SERVANTS NOT SOLDIERS: LORDSHIP AND SOCIAL MORALITY IN THE *VIA REGIA*

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ABSTRACT

Allison Gose: Servants Not Soldiers: Lordship and Social Morality in the *Via regia*
(Under the direction of Marcus Bull)

Smaragdus of St. Mihiel's *Via regia* captures a significant moment in Carolingian intellectual thought, emerging during the transition from Charlemagne to Louis the Pious. This thesis argues that ninth-century intellectuals, such as Smaragdus, possessed the historical awareness to recognize this pivotal change and craft innovative solutions to the questions it raised. Experimenting with models of rulership, thinkers constructed an ideal image to which king and noble could aspire, binding royal and aristocratic males to an evolving imperial project. A close examination of the writings of this abbot illuminates how those intimately involved in the court understood this succession and the imaginative opportunities it afforded for a new social order. This thesis thus analyzes the *Via regia* as a social and political guide for both royal and aristocratic administrators and how it aimed to inculcate universal principles of lordship necessary for the creation of a model Christian empire.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MGH   Monumenta Germaniae Historica

PL   Patrologia Latina

SERVANTS NOT SOLDIERS: LORDSHIP AND SOCIAL MORALITY IN THE *VIA REGIA*

Composed in 813 C.E., Smaragdus of St. Mihiel's *Via regia* captures a significant moment in

Carolingian intellectual thought. The text, addressed to the newly crowned emperor, emerges

during the period of transition from Charlemagne (r. 768-814) to Louis the Pious (r. 814-840).[1]

This thesis will argue that ninth-century intellectuals, like Smaragdus, possessed the historical

awareness to recognize this pivotal change and craft innovative solutions to the questions it

raised.[2] Experimenting with models of rulership, thinkers constructed an ideal image to which

king and noble could aspire, binding royal and aristocratic males to an evolving imperial

project.[3] A close examination of the writings of this abbot, long invested in the Carolingian

imperial program, illuminates how those intimately involved in the court understood this

succession and the imaginative opportunities it afforded for a new social order.[4] This thesis will,

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[1] See M.L.W. Laistner, "The Date and the Recipient of Smaragdus' Via regia," *Speculum* 3 (1928): 392-7.

[2] See Paul Dutton, *Awareness of Historical Decline in the Carolingian Empire, 800-887* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1981).

[3] "Carolingian project" and "imperial program" will be used to refer to the ambition of the Carolingian family to expand the Frankish territories, Christianize these regions, and effectively govern them through a network of noble elites and court reform. These terms thus subsume the military, political, religious, and social mechanisms of this system, including such elements as annual military campaigns and their associated courts and homosocial bonding, education both of the laity but also of religious figures, administration of legal courts and disputes, landholding and the giving of *beneficia*, and the duties of lords to their dependents and the downtrodden—the poor, widows, and orphans. I choose to employ "project" in order to emphasize the evolving and multifaceted nature of this process—a vision frequently adjusting and modifying in response to changes in leadership and to the demands of the vast and diverse territories it oversaw.

[4] See James Francis Lepree, *Sources of Spirituality and the Carolingian Exegetical Tradition* (PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 2008), 132-9 for a discussion of Smaragdus's service to Charlemagne in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, particularly in the *filioque* controversy. Lepree argues that despite the scant information available about the monk, we can assume that he was regarded by the emperor as a spiritual authority, worthy of consultation in these affairs.

therefore, analyze the *Via regia* as a social and political guide for both royal and aristocratic administrators and how it aimed to inculcate universal principles of lordship necessary for the creation of a model Christian empire.

In 814, Charlemagne had died. His death produced many questions about the future of the territory he had ruled for over four decades. While a successor had been chosen in his sole remaining son Louis, it remained unclear as to how much of the imperial ideal rested in the person of Charlemagne, the almost superhuman warlord who had conquered and united peoples from the Atlantic to the Rhine and beyond. Could his third son, long ruling in the peripheral region of Aquitaine, garner the support of the noble elite and govern this diverse realm as its emperor?[5]

Smaragdus of St. Mihiel captured this moment in his *Via regia*. This text has been long undervalued by historians, particularly in English-language scholarship,[6] despite an enduring

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[5] Much work has already been done on the rehabilitation of the reputation of Louis the Pious. F.L. Ganshof largely initiated this effort. Focusing on the emperor's early years (814-829), Ganshof contested the ubiquitous negative representations of Louis, emphasizing instead his ability to impose a stronger and more cohesive Carolingian order. See "Louis the Pious Reconsidered," *History* 42 (1957): 171-80. Thomas F.X. Noble continued the work of Ganshof in redefining Louis the Pious's early reign and revealed the emperor's ability to conflate spiritual and worldly authority into effective governance. See "The Revolt of King Bernard of Italy in 817: Its Causes and Consequences," *Studi medievali* 15 (1974): 315-26; "The Monastic Ideal as a Model for Empire: The Case of Louis the Pious," *Revue bénédictine* 86 (1976): 235-50; "Louis the Pious and His Piety Re-Reconsidered," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 58 (1980): 297-316. The following decade Louis the Pious received a multifaceted new treatment through a collection of articles, ranging in discussion from military expansion, to art, and to the church. Together these articles aimed to finally rehabilitate the emperor, showcasing his achievements and the complexity of his reign. See Peter Godman and Roger Collins (ed.), *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). More recent treatments of Louis the Pious's rule have tended to focus on his later years, aiming to rewrite the history of his greatest failures. Mayke de Jong analyzes Louis's construction of a penitential state, asserting that the rebellions of the 830s were ultimately possible due to the success of *admonitio,* as the correction once focused outward on the court and empire turned inward on the emperor himself. See *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Similarly, Andrew Romig has argued for an understanding of Louis the Pious's alleged weaknesses as hidden strengths—a fact even contemporaries acknowledged. See his "In Praise of the Too-Clement Emperor: The Problem of Forgiveness in the Astronomer's *Vita Hludowici imperatoris,"* *Speculum* 89 (2014): 382-409. For a longer discussion of attitudes toward and interpretation of Louis the Pious's reign, see Courtney Booker, *Past Convictions: The Penance of Louis the Pious and the Decline of the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

[6] Smaragdus and the *Via regia* have received more attention by German scholars. Significant treatments include Otto Eberhardt, *Via regia: Der Fürstenspiegel Smaragds von St. Mihiel und seine literarische Gattung* (Munich: Wilheim

reliance upon the moral mirrors of the eighth and ninth centuries to reconstruct the social,

religious, and political expectations for the laity.[7] The blame largely rests on the failure of

scholars to agree about what texts should be included in this grouping.[8] For example, Rachel

Stone notably excluded *specula* dedicated to kings in *Morality and Masculinity in the*

Carolingian World—the sole monograph on eighth- and ninth-century lay masculinity. She

argues:

> The exclusion of kings and princes may seem unusual, since such men have often
> been included in studies of lay mentalities and culture. Yet there are indications
> that the moral norms proposed to them were distinctive from those offered to lay
> noblemen…The moral significance of kings was also heightened in these texts:
> unlike other laymen, their sins could potentially destroy a kingdom.[9]

For Stone, the Carolingian Empire was largely maintained through consensus among elite men.[10]

Moralists, thus, aimed to foster achievable paradigms of piety for each group—royal, noble,

clerical, and monastic—that operated in concert rather than in opposition. Stone, for instance,

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Fink Verlag, 1977); Fidel Rädle, *Studien zu Smaragd von Saint-Mihiel* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1974); Hans Hubert Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit* (Bonn: Lugwig Rohrscheid Verlag, 1968), 132-90. While there has been increasing interest in Smaragdus in English-language scholarship over the last decade, more emphasis is placed on his monastic works and life. See the notable works of Matthew Ponesse, including "Standing Distant from the Fathers: Smaragdus of Saint Mihiel and the Reception of Early Medieval Learning," *Traditio* 67 (2012): 71-99; "Smaragdus of St. Mihiel and the Carolingian Monastic Reform," *Revue bénédictine* 116 (2006): 367-92.

[7] Moral mirrors or *specula* encompass the historical genre of guides addressed to members of the laity with advice on proper moral behavior, including prescriptions on religious, social, and political life. While the majority were composed by clergy, Dhuoda's lay and female perspective marks her work as a notable exception. See Franz Selmeier, *Die laienparänetischen Schriften der Karolingerzeit: Untersuchungen zu ausgewälten Texten des Paulinus von Aquileia, Alkuins, Jonas' von Orelans, Dhuodas und Hinkmars von Reims* (Munich: Ars Una, 2000) for general discussion of the moral mirrors. See both Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Valerie Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012) for historiographical examples of how these mirrors are employed to reconstruct expectations for noble men and women in the eighth and ninth centuries.

[8] See n. 6 for references to studies on the moral mirrors. As is clear from these examples, the canonical set of lay mirrors for the eighth and ninth centuries are Alcuin of York's *De virtutibus et vitiis,* Paulinus of Aquileia's *Liber exhortationis,* Jonas of Orleans's *De institutione laicali,* and Dhuoda of Septimania's *Liber manualis.* Hincmar of Rheims's *De cavendis vitiis et virtutibus exercendis* is sometimes included; however, this work's latter date (860-875 C.E.) often excludes it from this traditional grouping.

[9] Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 25.

[10] Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 332-4.

discusses the concessions moralists made for the aristocracy, particularly concerning celibacy and sexual restraint. She argues that "stressing sexual asceticism as a sign of virtue was to revive a competition between groups of elite men that only clerics and monks could hope to win."[11] This would have been to the detriment of the Carolingian project, which necessitated the cooperation of all of the orders. Under her schema, division encouraged unity among the Carolingian elite, a condition which legitimizes her omission of royal *specula.*

Despite her primary emphasis on lay mirrors, however, Stone does later qualify her exclusion of royal guides. Examining the will of Eberhard of Fruili, a prominent count under Louis the Pious and his son Lothar I, Stone notes the kinds of texts that ninth-century nobles might have possessed and thought worthy of passing along to their descendants. Within the genre of moral handbooks, this included both Alcuin of York's *De virtutibus and vitiis* and Smaragdus's *Via regia.*[12] "Eberhard's ownership of Smaragdus's *Via regia,*" she acknowledges, "confirms that the boundaries between mirrors for princes and lay mirrors were not rigid."[13] She also references Hincmar's *De cavendis vitiis et virtutibus exercendis*, noting that "although addressed to Charles the Bald, [it] discusses general moral behavior, rather than demands specific to the rulers."[14] Here, Stone herself recognizes that texts intended for a specific individual could have wider applicability when discussing more general or universal principles of morality. Yet, this understanding rarely extends to the *Via regia.* Nevertheless, while Stone restricts her use of royal *specula* for understanding elite morality and behavior, her qualifications illuminate a possible intellectual space for the wider dissemination of prescriptions for virtuous

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[11] Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 310.

[12] Stone, *Morality and Masculinity*, 29.

[13] Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 42.

[14] Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 36.

governance. This would not deny Stone's recognition that the bodily piety of the nobility, particularly in regards to marriage and sexual morality, differed and perhaps was less stringent than that of their royal counterparts. Yet, it begs the question of whether these mirrors, specifically the *Via regia*, could hold useful and largely untapped lessons for considering universal notions of ninth-century lordship.

The theory of hegemonic masculinity introduces a conceptual tool which has the potential to close the gap between the experiences of royal and noble men. This theory suggests that within an individual society there exists a hierarchy of masculinities in which one expression comes to embody the social and cultural ideal to which others aspire. While few may actually embody this standard, it becomes the model to which members of a social body will appeal in order to construct individual and group identities. Although this concept has been dominated by the social sciences and applied to modern contexts, hegemonic masculinity has the potential to aid an exploration of how one can elide the experience of kings (the immediate recipient of the *Via regia*) and elite males through the construction of a hierarchy of masculinities. In the argument that follows, the concept of hegemonic masculinity will thus be drawn upon in order to reinforce the hypothesis that Smaragdus's prescriptions had wider applicability than its explicit royal recipient.[15]

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[15] The theory of hegemonic masculinity has a significant history in the social sciences and has been used to analyze social and power relationships among male adults and adolescents. Hegemonic masculinity has been particularly useful in the study of education and classroom behavior, criminology, advertising and representations in the media, health and medicine, and professional organization and structure. It first appeared in a 1982 study of Australian high school students. See Sandra Kessler, *Ockers and Disco-Maniacs: A Discussion of Sex, Gender and Secondary Schooling* (Stanmore: Inner City Education Center, 1982). These observations were later expanded into a theoretical paradigm, largely by Raewyn Connell. See Tim Carrigan, Raewyn Connell, and John Lee, "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity," *Theory and Society* 14 (1985): 551-604 and Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987). As the study of masculinity evolved and developed as a field in the 1980s and 1990s, the theory of hegemonic masculinity was challenged and contested. In response to these critiques, Connell cogently revised and reissued her theory. See Raewyn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19 (2005): 829-59. This latter paradigm represents the model appealed to in this thesis.

