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BERNARD S. BACHRACH – DAVID S. BACHRACH

NITHARD AS A MILITARY HISTORIAN  
OF THE CAROLINGIAN EMPIRE, C 833–843

Introduction

Despite the substantially greater volume of sources that provide information about the military affairs of the ninth century as compared to the eighth, the lion's share of scholarly attention concerning Carolingian military history has been devoted to the reign of Charlemagne, particularly before his imperial coronation in 800, rather than to his descendants<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, much of the basic work on the sources, that is required to establish how they can be used to answer questions about military matters in the period after Charlemagne, remains to be done. An unfortunate side-effect of this relative neglect of military affairs as well as source criticism for the ninth century has been considerable confusion about the nature and conduct of war in this period<sup>2</sup>. To date, the field has been dominated by a small handful of studies that draw upon an impressionistic selection of texts and focus on a narrow range of questions, which has resulted in misleading conclusions about the nature of warfare in the *regnum Francorum*.

- 1 The outpouring of studies on Carolingian military history during the reign of Charlemagne is vast. For an introduction to this topic, see Étienne RENARD, *La politique militaire de Charlemagne et la paysannerie franque*, in: *Francia* 36 (2009), p. 1–33; Walter GOFFART, *Frankish Military Duty and the Fate of Roman Taxation*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 16 (2008), p. 166–190; Carroll M. GILLMOR, *The 791 Equine Epidemic and its Impact on Charlemagne's Army*, in: *Journal of Medieval Military History* 3 (2005), p. 23–45; John FRANCE, *The Composition and Raising of the Armies of Charlemagne*, in: *Journal of Medieval Military History* 1 (2002), p. 61–82; Bernard S. BACHRACH, *Charlemagne's Cavalry: Myth and Reality*, in: *Military Affairs* 47/3 (1983), p. 181–187; Robert-Henri BAUTIER, *La Campagne de Charlemagne en Espagne (778). La réalité historique*, in: *Bulletin de la Société des sciences, lettres et arts de Bayonne* 135 (1979), p. 1–5. Also see Bernard S. BACHRACH, *Early Carolingian Warfare*, Philadelphia 2001; and ID., *Charlemagne's Early Campaigns (768–777). A Diplomatic and Military Analysis*, Leiden 2013, with the literature cited there.
- 2 There are some notable exceptions to this otherwise considerable lacuna, particularly with regard to the lands east of the Rhine. See, for example, Charles R. BOWLUS, *Franks, Moravians, and Magyars. The Struggle for the Middle Danube, 788–907*, Philadelphia 1995; Eric J. GOLDBERG, *Struggle for Empire. Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817–876*, Ithaca (NY) 2006, particularly p. 119–146; Simon COUPLAND, *The Carolingian Army and the Struggle against the Vikings*, in: *Viator* 35 (2004), p. 49–70; and Ekkehard EICKHOFF, *Maritime Defence of the Carolingian Empire*, in: Rudolf SIMEK, Ulrike ENGEL (ed.), *Vikings on the Rhine. Recent Research on Early Medieval Relations between the Rhinelands and Scandinavia*, Vienna 2004, p. 50–64. Also now see Walter GOFFART, *»Defensio Patriae« as a Carolingian Military Obligation*, in: *Francia* 43 (2016), p. 21–39, who illuminates the methodological errors made by previous scholars regarding the important question of the obligation on all men with property to participate in the defense of the realm.

Typical in this regard is the influential article by Josef Fleckenstein concerning the putative decline of *militia* forces used as expeditionary levies following Charlemagne's reign. Relying on just two capitularies, one issued in 808 and the other in 847, Fleckenstein asserted that the mobilization of small-scale landowners had ended completely by the latter date<sup>3</sup>. Obviously, the use of just two capitularies in this manner is fraught with methodological problems. And indeed, scholars have identified the continued mobilization of such levies by the successors of the Carolingians during the tenth and eleventh century, both east and west of the Rhine<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, Fleckenstein's essay has exercised considerable influence over subsequent views of ninth-century military organization, particularly in the German-language tradition<sup>5</sup>.

Timothy Reuter similarly has exerted significant influence over scholarly understanding of Carolingian military history during the ninth century through two articles that are based on a narrow selection of capitularies and passages from a limited group of narrative texts<sup>6</sup>. Reuter asserted, like Fleckenstein, that *militia*-based expeditionary levies of small-scale farmers disappeared after c 800. Reuter also claimed that there was a concomitant end to Carolingian military expansion because of the

- 3 Josef FLECKENSTEIN, Adel und Kriegerum und ihre Wandlung im Karolingerreich, in: *Nascita dell'Europa ed Europa Carolingia. Un'equazione da verificare*, Vol. 1, Spoleto 1987 (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 27), p. 67–94, here p. 89–92.
- 4 With regard to the west, see Marjorie CHIBNALL, Military Service in Normandy Before 1066, in: *Anglo-Norman Studies* 5 (1982), p. 65–77; Emily Zack TABUTEAU, Definitions of Feudal Military Obligations in Eleventh-Century Normandy, in: MORRIS S. ARNOLD (ed.), *On the Laws and Customs of England: Essays in Honor of Samuel E. Thorne*, Chapel Hill (NC) 1982, p. 18–59; David BATES, *Normandy Before 1066*, London 1982, p. 122–125, 156–157; and Bernard S. BACHRACH, *Fulk Nerra – The Neo Roman Consul: A Political Biography of the Angevin count 987–1040*, Berkeley 1993. With respect to the lands in the east, see David S. BACHRACH, *Warfare in Tenth-Century Germany*, Woodbridge 2012; and ID., *Feudalism, Romanticism, and Source Criticism. Writing the Military History of Salian Germany*, in: *Journal of Medieval Military History* 13 (2015), p. 1–26.
- 5 See, for example, Hagen KELLER, Grundlagen ottonischer Königsherrschaft, in: Karl SCHMID (ed.), *Reich und Kirche vor dem Investiturstreit. Vorträge beim wissenschaftlichen Kolloquium aus Anlaß des achtzigsten Geburtstag von Gerd Tellenbach, Sigmaringen 1985*, p. 17–34, here p. 21, n. 14; and Werner RÖSENER, Rittersum und Krieg im Staufereich, in: ID. (ed.), *Staat und Krieg vom Mittelalter bis zur Moderne*, Göttingen 2000, p. 37–63, here p. 40.
- 6 These are Timothy REUTER, Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> series 35 (1985), p. 75–94; and ID., The End of Carolingian Military Expansion, in: Peter GODMAN, Roger COLLINS (ed.), *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, Oxford 1990, p. 391–405. Regarding the influence of Reuter's model of the decline of the expeditionary levy and end of Carolingian military expansion c 800 see, for example, Janet NELSON, Ninth-Century Knighthood: The Evidence of Nithard, in: Christopher HARPER-BILL (ed.), *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown*, Woodbridge 1989, p. 255–266, repr. in: *The Frankish World 750–900*, London 1996, p. 75–87, here p. 78; Karl LEYSER, Early Medieval Warfare, in: Janet COOPER (ed.), *Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, London 1993, p. 87–108, repr. in: Timothy REUTER (ed.), *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*, London 1994, p. 29–50, here p. 34; Matthew INNES, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400–1000*, Cambridge 2000, p. 144; and Simon MACLEAN, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire*, Cambridge 2003, p. 16–17.

putative decline in the numbers of men who were available for military service<sup>7</sup>. However, these assertions are not supported by a broader corpus of sources that provide information about either the continued deployment of *militia* levies, or the large-scale of Carolingian military operations during the ninth century<sup>8</sup>.

The focus by both Fleckenstein and Reuter on the question of the supposed discontinuity of military levies of *militia* forces is consistent with the long historiographical tradition, dating back to Heinrich Brunner's landmark study »Der Reiterdienst und die Anfänge des Lehnwesens«, in which he sought a socio-military explanation for the putative transition from »the nation in arms« to »feudal knights«<sup>9</sup>. The approach taken by Brunner, and more recent scholarship following his lead, is conspicuous for failing to address the much wider range of questions relating to the conduct of warfare. These include matters such as logistics, training, sieges, and military technology, which have been considered in much more detail by specialists in other fields, particularly Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman history<sup>10</sup>.

It is clear from a methodological perspective that a reappraisal of the conduct and nature of war in the ninth-century *regnum Francorum* requires the investigation of a wide range of topics that is based upon a thorough analysis of all pertinent source materials. These include not only texts but also information drawn from archaeological excavations, which are available in substantial numbers for the Carolingian period<sup>11</sup>. However, the process of analyzing and, just as importantly, vetting source materials that shed light on the military history of the Carolingian Empire in the period after Charlemagne, is in its infancy. In fact, so little analysis of the sources has been undertaken by military historians that it is not yet possible to write the history of

7 REUTER, Plunder and Tribute (as in n. 6), p. 75–94.

8 For critiques of Reuter's methodology and conclusions, see RENARD, La politique militaire de Charlemagne (as in n. 1), p. 14, 22; FRANCE, The Composition and Raising of the Armies of Charlemagne (as in n. 1), p. 66; Eric GOLDBERG, Ludwig der Deutsche und Mähren. Eine Studie zu karolingischen Grenzkriegen im Osten, in: Wilfried HARTMANN (ed.), Ludwig der Deutsche und seine Zeit, Darmstadt 2004, p. 67–94, here p. 70; ID., Struggle for Empire: Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817–876, Ithaca 2006, p. 120.

9 Heinrich BRUNNER, Der Reiterdienst und die Anfänge des Lehnwesens, in: Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germ. Abt. 8 (1887), p. 1–38, repr. in ID., Forschungen zur Geschichte des deutschen und französischen Rechts, Stuttgart 1894, p. 39–74. See in this regard the observations by BACHRACH, Feudalism, Romanticism, and Source Criticism (as in n. 4), here p. 3–8.

10 This literature in this area is vast. Some useful starting points include C. Warren HOLLISTER, The Military Organization of Norman England, Oxford 1965; Nicholas P. BROOKS, England in the Ninth Century: The Crucible of Defeat, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society. Series 5, 29 (1979), p. 1–20; Michael JONES, The Logistics of the Anglo-Saxon Invasions, in: Daniel M. MASTERSON (ed.), Naval History: The Sixth Symposium of the United States Naval Academy, Wilmington 1987, p. 62–69; John O. PRESTWICH, Military Intelligence under the Norman and Angevin Kings, in: George GARNETT, John HUDSON (ed.), Law and Government in Medieval England and Normandy: Essays in Honour of Sir James Holt, Cambridge 1994, p. 1–30; Richard ABELS, The Costs and Consequences of Anglo-Saxon Civil Defense, 878–1066, in: John BAKER, Stuart BROOKES, Andrew REYNOLDS (ed.), Landscapes of Defense in Early Medieval Europe, Turnhout 2013, p. 195–222.

