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COMMENT

# Jinty Nelson in Thirteen Articles

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## Abstract

This collection gathers thirteen contributions by a number of historians, friends, colleagues and/or students of Jinty's, who were asked to pick their favourite article by her and say a few words about it for an event held in her memory on 15 January 2025 at King's College London. We offer this collection in print now for a wider audience not so much because it has any claim to be exhaustive or authoritative, but because taken all together these pieces seemed to add up to a useful retrospective on Jinty's work, its wider context, and its impact on the field over the decades. We hope that, for those who know her work well already, this may be an opportunity to remember some of her classic (and a few less classic) articles, while at the same time serving as an accessible introduction to her research for anyone who knew her without necessarily knowing about her field, as well as for a new and younger generation of readers.

**Keywords:** Janet L. Nelson; early medieval history; carolingians; women's history; political history

## Introduction

Jinty Nelson, the first female President of the Royal Historical Society, died on 14 October 2024. She was one of the leading historians of her generation, and there have been and will be many obituaries dedicated to her, as there should be. Here we are attempting to do something different. The following collection gathers thirteen contributions by a number of historians – friends, colleagues and/or students of Jinty's – who were asked to pick their favourite article by her, the one that they felt had been the most meaningful to them personally, and to say a few words about what makes it special. These contributions were originally intended for an event held in her memory on Wednesday 15 January 2025, at a special meeting of the Earlier Middle Ages seminar

held at King's College London – both institutions that, for over forty years, had been central to her professional life, and she to theirs.

We offer this collection in print now to a wider audience not so much because it has any claim to be exhaustive or authoritative, and even less in order to recapture that moment of communal remembrance, but because, however quirky, uncoordinated and free-ranging the selections and however differently the brief was interpreted, taken all together these pieces did seem to add up to a useful retrospective on Jinty's work, its wider context, and its impact on the field over the decades. We hope that, for those who know her work well already, what follows may be an opportunity to revisit some of her classic (and a few less classic) articles, while at the same time serving as an accessible introduction to her research for anyone who knew her without necessarily knowing about her field, as well as for a new and younger generation of readers. The pieces follow the chronological order in which the articles were published, in order to give a sense of how her approach and her style changed over time.

*Alice Rio*
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## 'On the Limits of the Carolingian Renaissance', *Studies in Church History*, 14 (1977), 51–69.

This seminal article follows two other pieces that Jinty Nelson published in *Studies in Church History* on royal inauguration rituals (the crowning of kings) which had built on her Ph.D. research.[1] Jinty was famously loyal to any organisation she was involved with, beginning with the Ecclesiastical History Society. No less than six of her first papers were published under their auspices. These two earlier *Studies in Church History* pieces were focused on the detail of the different rituals in which kings were made, with the anointing of the new king becoming a common ritual across western Europe. Her discussion aimed to solve problems in explaining differences between the rituals. She was less concerned with the wider context and significance of each of them. 'On the Limits' marks a break-out in which Jinty brings the wider context, here Carolingian government and society, to bear on the specific proposition that the cultural status quo, and ultimately the political arrangement, of the Frankish kingdom could be changed by clerical diktat. The notion she attacked was that the rebirth of Carolingian society and culture, the so-called 'Carolingian Renaissance', came from the absorbing of ecclesiology into the governmental system itself. Earlier she had demonstrated that the Church had indeed driven the adoption of anointing in order to condition and when necessary control the actions of the king. But now she asked just what power it had to do this. That the church leaders did have such power had been the view of Walter Ullmann, he being Jinty's Ph.D. supervisor, and she his golden student. Jinty's main objection to

[1] J. L. Nelson, 'National Synods, Kingship as Office, and Royal Anointing: An Early Medieval Syndrome', *Studies in Church History*, 7 (1971), 41–59; J. L. Nelson, 'Symbols in Context: Rulers' Inauguration Rituals in Byzantium and the West in the Early Middle Ages', *Studies in Church History*, 13 (1976), 97–119.

his approach was her 'nagging doubts as to whether in the Carolingian period individual Christian renewal was so significant in ideological terms as to imply social renewal either in theory or practice'. Nor did government have the force to change things in this way. Scholars, she said, could live in ivory towers and not see the limited effect their ideas might have'. It was a sharp jab and Ullman certainly felt it, but it was also, I feel, something of a 'note to self'. Thereafter her feet were firmly on historical *terra firma.*

In the process of dismantling the traditional view Jinty reveals an understanding of the nature of power and community that would be a mainstay of her subsequent work. She now started from the concerns of people on the ground and considered politico-religious ideology in the frame of their lived experience. I will just mention a few things that I had forgotten were in this piece but which are immediately recognisable as Nelsonian: the way in which the Carolingians built on Merovingian foundations in law and religion, thus adding to laws rather than rewriting them, and in the process preserving the personality of the law; the notion that lay society had its own values that could not be changed by royal government, and that there was a warrior elite that was barely christianised, that government was based on consensus, and – very striking – that Carolingian capitularies had to be heard if they were to have any effect. We also see for the first time her trademark interest in the individuals who expressed the ideas which historians clump together in intellectual and cultural formations. So here for the first time we find Dhuoda, Agobard and Charles the Bald, people who would appear again and again in her writing. Not yet Charlemagne and his family: it would be more than another decade before she felt able to tackle this and she would not move on to Charlemagne himself before she had thought through the feasibility of writing early medieval biography.[2] First, 'On the Limits' amounted to a big turn in her work and a move away from the institutional and the constitutional. And just look at her notes over the period 1970 to 1980 as they turn from the *Verfassungsgeschichte* classics to more French structuralist stuff, and then to bring in English-language anthropology and sociology as it came on stream, and usually before the rest of us cottoned on to it. There we have it, the big picture, but etched with utterly reliable detail, insight and empathy, all informed by matchless reading.

*Paul Fouracre*
*University of Manchester*

## 'Inauguration Rituals', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. Peter Sawyer and Ian N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), 50–71.

When I arrived in Leeds in 1976 Peter Sawyer proposed that he and I should organise a seminar on early medieval kingship. As speakers, Patrick Wormald and Jinty were obvious choices: and Peter invited David Dumville, while I invited Roger Collins. The papers were given and published in 1977.

[2] J. L. Nelson, 'La famille de Charlemagne', *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines*, 61 (1991), 194–212; J. L. Nelson, 'Early Medieval Biography', *History Workshop Journal*, 50 (2000), 129–36.

The quality of Jinty's piece was instantly apparent: the analyses of the inaugurations of 751 (the anointing of Pippin), 848 and 869 (those of Charles the Bald as king in Aquitaine and Lotharingia) and 973 (the consecration of Edgar) are superb forensic examinations of four well-known, but problematic rituals, teasing out their precise contexts, showing their importance, and elucidating their social meanings. The interpretations have retained their value, even if more has been added by others over the years.

That being said, not everyone in 1977 felt the same. Peter insisted on sending a copy of the volume to Walter Ullmann (Jinty's old Ph.D. supervisor), who replied with letters to both of us, singling out three or four papers that he regarded as significant, and dismissing the rest as worthless. One of the papers that was not praised was Jinty's. The fact that Ullmann disliked it is, I think, a mark of its importance in Jinty's œuvre. What did he find so troubling? Its undermining of the pre-eminence of *Ordinesforschung* (the study of the texts of the ordination rituals), which Ullmann had certainly seen as one of the strengths of Jinty's doctoral thesis, was clearly something he did not want to hear. But it is the opening salvo of Jinty's lecture that was the most challenging to a certain audience in 1977: she starts with Meyer Fortes and Edmund Leach, and refers to Georges Balandier. Not that the citation of social anthropologists was new to Jinty or to other historians. Peter Sawyer was an enthusiast. And in Oxford one could point to Michael Wallace-Hadrill, Keith Thomas and Peter Brown: among Cambridge classicists there were Moses Finley and Keith Hopkins, and there were the heirs of H. M. Chadwick in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic. There was also the Cambridge degree in Archaeology and Anthropology. But Ullmann had not joined in the enthusiasm for the discipline.

