Frontiers and fortifications in the Carolingian imperial imagination

by Simon MacLean

The relative absence of written references to fortifications in the Carolingian Empire is well known, but seems difficult to square with increasing evidence that such buildings were familiar features in the ninth-century Frankish landscape. I argue that one reason for this is that contemporary narratives participated in a Carolingian "way of seeing" which associated castle building with frontier territories and lands beyond rather than with the imperial heartlands. Fortified residences were linked in the Carolingian imperial imagination with negative characteristics such as secrecy and hiddenness, in contrast to the supposed openness of Frankish royal palaces.

Middle Ages; 9th century; Italy; Francia; Carolingians; empire; castles; fortifications; frontiers; imperialism.

Abbreviations
Ermold, *Carmen* = Ermold, *Carmen in honorem Hludowici Caesaris*, ed. E. Faral, *Ermold le Noir: Poème sur Louis le Pieux et Épitres au Roi Pépin*, Paris 1964.
GSR = *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium*, ed. C. Brett, *The Monks of Redon*, Woodbridge 1989 (Studies in Celtic History, 10).
MGH, AB = *Annales Bertiniani*, ed. G. Waitz, Hannover 1883 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 5).
MGH, AF = *Annales Fuldenses*, ed. F. Kurze, Hannover 1891 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 7).
MGH, ARF = *Annales regni Francorum*, ed. F. Kurze, Hannover 1895 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 6).
MGH, Astronomer, *Vita* = Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici Imperatoris*, ed. E. Tremp, Hannover 1995 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 64).
MGH, VK = Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, Hannover-Leipzig 1911 (MGH. SS rer. Germ., 25).
MGH, Notker, *Gesta Karoli* = Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni*, ed. H.F. Haefele, *Notker der Stammler, Taten Kaiser Karls des Großen*, Berlin 1959 (MGH, SS rer. Germ. N.S., 12).
MGH, Regino, *Chronicon* = Regino, *Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi*, ed. F. Kurze, Hannover 1890 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 50).
MGH, Thegan, *Gesta* = Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici Imperatoris*, ed. E. Tremp, Hannover 1995 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 64).

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1. *Introduction*

In his classic 1972 book and television documentary *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger argued that looking at works of art objectively is not really possible, for we inevitably and subconsciously gaze through a thick layer of cultural filters. Seeing, for Berger, is a political act – what is seen, and how, is intimately related to the "where" and the "when" of the observer. The implicit assumptions which shape our vision do not necessarily «accord with the world as it is [...] they mystify rather than clarify»[1]. These insights are relevant beyond the world of art history because it is not only individuals who see in this way, but also communities and cultures – including empires. The ways that empires throughout history saw themselves and their colonies were crucial in justifying and sustaining their existence. External territories could be prepared for conquest through depictions of their inhabitants as primitive or corrupt; and their lands as empty or untouched. Imperial characterizations of places and landscapes were never simply descriptive, but always to some degree served as a means for the describers to represent and naturalize their domination of the political or social order. In the evocative expression of William Mitchell, imagining landscapes was an essential part of the «dreamwork of imperialism»[2].

Such considerations apply equally to written sources, since textual descriptions of landscape are just as selective and subject to contamination by the cultural predispositions of the observers as visual art. Accordingly, they can reveal much about authors' mindsets and ways of seeing. Much of the scholarship on this topic deals, however, with empires formed in the past 500 years, and some of it even assumes that imperial definitions of landscape are specific to modern and/or capitalist societies. In the present article, I will argue that we can find examples of this kind of mindset in the narratives produced in the Carolingian Empire of the later eighth and ninth centuries. In particular, I am interested in how the authors of these narratives imagined different landscapes as more or less fortified. Modern historiography on the early history of the European castle usually starts the story in the tenth century, because Carolingian sources refer relatively infrequently to fortified structures in the Frankish heartlands. Nonetheless, there is enough written and archaeological evidence to suggest that fortifications did exist in the European continent's north-west corner in the ninth century, perhaps in considerable number[3]. Could it be that their scarcity in the written sources was not simple evidence of absence, but at least in part a reflection of the cultural assumptions of our texts' authors? Carolingian writers certainly described "foreign" landscapes in ways which reflected their own cultural assumptions

[1] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*; Gunaratnam – Bell, *How John Berger*.
[2] Mitchell, *Imperial Landscape*, p. 10. Further on these themes see for example: Cosgrove, *Social Formation*; Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire*; *Landscapes*.
[3] Kohl, *Befestigungen*; MacLean, *Edict*; Bourgeois, *Recent Archaeological Research*.

and served political purposes – for example, dividing foreign territories into ethnic units as a way of appropriating them to familiar Frankish models that might «facilitate political control»[4]. Such depictions sometimes focused on types of building: as Walter Pohl has shown, surviving early medieval descriptions of barbarian residences in the Eurasian Steppe can only be understood if we take into account the various filters through which they passed before they were recorded and copied, even in cases where they may have begun with a genuine eyewitness report[5]. Taking a cue from these insights, my argument in what follows will be that in the imperial imagination of the northern Frankish elite, fortifications were thought to be primarily a feature of the frontier and the world beyond the frontier, not of the heartlands; and that this contrast was important enough that it could sometimes be rehearsed as a touchstone of Frankish cultural identity. I will go on to suggest two important reasons for this Carolingian way of seeing: that Frankish writers of the ninth century had internalized the narrative tropes of their empire's spectacular eighth-century expansion; and that ninth-century imperial politics had no clear role for private residences or fortifications.

