The Origins of Royal Anointing

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The anointing of kings emerged as a Christian rite of passage in the early Middle Ages, although the exact circumstances and sequence of events that led to the general emergence of the rite remain controversial. This article argues that royal anointing first became a recognized and repeated practice within two separate societies: seventh-century Visigothic Spain and the eighth-century Frankish kingdom. Whereas previous work has stressed the role of Christian clerics in the emergence of this rite, the article argues that royal anointing had its origins within lay elite political culture and spoke primarily to the needs, not of the clerics who performed it, but of the laypeople who received and beheld it.

In the 1970s, Janet Nelson (later president of the society) read two important communications on medieval royal anointing to the Ecclesiastical History Society. In these she proposed that we should understand anointing in the Western tradition as a rite of passage, a ritual that worked to turn its recipient into a new man: someone who was not a king became a king.[1] This article is inspired by Dame Janet's work to return to the question of royal anointing as a specifically Christian rite of passage and to ask how it came about: what were the forces within the societies in which it first emerged that made it necessary for rulers to go through a special religious ceremony in order to change their status? My argument is that these forces emerged from the lay elite political culture of those times and places

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[1] Janet L. Nelson, 'National Synods, Kingship as Office, and Royal Anointing: An Early Medieval Syndrome', in G. J. Cuming and Derek Baker, eds, *Councils and Assemblies*, SCH 7 (Oxford, 1971), 41–59 (repr. in her *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* [London, 1986], 239–57); eadem, 'Symbols in Context: Rulers' Inauguration Rituals in Byzantium and the West in the Early Middle Ages', in Derek Baker, ed., *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, SCH 13 (Oxford, 1976), 97–119 (repr. in Nelson, *Politics and Ritual*, 259–81). Hereafter I cite both articles from the reprint.

where royal anointing first took hold: namely, Visigothic Spain in the seventh century and the Frankish kingdom in the eighth century.

There is, of course, a vast quantity of material on early medieval royal anointing, debating its origin, purposes and nature. Most of this is narrowly focused on specific acts of anointing, especially that of Pippin III as the first Carolingian king of the Franks.[2] One of the really impressive things about Nelson's work in the 1970s was that she sought to look at the entire 'early medieval syndrome' of royal anointing and identify the common factors within different societies that embraced the rite of passage. She identified as key the existence of an active culture of episcopal synods, leading to a strong sense of group identity and shared interests amongst the higher clergy; anointing emerged out of 'a crystallization of the clergy's needs and expectations of kingship'.[3] I have been inspired by the ambition of Nelson's analysis to think across different societies where royal anointing emerged; if I come to a different conclusion from hers, that is primarily because I examine different case studies.

Nelson pointed to four contexts in which royal anointing became standard: seventh-century Spain, mid-ninth-century West Frankia, late ninth-century East Frankia and mid-tenth-century England.[4] I look at a narrower range of case studies than Nelson did because, as will become apparent, I believe royal anointing had already become a significant and sustained practice in Frankia before the ninth century, and the example of this Carolingian tradition of anointing clearly provided an authorizing model for the later development of the rite in the post-Carolingian states of the ninth and tenth centuries. While anointing probably became common in England before the tenth century (as Nelson's own work has shown), it was introduced there as a result of eighth-century Carolingian influence.[5] Arguments that anointing was practised or theorized before the eighth century in the British Isles are now generally found unconvincing.[6] Consequently, I would argue that Visigothic

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[2] The relevant literature is cited where appropriate in what follows.

[3] Nelson, 'National Synods', 241–8, 254–5 (whence the quotation); eadem, 'Symbols in Context', 265.

[4] Nelson, 'National Synods', 244–8.

[5] Janet L. Nelson, 'The Earliest Royal *Ordo*: Some Liturgical and Historical Aspects', in Brian Tierney and Peter Linehan, eds, *Authority and Power: Studies on Medieval Law and Government* (Cambridge, 1980), 29–48 (repr. in Nelson, *Politics and Ritual*, 341–60); Joanna Story, *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c.750–870* (Farnham, 2003), 87–8, 157–60, 178–80.

[6] The work of Michael J. Enright argues for an Irish origin for anointing: *Iona, Tara and Soissons: The Origin of the Royal Anointing Ritual* (Berlin, 1985); idem, 'On the Unity of

Spain and early Carolingian Frankia are the earliest two contexts in which we can be sure that royal anointing emerged essentially independently and endogenously.[7] I examine these two case studies in turn before briefly comparing them to draw some general conclusions.

VISIGOTHIC SPAIN

By the time the kingdom of Visigothic Spain was swept aside by the Arab Conquest of 711, its kings seem to have been regularly anointed at the start of their reigns, but when this practice began has been a contentious question. Some historians suggest that the point of origin was 589, when King Reccared first became a Nicene Christian.[8] He would have received a confirmation-anointing as part of that process, for this was the standard liturgical accompaniment to an 'Arian' heretic's being restored to Mother Church. But we know that the majority of the Gothic aristocracy converted with Reccared; this does not seem like a very likely context for an explicitly royal connection with anointing to emerge.[9] Others propose 633 as the start date, when the bishops of

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De Regno 1–4 of the "Hibernensis": The First Royal Anointing Ordo', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 48 (2014), 207–35. For earlier work, see Raymund Kottje, *Studien zum Einfluss des Alten Testamentes auf Recht und Liturgie des Frühen Mittelalters (6.–8. Jahrhundert)* (Bonn, 1964), 97–103. For the arguments against, see Jan Prelog, 'Sind Weihesalbungen insularen Ursprungs?', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 13 (1979), 303–56; Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'A Contract between King and People in Early Medieval Ireland? *Críth Gablach* on Kingship', *Peritia* 8 (1994), 107–19, at 109–10; Michael Richter, 'Die frühmittelalterliche Herrschersalbung und die *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*', in Matthias Becher and Jörg Jarnut, eds, *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung* (Münster, 2004), 211–19.

[7] Spanish-born clerics (such as Theodulf of Orléans) came to be influential at the court of Charlemagne, but Carolingian anointing predates the evidence for substantial Visigothic influence.

[8] Michel Zimmermann, 'Les Sacres des rois wisigoths', in Michel Rouche, ed., *Clovis, histoire et mémoire. Le Baptême de Clovis, son écho à travers l'histoire* (Paris, 1997), 9–28, at 15–16; Alexander Pierre Bronisch, 'Die westgotische Reichsideologie und ihre Weiterentwicklung im Reich von Asturien', in Franz-Reiner Erkens, ed., *Das früh-mittelalterliche Königtum. Ideelle und religiose Grundlagen* (Berlin, 2005), 161–89, at 168; Andrew Fear, 'God and Caesar: The Dynamics of Visigothic Monarchy', in Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville, eds, *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Leiden, 2013), 285–302.

