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Simon MacLean

Royal Adultery, Biblical History and Political Conflict in Tenth Century Francia: the Lothar Crystal Reconsidered

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ROYAL ADULTERY, BIBLICAL HISTORY AND POLITICAL CONFLICT IN TENTH CENTURY FRANCIA

The Lothar Crystal Reconsidered

1. Introduction

The Lothar Crystal, sometimes referred to as the Susanna Crystal, is a finely carved rock crystal of about 11 cm in diameter which can today be seen on display in the British Museum in London; cf. below after p. 10. The museum bought it for £ 267 in 1855 from a collector who had in turn acquired it for 12 francs from a professional religious. This religious reportedly fished it out of the River Meuse where it had landed after being removed from its monastic home at the time of the French Revolution[1]. Whatever acts of skulduggery might lie behind the various twists and turns of this story we can no longer know. We are, however, fairly confident that the crystal's original home was the Belgian monastery of Waulsort on the banks of the Meuse, about 40 km south of Namur, where in the mid-twelfth century a monastic author described it as a venerated and long-standing possession of the community. The crystal is considered one of the greatest treasures of Frankish art and one of the finest examples of its type from all of early medieval Europe[2]. Although primarily familiar to students and scholars of the Carolingians, it gained some measure of wider recognition in 2010 thanks to its inclusion in the high-profile BBC radio series »A History of the World in 100 Objects«[3].

The story told on the crystal – one rarely depicted in medieval art – is that of Susanna from chapter 13 of the Old Testament Book of Daniel. This narrative, considered apocryphal in some traditions but included in the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible commonly used in the Middle Ages, was about a wealthy woman falsely accused and then exonerated of adultery. An inscription at the centre of the crystal proclaims that »Lothar King of the Franks ordered me to be made«. In 1908 Philippe Lauer argued that this inscription, together with the images, pointed to a context amidst the famous divorce case of the Carolingian king Lothar II (855–869). Despite occasional attempts at alternative attributions, current scholarly consensus endorses Lauer's identification as the most plausible. The purpose of this article is to argue that there is a case for associating the crystal with a different Lothar, hitherto rarely mentioned in the literature other than to dismiss him as a possibility: the tenth-

1 Details and images: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1855-1201-5 (24.02.2022).
2 Genevra Kornbluth, Engraved Gems of the Carolingian Empire, University Park 1995.
3 https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00snm1v (24.02.2022); Neil MacGregor, A History of the World in 100 Objects, London 2012, no. 53.

century Carolingian king who ruled West Francia (France) from 954 to 986. First, I will describe the crystal in more detail, explaining what the different scenes show. Second, I will evaluate the arguments for Lothar II as the patron, and then consider some evidence that might seem to preclude a tenth century date. Finally, I will present my positive arguments for the other Lothar and explain how the crystal might cast new light on a comparatively underappreciated marital controversy which intersected with one of the great political crises of tenth-century Europe: the disputed succession to the Emperor Otto II.

2. The Lothar/Susanna Crystal

The carvings on the crystal's face tell the Susanna story in eight scenes, starting at the top and moving clockwise, with the final scene placed in the centre. Captions explain the action with short citations from the Bible story. In scene one we see Susanna in the enclosed orchard of her husband's house where, according to the biblical account, she was accustomed to bathe. Here she is approached by two local elders who lusted after her and had been spying on her movements. They threaten her, saying that if she rejects their advances they will publicly accuse her of committing adultery with a young man under a tree in the orchard (the captions here say *Sca Susana* – »Holy Susanna«; and *Surrexer Senes* – »the elders arose«). Susanna realises she is in serious trouble either way and decides that offending God would be the greater sin. She therefore refuses to comply and her loud protests are overheard, causing servants to come running from the house (*Occurer servi* – »the servants rush in«). The next day, the elders' threat is fulfilled, and we see a group of men in an assembly ordering that Susanna be summoned (*Mitite ad Susana* – »send for Susanna«). In the next scene, Susanna is depicted amidst a crowd of gesticulating men accusing her (falsely) of adultery and moving to remove her veil (*Miserunt manus* – »they laid on their hands«). The fourth scene shows us Susanna convicted and frogmarched away for execution. As she is led off to the left, she looks over her shoulder at Daniel, who is protesting that the elders should be cross-examined (*Cumque duceretur ad mortem* – »And when she was led away to be put to death«).

In the fifth scene, at the base of the crystal, we see Daniel in the role of investigator, interrogating the original two elders to find discrepancies in their stories (*Inveterate dierum malorum* – »O thou that are grown old in evil days«). The two men give different answers when asked what kind of tree Susanna was under when she committed the sin, and their mendacity is thus uncovered. In scene six, Daniel is seen condemning them (*Recte mentitus est* – »Well hast thou lied«). The penultimate scene, the seventh, shows the elders being stoned to death by way of punishment for their actions (*Feceruntque eis sicuti mali egerunt* – »And they carried out against them the same thing that they had maliciously dealt [against Susanna]«). The final scene is placed in the centre of the crystal, where an enthroned man sitting in judgement seems to be declaring that Susanna is innocent (*Et salvatus est sanguinis innoxius in die illa* – »And innocent blood was spared that day«). This central scene is enclosed in its own circle, along the top edge of which is inscribed: *Lotharius rex Francorum me fieri iussit* – »Lothar king of the Franks ordered me to be made«.

The above interpretation of the story told by the inscriptions is not controversial, for it sticks quite faithfully to the Susanna narrative as it was written in chapter 13 of the Vulgate's Book of Daniel. The captions clearly echo the wording of the biblical text at crucial junctures. Scholars have pointed out some differences of emphasis. Overall, the crystal version puts heavier stress on Susanna's acquittal and on the punishment of the accusers than does the original, which spends much longer on the set-up. This emphasis makes it distinct from other (later) medieval Susanna picture cycles and commentaries[4]. The crystal, like the source text, directs attention to the role of Daniel, who is the main active figure in three of the eight scenes on the engraving and the main protagonist in the second half of the Vulgate chapter. It has, though, been pointed out that the artist's depiction of Daniel makes him look older than the callow youth described in the Bible[5].

There are two points at which the version on the crystal diverges more explicitly from the original text. Firstly, the use of stoning for the execution in scene seven is not specified in Daniel 13, where we read only that the elders were put to death in accordance with the law of Moses. The reference to Mosaic law could have been what pointed the artist towards stoning, especially if they had in mind the story of the adulterous woman in chapter eight of the Gospel of John, where adultery and stoning are explicitly linked (before Jesus brings proceedings to a halt with the famous line: »He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone«). John and Daniel were associated with each other in parts of the Frankish liturgy, and this may have influenced the artist's decision here[6].

Secondly, the final scene, the acquittal, is not based directly on the biblical text either. In the Vulgate, the story effectively concludes with the assembly denouncing the elders and putting them to death. After that, we read only that God was praised, that Daniel became great in the sight of the people, and that Cyrus the Persian succeeded Astyages as king. The presider/judge who absolves Susanna on the crystal is not Astyages or Cyrus (who are mentioned only parenthetically, not as part of the story itself); nor does it seem to be Daniel, based on comparison of the seated figure to other scenes in the crystal. Even if we do interpret this final scene as a depiction of the assembly by which the men were condemned – which would require some poetic licence since the execution had taken place in the previous scene – the insertion of this absolving figure is anomalous by comparison with the Vulgate version of events. The judge figure is not wearing a crown, but otherwise does resemble ruler portraits known from illuminated manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries. The throne is

4 Genevra Kornbluth, The Susanna Crystal of Lothar II: Chastity, the Church, and Royal Justice, in: Gesta 31 (1992), p. 25–39; Valerie Flint, Magic and Marriage in Ninth-Century Francia: Lothar, Hincmar and Susanna, in: Marc Meyer (ed.), The Culture of Christendom: Essays in Medieval History in Commemoration of Denis L.T. Bethell, London 1993, p. 61–74; Valerie Flint, Susanna and the Lothar Crystal: a Liturgical Perspective, in: Early Medieval Europe 4 (1995), p. 61–86.

5 Kornbluth, Susanna Crystal (as in n. 4), p. 27; ead., Engraved Gems (as in n. 2), p. 40.

6 Flint, Susanna (as in n. 4), p. 75–76. On Daniel in Carolingian exegesis, see Sumi Shimahara, Le succès médiéval de l'Annotation brève sur Daniel d'Haymon d'Auxerre, texte scolaire carolingien exhortant à la réforme, in: ead. (ed.), Études d'éxgèse carolingienne: autour d'Haymon d'Auxerre, Turnhout 2007, p. 123–164; ead., Daniel et les visions politiques à l'époque carolingienne, in: Médiévales 55 (2008), p. 19–32.

an obvious parallel, but other elements such as the canopy and footstool call to mind pictures such as those of Charles the Bald in the Bible of San Paolo or Otto III in his Gospel Book. The presence of the »Lothar king of the Franks« caption immediately above this scene strongly suggests that the implied association with a royal figure was intentional. In this central picture, then, it seems possible that an early medieval king (or at least the type of an early medieval king) has been figuratively superimposed onto the biblical story[7]. But even if this conclusion is uncertain, it is undoubtedly the case that the central scene serves to put Susanna back at the centre of the story and ensures that the punchline is not the punishment of the accusers, but the exoneration of the accused.

3. The case for King Lothar II and Queen Theutberga

Who, then, was the King Lothar on whose instruction the item was apparently made? As a »speaking object« (objects whose inscriptions referred to themselves and their own creation), the crystal is far from unique, and fits into a tradition reaching back into Antiquity. The best-known early medieval example is probably the »Alfred Jewel«, a late-ninth century rock crystal from Wessex inscribed »[King] Alfred had me made«[8]. The Lothar Crystal has also long been dated to the ninth century – an assumption put on a firmer art-historical footing in 1995 by Genevra Kornbluth's book »Engraved Gems of the Carolingian Empire«, to which all subsequent research (including the present article) is deeply indebted. There were only two ninth-century Carolingian rulers called Lothar. Lothar I (840–855) has not attracted much attention as a candidate for the crystal's commissioning, because his reign was not – as far as we know – affected by any marital or sexual scandal to which the artistic scheme might relate. Rosamond McKitterick suggested that Lothar could have had in mind the past accusations of adultery against his step-mother Judith, and that the crystal could have been commissioned as a gesture of regret as part of the alliance he formed with his half-brother (and Judith's son) Charles the Bald in 849[9]. Although the Judith accusations were nearly 20 years in the past by this point, they did still hang in the air in the 840s and 850s. Lothar had, however, held the title of emperor since 817 and it is not likely that an object made on his instruction would downgrade his status to *rex*.

