In the midst of the Western Roman Empire’s collapse, Pope Leo I (r. 440-461) made the monumental assertion that the bishop of Rome was the true head of the Christian Church because Christ had designated Peter, Rome’s first bishop, as the “foundation” of his earthly Church and the “doorkeeper” of his heavenly kingdom. Leo’s reasoning became known as the Petrine Doctrine, an idea that developed into the basis of papal power throughout the Middle Ages and the theological justification for papal hegemony over all bishops and patriarchs of Christendom—both in the Greek East and in the Latin West. In the mid-fifth century, however, the western portion of the Roman Empire had suffered an unrecoverable collapse, and Roman Christianity was supplanted in the provinces with either the pagan animism of the Anglo-Saxons and Franks or the heretical Arianism of the Goths and Vandals. Leo’s bold proclamation of papal and Roman Catholic leadership did not coincide with social and political realities; he was writing at a time when the Roman Church held influence in Italy but little elsewhere. Establishing the authority of the Roman See in the Germanic kingdoms that occupied approximately what is now France, Spain, and Britain required the sustained efforts of successive popes and the churchmen who worked under their auspices. A key part of this long-range effort to translate the Petrine Doctrine from abstraction to reality included the late sixth-century mission to the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Kent in Britain that Pope Gregory the Great (r. 590-604) organized. The Gregorian mission resulted in the conversion of the pagan Kentish kingdom and the establishment of the Episcopal Church at Canterbury, the first Latin Church in Britain since Roman times. More importantly, the Gregorian mission planted the seed of Latin Christianity in Britain and culminated in the conversion of the whole island less than a century later under the leadership of the pope in Rome.

Pope Leo and Pope Gregory were visionaries who foresaw a universal church that would bring Latin Christianity to the new Germanic kingdoms of Western Europe. In the late sixth century, however, their vision was exactly that and nothing more. The prestige and authority of the Latin Church can be counted among the victims of the Germanic invasions of the fifth century. That the Latin Church was still extant in Gregory’s time was no small miracle in itself. Throughout late antiquity and the early Middle Ages the Church had no army of its own to enforce its
will or guard its interests; it was dependent upon secular authority for protection, the suppression of heresy, and the granting of economic and legal concessions.

The years between 400 and 600 were a transitory period for the Church, even more so perhaps than for Western European society in general. It was a time of tremendous flux in church-state relations that saw the Church in search of secular authorities stable and powerful enough to nurture its interests and protect it from those who would do it harm both physically and spiritually. The Roman Empire had filled this role during the last years of its existence. Emperor Constantine’s conversion in the early fourth century inaugurated the remarkable transformation of Christianity from a persecuted, underground religion of beggars to the state-sanctioned religion of the Caesars. Theodosius I (r. 379-395), the last emperor of any great consequence, vigorously proscribed both Roman paganism and Arian Christianity—the most important spiritual rivals of Latin Christianity. To these gifts were added a number of fiscal and judicial privileges that allowed the Church to develop the independence it later relied upon to withstand the Roman collapse. Members of the clergy were granted substantial tax exemptions, and the Church was allowed to develop its own canon law and hold its own tribunals that effectively meant the Roman state surrendered jurisdiction over members of the clergy. The emperors of the Christian Roman Empire thus ensured the continuity of the nascent Church, and at the end of the Roman era the Latin Church found itself in the unenviable position of being the only institution capable of ameliorating the unsettled society of post-invasion Europe.

The disordered condition of early medieval Europe prevented the popes from exercising any real leadership in the two hundred years following the Roman collapse. Indeed, Leo and Gregory were two anomalies in an otherwise steady decline in papal influence. Most of the fifth and sixth century popes did nothing to advance Pope Leo’s grand vision of papal authority and ecclesiastical leadership. Survival, preservation, and adjustment occupied the intellectual energies of churchmen during this tumultuous period.

Pope Gregory came to the papal throne in the late sixth century at the nadir of papal and Church influence. Gregory was painfully aware of the desperate condition of the Church and the monumental task that stood before him. In a pessimistic letter written shortly after his accession, Gregory compared the Church to an “old and grievously shattered ship,” constantly taking on water and “battered by a daily and violent storm.”

With enemies threatening on all sides, the position of the pope in Italy was precarious at best. The Ostrogoths and their leader Theodoric were defeated during the Gothic War (535-554) and replaced by the Byzantines who, under the direction of Emperor Justinian I (r. 527-565), had sought to reclaim their “authority over the
remaining countries which the ancient Romans possessed . . . [and were] . . . lost by subsequent neglect.”

Byzantine rule did not last in Italy, its power weakened with the invasion of the Lombards, a particularly barbaric tribe of Germans who invaded northern Italy in 568. The Lombards in Gregory’s day held the whole of Cisalpine Gaul up to the Alpine passes through which Hannibal had trekked some eight hundred years before. They also held Beneventum, Spoletum, and parts of Tuscany in the south. The Byzantines meanwhile retained Ravenna, Istria, Venetia, and Naples in addition to the islands of Sardinia, Corsica, and Sicily. As pope, Gregory maintained possession of the *Patrimonium Sancti Petri* consisting mainly of lands in the vicinity of Rome, Dalmatia, southern Gaul, and Sicily.

The violence and instability of his surroundings distressed Gregory. He spoke of the terrible “suffering from the swords of the Lombards in the daily plundering and mangling and slaying of our citizens” and complained of the danger he faced and the “confusion of the tribulations which we suffer in this land.” Unlike his ineffectual predecessors, however, Gregory was not one to sit idle. The pope worked through the Christian Lombard Queen Theodelinda to soften the behavior of the Lombards. His efforts eventually paid off. Theodelinda’s son Adaloaldus was baptized a Christian and succeeded his father as king in 616. The Byzantines retained control of North Africa and substantial portions of Italy, but no harmony developed between Rome and Constantinople. The caesaro-papist ideology of the Byzantine emperors meant that both the pope and the Byzantine emperor competed for absolute supremacy in ecclesiastical affairs. Gregory was cordial towards the Byzantine emperor, but in doing so, his aim was not conciliation but placation. The pope was simply buying time while he carried out his important work in Western Europe.

Most of Western Europe had fallen away from the Latin Church. The Visigoths controlled the Iberian Peninsula—what is now Spain and Portugal. They were a primitive tribe that had been among the first to invade Roman territory. They initially subscribed to Arian Christianity, a heretical interpretation of the nature of Christ that orthodox Christians condemned. The Arian heresy had spread virulently throughout the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire before Theodosius’s vigorous persecutions crushed it in 383 and 384. Official persecution, however, came too late to prevent the spread of Arianism beyond the Danube frontier where it contaminated the Goths shortly before their romp through Roman Gaul and Hispania. King Reccared I (r. 586-601) of the Visigoths converted in 587 “from the error of Arian heresy to the firmness of a right faith”—that is, Latin Christianity—shortly before Gregory assumed the Throne of Peter. The conversion of the Visigoths was a cause to celebrate, but it did little for the Latin Church for two reasons. First, the Visigothic kings were singularly inept in the arts of government and administration. The
orthodox Spanish population detested them for this reason and because the kings clung to tribal Arianism for two hundred years after arriving in Spain. The Visigoths, through their incompetence and their alien faith, failed to win the loyalty of the locals. Deprived of support, the Visigothic kingdom eventually succumbed to the Moslem invasion of Iberia in the early eighth century. Second, there is not enough evidence to suggest that Gregory was able to exert any influence over the direction of the Spanish Church or the conduct of the Visigothic kings. Gregory’s letter to Reccared drips of adulation and sermon, and it clearly shows the pontiff’s intent on Christianizing that kingdom and ameliorating the savage behavior of its kings. Gregory also dispatched a letter to a man named Claudius who appears to have been influential in the court of the Gothic king, but the correspondence is vague and refers neither to the good deeds that provoked Gregory’s praise nor to the precise station of Claudius. These two dispatches represent the extent of Gregory’s activism in Spain.

The religious situation in Merovingian France was more optimistic, but even there the condition of the Church was feeble at best. The Salian Franks came into Gaul as pagans, but they converted to Latin Christianity during the reign of Clovis I (r. 481-509). Though Gregory of Tours lauded Clovis as “another Constantine,” the conversion of the Franks ultimately did little to restore papal influence in Gaul. The Franks, like their Germanic cousins elsewhere in Europe, were a primitive and violent people who came to Gaul with unsophisticated legal and political systems and almost no concept of statehood. They possessed a deep-seated hatred for Roman civilization. The political organization of the Germanic tribes at the time of the Roman collapse centered on the war-band, what the medieval historian Norman Cantor called an “irresponsible type of kingship resting . . . upon military prestige.” War chiefs exercised societal leadership by commanding what was essentially an armed gang. Loyalty rested on the leader’s ability to provide opportunities for plunder. Religious conversion could not dilute the primitivism of the Frankish rulers, and the sixth-century Merovingian kings quite literally ran their country into the ground. They did nothing to ameliorate society, and they spent their energies satisfying their base desires and fighting over the throne. The Frankish contempt of Roman institutions meant that they preserved nothing of the Roman administrative structure. As in Spain, the ineptitude of the royal house caused the locals to hate them. Political and economic power began to decentralize in the early sixth century as the Gallo-Roman and Frankish nobility began carving up large, hereditary estates for themselves at the expense of the Merovingian royal family. Preoccupied with their infighting, the ruling house did nothing to stop this process.

The bishops of Gaul initially placed a tremendous amount of faith in their alliance with the Merovingian royal house. They thought it possible to resurrect that happy congruence of secular and ecclesiastical authority that had proved so
beneficial to the Church during the last century of Roman rule. Frankish barbarism precluded such a union, and the Gallic churchmen soon turned away from the Merovingian kings in disgust. Their disappointment is reflected in the unmistakable narrowing of vision among the higher clergy. Deprived of a conscientious secular authority that could bring about a Christian society, the French bishops resigned themselves to building up their own private estates in the manner of the secular Frankish nobility. The bishop and historian Gregory of Tours’s *History of the Franks* is representative of the disillusionment and pessimism of the late sixth century French bishops. The work is peppered with disgust at the destructive behavior of the Merovingian kings and the generally savage conditions that prevailed.