[9] I agree here with Céline Martin, 'L'Innovation politique dans le royaume de Tolède. Le sacre du souverain', in Corinne Péneau, ed., *Élections et pouvoirs politiques du VIIe au XVIIe siècle* (Pompignac, 2008), 281–300, at 282.

Spain, in council at Toledo, decreed that the king was the Lord's anointed whose life was therefore sacrosanct; hence the suggestion that anointing was introduced as a practice to defend the king against the 'Gothic disease' of regicide.[10] Modern historians have made rather more of the phrase *christus domini* than the bishops themselves did in 633; for them, it served purely to introduce the necessary Old Testament proof texts condemning the killing of a king.[11] The bishops never mentioned unction as a practice. More importantly, in his most famous work Isidore of Seville, who presided at the 633 Council of Toledo and probably had a hand in the writing of its acts, spoke of royal anointing as something that had happened in the Israelite past, but no longer occurred in the present; that he neither knew of, nor showed any interest in restoring, royal anointing is significant.[12]

The earliest evidence we have for an actual practice of royal anointing dates to 672: Julian of Toledo's account of King Wamba's inauguration of that year specifically states that he was anointed on the head with oil. After Wamba we start to see passing references in documentary sources to kings' having been anointed, something that never happened before 672.[13] The balance of scholarship has therefore shifted in favour of Wamba's being the first Visigothic royal anointing, and therefore the first anointing of any Christian king.[14]

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[10] P. D. King, *Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 3rd series 5 (Cambridge, 1972), 48–9; Pablo C. Diaz and M. R. Valverde, 'The Theoretical Strength and Practical Weakness of the Visigothic Monarchy of Toledo', in Frans Theuws and Janet L. Nelson, eds, *Rituals of Power: From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Transformation of the Roman World 8 (Leiden, 2000), 59–93, at 78–80. Cf. Aloys Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie im frühmittelalterlichen Okzident. Die Aussage konziliarer Texte des gallischen und iberischen Raumes* (Münster, 2001), 240–1.

[11] Fourth Council of Toledo (633), c. 75, in Gonzalo Martinez Diez and Felix Rodriguez, eds, *La Colección Canónica Hispana*, 6 vols (Madrid, 1966–2002), 5: 248–60 (with *christus domini* at 249–50).

[12] Isidore, *Etymologiae* 7.2.2. For close parallels between the acts of the Toledan council and the writings of Isidore, see Pierre Cazier, 'Les Sentences d'Isidore de Séville et le IVe Concile de Tolède. Réflexions sur les rapports entre l'Église et le pouvoir politique en Espagne autour des années 630', *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 3 (1986), 373–86.

[13] Julian of Toledo, *Historia Wambae regis*, hist. 4 (MGH SRM 5, 503–4); *Laterculus regum Visigothorum*, c. 47 (MGH AA 13, 468); Twelfth Council of Toledo (681), c. 1 (Diez and Rodriguez, eds, *La Colección*, 6: 151–3).

[14] Nelson, 'National Synods', 247; Kottje, *Studien zum Einfluss des Alten Testamentes*, 96–7; Eugen Ewig, 'Zum christlichen Königsgedanken im Frühmittelalter', in Hartmut Atsma, ed., *Spätantikes und Fränkisches Gallien: Gesammelte Schriften (1952–1973)*, 3 vols (Munich, 1976), 1: 3–71, at 33–4; Patrick Henriet, 'Rite, idéologie, fonction. Remarques

Wamba was a middle-aged courtier who had been elected to the kingship by the elite of the realm on the death of his predecessor, King Reccesuinth. To some extent, Wamba's succession to the kingship was a model case, for election by the court aristocracy and higher clergy was the constitutional form established as legal in 633 by the Council of Toledo. It had not been the practical norm in the intervening generation, but by 672 there were strong grounds for such a practice to be put into effect. During Reccesuinth's long reign in particular, an aristocratic elite of palatine officials emerged who would come to dominate Visigothic politics for the remainder of the century, particularly through their attendance at the national councils of Toledo.[15]

Wamba was one of this group: he emerged from the fairly narrow ruling clique that chose him. As will be obvious by now, Visigothic monarchy was non-dynastic: this had essentially been the norm since the beginning of the seventh century, a small number of (usually short-lasting) father-son successions notwithstanding. Direct inheritance of the throne does not reappear after Wamba's succession until the very end of the century. That does not mean that kings were chosen from a wide pool of candidates. A small number of often interconnected families, closely associated with the central royal court, seem to have supplied all the Visigothic kings from Wamba until 711.[16] The leading representatives of this group, as I have mentioned, attended national church councils and, although

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sur l'onction des rois wisigoths et hispaniques du Haut Moyen Âge (VIIe–XIe siècle)', in Giles Constable and Michel Rouche, eds, *Auctoritas. Mélanges offerts à Olivier Guillot* (Paris, 2006), 179–92, esp. 180–2; Christoph Dartmann, 'Die Sakralisierung König Wambas. Zur Debatte um frühmittelalterliche Sakralherrschaft', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 44 (2010), 39–57, at 45–6. Cf. Martin, 'L'Innovation politique', who argues that Wamba was not anointed but rather his contemporary, the rebel king Paul. Dietrich Claude, *Adel, Kirche und Königtum im Westgotenreich* (Sigmaringen, 1971), 155–7, and Roger Collins, 'Julian of Toledo and the Royal Succession in Late Seventh-Century Spain', in P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood, eds, *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1977), 30–49, at 48, both argue that anointing was practised before 672 but that greater emphasis came to be laid on it in the late seventh century.

[15] For the rise of the palace aristocracy in the Toledan councils, see Claude, *Adel, Kirche und Königtum*, 135, 145, 161–2, 177–81; Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie*, 274–5; Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain: 409–711* (Oxford, 2004), 86–90; José Orlandis and Domingo Ramos-Lisson, *Die Synoden auf der Iberischen Halbinsel bis zum Einbruch des Islam (711)* (Munich, 1981), 335–7.

