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Charlemagne 'Father of Europe': A European Icon in the Making

Marianne Ailes

University of Bristol

'The greatest and most distinguished of men'.
(Einhard, *Vita Karoli*)[1]

Along with the legendary King Arthur and the crusading conqueror of Jerusalem, Godefroy of Bouillon, Charlemagne was one of the three secular 'chivalric' Worthies of the later Middle Ages. Arthur and Charlemagne shared the status of legendary Christian kings belonging to a pervious age, but there were major differences between them. For Charlemagne, unlike Arthur, we have a significant body of factual evidence, documents and chronicles, and, even though some of it must be treated with great care, this gives us considerable knowledge of the emperor's deeds and reputation.[2] Secondly, whereas Arthur has a particular association with Britain, Charlemagne was 'emperor of Europe'. At his death in 814, the Emperor Charlemagne ruled over much of what we now call France, Germany, the Low Countries and modern Italy. As his myth developed he became associated with an even more extensive community, that of a united Christendom.

Given the extraordinary achievements of the man Charlemagne, it is not surprising that we find him being celebrated heroically. Within his own lifetime the anonymous poet of *Karolus et Leo Papa*, otherwise known as the 'Paderborn Epic', gave him the epithet '*Rex, pater Europae*', 'King and Father of Europe'.[3] The anonymous poet was not the only contemporary to write about Charlemagne,[4] but in this phrase he encapsulated an idea that has since grown wings, in recent decades being appropriated by the European Community: the Charlemagne

Building in Brussels houses offices of the European community; the annual Karlspreis is awarded for services to the unity of Europe; there is even a newspaper column about the European Union named after the emperor.[5] While the phrase itself, 'Father of Europe', may owe more to the Latin education of its writer than to any sense of 'Europe' as a polity in the ninth century, it still suggests a ruler whose reputation had already created a sense of unity which would extend beyond the identity of a single people.

The process of myth-making was not restricted to one context or one kind of writing; it begins with contemporary Latin material, and is developed and disseminated in both Latin and vernacular languages. Any analysis of the making of this image of Charlemagne as 'father of Europe' therefore needs to encompass both Latin and vernacular.[6] Throughout the Middle Ages Charlemagne was a central figure (even if not always depicted positively), in the literature of cultures from Iceland to Italy and from Ireland to Eastern Europe. Although he had not ruled this entire that area he was nonetheless celebrated; tales were told about him and statues representing him were erected.[7] He is not, however, treated in the same way in each language and literature of Europe. He is at once a symbol of a united Europe and at the same time is represented differently across different linguistic cultures and/or geographical areas.[8] This article will examine his presentation as a symbol of a united Europe, or Christendom, with regard to his particular appropriation in France and wider francophone culture thus acknowledging that literature in French plays a particular role in the development of the myth of Charlemagne. This presentation will be explored through early Latin accounts of Charlemagne and the earliest vernacular texts extant, early *chansons de geste* and the related *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle.*

The historical figure of Charlemagne was ideal material for myth-making: his coronation by the Pope on Christmas Day 800 united the sacral and royal functions, which have been observed as together making up the sovereign;[9] he was a successful military leader; under his reign a European wide trade system developed;[10] his private life was complex and would not have satisfied later medieval notions of a good example, but, nonetheless, love, marriages and heroic offspring fit well into medieval myth.[11] In the mythical developments of Charlemagne's life it was his nephew, Roland, who showed greatest heroism.[12] Charlemagne's son is less heroic and often presented in a relatively negative way in the vernacular narratives, but this only seems to highlight Charlemagne's qualities by contrast.

Whatever date is ascribed to the anonymous Paderborn Epic quoted above, and whoever wrote it, most scholars agree that it must have been composed before 804, so around the time Charlemagne was being made Emperor.[13] The epic poet not only describes him as 'Father of Europe', but also refers to him as 'father Charles'.[14] If, as Janet Nelson has suggested, the role of a Frankish ruler was like that of a father over his household, then the idea that Charles was 'father', *pater*, to all the peoples under his rule makes complete sense.[15] For the Paderborn poet Europe existed as an entity known from Classical writings; Charlemagne brought it together as a family.

Einhard's *Vita Karoli* is the best known early account of Charlemagne's life and reign. It was widely known in the Middle Ages and was instrumental in the spread of his legend and the attribution of that other epithet – magnus – to the emperor, an epithet which, as David Ganz notes, 'posterity had no hesitation in adopting'.[16] As an eye-witness account of the court, Einhard's work is invaluable, though it is, in Nelson's words, 'a gift to a modern biographer that comes with health warning'. [17]

When, in 768, Charlemagne and Carloman succeeded as joint heirs to their father's kingdom it was, as was customary, divided between them.[18] Their joint rule, however, lasted less than three years and Einhard tells us that on Carloman's death:

> Karolus autem fratre defuncto consensu omnium Francorum rex constituitur.[19]

Thus Charlemagne's first act as a 'unifier' in Europe was to re-unite the Franks as one. Einhard thereafter concentrates on how he doubled the extent of his kingdom and made allies beyond its borders. He is again depicted as one who brings people together, specifically bringing them together as Christians, when Einhard writes, at the conclusion of the long wars against the Saxons, of the conditions placed on the defeated Saxons:

> Eaque conditione a rege proposita et ab illis suscepta tractum per tot annos bellum constat esse finitum, ut, abiecto daemonum cultu et relictis patriis caerimoniis, Christianae fidei atque religionis sacramenta susciperent et Francis adunati unus cum eis

populus efficerentur.[20]

This is not just any kind of unity, but sharing the Christian faith was to make them 'one people'.

