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« ...*QUIA COR REGIS IN MANU DEI EST...* »:
THE PHARAOH IN CAROLINGIAN
MONASTIC NARRATIVES*

If conflict and competition were indeed intrinsic and undeniable facts of medieval life, as well as powerful catalysts for social change, this is perhaps nowhere more trenchant, more clearly visible than in the case of monastic communities in the Carolingian era¹. From the moment of their inception onwards, their existence was, to a large extent, defined by an arduous process of integration with their surroundings². Monasteries thus formed something of a paradox in the Christian world of the Early Middle Ages. Ideally, they were supposed to remain outside of the system, shielded from secular concerns by the walls of the cloister which was erected both around the community itself, and around the hearts of the individual monks³. In reality, however, they were and remained very much part of life in the area where they were founded, making their mark on society not only by being able to harness the power of prayer, but also by imposing themselves on the social and economic make-up of the region in a very real sense⁴. Monasteries could be a force to be reckoned with. For instance, as guardians of learning, both sacred and secular, the monks were in a position to divulge the knowledge they possessed, thus becoming cul-

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¹ W. C. Brown and P. Górecki, « What Conflict Means. The Making of Medieval Conflict Studies in the United States, 1970-2000 », in W. C. Brown and P. Górecki (ed.), *Conflict in medieval Europe. Changing perspectives on society and culture*, Aldershot, 2003, p. 1-35, at 1, broadly define conflict as « interpersonal or intergroup tension, and several modes of managing that tension ». A study of a very explicit instance of the interplay between conflicts and monastic self-realisation may be found in K. A. Smith, *War and the making of medieval monastic culture*, Woodbridge, 2011.

² C. Wickham, « Topographies of power. Introduction », in M. de Jong et al. (eds.), *Topographies of power in the early Middle Ages*, Leiden, 2001, 1-9, at 4-5.

³ M. de Jong, « Internal cloisters. the case of Ekkehard's *Casus sancti Galli* », in W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (ed.), *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter*, Wien, 2000, p. 209-221.

⁴ M. de Jong, « Carolingian monasticism. The power of prayer », in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The new Cambridge medieval history 2, c. 700 - c. 900*, Cambridge 1995, p. 622-653.

tural brokers as well as economic powerhouses. Through their association with their patron saints, they were able to retain huge tracts of land donated to them by pious retainers⁵. And, especially in the course of the late eighth and early ninth centuries, monastic communities could come to be seen as literal representatives of royal or imperial power, when a ruler would grant them immunities effectively placing them outside the worldly judicial system as well⁶. Especially in the more peripheral regions of the Carolingian empire, the combination of these factors could and would inevitably lead to conflicts, during which the monks would compete with local nobilities for power, authority, and possessions – using every means they had at their disposal⁷.

Added to these local issues were the wider concerns that had reared their head during the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. Not only had the Carolingian rulers become veritable experts at using monasteries to speed up the integration of newly acquired regions into the Frankish realms, they also helmed a concerted effort to impose a certain degree of uniformity on the *ecclesia* that they, as kings and emperors, presided over⁸. This was a major part of the *ministerium* they held, but it was not a burden they had to bear all by themselves : as evidenced by the many councils organised and capitularies issued throughout the empire – with the activities employed at the palace in Aachen in the early years of the reign of Louis the Pious taking pride of place – but also by the large amount of advice they were given, both Charlemagne and his son were happy to share responsibility for this grand endeavour with the bishops, abbots and other intellectuals gathered around them – that is, as long as they would have the last word,

⁵ As demonstrated in the works of B. Rosenwein, especially *Rhinoceros Bound. Cluny in the 10th century*, Philadelphia, 1982 ; *To be the neighbour of St. Peter. The social meaning of Cluny's property 909-1049*, Ithaca, NY, 1989.

⁶ B. Rosenwein, *Negotiating space. Power, restraint, and privileges of immunity in early medieval Europe*, Manchester, 1999.

⁷ See, for the specific case of Redon, W. Davies, « People and places in dispute in ninth-century Brittany », in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (ed.), *The settlement of disputes in early medieval Europe*, paperback ed., Cambridge, 1992, p. 65-84 ; J. M. H. Smith, « Confronting identities. The rhetoric and reality of a Carolingian frontier », in W. Pohl and M. Diesenberger (ed.), *Integration und Herrschaft. Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter*, Wien, 2002, p. 169-182.

⁸ R. McKitterick, *The Frankish church and the Carolingian reforms 789-895*, London, 1977 ; M. de Jong, « *Sacrum palatium et ecclesia*. L'autorité religieuse royale sous les Carolingiens (790-840) », in *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58 :6, 2003, p. 1243-1269, at 1246.

if only nominally⁹. Needless to say, in spite of the lofty ideals of unity thus propagated by the Carolingian court, this could prove to be a fertile breeding ground for competition as well : what was at stake, after all, was nothing less than the salvation of all the subjects in the *ecclesia*, and as such, there was no room for compromise. Another paradox, therefore : the close cooperation between cloister, bishop and court engendered by this Carolingian church reform movement would come to intensify the relationships among those with a stake in these reforms as much as it would set them on edge.

In these dynamic times, the involvement of the court in monastic life on a more local level was a double-edged sword at best. The emergence of the imperial immunities and the Carolingian efforts to uniformise the Church, coupled with the ever-present idea that a ruler really ought to share pastoral duties with the prelates of the *ecclesia*, gave commentators as many reasons to flatter their kings as to criticise them, and forced monastic authors to reflect on the world around them as they were simultaneously attempting to change it¹⁰. Thus, competitions for imperial favour and conflicts over the shape of the Church to come could actually grow into veritable crises of conscience for the monks themselves as well – which, it should be noted, is not necessarily a bad thing¹¹.

Within this broadly sketched context, the narrative output of a monastery could therefore be seen as an author – or a community – taking a stance in one of the many conflicts they might be embroiled in, either to improve his own position, to justify the outcome of a dispute, or to add prestige and status to the party that was being represented. However, things could become problematic when it came to descriptions and justifications of actual competitions, which could easily take the shape of a veritable « zero-sum game », in which compromise would become increasingly difficult as the conflict continued¹². Put bluntly, as the dos and don'ts of monastic life were (re)

⁹ J. L. Nelson, « The voice of Charlemagne », in R. Gameson and H. Leyser (ed.), *Belief and culture in the Middle Ages. Studies presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, Oxford, 2001, p. 76-88, at 78-79.

¹⁰ Cf. M. Alberi, « "The Better Paths of Wisdom". Alcuin's monastic 'true philosophy' and the worldly court », in *Speculum*, 76, 2001, p. 896-910 ; E. Jacxsens, *Learning literature & poetics, and the formation of monastic culture in the Carolingian world*, Providence, 2011.

¹¹ A point already made by R. Kottje, « Einheit und Vielfalt des kirchlichen Lebens in der Karolingerzeit », in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 76, 1965, p. 323-342.

¹² See, for example, R. B. Myerson, *Game Theory. Analysis of Conflict*, paperback ed., Harvard, 1997, p. 1-8 and 122-126.

defined in ever more detail, it became difficult for monks to justify having become embroiled in a competition in the first place ; they had to come to terms with the fact that they, in spite of aspiring to be paragons of the apostolic life, were quickly becoming very wealthy and influential indeed¹³. On the other hand, it is abundantly clear that every member of the elites in Carolingian times had to play the game simply in order to prevail – and, in the case of monastic communities, their survival was seen as vital for the survival of the church in the long run, so they could continue to play their part in order to ensure the salvation of their fellow Christians.

It is therefore not surprising that these communities had developed some very sophisticated strategies for justifying and explaining the competitions they did end up in, and especially so in the context of the monastic culture as it had developed in the course of the reforms set into motion during the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious¹⁴. In the remainder of this article, one of these strategies will be studied more closely, by shedding more light on the way the biblical Pharaoh, that infamous opponent to the people of Israel in many books of the Old Testament, was used as a metaphor for whomever was the opponent in the dispute they were embroiled in at the moment. As will be shown, monastic authors, using this biblical figure to make sense of their history, were also reflecting on the inevitability of conflict in their own world. Moreover – and perhaps more important for us – the invocation of the Pharaoh shows that these commentators were consciously creating a narrative of these conflicts already, which might point out a much broader *post hoc* awareness of the way the world worked – an awareness which we, in turn, ought to take into account when doing research into medieval conflicts.

