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Queenship, intrigue and blood-feud: deciphering the causes of the Merovingian civil wars, 561-613

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QUEENSHIP, INTRIGUE AND BLOOD-FEUD: DECIPHERING THE CAUSES OF THE
MEROVINGIAN CIVIL WARS, 561-613

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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Brandon Taylor Craft
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ABBREVIATIONS

- Fred. III = *Fredegarii et aliorum chronica*. Edidit Bruno Krusch (Hannoverae Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani MDCCCLXXXVIII) Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum II.
- Fred. IV = *Fredegarii Chronicorum Liber Quartus cum Continuationibus*. Ed. and Trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford University Press, 1960).
- Greg. Hist. = *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Libri Historiarum X*. Editionem alteram curaverunt Bruno Krusch et Wilhelmus Levison (Hannoverae Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani MCMLI) Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum I.
- LHF = *Liber Historiae Francorum*. Edidit Bruno Krusch (Hannoverae Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani MDCCCLXXXVIII) Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum II.
- Paul Hist. = *Pauli Historia Langobardorum*. Edentibus L. Bethmann et G. Waitz (Hannoverae Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani MDCCCLXXVIII) Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptorum Rerum Langobardorum et Italicarum Saec. VI-IX.
- Ven. Fort. = *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati Carminum Epistularum Expositionum Libri Undecim*. Recensuit et emendavit Fridericus Leo (Berolini apud Weidmannos MDCCCLXXXI) Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctorum Antiquissimorum IV.1.

ABSTRACT

The Frankish civil wars of AD 561-613 were a series of devastating encounters involving the four sons of Chlothar I and their descendants. While no party was guiltless during this period, modern scholars have tended to focus on two prominent Queens, Brunhild of Austrasia and Fredegund of Neustria, and the possibility of a blood-feud between their two families. King Sigibert of Austrasia married Brunhild because he believed she was worthy of a king, unlike many of the wives his brothers were taking. One of these women was Fredegund, who was married to King Chilperic of Neustria. Fredegund is often blamed for the assassination of Galswinth, Brunhild's sister, even though Chilperic is the more likely culprit. This murder is what many modern scholars believe started a blood-feud between the two families, which both queens were integral in prosecuting.

Even though Brunhild and Fredegund were integral figures throughout this series of *bella civilia*, it is apparent that the majority of the conflict which erupted during this period centered on the partition of Chlothar I's kingdom in 561. Furthermore, the impact of the nobility, bishops, and even the armies of these kingdoms in promoting and prolonging civil war is largely ignored by modern scholars. This thesis will argue that the wars of this period cannot simply be reduced to the machinations of two queens or a blood-feud between the families. Instead, these wars were far more complex finding origins varying from scheming nobles to greed of the common soldier.

INTRODUCTION

Following the death of Chlothar I in 561 A.D., there was a four way division of the Frankish kingdom among his sons. Gregory of Tours, whose *History of the Franks* is the best available source for early Merovingian history, states, “and so between the four of them, that is Charibert, Guntram, Chilperic and Sigibert, they made a legitimate division.”¹ The legitimacy of this division will be debated below, but there was precedent for it in 511 when Clovis’s kingdom was divided between his four sons. Chilperic was left with the smallest of the four territories. He was surrounded by Sigibert to the east, Guntram to the southeast and Charibert to the south.² Chilperic received a smaller share because of his ambitious nature, which led him to attempt to capture Paris immediately following his father’s death. Even though Chilperic was eventually forced out of Paris by his brothers without any actual fighting, this seizure of Paris was the first spark that set off the series of devastating civil wars. Unfortunately, the wars would not reach their final conclusion until 613 with the death of the last original protagonist, Queen Brunhild of Austrasia.

Chilperic is presented as the most warlike of the four brothers by Gregory of Tours, but it will be argued that Sigibert was equally culpable. However, beyond the role of kings in these wars, Queens Brunhild and Fredegund proved very influential in advancing the civil wars, especially after their husbands’ deaths. In the sources for this period, Fredegund, who was married to King Chilperic, is portrayed as bloodthirsty and often assassinating her rivals, including King Sigibert and Chilperic’s first wife. However, the image of Queen Brunhild, Sigibert’s wife, is one that evolves throughout the different sources. While Gregory never

¹ Greg. Hist., IV.22: “*et sic inter se hii quattuor, id est Chariberthus, Gunthramnus, Chilpericus atque Sigiberthus, divisonem legitimam faciunt.*”

² Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, ed. and trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Group, 1973), IV.22 and *Liber Historiae Francorum*, ed. and trans. Bernard S. Bachrach (Lawrence, KA: Coronado Press, 1973), 29.

directly accuses Brunhild of anything nefarious, when one switches from his account of events to the later sources, like Fredegar's *Chronicle*, her image is altered drastically. This is in part due to a *damnatio memoriae* begun after Chlothar II, Fredegund's son, united all of Francia and executed Brunhild.³ However, it is apparent that both of these women were completely capable political players, and their role in the civil wars should not be neglected.

Finally, scholars have largely ignored the role of bishops and nobility during this period of civil war. After the overthrow of Brunhild in 613, which was in large part due to unhappiness among the Austrasian and Burgundian nobles, the nobility became increasingly powerful eventually leading to the overthrow of the Merovingian Dynasty in the eighth-century. However, their political power, while not as great as in the aftermath of 613, is apparent throughout this period, most significantly with the Gundovald affair, a war in which nobles from the Merovingian kingdoms organized a revolt based around Gundovald who was supposedly a son of Chlothar I. One of the major tasks of this thesis will be to show that the impact of bishops and nobility need to be given more attention.

A. Brief History of the Civil Wars

Before delving into the arguments surrounding these civil wars, it is first necessary to provide a brief outline of the civil wars. In 561, Chlothar I died and his four surviving sons, Sigibert, Charibert, Guntram and Chilperic, buried him in Soissons at the church of Saint Medard. After the burial, Chilperic bribed influential Frankish nobles and attempted to establish himself

³ *Damnatio Memoriae* is not being used here in the technical sense. Instead, I am merely attempting to be consistent with the terminology used in secondary literature when describing the dramatic shift in tone between Gregory and the later sources. For example, in his article "The *Vita Columbani* in Merovingian Gaul," Alexander O'Hara uses this terminology when attempting to explain why Jonas placed the arrival of Columbanus in Gaul during the reign of Sigibert, when he actually arrived during the reign of Sigibert's son Childebert II. He states that "The suppression of Childebert's role in the founding of the early Columban communities appears to be linked to the *damnatio memoriae* of Brunhild and her progeny which took place following 613 when a rival branch of the Merovingian family assumed the sole rulership of the Merovingian kingdoms." O'Hara, 132. Another example is Ian Wood, "The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours," 254.

in Paris as sole ruler over the Frankish kingdom. He was not allowed to maintain his rule for long as his three brothers soon joined forces and drove him out. After Chilperic was removed from Paris, the four brothers partitioned Chlothar I's kingdom, with Chilperic receiving the smallest share.⁴ The following year, in 562, the Huns invaded Sigibert's kingdom and Chilperic seized Rheims, Sigibert's capital city, and a number of other cities. Sigibert defeated the Huns and then turned his army on Chilperic's forces. Sigibert recovered the cities which he had lost and even captured Chilperic's son, Theudebert, who was allowed to return to his father after being imprisoned for a year and taking an oath to never attack Sigibert again.⁵ After this war, five years passed before civil war returned to Francia.

Sigibert, who viewed the wives of his brothers as unworthy of a king, married Brunhild, a Visigothic princess, in 566. In response, Chilperic married Brunhild's sister, Galswinth, who he murdered not long after their marriage.⁶ This event caused conflict between Chilperic and his brothers, but it did not escalate into a full-scale war. However, a year later in 567, Charibert died and his kingdom was divided between the three surviving brothers. Shortly after the partition, Sigibert went to war with Guntram because he wanted to control the city of Arles. In the ensuing war, Guntram besieged Sigibert's army at Arles and captured Avignon. After defeating Sigibert's forces and recovering Arles, Guntram was kind to his brother and returned control of Avignon to Sigibert.⁷ Later in 567, Chilperic attacked and seized Poitiers and Tours from Sigibert. The former combatants, Guntram and Sigibert, allied against Chilperic and swiftly restored those

⁴ Gregory, *History*, IV.22: "These four, Charibert, Guntram, Chilperic, and Sigibert, then divided things up fairly between themselves. The Kingdom of Childebert, with Paris for its capital fell to Charibert. Guntram received the kingdom of Chlodomer, with Orleans as his chief city. Chilperic inherited the kingdom of his father Lothar, which he ruled from Soissons. Sigibert took over the kingdom of Theuderic, and established himself at Rheims."

⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IV.30.

cities to Sigibert's domain.⁸ The Frankish kingdoms were relatively peaceful after this war, and the next conflict did not occur until 573.

Chilperic's son Clovis was at Bordeaux when Sigulf, a partisan of Sigibert, attacked Clovis and chased him from the city. In response to the assault on his son Clovis, Chilperic sent his other son, Theudebert, to attack Tour, Poitiers and other cities south of the Loire River.⁹ Sigibert did not immediately respond to these assaults, but contacted his Germanic allies from across the Rhine in anticipation of his future campaign against Chilperic.¹⁰ In 574, Sigibert marched on Chilperic. Chilperic contacted his brother Guntram and they made an alliance against Sigibert. However, when Sigibert was unable to find a ford across the river Seine, he threatened to turn his army on Guntram if not allowed passage through his territory. Guntram capitulated and Sigibert demanded that Chilperic meet him on the battlefield. However, Chilperic sued for peace and restored the cities which he had taken from Sigibert.¹¹ Sigibert returned home, but this peace did not last for long.

In 575, Chilperic and Guntram again allied against Sigibert. Chilperic marched as far as Rheims and devastated Sigibert's territory. In response, Sigibert recalled his Germanic allies and sent messengers to Tours and Châteaudun where an army was raised to attack Chilperic's son Theudebert. Theudebert's army was defeated and he was killed during the battle, but Gregory also recounts that his body was mutilated.¹² Guntram again broke his alliance with Chilperic, who, after learning of this betrayal, took refuge in Tournai with Fredegund and his children. Sigibert seized Paris where Brunhild met him with his treasury. Before marching on Tournai to finish Chilperic, Sigibert was warned by Bishop Germanus of Paris not to pursue his brother with

⁸ Ibid., IV.45.

⁹ Ibid., IV.47.

¹⁰ Ibid., IV.49.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., IV.50.

the intent of killing him or else Sigibert would be the one who was killed. Sigibert did not heed this advice and marched on Tournai, but, before he reached the city, he was assassinated and his son Childebert II received his kingdom.¹³ In the immediate aftermath of Sigibert's death, Mummolus, a duke in Guntram's kingdom, attacked Limoges and defeated Duke Desiderius, Chilperic's commander.¹⁴ However, rather than attempt to hold this conquest, Mummolus retreated and Chilperic restored it to his domain. After this skirmish, there was peace again in the Frankish kingdoms for six years.

In 581, Childebert II, Sigibert's son, formed an alliance with Chilperic against Guntram in order to regain control of Marseilles, which Guntram had occupied since Sigibert's death. While his brother and nephew were at each other's throats, Chilperic attacked Guntram and seized Toulouse, Agen and a number of other cities.¹⁵ Guntram never attempted to reclaim these cities from Chilperic, and in 583 Chilperic again waged war with his brother Guntram. Childebert II sent envoys to Chilperic requesting aid in recovering Marseilles from Guntram, Chilperic agreed and marched on his brother. However, Childebert II's army refused to march in aid of Chilperic and so Guntram proved victorious. After the battle, Guntram and Chilperic were remarkably civil, and both agreed to call a council of bishops and pay whatever restitution the bishops deemed necessary.¹⁶ A year later, in 584, Childebert II switched alliances after Guntram voluntarily returned part of Marseilles to him. Both Guntram and Childebert II demanded that Chilperic restore territory which he had seized after Sigibert's death, but no war resulted from

¹³ Ibid., IV.51.

¹⁴ Ibid., V.13.

¹⁵ Ibid., VI.22.

¹⁶ Ibid., VI.31.

their threats.¹⁷ In that same year, Chilperic was assassinated and his son Chlothar II was elevated to the throne.¹⁸

After Chilperic's death, Gundovald, a supposed son of Chlothar I who had arrived in Francia in 582, proclaimed himself as king and began a war with Guntram. Gundovald had the support of prominent nobles from the kingdoms of Chilperic, Guntram and Childebert II. However, his attempt to claim part of the Frankish kingdom was not successful. After a few early victories, Gundovald was forced to retreat to the fortress of Comminges in 585. He was later betrayed by his supporters and Guntram destroyed the entire city, not even sparing the churches and clergy.¹⁹ After Gundovald's death, the next major event was the Treaty of Andelot in 587. Brunhild, Childebert II and Guntram were the three main contributors for this treaty.²⁰ This Treaty served three important functions. First, it confirmed the peace which had existed between Childebert II and Guntram for the previous four years. Second, it stipulated the return of territory to Childebert II which had belonged to his father Sigibert. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it made Childebert II the heir to Guntram's entire kingdom. Guntram had no living children, and though he had earlier adopted Childebert II and Chlothar II, this treaty confirmed that Childebert II would be Guntram's sole heir. After this treaty, there was peace in Francia until Guntram's death in 593. However, the relationship between Childebert II and Chlothar II was very tense, and, after Guntram died, war quickly returned to Francia.

In 593, Wintrio, a Duke in Childebert II's kingdom, attacked Chlothar II. Although Wintrio was defeated, both armies suffered serious losses.²¹ After Childebert II died in 596, his

¹⁷ Ibid., VI.41,46.

¹⁸ Ibid., VI.46.

¹⁹ Ibid., VII.35-36.

²⁰ Ibid., IX.20.

²¹ Fredegar, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, Trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1960), IV.14.

kingdom was divided among his two surviving sons, with Theudebert II receiving Austrasia and Theuderic II receiving Burgundy. In that same year, Fredegund, Chilperic's widow, along with her son Chlothar II, seized Paris and a number of other cities. Theuderic II and Theudebert II rallied their armies and marched to meet the enemy. Fredegund and Chlothar II's army was the victor, slaughtering their opponents. Fredegund died a year later in 597.²²

Theuderic II and Theudebert II formed an alliance in 600 and attacked Chlothar II. After winning a resounding victory, Theuderic and Theudebert seized the majority of Chlothar's territory and left him with a vastly reduced kingdom.²³ Four years later, Brunhild, who was now residing at the court of Theuderic II, attempted to have her lover Protadius promoted to mayor of the palace.²⁴ She sent Bertoald, the current mayor, to patrol the territory along the border with Chlothar II. He was given a very small force, and so Chlothar II sent his son Merovech with an army to kill Bertoald. In response, Theuderic II dispatched an army which defeated and captured Merovech; Chlothar II raised another army, but, thanks to the efforts of Theudebert II, everyone managed to reach a peace agreement.²⁵ A year after this peace was reached, another civil war occurred among the Franks. In 605, Theuderic II waged war with his brother Theudebert II. Brunhild and her lover Protadius had convinced Theuderic that Theudebert was not his real brother, but was actually the son of a gardener. However, before any battle could occur, Theuderic II's army mutinied, killed Protadius, and Theuderic made peace with his brother.²⁶

The peace between Theuderic II and his brother Theudebert II lasted for six years. In 611, Theuderic II made a pact with Chlothar II. Theuderic told Chlothar of his intention to wage war

²² Ibid., IV.16-17.

²³ Ibid., IV.20.

²⁴ The *maior domus* was an important position even during this period of Frankish history, handling many administrative and legal functions for the Merovingian kings.

²⁵ Ibid., IV.24-26.

²⁶ Ibid., IV.27.

with his brother, and asked only that Chlothar not give any aid to Theudebert. In return for his loyalty, Theuderic II promised to return territory to Chlothar II which Theudebert II had taken from him in an earlier war.²⁷ Chlothar II and Theuderic II reached an agreement, and a year later Theuderic marched against his brother. Theuderic II defeated his brother on multiple occasions, finally capturing Theudebert II and his son. Theuderic II had his brother ceremonially stripped of his royal vestments, sent in chains to Châlons, and then murdered Theudebert II's son.²⁸ In the wake of this victory, Chlothar II took possession of the territory which he had been promised. However, Theuderic II was angered by this action and prepared to march on Chlothar II. While marching against his cousin, Theuderic II contracted dysentery and died in 613.²⁹ Brunhild proclaimed one of Theuderic's sons, Sigibert II, as king. However, the nobles of Burgundy and Austrasia invited Chlothar II to take over the kingdom. Chlothar II accepted, and, after swiftly defeating Sigibert II's few retainers, Chlothar murdered Sigibert and two of his brothers. Brunhild was publicly executed and Chlothar II became sole king of the Franks. Chlothar's ascension to the throne led to a prolonged period of peace and an end to civil wars which had plagued the Frankish kingdoms for more than fifty years.³⁰

B. *Pactus Legis Salicae* and the Practice of Partible Inheritance

One of the key causes of these civil wars, at least until the treaty of Andelot, was conflict stemming from the division of Chlothar's kingdom in 561. In the Merovingian Kingdoms, the most common form of inheritance practiced was partible, where the land of the deceased was divided among his living heirs. According to the *Pactus Legis Salicae*, "concerning land, truly, no inheritance shall belong to a woman, but all the land shall belong to the male sex who are

²⁷ Ibid., IV.37.

²⁸ Ibid., IV.38.

²⁹ Ibid., IV.39.

³⁰ Ibid., IV.40-42.

brothers.”³¹ If there were multiple sons, they would divide their father’s lands among themselves. This practice was not only common among the populace as a whole, but it was practiced by the Merovingian kings as well. There are some notable exceptions to this, such as Brunhild’s attempt to make Sigibert II the sole heir of Theuderic II’s kingdom in 613. However, such examples are rare, and it is more common to find lands being divided amongst the living heirs.

Another issue to address of inheritance is the importance of paternity. Gregory of Tours writes that Bishop Sagittarius of Gap attempted to denounce the rights of succession of Guntram’s sons, stating that “[they] could never succeed to the throne because when their mother married him she had been one of Magnachar’s servants.”³² In Sagittarius’s mind, maternity mattered just as much as paternity. However, Gregory countered this argument by saying Sagittarius “was ignoring that, with the lineage of the mothers having been omitted, the children, who have been produced by kings, are called kings.”³³ In Gregory’s estimation, maternity did not matter, but so long as they were legitimate sons of a king, they too were kings.

Prominent examples of partible inheritance occur in 511 and 561 when the Merovingian kingdoms were divided amongst the four heirs of Clovis I and later the four sons of Chlothar I. Such partitions were designed to ensure no son of a king was disinherited and force these heirs to work together.³⁴ However, conflict inevitably resulted due to unhappiness from these divisions, and ultimately civil war plagued Merovingian Gaul for much of the sixth century. Although there was much internal conflict within the Merovingian kingdoms, the royal dynasty was able to

³¹ “De Alodis,” in *Pactus Legis Salicae*, edidit Karl August Eckhardt (Hannoverae Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, MCMLXII), Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Legum Sectio I, Legum Nationum Germanicarum IV.1, LIX.5: “*De Alodis. De terra vero nulla in muliere hereditas non pertinebit, sed ad virilem sexum qui fratres fuerint tota terra perteneunt.*”

³² Gregory, *History*, V.20.

³³ Greg. Hist., V.20: “*ignorans, quod, praetermissis nunc generibus feminarum, regis vocitantur liberi, qui de regibus fuerant procreati.*”

³⁴ J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long Haired Kings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 185-6.

endure. The royal line solidified by Clovis continued to practice partible inheritance, even with its flaws, and the Merovingians ruled into the eighth-century.

C. Primary Sources and their Biases

Beyond the law code *Pactus Legis Salicae*, there are a number of primary sources which survive from the Merovingians. Of those surviving sources, three major narrative sources supply scholars a relatively complete account of the period. These works are: Gregory of Tour's *History of the Franks*, *The Liber Historiae Francorum* and Fredegar's *Chronicle*. Ian Wood argues that "the narrators of early medieval history never simply recorded events. Always writing, as they did, with a purpose, they were interpreters rather than mere record keepers. They made conscious choices in determining what to include and what to exclude from their narratives."³⁵ Gregory of Tours, the *LHF*, and Fredegar all manipulated their histories in an attempt to present the material they wanted their readers to know. For example, Bernard S. Bachrach explains how Gregory "manipulated the facts," in his attempt to clear his friend Bishop Rufinus's name.³⁶ During the Gundovald revolt, which was an attempt by the nobility to place Gundovald, a supposed son of Chlothar I on the throne, Gundovald took refuge in the city of Comminges. The bishop of that city, Rufinus, helped Gundovald in his preparations for defense of the city. However, Bachrach argues that Gregory manipulated his account of events, making it appear as if Rufinus, who was leading city's levies, was shut out of the city by Gundovald in order to take possession of all the city's goods. Bachrach argues that Rufinus might have been shut out of the city, but the levies "were deployed in the countryside for the purpose of harassing the besieging force . . ."³⁷

³⁵ Ian Wood, "Jonas, the Merovingians, Pope Honorius: *Diplomata* and the *Vita Columbani*," in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History*, ed. Alexander Callander Murray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 99.

³⁶ Bernard S. Bachrach, *The Anatomy of a Little War: A Diplomatic and Military History of the Gundovald Affair* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 130.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Gregory does not reveal the fate of Rufinus, and there was no mention of a council being called to charge him with any crime, so perhaps Gregory's defense worked.

Gregory of Tours's *History of the Franks*, which is composed of ten books, covers an extensive time frame. It starts with the creation of the world and ends in 591 while Kings Guntram, Chlothar II and Childebert II were still reigning. Gregory, who was born around 540 to well established Gallo-Roman family, became Bishop of Tours in 573, replacing his mother's cousin Eufronius.³⁸ Gregory does not reveal how he became bishop, but a poem by Venantius Fortunatus addressed to the citizens of Tours claimed that Gregory owed his appointment as bishop to Brunhild and Sigibert. Fortunatus states that "exultant Sigibert and honored Brunhild favored [Gregory]."³⁹ In the Merovingian kingdoms, the kings had authority to promote whoever they wished as bishops, and simony was still a common practice. In Gregory's case, Fortunatus also mentions the support of Queen Brunhild, Sigibert's wife. Concerning Gregory's appointment, Ian Wood argues that "the bishop of Tours doubtless saw the advantage of silence on occasion. It is difficult, for instance, to interpret the comparative absence of information relating to Brunhild: it is tempting to associate Gregory's failure to identify her role in his appointment in part with his tendency to see the influence of queens, Chlothild excluded, in a negative light . . ."⁴⁰ Throughout Gregory's narrative, women who are involved in politics are often portrayed in a negative light and presented as bad influences on their husbands, the most prominent example of this is Fredegund, Chilperic's wife. However, at least in the case of Fredegund, she did not help her situation by attempting to bribe Gregory in the trial of Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen.

³⁸ Edward James, *The Franks* (New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988), 16.

³⁹ Fortunatus, "Ad Cives Turonicos," in Judith George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 194: "huic Sigibercthus ovans favet and Brunichildis honori."

⁴⁰ Ian Wood, "The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, Tome 71 fasc. 2, (1993), 270.

During the trial of Bishop Praetextatus, where he was accused of conspiring against King Chilperic, Gregory writes that “these servants of [Fredegund] then besought me not to oppose her interests; at the same time they promised me two hundred pounds of silver if, through my joining in the attack on him, Praetextatus were condemned . . . I made answer ‘If you gave me a thousand pounds of gold and silver, could I do aught but that which the Lord commanded?’”⁴¹ Gregory, a man of integrity, was highly offended that Fredegund would even think him capable of accepting a bribe. However, Martin Heinzelmann states that “Gregory recorded dates and events of general history in such a way as to be able to express his views on the essence of history . . . this is why Gregory placed episodes from contemporary history under clearly recognizable themes.”⁴² Gregory presented his facts in order to attend to his own agenda. The theme pertaining to the period of this paper is of the Godless King Chilperic, and, following Chilperic’s death, Fredegund’s inheritance of this “dishonorable title” as the Godless Queen.⁴³ Heinzelmann refers to Gregory’s bias as his “troublesome influence.”⁴⁴ In fact, Gregory’s *History* can be so hostile at times that Gregory Halfond argues “the libelous depiction of King Chilperic and his wife Fredegund in Gregory of Tours’ *Decem Libri Historiarum* has encouraged the false impression of these Merovingian monarchs as scourges of the Gallo-Frankish Church and its bishops.”⁴⁵ So, throughout this thesis, it is necessary to remember that, although Gregory’s *History* is one of the best and most complete sources for Merovingian history, he had his own agenda when writing this work.

⁴¹ Gregory, *History*, V.18.

⁴² Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 36.

⁴³ Heinzelmann, 37, 41.

⁴⁴ Heinzelmann, 202.

⁴⁵ Gregory I. Halfond, “*Sis Quoque Catholicis Religionis Apex: The Ecclesiastical Patronage of Chilperic I and Fredegund*,” *Church History* 81, no. 1 (March 2012), 48.

The next major narrative source for this period is Fredegar's *Chronicle*, which was written around 660 with continuations until 768. Fredegar borrowed much of his writings from early sources, including Gregory of Tours. Fredegar states that "I have reproduced successively in this little book, in suitable language and without many omissions, what these learned men have recounted at length in their five chronicles . . ." ⁴⁶ For the most part, Fredegar faithfully reproduces the writings of his predecessors, though there are some notable changes to Gregory's *History*, including the accusation that Brunhild was responsible for Chilperic's assassination in 584. Although the first three books of his *Chronicle* are drawn from others' works, the fourth book of appears to be an original composition. According to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill:

The original chronicle, from 584, begins by being little more than a transcription of local Burgundian annals but becomes progressively fuller as it proceeds. It is from the year 603 that the reader is unmistakably aware that he has before him the words of a writer who lived at the time of the events described; and this holds good to the end of the *Chronicle*, as we now have it, in the year 642. ⁴⁷

For the later period of the civil wars, especially after Guntram's death in 593, Fredegar is one of the most important sources due to its fairly contemporary composition. However, as with Gregory, there is a noticeable bias. Fredegar's *Chronicle* was written in Burgundy after Chlothar II had annihilated Brunhild and her descendants, establishing himself as sole king of the Franks. Later sources, including Fredegar, because of their bias towards Chlothar II and his descendants, tend to be prejudiced against Brunhild and present her as the chief villainess in the later years of the civil wars. ⁴⁸ This image of Brunhild is remarkably similar to that of Gregory's depiction of Fredegund, most notably in the numerous accusations of covert plots and assassination attempts.

⁴⁶ Fredegar, IV.Prologue.

⁴⁷ J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, "Introduction," in *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, xiii.

⁴⁸ Katharine Scherman, *The Birth of France: Warriors Bishops and Long-Haired Kings* (New York: Random House, 1987), 230-2.

A final point to mention concerning Fredegar's *Chronicle* is how the work was influenced by Jonas of Bobbio's *Life of Columbanus*. This work was commissioned around 639 by Bertulf, the abbot of Bobbio, which was a monastery in northern Italy founded by Columbanus after his exile from Francia.⁴⁹ This *Vita* recounts the life of the Irish missionary Columbanus throughout his travels in Francia, his establishment of monastic communities, and his battles with Theuderic II and Brunhild, which led to his expulsion from Francia. As with most hagiographies, the main adversary, in this case Brunhild, is presented in a villainous light. The event that drove Columbanus and Brunhild into conflict was Columbanus's refusal to acknowledge Theuderic II's bastard sons. Columbanus suggested that Theuderic II take a real wife if he wanted legitimate heirs, but both Theuderic and Brunhild rejected this idea. Theuderic II thought that Columbanus, through his willingness to challenge the king, was seeking martyrdom and so Theuderic exiled Columbanus from his kingdom.⁵⁰ Fredegar, who had access to this document, was so moved by Columbanus's tale that he included a sizeable portion of the *Vita* in the fourth book of his *Chronicle*. The rather extreme image of Brunhild presented in Jonas's work, that of a grasping older queen who refused to allow her grandson to marry in an attempt to maintain sway over him, appears throughout Fredegar's *Chronicle*.⁵¹ So, as one must be careful when employing Gregory's *History*, one must also recognize the limitations of Fredegar's *Chronicle*, especially considering how profoundly it was influenced by Jonas's *Life of Columbanus*.

The final major narrative source, the *Liber Historiae Francorum* (hereafter abbreviated as *LHF*) was written around 727. The anonymous author of this source attempts to recount events

⁴⁹ Alexander O'Hara, "The *Vita Columbani* in Merovingian Gaul," *Early Medieval Europe* 17, no. 2 (2009), 135.

⁵⁰ Fredegar, IV.36.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: "Observing how Theuderic yielded to [Columbanus], [Brunhild] feared that the substitution of a queen for mistresses at the head of the court would deprive her of part of her dignities and honor."

from the first arrival of the Franks in Gaul and then describe the foundation of the Merovingian dynasty and its long history in Francia. The author appears to have spent some time at the Neustrian court of Theuderic III, who reigned 673-690, as his account of this king's reign is far more detailed than other rulers. It is also because of his time at the Neustrian court that scholars such as Bernard Bachrach argue that the *LHF* has a clear Neustrian bias.⁵² Bachrach states that "he concentrates on Neustrian monarchs, clerics, and politics while giving meager attention to what was happening in Austrasia, Burgundy, and Aquitaine."⁵³ It is undeniable that many key events, places, and people are left out of this work, but this should not be surprising considering that the *LHF* is much smaller than Gregory or Fredegar's works.

Due to the massive disparity in length, it is not at all surprising that major events are ignored, though the events the author does cover primarily concern Neustria. However, Bachrach also argues that "from the *LHF* we obtain a picture which is less critical than that of the Fredegund which emerges from, for example, the *History* written by Gregory of Tours...our author takes pains to omit many of the evil doings which other historians attribute to her."⁵⁴ While Bachrach is correct that the *LHF* does omit many actions attributed to Fredegund, Gregory Halfond counters that "the author of the *LHF* is quite unequivocal in his reference to the 'evil deeds of Queen Fredegund,' despite including fewer specifics regarding these deeds than Gregory of Tours."⁵⁵ Bachrach has overlooked the fact that, though it omits many deeds, the *LHF* also attributes actions to Fredegund which neither Gregory nor Fredegar mention. For example, the *LHF* blames Fredegund for the assassination of Chilperic in 584.

⁵² Bernard Bachrach, "Introduction," in *Liber Historiae Francorum*, ed. and trans. Bernard S. Bachrach (Lawrence, KA: Coronado Press, 1973), 10-12. See also: Alexander Callander Murray, *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: a reader*. Trans. Alexander Callander Murray (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), 491 and Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubine, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 13-15.

