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**BASTARDS OR KINGS OR BOTH? LOUIS III AND
CARLOMAN
IN LATE-MEDIEVAL FRENCH HISTORIOGRAPHY**

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Consider the anxiety that late-medieval authors of histories of France must have experienced as their narratives approached the last decades of the ninth century. On the one hand, they lived in a kingdom where royalist ideology barred bastards from mounting the throne and in an era when ideologically-driven royalist historical propaganda insisted that they never had. On the other, they knew that the brothers Louis III (879–882) and Carloman (879–884), Frankish rulers of the West Frankish kingdom whom late-medieval Frenchmen regarded as French kings of France, had been both bastards and kings. Caught between a historical fact and a contemporary ideology that would deny it, they had to decide what to tell their readers about the two illegitimate Carolingian monarchs. This study will document their responses to the conflicting claims of ideology and history, and will assess the significance of those responses for understanding late-medieval French historical culture, through an examination of accounts of the reigns of Louis III and Carloman in twenty-three histories of France written between 1380 and 1515.

Their authors wrote in a social and political context that made royal bastardy a sensitive matter. Whereas bastards had shared in the upbringing of their legitimate half-brothers and had been accepted members of noble families during the High Middle Ages,¹ attitudes toward the illegitimate changed in the late-medieval centuries. The legal distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children became more pronounced, and a stigma increasingly came to be attached to the latter. What held true for the nobility held truer still for the Capetians and the Valois rulers, as the threat of royal bastardy provoked three enormous scandals in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The supposed adultery of the wives of Philip the Fair's three sons resulted in the untimely deaths of two of the king's daughters-in-law and the execution of their alleged lovers in 1314; and the resulting doubts about her parentage may have contributed to the exclusion of Louis X's daughter, Joan, from the throne in 1316. It was rumored that discovery of queenly adultery had been behind the death of

¹Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York, 1983), 262–263.

Bonne, wife of the future John II, in 1349, and the execution of her supposed lover, the Count of Eu, in 1350. In the minds of many of his contemporaries, the alleged bastardy of Charles VII explained and justified his exclusion from the throne by the Treaty of Troyes in 1420.² In late-medieval France, an illegitimate child could not be a legitimate monarch.

What is more, this contemporary ideology was projected back onto the whole of French dynastic history. Throughout the later Middle Ages, the monarchy's official historians and propagandists elaborated numerous historical arguments designed to impress upon its subjects the uniqueness and superiority of the French crown. Some of them applied to the history of the monarchy as an institution, such as the dynastic continuity they held to have always characterized the royal succession, the piety and religious orthodoxy they held France's Most Christian kings ceaselessly to have exemplified, and the just and defensive wars in which they stated the kings only and ever to have engaged. Others applied to the history of the royal line itself. Colette Beaune has described and catalogued the series of royalist historical propaganda themes that constituted what she termed a "political theology of the royal bloodline."³ The late-medieval monarchy's propagandists characterized the bloodline of the French kings as continuous, perpetual, and inherently holy. They also held it never to have been sullied by illegitimacy.

Beaune dates the appearance of the notion that the French royal line had forever been free of bastardy to the reign of Philip the Fair (1285–1314).⁴ The launching of this historical propaganda theme at this time was not accidental, for it was heightened fear and rejection of royal bastardy in the present that prompted a backlash against it in the past. Just as suspicions about any fourteenth- or fifteenth-century monarch's birth could—and, in the case of Charles VII, did—cast doubt on the legitimacy of his reign, so would the bastardy of one or more of his predecessors

²For an overview of this series of events and an analysis of their significance, see Colette Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France*, ed. Frederic L. Cheyette, trans. Susan Ross Huston (Berkeley, 1991), 183–186. On the events of 1314 and 1316 see, respectively, Joseph R. Strayer, *The Reign of Philip the Fair* (Princeton, 1980), 19, and Charles T. Wood, "Queens, Queens, and Kingship: An Inquiry into Theories of Royal Legitimacy in Late Medieval England and France," in *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages. Essays in Honor of Joseph R. Strayer*, ed. W.C. Jordan, B. McNab, and T.F. Ruiz (Princeton, 1976), 387–400, 562–566. On the events of 1349–1350, see Raymond Cazelles, *La Société politique et la crise de la royauté sous Philippe de Valois* (Paris, 1958), 247–252. The supposed bastardy of Charles VII was an important plank in English propaganda in France, on which see J.W. McKenna, "Henry VI of England and the Dual Monarchy: Aspects of Royal Political Propaganda, 1422-1432," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 145–162.

³Beaune, 181–193.

⁴*Ibid.*, 183.

both retroactively have delegitimized their reigns and sullied the pedigree of their late-medieval descendants. In short, once, and because, royal bastardy became ideologically unacceptable in the present, it became ideologically impossible to admit to in the past.

