Kings among kinglets? Carolingian dynastic identity at the dawn of the post-Carolingian age

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When discussing the demise of the Carolingian empire in 888, historians rarely turn to the relevant passages from *Gesta Berengarii Imperatoris*.[1] This panegyric, written in honor of the Italian king and emperor Berengar I, depicts his turbulent life from the assumption of royal power in the wake of the death of Charles III the Fat, through his struggles over the crown with Guy of Spoleto and Louis the Blind – after which it climaxes with the description of Berengar's imperial coronation held at Rome in 915. The prominence the poem gives to the latter suggests that the work was written shortly after the Roman festivities and that its author was probably a member of the emperor's inner circle.[2] The *Gesta* themselves were preserved in a single manuscript from the second half of the 10th century or the beginning of the next. They are accompanied by an abundance of glosses of unclear provenance. Their heterogeneous nature and the varied role they play in the text have long suggested that they came from several different authors. However, it seems that at least some of them should be attributed to our anonymous poet, or at least to his contemporary.[3]

The description of the collapse of the Carolingian empire was woven by the poem's author into a broader narrative pattern intended to portray Berengar as the sole legitimate heir to Charles III the Fat. According to the *Gesta*, on his deathbed the emperor appointed our protagonist as his successor, handing to him power over the Roman Empire. After Charles' death however, the people who had hitherto been subjected to the authority of one

1 *Gesta Berengarii Imperatoris* (henceforth: GBI), ed. P. de Winterfeld, in: Monumenta Germaniae Historica (henceforth: MGH) Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini, IV/1, Berlin 1899, pp. 354-403.

2 F. Bougard, *Le couronnement impérial de Bérenger Ier (915) d'après les Gesta Berengarii Imperatoris*, in: *Rerum Gestarum Scriptor. Histoire et Historiographie au Moyen Âge. Mélanges Michel Sot*, ed. M. Coumert, M.-C. Isaïa, K. Krönet, S. Shimahara, Paris 2012, pp. 329-343.

3 F. Duplessis, *Les sources des gloses des "Gesta Berengarii" et la culture du poète anonyme*, "Aevum" LXXXIX (2015), pp. 205-212.

emperor, decided to entrust power to several different tyrants.[4] This brief passage is also accompanied by a gloss that defines the nature of the latter's power. It is mentioned that formerly the kingdom (of the Franks) was ruled by one king, but now there are many of them ("miseranda cupido pervasit populos, ut non diversis regnis pararent uni regi, sicut antea, sed unaqueque gens eligerent suum"). The meaning of the term "tyrant" itself is then unambiguously explained: the Greeks call kings tyrants because they make no distinction between the two ("tiranos pro regibus grecę dictum; nam apud eos [qui] tiranni et regi(s) nulla discretio est"). However, for the author/s of the glosses and his/their contemporaries, a tyrant is one who usurps power for himself ("apud nos incubator imperii tirannus dicatur").[5]

Furthermore the identity of those "tyrants" is revealed to the reader in a speech ascribed later in the poem to Guy of Spoleto, Berengar's principal adversary. As he enters the struggle for the Italian crown, Guy invokes two other rulers who successfully achieved their bid for power: Odo, king of West Francia and Rudolph, king of Burgundy, who are referred to by the duke of Spoleto as "those like myself" and "my former companions" ("mei similes, dudum notique sodales").[6] The correlation of this fragment with the aforementioned gloss let us believe that of all the rulers who claimed royal power after the death of Charles the Fat, only Berengar exercised it in a fully legal manner as the emperor's rightful successor, while the other post-Carolingians kings were in fact nothing more than "tyrants", unlawfully usurping royal dignity.[7] The author of the poem however did not limit himself to merely contrasting Berengar's claim with those of other rulers in order to emphasize the legitimacy of his royal ambitions. He also devoted a great deal of attention to indicating the reasons for his hero's distinguished position, arguing that Berengar's aspirations were justified by his virtue and his lineage ("virtutis merito et generis quod stemate").[8]

Berengar's descent plays a clear and fundamental role in the story developed by the author of the *Gesta*, proving his undeniable rights to royal and imperial power. From the very start the anonymous poet stresses that

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4 GBI, v. 43-47, p. 359.

5 Ibidem, gloss no. 46, p. 359.

6 Ibidem, I, v. 78-95, pp. 361f.

7 See also Ph. Buc, *Noch Einmal 918-919. Of the ritualized demise of kings and of political rituals in general*, in: *Zeichen, Rituale, Werte : Internationales Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 an der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster*, ed. G. Althoff, C. Witthöft, Münster 2004, pp. 151-178.

8 GBI, III, v. 174, p. 390; see also G. Isabella, *Between regnum and imperium: the Political Action and Kingship of Berengar I, 888-924, in the Gesta Berengarii*, Leeds 2014, https://www.academia.edu/7704771/Between_regnum_and_imperium_the_Political_Action_and_Kingship_of_Berengar_I_888-924_in_the_Gesta_Berengarii?email_work_card=title (access 15.05.2021), p. 6.

the future king and emperor was a descendant of Charlemagne himself.[9] Moreover, Berengar's relationship with the late emperor, Charles III the Fat, went far beyond the mere designation of the former as heir to the throne: the poem seems to indicate that Berengar was also closely connected to the emperor by much more personal ties. Indeed, the *Gesta* mention that Berengar grew up under Charles, the last of the rulers bearing that name to rule in Rome: "Karoli sed enim nutritus alumni/Rite sub imperio, simili qui nomine Romam/Postremus Francis regnando coegit habenis".[10] This fragment was also glossed in the following way: "alumnus est, qui nutrit et qui nutritur".[11] As Frédéric Duplessis noted, by juxtaposing the terms *nutritus* and *alumnus* in the main text, as well as by the gloss which recalls both the active and passive forms of the verb *nutrio*, the author invites the reader to think that it was Charles the Fat who was personally responsible for Berengar's upbringing, thus making their relationship that of father and son. After all, the noun *nutritor*, usually expressing the relationship between teacher and pupil, was also used to refer to the parental relationship.[12]

The emphasis put by the author of the *Gesta* on the intimate relationship between Berengar and Charles the Fat unequivocally proves that the former's rights to the throne were not only founded on the act of designation by the late emperor, but were in fact primarily justified by the established pattern of paternal succession.[13] The ascension to power of poem's protagonist, a descendant of Charlemagne and the pupil, or almost son of Charles the Fat, should be read as fully in line with the practice of succession within the Carolingian royal family: it marks a continuation, on the dynastic level, of the previous Carolingian rule. Equally important, however, is the fact that the legitimization of Berengar's power on a dynastic basis, as presented in the *Gesta*, reflects also on his opponent to the crown. In comparison to the true heir to the emperor, it is the lack of royal, and therefore *de facto* Carolingian descent, that makes Guy and "those like him" nothing more than usurpers – "tyrants" who illegally seize royal power for themselves after the death of Charles the Fat. Accordingly, in the *Gesta*'s narrative, belonging

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9 "Francigenam fateor Karolum prenomine Magnum,/Quem tellus axi tremuit subiecta rigenti,/Quamque potens linguensque luit Sol aureus undas,/Et quam torret equis totiens invectus anhelis./Prodit avis atavisque illo de sanguine rector/Ausonię", GBI, I, v. 16-21, p. 358.