Paul Fouracre, in his fine Guardian obituary for Jinty,[3] singled out her article 'On the limits of the Carolingian Renaissance' as a piece which challenged existing interpretations. It too was published in 1977. A third paper, from the previous year, 'Symbols in Context: Rulers' Inauguration Rituals in Byzantium and the West in the Early Middle Ages', makes reference to anthropology, and thanks the LSE anthropologist Jonathan Parry for advice, although the paper in *Early Medieval Kingship* actually offers a critique of the use she had made in 1976 of ideas drawn from India.

But within Jinty's œuvre the Leeds lecture is particularly explicit in its use of anthropology. In later pieces the influence of anthropology would become more fully digested, and at the same time more muted, as other approaches and questions became more prominent – such as women's history, obviously (though that is actually signalled more than once in the *Early Medieval Kingship* paper, with its reference to the anointing of queens). Also story-telling – I think Jinty learnt a lot from her encounter with Natalie Zemon-Davies. But already in 1977 one can hear the unique blend of scholarship and conversational tone that was one of her hallmarks.

This leads me to ask why anthropology was so important to Jinty in the mid-1970s. One answer is surely the time she spent in China with her husband Howard in the

[3] *The Guardian*, 5 Nov. 2024.

late 1960s. Linked to that, at least in my memory, is her fascination with *Fanshen:* both William Hinton's huge anthropological study of Long Bow village in China,[4] and David Hare's dramatisation of it for Joint Stock in 1975. How well Jinty knew David Hare I don't know: but she was friends with his regular collaborator Howard Brenton. In my very regular encounters with Jinty between 1974 and 1977 I was constantly struck by how much she wanted to talk about *Fanshen*, both the book and the play. It does not appear, to my knowledge, in any of her footnotes, and it would scarcely provide an entrée into a study of inauguration rituals (although I do think that it helped Jinty envisage how small communities work and how they interact with higher authority).

Like all fine scholars, Jinty developed her approach over time, and it is not difficult to point to a number of turning points – not least those that can be linked with her connections to the Bucknell/Woolstone group, and with Frans Theuws's working party in the *Transformation of the Roman World* project. But the mid-1970s, and especially 1976/7, mark a very particular moment in her development as a scholar: the moment at which she proclaimed, in her words, 'The *Ordinesforschung* should be only a part of our repertoire.' The articles of 1976 and 1977 show her grappling with the problem of how to understand early medieval societies as living organisms, especially in those areas where our texts are most formulaic. One solution to that problem was to look to anthropology. In that context her contribution to *Early Medieval Kingship* was a hugely significant milestone.

*Ian N. Wood*
*University of Leeds*

## 'Queens as Jezebels: The Careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1978), 31–77.

Published in 1978, three years ahead of Suzanne Fonay Wemple's similarly influential *Women in Frankish Society* (1981), Jinty Nelson's 'Queens as Jezebels' changed our view of the Merovingian world, and in forty-six densely packed pages demonstrated the intellectual thrill of really good women's history.

But it also did much more than this. Despite its substantial length, 'Queens as Jezebels' has a breathless, break-neck quality, which is due to its almost reckless ambition and scope. For in this essay, Jinty aimed not merely to change how readers made sense of the comparison of early medieval queens to their much-maligned predecessor, the Israelite queen Jezebel, but also to change the horizon of the possible in the field of medieval history, and effect a broader change in how historians approach their sources.

Among the myriad insights of this kaleidoscopic *magnum opus*, five can be singled out as prescient and consequential in the way they influenced or anticipated later developments in the field.

[4] W. Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York, 1966).

### *Queens are not like other women*

Jinty had a sharp eye for how awkwardly kingship sat within the wider landscape of Merovingian kinship and coalition-building. Already from the article's first page, she stresses the fact that in this context queens cannot be typical. It is not only that by definition their lives are set apart from those of other women; she quickly goes deeper, to demonstrate that being set apart was sometimes a criterion for being chosen as queen in the first place. A foreign woman such as the Visigothic princess Brunhild, or a low-status woman such as the enslaved Balthild, had in common an important characteristic: each in her own way, these women were outsiders to the web of influence and promise-keeping of the Merovingian aristocracy. Each was independent of male relatives within that aristocracy who might seek to benefit from her influence. This fact made her advice more valuable and her influence less dangerous to the king who married her.

## The household is a place of wider consequence

If the palace was a place 'in which all revolves around the queen' (p. 47), the domestic lives of queens held significance that reached far beyond the palace walls. Would her husband love her or cast her aside? Would her child be a girl or a boy? The answers to these questions had consequences. In stressing this point, Jinty helped to loosen the hold of a deeply entrenched nineteenth-century paradigm, in which the significance of female actors was confined imaginatively to the 'private sphere'. In the Merovingian world, family relationships had a profound symbolic power as well as pragmatic significance for the spheres of politics and economics. It had never been a secret that domestic relations were nodes through which powerful social currents were channelled; the Merovingian writers themselves recognised this and spoke of it openly. But Jinty rightly gave new significance to this fact at a moment where questions regarding female agency were being re-evaluated across the historical spectrum. 'Our discussion of these two queens' careers [viz. of Brunhild and Balthild] has indicated less the alleged drawbacks of a woman's position than a kind of strength inherent precisely in its domestic location' (p. 74).

## To a powerful woman, the church could be both friend and foe

At the centre of the piece is a paradox: Merovingian churchmen delighted in brandishing a battery of misogynistic rhetoric – we will return to the eponymous 'Jezebel' accusation below – and yet they were often more than willing to collaborate with queenly allies. Women were often involved in the intersection of royal power with the power of the holy: 'it is precisely their interrelation which makes for some fundamental continuities in the Merovingian period … we can understand the religious *as* political, and vice versa, in the Merovingian world' (p. 73). Women and churchmen had something in common as individuals expert in the handling of 'soft power', influence rooted in familial bonds, charity, coalition-building and moral influence. And there was also the fact that like so many others, churchmen were understandably keen to reap the benefit, where they could, of queenly influence.

### Having a weak king can have its advantages

The fourth insight is one about regency. Jinty illuminated the unique social value, in a society rooted in kinship coalitions, of a king who had not yet established his ability to defend his throne. Such a person could bring many advantages to those around him. To begin with, controlling a weak king was an opportunity for men and women who could not hope to be kings themselves to enjoy, at least on a temporary basis, a share of the prerogatives of royal power. A king who had not yet reached the stage of independence, who did not yet know his own mind, was a figure of productive ambiguity. To an aristocracy inclined to welcome any opportunity to renegotiate standing and access to royal favour, such a figure offered an intoxicating sense of infinite possibility. In channelling the hopes of these favour-seekers, a widowed mother could play a particularly influential role, at least until her son reached maturity. But to claim this role, 'a widowed queen was thrown back on the personal ties she had formed during her husband's lifetime, and on her own political skill: for on these depended how much treasure and influence (the two were not unconnected) she might be able to salvage' (p. 38).

### Misogyny should not be confused with information

Finally, 'Queens as Jezebels' lives up to the promise of its title by bringing a tactical analysis to how and why churchmen and others chose to invoke misogynistic themes and paradigms. Jinty saw what few others had noticed, that recourse to misogynistic themes was a tactic that could be suited to a wide variety of purposes. It could cover a weak argument; it could serve as a foil to enhance the virtues of a holy man; it could provide distraction in cases where some sleight of rhetorical hand was required. What it was not was a rhetorical frame suited to conveying reliable information. After a sustained analysis of a case in which Eddius Stephanus compares Balthild to Jezebel in his *Life of Wilfrid*, Jinty is almost tart in her dismissal: 'Here the point is simply that the *Vita Wilfridi* and Bede who depends on it ... need not seriously affect our assessment of the regency of Balthild' (p. 66).

These observations have only scratched the surface of what is marvellous about Jinty's breakthrough study. It is fitting to conclude with the opening line of 'Queens as Jezebels', in which Jinty paid homage to Rosalind Hill, in whose Festschrift the article was published. 'Since they got a toe-hold in universities, the achievement of women in the field of medieval history has been high.' She might have added, and her own article proves the point, that things were only just getting started.

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## 'Legislation and Consensus in the Reign of Charles the Bald', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. P. Wormald, D. Bullough and R. Collins (Oxford, 1983), 202–27.