⁵³ *LHF*, 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Halfond, 54.

The *LHF* states that Fredegund was caught in an affair with Landeric, Chilperic's mayor of the palace, and told Landeric "do not fear. Hear my counsel and let us do this and we will not die . . . let us send someone who will kill [Chilperic] and who will shout that Childebert the treacherous king of Austrasia did it. And when the king has been killed, we will rule with my son Chlothar."⁵⁶ Fredegund was not only ordering the assassination to protect herself from Chilperic's wrath, but also securing her and her lover's position to rule after Chilperic's death. Landeric and she would rule Neustria through her infant son Chlothar II. While the *LHF* might assign fewer assassinations or evil deeds to Fredegund, this source did not attempt to rehabilitate her image.

Although this thesis will primarily rely on Gregory, the *LHF*, and Fredegar, there are other sources which provide key details and alternate accounts of events. The first of these is the *Chronicle* of Marius of Avenches. This account was written by Marius, Bishop of Avenches, during his lifetime and completed before his death in 594.⁵⁷ Marius was a contemporary of Gregory of Tours, and had access to an early version of Gregory's *History* when composing his own *Chronicle*⁵⁸. However, Marius's account of events is quite pithy, and often neglected by modern scholars. It does provide a useful alternate account of the assassination of Sigibert in 575, and so still proves to be quite useful.

Another contemporary source is Venantius Fortunatus, who arrived in Francia as a poet in the 560's and died as Bishop of Poitiers in the early 600's.⁵⁹ Fortunatus was a friend to Gregory of Tours, with whom he exchanged numerous letters, and wrote a poem to the citizens of Tours upon Gregory's appointment as bishop. Fortunatus spent much of his time in Francia as

⁵⁶ LHF, 35.

⁵⁷ Murray, 100.

⁵⁸ Lewis Thorpe, "Introduction," in *History of the Franks*, 37, 54.

⁵⁹ Judith W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 4-5, 34.

a court poet, and presented poems to Charibert, Chilperic and Sigibert I. In his poems to these Merovingian kings, Fortunatus focuses on their strength and martial prowess. For example, in his poem to Chilperic, Fortunatus states: “O king of admirable virtue, lofty fame and noble ancestry . . . If a barbarian interpreter were at hand, your name would be rendered also as ‘Valiant Defender’.”⁶⁰ Warfare was commonplace in the Merovingian kingdoms, and so, one of the most important qualities a king could have was martial ability. However, further in this poem, Fortunatus states that “warlike qualities make you like your family, but your literary pursuits single you out as exceptional. Thus you are both the equal and the superior of the kings of old.”⁶¹ This quotation helps reveal the main problem with Fortunatus as a source, namely that he was a poet. In the poems he presented to the Merovingian kings, he never depicted them in a bad light, and it is important to remember that Fortunatus was dependent upon the patronage of his client.

Finally, this thesis will use Paul the Deacon’s *History of the Lombards*. Paul lived and wrote his work during the eighth-century, dying in the 790s before he could complete his *History*. He began his career as a poet, and frequented the courts of such kings as King Ratchis of the Lombards and King Charlemagne of the Franks.⁶² His work focuses on the Lombards, but one is also able to glean information about other peoples, including the Merovingians. However, due to its focus on the Lombards, there are many events in Francia that are ignored, and Paul’s dating can be suspect. However, his history still proves useful through its alternate accounts of events, and because it was written from a different perspective, it was perhaps less tainted by certain biases which surround earlier Frankish accounts.

⁶⁰ Venantius Fortunatus, “Ad Chilpericum,” in George, *Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul*, 201.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁶² Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History A.D. 550-800: Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 329.

D. Bishops in the *Regnum Francorum*

One of the most influential positions in the Merovingian Kingdoms was bishop. They served two primary roles, political and religious. The bishops commonly were chosen from noble families, sometimes straight from their former role as a secular officer, although there were still many career churchmen chosen as bishops. However, it was often due to their aristocratic background that many bishops were used as ambassadors, court advisors, and generally helped kings with administrative matters.⁶³ Although the focus of this thesis will be on these political functions, Merovingian bishops also served some very important religious functions. One of the more important of these functions was the church council, at which the bishops were able to inform their king of occurrences in his kingdom.⁶⁴ The heresy of Arianism, which claimed that Jesus was a lesser member of the Holy Trinity, still existed and was the religion of the Visigoths in Spain. Beyond dealing with this heresy at councils, bishops also had the task of converting Visigothic princesses who some Frankish kings, such as Chilperic and Sigibert I, married. After her marriage to Sigibert, Gregory narrates that Brunhild “was, of course, an Arian, but she was converted by the bishops sent to reason with her and by the King who begged her to accept conversion. She accepted the unity of the blessed Trinity and was baptized with the chrism.”⁶⁵ These bishops were concerned about Brunhild’s eternal salvation and even Sigibert appealed to her in order that she renounce her heretic faith. The bishops of Merovingian Gaul, through concern for their flocks, were also involved in poor relief and building programs, which included the construction of hospitals and repairing churches and martyr shrines.

Bishops held the role of gate keeper to martyr shrines and relics, and this role was perhaps their most important. Martyrs and relics maintained a very important place in

⁶³ James, 183-4.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Gregory, *History*, IV.27.

Merovingian Gaul and often Gregory, and other sources, report miracles occurring at shrines to those martyrs and their relics. For example, during his attempt to claim a part of Chlothar I's kingdom, Gundovald heard rumors of the thumb of Saint Sergius being used to sway the outcome of battles. Gregory recounts that "as soon as Gundovald heard of this, he began to inquire very urgently whether there was anybody in the neighborhood who had managed to acquire any relics of this martyr Saint Sergius."⁶⁶ In his search for this relic, Gundovald enlisted the aid of one of his supporters, Bishop Bertram of Bordeaux, through whose help Gundovald was able to acquire a bone from Sergius's finger. Gundovald was never able to achieve any miracle with Sergius's relic, because Gundovald mistreated Sergius's body while trying to recover the bone and Gregory says that "what happened can hardly have pleased the martyr . . ."⁶⁷ Although Gundovald did not receive any, miracles were still a common occurrence around martyr shrines. For example, Saint Martin's oratory in Paris survived a great fire in 585. According to Gregory of Tours, Saint Martin "saved the oratory and house of his served but he prevented any harm from being done by the relentless flames to the dwellings which stood all around it."⁶⁸ People often sought out these shrines for their miracles, and kings lavished gifts and monetary donations on these martyr cults. A shrine to a martyr in one's see brought status to a bishop, especially having a shrine to Saint Martin who was patronized by much of the Merovingian royal family. So, although bishops are heavily involved in politics throughout this period, they were by no means merely political agents, but also served a number of important religious functions.

⁶⁶ Ibid., VII.31.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., VIII.33.

E. Queenship in the Merovingian Kingdoms

Another potentially powerful position in Gaul was that of queen. Suzanne Wemple, in her book *Women in Frankish Society*, states that “the power of queens, while far more extensive [than ordinary women], was also contingent on the careful exploitation of personal ties . . . [because] women who married kings gained access to the male world of politics and power.”⁶⁹ Women’s power was then dependent upon her relationship with the king and the maintenance of her position in court. The ultimate goal for a queen seeking to solidify her position at court was the production of heirs. According to Ian Wood, “the first priority for any queen or concubine was to retain the affections of the king,” and there was no better way to solidify their relationship than by bearing the king a son and heir.⁷⁰ In both Fredegund and Brunhild’s cases, they bore their kings multiple sons which is one of the reasons that these queens stayed relevant while other queens, including Chilperic’s two previous wives, became irrelevant and were replaced. Although production of heirs kept a queen relevant, if a queen wanted to wield true power there was one other necessary factor, namely a compliant husband or son. Wood argues that “It was not sufficient to have high born relatives, or even to achieve the status of queen; it was also necessary to have an obedient husband or son. Only through such could a queen realize her ambitions.”⁷¹ It was as regent for their sons that Fredegund and Brunhild held their greatest power and most profoundly influenced the civil wars of this period.

F. Merovingian Kings and the Economy of War

A final topic to address is the role of war in Merovingian society. Warfare was commonplace in Merovingian Gaul, and it was not because Frankish kings were bloodthirsty or

⁶⁹ Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500 to 900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 63.

⁷⁰ Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-71* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1994), 122-23.

⁷¹ Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 88.

that they simply desired to own vast territory. Rather, warfare to the Franks was a key component of their economy and political system. According to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, “the Merovingians desperately needed gold, for without it the largesse upon which the loyalty of their followers so greatly depended would be impossible. The hoarding of gold by the barbarian kings is not more remarkable than the liberality with which they distributed it.”⁷² The Merovingian kings relied heavily on their armies and the nobility which led those armies. One of the main tasks for the nobility during this period was to lead the king’s armies, especially in the instances when the king was unable to join the army directly.⁷³ In order to keep these important men happy, kings had to find a way to reward them, not only with gold, but also land.

The churches in the Frankish kingdoms often owned much land and were generally wealthy, but they also resisted every attempt at taxation. So, in order to fund their administrations, Merovingian kings frequently turned to warfare. According to Edward James, “a king could only prosper with the support and assistance of warriors, and these had to be rewarded, with land or with gold and together luxuries. Both types could most easily be won through warfare; frequent warfare may also have been necessary in order to satisfy those who had been brought up to regard it as their main pursuit.”⁷⁴ When James refers to those Franks who were raised to fight, he is referring to the fact that the Franks had long been a warrior people, dating even before the reign of Childeric I, Clovis’s father. So, Merovingian kings not only needed to generate loot to reward their nobles, but warfare also created an opportunity to employ the warrior caste in Frankish society, one which had profound influence over their kings.

Around 532-4, Chlothar I and Childebert I joined forces to attack Burgundy. They asked Theuderic I but he refused. Theuderic I’s army demanded that he join his brothers in war or they

⁷² Wallace-Hadrill, *Long Haired Kings*, 67-8.

⁷³ Archibald R. Lewis, “Dukes in the Regnum Francorum, A.D. 550-751,” *Speculum* 51, No. 3 (July 1976), 390.

⁷⁴ James, 169.

would desert him and join with his brothers. In response, Theuderic said, “I will lead you to a land where you will be able to lay your hands on so much gold and silver that you’re your lust for loot will be satisfied. If only you will agree not to go off after my brothers, in this other land you may capture as many cattle and slaves and seize as much clothing as you wish.”⁷⁵ Through this speech, Theuderic I convinced his men to follow him and attack Clermont because the men of that city plotted to revolt against him. Theuderic’s speech reveals how important it was for Merovingian kings to find opportunities to utilize their armies. His men saw Childebert I and Chlothar I’s armies marching to war and thus wanted their own opportunity to gain loot. Theuderic I’s response reveals how seriously he viewed their threat of deserting him, because by the end of this speech he was almost pleading with his men.

Being a king in the Frankish kingdoms was a position that often held much power and authority, but in order to maintain that position, kings had to maintain the support of their nobles and armies. In addition, this need for support was compounded for new kings because, as Ian Wood argues, “the history of royal succession shows time and again that a prince had to prove himself in order to be sure of inheriting a kingdom and the process of building up a following and prestige was likely to cause some conflict.”⁷⁶ Newly anointed kings were in an awkward position; they did not have the established following which their predecessors had, and they had not yet proven themselves capable of supporting their dependents, namely the nobility and army. According to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, in attempting to solidify their newly gained kingship, the need to generate gold and prestige “drove the Frankish kings to venture after venture outside their own territories—notably to Spain and to Italy—and such seemed to their followers the correct way of replenishing a royal treasure-hoard. To levy contributions upon the lands that

⁷⁵ Gregory, *History*, III.11.

⁷⁶ Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 92-3.

were held as a reward for loyal service was to invite trouble.”⁷⁷ During the reigns of Clovis and his children, the Franks sent many of their expeditions against foreign enemies, and in the case of Clovis’s children, they often cooperated in joint attacks on those enemies. However, during the reigns of Chlothar I’s sons, there were fewer opportunities for foreign campaigns. Guntram, Sigibert I, Chilperic and Charibert did send expeditions against the Visigoths, Lombards and Saxons. However there are far fewer examples of these kings combining forces in their campaigns. As a result, Chlothar I’s sons were far less successful in their foreign expeditions, and, to make matters worse, it was often easier to cannibalize each other’s kingdoms than expend immense resources to mount a campaign deep into Italy or Spain. So, when searching for the causes of the numerous civil wars which plagues this period, Roger Collins argues that “conflict was turned inwards and, under the guise of a blood feud, a long and bitter internecine war was fought out amongst the Merovingians until only one line of the dynasty survived.”⁷⁸ Collins is correct that decreased outlets abroad would inevitably turn conflict inwards, but it is the presence of blood-feud that has caused much debate among Merovingian scholars.

G. Feud in Francia

Before examining the historiographical debate surrounding feud, it is first necessary to define what a feud was. In defining feud, Wallace-Hadrill states that “we may call it, first, the threat of hostility between kins; then, the state of hostility between them; finally, the satisfaction of their differences and a settlement on terms acceptable to both. The threat, the state and the settlement of that hostility constitute feud but do not necessarily mean bloodshed.”⁷⁹ Wallace-Hadrill’s definition is relatively broad, but it serves as a good foundation. He also applies this

⁷⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *Long Haired Kings*, 68.

⁷⁸ Roger Collins, “Theodebert I: ‘*Rex Magnus Francorum*,’” in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish & Anglo-Saxon Society*, edited by Patrick Wormald (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1983), 14.

⁷⁹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Long Haired Kings*, 122.

definition to conflicts varying in scale, but when he mentions feud he “generally means quarrels between families, involving the neighborhood more or less.”⁸⁰ Wallace-Hadrill notes that feuds did not necessarily have to include any bloodshed, which is why the Merovingian kings provided fines and monetary reimbursement for murder in the *Pactus Legis Salicae*. By placing a worth on a man or woman’s life, the Merovingian kings attempted to legislate feud and reduce the possibility that a person’s death could lead to a feud-war or a blood-feud. A blood-feud operated under the notion of tit-for-tat, where each act of violence necessitated and gave legitimacy for the next action.⁸¹ Wallace-Hadrill argues that the threat of such a feud is why so many feuds ended through agreement of compensation. A feud-war was generally not something families wanted to enter into, but they did happen.⁸²

Blood-feud was not limited to strife between families, but could also occur within a family group. In addition, these feuds were not limited to small scale skirmishes, but could occur on a large scale as wars between kin. In order to display an intra-kinship and large scale feud, Wallace-Hadrill uses the famous example of Clotild’s feud with the Burgundian royal family. Clotild, who was Clovis’s wife, was a Burgundian princess whose father and mother were murdered by Gundobad, who was her paternal uncle.⁸³ After Clovis’s death, Clotild sought revenge for her murdered parents. Gregory recounts that Clotild called together her three sons, Chlothar I, Chlodomer and Childebert I and said “my dear children . . . do not give me cause to regret the fact that I have brought you up with such care. You must surely resent the wrong which has been done to me. You must do all in your power to avenge the death of my mother

⁸⁰ Wallace-Hadrill, “War and Peace in the Early Middle Ages: The Prothero Lecture,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 25 (1975), 160.

⁸¹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Long Haired Kings*, 126-30.

⁸² Wallace-Hadrill, “War and Peace,” 158-60.

⁸³ Gregory, *History*, II.28.

and father.”⁸⁴ Clotild was urging her children, to make war on their second cousins Kings Gundobad and Sigismund of Burgundy. Although they were not closely related, this example still displays that feuds could occur within kinship groups. After Clotild’s appeal, her sons immediately marched to war and defeated the Burgundians, capturing Sigismund and his family. So, Clotild’s actions reveal that a feud could be prosecuted long after the offense occurred, and that a feud between two royal families could be prosecuted on a large scale through the use of armies.

However, there was one noticeable absence in this feud, namely Theuderic I who was half-brother to Clotild’s children. He was not involved with the first war against the Burgundians, perhaps because he was married to Sigismund’s daughter. During his campaign against the Burgundians, Chlodomer had captured Sigismund and his wife, and before attempting a second campaign, Chlodomer had the pair executed. Only after he had executed Sigismund did Chlodomer approach Theuderic I about joining him in war. Gregory states that “Theuderic showed no desire to avenge the wrong done to his father-in-law, but promised to march in support of Chlodomer.”⁸⁵ Although Theuderic I did agree to wage war, he did it in support of his brother, not as an act of vengeance for Clotild. In addition, it appears that Theuderic felt no need to avenge the death of wife’s parents. There was no obligation for Theuderic I to prosecute a feud centered on a wrong done to an in-law, whether Clotild’s father or his wife’s father. This fact has caused some to question how closely one needed to be related in order to necessitate a blood-feud. In his discussion of Clotild’s feud with the Burgundians, Wallace-Hadrill neglected to include Theuderic I’s actions.

⁸⁴ Ibid., III.6.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

The idea that a wronged party needed to avenge an offense is an important aspect of feud, but Wallace-Hadrill failed to address a very important issue, namely whether it was necessary to avenge an offense done to an in-law. Wallace-Hadrill did not closely define the kinship groups he was referring to in his definition of feud. This fact is especially important because, Wallace-Hadrill argues that the most famous of the Merovingian feuds “sprang from the murder of the Visigothic princess Galswinth by her Merovingian husband, King Chilperic, allegedly at the instigation of his mistress Fredegund.”⁸⁶ Unfortunately, none of the pro-feud scholars attempt to define whether it was even necessary for Sigibert to prosecute a feud involving his wife’s sister. However, arguing against feud being one of the primary causes of the Merovingian civil wars, Roger Collins states that “I am by no means convinced that the conflict between rival branches of the Merovingian dynasty that resulted from Chilperic’s murder of his Visigothic wife Galswinth was motivated by the requirements of blood-feud: it is not clear that the obligations of feud necessitated the avenging of the blood of a sister-in-law upon a brother.”⁸⁷ While other anti-feud scholars employ different arguments, namely whether there is even any evidence for the existence of a feud, Collins’s argument is still valid. There has not been a study centered on identifying feuds involving in-laws and other non-blood kin, and, at least in Collins’s estimation, it does not appear that honor demanded the prosecution of a feud in response to a wrong committed against an in-law.

H. Historiography

One final point to make about Wallace-Hadrill is that he describes the civil wars of this period as a “fraternal feud contrived by wives and stretching over three generations.” So, there was not only a feud present within the Merovingian dynasty, but it was manufactured by

⁸⁶ Wallace-Hadrill, 134.

⁸⁷ Collins, 14.

Brunhild and Fredegund.⁸⁸ This is the most common argument found among Merovingian scholars concerning the outbreak of these civil wars. For example, Janet Nelson argues that “Fredegund is [Chilperic’s] female counterpart in villainy, and Brunhild, for whose Galswinth’s death the evil pair are responsible, is therefore an avenger on the side of the angels . . . clearly the pursuit of this vendetta is one main theme in Brunhild’s whole life.”⁸⁹ Nelson later adds that “Wallace-Hadrill once asked how women could have prosecuted a feud except by using hired assassins; but I have suggested that her grandson’s campaign against Chlothar II may have been instigated by Brunhild precisely to prosecute her feud against the son of Fredegund.”⁹⁰ So, according to Nelson, Brunhild was wronged by Fredegund and Chilperic through the murder of her sister Galswinth. After Galswinth’s death Brunhild was intent on avenging this death and did everything in her power to prosecute a feud against Chilperic and Fredegund, and after their deaths, continue the feud against their son Chlothar II. Nelson does not explicitly say how Brunhild prosecuted the feud before Sigibert’s death. Perhaps she was simply inferring that the increasing hostility between the pair, which is evident by Gregory’s increase in detail of these civil wars, was caused by Brunhild inciting Sigibert. Although it is possible that Brunhild was attempting to act as Clotild had and avenge a wrong done to her, Nelson does not address another major issue surrounding the later civil wars, namely that Brunhild incited her own grandchildren, Theuderic II and Theudebert II, against each other.

If this feud was present, as Nelson contends, why then does Brunhild waste time and resources in forcing her grandchildren into combat against each other? Brunhild had been exiled from the court of Theudebert II, though Fredegar does not reveal why, so perhaps she was

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Janet L. Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History,” in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Janet L. Nelson (London: The Hambledon Press, 1986), 10.

⁹⁰ Nelson, 45.

simultaneously prosecuting two feuds: one between her and the family of those who murdered her sister and the other between her and a grandson who had in some way wronged her. However, while this scenario is possible, there is no evidence which explicitly says Brunhild was ever seeking vengeance for a wrong done to her.

In her discussion of Venantius Fortunatus's poem, *De Galsuintha*, Judith George argues that "this poem is a lamentation and consolation on the princess's death, written by Fortunatus possibly in an attempt to avoid the bitter family feud which in fact arose from this event."⁹¹ This poem was written for Brunhild after the murder of her sister Galswinth, and it was intended to console Brunhild. The poem, instead of specifying a culprit in Galswinth's death, instead focuses on how she was a victim of inevitable fate. I agree with George that this poem was probably written to defuse a hostile situation. According to Gregory, Sigibert and his brothers had reprimanded Chilperic after Galswinth's murder, but it does not appear that any war actually took place.⁹² However, George states that this murder caused the eruption of a bitter feud. The period after Galswinth's death was full of civil war, but Chilperic and Sigibert had been at each other's throats long before this act. In another work, George states that, after Chilperic attacked Sigibert in 562, "to these hostilities between the two brothers were added the effects of Sigibert's dynastic ambitions, which triggered off a feud with Chilperic and his wife Fredegund, which was to rack their kingdoms with war and destruction for the rest of the century."⁹³ The dynastic ambitions George refers to is Sigibert's marriage to Brunhild, and the feud was triggered because of Chilperic's marriage to Galswinth and her following murder. According to George, this feud caused unrelenting war, but the political situation had changed dramatically by the end of the century.

⁹¹ George, *Personal and Political Poems*, footnote 76, 40.

⁹² Gregory, *History*, IV.28.

⁹³ George, *Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul*, 8.

Sigibert died in 575, and after his death there was not much conflict between his son Childebert II and Chilperic. In fact, they even formed an alliance against Guntram, and Chilperic adopted him and made him his heir. This alliance ended in 583, only lasting a few years, but if there was such hostility between Sigibert's and Chilperic's kingdom, why did Chilperic spare Brunhild and Childebert II? Brunhild lost influence over Childebert II until around 583, when Childebert broke his alliance with Chilperic. However, Childebert II did not wage war with Chilperic Galswinth's murder probably deepened the hostility between Sigibert and Chilperic, but characterizing the conflict which followed as a blood-feud is problematic.

Lisa Bitel is another advocate of a prominent feud between the two royal families. According to Bitel, "the history of the Frankish monarchy in the late sixth century is dominated by the ferocious rivalry between Fredegund, the former slave, and Brunhild, the Visigothic princess. Their titanic struggle stemmed originally from Brunhild's sense of family—she was determined to avenge the murder of her sister Galswinth."⁹⁴ Just as Wallace-Hadrill, Nelson and George, Bitel focuses on the role of both queens in this feud, and that it was an intense rivalry. Bitel also contends that Brunhild needed to punish the wrong done to her. In Bitel's estimation, Brunhild was obligated to avenge her sister's murder and that this quest for vengeance is what drove much of the conflict of the period covered in this thesis. Again, it appears that too much weight is being placed on the role of feud.

Bitel does not mention the political backdrop to this supposed feud, and what impact the partitions of 561 and 567 might have had on the political climate in Francia. She is ignoring the fact that Chilperic and Sigibert had both been at war multiple times before Brunhild and Fredegund made their appearance in Gregory's narrative. Granted, Bitel seems to be focusing on "the late sixth century," but she must also be referring to the civil wars occurring before the

⁹⁴ Lisa M. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe 400-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 88.

assassination of Sigibert in 575. After Sigibert's death, there was a noticeable drop in civil war, and though Brunhild and Fredegund were still active politically, there was not a civil war occurring between their two families until after the death of Guntram in 593. Considering that Fredegund died in 597, it does not appear that this four year span encompassed the "titanic struggle" which Bitel is referencing. Instead, she must also be referring to those civil wars after her sister's death in 566 and lasting until her husband's death in 575. During this period, no wars can be attributed to the actions of either queen. Neither Gregory nor any other source recounts that Sigibert waged war to avenge the death of his sister-in-law, or that Brunhild ever sought vengeance for this death. Even in the later period, 593-613 when wars are directly attributed to the queens, the sources never attribute Brunhild or Fredegund's actions to feud or a quest for vengeance.

Katherine Scherman, unlike Bitel, does acknowledge the tense situation which existed in Francia between Chilperic and Sigibert. She argues that Galswinth's murder is the act which brought both Fredegund and Brunhild into a conflict which had before been between only Chilperic and Sigibert. Scherman states that:

With the entry of these tenacious women into the family discord a feud was initiated that lasted thirty years . . . through their machinations three generations of Merovingian kings ruled in unending strife and intrigue, to the extreme detriment of themselves and Frankish Gaul. It is tempting to lay the downfall of the Merovingian dynasty at the door of the unforgiving hostility of Brunhild and Fredegund.⁹⁵

Scherman places far too much emphasis on the role of feud in these civil wars. She also argues that the feud lasted only thirty years. Perhaps this was simply a typo by Scherman, because otherwise this feud would have ended in 596, before Fredegund or Brunhild were even dead. Even if one assumes that the dating of the primary sources is wrong, and Fredegund died in 596,

⁹⁵ Scherman, 175.

numerous civil wars occurred within the Merovingian dynasty until 613 and Brunhild's execution. If Scherman did mean thirty years to be the time frame, close to a third of that time frame was spent in relative peace and one could not find roots of the Merovingian dynasty's downfall this early. From the assassination of Chilperic in 584 to Guntram's death in 593, the Merovingian kingdoms were at peace. Although tensions remained high during this nine year span, Guntram managed to keep the peace between Chlothar II and Childebert II. It seems that Scherman is more likely referring to the entire period from Galswinth's death in 566 to Brunhild's execution in 613. Scherman is correct that these queens did play a prominent role in promoting and continuing conflict, but her final line of the previous quotation takes this argument too far. To reduce the causes of these civil wars to a feud contrived by two women is denying license to the bishops, nobility, and, perhaps most importantly, the kings who all played leading roles in these civil wars.

Edward James maintains that blood feud wreaked havoc within the Merovingian dynasty, but unlike Scherman, he does not place as much weight on this feud and offers an alternative cause as well. James argues that, "the idea of feud, the duty that members of a family had to act together against any threat to their honor, was one of the most powerful moral imperatives acting for law and order in Frankish society. The tragedy for the Merovingian dynasty was that the feud took place within the family; instead of strengthening family bonds, it shattered them."⁹⁶ James does not specify the persons who were prosecuting the feud, but considering that not long after this quotation he discusses Galswinth's death and aftermath, it is clear that he is referencing the supposed feud between the families of Sigibert and Chilperic. Although James argues for the presence of a feud and its deleterious effects on the Merovingian kingdoms, he also provides an alternate cause. James argues that the position of Chilperic's kingdom in Francia, which was

⁹⁶ James, 172.

surrounded on all sides by his brothers, was one of the reasons for “Chilperic’s determination to extend his kingdom.”⁹⁷ James contends that a king needed the support of his warriors and nobles and that the only way to achieve their loyalty was through rewards. Warfare was the easiest avenue to earn these rewards, but Chilperic had no opportunity to attack foreign kingdoms. So, James claims that civil war was “an inevitable result of the pressure of political or economic necessity . . .”⁹⁸ James finds the roots of these civil wars in the partition of 561, when Chilperic was allotted a kingdom without adequate opportunities for war except through attacking his brothers. James is correct in his argument surrounding the root of the wars, although it is shortly after this discussion of the economics of war that James acknowledges the presence of a blood-feud. James and others need to explore further this idea of economic necessity fueling the civil wars.

Patrick Geary, in an argument similar to that of James, blends the ideas that a territorial dispute initially sparked these civil wars, but that they were continued because of the requirements of feud. Unlike James, Geary traces the origins of these civil wars to a dispute over the division of Charibert’s kingdom in 567. Geary argues that:

[Chilperic] spent much of his reign fighting his brother, the Austrasian Sigebert, and the latter’s widow, Brunhild, over the extent of his kingdom. This war, ostensibly over conflicting claims to the inheritance of their deceased brother Charibert, was simultaneously a bitter feud initiated by Chilperic’s wife Fredegund and her arch rival Brunhild.⁹⁹

Again, it appears that Geary is correct about the origins of the conflict centering on a partition, though in reality the dispute dates further back to the partition of Chlothar I’s kingdom in 561. However, Geary is right to argue that, after Charibert’s death, Sigibert and Chilperic were often

⁹⁷ James, 169.

⁹⁸ James, 172.

⁹⁹ Patrick Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 120.

waging war with each other over ownership of certain cities. Geary also argues that this territorial dispute was a feud contrived by Fredegund and Brunhild. What Geary, and others, does not address is why Fredegund is linked to this feud. Gregory of Tours does not assign Galswinth's death to the actions of Fredegund, but rather to Chilperic. Although Gregory recounts numerous assassination attempts by Fredegund against Brunhild, there is never any indication that these attempts were related to a feud. For example, after Chilperic's assassination, Fredegund was sent to the manor of Rueil by Guntram. Gregory states that "she was very depressed, because much of her power had been brought to an end, and yet considered herself a better woman than Brunhild. In secret she sent a cleric of her household who was to gain Brunhild's confidence by trickery and then assassinate her."¹⁰⁰ Fredegund's assassination attempt was not done seeking vengeance or in continuation of a blood-feud, rather it appears she did this out of personal dislike of Brunhild.

Brunhild did have legitimate cause to seek revenge. Geary argues that Brunhild's sense of family forced her to seek vengeance for her sister and that "the result was a three generation feud that wrecked the Merovingian family and ended only after the deaths of ten kings and the execution of Brunhild by Chilperic's son Chlothar in 613."¹⁰¹ Since this feud lasted three generations, it would include Brunhild's husband, sons and grandchildren. What Geary does not explain is whether Sigibert was necessarily obligated to prosecute a feud. His wife was the person wronged, and while it might appear that as her husband he would be obligated to avenge her, perhaps this was not the case. Returning to the account of Clotild seeking revenge for her murdered family, Clotild never demanded that Clovis help her prosecute this feud. It was only after Clovis's death that Clotild sought revenge for her injury. Clovis was a very successful

¹⁰⁰ Gregory, *History*, VII.20.

¹⁰¹ Geary, 80, 121.

general and expanded Frankish territory greatly, so it appears odd that Clotild would not ask her husband, who was aware of what had happened to his wife, to wage war against those responsible for her parents' murder. In addition, the parents of Theuderic I's wife were murdered by his brother Chlodomer, yet he never sought vengeance for this act, and instead later joined Chlodomer on campaign against the Burgundians. Perhaps Sigibert did wage war with Chilperic to avenge his sister-in-law's murder. However, no source ever explicitly attributes the cause of the wars of these periods to a feud.

