CONSENSUS IN MEROVINGIAN POLITICS: THE ANGLOPHONE CONTRIBUTION[1]

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Abstract: This article seeks to analyze the contributions made over the last few decades by English-speaking medievalists to the debate about consensus as a tool for social analysis. The work gives special emphasis to the contributions made by Paul Fouracre, responsible for inserting the concept at the center of Merovingian studies during the 1980s. Strongly inspired by Social Anthropology, the English academic tradition has tended to treat consensus in direct relation to conflict . Following the influence of Evans-Pritchard's anthropological writings among medievalists from the 1970s onwards, Fouracre and other English authors proposed that consensus within a group would often be linked to the exclusion of certain subjects from such a group. Thus, aspects such as "envy" and the threat of conflict have a central position in this tradition of consensus interpretation during the Merovingian period.

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[1] This is a revised version of a paper ('Consensus in Merovingian Politics: an assessment of the validity of the concept of consensus in seventh-century Francia'), which was given at the International Medieval Congress in the University of Leeds on 8th July 2018, at a session to celebrate the work of Paul Fouracre.

In a characteristically generous and judicious review of the 2017 *Konstanzer Arbeitskreis* volume on *Recht und Konsens im frühen Mittelalter* Paul Fouracre noted the strengths of the German *Rechtshistoriker* tradition of scholarship in dealing with the subject of consensus, as well as its limitations. (FOURACRE, 2018, p. 272-274) He praised the precise analysis of terminology to be found in the volume, but at the same time pointed to the frequent absence of a sense of how the detailed discussions contributed to a wider understanding of the period, such as was achieved by Patrick Wormald in his '*Lex Scripta* and *Verbum Regis*' of 1977 (WORMALD, 1977, p. 105-138),[2] and he also drew attention to the value of anthropology, with specific reference to the work of Simon Roberts, whose 1979 handbook *Order and Dispute* can be taken as exemplifying a whole tradition of political anthropology, which had a considerable impact on English early medieval scholarship in the 1980s. (ROBERTS, 1979) Within the world of Anglophone early-medievalists consensus is primarily a social (or socio-political) matter, whereas within the German academic tradition it is more frequently a topic for legal historians.

Of course, not every contribution to the Reichenau volume was constrained by the traditions of *Rechtsgeschichte*: one can immediately list the English-language contributions of Chris Wickham (2017, p. 389-426), Tom Noble (2017, p. 47-62) and John Moorhead (2017, p. 129-149), as well as the lengthy concluding remarks of Stefan Esders, which makes a particularly strong case for putting the Church and its councils into the equation. (ESDERS, 2017, p. 451-455) But the near total absence of any reference within the German volume to Anglophone scholarship of the three generations following 1945, despite a reference to Jinty Nelson's 'Legislation and Consensus in the Reign of Charles the Bald' in the second footnote of Verena Epp's historical introduction is striking. (EPP, 2017, p. 9)[3] Christoph Meyer provides a brief overview of 'Germanistische Frühmittelalterforschungen seit den 1970er Jahren', (MEYER, 2017, p. 27-39) and Steffen Patzold also looks at '"Konsens" in der jüngeren deutschen Forschung' (PATZOLD, 2017), but there is no sense here or in

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[2] Reprinted in Wormald, Patrick. **Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience**. London: The Hambledon Press, 1999, p. 1-43.

[3] Citing NELSON, Janet. Legislation and Consensus in the Reign of Charles the Bald. *In*: WORMALD, Patrick (ed.), **Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies presented to J.M. Wallice-Handrill**, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1983, p. 202-227.

the majority of contributions that consensus had been an interpretative concept in any scholarly tradition other than the German (despite the fact that Patzold, like Epp, cites Nelson's article). (PATZOLD, 2017, p. 267)