This article mainly revolves around two ninth-centuries hagiographical narratives in which such existential conflicts have been described by taking recourse to pharonic imagery. These are the *Vita Adalhardi*, written in the late 820s by Paschasius Radbertus, monk of

¹³ Cf. S. Wood, *The proprietary church in the medieval West*, Oxford, 2006, p. 109-139, esp. 115. The discrepancy between the apostolic ideal and practical economic concerns was already noted in the Early Christian period : D. Brakke, « Care for the poor, fear of poverty, and love of money. Evagrius Ponticus on the monk's economic vulnerability », in S. R. Holman (ed.), *Wealth and poverty in early church society*, Grand Rapids, 2008, p. 76-87.

¹⁴ S. Esders, « Mittelalterlicher Konfliktaustrag zwischen rechtlichem Verstehen und zielorientiertem Handeln », in S. Esders (ed.), *Rechtsverständnis und Konfliktbewältigung. Gerichtliche und außergerichtliche Strategien im Mittelalter*, Köln, 2007, p. 1-15 at 12-13, talks of « zielorientiertes Schreiben ».

Corbie in present-day Picardy, and the *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium*, composed by an anonymous monk of Redon, situated in the border region between Brittany and Francia, in the course of the 870s. Putting these two texts next to one another will be fruitful for various reasons. Firstly, in spite of the apparent chronological discrepancy, both texts were composed by people who had been close to the action at the moment of inscription. Even though the commentary in the *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium* (GSR), unlike that in the *Vita Adalhardi* (VA), could be presented with the benefit of hindsight, at a time when the stakes had been lowered considerably for the author and his intended audience, both were using hagiographical conventions to come to terms with very real interactions that had taken place between their protagonists and the Carolingian rulers at the time. Secondly, among the conventions they used featured explicit comparisons between said rulers and the Pharaohs of the Book of Exodus. As will be shown, this is not that special in and of itself – there are numerous similar comparisons to be found throughout early medieval literary output – but what makes these instances particularly noteworthy is that they apply this imagery to the reigning imperial dynasty instead of equating an already vanquished enemy to the hapless Pharaoh. Moreover, the actual competitions that are described are eventually resolved in a manner that is altogether more peaceful than the initial comparison would have you believe. Therefore, using the examples provided by these two particular sources, I hope to show how invoking the seemingly negative image of the Pharaoh could, by nature of its versatility, be used to efficiently condense fairly complex issues – issues which, for example, invariably arose when a monastery was founded, or at other times when power brokers would clash and subsequently strive to retain the moral high ground in a conflict – or rather, a competition – over their position in the world of the Carolingian court¹⁵.

First, however, it is time to dwell a bit longer on the Pharaohs themselves, as actors within the narratives of the Bible, and also, on the ways in which he could be – and was – used as a highly effective positive role model as well.

¹⁵ On the influence on Biblical narratives in subsequent literature, see N. Frye, *The Great Code. The Bible and literature*, 1981.

« *A position of rank* » : *Pharaohs in the early medieval discourse*

To the intellectuals of early medieval Western Europe, the Pharaohs of the Old Testament must have been bewildering figures, whose role in the Bible posed interesting exegetical challenges. On the one hand, they clearly were historical figures, rulers of a people that had frequently and intensively interacted with the Israelites – and even posed a threat to their existence at various times¹⁶. On the other hand, especially in the Romanised west, their historical presence had all but disappeared, having been relegated almost exclusively to the Bible or historiographical narratives based on the Bible¹⁷. To monks especially, the idea of Egypt lingered as the quintessential desert to which the desert fathers would retreat in order to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life and find perfect isolation – but even that image had, to a large extent, become a literary *topos* at best, or at least presented its audience with a picture of Egypt that had little or nothing to do with the actual situation there¹⁸. Another tradition, starting with Philo of Alexandria, took an opposite stance and turned the Egyptian desert into a metaphor for the body, « a symbol of corporeal and external goods » instead of the lands around the Euphrates river, where « the spiritual [goods] (...) having as their source wisdom and all the other

¹⁶ For an overview of the scholarship on Biblical Egypt itself and the historicity of the Book of Exodus, see J. K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt. The evidence for the authenticity of the Exodus tradition*, Oxford, 1996.

¹⁷ Perhaps the most pertinent example in the context of this article would be the repeated descriptions of various biblical or historical pharaohs in Bede's *Chronica Maiora*, chapter 66 of his *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. C.W. Jones, Turnhout, 1975-80; trans. F. Wallis, Liverpool, 1999 (Translated Texts for Historians 29); this text was subsequently reworked into the so-called *Chronicon Universale* or *Chronicle of 741*, and from there in the so-called *Chronicon Moissiacense*, ed. (partially) in W. Kettemann, *Subsidia Anianensia. Überlieferungs- und textgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Witiza-Benedikts, seines Klosters Aniane, und zur sogenannten anianischen Reform*, Duisburg, 2000. On the historiographical context of these works, see, among others, R. McKitterick, *Perceptions of the past in the Early Middle Ages*, Notre Dame, 2006, at 23; and H. Reimitz, *Writing for the future. History, identity and ethnicity in the Frankish world (6th to 9th cent.)*, Cambridge, forthcoming.

¹⁸ M. Diesenberger, « Die Überwindung der Wüste. Beobachtungen zu Rahmenbedingungen von Klostergründungen im frühen Mittelalter », in E. Vavra (ed.), *Die Suche nach dem verlorenen Paradies. Europäische Kultur im Spiegel der Klöster*, Sankt Pölten, 2000, p. 87-92, at 90; A clear example is given in the Preface of the highly influential *Conferences* by John Cassian, where he reminds his audience to « bear in mind the character of the country in which they [ie. the desert fathers teaching him] dwelt, how they lived in a vast desert, and were cut off from intercourse with all their fellow-men, and thus were able to have their minds enlightened, and to contemplate, and utter those things which perhaps will seem impossibilities to the uninitiated and uninstructed... », trans. C. S. Gibson, Buffalo, 1894, (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 11).

virtues » may be found¹⁹. However, unlike such Jewish, and also Islamic commentators, who had to put considerable effort into incorporating the remnants of the pharonic past in an appropriate narrative, Christian authors could treat Egypt as an exotic and interestingly dark place, which served largely as a treasure trove of Christian metaphors²⁰.

With that in mind, it is not all that surprising that the Pharaohs, unlike the rulers of other peoples threatening the Tribes of Israel, could not have been uniformly presented as either good or bad guys. Rather, they seemed to have served to demonstrate, and provide a backdrop to, the full range of human virtues and shortcomings. On top of all that, in spite of Isidore of Seville's insistence, in his *Etymologies*, that « Pharaoh is a position of rank, just like (...) Augustus », one sometimes even gets the feeling that some early medieval authors had difficulties distinguishing between « Pharaoh » as a proper name on the one hand, and « the Pharaohs » as a succession of worldly rulers, each with their own part to play, on the other²¹. Clearly, this posed something of a challenge: a recurring figure within the biblical narrative that was open to a wide range of interpretations, who could be used to illustrate various points about the will of God and the mysterious ways in which he worked, the nature of (secular) power and authority, and the trials and tribulations that anyone had to deal with in their respective lifetimes – to name but a few examples.

Apart from the ones with parts to play in the Books of Kings and the Chronicles, or those mentioned throughout other Old Testament books, there are four biblical Pharaohs that have a truly essential place in the story of the Chosen People and beyond, all in the books of Exodus and Genesis. Firstly, there is the one who received Abraham

¹⁹ Perhaps most clearly explained in Philo of Alexandria, *Quaestiones in Genesis* III, c.16, trans. R. Marcus, London, 1953, (Loeb Classical Library 380), p. 224. A Latin verse translation of this work circulated in early medieval Europe as well: see F. Petit, *L'ancienne version latine des Questions sur la Genèse de Philon d'Alexandrie*, Berlin, 1973, (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der althristlichen Literatur 113).

