11. The earliest known oath of vassalage, from the *Annales regni Francorum*

The following passage from a Carolingian chronicle of 757 is significant not only for its reference, the earliest known, to an oath taken by a vassal to his lord, but also because it represents an early effort to define the obligations owed by a great man of the realm to the king in terms of a vassal's duties. The source is the *Annales regni Francorum*, ed. F. Kurze (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores in usum scholarum; Hanover, 1895), p. 14. The translation is by D. Herlihy.

[Year 757]. King Pepin held his assembly in Compiègne with the Franks. Tassilo, the duke of the Bavarians, came there, and commended himself with his hands to vassalage. He swore many, innumerable oaths, placing his hands upon the relics of the saints. He promised fidelity to King Pepin and to his sons mentioned above, the lord Charles and Carloman, as a vassal, with right mind and firm devotion, ought in justice to do to his lords.

12. Vassalage and dependency in the Carolingian capitularies

The following excerpts from the laws of the Carolingian kings and emperors, known as capitularies, cast light on the nature of vassalage and also upon the efforts of the Carolingians to utilize the institutions of vassalage as a foundation of the stability of their kingdom. The oath taken to Charles the Bald in 858 contains the first reference to “aid and counsel” in a feudal context. The passages, translated by D. Herlihy, are taken from the *Capitularia regum francorum*, ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Legum Section II; Hanover, 1883–97).

No. 16, ca. 758–68
9. If anyone by necessity should flee into another duchy or province or should follow his lord, to whom he may not deny faith, and his wife, although she is able, should not wish to follow him for love of her relatives or possessions, she is to remain forever unmarried during the entire time that her husband, whom she did not wish to accompany, is alive. But her husband, who through necessity flees into another place, can with penitence take another wife, if he is unable to abstain.

No. 64, 810
17. Let every [lord] compel his dependents to obey better and better and consent to the imperial commands and orders.

No. 77, 802–3
16. Let no man abandon his lord after he has received from him the value of a single *solidus*, unless the lord wishes to kill him, or to beat him with a stick, or to violate his wife or daughter, or to deprive him of his inheritance.

No. 104, ca. 801–13
8. If any vassal should wish to abandon his lord, he may do so only if he can prove that the lord has committed one of these crimes: first, if the lord should have unjustly sought to enslave him; second, if the lord plotted against his life; third, if the lord committed adultery with the wife of his vassal; fourth, if the lord willingly attacked him with drawn sword in order to kill him; fifth, if after the vassal commended his hands into his, the lord failed to provide defense which he could have done. If the lord has committed any of these five offenses against his vassal, the vassal may abandon him.

No. 204, 847
2. We wish that every free man in our kingdom select the lord whom he prefers, us or one of our faithful subjects.
3. We also command that no man abandon his lord without just cause, nor should anyone receive him, unless according to the customs of our ancestors.
5. And we wish that the vassal of any one of us [Charles the Bald, Louis the German, and Lothar] should accompany his lord