

**«Fratres, omni die videtis  
cum vadit istud regnum in perdicionem»:  
Abbo of Saint-Germain and the Crisis of 888**

by Charles West

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**The collapse of the early medieval European  
kingdoms (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries)**

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1. *West Francia after 888*

In December 887, Emperor Charles the Fat lost power at an assembly in Bavaria in a coup orchestrated by his nephew Arnulf, and retired to an estate where he died a few weeks later on 13 January 888, probably from natural causes – though some suspected foul play<sup>1</sup>. Arnulf became king in Charles's stead in the eastern part of the Carolingian empire, and subsequently in 896 emperor too. But he refused invitations to take over the west as well, which Charles the Fat had ruled following the premature deaths of Carloman II and Louis III, grandsons of Charles the Bald, both in their twenties.

That gap was instead filled by Odo, a prominent aristocrat based in the Loire valley and around the Île-de-France, who was crowned king on 29 February 888 in the palace of Compiègne<sup>2</sup>. Odo's intention to rule along traditional lines was carefully signalled by his coronation oath, which followed the custom begun by Charles the Bald, and indeed by the very paraphernalia

\* I am grateful to the audience at the *El colapso de los reinos de la Europa altomedieval (siglos VIII-IX)* conference in Salamanca in October 2015 for their comments and discussion on an early version of this article, and to Iñaki Martín Viso and the conference organisers for their efficiency and warm hospitality. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for the journal for their helpful suggestions. This article was completed in the course of a Visiting Fellowship at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology of the University of Edinburgh. Research for it was supported by AHRC grant AH/L010623/1, and by a Humboldt-Stiftung Fellowship hosted at the Eberhard-Karls Universität, Tübingen.

<sup>1</sup> *Annales sancti Vedasti*, 887, p. 64: «fertur a suis strangulatus».

<sup>2</sup> For Odo's family, see now Noizet, *L'ascension du lignage robertien*, concentrating on its base at St-Martin of Tours.

of his coronation, which included crowns entrusted to Saint-Denis by Kings Charles and Louis<sup>3</sup>. However, Odo's grip on power was far from uncontested. Another magnate, Wido, briefly staked his own claim to kingship against Odo, and had himself anointed in Langres, while yet another, Ramnulf, certainly considered his options, and was perhaps crowned too. While Odo was quickly able to face down both, the new king's decade-long reign was uneasy, punctuated by rebellions and internal political disorder – of which Scandinavian raiders were not slow to take advantage.

Part of the reason for these difficulties doubtless lay in uncertainty over the new king's legitimacy. Odo was well-connected, from a family that had been close to kings for generations; but as Fulk, the contemporary archbishop of Rheims (and one of Odo's fiercest enemies), observed, he was nevertheless «a foreigner to the royal line». In other words, unlike other contenders for kingship after 888 across the Frankish world, Odo could not claim to be related to the Carolingians: and as Archbishop Fulk emphasised, it was the custom of the Franks to choose their kings from this dynasty<sup>4</sup>. Whether this was really the root of Fulk's hostility to Odo is impossible to say – after all, Fulk had initially offered his support to Wido, who was not a Carolingian either<sup>5</sup>. And previous archbishops of Reims had argued powerfully that Frankish kingship was not straightforwardly hereditary, but depended on moral qualities independent of bloodline<sup>6</sup>.

Nevertheless, at least one tenth-century Frankish historian – whose work is unfortunately now preserved only in abbreviated Arabic summary – treated Odo as a usurper who had resorted to paying off the Vikings, merely a brief interruption in a line of kings named Louis and Charles that stretched back to the Merovingians<sup>7</sup>. And the dynastic principle provided at least a convenient justification for Archbishop Fulk's support for Odo's most serious rival

<sup>3</sup> Compare Favre, *Eudes*, p. 1, «La royauté d'Eudes est absolument carolingienne», though he immediately goes on to emphasise the dynastic break; see also p. 93, where he stresses Odo's difference from the Carolingian kings. Koziol, *Politics*, p. 218, notes that Odo often referred to Charles the Bald in his charters, though also that Odo's charters were technically less proficient than Charles's had been: see now on these documents Mersiowsky, *Urkunde*, vol. 1, pp. 217-223, noting how they show that «Westfränkische Traditionen haben sich erhalten» at p. 223. For the royal paraphernalia, see Schramm, *Denkmale*, pp. 95-96; the coronation texts are in *Ordines*, ed. Jackson, vol. I, pp. 133-138.

<sup>4</sup> Flodoard, *Historia Remensis ecclesiae*, p. 381: «a stirpe regia... alienus»; «morem Francorum gentis asserit secutos se fuisse, quorum mos semper fuerit ut rege decedente alium de regia stirpe vel successione, sine respectu vel interrogatione cujusquam, majores aut potentiores regni eligerent». See also p. 382 for further discussion by Archbishop Fulk of the *regia stirps*. For the importance of dynasty in royal successions around 900, see Le Jan, *Le royaume franc vers 900*.

<sup>5</sup> On Wido's family background, see Hlawitschka, *Waren die Kaiser Wido und Lambert Nachkommen Karls des Großen?*.

<sup>6</sup> Hincmar of Rheims, *De Divortio*, p. 249, tr. Stone and West, pp. 302-303.

<sup>7</sup> The text, perhaps to be associated with Louis IV's court, is preserved in the history that Al-Masudi wrote around 947: an English translation is provided in König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, at p. 195. The usurping ruler is named «Qūmis», which means «count»; he is said to have ruled for eight years, which suggests Qūmis must be Odo.