²⁰ An Islamic example may, for example, be found in the ninth-century historian Ibn `Abd al-Ḥakam's *Futuḥ miṣr wa'l maghrab wa'l andalus* (*The Conquest of Egypt and North Africa and Spain*) ed. and trans. C. Torrey, Yale, 1922. More generally, on the image of Egypt in the Christian Middle Ages, see T. Scharff, « Die Rückkehr nach Ägypten. Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte des Ägyptenbildes im westlichen Mittelalter », in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 35, 2001, p. 431-453.

²¹ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, VII :6 :43, « Pharaon nomen est non hominis, sed honoris... », ed. W.M. Lindsay, Oxford, 1911, trans. Stephen Barney et. al., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge, 2006, p. 163-164. The problem of the identification of the Biblical Pharaoh is exacerbated by the fact that the Biblical designation of the Pharaoh was already difficult at the moment of composition: Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 87-88.

and Sarah in Egypt, and who gave him land and cattle in exchange for the patriarch's wife – whom he was led to believe was Abraham's sister, only to be rectified later²². This is an episode that has proven difficult for many subsequent commentators, and as such it seems to have only really been used in exegetical works, in which it has been explained as proof that God keeps his promises even if his mortal followers may or may not have had to resort to subterfuge to get what they need, or as an illustration that men, regardless of their moral standing, will always seek out purity and chastity as personified by Sarah²³. This Pharaoh is only rarely encountered in narrative sources, and will therefore be mostly left out of the equation here. Secondly, we have, as a more positive role-model, the ruler who made Joseph his King of Dreams after the latter had been imprisoned following an accusation of adultery, and who allowed the Israelites to enter Egypt to escape famine²⁴. Finally, there are the Pharaohs who, between the two of them, made life so difficult for the Israelites that Egypt ended up on the receiving end of the Ten Plagues, and that eventually, the Exodus occurred²⁵. Of this group, it is mostly the last one, the one who ended up being swallowed by the Red Sea in pursuit of Moses and the Israelites, who seems to have cemented the Pharaoh's reputation as a bad guy of truly biblical proportions.

Joseph's Pharaoh, on the other hand, has fared better in history. By accepting Joseph into his household, this ruler has become an example of a good king who is able to recognize good advisers whenever they cross his path – a quality that was deemed highly important in the Carolingian era, as perhaps most clearly illustrated by the seemingly offhand remark by Thegan in his *Gesta Hludowici Imperatoris* that Louis' main flaw was simply that « he trusted his advisers more than he should have »²⁶. Moreover, in spite of his pre-Christian background,

²² Gen 12 :10-20.

²³ Various interpretations of this passage are given by Didymus the Blind, *On Genesis*, ed. and trans. P. Nautin, Paris, 1978, (Sources Chrétiennes 244), p. 180-185 ; Beda, *Libri IV in Principium Genesis*, III, ed. C.W. Jones, Turnhout, 1967, (CCSL XVIIIa), p. 174-175 ; Philo also weighs in on this question, perhaps most notably in his *De Abrahamo*, c. 99-102, ed. L. Cohn, Berlin, 1902, p. 1-60, at 12-13.

²⁴ Gen 37-50.

²⁵ Although the entire Book of Exodus deals with this story, the Pharaoh himself has met his end by Ex 14 :28.

²⁶ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici Imperatoris*, c. 20, ed. and trans. E. Tremp, MGH SS Rer. Germ. 64, Hannover, 1995, p. 167-259, at 204-205; the English translation is by T. F.X. Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. The Lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan and the Astronomer*, Pennsylvania, 2009, p. 194-208, at 203; cf. Ernst Tremp, « Thegan und Astronomus,

this Pharaoh has been given a place among those Old Testament actors who prefigure the inevitable coming of Christ and the Church, as may be demonstrated by his insertion into an oath for converted Jews in the *Lex Visigothorum*, or by the fact that the ninth-century panegyricist Ermoldus Nigellus had put « the deeds of Joseph and the Pharaoh » among the image gallery of exemplary worldly rulers in the palace of Ingelheim, which he describes extensively in his *Carmen in Honorem Hludowici*²⁷. He was even used quite frequently to show how a good Christian ruler ought to behave. For example, the sixth-century intellectual Cassiodorus, in his *Variae*, compares his own position of praetorian prefect to that of Joseph, which, by extension, means that the ruler who appointed him to that office could be seen as the Pharaoh²⁸. In a similar vein, the author of *vita* of Eucherius of Orléans, written in the mid-eighth century, describes how the bishop, regardless of the fact that he had been exiled from his diocese, is received with all reverence due to a man of his stature by a certain count Chrodebert, who thus plays the role of Pharaoh to Eucherius' Joseph²⁹. Reversing the trope, the twelfth century *Gesta Burchardi Cameracensis* likens count Charles I of Flanders, apparently an unsatisfactory ruler in the eyes of the composer, to a « Pharaoh who does *not* listen to Joseph »³⁰. It did not stop with such rather general observations, either : the story of how the Pharaoh would not allow tribute to be taken from the temples in his kingdom during the preparations for the seven lean years can be seen in a wide variety of sources ; for instance, in a capitulary issued from a synod near Thionville, under

die beiden Geschichtsschreiber Ludwigs des Frommen », in P. Godman and R. Collins (ed.), *Charlemagne's heir. New perspectives on the reign of Louis the Pious*, Oxford, 1990, p. 691-700.

²⁷ *Lex Visigothorum* XII : 3 : 15, in ed. Karl Zeumer, MGH LL Nat. Germ. 1, Hannover, 1902, p. 444 ; Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmen in Honorem Hludowici*, IV, ll.2087-9, ed. and trans. E. Faral, Paris, 1964, p. 160-161 ; Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 127-186, at 174. Cf. A. Dubreucq, « Les peintures murales du palais carolingien d'Ingelheim et l'idéologie impériale carolingienne », in *Les renaissances médiévales*, Zagreb, 2010, (Hortus Artium Medievalium 16), p. 27-38.

²⁸ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, VI : 3, ed. T. Mommsen, MGH AA 12, Berlin, 1894, p. 175-177 ; trans. S.J.B. Barnish, Liverpool, 1992, p. 94.

²⁹ *Vita Eucherii*, c. 9, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS Rer. Merov. 7, Hannover, 1920, p. 41-53, at 51 ; for the dating of this essentially late-Merovingian hagiographical work, see M. Heinzelmann, « L'hagiographie mérovingienne. Panorama des documents potentiels », in M. Heinzelmann et al. (ed.), *L'hagiographie mérovingienne à travers ses réécritures*, Ostfildern, 2010, (Beihefte der Francia 71), p. 27-82, at 71.

³⁰ *Gesta Burchardi Episcopi Cameracensis*, c. 4, ed., G. Waitz, MGH SS 14, Hannover, 1883, p. 213-214 : « Ecce venit qui presulem non noverat, ecce venit tamquam Pharaon qui Ioseph ignorabat ! ».

the Frankish emperor Lothar in 844, it is used to justify the decision not to increase taxes on church property, while Liutprand of Cremona, in his *Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana*, written in the late 960s, uses this anecdote to criticize the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus II Phocas for doing just that – contrasting him with his patron, Otto II, in the process³¹. Thus, the interaction between Joseph and the Pharaoh who took him and his people under his wing was used in various ways to show contemporary rulers how they ought to behave, without having to overtly admonish or criticise them. He was as close to a positive role-model as it gets, after all, and as such could easily be employed by authors wishing to remain on a ruler's good side.

Thus, one end of the spectrum is covered. On the other end, we have the Pharaoh from the famous story of the Exodus, one of the great villains in history, the one who obstinately refused to let the people of Moses go, if only because God had « hardened his heart » – so that, as Saint Paul paraphrased it in his Letter to the Romans, « [God] may show his power in [the Pharaoh], and so that [his] name may be declared throughout all the earth »³². This Pharaoh's purpose, then, was to give God a means to demonstrate his power and seal his covenant with his people by effectively destroying the ruler, his entourage and his country³³. All in all, not a comparison that a king would have liked. In fact, as the fifth-century African bishop Victor of Vita recounts in his *Historia Persecutionis*, the Vandal king Geiseric actually went so far as to legislate against being compared with « Pharaoh, Nabuchodonosor, Holofernes, and others similarly named » in sermons, « as was the custom » at that time – and as attested in a letter by Sidonius Appollinaris to bishop Basilius of Aix, such comparisons really did take place in those times³⁴. But in Carolingian times as well, the image lingered – in a poetic summary of the Bible composed by Alcuin, the Pharaoh is simply described as a *rex impius*, an impious

³¹ *Capitula quae acta sunt in sinodo secus Teudonis villam*, ed. W. Hartmann, MGH Conc. 3, Hannover, 1984, 27-35, at 33 ; Liutprand, *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana ad Nicephorum Phocam* c. 63, ed. G. Pertz, MGH SS 3, Hannover, 1889, p. 347-363, at 362.

