Quasi una gens: Saxony and the Frankish world, c. 772-888

Abstract

The Saxons were conquered by Charlemagne in 804, after thirty-three years of intermittent campaigning; they were converted to Christianity and incorporated into the Carolingian political order. Yet despite this history of conquest and incorporation, historians have largely viewed Carolingian Saxony as distinct from the Frankish world. To a large extent, this may be seen as a result of the politicization of Saxon history in the early twentieth century. Early Nazi propaganda drew upon the Saxon wars as an example of German heroism and resistance, with particular attention paid to the history of conflict and warfare; unsurprisingly, there was little interest in such circles in delineating subsequent cooperation and coexistence. The postwar period, by contrast, saw a resurgence of local history, which, while serving as a corrective to earlier nationalistic approaches, did not seek to situate the history of individual Saxon Christian centres, whether monasteries or bishoprics, in their wider context. Only recently has an interest in Saxon regional history resurfaced, but even still the connection of the region to the Frankish world remains relatively unexplored with a few notable exceptions. Recent work on the Carolingian empire has stressed its regionalism and variety, arguing for less top-down control and more 'grassroots' politics. In such a context, Carolingian Saxony need not stand as an outlier: rather, it should be analyzed both alongside, and as part of, the wider Carolingian world.

Introduction

In 772, Charlemagne, king of the Franks, launched a campaign into Saxony. He and his men entered Saxony and seized a fort known as the Eresburg; they further sacked and destroyed a 'pagan' holy site, felling the Irminsul, a tree or column on which the heavens were believed to rest. Finally, they held a parlay with the Saxons and took hostages before returning home (*Annales Regni Francorum*, 772, in Kurze, 1895, pp. 32-4). The campaign was to be the first of many. Charlemagne resolved both to conquer and to convert the Saxons, and the next thirty-odd years saw a succession of battles, massacres, and general devastation, punctuated by periods of peace. Over time, more and more Saxons capitulated: through public submission, forced baptism, and the giving of hostages, they declared their allegiance, whether feigned or sincere, both to Charlemagne and to his Christian God.

Eventually, in 804, a lasting peace was achieved: Saxony was incorporated into the Carolingian empire. As Charlemagne's biographer, Einhard, wrote,

> This war, which had been drawn out over so many years, was concluded on the condition – proposed by the king, and accepted by the Saxons – that they, having cast aside demonic worship and abandoned the ceremonies of their fathers, were to receive the sacraments of Christian faith and religion, and then, having been united to the Franks, they were to become *unus populus* (one people) with them (Einhard, c. 7, in Holder-Egger, 1911, p. 10).

Einhard's last clause deserves some attention. He reports that the Saxons were to become one people with the Franks, using a Latin term (*populus*) which recalled membership in the Christian church, the *populus Dei*, and in so doing pointed to the forced conversions of the conquered

people (Flierman, 2015). His account exercised a lasting influence on Saxon historiography. Two authors even responded directly to this passage: the so-called Saxon Poet, an anonymous author who produced a verse life of Charlemagne around 890, and Widukind of Corvey, who wrote his history of the Saxons in the 960s. The Poet, drawing upon and notably reworking the earlier account of Einhard, described how 'the Saxons became one *gens* and *populus* with the Franks, always equally subject to one king', this time stressing the equality of the two peoples and employing the more straightforwardly ethnic term *gens* (people, nation) alongside Einhard's original, Christian-imbued, usage (Poeta Saxo, IV, lines 113-14, in Winterfeld, 1899, p. 48). Some seventy years later, Widukind of Corvey would further develop the Poet's version, writing of how 'those who were formerly friends and allies of the Franks were made their brothers *quasi una gens* (as if one people) in the Christian faith, just as we see them now' (Widukind of Corvey, I:15-16, in Hirsch and Lohmann, 1935, pp. 25-6). Einhard's depiction of a protracted, bitter war, whose conclusion was marked by the full capitulation of the Saxons, had undergone a complete transformation: in Widukind's account, the Saxons' and Franks' history of enmity was entirely expunged. The Saxons instead emerged as equal partners in a long and successful political relationship, which had pre-existed Saxony's conversion and which had only grown more close since.