Consequently, as Beaune demonstrates, its absence from French dynastic history became a commonplace repeatedly asserted by the monarchy's propagandists. Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, they insisted that "the sacred blood of kings from one generation to the next...has not known a single bastard," that "adultery cannot engender a king of France," that the "blood of France is passed on from generation to generation without intruders." According to an important body of royalist historical propaganda, bastardy had never figured in French dynastic history.⁵

Like many other themes of royalist historical propaganda, this one had the inconvenience of being false. Notably, it flew in the face of the fact that there had been bastards, not just in the royal genealogy, but on the throne itself. While modern historians generally describe ninth-century Carolingians who reigned in what would later become France as Frankish kings of the West Frankish kingdom, all late-medieval historians anachronistically regarded them as French kings of France. Such was the case with Louis III (879–882) and Carloman (879–884), the two sons of Louis II the Stammerer by his concubine and eventual first wife, Ansgard. Despite the fact that contemporaries contested their right to rule on the basis of their birth, the two bastards were crowned and anointed upon the death of their father in 879, the same year in which Louis II's second wife gave birth to a posthumous and indisputably legitimate son, the future Charles the Simple. The latter's illegitimate half-brothers reigned together until Louis III's death in 882, and Carloman then reigned alone until his own death in 884. He was succeeded by Charles the Fat (884–887), Odo, Count of Paris (888–898), and, finally, Charles the Simple, who was not crowned and anointed until 893 and who effectively ruled the kingdom only after the death of Odo in 898.⁶

Late-medieval authors of histories of France were quite familiar with these facts. Consequently, they faced a dilemma in chronicling the reigns of Louis III and Carloman. On the one hand, they wrote against the backdrop of social development that made their illegitimacy distasteful, a series of contemporary controversies that made it a current issue, and a royalist ideology that stated it was impossible. On the other, they knew that what contemporary ideology prohibited in the fourteenth and

⁵For these and further examples, see *ibid.*, 183–187.

⁶For brief but authoritative narratives of these events, see Jean Dunbabin, *France in the Making, 843-1180* (Oxford, 1985), 27–30, and Pierre Riche, *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe*, trans. Michael Idomir Allen (Philadelphia, 1993), 211–221, 232–238, 246–256.

fifteenth centuries, and what royalist propaganda claimed never had happened before then, had indeed occurred in the ninth century. To analyze the accounts of the reigns of Louis III and Carloman in twenty-three histories of France written between the accession of Charles VI (1380) and the death of Louis XII (1515) is to assess how a considerable number of them responded to these conflicting pressures of ideology and history. For the light that their accounts shed on late-medieval French historical culture, they merit a detailed exposition.⁷

Royalist ideology triumphed in thirteen of the twenty-three histories of France under consideration. In different ways, their authors handled ninth-century facts, or their narratives of those facts, in such a manner as to present their readers a dynastic past free of monarchs of illegitimate birth. One means to that end was to inform readers that Louis III and Carloman had been kings, but not that they had been bastards. Six of the thirteen historians used an array of devices implicitly to legitimize the two monarchs.

Two of the six simply wrote nothing about their parentage. Shortly after 1380, the author of the verse chronicle of the French kings known as the *Dit des Roys* stated only that, by his count, Louis III and Carloman were the thirty-second and thirty-third kings of France.⁸ Similarly, in a very summary treatment of the Carolingian dynasty written between 1449 and 1453, the author of the history of France contained in B.N., n.a., fr. 4811, simply listed them as having reigned after Louis II and before Charles the Fat.⁹ While it may have been a desire for brevity rather than a will to deliberate suppression that led both historians not to mention the kings' parentage, it remains a fact that both gave readers no indication of their illegitimate birth.

While some may have employed omission, others seem to have opted for commission; three of the historians who presented Louis III and Carloman as kings but not as bastards informed their readers only that they were sons of Louis II. Writing between 1380 and 1388, the author of

⁷Subsequent citations of manuscripts give the following information, in the following order: the Bibliothèque Nationale catalogue number of the cited manuscript; the title of the cited history or, if it is untitled, its *incipit*; the foliation in cases where the history in question is not the sole item in the cited manuscript; the foliation for the cited passage. For a full treatment of the dates, authorship, and manuscripts of the twenty-three histories of France in question, as well as for bibliography on those that have received scholarly attention, see Sanford Zale, "The Sources," chap. 2 in "Unofficial Histories of France in the Late Middle Ages" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1994).

⁸B.N., fr. 1707 (*Dit des Roys*, fols. 30–37), fol. 34v.: "Du XXXIIe souviengne / Loys ot nom chinq ans regna / Les francois onques ne greva / Le XXXIIIe charlon / VI. ans regna bien le sct on."

⁹B.N., n.a. fr. 4811 (*Les Chroniques de france especialement icelles advenues en cettuy temps*), fol. 5v.: "Loys le mal parlant Et ainsi estout denomme pour la chose quil besgoyoit Louis III et Caroman et Charles le Gros...."

the chronicle of the French kings contained in B.N., fr. 4948 (fols. 96–98) identified Carloman as Louis II's son and mistakenly described Louis III as Carloman's.¹⁰ The royal notary and secretary Noël de Fribois related the same partial truth about Carloman's parentage and the same error about Louis III's in the *Abrégé des Chroniques de France* that he completed in 1459.¹¹ Shortly before 1478, the author of the history of France contained in B.N., fr. 10137 (fols. 1–60v.), correctly identified Louis, Carloman, and Charles the Simple as sons of Louis II and chronicled their reigns as kings of France without explaining that they did not all issue from the same legitimate marriage.¹² Because they stated simple biological facts rather than more complex genealogical ones, these historians' works presented Louis and Carloman as kings of legitimate birth.

Finally, one historian used a third and more disingenuous means to the same end. Writing between 1461 and 1483, the author of B.N., fr. 5734 (fols. 93–111v.), one of the many and varied versions of the history of France known by the *incipit* "A tous nobles," stated that, upon his death, Louis II "left his wife pregnant with a son who was called Charles the Simple. And on this account his two brothers, Louis and Carloman, reigned together, and they were not all born of one marriage."¹³ One cannot help but be impressed by his craft. Since Louis, Carloman, and Charles the Simple were indeed half-brothers "not all born of one marriage" of Louis II, the historian's carefully chosen words allowed him to avoid genealogical falsehoods even as they masked the fact that Louis and Carloman were not born of a legitimate marriage.

