Charles the Bald: the Story of an Epithet

Thesis by

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## Abbreviations

*GRF = Genealogia regum Francorum* (the earliest witness to Charles 'the Bald')

*MGH = Monumenta Germaniae Historica*

      *SS = Scriptores*

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For centuries, historians have accepted that the early medieval king and emperor Charles "the Bald" (r. 843-877) was given his nickname because he was simply bald. To their credit, the Latin *calvus*, when used to describe a person, can only be translated to 'bald'. However, Charles may not have suffered from alopecia. First, there is the question of timing: the epithet may have been coined during the emperor's lifetime, but it could possibly be post-contemporary. If the nickname was created after his death, it would be less likely to reference physical baldness; there is little reason to believe that a chronicler or scribe writing almost a century after Charles' death would have known the king was bald. Instead, the epithet might have been endowed with symbolic meanings that were applied as Charles' legacy developed. Even if the epithet were contemporary with Charles, the available evidence suggests that we should not take it literally. Though there are several possible reasons that Charles became identified with 'calvus', the most likely may be that baldness symbolically represented the king's inability to produce a suitable male heir.

This investigation of Charles' sobriquet follows three major lines of questioning. The first considers Charles, the man; his life, his legacy, and the conditions surrounding the creation and popularization of his nickname. Who was Charles, how did his contemporaries view him, and what characteristics and events from his life could have led him to be considered 'bald'? The second theme explores the meaning and traditions surrounding hair in the middle ages, with a focus on baldness. What did head and facial hair mean in the early Middle Ages and what did alleged baldness or hairiness communicate about a person? The last major topic takes a step back to look at the history and origin of early medieval epithets before considering their meaning and long-term historical consequences. Why were people given – or why did people give themselves

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– nicknames? What effects, both short and long-term, have such nicknames had on how their bearers have been represented and understood?

I.      The grandson of Charlemagne

The investigation of Charles the Bald's sobriquet begins in the most logical place, with the life and times of Charles, himself.

Charles the Bald belongs to the powerful Carolingian dynasty of early medieval Frankia. For centuries after the fall of the western Roman Empire, the Merovingian dynasty had ruled the kingdom of Frankia, which emerged in old Roman Gaul and came to cover a sizeable portion of western Europe centered on modern day France. At the turn of the 8th century, a series of weak and young Merovingian kings were used as puppets by powerful courtiers. Though the Merovingians ruled in name, the influential mayors of the palace held the true power. In 751, mayor of the palace Pippin the Short arranged to have the Merovingian king Childeric III tonsured, meaning his head was shaved, and sent away to a monastery. In a hostile takeover, Pippin the Short claimed the throne. Pippin marked the birth of what would come to be known as the Carolingian dynasty. The reinvigorated Frankish empire reached its peak a few years later under the illustrious Charlemagne, or Charles the Great. This Charles, son of Pippin the Short, is well known for conquering a large portion of western Europe, being crowned emperor over this territory, and ushering in what is considered to be a brief revival of the western Roman empire. In the early 9th century, Charlemagne was succeeded by his son Louis the Pious and on June 13th, 823, Louis' second wife, Judith, gave birth to the emperor's fourth son, Charles the Bald.

Charles was born without the promise of a kingdom of his own. Prior to Charles' birth, Louis the Pious had divided his kingdom amongst three sons: Louis (often called the German)

was given the region of Bavaria, Pippin ruled Aquitaine, and eldest son Lothar was promised the lion's share of the empire upon his father's death. When Charles was born several years later, there was no corner of the kingdom left to give. Historian Janet Nelson notes in Charles' biography that Louis was anxious about the future of his new child.[1] In order to secure a sub-kingdom for Charles to rule, Louis pleaded with his other sons to take pity on their half-brother. Eventually, Louis the Pious carved out an inheritance for Charles and ensured that Lothar would protect his young brother as the child's godfather.[2]

Lothar was initially willing to make room for Charles, but quickly grew resentful. Why should he be required to split his inheritance with such a young half-brother? In an effort to claim the entirety of the kingdom, Lothar, with the support of Pippin and Louis the German, mounted a rebellion against their father. In the wake of the rebellion, young Charles the Bald, just seven years old, was sent off to a monastery at Prüm. Nelson believes that Charles did not suffer at the hands of his brothers during this period. Importantly, the prince was not tonsured. Perhaps out of some sense of mercy or through some lingering obligation as Charles' godfather, Lothar refused to have the boy shaved[3]. Had Charles' hair been cut, he would have been ritualistically excluded from kingly power, just like Childeric III a century before. Luckily for Charles, Louis the Pious quickly reclaimed his throne and punished his rebellious sons. As a result of his brothers' transgressions, Charles' inheritance grew to include a much larger portion of the kingdom. Instead of reclaiming what they had lost to Charles the Bald; Pippin, Louis, and Lothar ended up ceding more land to their half-brother in the wake of their rebellion. This conflict marked the first battle in a lifelong struggle amongst the sons of Louis the Pious.

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[1] Janet Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 76.
[2] Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 76.
[3] From page 92 of Nelson's biography, "Lothar… could not bring himself thus to exclude Charles from the ranks of the throneworthy": Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 92.

When the emperor died in 840, conflict once again arose among the brothers. Frankia plunged into civil war. The climax of the conflict was reached in 841 when the Battle of Fontenoy pitted Lothar and Pippin II (who had replaced his father, Pippin I, a few years prior) against Charles the Bald and Louis the German. Assured of success in battle, Lothar was confident that Charles would soon be tonsured and barred from kingship.[4] However, fortune once again smiled on Charles and the younger brothers were victorious. When hostilities subsided a few years later, a division of the kingdom was drawn up as part of the Treaty of Verdun. This agreement gave Charles the western portion of the empire, Louis the east, and Lothar the middle kingdom. These three regions (with a powerless Pippin II relegated to Aquitaine within Charles' land) fluctuated in size and influence but remained the bases of power for each of the brothers until their deaths.

Having reached a climax at the battle of Fontenoy, tensions between the brothers simmered for the rest of their lives. Alliances between the three constantly shifted and battles sprang up in response to slights and dishonors both real and imagined. Over the next three decades, Charles dealt with attacks from Vikings, rebellious courtiers, and his own family. In the 850s he finally defeated Pippin II in Aquitaine and had him tonsured.[5] From this point forward Charles took on a more imperial character, finally casting himself as his grandfather's heir. When Lothar II died in 869 and left the middle kingdom without an heir, Charles the Bald immediately moved to annex the land. As a gesture of his supremacy, Charles had himself crowned king and emperor[6] in Metz. However, Charles' victory was not absolute; his brother

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[4] "Archbishop George of Ravenna promised him [Lothar] that 'Charles should be tonsured tomorrow' – hence excluded forever from kingly power." (Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 117)

[5] From the Annals of St. Bertin entry for 852 (Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 162)

[6] Charles was crowned king, but the Annals of Fulda state "he gave orders that he was to be called emperor and augustus on the grounds that now he would possess two realms": Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 219.

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Louis the German found some support in Lotharingia, which undermined Charles authority. Control over the middle region remained a sticking point between the brothers until Louis died in 876.

Prior to Louis the German's death, Charles the Bald had been summoned to Rome to protect the pope and the church from outside invaders. Italy had recently been left vacant by the death of Louis II, son of Lothar I. Seeing an opportunity, Charles quickly entered Rome and was crowned emperor of the Romans. Unhappy to be passed over for the emperorship, Louis the German invaded Charles' land in retaliation. This attack rerouted Charles and his army back over the Alps to defend his kingdom. The attacks were quickly ended when Louis the German died less than a year later. Finally, as the last surviving son, Charles attempted to seize Louis' land and unite the entirety of the Frankish kingdom. In the midst of attempting to subjugate the East, Charles the Bald was summoned to Italy yet again due to a renewed threat to the papacy. He immediately headed for Rome to fulfill the obligations of his emperorship. Unfortunately, his mission into Italy was met with resistance- from nobles in both Italy and West Frankia. To make a bad situation worse, a renewed threat from Louis the German's son compelled the emperor to reverse direction once again back to Frankia.  Ill and weary from travel, Charles died in his fourth transit across the Alps.

Who would rule the empire in Charles' absence? On his deathbed, the emperor reluctantly passed the kingdom to his eldest and only surviving son, Louis the Stammerer. This decision was surprising because Louis had previously been disinherited, though not tonsured, as a consequence of rebelling. In reality, however, all of Charles' other sons had either died or rebelled against him, which left Louis as the only possible heir.

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Throughout his life, Charles the Bald had fifteen children by his two wives, eight of whom were boys. From Ermentrude, Louis the Stammerer was born first and followed closely by Charles the Child, Lothar the Lame, and Carloman. Sadly, Charles and Lothar- both weak in body and wracked by health issues- died in young adulthood in 866. Louis the Stammerer, fueled by the desire to rule without the guardianship of appointed advisors, mounted a rebellion against his father in 862.[7] The rebellion quickly collapsed and Louis was stripped of his governing position in western Frankia as well as his honorary titles. He was placed on a short leash and relegated to the county of Meaux, northeast of Paris.[8] Carloman, whose dynastic name indicated he was destined for the clergy, had been educated by churchmen from a young age. After ascending to an abbacy, Carloman sought the secular power that he had been denied. He mounted a rebellion against Charles the Bald- which quickly failed- and was blinded as punishment.[9] Soon after Carloman's rebellion, Charles' second wife, Richildis, gave birth to four boys who all died in infancy. By 877, despite Charles the Bald's best efforts, Louis the Stammerer was the king's only surviving son.[10]

Most of Charles' children were 'weak of body' and Louis the Stammerer was no exception. Just two years after inheriting the kingdom, Louis died. Through a series of accidents and unfortunate illnesses, the Carolingians in all of their branches had all but disappeared by the end of the following decade.[11] Charles the Bald has thus come represent the beginning of the end for the dynasty. He was one of the last Carolingians to unite a region nearly as vast as his Charlemagne's, though his achievements did not last. For many years, therefore, Charles the

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[7] Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 204.
[8] Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 204.
[9] Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 226.
[10] Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 210.
[11] Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 256.

