*Part III*

# Changing Senses of the Other from the Fourth to the Eleventh Centuries

# 9     Pagans, rebels and Merovingians: otherness in the early Carolingian world

*Richard Broome*

During the eighth century the *regnum Francorum* became increasingly expansionist, a process which began under Pippin II and Charles Martel and culminated in their descendant Charlemagne's Saxon Wars.[1] Such expansionism necessarily altered the way in which the community of the kingdom was perceived by its members and those who wrote about its recent past, with historians and hagiographers naturally looking beyond the borders of the kingdom to identify those who were nominally excluded from the community.[2] The community itself was identified with the positive traits of orthodox Christianity, strong military rulers and loyalty to the Carolingian dynasty,[3] while the excluded were those who challenged such concepts. Three excluded groups in particular dominate the early Carolingian sources: pagans, rebels and Merovingians. The presentations of these groups involved a great deal of misrepresentation, and the research of recent decades has shed light on a 'non-Carolingian' narrative of the eighth century: the peripheral peoples need not be seen as rebels;[4] the later Merovingians were not useless kings;[5] and there have been serious attempts to investigate the realities of early medieval Germanic paganism, if such a term can be used.[6]

Yet even for Carolingian authors there was a great deal of ambiguity in the portrayal of those identified as 'others'. The *regnum Francorum* had long been based on the idea that Franks ruled non-Franks, and that the latter owed some kind of notional loyalty to their rulers made them part of the community even if they were not Franks.[7] Nevertheless, Carolingian authors were very aware and made extensive use of ethnic and geographic

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[1] For an overview of the period see McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 63–136.
[2] On early medieval communities see Pohl, 'Introduction: ethnicity, religion and empire'.
[3] Reimitz, '*Omnes Franci*', pp. 53–4.     [4] Geary, *Aristocracy*, pp. 138–48.
[5] Gerberding, *Rise*; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 273–92; Fouracre, 'Long shadow', p. 14. For a refutation see Kölzer, 'Die letzten Merowingerkönige', pp. 33–6.
[6] Wood, 'Pagan religions'.
[7] Goetz, '*Gens*, kings and kingdoms'; Nelson, 'Frankish identity'; Wolfram, 'How many peoples'.

labels; many of the groups and individuals we encounter in the sources are identified as – for example – Frankish, Bavarian or Saxon. But while such labels as Bavarian or Saxon implied difference from a Frank they did not necessarily imply exclusion or otherness: what was important was a sense of moral judgement. For this reason the others of the early Carolingian period were not the peripheral peoples as such, since these could be integrated into the *regnum Francorum*. Rather, the others were those identified as pagans or rebels; those outside the Christian community or acting disloyally towards their rulers. Yet the purpose of the Carolingian wars and contemporary missionary efforts was to integrate these peoples, and rebels could, by definition, only rebel against those who were already thought to rule them. A further complication was added by the Carolingian attitude to the recent Frankish past, particularly the late seventh and early eighth centuries, which came to be seen as a time of degeneracy and weakness when the Franks were ruled by useless kings and which led in turn to a denunciation of the later Merovingians. This was an attitude which risked making other not those supposedly outside the kingdom but the very history of the community itself, an idea which would not fit with Carolingian attempts to stress continuity with the past.[8] One last point to bear in mind before proceeding is that these ideas of otherness were not fixed; they were part of an ongoing discourse in which authors drew on a common pool of signs, symbols and labels but did so in ways which suited their own needs and the expectations of their contemporary audience. Thus the depictions of pagans, rebels and Merovingians changed – sometimes radically – over the course of the eighth century and into the ninth.

What we shall look at here, then, is how early Carolingian historians and hagiographers approached the idea of 'otherness' and how they created a sense of distinction that did not necessarily exist in reality but which was essential to the Frankish world view during the first generations of Carolingian rule. We shall begin by considering how the Carolingians defined paganism through the identification of beliefs that were considered unacceptable in a Christian society. We shall then look at how authors presented the wars of the Carolingians as wars against rebels and addressed the issue of exclusion and integration inherent in such presentations. Next we shall analyse how authors dealt with the later Merovingians – the so-called *rois fainéants* – and the usurpation which brought the Carolingians to the throne. Within the analysis of each group we shall also consider the portrayals of three individuals: Radbod of Frisia, Grifo and Childeric III respectively. Between them, these three highlight

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[8] McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 63–5.

the variety present in the early Carolingian discourse of otherness and how depictions of others could change over time while still maintaining a sense of exclusion. Finally, we shall examine presentations of groups further removed from the early Carolingian world – either geographically or temporally – which we might expect to have been 'others'. We shall see that Muslims, Slavs and earlier members of the Merovingian dynasty were not subjected to the same kinds of hostile presentations as those groups already considered, despite the fact that they could have been. Therefore we can consolidate the idea that for Carolingian authors it was actually those closest to the community who were seen as others, further highlighting the sense of ambiguity in such a discourse. What will become apparent from this overview of a variety of presentations of different groups is just how important a particular presentation of the recent past was to these authors, and how central the control of Frankish cultural memory was to the legitimation of Carolingian power.