Charles the Simple, the posthumous son of Louis the Stammerer, whom Fulk crowned as king in 893: an event which led to a slow, indecisive civil war that simmered until a provisional peace was agreed in 897, shortly before Odo's death on 1 January 898.

King Charles however in turn faced resistance throughout the early tenth century from Odo's supporters, notably from Odo's brother Robert who soon renounced the loyalty he had declared to the new king, and whom Charles eventually faced in pitched battle at Soissons in 923 with consequences disastrous for both sides. We do not need to presuppose a permanent feud between "Carolingians" and "Robertians" to appreciate the instability of the times; and while it was far from self-evident in the tenth century that Odo's descendants would become the kings of France, no one would argue that this outcome was entirely coincidental either<sup>8</sup>. In short, the removal of Charles the Fat in the winter of 887/888 can be seen to have sparked political instability in the Frankish world in general, and in the West Frankish kingdom in particular, that proved difficult to control in the medium term. No wonder that some historians have in recent years put renewed weight on the significance of 888 as a turning point in West Frankish history<sup>9</sup>. No wonder too that for some historians at least, Odo was the first French king<sup>10</sup>.

To what extent, however, did these events mark the end or the collapse of a kingdom? And what did contemporaries understand by the notion of kingdom (*regnum*) anyway? These are the questions that this article will consider, chiefly by examining the work of a well-placed contemporary writer, the monk Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés of Paris. Abbo is best known today as the author of a poem about the Scandinavian sieges of Paris in the 880s, the *Bella Parisiacae Urbis*, which he completed at some point before 897, and which survives today in its complete form in a single manuscript<sup>11</sup>. But Abbo also wrote a number of sermons that he collected together in the 920s, on episcopal commission though apparently intended for the use of more humble clerics. Reflecting the general neglect of early medieval sermon literature, this work has been relatively little studied, yet it has much to offer the historian in search of how contemporaries responded to events of the time. I shall draw

<sup>8</sup> The best study of the politics of the period is now Koziol, *Politics*; see also Barthélemy, *Nouvelle histoire*, p. 15, emphasising the contest between the last Carolingians and the Robertians.

<sup>9</sup> Barthélemy, *Nouvelle histoire*, p. 19: «une page s'est incontestablement tournée»; Mazel, *Féodalités*, pp. 10, 17-25. Much of this is underpinned by the important work of Simon MacLean, e.g. *Kingship and politics in the ninth century*, and more recently *Cross-Channel marriage and royal succession*.

<sup>10</sup> This is the position defended by Schneider, *Odo*, in a book on the kings of France that begins with Odo. See also the classic account of Favre, *Eudes*, who approvingly cites Giry to the effect that this was the moment when «la France s'est faite», p. XI.

<sup>11</sup> The manuscript is Paris BnF ms Lat. 13833, which can be consulted online via *Gallica*, <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9067841t>> [18 June 2016]. Studies: Adams and Rigg, *Verse translation*, which as its title indicates includes a translation; Dass, *Viking Attacks on Paris*. MacLean, *Kingship and politics in the late ninth century*, provides a useful discussion at pp. 55-62.

extensively on both poem and sermons in what follows, alongside other contemporary sources<sup>12</sup>.

## 2. *Abbo of Saint-Germain's perception of crisis*

As is well known, Abbo's account of the Scandinavian sieges of Paris in 885/886, the *Bella Parisiacae Urbis*, which he wrote only after Odo had been crowned, puts much retrospective emphasis on the new king's martial heroism. It has even been read as a justification of the change in the political order. Emperor Charles the Fat appears but briefly and ingloriously, arranging a tribute payment to the Vikings before «he returned to die within his own domain»<sup>13</sup>. In contrast, Abbo's poem lauds Odo as the noble, brave and victorious defender of not just Paris, but of Francia: scanning the battlements, leaping over ditches, and generally taking charge: «Odo, victor, unsurpassed in war», «brave Odo pounded countless Danes», «he killed as many Danes there as he threw spears», «all stood amazed at Odo's great accomplishments», and so forth<sup>14</sup>. But Abbo does not shrink from deploring the upheavals wrought by the Vikings on Frankish society, despite all Odo's efforts: in a famous passage, he lamented how «the slave is made free, the free slave; and the servant is made master, and the master the servant»<sup>15</sup>.

In his sermons – or more accurately, sermons and homilies, which gloss biblical texts – Abbo is even clearer about the transition that he thought Francia was undergoing, for which indeed he had tailored his work, to make it «most suitable for the matters and the times»<sup>16</sup>. Composed as western Francia was being torn apart by raids and civil war, it is surely revealing that Abbo's collection begins with a sermon on the end times<sup>17</sup>. These sermons were written and collated under the shadow of crisis. Sometimes Abbo hints at this crisis obliquely or maybe even unconsciously, as when he explains that coins

<sup>12</sup> The sermons are edited in Önnfors, *Abbo von Saint-Germain-des-Prés*. The main manuscript is Paris, BnF. ms Lat. 13203, which can be consulted online through *Gallica*, <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9066729q>> [18 June 2016]; but the transmission of these sermons is complicated, and would repay further study. Though Abbo's collection was for «simple clerics» (*simplices clerici*, p. 63), it was commissioned by two bishops (p. 63) and some of the sermons were clearly intended to be read out by a bishop, e.g. no. 11 and no. 13, p. 125 and p. 127, «nos episcopi». Abbo may well have been a “ghost-writer”, as Önnfors suggests (p. 261). On early medieval sermons in general, see McCune, *An edition*, now available online, and *Sermo doctorum*, ed. Diesenberger, Hen and Pollheimer.

