court in B. Simson, Jährbucher des fränkischen Reiches unter Ludwig dem Frommen, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1874–76), ii. 232–65.
by the reforming synods of the 820s. Lupus of Ferrières also grumbled about the greed of the *clerici palatii*. I am not really concerned here with the question of how many *capellani* did manage to secure a plum job. After all, Lupus probably was not really too worried about that either; he was quite happy when Judith was using her queenly influence on his behalf (perhaps thus turning him into an honorary palace clerk). The point to be stressed here is that the palace clergy were perceived to be a group apart, a special and privileged body of men. It might be worth noting, in this context, Josef Fleckenstein’s observation that not all of the palace clergy of this period were of equally distinguished birth.

But outsiders who feel themselves to be excluded from the centres of power can be wilfully subjective in their attributing existence to a privileged group. Thus for Thegan the court was dominated by low bishops like Ebbo and by bishops ‘ex barbaris nationibus’, by which he probably meant, as Egon Boshof has suggested, men like Agobard of Lyons, who was from Spain. But we know from some poignant expressions in his own writings that Agobard felt himself to be at some distance from the inner circles favoured by Louis.

Did the insiders, the people who actually worked in the palace, perceive themselves to be a distinct group? There is evidence to suggest that they did. The figure and writings of Einhard are crucial here. We know how close he felt to the royal dynasty. As the famous opening words of the *Vita Karoli* tell us, Charlemagne was not only his ‘dominus’ but his ‘nutritor’. The *Vita Karoli* is very much a courtier’s text. We know that Louis’s court had a copy and we possess the dedicatory verses written by another courtier, the *bibliothecarius* Gerward, to whose career we shall return. The text was edited by another notable occupant of the palace, Walahfrid Strabo, who praised Einhard, in
terms that reveal a courtier’s perspective, as one of the most outstanding palatini of his time, and Walahfrid also thought it worth recording that Einhard survived the disturbances that racked Louis’s court.  

Another remarkable work by Einhard casts considerable light on to the world of the palace. This is his bizarre account of the translatio of the relics of Saints Marcellinus and Petrus to Seligenstadt. Einhard was an important man and I do not wish to suggest that any courtier could attain Einhard’s stature simply by virtue of being at court, but his text here reveals the existence of a way of life that must, at least in part, have been common to everyone there, both the great and the less great, a way of life conducted according to rhythms that must at least in part have been shared by all. Einhard’s text is punctuated with the phrase ‘according to custom’ (‘secundum consuetudinem’). For example, ‘In the month of November, as usual, I was preparing to travel to court’ and ‘rising early in the morning, according to the custom of courtiers’, a phrase that is backed up by the description of Charlemagne in the Vita Karoli hearing court-cases (and delegating business to his ministri) while dressing. Part of Einhard’s text recounts how much he wanted his fellow courtiers (‘aulici’) to take note of the miracles of ‘his’ saints. The world of the court, its rhythms and processes, inform the text so much that even the angel Gabriel, when he wishes to send an urgent spiritual message to Louis the Pious, is described as going through the proper channels and as understanding the need to have a patron at court.

The text reveals that Einhard did win the attention of his companions at court. When Gerward, the palace librarian, was travelling from Nijmegen to Aachen, he stopped off at a fundus regius, some eight leagues from Aachen. We see here, incidentally, how the royal palace extends its fabric over space; likewise, it was at a villa regia that Einhard and his companions stayed for a night on their way to Aschen. Gerward asked his host for the latest palace gossip and his host, interestingly enough, was able to tell him it. It was, of course, the story of miracles worked by Einhard’s relics.

So, Einhard’s Translatio shows us a world of a community, the palatini, the aulici, with habits, like getting up early in the morning, and gossip common to all. It is a world that is not confined to Aachen, or the immediate environs of...
whatever palace the king is in, as the stays in villae regiae demonstrate. It is a
world of a political community, centring upon the king. All members of this
community have at least one thing in common, viz., their royal service. It is
not surprising that, in the Vita Karoli, Einhard notes that even the lowly door-
keepers (‘janitores’) of the church at Aachen so benefited from the royal largess
that they did not need to perform their duties (‘ministrare’) ‘in privato
habitu’.