Originally published in the Festschrift volume for Michael Wallace-Hadrill in 1983, and an important stepping stone towards her later monograph on Charles the Bald, this

essay examines both the contents and manuscript traditions of the extensive capitulary legislation of the king, of which about fifty different examples survive. The weight of learning underpinning its twenty pages (more or less) of text and another five of supporting appendices is formidable enough, but what continues to astonish me are the field-defining insights crammed into such a brief compass.

Most immediately, it makes the fundamental point that early medieval legislation was customarily produced at assemblies. Jinty's interest here was investigating the broader suggestion that the greater frequency of references to consensus and agreement in his legislative acts was an indication of Charles's relative lack of power compared to his more famous grandfather of the same name. In partially overturning, or at least parrying, that interpretation, she demonstrated beyond doubt that Carolingian capitulary legislation, whether of Charles, Louis the Pious or the great Charlemagne himself, was generally a written record of decisions taken at assemblies of the great and good, ecclesiastical and secular, of the Empire/kingdom. Properly absorbing this point – although this might reflect my own personal ignorance – was a complete light-bulb moment. When you go back through the surviving law codes of the post-Roman west, whether Merovingian Frankish, Burgundian, Anglo-Saxon or Visigothic kingdoms, it quickly becomes apparent that the evidence is overwhelming. Law codes were, wherever evidence survives, agreed or at least promulgated at similar meetings of the great and the good, and indications to this effect are prevalent enough to make it a reasonable hypothesis that *every* early medieval law code had its origins in an assembly of this type.

This highlights the general importance of assemblies to the workings of early medieval western Europe, providing a line of intellectual attack which certainly merits greater exploration, but far from exhausts the riches of Jinty's piece. A second major contribution lies in its acute analysis – based on a detailed investigation of the convoluted manuscript evidence – of how the Carolingian capitulary tradition had slowly gathered momentum. Charlemagne's meetings, for instance, did not always generate an agreed written record of decisions taken. Many of the surviving texts from his reign were *aide-mémoires* created by individual participants – clerical or lay – which is one reason why there are some variant capitularies from the same assembly. Neither in the time of Charlemagne, certainly, nor long into the reign of Louis the Pious was anyone systematically collecting such written records of the assembly decision-making as were produced. Argument continues over how official the efforts of Ansegis to collect existing texts in the mid-820s were, but they were clearly insufficient. An astonishing one third of the capitularies of Charlemagne and Louis that appear in *Pseudo-Isidore* were faked by its author(s), demonstrating clearly that, in the second quarter of the ninth century, no one really knew what decisions had been made by Charlemagne and his son, leaving the field wide open for inventive fraudsters. Only under Charles the Bald did the Carolingians finally get the hang of the necessary bureaucratic procedures for a governmental system that was going to operate effectively on the basis of authoritative written decisions. First, you need official texts produced at the end of each meeting, recording the decisions made, and then you need systematically to collect them. As Jinty shows so clearly from the manuscript evidence, Carolingian bureaucrats had finally worked all this out by the 850s, and from that point onwards new laws were being made in the light of what had been agreed at previous meetings, as

demonstrated in the sequence of explicit cross-references within these latter texts to earlier decisions.

This broader model of bureaucratic development is again an extraordinarily powerful game-changer with a huge range of potential applications. The late Roman state, for one, went through a similar process of slowly developing systematic control over its potentially authoritative written declarations (the east started keeping central copies of everything only from 398, the west from 418[5]), as did the Papacy – eventually – in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and most of the early medieval western successor states, too, can be shown to have groped their way part or all the way along similar evolutionary paths.

Rather than pursuing all this further, however, I want to finish by highlighting a hugely enjoyable, cheerfully subversive conclusion which emerges from the paper as a whole. Jinty's intellectual formation – directly and indirectly (in the persons not least of Ganshof and her own supervisor Walter Ullmann) – took place in a historiographical context dominated by ideas that it was the prevailing structures of bureaucratic government which made Carolingian rulers so powerful. 'Legislation and Consensus' demonstrates beyond doubt, however, that in the Carolingian case the relationship was an inverse one. Carolingian government developed bureaucratic maturity only in the era of (one of) Charlemagne's grandsons, when it was already losing much of its underlying force.

*Peter Heather*
*King's College London*

## 'Public Histories and Private History in the Works of Nithard', *Speculum*, 60(2) (1985), 251–93.

First, some words from the last page of Jinty's last great book, *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne*: 'My quest first and foremost has been to trace a life in time. I have tried to grasp the complex personality of this exceptional man and the memories and experiences that helped to form it.' And then the book's final sentences: 'I have not found him – that would be ridiculously too much to hope. But perhaps I have encouraged new generations of historians to get nearer still.'

The quest to understand individuals who lived so long ago, and who necessarily had voices and thoughts of their own, was a quest which had long been in Jinty's mind, and one which she thought systematically about in papers such as 'The Problematic in the Private' (*Social History* 15, 1990), and 'Writing Early Medieval Biography' (*History Workshop Journal* 50, 2000). The more she wrote the closer she came to being an 'old-fashioned biographer, not ignoring structures, but not privileging them either'.[6] She did not find Charlemagne, but what she had done, as she noted in an essay entitled 'Did Charlemagne Have a Private Life?', was to try as hard as possible to guess plausibly at what made him tick, even – and this is the bit I love – 'if it meant

[5] T. Honoré, *Law in the Crisis of Empire, 379–455 AD: The Theodosian Dynasty and its Quaestors* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 141ff.

[6] J. L. Nelson, *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne* (2019), 4, 493; 'En tant que Britannique, j'aborderai naturellement les choses sous un angle empirique', in J. L. Nelson, 'Du couple et des couples à l'époque carolingienne', *Médiévales,* 65 (2013), 19–31, at 19.

sailing close to the imaginative wind and certainly into the eye of the speculative storm'.[7]

That quest for the private first surfaced in 'Public Histories and Private History in the Work of Nithard'. Nithard was a high-ranking lay aristocrat who attached his fortunes to the cause of the young Charles the Bald; they were both grandsons of the king he named *Karolus magnus*. His insider history of politics and war in the years 839–42 has long been recognised as offering a crucial alternative to the overwhelmingly ecclesiastical bias of the extant sources – all the more precious because it survives in just one early-ish (late tenth century) manuscript. Jinty analysed it much more closely than anyone before her, successfully teasing out private reasons behind the bleak tone audible at the end of his work, showing how in the politicking that filled his books 3 and 4, he had been outmanoeuvred by another great noble, Adalhard.[8] Her analysis powerfully appealed to me partly because I too had begun to employ a historian's writings about public affairs to reconstruct what ostensibly he was not writing about, namely his own career and his private concerns.

There are other reasons for my choice, above all memories of the years 1977–84 when at her invitation I crossed over the road from LSE every week in term time, and she and I co-taught a Special Subject class on the reign of Charles the Bald. In 1980 I returned the compliment, inviting her to join me in convening the early medieval history seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, the 'Wednesday Seminar' in which she was to play a crucial role for nearly forty years.[9]

Over the next few years, while Jinty was making her translation of the Annals of St Bertin (1991) and writing her book on Charles the Bald (1992), she returned to Nithard several more times. He – unlike Einhard – was a warrior, and she used his narrative of the struggle between brother-kings to investigate the dilemmas he and his fellow Frankish nobles faced as they steeled themselves to kill one another, as they did – and on a scale that shocked contemporaries – at Fontenoy on 25 June 841.[10] In a lengthy account of the preliminaries to battle, Nithard blamed Lothar, the eldest of the brothers, for the descent into bloodshed, but the only part of the battle about which he gave any sort of detail was to emphasise his own contribution: 'where they attacked Adalhard and others, I gave, with God's help, no little support. The fighting was hard, but finally they all fled.'[11] With those words, composed in October 841, he closed Book 2. When some months later he reluctantly took up his pen again, he began Book 3 with a long account of the battle's aftermath, the halt called to the pursuit, the burying of the dead of both sides, and the assurance they received from assembled bishops that

[7] In *Writing Medieval Biography, 750–1250,* ed. D. Bates et al. (2006), 15–28, at 16.

