Sub-kingdoms and the Spectrum of Kingship on the Western Border of Charles the Bald's Kingdom

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Abstract: Carolingian kinship was not an all-or-nothing proposition. This article compares three border regions of Charles the Bald’s kingdom, Neustria, Aquitaine and Brittany, all operating at a variety of removes from central authority, examining their rulers to see the extent to which they participated in the aspects of kingships. In doing so, it argues that there was a spectrum of kingship, in which ruler’s status could be higher or lower, partaking of different aspects of regality so as to be only semi-royal.

§1. The early eleventh-century Vita Conwoionis described Salomon, the late-ninth-century ruler of Brittany, as being called a king not because he really was a king (non quod re vera esset), but because, by Charles the Bald's permission, he wore a crown and purple robes (Brett 1989, 243). Leaving aside the Frankish chauvinism of the source, the kernel of the idea it expresses—that there were gradations of kingliness, and royal status was sometimes ambiguous—raises important questions about the nature of Carolingian kingship. The idea of negotiations between central royal authority and local rulers about the degree of royalty to which the latter could aspire disrupts binary notions of kingship—that is, that either one is a king or one is not—which inform, almost always implicitly, discussions of earlier medieval rule. In Garipzanov's excellent book on Carolingian royal authority, for instance, the categories of actor chosen for analysis boil down to "ruler" and "subject" (Garipzanov 2008, 7–8, 10, 13–14). Kings were indeed, in theory, perceived differently from other laymen (Stone 2007; Garipzanov 2008, 306–307). However, not all kings were equal, not all types of kingship were unambiguous, and not all people who partook of royal attributes were kings in the fullest sense. The idea of kingship as a spectrum, that a ruler could partake of some, but not all, of the attributes of royalty, making them a kind of "quasi-king," is of particular relevance to the westernmost frontier of the Carolingian domains.

§2. In Charles the Bald's kingdom, the three adjacent border regions of Neustria, Aquitaine, and Brittany all had substantially different degrees of formal connection to the West Frankish kingdom (Werner 1980, esp. 206–218; Werner 1978, 250). Neustria—here used as a shorthand for the region between the Loire and the Seine, but particularly focused on the lower and middle Loire and the region around Tours and Le Mans—had been an important royal region in Merovingian times; but western Neustria had fallen away from royal power in around the eighth century, and was not part of the Carolingian heartlands (Smith 1992, 45). In Charles the Bald's kingdom, the lower Loire was a badlands, although not an "outsider
region" in the same way as Aquitaine or Brittany (Smith 1995, 171, 176). For Aquitaine, even in the ninth century, was not fully part of the West Frankish kingdom: in Louis the Pious's *Ordinatio Imperii*, Aquitaine was separated out from the rest of Gaul and assigned to a separate ruler, Pippin I (Boretius 1883, no. 136, cap. 1). After the 843 division of the empire at Verdon, Aquitaine's status was ambiguous: Prudentius of Troyes claims that Charles received everything between the borders of Lothar I's kingdom and the sea—including Aquitaine (Ann. Bert., s.a. 843); but the Annals of Fulda claim that Charles attempted to claim dominion over the area "as if it rightly belonged to his realm" (*quasi ad partem regni sui iure pertinente*men) (Ann. Fuld., s.a. 843). This implies that even at the time this annal was composed in the latter part of the ninth century, the question of whether or not Aquitaine properly belonged to the West Frankish kingdom could be contested. Aquitaine was thus a semi-borderland, both of and not of the West Frankish kingdom (Martindale 1984, 137–138). Brittany was even more tenuously tied to the West Frankish realm—despite Carolingian claims to personal hegemony over its rulers, Brittany was on the independent side of a hypothetical line bisecting the spectrum between a province and a separate kingdom (Smith 1995, 85).

§3. Despite their differences, the three regions, geographically adjacent and socially and politically linked to one another, can be profitably compared. Whatever their formal situations, each region engaged in relations with the Carolingian political center, usually through a single local ruler. The negotiations and conflicts between Charles the Bald and these rulers over precisely where on the spectrum of royalty each fell was a key means by which these frontier zones came into the orbit of the political center (see more widely on this Innes 2000, 259–260). What follows will examine how authority developed in the three regions over the mid-ninth century, and how compromises with the royal center over power and status were developed. Only a few points of comparison can be examined here, and what follows is by no means exhaustive. In particular, how relations between the rulers of these regions and the royal center were affected by dynamics among regional elites will be touched on only briefly, partly due to a paucity of evidence and partly for reasons of space. Nonetheless, comparing some developments in these three border regions highlights the importance of a non-binary approach kingship for understanding the political history of the ninth-century West-Frankish kingdom.