10 Ibidem, I, v. 21-23, p. 358.

11 Ibidem, I, gloss no. 21, p. 358.

12 F. Duplessis, Nam cuncta nequit mea ferre Thalia. *Traitement de la matière historique par un panégyriste du X^e siècle*, "Cahiers électroniques d'histoire textuelle du LAMOP" (2013), p. 59.

13 GBI, I, v. 34-40, p. 359; on the importance of designation in Carolingian succession see: J. Dhondt, *Élections et hérédité sous les Carolingiens et les premiers Capétiens*, "Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire" XIV (1939), pp. 918-921; W. Giese, *Die designativen Nachfolgerungen der Karolinger 714-979*, "Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters" (2008), pp. 437-511.

to the Carolingian family seems to be a prerequisite for the legitimate exercise of royal power.

For this very reason, it is no coincidence that two other post-Carolingian kings who also laid claim to the imperial throne as successors to Charles the Fat, Arnulf of Carinthia and Louis the Blind, do not appear among the "companions" of Guy. Moreover, the *Gesta* leave no doubt that it was the ties of kinship uniting the East Frankish king and the ruler of Provence with Berengar, resulting from their common Carolingian descent, that fundamentally distinguish them from the "tyrant-likes". Thus, in describing Arnulf's Italian expedition of 894, the author of the *Gesta* is completely silent about its real purposes, which were to win the imperial crown for Arnulf and presents it instead as a family venture undertaken by the East Frankish king in order to support his cousin Berengar in the fight against Guy of Spoleto, a non-Carolingian usurper.[14] The ties of kinship between Berengar and Louis the Blind also seem to explain the poem's relatively mild treatment of the latter, even though, after the deaths of both Guy and Arnulf, he took up arms against Berengar and tried to size power over Italy.[15] The *Gesta* also try to free his main protagonist from responsibility for blinding his relative: in the text's interpretation of those events, the king warned his nobles against mutilating a member of a powerful, and in its essence royal family, from which he himself also descended.[16]

The representation of royal power presented in *Gesta Berengarii Imperatoris* seems to advocate for extreme Carolingian legitimism. For the panegyric's author, the only true kings are those who distinguish themselves by their Carolingian blood, amongst whom Berengar, the true successor to Charles the Fat, undoubtedly came first. Nonetheless there is little doubt that the panegyrist's concepts of the legitimate kingship were strongly influenced by the nature of his work, the main purpose of which was to portray Berengar's glory as the new emperor.[17] Given the fact that the struggle for the Italian crown between Berengar and Guy of Spoleto, a non-Carolingian contender, serves as the centerpiece of the whole story, it seemed only natural for the author to use the Carolingian descent of the main character as a "competitive edge" that he held over his enemies.[18] However, this particular attention to Berengar's ancestry as a determinant of his royal legitimacy was presented not only in the *Gesta*.

A similar image of the relationship between the Italian monarch and the Carolingian royal family also emerges from Berengar's royal documents,

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14 F. Duplessis, *Nam cuncta…*, pp. 72-74.
15 GBI, IV, v. 5-6, p. 395; see also G. Isabella, *Between regnum…*, p. 10.
16 GBI, IV, v. 53, p. 396
17 F. Bougard, *Le couronnement impérial…*, pp. 329f.
18 See F. Duplessis, *Nam cuncta…*, pp. 63f.

which strongly emphasize his kinship with the Frankish kings and present him as their legitimate successor.[19] Thus, in a diploma of 901 confirming the earlier endowments of Charles the Fat to the monastery of St. Zeno in Verona, Berengar evokes the late emperor by calling him "antecessore nostro dive memoriae Karolo imperatore et consorbino nostro".[20] In the same way, in a document for the church of St. Nicodemus in Fontana Broccola, Charles the Fat is described as "consurpinus [pred]ecessor noster".[21] Similarly, in a diploma of 888 for the abbey of S. Maria di Sesto, the deceased emperor is cited as Berengar's "senioris et consobrini".[22] In another act from the same year, the king refers to the emperor Louis II, without neglecting to indicate his relationship with him ("domnus Hludovuicus gloriosus olim imperator avunculus et senior noster").[23] Louis II, this time along with his father, Lothar I, is also mentioned in a diploma of 899 to the Abbey of Santa Maria Teodote in Pavia as Berengar's "predecessorum et consanguineorum".[24]

All the new kings who came to power in 888 and thereafter, of Carolingian or non-Carolingian descent, presented themselves as the legitimate successors to the former Carolingian rulers.[25] In this respect Berengar was by no means an exception. Unlike most of them, however, including Guy above all, in order to justify his claim to be a successor to Charles the Fat and to the Carolingian dynasty as a whole, Berengar appealed not only to the concept of the continuity of royal power at the institutional level, but also, and perhaps foremost, at the dynastic level. In the symbolic language of his diplomas, Berengar stylized himself as an heir to the former Carolingian kings and emperors, but also as their scion and member of their family which, as the narration of the *Gesta* puts it, still holds an exclusive grip over royal dignity.

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19 F. Bougard, *Charles le Chauve, Bérenger, Hugues de Provence: Action politique et production documentaire dans les diplômes à destination de l'Italie,* in: *Zwischen Pragmatik und Preformanz. Dimensionen mittelalterlicher Schriftkultur*, ed. C. Dartman, T. Scharff, C. Weber, Turnhout 2011, pp. 65-74.

20 *I Diplomi di Berengario I*, ed. L. Schiaparelli, Roma 1903, no. 34, p. 101.