[16] Claude, *Adel, Kirche und Königtum*, 196–8; Collins, *Visigothic Spain*, 113–16.

laymen, frequently signed the canons that emerged from those councils: these were men with titles from the court administration, such as Count of the Chamberlains or Notaries, but many of them also held the military rank of *dux*.[17] This lay elite seems to have taken part in the Christian spiritual government of the nation. Kings often noted at the later Visigothic councils that Christ or the Holy Spirit was present when bishops gathered in Christ's name; it is possible that this divine inspiration was thought to seep out from the episcopal core to irradiate the palatine officials present on these occasions.[18] While the liturgical ordo for Visigothic church councils specified that kings had to leave before deliberation began, their greatest lay subjects may have become agents of the Spirit through their presence at the gathering.[19]

Wamba's inauguration took place in a context of contestation: he faced a rival king who had been chosen by a different gathering, one that represented the interests of provincial aristocrats in the Gallic parts of the Visigothic kingdom, somewhat distant from the Toledan court. The rebel king, Paul, is also described as having been anointed in Julian of Toledo's account of Wamba, as well as having been crowned with a purloined votive crown. If true, this coronation with a sacred object would also be an innovative rite of passage in a Visigothic context.[20] Julian's text deals entirely with this challenge and how Wamba repressed it, including through the imposition of strict Old Testament purity regulations to ensure divine favour for his army.[21] Mayke de Jong, amongst others, has argued

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[17] Eighth Council of Toledo (653), subscriptiones (Diez and Rodriguez, eds, *La Colección*, 5: 447–8); Ninth Council of Toledo (655), subscriptiones (ibid. 5: 514); Twelfth Council of Toledo (681), subscriptiones (ibid. 6: 197–9); Thirteenth Council of Toledo (683), subscriptiones (ibid. 6: 265–7); Fifteenth Council of Toledo (688), subscriptiones (ibid. 6: 343); Sixteenth Council of Toledo (693), subscriptiones, in José Vives, ed., *Concilios Visigoticos e Hispano-Romanos* (Madrid, 1963), 521.

[18] Twelfth Council of Toledo (681), tomus (Diez and Rodriguez, eds, *La Colección*, 6: 142); Thirteenth Council of Toledo (683), tomus, lex (ibid. 6: 223, 270); Fifteenth Council of Toledo (688), tomus (ibid. 6: 292–3); Sixteenth Council of Toledo (693), lex (Vives, ed., *Concilios*, 515); Seventeenth Council of Toledo (694), tomus (ibid. 522–3).

[19] *Ordo de celebrando concilio* 3, c. 14 (MGH Conc., Ord., 213).

[20] Julian of Toledo, *Historia Wambae*, epistola Pauli (MGH SRM 5, 500); ibid. c. 26 (MGH SRM 5, 522). See Martin, 'L'Innovation politique'.

[21] Julian of Toledo, *Historia Wambae*, c. 10 (MGH SRM 5, 510). On Julian's response to the contested circumstances of Wamba's early rule, see now Molly Lester, 'The Ties that Bind: Diagnosing Social Crisis in Julian of Toledo's *Historia Wambae*', in Helmut Reimitz and Gerda Heydemann, eds, *Historiography and Identity II: Post-Roman Multiplicity and*

for this as a sign of a developing Gothic identification as the New Israel, in which the centre of the kingdom and its ruling elites were framed as masculine, ethnically pure and (Old Testament) Israelite, while peripheral groups were understood as feminine, foreign and (New Testament) Jewish.[22] Of course, as metropolitan of Toledo, Julian had an obvious vested interest in emphasizing the importance of the Toledan centre in the making of legitimate Visigothic monarchs; anointing in this context was something that helped put him and his successors at the heart of the king-making process, since Julian was clear that a king could only receive effective unction in the metropolitan church of Toledo itself.[23]

Even allowing for Julian's possible distortion, there remains a plausible context for the emergence of Visigothic royal anointing in the second half of the seventh century. The need for a rite of passage was clear in a case where royal succession could not be presented as a natural, dynastic fact. The king had to leave the group of the palace aristocracy and be separated from them, all the while maintaining the consensus and shared interests which bound him to the politically powerful elite. Anointing made sense in terms of the Israelite group identity that the central aristocracy might have developed at this time, but it also usefully set the king apart as something rather more than just a *primus inter pares*, more than just the leader of equals who, potentially, looked forward to their own day on the throne. In a context in which many of this ruling elite may have regularly bathed in the divine inspiration poured out upon the participants in a church council, their king needed an even closer relationship with divine inspiration in order to be seen as superior: Julian tells us that when the oil touched Wamba's head a shaft of steaming light went up and bees flew out.[24] For Julian, clearly, royal anointing provided an awe-inspiring spectacle, and spectacles only make sense when considered

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New Political Identities, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages 27 (Turnhout, 2020), 269–96.

[22] Mayke de Jong, 'Adding Insult to Injury: Julian of Toledo and his *Historia Wambae*', in Peter Heather, ed., *The Visigoths from the Migration Period to the Seventh Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology 4 (Woodbridge, 1999), 373–402. See also Bronisch, 'Die westgotische Reichsideologie', 169–74.

[23] Collins, 'Julian of Toledo', 45–6; Henriet, 'Rite, idéologie, fonction', 183–4; Dartmann, 'Die Sakralisierung König Wambas', 49–50; de Jong, 'Adding Insult to Injury', 379.

[24] Julian of Toledo, *Historia Wambae*, hist. 4 (MGH SRM 5, 504).

in terms of their audience. While undoubtedly the bishop's account stressed the episcopal contribution to king-making as vital, it seems that a need to manage the relationship between different members of the lay elite created this new rite.

One final piece of evidence for Visigothic royal anointing may deserve consideration: the liturgical evidence. All the manuscript records of a Mozarabic liturgy of anointing were created in the kingdom of Asturias / León, centuries after the fall of the Visigothic kingdom. Two bodies of material survive, although they may both derive from a single liturgical tradition: prayers for the office of the 'ordination' of a king are preserved in the Antiphonary of León, while the scriptural readings from the mass for the 'ordination' of a king are preserved in the *liber commicus / comicus* lectionary tradition.[25] The Antiphonary of León (León, Cathedral Library, MS 8) dates from the first third of the tenth century. While it can no longer be taken to be a copy of an exemplar dating from the beginning of Wamba's reign (previously the standard inference from a dating clause early on in the manuscript, which is now thought to have no relationship to the liturgical contents), it probably derives from an earlier (possibly late eighth-century) antiphonary.[26] The earliest manuscript of the *liber comicus* that I know of dates possibly to the ninth century: Toledo, Biblioteca del Cabildo, MS 35.8;[27] recent study of the Lenten readings in the *liber comicus* has concluded that they reflect seventh-century Spanish liturgical practice.[28] We may, therefore,

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[25] Thomas Deswarte, 'Liturgie et royauté dans les monarchies asturienne et léonaise (711–1109)', *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 58 (2015), 55–67, at 59, believes that these are two parts of a single ceremony derived from that developed by Julian of Toledo.

