

Sis Quoque Catholicis Religionis Apex: The Ecclesiastical Patronage of Chilperic I and Fredegund

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The libelous depiction of King Chilperic I (561–584) 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. In fact, evidence from Gregory's own writings, as well as from other contemporary sources, reveals that Chilperic and Fredegund were generous patrons of ecclesiastical persons, institutions, and cults. A prosopographical database of seventeen episcopal supporters of Chilperic and Fredegund is used to evaluate the means by which the royal couple attracted and maintained episcopal support. The patronage by the royal couple of saint cults and their associated institutions also is examined. It is concluded that Chilperic and Fredegund's ecclesiastical policies are less responsible for their posthumous reputations than the choices that they made in distributing their patronage.

IN his masterful study of the Gallo-Frankish Church, J. M. Wallace-Hadrill characterized the Frankish kings as “masters ... patrons and despoilers” of the church.¹ In the Merovingian era, kings appointed bishops, punished episcopal offenders, convoked ecclesiastical synods, legislated on religious matters, and patronized church institutions and cults through financial grants and privileges. Nevertheless, as Wallace-Hadrill recognized, it is an oversimplification to think of the relationship between Merovingian monarchs and the Gallo-Frankish Church as being characterized solely by royal strength and ecclesiastical subservience.² The Frankish monarchy's

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¹J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 42.

²*Ibid.*, 43: “Kings respected bishops and took care over their appointments; the office itself impressed them, with all that it implied as to spiritual patronage and guardianship.”

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difficulty in asserting its absolute authority over the Church lay not so much with the ecclesiastical institutions themselves, but with the men and women who made up the professional wing of the Church, and who possessed their own spiritual and political *auctoritas*, as well as personal agendas and loyalties. In Merovingian *Francia*, the bishops of the realm were active political players, supporting and scheming against monarchs, who, for their part, sought out the loyalty of churchmen, and attempted to punish, sometimes unsuccessfully, those who refused their friendship.

We can perceive this clearly in the ecclesiastical policies of King Chilperic I (r. 561–584) and his wife Fredegund (d. 597), both characterized by their contemporary, Bishop Gregory of Tours (538–594), as scourges of the Church and its bishops. From Gregory's perspective, Chilperic failed in his duties as a Christian monarch by abusing and ignoring the counsel of the episcopal elite, alienating ecclesiastical property, permitting the burning and looting churches, and failing to set a proper moral example for his subjects.³ Gregory, who spent nearly a decade as a subject of the Neustrian monarchy, from 576 to 584, had every reason to personally dislike and to demean Chilperic, having stood trial for treason in the king's presence at Berny in 580.⁴ As for Fredegund, Gregory's libelous narrative characterizes her as a scheming murderess who did not spare even bishops in her bloody plots to ensure her own and her children's political future.⁵

³On Gregory's explicit critiques of Chilperic, see J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, "Gregory of Tours and Bede: their views on the personal qualities of kings," in *Early Medieval History*, ed. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (New York: Harper Collins, 1976), 100–101; Marc Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1981), 416–420; Brian Brennan, "The Image of the Frankish Kings in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus," *Journal of Medieval History* 10 (1984), 8; Kathleen Mitchell, "Saints and Public Christianity in the *Historiae* of Gregory of Tours," in *Religion and Society in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Richard E. Sullivan*, ed. T. F. X. Noble and John Contreni (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1987), 86; Ian Wood, "The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 71 (1993), 254–259; Adriaan Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority in Sixth-Century Gaul* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1994), 235–237; Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, trans. C. Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 41–51 and 181–191; Guy Halsall, "Nero and Herod? The Death of Chilperic and Gregory's Writing of History," in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 337–350.

⁴On the military campaigns of 574–6, which culminated in Chilperic's permanent seizure of Tours, see Guy Halsall, "The Preface to Book V of Gregory of Tours' *Historiae*: Its Form, Context and Significance," *English Historical Review* 122, no. 496 (2007), 307–310.

⁵While it would be simplistic to dismiss Gregory of Tours as a mere misogynist, Dick Harrison observes that of the 197 women (approximately 15% of a total of 1,346 individuals) who appear in the *Historiae*, 27 out of 59 ascribed characteristics are portrayed negatively. Merovingian queens could acquire political influence through kinship and marital ties, acting as regents for underage sons, through their access to financial resources, and by patronizing secular and ecclesiastical clients. *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 1998), 75–76. On the sources of political influence, see Suzanne Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,

I. CHILPERIC AND FREDEGUND: THE GREGORIAN NARRATIVE AND BEYOND

While Gregory's characterizations of Chilperic and Fredegund are not without nuance, and are based on the author's first-hand experiences with the royal couple, they nevertheless are part of a conscious authorial program, which scholars in recent years have characterized variously as spiritual, theological or didactic,⁶ political,⁷ and even satirical.⁸ But there is a general consensus that Gregory was a sophisticated writer whose *Historiae* was a deliberate, complex, and unified work of historical art.⁹ His characterizations of Chilperic and Fredegund are no less deliberate.

But do these deliberate characterizations reflect a genuine hostility towards the royal couple? While most readers of the *Historiae* recognize a consistent and sincere hostility inspiring Gregory's portrayal of Chilperic and Fredegund,¹⁰ two prominent scholars have challenged this traditional interpretation. In an article published in 1993, Ian Wood suggested that Gregory's depiction of Chilperic in the final chapter of Book VI of the *Historiae* (much of which is given over to the author's damning obituary of the monarch) is more overtly hostile in its characterization of the king than in preceding chapters and thus signals a narrative shift. Following the compositional dating supported by Jean Verdon, Wood proposes that Book V was written in 580 and Book VI in 584.¹¹ Wood concludes that Gregory waited until after Chilperic's death in 584 to make his true feelings more

1981), 58–70; Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1983), 104–106; Janet Nelson, "Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History", in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Janet Nelson (London: Hambledon Press, 1986), 4–9; Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens*, 205–211. On female violence in Francia, see Nina Pancer, *Sans peur et sans vergogne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), 211–257; Nina Gradowicz-Pancer, "De-gendering Female Violence: Merovingian Female Honour as an Exchange of Violence," *Early Medieval Europe*, 11, no. 1 (2002), 1–18.

⁶Giselle de Nie, *Views From a Many-Windowed Tower: Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987); Mitchell, "Saints and Public Christianity," 7–26; Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*.

⁷Wood, "The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours," 253–270; Ian Wood, "The Individuality of Gregory of Tours," in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 29–46.

⁸Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, paperback ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 112–234.

⁹See, for example, the individual contributions to Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood, eds., *The World of Gregory of Tours* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

¹⁰See the observation of Halsall, "Nero and Herod," 337–338.

¹¹Jean Verdon, *Grégoire de Tours* (Le Côtéau: Horvath, 1989), 78–79. For a helpful summary of various multi-stage dating schemas for the *Historiae*, see Halsall, "The Preface to Book V of Gregory of Tours' *Histories*," 306–307.

explicit, having experienced the trauma of being tried for slandering the royal couple at Berny in 580.¹² Regarding Fredegund, Wood is forced to acknowledge that Gregory's portrayal is more uniformly hostile, although he observes that Gregory waited until Book VII to hint less subtly of Fredegund's marital infidelity.¹³

Addressing this same supposed discrepancy between chapter VI.46 and earlier depictions of Chilperic in the *Historiae*, Guy Halsall offered an alternate explanation in a study published in 2002. For Halsall, it is not Chilperic whom Gregory feared so much as Chilperic's brother Guntram of Burgundy. Therefore, in those books covering events from 584 onwards, Gregory developed "a new writing strategy," in which he systematically praised Guntram, while condemning the latter's enemies both living and dead.¹⁴ In short, unlike Wood, Halsall sees Gregory's criticism of Chilperic not as an expression of genuine animosity but rather as politically expedient rhetoric. Additionally, unlike Wood, Halsall does not extend his theory to include Fredegund.

It is problematic that neither theory accounts for Gregory's clearly sustained negative portrayal of Fredegund. Additionally, both Wood and Halsall presuppose that the *Historiae* were composed piecemeal over the length of Gregory's episcopate, an assumption that increasingly has come under attack.¹⁵ Finally, against Halsall's theory, Alexander C. Murray has perceptively observed that Gregory's narrative "silences" are more prominent in his treatment of Childebert II and Brunhild, those Austrasian monarchs under whose rule he lived and wrote after 585, than in his treatments of either Chilperic or Guntram.¹⁶ In fact, one can conclude, as Murray does, that Gregory's treatment of Chilperic, while certainly not devoid of nuance and humanizing features, is consistently hostile throughout the *Historiae*, as it also is of Fredegund. The Bishop of Tours' characterizations are undoubtedly colored by his moralistic attitude, his Austrasian political loyalties, and his personal animosity towards the king and queen; nevertheless, they were grounded in the reality of Gregory's personal knowledge of and frequent interactions with the Neustrian monarchs. Thus, chapter VI.46 is not an anomaly, but rather an extrapolation of preceding anecdotal evidence for Chilperic's character, serving as a capstone to Gregory's historical account of the king's reign. Indeed, this was not the

¹²Wood, "The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours," 254–257.

¹³Wood, "The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours," 257–259.

¹⁴Halsall, "Nero and Herod," 337–350.

¹⁵Alexander C. Murray makes a persuasive case that the *Historiae* in their entirety were composed between 585 and 594. "Chronology and the Composition of the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours," *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1 (2008), 157–196.

