INTRODUCTION

The authors whose work forms the heart of this history said they would rather be brief than be boring. It is a testament to their skill that they managed to express so many ideas with such economy. It is a testament to their art that we, their modern readers, do not always notice their effort. The rub is that explaining what Merovingian hagiographers did, and how and why they did it, took a whole book to do, and many more to lean on. This makes me think that Thomas Mann began *Der Zauberberg* with a wink: 'We shall tell it at length, in precise and thorough detail – for when was a story short on diversion or long on boredom simply because of the time and space required for the telling? Unafraid of the odium of appearing too meticulous, we are much more inclined to the view that only thoroughness can be truly entertaining.'[1]

The aesthetic and semantic virtuosity of the Merovingian texts had everything to do with their social functions, which is why this book is not just an examination of hagiography but of the society that created and read it and changed in the process. It takes a wide-angle-lens view of a socially involved literature in order to help recover a political and intellectual culture whose history has been deflated. The Merovingian kingdom of Gaul (which the hagiographers usually called it) or Francia (which modern historians usually call it) lasted almost 300 years. It bridged the dissolution of the Roman Empire in the West with the kingdom that Charlemagne would reshape in Rome's image. But a negative reputation that the Carolingians themselves set in motion concealed what Merovingian society had achieved in transforming its late antique legacies into new patterns of politics, economics, and self-reflection. Hagiography is not only the most abundant source we have for the Merovingian period; its authors were also highly interested and

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[1] Foreword to Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (New York, 1995).

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invested in the way that the kingdom was structured. It is an essential source for the history of Gaul's cultural transformation.

On the surface, hagiography is a literature devoted to narrating the life and virtues of exemplary Christians. Its portraiture may seem artificial – Walter Berschin aptly remarked that the Merovingian *vitae* were not biographies but a 'sweep of scenes' (*Bilderbogen*) – but hagiography was predicated on a model of truth that is different from ours.[2] The modern distinction between fact and fiction is too stark a contrast to explain ancient and medieval approaches to truth-telling. Across a broad spectrum of genres, authors were allowed to eschew the details of 'what actually happened' in favour of relating a deeper understanding of the world, one that they conveyed through a sophisticated use of symbolic cues, narrative convention, and inventive rewriting. *Historia* was as much a sculpted story as it was an account of what happened.[3]

Merovingian hagiography was constrained by the past it narrated, but it was also a literature of persuasion, and the following study is alert to – and also depends upon – the close and charged connection that the texts maintained between truth and argument. A *vita* (the hagiographical unit of one saint's 'life') had to be taken seriously in order to be persuasive. As the hagiographers saw it, the moral-social system that a *vita* embodied was only worth following if one believed that the events it narrated were both legitimate and credible. The pressure of these obligations made for a taut compositional tension. Without it, the texts would not offer nearly so rich a history.

But for early scholars of hagiography, who were interested in reconstructing a political history from what the *vitae* reported, the ancient and medieval idea that narrative could communicate truth through artful representation gave them pause. It was difficult to tell where the hagiographers' notion of historical truth coincided with theirs. When historians scrutinized these texts in the nineteenth century, their answer was sceptical. They gleaned what they could about people and places and events from material that they saw as otherwise superfluous. Some were more sensitive than others to the pedagogical and devotional quality of the *vitae*, but that was often a source of further discouragement. The Jesuit scholar Hippolyte Delehaye, who set the standard for twentieth-century

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[2] W. Berschin, *Merowingische Biographie: Italien, Spanien und die Inseln im frühen Mittelalter*, Vol. II (1988) of *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1986–2001), p. 6.

[3] F. Wittchow, *Exemplarisches Erzählen bei Ammianus Marcellinus: Episode, Exemplum, Anekdote*, Beiträge der Altertumskunde 144 (Munich and Leipzig, 2001); G. W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Berkeley, 1994); R. Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge, 1991); J. Martínez Pizarro, *A Rhetoric of the Scene: Dramatic Narrative in the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1989).

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hagiographical criticism, observed that the content of a *vita* was subject
to conflicting forces: to historical fact, and to the popular imagination
that 'embellished and disfigured' it, all the more so if a saint was especially
loved.[4] It was the mirror image of Bruno Krusch's exasperated complaint
that hagiography was *kirchliche Schwindelliteratur*, a literature produced by
ecclesiastical con men.[5] Whether by clerics or by the masses, readers were
being deceived.