[8] Repr. in J. L. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1996), 195–237, 220–25. The last public event narrated in Nithard's *History,* IV, 6, was the king's marriage to Adalhard's niece, whom – intriguingly – in this article Jinty did not name.

[9] For a very short history of the early medieval seminar from 1974 to 2013, see J. Gillingham, 'Seminar in Focus: The Earlier Middle Ages', *Past and Future*, 13 (2013), 21.

[10] 'Ninth-Century Knighthood: The Evidence of Nithard', repr. in J. L. Nelson, *The Frankish World* (London, 1996), 75–87; 'Carolingian Violence and the Ritualization of Ninth-Century Warfare', in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. G. Halsall (Woodbridge, 1998), 90–107.

[11] *Haud modicum supplementum, domino auxiliante, praebui.* II, 10. Note the first-person singular.

unless they had deliberately acted out of 'anger, hatred or vainglory' they were guiltless of sin. Nithard and his friends got the bishops to issue 'moral pronouncements that were out of line with their own textbooks.'[12] He, as Jinty emphasised, had his own moral code: it was better 'to die nobly rather than betray and abandon their king' (*nobiliter mori quam regem proditum derelinquere*).[13] He lived up to it. His contemporary epitaph at St Riquier shows that he died fighting in another battle: 'Death seized him' (*subito in bello ...hostile gladio*).[14]

My memories of Jinty on Nithard were revived when, asked to contribute to her Festschrift, I seized the opportunity to write a few pages on him, focusing on the literally epic scale of the slaughter at Fontenoy. I drew attention to the way Nithard avoided mentioning the pursuit and the slaughter in Book II, and then, in Book III, managed to downplay both.[15] He undoubtedly possessed what in 1985 she had already called his 'true historian's artifice in the selection and presentation of what he wanted to say'. For all these reasons, Jinty's 1985 article remains for me, like her, unforgettable.

*John Gillingham*
*London School of Economics*

## 'Dispute Settlement in Carolingian West Francia', in *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (Cambridge, 1986), 45–64.

This paper was published in 1986 in *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, edited by Paul Fouracre and myself. Jinty focused on four ninth-century texts, with full translation of three of them. These were: the 828 record of *coloni* who came from the settlement of Antoigné to King Pippin I of Aquitaine at Chasseneuil in order to complain that the monastery of Cormery had raised their rents unreasonably;[16] the 861 record of a different group of *coloni* who came from Mitry to King Charles the Bald at Compiègne to complain that the monastery of Saint-Denis was treating them as unfree and imposing servile obligations, although they had always been free (this was the text only partly translated);[17] a record of *c.* 875 detailing the court case of Bishop Wulfad of Bourges against Count Eccard over control of Perrecy, heard before *missi* at Mont in Burgundy;[18] and a record of three hearings in the 857 court case of the priest Nortbert against Autbert and his sister Agintrude and her husband Amalgar over property in

[12] Nelson, *Frankish World*, 83–4. Not until the twelfth century did the letter of canon law surrender to secular pressure.

[13] *Ibid.*, 82; Nithard, *History,* II, 4.

[14] MGH, *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini,* II, 139–40. When he was killed remains uncertain, perhaps in 844, perhaps later. Archaeologists now say that the bones found at St-Riquier in 1989 and once thought to be his, cannot be.

[15] J. Gillingham, 'Fontenoy and After: Pursuing Enemies to the Death in France between the 9th and 11th Centuries', in *Frankland: The Franks and the World of the Early Middle Ages,* ed. P. Fouracre and D. Ganz (Manchester, 2007), 242–65, at 251–5.

[16] *Recueil des Actes de Pépin I et Pépin II, rois d'Aquitaine (814–848)*, ed. L. Levillain (Paris, 1926), no. 12.

[17] *Recueil des Actes de Charles II le Chauve*, ed. G. Tessier, 3 vols (Paris, 1943–55), II, no. 228.

[18] *Recueil des chartes de Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire*, ed. M. Prou and A. Vidier (Paris and Orleans, 1900), no. 24.

the villa of Malebuxis in the Loire valley, heard before Saramian, provost of St Martin, Tours, on the second occasion at Tours.[19] The two groups of *coloni* lost, as did Bishop Wulfad and Autbert and his sister.

Jinty framed the paper with reference to the prevailing historiography, contrasting the view of van Caenegem and Boulet-Sautel that procedure was fundamentally 'irrational' with the view of Ganshof and Levillain that the capitularies prescribed top-down innovations in judicial procedure, making justice a matter of state control.[20] Declaring both to be 'too narrow' and involving questionable assumptions, she demonstrated, as did other papers in the book, that evidence was regularly taken from witnesses and from documents and that judgment was collective. Writing with enviable clarity and deep knowledge of potentially relevant primary texts, Jinty provides readable and nuanced translations of her case studies and plenty of context for each case. She argues throughout for the power of local potentates (inasmuch as government could not do anything without the people already established on the ground, 'top-down control' is an irrelevance); also for the importance of custom over capitularies; and for the importance of local participation. There are many characteristic touches. She was extremely interested in locations (as she still was when working on Charlemagne) and she would pore over maps of France, working out how far the *coloni*, with their children, had to travel and whether or not they had to travel overnight. She already had a keen interest in the treatment of women and in the power of their contributions: Agintrude had mounted a spirited defence and stated that witnesses could not be found to support her case because local people were frightened of the priest (uncharacteristically Jinty several times uses 'manpower' of labouring people, which she would not have done later). She ends with the comment that 'churches, as disputants, were more interested in victory than in compromise' and that it was 'fear of the priest' that conditioned evidence.

Not everyone liked the paper. There exists a three-page letter from an American lawyer specifically critiquing this piece. It includes the extraordinary sentence, referring to the *coloni* of Antoigné, 'She seems to be very lost here', because the author did not like her treatment of law and custom. Nor did he like her 'simple prose'.

Jinty wasn't lost. Her treatment was subtle and very well informed. To me the paper is important not only for the many points she makes about evidence, echoed elsewhere in the book, but because it boldly challenges orthodoxies about Carolingian government; it demonstrates the importance of the local; it questions the 'idealized picture of local consensus'; it gives a role to peasant agency; and, in tilting against ecclesiastical control, it raises the all-important question of who wrote the records.

But better than that, there is a memo from Jinty written in April 1982, setting out why three of the cases were historically important. Antoigné and Mitry are important because they are rare examples of Carolingian judgments (when she first talked about

[19] *Textes relatifs aux institutions privées et publiques aux époques mérovingienne et carolingienne*, ed. M. Thévenin (Paris, 1887), no. 89.

[20] R. C. van Caenegem, 'La preuve dans le Droit du moyen âge occidental'; M. Boulet-Sautel, 'Aperçus sur le système des preuves dans la France coutumière au moyen âge'; F. Ganshof, 'La preuve dans le Droit franc', all in *La preuve*, II, *Recueil de la Société Jean Bodin*, 17 (1965). L. Levillain, 'Les Nibelungen historiques', *Annales du Midi*, 49 (1937), 337–408.

these cases, she provided statistics) and 'because of what they reveal of economic conditions and social conflict at the level of a single estate'; and Mitry is also important because it reveals conflict within the peasant community: prosperous tenants versus the oppressed. Perrecy is important not only because, in dealing with well-known people, it throws light on factional politics in the 870s but because it shows 'how misleading can be any sharp distinction between public and private justice'. Thereby she foreshadows so much subsequent discussion.

*Wendy Davies*

### 'The Last Years of Louis the Pious', in *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Peter Godman and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1990), 147–59.

The deposition of Louis the Pious at Soissons in 833 has been taken to characterise his reign and the nature of sovereignty after Charlemagne. Two Carolingian annals have the same entry for the year 833: *Francorum dedecus* (the shame of the Franks).[21] In 1986, at a conference about Louis the Pious held in Oxford, Jinty Nelson delivered a brief paper which suggested that this focus was a misunderstanding of Louis's reign.[22] She noted that historians had ignored the years from 834 to 840. In this article Jinty wanted to get away from 'the overwhelmingly ideas-dominated interpretations traditionally offered for the years 814–833'. Most current writing about the Carolingians remains 'ideas-dominated': although the Oxford conference papers said little about the rebellions against Louis and his brief deposition, two later books, by Mayke de Jong[23] and Courtney Booker,[24] treated 833 as the central event of his reign. When she wrote, Theodor Schieffer, Walter Ullmann, Percy Ernst Schramm[25] and H. H. Anton were the chief investigators of the crisis of 833.[26] Indeed, the article is a turning from Jinty's own earlier work on royal anointing, the subject of her Cambridge thesis, towards investigation of royal legislation and the politics of Carolingian rule.

