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Places of Power in the Realm of Louis the Pious¹

Jens Schneider, University of Limoges

ANR-DFG project "HLUDOWICUS. La productivité d'une crise : Le règne de Louis le Pieux (814-840) et la transformation de l'Empire carolingien – Produktivität einer Krise: Die Regierungszeit Ludwigs des Frommen (814-840) und die Transformation des karolingischen Imperium" (2008-2011)

Nobody will deny the importance of space or the nearly constitutional function of several royal palaces in the ninth century, like Aachen during the reign of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, like Compiègne for Charles the Bald or Regensburg for Louis the German. But today, in 2009, we have now had two thirds of a century of scholarship in which authority in the Early Middle Ages has generally been conceived as based on people and relations between them. Since the 1940s there has been a consensus among historians to focus on the relationships of the important noble families, a consensus which persisted through all epistemological fashions: the key word is network.

German historical tradition after the war established the idea of the 'Personenverbandsstaat', a conception of a medieval constitution which is not a state in the modern sense². This conception has been criticised and more or less abolished because, to point out just one reason, of the self-representation of the early medieval aristocracy as feeling a higher responsibility for the *res publica*³. As Karl Ferdinand Werner demonstrated, this seems to have been an important marker of distinction for the *noblesse*⁴. I do not pursue this idea here because it leads to a major theoretical argument, as part of which historians as Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut and Walter Pohl have defended the position that there were structures of

¹ Paper presented at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, 2009, July 14th, as part of the session 'Louis the Pious and the Crisis of the Carolingian Empire' organized by the ANR-DFG project *HLUDOWICUS*. Among the important work published since 2010 on the problems this paper deals with I should like to mention GRAVEL, *Distances, rencontres, communications*, and MACLEAN, *Palaces, Itineraries*.

² MAYER, *Ausbildung der Grundlagen*; TELLENBACH (ed.), *Studien und Vorarbeiten*.

³ Nithard, *Histoire*, 142-144 (lib. IV, c. 7).

⁴ WERNER, *Naissance de la noblesse*, 500.

administration and government that we can already call a state⁵. I just want to stress the point that it is too simple to say that early medieval society was only people getting along with each other. So, ‘Personenverbandsstaat’ is history. Yet, historians continue to analyse society, both from an institutional or constitutional point of view – the rules and norms of a society – and from an anthropological perspective, analysing the rituals and taboos organizing life in groups or clans. Much important and admirable work has been done in the study of elites and *réseaux de parenté*⁶. Braudel’s conception of space⁷ as a determinant factor of history is far away in today’s historical research. I do not intend to deny for my part the importance of studying these networks, nor do I claim to proceed without noticing political actors and their interactions. But I think that different approaches are possible and necessary.

Ethnological work has shown the importance of places for the representation of a society, but also for everyday life. This seems particularly true for the memory of the foundation of places. American Maya Indians of the classical period (4th to 10th century) lived in proper city-states showing an absolute respect for their foundation places; there were no signs of expansion although they were powerful enough to control dependant smaller cities. Instead, they proceeded to a permanent re-foundation within the limits of their city-states⁸. The Yanomami Indians in South America showed, on the other hand, dynamic spatial rituals⁹. They used the same name for both their habitat and their community. Once they moved to the next place, they would use another name for themselves, the old name becoming a period in the past. Another well-documented example is that of the Australian Aborigines who do not mark the frontiers of their territory but who have their own rituals of memorizing and remembering it. These are the famous ‘songlines’: secret traditional songs that contain a very well-defined way to ‘walk their land’, as they put it¹⁰. At the same time the song is a way of paying respect to the land and the ancestors.

These three cases may show how earlier societies performed their given space. Joseph Morsel pointed out the meaning of the Aborigines’ songlines as a technique that bound a community

⁵ GOETZ, The perception of « power »; ID., *Erwartungen*; JARNUT, *Anmerkungen zum Staat*; AIRLIE / POHL / REIMITZ (ed.), *Staat*; cf TREMP, *stabilitas* und *mutatio*; cf BECHER, *Herrschaft*. For an opposite position see ALTHOFF, *Königsherrschaft ohne Staat*.

⁶ Cf LE JAN, Régine, *Conclusions*, in: DEPREUX / BOUGARD / LE JAN (ed.), *Les élites et leurs espaces*, 399-406; BÜHRER-THIERRY, Geneviève, *Conclusions*, in: BOUGARD / GOETZ / LE JAN (ed.), *Théorie et pratiques des elites*, 373-383.

⁷ BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée*, 2: 520.

⁸ BAUDAZ, *Durées et espaces*.

⁹ CLASTRES, *Un modèle d’inscription*. For an anthropological approach to the perception and practice of space cf SCHNEIDER, *Raum und Grenzen*, 182-186.

¹⁰ WAGNER, *From Mythology to Mythography*. Cf the novel from Bruce CHATWIN, *The Songlines*, London 1987.

to their inherited land¹¹. The cases presented here demonstrate that the first interest of these societies in administrating their territory is not defining frontiers nor establishing contact with their neighbours. The main interest is organizing space.