There is no need to subject these positivist approaches to further crit-
icism. As part of the turn to social and then cultural history, historians
have been challenging that historiography for decades, and the conse-
quences of their challenge for the study of hagiography have been enor-
mous.[6] Scholars began to put different questions to the *vitae*. They asked
about the social structures and imaginations of the societies that pro-
duced these texts, and hagiographers' interest in persuasion became less
of a liability and more of an indication that medieval society hungered for
Christian intercessors, whose strengths and services changed depending
on the society that valued them. But these views of hagiography veered
among intimidating sets of risks and limitations. The main risk was tak-
ing the hagiographical perspective as directly representative of society
more generally. Not only can it be difficult to square a *vita* with reality
in the absence of other evidence, but there is always the possibility that
a hagiographer might have a sense of humor, too (as Ian Wood pointed
out in a discussion of the Breton *Vita Samsoni*), and we may be missing
the joke.[7] On the other hand, the only sure way to avoid that risk entirely
is to limit the study of hagiography to the history of texts, and to resist
drawing conclusions about their relationship to the real world entirely.

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[4] H. Delehaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques*, 2nd edn (Brussels, 1906), p. 11.

[5] The phrase originally appeared in B. Krusch, 'Zur Florians- und Lupus-Legende: Eine Entgegnung', *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 24 (1899): 533–70 (p. 559), although it has proven to be infectiously quotable. Paul Fouracre also noted the similarity here with Delehaye's scepticism: 'Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography', *Past & Present* 127 (1990): 3–38 (pp. 4–5 n. 5).

[6] I include only a slim summary here: the subject has received many reviews on the state of the field. E.g., P. Henriet, 'Texte et contexte: Tendances récentes de la recherche en hagiologie', in *Religion et mentalités au Moyen Age: Mélanges en l'honneur d'Hervé Martin*, ed. S. Cassagnes-Brouquet, A. Chauout, D. Pichot, and L. Rousselot (Rennes, 2003), pp. 75–86; E. Paoli (ed.), *Gli studi agiografici sul Medioevo in Europa (1968–1998)* (Florence, 2000); P. J. Geary, 'Saints, Scholars, and Society: The Elusive Goal', in *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), pp. 9–29; F. Lifshitz, 'Beyond Positivism and Genre: "Hagiographical" Texts as Historical Narrative', *Viator* 25 (1994): 95–113; J. M. H. Smith, 'Early Medieval Hagiography in the Late Twentieth Century', *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1992): 69–76; and the research guide by J. Dubois and J.-L. Lemaître, *Sources et méthodes de l'hagiographie médiévale* (Paris, 1993).

[7] I. Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography', in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica, München, 16.–19. September 1986*, 6 vols., Vol. V: *Fingierte Briefe, Frömmigkeit und Fälschung, Realienfälschungen* (Hanover, 1988), pp. 369–84 (pp. 383–4).

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This was a conservative consequence of the linguistic turn. Fortunately the concerted and cautious disciplinary reflection of the 1990s and early 2000s has encouraged more researchers to investigate the relationship between texts and social practice, and to consider hagiography as much a participant in the present as a new record of the past.[8]

This is a brisk assessment, but it is still an act of gratitude. Centuries of suspicions and reservations toward hagiography have been as productive as they have been cautionary, and they have laid down a critical tradition of great depth and sophistication. On the subject of Merovingian hagiography specifically, I would like to make a few debts clear from the start. Most of my narrative sources come from the editions that Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison produced for the Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum series of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Their seven-volume collection of hagiography and histories is not exhaustive and their conclusions are not always correct, but the generally high quality of their editorial methods and criticisms has weathered the century very well. The success of the series had the additional and unintended effect of drawing attention away from texts that Krusch and Levison did not include, and as a result, *vitae* that are or could very well be Merovingian have sat in obscurity. Specialists already know this. But I mention it here to make clear that although this book does look to hagiography outside the MGH corpus, it is necessarily restricted to texts that modern scholars have dated with certainty, which are often but not always the ones that Krusch and Levison brought to critics' attention in the first place. In the book's final chapter, I will review what makes the *vitae* so tough to date and to what extent the intellectual horizons of hagiography can illuminate the context of their production; but in order to offer a persuasive account of the developments that were distinctive to Merovingian society, this book has to begin with sources whose origins are already secure. This means that I do not consider rich texts like the *Vita Eligii*, which Audoin of Rouen originally wrote between 660 and 684, but which was modified in different phases into the Carolingian period.[9] These are

