

CONCLUSION

I HAVE SHOWN that making better Christians (*correctio*) grew to include supervision of the environment and its inhabitants in Carolingian ideology. In the late eighth century both ideas came to define the exercise of Carolingian sovereignty over bodies and spaces in Europe. Supervision and domination of the environment became an end and constituent to the Carolingians' mission to Christianize and "redeem" lands and peoples: that is what Carolingian ecological sovereignty meant. The *Admonitio generalis*, the Council of Frankfurt in 794, and the *De litteris colendis* demonstrated that the pursuit of "better" biblical exegesis was not merely an intellectual exercise: Genesis became a model for Carolingian sovereignty because Charlemagne, the "new Adam," would master nature. Courtier-theologian Wigbod showed that trees were the ideal metaphor for obedience both to God and to Carolingian lords. Insular, Roman, and Frankish notions associating good rule with a prosperous environment and bad rule with a deleterious environment combined to forge a new idea of kingship at Charlemagne's court. The vocabulary of "happy kingdoms" meant the kind of empire as garden-paradise discussed in Wigbod's exegesis, Alcuin's letters, and Theodulf's poetry, became a measuring stick for Charlemagne's success or failure.

At the end of January in 814, Charlemagne died. He had spent the final part of the hunting season in the vicinity of Aachen but did not travel far because of his age and infirmity. In his biography of the emperor, Einhard reported that Charlemagne died of a fever and a "pain in his side, which the Greeks call pleurisy."¹ Fasting from food, Charlemagne thought to master his ailments as he had subdued illnesses in the past through moderation and bed rest. Yet on the morning of January 28, at the age of seventy-two,

I "Cumque ibi hiemaret, mense Ianuario febre valida correptus decubuit. Qui statim, ut in febribus solebat, cibi sibi abstinentiam indixit, arbitratus hac continentia morbum posse depelli vel certe mitigari. Sed accedente ad febrem lateris dolore, quem Greci pleuresin dicunt, illoque adhuc inediam retinente neque corpus aliter quam rarissimo potu sustentante, septimo postquam decubuit, die, sacra communione percepta, decessit, anno aetatis suae septuagesimo secundo et ex quo regnare coeperat quadragesimo septimo, V. Kal. Februarii, hora diei tertia." Einhard, *VK*, ed. Pertz and Waite, p. 35, lines 3–13.

Charlemagne succumbed to his illness. In Einhard's biography the event was heralded by many prodigies and omens that proved the dis-ordering of the Frankish realm and the degeneration of the Carolingian emperor's body. Such a disintegration of the polity's theological-political underpinnings threatened the Carolingian good garden described above.

Through historical happenstance Louis the Pious was the sole inheritor to the imperial title and rule of the Franks because both his brother Charles (the heir apparent) and his exiled brother Pepin had died in 811. It seems as if Louis had never been intended to rule as sole emperor, having spent nearly all his adult life in the south in Aquitaine, away from the Carolingian heartlands that Charles the Younger was meant to rule. In the poem *Karolus Magnus*, Louis was omitted from the courtly procession to mirror his place in the real-life entourage of Charlemagne. Moreover, one of Charlemagne's daughters may be responsible for having the emperor buried at Aachen instead of at Saint-Denis, the traditional burial site for kings of the Franks.² Historians have recently read into this innovation a sign that the succession was contested, despite Charlemagne's and Louis's co-rule as emperors after 813. Louis was a "southern" outsider, and powerful aristocrats—Charlemagne's daughters, but also Wala, the first magnate named in the ruler's will—did not know or trust him.³ Shortly after Louis arrived at Aachen to take up his father's rule, he expelled his sisters, Wala, and other powerful aristocrats whose allegiance might be questionable, and condemned the palace "as a den of sexual permissiveness and corruption and presented himself as a righteous and pious reformer, riding into town to cleanse the court and the empire of impurity."⁴ These actions were practical responses to political threats, but they were long taken as evidence of Louis as a "pious" reformer more interested in legislating morality than in governing an empire.⁵ Yet Louis's actions in 814 (and throughout his reign) were those of the ultimate *insider*. He understood Carolingian theological-political culture and believed that his father had lost his way and had been in the end cast out from the happy kingdoms.