It is true that in recent years more historical research in spatial problems has been done. In the tradition of British Cultural Studies and French philosophy the so-called Spatial turn has drawn attention to the idea of space being generated by humans¹². It is in this line that I would set the present essay on places of power in the Carolingian Empire. The purpose of these reflections is to analyse authority in relation to places and to explain the exertion of power – and possible opposition – not through a human network, but through space.

The Hludowicus project ‘Produktivität einer Krise: Die Regierungszeit Ludwigs des Frommen (814-840) und die Transformation des karolingischen Imperium’ is centered on the reign of Louis the Pious and the development of the Frankish society in the ninth century. The analysed period embraces the years from 800 until 877, that is the death of Louis’ last son Charles the Bald. More precisely, the central interest is directed to the so-called crisis years, from 827 to 835, trying to analyse the evolution that leads to Louis’ shameful defeat near Colmar in June 833, his deposition in Soissons afterwards, but also his regaining of power and reinstallation on the throne in 835¹³.

If we focus on the importance of space, in particular distinct places for the exertion and the representation of power in his realm, we should ask what kind of criteria and what kind of geographical, or – better – spatial, categories may be appropriate in defining places of power¹⁴. To avoid the network idea of important bishoprics and monasteries to describe important places I tried to establish another, more systematic approach. One of the most important inspirations certainly is the theory of central places, published by Walter Christaller for the first time in 1933¹⁵. He defines, from a geographical point of view, nine criteria to describe a central place: institutions of (political) administration, cultural and ecclesiastical (!) institutions, institutions of public health and welfare, of social and economic live, of trade and monetary circulation, of production, of labour market, of traffic, and of market regulation.

¹¹ MORSEL, Construire l’espace, 295.

¹² For a survey see SCHNEIDER, Suche nach dem verlorenen Reich, 242-251; cf HEIMANN / SCHNEIDER, Kloster – Landschaft.

¹³ SCHIEFFER, Die Karolinger, 131; DE JONG, penitential state, 214-259.

¹⁴ Cf DE JONG / THEUWS (ed.), Topographies of power; EHLERS (ed.), Places of Power.

¹⁵ CHRISTALLER, Die zentralen Orte; cf STEUER, Zentralorte.

Christaller insists on one important point, which is that every central place is dynamic, in other words subject to change.

Then there is to mention the work of Eckhard Müller-Mertens who developed the method of cartographical visualization of the ‘Reichsstruktur’ especially for the tenth century but proceeded to its application on other periods afterwards¹⁶. Every historian working on places or itineraries knows his maps, which are, though, limited on the material aspects, that’s to say the king’s movements and property.

More recently, ‘Topographies of Power’ is a collection of some rather important case studies. Janet Nelson’s analysis of Aachen as the constructed Carolingian place of power *par excellence* goes much further than Müller-Mertens, Falkenstein or Binding¹⁷. Aachen has nevertheless not always been the *lieu de mémoire* that we are used to¹⁸, just as Metz seems to lose political weight in the later ninth and tenth century: the concrete importance of these two Carolingian palaces has to be reviewed. Frans Theuws, taking the example of Maastricht in his contribution to the same volume, describes in anthropological terms the function of a relay, a centre of communicating spaces¹⁹. His point is to define the role of a centre by analysing both the more or less constructed symbolic past of a place and, at the same time, how it serves as a place of exchange, meaning both trade and social exchange.

This essay is focussed on Louis the Pious and the question of which places were the most important for royal administration and authority. Based on the cited studies I put forward five criteria for a place of power in the Early Middle Ages. I suggest the following categories:

- (1) Episcopal sees (*sedes episcoporum*)
- (2) mints
- (3) royal palaces (*palatia*)
- (4) royal assemblies (*placita*)
- (5) royal charters (*diplomata*)

These categories will be examined in the following. Of course, this is no more than a rough sketch of a possible approach that needs to be refined; other categories might be added, the main routes for instance, as well as other vectors of communication.