¹⁶On Gregory's silences, see Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, 159–164.

only occasion Gregory used the death of an individual as an opportunity to provide his own vitriolic assessment of their life and character. Chilperic's brother Charibert, for example, suffers a similar fate in Gregory's *Libri de Virtutibus Sancti Martini Episcopi*.¹⁷

Despite its bias, Gregory's unsympathetic characterization of Chilperic and Fredegund would be echoed, to varying degrees, by subsequent Frankish chroniclers reliant upon the Bishop of Tours' narrative. The seventh-century chronicler known traditionally as Fredegar concludes his elaboration of Gregory's account of Chilperic's assassination by commenting that the murderer "justly brought an end to a most cruel life."¹⁸ In contrast, the anonymous eighth-century Neustrian author of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* (ca. 727) [LHF], is less explicitly opinioned in his treatment of Chilperic and Fredegund, although he does detail Chilperic's draconian taxation measures, as well as Fredegund's adultery and possible role in her husband's assassination.¹⁹ The anonymous chronicler's laconic style has encouraged one commentator to compare favorably the depiction of Fredegund in the LHF to that found in Gregory's *Historiae*.²⁰ However, 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.²¹

In light of the fact that Gregory's depiction of Chilperic and Fredegund largely informs the subsequent Frankish historical tradition, it is fortunate that several contemporary and near-contemporary sources for the reigns of the Neustrian monarchs survive that are independent of the Gregorian narrative. These normative and testamentary legal documents include, most notably, Chilperic's lone-surviving *Edictum* and the will of Bishop Bertram of Le Mans, an important political ally of Fredegund following Chilperic's death.²² Poetic sources can also flesh out the picture, especially those dedicated to or written on behalf of the royal couple, such as those by Venantius Fortunatus,

¹⁷Gregory of Tours, *Libri de Virtutibus Sancti Martini Episcopi*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica [hereafter MGH] *Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum* [hereafter SRM] 1:2, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1885), I.29.

¹⁸Fredegar, *Chronica*, MGH SRM 2, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1888), III.93: "Crudelissimam vitam digna morte finivit." On the compositional context of Fredegar's *Chronicle*, see Ian Wood, "Fredegar's Fables," in *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Anton Scharer and Georg Scheibelreiter (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1994), 359–66; Roger Collins, *Fredegar* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996).

¹⁹*Liber Historiae Francorum*, MGH SRM 2, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1888), chapters 34–35.

²⁰Richard Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 155–156.

²¹*Liber Historiae Francorum*, chapter 36: ". . . maleficia Fredegundis reginiae."

²²*Capitularia Regum Francorum*, MGH Leges 2:1, ed. Alfred Boretius (Hanover: Hahn, 1883), 8–10; Margarete Weidemann, *Das Testament des Bischofs Berthramm von Le Mans vom 27. März 616* (Mainz: Verlag des Romisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 1982).

Gregory's contemporary and friend.²³ In particular, Fortunatus' panegyric for Chilperic, composed for the occasion of Gregory's trial at Berny in 580, offers a version of Chilperic almost unrecognizable from the villain of the *Historiae*. While Fortunatus' panegyric can be read as a subtle defense of his accused friend, employing loquacious praise for Chilperic and Fredegund as a means of encouraging the monarchs to embody an idealized vision of royal *auctoritas*,²⁴ its verses cannot simply be dismissed as mere groundless flattery. While the contents of the poem certainly were dictated in part by genre constraints and the context of its performance, if the king and queen had not already shared (if not necessarily embodied) those ideals and virtues extolled by Fortunatus, then the latter's praises would have had little effect. When Fortunatus encouraged Chilperic to assume his place as the "apex of the Catholic faith," he was appealing to that Chilperic who composed theological treatises and hymns, patronized the cults of saints, and sought the approval of the bishops of his realm.²⁵

The existence of alternative narratives for Chilperic's reign has encouraged some scholars to seek to restore the king's reputation, emphasizing in particular his audacious literary and theological efforts, which Gregory had mocked mercilessly.²⁶ Fredegund, in contrast, has been comparatively less fortunate in her treatment by modern historians. Much like Christine de Pizan (ca. 1365–1430), who described Fredegund in her *Book of the City of Ladies* as "unnaturally cruel for a woman" while also acknowledging that the queen ruled "most wisely after her husband's death,"²⁷ scholars willing to concede

²³Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, MGH Auctores Antiquissimi [hereafter AA] 4:1, ed. Friedrich Leo (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881), IX.1–5.

²⁴Brian Brennan, "The Career of Venantius Fortunatus," *Traditio* 41 (1985), 74–5; Judith George, "Poet as Politician: Venantius Fortunatus' Panegyric to King Chilperic," *Journal of Medieval History* 15:1 (1989), 5–18; Simon Coates, "Venantius Fortunatus and the Image of Episcopal Authority in Late Antique and Early Merovingian Gaul," *English Historical Review* 115, no. 464 (2000), 1135–6.

²⁵Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX.1.144: "Sis quoque catholicis religionis apex." C.f. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 183, note 93, who sees the absence of references in this poem to Chilperic's relations with his bishops as evidence that Chilperic sought to avoid employing "bishops as participants or councilors in his exercise of power." Presumably, the bishops in attendance at Berny would have disagreed with this assessment. Additionally, in the same note, Heinzelmann admonishes Judith George for failing to note the absence of any discussion of Chilperic's episcopal relations. In fact, George, "Poet as Politician," 12–13, reads lines 51–52 ("Noxia dum cuperent hostes tibi bella parere, pro te pugnavit fortis in arma fides") as being in reference to Chilperic's reliance upon the support of his bishops.

²⁶For the most recent (and thorough) effort, see Frédéric Armand, *Chilpéric Ier: petit fils de Clovis, grand-père de Dagobert, le roi assassiné deux fois* (Cahors: La Louve Éditions, 2008). Armand (pp. 152–270) acknowledges Chilperic's respectful attitude towards the church and its bishops. For Gregory's explicit critiques, see Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, MGH SRM 1:1, ed. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison (Hanover: Hahn, 1937–51), V.44 and VI.46.

²⁷Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (London: Penguin Classics, 1999), 31. Thus, for Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 63–64, Fredegund

the queen's intelligence and political acumen have been unable to abandon entirely those negative characteristics originally assigned to Fredegund by Gregory of Tours.

It is safe to say that the Neustrian monarchs did resort, on occasion, to unpleasant measures in order to protect their political interests. But questions of morality aside, the Bishop of Tours' characterization of Chilperic and Fredegund as instigators of a consciously anti-ecclesiastical political agenda does appear to be vastly overstated, particularly when one compares their policies towards the Gallo-Frankish Church to those of their royal contemporaries. Both alternative sources and Gregory's own writings suggest that Chilperic and Fredegund did not differ notably in their ecclesiastical policies from other contemporary and near-contemporary Merovingian kings and queens, who sought to establish profitable ties with the Gallo-Frankish Church as a form of *imitatio imperii*.²⁸ It may be true that Chilperic and Fredegund did not entirely subscribe to Gregory of Tours' ideal of *Bischofsherrschaft*. Certainly they did not hesitate to attack those ecclesiastics who allied themselves with their political rivals.²⁹ Rather than indiscriminate abusers of the righteous, Chilperic and Fredegund were, in fact, generous patrons of ecclesiastical persons, institutions, and cults.³⁰ But their discriminating selection of beneficiaries reveals the difficult choices that they were forced to make in order to forge alliances beneficial to themselves, choices which ultimately would prove nearly fatal to their posthumous reputations.

II. EPISCOPAL SUPPORT FOR CHILPERIC AND FREDEGUND

Chilperic I was born the son of King Chlothar I and his wife Aregund around 534.³¹ Chlothar had at least six additional sons by a variety of women, most prominently Aregund's own sister Ingund.³² Upon Chlothar's death in 561,

is a woman of "courage and acumen," but also, "ruthless and manipulative." For Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, 224, she is "savage but resolute." For Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* (London: Longman, 1994), 124, she is "a model, if somewhat bloodthirsty, queen."

²⁸On Chilperic's efforts at *imitatio imperii*, see Bernard Bachrach, *Anatomy of a Little War: A Diplomatic and Military History of the Gundovald Affair, 568–586* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 35–38

²⁹Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 181–191.

³⁰Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 184–185.

³¹Eugen Ewig, "Die Namengebung bei den ältesten Frankenkönigen und im merowingischen Königshaus," in *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien*, ed. Matthias Becher, Theo Kölzer, and Ulrich Nonn (Munich: Artemis, 1976–2009), III.202.

³²Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IV.3. The true parentage of the pretender Gundovald is uncertain.