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[8] E.g., S. K. Herrick, *Imagining the Sacred Past: Hagiography and Power in Early Normandy* (Cambridge, MA, 2007); M. Diesenberger, 'Der Cvp 420: Die Gemeinschaft der Heiligen und ihre Gestaltung im frühmittelalterlichen Bayern', in *L'hagiographie mérovingienne à travers ses réécritures*, ed. M. Goullet, M. Heinzelmann, and C. Veyrard-Cosme, Beihefte der Francia 71 (Paris, 2010), pp. 221–50; M. Diesenberger, 'Hagiographie et réforme en Bavière à la fin du VIIIᵉ siècle', *Médiévales* 62 (2012): 67–82; P. Sarris, M. Dal Santo, and P. Booth (eds.), *An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity* (Leiden, 2011). And earlier, J. Fontaine, 'King Sisebut's *Vita Desiderii* and the Political Function of Visigothic Hagiography', in *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches*, ed. E. James (Oxford, 1980), pp. 93–129; and I. Wood, 'Missionary Hagiography in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries', in *Ethnogenese und Überlieferung: Angewandte Methoden der Frühmittelalterforschung*, ed. K. Brunner and B. Merta (Vienna and Munich, 1994), pp. 189–99.

[9] The best discussion is T. Kloník, '*Vita Eligii*', in *RGA*, Vol. XXXV (Berlin, 2007), pp. 461–524.

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disappointing decisions to make, but it will become clear why they were
necessary for the kind of analysis I make here.

Other scholars took like prospectors to the terrain that Krusch and
Levison had surveyed – and struck gold. František Graus' *Volk, Herrscher
und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger*, published in 1965, was one of the
first studies on any period of history to argue that rather than harbour-
ing the dogma of an insulated clergy, hagiography reflected the inter-
ests of a society that stretched far past the purview of the institutional
Church. Martin Heinzelmann took a long view of the *vitae* and has
repeatedly demonstrated their debts to late antique rhetoric and cul-
ture. Marc Van Uytfanghe's *Stylisation biblique et condition humaine dans
l'hagiographie mérovingienne* highlighted how hagiographers' exegetical
practices coherently and strategically addressed a set of shared theological
concerns. Walter Berschin emphasized the texts' distinctive philological,
stylistic, and thematic voice.[10] Ian Wood's studies of Merovingian pol-
itics rest in good measure on his careful and critical readings of hagio-
graphical texts, including many *vitae* that did not make the MGH cut.[11]
Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding provide excellent introductions
to select Merovingian *vitae* in translation in their *Late Merovingian France:
History and Hagiography*, and the collection offers an expansive consid-
eration of both the pitfalls and the possibilities of the material.[12] Most

[10] F. Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger: Studien zur Hagiographie der
Merowingerzeit* (Prague, 1965); M. Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien: Zur Kontinuität
römischer Fuhrungsschichten vom 4. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert. Soziale, prosopographische und bildungsge-
schichtliche Aspekte* (Munich, 1976); M. Heinzelmann, 'Neue Aspekte der biographischen und
hagiographischen Literatur in der lateinischen Welt (1.–6. Jahrhundert)', *Francia* 1 (1973): 27–
44; M. Heinzelmann, 'Die Rolle der Hagiographie in der frühmittelalterlichen Gesellschaft:
Kirchenverständnis und literarische Produktion im spätantiken und merowingischen Gallien',
in *Sakralität zwischen Antike und Neuzeit*, ed. B. Hamm, K. Herbers, and H. Stein-Kecks, Beiträge
zur Hagiographie Geschichte 6 (Stuttgart, 2007), pp. 123–36; M. Heinzelmann, 'L'hagiographie
mérovingienne: Panorama des documents potentiels', in *L'hagiographie mérovingienne à travers ses
réécritures*, ed. Goullet, Heinzelmann, and Veyrard-Cosme, pp. 27–82; M. Van Uytfanghe, *Stylisation
biblique et condition humaine dans l'hagiographie mérovingienne (600–750)* (Brussels, 1987); W. Berschin,
Von der Passio Perpetuae zu den Dialogi Gregors des Grossen, Vol. 1 (1986) of *Biographie und Epochenstil*;
Merowingische Biographie.