Bald – perhaps drawing on the assumed negativity of his epithet- was seen as a weak and ineffectual king who marked the downfall of Charlemagne's empire. However, in more recent years, his legacy as the ruler of the West Frankish kingdom, has led him to be considered the earliest founder of the modern state of France.

II.     The Origins of Charles' Epithet

The exact origin of Charles' nickname is difficult to discern. The earliest written example of *Carolus Calvus* appears in a document known as the *Genealogia Regum Francorum* (henceforward *GRF*). This brief text, which offers a genealogy of the Carolingian kings up through the generation of Charlemagne's grandsons, runs as follows:

Original Latin:[12]
*Hildricus rex genuit Ludowicum, quem baptizavit sanctus Remigius.*
*Lodowicus genuit Lotharium et fratres eius.*
*Lotharius genuit Chipericum et fratres eius.*
*Chilpericus genuit Lotharium magnum ex Fredegunde.*
*Lotharius genuit Dagobertum et Blithildem.*
*Blithildes genuit Arnaldum ex Ansberto illustri viro.*
*Arnaldus genuit Arnulfum, post Mettensem episcopum.*
*Arnulfus genuit Flodulfum, Walchisum, Ansigisum.*
*Ansigisus genuit Pippinum seniorem ex Begga, filia Pippini maioris domus.*
*Pippinus senior et dux genuit Karolum seniorem et ducem.*
*Karolus senior et dux genuit Pippinum regem et Karlomannum, post monachum.*
*Pippinus rex genuit Karlomannum et Carlum inperatorem.*
*Karolus imperator genuit Pipinum, Karolum et Ludowicum piissimum augustum.*
*Luduwicus genuit Lotharium, Pipinum, Luduwicum ex Ermengarda et Karolum Calvum ex Iudith.*

English translation:
King Childeric begat Louis [Clovis], who was baptized by Saint Remigius.
Louis begat Lothar [Chlothar I] and his brothers.
Lothar begat Chiperic [I] and his brothers.
Chiperic begat Lothar [Chlothar II] the great by Fredegunde.
Lothar begat Dagobert [I] and Blithilde.
Blithilde begat Arnold by the illustrious man[13] Ansberto.

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[12] "Genealogia regum Francorum", MGH SS 13 (Hanover: Hahn, 1881), pp. 246-7.
[13] A common Byzantine title

Arnold begat Arnulf, later bishop of Metz.
Arnulf begat Flodulf [Chlodulf], Walchis, and Ansegisel.
Ansegisel begat Pippin senior [II, of Herstal] by Begga, daughter of Pippin [I, of Landen, the elder], mayor of the palace.
Pippin senior and duke begat Charles senior [Martel] and duke.
Charles senior and duke begat king Pippin [I/III, the short] and Carlomann, later a monk.
King Pippin begat Carlomann and emperor Charles [Charlemagne].
Emperor Charles begat Pippin [the hunchback], Charles, and Louis [the pious], the most pious augustus.
Louis begat Lothar, Pippin [of Aquitaine], Louis [the German, the Illustrious] by Ermengarde and Charles the Bald by Judith.

Given that this text ends with Charles the Bald's birth, its contents may have been developed contemporary with him. However, the oldest surviving copy of this genealogy dates to only the mid 10th century.[14] It is impossible to determine whether Charles was considered bald during his lifetime when the original text was written or whether 'calvus' was added for clarity by a later scribe who recopied the old text in an age already accustomed to calling Charles "the bald". It is entirely possible that the nickname was contemporary with Charles. Nevertheless, based on the actual age of the manuscript, the earliest that Charles' nickname can *surely* be dated is the mid 10th century.

The *GRF* was part of a growing effort to document the ancestry of the Carolingian dynasty. As usurpers, the Carolingians lacked the legitimacy that the Merovingian kings had built up over centuries of rule. Genealogies, such as the *GRF*, follow a family tree from son to father all the way to an important ancestor. They have been used to prove inheritance for millennia. The earliest Carolingian genealogies served as an important tool to generate legitimacy for the family by tracing its lineage back to the Merovingians or even to the great kings of the Bible. One of them, an early ninth century text called the *Commemoration of the Genealogy of Lord Charles*

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[14] Kurt-Ulrich Jäschke, "The Carolingian Genealogies from Metz and Paul the Deacon. With an Excursus on Charles 'the Bald'," *Rheinische Vierteljahrsblätter* 34 (1970): 190-217

*the Most Glorious Emperor*, is lauded as the earliest genealogy of a Christian medieval ruler.[15] The text was copied, edited, and adapted throughout the 9th century. From this beginning, a tradition of written genealogical histories proliferated over the next few centuries, reaching a climax around 1050.[16]

Some of these genealogies traced the Carolingian lineage through an obscure or forgotten relative back to the Merovingians, while others reach all the way back to the biblical era. Historians had been weaving together Frankish history and the events of the bible as early as the 7th century.[17] Their texts present the Franks as 'God's people' by tying their origin to heroes from the Bible, thus placing the Franks at the forefront of history. Carolingian genealogies that followed this path served to legitimize the Carolingian rule by presenting the kings as the descendants of biblical rulers and thus tying their reign to God.  Some genealogies, such as the *Commemoratio* written for Charlemagne at the abbey of Metz, even mimic the biblical style as if casting the Carolingians as figures from the Bible.[18] The Bible, itself, contains several genealogies that trace the lineage of Jesus Christ back to great biblical kings and even to the first man, Adam. These genealogies vary but generally take the form 'father begat son' (in latin: *pater genuit filium*). It is this style which the *Commemoratio*[19] and many subsequent Carolingian genealogies mimic.

If the genealogies were tools to assert the legitimacy of the Carolingians, who wrote them and why? Most often, the texts were written by outsiders looking in: monks or clerics who were just as interested in furthering their own agenda as glorifying the Carolingian family. The

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[15] Hans Hummer, *Visions of Kinship in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 289.
[16] Hummer, *Visions*, 269.
[17] Hummer, *Visions*, 283.
[18] Hummer, *Visions*, 291.
[19] Interestingly, the *Commemoratio* only follows the biblical style when recounting the genealogy of the Carolingians (not when discussing their predecessors, the Merovingians): "Commemoratio genialogiae domni Karoli gloriosissimi imperatoris" MGH SS 13 (Hanover: Hahn 1881), p. 245; Hummer, *Visions*, 291.

*Commemoratio* mentioned above was written in a time, the early ninth century, when the church at Metz faced shrinking influence and prestige. In a play to both exalt the king and raise their own status, the authors of the genealogy traced the Carolingian lineage back to Arnulf, a bishop of Metz, and a host of ancestors now buried in properties controlled by the church at Metz. The text, intended for Charlemagne, hoped to take advantage of Charlemagne's desire to learn more about his ancestor Arnulf and subtly demonstrate the power of the bishopric of Metz and its strong ties to Carolingian history.[20] In order to create their seamless genetic path from the Merovingians to bishop Arnulf and the Carolingians, the authors of the *Commemoratio* seem to have invented relatives and ancestors.[21] This incident serves as a warning to those who would analyze the information presented in genealogies from this period; familial ties can easily be forged or exaggerated and the texts may be designed to serve some ulterior motive.

The *Genealogia Regum Francorum* that contains the first reference to *Carolus calvus* represents an attempt to legitimize the Carolingians by casting them as descendants of the Merovingians. The text presents the royal Frankish line from the 5th century Merovingian king Childeric I – father of the first Christian king of Frankia, Clovis – to Charles the Bald. The Carolingians and Merovingians are connected via a woman named Blithild who is the daughter of a Merovingian king and gives birth to what would become the Carolingian lineage.  The earliest version of this text draws on a tradition birthed by the earliest Carolingian genealogy, the aforementioned *Commemoration of the Genealogy of Lord Charles the Most Glorious Emperor*; both texts include Bishop Arnulf of Metz among the Carolingians' ancestors. The *GRF* is thought to have been adapted from a genealogy drafted at Fontanelle in the tradition created by

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[20] Hummer, *Visions*, 290.
[21] Hummer, *Visions*, 291.

the *Commemoratio* in the early to mid-ninth century.[22] This genealogy, which was extended in

869, sets the age of the *GRF*. Because the *GRF* lacks the information added to the extended

Fontanelle manuscript, historians reasoned that the *GRF* was adapted from the earlier version

and thus consider its creation date to be 'before 869' when the new Fontanelle text was created.

Since the text refers to the youngest Charles as *Carolus Calvus*, it would appear, on the surface

at least, that the epithet also predated 869 and was thus contemporary with him. As with many

early genealogies, the *Genealogia*'s content was often copied and referenced in later works. If

*calvus* was a feature of the original text, the document's early creation date could easily have

contributed to the nickname's proliferation - parallel to the proliferation of the genealogical

tradition itself.