³² Rom. 9 :17.

³³ G. K. Beale, « An exegetical and theological consideration of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans 9 », in *Trinity Journal*, 5 NS, 1984, p. 129-154.

³⁴ Victor Vitensis, *Historia Persecutionis Africanae Provinciae*, c. 7, in ed., K. Halm, MGH AA 3, Berlin, 1879, p. 6-7 : « Et si forsitan quispiam, ut moris est, dum dei populum admoneret, Pharaonem, Nabuchodonosor, Holofernem aut aliquem similem nominasset, obiciebatur illi, quod in persona regis ista dixisset, et statim exilio trudebatur » ; trans. J. Moorhead, Liverpool, 1992, p. 11-12. Sidonius Appollinaris, *Epistolae* VII :6 (*Epistula Papae Basilio*), ed. C. Luetjohann, MGH AA 8, Berlin, 1887, p. 108-110, at 109.

king, a turn of phrase instantly associating him with everything an early medieval ruler should strive to avoid³⁵.

Generally, this Pharaoh seemed to have enjoyed a moderate degree of popularity in the early medieval world as *exemplum* of a particularly obtuse person – not even necessarily a ruler *per se* – who is bound to get his comeuppance eventually. In the *vita* of the seventh-century bishop Wilfrid of York, a group of pirates refuses to listen to the entreaty of the prelate and ends up getting soundly beaten by the companions – because « their hearts were hardened like that of the Pharaoh »³⁶. In a late ninth-century version of the *Miracula Vedasti*, a story is told about a certain Leuthardus and his wife, who are threatening the possessions of the monastery, and who, like the Pharaoh, are unable to perceive that divine vengeance is out to get them³⁷. In the part of the *Annales Bertiniani* composed by Hincmar, he compares bishop Rothad of Soissons to the Pharaoh « because of the hardness of his heart » because he refused to submit to the will of his colleagues gathered in a synod during a conflict over the right to depose priests³⁸. The list goes on, and extends well into the later Middle Ages as well, with similar similes occurring in the Chronicles of Thietmar of Merseburg and Otto of Freising, for example³⁹. However, thus far, all the examples mentioned did not refer to a ruler or dynasty actually in power at the time of writing – if anything, they seemed to have served to remind the rulers not to make the same mistakes as their less successful forebears did.

Even though we have merely scratched the surface in this short overview, these instances of the use of pharonic imagery in the early medieval period, when taken together, show that the Pharaoh was

³⁵ Alcuin, *Carmen LXIX : In Sacrum Bibliorum Codicem*, ll. 59-62, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Poetae 1, Berlin, 1881, p. 288-292, at 289 : « Continet haec Genesis pariter liber omnia primus/ Usque fuit Ioseph mortis amara dies/Post cuius mortem Pharao rex impius alter/Inposuit famulis vincula dura dei ».

³⁶ Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, c. 13, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave, Cambridge, 1927, p. 26-29 : « Illi vero feroces et indurato corde cum Pharaone populum Dei dimittere nolentes et dicentes superbe... ».

³⁷ Ulmarus praepositus, *Libellus de inventione corporis et miraculis s. Vedasti* (BHL 8513), ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15.1, Hannover 1887, p. 396-405, at 401-402.

³⁸ *Annales Bertiniani*, 862, ed. G. Pertz, MGH SS 1, Hannover 1826, p. 457 : « Sed isdem post eiusdem concilii iudicium unde appellaverat expetens, constitutis 12 ab eadem synodo iudicii exequendi iudicibus, novus Pharao propter sui cordis duritiam... », trans. J. L. Nelson, Manchester, 1991, p. 100-101.

³⁹ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, VIII : 5 and VIII : 72, ed. R. Holtzmann, MGH SS rer. Germ. N.S., Berlin, 1935, p. 499 ; Otto of Freising, *Chronica*, III : 45, ed. A. Hofmeister, MGH SS Rer. Germ. 45, Hannover, 1912, p. 179.

mostly used to comment on the behaviour of people who were either threatening to the protagonists of these stories, or who could help them move up in the world. In other words, he seems to have been used predominantly to comment on those in a position of power or authority – wherever his image was used in a story, it served in part to put the other actors in the position of the underdog, implying that they were in some way, shape or form dependent on the course of action taken by this powerful player. Now, it is time to shed more light on the narrative strategy behind the use of this metaphor, by zooming in on two particular instances occurring in rather competitive situations.

Resisting the ordinance of God? Louis the Pious and the monks of Redon

Sometime in the early 830s, a Breton nobleman named Ratuili bequeathed a plot of land to the monk Conwoion and his companions, thus laying the foundations for the monastery of Redon, in the present-day *département* of Ille-et-Vilaine. Situated as it was on the border between the Frankish and Breton spheres of influence, the initial phase of this community was fraught with difficulties, as they had faced opposition from practically all sides, from Raginarius, bishop of Vannes and Ricwin, count of Nantes, who were wary of a potentially influential institution developing on their doorstep, to the local chieftains, the so-called *machtierns*, who saw the precarious socio-economical balance in the region upset by the appearance of a new player on the field. Needless to say, the abbot and his monks had to tread carefully in this initial phase, striking a balance between furthering local interests on the one hand, and latching on to the overarching Carolingian ecclesiastical reforms on the other. After all, it was by supporting the ideology propagated from the imperial court, that they could hope to formally obtain protection from the emperor, and thus cement their place in the *ecclesia* as well.⁴⁰

The fact that this was, in retrospect, quite a big deal for the community may be seen in the work chronicling the deeds of the first generation of monks of Redon, a hagiographical composition in three

⁴⁰ J. M. H. Smith, « Aedificatio sancti loci. The making of a ninth-century holy place », in *Topographies of power*, 361-396. For a comprehensive overview of the textual output of this (and surrounding) monastery, see C. Garault, *Écriture, histoire et identité. La production écrite monastique et épiscopale à Saint-Sauveur de Redon, Saint-Magloire de Léhon, Dol et Alet/Saint-Malo (milieu du IXe siècle – milieu du XIIe siècle)*, Rennes, 2011.

parts known as the *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium* (GSR), written shortly after the death of Comwoion in 868⁴¹. Especially in the first book, in which the community is shown to integrate itself in the regional and supra-regional framework of the times, the importance of immunity for the community is emphasised. Not only does the first book culminate in a demonstration of the positive effects of having imperial protection, its composer also stresses the difficulties in obtaining it in the first place: the abbot has to make the long, arduous trip to the Carolingian court no less than three times in order to get Louis the Pious to pierce through the objections voiced by the opponents of the new community, and heed his pleas⁴².

It is in the course of this narrative arc, right before he describes the abbot's third journey, when Louis the Pious finally relents, that the author of the *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium* invokes a rather striking biblical passage. In fact, he starts out the chapter with the following little prologue:

« When the people of the Lord were oppressed with the heavy yoke of slavery by Pharaoh in Egypt, the Lord appeared in the bush to holy Moses and spoke to him, saying these words: 'I have beheld and seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, and have heard their cry, and now I have come down to set them free. Go therefore to Pharaoh and say to him: 'thus says the Lord: let my people go, that they may sacrifice to me in the wilderness' ». Also, the apostle Paul advises us thus, saying: 'There is no power but from God; the powers that be are ordained of God, and he who resists the powers, resists the ordinance of God »⁴³.

⁴¹ *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium*, ed. and trans. Caroline Brett, Woodbridge, 1989 (Studies in Celtic history 10). Cf. J.-C. Poulin, « Le dossier hagiographique de saint Conwoion de Redon : À propos d'une édition récente », in *Francia*, 18 :1, 1991, p. 139-159.