A generation after Einhard the chronicler Nithard, writing c.844, stressed that Charlemagne had united Barbarian and Frank. For Nithard, writing during the struggle between the deceased emperor's three surviving grandsons, Charlemagne was already something of an icon for having brought unity, and he wrote about him in glowing terms:

> Karolus bonae memoriae, et merito Magnus, imperator ab universis nationibus vocatus…in senectute bona decedens, omnem Europam omni bonitate repletam reliquit.[21]

The image he presented was of Frank and Barbarian united as one under the benign and happy rule of Charlemagne, though the nostalgic longing for unity probably had more to do with the politics of the middle of the ninth century than the reality of a bygone age under
Charlemagne's rule:

> Nam super omne quod admirabile fateor fore, Francorum Barbarorumque ferocia ac ferrea corda, quae nec Romana potentia domare valuit, hic solus moderato [Col.0046B] terrore ita repressit, ut nihil in imperio moliri praeter quod publicae utilitati congruebat, manifeste auderent. Regnavit feliciter per annos duos et triginta, imperiique gubernacula nihilominus cum omni felicitate per annos quatuordecim possedit.[22]

Placing Frank and Barbarian next to each other, *Francorum Barbarorumque*, Nithard stresses this unity in the syntax of his sentence.

At the very end of his account Nithard stresses again the unity of the people under Charlemagne, but this time he adds another dimension as he writes of the people walking together 'in the way of the Lord':

> Nam temporibus bonae recordationis Magni Karoli, qui evoluto jam pene anno

tricesimo decessit, quoniam hic populus unam eamdemque rectam, ac per hoc viam Domini publicam incedebat, pax illis atque [Col.0076D] concordia ubique erat.[23]

We see here a myth in formation. Charlemagne, known as conqueror, achieves this status by also being presented as an agent of God, an aspect of his mythic identity that was to be enhanced in the early vernacular texts; he combines the sacral, the royal and the military. Nithard, grandson of Charlemagne, writing at the time of the division of the Empire, obviously had his own agenda, but within that context the association of Charlemagne with unity is clear.[24]

Notker the stammerer, a monk of St Gall, drew largely on Einhard's *Vita* for his *Gesta Karoli Magni*, and, like the anonymous poet of the Paderborn epic, uses the term 'Europe', apparently as equivalent to 'Empire'.[25] Describing the building of a great bridge at Mainz, Notker wrote of men of different peoples working together in seeming harmony:

> quem tota Europa communi quidem sed ordinatissime participationis opera perfecit.[26]

Later he describes the reception at court of a group of Persians along with the 'nobles of Europe and of the Frankish Empire'.[27] What is not clear is whether this is a rhetorical binomial and the two terms 'Europe' and 'Empire' are two expressions of the same concept, or whether they are supposed to be distinct. For Notker, it seems, the idea of 'Frankishness' was inherently broader than a single ethnic group:

> Franciam vero interdum cum nominavero, omnes cisalpinas provincias significo, quia...in illo tempore propter excellentiam gloriossimi Karoli et Galli et Aquitani, Edui et Hispania, Alemanni et Baiorii non porum se insignitos gloriabontur, si vel nominee Francorum servum censeri mererentur.[28]

It seems that Frankishness was inclusive, not defined by otherness, and implied being part of a larger entity than one's own people.[29] It is specifically 'the fame and glory of Charlemagne' which has brought about this condition of unity.

The emphasis in these early Latin texts is on Charlemagne bringing unity; they addressed a particular textual community, a trans-national community that was Latin-literate. The myth of Charlemagne was to spread even more widely through the francophone world, in texts, narratives and songs which would be known by both the learned and illiterate, in church and at court and for all those who listened to the songs of entertainers.[30] From the earliest *chansons de geste* Charlemagne was transformed into a summation of French / Frankish monarchs, in particular bringing together the different kings who bore the name Charles: Charles Martel, Charles the Bald and Charlemagne.[31]

The best known of the *chansons de geste* was in the Middle Ages, and remains now, *La Chanson de Roland.* The narrative of the battle of Roncevaux spread across Europe. The oldest extant version is that known as the 'Oxford *Roland*' which survives in an Anglo-Norman manuscript in which Charlemagne's territory is expanded to include England:[32]

> ...Merveilus hom est Charles
> Ki cunquist Puille et trestute Calabre
> Vers Engleterre passat il la mer salse (ll. 370 – 72).[33]

Later in the text Roland lists England among the lands he has conquered for Charlemagne, as well as Scotland and Ireland (or Iceland depending on how the text is read).[34] The lands over which Charlemagne has control have been extended beyond the limits of the historical Carolingian Empire, allowing the *Roland* text, copied in England, to have the reading '*nostre emperere magnes*', 'our great emperor' (l. 1).