At first it would appear that there is relative consensus concerning the presence of a blood-feud during these civil wars. Scholars such as James, Geary, and Collins have included alternative causes for these wars in their works, but neither attempted to deny the impact of feud. However, Ian Wood is one of the primary opponents of the presence of blood-feud in these civil wars. He argues that, although there is clearly animosity between Brunhild and Fredegund, there is no evidence found in Gregory, or any of his contemporaries, that supports the idea of a blood-feud. He goes on to say that:

Nor, indeed, is there any indication that Fredegund was involved in Galswinth's murder, which is laid entirely at Chilperic's door. Equally, Fredegund's apparent involvement in the murder of Sigibert is not described by Gregory as instigating a feud . . . any murders which were committed by these queens were part of the politics of survival, not of the blood-feud.¹⁰²

So, according to Wood, there is no evidence for feud, at least from the early years of the wars. In an article dealing with the debate over blood-feud, Wood states that, although there is no evidence for a feud in sixth-century sources, "it becomes an explicit reading in the eighth century, by which time the relations between the two queens may have been subjected to a certain amount

¹⁰² Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 127.

of imaginative recasting.”¹⁰³ So, while Wallace-Hadrill and others are wrong in their assessment that Francia was enmeshed in a feud, it is because their assumptions were based on later, less trustworthy narrative sources.

Wood, however, might have overlooked a passage in Gregory which hints at possible feud. After Gregory’s recitation of the entire Treaty of Andelot, Guntram turns to Bishop Felix and asked if the rumor was true that he was able to patch up the relationship between Brunhild and Fredegund. Felix said this was not true and Gregory answered ““you may know for certain that the hatred, which has existed between them for some time, is not withering but still sprouting.”¹⁰⁴ This statement by Gregory to Guntram reveals that, at least in Gregory’s estimation, Brunhild and Fredegund had hated each other for a long time and that this hatred was still growing. Gregory does not say why the two hated each other, especially in the case of Fredegund because Brunhild had not committed any wrong against her, at least that Gregory reveals. Fredegar blamed Brunhild for Chilperic’s assassination, and if true this would be reason for hatred. However, this account comes from the third book of Fredegar’s *Chronicle*, which in general is a condensed version of Gregory’s *History*. There are a few noticeable additions and alterations to Gregory’s *History* by Fredegar, and the account of Chilperic’s assassination is one of them. Since Fredegar’s account was written after Brunhild’s execution, and was intended for a Neustrian audience, assignation of Chilperic’s murder to Brunhild might simply be a symptom of bias. Fredegund’s hatred of Brunhild probably had more to do with her son’s small kingdom, much of which was appropriated by Guntram, with some also taken by Childebert II. In any event, this account by Gregory provides evidence that the hatred between these two queens had

¹⁰³ Ian Wood, “The Bloodfeud of the Franks: a historiographical legend?” *Early Medieval Europe* 14, no. 4 (2006), 491.

¹⁰⁴ Greg. Hist., IX.20: “*Nam certe scias, quia odium, quod inter illas olim statum est, adhuc pollulat, non arescit.*”

existed for a long time, and perhaps this is sixth-century evidence of a feud which Wood overlooked.

Wood is not the only scholar who rejects the idea of Galswinth's murder sparking a feud. Roger Collins argues that "I am by no means convinced that the conflict between rival branches of the Merovingian dynasty that resulted from Chilperic's murder of his Visigothic wife Galswinth was motivated by the requirements of blood-feud: it is not clear that the obligations of feud necessitated the avenging of the blood of a sister-in-law upon a brother."¹⁰⁵ Collins's argument appears to coincide with the evidence, because while Sigibert occasionally initiated conflict with his brother, ultimately Chilperic was more often the aggressor. It is also not clear whether or not Sigibert would be required to avenge a wrong done to his wife's family. Theuderic I did not seek vengeance on his brother Chlodomer for the murder of his wife's parents, and Clovis did not avenge the murder of Clotild's family. That is not to say that such a scenario is impossible. However, there does not appear to be any evidence to support the argument that a husband was obligated by honor to avenge wrong's done to his wife's family.

In trying to reevaluate the notion of feud dating back to Wallace-Hadrill, Wood and Collins argued against the presence of a blood-feud, but neither attempted to redefine Wallace-Hadrill's definition of feud. However, Guy Halsall has attempted to provide a more precise definition. He argues that there are two levels of violence in early medieval society, tactical and strategic. He states that

Tactical violence aims directly at the resolution of a dispute . . . Strategic violence is different. In many instances one part in a dispute does not have the power to attempt to achieve its aims by open, tactical violence against its opponents . . . in such cases, 'strategic' violence ensues . . . Now, in a 'true' feud, each act of violence is strategic. It draws attention to the dispute, rather than solving it itself.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Collins, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Guy Halsall, "Reflections on Early Medieval Violence: The example of the 'Blood Feud,'" *Memoria y Civilización* 2 (1999), 11.

According to Halsall's definition, the conflict which occurs within the Merovingian dynasty does not conform to his idea of a feud. For example, if Brunhild was behind the assassination of Chilperic, and she was murdering him to avenge the death of her husband or sister, it does not qualify as a 'true' feud because her intention was not to draw attention to the wrong done to her but rather try to solve it through eliminating the wrongdoer. In the year following Chilperic's death, when Fredegund was removed to a manor, she had attempted to assassinate Brunhild. However, Gregory did not state that this attempt was done to avenge Chilperic's murder, but rather Fredegund simply hated Brunhild and wanted her dead.¹⁰⁷ It appears that Fredegund genuinely disliked Brunhild, but that does not mean there was a blood-feud. Following either Wallace-Hadrill's or Halsall's definition, a feud required some kind of wrong which required resolution. Fredegund's assassination attempt was not meant to draw attention to a wrong done or to avenge a wrong.

So, if Wood and others are right, and there was no blood-feud in the Merovingian kingdoms, what then caused these civil wars? As James and Geary have argued, there was much conflict surrounding the partitions of 561 and 567.¹⁰⁸ Although neither James nor Geary argued that these partitions were the main cause of these civil wars, Wood and Collins do. They trace the roots of these civil wars to the partition of 561 when Chilperic was allotted the smallest kingdom. It was his weak position, being surrounded on all sides by his brothers, which drove Chilperic to war. As Wood and others have argued, war was a necessary evil for Merovingian kings. Without war, there was no way to make the funds needed to support nobles and an army.

¹⁰⁷ Gregory, *History*, VII.20.

¹⁰⁸ Geary, 120 and James, 169.

So it was economic pressure which drove Chilperic to attack his brothers, because, if he did not find an outlet of war for his men, they might turn against him.¹⁰⁹

One area which is largely absent in the works of the previously mentioned scholars, and which deserves more attention, is the impact of bishops and nobility on these civil wars. These two groups have largely been ignored by modern scholars and there is no scholarly work designed to examine their impact on the civil wars of this period. In addition to arguing against the idea of a feud, this thesis will prove that, whether by acting militarily without the express consent of their kings, or by propping up a rival claimant to the throne, these leading men could have a profound effect on politics in Merovingian Gaul.

This thesis will reveal that scholars have placed far too much emphasis on the impact of feud. It is clear that, if there was a blood-feud, it was merely a secondary cause of war, and not the primary factor. It appears far more likely that Wood, Collins and Halsall are correct in their argument against the existence of feud. However, that does not mean that Brunhild and Fredegund played no part in these civil wars. Both proved influential in the later period of these wars, but it does not appear that one can define the conflict between them as a feud. In addition, it appears that Wood, James and Geary are correct in tracing the roots of these civil wars to the partitions of 561 and 567. Overall then, this study will not only show the influence of Brunhild and Fredegund on these wars, but also demonstrate that the nobility, bishops, and kings had an equally important impact in these wars.

¹⁰⁹ Collins, 14 and Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 92-3.

CHAPTER ONE: *SENIORES ET SACERDOTES*: THE IMPACT OF ‘LEADING MEN’

Before introducing and examining the major actors during this period, namely the kings and queens, it is important to first look at a segment of people largely ignored during most studies of these civil wars, bishops and nobles. Most bishops came from wealthy aristocratic backgrounds, and many had ties to Gallo-Roman lineage. Simon Coates states that “aristocratic lineage and wealth remained important elements in a bishop's background as is evident from Venantius’ epitaphs. Of the ten episcopal epitaphs composed by Venantius, only one, that for Chalactericus of Chartres, is not concerned with a Gallo-Roman, and eight allude to the senatorial nobility.”¹¹⁰ So, while it was not necessarily a requirement for a bishop to have a distinguished family, it appears to have been preferred, and, according to Patrick Geary, there was a good reason for this preference. In many cases, former dukes, patricians and counts would be raised to bishoprics in their later careers. Geary states that “the administrative experience acquired by such bishops no doubt prepared them well for the administration of their sees, and their political power made possible their frequent activities as the protectors of their communities against royal demands.”¹¹¹ Their experience made them prime episcopal candidates to the Merovingian royalty who were responsible for their elevation to the episcopacy and relied on these bishops’ political connections and support in exchange for patronage.¹¹² However, as Geary points out, there were drawbacks, especially when the bishops were forced to choose between their flock and their king.

¹¹⁰ Simon Coates, “Venantius Fortunatus and the Image of Episcopal Authority in Late Antique and Early Merovingian Gaul,” *English Historical Review* (November, 2000), 1116.

¹¹¹ Geary, 132.

¹¹² Halsall, 56. In addition to their political support, the bishops were also relied upon to enforce moral norms and keep the populace happy. Also, for examples of bishops being chosen by kings in Gregory’s *History*, see: III.17, 23, IV.7.

Many bishops, like Gregory of Tours, were not in favor of taxes levied against their bishoprics, often forcing a bishop into conflict with the king. A council of bishops would be called and punishment, if any, assessed. Unfortunately for many kings, the defendant's fellow bishops would do everything in their power to exculpate their colleague, an example being the trial of the Bishop Egidius. In Gregory's account of Egidius's trial, it becomes clear through physical evidence and testimony that Egidius was guilty of the charges Guntram brought against him. Even so, Gregory says that the bishops asked for three days to consider the case, in which time perhaps "Egidius might discover some manner to repent, through which he could excuse himself from those crimes which had been brought against him."¹¹³ After Egidius confessed, his fellow bishops realized there would be no protecting one of their brothers from punishment, though they did manage to prevent him from being executed. Even in the case of overwhelming evidence, bishops revered each other and would often go out of their way to try to protect their fellow bishops, which led to numerous headaches for the Merovingian kings.

A final point to consider about Merovingian bishops is that, because they were largely drawn from the nobility, some of these bishops were not afraid to involve themselves in war. The two, brothers Salonius and Sagittarius, were both bishops who accompanied Mummolus on a campaign against the Lombards. Gregory states that "Salonius and Sagittarius, brothers and bishops, had been in this battle. They were not defended by the heavenly cross, but armed with worldly helm and coats of mail, and what is worse, they are reported to have killed many people with their own hands."¹¹⁴ Although most bishops did not adorn themselves with armor and fight invading armies, this example reinforces the fact that Merovingian bishops were not simple holy

¹¹³ Greg. Hist., X.19: "*ut forsitan resipiscens Egidius ullum modum repperire possit, per quem se ab his noxis, que aei obiciebantur, excussare valerit.*"

¹¹⁴ Ibid., IV.42: "*Fueruntque in hoc proelio Salonius et Sagittarius fratres atque episcopi, qui non cruci caelestium, se galea ac lorica saecularia armati, multos minibus propriis, quod peius est, interfecisse referuntur.*"

men. In addition, not all were lackeys who submitted to the demands of their kings. For example, Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen was discovered “giving gifts to people for Chilperic’s disadvantage.”¹¹⁵ These bishops, such as Praetextatus, were often from aristocratic backgrounds and used their influence from not only their episcopal see, but their family ties, in order to further their own personal goals, protect their flock, and enmesh themselves deeply in the politics of their day.¹¹⁶

During the later Merovingian period, growth in the power of the landed aristocracy eventually led to the emergence of the Carolingian dynasty in France. In the period covered by this thesis, the Merovingian dynasty was still strong, even after its numerous civil wars. Only after the overthrow of Brunhild and the Austrasian line of the Merovingian royals did the nobility come to the fore. However, even during the early period of these wars, nobles were still able to influence politics in Merovingian Gaul. These nobles could be employed as judges in local areas, or, along with bishops, be used as ambassadors to foreign countries. However, their real importance resided with the military.¹¹⁷ Archibald Lewis argues that “all of our evidence indicates that the principal duties carried out by patricians, rectors, and dukes were of a military character and that these officials led the military forces of Merovingian monarchs, either as overall military commanders, or as subordinate ones commanding contingents which were often raised by counts.”¹¹⁸ Their position as military leaders caused the rise in prominence of many men, one of the most recognizable names being Mummolus, who rose to the rank of *dux* under Guntram because of his military prowess. He would later use his newfound influence and

¹¹⁵ Ibid., V.18: “*contra utilitatem suam populis munera daret . . .*”

¹¹⁶ Wood, “Secret Histories,” 254.

¹¹⁷ Lewis, 391.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 390.

authority to help prop up a rival claimant to the Merovingian throne in the Gundovald affair.¹¹⁹

This revolt reveals that, even though nobles were willing to attempt to overthrow a reigning king, they still needed someone who could at least claim ties to royal blood.¹²⁰ So, while the nobility was by no means incapable of profoundly influencing politics, even starting a civil war by raising up a rival king, there were still limits to their powers which would not be completely thrown off for another two centuries.

The first example to consider of the role of bishops and nobles in the Merovingian civil wars occurred in 573. According to Gregory, one of Chilperic's sons, Clovis, was living in Bordeaux. While he was there, Gregory claims that "a certain Sigulf, from Sigibert's kingdom, set himself against Clovis. With Clovis having fled, Sigulf hunted him with horns and bugles just as hunting a stag."¹²¹ Clovis escaped to his father, but, in response to the attack on his son, Chilperic seized some of Sigibert's cities and once again the two brothers were at war. What is interesting about this event is that Gregory does not say Sigulf was instructed to attack, but rather implies that Sigulf simply acted on his own. If Gregory is correct, it appears that in this instance, the war which started between Sigibert and Chilperic was not caused by either of the kings, or even the queens, but rather by the rogue action of one of Sigibert's nobles.

There is a different account of this event, but it comes from the much later, and much less reliable *LHF*. The *LHF* recounts that:

Also, Clovis, the younger son of Chilperic, went off all the way to the city of Bordeaux. While he was residing there, disturbing no one, Sigulf, from the faction of King Sigibert, having been sent with an army, set against him. He, in flight, was hunted with horns and

¹¹⁹ Gregory, *History*, IV.42-5.

¹²⁰ Scherman, 201-2.

¹²¹ Greg. Hist., IV.47: "*Sigulfus quidam a parte Syiberti se super eum obiecit. Quem fugiente cum tubis et bucinis quasi labentem cervum fognas, insequibatur.*"

trumpets just as a fleeing deer was hunted. Scarcely slipping away to his father, he arrived at Paris.¹²²

So while Gregory claims that Sigulf simply attacked at random, the *LHF* instead relates Sigulf as “*missus cum exercitu*.” Knowing that Sigulf was a follower of Sigibert, it is not implausible that Sigibert was behind the action of one of his subordinates, especially considering that this was a sensitive military matter, one which could and did spark another war with his brother. However, this source has strong Neustrian bias, and it is perhaps not surprising that it relates the account differently than Gregory, placing the cause of the war on Sigibert.¹²³ While it is possible that Sigibert was responsible for the actions of Sigulf, I find it Gregory’s account more probable. Although Gregory had a favorable opinion of Brunhild, he was not afraid to criticize Sigibert, most notably when he refused to take Bishop Germanus’s advice and died because of it.¹²⁴ If it was common knowledge that Sigibert was behind Sigulf’s actions, I have little doubt that Gregory would have included such information in his text, even if it was simply in the form of “some people say,” which Gregory was prone to do when including rumors he had heard. Overall then, it appears that, in this instance, Sigulf was to blame for the outbreak of a civil war following his attack on Clovis. This example shows the nobility’s ability to provoke and prolong civil conflict between the royal families in Francia.

In 576, Chilperic had already heard the bishop of Rouen, Praetextatus, was bribing people to act against his interests, but, perhaps more importantly, the bishop had also presided over the

¹²² LHF, 32. “*Chlodoveus quoque, inior filius Chilperici, abiit usque Burdigalem urbem. Cum illie, nullo inquietante, resederet, Sigulfus quidam a parte Sighiberti regis missus cum exercitu, se super eum obiecit. Quem fugientem eum tubis et bucinis quasi fugientem cervum insequabatur; qui vix ad partem labens, Parisius pervenit.*”

¹²³ Bernard Bachrach, “Introduction,” in *Liber Historiae Francorum* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1973), 10: Bachrach states that “scholars agree that our author has a clear Neustrian bias. Thus he concentrates on Neustrian monarchs, clerics, and politics while giving meager attention to what was happening in Austrasia, Burgundy and Aquitaine. He refers to Neustria as Francia and he calls its inhabitants Franks rather than Neustrians. The inhabitants of Austrasia, however, a people who in an ethnic sense may well merit being called Franks, are described as either Austrasians or Ripuarians.”

¹²⁴ Gregory, *History*, IV.51.

marriage of Brunhild and Merovech, Chilperic's son. In 576, Chilperic sent his son Merovech to Poitiers, but instead Merovech marched on Tours. There, with the help of Bishop Praetextatus, Merovech married Brunhild. Chilperic responded by raising an army and marching to Rouen. According to Gregory, not long after, troops gathered in Champagne and attacked Soissons forcing Fredegund and Clovis, Chilperic's son by Audovera, to flee. Chilperic quickly marched and routed this army, but Gregory states that "after these things were done, Chilperic began to have suspicions against his son Merovech, because of his marriage to Brunhild, saying that these battles have arisen from his treachery."¹²⁵ Although a war did not erupt between the two, Chilperic did have Merovech tonsured and sent to a monastery.¹²⁶

Merovech escaped and eventually committed suicide, but Bishop Praetextatus was put on trial after being found in the possession of property belonging to Brunhild.¹²⁷ During the trial, Chilperic demanded to know why Praetextatus turned Merovech into his enemy by marrying him to Brunhild. He went on to say that "moreover, you have made a son an enemy to his father, you seduced the common people with bribes, so that no one should preserve their customary faith with me, and you wanted to give my kingdom into another's hands."¹²⁸ According to Chilperic, Praetextatus was attempting to spark a civil war between father and son, with the goal that Merovech become king. However, there are no definitive answers as to why this change in king was needed.

During Praetextatus's trial, after being promised mercy if he confessed, Gregory recounts that Praetextatus prostrated himself before the king saying "I am an abominable murderer; I

¹²⁵ Greg. Hist., V.3: "*Quae postquam acta sunt, rex propter coniugationem Brunechildis suspectum habere coepit Merovechum, filium suum, dicens, haec proelia eius nequitia surrexisse.*"

¹²⁶ Gregory, *History*, V.14.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, V.18.

¹²⁸ Greg. Hist., V.18: "*Hostem autem filio patri fecisti, seduxisti pecuniam plebem, ut nullus tecum fidem habitam custodiret, voluistique regnum meum in manu alterius tradere.*"

wanted to kill you and to raise your son onto your throne.”¹²⁹ Unfortunately, Gregory did not reveal if he believed Praetextatus was guilty of the crimes charged against him. What is left then is a confession that in all likelihood was given in an attempt to avoid dire punishment. However, if Praetextatus’ confession was truthful, it displays how enmeshed in politics many Merovingian bishops were. Praetextatus, like the bishops involved in Gundovald’s revolt, tried to achieve regime change through a civil war. Although his confession might simply have been to save his life, it is unlikely Chilperic would have charges brought if there were no evidence to support his case. When he was arrested, Praetextatus had possessions which were entrusted to him by Queen Brunhild. Chilperic added all the evidence together, and assumed there was a conspiracy aimed at his overthrow. This whole revolt not only shows how politically involved bishops were, but that they were sometimes actively promoting civil war.

One of the most important events during this period was the Gundovald revolt of 582-5. In what turned out to be a very brief war, the nobles and bishops were largely responsible for causing a civil war in Francia by introducing a supposed son of Chlothar I named Gundovald. According to Ian Wood, “Gundovald’s bid for the throne was based on his claim to Merovingian blood...[but] what made the bid viable were two related factors: treasure and aristocratic support.”¹³⁰ So even if Gundovald was legitimately an heir of Chlothar I, in reality it was much more important that he had ample treasure and strong support among the local nobles. Ultimately, the same nobles who were integral in supporting Gundovald’s revolt would betray him in an attempt to spare their lives.

Gundovald’s attempt to claim a portion of Chlothar I’s former kingdom began in 582-583 when Gundovald arrived from Constantinople and landed at Marseilles. Gregory writes that

¹²⁹ Ibid.: “*Ego sum homicida nefandus, ego te interficere volui et filio tuo in solio tuo eregere.*”

¹³⁰ Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 95.

Gundovald was raised diligently and even wore his hair long “as is the custom of Frankish kings.”¹³¹ Gregory showed that Gundovald, at least in the beginning, was raised as if he were royalty, namely being allowed to grow his hair long and being taught to read and write. While Gundovald was still a young child, his mother presented him to King Childebert I, one of Chlothar I’s brothers, who, since he was childless, took Gundovald as his own son. Chlothar I learned of this and asked that the boy be returned to him. Chlothar promptly viewed him, claimed that Gundovald was not one of his sons and had Gundovald’s hair shorn. Gundovald then disappeared for a while before showing up at the court of King Charibert, one of Chlothar I’s children, who was also childless. Again, Gundovald was summoned, judged and had his hair cut, only this time it was by Sigibert, Charibert’s brother. Gundovald fled to Italy where he befriended the Exarch Narses and then moved to Constantinople until Guntram Boso arrived to call him back to Francia.¹³²

Gregory at first leaves the man responsible for bringing Gundovald to Gaul nameless, but later reveals it was Guntram Boso, who was a duke in Childebert II’s kingdom. After landing in Marseilles, Gundovald “was received by Bishop Theodore [of Marseilles]. Also, having received horses from Theodore, he joined Duke Mummolus, who was then in the city of Avignon, just as I said above.”¹³³ So, from the beginning, Gundovald’s return to Gaul was brought about by a section of nobility, which at least included men from Childebert’s kingdom, Guntram Boso, and a bishop and duke from Guntram’s kingdom. Unfortunately for Gundovald, Guntram Boso quickly betrayed him and arrested Theodore:

Charging that he had introduced a foreigner into Gaul because he wanted to subject the kingdom of the Franks to imperial authority. But this bishop, as some say, brought forth a

¹³¹ Greg. Hist., VI.24: “*ut regum ipsorum mos est.*”

¹³² Gregory, *History*, VI.24, VII.36.

¹³³ Greg. Hist., VI.24: “*A Theodoro episcopo susceptus est. Ab eodem etiam acceptis aequitibus, Mummulo duce coniunctus est. Erat autem tunc Mummolus in civitate Avennica, sicut supra diximus.*”

letter signed by the hand of the greater men of Childebert's kingdom, saying 'I have done nothing on my own except those things which were ordered of me by our lords and nobles.'¹³⁴

In this scandal, Bishop Epiphanius of Fréjus was also implicated and Guntram kept both bishops in custody, where Epiphanius died. Gundovald withdrew to an island in the Mediterranean with the rest of his treasure and stayed there until after Chilperic's assassination in 584.

What is most important to glean from this first attempt by Gundovald is the extent of his support among nobles in the Merovingian Kingdoms. While Guntram Boso quickly betrayed him, Gundovald still had the support of many others, most notably Duke Mummolus, who was once King Guntram's best general. Perhaps more important than Mummolus was what happened during the arrest of Bishop Theodore of Marseilles. He produced a letter which was signed by the leading men in Childebert II's kingdom.¹³⁵ Gregory does not elaborate on who these men were, but if Gregory's account of events is correct, it appears that there was a large faction of important nobles and bishops in both Childebert II and Guntram's kingdoms who were unhappy with their kings and were seeking an alternative. After the death of Chilperic in 584, Gregory also reveals that some nobles from his kingdom were complicit in the conspiracy.

After Chilperic was assassinated, Duke Desiderius, who was transporting Chilperic's daughter Rigunth to Spain for her wedding to Recared, King of the Visigoths, stole her treasures and "hastened to Mummolus, with whom he had entered into a pact two years earlier. Then, Mummolus was lingering within the walls of the city of Avignon with Gundovald."¹³⁶ According to Gregory, Desiderius, a leading duke in Chilperic's kingdom, had made a pact supporting

¹³⁴ Ibid.: "*Reputans eum, quor hominem extraneum intromississet in Galleis, voluisset Francorum regnum imperialibus per haec subdere ditionibus. At ille, ut aiunt, epistolam per manum maiorum Childeberthi regis subscriptam protulit, dicens: 'Nihil per me feci, nisi quae mihi a domnis nostris et senioribus imperata sunt.'*"

¹³⁵ Gregory, *History*, VI.24

¹³⁶ Ibid., VII.10: "*Ipse vero ad Mummolum, cumque foedus ante duos annos inierat, properavit. Morabatur tunc Mummolus infra murus Avennice urbis cum Gundovaldo . . .*"

Gundovald when he first arrived in Gaul. So, from the beginning it appears that Gundovald had support from leading members in all three reigning kings' realms. The conspirators were waiting for an opportunity to bring Gundovald back to the fore, and the murder of Chilperic gave them their opportunity. It seems likely that Chilperic's murder was orchestrated by leading men in his kingdom and his relatives' kingdoms in an effort to introduce a new king to Francia.

After the war with Gundovald was over, Guntram himself admitted that he believed the supporters of Gundovald were behind Chilperic's murder. At a council he called to chastise Bishop Bertram of Bordeaux for his role in the Gundovald revolt, Guntram says that "I know that, through the plot of those men, he had my brother Chilperic murdered."¹³⁷ Gregory argues that Chilperic himself was responsible for his own death due to his terrible deeds in life, but it was not surprising to see Gregory defending one of his fellow bishops, especially one who he knew had supported Gundovald. Why the nobles and bishops would go to these lengths, namely assassinating Chilperic and proclaiming Gundovald as king, is unknown, but according to Ian Wood "effectively Gregory indicates that a section of the aristocracy was dissatisfied with all three Merovingian Kings, including Childebert in 582."¹³⁸ Perhaps these nobles were tired of close to two decades of intermittent civil war and were looking for someone to rally around who would unite the kingdoms. Perhaps they simply thought Gundovald would be a useful puppet under whom they could gain new power. Regardless of their motives, the Gundovald affair is a prime example of both nobles and bishops proving their political importance by promoting a civil war within Francia.

¹³⁷ Ibid., VIII.5: "*Scio enim, quod horum causa germanum meum Chilpericum interfeci fecit.*"

¹³⁸ Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 97.

From the beginning, Gregory had predicted Gundovald's demise through various portents, including a comet and earthquake.¹³⁹ However, Gundovald did experience some military success, capturing Toulouse, Périgueux and he even took Bordeaux with the aid of Bishop Bertram, who also helped Gundovald appoint Faustianus as the Bishop of Dax.¹⁴⁰ Guntram called a meeting with Childebert II in order to prosecute this war and confront accusations that Childebert's men were involved in this conspiracy. Gregory states that Childebert II and Guntram together questioned two messengers who were captured by Guntram's forces. According to Gregory "they were firmly maintaining that this conspiracy, just as I said above, was known to all the leading men in the kingdom of Childebert."¹⁴¹ Once again it was alleged that leading men in Childebert II's kingdom were involved in this civil war. Guntram, who had a suspicious nature, did not reach the conclusion that Childebert II himself might have been involved. In fact, when Gundovald captured cities, Gregory states "he demanded an oath of allegiance to King Childebert from all the cities which had belonged to King Sigibert. The others, which had belonged either to Guntram or to Chilperic, had to swear an oath to Gundovald himself."¹⁴² Although Gregory never hints that Childebert II himself had any interaction with Gundovald, it is odd that Gundovald would only seek to capture for himself those cities which belonged to Chilperic and Guntram. As will be discussed below, Guntram often accused Queen Brunhild, Childebert II's mother, of being involved with Gundovald, and perhaps this is evidence to that

¹³⁹ Gregory, *History*, VII.11: "All this happened in the tenth month of the year . . . A great beacon traversed the heavens, lighting up the land far and wide some time before the day dawned. Rays of light shone in the sky, and in the north a column of fire was seen to hang from on high for a space of two hours, with an immense star perched on top of it. There was an earthquake in the district of Angers and many other portents appeared. In my opinion all this announced the coming death of Gundovald."

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, VII.26-28, 32.

¹⁴¹ Greg. Hist., VII.33: "*Adsebant etiam constanter, hanc causam, sicut iam supra diximus, omnibus senioribus in regno Childeberthi regis esse cognitam.*"

¹⁴² Gregory, *History*, VII.26.

effect. However, even though Guntram levies accusations against Childebert's mother, there was never a hint that he was involved with Gundovald's revolt.

Even faced with accusations that many nobles in Childebert II's kingdom were supporting Gundovald, Guntram made a profound gesture of support in his young nephew. Gregory states that Guntram placed a spear in Childebert II's hand and said "this is a sign that I have handed the whole of my realm over to you. Go now, and by this token take under your own rule all my cities, just as if they were yours . . . I exclude all others from the succession. It is you who are my heir and you must inherit my whole kingdom."¹⁴³ It was a dramatic act, one which helped illuminate the severity of the situation in which Guntram was embroiled. Guntram, who was suspicious of Brunhild's involvement with Gundovald, and had heard accusations against Childebert II's nobles, still chose to place support in his young nephew. He completely dismissed the accusations against his nephew, and joined forces to combat this new threat. After this conference, the tide quickly turned against Gundovald, and he was forced to flee to the fortress of Comminges in February of 585.¹⁴⁴

During the siege of Comminges, Gundovald reveals by what means he was convinced to leave his home in Constantinople and return to Francia. In his response to the berating by the besieging army, Gundovald states that Guntram Boso came to him and told him that "of our entire house none remained except the two Kings Childebert and Guntram, my brother and my brother's son...my nephew Childebert had no following. Guntram Boso told me all this in detail. "Come!" he said. "You are invited by all the leaders of King Childebert's realm, for not one has dared to speak against you."¹⁴⁵ One obvious problem with Gundovald's speech is that he stated Chilperic was dead when Guntram Boso came to invite him back to Gaul. This was false,

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Gregory, *History*, VII.35.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., VII.36.

because, as was already mentioned, Gundovald had arrived in Gaul in 582, two years before Chilperic was assassinated. Thus it is hard to make too strong a statement based on his speech as evidence.