The situation in Spain, Gaul, and Italy imparted a dreary backdrop to Pope Gregory’s chosen task of establishing papal authority throughout Western Europe. The pope’s leaky ship was in need of repair, and he chose Britain as a starting point. The situation in Britain had been perhaps bleakest of all. Christianity had arrived in Britain some two centuries before the Roman collapse, but the coming of the Anglo-Saxons in the mid-fifth century dealt a serious blow to the faith. The Angles, Jutes, and Saxons who arrived in Britain were almost entirely untouched by Roman civilization, and like the other Germanic tribes who came across the frontier, their socio-political and legal systems were rudimentary at best. They were ruled by a warrior chieftain whose hold on power depended upon the size of his army and his abilities as a warrior. No aristocracy or nobility existed to speak of; most people belonged to a large class of free peasant farmers. The Anglo-Saxons were illiterate, and they harbored a special hatred of urban life. They held few qualms over burning libraries, levelling what remained of the Roman cities, and enslaving the Romano-Celtic inhabitants. “Peace,” according to Tacitus, “is repulsive to the race.” The late British historian Jasper Ridley agreed, calling them “the most destructive immigrants who have ever come to Britain.” The native Britons were poor fighters, and their inability to unite amongst themselves meant that they could not match the aggression of the Germanic invaders. The regions that now approximate Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall were all that remained of British territory by the end of the sixth century. Elmet, Rheged, Gododdin, and several other smaller British kingdoms to the west and north of Northumbria fared better than their southern counterparts, but they soon lost their independence to Anglo-Saxon expansionism throughout the seventh century.

The process of conquest spurred changes in Anglo-Saxon society. A more stable form of semi-hereditary kingship developed in which a male of the royal line succeeded the king. An armed retinue of warrior nobles drawn from prominent families attended the king. By the time Gregory’s missionaries arrived in 597,
Britain south of the River Tyne was a pagan land comprised of more than a dozen independent kingdoms, each governed by its own royal house. The overriding objective of these kingdoms from their formation beginning in the mid-fifth century was to acquire and maintain power at the expense of their neighbors.\(^{28}\) The result was a period of unabated internecine warfare five centuries long. Nothing, not even the arrival of Christianity, could temper Anglo-Saxon destructiveness.\(^{29}\)

The British Isles were not devoid of Christianity when Gregory’s mission arrived in Kent under the leadership of his chosen emissary, the Benedictine monk Augustine. It persisted in Ireland, an island so wild that the Romans had never tried to conquer it, yet it became the great preserver of the Christian tradition in the British Isles. Irish monks meticulously copied and preserved great libraries of classical works in their dimly lit monasteries.\(^{30}\) From these bases at the edge of the world, the sixth-century Irish monks set about converting the Scots, Picts, and English who resided in the wild territories of northern Britain.

Christianity had first come to Ireland in the fifth century through Patricius, a Roman Briton known today as Saint Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland. Abducted at the age of sixteen by Irish raiders, Patrick spent six miserable years as the slave of a pagan Irish chieftain.\(^{31}\) The traumatic experience of incessant hunger and exposure had a profound effect on him. Like many in such desperate circumstances, he turned to God and developed an intense spirituality and sense of mission.\(^{32}\) Patrick escaped and eventually found his way back to Britain, but he could not sit still knowing that the Irish remained pagans. He returned and worked tirelessly to convert his former captors until most Irish were Christians by the time of his death around the middle of the fifth century.\(^{33}\) From the beginning, the rough nature of Ireland’s apostle set Irish Christianity on an independent course. Patrick spent his entire life at the periphery of civilization and, unlike his counterparts elsewhere in the Romanized world, he was not a scholar. His education was cut short by his abduction,\(^{34}\) a fact revealed in his simplistic use of Latin rife with grammatical errors.\(^{35}\) Patrick’s isolated upbringing, coupled with his deficient classical education, ensured the Christianity he brought to the Irish was unencumbered by the legacy of the Greco-Roman world.

Ireland was an illiterate country devoid of urbanization when Patrick arrived, a veritable tabula rasa. While the early Church had emerged within the Roman state and was shaped by it, the reverse held in Ireland. Unlike elsewhere in the Roman world, there was no preexisting infrastructure in Ireland—either political or physical—for Christianity to graft itself upon when it arrived in the fifth century. Therefore, Christianity helped to shape Irish civilization to a much greater extent than in the rest of the former Roman Empire. As the first monks formed monastic communities dedicated to learning and the preservation of classical texts, their religious houses drew thousands of students and converts hoping to benefit from
what the monks had to offer. Unsurprisingly, the nuclei of Ireland’s first urban centers sprang from the monastic repositories of classical learning and holy Wisdom.

Ireland’s isolation shielded it from the tumult unfolding in Britain and gave its Christianity time to crystallize. From their sanctuary at the fringe of civilization, Irish monks spread further afield into Scotland, northern Britain, and continental Europe. Some one hundred years after Patrick’s death, Irish missionaries under the leadership of the unstoppable monk Columba (521-597) arrived in Pictland (Scotland) and succeeded in converting both the Scots and the northern Picts. Columba founded the religious community on the island of Iona in 564, a place that soon became an important center of learning and piety. Columba, along with his intrepid brothers from Iona, then went on to found dozens of monasteries throughout Scotland. Iona became an important base for new missions into Pictland and northern England, and it became a nexus of Celtic Christianity for the next two centuries. Irish monks from Iona were also active in the powerful Northumbrian kingdom in the early seventh century. Among them was Aidan, an Irish monk known as the Apostle of Northumbria for his spectacular success there under the patronage of the Bernician king Oswald (604-641). Significantly, Aidan, an Irishman, was Northumbria’s first bishop. He established his see on the island of Lindisfarne, a place that would later play an important role in ecclesiastical history.

The intellectual and missionary work of the Irish monks would have ordinarily been encouraging for Gregory. However, Celtic Christianity—sometimes called Insular Christianity—differed in a number of ways from the Latin Christianity of the Roman Church. These differences were largely superficial, for both Latin and Celtic Christians agreed on all the major theological points. Still, the peculiar habits of the Insular Christians troubled orthodox adherents of the Roman Church. The ecclesiastical organization of the Celtic Church was unique in that the monastery and not the cathedral dominated the ecclesiastical landscape, and abbots, not bishops, exercised authority. Indeed, there were no dioceses and diocesan clergy at all. Bishops had been sources of stability and leadership since the Roman era, and for many Latin churchmen a hierarchy without bishops was both untenable and unholy. The nature of Insular monasticism was unique as well, based on the loose cenobitic type more commonly found in the eastern Mediterranean in which the abbot enjoyed only a loose control over the individual brothers. Insular monks were also known for their singular knowledge of Greek and their possession of a number of important Greek texts, most of which could not be found anywhere else in early medieval Europe. The two most important points of divergence, judging from their frequent mentions in the Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum (Ecclesiastical History of the English People) written in the eighth century by the Northumbrian monk Bede (c. 672-735), were the shape of the tonsure

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and the reckoning of the date of Easter. Celtic churchmen looked different from their Latin counterparts, and this reinforced their “otherness” in the eyes of the Roman churchmen who took issue with it ostensibly because of its association with the biblical heretic Simon Magus.\(^{46}\) The more important dispute was the different calculation for the date of Easter.\(^{47}\) Despite incessant appeals from Roman churchmen, Insular Christians persisted in their Celtic interpretation of Easter for over a century after Latin Christianity took hold in Kent.\(^{48}\)

If the unorthodox practices of Insular Christians were not enough to concern Gregory, the swaggering behavior of the missionary Columbanus (543–615) certainly was. Columbanus was a rough Irish monk with a profound sense of duty much like Saint Columba before him. Columbanus became Irish Christianity’s continental representative, making it his mission to proselytize to the pagans of Europe. His chosen theatre was Gaul, to which he went around 590 to establish as many monastic communities as he could. Columbanus was very successful; his monasteries in Gaul and Lombardy attracted many new adherents to the faith. Soon, however, the Latin bishops of Gaul took issue with his activities within their jurisdiction. The Gallic bishops were a proud and petty lot, much more interested in building up their worldly estates than spreading the Gospel. These men never left the comfort of their dioceses, unwilling to subject themselves to worldly hardships for the sake of preaching to the Frankish masses. The bishops summoned Columbanus to a synod, presumably to assert their authority over him and to correct his erroneous interpretation of Easter, but Columbanus had no intention of appearing before them. Instead, he sent a defiant letter in which he castigated the bishops for their myopic worldliness and lectured them in the virtues of pious humility and clerical poverty.\(^{49}\)

Intending to plead the case for the Celtic date of Easter, Columbanus wrote to Pope Gregory around the time of his quarrel with the Gallic bishops. His letter was couched in respectful pleasantries, but it clearly revealed that Columbanus had no intention of submitting to the Pope’s authority. He addressed Gregory not as the supreme head of Christendom but as a colleague, urging him to accept the Insular interpretation of Easter. Further, Columbanus prodded the pope to correct the erroneous interpretations of his predecessors and poked fun at Pope Leo’s name in the process. “Better by far is a living dog,” wrote Columbanus, “in this problem than a dead lion.”\(^{50}\) Gregory’s response is not extant. The pope may have opted for pontifical silence in the face of such insolence, or his reply may have been lost in transit. The source of Columbanus’s boldness is also difficult to ascertain. Perhaps it was, as scholar Thomas Cahill asserted, a consequence of his “Irishness,” his innate playfulness, and honesty.\(^{51}\) More likely, however, the secular behavior of the Gallic bishops disgusted Columbanus. In any event, Columbanus’s rebellious tone could have only heightened Gregory’s fear of losing control of Britain to the Irish monks.
who were spreading in all directions from their monasteries in Scotland.

His alarm over an impending rift between the two churches aside, Gregory may have been genuinely concerned for the souls of the pagan English. This hypothesis is derived from the well-known tale in Bede’s Historia of Gregory’s encounter with some Deiran slave children. According to Bede,

He inquired whether those islanders were Christians, or still involved in the errors of paganism, and was informed that they were pagans. Then fetching a deep sigh from the bottom of his heart, “Alas! what pity,” said he, “that the author of darkness should own men of such fair countenances; and that with such grace of outward form, their minds should be void of inward grace.” He therefore again asked, what was the name of that nation? and was answered, that they were called Angles. “Right,” said he, “for they have an angelic face, and it is meet that such should be co-heirs with the Angels in heaven.”

The episode, which had occurred before Gregory attained the Throne of Peter, made the pontiff aware of English paganism, and spurred his resolve to bring Christianity to Britain. Evidence suggests that Gregory never forgot those English children he met at the Roman marketplace. In 595, after he became pope, Gregory directed his agent Candidus to use some of the proceeds of the papal estates in Gaul to purchase English slaves there so they could be sent to a monastery for their salvation.

Whether motivated by genuine compassion, power, or both, Gregory understood that he needed to act quickly lest the Irish monks succeed at converting the Anglo-Saxons to their unorthodox version of Christianity. Between the Roman and Irish monks sat pagan England, a prize waiting for whoever could get to the pagan kings first. One of Gregory’s few flaws was his small-minded perspective towards the Celtic monks. Like his contemporaries, he perceived them as rivals instead of allies and the conversion of England as a contest between Rome and Iona. A race for the souls of the English began as soon as Augustine landed in Kent.