The text suggests itself for this form of analysis. The *Via regia* frequently addresses the king specifically, referring to the him in the vocative case and admonishing him in the second person singular. This language positions the king at the apex of the hierarchy of elite men, embodying virtuous rulership through his pious adherence to the tenets of the text. While the analysis could end here, another layer presents itself through close attention to the syntax of the prescriptions. The abbot frequently employs the first person plural, alluding to some collective body who would both have read and understood the text. Some of the "we" language can be explained as referents to the author(s) of the text, as, for example, when the work admonishes, "mildest king, if you wish to run the Royal Way through this which *we write…*"[16] Yet, several instances suggest another possible audience of the text—a group also participating in the *Via regia,* even if they did not exemplify the height of virtue like the king.

> We ought to show copious gratitude to God, who commanded us to proceed along the royal path toward the heavenly kingdom, so that through walking straight paths, we might happily merit to reach the heavenly fatherland. Therefore, let us not turn toward the right or left; we must advance in firm and solid step along the royal path and in chaste and sacred fear of heaven…[17]

Here, the concept of hegemonic masculinity affords some purchase on the text's intended audience, as this elite collective shared in the text's programmatic, participating in and progressing themselves along the path while they looked toward and followed the king as the epitome of these ideals. This presentation allows Smaragdus to affirm the supreme excellence of the king while creating an accessible paradigm for the nobility to emulate. Through this process,

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[16] Smaragdus, "Via regia," ed. J.P. Migne, PL 102 (Paris, 1865), 965. *Mitisime rex, si vis per hanc quam scribimus Regiam currere Viam…*emphasis mine.

[17] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 941. *Uberes Deo gratias agere debemus, qui nos ad coelica regna per regiam jubet pergere viam, ut per recta gradientes itinera, ad coelestem feliciter mereamur pertingere patriam. Ergo non declinemus ad dexteram aut sinistram; firmo solidoque gradu per regiam nobis incedendum est viam, et casto sanctoque timori coelestis…*

the *Via regia* aims to transform the ruler—Louis the Pious—into a vehicle of moral reform in a larger project of forging a moral elite.

The process of correction and reform emphasized imitation—imitation both of Christ, the highest lord, and of one's social and political superiors. These figures served as models for pious behavior and rulership. Moral literature likely took advantage of these multivalent connections between Christ, the emperor, and the elite, anticipating that their prescriptions could apply to both royal and noble groups. Much excellent work has been done for the Carolingian period on a Christo-mimetic understanding of governance.[18] Building on this earlier work, this thesis will explore the obligations and expectations of a Christian king, and by extension the nobility, developed in the *Via regia*. The success of this model of rulership required the approbation of the aristocratic class. Stuart Airlie and Thomas F.X. Noble, acknowledging the complexities and delicacies of this process, have both dedicated much scholarly ink to understanding how nobles participated in and shaped the project instituted by the Carolingian family.[19] Nobles conceived of themselves as public administrators of the Christian empire and behaved as members of the "state elite," participating in a *ministerium* with responsibilities not only for their own salvation but for those they governed.[20] While the *Via regia* only deploys the word *ministerium* three

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[18] See Eric P Miller, "The Political Significance of Christ's Kingship in the Biblical Exegesis of Hrabanus Maurus and Angelomus of Luxeuil," *Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages: Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages,* ed. Claudio Leonardi and Giovanni Orlandi (Sismel: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005), 193-213; Elizabeth Sears, "Louis the Pious as *Miles Christi:* The Dedicatory Image in Hrabanus Maurus's *De laudibus sanctae crucis,*" *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious*, ed. Peter Godman and Roger Collins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 605-28 for a discussion of the tradition of Christo-mimetic rulership on the part of Carolingian rulers.

[19] Stuart Airlie, "Charlemagne and the Aristocracy: Captains and Kings," *Charlemagne: Empire and Society,* ed. Joanna Story (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 90-102; see also Thomas F.X. Noble, "Secular Sanctity: Forging an Ethos for the Carolingian Nobility," *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World,* ed. Patrick Wormald and Janet Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8-36.

[20] Stuart Airlie, "The Aristocracy in the Service of the State in the Carolingian Period," *Staat im Frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Stuart Airlie, Walter Pohl, and Helmut Reimitz (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), 96-7; see also Noble, "Secular Sanctity," 13.

times, its usage implies an understanding of a collective ministry to oversee the empire's downtrodden and uphold the fundamental tenets of Christian imperial administration.[21] As Matthew Innes argues, these values were inculcated at court, a space in which moralist teachings were converted into the *mores* of the rising administrators of the realm.[22] The moral exemplarity of the nobility did not threaten the distinctiveness of the emperor but rather reflected a recognition that a shared ethical framework, in which the king embodied the pinnacle of perfection, was considered ideal for the effective rulership of the empire due to the nobles' significant role in this governance. Examining this process through the lens of hegemonic masculinity thus helps us to expand the genre of moralist teachings of the court to include royal *specula,* like the *Via regia*, potentially multiplying the moral and spiritual expectations for *all* administrators of the realm and supporting the hypothesis that these *specula* had wider applicability though the court culture of imitation and the demands of Christian lordship.

Negotiating issues of rulership, spirituality, and masculinity, Smaragdus's *Via regia* has the potential to illuminate the ways in which ninth-century intellectuals understood the complexities of the Carolingian superstructure and how reciprocal relationships of lordship between and among elites evolved in response to larger transitions in the empire. This not only speaks to the ingenuity of these thinkers but also their ability to appreciate and respond to change. Understanding the significance of this imperial transition of power, Smaragdus provides the new emperor with a moral guide, figuratively directing his steps along a royal path. The transition, however, affected more than merely one figure, illuminating the importance of this

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[21] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 968. *Esto pauperum pater, pupillorum nutritor, orphanorum amator, viduarum que defensor, peregrinorum educator, omniumque secundum regulae ministerium defensor et rector.*

[22] Matthew Innes, "'A Place of Discipline': Carolingian Courts and Aristocratic Youth," *Court Culture in Early Middle Ages: The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference,* ed. Catherine Cubitt (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 74.

model of lordship for the wider elite of the Christian empire. This thesis will thus explore the use of the *via* metaphor and Smaragdus's vision and ambitions for a new class of imperial magnates, progressing in virtue and applying these teachings to their ministerial duties in the service of an evolving political order.

The notion of progression will also serve as the structure of this argument. By advancing through Smaragdus's abstract spiritual commands, journeying ourselves along the *Via Regia*, we shall unpack his attempts to foster an ideology of social morality for the empire's administrators. Consequently, the following argument will be organized into several themes that govern the *Via regia* and provide insights into Smaradgus's efforts to create a moral elite through a process of moral instruction, culminating in a new imagination of social order focused on the stewardship of wealth. As we shall see, the initial step in this progression requires the practitioner to understand the preeminence of virtue over worldly might and power. Virtues serve as the appropriate tools of governance for a pious king, not only earning him salvation but also reinforcing temporal power in subduing enemies and maintaining kingdoms. Here, Smaragdus proposes a shift in the paradigms of rulership, emphasizing above all protection of and charity for the downtrodden. In an effort to convince his royal or aristocratic audience, the abbot aims to establish and reinforce a cosmological hierarchy. The universal dependence of all human beings on God operates as an equalizer, stressing the joint depravity and reliance of all people on the Lord. Smaragdus, however, acknowledges that inequality persists in the world, charging rulers with the welfare of those under their care. Developing an ideology of social morality, the abbot encourages charity and protection of the helpless, reminding administrators that their treatment of these individuals mirrors the treatment that they will receive from God. These notions culminate in Smaragdus's discussion of wealth—a traditional facet of Carolingian elite status

and culture.[23] In the abbot's moral scheme, wealth serves as a tool to aid those beneath one's station, as Christ enjoined some with superior resources to aid the less fortunate.

As we shall further see, moving from virtue to virtue, the abbot frames a new social order through an image of the ideal administrator, caring for Christ's flock through supreme piety. Smaragdus's *Via regia* can be seen as encouraging Louis the Pious to assert his authority through notions of virtue and social morality. By contextualizing this in the imperial transition of power, it is possible to see the wider significance of this text in recognizing and responding to historical change. While Charlemagne was a great reformer and concerned with the morality of his magnates, his legitimacy largely rested on his person and his success in warfare. His greatness, however, separated him from his magnates. As Noble, discussing the two emperors' biographies, observes, "if Einhard's Charles was to be admired with a kind of awestruck reverence and admiration, the Astronomer's Louis was to be emulated."[24] In the *Via regia,* Smaragdus attempts to transform Louis the Pious's rulership into a model, one accessible to lower administrators of the empire. In the author's view, the emperor's exemplary morality could smooth the transition from the legendary Charlemagne to his son, legitimizing the latter's authority and providing him with the tools needed to continue the Carolingian project begun in 751.

A Spiritual Journey

Neither Charlemagne nor Louis the Pious possessed a blueprint for governing a European empire. While they could look to both Rome and the Old Testament, they had no detailed plan to transpose these models, particularly an imperial superstructure, onto their contemporary world.

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[23] n. 49 below.

[24] Thomas F.X. Noble (ed.), *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: The Lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan, and the Astronomer* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 223.

Although the emperors had inherited a position whose terms remained largely undefined, each recognized the ample opportunities their authority presented and thus experimented with notions of rulership and governance.[25] As Jennifer Davis cogently argues, Charlemagne's authority could best be understood as a "practice of empire, a rule that emerged out of pragmatism rather than ideology."[26] It was tied to his personal being, as he responded, erratically but successfully, to the needs of his growing and evolving empire.[27] Here, the necessity of the *Via regia* emerges, as a guiding program for governance during a period of transition. Relying heavily on the Old Testament, Smaragdus constructed an imagination of empire, an institutionalized structure with administrative offices spanning from the perfected emperor to the magnates who executed a program of Christian governance locally. This vision would provide the new emperor with his own distinctive imperial persona, not tied to military conquest or expansion but to pious administration that would meet the demands of the evolving empire. Unlike his father, however, Louis did not tie his reign to his person but rather developed an institution of *Carolingian* imperial rule, reforming, standardizing, and regulating the Frankish lands into a unified, Christian entity.[28] Davis's paradigm, ultimately, attempts to free both Charlemagne and Louis the Pious of one another, allowing their reigns to be understood for what they were independent

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[25] See F.L. Ganshof, *Frankish Institutions under Charlemagne*, trans. Bryce Lyon and Mary Lyon (New York: Norton, 1968); Matthew Innes, "Charlemagne's Government," *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 71-89; Janet Nelson, "Kingship and Royal Government," *New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 383–430.

[26] Jennifer R. Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 432.

[27] See Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire,* 376-7 where she counters accusations about a decline in Charlemagne's last years and emphasizes the innovations and haphazard, yet functional, system of governance Charlemagne developed throughout his reign.

[28] Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire,* 436; see also 13-4. See n. 5 above for the new interpretations of Louis the Pious and his rule to compare with treatments of Charlemagne, including *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); and Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

of each other's shadows. Nevertheless, while this approach is helpful in challenging traditional biases, it also invites examination of this transitional period between Charlemagne and Louis the Pious and the innovations the new emperor and his intellectual cohort had to employ in order to assume control of the Carolingian territories.[29]

The emperors, however, were limited in their political and social experimentation by its appeal to the nobility. The Carolingians were entirely dependent on the aristocratic class to rule their territories, holding assemblies, issuing capitularies, and investing these lesser governors with the authority to execute locally a larger imperial program.[30] The bonds holding this empire together were, accordingly, as much horizontal as they were vertical. As Stuart Airlie has shown, the success of this structure was tied to the Carolingians' ability "to persuade the aristocracy that service to them was an integral component of aristocratic identity and part of the aristocratic ethos."[31] Each emperor, however, encouraged this bond in different ways. Charlemagne largely recognized existing regional authorities and partnered with them to accept and enforce his reforms.[32] Increasingly defining the duties of the counts and *missi* and reinforcing these expectations, Charlemagne's capitularies outlined the emerging office of a Frankish noble.[33]

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[29] Louis's ascension is attested to in the *Annales regnum Francorum* and Louis's biographies by Ermoldus, Thegan, and the Astronomer. While all report that the emperor ascended the throne with the full consent of the Frankish nobility, Louis's subsequent cleansing of the palace of Aachen, declarations to send out *missi* to relieve oppression and abuses in the territories, and the issuing of the *Ordinatio imperii* (c. 817) to define his own succession plans all suggest that this transition from Charlemagne to Louis was more contentious than the sources supporting Louis, particularly the biographies, would lead us to believe. This tension encourages a more thorough examination of this transition period and what Louis and his supporters aimed to achieve through these measures.

[30] Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 182-94 offer recent interpretations of the role of the *missi* and court capitularies in successfully creating a unified program. See also n. 24 for what is understood as elements of this program/project.