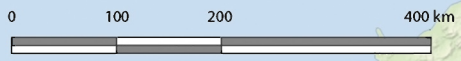
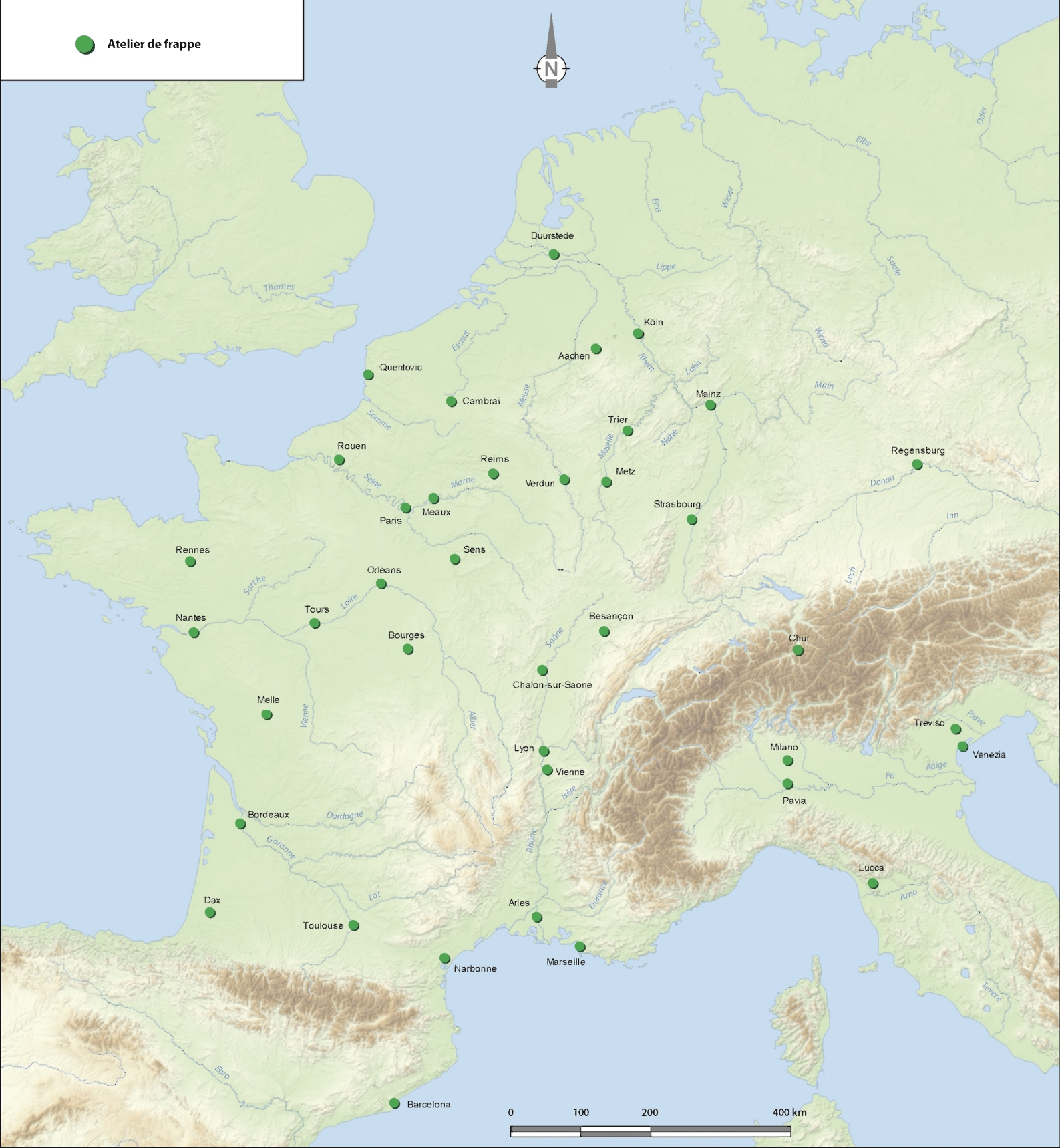
¹⁶ MÜLLER-MERTENS, Die Reichsstruktur.

¹⁷ NELSON, Aachen; MÜLLER-MERTENS, Die Reichsstruktur; FALKENSTEIN, Charlemagne et Aix-la-Chapelle; BINDING, Deutsche Königspfalzen.

¹⁸ MCKITTERICK, Charlemagne, 158.

¹⁹ THEUWS, Maastricht.

● Atelier de frappe



1. *Sedes episcoporum*

Even if nowadays one does not believe anymore in the long term constancy of the territorial shape of the dioceses, the ecclesiastical *civitas* remains an eminent functional structure in the early middle ages²⁰. In the Frankish kingdom of the ninth century Liège on the river Meuse had just replaced Maastricht as Episcopal see²¹. In the North of modern-day France, Arras and Tournai cannot be taken into consideration because they were administrated by the bishops of Cambrai and Noyon until the eleventh century²².

2. Mints

Rosamond McKitterick recently reminded us that mint distribution ‘mirrors the concentration of the king’s movements’²³. Thanks to the cooperation with a project on early medieval minting we have a revised list of the mint places under Louis the Pious²⁴. On the first map we can observe a rather homogeneous net all over the empire but nothing east of the Rhine, except Regensburg on the river Danube. The mint places are essentially bishoprics and only a few trading places like Dorestad on the lower Rhine and Quentovic on the Channel coast. In Aquitaine there is a well-known mint at Melle (*Metallum*) near Poitiers, but not Limoges, though it had been known as a mint place at the end of the eighth century when Charlemagne struck coinage for his son Louis king of Aquitaine²⁵. On the other hand we can see that coins were minted at Dax, which had lost its Episcopal see at the time of Louis the Pious.