2. *Fortifications and frontiers*

At its full ninth-century extent the Carolingian Empire had a number of frontiers which were quite different from each other. Some of them at least were considered in some sense fortified. The best-known example is the zone of fortifications built or restored along the River Elbe in the course of the eighth century to control Eastern Saxony and the frontier against the Slavs. Some of these structures, for example Büraburg near Fritzlar, are known through excavation[6]. This feature of the north-eastern frontier was also acknowledged in written sources. In the *Vita Karoli*, Einhard talks of Charlemagne «establishing garrisons at appropriate locations» in Saxony to allow him to depart to Spain[7]. References can also be found in the *Annales regni Francorum* and the Astronomer's *Vita Hludowici Imperatoris* to the Slavic (and Spanish) frontiers as characterized by fortifications[8].

The authors of some of the main Carolingian narratives also seem to have imagined the landscapes beyond the frontiers as fortified, and consequently saw them as requiring conquest through sieges and the destruction of walls.

[4] Reimitz, *Grenzen*; Pohl, Regia *and the* Hring, p. 459. On the "conceptual interdependence" of history and geography in the early Middle Ages see Merrills, *History*, p. 7. On Carolingian notions of imperial geography see Conant, *Louis the Pious*.
[5] Pohl, Regia *and the* Hring, pp. 460-464.
[6] Hardt, *Hesse*; Wolfram, *Creation of the Carolingian Frontier System*; Henning, *Civilization versus Barbarians?*.
[7] MGH, Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, 9, p. 12.
[8] MGH, ARF, pp. 121-122, 127, 130, 147, *ad annum* 806, 808, 809, 817; MGH, Astronomer, *Vita*, 8, p. 308.

The vocabulary deployed in the *Annales regni Francorum*, the most substantial and influential account of the Frankish expansion under the Carolingians, covering the years 741-829, provides a suggestive example. Vocabulary can betray implicit assumptions about the ascribed or assumed nature of particular places or landscapes – where such vocabulary was used consistently, it was often meaningful[9]. In the case of the *Annales regni Francorum* there seems to be a clear division of use between generic place words which imply fortification and defensive function (*castrum*, *castellum*, *firmitates*, *munitiones*, *oppidum*) and those which imply a primarily residential or seat-of-power function (*villa*, *palatium*). We need to acknowledge that none of these words had exact meanings or absolute definitions and their connotations could vary with context, but the broad distinction made here is validated by Hraban Maur's ninth-century encyclopedia *De Universo*, which (closely following Isidore of Seville's influential *Etymologiae*), discusses the word *villa* in a section on rural buildings, separately from his section on defensive structures[10]. Taking the *Annales regni Francorum* and the alternative ("Revised") version of the *Annales regni Francorum* together, there are by my count over 50 uses of each group of words in total, including some examples of multiple use for the same places. With only one exception, the "residential" terms are used exclusively for sites in the heartlands of the empire; while the "fortification" words are used only for sites on or beyond the frontiers (again, with only one exception). The contrast looks especially programmatic in the section of the annals after around 792, when a clear preference can be detected for the words *palatium* and *castellum* standing for sites in the interior and the exterior of the kingdom.

In light of the fact that the *Annales regni Francorum* is a multi-author compilation rather than the product of a single mind (and even allowing for the imprecision of the terminology), this pattern is strikingly consistent. Literary preference is part of the picture here. One of our authors – the so-called "Reviser" – favoured classical terminology and tended to use *castellum* instead of *castrum*[11]. But there are other signs that the choice of words was often contextual. Thus, the only time somewhere beyond the frontier was called *villa* was on an exceptional occasion when Charlemagne spent Christmas in Saxony – in the eyes of the annalist, it was the king's presence that turned a Saxon stronghold into a *villa*[12]. This is paralleled by a later example from the *Chronicle* by Regino of Prüm (*c.* 907), which describes the central place of the frontier command in Carinthia at the south-east corner of the empire as «the very well defended stronghold of Moosburg, so called because of the impenetrable bog which surrounds it and offers very difficult entry to those who approach it». Yet when King Arnulf stayed there in 890, he issued a char-

[9] For one example see Campbell, *Bede's Words for Places*.
[10] Hraban, *De Universo*, XIV, 30, col. 410-412.
[11] Collins, "*Reviser" Revisited*.
[12] MGH, ARF, p. 68, *ad annum* 784.

ter in which this fortification was labelled instead as a «*regia civitas*» (royal city)[13]. There is also the case of Aquitaine, which during the eighth-century Frankish conquest is portrayed as a landscape of fortresses needing besieged; but once conquered, becomes a landscape of palaces and *villas*, both in the *Annales regni Francorum* and in the Astronomer's *Vita* of Louis the Pious[14]. Unfortunately there are very few contemporary narratives from the perspectives of the societies under Frankish attack, but comparison with the *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium*, a later ninth-century Breton source, is instructive. When the author of this source described Frankish invaders besieging Breton soldiers, the word they used for the building was *villa*, and from context it is clear that a rural residence or farm building rather than a fortification is meant[15]. These observations strengthen the suggestion that the patterns of vocabulary observed in the *Annales regni Francorum* do not simply reflect objective classification of particular kinds of buildings. Rather, they may indicate the projected assumption of an imperial heartland characterized by residences, palaces and assemblies; and a frontier and external territories characterized by fortifications.