If one way to purge the dynastic record of bastard monarchs was to obscure their illegitimate birth, another was to deny that Louis III and Carloman had been kings of France. While six of the historians under

¹⁰B.N., fr. 4948 (*Cy apres fait mencion de tous les roys de france combien ilz regnerent*, fols. 96–98), fol. 96v.: "Charles [*i.e.*, Carloman] filz dudit loys [II]. cinq ans. Eudes duc de bourgne IX ans pour loys filz dudit charles..."

¹¹B.N., fr. 1233 (*Abrégé des Chroniques de France*, fols. 84–127), fol. 96v.A: "Charles [*i.e.*, Carloman] filz dudit loys le baube regna cinq ans... Loys filz dudit charles fut apres..."

¹²B.N., fr. 10137 (*Le narre des faiz et gestes des francoys selon les croniques de france qui sont a saint denis en france, extrait en brief du contenu en icelles*, fols. 1–60v.), fols. 17–18r.. The author noted that Louis II left two children named Louis and Carloman, that they were crowned, and that they reigned: "...et [Louis II] laissa deux enfans... Lesdiz deux enfans avoient nom Loys et Charlemaigne [*i.e.*, Carloman] ...Lesdiz enfans furent hastivement couronnez roys de france... Charles [*i.e.*, Carloman] filz loys le baube Apres la mort dudit loys son frere fut roy de france..." (fols. 17rv.). Later, he chronicled the posthumous birth of Charles the Simple and his reign: "...et [Louis II] laissa ung enfant ou bersel qui fut appelle Charles le simple... Charles le simple apres la mort oeldes fut fait roy..." (fol. 18r.). In both cases, he noted only that Louis II was the father of the monarchs in question.

¹³B.N., fr. 5734 (*incipit*: "A tous nobles," fols. 93–111v.), fol. 102r.: "Et [Louis II] laissa sa femme grosse dun filz qui charles le simle fu appelle. Et pour ce regnerent ces II. freres tous ensemble loys et charlemant et nestoient pas tous ensemble dun mariage."

consideration legitimized their birth, seven others used a variety of revisionist devices to delegitimize their kingship.

On the grounds that Charles the Simple, as the legitimate son of Louis II, had automatically succeeded to his father's throne, two of the seven presented Louis and Carloman as regents who had "held" the throne for their youthful half-brother. Writing between 1384 and 1422, the author of the history of France known as the *Chronique anonyme finissant en 1383* noted in his chapter on Louis III and Carloman that "the illegitimate sons of King Louis the Stammerer...reigned and held the government of France for five years" after the death of their father.¹⁴ On the one hand, his use of the verb "to reign" could be taken to indicate the legitimacy of their kingship. On the other, he qualified it with the phrase "held the government," and he went on more clearly to posit Louis and Carloman as regents in his chapter on Charles the Simple. There, he explained the fact that Charles was not crowned until well after his father's death by stating that "Charles the Simple, son of King Louis the Stammerer, on account of whose youth the kingdom had been governed by several abovementioned persons, being nineteen years of age, was crowned and ordained king of France." Inasmuch as Louis and Carloman were among the "abovementioned persons," he presented them not as kings, but as "governors."¹⁵ Indeed, that this historian viewed them as such is further indicated by the regnal numbers that he assigned to later monarchs named Louis. Some medieval historians who did not regard Louis III as a rightful king referred to subsequent monarchs who bore that name by numbers one lower than those by which they are traditionally known. The author of the *Chronique anonyme finissant en 1383* adhered to this practice, qualifying Louis IV d'Outremer as "Louis III," Louis V as "Louis IV," and so on.¹⁶ He took note of Louis and Carloman as bastard "governors," but not as bastard kings.

Writing between 1444 and 1461, the author of the version of "A tous nobles" contained in B.N., fr. 4991, presented them likewise. Having

¹⁴B.N., lat. 5027 (*Chronique anonyme finissant en 1383*, fols. 67–109), fol. 71r.: "Loys et charlemant...filz du roy loys le begue non legitimez...les dis loys et charlemant regnerent et aurent le gouvernement de france par V. ans."

¹⁵B.N., lat. 5027, fol. 71v.: "Charles le simple filz du roy loys le begue pour la jeunesse duquel le royaume avoit este gouverne par aucuns dessusdiz. lui estant en laage de XIX ans fut couronne et ordonne en roy de france..." The "abovementioned persons" referred to Louis III, Carloman, Charles the Fat, and Odo.

¹⁶Michel François, "Les Rois de France et les traditions de l'abbaye de Saint-Denis à la fin du XVe siècle," in *Mélanges dédiés à la mémoire de Félix Grat*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1946–49), 1:371, described this practice and the reasoning behind it. While the author of the *Chronique anonyme finissant en 1383* did not attach regnal numbers to Louis VII, Saint Louis IX, and Louis X, he referred to Louis IV d'Outremer as "Loys le tiers du nom" (B.N., lat. 5027, fol. 72v.), to Louis V as "Loys le quart" (fol. 72v.), to Louis VI as "Loys le gros Ve de nom" (fol. 73v.), and to Louis VIII as "Loys VIIme" (fol. 80r.).