[31] Airlie, "Charlemagne and the Aristocracy," 91; see also 92-4.

[32] Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire,* 90-106, 289-92.

[33] Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire,* 98, 116-22; see "Admonitio Generalis*," MGH* Capit. 1 (Hannover, 1883), 52-62.

While many of these duties carried over into Louis's reign, the latter emperor's new ideologies of empire also sought to transform noble behavior and obligations. Examining the prosopography of Louis's followers, Airlie suggests that there emerged a group consciousness among those within the imperial administration—a construction and understanding of themselves as a state elite supporting and maintaining the empire through their efforts.[34] Although not a homogeneous group, these individuals, including men such as Count Bego and Count Adhemar, bound their identities to the administration of the Carolingian project, performing routinized duties that fostered both vertical bonds with the imperial court and crown and horizontal bonds with other members of the aristocracy.[35] Increasingly, this consciousness became imbued with an associated religious ethos.[36] Under Louis's conception of empire and *ministerium*, the nobles were to be regarded as moral exemplars, emulating the emperor's piety and disseminating court reform in the creation of a unified, Christian realm.[37]

The *Via regia* belongs to this long tradition of Carolingian elite formation. Unlike the other moral mirrors, commonly grouped as Alcuin of York's *De virtutibus et vitiis* (c. 800), Paulinus of Aquileia's *Liber exhortationis* (795), Jonas of Orleans's *De institutione laicali* (c.

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[34] Airlie, "The Aristocracy in the Service of the State in the Carolingian Period," 100. Airle relies on Philippe Depreux, *Prosopographie de l'entourage de Louis le Pieux (781-840)* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1997) for his analysis of these men surrounding Louis the Pious and their development of a group consciousness through routinized activity.

[35] Airlie, "The Aristocracy in the Service of the State in the Carolingian Period,"100-7.

[36] Noble, "Secular Sanctity," 31.

[37] See for example "Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines," *MGH* Capt. 1 (Hannover, 1883), 303-7 issued between 823 and 825. This capitulary illustrates the responsibilities the court attempted to inculcate in the nobles, as they managed the vast empire under the direction of a central core. See specifically section three, which reads "*sed quamquam summa huius ministerii in nostra persona consistere videatur, tamen et divina auctoritate et humana ordinatione ita pera partes divisum esse cognoscitur; unde apparet, quod ego omnium vestrum admonitor esse debeo, et omnes vos nostri adiutores esse debetis. Nec enim ignoramus, quid unicuique vestrum in sibi commissa portione conveniat, et ideo praetermittere non possumus, quin unumquemque iuxta suum ordinem admoneamus*" (303). Here, Louis defines his *ministerium* as a hierarchy of responsibility and admonition, requiring all orders of the realm to correct one another according to their order, ensuring proper stewardship of the empire given by God.

828)*, and Dhuoda of Septimania's *Liber manualis* (c. 843), the *Via regia* is structured as a journey, one that is meant to produce an internal transformation with external manifestations.[38] While on one level intended for Louis the Pious, the text offers advice accessible to the wider nobility, who shared in the emperor's ministry, as revealed in the abstract level of discourse that does not limit its applicability to one individual. Following this guide, Louis, and by extension the nobles, would become model Christian rulers, worthy and deserving of pious emulation. Not only would this foster a persona for the new emperor but also draw the aristocracy ever closer to the center, sharing in a fixed imperial ideology of governance. This artful articulation reflects Smaragdus's authorial ambitions, as the multilevel and multivalent design of the text attests to its intended applicability past the individual person of the king. While following the king, the embodiment of virtuous rulership and the physical representation of the Carolingian imperial project, along the path the lesser magnates too might participate in this spiritual journey, learning the tools of proper Christian governance necessary to bring Smaragdus's imperial vision to fruition.

The very structure of the *Via regia* illustrates its aim to construct a model ruler. Smaragdus envisions virtues as steps (*gressus*), along a royal path, building upon one another and allowing the ruler to ascend to higher virtues. As noted earlier, the text leads its reader along this road, directing him "to proceed along the royal path toward the heavenly kingdom, so that by walking straight paths, we might happily merit to reach the heavenly fatherland."[39] The royal path, therefore, helps its recipient on his quest for salvation and thus the deliverance of those

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[38] See Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 36-42 for a discussion of this textual genre and grouping.

[39] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 941. *Ad coelica regna per regiam jubet pergere viam, ut per recta gradientes itinera, ad coelestem feliciter mereamur pertingere patriam.*

under his care.[40] The *Via regia* identifies an initial ten virtues, beginning with the most fundamental principles of the Christian faith—the love of God and of neighbor.[41] Although this commandment might seem rudimentary for a member of the faithful, the virtue of love primes the soul to proceed along the path. It serves as the foundation upon which piety and proper rulership is built. Smaragdus maintains that the second stage—adherence to the commandments of God—depends entirely upon the earlier virtue, for "if the love of God and neighbor appeals to you, it ensures that you do what he commands, because in so much as you love in so much do you do."[42] These virtues are more than words to be read; they are milestones to be mastered and internalized. As the path continues, the virtues become increasingly challenging, presupposing the mastery of all former precepts. Mercy represents the pinnacle of this progression. By this stage, the ruler largely forgets his worldly affairs, turning his attention to the celestial kingdom and its eternal rewards.[43] While this progression may appear monastic or, perhaps, even mystical in its transcendence and partial rejection of the temporal, Smaragdus aims to instill these fundamental Christian virtues in the ruler, knowing that he will ultimately return to the worldly affairs of his position.

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[40] See de Jong, *The Penitential State*, 37, 130-5, for a discussion of the responsibility of the emperor for the souls of those beneath him.

[41] The first ten chapters of the *Via regia* are in order: on the love of God and neighbor (*De dilectione Dei et proximi*), on the observation of God's commandments (*De observandis mandatis Domini*), on fear (*De timore)*, on wisdom (*De sapientia*), on prudence (*De prudentia*), on simplicity (*De simplicitate*), on patience (*De patientia*), on justice (*De justitia*), on judgement (*De judicio*), on mercy (*De misericordia*). These chapters enumerate abstract and fundamental expectations for a moral elite.

[42] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 937. *Ergo si te dilectio Dei proximique demulcet, consequens est ut facias quod ille praecepit, quia in tantum diligis, in quantum facis.*

[43] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 951. *Ergo, mitissime atque clarissime rex, fide plena, mente devote, operatione continua, Domino Deo tuo obsequium praepara: da Christo in terra vestimentum, ut ab illo coeleste recipias indumentum; da cibum et potum, ut cum Abraham, Isaac et Jacob ad convivium merearis pervenire aeternum.*

After ascending to mercy (*misericordia*), therefore, Smaragdus moves from abstract virtues to more concrete concerns of one engaged in the world. The remaining twenty-two chapters contain prescriptions on negative virtues,[44] reminders of heavenly rewards,[45] and warnings against the common vices of rulers.[46] Here, the text's concern for the downtrodden emerges most forcefully, informing many of the remaining sections. While a sense of progression persists in the second portion, these chapters lack the coherence of the treatment of the initial ten virtues. This operates as a rhetorical device for the *Via regia,* mimicking the confusion of the world and its precepts compared to the straightforward path of the initial virtues. The individual proceeding along this path appears to slowly ascend, accumulating the fundamental, Christian virtues for a ruler, before descending back into the world, now capable of overcoming the temptations and corruption of rulership and leading those under his care to the kingdom of heaven. This return, however, is not lamented, but rather an important and necessary step in the creation of a moral elite, capable of governing a Christian empire. The *Via regia* thus

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[44] Although this approach is problematic, this thesis will employ chapter titles to capture the breadth of the text's prescriptions. The *Via regia* currently survives in three manuscripts; however, the recension produced by J.P. Migne in the *Patrologia Latina* was based upon a fourth and now lost Vaticanus Reginensis Latinus 190. While it is impossible to know whether these headings were composed by Smaragdus, they had at least become fairly standardized, especially for the earlier prescriptions, by the late tenth century. The text admonishes its audience against certain behaviors, attempting to dissuade them from beliefs and activities that diminish their morality. These include: on the wealth not to trusted (*De non fidendo divitiis),* on being glorified not in wealth but in humility (*De non gloriando in divitiis sed in humilitate),* so that each guards against pride (*Ut caveat unusquisque superbiam),* on not returning evil for evil (*De non reddendo malum pro malo),* on repressing anger (*De reprimenda ira*), on avoiding avarice (*De cavenda avaritia*).

[45] The *Via regia* encourages its audience to follow its prescriptions through frequent reminders of heavenly rewards. Examples include: so that the Lord may be honored through works (*Ut operibus Dominus honoretur),* so that rewards may be gathered in heaven (*Ut thesaurus in caelo collocetur*), the quality and quantity a man will put away for himself in life and the great treasure he will find after death (*Qualem et quantum thesaurum in vita sibi homo reconderit, talem et tantum post mortem inveniet*).

[46] The text also includes warnings against behaviors common to rulers yet threatening to their administrative efficacy. It admonishes against: on not consenting to flatterers (*De non consentiendo adulatoribus),* so that the house may not be built on the expenses of foreigners (*Ut de impensis alienis domus non aedificetur),*so that no rewards are required by judges for justice to be done (*Ut pro justitia facienda nulla judicibus requirantur praemia*), so that a deceitful balance will not be found in your kingdom (*Ne statera dolosa inveniatur in regno tuo).*

provides a guide for the formation of a Christian ruler, whether king or magnate, by leading a humble man along the path of virtue and transforming him into a conduit of the Lord.

The Might of Virtue

As we have noted, the structure of the *Via regia* testifies to its overall purpose, namely to fashion a pious king capable of governing a Christian empire and to extend its lessons to members of the governing class. Smaragdus, however, does not merely elucidate and recommend these virtues to a ruler. Rather, he illustrates how they work to establish a specific form of rulership, founded on the preeminence of virtue over worldly might and power.

While the text does not reject warfare outright, the absence of active martial language reveals its preference for virtue.[47] Although one could argue that this hierarchy simply reflects monastic values and preferences, it is likely that it is also informed by larger shifts in the empire, particularly the end of military expansion and the initial phases of consolidation.[48] Martial prowess represented an enduring and important facet of Carolingian masculinity; the ability to bear weapons was a sign of lay power and status.[49] Annual campaigns, warring, and plundering

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[47] See Mary Alberi, "'Like the Army of God's Camp': Political Theology and Apocalyptic Warfare at Charlemagne's Court," *Viator* 41 (2010): 1-20 for a discussion of the martial language defining Charlemagne's court as the *castra Dei* involved in an apocalyptic struggle against Christian foes.

[48] For an overview of Carolingian monastic thought and practice, see Mayke de Jong, "Carolingian Monasticism: The Power of Prayer," *New Cambridge Medieval History,* ed. Rosamond McKitterick*,* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 622-65; Richard Sullivan, "What Was Carolingian Monasticism? The Plan of St. Gall and the History of Monasticism," *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History Essays Presented to Walter Goffart* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 251-87; and Lynda Coon, "Collecting the Desert in the Carolingian West," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86 (2006): 135-62. For some discussion of the frequent and mutual interaction between monastic and lay communities, see Stephanie Lebecq, "The Role of Monasteries in the Systems of Production and Exchange of the Frankish World Between the Seventh and the Beginning of the Ninth Centuries," *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution, and Demand,* ed. Inge Lyse Hansen and Chris Wickam (Boston: Brill, 2000), 121-48; and Mayke de Jong, "Imitatio Morum. The Cloister and Clerical Purity in the Carolingian World," *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*, ed. Michael Frassetto (New York: Garland Publishing: 1998), 49-80.

[49] Airlie, "The Aristocracy in the Service of the State," 94-5; Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 69.

all comprised important components of fostering homosocial bonds between king and noble, socially, politically, and economically.[50] Yet, by 800, the wars of expansion were largely over. Whether or not the aristocracy considered the risks of further expansion too high or were satisfied with the vast amount of conquered territory they ruled, especially after the Avar "boom," the emperors began consolidating, an effort Charlemagne initiated in the 790s with the *Admonitio Generalis*.[51] Without yearly campaigns and the rewards of warfare, both tangible and intangible, the nobles needed a new way to construct their authority and relationship with the emperor. According to Timothy Reuter, "the only way in the long run in which these [demands] could be satisfied without expansion was by internal expansion, in other words by increasing one's share of political power and the rewards that went with it."[52] Repurposing these elites from successful warriors to moral administrators required bolstering the understanding of virtue's power. Whether the governing elite understood this shift as a permanent change in their social and political relationships and roles cannot be known, yet the *Via regia* attests to a growing sense, at least among some intellectuals, that their world was changing, offering opportunities for experimentation and creativity in the evolving imperial project.