It could be objected that because the *Annales regni Francorum* is an account of imperial expansion, one would expect descriptions of the conquests to focus on military confrontation and sieges. Moreover, it is only to be expected that events in the Frankish heartlands of the empire were described in peaceful terms, since there was little significant internal warfare in the period 750-829. On the other hand, there is little sign that Frankish observers saw fortifications as an important feature of the imperial landscape later in the ninth century either, even in times of conflict. Nithard's account of the civil wars between the sons of Louis the Pious in the 840s has little to say about sieges or fortification; and descriptions of Viking raids show them ravaging towns and churches, not castles or aristocratic residences. One of the few detailed accounts of a battle between Franks and Vikings is Regino's story of an encounter at Brissarthe on the Loire in 866. According to him, when the Scandinavians found themselves forced to retreat to a *villa* (here probably meaning something like "village") and looked for a place to defend, they could find only a church fit for purpose. The Franks lost their commander and failed to take the church, which was described as «*locum munitum*» (a well-fortified place), and even as a «*munitio*» (fortification)[16]. Categories, here, were determined by function rather than architecture or original purpose. Regino was writing half a century after the event on the basis of oral traditions, and probably had no accurate information about the clash – sources written

[13] MGH, Regino, *Chronicon*, p. 117, *ad annum* 880; MGH, DD Arn, no. 75, pp. 112-114. Despite the editors' doubts about this phrase, the charter survives as an original and can be plausibly contextualised: Bowlus, *Imre Boba*, pp. 567-570.
[14] MGH, Astronomer, *Vita*, 6-7, pp. 300-306; MGH, ARF, pp. 50, 140, *ad annum* 777, 814.
[15] *GSR*, I, 7, pp. 129-131.
[16] MGH, Regino, *Chronicon*, pp. 92-93, *ad annum* 867.

closer to the event imply that Brissarthe was a straightforward battle rather than a siege[17]. His story is nevertheless useful for what it tells us about how Carolingian intellectuals imagined the dynamics of such encounters and the landscapes in which they took place.

In fact, it was the Vikings themselves who were seen by the Franks as the real fortification builders of the period. According to a late ninth-century entry in the *Annales Fuldenses*, the Scandinavian raiders had bever been defeated in any of their *castra*, while Regino of Prüm said that fortification building was Viking «custom»[18]. When in the 850s Hraban Maur dedicated to King Lothar II an epitome of Vegetius's fourth-century *De re militari*, adapted to the pressing needs of «the present time» in the face of «the very frequent incursions of the barbarians [i.e. the Vikings]», he underlined the need for young Frankish soldiers to be trained to take enemy fortifications quickly. He did not, however, show any interest in the content of Vegetius's fourth book, which contained extensive discussion of how to defend fortified sites[19]. Even when the roles of invader and victim were reversed, therefore, Carolingian authors saw fortification as a practice associated not with the Franks, but with their enemies.

This Carolingian way of seeing fortified and unfortified landscapes was occasionally articulated more directly. Notker of St. Gall's *Gesta Karoli*, a largely apocryphal biography of Charlemagne written in the 880s for the latter's descendant Emperor Charles the Fat, contains a famous description of the Avar Ring – the terrifying series of fortifications (*munitiones*) faced by Charlemagne's armies across their south-eastern frontier. Notker claimed there were nine rings made of walls 20 feet high, and spaces between each equivalent to the distance from Zurich to Constance (in other words, around 70 km)[20]. Although some impressively long early earthworks have been discovered in the Carpathian Basin, Notker's account was a hugely exaggerated riff on terse references to Avar fortifications he had read in earlier sources[21]. What is often not noticed about this story is that Notker made a point of emphasizing how alien the Avar fortification was to his own cultural norms by integrating his own disbelief into the narrative. On hearing about the Avar walls, he says: «I could not imagine any sort of rings except those which usually grow around our grain fields»[22]. Elsewhere in his work, Notker describes Saxon and Lombard enemies of Charlemagne hiding behind fortified walls; and in contrast praises the Frankish king Louis the German for demolishing

[17] MGH, AB, p. 84, *ad annum* 866.
[18] MGH, AF, pp. 119-120, *ad annum* 891; MGH, Regino, *Chronicon*, p. 122, *ad annum* 884.
[19] Dümmler, *De procinctv*, p. 450. There were other Carolingian copies of Vegetius: Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*, pp. 40-42.
[20] MGH, Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II, 1, pp. 49-51.
[21] Pohl, *Avars*, pp. 370-372.
[22] MGH, Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II, 1, p. 50; transl. Noble, *Charlemagne*, p. 91.

his own city walls to build churches – and being rewarded with the discovery of hidden gold[23].