⁴² Cf. M. Gravel, *Distances, rencontres, communications. Les défis de la concorde dans l'Empire carolingien*, Paris 2010, p. 590-592. I have not been able to consult the adaptation of this dissertation, *Distances, rencontres, communications. Réaliser l'Empire sous Charlemagne et Louis le Pieux*, Turnhout, 2012 (Collection Haut Moyen Âge 15).

⁴³ GSR I :10, p. 136-141 : « Cum populus domini grauissimo iugo seruitutis opprimebatur a Pharaone in Aegypto, apparuit Dominus sancto Moysi in rubo, affatusque est eum his verbis dicens : 'Videns uidi afflictionem populi mei, qui est in Aegypto, et gemitum eorum audiui, et nunc descendi ut liberem eos. Vade ergo ad Pharaonem et loquere ei : 'Haec dicit Dominus : dimitte populum meum, ut sacrificet mihi in deserto.' Sed et Paulus apostolus ita nos admonet, dicens 'Non est potestas, nisi a Deo : quae autem sunt, in Deo ordinatae sunt, et qui resistit potestati, ordinationi Dei resistit' ».

And, even though he does not state it directly, it seems to be implied that Louis the Pious, to whom the decision to sponsor the monks or make their life more difficult ultimately befalls, is cast as the Pharaoh in this story.

This seems rather odd. Although the emperor is indeed the one with the power to grant his protection to Redon, and even though obtaining this protection would be a boon to the community, it hardly stands to reason that Louis' refusal ought to be compared to the famous *hubris* of the Pharaoh. Would turning down the abbot really eventually lead to his own demise and that of his people? Would not the aforementioned Ricwin of Nantes or Raginarius of Vannes, or even the violent Gonfred or the spiteful and avaricious local *tyranni* Risweten and Tredoc, have been more apt actors to be on the receiving end of this comparison?⁴⁴ After all, Louis the Pious does in the end grant the monastery his protection, and on the whole, the author of the *GSR*, and the entire community of Redon, in fact, seem to be relatively positive towards the Carolingians influence: any overt hostility in the text is reserved for the local nobility who try to encroach upon the monastic possessions, or for the Viking invaders in the climax of the work – not to the Franks⁴⁵. How come, then, that the Breton composer of the *GSR* picked the impious Pharaoh to describe the negotiations between Louis and the abbot?

At first glance, this may indeed seem a critique of the emperor. However, upon closer inspection of the *GSR*, it becomes clear that there is more going on behind this quotation. For instance, this is one of many times biblical allusions are used in the text – something the composer has done extraordinarily often even by early medieval standards. And, as it turns out, there is an ulterior motive behind practically every quotation and invocation. They operate within the narrative on more than just a textual level, but instead reveal a whole world of reasoning behind them, a world which may not be readily apparent to the modern reader, but which may have resonated more clearly with monastic audiences⁴⁶. In fact, the author sometimes even guides the audience along his line of reasoning, by giving deliberate « mis-

⁴⁴ For these actors in the narrative, see *GSR* I :8, I :11 and I :7, respectively.

⁴⁵ *GSR* III :9.

⁴⁶ E. A. Matter, « The Bible in early medieval saints' lives » in C. Chazelle et al. (ed.), *The study of the Bible in the Carolingian era*, Turnhout, 2003, p. 155-165; on this practice in general, see M. van Uytanghe, *Stylisation biblique et condition humaine dans l'hagiographie Mérovingienne (600-750)*, Brussel, 1987.

quotations » that reveal the meaning Church Fathers and other influential exegetes have given to the biblical quotations used – which enable us not only to partially reconstruct the material this author had used for inspiration (and may even tell us more about the contents of the library of Redon)⁴⁷. It also presents us with another tool to further understand this invocation, by pointing us in the direction of Augustine, whose influence on Carolingian thought in general certainly cannot be underestimated⁴⁸.

It is, of course, exceedingly difficult to condense the thoughts of this venerable Church Father in a short overview such as this, but fortunately he has presented us with a at least one very explicit explanation of this story, in his *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum*⁴⁹. This work has been constructed as a dialogue between a bishop and his students, in which the teacher sits down to simply give answers to frequently asked questions about the first seven books of the Old Testament. Concerning this episode, his basic argument is developed along two trains of thought. The first of these is that the Pharaoh was such a bad ruler, that it was, in fact, justified to ignore his demands and disobey his orders. Like the Egyptians under his command, he was effectively outside of the system in a way, to the extent even that Moses had not sinned when he killed an abusive overseer, and could even be « appointed the God of Pharaoh »⁵⁰. Secondly, the actions of the ruler were indeed intended to illustrate the mysterious ways in which God operates, to give him a reason to demonstrate his might, and to show how bad circumstances can lead to good consequences for those who are patient enough to bear them – « the malice of the heart put to good use », as he puts it himself⁵¹. Thus, the Pharaoh is no more than a tool in much the same way as Moses : God has hardened his heart

⁴⁷ R. Kramer, « *In Divinis Scripturis Legitur*. Monastieke idealen en het gebruik van de Bijbel in de *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium* », in *Millennium, Tijdschrift voor Middeleeuwse Geschiedenis* 22 :1, 2008, p. 24-44.

⁴⁸ Cf. the relevant articles in A. D. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia*, Grand Rapids, 1999, p. 124-132.

⁴⁹ Augustinus, *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum Libri VII*, esp. Book II, 1-40, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 34, 1841, p. 597-608.

⁵⁰ Augustinus, *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum*, II :2, p. 597 : « Quod ideo non videtur, quia nullam adhuc legitimam potestatem gerebat, nec acceptam divinitus, nec humana societate ordinatam » ; Ex. 7 :1 : « Dixitque Dominus ad Moysen : Ecce constitui te Deum Pharaonis : et Aaron frater tuus erit propheta tuus ».

⁵¹ Augustinus, *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum*, II :30, p. 608, « Sed hoc Dei fuit, malitia cordis illius bene utentis ; non Pharaonis, Dei patientia male abutentis ».

only to the extent that he would sin in the circumstances created by the Lord, and thus become the « vessel of wrath » described by Saint Paul⁵².

Although it might have been somewhat straightforward by Augustine's standards, this explanation did prove quite influential in the subsequent centuries. The anonymous *Quaestiones super Exodum*, attributed to Wigbod or Bede and extant in several ninth-century copies, two of which come from the north of Francia, even takes it one step further by explicitly stating how « Israel is similar to our people » and « the Pharaoh is the Devil » under whose yoke they had to suffer to wipe out their own sins before they could attempt the journey to the Holy Land – a line of reasoning also alluded to in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, among others⁵³. A similar interpretation of the desert as a state of sin before redemption is, for example, also visible in a poem by John Scottus Eriugena, in which the soul is freed from a metaphorical Egypt where sinfulness is « vanquished and drowned » in a baptism by the Red Sea⁵⁴. An even more curious instance is a prayer that could be said over a piece of bread in order to free it from Demons so that they could not pass into the gullet of its consumer, « like the Pharaoh was unable to pass the Red Sea »⁵⁵. Seen in this way, the sojourn in Egypt might be seen as something of a necessary evil, a collective exorcism of sorts, with the Pharaoh doing evil things, but for the ultimate benefit of the Chosen People.

But times and circumstances change, and by the time the Carolingians had well and truly settled themselves in their position as rulers

⁵² Rom. 9 :15-23 ; cf. for example Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, XV :1-2, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, Turnhout, 1955, (CCSL 48), p. 453-455.

⁵³ *Quaestiones super Exodum*, c. 4, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 93, col. 565C, 1850 : « Israel similitudo est populi nostri, Pharaon autem diaboli qui imposuit jugum gravissimum servitutis luto et latere operari... ». The two manuscripts mentioned are probably from Laon, and are still there : Bibliothèque municipale 273 and 279 ; a connection with the *Glossa Ordinaria*, (*Patrologia Latina* 113), 184-185, long attributed to Walafrid Strabo but now ascribed to Anselm of Laon, is easily imagined.

⁵⁴ Iohannus Scottus, *Carmen II*, ll. 33-42, ed. M. W. Herren, Dublin, 1993, p. 64-67 ; cf. Celia Chazelle, *The crucified God in the Carolingian era. Theology and art of Christ's passion*, Cambridge, 2001, p. 201, n.145.