If Gundovald was being honest, it seems that the reason for Guntram Boso's expedition to Constantinople was a lack of faith in Childebert II as king. According to Boso, Childebert II had lost the support of the leading men of his kingdom and these men were now willing to support Gundovald. Once again the importance of having substantial aristocratic support is evident. Gundovald continued his speech and revealed his connections with the Merovingian royal family. He asked that he be allowed to present himself to King Guntram, but "if you refuse to do this, let me return to the place from which I set out. I will go willingly and I will do harm to no man. Ask Radegund of Poitiers and Ingitruide of Tours, and you will find that what I say is true."¹⁴⁶ Gundovald, in an attempt to appeal to the besieging army, argued that the only reason he had returned was because he thought the reigning kings were weak and did not have the support of their nobles. Since Guntram Boso had misled Gundovald, he was now willing to give up his claim and return to Constantinople. More importantly, he references Radegund and Ingitruide. The former was a wife of Chlothar I who became a nun and the latter was a relative of Ingund and Aregund, also Chlothar's wives. These were two very influential monastic women, ones who had ties to the Merovingian royal family, and, if Gundovald was truthful, they would be able to corroborate his story.

Unfortunately, these women were never questioned about the Gundovald revolt, or at least not that Gregory reveals, and the only other primary source that deals with this entire revolt is Fredegar's *Chronicle*. While Fredegar does mention this conflict, he merely recounts that "in November of this year, Gundovald with the aid of Mummolus and Desiderius presumed to

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

invade part of the kingdom of Guntram and destroy his cities . . . Gundovald retreated and was given refuge in the city of Comminges. Thereafter he died, having been thrown from a high cliff by Duke Boso.”¹⁴⁷ From this account, the support of Mummolus and Desiderius is reiterated, but Fredegar does not provide any new details for the Gundovald affair, except when it comes to how Gundovald was killed. Whereas Fredegar recounts that Gundovald was thrown from a wall, Gregory relates that Bishop Sagittarius, Dukes Mummolus and Bladast, and Count Waddo decided to betray Gundovald in order to save their lives.¹⁴⁸ Guntram’s forces executed Gundovald, and Mummolus and Sagittarius were killed in the immediate aftermath of the siege.¹⁴⁹

Thus the siege was finished and, the following morning, after Gundovald and the other conspirators had been killed, Gregory states that:

The gates were flung open and the army was allowed in. All the common people were put to the sword, and all the priests of the Lord God, with those who served them, were murdered where they stood at the church altars. When they had killed every living soul . . . the troops burned the whole city, with all the churches and every single building, leaving there nothing but the bare earth.¹⁵⁰

Guntram meant to make a statement here that he would not tolerate civil war and rebellion. This statement was intended not only for those of his landed aristocracy who might be thinking of betraying him, but for the bishops and clerics of his realm as well, evident by the complete destruction of the city without sparing even the churches.

¹⁴⁷ Fred. IV, 2: “*Hoc anno gundoaldus cum solation Mummolo et Desiderio mense Novembre partem regni Gunthramni presumit invader et civitates evertere . . . Gundoaldus terga vertens Conbanem civitatem latebram dedit. Exinde de rupe a Bosone duci praecipetatus interiit.*”

¹⁴⁸ According to Ian Wood, Gundovald’s support came from former Guntram followers Duke Mummolus and Bishop Sagittarius. He also had the support of Duke Desiderius, Duke Bladast, Count Waddo, Bishop Bertram of Bordeaux, and unnamed abbot of Cahors who were former followers of the now deceased Chilperic. Wood, “Secret Histories,” 265. This Sagittarius is the same who was earlier fighting alongside his brother Salenius in Mummolus’s campaign against the Lombards. He was also involved in fighting during the siege of Comminges. Gregory states that “Bishop Sagittarius walked round and round the ramparts fully armed, and with his own hand kept tossing rocks on to the heads of the besiegers,” VII. 37.

¹⁴⁹ Gregory, *History*, VII.38.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

With the death of Gundovald ended the nobility's second attempt to bring about change on the throne through a civil war. While this struggle barely lasted two years, it is an important statement about the power that the nobility had to affect politics in the Merovingian Kingdoms. As appears clear in this instance, and will be shown again with their overthrow of Brunhild, the nobility and bishops of the Merovingian kingdoms were quite capable of influencing events in their realms, even to the point of sparking a civil war between royal relatives. These events, and others brought about by the aristocracy and bishops, are evidence that this period cannot simply be boiled down to a feud between two rival queens or families.

In 587, Duke Rauching, who was one of Childebert II's leading men, was involved in a conspiracy to assassinate the king.¹⁵¹ According to Gregory, Rauching, along with his fellow Dukes Ursio and Berthefried, conspired with nobles in Chlothar II's kingdom. Gregory narrates that Rauching pretended to be seeking peace between the two kings in order to have a quieter border:

But their real plan was to assassinate King Childebert. Rauching would then be given command of Champagne, with control of Theudebert, Childebert's eldest son, while Ursio and Berthefried would seize the King's younger son, called Theuderic, who had been born only recently, take command of the rest of the kingdom, and see that King Guntram did not intervene.¹⁵²

Once again the nobility of two kingdoms are found conspiring together in order to attempt an overthrow of a reigning king. However, they did not desire to install themselves upon the throne, but rather wanted to rule through Childebert II's young children. Unfortunately, Gregory does not elaborate on the role which Chlothar II's nobles were to play, but perhaps they were simply to play along with this ploy for peace and keep Chlothar from invading while Rauching and his

¹⁵¹ There are other accounts of nobles and bishops rebelling against the Merovingian Kings, but this is the last one which took place during the time period covered by this thesis, and the last one which involved a conspiracy between the nobles of multiple kingdoms.

¹⁵² Gregory, *History*, IX.9.

men accomplished their coup. What differs between this attempted coup and that of the Gundovald affair is that these nobles were not trying to incite a war. The nobility wanted to assassinate Childebert II rather than attempt his overthrow by involving Guntram or Chlothar II, which would enmesh Austrasia in yet another civil war. Ursio and Berthefried's task was to keep Guntram from intervening in their affairs. Eventually Childebert II learned of this betrayal, Rauching was executed, and Ursio and Berthefried, who had continued with their side of the plan thinking Rauching had succeeded, were later killed by Childebert's men.¹⁵³

During the trial of Bishop Egidius of Rheims, charges were brought by King Guntram against this bishop for his role in an attempt to assassinate Childebert II and inciting civil war between Guntram and Chilperic. In 591, both Guntram and Childebert took part in this trial as judges and, during the trial, Childebert states that "it was you, Egidius, who set my uncles against each other and stirred up civil war between them," . . . "Many men died in this war, and their souls, I imagine, are only waiting for the moment when God will sit in judgment on you."¹⁵⁴ According to Gregory's account of the trial, Egidius was accused, and later found guilty of inciting Childebert II and Chilperic against Guntram, which led to a civil war causing numerous deaths. In this trial there was also documentary evidence, namely in the forms of the agreements which Egidius was accused of helping to author. Gregory states that "Egidius was in no position to say that this was not true, for the papers concerned had been discovered in one of King Chilperic's dispatch-cases. They had passed into Childebert II's possession when Chilperic died."¹⁵⁵ So, in the case of Egidius, there was overwhelming evidence, both in the form of accusations and physical proof, that a bishop was capable and guilty of inciting a civil war within the Merovingian dynasty.

¹⁵³ Ibid., IX.12.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., X.19.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

The overthrow and execution of Brunhild in 613 is the most famous event revealing the power of aristocracy to promote civil war. The war, which ultimately led to the consolidation of Gaul under the Neustrian dynasty, was brought about after the death of Brunhild's grandson Theuderic II by dysentery. Brunhild attempted to proclaim one of Theuderic II's sons, Sigibert II, as the new king. However, the aristocracy invited Chlothar II to take over Austrasia and Burgundy. Chlothar II had Brunhild executed and absorbed Austrasia and Burgundy, unifying the Frankish kingdoms under one king for the first time since Chlothar I.

The first question to answer, is why the nobility wanted to remove Brunhild and her young great grandson from power? Patrick Geary argues that Theudebert I, one of Clovis I's heirs, had attempted to establish a Gallo-Roman tax system in his Germanic territory. This form of taxation was not popular among the nobility, and Geary states that "Brunhild, the Visigothic wife of his successor Sigibert I, attempted to continue this Romanization, with the result that an increasing rift developed between the aristocracy and the monarchy, which resulted in a long and bloody series of wars."¹⁵⁶ Geary does not specify which wars he is referring to, and while there were not many wars between noble and king during the period covered by this thesis, conflict between royal and noble did occur often in the later seventh and early eighth centuries. However, Geary is probably including the famous war in 613 where the aristocrats from both Austrasia and Burgundy played a pivotal role in Chlothar's victory. However, Geary also argues that the real cause of conflict was "conceived in personal terms and carried out as family feuds."¹⁵⁷ Although Geary still places the most emphasis on the role of feud in provoking these civil wars, unlike many others, he does offer alternate causes.

¹⁵⁶ Geary, 120. Katharine Scherman also argues this in her book, *The Birth of France: Warriors Bishops and Long Haired Kings*, 187.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

In addition to disagreement over the introduction of tax policies, the nobility were probably experiencing some war weariness after being thrown into another conflict between two royal brothers, Theuderic II and Theudebert II, both of whom were Brunhild's grandchildren. According to Fredegar, "truly, the notables of Burgundy, as many bishops as other lords, fearing Brunhild and holding anger against her, entered into Warnachar's plan, plotting so that not one of the sons of Theuderic would escape, but that they destroy them all with Brunhild and give the kingdom to Chlothar."¹⁵⁸ Warnachar had originally supported Brunhild's plan to elevate Sigibert II to the throne, but later learned that she was planning to have him assassinated. So, in turn, he convinced the men he had organized to support Brunhild to desert her and join him in inviting Chlothar II to take over the kingdom. It appears then that Brunhild had lost all of the support of the leading men in her kingdom, nobles and bishops, and, as has been shown, these men were important for maintaining control in one's kingdom.

This hatred from the aristocracy did not appear overnight. Although Gregory presented a largely positive account of Brunhild, one can find evidence in his narrative of her poor standing among the nobles of Childebert II's realm. According to Gregory, Duke Lupus of Champagne was attacked by Ursio and Berthefried; Brunhild came to Lupus's defense. Lupus was her supporter, and so Brunhild tried to convince the aggressors to withdraw. In response, Ursio said "it should have been sufficient for you to have held royal power under your husband. However, now your son is reigning, and his kingdom is not kept safe by you, but by our protection."¹⁵⁹ Although Brunhild accomplished her task, and these nobles made peace with each other, it is clear through their language that they resented her role in politics. They were unhappy with the

¹⁵⁸ Fred. IV, 41: "*Burgundae faronis vero tam episcopi quam ceteri leudes timentis Brunehildem et odium in eam habentes, Warnachario consilium inientes, tractabant ut neque unus ex filiis Theudericus evaderet sed eos totus oppressus Brunehilde delirent et regnum Chlothariae expetirent.*"

¹⁵⁹ Greg. Hist., VI.4: "*Sufficiat tibi sub viro tenuisse regnum; nunc autem filius tuus regnat, regnumque eius non tua, sed nostra tuitione salvatur.*"

authority she held when Sigibert was alive, though Gregory does not reveal much about Brunhild until after Sigibert's death. However, now that Sigibert was dead, the leading men in her realm were trying to take control over policy in Austrasia by their *tuitio* over Childebert II. It is clear that, although nobles wanted as much power as they could grasp, there was still a need of a Merovingian king around whom to gather.

Returning to the downfall of Brunhild, the *LHF*, similar to Fredegar's account, states that the nobles and bishops joined together and invited Chlothar II to come and rule them. The *Liber Historiae Francorum* states that:

With these kings having passed away, the Burgundians and Austrasians made peace with the rest of the Franks and elevated King Chlothar to the monarchy in all three kingdoms. And so King Chlothar, with his army having been assembled, directed it into Burgundy and Brunhild. He was pretending as if to accept her alliance and asked that she come to him, for the purpose of peace.¹⁶⁰

When she arrived, the army all at once chanted that death was fitting this evil woman. While the *LHF* does not specify whether it was the nobles or bishops who made peace with Chlothar II and invited him to overthrow Brunhild and Sigibert II, it can be inferred that, if Chlothar II were to make peace with anyone outside of the royal family, it must have been with leading men in these kingdoms, those who controlled the armies.

In summing up Brunhild's overthrow and execution, it is important to stress that this was a pivotal event in the Merovingian history. The two founders of the Arnulfing dynasty were both proponents of inviting Chlothar II to take over Austrasia and Burgundy, and so many Carolingian scholars use this event when discussing the rise in power of the mayors of the palace. Eventually, in the eighth century, the true power of the Merovingian kingdoms resided with the mayors, but for the purpose of this thesis, it is more important to notice that once again a civil

¹⁶⁰ LHF, 40: "*His regibus mortuis, Burgundiones et Austrasii, cum reliquis Franci pace facta, Chlotharium regem in totis tribus regnis in monarchiam elevaverunt. Rex namque Chlotharius, commoto exercitus, in Burgundiam dirigit, Brunchilde, quasi ad coniugium accipere fingeret, ad se venire rogavit, tamquam ad pacem.*"

war, albeit on a limited scale, was instigated by the actions of the nobility. While one could also argue that the real reason Chlothar II intervened and accepted the nobles' and bishops' invitation was to kill his mother's lifelong rival, I contend that if feud played any role in the final chapter of these civil wars, it was a secondary one.

In 611, Theuderic II approached Chlothar II and made a deal with him. Chlothar would not intervene in Theuderic's war with his brother Theudebert II, and in return Chlothar would receive territory which Theudebert had earlier taken from him.¹⁶¹ A year later, during the war between Theudebert II and Theuderic II, Chlothar did not intervene, keeping his end of the treaty. It appears odd that, if Chlothar was longing to avenge himself upon his mother's rival that he would not strike at this opportune moment, or that he would have made any agreement to begin with. Instead it appears far more likely that the real reasons for Brunhild's downfall were the loss of support of the leading men in her kingdoms and the territorial ambitions of Chlothar II. He was similar to most Merovingian Kings in that he was constantly trying to expand his kingdom.

This chapter has shown that the many civil wars which plagued this period of Merovingian history can often find root in the plots of bishops and nobles. This fact helps to chip away at the common view of this period, which finds the root cause of all these civil wars in the scheming of Brunhild and Fredegund and the blood-feud between their families. While both of those elements might have had an influence on this period and its numerous civil wars, it appears that the weight which historians place on their actions should be tempered, and the role of the nobility and bishops given more prominence.

¹⁶¹ Fredegar, IV.37-8.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MEROVINGIAN KINGS AND THEIR POLICIES: THE CIVIL WARS 561-87

Just as the causes of the civil wars which plagued this period cannot be simply distilled into the rivalry between two queens or a feud between royal families, neither can the reasons why kings such as Chilperic went to war. In this chapter, the first period of the war, from the death of Chlothar I until the Treaty of Andelot, will be thoroughly examined in an attempt to show that, contrary to many scholars' common opinion, this period was not characterized by the machinations of queens or a deadly blood-feud. Instead the causes for the numerous civil wars which plagued this period can largely be associated with the Merovingian kings who reigned during it. Most of the wars sprouted out of disagreements over the partitions of the Merovingian kingdoms in 561 and 567, and that is where this investigation will first turn.

The relationship between a king and his military, both noble and not, is one of the reasons that these civil wars lasted three generations. According to Edward James, "a king could only prosper with the support and assistance of warriors, and these had to be rewarded, with land or with gold and other luxuries. Both types could most easily be won through warfare; frequent warfare may also have been necessary in order to satisfy those who had been brought up to regard it as their main pursuit."¹⁶² A top priority for a Merovingian king was finding a way to generate enough income, whether through loot or taxes, to keep his army happy. In general, there was much resistance by the church and bishops in regards to taxation, so the only real avenue open to kings was military raiding or conquest. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill states that "the need for gold and treasure drove the Frankish kings to venture after venture outside their own territories—notably to Spain and to Italy—and such seemed to their followers the correct way of replenishing

¹⁶² James, 169.

a royal treasure-hoard.”¹⁶³ During the reigns of Clovis I and his sons, there was an adequate release valve, as seen in Figure 1, in the form of foreign threats, such as the Visigoths in Spain, and the Romans and Goths in Italy, which kept the internal conflict between these kings from getting out of hand.¹⁶⁴ However, during the reign of Clovis’s sons, there were examples of a king being forced into war against his will through the actions of his army.

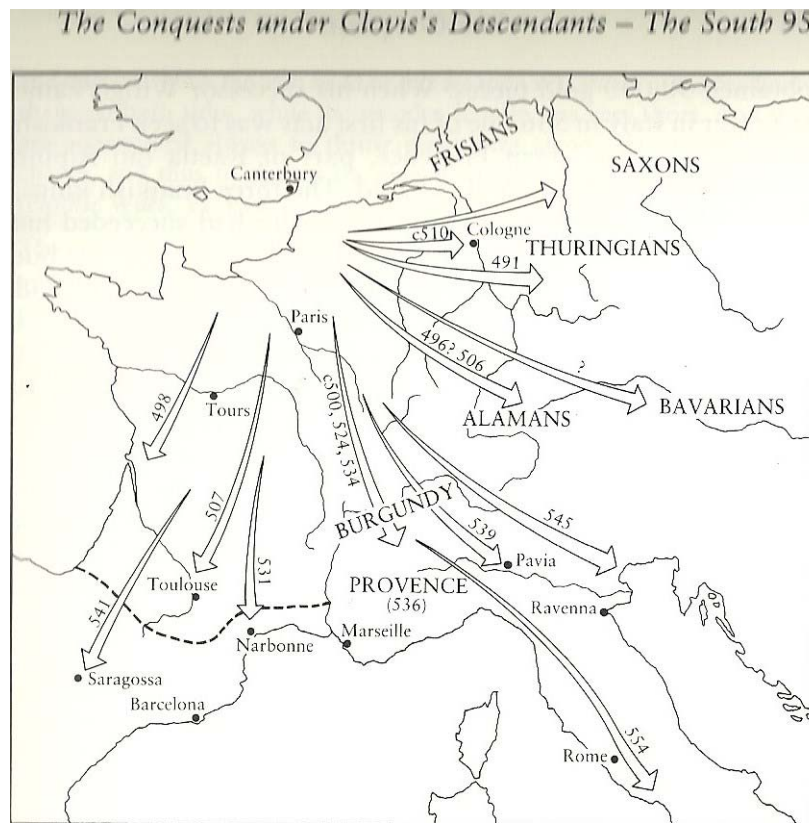


Figure 1 – Merovingian Conquests until the Mid-Sixth Century. This image displays the foreign conquests by Clovis and his children until the mid-sixth century. Many of the early wars were conquering and consolidating much of modern day France, and later campaigns were generally sent against the Romans and Goths in Italy, or Visigoths in Spain. Source: Edward James, *The Franks* (New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988), 95.

¹⁶³ Wallace-Hadrill, *Long Haired Kings*, 67-8.

¹⁶⁴ That is not to say that Clovis’s sons never fought each other. On the contrary, they often fought each other. Some examples found in Gregory’s *History* are: III. 9, 15, 18, 23, 28, 31.

According to Gregory of Tours, in 555 the Saxons were rebelling against King Chlothar I, but, when he went to meet them, they sued for peace and even offered terms for a long term peace. Chlothar I's soldiers were vehemently against this, and Gregory says that "the Franks were furious with Chlothar: they rushed at him, tore his tent to pieces, heaped insults upon him, dragged him out with great violence and swore that they would kill him if he refused to accompany them. When he saw how matters stood King Chlothar marched against his will."¹⁶⁵ The Franks lost the ensuing battle, but Chlothar was able to extract reasonable terms for peace by arguing that he had been forced into the war against his will. This example reveals that, for a Merovingian king, it was a priority to find ways to keep your soldiers happy, and one of the easiest ways to do this was by providing them with an opportunity to gain booty.

After the reign of Clovis I' sons, those same avenues which allowed internal pressure to be released were no longer as viable. According to Roger Collins:

Under the pressure of Lombard aggression, strengthened Visigothic resistance and the successful revolt of the subject peoples east of the Rhine, the Frankish kingdoms began to contract, conflict was turned inwards and, under the guise of a blood feud, a long and bitter internecine war was fought out amongst the Merovingians until only one line of the dynasty survived.¹⁶⁶

So, while the need for treasure to keep one's followers did not dissipate, the opportunities for expansion and raiding into foreign territory did and thus the kings of this period, especially Chilperic, were put in the awkward position of choosing between risky foreign expeditions or cannibalizing the territory of their kin.¹⁶⁷ As Ian Wood has argued "the history of royal succession shows time and again that a prince had to prove himself in order to be sure of inheriting a kingdom and the process of building up a following and prestige was likely to cause

¹⁶⁵ Gregory, *History*, IV.14

¹⁶⁶ Collins, 14.

¹⁶⁷ James, 169.

some conflict.”¹⁶⁸ The four sons of Chlothar I, all newly ascended to the throne, now had to prove themselves, and the pressure of the economic necessity to wage war ultimately led to a situation in which civil war was in many cases the best available option.¹⁶⁹ One of the main reasons for this viability, in addition to the now decreased prospects abroad, was the way in which the kingdom of Chlothar I was divided.

The first issue of the partition of Chlothar I’s kingdom in 561 to address is whether or not there was a legitimate division, and if there was any precedent for it. Most scholars are willing to take Gregory at his word regarding the partitions, both in 511 and 561. However, Marc Widdowson argues that the partitions presented in Gregory’s *History* are meant to legitimize some portions of the Treaty of Andelot in 587, a treaty between Childebert II and Guntram that led to peace between the Frankish kingdoms until Guntram’s death in 593.¹⁷⁰ One of the main issues addressed in the Treaty of Andelot is the recovery of cities by Childebert II which had come into his father’s possession after the death of Charibert in 567.¹⁷¹ According to Widdowson, “the claim that Gaul had been partitioned in 561 was a fundamental component of Gregory’s political agenda . . . Furthermore, Gregory’s description of a partition in 511 may have been designed to normalize the one he claimed occurred in 561 . . . His purpose was to legitimize the claim that Tours should belong to the kingdom of Childebert II.”¹⁷² So, in Widdowson’s estimation, Gregory invented the ‘legitimate’ divisions of 511 and 561 in order to ensure that his city would return to the ownership of Childebert II, whose father and mother had been responsible for Gregory’s appointment to Tours. Instead of a nice clean division of the kingdoms

¹⁶⁸ Ian Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 92-3.

¹⁶⁹ James, 169-70.

¹⁷⁰ Marc Widdowson, “Merovingian Partitions: a ‘Genealogical Charter’?” *Early Medieval Europe* 17, no.1 (2009), 2.

¹⁷¹ Widdowson, 16.

¹⁷² Widdowson, 21.

that Gregory presented in his *History*, Widdowson argues that “the politics of ‘511’ and ‘561’ were more drawn out and contested than previously emphasized. By ‘drawn out’, I mean in the order of decades rather than years, and by ‘contested’, that the rival kings had different conceptions of what, if anything, had been agreed.”¹⁷³ If Widdowson is correct, it would reveal why there was such conflict in the immediate aftermath of Chlothar I’s death, and why it continued throughout the reigns of his children until the treaty of Andelot in 587.

In the sources for this period, there are multiple accounts of the partitions of 511 and 561. In 511, Gregory of Tours states that: “once Clovis was dead, his four sons, Theuderic, Chlodomer, Childebert and Chlothar, inherited his kingdom and divided it equally among themselves.”¹⁷⁴ Fifty years later, when Clovis I’s last son Chlothar I died, Gregory writes that:

These four, Charibert, Guntram, Chilperic, and Sigibert, then divided things up fairly between themselves. The Kingdom of Childebert, with Paris for its capital fell to Charibert. Guntram received the kingdom of Chlodomer, with Orleans as his chief city. Chilperic inherited the kingdom of his father Lothar, which he ruled from Soissons. Sigibert took over the kingdom of Theuderic, and established himself at Rheims.¹⁷⁵

Most important to glean from this quotation is that Chilperic’s kingdom is by far the smallest, as seen in Figure 2. However, Widdowson argues that “Gregory seems to acknowledge Chilperic’s pre-eminence by referring to his throne at Soissons as a *cathedra*, while the others have only *sedes*.”¹⁷⁶ While I agree with Widdowson’s interpretation of this vocabulary, it must also be pointed out that Gregory’s choice of words could simply be in homage to King Chlothar I, whom Gregory greatly admired.

¹⁷³ Widdowson, 2.

¹⁷⁴ Gregory, *History*, III.1.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.22.

¹⁷⁶ Widdowson, 10.

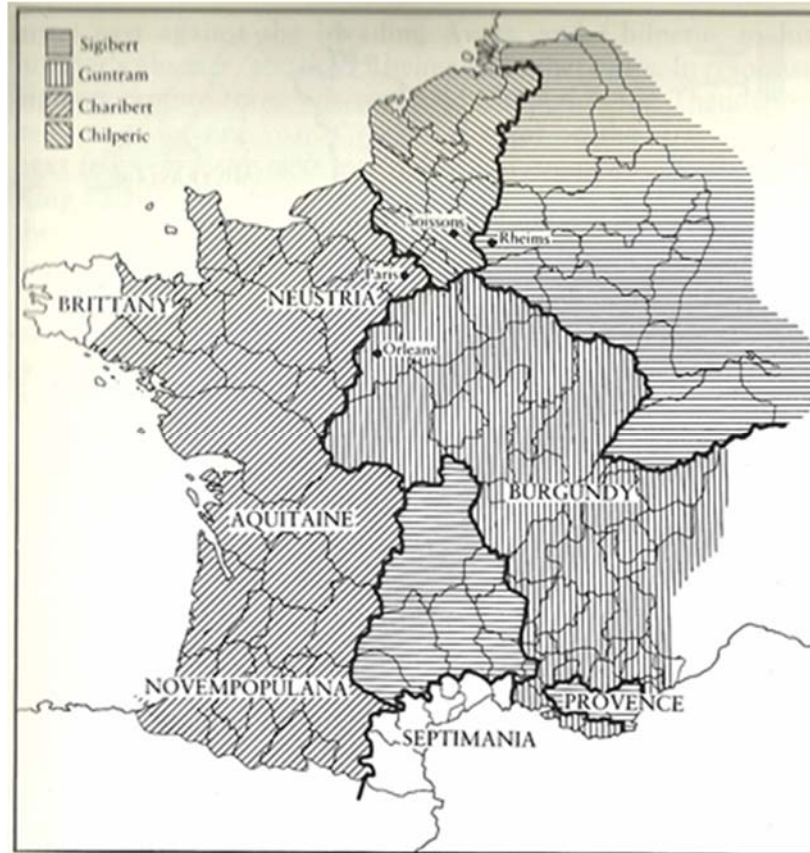


Figure 2 – Merovingian Kingdoms in 561. This image is a depiction of the division of kingdoms after the death of Chlothar in 561. As is evident, Chilperic’s share of the kingdom was the smallest of the four, and he was surrounded on all sides by the territory of his brothers. Source: James, *The Franks*, 171.

The second partition of the kingdom then is dependent upon the first, in that Gregory explains the division of the kingdoms between Chlothar I’s sons in the same manner as in 511. Unfortunately, the only near contemporary source we have for the division of 511 is Gregory of Tours, but there are other accounts of the division of 561. Another source for this partition is Marius of Avenche’s *Chronicle*, which was written in Burgundy before his death in 594. According Marius, “in this year, King Chlothar died and his sons, namely Charibert, Guntram, Chilperic and Sigibert, divided his kingdom.”¹⁷⁷ Marius does not elaborate on how the kingdoms

¹⁷⁷ Justin Favrod, *La Chronique de Marius d’Avenches (455-581): Texte, Traduction et Commentaire* (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 1993), 561: “Hoc anno Chlothacarius rex mortuus est et diviserunt regnum eius filii ipsius, id est Charibertus, Guntegramnus, Hilpericus et Sigibertus.”

were divided up, but it must be pointed out that Marius was a contemporary of Gregory of Tours. He died in 594 and it is believed that he had access to an early version of Gregory of Tours' work.¹⁷⁸ If Marius indeed did have access to Gregory's *History* it seems odd that he did not include how the kingdom was divided amongst the four kings.

A second account of the division is found in the *LHF*, which is almost verbatim from Gregory, writing:

And thus between these four, that is Charibert, Guntram, Chilperic and Sigibert, they made among themselves a legitimate division. Charibert received the kingdom of Childebert and set up his seat at Paris. Guntram received the kingdom of Chlodomer, and established his seat at Orleans. Truly, Chilperic, receiving the kingdom of his father Chlothar, established his seat at the city of Soissons. Moreover, Sigibert received the kingdom of Theuderic and established his seat at the city of Rheims.¹⁷⁹

The main problem with this account is that it was written in 727, and, since it is also a near verbatim copy of Gregory of Tours, it does not offer much new on the partitions, though it is interesting to point out that he uses *sedes* to refer to all four kings' thrones.

A third account of the division is found in Paul the Deacon's *History of the Lombards*.

According to Paul:

In those days, during which the Lombards invaded Italy, with the death of King Chlothar, his sons were ruling via a fourfold division of the kingdom of the Franks. The first of them, Charibert, was having his seat at Paris. Truly the second, Guntram, was governing at the city of Orleans. Also, the third, Chilperic, had his throne at Soissons, in the place of his father Chlothar. Nevertheless, Sigibert, the fourth, was reigning at the city of Metz.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Lewis Thorpe, "Introduction," in *History of the Franks*, 37, 54.

¹⁷⁹ LHF, 29: "Et sic inter se hii quattuor, id est Charebertus, Guntrammus, Chilpericus, atque Sighibertus, divisionem legitimam inter se fecerunt. Accepitque Charebertus regnum Childeberti sedemque constituit Parisius; Guntrammus regnum Chlodomiris accepit, Aurilianis sedem instituit; Chilpericus vero regnum Chlotharii, patris sui, accipiens, Suessionis civitate sedem statuit; Sighibertus autem regnum Theoderici accepit, sedem habere Remus civitate constituit."

¹⁸⁰ Paul Hist., II.10: "His diebus, quibus Langobardi Italiam invaserunt, Francorum regnum, mortuo iam eorum rege Chlotario, eius filii quadrifarie regebant divisum. Primusque ex his Aripertus sedem habebat apud Parisios. Secundus vero Gunthramnus civitati praesidebat Aurelianensi. Tertius quoque Hilpericus cathedram habebat apud Sessionas in loco Chlotarii, patris sui. Quartus nihilominus Sigisbertus apud urbem regnabat Metensem."