21 Ibidem, no. 26, p. 78.

22 Ibidem, no. 2, p. 9.

23 Ibidem, no. 4, p. 26.

24 Ibidem, no. 27, p. 82.

25 See e.g., R.-H. Bautier, *Le règne d'Eudes (888-898) à la lumière des diplômes expédiés par sa chancellerie*, "Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres" CV (1961) 2, pp. 140-157; L. Dupraz, *L'avènement de Rodolphe Ier et la naissance du royaume de Bourgogne transjurane (6 janvier 888)*, "Revue suisse d'histoire" XIII (1963), pp. 177-195; S. MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century. Charles the Fat and the end of the Carolingian Empire*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 64-75; W. Fałkowski, *Le second couronnement du roi Eudes. L'ordo de Reims,* in: *Auctoritas: Mélanges offerts à Olivier Guillot*, ed. G. Constable, M. Rouche, Parsi 2006, pp. 281-290; F. Demotz, *La Bourgogne, dernier des royaumes carolingiens (855-1056). Rois, pouvoirs et élites autour du Léman*, Lausanne 2008; A. Hauff, *Carolingian Tradition and New Beginnings: The Coronation of Rudolphe I of Upper Burgundy*, "Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre" XXII (2018) 1, pp. 1-13.

This fundamental conviction, that only descendants of Pippin the Short have a unique right to the royal office, was one of the cornerstones of the ideology of power in the Carolingian period. However, all of this changed in 888. After the death of Charles the Fat, the *reguli*, kinglets, as there are described in some narrative sources, arose in various Frankish kingdoms. These new rulers, no longer of Carolingian descent, have successfully challenged the monopoly on kingship held by the old royal family.[26] Nevertheless, *Gesta Berengarii*, most likely created about 30 years after the crisis of 888, seem to stress that in the post-Carolingian world, Carolingian ancestry still had importance and significance. Besides, Berengar was not the only king in the late 9th and early 10th century to underline his Carolingian heritage as a means to legitimize his ascension to royal dignity.

Carolingian descent also shaped the ideological foundations of royal power as exercised by Louis the Blind, king of Provence, as is demonstrated in *Acta Valentinensia*, a document issued in 890 in Valence, illustrating the proceedings of the assembly held by Provençal nobles. The text begins with a brief description of the expedition of the archbishop of Vienne, Bernoin, who comes to Rome in order to present to Pope Stephen V the affairs of both his ecclesiastical province and the kingdom. Bernoin lamented to the pope that, since the death of emperor Charles, the kingdom had been plagued by numerous disasters caused both by its inhabitants, who were deprived of the disciplinary authority of royal power, as well as by pagan invaders. After hearing these complaints, the Pope ordered the bishops and archbishops of Cisalpine Gaul to elevate Louis, grandson of emperor Louis II, to royal office ("nepotem quondam Ludovici gloriossimi imperatoris"). The *Acta* then proceed directly to the events taking place at the assembly, which ultimately led to the election of Louis as a king. It is emphasized that the future king comes from an imperial family ("ex prosapia imperiali"), and what is more, that emperor Charles himself had already deemed him worthy of royal dignity ("cui praestantissimus Carolus imperator iam regiam concesserat dignitatem"). Last but not least, even Charles' successor, Arnulf

26 For the discussion concerning the crisis of 888 and a collapse of the Carolingian monopoly on kingship see: S. Airlie, *'Sad stories of the death of kings': narrative patterns and structures of authority in Regino of Prüm's Chronicle,* in: *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, ed. S. Airlie, E.M. Tyler, R. Balzaretti, Turnhout 2006, pp. 105-131; idem, *Semper fideles? Loyauté envers les Carolingiens comme constituant de l'identité aristocratique,* in: *La royauté et les élites dans l'Europe carolingienne (du début du IXe aux environs de 920)*, ed. R. Le Jan, Lille 1998, pp. 129-143; idem, *Les élites en 888 et après, ou comment pense-t-on la crise carolingienne?,* in: *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge : Crises et renouvellements*, ed. S. Airlie, F. Bougard, L. Feller, R. Le Jan, Turnhout 2006, pp. 425-437; I.S. Salazar, *Crisis? What Crisis? Political articulation and government in the March of Tuscany through placita and diplomas from Guy of Spoleto to Berengar II*, "Reti Medievali Rivista" XVII (2016) 2, pp. 251-279; see also recently S. Airlie, *Making and Unmaking the Carolingians, 751-888*, London 2020, pp. 273-318.

of Carinthia, through his envoys presented in Valence, took upon himself the role of protector of the kingdom.[27]

The ideology of royal power presented in the *Acta* follows the patterns already identified in *Gesta Berengarii Imperatoris* as well as in royal diplomas issued by Berengar. Of course, some of its elements fit into the broader category of the perception of kingship in the post-888 world. The bleak picture of a kingdom in turmoil after the death of Charles the Fat is not in itself unique: similar content can also be found in the *electio* of Guy of Spoleto from 889, whose appointment to the royal office was also to have been a response to the misfortunes that had befallen Italy in the wake of the death of the last Carolingian emperor.[28] Unlike the non-Carolingian kings, however, Louis' royal status, like that of Berengar, was due not only to "institutional" succession but also to dynastic continuity. The young king came from an imperial lineage: he is the grandson of Louis II, which in the *Acta*'s narrative becomes a central argument for his rights to the throne. Moreover, Charles the Fat considered him worthy of royal power, which is reminiscent of the argumentation used by the author of the *Gesta* to justify Berengar's ascension.[29] It seems, therefore, that secular and clerical nobles of Provence in elevating Louis, still a child at this time, based their decision on his affiliation with the Carolingian dynasty, which justified the legitimacy of his royal claim.

The idea of the Carolingian descent of Louis the Blind, already underlined in *Acta Valentinensia*, is, however, much more developed in the *Visio Caroli*,[30] which depicts a dream-vision of Charles the Fat who, having left his body, goes on a journey into the afterlife. At the end of his adventure through the depths of hell, he arrives in paradise, where he meets his relatives, emperors Lothar I and his son Louis II. Then the former explains to Charles that thanks to St. Remigius, royal and imperial power still rests in the hands of their family; even so, Charles himself will soon have to leave the earthly world. The dreaming emperor is then addressed by Louis II, who states that the imperial power that

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27 *Ludovici Regis Arelatensis Electio*, ed. G. Pertz, MGH, Leges, I, Hannover 1835, pp. 558f.; see also R. Poupardin, *Royaume de Provence sous les Carolingiens*, Paris 1901, pp. 156f.; R.H. Bautier, *Aux origines du royaume de Provence. De la sédition avortée de Boson à la royauté légitime de Louis*, "Provence historique" XCIII/XCIV (1975), pp. 66-68; P. Ganivet, *La consolation de l'Empire. Louis III de Provence, dit « L'Aveugle » ou les ambitions d'un prince*, "Hortus Artium Medievalium" VIII (2002), pp. 179-182.