One can contrast this silence with a comment of Mayke de Jong made in the course of a conference held in 1995 devoted to the Franks and Alamanni, 'To the outsider the consensus in English is so strong as to be quite overwhelming'. (DE JONG, 1998, p. 311) The papers by Guy Halsall and by Fouracre himself in the same volume see consensus as a significant feature of early medieval political society, while at the same time noting that it was not automatic, and stressing the break-down in consensus that took place in the course of the second half of the seventh century. (HALSALL, 1998, p. 141-175)[4] Although not everyone was willing to place the same emphasis on the concept, in the concluding debate Simon Loseby affirmed with regard to Merovingian history, that 'some sort of consensus must have been essential'. (LOSEBY, 1998, p. 391) Wickham has more recently endorsed the importance of consensus, as realised through assemblies, in the Frankish world. (WICKHAM, 2017, p. 406-415) The limits of consensus in the Merovingian period are quite rightly a subject of debate, but the concept has unquestionably proved useful in Anglophone attempts to understand the functioning of Frankish society in the seventh century. (WOOD, 2005, p. 16-18) And not only the seventh century: one can add that Philippe Buc in his study of 'the dangers of ritual', which put the interpretation of consensus more generally under the spotlight, also specifically applied the concept to his reading of the works of Gregory of Tours. (BUC, 2001, p. 88-122) Consensus is central to Peter Brown's reading of the same bishop's presentation of the cult of relics. (BROWN, 1977, p. 1-22)[5]

The concept of consensus, as employed by scholars of the early Middle Ages in the English-speaking world, has not only been applied to the study of Frankish society. It has been very present in the study of late-antique and early medieval ritual, not least in Sabine MacCormack's study of late-Roman ceremony.

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[4] Reprinted in HALSALL, Guy. Social identities and social relationships in early Merovingian Gaul *In*: FOURACRE, Paul. **Frankish History: Studies in the Construction of Power**. London: Routledge, 2013.

[5] Reprinted in BROWN, Peter. **Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, p. 222-250.

(MacCORMARK, 1981) Buc does not confine his attention to Gregory of Tours, but also looks at late-antique martyr acts, as well as Liudprand of Cremona. Wickham's contribution to the *Konstanzer Arbeitskreis* volume covers most of western Europe, including Spain, Italy, England, and Scandinavia, as well as Francia. In the same volume Moorhead looks at the evidence for Ostrogothic Italy (MOORHEAD, 2017), and Noble at that provided by Gregory the Great. (NOBLE, 2017) Rachel Stocking (2001) places consensus at the heart of her reading of the Visigothic kingdom in Spain from 589 to 633, and above all of its Church councils. (STOCKING, 2000) Her study of the Councils of Toledo effectively foreshadows the comments of Esders on the value of consensus-theory for the study of ecclesiastical assemblies. (ESDERS, 2017, p. 451-455) For Stocking, however, the concept of consensus is a Christian ideal rather than one drawn from political anthropology. Her reading looks back primarily to the work of Peter Brown (STOCKING, 2000, p. 4-12), not least to his study of relics (BROWN, 1977, p. 1-22), and of the ordeal. (BROWN, 1975, p. 133-151)[6] In formulating his ideas Brown drew on social anthropology, albeit on different traditions within the discipline than the school of political anthropology represented by Roberts, cited by Fouracre. Above all he made use of the work of Mary Douglas and Evans-Pritchard.

It is worth pausing on the origins of the Anglophone concern for consensus, because, as Mayke de Jong stated, it was indeed a central concept for British early-medievalists in the last quarter of the twentieth century. On a personal note I might refer to my first article on 'Kings, kingdoms and consent' from 1977 (SAWYER; WOOD, 1977, p. 6-29) and to the title of the chapter of *The Merovingian Kingdoms* of 1994 that dealt with the second half of the seventh century: 'The failure of consensus'. (WOOD, 1994, p. 221-238) An interest in consensus, however, was not new in Anglophone medieval studies: the late-medievalist K.B. McFarlane had already developed the idea in the context of relations between the crown and the aristocracy in the late Middle Ages. (McFARLANE, 1973) But there was also a general context for the emphasis placed on consensus in the last three decades of the twentieth century. In 1969 the Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity,

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[6] Reprinted in BROWN, Peter. **Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, p. 302-322.

Barbara Castle, produced a major paper dealing with relations between the State and the unions, *In Place of Strife*. Ten years later Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, and ushered in a period of bitter political division. This surely attuned British scholars to the question of consensus and disagreement.