noted that Louis II “left his wife pregnant with a son who was named Charles the Simple,” he went on to state that “on this account, by the ordinance of the barons, Charles [that is, Carloman] and Louis, bastard children of King Charles the Bald [*sic*], held the government of the crown and of the kingdom for their brother Louis [*sic*] the Simple.” While either the author or a copyist made two genealogical misstatements, the former’s purport is clear. Rather than reigning as kings, Louis and Carloman had merely governed in the name of the young Charles the Simple during the first years of his reign. Indeed, this revisionist notion was represented graphically in the painted genealogical tree of the French kings, including portraits of each of them, that adorned the text of “A tous nobles” in B.N., fr. 4991. Whereas the illustrator routinely depicted French monarchs wearing a crown and carrying a scepter, he portrayed Louis III and Carloman without the scepter and with the crown carried not on their heads, but in their hands. They had, literally, “held” it for Charles the Simple.¹⁷

Their status suffered worse deterioration yet. Two of the historians who denied the kingship of Louis III and Carloman presented them as usurpers. One, composing between 1479 and 1483 the chronicle of the French kings contained in B.N., lat. 5195 (fols. 8–24v.), did so implicitly. He mentioned Louis and Carloman only in his chapter on Charles the Simple, stated that the brothers “had themselves crowned” during his reign, and emphasized that Charles’s reign had begun before their coronation and had continued after their deaths.¹⁸ Thus, he presented Louis and Carloman not as Charles the Simple’s “governors,” but as his rivals. Far from “holding” the crown and exercising its authority on behalf of its rightful possessor, Louis and Carloman were usurpers who had sought to strip it from him.

Writing between 1488 and 1498, the author of the history of France contained in B.N., fr. 5704, more explicitly presented them as such. He informed his readers that “Charles [the Simple] was crowned king of France by the lords, but because he was so young Louis the

¹⁷B.N., fr. 4991 (*incipit*: “A tous nobles”), fol. 9v.A: “Mais il [Louis II] laissa sa femme grosse dun filz qui ot nom charles le simple. Et pource par lordonnance des barons Charles et loys enfens bastars du roy charles le chaive eurent le gouvernement de la coronne et du royaume cinq ans pour leur frere loys le simple.” Of the fifty-nine French kings portrayed by the illustrator, only Louis III (fol. 9v.), Carloman (fol. 9v.), Odo, and Ralph of Burgundy do not both bear the scepter and wear the crown on their heads. Louis, Carloman, and Odo are depicted without a scepter but with the crown in their hands, and Ralph is portrayed with the scepter but without the crown.

¹⁸B.N., lat. 5195 (*La genealogie des roys de france et ducz de normendie*, fols. 8–24v.), fol. 11r.: “Charles le simple filz dudit loys regna XXVII ans...durant le temps de cedit roy icy. pour quil fut couronne roy jeune enfant. charlemaigne et loys faignant filz dudit loys le begue. se firent couronner roys a ferrieres en gastinois, les quelz ne regnerent que environ cinq ans. et moururent long temps devant le roy charles le simple.”

bastard...usurped the lordship of the crown of France and occupied the kingdom until 884 [sic], when he died. And after him, his brother Carloman also usurped the crown.”¹⁹ As if his narrative had failed to indicate their status sufficiently, he went on to editorialize against Louis and Carloman, insisting, “All the abovementioned persons who came after Louis the Stammerer, until King Charles the Simple, are not at all considered kings of France, for they usurped the crown and held it by force, without right or valid title, during the childhood of the said Charles, who was the true and legitimate king.”²⁰ Putting this principle into practice, he referred to subsequent monarchs named Louis by regnal numbers one lower than those by which they are traditionally known.²¹

While two historians reduced them to regents and two branded them as usurpers, it appears that three others sought to deprive Louis III and Carloman of “true and legitimate” kingship by consigning them to oblivion. Such seems to have been the intention of Pierre Choynet, the physician-astrologer of Louis XI who included an account of French history in his *Rosier des Guerres*, the manual of the mirror-of-princes genre that he wrote in 1481–82 for the instruction of the future Charles VIII.²² Choynet stated that “Louis and Carloman, sons of King Louis the Stammerer, are not at all taken into account [that is, as kings of France] in this chronicle, because they were born of his concubine, as it appears at the year 880.”²³ At that point in his work, he wrote, “In the year 880, the

¹⁹B.N., fr. 5704 (*incipit*: “Cy sensuyt la generation de la bible qui comprend dadam jusques au deluge...”), fol. 32r.: “...lequel Charles [the Simple] fut couronne roy de France par les seigneurs. mais pource quil estoit si jeune loys le bastard dont on parlera cy dessus usurpa la seigneurie de la coronne de france et occupa le royaume jusques a lan huyt cens quatre vings et quatre. quil mourut. Et apres son frere calaman usurpa aussi la coronne.”

²⁰B.N., fr. 5704, fol. 32v.: “Et ne sont point comptes roys de france. tous les dessusditz qui furent depuis loys le baube jusques au roy charles le simple. Car ilz usurperent la coronne et tindrent par force, sans force [sic] sans droit ne tiltre vaillable durant lenfance dudit Charles qui estoit vray et legitime roy.” This judgment applied to Charles the Fat and Odo, as well as to Louis III and Carloman.

²¹Hence his references to Louis IV d’Outremer as “loys troisesme de ce nom” (B.N., fr. 5704, fol. 33r.), to Louis V as “loys quatriesme de ce nom” (fol. 34v.), to Louis VI as “loys. V de ce nom dit le gros” (fol. 36r.), and so forth.