The other option, which has commanded general consensus since Lauer's article of 1908, is that the crystal was commissioned by Lothar II. There is good reason for this, as Lothar II had one of the most famous of all the terrible royal marriages of European medieval history. He was born around 835, the second son of Lothar I and his wife Ermengard. Lothar I ruled the Frankish »Middle Kingdom«, stretching from the Low Countries down to central Italy, which had been created by a major

7 Kornbluth, Susanna Crystal (as in n. 4), p. 30–33; ead., Engraved Gems (as in n. 2), p. 35, 45–46. Some Carolingian exegetes assumed that the assembly must have handed over the accused to a king for punishment: Shimahara, Le succès (as in n. 6), p. 129.

8 Leslie Webster, The Art of Alfred and his Times, in: Nicole Guenther Discenza, Paul E. Szarmach (ed.), A Companion to Alfred the Great, Leiden, Boston 2015, p. 47–81, at p. 57–64.

9 Rosamond McKitterick, The Frankish Kingdoms Under the Carolingians 751–987, London 1983, p. 174.

three-way division of the empire in 843. Upon Lothar I's death in 855, this Middle Kingdom was sub-divided in turn between his three sons. The eldest, Louis II, was confirmed as king of Italy, and the youngest, Charles, was designated ruler of a realm based on Provence. Lothar II's kingdom – known to posterity as Lotharingia – lay in the north, roughly between the Scheldt and the Rhine. Lotharingia included some of the key centres on which Carolingian power had been founded, including the palace of Aachen and the episcopal cities of Metz and Cologne, and contained some of Western Europe's most productive agricultural regions[10]. For these reasons and others, Lothar's kingdom was subject to the expansionary ambitions of his powerful uncles Louis the German and Charles the Bald, who ruled the large Frankish kingdoms to the east and west.

Their opportunity was provided by developments in the king's personal life[11]. As a young man, Lothar had had a relationship with a woman called Waldrada who bore him a son and two daughters. On becoming king, he put Waldrada aside and married Theutberga, an aristocrat whose family connections brought control of major routes to Italy at a time when Lothar felt threatened by his brother Louis II. Within a couple of years, however, the fraternal tensions eased, and Lothar's position grew even more powerful as his uncles came to blows, culminating in an invasion of West Francia by Louis the German in 858. With his position now secure, Lothar seems to have decided that the marriage to Theutberga could be dispensed with, and already in 857 he was beginning to lay the groundwork for a divorce. He stepped up his campaign at a synod in Aachen early in 860, where Theutberga was accused of a litany of sexual crimes including incest, sodomy, conception through witchcraft, and abortion – all committed with her brother Hubert. These extreme accusations were surely false, but they were verified by a series of episcopal hearings and the queen had no choice but to accept guilt. She asked to enter a monastery, before fleeing to the kingdom of Charles the Bald later in 860. Although Lothar was not formally able to marry Waldrada until authorised by another council in 862, Theutberga's public humiliation was clearly a victory for the young king, and he considered himself divorced.

Lothar's motives are not clear: it may be that he was in love with Waldrada; or that he hoped to have their son Hugh accepted as a legitimate heir; or that he felt the need to cut Hubert down to size; or some combination of all of these. But in any case, the legality of his actions was drawn into question almost immediately, as shown by the long tract »On the Divorce of King Lothar and Queen Theutberga« written in 860 by Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims on the request of a group of disgruntled Lothar-

10 For discussion and further references, see: Simon MacLean, Shadow Kingdom: Lotharingia and the Frankish World c. 850–1050, in: History Compass 11 (2013), p. 443–457; Charles West, Reframing the Feudal Revolution: Political and Social Transformation Between Marne and Moselle, c.800–c.1100, Cambridge 2013; Simon MacLean, Who were the Lotharingians? Defining Political Community after the End of the Carolingian Empire, in: Daniel Mahoney, Walter Pohl (ed.), Historiography and Identity IV. Writing History Across Medieval Eurasia, Turnhout 2021, p. 247–274.

11 For what follows see Stuart Airlie, Private Bodies and the Body Politic in the Divorce Case of Lothar II, in: Past and Present 161 (1998), p. 3–38; Karl Heidecker, The Divorce of Lothar II: Christian Marriage and Political Power in the Carolingian World, trans. Tanis Guest, Ithaca 2010; Rachel Stone, Charles West, The Divorce of King Lothar and Queen Theutberga: Hincmar of Rheims's De Divortio, Manchester 2016, p. 1–80.

ingians. As well as opening himself to opposition on matters of legality, Lothar discovered that his attempt to deploy against his wife the discourse of sexual sin, which had become a well-established Carolingian political code since the accusations against Judith in the early 830s, was not fit for purpose. Divorce was not a simple procedure, especially for a king, and Lothar's claim that he had been unable to control the youthful urges of his body, a strategy intended to position him as a victim, was quickly taken up by his enemies and used against him. The crisis really escalated in 863, when Lothar's close advisers – Archbishops Gunther of Cologne and Theutgaud of Trier – were deposed by Pope Nicholas I, and in 865 Theutberga was forced to return to his side. The king soon tried to send her away again, leading the pope to excommunicate Waldrada and threaten Lothar with the same in 866. Eventually, a new pope, Hadrian II, offered the king absolution if he visited Rome. He did so in 869 and set off for home, triumphant at last, only to fall ill and die before he had even made it to the Alps. His son was not recognised as an heir, and his kingdom was absorbed by those of his uncles.

Although he was not the first to make the connection, Lauer's article was the one which definitively established the argument that the crystal was a product of Lothar's divorce case[12]. In his interpretation, the figures in the Susanna story offered a set of direct parallels to the main players in the 860s. Susanna is cast as a stand-in for the victimised Theutberga, wrongly accused of sexual crimes. The two elders are equivalents of the two archbishops, Gunther and Theutgaud, who acted as the public face of the accusing party. The presiding judge figure is Lothar himself, magnanimously recognising his wife's innocence. Lauer proposed that this configuration of parallels fits best the circumstances of an assembly in 865 at which the king was forced once more to accept Theutberga as his legitimate wife. A contemporary source tells us that as part of this reconciliation the king publicly gave gifts to his wife, and according to this hypothesis the crystal was among them[13]. The crystal was, in other words, not a celebration of Lothar's royal strength but an artefact of his humiliation. To reinforce the argument, Lauer pointed out that the most detailed account of the divorce, Hincmar's anti-Lothar tract of 860, mentions the Susanna story several times. He also proposed that the crystal could have reached Waulsort in the tenth century by a circuitous route beginning with Theutberga's retirement to Metz.

On the reasonable assumption that the artistic scheme of the crystal is likely to have related in some way to the circumstances of the king on whose authority it was produced, Lauer's argument is surely plausible. On closer inspection, however, there are several difficulties with his correlations between the Theutberga case and the Susanna story. Firstly, Theutberga was not actually accused of adultery. While adultery as a generic concept certainly »hovered in the background« of the controversy,

12 Philippe Lauer, Le joyau carolingien de Waulsort-sur-Meuse, in: Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France (1908), p. 102–107. For discussion of the older literature see Alain Dierkens, Abbayes et chapitres entre Sambre et Meuse: VII^{e}–XI^{e} siècles, Sigmaringen 1985, p. 188–189; Mats Dijkdrent, The Lothar Crystal as a Relic of Saint Eligius, in: Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture 7 (2021), p. 1–26.

13 Annales Bertiniani, ed. Georg Waitz, Hanover 1883 (MGH SS rer.Germ., 5), *s. a.* 865, p. 76–78; Annales de Saint-Bertin, éd. Félix Grat *e. a.*, Paris 1964, p. 119–121; trans. Janet L. Nelson, The Annals of St-Bertin, Manchester 1991, p. 126.

the specific accusations against Theutberga were incest, sodomy and abortion[14]. These alleged crimes were pre-marital, and committed with her brother Hubert (who understandably also fled to the protection of Charles the Bald). In the eyes of the king's critics it was not Theutberga who had committed adultery but Lothar himself, thanks to his ongoing relationship with Waldrada. If, as Lauer argued, the crystal represents the perspective of those critics, forced on Lothar as part of a script for his performed contrition in 865, then the most obvious parallel to the Susanna story dissolves. Secondly, the similarities between the two archbishops and the two creepy elders who accused Susanna might seem closer, given their role in formalising the claims about Theutberga after 860, but strictly speaking they were not the queen's accusers: they were her judges. The offence for which Pope Nicholas I deposed Gunther and Theutgaud was not false testimony but overstepping the bounds of their authority by judging the case in what he regarded as an improper hearing. He also berated them for ignoring papal rulings[15]. It is worth recalling at this point that the two accusers on the crystal are captioned as elders (*senes*) rather than the more archbishop-appropriate priests (*presbyteri*), both of which terms were used in the Vulgate[16].

Thirdly, what of the argument that Hincmar's long tract on the divorce's early phases mentions Susanna several times? This is certainly the case. In none of these references, however, is the wronged woman compared to Theutberga. The Susanna story is used by Hincmar to argue procedural points about the abuse of power and the need for valid judgements to take place in public. This is because it is one of the few biblical stories that can be used as a paradigm for courtroom procedure. For the archbishop of Rheims, Daniel 13 served to delegitimise certain arguments made by Theutberga's accusers, which were based on information which had been extracted in private. Of course, these citations would surely have brought to the minds of connoisseurs the fact that Susanna was a woman falsely accused, but Hincmar did not deploy the biblical text as a metaphor for the divorce as a whole. Indeed, the lessons he drew from it in his writings on the divorce case were the same as those he highlighted in writings that predated the reign of Lothar II[17]. Finally, the absence of a clear connection to Waulsort (a monastery founded in the 940s, almost a century after these events) is a weak point in Lauer's reconstruction[18].