[26] Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz, 'Some Incidental Notes on Music Manuscripts', in Susana Zapke, ed., *Hispania Vetus: Musical-liturgical Manuscripts from Visigothic Origins to the Franco-Roman Transition (9th–12th Centuries)* (Bilbao, 2007), 93–111, esp. 94–100. Elsa de Luce, 'Royal Misattributions: Monograms in the León Antiphoner', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 9 (2017), 25–51, which summarizes subsequent scholarship on the dating of the manuscript, agrees with Díaz y Díaz and provides further evidence for an early tenth-century date.

[27] A. M. Mundó, 'La datación de los códices litúrgicos visigóticos toledanos', *Hispania Sacra* 18 (1965), 1–25, at 16, argued for a later date, but most scholarship remains undecided: e.g., H. A. G. Houghton, *The Latin New Testament: A Guide to its Early History, Texts and Manuscripts* (Oxford, 2016), 98–9, 240.

[28] Nathan Chase, *The Homiliae Toletanae and the Theology of Lent and Easter*, Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense Études et Documents 56 (Leuven, 2020), 65–8; for earlier work on the *liber comicus* reflecting seventh-century liturgy: Paul G. Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse: Studies in Genesis, Exodus and Daniel* (Cambridge, 1996), 212–13.

have access to elements from a Spanish anointing liturgy of the 800s, if not earlier. This is a liturgy which shows no trace of a relationship to Frankish traditions, which were well established by the ninth century and already proving influential elsewhere in Europe.[29] The Spanish manuscripts seem to preserve a liturgy of royal anointing which is entirely the product of indigenous Spanish developments; they are, consequently, probably the closest we can get to how Visigothic royal anointing was performed.

The antiphonary material provides evidence of a self-conscious comparison of the ruler's subjects with Israel, and some striking use of the Psalms to describe the awe-inspiring sight of the king in his regalia which chimes with my comments above on the significance of spectacle in Julian of Toledo's account of Wamba's anointing.[30] The lectionary evidence is more interesting. The three readings (which are Old Latin, not Vulgate) are: Wisdom 9: 1–12 in the voice of Solomon, chosen by God as king, requesting wisdom so that he will rule justly and worthily; Romans 13: 1–8 on obeying all powers because they come from God, with the ruler as a minister of God to punish the wicked; and Luke 4: 16–22 where Christ reads in the synagogue about the Spirit of God anointing the Messiah to preach, help the downtrodden and proclaim the day of judgement.[31] This last lection ends with Christ announcing that this, the anointing of the Messiah, is now fulfilled 'before you'. If we think of Visigothic royal anointing as a rite of passage, as a ritual journey from one status to another, here we have the indication that the king has been transformed from being the weak candidate for the throne, the *homo infirmus* of Wisdom 9: 5, to the anointed one himself. Alongside the king's transformation, the audience of the lections shifts from God himself in Wisdom to the surrounding congregation, whose obedience to the king is demanded by Romans 13, and whose wonder at the miraculous transformation which has occurred is elicited by the Gospel text.

Julian's mention of Wamba's illuminated head conjures up this same sense of wonder. His text may give us a clerical perspective,

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[29] Deswarte, 'Liturgie et royauté', 59–60.
[30] Louis Brou and José Vives, eds, *Antifonario visigotico mozarabe de la cathedral de León* (Barcelona, 1959), 450–2. Cf. Collins, 'Julian of Toledo', 44.
[31] Justo Pérez de Urbel and Atilano González y Ruiz-Zorrilla, eds, *Liber commicus*, 2 vols (Madrid, 1950–55), 2: 535–7.

but it nonetheless hints at how the reaction of the lay congregation around Wamba mattered, something the liturgical evidence also suggests.[32] Nelson made an important point in emphasizing the significance of seventh-century Spain's conciliar tradition. This certainly played a role in the process by which Visigothic kingship came to be understood as an office with religious and moral responsibilities that in part limited and constricted the king.[33] But the presence of the laity at Toledan councils means that these ideas cannot have simply expressed clerical opinion, separate from that of the rest of the leading aristocracy. In the lectionary for a royal inauguration, we see a stress on submission to the king, a glorification of him, and a narrative telling us how he is no longer just like other men; the readings say surprisingly little about how a king ought to behave. This may be a liturgy which, rather than simply sending a clerical message to kings, might have been intended to send a royal message to lay subjects, until recently the king's colleagues and equals.

THE CAROLINGIANS

Frankish anointing is far better known and more extensively studied than its Visigothic predecessor. That the usurping Pippin III exploited anointing to establish himself on a throne held by members of the Merovingian family for the previous two and a half centuries is one of the most repeated facts of early medieval history. Older comments about how the sacrality of the Merovingians could only be replaced by a revolutionary 'piece of church magic' still do the rounds outside specialist scholarship on occasion, but tend not to be taken very seriously by historians now.[34] Indeed, much that was once

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[32] For a reading of Julian's account of Wamba as describing essentially a 'secular' king-making: Collins, 'Julian of Toledo', 43–4.

[33] Nelson, 'National Synods'; I explore this development of an office of Christian kingship in Visigothic Spain in my forthcoming book, *The Rise of Christian Kingship*.

[34] J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The *Via Regia* of the Carolingian Age', in Beryl Smalley, ed., *Trends in Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1965), 22–41, at 26, quoted with approval by Francis Oakley, *Empty Bottles of Gentilism: Kingship and the Divine in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (to 1050)* (New Haven, CT, 2010), 160. Also on anointing and 'sacrality': Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, transl. J. E. Anderson (London, 1973), 35–41; David Harry Miller, 'Sacral Kingship, Biblical Kingship, and the Elevation of Pepin the Short', in Thomas F. X. Noble and John J. Contreni, eds, *Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honour of Richard E. Sullivan* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1987), 131–54.

known about Pippin's anointing has had to be rethought in light of some devastating primary source criticism in recent years, especially by Josef Semmler and Rosamond McKitterick.[35] The old story told how Pippin was anointed twice, once in 751 by St Boniface on the orders of Pope Zacharias (741–52), and again in 754 by Pope Stephen II (752–57) in person, but it is now not clear that any anointing took place in 751 at all: if it did, Boniface certainly had nothing to do with it. His role is mentioned only in the *Annales regni Francorum*, put together in or near Charlemagne's court around the year 790; the much more closely contemporary so-called *Continuation of Fredegar* simply refers to a consecration (*consecratio*) of Pippin by unnamed bishops.[36]

Pippin was certainly anointed in 754 by the pope; plenty of papal evidence, including numerous letters written in subsequent years by the pope himself, shows that Stephen II anointed both the king and his two young sons, Charles (i.e. Charlemagne) and Carloman, on that occasion.[37] Much excellent work has been done showing that the papacy probably developed the ritual of royal anointing out of that of post-baptismal anointing, so that Carolingian anointing could be understood as a kind of spin-off of confirmation, a rite of passage exported from the Roman Church to the rest of Western Europe.[38] Alternative liturgical origins have been suggested: Nelson

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[35] Rosamond McKitterick, 'The Illusion of Royal Power in the Carolingian Annals', *EHR* 115 (2000), 1–20; Josef Semmler, *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751 und die fränkische Königssalbung*, Studia Humaniora 6 (Düsseldorf, 2003), 10–56; Olaf Schneider, 'Die Königserhebung Pippins 751 in der Erinnerung der karolingischen Quellen', in Becher and Jarnut, eds, *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751*, 243–75.