### Pagans and paganism

In many ways pagans were the most definite other for Carolingian authors.[9] Paganism had been the antithesis of Christianity since Late Antiquity, with the modern word 'pagan' deriving from the Christian label for any non-Christian practice, even if collectively these practices had little in common.[10] In a world where Christianisation and the enforcement of orthodoxy were matters of political policy as much as of spiritual belief, we should not be surprised that pagans and paganism were causes of concern for churchmen and hagiographers. It should also not come as a surprise that the eighth century saw the start of determined efforts to define paganism, although this often meant generally unacceptable beliefs rather than pagan practices in the modern understanding of the concept. Such efforts can be seen particularly clearly in the texts composed and influenced by the circle surrounding the Anglo-Saxon missionary Boniface, particularly the *Concilium Germanicum* (742) and the related document *Indiculus superstitionum*.[11] A letter from Daniel of Winchester to Boniface likewise highlights the interest in pagan beliefs.[12] Also within this tradition are the documents of Charlemagne related to the governance of Saxony, *Admonitio generalis* (789) and *Capitulatio de*

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[9] Palmer, 'Defining paganism'.    [10] Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 5–6.
[11] Boniface, *Epistolae*, 56; *Indiculus superstitionum*, pp. 19–20. See Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 122–4.
[12] Boniface, *Epistolae*, 23.

*partibus Saxoniae* (*c.* 792).[13] These texts contain examples of the practices late eighth-century churchmen expected pagans to perform, but historians have debated both the reality of such beliefs and the extent and nature of *interpretatio Romana* – the interpretation of 'Germanic' gods as their classical equivalents: was this an attempt by Christians to place contemporary pagan beliefs in a classical framework, or a reflection of the reality of syncretic beliefs which had been influenced by exposure to the Roman world? Such a question is not easy to answer.[14] The Carolingians were not attempting to understand paganism on its own terms, though, and generally had little interest in the realities of pagan belief and practice. Thus, it is interesting to note that these definitions do not always distinguish between what we would think of as heresy, superstition and paganism.[15] This may be a reflection of the fact that Boniface in particular worked as much – if not more – in areas that were already Christian but not necessarily 'orthodox' as he did in pagan areas.[16] Just as in Late Antiquity, when 'pagan' and 'paganism' were catch-all terms for non-Christian practices, these eighth-century attempts to define 'paganism' should be seen more accurately as attempts to define the beliefs and practices that would result in exclusion from the Frankish community.

Hagiographical texts also contain descriptions of pagan beliefs and practices. Among the most explicit examples are the vivid depictions of attempted human sacrifice in *Vita Vulframni*, a text composed at the monastery of Saint-Wandrille at the turn of the ninth century.[17] According to the author, while preaching in Frisia Wulfram witnessed several sacrifices in which he intervened and saved the victims.[18] Similar to this is the story of Liudger's mother found in Altfrid's *Vita Liudgeri*, composed in the 840s. Here Liudger's great-grandmother attempts to drown her granddaughter before the latter had eaten 'earthly food', although this is presented as something that pagans believed to be acceptable, rather than occurring in the context of a sacrifice.[19] While it is not always easy to draw the line between *topos* and reality in such passages,[20] it is worth noting that the importance of water in both cases seems to parallel certain references in *Lex Frisionum*, also believed to have been composed in the early ninth century.[21] However, these authors were not attempting

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[13] *Admonitio generalis*, 64; *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, 1, 6–10, 22.
[14] Wallace-Hadrill, *Frankish Church*, pp. 18–19; Wood, 'Pagan religions', p. 254; Palmer, 'Defining paganism', 407–8.
[15] Wood, 'Pagan religions', p. 261.
[16] Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 57–64; Wood, 'An absence of saints?', pp. 340–2; Clay, *Shadow of Death*, pp. 177–84.
[17] Wood, *Missionary Life*, p. 92.    [18] *VV*, 6–8.    [19] Altfrid, *VL*, 6–7.
[20] Wood, 'Pagans and holy men', pp. 348–9; Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons*, p. 135.
[21] *Lex Frisionum*, *Additio* XI, 1.

to define paganism but to present their audience with personal encounters between Christians and pagans. Such personal encounters can be explored further through presentations of the pagan leader Radbod.

### Radbod of Frisia

Of the individual pagans mentioned in early Carolingian texts none is more prominent than Radbod, the ruler of Frisia from the 680s until his death in 719. It is therefore worth considering how depictions of him differed from one text to another. The first hagiographer to depict Radbod at length was Willibald, author of *Vita Bonifatii*, who wrote in the 760s. *Vita Bonifatii* places Boniface's first mission to Frisia in the context of Charles Martel's war against Radbod, but for Willibald the main outcome of this war was not the political destabilisation of the region. Rather it was the religious impact which the 'pagan invasion' had: the Radbod of *Vita Bonifatii* is an archetypal pagan persecutor who seeks to devastate the churches of Frisia, expel the priests, raise idols and restore temples.[22] While this may be an exaggeration of what was actually a targeting of Charles Martel's supporters in the area, the depiction of Radbod shows how central the concept of the pagan persecutor could be, and also sets the scene appropriately for Boniface's return to Frisia in 754 and his martyrdom at the hands of Frisian pirates.[23] This Radbod is completely beyond the pale and irredeemable, as are the inhabitants of Frisia whom he represents.