3. *Palatia*

Far more than the mints, the royal palaces can be considered as symbols of royal or imperial authority²⁶. The palatial system is older than the Carolingians: we know that the Merovingian kings used palaces in their cities, but also for their hunting expeditions, especially in the Ardennes and the Vosges, in Lotharingia²⁷. Still, it was significant if a king built a new palace

²⁰ Cf MAZEL (ed.), *L’espace du diocèse*; PATZOLD, *Raum der Diözese*; ID., *Episcopus*.

²¹ KUPPER, *Liège*, 78.

²² MERIAUX, *Gallia irradiata*, 20.

²³ MCKITTERICK, *Charlemagne*, 168.

²⁴ DFG projekt ‘Die Merowingischen Monetarmünzen als interdisziplinär-mediaevistische Herausforderung’ (2007-2009). Cf JARNUT / STROTHMANN (ed.), *Monetarmünzen*. – Thanks to Jürgen Strothmann, University of Paderborn (now University of Siegen).

²⁵ COUPLAND, *Trading Places*, 221; cf ID., *Money and coinage*, 24 and *Coinages of Pippin*, 197.

²⁶ Among the enormous bibliography I only mention BARBIER, *Le système palatial*; BRÜHL, *Palatium und Civitas*; EHLERS (ed.), *Places of Power*; ID. (ed.), *Orte der Herrschaft*; FENSKE / JARNUT / WEMHOFF (ed.), *Splendor palatii*; STAAB (ed.), *Die Pfalz*; ZOTZ, Thomas, *Pfalz und Pfalzen*, in: *RGa*² 22 (2003), 640-645.

²⁷ HENNEBICQUE [R. LE JAN], *Espaces sauvages*; WENSKUS, Reinhard, *Forst*, § 2: *Historisches*, in: *RGa*² 9 (1995), 348-350.

as Charlemagne did in Paderborn and Nijmegen, or if he chose to enlarge an inherited palace as was done by Louis' sons, Louis the German with Frankfurt and Charles the Bald with Compiègne²⁸. The difficulties in compiling a reliable catalogue of royal palaces are well known, as well as the problems of distinction between a completely equipped *palatium*, a smaller *aula* or just a *villa*²⁹. For the present purpose, the extremely useful list of charters of Louis the Pious containing some 417 items, established by Jens Peter Clausen and Theo Kölzer, served as a basis, since the new edition prepared at Bonn is not yet published³⁰.

4. *Placita*

Another issue of Kölzer's editing project for the *Monumenta Germaniae historica* is the study of the assemblies held by Louis the Pious. From Daniel Eichler's table of 61 assemblies, the one held at Compiègne from October to November 833 has not been counted for the present purpose because Louis the Pious was absent³¹. It was then when Lothar and the Frankish bishops listed all the sins and faults of the dethroned emperor³². Eichler counts one each at Paderborn, Augsburg, Vannes, Orléans, Tours, Le Palais-sur-Vienne, Langres, Tramoyes et Chalon-sur-Saône; two at Attigny, Frankfurt and Mainz; three at Quierzy; four at Worms; five at Nijmegen, Ingelheim, Compiègne and Thionville; and nearly four times as many again (18) held at Aachen.

The second map thus shows, somewhat surprisingly, a concentration of Louis' 'parliamentary' activity, to use an anachronistic term, more or less along the middle and lower Rhine valley. After the nearly exclusive assembly place of Aachen in the first years we can observe a kind of triangle with the edge points at Nijmegen in the North, Frankfurt-Ingelheim-Worms in the East and Compiègne in the West. Outside this frequently visited space there seem to have been limitrophic assemblies held on the Loire, the Saône and Rhone valley or at Augsburg and Paderborn. The later on in his reign, we deduce from the dark grey points, the more Louis the Pious was obliged to travel to the South-West of his empire.

²⁸ BAUTIER, *Le poids de la Neustrie*, 557; BINDING, *Deutsche Königspfalzen*, 118; ZOTZ, *Le palais et les elites*, 233; BARBIER, *Le sacré dans le palais franc*; MCKITTERICK, *Charlemagne*, 161.

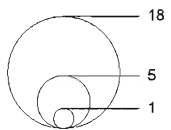
²⁹ ZOTZ, *Vorbemerkungen*; BINDING, *Deutsche Königspfalzen*, 21-26. See for such a catalogue BARBIER, *La fortune du prince* (583 items, forthcoming).

³⁰ KÖLZER, *Kaiser Ludwig der Fromme*, unpaginated appendix [40-65]. – Thanks to professor Theo Kölzer, University of Bonn.