Such a sequence of accounts represents a 'coming to terms with the past' (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), in the words of Helmut Beumann (Beumann, 1982). Beumann described how, over the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, the Saxons rewrote Frankish accounts of the Saxon conquest, replete with descriptions of Saxon perfidy and treachery, in a more positive light, stressing the true Christian conversion of the Saxons above their military defeat. In so doing, Saxon authors not only asserted a positive role for the Saxons within, and eventually without, the Carolingian world order; they also articulated a conception of the Saxons as a people, a *gens*, thereby contributing to the process of Saxon ethnogenesis. For example, Widukind's account, which represents the culmination of this trend, not only recounts origin stories of the Saxons, but also presents a case for his dedicatee, the Saxon emperor Otto I, as the leader of the Saxon and Frankish empire.

Many historians, following Beumann, have productively teased out the differences between such accounts. Indeed, the ninth-century corpus provides much material for this kind of analysis, as a wide array of authors composed local Christian histories detailing the exploits of recent saints and newly-imported relics. Scholars have contrasted Frankish and Saxon attitudes to the Saxon past, not only during – but also well after – the Saxon conquest; they have pointed to stages of Christianization, as revealed through accounts of the conversion and contemporary Christian observance; perhaps most interestingly, they have sought to elucidate progressive conceptions of the Saxons' role both within the wider Carolingian world and within the Christian church (Appleby, 1996; Becher, 1996; Flierman, forthcoming; Palmer, 2011; Karras, 1986; Shuler, 2010). Yet while such differences can be revealing, it is also worth reflecting on the commonalities between these diverse reports. After all, even Einhard, the Saxon Poet, and Widukind of Corvey, despite all of their differences in emphases, agreed on one fundamental point: the Franks and Saxons had become one. They had been successfully united under the banner of Christianity.

From national to local history

The idea of Frankish-Saxon unity to which both Einhard and later Saxon authors subscribed found little purchase in the region's early historiography. Following the kingdom of Hanover's annexation by Kaiser Wilhelm in 1866, Charlemagne's conquest of the region was celebrated in Prussian propaganda; the First Reich was used as precedent for, and justification of, the Second (see, for example, the pictorial programme at the newly-restored palace of Goslar, as detailed in

Arndt, 1976). More ominous still was the (mis)use of its history during the Third, as the Nazi party turned to the distant Saxon past for its own origin myths. This time, the figure of the Saxon rebel Widukind was singled out as a model for emulation, the embodiment of the 'German' spirit, who remained steadfast even in the jaws of defeat; Alfred Rosenberg would speak in 1934 of how 'today, at the turn of the millennium, we can make clear, that if Duke Widukind was defeated in the eighth century, he has triumphed for ever in the twentieth century in Adolf Hitler!' (as excerpted in Zöllner, 1975, p. 11). The past had been fully appropriated in the service of the present.

Rosenberg's deeply myopic vision of the past was shared by many, and not just in the stadia he packed on his lecture circuits. In the early 1930s, Widukind was lauded as a hero, commemorated in plays, poems, monuments, and even, more mundanely, in suburban planning – hence Widukindland, a district in Osnabrück (here especially Jansing, 2012; see further Gadberry, 2004). Correspondingly, Charlemagne was denounced as a French imperialist; his customary, laudatory epithet *Karl der Große* was replaced with *Karl der Sachsenschlächter* (Charles the Saxon-slaughterer), a reference to the 4,500 Saxons he ordered to be killed at the massacre of Verden (Diebold, 2011, p. 375; Zöllner, 1975, pp. 8-9). Those victims, too, received commemoration: 4,500 torches were lit at a Nazi rally, and – more lastingly – 4,500 standing stones were erected at the so-called *Sachsenhain*, a monument which even today serves as a meeting point for Neo-Nazi groups (Linde, 2013, pp. 475-82). The few dissenting voices – Catholics, pacifists, and a handful of academic historians, in particular Martin Lintzel – found little favour in official circles (Lintzel, 1961; see also Zöllner, 1975). Karl Bauer, a Catholic historian who argued that the entire report of the Verden massacre arose from the erroneous transcription of '*delocare*' (to deport) as '*decollare*' (to execute), notably did so from his exile in Paris (Bauer, 1970 – a reprint of his earlier article).