28 *Widonis Capitulatio Electionis*, ed. A. Boretius, V. Krause, MGH, Capitularia regum Francorum, t. 2, Hannover 1897, pp. 104-106.

29 S. Airlie, *Making and Unmaking…*, pp. 292-300. It is possible that Louis the Blind was also adopted by Charles the Fat in 887, during the former's visit in Kirchen. It is not however clear what kind of obligation this act implied. For the summary of discussion on this topic see S. MacLean, *Kingship…*, pp. 161-169.

30 *Visio Karoli*, in: Hariulf, *Chronique de l'abbaye de Saint-Riquier*, ed. F. Lot, Paris 1894, pp. 144-148.

Charles possesses, belongs next (by hereditary right) to Louis, the son of his daughter. A small child then appears before Charles, to whom the emperor, on the instructions of his relative, hands over the *imperium* in the form of a thread that had previously served him to find his way through the afterlife. Thereafter, the spirit of Charles returns to his body, and then the emperor himself, in the conclusion of the *Visio*, announces that, by the will of God, the empire will be handed over to Louis the Blind.

Historiography has made it clear that the *Visio* must have been written in the intellectual circles associated with Reims, mostly because of the role that it attributes to St. Remigius as the patron saint of the royal family.[31] Nor does the text hide its goal, which is to justify the royal or imperial power of Louis the Blind. The question of its dating, however, is much more controversial. René Poupardin, basing his arguments primarily on the *Visio*'s depiction of Louis the Blind as a young child and its omission of Arnulf of Carinthia, thought that it must have been written shortly after the death of Charles the Fat and before Arnulf's imperial coronation, probably between 888-891.[32] Eduard Hlawitschka attributed to the *Visio* a similar date, linking its creation to the plans of archbishop Fulk of Reims who supposedly aimed at putting forward Louis' candidacy for the West Frankish throne against Odo around 890.[33] Claude Carozzi, however, pushed this dating forward. He deemed it hugely improbable that any attempt was made to push Louis, still a little child and not even yet a king, as a candidate for imperial office, which the text of the *Visio* evidently implies. In his discourse he favored the years between 898 and 900 as the possible date of the *Visio*'s writing, yet again attributing its authorship to the milieu associated with Fulk, who, after the death of his kinsman emperor Lambert, should have turned to Louis the Blind as his potential successor.[34] Nevertheless, Marie-Céline Isaïa has proposed yet another date, setting the creation of the *Visio* during the episcopate of Hervius, Fulk's successor to the archiepiscopal see. *Terminus post quem* would consist primarily of the imperial coronation of Louis in Rome in 901, and the *Visio* itself, like other examples of visionary literature, would rather explain past events than anticipate future ones. The tale told in the *Visio* would not serve to convince the reader of the validity of Louis' not yet realized imperial claims, but rather to justify the legitimacy of his already accomplished coronation.[35]

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31 M. Sot, *Un historien et son Église au X^e siècle: Flodoard de Reims*, Paris 1993, pp. 135-137.

32 R. Poupardin, *Royaume de Provence…*, pp. 324-332.

33 E. Hlawitschka, *Lotharingien und das Reich an der Schwelle der deutschen Geschichte*, Stuttgart 1968, pp. 100-106; see also T. Offergeld, *Reges pueri. Das Königtum Minderjähriger im frühen Mittelalter*, Hannover 2001, pp. 500-505.

34 C. Carozzi, *Le Voyage de l'Âme dans l'Au-delà d'après la Littérature Latine (V^e-XIII^e siècle)*, Rome 1994, pp. 359-368.

35 M-C. Isaïa, *Remi de Reims. Mémoire d'un saint, histoire d'une Église*, Paris 2010, pp. 621-626.

However, regardless of *Visio*'s dating, it is difficult to deny that it primarily expresses the imperial, rather than the royal aspirations of Louis the Blind. It indicates unequivocally that it is the Carolingian descent of Louis II's grandson that justifies his claim to the imperial crown. Louis' accession to the throne is inscribed into the line of dynastic successions within the Carolingian royal family. As the text describes, Lothar I, uncle of Charles the Fat and great-grandfather of Louis the Blind, in addressing the dreaming emperor, names him directly as his successor in the Roman Empire: this honor is then bestowed by Charles upon Louis.[36] However, in handing over imperial power, Charles is merely carrying out God's will. In contrast with *Acta Valentinensia*, where the emperor was to decide whether young Louis was worthy of the royal office, in the *Visio* the imperial crown is already due to Louis by hereditary right, *jure haereditario*.[37] For the author describing Charles the Fat's dream, the right of the king of Provence to hold imperial office is based solely on his Carolingian descent.

Just like *Gesta Berengarii Imperatoris*, *Visio Caroli* visibly advocates for the exclusive rights of the Carolingians to exercise imperial power. Nevertheless, the practice of imperial succession in the late 9th and early 10th centuries could not have been more different. Already in 891, Guy of Spoleto took over the imperial title; only one year later, he made his son Lambert co-emperor. Both Widonids emperors were also supported by their relative, the aforementioned Fulk, archbishop of Reims.[38] It is therefore reasonable to think that the ideological position expressed in this text, emphasizing the inextricable link between imperial power and the Carolingian family, should be read primarily in terms of attempts to legitimize the imperial aspirations of Louis the Blind and should not be seen, as in the case of the *Gesta*, as a broader phenomenon of "Carolingian legitimism". One need nonetheless note that tabling these dynastic arguments seems to demonstrate that, at least in the milieu associated with the archbishopric of Reims, significant value was still attached to Carolingian descent.

An attempt to establish yet another member of the Carolingian dynasty as a king was also made in Reims. In 893, archbishop Fulk, with a number of supporters, crowned the posthumous son of Louis the Stammerer, Charles III the Simple, in an attempt to push his claim to the throne against the non-Carolingian king, Odo of West Francia. It does not come as a surprise that the main arguments for elevating a son of the former Carolingian ruler were dynastic in nature, stressing not only the importance

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36 "Karole, successor meus nunc tutius in imperio Romanorum", "in manum illius revertetur totum imperium Romanorum", *Visio Karoli…*, pp. 147f.

37 Ibidem, p. 148.

38 M. Sot, *Un historien…*, pp. 132-138.

of paternal succession, but also indicating Carolingians' exclusive right to exercise royal power.[39] After Charles was anointed, Fulk of Reims launched a major diplomatic effort to gather support for his protégé's cause.[40] His efforts are known primarily from his voluminous correspondence, preserved by Flodoard in his "History of the Church of Reims", which demonstrates the scale of his undertaking as well as his basic line of argumentation in favor of Charles.