Some of these doubts about the literal correspondences between the crystal and the shape of the Lothar divorce case were acknowledged in the most recent phase of sustained comment on the crystal. A highly nuanced debate between Genevra Korn-

14 Stone, West, Divorce (as in n. 11), p. 55–64 (quote at p. 55).

15 Annales Bertiniani, ed. Waitz (as in n. 13), s. a. 863, p. 64; Annales de Saint-Bertin, éd. Grat (as in n. 13), p. 100–101; trans. Nelson, Annals (as in n. 13), p. 107–108. On the sources for the archbishops' deposition and the controversy it occasioned, see Philippe Buc, The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory, Princeton 2001, p. 67–87.

16 Kornbluth, Susanna Crystal (as in n. 4), p. 26, n. 10.

17 Hincmar, De Divortio Lotharii regis et Theutbergae reginae, ed. Letha Böhringer, Hanover 1992 (MGH Concilia, 4. Supp. 1), p. 145, 173–174, 226; trans. Stone, West, Divorce (as in n. 11), p. 143, 185–186, 188, 209. See also Abigail Firey, A Contrite Heart: Prosecution and Redemption in the Carolingian Empire, Leiden 2009, p. 44–55.

18 Daniel Misonne, L'intaille carolingienne de Waulsort et Eilbert, le fondateur de l'abbaye, in: Revue Bénédictine 111 (2001), p. 139–145, at p. 143–144.

bluth and Valerie Flint across a series of publications in the 1990s provided solutions to the problem of the discrepancies in Lauer's reconstruction. Both scholars proposed to interpret the crystal in a more abstract sense than Lauer. In the first place, they pointed out that we need to bear in mind exegetical understandings of the biblical text. Early medieval biblical specialists understood Susanna as a symbol of chastity and a type of the Church, and the accusations of adultery as a kind of metaphor for an assault on its purity and sanctity[19]. More specifically, Kornbluth underlined the crystal's emphasis on judgement and judicial process as a key element of its designers' agenda. Noting that Hincmar and other ninth-century authors cited the Susanna story as a text on judgement, she interpreted the crystal itself as a statement about the concept of justice and the king as its guarantor in the context of the divorce case[20]. Flint sought to qualify Kornbluth's point by arguing that Susanna was not the most appropriate biblical avatar for a statement on justice *per se* and that the object must therefore be addressing an even more specific point. This she saw as the Church's claims to monopolise judgement particularly in matters of sexual misconduct and witchcraft, both of which featured prominently in the divorce case[21].

These arguments are important because they rightly draw attention to the more abstract or thematic messages which were undoubtedly an important part of the object's field of meaning. Interestingly, though, even as it rejects or qualifies Lauer's direct correlations, the Flint/Kornbluth exchange ends up tacitly validating his fundamental conclusion that the crystal was part of the commentary on the unfolding of Lothar's divorce. This need not be a major problem, because we shouldn't expect such abstract readings to explain away or compensate for the inconsistencies in more literal readings like Lauer's. All political debate depends on both types of meaning. The specific and the discursive are in practice inseparable, and the former draws its force from the latter – they are mutually interactive[22]. After all, the conduct of the debate in the 860s focused much more on questions of jurisdiction, authority and procedure than on binary questions of guilt and innocence. The truth is that both layers of meaning could be, and were, simultaneously in play. Specific arguments were framed by, and embodied, broader discourses. The crystal functioned as a comment on received values and principles of justice and marriage while recognisably relating to a particular context or set of circumstances.

Undermining Lauer does, though, create a different problem: it weakens some of the bonds tethering the crystal to the events of the 860s. Although, as we have seen, the themes of the crystal certainly do make broad sense in the context of those events,

19 Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, Reines adultères et empoisonneuses, reines injustement accusées: la confrontation de deux modèles aux VIII^{e}–X^{e} siècles, in: Cristina La Rocca (ed.), Agire da donna. Modelli e pratiche di rappresentazione, Turnhout 2007, p. 151–170, at p. 165–168.

20 Kornbluth, Susanna Crystal (as in n. 4); ead., Engraved Gems (as in n. 2), p. 37–47; ead., Susanna and Saint Eligius: Romanesque Reception of a Carolingian Jewel, in: Studies in Iconography 16 (1994), p. 37–51.

21 Flint, Magic (as in n. 4); id., Susanna (as in n. 4). Misonne, L'intaille carolingienne (as in n. 18) (first published in 1963) already pointed out some of the weaknesses in Lauer's correspondences, without doubting that Lothar II was the commissioner.

22 For extended discussion of this issue, focused on a slightly later period, see Ludger Körntgen, Königsherrschaft und Gottes Gnade: zu Kontext und Funktion sakraler Vorstellungen in Historiographie und Bildzeugnissen der ottonisch-frühsalischen Zeit, Berlin 2001.

the stripping away of correlations to the politics of Lothar's divorce means that the only clear evidence directly placing the crystal in that context is the dedicatory caption, »Lothar king of the Franks ordered me to be made«. Lothar II, however, was never called »king of the Franks« in any contemporary document. He was simply »king«, in both the titulature and signature sections of his royal charters[23]. What is more, his name was consistently spelled in these documents with an H – *Hlotharius* – as was common practice in north-central Francia in the ninth century[24]. Certainly, some caution is warranted here: the crystal was not a charter[25]. Nonetheless, royal titulature in our period was deployed precisely and with deliberation. These formulations were meaningful to those who used them and were intended to convey messages of one kind or another to those who received them[26]. Although in modern parlance historians are used to referring to the Carolingian rulers generically as »kings of the Franks« or »Frankish kings«, in a contemporary context this formulation is much more resonant of tenth-century sources than those written in the ninth. If we look into the tenth century, two further Kings Lothar come into play. One was ruler of Italy between 947 and 950, and though he was a distant relative of Theutberga's and a great-grandson of Lothar II's, his career was exclusively based in Italy – there are no clear grounds for associating him with a work of art from Waulsort. The other, king of West Francia from 954 until 986, was not only styled »king of the Franks« in contemporary documentary and narrative sources, and generally had his name spelled without an H, but also had a wife, Queen Emma II, who was publicly accused of adultery and subsequently exonerated. Moreover, one of her accusers – who later repented and became her defender – was a powerful bishop with a direct relationship to the monastery of Waulsort.

4. Obstacles to a tenth-century date

The main reason why Lothar and Emma have not been seriously considered in relation to the crystal is the historiographical certainty that the Lothar II identification is correct. The fact that they are much less famous than Lothar II and Theutberga, and their reigns considerably less well documented, must also have played a part. There are also, though, two other pieces of evidence that may have deterred scholars from considering a late-tenth-century date for the crystal. The first is the testimony of the twelfth-century »History of Waulsort«, which offers a description of the crystal and even makes it part of the eponymous monastery's origin story, set in the first half of the tenth century. According to this text, the founder of Waulsort, an aristocrat from Lotharingia named Eilbert, used a fabulously mounted crystal depicting the Susanna

23 Die Urkunden Lothars I. und Lothars II., ed. Theodor Schieffer, Berlin, Zurich 1966 (MGH DD Karol., 3).

24 Dijkdrent, Lothar Crystal (as in n. 12), p. 14–16.

25 Dierkens, Abbayes (as in n. 12), p. 188.

26 Herwig Wolfram, Lateinische Herrschertitel im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert, in: id. *et al.* (ed.), Intitulatio II, Vienna 1973, p. 19–178; Geoffrey Koziol, The Politics of Memory and Identity in Carolingian Royal Diplomas: the West Frankish Kingdom (840–987), Turnhout 2012; Mark Mersiowsky, Die Urkunde in der Karolingerzeit: Originale, Urkundenpraxis und politische Kommunikation, Wiesbaden 2015.

story as security for a horse sold to him by a cleric from Rheims. When Eilbert returned later to pay the full price, the man refused to hand over the crystal, so Eilbert burned the cathedral of Rheims (Notre-Dame) to the ground. The cleric then returned the crystal to buy his safety. This incident led to a war, during which Eilbert took prisoner the West Frankish king, Charles the Simple. In the middle of the 940s, to atone for his extreme actions, Eilbert founded a series of monasteries, one of which was Waulsort. He dedicated it to Notre-Dame in honour of the cathedral he had burned in Rheims, and he donated the crystal to the new community[27].

Nothing about this story rings true. The text was written around 1152 and it is abundantly clear that the chronicler had no accurate information about the early decades of his community's history beyond what he could guess or fabricate based on the charters and other objects that he found in its treasury. One can see, for example, how he repurposed details found in the monastery's royal charters which mentioned Eilbert's role in Waulsort's founding. One of these charters was itself doctored in the mid-twelfth century to better fit the »Historia«'s narrative. The broader agenda to which these texts spoke was a demonstration of Waulsort's historical independence from and seniority to the neighbouring house of Hastière, which had likewise been founded by Eilbert. The relationship between these sister foundations was a matter of active dispute in the 1150s, as part of which institutional histories were amended, created and weaponised by the communities[28]. The »Historia«'s patent inaccuracies and anachronisms mean that it cannot be used as evidence that the crystal already existed in the era of Charles the Simple and the historical Eilbert. All we can say for sure is that it was at Waulsort by the 1150s, and that it was by then regarded in the community as an ancient and prestigious treasure.