First of all, unlike the *LHF*, the seat of Chilperic is referred to as a *cathedra* and the rest were *sedes*. The problem with Paul's account of the division is that it was written in the late eighth century. He was also using a version of Gregory of Tours's *History*, so unfortunately we must still rely primarily on Gregory's account of events.

Returning to Widdowson and his argument against an official partition in 561, there is much evidence to support his thesis. The first issue to sort out is whether or not the kingdom was even meant to be divided by Chlothar I's four sons. In the immediate aftermath of Chlothar's death, Gregory states that:

Once his father had been buried, Chilperic took possession of his treasury, which was kept in his villa at Berny. Chilperic sought the more influential of the Franks and won them over to his side with bribes. Soon after this he entered Paris and occupied Childebert's throne; but he was not to hold it for long, for his brothers united against him and drove him out.¹⁸¹

Gregory attempted to delegitimize Chilperic's seizure of Chlothar I's entire kingdom by saying that Chilperic sought out and bribed these men into supporting him. However, Widdowson rightly argues that the seizure of Paris involved at least some form of military action, which could not have been instantaneous.¹⁸² Rather, it appears more plausible that Chilperic, through the intentions of his father or through prominent nobles, was meant to inherit the entirety of his father's kingdom.

In support of this argument, one cannot only try to reinterpret Gregory's account of events, but one may also use the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus. Venantius Fortunatus was a poet living in Merovingian Gaul, arriving in Gaul in the early 560's. He was not beholden to one king, and patronized the courts of Kings Charibert, Sigibert, and Chilperic.¹⁸³ Fortunatus states that "on you, dear prince, every care of your father hung, among so many brothers, you alone

¹⁸¹ Gregory, *History*, IV.22.

¹⁸² Widdowson, 6.

¹⁸³ Judith George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems*, xviii-xix.

were his love. For, he already recognized that you merited greater things. Just as he nurtured you more, so your father placed you before the rest. The father placed in command the son whom he loved more. No one is able to break the command of the king.”¹⁸⁴ There is of course the problem that Fortunatus was a poet dependent upon the patronage of a king, in this case Chilperic I. It is unlikely that he would present a poem to him that delegitimized his right to rule, especially considering that this poem was written in 580 while Chilperic was at his peak power. However, Fortunatus also wrote poetry to both Sigibert and Charibert. In these poems, there were no references to them being a preferred child or destined to be greater than their father. So, it is possible, when combining this poem with what Gregory has already said concerning the partition, to argue that Chlothar I favored Chilperic and groomed him to rule over a united Francia, as he had.

This line of argument is further supported by Fortunatus in the same poem when he writes that:

But suddenly life’s fortune, jealous of such qualities, seeking to disrupt the peace of your reign, and disturbing the disposition of the people and the agreements of your brothers, favored you with success in its attempt to bring you down . . . when enemies were seeking to raise destructive war against you, faith, strong against arms, fought for you.¹⁸⁵

In this quotation, Fortunatus implies that there were agreements between Chilperic and his brothers, perhaps concerning his sole rule of the kingdom, but that they were broken because of jealousy. Furthermore, though Chilperic was surrounded by enemies seeking his destruction, he was ultimately saved by God’s intervention. The problem with this passage is that it is impossible to know to which of the many conflicts during Chilperic’s reign this is a reference.

The mention of agreements between the brothers does narrow the list of possible dates, and while

¹⁸⁴ Ven. Fort., *Carm.* 9.1: “*In te, dulce caput, patris omnis cura pependit, inter tot fratres sic amor unus eras. Agnoscebat enim te iam meliora mereri: unde magis coluit, praetulit inde pater; praeposuit genitor eum plus dilexit alumnum: iudicium regis frangere nemo potest.*”

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, in George, *Personal and Political Poems*, 75-6.

it could be a reference to the partition of 561 and his brothers reneging on their agreement of Chilperic's sole rule, it is equally plausible that it is in the aftermath of Charibert's death in 567 when the three brothers divided his kingdom. Even so, the evidence is beginning to mount against a harmonious partition.

Although Gregory was vague on the time frame in which Chilperic ruled a united kingdom, Widdowson looks to church council records to further his thesis. He argues that:

Later partition would fit with the evidence of a Council of Lyons, which is dated to the sixth year of Guntram's reign and, by the indiction, to the year 570. The implication is that Guntram's reign began in 564 or 565, although, to maintain the standard chronology, it is usually assumed that one of the dating indications is wrong.¹⁸⁶

As Widdowson points out, there are always problems when trying to assign precise dates to events, but assuming this document is correct, it appears that Chilperic might have managed to rule over a united kingdom for close to three years before being forced by his brothers to partition it.

A final point to consider about partitions is found after Charibert's death in 567. Gregory writes that "when, after the death of Charibert, Chilperic invaded Tours and Poitiers, which, by their agreement, had fallen to the share of King Sigibert, that King joined with his brother Guntram to appoint Mummolus as the man to restore these cities to their dominion."¹⁸⁷ Gregory recounts that there was an agreement between the brothers that Sigibert should have control of Tours and Poitiers and paints Chilperic as greedy for breaking this agreement. However, if we assume that Chilperic had always thought of himself as the rightful heir to his father's entire kingdom, and only divided it up when forced to do so by his brothers, it is not surprising that he considered Charibert's cities to be his. Even if there was an agreement, as Gregory says, it appears clear that Chilperic did not consider it legitimate, as evident by Chilperic's almost

¹⁸⁶ Widdowson, 8.

¹⁸⁷ Gregory, *History*, IV.45.

immediate rupture of it in the wake of Charibert's death.¹⁸⁸ However, there are references found in Gregory that seem to support the idea of a more legitimate partition in 567.

In Easter season of 583, Chilperic went to Paris, and Gregory states that "in order to avoid the curse pronounced in the pact between his brothers and himself on whichever of them should enter Paris without the agreement of the others, he sent the relics of a great number of saints on ahead, and then marched into the city himself."¹⁸⁹ Gregory does not mention when this pact is supposed to have occurred, whether the original partition or the partition after Charibert's death. However, since Charibert's capital was at Paris, it appears that in the wake of his death the three remaining brothers made pact concerning Paris. No brother was allowed to enter Paris without the consent of the others. There was a curse involved in this agreement, one which, in Gregory's mind, led to the death of both Chilperic and Sigibert for violating it.

According to Gregory, after Chilperic's death, Childebert II sent messengers to Guntram to turn over Fredegund, who was under his protection. In addition to this demand, they asked for the cities, which came to Sigibert in the wake of Charibert's death, to be returned to Childebert. In response Guntram replied that Chilperic and Sigibert both entered Paris without his consent and that:

By breaking the terms of the pact they both lost their claim to a share. They both incurred the vengeance of God and the malediction promised in the pact. Without breaking the law in any way I therefore propose to take under my own jurisdiction the whole kingdom of Charibert and his entire treasure: none of this will I hand over to anybody, except as a completely voluntary act on my part.¹⁹⁰

Once again there is mention of an agreement that had occurred between Sigibert, Guntram and Chilperic regarding the ownership of Paris. It appears that the three had agreed it be a demilitarized zone, a city that they all nominally owned but could only enter with the approval of

¹⁸⁸ Widdowson, 10.

¹⁸⁹ Gregory, *History*, VI.27.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, VII.6.

the rest. Paris was an extremely important city to these Merovingian kings, not only because of its central location in Francia, but it was also the resting place of King Clovis I. Gregory greatly admired Clovis and exhorted the sons of Chlothar I to follow Clovis's model of expansion and not waste resources on civil war.¹⁹¹ Although these two references support the argument that there was some sort of legitimate division after Charibert's death, it also explains why Chilperic chose to take Paris after his father's death. It seems that holding Paris added such authority to its king that it was ultimately decided no one should control it on his own, with the implication that if one of them had it he might wield more influence than the rest.

There are many questions concerning the reality of the division of kingdoms which Gregory describes. Widdowson argues that "whether a partition occurred in 561 was therefore not an established fact but a matter for factionalism and interpretation. Chilperic and his backers, probably Chlothar's leading officials, seem not to have recognized a de jure division of the kingdom."¹⁹² It appears, from the examples given, that Widdowson's assessment is correct. Chilperic did not act as if he accepted that his brothers had a legitimate right to inherit part of their father's kingdom. This conflict, concerning the division of Chlothar I's kingdom in the early years after his death, is the main cause of the civil wars which occurred until the Treaty of Andelot. It is by no means the only cause of war between the Merovingian kings, but I maintain that Chilperic was disgruntled after being forced to cede territory which he viewed as rightly his, and this anger fueled many of his actions.

Contention over the division of the kingdom of Chlothar I is one of the leading causes of the civil wars during this period. According to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, "partition strengthened the sense of family. Indirectly, however, it did produce a situation which led to change, for it led to

¹⁹¹ Ibid., V.Prologue.

¹⁹² Widdowson, 12.

quarrels and to feuds within the dynasty, characterized by Gregory of Tours as ‘*bella civilia*.’¹⁹³ While I agree with Wallace-Hadrill that the partition of the Merovingian kingdom between the sons of Chlothar I did produce a volatile political situation, I disagree with him about it strengthening the sense of family. In theory the brothers would be forced to rely on each other to maintain their kingdoms because none of them would be powerful enough on their own to expand and maintain the Frankish realm, especially considering the tougher foreign resistance they now faced. In this sense, their bond would be strengthened.¹⁹⁴ However, the partition of 561 caused such an adverse effect on Chilperic’s attitude that, at least in this case, partition did more to damage the ties within the Merovingian royal family than to strengthen them.

Among the kings participating in the civil wars until the Treaty of Andelot, Chilperic and Sigibert deserve much of the blame. Even though Fredegund might have played a role in persuading and inciting Chilperic to action, the fact still remains that even before Fredegund arrived at court, Chilperic had already proven he was willing to initiate civil war with his brothers. That is not to say that Chilperic and Sigibert were alone in fault—Guntram and Childebert II also instigated wars with their relatives—but it was Chilperic and Sigibert who were most often inciting and prolonging conflict.

Returning to the beginning of this period, the first example of Chilperic’s ambition was his attempt to rule over a united Francia immediately following his father’s death. According to Katherine Scherman:

The fighting started before there was time to divide the kingdoms reasonably. The provocateur was Chilperic, the evil genius of Gregory’s tale. Chilperic was the most grasping and ill-intentioned of the four, yet at the same time the most gifted and

¹⁹³ Wallace-Hadrill, *Long Haired Kings*, 185-6.

¹⁹⁴ Simonde de Sisimondi, *The French under the Merovingians and Carolingians*, trans. William Bellingham (London: W. & T. Piper, 1850), 106.

progressive . . . either he had a bad heredity or he was jealous, for he never ceased fighting them openly or undermining them secretly.¹⁹⁵

Even though no battles are reported, Scherman is probably right about fighting taking place. It can be inferred that Chilperic did not willingly give up the sole rule which he and his supporters thought was legitimate. This is especially likely since his brothers had to join forces in their attempt to *repellere* [thrust or repel] him from Paris. Scherman is also right in characterizing Chilperic as jealous, but I believe it had more to do with the forced partition than with his being a grasping and ill intentioned “evil genius.” After Chilperic’s attempt at sole rule was thwarted, a year later, in 562, there was another war between Chilperic and his brothers. This war is the first time that the words *bellum civile* are used by Gregory in describing the conflicts among Chlothar I’s children.

Following Chlothar I’s death, the Huns invaded Gaul in 562 and Sigibert went to meet them. While Sigibert was occupied with fighting the Huns, Gregory states that “Chilperic, his brother, seized Rheims and stole other cities, which were belonging to him [Sigibert]. Next, out of this [invasion of Sigibert’s cities], what is worse, civil war started between them.”¹⁹⁶ It is necessary to mention that, Lewis Thorpe’s translation of this passage adds that the cities were belonging to Chilperic “by right of inheritance.”¹⁹⁷ These words do not appear in the Latin text and I was unable to find any mention in Niermeyer or other Latin dictionaries which contend that *pertinere* implies ownership based on inheritance. Instead it appears that Thorpe added these words to fit with the idea that there was a legitimate division a year before in 561.

In addition to Gregory’s account, the *LHF* states that:

¹⁹⁵ Scherman, 168.

¹⁹⁶ Greg. Hist. IV.23: “*Chilpericus, frater eius, Remus pervadit et alias civitates, quae ad eum pertenebant, abstulit. ex hoc enim inter eos, quod peius est, bellum civile surrexit.*”

¹⁹⁷ Gregory, *History*, IV.23.

Moreover, while Sigibert was delayed there, his brother Chilperic, having assembled a host, passed through Rheims and laid waste to Champagne, having burned and plundered it. Sigibert, returning as victor over the Huns, directed his army against Chilperic . . . moreover, marching against Chilperic, he began the war. With his brother having been conquered and put to flight, Sigibert restored his cities to his own dominion.¹⁹⁸

It is possible that this war took place before the forced partition and that the cities belonging to Sigibert were given to him by Chilperic in order to support him and his household. This is exactly the situation which occurred after Chlothar II's death when Dagobert's brother rebelled and was defeated. Rather than kill his brother, Dagobert made him give up all rights to succession and then granted him some cities to support him until his death when they would return to Dagobert's ownership.¹⁹⁹ However, if that was the case, it is odd that Chilperic would give cities to his brother willingly only to try to take them back shortly thereafter, so it is much more likely that this war took place after the forced partition.

The reason for placing this event after the forced partition is Chilperic's tiny territory, visible in Figure 2. One of the main responsibilities for a Merovingian king was keeping his army happy, and the only viable way to do that was through war. However, Chilperic had no way to expand except by attacking his brothers. If this war took place while Chilperic was still in relative control of the entire kingdom, it seems unlikely that he would be attacking his brother's cities, since his kingdom would also be at threat by the Huns. Rather it appears that this civil war began after the partition due to the political and economic pressures placed upon Chilperic to placate his army, and the Huns' invasion of Sigibert's kingdom gave Chilperic an excellent opportunity to accomplish that task.

¹⁹⁸ LHF, 30: "*Dum illic moraretur Sighibertus, Chilpericus, frater eius, hoste collecto, Remus pervasit, Campania succensa atque predate vastavit. Sighibertus quoque rediens victor a Chunis, contra Chilpericum exercitum commovit...Accedens autem contra Chilpericum, bellum commovit. Quo victo atque fugato, civitates suas in sua dominatione restituit.*"

¹⁹⁹ Fredegar, IV.57.

Chilperic attempted to take advantage of his brother's misfortune by attacking his rear while he dealt with the Huns. However, the war did not progress favorably for Chilperic and his son Theudebert was captured by Sigibert. Rather than kill his brother's son, Sigibert kept him captive for a year and then let him return to his father, but Theudebert first had to take an oath never to attack Sigibert again.²⁰⁰ Although Chilperic lost this war and was forced to make peace with his brother, this example shows that Chilperic was willing to strike at opportune moments, without provocation or persuasion. It is perhaps also an example of Chilperic's unhappiness with the way in which the partition was carried out, and a display that he felt these cities were still his by right. This event, combined with Chilperic's invasion of Paris in 561, is significant because these events occurred five years before Fredegund is mentioned at court. Twice Chilperic had proven, even before Fredegund and Brunhild made their appearances, that he was willing to make war to expand his borders.

After the death of Charibert in 567, his kingdom was divided among the three living brothers. As seen in Figure 3, Chilperic's position was still the weakest as the only foreign outlet for raiding was Brittany, although he technically owned territory bordering Spain. In reality, the distance from his capital in Soissons made any idea of campaigning against the Visigoths highly unlikely, especially considering the need to traverse his brothers' territory in order to do so. According to the French scholar Simonde de Sismondi, it is after this division that the civil wars within the Merovingian royal dynasty begin to accelerate. He states that "thenceforth one civil war succeeded another, almost uninterruptedly, and neither of the three kingdoms having any military frontiers, and each being close to an enemy, they were constantly exposed, in all parts, to pillage and desolation."²⁰¹ The territory which Guntram, Chilperic and Sigibert acquired after

²⁰⁰ Gregory, *History*, IV.23.

²⁰¹ de Sismondi, 106.

Charibert's death was generally separated from the core of their kingdoms, and thus harder to defend from enemies, both related and foreign.

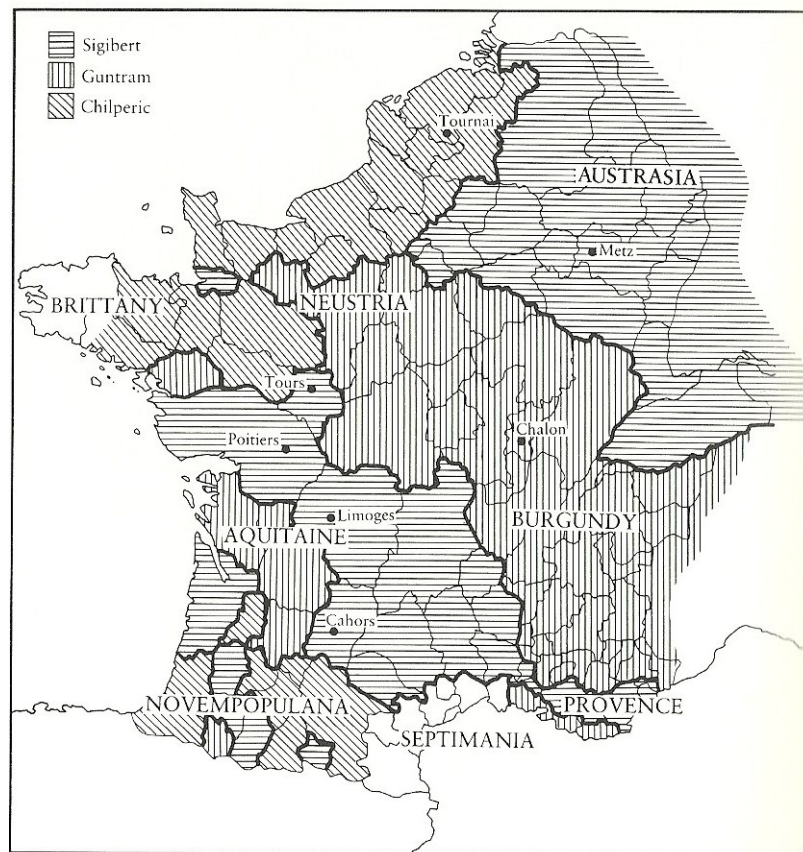


Figure 3 – Merovingian Kingdoms in 567. This image shows the division of Charibert's kingdom between the three surviving brother's after his death in 567. Source: James, *The Franks*, 172.

Soon after the division, Chilperic took the opportunity to strike at Sigibert's newly gained cities of Tours and Poitiers. Gregory states that "after Charibert's death, when Chilperic had seized Tours and Poitiers, which, by the pact, had come into the ownership of Sigibert, this king himself [Sigibert] joined with his brother Guntram. They chose Mummolus as the one who ought to return these cities to their rightful dominion."²⁰² Chilperic once more engaged his brother

²⁰² Greg. Hist., IV.45: "Nam post mortem Chariberthi, cum Chilpericus Toronus ac Pectavis pervasisset, quae Sigybertho regi per pactum in partem venerant, coniunctus rex ipse cum Gunthchramno fratre suo, Mummolum elegunt, qui has urbes ad verum dominium revocare deberet."

Sigibert in war, and in this instance, Sigibert sought aid from Guntram in order to reprimand Chilperic. Mummolus, Guntram's prized field general, was able to swiftly restore Poitiers and Tours to Sigibert.²⁰³ Although Chilperic was unable to win a war that he started, it is important to note that a dispute over partition was yet again the cause of civil strife within the Merovingian family. Perhaps Chilperic was simply being greedy in trying to take Tours and Poitiers, or maybe he thought he was simply reclaiming cities which he still felt were rightfully his.

Lest it be assumed that Chilperic was the only brother unhappy about the division of Charibert's kingdom, Sigibert was also involved in a war with his brother Guntram in 567.

Gregory recounts that:

King Sigibert wanted to take over Arles and he ordered the men of Clermont-Ferrand to attack the city...when King Guntram heard of this, he in his turn sent the patrician Celsus with an army. Celsus came to Avignon and captured the city. Then he, too, marched on Arles, surrounded the place and began to assault Sigibert's army, which was shut up inside the walls.²⁰⁴

Sigibert was no more successful in his attempt to expand his kingdom at the expense of his brothers than was Chilperic. However, Guntram was being remarkably civil in the aftermath of war with Sigibert. He could have simply kept Avignon under his control, but instead decided to give it back to his brother, perhaps because he felt that Avignon was Sigibert's city by right and that holding it would only cause further trouble in the future. Overall, at this point during the civil wars, the brothers, though willing to attack each other's possessions, still treated each other with mercy. For example, Sigibert could have killed Theudebert after capturing him, but instead let him live and return home to his father.

What then caused the wars, especially those between Chilperic and Sigibert, to increase in brutality? One possible answer for this question is found in an event happening in 566. In that

²⁰³ Gregory, *History*, IV.45.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, IV.30.

year, Chilperic murdered Galswinth, Brunhild's sister, an act which only deepened the hostility that had been growing between Sigibert and Chilperic. According to Gregory of Tours, Sigibert saw that his brothers were taking wives that were unworthy of a king, like Fredegund who both Gregory and the *LHF* report was a lowborn serving woman.²⁰⁵ Gregory states that "when [Chilperic] saw [Sigibert take a worthy wife], although he already had several wives, he sent to demand her sister Galswinth . . . when she was come to King Chilperic, he received her with great honor, and was joined to her in marriage, loving her dearly, for she had brought with her great treasures."²⁰⁶ According to Gregory, Chilperic was only marrying Galswinth due to the large dowry she brought with her. Shortly after her arrival, a dispute arose between Fredegund and Galswinth because Chilperic refused to stop seeing Fredegund. As a result of this dispute, Gregory states that "[Galswinth] craved [Chilperic's] permission to return in freedom to her own country, leaving behind her the treasures which she had brought with her. He cleverly dissembled, and appeased her with smooth words. At last he ordered her to be strangled by a slave, so that she was found dead in her bed."²⁰⁷ After murdering Galswinth, Chilperic once again took Fredegund back as his wife. Chilperic's brothers were upset to hear of Galswinth's death because they knew that "the aforesaid queen was not slain without his prompting."²⁰⁸ Gregory states that his brothers banished Chilperic from his kingdom. However, there is no evidence that Chilperic was ever removed from power, but perhaps Gregory merely meant that Chilperic had been exiled for a short time and then allowed to return to his throne.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, murdering Brunhild's sister could only have deepened the hatred that had been growing between these two brothers over the course of their numerous wars.

²⁰⁵ LHF, 31, and Gregory, *History*, IX.4.

²⁰⁶ Gregory, *History*, IV.28.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

After 567, six years passed before another civil war broke out between the sons of Chlothar I. In 573, war broke out again between Sigibert and Chilperic. At this time it is appropriate to address a common argument among Merovingian scholars. Many believe that Chilperic was greatly incited into civil war by his wife Fredegund. An example of this line of argument is Katharine Scherman's argument that "in 573 Chilperic, spurred by Fredegund, went to war against Sigibert, aiming to bite off a piece of Austrasia."²¹⁰ Unfortunately, Scherman does not cite specifically the origin of this event; I can find no mention in Gregory of Tours of Fredegund persuading Chilperic to go to war in this instance. In fact, Chilperic was actually provoked by Sigibert, or at least by a partisan of Sigibert. Gregory of Tours states that "a certain Sigulf, from Sigibert's kingdom, set himself against Clovis. With Clovis having fled, Sigulf hunted him with horns and bugles just as hunting a stag."²¹¹ It appears from Gregory's account that Sigulf was acting without Sigibert's consent, revealing how the nobility could affect politics in the Merovingian kingdoms, in this instance sparking a civil war. However, the *LHF* does imply that Sigibert was responsible for the provocation stating that "Sigulf, from the faction of King Sigibert, having been sent with an army, set against him."²¹² This does not reveal who sent Sigulf with this army, but, if this account is accurate, it is likely that any action of Sigibert's followers, especially one involving an army and the assault of Chilperic's son, would require his approval. Regardless of whoever was responsible for this attack, this act of aggression provoked another civil war. In response to the attack on his son, Chilperic sent another of his sons, Theudebert, to invade Sigibert's cities of Tours and Poitiers. In this instance then, regardless of

²¹⁰ Scherman, 177. For more examples see: Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 65; Joseph Dahmus, *Seven Medieval Queens* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1972), 61-89.

²¹¹ Greg. Hist., IV.47: "*Sigulfus quidam a parte Syiberti se super eum obiecit. Quem fugiente cum tubis et bucinis quasi labentem cervum fignas, insequibatur.*"

²¹² *LHF*, 32: "*Sigulfus quidam a parte Sighiberti regis missus cum executu, se super eum obiecit.*"

whether or not Sigibert is responsible for Sigulf's attack on Clovis, Chilperic actually was not the aggressor and was simply responding to an attack.

The attack on Chilperic's son is not the only instance of hostilities which can be attributed to Sigibert in 573. According to Gregory of Tours, "a dispute now began between the two Kings Guntram and Sigibert. King Guntram called a council in Paris of all the bishops in his realm, to decide which of them was in the right. The two kings, however, refused to listen to the bishops' advice and as a result of their sinful behavior this civil war grew more and more bitter."²¹³ What is problematic about this passage is that Gregory never elaborates on what civil war he is referring to or even the nature of the dispute which the bishops were supposed to resolve. In 573, when Sigibert's man Sigulf was reported attacking Chilperic's son, Sigibert was also embroiled in a bitter civil war with Guntram over some unknown issue. Since Sigibert had started war with Guntram in 567 over his desire to gain Arles, perhaps yet another conflict resulted from some unresolved issue regarding the partition of 561 or 567.

Following this deepening of hostilities between Sigibert and Guntram, Gregory writes that:

Chilperic was the next to fly into a rage. He sent his elder son Theudebert to invade the cities of Tours, Poitiers and others south of the Loire...he burned the churches, stole their holy vessels, killed the clergy, emptied the monasteries of monks, raped the nuns in their convents and caused devastation everywhere. There was even more weeping at the churches in this period than there had been at the time of Diocletian's persecution.²¹⁴

Since Chilperic was the "next to fly into a rage," it can be inferred that the animosity between Sigibert and Guntram must have been quite fierce. Furthermore, in contrast to Gregory's recounting of earlier wars, he now goes into much more detail about the war and the devastation it wrought. This trend continues throughout Gregory's account of the wars between 573-5, which

²¹³ Gregory, *History*, IV.47.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

is perhaps an indication that there was an increase in the brutality of war in this period.²¹⁵ As in 567, Chilperic captured Tours and Poitiers, cities which Gregory said were awarded to Sigibert after the partition of Charibert's kingdom. Again there was trouble centered on the issue of possession of these two cities, though if Chilperic was asserting his right of ownership of these cities, it is puzzling that he would approve of, or even allow, a conquest which involved such brutal treatment of the churches and monasteries.

After more than a decade of intermittent war, Sigibert finally appears to have reached his breaking point concerning Chilperic. In 574, following Chilperic's seizure and destruction of his territory, Sigibert called upon his German allies to help him crush Chilperic finally. In response, Chilperic "sent messengers to his other brother Guntram. They agreed to a treaty by which neither of them would permit the other to suffer harm."²¹⁶ It appears from Guntram's willingness to ally himself with Chilperic that his hatred of Sigibert was still seething. However, when Sigibert could not find an adequate place to cross the Seine, he demanded that Guntram allow his army to march through his kingdom or he would turn his wrath upon Guntram. Guntram was cowed by his brother's threat and allowed him passage. Gregory then states that Sigibert "petitioned Chilperic to prepare a field for battle. In truth, [Chilperic], fearing that if both armies clashed his kingdom would collapse, sued for peace and surrendered those cities which Theudebert had wrongfully seized."²¹⁷ Chilperic knew that he stood no chance without the help of Guntram, and so suing for peace bought him time.

A year later in 575, Gregory narrates that Chilperic sent a messenger to his brother Guntram asking for support against Sigibert. Guntram agreed to support the attack, and so

²¹⁵ This remarkable increase in detail of the war has caused Ian Wood, in *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, to argue that "it is possible that the wars of 573 to 575 marked the worst period of civil war in sixth-century Francia," 89.

²¹⁶ Gregory, *History*, IV.49.

²¹⁷ Greg. Hist., IV.49: "*campum sibi praeparare petiit. Illi vero timens, ne, conliso utroque exercitu, etiam regnum eorum conruerit, pacem petiit civitatesque eius, quas Theoderthus male pervaserat, reddidit . . .*"

Chilperic once more invaded Sigibert's lands.²¹⁸ Sigibert responded by recalling his German mercenaries and sent an army against Chilperic's son Theudebert. It is not surprising to find Chilperic being portrayed as the aggressor in this instance, especially considering Gregory's hostility towards him and his bias towards Brunhild and Sigibert's son, Childebert II. However, Gregory does not provide the only account of this conflict, and whereas the *LHF* presents a similar picture of this war, namely Chilperic being the aggressor, in Fredegar's *Chronicle* the account differs. While Book III of the *Chronicle* of Fredegar is a condensed version of Gregory of Tours' *History*, there are some important changes, one of which concerns this war. Fredegar states that Sigibert and Chilperic had met and "afterwards, wishing to kill Guntram and take over his kingdom, they decided on one plan, whereby they both march their armies."²¹⁹ Guntram heard of this and raised his army, but all three kings exchanged emissaries, met and agreed to a peace. However, Sigibert's troops were upset and demanded that he allow them an opportunity to get rich or else they would not return home. Thus, Fredegar states that:

Having been pressured by his own men, Sigibert was willing to march against Guntram. Those wise Austrasians were vigorously saying that 'You made a firm peace with Guntram by sacred oaths. By what agreement are we able to attack him?' Having exclaimed unanimously that they were willing to go against Chilperic, they immediately marched and attacked Chilperic.²²⁰

According to Fredegar's account, Sigibert was forced into a war by the actions of his troops. This example reinforces the argument that it was a top priority of Merovingian kings to find an outlet for their troops to fight and gain loot.

²¹⁸ Gregory, *History*, IV.50.

²¹⁹ Fred. III, 71: "Postea uno inientes consilio amboque moventes exercito, volentes Gunthramnum interficere regnumque eius adsumere."

²²⁰ Ibid.: "Illi volens, compulsus a suis, super Gunthramno ire, Austrasiae valde consiliosae dicent ad eum: 'Sacramentis pacem cum Gunthramno firmasti; quo pacto possumus super eum inruere?' Unianimiter exclamatis, se super Chilpericum velle ire, protinus moventis, inruunt super Chilpericum."