By the mid-1930s, the Nazi party was on the ascendant; poised to gain further power and influence, it had outgrown its precedent. The figure of Widukind no longer sufficed: after all, he had publicly capitulated, and the Saxons had been subjected to a foreign emperor and faith. And so, in 1935, Hitler himself abruptly changed direction, turning, in the spirit of Kaiser Wilhelm before him, to Charlemagne – once again *Karl der Große* – as a model (Linde, 2013, p. 481; Diebold, 2011, p. 375). The party, divided, celebrated both victor and victim, conqueror and conquered, distorting both in the process. Perhaps unsurprisingly, neither faction showed particular interest in the post-conquest period, in the vision of cooperation and unity which later Frankish and Saxon authors depicted.

The politicization of early Saxon history left a toxic legacy. Accordingly, post-war German historians directed their energies elsewhere. In the socialist East, attention was turned from the Saxon conquest to the *Stellinga* revolt of 841-842/3, a Saxon peasant uprising that took place during the civil war between the sons of Emperor Louis the Pious. Here, debates centred on the extent to which the revolting Saxons represented the victims of feudalization or a more loosely-defined peasant class, and on the relationship of the revolt to Carolingian power, as we shall see below. More generally, interest in German 'national' history was replaced with a profusion of local-historical and regional studies (*Landesgeschichte*): hence, for early Saxon history, the many pertinent articles published in (West) German journals such as *Westfälische Zeitschrift* and *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, alongside the many relevant monographs in *Germania Sacra*. These 'bottom-up' studies have acted as an important corrective to earlier, politically-motivated history; they have illuminated the varied 'microhistories' of Saxon Christian centres and texts. The local-historical focus of such scholarship, however, has led early Saxon history to remain largely distinct from its Carolingian context – as indicated, for example, by the relative absence of English, French, and Italian scholarship on the topic. Moreover, the lack of wide-

scale syntheses, in itself a natural reaction to the earlier politicization of the Saxon past, may have contributed to largely conservative approaches to the region's history in the early post-war period.

Renewed interest in the Saxon past may be credited, in part, to Helmut Beumann, whose 1982 seminal article, as alluded to above, drew upon a long German tradition of 'coming to terms with the past' (Beumann, 1982). In the decades that followed, many historians have responded to his article (as above), and new lines of debate and analysis have opened. Drawing on the work of the 'Vienna school', which developed the concept of ethnogenesis (the process by which ethnicity was constructed) in contrast to earlier, essentialist views of ethnicity, Matthias Springer, Matthias Becher, and Robert Flierman have produced important reassessments of the ethnic identity and political history of the Saxons (Becher, 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Flierman, 2015, 2016, forthcoming; Springer, 1999a, 1999b, 2003, 2004; for key works of the Vienna school, see especially Geary, 2002; Pohl and Heydemann, 2013; Pohl and Reimitz, 1998; Wenskus, 1961; Wolfram, 1995). In the field of religion, Hedwig Röckelein has illuminated the Christianization of the region, with particular attention paid to the role of relics in society, while Theo Kölzer has refined our view of Carolingian involvement in fledgling Saxon foundations through the diplomatic analysis of imperial charters (Kölzer, 2012, 2013, 2014; Röckelein, 1996, 1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2015). The last twenty-odd years have also marked the emergence of interest in Carolingian Saxony by English-language historians such as Ian Wood, Eric Goldberg, Eric Knibbs, and Robert Flierman, among others (see here especially Appleby, 1996; Bachrach and Bachrach, 2007; Carroll, 1999; Flierman, 2015, 2016, forthcoming; Goldberg, 1995; Hen, 2006; Karras, 1986; Knibbs, 2011; Mayr-Harting, 1996; Palmer, 2004, 2010, 2011; Rembold, 2013, 2015, forthcoming; Shuler, 2010; van Egmond, 2000; Wood, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003). Finally, it is worth noting the role that published conference proceedings and exhibition catalogues have played in the field, especially those resulting from an 1999 exhibition and associated conferences organized by the Diözesanmuseum Paderborn, and likewise from a conference held in the same year by the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Social Stress in San Marino (Hässler, Jarnut and Wemhoff, 1999; Stiegemann and Wemhoff, 1999; Green and Siegmund, 2003).