As an aside, it is worth noting that even the chronicler's description of the crystal itself is perplexing: »This desirable treasure was made in the likeness of a remarkable collar, that the venerable Bishop Eligius, distinguished for his holiness and integrity, with all the skill of his craft made with his own hands, by order and command of the famous Lothar, King of the English. A beryl stone positioned in the middle contains a carving showing how in [the book of] Daniel, Susanna was maliciously accused by the elderly judges. It shows the skill of its art through the variety of its workmanship, and through its diligence the elegance of its high reputation[29].« It is interesting that the chronicler was impressed less by the crystal than by its mount (now lost – the current one is late medieval), which he believed to have been made by the famous

27 Historia Walciodorensis, ed. Georg Waitz, in: MGH SS, vol. 14, Hanover 1883, p. 506–511, 523.

28 Dierkens, Abbayes (as in n. 12), p. 155–161, 166–167, 174–187; see also Georges Despy, Les chartes de l'Abbaye de Waulsort: étude diplomatique et édition critique, vol. 1, 946–1199, Brussels 1957, p. 58–63, 71–74; Daniel Misonne, Eilbert de Florennes. Histoire et légende: La geste de Raoul de Cambrai, Louvain 1967, p. 178–183. Charters: Die Urkunden Konrad I., Heinrich I. und Otto I., ed. Theodor Sickel, Hanover 1879–1884 (MGH DD Regum et Imperatorum Germaniae, 1), nos. 81 (946) and 381 (969).

29 Historia Walciodorensis, ed. Waitz (as in n. 27), p. 506: *Thesaurus autem iste desiderabilis compositus est in similitudinem insignis monilis, quem Eligius venerabilis episcopus, sanctitate, honestate et in omni operationis artificio egregius, precepto nutuque incliti Lotharii regis Anglorum manibus propriis operatus est. Lapis siquidem beryllus in medio positus sculptum retinet, qualiter in Daniele Susanna a senibus iudicibus male criminata sit, qui varietate sui operis diligentiam ostendit artis et diligentia venustatem locupletis honoris.*

The Lothar/Susanna Crystal (image supplied by the British Museum).

seventh-century goldsmith St Eligius. This was probably another invented tradition[30]. Confusingly, the »Historia«'s author described the mount as having been commissioned by an English king called Lothar. In an excellent recent article, Mats Dijkdrent has made the intriguing suggestion that this apparent error might indicate that the captions had not yet been added to the crystal by the 1150s; and that when they were, at some unknown later date, the intention was to refer to the Merovingian King Clothar II, retro-fitted as the patron from his known association with the historical Eligius[31].

This is a possibility, but it leaves us wondering why the chronicler – if he had no inscription before him – believed that the patron of the mount was also called Lothar, and why he thought he was English. Transmission error has been offered as a solution: the only surviving full copy of the »Historia« is very late (post-medieval), but a lost manuscript of unknown date published in the seventeenth century apparently read *Francorum* instead of *Anglorum* at this point[32]. Unfortunately, we don't know whether this reading really did constitute a more authentic version of the original as opposed to a correction supplied by an intervening editor or copyist. Moreover, there is a second reference to an English king in the same section of the »Historia«. This appears in a poem inserted immediately after the description of the treasure: »The English king, king of an eminent people, gave this to him / He hoped he would be pleased, giving many things freely / Among which it pleased him to give such a thing (*Egregiae gentis rex Anglicus hunc dedit illi / Quem fore speravit gratum, dans plurima gratis / Inter quae danti placuit sibi portio tali*).« The author inserts this poem parenthetically, making no attempt to integrate it with the »Historia«'s narrative, leading to the suspicion that he was transcribing it into the text from another source – possibly it was inscribed on or attached to the mount, to commemorate the king who donated it[33]. If so, it presents another solution to the logic of the text. If the »Historia«'s author had two conflicting texts in front of him – one the inscription on the crystal mentioning Lothar king of the Franks, the other a poem (perhaps inscribed on the mount) referring to an unnamed English king – he may simply have split the difference and tried to combine the two. It would be in keeping with his un-scientific methods to decide that Lothar must have been *rex Anglorum* after all, thus giving priority to the information from what he considered the most important part of the treasure, the mount. In any case, the fundamental confusion here is his as much as ours. He did not know the history of the crystal any better than he knew the early history of Waulsort, nor perhaps did he really care – at least, not in the same way that a modern historian cares. All things considered, it is difficult to disagree with the assessment of Alain Dierkens that this author was (albeit in service of a perfectly rational agenda) »a fantasist on almost every point«[34].

30 Kornbluth, Susanna and Saint Eligius (as in n. 20), p. 40.
31 Dijkdrent, Lothar Crystal (as in n. 12).
32 Kornbluth, Susanna and Saint Eligius (as in n. 20), p. 46, n. 1. An edition of the relevant section using all manuscript witnesses is provided by Misonne, Eilbert (as in n. 28), p. 187–190.
33 Misonne, L'intaille carolingienne (as in n. 18), p. 144–145. The term *rex Anglicus* is not common, and seems to favour a composition date for this poem in the twelfth century rather than earlier.
34 Dierkens, Abbayes (as in n. 12), p. 176.

The second type of evidence that might seem to preclude a tenth-century date for the crystal is art historical. Carvings such as these are notoriously difficult to date on stylistic grounds, and at the end of the day our main method is comparison with other works of art. Similarities have been identified between the figures depicted on the Lothar Crystal and those in Carolingian manuscripts and ivories from the major centres of cultural production in northern Francia, with particular reference to works connected with Metz. The closest parallels are found in the so-called »later Metz group« of ivories which were most likely made in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Many of these, like the crystal, feature multiple human figures crowding the space, shorthand depictions of architectural detail, and finely drawn clothing with distinctive folds[35]. These carvings were mostly created in the era of Lothar II's immediate successors, but they remained well known and appreciated in the time of the other Lothar. Artists and sculptors in and around Metz in the later tenth century engaged with and were directly influenced by the work of their Carolingian predecessors[36]. Comparisons across artistic mediums can be problematic, as the technical demands and limitations of crystal carving might not translate in a straightforward way to ivory work or manuscript illumination. Even restricting the comparisons to the corpus of early medieval gemstones is, however, not decisive. Kornbluth's superb study of this topic situates the crystal in a group of gems which share a number of stylistic features, yet the dating of these objects to the middle of the ninth century depends ultimately on the prior hypothesis that the Lothar Crystal was made in the reign of Lothar II[37]. Interestingly, the only such object known with certainty to come from his reign, a seal matrix, has some significant stylistic differences from the »Susanna Group«; and moreover only survives embedded in a processional cross which dates from the reign of the tenth-century Lothar[38].

35 Adolph Goldschmidt, Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser, VIII.–XI. Jahrhundert, vol. 1, 2nd ed., Berlin 1969, p. 46–59; Misonne, L'intaille carolingienne (as in n. 18), p. 141; Peter Lasko, Ars Sacra, 800–1200, 2nd ed., Yale 1994, p. 35–39, 42, 76; Kornbluth, Engraved Gems (as in n. 2), p. 30 (the latter also pointing out that the letter forms on the crystal likewise recall the ivory carvings).

36 Lasko, Ars Sacra (as in n. 35), p. 174–175; Jean-Pierre Caillet, Metz et le travail de l'ivoire vers l'an Mil, in: Dominique Iogna-Prat, Jean-Charles Picard (ed.), Religion et culture autour de l'an Mil, Paris 1990, p. 315–337; François Heber-Suffrin, Les arts dans le sud de la Lotharingie, in: Hans-Walter Herrmann, Reinhard Schneider (ed.), Lotharingia. Eine europäische Kernlandschaft um das Jahr 1000, Saarbrücken 1995, p. 245–252. The dating to the mid-ninth century of the ivory with the closest similarities to the crystal (a book cover) is in turn partly predicated on that similarity; but in any case we know from an inscription that this book was in active use (and its cover the subject of maintenance by craftsmen) in the cathedral at Metz in the tenth century: Genevra Kornbluth, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Lat. 9383: Archaeology and Function of a Carolingian Treasure Binding, in: Aachener Kunstblätter 62 (1998/2002), p. 185–200, at p. 186. The ivory crucifixion made for Bishop Adalbero II of Metz (984–1005) is another relevant point of comparison: Lasko, Ars Sacra (as in n. 35), p. 114.

37 Kornbluth, Engraved Gems (as in n. 2), p. 24–48.

38 Genevra Kornbluth, The Seal of Lothar II: Model and Copy, in: Francia 17 (1990), p. 55–68; ead., Engraved Gems (as in n. 2), p. 58–63; Lawrence Nees, Aspects of Antiquarianism in the Art of Bernward and its Contemporary Analogues, in: Angela Wever, Gerhard Lutz (ed.), 1000 Jahre St. Michael in Hildesheim: Kirche – Kunst – Stifter, Petersberg 2012, p. 153–170, at p. 156–163; Klaus Gereon Beuckers, Das Lotharkreuz im Aachener Domschatz: zur Datierung mit

These caveats are offered not as a counsel of despair on the validity of dating by stylistic comparison, nor in the hope of eliminating the possibility of a ninth-century origin for the crystal, but simply as a way of loosening the range of potential dates for its creation. The images sit quite comfortably in the context of Lotharingian prestige art of the ninth and tenth centuries. The terminology of the captions was mostly drawn from the Vulgate but was also period-appropriate for a Carolingian or post-Carolingian context. In particular, the choice of *senes* for the two accusers, instead of *presbyteri* (priests) and *iudices* (judges), which are also used in the Vulgate, suggests a desire to avoid the specific technical connotations that the latter terms would have had for an early medieval audience[39]. The point, in any case, is that there is no insuperable barrier to an interpretation of the crystal as a product of the later tenth century.

5. King Lothar, Queen Emma and the Otto II succession crisis

What, then, are the positive arguments for associating this artefact with the reign of Lothar and Emma II? Although he enjoyed a long tenure as king of West Francia, there are good reasons that the tenth-century Lothar is remembered with less fanfare than his ninth-century namesakes. He was a Carolingian, descended in the direct male line from Charles the Bald and Charlemagne; and his father and grandfather (Louis IV and Charles the Simple) had also been West Frankish kings. In the tenth century, however, Carolingian descent had lost some of the exclusive royal aura it had commanded in the ninth. This was because the Carolingian Empire had disintegrated in 887–888 with the deposition and death of Charles the Fat, who was replaced by several kings from a variety of different lineages[40]. This turn of events not only diluted the royal exclusivity of the Carolingian family but also caused a diminution of the material base of West Frankish kingship, leading to a fundamentally different style of rule exercised from a position of relative weakness. Lothar would be the penultimate Carolingian king, not that anyone knew it at the time. His young son Louis V succeeded him in 986 but a hunting accident ended his reign and his life a year later. He was replaced by one of the kingdom's most powerful dukes, Hugh Capet, thus inaugurating the multi-century tenure of Western Europe's most tenacious medieval dynasty, the Capetians.