There was also a more specifically intellectual context for the emphasis placed on consensus by early-medievalists. An obvious clue to the origins of this concern lies in the title of Janet Nelson's contribution to the 1983 Festschrift for Michael Wallace-Hadrill – 'Legislation and Consensus in the reign of Charles the Bald'. (NELSON, 1983) In the 1960s and 70s there were two titans of Merovingian scholarship, Wallace-Hadrill and Eugen Ewig – and although the latter's work on the *Teilreiche* and on ecclesiastical privileges are the foundations of much subsequent scholarship (EWIG, 1976/2009), it was Wallace-Hadrill who provided the overarching interpretation of the period – despite the fact that his pared down and elusive style does not make him the easiest of guides. (WALLACE-HADRILL, 1962)

I doubt whether Wallace-Hadrill used the specific term 'consensus', but Nelson's contribution to his Festschrift was entirely appropriate, for central to his work was a search for the mechanisms by which peace was achieved in the Merovingian and Carolingian periods, most obviously in his papers on the 'The Bloodfeud of the Franks' (1959, p. 459-487)[7] and 'War and Peace in the early Middle Ages', (WALLACE-HADRILL, 1975, p. 157-174)[8] but also in his inaugural lecture as Chichele Professor, with its emphasis on 'nobility of mind'. (WALLACE-HADRILL, 1975, p. 18) Wallace-Hadrill's personal concern with the topic arose, I would guess, from his experience as an intelligence officer during the Second War, from 1939 to 1945, but his conceptual approach certainly reflected the influence of the Anglo-Saxonist Dorothy Whitelock. (WOOD, 2004, p. 332-355; 2006, p. 489-504) It was surely enhanced by the work of another anglophone anthropologist, Max Gluckman (1955), Wallace-Hadrill's colleague from his days as Professor of History at Manchester. (WOOD, 2006) Gluckman's short, but seminal, book *Custom and Conflict*

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[7] Reprinted in WALLACE-HADRILL, John M. **The Long-Haired Kings: And Other Studies in Frankish History**. London: Routledge, 1962, p. 121-147.
[8] Reprinted in WALLACE-HADRILL, John M. **Early Medieval History**. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975, p. 19-38.

in Africa, published in 1970, contains two chapters, 'The peace in the feud' and 'the frailty in authority', that became central to Anglophone readings of early-medieval social structures.[9] (GLUCKMAN, 1955, p. 1-53) For undergraduates in Oxford in the 1970s Gluckman was required reading, as, in the 1980s, was Simon Roberts for British early-medievalists. The English emphasis on consensus, in other words, was, to a large extent, inspired by a branch of social anthropology that concentrated on political structures, an area of study which had particular resonance in the 1970s and 1980s.

Paul Fouracre was probably the scholar who put consensus most firmly at the centre of Merovingian studies in the 1980s. He was an undergraduate in Oxford during Wallace-Hadrill's early days as Chichele Professor, before becoming a doctoral student of Jinty Nelson at King's College London, where he wrote a thesis on the career of the Neustrian mayor of the palace, Ebroin. (FOURACRE, 2013, p. ix) The thesis is not published, but some of its contents can be gleaned from his 1984 article on 'Merovingians, mayors of the palace, and the notion of a "low born" Ebroin' (FOURACRE, 1984, p. 1-14)[10], as well as two substantial pieces on Merovingian hagiography: a 1979 article on Audoenus and Eligius (FOURACRE, 1979, 77-91)[11], and a 1990 article on 'Merovingian History and Merovingian hagiography' (FOURACRE, 1990, p. 3-38)[12], together with a study of the murder of Merovingian bishops published in 2003. (FOURACRE, 2003, p. 13-35)[13] Some of the broader themes are set out in the opening chapter of the 2000 study of *The Age of Charles Martel* (FOURACRE, 2000, p. 12-32), and also in the account of 'Francia in the seventh century', to be found in the first volume of the *New Cambridge Medieval History*. (FOURACRE, 2005, p. 371-96) In addition there is Fouracre's 1996 work of

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[9] See WHITE, Stephen D. '"The peace in the feud" revisited: feuds in the peace in medieval European feuds', *In*: COOPER, Kate LEYSER, Conrad (Eds.) **Making Early Medieval Societies: conflict and belonging in the Latin West, 300-1200**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. p. 220-43.