However, given the purpose of genealogies, the presence of Charles' epithet in the *GRF*

remains a puzzle. If the text was designed to glorify the king's family, then the presence of a

derogatory nickname is rather contrary. This incongruity may suggest that *calvus* was not meant

to be negative at all. However, the physical manuscript which has survived to this day is a tenth

century copy of the *GRF*, not the original text. The 10th century scribe, following what was by

his time a visible tradition of referring to this Charles as "the Bald" (see below), may have

simply added 'the bald' to distinguish between the many Charleses in the family[23]. If the

nickname is post-contemporary and added by a later scribe, the tension between the document's

purpose and the negative connotations of *calvus* is eliminated. Of course, if the name was added

later for clarity, then why is it the only epithet in the text? Surely one would have expected to see

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[22] Jäschke, "Carolingian Genealogies".
[23] The text references four Charleses: Charles Martel as Charles senior and duke, Charlemagne as Emperor Charles, Charles (sometimes the Younger), and Charles the Bald: *GRF*, 246-7.

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Charlemagne, Pippin the Short, or even Louis the Pious[24] by the 10th century.[25] Instead, the text differentiates between the other Charleses and Louises simply by their titles. A later unrelated text also called the *Genealogia Regum Francorum*, supposedly based on the *Life of Geretrude*, instead specifies the regions ruled by each sub-king under their father, but still identifies Charles the Bald as '*Karolum Calvum, post imperatorem*', that is, "Charles the Bald, afterwards emperor".[26] In our older *GRF*, one may be tempted to believe that the name Charles was repeated more than others, therefore necessitating a unique identifier. However, the document lists four Charleses alongside its four Pippins.[27] So what was special about Charles the Bald? Sadly, given the uncertainty of when the epithet was added to the text, it is impossible to reach a definite conclusion.

While the *GRF* is most likely the earliest written witness of *Carolus Calvus*, other examples crop up soon after. The nickname appears in the Minor Annals of St. Germain, a text produced in the early tenth century.[28] Charles the Bald is also referenced in a genealogy presented by chronicler Adhemar of Chabannes in the early eleventh century that may have been copied from the *GRF*.[29] Another early medieval historian, Richer of Rheims, also identifies the 'bald' ruler around the turn of the millennium.[30] From there, the nickname was used more and more often as it became the ubiquitous moniker that it is today.

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[24] Louis the Pious is referred to as *Ludowicum piissimum augustum* (the most pious augustus), which was a common form of the imperial title and thus not likely to be a reference to his epithet: GRF, 246-7.

[25] Notker the Stammerer's ninth century *Gesta Karoli* references Louis the Illustrious (a contemporary nickname for Louis the German), Louis the Pious, and Pippin the younger (a variation of Pippin the short). This text proves that these epithets were in use before the *GRF* was copied in the tenth century. See *Two Lives of Charlemagne,* ed. trans. David Ganz (London: Penguin Press, 2008), 107.

[26] "Genealogia regum Francorum", MGH SS 13 (Hanover: Hahn 1881), p. 247. Hummer, *Visions*, 294.

[27] See footnote above for Charleses in the *GRF*. The four Pippins were Pippin Senior (Pippin of Herstal), mayor of the palace Pippin (Pippin of Landen), Pippin the king (Pippin the Short), and simply Pippin (of Aquitaine): GRF, 246-7.

[28] "Annales Sancti Germani Minores", MGH SS 4 (Hanover: Hahn 1881), p. 3.

[29] Hummer, *Visions*, 295. Paul Edward Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," in *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 36.

[30] Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 36.

III.      The Significance of Hair in the Medieval World

Why does it matter that Charles was called 'the bald'? Beyond the epithet's far-reaching implications for Charles' legacy, hair held a deep significance in the Middle Ages. To the medieval mind, hair was a visible symbol of health and well-being. In the late Middle Ages, hair was thought to be composed of solidified vapors that were released from the body during the digestion of humors.[31] Different deficiencies or imbalances of humors would produce unique hair properties, such as texture, color, or even baldness. This medical understanding evolved from the idea that hair was an important symbol of morality and identity; it also explains hair's ability to reveal the internal processes and characteristics of the human body. Throughout the Middle Ages, including the Carolingian era, hair was thought to indicate morality and health. Hair was a window into the otherwise private features of a person.

Additionally, hair held great importance as a marker of difference. While the exact interpretation of a given hairstyle had significant variation over time and space, differences in hair length and style could be used to separate 'us' from 'them'. For example, at the battle of Hastings in 1066, Anglo-Saxon scouts thought that the Norman army was made of priests because of their short hair.[32] Though only separated by the English Channel, the Anglo-Saxons and Normans clearly had different interpretations of what it meant to have short hair. Two centuries later in a different part of the world, the explorer William of Rubruck shaved his beard in an effort to mimic the appearance of the residents of the Mongolian Khanate through which he was travelling. However, instead of signifying his place of origin, a clean-shaven face

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[31] Roberta Milliken, ed., *A Cultural History of Hair, Volume 2: A Cultural History of Hair in the Middle Ages* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 94.

[32] Robert Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4 (1994): 45.

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unintentionally marked the young voyager as a Buddhist.[33] William had recognized that his

beard stood out from the locals, but had confused its meaning. The Norman conquest and the

explorer William of Rubruck offer examples of spatial variation in hair interpretation, but there

was also great fluidity over time. The changing ideal length of men's hair in Frankia is an

important temporal trend. Within the Roman Empire, men sported short hair, but as the empire in

the West dissolved and Germanic tribes overtook the region, longer hair dominated.[34] When the

Merovingians rose to power, this long hair was ascribed even more power and mystique, with the

longest hair being reserved exclusively for the king. However, the shearing of the last

Merovingian made way for the short haired Carolingians (see below). From this point on, the

ideal hair length would continue to be a moving target, especially for male courtiers who were

caught between the worlds of fashion, religion, and identity. Overall, while the meaning and

ideality of different hairstyles varied wildly over time and space, hair remained an important

marker of difference. The starkest example comes from Ireland, where hair was used to

distinguish between 'the king's loyal subjects' and the 'wild Irish'.[35] The difference was so

important to maintaining order among the local and occupying populations that Englishmen were

forced to maintain English hairstyles on pain of losing property or imprisonment.[36] The one

constant throughout time and space is that hair can distinguish 'us' from 'them'.

Before the rise of the Carolingian kings, the rule of the Merovingians was steeped in tradition

– and hair played a central role. Many historians assert the importance of personal identification

in the tumultuous early Middle Ages, not just for identifying friend or foe, but also for the rapid

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[33] Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings," 60.
[34] Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings," 44.
[35] Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings," 45.
[36] Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings," 46.

placement of a stranger within the social hierarchy.[37]  In the Merovingian kingdom, hair was an immediate signifier of status. The length of a person's hair followed a hierarchy from bald or short-haired slaves to the 'long-haired kings'.[38] Maintaining this strict hierarchy was so important to holding power that the Merovingian kings regulated the hair length of their inferiors.[39] Courtiers could only grow their hair to a length which befit their status in the court and no one could have hair as long as the king's. As a result of strict regulation, the king could be readily identified by the length of his hair. Similarly, a Byzantine historian recognized a high ranking Frankish chieftain killed in battle because of the body's long hair.[40]

Hair was a powerful symbol in this period and royal hair was shrouded in mystique. Long hair, an emblem of legitimacy, was strongly associated with the Merovingian family.[41] Royal hair came to be a corporeal representation of authority and the divine right to rule. Naturally stemming from this symbology, deposing a king in this period centered on a ritualistic shearing of the royal hair. A full head of hair signified a free man in the Merovingian world. Thus, losing hair to alopecia or a violent shaving was an immediate loss of status. Shearing and tonsure[42] were akin to castration because of the association of baldness with old age and a loss of masculinity and virility. Being shaved was thus incredibly humiliating.[43] When forced to choose between shearing and death for her nephews, Clotild, wife of the Frankish king Clovis I, chose death in an effort to spare the boys' reputations.[44] The tonsure was a commonly-used political

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[37] Paul Edward Dutton, "The identification of persons in Frankish Europe," *Early Medieval Europe* 26, no. 2 (2018). Milliken, *Cultural History*, 4.
[38] 'Long hair' refers to roughly shoulder-length hair in men. Women would commonly grow hair to waist-length in this period: Milliken, *Cultural History*, 108; Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 12.
[39] Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 12.
[40] Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 12.
[41] Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 12.
[42] The word tonsure, as opposed to shearing, has a religious connotation. It often refers to the haircut born by monks (characterized by a short ring of hair around an otherwise bald scalp) or the act of cutting the hair to this style.
[43] Milliken, Cultural History, 168; Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 13.
[44] Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 15.

tool in the Merovingian kingdom. Powerful enemies or royal competitors would lose the right to rule if they were captured and shorn. These deposed figures were first shaved, sometimes violently[45], and then shipped off to a monastery from which they rarely returned. Ritualistic shearing was wielded to remove many political figures from power and was even coopted by the predecessors of the Carolingian rulers to depose the last Merovingian king, Childeric III.[46]

Did hair hold the same importance in the Carolingian era? The Pippinids, the ancestors of the Carolingians, certainly conformed to Merovingian hair-related traditions. They wore long hair as befit their status and were quick to shear their rivals. When deposing Childeric III, the Carolingians legitimized their political coup by utilizing the tools and rituals that had been employed by the Merovingians for centuries. The practice of forced tonsuring remained popular well into the Carolingian era.[47] The continuity of this tradition suggests that hair remained an important symbol of power.

However, the coming of the Carolingians marks a distinct change in the significance of hair. By the ninth century, kings such as Charlemagne sported short hair[48] similar to Roman tradition, but also bore moustaches in a distinctly Germanic style.[49] The Carolingians, perhaps in an effort to distance themselves from the long-haired Merovingians, ceased to ascribe any mystique or mythological power to a king's hair. Because the Carolingians drew legitimacy from Christianity and asserted a God-given right to rule, they no longer relied on the mythological significance of long royal hair. They instead embraced romanization and the symbolic power of long hair was

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[45] Sometimes the ears could be taken off with the hair, though a tonsure was not a literal scalping: Dutton "Charlemagne's Mustache," 16.