The precise make-up of the group known as the twelve peers, who are among the most important Franks, varies from text to text, and some of Charlemagne's closest advisors are not included in their number in the earliest texts, but they were from the beginning an 'international' grouping.[35] The Oxford *Roland* features Naimon of Bavaria, Richard of Normandy and Ogier le Danois among the barons, but not among the twelve peers, though later texts do include them. Girart de Roussillon is among the twelve in the Oxford Roland; later texts also include Guy of Burgundy.[36] In literature at least, the men closest to Charlemagne seem to embody this idea of the unity of Christendom. There is also an echo of historical reality; when in 778 Charlemagne went in to Spain in response to an appeal from al-Arabi, the Muslim governor of Barcelona, the event

which was the historical basis of *La Chanson de Roland*, it was with 'an army of men from Burgundy, Austrasia, Provence and Septimania, as well as a contingent of Lombards'.[37] Similarly, early in the very popular twelfth-century *chanson de geste Aspremont*, Naimon addresses Charlemagne as ruler over men from six kingdoms:

> "De .vi. reaumes sont ci li chevalier.
> .vi. rois vos servent, que nus n'en fait dongier" (ll. 55-56).[38]

The Norman conquests of divers lands and what Robert Bartlett has called the 'aristocratic diaspora' contributed to a widespread francophone culture of which the matter of Charlemagne was part.[39] The Latin histories and French epic songs both presented this unifying image of Charlemagne, but Latin and vernacular cultures did not just sit side by side. The interaction between them can be seen clearly in one particular text. The twelfth-century *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* was written in Latin; it is presented as an account of Charlemagne's wars in Spain, set within a religious context in that the apostle James orders s the author–persona that the account must be written. But the material is taken from the vernacular *chansons de geste*; the narratives of the battles of Roncevaux from the *Roland* tradition, and the near-conversion of the pagan Agoland, as related in *Aspremont*, are key parts of the story which presents itself as an account written by the Archbishop Turpin who, rather than being killed at Roncevaux, as the *chanson de geste* relates, survived to, literally, 'tell the tale'. The text thus undermines the narrative it draws upon. The *Pseudo-Turpin* was very successful and circulated widely in both Latin and French. It is found in monastic libraries in England in both languages, and indeed this mythic account is found more frequently than the (in modern terms) 'real' chronicle by Einhard.

Charlemagne's myth was thus spread across Europe. Transformed into something even greater than his historical significance, Charlemagne was at the same time, given a specific national significance in France.[40] As Charlemagne has since become more associated with Germany there now seems some irony in the use of this Frankish emperor as a symbol of the French nation, particularly in times of tension with Germany. In the nineteenth century *La Chanson de Roland* was seen as the 'emanation of France's national spirit' and used by scholars 'to find a source of unity and national pride for their country'.[41] In the two centuries immediately following Charlemagne's death it does seem that he was adopted

more by the East Frankians, but by the eleventh century the Capetians are being linked to their Carolingian antecedents;[42] this is most clearly seen with those rulers who work most closely with the Abbots of Saint Denis. The association of the Carolingians with St Denis undoubtedly facilitated the appropriation of Charlemagne by the French. St Denis was the royal saint of the Merovingians, taken over by the Pippinids with the crown; the Capetians were to do the same thing in their turn, so by the time we have written *chansons de geste* in the twelfth century St Denis was firmly associated with French monarchs. Some of the Merovingian royal family were buried there; Pippin himself was buried there, as were subsequent kings of France right down to the revolution, though Charlemagne himself was buried at Aachen. Charlemagne and Carloman were crowned joint kings on the feast day of St Denis on October 9th, 768.[43] While we associate the historical Charlemagne perhaps rather more with Aachen, recent excavations have also revealed evidence of an eighth-century royal palace as part of the St Denis complex.[44] The transfer, in French vernacular texts, of Charlemagne's main seat from Aachen to Paris was facilitated in part by these historical links between both Carolingian and the later kings of France and the Abbey of Saint Denis.

In the *chanson de geste* tradition Charlemagne, the Frankish, Germanic, emperor was 'le roi de Saint Denis' as well as of Aix/Aachen, and he ruled over 'douce france'. The actual references to St Denis in the earliest *chansons de geste* are limited. In the Oxford manuscript of *La Chanson de Roland* we have one reference to the place, but it is a significant one; a pagan boasts that the Saracens will lie 'el burc de seint Denise' (1.973), implying that the occupation of Saint Denis would symbolise the occupation of Charlemagne's territories. There is also one reference to the saint rather than to the place: hairs of Saint Denis are among the relics Roland carries in the pommel of his sword:

E les chevels mun seignor seint Denise (1.2347)

The use of the personal pronoun indicates that St Denis had a particular link with the royal house of which Roland was a member. Paris itself does not figure in the oldest version of *La Chanson de Roland*. Charlemagne's seat is clearly at Aix/Aachen 'in France' (1.36, 1.52, 1.135, 1.188, 1.478, 1.435, 1.726, 1.1409, 1.2556, 1.2667, 1.2860, 1.2917, 1.3696, 1.3734, 1.3744, 1.3873, 1.3945, 1.3984). Aachen is even described as 'le meillor siéd de France' (1.3706). Later redactions, however, have Charlemagne in Paris. In the Châteauroux-Venice 7 version the standard formula 'le rois de Saint Denis' becomes on one occasion 'Li rois de Paris' (1.7620), and in

the Lyon version Charlemagne is once described as 'Karles de Paris' (1.2601). The move of Charlemagne's capital to Paris is thus quite a gradual one, but important in his presentation as peculiarly king of France. The *Rhymed Roland*, represented by these manuscripts, dates from around 1180, though the manuscripts are later; a number of other *chansons de geste* from around the end of the twelfth century, such as the *Chanson de Fierabras* also place Charlemagne at Paris.[45] It does seem that before the end of the twelfth century Charlemagne was, in the *chansons de geste*, firmly fixed in Paris, the capital of the twelfth-century French kings.