Chilperic attempted to circumvent his surviving brothers, Sigibert, Guntram, and Charibert, by seizing their father's treasury at the villa of Berny and laying claim to the *civitas* of Paris. His brothers, however, joined forces in order to expel Chilperic from the city and forced a division of Chlothar's kingdom in which Chilperic was awarded the Kingdom of Soissons, which his father had inherited from Chilperic's grandfather, Clovis I, in 511.³³ Chilperic did not lose any time in attempting to expand the borders of his kingdom at the expense of his brother Sigibert, attacking several *civitates* within the Kingdom of Rheims.³⁴ The hostility between the two brothers culminated in the assassination of Sigibert in 575, supposedly at the behest of Chilperic's loyal wife, Fredegund.³⁵ It is not certain when Chilperic and Fredegund were wed; yet, they were already married when Sigibert took as his wife the Visigothic princess Brunhild, whose sister, Galswinth, Chilperic received as his own bride.³⁶ Fredegund loyally supported her husband in his continuing disputes with his brothers, but at the same time worked tirelessly to undermine the political ambitions of Chilperic's sons by other women.³⁷

Chilperic's *regnum* increased in size significantly with the death of Charibert in 567, with the addition of the majority of the *civitates* located within the ecclesiastical provinces of Tours and Rouen. Additionally, in Aquitaine, Chilperic acquired Cahors, Limoges, Bordeaux and Bearn-Bigorre.³⁸ Although his brother Sigibert in particular posed a serious challenge to Chilperic's territorial ambitions over the next several years, after the former's death, Chilperic's Neustrian *regnum* was able to absorb an even greater share of Charibert's former territories.³⁹ Due to Chilperic's assassination under mysterious circumstances in 584, much of this territory was lost to Chilperic's brother Guntram, his nephew Childebert II, and Childebert's mother Brunhild.⁴⁰ What remained of Chilperic's kingdom was inherited by

³³Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IV.22. On the partition of 511, see Eugen Ewig, "Die fränkischen Teilungen und Teilreiche (511–613)," in *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien*, ed. Hartmut Atsma (Munich: Artemis, 1976–2009), I.114–128. The Kingdom of Soissons included in 561 the *civitates* of Soissons, Amiens, Boulogne, Therouanne, Tournai, Cambrai, Arras, Noyon, Toulouse, and possibly other cities within the southern province of *Novempopulana*. On Soissons as a royal center, see Eugen Ewig, "Résidence et capitale pendant le Haut Moyen Age," in *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien*, ed. Hartmut Atsma (Munich: Artemis, 1976–2009), I.386.

³⁴Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IV.23.

³⁵Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IV.51.

³⁶Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IV.28. On Merovingian polygamy, see Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 38–41.

³⁷Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 123–124.

³⁸Ewig, "Die fränkischen Teilungen," 138–139.

³⁹Ewig, "Die fränkischen Teilungen," 139–140.

⁴⁰For the treaty of Andelot between Childebert II, his mother Brunhild, and Guntram, see Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IX.20. Among those *civitates* redistributed were those originally given to Chilperic's wife Galswinth as a *morgengabe*.

his son with Fredegund, Chlothar II.⁴¹ Fredegund herself served as Chlothar's regent until her death in 597. Under his mother's guidance, Chlothar struggled to rebuild his father's kingdom, a project which eventually would culminate in the unification of the disparate Frankish *regna* under Chlothar's sole rule.⁴²

By the time Chilperic came to power in 561, the involvement of Gallic bishops in Frankish royal politics was well-established. The political alliances forged between kings and bishops had proven to be mutually beneficial. Royal support, for example, could guarantee success to a candidate for episcopal office.⁴³ Additionally, monarchs proved generous patrons to sitting bishops, as well as to the institutions and cults under their management.⁴⁴ Kings also supported efforts by the Gallic episcopate to legislate religious and social norms in the Frankish Kingdoms by convoking ecclesiastical councils and enforcing conciliar legislation as legally binding statutes.⁴⁵ In return, the aristocratic Gallic bishops proved to be valuable localized allies in individual *civitates*, as well as founts of spiritual patronage for the Merovingian dynasty.⁴⁶ Prelates were expected to assume a variety of civic functions, acting as regional and ecclesiastical administrators, peace-keepers, and urban-planners.⁴⁷ At the same time, they had to balance these responsibilities with their primary obligation to provide pastoral care to their flock.⁴⁸ Included in this flock were the Merovingian kings themselves, who were expected to rely on the counsel of their bishops in order to govern effectively.⁴⁹ As Ian Wood has observed, "not surprisingly, effective kings worked well with their bishops . . . weak kings are likely to have had very

⁴¹Weidemann, *Das Testament des Bischofs Berthramn von Le Mans*, 149–151, has reconstructed Chlothar's *regnum* circa 584 as consisting of the following *civitates*: Boulogne, Therouanne, Tournai, Arras, Amiens, Vermand-Noyon, Rouen, Beauvais, Coutances, Bayeux, Lisieux, Evreux, Rennes, Le Mans, Angers, and possibly Avranches.

⁴²As described by Fredegar, *Chronica*, IV.42.

⁴³Dietrich Claude, "Die Bestellung der Bischöfe," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonistische Abteilung* 49 (1963), 1–75.

⁴⁴Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 22–27.

⁴⁵On the legal value of conciliar *canones*, see Gregory Halfond, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils, AD 511–768* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 131–158.

⁴⁶On the aristocratic backgrounds of sixth-century Merovingian-era bishops, see Martin Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien* (Munich: Artemis, 1976). Matthew Innes exaggerates the dichotomy between central and peripheral political power, but is correct to emphasize the importance of episcopal office-holders as important sources of local *auctoritas*. See *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages, the Middle Rhine Valley 400–1000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 254.

⁴⁷Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 75–77.

⁴⁸Henry G. Beck, *Pastoral Care of Souls in South-East France during the Sixth Century* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1950).

⁴⁹This was the lesson that Remigius of Rheims attempted to convey to Clovis in his first letter to the king, written after Clovis took control of the province of Belgica Secunda: *Epistola Austrasicae*, MGH *Epistolae* 3, no. 2, ed. Wilhelm Gundlach (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), 113.

much less influence on their clergy.”⁵⁰ Venantius Fortunatus attempted to impart a similar lesson to Chilperic face-to-face at Berny on the occasion of Gregory of Tours’ trial in 580.⁵¹ In his panegyric to the king, Fortunatus reminded Chilperic that “when foes attempted to wage noxious war against you, faith fought on your behalf, steadfast in arms.”⁵² Recognizing in the bishops of Merovingian Gaul valuable political and spiritual allies, kings employed them as counselors, ambassadors, and legislators. For Chilperic and Fredegund to have singled out bishops as a group for attack would have been to undermine one of the major pillars of their *regnum*.

Despite Gregory of Tours’ insinuations to the contrary, neither Chilperic nor Fredegund had any difficulty attracting episcopal supporters. It is possible to identify a pro-Neustrian political faction within the Gallo-Frankish episcopate whose members requested and were the recipients of royal patronage. These men were willing, rather than reluctant, supporters of Chilperic and Fredegund. Furthermore, in the cases of several of these bishops, we possess clear evidence for their involvement in political, diplomatic, and judicial efforts on behalf of the Neustrian monarchy. From a survey of Gregory of Tours’ own writings and other contemporary sources, seventeen bishops can be identified as supporters of Chilperic and Fredegund.⁵³ This number is only a minimum tally, as dozens of bishops held office in the Neustrian Kingdom between 561 and 597 without any recorded conflicts with the reigning monarchs. Of the seventeen identifiable episcopal supporters, at least seven were demonstrably on good relations with both the king and the queen,⁵⁴ while three can be associated only with Fredegund and seven only with Chilperic.⁵⁵

⁵⁰Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 79.

⁵¹Judith George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 51–2.

⁵²Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX.1.51–52: “Noxia dum cuperent hostes tibi bella parere, pro te pugnavit fortis in arma fides.”

⁵³I.e. Aetherius of Lisieux, Badegisel of Le Mans, Bertram of Le Mans, Bertram of Bordeaux, Egidius of Reims, Faramodus of Paris, Ferreolus of Limoges, Germanus of Paris, Leudovald of Bayeux, Malluf of Senlis, Palladius of Saintes, Melantius of Rouen, Nicetius of Dax, Nonnichius of Nantes, Ragnemodus of Paris, Amelius of Tarbes, and Unknown of Tournai. Similarly, a core group of seventeen prelates provided the basis for ecclesiastical support for Chilperic’s brother, Guntram: Gregory Halfond, “All the King’s Men: Episcopal Political Loyalties in the Merovingian Kingdoms,” *Medieval Prosopography* (forthcoming).

⁵⁴I.e. Faramodus of Paris, Ragnemodus of Paris, Egidius of Rheims, Melantius of Rouen, Malluf of Senlis, Unknown of Tournai, Bertram of Bordeaux. I have not included here Bishop Felix of Chalon-sur-Marne, whom Guntram suspected of working to forge friendly relations between Brunhild and Fredegund, a charge which Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IX.20, explicitly denies.

⁵⁵With Fredegund: Bertram of Le Mans, Amelius of Tarbes, and Palladius of Saintes. With Chilperic: Aetherius of Lisieux, Badegisel of Le Mans, Ferreolus of Limoges, Germanus of Paris, Leudovald of Bayeux, Nicetius of Dax, and Nonnichius of Nantes.