Further examples can be added. Gerward, who was probably, according to
Josef Fleckenstein, one of Einhard’s closest friends, did not lose his interest in
the court when he retired from there into a monastery. There he wrote (part
of) the Annales Xantenses. This text reveals his continuing interest in members
of the royal family like Judith, and Louis’s half-brother Hugh, as well as in
other ex-courtiers like Theodulf of Orleans and Ebbo of Reims. Similarly,
Abbot Grimald of St Gallen, long after the death of Louis and Judith,
remembered them in his prayers. The court of Louis the Pious thus extended
over time as well as space. Nor can such links be perceived only among the
clerical members of Louis’s court. The ostiarius Gerungus retired from court,
probably around 830 (a wise decision, one might think), and became a monk at
Prüm. But to be at Prüm of course did not mean that he had severed his links
with the royal house. We know that Gerungus turned out to welcome Louis
when the emperor visited the abbey in 836. We also know that Gerungus had
some form of contact with Count Richard, who was ostiarius for a while in the
830s. Old officers of the court did not forget each other. Nor did the court
forget them. Some time in the second half of the 830s, Louis granted a
benefice to one Atho, who had been ostiarius under Charlemagne. Even in
retirement the great ministeriales palatini preserved a closeness to the dynasty,
just as the lesser ones like the mid-century author of the Vita of St Hugh
preserved the memory of joyful feasts at court with his conpalatini.

But while it is possible to see in the careers of these men the idea of service
to the Carolingians, such men were not ordinary palatini. Nor was the court
the only focus for their self-perception. Einhard’s Translatio is in fact partially

31 Vita Karoli, ch. 26, p. 31.
32 Fleckenstein, Hofkapelle (as in n. 16), p. 69; Löwe, ‘Studien’ (as in n. 23), pp. 87 ff.
33 Annales Xantenses, in Annales Xantenses et Annales Vedastini, ed. B. Simson (MGH SRG), s.a.
34 See B. Bischoff, ‘Bücher am Hofe Ludwigs des Deutschen und die Privatbibliothek des Kanzlers
Grimald’, in his Mittelalterliche Studien (Stuttgart, 1961), iii. 208; Grimald had strong connections with
the courts of Charlemagne and Louis: ‘a prima aetatis flosculo inter aulicos beatorum augustorum
mores decentissimos enutritus’ (MGH Epist. 3), 536.
35 On Gerungus at court, see the letters of Frotharius of Toul (MGH Epist. 3), nos. 6, 10, 18, 23,
pp. 280, 283, 288–9, 292.
36 Louis and Gerungus at Prüm: Wandalbert, Miracula S. Goarid, ed. H. Steine (Lateinische
Sprache und Literatur des Mittelalters, 11; Frankfurt, 1981), ch. 31, p. 79; Richard: see a charter of
Lothar I in Lotharii I et Lotharii II diplomata, ed. T. Schieffer (MGH Diplomata, 3), no. 68.
37 Hincmar, De villa Noviliaco (MGH SS 15.2), 1168.
38 ‘Vie inédite de S. Hugues, évêque de Rouen’, ed. J. Van der Straeten, Anecdotum Bollandianum, 87
(1969), chs. 7 and 8, pp. 238–9 and see van der Straeten’s comments at p. 230; cf. P. Riché, ‘Les
about his withdrawal from the world of the court. Men like Einhard, Grimald, Gerward, and Gerungus were big men with a multiplicity of connections. Grimald, for example, was a nephew of Archbishop Hetti of Trier. Gerward came from an aristocratic family that patronized Lorsch. Such men were not exclusively dependent upon the Carolingians for their rise. They could bring resources to the dynasty that rewarded them. The bonds between such figures and Louis are therefore what one might call ‘bonds of power’, bonds that linked a lord with the stronger members of his following. These were two-way bonds.

