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Mobility, Trade and Control at the Frontier Zones of the Carolingian Empire (8th–9th Centuries AD) *

1. Introduction: Frontier Zones and Empires, p. 71. – 2. The Border Zone of the Elbe River and the Capitulary of Diedenhofen, p. 78. – 3. Building on the Frontier Zone, p. 84. – 4. Practices of Frontiers Control: A Comparison Between Lombards and Franks, p. 88. – 5. Conclusions, p. 95.

ABSTRACT: This contribution highlights the measures taken by the Franks in the eighth and ninth centuries to control the movement of goods and people on the peripheries of the empire. It focuses on the north-eastern frontier zone of the Carolingian empire, where Charlemagne adopted a series of restrictive policies aimed at channelling trade into centres, often fortified, administered by royal envoys. In the context of studies of the mobility of goods and people in the Early Middle Ages, restrictions of this kind were nothing new: in the first half of the eighth century, the Lombard kings Ratchis and Aistulf had already created trade posts at the chokepoints of the Alpine passes to control the passage of travellers and merchants into and out of Italy. Charlemagne himself had similar laws in place for the trade of certain types of goods, such as weapons, armour and grain. However, they were only possible if they were adequately accompanied by logistical and military infrastructure. This contribution argues that the Capitulary of Diedenhofen, listing trade centres located along the Elbe and Saale rivers that were fortified from 806 and onwards, offers the opportunity to study such intertwined efforts. It shows that for the Carolingian kings, and for the central authorities of the Early Middle Ages, the management and control of the mobility of people and goods was a fundamental tool through which they could impose their authority.

1. INTRODUCTION: FRONTIER ZONES AND EMPIRES

There were a great variety of borders and frontiers in the Early Middle Ages, many of which intertwined and even overlapped with one another. Indeed, medieval frontiers encompassed not just military and political borders, but also the fragmented complexity of cultural, ethnic, religious and economic differences. During the eighth and

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ninth centuries, the Carolingians directed their efforts towards the peripheral regions of the kingdom to both combat threats from neighbouring kingdoms and peoples and to expand their realm. The great expansion of the eighth and the early years of the ninth centuries began with the reconquest of all the territories that had once been part of the Merovingian kingdoms, under the leadership of Charles Martel and his sons, Pippin – the future king of the Franks – and Carloman. The expansion then continued with the constant state of war that took place under the reign of Charlemagne¹. As a result of these conquests, the Frankish kingdom expanded its borders to its maximum extent, incorporating into the Carolingian dominion the Lombard kingdom in Italy, the Saxons in northern Germany, a strip of land beyond the Pyrenees on the Iberian Peninsula, the Istrian Peninsula, the Dalmatian mainland, and some territories once controlled by the Avar Empire in the region that Frankish sources call Pannonia².

One classic approach in the history of empire is to focus on imperial peripheries to understand how the relationship between the imperial centre and the margins functioned³. Ever since Frederick Jackson Turner published his famous essay on the American Western frontier, medieval historians have analysed the long Middle Ages through the lens of the frontier and Turner's so-called 'frontier thesis'⁴. From the

¹ Concerning the efforts the Carolingians made to reconquer all the territories that had once been part of the Merovingian kingdom, Bachrach believed that this was a 'long term strategy' of the Carolingian dynasty: BERNARD S. BACHRACH, *Charlemagne's Early Campaigns (768–777). A Diplomatic and Military Analysis*, Leiden – Boston 2013, p. 2: "[...] vindicated a long-term effort to reconstruct the *regnum Francorum* under the rule of their dynasty". This theory is based on the 'Annales Mettenses Priores', whose political geography is based on the new spatial hierarchy as well as the geographical and political order created by the Carolingian dynasty. In fact, the text stresses all the peoples and enemies that Pippin had to fight to reconstitute the Kingdom in his former glory: *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. BERNHARD VON SIMSON (MGH SS rer. Germ 10), Hanover – Leipzig 1905, ad a. 687, pp. 12–13: *Pippinus singularem Francorum obtinuit principatum, correctisque omnibus pravitatibus, quae in illis partibus per cupiditatem et iniquitatem principum per multos annos adoleverant, cunctam illam patriam in Christi servitio florentem pacatissimamque reddidit. Ex hoc ergo tempore iam non de principatu Francorum, sed de diversarum gentium acquisitione, quae quondam Francis subiegate fuerant, invicto principi certamen instabat, id est contra Saxones, Frisiones, Alemannos, Bawarios, Aquitanios, Wascones atque Brittones. Harum enim gentium duces in contumaciam versi a Francorum se dominio per desidiam precedentium principum iniqua se presumptione abstraxerunt.*

² As Einhard wrote in his 'Vita Karoli', the Frankish kingdom doubled in size: Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. GEORG WAITZ (MGH SS rer. Germ. 25), Hanover – Leipzig 1911, 15, p. 17: *Quibus regnum Francorum, quod post patrem Pippinum magnum quidem et forte susceperat, ita nobiliter ampliavit, ut poene duplum illi adiecerit.*

³ DAVID LUDDEN, *The Process of Empire. Frontiers and Borderlands*, in: PETER FIBIGER – CHRISTOPHER A. BAYLY (eds.), *Tributary Empires in Global History*, New York 2011, pp. 132–150, here p. 135.

⁴ In his essay 'The Significance of Frontier in American History', published in 1893, Turner for the first time analysed the frontier as an object in its own right. Since Turner's 'frontier thesis', and the almost contemporary works of Friederich Ratzel 'Anthropogeographie' (1882–1891), and 'Politische Geographie' (1897), which would later lead to the conception of geopolitics and political geography as separate fields of studies, frontier studies have moved in very different directions. The bibliography on Frederick Jackson Turner is extremely vast, about his impact on Medieval studies I suggest: WILLIAM O'REILLY, *Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, Orientalism, and the Austrian Mili-*

second half of the twentieth century, and especially from the beginning of the new millennium to the present day, there have been numerous studies on the shape, the perception, the archaeology, the impact and the complex intertwining of the different realities that overlapped in early medieval frontiers⁵. As political entities that by definition claimed a greater or lesser degree of universal and ecumenical afflatus, empires are key to understanding peripheries, marginal areas, borderlands and borders, what historians prefer nowadays to call frontier zones. In fact, at the borders of empires, the paradox arose whereby a state entity declared itself as the ruler and order-giver of the entire world yet had to set limits to its own aspirations⁶. Sometimes these political, cultural, economic and military limits even manifested themselves in the form of military structures such as fortresses, watchtowers, customs posts and walls. Even the Early Middle Ages have their own examples of ‘walls’: large linear earthworks, like the

tärgrenze, in: *Journal of Austrian-American History* 2, 2018, pp. 1–30. OWEN LATTIMORE, *Studies in Frontier History. Collected Papers 1928–1958*, Oxford 1962, p. 489; DANIEL POWER – NAOMI STANDEN (eds.), *Frontiers in Question. Eurasian Borderlands 700–1700*, New York 1999, p. 9; BRYAN FEUER, *Boundaries, Borders and Frontiers in Archaeology. A Study of Spatial Relationships*, Jefferson City (MO.) 2016. On Ratzel and his works and ideas: LUCIEN FEBVRE, *La terre et l'évolution humaine. Introduction géographique à l'histoire*, Paris 1970. ROBERT BARTLETT – AUGUST MACKEY (eds.), *Medieval Frontier Societies*, Oxford 1989; CLAUDIO CERETTI et al., *Spazi e poteri. Geografia politica, geografia economica, geopolitica*, Bari 2019, p. 341; PATRICIA CHIANTERA-STUTTE, *Ratzel's Stone Guest. The Art of Politics in the Work of Friederich Ratzel*, in: *Journal of Historical Geography* 61, 2018, pp. 91–96, here p. 95; TROY PADDOCK, *Spatial Relations and the Struggle for Space. Friederich Ratzel's Impact on German Education from the Wilhelmine Empire to the Third Reich*, in: *Journal of Educational Media, Memory & Society* 8, 2018, pp. 1–15, here p. 12; CHRISTIAN LANGER – MANUEL FERNÁNDEZ-GÖTZ, *Boundaries, Borders and Frontiers. Contemporary and Past Perspectives*, in: *eTopoi. Journal for Ancient Studies* 7, 2020, pp. 33–47.

⁵ Since 2000, there has been a growing interest in the topic of space, borders and frontier zones, which becomes evident in the quantity and quality of conferences and publications on the subject. WALTER POHL – HELMUT REIMITZ (eds.), *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter*, Vienna 2000; WALTER POHL et al. (eds.), *The Transformation of Frontiers from Late Antiquity to the Carolingians*, Boston – Leiden 2001; MAYKE DE JONG – FRANS THEUWS (eds.), *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, Leiden et al. 2001; DAVID ABULAFIA – NORA BEREND (eds.), *Medieval Frontiers. Concepts and Practices*, London 2002; JULIA M. H. SMITH, *Province and Empire. Brittany and the Carolingians*, Cambridge 2006; FLORIN CURTA (ed.), *Borders, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis. Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2006; MOHAMMAD A. CHAICHIAN, *Empires and Walls. Globalization, Migration, and Colonial Domination*, Leiden – Boston 2014; ANDREA STIEDORF, *Marken und Markgrafen. Studien zur Grenzsicherung durch die fränkisch-deutschen Herrscher*, Hanover 2012; DANIJEL DZINO et al. (eds.), *Migration, Integration and Connectivity on the Southeastern Frontier of the Carolingian Empire*, Leiden – Boston 2018.

⁶ The classic example of this paradox concerning empires and frontiers is the Roman Empire. There are multiple studies on the frontiers of the Roman Empire, the so-called *limes*; the following are the most relevant to the topic we are discussing: CHARLES R. WHITTAKER, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire. A Social and Economic Study*, Baltimore – London 1994; ID., *Roman Frontiers and European Perceptions*, in: *Journal of Historical Sociology* 13, 2000; ID., *Rome and its Frontiers. The Dynamics of an Empire*, London 2004; MARK W. GRAHAM, *News and Frontier Consciousness in the Late Roman Empire*, Michigan 2006.

Danevirke, close to the Frankish and Danish border, and Offa's Dyke, built by Offa, king of Mercia, on the border with Wales ⁷.

Even before Charlemagne's famous Christmas coronation in Rome in 800, the Frankish kingdom could have been called an 'empire' by modern definitions. The Frankish kingdom, in fact, was a "complex trans-ethnic and trans-regional political network" that, like most empires throughout history, caused changes on its fringes through expansion, which reshaped local power-relationships and introduced new ideological discourse ⁸. Frankish aspiration to world domination, whether ideal or actualised, was infused by a strong Christian missionary purpose ⁹. This strong Catholic – and therefore universal – belief in an *imperium christianum sine fine* clashed with the harsh reality of the surrounding world. Indeed, some neighbouring peoples remained pagan, such as the Danes and the Slavs, or Muslim, such as the Saracens and many other peoples of Iberia. Moreover, not all the Christian peoples of Europe were fully integrated in the empire; these include the Lombards of southern Italy, the Bretons, the Venetians, the various peoples living in the British Isles, and most of the cities on the Balkan shoreline on the Adriatic Sea. Nevertheless, as Mayke de Jong has pointed out, "in the territorial sense of the word, this empire ended where the correct Christian cult was no longer practised. Its boundaries were liturgical as well as political: the right kind of baptismal rite determined membership of the political community." ¹⁰ This strong sense of a divine mission is more evident in the years of Louis the Pious than during the reign of his father Charlemagne ¹¹. The proposed universality was therefore to be achieved through the conquest and conversion of neighbouring peoples, to integrate them, assimilate them and make them one with the Franks themselves. As Einhard optimistically wrote, after the end of the war, Franks and Saxons became one people

⁷ On the Danevirke: Annales Regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses Maiores et Einhardi, ed. GEORG HEINRICH PERTZ (MGH SS rer. Germ. 6), Hanover 1895, ad a. 808, p. 126: *Ibi per aliquot dies moratus limitem regni sui, qui Saxoniam respicit, vallo munire constituit, eo modo, ut ab orientali maris sinu, quem illi Ostarsalt dicunt, usque ad occidentalem oceanum totam Egidorae fluminis aquilonem ripam munimentum valli praetexeret, una tantum porta dimissa, per quam carra et equites emitti et recipere potuissent.* ANDRES SIEGFRIED DOBAT, Danevirke Revisited. An Investigation into Military and Socio-Political Organisation in South Scandinavia (c. AD 700 to 1100), in: *Medieval Archaeology* 52, 2008, pp. 27–67. On the general topic of earthworks and similar infrastructures in the Early Middle Ages: PAOLO SQUATRITI, Digging Ditches in Early Medieval Europe, in: *Past & Present* 176, 2002, pp. 11–65.