### Convergent Evolution, c. 800–c. 870

§4. Neustria had occasionally been split off as a sub-kingdom or separate march region under the Merovingians and the earlier Carolingians (Brunterc'h 1989). Despite this history of occasional monarchy, for most of the reign of Louis the Pious and the first decades of the reign of Charles the Bald, power in the region was split between several competing individuals and families who although not necessarily confined to the region nonetheless had strong ties to it. This situation was exacerbated by conflicts within the Carolingian dynasty itself (Smith 1992, 50–55). In 850, for instance, the ruler of the Breton march, Count Lambert, and his brother Warner, revolted against Charles the Bald in alliance with Nomoioê (possibly at the instigation of Emperor Lothar I) (Ann. Font., s.a. 850; Smith 1992, 98–99). This revolt intersected with local quarrels, for Warner was soon captured by Count Gauzbert of Le Mans, who later slew Lambert in battle (Ann. Font., s.a. 851). This four-pointed quarrel is illustrative of the way in which, as Smith has laid out, power in mid-ninth century Neustria was widely distributed and subject to potentially-violent competition as a result of the friction generated by the many moving parts of Neustrian politics grinding against one another (Smith 1992, 94–106).

§5. Charles the Bald attempted to simplify matters by granting his ten-year-old-son Louis the Stammerer a subkingdom in Neustria in 856 and betrothing him to the daughter of Nomoioê's son Erispoê, who had succeeded him as Breton ruler (Ann. Bert., s.a. 856; Koziol 2012, 141). However, this further destabilized the balance of power between different magnate factions in both Neustria and Brittany. In particular, the important magnate Robert the Strong, whom Charles had implanted in Neustria earlier in the 850s, was not happy (Smith 1992, 103). Over the course of the next few years, Robert and other Neustrian magnates attempted to provoke a wider revolt against Charles, eventually gaining the assistance of Louis the German, who invaded in 859. After Louis's repulsion from the kingdom, Charles attempted to be more conciliatory; nonetheless, he seems to have made a second, albeit brief, attempt to re-establish Louis in Neustria in 860 by granting him the abbey of Saint-Martin of Tours (Ann. Bert., s.a. 860). Despite Charles's efforts, regional stability does not seem to have been achieved until 866, when he granted Robert the Strong vast number of *honores* in the Loire region as the basis for a unified regional command (Koziol...
§6. Brittany followed a similar but more extreme trajectory towards the concentration of authority in the hands of an individual ruler. As Smith and Davies have argued, Brittany seems to have been a region in which power was very widely distributed well into the reign of Charlemagne—most accounts of Breton activity have their rulers as unnamed and plural, bringing to mind a picture of many local chiefs rather than one dominant figure (Smith 1992, 73–74; Davies 2009, 104–105). This changed somewhat after Charlemagne's death, when one Morman revolted against Louis the Pious in 814, although he was killed in battle in 818. However, the major shift came in and immediately following the reign of Louis the Pious. Nominoë, a Breton nobleman, had been appointed by Louis to rule Brittany as a missus imperatoris under his suzerainty (Brunterc'h 1989, 52). After his death in 851, the government of Brittany passed first to his son Erispoë and then to Erispoë's murderer Salomon. Between the 840s and Salomon's death in 874, then, there was a single ruler at the peak of the political hierarchy in Brittany.

§7. Aquitaine presents a picture which is precisely the opposite of Neustria and Brittany. Whereas in the early ninth century the latter two regions had a profusion of power-holders, in Aquitaine there was one effective king, and had been for a long time. Charlemagne had appointed Louis the Pious as king of Aquitaine in 781, and over the course of the late eighth century Louis had developed reasonably effective authority within the kingdom. This authority was maintained by his son Pippin I (Collins 1990, 364). After Pippin's death in 838 and Louis's in 840, however, things began to change in Aquitaine. Despite the division of the empire mentioned above, Pippin II maintained his claim to kingship in Aquitaine. However, the Aquitanian nobility seems to have abandoned him almost completely in 848, and they acknowledged Charles the Bald as their king until 853 (Ann. Bert., s.a. 848; Auzias 1937, 248–258).