11 See the discussion of this issue by Bernard S. BACHRACH, David S. BACHRACH, Landscapes of Defense: At the Nexus of Archaeology and History in the Early Middle Ages, in: Francia 42 (2015), p. 231–252.

warfare in the ninth century. The burden of this present study, therefore, is to take an important first step toward this goal by assessing the information regarding military affairs that is provided in the exceptionally important »Histories«, written by Charlemagne's grandson Nithard between 840–842. This task is two-fold, requiring first an assessment of the reliability of this author in providing accurate information about military affairs and second an analysis of what Nithard has to say about the conduct of war.

### Evaluating Nithard and his Text

The assessment of Nithard's »Histories« and the information that he provides regarding military matters must begin with an understanding of his background, his knowledge of military affairs, the purpose for which he wrote, and the intended audience for the text. The answers to these questions illuminate not only Nithard's access to information about the conduct of war, but also whether he had an interest in providing this information in an accurate manner<sup>12</sup>.

In this context, it is noteworthy that Nithard enjoyed an exceptional education and had a lengthy career, including duties as a military commander. Nithard was the illegitimate son of Angilbert, the lay abbot of Saint-Riquier (790–814), and Charlemagne's daughter Bertha. Born at the royal court no later than 800 and educated in the palace complex at Aachen, this illegitimate grandson of Charlemagne served as an official both under his uncle Emperor Louis the Pious (814–840), and under his cousin, King Charles the Bald of West Francia (840–877)<sup>13</sup>. Nithard received benefices from Emperor Louis for his highly regarded service<sup>14</sup>, and very likely participated in military campaigns during the 820s and 830s<sup>15</sup>. Nithard certainly served in a military capacity under Charles the Bald, fighting at the battle of Fontenoy on 25 June 841, participating in high level discussions of strategy with the king, and ultimately dying in combat near Angoulême while fighting Viking raiders in 844<sup>16</sup>. In addition to his military duties, Nithard undertook a number of high-level diplomatic missions on behalf of his cousin, including acting as an emissary to Charles's eldest brother and frequent adversary Lothair I (840–855), and as one of the twelve com-

12 Regarding the interrogation of narrative sources for the purposes of writing military history, see David S. BACHRACH, *Memory, Epistemology, and the Writing of Early Medieval Military History: The Example of Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg (1009–1018)*, in: *Viator* 38 (2007), p. 63–90.

13 See the useful discussion of Nithard's career by Claudia VILLA, *Nithard, from History to Legend*, in: Francesco LO MONACO, Claudia VILLA (ed.), *I Giuramenti di Strasburgo: testi e tradizione/The Strasbour Oaths: Texts and Transmission*, Florence 2009, p. 93–111.

14 Nithard, *Historiarum libri IIII*, ed. Ernst MÜLLER, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Hanover 1907 (MGH. SS rer. Germ., 44), 2.2, p. 14–15. There is a new French translation of the edition of this text by Philippe LAUER from 1926. See Nithard: *Histoire des fils de Louis le Pieux*, ed. and trans. Philippe LAUER and revised by Sophie GLANSDORFF, Paris 2012. There are no significant differences between the new MGH edition and the revised Lauer edition.

15 Janet NELSON, *Public Histories and Private History in the Work of Nithard*, in: *Speculum* 60/2 (1985), p. 251–293, here p. 269, makes this suggestion with regard to Nithard, in part on the basis of the information that Nithard shared about Louis' military campaigns during this period.

16 For Nithard's participation in the fighting at Fontenoy, see Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 2.2, p. 14–15. For Nithard's death in battle, see François L. GANSHOF, *Note critique sur la biographie de Nithard*, in: *Mélanges Paul Thomas*, Bruges 1930, p. 335–344, here p. 335–341.

missioners given the task of dividing the Carolingian empire equally among Louis the Pious's three surviving sons in 842–843<sup>17</sup>. Consequently, it is possible to conclude with great confidence that Nithard was an expert in military affairs, and had the knowledge to provide detailed information about the conduct of war. The next question that must be asked, therefore, is whether he had an interest in providing an accurate account of what he knew.

### Audience for the Text and »Causa Scribendi«

Nithard's text has received considerable attention from scholars with regard to both the purpose for which he wrote, and his intended audience. One recent strand of scholarship has focused on the importance of Nithard's work in shedding light on contemporary concepts of masculinity and family bonds, although rather conspicuously has avoided military matters that were at the heart of aristocratic masculine identity<sup>18</sup>. Earlier scholarly traditions were rather more focused on Nithard's intentions and audience. Hans Patze and Hans-Werner Goetz, for example, have argued that Nithard wrote in order to promote the cause of justice and discuss the obligations of both kings and magnates to serve the public good<sup>19</sup>. Perhaps the most detailed and comprehensive treatment of Nithard, however, has been by Janet Nelson, who made a compelling case that the »Histories« were intended to serve a propaganda purpose for an audience of secular magnates at Charles the Bald's court. In particular, Nelson contended that Charles the Bald commissioned Nithard to write the first three books of the »Histories« in order to support Charles's claims to rule in West Francia, and also to depict Lothair I's actions in a negative light<sup>20</sup>. On the basis of newly developed information regarding the manuscript tradition for Nithard's work as well as evidence that other contemporary writers had access to the full text

17 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 2.2, and 4.1, p. 14–15, 40–41. See the discussion of the process that led ultimately to the treaty of Verdun, including the role played by Nithard, in François L. GANSHOF, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte und Bedeutung des Vertrages von Verdun (843)*, in: *Deutsches Archiv* 12 (1956), p. 313–330; and translated as, *The Genesis and Significance of the Treaty of Verdun (843)*, by Janet SONDEHEIMER in: François L. GANSHOF (ed.), *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy: Studies in Carolingian History*, London 1971, p. 289–302.

18 See, for example, Dana POLANICHKA, »As a Brother Should Be«, *Siblings, Kinship, and Community in Carolingian Europe*, in: Jason COY, Benjamin MARSCHKE, Jared POLEY, Claudia VERHOEVEN (ed.), *Kinship, Community and Self: Essays in Honor of David Warren Sabean*, New York 2015, p. 23–36; Meg LEJA, *The Making of Men, Not Masters: Right Order and Lay Masculinity According to Dhuoda and Nithard*, in: *Comitatus* 39 (2008), p. 1–40 with the literature cited there; Stuart AIRLIE, *The World, the Text and the Carolingian: Royal, Aristocratic and Masculine Identities in Nithard's »Histories«*, in: Patrick WORMALD, Janet L. NELSON (ed.), *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, Cambridge 2007, p. 51–76; repr. in: Stuart AIRLIE, *Power and its Problems in Carolingian Europe*, Farnham 2012, with the same pagination.

19 See Hans PATZE, »Iustitia« bei Nithard, in: *Festschrift für Hermann Heimpel zum 70. Geburtstag am 19. September 1971*, Vol. 3, Göttingen 1972, p. 147–165; Hans-Werner GOETZ, *Staatsvorstellung und Verfassungswirklichkeit in der Karolingerzeit, untersucht anhand des »Regnum«-Begriffs in erzählenden Quellen*, in: Joerg O. FICHTE, Karl Heinz GÖLLER, Bernhard SCHIMMELPFENNIG (ed.), *Zusammenhänge, Einflüsse, Wirkungen. Kongreßakten zum ersten Symposium des Mediävistenverbandes in Tübingen 1984*, Berlin 1986, p. 229–240.

20 NELSON, *Public Histories* (as in n. 14), p. 251–293.

of the »Histories«, Nelson subsequently revised her argument, concluding that the entire text was intended to serve the ends of both royal propaganda and education<sup>21</sup>. In this vein, Nelson's argument certainly is enhanced by the fact that Nithard wrote in a plain style that would have been accessible to an audience of secular aristocrats<sup>22</sup>.

Nelson's conclusions regarding both the purpose and audience for Nithard's »Histories« subsequently were affirmed by Stuart Airlie, who places Nithard's work within a broad context of writing by laymen, who were motivated to comment upon and attempt to influence events during the political crises of the 830s and 840s<sup>23</sup>. In commenting on Nithard's audience, Airlie describes the »Histories« as a »mirror for the aristocracy as well as for princes«<sup>24</sup>.

The compelling arguments made by Nelson and Airlie, specifically that Nithard had a fundamentally didactic as well as propagandistic purpose and that his intended audience was comprised of fellow secular aristocrats and members of Charles the Bald's court, have important implications for interpreting the information that he provides about military matters. First, insofar as Nithard's discussion of events and the decisions made by the Carolingian kings and their commanders did not impinge directly on his anti-Lothair *parti pris*, the author had an incentive to ensure the good will of the audience by providing accurate information insofar as he was able. This incentive was strengthened even further by the fact that Nithard's audience consisted of men who were intimately familiar with the subject matter of the »Histories«, because many of them had served in the king's army on campaign.

Nithard's didactic purpose also gave him a strong incentive to provide accurate information so as to give proper lessons with respect to effective and ineffective military decision-making. The use of historical works for this purpose was very well established at the court of Charlemagne, where Nithard was raised, and in the courts of Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald by whom Nithard was employed. Indeed, the Carolingians fully embraced the argument by Isidore of Seville in his »Etymologies« that men who wished to be effective rulers should read history because these texts allowed them to benefit from the experiences of the past<sup>25</sup>. Charlemagne's interest in *historiae* and *res gestae antiquorum*, as sources of information about the past, was

21 Janet NELSON, History-Writing at the Court of Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald, in: Anton SCHARER, Georg SCHEIBELREITER (ed.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, Vienna 1994, p. 435–442.

22 The unadorned nature of Nithard's text was stressed by Franz BRUNHÖLZL, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, Munich 1975, p. 399–400; but also see the observation by NELSON, *Public Histories* (as in n. 14), p. 253 that unadorned does not mean simple or simplistic.