⁸ DANIJEL DZINO et al., A View from the Carolingian Frontier Zone, in: ID. et al. (eds.), *Migration, Integration and Connectivity on the Southeaster Frontier of the Carolingian Empire*, Leiden – Boston 2018, pp. 1–14, here p. 1.

⁹ OWEN M. PHELAN, *The Formation of Christian Europe. The Carolingians, Baptism, and the Imperium Christianum*, Oxford 2014, p. 45.

¹⁰ MAYKE DE JONG, The Empire that was always Decaying. The Carolingians (800–888), in: WALTER POHL – ANDRE GINGRICH (eds.), *Empires. Elements of Cohesion and Signs of Decay*, Vienna 2015, pp. 6–25, here p. 15. JONATHAN P. CONANT, Louis the Pious and the Contours of Empire, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 22, 2014, pp. 336–360, here p. 336.

¹¹ MAYKE DE JONG, *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840*, Cambridge 2009.

in Christ: *Christianae fidei atque religionis sacramenta susciperent et Francis adunati unus cum eis populus efficerentur*¹². The case of the Carolingian Empire is thus a good example of how despite theoretically and ideologically claiming supremacy over the whole world (*orbis terrarum*), imperial powers must compromise with the reality of their peripheries if they want to rule them. Hence, empires usually adopt a pragmatic and compromising policy towards their peripheries to avoid the possibility of a permanent state of war with local elites and populations, especially those recently subjugated and very different from those in the centres¹³.

The great investments in terms of political and religious capital, manpower, and military efforts that the Franks dedicated to the peripheries were also aimed at reinforcing the control of the king and the ruling elites in areas where, usually, the influence of the central authority was weaker and more difficult to impose¹⁴. As Julia Smith and other scholars have stressed, the Franks exerted their influence over the newly conquered territories with a practical approach, establishing compromises with local powerbrokers and alternating violence and diplomacy¹⁵. The great variety and complexity of the frontier zone obliged the Franks to adapt their strategy to local circumstances. In a pragmatic way, the Franks were able to alternate the use of the sword, or the menace of it, with diplomacy and a readiness to accept and integrate lifetime enemies into their elites. This happened, for example, with the two Saxon leaders Widukind and Abbi, who were fiercely fought for years by the Franks, and then, once defeated, were baptised and accepted into the Carolingian ruling elites¹⁶. As Alcuin of York wrote in one of his letters, some Saxons were converted and coopted

¹² Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* (as note 2), 7, p. 10: *Eaque conditione a rege proposita et ab illis suscepta tractum per tot annos bellum constat esse finitum, ut, abiecto daemonum cultu et relictis patriis caerimoniis, Christianae fidei atque religionis sacramenta susciperent et Francis adunati unus cum eis populus efficerentur*.

¹³ JENNIFER R. DAVIS, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire*, Cambridge 2015, p. 241.

¹⁴ JULIA M. H. SMITH, *Fines Imperii. The Marches*, in: ROSAMOND MCKITTERICK (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 2: c. 700–c. 900, Cambridge 1995, pp. 169–189, here pp. 169–170.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171: “Each frontier region established a compromise with local circumstances, taking into account the particular nature of the political and social situation beyond the frontier. In exercising the royal prerogative of defining and defending the frontiers of empire, Charlemagne (and his successors likewise) maintained a careful, panoramic concern with the entire periphery of the territory under his rule. A brief glance at one year towards the end of his reign highlights the need for constant alert, stresses the uniqueness of each sector of the frontier and draws attention to some common strategies”. Also, PETER FIBIGER BANG, *Empire – A World History. Anatomy and Concept, Theory and Synthesis*, in: *Id. et al. (eds.), The Oxford World History of Empire*, vol. 1: *The Imperial Experience*, Oxford 2021, pp. 1–88, here p. 14.

¹⁶ *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 785, p. 70: *Tunc dominus Carolus rex reversus est in Franciam et mittens ad supradictos Widochindum et Abbionem obsides per missum suum Amalwinum; qui cum recepissent obsides, illos secum deducentes et coniunxerunt se ad Attiniacum villa ad dominum regem Carolum*. Gerd Althoff has contested the idea that Widukind later became a monk in Reichenau: GERD ALTHOFF, *Der Sachsenherzog Widukind als Mönch auf der Reichenau. Ein Beitrag zur Kritik des Widukind-Mythos*, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 17, 1983, pp. 251–279.

“by gifts, and others by threats.”¹⁷ As highlighted by Ingrid Rembold, this process of integration and cooptation is still evident in sources some decades after the end of the Saxon War. For example, around 860–870, Waltbrath, Widukind’s grandson, was the dedicatory of Rudolf and Meginhard of Fulda’s ‘*Translatio Sancti Alexandri*’¹⁸. This text, as well as other *translationes* written in Saxony during the ninth and tenth centuries, provided an account of the Saxons’ participation in the wider practice of translating relics in the Carolingian empire, a ritual process of relic discovery and exchange that linked together regions and peoples of the empire, and redefined the identities of local elites and peoples in connection with the Franks and the Carolingians as well as the wider catholic community¹⁹. Relics were traded, bought and stolen throughout the vast Mediterranean world; and the movement of saints’ relics as well as the involvement of public authorities in this process were already extremely developed by the ninth century. The very intense mobility of relics between Saxony and Italy, and their strategic appeal as sources of power, prestige, self-representation and religious authority, was thus an important mark of Saxon integration into the empire.

Nonetheless, violence and conversion – often forced – were not enough to pacify and rule Saxony. Therefore, the Franks depended on forging alliances with the local elites. Admittedly, peripheries, as explained by Timothy Reuter, were the places where the same elites could get rich through looting and tributes, thanks to a constant state of pillaging, raiding and victorious warfare²⁰. But frontiers were not places where violence and conflict were the only norm: they were also places of a vibrant exchange of goods and ideas, where merchants, royal envoys, missionaries, craftsmen and people from other parts of the world met and communicated²¹. At the frontier zone, the Carolingians were even able to answer Muslim requests for aid, as Charle-

¹⁷ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, ed. ERNST DÜMMER (MGH Epp. Karolini aevi 2,4), Berlin 1845, nr. 7, p. 32: [...]
alios premiis et alios minis sollicitante [...].

¹⁸ INGRID REMBOLD, *Conquest and Christianization. Saxony and the Carolingian World, 772–888*, Cambridge 2018, pp. 68–69.

¹⁹ On the importance of relic translations as a form of identity affirmation in Saxony: ERIC SHULER, *The Saxons within Carolingian Christendom. Post-Conquest Identity in the translationes of Vitus, Pusinna and Liborius*, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 26, 2010, pp. 39–54, here pp. 41–42. On relic movement across the empire: HEDWIG RÖCKELEIN, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen im 9. Jahrhundert. Über Kommunikation, Mobilität und Öffentlichkeit im Frühmittelalter*, Stuttgart 2002. FRANCESCO VERONESE – GIULIA ZORNETTA, *Holiness on the Move. Relic Translations and the Affirmation of Authority on the Italian Edge of the Carolingian World*, in: *Medieval Worlds* 13, 2021, pp. 54–75. FRANCESCO VERONESE, *Men Moving Men’s Bodies. Translationes and Masculinity in Carolingian Times*, in: FRANCESCO BORRI et al. (eds.), *Masculinities in Early Medieval Europe. Tradition and Innovation 450–1050*, Turnhout 2023, pp. 183–220.

²⁰ TIMOTHY REUTER, *Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire*, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 35, 1985, pp. 75–94, here p. 76.

²¹ MICHAEL McCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce AD 300–900*, Cambridge 2002.

magne did for Sulayman al-Arabi at the Paderborn's assembly in 777²², or to accept pagans as faithful servants, as Louis the Pious did in 814 with the exiled Danish prince Harald Klak²³. Another way to rule the periphery and to impose Frankish authority on the territory was to christianise the defeated peoples, as happened in Saxony and in Pannonia²⁴. After the destruction of the Avar Empire, the Carolingians organised the so-called 'Conventus episcoporum ad ripas Danubii', a council deciding how to christianise and convert the newly conquered peoples and territories²⁵. The 'Conventus episcoporum ad ripas Danubii' explains the urge that Carolingian elites felt to re-organise, standardise, and absorb the frontier zone²⁶. The Frankish management of the border zones, therefore, while equal and uniform in the field of political theory, was in fact different from region to region, varying in intensity, military presence and policies. Nonetheless, the aim of frontier management was always to impose Carolingian authority.

This contribution investigates the practical aspects of these impositions, by analysing the legislative, military and infrastructural measures taken by Frankish authorities in the early ninth century to control and regulate the movement of goods and people across the northeastern borders of the empire, then comparing it with practices in Lombard Italy and other earlier examples of movement control. The Capitulary of Diefenhofen and its information on the Elbe frontier offers the unique opportunity to do so, and to study the relationship between imperial control over the frontier and the construction of new infrastructure. The various measures to oversee the frontier zone of the Elbe will then be compared to those taken on other peripheries of the Carolingian Empire. From this, I will suggest that the various practices of control were possible only if adequately accompanied by logistical and military infrastructure, and thus that selectively allowing and denying, and monitoring mobility across borders was a widespread practice in the Early Middle Ages²⁷.

²² *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 777, p. 48.

²³ *Ibid.*, ad a. 814, p. 141.

²⁴ CHRISTOPHER CARROL, *The Bishoprics of Saxony in the First Century after Christianization*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 8, 1999, pp. 70–84.

²⁵ *Concilia aevi karolini* [742–842], ed. ALBERT WERMINGHOFF (MGH Conc. 2,1), Hanover – Leipzig 1906, pp. 172–177: *Conventus ad episcoporum ad Ripas Danubii* a. 796.

²⁶ HELMUT REIMITZ, *Conversion and Control. The Establishment of Liturgical Frontiers in Carolingian Pannonia*, in: WALTER POHL et al., *The Transformation of Frontiers* (as note 5), pp. 189–207, here p. 190; DAVIS, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire* (as note 13), p. 103.

²⁷ WALTER POHL, *Frontiers in Lombard Italy. The Laws of Ratchis and Aistulf*, in: *Id. et al., The Transformation of Frontiers* (as note 5), pp. 117–142; GIANMARCO DE ANGELIS, *Mobilità e controllo politico nell'Italia longobarda e carolingia*, in: *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Âge* 132, 2020, pp. 1–17.