But if these men are not the upstarts described by Thegan and Adrevald where can we find men who did depend for their power upon their association with the ruling dynasty, an association that found expression in the offices they held? Here we turn to the second group on our list, the administrators of the fisc. As we have seen, Adrevald of Fleury had complained that Charlemagne had promoted lowly servi of the fisc. While as a statement of fact this is untrue, it is perhaps significant that Adrevald singled out this group of men as being potentially powerful. A study by Franz Staab of estates near Mainz and Ingelheim, including an analysis of the position of Hagano (exactor of the fisc at Ingelheim in 835), suggests that royal fiscalini could enjoy a privileged status with important chances of promotion. Our concern here is not so much with the servi of the fisc as with its administrators. While the aristocracy provided many of the men who ran the fiscs, these men were not all equally aristocratic and were by no means only members of an imperial aristocracy, the so-called Reichsaristokratie.
Stuart Airlie

Hagano at Ingelheim in the 830s, for example, is a very hard man to place with certainty in any known noble grouping. Even if he can be so placed, he does not seem to have derived all his power on the ground from whatever noble connections he had, but from his position in the royal administration. It is perhaps worth recalling here that in the Capitulare de villis Charlemagne had looked for men of modest status to be maiores of the fisc: ‘These men are by no means to come from the ranks of the powerful, but from the ranks of the lesser sort who are faithful.’ One man of seemingly lowly origins does appear in the fiscal service under Louis. From a charter of 827 we learn of a dispute between the abbot of Stavelot-Malmédy and Albricus, actor of the fisc at Theux. The dispute was settled when Louis, interestingly enough, sent two court officials to investigate, Iasto, count of the palace and Wirnitus, magister parvulorum nostrorum. It is worth noting here, incidentally, that Wolfgang Metz has observed that in the reign of Louis royal control of fiscal administration, as seen in the records of disputes, remained tight. The actor Albricus interests us here because he had been a servus of Charlemagne but had been freed by him and Louis had confirmed that he could transmit his own property to his descendants. Connections with the royal house had paid off for this zealous fiscal official. It is possible that a relationship exists between this man and one Alberichus, vassal of Lothar I, who, according to a charter of 855, held property in the Eifelgau. It is known that this latter Alberichus was a member of a Lotharingian magnate family whose ranks included Hunfrid, bishop of Thérouanne and which had connections with the abbey of Prüm. If Metz is right, and the vassal of Lothar I was a descendant of the actor of Theux, one would then have an indubitably aristocratic family of interestingly

46 ‘Nequaquam de potentioribus hominibus maiores fiunt, sed de mediocribus, qui fideles sunt’ (MGH Capit. 1), no. 32, ch. 60, p. 88; cf. Brühl, Fodrum, Gistum (as in n. 44), i. 97, and F. L. Ganshof, Frankish Institutions under Charlemagne, transl. B. and M. Lyon (New York, 1968), 38 and nn. 278, 279.
48 Metz, Reichsgut (n. 44), pp. 147–8.
49 MGH Formulae, Formulae imperiales, no. 38, p. 316. The text refers to ‘fidelis noster Albricus actor’. The identification is made by Metz, Reichsgut (n. 44), pp. 145, 154.
50 Lotharii I diplomata, no. 137, and Metz, Reichsgut, p. 154.
51 See the 868 charter of Heriric for Prüm, which names his parents Albricus and Huna and his brothers Hunfrid, Heriricus, and Albricus, Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der jetzt die Preußischen Regierungsbezirke Koblenz und Trier bildenden mittelrheinischen Territorien, ed. H. Beyez et al. (Coblcnz, 1860), i, no. 110; cf. R. Hennebicque, ‘Structures familiales et politiques au IXe siècle’, Revue historique, 265 (1981), 294 ff.
low origins, at least on one side. The direct evidence for such a connection is, however, lacking. The family of Lothar I's vassal can be traced to regions south and east of Stavelot, to Echternach, Bidgau, and Lobdengau, as well as to Prüm. The common feature of the name Alberichus is not enough by itself to establish a link between the actor and the vassal. Nevertheless, the fact that both men appear in royal service is interesting and Stavelot is not too far from Prüm.

