Lights, power and the moral economy of early medieval Europe

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By the beginning of the early Middle Ages the convention that each church should have a light burning at all times on the altar was strongly established. This paper examines how elites promulgated this idea and benefitted from their ability to furnish lighting material (oil and wax) when this was becoming scarce and expensive. This seeming generosity helped to give the power of rulers a moral quality, but at the same time their insistence that to provide for the lights was a universal obligation meant that the social base of those who could provide for the lights broadened. It is argued here that growth in the number and types of people giving for the lights diluted the moral power that came from giving, but that it also allowed a much broader section of society to participate in the moral economy.

After creating heaven and earth, ‘God said, let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good’ (Genesis I.3–4).

Light, it almost goes without saying, is seen in positive terms in all cultures. In antiquity the sol invictus was venerated and this was Christianized as sol iustitiae.¹ Rulers were associated with light and justice. For example, in the poem known as the ‘Paderborn epic’, a work in praise of Charlemagne, and penned around the year 800 when he became emperor, the poet strained to make the ruler’s very name mean that he was beacon of light: ‘Carolus’ sounds pretty much like cara lux, ‘dear light’ does it not? The background to this awkward pun

¹ C.R. Dendy, The Use of Lights in Christian Worship (London, 1959), pp. 1–3; C. Vincent, Fiat lux. Lumière et luminaires dans la vie religieuse du XII au XVI siècle (Paris, 2004), pp. 26–9. The present paper is a revised version of the ‘Annual Early Medieval Europe Lecture’ delivered at the 2018 International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds.

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was that Charlemagne was associated with justice, justice was associated with light, and the use of light had become an important part of Christian worship. The ‘dear light’ was at once just and pious, and the title of emperor which Charlemagne was about to receive was a fully justified recognition of his qualities as a ruler. This is where lights, power and the moral economy meet. Early medieval elites sought to exercise power and influence in a political economy that, following Chris Wickham, one might characterize as ‘post-fiscal’. That is to say, the basis of power changed as income from direct taxation declined. Morality, that is, Christian morality, came to occupy an increasingly large place in the justification of power. Moral authority, as it were, filled something of the gap left by the decline of the material resources available to government. In Mayke de Jong’s thinking, ecclesia was as close as early medieval societies came to having a state. Ian Wood argues that the post-Roman west became a ‘temple society’: the Church had become the single most significant element in the economy, and the justification for its wealth was a moral commitment to support the weak and the poor. ‘By the seventh century’, says Wood, ‘there was unquestionably a new ecclesiastical economy, driven by a concern to buy spiritual salvation.’ In a practical sense the drive to promote morality or good Christian behaviour provided the ruler with a right, or even obligation, to try and intervene in the life of the subject. In its French sense, the term économie morale invokes the hoped-for collective response to such intervention. Taking into account the very positive terms in which light was regarded, the provision of lighting for churches united a practical and spiritual expression of power.

Lights were of course provided for a range of reasons, chief amongst them the hoped-for salvation of both donor and deceased kindred, and such devotional concern was obviously not limited to the elite, nor the basis of power itself, for this rested ultimately on control over people and land. The resources dedicated to the provision of lighting to churches must indeed pale into near insignificance alongside the cost of

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2 G. Bührer-Thierry, ‘Lumière et pouvoir dans le haut moyen âge occidental. Célébration de pouvoir et metaphors lumineuses’, Mélanges de l’École français de Rome – Moyen Age 116.2 (2004), pp. 521–6. On the ‘Paderborn epic’ see now J. Nelson, King and Emperor. A New Life of Charlemagne (London and Milton Keynes, 2019), p. 345.

3 The effects of the inexorable decline in income from taxation are set out at length in C. Wickham, Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800 (Oxford, 2005), esp. pp. 56–150.

4 M. de Jong, ‘Ecclesia and the Early Medieval Polity’, in S. Airlie et al. (eds), Staat im Mittelalter (Vienna, 2006), pp. 113–32.

5 I. Wood, ‘Creating a Temple Society in the Early Medieval West’, ‘Annual Early Medieval Europe Lecture’, Leeds International Medieval Congress, 2019, forthcoming in Early Medieval Europe, and I. Wood, The Transformation of the Roman West (Leeds, 2018), pp. 110–11.
armies, or of the gifts that lubricated social exchange, or the other costs of maintaining religion, such as church buildings or the resourcing of the clergy. Nevertheless, enabling lights to be burned in churches was a constant concern in all west European societies throughout the early Middle Ages and this is what made the connection to power: for power, and its moral justification, are at least in part constructed through ‘being able to do what one ought to do when others are unable to do so’. Here, the expense of materials needed to fuel the lights put the means to provide for them beyond the reach of most people.⁶

It is perhaps the low-level ubiquity of the concern to provide for the lights that is one reason why historians have tended not to notice the resources dedicated to keeping the lamps and candles burning. Giving for the lights can, however, easily be demonstrated. If a long run charters is taken, such as the 1,323 charters from the monastery of Farfa in Lazio, Italy which span the period from 705 to 1120, it can be shown that around 7 per cent of them can be associated with provision of lighting.⁷ In the charters issued by the Carolingian kings of Francia, the percentage is about the same, a bit higher, in fact. Where there are no charters that mention lighting at all, namely in Anglo-Saxon England, a concern with lighting still appears in laws, church councils and homilies.⁸ Both King Offa of Mercia (757–96) and King Æthelwulf of the West Saxons (839–58) were said to have given money to Rome for the lights in St Peter’s and other churches there, a payment that may have led the way to more generalized collections of what was later known as ‘Peter’s Pence’.⁹ Another reason why references to the provision of lighting have so often been ignored is the feeling that in both charters and normative material they are merely formulaic. Alice Rio, by contrast, makes a strong case that the evidence of formulae should be taken more seriously.¹⁰ Apart from the fact that formulae are chosen to a purpose, and chosen very carefully in the dispositive