<sup>13</sup> Abbo, *Bella*, II, line 343, «moriturus fine propinquo» (which Dass translates as «not long afterwards»).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, I, lines 96 («bellis invictus ab ullis»), 107 («Fortis Odo innumeros tutudit»), 247 («totidem Danos perimit, quot spicula mittit»); II, line 30 («Nobilibusque stupent eius super actibus omnes»). For scanning battlements, I, line 488; for leaping over ditches, II, line 27.

<sup>15</sup> Abbo, *Bella*, I, lines 184-185: «efficitur servus liber, liber quoque servus/Vernaque fit dominus, contra dominus quoque verna».

<sup>16</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 63: «rebus temporibusque aptissimos».

<sup>17</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, pp. 66-71, glossing «Erunt signa» (Luke 21, 25).

used to have the name and face of the king upon them – something that had been entirely normal until only a few years before he wrote<sup>18</sup>. But for the most part, he is entirely explicit in his articulation of the disruption that was affecting a world «in commotion and conturbation», a world that could never stand still<sup>19</sup>.

That disruption is often linked in Abbo's work to the Viking threat, the «gens normannica», as well as briefly to the Hungarians<sup>20</sup>. In one particularly fascinating sermon, Abbo drew on the grisly fate of King Zedekiah, whose family was slaughtered before his own eyes by the Babylonians in the Book of Kings, as a warning of what might come to pass<sup>21</sup>. Yet Abbo did not rely only on Biblical precedents, for in what might be a reference to contemporary Mercia and Northumbria, he also warned in this sermon of what had happened to Britain. Its kings had been defeated and had fled; so too had its counts and its bishops, who had become exiles abroad. Abbo worried that this fate might also befall Francia<sup>22</sup>. Perhaps Abbo was exaggerating the actual threat, but the sense of panic the Vikings created is amply attested elsewhere too. In a sermon by Lupus of Ferrières from around 860, the Vikings are described as having most cruelly slaughtered, and as still most cruelly slaughtering, the greater part of the Christian people, while for Radbert of Corbie writing around 850, their attacks, alongside the Frankish civil wars, were maybe a sign of the end times<sup>23</sup>.

Indeed in Abbo's eyes, the Vikings were not really agents in their own right: he followed the traditions of his monastery, and in good Carolingian

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 81: «In illis diebus antiquis habebat unusquisque denarius nomen et imaginem regis». This is a good example of how Abbo adapted his sources, notably Haimo of Auxerre, whose own homily explained that «Denarius genus erat nummi, qui pro decem nummis imputabatur, et habebat imaginem Caesaris expressam nomenque superscriptum». Where Haimo sticks to a straightforward gloss on the base Matthew text, Abbo's «in illis diebus» gives a very different emphasis. Royal control of minting had been breaking down since the late ninth century.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 88: «istud presens seculum quod semper est in commotione et in conturbatione... et umquam non potest stare in pace».

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 145 for the «gens normannica».

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 98. I have made an English translation of this sermon, *Sermon against the Robbers of Other People's Property*, available online at <<http://history.dept.shef.ac.uk/translations/medieval/abbo-sermon>> [18 June 2016], thanks to the sterling assistance of James Pearson.

<sup>22</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, pp. 97-98: «multum est timendum, ut non veniat super nos tam grande malum cum nos sapimus venisse super regem et super comites et super episcopos Britannorum... Certe rex coronam fugit et laxavit suum regnum. Similiter et alii principes, episcopi et comites fugerunt et facti sunt peregrini». This might of course be a comment on the fate of Roman Britain, but Fried, *Um 900: Warum e das Reich der Franken nicht gegeben hat*, p. 88, assumes it is a contemporary reference to the Anglo-Saxons.

<sup>23</sup> Lupus of Ferrières, *Sermo*, p. 563: «Piratae, id est praedones maritimi, maximam partem Christianorum crudelissime trucidaverunt et trucidant impune»; Radbert, *Expositio in Matheo*, vol. III, p. 1159: «Tanta a barbaris et paganis hostibus exterminia hominum et desolationes civitatum iugiter sustinemus qui nihil aliud cotidie quam finem nostrum cum gemitu expectamus». Radbert repeated the orthodoxy that the apocalypse could not be predicted, but the note of anxiety sounded in this part of his commentary is nevertheless unmistakable. For a recent survey of the Viking impact in Francia, with a somewhat irenic tone and plenty of emphasis on the concept of accommodation, see Bauduin, *Le monde franc*.

style saw them primarily as the rod of God's wrath<sup>24</sup>. As Abbo explained, «Certainly God is angry with us, and so many afflictions of the pagans and the sterility of the earth come upon us»<sup>25</sup>. God was not listening to prayers, because of the sins of the people: «therefore» (*idcirco*) the pagans were ravaging the land<sup>26</sup>. So along traditional lines, in both poem and sermons, Abbo pinned the blame ultimately on bad Christians: the «principes mundi» and their followers. It was these «falsi christiani» or «pseudo-christiani» who were stealing church property, lusting after alods, horses and serfs, committing rapine and theft, and generally disobeying God's orders: these were people who loved their horses and their dogs more than the poor<sup>27</sup>. These were the people to blame, not the Vikings, who were essentially demonic forces, both in Abbo's sermons and in his account of the Paris siege<sup>28</sup>.

### 3. *The end of a kingdom?*

It is clear then that Abbo presented his own time, in the aftermath of 888, as politically and socially disrupted. He was by no means the only writer to do so: one only need think of Regino of Prüm's chronicle written around 908, or the laments of the Council of Trosly in 909, or, a few decades later, Flodoard of Reims's annals, as Geoffrey Koziol has recently argued<sup>29</sup>. These observers' judgement was a historical one: that previous ages had been calmer, more peaceful. We may wonder whether the contrast between the then and the now was really as strong as they made it out to be, or whether in fact Abbo, Regino and Flodoard all perhaps unwittingly exaggerated the political harmony of those earlier times, misled or at best patchily informed by the sources at their disposal. But all that is beside the point, if we are thinking about perceptions.