In a letter addressed to Arnulf of Carinthia, Fulk urged the East Frankish king to give aid to his western cousin, invoking the idea of familial solidarity binding the Carolingian rulers.[41] Even more, Fulk reminded Arnulf that Odo is "a stranger to the royal family", and he warned the East Frankish king that his negligence in helping Charles could potentially led even to undermining Arnulf's son's claim to royal office, what with so many non-Carolingians kings around.[42] In another letter, addressed this time to Pope Formosus, Fulk, demanding his aid, also expressed Charles' hereditary rights to the kingdom as the basis of his royal ascension: "ad regnum hereditario sibi iure debitum proficiat".[43]

Charles the Simple's position as the rightful ruler of the West Frankish Kingdom was also demonstrated in political ritual. Even the date of Charles' coronation, 28 January or the anniversary of Charlemagne's death, carried an unambiguous message proving his hereditary rights to the throne.[44] Moreover, as David Pratt has suggested, the *ordo*, which may have been used during the ceremony of 893, underlined the dynastic nature of Charles' ambitions.[45] Pratt has drawn attention to the "Leiden *ordo*", formerly associated

39 W. Fałkowski, *La monarchie en crise permanente. Les Carolingiens après la mort de Charles le Chauve,* in: *Le monde carolingien: Bilan, perspectives, champs de recherches. Actes du colloque international de Poitiers, Centre d'Études supérieures de Civilisation médiévale, 18-20 novembre 2004*, ed. W. Fałkowski, Y. Sassier, Turnhout 2009, pp. 354-355; on the ideology of kingship in the West Frankish Kingdom at the end of 9th century see W. Fałkowski, *Potestas regia. Władza i polityka w królestwie zachodniofrankijskim na przełomie IX i X wieku*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 93-105; G. Koziol, *The Politics of Memory and Identity in Carolingian Royal Diplomas. The West Frankish Kingdom (840-987)*, Turnhout 2012, pp. 479-500.

40 M. Sot, *Un historien…*, pp. 142-150; H. Lößlein, *Royal Power in the Late Carolingian Age. Charles III the Simple and His Predecessors*, Cologne 2019, pp. 39-44.

41 *Flodoardus Remensis Historia Remensis Ecclesiae*, ed. M. Stratmann, MGH, Scriptores, XXXVI, Hannover 1998, V, p. 381.

42 Ibidem, pp. 381f.

43 Ibidem, p. 376.

44 R-H. Bautier, *Sacres et couronnements sous les Carolingiennes et les premiers Capétiens*, "Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société d'histoire de la France" (1987), p. 49.

45 D. Pratt, *The making of the Second English Coronation Ordo*, "Anglo-Saxon England" XLVI (2017), pp. 147-258; see also *Ordo of Eleven Forms*, ed. R.A. Jackson, in: *Ordines Coronationis Franciae. Texts and Ordines for the Coronation of Frankish and French Kings and Queens in the Middle Ages*, I, ed. R.A. Jackson, Philadelphia 1995, pp. 154-167.

with the coronation of Charles the Bald in 848 as king of Aquitaine.[46] Pointing to its textual dependency on other Frankish *ordines*, the historian postponed the time of its creation with a *terminus post quem* of 877.[47] With this change in the dating, he then hypothesized that the "Leiden *ordo*" might have been written and used for the coronation of Charles the Simple. The formula introduced into it, emphasizing that the new king takes over the kingdom in paternal succession, would gain particular significance precisely in the case of the controversial royal inauguration of Charles against a king with no royal ancestry.[48]

However, the Carolingian descent of Charles the Simple, defining in the eyes of his supporters the legitimacy of his claim to the West Frankish throne, was not as clear-cut as it may seem at first glance. In the aforementioned letter to Arnulf, Fulk felt compelled to assure the East Frankish king that Charles, contrary to the lies that were being spread, was without a doubt a son of Louis the Stammerer and thus a member of the royal family.[49] It seems that the need for the Archbishop of Reims to reaffirm Charles' royal descent was closely tied to controversies surrounding his father's two marriages. According to Regino of Prüm, Louis the Stammerer during his youth married a certain noble woman named Ansgard, with whom he had two sons, the future kings Louis III and Carloman II. However, since this marriage was concluded without the knowledge and consent of Louis' father, Charles the Bald, the latter ordered him to abandon his wife and marry Adelaide, the future mother of Charles the Simple, instead. As the chronicler further adds, the child born of this second marriage was then named in honor of his grandfather.[50]

The unclear status of Louis the Stammerer's two marriages, and thus the legal status of his offspring, had caused much controversy long before the coronation of Charles the Simple in 893. In the 9th century, the question of the indissolubility of marriage as well as of the rights of children from extramarital unions formed the focal point of political and religious debates in the Frankish Empire.[51] Until the end of the 9th century, the natural sons of Carolingian kings and emperors were regularly denied a share in their fathers' inheritance. Even more were their attempts to win power met with stiff

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46 G. Länoé, *L'ordo de couronnement de Charles le Chauve à Sainte-Croix d'Orléans (6 Juin 848)*, in: *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. Duggan, London 1993, pp. 41-68.

47 D. Pratt, *The making…*, pp. 187f.

48 Ibidem, pp. 187, 192-194.

49 *Flodoardus Remensis Historia Remensis Ecclesiae…*, p. 382.

50 *Reginonis Abbatis Prumensis Chronicon cum Continuatione Treverensi*, ed. F. Kurze, MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi, L, Hannover 1890, p. 114.