23 AIRLIE, *The World, the Text* (as in n. 17), here p. 61. But also see POLANICHKA, »As a Brother Should Be« (as in n. 18), p. 23–36; Dana M. POLANICHKA, Alex CILLEY, *A Very Personal History of Nithard: Family and Honour in the Carolingian World*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 22 (2014), p. 171–200, for an interpretation of the text as an expression of Nithard's family identity.

24 AIRLIE, *The World, the Text* (as in n. 17) p. 71.

25 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. Wallace Martin LINDSAY, Oxford 1911, Bk. I, ch. XLIII. See the discussion by Jacques FONTAINE, *Isidore de Séville et la culture classique dans l'Espagne wisigothique*, Paris 1959, p. 180–185, regarding Isidore's view of history.

well documented in Einhard's popular »Vita Karoli«<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, when writing in 798 to Charlemagne, who was campaigning in Saxony, Alcuin addressed the king in the persona of Horace (Flaccus), a veteran soldier (*veteranus miles*), and reminded him of the importance of historical works when fighting wars<sup>27</sup>. Alcuin observed, »that it is very important for us to read in ancient books of history about the kind of strength that fighting men had so that the kind of wise temperament, which ought to be acted upon, shall guide and rule us in all things«<sup>28</sup>. Similarly, Lupus of Ferrières presented Charles the Bald »brief summary of the deeds of the emperors«, emphasizing that reading histories was important for conducting public affairs<sup>29</sup>. Consequently, Nithard's text fits within a lengthy tradition of historiographical works that were intended for a didactic purpose and offered lessons regarding the effective conduct of military affairs.

### Nithard on the Conduct of War

Despite the considerable scholarly attention to Nithard's *causae scribendi* and his audience, there are no studies that treat in a systematic manner the overwhelmingly military content of his text, although several scholars have drawn on the »Histories« in studies that deal with specifically social aspects of Carolingian warfare. For example, Janet Nelson briefly addressed some military aspects of Nithard's work in a study focused on the issue of »kighthood« in the Carolingian period, and John Gillingham utilized Nithard's »Histories« as a witness to changing Frankish attitudes toward killing other high-ranking Franks in battle<sup>30</sup>. However, there are no studies of Nithard that consider his discussion of topics that now are central to the investigation of military history, such as military organization, logistics, tactics, or strategy. The following sections, therefore, will set out in detail Nithard's observations about the conduct of war during 830s and 840s. We then will conclude with a discussion of the implications of Nithard's depiction of this period for our understanding of Carolingian warfare in the period following the death of Charlemagne in 814.

26 Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. Oswald HOLDER-EGGER, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., Hanover 1911 (MGH. SS rer. Germ., 25), ch. 24, p. 29.

27 Alcuin, *Epistolae*, ed. Ernst DÜMMLER, in: MGH Epp., Vol. 4, Berlin 1895, No 149, p. 241–245.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 242, *quod militantibus virtutis genus maxime necessarium esse in antiquis historiarum libris legimus, ut cuncta sapiens temperantia, quae agenda sint, regat atque gubernet.*

29 See the discussion by Rosamond MCKITTERICK, *Charles the Bald (823–877) and his library: the patronage of learning*, in: *The English Historical Review* 95 (1980), p. 28–47, and republished with the same pagination in EAD., *The Frankish Kings and Culture in the Early Middle Ages*, Aldershot 1995, here p. 35.

30 NELSON, *Ninth-Century Knighthood* (as in n. 6), p. 255–266; JOHN GILLINGHAM, *Fontenoy and After: Pursuing Enemies to Death in France Between the Ninth and the Eleventh Centuries*, 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. 242–265.



## Military Organization

As discussed above, with a few notable exceptions, current scholarly understanding of the organization of Carolingian military forces in the period after Charlemagne is that levies of small property owners for campaign duty came to an end around the turn of the ninth century<sup>31</sup>. By contrast, throughout his »Histories«, Nithard makes clear that military forces commanded by Louis the Pious and all three of his sons, who contended for rule of the *regnum Francorum*, were drawn from both the military households of magnates and from the expeditionary levies. This included the use of these levies for offensive as well as defensive operations.

For example, in his discussion of the campaign that Louis the Pious ordered against Lothair I in the spring of 834, Nithard observes that Count Wido and »all of the men between the Seine and Loire« were dispatched to the Breton frontier<sup>32</sup>. Nithard does not identify any particular magnates when discussing this mobilization, but does mention that several of the *comites* in Wido's army, who were responsible for mobilizing the expeditionary levies of their *pagi*, were killed in the battle. Nithard also observed that the losses suffered by Louis the Pious's army included not only magnates but also *plebis innumera multitudo*, which is a clear reference to men of lower social and economic standing<sup>33</sup>. The naming of counts and also the *plebs*, who died in this campaign, makes clear that levies participated in the campaign. Indeed, as Walter Goffart has demonstrated in several studies, the so-called *pauperi*, another term for *plebs*, were subject to military mobilization under both Charlemagne and his successors<sup>34</sup>.

Nithard again points to the mobilization of a very large force, which included both magnate led elements and levies commanded by counts in his description of Lothair's invasion of Charles's territories in October 840<sup>35</sup>. In his initial discussion of Lothair's advance, Nithard observes that the senior Carolingian king mobilized all of the men, i. e. *omnes*, living east of the Charbonnière forest<sup>36</sup>. Nithard returned to his commentary on these forces when discussing Charles's own advance toward the Seine in March 841. According to Nithard, once Charles arrived at the river, he learned that a number of magnates as well as all counts (*comites*), abbots, and bishops from east of the Charbonnière had been deployed along the Seine. Nithard observes that Lothair had positioned a rear guard there in order to prevent Charles from crossing the river<sup>37</sup>. The presence of the counts in this army, as in 834, indicates that levies of *militia* troops as well as the household troops of the various magnates who were serving in Lothair's army at this time.

In addition to observing the role played by forces led by counts in expeditionary campaigns, Nithard also signals the deployment of small-scale landowners for ser-

31 For a contrary view, see GOLDBERG, *Struggle for Empire* (as in n. 2), p. 119–146.

32 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 1.5, p. 7–8.

33 Ibid.

34 GOFFART, *Frankish Military Duty* (as in n. 1), p. 166–190; ID., »Defensio Patriae« (as in n. 2), p. 21–39.

35 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 2.3 and 2.6, p. 15–16, 19–20.

36 Ibid., 2.3, p. 15–16.

37 Ibid., 2.6, p. 19–20.

vice in offensive campaigns when he discusses the mobilization of regional levies by the Carolingian kings. The use of regional designations, e.g. Burgundians or Tournois, to denote offensive military forces that included *militia* levies as well as the military households of various magnates, dates to the Merovingian period, and was carried through into the eighth and ninth century. Gregory of Tours, for example, whose history was widely read by men of Nithard's status and education, observed that the »men of the Touraine« served in Poitou, that is outside of their home region, as part of King Guntram's army<sup>38</sup>. In this case, Gregory made clear that many of the Tournois who went on campaign had not been mobilized by the count of the city, but rather were drawn by the hope of plunder.

Other, much more contemporary writers of history, e.g. from the late eighth to the mid-ninth century, also identified levies on the basis of the region from which they were mobilized. In his discussion of Charlemagne's invasion of Spain in 778, for example, the author of the »Annales regni Francorum« observed that Charlemagne's two armies were drawn *de partibus Burgundiae et Austriae vel Baioariae seu Provinciae et Septimaniae et pars Langobardorum*<sup>39</sup>. The author similarly observed with regard to Charlemagne's campaign in 806 into Bohemia, that the army was mustered *de Baioaria et Alamannia atque Burgundia*<sup>40</sup>.

Ermoldus Nigellus, who had military experience under King Pepin I of Aquitaine (817–838), also used regional designations to denote levies<sup>41</sup>. In his presentation of Louis the Pious's Breton campaign in 818, for example, Ermoldus observes that Louis mobilized the Franks and their subject peoples to serve in his army. Ermoldus then discusses the thousands of Swabians who were »organized by their hundreds«, and the *cohors* of Saxons, and the force (*manus*) of Thuringians, and the very large number of young men from Burgundy<sup>42</sup>. It is noteworthy in this context that the Swabian peasant levies (*rustici*) continued to be depicted in narrative sources as being organized by their hundreds into the late eleventh century<sup>43</sup>.

Nithard's exact contemporary, the author of the »Vita Hludowici«, usually denoted as the Astronomer, describes the army sent by Louis the Pious in 815 to intervene

38 Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum X, in Gregorii Turonensis Opera, ed. Bruno KRUSCH, Wilhelm LEVISON, Vol. 1, Hanover 1937–1951 (MGH. SS rer. Merov., 1), Bk. 7, ch. 28, p. 346, *Securisque sunt eum de Toronicis multi lucre causa*. The basic study remains, Bernard S. BACHRACH, Merovingian Military Organization, 481–751, Minneapolis 1972. However, for various additions and modifications see ID., Quelques observations sur la composition et les caractéristiques des armées de Clovis, in: Michel ROUCHE (ed.), Clovis: Histoire et Mémoire, Vol. I, Paris 1997, p. 689–703; ID., The Imperial Roots of Merovingian Military Organization, in: Anne Norgard JORGENSEN, Birthe L. CLAUSEN (ed.), Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in a European Perspective, AD 1–1300, Copenhagen 1997, p. 25–31.

39 Annales regni Francorum, ed. Friedrich KURZE, Hanover 1907 (MGH. SS rer. Germ., 6), an. 778, p. 50.

40 Ibid., an. 806, p. 122.

41 Ermoldus Nigellus, In honorem Hludowici, ed. Ernst DÜMMLER, in: MGH. Poetae, Vol. 2, Berlin 1884, Bk. 4, l. 137–138, p. 62.

42 Ermoldus Nigellus, In honorem Hludowici, Bk. 3, l., 258–267, p. 48.

43 This point was made by Berthold of Reichenau in the context of the German civil wars of the 1080s. See Die Chroniken Bertholds von Reichenau und Bernolds von Konstanz 1054–1100, ed. Ian S. ROBINSON, Hanover 2003 (MGH. SS rer. Germ. N. S., 14), Hanover 2003, an. 1078, p. 322–323.

in the Danish succession struggle as being comprised of Abodrites and forces commanded by Saxon *comites*<sup>44</sup>. The Astronomer repeats this usage in discussing Louis the Pious's spring campaign in 816 against the Sorbs, another Slavic people living between the Saale and Elbe rivers. The author observes that Louis mobilized both the men who are called East Franks, i. e. *orientales Franci*, and also the Saxon counts<sup>45</sup>.