Jinty asserted that 833 was eminently reversible. She suggests that for Louis 834 was a new beginning and that he was very much responsible for what went on. She explains the lack of a historical treatment of the last years as the result of a lack of legislation (capitularies) and the historiographical shadow of 833, which she describes

[21] *Annales Alamannici* written at the Reichenau, the source of the entry in the late ninth century *Annales Weingartenses*. These annals were noted by Courtney Booker, *Past Convictions: The Penance of Louis the Pious and the Decline of the Carolingians* (Philadelphia, PA, 2012), 83 and the footnote.

[22] P. Godman and R. Collins (eds.), *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)* (Oxford 1990). Nelson's paper pp. 147–59, reprinted in her *Frankish World*, 37–50.

[23] Mayke De Jong, *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the age of Louis the Pious* (Cambridge 2009).

[24] Booker, *Past Convictions*.

[25] P. E. Schramm, *Kaiser, Könige und Päpste, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 5 vols (Stuttgart, 1968–71). When writing her thesis Jinty had corresponded with Schramm. Neither Schramm nor Anton is mentioned in this article.

[26] H. H. Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit*, Bonner historische Forschungen 32 (Bonn, 1968) and his article 'Zum politischen Konzept karolingischer Synoden und zur karolingischen Brüdergemeinschaft', *Historisches Jahrbuch* 99 (1979), 55–132.

as an 'unfortunate episode'. Capitularies were about ideals and programmes and not necessarily about realities. Her comments raise fundamental questions about just what capitularies represent, and how they should be interpreted, particularly because she can show from the Annals of St Bertin that assemblies remained central to Louis's governance and produced written instructions for *missi*, though the texts of those instructions are lost.

The paper explores how Louis managed his adult sons wanting power, suggesting that he ousted Louis the German from the Rhineland, was strong east of the Rhine against Louis the German, and 'after 834 Lothar's resistance was broken'.[27] That strength resulted from his disposition of high office and Jinty praises his shrewd perception of priorities. Supporters for Charles the Bald were created by Louis in Auxerre and Frisia, at Tours and Nantes and after 838 in Aquitaine. Louis succeeded in rebuilding consensus, holding regular assemblies[28] and royal hunts. His bishops were not 'would-be hierocrats' but shared the desire for peace and reassurance. Louis presented himself as concerned for the Franks.

By entitling a section 'the two *res publicae*' Jinty acknowledged the discussion of Carolingian ideas of the state. She noted how, confronted with lay interest in church property, churches' interests were best served by unswerving loyalty to Louis. In these years Louis repeatedly showed military skill against rebels and Bretons, and the supply of largesse continued to be abundant.[29] The crisis of Louis's reign proved surmountable.

The paper asserts that 'It was not Soissons but Fontenoy that traumatised the Franks.'[30] That was the view of ninth-century authors: Agnellus, the Annals of Fulda, Ado of Vienne and Regino of Prüm. The impact of Soissons was perhaps greater than Jinty allows. The Astronomer wrote of *pene inaudita traguedia*.[31] Stuart Airlie points out that '833's ceremony of penance had to be countered, argued against'.[32] The 867 council of Troyes described the deposition as the work of the devil.[33] But neither Ado nor Regino treated it as a disaster. By writing about the realities of Louis's last years, rather than the understanding of his penance and ideals of resistance to royal power, Jinty

[27]Jinty gave a fuller narrative account of the last years of Louis the Pious in her *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992), 93–104.

[28]On Louis's assemblies, see D. Eichler, *Fränkische Reichsversammlungen unter Ludwig dem Frommen* (Hanover, 2007).

[29]Her argument owes much to two articles by Tim Reuter, 'Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 35 (1985), 75–94 and 'The End of Carolingian Military Expansion', given at the Oxford conference and published in *Charlemagne's Heir*, 391–405. She criticised Reuter's argument in her introduction to *The Frankish World*, xxviii–xxix.

[30]This is accepted by de Jong, *Penitential State*, 56–7.

[31]Astronomer, Vita Hludowici, c. 49, ed. Tremp, MGH SS rer. Germ. 64, p. 480. The most helpful discussion of the treatment of the reign of Louis the Pious as a tragedy is in the dissertation of N. Staubach, *Das Herrscherbild Karls des Kahlen: Formen und Funktionen monarchischer Repräsentation im frühem Mittelalter* (Münster, 1981), 30–3.

[32]S. Airlie, *Making and Unmaking the Carolingians 751–888* (2022), 147.

[33]Troyes 867, ed. W. Hartmann, MGH Concilia IV, p. 233: *Invidia diaboli operante*; p. 240: *instigante diabolo Francorum populus imperatorem sibi a deo ordinatum et apostolica sede coronatum suo sunt moliti propellere imperio.*

Nelson offered a way to escape from hindsight and to understand the forces which shaped Carolingian politics.

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### 'Women and the Word in the Earlier Middle Ages', *Studies in Church History* 27 (1990), 53–78.

'Are you going to Jinty's seminar tomorrow?' This was the question my husband, Karl Leyser, asked me on the day he had just suffered a stroke. We had indeed been planning on going to London together for just such an occasion and although of course, under the circumstances, the answer was 'no', I have always remembered the question because of what it said about the depth of Karl's admiration and respect for Jinty. These feelings were clearly mutual for while their work was not collaborative in any formal sense Jinty and Karl shared an understanding of the intensely personal nature of early European society and of how and why women of that era might exercise power. Notably in 'Women and the Word in the Earlier Middle Ages', Jinty refers to Karl's work on Saxon convents before herself moving westwards to Francia observing as she went: 'Saxony was different – not to say peculiar!' (p. 56).

Once settled in Francia Jinty kept to her deliberately ambiguous title, intending it to refer to women and the word with both a lower w and an upper-case W since she wanted to examine both women's own use of words and how they related themselves to the particular Word of Christian revelation. She wanted to look at how 'both the ways in which women were represented, and the ways women acted, were required and permitted by the conditions of the earlier medieval West' (p. 56). She was concerned with what was tolerated and what, on occasion, happened. The meanings inscribed on women were, she thought, 'diverse, and opposed', with texts lending themselves to 'multiple interpretations' in ways that notably did not apply to men (p. 58). The 'classical cultural traditions' (p. 60) which Christendom had inherited left much to be negotiated and thus was born a world of 'inspired improvisations' (p. 77) in which as yet there was no clearly defined 'private' sphere where women could be confined and controlled while men operated 'in public'. In consequence, before the birth of the university (from which women would for so many centuries be excluded) the well-born woman was allowed and expected both to be literate and to speak out; this was a world where 'Class sometimes transcended gender' (p. 77), and where aristocratic women might even be 'praised for their influential words' (p. 63). Enter, for example, the tenth-century nun Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim who despite St Paul's injunctions (I Timothy 2: 8) that demanded women 'learn in silence with all submissiveness' could nonetheless characterise herself, in a pun on the meaning of her own name, as thoroughly loud-mouthed: 'ego clamor validus' (p. 61). (Roughly translated: 'I can really make a din.') Enter Frankish Dhuoda, a 'confident author' who feels both that she can and should write a book of guidance for her fifteen-year-old son: 'I am taking a very great deal of trouble, O William my son, to send you words that will be the saving of you ... However many other books you acquire, I hope you will always want to keep reading this little book I've written for you' (p. 69).