51 See S. Airlie, *Private bodies and the body politic in the divorce case of Lothar II*, "Past & Present" CLXI (1998), pp. 3-38.

resistance from other members of the royal family. As late as in 885, the efforts of Hugh, son of Lothar II from his extramarital union with Waldrada, to take over his father's kingdom were put to a swift end: Lothar's bastard was eventually captured, imprisoned, and blinded by emperor Charles the Fat.[52]

Accusations of extramarital descent were also widely employed in the intradynastic conflicts among the Carolingians. Charlemagne himself had invoked the illegitimate status of his eldest son from his first marriage, Pippin the Hunchback, to exclude him from the succession.[53] Similarly, in the entourage of Charlemagne's son and successor, Louis the Pious, accusations of illegitimacy were made against the emperor's nephew, Bernard, king of Italy.[54] Boso of Vienne yet again, according to Regino of Prüm, justified his royal coronation in 879 by the impaired (*degeneres*) descent of Louis the Stammerer's sons and successors, as their mother had been sent away.[55] Concerns about the royal rights of Louis' descendants from his first marriage seemed to have made themselves felt already while their father was still alive. The successor to Charles the Bold concluded with his namesake, East Frankish king Louis the Younger, an agreement at Férone, in which one of the clauses equated his offspring from his first marriage to the others he might have in the future. This specification, clearly seeking to safeguard the interests of Louis and Carloman, must have been due to the ambiguous position of their mother, which endangered theirs claims to their father's kingdom.[56]

However, Louis the Stammerer's marriage troubles seemed to have cast a shadow over his offspring coming from both his first and second union. As the *Annals of Saint-Bertin* tell us, in 878 Pope John VIII, when crowning Louis as king, refused to anoint his second wife, Adelaide.[57] Hincmar of Reims, author of this part of the annals, does not give us the reasons for the papal refusal (nor does he even mention Louis' wife by name). It seems, however, that it must have had something to do with Adelaide's problematic position as the king's legitimate wife. Hincmar's silence on the subject should not however come as a surprise: the archbishop of Reims, a privileged advi-

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52 *Reginonis…*, pp. 123-125; S. MacLean, *Kingship…*, pp. 144-160.

53 See M. Costambeys, M. Innes, S. MacLean, *The Carolingian World*, New York 2011, p. 185; S. McDougall, *Royal Bastards. The Birth of Illegitimacy, 800-1250*, Oxford 2017, pp. 81-83.

54 See J. Fried, *Elite und Ideologie. Die Nachfolgeordnung Karls des Großen vom Jahre 813*, in: *La royauté et les élites dans l'Europe carolingienne (début IXe siècle aux enviros de 920)*, ed. R. Le Jan, Lille 1998, pp. 71-109.

55 *Reginonis…*, p. 114; see also E. J. Goldberg, S. MacLean, *Royal Marriage, Frankish History and Dynastic Crisis in Regino of Prüm* Chronicle, "Medieval Worlds" X (2019), pp. 121f.

56 *Hludovici Iunioris et Hludowici Balbi Conventio Furonensis*, ed. A. Boretius, V. Krause, MGH, Capitularia regum Francorum, II, Hannover 1987, p. 169; H. Lösslein, *Royal Power…*, p. 24.

57 *Annales Bertiniani*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi, V, Hannover 1883, p. 143.

sor of Louis and, earlier, of his father, completely omits the marital troubles of the Frankish king in his writings. Hincmar was also strongly involved in the divorce of Lothar II, advocating for the sanctity of marriage as an indissoluble union, as he stated in his *De divortio.*[58]

The Archbishop of Reims was also the author of the *ordo of Ermentrude*, *ordo coronandi* drawn up on the occasion of the coronation of Charles the Bald's wife. Hincmar's text places marriage at the center of the royal ideology, putting the biblical union of Sarah and Abraham as a model for the royal family.[59] It seems then that the case of Louis' two wives was so contagious for Hincmar that he preferred to keep it completely out of his historiographical work.[60] In this context, Regino's narrative on the birth of Charles the Simple, stressing his legitimacy by invoking his royal name that he inherited from his grandfather, as well as the content of Fulk's letter, seem to clearly suggest that the recognition of Louis the Stammerer's youngest son as his father's rightful heir caused serious doubts in the eyes of the contemporaries. It also appears rather clear that those accusations pointed at Charles' extramarital descent, proliferated most probably by Odo's supporters, were aimed at undermining his claims to the West Frankish throne.[61] It seemed only natural that Fulk, deriving Charles the Simple's right to rule from him being part of Carolingian *stirps regia*, had to fend off attacks on the very essence of his royal ambitions.

The controversy surrounding Charles the Simple's legitimacy proves rather obviously that being part of the Carolingian family was determined not only by biological considerations. In the 9th century, the Carolingian dynasty formed an essentially stable agnatic structure, which unequivocally excluded both extramarital offspring and matrilinear relatives from competing for royal power.[62] This is not to say, of course, that the illegiti-

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58 Hincmar de Reims, *De Divortio Lotharii Regis et Theutbergae Reginae*, ed. L. Böhringer, MGH, Concilia, IV, sup. 1, Hannover 1992; see also H. J. Hummer, *Politics and Power in Early Medieval Europe. Alsace and the Frankish Realm, 600-1000*, Cambridge 2005, pp. 169-176.

59 *Ordo of Ermentrude,* in: *Ordines Coronationis Franciae…*, pp. 83f.; see also J.L. Nelson, *Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship*, in: *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. Duggan, London 1995, pp. 306-309; G. Pac, *Koronacje władczyń we wcześniejszym średniowieczu – zarys problematyki,* in: *Gnieźnieńskie koronacje królewskie i ich środkowoeuropejskie konteksty*, ed. J. Dobosz, M. Matla, L. Wetesko, Gniezno 2011, pp. 45-49; Z. Mistry, *Ermentrude's consecration (866): queen-making rites and biblical templates for Carolingian fertility*, "Early Medieval Europe" XXVII (2019) 4, pp. 567-588.

60 M.J. McCarthy, *Hincmar's influence during Louis the Stammerer's reign,* in: *Hincmar of Rheims. Life and Work*, ed. R. Stone, C. West, Manchester 2015, pp. 112-114.

61 H. Lösslein, *Royal Power…*, p. 38.

62 See R. Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde franc (VII^{e}-X^{e} siècle.): essai d'anthropologie socjale*, Paris 1995, p. 252; C. Bouchard, *Those of My Blood. Constructing Noble Families in Medieval Francia*, Philadelphia 2001, pp. 59-61.

mate sons of Carolingian rulers did not make attempts to attain kingship: the case of the aforementioned Hugh, son of Lothar II, proves this. However, no descendant of Charlemagne from an illegitimate union achieved kingship prior to 888. The reluctance of the Frankish elite, both secular and ecclesiastical, to accept the natural sons of kings and emperors as their successors was still very much ongoing during the last years of Charles the Fat's reign, when he failed to make his illegitimate son, Bernard, his heir to the royal office.[63] In the 9th century, in order to be a king one undoubtedly had to be Carolingian: however, being recognized as such was practically restricted to offspring in the male line, born into legitimate marriages.