While most of Theudebert's army deserted him, he and a few loyal men fought bravely. Gregory narrates that, "however, in the ensuing battle, Theudebert lay prostrate on the field of battle, defeated, and, it is agonizing to recount, but his dead body was violated by the enemy."²²¹ The defiling of Theudebert's corpse suggests the brutal nature of the recent wars. Even Gregory, who was no admirer of Chilperic or his children, was pained to recount the desecration of Theudebert's body. It appears then that Sigibert's intention was not simply to reprimand his brother and restore his lost cities, but to destroy Chilperic and his kingdom. Recognizing Sigibert's intention, Guntram made peace with Sigibert.²²²

After learning of Guntram's withdrawal from the war, Chilperic fled to Tournai with his wife and children. Sigibert advanced as far as Rouen but then entered Paris where Brunhild came to meet him. There was a pact surrounding ownership of the city of Paris, and, in this instance, Sigibert did not seek Guntram's approval before entering Paris. After preparing his army, Sigibert was about to depart when Gregory recounts that, "Saintly Bishop Germanus told [Sigibert]: 'If you depart not wanting to kill your brother, you will come back alive and victorious; however, if you consider anything else, you will die'. . . [But] because of Sigibert's transgressions, he neglected to heed [Germanus's words]."²²³ Sigibert was not in the mood for compromise. He ignored Germanus's advice, risking divine retribution, and sought to destroy Chilperic, with whom he had battled off and on for more than a decade. Before Sigibert had a chance to accomplish his goal, both Gregory of Tours and the *LHF* relate an account that Sigibert was assassinated on orders from Fredegund. However, there are other accounts of this event, including the contemporary *Chronicle* of Marius of Avenches, which point to a different

²²¹ Greg. Hist., IV.50: "*Ineuntes autem proelium, Theodoberthus evictus in campo prosternitur, et ab hostibus exanime corpus, quod dici dolor est, spoliatur.*"

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Greg. Hist., IV. 51: "*Cui sanctus Germanus episcopus dixit: 'Si abieris et fratrem tuum interficere nolueris, vivus et victur redis; sin autem aliut cogitaveris, morieris. . . Quod ille, peccatis facientibus, audire neglexit.*"

culprit. Marius states that “in this year, King Sigibert of the Franks waged war against his brother Chilperic. When he had Chilperic besieged and was thinking about killing him, Sigibert was killed through treachery *ab hominibus Chilperici* (by Chilperic’s men); his son Childebert received his kingdom . . .”²²⁴ Granted, this text is not considered by Anglophone scholars to be as trustworthy as Gregory of Tours, but it is a contemporary account and it shows what people in another region, namely Burgundy, believe happened to Sigibert.²²⁵

In his *Life of Columbanus*, Jonas of Bobbio provides another account of Sigibert’s assassination. Jonas states that “as a matter of fact, Sigibert, of whom we made mention above, was killed at the royal villa of Vitry, which is situated near the city of Arras, by the deception of his brother Chilperic, who was then at the fortress of Tournai. Sigibert was pursuing the destruction of Chilperic.”²²⁶ While this *Vita* was written between 639-42, it is still an important source to include because of the relationship between Chlothar II, Chilperic’s son, and Columbanus’ monasteries.²²⁷ Columbanus was an Irish missionary who arrived in Francia during the reign of Childebert II and established a famous monastery at Luxeuil. Eventually, during the reign of Theuderic II, Childebert II’s son, Columbanus was driven from Francia due to his unwillingness to baptize Theuderic’s bastard children.

Childebert II and his son were depicted poorly in this *Vita*. However, Chlothar II appears in as one of the prime supporters of Columbanus’ monasteries and it is odd that Jonas would

²²⁴ Favrod, *Chronique de Marius d’Avenches*, 84: “*Hoc anno Sigibertus rex Francorum bellum contra fratrem suum Hilpericum movet et cum eum iam inclusum haberet et de eius interfectione cogitaret ab hominibus Chilperici per fratrem interfectus est et suscepit regnum eius Childebertus filius ipsius.*”

²²⁵ Thorpe, “Introduction,” 37: “The Chronicle of Marius contains a number of personal reminiscences of the happenings of his own lifetime, but much of it consists of names only. It is succinct and arid, and it can in no way be compared with Gregory’s History, for it fills only eight pages of modern print.”

²²⁶ *Jonae Vitae sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, editionem Bruno Krusch (Hannoverae Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani MCMV), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptorum Rerum Germanicarum* 37, I.18: “*Sigibertus etenim, cuius superius fecimus mentionem, apud Victuriacum villam publicam, quae in suburbano Atravitensis urbis sita est, Hilperici germani sui dolo, qui apud Turnacum oppidum tunc erat, quem Sigibertus usque ad internitionem persequabatur, interfectus est.*”

²²⁷ O’Hara, 126.

attribute this murder to Chlothar's father if it was untrue. Perhaps Jonas was simply using the past evil actions of Chlothar II's father to make him seem better by comparison, but in any case, supplementing the account found in Marius with this one makes it appear more likely that Sigibert was killed by Chilperic.

A final account of Sigibert's death is found in Paul the Deacon's *History of the Lombards*. Paul the Deacon writes that "at this time, King Sigibert of the Franks was killed by the treachery of his brother Chilperic, with whom he had waged war..."²²⁸ This account, although written in the late eighth century, is still useful when investigating Sigibert's assassination. Although his account was written much later, Paul had access to Gregory of Tours's *History* yet still attributed Sigibert's death to Chilperic and not Fredegund. Perhaps the treachery is an allusion to the assassins Fredegund supposedly employed. However, in combining these three accounts, including the contemporary account of Marius and near contemporary account of Jonas, it appears likely that it was Chilperic who was responsible for arranging Sigibert's assassination and not Fredegund. If true, it shows the lengths to which Chilperic was willing to go in order to protect himself and expand his territory.

Regardless of who killed Sigibert, there was a noticeable drop in conflict after his death. Although this reduction is not that surprising, especially considering that almost all of Chilperic's wars were against Sigibert, it did not spell the end of civil war for Francia. However, there is one final point to make about the narrative of Gregory until Sigibert's death. Gregory recounts the entire period from 561-575 in only 29 chapters of book IV; in contrast the nine years between Sigibert's death and Chilperic's death is given two entire books. So, while Gregory's narrative at the end of Book IV makes it seem like there was never-ending war

²²⁸ Paul Hist., III.10: "*Hoc tempore Sigispertus rex Francorum occisus est fraude Hilperici, germani sui, cum quo bellum inierat...*"

occurring after Chlothar I's death, it is hard to know what this period was actually like. Perhaps Gregory included all the wars of the period, or maybe he just focused on those in which Chilperic was involved because of his consistently hostile attitude towards this king. Unfortunately, what we are left with is a skewed account of the history from 561-575, but from what we do know of this period, civil war appears as a relatively common occurrence within the royal family.

Following Sigibert's death in 575, there was relative peace in the Merovingian kingdoms for five years. However, there was some fighting in the immediate aftermath of Sigibert's assassination. Although the nobles in Sigibert's kingdom proclaimed Childebert as their king, Chilperic saw an opportunity to capture territory while Austrasia was still in chaos. Gregory states that "King Chilperic sent his son Clovis to Tours . . . Thereupon Mummolus, the patrician in the service of King Guntram, invaded the region of Limoges and attacked Desiderius, King Chilperic's commander. Five thousand of Desiderius' troops fell in this battle and Desiderius himself escaped only with difficulty."²²⁹ It is not clear here whether Gregory is arguing that Mummolus was acting out Guntram's wishes, or if he was simply stating that Mummolus was at this time still loyally serving Guntram. It is most probable that Guntram also had eyes on expanding his kingdom in the wake of Sigibert's death; in the years following Sigibert's death, there were many arguments between Guntram and Childebert II over the ownership of certain cities which had belonged to his father, Sigibert. In this instance, it appears that Guntram did not want Chilperic to take possession of Tours. It seems odd that after his victory Mummolus did not attempt to retain control of Tours and instead retreated back into Burgundy through Clermont, to which he laid waste. Perhaps then Mummolus was acting without Guntram's express command,

²²⁹ Gregory, *History*, V.13.

and after providing his soldiers with an opportunity to gain loot, he returned home to avoid suspicion that he might be trying to stake a claim on territory for himself.

Two years later, in 577, Guntram lost his two sons to dysentery, and “soon after this King Guntram sent envoys to his nephew Childebert to sue for peace and to suggest a meeting. Childebert with his leaders came to meet Guntram.”²³⁰ Guntram made Childebert II his heir and promised that even if he were to have other sons in the future, he would still consider Childebert one of them. While Gregory does not elaborate on what the two kings were fighting over, or how long it had been occurring, the need for Guntram to sue for peace implies that both kingdoms were at war. More than likely the conflict centered on the ownership of cities that had belonged to Sigibert, which Guntram had acquired during the interregnum. The ownership of these cities would remain a sore spot in the pair’s relationship until the Treaty of Andelot when they were finally returned to Childebert.

After Guntram and Childebert II made peace with each other, Guntram decided to help his nephew try to recover territory that had been lost to Chilperic. Gregory states that:

They sent an embassy to King Chilperic to demand that he should restore all the territory which he had taken from their realm; for, unless he did this quickly, he had better choose a spot for battle. Chilperic took no notice of what they said: he was building amphitheaters in Soissons and Paris, for he was keen to offer spectacles to the citizens.²³¹

Chilperic had such little fear of his brother and nephew that he completely ignored them and focused on his building program. Gregory does not give any account of Guntram and Childebert’s response, and since Gregory was not shy about relating tales of civil war, it is probable that they decided not to move against Chilperic. In fact, the next hint of a civil war does not occur for another three years and, even then, that war was ultimately averted.

²³⁰ Ibid., V.17.

²³¹ Ibid.

In 580, Gregory states that “a most serious epidemic followed these prodigies. While the Kings were quarreling with each other again and once more making preparations for civil war, dysentery spread throughout all of Gaul.”²³² Unfortunately, Gregory does not elaborate on what the nature of the quarrel was between the kings, or which kings were involved. What this passage does reveal is that the death of Sigibert had not eliminated the threat of civil war. In this instance, Gregory believes that war was prevented by an act of God, which was preceded by portents like floods and bleeding loaves of bread. However, war between the Merovingian kings was not prevented for long.

Gregory states that “in the sixth year of his reign [581] King Childebert broke the peace which he had made with King Guntram and formed an alliance with Chilperic.”²³³ The fact that there was a peace to be broken implies that Childebert hoped to renew the war with Guntram and pursue claims on territory he believed was rightfully his. At this point, both Chilperic and Guntram had no living sons, and so both flirted with the idea of adopting Childebert. It is especially odd in the case of Chilperic. If there were a deadly feud between his and Sigibert’s family, specifically between Fredegund and Brunhild, it seems odd that Chilperic would spurn his wife by adopting the heir of her rival. In the case of Childebert II, Brunhild had not yet reestablished herself at court, so there is the possibility that Childebert’s nobles were the people who helped orchestrate this treaty.

After breaking his peace with Guntram, and allying himself with Chilperic, Gregory states that Childebert II was called to a meeting with Chilperic. Chilperic said “I confirm that Childebert shall inherit everything that I manage to keep under my control. All I ask is that for

²³² Ibid., V.34. Some of the prodigies which Gregory refers to include: an earthquake, torrential rains and massive flooding, and bread that bled during the Eucharist.

²³³ Ibid., VI.1.

the term of my natural life I may be left to enjoy these things in peace and quiet.”²³⁴ This action seems implausible if there was a blood-feud between these two branches of the Merovingian dynasty. However, Chilperic’s desire to live in peace and quiet during his last days is a little disingenuous. Not long after this pact, Chilperic went to war with his brother Guntram, but first he needed the appropriate opportunity.

After making his alliance with Chilperic, Childebert II demanded that half of Marseilles, which had been under Guntram’s control since Sigibert’s death, be returned to his rightful rulership. Guntram refused and Chilperic sent an army to take Marseilles. In an effort to maintain surprise, the army went through Chilperic’s territory, and in the process captured Tours, which alerted Guntram.²³⁵ Childebert II was not personally leading this army, and it is possible that it acted without his consent in attacking Tours. Childebert would not violate an alliance so quickly after making it, especially since by attacking Chilperic he would now be at war with both Guntram and Chilperic. Instead, it appears that Childebert II’s army acted in its own best interests, which were to fight and gain loot.

Ultimately, nothing came of Childebert II’s attempt to take Marseilles. Gregory does not mention Chilperic retaking Tour or reprimanding Childebert II in any way. However, while Childebert II and Guntram were still hostile to each other, Gregory states that “therefore, king Chilperic, seeing these problems sprout up between his brother and nephew, called upon Duke Desiderius and ordered that he inflict something vile upon his brother.”²³⁶ Chilperic’s armies seized a number of Guntram’s cities, including Perigueux, Agen, and Toulouse.²³⁷ Chilperic again took advantage of the misfortune of one of his brothers. It is odd that Guntram did not

²³⁴ Ibid., VI.3.

²³⁵ Ibid., VI.11.

²³⁶ Greg. Hist., VI.12: “*Igitur Chilpericus rex cernens has discordias inter fratrem ac nepotem suum pullulare, Desiderium ducem evocat iobetque, ut aliquid nequitiae inferat fratri.*”

²³⁷ Ibid.

respond to Chilperic’s assault, and Gregory did not label this conflict as a civil war. However, this was more than a simple raid. A year later, in 582, Chilperic still retained possession of the cities which he had taken in Aquitaine. Gregory states that “King Chilperic appointed new counts to the cities which he had taken from his brother and ordered all the taxes from these cities to be paid to him. I know for a fact that this was done.”²³⁸ So, unlike his brother Sigibert, Guntram appeared unwilling to challenge Chilperic, at least in this instance. As seen in Figure 4, at this point in his reign, Chilperic had amassed quite a large territory, which is more impressive when one remembers from Figure 1 just how small it started out.

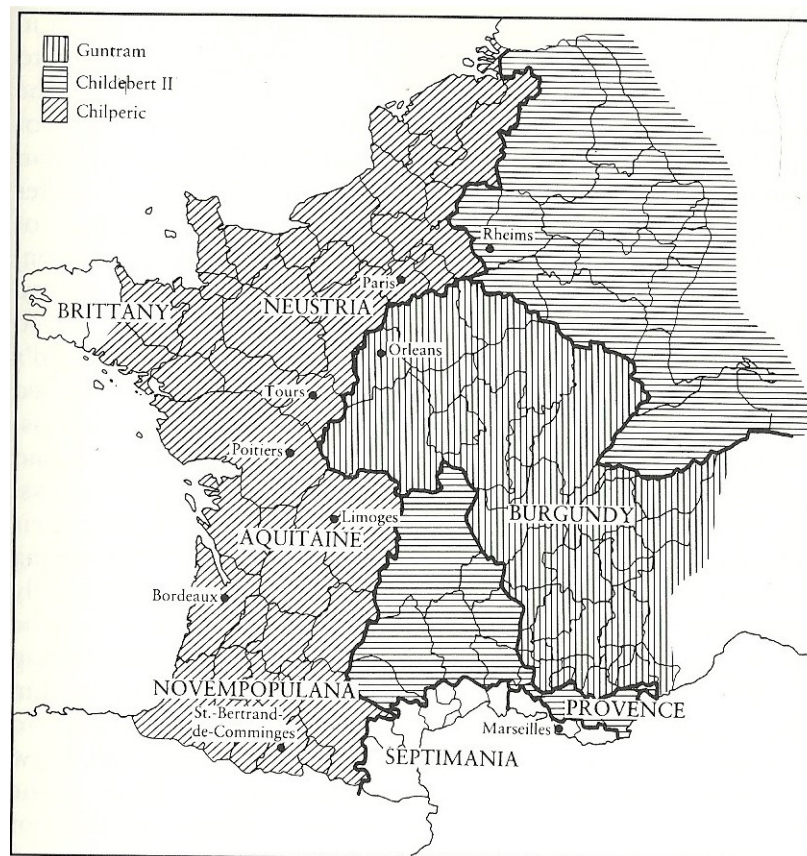


Figure 4 – Chilperic’s Kingdom in 583. This map shows the territorial holdings of the Frankish kings before Chilperic’s assassination in 584. Source: James, *The Franks*, 177.

²³⁸ Gregory, *History*, VI.22.

During the Easter season of 583, Chilperic went to Paris without consulting his brother Guntram. Gregory states that “in order to avoid the curse pronounced in the pact between his brothers and himself on whichever of them should enter Paris without the agreement of the others, he sent the relics of a great number of saints on ahead, and then marched into the city himself.”²³⁹ Chilperic understood that his entrance into Paris was in violation of this agreement, demonstrated by the relics of saints being brought into the city before him. However, according to Gregory, the curse surrounding the agreement of Paris led to death, although in the case of Chilperic it took longer to be fulfilled.

While in Paris, Chilperic was visited by ambassadors from Childebert II who argued that they were not able to keep peace with Guntram and asked for Chilperic’s help in recovering part of Marseilles. Chilperic responded by saying that “my brother is clearly guilty of many crimes. If my adopted son Childebert will look into the sequence of events, he will soon discover that his father Sigibert was killed with Guntram’s connivance.”²⁴⁰ While I do not believe that Guntram was in any way involved with Sigibert’s assassination, Chilperic probably included this accusation in an attempt to ensure Childebert II would keep his promise to join Chilperic in his campaign against Guntram. When Chilperic went to war, he attacked Bourges from two directions, but Childebert II’s forces never joined him. Chilperic was defeated in battle by Guntram and after the battle, Gregory states that “the two Kings made peace, each promising the other that his bishops and leading subjects should agree as to how far the bounds of law had been exceeded, and that then they would both pay compensation. With peace restored, they each went

²³⁹ Ibid., VI.27.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., VI.31.

home.”²⁴¹ The aftermath of this war was remarkably civil. Guntram, who was not the aggressor, agreed to pay a compensation agreed upon by a council of bishops. It is understandable that Chilperic would be forced to pay an indemnity to his brother, but perhaps Guntram felt that Childebert II was behind Chilperic’s aggressive action and decided to be lenient with his brother, lest Chilperic try to repeat his actions in 581.

In the last year of Chilperic’s life, Guntram voluntarily returned the half of Marseilles in his possession to Childebert II as part of a peace agreement between the two.²⁴² Gregory states that:

When King Chilperic heard that his brother Guntram had made peace with his nephew Childebert, and that they proposed to win back the cities which he had occupied by force of arms, he withdrew to Cambrai with all his treasury...he sent messengers to his dukes and counts to tell them to repair the walls of their cities, and then to shut themselves up inside these fortifications together with their property and their wives and children.²⁴³

Chilperic was worried about the consequences of his two relatives joining forces against him, and was preparing a defensive strategy to stymie their advance. However, the war which he expected never materialized.

In September, Chilperic felt safe enough to meet the envoys from Spain in Paris. These men were to bring Chilperic’s daughter Rigunth back to Spain to marry Recared, a Visigothic prince who became king in 586. After they departed, Chilperic went to his villa near Chelles to go hunting. Gregory states that Chilperic was returning from a hunt “when a man stepped forward, struck him with a knife under the armpit and then stabbed him a second time in the stomach. Blood immediately streamed both from his mouth and through the gaping wound, and that was the end of this wicked man.”²⁴⁴ Gregory felt that Chilperic received his just end. The

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid., VI.33.

²⁴³ Ibid., VI.41.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., VI.46.

murder of Chilperic is one of the great mysteries of this period. Gregory did not elaborate on who he thought killed Chilperic, and it is likely that if he knew he would not have hesitated to include the information. There are accounts which assign blame for the death to Fredegund and Brunhild, which will be discussed in the following chapter, but it appears most likely that, as was discussed in the previous chapter, he was killed by a faction of his nobility which was conspiring to elevate Gundovald as king.

In the three years following Chilperic's death, there are no civil wars mentioned in Gregory's narrative, Fredegar or the *LHF*. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of Chilperic's assassination, Guntram marched to Paris and protected Chilperic's infant son from Childebert II, who demanded that Guntram hand Chlothar II and Fredegund over for the murder of his father, among many others.²⁴⁵ Guntram refused, and perhaps surprisingly, this action did not spark a war. Not long after this, Gregory states that "the chief men of Chilperic's kingdom, Ansovald and the others, rallied around his son, who, as I have just said, was four months old. They decided to call him Chlothar. From all the cities which had hitherto owed allegiance to Chilperic they exacted an oath of loyalty to King Guntram and his nephew Chlothar."²⁴⁶ The oath to both Kings Guntram and Chlothar II is indicative of the precarious position of the infant king. Guntram played the role of protector of both Chlothar II and his mother. So, the political situation in Gaul now consisted of childless Guntram and his two nephews, Childebert II aged fourteen and Chlothar II not yet one. In the years following Chilperic's assassination, one of the most important tasks left to Guntram was securing a succession.

While there are no wars mentioned, Gregory does mention Guntram taking advantage of Chilperic's death. As seen in Figure 5, both Guntram and Childebert II capitalized on the

²⁴⁵ Ibid., VII.4-5.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., VII.7.

interregnum following Chilperic’s assassination. Gregory states that Guntram took control of the cities which had been awarded to Sigibert after Charibert’s death, and which had been conquered by Chilperic after Sigibert’s death. The ownership of these cities is one of the key provisions of the Treaty of Andelot. According to Gregory, on November 28, 587 “King Guntram signed a treaty with his nephew and the Queens. They gave each other gifts . . . they signed the treaty, gave each other gifts and exchanged kisses of peace then each returned to his own city in joy and amity, thanking God again and again.”²⁴⁷ This treaty led to a period of peace until the death of King Guntram in 593. However, some dispute followed during its implementation.

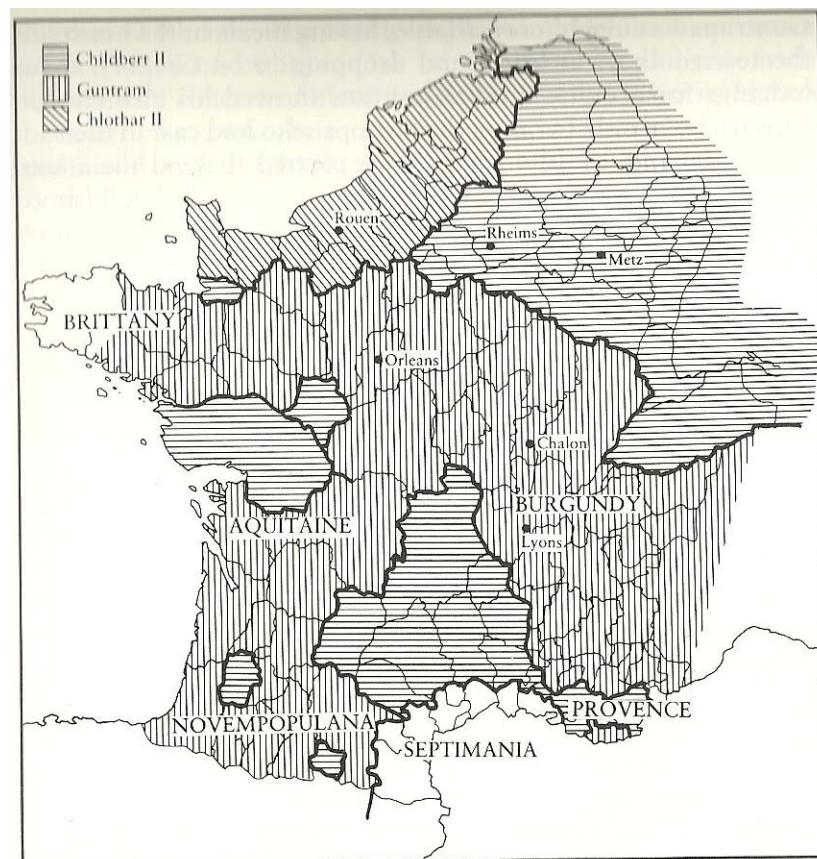


Figure 5 – Merovingian Kingdoms in 584. This map shows the division of Chilperic’s kingdom following his assassination in 584. Similar to his father, Chlothar II is left with a tiny kingdom surrounded on all sides by his relatives. Source: James, *The Franks*, 179.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., IX.11.

In 588, Guntram was angry because he felt Childebert II was not keeping his side of the treaty, which involved giving Guntram one third of the city of Senlis.²⁴⁸ In addition, Childebert was upset with Guntram because he received envoys from Chlothar II. In his ensuing conversation with Gregory of Tours, Guntram said:

Am I such a fool that I cannot mediate between them and so stop their quarrel from spreading? I am quite sure that it is better to end that quarrel, instead of letting it drag on. If I do recognize Lothar as my nephew, I will give him two or three cities in some part or other of my dominions, so that he many not feel disinherited from my kingdom. Childebert has no reason to take offence if I make these gifts to Lothar.²⁴⁹

There are a number of important elements in this passage, the first of which is Guntram's mention of conflict between Chlothar II and Childebert II. In the Latin text, the word used is *scandalum*. According to Niermeyer, in this specific instance in Gregory of Tours, a *scandalum* is a quarrel or dispute.²⁵⁰ Gregory does not elaborate on what the quarrel was between these two kings, but perhaps it is a reference to the feud so many scholars argue was occurring between those two families. Or, perhaps it was simply some sort of territorial dispute which Gregory did not include. Either way, it is an indication that these two kingdoms maintained a very tense relationship with each other, especially considering Guntram felt he must mediate between the two sides.

A second point to take away from this passage is the mention of Guntram giving a couple of cities to Chlothar II. While the Treaty of Andelot states that all of Guntram's possessions would transfer over to Childebert II after his death, it appears that Guntram felt he should at least give his nephew something in order that Chlothar II not feel disinherited and slighted. Guntram

²⁴⁸ Ibid., IX.20: "It is further agreed that from this day forward King Childebert shall hold under his dominion the city of Meaux, two thirds of Senlis, and the cities of Tours, Poitiers, Avranches, Aire, Couserants, Labourd and Albi, with their territories."

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ J.F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill Publishing, 1976), 942.

was the adopted father of both Chlothar II and Childebert II, so it is not surprising that he would not want to insult his adopted son.

While Gregory would like his audience to believe that Chilperic was the ultimate villain of this period, equating him to Nero and Herod, it is evident that this was not the case.²⁵¹

Chilperic was often the aggressor in Gregory's account of events, and it appears highly plausible that he was the responsible party for Sigibert's assassination. However, Sigibert was an equal partner in causing war with his brothers, attacking both Guntram and Chilperic on multiple occasions. After Sigibert's assassination, the nine-year period until Chilperic's death was one that was relatively peaceful, with only two civil wars occurring. It is apparent that, because of the inconclusive divisions of Francia in 561 and 567, Chilperic and Sigibert were constantly at each other's throats. As a result, both Chilperic and Sigibert deserve a majority of the blame for the numerous civil wars which plagued this period.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Gregory, *History*, VI.46. For a better idea of just how badly Gregory viewed Chilperic, what follows is a portion of the obituary Gregory provided following Chilperic's assassination: "The evil which Chilperic did has been set out in this book. Many a district did he ravage and burn, not once but many times. He showed no remorse at what he did, but rather rejoiced in it, like Nero of old who recited tragedies while his palace was going up in flames...In his day churchmen were rarely elected to bishoprics. He was extremely gluttonous, and his god was in his belly...He hated the poor and all that they stood for."

²⁵² Widdowson, 14.

CHAPTER THREE: BRUNHILD AND FREDEGUND: AGGRESSIVE POLITICS OR BLOOD-FEUD?

This chapter will accomplish two tasks. The first will be to consider the this period of civil wars, 561-613, and show the leading role which the two queens had in provoking, prolonging, or even preventing civil war. Second, there will be an examination of blood-feud and whether or not it existed in these conflicts. Feud is the most common explanation used by scholars trying to explain why this period was so plagued with civil war. There might be some truth to this idea, but, as has been shown in the previous two chapters, it is by no means the predominant reason Francia was rent by civil strife.

Brunhild and Fredegund were often engaged in nefarious activities, especially Fredegund who has countless assassinations attributed to her. This chapter will focus on only those actions which had a direct effect on the politics of this period, whether by promoting conflict or resolving it.²⁵³ In Fredegund's first appearance in Gregory of Tours' narrative, she caused problems in the relationship between Chilperic and Galswinth, his Visigothic wife, which ultimately led to Chilperic murdering Galswinth. Gregory narrates that Galswinth was upset with Fredegund's presence at court, and that she was often the object of verbal abuse from Fredegund. After asking permission to return to Spain, Chilperic had Galswinth strangled in her sleep.²⁵⁴ Although Gregory does not mention Fredegund having any direct involvement in Galswinth's murder, the *LHF* gives Fredegund a greater role. The *LHF* recounts that "through the most evil advice of Fredegund, at night, [Chilperic] strangled [Galswinth] in her bed."²⁵⁵ The murder of Brunhild's sister angered Chilperic's three brothers, resulting in his supposed expulsion from his kingdom. Many scholars, such as Patrick Geary and Janet Nelson, point to this event as the

²⁵³ For some examples of Fredegund being blamed for assassination in Gregory's *History* see: IV.51, V.39, VI.35, VII.20 and *LHF* 31, 32, 35. For Brunhild see: Fredegar, IV.18, 21, 28, 29.

²⁵⁴ Gregory, *History*, IV.28.

²⁵⁵ *LHF*, 31: "*per consilium pessimum Fredegundis eam per noctem in strato suo strangulavit.*"

initial cause of a blood feud between the two families.²⁵⁶ Fredegund, through her possible role in Galswinth's murder, did cause a disagreement between Chilperic and his three brothers.

However, there is no evidence that the brothers actually expelled Chilperic from his kingdom, but it is not implausible that there was some sort of reprimand against him, especially since he was still in such a weak position due to his small territory.

The most famous action attributed to Fredegund was the assassination of Sigibert in 575. While Chilperic and Fredegund were besieged at Tournai, Fredegund approached two of her followers and convinced them to assassinate Sigibert. According to Gregory of Tours, "then, two young men, having been corrupted by Queen Fredegund, pretending to discuss with him some cause, struck [Sigibert] on each side with strong blades imbued with poison, which they commonly call scramasaxes."²⁵⁷ The *LHF* presents a similar account of Sigibert's assassination, stating that Fredegund convinced two thugs to assassinate Sigibert by promising them "if you escape alive, I will honor you and your children with amazing things. However, if you die there, I promise to donate, on your behalf, much alms for the places of saints."²⁵⁸ This account is valuable because, unlike Gregory's account, it gives an idea of what Fredegund is offering to these men in return for their actions. The *LHF* then expands upon the immediate aftermath of the assassination, writing that "Chilperic, not knowing about his brother's death, was afraid the following day that he would be seized by his brother's army until Fredegund announced the truth to him, that his brother was dead."²⁵⁹ The normally brazen Chilperic was reduced to fearing for his life while Fredegund was composed enough to save both of their lives through Sigibert's

²⁵⁶ Nelson, 10 and Geary, 80, 121.