Nithard routinely deploys regional designations to denote a broad-based mobilization of forces rather than a summons issued only to specific magnates and their military households. In discussing the period immediately preceding the death of Louis the Pious in June 840, for example, Nithard claims that Louis the German invaded Swabia having levied forces from among the Thuringians and Saxons<sup>46</sup>. In a similar manner, when discussing Lothair I's offensive against Charles in August and September 841, Nithard observes that the former had very substantial forces of Saxons, Austrasians, and Swabians<sup>47</sup>. In this case, Nithard's emphasis on the large number of men from these regions makes clear that he was not referring merely to small contingents of mounted troops in the military households of magnates. We see this same dynamic at play in Nithard's discussion of events in the winter of 842, when Charles and Louis combined their armies at Mainz to face Lothair yet again. While camped in and around this fortress city, the two royal brothers were joined by reinforcements led by Louis's son Carloman, whom Nithard describes leading »an immense army of Bavarians and Swabians«<sup>48</sup>. Once again, the very large number of men who were mobilized indicates that this force included *militia* levies as well as the military households of magnates.

### Sizes of Armies and Overwhelming Force

Nithard not only frequently mentions that the armies mobilized by the various Carolingian rulers were large, he also emphasizes the positive political effect of employing what modern military specialists characterize as the doctrine of overwhelming force. This is a different issue from the wide-spread topos found in medieval narrative sources where authors claimed that the opponents possessed a vast numerical superiority in order to explain away defeats by the »home side« and to enhance their victories against putatively overwhelming odds<sup>49</sup>. Rather, Nithard indicates that the Carolingian kings of his day frequently chose a policy of mobilizing the largest possible army for operations in the field, and that failing to do so could have significant negative political as well as military consequences.

44 Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*, ed. Ernst TREMP, Hanover 1995 (MGH. SS rer. Germ., 64), ch. 25, p. 214–215.

45 *Ibid.*, ch. 26, p. 214–215.

46 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 1.8, p. 12–13.

47 *Ibid.*, 3.3, p. 31–33.

48 *Ibid.*, 3.7, p. 38, *cum ingenti exercitu Baioariorum et Alamannorum*.

49 With regard to this practice among medieval authors, see the observations by Bernard S. BACHRACH, *Early Medieval Military Demography: Some Observations on the Methods of Hans Delbrück*, in: Donald KAGAY, L. J. Andrew VILLALON (ed.), *The Circle of War*, Woodbridge (UK) 1999, p. 3–20.

Nithard first illuminates the important political implications of having a large or an insufficiently large army in his discussion of the events at the Field of Lies in late June 833. This confrontation marked the culmination of the revolt by Lothair, Louis the German, and their brother Pepin I of Aquitaine (died 838) against their father, Emperor Louis the Pious. Nithard emphasizes that the three brothers confronted their father with a massive army (*ingens exercitus*)<sup>50</sup>. It was in this context that the magnates serving as subordinate military commanders on Louis the Pious' side made the decision to abandon their ruler rather than face this overwhelmingly large host. They were willing, according to Nithard, to accept promises of future reward from the emperor's sons in return for their betrayal of their ruler<sup>51</sup>. Nithard did not need to add for his audience that Louis the Pious' men were not willing to die on the battlefield in a hopeless cause.

The situation was reversed, however, one year later when Lothair faced Louis the Pious at Chouzy in August 834. Nithard makes clear that it was now Louis the Pious who possessed the larger army, having mobilized a powerful force (*manus valida*) in the Frankish heartlands. Louis the Pious's military position was further enhanced by the decision of Louis the German to switch sides in the conflict and join him with »all of the forces from the further side of the Rhine«<sup>52</sup>. As a consequence of the changed status of forces, it was now Lothair who was forced to concede defeat, and accept humiliating conditions, including being confined to Italy, from where he was not permitted to leave without his father's permission<sup>53</sup>. In both of these military confrontations it is noteworthy that no battle was fought, precisely because it was clear that one side possessed overwhelming force.

Nithard suggests that Lothair applied the lessons of 833–834 once he made the decision in 840 to attempt to acquire rule of the entire *regnum Francorum* and deprive his brothers Louis and Charles of the territories that had been assigned to them by their father in 836<sup>54</sup>. According to Nithard, immediately after Lothair received word of his father's death, he began advancing north through the Alps at a very deliberate pace, sending out emissaries to make promises or offer threats to all of the magnates along his line of march<sup>55</sup>. Nithard emphasizes that Lothair's plan of building up his forces in this manner was quite successful, drawing supporters either through their greed or their fear<sup>56</sup>.

Lothair's ability to mobilize a large army encouraged him to pursue an aggressive strategy, according to Nithard, and the emperor thus settled upon a military solution to the succession struggle against his brothers. Lothair decided first to seek out and defeat Louis the German, and he achieved an initial victory over a comparative small element of his brother's forces in the environs of the fortress city of Worms. Lothair

50 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 1.4, p. 5–7.

51 Ibid., p. 5, *ac variis affectionibus populum, ut a patre deficeret, filii compellunt*.

52 Ibid., 1.5, p. 8, *insuper Lodhuwico filio suo cum universis, qui trans Renum morabantur, in auxilium sibi assumpto*.

53 Ibid.

54 See *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, ed. Félix GRAT, Jeanne VIELLIARD, Suzanne CLÉMENCET, Léon LEVILLAIN, Paris 1964, an. 836, p. 18–20.

55 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 2.1, p. 13–14.

56 Ibid., p. 13, *Ergo cupiditate terroreque illecti undique ad illum conflunt*.

then marched to the important royal fiscal center and palace complex at Frankfurt, where he was confronted by Louis's main army. Nithard makes clear that Lothair had hoped to overawe his brother's supporters with his own exceptionally large army, and win a bloodless victory of the type achieved at the Field of Lies. However, when the two armies faced each other, Louis's partisans gave no sign of giving up, and Lothair realized that he would not be able to achieve victory without a bloody battle because he would have been forced to attack Louis's troops, who were deployed in prepared position<sup>57</sup>. Consequently, Lothair withdrew in the hope that he would have an easier time of overcoming Charles's armies<sup>58</sup>.

Turning northwest, Lothair advanced during the autumn of 840 into the territories that had been assigned to Charles by Louis the Pious as part of the division of the *regnum Francorum*. As seen above, Lothair received additional reinforcements, whom Nithard identifies as all of the men (*omnes*) east of the Charbonnière forest as well as the support of the powerful magnates, Abbot Hilduin of St. Denis and Count Gerard of Paris, whom Nithard's audience would have understood commanded the substantial levies of *militia* troops from this densely populated region<sup>59</sup>. According to Nithard, the decision by these magnates to abandon Charles had a ripple effect, leading even more magnates to switch sides, including Pepin, a great-grandson of Charlemagne and grandson of King Pepin of Italy (781–810), as well as other local nobles, whom Nithard again describes as succumbing either to Lothair's promises or to his threats<sup>60</sup>. It is in this context that Nithard observes that Lothair decided to advance as far south as the Loire, »placing his trust in the very large size of his army«<sup>61</sup>. After gathering his forces, Lothair advanced toward Charles, who was encamped near Orleans<sup>62</sup>.

Lothair's plan, as had been the case earlier with regard to Louis at Worms, was to force a confrontation with Charles where it would be obvious to the latter's supporters that they simply could not win against such overwhelming odds. The result, as Lothair hoped, would be a victory without a battle. This plan failed, according to Nithard, because Charles's men, like those of Louis earlier, had sworn an oath to fight to the death rather than betray their king<sup>63</sup>. This is in marked contrast to the magnates who had marched with Louis the Pious to the Field of Lies in 833. In fact, such oaths may be understood as a response to the failure of so many Carolingian magnates to keep faith with Louis the Pious in his hour of dire need. What becomes clear from Nithard's text is that Lothair was unsuccessful in his effort to sow seeds of disunity among Charles's forces, and that the unified front presented by Charles's supporters prevented Lothair from gaining additional strength as his brother's army was weakened by defections. In the end, Lothair's plan to achieve a political victory on the battlefield failed, and he did not wish to risk a military confrontation.

57 Ibid., p. 14, *Lodharius illum absque praelio sibi subigere diffideret*.

58 Ibid., *sperans Karolum facilius superari posse*.

59 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 2.3, p. 15–16.

60 Ibid. This Pepin should not be confused with Pepin II of Aquitaine.

61 Ibid., p. 16, *spe multitudinis suae fretus, Ligerem usque ut procederet, deliberavit*.

62 Ibid., 2.4, p. 16–17.

63 Ibid., 2.4, p. 16, *elegerunt potius nobiliter mori quam regem proditum derelinquere*.

Nithard then shows Lothair again seeking to utilize the strategy of bringing to bear overwhelming force in the spring of 841, by directing his attention once more against Louis. Lothair left a substantial blocking force along the Seine to protect his rear and lines of communications and supply, and then mobilized an army, characterized by Nithard as »an infinite multitude« (*infinitas multitudo*), which he led across the Rhine to invade Louis the German's lands<sup>64</sup>. Lothair, according to Nithard, employed his usual tactic of sending ahead emissaries who threatened and cajoled the *plebs* to forsake Louis. As seen above, men denoted by Nithard as *plebs*, were sufficiently wealthy to be obligated for service in the expeditionary levy. Nithard makes clear that Lothair's strategy was successful on this occasion because he convinced a number of Louis's supporters, denoted as the *populus*, that they could not withstand such an enormous army (*tantus exercitus*). Some of Louis's supporters switched sides. Others simply fled. As a consequence, Louis, who was now bereft of much of his military support, had no option other than to withdraw before Lothair's advance, and retreat to his base in Bavaria<sup>65</sup>.

In emphasizing the size of the armies employed by Carolingian rulers and the concomitant decisions by magnates, and perhaps the broader population as well, to re-assess their original loyalties, Nithard was making clear to his audience the intertwined nature of politics and war. To be seen to be winning was, in some circumstances, tantamount to winning, and having a large army, in general, was a decisive element in being seen as a winner. As a corollary, being seen as losing, which as a practical matter meant having a small army, could have equally negative consequences in the political and, consequently, the military sphere. The political implications of having a large army were not, in Nithard's view, the equivalent of commenting on the fighting ability of the army. Indeed, Nithard observes that a smaller but better trained and led force could defeat a larger but poorly led force<sup>66</sup>.