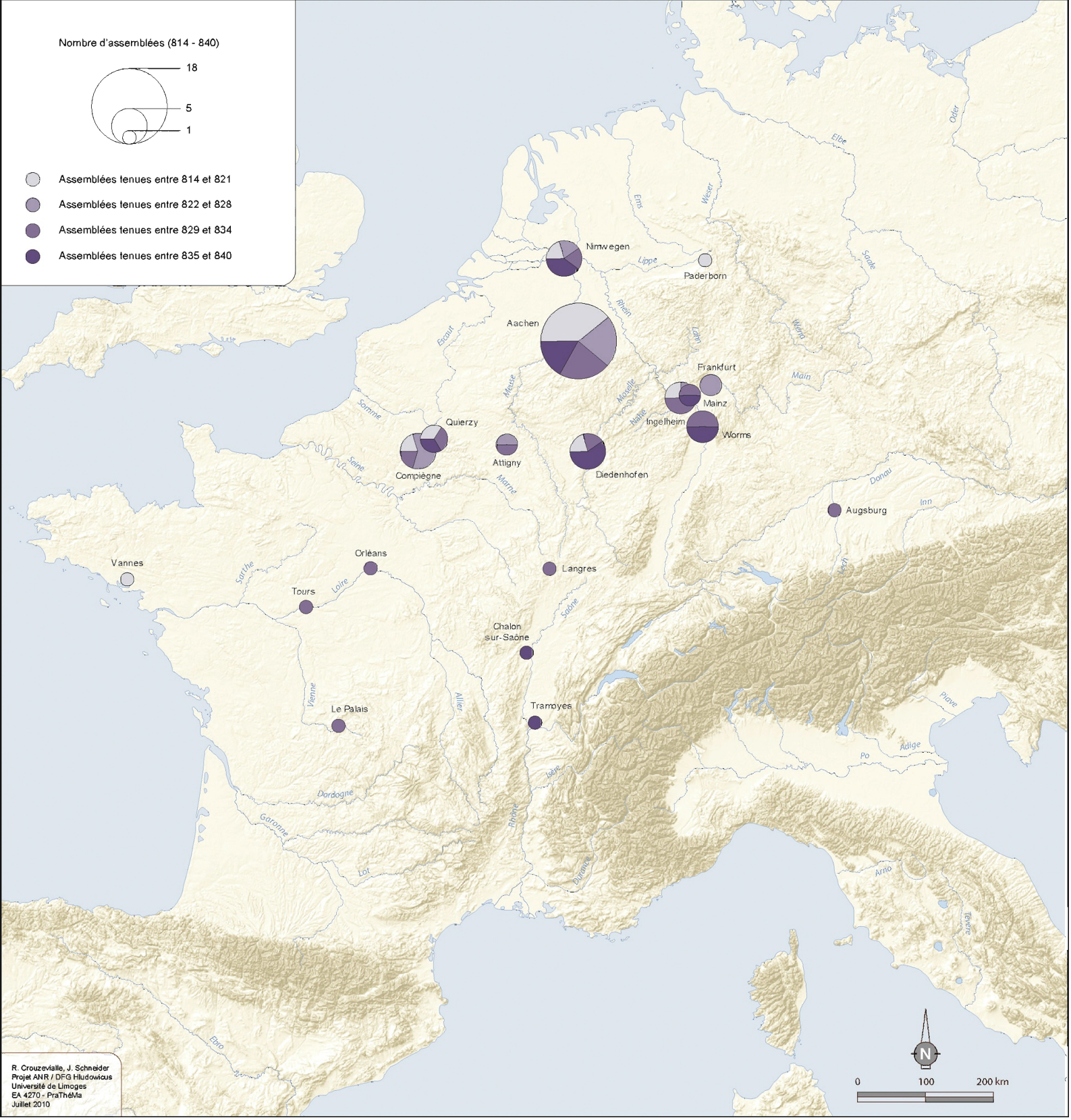
³¹ EICHLER, *Fränkische Reichsversammlungen*, 111-113.

³² *Relatio episcoporum a. 829* (see the present volume), 40-41. Cf DE JONG, *penitential state*, 228-234.

Nombre d'assemblées (814 - 840)



- Assemblées tenues entre 814 et 821
- Assemblées tenues entre 822 et 828
- Assemblées tenues entre 829 et 834
- Assemblées tenues entre 835 et 840



5. *Diplomata*

We get confirmation of this phenomenon in analysing the production of the chancery of Louis the Pious. The above-mentioned list by Kölzer contains 417 charters in total. Our third map shows the places where royal charters were given in four chronological phases, from yellow to red. At the same time, the map allows us to compare the principal places of enactment. If we relate the number of issued charters to the frequency and length of the visits Louis paid to these places, we can confirm that he preferred Aachen by far. Kölzer lists 191 charters given in this palace: Aachen is thus ‘unbestrittene Hauptresidenz’, followed by the middle Rhine region with Ingelheim (23), Frankfurt (23) and Worms (11)³³. At Thionville, Louis the Pious gave 12 charters and held five assemblies. These numbers confirm that the Thionville palace was an important element of the described triangular space where Louis spent most of his time: already more important than Metz that is outside of this central region.