Among those bishops with demonstrable loyalties towards Chilperic and Fredegund, twelve governed *civitates* in the Neustrian heartland of northwestern Gaul, within the ecclesiastical provinces of Rheims, Rouen, Sens, and Tours. Five had seats in Aquitanian cities under Neustrian rule.⁵⁶ Three of these bishops were metropolitans, meaning that they were the senior prelates in their provinces, possessing extra judicial and administrative powers, which made them particularly desirable royal allies.⁵⁷ At the time of Chilperic's death in 584, his kingdom encompassed only one additional metropolitan see—Tours—whose bishop, Gregory, certainly was no admirer of the royal couple. Three of the Neustrian monarchs' episcopal supporters held at various times the episcopate of Paris, which, despite its official neutrality, was a significant political—if not ecclesiastical—center in Northern Gaul.⁵⁸

While seven bishops have demonstrable links to both Chilperic and Fredegund, it is very likely that in the period of Fredegund's regency (584–597) additional bishops pledged their loyalty to the queen and her young son Chlothar. A core group of a dozen bishoprics in northern Gaul remained consistently under Fredegund's control throughout this tumultuous period.⁵⁹ While information about their episcopal governance is sparse, of those bishops identifiable by name only Leudovald of Bayeux's loyalties can be considered seriously suspect. Among those other bishops for whom biographical data exists, what little information is available is not suggestive of political disloyalty. Bishops Ermenulfus of Evreux and Haimoaldus of Rennes, for example, were the brothers of Fredegund's loyal supporter Bishop Bertram of Le Mans. There is no reason to doubt that they shared their brother's political loyalties.⁶⁰ Additionally, when Guntram demanded proof of the legitimacy of Chlothar II before acknowledging him as Chilperic's heir, three unnamed bishops (along with three hundred of Fredegund's *optimates*) swore that the child was the offspring of Chilperic

⁵⁶In Neustria: Bertram of Le Mans, Melantius of Rouen, Aetherius of Lisieux, Leudovald of Bayeux, Faramodus of Paris, Germanus of Paris, Ragnemodus of Paris, Egidius of Reims, Unknown of Tournai, Malluf of Senlis, Badegisel of Le Mans, and Nonnichius of Nantes. In Aquitaine: Bertram of Bordeaux, Amelius of Tarbes, Palladius of Saintes, Ferreolus of Limoges, and Nicetius of Dax.

⁵⁷That is Egidius of Rheims, Melantius of Rouen, and Bertram of Bordeaux. Rheims was a political capital of the Austrasian *regnum*, although Bishop Egidius frequently worked on behalf of the Neustrian monarchy. The three unnamed bishops mentioned by Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.9 have not been included in the tally.

⁵⁸That is Bishops Germanus, Ragnemodus, and Faramodus.

⁵⁹That is: Boulogne, Therouanne, Tournai, Cambrai/Arras, Amiens, Vermand/Noyon, Rouen, Beauvais, Coutances, Bayeux, Lisieux, and Evreux. See Weidemann, *Das Testament des Bischofs Berthramm von Le Mans*, 149–158.

⁶⁰Weidemann, *Das Testament des Bischofs Berthramm von Le Mans*, 125–127.

and Fredegund.⁶¹ As for Leudovald of Bayeux, after the assassination of Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen on Fredegund's orders in 586, Leudovald responded by closing the churches of his *civitas* until the murderers were brought to justice. According to Gregory of Tours, Fredegund targeted Leudovald for assassination, fearing that the latter had learned of her culpability; but her plot failed.⁶² Despite Leudovald's allegedly tense relations with Fredegund, while Chilperic had still ruled he had trusted Leudovald to serve as an ambassador to the court of his nephew, King Childebert II of Austrasia, in 581 in order to confirm Neustria's anti-Burgundian alliance with Austrasia.⁶³ Furthermore, despite Gregory's claim that Fredegund sought the bishop's death, Leudovald did the queen a substantial favor in 587 by arranging for the *legatus* Baddo, who was accused of being sent by Fredegund to kill King Guntram of Burgundy, to be released from captivity.⁶⁴ The trust placed in Leudovald by the Neustrian monarchy seems to have persisted into the reign of Fredegund's son, Chlothar II, who invited Leudovald to attend his Council of Paris in 614.⁶⁵ There is even less evidence to suggest that Bishop Gaugericus of Cambrai-Arras, who owed his seat to the good graces of King Childebert II, ever demonstrated any disloyalty to Fredegund, whose hatred for Childebert and his mother Brunhild was well known.⁶⁶ Thus, it is quite likely that Fredegund's episcopal allies in the period of her regency numbered much higher than those whose loyalties are explicitly stated in contemporary sources, just as her husband's episcopal partisans certainly included more than the fourteen prelates who can be indentified definitively.

III. *ECCLÉSIA* AND *MONARCHIA* IN CONFLICT

The identification of these seventeen episcopal supporters of Chilperic and Fredegund begs the question of how unique Gregory of Tours was among his episcopal colleagues in his intense dislike of the Neustrian monarchs. Besides those bishops who resided in *regna* ruled by other members of the Merovingian dynasty (and thus ostensibly owed their loyalties to these

⁶¹Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.9. These three unnamed bishops have not been added to the tally of Fredegund's supporters, since they might have been prelates whose loyalty is explicitly attested elsewhere, such as Unknown of Tourmai.

⁶²Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.31.

⁶³Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.3.

⁶⁴Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IX.13.

⁶⁵*Concilia aevi Merovingici*, MGH Leges 3:1, ed. Friedrich Maassen (Hanover: Hahn, 1893), 191.

⁶⁶Louis Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux de l'ancienne Gaule* (Paris: Albert Fontemoing, 1907–15), III.110.

monarchs), surprisingly few bishops can be identified as sharing Gregory's critical opinion of Chilperic and Fredegund. In the *Historiae*, Gregory does report a vision by King Guntram of the deceased Chilperic being tormented by Bishops Tetricius of Langres (d. 572), Agricola of Chalon-sur-Saone (d. 580), and Nicetius of Lyons (d. 573).⁶⁷ These bishops, all of whom were exemplars of piety according to Gregory's own standards, were punishing Chilperic on behalf of the entire Gallic Church for his many sins.⁶⁸ Indeed, it is the piety of these bishops that best explains their presence in Guntram's vision, rather than the three prelates' own experiences with Chilperic.⁶⁹ Not one of these three bishops was involved in any known conflicts with Chilperic, and none even had his see within the borders of Chilperic's kingdom. Thus, Gregory's account of Guntram's vision provides little support for his insinuations regarding general episcopal opinion of the king.⁷⁰

In fact, in contrast to our inventory of pro-Neustrian bishops, contemporary and near-contemporary sources only explicitly identify half a dozen bishops targeted for investigation, abuse, or punishment by Chilperic and Fredegund.⁷¹ In the case of several of these prelates, their treatment by the king and queen was clearly justified by contemporary standards of royal justice. Although Chilperic and Fredegund were not above employing assassins in dealing with threats to their rule, typically they sought to deal with episcopal wrongdoers in open, if not always strictly canonical, forums.⁷² Gregory of Tours includes as major set-pieces in his *Historiae* the trials of Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen and himself in 577 and 580 respectively. Both trials were held in the context of episcopal synods, where

⁶⁷Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.5.

⁶⁸As Breukelaar observed, good bishops, for Gregory, are pious, charitable, educated, capable administrators, and effective shepherds of their flocks. See *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*, 242–243. On the praise of good bishops by Gregory's contemporary, Venantius Fortunatus, see Michael Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow: The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 38–53.

⁶⁹Tetricius and Nicetius were also, purely coincidentally of course, relations of Gregory: Heinzlmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 17 and 21.

⁷⁰Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.14 and V.50 respectively record visions by Gregory himself and Salvius of Albi predicting the deaths of Chilperic's sons. Heinzlmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 141, sees the vision of V.14 as anticipating that of V.50. On the implications of V.14 for the dating of the *Histories*, see Murray, "Chronology and the Composition of the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours," 168–172. On dream-visions in the *Historiae*, see De Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower*, 268–293.

⁷¹That is, Praetextatus of Rouen, Eunius of Vannes, Salvius of Albi, Charterius of Périgueux, Mundericus (bishop elect) of Langres, Gregory of Tours, and Leudovald of Bayeux (on whom, see above). Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.5, has Guntram accuse Bishop Theodore of Marseilles of colluding in Chilperic's murder as one of the Gundovald conspirators, although his guilt is far from certain, and Gregory himself seems to have believed in Theodore's innocence: Wood, "The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours," 263–264.

⁷²On Chilperic's preference for 'face-to-face' confrontations with accused bishops, see Nelson, "Queens as Jezebels," 46.

the defendants were judged by their peers under the supervision of Chilperic. A king's participation in such judicial proceedings was considered to be appropriate so long as he acted according to canonical rule, and certainly was not unique to these two cases.⁷³ In the case of Praetextatus' hearing, if Gregory's first-hand account is to be believed, Chilperic was not content to play the role of a passive observer. He not only personally interrogated Praetextatus, and presented evidence in support of the prosecution, he also intimidated and attempted to bribe the attending bishops, had a suspect collection of canon law prepared for their use, tricked the defendant into confessing, and imposed a non-canonical punishment. Although Gregory describes the trial as a miscarriage of justice, it is unlikely that all of his fellow participants felt the same way. The majority of forty-five bishops in attendance agreed to Chilperic's demand that Praetextatus, having confessed, be deposed, excommunicated, and imprisoned. Perhaps some of the prelates went along with the king out of fear, but Gregory acknowledged the willing support of several of the participants, including Bishops Bertram of Bordeaux and Ragnemodus of Paris.⁷⁴ When Gregory himself, three years later, was dragged before a council of his peers assembled at Chilperic's villa at Berny on charges of slandering the queen, the king was aware that episcopal, and perhaps even popular, sentiment lay with the accused. Chilperic, to Gregory's surprise, chose to defer to the assembled bishops as to whether the trial should continue, and accepted their judgment that it should not.⁷⁵

So, despite Gregory's accusation that Chilperic and Fredegund harbored little respect or admiration for bishops, his own narrative appears to belie this charge.⁷⁶ Certainly, the king and queen did not hesitate to prosecute those bishops whom they perceived as political enemies, but at the same time they recognized the value of including their episcopal colleagues in the judgment of their crimes.⁷⁷ In this sense, they differed little from their contemporary, Guntram, who, on at least half-dozen occasions, convoked ecclesiastical synods to investigate, judge, or restore accused prelates.⁷⁸ Many other sixth and early-seventh century Merovingians did the same.⁷⁹

⁷³Halfond, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils*, 91.