Gregory took decisive action, marshaling all the resources at his disposal to ensure the success of his missionaries. He dispatched Augustine together with a small band of forty Benedictine monks in 596 to that “barbarous, fierce, and unbelieving nation” of Kent in southeast Britain. The pope’s many letters to Augustine and others reveal that he was personally invested in the direction of the mission and its outcome. Gregory sent letters urging the bishops and nobility of Gaul, the territory through which Augustine and his brethren needed to travel on their way to Kent, urging them to grant the monks safe passage and whatever
assistance they could give. Gregory’s entreaties paid off; the Frankish king and clergy welcomed the mission. The Benedictine monks landed on the Isle of Thanet in the following year and immediately made contact with the Kentish ruler Ethelbert. The king ordered them to remain where they were and supplied them with necessities while he decided what to do with them. Ethelbert soon visited, and Augustine seized the opportunity to preach the “word of life” to him. The king was swayed but did not convert immediately. He did, however, give the monks permission to evangelize in his kingdom and allowed them to settle in Canterbury, the main town in Kent. The monks began practicing their simple way of life according to the Rule of Benedict, attracting numerous converts. King Ethelbert was baptized soon after, prompting the Kentish nobility and a large proportion of the population to convert as well. Bede mentioned that the king did not compel his subjects to convert but that they did so out of their own free will. In a jubilant letter dated 597 to Eulogius, the Bishop of Alexandria, Gregory informed him of the conversion of ten thousand English. Gregory made Augustine “archbishop of the English nation” in that same year. Interestingly, the pagan authorities of Kent received Gregory’s missionaries better than the British churchmen did. Augustine’s early interactions with Celtic churchmen established in southern Britain reinforced Gregory’s suspicions of an inevitable schism. The initial meeting between the Latin monks and the Celtic churchmen was unproductive and peppered with animosity. The Insular monks proved uncooperative and unwilling to preserve “the unity of the church,” according to Bede. They “preferred their own traditions” and “could not depart from their ancient customs,” namely, the Celtic date of Easter. Moreover, Augustine’s inflated perception of his own importance as the representative of the one universal Church caused him to be tactless and arrogant. He failed to rise from his seat at the Celts’ approach, angering them and convincing them that one so pompous could not possibly be the bearer of God’s truth. Failing to reason with them, Augustine subsequently threatened them with divine vengeance, which, predictably, had little effect. The rivalry between the Insular and Roman Churches is prominently displayed in Bede’s Historia Ecclesiastica. Bede was an Englishman who spent his entire life working in the Northumbrian monastery at Jarrow, a Latin religious house. To a degree, the purpose of his Historia was to highlight God’s workings in the world, and in this way it conformed to the eschatological and linear concept of history prevalent in Christianity since apostolic times. Significantly, however, Bede sought to emphasize the victory of Latin Christianity in Britain and the achievements of Anglo-Saxon Church unity under the leadership of Canterbury—the first and most important Latin Church in Britain. This bias affected his treatment of events. For
example, he downplayed the interactions between the Northumbrian and Celtic
kingdoms and overstated Northumbrian interactions with the English kingdoms to
the south.\textsuperscript{69} He also discounted the contributions of the Irish monks in the conversion
of England.\textsuperscript{70}

Bede’s coverage of the early seventh-century conflict between the Anglo-
Saxon kings Penda of Mercia and Edwin of Deira is a case in point. Edwin converted
to Latin Christianity in 627, and his baptism by the Roman monk Paulinus prompted
mass conversions of the Northumbrian people.\textsuperscript{71} Penda, the pagan king of the
aggressive Mercian kingdom in central England, entered into an alliance of
convenience with the Welsh prince Cadwallon of Gwynedd, a Celtic Christian.
Together, the two defeated and killed Edwin, then proceeded to massacre the newly-
baptized inhabitants of Northumbria. Predictably, this inaugurated a period of
apostasy as converts renounced their new faith to avoid persecution.\textsuperscript{72} Though both
Penda and Cadwallon shared guilt for their atrocities, Bede’s ireful pen lashed
Cadwallon the hardest:

\begin{quote}
[O]ne of the chiefs, by whom it was carried on, was a pagan, and
the other a barbarian, more cruel than a pagan; for Penda, with all
the nation of the Mercians, was an idolater, and a stranger to the
name of Christ; but Caedwalla, though he professed and called
himself a Christian, was so barbarous in his disposition and
manner of living.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

Cadwallon—\begin{quote}that “unrighteous instrument of rightful vengeance,” as Bede
called him\textsuperscript{74}\end{quote}—\begin{quote}was cast as the ultimate villain, a Christian who had betrayed his
brothers in Christ by siding with the pagan warlord Penda. The fact that Cadwallon
was a Celtic Christian only served Bede’s purpose in casting Celtic Christianity as
inferior to Latin Christianity.

Bede’s hostility to Celtic Christianity is also displayed in his coverage of
the earlier slaughter of British monks at Chester in 616. Ethelfrith, the Bernician
king of Northumbria, embarked on a punitive expedition to Wales to enforce his
overlordship there. When he arrived at Chester, he found approximately two
thousand Celtic monks from the monastery at Bangor gathered in prayer against him.
They chanted prayers and sang psalms for the victory of the Welsh. Ethelfrith
slaughtered almost twelve hundred of them along with the entire Welsh army.
Bede’s mention of this failure of Christian prayer highlights that the monks were
Celtic rather than Latin Christians. Their death at the hands of a pagan lord was
punishment for their earlier failure to submit to the direction of Augustine and the
Roman Church.\textsuperscript{75} Bede also addressed the animosity between the Celtic and Latin
churchmen directly, noting that even in his own day, some 130 years after the arrival of Roman Christianity, it was “the custom of the Britons to despise the faith and religion of the English, and to have no part with them in anything any more than with pagans.”

Gregory continued to communicate with his missionaries long after their arrival in Kent. Through frequent correspondences, he directed their efforts, provided encouragement, and answered questions. Gregory sent a shipment of supplies to Augustine in 601 consisting of “vessels and altar-cloths . . . church furniture, and vestments for the bishops and clerks.” He also sent instructions for the episcopal organization of Britain. Telling of his great insight, moderation, and practical wisdom, Gregory directed Augustine to be flexible in administering his see. Gregory understood that the English church was in its infancy and that strict adherence to the minutia of orthodoxy might be counterproductive. Gregory’s sensibility and practicality was also on display in his softening of the harsh Augustinian (of Hippo) stance on the nature of free will and salvation. The early Christian theologian and philosopher St. Augustine (354-430) taught that salvation was a consequence of divine grace and that humans could do nothing to earn that grace. This stance would have severely hindered the early medieval church’s effort to convert the pagan masses: if good works did nothing to assure salvation, people would have no incentive to act in accordance with God’s will. The ultimate evangelist, Gregory, took a much more moderate approach. He posited that individuals did not need to worry about salvation as long as they received the sacraments and lived according to the moral teachings of the Church. This was in violation of St. Augustine of Hippo’s position but necessary if the Church was to be successful at converting the Germanic masses.

The conversion of Kent was only the beginning. Gregory praised King Ethelbert for his piety, but he also urged him to “make haste to extend the Christian faith among the peoples under thy sway [and] redouble the zeal of thy rectitude in their conversion. . . . make haste to infuse into the kings and peoples subject to you the knowledge of God.” The pope implored the Kentish king to “build up the manners of thy subjects in great purity of life by exhorting, by terrifying, by enticing, by correcting, by shewing examples of well-doing.” Gregory clearly had grand designs for his new Constantine in Britain, and Ethelbert did not disappoint. The Kentish king set about bringing Christianity to those kingdoms over which he enjoyed influence. King Sabert of Essex converted in 604 due to Ethelbert’s intervention. Ethelbert also built and endowed the original St. Paul’s Church in London according to Gregory’s plan. Further, Ethelbert attempted to convert the East Anglian king Raedwald. Though Raedwald refused and died a pagan, he did erect a Christian altar in his kingdom. The kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex were
slower to accept Christianity owing to their independence from Kentish influence. King Penda of Mercia clung stubbornly to paganism, but he later allowed his son and daughter to marry the Christian children of the Bernician royal house for political purposes. Penda’s children turned Mercia into a Christian kingdom after his death in the Battle of the River Winwaed in 654. Christianity took hold slowest in Wessex. A Frankish bishop named Birinus came to Wessex with the sanction of Pope Honorius I to preach there, and he was successful at winning the conversion of the first West Saxon ruler Cynewulf in 635. Cynewulf’s son and successor Cynegils refused to convert initially, but he did later due to the influence of King Anna of the East Angles in whose court he spent a period of exile.

The ecclesiastical history of Northumbria (comprised of Bernicia and Deira in the early seventh century) is second in importance only to that of Kent, as the kings of Northumbria ultimately chose to side with the Latin churchmen of Canterbury at the Synod of Whitby in 664. Latin Christianity came to Northumbria through the conversion of Edwin of Deira (r. 616-633). In 604, the pagan king of Bernicia, Ethelfrith, invaded Deira and slew the Deiran king Ethelric, prompting Edwin, Ethelric’s kinsman, to flee for his life. Edwin spent many years in exile among the southern English where he was drawn into the orbit of Latin Christianity. In 625, Edwin married Ethelbert’s daughter, the Christian Kentish princess Ethelburh. Edwin did not immediately convert, but a condition of the marriage contract required Edwin to provide tolerance of Christians within his kingdom. A Roman monk from Canterbury named Paulinus accompanied Ethelburh to Northumbria, ostensibly to serve as her holy advisor. In reality, however, Paulinus dreamed of converting the Northumbrian king and his people. In this effort, Pope Boniface V assisted Paulinus. The pope sent a letter to King Edwin, urging him to accept Christianity without further delay. He also corresponded with Queen Ethelburh, imploring her to persuade her husband to convert. These efforts eventually bore fruit, and Edwin was baptized by Paulinus on Easter in 627.