[46] Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 22.

[47] We have already discussed how it was threatened against Charles and used by him against other Carolingians, such as Pippin I and II of Aquitaine.

[48] This could be a nod to Rome or a tie to Christianity from which they claimed the right to rule as god's chosen ones.

[49] A style choice well elaborated in Paul Edward Dutton's "Charlemagne's Mustache". While short hair may have honored Roman tradition, moustaches were a thoroughly Germanic style (notably sported by Theuderic the Great).

transferred to physical regalia and crowns.[50] Their mustaches served to maintain ties to the

Germanic origins of the Franks in a manner that was wholly distinct from the Merovingians'

long hair. In many ways, the Carolingian image reflected their cultural influences. They admired

the strength of Rome and its culture of learning, but still acknowledged their own Germanic

heritage. This conscious cultivation of a royal hairstyle suggests that the Carolingians still

attributed significant symbolic importance to hair, just in a different way than their Merovingian

predecessors.

There are very few Carolingian sources which explicitly discuss baldness. Nevertheless, a

broad survey of sources from across the medieval period can demonstrate some general attitudes

and interpretations of baldness that persisted or grew from ideas prevalent in the early Middle

Ages.  Because hair was closely tied to health, late medieval medical textbooks often include

recipes for bleaching or regrowing hair.[51] Since the associations between hair and health can be

traced back to Roman ideas which were often adopted and adapted by scholars of the

Carolingian era, it requires no stretch of the imagination to believe that hair and health remained

linked in the ninth century.[52] Further, the widespread presence of remedies for baldness in the

high Middle Ages suggests that alopecia was a common problem, as it is today. Medieval

medical knowledge[53] touted that hair loss could be caused by aging, illness, excessive sexual

activity, or, apparently, sexual contact with the pubic hair of female peasants.[54] Because men

often lose hair as they age, alopecia was also tied to old age and subsequently infertility, a loss of

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[50] Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 22.

[51] Milliken, *Cultural History*, 71, 82. Indeed, medieval barbers and surgeons were often one and the same: ibid, 87.

[52] Mary Harlow, ed., *A Cultural History of Hair, Volume 1: A Cultural History of Hair in Antiquity* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 89.

[53] There are also similar Roman beliefs (Harlow, *Cultural History*, 89).

[54] Milliken, *Cultural History*, 138, 149. In fact, the pubic hair of female peasants was so potent that images of these women trimming hair under their skirts were carved into the portals of some medieval cities, such as Milan, to ward off bad spirits and evil: ibid.

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virility, and folly.[55] To Roman thinkers and according to late medieval humoral theory, natural baldness suggested some internal deficiency.[56] In both eras, an overabundance of hotness and dryness led to balding.[57] In the Middle Ages, this unbalanced disposition led to the idea that bald men were considered degenerates, fools, and thieves.[58] Any imbalance of hot, dry, cold, and wet in the body – beyond natural variations with associated sex and age – indicated an internal malfunction which was tied to questionable character and morality. Thus, as an indicator of balance within the body, the age at when a man began to lose hair was used to diagnose brain temperament.[59] In the Merovingian period in particular, baldness – whether natural or caused by shaving- was associated with servitude, low class, and moral corruptness because of the hierarchical social structure based on hair length.

While baldness invoked these negative associations from the Roman Empire to the late Middle Ages, bald men were sometimes considered in a more positive light. In medieval Europe, the relation between loss of hair and the monastic tonsure[60] suggested that bald men were close to God. If long hair was a symbol of power for the Merovingians, then shearing renounced this secular power and signified submission to the will of God.[61] Deliberate shaving could also indicate a renouncement of worldly ties.[62] This association could stem from ideas surrounding the monastic tonsure or from the fact that self-grooming was a symbol of vanity and thus removing hair was a great act of humility.[63] Additionally, from as early as the Roman era, ties to

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[55] Milliken, *Cultural History*, 168.
[56] Harlow, *Cultural History*, 152; Milliken, *Cultural History*, 139, 168.
[57] Harlow, *Cultural History*, 92; Milliken, *Cultural History*, 100.
[58] Milliken, *Cultural History*, 168.
[59] Milliken, *Cultural History*, 97.
[60] The tradition of the tonsure is based on a biblical precedent in which Peter equated baldness and shaving with a clean and unpretentious life: Milliken, *Cultural History*, 31.
[61] Clovis tucked his long hair under his helmet during battle, perhaps as a nod to his new Christian God: Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 15.
[62] Milliken, *Cultural History*, 169.
[63] Milliken, *Cultural History*, 23, 59.

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old age sometimes invoked the idea of wisdom; there are even a few medieval depictions of old bald wise men.[64] Overall, while baldness held mainly negative connotations, it carried some positive associations as well.

There is one extant piece of verse from the Carolingian period itself that explicitly addresses baldness. This text is incredibly valuable for evaluating the concept of baldness in the early medieval world. Moreover, it is great fun. Composed of 137 metered lines of only 'c' words– as in the latin *calvus*- the tour de force is a truly virtuosic accomplishment.[65] The poet, Hucbald, wrote during the late ninth century, so his poem gives insight into what Charles the Bald's contemporaries thought about baldness. The goal of the piece is to admonish those who mock bald men and tonsured clerics by highlighting the positive aspects of baldness. Thus, because Hucbald must repeatedly rebuke those who taunt bald men, we learn that baldness in Hucbald's world was a source of ridicule. The very fact that mockers must be chided proves that they existed. However, in coming to the defense of the bald, Hucbald outlines many of the possible virtues of bald and tonsured men. Throughout the poem he praises their closeness to God, their simple and unassuming lifestyle, their wisdom, and their thoughtfulness. He compares the monastic tonsure to a crown bestowed by God.[66] Hucbald praises the prudence and patience of bald rulers, priests, and warriors. The poem solidifies much of the positive symbology of baldness that was apparently often overlooked in the midst of jeering and taunts. Hucbald illustratively suggests that the meaning of baldness is in the eye of the beholder.

Yet, Hucbald's writing provides another intriguing detail to be considered when evaluating Charles' epithet. Throughout the poem, he uses the word *calvus* figuratively to refer to a

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[64] Milliken, *Cultural History*, 168.
[65] Thomas Klein, "In Praise of Bald Men: A Translation of Hucbald's Ecloga de Calvis," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 26, no. 1 (1995).
[66] Klein, "Praise".

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monastic tonsure. At the very least, he proves that the word can be used to imply something other than physical hair loss – piety and humility in this case – which opens the door to a more metaphorical interpretation of Charles 'the Bald'.

IV.    Carolingian Bynames[67]

Medieval kings held a rather complicated position in the sphere of identity and individuality. In many ways, the identity of royalty was never in doubt. They were constantly surrounded by material and situational symbols of their authority; be it the long, uncut hair of a Merovingian or the regalia of Carolingian monarchs. However, out of the personal intimacy of Carolingian courts came a tradition of regal epithets used for identification that persisted for many centuries. How did it all begin?

Like the origin of Charles' epithet, the seed of the Carolingian nicknaming tradition is unknown. One of the earliest nicknaming traditions in the west was the Roman *cognomen* – part of a system where each person was identified with three names. The first name, called the *praenomen* was an individual's first name. The *praenomen* was followed by a *nomen* which identified the name of the clan or family to which the person belonged. Finally, the third name, the c*ognomen*, functioned as a nickname or indicated a specific branch of the family. This *cognomen* could highlight a specific trait or feature of the person who bore it, just like medieval epithets. Giving *cognomina* would often invoke a sense of social bonding. People were often identified by these names in informal settings or conversations and addressing people by their *cognomina* could imply friendship. When discussing Carolingian sobriquets, historians often highlight the fraternity and social intimacy created by giving nicknames, which is reminiscent of

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[67] The terminology of these nicknames varies greatly by author (some constructing rather complex schemes for identifying various categories), but I take 'byname', 'epithet', 'nickname' and 'sobriquet' to be essentially interchangeable.

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the confraternity associated with the *cognomina*.[68] The Roman *cognomen* is an important

predecessor to the Carolingian tradition, but there is no evidence that the former is the source of

the latter.[69] While the *cognomina* serve a very similar function to Carolingian epithets and the

Carolingians themselves were part of a Roman revival that 'rediscovered' the philosophy and

tradition of learning of the region's Roman past, historians are reluctant to connect the two

traditions.[70] It is certainly possible that the Roman practice inspired the Carolingians, but the

connection remains hypothetical.

It is most likely – though still purely speculative – that Carolingian bynames developed from

Norse nicknames. Historian Paul Peterson studies these nicknames through the Old Icelandic

Sagas. Although the saga manuscripts were drafted the thirteenth century, they are based on an

oral tradition which may reach back to the ninth century.[71] Thus, the sagas may provide a

representation of the Carolingian era as seen through the lens of a later period. Based on

evidence from the Icelandic Sagas, Old Norse nicknames seem to have been born from the need

to differentiate between people with the same name. The rise in popularity of these nicknames

came after the increased inheritance of dynastic names in Scandanavia, that is, the practice of

passing single names down over generations to mark a given descent group as a dynasty. This

repetition of familial names condensed the available stock of names and required more

differentiation between those with the same name.[72] In Norse society, nicknames were given

during their bearers' lifetime and often highlighted some specific characteristic or event

associated with that person's identity. They developed along with oral history as a method of

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[68] Steven Wilson, *The Means of Naming: A Social History* (n.p.: Routledge, 2003), 118; John E. Morby, "The Sobriquets of Medieval European Princes," *Canadian Journal of History* 13, no. 1 (1978): 16.
[69] Zheltukhina et al. and Peterson initially suggest this evolution, though Peterson later questions the possibility.
[70] Paul R. Peterson, "Old Norse Nicknames," (2015), 47.
[71] Peterson, "Old Norse," 19.
[72] Peterson, "Old Norse," 2.