⁷⁴Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.18.

⁷⁵Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.49.

⁷⁶Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.1.46.

⁷⁷Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 44.

⁷⁸I.e. the Councils of Lyons (567/70), Paris (573), Chalon-sur-Saône (579), possibly Lyons (581), Troyes (585), Mâcon (585), Unknown (588), on which see Halfond, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils*, 229–234.

⁷⁹For example, Childebert I: Orleans (549), Paris (551/2); Childebert II: Verdun/Metz (590); Brunhild and Theuderic II: Chalon-sur-Saône (602/4). On these councils, see Halfond, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils*, 227–228, and 235–236.

One of Guntram's primary reasons for convoking the Council of Mâcon (585), for example, was to discipline those bishops who had participated in the Gundovald conspiracy, including Faustus of Dax, Bertram of Bordeaux, Orestes of Bazas, Palladius of Saintes, and Ursicinus of Cahors.⁸⁰ Strictly in terms of quantity, we know of more bishops targeted for investigation by Guntram than by Chilperic and Fredegund. While probably not so prolific a convoker of ecclesiastical synods as Guntram, Chilperic still respected their institutional utility. Indeed, it is quite likely that Chilperic convoked more ecclesiastical synods than those whose acts are attested by Gregory.⁸¹ Furthermore, Chilperic even permitted the bishops of his own *regnum* to attend councils called by his brothers, including the Councils of Paris held in 573 and 577.⁸² Finally, as Gregory's own conciliar trial shows, Chilperic was prepared to follow the judgment of his assembled bishops, even when a prelate was accused of the serious crime of treason.

A bishop who stood in judgment before Chilperic apparently had no reason to believe that his judgment was a foregone conclusion any more so than a bishop summoned to the court of one of the king's relations. Several years after Gregory's trial, for example, Chilperic's agent, Count Nonnichius of Limoges, discovered letters apparently written by Bishop Charterius of Périgueux, which expressed treasonous sentiments. Chilperic, Gregory admits, proceeded cautiously in investigating the charges. When the king learned that the incriminating letters came from Charterius' enemy, the deacon Frontinus, he was "moved by mercy" to dismiss the charges, and restored Charterius to his seat.⁸³ Chilperic similarly showed mercy to the bishop-elect of Langres, the arch-presbyter Mundericus, who supposedly carried the favor of Chilperic's brother, Sigibert I. After imprisoning the bishop-elect for two years, Chilperic freed Mundericus at the request of Bishop Nicetius of Lyons. Mundericus, however, soon proved his true loyalties by eventually fleeing to Sigibert's kingdom.⁸⁴ Chilperic also showed clemency towards Bishop Eunius of Vannes, who served as an envoy for the Breton leader Waroch in 578, an act which the Frankish king viewed as treasonous. Chilperic punished the bishop by ordering him to be deposed, a rather lenient sentence for a traitor.⁸⁵ While Eunius would never

⁸⁰Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.20.

⁸¹Armand, *Chilpéric Ier: petit fils de Clovis*, 252–3. C.f. Heinzmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 184.

⁸²Armand, *Chilpéric Ier: petit fils de Clovis*, 111–112 and 139–140.

⁸³Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.22: "Proclamante vero episcopo et dicente, quod saepius hic ingenia quaereret, qualiter eum ab episcopatu deiceret, rex misericordia motus, commendans Deo causam suam, cessit utrisque, deprecans clementer episcopum pro diacono, et supplicans, ut pro se sacerdos oraret. Et sic cum honore urbi remissus est."

⁸⁴Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.5.

⁸⁵Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.26.

regain his seat, he was supported, at the state's expense, at Angers for the remainder of his life.⁸⁶

In contrast to Chilperic's willingness to show mercy, his relations were not always so forgiving. Gregory of Tours credits Guntram's near-fatal illness of 585 to the latter's desire to exile a number of bishops after learning of their involvement in the Gundovald conspiracy.⁸⁷ Gregory also strongly disapproved of Guntram's tireless efforts to prosecute Bishop Theodore of Marseilles for his supposed involvement in the conspiracy, including going so far as to imprison the bishop after a judicial hearing found him to be not guilty.⁸⁸ Guntram's illness of 585 may have been what finally convinced him to allow the Council of Mâcon to restore Theodore to his seat.⁸⁹

Despite Chilperic's proven record in fairly administering justice among ecclesiastical elites, in Gregory's critical obituary of the Neustrian king, the Bishop of Tours accuses the king of additional crimes against the Church and its officers, several of which he elsewhere attributes to Fredegund too. Among these charges is that Chilperic filled empty episcopal seats with non-clerics. To be sure, there were legitimate grounds for this accusation. Chilperic had arranged, for example, for his palace mayor, Badegisel, to succeed Bishop Domnolus of Le Mans six weeks in advance of the latter's death in 581. Domnolus had hoped to be succeeded by the abbot Theodulf, whose candidacy Chilperic initially supported. Subsequently, Chilperic changed his mind, and arranged for Badegisel to be promoted quickly through the clerical ranks in order to qualify him for the episcopal throne.⁹⁰ Similarly, Chilperic intended to promote Nicetius, the *comes* of Dax, to the episcopacy of that *civitas*. Chilperic died prior to the election, however, which allowed the Merovingian royal pretender Gundovald to intervene and successfully support the candidacy of the priest Faustianus for the office.⁹¹ Later, following the Council of Maçon's deposition of Faustianus in 585, Nicetius was finally awarded the seat.⁹²

Although such cases apparently bolster Gregory's accusations, Chilperic was in no way unique in appointing former royal officials to the episcopate. Indeed, his appointments are reflective of the prevalence of office-holding elites within the Gallo-Frankish episcopate.⁹³ Chilperic's own brother, Guntram, whom

⁸⁶Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.40.

⁸⁷Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.20.

⁸⁸Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.24, VIII.5, VIII.12–13.

⁸⁹Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.20.

⁹⁰Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.9.

⁹¹Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VII.31. Nicetius was the brother of Bishop Rusticus of Aire. On the *Rustici*, see Heinzmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien*, 101–113.

⁹²Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.20.

⁹³Martin Heinzmann, "L'aristocratie et les évêchés entre Loire et Rhin jusqu'à la fin du VIII^e siècle," in *La Christianisation des pays entre Loire et Rhin (IV^e-VII^e siècle)*, ed. Pierre Riché (Paris: Editions du Cerf 1993), 81–82.

Gregory to a certain extent viewed as a model king (or at least preferable to Chilperic),⁹⁴ had sponsored similar promotions on numerous occasions, despite swearing that he would never appoint a layman to the episcopate.⁹⁵ Bishop Priscus of Lyon, for example, formerly had served Guntram as a *domesticus*;⁹⁶ Flavius of Chalon as a *referendarius*;⁹⁷ Licerius of Arles as a *referendarius*;⁹⁸ Cariatto of Geneva as a *spatharius*;⁹⁹ and Gundegisel of Bordeaux as *comes*.¹⁰⁰ Chlothar I, the father of Guntram and Chilperic, had provided his sons with precedent for such appointments through his promotion of the *dux* Austrapius to the seat of Champptoceaux and the *referendarius* Baudinus to the episcopate of Tours.¹⁰¹ Regardless of whether Chilperic's actions were strictly canonical, they certainly were in line with the norms of Merovingian royal prerogatives regarding episcopal elections.

In general, Chilperic, as well as Fredegund, did not hesitate to support favored candidates—lay and clerical—for the episcopacy. For example, Chilperic appointed a certain Nonnichius to the episcopal seat of Nantes (ca. 582). A kinsman of his predecessor, Felix, Nonnichius also was possibly related to Chilperic's *comes* of Limoges also named Nonnichius.¹⁰² Also, Chilperic most likely was responsible for the appointment of Bishop Melantius of Rouen, who was elected following Praetextatus' expulsion from Rouen in 577. Even with Fredegund's support Melantius lost his office when Praetextatus was reinstated upon Chilperic's death.¹⁰³ Fredegund herself was left in Melantius' care after her husband's assassination.¹⁰⁴ When Praetextatus subsequently was murdered Fredegund repaid Melantius' loyalty by having him reinstalled as bishop of Rouen, despite the protestations of bishops loyal to Guntram and rumors that Melantius might have been involved in his predecessor's

⁹⁴Compare Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 51–75 and 181–191, to Wood, “The Individuality of Gregory of Tours,” 44–45.

⁹⁵Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.22.

⁹⁶Priscus' service is recorded in his epitaph: Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux de l'ancienne Gaule*, II.168.

⁹⁷Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.45.

⁹⁸Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.39.

⁹⁹Fredegar, *Chronica*, III.89.

¹⁰⁰Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.22.

¹⁰¹Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IV.18 and X.31. Similarly, Chilperic's nephew, Childebert II, was responsible for the appointment of the *referendarius* Charimer to the episcopate of Verdun: Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IX.23.

¹⁰²Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.15. On the existence of an episcopal dynasty in Nantes, see Heinzelmann, “L'aristocratie et les évêchés entre Loire et Rhin,” 85. On the *comes* Nonnichius, see J. R. Martindale, ed., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), IIIB.947–8. On the identification of the *vir illustris* Nonnichius mentioned in Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Sancti Germani*, MGH AA 4:2, ed. Bruno Krusch (Berlin: Weidmann, 1885), chapter 158, see Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien*, 214, note 180; Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, 295, note 107.