§8. Thereafter, the question of who was king of Aquitaine became bitterly disputed, and what follows is very heavily simplified. In 853, a possibly rather small kin-group (cognatio) of Aquitanian rebels, angry at Charles for his execution of one of their number, sent to Louis the German, who sent them his son Louis the Younger as king in 854 (Ann. Bert., s.a. 853, 854; Ann. Fuld., s.a. 853, 854). Both the Annals of Saint-Bertin and the Annals of Fulda note that when Louis arrived, his support was limited; yet it seems likely that discontent in Aquitaine encompassed more than this one kin-group, for no sooner had Louis withdrawn than Pippin II (who had been tonsured) escaped from his monastery and found a following in the kingdom (Ann. Bert., s.a. 854). In response, Charles invaded Aquitaine and set up his son Charles the Child as king. The younger Charles was accepted by at least some of the nobility in 855. Thereafter royal power was principally contested between Pippin II until his ultimate neutralization in 864 and Charles the Child until his death in 866 and subsequent replacement by Louis the Stammerer (Auzias 1937, 271–359). However, during almost all of this time, Charles the Bald maintained de facto overlordship over Aquitaine. Consequently, both the effectiveness and the status of the Aquitanian kings was reduced from what it had been under Louis the Pious and Pippin I, and they became much more similar to their counterparts in Neustria and Brittany.

The Names of Rulership

§9. One key similarity among the three regions was the quasi-regal status shared by their rulers. Of the three, only the ruler of Aquitaine was consistently entitled as a rex, and even this was occasionally contested. After Charles the Bald's defeat in the pagus of Angoulême in 844, he recognized Pippin II's control over Aquitaine in 845. Pippin's royal diplomas from this period consistently entitle him as "king of the Aquitanians" (rex Aquitanorum), as do his coins (Garipzanov 2008, 45–46; Coupland 1989). However, Prudentius's Annals of Saint-Bertin, supporting Charles, refers to him not as king, but as one exercising dominatus (lordship) (Ann. Bert., s.a. 845). This is, of course, face-saving from a side who had been forced into compromise due to military defeat; nonetheless, it indicates that even Pippin II's royal title was a matter of contemporary contestation even as seems to have been mostly accepted.

§10. The quasi-royal status of regional leaders is much clearer in Neustria. It is likely, although not completely clear that Louis the Stammerer received a royal title during his tenure in Neustria (Nelson 1992, 183; Chêdeville & Guillotel 1984, 293; Kasten 1997, 444 fn. 61). Prudentius refers to Louis
receiving the ducatus of Neustria and does not mention a coronation (Ann. Bert., s.a. 856). The Historia translatio SS. Ragnoberti et Zenonis, composed in two stages in the late 850s and late 860s, refers to Louis being given the regnum of Neustria and being set up to rule the kingdom ([Erispoë] in hac regni parte eum [i.e. Louis] regnandum constituit)—language which is much more heavily regalian (Joseph the Priest, Translatio Ragnoberti, cap. 18). Louis had certainly been acclaimed as king by 865, for the Annals of Saint-Bertin—now being written by Hincmar—refer to Charles sending Louis back to Neustria without either restoring or withdrawing his royal title (Ann. Bert., s.a. 865). Again, what is interesting here is the way in which the title of a region's ruler was contestable: Charles seems to have mistrusted Louis; and certainly he was rebellious, especially in the early 860s (Kasten 1997, 462). Consequently, the implication of the annal seems to be that Charles expected Louis to earn his royal title through more regal behavior than he had displayed thus far—it was up to Louis to solidify his own status. Charles, then, could exploit the ambiguous position of such intermediate rulers on the kingship spectrum to make clear his superiority over his son.

§11. The men who ended up in sole command over the region, Robert the Strong and Hugh the Abbot, were never entitled as kings. Indeed, these men are the most clearly non-royal figures of all those to be compared here. However, they were not simple counts. They appear in sources as marchio or (very occasionally) dux, and their command as a ducatus—the same word used to describe what Louis the Stammerer ruled in 856 (Werner 1980, 216–217). The use of this word probably emphasizes the military function of the Neustrian ruler, but the lack of differentiation between the word used to describe Louis's area of rule and that of his aristocratic successors is in a small way suggestive of the blurred boundaries between kingship and nobility. Consequently, Robert and Hugh can be seen as at an extreme end of a spectrum between "king" and "not a king," high-status, but not royal.