Being ruler of West Francia in the tenth century meant dealing with the power of dukes like Hugh, but it also meant coping with the rising dominance of the Ottonian kings of East Francia. The Ottonians were the most successful of all the tenth-century royal dynasties who took over management of the old Frankish kingdoms. They ruled East Francia from 919 and Italy from 962, acquiring the imperial title along the way. Although the Ottonians also had to contend with mighty dukes, their authority was enhanced by military success against raiding Hungarians, and by the 960s they had begun to enjoy a kind of neo-Carolingian hegemony over all the realms of the

ikonologischen, stilistischen und historischen Methoden, in: Kanon Kunstgeschichte 1 (2015), p. 79–107.

39 Kornbluth, Susanna Crystal (as in n. 4), p. 26.

40 Stuart Airlie, Making and Unmaking the Carolingians, 751–888, London, New York 2020.

ninth-century empire, even those they did not rule directly. Lothar was not merely overshadowed by this hegemony, but incorporated into it by marriage: his mother was Gerberga, a sister of Otto I (936–973), and his wife Emma was the same Otto's step-daughter. These relationships actively shaped Lothar's career. In 965, for example, he travelled to Cologne along with other members of the extended Ottonian family to celebrate Otto's triumphant imperial return from Italy[41]. Underlying tensions persisted, especially over control of Lotharingia, Lothar II's old realm in the middle of Francia. This region changed hands several times up until 925, when it became part of the East Frankish kingdom. Hindsight shows that this state of affairs would last for centuries, but the tenth-century Carolingians did not know that, nor were they every really reconciled with the prospect. Matters came to head in 978 when Lothar invaded northern Lotharingia, temporarily capturing the palace of Aachen before being turfed out by the superior forces of Otto II[42].

As already mentioned, there are two reasons to think that this Lothar could be the crystal's commissioner. Firstly, in official documents his name was almost always written *Lotharius*, not *Hlotharius*, and he was habitually titled *rex Francorum* – king of the Franks. This title appears in many of his royal charters, including half of those surviving as originals, which helps allay any anxiety about copyist tampering[43]. Such titles were not deployed as a simple matter of course, but were intended to carry specific connotations[44]. The ninth-century Carolingians had rarely styled themselves using this formulation, and in the tenth century it was closely associated with their claims to the especially resonant royal heartland of Lotharingia. Lothar's grandfather Charles the Simple had begun adopting the style *rex Francorum* in connection with his annexation of Lotharingia in 911[45]. It was used in Lothar's titulature particularly in charters of the 950s and 970s. This pattern might indicate changing notarial preference, but it may also reflect the fact that in the 960s Lothar's relations with Otto were at their most peaceful, and his ambitions in Lotharingia at their most dormant[46]. That said, from the middle of the 960s Lothar adopted a new royal seal – one

41 Johannes Laudage, »Liudolfingisches Hausbewußtsein«: Zu den Hintergründen eines Kölner Hoftages von 965, in: Hannah Vollrath, Stefan Weinfurter (ed.), Köln: Stadt und Bistum in Kirche und Reich des Mittelalters. Festschrift für Odilo Engels zum 65. Geburtstag, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna 1993, p. 23–59.

42 Theo Riches, The Carolingian Capture of Aachen in 978 and its Historiographical Footprint, in: Paul Fouracre, David Ganz (ed.), Frankland: The Franks and the World of the Early Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Dame Jinty Nelson, Manchester 2008, p. 191–208; Jacek Banaszkiewicz, Was soll im Juni 978 um die Johannisnacht in Aachen geschehen sein?, in: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 43 (2009), p. 393–406; Stuart Airlie, The Palace Complex, in: John Hudson, Ana Rodriguez (ed.), Diverging Paths? The Shapes of Power and Institutions in Medieval Christendom, Leiden 2014, p. 255–290, at p. 282–287.

43 Originals: Recueil des actes de Lothaire et de Louis V, rois de France (954–987), ed. Louis Halphen, Ferdinand Lot, Paris 1908 (Chartes et diplômes), nos. 1, 12, 25, 26, 29, 38, 29, 56.

44 See above, n. 26.

45 Bernd Schneidmüller, Karolingische Tradition und frühes französisches Königtum: Untersuchungen zur Herrschaftslegitimation der westfränkisch-französischen Monarchie im 10. Jahrhundert, Wiesbaden 1979; Horst Lösslein, Royal Power in the Late Carolingian Age. Charles III the Simple and his Predecessors, Cologne 2019.

46 Recueil des actes de Lothaire, ed. Halphen, Lot (as in n. 43), p. XXII–XXV, XXXIX–XLI; Carlrichard Brühl, Deutschland – Frankreich: die Geburt zweier Völker, Cologne 1995, p. 560.

based in some respects on Ottonian models – which bore the legend *Lotharius dei gratia rex Francorum*: »Lothar, by the grace of God, king of the Franks«[47].

The second reason is that Emma II was accused of adultery. We do not have anything like the evidence for this matter that we have for the Lothar II case: there is no equivalent to the hundreds of pages written about Theutberga by Hincmar of Rheims, or the numerous letters which flew back and forth across the Alps in the 860s. In general, there is very little contemporary narrative source material at all from Lothar's reign, and it is difficult to reconstruct a detailed account of Emma's career despite her obvious importance to the web of familial-political relationships connecting West Francia to the Ottonian kingdoms[48]. Regarding the accusation of adultery, our direct evidence boils down to one narrative source and a couple of letters. The narrative is the highly detailed and rhetorically colourful four-book »Histories« by Richer of Rheims, written in the early 990s[49]. Towards the end of his third book, Richer says: »At that time, Queen Emma and Bishop Adalbero of Laon were being accused of adultery. These allegations were made only in private, however, since no one was prepared to bring a charge openly. But because the rumours had reached everyone's ears, the bishops decided to adjudicate the matter so that their brother and fellow bishop would not have to endure such a scandalous allegation. A synod of bishops therefore assembled at St-Macre, in the diocese of Rheims, at the behest of Archbishop Adalbero [of Rheims]. They took their seats and discussed some preliminary matters of importance, and after the archbishop …[50].« The end of this passage is lost because part of the folio has been cut away. The manuscript we have is Richer's own, and we know that he was not at all averse to going back over his work to make erasures and revisions, and even to reorganise the folios into a different order. Sometimes we can see why he made particular decisions in response to the controversial events unfolding at the heart of the West Frankish kingdom as he wrote, including a dispute over who should be archbishop of Rheims[51]. Whether the bottom of our folio was removed by Richer, or by some later reader – and whether it was done because the content was considered controversial, or for some more innocent reason – we cannot now know. From context, though, it is clear that the missing section

47 Recueil des actes de Lothaire, ed. Halphen, Lot (as in n. 43), p. L–LII; Hagen Keller, Zu den Siegeln der Karolinger und der Ottonen: Urkunden als Hoheitszeichen in der Kommunikation des Königs mit seinen Getreuen, in: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 32 (1998), p. 400–441.

48 Jean Dufour, Emma II, femme de Lothaire, roi de France, in: Franz Staab, Thorsten Unger (ed.), Kaiserin Adelheid und ihre Klostergründung in Selz, Speyer 2005, p. 213–227; Simon MacLean, Ottonian Queenship, Oxford 2017, p. 164–179; Linda Dohmen, Die Ursache allen Übels: Untersuchungen zu den Unzuchtsvorwürfen gegen die Gemahlinnen der Karolinger, Ostfildern 2017, p. 312–324.

49 On Richer, see Jason Glenn, Politics and History in the Tenth Century: the Work and World of Richer of Reims, Cambridge 2004; Justin Lake, Richer of St-Rémi: the Methods and Mentality of a Tenth-Century Historian, Washington DC 2013.

50 Richer of Rheims, Historiae, ed. Hartmut Hoffmann, Hanover 2000 (MGH SS, 38), 3.66, p. 205; trans. Justin Lake, Histories: Richer of St-Rémi, Cambridge 2011, p. 106–109.

51 Hartmut Hoffmann, Die Historien Richers von Saint-Remi, in: Deutsches Archiv 54 (1998), p. 445–532.

referred to the public exoneration of the accused, and that the accusations and the synod took place in 977 or 978[52].

To supplement this brief report we have the letter collection of Gerbert of Aurillac, one of the tenth century's most famous intellectual figures. In 999 he would become pope, taking the name Sylvester (II), but around 980 he was working as a close adviser of the Archbishop of Rheims. For present purposes, his significance lies in allusions in some of his letters to the identity of the person who accused Emma and Adalbero of adultery: King Lothar's brother, Charles of Lorraine[53]. Charles was an ambitious man with the odds stacked against him, and as a consequence he tends to be portrayed in the sources as a conniving and slippery individual. He was a few years younger than Lothar and had probably been lined up for a kingdom when he was very young, but this was thwarted by the unexpected death of their father Louis IV in 954. Louis's widow Gerberga called the shots in the events that followed, and the deal she struck with the powerful of the realm involved Lothar reigning alone[54]. Charles's relationship with his brother hit rock bottom at the end of the 970s, when he was expelled from the kingdom by Lothar. This complete breakdown in relations was probably related to Charles's claims about Emma, and his exile may explain why Richer said that no accuser could be found by the bishops[55]. The rift between the brothers created an opportunity for Otto II, who put Charles in charge of northern Lotharingia with ducal authority, a divide-and-conquer move designed to fend off Lothar's interventions in the region, and presumably also to annoy the West Frankish king[56]. This was the immediate backdrop to Lothar's invasion of northern Lotharingia in 978. It is not clear whether Lothar's goal was the permanent annexation of parts of the old Middle Kingdom, or simply to embarrass his brother in the eyes of his new Ottonian patron[57]. In any case, Otto's retaliation was swift and overwhelming: he sent a large army which attacked and damaged significant centres of West Frankish royal power. Charles travelled with them and declared his own royal ambitions by participating in the assault on Lothar's principal royal seat at Laon[58].