Gormond et Isembart, another twelfth-century *chanson de geste*, has the emperor, in this case Louis rather than Charlemagne, hold his fief directly from St Denis, stressing the French royal family's link with the saint, as distinct from the place.[46]

The *chansons de geste*, while presenting Charlemagne as both emperor and king, largely ignore the existence of another emperor in the East. In this they differ from the early chronicles: Einhard, for example, discusses explicitly the anxiety the Greeks felt about Charlemagne's coronation as emperor.[47] Charlemagne's function as symbol of a united Christendom might have been undermined by this. Yet one relatively early *chanson de geste* does bring the Eastern Empire into the text; the whole narrative dramatizes the tensions between the two Empires, and personalises it as rivalry between the two emperors.[48] This is the twelfth-century *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, which gives an ambiguous presentation of the heroic emperor and his twelve paladins. The text opens with Charlemagne at a crown-wearing asking his wife to admire him. She says she has heard of another who would compare well with him, namely Hugh, Emperor of Constantinople. The queen's jibe leads to a journey to Jerusalem and then to Constantinople, so that Charlemagne can compare himself to this rival emperor.

Although Charlemagne is at the receiving end of his wife's barbed comments and the butt of some humour in the text, he is also a 'type' of Christ, seen with his twelve peers around him, and, in case the inattentive reader/listener has not perceived the parallel, is even mistaken by a Jew for 'God Himself' with the twelve apostles (ll. 139-40). There has been some critical debate over the presentation of Charlemagne in this text; the French scholar Dominique Boutet offers what might provide a means of reconciling the apparent inconsistencies by suggesting a distinction between the function of Charlemagne and his personal qualities.[49] Charlemagne's function, or perhaps functions, including his role in uniting Europe, remains unimpaired regardless of whether his personal qualities

inspire respect.

In the end Charlemagne the emperor arguably triumphs, but not without the poet's mockery of Charlemagne the man on the way.[50] Symbolically Charlemagne returns bearing many relics with which he enriches the churches of France, and in particular, St Denis, which receives the important passion relics of the nail and the Crown; the Western Empire gains at the expense of the Eastern Empire. Boutet describes this transfer of relics as 'une veritable *translatio imperii*.[51] The *translatio imperii* actually permeates the whole poem; the translation of the relics is a dramatization of this. The West overcomes the East at every level. This is not to suggest the personal superiority of Charlemagne and his peers, who at several points in the narrative are presented in a far from positive manner; they fall over when a marvellous mechanism causes the Byzantine palace to move; they make puerile boasts when drunk, and they are forced by Hugh to try to fulfil them – yet the fact that they do fulfil selected boasts leaves Hugh at a disadvantage.

Although, alone of all the *chansons de geste*, the *Pèlerinage* has the potential to subvert Charlemagne's symbolic function as the head of Christendom by insisting on the presence of the Eastern Empire, even here, by making an ally of his rival, by defeating him symbolically in the fulfilment of the boasts made by his peers and by bringing back from the East treasures for his own churches, Charlemagne in the end has a unifying function. Ultimately, the emperor Hugh of Constantinople accepts that he should hold his position and his lands from Charlemagne, and he does so explicitly because Charlemagne is 'loved by God' (11.796-97). When the two men wear their crowns Charlemagne is symbolically more than a foot taller than Hugh (1.811). The Empires of East and West, whose rivalry remained a reality, were in fiction united under Charlemagne.

These early *chansons de geste* also put some emphasis on Charlemagne's peculiar relationship with God. Although Turpin formally fulfils the sacral role, Charlemagne is presented as an instrument of God and as one who is privileged by God, who communicates directly with him. In *La Chanson de Roland* God sends Gabriel to give Charlemagne dreams, giving him words of encouragement in combat, and performing for Charlemagne the miracle performed for Joshua in the Old Testament, giving him time to win the battle by prolonging the day. In the *Pèlerinage* God enables the French to fulfil some of their boasts. Above all, Charlemagne has the privilege of translating relics from the East to the West in the *Pèlerinage*, and in what could be considered a more controversial role, from

Rome to France in the slightly later *Fierabras*. In this he is an agent of God, transferring the visible signs of God's favour.

The early vernacular tradition thus continues the focus we observed in the Latin texts on Charlemagne as a means of bringing Christian unity, while at the same time presenting him as 'king of France'. At the end of the twelfth century another writer, also producing his text in French, the Norman chronicler Ambroise, would use Charlemagne in a way not dissimilar to Nithard. In *Ambroise's Estoire de la guerre sainte* Charlemagne is held up as a positive exemplum, against the negative exemplum of the squabbling and dissenting crusaders on what we now call the Third Crusade:

> Quant li vaillant reis Charlemaines,
> Qui tant conquist terres e regnes,
> Ala josteier en Espaine
> Ou il amena la preuz compaine
> Qui fu vendu al roi Marsille
> Par Guenelon, dont France avile;
> E quant il refu en Sesoigne
> Ou il fist meinte grant besoigne...
> La n'avoit estrifs ne barates,
> Lores a cel tens në anceis,
> Qui erent Norman ou Franceis,
> Qui Peitevin, ne ki Breton,
> Qui Mansel ne ki Burgoinon,
> Ne ki Flamenc, ne qui Engleis;
> Iloc n'i aveit point de jangleis,
> Ne point de s'entreramponoient
> Mais tote honors en reportouent:
> C[il] erent tuit apelé Franc
> E brun e bai e sor e blanc,
> E par pechié quant descordouent,
> E li prince les racordouent
> E erent tuit a une acorde
> (ll. 8459 - 62, 8480 - 93).[52]

The echo here of Paul's letter to the Galatians highlights the focus on unity in Christ.