To facilitate this shift, Smaragdus draws the reader's attention to the difference between the transitory world and the celestial kingdom. The abbot recognizes the corruption and

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[50] See Timothy Reuter, "Plunder and Tribute in Carolingian Empire," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 5th ser. 35 (1985): 75-94.

[51] See Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire*, 368-9 for Davis's critique of Timothy Reuter's "The End of Carolingian Military Expansion" and "Plunder and Tribute." Davis criticizes the importance Reuter places on tribute and asserts that it does not explain the end of military expansion. Without the financial and social loss that would have existed without this tribute, it is difficult, according to Davis, to sustain a gradual decline or shift in the last years of Charlemagne's rule. Rather, she traces a gradual pivot in the 790s, with increasing institutionalization and decreasing military activity, particularly by Charlemagne himself. Despite Davis's astute observations, the Avar victory and its subsequent wealth marked the pinnacle of that imagination of imperial rulership. The future demanded new visions of empire and governance, a transition that was not fully realized until the Louis the Pious.

[52] Timothy Reuter, "End of Carolingian Military Expansion," *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious*, ed. Peter Godman and Roger Collins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 405.

temptation arising from the prestigious status of his audience. They enjoy worldly comforts and wealth, which could easily distract them from their duties and obligations as Christian rulers. Smaragdus, therefore, creates a dichotomy between the corporeal and incorporeal, urging the reader to adhere to the virtuous path and promising him eternal bounties:

> Oh what a blessing is the life of just kings, which is supported by temporal things, and immortally rests with the angels in eternity. Here he is nourished with earthly delights, there he is dressed in the glory of grace. Here he is surrounded with crowds of people, there is joined with the chorus of angels. Here he is charmed by a multitude of men, there he rejoices with the chorus of angels. Here the soldiers of the empire obey him, there he exalts in service of the Redeemer. Here, dressed in the royal stola, he begins to shine, there he shines in the glory of immortality. Here he bears the crown of the king, there he resounds with the joy of exultation. Here he is called the son of the terrestrial king, there he is confirmed as the son of the celestial King. Here he honorably acquires the great inheritance of the terrestrial kingdom, there he happily receives a blessed portion of the celestial kingdom. So that this may befall you, most accomplished king, do not cease to labor in these virtues. None will be more successful than you if these things befall you, with the help from the Lord. None will transcend you in glory if it should be happily arranged for you by the Lord.[53]

In this passage, Smaragdus asserts the preeminence of virtue over worldly might. While the king may have temporal success, including a large court, a strong army, and lavish finery—key markers of elite status—these fail to compare to the rewards achieved solely through virtue.[54] This represents less an attack on elite position than an admonishment both to avoid the corruption of the world and to exercise temporal and spiritual might through virtue. While nobles

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[53] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 949-50. *O quam beata est vita regum justorum, quae et hic temporalibus rebus fulta nitescit, et in aeternum cum angelis immortaliter requiescit: hic terrenis nutritur deliciis, illic gloria vestitur decoris; hic populorum constipatur catervis, illic choris comitatur angelicis; hic hominum multitudine delectatur, illic cum angelorum choro laetatur, hic illi militia imperii obtemperat, illic in militia Redemptoris exsultat; hic stola vestitus regali nitescit, illic gloria immortalitatis refulget; hic regis diademata portat, illic gaudio exsultationis resultat; hic terreni regis filius vocitatur; illic coelestis Regis filius confirmatur; hic terreni regni decenter magnam capit haereditatem, illic coelestis regni felicem feliciter accipit portionem. Haec ut tibi eveniat, clarissime rex, totis viribus laborare non cesses; nullus te felicior erit, si tibi haec, auxiliante Domino, evenerit; nullus te transcendet in gloria, si haec tibi a Domino feliciter fuerit collata.*

[54] See Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture*, 37-56 (beauty and ascetics), 188-202 (courts and hospitality); Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 82-100 (warriors), and 216-21, 232-45 (wealth and its uses) for a discussion of the importance of these three elements to aristocratic identity.

may not be able to compare a royal *stola* with the glory of immortality, the fundamental lesson of this prescription could have had wider applicability than merely the king. Expanding these admonishments through the lens of hegemonic masculinity helps to illuminate the *Via regia's* wider project, namely fostering a model Christian empire. By imitating their king in his pious administration, the nobility could fulfill their essential service as a moral elite, guiding and protecting those beneath them.

Smaragdus's continual emphasis on the practical application of these virtues illustrates the lay orientation of the *Via regia* despite the author's monastic vocation. These virtues were not merely positive attributes of a king. Rather, they were the most effective and appropriate tools of governance for a pious ruler. Smaragdus, however, frequently presents these tenets of virtuous rulership in a duality between individual and corporate reward received for their execution. While these two notions were frequently conflated, the text endeavors to motivate the king and his noble followers both as individuals possessing an incorporeal soul and as rulers with corporeal obligations to follow its prescriptions. Smaragdus's discussion of wisdom best illustrates this duality:

> For wisdom is a royal virtue because it justifies kings who labor well and the inextinguishable light of knowledge shines in them. It illuminates the eyes of the heart, brightens the reason of the mind, administers keen intellect, bestows health of the body, grants integrity to ways of behaving, multiplies infinite treasures…[55]

Here, wisdom imbues the king and, by extension other elite governors, with personal benefits, granting him health and strength in mind and body. Virtue grants him these outward expressions of success, establishing an imperial persona and thus proving his worthiness to rule. Yet, these manifestations are also reflected in the kingdom:

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[55] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 943. *Regia namque virtus est sapientia, quia bene operantes reges justificat, et lumen scientiae illis inexstinguibile radiat, oculos cordis illuminat, sensus mentis illustrat, subtilem intellectum ministrat, salutem corporis praestat, honestatem moribus concedit, thesauros infinitos multiplicat…*

It [wisdom] gives justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance to kings, administers virtue and sobriety, produces stability in the kingdom…Wisdom allows kings to shrewdly arrange kingdoms subjected to them and agreeably make conquered peoples to serve them. For it can greatly subdue foreign, menacing peoples and makes fearsome nations submit and defiant kings be trampled underfoot, and, as I should say, in wisdom the disposition of the kingdom remains whole.[56]

Wisdom supplies the empire with authority and power, subjugating enemies and ensuring stability. What was once accomplished by the sword now falls within the purview of virtue. As individuals complicit in questions of justice, stability, and subjection, the noble elite too were held accountable to this shift, having to embrace these values and prescriptions to fulfill their function as administrators of the imperial project. Smaragdus builds upon this duality throughout the *Via regia*, balancing the individual and corporate rewards of virtue to illustrate its superiority for the salvation of both the ruler and his domain.

An emphasis on humility largely characterizes Smaragdus's individual prescriptions. Interestingly, the abbot does not dedicate one of the initial ten chapters to this theme, instead integrating it as a common refrain throughout the *Via regia*. While this repetition could simply reflect Smaragdus's approbation for humility, it could also be read as a critique, especially as most of this language occurs in the latter section of the text—the descent back into the world. A concern over the corruption of power and wealth here emerges. Smaragdus admonishes the emperor that "although you are lofty, great, and high, keep to humility."[57] The abbot continually couches these reproaches in the language of heavenly reward, directing the eyes of the emperor from worldly riches to those of the celestial kingdom, "where it will be tarnished neither by rust

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[56] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 943. *Justitiam regibus et prudentiam, fortitudinem et temperantiam donat, virtutem et sobrietatem ministrat, stabiles facit in regno…Sapientia regibus concedit sibi subdita discrete disponere regna, et suaviter populos jam sibi facit servire possessos. Exteras etiam gentes fortiter facit debellare minaces, et nationes subjici diras, et reges calcari feroces, et ut ita dicam, in sapientia constat regni dispositio cuncta.*

[57] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 956. *Quamvis sis sublimis, magnus, et summus, humilitatem tene.*

or maggot."[58] Rather than investing in transient pleasures, potentially including those afforded by the plunder and tribute of warfare, the king as the epitome of this paradigm of masculinity should focus on the eternal benefits he will receive for his virtuous behaviors—treasures that withstand time and death.

Several historians have dismissed these critiques as the simple groanings of a monk attempting to impose his own morality on lay figures; however, contextualizing the text within the larger transitions of the empire in the 810s illuminates new possibilities.[59] The *Via regia's* prescriptions could instead be understood as an effort to transfer the gaze of an administrator from transient worldly power to the celestial rewards achieved through humility. This virtue, again lacking its own chapter heading, acts as a bridge between the king and noble, for humility operates as an essential and almost universal quality possessed by all that enables the abbot to extend his explicit prescriptions toward the king to the elite. Despite his monastic perspective, however, Smaragdus was not advocating a refusal of power and wealth. Rather, he endeavored to construct a model Christian magnate, an individual capable of espousing great humility while experiencing the comforts of the wealth and power appropriate to his station. He writes:

> Therefore, although you begin to shine in gold and purple, you ought not to reject the clemency of humility. Although you are resplendent in royal worship, do not depart from the clemency of humility. Although you are surrounded by a

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[58] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 953. *Ubi neque aerugo neque tinca demolitur* (Matthew 6:20).

[59] Both Anton and Rädle focus on the similarities between the *Via regia* and Smaragdus's monastic guide—the *Diadema monachorum*. They largely view the lay mirror as an attempt to instill monastic values in a secular leader. See Anton, *Fürstenspiegel and Herrscherethos,* 176; and Rädle, *Studien zu Smaragd,* 68-70. In her "Royal or Monastic Identity? Smaragdus' *Via regia* and *Diadema monachorum* Reconsidered," *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages,* ed. Richard Corrandini, Rob Meens, Christina Pössel, and Philip Shaw (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenshaften, 2006), 239-51, Jasmijn Bovendeert challenges this traditional understanding of the *Via regia* as an attempt to impose monastic virtue on imperial figures. While Bovendeert acknowledges the common overlap of some chapters, she argues that an analysis of the texts as a whole, not merely the chapters they share, reveals the ways that Smaragdus aimed to create distinct identities for the orders.

multitude of people, retain nevertheless pious clemency: for this is a royal virtue, and is the protection of good kings.[60]

While it is impossible to know the direct impact of this text on its recipient, Louis the Pious was criticized by contemporaries and later historians for his alleged monastic piety.[61] Perhaps, as his story has recently been revised to show the political and social power of humility, so too can Smaragdus's emphasis on the efficacy of virtue be revisited to illustrate the value of righteousness in the successful governance of a model Christian empire.[62]

The efficacy of this form of rulership is strengthened through its application beyond the overt addressee of the *Via regia*—the king—to the wider intended audience of the aristocratic class, who were called upon to emulate their perfected king in his pious administration of the empire. Smaragdus notes the temporal benefits of virtue for the empire as a whole—benefits favorable to king and noble alike. It tempers the conquered, subdues enemies, and engenders loyalty and service among the people.[63] The abbot also frequently presents these virtues as guarding the ruler. Citing the Bible, Smaragdus argues "more than the shield of the mighty and more than the spear it will cleanse against your enemy. Mercy and truth guard the king, and his

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[60] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 958. *Quamvis ergo auro nitescas et purpura, humilitatis non debes abjicere clementiam; quamvis regali cultu resplendeas, ab humilitatis clementia non recedas; quamvis populorum sis circumdatus multitudine, tu tamen piam clementiam tene: regalis enim virtus est, et bonorum regum custos est.*

[61] See Thegan, "Gesta Hludowici imperatoris", ed. Ernst Tremp, *MHG* SS rer. Germ. 64 (Hannover, 1995), 204. Thegan claims: "he [Louis] did things prudently and cautiously, and did nothing unwisely except that he trusted his advisors more than was needed" (*omnia prudenter et caute agens, nihil indiscrete faciens praeter quod consiliariis suis magis credidit quam opus esset*). See also the Astronomer, "Vita Hludowici imperatoris," ed. Ernst Tremp, *MGH* SS rer. Germ. 64 (Hannover, 1995), 284, in which he asserts that "only one sin was found by his rivals to which he had succumbed: that he was too merciful" (*Uni tantummodo ab emulis ascribebatur subcubuisse culpe, eo quod nimis clemens esset*).

[62] See n. 5.

[63] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 940, 958-9.

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throne is guarded in clemency."[64] This instruction encourages the ruler to lay down his mortal arms and exchange them for weapons of piety. Rather than diminishing his authority, the exchange illuminates a proposed transition, for pious administrators wield power through virtue not iron, while still maintaining the ability to effectively rule their domains and by extension other governors. However, it is important to note that these weapons of virtue are often passive. Spiritual battles between the righteous and the unrighteous are not present in this text, unlike Smaragdus's commentary on the *Regula Benedicti*.[65] While he was familiar with this motif— spiritual battle—Smaragdus instead focuses on peace and guarding against outside forces, be it Christian or non-Christian enemies.[66] Virtues serve as the shield of the ruler, and it is likely not coincidental that the highest of Smaragdus's ten virtues—mercy—is the ultimate source of this protection. Only the most pious can achieve this level of defense, having advanced along the *Via regia.* These prescriptions ultimately do not condemn warfare, yet advocate a new and different approach to kingship, a form prizing virtue above the sword in a period striving for peace and consolidation.[67]

As the motif of the weapons of virtue illustrates, Smaragdus deliberately develops prescriptions for each order, aiming to instill the behaviors for the specific groups that would

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[64] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 950. *Super scutum potentis, et super lanceam adversus inimicum tuum purgabit* (Eccli. 24:2, 15, 18)…*Misericordia et veritas custodiunt regem, ei roboratur clementia thronus ejus* (Proverbs 20:28).