Nevertheless, despite these recent encouraging trends, Carolingian Saxony remains a largely discrete subject of enquiry. Attempts to synthesize the 'Saxon experience' with Carolingian patterns of governance and Christian observance remain few and far between: the work of Wenskus, whose onomastic study of the Saxon elite drew numerous connections, some no doubt erroneous, with the Frankish imperial aristocracy, and that of Röckelein, who approached Saxon relic translations in terms of Saxon-Frankish networks, stand out as commendable exceptions (Röckelein, 2002a; Wenskus, 1976). More commonly, however, Saxony is taken either on its own or as a limit case of Carolingian control, the 'Wild East' of the Frankish world, where Carolingian rule and Christian observance were still taking root, or occasionally blowing like tumbleweed across the plain (see Reuter, 1991, p. 81 for this coinage). If the Saxons and Franks did indeed come together *quasi una gens*, many historians do not appear to have taken notice.

Warfare and governance

Saxony was incorporated into Carolingian territory as the result of sustained Frankish campaigning. This conquest has somewhat fallen off the map historiographically since the second world war, and understandably so, given the toxic legacy of previous politically-motivated work on the subject. Yet it remains essential to charting history of Carolingian Saxony in this period as well as that of Carolingian warfare more generally. Marked out by Einhard as the most important war which Charlemagne ever fought (Einhard, c. 13, in Holder-Egger, 1991, p. 15),

the Saxon conquest provides useful context for the other campaigns undertaken by Charlemagne, while also giving insight into the motivations which underlay Carolingian campaigning. So too the Saxon wars are best understood in their Carolingian context.

On a basic level, all of Charlemagne's wars were recorded in the same sources – largely, in the extensive corpus of Frankish annalistic writing, headed by the *Royal Frankish Annals* and their revised version. Accordingly, the Saxon wars were moulded to fit the same narrative pattern as Charlemagne's other campaigns. Take, for example, the treatment of the Saxon rebel Widukind and Duke Tassilo of Bavaria in the *Royal Frankish Annals*. The relevant section of the text was composed circa 790 in the aftermath of both leaders' submissions (Collins, 1998); the narrative highlights their alleged criminality and eventual public capitulations, with Widukind's submission shaped so as to foreshadow that of Tassilo some three years later (compare *Annales Regni Francorum* 785 with 788, in Kurze, 1895, pp. 68-70, 80-2). Indeed, Widukind's very prominence may have been grossly exaggerated for this effect: a number of Frankish annals narrate the Saxon wars without even once including his name (see *Annales Alamannici*, *Annales Augienses*, *Annales Guelferbytani*, *Annales Laubacenses*, *Annales Nazariani*, *Annales Petaviani*, *Annales Sangallenses Baluzii*, *Annales Sangallenses breves*, and *Annales Sangallenses maiores*, all in Kurze, 1826). Even the supposedly great crimes ascribed to him by the *Royal Frankish Annals* are not particularly noteworthy, constituting merely his non-attendance at an assembly in 777, his alleged role in stirring unrest in 778 and 782, and his frequent recourse to northern exile throughout these years (*Annales Regni Francorum*, 777, 778, 782, in Kurze, 1895, pp. 48, 52, 58-60). Rather, Widukind's prominence can be explained insofar as he provided a convenient, explanatory scapegoat for Frankish audiences, who presupposed a unified leadership for Saxon resistance – hence the performance of his capitulation before a Frankish audience at Attigny – and insofar as his downfall served a narrative function in a text intended for circulation at the Frankish court. This context is essential to understanding Widukind's significance. So too other contemporary reports on Saxony must be placed within their broader context: for example, Alcuin's critique of the Saxon mission, which famously argued against forced conversion and the imposition of tithes, was expressed within a discussion about the best missionary strategy to be undertaken among the Avars, as Ian Wood has observed (Alcuin, nos. 107, 110, 111, in Dümmler, 1985, pp. 153-4, 156-62; Wood, 2001, pp. 85-6). While a separate, Saxon history of the Saxon conquest would develop over the course of the ninth century, contemporary sources viewed the wars as simply part of the larger drive of Carolingian expansion, and crucially not as something special and distinctive.