Nithard specifically addresses the problems caused when kings led small armies in the context of discussing the political and military maneuvers of the royal brothers in the months after the battle of Fontenoy (25 June 841). Following their victory over Lothair, Charles and Louis each led his army in different directions and arranged to meet again in two months on 1 September at the city of Langres, located approximately 280 kilometers southeast of Fontenoy<sup>67</sup>. Louis marched east toward the Rhineland and Charles marched southwest toward Aquitaine, each to deal with problems in his own lands, concerning which they had received information prior to the battle at Fontenoy<sup>68</sup>. Nithard criticized their decision asserting that »because all opposition *appeared* to have been overcome« Louis and Charles went their separate ways. Nithard added that »the needs of the state were neglected through their lack of

64 Ibid., 2.6 and 2.7, p. 19–21.

65 Ibid.

66 The political implications of having a large army were not, in Nithard's view, the equivalent of commenting on the fighting ability of the army. Indeed, Nithard observes that a smaller but better trained and led force could defeat a larger but poorly led force. See *ibid.*, 1.5, p. 7–8.

67 Ibid., 3.2, p. 29–31.

68 Ibid.

forethought«<sup>69</sup>. This passage might be understood as a general condemnation of the Carolingian nobility and their failure to seek the common good rather than their personal interests. However, the context here indicates that Nithard is commenting specifically on the decision of the two kings to separate their forces while Lothair was still in the field, and also the likely demobilization of at least part of their forces, i. e. the idea that each man (*quis*) did as he desired<sup>70</sup>. This latter comment would seem to have been directed not only at the kings, themselves, but also their magnates. In sum, Nithard was observing the failure of Charles and Louis to maintain the overwhelming force that had allowed them to achieve victory at Fontenoy.

Nithard illustrates the cost of this error in strategic judgment as he describes the efforts by Charles to use the victory at Fontenoy to strengthen his support in the heartlands of West *Francia*. According to Nithard, Charles dispatched emissaries to meet with the »Franks« at Quierzy. However, the magnates refused to commit to Charles, according to Nithard, because they were not sure about what actually had happened at Fontenoy. Lothair's supporters had circulated the disinformation that Charles had been killed, and that Louis was wounded in the battle<sup>71</sup>. In this context, Charles's emissaries and his potential supporters requested that he advance into the region in order to demonstrate both his health and his military strength. However, as Charles marched through the districts of Beauvais, Compiègne, Soissons, Rheims, and Châlons, the local magnates, according to Nithard, refused to join him. The overriding reason, as Nithard explains, was their contempt for the small size of Charles's army<sup>72</sup>. Nithard adds that this was also the attitude of the Aquitanians<sup>73</sup>. Nithard's explicit criticism of Charles and Louis, as well as their magnates, for failing to maintain a large, unified army after Fontenoy would appear to have the purpose of instructing his audience about the serious cost of pursuing the wrong military strategy. In this case, dividing their forces to deal with peripheral problems rather than focusing on the main threat that they faced, i. e. Lothair, gave the latter an opportunity to regroup and extend the war.

### Battle Seeking and Battle Avoiding Campaign Strategies

In his important article on the science of war in the Middle Ages, John Gillingham observed the central role played by Vegetius's »*Epitoma rei militaris*« in informing the thought of medieval military commanders about the risks inherent in battle<sup>74</sup>. Gillingham's observations are certainly apropos with regard to the early Middle

69 Ibid., p. 29, *Cumque adversa undique propulsa viderentur [...] Res autem publica inconsultius, quam oporteret, omisa.*

70 Ibid., *quo quemque voluntas rapuit, perfacile omisus abscessit.*

71 Ibid., 3.2, p. 30.

72 Ibid., *Franci vero eandem paucitatem [...] spermentes.*

73 Ibid.

74 The importance of Vegetius's observations for the thinking of medieval military commanders has been the subject of considerable debate. For a useful introduction to this debate, see the discussion by John B. GILLINGHAM, *Richard I and the Science of War in the Middle Ages*, in: ID., James C. HOLT (ed.), *War and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of J. O. Prestwich*, Woodbridge 1984, p. 78–91; Clifford J. ROGERS, *The Vegetian »science of war« in the Middle Ages*, in: *Journal of Medieval Military History* 1 (2002), p. 1–19; and John B. GILLINGHAM,

Ages, as the »Epitoma« was very well known to the members of the Carolingian ruling family and to their advisors. Charlemagne and Alcuin communicated in letters about Vegetius's text<sup>75</sup>. Louis the German and Charles the Bald both possessed copies of the text<sup>76</sup>. Rabanus Maurus, one of Lothair's leading supporters as the abbot of Fulda, wrote a revised version of the »Epitoma«, when he served as archbishop of Mainz, which he sent to Lothair II (855–869), the son of Lothair I<sup>77</sup>. Indeed, the privileged place accorded to Vegetius's text is of piece with the significant role played by classical works, including both histories and manuals, in the education of the Carolingians. The works of numerous classical authors, such as Livy and Caesar, were assiduously copied, and often bound together in manuscripts with manuals as well as Biblical and contemporary historical works that can be understood as a curriculum to educate aristocrats for war<sup>78</sup>.

In the present context, it is notable that Vegetius had argued that combat was to be avoided unless the commander seeking battle enjoyed an overwhelming superiority in numbers of troops, as well as other advantages, including good logistic support, the choice of an advantageous field for battle, and having a secure line of communications<sup>79</sup>. In light of the importance accorded to this text by the Carolingian kings, there can be little doubt that Vegetius's warnings about the dangers of seeking battle without overwhelming force were well known to aristocrats in the followings of all three of Louis the Pious' surviving sons, and also influenced Nithard as he composed his »Histories«. It seems likely, therefore, that the ideas available in Vegetius's text also informed the thinking of Carolingian commanders and lay magnates in general when they made decisions about committing to a battle. Indeed, the influence of Vegetian thought is further suggested by the fact that in the course of numerous confrontations between Carolingian armies directly commanded by kings in the period 833–843, there were, in fact, only two battles, namely those at Worms and Fontenoy, mentioned above.

However, it is also true, as Nithard makes clear, that Carolingian kings did not always avoid battle in the field, and sometimes even sought battle when conditions

Up with Orthodoxy: In Defense of Vegetian Warfare, in: *Journal of Medieval Military History* 2 (2004), p. 149–158.

75 See Alcuin, *Epistolae*, ed. DÜMMLER (as in n. 27), No 257, p. 414–416; and the discussion by Liutpold WALLACH, *Alcuin and Charlemagne: Studies in Carolingian History and Literature*, Ithaca (NY) 1959, p. 50–51.

76 For Louis the German's possession of a copy of Vegetius's text, see GOLDBERG, *Struggle for Empire* (as in n. 2), p. 40–42. Frechulf of Lisieux, royal chancellor of the West Frankish kingdom, provided King Charles the Bald with a specially revised edition of »Epitoma rei militaris«. See MCKITTERICK, *Charles the Bald (823–877) and his library* (as in n. 2), p. 31.

77 Rabanus Maurus, who served both as abbot of Fulda and archbishop of Mainz, in both of which capacities he had extensive military responsibilities, oversaw the composition of a revised version of Vegetius's handbook, which would only deal with those matters that were of value *tempore moderno*. Rabanus Maurus, *De procinctu Romanae militiae*, ed. ERNST DÜMMLER, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum* 15 (1872), p. 443–451, here p. 450.

78 For an introduction to the copying and use of classical, Biblical, and contemporary historical works and manuals for the military education of aristocrats, see Bernard S. BACHRACH, *Charlemagne's Early Campaigns 768–777*, Leiden 2013, *passim*; and David S. BACHRACH, *Warfare in Tenth-Century Germany* (as in n. 4), p. 102–134.

79 Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris*, ed. Alf ÖNNERFORS, Stuttgart 1995, Bk. 3, ch. 20–21, p. 165–173.



were regarded as propitious. This was the case not only at Worms and Fontenoy, but in several other cases as well, where one commander sought battle but was frustrated in executing his plan. This happened to Lothair when facing Louis the German at Frankfurt and again when facing Charles the Bald near Orléans, as discussed above.

In the context of battle-seeking strategies, it is frequently observed in the scholarly treatments of the »Histories« that Nithard devotes much more attention to the preliminaries at Fontenoy than he does to the battle, itself<sup>80</sup>. This usually has been interpreted as evidence of Nithard's efforts to establish the *bona fides* of Charles and Louis as doing everything in their power to avoid battle and the subsequent shedding of great quantities of Frankish blood<sup>81</sup>. Undoubtedly, this is true. The propagandistic purpose of Nithard's text required showing Charles as extremely reluctant to shed Frankish blood. Indeed, according to Nithard, Lothair's younger brothers even agreed to a truce with the emperor, in order to allow time to negotiate a lasting peace agreement<sup>82</sup>.

From the perspective of understanding the decision by Charles and Louis to cast the dice and order an attack on Lothair's forces, however, there is another factor that is of central importance. Nithard emphasizes that on the very day that Louis and Charles agreed to a truce with Lothair and returned to their camp to celebrate mass, they received intelligence that Lothair had obtained a promise of support from his nephew Pepin II of Aquitaine. Moreover, Pepin was marching with his army to join his eldest uncle at Fontenoy<sup>83</sup>. Nithard emphasizes that it became clear to the two brothers that Lothair was using the truce simply to gain time while waiting for Pepin to arrive. It was only at this point, when the numerical superiority that they had achieved at this place and time was threatened, that Charles and Louis decided to commit their armies to battle in order to press home their numerical advantage while they still had it.

As is well known, after their victory, Louis and Charles decided not to undertake a full pursuit of Lothair's forces, and thus prevented the massive casualties that usually occur in the course of such a pursuit<sup>84</sup>. As a consequence, as discussed above, their victory at Fontenoy did not alter in a fundamental manner the military and political situation in the *regnum*. Indeed, soon after Fontenoy Lothair again went on the offensive, and pursued a battle-seeking strategy. Lothair's post-Fontenoy campaign strategy was based, in large part, on the miscalculation, as presented by Nithard, of Louis and Charles who chose to divide their armies and go their separate ways rather than pursue and administer the *coup de grâce*<sup>85</sup>.