2. THE BORDER ZONE OF THE ELBE RIVER AND THE CAPITULARY OF DIEDENHOFEN

The management and control of the mobility of goods and people was a tool of fundamental importance, with which kings and elites could impose their power on the surrounding territory²⁸. Control of the merchants was a prerequisite for the collection of tolls and thus for the acquisition of economic and political power²⁹. Indeed, one of the first initiatives taken by the Franks at the end of the long war against the Saxons from 772 to 804 addressed the control of mobility and the creation of an infrastructure network in the area. However, one of the most interesting sources regarding the management of the Carolingian border zone is Chapter 7 of the Capitulary of Diedenhofen. This capitulary was issued in the palace of Diedenhofen, today Thionville in the department of Moselle, France. Charlemagne arrived in the *villa* with his retinue in July 805 after hunting in the Vosges Mountains³⁰. Charles the Younger then joined his father after a victorious military campaign against the Slavs fought in the same year. As the ‘Annales Mettenses Priores’ and the ‘Chronicon Moissiacense’ report, this was an important campaign fought on the eastern border of the empire. In fact, three armies were set to invade the land of the Bohemians. Charles the Younger entered the “territory of the Slavs called Bohemians” from Germany³¹. Another army, composed by Saxons and Slavic tributaries, was ordered to enter Bohemia by the northern route, while an army of Bavarians marched in from the south-west³². It was after this devastation of the land of the Bohemians that Charles the Younger joined his father in the Vosges, and then the two Charles moved together to Diedenhofen. There, before Christmas, King Pippin of Italy and King Louis of Aquitaine arrived. The assembly of Diedenhofen was thus destined to be a decisive moment for the present, and for the future of the empire and the *regnum Francorum et Langobardorum*. In addition to the capitulary, which I will discuss shortly, more complex issues were to be discussed, including the division of the empire between the emperor’s three eldest sons and, consequently,

²⁸ ADRIAAN VERHULST, *The Carolingian Economy*, Cambridge 2002.

²⁹ NEIL MIDDLETON, *Early Medieval Port Customs, Tolls and Controls on Foreign Trade*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 13, 2005, pp. 313–358, here p. 315. MCCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy* (as note 21), p. 640.

³⁰ *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 805. English translation: *Carolingian Chronicles. Royal Frankish Annals and Nithard’s Histories*, ed. BERNARD WALTER SCHOLZ, Ann Arbor (MI) 1972, p. 85: “The emperor had left Aachen in July and headed by Thionville and Metz for the Vosges Mountains, where he went hunting. Once the army had returned, he moved on to the castle of Remiremont, where he remained for a while, and then he settled down for the winter in the palace of Thionville.”

³¹ JANET L. NELSON, *King and Emperor. A New Life of Charlemagne*, London 2020, p. 420; *Annales Mettenses Priores* (as note 1), ad. a. 805, p. 93.

³² In the ‘Chronicon Moissiacense’ the names of the leaders of the Bavarian army are also reported: Audulf and Werinhar. *Chronicon Moissiacense*, ed. GEORG HEINRICH PERTZ (MGH SS 1), Hanover 1826, ad a. 805, pp. 107–109. The ‘Royal Frankish Annals’, instead, report the death of the Bohemian leaders Lecho: *Carolingian Chronicles* (as note 30), pp. 84–85: “In the same year he sent the army under his son Charles into the country of the Slavs who are called Bohemians. Charles ravaged their native land from one end to the other and killed their chief Lecho.”

the reconfiguration of the networks of power revolving around the three Carolingian kings and the spatial reorganisation of the empire³³. It was during this important assembly that Charlemagne issued the double capitulary of Diedenhofen³⁴.

The capitulary was split in two parts, the first one about ecclesiastical and lay matters, while the other addressed the *missi* of the kingdom, and other general matters. One of the first topics of the second part of the capitulary was the dangerous famine of 805. To overcome the situation, Charlemagne ordered that “[...] each person is to help his own people as best he can and is not to sell his corn at an excessively high price, and no foodstuffs are to be sold outside our empire.”³⁵ Then, in chapter 7 were listed the only inhabited centres where it would have been possible to trade with the neighbouring Slavs and Avars:

[ch. 7] Concerning the merchants (*negotiatores*) who are going to regions of the Slavs and Avars, and they must proceed with their business, that is, to the parts of Saxony as far as Bardowick, where Hredi is in charge; and at Schezla where Madalgaudus is in charge; and at Magdeburg where Aito is in charge; and at Erfurt where Madalgaudus is in charge, and at Hallstadt where Madalgaudus is also in charge; at Forcheim, and at Premberg and at Regensburg Audulfus is in charge, and Warnarius at Lorch. And let them not bring weapons (*arma*) and armour (*brunias*) to be sold; and if they be found carrying them, that all their goods should be taken away from them, one half to the share of the palace, and the other half shall be divided between the above-mentioned *missi* and the person who found out³⁶.

³³ PETER CLASSEN, Karl der Große und die Thronfolge im Frankenreich, in: ID. – JOSEF FLECKENSTEIN (eds.), *Ausgewählte Aufsätze von Peter Classen*, Sigmaringen 1983, pp. 109–134. EUGEN EWIG, Überlegungen zu den merowingischen und karolingischen Teilungen, in: *Nascita dell'Europa ed Europa carolingia. Un'equazione da verificare*, Spoleto 1981, vol. 2, pp. 225–253. NELSON, King and Emperor (as note 31), pp. 429–435. DAVIS, Charlemagne's Practice of Empire (as note 13), pp. 415–423. MARCO STOFFELLA, Pipino e la Divisio regnorum del 6 febbraio 806, in: GIUSEPPE ALBERTONI – FRANCESCO BORRI (eds.), *Spes Italiae. Il regno di Pipino, i Carolingi e l'Italia (781–810)*, Turnhout 2022, pp. 183–210.

³⁴ *Capitularia Regum Francorum*, ed. ALFRED BORETIUS (MGH Capit. 1,1), Hanover 1883, nr. 43–44, pp. 120–126: Duplex capitulare missorum in Theodonis villa datum a. 805. MICHAEL GLATTHAAR, Die drei Fassungen des Doppelkapitulars von Diedenhofen/Thionville (805/806). Entwurf – Erlass – Revision, in: *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 69, 2013, pp. 443–478.

³⁵ *Capitularia Regum Francorum* (as note 34), nr. 44, c. 4, pp. 122–123: *De hoc si evenierit fames, clades, pestilentia, inaequalitas aeris vel alia qualiscumque tribulatio, ut non expectetur edictum nostrum, sed statim depraecetur Dei misericordia. Et in praesenti anno de famis inopia, ut suos quisque adiuvet prout potest et suam annonam non nimis care vendat; et ne foris imperium nostrum vendatur aliquid alimoniae.* NELSON, King and Emperor (as note 31), p. 426.

³⁶ The translation is mine. *Capitularia Regum Francorum* (as note 34), nr. 44, c. 7, p. 123: *De negotiatoribus qui partibus Sclavorum et Avarorum pergunt, quosque procedere cum suis negotiis debeant: id est partibus Saxoniae usque ad Bardaenowic, ubi praevideat Hredi; et ad Schezla, ubi Madalgaudus praevideat; et ad Magadoburg praevideat Aito; et ad Erpesfurt praevideat Madalgaudus; et ad Halazstat praevideat item Madalgaudus; ad Foracheim et ad Breemberga et ad Ragenisburg praevideat Audulfus, et ad Lauriacum Warnarius. Et ut arma et brunias non ducant ad venundandum; quod si inventi fuerint portantes, ut omnis substantia eorum auferatur ab eis, dimidia quidem pars partibus palatii, alia vero medietas inter iamdictos missos et inventorem dividatur.*

As we can see from the text mentioned above, on the northeastern borders of the empire, from the North Sea to the Danube River, Charlemagne enacted a series of rigorous policies that were aimed at effectively directing trade towards fortified centres that were managed by royal envoys. Additionally, the Carolingians made the trading of weapons and armour illegal, thereby ensuring that these commodities did not fall into the hands of neighbouring peoples, such as Avars, Slavs and the Northmen. This strategic decision not only helped control and promote commerce, but also maintained peace and stability within the realm³⁷. Even if “economic and social resources available at that time were not sufficient for supporting cultural uniformity across the entire area under the direct control of the Carolingians [...]”³⁸ as Joachim Henning wrote, the Franks invested in the eastern borderlands to create new infrastructure and trade centres to absorb this wide region into the empire. In the peripheries, the Carolingian government established new symbolic spaces of power by controlling the movement in and out of border areas, and imposing restrictions on the trade of specific goods. This was a crucial aspect of their governance at the frontiers.

One of the main purposes of the *capitulare* was to regulate the trade in and out of the eastern frontier zones of the Carolingian empire, which had to be controlled to ensure security in a high-risk peripheral region. The places mentioned in the text, which extend from the North Sea to the Danube and were mostly settlements or villages located close to rivers near the border, were the only places where trade with Slavs and Avars was permitted³⁹. Three of these trading nodes, Bardowick, Schezla and Magdeburg, were in Saxony. The others were Hallstatt, Erfurt, Forcheim, Regensburg, Lorch and Premberg, and were distributed between Hesse and Bavaria, with the furthest at Lorch along the Danube in present-day Austria⁴⁰. The Capitulary of Diedenhofen also names the various royal envoys to whom the administration of commercial hubs was delegated. This is a broad region that includes the mouth of the Elbe river in the North Sea, near the city of Hamburg, then it follows the course of the Elbe and Saale rivers. After Forcheim, the frontier zone passes through Bavaria and then, from Regensburg on, it follows the course of the Danube up to Lorch. As highlighted by Matthias Hardt, all the places listed in the Diedenhofen capitulary were located at the crossroads of land and river routes, or at the mouth of smaller rivers through which the area of Slavic settlements could be easily reached. Bardowick, for example, was an

³⁷ MATTHIAS HARDT, Hesse, Elbe, Saale and the Frontiers of the Carolingian Empire, in: WALTER POHL et al., *The Transformation of Frontiers* (as note 5), pp. 219–232; HEIKO STEUER, *The Beginnings of Urban Economies among the Saxons*, in: DENNIS H. GREEN – FRED SIEGMUND (eds.), *The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century. An Ethnographic Perspective*, Woodbridge 2003, pp. 159–192, here p. 160.

³⁸ JOACHIM HENNING, *Civilization Versus Barbarians? Fortification Techniques and Politics in the Carolingian and Ottonian Borderlands*, in: CURTA, *Border, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis* (as note 5), pp. 23–34.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ MICHAEL SCHMAUDER, *Überlegungen zur östlichen Grenze des karolingischen Reiches unter Karl dem Großen*, in: POHL – REIMITZ, *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter* (as note 5), pp. 57–98.

important trade place, and Magdeburg later became a prominent center under Henry the Fowler and the Ottonian dynasty⁴¹. Of all these places only Schezla has not yet been clearly identified⁴².

It is interesting to note that none of the above-mentioned places were used by Charlemagne or Louis the Pious as gathering or assembly centres. After the last assemblies held by Charlemagne in Saxony in 804 (Lippspringe and Hollenstedt), Louis the Pious held one sole assembly in Paderborn in 815. Only under the Ottonian dynasty would there be a flourishing of assemblies in the Elbe and Saale region⁴³. As demonstrations of supremacy and triumph, assemblies were an important part of Frankish dominion. It is not surprising, then, that most of the assemblies organised by Charlemagne, as Caspar Ehlers states, “took place in Westphalian localities between the river Rhine and Weser that had been secured early on.”⁴⁴ The Elbe region, recently conquered and reorganised by the Diedenhofen capitulary, required particular political and military attention since the menace of neighbouring peoples was still very strong in the region. The situation of trading posts at these sites must therefore be linked to and studied in conjunction with the significance of these sites as actively negotiated frontiers, distinct from the centres of authority from which assemblies were held. This is demonstrated by the continuous incursions of the Frankish army into Slavic territories during the reign of Charlemagne, and, later on, by Slavic and Danish incursions into Frankish lands during the reign of Louis the Pious. The constant state of warfare, both aggressive and defensive, helps us to understand the promotion of these royally-controlled centres of trade, and the structural efforts made by the Franks from 806 onwards. The Franks had to organise the frontier zone and trade over the border so as to protect not only trade and merchants, but also the inhabitants of the region.