§12. That this was a spectrum, and not two qualitatively different types of status, is demonstrated by the case of Brittany. The Breton rulers were only sometimes seen as kings (Brunner 1973, 270–71). Erispoë, for instance, despite receiving royal regalia in 851 and issuing a charter as rex, was referred to as a dux by several Redon charters in 852 (Merlet 1896, no. 14; De Courson 1863, nos. 20, 35). His successor Salomon's status was even more in flux. Although he was not called rex before Charles the Bald's grant of regalia in 868, he was nonetheless perceived as being of unusually high status, illustrated by the title of princeps given to him in several documents (e.g. De Courson 1863, nos. 52, 78). After 868, moreover, he retained the title of princeps, being called rex and princeps in a single document on several occasions, including in one document issued in Salomon's own name in 868 (De Courson 1863, nos. 240, 247). This does not appear to be comparable to modern practices of titulature such as the king of Spain retaining the title of duke of Milan in addition to his royal title, for Salomon's titles are not used in any systematic way, but rather impressionistically, to convey a status somewhere below the plenitude of regality but more than just another aristocrat—as Davies puts it, we are dealing with "a changing trend rather than sudden changes" (Davies 2009, 104). Hence, in Salomon's most solemn charter, issued for his new foundation at Plélan on Easter Sunday of 869, he is given the title of princeps only, but described as acting by royal custom (regali more) anyway (De Courson 1863, no. 241). The intent of the scribes describing Breton power was clearly not to record Salomon's historical accumulation of titles or functions, but to convey a status wherein a high-status princeps and a low-status rex could not be clearly distinguished because there was no distinction to make. Salomon was very high-status, but not of the highest status, and so impressionistic language was appropriate for an ambiguous position. This ambiguity extends even to the form of documents. Even after his assumption of the royal title, Salomon's donations to Redon were sometimes recorded in documents with the form of Carolingian royal diplomas, but sometimes in the standard Redon notice form thought suitable for donors of any status (De Courson 1863, no. 257; Davies 1990, 74). The scribes writing for both Salomon and Erispoë, moreover, only appropriated some of the features of Carolingian royal diplomatic, omitting others; noticeably, the royal charters of both contain witness lists, something not typical of Carolingian practice. The lack of consistency in Breton titulature, then, is likely to indicate an active attempt to communicate the ambiguous nature of their kingship: the Breton rulers were generally perceived as being semi-royal; and, as the use of dux, princeps and rex in the same documents demonstrates, all these titles were part of a spectrum of status, wherein the Breton rulers were attributed some but not all of the attributes of kingship, right down to the name given to their authority.
§13. Something similar can be seen in the use of the props of royal status by the rulers of the three regions. As noted above, Salomon made use of royal regalia such as a crown and purple robes. The story of the eleventh-century *Vita Conwoionis* is substantiated on this front by the *Annals of Saint-Bertin*, which describe royal garments being given to Erispoe in 851 after Charles's defeat at Jengland and to Salomon in 868 after the Breton military successes of the earlier 860s—gifts which evidently had some significance, as it is only after this point that rex becomes part of the Breton ruler's mix of titles (*Ann. Bert.*, s.a. 851; Smith 1992, 112). As with the Breton ruler's royal title, so with the Breton ruler's royal regalia: it only made them sort-of kings, not unequivocally so.

§14. One of the marks of undisputable kingship was the presence of a seal, and it is noticeable that seals can only be certainly evidenced for Aquitaine before 848, where traces of seals can be seen on Pippin II's original diplomas (Lot and Lauer 1945, no. 24). After Charles the Bald's invasion of Aquitaine in 848, however, its kings issued no further diplomas. In the case of Pippin II, this may be due to the precariouslyness of his position. In the case of Charles the Child and Louis the Stammerer, however, it seems reasonable to follow the suggestion of Levillain, supported by Martindale, that Charles the Bald did not allow his sons to issue diplomas, instead issuing diplomas for Aquitaine himself. Louis and Charles the Child never had a chancery, never issued diplomas, and consequently did not wield several important markers of royal status, including use of a seal (Martindale 1997, 127). It is probable that Louis the Stammerer had a seal as ruler of Neustria in 856: Joseph, author of the *Translatio Ragnoberti*, describes himself as "executing the duties of the chancellor of [Louis'] sacred palace" (eiudem sacri palatii cancelliorum ministerio functus) (Joseph the Priest, *Translatio Ragnoberti*, cap. 18); it is also likely that an official document issued in Louis's name survives (Boretius and Krause 1897, no. 263; Nelson 1992, 183). However, after Louis was driven out of Neustria in 858, no further traces survive of his chancellorship: by the same logic as applies in the case of Aquitaine, he was probably not permitted one. In Brittany, some surviving acts of the Breton rulers make reference to their being sealed (Smith 1992, 177 fn. 2). However, these documents are preserved only in later copies, and it is possible that their sealing refers to eleventh-rather than ninth-century practice (Bedos-Rezak 2011, 90–91 fn. 48). Even if the Breton rulers did possess seals, however, as with their royal titles, their use was erratic. In none of the three regions, then, can the rulers be shown to have consistently used a royal seal (and in some cases not at all); and in Aquitaine, this mark of status seems to have been actively removed from the kings.