[36] *Annales regni Francorum* [hereafter: *ARF*], *s.a.* 749 (MGH SRG i.u.s. 6, 8); *Continuation of Fredegar* (recte *Historia vel gesta Francorum*), c. 33, in J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, ed. and transl., *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations* (London, 1960), 102. On the meaning of *consecratio*: John F. Romano, 'The Coronation of Charlemagne as a Liturgical Event', *Mediaeval Studies* 82 (2020), 149–81, at 161–2.

[37] *ARF*, *s.a.* 754 (MGH SRG i.u.s. 6, 12); *Codex epistolaris Carolinus* [hereafter: *CC*] 6, 7, 8 (MGH Epp. 3, 489, 493, 496); *Liber Pontificalis* [hereafter: *LP*] 94.27, in Louis Duchesne, ed., *Le* Liber pontificalis. *Texte, introduction et commentaire*, 2 vols (Paris, 1886), 1: 448.

[38] Arnold Angenendt, 'Rex et Sacerdos. Zur Genese der Königssalbung', in Norbert Kamp and Joachim Wollasch, eds, *Tradition als Historische Kraft. Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zur Geschichte des früheren Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1982), 100–18; Paul A. Jacobson, '*Sicut Samuel unxit David*: Early Carolingian Royal Anointings Reconsidered', in Lizette Larson-Miller, ed., *Medieval Liturgy: A Book of Essays* (New York, 1997), 267–303; Semmler, *Der Dynastiewechsel*, 46–53.

pointed to the development, within Frankia itself, of priestly anoint-ings in particular; a number of scholars have pointed to how oil rit-uals, of all sorts, were increasingly common in Western Christianity at this time.[39] This stress on the liturgical context for royal anointing has exacerbated the tendency to see the ritual as a clerical imposition on lay rulers, something rather foreign to kings, reflecting little of the Carolingians' own concerns and priorities. That was Nelson's original interpretation: for her, the anointing(s) of the 750s were a one-off clerical creation that went nowhere, because unrepresentative of Frankish lay interests and concepts; only the episcopate of the ninth century, regularly meeting in synod, eventually ensured that royal anointing became the norm.[40]

Nelson pointed to all the literature we have from the court of Charlemagne, none of it mentioning his anointing at papal hands: 'Don't courtiers write what kings want to hear?'[41] The problem, of course, is that what kings want to hear changes. Literary works, mostly from the 790s, do not necessarily allow us to see lay percep-tions of anointing several generations earlier. Charlemagne's anoint-ing seems to have mattered more in the generation after 754 than it did by the end of the eighth century. My contention is that the role of royal anointing changed in Carolingian society over time, and did so within a continuing tradition of royal anointings, from 754 until the early ninth century. Rather than there being a substantial gap in Carolingian anointings between Pippin in 754 and Charles the Bald in 848, there were probably unctions in 768, 771, 781, 800, 816 and 823, as well as an attempted anointing around 772/3. However, we cannot take the reality of all these events for granted, and I therefore need to devote some space to the technical task of set-ting out the evidence.[42]

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[39] Janet L. Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', in Sawyer and Wood, eds, *Early Medieval Kingship*, 50–71, at 58 (repr. in Nelson, *Politics and Ritual*, 283–307, at 291) [hereafter I cite the reprint]; Janet L. Nelson, 'The Lord's Anointed and the People's Choice: Carolingian Royal Ritual', in David Cannadine and Simon Price, eds, *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1987), 137–80, at 150; Enright, *Iona, Tara and Soissons*, 137–59; Jan Clauß, 'Die Salbung Pippins des Jüngeren in karolingischen Quellen vor dem Horizont biblischer Wahrnehmungsmuster', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 46 (2013), 391–417, at 403–4.

[40] Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 289–95; eadem, 'National Synods', esp. 256.

[41] Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 292.

[42] Carlrichard Brühl, 'Fränkischer Krönungsbrauch und das Problem der "Festkrönungen"', *Historische Zeitschrift* 194 (1962), 265–326, at 306, 313–14, and

In 768, Pippin III died and his two sons, Charlemagne and Carloman, succeeded him. In separate ceremonies within their own sub-kingdoms, both kings were raised to their new positions on 9 October 768. To my knowledge, only one Carolingian text described what happened on that date as an anointing: the *Annals of St Amand* declared that 'Charles and Carloman were anointed as kings'.[43] Do we have any reason to give this single source much credence? It is broadly contemporary; this section of the *Annales sancti Amandi* was completed in or shortly after 771, and the text may be strictly contemporary in many of its entries from around this time.[44] Therefore someone in north-eastern Frankia, shortly after the events of October 768, believed that Pippin's two sons had been anointed when they succeeded their father. Also closely contemporary (and much closer to the Carolingian kings themselves) was the *Continuation of Fredegar*, which here again used the word *consecratio*. Presumably, this is a deliberate echo of the terminology used to describe Pippin's inauguration in 751: clearly some sort of episcopal consecration was involved in 768.[45]

We may see the impact of a 768 royal anointing in papal letters to Charlemagne and Carloman. During their father's reign, the two young kings had received numerous letters from Rome which made reference to their anointing by Stephen II, events also mentioned in some letters to their father Pippin.[46] These references almost all take

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Enright, *Iona, Tara and Soissons*, 122, accept the reality of the 768 and 771 anointings; Mary Garrison, 'The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an Identity from Pippin to Charlemagne', in Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes, eds, *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), 114–61, at 138, does not; Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 291–2, is undecided.

[43] 'Karlus et Karlomannus ad reges uncti sunt': *Annales sancti Amandi*, *s.a.* 768 (MGH SS 1, 12).

[44] Norbert Schröer, *Die* Annales s. Amandi *und ihre Verwandten. Untersuchungen zu einer Gruppe karolingischer Annalen des 8. und frühen 9. Jahrhunderts*, Göppinger akademische Beiträge 85 (Göppingen, 1975), 5.

[45] *Continuation of Fredegar*, c. 54 (Wallace-Hadrill, ed. and transl., 121).