And for all that the interpretations of Regino, the Council of Trosly and Flodoard were shaped by their available sources in different ways, there are some indications that contemporaries were pragmatically improvising, too, in

<sup>24</sup> See the classic article of Coupland, *Rod of God's Wrath*. Saint-Germain's traditions of interpreting the Viking attacks in this way are exemplified through its extensive – and under-studied – ninth-century hagiography, for instance in an anonymous mid-ninth-century account known as the *Translatio sancti Germani*: «Sed quia hoc permissu Dei ita factum est, nostris debemus imputare peccatis», p. 72. On the evidential value of such miracle collections, see Innes and West, *Saints and Demons in the Carolingian Countryside*. On the importance of the Viking attacks in the monastery's consciousness, see Elmshäuser and Hedwig, *Studien*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 94: «Certe Deus est nobis iratus...».

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 114.

<sup>27</sup> «Pseudochristianos»: *ibidem*, p. 141. See also p. 145, «falso nomine christiani»; further references to *falsi christiani* at p. 67 and p. 70. Lusting for alods, horses and serfs: *ibidem*, p. 91. Loving horses and dogs more than the poor: Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 145.

<sup>28</sup> Abbo, *Bella*, I, line 227 («proles Satanae»); Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 99, «princeps paganorum diabolus».

<sup>29</sup> On Regino, see West, *Regino of Prüm and the Lost Manuscript of Adventius of Metz*. On Flodoard, see Koziol, *Flothilde's Visions and Flodoard's Histories*.



reaction to the new circumstances<sup>30</sup>. For instance, around the year 900, Bishop Dado of Verdun orchestrated a relic-based public assembly, based around the relics of the monasteries of Saint-Vanne, Montfaucon and Beaulieu, of a kind that seems strongly to prefigure later “Peace of God” assemblies, as well as foreshadowing the assertion of episcopal authority over monastic communities that sparked so fierce a contest in the tenth century<sup>31</sup>.

Yet despite the perception and perhaps reality of crisis, it is equally clear that for Abbo at least, 888 had nevertheless marked neither the end of the kingdom nor the beginning of a new one, despite dynastic change. In his poem, he described Odo as the «most outstanding prince... since the origin of the kingdom»<sup>32</sup>. What is significant here is not the flattery of the new king, a former count of Paris whose brother was later the lay abbot of Abbo’s own monastery: it is rather that for Abbo, Odo was simply the latest in a line of the kingdom’s rulers. True, Abbo began his sixth sermon with the bald statement that «Brothers, every day you see that this kingdom is heading for perdition»<sup>33</sup>. And he noted that every kingdom that is divided, «like our kingdom», cannot stand<sup>34</sup>. This was a kingdom that was threatened, then: yet it was not destroyed. «This kingdom» was for Abbo the same kingdom that previous generations of warriors had defended<sup>35</sup>; «this kingdom» was the same kingdom that previous, happier kings had ruled<sup>36</sup>. «This kingdom» was down, but it was not out, and Abbo gave advice for how «we» might be able to save it yet<sup>37</sup>. Despite everything, the western Frankish kingdom proved more resilient than those of its Anglo-Saxon neighbours over the Channel, whose elites, organised in any case on a smaller scale, were maybe readier to collaborate with the invading forces<sup>38</sup>.

As it happens, Abbo’s own monastery of Saint-Germain-des-Prés pre-

<sup>30</sup> Koziol, *Politics*.

<sup>31</sup> Flodoard, *Historia*, p. 443. The conflict between bishops and monasteries in the tenth century is often associated with Abbo of Fleury (no relation to Abbo of Saint-Germain): on this figure see now *Abbon, l'abbé de l'an Mil*, ed. Dufour-Malbezin.

<sup>32</sup> Abbo, *Bella*, Preface, p. 22: «praecellentissimi quoque principis ab examine regni hucusque Odonis»; «ab examine» is glossed *origine* in the Paris manuscript.

<sup>33</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 94: «Fratres, omni die videtis cum vadit istud regnum in perditionem». Note here Önnefor’s comments that this sermon «ist aus aktuellen Anlass geschrieben», and also his impression that it is the Latin translation of a French original.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 189: «si fuerit divisum per partes sicut istud nostrum regnum est». Cf. Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 132, «discordia».

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 96, «qui ante vos defenderunt istud regnum».

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 120, «reges enim boni qui fuerunt et omnes principes qui istud regnum defendebant».

<sup>37</sup> «Nos»: *ibidem*, p. 97 and p. 114.

<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the most famous case of Anglo-Saxon collaboration with the Vikings is that of Ceolwulf II of Mercia: the coin hoard from the late 870s recently discovered at Watlington suggests however that a reconsideration of his reign is in order. On Frankish collaborators, including the Carolingian would-be king Pippin II, see Bauduin, *Le monde*, pp. 313-341. For a comparison between England and West Francia, see Nelson, *West Francia and Wessex in the ninth Century compared*, noting at p. 103 that the Vikings were «different but not that different from the Anglo-Saxons and whose leaders therefore presented alternative focuses of loyalty for dissident royals, aristocrats and landowners generally».



serves one of the most important indications of the endurance of royal power structures into the early tenth century in West Francia. By the time Abbo wrote his sermons, the monastery's great estate-survey or polyptych – the so-called “polyptych of Irmino” – was already almost a century old. Someone however – and one imagines Abbo would personally have known the monk in question – made an addition to the polyptych around the year 900, judging by the surviving manuscript. The addition concerned a donation to the monastery of property centred around Neauphlette (Yvelines), including a jointly-owned church, all given by fourteen free («liberi et ingenui») and individually-named peasants. The motive behind their gift was explicitly that «they were not able to carry out the king's military service»<sup>39</sup>. The tactic they accordingly adopted, of placing themselves and their lands under the monastery's protection, was not a novel one – Carolingian kings from Charlemagne onwards had worried about precisely this issue – yet it is striking nevertheless to see the same pressures that had reshaped the Carolingian social landscape, centred on the king, continuing to do so into the tenth century, at least in the well-documented area around Paris<sup>40</sup>.