[65] See Katherine Allen Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2011), 23-7, for a discussion of Smaragdus's influence on how later monastic practitioners understood the militaristic aspects of the *Regula Benedicti*, as he converted Benedict of Nursia's implicit warrior language into an explicit call to take up spiritual arms against the devil.

[66] For peace see Smaragdus, "Via regia," 957.

[67] See Jonathan P. Conant, "Louis the Pious and the Contours of Empire," *Early Medieval Europe* 22 (2014): 336-60, for a discussion of how Louis the Pious attempted to expand his imperial control in the Spanish borderlands through diplomacy.

best lead to their salvation.[68] The principle of *ministerium,* expands this calling, for king and magnate were both necessary to fulfill the administrative obligations of Smaragdus's imperial vision. By prizing a set of fundamental Christian tenets, the text instills a general set of virtues that apply universally to all administrators of the proposed social order.

The Hierarchy of the Cosmos

Would the incentives of virtue have been enticing enough for this moral elite? While they certainly could have benefitted Louis the Pious in the creation of his own persona and form of rulership, their attraction to the warrior aristocracy, executing these ideals on the ground, might have been limited. If the benefits of virtue were, therefore, not enough, Smaragdus reminded his elite audience of its place within the cosmological hierarchy. While a king or magnate might enjoy high status in the world, he, like all human beings, was dependent upon God, the Lord (*Dominus*). To understand how contemporary nobles may have understood this rhetoric of spiritual hierarchy and dependence, one must also investigate Carolingian social structure, particularly the connections and interactions between lords and their dependents. These secular relationships would have acted as an analogue for Smaragdus's proposed hierarchy, providing the language and metaphorical structure to understand their evolving roles and duties in the hierarchy of the cosmos, especially as these spiritual duties demanded worldly action.

      The conditions of servitude and unfreedom provide persuasive insight into these bonds of dependence, allowing us to view the direct interactions between lords and dependents and

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[68] See Andrew Romig, "The Common Bond of Aristocratic Masculinity: Monks, Secular Men and St. Gerald of Aurillac," *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages,* ed. Jennifer D. Thibodeaux (New York: Palgrave MacMillan: 2010), 39-56. His article focuses on the tenth-century Gerald of Aurillac, limiting his argument's applicability to this study of early ninth-century masculinity. Nevertheless, Romig does emphasize the unifying effort to obtain salvation across orders and levels of society, proposing a universal mission that transcended vocational boundaries.

illuminating how they understood and negotiated these bonds. Alice Rio has examined these notions in the early medieval Frankish world through a close examination of legal formulae and the social relationships they fostered. In her analysis, rather than binary opposites, freedom and unfreedom operated on a spectrum, forging complex bonds of dependence. Rio argues against viewing these bonds as purely exploitative or degrading, as some willingly entered into the service of another, recognizing the material and immaterial benefits of such an arrangement.[69] These benefits ranged from agreements to ensure sustenance and standards of living to legal and military protection. In both of these cases, individuals, both high and low, free and unfree, entered into bonds of dependence when the perceived gain of the relationship outweighed its costs.[70] It is therefore reasonable to suppose that nobles would have been familiar with this concept, engaging in these relationships both with those under their authority and with the Carolingian kings whom they supported. While Rio focuses on earlier Frankish history, her paradigms would have remained relevant to Carolingian elites, especially those of the aristocratic class. Despite belonging to an evolving and increasingly institutionalized Carolingian superstructure, these nobles long had governed their regional territories under familiar understandings of lordship, understandings which Smaragdus aimed to challenge and refine with his moral guide. What remained useful to the abbot was the rhetoric of dependence, a relationship defined not as much by the distinctions, worldly or otherwise, between free and unfree as by "the type of duties that could be demanded of a man who served."[71] Smaragdus creatively employs these secular understandings of dependence, focusing not on the status of

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[69] Alice Rio, "High and Low: Ties of Dependence in the Frankish Kingdoms," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 18 (2008): 53, 65.

[70] Rio, "High and Low," 50-65, particularly 58-61.

[71] Alice Rio, "Freedom and Unfreedom in Early Medieval Francia: The Evidence of the Legal Formulae" *Past & Present* 193 (2006): 31.

worldly elites but on the spiritual duties demanded of individuals in those positions within the cosmological hierarchy. By reminding readers of the joint depravity and reliance of all people on the Lord, the *Via regia* calls nobles' attention to the duties that they must perform for their God—their highest *Dominus*—in exchange for the protections and sustenance he provides in this world and the next.

While these notions of dependence should not have been unfamiliar to the empire's elite, superiority over and hostility toward those of lower status certainly existed.[72] Smaragdus, therefore, appears to remind the upper echelons of their status relative to their Lord. From the first chapter of the text—*De delictio Dei et proximi*—the abbot stresses utter human dependence on God. Placed in the context of this cosmological hierarchy, love of God and neighbor transforms into part of a hierarchal relationship, something owed in exchange for spiritual or material benefits.[73] This debt extends past simple salvation. God endows the elite with the very position they possess. "For the loving God, oh gentlest king, created you, and vivified, nurtured, guarded you and led you through to the bath of regeneration, renewed, governed, and led you through to perceivable eternity; and *while you were still small*, he carried you sublimely to the regal seat."[74] Smaragdus promotes profound humility, encouraging his audience to recognize their absolute dependence on the *Dominus* for every comfort, security, and authority that they possess. Rachel Stone uses this God-given origin of worldly power as evidence of the

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[72] See for example Thegan, "Gesta Hludowici imperatoris," 206. He charges that "for a long time there was the worst custom of making clerics from the lowest of servants; this was not prohibited. Nevertheless, it is the greatest evil for the Christian people." (*Iamdudum illa pessima consuetudo erat, ut ex vilissimis servis fiebant summi pontifices; hoc non prohibuit. Tamen maximum malum est in populo christiano…*) While Thegan's critique reflects a particular animosity to Ebbo of Rheims, the former commoner who rose to the position of archbishop through his connection to the Carolingian family, it also speaks to wider fears about social mobility.

[73] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 935. *Nihil enim habet homo quod non acceperit.*

[74] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 935. *Diligens etenim Dominus, o mitissime rex, creavit te, et vivificavit, nutrivit et custodivit, et ad lavacrum regenerationis perduxit, renovavit, gubernavit, et ad intelligibilem perduxit aetatem; et dum adhuc parvulus esses regali te sede sublimiter evexit*: emphasis mine.

naturalness of the social hierarchy to Carolingian moralists and elites. Since all power derived its source from God, she observes, morality and nobility became inherently intertwined, ordering the universe socially from those of the highest goodness to the lowest.[75] The *Via regia*, however, reveals how even divinely-sanctioned authority might become destabilizing. By imagining the nobility's larger place in the cosmological hierarchy, the text inverts the social order, revealing the aristocracy's position in relation to the highest *Dominus* and simultaneously transforming the powerful and wealthy nobles into the lowest of servants, responsible for the care of the downtrodden as part of their spiritual duties as the most pious Christian, moral elite.

It is not, however, only positive blessings that the Lord provides. In addition, he frees those devoted to him from their own vice, pain, and depravity. Language of this liberation (*liberare)* pervades the *Via regia*. Smaragdus presents a twofold liberation—temporal freedom from want[76] and eternal freedom from damnation.[77] This freedom from the world and its corruptions, however, depends on the ruler's adherence to virtues. Discussing the efficacy of prayer, Smaragdus argues:

> *Alms are greater than rewards of gold to be put away, for alms deliver from death and alms are that which purges sins and allows one to find mercy and eternal life.* The angel reveals and affirms that our petitions are made powerful with alms, life redeemed from dangers with alms, souls freed from death with alms.[78]

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[75] Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 121-2.

[76] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 948. *Per eam de angustia justi liberabuntur.*

[77] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 950. *David quoque tam de se quam et de omnibus eleemosynas misericorditer facientibus ait: Beatus vir qui intelligit super egenum et pauperum: in die mala liberabit eum Dominus.*

[78] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 951 Eleemosyna magis quam thesauros auri recondere, quoniam eleemosyna a morte liberat, et ipsa est quae purgat peccata, et facit invenire misericordiam et vitam aeternam (Tob. 12:8). *Relevat angelus et affirmat eleemosynis petitiones nostras efficaces fieri, eleemosynis vitam de periculis redimi, eleemosynis a morte animas liberari,* italics are biblical references.

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Here, the giving of alms—charity—operates as a mechanism for channeling divine grace, enhancing the power of one's supplications and garnering the protection of the Lord. Yet, even the choice to be virtuous lies outside of human determination, for "this virtue [humility] is not acquired by any one human will but is mercifully bestowed by God on whom he pleases."[79] Under Smaragdus's paradigm, therefore, the temporally powerful and wealthy noble is left helpless with respect to divine machinations, lacking independent will for moral goodness and thus redemption. Rather, he is left in full knowledge of his worldly captivity and of his sole reprieve in the grace and protection of the celestial *Dominus*, the liberator of fallen human beings, both high and low.

How did Smaragdus manipulate this language of unfreedom and captivity into a rhetorical device in the *Via regia* to elicit certain behaviors from this elite class, particularly in their relationship with their own dependents? The abbot explains how this recognition informs their interactions with those beneath them. The dependence on God operates as an equalizer, binding all humans in a shared reliance on the Lord. Smaragdus recognizes, however, that not all are temporally equal. The king and thus the nobles ("*domini*") should thus "bestow what is fair to the servants, *knowing now that you also have a God in heaven*."[80] Care for the downtrodden—the orphans, widows, and poor—becomes a duty both as a human soul sharing in their cosmological status as fallen beings but also an obligation demanded by the *Dominus.* These notions should also inform nobles' understanding of the poor, especially as Smaragdus pays a unique attention to and shows concern for the poorest elements of society, frequently employing them as a rhetorical device to elicit desired behaviors from his elite audience.

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[79] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 956. *Sed non haec virtus humana voluntate a quoquam sumitur, sed misericorditer a Domino cui voluerit largitur.*

[80] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 936. *Quod justum est et aequum praestate servis, scientes quoniam et vos Deum habetis in caelis* (Coloss. 3:19).

One of the most significant examples of this strategy is the *Via regia's* discussion of the souls of the unfree. Despite their worldly subjection and abjection, the downtrodden possess comparable souls. Smaragdus writes: "on account of God's great love, everyone ought to free the slaves, considering that he does not subjugate them to him by nature but by blame; for we were created equally in status, but some were subjected to others in blame."[81] The abbot counters any elite sense of superiority based on the simple depravity of the downtrodden. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that action—the will—creates the social stratification that maintains elite superiority. This supports, almost in spite of his efforts, the belief that sinfulness was an inherent characteristic of the lower classes.[82] While this could contribute to the idea that elite status alone evidenced their spiritual superiority, Smaragdus instead focuses on the obligations that this places on the elite. If the difference between the downtrodden and elite is one of moral uprightness, it would follow that the elite now have a duty to become pious administrators, warranting the position given to them by God. Failing to uphold their virtue jeopardizes their status and potentially the spiritual and material security of those under their care.[83]

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[81] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 968. *Propter nimiam illius charitatem unusquisque liberos debet dimittere servos, considerans quia non illi eos natura subegit, sed culpa; conditione enim aequaliter creati sumus, sed aliis alii culpa subacti.*

[82] The capitularies of Louis the Pious testify to this anxiety about the poor and downtrodden. "Capitulare Ecclesiasticum" shows a particular concern about former unfree who became priests. They had to be manumitted, for servitude and clerical authority appeared almost mutually exclusive: see *MGH* Capit. 1:276-7.

[83] See Adelheid Krah, *Absetzungsverfahren als Spiegelbild von Königsmacht: Untersuchungen zum Kräfteverhältnis zwischen Königtum und Adel im Karolingerreich und seinen Nachfolgestaaten* (Aalen: Scientia, 1987) for a discussion of the twenty noble administrators that Louis the Pious dismissed because of moral failings. See also Paul Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 63-6, for examples of administrators who failed to perform their duties and suffered in the afterlife for their moral failings. This monograph, for example, discusses the *Visio Wettini* (c. 825-7), a monastic dream text in which Charlemagne is punished in hell for his alleged sexual promiscuity. These examples suggest that morality remained an important facet of rulership in the 820s when the majority of these texts emerged, for moral failings could weaken one's legitimacy.