Another example comes from Ermold's praise poem to the Emperor Louis the Pious, written in the second half of the 820s. Ermold has much to say about the emperor's conflicts with the Bretons, depicting them like beasts living in the open ready to be hunted and conquered[24]. Their «king» Murman he described as living «in a place with woods on one side and a stream on the other, situated among hedges, trenches and a swamp. Inside was a grand house [*opima domus*] that shone with the splendour of weapons whenever it happened to be filled with different soldiers»[25]. The Breton ruler's love of this «*arx*» (fortress) is portrayed by Ermold as a negative trait. Murman stays in his house worrying about what might happen if he comes out. In this domestic space he is also vulnerable to the influence of his wife, who unwisely prompts him to war[26]. A Frankish ambassador in the text predicts he will lose badly if he fights against Louis: «Don't be deceived», he tells Murman, «just because your house is fenced by a forest and wall»[27]. In the war that follows, the Bretons refuse to fight in the open and go to «hiding places»; while the Franks taunt Murman that «your concealed refuges and your vaunted house are laid open»[28]. By contrast, our only Breton narrative for this period describes the local ruler's residence as a «aula» (hall), a term whose connotations – as pointed out by Hraban Maur – were much closer to "palace" than "fortification"[29].

A third example can be found in texts detailing Frankish relations with the Slavic-speaking peoples to the east. It is notable that the Franks thought of these societies as epitomised by fortifications. A document from the 840s suggests that the court circle of Louis the German understood the make-up of the lands to the east primarily in terms of how many "fortresses" each contained[30]. Authors in Louis's kingdom seem to have viewed such structures with suspicion (despite the Franks' own history of building fortifications to control regions such as Saxony). An East Frankish author writing about Moravia around 869 refers with apparent distaste to an «unspeakable stronghold [*ineffabilis munitio*], unlike those built in past times» which confronted an invading Frankish army[31]. The Moravian "empire" was structured around significant fortified sites in what is now Slovakia and the Czech Republic, but archaeological investigation suggests that the most significant of these were not

[23] MGH, Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II, 2, II, 11, II, 17, pp. 51, 68-69, 81-82.
[24] Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks*, pp. 112-114.
[25] Ermold, *Carmen*, p. 104; transl. Noble, *Charlemagne*, p. 158. High-status residences in Brittany at this date were probably rural stockades: Smith, *Province and Empire*, p. 21.
[26] Ermold, *Carmen*, p. 110; transl. Noble, *Charlemagne*, p. 160.
[27] Ermold, *Carmen*, p. 114; transl. Noble, *Charlemagne*, p. 161.
[28] Ermold, *Carmen*, p. 124; transl. Noble, *Charlemagne*, p. 164.
[29] *GSR*, I, 1, p. 109.
[30] Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*, pp. 135-137.
[31] MGH, AF, p. 69, *ad annum* 869. See Goldberg, *Ludwig*.

upgraded to their full extent until the century's last quarter[32]. This means that it was likely not a recent change in the scale of the stronghold that disturbed the East Frankish annalist, but the nature of the fortress itself. In the year 900, some Bavarian bishops wrote to the pope defending the royal status of King Louis the Child by contrasting the virtues of the Carolingian royal family with the unworthy behaviour of the Moravians. Where the Carolingians fostered Christianity, the Moravians weakened it; where the Carolingians respected Rome, the Moravians despised it; and where the Carolingians were «openly seen by the whole world», the Moravian rulers «hid away in secret lairs and fortresses»[33]. Here again we see a fact of socio-political topography rhetorically twisted into a point of principle about Frankish cultural identity and its supposed contrast with those of its neighbours.

Scattered references in Carolingian narratives imply a connection between fortification and rebellion. In 821, the *Annales regni Francorum* signals the resistance to Frankish authority of the Pannonian leader Ljudewit by the fact that he built fortifications[34]. The Astronomer's biography of Louis the Pious uses a similar shorthand for Aizo's rebellion in northern Spain, which was reportedly inaugurated by his fleeing the emperor's palace and seizing frontier fortifications[35]. Bernard of Italy's so-called rebellion against Louis was represented as beginning with his garrisoning of the passes through the Alps; and a year later, the ending of a Breton uprising was said to have been achieved through the emperor's taking of rebel fortifications[36]. Another author mocked the Bohemians for an attempt to trick East Frankish frontier guards by building a wall with a narrow entrance which would create a bottleneck where they could be trapped and killed. Instead, it was the Bohemians themselves who fell into their own trap, allowing the Frankish army to walk in and steal several hundred now unattended horses[37]. More generally, our sources portray hiding and secrecy in themselves as suspect behaviour, particularly associated with figures not trusted by the Franks. The "Reviser" imagined that the treachery of the Aquitanian leader Hunald was shown by his ability to evade Charlemagne «because he knew places where he could hide from the king's army»[38]. One later ninth-century continuator of the *Annales regni Francorum* described an attempt to commit «a malicious act of slaughter» on the person or entourage of King Charles the Bald, in preparation for which the perpetrator hid in a forest[39]. Another wrote about the secret plots of the Mora-