At this point it is necessary to come back to Berengar and Louis the Blind. Despite the unambiguous conviction and assertions of the authors of the *Gesta Berengarii Imperatoris* and *Visio Caroli*, convincing us of their protagonists' Carolingian descent, there is no escaping the fact that their affiliation with the royal dynasty was not at all, to put it mildly, self-evident. Both Berengar and Louis could claim their Carolingian descent only in the female line: the former's mother was Gisela, a daughter of Louis the Pious, while the latter was the grandson of Emperor Louis II also through his daughter, Ermengard. The problematic nature of this matrilineal legacy is already apparent in the narration of the *Gesta*: as the poem's author mentions Berengar's descent, he states bluntly that he was unable to determine the exact nature of the kinship relating his protagonist to Charlemagne.[64] Nonetheless, it is difficult to believe that the panegyrist was genuinely unaware of the nature of the relationship between Berengar and the Carolingian dynasty. It is much more probable that he deliberately chose to omit this inconvenient aspect of Berengar's legacy, which was certainly the fact that he was member of the Carolingian dynasty in the female line only, thus putting into question his claim to act as a true heir to the Carolingian tradition.[65]

This non-Carolingian nature of Berengar and Louis was nevertheless obvious to Regino of Prüm. As he describes in his work, the aspiring king of Italy was merely one of the many *reguli* of 888 who claimed the crown after the death of Charles the Fat. Mentioning Berengar's royal ascension, Regino pointed out that he was the son of Eberhard, omitting in complete silence his Carolingian descent from his mother's side.[66] He also described Louis the Blind in a similar way, only recalling his father, Boso.[67] Moreover,

63 S. MacLean, *Kingship…*, pp. 129-133, 168-169.

64 "generis quo stemmate pollet, / Scire vacat; nam cuncta nequit mea ferre Thalia", GBI, v. 14-15, p. 358.

65 G. Albertoni, *La fine dell'impero carolingio e i conflitti per il regno italico nei Gesta Berengarii*, "Reti Medievali Rivisita" XVII (2016) 2, pp. 290f.; F. Duplessis, *Nam cuncta…*, pp. 58f.

66 *Reginonis…*, p. 129.

67 Ibidem, p. 142.

the Abbot of Prüm, in depicting the conflict between Berengar and Guy treats them as having equal claims to rulership over Italy: neither of them can boast Carolingian descent (Guy is called Lambert's son), both of them come from the imperial aristocracy (the one "ducatum Foroiulanorum tenebat" the other is "dux Spolitanorum"), and Guy's coronation was basically no different from that of his rival ("aeque regia dignitate sublimandum decernunt").[68] Unlike the author of the *Gesta*, Regino saw no qualitative difference between the two *reguli* waging war over the crown of Italy.

A slightly different approach is ostensibly taken by the *Annals of Fulda*, which, in contrast to Regino's chronicle, repeatedly underline the ties of kinship linking Berengar to the Carolingian family. When Charles the Fat entrusted in 883 the count of Friuli with the mission to suppress Guy of Spoleto's revolt in Italy, the author of the annals calls him the emperor's *consaguineus*.[69] Also in describing the conflict between Berengar and Charles' favored advisor Liutward of Vercelli, the former is named *cognatus regis*.[70] The king of Italy is also referred to as *nepos* to Arnulf of Carinthia.[71] However, the Annals' emphasis on the kinship relating Berengar to the royal family does not mean that the annalist considered him a "true" member of the Carolingian dynasty, on par with Charles or Arnulf. In this way, when describing the events of 888, that is the rise to power of the *reguli* in the former Carolingian empire, the author of the *Annals of Fulda* points out that those took place "in Europa vel regno Karoli sui [Arnulf's] patruelis".[72] Then the text proceeds to list these "kinglets", among whom appears "Perngarius filius Ebarhardi".[73]

The author's invoking of the name of Berengar's father does not seem to be a coincidence, but rather falls into a carefully structured ideological message. The other *reguli*, with which Berengar is associated, are also presented in a similar manner. Thus, we learn that besides Berengar, a son of Eberhard, also Rudolph, a son of Conrad, Louis, a son of Boso, Guy, a son of Lambert and Odo, a son of Robert, claimed royal power because of Arnulf's absence in the kingdom. It seems that the annalist's intention in presenting these "kinglets" was first and foremost to indicate their non-Carolingian descent. Unlike the true *rex* Arnulf, a nephew of Emperor Charles, the *reguli* were not members of the royal family, which was clearly evidenced by the non-Carolingian, and therefore non-royal, names of their fathers. For the author

68 Ibidem, p. 129.

69 *Annales Fuldenses*, ed. F. Kurze, MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi, VII, Hannover 1891, p. 110.

70 Ibidem, p. 114.

71 Ibidem, p. 127.

72 Ibidem, p. 116; R. Le Jan, *Famille…*, p. 173.

73 *Annales Fuldenses…*, p. 116.

of the *Annals of Fulda*, Berengar's ties to the royal dynasty did not make him a true member of the Carolingian dynasty. "The son of Eberhard", just like, "the son of Boso", were therefore not true Carolingians, and therefore could not become true *reges* either.

The aforementioned sources show clearly that at the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries, being considered a member of the Carolingian dynasty was not simple affair. Certainly behind the accounts of the *Gesta Berengarii* and of the *Visio Caroli*, insisting as they did on Berengar's and Louis the Blind's Carolingian descent, stood the political interests of the groups with which their authors were associated. The same can be said about work of Regino of Prüm, as well as the *Annals of Fulda*. Similarly, current political needs motivated discussions regarding the legitimacy of Charles the Simple's descent. It seems that with the disintegration of the Carolingian empire, the question of who does and who does not belong to the former royal family became a political statement that was used to push forward or undermine the claims to kingship of post-888 kings. It is therefore no accident that both Regino's chronicle and the Bavarian continuation of the *Annals of Fulda*, rejecting the Carolingian claims of Berengar and Louis, were written in an entourage closely associated with Arnulf of Carinthia and his successor, Louis the Child, who are presented in these works as the only true heirs to the last ruler of the whole Carolingian empire, Charles the Fat.[74]

What is also important is that Berengar's, Louis', and Charles the Simple's efforts to preserve and demonstrate their Carolingian heritage unambiguously show that despite the breakdown of the Carolingian monopoly on the exercise of royal power in 888, the blood of the former royal family was still perceived as an element largely determining the scope of their royal aspirations. Even though non-Carolingian *reguli* became a permanent part of post-888 political reality, and Carolingian descent did not guarantee an exclusive access to royal power, the "Carolingianess" still constituted the major point of reference for contemporaries.[75] It was this Carolingian heritage that allowed the aforementioned kings to inscribe their rule not only into the institutional, but also into the dynastic continuity, distinguishing them from non-Carolingian contenders. Indeed, it seems no coincidence that the rulers who could make the slightest reference to their Carolingian descent did so in explicit ways.