We don't know if Otto intended to set up Charles as king in Laon, or if he was just using him to enrage Lothar as much as possible – something of the former kind was clearly threatened, though it is unlikely that a formal coronation took place. In any case, Lothar recovered soon enough, and he and Otto formally reconciled in 980. As in 954, Charles's prospects of kingship were once more a dead letter. Now it was

52 Here I am following the arguments of Dohmen, Die Ursache (as in n. 48), p. 314–317, 319–321.

53 Gerbert d'Aurillac, Correspondance, ed. Pierre Riché, Jean-Pierre Callu, Paris 1993, nos. 31, 32. Translations based on Harriet Lattin, The Letters of Gerbert, with his Papal Privileges as Sylvester II, New York 1961.

54 Brühl, Deutschland – Frankreich (as in n. 46), p. 335–336; MacLean, Ottonian Queenship (as in n. 48), p. 67. On Adalbero of Laon: Robert T. Coolidge, Adalbero, Bishop of Laon, in: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History 2 (1965), p. 1–114.

55 Dohmen, Die Ursache (as in n. 48), p. 321.

56 The evidence for this dating of Charles's ducal elevation is circumstantial: Theo Riches, Bishop Gerard I of Cambrai (1012–1051) and the Representation of Authority in the Gesta Episcoporum Cameracensium, PhD thesis, University of London 2006, p. 220–221.

57 Brühl, Deutschland – Frankreich (as in n. 46), p. 565.

58 Gerbert, Correspondance, ed. Riché, Callu (as in n. 53), nos. 31, 32 constitute the evidence for this event: Brühl, Deutschland – Frankreich (as in n. 46), p. 567.

Charles's turn to be infuriated, and he spent much of the 980s trying to get back on the throne, via intrigue first against his brother, then his nephew Louis V, then Hugh Capet. In particular, he was always trying to regain Laon, the main seat of the West Frankish kingdom. All of this provides the general context amidst which his accusations of adultery against the queen and the bishop were made. Regardless of whether or not they were true, the accusations were born of Charles's resentment against Adalbero, who was riding high in the king's favour, and Emma, whom he reportedly blamed for estranging him from his brother[59]. Attacks of this kind against Carolingian queens were sometimes intended to inflict collateral damage on the king by giving focus to wider tensions already simmering, and Lothar was surely one of Charles's targets here[60]. It is plausible that his claims about Emma were used to help justify his attempted seizure of Laon in 978, which was obviously a move against his brother. The formal designation of Louis V as Lothar's heir in 979 can have done little to quell his frustration[61].

Here, then, we have a situation that corresponds in its literal details more closely to the plot of the crystal's Susanna story than did the divorce of Lothar II: Emma, unlike Theutberga, was actually accused of adultery, then formally exonerated[62]. That literal understandings of the biblical text were abroad in this period is implied by the case of Rozala, the wife of Count Arnulf II of Flanders, who went so far as to change her name to Susanna, possibly in response to a politicised accusation of adultery around 987–988[63]. Rozala-Susanna, an Italian princess by birth, had been raised at the Ottonian court and thus moved in the same political-cultural circles as Lothar, Emma, Charles and the other elite figures mentioned in this article.

At the same time, and just as clearly as in the controversy around Theutberga, the Emma affair brought to the fore all of the broader thematic lessons that early medieval intellectuals drew from Daniel 13. As the accuser, Charles of Lorraine had a reputation, according to Richer, as a man of »bad faith«. The archbishop of Rheims reportedly said to him: »you have always been devoted to perjurers, blasphemers and other wicked men[64].« Perjury and bad faith, and the threat they posed to the virtues of justice, are at the centre of the Susanna story as told in the crystal. Note also Richer's care in reporting that the accusations were made in private but the exculpatory hearing was in public, which we can safely assume was the basis for the

59 Richer, Historiae, ed. Hoffmann (as in n. 50), 4.16, p. 242–243; trans. Lake, Histories (as in n. 50), p. 232–233.

60 On this recurring political dynamic and the cultural categories which gave it shape, see Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, La reine adultère, in: Cahiers de civilisation médiévale 35 (1992), p. 299–312.

61 Geoffrey Koziol, A Father, His Son, Memory, and Hope: the Joint Diploma of Lothar and Louis V (Pentecost Monday, 979) and the Limits of Performativity, in: Jürgen Martschukat, Steffen Patzold (ed.), Geschichtswissenschaft und Performative Turn, Cologne 2003, p. 83–103; Dohmen, Die Ursache (as in n. 48), p. 324–329.

62 Kornbluth, Susanna Crystal (as in n. 4), p. 27 and ead., Engraved Gems (as in n. 2), p. 39 suggests that Susanna's accusers on the crystal are dressed in secular garb which, if correct, would also fit with Charles of Lorraine.

63 Jean Dunbabin, The Reign of Arnulf II, Count of Flanders, and its Aftermath, in: Francia 16 (1989), p. 53–66, at p. 64.

64 Richer, Historiae, 4.9–11, ed. Hoffmann (as in n. 50), p. 236–239; trans. Lake, Histories, p. 214–223 (as in n. 50) (quote at p. 217).

exoneration in the missing part of the manuscript. This was not a point about how many people knew about the supposed scandal (Richer says that »everyone« had heard the rumours), but about the procedural distinction between an accuser who was prepared to bring formal charges in a properly constituted forum, and one who was intent only on spreading private gossip. This procedural distinction was exactly the point of the Susanna story as it had been deployed by Hincmar in his writings of the 850s and 860s – but Richer's telling carried an extra layer of meaning because he, unlike Hincmar, was describing an actual accusation of adultery which followed the same pattern as the biblical story. Richer may indeed have been conscious of the parallels between the Emma and Susanna cases, since the only citation of Daniel 13 in his entire work appears in a passage describing how Charles of Lorraine and Adalbero of Laon eventually became allies around 990[65].

Can we edge out along the branch a little further, and try to identify a closer context for the crystal's creation? The letters which identify Charles as the originator of the adultery accusations may be helpful here. These texts contain a furious exchange of insults between Charles himself and Bishop Theoderic of Metz (964–984), a relative of the Ottonian royal family and one of the most powerful bishops in Lotharingia[66]. The contretemps took place in the late spring and early summer of 984, a moment at which the future of Lotharingia was once again at issue because of the sudden death in Italy of the emperor Otto II at the end of 983. The unexpectedness of his death was destabilising enough, but what pushed the situation into crisis was the fact that his heir, Otto III, was only three years old. From 983 until 985 various parties fought to control or possibly even replace the young king. While his mother, aunt and grandmother worked together to protect Otto's right to the throne, Henry duke of Bavaria (aka »the Quarrelsome«) and Lothar himself – both cousins of the young king – exploited the situation to extend their own influence. The loyalties of the Lotharingian aristocrats were divided, some of them supporting Otto III under the guardianship of his mother; some favouring the claims of Duke Henry; and some flirting with the idea of taking their allegiance west, to Lothar. Lothar courted Lotharingian loyalties and considered another attempt to seize the region[67].

This situation did not lead to the formation of clearly-defined factions but it did foster an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust amongst the powerful of Lotharingia. Gerbert's letters offer a tantalising outline of messengers travelling to-and-fro on clandestine missions, and reveal the simmering cauldron of nerves that affected members of the ruling class, each desperate to find out what the others were really thinking while keeping their own options open and their cards close to their chests. It was amidst this crisis of loyalties, in the spring or early summer of 984, that Bishop Theoderic (who had been backing Duke Henry) wrote his startling letter to Charles,

65 Richer, Historiae, ed. Hoffmann (as in n. 50), 4.46, p. 260; trans. Lake, Histories (as in n. 50), p. 290–293. The allusion is to Daniel 13:14, where the two elders hatch their plan against Susanna.

66 Michel Parisse, Il y a mille ans: Thierry I[er], évêque de Metz (965–984), in: Les cahiers lorrains 17 (1965), p. 110–117; Robert Folz, Un évêque ottonien: Thierry I[er] de Metz (965–984), in: Media in Francia. Recueil de mélanges offerts à Karl Ferdinand Werner, Maulévrier 1989, p. 139–156.

67 Carlrichard Brühl, Lothar 954–986 und Ludwig V. 986–987, in: Joachim Ehlers, Heribert Müller, Bernd Schneidmüller (ed.), Die französischen Könige des Mittelalters. Von Odo bis Karl VIII. (888–1498), Munich 1996, p. 60–74, at p. 72–73.

»the most shameless violator of fidelity«, and brought up once more the old accusations against the queen. »You fickle deserter«, he addressed him, complaining at his flouting of oaths. No wonder, he said, »you pour forth the disease of your utterly wicked heart«, since »you want to steal the city of Laon from your brother, the noble Lothar, king of the Franks – but it is his city not yours. You would deprive him of his kingdom; and you would bring the imperial sister, the queen, into ill repute and defile her with your lies … Remember how my finger would restrain your impudent mouth while you spread shameful insinuations about the queen by simulating a serpent's hiss. What you did against the bishop of Laon, you yourself know well.« Charles should stop »hiding away in his little corner of Lotharingia« and boasting how he was going to rule the whole kingdom. Theoderic, for his part, would defend the church – »that one redeemed by the blood of the greatest shepherd that you, despising divine law, strive to lacerate and destroy …[68].«

We also have Charles's equally astonishing reply, which systematically deflects each accusation in turn back against Theoderic, right down to the issue of which of them was the more overweight. Charles denounced Theoderic as »an archetype of hypocrites, a faithless murderer of emperors and their offspring, blown up with arrogance like an empty bag.« Charles was the one who was loyal to the Frankish king, and the bishop was the real traitor. Not only was the bishop of Metz opposing Otto III, but in helping Charles he had surely betrayed Lothar: seemingly a reference to their collaboration during the events of 978. In fact, on that occasion Charles had only attacked Lothar – and Emma – because Theoderic had forced him. The bishop, said the duke, had acted only for self-enrichment. He was a destroyer of the church and a habitual perjurer[69].