The conversion of Northumbria was consistent with the typical modus operandi of the Church in its efforts to convert the Germanic rulers of Western Europe. The Church found it easier to convert the queen of a pagan ruler, then recruit her help in converting her husband. The letter Pope Boniface V wrote to Edwin’s queen Ethelburh, reflected this method:

Persist, therefore, illustrious daughter, and to the utmost of your power endeavour to soften the hardness of his heart by carefully making known to him the Divine precepts; pouring into his mind a knowledge of the greatness of that mystery which you have received by faith, and of the marvellous reward which, by the new
birth, you have been made worthy to obtain…Strive, both in season and out of season, that with the co-operating power of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, your husband also may be added to the number of Christians.\textsuperscript{89}

Bertha, the Merovingian Christian queen of Ethelbert, received a similar letter from Pope Gregory in which he urged her to “strengthen by continual hortation the mind of your glorious husband in love of the Christian faith; let your solicitude infuse into him increase of love for God.”\textsuperscript{90} The technique is also revealed in Gregory’s letters to the Christian Lombard queen Theodelinda.\textsuperscript{91} Paul the Deacon in his \textit{Historia Langobardorum} claimed that the Lombard king Agilulf’s wife persuaded him to accept Christianity.\textsuperscript{92} Even the Christian queen Clotilda persuaded her husband, Clovis I, the first Christian king of the Franks, to abandon his paganism.\textsuperscript{93} The church leveraged the influence wives had, and continued to have, over their husbands.

As mentioned previously, King Edwin of Diera in Northumbria was later defeated and killed in a conflict with Penda and Cadwallon. This prompted Northumbria to enter a period of apostasy due to abuses the victors inflicted on Christians. Christianity was restored under Oswald (r. 634-642), a son of Ethelfrith of Bernicia who, unlike his father, was a devout Christian. Bede called Oswald “the most Christian king” for his role in reintroducing Christianity to the Northumbrian kingdom and establishing the important religious center at Lindisfarne.\textsuperscript{94} Oswald differed from his predecessor in two ways. Coming from the Bernician royal house, he was heavily exposed to Insular Christianity. While Edwin had fled south, Oswald and his brother Oswiu fled to Ireland and Scotland where they were introduced to Celtic Christianity.\textsuperscript{95} Oswiu (r. 642-670) succeeded his brother after Penda killed the latter in 642. Oswiu made the monumental decision to orient his kingdom towards Latin Christianity at the Synod of Whitby in 664.\textsuperscript{96} Oswiu called on the conference to settle, once and for all, the dispute between the Celtic and Latin Churches over the dating of Easter. The Northumbrian bishop Colman argued for the Insular side while Wilfrid, a Northumbrian priest educated in Rome, spoke for the Latin side. After hearing the arguments, Oswiu asked Colman whether it was true that God had given Peter the keys to heaven. Colman could not deny the verse in Matthew 16:18—the foundation of the Petrine doctrine which Pope Leo had forcefully posited some two centuries before. Oswiu ruled in favor of the Latin Church with the following reasoning:

I also say unto you, that he is the door-keeper, and I will not gainsay him, but I desire, as far as I know and am able, in all
things to obey his laws, lest haply when I come to the gates of the kingdom of Heaven, there should be none to open them, he being my adversary who is proved to have the keys.\textsuperscript{97}

Oswiu’s decision to favor Canterbury over Iona is interesting as most of the evidence suggests he favored Insular Christianity. Oswiu had deep ties with the Scots and was fluent in Gaelic. He was baptized by a Celtic churchman, and he was “instructed according to the doctrine of the Scots.”\textsuperscript{98} Evidence also suggests he spent some of his exile in Ireland as well.\textsuperscript{99} A Scottish bishop sat at Lindisfarne at the time of the synod, and Northumbria was geographically closer to the Celtic regions of the north than to the Latin regions of the south. The Northumbrians enjoyed an above-average level of cultural, political, and social interaction with the Celtic populations on their western and northern borders.\textsuperscript{100} Evidence demonstrates, for example, a diffusion of architectural forms between the Celts and the Northumbrians as well as similarities between the organization of Welsh and Northumbrian estates.\textsuperscript{101} Oswiu’s sister-in-law was a Pictish princess, and Oswiu himself took a British princess for one of his brides.\textsuperscript{102} Moreover, ties between Northumbria and its Celtic neighbors ran deeper than the royal level. Native Britons integrated into Northumbrian society through their membership in several Northumbrian religious houses, and a large segment of the total Northumbrian population was of Celtic provenance.\textsuperscript{103}

Political considerations may have affected Oswiu’s decision more than any other factor. He was astute enough to see that the future rested with Latin Christianity and the pope in Rome, although the influence of his Latin Christian wife Eanflaed and the fresh memories of Cadwallon’s atrocities could not have helped Bishop Colman’s arguments at Whitby. The Synod marked the beginning of the end for Celtic Christianity in Britain. Thereafter, the Latin churchmen worked steadily to eradicate the unique practices of Insular Christianity from religious life.

Pope Gregory’s mission to Kent turned out to be a resounding success. Latin Christianity was everywhere victorious less than a century and a half after Augustine and his fellow monks landed on the Isle of Thanet. The final bastion of paganism fell when the South Saxons converted in 681.\textsuperscript{104} In 716, a Northumbrian priest named Egbert persuaded the monks of Iona to adopt the Roman date of Easter and the Roman style of tonsure.\textsuperscript{105} The transition from paganism to Christianity was not an uninterrupted process. Most of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms went through periods of apostasy depending on the current disposition of their rulers. However, Anglo-Saxon England, and indeed Britain as a whole, marched steadily towards the Roman Church after the conversion of Kent.
Notes


15. Cantor, The Civilization of the Middle Ages, 94.

16. Ibid., 114-115.

17. Ibid., 116.

18. Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks, 105-6.

19. Gildas claimed that Christianity came in the first century during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius, while Bede assigned the coming of Christianity to the second century. Bede claimed that the inhabitants of Britain preserved the Christian faith continuously until the persecutions of Diocletian. Dorothy Watts, whose Religion in Late Roman Britain was heavily informed by archaeological research, contends that Christianity was established in the second or early third century. The precise date of Christianity’s arrival may be impossible to determine with absolute precision, but the presence of Christianity in Gaul by the second century meant that it was only a matter of time before the underground religion was smuggled over to Britain. Gildas, “De Excidio Et Conquestu Britanniae,” in Six Old English Chronicles, 8; Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum [Ecclesiastical History of the English People], trans. John Allen Giles (London, GBR: Henry G. Bohn, 1859), 10; Dorothy Watts, Religion in Late Roman Britain: Forces of Change (London, GBR: Routledge, 2002), 2, 12-13.


23. Tacitus’s account was probably colored by the traditional Roman contempt of the “wild other” across the frontiers, but it is the most contemporary one available. His insights into Germanic society are particularly valuable. The Germans, according to Tacitus, regarded it a “dull and stupid thing to painfully accumulate by sweat of the brow what might be won by a little blood.” Given the emphasis which the Romans placed on the virtues of honest agriculture, it is easy to see why they detested the Germans as hopeless savages. Tacitus, “Germania,” in Tacitus: The Agricola and Germania, 67-8.


25. Both Gildas and Bede levelled harsh criticisms against the Britons of the early-fifth century. Gildas scolded the Britons for being “neither brave in war nor in peace faithful,” and Bede noted that the “cowardice of the Britons” only encouraged further Anglo-Saxon invasions. Gildas, “De Excidio Et Conquestu Britanniae,” in Six Old English Chronicles, 6; Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, 1.15.


27. This date is derived from Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, 1.25.

28. An overall trend of political consolidation prevailed throughout the Anglo-Saxon period as smaller states were accreted into the orbit of larger ones, and by the early ninth century there stood only four large kingdoms: Wessex, Mercia, Northumbria, and East Anglia. The decentralized political structure

29. More moderate interpretations of the Anglo-Saxon invasion have been floated in recent years. Barbara Yorke downplays the impact of the Anglo-Saxon invasions on the economy and society of Roman Britain, contending that the physical, social, and religious deterioration of the island was already well underway before the Anglo-Saxons arrived. She blames the simplification of Romano-British society in the years leading up to the Roman collapse on the complex problems of the declining Roman Empire. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 1-9. Similarly, Dorothy Watts claimed that Christianity failed to become fully established in Britain owing to a resurgence of Celtic paganism, the pre-Roman religion of the island, after the apostasy of the Emperor Julian. She contends that British resistance to Romanization throughout the centuries of occupation reinforced this development. If this is true, the impact of the Anglo-Saxon invasion on Christianity may not have been as dramatic as it is often portrayed to be. Watts, *Religion in Late Roman Britain*, 24-95.


32. On this Patrick wrote, “I prayed frequently during the day; love of God and the fear of Him increased more and more, and faith became stronger. . . . In one day I said about a hundred prayers, and in the night nearly the same.” Saint Patrick, “Confessio,” in *The Writings of St. Patrick*, 53.


36. The Scots themselves were Irish immigrants who had come to south-west Pictland in Patrick’s time. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 3.4.

37. The Ionan monks had established no less than sixty monastic communities in Columba’s name by the time of his death in the late-sixth century. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 3.4; Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, 184-5.


39. Ibid., 3.3, 3.5.

40. Ibid.

41. It is telling that Bede, a fierce partisan of Latin Christianity, lavished praise on the Irish churchmen for their “continence, love of God, and observance of monastic rules” and their “piety and chastity” in spite of the fact that they “employed doubtful cycles in fixing the time of the great festival [of Easter].” He excuses their unorthodoxy, asserting that their remoteness prevented anyone from bringing them the “synodal decrees for the observance of Easter.” Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 3.4.

42. Ibid., 3.4.

43. Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, 163. The conspicuous absence of dioceses reflects the isolated development of Irish Christianity. Dioceses initially followed the provincial outlines
of the Roman Empire, but Rome had never exercised control in Ireland. Therefore, the Irish Church had no territorial framework to use as a model. William E. Dunstan, *Ancient Rome* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 483.


45. The Eastern Greek elements within Irish Christianity came from the throngs of Christian immigrants who escaped to Ireland in the wake of the Germanic invasions. Ireland experienced an influx of fleeing ascetics, monks, and other holy men after Patrick’s time, and many of these came from the Roman provinces in the Near East. Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, 180; Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, 145-9, 162.


47. Ibid., 3.4, 3.3, 2.4, 2.19, 3.25, 5.21-22.

48. For an example of such an appeal, see Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 2.19.


58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., 1.26.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.


64. Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, 1.27.

65. Ibid., 2.2.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. Yorke, Kings and Kingdoms, 83.

70. Cantor, The Civilization of the Middle Ages, 162.


72. Ibid., 3.1.

73. Ibid., 2.20.

74. Ibid., 3.1.

75. Ibid., 2.2.

76. Ibid., 2.20.

77. Ibid., 1.29.


80. Yorke, Kings and Kingdoms, 47-8; Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, 1.33.

81. Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, 2.15.

82. Ibid., 3.24.

83. Ibid., 3.7.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid., 2.9.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid., 2.10-11.
88. Ibid., 2.14.
89. Ibid., 2.11.


95. Ibid., 3.1.
96. Ibid., 3.25.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid., 3.25, 3.1.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid., 85.
103. Ibid., 86.

105. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 5.22, 3.4. The Scots and the Picts were persuaded to adopt the Roman custom of tonsure and Easter earlier in the eighth century. See Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 5.15, 5.21. The British Christians of Wales and Cornwall still refused to abandon their Celtic practices as of Bede’s final entry in 731, but Bede dismissed these nations as politically weak and rapidly losing their independence to their English neighbors to the east. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, 5.23.

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Charles Martel Turns South: The Hammer’s Campaigns in Southern France 733-737

Patrick S. Baker

Introduction

In 732, Charles Martel defeated the Muslim Moors at the Battle of Tours and stopped the Islamic advance into Western Europe. The victory won him the cognomen Martel or “hammer” for the way he pounded his enemies. In addition to this title, his peers recognized him as the Mayor of the Palace and Prince of the Franks. With the Islamic advance halted, Charles Martel turned his strategic efforts to securing the city of Narbonne and the rest of modern-day southern France. From 720 to 732, he had campaigned extensively throughout what is today northern France, Germany, and the Benelux countries. After 732 until his death in 741, Charles Martel campaigned, almost exclusively, in Aquitaine, southern Burgundy around Lyon, the Rhone Valley to the Mediterranean Sea, and in Septimania, modern-day Languedoc.¹

Before 732, Charles Martel’s primary interest was in establishing himself as the principal leader of the three Frankish kingdoms of Austrasia, Neustria, and Burgundy. After 732, he shifted his strategic focus southward. Charles Martel’s southern strategy was the result of a Moorish-controlled Narbonne. From there they threatened Frankish interests in the Rhone Valley, southern Burgundy, and Aquitaine. To secure his realm, Charles Martel had to eliminate the Moors from what is today southern France.²

Historiography

The primary sources regarding Martel’s move south are a collection of medieval chronicles, histories, and annals primarily written in Latin. For the most part, these works are anonymous. The most important are The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations, likely completed in 768, the Annales Mettenses Prioress (The Earlier Annals of Metz) compiled about 805, Paul the Deacon’s History of the Lombards completed in the late Eighth Century, the Liber Historiae Francorum (The Book of the History of the Franks) completed in 727, the Chronicon Moissiacense (The Chronicle of Moissac) composed sometime in the
ninth century, and *The Royal Frankish Annals*, likely edited into a final form in the mid-800s. All these works, written some years after the events, used earlier written sources and oral traditions. The *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Monument to German History) is a collection of early medieval texts edited and published in a massive set of over ninety volumes.³

For information regarding the Moors, *The Chronicle of 754*, sometimes referred to as the *Mozarabic Chronicle of 754*, is a singularly important source. A Christian, possibly a churchman, composed the Latin *Chronicle of 754* in Moslem Spain. This chronicle, translated and edited by Kenneth Baxter Wolf in 1990, gives a great deal of information about Spain under the Moors and their conflict with the Franks. Other valuable information is contained in Arab sources that are available in either French or English translations. Muhammad Al-Makkari’s *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain in 2 Volumes*, completed sometime before the author’s death in 1632, is a compilation of earlier written material, much of which is now lost. This work was translated into English by Pascual de Gayangos in 1840 (Volume 1) and 1843 (Volume 2). Making use of now lost sources, ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn Al-Athir completed The *Prefect History* in the 1220s. E. Fagnan extracted, edited, and translated into French the sections regarding North Africa and Spain as *Annales du Maghreb et de l’Espagne*, published in 1901. Ibn Al-Qutiya’s *Early Islamic Spain: the History of Ibn al-Qutiya* completed between 961 and 977 records much of the oral tradition about the Moors’ early years in Spain. David James translated the work into English in 2009.⁴

Their brevity often mars the value of the above sources. Oftentimes, a few short lines cover the events of entire years. Furthermore, the “facts” presented in the chronicles cannot always be taken at face value. For example, in his *History of the Lombards*, Paul the Deacon reports that Charles Martel and Eudo, Duke of Aquitaine, fought together at the Battle of Toulouse and killed over 300,000 Moors. Paul confuses the 721 Battle of Toulouse with the 732 Battle of Tours. In addition, the number of Moors reported killed is at least an order of magnitude larger than the greatest possible number of the entire Moorish army involved in the battle.⁵

Many of the Latin primary sources, specifically the *Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations*, the *Annales Mettenses Piores*, the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and *The Royal Frankish Annals* are unabashedly pro-Frank and pro-Carolingian and are nearly hagiographic in their praise of Charles Martel and his descendants. Christian and Muslim sources are also biased. Ibn Al-Athir’s, Al-Qutiya’s and Al-Makkari’s works are all pro-Muslim. Clearly, none of these sources contains objective writing. Therefore, critical reading is necessary.⁶

Many secondary works explore the military organization, strategy, tactics, weapons, and motivations of the two sides as they battled for control of what is now
southeastern France. For discussions of the Frankish military and political organization Bernard S. Bachrach’s *Merovingian Military Organization, 481-751* (1972) and *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire* (2001) are invaluable. Also, Paul Fouracre’s *The Age of Charles Martel* (2000) is extremely useful for information on the Frankish realm and Charles Martel. Important secondary sources about Muslims such as *The Arab Conquest of Spain, 710-797* (1989) by Roger Collins and Hugh Kennedy’s *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (2001) are equally valuable for information on the caliphates’ military organization and the internal politics of *al-Andalus*.

**The Theater of War**

**Franks in Francia**

The year 732 marked three hundred years of established Frankish kingdoms in Gaul. The Franks first entered Gaul as Roman auxiliaries and fought the Huns at Chalon in 451. Since then, under the Merovingian kings, the Franks had, at one time or the other, either directly ruled or had formed allied or client relationships with regions from Bavaria to Gascony. However, outside the central kingdoms of Austrasia, Neustria, and Burgundy this control oscillated between direct rule and no control at all.  

This period was known as the time of the *rois faineants* or “Do Nothing” kings. Power centered on the *Maior Domus*, or Mayor of the Palace. The kings remained in their position as figureheads. Though a selection process existed amongst the nobles, the death of the Mayor of the Palace often produced power struggles. Bloodlines did not guarantee the office. As a result, assassinations, a coup, or outright war decided the matter.

Charles Martel was the third son of Pippin the Middle, the Austrasian Mayor of the Palace. In 715, Charles’s stepmother imprisoned him to prevent him from inheriting his father’s position and passed favor onto his infant nephews. However, Charles Martel managed to escape. With the Austrasian Carolingian clan defeated and the family treasure handed over the rival Neustrians, Charles Martel organized a counterstroke against the Neustrians at Ambleve near Malmedy. He ambushed and inflicted a serious defeat on them just one year after escaping his confinement.

Charles Martel went on to defeat his Neustrian rival, Ragamfred, again in 717 at Vichy. In 718, Charles Martel chased an army of Aquitainians, allied to Ragamfred, back over the River Loire. Later that same year he marched east of the River Rhine and defeated the rebellious Saxons. By 724, Charles Martel was the
master of *Francia*. He began to reassert control over regions that had slipped loose from the *regnum Francorum* (Kingdom of the Franks) during the preceding years.\(^\text{10}\)

Despite the chaotic conditions, the Frankish homeland was surprisingly secure, stable, and expansive when compared to other successor states of the old Western Roman Empire. The reason for this is rooted in “the Frankish System” of rule. Even on the periphery of the realm, Frankish rulers operated through local power structures when they could, and sought consensus among the powerful magnates for important decisions. The rulers called meetings of these powerful men, sometimes at the start of the campaign season as a military muster, but also at other times to discuss issues important to the realm. Consensus was an important aspect of the Frankish political system. Failure to engage in dialogue often disrupted the system.\(^\text{11}\)

**Moors in al-Andalus**

The Muslims, or Moors, as they were known to the Franks, were newcomers to the continent. In fact they were a new force in the world. Motivated by a new religion, Islam, the small, fierce Arab tribes had emerged from the desert and through conversion and conquest had, by 711, ruled half the known world. In the west, the Muslims stood on the south shore of the Straits of Gibraltar and looked north at the Visigoth kingdom of Hispania, modern day Spain and Portugal. Meanwhile, in the east they were fast approaching the gates of Constantinople.\(^\text{12}\)

The Umayyad Caliphate was under a political and religious mandate to take new lands and *Hispania* was the next logical step of expansion after the conquest of the Berbers of North Africa. However, there is a myth about the Muslim invasion of *Hispania*. The tale involves the daughter of a powerful Visigoth noble raped by Roderic, the last Visigoth King of *Hispania*, and in revenge for the crime, the girl’s father invited the Muslims into Spain.\(^\text{13}\)

Either way, the conquest of *Hispania* was swift. Before the main invasion, the Muslims in North Africa scouted, raided, and pillaged the southern coast of Spain. In 711, Tariq ibn Ziyad arrived in *Hispania* with a force of about seven thousand men for the Battle of Guadalete, the only large battle fought between the Muslim invaders and the Visigoth army. The Moors almost completely annihilated the Visigoths. A few Visigoth survivors fled. A civil war and a conspiracy within Roderick’s government weakened the Visigoths’ resistance to the Moors. Rivals for the Visigoth throne ultimately betrayed the king.\(^\text{14}\)

An additional force of twelve thousand men led by Musa ibn Nusayr joined Tariq for clean-up operations. Thereafter, large-scale resistance ended. However, some cities continued to resist. Musa besieged, looted, and burned those cities. Musa
and Tariq advanced as far east as Zaragoza. Musa, recalled to Damascus, took Tariq with him, but left his son, Abd al-Aziz ibn Musa, in charge of the newly conquered territory.¹⁵

Abd al-Aziz continued the pacification of the peninsula “by subduing several important fortresses and cities.”¹⁶ However, he was just as happy to sign treaties with local Visigoth nobles; which followed the tradition of similar pacts signed by the Muslims in their earlier conquests. In 713, Abd al-Aziz signed a treaty with the Visigoth nobleman, Theodemir, called Tudmir by the Moors, in which the Muslim leader promised to respect Christian property and religion and vowed to recognize Theodemir’s sovereignty. In return, the Visigoth noble would not hide deserters, would pay an annual per capita tax of hard money, and would provide certain agricultural goods. Arrangements like this treaty allowed the small Muslim armies to deal with armed rebellions and at the same time expand their sphere of influence. These treaty arrangements were so beneficial to both sides that they maintained them for years.¹⁷

The Theater of the Conflict

Septimania

Septimania was the part of the Visigoth kingdom of Hispania that extended east of the Pyrenees along the Mediterranean coast, nearly to the Rhone River, and on the north along a line between the cities of Carcassonne and Toulouse. Septimania’s capital was Narbonne. Other important cities were Nimes, Maguelone, Agde, and Beziers. By 507, the Franks destroyed the Visigoth kingdom of Toulouse and occupied all of its territory, except Septimania. A series of back and forth wars in the early 500s saw the Franks take all of the Visigoth territory only to be dislodged again before 548. After the last campaign, the territory remained part of the Visigoth kingdom.¹⁸