²²Scholars have disputed the authorship of the *Rosier des Guerres*. Some, like André Stegmann, “*Le Rosier des Guerres*: Testament politique de Louis XI,” in *La France de la fin du XV^e siècle. Renouveau et Apogée*, ed. Bernard Chevalier and Philippe Contamine (Paris, 1985), 313–323, have attributed it to Louis XI himself. To credit it to Pierre Choynet is to find more persuasive the arguments of Jean Kaulek, “Louis XI est-il l’auteur du *Rosier des Guerres*?” *Revue Historique* 21 (1883): 312–322; A. Hellot, “Etude critique sur les sources du *Rosier des Guerres*,” *Revue Historique* 29 (1885): 75–81; and especially Charles Samaran, “Pierre Choynet, le *Rosier des Guerres* et le *Livre des Trois Eages*,” *Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Chartes* 87 (1926): 372–380.

²³B.N., fr. 1965 (*Rosier des Guerres*, fols. 1–127v.), fol. 127r.: “En ceste cronique ne sont point mis en compte loys et karloman filz du roy loys le baube pource quilz estoient de sa concubine comme il appert sur lan VIII.c IIII.xx.”

said King Louis the Stammerer died, and left the queen pregnant with a son who was named Charles the Simple, who only began to reign sixteen years later. In the meantime and immediately after the death of the said King Louis the Stammerer, two children whom he had had by his concubine began to reign, that is, Louis and Carloman, who divided the kingdom between them.” He then went on, after chronicling the reigns of Charles the Fat, Odo, and Charles the Simple, to conclude that “it seems that those who reigned between his [Charles the Simple’s] father and him must not be counted among the number of kings descended from the rightful line.”²⁴ Since he delegitimized their kingship without stating either that they had “held” the crown for Charles the Simple or that they had seized it from the latter, Choynet would seem to have viewed Louis and Carloman less as regents or as usurpers than as marginal figures of little importance. Indeed, on the grounds that Louis III had not been king, Choynet consistently referred to his own master, Louis XI, as “Louis X.”²⁵ While he did not strike the existence of Louis and Carloman from the historical record, he did, literally, discount them.

Others went further. Shortly after 1498, the author of the chronicle of the French kings contained in B.N., fr. 4954, stated that “Charles, called the Simple, son of King Louis the Stammerer, was born in the abovesaid year 880 [*sic*], and only began to reign in the year 899 [*sic*], during which time several of his guardians governed for his minority of age.”²⁶ While this historian implicitly posited them as regents, his account differed from the others that did so in that he not only provided no genealogical information about Louis and Carloman, but also neglected to mention them by name. Treated not as kings or as bastard regents or as bastard usurpers, and reduced to anonymity, all that separated them from oblivion was a vague allusion. Finally, writing shortly after 1461, the author of the history of France contained in B.N., fr. 24976 (fols. 1–83), afforded Louis and Carloman not even that. To make good his claim that all the Carolingian kings of France “descended from King Pepin in a legitimate line

²⁴B.N., fr. 1965, fols. 51rv.: “Lan VIIIc IIIIxx ledict roy loys le baube trespasa, et laissa la royne ensainte dun filz qui fut nomme charles le simple, qui ne print a regner que jusques a XVI ans apres. Ce pendant et incontinant apres la mort dudict roy loys le baube prindrent a regner deux enffens quil avoit euz de sa concubine Cestassavoir loys et karloman qui entre eulx deulx diviserent le royaume.... Et semble que ceulx qui regnerent entre son pere [Louis II] et lui [Charles the Simple] ne doivent estre comptez du nombre des roys yssus par droicte ligne....”

²⁵For instance, B.N., fr. 1965, fol. 2r., “le roy notre souverain seigneur loys dix.me de ce nom filz du roy deffunct de noble memoire Charles sept.me le bien servy,” and fol. 127r., “loys dix.me de ce nom”.

²⁶B.N., fr. 4954 (*Les Roys de france*), fol. 12r.: “Charles dit le simple filz du roy loys le baube fut ne lan dessusd. VIII.c IIII.xx. Et ne commença a regner que lan VIII.c IIII.xx XIX. durant lequel temps aucuns de ses tuteurs gouvernerent pour sa minorite daage.”

from father to son,” he simply made no reference to their persons or to their reigns.²⁷

In sum, the theme of royalist historical propaganda according to which French dynastic history was free of bastardy influenced late-medieval French historiography in impressive ways. Quantitatively, it is reflected in the fact that a majority of the histories written in that period presented Louis III and Carloman as something other than bastard kings of France. Qualitatively, it is reflected in the variety of means that the histories’ authors devised in order to do so. Even as some historians labored to gloss over their illegitimate birth or to obscure their reigns as French kings, however, late-medieval royalist ideology failed to inspire some others to disguise either of those ninth-century facts. Ten of the histories under scrutiny reported both of them. But for an interesting hiatus during the reign of Louis XI, these accounts spanned the period under consideration.

During the reign of Charles VI (1380–1422), while the authors of the *Dit des Roys* and B.N., fr. 4948 (fols. 96–98), did not report their bastardy and the author of the *Chronique anonyme finissant en 1383* denied their kingship, four other historians did present Louis III and Carloman as bastard kings. In 1381, the author of the history of France contained in B.N., lat. 14663 (fols. 14–19v. and fol. 30r.), wrote, “After the death of Louis the Stammerer, Louis and Carloman, his sons by a concubine, divided the kingdom between them and reigned for six years.”²⁸ Written between 1409 and 1415, the version of the history of France known by the *incipit* “A tous nobles” contained in B.N., fr. 5697, stated that Louis II “left his wife pregnant with a son called Charles the Simple, and with another son who was named Louis, who reigned together for five years.” This convoluted passage, mentioning neither Carloman’s existence nor Louis III’s illegitimate birth, seems to have resulted from a copyist’s error, for the brothers did appear as bastard kings in the author’s work. The genealogical tree of the French kings that adorned and complemented his history informed readers that “Charles [that is, Carloman] reigned with

²⁷B.N., fr. 24976 (*incipit*: “Il est assavoir que Jupiter ancien chef de noblesse...”, fols. 1–83). The author concluded his treatment of Carolingian dynastic history by claiming that “A cestui loys [Louis V] fine la genalogie seconde des franscoys descenduz du roy pepin en droicte ligne de pere a filz jusques audit loys...” (fol. 22v.). He made good his claim by advancing from the reign of Louis II to that of Charles the Simple without mentioning those of Louis III, Carloman, Charles the Fat, and Odo (fols. 21rv.).