§15. A final mark of kingship was the coinage. Here, the only indication of minting in any of these areas (after the end of Pippin II's coinage in 848) is when, in 855, a token coinage was minted in celebration of the coronation of Charles the Child as king of Aquitaine (Depeyrot, no. 747). However, this seems to have been issued not within Aquitaine itself, but at the palace mint of Charles the Bald (Depeyrot, no. 747). However, this seems to have been issued not within Aquitaine itself, but at the palace mint of Charles the Bald. Elsewhere, Charles the Bald seems to have been the only king named on coins in the whole of Gaul. Louis the Stammerer did not mint in his own name in Neustria, and even in Nantes and Rennes, which had been conceded to the rulers of Brittany in 851, the only coins known to have been minted were in Charles's name (Smith 1992, 127). It is quite possible that this has the same significance as the point made above in relation to seals—that Charles did not permit the kings of the western borderland to use certain signs of royal authority—but there may be a wider point at stake here. Coins continued to be issued in Charles's name even in mints which may not have been under royal control, indicating that these mints saw Charles's name as more authoritative to stamp their coins with than that of their local rulers (Coupland 1991, 153). This is particularly significant in the case of Nantes and Rennes, which were under Breton control. Smith suggests that Charles maintained enough control over the mint there to have his name on the coins (Smith 1992, 142). It is possible that, instead, Salomon was not seen as sufficiently kingly to have coins in his name.

**Royal Followings**

§16. The final matter to be examined is the dynamics of regional rule in practice in the three areas. This question, however, will not be approached in institutional terms, but in terms of an overview of how regional rulers related to their regions and to the center. While the Breton rulers are usually seen as dynamic and effective, the Carolingian sub-kings of Neustria and Aquitaine (particularly Louis the Stammerer in both regions) are often seen as marginal figures at best, powerless non-entities at worst (Kasten 1997, 433; Nelson 1992, 232).
§17. In the case of Brittany, this impression is largely accurate. If the homicidal factionalism of Breton politics (Nominoë was the last ruler of a united Brittany to die in his bed for over fifty years (Van der Kaaij 1995, 111)) could occasionally make ruling the peninsula like riding a tiger, it is noticeable how long and skillfully the riders could stay on top. Smith has raised doubts about how entrenched princely power really was (Smith 1992, 125–127, 129). Whilst these doubts are justified compared to West Frankish royal power, compared to other regional rulers the Breton rulers developed a coherent and relatively successful local hegemony over the course of several decades. By the end of Salomon's reign his court was attracting important figures from across the peninsula, and demonstrating a significant capacity to intervene in the locality (Davies 1988, 171–172; Chédeville & Guilhot 1984, 321–327). In Salomon's retinue, for instance, we find sub-regional power figures from Vannes in the south-east, Cornouaille in the far west, and from Rennes and Nantes in the far east (Smith 1992, 124). Salomon's retinue was admittedly larger and probably more formalized than Nominoë's had been twenty years earlier; nonetheless, even in earlier times, Nominoë and Erispoë had wielded enough power in the peninsula to pose a threat to the Carolingian kings both within and without Brittany.