⁵⁵ *Exactum super Panem Hordeaceum de Aliqua Re Perdita*, ed. K. Zeumer, MGH Form. 1 Hannover, 1884 p. 630-632, at 631, « Separetur ab eo spiritus diaboli, qui conscius est, qui innocens est manducet, qui culpabilis est tremat, tremescat tanquam arbor tremulus, et requiem non habeat, usque dum confiteatur, te iubente, sancte Pater, qui liberasti Noe de undis diluvii, Danielelem de lacu leonum, Petrum de fluctibus, Paulum de carcere, Ionam de ventre ceti, sicut fecisti Pharaonem regem Aegypti mergi, sicut ille mare siccum non pertransivit, sic nec pertranseat gulam eius, donec confiteatur. Deus omnipotens, iudica causam istam ».

of the Frankish *ecclesia*, the idea that a bad ruler was somehow wholly outside of the system, outside of the *ecclesia*, could not be considered part of an acceptable discourse any more. This may be illustrated, for example, by looking at Hrabanus Maurus' *Commentarium in Exodum*, in which he nuances the position taken up by some of the more uncompromising followers of Augustine, and presents a more accessible view. To him, the headstrong Pharaoh is influenced by the Devil, and represented the standard disposition of unbelievers before they have been introduced to the proper faith. The hardening of his heart merely ensured that he would not be chastised by the Lord, and persist in his crooked ways – and, even worse, without asking forgiveness afterwards!⁵⁶ However, he goes on to argue, under normal circumstances, such a chastisement would lead to a conversion, as happened to the Israelites who were chastised themselves by means of the oppression by the Egyptians⁵⁷. Hrabanus does put the blame partially on the ruler's bad advisers as well, by pointing out that the Pharaoh who interacted with Joseph did do the right thing. Sadly, however, his successors dropped the ball, eventually and inevitably leading to the Ten Plagues and the demise of the Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea⁵⁸. In short, the Lord, by taking the heart of the Pharaoh and hardening it, was not exacting vengeance against the Egyptian ruler himself, but actually used him to excise sinfulness from the Israelites.

At the time the *GSR* was being composed, the lines between Augustine and his many Carolingian commentators had become almost entirely blurred, to the point where the Church Father had become a part of the regular discourse. This is perhaps nowhere more visible than in the course of the debates about free will and predestination that emerged in the wake of the controversies stirred up by Gottschalk of Orbais from the late 840s onwards⁵⁹. During these, at times, highly complicated discussions, the strange case of Moses and the Pharaoh

⁵⁶ Rabanus Maurus, *Commentariorum In Exodum Libri Quatuor*, 1,9, ed. J.P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 108, cols. 27-28, 2.

⁵⁷ Rabanus Maurus, *Commentariorum In Exodum*, 1,10.

⁵⁸ Rabanus Maurus, *Commentariorum In Exodum*, 1,1.

⁵⁹ About Gottschalk, his opponents and the debate they were embroiled in, see, for example M. B. Gillis, *Gottschalk of Orbais. A study of power and spirituality in a ninth-century life*, 2009 ; online at <http://udini.proquest.com/view/gottschalk-of-orbais-a-study-of-pqid:1990972741/> ; D. Ganz, « The debate on predestination », in M. Gibson, J. L. Nelson and D. Ganz (ed.), *Charles the Bald – court and kingdom. papers based on a colloquium held in london in April 1979*, Oxford, 1981, p. 353-373 ; A. Diem, « Een verstoorder van de 'Ordo'. Gottschalk van Orbais en zijn leer van de dubbele predestinatie », in M. de Jong, M.-T. Bos, and C. van Rijn (ed.), *Macht en gezag in de negende eeuw*, Hilversum, 1995, p. 115-31.

was explained in several subtly different ways as well, each dealing with the extent to which the hapless ruler was an unwilling and unwitting puppet – a « vessel » – in God's hands, or whether divine influence on his soul would only have made him unreceptive to the benevolence of the Lord and the advantages of having a repentant heart.

There is one recurrent theme in all these interpretations, however, and that is that regardless of whether the Pharaoh himself was evil, the difficulties he put the Israelites through – as a proxy of God – had the long-term effect of making them ready for the trip to the Holy Land. Similarly, the emperor's stubbornness was presented in seemingly negative terms at first to these monks in Brittany, but it was done with the implicit purpose of showing how this would, ultimately be beneficial to the community – spiritually as well as materially.

The riches of Pharaoh's kingdom: Adalhard of Corbie and the Carolingian Court

These themes all come together in the second hagiographical narrative under scrutiny here, the *Vita Adalhardi*, written in the late 820s by Paschasius Radbertus, in order to commemorate the recently deceased abbot of Corbie⁶⁰. In fact, he does this so well that the work does sometimes take on the shape of an elegy rather than a classical hagiography, and he does eschew many of the tropes commonplace in the genre. However, as shown by the rest of his career, Paschasius was never one to shy away from rather more unconventional ways to make his point⁶¹. For instance, the *vita* that could be seen as a companion piece to the *VA*, the so-called *Epitaphium Arsenii*, composed for Adalhard's brother Wala, takes the shape of a classic fictional conversation between four actors each representing a specific world-view, while another major work he most probably had a hand in, the *Pseudo-Isidoran Decretals*, is a forgery so expertly composed that it has taken centuries to uncover its background – a process that is, in fact, still

⁶⁰ Paschasius Radbertus, *Vita Adalhardi*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 120, cols. 1507-1556, 1852; a partial edition was made by G. Pertz, Hannover, MGH SS 2, 1829, p. 524-532, and a new critical edition and Italian translation has been prepared by C. Verri, *Edizione critica, traduzione e commento della Vita Adalhardi e dell'Egloga duarum sanctimonialium di Paschasio Radberto*, Macerata, 2005. A translation into English is done by A. Cabaniss, *Charlemagne's cousins. Contemporary lives of Adalard and Wala*, Syracuse, 1967, p. 25-78.

⁶¹ On Paschasius Radbertus and his tenuous relationship with the court, see M. de Jong, *The penitential state. Authority and atonement in the age of Louis the Pious, 814-840*, Cambridge, 2009, *passim*.

ongoing⁶². Paschasius' two other main works, then, a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew and a treatise on the nature of the Blood and Body of the Lord, impressive though they may be, are almost conventional by comparison⁶³.

Like many of the works of Paschasius, the *Vita Adalhardi* is a work that can, at times, be highly critical of the actions of the Carolingian rulers and courtly life in general. Although this criticism need not always imply that he actively opposed the emperor and his entourage, it does show that he saw it as his responsibility to admonish those in power and point out that not every decision they made would automatically be the correct one⁶⁴. As an author, especially this early in his career, Paschasius seemed to have been inclined to hold the Frankish rulers up to the same high standards as he held his abbot, and his criticism should therefore be viewed as a fair warning as well⁶⁵. Additionally, the author's first loyalty was to his community, the monastery of Corbie and its pendant, Corvey – to him, these monasteries ought to remain the enclaves of learning that they were intended to be, and as such, the life of the founding abbot of both institutions as presented in the *Vita Adalhardi* was shaped by an almost perpetual competition with the outside world, to see who would be able to retain the moral high ground⁶⁶.

As such it comes as no surprise that Adalhard's monastic career starts in earnest when he feels obliged to leave the court of Charlemagne as a matter of principle, after he disagreed with the ruler's rather frivolous marriage politics. It is at this point in the work that

⁶² Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, ed. E. Dümmler, Berlin, 1900 ; The work has been translated by Cabaniss in *Charlemagne's cousins* as well, and a new study on this work by Mayke de Jong is currently in preparation, building on her observations in *The penitential state*, esp. p. 105-111. On the so-called Pseudo-Isidoran Decretals, see K. Zechiel-Eckes, « Ein Blick in Pseudoisidors Werkstatt. Studien zum Entstehungsprozeß der falschen Dekretalen. Mit einem exemplarischen editorischen Anhang (Pseudo-Julius an die orientalischen Bischöfe, JK + 196) », in *Francia*, 28 : 1, 2001, p. 37-90.