After Charlemagne the tenor of Carolingian ecological sovereignty shifted but not the tune itself. Louis's biographers portrayed the emperor

2 On the women at Aachen, see Nelson, "Women at the Court of Charlemagne," 223–42.

3 Costambeys et al., *The Carolingian World*, 196–97.

4 Costambeys et al., *The Carolingian World*, 199.

5 Ferdinand Werner, "*Hludovicus Augustus*," 1–4.

as the abbot of a monastery that spanned the length and breadth of the empire.⁶ Yet we have seen that the monastic garden was both constitutive of and constituent to the Paradise-game park imagined by Carolingian theologians and clerics, and that ordering the lives within its walls contributed to the mission of supervising, controlling, and redeeming nature. Louis the Pious collaborated with his chief monastic reformer, Benedict of Aniane to fashion a monastic style of rulership in the Carolingian Empire that contributed to an ethos of “lay sanctity” in ninth-century Francia and informed later medieval concepts of knighthood.⁷ Louis the Pious’ deposition in 833—at the hands of bishops and his son, Lothar—and forced public penance was also for a long time taken as a sign of weak rule by historians, yet it too was a performance of authoritative piety, and it made perfect sense according to the logic of Carolingian religious and political culture.⁸

In the Carolingian imagination, the royal disaster-happy kingdoms paradigm and the image of the empire as a garden together formed a grammar of ecological sovereignty, in which the ruler’s virtue was legible in the flourishing or decay of creation itself. This notion continued to shape Carolingian politics and imperialism in the ninth century. In fact, Louis’s self-abasement reflected the values of Carolingian ecological sovereignty reconstructed in this book. So too did the aims of the bishops who pressured their emperor to step down and undergo penance: in their *Relatio* (the record of the event’s proceedings) they accused Louis of negligence in his governance of the empire, which directly impacted the “scandal of the church,” the “ruin of the people,” and the “destruction of the kingdom.”⁹ These accusations stemmed from Louis’ decision to include his youngest son (from a different mother) Charles the Bald in the succession and division of the realm, at the expense of territories belonging to Charles’s older brothers.¹⁰ The *Relatio* then compared Louis with his father, Charlemagne, who had enlarged the kingdom

6 Noble, “Thegan, Introduction,” in *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 187–88.

7 McKitterick, *The Frankish Church*, 14; Diem, “The Carolingians and the *Regula Benedicti*”; Noble, “Secular Sanctity,” 8–16; Airlie, “The Anxiety of Sanctity,” 373; Leyser, “Early Medieval Canon Law and the Beginning of Knighthood,” 51–56.

8 de Jong, “Power and Humility in Carolingian Society,” 44–46.

9 *Episcoporum de poenitentia, quam Hludowicus imperator professus est, relatio Compendiensi*. “sunt multa, quae per negligentiam in hoc imperio contigerunt, quae ad scandalum ecclesiae et ruinam populi vel regni interitum manifestis indiciis pertinebant.” In Booker, “The Public Penance of Louis the Pious,” 13. Translation adapted from Booker, *Past Convictions*, 259.

10 de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 25–36, 32–33.

and brought peace, a tranquillity that Louis's indecisiveness and impulsiveness wrecked. One can see in the above charges the seeds of the dissension surrounding the succession crises and civil conflicts of the mid-ninth century, though the bishops framed their narrative within the context of spiritual correction. The emperor and the bishops of the Carolingian Empire shared the theological-political discourse of ecological sovereignty, finding divine retribution in *clades*—ecological and other catastrophes that resulted from the ruler's misdeeds.

There is perhaps no more striking proof that norms of ecological sovereignty from Charlemagne's reign persisted—even as his moral reputation suffered in the aftermath of his rule—than the dream recorded in the *Visio Wettini*. In November of 824, Wetti, a monk of Reichenau, experienced a dream-vision that took him (among other places) to a place of purgatory, where he saw Charlemagne:

Wetti said that he had seen standing there a certain prince, who had once ruled Italy and the Roman people, and his genitals were being mangled by the teeth of a beast, although the rest of his body remained free from injury. Wetti was struck with violent bewilderment, wondering how so great a man, who had appeared almost alone among others in this modern age in defense of Catholic faith and direction of the holy church, could have been inflicted with such a hideous punishment. His angelic guide quickly answered that although he had done many wonderful and praiseworthy things accepted by God, for which he would not be deprived of his reward, nevertheless, alongside these other goods offered to God, he had given himself up to the delight of debauchery and had chosen to end his long life in this state.¹¹