§18. Consequently, relations between the West Frankish kings and the Breton rulers consisted in practice of a series of concessions made by the former to the latter. In 846, Charles conceded Nominoë's dominant position in Brittany after a military defeat at Ballon (Ann. Bert., s.a. 846). In 851, after his defeat at Jengland, Charles conceded Erispoë Nantes, Rennes, and royal regalia; subsequently, in 856, he betrothed Louis the Stammerer to Erispoë's daughter and issued a number of diplomas featuring Erispoë intervening as Charles's fidelis and compater (Ann. Bert., s.a. 856 (Giry, Prou, and Tessier 1943, nos. 180, 181). Following a series of military defeats in the 860s, Salomon was awarded western Anjou in 863 and the Cotentin and Avranchin in 867, as well as royal regalia in 868 (Ann. Bert., s.a. 863, 867, 868; Chédeville & Guilhot 1984, 318). All this indicates the position of relative strength the Breton rulers could negotiate from when dealing with the West Frankish kings.

§19. If the impression of the Breton rulers as effectively wielding regional power and using that power to successfully negotiate with the West Frankish kings is fundamentally accurate, the idea that the rulers of Neustria and Aquitaine were wet blankets could use a degree of nuance. It has been pointed out (including above) that Charles the Bald's sons exercised very few formal powers in their subkingdoms—these seem instead to have been reserved for men sent by their father—and that after 848, Pippin II's government in Aquitaine sunk to the level of an occasionally-existing outlaw kingdom. Nevertheless, all these kings—even Louis the Stammerer—seem to have been more substantial figures than is often appreciated.

§20. Pippin II's reign in Aquitaine after 848, at first glance, does not seem to substantiate this. Pippin mounted failed rebellion after failed rebellion. However, this means that he was able to maintain at least the basic level of regional effectiveness necessary to keep fronting rebellion after rebellion despite repeated defeats. Royal politics in Aquitaine in the 850s, as noted above, was immensely complex, but nonetheless it emerges from the hostile report of the Annals of Saint-Bertin and also from some notices in the Annals of Fontanelle that Pippin was able to find a receptive audience among some Aquitanians in 850, 854, 856 (in the latter two cases, having made an escape from the monasteries wherein he was held prisoner) and 857 (Ann. Bert., s.a. 850, 854, 856, 857). This is certainly not to argue that Pippin's rebellions were particularly successful or long-lived, rather that he maintained enough links and credibility within Aquitaine to be a realistic prospect as king throughout the decade, preserving a base amount of power which could be combined with factional politics in Aquitaine to be realized in the form of his constant rebellions. It is likely that Charles the Bald eventually realized this—in 858, he conceded Pippin a number of Aquitanian honores, an act recognizing Pippin as a persistent and potential damaging threat who had to be neutralized through means other than throwing him back into a monastery (Ann. Bert., s.a. 858). In this regard, Charles was successful—after 858, Pippin appears to have lost credibility within Aquitaine, and was able to find only Viking allies (Nelson 1992, 202).

§21. By contrast, Charles the Child's success in Aquitaine seems to have been appreciated at the time. In 862, Charles the Child married the widow of a recently-deceased Count Humbert, seemingly ingratiating himself further into a circle around Berry (Ann. Bert., s.a. 862). This was part of a series of marriages which Charles the Bald's children carried out without his permission in this year, including his daughter Judith and Louis the Stammerer (Nelson 1992, 201–204). Charles entered into negotiations with Charles the Child in June and Louis in August, aiming to re-subordinate his rebellious children. However, there seem to have been some important differences between the negotiations. Hincmar presents Louis as
substantially more submissive—he performs a total submission to Charles, who summons him from his kingdom in Neustria to the heart of Charles's own power-base in the east (Ann. Bert., s.a. 862). Negotiations with Charles the Child, in contrast, seem to have been carried out with a greater degree of ambiguity about the two parties' relative status: they took place not in Charles the Bald's heartland, but at Meung-sur-Loire, on a symbolic border between Aquitaine and the north (Kasten 1997, 435). It seems from this that the Aquitanian nobility were much more ready to partner with their sub-king in potential opposition to Charles the Bald than their Neustrian counterparts. Hincmar claims that peace was settled between the two Charles, but despite Charles the Child's submission, "his contumacious spirit remained" (animo contumaci erecto) (Ann. Bert., s.a. 862). Presumably, this indicates that Charles the Child maintained enough support in Aquitaine to be a potential challenge to Charles the Bald there. This also seems to be indicated by Hincmar's entry to the following year, 863, which depicts Charles the Bald as heading to Aquitaine unsure whether Charles the Child would meet him or fight him (Ann. Bert., s.a. 863). In the event, Charles met him and he, along with the other major nobles of Aquitaine, swore an oath of loyalty. That Charles the Bald made the other Aquitanians swear the oath is also significant. It parallels negotiations with the Bretons in the same year, where the major Breton nobles as well as Salomon swore an oath of loyalty to Charles (Ann. Bert., s.a. 863). In both cases, the impetus seems to have been caution on Charles's end—an attempt to blunt the power and authority of local rulers who were seen to present actual or potential threats by developing formal claims of loyalty on their subordinates, attempting to short-circuit the links between sub-kings and regional nobility by forging his own. Indications are, therefore, that before his incapacitation in 863, Charles the Child had a relatively strong position in Aquitaine that he could leverage during negotiations with his father.