[11] E.g., I. Wood, 'The *Vita Columbani* and Merovingian Hagiography', *Peritia* 1 (1982): 63–80; *The
Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (London and New York, 1993); *The Missionary Life: Saints and the
Evangelisation of Europe, 400–1050* (Harlow, 2001). Wood is most explicit about his analytical approach
in 'Jonas, the Merovingians and Pope Honorius: *Diplomata* and the *Vita Columbani*', in *After Rome's
Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History. Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, ed. A. C. Murray
(Toronto, 1998), pp. 99–120; 'The Use and Abuse of Latin Hagiography in the Early Medieval West',
in *East and West: Modes of Communication*, ed. E. Chrysos and Wood, Transformation of the Roman
World 5 (Leiden, 1999), pp. 93–109; and 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography'.

[12] P. Fouracre and R. A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640–720* (New
York, 1996). See also Fouracre's influential article pre-dating that book: 'Merovingian History and
Merovingian Hagiography'.

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recently, new questions about how the *vitae* were quietly and continually revised or recombined with other texts in subsequent centuries – posed by Monique Goullet, Martin Heinzelmann, and Max Diesenberger, among others – have increased the hagiographical source base exponentially by finding productive uses for texts that had once seemed derivative or corrupted, a reclamation they made possible by drawing attention to the subtle ways in which a *vita* was capable of conveying and acquiring meaning.[13]

But the vitality of Merovingian hagiography is so great that its possibilities have not been exhausted. The possibilities, of course, are never exhausted. As historians' interests and frames of reference change, so will their histories. Today, our narratives tilt toward a history that looks to Late Antiquity and to the Mediterranean as a whole, and consequently the history of early medieval Europe is shifting, too. When scholars lifted the conventional periodizations that bracketed the ancient and medieval worlds and de-privileged the history of western Europe, they made two surprising discoveries: first, that Rome left a legacy that outlived its imperial presence in the West, and second, that post-imperial societies in the eastern and western wings of the Empire took this common legacy in different directions. The recent work of Chris Wickham and Peter Brown furnishes two mature examples of the dynamic and experimental world that has emerged as a result of such geographical and chronological readjustments, although as Brent Shaw has pointed out, we have yet to unscramble the causes and effects of the changes that took place between the fifth and the eighth centuries.[14] At the time there was no consensus or foregone conclusion on what a post-imperial society would or should look like, although in retrospect it seems obvious to ask how and why the western kingdoms developed as they did, and how it was that the bland, grand narrative of a civilization in decline had more or less floated past the question. But recent reappraisals of different bodies of sources attest to the concerted effort that early medieval societies applied to their own remaking. To take the case of Gaul alone: Helmut Reimitz's work on histories, Stefan Esders' on royal legislation, Albrecht Diem's on monastic rules, Alice Rio's on formularies, and Gregory Halfond's on

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[13] E.g., Goullet, Heinzelmann, and Veyrard-Cosme, *L'hagiographie mérovingienne*. See Chapter 5 for a full discussion.

[14] For the varied legacies of Rome's political and economic structures, Wickham's comparative analysis is the obvious starting point: C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford, 2005); and Brown shows that contemporaneous conceptual universes were equally varied, even as they responded to a common Roman past: P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200–1000*, rev. edn (Malden, MA, 2013). B. Shaw, 'After Rome: Transformations of the Early Mediterranean World', *New Left Review* 51 (2008): 89–114.

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ecclesiastical councils have exhumed a complex of pragmatic and opti-
mistic approaches to managing and improving the social order – all of it
part of the early medieval 'experiment'.[15]

Merovingian hagiographers were energetic participants in these
efforts, especially in the seventh and eighth centuries when debates about
social organization looked to the kingdom as a definitive unit. The *vitae*
were not parochial. Although they took single protagonists as their focal
points, the hagiographers wrote not just to praise the life and virtues
of individuals, but also to posit a society based on the principles that
those individuals represented, to shape how the kingdom saw itself. They
argued – among themselves and to the highest echelons of government –
for a Merovingian polity based on new concepts of authority, group
identity, political responsibility, and economic value; and to do so they
blended elements of history, law, and literature, in order to makes these
ideas more persuasive and effective.