In this way, Smaragdus employs the rhetoric of the cosmological hierarchy to craft his paradigm of reciprocal relationships, both those between the Lord and the administrator and the administrator and his subjects. The abbot stresses these parallel bonds, urging his audience to consider how they are treated by their Lord when interacting with their dependents:

> Imitate your good Father God, and forgive the sins of your neighbor, so that those committed by you will be forgiven by God. Do to your neighbor what you wish that your God would do to you: do not seek vengeance from your neighbor, lest offenses come back on you by divine vengeance. Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil in good. That which you would not wish God would do to you, do not do to a man as a man.[84]

While Smaragdus essentially elucidates the Golden Rule, his language additionally emphasizes the reciprocity inherent in this cosmological hierarchy. The deity has invested his divine authority in these individuals, acting as his hands in the world, as judges, administrators, and protectors of the downtrodden. This role imbued these magnates with personal in addition to ministerial obligations, blurring the distinctions between the individual and his position.

Smaragdus's understanding complicates Stone's theory of impersonal office-holding. In her study of aristocratic masculinity, she found that the personal morality and body of a magnate remained largely independent of his official office and execution of duty.[85] She writes, "the sources show little interest in the wider moral significance of comital office…Secular titles of office rarely attracted the moralizing etymology common for episcopal and royal titles."[86] Admittedly, the *Via regia's* discussions of virtue do not include any mentions of sexuality, perhaps reflecting, as Stone noted, an ambivalence about the nocturnal activities of officeholders.

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[84] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 962. *Patrem tuum bonum imitare Deum, et proximo relinque peccata, ut et tua dimittantur a Domino commissa. Fac tu proximo tuo quod et vis ut facat tibi Deus tuus: noli quaerere de proximo vindictam, ne expetantur a te, Domino vindicante, delicta.* Noli vinci a malo, sed vince in bono malum (Romans 12:21). *Quod non vis tibi faciat Deus, noli tu homo facere homini.*

[85] Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 154-8.

[86] Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 157.

While this lack of language could support Stone's differentiation between royal and aristocratic masculinity and its prescriptions, the *Via regia* offers an alternative view through its focus on universal principles of rulership, notions that exist independent of physical bodies and sexuality but not one's individual morality, which is intimately tied to and reflected in the proper execution of one's ministerial duties. As the *Via regia* illustrates, the reciprocal relationships defining an administrator's duties and obligations were meant to be, in Smaragdus's vision, informed by his personal relationship with God. The abbot challenges the naturalness of power and the goodness of the noble elite, emphasizing their duties for moral lordship and their stakes in this larger endeavor. The king's or magnate's freedom from worldly captivity ultimately rested, in Smaragdus's schema, on his execution of virtuous rulership. Their social morality was thus intimately tied to personal redemption, shifting the focus from the bedroom but not the individual and his morality.

The Responsibilities of Lordship

This virtuous rulership, however, required more than merely a recognition of the cosmological hierarchy. It demanded that the inculcated virtues of the *Via regia* be applied to one's lordship. Studies on medieval lordship (*Herrschaft*) and state formation have been dominated by German historians,[87] yet relatively little has been done with Carolingian evidence, particularly in English-

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[87] Rachel Stone provides a cogent review of the German scholarship in "In Search of the Carolingian 'Dear Lord,'" *Frankland: The Franks and the World of the Early Middle Ages,* ed. Paul Fouracre and David Ganz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 152, n. 3. These works include W. Schlesinger, "Herrschaft and Gefolgschaft in der germanisch-deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte," *Historische Zeitschrift* 176 (1953): 225-75; H. Kuhn, "Die Grenzen der germanischen Gefolgschaft, *ZRG Germanistische Abteilung,* 73 (1956), 1-83; F. Graus, "Über die sogenannte germanische Treue," *Historica,* 1 (1959), 71-121; D. Green, *The Carolingian Lord: Semantic Studies on Four Old High German Words: Balder, Frô, Truhtin, Hêrro* (Cambridge, 1965).

language scholarship.[88] While our ability to understand the dynamics of dependency between nobles and their followers remains obscured by limited evidence, the notion of hegemonic masculinity provides a means to conceptualize more universal lordship paradigms and their extension from king-noble relations to noble-follower interactions. Employing this approach can help to illuminate the expectations for and ideologies of lordship for ninth-century aristocrats, as they governed a loose network of regions tied to an imperial core.

While eighth- and ninth-century lordship has long been under-researched, some scholars have noted the important ways in which aristocrats shaped the Carolingian project. For example, Matthew Innes examines the minutiae of local evidence in order to interrogate these nobles and their roles both with the imperial state and in relation to their own regional dependents. His efforts reveal the heterogeneity of the Carolingian Empire even at its height, as he characterizes the united empire as "an agglomeration of regional political units, *regna,* most of which had long pre-Carolingian heritages."[89] Although control over the regional elites was maintained by royal patronage, lords possessed great influence over the execution of royal initiatives and decrees within their territories.[90] Personal bonds and persuasion held this loose system together and tied the periphery to the center. Moral economy largely acted as the glue, transforming simple landowners into a Christian elite. As Innes argues, "'nobility' was a moral distinction…to be 'noble' in this sense was to exercise social power in the proper manner."[91] The laity, however,

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[88] See Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 84-114; Rachel Stone, *Masculinity, Nobility, and the Moral Instruction of Carolingian Lay Elite* (PhD dissertation, University of London, 2006) for exceptions in English-language scholarship.

[89] Matthew Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400-1000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 195-6.

[90] Innes, *State and Society,* 192; see also 87-93 for a discussion of Carolingian lordship; see additionally Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 188-90.

[91] Innes, *State and Society,* 83.

were not passive actors in this process. Abigail Firey suggests that the larger imperial project relied upon an underlying popular piety among the laity that, once harnessed, could maintain peaceful accord and order between and among secular and religious authorities by ensuring the morality of both the rulers and the ruled.[92] This interaction between the imperial reform initiatives and the existing piety of the Frankish elite largely pervades conceptions of ninth-century lordship. By capturing this reform and penitential culture, developed from educational practices throughout the eighth century, early ninth-century intellectuals, including Smaragdus, were in a position to craft innovative constructions of lordship and its duties. Smaragdus's abstract language allows for adaptation but provides guiding principles for rulership, inculcating the reform initiatives of the court, principally standards of proper, Christian lordship, through his prescriptions for the proper exercise of governance on the part of the elites who controlled the empire's regions.

While certain social obligations applied to all the Christian faithful, the *Via regia* emphasizes the performance of these duties by virtuous lords. Participating in a *ministerium,* administrators served as moral exemplars for their dependents.[93] Individual and internal transcendence and transformation alone did not satisfy the ambitious aims of the *Via regia*. The abbot writes: "from you, oh good king, we always want to hear testimony, *frequently to see work as well.*"[94] The journey along the royal path demanded communal and external manifestations of piety through specific obligations attending to governance, necessitating both internal and

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[92] Abigail Firey, *A Contrite Heart: Prosecution and Redemption in the Carolingian Empire* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publisher, 2009), 156, 161-98, for a discussion of penitential discourse and education of the laity and their use by secular and religious authorities in jurisprudence.

[93] Noble, "Secular Sanctity," 13

[94] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 938. *Tale ergo de te, o bone rex, volumus semper audire testimonium, tale videre frequenter et opus*: emphasis mine.

external discipline and, potentially, mortification. These demonstrations were especially important from the king, as he served as the physical manifestation of the imperial vision and the pinnacle of this reformed masculinity for all under his rule. As the mirror illustrates, however, the moral duties elucidated by the *Via regia* were not imposed arbitrarily. Rather, as noted, the Bible explicitly addresses kings.[95] Entrusted by the deity with the administration of his chosen empire, Carolingian rulers were believed to have received divine grace and instruction, investing them not only with a holy aura but also grave responsibilities.[96] The purpose of scriptural mandates extended beyond simply elucidating and encouraging virtuous behavior for Christian rulers. The *Via regia* recognizes the exceptional violence of kingly anger and its appetite for vengeance. Aware of this force, faithful kings, and by extension their noble surrogates, should employ the virtues of the *Via regia* to quell this rage and behave mildly, pacifying the self through love and avoiding anger's destruction.[97] Virtue thus charges kings with an especial burden of piety and obligation, one that extends through participation in the *ministerium* and through royal imitation to the lesser magnates of the realm.

Reform served as one of the primary facets of the imperial project. As Mayke de Jong artfully demonstrates, *correctio* and *admonitio* operated as key tools of imperial administration

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[95] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 942. *Audis, ergo, clarissime rex, quia specialiter regibus, ex quibus divina largiente gratia, unus es tu, haec superna dirigitur vox; et ut sapienter agant, oraculum divinum frequenter regibus clamitat.*

[96] See Mary Garrison, "The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an Identity from Pippin to Charlemagne," in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114-61; Mayke de Jong, "*Ecclesia* and the early medieval polity," *Staat im Frühen Mittelatler*, ed. Stuart Airlie, Walter Pohl, and Helmut Reimitz (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), 113-31.

[97] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 963. For example, "*De ira regis scriptum est:* Sicut fremitus leonis, ita ira regis (Proverbs 19:12) *Et iterum:* Ira regis nuntius mortis (Proverbs 16:14). *Ergo quantum validior est ira regis ad reddendum vindictam, tantum a fidelissimis regibus temperata debet esse et cauta.*

in both lay and ecclesiastical life.[98] The appropriateness and usefulness of these tools duly

surface in the *Via regia.* Rulers were charged with the care of dependents and were responsible

for their spiritual and physical wellbeing. Passive exemplarity did not suffice; administrators had

to actively lead their flock, chastising amorality and encouraging piety. Smaragdus admonishes:

> By chance, if you see one corrupted in the Church of Christ, strive to correct and
> do not cease to improve. If you see someone in the house of God, which is the
> Church, hastening toward luxury, toward inebriation, prohibit, forbid, deter, if the
> zealous house of God feeds you. If you see one inflated by arrogance, or made
> savage by irritability, or intoxicated by violence, or envious with jealousy of the
> brother, or aroused by lust, or given to the avarice of booty, or violent with
> cruelty, repress all, threaten all, and restrain all most severely. Do whatever you
> can for the person whom you are, for the royal ministry that you bear, for the
> name of Christian that you have, for the vicariate of Christ that you perform.[99]

Here, the guide provides great latitude in the correction of the wayward, encouraging the king to

repress and restrain the errant by any means under his divine authority. While a certain abbatial

overtone pervades this language of correction, this monastic imagination of rulership does not

anticipate weakness but enhanced strength and control, illustrating the spiritual and temporal

superiority and authority of the ruler.[100] The purchase of this spiritual authority should not be

underestimated.[101] The *Via regia* encourages its recipients to "show clemency to the

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[98] See de Jong, *Penitential State*; eadem, "*Admonitio* and Criticisms of the Ruler at the Court of Louis the Pious," *La culture du haut moyen âge, une question d'élites?,* ed. F. Bougard, R. Le Jan, and R. McKitterick (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 315-38.

[99] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 958. *Si quid forte perversum in Ecclesia videris Christi, satage corrigere, et emendare non cesses. Si videris aliquem in domo Dei, quae est Ecclesia, currere ad luxuriam, ad ebrietatem, prohibe, veta, terre, si zelus domus Dei comedit te. Si videris superbia inflatum, aut iracundia saevum, aut violentia temulentum, aut livore fratris invidum, aut libidine incensum, aut avaritia rapinae, deditum, aut crudelitate violentum, reprime omnes, minare omnibus, et refrena severissime omnes. Fac quidquid potes pro persona quam gestas, pro ministerio regali quod portas, pro nomine Christiani quod habes pro vice Christi qua fungeris.*

[100] See Noble, "The Monastic Ideal as a Model for Empire," for a discussion of Louis the Pious garnering power by asserting his authority as imperial abbot, responsible for the admonishment and salvation of those under his care.

[101] The assertion of spiritual authority by secular leaders, particularly kings, could lead to conflict with bishops and clerics. See Michael Moore, *A Sacred Kingdom: Bishops and the Rise of Frankish Kingship, 300-850* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 286-327, especially 291-4. Here, Moore focuses on how the *Via regia* itself proposes a model of secular piety that challenges the ecclesiastical authority, notably through its emphasis on the protection of the downtrodden—the traditional sphere of the clergy. See also de Jong, *The*

insolent...demonstrate the way of uprightness to the errant, call back the discordant to peace…"[102] These are obligations borne only by those who possess the power to punish the insolent, condemn the errant, and crush the discordant. Choosing to employ virtuous tools to address the wayward, therefore, does not reveal weakness or passivity but rather an evolution to more effective mechanisms of governance appropriate for a Christian ruler. Thus, Smaragdus emphasizes the ministerial duty of reform and stresses the importance of accomplishing correction through piety in addition to the sword.