Those who followed Willibald in writing about the Frisian mission took a more nuanced approach to the region's infamous ruler, however. In his *Vita Willibrordi* (*c*. 796) Alcuin avoids such an explicit denunciation of Radbod.[24] Instead he portrays Radbod as a figure with whom Willibrord could debate the progress of the mission, stating that the saint 'was not afraid to approach King Radbod of Frisia and his pagan people', but that he was unable to 'to soften Radbod's heart of stone to life'.[25] Alcuin stopped short of portraying Radbod as an active persecutor of Christianity, even if the Frisian ruler was also not an active helper of the missionaries. It is clear that Alcuin felt Radbod to be an obstacle to the mission, though, since he claims that the pagan's death paved the way for Charles Martel's conquest of Frisia, which in turn allowed the mission to progress more smoothly.[26] This sentiment was also displayed by Altfrid, who borrowed the relevant passage from *Vita Willibrordi* in his

[22] *VB*, 4.   [23] *VB*, 8.   [24] Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 79–81, 85–6.
[25] *VW*, 9.   [26] *VW*, 13.

*Vita Liudgeri*, suggesting that there was no attempt by the ninth-century Christians of Frisia to rehabilitate Radbod.[27]

*Vita Vulframni* provides us with our most vivid and unusual depiction of Radbod.[28] Here the Frisian ruler is not depicted as opposing Wulfram's mission in any way; in fact, he allows the saint to preach to anyone who wishes to hear the word of God and even allows the saint to recruit those he is able to miraculously save from being sacrificed to the gods.[29] Yet despite his goodwill, Radbod is unwilling to be converted himself, and we actually hear his reasons for this. First, when on the verge of being baptised, Radbod declares to Wulfram that he would rather spend eternity in the company of his ancestors than in the company of a few paupers, the citizens of heaven.[30] Second, Radbod had been deceived by the Devil. This is first implied in Wulfram's reaction to his claim about spending eternity with his ancestors, but made more explicit in the following chapter, when the Devil appears to Radbod in a dream and promises him a golden hall in which to spend eternity. The Devil even promises to show the hall to him, something Wulfram would be unable to do with the promised heavenly residence. One of Radbod's followers and a deacon are then shown a golden hall by a demonic guide. The guide and the hall turn to dust when the deacon invokes the power of Christ, and when they return they discover Radbod has died unbaptised.[31]

Each author presented Radbod in a way which reflected his aims and the construction of his text. Willibald aimed to highlight the multifaceted nature of Boniface's career, as well as to stress the saint's appeal to a Frankish audience,[32] not least because Boniface appears to have been somewhat unpopular among his peers during his lifetime.[33] For this reason, his Boniface shares the enemies of the Carolingians. In addition to his hostile portrayal of Radbod, Willibald denounces Charles Martel's Thuringian rival Heden as a heretic despite the latter having been a supporter of Willibrord's monastic foundation at Echternach.[34] Alcuin's purpose in *Vita Willibrordi*, meanwhile, was – at least partly – to show that the most important tools in the conversion of pagans were not miracles, conquest or forced conversion, but education and preaching, which brought an understanding of the new religion.[35] He was therefore keen to highlight the peaceful interaction that could take place between missionaries and pagans in order to show that cooperation was possible. Willibald

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[27] *VL*, 4.    [28] Wood, 'Saint-Wandrille', pp. 13–14; Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 92–3.
[29] *VV*, 6–8.    [30] *VV*, 9. See Lebecq, 'Le baptême manqué'.    [31] *VV*, 10.
[32] Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 61–4.    [33] Ewig, 'Milo'.
[34] *VB*, 6. Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 62–3. On Heden see Mordek, 'Die Hedenen'; Fouracre, *Charles Martel*, pp. 113–14.
[35] Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 82–8.

had hinted at this in his description of Boniface's conversion of Hesse –
which involved the famous felling of the Oak of Jupiter[36] – but Alcuin
went further and made it the focal point of his missionary hagiography,
even if he still had to admit that military conquest could be useful.[37]
*Vita Vulframni* may well have been a direct reaction to Alcuin's text, since
it involves a Neustrian saint who allegedly interacted more closely with
Radbod than Willibrord had, came close to converting and baptising the
Frisian leader, and relied heavily on miracles to undertake the conversion
of the Frisians.[38] What we appear to have in this text, then, is an attempt
by the monastery of Saint-Wandrille to claim some of the glory associated
with the Frisian mission, and to show that a Neustrian bishop associated
with the monastery had been just as important in the conversion of Frisia
as Willibrord and Boniface, two saints more readily associated with the
Carolingians and Austrasia: its portrayal of Radbod as a ruler willing to
tolerate the missionaries may in fact be more in line with the memory
of his role as an ally of Charles Martel's Neustrian enemies Ragamfred
and Chilperic II.[39] We must remember, though, that in *Vita Vulframni*
Radbod staunchly defends his paganism and dies unbaptised. Even in
this almost sympathetic text, then, he remains other.