[32] Macháček *et al.*, *Dendrochronologische Datierung*; Hladík *et al.*, *Fortification*.
[33] Lošek, *Die Conversio*, p. 148: «illi toto mundo spectabiles apparuerunt, isti latibulis et urbibus occultati fuerunt».
[34] MGH, ARF, p. 153, *ad annum* 820.
[35] MGH, Astronomer, *Vita*, 40, p. 434; MGH, ARF, pp. 170-171, *ad annum* 826.
[36] MGH, ARF, pp. 147-148, *ad annum* 817-818. On the difficulty of fortifying the north Italian frontier as described in this text: Pohl, *Frontiers*.
[37] MGH, AF, pp. 74-75, *ad annum* 871.
[38] MGH, ARF, pp. 28-31, *ad annum* 769.
[39] MGH, AB, pp. 72-73, *ad annum* 864; transl. Nelson, *Annals of St-Bertin*, p. 119.

vian leader Rastiz, furious at his nephew's allegiance to the Franks – only by God's grace were his plans revealed and foiled[40]. Meanwhile, part of Ermold's negative representation of raiders from Spain was their alleged habit of hiding behind palisades after plundering the Franks' open-skied harvest[41].

These accounts were all highly partial, written from a decidedly pro-Frankish and pro-Carolingian perspective, and their versions of events need to be handled carefully. Even to refer to the actions of the Bretons, Pannonians, Aquitanians and the rest as "rebellions" is to assume the imperialist perspective of our texts' authors. The issue here is not, however, the truthfulness or otherwise of these accounts – it is the terms in which their stories were couched, and the values they implied. The fact that they drew attention to the use of fortification by external enemies was a distinctive feature of these short texts, and it was certainly an authorial choice – there were plenty other options for conveying notions of disobedient and dishonourable behaviour. Their shared distaste for fortifications as associated with hiding, secrecy and resistance to Carolingian power – and perhaps by extension with the absence of Frankish manliness – surely reflects a wider current in the intellectualization of Carolingian imperialism.

3. *Picturing the palace*

There are some hints that this attitude stood in a binary relationship with Carolingian ideas about the *palatium*. The palace was not simply a type of building but also one of the governing metaphors for Carolingian political order as a whole. «Adornment» of the kingdom through construction of palaces was a significant element of Charlemagne's achievement in Einhard's eyes. The king's royal persona was associated with these buildings at a fundamental conceptual level, to the extent that damage to the material structures of the palace could be interpreted as a portent of the emperor's death[42]. The physical presence of various royal palaces stood for the dispersal of royal power across the territory of the empire; and as a concept it described the space within which the distribution of political and religious authority was negotiated and allocated[43]. The palace was also, however, imagined as a characteristically "open" place. Take, for instance, Ermold's description of Louis the Pious's palace at Ingelheim, which is well known for its description of the fresco sequence on the walls of the great hall. Less often noted is the way

[40] MGH, AF, p. 70, *ad annum* 870. Cf. MGH, Regino, *Chronicon*, p. 126, *ad annum* 887 on the Frankish general Henry ambushed by hiding Vikings.
[41] Ermold, *Carmen*, pp. 12-20; transl. Noble, *Charlemagne*, pp. 130-133. Further examples of secrecy as negative: MGH, Regino, *Chronicon*, p. 79, *ad annum* 860 (Charles the Bald fleeing in secret at night), and p. 123, *ad annum* 885 (Hugh son of Lothar II plots a rebellion in secret).
[42] MGH, VK, 17-18, 32, pp. 20-21, 36.
[43] Airlie, *Palace of Memory*; MacLean, *Palaces*; De Jong, *Sacred Palace*.

Ermold talks about the architecture of the palace itself: «Supported on one hundred columns, it has various passageways, many kinds of roofs, a thousand entries and exits, and a thousand rooms»[44]. Here there is no mention of walls. The ideal was openness – a thousand entries and exits. This emphasis is all the more pointed in that it appears amidst Ermold's discussion of Louis the Pious's wars against Murman, the Breton leader hiding in his fortified house. That the Franks did not think of their palaces as fortified is further illustrated by an annalist's report of a group of Vikings seizing the palace of Nijmegen and quickly building a rampart and a wall to transform it into a defensible site[45].

Ninth-century descriptions of what happened inside palaces are rare, but those we have broadly complement Ermold's point about openness. *De Ordine Palatii*, a description of palace administration and imperial government written by Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims in 882 based closely on a similar work from the earlier ninth century, depicted the palace (here in the sense of a generic political centre rather than a specific site) as a type of space where the king exercised power as much through sociability and hospitality as formal control. Hincmar claimed that anyone in the realm, no matter how poor, should have access to the palace and its senior officers at any time. At the regular assemblies held in the *palatium*, the king supposedly circulated among the powerful men of the kingdom who had gathered for the occasion[46]. A handful of stories set by Einhard within the royal palace likewise emphasise accessibility and architectural openness. In the *Vita Karoli* we read about Charlemagne mixing with his men in the pool and at dinner; while in the *Translatio SS Marcellini et Petri* there is an anecdote about one of the king's advisers waiting for him on the balcony outside the ruler's bedroom. The two men then stood at a window where they «could look down into the lower parts of the palace»[47]. Notker of St. Gall expanded on Einhard's stories, describing the palace of Aachen as an endless network of rooms, balconies and windows which bamboozled visiting dignitaries. His Charlemagne stood high in the building, looking down and watching what all his officials were up to at all times[48]. This reminds us that open space need not be communal and egalitarian – even in the notionally accessible world of the Carolingian palace, there was a «spatial hierarchy» with the ruler firmly at the top[49]. A *palatium*, in this conception, was a place in which by definition one could not hide, and where you were always seen by the rightful ruler[50]. In this respect, it was the exact opposite of a *castellum*.