There is perhaps an unconscious irony in the fact that the first narrative evoked is the story of the battle of Roncevaux in which Ganelon betrays the Christians, but while irony is used elsewhere by the poet it is not unconscious, so perhaps the treachery of Ganelon just highlights the unity of the others. They were all 'Franks' in the sense that the Christian army in the Levant were designated 'Franks'; it is here almost a synonym for 'Christian' rather than a matter of racial identity.

The three early *chansons de geste* we have examined were composed before Philip Augustus began to expand and consolidate royal power, and it is not easy for us to understand exactly how 'France' was conceptualised by the poets. The dual identity of Charlemagne as emperor and king of France clearly permitted him to be 'our' emperor in lands which were neither ruled by the king of France nor part of the Empire, most specifically England as, like *La Chanson de Roland*, the *Pèlerinage* and *Gormond et Isembart* survived in Anglo-Norman manuscripts. The myth of the unifying emperor had become stronger than any political reality.

It was through the francophone world that Charlemagne's legend was largely disseminated, though it extended beyond the borders even of medieval Francophonia. In England (never, as we have noted, part of Charlemagne's empire) the French narratives were well known through both the *chansons de geste* and the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, circulating in Latin and in both continental French and Anglo-Norman versions. Charlemagne, king of France and Emperor of Christendom, thus uniting Europe, was part of the insular francophone heritage. This depiction of Charlemagne as a leader of Christians is also stressed in the changes we find in Middle English translations of the Old French *chansons de geste*; some of the Middle English texts change the emphasis in their designation of Charlemagne's army, from 'French knights' or peers to 'Christian knights.[53] This very change, however, is also an indication of something else, the different treatment of the Charlemagne myth in different parts of the European area.

Charlemagne's myth has spread beyond the Carolingian Empire. The vernacular tradition, and the francophone tradition in particular, presents a far

from homogenous picture of Charlemagne's character, but there is a consistent picture of his function as mythologized leader of Christendom.

Notes

[1] Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, in Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, trans. Lewis Thorp (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969), p. 52; also translated by Paul Edward Dutton (ed. and trans.), *Charlemagne's Courtier The Complete Einhard*, Readings in Medieval Civilisation and Cultures II (Ontario, Broadview Press, 1998), p. 16. My research has been supported by a Standard Research Grant from
the AHRC (www.ahrc.ac.uk) for the collaborative project 'Charlemagne in England: The Matter of France in Middle English and Anglo-Norman Literature'.

[2] Nonetheless Roger Collins commented that 'it is not really possible to write a biography of Charlemagne', Roger Collins, *Charlemagne* (London, MacMillan, 1968), p. viii, quoted by Janet Nelson, 'Did Charlemagne have a private life?', in *Writing Medieval Biography Essays in Honour of Frank Barlow*, edited by David Bates, Julia Crick and Sarah Hamilton (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 15-28; Nelson outlines the challenges in writing a biography of Charlemagne (p. 15). See also idem, 'Charlemagne, the Man', in *Charlemagne Empire and Society*, edited by Joanna Story (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 22-27. For a recent study of Charlemagne see Rosamund McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008). A brief overview of documents relating to his reign is given in Collins, *Charlemagne*, pp. 1-15; a more detailed analysis is found in McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 1-56.

[3] Edited by Franz Brunhölzl in *Karolus magnus et Leone Papa: ein Paderborner Epos vom Jahre 799*, edited by Helmut Beumann, Franz Brunhölzl and Wilhelp Winkelmann (Paderborn, 1966), l.505; an older edition is available in the Monumenta Germaniae Historica series, *Karolus magnus et Leone papa*, edited by E. Dummler, MGH poet 1, (Berlin, 1881), pp. 366-79, l. 505; an English translation of excerpts from the text is found in Paul Edward Dutton (ed.) *Carolinigan Civilisation: A Reader* (Ontario, Broadview Press, 1993), pp. 55-57.

[4] McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 139-42.

[5] http://www.karlspreis.de, accessed 23 September 2011; *The Economist* has a column on European politics named after Charlemagne and an associated blog 'Charlemagne's notebook', http://www.economist.com, accessed 23 September 2011.

[6] See Matthew Gabriele and Jace Stuckey (eds), *The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages Power, Faith and Crusade*, The New Middle Ages series (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), pp. 1-5 and p. 7 on the need to work across languages and literary traditions.

[7] For a study of the art surrounding Charlemagne's most famous warrior see Rita Lejeune and Jacques Stiennon, *La Légende de Roland dans l'art du moyen âge*, 2 vols (Brussels, Éditions de l'Arcade, 1966); on representations of the Matter of France in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe see pp. 361-63.