[10] Reprinted in FOURACRE, Paul. **Frankish History: Studies in the Construction of Power**. London: Routledge, 2013.

[11] Reprinted in FOURACRE, Paul. **Frankish History: Studies in the Construction of Power**. London: Routledge, 2013.

[12] Reprinted in FOURACRE, Paul. **Frankish History: Studies in the Construction of Power**. London: Routledge, 2013.

[13] Reprinted in FOURACRE, Paul. **Frankish History: Studies in the Construction of Power**. London: Routledge, 2013.

translation and commentary, *Late Merovingian France, History and Hagiography*, written with Dick Gerberding. (FOURACRE & GERBERDING, 1996) The recurrent discussions of consensus in the San Marino volume on Franks and Alamanni, where de Jong noted the significance of the subject within British scholarship, need to be read against this background.[14]

As Fouracre noted in his volume of collected essays, his doctoral thesis not only provided a deconstruction and reconstruction of the narrative of Ebroin's life (which involved a great deal of meticulous source-criticism, which was to be the springboard for the hagiographical studies), but also an analysis of the nature of political power in the Merovingian period: hence the concern with the notion of consensus, and with its failure in the days of Ebroin (and subsequently with the creation of a new Carolingian consensus in the mid to late eighth century). Fouracre touched on the notion of consensus again in 2016, in a paper entitled 'The incidence of rebellion in the early medieval West', in which he argued that Frankish assemblies 'might also explode into violence as different factions came face to face, but they were nevertheless moments expressing a consensus about the nature of authority, even if they saw bickering about the distribution of power.' (FOURACRE, 2016, p. 113)

Fouracre's reading of the political structure of the seventh century is clearly expressed in the commentary on the translation of part of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* to be found in the joint Fouracre and Gerberding volume of 1996

> The basic political dynamic of those years has usually been thought to have resulted from a continuing conflict between the crown and the court as a politically centralising force on the one hand and on the other a political force of local nobility seeking to stop royal Neustrian encroachment and to stop political autonomy. Yet for the author of the LHF it was not conflict between nobility and Crown but co-operation between them which was the basis of the political order. A properly functioning system had a Merovingian on the throne reigning in concert with the great of the realm. The mechanism which bound Crown and nobility together was the *consilium*, the plan or advice. Kings acted properly when

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[14] See the index entry on 'consensus' in **Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective**. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer**,** 1998**,** p. 461.

they acted *cum consilio* of the Neustrian nobility and bad kings acted heedlessly. (FOURACRE and GERBERDING, 1996, p. 80-81)

Wickham has returned to the same issue in his discussion of assemblies. (WICKHAM, 2017, p. 411-412)

This emphasis on noble counsel is certainly a reading that Wallace-Hadrill would have understood, and one might note that while Nelson supervised Fouracre's thesis, Wallace-Hadrill supervised Dick Gerberding's. Wallace-Hadrill had already challenged the once dominant reading that saw Chlothar's Edict of Paris as a major concession to the magnates. (WALLACE-HADRILL, 1962, p. 411-412) His own reading of the seventh century was dominated by the functioning of the religious group associated with the courts of Chlothar II and Dagobert, as revealed above all in the correspondence of Desiderius of Cahors. (WALLACE-HADRILL, 1962, p. 222-223) Fouracre and Gerberding's discussion of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and of the great hagiographical works of the late seventh century is the counterpart of Wallace-Hadrill's comments on Desiderius, and what can be drawn from his correspondence.

The word 'consensus' is not in the passage by Fouracre and Gerberding cited above, but *consilium* is. (FOURACRE and GERBERDING, 1996, p. 80-81) This is entirely in keeping with the conclusions of Steffen Patzold (2017), following his exhaustive analysis of the word *consensus* in the Merovingian sources (an exercise that is far easier nowadays than it would have been even as recently as the 1990s). Patzold notes the relative scarcity of appearances of the word *consensus*, and suggests, surely correctly, that the terms *consilium*, *placitum*, *tractare* deserve greater scrutiny. (PATZOLD, 2017, p. 297) One might add that *placita* were at the heart of the discussions of the so-called Bucknell group, some scholars who met (and meet) regularly at the house of Wendy Davies. Among the contributions to the first volume to be produced by the group, *The Settlement of Disputes*, edited by Davies and Fouracre, the papers by Fouracre and Wormald pay particular attention to

placita.[15] (FOURACRE, 1986, 23-43) The word *consensus*, however, was used in the sixth century, sometimes strikingly: Cassiodorus, writing in the name of Athalaric, speaks of *Gothorum Romanorumque suavissimus consensus in regnum nostrum*. (CASSIODORUS, 1894, VIII, 3)