Another important aspect of this capitulary for understanding Carolingian policies in the border areas is the prohibition of selling weapons and armour to Slavs and Avars. This limitation on commerce, which is stressed in the capitulary of Diedenhofen (“they should not bring weapons and armour to be sold”), mirrors similar limitations that were already implemented in earlier capitularies⁴⁵. Those caught trading

⁴¹ MATTHIAS HARDT, Magdeburg und die Ostgrenze des Frankenreiches, in: BABETTE LUDOWICI – HEIKE PÖPPELMANN (eds.), *Das Miteinander, Nebeneinander und Gegeneinander von Kulturen. Zur Archäologie und Geschichte wechselseitiger Beziehungen im 1. Jahrtausend n. Chr.*, Hanover 2011, pp. 172–183, here p. 174.

⁴² *Ibid.*: “Es häufen sich allerdings die Indizien dafür, den heutigen Ort Hitzacker mit der Befestigung auf dem Weinberg über der Mündung des Flusses Jeetzel in die Elbe im Hannoverschen Wendland mit Schezla in Verbindung zu bringen.”

⁴³ One at Erfurt in 936, at Magdeburg in 965 and again in Magdeburg in 973. *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 804, pp. 118–119, ad a. 815, p. 142. CASPAR EHLERS, *Between Marklo and Merseburg. Assemblies and their Sites in Saxony from the Beginning of Christianization to the Time of the Ottonian Kings*, in: *Journal of the North Atlantic* 8, 2016, pp. 134–140, here p. 137.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Capitularia Regum Francorum* (as note 34), nr. 44, p. 123. It is also very interesting to note that there is also a capitulary fragment that deals with night trade, probably intended to prevent smuggling and

weaponry to neighbouring peoples with whom commerce of these goods was forbidden would be punished with the confiscation of all the goods in question. In order to motivate and encourage the perquisitions of merchants, half of the contraband goods would have gone to the officials in charge, the other half to the king⁴⁶. This decision echoes one already taken in the ‘Capitulare Haristallense’ of 779, issued by Charlemagne, where one reads: “About armour, that none should presume to sell it outside our kingdom.”⁴⁷ This specific capitulary was written in the middle of the Saxon war, while Charlemagne was still facing strong opposition in Westphalia and in the valley of the Lippe River. The general prohibition on selling armour (*brunias*, there is no mention for *arma*, as in the Diedenhofen capitulary) of the ‘Capitulare Haristallense’ of 779 was later made more specific in the 805 capitulary of Diedenhofen (“And let them not bring weapons [*arma*] and armour [*brunias*] to be sold”)⁴⁸, which also bans selling weapons and armour to specific groups, the Slavs and Avars. After 804, the Saxons were no longer a problem. The last rebellious Saxons had, in fact, been deported, and the capitulary emphasises that the real menace now came from the neighbouring Slavs, the Danes and the remaining and dispersed Avars in the Danube basin.

This prohibition on the sale of swords outside the kingdom, repeated in several capitularies, did not mean that Carolingian weapons never circulated beyond Carolingian borders. On several occasions, archaeologists have found Carolingian-made swords in territories beyond the frontiers. Frankish swords have indeed been found in Slavic territory⁴⁹. They may have been sold by Frankish merchants before the Diedenhofen ban, or smuggled in after it, or were the spoils of a battle in which the Slavs had prevailed. There was a huge trade in weapons in Carolingian Europe, as evidenced by finds from the port town of Dorestad, in present-day Netherlands, near the modern town of Wijk bij Duurstede. The discovery of numerous swords here suggests that they were not only forged and used by the city’s guards, but also the object of

to clarify that every trader should trade during ‘daytime’ and in front of witnesses: *Capitularia Regum Francorum* (as note 34), nr. 55, p.142: *De negotio super omnia praecipendum est, ut nullus audeat in nocte negotiare in vasa aurea et argentea, mancipia, gemmas, caballos, animalia, excepto vivanda et fodro quod iter agentibus necessaria sunt, sed in die coram omnibus et coram testibus unbusquisque suum negotium exerceat*; also in NELSON, King and Emperor (as note 31), p.427: “Concerning trade, it is to be commanded above all that no-one should dare to trade at night in gold and silver vessels, slaves, jewels, horses and livestock except living animals and the fodder they need if they are travelling, but each trader is to engage in their business during daytime and before witnesses.”

⁴⁶ *Capitularia Regum Francorum* (as note 34), p. 123.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, nr. 20, c. 20, p. 51: *De brunias, ut nullus foris nostro regno vendere praesumat*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, nr. 44, c. 7, p. 123.

⁴⁹ SCHMAUDER, Überlegungen zur östlichen Grenze des karolingischen Reiches unter Karl dem Großen (as note 40), p. 82. SEBASTIAN BRATHER, Merowinger- und karolingerzeitliches „Fremdgut“ bei den Nordwestslawen. Gebrauchsgut und Elitenkultur im südwestlichen Ostseeraum, in: *Prähistorische Zeitschrift* 71, 1996, pp. 46–84. ROSTYSLAV VATSEBA, Charlemagne and the Velei Slavs. Reconstructing the Campaign of 789, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 55, 2021, pp. 89–113, here pp. 96–98. FLORIN CURTA, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages 500–1250*, Cambridge 2006, p. 135.

a vast trade with the rest of the Frankish world and the North Sea emporia⁵⁰. The importance of this commerce, and the rise of trading places in the North Sea such as Hedeby, Dorestad, London, and Birka, is also underlined by a passage in the Royal Frankish Annals where Godfrid, king of the Danes, during his invasion of Obodrites lands in 808, ravaged and destroyed the port of Reric, taking with him into the coastal city of Hedeby all the merchants that were living there⁵¹. A similar limitation to the one of Diedenhofen was already defined in the ‘Capitulare Mantuanum’ of 781, issued in Italy, in which the ban on selling weapons outside the kingdom (*foris regno nostro*)⁵² was added to the ban on selling Christian or pagan slaves. In the capitulary of Diedenhofen, however, there is also the injunction not to export grain outside the kingdom (*ne foris imperium nostrum*)⁵³, made in response to a famine. Analogous bans help us to better understand the Frankish effort to oversee the border area, and to prevent neighbours from buying Frankish arms and armour, probably of better quality, thus becoming a possible threat to Carolingian interests across the border zone⁵⁴. All this regulation went hand in hand with the building of fortresses, bridges and infrastructure, at least where older buildings did not already exist, to guarantee the defence of the territory and the successful control of its merchants. In the Early Middle Ages, the protection of merchants, resources and technologies, and internal trade (including its expansion as well as its defence) were priorities for the central authorities in both Frankish and Danish lands⁵⁵.

The second part of the Diedenhofen Capitulary should hence be read as supporting evidence for greater Carolingian political and military activity than has been acknowledged in the eastern frontier zones. Even after the defeat of the Saxons (804) and the Avars (796), the northern and eastern border regions of the Carolingian empire were still dangerous territories, as proved by the deaths of two important

⁵⁰ ANNEMARIEKE WILLEMSSEN, Mixed Emotions. The Swords of Dorestad, in: EAD. – HANNEKE KIK, Dorestad and its Networks. Communities, Contact and Conflict in Early Medieval Europe, Leiden 2021, p. 114.

⁵¹ Annales Regni Francorum (as note 7), ad a. 808, p. 126: *Godofridus vero, priusquam reverteretur, distructo emporio, quod in oceani litore constitutum lingua Danorum Reric dicebatur et magnam regno illius commoditatem vectigalium persolutione praestabat, translatisque inde negotiatoribus, solute classe ad portum, qui Sliesthorp dicitur, cum univ[er]se exercitu venit*. MCCORMICK, Origins of the European Economy (as note 21), p. 580.

⁵² Capitularia Regum Francorum (as note 34), nr. 90, c. 7, p. 190: *Ut nullus mancipia christiana vel pagana nec qualibet arma vel amissario foris regno nostro vendat; et qui hoc fecerit, bannum nostrum componere cogatur; et si ea mancipia minime revocare potuerit, widrigild suum componat*. DAVIS, Charlemagne’s Practice of Empire (as note 13), pp. 281–282; as Jennifer Davis wrote, this capitulary was aimed to “assert Carolingian authority” (p. 282).

⁵³ Capitularia Regum Francorum (as note 34), nr. 44, pp. 122–123.

⁵⁴ SCHMAUDER, Überlegungen zur östlichen Grenze des karolingischen Reiches unter Karl dem Großen (as note 40), p. 82.

⁵⁵ MCCORMICK, Origins of the European Economy (as note 21), p. 579: “No doubt western European kings lacked the complex conceptual tools of modern economists and administrators as well as the bureaucratic apparatus of their Byzantine colleagues. But they too had some real sense of commerce and its value.”

high-ranking officials of the empire: Gerold, *praefectus* of Bavaria, and Eric, duke of Friuli ⁵⁶. The Franks fought against several peoples along those borders. On the other side of the border zone, confederations and kingdoms of Slavic peoples such as the Bohemians, the Sorbs, the Linones, the Carantanians, the Slavs of Lower Pannonia, and the Wilzi, were difficult to subjugate. The threat of the Danes in the north grew stronger from 808 onwards. In 805, Charles the Younger fought against the Slavs in Bohemia, and in 806 he led another army against the Sorbian Slavs while an army of Burgundians, Alemanni and Bavarians ravaged the Bohemian region ⁵⁷. From 808 onwards, the presence of the Danish king Godfrid became a real threat to Carolingian sovereignty in the Elbe region ⁵⁸. Godfrid defeated the Obodrite Slavs, allies of the Franks, on multiple occasions and imposed his authority in this region between the Danish Kingdom and Saxony ⁵⁹. Indeed, these multiple threats obliged Charlemagne, and later his son Louis the Pious, to build forts on the two sides of the Elbe to protect Frankish interests in the region ⁶⁰.