¹⁰³Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VII.16.

¹⁰⁴Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VII.18.

murder.¹⁰⁵ In spite of Gregory of Tours' insinuations regarding Melantius' integrity, the Bishop of Rouen enjoyed a friendly correspondence in later years with Pope Gregory the Great, who in 601 asked Melantius to give aid to missionaries he was sending to England to assist Augustine.¹⁰⁶

The case of Melantius reveals the difficulty Fredegund faced in securing the election of favored episcopal candidates following her husband's assassination. In 591, the *presbyter* Faramodus, the brother of Bishop Ragnemodus of Paris, lost his bid to succeed his brother as bishop.¹⁰⁷ Previously, Faramodus had served in the Neustrian court as a *referendarius*, but his connections to the court were no match for his opponent Eusebius' generous bribes.¹⁰⁸ It was only after the Eusebius' death sometime between 591 and 601 that Faramodus finally was able to be elected Bishop of Paris almost certainly with the support of either Fredegund or her son Chlothar.¹⁰⁹

Along with his accusation of improper interference in episcopal elections, Gregory lays an even more damning charge against Chilperic in his critical obituary of the king. Chilperic, Gregory alleges, was forever making accusations against the bishops of his realm, demeaning their reputations, and denigrating their spiritual authority. Once again, there is a grain of truth to Gregory's charges. Chilperic did indeed castigate those bishops whose actions or loyalties he perceived as threats, and was openly critical of those bishops whose wealth and influence he judged excessive. Nevertheless, as observed above, in most of those cases cited by Gregory, Chilperic's readiness to investigate and penalize individual episcopal wrongdoers was acceptable according to contemporary standards of justice. Moreover, Chilperic was willing to be corrected and rebuked by his own bishops when he recognized that they were in the right, particularly when it came to matters of faith. When the king composed a theologically-suspect treatise on the Trinity, he was forced to acknowledge its heretical nature after being unbraided by Bishop Salvius of Albi.¹¹⁰ He even recognized the spiritual authority of those prelates with whom he did not enjoy collegial relations,

¹⁰⁵Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.31 and VIII.41.

¹⁰⁶Gregory I, *Registrum Epistularum*, ed. Dag Norberg, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 140 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1972), XI.41.

¹⁰⁷Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, X.26.

¹⁰⁸Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX.12. On the identification of the *referendarius* Faramodus, see Karin Selle-Hosback, "Prosopographie merowingischer amsträger in der Zeit von 511 bis 613," Ph.D. Diss. (Bonn: Universität zu Bonn, 1974), no. 91; Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, IIIA.477; Margarete Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit nach den Werken Gregors von Tours* (Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 1982), 178.

¹⁰⁹Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux de l'ancienne Gaule*, II.467.

¹¹⁰Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.44. While the suggestion of Halsall, "Nero and Herod," 340–341, that the Trinitarian debate occurred around the time of the Council of Berny is plausible, I follow Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 144, in dating this debate to the days

including Gregory of Tours himself, whose blessing the king sought while the bishop was visiting the royal villa at Nogent-sur-Marne.¹¹¹

However, Gregory also claims that Chilperic routinely bemoaned the wealth of the Gallo-Frankish bishops in comparison with his own: “Look at how our treasury has diminished! Look at how all of our wealth has fallen into the hands of the Church! No one has any power except the bishops!”¹¹² Assuming the veracity of this attribution, it is almost certain that “the poor fellow exaggerated” his own impoverished state.¹¹³ Moreover, Gregory fails to substantiate his charge that Chilperic attempted to prevent bequeaths from being granted to the Church and its bishops.

Jean Durliat has suggested that the wealth Chilperic attributes to the Church refers not simply to the private assets of individual bishops, but to those public funds and revenues under the purview of Gallic prelates on account of their civic responsibilities.¹¹⁴ While this may well have been the case, Martin Heinzelmann has used Durliat’s hypothesis to argue that Chilperic’s outburst reflects his rejection of Gregory of Tours’ ideal of bishops sharing in the responsibilities of governance, that is *Bischofsherrschaft*.¹¹⁵ While there is some merit to this claim, Heinzelmann overstates his case, not only by underestimating Chilperic’s willingness to consult with his bishops, but more significantly by reading alternate accounts of Chilperic’s rule in light of Gregory’s narrative.¹¹⁶ Thus, following Franz Beyerle, he reads the one chapter of Chilperic’s *Edictum* that refers to the Frankish Church as evidence for the king’s desire to keep civil and ecclesiastical affairs distinct.¹¹⁷ Like

immediately following the council. This would better explain Gregory’s willingness to confront Chilperic.

¹¹¹Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.5.

¹¹²Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.46: “Ecce pauper remansit fiscus noster, ecce divitiae nostrae ad ecclesias sunt translatae; nulli penitus nisi soli episcopi regnant.”

¹¹³Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 124.

¹¹⁴Jean Durliat, *Les finances publiques de Dioclétien aux Carolingiens, 284–889* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1990), 138.

¹¹⁵Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 181–191. Durliat’s explanation of the passage cited above is repeated by Heinzelmann in *Gregory of Tours*, 183–184. Concerning the reality of Gregory’s ideal, see Friedrich Prinz, “Die bischofliche Stadtherrschaft im Frankenreich vom 5. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 217 (1973), 23. Prinz suggests that Chilperic “hit the nail on the head” when he complained that “periet honor noster et translatus est ad episcopos civitatum” (Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.46). On Gallic bishops adopting civic functions following the disintegration of Roman imperial institutions (that is, *Bischofsherrschaft*), see also the contributions of Prinz, Heinzelmann and Kaiser to *Herrschaft und Kirche. Beiträge zur Entstehung und Wirkungsweise episkopaler und monastischer Organisationformen*, ed. Friedrich Prinz (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1988), 1–108.

¹¹⁶See note 25 above.

¹¹⁷Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 184–185, following Franz Beyerle, “Das legislative Werk Chilperichs I,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanische Abteilung* 78 (1961), 37.

several other chapters in the edict, this one deals with the proper procedures for summoning accused persons to court (*mallus*): “Those things that have been proclaimed in the churches shall be proclaimed to those residing where the court convenes.”¹¹⁸ Significantly, the decree does not explicitly ban the proclamation of summonses in churches, although this perhaps can be inferred, but rather emphasizes the importance of repeating a summons in the location where the court will assemble. The primary motivation underlying this decree was not to “limit the social role of the churches,” as Heinzelmann claims,¹¹⁹ but rather to ensure that the community was informed of a case, and that defendants and witnesses attended the *mallus*, a major concern in the *Pactus Legis Salicae* to which Chilperic’s edict was appended.¹²⁰ To be sure, Heinzelmann is correct that Chilperic had little interest in sharing his own royal *auctoritas* with bishops, but there is no evidence to suggest that the king made any concerted legislative effort to weaken the local influence of prelates.¹²¹ On the contrary, Chilperic seems to have been perfectly willing to take advantage of this influence, and to consult with his bishops on matters of both state and faith.

Fredegund, like Chilperic, as Gregory acknowledges, also was capable of recognizing her own vulnerability, as well as culpability, in spiritual matters. When her sons Chlodobert and Dagobert grew sick during an epidemic in 580, it was she who interpreted their illness as divine punishment for her and Chilperic’s sins, and it was she who begged her husband to seek pardon from God by burning the tax records of the cities under their rule.¹²² While Gregory rather callously notes that Fredegund’s repentance came too late to save her children, his account does make it clear that the queen understood that she was not immune from judgment, and that there existed a spiritual authority above her own.

¹¹⁸*Capitularia Regum Francorum*, 10 (chapter 9): “Illas et marias qui nuntiabantur ecclesias nuntientur consistentes ubi admallat.” Beyerle, “Das legislative Werk Chilperichs I,” 10 and 16–17, reads “marias” as “wargos,” (outlaws). I follow Maurizio Lupoi, *The Origins of the European Legal Order*, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 372, note 40, in rejecting this textual alteration.

¹¹⁹Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 185.

¹²⁰For example, *Pactus Legis Salicae*, MGH Leges Nationum Germanicarum 4:1, ed. Karl Eckhardt (Hanover: Hahn 1962), chapters I, XLVII.2, XLIX, L.4, LII.1, LVI, LXXIII, and CII. On the protocol of summoning in Merovingian law, see Ian Wood, “Jural Relations among the Franks and Alamanni,” in *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period*, ed. Ian Wood (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 216–217.

¹²¹C.f. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 185, who argues that the decree discussed above was “almost certainly accompanied by other comparable decrees [intended] to limit the social role of the churches.” No such decrees, if they ever existed, survive.

¹²²Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.34.