⁶³ Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo libri XII*, ed. B. Paulus, Turnhout, 1984 (CCCM 56-56C) ; *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, ed. B. Paulus, Turnhout, 1969 (CCCM 16) ; cf. C. Chazelle, « Exegesis in the ninth-century Eucharist debate », in C. Chazelle and B. van Name Edwards (ed.), *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era*, Turnhout 2003, p. 167-187.

⁶⁴ D. Ganz, « The *Epitaphium Arsenii* and opposition to Louis the Pious », in P. Godman and R. Collins (ed.), *Charlemagne's heir. New perspectives on Louis the Pious*, Oxford, 1990, p. 537-550.

⁶⁵ M. de Jong, « Becoming Jeremiah. Paschasius Radbertus on Wala, himself and others », in R. Corradini, M. Gillis, R. McKitterick and I. Renswoude (ed.), *Ego trouble: Authors and their identities in the Early Middle Ages*, Vienna, 2010, p. 165-196.

⁶⁶ D. Ganz, *Corbie in the Carolingian Renaissance*, Sigmaringen, 1990 (Beihefte der Francia, 20).

the author states « Therefore, despising the riches of Pharaoh's kingdom, he arrived at last as a monk – like Moses in the desert... »⁶⁷.

The trials of Adalhard's life – admittedly quite a turbulent life indeed – do form a *Leitmotif* throughout the *VA*, and it should be noted that his career is paralleled with that of Moses on more than one occasion within the work⁶⁸. This also implies, however, that the Carolingian court could be compared to that of the Pharaoh, fulfilling a role similar to the one described in the *GSR*. However, by pointing out that Adalhard spurned the riches of the kingdom, Paschasius draws attention to another phenomenon, one which takes up a central place in many an early medieval competition. And that, of course, is the question of wealth and *honor* – the questions of monastic property as such, but also how it could be used to negotiate the relationship between monastic communities and the secular powers that be, a relation that could become very tenuous at times⁶⁹.

Whenever this relation is thematised in the early middle ages, it is, once again, all but impossible to avoid the works of Augustine, whose philosophy of the Two Cities laid the groundwork for most subsequent commentaries on the eternal conflict between the heavenly and the earthly⁷⁰. As such, the imprint he left on the thought of Paschasius is undeniable as well, especially since he may have had direct access to the *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* in the monastic library of Corbie⁷¹. And, when looking at his take on the riches of the Pharaoh, one passage comes to the fore : when explaining the events of the Exodus, Augustine also mentions the passage in Ex 3 :22, 11 :2, and 12 :35, where God commands the Israelites « that they ask of the Egyptians vessels of silver and gold, and much raiment » before their flight. They heed His command, and the Egyptians, cowed into submission by the

⁶⁷ *VA* 8.1 : « Despiciens itaque Pharaonis regni divitias, pervenit tandem ut monachus, velut Moyses in eremo, Dei frueretur ».

⁶⁸ *VA* 58 :1. For an overview of Adalhard's life, see B. Kasten, *Adalhard de Corbie (751-826)*, Corbie, 1992; De Jong, *Penitential state*, cit. n. 61, p. 102-104.

⁶⁹ Cf. Matthew Innes, *State and society in the early Middle Ages. The middle Rhine valley 400-1000*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 10-11.

⁷⁰ Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages*, 196-202.

⁷¹ W. Otten, « Between Augustinian signs and Carolingian reality. The presence of Ambrose and Augustine in the eucharistic debate between Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus of Corbie », in *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 80, 2000, p. 137-156. The manuscript Paris BN Lat. 12168, which contains the *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, dates from the 8th century, comes from the area around Laon, and was in Corbie as well: Ganz, *Corbie*, op. cit. n. 65, p. 128.

Ten Plagues and influenced by the will of God, indeed give their riches to their erstwhile slaves, who then proceed to flee into the desert.

What had happened here ? Was this passage solely intended to explain the wealth of the Isrealites in subsequent years ?⁷² Or was it there to give the Pharaoh yet another reason to pursue them, or maybe simply to justify the greed of the Israelites ? If we look at Augustine's explanation – which is largely taken over by Hrabanus Maurus – it would seem that there was more at stake. In a nutshell, the explanation given by both exegetes is that, whenever the Lord expressly commands something, it is in and of itself a good thing⁷³. By extension, this would also mean that carrying wealth is not altogether bad either. Nevertheless, lusting after it, coveting, and abusing it is. This became a main crux of the Carolingian church reforms at the time ; one of the red threads running through the capitularies issued from Aachen, for example, during the reform councils of 816-819 is to teach the clergy – bishops and abbots alike – to cope with the possessions entrusted to them, and to use them wisely⁷⁴. This happened by referring to the works of Augustine as well, as may be shown, for example, by looking at the *Institutio Canoniorum*, one of the major works to come out of these reform councils, in which a large section of the work takes the shape of a lengthy *florilegium* of patristic texts before the more topical rules for canons that have given their name to the text in general are presented⁷⁵. Here, the prelates gathered in Aachen have attempted to treat, in turn, who exactly constitute the clergy, what they should and should not do, and how they ought to behave in a moral sense. Forming a segue between these two sections

⁷² This actually is the argument made – albeit more subtly, by saying that the riches were used to accessorize the Temple – by Origen, in his *Letter to Gregory*, c. 2, ed. and trans. F. Crombie, A. Roberts et al., Buffalo, NY, 1885, repr. 2007, (Ante-Nicene Fathers 4), p. 393-395.

⁷³ Augustinus, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, 2 :6.

⁷⁴ E. Magnani, « Un trésor dans le ciel. De la pastorale de l'aumône aux trésors spirituels (IV^e-IX^e siècle) », in L. Burkart, P. Cordez, P. A. Mariaux, Y. Potin (ed.), *Le trésor au Moyen Âge. Discours, pratiques et objets*, Florence, 2010, p. 51-68.

⁷⁵ *Concilium Aquisgranense a. 816*, ed. A. Werminghoff, MGH Conc 2.1, Hannover, 1906, p. 307-464. The actual *institutiones* are on p. 394-421, with the preceding part consisting of the *florilegium*, and the remainder of the edited text being the *Institutio Sanctimonialium*, aimed at female communities. A commentary and partial translation may be found in J. Bertram, *The Chrodegang rules. The rules for the common life of the secular clergy from the eighth and ninth centuries*, Aldershot, 2005, p. 84-195. This text is in dire need of a more in-depth commentary than has been given thus far, seeing as most later commentators have focused on the « original » part of the work at the expense of the lengthy series of patristic quotations that precedes it.

are two exhortatory sermons by the bishop of Hippo, in which he also treats the problem of clerical possession, based on a case-study from within his own diocese – an addition that was probably intended by his Carolingian colleagues to be a moral compass for those prelates dealing with similar problems⁷⁶. In his commentaries on Exodus, however, the Church father has turned the question around, and emphasises how wealth, the riches of Egypt, may also be seen as a metaphor for how knowledge coming from the secular sphere may be useful for the clergy as well – again, as long as they learned how to use it for the greater good⁷⁷. Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel would use this exact line of reasoning to justify writing a handbook on grammar based on Antique – pagan – sources in the Prologue to his *Liber in Partibus Donati*, composed in the early ninth century⁷⁸.

It would seem that Paschasius was thinking of this as well, when he gives us the story of Adalhard's personal Exodus, which is, in part, also a story of mutual, reciprocal vindication between the abbot and the emperor. Adalhard, having opted out of courtly life, arrives in the desert like a true monk, and has to wander around in a spiritual wilderness, almost perpetually exile, until he, together with his brother, founds the monastery of Corvey in recently conquered Saxony, under the patronage of not only Corbie, but also of Louis the Pious himself⁷⁹. That this is now possible after the many conflicts between Adalhard and the court, is, in part, a reflection of the journey of the protagonist of the *vita*: when he left the court, he was but a learner, but now he is, in fact, the master. The Carolingians, in the meantime, have undergone their own learning curve, culminating in the famous council of Attigny in 822, where Louis, by doing penance for his sins, « was made the most humble of all, who first through his royal pride was his own worst adviser »⁸⁰. In turn, this seems to have also made the court

⁷⁶ These are *Sermones De Vita et Moribus Clericorum*, no. 355 and 356, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 39, cols. 1568-1581, 1845. For a commentary on the sermons in question, see Peter Brown, *Through the eye of a needle. Wealth, the fall of Rome and the making of Christianity in the west 350-550*, Princeton, 2012, p. 482-485.