⁶ P. Fouracre, “Framing” and Lighting. Another Angle on Transition’, in R. Balzaretti, J. Barrow and P. Skinner (eds), Italy and Early Medieval Europe. Papers for Chris Wickham (Oxford, 2018), pp. 305–14, at p. 308.
⁷ Il Regesto di Farfa compilato da Gregorio di Catino, ed. I. Giorgi and V. Balzani, 5 vols (Rome, 1879–1914).
⁸ For the universal obligation to pay for the lights as expressed in Anglo-Saxon laws and the records of church councils, Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church, part I, ed. D. Whitelock, M. Brett and C. Brooke (Oxford, 1981), nos. 47, 48, 49, 52. There is in fact a single document making a grant for the lights. This is a will dated to 995: Anglo-Saxon Wills, ed. and trans. D. Whitelock (Cambridge, 1930), no. 16(1).
⁹ R. Naismith and F. Tinti, ‘The Origins of Peter’s Pence’, English Historical Review 134 (2019), pp. 522–52, at pp. 526–8.
¹⁰ A. Rio, Legal Practice and the Written Word in the Early Middle Ages. Frankish Formulae c. 500–1000 (Cambridge, 2009).
sections of charters, I shall argue that the patterning of references to lighting reveals its importance first to the elite and then to a widening group in society. In other words, people knew exactly what they were doing when they repeated time-honoured words and phrases associated with lighting. I shall first very briefly explain where the concern with lights came from, and then how it came to be woven into Christian organization and behaviour. The intention is to demonstrate how and why the provision of lighting long stayed as the preserve of the elite, and how they made use of this provision in political discourse. I shall then consider how the practice spread as both church and rulers sought to universalize the obligation to provide, and I shall end by pointing to a growing constituency of light providers in the tenth and eleventh centuries which opened up provision to the point that a degree of plurality began to weaken the link between power and the moral economy.

The idea of keeping a light burning at all times in a church comes from scripture. In the Old Testament books of Exodus and Leviticus, Moses was to instruct the Israelites to keep a lamp of the purest olive oil burning at all times before the tabernacle. Aaron, and the sons of Aaron, that is, the nascent priesthood, were charged with the duty of maintaining the light and also a fire upon the altar. When Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abiu failed in the task and let the flame go out, God had them consumed in a heaven-sent fire and their memory was to be erased. As the Christian church began to mine the Mosaic books for precepts in the third and fourth centuries, this law was repeated and priests given the task of keeping lamps burning on Christian altars. The idea that the spirit was nourished by flame was already familiar in antique culture in which heroes were honoured with flaming torches, and there was a move to venerate martyrs in this way by keeping a flame burning at their tombs or shrines. Lastly, the connection between the flame and the spirit encouraged people to commemorate ancestors with eternal flames. After some misgivings over the pagan connotations of these practices, church councils began to endorse them, to the point that by the late sixth century two councils held in Braga (in what is now northern Portugal) in 561 and 572, stipulated that one third of a church’s income should go towards repairs and towards the lights. Bishops could not appropriate anything from this portion because a church could not be deprived of its lights. Before a

11 Exodus XXVII.20–1, Leviticus XXIV.2.
12 On ways in which the Christians came to embrace the Old Testament law and history, M. Young, Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 22–69.
13 Dendy, Use of Lights, pp. 1–3, 92–7.
church could be consecrated, bishops had to ensure that it had the wherewithal to provide for its lights. The message here was that a church could not be a church without lights. Interestingly, a later seventh-century Visigothic law envisaged a quarrel between two parties, presumably over the control of a church. What was not to happen was that one party should reach the altar and take away the lights. This would make the church defunct.

This early evidence about what should be done comes from Spain, but Spain provides no evidence of what was actually done. For this we have to turn to Italy and Francia.

In terms of rulership and lights, the gold standard, literally, was the generosity of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, as relayed by the Book of the Popes (the Liber Pontificalis). According to this account, no doubt exaggerated, Constantine’s generosity to the churches of Rome was staggering. For the lights of the Lateran church alone he donated an annual income of 4,390 soli (gold pieces). For the building itself he provided 397 lamps and candelabra of gold and silver. Whether he really did this or not does not matter, for later rulers could read that he did. The passages detailing his giving were repeated in the famous ‘Donation of Constantine’, a forgery of the later eighth century designed to persuade the Frankish kings of the importance of a partnership with the papacy. It was said that Constantine had ceded primacy over the western Empire to the papacy and he had given over estates in east and west and on the various islands ‘in order for lights to be provided’ for the new churches of St Peter’s and St Paul’s in Rome. That the forger should have given provision for lights as the reason for handing over the estates shows just how firmly the Frankish rulers had by the later eighth century associated themselves with the burning of perpetual lights. Offa, king of Mercia, may in turn have been influenced by the Franks, as well as by the example of Constantine, when he gave money to Rome for the lights. Or, as tradition has it, the payment might have been made in thanks to the papacy in respect of Gregory the Great’s initiative in bringing Christianity to his people.
one worthy of a ruler. Lombard rulers, that is dukes and kings, were similarly associated with gifts for the lights, but not of course with lights for the churches in Rome. In Italy early charters show more of a trend towards commemorative lights.

One factor that worked to keep the provision of lighting largely the preserve of the elite in this early period was the growing scarcity of olive oil. The decline of oil production and trade in oil in the period 350–750 is well evidenced. The decline has a cultural manifestation too, in stories in which oil is miraculously replenished, or lamps before shrines burn incessantly without being refilled.19 And at the same time, drawing on the analogy of the beehive with the monastery, there was a hallowing of wax, which also could be used in perpetual lighting.20 A shortage of oil may actually have been to the advantage of the elite, for, as suggested earlier, in terms of the moral economy, power rested in part in being able to meet supposedly universal obligations that others could not fulfil, and to meet those obligations in style. The Merovingian kings of Francia, for instance, were able to devote massive resources to enable supplies of oil for lights to reach the most prestigious monasteries.21 That they tapped into diminishing fiscal resources in order to do this is a rather nice illustration of the shift in the political economy. That is, they were building up the resources of key institutions which supported them both politically and spiritually, and they increasingly drew on these institutions not only for supernatural support, but also bureaucratic help and for a learned justification of their right to exercise power. Enabling lights to be burned in churches was not something you could argue against, as the authors of the ‘Donation of Constantine’ clearly understood.