[46] For example, *CC* 6, 7, 26, 33, 35, 99 (MGH Epp. 3, 489, 493, 530, 540, 543, 651–2). Although the last letter (*CC* 99) was actually sent in late 767, around the chronological mid-point of the letters in *Codex Carolinus*, it appears at the end of *CC*'s sole surviving manuscript because it was a letter from the 'anti-pope' Constantine II, on whom see Rosamond McKitterick, 'The *damnatio memoriae* of Pope Constantine II (767–768)', in Ross Balzaretti, Julia Barrow and Patricia Skinner, eds, *Italy and Early Medieval Europe: Papers for Chris Wickham on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Oxford, 2018), 231–48.

the same basic form: God had anointed Charles and Carloman as kings through the apostle Peter, by the hands of the latter's representative. But after Pippin's death these mentions of anointing dry up in papal letters: Charlemagne and Carloman never again received a reminder that they had been anointed as kings by Stephen II. Might this simply reflect changes at Rome at either the papal or the notarial level? There is also a noticeable drop-off in the use of biblical references in papal letters after Pippin's death, noted by a number of scholars.[47] But, as we have seen, there was no particularly biblical overtone to how the popes had referred to anointing, so the one change cannot necessarily explain the other. The disappearance of royal anointing from these letters may also slightly predate the decline of biblical rhetoric. Pope Stephen III (768–72) wrote a famously violent letter to Charlemagne and Carloman, warning them off marriage to a Lombard princess, that relied heavily on biblical imagery and language. Stephen admonished the Franks against setting aside their lawful wives, behaviour unworthy of Christians who 'through anointing with holy oil … have been sanctified with a heavenly blessing by the hands of the vicar of the blessed Peter'. Here the anointing of 754 was not described as a royal anointing, as it always had been before, but as a straightforward post-baptismal / confirmation anointing.[48]

The disappearance of royal anointing from papal letters seems to have derived from a conscious decision: when Pope Hadrian I (772–95) reused one of Stephen II's letters to Pippin to provide him with the words with which to address Charlemagne in 775, all reference to the papal anointing of the king was removed.[49] Charlemagne had, of

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[47] Thomas F. X. Noble, 'The Bible in the Codex Carolinus', in Claudio Leonardi and Giovanni Orlando, eds, *Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, Millennio medievale 52 (Florence, 2005), 61–74, at 71–2; Dorine van Espelo, 'A Testimony of Carolingian Rule: The *Codex epistolaris carolinus* as a Product of its Time' (PhD thesis, University of Utrecht, 2014), 188–94. Arnold Angenendt, 'Karl der Große als *rex et sacerdos*', in Rainer Berndt, ed., *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794. Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur*, 2 vols (Mainz, 1997), 1: 255–78, at 269–70, notes that Hadrian I never mentioned royal anointing in his letters.

[48] '[Q]uia oleo sancto uncti per manus vicarii beati Petri caelesti benedictione estis sanctificati': *CC* 45 (MGH Epp. 3, 561). ET: Rosamond McKitterick et al., *Codex Epistolaris Carolinus: Letters from the Popes to the Frankish Rulers 739–791*, TTH 77 (Liverpool, 2021), 285. On the biblical imagery: Walter Pohl, 'Why not to Marry a Foreign Woman: Stephen III's Letter to Charlemagne', in Valerie L. Garver and Owen M. Phelan, eds, *Rome and Religion in the Medieval World: Studies in Honour of Thomas F. X. Noble* (Farnham, 2014), 47–63.

[49] *CC* 57 (MGH Epp. 3, 582), drawing on *CC* 8 (MGH Epp. 3, 496).

course, been anointed by the pope on the very same day as Pippin. Why was that fact no longer relevant and why did it cease to be relevant almost as soon as Pippin died? One explanation would be that in 768 the papal anointing had been superseded by another royal anointing of Charlemagne and Carloman, one in which no pope had participated. If the papacy knew that the Frankish kings were, after October 768, appealing to a more recent liturgical unction for their kingly legitimacy, then it might no longer have been deemed politic to refer to the 754 anointing. This would suggest that royal anointing was not just a papal, or even a clerical, idea. Rather, it suggests that it was a Frankish rite presumably valued by the Carolingian family themselves.

On 4 December 771, Carloman died and representatives from his kingdom swiftly journeyed to meet Charlemagne on the border between the two sub-kingdoms to accept him as their ruler. Once again, most sources do not mention an anointing on this occasion, except one: in addition to the list of dignitaries given in the *ARF* entry, the *Annales Mettenses priores* state that 'they anointed the most glorious king Charles as their lord over them'.[50] Now the so-called 'earlier' *Annals of Metz* are certainly not a contemporary source. The text was written around 805 by someone keen to provide a favourable view of the Carolingian family's history, someone probably close to the (post-800) imperial court who intended to defend the providential nature of the Carolingian ascent to empire, and possibly influence succession plans amongst Charlemagne's sons. Charlemagne's sister, Gisela, has been credited with the inspiration for the text, although her patronage is not universally accepted.[51] If true, of course, Gisela's role would mean that the Metz annalist had access to good quality family information about the recent

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[50] 'Ibi venientes ad eum Wileharius achiepiscopus et Fulradus Capellanus cum aliis episcopis ac sacerdotibus, Warinus quoque et Adhalardus comites cum aliis principibus, qui fuerant ex partibus Carlomanni, et unxerunt super se dominum suum Carolum gloriossimum regem': *Annales Mettenses priores, s.a.* 771 (MGH SRG i.u.s. 10, 57–8). Cf. *ARF, s.a.* 771 (MGH SRG i.u.s. 6, 32). See Janet L. Nelson, *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne* (London, 2019), 108–9.

[51] See Janet L. Nelson, 'Gender and Genre in Woman Historians of the early Middle Ages', in J.-P. Genet, ed., *L'Historiographie médiévale en Europe* (Paris, 1991), 149–63, at 156–60; Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640–720* (Manchester, 1996), 330–49; Yitzhak Hen, 'The Annals of Metz and the Merovingian Past', in Hen and Innes, eds, *Uses of the Past*, 175–90.