Words are only the building blocks for constructing an image of a functioning society – and it is the functioning of society rather than any decontextualised set of words that has been at the heart of all Fouracre's work. The same is true of most Anglophone studies that consider consensus in the early Middle Ages. In his contribution to the *Konstanzer Arbeitskreis* Chris Wickham placed the importance of assemblies firmly at the heart of the consensus of Visigothic Spain, Lombard Italy and the Frankish kingdom. (WICKHAM, 2017) Consensus in its modern sense (for as both Patzold and Esders imply in the Reichenau volume dedicated to the topic, the early medieval use of the term does not have exactly the meaning envisaged in modern discourse) is a handy concept when we wish to comment on the frequently smooth functioning of Merovingian political society. The sociological concept can provide a key to understanding the seventh century, regardless of the appearance or non-appearance of the Latin term in our sources – and regardless of the fact that, as Detlef Liebs states in the same Reichenau volume, there was little aristocratic participation in the issuing of Roman law of the sub-Roman kingdoms, which reflects royal authority. (LIEBS, 2017, p. 63-85) The Anglophone concept of consensus, however, was never tied to legal history. But as Guy Halsall argued at San Marino, 'Consensus is neither a constant nor a given, and recognizing this reveals the central dynamic of early medieval politics.' (HALSALL, 1998, p. 144) This was a general point with which everyone was in agreement, although there were varying views of the extent to which consensus was under threat in the Merovingian period.

Much of the anthropologically-inspired work in English that deals with consensus has been concerned primarily with its opposite: conflict. Keith Hopkins, one of the first and most prominent ancient-historians to make use of anthropology, was already talking about 'consensus and dissensus' as a pair in a collection on

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[15] Reprinted in Fouracre, **Frankish History**. Patrick Wormald, 'Charters, law and the settlement of disputes in Anglo-Saxon England', in Davies and Fouracre, eds., **The Settlement of Disputes**, p. 149-68, reprinted in Wormald, ed., **Legal Culture in the early Medieval West**, p. 289-311.

History and Social Anthropology that was published in 1968. (HOPKINS, 1968, p. 77-79) The same concern with the balance between consensus and the threats posed to it dominate study of the Merovingians. In his study of 'Francia in the seventh century' Fouracre sets out an account of the 'feuding' and 'faction-fighting' of the élite, before noting 'the overall stability of the Frankish polity'. (FOURACRE, 2005, p. 394-5) Here he does not use the term 'consensus', but he could very well have done. Perhaps, equally important, the introduction of the term 'feuding' takes us back to Wallace-Hadrill and to Gluckman, and thus to the anthropological base of much Anglophone interpretation.

Although he does not use the term in his contribution to the *New Cambridge Medieval History*, the threat to consensus has been a recurrent theme in Fouracre's work. In his consideration of Frankish political institutions at San Marino, he remarked:

> First, decisions to condemn individuals appear to have reflected a consensus amongst the magnates, which meant that they were willing to enforce that decision. Second, at least in the three cases about which we are best informed (those of bishops Aunemund, Praejectus and Leudegar), local opposition to the figure in question played a key role in formulating charges against him and in aiding his prosecution (or persecution, according to our hagiographical sources). Both factors reveal the dynamic of competition or rivalry, expressed really very frequently in our sources through the concept of envy. (FOURACRE, 2013, p. 293-294)

This observation contains a crucial perception: consensus within a group may involve exclusion of certain individuals. On the other hand, attempts to exclude complete factions, as in the case of Ebroin's blocking the access of the Burgundian nobility to the king, recorded in the *Passio Leodegarii*, was a cause for open hostilities.