#### 4. *Abbo's perception of regnum*

What exactly did Abbo and his contemporaries mean, though, by “kingdom” (*regnum*)? This is a question that has recently been much debated. According to Johannes Fried, it was an essentially empty concept: people in Francia around the year 900 – and Fried here specifically includes Abbo, on the basis of one of the sermons discussed above – did not think in terms of kingdoms, but of kings. *Regnum* should thus be understood to signify the emanation of *königlicher Herrschaft* or royal power, and not as meaning *Reich* or “kingdom”<sup>41</sup>. Fried suggests that Abbo and his contemporaries really had no idea of the overall connection of the political order («der Gesamtzusammenhang der politischen Ordnung»), if only because Abbo supposed, in what Fried considers an almost magical form of thinking, that the solution to the Viking threat would come not from sensible improvements to political arrangements, but from interior moral reform<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> «Quia militiam regis non valebant exercere»: *Das Polyptychon*, ed. Hägermann, pp. 23-24. The entry is undated, but the script clearly has tenth-century characteristics, as observed by Hägermann («Nachtrag 10. Jh auf dem Freiraum der ersten Kolumne»), and Sigoillot, *Les Liberi homines*, p. 270, note 46. The manuscript of the polyptych, Paris BnF ms lat. 12832, can now be consulted online courtesy of the BnF's Gallica (the addition is on f. 16v): *Gallica*, <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84260311/f42.item>> [15 June 2016].

<sup>40</sup> For the history of the tactic, see Renard, *Une élite paysanne en crise?* (with discussion of the Neauphlette text at pp. 327-328). See also Devroey, *Puissants*, p. 511.

<sup>41</sup> Fried, *Um 900: Warum es das Reich der Franken nicht gegeben hat*, 85. For further references on this notoriously vexed question, see *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat*, ed. Pohl and Wieser, and see below, note 64.

<sup>42</sup> Fried, *Um 900: Warum es das Reich der Franken nicht gegeben hat*, p. 88, noting Abbo's fai-

It certainly must be acknowledged that Abbo's conception of the *regnum* was, so to speak, doubly subordinated to overarching Christian frameworks. In the first place, Abbo was conscious that the Frankish kingdom held only a very minor place in time. Following a traditional schema that framed how many early medieval writers perceived their time, Abbo believed that the world's history was divided up into six ages, and that his own age, the sixth, was after the eleventh hour. The key break in time had been the coming of Christ, the incarnation, when everything changed; another key moment was represented by the "Fall of Man" in the Garden of Eden, the point of original sin<sup>43</sup>. Compared to these epochal moments, and the serenity of the *regnum celorum* or kingdom of heaven to come, the political vicissitudes of the world now were merely bumps along the way, as the cosmic narrative unfolded<sup>44</sup>. Abbo's chronology was eschatologically oriented, «per infinita seculorum secula, amen»<sup>45</sup>.

If the Frankish kingdom was subordinated chronologically, it was subordinated in spatial terms, too. Admittedly, in his poem Abbo described Charles the Fat as ruling almost the whole *kosmos*, and he was impressed by the multi-lingual army that Charles brought with him to Paris. But as a writer well known to Abbo, Haimo of Auxerre, had written a generation earlier (and contrary to some generalisations about early medieval identity formation), language did not map neatly onto ethnic identity: many separate peoples or *gentes* could, after all, share the same language<sup>46</sup>.

And Abbo's vision of the world stretched far wider than Francia, or even the Frankish empire: he had an eye on a truly global *Christianitas*, a word which was increasingly taking on a territorial meaning, not least in his own work<sup>47</sup>. Over and again in his sermons, he stressed that Christianity had spread throughout the entire world<sup>48</sup>. «We» are sometimes the Franks: but

lure to recommend to his lay audience the «Reorganisation der Grundherrschaft», or the «Verbesserung des Lehnswesens», and his recourse instead to magical thinking («magisches Denken»).

<sup>43</sup> The «aetates mundi» are discussed by Abbo in Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 81 (and see Önnfors's comments on p. 225 for associations with Haimo of Auxerre). The incarnation is also the theme of sermon 2: *ibidem*, pp. 75-76. The fall of Adam is a common topic: Abbo, *Sermones*, pp. 81, 85, 112, 118, 125, and 153. For wider discussion of early medieval temporalities, see McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past*, and now also Palmer, *Apocalypse*.

<sup>44</sup> «Regnum celorum»: Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 79. Cf. «regnum dei», *ibidem*, p. 115 and 179, and «regnum christi»: *ibidem*, p.116. See also *ibidem*, p. 86: «de gula, de vana gloria, de avaricia». Transitory as opposed to permanent: *ibidem*, p. 88; p. 142; p. 174.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 71; cf. also p. 99.

<sup>46</sup> Haimo of Auxerre, *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, II, 5, «quia plures sunt populi quam linguae, utpote cum una lingua multae gentes loquuntur... », ed. *Patrologia Latina*, 117, col. 1020. Charles as ruling the *kosmos*: Abbo, *Bella*, I, line 49; multi-lingual army, *Bella*, II, line 333 («diversi populo labii»).