This second text's extravagant criticisms of Theoderic were rich in irony, for they depended on characterising Charles's own past actions as illegitimate: the point being made was that in now turning against the duke he had once supported, the bishop exposed himself as a hypocrite. For effect, this argument required Charles to make some arch comments about how he – Charles – was a tyrant. The irony belonged on the face of it to Charles himself, but it has to be noted that the letter was composed on his behalf by Gerbert, who wrote a third letter to Theoderic to apologise for doing so, while also claiming that he had toned down the original sentiment[70]. It is not outwith the bounds of possibility that Gerbert wrote it as satire rather than dictation, perhaps as part of an attempt to cajole the bishop into supporting Otto III in the imperial succession struggle[71]. But even if that were the case, to function as an effective piece of rhetoric the letter would at least have had to preserve the essence of what Theoderic and Gerbert understood Charles's position to be in 984.

These letters show that the adultery accusations first made against Emma at the end of the 970s had not been forgotten, and were actively revived in the context of

68 Gerbert, Correspondance, ed. Riché, Callu (as in n. 53), no. 31. On this letter see the insights of Airlie, Making and Unmaking (as in n. 40), p. 314–316.

69 Gerbert, Correspondance, ed. Riché, Callu (as in n. 53), no. 32.

70 Ibid., no. 33.

71 On Theoderic's ambiguous position: Dominik Wassenhoven, Swaying Bishops and the Succession of Kings, in: Ludger Körntgen, id. (ed.), Patterns of Episcopal Power: Bishops in Tenth and Eleventh Century Western Europe, Berlin 2011, p. 89–110, at p. 94–96.

the succession crisis that followed the death of Otto II. As with Richer's account of the accusations, the exchange points to all the main abstract/typological themes of the Lothar Crystal – deceit, secrecy, bad faith, injustice, false accusation, and defiling the church (of which Susanna was a type). All of these texts (Richer's »Histories«, the letters, the crystal) work on both the levels identified by Kornbluth and Flint: they referred in specific ways to particular events, and responded to the abstract issues raised by those events. These layers were intertwined. We need to look for both, not expect one to compensate for the absence of the other – and both can be identified in the chatter around Emma II's relationships with Lothar, Charles, and Adalbero of Laon. What, then, do these letters tell us about why the accusations against Emma mattered again in 984, several years after they been first aired and formally dismissed? To answer this question, we need to understand the rapidly changing position of the bishop of Metz as the Ottonian succession crisis unfolded[72].

The key point is that Theoderic and Charles had previously been allies but were now on different sides due to the tension following the death of Otto II. This explains the bitterness of their letters' rhetoric, and also the fact that their accusations were mutual: everything of which Theoderic accused Charles, he was accused of in turn. Which of them had broken oaths, damaged the church, and bore ultimately responsibility for the attacks on Emma and Lothar a few years earlier? Each said it was the other. Such blame shifting was necessary precisely because they had once been friends. The evidence doesn't support a formal coronation or anointing of Charles by Theoderic at Laon in 978 in opposition to Lothar. He had, however, clearly done something to support the duke's aspiration to kingship and the control of the West Frankish royal city[73]. A Metz source of the early eleventh century claims that the bishop was the man responsible for persuading Otto II to mount the 978 invasion of West Francia in the first place[74]. In the last years of the 970s, nobody would have mistaken Theoderic of Metz for a friend of King Lothar's.

By the late spring of 984, when he wrote his letter, things had changed drastically. In the early stages of the Ottonian succession crisis, Theoderic – along with a few other Lotharingian aristocrats – leaned towards backing Henry of Bavaria's claims to act as guardian for his infant nephew Otto III. This may have seemed like a *fait accompli* in 983, since at that time Henry had control of the boy, but it was clearly a snub not only to young Otto's mother and grandmother, but also to his other cousin Lothar. Henry soon overplayed his hand, however, by having himself received at Quedlinburg in king-like fashion at Easter 984, and the backlash took hold quickly. By June of that year he had publicly relinquished his claims along with his control of Otto[75]. Coinciding with these developments, Lothar let it be known that he too now supported Otto's mother and grandmother, while continuing to pursue his

72 The rumours also reappeared after Lothar's death in 986: Dohmen, Die Ursache (as in n. 48), p. 317–319, 322–323.

73 Brühl, Lothar (as in n. 67), p. 69–70.

74 Alpert, De episcopis Mettensibus, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, in: MGH SS, vol. 4, Hanover 1841, p. 697; Alpertus van Metz: Gebeurtenissen van deze tijd en Een fragment over bisschop Diederik van Metz, ed. Hans van Rij, Anna Sapir Abulafia, Amsterdam 1980, p. 108–110.

75 Brühl, Deutschland – Frankreich (as in n. 46), p. 577–580; Gerd Althoff, Otto III, trans. Phyllis Jestice, University Park 2003, p. 29–40.

Lotharingian ambitions[76]. These shifts made it clear to Henry's erstwhile supporters in Lotharingia not only that they had backed the wrong horse, but that the West Frankish king would now have to be appeased[77]. This was especially the case for someone like Theoderic, whose history of anti-Lothar collusion with Charles made some kind of rapprochement essential. In May or June, around the time he was writing his letter, a West Frankish army besieged and took the Lotharingian city of Verdun, only 80 km to the west of Metz. Queen Emma was placed in charge of the city[78]. The threat posed to Theoderic by this turn of events was not only the potential for military confrontation – it was the looming shadow of his own past beginning to catch up with him.

Such were the anxieties to which the bishop's letter spoke, as he hoped in spring 984 to win forgiveness from Lothar and Emma[79]. The fact that Theoderic was clearly on friendly terms with Gerbert, an influential figure in Rheims, suggests that his attempt to reposition himself had already met with some success. To pull this move off at a time of suspicion and uncertainty, the bishop had to put his cards on the table. He had to openly and ostentatiously regret his past actions by blaming them exclusively on his former ally, Charles. His opportunity was provided by the duke's new ambitions in southern Lotharingia, which he also denounced in his letter[80]. The last line of the letter contained an allusion to the Old Testament (2 Samuel 15): »May God make foolish the counsel of Achitophel.« Achitophel was an adviser of King David who switched sides and supported a rebellion led by the king's son Absalom, but later regretted it. Carolingian authors deployed him as an archetype of the bad counsellor[81]. To allude to himself as a type of Achitophel was an efficient and striking way for the bishop to both own and renounce the backing he had once given to Charles.

Theoderic's lashing out at the king's brother in 984 was therefore not just the symptom of a disintegrating personal relationship, but part of a public attempt to defuse memories of his own past hostility to Lothar. At the radioactive centre of that history sat his complicity in the accusations against Emma II. He wrote at a moment when the nerve-wracking uncertainty surrounding the succession to Otto II was rapidly resolving into clarity. The bishop's reheating of the old claims about Emma does not necessarily mean they were live in 984 – only that it served his self-exculpatory purposes to disinter and renounce them. This situation provides a context in which we might locate the crystal, as an artefact of the bishop's gravitation towards

76 Gerbert, Correspondance, ed. Riché, Callu (as in n. 53), no. 22; Ferdinand Lot, Les derniers carolingiens: Lothaire, Louis V, Charles de Lorraine, 954–991, Paris 1891, p. 135.

77 Gerbert, Correspondance, ed. Riché, Callu (as in n. 53), nos. 35, 63.

78 Richer, Historiae, ed. Hoffmann (as in n. 50), 3.99–102, p. 224–226; trans. Lake, Histories (as in n. 50), p. 171–177.

79 Parisse, Il y a mille ans (as in n. 66), p. 114; Folz, Un évêque ottonien (as in n. 66), p. 154.

80 Lot, Les derniers carolingiens (as in n. 76), p. 137. Theoderic may also have been worried that Charles was himself growing closer to Lothar at this moment, hence his implication that the duke was uniquely opposed to Lothar and Otto III through the claim that he had broken an oath taken with other Lotharingian aristocrats.

81 G. Bidault, Achitophel, conseiller de la dissidence, in: Revue du Moyen Âge Latin 1 (1945), p. 57–60; Pierre Riché, La Bible et la vie politique dans le haut Moyen Âge, in: id., Guy Lobrichon (ed.), Le Moyen Âge et la Bible, Paris 1984, p. 385–400, at p. 392–393.

friendship with King Lothar. In this reconstruction, the crystal reflected Lothar's own position on the old adultery accusations, but even more so it served the bishop of Metz's need to wash his hands of the whole matter. In the bishop's eyes, the memory of Queen Emma's exoneration in 977–978 overlapped neatly with his own hoped-for exoneration in 984. As Kornbluth pointed out, Daniel was depicted in the crystal as an older man, where the original text specifies that he was a youth[82]. Did the engraver think of Theoderic's furious denunciation of Charles of Lorraine when he considered Daniel's unmasking of the sinister elders who had falsely accused Susanna? Of course, we will never know. What we do know is that the carvings bear close similarity to some of the artistic output of ninth- and tenth-century Metz, one of the great cultural workshops of early medieval Europe. We also know that Waulsort, the monastery where the crystal was held for most or all of its history before the eighteenth century, was a subordinate house of the bishopric of Metz. In fact, it had been given to none other than Bishop Theoderic himself, in full ownership, by an imperial charter of Otto I in 969[83].