'reinforcing cultural memory'.[73] Typical bynames include Ormr *konungsbróðir* (Ormr 'brother of the king'), Haraldr *hárfagri* (Haraldr 'fair hair'), and Ragnarr *loðbrók* (Ragnar 'hairy pants'), which highlight their bearers' relationship, appearance[74], and clothing, respectively.[75] The bynames were just as often laudatory as derogatory[76] and sometimes seem to fly in the face of the Norse concept of honor. How did Eysteinn *fretr* ('fart') develop within a society with a deeply intrenched sense of honor and reputation?[77] Peterson insists that many of these names must be considered with a sense of humor and an eye towards the wit and irony[78] that they conveyed.

The connection between Norse and Carolingian naming tradition is one of probability and timing. Norse nicknames constituted the largest stock of nicknames of any Germanic society in the early Middle Ages.[79] As one of the most robust and ubiquitous nicknaming traditions of the era, it is not difficult to believe that the Carolingian epithets could have grown out of the Norse practice. In fact, contact between Northmen and western Europe became commonplace just before the growth in popularity of Carolingian bynames in the ninth and tenth centuries, making the cultural connection possible. The two groups met not only in raids and battle, but also through trade, the exchange of envoys, and peace negotiations. Paul R. Peterson readily interweaves examples of Norse and early medieval Frankish nicknames in his studies of Old Icelandic nicknames, as if he assumes some connection between the two traditions. In his introduction a list of derogatory Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon nicknames leads directly into a

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[73] Peterson, "Old Norse," 75.
[74] 'Fair hair' actually replaced 'matted hair' as a nickname when king Haraldr washed and combed his unruly hair (after ten years of remaining unkempt) and discovered that it was lovely and fair: Peterson, "Old Norse," 39.
[75] Peterson, "Old Norse," 14, 39, 14.
[76] For example, Rollo 'the walker' was given his epithet because he was too heavy to ride a horse: Peterson, "Old Norse," 80.
[77] Peterson, "Old Norse," 114.
[78] For example, Þórðr *inn lági* ('the short') was actually extremely tall: Peterson, "Old Norse," 113.
[79] Paul R. Peterson, "Old Norse Nicknames: Origins and Terminology," *Names* 67, no. 2 (2019): 90.

discussion about the role of the same sort of nicknames in the Norse world.[80] However, he notes that there are only a few scattered examples from runes or old Swedish, Danish, or Norwegian texts[81] that actually predate the Carolingians.[82] Thus, there is very little proof that the Norse nicknaming tradition was well established before contact between Vikings and the continent[83]. The lack of written or physical evidence means that speculations about the origins of the Carolingian tradition remain just that: speculation.

As a possible counterpoint to the Norse origin theory, there are a few Merovingian and pre-Carolingian examples of second names. Though it was unusual, a few individuals carried second names in Frankia in the fifth and sixth centuries.[84] One of the earliest true bynames appears in the later 6th century, when the prolific historian Gregory of Tours notes that one Sigibert was called 'the lame' after being injured in battle.[85] This and a few other scattered examples pre-date interaction between the Franks and Norse Vikings. Thus, the Carolingian practice may have been independent from the Norse one.

Though epithets crop up in Frankia in the sixth century, they first became widespread in the ninth and tenth century. It is possible that they were adopted in response to economic and concomitant social change. In the two centuries leading up to the turn of the millennium, an increasing population fueled the need for public identity. When describing the rise of bynames, Iris Shagrir cites an "individual's growing public activity, social affiliation, and public

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[80] Peterson, "Old Norse," 4.
[81] Norse storytelling culture was very much rooted in oral histories in the early middle ages, which limits the available written evidence from this period.
[82] Peterson, "Old Norse," 5.
[83] However, the Ynglinga saga dated to as early as 900 presents a slew of Norse nicknames that were allegedly carried by men from the 7th to the 9th century; which may be evidence that epithets were common in this period: Andreas Wrackmeyer, "Studien zu den Beinamen der abendländischen Könige und Fürsten bis zum Ende des 12," (1936), 101.
[84] Wilson, *Means of Naming*, 73.
[85] Wilson, *Means of Naming*, 73.

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consciousness" where a name served as a social identity.[86] The growth in population also

required bureaucracies which could better identify citizens to monitor and tax them.[87] In all, this

period saw an increased need for a public identity which the use of bynames could satisfy.

Hands down, however, the most commonly cited reason for the rise of bynames is a

decreased stock of first names.[88] This reduction in diversity is tied to a trend away from

dithematic names, the increased inheritance of familial names, and the adoption of saint's

names.[89] In the Merovingian era, dithematic names were typical: two-part names such as

Childeric, Childebert, and Dagobert. Certain parts of these names came to be inherited bilaterally

– along patrilineal or matrilineal lines- with a common root becoming a unifying feature of a

kindred. A fifth or sixth century song titled *Hildebrandslied* exemplifies this familial naming

practice. Though the manuscript dates from the early ninth century, the content of the song is tied

to an early Merovingian-era family known as the Brandings. In the tale, a father and son meet on

the battlefield as strangers. The father asks "…of what ancestry are you?... name but one, the

others I will know".[90] Because family names included a common element, such as 'brand' for the

Brandings, just one name would reveal the stranger's kin. Here, the connection is obvious; the

poem's hero is named Hildebrand, son of Heribrand, and father of Hadubrand. Over the course

of the early Middle Ages, two-part names were phased out in favor of single part names such as

Chlothar and Clovis. This meant that a single name would be passed down through generations

relatively unchanged. The inheritance of single component names seems to have started within

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[86] Iris Shagrir, "The medieval evolution of by-naming: notions from the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem," in *In Laudem Hierosolymitani* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 49.
[87] Shagrir, "evolution," 49.
[88] Peterson, "Origins," 89; Marina R. Zheltukhina et al., "Naming as Instrument of Strengthening of the Dynastic Power in the Early Middle Ages (France, England, Vth-XIth Centuries)," *International Journal of Environmental and Science Education* 11, no. 14 (2016): 8; Morby, "Sobriquets," 15.
[89] Wilson, *Means of Naming*, 73; Peterson, "Old Norse," 2; Shagrir, "evolution," 51.
[90] Patrick Geary, ed., Readings in Medieval History (Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 111.

the Merovingian and then Carolingian families before being imitated by courtiers, the upper

class, and eventually everyone else. Without the flexibility of a second name component to

separate people with the same dynastic name, nicknames became a necessary tool. The Oxford

Handbook on Names and Naming defines: "the function of a byname is to individualize, to

identify, and to differentiate people with the same given name".[91] Iris Shagrir, however, noted a

possible reverse correlation between the popularity of epithets and decreased variety of first

names. Perhaps the use of nicknames allowed the repetition of names so that the rise of bynames

led to a reduction in the stock of first names instead of vice versa. In truth, Shagrir saw both

trends in different regions of Europe.[92] Overall, the dominant hypothesis suggests that any

number of factors led to a reduction in the diversity of first names, but the need to differentiate

every Tom, Dick, and Harry[93] fueled the increased use of sobriquets.

Beyond the need to distinguish between people with the same name, some historians suggest

that the use of multiple names indicated high status. The use of Latin bynames is vaguely

reminiscent of the Roman *cognomina* and could have been an attempt to build on glorious

memories of the Roman Empire[94]. Some writers also point to a pre-Christian belief that people

with two names would live longer to explain the popularity of nicknames.[95] Similarly, the two

component dithematic names from the Merovingian period – the heart of naming tradition prior

to the rise of epithets – were considered 'promising' and thought to promote long life.[96] Working

from this hypothesis, there is some evidence that these compound names were originally

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[91] Carole Huough and Daria Izdebska, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 238.
[92] Shagrir, "evolution," 50, 51.
[93] Perhaps more accurately every Lambert, Robert, and Baldwin.
[94] Peterson, "Old Norse," 47. Though there is little evidence of a direct connection between the two traditions, latin and Roman names persisted well into the medieval period as a way to invoke the glory and prestige of the Roman Empire: Wilson, *Means of Naming*, 67.
[95] Peterson, "Origins," 92.
[96] Peterson, "Origins," 92.

reserved for high status individuals.[97] The belief that two-component names were harbingers of good fortune and indicators of prestige seems to have transferred over to bynames and persisted through the Carolingian period. In twelfth century medieval England, having more than one name continued to be an indicator of high rank.[98] Perhaps the Carolingians' affinity for all things Roman- and a healthy dose of superstition- led to the conscious adoption of epithets in the royal court.

While the origins and exact reasons for the introduction of nicknames will remain a mystery, the stage was set for their use among the Carolingian rulers of the ninth century. For Carolingian men along the direct and legitimate male line of descent from the usurper of the Merovingians, Pepin the Short, names were chosen almost exclusively from Charles, Louis[99], Lothar[100], Carlomann, and Pippin. The eldest sons were often Charles, Louis, or Lothar, while Pippin was less common from Louis the Pious' reign onwards. Carlomann was typically reserved for a younger son destined for the clergy[101]. The Carolingians so carefully guarded this stock of five dynastic names that the names remained solely within the royal family throughout the ninth and tenth centuries.[102] Because of this jealous guarding of a small stock of names, the growing Carolingian family tree quickly became more and more confusing as names were repeated – sometimes multiple times within the same generation.