Another record of disputes over fiscal property dating from Louis's reign (from the year 823) reveals to us an over-zealous fiscal official whose power, I suspect, was very much bound up with the resources his rank gave him. This is the actor at Frankfurt, Nantharius, who was active there from some time in the reign of Charlemagne until some time before 823. This man seems to have been so keen, not to say acquisitive, in his watching over royal property that he actually infringed on his own family's property rights. He had appropriated for the fisc property belonging to Hornbach, a monastery that was dominated by the 'Widonid' family, of which Nantharius was a member. He would thus appear to be acting against his family's interests. But in taking its property, Nantharius was striking at rival members of his own family who were competing with him for a share of finite resources. His position as actor at Frankfurt gave him a lever which could raise him, at least in this region, above the generally more exalted members of his kin. Whether this type of behaviour actually benefited the royal administration is another question.

Such men found that their position as administrators of the fisc could bring them rewards that might have been difficult otherwise to obtain. But since such rewards were bound up with their position in royal service it obviously paid them to work in that service. This might make us reconsider Wolfgang Metz's interpretation of a passage in Hincmar's famous letter to Louis the German in 858. In this letter Hincmar artfully explained to Louis why the West Frankish episcopate would not back him in his attempt to invade his brother's kingdom, but he also outlined to him what a good king's actions ought to be, and we know that Hincmar meant this part of the message to strike home to Charles the Bald. Metz thought that Hincmar's demand that a good king restrain the activities of his fiscal officials showed that these officials were escaping from royal control. But perhaps it shows the opposite, namely,

52 See Hennebicque, 'Structures', p. 296.
53 Ibid. 297–8.
54 J. F. Böhmer, Regesta Imperii, i. Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Karolingern, 751–918, revised by E. Mühlbacher and J. Lechner (Innsbruck, 1908), no. 770; Metz, Reichsgut (n. 44), p. 149.
55 Metz, Reichsgut, pp. 151–2; on this family W. Metz, 'Miszellen zur Geschichte der Widonen und Salier, vornehmlich in Deutschland', Historisches Jahrbuch, 85 (1965), 1–27.
that these men were still very much under royal supervision and that their exaction of services due reflects the will of the king at the centre.\footnote{Perhaps it is in this context that we should understand how Eberhard of Friuli's \textit{negligentia} of his property in West Francia resulted in its reversion to the fisc, \textit{Recueil des actes de Charles II le Chauve}, ed. G. Tessier, 3 vols. (Paris, 1947–55), ii, no. 323 bis.}

That the Carolingians might wish to bind such relatively 'low' servants closely to them is surely understandable without our having to resort to Thegan's and Adrevald's explanations. Any politically shrewd dynasty will want, and indeed must have, powerful followers like the important \textit{palatini} discussed above; such figures constitute political muscle. But it also makes sense for such a dynasty to have some servants who owe everything, or at least a lot, to it; loyalty and self-interest here fuse in the interests of the patron. It is in this light that I wish to consider the third aspect of royal service under Louis, the case of Ebbo of Reims.

It might be possible to use Ebbo's career to explore notions of social mobility in the Carolingian period, to see whether Thegan had any real grounds for worrying that the sons of goatherds were rising to the highest ecclesiastical offices in the empire. We know that Thegan's views were not everybody's views. His editor Walahfrid Strabo, for example, suggested that Thegan was almost obsessed with this topic: 'quod de indignitate vilium personarum dolor suggestit, tacere non potuit.' Walahfrid himself, it is worth pointing out, was a man of humble origins who rose through royal patronage at court.\footnote{Walahfrid's Preface to Thegan, ed. G. H. Pertz (MGH SS 2), p. 589; on Walahfrid's origins, F. Graus, 'Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte der Hagiographie der Merowinger- und Karolingerzeit', in A. Borst (ed.), \textit{Mönchttum, Episkopat und Adel zur Gründungszeit des Klosters Reichenau} (Vorträge und Forschungen, 20; Sigmaringen, 1974), 168.} His career suggests the existence of a network of intellectual connections in Carolingian political society alongside the more familiarly visible one of aristocratic family links. Such networks often, indeed perhaps normally, overlapped, but not always.\footnote{See the relevant remarks of K. Schmid, 'Religiöses und Sippengebundenes Gemeinschaftsbewusstsein in frühmittelalterlichen Gedenkbucheträgen', \textit{Deutsches Archiv}, 21 (1965), 39–40.} Thegan complained that Ebbo and other base-born types used education as a means of social advancement: 'aliquos eorum liberalibus studiis instruunt.'\footnote{Thegan, ch. 20, p. 230.} Ebbo himself, of course, gained the see of Reims because of his intellectual superiority to the original nominee.\footnote{See the letter of Charles the Bald (PL 124), cols. 872–3.}