Although Smaragdus remains quite abstract about the ruler as reformer, he becomes much more concrete and developed when discussing him as protector of the downtrodden. Charity toward orphans, widows, and the poor represented a well-known Christian virtue, an obligation familiar to all the faithful. Yet, the significance that the abbot attaches to this specific duty warrants investigation.[103] Here, the importance of the progression and transformation along the royal path becomes apparent, for only after embracing both the preeminence of virtue and, more importantly, one's place in the cosmological hierarchy can one fully understand the obligation to provide for the downtrodden. Again employing slavery as a rhetorical tool, Smaragdus refers to the Psalmist: "do not reject me from your sons since I am your slave and a

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Penitential State, 176-84 in which she discusses the rebalancing of sacerdotal-lay power at the Council of Paris in 829.

[102] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 962-3. *Procacibus mansuetudinem ostendat…errantibus viam rectitudinis demonstrat, discordes ad pacem revocat.*

[103] Perhaps this emphasis reflects crises or concerns about the poor during this transition. Louis is reported by his biographer Thegan as correcting many comital abuses against the poor, including confiscation of property and enslavement, when he assumed power in 814. See Thegan, "Gesta Hludowici imperatoris," 192-3*;* See also "Capitulare Missorum," *MGH* Capit 1:288-9. See also Pierre Boucaud, "All are Free before God: Slavery, the Church and Carolingian Society in the Exegesis of Claudius of Turin (ca. 827/828)," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 228 (2011): 349-87, noting the frequent discussions of slavery and unfreedom among Carolingian intellectuals in the early ninth century.

son of your slave."[104] Recognizing his utter dependency, David beseeches the Lord to "lead me in my works soberly and guard me in your power…and I will administer your people in justice and I will be worthy of the seats of my palace."[105] Smaragdus establishes the paradigm of rulership not on the worldly power of the king but on his dependency on God. Servitude, therefore, emerges as the foundational model of power. Founded upon reciprocation, this style demanded certain duties from the recipient, specifically care for God's chosen, protected classes.

Following on from this, Smaragdus implores the king, and thus other elites, with temporal and spiritual rewards to care for the downtrodden, admonishing them frequently to liberate the oppressed, provide alms, support physicians, and defend foreigners. While these activities strengthen the temporal throne, the eternal benefits serve as the true bounty. The abbot admonishes his reader: "therefore see and diligently pay attention to, oh king, what befalls the defenders of the poor; God pronounces that he is the debtor of them and that he will repay, he promises to the sinner the dazzling whiteness of snow."[106] The deity ensures recompense for the administrators who uphold their duties to the downtrodden, emphasizing the reciprocity within these relationships of dependence. Charity and protection remove the sins of the earth and prepare a ruler for his celestial throne, in which he will enjoy the perpetual bounties of the angels for his temporal service to God's chosen.[107] Yet, the abbot also outlines the converse of this system. If a ruler refuses to perform his duty of charity for those under his care, his entreaties for

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[104] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 944. *Et noli me reprobare a pueris tuis, quoniam servus tuus ego sum, et filius ancillae tuae* (Wisdom 9:1).

[105] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 944. *Et deducet me in operibus meis sobrie et custodiet in sua potentia…et disponam populum tuum juste, et ero dignus sedium pairis mei* (Wisdom 9:1).

[106] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 949. *Vide ergo et diligenter attende, o rex, quid defensoribus eveniat pauperum; se illis esse debitorem, seque redditorem pronuntiat Deus, nivis candorem peccatoribus promittit.*

[107] See Smaragdus, "Via regia," 949-50.

mercy and aid will face equal treatment from his celestial Lord. "For he will not be able to earn the mercy of God, he who was not merciful; nor will he obtain anything from divine piety by means of prayers, he who was not compassionate to the prayer of the poor."[108] Charity thus is transformed from an act of piety into an administrative obligation tied to the salvation of one's soul for both royal and elite rulers responsible for the welfare of other human beings.

From this, it emerges that Smaragdus's two-pronged focus—on reform and on charity—reflects an overall conception of rulership as *imitatio Christi*. While a Christo-mimetic model of rulership was not foreign to the Carolingians, Smaragdus's model emphasizes attributes not commonly deployed by Carolingian intellectuals, namely those of a lowly, servant Christ.[109] Poets and moralists had long portrayed Carolingian kings in Christological terms.[110] Yet, these employed largely militaristic imagery, featuring Christ the conqueror of Satan and Hell transfigured into king the vanquisher of non-Christians. Even later images of Louis the Pious featured this motif.[111] As Celia Chazelle has demonstrated through a thorough examination of Carolingian artistic representations of Christ, images of a contorted Savior, suffering on the Cross as a faithful servant, are rarely seen. Rather, most depictions feature an erect, opened-eyed Christ.[112] In this way therefore, Smaragdus's emphasis on the servant distinguishes his work from its cultural milieu. He instead encourages his recipient to imitate his Lord, and:

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[108] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 951. *Neque enim mereri Dei misericordiam poterit, qui misericors et ipse non fuerit; aut impetrabit de divina pietate aliquid precibus, qui ad precem pauperis non fuerit humanus.*

[109] Stone, *Morality and Masculinity,* 121.

[110] See, for example, "De Pippini regis victoria Avarica," *MGH* Poetae 1:116-17.

[111] Sears, "Louis the Pious as *Miles Christi,*" 605-28.

[112] See Celia Chazelle, *Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 75-103.

As the elect of God, the holy, and the chosen, take upon yourself the bowels of mercy, kindness, humility, modesty, patience, supporting each other and giving of yourself if anyone has a quarrel against another. As the Lord has given to you, thus do you do. For that virtue is the virtue of princes… The Apostle truly calls to those same princes, saying: *seize the restless, console the fainthearted, take up the infirm, be patient to all.*[113]

In this conception, Christ was the ultimate servant and, therefore, the ultimate model for Christian administrators. He anticipated and personified the virtues of the *Via regia* and faithfully executed their associated duties and obligations. Thus, Carolingian kings and magnates should "imitate him faithfully, with whom you hope to rule perennially."[114] Through this, they might obtain salvation and could fulfill their duties within the cosmological hierarchy.

A New Social Morality

The duties and obligations enumerated by and developed along the royal path culminate in Smaragdus's discussion of wealth, which largely acts as a test case for the schema of the *Via regia*. Parallel to his promotion of virtue over worldly might, the abbot devotes great attention to praising eternal rewards over worldly riches. He imagines charity as an investment, one that reaps extraordinary rewards for minimal worldly sacrifice.[115] Smaragdus instructs his audience to "cast your bread in the bowels of the hungry, so that you may find it manifold in the eternal fatherland."[116] Again, the abbot directs his recipient's attention from the world to the celestial

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[113] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 947. *Paulus quoque ait:* Induite vos ergo sicut electi Dei, sancti, et dilecti viscera misericordiae, benignitatem, humilitatem, modestiam, patientiam, supportantes invicem, et donantes vobismetipsis si quis adversus aliquem habet querelam: sicut Dominus donavit vobis, ita et vos (Colossians 3:12). *Nam quod et ista virtus principium virtus sit…Apostolus vero ad eosdem principes clamat, dicens:* Corripite inquietos, consolamini pusillanimes, suscipite infirmos, patientes estote ad omnes (1 Thess. 14).

[114] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 967. *Imitare illum fideliter, cum quo speras regnare perenniter.*

[115] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 952. *Ille te facere vult in aeternum honorificando sublimem, et in pauperibus a te parvum expetit honorem.*

[116] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 955. *Mitte panem tuum in esurientium viscera, ut eum multiplicem invenias in aeterna patria.*

kingdom through the promotion of virtue. He reinforces these values by stressing the transitory

nature of worldly riches. According to the abbot, the only wealth is that which is eternal, "for

otherwise they would not refer to it truly as wealth, unless it is that wealth which is happily

stored up in celestial reward."[117] Temporal abundance is ultimately meaningless and ought,

therefore, to be poured out happily to the downtrodden since only through this act may an

individual gain true wealth. If, however, this motivation was insufficient in itself, the

cosmological hierarchy should persuade one to support the weak and oppressed, for these

investments are "given without a doubt to the Lord himself, when it is cheerfully paid out to the

poor."[118] By performing their duties as faithful lords, the magnates will also serve their heavenly

Lord, caring for his flock as commanded and storing up heavenly reward for this service. Yet, by

abandoning these duties, the magnate "who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker."[119] Not

only does this stress the reciprocal relationships that characterize the cosmological hierarchy but

also emphasizes Smaragdus's unusual presentation of Christ as servant in this text. He is the

servant among the poor. Imitating him requires protecting and providing for the indigent and

weak—the temporal unfree—thereby allowing the magnates to simultaneously mimic and serve

their Creator through their ministry.

Part of this service includes explicit protections for the poor, namely that temporal riches

should not be enjoyed at the expense of the downtrodden. Royal and noble status largely

depended upon landed property and dependents that supplied the food, clothing, and other

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[117] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 955. *Neque enim aliae veraciter dicendae sunt divitiae, nisi illae quae in coelesti thesauro feliciter sunt reconditae.*

[118] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 950-1. *Cum magna mentis hilaritate pauperibus debemus eleemosynas dare, quando ipsi Domino sine dubio datur, quod pauperibus hilariter erogatur.*

[119] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 952. *Sicut scriptum est:* Qui culumnitur egentem, exprobat factori ejus (Proverbs 14:31).

luxuries that visibly demonstrated their position.[120] Smaragdus acknowledges that some enjoy greater temporal wealth than others. This wealth, however, does not provide license for the abuse of those of lesser material support. The abbot admonishes:

> Therefore, king, the omnipotent Lord granted to you ample kingdoms, abundant with riches and many ancestral estates; he gave many returns from the fisc, and honored you with the gifts of many potentates by means of which you can build royal palaces. Beware lest the royal house is built for you with the tears of the poor and the payments of the miserable.[121]

Here, Smaragdus stresses that these riches are provided by the Lord—God grants, he gives, he honors. Wealth and the power that it imparts arise not from one's own ingenuity and goodness, but from God's grace. Not only does this speak to Smaragdus's cosmological paradigm but also his understanding of the souls of the downtrodden—oppressed by blame, not by nature.[122] Their equal nature should prohibit their abuse by the materially superior, as all are dependents of God, elevated or not at his will. Proper lordship along the *Via regia* thus demands mercy and liberation for the oppressed of the world. To accomplish this feat, "so that you may merit to sit happily on the throne of heaven, do not amplify yourself with gifts of the poor or erect a home."[123] Rather than condemning wealth, Smaragdus challenges its abuses, warning his recipients of the dangers of further burdening rather than alleviating the plight of the downtrodden by means of their fortunes.

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[120] See n. 49 for references to the importance of these to lay aristocratic status. See also Costambeys, et. al., *Carolingian World,* 229-41 for the most recent interpretations of Carolingian village life and economic relations within these communities.

[121] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 966. *Tibi ergo, rex, omnipotens Dominus ampla et florida, divitiisque plena tribuit regna, parentumque multiplicia divisit et praedia; fiscorum plurima dedit vectigalia, et multorum potentum honoravit munera, unde regia fabricare possis palatia. Cave ne pauperum lacrymis miserorumque impensis tibi domus aedificetur regalis.*

[122] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 967; see above n. 77.

[123] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 965. *Ergo ut merearis in excelso sedere feliciter throno, muneribus pauperum non amplifices tibimet, aut aedifices domum.*

Smaragdus's understanding of temporal wealth here emerges. The abbot largely establishes a paradigm of stewardship, in which magnates oversee and manage the empire's wealth in the service of the *Dominus*. Since celestial reward represents true wealth, temporal riches, whether they be land, clothing, or even power, serve as transitory tools, which the Lord God provides to his faithful to perform his work in the world. Wealth, therefore, ultimately does not belong to the individual, but rather God invests certain people—kings and magnates—with riches in order to care for his protected classes. This paradigm attaches reciprocal obligations to wealth, transforming it from a personal possession into an office with mandatory responsibilities. "And because the Lord mercifully granted to you the royal and abundant riches in the present world, *you ought to skillfully act,* so that you may find much wealth from this in the future fatherland."[124] Elite status demanded virtuous administration; it could not merely be enjoyed. Not only does this system ensure the social welfare of the empire's dependents, it also prevents sinful attachment to temporal wealth. Smaragdus elucidates these benefits:

> For the Psalm writer does not condemn the possession of great wealth, but he forbids lest the heart be attached to it. The just accumulation of wealth will not do harm to you, if there is a broad distribution. For from this a gift of mercy is poured out to the indigent. From this the nakedness of the poor is covered. From this the want of the foreigner will be made good. From this the misery of orphans is wiped clean. From this comforts of widows are granted. From this the hunger of the starving is expelled. From this the thirst of the thirsty is chased away. From this the longings of the infirm are supplemented. From this those suffering from miseries are liberated, and the faithful steward of this wealth will be enriched in the future.[125]

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[124] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 955. *Et quia tibi Dominus misericorditer regias concessit in praesenti saeculo et largas divitias, solerter agere debes, ut multas invenias ex illis in futura patria repositas*: emphasis mine.