3. BUILDING ON THE FRONTIER ZONE

Following the end of the Saxon conflict in 804, and the deportation of thousands of Nordalbingian Saxons to Francia, the Franks undertook the construction of infrastructure along the banks of the Elbe to control the surrounding region and defend the recently conquered territories. The distance from the heart of the kingdom, the lack of Roman infrastructure, and the threat from the Slavic populations beyond the Elbe were just some of the reasons that influenced the Franks to build various fortresses in this region. From 805 onwards, Charlemagne engaged himself in the reor-

⁵⁶ *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad. a. 799, p. 108: *Eodem anno gens Avarum a fide, quam promiserat, defecit, et Ericus dux Foroiulensis post tot prospere gestas res iuxta Tharsaticam Liburniae civitatem insidiis oppidanorum oppressus est, et Geroldus comes, Baioariae praefectus, commisso contra Avars proelio cecidit.*

⁵⁷ *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad. a. 805, p. 120: *Eodem anno misit exercitum suum cum filio suo Carlo in terram Sclavorum, qui vocatur Bebeimi. Qui omnem illorum patriam depopulatus ducem eorum nomine Lechbonem occidit [...]; ad a. 806, p. 121: [...] Karlum filium suum in terram Sclavorum, qui dicuntur Sorabi, qui sedent super Albim fluvium, cum exercitu misit; in qua expeditione Miliduocho Sclavorum dux interfectus est, duoque castella ab exercitu aedificata, unum super ripam fluminis Salae, alterum iuxta fluvium Albim; p. 122: Missa est et manus de Baioaria et Alamannia atque Burgundia sicut anno superiore in terram Beeheim vastataque terrae non minima portione absque ullo gravi incommodo regressa.*

⁵⁸ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* (as note 2), 14, p. 15. *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 808, p. 125: [...] *Carlum filium suum ad Albiam cum valida Francorum et Saxonum manu misit, iubens verano regi resistere, si Saxoniae terminos adgredi temptaret.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ STEUER, *The Beginnings of Urban Economies among the Saxons* (as note 37), p. 173. "All the fortifications enclosed approximately the same area of 100 by 200 or 200 by 300 metres. These were Paderborn (4.9 hectares), Osnabrück (3.5 hectares, in the eleventh century 4.3 hectares), Münster (5.9 hectares), Minden (4.2 hectares), Bremen (3 hectares), Bardowick, Verden (4 to 6 hectares), Halberstadt (3 hectares around the year 800, 3.9 hectares in the ninth century), Hildesheim (4 hectares) and Hamburg (1 hectare)."

ganisation of the Saxon lands, paying great attention to the periphery of the Elbe and Saale rivers. The settlement of the Obodrites, even defined by the sources as *Sclavi nostri*, “our Slavs”⁶¹, in the territory that was once inhabited by the Nordalbingians and that now separated the Danes from Frankish Saxony, was later followed by the Capitulary of Diedenhofen, and by the reorganisation of the entire eastern frontier of the Carolingian empire. However, the control of goods and of mobility across the border area could only be guaranteed by creating physical structures capable of implementing these rules. The year following the Diedenhofen capitulary, the Franks built two fortresses, one on the western bank of the Saale River and the other on the eastern bank of the Elbe⁶². This second fort was built in front of Magdeburg, one of the commercial nodes already mentioned, governed by the *missus dominicus Aito*, as the author of the ‘Chronicon Moissiacense’ recalls⁶³. Magdeburg’s position was strategic, since it was both one of the trading points indicated in the Diedenhofen Capitulary and also because it was located on one of the main routes connecting Saxony to the Slavic territories⁶⁴. However, the fort was not built in the centre itself, but on the opposite side of the river (*ad aquilonem partem Albiae contra Magadaburg*⁶⁵), so as to guarantee greater defence for the bridge that linked the two banks and to allow the passage of merchants⁶⁶.

In 808, the emperor ordered that two of his envoys build two fortresses on the Elbe to defend themselves against the attacks of the Slavs. According to the entry in the Royal Frankish Annals for 808, “[a]fter having two castles built on the River Elbe by his envoys and placing troops in them for the defense against the attacks of the Slavs, the emperor spent the winter at Aachen [...]”⁶⁷. One such fort was most likely

⁶¹ *Annales Laureshamenses*, ed. GEORG HEINRICH PERTZ (MGH SS 1), Hanover 1826, ad a. 798, p. 37: [...] *et interim congregati sunt Sclavi nostri* [...].

⁶² *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 806, p. 121: *Et inde post non multos dies Aquasgrani veniens Karlum filium suum in terram Sclavorum, qui dicuntur Sorabi, qui sedent super Albim fluvium, cum exercitu misit; in qua expeditione Miliduoch dux interfectus est, duoque castella ab exercitu aedificata, unum super ripam fluminis Salae, alterum iuxta fluvium Albim.*

⁶³ *Chronicon Moissacenses* (as note 32), p. 308: *Et mandavit eis rex Karolus aedificare civitates duas, unam ad aquilonem partem Albiae contra Magadaburg, alteram vero in orientalem partem Sala, ad locum qui vocatur Halla; deinde reversus est ad patrem suum in Francia.* The author of the ‘*Annales regni Francorum*’ is less specific: *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 806, p. 121: *Et inde post non multos dies Aquasgrani veniens Karlum filium suum in terram Sclavorum, qui dicuntur Sorabi, qui sedent super Albim fluvium, cum exercitu misit; in qua expeditione Miliduoch Sclavorum dux interfectus est, duoque castella ab exercitu aedificata, unum super ripam fluminis Salae, alterum iuxta fluvium Albim.*

⁶⁴ HARDT, Magdeburg und die Ostgrenze des Frankenreiches (as note 41), p. 174.

⁶⁵ *Chronicon Moissacenses* (as note 32), p. 308.

⁶⁶ HARDT, Magdeburg und die Ostgrenze des Frankenreiches (as note 41), p. 175; ID., Hesse, Elbe, Saale and the Frontiers of the Carolingian Empire (as note 37), p. 228. HENNING, Civilization versus Barbarians? (as note 38), p. 25.

⁶⁷ *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 808, p. 127: *Imperator vero aedificatis per legatos suos super Albim fluvium duobus castellis praesidioque in eis contra Sclavorum incursiones disposito Aquisgrani hiemavit [...].* Carolingian Chronicles (as note 30), p. 89.

the one later described as “the castle of Hohbuoki”⁶⁸ in the Royal Frankish Annals, built on an island in what is now called Hannoversches Wendland⁶⁹. Hohbuoki fort was later captured by the Wilzi, who in 810 captured the Franks residing there along with Odo, the imperial envoy in command of the Franks that defended the fort⁷⁰. In the same years, Charlemagne also had a fort built at Esesfeld, in what is now the southern part of Schleswig-Holstein, on the river Stör, in a strong position to counter Danish incursions in this area and protect the city of Hamburg at the mouth of the Elbe. A count named Egbert was sent to build the fort of Esesfeld, located 14 km north of the Elbe and 60 km south of the Danish Danevirke, near the present-day city of Itzehoe⁷¹. This building activity did not stop with the death of Charlemagne and shows how Louis continued his father’s policies in the Elbe region. In 822, the emperor Louis the Pious had the Saxons build a fort at Delbende with the declared intention of defending themselves against the attacks of the Slavs: by then the Obodrites were no longer “our Slavs” as they had been during his father’s time, and the border area was more exposed than before⁷².

The development of a well-structured system of fortresses and trade centres on the north-eastern frontier zone under the leadership of the royal *missi* was beneficial to the defence of the newly conquered territories, and the development of the region. This building process coincided with the development of a Christian landscape in the newly submitted areas of Saxony. A key feature in the conquest of Saxony, as well as in the war against the Saxons, was the missionary aspect of converting pagans⁷³. In fact, the process of conversion received a great boost during the thirty years’ war that the Franks waged against the Saxons⁷⁴. The conquest and subjugation of the various

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 92: “[...] that the castle of Hohbuoki on the Elbe, with Odo, the emperor’s envoy, and a garrison of East Saxons, had been captured by the Wilzi [...]”

⁶⁹ HARDT, Hesse, Elbe, Saale and the Frontiers of the Carolingian Empire (as note 37), p. 226; JENS SCHNEEWEISS – THOMAS SCHATZ, The Impact of Landscape Change on the Significance of Political Centres along the Lower Elbe River in the 10th Century A.D., in: Quaternary International 324, 2014, pp. 20–33, here p. 23.

⁷⁰ Annales Regni Francorum (as note 7), ad a. 810, p. 131.

⁷¹ Ibid., ad a. 809, pp. 129–130: *Sed imperator, postquam locus civitatis constituendae fuerat exploratus, Egbertum comitem huic negotio exsequendo praeficiens Albim traicere et locum institit occupare. Est autem locus super ripam Sturiae fluminis, vocabulo Esesfelth et occupatus est ab Egberto et comitibus Saxonicis circa Idus Martias et muniri coeptus*. The Esesfeld fort was besieged by a joined force of Danes and Obodrites in 817; *ibid.*, ad a. 817. THORSTEN LEMM, The Fight for Nordalbingia. Reconstruction and Simulation of the Danish Obodrite Attack on the Frankish Fortress of Esesfelth in AD 817, in: Viking. Tidsskrift for norrøn arkeologi 84, 2021, pp. 63–84, here pp. 79–80.

⁷² Annales Regni Francorum (as note 7), ad a. 822, p. 158; HENNING, Civilization versus Barbarians? (as note 38), p. 29; MATTHIAS HARDT, The Limes Saxoniae as Part of the Eastern Borderlands of the Frankish and Ottonian-Salian Empire, in: CURTA, Borders, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis (as note 5), pp. 35–50, here p. 37.

⁷³ Einhard, Vita Karoli Magni (as note 2), 7, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Annales Laureshamenses (as note 61), ad a. 780, p. 31: [...] *divisitque ipsam patriam inter episcopos et presbyteros seu et abbates, ut in ea baptizarent et praedicarent* [...].

Saxon tribes went hand in hand with their – often forced – conversion. Laws such as the ‘*Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*’⁷⁵, the ‘*Capitulare Saxonicum*’⁷⁶, or events like the massacre of Verden⁷⁷, and the debate raised by Alcuin of York on the usefulness of the tithe to be paid to the newly founded ecclesiastical institutions imposed on all Saxons⁷⁸, illustrate the harshness and uniqueness of the conversion of the Saxons⁷⁹. While conquering and converting the Saxons, the Franks built numerous churches and monasteries, and established bishoprics to govern the territory and ensure the complete christianisation of the land and its inhabitants. As Ingrid Rembold writes, the creation of a Christian landscape in Saxony was not a straightforward process⁸⁰. However, towards the end of the eighth century, some diocesan sees were already founded⁸¹. Since there was a general lack of cities in Saxony, many of these religious centres were founded at fortified sites, as demonstrated by the missionary centres and bishoprics of Bremen, Verden, Osnabrück, Paderborn, Münster and Minden⁸². The construction of churches, the imperial palace at Paderborn⁸³, bridges, monasteries, markets, and other buildings surely attracted a large number of artisans and workers from other regions of the empire to Saxony, with a growing need for construction materials, goods and other necessities to be purchasable through trade. These nascent ecclesiastical institutions, then, were not only a missionary force, but most likely also acted as royal agents in the area, capable of controlling the surrounding region and the newly subjugated population, and yet dependent on trade and infrastructure for their continued existence.

⁷⁵ *Capitularia Regum Francorum* (as note 34), nr. 26, pp. 68–70.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, nr. 27, pp. 71–72.

⁷⁷ *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 782, p. 62.

⁷⁸ Alcuin, *Epistolae* (as note 17), nr. 111, pp. 159–162; REMBOLD, *Conquest and Christianization* (as note 18), pp. 168–171; PHELAN, *The Formation of Christian Europe* (as note 9), pp. 100–101.

⁷⁹ IAN WOOD, *An Absence of Saints? The Evidence for the Christianisation of Saxony*, in: PETER GODMAN, et al. (eds.), *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung. Das Epos “Karolus Magnus et Leo papa” und der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799*, Berlin 2002, pp. 335–352, here p. 341: “To some extent there can be no doubt that the christianisation of the Saxons was unusual. It was interlinked with war and conquest to an extent that was not paralleled elsewhere in the Frankish world.”

⁸⁰ REMBOLD, *Conquest and Christianization* (as note 18), pp. 143–146, 218.

⁸¹ STEUER, *The Beginnings of Urban Economies among the Saxons* (as note 37), p. 173. GENEVIÈVE BÜHRER-THIERRY, *À l’Est du Rhin. Construction et gestion des espaces périphériques*, in: ROLF GROSSE – MICHEL SOT (eds.), *Charlemagne. Les temps, les espaces, les hommes. Construction et déconstruction d’un règne*, Turnhout 2018, pp. 337–349, here p. 343. MARCO STOFFELLA, *In a Periphery of the Empire. Tuscany Between the Lombards and Carolingians*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 319–336, here p. 335.