### Rebels

Rebels are ubiquitous in the early Carolingian sources, although attempts
to define rebellion were perhaps less zealous than attempts to define
paganism, at least before the advent of Charlemagne's oaths of loyalty.[40]
Rebels were excluded from the Frankish community because they had
removed themselves from it by acts of disloyalty against the Carolingian
rulers who held the community together. The concept of rebellion could
be used not only to justify Carolingian wars of expansion, but also to
explain why the rulers had undertaken wars against those who were
supposed to be their subjects. Unlike pagans, then, rebels could be found
not just on the peripheries of the Frankish realm, but also within the
*regnum Francorum* itself, and the latter could be particularly problematic,
as we shall see. Yet the peripheral peoples were the primary target of the
discourse of rebellion, and because of this there was an ambiguous but
crucial ethnic element to the discourse. Indeed, the link between rebellion
and ethnicity seems to have been so deeply ingrained in the minds of

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[36] *VB*, 6. See Palmer, 'Defining paganism', 411–12; Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 124–9;
Clay, *Shadow of Death*, pp. 288–9.
[37] *VW*, 13. Wood, *Missionary Life*, p. 85.    [38] Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 92–3.
[39] Wood, 'Saint-Wandrille', p. 14.    [40] See Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft*.

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Carolingian authors that certain peoples – those who had proven most difficult to conquer or integrate – were seen as inherently rebellious. The Saxons represent the most obvious case of this, and several annal entries report that the Saxons 'rebelled in their usual manner', or words to that effect.[41] Einhard's presentation of Charlemagne's Saxon Wars in *Vita Karoli* represents the most extreme version of this trend, since unlike earlier authors he did not distinguish between the different groups of Saxons.[42] But it is clear that it was rebelliousness rather than ethnicity that equated to otherness, since the annals report that both Saxons and Frisians marched to war with the Frankish army.[43]

At the same time, many peoples were rebellious because they had been led astray by their leaders. Example of such leaders are Hunoald of Aquitaine and Odilo of Bavaria, both of whom had been given their positions of power by Charles Martel but then renounced the loyalty they had sworn to his sons.[44] Such figures seem to have served a particular purpose in the sources. Firstly, they represented a counterpoint to the Carolingian rulers, but secondly – and perhaps more importantly – they allowed for only a single figure to be excluded: if an entire people was rebellious it would be difficult to incorporate it into the Frankish community, as in the case of the Saxons, although at least some of them were led astray by Widukind.[45] If a people had been led astray by its leader, though, integration could theoretically take place after the leader's death. But if the idea of rebellion was intrinsically linked to ethnicity and the peripheral peoples, how were rebellious Franks to be portrayed? As an answer, we shall now turn to the treatment of Charles Martel's son Grifo in the historical narratives of the period.

### Grifo

Although early-Carolingian sources attempt to stress the unity of the Franks under the Carolingian dynasty, there were several disagreements within the royal family itself which proved to be unavoidable. Perhaps the most interesting example of this in terms of looking at changing approaches to others is Grifo, Charles Martel's son by his second wife Swanhild. Grifo actually came incredibly close to wielding real power in the Frankish kingdom, as shown by a letter he received from Boniface,[46] and his father almost certainly imagined that he would inherit joint

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[41] *ARF*, and *AMP*, s.a. 776–95. On the Saxons see Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 166–261.
[42] *VK*, c. 7. See Flierman in this volume.     [43] *ARF*, s.a. 789–91.
[44] *AMP*, s.a. 742–3. On early medieval Aquitaine see Rouche, *L'Aquitaine*. On Odilo and Bavaria see Hammer, *'Ducatus' to 'Regnum'*, pp. 58–64; Brown, *Unjust Seizure*.
[45] *AMP*, s.a. 777–82.     [46] Boniface, *Epistolae*, 48.

authority with his brothers, probably consisting of parts of Neustria, Austrasia and Thuringia.[47] Instead Grifo fell into dispute with his half-brothers Pippin III and Carloman and spent most of the 740s imprisoned in Neufchâteau, and the remainder of his life from 747–53 variously at war with or fleeing from Pippin.[48] Yet we learn nothing about Grifo from the earliest Carolingian version of Frankish history – the so-called *Continuations to the Chronicle of Fredegar* (*c.* 751–86)[49] – except that he died in 753 while attempting to cross the Alps to the Lombard kingdom.[50] Fredegar's continuator remained almost silent about the wayward member of the Carolingian dynasty, and it seems that he preferred to ignore this divisive character rather than attempt to deal with the implications of his actions.