[125] Smaragdus, "Via regia," 956. *Largas enim divitias Psalmographus habere non damnat, sed ne cor illis apponatur vetet. Non tibi oberit divitiarum congregatio justa, si adfuerit distributio larga. Ex illis enim munus misericordiae egenis porrigitur; ex illis pauperum nuditas operitur; ex illis peregrinorum inopia suppletur; ex illis pupillorum miseria detergitur; ex illis viduarum solatia tribuuntur; ex illis esurientium fames repellitur; ex illis sitientium sitis fugatur; ex illis infirmantium desideria supplentur; ex illis accipientes a miseriis liberabuntur, et illarum fidelis dispensator in futuro ditabitur*.

This approbation should not be considered an endorsement of wealth. The abbot further constructs a discourse from the teachings of Paul, David, and Solomon elucidating the dangers of wealth, focusing on the vanity and emptiness of treasures that fade into dust and fail to save men from damnation.[126] It follows that only by providing for the downtrodden can this wealth and its recipient be redeemed, for they are thereby shielded in the virtues of mercy and justice.

How does Smaragdus's conception of wealth compare to his fellow moralists? As noted above, four primary texts have become accepted as the standard canon of Carolingian moral thought.[127] Examining their understandings of charity and alms helps to illuminate the unique project that Smaragdus devised even while he remained in a familiar spiritual milieu. Paulinus of Aquileia composed his *Exhortations* for Duke Eric of Fruili in 795. The patriarch does not provide an extensive discussion of the purpose of alms but admonishes the duke that "*although a laymen,* he should be eager toward all the works of God, pious toward the poor and infirm, a comforter of the grieving, compassionate to the miseries of all, magnanimous in alms…"[128] His qualification of lay status ("although a layman") significantly differs from the paradigm established by Smaragdus, who placed the magnates within a cosmological hierarchy requiring these virtues for proper lordship. This is an expectation, not an exception.

Alcuin of York's *De virtutibus et vitiis* (799/800), in contrast, appears closer to the *Via regia,* instructing Count Wido to provide charity from his abundance to the poor in order to earn eternal rewards. Its language, nevertheless, differs from that of the later moralist. Alcuin first

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[126] See Smaragdus, "Via regia," 955-6.

[127] See nn. 9, 32.

[128] Paulinus of Aquileia, "Liber exhortationis," *PL* 99:200-1. *Esto, quaeso, quamvis laicus, ad omne opus Dei promptus, pius ad pauperes et infirmos, consolator moerentium, compatiens miseriis omnium, largus in eleemosynis…:*emphasis mine.

introduces almsgiving as "a work of piety."[129] While Smaragdus would not disagree with this characterization, his treatment of charity extends its purpose beyond piety to social and even political obligation. Almsgiving serves not simply as a pious reallocation of one's divinely-bestowed gifts but rather as the duty of an administrative member of the imperial *ministerium*. This notion of piety may also reflect Alcuin's differing understanding of the downtrodden. When referring to the "needy and the weak" (*debilium et peregrinorum*), he writes "these the justice of God therefore allowed to labor under diverse troubles, so that he may crown both the *wretched* for their patience and the merciful for their benevolence."[130] Here, at least, Alcuin fails to acknowledge the equality of souls, emphasizing and almost legitimizing the wretchedness that facilitates the oppression of the downtrodden.

Some later moralists, however, appear to support Smaragdus's understanding concerning the equality of human souls. In *De institutione laicali,* Jonas of Orleans suggests that the powerful and wealthy should welcome the visiting poor and weak, for "just as all exist equally in the condition of nature, so equally when they are infirm."[131] Like Smaragdus, Jonas suggests that all are made equal by the Lord, despite their temporal status and condition. This understanding, nevertheless, does not seem to affect the language he uses to discuss wealth and avarice. The bishop, possibly due to his greater intimacy with the laity than Smaragdus, acknowledges the dangers of "avarice, lavish outpourings, and many similar things," and likens these vices to robbery. Yet, he focuses on self-restraint and encourages the laity to avoid any corrupting desire

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[129] Alcuin of York, "De virtutibus et vitiis," *PL* 101:625. *Sciendum est enim esse pietatis opus.*

[130] Alcuin, "De virtutibus et vitiis," 625. *Quos ideo sub diversis molestiis justitia Dei laborare permisit, ut et miseros pro patientia, et misericordes pro benevolentia coronaret:* emphasis mine.

[131] Jonas, *De institutione laicali,* vol. 2, ed. and trans. Odile Debreucq (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2013), 292. *Sicut enim omnes conditione naturae aequales existunt, ita aequaliter cum infirmantur,*

for the world.[132] To avoid these vices, Jonas admonishes his audience to contribute to the poor "if they do not wish to be burned in flames."[133] In this passage, almsgiving serves as a way to mitigate one's sin. While establishing the equality of all and dismissing claims about the unworthiness of the downtrodden, Jonas frames charity as a personal tool of correction rather than a social obligation attached to one's status.

Likewise, Dhuoda of Septimania, a laywoman writing to her captive son, also notes the innate equality of all human beings.[134] This understanding informs her conception of wealth, for she often remarks on spiritual poverty, both positively and negatively. Dhuoda advises her son that a "rich man may not wholly avoid poverty. Why? Because his soul wallows in poverty."[135] She, therefore, instructs him to clothe his nobility in a suppliant heart, protecting himself from vice.[136] Despite her approbation of spiritual poverty, Dhuoda views wealth as divine affirmation of one's virtue. Referring to the Old Testament patriarchs, she asserts "they [the Fathers] merited to be exalted temporally, in the enjoyment of their children and their earthly goods."[137] Her emphasis on temporal reward and possible enjoyment of this material abundance significantly

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[132] Jonas, *De institutione laicali,* vol. 3, 270. *Pleraque sunt vitia quae leuia putantur et non sunt, sicut est tenacia et prodiga effusio et multa his similia.*

[133] Jonas, *De instiutione laicali*, vol. 3, 278. *Tribuant ergo pauperi, si nolunt flammis exuri.*

[134] Dhuoda, *Liber manualis,* ed. and trans. Marcelle Thiébaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 162. She writes: "Flesh signifies the fraternal condition in which we trace origin with all, of brotherhood in which all of us take our origin…for flesh takes its name from to fall, in this sense and by this reasoning both poor and rich may fall and rise, but all return to dust in the end" (*Carnem hic fraternam conditionem designat, ex qua nos cum omnibus originem trahimus...Karo namque a cadendo nomen accepit, ea vero tenore rationis mensura, licet cadat, licet resurgat, tam pauper quam dives, omnes per finem in pulverem revertentur*).

[135] Dhuoda, *Liber manualis*, 150. *Eventus est dives egestate omnino non carens. Quare? Quia anima illius in egestate vilescit.*

[136] Dhuoda, *Liber manualis,* 154. *In paupertate etenim mentis tuam nobilitatem supplici corde latitare semper.*

[137] Dhuoda, *Liber manualis*, 130. *In iocunditate filiorum cum rebus terrenis temporaliter fruentes exultari meruerunt.*

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differs from Smaragdus's conception of wealth and model of social morality. It ultimately better reflects Alcuin's understanding of charity as an act of piety, capable of remitting sins.

These comparisons with moralists both before and after Smaragdus throw a clear light on the distinctive nature of the project of the *Via regia*. While the text is addressed to an individual like the other *specula,* it focuses on a corporate morality, thereby informing the behavior of all magnates and kings as they operate within a collective *ministerium*. This implied but cogent emphasis on the communal reflects the aims of an intellectual to structure how these elites worked as administrators of an evolving imperial project during a period of transition. Smaragdus explores several facets of proper lordship, yet he continuously emphasizes the obligations of a lord to his dependents, particularly the downtrodden. His work is unique in constructing a social morality founded on wealth, in which charity and almsgiving transform from acts of piety into tools of administration. In his schema, having been given divinely-bestowed wealth, the empire's elite were entrusted with the care of God's protected classes—the poor, the orphans, and widows. In exchange for this service, these administrators would receive celestial rewards from their cosmological Lord. This system of reciprocal obligations would ensure the spiritual and material welfare of the empire's elite and lesser classes, protecting each group from the sin of want and greed even while providing for its physical wellbeing. Smaragdus, thus, developed nothing less than a model for a Christian empire, one founded on the social morality of wealth.

Conclusion

This thesis has taken us on the spiritual journey of a ninth-century magnate. One way to conceptualize this transformative passage is to literally imagine our steps along this path. Proceeding along the *Via regia*, we ascend in virtue, understanding its power both in this world and the next. Yet, if awareness of this might does not mitigate our worldly corruption, we are tamed by our cosmological Lord, reigning supreme over even the highest of the terrestrial plane. Humbled by our relative status, we are charged with the care of the downtrodden and promised reciprocal treatment from our Lord in our conduct with God's protected. The *Via regia* illuminates the duties of proper lordship through its virtues, teaching us how to imitate Christ the Lord in our governance. Having finally imbibed this ethos, we can participate in a new model of Christian lordship. Through virtue, our worldly status has transformed into an office as an extension of the imperial *ministerium*, applying not only to our societal position but also to the wealth that sustains it. As stewards of this material abundance, we are called by the Lord to distribute his divinely-bestowed gifts to the downtrodden, not only ensuring their spiritual and physical welfare but also our own. We emerge from the *Via regia* transformed and repurposed, equipped with the principles of proper Christian governance for the evolving imperial project. In sum, we participate in Smaragdus's vision of a Carolingian noble and spiritual elite.

While it is impossible to know what tangible influence the *Via regia* had on Louis the Pious or on the behavior of noble elites, this study explores at least one vision of how this imperial project might have operated. This vision speaks to the awareness of Carolingian intellectuals to historical change. For Smaragdus, the transition of power from Charlemagne to Louis the Pious held enormous possibilities. His work, however, is not necessarily a criticism of the former emperor's program, but rather represents an effort to imagine what an enduring

Carolingian empire could be without its heroic conqueror and its expanding borders. The *Via regia* offers a solution, aiming to inculcate universal values of proper lordship into royal and aristocratic elites in order to establish a model Christian empire. Establishing uniformity throughout the vast realm, this model would bind the nobles and their territories to the royal court, all participating in a single, imperial project. This does not deny diversity or modification to suit the specific needs of various regions.[138] The abstract language of the *Via regia* instead provides foundational guiding principles, allowing for adaptation while maintaining certain standards of rulership. This illuminates the creative project of the *Via regia,* as it codifies an ideology of redeeming rulership to be embodied by the hegemon—the king—and imitated as closely as possible by those lords beneath him in an overarching effort to realize a perfected empire, worthy of the *Dominus's* grace and mercy. Smaragdus thus presents a program destined for longevity, capable of flexibility and development. The *Via regia* can, therefore, provide a new way of understanding the ability of the Carolingian system of governance to survive and adapt, as the system of lordship and social morality presented in this text was meant to withstand the possible division and fragmentation of the larger imperial structure, operating within smaller systems of administration under the magnates who had internalized the principles of virtuous governance enumerated in the text.

Although this thesis was largely inspired by the recent efforts to rehabilitate the historical reputation of Louis the Pious, this study has shown how moving away from direct analysis of the emperor opens up new opportunities for future scholarship. Instead of focusing on the final volatile decade of his reign, it is useful to return to the scholarship of Ganshof and Noble in examining the early period of his rule and what Louis's imperial vision might have been. Many

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[138] Ponesse, "Standing Distant from the Fathers," 71-99 and "Smaragdus of St. Mihiel and the Carolingian Monastic Reform,"367-92, in which he discusses how Smaragdus adapted monastic regulations to both circumstance and region to fit various communities' needs.

themes from the *Via regia* have been largely underappreciated in understanding the ninth-century empire. Further study of the downtrodden, especially representations of the poor, has the potential to reveal new emphases or concerns about their societal role under Louis the Pious and his successors. Similarly, a deeper examination of ninth-century lordship and relationships of dependency could illuminate continuities and discontinuities between the Central and High Middle Ages as well as increase our understanding of Carolingian government and aristocratic participation in it. Lastly, while it is impossible to measure the direct effects of the *Via regia* on the behavior of Louis the Pious, an analysis of his Christo-mimesis and pious rulership, particularly his use of penance, might elucidate his efforts to garner legitimacy. Ultimately, the close textual analysis of Smaragdus's *Via regia* possibly poses more questions than it answers for understanding early ninth-century lordship. Yet, this ambiguity and openness perhaps reflects the challenges of the transition from Charlemagne to Louis the Pious and one intellectual's journey to solve it.

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