§22. Even Louis the Stammerer's reign in Aquitaine may not have been a complete write-off, although a near-complete lack of evidence makes any hypothesis about Louis's activities in Aquitaine very tentative. In 872, Charles appointed Boso, later king of Provence, as Louis's chamberlain, entrusting him with the administration of the kingdom (Ann. Bert., s.a. 872). At the time, Charles was facing a revolt on the part of his son Carloman, and his move has been, probably rightly, interpreted as a means of neutering what power Louis had in Aquitaine in order to prevent him helping his brother (Auzias 1937, 370). That this was necessary, however, may indicate that Louis had enough power in Aquitaine to be a potential threat.

§23. During Louis the Stammerer's time in Neustria, however, the young ruler appears to have been almost completely without regional power. In his case this can probably be attributed to the shortness of his tenure there and his young age: when he was initially established in Neustria in 856, he was only nine years old, and was driven out in 858, after less than two years, having faced near-constant opposition from the regional aristocrats during this time (Smith 1992, 103). His re-establishment in 860 was similarly brief; even then, he was apparently able to find enough support to maintain a rebellion in Neustria in 862.

§24. Moreover, Hugh the Abbot, during his tenure in Neustria in the 870s, developed structures of control in the region which had not previously been seen. As Werner has pointed out, the title of vicecomes appears in the region for the first time during this period (Werner 1997, 37). Power within Neustria seems to have shifted from the roughly-equal-status nobles of the 840s, 850s, and 860s to a more hierarchical structure, as prominent local families became viscounts in the major civitates of the Loire valley, clearly subordinate to the marchio. By the time the Robertians Odo and Robert of Neustria took control in the last decades of the ninth century, Neustria was (as Smith puts it) "no longer the 'merry-go-round' on which the Carolingian aristocracy played." Instead, it was under the uncontested control of a single marchio, whose regional hegemony was, for the most part, unchallenged (Smith 1992, 193).

§25. Two points emerge from this comparative overview of the powers of regional rulers within Neustria, Aquitaine and Brittany. First, none of these rulers were ever simply Charles the Bald's puppets in their respective areas. They maintained followings, even if these were marginal, as in the case of Louis the Stammerer in Aquitaine and Neustria. In other cases, however, as with Pippin II in the Aquitaine of the 850s and Charles the Child in the Aquitaine of the 860s, these followings were surprisingly substantial and were recognized as posing a potential threat to the balance of power between Charles the Bald and his subordinate rulers.

§26. The second point is that, despite this, none of these figures ever negotiated with Charles the Bald as an equal. This may be expected with Charles the Bald and his sons, as questions of familial hierarchy come in to play. A royal title being entirely within Charles's purview to give or withhold, as with Louis the
Stammerer's return to Neustria in 867, may have been a slightly anomalous concentration of agency on Charles's part—it seems unlikely that he could have been so high-handed with Charles the Child in 862/3, for instance. Despite their royal titles, though, Charles the Bald's sons would have been expected to deal with their father as a superior under any circumstance (Kasten 1997, 435). However, the same patterns are true of Pippin II and the Breton rulers. In the case of Pippin, Charles consistently presented himself as higher-status during their negotiations, even in 845 when he was operating from a position of weakness after military defeat. In 845, as noted above, he granted Pippin only lordship over Aquitaine; in 858, it was "some counties and monasteries" (*ei comitatus ac monasteria in Aquitania tribuit*) (*Ann. Bert.*, s.a. 858). Pippin, moreover, seems to have recognized his subordination to Charles: in a diploma of 845 issued to the abbey of Saint-Chaffre, he described his uncle as "Our patron, the invincible king Charles" (*patroni nostri Karoli regis invictissimi*) (Levillain 1926, no. 51). Similarly in Brittany, the Breton rulers never negotiated with Charles on an equal footing, despite their consistent military success against him. In two diplomas issued in 856, Charles described Erispoë as *noster fidelis et compater*—a title of respect, but of a respected subordinate (Giry, Prou, and Tessier 1943, nos. 180, 181; *contra* Koziol 2012, 154). Erispoë came the closest—at the same time in 856, he issued a quasi-royal diploma giving him the name of king—but the hierarchy was nonetheless ultimately maintained: Erispoë was not an equal king, but a subordinate one. With Salomon, peace between the two rulers was usually marked by an oath of fidelity on Salomon's part—as in 863, 867 and 873 (*Ann. Bert.*, s.a. 863, 867, 873). In short, relations between Charles the Bald and these regional rulers were consistently and persistently marked by dominance and subordination no matter how weak Charles's position may have been at the time.