Out of the cloud of Louises and Charleses came epithets. Famous Carolingians include Pippin the Elder, Charles Martel (literally, the Hammer), Pippin the Short, Charlemagne[103]

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[97] Wilson, *Means of Naming*, 72.
[98] Peterson, "Old Norse," 93.
[99] Louis was a name coopted from the Merovingian dynasty as Chlodovech (Ludwig).
[100] Also borrowed from the Merovingian Chlothar.
[101] When one of Charlemagne's sons, Carlomann, became a viable candidate for rule, he was rebaptized as Pippin…even though Charlemagne already had a son named Pippin (the hunchback).
[102] Wilson, *Means of Naming*, 81
[103] Charlemagne derives from the French 'Charles le magne' which translates to Charles the Great.

(*Carolus magnus* or 'Charles the Great'), Louis the Pious, Charles the Bald, Louis the German

(originally the Illustrious), Charles the Fat, Louis the Stammerer, Charles the Simple, Charles the

Child, Lothar the Lame, and Pippin the Hunchback. Laudatory nicknames essentially cease after

Charles the Bald's brother Louis the Illustrious in the ninth century. The later Carolingian kings

seem to exhibit a downward trend in epithets from 'the Stammerer' to 'the Fat' and 'the

Simple'[104]. The trend generally correlates with the waning influence of the Carolingian

monarchy.

Interestingly, not a single one of these epithets has been *proven* to be contemporary with its

bearer[105]. Most seem to have been coined by later historians or scribes. One of the earliest

witnesses to this host of epithets is Notker the Stammerer's *Gesta Karoli*. Written in the late

ninth century in the reign of Charles the Fat, the text references Pippin the Younger,

Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, Louis the Illustrious, and notes that Charlemagne's son Pippin

was hunchbacked.[106] The text does not refer to Charles the Fat or Charles the Bald with their

nicknames, though it does list Louis the Illustrious just over a decade after his death. Most of the

other early witnesses to these nicknames are chronicles or histories dated anywhere from just a

few decades to about a century after the subject's death. The thesis of German historian Andreas

Wrackmeyer from 1936 contains a chart which lists many bynames from the Merovingians and

the Carolingians (as well as the Northmen). Wrackmeyer suggests[107] that the earliest witness to

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[104]However, there is some debate whether 'the simple' refers to Charles' simple and unassuming lifestyle or stupidity: Morby, "Sobriquets," 6; Carlrichard Brühl, "Herrscherbeinamen im frühen und huhen Mittelalter," *Società, istituzioni,* spiritualità 1, (1994): 137.

[105] Throughout this investigation, I have come across many historians that allege that Louis was 'the Pious' in his lifetime or that Charlemagne was 'great' and so on (even that Charles was already called 'the bald' during his life), but in each case, their textual evidence relied on a later copy of an original manuscript, an erroneous translation, or an incorrect date.

[106] *Two Lives*, 107, 101.

[107] The information given by Wrackmeyer must be treated carefully. For example, he suggests that the earliest mention of Carolus Calvus comes from Hucbald's poem, which has since been proven incorrect: Wrackmeyer, "Studien," 101.

Louis the Stammerer is a poem, *De bello Parisiacae Urbis* ("On the War for the City of Paris") written by Abbo of St. Germain just seventeen years after the Louis' death.[108] On the other hand, the earliest example of Pippin the Short comes from Adhemar of Chabannes nearly three centuries after his death.[109] Both of these bynames first appear in post-contemporary works by chroniclers: a typical narrative for Carolingian epithets.

Much like the uncertainty surrounding the development of Charles 'the Bald', the exact origins of many of the other Carolingian bynames remain elusive. One would think that if we could fully understand any Carolingian epithet, it would be the one belonging to the well-researched Charlemagne. Charlemagne's greatness seemingly grew from the efforts of the historian Einhard in his *Vita Karoli,* written under Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious, to represent the emperor in a manner designed to evoke earlier Roman models.[110] Charles' greatness solidified in an era of discontent under his immediate successors which looked back on Charlemagne's rule as a 'golden age'.[111] Einhard addressed Charles as "the great and orthodox emperor", but a later historian, Charlemagne's own grandson Nithard, is one of the first to write of Charlemagne's epithet by noting that he was "rightfully called the great".[112]  However, the exact origin of 'the great' is still up for debate. If the development of Charlemagne's byname is not well understood, what hope is there for the less often studied rulers like Charles the Bald? In a world where perfect information about how and when a sobriquet was developed does not exist, one must be satisfied with an analysis based on fact-driven hypotheses.

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[108] Wrackmeyer, "Studien," 102.
[109] Wrackmeyer, "Studien," 101.
[110] Paul Edward Dutton, "Karolvs Magnvs or Karolvs Felix: The Making of Charlemagne's Reputation and Legend," in *The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 29.
[111] Dutton, "Karolvs Magnvs," 32.
[112] *Two Lives*, 31; Joanna Story, ed., *Charlemagne: Empire and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 49; Dutton, "Karolvs Magnvs," 34.

But, perhaps it is more fruitful to consider 'why' instead of 'when'. What are the nicknames supposed to mean and why were they given? As with Charles 'the bald', an epithet may have carried hidden or allegorical meanings that have been lost over time. A Russian essay titled 'From the history of epithet' asserts:

> Behind every epithet, which we perceive impartially because we are used to it, there is a long historical and physiological background, accumulation of metaphors, comparisons and abstractions, an entire history of taste and style given in its evolution from the idea of being useful and necessary to becoming an ideal.[113]

Beyond the seemingly one-note bynames lies a wealth of nuance and symbolism that has been lost over time. It is unknown whether Charles the Fat was truly overweight, whether Louis the Stammerer actually had a speech impediment, and whether Charles the Simple was unwise. With a little imagination, Charles the Fat could have been gluttonous or greedy and Charles the Simple could have been uncomplicated or straightforward[114]. Even the seemingly obvious Pepin 'the Hunchback' developed only after a note in Notker's *Gesta Karoli,* which may have been based on Pepin's morality – he had incited rebellion against his father, Charlemagne – rather than his physical reality. Describing Pepin as hunchbacked may have been an attempt to spark the reader's imagination and cast the rebellious son as an evil villain who looked the part. Some historians even suggest that Carolus Magnus was originally just Charles the Elder.[115] The only byname with a truly undeniable meaning appears to be Louis 'the Pious'. The extraordinary piety of Charlemagne's son is well documented by contemporary chronicles and regardless of when and why the epithet evolved, its meaning is clear.

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[113] Quote from Veselovsky in Zheltukhina et al., "Naming," 6.
[114] As discussed in footnote 104.
[115] Brühl, "Herrscherbeinamen," 140.

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So, the origins of the epithets are unknown and their meaning is often uncertain, but why give one in the first place? Some nicknames in the Carolingian era were self-created. Notker the Stammerer seemingly cultivated his own byname by introducing himself as a clumsy explainer in his own *Gesta Karoli*: "I, a toothless man with a stammering tongue".[116] Notker may have been crafting a persona for the court to ensure that he would be recognized and remembered.[117] If the Carolingian kings knowingly carried epithets, they may have been trying to do the same.

On the other hand, the Carolingian family was very confusing for chroniclers and historians. As mentioned previously, choosing from a small set of familial names meant that several names were reused, often multiple times in one generation. How should a writer distinguish between Louis and his cousin, Louis? The confusion only increases when discussing the Carolingian family over longer periods of time. Starting with Charlemagne in the eighth century, it would be accurate to state that Charles begat Louis begat Charles begat Louis begat Charles begat Louis begat Charles! To add to the confusion, each of these Charleses and Louises had brothers and cousins that were also Charleses and Louises. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provides an illustrative example of a historian practically tripping over himself to keep all of the Carolingians straight. The *Chronicle* was a written record first crafted in the late ninth century under king Alfred the Great[118] of Wessex and continuously copied and updated through the twelfth century. From the entry for 885:

> The same year, ere midwinter, died Charles, king of the Franks. He was slain by a boar; and one year before his brother died, who had also the Western kingdom. They were both the sons of Louis, who also had the Western kingdom, and died the same year that the sun was eclipsed. He was the son of that Charles whose daughter Ethelwulf, king of the West-Saxons, had to wife... And the same year succeeded Charles to the Western kingdom, and to all the

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[116] *Two Lives*, 109.
[117] Dutton, "identification," 149.
[118] Alfred was actually the step-son of Charles the Bald's daughter, Judith, from her first marriage (see VI for more on Judith). His greatness was only immortalized in an epithet in the 1600s, 700 years after his death: Morby, "Sobriquets," 12.

territory this side of the Mediterranean and beyond, as his great-grandfather held it, except the Lidwiccians. The said Charles was the son of Louis, who was the brother of that Charles who was the father of Judith, whom Ethelwulf, king of the West-Saxons, married. They were the sons of Louis, who was the son of the elder Charles, who was the son of Pepin.[119]

This text identifies the Carolingians by relating them to specific historical events that would have been well known to contemporary readers. But surely there was a better way to differentiate them without relying on so much contextual knowledge? For many historians, bynames were the answer. Instead of identifying a king by the time of his death[120] or the sub-region he once reigned[121], they could be identified with just one word. The confusion surrounding Carolingian names and the ease with which epithets could be used for identification makes a very compelling case that the nicknames were post-contemporary and cultivated by writers and historians to distinguish the Charleses and Louises.