In Wetti's vision, Charlemagne was being slowly devoured by one of the beasts over which (as nature's sovereign) he should have held mastery, betrayed by his own sinful desires. It was further proof that the imperial game park's warden had lost his mandate, one that Louis the Pious had to restore.¹²

11 "Illic etiam quendam principem, qui Italiae et populi Romani sceptrum quondam rexerat, vidisse se stantem dixerat, et verenda eius cuiusdam animalis morsu laniari, reliquo corpore immuni ab hac lesione manente. Stupore igitur vehementi attonitus, ammirans quomodo tantus vir, qui in defensione catholicae fidei et regimine sanctae ecclesiae moderno seculo pene inter ceteros singularis apparuit, inuri tanta deformitate poenae potuisset. Cui ab angelo ductore suo protinus responsum est, quod, quamvis multa miranda et laudabilia et deo accepta fecisset, quorum mercede privandus non est, tamen stupri inlecebris resolutus, cum ceteris bonis deo oblatis longevitatem vitae suae in hoc terminare voluisset." *Heitonis Visio Wettini*, ed. Dümmler, 271. Translation from Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming*, 63–64.

12 For "king of beasts," see Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 43–68.

Walafrid Strabo's later verse reworking of Wetti's vision struck even more clearly the chords of Carolingian ecological sovereignty:

He [Wetti] gazes also upon him [Charlemagne], scanned across the fields,
Who once held the kingdoms of Ausonia and the lofty Roman race,
Now standing still with fixed step,
And the beast before him tearing at the genitals of the man who stands.¹³

Charlemagne (whom we can identify by the acrostic beginnings of each verse line that spell out "CAROLUS IMPERATOR"¹⁴), in other words, was rooted, standing still (*fixo consistere gressu*) not unlike a tree—but like Wigbod's Adam and Eve, a *thinking* tree, condemned to live, feel, and ponder his transgressions—while the animal emasculated him. It was a complete inversion of the gendered hierarchies of Paradise and the biblical authority that had legitimated Charlemagne's claims of sovereignty over bodies and spaces in the Christian empire.

Despite these shifts in tenor, Louis the Pious's "practice" of empire shared "fundamental continuities" with that of his father.¹⁵ Both their political agendas were rooted in the commitment to correct biblical teachings. The scope and ambitions had changed: Charlemagne had ruled a Frankish heartland that was surrounded by kingdoms made up of different *gentes*, each possessing varying degrees of political and religious autonomy, and which were absorbed, annexed, and drawn into political relationships with Franks over the course of the long eighth century. Louis the Pious, himself a product of one of the peripheral kingdoms (Aquitaine), ruled an empire that became more polyethnic and universal in the descriptions of its chroniclers, who described him not as ruler "of the Franks," but rather as the "Christian emperor of the *populus christianus*."¹⁶ Between 816 and 829, Louis and the ecclesiastics who advised him put into place a program developed at assemblies and promulgated via synods and capitularies with "empire-wide force."¹⁷

13 "Contemplatur item quantam lustrata per arva, / Ausoniae quondam qui regna tenebat et altae / Romanae gentis, fixo consistere gressu, / Oppositumque animal lacerare virilia stantis." *Visio Wettini Walahfridi*, ed. Dümmler, p. 318, lines 446–49. Translation from Pollard, "Charlemagne's Posthumous Reputation and the *Visio Wettini*."

14 Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming*, 66.

15 Costambeys et al., *The Carolingian World*, 198.

16 Noble, "Louis the Pious and the Frontiers of the Frankish Realm," 340–42.

17 Noble, "Louis the Pious and the Frontiers of the Frankish Realm," 345.

Carolingian exegetes in the 810s and 820s reflected this newfound confidence in their imperial success, as commentators like Claudius of Turin worked to produce wholly new texts on Genesis that derived from earlier texts like Wigbod's but that asked new questions.¹⁸ These developments foreshadowed the education and confidence of mid-ninth century writers like Angelomus of Luxeuil, described by Michael Gorman as a "self-conscious creator, not a mere excerptor of previous opinions," and John Scotus Eriugena, who blended biblical and ancient Greco-Roman philosophical notions to create complex and controversial arguments about the properties of God and the universe itself.¹⁹