By the turn of the ninth century, though, we can see a growing interest in Grifo, since he features in both versions of *Annales regni Francorum* (*ARF*).[51] In the original version, composed *c.* 793, we learn that Grifo made an alliance with the Saxons in 747, but then fled to Bavaria in the following year and took over the duchy before being thwarted by Pippin III, who offered him control of twelve counties in Neustria. Not satisfied with this, Grifo fled to '*Vasconia*' and Duke Waifar of Aquitaine.[52] The revised version, composed probably shortly after 800, adds more detail to Grifo's story, while our fullest account of his career comes from *Annales Mettenses Priores* (*AMP*), composed *c.* 805.[53] Between them these sources present a much more explicitly rebellious vision of Grifo. Thus Grifo's attempt to exercise the authority he had been given by his father is portrayed as a rebellion against his brothers, simultaneously emphasising their legitimacy and his illegitimacy.[54] Not only this, but when he rebels against his brothers, he leads other Franks into rebellion with him, described by the author of *AMP* as 'Many fickle young men of noble Frankish birth' who 'were led away from their own master'.[55] In this sense, then, Grifo embodied the spirit of rebellion as much as any of the peripheral leaders, and was actually worse, since he was a Frank.

It is probably Grifo's alliances with various peripheral peoples that condemn him most in the eyes of a Carolingian audience, though, since these place him outside the mainstream of Frankish society among the

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[47] Becher, 'Eine verschleierte Krise'.
[48] See Collins, 'Pippin III', pp. 76–87; Airlie, 'Towards a Carolingian Aristocracy', pp. 112–21.
[49] Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, p. 92; Collins, 'Fredegar', pp. 112–17.
[50] Fredegar, *Continuations*, c. 35.
[51] On *ARF* see McKitterick, *History and Memory*, pp. 101–19.      [52] *ARF*, s.a. 747–8.
[53] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, pp. 332–3.
[54] Revised *ARF*, s.a. 741.      [55] *AMP*, s.a. 748.

rebellious peripheral peoples. Immediately after being released from captivity by Pippin he flees to the Saxons, who have already been established as inherently rebellious. He then provides them with a leader around whom they can rally in their disloyalty to Pippin, in other words, he forsakes his position in the Frankish community for power outside it.[56] Grifo then flees to Bavaria, a region he had a legitimate family link to, and which he is able to subject temporarily before being defeated by Pippin.[57] Next he flees to Aquitaine before finally attempting to cross the Alps to the Lombard Kingdom. In each of these cases he is also associated with fellow antagonists of the Franks, Waifar and Aistulf, each of whom took their turn as Pippin's chief rival in the sources.[58] Two points are worth considering here. The first is that Grifo is continually presented as a contrast with Pippin. The latter leads the loyal Frankish army and is generous in victory, while Grifo's followers are disloyal and treacherous and Grifo rejects Pippin's attempts to make peace.[59] The second is the constant association between Grifo and peripheral peoples, which highlights the ambiguity of both parties in the sources. As already stated, these peoples were not inherently bad; it was only when ethnic labels were combined with the concepts of paganism or disloyalty that they became negative. Likewise, we should not understate the fact that Grifo was not only a Frank, but a member of the Carolingian family, and thus a Frank *par excellence*. In highlighting Grifo's alliances with or leadership of peripheral groups, then, the historians were attempting to lessen his 'Frankishness' by conflating the already related ideas of rebelliousness and peripheral status; after all, he is consistently depicted as 'fleeing' from the *regnum Francorum* to the peripheral regions.

But why this need or desire to present an audience with a narrative of Grifo's actions fifty years after his death? It may be that the increasing strength of the Carolingian dynasty filled its historians with increasing confidence in describing their victories over rival leaders.[60] However, it seems there was more involved in the case of Grifo. The last two decades of the eighth century saw two alleged rebellions against Charlemagne from within his own family; the first by his cousin Tassilo III of Bavaria,[61] the second by his son Pippin the Hunchback.[62] These rebellions resulted in a renewed interest in the oaths of loyalty which Charlemagne's subjects had to take, and they may also have sparked a renewed interest in that last great family dispute which escalated into fratricidal war. There

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[56] Revised *ARF*, s.a. 747.      [57] Revised *ARF*, s.a. 748; *AMP*, s.a. 749.
[58] *AMP*, s.a. 753–6, 760–3.      [59] Revised *ARF*, s.a. 748.
[60] McKitterick, *History and Memory*, pp. 117–18.      [61] Airlie, 'Narratives of triumph'.
[62] Nelson, 'Charlemagne – *pater optimus*?', pp. 276–8.

are certainly similarities in the way the rebellions were portrayed. Like Grifo, Tassilo was an outsider despite his descent from Charles Martel; indeed, he was more a Bavarian than a Frank, being the son of the 'rebellious' Odilo and Charles' daughter Hiltrude. Tassilo also associated himself with those beyond the borders of the *regnum Francorum* when he attempted to ally with the Avars.[63] Pippin the Hunchback's rebellion is more obscure, but this may be because he was the most 'Frankish' and had the least association with peripheral peoples, making it difficult to associate his disloyalty with the usual suspects. Nevertheless, the presentation of Grifo suggests that simply 'rebelling' was enough to lose one's place in the community. The roles of women in fomenting rebellion are also mentioned in all three cases. The Revised *ARF* state that Pippin's rebellion was a reaction to the 'intolerable cruelty' of his step-mother Fastrada,[64] while the Paul the Deacon and Einhard describe his mother as a concubine, emphasising his illegitimacy.[65] While Grifo and Tassilo were not acting in response to female tyranny, they were encouraged in their actions by women; Grifo by his mother, the Bavarian 'concubine' Swanhild,[66] and Tassilo under the influence of his 'spiteful wife' Liutberg.[67] What we can see here, then, is that by the turn of the ninth century authors were more willing, and more able to deal with Frankish disunity, and did so through the use of a trait which placed the guilty parties outside the Frankish community, even when they were Franks.