Following the Muslim invasion of Spain in 711, Septimania, under a Visigoth king named Ardo, maintained some autonomy. However, independence did not last long. In 717, the Moors crossed the Pyrenees Mountains and engaged the Visigoths in frequent skirmishes. By 720, the Muslims occupied Narbonne, and were soon using it as a raiding base.¹⁹

From 720 to 759, the Moors saw Septimania as an integrated part of the Caliphate, just like the rest of al-Andalus (Muslim Spain). Furthermore, for two generations, the city of Narbonne was a valuable strategic asset of the Moors. From this stronghold, the Moors launched raids up the Rhone Valley, into Aquitaine, and along the Mediterranean coast, without having to navigate the difficult mountain
passes. As such, Narbonne was a primary strategic target for the Franks.\textsuperscript{20}

**Aquitaine**

Aquitaine, in the eighth century, was a rough pentagon, bound on the southwest by the Pyrenees, by Biscayne Bay to the west, the Loire River on the north and northeast, and an ill-defined line about halfway between Toulouse and Carcassonne on the south. The Frankish king Clovis, in an alliance with the Byzantine Empire, shattered the Visigoth kingdom of Toulouse in 507 at the Battle of Vouille. After Clovis’s victory, Aquitaine became a somewhat troublesome part of the Frankish realms. Sometimes Aquitaine appeared to be an integrated part of the Frankish realms and other times nearly completely independent. Only a long series of campaigns by Charles Martel, his son, King Pippin I, and his grandson, Charlemagne, brought Aquitaine under complete control. Until then, the region enjoyed a singularly ambiguous political situation.\textsuperscript{21}

A number of Frankish kings and queens controlled parts of the region through most of the sixth century. However, after 567, the cities of Aquitaine passed on as an inheritance in a rapid and apparently random fashion to a number of rulers. For example, in a span of just twenty years, five kings and two queens held the city of Cahors. Because of unstable leadership, Aquitaine remained politically disjointed in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.\textsuperscript{22}

When Dagobert I inherited the entire kingdom from his father in 628, Dagobert’s half-brother, Charibert, tried to seize the throne. However, “Charibert … made little headway since he was simple-minded.” Rather than kill his half-brother, Dagobert gave him Aquitaine from the Loire River to the Pyrenees Mountains. This included the cities of Toulouse, Cahors, Agen, Perigueux, and Saintes. In exchange for this generous land grant, Charibert would make no further claims to any other part of his father’s kingdom. During his reign, Charibert extended his rule by conquering Gascony, roughly the area between the River Garonne and the Pyrenees along the Atlantic coast. Charibert died in the ninth year of Dagobert’s reign, and his infant son, Chilperic, died shortly after his father. These deaths drew some suspicion that Dagobert had arranged the assassination of both. The death of Chilperic returned the Kingdom of the Frank to single rule.\textsuperscript{23}

In the confusion that beset Francia in the late 600s, civil war raged in Neustria, open war broke out between Neustria and Austrasia, and at least two kings died a violent death. Aquitaine reclaimed a measure of political, military, and cultural independence from the Kingdom of the Franks. In 691, Pippin the Middle took sole leadership of the Franks. The Aquitainians along with the Saxons, Bavarians, Bretons and other peoples had managed to break away from Frankish
During this time, the Aquitainians also reasserted a certain cultural distinctiveness from the Franks. For example, the Franks referred to the peoples that lived south of the Loire as “Romans.” In contrast, the Aquitainians called the Franks that resided north of the Loire “barbarians.” In addition, Aquitaine retained a distinct and different military tradition and organization from the Frankish lands north of the Loire. Evidence indicates that Aquitaine remained far more influenced by Roman institutions than other parts of Gaul.  

However, too much may be made of this supposed separateness. The level of autonomy the Duchy of Aquitaine had is unclear. Certainly, some of the churches and monasteries that held lands in other parts of the Frankish kingdoms also had property in Aquitaine and at least one great churchman of Aquitaine, Ansoald, Bishop of Poitiers, also had land in Burgundy. In addition, a version of Latin was the common written tongue both north and south of the Loire. Through all this, Aquitaine had links to the Kingdom of the Franks through landholding, a common religion, and a common tongue, as well as common social and political structures.  

**Provence**

Eighth century Provence ran south from Lyon along the Rhone River Valley. The region was west of the Alps and east of Moorish Septimania. The area’s major walled cities on the Rhone River were Arles and Avignon, while Marseilles was the region’s major Mediterranean Sea port. Roman roads that ran along both sides of the Rhone connected all of these cities, and bridges at Avignon crossed the river. Since the early 500s, the Franks had had an interest in Provence, fighting both Goths and Lombards to take and maintain control of the area. From the sixth to the eighth centuries, two considerations drove Frankish interests. First, maintaining the lucrative trade along the Rhone River from the Mediterranean Sea into Central Gaul, which the Franks taxed. Second, controlling the Alpine mountain passes into Northern Italy. By doing so, they controlled trade and maintained a defense against possible Lombard invasion.  

During the late seventh and early eighth centuries, Provence remained in the Frankish sphere of influence. However, at least some the great men of the province were decidedly anti-Charles Martel and in open conflict with him. For example, the clan headed by Duke Maurontus resisted Charles Martel’s attempt to take direct control of Provence. Meanwhile, another great family headed by Patricius Abbo, supported Charles’s bid to control the area.
The Hammer Moves South

For Charles Martel, the victory at Tours in 732 made him the preeminent Frankish leader. This victory also made Eudo, Duke of Aquitaine, who had previously opposed Charles Martel recognize him as his overlord. In 731, Charles Martel launched two devastating raids into Aquitaine to restrain Eudo. However, Eudo’s disastrous defeat at the hands of the Moors at the Battle of the River Garonne in 732 forced him to turn to his old enemy. For the time being, the arrangement between Charles Martel and Eudo secured Charles Martel’s personal control of Aquitaine. The Frankish Mayor of the Palace, Charles Martel, could now turn his attention to securing southern Burgundy and Provence against the threat posed by the Muslims holding Narbonne and Nimes.

Burgundy was the third Merovingian Frankish kingdom in importance after Neustria and Austrasia. With no Burgundian Mayor of the Palace, at times, the Merovingian kings directly controlled Burgundy. By the time of the Battle of Tours, some of the lords of northern Burgundy around Orleans were under Charles Martel’s personal authority or closely allied with him, to the extent that he felt powerful enough to direct the area’s churchmen to his satisfaction. However, the area in southern Burgundy around Lyon was not under such control. A year after defeating the Moors, Charles Martel invaded southern Burgundy and appointed his followers as judges and counts to take and enforce his mandate over the locals.

In 734, Charles Martel had to put down a revolt of the Frisians that included seaborne operations in the North Sea. The year 735 saw Charles Martel back in Aquitaine. Eudo died that year and Charles Martel enforced his control over the area and over Eudo’s heir, Hunoald, by occupying Hunoald’s territory including many of the cities and forts. Because of this military occupation of his lands, Hunoald only ruled Aquitaine with Charles Martel’s “permission.” Furthermore, Charles Martel made Hunoald swear allegiance to his sons, Carloman and Pippin. Charles Martel could now move his strategic focus further south.

With affairs settled in Aquitaine, in 736 Charles Martel once more moved south, this time into the Lyonnais. His attempt to exert control over the city of Lyon and the surrounding area three years earlier produced limited success. At this time he was forced to replace many of the previously appointed officials with new men. He then led his forces down the Rhone River Valley all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. This move displaced Duke Maurontus from his position of power in the area. With the Frankish military occupying the Rhone Valley, the Moors were now cut-off from easy raiding and further expansion to the east.

Maurontus made common cause with the Muslims of Narbonne to regain his previous position in Provence. He and his followers allowed the Moors into the
strongly fortified city of Avignon. Maurontus then used the Moors to attack his enemies, including Charles Martel’s allies. The *Annales Mettenses Prio*res merely reports the city’s capture by deception and the devastation of the countryside by the Moors without mentioning Maurontus’s role in the action. Nonetheless, in light of other evidence, Maurontus likely had some part in the Moors’ capture of the city. Other sources report that the Muslims also captured Arles.\(^{33}\) The capture of Avignon and Arles was a serious strategic threat to Charles Martel’s position in the Rhone Valley. It cut him off from his followers in the south, and the Alpine passes into Italy. Furthermore, the Moors could now easily attack up the river into Burgundy and east to the Alps.

The Frankish response to the capture of Avignon was massive. First, Charles Martel dispatched an advanced force under his half-brother, Duke Childebrand, which had a siege train large enough to surround the well-prepared target. Charles Martel arrived with more men and decided to take the city by assault rather than wait for it to surrender, because a second Moorish army was forming near Narbonne.\(^{34}\)

The Franks had a long tradition of siege warfare. Clovis and his successors conducted sieges at Avignon in 500 and at Comminges in 585. The skills to invest and attack a city were not lost with the rise of the Mayors. Pippin the Middle conducted at least one siege at Namur in 684. The pervasiveness of fortified places throughout former Roman Gaul demanded that any effective army have the means to deal with walled cities and other kinds of fortification.\(^{35}\) For their time, Frankish siege-techniques were no less effective than the Romans. The willingness of the Franks to engage in sieges indicates they were confident in their abilities.