⁸² REMBOLD, *Conquest and Christianization* (as note 18), p. 218.

⁸³ SVEVA GAI, *Tradizione o innovazione? I palazzi reali di età carolingia e ottoniana espressione del potere. L’esempio di Paderborn*, in: *Hortus artium medievalium. Journal of the International Research Center for Late Antiquity and Middle Ages* 20, 2014, pp. 98–111. EAD., *La construction des palais royaux à l’époque de Charlemagne. Introduction e modèles de l’antiquité dans une architecture d’origine germanique*, in: GROSSE – SOT, *Charlemagne* (as note 81), pp. 137–164.

4. PRACTICES OF FRONTIERS CONTROL: A COMPARISON BETWEEN LOMBARDS AND FRANKS

Controlling, directing, and preventing the mobility of peoples and goods were not practices unique to the Carolingians or the Franks. Indeed, scholars have highlighted that restrictions such as those imposed by the Franks on trade and circulation were not uncommon between the eighth and ninth centuries. Already in the second half of the eighth century, the Lombards introduced custom stations called *clusae* to control the movements of peoples across the Alps and prevent an easy alliance between the Carolingians and the pope. The *clusae* did not achieve their goal, and they fell into disuse until their later restoration by King Pippin of Italy, Charlemagne's son. Yet, despite this, and the distance in time and space, it is useful to compare Lombard laws about the *clusae* and movement across the *marca*, as they called the frontier zone, with those issued by Charlemagne in 805⁸⁴.

The Lombard kings Ratchis and Aistulf established customs posts, called *clusae*, located at Alpine passes, that were intended to supervise movement through the Alps in the first half of the eighth century⁸⁵. Their successor, King Desiderius, had the *clusae* restored in preparation for a conflict with Charlemagne and the Franks. According to the laws of Ratchis (744–749) and Aistulf (749–756), the *clusae*, located along the transit routes of the Alps, were places to control anyone who crossed the frontier of the kingdom. This control was to be performed through the use of an official recognition, a document delivered at the border by the guards in charge – called *clausarii* – who would then collect the same document when the traveller left the kingdom⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ STEFANO GASPARRI, La frontiera in Italia (sec. VI–VIII). Osservazioni su un tema controverso, in: GIAN PIETRO BROGIOLO (ed.), Città, castelli, campagne nei territori di frontiera (secoli VI–VII), Mantua 1995, pp. 9–19; STEFANO GASPARRI, La frontiera in età longobarda, in: Civiltà Bresciana 19, 2010, pp. 13–26.

⁸⁵ The institution of the Lombard *clusae* coincided with the rise of the Carolingian-papal alliance. Therefore, the Lombard kings passed laws to renovate late Roman infrastructure such as the *Tractus Italia circa Alpes* and the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*. About the Roman fortifications on the Alps: EMANUELA MOLLO, Le chiuse Alpine fra realtà e mito, in: I Lombardi e le Alpi. Atti della giornata di studio “Clausae Langobardorum, i Lombardi e le Alpi”, Susa 2005, pp. 47–66. NEIL CHRISTIE, The castra of Paul the Deacon and the Longobard Frontier in Friuli, in: Paolo Diacono e il Friuli altomedievale (sec. VI–X). Atti del XIV Congresso Internazionale di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 1999, pp. 231–351. CRISTOPHER HEATH, Aspects of Movement and Mobility in Lombard Law. Fugitives, Runaway, Slaves and Strangers, in: ID. et al. (eds.), Mobility in the Medieval Mediterranean. Changing Perspectives from Late Antiquity to the Long-Twelfth-Century, Vienna 2021, pp. 12–35; POHL, Frontiers in Lombard Italy. The Laws of Ratchis and Aistulf (as note 27), pp. 117–141.

⁸⁶ *Leges langobardorum*, ed. GEORG HEINRICH PERTZ (MGH LL 4), Hanover 1869, Ratchis regis capitula in breve statuta, pp. 192–193, nr. 13: *Hoc autem statuere previdimus ut marcas nostras Christo custodiente sic debeat fieri ordinatas et vigilatas, uti inimici nostri et gentes nostre non possint per eas sculcas mittere aut fugacis exientes suscipere, sed nullus homo per eas introire possit sine signo aut epistola regis. Propterea unusquisque index per marcas sibi commissas tale studium et vigilantiam ponere debeat, et per se et per loco positos et clusarios suos, ut nullus homo sine signo aut epistola regis exire possit. Et dum ad ingrediendum venerit peregrini ad clusas nostras, qui ad Romam ambulare disponunt, diligenter debeat eos interrogare unde sint; et si cognoscat, quod simpliciter veniant, faciat index aut*

These structures, as Walter Pohl has explained, were not only the answer to a moment of great political crisis for the Lombard kingdom, but also a means of internal control and defence against outsiders in times of peace⁸⁷. In fact, the aim of the laws about the *clusae* was to control movement through the realm. The text of Ratchis' law explained how those who pass through the checkpoints must be stopped, to know who wants to enter or leave the kingdom: "[...] but no man should enter through the border without a sign or a letter from the king."⁸⁸

Controlling the Alpine crossings and passes was fundamental for the Carolingians too, in order to project Frankish power beyond the mountain range, and into the Lombard kingdom. Before the conquest of the Lombard kingdom, the Franks also organised themselves to control movement across the Alpine passes. Most likely, this organisation was the response to previous problematic episodes, as the Frankish-Lombard history reminds us⁸⁹. In a passage of the 'Annales Mettenses Priores', Grifo, the half-brother of Pippin who was excluded from Charles Martel's inheritance, was intercepted at Saint Jean-de-Maurienne by Theodowin, Count of Vienne. Count Theodowin was one of King Pippin's faithful and, with his men, responsible for the

clusarius syngraphus, et mittat in cera et ponat sibi sigillum suum, ut ipsi postea ostendat ipsum signum missis nostris, quos nos ordaenaverimus. Signum post hoc missus nostri faciant eis epistola ad Romam ambulandi; et con venerent de Romo, accipiat signo de anolo regis. Si vero cognoverent, quid fraudelenter veniant per suos missos, eos ad nos diriga, et innotescat nobis causa ipsa. Nam qui ille index hoc facere distulerit et, quod absit, forte per ipsius noticia aliquis exierit, sanguinis suo incurrat periculum, et res eius infiscentur. Ahistulfi Leges de anno I, p. 197, nr. 5: De clusas, qui disruptae sunt, restaurentur et ponat ibi custodiam, ut nec nostri homines possint transire sine voluntate regis, nec extranei possint introire in provincia nostra similiter sine voluntate regis vel iussone. Et in quale clusa inventus fuerit, tali pena subiaceat clusarius qui custodire neglexit a iudice suo, qualis ipse index a rege anteposito, nisi index pro utilitate regis miserit missum suum, aut recipit tantummodo pro causa regis.

⁸⁷ POHL, Frontiers in Lombard Italy. The Laws of Ratchis and Aistulf (as note 27), p. 125: "It should have become clear so far that Ratchis 13 and several of the laws issued by Aistulf in 750 form a whole in trying to introduce firmer checks and balances against undesired movements within and across the boundaries of the kingdom". DE ANGELIS, Mobilità e controllo politico nell'Italia longobarda e carolingia (as note 27), p. 4.

⁸⁸ Due to their very nature, the Lombard *clusae* were initially perceived as primarily a military instrument. Centuries before the Lombards, Cassiodorus praised the defensive qualities of the Alpine fortifications built by the Romans: Cassiodorus, *Variae*, ed. THEODOR MOMMSEN (MGH AA 12), Berlin 1844, II, 5, p. 49. Indeed, as historians have noted, the *clusae* were always defeated when tested in battle. After all, King Pippin was able to pass the Alpine passes twice, once in 755 and again in 756; so did his son Charlemagne, who in 773 bypassed the Alpine defences of the Lombards with a great pincer manoeuvre. The role of the Lombard locks, although they were the *fulcrum* of the Lombard resistance both in 756 and in 773, was not in fact military, but rather that of custom stations to control trade and movement of goods and people, *Annales Regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 755, p. 12, ad a. 773, p. 36.

⁸⁹ Paul the Deacon, in his 'Historia Langobardorum', reports many of the fights that occurred in the Alps between Franks and Lombards, Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum*, ed. GEORG WAITZ (MGH SS rer. Lang. 1), Hanover 1878, III, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 17; V, 5; VI, 35.

defence and control of the Alpine passes⁹⁰. According to the passage, Grifo was trying his luck at entering the Lombard kingdom, after having been driven out of Bavaria the previous years by his older brothers. However, he was intercepted by Theodowin and killed in battle. We can thereby assume that the task of these men was to control the mountain passes and crossings on the Frankish side. Count Theodowin and his men, in fact, were described as those who “guarded the crossing of the Alps”, *qui Alpium transitus tuebantur*⁹¹. Although not organised, as far as we know, like the *clausarii* and *clusae* of the Lombard laws, Count Theodowin and his men had to control transit across the Alps, an essential passageway for pilgrims and merchants. Unfortunately, unlike the codified Lombard laws concerning the Alpine *clusae*, there are no written documents that clarify how the Franks guarded and controlled their Alpine passes and frontier routes at the time of Count Theodowin and King Pippin III. However, as Gianmarco De Angelis notes, controlling mobility across the Alpine passes is the purpose of a legislative measure taken later by Pippin, son of Charlemagne and king of the Lombard kingdom, in 787⁹². In a moment of tension between the Bavarian duchy and the Frankish kingdom, Pippin ordered the re-establishment of controls at the entry points (*portas*), together with identification documents⁹³. The importance of the

⁹⁰ *Annales Mettenses Priores* (as note 1), p. 43: *Hoc anno Gripo cernens, quod in Aquitaniam a facie fratris sui Pippini minime latitare potuisset, Langobardiae dum ad Heistulfum regem confugium facere voluisset, occurrit ei Theodewinus, vir illustris, cum aliis comitibus, qui Alpium transitus tuebantur, in valle qua Morienna urbs sita est. Dum ipse Gripo eos vi pretereire nactus est, pugnam inierunt. In qua ex utraque parte multi nobiles Franci cornuerunt; inter quos etiam Gripo et Theodewinus vitam finierunt. Exinde omnis terra Francorum sub Pippini dominatione in summa pace quieuit.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.* In the ‘*Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholastici libri IV cum continuationibus*’ the author named two counts: *Theudoeno comite Viennense and Frederico Ultraiurano*. If the source is dubious about which count killed Grifo, it is certain about the death of the fugitives in the Maurienne region: *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholastici continuationes*, ed. BRUNO KRUSCH (MGH SS rer. Merov. 2), Hanover 1889, 35, p. 183: *Dum haec ageretur, nuntius veniens ad praefato rege ex partibus Burgundiae, quod germanus ipsius rege nomine Gribo, quod dudum in Vasconia ad Waiofario principe confugium fecerat, ad Theudoeno comite Viennense seu et Frederico Ultraiurano comite, dum partibus Langobardie peteret et insidias contra ipso praedicto rege pararet, Maurienna urbem super fluvium Arboris interfectus est. Nam et ipse superscripti comites in eo proelio partier interfecti sunt.*

⁹² DE ANGELIS, *Mobilità e controllo politico nell’Italia longobarda e carolingia* (as note 27), p. 6: “Il contesto di gestazione di quest’ultima norma non fu certo indifferente. Il 787, al pari dei concitati decenni centrali del secolo, rappresentò difatti un altro cruciale snodo politico, alla vigilia della resa dei conti tra Carlo Magno e Tassilone III di Baviera [...]”.