IV. SERVICE TO THE *REGNUM*

Despite Gregory's depiction of Chilperic and his wife as the bane of the Gallo-Frankish episcopate, the seventeen bishops who can be identified as supporters of the Neustrian monarchy proved their loyalties through their service to the Neustrian king and queen. Their loyal service also is reflective of the willingness of the monarchs themselves to take advantage of episcopal power and influence, particularly in times of personal weakness. After Chilperic's assassination in 584, for example, Bishop Ragnemodus gave sanctuary to the now vulnerable Fredegund in the cathedral of Paris.¹²³ While Chilperic had still lived, Ragnemodus had not only assisted the prosecution at Praetextatus' trial, he also was the king's choice to baptize his son Theuderic.¹²⁴ In the wake of Chilperic's assassination, Bishop Malluf of Senlis, about whom we know little else, prepared the murdered king's body for burial.¹²⁵ Shortly thereafter, Melantius, the once and future Bishop of Rouen, who had owed his office to the king's support, assumed responsibility for Fredegund's protection.¹²⁶

Chilperic and Fredegund also employed bishops in an official capacity. Like their royal contemporaries, they frequently engaged prelates as ambassadors.¹²⁷ For example, Chilperic sent Bishop Leudovald of Bayeux as his envoy to the court of King Childebert II in 581.¹²⁸ Several years later, in 585, Bishop Amelius of Bigorra-Tarbes allegedly facilitated communications between Fredegund and King Leuvigild of Spain, who were rumored to be jointly plotting the assassination of Childebert II and Brunhild in order to forestall Guntram's plans to invade Iberia.¹²⁹ According to Gregory of Tours, Fredegund went so far as to hire two clerics to carry out the assassination, but the men were captured and revealed the nature of the plot.¹³⁰ Two years later, in 587, rumors arose that Palladius of Saintes was assisting Fredegund in maintaining diplomatic contact with the Visigothic court; however, these charges were never substantiated by contemporary investigators.¹³¹

¹²³Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VII.4.

¹²⁴Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.27.

¹²⁵Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.46; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, ch. 35.

¹²⁶Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VII.19.

¹²⁷E.g. Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.31, VII.14, VIII.31, and IX.20. On the late antique hagiographical tradition of episcopal ambassadors, see Andrew Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 411–533* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113–171.

¹²⁸Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.3.

¹²⁹Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.28. On Merovingian-Visigothic relations, see Wood, *The Merovingian kingdoms*, 169–175. On Fredegund and Brunhild's rivalry as a 'bloodfeud,' see J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings* (London: Methuen and Co., 1962), 134–135; c.f. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 127.

¹³⁰Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.29.

¹³¹Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.43.

Palladius earlier had been implicated in the conspiracy to replace King Guntram of Burgundy with the Merovingian pretender Gundovald. This conspiracy was originally the brainchild of an influential faction of Austrasian nobles who sought an alliance with Neustria against Burgundy. This faction included Bishop Egidius of Reims, another close intimate of Fredegund and Chilperic. If Gregory's account is to be believed, he may also have assisted the queen in ridding herself of her despised step-son Merovech.¹³² Ironically, Egidius cemented his alliance with the king and queen through his service as Austrasian ambassador to the Neustrian court in the early 580s. None other than Gregory of Tours, who had been consecrated by the Bishop of Rheims back in 573, assisted Egidius in his diplomatic work.¹³³ As ambassador, Egidius helped to craft an alliance between Chilperic and his nephew against Guntram of Burgundy, a project that ultimately culminated in the conspiracy to replace Guntram with Gundovald.¹³⁴ Bishop Bertram of Bordeaux, who had assisted in the conciliar trials of Praetextatus of Rouen and Gregory of Tours, was another Gundovald conspirator with links to Chilperic and Fredegund.¹³⁵ After Chilperic's murder in 584, Bordeaux, along with a number of other *civitates*, fell into Guntram's hands. Bertram, whose previous political allegiances were common knowledge, chose to back Gundovald instead of the king of Burgundy.¹³⁶ Once the conspiracy crumbled and the plotters were at Guntram's mercy, Bertram had a falling-out with his former co-conspirator, Palladius of Saintes. Both bishops attempted to shift blame to the other.¹³⁷ Several scholars have suggested that Chilperic's assassination can be tied to the conspiracy, but if this was the case Neustrian participants, such as Bertram, were most likely innocent of this change of plans. They had much to lose by the king's death and surely would have thought twice before staking their very lives on an extremely risky coup-d'état.¹³⁸

The fact that several of Chilperic and Fredegund's episcopal allies were enmeshed in clandestine plots and political violence is less reflective of the royal couple's alleged impiety than of the highly politicized nature of the Frankish episcopate. There was much to be gained in maintaining a friendly

¹³²Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.18.

¹³³Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, 73–76; Wood, "The Individuality of Gregory of Tours," 33 and 43; Halsall, "Nero and Herod," 344–347.

¹³⁴On Egidius's role in political conspiracies, including the Gundovald affair, see Walter Goffart, "Byzantine Policy in the West under Tiberius and Maurice: The Pretenders Hermengild and Gundovald (579–585)," *Traditio* 13 (1957), 73–118; Bachrach, *Anatomy of a Little War*, 48–49, 78–81, and 107–108; Wood, "The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours," 267–268.

¹³⁵Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.18 and V.49.

¹³⁶Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VII.31, VIII.2, and VIII.20.

¹³⁷Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.7, VIII.22.

¹³⁸Goffart, "Byzantine Policy in the West," 104–105; Bachrach, *Anatomy of a Little War*, 88–92.

relationship with the king. This is evident in the case of Bishop Aetherius of Lisieux, whose unpopular administration of his *civitas* led his own clerics to plot his assassination in the early 580s. After the plan was discovered, the conspirators publically accused the bishop of fornication. Arrested by his enemies, Aetherius escaped to Guntram's *regnum*. The conspirators then turned to Chilperic, asking the king to have the bishop formerly deposed. Chilperic refused on the grounds of insufficient evidence. The citizens of Lisieux later petitioned Chilperic to restore Aetherius. Agreeing to do so, Chilperic declared his belief in the bishop's virtue.¹³⁹ In forsaking the opportunity to replace Aetherius in his seat, Chilperic acknowledged his faith not only in the bishop's innocence, but also, presumably, in his fidelity.

Royal patronage could also take the form of generous gifts. If the legislative edict known as the *Praeceptio Chlotharii* may be attributed to Chilperic and Fredegund's son, Chlothar II, then its references to gifts and immunities granted by the author's father to churches and clerics reflects Chilperic's generosity.¹⁴⁰ Fredegund too offered financial patronage independent of her husband. In his testament of 616, Bishop Bertram of Le Mans acknowledges that he originally received the *villa* of Bonnelles in Étampes as a gift from Fredegund and her young son Chlothar II, for whom she served as regent, sometime between 596 and 597.¹⁴¹ This bequest may have been just one of several made by the queen and her son to the Bishop of Le Mans in these years. Bertram to the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Le Mans granted additional villas in the region of Étampes as an endowment upon its dedication in 596; Margarete Weidemann has plausibly suggested that some of these gifts from the royal family were also granted around the same time as Bonnelles.¹⁴² Fredegund's generous patronage towards Bertram is easy enough to explain. As the former archdeacon of Paris under Bishop Ragnemodus (also a close ally of the Neustrian ruling family), Bertram had become bishop of Le Mans around 586. He did so, most likely, with the support of King Guntram of Burgundy, who had taken control of Le Mans after the death of Chilperic two years earlier.¹⁴³ Although Bertram was loyal

¹³⁹Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.36.

¹⁴⁰*Capitularia Regum Francorum*, 19 (chapters. 11–12). Although this is the standard attribution, recently Ingrid Woll, *Untersuchungen zu Überlieferung und Eigenart der merowingischen Kapitularien* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995), 17–29, has identified Chlothar I as its author. C.f. however, Marcelo Candido da Silva, "Le prince, la *lex* et la *iustitia*: le Bréviaire d'Alaric et l'Édit attribué à Clotaire II," in *Le Bréviaire d'Alaric aux origines du code civil*, eds. Michel Rouche and Bruno Dumézil (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Sorbonne, 2008), 199–212, who also summarizes the debate concerning authorship.

¹⁴¹Weidemann, *Das Testament des Bischofs Berthramn von Le Mans*, 8–9, no. 1 Fredegund and Chlothar conquered Étampes in 596 upon the death of Childebert II: Fredegar, *Chronica*, V. 17. Fredegund would die within a year of the victory.

¹⁴²Weidemann, *Das Testament des Bischofs Berthramn von Le Mans*, 11–12, no. 4.

¹⁴³Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.39.

to Guntram when sitting with the king in council, and even serving as a royal envoy to the Bretons, he renewed his old loyalties to the Neustrians when Guntram died in 592.¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately for the bishop, the city soon was seized by the Austrasian king Childebert II and Brunhild, the arch-rivals of Chlothar and Fredegund, who punished the Bishop for his political leanings by having him deposed.¹⁴⁵ It was only in 596, following Childebert's death, that Chlothar and Fredegund were able to retake Le Mans, restore Bertram, and reward the bishop for his loyalty.

The financial generosity of Fredegund and Chilperic towards ecclesiastics similarly can be seen in their friendship with Radegund of Poitiers, whose monastery of the Holy Cross in Poitiers they patronized.¹⁴⁶ Like her friend and supporter, Bishop Germanus of Paris,¹⁴⁷ Radegund did not take sides in the civil wars between the sons of Chlothar I and sought to encourage peace between the royal brothers.¹⁴⁸ Due in no small part to her political neutrality, Radegund enjoyed friendly relations with both Chilperic and Fredegund.¹⁴⁹ When Chilperic considered removing his daughter Basina from the monastery at Poitiers in order that she might be married to Prince Reccared of Visigothic Spain, he respected Radegund's request that Basina not be forced to leave against her wishes.¹⁵⁰

V. NEUSTRIAN PATRONAGE OF ECCLESIASTICAL INSTITUTIONS AND CULTS

As the case of Radegund reveals, the patronage of Chilperic and Fredegund was directed toward institutions as often as it was toward individuals. As important as bishops were as political allies, Merovingian monarchs—Chilperic and Fredegund included—also recognized the saints of the Gallo-Frankish church as spiritual allies. Just as cults of sanctity and their associated shrines depended upon the patronage of local ecclesiastical authorities for their survival and promotion, lay Christians were cognizant of the power of the saints to offer protection, aid, and healing.¹⁵¹ The decision to patronize a

¹⁴⁴Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IX.18 and IX.41.