[8] This appropriation is the subject of a major project 'Charlemagne: A European Icon' aiming to publish a series of volumes on Charlemagne in the different cultures of Europe. This has grown out of the AHRC funded collaborative project on the 'Matter of France in Medieval England'; see n.1 above. The volumes are to be published by Boydell and Brewer in the Bristol Studies in Medieval Cultures series. Among studies of the legend of Charlemagne in different cultures see Robert Folz, *Le Souvenir*

et la légende de Charlemagne dans l'Empire germanique medieval (Paris, Les belles Lettres, 1950) for Germany; Karen Pratt (ed.), *Roland and Charlemagne in Europe: Essays on the reception and transformation of a Legend*, King's College London Medieval Studies, XII (London, King's College, 1966); on the Middle Dutch reception of Charlemagne see various publications by Bart Besamusca, including *Repertorium van de MiddelnederlandsenKarelepiek een beknopte beschrijving van de handschriftelijke en gedrukte overlevering* (Utrecht, Hes & de Graaf, 1983); Bart Besamusca and Evert van den Berg, 'Middle Dutch Charlemagne Romances and the Oral Tradition of the *chansons de geste*', in *Medieval Dutch Literature in its European Context*, ed. Erik Kooper (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 81-95. For a broad coverage of the different appropriations of Charlemagne see also Bernd Bastert (ed.), *Karl der Große in den europäischen Literaturen des Mittelalters: Konstruktion eines Mythos* (Tubingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004), which offers an exceptional range of material; it should be noted that the chapter on the Middle English Romances by Janet Cowan, 'Die Mittelenglischen Romane von Karl dem Großen', pp. 163-182, is a revised version of her 'The English Charlemagne Romances', in Pratt (ed.), *Roland and Charlemagne*, pp. 149-168. Gabriele and Stuckey, *The Legend of Charlemagne*, contains a series of studies looking at way the legend of Charlemagne was appropriated through specific texts or artefacts.

[9] Georges Dumézil, *Flamen-Brahman* (Paris: 1929); Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1940); Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, 3 vols (Paris, Gallimard, 1968-73). The Dumézil approach has been used most recently in the major comparison of the two great legendary kings, Charlemagne and Arthur, by Dominique Boutet, *Charlemagne et Arthur ou le roi imaginaire* (Paris, Champion, 1992); Boutet also draws upon the work of Joël Grisward, *Archéologie de l'épopée medieval: structures trifonctionelles et myths indo-européens dans le cycle des Narbonnais* (Paris, Payot, 1981), preface by Georges Dumézil. For a brief summary and apologia of the approach of Dumézil see Marco V. Garcia Quintele, *Dumézil: Une Introduction*, French edition (Crozon, Éditions Armeline, 2001).

[10] Richard Hodges, *Town and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne* (London, Duckworth, 2000). Alessandro Barbero, *Charlemagne: Father of a Continent*, trans. Allen Cameron (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000), pp. 272-98.

[11] Charlemagne had three wives and a succession of mistresses producing both legitimate and illegitimate children. For a list Charlemagne's actual offspring see McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 90, 92 and Barbero, *Charlemagne*, pp. 129-40; see Einhard's description *Einhard, Vita Karoli: Einhard's life of Charlemagne, the Latin Text*, section 18, edited, with introduction and notes by H.W. Garrod and R.B. Mowatt pp. 20-21; also ed. J.P. Migne, *Patrilogia Latina*, vol. 97; trans. Dutton p. 28, trans. Thorp, p. 73.

[12] The Anglo-Norman *Fierenbras*, an abbreviated *Fierabras* text also describes Roland's companion Oliver as a nephew of Charlemagne; in l.247 Oliver is the 'neveu de Charles' and in l. 533 he is 'cousin de Roland'; Louis Brandin, ed., '*La Destruction de Rome* et *Fierabras:* MS Egerton 3028, Musée Britannique, Londres', *Romania*, 64 (1938), pp. 18-100.

[13] For a brief summary of debates over date and authorship see R.P. Green, 'Modoin's Eclogues and the Paderborn Epic', *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch*, 16, 1981, pp. 42-53 (pp. 42-43).

[14] Trans. Dutton, p. 57; see Robert Morrisey, *L'empereur à la barbe fleurie: Charlemagne dans la mythologie et l'histoire de France* (Paris, Gallimard, 1997), English translation Catherine Tihanyi, *Charlemagne and France: A Thousand Years of Mythology* (Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 9.

[15] Janet Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire', in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. Rosamund McKitterick (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 52-87 (p. 59).

[16] David Ganz, 'Einhard's Charlemagne: the characterisation of greatness', in *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, edited by J. Storey (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 38-51 (p. 49).

[17] Nelson, 'Did Charlemagne have a private life?' p. 18.

[18] McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 75-88.

[19] 'Once his brother was dead Charlemagne was elected King with the consent of all the Franks'; *ed.cit.*, section 3, p. 7; trans. Thorp, p. 58.

[20] Para 7, *ed.* Garrod, p.11 'At long last this war, which had dragged on for so many years, came to an end on conditions imposed by the king and accepted the Saxons. These last were to give up their devil worship and the malpractices inherited from their forefathers; and then, once they had adopted the sacraments of the Christian faith and religion they were united with the Franks and became one people with them', trans. Thorp, p. 63; trans. Dutton, p. 21; see Morissey, *Charlemagne and France*, p. 24.