²⁸B.N., lat. 14663 (*incipit*: “Comment valentiniain empereur fist regner avecques luy gracian...”, fols. 14–19v. and fol. 30r.), fol. 17r.: “Après la mort loys le baube, loys et charlemans ses filz de concubine diviserent entre eulx le royaume, et regnerent. VI. ans.”

Louis, and they reigned for five years,” and that “Louis reigned with Charles, and they were not at all born of marriage.”²⁹

Similarly, the author of B.N., fr. 23019, who included a version of “A tous nobles” in the universal chronicle that he composed between 1415 and 1417, wrote that Louis II “left his wife pregnant with a son who was called Charles the Simple. And on this account his two brothers, Louis and Charles [*sic*], reigned together; and they were not born of marriage, and they reigned for five years.”³⁰ Finally, around 1422, the author of the chronicle of the French kings contained in B.N., fr. 1623 (fols. 89–95v.), misstated their parentage but made plain their illegitimate birth when he wrote, “The thirty-first king of France was named Carloman, and his brother Louis reigned with him, and they were children of Charles the Bald [*sic*] and of his concubine.”³¹

Historians continued to present them as bastard kings during the reign of Charles VII (1422–1461). While Noël de Fribois and the author of B.N., n.a., fr. 4811, portrayed Louis III and Carloman as kings but not as bastards, the authors of the work known as the *Chronologie universelle jusqu’à la mort de Charles VI* and of the history contained in B.N., fr. 10468 (fols. 105–110v.), reported that these kings were bastards who had mounted the throne. The former author, who included a history of France in the universal chronicle he wrote around 1423, told his readers that “his [Charles the Simple’s] two brothers, Louis and Carloman, reigned together and they were not born of marriage.”³² The latter, who wrote his chronicle of the French kings between 1422 and 1436, informed his readers that “He [Louis II] left two children, one a bastard, named Charles [that is, Carloman], and the other legitimate, named Louis. The elder bastard reigned for around two years, and the other reigned later, not for long. Some say that both of the two were bastards.”³³

²⁹B.N., fr. 5697 (*incipit*: “A tous nobles”), fols. 20v.–21r. The text reads: “Loys le baube...laissa sa femme grosse dung filz appelle Charles le simple. et dung autre filz qui fut nomme loys. lesquelx regnerent. V. ans ensemble.” The notices on Carloman and Louis III in the accompanying genealogical tree read: “charles [i.e., Carloman] regna avecques loys et regnerent V. ans,” and “loys regna avec charles et nestoient mie de mariage.”

³⁰B.N., fr. 23019 (*Les chroniques des papes et des emperours et des roys de france et d’engleterre*), fol. 27r.A: “Et [Louis II] laissa sa femme grosse dun filz qui charles le simple fut appelle. Et pource regnerent ses II freres tous ensemble loys et charles [i.e., Carloman] et nestoient pas de mariage. Et regnerent V ans.”

³¹B.N., fr. 1623 (*Ce sont les noms de tous les roys qui ont este en france puis quelle fu fondee*, fols. 89–95v.), fol. 92r.: “Le XXX.le roy de france ot nom charlemans et regna avec lui loys son frere Et estoient enfans de charles le chauve et de sa concubine.”

³²B.N., fr. 9688 (*Chronologie universelle jusqu’à la mort de Charles VI*), fol. 37r.: “Et demoura sa [Louis II’s] femme grosse dun filz qui fut appelle charles le simple. Et pour ce regnerent ces deux freres loys et charlemant ensemble et nestoient pas de mariage. Et regnerent V. ans.”

³³B.N., fr. 10468 (*incipit*: “Après la destruction de troye la grant de ceulx qui en eschapperent une grant multitude...”), fols. 105–110v.), fol. 107v.: “Il [Louis II] laissa deux fils. Lun bastart nomme Charles [*i.e.*, Carloman]. et lautre legitime nomme Louys. Le bastart ainsne regna

Likewise, even as the author of the version of “A tous nobles” contained in B.N., fr. 4991, purified the French throne of bastardy by revising Louis and Carloman into regents, the contemporary authors of two other versions of “A tous nobles” left intact both their illegitimate birth and their kingship. Writing between 1444 and 1461, the author of the version contained in B.N., fr. 10139 (fols. 2–14v.), disguised neither their bastardy nor their reign in stating that “after the death of the said Louis [the Stammerer] there was great discord in France. For the two brothers of the king reigned together, and they were not born of marriage.”³⁴ Writing between 1440 and 1470, the author of the version contained in B.N., n.a. fr. 7519 (fols. 15–85v.), more precisely and fully explained that Louis II “left his wife pregnant with a child who was called Charles the Simple. Because the child was not born when the father died, Louis and Carloman, two brothers of the said child—whom his father had had not by his mother, but from a lady whom his said father had kept—were kings together.”³⁵ In short, during his reign, Charles VII was not the only French king sometimes said to be a bastard.