At Avignon, the Franks used a combination of siege machines, such as battering rams and rope ladders, to assault the city. The battering rams were heavy logs with iron heads attached. They hung from a frame so that it swung back and forth to smash gates or walls. Affixed with wheels, the device sported a protective cover of woven branches, planks, layers of leather, wool, and sand to ward off stones and incendiary devices. The rope ladders were likely just knotted ropes with grappling hooks of some kind. The nature of rope ladders made their use in the attack on Avignon a commando-type or sneak attack. Furthermore, the use of rope ladders indicates that the defending force was relatively small. The attack scenario played out as follows: the Franks pushed battering rams into position against the city’s gates and while the defenders rushed to fend off this attack, other Franks using rope ladders climbed over the now undefended parts of the wall. The Franks used ropes to climb not just the walls but also buildings. It is likely the suburbs had encroached on the city walls, giving the attackers platforms to help them slip over. The Franks captured the city and burned it. Even though the Franks killed and
imprisoned an unknown number of enemy soldiers, insurgents forced Charles Martel and Childebrand to recapture the city the next year.\textsuperscript{36}

After taking Avignon, he took the strategic offensive against the Moors. He “crossed the Rhone with his men and plunged into Gothic territory as far as the Narbonnaise.”\textsuperscript{37} On reaching Narbonne, Charles Martel also found an unanticipated enemy army encamped outside the city. Commanded by Yusuf Ibn Abd ar Rahman al Fihri, this new army was possibly a relief force meant for Avignon that had not had time to act before that city fell. The Franks then surrounded both the city and the army camp with a rampart and blocked river traffic into the city. Charles Martel’s army also added redoubts and armed camps at intervals to combat Moorish sorties or any attempted breakouts. Furthermore, he placed catapults and batter rams in strategic locations in preparation for an assault on either the city or the camp.\textsuperscript{38}

The Moors of Narbonne sent a dispatch to al-Andalus asking for assistance. A large relief force gathered as the great nobles and warlords in Spain gathered another army from their combined resources. Omar ibn Chaled took command of this force. Rather than cross the dangerous Pyrenees, the relief force came by sea. Ibn Chaled landed at what today is Port-Mahon where a Roman-built dock was still useable. Thinking he had achieved surprise, the Moorish general established a fortified camp on some high ground at the base of the Port-Mahon peninsula. He then moved his main force a little distance up the river and rested for the night.\textsuperscript{39}

Charles Martel received word of Ibn Chaled’s approach and countered the threat to his rear. Leaving part of his force to maintain the siege of Narbonne, Charles Martel quickly marched the rest of his army along the Via Domitia to the Valley of the River Berre. On reaching the valley, he turned and moved his force toward the sea. This blocked any Moorish attempt to reach the road. Due to good intelligence, Martel knew the location of the Moors. To rest his army, Martel had his men construct the Roman-influenced Frankish camp on the banks of the Berre in the valley of the Corbieres where an earlier Visigoth palace once stood.

The next day as the Franks approached the enemy position they deployed in their traditional infantry lines and attacked. Tradition puts The Battle of the Berre in an area between the Berre River and the marsh now called the Etang de la Palme near the village of Sigean. The location made tactical sense. The Franks secured their flanks with impassable terrain when possible. At the Battle of the Berre, they used the Berre River and the Etang de la Palme Marsh. At the Battle of Tours, they used a heavily wooded hill and the Clain River. The Moors had the sea behind them with their camp occupying the only nearby high ground. Using good tactics, the Franks cut off the Moors from their camp by a straightforward pinch from their right to their left.\textsuperscript{40}

In their battle line, the Franks were like a living threshing machine, but
instead of harvesting grain, they reaped the lives of their enemies. The Frankish infantry advanced slowly, systematically stabbing and smashing anything that stood in front of them. As was their custom, they refused to allow a gap in the line and kept moving forward. Both sides fought hard, but when the Franks killed Ibn Chaled, the Moors broke and ran. The retreating Muslims, cut off from their camp, tried to swim or take small fishing boats back to their fleet still at anchor at Port-Mahon. The Franks pursued the defeated Moors in boats, many Moors drowned as they fled. The victorious Franks now turned on the Moors’ camp, which quickly surrendered. The victors captured a great amount of loot and a large number of prisoners.\textsuperscript{41}

After his success at the Berre, Charles Martel lifted his siege of Narbonne. It is possible that his army had suffered a number of casualties in the battle at the Berre River and he did not feel strong enough to attempt a direct assault on both the city and the nearby enemy camp. Starving out either the city or the camp was a slow process and another relief force might appear at any time from Spain. Nevertheless, on his way out of Septimania, Charles Martel and his army captured the Moslem controlled cities of Agde, Bezier, and Nimes. He destroyed the cities and their suburbs.\textsuperscript{42} This rendered those cities useless as military outposts.

\textbf{Conclusion}

When Charles Martel died in 741, he had not been able to capture Narbonne, but had left that to his son, Pippin, who accomplished the capture of the city in 759 after a long siege.\textsuperscript{43} However, Charles Martel’s southern strategy had largely eliminated the Moorish threat posed to the Kingdom of the Franks and, by extension, all of Christian Europe by Islamic Spain. By driving the Moors west of the Pyrenees, Charles and Pippin secured and established the southern border of what would become France. This border is still in place today.

For good or ill, Charles Martel largely established the Franks as the preeminent Christian military power in Europe. This military dominance passed to his son and his grandson Charlemagne. This power let Charles Martel’s descendants build the Holy Roman Empire and sparked the Carolingian Renaissance.
Notes


15. Al-Athir, Annales, 35; Chronicle of 754, 54, 56.


27. Geary, Phantoms of Remembrance, 32; Gregory, History of the Franks, 3.6 and 3.21; Jordanes, Gothic History, 138; Paul, History of the Lombards, V.5.

28. Fouracre, Charles Martel, 66; Bachrach, Early Carolingian Warfare, 33.


42. *Continuations of Fredegar*, 20.

43. *Continuations of Fredegar*, 24; *Chronicon Moissiacense*, s. a. 759.
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Since the author published this article in 2015, Patrick S. Baker has retired from the Department of Defense and has focused on writing. He has published more than 20 history and other non-fiction articles in magazines such as Strategy & Tactics Magazine, Modern War Magazine, Military History Magazine as well as New Myths and Electric Athenaeum.
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Book Review

Francis M. Hoeflinger

In his book Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century: Discipline, Tactics, and Technology, Kelly DeVries contends that his analysis and findings differ from most historians of medieval warfare, as he asserts that infantry alone could and did win battles. Through the use of primary and secondary sources, a narrative of fourteen battles, interwoven with contemporary descriptions, is produced which provides a detailed account of the chosen battles that were fought in the first half of the fourteenth century. Each chapter covers one battle and provides, where known, some background on the fight, topography of the battlefield, opposing commanders, and, composition of the opposing armies. Also covered in each chapter is an analysis of the causes of victory and defeat. Additionally the book also contains an appendix titled “Ambushes (p.188).” “Ambushes” details three fights where the victorious army initially used surprise when initiating battle. All of the battles covered in the appendix occurred in the same early fourteenth century time period. The book ends with a chapter titled “Conclusion” that summarizes the authors initial thesis and reinforces the conclusions he reached by the end of his study. Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century: Discipline, Tactics, and Technology also includes an eleven-page bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

The author uses a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, both literal and poetic that cover an assortment of subjects relevant to the time period studied. It appears from reading the bibliography, and the extensive footnotes found throughout the book that the author used sources that cover the sociology of the period of the high to late middle ages as well as biographies of rulers, leaders, and nobles. Military treaties and contemporary histories are also utilized as well as modern studies on almost every area and aspect of life in medieval Western Europe. The cited sources cover almost every
location in Western Europe. Sources on the political, societal, and military organization and other aspects of life in medieval Western Europe are listed as well. The bibliography is a strong and useful reference on the late medieval time frame and can be used as a springboard for further research and study.

*Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century* provides not only a contemporary look at early fourteenth century combat, but also a concise analysis of why the victors won and the mistakes made by the defeated armies. DeVries illustrates this point with a description of a ledger account of the defeated French commander at the Battle of Courtrai. The ledger account details how the French commander bought a map of the battlefield that included details of the very trenches that would cause the deaths of so many of his soldiers (p.15). Even though the French commander had knowledge of the trenches dug and camouflaged in front of the Flemish positions, he ordered his attack to be conducted directly into the Flemish positions protected by the trenches. DeVries points out that the combination of disregarding the trenches and stiff Flemish resistance lead to the defeat of the attack and the deaths of the cream of French nobility. DeVries analyzes the tactics, techniques, and weapons used in each battle. The book uses a variety of primary and secondary sources written in both Latin and Middle English to provide as accurate and complete a picture of the battle covered as possible. DeVries also attempts to explain and mitigate any nationalistic prejudice of the sources used. The author uses sources, which conflict with each other, and provides a plausible explanation for the discrepancies. DeVries frames his explanations in a manner that adds to the depth of the battle without confusing the reader.

Many students of medieval military history believe that the armored knight dominated the battlefield and that until the introduction of viable firearms an army of mounted knights would always defeat foot soldiers. Before reading *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century* it is easy to picture the armored knight riding down and impaling his enemies with impunity; breaking any infantry formation and cutting down all who would dare to resist him. After reading this book the reader begins to realize that regardless of the time period studied, the terrain and weapons have more of an impact on an army’s chances of victory than almost any other factor. The book also reinforces the belief that the terrain can act as a combat multiplier and increase the effectiveness of weapons and the efficiency
of the battle plan a commander constructs to ensure victory.

This is a very easily read and thoroughly enjoyable book, on a subject that could be very dry and boring. Where appropriate the author provides a level of detail that brings the battle to life, but not so much as to inundate the reader with too much information. *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century* can be read and enjoyed by the casual reader of military history as much as the well-informed student; it makes a significant contribution to the literature of medieval warfare and to a better understanding of the infantry’s role in fighting and winning battles during the first half of the fourteenth century.

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Since 2013 when the Saber and Scroll Journal published this book review, Frank has worked (and resigned) from the US Central Command, welcomed three grandchildren into the world, received a 100 percent disability rating from the VA and started his own business. He and his wife have bought their “forever” home and have adapted to life on Florida’s Gulf coast.
At first glance, the popular impression of King Edward II of England (1284-1327, r. 1307-1327) persists that he was a weak, immature, effeminate failure of a king who lusted after his male “favorites,” was bullied by his powerful father Edward I Longshanks, and loathed by his long-suffering wife Isabella of France (1295-1358). Much material has been produced about Edward, but unfortunately, large amounts of it are twisted versions of reality, perpetuated rumors, or outright falsehoods. Fictionalized modern accounts, found in novels and movies such as Braveheart, further mislead readers’ and viewers’ preconceptions about Edward. Fortunately, historian Kathryn Warner has written an important biography of this king that exposes both his real quirks and the inaccuracies attached to him, all placed within the context of England’s political position in fourteenth-century Europe.

Holding two degrees in medieval history from the University of Manchester, Warner is a well-respected expert on Edward II and the fourteenth century. Her study is based almost completely on primary sources, built on a daunting number of scraps of information found in documents ranging from letters and speeches in Edward’s own words, letters from others surrounding him, itineraries, and various administrative rolls to royal household records, papal letters, and chamber journals. What emerges is not only a richly detailed account of the king’s life, but a fascinating look at his personality that has been hidden behind innuendo and fabrications for centuries.