But if historians were purely focused on identification, they could have used numbers. The problem with numbering arises when there are multiple Carolingians in the same generation with the same first name who were kings in different regions. Some of these kings are identified with numerals, but the numbering is often confusing. Take, for example Pippin III/I (Pippin the Short) who was the first Carolingian king but the third Pippin in the Carolingian lineage.[122] Additionally, both Charles the Fat and Charles the Simple are considered Charles III. The difference between the two – other than the fact that Charles the Fat held the throne a decade before *Carolus Simplex* – is the region over which they reigned. Charles the Fat was the third (and final) Charles to become emperor over the Carolingian empire while Charles the Simple was the third Charles to be crowned the king of West Frankia – the region once controlled by

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[119] "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," The Online Medieval and Classical Library, http://mcllibrary.org/Anglo/part2.html.
[120] As in the quoted passage from the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle"
[121] As in the later *Genealogia regum Francorum: Genealogia*, 247.
[122] Jäschke, "Carolingian Genealogies".

Charles the Bald; thus, they were both Charles III. This example demonstrates just how confusing numbering the Carolingians could be. Epithets are much less ambiguous.

Additionally, bynames say a great deal more than numbers. The nickname that a king was given had the power to honor or degrade the leader's memory and legacy. By creating a byname, historians had the power to control how a king was remembered. Beyond having control over a king's image, giving a nickname could highlight the writer's personal connection to the king because the ability to create a nickname requires a certain amount of familiarity. As mentioned previously, sharing bynames generates congeniality and social intimacy, much like the fraternity associated with the Roman *cognomina*. This connection could even be familial. One historian has suggested that Charlemagne's grandson Nithard, a writer contemporary with Charles the Bald, called Charlemagne 'the great' simply because they were related.[123] Of course, a blood connection like Nithard's was generally rare and some Carolingian bynames developed far removed from the royal courts of the ninth and tenth centuries. As an extreme counterpoint, Charles the Bald's brother Louis only became 'the German' in the 19th century; his history was coopted and rebranded during an era of increased nationalistic sentiment in Germany. The personal connections built by sharing nicknames assume that chroniclers were being innovative and creating the epithets themselves; however, they may have simply parroted a pre-existing verbal tradition. Notker the Stammerer listed the epithets of the Carolingian kings by noting that they were 'called' by their nickname.[124] His wording suggest that the bynames may have already been in popular use in the later ninth century when he wrote. Using a popular epithet could be second nature and could also help the audience recognize figures in the story. In all, there are many reasons to give an epithet: for identification, to honor or degrade the subject, to highlight

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[123] Brühl, "Herrscherbeinamen," 143.
[124] *Two Lives*, 107.

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your familiarity or personal connections, or to ensure that your readers are able to identify the characters in your chronicle.

Epithets certainly have a marked effect on a king's memory. Some, like magnus and pious, are lofty and laudatory; they invoke images of greatness and prestige. Others, like *crassus* ('fat') and *strabo* ('stammering'), are very derogatory and reflect on their bearer in a negative light. In many cases, the byname is the first thing associated with a Carolingian king. Its common use and repetition have caused the word to become fused with the person's identity. For Charles the Bald, at least, his byname is humanizing; it is much more tangible than the lofty Charles II. Perhaps its popularity was fueled by this approachability. Maybe the nickname caught on because of phrasing. The alliterative *Carolus Calvus* is undeniably catchy. The same could be said about *Carolus Crassus* (Charles the Fat) and even the tenth century Anglo-Saxon *Aethelraed unraed*[125]. Regardless, today Charles' sobriquet brings to mind an unimposing and aging figure. The nickname may have even contributed to a common belief among historians that Charles was a poor leader. Why would a successful king be closely associated with baldness? In reality, it remains somewhat difficult to reconcile this imagery of Charles 'the Bald' with the dynamic and savvy leader portrayed in history.

V.      Alleged Baldness

So, was Charles the Bald actually bald? At first glance, the answer seems obvious: of course! As stated before, in medieval literature, *calvus* can only be translated to 'bald'. However, there are several reasons to believe that Charles was not actually bald.

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[125] Though often translated as 'Aethelraed the Unready', this epithet more accurately means Aethelraed 'poor counsel'. The irony of the epithet is that 'Aethelraed', itself, means noble counsel: Morby, "Sobriquets," 1.

The most commonly cited evidence that the king *was* truly bald is Hucbald's poem 'In Praise of Bald Men'discussed above: it was long thought to be dedicated to Charles.[126] Hucbald was, in fact, a member of Charles' court in the mid-ninth century, so many historians assumed that he wrote the poem to praise his bald patron king. However, a close examination of the text of the poem and more modern scholarship on the subject reveal that the poem was not dedicated to Charles the Bald, but instead addressed a high-ranking member of the clergy, namely Archbishop Hatto of Mainz.[127] The whimsical and thoroughly entertaining text admonishes the 'blind' who mock the bald and praises the tonsured and shorn for their closeness to God.[128] The poem only once mentions a bald ruler: "Clearly, as kings or consuls their censure is clean".[129] This phrase is part of a longer passage that praises bald men in all walks of life – and thus does not refer to any particular king. In fact, most of the poem is clearly targeted at tonsured clerics. The poem notes "When that crown comes up around a clean crest; It bodes this bald will be a bishop, or a brother".[130] The crown here refers to the band of hair which circled clergymen's otherwise bald heads. This poem would be solid evidence that the king was physically bald if it was truly dedicated to Charles. However, its content suggests otherwise. Instead, the poem praises an archbishop, Hatto of Mainz, who took office in 891, therefore pushing the poem's creation date to at least fifteen years after Charles the Bald died. Hucbald was certainly familiar with Charles the Bald, and had most certainly seen him in person, yet his poem praising bald men fails to identify or refer to the king. Instead of proving that Charles was truly bald, his conspicuous absence from the poem actually suggests that he was *not* truly bald. If the emperor

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[126] Wrackmeyer, "Studien"; Morby, "Sobriquets," 8; Brühl, "Herrscherbeinamen," 136.
[127] Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 39.
[128] Klein, "Praise".
[129] Klein, "Praise," 4.
[130] Klein, "Praise," 2.

was among the ranks of the bald, surely Hucbald could not have missed the chance to praise his former patron in his landmark eclogue of baldness. Is he not mentioned because he was not bald? Effectively, what was once considered the strongest evidence for Charles' baldness may actually imply the opposite.

Throughout his early life, as a child and again into his early adulthood, Charles had hair. We know this because when young Charles was sent away to the monastery at Prüm, he was specifically not tonsured. Similarly, before the battle of Fontenoy, Lothar and his advisors openly touted that they would soon shave the king.[131] Presumably, if they could brag about cutting Charles' hair, he had hair to be cut. While this evidence suggests that Charles did not bald unusually early, he could have lost his hair later in life.

But if Charles actually became bald as an adult, why are there no comments from jeering enemies or jesting courtiers?[132] Surely, no one hoping to mock or discredit the king would overlook his alopecia. As addressed previously, baldness carried a large number of negative connotations and could have been a powerful tool for questioning the king's morality. Carolingian poets and authors were well known for poking fun at their superiors; why would Charles be an exception? Unlike his grandfather, Charlemagne, who drew poets and artisans to his court to cultivate their talents to his own ends, learned people were spread far and wide in Charles the Bald's era, even in the courts of his enemies.[133] While Charlemagne could easily regulate what was written about him and his family[134], his grandson had no such control over the written record.

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[131] See footnote 4 above.
[132] Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 36.
[133] Dutton, "Karolvs Magnvs," 24.
[134] One of Charlemagne's sons, commonly called Pippin the Hunchback, was a subking under his father. In 792, Pippin led a failed rebellion against the emperor. Pippin was ritually disinherited via tonsure and sent to a monastery. As an example of Charlemagne's control of the written record, there remains only one reference to his son 'king Pippin'. This text was found on a scrap of parchment within the binding of another manuscript and is the

The most obvious way to test whether the king had hair would be to examine contemporary portraits of the king. However, portraiture in the Carolingian era was less concerned with realism than with portraying an ideal figure. Many portraits of Carolingian kings seem to be simply archetypical images of the ideal ruler; they may have had no relation to how the kings actually looked. In fact, a famous equestrian statue that was long thought to be Charlemagne may actually portray his grandson, Charles the Bald; and it has a full head of hair.[135] Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that all of Charles portraits exhibit a full head of hair. They could merely depict a stereotypical Carolingian ruler rather than Charles himself. One caveat is presented by Charles' biographer Janet Nelson; she suggests that "some of these images may be partly taken from life, not just stereotyped Carolingian ruler images" because Charles is sometimes depicted with a distinct mustache.[136] These portraits offer the tantalizing, if completely unprovable, suggestion that Charles was not actually bald.

If Charles' nickname is post-contemporary, it is less likely to refer to physical baldness. A scribe in the tenth century would only know of Charles' baldness via rumor. Any images they encountered would depict a king with hair and there are frustratingly few written descriptions of Charles the Bald's appearance – none of which mention his hair.