Five of the histories of France under examination were written during the reign of his son, Louis XI (1461–1483). We have already seen that all of their authors presented a dynastic past free of bastard kings by portraying Louis III and Carloman as something other than monarchs of illegitimate birth.³⁶ On the one hand, five examples will not sustain the conclusion that the notion of such a past took hold more firmly in French historiography during Louis XI’s reign than it had previously. On the other, it is possible that the very fact of his reign contributed to its success. Since he was the first “Louis” to mount the French throne in nearly a century and a half, Louis XI’s accession contemporized the reign

environ deux ans. Et laute apres regna non pas longuement. Aucuns dient quilz furent tous deux bastars.”

³⁴B.N., fr. 10139 (*incipit*: “A tous nobles,” fols. 2–14v.), fol. 8r.: “Et apres la mort dudit louys [Louis II] y eult grans discentions en france. Car les deux freres du roy regnerent tout ensemble et nestoient pas de mariage.” It is unclear whether “the king” in question is Louis II or Charles the Simple. If the first case is true, then the author has misstated the place of Louis III and Carloman in the royal genealogy. If the second, considering Charles the Simple as the only legitimate successor to Louis II, then he correctly has identified Louis III and Carloman as “the two brothers of the king.”

³⁵B.N., n.a., fr. 7519 (*incipit*: “A tous nobles,” fols. 15–85v.), fol. 30r.: “...et [Louis II] laissa sa femme grosse dun enfant qui charles le simple fut appelle. Pourceque lenfant nestoit pas ne quant le pere mourit. furent roys ensemble deux freres dudit enfant que son pere avoit eu non pas de sa mere. Mais dune dame que sondit pere avoit maintenue. lesquelx furent appelez louis et charlement.”

³⁶The works that date to the reign of Louis XI, in the order in which they have been discussed, are the history of France contained in B.N., fr. 10137 (fols. 1–60v.); the version of “A tous nobles” contained in B.N., fr. 5734 (fols. 93–111v.); the chronicle of the French kings contained in B.N., lat. 5195 (fols. 8–24v.); Pierre Choiselet’s *Rosier des Guerres*, and the history of France contained in B.N., fr. 24976 (fols. 1–83).

of Louis III in two important ways. For one, the question of which regnal number to attach to his name hinged on whether one counted his ninth-century namesake as a king, and contemporaries were uncertain about whether he should be properly referred to as Louis X or as Louis XI.³⁷ Perhaps the problem prompted more historians closely to examine the circumstances of Louis III's reign, and to judge them ideologically unacceptable. For another, historians whose sovereign was named Louis may have been reluctant to sully his name by advertising the presence of a bastard namesake in the royal genealogy.

The success, in French historical writing under Louis XI, of the notion that the crown's history was devoid of bastardy was, however, neither complete nor permanent. Even Pierre Choynet, who referred to that monarch as Louis X, was of the opinion that "the said noble king Louis can be counted as the eleventh of this name, depending on whether one wishes to take into account Louis and Carloman, brothers, and children of King Louis the Stammerer and of his concubine."³⁸ Indeed, later historians continued to do just that.

Even as the author of B.N., fr. 5704, railed against them as usurpers who "are not at all considered kings of France," a contemporary of Charles VIII (1483–1498) presented Louis III and Carloman as both bastards and kings. Writing shortly after 1483, the author of the version of "A tous nobles" contained in B.N., fr. 5696, stated that "Louis and Carloman reigned together, and they were not born of marriage, and they reigned for five years."³⁹ Finally, even as the author of B.N., fr. 4954, alluded to their putative regency without providing any genealogical particulars or even mentioning their names, a contemporary of Louis XII (1498–1515) obscured none of the sensitive ninth-century facts. In 1504, the author of B.N., fr. 5709 (fols. 1–79v.), a universal chronicle, the final book of which is a history of the French kings, noted simply that "Louis,

³⁷The confusion is reflected in the fact that even contemporary historians who did not consider Louis III and Carloman to have reigned legitimately as kings referred to their own sovereign as both Louis X and Louis XI. For instance, at the same time that Pierre Choynet referred to him as Louis X in the *Rosier des Guerres*, the author of the chronicle of the French kings contained in B.N., lat. 5195 (fols. 8–24v.), who presented Louis III and Carloman as usurpers, referred to him as "Loys XIe de ce nom" (fol 16v.).

³⁸B.N., fr. 1965 (*Rosier des Guerres*, fols. 1–127v.), fol. 2r.: "Le dit noble roy loys [Louis XI] peut estre compte pour XIe de ce nom. selon veult mectre en compte loys et karloman freres et enfens du roy loys le baube et de sa concubine...."

³⁹B.N., fr. 5696 (*incipit*: "A tous nobles"), fol. 23v.: "...et [Louis II] laissa sa femme grosse dun filz qui Charles le simple fut appelle Et pource regnerent ensemble. loys et charlemant et nestoient pas de mariaige et regnerent cinq ans."

the twenty-sixth [king of France], and Charles [that is, Carloman], the twenty-seventh, were bastard children of Louis the Stammerer.⁴⁰

The matter-of-fact manner in which ten of the historians reported that Louis III and Carloman were both bastards and kings stands in marked contrast to the various ploys by means of which the thirteen others presented them as one, or as the other, but not as both. Together, their diverse accounts of the reigns of the two Carolingian brothers shed valuable light on the nature of late-medieval French historical culture.