This is not to say that the Saxon wars were entirely representative of Carolingian warfare. Indeed, several features stand out as anomalies, namely its sheer length and the level of recorded casualties, most famously the 4,500 slain in judgment at Verden. The relative dearth of valuable plunder from Saxon campaigns has also been highlighted by Janet Nelson in an important critique of the so-called 'Reuter thesis', familiar to any student of Carolingian warfare. If, as Timothy Reuter argued, both the Frankish war machine and politics at large were facilitated by the influx provided by tribute and booty, then the long and exhaustive Saxon conquest stands out as an important counterexample (Nelson, 1996, pp. xxviii-xxx; Reuter, 1985). Yet many other features of the wars exhibit parallels with other campaigns conducted by Charlemagne. Yitzhak Hen and Robert Flierman have recently argued that the draconian *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, the so-called 'Terror Capitulary', may be best dated to circa 794/5 (Flierman, 2016, forthcoming; Hen, 2006); in this context, the Carolingian reaction to renewed rebellion of Saxony may be seen as more or less typical of the early 790s, which saw the brutal repression of the revolts which spread across East Francia in the period. Nelson has likewise contended that the hostage movements recorded in the Saxon Hostage List should be viewed in the context of the Carolingian system of political hostages as envisaged by the *Divisio Regnorum* of 806 (Nelson,

2008, pp. 226-7). Such perspectives serve to underscore the various ways in which warfare and governance in Saxony resembled that in other regions of the Carolingian world.

After the conclusion of the conquest, the source base dries up; the reign of Louis the Pious (814-840) passed largely without comment on contemporary Saxon affairs. Following Louis' death, however, the *Stellinga* revolt of 841-843 succeeded in provoking Frankish reactions, drawing commentary from four contemporaries (*Annales Bertiniani*, 841, 842, in Grat, Vielliard and Clémencet, 1964, pp. 38-9, 42-3; *Annales Fuldenses*, 842, in Kurze, 1895, pp. 33-4; *Annales Xantenses*, 841, 842, in Simpson, 1909, pp. 12-13; Nithard, IV:2, IV:4, IV:6, in Lauer and Glansdorff, 2012, pp. 130-4, 142, 152-4). The *Stellinga* likewise attracted the attention of modern historians, for, as mentioned above, this revolt was the subject of considerable debate in East Germany. Historians such as Heinz Schulze and Hans Bartmuss problematized the connection of the revolt to Carolingian politics and sought to explore the social class and motivations of its participants, the latter of which was eagerly debated by numerous historians, including, in the West, Reinhard Wenskus (Bartmuss, 1957, 1962; Eggert, 1975; Epperlein, 1966, 1969; Hermann, 1971; Müller-Mertens, 1969, 1972; Schulze, 1955; Wenskus, 1986). Some years later, the subject was taken up by Anglophone scholars, namely Chris Wickham, who explored the *Stellinga* in the context of early medieval peasant revolts, and Eric Goldberg, who sought to shift the debate back to Carolingian politics by arguing that the Carolingian civil war provided crucial context to the *Stellinga* and their actions (Goldberg, 1995; Wickham, 2003). While Goldberg's contention is convincing, it can pressed further still, insofar as the *Stellinga* were acting in concert with the Emperor Lothar; accordingly, they may be viewed as operating within the bounds of Carolingian political activity until their violation of the truce in 842-843 (Rembold, forthcoming).