⁹³ *Capitularia Regum Francorum* (as note 34), nr. 95, c. 17, p. 201: *Sicut consuetudo fuit sigillum et epistola prendere et vias vel portas custodire, ita nunc sit factum*. This initiative was most likely due to the growing tension between the Franks and the Bavarians, which in 784 or 785 had turned into a skirmish on the border. According to the ‘*Annales Sancti Emmerani Ratisponensis Maiores*’ we know that the Franks and the Bavarians clashed for control of the city of Bolzano: *Pugna Baiovariorum cum Hrodperto ad Pozana*; *Annales Sancti Emmerani Ratisponensis Maiores*, ed. GEORG PERTZ HEINRICH (MGH SS 1), Hanover 1826, p. 92. NELSON, *King and Emperor* (as note 31), pp. 213–214, 533. Also: *Annales ex Annalibus Iuvavensibus antiquis excerpti*, ed. GEORG HEINRICH PERTZ (MGH SS 9), Hanover 1934, p. 564: *Ad Pozanum pugna magna fuit inter Bawaros et Rodbertum ducem, et ipse Ruodpertus occisus est cum plurimis suorum.*

transit routes and control of the Alpine valleys is also underlined by the fact that, in planning the attack against the Duchy of Bavaria in 788, King Charles ordered his son Pippin's army to march towards Trento, and then move on to Bolzano, thus securing the Brenner Pass up to the Resia Pass⁹⁴. The fact that King Pippin of Italy ordered the re-establishment of control measures in the Alpine passes allows us to hypothesise that once the Lombard kingdom was conquered by Charlemagne, the system of the *clusae* and the control of the movement across the Alps was slowly abandoned. Since from 773 onwards, both sides of the Alps were under Frankish domination, supervising mobility across the Alps demonstrates that this practice was mostly conceived for times of struggle and danger for the kingdom, whether Lombard or Frankish.

The Franks knew of the Lombard system of the *clusae*, but why did they not use it on the northeastern border zone of their empire? The answer, from my point of view, is twofold. Firstly, creating an organisation like that of the *clusae* on the Elbe and Saale rivers would require a system of infrastructure capable of controlling the main routes that went through the frontier. The Lombards in the Italian Peninsula, and later the Franks, were able to utilise old Roman roads, towers, fortifications, and infrastructure. These buildings were missing in the Elbe region and the Franks were compelled to build them from 806 onward. Secondly, the topographical differences between the narrow Alpine passes and the wide rivers, swamps, plains and forests of the region that goes from the North Sea to the Elbe, Saale and Danube rivers made it more difficult to control the region surrounding the Elbe. Passages and roads through the Alps were mostly obliged to utilise certain places and valleys, while on the Elbe there could have been multiple places to cross the frontier⁹⁵. Another possible explanation for the difference between the *clusae* and the system of control implemented along the Elbe River is the use of written documents. On the northeastern frontier it was probably sufficient to control goods rather than people, as was the case with the Lombard *clusae*. At the same time, it should be stressed that there was a different

⁹⁴ *Annales regni Francorum* (as note 7), ad a. 787, p. 79: *Cumque Pippinum filium cum Italicis copiis in Tredentinam vallem venire iussisset, orientales quoque Franci ac Saxones, ut iussi fuerant, ad Danubium in loco, qui Pferinga vocatur, accessissent, ipse cum exercitu, quem secum duxerat, super Lechum fluvium, qui Alamannos et Baioarios dirimit, in Augustae civitatis suburbano consedit, inde Baioariam cum tam valida manu procul dubio petiturus, nisi Tassilo sibi ac populo suo ad regem veniendo consulere.* GIUSEPPE ALBERTONI, *La politica alpina dei carolingi*, in: Carlo Magno e le Alpi. Atti del XVIII Congresso internazionale di studio sull'alto medioevo, Spoleto 2006, pp. 49–76, here p. 61.

⁹⁵ Einhard, in his biography of Charlemagne, explains that one of the problems of the constant state of warfare between Franks and Saxons originated in the uncertainty of the frontier itself; Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. Lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan, and the Astronomer, ed. THOMAS F. X. NOBLE, Philadelphia 2009, p. 28: "There were always issues that could disturb the peace on any day, particularly because our borders and theirs touched almost everywhere in open land, except for the few places where substantial forests or mountain ridges traced precise limits between both our lands [...]"; Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* (as note 2), 7, p. 9: *Suberant et causae, quae cotidie pacem conturbare poterant, termini videlicet nostri et illorum poene ubique in plano contigui, praeter paucal oca, in quibus vel silvae maiores vel montium iuga interiecta utrorumque agros certo limite disterminant [...].*

tendency towards the written document. There was certainly a greater familiarity with written documents in Lombard Italy than in the Frankish tradition of border control, as the vagueness of Count Theodowin's role attests. Therefore, the objective of the Capitulary of Diefenhofen was to protect the kingdom from external threats while organising a wide territory, creating a new topography of power that could impose Carolingian authority in a wide frontier area which stretched from the North Sea to the Danube River. What interested both the Carolingians and the Lombards more than the fortifications of the passes for defensive measures, was the control of transit routes, the valleys and the Alpine passes.

Monastic and ecclesiastical institutions were also used to control mobility. Monasteries, often built near important routes, played a strategic role in controlling the surrounding territories and the peripheries. Nor should we underestimate the economic, cultural and social impact that these institutions had on the territory in which they were founded⁹⁶. Monasteries were centres of spirituality and culture, through which institutions, both religious and secular, could consolidate their hegemony over the surrounding area, thus guaranteeing a trusted intermediary in peripheral and difficult-to-control regions⁹⁷. Indeed, the position of the monasteries had great political importance, as in the case of the abbeys of Novalesa, Nonantola, San Salvatore, Monte Cassino and Farfa, all built in frontier zone territories of the Lombard kingdom⁹⁸. It is in light of these considerations that we must read the political initiatives and donations made by Charlemagne in the years immediately following the conquest of the Lombard kingdom⁹⁹. For example, in a diploma issued in Pavia on July 16th 774, Charlemagne and Queen Hildegard donated the entire Camonica Valley to Abbot Gulfrado, acting in the name of the Monastery of Saint Martin of Tours¹⁰⁰. The donation to the Monastery of Saint Martin not only rewarded the loyalty of a trustworthy and faithful institution, increasing its landed wealth, but also allowed indirect control of a key region for mobility along the Alpine arc¹⁰¹. In the same period, the Abbey of Saint Denis was also the recipient of a similar donation, being granted with the Valtellina,

⁹⁶ MAYKE DE JONG, Carolingian Monasticism. The Power of Prayer, in: MCKITTERICK, *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (as note 14), pp. 622–653, here p. 623.

⁹⁷ ALBERTONI, *La politica alpina dei carolingi* (as note 94), pp. 59–63.

⁹⁸ MARIOS COSTAMBEYS et al., *The Carolingian World*, Cambridge 2012, p. 4.

⁹⁹ PATRICK GEARY, *I Franchi sull'arco alpino*, in: Carlo Magno e le Alpi (as note 94), pp. 1–16, here p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ Die Urkunden der Karolinger 1, eds. ALFONS DOPSCH et al. (MGH DD Karol 1,1), Hanover 1866, nr. 81, p. 117. MARCO FRANZONI, *Donamus etiam in [...] locum vallem qui vocatur Camonia [...]*. I carolingi, le montagne e la frontiera, in: FEDERICO TROLETTI (ed.) *Storia, arte e archeologia in Valcamonica*, Sebino e Franciacorta. Studi in onore di don Romolo Putelli, Capo di Ponte 2021, pp. 20–29.

¹⁰¹ MARIOS COSTAMBEYS, *Power and Patronage in Early Medieval Italy. Local Society, Italian Politics and the Abbey of Farfa, c.700–900*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 306–326. DAVIS, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire* (as note 13), p. 226: "The first was to use grants, especially grants to monasteries, to win over institutions in strategically located areas".

another important transit route for northern Italy¹⁰². As recently noted by Maria Elena Cortese, after the conquest of the Lombard kingdom, those were two of the most important mining districts in Italy¹⁰³. Similar to the Italian case is also the incorporation of the important passageway of Chur through the placing of the people of Raetia and the church of Chur under Charlemagne's *mundoburdo vel defensione nostra*¹⁰⁴. This was another important passageway on the northern side of the Alps¹⁰⁵. Through these actions, Charlemagne was able to control both strategical places and important economic resources. In the years of the capitulary of Diedenhofen and the organisation of the Elbe frontier zone, the Franks were still in the process of building a Christian landscape in Saxony. Although Christian ecclesiastical and monastic institutions already existed in the area, they were not as well established as in the rest of the empire. Nevertheless, these centres played an important role in spreading Carolingian authority and the Christian religion among the Saxons. In fact, bishoprics were established close to fortified centres that already ruled the surrounding countryside¹⁰⁶. The fortifications along the Elbe and Saale rivers and the construction of new trading centres allowed these newly established ecclesiastical institutions to flourish. Hamburg, for example, became an important centre for the evangelisation of the Danes and Norsemen¹⁰⁷. Nevertheless, Charlemagne's main interest in the Diedenhofen Capitulary was to create a network of fortified commercial centres ruled by royal *missi*.

¹⁰² In the Early Middle Ages, the Alps were a very popular place of passage thanks to the road network of Roman heritage; the fact that the *topos* of the insurmountable mountains survived, did not prevent that, as Einhard writes in his 'Vita Karoli'; Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* (as note 2), 6, p. 9: *Italiam intranti quam difficilis Alpium transitus fuerit, quantoque Francorum labore invia montium iuga et eminentes in caelum scopuli atque asperae cantes superatae sint, hoc loco describerem, nisi vitae illius modo potius quam bellorum, quae gessit, eventus memoriae mandare praesenti opere animo esset propositum*. GIUSEPPE ALBERTONI, *Italia carolingia*, Urbino 1997, p. 100. About the donation of Valtellina, see ID., *La politica alpina dei carolingi* (as note 94), p. 61, note 33: this particular diploma was not preserved, as Albertoni notes, but it is recalled in *Die Urkunden der Karolinger* 3, ed. THEODOR SCHIEFFER (MGH DD Karol. 3), Berlin – Zurich, nr. 3, pp. 54–59 (Compiègne 824, I, 3).

¹⁰³ MARIA ELENA CORTESE, *Beni fiscali e attività minerario-metallurgiche nell'Italia centro-settentrionale* (secoli VIII–XI), in: *Reti Medievali Rivista* 24, 2023, 251–283, here pp. 255–256.

¹⁰⁴ *Die Urkunden der Karolinger* 1 (as note 100), nr. 78, pp. 112: *Statuentes ergo iubemus, ut tam ipse vir venerabilis praefatus Constantius quam et successores sui, qui ex nostro permisso et voluntate cum electione plebis ibidem recturi erunt, dum nobis in omnibus palatiique nostri, sicut rectum est, cum omni populo Retiarum fideles apparuerint, sub mundoburdo vel defensione nostra absque aliorum hominum laesione aut inquietudine resideant et legem ac consuetudinem, quae parentes eorum iuste et rationabiliter habuerunt, se a nobis concessam esse cognoscant [...]*. ALBERTONI, *La politica alpina dei carolingi* (as note 94), pp. 98–99.

¹⁰⁵ CORTESE, *Beni fiscali e attività minerario-metallurgiche* (as note 103), p. 256.

¹⁰⁶ REMBOLD, *Conquest and Christianization* (as note 18), p. 218.