<sup>47</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 133: no kingdom or city was ever built with such care as this *christianitas*. For Abbo's use of the word *christianitas*, see the very stimulating article of Nagy, *La notion*; a general survey of the term in Late Antiquity is provided by Geelhaar, *Christianitas*.

<sup>48</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 100, «per orbem»; p. 123, «per totum istum mundum»; see also p. 138, «totum pene repleret mundum»; p. 142, «per universalem orbem»; and p. 169, «in toto mundo».

sometimes too the Christian peoples, «nos christiani populi»<sup>49</sup>. In one of his longer sermons, Abbo explained to his audience how the apostles had gone out to India, Ethiopia, Persia, Asia and Scythia<sup>50</sup>. Elsewhere, he compared the Vikings in the «northern and western climates» of the world with the Ishmaelites and Moabites in the «eastern and southern parts of the world»<sup>51</sup>. In another, he provided a detailed architectural description of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem according to those «who had seen it for themselves»<sup>52</sup>. Christians were brothers no matter in which kingdoms they lived<sup>53</sup>. Abbo's cosmography was anything but parochial.

Yet subordinated though it was to broader spatial and temporal frames, Abbo knew that he lived in a *regnum*, and that *regnum* was Francia<sup>54</sup>. Of course, he noted that Francia was made up of component parts, that is Neustria, Aquitaine and Burgundy, and even proudly described himself as a Neustrian<sup>55</sup>. It may also be noted that King Odo himself conspicuously avoided using an ethnic label in his charters, simply calling himself *Odo rex* perhaps to avoid unnecessary tensions. But the kingdom cohered nevertheless. This was the Francia to which Abbo addressed himself («O Francia!»), the Francia that lamented the fate of its inhabitants, the Franks or the «populus Francorum»<sup>56</sup>. This was the kingdom that was beset by «foreign nations», that needed to be defended now just as it had been in previous generations, the kingdom for whose sake Paris could not fall<sup>57</sup>; this was the homeland or *patria*, whose defence was authorised by Scripture<sup>58</sup>. That defence was a holy war, God's war («bellum dei»), whose name the Frankish soldiers were to invoke in quasi-liturgical style as they headed into battle. And, prefiguring later elaborations of the idea of holy war (if that is not too teleological a way of thinking about it), Abbo had no doubts that those who died as a consequence of that war were martyrs<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 79.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 145: «orientis partibus mundi et australibus...In clymate vero septemtrionali et occidentali...».

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 147-148 (Sermo 15): «qui oculis ipsum viderunt sepulchrum». The text is based on a sermon by Haimo of Auxerre, but also it seems on Adomnan of Iona's *De Locis Sanctis*: see Önnfors, *Abbo*, p. 286, who points out that there was a manuscript of Adomnan's work at Saint-Germain.

<sup>53</sup> Thus Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 143: «tali quippe modo existimus omnes christiani fratres ubique regnorum degentes».

<sup>54</sup> Abbo, *Bella*, II, lines 226-227: «regnum/ Francorum».

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, II, lines 447-453. Abbo's own identity as Neustrian is confirmed by a gloss: see Adam and Rigg, *Verse translation*, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Francia itself lamenting: Abbo, *Bella*, I, line 188. The «populus Francorum»: e.g. Abbo, *Bella*, II, line 445.

<sup>57</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 98, «O Francia!»; cf. p. 114, «extere nationes». For the importance of Paris, Abbo, *Bella*, I, line 51. Compare with Archbishop Fulk's description of the city as «caput... et introitum regnorum Neustrie atque Burgundie», in Flodoard, *Historia*, p. 380.

<sup>58</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 98, drawing on Maccabees: «pugnate pro patria vestra, nolite timere mori in bello dei».

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 98: «si ibi mortui fueritis sancti martyres eritis»; see also p. 67 for a hint in the

Of course, as already mentioned, Abbo's diagnosis of the underlying problem affecting the kingdom was moral, or theological, rather than political in a strict sense<sup>60</sup>. It is this that explains why the third book of Abbo's poem on Paris, the most popular part of the work, according to the surviving manuscripts, is dedicated entirely to imparting pithy moral advice (in very showy Latin). The crisis had occurred because people were wearing ostentatious clothing, because of gluttony, because of vainglory<sup>61</sup>. In a quotation that Abbo attributes to Augustine (though it seems he or someone else might have made it up), the very earth was crying out for the sins of those upon it<sup>62</sup>. Of all these sins, it was avarice that was the worst, a sin that Abbo defined as wanting more than one's ancestors had had – thereby striking a note of conservative anxiety about social change to match the fear of the social inversion brought by the Vikings<sup>63</sup>.

Yet I am not sure that any of this justifies an interpretation that Abbo therefore had no conception of the kingdom, independent of the king<sup>64</sup>. The fact that for Abbo the kingdom was the same as it had been under previous kings, that there was a continuity here, surely strongly suggests otherwise. In his view, the Frankish kingdom occupied the complicated middle ground between the celestial future and the biblical, and Roman, past. That Abbo's diagnosis of this kingdom's problems was theological is a self-evident reflection of how he conceived of his time (he was after all a monk living in a thoroughly Christianised society): it does not mean that he could not conceive of the kingdom as an entity in its own right.