²⁵⁷ Greg. Hist., IV.51. "*Tunc duo pueri cum cultris validis, quos vulgo scramasaxos vocant, infectis veneno, malificati a Fredegundae regina, cum aliam causam suggerere simularent, utraque ei latera feriunt.*"

²⁵⁸ *LHF*, 32: "*Si evadetis vivi, ego mirifice honorabo vos et filios vestros. Si autem illic peritis, ego pro vobis elymosinas multas per loca sanctorum dare promitto.*"

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: "*Chilpericus namque nesciens, esse mortuum fratrem suum, timebat alia die sequente a fratris hoste esse occupatum, usque quod Fredegundis rei veritatem ei predixit, mortuum esse fratrem suum.*"

assassination. Granted, this account does come from the less trustworthy *LHF*, but this source is still useful in showing the perceived power and influence of Fredegund. A final point to mention is that, for those scholars who favor the idea of a blood-feud causing these civil wars, this is the second place they turn to in order to support their thesis.

In 576, during Merovech's failed rebellion against his father Chilperic, there is evidence of Brunhild's possible involvement in this revolt. As was discussed in chapter one, Bishop Praetextatus was the primary instigator of the conflict between father and son. However, Merovech, Chilperic's son, did marry Brunhild, who later wielded tremendous influence through her sons and grandchildren. Perhaps this was an early instance of her trying to assert her authority by convincing Merovech to cause a civil war within the Neustrian kingdom and claim the throne from his father. Unfortunately Gregory does not elaborate on what role, if any, Brunhild might have played in Merovech's decision making. Chilperic did suspect Merovech was behind the Champagne men's attack on Soissons "because of his marriage to Brunhild."²⁶⁰ Chilperic's suspicion that his son might be plotting to overthrow him only came after his marriage to Brunhild, so it appears Chilperic suspected Brunhild might have a negative influence on his son. There was also the accusation of Brunhild entrusting treasure to Bishop Praetextatus, though Chilperic did not elaborate on what purpose he thought the treasure was to be used for. Perhaps it was to bribe Praetextatus into supporting her and Merovech's failed rebellion against Chilperic, or maybe she was simply trying to protect what treasure was left to her after Sigibert's death. Regardless, it appears that, in this instance, Chilperic was suspicious of Brunhild.

In 581, one of Brunhild's supporters, Duke Lupus of Champagne, was attacked by the Dukes Ursio and Berthefried, who were prominent men in Childebert II's kingdom. Brunhild went to the battlefield where the two armies were arrayed and spoke with Ursio and Berthefried.

²⁶⁰ Greg. Hist., V.3: "*propter coniugationem Brunehildis.*"

She exhorted them “not to engage in battle, which ruins the peace in these regions, on account of this one.”²⁶¹ In this instance it appears that Brunhild was trying to prevent a civil war among the nobles of her own kingdom. However, to her demands, they responded “withdraw from us, O woman! It should have been sufficient for you to have held royal power under your husband. However, now your son is reigning, and his kingdom is not kept safe by you, but by our protection.”²⁶² This example shows that, through their guardianship over Childebert II, these nobles wielded much power in his kingdom. Brunhild had not yet regained control of her son’s regency, and so this passage reveals that the nobility was disgruntled with a woman wielding power. It also reveals that perhaps Brunhild wielded more authority during the period before her husband’s death than Gregory reveals.

Brunhild did not have control over her son again until 585, but in 584 her influence was increasing to its previous level. According to Gregory of Tours, a competition arose over who would replace Theodosius as Bishop of Rodez, and “nevertheless, the priest Transobadus was rejected and Count Innocentius of Javols, was elected to the episcopate, with Queen Brunhild helping him.”²⁶³ Since bishops were almost always chosen by the king, and because Gregory felt it necessary to mention Brunhild’s prominent role in assisting Innocentius, the count of Javols, in this endeavor, it is a sign of her rising influence at the court of Childebert II. This fact is especially important when it is recalled that, in this year, Childebert II broke his alliance with Chilperic and allied himself with Guntram.

Regardless of whether or not there was a blood-feud happening between the two families, if Brunhild had regained influence over her son’s minority, she would probably use that

²⁶¹ Greg. Hist., VI.4: “*Nolite pro uno homine committere proelium, quo solatium regionis intereat.*”

²⁶² Ibid.: “*Recede a nobis, o mulier. Sufficiat tibi sub viro tenuisse regnum; nunc autem filius tuus regnat, regnumque eius no tua, sed nostra tuitione salvatur.*”

²⁶³ Greg. Hist., VI.38: “*Verumtamen Transobadus presbiter reiecitur, et Innocentius Gaballitanorum comis eligitur ad episcopatum, opitulante Brunichilde regina.*”

influence to break an alliance with the king who was responsible for the death of her sister and her husband. In addition, the *LHF* states that “also, in those days, tempers were greatly increasing between Chilperic and his nephew Childebert II. For, Fredegund and Brunhild, on each side, were provoking them.”²⁶⁴ The problem with this account is that, in the same year, the *LHF* says that Guntram died. Considering that he does not die until 593, it is impossible to put a reliable date on when this supposed conflict arose. However, after relating the death of Guntram, the *LHF* continues to discuss the assassination of Chilperic. Perhaps the conflict between Childebert II and Chilperic is a reference to the alliance formed between Guntram and Childebert II in 584. Guntram voluntarily returned two-thirds of Marseilles to Childebert II and, after forming an alliance, both kings threatened to attack Chilperic if he did not return those cities which he had taken in the wake of Sigibert’s death. Neither Guntram nor Childebert II ever actually attacked Chilperic, but it is important to note the role which Brunhild might have played in encouraging her son to change alliances.

Following the assassination of Chilperic in 584, the next war in which both these queens might have been involved is with the Gundovald affair. The most likely instigators of this conflict were bishops and nobles from all three kingdoms who were unhappy with the rulers of Francia. Gregory of Tours does not explicitly accuse Fredegund of participating in the plot which brought Gundovald to Gaul; however, he does imply that Fredegund considered allying with him. Gregory of Tours relates that:

Moreover, in those days, Queen Fredegund sent Chuppa [who had been master of horse to King Chilperic] to Toulouse, evidently to pluck her daughter from there in whatever way he could. Truly, very many were reporting that he was sent, so that, if he had

²⁶⁴ *LHF*, 35: “*Maxime quoque discordiae in illis diebus inter Chilpericum et Childebertum, nepotem suum, crescebant. Inritabant enim eos ex utrisque partibus Fredegundis and Brunchildis.*”

discovered Gundovald [the supposed son of Chlothar I] alive, having enticed him with many promises, he would transport him to her.²⁶⁵

So, according to Gregory, Fredegund was interested in meeting with Gundovald. However, Gregory does not reveal whether this meeting was to form an alliance or express Fredegund's support. If Fredegund's goal were to help Gundovald, her timing was unfortunate because he had already been betrayed and killed by this time. It is also highly unlikely that Fredegund would have supported a revolt against one of her primary protectors. It is far more probable that Chuppa was merely there to bring back Fredegund's daughter, and knowing the hatred which Gregory bore towards Fredegund, Gregory is likely among the *plerique* who thought Fredegund was up to no good. Although Fredegund does not appear to have had any role in instigating a civil war between Gundovald and Guntram, the evidence implies that Brunhild did.

Through various statements attributed to Guntram in Gregory's *History*, Bernard Bachrach argues that Guntram believed Brunhild was involved with Gundovald.²⁶⁶ There are four primary examples that suggest Guntram's suspicion of Brunhild. The first of these occurs after Guntram made Childebert II his sole heir. Gregory states that "then, King Guntram returned to Childebert everything which his father Sigibert had held, imploring that he not go to his mother, so that no opportunity was given for her writing to Gundovald or for her receiving letters

²⁶⁵ Greg. Hist., VII.39: "*Fredegundis autem his diebus Chuppanem in Tholosano direxit, ut scilicet filiam suam exinde quocumque modo possit eruere. Ferebant enim plerique ob hoc eum transmissum, ut, si Gundoadum reperisset vivum, multis inlectum promisionibus ad eam transduceret.*"

²⁶⁶ Bernard S. Bachrach, *The Anatomy of a Little War: A Diplomatic and Military History of the Gundovald Affair 568-586* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 151." it is clear that King Guntram believed that [Brunhild] was very seriously involved with Gundovald and that she was an important figure in the effort to make him king . . . King Guntram not only made accusations, he also acted decisively on his belief that Brunhild was deeply involved with Gundovald."

written by him.”²⁶⁷ Guntram was afraid that any information he gave Childebert II would be reported to his mother and sent to Gundovald in order to give him an advantage.

In an attempt to prove Brunhild’s involvement with Gundovald, Guntram sent a letter forged under her name to Gundovald in an attempt to elicit a reply. Gregory states that “at this time, King Guntram sent letters to Gundovald in the name of Queen Brunhild . . . truly he had written these duplicitous letters so that he learn more fully from Gundovald what he was going to do.”²⁶⁸ Guntram hoped that Gundovald would take the bait and send a reply detailing his next move, which would not only allow Guntram to prepare for action against him, but also give him the proof he wanted with regard to Brunhild’s involvement. Unfortunately for Guntram, Gundovald did not fall for this ploy, but this incident does reveal how Guntram was becoming more suspicious that Brunhild was trying to bring about his downfall.

After defeating Gundovald in 585, Guntram had a feast acknowledging Childebert II as his heir, and there stated that “his mother Brunhild was threatening to kill me, but it is no cause of fear for me. For the lord who has rescued me from the hands of my enemies also has saved me from her plots.”²⁶⁹ While Guntram denied that he feared Brunhild, his actions proved otherwise. Guntram was convinced of Brunhild’s involvement not only with Gundovald, but with attempts on his life. While Guntram could just be paranoid, the accusations against Brunhild are reminiscent of those commonly levied against Fredegund by Gregory, namely with regard to assassination.

²⁶⁷ Greg. Hist., VII.33: “*Tunc ei reddedit rex Guntchramnus Omnia que pater eius Sighibertus habuerat, obtestans, ne ad matrem accederet, ne forte aliquis daretur aditus, qualiter ad Gundoardum scriberet ut ab eo scripta susceperit.*”

²⁶⁸ Ibid., VII.34: “*Eo tempore Guntchramnus rex missit litteras ad Gundoardum ex nomine Brunechildis regine...Scripserat enim hec dolose, ut de eo plenius, quid agerit.*”

²⁶⁹ Ibid., VIII.4: “*‘Qui mater eius Brunechildis me minatur interemere, sed nihil mihi ex hoc formidinis est. Dominus enim, qui me eripuit de minibus inimicorum meorum, et de huius insidiis liberavit me.’*”

The final example of Guntram's accusation of Brunhild's involvement with Gundovald happened in 588. Brunhild had a great salver made as a gift to King Recared of the Visigoths, who was soon to marry Chlodosind, Brunhild's daughter and Childebert II's sister. After Brunhild sent her envoy on his mission to bring this salver to Recared, rumor spread to Guntram that really this gift was meant for one of Gundovald's sons; Guntram had the envoy seized. In the ensuing interrogation, Guntram shouted "it is not enough that you had the effrontery to summon the Ballomer him whom you call Gundovald, to marry Brunhild—the man whom I destroyed because he wanted to take over the government of my kingdom? Now you are carrying presents to his sons and no doubt inviting them back to Gaul to cut my throat!"²⁷⁰ Guntram's suspicion of Brunhild is readily apparent, but perhaps there is some truth to his allegations.

Although Gregory never explicitly revealed that Brunhild had any role in the Gundovald affair, the later primary sources often depict Brunhild promoting civil war after Guntram's death. Granted, this is at least in part due to the shift in primary sources away from Gregory, who died in 594, and to the later *Chronicle* of Fredegar and *Liber Historiae Francorum*. Both of these were written after Chlothar II had destroyed the family line associated with Brunhild. Chilperic's progeny were the last surviving branch from the four brothers who had divided the kingdom in 561. The dramatic shift in tone against Brunhild is not surprising in these later sources, but it is important to recognize that, even in the period covered by Gregory of Tours, there were hints about Brunhild's less savory activities.

In 585, Brunhild regained control over her son's regency after the death of his tutor. Gregory notes that "Wandelen, King Childebert's tutor, died at this time. No one was appointed to replace him, for the Queen Mother herself wanted to have charge of her son."²⁷¹ It was not

²⁷⁰ Gregory, *History*, IX.28.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, VIII.22.

long after this reemergence on the political scene that Brunhild involved herself in the major treaty which ended the first period of civil war. Gregory of Tours states that “the most excellent lords King Guntram and Childebert and the right glorious lady the queen Brunhild met together at Andelot . . . [and] it was settled, approved and agreed between them . . . that as long as Almighty God shall grant them life in this present world they shall preserve mutual faith and loving-kindness in purity and singleness of heart.”²⁷² It is important to point out that this treaty was not simply in Guntram and Childebert’s name but Brunhild’s as well. She was such an important participant that she even secured the return of the cities which had belonged to her sister, Galswinth, and which Guntram had seized after Chilperic’s death.²⁷³

Before leaving Gregory’s narrative, there is one last passage to examine, one which reveals Brunhild’s power at the court of Childebert II and the nobility’s fear of her influence. In 589, Faileuba, Childebert II’s wife, gave birth to a son. The boy died shortly after his birth, but during her recovery from childbirth Faileuba learned of a plot against her and Brunhild led by Sunnegisil, Childebert II’s Count of the Stables, and Gallomangus, his Referendary. The conspirators hoped to convince Childebert to banish Brunhild and reject Faileuba for another woman. Gregory states that “in this way the conspirators hoped to do with the King what they wished and to obtain from him what they asked. If the King refused . . . he was to be killed by witchcraft, his sons were to be trained to succeed him, and in the meantime the conspirators would take over the government . . .”²⁷⁴ This passage portrays Childebert II as being easily manipulated. Since the conspirators’ goal was to have Childebert II marry another woman, through whom they could manipulate him, it appears that he might have had a tendency to be

²⁷² Ibid., IX.20.

²⁷³ Ibid., IX.20. Most of the cities were not to be returned until Guntram died, but he did guarantee their return to her after his death.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., IX.38.

malleable, especially when it comes to women. It also reveals that they feared the influence which Brunhild had over her son, because even if they were forced to murder Childebert, Brunhild still was to be banished from court.

Although Brunhild and Fredegund appear to play a less important role than their husbands in the wars which plagued the period of civil wars from 561 until the Treaty of Andelot, nevertheless they were important players behind the scenes. Their increasingly prominent impact came in the wake of their husbands' deaths. They ruled as regents for their sons, under whom they could more easily wield power. It was during their regencies that their involvement in encouraging civil war increased.

Before delving into the later period of civil wars recounted by Fredegar and the *LHF*, it is first necessary to show an example of the dramatic shift in tone towards Brunhild in these later accounts. In the third book of Fredegar's *Chronicle*, which is largely a compressed version of Gregory's *History*, there is a major change in the account of the marriage of Brunhild to Sigibert. According to Fredegar's addition, Brunhild was responsible for the death of Gogo, Sigibert's mayor of the palace, because, immediately after arriving in Francia, she turned Sigibert against Gogo. Fredegar states that Gogo was a fully capable man, one who was both worthy of praise and also supported by Chrocin, whom many had previously backed to be the mayor of the palace. Fredegar states that Gogo brought the queen back from Spain for her marriage but, "at once, Brunhild made Sigibert hate him and, by her inciting advice, Sigibert killed him. So much evil and bloodshed was done in Francia by Brunhild's advice that the prophecy of the Sibyl was fulfilled, saying 'Bruna, coming from parts of Spain, before whose sight many races will die.'"²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Fred. III, 59: "*Quem Brunehildis continuo apud Sigybertum fecit odiosum, ipsumque, suo instigante consilio, Sigybertus interfecit. Tanta mala et effusione sanguinum a Brunehildis consilium in Francia factae sunt, ut prophetia Saeville impleretur, dicens: 'Veniens Bruna de partibus Spaniae, ante cuius conspectum multae gentes peribunt.'*"

So, from the beginning, Fredegar established a precedent for the many violent actions which he would later attribute to Brunhild. The recounting of the Sibyl's prophecy prepares his reader for this dramatic shift in tone which happens in the fourth book of his *Chronicle*.

After Guntram's death in 593 there was an immediate renewal of war. Fredegar states that "in the same year, Wintrio, the Duke of Champagne, entered into the kingdom of Chlothar with his army. Chlothar, advancing with his men against Wintrio, routed him like an enemy. However, each army was greatly slaughtered."²⁷⁶ From Gregory we learn that Wintrio was a Duke in Guntram's kingdom, which was inherited by Childebert II after his death.²⁷⁷ At first, Duke Wintrio's invasion could be linked to Childebert II or Brunhild because he was a prominent duke in their kingdom. Chlothar II had a very tense relationship with Childebert II and Brunhild, but Guntram had managed to keep war from breaking out. However, Wintrio might also have been acting without his king's approval as he was later assassinated in 598 by Brunhild.²⁷⁸ This assassination did not come until five years later, so the reason for his murder might be attributed to a later event. However, in Paul the Deacon's *History of the Lombards*, there is a reference to a war waged by Childebert II against Chlothar II that perhaps connects to Wintrio's attack in 593.²⁷⁹

In his *History of the Lombards*, Paul the Deacon states that "also, Childebert waged war with his cousin, the son of Chilperic. In this war up to thirty thousand men were killed."²⁸⁰ It is not entirely clear if these two wars coincided or were the same conflict. Paul does not mention a dateable event during this chapter, but the next chapter, which recounts Pope Gregory's writing

²⁷⁶ Fred. IV, 14: "Eodem anno Quintrio dux Campanensim cum exercito in regno Chlothariae ingreditur. Chlotharius cum suis obviam pergens hostiliter Quintrione in fugam vertit, sed utrasque exercitus nimium trucidatus est."

²⁷⁷ Gregory, *History*, VIII.18, X.3.

²⁷⁸ Fredegar, IV.18.

²⁷⁹ Paul Hist., IV.4.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.: "Childepertus quoque bellum gessit cum consobrino suo, Hilperici filio; in quo proelio usque ad triginta milia hominum eaesa sunt."

his *Life of the Saints*, is dated to 593. If these events took place in the same year, then the war which Paul the Deacon mentions could be the same war Duke Wintrio started. The problem with Paul's account is that his dating of events was sometimes suspect. For example, in chapter eleven of the same book, he placed the death of Childebert II, who died in 596, before that of Guntram, and said that Brunhild and Childebert II's grandchildren were the ones who inherited Guntram's kingdom.²⁸¹ So, it is not clear when the war mentioned by Paul occurred, but even if it was not the war between Wintrio and Chlothar II, it does show that hostilities between Chlothar and Childebert II escalated quickly. The window between Guntram's death and Childebert's death was only three years.

There is a third account of a war following Guntram's death involving the forces of Childebert II and Chlothar II. According to the *LHF*, after the death of Guntram, Childebert II gathered an army to attack Fredegund. Fredegund learned of this and gathered her army and to prepare for a night attack on Childebert's forces. According to the *LHF*, at dawn Fredegund's army attacked the sleeping Austrasians and Burgundians and:

With Fredegund and tiny Chlothar, they killed the greatest part of that host, an innumerable multitude, an exceedingly great army, from the greater all the way to the lowest... Truly, Fredegund went all the way to Rheims with the rest of the army. She burned and devastated Champagne. She, along with her army, returned to Soissons with much loot and many spoils of war.²⁸²

This account is one of the pieces of evidence many scholars, such as Bernard Bachrach, point to in order to further their argument that the *LHF* was biased in favor of Fredegund.²⁸³ I disagree with Bachrach and others on this point, but it is important to see how later sources treated the

²⁸¹ Paul Hist., IV.11.

²⁸² *LHF*, 36: "inrueruntque Franci cum strepitu tubarum super Austrasiis et Burgundiones dormientibus cum Fredegunde vel Chlothario parvulo interfeceruntque maxime parte de hoste illo, innumerabilis multitudine, maximus valde exercitus, a maiore usque ad minorem . . . Fredegundis vero cum reliquo exercitus usque Remus accessit, Campaniam succenit atque vastavit. Cum Multa preda atque spolia reversa est Suessionis civitate cum exercitus suo."

²⁸³ Bachrach, "Introduction," 10.

now legendary Fredegund. She is not only depicted as a powerful political leader, but she also commands her son's armies.

From these three accounts, it is evident that, in the immediate aftermath of Guntram's death, civil war quickly returned to the Merovingian Kingdoms. Tensions between the Austrasian and Neustrian dynasties were high during the period leading up to Guntram's death, but he had managed to keep fighting from breaking out. What is also important, at least in the case of the *LHF*'s account of events, is that Fredegund played a key role in the war by leading an army against Childebert II's forces. None of the sources report if Brunhild was behind Childebert II's decision to go to war against Chlothar II, but, considering her influence within his kingdom, she might have incited her son.

The first civil war in this period directly attributed to Fredegund or Brunhild occurred in 596. Childebert II died in this year and his two young sons divided his kingdom, with Theuderic II obtaining Burgundy, and Theudebert II gaining Austrasia. In the immediate aftermath of Childebert II's death, Fredegar states that "in this year, Fredegund, with her son King Chlothar II, seized Paris and the remaining cities by the barbarian custom and moved her army against the sons of Childebert, kings Theudebert and Theuderic at the place named Laffaux . . . Chlothar and his men, charging over Theudebert and Theuderic, violently slaughtered their army."²⁸⁴ Considering that Chlothar II was only twelve years old, the decision to engage in a civil war did not rest with him. Fredegund dispatched the armies to deal with Theudebert II and Theuderic II. It appears that Fredegund, similar to many previous Frankish rulers, was taking advantage of the misfortunes befalling another Frankish king. Childebert II's death left a power vacuum in his kingdom, one which would eventually be filled by his two sons, but, in the wake of his death, his

²⁸⁴ Fred. IV, 17: "*Eo anno Fredegundis cum filio Clothario regi Parisius vel reliquas civitates rito barbaro occupavit et contra filius Childeberti regis Teudeberto et Teuderico movit exercitum loco nominante Latofao . . . Chlotharius cum suis super Theudebertum inruens eorumque exercito graviter trucidavit.*"

kingdom was in a weak position. The kingdom was being divided among his two sons. Seizing this opportunity, Fredegund expanded her son's dominion, an action which most of the Merovingian kings covered by this study would have taken.

A year after this war, Fredegund died peacefully and was buried at the Church of Saint Vincent in Paris. However, her counterpart Brunhild did not remain inactive. She was driven from her grandson Theudebert's kingdom of Austrasia, but was welcomed at the court of Theuderic in Burgundy in 599.²⁸⁵ Fredegar does not reveal what caused Brunhild's expulsion, but she was responsible for the assassination of Duke Wintrio a year earlier, in 598, and perhaps she was expelled as a result. A year later in 600, the Frankish kingdoms were once again embroiled in another civil war. Brunhild's grandchildren, Theudebert II and Theuderic II, joined forces and attacked Chlothar II. Fredegar states that in the ensuing battle, Chlothar II's army was slaughtered and he was forced to cede much of his territory to the two brothers.²⁸⁶ Although Fredegar does not specifically mention Brunhild having any role in spurring these two kings to war against Chlothar II, considering they were both under thirteen years old, it is unlikely they were making these decisions on their own. In the case of Theudebert II, this decision was probably handled by his mayor of the palace. However, perhaps Brunhild played a more prominent role in Theuderic II's decision to go to war. She served at the court of Theuderic II and was often involved in serious political situations.

Another account of this war is found in the less reliable *LHF*. The *LHF* states "and so King Theuderic of the Burgundians was handsome, vigorous and excessively rash. Through the counsel of his grandmother Brunhild, gathering a very great host from Burgundy, he directed it

²⁸⁵ Fredegar, IV.19.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.20.

against Chlothar, his paternal cousin.”²⁸⁷ In the ensuing battle, Chlothar II’s army was slaughtered and Theuderic II returned home victorious. According to this account, Brunhild is pivotal to provoking the civil war which occurred between the two kings. However, this event is extremely problematic to date. The *LHF* places the war after Fredegund’s death, but there is no war presented in Fredegar’s Chronicle which closely matches this event. The *LHF* does not recount that both Theuderic II and Theudebert II were involved in this attack on Chlothar II, and so it is not certain whether this account and the one from Fredegar refer to the same war. Regardless, even if the war recounted in the *LHF* is not an alternate account of the civil war in 600, it is an important example of Brunhild’s involvement in inciting civil war.

In 604, Brunhild sparked a civil war between Theuderic II and Chlothar II when she attempted to make one of her favorites, Protadius, mayor of the palace. Fredegar also alleged that Protadius, who was a Gallo-Roman, was Brunhild’s lover.²⁸⁸ Brunhild sent Bertoald, the current mayor, to inspect the territory which was gained during the previous war with Chlothar II. Brunhild was hoping to entice an attack from Chlothar II, and sent Bertoald with only a few troops.²⁸⁹ When Chlothar II learned of this, he sent his son and mayor of the palace to attack Bertoald. Theuderic II heard about Chlothar II’s men being in his territory and set out with an army to stop them. In the ensuing battle, Bertoald advanced too quickly and was killed “and there, Merovech, the son of Chlothar, was captured, Landeric was turned into flight, and the army of Chlothar was cut to pieces in this sword battle. Victorious Theuderic entered Paris. Theudebert II entered into a peace with Chlothar at the villa of Compiègne, and each of their

²⁸⁷ *LHF*, 37: “*Theudericus itaque rex Burundiae erat pulcher et strenuus ac calidus nimis. Per consilium avae suae Brunchilde hoste maximo ex Burgundia congregans, contra Chlotharium, patruelem suum, dirigens...*”

²⁸⁸ Fredegar, IV.24.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

armies returned to their own lands unscathed.”²⁹⁰ So, in her plot to help her favorite achieve a promotion, Brunhild sparked a civil war between Chlothar II and Theuderic II. After learning of his son’s capture, Chlothar II gathered his army and prepared to march against Theuderic II. However, because of Theudebert II’s intervention, the war was kept from spiraling out of control, and everyone managed to return home without having their armies destroyed.

The following year, in 605, Brunhild instigated another civil war; however, unlike the previous wars, this one was between Theuderic II and Theudebert II. According to Fredegar, “Brunhild was constantly advising her grandson Theuderic so that he move his army against Theudebert, saying that Theudebert was not the son of Childebert but instead the son of a gardener. Protadius having assisted with this plan, finally the army was marched by the order of Theuderic.”²⁹¹ It is unclear why Brunhild, through her own actions and those of Protadius, was advising Theuderic II to attack Theudebert II. Perhaps Brunhild was still upset about being banished from Theudebert’s court in 599. However, if there was indeed a blood-feud between Brunhild and Chilperic’s family, it appears odd that she would waste resources on infighting within her own family rather than trying to join forces to eliminate her true enemy. In this instance though, war was averted through the actions of Theuderic II’s own troops.

Fredegar states that “Theuderic was being urged by his loyal men in order that he enter into peace with Theudebert. Protadius alone was exhorting that battle be committed . . . Then the whole army of Theuderic, with an opportunity having been discovered, attacked Protadius,

²⁹⁰ Fred. IV, 26: “*Ibique Bertoaldus cum nimis ceteris precessisset ab exercito Clothariae cum suis interficetur...Ibique Meroeus filius Clothariae capetur, Landericus in fuga versus est, nimia multitudine exercitus Clothariae in eo prilio gladio trucidatus est. Teudericus victur Parisius ingreditur. Teudebertus pacem cum Chlothario Compendio villa inivit, et uterque exercitus eorum inlesus redit ad propriam.*”

²⁹¹ Ibid., 27: “*Cum Brunechildis nepotem suum Teudericum integra adsidue moneat ut contra Teudebertum moverit exercitum, dicens quasi Theudebertus non esset filius Childiberti nisi cuiusdam ortolanum, et Protadius ipsoque consilio adsistens, tandem iusso Teudericum movetur exercitus.*”

saying that it was better for one man to die than the whole army be sent into danger.”²⁹² It is important to note again the impact of soldiers in promoting, or in this case, resisting war. The soldiers of Theuderic’s army took matters into their own hands and judged it was better for Protadius to die than to risk the entire army. The army did not wish to be involved in a war between the two brothers, and their actions were successful because, after Protadius’ death, Theudebert II and Theuderic II made peace and both armies went home unscathed.

Tensions remained high between the two brothers, and matters only worsened through the actions of Bilichildis, Theudebert II’s wife. In 608, she sent many contemptuous messages to Brunhild, who responded by mocking Bilichildis for having once been her slave. According to Fredegar, after relations between the two sides had become extremely hostile, a meeting was arranged “so that these two queens might meet together in order to converse for peace between Theuderic and Theudebert.”²⁹³ The relationship between the two kings was very tense, and perhaps the people arranging this meeting thought that Brunhild and Bilichildis would be able to defuse the situation. However, the meeting was aborted due to the advice of the Austrasians, perhaps fearing that their queen might be assassinated by Brunhild.²⁹⁴ The enmity between Theudebert II and Theuderic II only deepened, eventually leading to a final decisive conflict.

Three years after Brunhild and Bilichildis’ disagreement, in 611, Theuderic II sent envoys to Chlothar II to propose a joint attack against Theudebert II. Fredegar states that “in the sixteenth year of his reign, Theuderic sent an envoy to Chlothar, saying that he wished to make an attack against Theudebert, who was not a brother to him, and would Chlothar not provide aid

²⁹² Ibid.: “*Theudericus cum exercito castra metasset ortabatur a leudibus suis ut cum Theudeberto pacem iniret. Protadius singulos ortabatur ut priliu committeretur . . . Tunc omnes exercitus Theudericus inventa occasione supra Protagio inruunt, dicentes melius esse uno hominem moriturum quam totum exercitum in periculum missum.*”

²⁹³ Fred. IV, 35: “*ut has duas reginas pro pacem inter Theudericum Teudebertum coniungerint conloquendum.*”

²⁹⁴ Ibid.: Bilichildis would not last much longer, because Fredegar states that she was assassinated by her husband Theudebert the following year, 609.

to Theudebert.²⁹⁵ In addition, Theuderic II promised to return territory to Chlothar II which had been taken from him by Theudebert II. The two sides reached an agreement and Chlothar II raised an army in preparation of the upcoming war. Fredegar does not relate that Brunhild was behind Theuderic II's deputation to Chlothar, but his *casus belli* was centered on the premise that Theudebert II was not his real brother, and thus not worthy of being king. Recalling the conflict between the brothers in 605, Brunhild originally proposed the idea that Theudebert II was not really Childebert's son, but rather born of a gardener. However, Gregory of Tours wrote that they were both Childebert II's sons.²⁹⁶ It is not clear if both were sons of Faileuba, although both were born during the lifetime of Faileuba. Even if they were not born of the same mother, it appears that Theuderic II's attack was more targeted at Theudebert II's paternity. So, even if Brunhild was not directly involved in Theuderic II reaching out to Chlothar II, her accusation of Theudebert II's parentage was the primary justification given to Chlothar in attempting to gain his support. However, if she was behind this deputation, it appears to be further evidence against a long lasting blood-feud.