Following the *Stellinga*, the reign of Louis the German (840/843-876) marks the blossoming of a Saxon literary tradition: for the first time, the works of Saxon authors have been preserved. Yet the focus of these authors – and hence many modern historians – was on the development of Christianity and Christian infrastructure in Saxony. Some have read against the grain of both these and other sources in order to develop a political history of the region; one may point, for example, to the work of Bernard and David Bachrach, whose 2007 article charted the role of Saxons in Carolingian warfare, as reconstructed from assorted annalistic entries (Bachrach and Bachrach, 2007). Particular interest has centred around the process of Saxon ethnogenesis and the rise of the Liudolfings, more commonly known from the tenth-century on as the Ottonians. Here, the work of Becher is key; his seminal monograph explored the emergence of Saxony a political unit (Becher, 1996). This publication has been subject to convincing critique, notably by Sören Kaschke, who called into question the significance which Becher attributed to the first 'king of the Franks and Saxons', Louis the Younger (Kaschke, 2007; for the wider debate surrounding this issue, see Eggert, 1994; Semmler, 1990). Nevertheless, Becher's work remains essential for charting the ascent of the family who would emerge as the successors to the Carolingian dynasty in the East.

By the close of the Carolingian period, Saxony had been transformed almost beyond recognition. Prior to the conquest, Saxony had been independent and disunified, not only in terms of politics, but also in terms of religion, ethnicity, and material culture. It had lacked much of the infrastructure of the Frankish world, from Roman roads and cities to Christianity and the institutional church. Such conditions made the process of incorporation considerably more difficult. Nevertheless, by the end of ninth century, Saxony had become a cohesive region under Carolingian rule; Saxony's economy had developed in tandem with increasing social stratification. Perhaps most significantly, Saxony had become Christian. Let us turn now to this last development – to the historiography of Christianization.

Mission and church

Much of the work on the Christianization of Saxony remains local-historical in approach. In part, this is rooted in the rich tradition of Saxon hagiography, which sought to create histories of local Christian centres, their saints, and their relics; in part, it is rooted in the historiographical legacy of the second world war, as has been discussed above. Accordingly, the history of Frankish mission is traditionally delineated in terms of the roles of individual Frankish centres and their incipient missions. And while *Landesgeschichte* remains the main historiographical model for the mission, some historians such as Hans Patze and Peter Johanek have pursued an integrative model which considers these various local histories in parallel (Johanek, 1999; Patze, 1977; see also Ehlers, 2007); one may also point to the work of Ian Wood, who has illuminated Frankish 'missionary strategy' through detailed examinations of contemporary hagiography (Wood, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003; see also Palmer, 2009, here especially pp. 131-6; Palmer, 2010).

Those who seek to study the early missions are constrained by the extremely limited nature of the source base. The resultant ambiguities have led to some contested debates, for example concerning the early history of the bishopric of Verden: some have argued that the original site of foundation was at nearby Bardowick, though the pendulum of historical consensus has now swung back to Verden (Drögereit, 1969, 1970; Last, 1984; Vogtherr, 2002). The early history of the monastic cells at Hameln and Brunshausen has been similarly contested, here regarding their date of foundation and their role, or lack thereof, in the early mission (for the debate surrounding Brunshausen, see Goetting, 1974; Hildebrandt, 1992, pp. 121-5; Last, 1970, pp. 341-7; contrast to Naß, 1987). Nevertheless, some have succeeded in evoking a rich history from singularly unyielding sources: particularly sophisticated analyses along these lines are to be found in the contributions of Eckhard Freise and Edeltraud Balzer (Balzer, 2010-2011; Freise, 1983, 1993).