It would be the Carolingian rulers who better articulated the joining of morality and power. They could be said to have formulated a political programme based on morality. Like their predecessors the Merovingians they took measures to ensure that the leading

19 On the decline in oil production, seminal is A. Pini, ‘La vite e l’olivo nell’Italia padana. Due colture specialistiche del Medioevo’, in V. Fumagalli and G. Rossetti (eds), Medioevo rurale. Sulle tracce della civiltà contadina (Bologna, 1980). On the shortages of oil and its consequences, Fouracre, ‘Framing and Lighting’, pp. 306–10.
20 On the beehive analogy, as made by Aldhelm in late seventh-century England, A. Cassiday, ‘St Aldhelm’s Bees (De virginitate prosaic, cc. iv–vi): Some Observations on a Literary Tradition’, Anglo-Saxon England 23 (2004), pp. 1–22. When refined for candle-making wax becomes bright white, a hue that was associated with purity and sacrifice: like Christ it perished in the flame in order to provide light.
21 On the Merovingians granting income from the fisc for the lights via the institution of immunity privileges, P. Fouracre, ‘Eternal Light and Earthly Needs: Practical Aspects of the Development of Frankish Immunities’, in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds), Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 53–81, reprinted in P. Fouracre, Frankish History. Studies in the Construction of Power (Farnham, 2013), no. XII.
ecclesiastical institutions had the wherewithal for lighting, but they also took up where the Councils of Braga had left off in insisting that every church, little or large, burned lights, and that all of the congregation contributed to the cost. I will come to their attempts to do this, and try to gauge their success, but first I would like to note use of lighting provision in high politics. In 774 Charlemagne conquered the kingdom of the Lombards. As Jinty Nelson has shown, his move to sequester the assets of the Lombard royal family was rapid and brutal.\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Inter alia}, he seized the lands around the Italian lakes where there had been a modest expansion of olive cultivation. Lands in this region were then given to the northern monasteries, precisely those ones which the Merovingians had supplied with oil. There was by now probably no other source of oil accessible to the northern Franks. Being able to supply it was in itself an expression of power, supplying it was as well a good deed, and a way of saying a big ‘thank you’ for supporting Charlemagne in his Italian venture. In the next generation, according to a fragment of a letter from Fulda, Charlemagne’s son Louis was said to have noticed that Fulda (a monastery in Hesse) had been reduced to burning pork tallow in their lamps for lack of oil. He then gave the monks an olive plantation in northern Italy, presumably in the Lakes region.\textsuperscript{23} This region would be coveted by northern kings for the next one hundred and fifty years, as well as contested by the archbishops of Milan.\textsuperscript{24} The bitter complaints from the inhabitants about the burden of producing olive oil shows what was at stake.

Some indication of the importance of lights to kings, apart from the act of political giving, is shown by Charlemagne’s arrangements for the commemoration of his wife Hildegard, made the day after she died, 30 April 783. He granted an estate (\textit{villa} is the term), to the church of St Arnulf’s in Metz. The grant was to enable lights to be burned ‘continuously day and night’ before Hildegard’s tomb. The abbots of St Arnulf were forbidden ever to grant out this land as a favour to any client or supporter. Whatever was left over after paying for the lights was to go towards Masses and prayers to be said for his beloved wife.\textsuperscript{25} This is in fact a very rare Frankish commemorative grant. Charlemagne may have got the idea from Italy where charters from the Lombard

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{22} J. Nelson, ‘The Settings of the Gift in the Reign of Charlemagne’, in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds), \textit{The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages} (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 116–48, at pp. 120–6. See now also Nelson, \textit{King and Emperor}, pp. 143–8.
\bibitem{23} Appendix ad Hrabanum, \textit{Epistolarius Fuldensis Fragmenta}, c. 2, ed. E. Dümmler, \textit{MGH Epistolae 5, Epistolae Karolini Aevi 3} (Berlin, 1899), pp. 517–18.
\bibitem{24} R. Balzaretti, \textit{The Lands of Saint Ambrose. Monks and Society in Early Medieval Milan} (Turnhout, 2019), pp. 421–73.
\bibitem{25} \textit{MGH Diplomata Karolinorum} 1, ed. E. Mühlbacher (Hanover, 1906), no. 149, p. 203.
\end{thebibliography}
period record a range of people making grants for lighting for the souls of their ancestors.\textsuperscript{26} Those doing so included some who were not members of the elite. These Italian commemorative grants tail off just as they begin in Francia, where they were restricted to the elite, beginning with Charlemagne. But even in this moment of great sadness for the king and his personal commitment to the commemoration of a much-loved wife, there was a political element. King Dagobert I (623–34), the most famous of Charlemagne’s seventh-century Merovingian predecessors, had been notably generous to the churches of Metz, at one stage providing over 500 \textit{solidi} a year for the lights of the Metz basilicas.\textsuperscript{27} In choosing to privilege St Arnulf’s with lights and by entrusting to it commemoration of his wife, Charlemagne was also matching and maybe outshining the famous Dagobert.

From the many royal grants for lights over the next century and a half one can identify a certain pattern beyond a simple wish to favour institutions and to be seen to do so. It is very much the pattern that Geoffrey Koziol identified in his impressive work on the issuing of royal diplomas in general, a study in which he noted the performative aspect involved in issuing a charter.\textsuperscript{28} That is to say that kings issued charters at moments at which they wished to demonstrate their legitimacy by positioning themselves in a long line of recognized rulers. This is why so many later Carolingian charters are confirmations of grants made by earlier kings, for confirmations enabled the ruler to rehearse the line of predecessors to which he (always a ‘he’ in the Carolingian period) was visibly, maybe even dramatically, added. And this tended to occur at moments of accession, when new territories were occupied or when a king had been challenged. What Geoffrey Koziol did not note, perhaps because he was receiving too much wisdom about the formulaic content of the charters, was that these moments tended to include grants for lighting. Again, I would argue, this was because giving for the lights was a good deed that lay at the heart of a royally promoted morality. If we take the troubled ruler Charles the Simple, for example, who reigned from 898 to 923 and whose authority was frequently challenged, we find that 22 out of the 122 charters he issued were concerned with grants for lighting. At 18 per cent this is more than twice the average for his predecessors.