⁷⁷ Augustinus, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 2:40:60, ed. K.D. Daur and J. Martin, Turnhout, 1962 (CCSL 32), p. 73-74.

⁷⁸ Smaragdus, *Liber in Partibus Donati*, Prologus, ed. B. Löfstedt, L. Holtz and A. Kibre, Turnhout (CCCM 68), p. 1-2.

⁷⁹ VA 65.

⁸⁰ VA 51: « Quid plura ? Ipse gloriosus imperator publicam ex nonnullis suis reatibus poenitentiam suscipiens, factus est omnium humillimus, qui quasi regali elatione sibi pessimus persuasor fuerat : ut quorum oculi offenderant in delicto, satisfactione regia sanarentur ; praesertim quod ejus velle cunctos considerare, ejusque nolle conspiciere manifestum non

acceptable again to Adalhard – or rather, Paschasius. Even though not everyone was convinced of the emperor's willingness to perform this penance, the door is opened again for Adalhard, the « declarer of truth » who nullifies the delusions of grandeur that Louis and his courtiers had had during his exile⁸¹. And indeed, the abbot wastes no time putting things back in order again at the court⁸². Having thus come back into the emperor's good graces, Louis throws his full support behind the (re)founding of the monastery of Corvey: he even implores the abbot to accept his gifts and *beneficia*, and Adalhard graciously accepts. Having both learnt to see each other's usefulness, a *modus vivendi* between court and cloister has thus been established.

Throughout this story arc, Paschasius makes clear that Adalhard bore no ill will towards Louis as a person, as he could see that it would be futile to pretend that « what is done to us were in man's power », because « even if one should choose something other than what had once been proffered by God, it could not be declined until it had first been completely fulfilled and no disposition can be fulfilled unless He agrees »⁸³. Adalhard even goes as far as to welcome his fall from imperial grace, giving « thanks that he would be found worthy to suffer contumely for the truth »⁸⁴. By subtly hinting at a perceived connection between the Pharaoh and the Carolingian court, Paschasius has thus created a subversion of the pharonic trope. The saint, forced by Charlemagne's infidelity, feels forced to turn his back on the court and everything to do with it, and actually gains wisdom whilst in the desert. In the end, however, the ruler has actually learned from his mistakes, thus opening the door for the abbot to make use of what

ambigitur ». The translation by Cabaniss reads, on p. 56-57, « with kingly exaltation he became his own worst convictor », but I would follow de Jong's more accurate translation in *Penitential state*, cit. n. 61, p. 127-8 (« he who, as it were, by royal haughtiness had been his own tempter was made the humblest of all ») and contend that this phrase juxtaposes with the *assertor veritatis* that is Adalhard (see below, n. 80), and thus refers to the way Louis was before he saw the error of his ways: not just his advisers were bad (see above, n. 26), but Louis was himself blinded by his pride. In fact, the whole episode is much more positive about Louis than the translator has it. More generally, on this penance, see esp. de Jong, cit. n. 61, *Penitential state*, p. 122-131.

⁸¹ VA 51, « Sed nisi reversus esset veritatis assertor, interea minime paruisset ».

⁸² VA 52.

⁸³ VA 37, « 'Nolite, quaeso, fratres mei, nolite attendere, quasi quod de nobis agitur, in hominis sit potestate. Fateor enim etiam si idem aliud delegerit, quam quod a Deo semel prolatum est, non posse penitus retractari, nisi primum hoc opere compleatur : neque possunt compleri disposita, si non idem annuerit ».

⁸⁴ VA 36, « Agebat namque gratias quod dignus inventus fuerit pro veritate contumeliam pati ».

has to offer as well – to go into the desert with the riches of the Pharaoh the second time around.

« ...the heart of the king is in the hand of God... »: *by way of conclusion*

The role of the Pharaoh in the VA was thus to provide the protagonist with a justification for his initial refusal to have anything to do with the court, whereas the author of the GSR used him to explain the inner workings of the court, of the emperor's decision-making process – or rather, of God's, as Conwoion puts it himself, quoting from the book of Proverbs: « the heart of the king is in the hand of God »⁸⁵. Could it be that he wanted to evoke the full verse, « As the division of waters, so the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord: wherever he will, he shall turn it » ?⁸⁶ Could he, too, have had Exodus on his mind?

In the Bible, the Pharaohs were among the first secular rulers that the Israelites had to deal with, and the description of the trials and tribulations caused by them posed an interesting challenge to the intellectuals of the Carolingian age. However, when employed as part of a larger narrative strategy, they could be a useful tool to make sense of conflicts and competition as well, especially after the dust had settled and everybody had been put back in his or her place. Everyone, from bishops to pirates, and from kings to saints, had a part to play in the greater scheme of things, and the interaction between the Israelites and the unfortunate Egyptian rulers served as a permanent reminder that it could be very daunting to interpret exactly how that part ought to be played. After all, even though the king's heart was not the only one that was in the hand of God, it was an important one nonetheless: the ruler was the God-given safeguard of the *ordo* that everyone ought to be supporting, and his decisions and actions could therefore easily serve as a catalyst to enact the will of an even higher power⁸⁷.

This, in turn, makes the evocation of the Exodus more than a way to underline the difficulties that the saints in our stories had to go

⁸⁵ GSR 1.9: « Cumque vellet loqui cum imperatore et munus ei offerre, ilico deiectus est a praesentia eius, sicut deiectus prius fuerat, reuersusque est ad hospitium suum dixitque confratri suo Cumdeluc : 'Nondum aperuit Dominus cor imperatoris ut daret aliquid nobis, quia cor regis in manu Dei est.' ». The editor has not noted this Biblical parallel, incidentally.

⁸⁶ Prov 21:1.

⁸⁷ R. Meens, « Politics, mirrors of princes and the Bible. Sins, kings and the well-being of the realm », in *Early Medieval Europe*, 7, 1998, p. 345-357.

through, and how they came out stronger in the end. Precisely because, to early medieval commentators, this story clarified how it is God who determines all in the end, and how everything has a purpose, it also becomes a reflection on the inevitability, and perhaps even necessity, of conflicts. The author of the *GSR* certainly wanted to show how the repeated trips to the imperial court strengthened the community, but not simply by creating a common enemy ; his story also created understanding for the actions of the emperor. Similarly, in Adalhard's story, both the abbot and the court undergo a trial by fire, and, thanks to God's agency, come out at the other end with a mutual understanding for each other's purpose in life.

From Joseph's Pharaoh, who could recognize a good adviser when he saw one, and who had the foresight to prepare his people for the inevitable lean years, to the nemesis of Moses, who obstinately refused to amend his ways in spite of very convincing evidence that he was fighting a losing battle, the biblical Pharaohs presented early medieval commentators with the full gamut of a person's virtues and vices. As such, even though tradition states that the winners write history, using the Pharaoh shows how these winners, these monastic authors shaping the world around them through their stories, were probably more understanding of their opponents as may be thought at first glance. They were aware that, in any conflict, one not only needs opposition in order to make any real, lasting gains, but also needs to realise that the settlement of any dispute was as much a balancing act as an outright victory for one of the parties involved – with God, not the rulers, providing the ultimate outcome⁸⁸. Or, to quote the *GSR* quoting Saint Paul once last time, « only he who competes fairly will be crowned »⁸⁹.

In other words, life is not a competition – but they are winning all the same.

⁸⁸ Also described, albeit from a different point-of-view, by J. L. Nelson, « Dispute settlement in Carolingian West-Francia », in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (ed.), *The settlement of disputes in early medieval Europe*, Cambridge, 1986, p. 45-64 ; *GSR* 1.8 : « Ille vero sanctus uir benigne et placido uultu eos admonuit dicens : 'Bonum est sperare in Domino quam sperare in principibus' ».

⁸⁹ *GSR* 1.9 : « Sapientia namque ait : 'Vas figuli probat fornax et homines iustos tentatio atque tribulatio'. Et Paulus ait : 'Non coronabitur nisi qui legitime certaverit' ».