Reference to envy occurs several times in Fouracre's work, and the term even gets its own index entry in his collected essays. (FOURACRE, 2013) He notes that '"Envy" is the explanation most often offered for why particular bishops had enemies'. (FOURACRE, 2003, p. 24) Here, in place of a discussion of feuding, we are introduced to a term that points to the origins of faction-fighting. Envy, one might

note, is a further concept that had attracted British anthropologists. Evans-Pritchard, another of the anthropologists much read by British early medievalists in the 1970s, had made a good deal of the concept of envy in his study of witchcraft. (EVANS-PRITCHARD, 1937) Interestingly, *invidia* is a word that neither Krusch nor Levison saw fit to index in their edition of Gregory of Tours' *Histories*, although they did index the word *insidia* (KRUSCH; LEVISON, 1951, I, 1), with which it is sometimes associated. Perhaps, even more interesting, while Fouracre is unquestionably correct to point to the centrality of *invidia* in accounts of the fate of Praejectus, Leodegar and also Lambert, the term appears remarkably infrequently in early medieval sources, despite the inclusion of envy in lists of vices. It is present in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours, where it appears in a citation from Sallust (GREGORY, 1951, IV, 13), as well as in several passages of Book One, and otherwise in tales of religious rivalry (GREGORY, 1951, I, 2, 9, 20, 25; II, 3; III, 18; VI, 36; VIII, 11; X, 8). Despite the Sallust citation, in the early Middle Ages the term had a primarily religious connotation, as one of the most discussed sins. It is used most often by Gregory the Great in the work where he sets out the seven deadly sins, the *Moralia in Job* (GREGORY, 1979, XXXI) – which one might note is the text, apart from the Bible, that is best represented among Merovingian manuscripts. (WOOD, 2017, p. 203) As Fouracre observed, envy is seen as the central factor in the political conflicts of the seventh century. But one can go on to add that this is the view of a very particular group, and the vision would seem to be ecclesiastical in origin.

Merovingian consensus has to be understood alongside the rivalry that threatened it: in De Jong's terms, conflict and consensus are two sides of the same coin. (DE JONG, 1998, p. 165) One could rephrase this in Gluckman's words: 'the peace in the feud'. (MAX, 1955, p. 1-26) The threat of conflict was a major factor in creating consensus. But the two elements are also held together in the more recent formulation of 'coopétition', which the French scholar Régine Le Jan has introduced to early medieval studies. (LE JAN; BUHRER-THIERRY; GASPARI, 2018) The coinage 'coopétition' is a useful reminder that competition and cooperation often go together, and need to be considered in tandem.

At various moments in the sixth and seventh centuries the Merovingian world very nearly fell apart. Although it is easy to think that *bella civilia* filled more

years than was actually the case (because of the power of Gregory of Tours' language), there certainly were civil wars in the sixth century. In the seventh one can point to the last years of Theudebert II and of the family of Theuderic II, to the brief campaigns of Ebroin, and to those in which the Pippinids and Arnulfings came to the fore. By comparison with the civil wars of the Later Roman Empire and of the sons of Louis the Pious, however, these were all relatively minor. In most years during the seventh century there was peace, even if simmering away under that peace was a great deal of rivalry. And it was not just rivalry between competing secular aristocrats. Despite the fact that the Church gave the Merovingians an ideology that went a long way towards uniting Frankish society, bishops were in competition, as were monasteries and their abbots – here we can see Le Jan's 'coopétition' in operation. (WOOD, 2018, 24-113) Occasionally this competition boiled over, and led to martyrdom, as Fouracre (2003) has graphically noted. But it was present even when it did not lead to open disagreement – and one might point here to the divisions within the monastic communities that looked back to the figure of Columbanus. (WOOD, 2018, 24-113)

If by consensus we mean universal sweetness and light, of course it did not exist in the Merovingian world, and modern scholarship is right to look at the simmering conflicts of the period. It is also correct to stress that in so far as it existed, it did so primarily for the élite, although the Church's vision embraced the whole of society. But if, like Wallace-Hadrill, and those influenced by him, we want to remember that this was a world that survived relatively peacefully for a remarkable length of time, the concept as developed by the political anthropologists can stand as a useful shorthand. Not surprisingly it has been at the core of Anglophone interpretations of the Merovingian period for several decades.

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