Further, though *calvus* necessarily refers to baldness, this baldness could be symbolic. Hucbald's poem provides an example of this symbolism. Throughout his verses, 'bald' is connected to an innate goodness via its similarity to the monastic tonsure. Thus, symbolism gives

only reason historians know that Pippin ever served as king. Charlemagne's court was the only great center for learning during his reign; as a result, every learned scribe or chronicler resided at his court or benefitted from his patronage. Through these connections, Charlemagne had strong control of his written legacy, perhaps best illustrated by the erasure of 'king Pippin': Courtney M. Booker, "By Any Other Name? Charlemagne, Nomenclature, and Performativity," in *Charlemagne: les temps, les espaces, les hommes: Construction et deconstruction d'un règne*, ed. Rolf Grosse and Michel Sot (Turnhout: Brepolis Publishers, 2018), 418; Dutton, "Karolvs Magnvs," 27.
[135] Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 35.
[136] Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 14.

us the freedom to step away from a question of whether Charles was simply bald or not and consider what being 'the bald' could possibly mean. There are many possible ways that being bald could tie into Charles' life and legacy. First, as the youngest son, Charles was born without an inheritance. In this way he was barren. In support of this interpretation, in the second, later of the two Carolingian genealogies titled *Genealogia Regum Francorum* (not the first *GRF* containing the earliest known reference to *Carolus calvus*), Charles is the only son of Louis the Pious listed without his own subkingdom. Instead of being associated with his lands like his three brothers, Charles is identified simply as *calvus*. This difference in identification could suggest that *calvus* was meant to signify that young Charles, though he was later crowned emperor, was born with little hope of a kingdom of his own.

Intriguingly, some historians suggest that Charles' epithet may have been entirely ironic; that the king was, in fact, unusually hairy.[137] Though not beyond the bounds of the Carolingian imagination, this theory is tenuous at best. Paul Edward Dutton provides the sturdiest evidence against the ironic interpretation when he notes "the so-called Genealogy of Frankish Kings… does explicitly state that Louis was the father and Judith the mother of "Karolus caluus (bald)" and it is a source without a trace of irony".[138] Following another questionable train of thought, *calvus* could have signified that Charles, like his father, was unusually pious. Baldness was commonly associated with the monastic tonsure[139] and could therefore be easily tied to a connection with God. Charles the Bald was extremely pious; he prayed regularly and was an ardent supporter of the monastery at St. Denis, even serving as its lay abbot.[140] However, there is no evidence that Charles was exceptionally devout for his time. He lived in an era where kings,

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[137] Jäschke, "Carolingian Genealogies"; Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 13.
[138] Dutton, "Charlemagne's Mustache," 36.
[139] As in Hucbald's poem on baldness, quoted above: Klein, "Praise".
[140] Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 15, 62.

especially the Carolingians who derived their right to rule from god, were expected to be particularly pious.[141] Charles, in this regard, did not stand out.

Perhaps the most likely conclusion is that *calvus* referred to Charles' difficulty producing a suitable male heir. As detailed above, Charles the Bald was forced to pass his kingdom to his eldest son Louis the Stammerer because Louis was the only heir left alive. Though the baldness could not signify literal sterility, based on Charles' plurality of children, it could refer to a figurative infertility. Essentially all of Charles the Bald's sons either died in infancy or were described as 'weak of body' and wracked by health problems.[142] This misfortion (or perhaps genetic affliction) made it very difficult to produce a suitable male heir. Despite numerous attempts to produce a son with his second wife, Richildis, after his elder sons' rebellions, none of their sons lived to see their second birthday. Thus, Charles had no choice but to pass his kingdom down to the rebellious Louis the Stammerer. In the early Middle Ages, hair was closely tied to fertility.[143] A lack of hair could signify not only sterility, but also elected celibacy in the case of a monk. Perhaps Charles' baldness was meant to highlight his difficulty in producing an heir to continue the Carolingian line. In this case, Charles' position at the end of the early *GRF* serves to accentuate his 'barrenness'.

VI.    Kinship and Baldwin the Bald

One intriguing piece of evidence strengthens the idea that Charles' nickname was symbolic: it was passed down to one of his descendants, namely Margrave (or Count) Baldwin II "the Bald" of Flanders (c. 865-918). Baldwin's story begins with Charles the Bald's eldest daughter,

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[141] Nelson, *Charles the Bald*, 15.

[142] As a scientific aside: Given that all of Charles' sons across two wives were 'weak of body' and that his daughters were more healthy and survived much longer, on average, Charles' probably had some kind of a genetic defect in his Y chromosome. Charles' sons (and not his daughters), regardless of their mother, would inherit the sex-linked defect from his Y chromosome.

[143] See section III on page 17 for more on the connection between hair and fertility.

Judith. As king, Charles had access to the forests of Flanders as his private hunting ground. On

his recreational visits, the king brought along his daughter. The forests were overseen by a young

count and forester named Baldwin Bras-de-fer (Iron arms). Baldwin and Judith subsequently fell

in love, but their relationship was denied by her father. Seeking a politically advantageous

match, Charles sent Judith to wed the Anglo-Saxon King Æthelwulf of Wessex in England. Less

than two years later, king Æthelwulf died and Judith was rewed to her own stepson Æthelbald,

who assumed the throne. Just a few years after that, Æthelbald, too, died. As a childless double

widow, Judith returned to France. Though her father intended her for a nunnery, she eloped with

her childhood love, Baldwin Bras-de-fer. Facing wrath from Charles, the two fled to Italy and

threw themselves at the feet of Pope Nicholas, begging him to intercede on their behalf. The

pope eventually prevailed in soothing Charles' fury and the two returned to the west Frankish

court and were properly married. A few years later, the couple produced a son named Baldwin

who would eventually inherit both his father's position as count of Flanders and his grandfather's

moniker.[144]

It appears, however, that this Baldwin the Bald was not actually bald. The earliest witness to

Baldwin 'the Bald' is the Life of Winnoci, composed in the mid-eleventh century – nearly a

century after Baldwin's death.[145] A fourteenth century *Chronicon Sancti Bertini* elaborates that

"Bauduin, qu'on nomma le Chauvre, non qu'il fut chauve en effet, mais en souvenance de son

aeiul maternel empereur Charles"- "Baldwin, who is called the bald, not because he was truly

bald, but in memory of his maternal grandfather, emperor Charles".[146] It is possible that Baldwin

consciously bore 'the Bald' in honor of his grandfather. Yet, given that the nickname only

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[144] Édouard André Joseph Le Glay, *Histoire des Comtes de Flandre* (Paris: H. Casterman, 1867).
[145] Wrackmeyer, "Studien," 102.
[146] Le Glay, *Histoire*, 22.

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appears in post-contemporary sources, it may be a later author's attempt to tie Baldwin and the Counts of Flanders more closely to the Carolingian family.

Overall, the fact that Baldwin became 'the bald' tells us a few important things about epithets in this period. First, they could be inherited. Regardless of whether Baldwin adopted the epithet himself or it was bestowed on him by a later author, the nickname serves to accentuate Baldwin's ties to Charles and the kingship and, presumably, not the count's physical appearance. Second, if Baldwin adopted the nickname himself, it would suggest that, for Baldwin, the nickname was already inextricably tied to Charles' identity. Thus, if Baldwin went by 'the Bald' to honor his grandfather, then surely the word was strongly associated with Charles' legacy during Baldwin's adulthood. Similarly, the honorary use of 'the bald' would suggest that the epithet, at least to Baldwin and his contemporaries, may not have carried the negative associations tied to baldness. If Charles was mocked as 'the stupid', then becoming Baldwin the Stupid would only serve to anchor Baldwin to negative aspects of his grandfather's legacy. Of course, this analysis hinges on the possibility that Baldwin knowingly cultivated this epithet. A later scribe could have simply invented the inheritance of *calvus* to connect Baldwin and the subsequent counts of Flanders to the Carolingians; a scenario which would not suggest that Charles' epithet was contemporary or that it necessarily lacked any negative connotations.

VII.    Conclusions

For centuries, historians have followed the lead of their forebears by using standardized names to refer to people and events. The use of 'Charles the Bald' to refer to Charlemagne's grandson has been reinforced via centuries of copying, paraphrasing, and citing historical documents. The sobriquet is now inextricably linked to the man. But in the simple process of writing the epithet, it is easy to forget how much complexity is distilled into one word. Any

sophisticated metaphors or hidden meanings have been nearly erased by time. But, this one word carries a wealth of nuance in meaning and intentions. Any analysis of this nickname must attempt to reconnect with the medieval mindset and understand how to reconcile the simplicity of the epithet with the complexity of the man.

Here are the facts: first, though the true origin of Carolingian epithets will never be known, their use and proliferation were certainly fueled by the need to distinguish between the overlapping names of the Carolingians. Second, the nickname *Carolus Calvus*, could come from as early as 869 or as late as the 10th century. Third, Hucbald's *Ecloga de Calvus* was not written for Charles, but it does demonstrate that bald men were ridiculed in the ninth century, symbolically ties 'calvus' to virtue and holiness, and discusses several positive aspects of baldness. Fourth, Charles' grandson, Baldwin II of Flanders was known as 'the bald' by the 11th century.

In their analysis of Charles' nickname, many historians conclude that the meaning is obvious and undeniable, that Charles was simply bald. Regardless of how much time these scholars spend analyzing other Carolingian epithets, Charles was 'obviously' bald. From the facts and theories cultivated during this thesis, however, there is no reason to believe that Charles was truly bald. There are no images or descriptions of a bald king and a significant lack of mocking from Charles' enemies and detractors. Furthermore, Charles certainly had hair into his early adulthood and Hucbald, who lived in his court for a time, failed to address the king directly in his praise of bald men. Charles may have been called the bald in his lifetime, as the adoption of the epithet by his grandson would suggest, yet its earliest recorded use can only be confidently dated to the mid-to-late tenth century. It is entirely possible that the Charles' byname and its use by his grandson were invented by post-contemporary historians looking to distinguish between the

Carolingians and make their mark on Charles' legacy. Either way, baldness could symbolize any number of things, but likely referenced a symbolic infertility tied to Charles' difficulty in producing a suitable male heir as well as the subsequent sunset of the Carolingian dynasty.

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