80 GILLINGHAM, *Fontenoy and After* (as in n. 29), p. 242–265; NELSON, *Public Histories* (as in n. 14), p. 255, 262.

81 Frank PIETZCKER, *Die Schlacht bei Fontenoy*, in: *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, Germ. Abt. 81 (1964), p. 318–342, argued that Charles and Louis acted immorally by attacking Lothair's forces before the end of the truce, and thus Nithard's emphasis on timing of the battle, after the truce had expired, was intended to obscure the crime committed by the two victorious kings.

82 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 2.10, p. 25–27.

83 *Ibid.*, 2.10, p. 24.

84 GILLINGHAM, *Fontenoy and After* (as in n. 29), p. 252–253 provides a valuable discussion of the losses that usually were suffered by the defeated army in the immediate aftermath of the battle.

85 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 3.2, p. 29–31.

The result, according to Nithard, was that Lothair once again pursued a battle-seeking strategy, similar to the one he employed in the summer and autumn of 840, by trying to defeat his brothers in detail while their forces were divided. Initially, Lothair decided that he would march against Louis, and pursued his army into the middle Rhine region dominated by the fortress city of Worms with the aim of engaging him in battle<sup>86</sup>. In the meantime, according to Nithard, Charles received intelligence regarding Lothair's movements, and learned from Louis that because of Lothair's advance, Louis would not be able to attend the assembly that they had planned for 1 September at Langres<sup>87</sup>. Taking these facts into consideration, Charles decided to lead his army, which Nithard depicts as small, toward St. Quentin, and then Maastricht to provide aid to Louis, and perhaps catch Lothair's forces in a pincer movement<sup>88</sup>.

Nithard gives the impression that when Lothair received a report that Charles had moved his forces eastwards, the senior Carolingian ruler understood the threat posed by his brother's maneuver to his rear. As a consequence, he broke off his advance against Louis and led his entire army northwest in order to engage in battle with his youngest brother, whose army was substantially smaller than the forces commanded by Lothair<sup>89</sup>. Charles, according to Nithard, found himself in a very dangerous position as Lothair led his entire army against him. In light of Lothair's volte-face, Charles sent a magnate named Rabano to Louis to beg him to come to his aid as quickly as possible. Louis's advance had the obvious tactical significance of lessening Lothair's numerical advantage, and again offered the potential option of catching Lothair in a pincer by attacking his rear.

However, as Nithard details, Charles's appeal to Louis was in vain because Lothair had positioned his army to prevent his brothers from reuniting their forces<sup>90</sup>. Consequently, facing Lothair alone, Charles had no choice other than to retreat to the fortress city of Paris, and wait for aid to arrive from his brother and from his *fideles*, whom he had summoned from »all over«<sup>91</sup>. It seems likely that these were the same men whom Nithard earlier accused of following their own interests rather than the common good after the battle of Fontenoy by returning home too early. Lothair pursued Charles, as Nithard emphasizes, very confident in the large number of east Frankish, Swabian, and Saxon troops whom he commanded<sup>92</sup>. It was only after Charles was able to block Lothair's crossing of the Seine, by positioning forces at all of the bridges and fords, that the latter decided to break off his pursuit and try again

86 Ibid., 3.3, p. 31–33.

87 Ibid., 3.2, p. 31, *venire non posset, eo quod Lodharius in regnum illius hostile manu irruere vellet.*

88 Ibid., 3.3, p. 31.

89 Ibid., *iter arripuit et, qualiter super Karolum irrueret.*

90 Ibid., *Rabanonem etiam ad Lodhovicum dirigens mandat, qualiter pro suo adiutorio illis in partibus isset, quod Lodharius audiens, illo omisso, supra se cum omnibus copiis ire pararet [...].*

91 Ibid., p. 32, *tam fratris sui Lodhuvici adventum quam et ceteros fideles suos, quos undique convocaverat, praestolaturus.*

92 Ibid., *habebat enim tam Saxonum quam et Austrasiorum nec non et de Alamannis partem haud modicum secum, horumque auxilio praemaxime confisus [...].*

to create a rift between Charles and Louis by offering a diplomatic solution to the conflict<sup>93</sup>.

Nithard presents Lothair seeking battle again in the late autumn of 841. Charles, according to Nithard, had dispatched part of his army to cross the Seine and march west toward a wooded region in what is today the French department of Orne, near the Breton frontier<sup>94</sup>. Lothair thought that these troops would be defeated quite easily, and believed that this victory would bring additional dividends. Nithard comments specifically on Lothair's goal of bringing the Breton leader Nomenoi (831–851) over to his side, and of causing the rest of Charles's army to collapse in panic<sup>95</sup>. Nithard appears to have been heartened to be able to report that Lothair was unsuccessful because Charles' entire army was able to escape<sup>96</sup>. However, Nithard's observations again point out the danger of dividing one's forces in the face of the enemy, and the likelihood that such a decision, for all intents and purposes, had the negative consequence of inviting a battle on unequal terms.

### Seeking Battle as a Moral Problem

Nithard's repeated claims that Lothair sought to force his brothers to fight a battle might be understood as an element of his *parti pris* in blackening the image of the senior Carolingian ruler. Indeed, the repeated emphasis by Nithard on Lothair's aggressiveness in seeking battle seems to have had this very purpose. However, Nithard also depicts Charles as actively seeking battle when the conditions were right in the Vegetian sense, meaning that he had achieved a substantial numerical superiority in a particular place and time. Consequently, the proper conclusion to draw here is that battle-seeking in Nithard's view was not *ipso facto* morally wrong or undesirable either in a tactical or strategic sense, but rather was illegitimate if the military commander were seeking an evil end.

In this context, Nithard discusses Charles's effort to seek a battle in the spring of 841. In March of that year, Charles began mobilizing a large army with which he intended to force a crossing of the Seine, and advance into lands currently held by Lothair. The west Frankish army successfully turned the flank of the forces that Lothair had left to guard the Seine by commandeering merchant ships down stream at Rouen<sup>97</sup>. Marching south, Charles arrived at St. Denis, where he received intelligence both about the location of Lothair's troops, who had withdrawn from the Seine, and also about the imminent arrival of his own men, who were hurrying to join him. In particular, Nithard records that Lothair's men had planned an ambush of Charles's reinforcements, but when faced with the overwhelming forces that had been brought to bear through river transports, Lothair's troops retreated instead<sup>98</sup>.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., 3.4, p. 33–35.

95 Ibid., p. 34, *Qua quidem re sperabat se et hos facile delere et hoc terrore sibi residuos subiugare maximeque Nominoium Britannorum ducem suo subdere dominatui posse.*

96 Ibid., *Nam exercitus Karoli omnis ab eo salvus evasit.*

97 Ibid., 2.6, p. 19–20.

98 Ibid.

Nithard explains that after receiving this information, Charles advanced from Saint-Denis 15 kilometers southwest to Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris, where he ostentatiously prayed, and then undertook a forced march of approximately 100 kilometers east to the confluence of the Seine and Loing at Saint-Mammès. This enabled Charles to join his reinforcements, and prevent their ambush by Lothair's now numerically inferior force<sup>99</sup>. After marching an additional 40 kilometers southeast of Saint-Mammès to Sens, Charles led his now substantially enlarged army in another forced night march toward the forest of the Othe, located 30 kilometers to the east of Sens. Nithard emphasizes that the purpose of Charles's maneuver was to undertake an attack against Lothair's forces, which he had learned were located in this forested area. In fact, Nithard claims that Charles »intended to attack them wherever and in whatever manner that he could«<sup>100</sup>. However, Lothair's troops, who obviously were greatly outnumbered, had learned of Charles's advance, and fled rather than face him in battle.

In considering the implications of these events, it is clear that Nithard has once again shown the conditions under which a battle-seeking strategy was an acceptable risk, namely when a commander enjoyed a substantial numerical superiority over his opponent. Charles was in direct command of his entire army after linking up with reinforcements and was facing only a part of Lothair's forces. Consequently Charles can be understood to have enjoyed a significant numerical superiority in this place and time. In addition, Nithard discusses the effort by Charles to gain the element of surprise by undertaking forced marches at night. Unfortunately for Charles, Lothair's men were not caught unprepared, which would seem to be a testament to the skill of their scouts, a topic to which we will return below.

Charles, in effect, attempted to launch a surprise attack on men who had, themselves, prepared an ambush. For scholars enamored of the idea of chivalry, an assault of this type might seem to pass muster, because Lothair's men already had violated a putative code of ethics by preparing to ambush Charles's men<sup>101</sup>. However, Nithard also depicts Charles, himself, seeking to ambush opposing forces even without the exceptional circumstances in play in the forest of Othe. Nithard observes, for example, that in January 841, Charles ordered Bernard of Septimania to meet with him at Bourges, where the latter indicated that he had failed to carry out his mission of negotiating a settlement with Pepin II of Aquitaine<sup>102</sup>. Nithard explains that Charles was enraged by Bernard's apparent lack of loyalty both toward Louis the Pious, earlier in his career, and also toward himself. Because of his deteriorating relationship with Bernard, Charles decided to take the drastic step of depriving Bernard of his offices and imprisoning him. However, Charles, according to Nithard, feared that carrying out this action would be very difficult, and consequently decided to launch a surprise attack on Bernard because »he feared that he would not be able to capture him in any other way«<sup>103</sup>. Consequently, Charles ordered this operation to take place.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid., 2.6, p. 20, *disposuerat enim, ubicumque et qualitercumque posset supra illos irruere*.

101 NELSON, *Knighthood* (as in n. 6), p. 75–87 stresses the putatively »chivalric« aspects of Carolingian warfare.

102 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 2.5, p. 17–19.

103 Ibid., p. 18, *timens, ne aliter illum comprehendere posset, subito in illum irruere statuit*.

Bernard, himself, barely managed to escape from Charles's soldiers, but a number of his men were killed and many others were captured along with Bernard's baggage train<sup>104</sup>. Nithard offers no explanation for Charles's decision to launch this surprise attack other than utility, and does not appear to question either his justness or morality. Rather, Nithard's emphasis on Bernard's history of betrayal suggests that he considered the ambush planned by Charles to have been justified.