'A very great deal of trouble': Dhuoda's words to her son William take me directly to my own experience of working with Jinty as co-editor of the *Oxford History of Medieval Europe*. In connection with this I have a number of emails so there is a trail I can follow. When faced with a problem, 'it would be nice', Jinty would say, 'to have a wee word about this'. One of the subjects that took quite a few 'wee words' was the title for the first of our volumes. Jinty was rightly doubtful about a rather off-beam suggestion I had made (to do with threshing floors) because, she wrote, 'I recently discovered in a straw poll that students nowadays don't understand what are (to them) abstruse allusions. I worry about this one. I don't even like writing this. It makes me sound elitist, but I just worry and care about communicating.' And this – caring and communicating – was of course what Jinty did so brilliantly. I suspect these were skills she may have learnt quite early on – possibly at her mother's knee where she tells us she was taught to bridle at the words 'Great Man' (*King and Emperor*, 2) – but Jinty herself, as we all know, was most certainly a great woman.

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## 'The Wary Widow', in *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. W. Davies and P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 1995), 82–113.

I chose this article not necessarily because I think it's Jinty's most important article but because I have such a strong memory of first reading it; it was the one where I most felt the scales fall from my eyes. When I finished reading it I felt as if it had left a corner of my mind rearranged forever. It changed my way of thinking about all sorts of things, and I think it made me better at what I do.

Jinty fought hard against 'the Dark Ages',[34] but she also fought against more rose-tinted views of the Middle Ages. This article challenges the idea of the period before the twelfth century as a 'golden age for women'. Widows had been seen as a particularly promising case in that line of thought, because you see widows in so many documents from the ninth and tenth centuries making donations of land to churches on their own behalf, with no one apparently doing it with them or supervising them. This *looks* like economic clout, independent action – all the things that tend to scream 'women's agency' at us.[35]

Jinty turns this expectation on its head using the example of an otherwise unremarkable widow named Erkanfrida, who wrote a testament disposing of her property. She shows that, although Erkanfrida does give a lot of property to a variety of churches, she wasn't really making a free disposal of her assets: what she was making was a series of deals with a whole bunch of men, using all of the property she felt she had a claim to. Instead of a husband, she now had a multiplicity of male claimants to contend with. Erkanfrida was giving all these people a vested interest in preserving her claims, and

[34]J. L. Nelson, 'The Dark Ages', *History Workshop Journal*, 63 (2007), 191–201.

[35]For another key critical discussion: P. Stafford, '*La mutation familiale*: A Suitable Case for Caution', in J. Hill and M. Swan eds., *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, (Turnhout, 1998), 103–25.

making herself less marginal, by making them future beneficiaries. Jinty shows beautifully that, instead of having won life's lottery by living longer than their husbands and becoming widows, women like her in Carolingian Francia probably had to reckon with many more men in order to find agency for themselves. Without making all these promises to secure these male patrons, it's clear she didn't have a chance of holding on to her property. And Jinty ends with this great phrase, of the kind that she had a magnificent knack for finding, where she says that, while Erkanfrida might have *hoped* that her wishes would be respected, 'hers was the hope placed by the weak in the strong' (p. 111).

For me this was not just interesting and worth knowing in itself; it's about the point of method as well. There's a natural tendency to think that people who generate their own source material somehow have more agency. Erkanfrida does have agency, but it took a lot for her to find it. Perhaps the most counter-intuitive adjustment in perspective we need to make when we think about women in the middle ages – and since then I've found out this applies to twelfth-century Egypt[36] as much as to ninth-century Francia – is how independent economic activity can't be taken as a straightforward index of independence in terms of actual experience of life: when you find lots of records where women are doing things with their property, it can be just as much, if not more often, an index of their desperation and vulnerability.

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**'The Siting of the Council at Frankfort: Some Reflections on Family and Politics', in *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794. Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur*, i, ed. R. Berndt (Mainz, 1997), 149–65.**

This article from 1997 is not one of the big historiographically resonant pieces; 16 pages and 64 footnotes, compared to 1978's 'Queens as Jezebels' (48 pages and 239 footnotes) or 1985's 'Nithard' (42 pages, 158 notes, 2 Appendices). But students love it. And so should tutors. It is a teaching piece. It is for every kind of reader.

Students love the simplicity (and clarity) of the argument. The question and the answering argument are very straightforward. Jinty tries to work out why Charlemagne chose to hold the great 794 assembly at Frankfurt, rather than at Worms or Aachen, etc. This was part of the shift of political gravity from the west of the Frankish kingdom, the Seine–Aisne region, to the east, the Rhine–Main region. One possible answer is the sway of his queen, local lass Fastrada. Her own eastern family connections and interests here mean that Fastrada herself is the answer to what Jinty poses as the real question: 'why did Fastrada choose Frankfort?' (p. 162). This becomes credible when the paper zeroes in on Fastrada's reputation. Written after her death, the *Royal Frankish Annals* and Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne* tell us that

[36] Cf. Eve Krakowski's splendid *Coming of Age in Medieval Egypt: Female Adolescence, Jewish Law, and Ordinary Culture* (Princeton, NJ, 2018).

she was cruel and that this 'cruelty' triggered the only two rebellions against mild-mannered Charlemagne. Jinty simply flips this over, taking the misogyny as in fact these sources' tribute through clenched teeth to Fastrada's very real power and high status. In this light, contemporary references (i.e. written before she died) to her political and personal closeness to Charlemagne, to her responsibilities and stark power in the palace, make a lot of sense, and cast light on regional power structures in east Francia as well as in the royal centres. She was a player. Aglow with agency, Jinty's Fastrada helps steer the Carolingian centre of gravity to the east, brings severe moderation to tensions in the royal kin, wields startlingly violent power in the palace, etc.

Jinty pushes her materials pretty hard. Since Fastrada belonged to an aristocratic east Frankish family, why shouldn't the rich seventh-century grave of a princess under Frankfurt cathedral be that of one of her ancestors? Why shouldn't her ill health be another reason why her loving husband Charlemagne holds the assembly in Frankfurt? Students love this kind of historical imagination. Who doesn't? But perhaps at times Jinty overstates her case. While she remains, of course, ever sensitive to historical context, does she ascribe too much agency to Fastrada? Is she trying too hard to make the past less harsh than it was? Is this the kind of problem with retrospective granting of agency to the exploited and marginalised, the problem so well analysed by Lynn M. Thomas back in 2016?[37]

To ask this, however, is simply to point to a challenge and debate that Jinty would have enjoyed and which in fact she wants, she invites. She knows that she is pushing points as far as she can. But she sets out her dossier of contemporary sources as clearly and briefly as she can; this article is not an edict, it is an open-ended DIY kit for students of all ages to make their own judgements, their own articles. Here it resembles her later article on Bertrada, Charlemagne's mother, which explicitly and even more fully sets out a dossier of essential sources, and her article on 'The Voice of Charlemagne' where she translates the key sources for her reader. Her message is clear: here are the tools, get busy. 'Kinder, schafft Neues!', as Richard Wagner said, and Jinty relished Wagner's music.

And she had other reasons for pushing hard. This paper is only one example of her creative historical engagement with gender; it came from the specific context of a conference in 1990s Germany (to be fair, that conference also had another paper on Fastrada) where interest in gender topics and questions was not always high. I myself was to witness the bafflement of some eminent professors after Jinty's Bertrada paper in Bonn in 2002 at a conference on Charlemagne's father Pippin. Why had Professor Nelson spent her time on that topic? Jinty knew that this kind of work had to be done again and again, and not just in Germany. Her great book on Charlemagne found time to quote an eminent professor's view of Fastrada as some sort of beautiful and cruel queenly vampire (!).[38] Systems never sleep; historians must stay alert.

Finally, if I myself thought that she did overdo her case for Fastrada a bit, I was, of course, wrong. The exciting 2023 discovery of the Charlemagne-Fastrada coin showed

[37]L. M. Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', *Gender & History*, 28.2 (2016), 324–39.

[38]Nelson, *King and Emperor*, 205.

that Jinty was right about her prominence, and about the intensity of her relationship to Charlemagne.[39] Another Nelson win! Long live the queen.

*Stuart Airlie*
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### 'The Voice of Charlemagne', in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. Richard Gameson and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford, 2001), 76–88.

'The Voice of Charlemagne' is a short paper, but one that I've often referred to. That's partly because it includes a useful translation from the Latin of two of Charlemagne's capitularies, documents expressing his royal will.[40] But the main reason I've often gone back to this article is because it considers a question that both Jinty and I were fascinated by: what did Carolingian reform mean in practice?