5 possible criteria of a place of power

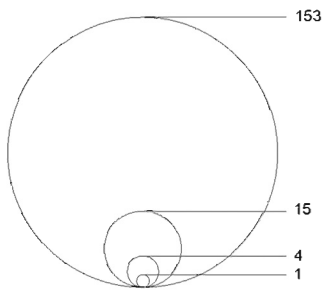
Frankish Empire under Louis the Pious (814–840)

	Aachen	Compiègne	Frankfurt	Ingelheim	Mainz	Thionville	Worms
Episcopal see					x		x
Mint	x				x		
Royal palace	x	x	x	x	?	x	x
Assemblies	18	5	2	5	2	5	4
Charters	191	9	23	23		12	11
<i>Criteria</i>	4	3	3	3	3	3	4

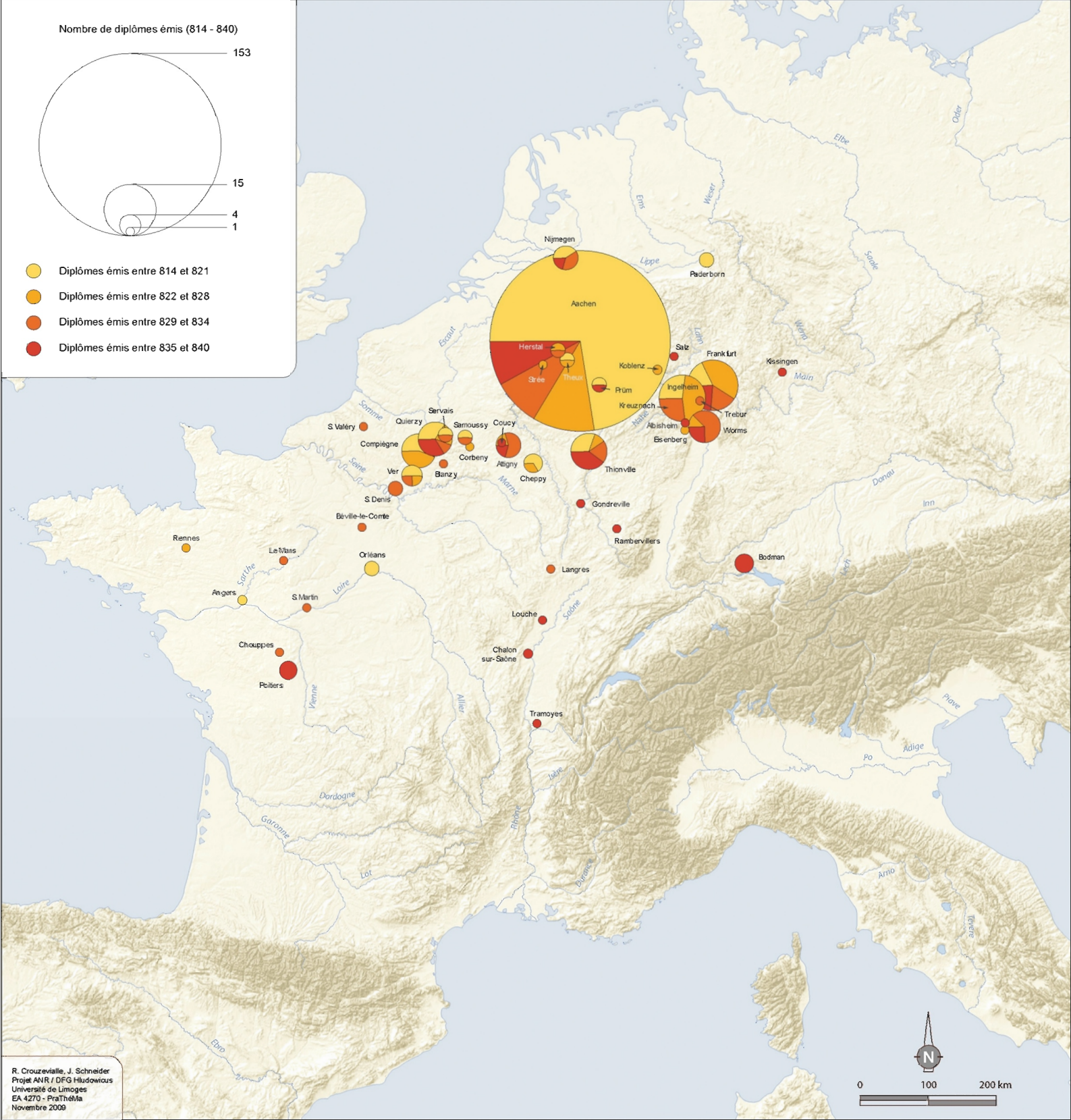
I now want to come back to my initial goal, that is to undertake a systematic approach to the presence of the king’s body. In other words, I wish to ask how we might define his preferred and privileged places, the space covered by his immediate authority.

³³ BAUTIER, *Le poids de la Neustrie*, 552; KÖLZER, *Kaiser Ludwig der Fromme*, 31.