By the time Louis the Pious died, and his sons warred among themselves for control of a fractured empire in the 840s, in John Contreni's words, the "fissures in the landscape of biblical culture, evident in its most sophisticated work, suggest that the seed sown by Charlemagne and tended by generations of kings, bishops and masters sank deep roots in Carolingian literate society, but that its harvest was somewhat unexpected and troubling."²⁰ Further investigation into the diverse interpretations of Genesis commentaries (and their political patrons) might shed light onto continuities or ruptures in ideas of ecological sovereignty in the later ninth century and beyond. But it is certain that the application of Genesis to the contemporary context of Carolingian politics (whether under Charlemagne or his successors) was an important legacy of Wigbod and Alcuin, among others.

Even Louis the Pious, despite his initial "clearing of the decks" policy regarding Charlemagne's habits and personal associations, returned to the forms established by his father. Louis is known to have gone hunting twenty-seven times as ruler, performing both his own fitness to rule and the success of the empire.²¹ In panegyric verse describing a hunt in which the king of the Danes joined the Frankish royal entourage, Ermold told how "happy caesar bagged many beasts" while "the boy Charles" (the Bald) was presented with a captive deer to slay himself:

[h]e picked up weapons suited to his tender years and struck the animal's quivering hide. It was a boyish achievement this time, but more would fol-

18 Gorman, "The Commentary on Genesis of Claudius of Turin," 317.

19 Moran, "The Secret Folds of Nature," 109–10.

20 Contreni, "The Patristic Legacy to c. 1000," 529–35.

21 Goldberg, "Louis the Pious and the Hunt," 614.

low, and he would go forth marked by his father's strength and adorned with his grandfather's name.²²

Such Carolingian performance of fitness to rule extended beyond the hunt to the control and reclamation of real landscapes. Louis the Pious helped establish the monastery at Conques, in southern France, a place that "used to be fit only for wild beasts and songbirds and was unknown to men on account of its wilderness."²³ Louis endowed the church and the monastery, and "gave it a path cut through the rocks with heavy, sweaty labor, which made the place accessible," and he protected the place when it was under attack by the "Moors," so that "where recently a great troop of beasts lay down to sleep, now cornfields give thanks to God."²⁴ Within the game park and without, control and subjugation of natural bodies continued to justify and support Carolingian claims to sovereignty.

At the end of the eighth century, several strands of theological and political authority came together at Charlemagne's court to coalesce into Carolingian ecological sovereignty. They facilitated the development of new notions of imperial authority and power rooted in the control of the natural world. The courtier-theologians who advised Charlemagne drew on biblical notions of authority and Roman models of sovereignty, fusing them with Frankish customs and other ideas from Britain, Visigothic Iberia, and Italy, to bolster Charlemagne's claims to rule over vast spaces in Europe and its human and nonhuman inhabitants. The ambitious concept of ecological sovereignty first developed and shaped at Charlemagne's court informed the lofty aims set forth in "constitutional" documents like the *Admonitio generalis*. Ultimately, Charlemagne's exercise of imperial rule was rooted in Carolingian ecclesiastics' vision of him as a kind of

22 "Caesar laetus enim dat corpora multa ferarum...Carolus cum quibus ipse puer... Arma aevo tenero tunc convenientia sumit, / Perculit atque ferae terga tremenda puer. / Hunc puerile decus hinc inde frequentat et ambit, / Unc patris virtus, nomen et ornat avi." Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris*, ed. Weidmann, p. 72, lines 507, 516, p. 73, lines 529–32. Translation from Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 181.

23 "Olim namque feris avibusque canoribus aptus, / Ignotusque homini pro feritate fuit." Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris*, 11, lines 197–98. Translation from Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 133.

24 "Rupibus excisis valido sudante labore, / Quo pateat locus hic, semita regi datur... Nuper quo valido recubabant agmine beluae, / Redditur inde deo nunc quoque grata seges." Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris*, ed. Weidmann, p. 11, lines 205–6 and p. 13, lines 265–66. Translation from Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 133–34.

Adam, the steward of a garden who subjugated all creatures in his domain to Frankish sovereignty. A nostalgia for conditions in *the* beginning underlays the Carolingians' self-appointed mission to subdue and redeem the world before its end.