\textsuperscript{26} Fouracre, ‘Framing and Lighting’, pp. 307, 311.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Epistulae S Desiderii Cadurcensis}, ed. D. Norberg (Uppsala, 1961), 2.11, pp. 333–4; D. Shanzer, ‘Tangled Transactions’ (unpublished conference paper).
\textsuperscript{28} G. Koziol, \textit{Politics of Memory and Identity in Carolingian Royal Diplomas. The West Frankish Kingdom (840–987)} (Turnhout, 2012).
To see how this worked in more detail, let us consider the so-called Lotharingian divorce case of the 860s. King Lothar II was seeking a divorce from his wife Teutberga in order to marry the love of his life, Waldrada, by whom he had a son, Hugh. At stake was his kingdom, which Hugh could inherit as long as Lothar could marry Waldrada his mother. Lothar began negotiations for the support of his uncle, Charles the Bald, in January 860 by making a small grant for lights to the monastery of Saint-Denis, Charles’s most favoured institution and a royal necropolis. The grant was of a single farmstead near Valenciennes right on the border between Charles’s kingdom, West Francia, and Lotharingia, Lothar’s kingdom. Though the amount given, one farm and one serf and his family, was tiny, this was an important symbolic and thus political act. Not only was Charles very closely associated with Saint-Denis, the monastery had actually asked Lothar to give it something for the lights. This is highly unusual – institutions were not meant to solicit gifts. The abbot of Saint-Denis was Louis. He was the son of Charlemagne’s daughter Rotrude and thus kin to Charles, both of them being grandsons of Charlemagne. Louis and Charles were also kin to Lothar, who was a great-grandson of Charlemagne. But Louis, like Lothar’s son Hugh, was born of an informal union (Charlemagne famously would not countenance the marriage of his daughters). He might therefore have been sympathetic towards Lothar’s union with Waldrada, and willing to see her become part of the wider Carolingian family. Making provision for the lights of Saint-Denis would have been a good cause around which all sides could rally, that is, a gesture of goodwill with which negotiations might open, starting with an affirmation of family ties. At the very least, giving for the lights of Saint-Denis was an act of royalty. There are, to the present author’s knowledge, no non-royal gifts of this nature to Saint-Denis in the early medieval period.

In May 863 Lothar made another grant for lights to be provided, the second of the four such grants he is recorded as having made, which represents 8 per cent of his surviving charters. This is a charter Geoffrey Koziol discussed as one in the series in which rulers demonstrated their authority on taking over a new region. In this case Lothar had recently come into possession of northern Provence after the death of his brother Charles. Koziol did not comment, however, on

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29 Invaluable guides to the ‘Lotharingian divorce case’ are J. Nelson, Charles the Bald (Harlow, 1992), pp. 198–9, and S. Airlie, ‘Private Bodies and the Body Politic in the Divorce Case of Lothar I’, Past and Present 161 (1998), pp. 3–38, at pp. 11–12, reprinted in S. Airlie, Power and its Problems in Carolingian Europe (Farnham, 2012), no. X.
30 MGH Diplomata Karolinarum 3, no. 13, pp. 402–4.
the fact that the grant was for lights, and honoured Waldrada and Hugh. The grant – a big one – was made to the convent in Lyon in which Charles had been buried and it was for lights and also for the support of the nuns there. Lothar hoped that his gift would facilitate the salvation of his deceased brother, another brother still living, his parents and ‘the salvation of my beloved wife Waldrada and my son Hugh’. So Waldrada and Hugh were being inscribed as part of the family in association with an act of piety. Again, giving for the lights was emblematic of that piety. But, as we know, all Lothar’s efforts here came to nought.

A light burning day and night would be visible reminder of a donor’s pious largesse, and it is striking that sometimes the particular altar on which the light should be set was stipulated. It is clear from later medieval church inventories that for commemorative purposes the lights were in effect labelled, a bit like park benches, but with a stronger pointer to eternity. It was in part the link to eternity that perpetual lighting symbolized which encouraged the powerful to give, and as we have seen, giving, and being able to give, was an expression of power. Due to the focus of the sources on the elite and on leading institutions, it is not possible to see how socially widespread giving for the lights actually was, although miracle stories seem to show ordinary people involved in contributing to the upkeep of lights at saints’ shrines from at least the early sixth century onwards. But from normative evidence it also seems that those in power had to push quite hard to get the mass of people to contribute to the costs of lighting in local churches as envisaged in the Councils of Braga. It is to this that I turn in the second part of this article. The aim here is to explain how what appears to have been an elite practice spread downwards socially. As just suggested, part of the explanation was that it spread through pressure from above, but towards the end of the early medieval period demand from below can also be identified. Imitation as well as coercion may be a factor here, as may be a rising piety, such as we see in demands for reform from the mid-tenth century on. But another factor, I shall argue, is the growing number of people who could afford

31 MGH Diplomata Karolinorum 3, no. 19, pp. 414–15, discussed in Koziol, Politics of Memory and Identity, pp. 105–6.
32 As in another grant for the lights of Saint-Denis, this time from the ruler Charles the Bald: Recueil des chartes de Charles II le Chauve, ed. G. Tessier, Chartes et diplômes relatifs à l'histoire de France, 3 vols (Paris, 1941, 1952, 1955), I, no. 55, p. 55.
33 Gregory of Tours, writing in the later sixth century, has a series of lighting miracle stories that relate to the veneration of St Martin of Tours in which all manner of people participated. See for instance, Libri de virtutibus Sancti Martini episcopi, trans. R. van Dam, Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul (Princeton, 1993), ‘Miracles of St Martin’, 1.2, pp. 203–4; 1.15, p. 215; 3.18, p. 267.
the investment in eternity. As in the previous discussion, the focus will be on Francia, for not only is this where the bulk of the evidence lies – this consisting of secular legislation, the records of church councils, and statutes, or collections of rules, put out by bishops – but Francia was, according to such evidence, also the place in which power was most visibly clothed in moral concern. The concern was to correct society to ensure salvation and the well-being of the rulers.

Carolingian legislation in the form of royal capitularies, the records of church councils and the so-called ‘episcopal statutes’, addressed the upkeep of churches and the maintenance of their lights on and off over roughly 140 years, that is, from the time of Charlemagne’s father Pippin to the death of his great-grandson Charles the Fat, who died in 888. The maintenance of churches and lights was a steady concern but not a major one, compared with, say, the performance of military service, the behaviour of officials, or matters of faith. Across the different kinds of normative statement attention was given to the payment of tithes, to the maintenance of the fabric of churches, and to the income due a church. Lights featured in all three areas. A proportion of the tithe was to be earmarked for the lights. The repair of church buildings included making sure that the lights were in good order. As in the early Spanish legislation, it was the bishops who were to make sure that each church had lights, and a proper roof. Where it was said that churches had been scandalously neglected, the first complaint was that their priests had failed to repair them and to take care of their lights. In terms of income, two kinds of abuses were identified. First, where property had been donated to a church, the income was to go towards repair and the lights, not into the pockets of bishops and archdeacons.