[21] 'When Emperor Charles of blessed memory, rightfully called the Great by all nations, died at a ripe old age...he left the whole of Europe flourishing', Nithardi Angilberti Filii, Caroli Magne Imperatoris ex Bertha Filia Nepotis *De dissentionibus Filiorum Ludoviv Pii*, (Ad annum usque 843.), ed. J.P. Migne, Patrilogia Latina, vol.116, praefatio [Col.0045C]; English translation by Bernard Walter Scholz, with Barbara Rogers, *Carolingian Chronicles: Royal Frankish Annals and Nithard's Histories* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 129.

[22] 'But above all, I believe he will be admired for the tempered severity with which he subdued the fierce and iron hearts of Franks and barbarians. Not even Roman might had been able to tame these people but they dared do nothing in Charles's empire except what was in harmony with the public welfare. He ruled happily as king for thirty-two years and held the helm of the empire with no less success for fourteen years', *idem*, Liber 1 Col 0045D-0046B; trans. Scholz and Rogers, p. 130.

[23] 'In the time of Charles the great of good memory, who died almost thirty years ago, peace and concord ruled everywhere because our people were treading the one proper way, the way of common welfare, and this the way of God', trans. p. 174; *ed.cit.* liber IV, Col. 0076C-0076D.

[24] Matthew Gabriele, *An Empire of memory: The Legend of Charlemagne, the Franks and Jerusalem before the First Crusade* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 15 comments 'one can almost hear Nithard weeping...wistfully thinking back two generations to the reign of his grandfather'; on Nithard's agenda see Janet Nelson, *Public and Ritual in Early medieval Europe* (Lonond, Hambledon Press, 1986), chapter 9, 'Public Histories and Private History in the works of Nithard', pp. 195-237.

[25] Notkeri Balbuli Gesta Karoli Magni imperatoris, ed. Haefele, *Monumenta Germaniae historica, Scriptores rerum Germanicum*, new series, vol. 12, Bk 1 (Berlin, Weidmann, 1959); can be consulted at http://www.dmgh.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb00000692_00183.html?sortIndex=010%3A060%3A0012%3 A010%3A00%3A00&sort=score&order=desc&context=notker&subSeriesTitle_str=&hl=false&fulltext=n otker; trans. Thorp, *Two Lives of Charlemagne*.

[26] *Ed.cit.*, p. 40: 'All Europe, so to speak, laboured side by side at this bridge in orderly co-operation'; trans. p. 127.

[27] 'cum Francie Europeve proceribus sunt invitate', section 8, *ed.cit.*, p. 60; trans. Thorp, p. 144.

[28] 'when I say the land of the Franks, I mean all the provinces north of the Alps...so, at that time, because of the fame and glory of Charlemagne, the Gauls, the Aquitanians, the Aedui, the Spaniards, the Germans and the Bavarians, all prided themselves on being paid a great compliment if they earned the right to be called Swabian Franks'; *ed.cit.*, p. 13, trans. Thorp, p. 103.

[29] Gabriele, *An Empire of Memory*, p. 23.

[30] The textual community of the *chansons de geste* seems to have been a particularly wide one. Paula Leverage, in a recent study, has largely rejected the traditional view of the itinerant jongleur taking his tales around Europe, in favour of a reading public; Paula Leverage, *Reception and Memory: A Cognitive Approach to the Chansons de geste* (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2010). It is quite clear from evidence of manuscript ownership, as discussed by Leverage, that these texts were known in courts and ecclesiastical institutions, but this does not mean that the *chansons de geste* were not also disseminated orally through performance before a variety of audiences.

[31] As long ago as 1865 Gaston Paris traced the absorption into his story of legends associated with other monarchs named Charles, and even Clovis; Gaston Paris, *Histoire Poétique de Charlemagne* (Paris, 1865; reprint 1905), pp. 438-446; one could argue the same for Louis, that the persona in the texts brings together various kings, though in most texts he is presented in a negative way. By its very contrast with the reputation of his father this actually enhances the myth of Charlemagne.

[32] There has been considerable debate about the date of the manuscript, though the general consensus is that it dates from some time in the twelfth century. There are numerous editions of this text. The one used here is *La Chanson de Roland: The Song of Roland. The French Corpus*, general editor Joseph J. Duggan, 3 vols (Turnhout, Brepols, 2005), vol. 1, part 1, 'The Oxford Version', ed. Ian Short. Using the Duggan edition of the whole corpus makes it easier to compare different manuscript versions of the narrative.

[33] 'Charles is an extraordinary man, who conquered Apulia and all Calabria. He crossed the sea to reach England'; the translation is that of Gerard J. Brault, *The Song of Roland*, edition and translation, 2 vols, (University Park and London, Pennsylvania University Press, 1978).

[34] MS 'islonde'.

[35] In these early texts it is not the identity of individuals which matters so much as the number twelve, evoking the twelve apostles. Paris, *Histoire Poétique de Charlemagne*, p. 507, lists the peers in some individual texts. Léon Gautier, *Les Épopées françaises: Études sur les origins et l'histoire de la literature*, 3 vols (Paris: 1880), vol. 3, pp. 185-86 lists sixteen different combinations and Gerard Brault, 'Adenet le Roi and the Coats of Arms of Charlemagne and His Twelve Peers in a Medieval Roll', in *'Contez me tout': Mélanges de langue et literature offerts à Herman Braet*, edited by C. Bel, P. Dumont and F. Willaert (Louvain, Peeters, 2006), pp. 115-28, points out that even within the *Chanson de Roland* there is some variation (p. 115).