Carolingians.[52] Olaf Schneider has pointed out a number of striking similarities between the events of 771 and the *ARF*'s account of Pippin's anointing in 751; the latter probably distorted the record to make Charlemagne's recent accession to sole kingship seem in perfect continuity with Pippin's receipt of Frankish kingship.[53] If Charlemagne was anointed in 771, that might explain why the *ARF* felt compelled to state that Pippin had been so in 751: anointing, by the early 770s, may have become the standard way that a Carolingian king was made. Alternatively, Josef Semmler has suggested that the Metz annalist simply used 'anointed' to mean 'appointed'; if so, that was a significant choice of word.[54]

The other evidence we have for Carolingian anointings in the eighth century points to a papal rite. In 781, Charlemagne had his sons Pippin and Louis anointed kings of Italy and Aquitaine respectively by Hadrian I in a grand ceremony in Rome; their elder brother, Charles the Younger, had to wait until 800, when he became a king immediately after his father's imperial coronation. Papal sources state that Pope Leo III (795–816) anointed Charles.[55] There was also a papal anointing that never happened. In 772 or 773, the Lombard king Desiderius attempted to have the pope anoint Charlemagne's two young nephews as kings, presumably as part of an attempt to weaken Charlemagne's position within Frankia by establishing rivals for the monarchy. Within a few years, Charlemagne had invaded Italy and taken over the Lombard kingdom, causing his nephews to disappear in the process.[56] There is an important context here: the difficulty of determining who exactly was a member of the royal family in the early Carolingian era. At regular intervals the dynastic tree had to be rather brutally pruned.

Pippin III spent some years before 754 excluding various close male relatives (including his own brother's son) from power in

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[52] Nelson, *King and Emperor*, 36.

[53] Schneider, 'Die Königserhebung Pippins', 249–62.

[54] Semmler, *Der Dynastiewechsel*, 41–3.

[55] *ARF*, *s.a.* 781 (MGH SRG i.u.s. 6, 57); *LP* 98.24 (Duchesne, ed., *Le* Liber pontificalis, 2: 7); Romano, 'The Coronation of Charlemagne', 162–4. Alcuin, *Epistola* 217 (MGH Epp. 4, 360), does not mention anointing in 800 but indicates that Charles had received some coronation ritual at the pope's hands; see Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge, 2008), 96.

[56] *LP* 97.8 (Duchesne, ed., *Le* Liber pontificalis, 1: 488): Pope Hadrian's recognition that to have anointed Charlemagne's nephews would have meant a break with the king indicates that at this time royal anointing was understood to have real meaning and impact in the Frankish world: Nelson, *King and Emperor*, 123, 132–5.

Frankia. Having his sons anointed alongside him indicated that only his branch of the Carolingian family was entitled to rule.[57] Charlemagne not only prevented his nephews from using anointing to assert their membership of the royal family; he also seems to have used anointing to manage his own children. The papal anointing in 781 took care of Charlemagne's two youngest sons, setting them up usefully in sub-kingdoms within their father's larger realm. This left the two older sons in a somewhat ambiguous position at best. The eldest, Pippin 'the Hunchback', did not belong to Charlemagne's second family (the children of his, probably, third wife, Hildegard) and may well have been essentially demoted from the status of a legitimate Carolingian in 781, when one of Hildegard's sons was renamed Pippin.[58] Hildegard's eldest son, Charles the Younger, also, rather oddly, was not anointed in 781, although he seems to have enjoyed paternal favour in the years that followed. There may have been personal issues with Charles that raised doubts about his suitability as a king, or Charlemagne may have preferred to maintain some ambiguity rather than raise up another king of the Franks. Having avoided trouble during the revolt of 'the Hunchback' of 792, Charles the Younger was eventually ritually acknowledged as a king in 800, his status as successor to the lion's share of his father's realm (confirmed by the succession plans Charlemagne published in 806) probably being decided at that point.[59]

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[57] Matthias Becher, 'Drogo und die Königserhebung Pippins', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 23 (1989), 131–53. Fundamental now on the shaping of the Carolingian family, and the creation of consensus around its right to rule, is Stuart Airlie, *Making and Unmaking the Carolingians: 751–888* (London, 2021), which was published after I completed work on this article.

[58] For a survey of Charlemagne's shifting and complex management of his children, see Jennifer R. Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire* (Cambridge, 2015), 415–22. Janet L. Nelson, 'Charlemagne – *pater optimus*?', in Peter Godman, Jörg Jarnut and Peter Johanek, eds, *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung. Das Epos 'Karolus Magnus et Leo papa' und der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799* (Berlin, 2002), 269–82, at 273–4, argues that the 781 anointing did not mean that Pippin 'the Hunchback' had certainly been removed from the succession by this point. For the varying attempts to explain the naming of a second son as Pippin in 781: Courtney M. Booker, 'By any other Name? Charlemagne, Nomenclature, and Performativity', in Rolf Grosse and Michel Sot, eds, *Charlemagne. Les Temps, les espaces, les hommes*, Collection Haut Moyen Âge 34 (Turnhout, 2018), 409–26, at 415–19.

[59] Carl I. Hammer, 'Christmas Day 800: Charles the Younger, Alcuin and the Frankish Royal Succession', *EHR* 127 (2012), 1–23; Nelson, 'Charlemagne – *pater optimus*?', 278–81; eadem, *King and Emperor*, 270–5, 385–6. While there is evidence that Charles

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Royal anointing thus functioned as an important tool for control-
ling and manipulating the shape of the Carolingian family and the
eventual succession to power. By the end of the eighth century this
may have been its primary function in the Frankish lands. The
Frankish memory of the 754 anointing ceremony preserved the
idea that Stephen II had declared that the Franks could only choose
anointed Carolingians as their kings henceforth;[60] regular re-enact-
ments of the papal anointing of that year served to indicate who
was a member of that chosen family of monarchs. But that function
does not explain the possible anointings of Charlemagne and
Carloman in 768, and of Charlemagne alone in 771. In order to
explain those, we need to remember that in its early years the
Carolingian dynasty was no such thing. The Carolingians were
merely the greatest of the aristocratic families in the Frankish
realm. They were members of the elite *gens Francorum*, the ethnically
defined warrior aristocracy who were celebrated for their religious
excellence in much propaganda of the early Carolingian era. A rich
array of evidence survives for the intense group identity of the mid-
eighth-century Frankish elite, for their self-conception not just as
'strong in arms' but also as 'immune from heresy', a Christian, an
orthodox and a holy people.[61] Sanctity had become a key resource in
late Merovingian elite politics, accessed via patronage of monasteries

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received territory to rule in 789, none exists for him holding a royal title before 800: Davis,
Charlemagne's Practice, 418.
[60] *Clausula de unctione Pippini* (MGH SRM 1.2, 16). This text describes itself as an
account of the 754 anointing ceremony written down in 768, but the dating is controver-
sial: McKitterick, 'The Illusion of Royal Power', 7–8; Alain J. Stoclet, 'La *Clausula de unc-
tione Pippini regis*, vingt ans après', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 78 (2000), 719–71;
Schneider, 'Die Königserhebung Pippins', 268–75.
[61] 'Gens Francorum inclita, auctorem Deo condita, fortis in arma, firma pace fetera, pro-
funda in consilio, corporea nobilis, incoluma candore, forma egregia, audax, uelox et
aspera, [nuper] ad catholicam fidem conuersa, emunis ab heresa': *Lex Salica*, (D) prologue
(MGH LL nat. Germ. 4.2, 2). For discussion of the evidence for Frankish elite identity:
Garrison, 'The Franks as the New Israel?'; Matthew Innes, '"Immune from Heresy":
Defining the Boundaries of Carolingian Christianity', in Paul Fouracre and David
Ganz, eds, *Frankland: The Franks and the World of the Early Middle Ages. Essays in
Honour of Dame Jinty Nelson* (Manchester, 2008), 101–25; Ildar H. Garipzanov, *The
Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c.751–877)*, Brill's Series on
the Early Middle Ages 16 (Leiden, 2008), 262–71.

and family connections to saintly men and women.[62] Carolingian royal sanctification took place, consequently, against a backdrop of wider aristocratic sanctification.