In 853 the Council of Soissons went further and ordered that all church property that had been given out as beneficia, that is, let out at low rent to clients of the church or of the king, should be checked to see what rent or census (a term I shall come back to) was actually being paid. Agents were to make sure that the church which had let out the property was being properly supported by the census, and what was the

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34 This was a period in which increasing efforts were being made to raise the tithe and to apportion its use. See S. Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 459–78, and on the spread of tithes in Germany, J. Eldevik, *Episcopal Power and Ecclesiastical Reform in the German Empire. Tithes, Lordship and Community 950–1150* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 2–95.

35 MGH *Capitularia* 2, ed. V. Krause (Hanover, 1897), no. 293, c. 78, pp. 419–20.

36 MGH *Capitularia* 1, ed. A. Boretius (Hanover, 1883), no. 43, c. 8, p. 121; no. 49, c. 4, p. 136; no. 83, c. 11, p. 182.

37 MGH *Capitularia* 2, no. 196. c. 11, p. 33.

38 MGH *Capitularia* 1, no. 150, c. 5, p. 304.
proper level would be determined by how many priests and how many lights it had. The second concern about income was that lay people who had chapels and had given them a priest should use the tithes to repair the roofs and provide ‘decent’ lights. Interestingly, where they had given the tithe income over to others, these people should not use it to feed dogs or provide for women weavers, a complaint that suggests that tithes were being appropriated for use on lordly estates, for that is where dogs and women weavers were to be found. Finally, we see a return to the words of the Council of Braga, which stated that a church could not be consecrated unless there was written confirmation of its endowment, ‘for it is seriously rash should it be without lights or without the resources to sustain those who serve there’. This raft of legislation universalized obligations, but also sought to ensure that when people paid their dues, they were used for the purposes for which they were designated. One might just be able to detect a response to demand from below here. Perhaps people minded less about paying for lights and the upkeep of the roof than they did about the feeding of dogs. Legislation from later Anglo-Saxon England also insisted on the tithe, yet England seemed to have separate dues for lights. And while there is no hint that tithe income might be misappropriated, there is a suggestion that the dues destined for Rome might, as in Francia, be kept by the clergy. But the evidence from England is very thin indeed.

The ‘episcopal statutes’ (also known as the ‘bishops’ capitularies’, *Capitularia Episcoporum*), show us the picture from a slightly different angle: because they were concerned with the ministry of the priesthood, they addressed the facilities available to the laity. Of the thirty-four statutes issued between about 800 and 970, sixteen, just under half, made some reference to the maintenance of lights. They reinforced the notion that the priest should be responsible for the lights and that the lights should burn throughout the night. They confirmed the demand that a quarter of the tithe should be spent on the roof and go towards the lights. What the statutes do rather more than the secular or conciliar legislation is to emphasize the special nature of the church as a building. It was the only place pure enough for the

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39 *MGH Concilia* 3, ed. W. Hartmann (Hanover, 1984), no. 27, c. 3, p. 286.
40 *MGH Capitularia* 2, no. 293, c. 78, pp. 419–20.
41 *MGH Concilia* 4, ed. W. Hartmann (Hanover, 1998), no. 25, c. 38, p. 279.
42 On the lighting dues, J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 157, 438, 444, 458. On keeping back money destined for Rome, Naismith and Tinti, ‘The Origins of Peter’s Pence’, pp. 537–8.
43 *MGH Capitularia Episcoporum*, ed P. Brommer and R. Pokorny, 3 vols (Hanover, 1985–95). A fourth volume adds a valuable commentary and index. For further analysis of the statutes, C. van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord. Priests and Episcopal Statutes in the Carolingian Period* (Turnhout, 2007).
performance of the liturgy and nothing else should take place within it. It should contain only liturgical vessels (ornamenta, which included the lamps), vestments and books, but above all what distinguished a church from a house was the altar, which had to be protected from defilement at all times.\textsuperscript{44}

The concentration on the altar drew on the dream of Jacob in Genesis. When he awoke from his dream, Jacob anointed with oil the stone on which he had rested his head, and declared that it was the dwelling place of God.\textsuperscript{45} Placing a light on the altar put the offering physically as close as possible to God. An anonymous text from the ninth century (c. 840) known as ‘The significance of the twelve candles’ (Quid significant duodecim candela) gives instruction on how a church was to be consecrated. ‘It shows’, in Carine van Rhijn’s words, ‘step by step how in its ritual of dedication a church is transformed from a building into something more.’\textsuperscript{46} That ‘more’ was the way in which churches dedicated and consecrated to God became, as conciliar legislation put it, ‘sacred places’ and ‘the dwelling places of God’. The ritual itself has been compared with that of baptism. Twelve candles were to be lit outside the building, the alphabet was to be written twice from corner to corner inside. The altar was to be wiped with oil and a cross drawn in oil from corner to corner. It would then be anointed with chrism, relics were to be placed within it, and a cloth placed upon it. Finally the ornamenta were put inside the building and then, as we might say, it was ‘switched on’ by the lighting of many lights (accendunt luminaria multa). This ritual of consecration helps us to understand why the maintenance of the lights was of such concern in legislation. It also gives us another take on the repeated demands that church buildings, and especially their roofs, be kept in good repair. At stake was not just the weatherproofing of the building, but also its very integrity as a sacred place. It had been spiritually sealed at the time of consecration and the ritual had encapsulated the host within it. Holes would puncture its integrity and let out the holy. If people imagined the holy spirit as heaven bound, a hole in the roof would be particularly dangerous.

So far, it has been shown that pressure from above was aimed at driving support for the church deeper into the population by universalizing obligations, and also by standardizing practices. This was part of a drive to bring Christian order to the kingdom and it is here that we see the

\textsuperscript{44} Van Rhijn, Shepherds of the Lord, pp. 124–38.

\textsuperscript{45} Genesis XXVIII.10–22. Further on the place of the altar in the building, M. Gzock, Gottes Haus, Untersuchungen zur Kirche als Heiligen Raum von Spätantike bis in Frühmittelalter (Göttingen, 2102), pp. 52–61.