However, despite the importance that continued to be attached to Carolingian descent, it is hard not to notice the changes in the ways it was understood after the crisis of 888. Suffice it to say that of all the kings who, after

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74 S. MacLean, *Kingship…*, pp. 24-30; E. J. Goldberg, S. MacLean, *Royal Marriage…*, pp. 108f.

75 See S. Airlie, *Les élites en 888 et après, ou comment pense-t-on la crise carolingienne?*, in: *Les élites…*, pp. 425-438.

the death of Charles the Fat, invoked a Carolingian heritage to legitimize their power, only Charles the Simple was a legitimate son of a Carolingian king and thus a person who, according to the settled practice of succession, could lay claim to royal office. Arnulf of Carinthia, who in most contemporary sources is considered to be the true, or even the only, heir to Charles the Fat and, by extension, to the dynasty as a whole, came from a non-sacramental union. This fact posed a certain problem even for his supporters. In this context, it seems worth looking at the account of the chronicle of Regino of Prüm. In mentioning the death of Arnulf's father, Carloman, the chronicler, stated that he had only a son from an extramarital relationship with a certain noble woman, and the child was named after the founder of the Carolingian dynasty, St. Arnulf, Bishop of Metz. Then Regino, after having described the dramatic situation in which the Carolingian dynasty found itself due to the infertility of the royal wives and the premature deaths of the members of the family, pointed out that of the once numerous royal line, only Arnulf remained able to rule the Frankish kingdoms.[76]

The narrative concerning Arnulf seems to be designed to prove that, despite his extramarital origins, he was a true member of the Carolingian royal family. Regino's invocation of St. Arnulf to explain the name prescribed to the future king and emperor seems to only subtly disguise the fact that "Arnulf" was not one of the names traditionally given to Carolingian kings, and thus to indicate Carloman's son illegitimate descent, which did not give him the rights to aspire to royal dignity. It is possible to think that Regino, who, as he directly informs us, himself shaved and then took care of another Carolingian bastard, Hugh, son of Lothar II, tried in this way to justify the fact that another illegitimate son of a Carolingian king had assumed power.[77] The Abbot of Prüm's efforts in this regard seem all the more obvious if we pay attention to how much in his chronicle legal descent was a determinant of the right to exercise royal power: it is no coincidence that describing the election of Arnulf's son, Louis the Child, Regino explicitly states that the new king came from a legitimate marriage.[78]

In conclusion, the ease with which Berengar, Louis the Blind, or Arnulf invoked their Carolingian heritage also convinces us that the end of the Carolingian monopoly on royal office was accompanied by an equally deep crisis of Carolingian dynastic identity. With the disintegration of the traditional model of kingship, founded on the exclusive hold of the royal family over kingly office, the Carolingians, as a family structure, also suffered a major blow. Relatives of Carolingian rulers who had previously found themselves

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76 *Reginonis…*, pp. 116f.

77 E. J. Goldberg, S. MacLean, *Royal Marriage…*, p. 126.

78 *Reginonis…*, p. 148.

on the margins of the dynastic community, could now reclaim full participation in the Carolingian family tradition formerly unavailable to them. Certainly the crisis of Carolingian identity was also due to biological factors: after the death of Charles the Fat, the only representative of the dynasty in its traditional sense was a little child, Charles the Simple, whose "Carolingianess" also raised doubts. In this situation, the claims of the so far overlooked relatives of the royal family could no longer be countered by the "true" Carolingians who had previously guarded access to the dynastic legacy, removing the former from participation in royal power.[79]

As a result, "Carolingian identity" at the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries became an object of rivalry and negotiation between rulers who could demonstrate at least a drop of Carolingian blood in their veins. Of course, it should not be claimed that belonging to the Carolingian dynasty was the only point of reference for the ideological concepts developed around Louis the Blind and Berengar to justify the legitimacy of their royal rule.[80] In the new, "post-Carolingian" reality, as the careers of Odo of West Francia, Guy of Spoleto, and Rudolph of Burgundy clearly prove, it was no longer necessary to be a Carolingian to rule successfully. Nevertheless, Carolingian descent continued to provide a significant argument in political discourse concerning the foundations of royal power, allowing Carolingian rulers to clearly distinguish their position from the non-Carolingian "kinglets". However, this was already a different "Carolingianess" than that which, until 888, determined access to royal and imperial office.

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79 See Z. Dalewski, *Patterns of Dynastic Identity in the Early Middle Ages*, "Acta Poloniae Historica" CVII (2013), pp. 5-43.

80 On Berengar see B. Rosenwein, *The Family Politics of Berengar I, King of Italy (888-924)*, "Speculum" LXXI (1996) 2, pp. 247-289; L. Feller, *L'exercice du pouvoir par Bérenger Ier, roi d'Italie (888-915) et empereur (915-924)*, "Médiévales" LII (2010), pp. 129-149. In the case of Louis the Blind, his father's royal legacy also played an important role, as was displayed mainly in his diplomas, see *Recueil des actes des rois de Provence (855-928)*, ed. R. Poupardin, Paris 1920, no. 30, pp. 55-57, no. 31, pp. 57-59, no. 42, pp. 78-80. Regarding Boso, Louis' father, see: S. Airlie, *The Nearly Men: Boso of Vienne and Arnulf of Bavaria*, in: *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe. Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. A.J. Duggan, Woodbridge 2000, pp. 25-42; F. Bougard, *En marge du divorce de Lothaire II: Boson de Vienne, le cocu qui fut fait le roi?*, "Francia" XXVII (2000), pp. 33-51.

ABSTRACT

The collapse of the Carolingian Empire in 888 dramatically changed the political and ideological landscape of Western Europe. For the first time since 751, in the kingdoms that formerly formed the Frankish Empire power was taken by non-Carolingian kings, who effectively broke the monopoly on kingship held by the descendants of Pepin the Short. However, the end of the Empire did not mean the end of the royal family itself: after 888, there were still kings who perceived themselves as members of Carolingian stirps regia. This article deals with three of the post-888 rulers, Berengar of Italy, Louis of Provence and Charles the Simple, who aspired to present themselves as the true heirs to the Carolingian tradition. Nonetheless, their not-so-self-evident adherence to the former royal family clearly demonstrates that the crisis of 888 did not only leave its mark on the political shape of the post-Carolingian Europe, but more importantly it touched the very idea of Carolingian familial identity.

Keywords: Carolingians, dynastic identity, Berengar of Italy, Charles the Simple, Louis of Provence, royal family, post-Carolingian Europe