Nithard again comments positively on Charles's decision to seek battle through an ambush in discussing events in September 842<sup>105</sup>. After observing that Charles had driven Pepin II into Aquitaine, and had left forces under the command of the *dux* Warin to maintain a watchful eye on the king's nephew, Nithard turns his attention to actions of Charles's *fidelis*, Count Egfrid of Toulouse. Nithard claims that Pepin II had dispatched forces to attempt to assassinate Egfrid. But the latter, apparently having learned of Pepin's plan, set an ambush for these would-be assassins killing a number of them and capturing others<sup>106</sup>. Once again, Nithard gives no indication that Egfrid's use of an *insidia* to get an advantage over his opponents was either unjust or immoral. Quite the opposite, because Pepin's men were intent on murdering Egfrid, the lesson here is that they received their just deserts.

### Military Intelligence and Communications

Of primary concern for military commanders, whether actively seeking battle or not, was the acquisition of timely and accurate information about the location, disposition, and the size of opposing forces<sup>107</sup>. However, some scholars have asserted that early medieval armies were notably inept with regard to obtaining military intelligence, and particularly in the use of scouts prior to military engagements<sup>108</sup>. This view of early medieval warfare as primitive in conduct, conception, as well as organi-

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., 4.4, p. 44–46.

106 Ibid., p. 45, *Insuper Egfridus comes Tolosae e Pepini sociis, qui ad se perdendum missi fuerant, quosdam in insidiis cepit, quosdam stravit.*

107 In examining the gathering of military intelligence, it is helpful to consider as well the well developed system of communications between the court and aristocrats at the regional and local levels. In this context, see the discussions by Rosamond MCKITTERICK, *Court and Communication in the Early Middle Ages: The Frankish Kingdom under Charlemagne*, in: Walter POHL, Veronika WIESER (ed.), *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat – europäische Perspektiven*, Vienna 2009, p. 357–368; Janet NELSON, *How the Carolingians Created Consensus*, in: *Le monde carolingien: bilan, perspectives, champs de recherches*, Turnhout 2009, p. 67–81. Of course, the acquisition of information and political communications had a very long tradition in the Latin West. For background, see Andrew GILLET, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West*, 411–433, Cambridge 2003.

108 The best known and most widely cited example in this context is Guy HALSALL, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900*, London 2003, p. 147–148, who argues that medieval military commanders routinely led their troops into ambushes and were ignorant of the basic necessities of military intelligence gathering. In light of the evidence that this broad-gauged assertion is simply untrue, Halsall adds that, »nevertheless, it is unlikely that no attempt at all was ever made to scout ahead of the army. There are some references to scouting«. See the criticism of Halsall's characterization of the use of scouting by Clifford ROGERS, *Soldiers' Lives through History – The Middle Ages*, Portsmouth 2007, p. 106.

zation cannot be sustained on even the most cursory reading of the »Histories«. In fact, Nithard makes clear throughout his work that all of the contenders for the rule of the *regnum Francorum* were well aware of the need to obtain detailed information about the military operations of their opponents, and were highly successful in acquiring this intelligence.

Nithard observes, for example, that Lothair intentionally advanced north from his Italian lands at a very deliberate pace, i. e. *pedetemptim*, in June 840 because »he wished to know the state of affairs before he crossed the Alps«<sup>109</sup>. Nithard contrasts the slow movement of Lothair's main army with the rapid departure of his *nunciū*, whom he dispatched throughout all of *Francia* in order to rally support, and also to obtain information and determine which magnates would support him<sup>110</sup>.

Nithard again points to Lothair's efforts to acquire military intelligence after he drove Louis and his army south from the Middle Rhineland into Bavaria in April 841. Following his victory over Louis at Worms, discussed above, Lothair marched to Aachen to celebrate Easter at Charlemagne's imperial seat, and thus gain an important propaganda advantage from this act. During the march, he began planning military operations against Charles. Significantly, Nithard observed that Lothair decided to alter his plans after learning that Charles had crossed the Seine and was headed east in order to provide aid to Louis<sup>111</sup>. A central element in Lothair's efforts to develop a new campaign strategy was the acquisition of additional information before he took further military action. Nithard observes that Lothair »quickly sent out men because he wished to know the state of affairs, that is where Charles was, and with whom«<sup>112</sup>.

Nithard provides a similar example of the impact of timely military intelligence in his discussion of Charles's campaign to cross the Seine early in the spring of 841, i. e. in the same timeframe that Lothair was making preparations to celebrate Easter at Aachen. In March 841, following his successful effort to neutralize the threat posed by both Pepin II of Aquitaine and Bernard of Septimania, at least for the time being, Charles began recruiting a large army in order to take the initiative against Lothair in the territories between the Seine and the Rhine<sup>113</sup>. After mobilizing forces from Burgundy, Aquitaine, and the regions between the Loire and the Seine, Charles marched toward the latter river. As Nithard makes clear, Charles found Lothair's forces defending the right bank. Through scouting of the environs of the left bank, as Nithard describes the action, Charles learned that Lothair's men had destroyed or sunk all of the local ships, and wrecked the bridges to prevent him from crossing<sup>114</sup>. However, Charles obtained information about a fleet of merchant ships that had been forced ashore near Rouen approximately 120 kilometers west-northwest of Paris. Taking advantage of this intelligence, Charles ordered the ships to be loaded with his troops,

109 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 2.1, p. 13, *ipse autem, pedetemptim, quo se res verteret, antequam Alpes excederet, scire volens*.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid., 2.7, p. 20–21.

112 Ibid., 2.7, p. 21, *Velociter quidem praemittit rei veritatem, ubi et cum quibus esset, scire cupiens Aquis pascha celebraturus*.

113 Ibid., 2.6, p. 19–20.

114 Ibid.

and sailed up the Seine, thus forcing Lothair's troops to retreat from their positions along the banks of the river, as discussed above<sup>115</sup>.

Nithard's depiction of Lothair and Charles using military intelligence to inform their campaign decisions is paradigmatic of his discussion of the acquisition of military intelligence during the entire period of civil wars. Nithard makes clear throughout his narrative that all of the Carolingian rulers regularly received detailed information about the actions of their adversaries. The only instance in which Nithard claims that there was confusion about the location of the armies under the direct command of Charles, Lothair, and Louis concerns the period immediately preceding the battle at Fontenoy regarding which he states: »When the armies of the two sides *unexpectedly* caught sight of each other at Auxerre, Lothair immediately withdrew his troops a short distance from his encampment because he feared that his brothers might immediately launch an attack against him<sup>116</sup>.« It seems likely, however, that the reader need not accept at face value Nithard's assertion about the unexpected nature of the meeting between the armies at Auxerre. Rather, this claim fits all too well with Nithard's overall effort to present Charles and Louis as doing everything in their power to avoid battle, rather than purposely seeking out and forcing a battle against Lothair. However, even in this case is important not to discount the issue of the »fog of war« entirely.

The striking consistency with which the Carolingian kings, in Nithard's depiction of events, were able to gain information about both the location and plans of enemy forces, however, does require some further discussion. The fact that Carolingian commanders sought military intelligence does not explain why they apparently were so successful in obtaining it. The history of warfare is filled with intelligence failures. It seems likely that a major part of the explanation for the intelligence successes of the Carolingian rulers is that all of the armies were fighting, more or less, on their home ground. Consequently, each of the kings had men in his entourage who were intimately familiar with the geography and topography, including the military topography of roads, fortifications, and supply centers, in the lands through which the armies were marching. Large armies, of the type discussed by Nithard, required well-developed roads, and other logistical infrastructure, such as the river ports. As a consequence, military commanders were familiar with the routes that were available to enemy forces, and confirmation of the specific line of march chosen by the enemy could be obtained relatively easily through the deployment of advanced scouts. An additional factor that likely enhanced the opportunities for gaining military intelligence was the large number of magnates, and others, who switched sides in the conflict, bringing with them valuable information about both the current deployment of their erstwhile comrades, and also concerning their future plans.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid., 2.10, p. 25, *Cumque atque insperate propter urbem Alciodorensis uterque exercitus alter ab altero videretur, confestim Lodharius verens, ne forte fratres sui absque dilatione supra se irruere vellent, armatus castra aliquantulum excessit.*

## Propaganda

As suggested by Nelson, Nithard's discussion of military operations should be understood as part of his broader agenda of establishing a case for »just war« carried out by Charles and Louis<sup>117</sup>. However, in addition to the evidence from Nithard's text, itself, the author also devotes considerable attention in his »Histories« to the efforts of the Carolingian rulers to sway »public opinion« during the course of their struggle. Nithard makes clear that communicating the proper message to both current and potential supporters about both the material and moral advantages of the »home side« was critically important for the successful pursuit of both military and political objectives.

Considerable numbers of written works of propaganda were produced in the context of crises of the 830s, and the civil war of the early 840s<sup>118</sup>. Among these, in February 835, Louis the Pious ordered a *libellus* to be produced following an assembly at the royal *villa* of Thionville. Louis ordered that this text, which treated in detail the unjust nature of his deposition from office in 833, be read publicly, copied, and disseminated<sup>119</sup>. However, Nithard's main focus throughout his »Histories« is on the oral communications of the kings directly with their magnates in assemblies, or the royal dispatch of emissaries to make the case for their patron<sup>120</sup>. Nithard emphasizes, for example, that when Charles and Louis finally joined forces near Châlons-en-Champagne, located some 110 kilometers southeast of Fontenoy, in May of 841, their first conversation, according to Nithard, focused on Lothair's »utter lack of self-control and his savage attacks on them and their supporters«<sup>121</sup>. Nithard adds that the very next morning, the two kings held an assembly of their supporters where they set out in detail all of the calamities that they had suffered at the hands of Lothair<sup>122</sup>. Nithard again shows the two brothers using a public assembly to influence the perspectives of their supporters in the famous oaths of Strasbourg, which were made on 14 February 842<sup>123</sup>. Each of the kings addressed both of the armies, Louis in

117 NELSON, *Public Histories* (as in n. 6), p. 251–293.

118 Janet NELSON, *The Search for Peace in a Time of War: the Carolingian »Brüderkrieg«, 840–843*, in: Johannes FRIED (ed.), *Träger und Instrumentarien des Friedens im hohen und späten Mittelalter*, Sigmaringen 1996, p. 87–114, here p. 98.

119 This *libellus* is noted in the *Annales Bertiniani*, ed. Félix GRAT (as in n. 54), an. 835, p. 16. We thank Phil Wynn for his generosity in allowing us to see his manuscript dealing with the topic of propaganda in the period of the civil wars, and alerting us to the rich vein of surviving texts that were produced to influence the »public«.