### The Merovingians

Of the three groups here discussed, the Merovingians represent the most uniquely Carolingian vision of otherness, even if the *topos* of *rois fainéants* was taken to far greater extremes in later centuries.[68] Early Carolingian authors had to come to terms with the fact that Pippin III was a usurper, and the way for them to do this was to justify the Carolingian takeover by ignoring the later Merovingians,[69] or by portraying them as useless and idle,[70] doing nothing but acting as political figureheads.[71] The descendants of Dagobert I (generally regarded as the last of the powerful Merovingians),[72] were excluded from having had any positive role in the course of Frankish history: at best they were non-kings and at worst their inactivity had caused divisions and trauma in the Frankish kingdom which had taken the Carolingians a century to resolve. *AMP*, which

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[63] *ARF*, s.a. 788.     [64] Revised *ARF*, s.a. 792.
[65] Paul the Deacon, *Gesta episcoporum Mettensium*; *VK*, c. 20.     [66] *AMP*, s.a. 741.
[67] *ARF*, s.a. 788.     [68] Peters, *Shadow King*.     [69] *Continuations*, cc. 11–33.
[70] *AMP*, s.a. 688–93.     [71] *VK*, c. 1.
[72] Kölzer, 'Die letzten Merowingerkönige', p. 33.

contains the most anachronistic picture of the late Merovingian world,[73] represents the latter viewpoint most explicitly in the way it describes Pippin II's wars against non-Franks. First the author states that when Pippin II took up leadership of the Austrasians, the Suevi, Saxons and Bavarians 'were struggling to defend their own unique freedoms' due to 'the idleness of kings,' and the civil wars which had divided the kingdom.[74] Later the author explains that Pippin II's external wars were fought to acquire an extensive list of peoples who 'formerly were subjected to the Franks'.[75] In both cases the author blames the sorry state of affairs on the weakness of kings who had failed to prevent civil war and the fracturing of Frankish hegemony. Einhard targeted not just the supposed inactivity of the later Merovingians, but also their allegedly degenerate and outdated customs and practices. He did so by concentrating on Childeric III – the last Merovingian – specifically, although it is clear from the language used to introduce Childeric that he was supposed to stand for all the later members of the dynasty. The two most infamous Merovingian features attacked by Einhard – besides the idleness – were the long hair and beard which set the king apart from his subjects and the ox-cart used to transport him from place to place.[76] Merovingian hair has enjoyed a special place in modern scholarship,[77] with various explanations of it as a symbol of sacral kingship,[78] a more secular but no less important symbol of political superiority over subjects,[79] or most recently a sign of Biblical virility in the model of Samson.[80] The ox-cart, though less discussed, appears to have been a part of the late Roman administration which survived into Merovingian Francia.[81] Given the Carolingian interest in Roman precedents it seems that Einhard meant to turn this perfectly legitimate sign of political power – like the long hair – into an object of ridicule; a symbol of otherness.

## Childeric III

As with Grifo, when it came to discussing the later Merovingians – and Childeric III in particular – it appears that Carolingian authors became more confident the further in time they were writing from Pippin's usurpation: certainly, in the earlier sources Childeric appears more as a non-entity than a figure to be accused of bad kingship. Fredegar's continuator, who took the first ten chapters of his work from the last

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[73] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, pp. 340–9.    [74] *AMP*, s.a. 688.
[75] *AMP*, s.a. 691.    [76] *VK*, c. 1.    [77] Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, pp. 3–42.
[78] Le Jan, 'Die Sakralität'.    [79] Diesenberger, 'Hair, sacrality'.
[80] Goosmann, 'Long-haired kings'.
[81] Wallace-Hadrill, 'Review', 789; Murray, '*Post vocantur Merohingii*', pp. 130–2.

ten of *Liber historiae Francorum* – a Merovingian text composed in 727 – mentions the late seventh- and early eighth-century kings, but tones down his model's positive representations of them.[82] When taking the narrative beyond the accession of Theuderic IV in 721, though, the continuator makes no mention at all of the Merovingians, instead focusing entirely on the Carolingian mayors. Thus Childeric III is conspicuous by his absence, at least to a modern audience. This can be seen as an attempt to write the last Merovingian out of history in order to emphasise the rule exercised by Charles' sons, but it also shows that this author felt no need to actively denigrate the later Merovingians, and ignoring the last two was enough to pave the way for Pippin III's accession. Perhaps, though, as with Grifo, the author felt unable to deal with the implications of the events of the early 750s.