### 5. *Post-Carolingian Francia?*

As already mentioned, most historians would talk of Abbo's kingdom, in the wake of 888, as post-Carolingian. Yet this is a term that requires as much reflection as does Abbo's concept of "kingdom". After all, Odo's takeover had developed within the framework of Carolingian structures of rule: his position had been established to a great degree by the patronage of King Charles the Fat<sup>65</sup>. Moreover, the crisis of succession – the simple lack of any available legitimate adult "Carolingian" rulers to succeed Charles the Fat in 888 – that

same direction. Cf. also Abbo, *Bella*, I, 562 for the «martirii palmam», as noted by Önnfors, *Abbo*, at p. 242.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. here Fried, *Um 900. Warum es das Reich der Franken nicht gegeben hat*.

<sup>61</sup> Clothing: Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 77.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 94; see p. 236 for Önnfors's commentary.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 87: «quando illos honores et illa bona cupitis habere que vestri parentes non habuerunt».

<sup>64</sup> Cf. here the similar arguments of Goetz, *Erwartungen*, who concludes (in Latin, to avoid any possible ambiguity arising from modern European vernaculars!), that «Relationibus auctorum altomedievalium distinctam conscientiam politicam rei publicae suae temporis inhaeret», a statement that equally applies to Abbo.

<sup>65</sup> See MacLean, *Kingship and politics in the late ninth century*, pp. 49-55.

led to Odo's takeover was itself largely a problem of the Carolingian dynasty's own making, the unforeseen though perfectly logical consequence of their promotion of the marital bond as a means of attacking relatives and rivals. In any case, as Abbo was putting the finishing touches to his sermon collection, a Carolingian ruler, Charles the Simple, was once again on the throne: and as Archbishop Fulk alleged, Charles was the spitting image of his Carolingian father<sup>66</sup>.

And there is another perspective on this question that brings us back to Abbo. For it is striking how Abbo's responses to the problems of his age, indeed his very diagnosis of crisis, were all imbued with a distinctively Carolingian intellectual heritage. Like his near contemporary Odo of Cluny (d. 942), Abbo's conceptual baggage was Carolingian<sup>67</sup>. That is partly a question of his sources – it needs to be emphasised how heavily Abbo relied on earlier sermons and homilies, notably those of the already-mentioned ninth-century author Haimo of Auxerre – but I think it goes further than that<sup>68</sup>.

Let me sketch out three examples, beginning with Abbo's conception of kingship. Abbo talks of the biblical Herod as a wicked, unjust king partly on the grounds of his marital behaviour; and he talks of a contemporary Viking ruler as no king at all except in name alone<sup>69</sup>. In contrast, Odo is simply a conventional king. Unlike Archbishop Fulk, Abbo made no reference to Odo's family background, but treated him straightforwardly as the *domini christus*, the Lord's anointed. As we have seen, Abbo praises Odo for his martial valour in good Carolingian style, and he criticises him for neglecting the *pauperes* or the weak, another favourite Carolingian theme<sup>70</sup>. In other words, he holds Odo to account by traditional measures. And no wonder, for Odo, as already touched upon, did his best to rule along traditional Carolingian lines.

One of those criteria, the fate of the labouring poor, seems to have particularly concerned Abbo, because he returned to it elsewhere too. Lamenting the capture and death of the *villani*, the men who worked the lands and paid the dues from which everyone else acquired clothing and bought horses and weapons, Abbo exclaimed: «What shall we do without these men, we who do know how to plough or to sow or to prune vines or to dig? What shall we do

<sup>66</sup> Flodoard, *Historia*, p. 382. Cf. Barthélemy, *Nouvelle histoire*, p. 28, for a description of the later Carolingian rulers as an «anomalie néocarolingienne». For the problems that Charles the Fat faced as a consequence of Carolingian constructions of legitimacy – problems that perhaps led to the 887 coup – see MacLean, *Kingship and politics in the late ninth century*, pp. 129-178; it may be noted that King Arnulf's attempt a few years later to make his son Zwentibold his successor faced considerable resistance from the aristocracy on the grounds of Zwentibold's illegitimate birth.

<sup>67</sup> Rosé, *Construire une société seigneuriale*, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> An early copy of Haimo's sermons, now Paris BnF. Lat. 12305, comes from Saint-Germain-des-Prés: see Barré, *Les Homélieires carolingiens*, pp. 55-56, for details of this manuscript.

<sup>69</sup> Herod as «malus rex qui tulit suo fratri suam mulierem», Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 74; Siegfried as «solo rex verbo»: Abbo, *Bella*, I, line 38.

<sup>70</sup> Lord's anointed: Abbo, *Bella*, II, line 523. Criticism: Abbo, *Bella*, II, lines 586-587: «Ruricolae prendunt, nexant et trans mare mittunt/Rex audit, nec curat, Odo: per verba respondit».

now?»<sup>71</sup>. Moreover, Abbo also places great emphasis throughout his sermons on the redemptive value and importance of work, *labor*<sup>72</sup>. For instance, in the fourteenth sermon, he marvels at the sheer amount of work that had been involved in establishing the Church: «Oh how much *labor* in building Christianity!» – much more than had gone into any kingdom, let alone any physical constructions like cities<sup>73</sup>. And he went on to discuss the difference between the active life and the contemplative life, stressing that while the latter is optional, the former is obligatory for all Christians<sup>74</sup>. This emphasis on the positive value of work was something already visible in late Carolingian writers, not least in the elaboration of the famous “three orders”: Abbo’s thought was clearly located within this trend<sup>75</sup>.

Finally, there is the question of the relation between the lay and clerical orders. The sharp divide between the two was a theme that emerged with growing clarity in the late Carolingian period, and it is a division prominent in Abbo’s own work, even though the “church”, *ecclesia*, still normally refers to the entirety of the faithful in his work<sup>76</sup>. The division even takes on a jurisdictional edge at one point, when Abbo notes that there are certain crimes that laymen ought not to judge, including, rather jarringly to modern eyes, murder<sup>77</sup>. It also takes a turn reminiscent of debates in subsequent decades when Abbo worries about the influence of sinful clergy on the laity entrusted to their care<sup>78</sup>.