When I re-read the article yet again for this talk, what struck me this time was Jinty's ability to change her mind. Paul Fouracre has already discussed here her 1977 article 'On the Limits of The Carolingian Renaissance'.[41] Then, Jinty was not just sceptical about the concept of 'renaissance', but also suggested alternatives such as 'reform' and 'correctio', which have now become standard labels for the cultural changes in the Carolingian empire. She also stated, against the then prevailing view, 'most Carolingian capitularies cannot be classed as legislation at all'. So why was she studying several of these capitulary texts so closely more than twenty years later?

At one level, it's because, like Marc Bloch, whom she quotes in this article, Jinty was always keen for 'scenting human flesh':[42] she wanted to hear the voice of Charlemagne, and of whatever other early medieval figures she could, from queens to peasants. It's typical that she starts the paper with Einhard's reference to Charlemagne's actual voice not matching his bodily size, lists other possible sources for Charlemagne's 'personal views', before focusing on some late capitularies that she argues give 'echoes of a distinctive voice'. In that sense, this paper can be seen as one of many preliminary studies for her last major work: the biography of Charlemagne published in 2019.

Her interest in Charlemagne, however, was not purely concerned with his personality. Jinty also returned to these capitularies because she, along with scholars such as Rosamond McKitterick and Mayke de Jong, had helped create a new idea of Carolingian

[39] S. Coupland, 'A Coin of Queen Fastrada and Charlemagne', *Early Medieval Europe*, 31.4 (2023), 585–97. I am very grateful to Alice Rio for organising this tribute to Jinty, and inviting me.

[40] I once adapted a phrase from Jinty's translation into an article title: R. Stone, '"In what way can those who have left the world be distinguished?" Masculinity and the Difference between Carolingian Men', in Cordelia Beattie and Kirsten Fenton eds, *Intersections of Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2011), 12–33.

[41] See the contribution by Paul Fouracre above.

[42] M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans P. Putnam (New York, 1953), ch. 1, p. 26: 'The good historian is like the giant of the fairy tale. He knows that wherever he catches the scent of human flesh, there his quarry lies.'

reform.[43] This new paradigm highlighted cooperation between secular and ecclesiastical powers in a project of Christian renewal at both the personal and social level. The religious values and overall goals of this project were shared and developed at courts and assemblies, but its practical implementation was highly variable and decentralised. In the article she describes how after 802, 'the capitulary form was bursting at the seams' (p. 79). Charlemagne, whom Jinty calls 'an old man in a hurry' (p. 82), was using capitularies as agendas to frame discussions with his assembled magnates. She describes him as trying to create an atmosphere 'like a cross between Quaker meeting and quality inspection, with traces of confessional, lawcourt, touch-group and management training session' (p. 81). Several scholars have since used managerial language about the Carolingians, but I think Jinty was one of the first to see those multiple resonances.

I don't think Jinty ever ceased to believe that there were limits to the Carolingian renaissance, but she did come to appreciate more how Charlemagne pressed against these limits. Perhaps once she herself was no longer a young woman in a hurry, but had lived for longer with Charlemagne, as it were, she could appreciate more what he was trying to do. In 'The Voice of Charlemagne' she highlights Charlemagne's searching questions to his counts, bishops and abbots, including the most basic of all: 'whether we are really Christians' (p. 86, c. 9). She ends with a call for historians to 'attune our ears to authentic tones of Carolingian spirituality' (p. 85), and Jinty's article, in her own distinctive voice, definitely helps us to do that.

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### 'Gendering Courts in the Early Medieval West', in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. J. M. H. Smith and L. Brubaker (Cambridge, 2004), 185–98.

'Gendering Courts in the Early Medieval West' is among Jinty Nelson's shortest articles, and it packs a huge punch. As with so much of her best work, it is a response to the inadequacies of existing scholarship as she identified them. But there was a specific piece of grit from which this pearl grew. Jinty had been a key player in the sub-group of the Transformation of the Roman World project (TRW) devoted to 'Power and Society', which I was invited to join when I returned to British academia in 1995, after nearly a decade teaching in the USA. Although I had first met Jinty when I was a doctoral student in Oxford, it was in the context of that sub-group's meetings that we got to know each other well. When the TRW project started, Jinty had already published several notable articles on women (especially royal women) and gender, but this international project had been conceived and managed by a group of scholars of an older mindset. Its neglect of social history, especially of women and gender, prompted efforts by myself and Leslie Brubaker to establish a follow-on project to remedy the deficit. The result, in 2004, was the volume we co-edited on *Gender in the Early Medieval*

[43] See, for example, R. McKitterick ed., *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge, 1994); A. Westwell, I. Rembold and C. van Rhijn eds., *Rethinking the Carolingian Reforms* (Manchester, 2023).

*World, East and West, 300–900*, which included Jinty's piece on 'Gendering Courts'. Jinty had been central to the extensive discussions among the contributors which informed the essays but – as commonly was the case – was so heavily committed that she was the last author to get her article to the editors. We refused to send the book to press without her, and I recollect that when it finally reached me, my immediate reaction was relief at its arrival coupled with disappointment that it was so very short. It printed up at only thirteen pages, but my dismay could not have been more inappropriate, and here's why.

Central to 'Gendering Courts' is a manifesto about how to do this sort of history. Jinty frequently encapsulated some of her most incisive thoughts in a Shakespearean quotation, and this one appears on the penultimate page. 'An early medieval historian keen to understand how courts worked in the sub-Roman world', she wrote, 'must be, like Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, "a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles".' How true, and not only of early medieval historians or historians of courts elsewhere. Jinty's brilliance was to snap up numerous tiny textual fragments – an un-considered word or sentence here and there – and craft a big argument out of them.

It takes something of an effort of imagination to remember that 'Court Studies' only emerged as a recognised field of study in the 1990s, not long after gender history had burst upon the scene. (The journal *The Court Historian* started in 1996, for example, seven years after *Gender & History*.) At that time, historians generally took their cue from Norbert Elias's arguments that a recognisable 'court society', a feature of his 'Civilising Process', only emerged in the early modern era, paradigmatically at Louis XIV's Versailles. One effect of Michel Foucault's notoriously gender-blind studies of sexuality and modes of disciplining the self was a reinforcement of Elias's position. But as Jinty remarked trenchantly at the end of the first paragraph of 'Gendering Courts', 'Both [Elias and Foucault] tended to write as if the world consisted of men only.' Her thirteen pages of 'un-considered trifles' put them in their place: leaning on studies of medieval vernacular courtly literature, she both pushed the concept of court society and its associated modes of courtliness back by one thousand years and credited women with a central role as agents of its development and dissemination. Bluntly stated, she demonstrated that it is impossible to understand courts without understanding gender, not nearly such an obvious point twenty-five years ago as now.

It's worth drilling into this short article to reflect on Jinty's *modus operandi*. Most of its 'un-considered trifles' comprise a few words, or at most a sentence or two. An excellent Latinist who thrived on very close textual reading, Jinty knew how to squeeze the most juice out of her chosen texts. I benefitted frequently from being challenged on my interpretation or translation, and on occasion she was even prepared to criticise other scholars' readings in print. 'Gendering Courts' includes a paragraph discussing a short letter of Alcuin to Hundrud, a woman living an exemplary life of chastity at the court of Offa of Mercia. Jinty queried Hundrud's exact status: 'Whether we infer she was a nun or a veiled widow depends on how strictly the phrase *regularis vita* is interpreted.' Two words with two possible translations: the relevant footnote takes to task the author of a 2000 publication who had failed to spot this.

As in all Jinty's articles which originated as conference papers, there are passages redolent of her spoken style. One such asks 'Has anyone else wondered what happened

to the baths at Aachen after Charlemagne had gone?' Then, from the silence of the Astronomer and Thegan, she deduced that serious conversations were displaced from the homosocial context of Charlemagne's baths to the mixed-gender spaces of the hall and hunt — spaces where women were present, could participate, and might even be heard. Perhaps so: but there's an element of over-reach, for absence of evidence about the baths after 814 isn't evidence of absence. Jinty was fond of the maxim that there are some historians who like to be right, while others prefer to be interesting. How fortunate we are that she placed herself firmly among the latter!