Conclusions

§27. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this brief run-through of the West Frankish kingdom's western borderlands. The first and most fundamental is that these three regions had, by the end of Charles the Bald's reign, converged. Despite the variation evident in their initial positions, by the 870s Aquitaine, Brittany and Neustria had all become regions in which authority was in the hands of a single individual, subordinate to the West Frankish king but of higher status than a simple count. In the latter two regions, power and status became more concentrated; in the former, it passed from a local Aquitanian sub-king to the West Frankish ruler, as Aquitaine became more politically subordinate to the West Frankish kingdom. There were several dynamics at play here, but one which emerges particularly clearly is a desire on the part of the royal center to simplify regional hierarchies. Hence, the initial assignment of rulers to regions which had not previously had them—Louis the Stammerer and the *marchiones* in Neustria, Nominoë in Brittany—had a strong top-down impulse behind them. This is not to say that the center's agency had unchallenged domination in any of the western borderlands—as the cases of Louis the Stammerer's brief reign in Neustria and the Aquitanian nobility's shifts of allegiance between various candidates for the sub-kingdom show, it was very possible for a regional alliance to reject their ruler of the moment.

§28. Once a sole ruler had been established, however, it was not usual to get rid of them. Instead, Charles the Bald focused on maintaining hegemony over regional rulers. If a local ruler already existed, Charles attempted to maintain and if possible increase their subordinated status. Hence, in Aquitaine, the symbols of status available to previous monarchs and initially wielded by Pippin II, such as seals, diplomas and (for the most part) coinage, were stripped from Pippin, Charles the Child and Louis the Stammerer. Even when—as in Brittany—symbols of royal status such as regalia were granted to a regional ruler, it was done in such a way as to emphasize their dependence on Charles (Smith 1992, 113–114).

§29. Consequently, rather than being "kings" or "not-kings," regional rulers were on a spectrum of kingship: more than "just" a count, but not endowed with the full panoply of markers indicating royal status. The precise place any given ruler was on this spectrum may have fluctuated over time, but what remained consistent was that at no point during the time in question could any of the rulers examined here be legitimately placed at either extreme. Instead, the precise degree of authority to be wielded between regional rulers was negotiated and contested through a churn of status games, family struggles, alliances and military conflicts. These negotiations happened within limits—Charles the Bald was always accorded superior status, for instance—but nonetheless, they could over (relatively extended periods of) time produce periods of peace, as with Aquitaine after 860 and Neustria and Brittany after circa 866.
§30. The final point to be made is that while the precise outcomes for each region often rested on very contingent factors such as rulers' deaths or military victory, the overall dynamics were very similar for all three of the regions concerned. The formal relationship of these regions to the political center had a very limited impact on their political development. The nominal fact that Neustria was solidly within the West Frankish kingdom, Aquitaine's status was shakier, and Brittany was notionally outside it, had little influence on the way their histories progressed. That is, the "political frontiers" of the kingdom's western borderlands did not have direct material impact on those regions it encompassed. The relationship between a dominant West Frankish kingship and regional hierarchies proceeded independently of formal or, as it were, "constitutional" relationships between the regions, and much more in accordance with political and personal distance or closeness between regional elites, both those nominally inside the West Frankish kingdom and those nominally outside it, and the court.
Notes

1. Prou had Louis the Stammerer mint coins in his name as king of Aquitaine; however, it seems more likely (as noted by Grierson and Blackburn) that these date to his sole reign over the entire kingdom (Prou 1969, nos. 675, 676; Grierson and Blackburn 2006, 219). [Back]
Works Cited


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