To other thinkers of Louis's reign, such as Agobard of Lyons, the law of Christ meant the disregarding of many earthly social distinctions: 'non est gentilis et Judeus, circumcisio et preputium, barbarus et Scitha, Aquitanus et Langobardus, Burgundio et Alamannus, servus et liber, sed omnia et in omnibus Christus.'\footnote{MGH Epist. 3, p. 159, no. 3.} This in almost exact contrast to Thegan, who saw the troubles of Louis's reign as springing from the overturning of old boundaries, whether of birth or of nationality. Louis's bishops were 'ex vilissima servili conditione . . .
Bonds of Power and Bonds of Association

Later, Hincmar was sensitive to such accusations. In his letter to Louis the German of 858 he urged the king to listen to the bishops and not to the sneering comments of his lay followers, who, according to Hincmar, were saying, 'Non tibi sit curae, rex, quae tibi referunt illi fellones atque ignobiles [i.e. the bishops]; hoc fac, quod tibi dicimus, quoniam cum nostris et non cum istorum parentibus tenuerunt parentes tui regnum.'

Hincmar, as Janet Nelson has pointed out, could have responded that the bishops were in fact noble to a man. Instead he claimed that God chose for 'gubernandum ... non ... divites et nobiles, sed pauperes et piscatores' and that the parentes of bishops were the Apostles. The line of episcopal succession could involve 'une filiation dans la sainteté' as well as, or sometimes instead of, 'une filiation biologique.' Certain capitulary and conciliar texts of Louis's reign stress that all men were equal before God, their common father. It was, after all, the bishops assembled at Paris in 829 who reminded Louis that 'it was not his ancestry but God who had given the kingdom to a ruler.' Ebbo's office elevated him and so claims of noble blood could appear irrelevant.

But such examples are not strictly relevant to the purpose of this paper. After all, how many bishops of lowly status can we put beside Ebbo? He did not gain the see of Reims just because he was intelligent but because he was close to the king. A story in the Gesta Karoli of Notker will focus our attention on the appropriate issues here. Notker tells us that Charlemagne on a visit to a 'school' found that the best scholarly work had been performed by the 'Mediocres ... et infimi' while the 'nobiles ... primorum filii' had neglected their studies. Disappointed in these aristocratic slackers, Charlemagne told the others to stick in at their work and he would reward them with bishoprics and monasteries: 'dabo vobis episcopia et monasteria.'

Now, Notker's anecdote is not about social mobility as such, but about power, and about the power that stemmed from royal patronage, the power
that came to you if you were close to the king. It was precisely this closeness, as much as his undoubted intelligence, that was the real secret of Ebbo's rise to power. His family, though servile, was a family of the royal fisc: 'regii fisci familia'; and it was from this family that his mother, Himiltrudis, gained access to court as wet-nurse and foster-mother to the young Louis the Pious. Once Ebbo had gained his freedom (from Charlemagne) and profited from his upbringing at court ('palatinis negotiis ... annutritus'), his career was assured. In some respects Thegan's analysis of that career was correct. Parts of it were thoroughly conventional. For Thegan the bad thing about people like Ebbo was that they strove to advance their 'Turpissimam cognationem'. Similar accusations were made against Charles the Fat's favourite, Liutwart bishop of Vercelli, who was raised 'ex infimo genere'. In Ebbo's case, the 'accusations' can be substantiated.