\textsuperscript{46} Van Rhijn, Shepherds of the Lord, p. 135. The text of ‘the significance of the twelve candles’ is in Patrologica Latina 131, cols 845a–866b.
moral economy as a tool of power, although the drive for order could sometimes also be a force to limit the actions of the powerful, as when the powerful were castigated for diverting income destined for the church. This included rulers who were said to have abused the church. For example, in a letter sent in 836 from bishops at the Council of Aachen to Pippin, king of Aquitaine, Pippin was castigated for not stopping his supporters helping themselves to church property. The bishops used the story of the sons of Aaron to upbraid the king. The sons, Nadab and Abiu, had let the holy fire go out and were incinerated. ‘Those who should look after the perpetual fire, that is, the lights provided by the offerings of the faithful in the consecrated churches of the lord, should give great weight to the words of the law and fear them greatly should they dare to take the fire away’, wrote the bishops.

Keeping the flame burning was a metaphor for the maintenance of the church and the protection of its property, but the choice of metaphor is an indication of the great extent to which politico-religious discourse had become infused with the Mosaic precept. By the same token, it struck home at a local level at which authorities voiced concern to make sure that funds were not siphoned off from churches. Locally, people began, or at least are first seen to, make a contribution to churches over and above the payment of tithe. Emphasis on the holiness of the building and on the spiritual charge of the altar must have aided this, and we should note that the tenth century saw the beginnings of new church construction as churches were founded outside of the older estate structures and in line with the emergence of village communities, and, of course, of the parish. Over the next two hundred years this would be the picture across western Europe, and we can of course still see the material results of the investment. That providing for the lights of churches had by now become so well established as basic to the creation and maintenance of a church meant that provision mushroomed as communities became more vigorous in their religious practice.

An early sign of this was the emergence of guilds and confraternities dedicated to mutual religious support. In one of his ‘Statutes’ Hincmar, who was archbishop of Reims from 845 to 882 and the leading churchman of the later Carolingian world, spoke of voluntary associations which supported churches. These lay guilds or confraternities might gather together for religious purposes such as to make offerings, for the lights, for mutual prayer, for ceremonies

47 MGH Concilia 2.1, ed. A. Werminghoff (Hanover and Leipzig, 1906, 1907), no. 56, c. 28, p. 739.
for the dead, for almsgiving and for other religious duties.\footnote{There is an air of reluctant permission here which might indicate genuine demand from below. Hincmar, and others, were actually quite nervous about guilds because they were also associated with feasting and drinking, and this, thought Hincmar, could lead to drunkenness, dancing, and even homicide. At a political level too they were regarded as dangerous as they encouraged oaths to be taken horizontally, and this threatened the established hierarchy.} There is an air of reluctant permission here which might indicate genuine demand from below. Hincmar, and others, were actually quite nervous about guilds because they were also associated with feasting and drinking, and this, thought Hincmar, could lead to drunkenness, dancing, and even homicide.\footnote{At a political level too they were regarded as dangerous as they encouraged oaths to be taken horizontally, and this threatened the established hierarchy.}

In the early Middle Ages guilds and confraternities were not numerous, but they are a pointer to a generation of support for lighting which helps explain how provision for lighting took off – that is, how it was transformed from a socio-religious practice that was largely confined to the elite, to a practice that engendered organizations that had a significant impact on the way in which communities were structured.\footnote{This is well beyond the early medieval horizon, but I would like to close by showing the very beginnings of this process and by identifying the constituency from which future providers would be drawn. This may in turn help us understand how a degree of pluralism arguably weakened the link between morality and power. Groups of people who were dedicated to paying for the lights (whose rent or charges or labour provided that resource), can be traced back into the eighth century and were no doubt in existence before then. That would include tributarii or tabularii in Italy. In Francia in legislation of 779, that is, the Capitulary of Herstal, there is reference to ‘ecclesiastical tributaries who pay tribute in wax and those manumitted by deed or charter’. Such people lived under ‘long-standing’ arrangements. The heterogeneity of these groups}

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\footnote{MGH Capitula Episcoporum 2, p. 43 (Hincmar I (852), c. 16), p. 43: ‘Ut de collectis, quas geldonias vel confra tries vulgo vocant, in omni obsequio religionis coniunguntur, videlicet in oblazione, in luminaribus, in orationibus mutuis, in exequiis defunctorum, in helemosinis, et in ceteres pietatis officiis.’}
means that it is tricky to get a handle on them at this stage, but tributaries whose dues were paid in wax, and thus for the lights, become an important category of persons in the central Middle Ages.

In a tradition that stretches back to late Roman law and was thus found in southern and western Germany, France, Italy and Spain, when people of servile status were granted their freedom – manumitted – they remained in some way obliged to their former masters. In a kind of catch-22, this could mean continuing in service as a way of showing gratitude for being freed. But the new service was in some ways lighter and the condition and status of the freedman or freedwoman was improved, although in eleventh-century France people whose name suggested that they had been freed, the *colliberti*, seem to have been treated just like serfs.\(^{52}\) In seventh-century Francia, by contrast, there are indications, albeit faint, that the obligations of the freed-person amounted to little more than keeping a light burning before the tomb of the manumitter.\(^{53}\) It was thus service that was both easy and honourable. Service was also payment for protection of status and person.

Later evidence indicates that an increasing proportion of the manumitted were freed into the care of a church, which gave the manumitter extra spiritual credits, as it were, gave the freed an immortal protector, and gave the church extra income and services. That income or tribute was very often in the form of wax and to the value of four pence, the latter being for long the price of a pound of wax. This was the so-called head-tax, *Kopfzins* in German. Perhaps derived from the Roman *capitatio*, which had been paid by free people, it was now a recognition of dependency, if not servitude, and the condition also involved restrictions on marriage as well as on movement. We therefore begin to see a substantial group of people, usually, one assumes, peasants who were of relatively high status in that their services were light and honourable, actively tied into the church through the provision of lighting materials. They were generically known as *censuales*, the payers of *census*, rent or tribute, and in Germany especially, as *cerocensuales*, payers of tribute in wax.\(^{54}\)

\(^{52}\) It is impossible to demonstrate the origins of the *colliberti*. There are hints of a status superior to that of serfs (*ancillae, mancipia, servi*) but this superiority seems to have been at most vestigial by the eleventh century. The seminal works are M. Bloch, ‘Les *colliberti*. Étude de la formation de la classe servile’, *Revue Historique* 157 (1928), pp. 1–48 and 225–63 which argues for a superior status, and D. Barthélemy, *La société dans la comté de Vendôme de l’an mil au XIVe siècle* (Paris, 1991), pp. 481–90, which argues that there was no difference at all between the two groups.