It was one of Janet Nelson's great insights in the 1980s that early medieval king-making rituals were intended both to separate out the king from his subjects, and to appeal to the aristocratic consensus on which royal power depended in practice. For Nelson, anointing was part of this balancing act, but was still a somewhat foreign one, barely reflecting indigenous Frankish lay ideas.[63] But Frankish records of the 754 anointing also mention that Stephen II blessed the assembled Frankish nobles on that occasion. In other words, a confirmation of the religiously special status of the entire elite provided the setting for royal anointing.[64] The Frankish liturgy for royal anointing that existed by the end of the eighth century (incidentally, evidence that anointings were performed by clerics other than popes) shows little sophisticated clerical thought about what royal anointing meant. It is really just a cut-and-paste job, essentially replicating the liturgical prayers used for earlier oil rituals familiar to local lay audiences.[65] Consequently, Carolingian royal anointing very plausibly had its origins in Frankish lay expectations and needs.

In the first instance, anointing may have been a strategy for setting apart some (and only some) members of the Carolingian family from the rest of the Frankish elite as royal, in a manner that made sense in terms of the self-conception of the aristocracy as a whole. Over time,

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[62] Paul Fouracre, 'The Origins of the Carolingian Attempt to Regulate the Cult of Saints', in James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward, eds, *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown* (Oxford, 1999), 143–65. For a recent re-interpretation of the late Merovingian cult of the saints and its relationship to social elites: Jamie Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography in the Merovingian Kingdom*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th series 96 (Cambridge, 2014).

[63] Nelson, 'The Lord's Anointed', 146–7, 153–7.

[64] *Clausula de unctione Pippini* (MGH SRM 1.2, 15–16). There is also a ninth-century account of the ceremony that similarly portrays a blessing of the aristocracy: Stoclet, 'La Clausula', 751–2.

[65] Robert Amiet, ed., *The Benedictionals of Freising (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Lat. 6430)*, HBS 88 (London, 1974), 100–1; cf. Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, with Leo Eizenhöfer and Petrus Siffrin, eds, *Missale Francorum (Cod. Vat. Reg. lat. 257)*, Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta Series Maior: Fontes 2 (Rome, 1957), 10; Nelson, 'The Lord's Anointed', 150; eadem, 'Inauguration Rituals', 291; Ernst Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae: A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Medieval Ruler Worship* (Berkeley, CA, 1946), 55 n. 142.

with Charlemagne securely on the throne and his position increasingly accepted by a new generation of nobles, anointing seems to have become restricted to managing succession *within* the Carolingian dynasty. The utility of this function also faded with time, as, with all Hildegard's sons anointed by 800, maternal status could unproblematically become the determining factor of who would be a king and who would not. Anointing, therefore, was no longer needed to single out some of Hildegard's sons and so was no longer a noteworthy feature of the younger Carolingians' biographies, as it had ceased to be a noteworthy feature of their father's some years previously.[66] Royal anointing was next deployed in 816 when Louis the Pious sought to limit Carolingian kingship to himself and his children, in a process that excluded his nephew and other relatives.[67] This revival suggests that the dynastic meaning of anointing had impressed itself on Carolingian memories.

CONCLUSION

What do our two cases studies have in common? In both seventh-century Spain and eighth-century Frankia we see situations in which the distinction between a new king and the other members of the lay aristocracy was not immediately clear. There was a lack of a dynastic principle that commanded consent: this simply did not exist in the Visigothic context and had broken down in the Frankish, where a new royal dynasty was trying to establish itself. Kings in these societies were passing from one social group (the elite aristocracy) into a new status: a rite of passage was needed to mark this transition. In both cases, the lay aristocracy had a strong religious self-understanding as a Christian elite, and were frequently involved in the religious life of

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[66] Much recent work has shown the importance of maternal status to dynastic thinking under the Carolingians: Janet L. Nelson, 'Bertrada', in Becher and Jarnut, eds, *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751*, 93–108; Constance Brittain Bouchard, 'The Carolingian Creation of a Model of Patrilineage', in Celia Chazelle and Felice Lifshitz, eds, *Paradigms and Methods in Early Medieval Studies* (Basingstoke, 2007), 135–51; Sara McDougall, *Royal Bastards: The Birth of Illegitimacy, 800–1230* (Oxford, 2016), 66–93.

[67] Karl Ferdinand Werner, '*Hludovicus Augustus*. Gouverner l'empire chrétien – idées et réalités', in Peter Godman and Roger Collins, eds, *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)* (Oxford, 1990), 3–124, at 31–42. See Ermoldus Nigellus, *In honorem Hludowici*, book 2, lines 439–46 (MGH Poetae 2, 36–7), for the stress on Louis's descendants at the 816 ceremony.

the kingdom. Something more than the usual religious features of early medieval kingship was needed to set the monarch apart from his nobles, while also winning support from them by flattering their sense of 'chosenness'. Royal anointing was a rite of passage that chimed with existing elite identities, while also elevating the king.

In the Carolingian case, where the aim was to create a new royal family, the rite was used to ease the succession of the younger generation. By the ninth century, anointing's main purpose seems to have become family management for the rite's significance had changed over time. Further change helps explain why, by the middle of the ninth century, royal anointing had become a much more clerical rite. A sea change in the self-perception of the Frankish episcopate around the 820s led to the emergence of bishops willing and able, as Nelson skilfully detailed, to shape the liturgy and ideology of anointing.[68] But they modified an existing Christian rite, one whose origins had probably been driven more by the laypeople who received and beheld it than by the clerics who performed it.

[68] Steffen Patzold, *Episcopus. Wissen über Bischöfe im Frankenreich des späten 8. bis frühen 10. Jahrhunderts*, Mittelalter-Forschungen 25 (Ostfildern, 2008) is essential on the changing understanding of bishops in the Carolingian world.