[36] Gui de Bourgogne figures among Charlemagne's men in *Fierabras* (c.1190-1202), *Anseïs de Cartage* (1200-1240); *Doon de la Roche* (late 12th c. – early 13th c.); *Jehan de Lanson* (1212-1234); *Renaut de Montauban* (early 13th c.); see also Paris, *Histoire poétique*, p. 507.

[37] McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 134.

[38] 'There are knights here from seven kingdoms: / Seven kings serve you, protecting you from danger'; *Aspremont: chanson de geste du XIIe siècle*, ed. François Suard (Paris, Champion, 2008); the translation here is my own. There is a loose English translation by Michael Newth, *The Song of Aspremont: La Chanson d'Aspremont* (New York, Garland, 1989).

[39] Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe* (London, Penguin, 1994), pp. 24-59.

[40] Morissey, *passim* on 'Charlemagne's role in the emergence of modern France' (p. 11). On whether Charlemagne should be considered French or German see K.F. Werner, *Karl der grosse oder Charlemagne?* (Munich, 1995); on political implications of the Karl der grosse or Charlemagne debate see Barbero, *Charlemagne*, pp. 102-108. As Barbero states, 'Charlemagne was not, and could not have

been, either French or German, because neither of these two peoples had yet come into existence' (p. 103). By the twelfth century, when the earliest *chansons de geste* were being written, however, there was an emerging state of France.

[41] Isabel Di Vanna, 'Politicizing national literature: the scholarly debate around *La Chanson de Roland* in the nineteenth century' *Historical Research*, 84 (2011), 109-134 (121 and 134); an additional irony lies in the fact that the text being used for these nationalistic purposes was the version copied by an Anglo-Norman scribe and now extant in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, under the shelf mark Digby 23.

[42] Gabriele, *An Empire of Memory*, pp. 20-23; Gabriele notes particularly the role of Abbo of Fleury.

[43] McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 75.

[44] McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 161.

[45] *Fierabras*, ed. M. Le Person (Champion: Paris, 2003); see also *Otinel*, ed. F. Guessard and H. Michelant, (Paris: APF, 1859). Aix has not entirely disappeared from the texts yet but the focus is on Charlemagne at Paris.

[46] *Gormond et Isembart* ed., Alphonse Bayot (Paris, Champion, 1969), ll.374=75.

[47] *Vita Karoli*, section 28, trans Dutton, pp. 33-34; trans Thorp p. 81. On tensions between the two empires see Barbero, *Charlemagne*, pp. 94-101.

[48] *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess (Edinburgh, Société Rencesvals British Branch Publications, 1998). The date of the *Pèlerinage* is difficult to establish with certainty, but see *ed.cit.*, introduction, p. xi for a summary of views. The tradition that Charlemagne had travelled to the East was already established and recounted in the late eleventh-century *Descriptio qualiter Karolus Magnus clavum et coronam Domini a Constantinopli acquisgran detulerit...*', ed. F. Castets, *Revue des langues romanes*, 56 (1892), 417-69; in early Latin accounts of Charlemagne's journey to the East see Gabriele, *An Empire of Memory*, pp. 40-70.

[49] Boutet, *Charlemagne et Arthur*, p. 565.

[50] On the debate over the tone see the summary in *ed.cit.*, pp. xlii-xliv where the editor gives a very balanced analysis; particularly significant contributions to the discussion are Philip E. Bennett, 'le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne: le sens de l'aventure', in *Essor et Fortune de la chanson de geste dans l'Europe et l'Orient latin: actes du XIe congrès international de la société Rencesvals, Padoue-Venise*, (Modena, Mucchi, 1984), pp. 475-87; Jules Horrent, *Le Pèlerinage de Charlmagne: essai d'explication* (Paris, Les belles Lettres, 1961); Anne Latowski, 'Charlemagne as Pilgrim? Requests for relics in the *Descrtiptio Qualiter* and the *Voyage de Charlemagne*' in Gabriele and Stuckey (eds) *The Legend of Charlemagne*, pp. 153-167, compares the texts and concludes that the *chanson de geste* is engaged in a 'meticulous dismantling of the discourse of Christian imperial relic exchange' (p. 124).

[51] Boutet, *Charlemagne et Arthur*, p. 448.

[52] 'When the valiant King Charlemagne, who conquered so many lands and countries, went to campaign in Spain, taking with him the noble band who were sold to Marsile by Ganelon to the dishonour of France, and when he, Charlemagne, had returned to Saxony, where he did many great deeds...there was no bickering and quarrelling, at that time and before; then there was neither Norman nor French, Poitevin nor Breton, Mansel nor Burgundian, Flemish nor English; there was no malicious gossip nor insulting of one another; everyone came back with honour and all were called Franks, whether brown or red, swarthy or white'. Ambroise, *Estoire de la Guerre sainte*, ed. and trans. Marianne Ailes and Malcolm Barber, 2 vols (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2003), trans. pp. 145-46; Galatians 3: 28: There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. *New International Version*; see also Colossian 3:11: 'There there is

no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all'.

[53] Marianne Ailes and Phillipa Hardman, 'How English are the English Charlemagne Romances?', in *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartidge (Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2008), pp. 43-55; on the Middle English texts see Hardman *infra*.