Throughout the ninth century, much concerning the foundation and early history of Saxon religious institutions remains obscure. The dates of foundation for Saxon bishoprics remain a flash-point: in the most recent contribution to a debate stretching back decades, Theo Kölzer argued that many of the early charters granted to Saxon bishoprics are erroneous (Kölzer, 2012, 2013, 2014). According to his diplomatic analysis, the first genuine charters to Saxon bishoprics, with the notable exception of Paderborn, were granted in the reign of Louis the German. But while such analysis can do much to clarify the extent of royal involvement in Saxon foundations, determining the precise date of foundation will always remain primarily definitional. Foundation was, after all, a process, not a discrete act. In some cases, it was even more complicated, as in the case of Hamburg-Bremen, the so-called 'missionary archbishopric' for the North, whose eventual status was the result of clerics' self-representation and forgeries. Previous revisionist arguments, such as those of Richard Drögereit, have been subjected to yet further revision in recent years, most notably by Knibbs and Kölzer; the former sought to provide a comprehensive history of the ninth-century forgeries, falsifications, and narratives written in support of the emerging (arch)bishopric, while the latter reevaluated the authenticity of Louis the Pious' charter for the then-bishopric (Drögereit, 1975; Knibbs, 2011; Kölzer, 2014; see Knibbs, 2011, pp. 8-9, for a more thorough discussion of the historiography). Hamburg-Bremen's role as a missionary centre, and the various works of hagiography and historiography associated with it, have been further addressed in an array of scholarship (see here especially Palmer, 2004, 2010; Wavra, 1991; Wood, 1987, 2001; for the conversion of Scandinavia more generally, see Sawyer, Sawyer and Wood, 1987; Winroth, 2012).

While much debate has centred on the origins of bishoprics, it is worth bearing in mind their importance relative to that of Saxon monastic institutions. As a 1999 article by Christopher

Carroll contended, Saxon elite patronage appears to have been concentrated on monastic institutions, whether large and well-endowed monasteries such as Corvey and Herford or smaller, familial houses such as Neuenheerse (Carroll, 1999). But such a comparison, while useful, should not be overemphasized: rather, the very distinction between episcopal and monastic institutions appears decidedly inexact. The work of Rudolf Schieffer has emphasized that the early Saxon bishoprics were described in contemporary sources as *monasteria* and were formed around the principle of communal life; their endowments often consisted of monastic cells, as Röckelein has observed, and bishops were often heavily implicated in the foundation, and in some cases governance, of local monasteries (Röckelein, 2002b; Schieffer, 1976; Schieffer, 1988). The family foundation of Neuenheerse, for example, was founded by a bishop of Paderborn on behalf of his sister and was subsequently patronized by his episcopal successors (*D LD* no. 137, in Kehr, 1934, pp. 190-2; *D Karl*, no. 169, in Kehr, 1937, pp. 273-4). Saxon bishops, like Saxon elites, stood to profit both spiritually and materially from their association with monasteries.

After the monastic reforms of 816-818, the division between episcopal, canonical institutions such as Paderborn and Benedictine monasteries such as Corvey became clearer. Yet in many cases, Benedictine and canonical houses remained indistinguishable, perhaps intentionally so. As Irene Crusius has concluded, it is often impossible to determine which rule was observed by Saxon female communities in this period, if indeed they even observed one rule consistently (Crusius, 2001; contrast to Semmler, 1970). This is significant, given the preponderance and sheer importance of female communities in Saxon monastic life from mid-ninth century onwards, and particularly going forward into the Ottonian period (see here especially Althoff, 1991, 2006; Crusius, 2001; Leyser, 1979; Parisse, 1992; and Röckelein, 2008, among others).

Other aspects of monastic life can be delineated with greater clarity. The development of monastic estate management has been addressed by Werner Rösener (Rösener, 1985, 1999), while the politics of monastic memory have been explored by authors such as Karl Krüger, whose skillful analysis of how and why ninth-century authors rewrote Corvey's foundation narrative bears productive comparison to Knibb's 2011 publication (Krüger, 1982, 2001). A wide array of scholarship looks at Saxon hagiography and historical writing, whether charting the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or seeking to elucidate the context of specific works, such as the studies of the Poeta Saxo by Bernhard Bischoff and Krüger (for the Poeta Saxo, see Bischoff, 1981; Krüger, 2001/2002; see also Rembold, 2013; Steine, 1987). The popular Saxon genre of relic translation narratives, meanwhile, has been expertly addressed by Röckelein, who examined both the act of relic translation and its literary representation in a work whose methodology encompassed both literary analysis and network theory (Röckelein, 2002a; see also Honselmann, 1962; Schieffer, 1999).