Modern historians have stressed the success of royalist historical propaganda in shaping what late-medieval Frenchmen knew and believed about the kingdom's past. Taking as their point of departure the principle that "in a world where the past was the best justification of the present, it was natural that history be the best argument of propaganda, the best prop of political power,"⁴¹ they have looked to the late-medieval French monarchy's official historiography and other historically-based propaganda in order to explain its political success. Led by Bernard Guenée, Gabrielle Spiegel, and Colette Beaune, scholars have catalogued the notions about the French past formulated and spread by means of that propaganda.⁴² Analyzing the propaganda's ideological contents, they have argued that those notions were designed to spark and to maintain the national sentiment and the political loyalty of the monarchy's subjects.⁴³ Gauging the propaganda's influence in molding those subjects' knowledge and beliefs about the national past, they have argued that the royalist political culture of late-medieval France was underpinned by a royalist historical culture created and maintained by successful historical

⁴⁰B.N., fr. 5709 (*incipit*: "Le premier jour dieu crea les Anges le second crea les cieulx..."), fols. 1–79v.), fol. 76v.: "Loys XXVIe et charles XXVIIe furent enfans bastars de Loys balbe dessusdit."

⁴¹Bernard Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident medieval* (Paris, 1980), 333.

⁴²See Bernard Guenée, "Les Grandes Chroniques de France. Le Roman aux roys (1274–1518)," in *La nation*, vol. 2 of *Les Lieux de memoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 3 vols. (Paris, 1984–92), 189–214, and "Histoire d'un succès," in François Avril, Marie-Thérèse Gousset, and Bernard Guenée, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France. Réproduction intégrale en facsimilé des miniatures de Fouquet. Manuscrit français 6465 de la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris* (Paris, 1987), 81–138, 286–289; Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "The Cult of Saint Denis and Capetian Kingship," *Journal of Medieval History* 1 (1975): 43–69, "Defense of the Realm: Evolution of a Capetian Propaganda Slogan," *Journal of Medieval History* 3 (1977): 115–134, and *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis: A Survey* (Brookline, MA, 1978); and Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*.

⁴³See Bernard Guenée, "L'histoire de l'Etat en France à la fin du Moyen Age vue par les historiens français depuis cent ans," *Revue historique* 232 (1964): 331–360; "Etat et Nation en France au Moyen Age," *Revue historique* 237 (1967): 17–30; "Le poids de l'histoire," chap. 8 of *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1980), 332–356; and "Intellectual Attitudes," pt. 1 of *States and Rulers in Later Medieval Europe*, trans. Juliet Vale (Oxford, 1985), 23–88; as well as Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "Political Utility in Medieval Historiography: A Sketch," *History and Theory* 14 (1975): 314–325.

propaganda.⁴⁴ In short, the propagandists' ideologically-driven notions about the French past took hold, and "such beliefs did more during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to shore up the unsteady trusses of the state than any institutions."⁴⁵ The monarchy's historical propaganda worked, and it dominated French knowledge and beliefs about the national past.

While generally persuasive, this picture of late-medieval French historical culture may overstate the extent to which royalist historical propaganda succeeded in informing it. Given the great popularity of national history among literate late-medieval Frenchmen, histories of France represented a vehicle essential to the dissemination of the propagandists' historically-based claims.⁴⁶ Consequently, the attitudes of their authors were crucial to the success of those claims; the extent to which they molded their histories of France so as to reflect them influenced the degree to which Frenchmen became familiar with them. Hence the importance of close readings of the many histories of France written and read by late-medieval Frenchmen, and hence the insight yielded by this study of the accounts of the reigns of Louis III and Carloman in a substantial number of them. While a majority of their authors did purge France's dynastic past of the two bastard kings, it is quite significant, in view of the image of late-medieval French historical culture current among historians, that a substantial minority did not.

Clearly, the latter authors did not share the ideological sensitivity of the former. Even as the propagandists repeatedly asserted that the royal line had been forever free of illegitimacy, these other writers told their readers that two bastards had reigned in France. Their histories put the lie to the propagandists' claim. They, and their readers, knew it to be false. Thus, in a matter of compelling contemporary importance for the monarchy, its propagandists' success in shaping the historical knowledge and beliefs of its subjects was far from complete. While the ideologically-driven notion that the national past was free of bastard kings did achieve widespread currency in late-medieval histories of France, its success did not preempt the continuing composition and circulation of historical accounts that contradicted it. Late-medieval responses to the putative absence of royal

⁴⁴This is the central argument of Beaune's *The Birth of an Ideology*, which is the most comprehensive investigation into, and synthesis of scholarly work on, late-medieval French historical culture to date. Contending that it was the "myths and symbols" of France, most of which were historical in nature and many of which were formulated and disseminated by royalist historical propaganda, that enabled the French state to weather the crises of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, she concluded, "In that age of great catastrophes, it was this France personified who saved the France of history" (*op. cit.*, 325).

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁶On the popularity of national history in fifteenth-century France, see Guenée, "Histoire d'un succès," 83, 89.

bastardy in French history were characterized not by uniformity, but by variety; and late-medieval knowledge about royal bastardy in the national past not by conformity to royalist ideology, but by diversity. Late-medieval French historical culture harbored not just the royalist historical propaganda theme, but also knowledge and beliefs that plainly belied it.

This is not to argue that royalist historical propaganda did not profoundly shape late-medieval French historical culture. It does, however, venture that close examinations of the resonances of particular themes of royalist historical propaganda in late-medieval histories of France may lead us to qualify and to nuance our understanding of the extent to which it did; and this study offers an example of how further ones might do so as well. In late-medieval France, to purge the dynastic past of bastard monarchs required omitting or revising the ninth-century facts of the reigns of Louis III and Carloman. Many late-medieval histories of France bear signs of the necessary manipulations, but many others do not. In some of them, Louis and Carloman became kings but not bastards, or bastards but not kings. In others, they were, still, both.

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