The issue was however particularly acute when it came to the matter of church property, which Abbo depicted again and again as the object of wicked secular rapacity<sup>79</sup>. It is significant that one of few texts that Abbo expressly cites in his sermons are the forged decretals of Pseudo-Isidore, compiled in

<sup>71</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 94: «Quale opus habemus nos sine illis hominibus: nos non scimus neque terras arare neque seminare neque vineas putare aut fodere? Quid faciemus nos modo?».

<sup>72</sup> E.g. *ibidem*, p. 82: «illi bene laborant»; also p. 85. Cf. also p. 78: «donec vivimus laboremus».

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 134, «O quantus labor edificande christianitatis!». Comparison with other constructions, p. 133: «Nulla siquidem causa fuit umquam, nullum quippe regnum, nulla prorsus edificatio urbium cum tanto labore constructa quemadmodum christianitas».

<sup>74</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>75</sup> For further discussion, see West, «Charlemagne», *Carolingian Kingship and the Peasants of Le Mans*. It may be noted that similar themes are also explored in the mid-ninth-century *Translatio Sancti Germani*, e.g. p. 70, so here too Abbo was drawing on the traditions of his own monastery.

<sup>76</sup> Broad meaning: Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 67. It continued to have this primary meaning into the twelfth century, for instance for Bishop Otto of Freising. Note however Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 140: the *praesidia christianitatis* are the *sedes episcopales* and the *monasteria*. See also pp. 73 («omnes clerici sive laici»); 120; 126; and 121 («sed quia vos laici non adiuvatis clericos orantes semper pro vobis...»).

<sup>77</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 195: «De peccatis vero certis et manifestis nobis, sicut sunt adulteria, homicidia, sacrilegia, falsa testimonia, non debent iudicare laici sed episcopi, presbiteri et alii qui sunt prelate sancte ecclesiae».

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 197: «videt suum presbiterum esse in peccatis...». Cf. here Moore, *Family, Community and Cult*.

<sup>79</sup> «Villas ecclesiarum»: Abbo, *Sermones*, pp. 95, 113, 199-200; «villas sanctorum», Abbo, *Sermones*, pp. 96, 116.



the first half of the ninth century: specifically, the statements of Pope Anacletus and Pope Urban about the inviolability of church property, reaching back, or so Abbo thought, to the early church, but in reality reflecting distinctively Frankish concerns<sup>80</sup>. But Abbo also brought a more deliberately Frankish perspective to bear, explaining how previous kings had established monasteries and cloisters, and endowed them with lands; and he lamented that now these monasteries were being deserted<sup>81</sup>. It was not just the early church, then, in its real or imagined form whose past was relevant: the more recent Frankish past was important too in establishing the correct relationship between the lay and ecclesiastical spheres.

## 6. Conclusion

Undoubtedly 888 was a moment of stress in West Francia, as it was throughout the Frankish world, as dynastic turmoil was compounded by rebellions and invasions, particularly in the north. Whether that political and social instability was so much more intense in and around 888 as to be qualitatively different from the years before is difficult now to say for certain. Neither wars between rivalling kings nor invasions nor rebellions were in themselves novelties in ninth-century Francia, after all, and Abbo's own monastery of Saint-Germain seems to have suffered more in institutional terms in the eleventh century than in the tenth<sup>82</sup>. But we can see that contemporaries perceived things differently: like other authors at the time, Abbo "knew" he was living through a crisis. That he saw that crisis in a moralising and eschatological framework takes away nothing of its significance, and to expect anything else from a ninth- or tenth-century writer would be anachronistic.

However, Abbo did not think that the kingdom itself had disappeared, or had even been transformed: it had at most fallen into peril. «Istud regnum», «this kingdom», was still the same kingdom that earlier kings had fought to defend, irrespective of a dynastic change that Abbo took in his stride. Abbo might not have thought of this kingdom as an "acting subject" in Fried's terms, but we may wonder how many and how often people actually think of their polities in this way in any period. The kingdom was in any case for Abbo a reality, and a reality worth protecting irrespective of precisely which family the king came from. And what is more, the very way that Abbo in his sermons and in his poetry reflected on the crisis of the political order that he

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 202: «Ecce audiant raptores et predones ecclesiasticarum rerum quid iudicavit sanctus Anacletus papa... Item sanctus Urbanus papa et martyr...». For recent discussion of the dating of the Pseudo-Isidorian decretals, see *Fälschung als Mittel der Politik?*, ed. Ubl and Ziemann.

<sup>81</sup> Abbo, *Sermones*, p. 139: «Deinde christianitatis monasteria et claustra pii reges eorumque religiosi proceres ubique fundaverunt suisque rebus cum donis ditaverunt».

<sup>82</sup> Disruption at Saint-Germain: La Motte-Collas, *Les possessions*.



perceived— notably in terms of kingship, in conceptions of labour, and in the relation between secular and clerical – suggests the durability of late Carolingian cultural dynamics.

So, there is good reason to talk of post-Carolingian Francia, in view of the transitions in dynasty and in the scale of rulership that ensued after 888. But the “post-” in “post-Carolingian” is surely the same as the “post” in “post-colonial”. It marks neither an entirely fresh start, nor even a turning of the page, but rather the establishment of new circumstances that were still profoundly and enduringly shaped by what had come before. In Abbo’s work, we can discern continuity in spite of evident change; or, in view of the vigour of those late Carolingian dynamics, perhaps really because of it.

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