In 612, Theuderic II went to war with Theudebert II and defeated his brother twice in battle. In the aftermath of these battles, Theudebert II was presented to Theuderic II where he was formally deprived of his royal vestments.²⁹⁷ It is not clear if this ceremony also included Theudebert being tonsured, but he was not executed. He was taken in chains to Châlons, and his son was murdered.²⁹⁸ After the war was over, Theuderic II controlled all of Austrasia and Burgundy. However, Fredegar states that "Chlothar, according to the agreement with Theuderic, received the whole duchy of Dentelin in his domain; Theuderic was excessively agitated because

²⁹⁵ Fred. IV, 37: "Anno XVI Theudericus legationem ad Chlothario diregit, indecans se contra Theudebertum, eo quod suos frater non esset, hosiliter velle adgrederi: Chlotharius in solatium Theudeberti non esset."

²⁹⁶ Gregory, *History*, VIII.38, IX.4.

²⁹⁷ Fred. IV, 38: "Vestis regalibus Theudebertus expoliatus . . ."

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

of this act, although he was now ruling the entirety of Austrasia and, in the eighteenth year of his reign, he commanded the army of Austrasia and Burgundy to move against Chlothar...²⁹⁹ He sent envoys to demand Chlothar retire from this territory or prepare for battle. Fredegar does not say why Theuderic II was infuriated with Chlothar II, who was simply acting in accordance with their agreement. However, in Fredegar's account of the war between Theuderic II and Theudebert II, there was no mention of Chlothar or his army participating in any of the battles. In Theuderic II's appeal to Chlothar II, he only asked that Chlothar not help his brother Theudebert II and did not mention of military support. Maybe when the two sides were creating the formal agreement there was the inclusion of some clause requiring Chlothar II to actually participate in the war. Unfortunately, Fredegar does not give the specifics of the agreement, but perhaps Chlothar II's raising of an army after the agreement was signed is an indication that he was supposed to contribute militarily. There was a real threat of another civil war in Francia. However, while marching against Chlothar II, Theuderic II died of dysentery at Metz and his men returned home without delay.

The *LHF* also offers an account of this final showdown between Theuderic and Theudebert. According to this source, "moreover, Brunhild was daily administering inflammatory advice to Theuderic, saying: 'Why do you neglect and not seek your father's treasure and his kingdom from the hand of Theudebert, since you know that he is not your brother because he was spawned in adultery with your father's concubine.'³⁰⁰ Theuderic II,

²⁹⁹ Fred. IV, 38: "*Chlotharius docatum Denteleno secundum convenientiam Theudericus integro suae ditione redegit; ob quam rem Theudericus, cum iam totum Auster dominarit, nimi indignatione commotus, contra Chlotharius exercitum anno XVIII regni sui de Auster et Burgundias movere precepit . . .*"

³⁰⁰ LHF, 38: "*Brunchildis enim cotidie peiora consilia ipsius Theudericus ministrabat, dicens: 'Quare negligis et non requires thesaurum patris tui ac renem eius de manu Theudoberti, cum scias, eum non esse fratrem tuum, quia in adulterio in concubine patris tui procreatus fuit?'*"

“because of his cruel heart,” raised an army and sent it against his brother.³⁰¹ The outcome of the battle was slightly different from that mentioned in Fredegar, namely with Theudebert II being betrayed and murdered by his supporters while taking refuge in Cologne. What is more important about this account is the prominent role Brunhild was assigned. She was “daily” inciting Theuderic II against his brother, trying to provoke him into starting a civil war. So, if the *LHF* is to be believed, Brunhild played a crucial role in at least two civil wars, the cruelest of which involved convincing one of her grandsons to wage war and kill the other.

In 613, after the death of her grandson, Fredegar states that “Brunhild was staying at Metz with the four sons of Theuderic, Sigibert, Childebert, Corbus and Merovech striving to install Sigibert into the kingdom of his father. Chlothar entered Austrasia by means of the faction of Arnulf, Pippin and other nobles.”³⁰² There are a number of important elements in this passage. First of all, Brunhild was trying to take control of her grandson’s kingdom by arranging her great grandson to inherit his throne. So, Brunhild was doing everything she could to hang onto power, evidenced by her attempt to elevate only Theuderic II’s eldest son as king, rather than divide the kingdom into four parts. It seems that the custom of partible inheritance could be set aside when it was politically expedient, which is further evidence against the partition described by Gregory. Brunhild considered her best odds of surviving the interregnum were with proclaiming Sigibert II, the oldest son of Theuderic II, as sole king. The nobility were ultimately responsible for inviting Chlothar II to invade and overthrow Brunhild, but there is one alternate account of the final year of Brunhild’s life.

³⁰¹ Ibid.: “*Haec audiens Theudericus, fero ut erat corde, hostem plurimum commovit, contra Theudobertum, germanus suum, direxit.*”

³⁰² Fred. IV, 40: “*Brunechildis cum filius Eudericus quattuor Sigybertum, Childebertum, Corum et Meroeum Mettis resedens, Sigybertum in regnum patris instituere nitens, Chlotharius factione Arnulfo et Pippino vel ceteris procerebus Auster ingreditur.*”

In the *Life of Saint Desiderius*, King Sisebut states that Brunhild was the instigator of war with Chlothar II. He says that Brunhild, due to her old age, was thinking about all of the horrible things she had done in life and “while she was rolling those things around in her sad mind, she declared war against a neighboring people.”³⁰³ When the time for battle came she fled and was captured and executed in a manner similar to the accounts of the *LHF* and Fredegar. Although this account of Brunhild’s final days is extremely biased, it does reveal what a close contemporary thought of her. King Sisebut was the king of Visigothic Spain from 612-21, so he was ruling during the last year of Brunhild’s reign. What is most important about this account is that it was written before Fredegar’s *Chronicle* and the *LHF*, both of which have a bias towards Chlothar II and his Neustrian dynasty. Sisebut was hostile towards Brunhild, but this had to do with her role in the stoning of Saint Desiderius. So, while this source has many problems, it is still useful to employ, especially considering that it attributes a civil war to Brunhild long before authors like Fredegar would begin to write their history of this period.

After defeating Sigibert II’s few retainers, Chlothar II had Sigibert II and his brother Corbus executed. However, Chlothar II did spare Merovech, who was his godson. For Brunhild however, there was a more memorable end. Fredegar states that:

Chlothar, when Brunhild was presented to him, had excessive anger against her, charging that ten kings of the Franks had been killed by her—that is Sigibert and Merovech and his father Chilperic, Theudebert and his son Chlothar, the son of Chlothar, who was the other Merovech, and Theuderic and his three sons, who had just been killed recently.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ King Sisebut, “The Life and Passion of Saint Desiderius,” In *King Sisebut and the Culture of Visigothic Spain: with Translations of the Lives of Saint Desiderius of Vienne and Saint Mazona of Mérida*, trans. by John R. C. Martyn, (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 20: “*Ista secum atra mente dum volveret, bellum contra finitimam gentem indixit.*”

³⁰⁴ Fred. IV, 42: “*Chlotharius, cum Brunechildis suum presentatur conspectum et odium contra ipsam nimium haberit, repotans ei eo quod decem reges Francorum per ipsam interfecti fuissent—id est Sigibertus et Meroeus et genitor suos Chilpericus, Theudebertus et filius suos Chlotharius, item Meroeus filius Chlothariae, Theudericus et eiusdem filiae tres, qui ad presens extincti fuerant.*”

This list of kings is a bit problematic, as Brunhild was almost certainly not responsible for killing her own husband, Sigibert. While it is possible that she was responsible for assassinating Chilperic, it seems ludicrous that Chlothar II would accuse her of responsibility in the death of Theuderic II's sons, the same sons whom he had murdered. However, this is all part of a *damnatio memoriae*, one which had profound effect on the sources which came after Brunhild's death. Concerning Brunhild's death, Fredegar states "having been afflicted for three days with diverse torments, he ordered that she be led before the whole army sitting on a camel. After these things, he ordered to tie her by the hair of her head, her foot and arm to the tail of an unbroken horse and there she was severed limb from limb by its hooves and by its running speed."³⁰⁵ The horrible manner of her death is generally cited by scholars who favor the idea of a blood-feud between the two families. The *LHF* largely includes a similar account of Brunhild's death but adds to it that "fire was her final burial place. Her bones were burned. Truly, the King, having made peace all over, returned to his kingdom."³⁰⁶ With this final act of brutality, Chlothar II brought peace to Francia.

Following the death of Brunhild, there was long period of stable rule in Francia, free of civil war. However, it must be noted that there were no more civil wars because there was no one left alive to wage them against. Chlothar II and his progeny were the sole surviving branch descended from the four brothers in 561, and, because of this, the later sources tend to be extremely hostile to Brunhild.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Ibid.: "*Per triduo eam diversis tormentis adfectam, iobetque eam prius camillum per omne exercito sedentem perducere, post heac comam capitis, unum pedem et brachium ad veciosissemum aequum caudam legare: ibique calcibus et velocitate cursus membratim disrumpetur.*"

³⁰⁶ LHF, 40: "*Ad extremum sepulchrum eius ignis fuit, ossa ipsius combusta. Rex vero, pacem per circuitum facta, eversus est.*"

³⁰⁷ In Jonas' *Life of Columbanus*, she appears as one of the main instigators of conflict between King Theuderic II and Columbanus, and helps expel Columbanus from the kingdom. She is also presented as a key player in the death of Bishop Dalfinus in the *Life of Wilfrid*.

Both Brunhild and Fredegund were important political players during this long period of civil war. However, their true power came after the death of their husbands. As regents for their children, both queens occupied a central role in deciding policy. Before Guntram's death, both sides were kept well checked, but in the years following his death, war quickly resumed. The civil wars from 593-613 are most commonly attributed to the actions of the two queens, though, with Fredegund dying in 597, it is Brunhild who is assigned most of the blame. However, the dramatic change in tone towards her in the narrative sources must be considered. As a result of the destruction of Brunhild's image following her downfall, which is portrayed in sources written for a Neustrian audience, it is perhaps not surprising that Brunhild gets assigned such a prominent role in causing war. Both queens played a prominent role in the civil wars which plagued this period, but perhaps too much weight is given to them because of supposed existence of a blood-feud.

The best place to start a discussion of the role of feud in these wars is with J.M. Wallace-Hadrill. His article on blood-feud is largely relied upon by those who favor the idea of feud being the predominant cause of these civil wars. Wallace-Hadrill states that the civil wars which Gregory recounts in his book are an example of feud, although a special one. He argues that "the most famous of them, involving the entire Merovingian house, sprang from the murder of the Visigothic princess Galswinth by her Merovingian husband, King Chilperic, allegedly at the instigation of his mistress Fredegund."³⁰⁸ This event, namely the murder of Galswinth, is commonly referenced as the start of a blood-feud between Sigibert's family and Chilperic's family. However, there is some debate about whether Sigibert was necessarily obligated to prosecute a feud on behalf of his wife.

³⁰⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, *Long-Haired Kings*, 130-1, 134.

Roger Collins, arguing against Wallace-Hadrill's assertion that a blood-feud sprang from Galswinth's murder, states that "it is not clear that the obligations of feud necessitated the avenging of the blood of a sister-in-law upon a brother."³⁰⁹ From evidence found in Gregory of Tours, it appears that Collins is correct. As mentioned above, Clovis's wife Clotild began a feud war with the Burgundians because of the murder of her father and mother. However, only her sons were involved, Chlodomer, Chlothar I and Childebert I. Theuderic I, who was their half-brother, did not immediately enter this war. It was only after Chlodomer captured and murdered Theuderic I's father-in-law Sigismund, who was a Burgundian King, that Theuderic entered the war. However, Theuderic I did not wage war with Chlodomer, but rather allied with him against the Burgundians. Gregory states that "Theuderic showed no desire to avenge the wrong done to his father-in-law, but promised to march in support of Chlodomer."³¹⁰ From Gregory's account of events, it does not appear that honor obligated one to prosecute a feud concerning a wrong done to an in-law. In addition, Clotild did not attempt to avenge the death of her father when her husband Clovis I was alive. Clovis was not afraid to wage war, so it appears odd that he would not attack the Burgundians if honor demanded that he avenge the wrong done to his wife.

So, it does not appear that Sigibert was obligated to prosecute a feud on behalf of his wife, Brunhild. In addition, the wars that occurred between Sigibert and Chilperic were centered on discontent surrounding the partitions of 561 and 567. More importantly, the two brothers had been at war twice before Brunhild and Fredegund appeared in Gregory's narrative. Perhaps Galswinth's murder increased the hatred between Sigibert and Chilperic, but it does not appear that their wars were caused by a blood-feud, especially considering that Chilperic was most often the one who began the conflicts.

³⁰⁹ Collins, 14.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

However, perhaps in the later wars, when Brunhild is given a more prominent role, one can find evidence of a blood-feud. For example, the *LHF* states “and so King Theuderic of the Burgundians was handsome, vigorous and excessively rash. Through the counsel of his grandmother Brunhild, gathering a very great host from Burgundy, he directed it against Chlothar, his paternal cousin.”³¹¹ From this quotation, it appears that Brunhild was inciting Theuderic II against Chlothar II, although the *LHF* does not reveal the reasons for her actions. However, evidence such as this caused Janet Nelson to argue that “her grandson’s campaign against Chlothar II may have been instigated by Brunhild precisely to prosecute her feud against the son of Fredegund.”³¹² According to Nelson, Brunhild, in seeking vengeance for her sister’s death, used her grandson to wage war with Chlothar II, whose parents were responsible for Galswinth’s death. However, if Brunhild was attempting to prosecute a feud against Chlothar II through her grandsons, it appears odd that she would then force her grandchildren into conflict with each other, ultimately leading to the death of one.

Ian Wood is one of the primary opponents of blood-feud in these civil wars. He argues that, although there is clearly animosity between Brunhild and Fredegund, there is no evidence found in Gregory, or any of his contemporaries, that supports the idea of a blood-feud. He states that:

Nor, indeed, is there any indication that Fredegund was involved in Galswinth’s murder, which is laid entirely at Chilperic’s door. Equally, Fredegund’s apparent involvement in the murder of Sigibert is not described by Gregory as instigating a feud . . . any murders which were committed by these queens were part of the politics of survival, not of the blood-feud.³¹³

³¹¹ *LHF*, 37: “*Theudericus itaque rex Burundiae erat pulcher et strenuus ac calidus nimis. Per consilium avae suae Brunchilde hoste maximo ex Burgundia congregans, contra Chlotharium, patruelem suum, dirigens . . .*”

³¹² Nelson, 45.

³¹³ Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 127.

In Wood's estimation, there is no evidence, in the early period at least, to support the existence of a blood-feud. In addition, Wood raises a particularly important point, namely that scholars often argue this supposed blood-feud was prosecuted by Fredegund and Brunhild, as well as their families. However, none have adequately explained why Fredegund would be involved in a feud with Brunhild. She was not directly responsible for Galswinth's murder, but perhaps Brunhild linked her to it. Even so, it does not explain why Fredegund would be waging a feud-war with Brunhild. Fredegar does recount that Brunhild was responsible for Chilperic's murder, but it was written long after the fact, and was biased against Brunhild. Fredegund is often attributed with assassination attempts on Childebert II and Brunhild, but, in the primary sources, it does not appear that these were necessitated by a feud. Rather, they were done in an attempt to rid Fredegund of someone she genuinely hated, and to aid her son Chlothar II, because, if Childebert II was dead, it would provide Chlothar with a great opportunity for expansion.

Guy Halsall has attempted to provide a more precise definition of feud. He argues that there are two levels of violence in early medieval society, tactical and strategic. He states that:

Tactical violence aims directly at the resolution of a dispute . . . Strategic violence is different. In many instances one part in a dispute does not have the power to attempt to achieve its aims by open, tactical violence against its opponents . . . in such cases, 'strategic' violence ensues . . . Now, in a 'true' feud, each act of violence is strategic. It draws attention to the dispute, rather than solving it itself.³¹⁴

According to Halsall, the conflict which occurs within the Merovingian dynasty does not conform to his idea of a feud. In order to demonstrate this argument, it is first necessary to provide the account of the famous blood-feud between Sichar and Chramnesind, who were both citizens of Tours.³¹⁵

³¹⁴ Halsall, 11.

³¹⁵ Another example of a blood-feud in Gregory is found in Book X.27. Gregory states that "an altercation now arose between certain Franks in Tournai. The immediate cause was that the son of one of them angrily and repeatedly rebuked the son of another, who had married his sister, for neglecting his wife and going after loose

Sichar had killed Chramnesind's father, brother and uncle, and in retaliation Chramnesind had burned down Sichar's house.³¹⁶ The two were brought into court, payment awarded to Chramnesind and both sides made oaths that the conflict was now over. Gregory then states "and so this dispute ended."³¹⁷ It must be pointed out that the modern translations of both O. M. Dalton and Lewis Thorpe render *altercatio* as feud. I have instead chosen to translate it as "dispute." While *altercatio* could be a reference to the entire conflict between Chramnesind and Sichar, taking into account that the first half of this conflict ended with both parties appearing in court, *altercatio* might instead be a reference to the court case which resolved this dispute. This definition would also fit the definitions found in Niermeyer of *altercatio* being a litigation or legal claim.³¹⁸ If there was any conflict in Gregory's *History* which qualifies as a legitimate blood-feud, this conflict is it, but this example reveals the dangers of relying on translated sources alone.

Returning to the conflict between Sichar and Chramnesind, years had passed and they had become good friends. One night Sichar was boasting that Chramnesind ought to be thankful that his relatives were dead because of the gold he now had. According to Gregory, Sichar

women. The young man at fault took no notice. The ill-feeling reached such a pitch that the girl's brother attacked his brother-in-law and killed him, with some of his relations. Then the brother in his turn was murdered by those who had supported his brother-in-law. In the end not a single member of either family remained alive, except one survivor for whom there was no opponent left. The next thing which happened was that relations of each of the two families started quarreling with each other. They were warned by Queen Fredegund on a number of occasions to give up their feud and to make peace once more, for if the dispute continued it would become a public nuisance of considerable dimensions. This attempt at reconciliation by soothing talk was not a success, and in the end Fredegund silenced both sides by the axe."

³¹⁶ Gregory, *History*, VII.47: The background to the murder of Chramnesind's relatives is as follows. One of Sichar's friends was killed by Austregesil and a small skirmish occurred between supporters of both men. In the aftermath of this fight, Austregesil stole some goods from the house of a Sichar supporter. A tribunal was called and Austregesil was found guilty and ordered to pay restitution. However, Sichar learned where the stolen loot was being held and went there and killed Auno, and his son and brother. Gregory knew that things were going to snowball if he did not intervene and he tried to get both sides to settle the matter, even going as far as to offer to help pay restitution to Chramnesind, Auno's son. Chramnesind refuses to accept compensation, burns down Sichar's house, and was forced to donate half of the restitution previously offered him to the church. Both sides agree to take an oath and so peace was restored.

³¹⁷ Greg. Hist., VII.47: "Et sic altercatio terminum fecit."

³¹⁸ Niermeyer, 38.

thought to himself “unless I take vengeance for the annihilation of my relatives, I ought to lose the name of man and call myself a weak woman.’ Immediately, having extinguished the lights, he cleaved the head of Sichar in two . . . Chramnesind deprived the body of clothes and hanged the nude body on a fence post. And, having mounted his horse, he sought after the king.”³¹⁹

What is most important about this account is not that Chramnesind felt he was obligated to avenge his relatives, but rather that after avenging the death he made a public display of the body. He wanted to draw attention to this person’s corpse and by doing so publicize the feud which had existed between them. If he had hidden the corpse, it would have been an admission that he was not justified in killing Sichar. Not only did he put the corpse on display, but he also immediately sought out the king to explain what had happened. His first attempt did not end well, because Sichar was one of Brunhild’s favorites, and so Chramnesind fled to the kingdom of Guntram for a time. He eventually went back to Childebert II, who demanded that he prove this murder was justified. Chramnesind was able to do so and so peace was once again restored.

This feud is one of the only examples found in Gregory of Tours that all scholars agree is a legitimate instance of blood-feud. However, this pattern does not appear during the civil wars of this period. If Brunhild was in fact seeking vengeance for her sister, it is not clear that honor necessarily demanded Sigibert participate. In addition, Chilperic was more often the aggressor against his brother, and conflict between them generally revolved around territorial disputes. If then scholars tried to point to the murder of Chilperic as a vengeance killing in a feud, there is the legitimate counterargument that it does not fit the definition provided by Halsall and shown in the example above. In a ‘true’ feud the goal was to bring attention to the wrong that was done and the correction of this wrong. If Brunhild was responsible for Chilperic’s death, she did not

³¹⁹ Greg. Hist., IX.19: “*Dixitque in corde suo ‘Nisi ulciscar interitum parentum meorum, amitteri nomen viri debeo et mulier infirma vocare.’ Et statim extinctis luminaribus, caput Sichari seca dividit . . . Cramsindus exanimus corpus nudatum vestimentis adpenit in sepiis stipites, ascensisque aequitibus eius, ad regem petiit.*”

claim responsibility for it, which one would do if trying to bring attention to the feud and show that his death was justice for the wrong done to her, her husband and her sister. So it appears then that feud, if it existed, cannot be traced back to the murder of Sigibert or Galswinth, which lends support to the argument that the Merovingian family was not embroiled in some blood-feud.

It is apparent throughout this chapter that there is very little evidence of a blood feud between the Neustrian and Austrasian dynasties. In his famous article on blood-feud, Wallace-Hadrill stated that “all vengeance is not feud, and all bloodshed is not blood-feud.”³²⁰

Unfortunately, it appears that Wallace-Hadrill encountered the same pitfalls he was hoping to help others avoid. Although Brunhild and Fredegund clearly hated each other, it does not appear that their conflict can be defined as a blood-feud. Not only have many modern scholars placed far too much emphasis on this idea of feud, but they are also captivated by the role which women played in these civil wars. While I do not want to imply that these women were not completely capable political players, it appears that other people, namely the kings, are more to blame for these civil wars.

³²⁰ Wallace-Hadrill, *Long-Haired Kings*, 123.

CONCLUSION

The numerous civil wars following the death of Chlothar I were so devastating that Gregory of Tours states that “it is offending that I call to mind the various civil wars, which vigorously oppress the race and kingdom of the Franks; in which time, what is worse, we now see that time which God announced as the beginning of anguish [i.e. the apocalypse].”³²¹ Gregory, so worried about the destruction that the civil wars were reaping on Francia, believed it was the beginning of the apocalypse. His advice to the dueling kings was “*cavete* (beware) of dissension, beware of the civil wars which assault your people and you yourselves.”³²² Gregory’s use of *cavete*, the plural imperative form of the verb *cavere* (to beware or take care), indicates that Gregory was not beseeching a specific king, but all of them. He wanted them to take notice of what their predecessors, like Clovis, had done and focus their military exploits against an external foe.

Further into his prologue, Gregory states that these kings should “remember Clovis who became the founder of your victorious country, who killed those kings who went against him, shattered enemy peoples, and subjugated their countries leaving behind for you the unimpaired total power over them!”³²³ I find it baffling that Gregory would look to Clovis as his example for how Chlothar I’s sons should act. The same Clovis whom Gregory states that, “having killed many other kings and close kin, about which he was having zeal so that they not steal his kingdom, he extended his kingdom throughout all of Gaul.”³²⁴ Even if it appears that Gregory

³²¹ Greg. Hist., V.Prologus: “*Taedit me bellorum civilium diversitatis, que Francorum gentem et regnum valde proterunt memorare; in quo, quod peius est, tempore illud quod Dominus de dolorum praedixit inquit iam videmus.*” Gregory also laments about the various civil wars in IV.48, 50.

³²² Ibid.: “*cavete discordiam, cavete bella civilia, quae vos populumque vestrum expugnant.*”

³²³ Ibid.: “*Recordamini, quid capud victoriarum vestrarum Chlodovechus fecerit, qui adversos reges interfecit, noxias gentes elicit, patrias subiugavit, quarum regnum vobis integrum inlaesumque reliquit!*”

³²⁴ Ibid., II.42: “*Interfectisque et aliis mutis regibus vel parentibus suis primis, de quibus zelum habebat, ne ei regnum auferrent, regnum suum per totas Gallias dilatavit.*” For examples of Clovis killing his relatives, see Gregory, *History*, II.40-2.

was trying to legitimize Clovis' murder of his relatives, he made an even stronger statement in the same chapter.

According to Gregory, Clovis lamented having no living relatives because he would have no one to call upon if he was attacked. However, Gregory claims that “he was not feeling pain about the death of [his relatives,] and he was saying this with deception, so that, if by chance he had been able to discover someone, he might kill them.”³²⁵ This Clovis, the one who desired to murder all of his kin, is whom Gregory chose as his exemplary king. It is true that Clovis often fought against the Visigoths and others in order to expand his kingdom, but even so, he still spent much of his time annihilating all other branches of his family tree until he was the last survivor. The period covered by this thesis is less exceptional in its numerous civil wars than was previously thought. It was not just Clovis, but also his sons and grandsons who were often battling amongst themselves and trying to consolidate as much power as possible.³²⁶

What this study has shown is that, although modern scholars tend to focus on the more exotic causes of these wars, namely the role of women and blood-feud, there are more mundane reasons behind these civil wars. In the beginning, Chilperic was not only kept from inheriting the sole possession of the Frankish kingdoms, but also left with a small territory without any avenue of expansion. Chilperic was faced with the tough decision: he could have an unhappy army, which could lead to drastic consequences, or he could attack his brothers. It was not only Chilperic who was greedy. As has been revealed, other kings, such as Sigibert and Guntram, also wanted to control as much territory as possible. The civil wars also gave new opportunities for

³²⁵ Ibid.: “*Sed hoc non de morte horum condolens, sed dolo dicebat, si forte potuisset adhuc aliquem repperire, ut interfeceret.*”

³²⁶ For example, according to Gregory, Theuderic I and Chlothar I had joined forces and defeated the Thuringians. However, after they won, Theuderic tried to have Chlothar assassinated, though the attempt ultimately failed. Gregory, *History*, III.7. For other examples of conflict between the sons of Clovis see: Gregory, *History*, III. 9, 15, 18, 23, 28, 31.

the bishops and nobility to assert their power, evidenced by their attempted overthrow of Guntram via Gundovald. Finally, the two powerful queens of this period, Brunhild and Fredegund, did have a profound impact on the later years of the war, although it seems unlikely that there was a blood-feud at the root of their actions. However, the actions of Brunhild and Fredegund in promoting and provoking civil war reveal just how varied the causes of these wars were.

In closing, it is apparent that modern scholars need to reassess the amount of attention given to the role of queens and blood-feud in these wars. Instead more time should be spent on the role of the kings, nobility, and bishops in promoting and prolonging the civil wars which characterized this period.

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APPENDIX: GENEALOGY OF MEROVINGIAN ROYAL FAMILY

Source: Edward James, *The Franks* (New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988), 170.

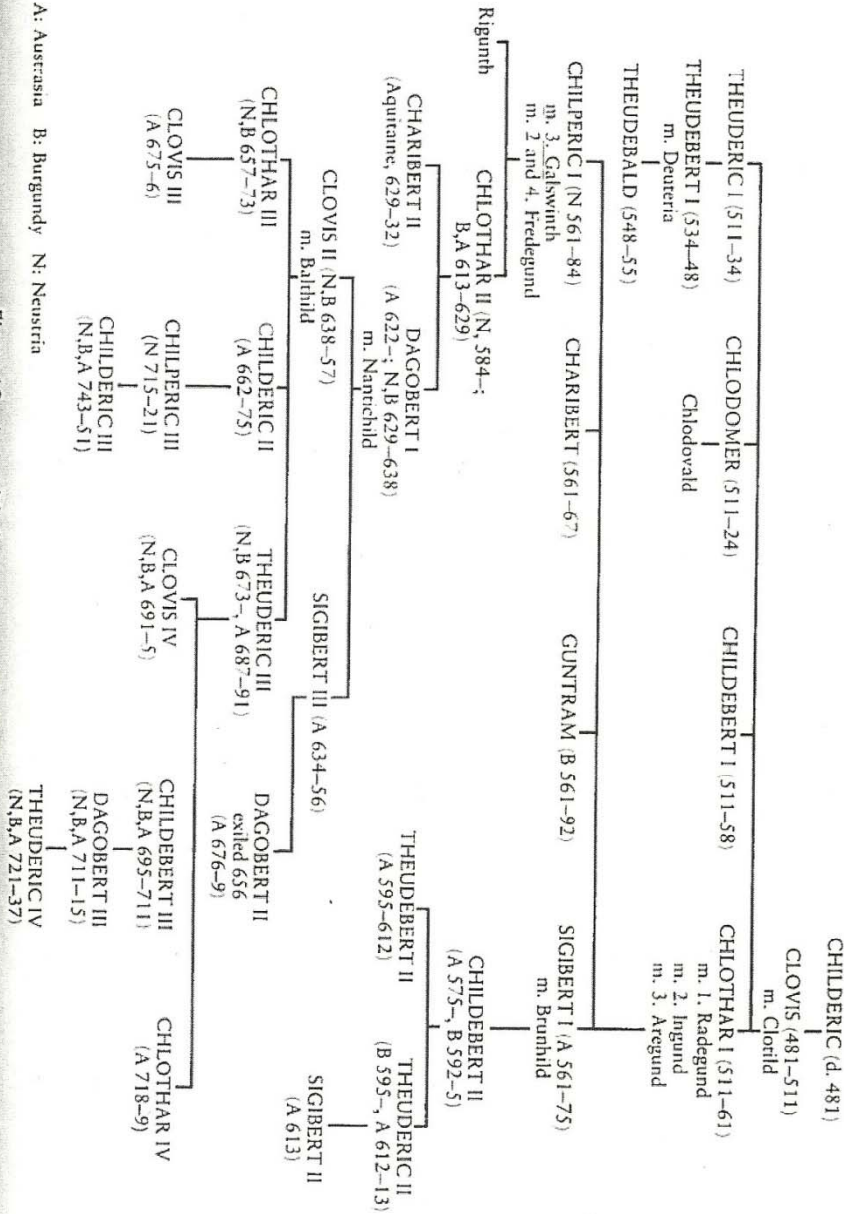


Figure 18 A simplified genealogy of the Merovingians.

VITA

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