44 Ermold, *Carmen*, pp. 156-158; transl. Noble, *Charlemagne*, p. 174.
45 MGH, AF, p. 96, *ad annum* 880.
46 Hincmar, *De Ordine Palatii*, 25-30, 35-36, pp. 78-86, 92-96.
47 MGH, VK, 22, 24, pp. 27-29; MGH, Einhard, *Translatio SS. Marcellini et Petri*, II, 1, p. 243.
48 MGH, Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, I, 30, II, 6, II, 8, pp. 40-41, 55-56, 59-62.
49 De Jong, *Charlemagne's Balcony*, esp. pp. 284-286; Airlie, *Palace Complex*.
50 De Jong, *Penitential State*, pp. 185-187.

4. *The Carolingian imperial imagination*

All of this adds weight to the suggestion that the *Annales regni Francorum* authors' choice of vocabulary (palaces and *villas* inside the empire, fortifications on the frontiers and outside) may stand for a broader set of ideas about political power and political landscapes. If the palace was a metonym for a landscape of righteous Carolingian authority, orderly and supervised, the castle was shorthand for its antithesis – a contested political landscape populated by elusive rebels. Can we say anything about the influences which informed this way of looking at the Frankish imperial landscape? One obvious place to look, given its significance for Carolingian intellectual culture in general, is Roman literature. Recent work has shown that the Roman imperial frontiers were not as uniform as once thought, and they were likely not structured along clearly defined lines chosen for carefully planned military and strategic reasons[51]. As in the early Middle Ages, logistics had a huge influence on where empire shaded into frontier, and where frontier shaded into the world beyond. Ideology was at least as important as architecture or mapping in creating distinctions between the "us/here" and the "them/there". Some Roman texts seem to articulate a perspective broadly similar to the Carolingian texts we have been discussing. In the second century, the panegyrist Aelius Aristides spoke of the armies «enclosing the civilized world in a ring, like a rampart». Writing a few decades earlier, Tacitus in his *Histories* had claimed that Gaul was a «provincia inermis», an unarmed province, as a way of indicating that it had fully accepted Roman rule. These texts were not, however, influential in ninth-century Francia, nor were they even especially representative of Roman thinking. Aelius Aristides's oft-cited statement was a highly rhetorical reflection of a specifically Greek intellectual sensibility, and writers of that period in any case tended to imagine the empire as unbounded and even universal[52]. Still, we do know that Carolingian authors including Ermold, the Astronomer and the so-called "Reviser" who wrote the alternative version of the *Annales regni Francorum* were connoisseurs of works by Roman authors (including Livy, Caesar, Josephus and Vergil) which were full of stories about Roman imperial expansion by siege warfare[53]. Their reading in Roman history certainly influenced their own writings in style and sometimes content, which – transplanted to the very different context of ninth-century Francia – might have completely different connotations from those intended by the ancient authors[54]. The "Reviser", for instance, was a rare early medie-

[51] Isaac, *Limits of Empire*; Whittaker, *Rome and its Frontiers*, pp. 1-49, 63-87. Qualifications: Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 138-144; Symonds, *Protecting the Roman Empire*, pp. 131-132.
[52] Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, pp. 31-32; Whittaker, *Frontiers*, p. 299; Isaac, *Core-Periphery Notions*, pp. 101-110.
[53] Collins, *"Reviser" Revisited*, pp. 204-205; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 27-31; Pollard, *Flavius Josephus*.
[54] See on this theme Lozovsky, *Roman Geography*.

val reader of Livy's *History of Rome*, and his clearest citation comes from a passage where Hannibal, one of ancient Rome's archetypical opponents, was besieged in a fortress[55]. And in book 9 of Vergil's *Aeneid*, a text beloved of Ermold and the Astronomer, one can find criticism of the Trojans – with whom ninth-century authors sometimes identified the Franks – for the shameful and ultimately costly behaviour of hiding behind walls[56]. One of the most famous walls of legend, the barrier against the mythical Gog and Magog erected by Alexander the Great, began life as a story of Josephus's which was repeatedly copied and elaborated in the centuries following[57]. Carolingian intellectuals were also, of course, deeply influenced by Biblical texts, and it would be interesting to investigate the evidence for traces of the Book of Joshua and its account of the conquest of Jericho. We do not need to imagine that ninth-century annalists borrowed mechanically from these ancient authorities to acknowledge that their world view (or at least their way of narrating history) was deeply influenced by them.