Nombre de diplômes émis (814 - 840)



- Diplômes émis entre 814 et 821
- Diplômes émis entre 822 et 828
- Diplômes émis entre 829 et 834
- Diplômes émis entre 835 et 840



The five categories discussed above were the Episcopal sees, the mints, the royal palaces, the assemblies and the enactment of charters. There are only two places which answer to four of the five criteria. It will not come as a surprise that these are Aachen and Worms. Mainz would be a third but we do not have any certain evidence for a royal palace there at the time of Louis the Pious; the emperor might easily have stayed at the monastery of St Albans or rather at his nearby palace at Ingelheim³⁴. Worms is one of the important palaces where assemblies took place and charters were given; it is an Episcopal see and it had a prestigious royal palace, rebuilt after it burned in 790/91³⁵. Aachen was not a bishopric but it had a famous royal palace and a mint. Given that in Aachen by far the highest number of assemblies were held and highest number of charters given it seems to be justified to declare Aachen as the real *sedes regni* at the time of Louis the Pious, just as medieval authors did³⁶. By a remarkable distance it is followed by Worms, then Mainz which had a mint, too, and finally, given the number of assemblies held there, Nijmegen and Compiègne.

So far, so good: but where is the crisis? Did nothing change in Louis' whereabouts? It has been said, especially by German historians working on the charters, that his reign can be seen as the succession of three phases: 'the energetic beginning, the "stagnation and paralysing tension in the 820s", and finally the crisis of the last decade', as Mayke de Jong has put it in a deconstructivist perspective³⁷. As a consequence of the crisis in the 820s, the centre of Louis activities would have been in the Eastern part of the Empire³⁸. Is this so?

Instead of a conclusion, a last map may bring some clarification. Louis the Pious has been officially and ritually dethroned in 833, a date that can be considered as a kind of institutional caesura. One might ask whether the royal charters given from 835 on indicate a change in Louis' government. Our map showing a correlation of the actum places with the chronological evolution of the charter production clearly confirms the observation Kölzer already made on the basis of his list, that Aachen becomes less important after 834³⁹. If we compare the total number of 191 charters to only 17 in the last seven years, being 20 % of his reign from 814 to 840, we can ascertain that Aachen was losing its central status.

³⁴ I am obliged to professor Ludger Körntgen, Mainz, for confirming this opinion. Cf BRÜHL, *Palatium und Civitas*, 108-111, who suggested a 'Klosterpfalz' in Mainz.

³⁵ BRÜHL, *Palatium und Civitas*, 128; EICHLER, *Fränkische Reichsversammlungen*, 60.

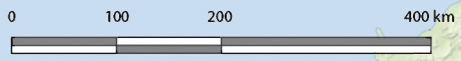
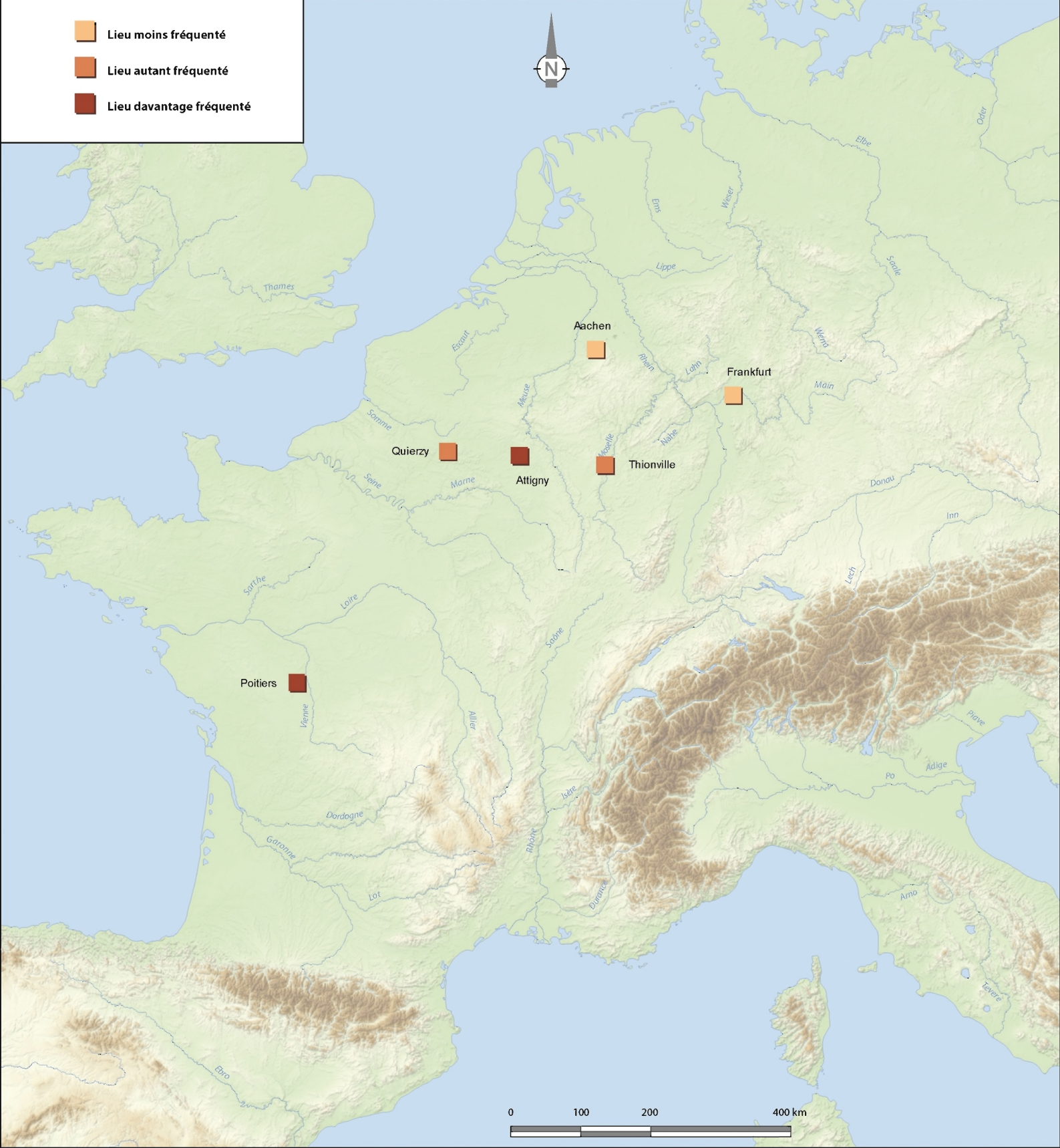
³⁶ Regino Prumiensis, *Chronicon*, 98 (a. 869); cf Nithard, *Histoire*, 116 (lib. 4, c. 1), a scribe's marginal note: *sedes prima Frantię*.