*ARF* largely avoided the Merovingian issue since its account begins in 741, but it too neglects to mention Childeric's accession in 743, an event which is only known from charter evidence.[83] His deposition is mentioned, though, in relation to Pippin III's claiming of the kingship. The author writes: 'Following the custom of the Franks, Pippin was elected as king . . . Truly Childeric, who falsely was called king, was tonsured and sent into a monastery.'[84] So here we have Childeric denounced as a false king, but no further information is provided, and we are given nothing about why he was judged in this way. It is interesting to note, given *AMP*'s overt hostility to the Merovingians, that they make no mention of Childeric or his deposition.

Finally we come to the most explicit denunciation of the Merovingians found in a Carolingian source; Einhard's outlandish portrayal of the royal scapegoat Childeric III as a long-haired, long-bearded king who was transported to and fro in an ox-cart to act as nothing more than a symbol of authority through which the mayors could rule.[85] This may well have had some basis in reality, but the point was not to represent the real Childeric, it was to present a king who was everything a good Carolingian ruler was not. Nonetheless, given that Einhard meant Childeric to stand for all the later Merovingians, this was not just how he and his contemporaries pictured one king; it was how they imagined an entire series of kings, even an entire period of Frankish history, with Childeric now providing the embodiment of all that was wrong with that period. As with rebel leaders, this provided an important discursive tool. Laying the problems of the late Merovingian period specifically on Childeric meant the Franks were not blamed for their degeneracy, and Childeric's

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[82] *Continuations*, cc. 1–10.    [83] Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 290.
[84] *ARF*, s.a. 750. On monastic 'retirement' see Goosmann in this volume.    [85] *VK*, c. 1.

deposition both became a redemptive act and allowed for a sense of uninterrupted continuity in the Frankish community.

Ultimately, though, what we see from *AMP*'s general denigration combined with Einhard's specific denunciation is that as the Carolingians became more powerful, so their historians showed a greater willingness to deal with the Merovingian issue. That the most explicit criticisms of the previous dynasty come from the period after Charlemagne's imperial coronation should not be overlooked. It was not simply that authors saw a continuing need to address this problem; it was that after 800 they could do so because Charlemagne's actions had proved the ultimate legitimation of his father's usurpation. They also had brought the contrast between Merovingian and Carolingian styles of rule into contrast more sharply than ever before, and meant that authors who had grown up during the reigns of Pippin and Charlemagne judged the Merovingians by the standards of royal power with which they were familiar; standards which emphasised strong military rule and expansionist warfare, activities the later Merovingians had not undertaken. Here, then, we can see the emergence of the idea that the later Merovingians had not lived up to the correct standards of kingship, or more accurately the Carolingian expectation of kingship embodied by Charlemagne, and it seems sensible to conclude that this was an expectation shared by Einhard, the author of *AMP* and their audience.

## Proximity and otherness

In his *Vita Karoli* Einhard reported a Greek proverb to the effect that 'if a Frank is your friend he is clearly not your neighbour'.[86] While he mentioned this in the context of Byzantine distrust of Charlemagne's imperial coronation, the proverb actually seems like a reasonable representation of the views we find in the early Carolingian sources. After all, one thing which strikes us about the groups and individuals so far discussed is that they were in close proximity to contemporary Carolingian society, either geographically or temporally; they were the neighbours of the Franks. It makes sense, of course, that the immediate enemies of the Frankish community would receive the harshest treatment. Yet we must also consider that the Saxons, for example, received such a harsh treatment because of their ambiguous situation with regards to membership of the Frankish community: their peripheral nature meant they could be used to highlight the traits which would result in exclusion from the community. Such a theory is consolidated by the treatment in the sources of those further in

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[86] *VK*, c. 16.

space or time from the community, and we can see depictions of groups or individuals we might expect to be part of the discourse of otherness but who instead are treated with ambivalence or even praise. We shall now briefly consider, then, the portrayals of Muslims, Slavs and early Merovingians.

Even when authors chose to present a nuanced picture of pagans they still focused on a strong sense of religious dichotomy between Christianity and paganism. Such dichotomy, however, was not the focal point for depictions of relations between the Carolingians and Islam. Fredegar's continuator drew on the imagery of Joshua's siege of Jericho when discussing Charles Martel's victory over the Muslims in Aquitaine,[87] suggesting a religious aspect to the confrontation, but these Muslims had invaded the *regnum Francorum*, and other than this it is difficult to find a sense of religious dichotomy in the sources. Indeed, one of the most famous Carolingian campaigns against the Muslims of Spain – Charlemagne's campaign of 778 – was used to highlight the treachery of the Basques who ambushed the Frankish army in the Pyrenees and the Saxons who took advantage of the king's absence to rebel.[88] Generally speaking the Muslims, like the Byzantines, were treated as a people who could be dealt with as equals, which included the sending and receiving of embassies and the mutual giving of gifts.[89]