Flodoard has preserved the epitaph of Ebbo's mother and the fact that he could do this surely indicates either that she was buried at Reims (as the text of the epitaph would suggest), or that a dossier of information on Ebbo and his family was available at Reims. From this angle, Ebbo's career appears familiar. It is the career of a family that used Königsnähe to acquire honores which then became the basis of family power and around which it could organize itself. Honores offered security and Ebbo realized this fact and exploited it as much as members of the secular nobility did. His bond with the king was especially intimate, and he had been with Louis in Aquitaine. When Louis came to power Ebbo received Reims. He worked on the improvement and embellishment of his church and this work was a family concern. Ebbo's pious duty, rich patronage, and sense of family appear fused in the epitaph of his mother:

Presul erat urbis huius mihi natus unicus;  
Idem me conduxit sibi sociam laboribus  
Proximum ruinae locum renovando cupidus.  
Decem ferme nuper annos simul hic peregrinus,  
Ebbo rector, ego mater Himiltrudis humilis  
Fundamenta sedis sanctae pariter ereximus.

So we can see that Himiltrudis accompanied her son to Reims and in some way, while living there, participated in his work of restoration. She was then buried there, judging by the existence of the epitaph itself and the phrases in it.
like 'urbis huius' and 'simul hic peregimus'. Reims was an honor which provided a fixed basis of power and residence for the family in life and death. Reims functioned thus for different generations of the family: for Himiltrudis, then Ebbo himself, and then for his nephew Ebbo. This latter Ebbo was 'nutritus in Remensi ecclesiae monasterio' and was then made abbot there by his patron, his uncle; he later became bishop of Grenoble. Ebbo of Reims also used his patronage to advance another nephew, one Gauzbertus, whom he designated, with the permission of Louis the Pious, as an assistant to Anskar in his missionary work in the North. This Gauzbertus, who seems to have become a bishop, also had a nephew whose existence was noted in the Life of Anskar.

The name 'Gauzbertus' is perhaps rather surprising to encounter in this context. It is well known as characteristic of a branch of the powerful aristocratic family, the so-called 'Rorigonids'. It would be absurd to claim kinship or even alliance between Ebbo and this clan on this basis alone, but it may be worth noting that the name Ebbo, together with its variants Abbo/Ebulus, does occur in some Rorigonid contexts. Count Rorico did have a kinsman called Ebbo and Count Ramnulf I of Poitiers had three sons, called Ramnulf, Ebulus, and Gauzbert. The names Abbo/Ebbo/Ebulus can be found in Aquitaine, around Poitou. Such seeming parallels and connections may or may not be suggestive. The current state of research does not permit certainty and the very nature of this material makes certainty hard to come by. Such material, however, may help show how wide Ebbo's circle became once he had attained eminence.

Ebbo's career, therefore, had much that was normal or traditional, as Thegan would have understood it, about it, despite its surprising starting-point. That starting-point, however, together with the relatively lowly social position of a number (but only further investigation can reveal how significant that number might be) of the administrators of the fisc, and the fact that both high and low members of the royal court had a common identity as palatini should make us think hard about the nature of power and patronage in the reign of Louis. Perhaps, as Donald Bullough has suggested, the Carolingians were rather less 'restricted in the choice of men through whom they sought to carry out their policies' than the current fixation with the Reichsaristokratie,

77 Letter of Hincmar in Flodoard, Historia, iii. 15, p. 503.
79 'nepotem venerabilis Gauzberti episcopi Erimbértum nomine', Vita Anskarii, ch. 28, p. 59 and see ch. 33, p. 64.
80 On this family, K. F. Werner, 'Bedeutende Adelsfamilien' (n. 6), Exkurs, pp. 137–42.
82 Ibid. A Count Aeblus was active in Spain under Louis the Pious, Annales regni Francorum, s.a. 824, ed. F. Kurze (MGH SRG), 166.
for example, might suggest. This is not to claim that Louis the Pious possessed a form of 'civil service', but the lower grades of Louis's following do repay investigation, not least because the career of such figures reveals much about Louis's power of patronage. This is what Thegan's complaints about Ebbo really point us towards, namely, the hunger of the Carolingians for trustworthy and talented servants, and their ability to give such men clout through their patronage. Reading Thegan we know that Carolingian *nobiles* were *potentes*, but he also reveals to us that not all *potentes* were *nobiles*.