

Cross-channel marriage and royal succession in the age of Charles the Simple and Athelstan (c. 916-936).

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 [MacLean_2015_MW_Cross_channel_CC.pdf \(106.7Kb\)](#)

Date

01/12/2015

Author

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Keywords

[Carolingian Empire](#)

[Marriage](#)

[Anglo-Saxon](#)

[England](#)

[Edward the Elder](#)

[Athelstan](#)

[Charles the Simple](#)

[Ottonians](#)

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Abstract

This article discusses the marriages of four Anglo-Saxon princesses to Continental kings and princes between the years 917 and 930. These are often interpreted as acts of diplomacy, sealing alliances across the Channel and indicating the dominant position of King Athelstan in early tenth-century Europe. I reinterpret the motivations of the princes by reading the marriages as acts of symbolic communication driven by the uncertainty over the West Frankish royal succession in the 920s and framed by a competition to access a version of Carolingian dynastic legitimacy. This in turn allows us to reflect on the decay of the Carolingian Empire after 888. Because Carolingian-ness was no longer a hegemonic political discourse, I argue that these events belong emphatically to a post-imperial political landscape.

Citation

MacLean, S 2015, ' Cross-channel marriage and royal succession in the age of Charles the Simple and Athelstan (c. 916-936) ' *Medieval Worlds. Comparative and Interdisciplinary Studies* , vol 1 , no. 2 , pp. 26-44 . DOI: 10.1553/medievalworlds_no2_2015s26

Publication

Medieval Worlds. Comparative and Interdisciplinary Studies

Status

Peer reviewed

DOI

https://doi.org/10.1553/medievalworlds_no2_2015s26

ISSN

2412-3196

Type

Journal article

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