As the story of Edward’s life unfolds, Warner focuses on the notorious controversies and myths that have grown up around him over time. One of the most persistent was his close bond with his male friends, in particular, Piers Gaveston (c.1284-1312) in the early part of the reign and Hugh Despenser the Younger (c.1286-1326) towards the end of it. Speculation and rumor have plagued writers’ works on Edward from the earliest chroniclers to modern historians, suggesting that his closeness to these men meant he was either bisexual or homosexual. In her chapters on Piers Gaveston, who was the second of four sons of a poor Gascon knight and who had been a squire in Edward I’s household and later a talented
soldier in the army, Warner points out that his and Edward’s rapport might have been misinterpreted through the ubiquitous usage of words such as “love.” “The early fourteenth century was an age when men bandied about declarations of love for other men far more easily than in later eras” (p.29), meaning it had a different connotation at that time. Chroniclers of the day designated this closeness as “improper,” but Warner also clearly points out these writers were unreliable sources that had strong biases against the king, reflecting the mood of England’s nobility towards his relationship with Gaveston. The chroniclers likely were trying to gain the aristocracy’s favor. The author also notes that Christopher Marlowe’s play *Edward II*, written c. 1592, a purely fictional rendition, certainly perpetuated the preconceived notion, carrying it into modern times with each of its continued productions. While Warner concedes that from the surviving evidence no absolute proof can be determined whether Edward’s relationships with his favorites were sexual, she notes that both Edward and Gaveston took wives, had children, and even fathered illegitimate children, all in the traditional sense, suggesting that they were simply close friends who chose to defy the growing angst of England’s powerful nobles.

Edward’s queen, Isabella of France (m. 1308), was supposedly long-suffering, ignored, and despised. Here again Warner carefully examines the surviving documentation and reveals strong clues that Edward and Isabella probably had a warm, even loving, marriage for many years. In one of her letters to him, she called him “my very sweet heart” five times, and he called her his “dear heart” (p.47). Whether—or how much—Isabella was exasperated at the presence of Piers Gaveston during the favorite’s years around Edward is not known, but the impression is that she tolerated the situation, whatever it entailed.

How Isabella viewed Edward’s relationship with his second predominant “favorite,” Hugh Despenser the Younger, was quite another matter. Isabella detested him. Unlike the arrogant but apparently tolerable Gaveston, Despenser appears to have been coldly calculating and greedy, gradually gaining control over Edward’s political and financial power. Close to the time that Despenser’s “friendship” with Edward deepened, the king’s marriage began to sour. Although Warner skirts around the possibility that the favorite caused a major rift between the royal couple, she hints that Despenser may have been a catalyst behind Isabella’s departure for France in 1325, never to return to her husband. There, she eventually allied with the exiled nobleman Roger Mortimer, a sworn enemy of both Despenser and Edward. Rumors developed of an affair with Mortimer and whether her eldest child, the future Edward III (1312-1327), could have actually been Mortimer’s son. Warner finds no evidence that Isabella and Mortimer were ever lovers. Instead, the author presents the strong likelihood that they were only political allies. Further, Isabella could not
have met Mortimer until years after her last child was born in 1321. Warner also shows proof that Edward and Isabella were together when each of their four children was conceived. Interestingly, based on the period’s events Isabella allegedly earned the nickname “She-Wolf of France” (p. 39). However, that epithet was actually Shakespeare’s title for Margaret of Anjou, mistakenly applied to Isabella in 1757 by poet Thomas Grey.

Throughout the book, Warner highlights Edward’s inadequacy as a king, the odd hobbies that made him the butt of jokes, and his generosity. On the one hand, Edward paid little attention to his country, neglecting important political issues while he spent time with his favorites. He also placed himself in the company of lowborn tradesmen, preferring their company and performing robust physical labor alongside them. He appears to have disliked any sort of regal and “idyllic” court life, which probably bored him. This caused a great amount of furor amongst his nobles, who disdained such work and considered it inappropriate for a king to enjoy. On the other hand, Edward was extremely generous to those around him—not only to his favorites, to Isabella, and to others of the aristocracy with whom he was pleased—but to strangers, messengers, and others on down the scale to the lowest ranks. While he was generous to a fault, unfortunately this strained his treasury, already depleted due to his father’s wars. To give huge gifts of lands and titles to his favorites, especially the arrogant Gaveston and the hated Despenser, created serious animosity. Warner carefully examines the period when Edward’s power waned: in September 1326, Isabella and Mortimer staged a small-scale but very successful invasion that resulted in Edward’s deposition, Despenser’s execution, and the placement of the young Edward III on the throne under Isabella and Mortimer’s regency. Even while trying to avoid capture and after his imprisonment, Edward continued to show generosity; sometimes he is compared to the image of Nero fiddling away while Rome burned.

In the final chapter, “The Curious Case of the King Who Lived,” Warner addresses the intriguing controversy of when and how Edward actually died. According to fourteenth century chroniclers, he supposedly died in late September 1327, murdered, first by suffocation, then “with a plumber’s red-hot iron inserted through a horn leading to the inmost parts of the bowel, [his killers] burned out the respiratory organs beyond the intestines, taking care that no wound should be discernible on the royal body” (p. 243). This method of murder was handed down in numerous accounts over the years. Warner, however, refutes this as pure falsehood, first citing the unreliability of the chroniclers, and more importantly, laying out strong evidence that Edward may have survived for a few years past his alleged death date, perhaps up to 1330, or even later. While this evidence is not indisputable, it includes traces of at least four conspiracies to rescue Edward, the mysteries of why
no one was allowed to view his body after his alleged death, why he was not buried for three months afterward, and why he was not laid in state like other kings. No details remain of his December 1327 funeral either. Most importantly, Warner cites letters that have surfaced which date to the years after the funeral, stating that Edward was “alive and in good health of body, in a safe place at his own wish [or command]” (p.248). Some conspirators of the time believed he was kept at Corfe Castle in Dorset, prompting armed plots to free him in 1329-1330. Other letters suggest Edward had fled to Italy and lived out his years there.

This biography includes a genealogy tracing from Edward’s grandparents through four generations after him; a useful note on wages and prices of the period; several color plates, mostly of locations important to the biography plus photographs of related documents; and a warm foreword by historian Ian Mortimer, who gives the author a resounding endorsement. The one item missing is a map. Although most of the place names will be familiar to scholars of this period, a map showing their locations would have been a good addition.

Warner has pieced together a richly detailed puzzle that corrects many of the misconceptions about Edward II of England and produces a much more complete portrayal of his personality. Where the truth is unknown due to the lack of surviving evidence, Warner says so. Her approach is remarkably even-handed; while she points out the good things Edward did, she does not gloss over his terrible flaws. Warner’s biography is a welcome addition to the collection of anyone studying this period. She will be following up with a biography of Isabella of France, due in spring 2016.

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Kathleen Guler is the author of a series of historical novels set in fifth century Britain, including, A Land Beyond Ravens, which won the 2010 Colorado Book Award and the 2010 National Indie Excellence Award, both in the historical fiction category. Kathleen earned her Masters Degree in history in 2014. She has also published numerous articles, essays, short stories, reviews, and poems.
Currently, she is currently working on a fifth novel comprised of three interconnected stories, each set in a different time. The author lives in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.
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Professor John France of Swansea University owns a lofty reputation in medieval military history circles. His book, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades, 1000-1300*, is an attempt to shed light on the socio-economic characteristics of medieval warfare. France’s book presents three fascinating arguments.

First, his discussion about how medieval Europe fought its wars encapsulates how warfare at this time consisted of haphazard engagements. European medieval society was comprised of decentralized governmental systems. France calls the spheres of power in European society the *mouvances*. These consisted of well-heeled medieval families. For example, the Counts of Anjou ruled from Western France, the Baldwins ruled in Jerusalem, the Dukes of Brabant ruled from the south of the Netherlands, and the royal houses of Hohenstaufen and Capetians ruled from Germany and France, respectively. All of this economic, military, and political dispersion made it difficult for any one family to maintain a lasting hold on the European continent. If the political and military leaders wanted to fight wars, then they had to conduct it through indirect means, namely raiding, pillaging, and ambushing one’s opponents. This indirect way of war made a lot of sense since limited logistical abilities of the state restricted large-scale warfare. In addition, a direct conflict jeopardized the nobilities’ position of power should the outcome be negative.

The second argument France discusses is the primacy of the castle. He dedicated two chapters to castles and fortifications and how they impacted wars and sieges. The primacy of the castle can be found in its construction. Castles protected the inhabitants from both domestic and foreign threats. For instance, the castle's walls assisted in helping to protect governments from rebellion by the native populace as well as external coercion. The castle’s defensively strong characteristics often held the advantage in battle and medieval governmental infrastructure helped to maintain the castle's prominent role in European society. France writes that castles held “a military purpose—to defend the life and goods of its owner and to provide his troops with a base.”

The number of castles...
increased throughout the Middle Ages and reinforced this basic component of war.\textsuperscript{3} One of the benefits of the castle in a war was that it protected the troops from enduring enemy attacks. For example, after ransacking the surrounding landscape the enemy grew tired. Protected from the initial attack, the rested garrisoned troops inside the castle sallied out and laid waste to weakened opponents. During the medieval period, conducting a siege against a garrisoned castle often led to a long and protracted expedition. If a ravaging army decided to besiege an enemy’s castle, they left themselves vulnerable to attack from relief forces. This created a situation where those conducting the siege found themselves surrounded by the besieged and their allies.

The third argument comes at the end of his book where France recognizes a paradox in medieval society. It was highly militarized, but at the same time, it lacked war academies. France is correct to point out that a lack of instruction in war solidified the power of the nobility. When medieval armies did go to war, their political and military leaders sought out conservative objectives. These leaders knew that their armies did not have the resources to conduct an extended war.

His list of sources is impressive. The historiography represented draws from a list of well-known medieval military historians. Bernard S. Bachrach, Kelly Devries, Stephan Morillo, Helen Nicholson, and Michael Prestwich are a few of his secondary sources.

Although this book has an illuminating thesis and fascinating historical arguments, one is bound to find a few criticisms. First, the reader may find that France's book lacks a prologue and an epilogue to introduce and conclude with his main thoughts to the reader. Second, he refers to many battles without equipping the reader with an adequate supply of maps. The great number of battles and sieges France lists makes it easy to get lost in the text. If he had focused only on the most consequential engagements, readers might not get easily lost. Third, the content is advanced and this creates confusion for newcomers to the discipline. For instance, it is easy for the newcomer to get lost when France is discussing the Maciejowski Bible and stone machicolations and how they relate to his central thesis. Diagrams of machicolations in use can be helpful to the reader. For the above reasons the work is in need of revision.

In closing, John France’s book deftly blends the mouvances in European society. The socio-economic infrastructure of European culture led to the inability of military and political leaders to execute a plan that resulted in a decisive conflict. Even though the medieval world might seem distant in our technological society, the study of warfare during the Middle Ages is the study of hegemonies vying for control over the continent. European culture needs to acknowledge that “hegemonic” warfare is a historical legacy of Western identity.\textsuperscript{4} Any student who
is specializing in medieval warfare would do well to place France’s book on their bookshelf.

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Notes


2. Ibid., 84.

3. Ibid.