\(^{53}\) These indications come from the late seventh-century *Formulary of Marculf* 2, c. 17 (repeated in a model for manumission in *Marculf* 2, c. 34), trans. A. Rio, *The Formularies of Angers and Marculf: Two Merovingian Legal Handbooks* (Liverpool, 2008), pp. 202, 216.

\(^{54}\) For a clear and cogent account of how the *censuales* came into being, S. Esders, *Die Formierung der Zensualität, Vorträge und Forschungen*, Sonderband 54 (Ostfildern, 2010).
Another development which led to the creation of *censuales* was the spread of precarial tenure in the lands controlled by the Franks. This was when people donated land to the church but then received it back in usufruct, initially for their lifetime, although the arrangements were generally renewed over subsequent generations. People could also simply request a church to let them have tenure of this sort, or rulers might request that such land be let out to their followers. In all cases a symbolic rent, the *census*, was paid and in order to show that this was ultimately church land, that rent was dedicated to the support of religious activity.\(^{55}\) This very often included the maintenance of the lights. Not surprisingly this form of tenure tended to become hereditary, and as the land could also in effect be sub-let there was a concern to make sure that the rent actually went to the ultimate owner, the church that had made the original grant. Such concern was highlighted earlier in this paper in the form of legislation of the mid-ninth century. The numbers of precarial tenures were likely to have been very high, though maybe over-represented in the surviving record because one feature of this kind of grant was that it was meant to have been very carefully recorded in order to show that it was a temporary lease rather than outright gift. Ian Wood has drawn attention to figures in the history of the abbey of Saint-Wandrille, supposedly for the year 787 when the abbey claimed to have 3,964 farmsteads, 2,395 of which were let out to clients.\(^{56}\) Assuming that the *census* was passed on the peasants, and that something in the range of these figures pertained to other major houses, that would give us a substantial body of peasants involved in providing for the lights. They may not have paid the head-tax, however, and perhaps should not be included amongst the distinctive group of *censuales* that Stefan Esders has studied as the so-called *Zensualität*.

Finally, from the later ninth century onwards there were increasing numbers of people giving themselves to churches in order to become *censuales*. The earliest reference is from the polyptych of Saint-Germain des Prés which named sixty-one people as ‘men who gave themselves for the lights of Saint Germain’, that is, they made themselves dependants of the church, paying the wax tribute, and, from later examples, this meant that their descendants too became dependants.\(^{57}\) If this so-called ‘auto-dedition’ was a truly voluntary act, then to become a semi-free

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\(^{55}\) P. Fouracre, *Age of Charles Martel* (Harlow, 2000), pp. 137–8 on the development of the precarial grant.

\(^{56}\) I. Wood, ‘Teutsind, Witlaic and the History of Merovingian precaria’, in Davies and Fouracre (eds), *Property and Power*, pp. 31–52, at pp. 35–7.

\(^{57}\) *Das Polyptychon von Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, ed D. Hägermann (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1993), c. 24, pp. 209–10.
tributary in this way was not likely to have been seen as lowering of social status. The polyptychs give further examples of tributaries whose charge was for the lights, *cerarii*, for example, wax-payers in the survey from Reims who paid three pence in coin or wax.\(^{58}\) Other groups appear, such as the numerours *haistaldi* from Prüm and Lobbes, also relatively lightly burdened but whose services are less clear, although they seemed to have included riding and messaging, both honourable duties. Most striking in the context of lighting are the *luminarii* counted in the polyptych of Saint-Bertin, drawn up between 844 and 859.\(^{59}\) In this relatively small survey there were 621 *luminarii*, by far the largest category of people associated with the monastery. They were, according to F.L. Ganshof, people who were originally free but had become dependants of Saint-Bertin by virtue of having sought its protection.\(^{60}\) Though this is something of a guess, it is clear that the majority of them paid four *denarii* a year, and their name, *luminarii*, indicates that it was for the lights. Again the relatively small and honourable nature of the charge means that they were of high status.

Apart from revealing groups of relatively privileged dependants, often using terms that are not seen again after the mid-tenth century, the polyptychs allow us to see the size of peasant holdings when the size of *mansi* (farmsteads) were measured in *bunuaria*. If we convert the figures from the polyptychs of Lobbes, Saint-Bertin, Saint-Remi and Prüm to acreage, they come out as holdings of between about twenty and forty acres.\(^{61}\) This is in contrast to the large amounts of land that appear in earlier donations to the church, that is *villae* with numerous *mansi* as *appurtenances* in Frankish and Italian charters, or grants of multiple *hides* in Anglo-Saxon documents. It is an open question of how we get from the larger to the smaller units – whether it was via a break-up or adaptation of older estate structures, or whether it is the case that a thickening in the detail of the documentary record only now reveals an older substructure. It is, however, possible to point to similar sized peasant holdings across Europe, which could suggest the latter case. There were yardlanders holding thirty-acre plots in England, first mentioned in the Laws of Ine at the end of the seventh century and

\(^{58}\) Le polyptyque et le listes de cens de l’abbaye de Saint-Remi de Reims (IXe–Xle Siècles), ed. J.-P. Devroey (Reims, 1984), p. 54.

\(^{59}\) Le polyptych de l’abbaye de St Bertin (844–859), ed. F.L. Ganshof (Paris, 1975).

\(^{60}\) Ganshof, *Polyptych de St Bertin*, p. 29.

\(^{61}\) The dictionary definition of a *bunuarium* is one-quarter of an acre, as in the modern French *bonnier*: J.-F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden, 1984), p. 107. *Bunuaria* calculated from amounts of land given in the polyptych of Saint-Bertin and other documents of the ninth century are around the higher level of 1.28–1.38 hectares, which roughly equals 3.2–3.4 acres. Thus Ganshof in his commentary on the polyptych of Saint-Bertin: *Le polyptyque de Saint Bertin*, p. 10.
then in one eleventh-century survey in which twelve pence was due in rent from each yardland. There were in England also figures like the Frankish haistaldi, viz. the late Saxon geneats or the radknits seen in the Domesday survey. That survey also has a large number of people holding fractions of a hide who might not be thegns whose holdings had been reduced by the Normans, but descendants of yardlander-type peasants. The very many charters from Italy in which peasants donated, exchanged and bought small plots, often termed petia, suggest a similar picture of smallholders. So do the charters of northern Spain from the tenth century onwards in which people transacted over small amounts of lands, often down to the size of gardens and orchards.