¹⁰⁷ On the importance of Hamburg for the christianisation of the Northmen see: *Vita Anskarii*, Auctore Rimberto, ed. GEORG WAITZ (MGH SS. rer. Germ. 55), Hanover 1884; JAMES TREVOR PALMER, *Rimbert's Vita Anskarii and Scandinavian Mission in the Ninth Century*, in: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55, 2004, pp. 235–256.

One of the many problems that the frontier zone posed for the central authority was how to impose control over the population, the local elites, the land, the resources, trade to and from the border areas, and the taxes and tolls levied on the resident population. To respond to these problems in the Elbe region, the Carolingians committed themselves in a pragmatic way by not only regulating trade, but also by guaranteeing the defence of the territory from external threats through the construction of a series of fortresses, while using the threat of force – or violence itself – and diplomacy to submit the neighbouring Slavic peoples. Also, as underlined in the Diedenhofen Capitulary, Charlemagne stated that the old and fair taxes should be respected, while the new and unjust ones, very often implemented locally, should not. This complaint can be better understood if we compare it to the well-known and studied Plea of Rižana (804)¹⁰⁸.

In the Plea of Rižana, the local population of Istria complained about the abuse of power by John, the Frankish appointed duke of the region. The Istrians claimed that the duke was abusing his power by implementing new tolls, imposing corvées, and other taxes¹⁰⁹. After an inquiry, the royal *missi* agreed with the local population and asked the duke to take an oath to not impinge on the population's traditional rights. It is clear from this event that Carolingian governance of newly subjected peoples faced a fragmented reality that required pragmatic rulership, “balancing” it, as Julia Smith wrote, “between protecting Frankish interests and provoking an anti-Carolingian backlash.”¹¹⁰ There were also numerous port customs, and customs stations that intercepted merchants moving on the roads of the kingdom, from north to south¹¹¹. Thus, for example, the Lombard *clusae* of the Susa Valley, Aosta Valley and one near Chur were not only supposed to serve military purposes, but also to control the traffic of merchants entering and leaving Italy¹¹². There were also customs on the French Mediterranean coast, probably at Marseille and Arles, as well as control stations along the great rivers of northern France, such as at Rouen¹¹³. As concerns the control or prohibition of movement and commerce more widely, the embargo that Charlemagne imposed on traders from Britain in 790 is also well known. Similarly, as Alcuin reports, Charlemagne ordered that no one from Britain was allowed to trade in Gaul after Offa of Mercia refused to arrange a marriage between his son, Ecgrith, and King Charles'

¹⁰⁸ HARALD KRAHWINKLER, ...*In loco qui dicitur Rižano*...: zbor z Rižani pri Kopru leta 804 = Die Versammlung in Rižana/Risano bei Koper/Capodistria im Jahre 804, Koper 2004.

¹⁰⁹ YURI A. MARANO, Le fortune di un patriarca. Grado altomedievale e il “testamento” di Fortunato II, Rome 2022, pp. 33–34; DAVIS, Charlemagne's Practice of Empire (as note 13), pp. 102–104.

¹¹⁰ SMITH, Fines Imperii. The Marches (as note 14), p. 172.

¹¹¹ MIDDLETON, Early Medieval Port Customs (as note 29), p. 320: “The merchants who bought and sold in these market towns would have paid tolls for the privilege to the royal officials (*missi*) in charge. Such public markets were known by the term *legitimus mercatus* which means that they operated with royal consent, or at least acquiescence, and at fixed times and places according to custom”.

¹¹² McCORMICK, Origins of the European Economy (as note 21), p. 640.

¹¹³ Ibid.

daughter Bertha¹¹⁴. Mobility management thus became a fundamental instrument of power and authority. It made it possible to impose order on a frontier area with complex features, where alliances changed frequently and human, political, commercial and military interests overlapped with each other¹¹⁵.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The control of mobility across border zones played an important role in the peripheries of early medieval realms such as the Lombard and the Frankish kingdoms. Carolingian rulers employed a combination of violence and diplomacy, as well as a policy of integrating defeated elites and incorporating them into their ranks. Following their military triumphs in Aquitaine, Saxony, Italy, the Danube basin and the Balkans, the Franks were faced with the challenge of establishing peace and order in the recently conquered lands. In order to achieve this goal, they used a variety of strategies. The new order established by Charlemagne on the north-eastern frontier zone at Diedenhofen did not create a fixed border from north to south-east. Instead, it created nodes of power, strategic places where Frankish authority was manifested by royal envoys, warriors, fortresses, guards, new ecclesiastical institutions and infrastructure. A fixed border would have, instead, blocked any Frankish adventure on the other side of the rivers. And, as we have seen, the Carolingians never stopped crossing the frontier and attacking neighbouring Slavic people. In fact, Carolingian power, echoing Walter Pohl's words, did not create fixed boundaries, but opened up space for manoeuvre in which the outcome of the game was always open: Charlemagne's priorities on the vast northeastern frontier were order and defence, but this wide region remained an open frontier¹¹⁶. As Mayke de Jong and Frans Theuws wrote, in the Carolingian borderlands of the Elbe, power assumed "different forms"¹¹⁷. Here, Carolingian authority had to weave new webs of relations between settlements, fortresses, royal envoys, local elites, trade centres, episcopal and ecclesiastical sites. Charlemagne thus issued new rules to control and manage trade and commerce. It is difficult to believe that across the wide frontier zone that went from the North Sea to the Elbe, Saale and Danube Rivers, only the few places listed in the Diedenhofen Capitulary were able to prevent smuggling, illegal trade and movements and other felonies. Indeed, the effort made by the Franks to control movement and mobility in other way is evident from the cases studied in this article. In his effort to establish Carolingian power over the Elbe region, Charlemagne

¹¹⁴ Alcuin, *Epistolae* (as note 17), 7, p. 32; MIDDLETON, *Early Medieval Port Customs* (as note 29), pp. 323–324.

¹¹⁵ DE ANGELIS, *Mobilità e controllo politico nell'Italia longobarda e carolingia* (as note 27), p. 9.

¹¹⁶ WALTER POHL, *Soziale Grenzen und Spielräume der Macht*, in: ID. – REIMITZ, *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter* (as note 5), pp. 11–18; here p. 15: "Macht verschafft nicht feste Grenzen, sondern erschließt Spielräume, in denen der Ausgang ihres Spiels jeweils offen ist."

¹¹⁷ MAYKE DE JONG – FRANS THEUWS, *Topographies of Power. Some Conclusions*, in: DE JONG – THEUWS, *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (as note 5), pp. 533–545, here p. 534.

thus used various tools like diplomacy and client management, violence and the fortification of geographical key-places – like Magdeburg –, and the issuance of laws to control, and to forbid commerce of specific goods through the borders.

In the various capitularies, we have seen that Charlemagne issued laws concerning trading and smuggling of illegal goods like weapons, armour, and also corn and “foodstuffs”¹¹⁸. These laws were usually implemented in situations of danger and war, like with the Saxons, or the Avars and the Slavs. At the northeastern frontier of the Carolingian empire, Charlemagne had to nominate one by one the various trading places and their *missi*, whereas in Italy, the Franks were able to use the Lombard *ducae*. I have argued here that this difference is in part due to the fact that in the Alpine valleys they were able to rely on Roman and Lombard infrastructure and institutions, while on the wide Elbe, Saale and Danube frontier zones, they had to create a new infrastructure of power to impose their authority. Similar problems were addressed with similar solutions in different environments. Through various investments in infrastructure, the creation of a relationship network with the defeated elites, the application of an ecclesiastical administration (when needed, as in Saxony, or Pannonia, for example), or the placement of trusted men in strategic places (monasteries, duchies, cities and churches), the Carolingians were able to build their network of power in the frontier zones¹¹⁹. From the fort of Esesfeld north of the Elbe River, via Bardowick, Hohbuoki, Schezla, Delbende and Magdeburg, the Franks built a series of fortresses, bridges and trading posts to protect their interests and their authority in the region. They built defensive and customs infrastructure, useful for trade and for the management of the peripheries. They did not barricade themselves behind the great rivers of central-northern Europe, but tried as much as possible to build on both sides of the Elbe, and to subjugate Slavic tribes that lived on the other side of the river. The aim was both to project their influence beyond the river, and to defend the recently conquered lands as much as possible and control the course of the river. These constructions, accompanied by the use of violence, diplomacy and the conversion and cooptation of the Saxons and neighbouring peoples, served to absorb a fragmented and disunited landscape. Carolingian infrastructural and political investments standardised the region into a network that served both political and economic interests.

¹¹⁸ NELSON, King and Emperor (as note 31), p. 426; Capitularia Regum Francorum (as note 34), nr. 44, p. 123.

¹¹⁹ PIERRE TOUBERT, *Frontière et frontières. Un objet historique*, in: JEAN-MICHEL POISSON (ed.), *Frontière et peuplement dans le monde Méditerranéen au Moyen Âge. Actes du colloque d'Erice – Trapani (Italie) tenu du 18 au 25 septembre 1988*, Madrid 1992, pp. 9–17, here p. 13. COSTAMBEYS et al., *The Carolingian World* (as note 98), pp. 430–431. The examples are numerous and range from border to border: in Italy most of the Lombards who surrendered to Charlemagne retained their position of power, while those who rebelled were deposed, killed in battle or banished, as happened to those who followed the duke of Friuli Hrodgaud in his rebellion in 776. Slavic leaders, such as Thrasco, Sclaomir or Ceadrag of the Obodrites were subjects of the Franks, while Vojnomir and Borná struck alliances with and fought for the Carolingians in the Balkans. Duke Borná of the Guduscani fought against Ljudewit, duke of the Slavs of Lower Pannonia, who rebelled against Frankish authority in the region.

The Frankish buildings and new legislation implemented at the border zone of the Elbe river, therefore, served to mark the border areas and to materialise the new authority over the newly conquered territories in order to rule and control them.

In the specific case of the northern frontier between the eighth and ninth centuries, Saxony and the trading places of the Elbe region were key knots of great value for maritime and land trade that connected the various emporia of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea such as Hedeby, Dorestad, London, Reric and many others ¹²⁰. Commerce and the movement of people through the wide eastern frontier zone probably did not have the same volume as the one in the Mediterranean world, but it needed to be controlled ¹²¹. Armours, weapons, luxury goods, grain, slaves, relics and other objects were not the only things that moved through the Carolingian frontier zones. It was therefore imperative for the Franks to control the land routes of trade, both for direct gain and to extend the range of their influence on both sides of the frontier. The peripheries in the Middle Ages were places where the efforts of the central authority manifested themselves through the construction of infrastructures and the organisation (or re-organisation) of the topography of power. The importance given to the control of movement to and from the border confirmed the importance of mobility, at the same time a threat, if not controlled, as well as an instrument of power, if adequately limited and addressed.

¹²⁰ CHRIS WICKHAM, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800*, Oxford 2005, pp. 693–824. CHRISTOPHER LANDON, *Economic and Military Aspects of the Frankish Conquest of Saxony*, in: *History Compass*, 19, 2021, pp. 1–12. McCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy* (as note 21), p. 607. SIMON COUPLAND, *Trading Places. Quentovic and Dorestad Reassessed*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 11, 2002, pp. 209–232. MIDDLETON, *Early Medieval Port Customs* (as note 29), pp. 313–316. STEUER, *The Beginnings of Urban Economies among the Saxons* (as note 37), p. 161. LUCIE MALBOS, *Les ports des mers nordiques à l'époque viking (VII^e–X^e siècle)*, Turnhout 2017.

¹²¹ McCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy* (as note 21), p. 644.



A Map of the North-Eastern Frontier of the Carolingian Empire,
8th–9th Centuries