THE STRUCTURE AND ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK

It is my goal to show that, if we are equally attentive to Merovingian
hagiography's dual objectives of truth-telling and persuasion, we get a
view of Merovingian society, and the contribution of the *vitae* to that
society, that are otherwise difficult to detect. There are therefore two
major arguments in this book, one about the content of this literature
and another about its form, although as we will see that distinction is
somewhat superficial. The first argument is that the Merovingian king-
dom transformed its standards for justice and order, and its criteria for
political legitimacy, in response to Christian ideas about social responsi-
bility and discipline. The second major argument, which moves alongside
the first throughout the book, is that hagiography played a pivotal role
in these transformations by deploying specific rhetorical and cognitive
strategies to effect the social order for which it so strenuously argued.

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[15] H. Reimitz, 'Social Networks and Identities in Frankish Historiography: New Aspects of the
Textual History of Gregory of Tours' *Historiae*', in *The Construction of Communities in the Early
Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, ed. R. Corradini, M. Diesenberger, and Reimitz (Leiden,
2003), pp. 229–68; H. Reimitz, 'Der Weg zum Königtum in historiographischen Kompendien der
Karolingerzeit', in *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751: Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung*,
ed. M. Becher and J. Jarnut (Münster, 2004), pp. 277–320; H. Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity
and the Rise of Western Ethnicity, 550–850* (forthcoming at Cambridge University Press); S. Esders,
*Römische Rechtstradition und merowingisches Königtum: Zum Rechtscharakter politischer Herrschaft in
Burgund im 6. und 7. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1997); A. Diem, *Das monastische Experiment: Die Rolle
der Keuschheit bei der Entstehung des westlichen Klosterwesens* (Münster, 2005); A. Rio, *Legal Practice
and the Written Word in the Early Middle Ages: Frankish Formulae*, c. 500–1000 (Cambridge, 2009); G.
I. Halfond, *Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils, AD 511–768* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2010).

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This happened at a time when changes to the structure of royal politics after an extended period of civil war saw the rise of a ruling class that was at once competitive and cohesive: this was hagiography's core audience.

I begin with the subject of law, in order to show that the hagiographers optimized even the basic structure of their texts to make their arguments more convincing and forceful, which they did by invoking and adapting principles of Merovingian legal culture. It helped that written documentation was a form of evidence that the courts took seriously, so the format of the *vitae* gave their arguments an edge. But the hagiographers also appealed to norms and principles that already had legal force and offered new views of how those laws should play out in practice. Most dramatically, they argued that although the Merovingian kings ruled with God's favour, rulers should be held accountable for their responsibility to uphold the stability and security of the realm. In extreme cases at least one hagiographer allowed for the execution of an intractably unjust king, and other elites, though not necessarily other hagiographers, also cautiously endorsed this perspective.

Because a Merovingian *vita* was at its core a legalistic argument, the second chapter explains how such arguments were supposed to make a difference once readers were persuaded that they were legitimate. Here I analyse the hagiographers' ideas about what we might call cognitive and behavioural psychology. They considered the relationship between language, the individual mind, and social practice, with the aim of crafting their narratives in a style that would help focus the mind and memory. They did this with the expectation that their prose would train willing readers to follow new patterns of thinking, and that audiences would eventually reorient their behaviour and their sense of community along the lines that the *vitae* suggested. The hagiographers argued that their model and plan for social consensus were superior to others – that Christian identity was the most important set of interests, incentives, and practices for ensuring the integrity of the kingdom. This was a firm challenge to their contemporaries' interest in defining the polity principally on the basis of ethnic identity, but it was not a complete rejection of ethnic identification, either.