Alongside such Latin compositions, ninth-century Saxony saw the composition of two vernacular biblical epics, the *Heliand* and *Genesis*, alongside other shorter works; this burgeoning vernacular culture has been the focus of considerable scholarly focus. Particular attention has been showered on the *Heliand*, a poetic rendering of the four Gospels in a unified narrative; debates centre on its place of composition (with the monasteries of Fulda, Werden, and Corvey emerging as the main contenders), its date of composition (whether in the reign of Louis the Pious or that of his son, Louis the German), its intended audience (whether recent converts, converted elites, and/or monks and nuns), its potentially 'syncretic' nature (with particular attention allotted to the use of fate in the narrative), and its role in inter-cultural communication (*Heliand*, in Behaghel and Taeger, 1984; for a selection of scholarship on this subject, see Augustyn, 2002; Bischoff, 1979a, 1979b; Cathey, 2002; Drögereit, 1951; Eichhoff and Rauch, 1973; Gantert, 1998; Hagenlocher, 1975; Matzner, 2008; Mierke, 2008; Murphy, 1989; Pakis,

2010; Price, 2011; Rathofer, 1962; Taeger, 1978, 1981; Zurla, 2004). Somewhat surprisingly, its Old Testament counterpart, the *Genesis*, has been largely overlooked save for its excellent treatment in the work of Alger Doane (Doane, 1991; see also Raw, 1976; Sievers, 1875). An overview of Saxon vernacular literature which places the *Heliand* and *Genesis* in their cultural context, meanwhile, is to be found in Wolfgang Haubrichs' work (Haubrichs, 1988).

The vernacular evidence raises one further issue inherent in studies of ninth-century Saxon Christianity: the spectre of lingering paganism. Much work on the *Heliand* has been predicated on the assumption that there were significant pagan elements in ninth-century Saxon society; so too historians on a variety of subjects, from the *Stellinga* to late-ninth-century hagiography, have operated on the assumption of continuing paganism, or, at the very least, syncretic Christianity. Yet such an assumption is without basis in the contemporary evidence. Assertions of paganism are few and far between, and always serve a larger narrative point, whether to delegitimize a political rival or to demonstrate the power of saints and relics; assertions of the Christianity of the Saxons, by contrast, are to be found in almost every work (Rembold, forthcoming). Of course, authors who sought to affirm Saxon Christianity could have just as much of a motive as those who sought to deny it, but their almost-universal agreement is difficult to ignore. Even when authors sought to reproach the Saxons for their sins and imperfect observances, they did not impugn their audience with accusations of paganism, but rather spoke to them as imperfect Christians in need of *correctio*. The discourse of Saxon Christianity extended well beyond sheer triumphalism.

Arguing for Saxon Christianity need not imply that Saxon Christianity were precisely the same as in other regions of the Frankish world. Christianity in Saxony might better be considered as a 'micro-Christendom' (Brown, 1996). The recent history of conquest and conversion, placed alongside differences in language and economic development, necessarily entailed that the forms that Christian institutions and observances assumed in Saxony were distinctive.

Conclusion

While Saxony shared many similarities with other regions of the Carolingian world, there were also significant differences. Historians must walk the fine line between homogenizing the Carolingian experience and overemphasizing the exceptional and anomalous position of Saxony. Recent work on Carolingian governance has stressed its variety, noting a wide degree of regional variation. Certainly, Saxony can be better understood as a constituent part of the Carolingian world as evoked in the revisionist work of Matthew Innes than in that of his early twentieth-century forebear, François Ganshof (compare Ganshof, 1971 and Innes, 2000). A profitable direction for future research, therefore, would see historians seeking to place Saxony and the Saxons within their wider European context. For even when ninth-century Saxon authors sought to create their own histories of the Saxons, they did so within the framework of Carolingian rule and Christian observance, even to the point of 'appropriating' Charlemagne as their apostle (Nelson, 1996, p. xxx). Einhard might have stressed the common Christian observance of the Franks and Saxons, but according to Saxon authors, they were even more intimately linked: they had become one *gens* in the Christian faith.

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