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## 'Charlemagne and Ravenna', in *Ravenna: Its role in Earlier Medieval Change and Exchange*, ed. J. L. Nelson and J. Herrin (London, 2016), 239–52.

Jinty was one year ahead of me at Newnham College Cambridge and was already established as a brilliant scholar of medieval history in the 1960s. Although I went off to investigate the Byzantine Empire, we kept in touch and Jinty always encouraged my enthusiasm for what was then a much and wrongly neglected field of history. Over many decades we celebrated the birth of our children, our publications and her honours and promotions at King's College London. So when I returned from Princeton to London to take up the Chair of Late Antique and Byzantine Studies in the same institution I was very happy that we could cooperate more closely. This happened most notably in the volume that we edited together, *Ravenna: Its Role in Earlier Medieval Change and Exchange,* based on a workshop we organised at the Institute of Historical Research in London in 2016.

In her splendid contribution to this volume, 'Charlemagne and Ravenna', Jinty demonstrates her unmatched skill in reading behind and beyond often familiar and much cited Latin texts to reveal new and significant insights. Taking seven letters written by Pope Hadrian to Charlemagne preserved in the *Codex Carolinus* of 791, she analyses papal concerns about Archbishop Leo of Ravenna.[44] The first four (nos. 49, 53, 54, and 55, dated between late 774 and November 775, or early 776), reflect the period immediately following Charlemagne's conquest of the Lombard kingdom, when Hadrian complained that Leo was keeping certain Italian cities together with their taxes under his control.[45] The archbishop also made an unauthorised, surprise visit to Charlemagne, and even more scandalously had opened a letter from John, patriarch of Grado, destined for Hadrian himself, and had revealed its contents to the duke of Benevento and others, 'who are our rivals' (p. 245). Jinty here identifies Charlemagne's policy of 're-triangulation from three points', by which he created separate relationships with both Ravenna and Rome.[46]

[44] *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistulae*, III, ed. W. Grundlach (Berlin, 1892; repr. 1957); *Codex Epistolaris Carolinus: Letters from the Popes to the Frankish Rulers, 739–792*, trans. and ed. R. McKitterick, D. van Espelo, R. M. Pollard and R. Price, Translated Texts for Historians 77 (Liverpool, 2021).

[45] Nos. 49 (Codex Carolinus [hereafter CC], 567–90); 53 (CC, 574–6); 54 (CC, 576–7); 55 (CC, 578–80) cf. Nelson, *King and Emperor*, 151–4.

[46] J. Herrin, *Ravenna: Capital of Empire, Crucible of Europe* (2020), 358–9.

She then explains the EMBOLUM, written in capitals: an annex, rarely used in papal correspondence, which contains a more forthright denunciation of Leo for appointing his own officials to cities, in place of Hadrian's. This fractious rivalry between Ravenna and Rome over urban resources makes the pope worry that the donations made by Pepin and Charlemagne to the holy see will be undone. Another EMBOLUM is attached to the final letter of this group with specific instances of Leo's 'ferocious pride' in replacing papal officers by his own, including even the capture and imprisonment of Count Dominic, appointed to Gavello. Gregory, the papal treasurer, had also been denied access to Bologna and other cities. Hadrian begs Charlemagne not to allow 'St. Peter's church to be humiliated by evil men' (p. 246).

Jinty suggests that in these two vituperative annexes or postscripts, the pope may have been preparing a list of Leo's 'crimes' to use in a future trial for disobedience. But what Hadrian documented as the acts of a wicked, independent subordinate was exploited by Charlemagne, who identified the archbishop as successor to the Byzantine exarchs, rulers of north-east Italy from Ravenna. In his newly conquered territory, the king became aware of the city's imperial traditions as a western capital. This is also confirmed by his willingness to receive petitions from Ravenna, which limited papal authority. By detailing Charlemagne's pro-Ravenna policy, independent of his commitment to Rome, she fundamentally revises the traditional view of the papal-Frankish alliance.

The later development of the rivalry between Rome and Ravenna is mentioned in three later letters, nos. 75 (783), 81 (787) and 94 (790–1), which document the improper visit of two Ravenna *iudices* and other citizens of Ravenna and the Pentapolis to Charlemagne, and the pope's somewhat grudging agreement to the king's removal of marbles, mosaics and other items from the palace of Ravenna to enrich the new structures at Aachen.[47] While the pope could not prevent the reuse of *spolia* from Rome and Ravenna, he was desperate to sustain the promises made by Frankish kings to defend the papacy and its estates in central Italy. Jinty shows how this remained an underlying concern up to the moment of Christmas Day 800.

She concludes this illuminating analysis with the notable gifts Charlemagne made to Ravenna in his will, and his determination to move the huge, mounted statue of Theoderic from its place in front of the palace at Ravenna to Aachen. Does this explain the name chosen for his last son, born in 807 – Theoderic (p. 252)? In addition, at San Vitale Charlemagne had witnessed the mosaics of Justinian and Theodora – truly imperial depictions. Here Jinty demonstrates how the Frankish ruler, now *imperator Romanum gubernans imperium*, could have drawn inspiration from Ravenna, encouraged no doubt by Archbishop Leo and his successors.[48]

I would like to close by returning to Cambridge in the summer of 1964. That year for the first time the final History Part 2 papers were marked by number, rather than name. We all knew that Jinty would get a first, but in a surprising result many other women also gained that status – more than usual. Some examiners were not happy at

[47]Nos. 75 (CC, 606); 81 (CC, 614); 94 (CC, 632–6).

[48]Herrin, *Ravenna*, 378–80.

this, showing perhaps how in informal but pernicious ways, the recognition of brilliant women had been suppressed. I like to remember Jinty as the leader and inspirer of a great regiment of first-class women historians, many feminists, against the male prejudice of the twentieth century.

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## By way of conclusion

This collection has, inevitably, been partial. Many other colleagues and friends could have joined the contributors and added more excellent articles to this list: Jinty's back catalogue would certainly have given us plenty to go on. Some classic pieces were left out that many of us felt ought to have been included ('Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity, c. 900' is a particularly glaring omission). But in order to keep the whole enterprise to manageable proportions, it seemed best simply to stick to those who had been able to come and take part in the 'live' event at King's.

The choice of pieces included above reflects contributors' own personalities as historians, but also in great part their own personal history with Jinty. Many made their choice not only because the piece was a brilliant and important contribution in itself, but also because of associated memories of working with her, of being part of a common enterprise with her – intellectually, and in several cases also as her editors. This seemed, in a way, more valuable than a Greatest Hits approach, which may have had stronger claims to objectivity but would also have required assigning marks to her various efforts. In the end, it is these human connections that say the most about her: how much she meant to people who worked with her, the seeds she sowed, and the thoughts she provoked.

This may be why the research article was her format *par excellence*. We all have cause to feel grateful that she was able to pip illness to the post and to complete her great, long-awaited book on Charlemagne just before it became impossible for her to do so. But articles are where she made her mark; it was through them that she made her most decisive interventions in the field, and together they constitute her most important legacy.[49] Not coincidentally, in her hands they were also a fundamentally sociable, community-building format. Although a few of the pieces included here came out in journals, most were published in edited collections produced as part of a group; and some of her most classic pieces came out in Festschrifts celebrating the life and work of other scholars.

Paul Kershaw, a former doctoral student of Jinty's, seems to me to have put it best when he said that although we who knew her all mourn her and miss her greatly, next year will bring another stream of undergraduates embarking on their first year of a history degree who will discover her work anew, read her articles for the first time

[49]Many are collected in the four volumes *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*; *The Frankish World*; *Rulers and Ruling Families in Early Medieval Europe: Alfred, Charles the Bald and Others* (Aldershot, 1999); *Courts, Elites, and Gendered Power in the Early Middle Ages: Charlemagne and Others* (Aldershot, 2007).

and be blown away by them – and the year after that, and the year after that.[50] If the preceding collection can help any such future readers to navigate her rich body of work and get a better sense of her as a person, then it will have done as much as we could possibly have hoped.

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[50] At another, more public memorial event held in her memory at King's on 20 May 2025. I found this a very comforting thought, and I hope he will not mind having it repeated here!

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