³⁷ Paper given at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, 2009, session 706 organized by HLUDOWICUS on July, 14th: 'Capitularies, Charters and the So-called Crisis of the Reign of Louis the Pious'.

³⁸ KÖLZER, *Kaiser Ludwig der Fromme*, 32.

³⁹ KÖLZER, *Kaiser Ludwig der Fromme*, 32.

- Lieu moins fréquenté
- Lieu autant fréquenté
- Lieu davantage fréquenté



The same observation is true for Frankfurt where he had built a new palace but did not have the occasion to spend much time: only four charters after 833. Worms, Ingelheim and Nijmegen each show two to three charters, rather a *quantité négligeable* compared to their former importance. Quierzy and Thionville are two palaces that already figured on the maps shown here; they maintain their status with five and six charters after 834.

The fourth and last map we made finally resumes the six most frequent enactment places of the charters given from 834 until his death on the 20th of June 840. The surprise here is Attigny, and especially Poitiers, both places where Louis did not give many charters before 833. With four and six charters in his last years they seem to have become more important for the Emperor. After the Attigny assembly of 822 when he sent out Lothar to Italy and Pippin to Aquitaine, Louis convoked another assembly there in November 834⁴⁰. The Poitou region was familiar to the former King of Aquitaine who was born in the palace of Chasseneuil, some eight kilometres from Poitiers.

Certainly, one should not overstrain this observation. Louis spent his last winter in Poitiers together with his wife Judith because he held a military campaign against Pippin II whose claim to his father's throne Louis would not accept⁴¹. Still, this short analysis of the charters proves that we cannot state that Louis the Pious moved his presence and political action to the East. The maps shown here, even if they represent a preliminary sketch, indicate a clear shift to the South-West after 833: more and more assemblies were held in what would become the *Francia occidentalis* of Louis' son Charles the Bald. The political equilibrium between the different geographical parts of his empire that has been seen as one big issue of the reign of Louis the Pious⁴² appears so as the result of his last years' activities.

The observation of Aquitaine as a region somehow apart during the process of supposed fragmentation shall have to be proved. There is the testimony of the assemblies, the charters and the mints, but the question is if, or why, Aquitaine was left out by Louis as long as Pippin Ist was King there. It is remarkable that the only coins bearing a choronymic indication of the mint place during the reign of Louis the Pious are the AQVITANIA coins minted under Pippin Ist in Bordeaux and perhaps Bourges, if we believe Simon Coupland⁴³. The old

⁴⁰ DEPREUX, Lieux de rencontre, 214; EICHLER, Fränkische Reichsversammlungen, 42.

⁴¹ Annales Bertiniani, 34-35 (a. 839).

⁴² BAUTIER, Le poids de la Neustrie, 555.

⁴³ COUPLAND, Coinages of Pippin, 205-207.

Emperor trying to reintegrate the *regnum* of his beginnings recalls the case of Charles the Simple in Western Francia who, once he had acquired his ‘greater heritage’⁴⁴, took refuge in Lotharingia in the last years of his reign.

All the maps shown here are part of the *HLUDOWICUS* project. I would like to thank Rémi Crouzevialle, University of Limoges, for the cartographical collaboration.

map 1: mint places

map 2: assemblies

map 3: charter production and actum places

map 4: frequent actum places after 834

⁴⁴ Actes de Charles III le Simple: *largiore vero hereditate indepta* (eschatocol, used from 911 on). I would like to thank Simon MacLean, St Andrews, who kindly accepted to read and correct this paper.