At another level, Carolingian thinking about the nature of the frontier is similar enough to examples from other periods that we might see it as something approaching an anthropological constant. The *Annales regni Francorum* descriptions of Saxony as a land of «swamps and pathless places» and Brittany as one of «castles and fortifications in swamps and forests» are strongly reminiscent of later imperial enterprises which saw target territories as ripe for conquest and incorporation into civilization[58]. This kind of discourse «negated» the society and landscape of the colonized by seeing only what was unfamiliar or different to the eyes of the observer, or by characterizing them as literally empty[59]. The idea of the frontier as fortified or even walled as a bulwark of civilization against barbarism, or vice versa, also seems to have been a recurrent metaphor (and occasional reality) in numerous empires throughout history[60]. The early Middle Ages is no exception. A century or so after the Carolingian period, the missionary Bruno of Querfurt's report that the kingdom of the Rus was completely surrounded by a massive fence recalls Notker's account of the Avar "Ring"[61]. The *Annales regni Francorum*, meanwhile, says that the Jutland peninsula was completely sealed off by a wall except for one gate allowing access. This is a reference to the undeniably impressive *Danevirke* begun in the earlier eighth century, but the annalist's exaggerated account reveals as much about his own mental landscapes as it does about the actual extent of the earthwork[62].

[55] MGH, ARF (*Annales q.d. Einhardi*), p. 63, note 5, *ad annum* 782 (referring to Livy, *History of Rome*, XXI, 59).
[56] Virgil, *Aeneid*, pp. 226-227. In general, see Innes, *Teutons or Trojans?*.
[57] Frye, *Walls*, pp. 77-79.
[58] MGH, ARF, pp. 100, 72, *ad annum* 797, 786 respectively.
[59] Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 93-96.
[60] Frye, *Walls*.
[61] Wood, *Missionaries*, pp. 209-210.
[62] MGH, ARF, p. 126, *ad annum* 808.

Whether or not these background influences had an impact on the imaginations of eighth and ninth-century authors, the most important factors shaping Carolingian ways of seeing were surely those generated by the dynamics of the empire itself. One element of this was the way the Franks told the story of their expansion to themselves, via the *Annales regni Francorum*. In this conquest narrative, the repetitive cycle of kings sending armies out from *villas* to attack "castles", then spending Christmas and Easter holding assemblies back at the *villas* and palaces, was not merely incidental information – it was the central organizing motif of the text's year-by-year structure. The historiographical template set by the *Annales regni Francorum* became in the ninth century the canonical way of narrating the empire's creation, influencing almost all subsequent Carolingian histories in form as well as content[63]. It was not only imitated but also continued by the annalists who narrated the history of the Frankish empire after 830. Their engagement with the text was active, not passive. Some of them literally copied it out and treated it with apparent reverence – Regino of Prüm, for instance, who incorporated it as the centrepiece of his own history, intervening only to improve the Latin of the copy he was using and insert a couple of additional stories of his own[64]. These later authors had their own ideas about imperial landscapes (beyond the scope of the present article), but their reception of the *Annales regni Francorum* reified its mnemonic out-and-back structure and canonized its constructed vision of how the expanding imperial core shaded into the territory of the conquered. It is also worth noting that some specific sieges took on iconic status to Carolingian authors. The siege of Barcelona in 801 was obviously very important to Louis the Pious, in whose reign many of our key sources were written. Louis had taken the city for the empire while a young man. The significance that he ascribed to this achievement is indicated by the fact that Ermold's praise poem to Louis collapsed his early life into an extremely long triumphal account of the city's fall; and by the emperor's own furious reaction when a Frankish army he had despatched failed to protect the city from an attack in 828[65].

Second, the binary of openness vs hiddenness was not just an abstract idea, but was sometimes played out in the performance of Carolingian elite masculinity[66]. Kings were certainly expected to be seen in public by those who mattered. When King Arnulf fell ill at the end of 896 and retreated to «hidden places», this was taken by one contemporary observer as an indication that things were sliding out of control. The contrast to the behaviour of Louis the German, who in 870 kept the show on the road by faking good health to maintain his public image, could not be clearer[67]. Regino's anecdotes about Rudolf

[63] McKitterick, *History and Memory*; Corradini, *Die Annales Fuldenses*.
[64] MacLean, *History and Politics*, pp. 16-17.
[65] Costambeys – Innes – MacLean, *Carolingian World*, p. 214.
[66] On which see Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks*.
[67] MGH, AF, pp. 71, 130, *ad annum* 870, 897; MGH, AB, p. 110, *ad annum* 870.