6. Conclusion: art and politics in the later tenth century

Teleporting the crystal from its usual home in the divorce case of Lothar II into the furnace of anxiety surrounding Otto II's succession is a move that I think resolves some of the problems in its interpretation, and gives us an extra source for understanding how the accusations against Queen Emma dovetailed with the wider political crises of the 980s. Lothar II cannot be ruled out definitively, but the assembly of circumstances described in this article gives us a potential alternative context for the crystal's creation. It is difficult to say anything more specific about how it came to be made, or how its creators and patrons envisaged its use. It could have been conceived as an item of jewellery, or something mounted on a book or altar, or simply a stored treasure[84]. We have to remember that this was an exceptionally high-quality piece of art, made with such skill and purpose that modern scholars for a long time had trouble believing that it wasn't Byzantine, or at least Italian[85]. Carving on rock crystal was extremely difficult, and the complexity and execution of the Lothar Crystal was virtually unique. It was not created casually or as an afterthought, and it must have meant something specific to its commissioners. The evidence does not tell us exactly what that was. Did Lothar commission it as a symbol of his alliance with Theoderic? Did he demand it as part of the price for his forgiveness? Did Emma, who was out-

82 Kornbluth, Susanna Crystal (as in n. 4), p. 27; ead., Engraved Gems (as in n. 2), p. 40.

83 Die Urkunden Ottos I., ed. Sickel (as in n. 28), no. 381, which was falsified during the twelfth-century Hastière dispute but is based on a genuine grant of Waulsort to Theoderic: Daniel Misonne, Le diplôme de l'Empereur Otton Ier relatif à Waulsort et Hastière (16 décembre 969), in: Archiv für Diplomatik 9–10 (1963–1964), p. 42–52; Dierkens, Abbayes (as in n. 12), p. 155–161, 189–192. Theoderic's proprietorial role at Waulsort, and close relationship with Eilbert, was also commemorated by a biographer writing around 1070: Sigebert, Vita Deoderici I, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, in: MGH SS, vol. 4, Hanover 1841, p. 461–483, at p. 467.

84 In general see now Philippe Cordez, Treasury, Memory, Nature: Church Objects in the Middle Ages, London, Turnhout 2020.

85 Misonne, L'intaille carolingienne (as in n. 18), p. 141.

raged by the accusations and later wrote of them as »very wicked things fabricated to my shame and the shame of all my lineage«[86]? Was it created by the bishop as a peace offering and inscribed with Lothar's name in hope and anticipation? Or some uneasy combination of the above? It was certainly a valuable enough artefact to have served any of these purposes, and to have had its own visibility as part of some public event orchestrated around a renewed exoneration of Emma or a reconciliation between Theoderic and the West Frankish rulers, with the choice of medium denoting transparency and purity[87]. If that were its originally intended function (as others have argued for its participation in the humiliation of Lothar II and Theutberga in 865) then the crystal would have had some agency of its own, befitting its considerable artistic qualities.

Even in that scenario, though, its propaganda value would have been limited. Though relatively large for its type, the crystal's detail would not have been visible from more than a few feet away, nor, most likely, would the nuances of its artistic scheme have been easily appreciated on a casual viewing. What is more, the rather extreme pressures which in my reconstruction explain the creation of the crystal also evaporated quite soon afterwards. It is true that the accusations against Emma and Adalbero came back again in the later 980s, which might have extended the crystal's relevance, but Theoderic died in late 984 and the succession crisis that had put him in such a difficult position was definitively settled in 985. Otto III was now fully acknowledged as sole ruler of the Ottonian realms, and it would be a long time before a West Frankish king again harboured serious ambitions of dominating Lotharingian centres like Metz. Hardly surprising if the crystal, like the Ark of the Covenant at the end of »Raiders of the Lost Ark«, was crated up and sent off to a dependent monastic treasury, there to have its true history forgotten and eventually replaced with legend[88].

But even if the crystal did not itself play a major role in the dramas of the ninth or tenth centuries, that is not to deny its significance as a source for modern historians trying to understand those dramas. Political art, or political text, can be private and still be political. Like most texts of the period, the crystal's greatest historical value is as a witness to the perspectives and preoccupations of those who created it. It is comparable to other contemporary artefacts which served »private« functions, but can be instructive as responses to political circumstances and mentalities. The Lothar Cross, now on display in the treasury at Aachen, is one example. This spectacular object functioned as a processional cross intended for use in the liturgies of the church, but it was likely produced to mark the end of the struggle between Otto II

86 Gerbert, Correspondance, ed. Riché, Callu (as in n. 53), no. 97.

87 For broader discussion of techniques and symbolism: Genevra Kornbluth, Carolingian Engraved Gems: Golden Rome is Reborn?, in: Studies in the History of Art 54 (1997), p. 44–61; Stefania Gerevini, Christus Crystallus. Rock Crystal, Theology and Materiality in the Medieval West, in: James Robinson *et al.* (ed.), Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period, London 2014, p. 92–99; Cynthia Hahn, Avinoam Shalem (ed.), Seeking Transparency: Rock Crystals across the Medieval Mediterranean, Berlin 2020.

88 This process is traced in different ways by Kornbluth, Susanna and Saint Eligius (as in n. 20) and Dijkdrent, Lothar Crystal (as in n. 12). For the later 980s accusations, see above, n. 52.

and Lothar in 980 and was intended by its designers to memorialise Ottonian domination of Lotharingia (hence its incorporation of the Lothar II seal matrix)[89]. Another is the now-lost prayer book of Emma herself, which included an image (fortunately copied out in the seventeenth century) of the queen and her family. On one side, it shows God reaching down touching the crowns of Lothar and Emma, each flanked by one of their two sons Louis V and Otto. On the other, we see Lothar enthroned with Louis sitting at his feet, in a pose reminiscent of the central image on the crystal. The image was likely made in response to Otto II's invasion of West Francia and the adultery accusations against the queen. It preserved a particular understanding of Emma's nuclear family as legitimate and coherent, pointing defensively to the validity of young Louis's designation as king in 979[90]. Thirdly and finally, consider the so-called Bamberg Table, which is one of the earliest known royal genealogies to be drawn with names in medallions – capsules with connecting lines. It was made as a comment on the legitimacy of the contested succession of the last Ottonian Henry II in the early eleventh century, but it is demonstrably based on an earlier (lost) Carolingian genealogy that promoted the royal claims of Charles of Lorraine against those of his nephew Louis V. This genealogy did not represent a simple history of the royal succession, but made an argument about its past and its future. It was almost certainly produced at Metz in connection with Bishop Theoderic's backing of Charles's efforts against his brother in the conflict of 978–979[91].

These artefacts were all, like the crystal, shaped by the complex political controversies of the late tenth century. All were embedded in books and objects which can only have had a very limited audience, and may not even have been intended to reach one beyond their owners. If anyone else did observe them, they would likely not have been capable of or interested in decoding the intricacies of their political messaging. In short, it would be very difficult to interpret them as weapons in a propaganda war. We can, though, at least interpret them as trace evidence for the existence – beyond themselves – of a high-stakes struggle to define the shape and power of the ruling families of the era. They responded to and fossilised real political discourses of immense importance at the moment of their creation, even if the artefacts themselves played no role in the unfolding of events.

People like Lothar, Emma, Charles and Theoderic were not interested in such images and items because of a calculation about their instrumental value in persuading others of their case. They desired to create and gaze upon these objects because they were utterly, furiously, convinced that they were in the right. Charles, according to Richer, frequently complained that he should have been king: »Everyone knows that by hereditary succession I should succeed my brother … no one denies that my

89 Beuckers, Das Lotharkreuz (as in n. 38).

90 Walter Cahn, The Psalter of Queen Emma, in: id., Studies in Medieval Art and Interpretation, London 2000, p. 239–262. Context: Koziol, A Father (as in n. 61).

91 Karl Schmid, Ein verlorenes Stemma Regum Franciae: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Entstehung und Funktion karolingischer (Bild-)Genealogien in salisch-staufischer Zeit, in: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 28 (1994), p. 196–225; id., Geschlechterbewußtsein am Beispiel ausgewählter karolingischer (Bild)Stemmata aus dem hohen Mittelalter, in: Claudie Duhamel-Amado, Guy Lobrichon (ed.), Georges Duby. L'écriture de l'histoire, Brussels 1996, p. 141–159.

ancestors were kings[92].« This attitude was inculcated in him from childhood. His elder brother had also been named Charles, a contemporary source tells us, »for the purposes of instruction« – in other words so that he could know, and be shaped by, his glorious Carolingian heritage[93]. This Charles died very young, but the same thinking must have applied when the future duke was baptised with the same name a few years later. The tenth-century Carolingians were obsessed with the histories of famous Charleses and Lothars, and they cultivated deep hopes and insecurities about living up to them[94]. Lothar was so-named in 941 precisely to advertise his parents' claims to Lotharingia, which at the time were the cause of open conflict with Otto I[95]. Emma was not just married to a king: she was a daughter, widow and mother of kings. »I had the family, name and birthright of kings«, she wrote in a letter of the late 980s, »I, queen of the Franks, who commanded so many thousands«[96]. And Bishop Theoderic, a friend, relative and trusted adviser of both Otto I and Otto II, was convinced of his right to influence the royal succession. His epitaph described him as »born of the noble blood of kings«[97]. These people were hyper-conscious of their status, their personal histories, and their participation in epic dynastic struggles spanning decades and even centuries. They were born to rule, and they knew it. We can certainly ask why they wanted to convince themselves that their deeds and ambitions constituted momentous dramas worthy of immortalisation in artistic and literary works and demanding of comparison to Old Testament rulers and prophets. But a more appropriate question might be: why wouldn't they[98]?

92 Richer, Historiae, ed. Hoffmann (as in n. 50), 4.9, p. 236–237; trans. Lake, Histories (as in n. 50), p. 214–217.

93 Flodoard, Annales, ed. Philippe Lauer, Paris 1906, *s. a.* 945, p. 95–96: … *Karolus ad catezizandum vocitatus est*. On the significance of names to the Carolingians: Airlie, Making and Unmaking (as in n. 40), p. 102–108, 282–283.

94 Koziol, Politics of Memory (as in n. 26), p. 535–556.

95 MacLean, Ottonian Queenship (as in n. 48), p. 54–55.

96 Gerbert, Correspondance, ed. Riché, Callu (as in n. 53), no. 147.

97 Sigebert, Vita Deoderici, ed. Pertz (as in n. 83), p. 482: *Hic Deodericus, generoso sanguine natus, regum progenie* …

98 For discussion and feedback I am grateful to Robert Bartlett, Mats Dijkdrent, Berthold Kress, Fraser McNair, Pauline Stafford, Charles West, and seminar audiences in Berlin, Leeds and St Andrews. The image of the crystal is reproduced by permission of the British Museum.