Working back from the guilds and confraternities of the central Middle Ages, which were filled with people of this sort in the countryside, I would argue that it is to a constituency of better-off peasants like this that we should look for the great expansion of those providing material support for the church from the later tenth century onwards. Following the work of Stuart Pracy in Manchester, it may be possible to detect in England the first signs of such people sharing a political space with the lesser nobility. This Pracy finds in the witness lists to late Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman manumissions where there are witnesses with descriptive names and no indication of status. ‘Godric Buttock’, or ‘Aelfric Neck’ come to mind. There are in addition by-names which reveal occupational status such as lesser officials, craftsmen or townspeople, all of which suggest social standing at a level below that of thegn.

Better evidenced, as Knut Schulz demonstrated in two seminal papers, is the rise in status and organization of the Zensualität in Germany, which acquired its own customs and privileges and followed the bishops into the towns in the central Middle Ages. The Zensualitätsrecht, the customs of the censuales, morphed into Bürgerrecht, the rights and privileges of

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62 *Laws of Ine*, trans. D. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents* 1 (London, 1968), pp. 364–72, c. 67, p. 271: yardlands held for fixed rents. No other services could be demanded unless a lord had furnished the yardlander with a dwelling: ‘Survey of an Estate at Tidenham, Gloucestershire (c. 1060)’, trans. D.C. Douglas, *English Historical Documents* 2 (London, 1961), pp. 817–18.

63 W. Davies, *Acts of Giving. Individual, Community and Church in Tenth-Century Christian Spain* (Oxford, 2007) notes that of 1,960 charters produced in the tenth century, 950 recorded gifts and 850 sales and exchanges. The hundreds of examples of small-scale dealing were, says Davies, ‘of a type that characterizes peasant-level rural society’ (at pp. 17–18). In what follows I owe a great deal to Wendy Davies. Her later work, *Windows on Justice in Northern Iberia* (London, 2016), p. 12, revises the number upwards to 2,700 charters, but with the same point about the proportions of gifts, sales and exchanges.

64 S. Pracy, ‘Social Mobility and Manumissions in Early Medieval England’, *Haskins Society Journal* 31 (forthcoming, 2020). I am grateful to Stuart Pracy for allowing me to read this work pre-publication.
citizens.65 The consolidation of these tribute payers into a distinct group in Germany marks a significant difference in social organization between the east and west of what had been Francia. In the west the possibly similar group of the freed under the care of the church, the coliberti, had disappeared by the mid-twelfth century, and they had never been as widespread as the German censuales. The difference may be explained by the stronger presence of bishops in Germany, something that was a consequence of empire in that when the Franks conquered or absorbed the lands east of the Rhine, rule was to a large extent imposed through bishops. That meant that there were more precaria in the east, and more ecclesiastical clients and tributaries. The provision of lights played an important part in the structuring of these dependent communities, and later became important too in the way towns were actually organized. It is no accident that very much later when the Reformation came to the various German and Swiss towns and there was a revolt against the power of the bishops, there was a wholesale rejection of the idea that keeping a light burning served any useful purpose at all. Lamps were even castigated as Ölgötzen, ‘oil-guzzling idols’ and smashed.66

The provision of lights is a thread that runs through the formation of these solidarities. It did not necessarily call them into being, but it was a good deed with spiritual benefits that served as an organizing principle. To give extra was to be distinguished from the mass of people who provided as a matter of obligation through the tithe. We have seen that tributary providers were a privileged group amongst the peasantry in that they owed little else in terms of service. The supply of lights for commemoration, at saints’ shrines and for important festivals was also a mark of social distinction. There was surely an acculturative element here: that is, people wishing to do what their superiors had done, and as we move into the tenth century it seems to be the case that more and more people could afford to do this. Or to put it another way, people had finally got the message that salvation, at both a collective and individual level, could be earned by active support for the practice of religion. Providing for the lights was a very visible way of providing that support and it linked the material, the social and the spiritual. It was a social commodification of eternity. Rulers played on what

65 K. Schulz, ‘Zum Problem der Zensualität im Hochmittelalter’, in K. Schulz, Die Freiheit des Bürgers. Städtische Gesellschaft in Hoch- und Spätmittelalter (Darmstadt, 2008), pp. 69–105; K. Schulz, ‘Zensualität und Stadtentwicklung im 11/12 Jahrhundert’, in Schulz, Die Freiheit, pp. 106–110.
66 R. Kiessling, Bürgerliche Gesellschaft und Kirche in Augsburg im Spätmittelalter (Augsburg, 1971), pp. 102–17; L.P. Wandel, Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg and Basel (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 69–71, 100–1.
scripture said ought to be done, and insisting that it should be done was one way of justifying and expressing power. In the early period especially, when oil was scarce and wax expensive, giving for the lights was a statement of royalty and of the personal largesse and piety that underpinned it. But as a wider range of people began to volunteer support in new ways, the hold of elites over the moral economy began to weaken.

To conclude, it is necessary to return to the note of caution sounded at the beginning of this paper, namely that one should be wary of overestimating the importance of a chosen subject: the waning of a theocratic urge to power, the rise and fall of particular regimes, the growth of the documentary record, the challenge to the centre from the region and then from the locality, the tentative signs of the entry of the middling sort into the political arena, a growing differentiation within the peasantry etc., all this could have happened without a single candle being lit. But the recommendation of this under-studied, or even unnoticed, subject is that it allows us to see a little more clearly how these things happened. It also draws attention to differences between regions: to why, for instance, the Zensualität cohered as a group in Germany in contrast to the coliberti in France, or why Anglo-Saxon England alone has no charters in which provision for light was made. In a sense the subject acts as a kind of vade mecum to the longue durée of the early Middle Ages. Despite regional differences, the precept that a light be kept burning at all times before the tabernacle was everywhere incorporated into religious practice. For long – for almost half a millennium in fact – this was a practice only the richest and most powerful could afford to support, with provision and the urging of provision being an attribute of power, before it was universalized and sprang into social life towards the end of our period.

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