of Burgundy hiding «in high places» normally only accessible to goats, and Charles the Bald having to hide because he had lost control of his kingdom following an invasion by his brother, turn on his implicit assumption that hiding stood in an inverse relationship to the exercise of correct royal authority[68]. Aristocratic males were also expected to operate in public. They certainly had houses which presumably reflected their status, but these are mentioned rarely in our sources, and then usually only when functioning as defensive structures in the context of disputes[69]. The more important markers of participation in Carolingian politics were effective networking in the right circles and the management of *honores* – offices distributed by the ruler[70]. In 868 the *Annales Bertiniani* report an armed feud between two counts called Egfrid and Gerald, both of whom are reported to have possessed fortified residences. But these residences are mentioned only in passing: the annalist thought it more important to emphasise that Egfrid's power was based on his control of *honores*, especially the monastery of St. Hilary in Poitiers. And when Gerald lost the king's favour as a result of the feud and vanished from the pages of history, it was his benefices which were confiscated – not his «strongholds», which he apparently kept[71]. A famous negative example of this idea appears in Thegan's description of Count Hugh of Tours being mocked every time he tried to leave his house after his disgrace for failing to come to the aid of Barcelona in 828. The moral of this story (which is quite similar to Frankish mocking of the Breton leader Murman in Ermold's poem) was that Hugh was trapped in domestic space and unable to emerge into and participate in the public world[72]. To be left with only houses, like Gerald and Hugh – or like the last Merovingian in Einhard's *Vita Karoli*, or like the Emperor Charles the Fat after his deposition in 887 – was in Carolingian eyes to be left with nothing that really mattered in ninth-century elite politics[73].

5. *Conclusion*

In conclusion, a few caveats are necessary. We cannot take the vocabulary of the texts cited in this article as accurate reports of conditions on or beyond

[68] MGH, Regino, *Chronicon*, pp. 90, 130, 142, *ad annum* 866, 888, 894.
[69] MacLean, *Edict*, pp. 50-51.
[70] Airlie, *Aristocracy*; Airlie, *Power and its Problems*; Innes, *Framing*; Costambeys – Innes – MacLean, *Carolingian World*, pp. 271-323.
[71] MGH, AB, pp. 90-91, 115, *ad annum* 868, 871 (the wording here implies that Gerald lost Vienne to the king and gave hostages to the *missi* for his «other *castella*», though it is not clear whether these were residences as opposed to centres he had taken control of during the conflict). Cf. MGH, AF, pp. 70-71, *ad annum* 870 on the Moravian leader Rastiz having to give up his *castella* in defeat.
[72] MGH, Thegan, *Gesta*, 28, 55, pp. 216, 250; Costambeys – Innes – MacLean, *Carolingian World*, p. 298.
[73] MGH, VK, 1, p. 3; MGH, AF, pp. 115-116, *ad annum* 887; MGH, Regino, *Chronicon*, p. 128, *ad annum* 887. Contrast the role of the Roman *domus*: Cooper, *Closely Watched Households*.

the frontiers. Our sources represent the views of intellectuals based primarily in northern Francia who saw the world from the imperial heartlands, and there is every likelihood that those on the frontier itself, or in other parts of the empire such as southern Francia or northern Italy, would have seen the world differently. On top of that, not all frontiers were seen as equal. Most of the examples used here relate to the various eastern frontiers and the one with the Bretons – in other words with the peoples who were most aggressively "othered" by the Franks. Descriptions of Italy, a *regnum* seen as fundamentally more civilized than those to the Franks' east, were quite different. Even from northern Francia, the Italian landscape looked like one characterized by cities (*urbs*, *civitas* – terminology outwith the scope of the present article) rather than fortifications *per se*. In view of these qualifications about the accuracy of the sources, it is also important to stress that I am not arguing that the Carolingian way of seeing landscapes was fictional, or purely a textual artifice. Carolingian palaces were indeed unfortified and, as far as we can tell from those whose architecture can be recovered, quite sprawling and open in plan[74]. Frankish fortifications did play a role in the conquest of Saxony, and the expansion of the empire surely did involve a lot of sieges. As Guy Halsall has argued, one of the primary goals of early medieval warfare was precisely to force enemy leaders to retreat to strongholds rather than fight in the field, in the hope of undermining their authority in the eyes of those they led by making them seem fearful[75].

Ideologies do not, however, have to be conjured from thin air in order to operate as such, nor do they have to be explicit or policed from above. Setting aside the question of how accurate or otherwise their information was, the fact that most of our authors had probably never been to the frontiers they described makes their choice of vocabulary more, not less, revealing of their own cultural filters. It remains striking that even through the Franks sometimes built fortifications, Carolingian authors were reluctant to think of their empire as a fortification-building culture. These Carolingian ways of seeing landscapes hardly saturated the texts we have been using, but nonetheless represented a tendency in the ninth-century imperial mindset. Imperial discourses are repetitive, but not necessarily totalizing or programmatic[76]. The question here is not whether or not Frankish depictions of cross-frontier conflict were true and accurate – it is whether they were narrated in such a way as to reveal assumed points of principle which fed into a Carolingian concept of proper Frankish behaviour. This argument has implications for how we read early medieval descriptions of frontier landscapes and accounts of how conflict was handled in them. This could be a factor in debates about how and why early medieval authors were influenced by classical authors when describing

[74] Lobbedey, *Carolingian Royal Palaces*.
[75] Halsall, *Predatory Warfare*.
[76] Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 2; Mitchell, *Imperial Landscape*, p. 10.

military matters. It also has relevance to the early history of the medieval castle, which is traditionally analysed using the paradigm of public vs private power. The alternative binary of open/public vs closed/secret/hidden has not been accounted for in the scholarship on pre-tenth century fortifications. The arguments presented in this article may therefore have further implications for the way we write the early history of the castle, and how we conceptualize the change from the empire of the ninth century to the post-Carolingian landscape of the tenth[77].

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