A similar pattern can be seen with regard to the peripheral peoples. While various peoples were labelled as rebels in the Carolingian sources, it tended to be those who had been recently conquered who were most vehemently targeted, as in the case of the Saxons. More distant peoples who remained outside direct Frankish rule during Charlemagne's reign could be presented in a more nuanced fashion. The Slavs, for example, could certainly have been considered within the Frankish sphere,[90] and were still pagan in the eighth century, but received a more ambivalent treatment than the Saxons. The Slavs were subjected to neither religious nor political denunciations in the same consistent manner as were the Saxons, and there was a much greater tendency to distinguish between sub-groups of Slavs. Indeed, there seems to have been little sense at all of a homogeneous Slavic group.[91] This was probably dictated above all by the nature of Frankish diplomatic relations with the Slavs, wherein certain groups allied with the Franks and others with their enemies, particularly the Saxons, but because they had not been subject to a drawn-out war of conquest like the Saxons, there was no need for Frankish authors to

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[87] *Continuations*, c. 13.     [88] *ARF*, s.a. 778.
[89] *ARF*, s.a. 777–92. See McCormick, 'Charlemagne'; McCormick, 'Pippin III'.
[90] See Curta, *Making of the Slavs*, pp. 36–119; Curta, 'Slavs'.     [91] *AMP*, s.a. 789.

present the Slavs as uniformly other. This meant the role of the Slavs in the historical discourse was to praise loyalty and show that it would be rewarded, while alliance with 'others' would not be tolerated.

Likewise the Merovingians: it was only those who were closest in time to the Carolingians, and who had lived alongside Pippin II, Charles Martel and Pippin III, who were subjected to *damnatio memoriae*. The Merovingian historical works, with their positive depictions of Clovis I in particular but also some of his descendants, continued to be read in the Carolingian period, even if in altered forms:[92] only the later chapters of *LHF* were reworked to an extent that subverted the author's original message.[93] Indeed, while the later members of the Merovingian dynasty were 'other', Carolingian authors actively promoted the idea of continuity between the two royal dynasties, and thus a continuity of the community as a whole. Even as early as the 760s the earlier Merovingians were being used as the standard against which the new regime would be measured: Clovis' Catholicism became the template for the explicitly Christian style of rule employed by the Carolingians.[94] The early Merovingians were also judged as the standard for Carolingian rule of non-Franks, as shown by a reference by Fredegar's continuator to Pippin III's ability to return the Saxons to the tribute which they had paid to Chlothar I, and from which they had been excused by Dagobert I.[95] This idea of dynastic continuity went even further in the genealogies of the Carolingian dynasty,[96] which linked the family to a daughter of Chlothar II, a notion which offered the dynasty a level of legitimacy it otherwise lacked, while also conveniently bypassing the later, idle members of the Merovingian line.[97] As a final point, it is worth remembering that Clovis (Louis) and Chlothar (Lothar) became dynastic names for the Carolingians alongside Charles and Pippin.[98]

### Conclusions: ideal and reality

Each of the authors and sources here examined attempted to depict an idealised world in which the Franks and their missionary allies were confronted with enemies but triumphed over them. They achieved this depiction by conjuring up a world strongly divided between 'the Franks' – embodying the positive traits of Christianity, unity, loyalty and strong

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[92] Reimitz, 'Providential past'.     [93] *AMP*, s.a. 688–92.
[94] Innes, 'Immune from heresy', pp. 101–4.
[95] *Continuations*, c. 31. Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, IV, 14; Fredegar, *Chronicon*, IV, 74.
[96] *Genealogia Karolorum*.     [97] See Wood, 'Genealogy', pp. 234–5.
[98] Jarnut, 'Chlodwig und Chlothar'.

rule – and 'the others' – embodying the negative traits of paganism, rebellion and weak rule. But of course such a heavily idealised world belies the complex reality which existed in the eighth century. The peripheral peoples described in the sources were part of the Frankish world, whether or not they were Christian, and this world had been stabilised by three centuries of Merovingian rule.[99] This world, however, was not what the Carolingians imagined their own should be like. Carolingian rule over the peripheries was more consolidated than Merovingian rule had been, and the early Carolingians were military leaders in a way the later Merovingians had ceased to be; the ongoing successes of the Carolingians only served to highlight such dynastic differences. We should not be surprised, then, that those authors attempting to provide a narrative of the eighth-century Frankish world relied increasingly on an idealised dichotomy between the Franks and their enemies. What is more difficult to determine, though, is how far this was a conscious decision and how far it was instinctive or subconscious, or even a result of audience expectation. After all, the 'othering' of peripheral peoples and the old dynasty allowed not only for the justification of the Carolingian dynasty and its actions, it also allowed authors to make sense of the world in which they lived and its contrasts with the late Merovingian world. To put it more plainly, those who had grown up under Pippin III and Charlemagne and heard the exploits of the missionaries working across the Rhine would expect the world to work in a certain way; they would expect to find the dichotomy which is present in the sources. Yet the authors at least knew the world was not as black and white as such expectations might suggest, and allowed for ambiguities in their portrayals of others, partly by focusing on scapegoats, but more generally by allowing that others could be (re)integrated into the Carolingian Frankish community. Even in such idealised portrayals, then, we can still see that any pagan was a potential Christian, any rebel was simply a misguided subject, and that the Merovingian dynasty still represented the source of Frankish royal power.

[99] Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 322–4.