120 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 3.1, p. 28, claims to have been impelled to have written the third book of his text out of fear that *forte quilibet quocumque modo deceptus res nostro in tempore gestas, praeterquam exactae sunt, narrare praesumat [...]*. In his translation of the text Bernhard Walter SCHOLZ, *Carolingian Chronicles*, Ann Arbor 1970, p. 155, translated *narrare* as record, suggesting another work of written propaganda. This is certainly a possible translation, but it is much more common to see this verb used for oral rather than written communications.

121 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 2.9, p. 24, *quae Lodharius absque quolibet moderamine erga se suosque seviebat*.

122 *Ibid.*

123 *Ibid.*, 3.5, p. 35–37.



Romance, and Charles in German<sup>124</sup>. According to Nithard, Charles and Louis laid out their case against Lothair, and then promised everlasting friendship and loyalty between themselves.

Nithard also presents Lothair using assemblies of his supporters to make the case for his position as the rightful ruler of the *regnum Francorum*. For example, Nithard draws attention to Lothair's successful use of propaganda to enhance his political and military position vis-à-vis Charles, following a significant tactical blunder by the latter. In May 841, Charles faced a choice about whether to march southwest from Attigny to join his mother and the reinforcements she was bringing from Aquitaine, or to advance toward Lothair's forces. According to Nithard, Charles summoned his magnates to discuss the two options, and the majority opted for advancing against Lothair, or at least announcing his intention of meeting Lothair at a specific location<sup>125</sup>. This majority party counseled that if Charles withdrew to meet with his mother, this action would be characterized as a retreat by his adversaries, and those magnates who had remained neutral so far would now join Lothair<sup>126</sup>.

According to Nithard, as soon as Lothair received word of Charles's withdrawal: »he announced to the people gathered all around that Charles had fled, and that he would pursue him as quickly as possible.« Nithard opines that »this announcement strengthened the resolve of his faithful supporters, and encouraged those who were doubtful of his cause to come over to his side more firmly«<sup>127</sup>. This passage serves to demonstrate the important impact that propaganda could have in galvanizing support. In addition, it would seem to be a clear example of Nithard's didactic purpose with regard to the »Histories«, and particularly the negative consequences that could arise when a king ignored the sound tactical advice that was proffered by his magnates. In fact, Nithard's emphasis regarding this matter perhaps permits the conclusion that he had agreed with the majority of the magnates, and opposed the withdrawal toward Aquitaine that had permitted Lothair to seize the propaganda initiative.

In addition to the use of assemblies to disseminate propagandistic accounts of emerging events, Nithard observes that the Carolingian kings also frequently dispatched emissaries to strengthen the resolve of their supporters, and to persuade others to join their side. In September 841, for example, Charles dispatched his seneschal

124 See the discussion by Patrick GEARY, Oathtaking and Conflict Management in the Ninth Century, in: Stefan ESDERS (ed.), *Rechtsverständnis und Konfliktbewältigung. Gerichtliche und außergerichtliche Strategien im Mittelalter*, Cologne 2007, p. 239–253; NELSON, How the Carolingians Created Consensus (as in n. 106), particularly p. 73; and the recent treatment by Rosamond MCKITTERICK, The Oaths of Strasbourg (842) and their Implications in the Light of Recent Scholarship, in: Jörg SONNTAG, Coralie ZERMATTEN (ed.), *Loyalty in the Middle Ages: Ideal and Practice of a Cross-Social Value*, Turnhout 2015, p. 141–159. Also see the collection of essays in LE MONACO, VILLA, *I Giuramenti di Strasburgo: testi e tradizione/The Strasbourg Oaths: Texts and Transmission* (as in n. 13).

125 Nithard, ed. MÜLLER (as in n. 14), 2.9, p. 23–24.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid., p. 23, *Lodharius quoque ut haec ita se habere deprehendit, circumfusae plebi Karolum fugam inisse persequique illum, quantocius posset, vell denuntiat; quo quidem nuntio fidos sibi alacriores reddidit, dubiis autem quibusque et affluendi audaciam iniecit et firmiores suae parti reddidit.*

Adalhard and Abbot Hugh of Saint-Quentin (d. 844) to convince Count Gislebert of the Maasgau, located in the region of the lower Meuse, and other local magnates to join his side<sup>128</sup>. Nithard also devotes considerable attention to Lothair's use of emissaries and agents to ride ahead of the army in order to persuade potential supporters, or opponents, that he would be victorious and that they should take the appropriate action in light of this reality. As discussed above, Lothair used this strategy to great effect while campaigning against Louis the German in the spring of 841<sup>129</sup>. In fact, Nithard emphasizes throughout his text that it was Lothair's common practice to utilize agents in this manner. In discussing Lothair's advance toward the Loire in October 940, for example, Nithard comments that the Carolingian king dispatched emissaries in his habitual manner (*more solite*) to convince the inhabitants between the Loire and the Seine to support him, either with promises or with threats<sup>130</sup>.

In Nithard's account, all three of the royal brothers clearly utilized propaganda to encourage their supporters and to undermine the support of their opponents. Nithard's *parti pris* on behalf of Charles and Louis is illuminated, however, when the content of this propaganda is considered in detail. Nithard consistently presents Lothair offering material gain to men who would support him, and threatening with grave losses those who failed to do so. By contrast, Charles and Louis, according to Nithard's telling, utilized arguments based upon justice and morality<sup>131</sup>.

## Conclusion

Carolingian pedagogues stressed the value of learning from books, and the sons of Louis the Pious were substantial consumers of knowledge preserved by the written word<sup>132</sup>. Nithard certainly must be understood to be in this tradition, even if he engaged in an altogether uncommon activity as a layman by writing a history that focused almost exclusively on contemporary affairs<sup>133</sup>. Nithard's choice to do so permits the insight that he regarded this information as necessary for men of his status

128 Ibid., 3.3, p. 31, *Hugonem et Adhelhardum ad Gislebertum una cum ceteris foedere, quo valerent sibi adnecterent, direxit.*

129 Ibid., 2.7, p. 20–21.

130 Ibid., 2.3, p. 16, *praemittens more solite, qui ad defectionem inter Sequanam et Ligerem degentes partim minis, partim blanditiis subducerent.*

131 The role of justice in Nithard's text is discussed in detail by PATZE, *Iusticia* (as in n. 18), p. 147–165.

132 See, for example, Rosamond McKITTERICK, *The palace school of Charles the Bald*, in: Janet NELSON, Margaret GIBSON (ed.), *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, Aldershot 1990, p. 326–339, and reprinted with the same pagination in ID., *The Frankish Kings and Culture in the Early Middle Ages*, Aldershot 1995.

133 The writing of history by laymen was quite uncommon. The writing of strictly contemporary work of history, as contrasted with biography, without contextualizing modern affairs in a lengthy prologue dating back to the birth of Jesus or even to the Creation, also was exceptionally rare in the period before the First Crusade. There are only three such texts that survive between the ninth and eleventh centuries: Nithard's work, Alpert of Metz's »*De diversitate temporum*«, and Bruno of Merseburg's »*Bellum Saxonum*«. For a discussion of this issue, see Bernard S. BACHRACH, David S. BACHRACH, *Bruno of Merseburg and his Historical Method c 1085*, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 40 (2014), p. 381–398.

and profession, and consequently can be understood to illuminate the actual conduct of war in the mid-ninth century.

Of primary importance, given the attention that Nithard devotes to the topic, is the crucial relationship between political and military affairs. In Nithard's account, the fighting and winning of battles comprised the final stage in a lengthy diplomatic, political, and propaganda struggle to demonstrate both the moral and practical superiority over one's foes. This presentation of warfare, as distinguished from actual combat on the field, highlights Nithard's understanding of the multi-faceted relationship of the Carolingian rulers of this generation with the magnates in the *regnum Francorum*. In addition, Nithard's detailed discussion of the extensive maneuvering by the Carolingian kings on the one hand to gain the support of the magnates and on the other to place their armies in a position to gain maximum long-term advantage makes clear his views regarding the political complexity of military operations in this period.

As discussed above, Nithard also made numerous observations concerning the size of the Carolingian armies, their composition, as well as the strategic and tactical decisions of the contenders for the rule of the *regnum Francorum*. From Nithard's perspective, and he was in a very good position to know, the Carolingian kings sought to mobilize very large armies, and did so utilizing both the military households of magnates as well as expeditionary levies drawn from militia forces. It is noteworthy, however, that little is said of the local levies who were too poor to be mobilized for the offensive operations that dominated Nithard's account, although he did draw attention to the *plebs*, that is the poor who, nevertheless, were sufficiently wealthy to be mobilized for campaigns.

In terms of military operations, Nithard's observations permit the inference that the Carolingian rulers possessed and relied upon an extensive apparatus for obtaining accurate and timely information about the military forces of their opponents. In short, Nithard presents them as working diligently and often successfully to acquire military intelligence. Nithard's discussion of the battle-seeking and battle-avoiding strategies of Charles, Louis, Lothair, and their various commanders, also may suggest that Vegetian-style conceptions of the conduct of war were thoroughly ingrained within the leadership cadres of Carolingian society. These Carolingian rulers, as presented by Nithard, did not seek out battle very often. When they did seek battle, it would appear from Nithard's account that this was because they believed that they had a significant numerical advantage.

Finally, propaganda played an essential role in the conduct of military operations, according to Nithard. He presents the Carolingian kings working hard to show their magnates that they were fighting on the just side, and moreover the winning side. In this manner, Nithard connects effective propaganda quite closely to both political and military success. According to Nithard, having a large army showed wavering magnates that a Carolingian king already enjoyed broad support. By contrast, having a small army suggested that a ruler faced grave doubts about his ability to win.

As discussed in the introduction to this essay, our purpose has been to take a first important step in laying the groundwork for an eventual thorough-going history of warfare during the ninth century. In light of the now considerable body of scholarship dealing with Nithard and his »Histories«, it is clear that he offers a unique and

uniquely well-informed account of the nature of war in the period between c 833–843. Moreover, in light of Nithard's didactic goals and his well-informed audience of fellow aristocrats at the court of Charles the Bald, it is also clear that he had a compelling interest to provide an accurate account, insofar as he was able, unless this impinged on his particularly *parti pris* against Lothair and in favor of the West Frankish ruler. Nithard's insights, therefore, as we have discussed them throughout this essay, provide a foundation for future research that takes into account the broader array of narrative texts as well as charters, letters, sermons, *libelli*, and material information developed through archaeological work.