The first two chapters examine the role that documents and narratives played in Merovingian society in order to demonstrate hagiography's potential to connect with and persuade audiences that did not share their perspective. The next two turn to focus more comprehensively on what kind of society it was that the *vitae* described and envisioned, and they also examine a third mode of argument that the more fundamental forms of communication made possible, which I describe as discursive or double-scope representation. (I take the 'double-scope' concept

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from the cognitive scientists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, and I will explain and justify that borrowing in the third chapter.) The very unfolding of a story, ostensibly about a single life, conveyed claims about the priorities and practices of an entire kingdom through a great economy of representation. Chapter 3 discusses this process in the context of how Merovingian elites increasingly expected kings to consider the consequences of their fiscal actions on their subjects. The hagiographers supported and responded to these expectations by expanding the definition of who deserved the king's consideration, to include royal subjects who were economically and politically marginal. They also insisted that bishops were indispensable to the royal government because they were in an ideal position to represent this large swathe of the Merovingian population to the Crown – and the evidence we have for a burgeoning liturgical economy by the later seventh and early eighth centuries suggests that the kingdom invested heavily in this view.

The fourth chapter continues to explore this debate about who mattered in the Merovingian realm by focusing on a contemporaneous development, the construction boom in Christian sanctuaries across Gaul. I will discuss how and why scholars have traditionally explained the efflorescence of cult sites as part of the competitive self-promotion of the Merovingian aristocracy. I will also argue that it still remains to ask why sacred power was seen to enhance secular power at all. We have naturalized a transformation that at the time was new and somewhat controversial. The *loca sanctorum* – the saints' places – were already appreciated as *spiritually* profitable, but the hagiographers suggested that contributions to ecclesiastical enterprises were profitable on earth, too. Since this was the same period in which fiscal and social generosity was acquiring political charge, the *vitae* presented the *loca sanctorum* as opportunities for elites to transform their personal wealth into indiscriminately beneficial wealth. By founding and supporting sanctuaries for the spiritual succour of an entire population, donors were better positioned to claim political authority on the grounds that they were advancing the interests of the public and therefore the interests of the kingdom.

The book concludes by addressing how the Carolingian dynasty made use of the Merovingians' political-hagiographical legacy. I use two case studies and a new methodological approach to do this. Fusing the insights that research centres in Paris and Vienna have most recently developed, my analysis considers how the Merovingian *vitae* were rewritten in the Carolingian period and how they were assembled and anthologized into manuscript collections. This approach highlights the value that particular texts continued to have in subsequent centuries; it also allows for more precision about the possibilities that hagiography offered to the

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intellectual and political circles who were involved in reproducing and reinventing it.

The argument of the final chapter, which also serves as a reflective conclusion to the entire book, is that despite their famously dim view of the dynasty they replaced, the Carolingians actually found a great deal to preserve in Merovingian hagiography, and their hagiographical compendia and rewritten *vitae* are some of the best sources we have for how the Carolingians adapted older norms and practices for their own purposes. While they retained and even amplified models of royal responsibility to the law, Christian-inflected ethnic identity, episcopal representation, and ecclesiastical donation – all of which Merovingian hagiography had promoted – the Carolingians restricted the production of new saints, a sign that they were as wary of hagiography's power to innovate as they were appreciative of what it had already accomplished.

AUDIENCE AND RECEPTION

The Carolingian record prompts the question: how is it possible to gauge the audience and impact of the *vitae* in their own day? Most hagiographers wrote anonymously, and today the manuscript trail of their work is paltry. Only two Merovingian manuscripts with hagiographical content still survive: a sixth-century copy of the *Passio martyrum Acaunensium*, which Eucherius of Lyon had written in the mid fifth century, and a copy of the Merovingian *Vita Wandregiseli*, which survives in a booklet made around AD 700.[16]

These two lucky survivals give tantalizing indications that Merovingian scribes copied hagiography in ways that reinforced and interacted with the narrative content of their material. Both manuscripts divide up their texts into narrative chunks that in many cases happen to match the episodic division in their modern guises, and the copyists of the Wandregisel libellus also made regular, strategic use of ornamented initials further to divide and punctuate the text, as a way of marking subtle narrative shifts within larger scenes or to punctuate material that occurs in the form of a list or sequence. (Interested readers can find a full analysis in the appendix.) These formatting elements may represent aesthetic choices, or perhaps copies of earlier aesthetic choices, but it is also clear that they correspond closely to the content of the texts and, in many instances, the visual and rhetorical elements of the *vita* interlocked. It is possible that the elements of design helped guide the processes of reading and remembering.

[16] BNF Ms. Lat. 9550; BNF Ms. Lat. 18315.