¹⁴⁵Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 207.

¹⁴⁶Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IX.42.

¹⁴⁷Baudonivia, *Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, MGH SRM 2, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1888), chapter 7; Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IX.39 and IX.42.

¹⁴⁸Baudonivia, *Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, chapter 10.

¹⁴⁹Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX.1.125–128.

¹⁵⁰Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.34. Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, MGH SRM 1:2, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1885), chapter 5, reports without explanation that Chilperic ordered an orphaned blind girl named Chrodigildis to enter Radegund's monastery, where her sight was miraculously cured.

¹⁵¹Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 73–75.

specific cult and its related institutions was indicative not only of the royal patron's faith in the spiritual power of the saint, but also of the patron's relationships with the episcopal guardian of that saint's cult as well as the *civitas* with which the cult was linked.

Over the course of their reigns, Chilperic and Fredegund cultivated relationships with a number of religious institutions and their associated cults.¹⁵² Their devotion to these cultic centers is reflected both by their patronage as well as by their public acts of devotion towards the associated saints. Chilperic and Fredegund's selection of burial sites for immediate family members, for example, reflects their devotion to specific cults. When their sons Chlodobert and Dagobert died during an epidemic, Chilperic and Fredegund had the former buried in a church in Soissons dedicated to the local martyrs Crispin and Crispinian. Soissons, of course, was the traditional capital of Chilperic's kingdom. The king and queen had Dagobert, however, buried at the basilica of St. Denis in Paris, a *civitas* that Chilperic had long sought to dominate.¹⁵³ While it once was thought that Chilperic's mother, Aregund, too was buried at St. Denis, archaeology has shown this not to be the case.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, we can also perceive Chilperic's devotion to St. Denis in an incident when several members of his court got into an altercation at the basilica. Services were cancelled until the matter was brought before the king, who refused to exonerate the men for their sacrilegious transgression, and put the matter before Bishop Ragnemodus of Paris, who made the accused pay a fine in order to be readmitted to communion.¹⁵⁵ While the burial place of Samson, another son to predecease Chilperic and Fredegund, is unknown, it has been suggested, plausibly, that the boy's name was meant to honor Bishop Samson of Dol, later venerated as a saint.¹⁵⁶

Despite Chilperic's devotion to Paris' legendary first bishop and the church dedicated in his honor, he reserved even greater affection for the church of St. Vincent in the same city. This basilica housed the shroud of Saint Vincent of Saragossa, originally brought to Gaul by Chilperic's uncle, Childebert I, who was buried in the church in 576.¹⁵⁷ The church also

¹⁵² *Capitularia Regum Francorum*, 19, chapters. 11–12.

¹⁵³ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.34; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, ch. 34. Fortunatus composed epitaphs for the two princes: Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX.4 and IX.5. On the Church of Sts. Crispus and Crispinian, see May Viellard-Troiekouff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule d'après les œuvres de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris: H. Champion, 1976), 288–289. On St. Denis, see Viellard-Troiekouff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule*, 252–53.

¹⁵⁴ Bonnie Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 122–123.

¹⁵⁵ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.32.

¹⁵⁶ Pierre Flobert, *La vie ancienne de Samson de Dol* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1997), 19.

¹⁵⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, III.29 and VIII.33. On the church of St. Vincent (later Saint-Germain-des-Prés), see Viellard-Troiekouff, *Les monuments religieux*, 211–14; Jean-Charles Picard, Brigitte Beaujard, et al., *Province ecclésiastique de Sens* (Paris: De Boccard, 1992),

housed the tomb of Bishop Germanus of Paris, of whose cult of sanctity Chilperic was an early supporter.¹⁵⁸ Chilperic's fondness for the Bishop of Paris was due in no small part to Germanus' accurate prophesy to Sigibert that should he attempt to kill Chilperic at Tournai his life would be forfeited?¹⁵⁹ Germanus also had contacted Chilperic's sister-in-law, Brunhild, directly to try to encourage her to intervene with her husband.¹⁶⁰ In a visit to Paris following the bishop's death (possibly in order to attend the festival in Germanus' honor), Chilperic may have witnessed a miraculous healing caused by Germanus' relics.¹⁶¹ Sometime between 576 and 584, Chilperic ordered the construction of a new basilica in Paris with the intention of interring the body of St. Germanus of Paris there; however, the transfer from St. Vincent never took place, possibly because of the king's death.¹⁶² While Chilperic lived, the Neustrian royal couple granted the basilica of St. Vincent special privileges,¹⁶³ and also chose it as the burial site of their son Theuderic in 584.¹⁶⁴ When Chilperic himself died, he too was buried in the church.¹⁶⁵ Later, Guntram ordered the bodies of Merovech and Clovis—Chilperic's elder sons—to be buried at St. Vincent.¹⁶⁶ It is doubtful that Queen Fredegund, who was suspected of the princes' murders, approved of this move. Guntram's actions did not weaken the queen's own devotion to the church, as she would be buried there in 597.¹⁶⁷

Chilperic also patronized the cults and churches of Saint Martin of Tours¹⁶⁸ and Saint Medard of Noyon.¹⁶⁹ Although Gregory of Tours famously accused

119–122; Patrick Perin, "Saint-Germain-des-Prés, première nécropole des rois de France," in *Médiévales* 31 (1996), 29–36.

¹⁵⁸Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.33.

¹⁵⁹Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IV.51.

¹⁶⁰*Epistolae Austrasicae*, MGH Epistolae 3, ed. Wilhelm Gundlach (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), no. 9.

¹⁶¹Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, MGH SRM 1:2, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1885), chapter 88. For a different reading of this passage, see Halsall, "Nero and Herod," 348.

¹⁶²Weidemann, *Das Testament des Bischofs Berthramn von Le Mans*, 18–19, no. 18; Picard, *Province ecclésiastique de Sens*, 126–127.

¹⁶³Carlrichard Brühl, Theo Kölzer, Martina Hartmann, and Andrea Stiedorf, eds, *Die Urkunden der Merowinger* (Hanover: Hahn, 2001), Dep. 58 and 59.

¹⁶⁴Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.34.

¹⁶⁵Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.46; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, ch. 35.

¹⁶⁶Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VIII.10.

¹⁶⁷*Liber Historiae Francorum*, chapter 37. Erwin Panofsky notes that the mosaic slab marking Fredegund's tomb is a later replica, see *Tomb sculpture: four lectures on its changing aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1964), 50.

¹⁶⁸On the Church of St Martin in Tours, see Viellard-Troiekourov, *Les monuments religieux*, 311–24.

¹⁶⁹On the Church of St. Medard in Soissons, see Viellard-Troiekourov, *Les monuments religieux*, 289–90.

Chilperic of disrespecting the Church of Saint Martin's property and its rights of asylum when thieves stole valuable property from the church,¹⁷⁰ Chilperic ordered the criminals to be brought before him, and only spared their lives at Gregory's request.¹⁷¹ Some years after Chilperic's death, around 590, when his son Chlothar II became seriously ill, Fredegund vowed to donate a large sum of her considerable wealth to St. Martin for his recovery, suggesting that she shared her husband's devotion to Martin.¹⁷²

Possibly to even a greater extent than the cult of Saint Martin, the cult of Saint Medard, based in Soissons, was heavily patronized by sixth-century Merovingians.¹⁷³ Originally built on the orders of Chlothar I, Chlothar's son Sigibert completed his church; both father and son were buried there.¹⁷⁴ Chilperic, whose devotion to the saint even Gregory of Tours was willing to acknowledge,¹⁷⁵ donated property to Medard's church¹⁷⁶ and even composed a hymn of dubious quality in the saint's honor.¹⁷⁷ When Chlodobert became ill during an epidemic, the royal couple placed their boy's body on the altar of Medard's tomb. Together they prayed diligently, though unsuccessfully, for his recovery.¹⁷⁸

There is no reason to believe that Chilperic and Fredegund were insincere in their devotion to the cults of favored Gallic saints and those churches that housed their relics. They expressed this devotion not only through gifts and grants of privileges, but also by turning to the saints and other holy persons in times of vulnerability, especially when they too required the power of

¹⁷⁰Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.14. Chilperic supposedly composed a letter to the saint asking whether Guntram Boso could be ejected from the saint's church, but he received no response.

¹⁷¹Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VI.10.

¹⁷²Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, X.11. While Fredegund enjoyed considerable personal wealth, she had limited access to the funds of the royal *fiscus*. See Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, 104–105; Yitzhak Hen, "Gender and the Patronage of Culture in Merovingian Gaul," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World*, eds. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2004), 227–229.

¹⁷³Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, 22–28. C.f. Eugen Ewig, "Le culte de Saint Martin à l'époque Franque," in *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien*, ed. Hartmut Atsma (Munich: Artemis, 1976–2009), II.360–363.

¹⁷⁴Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IV.19, IV.21, and IV.51. Medard of Noyon had consecrated Chlothar's wife Radegund a deaconess: Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis*, MGH AA 4:2, ed. Bruno Krusch (Berlin: Weidmann, 1885), chapter 12.

¹⁷⁵Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, 72.

¹⁷⁶Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.3.

¹⁷⁷*Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, MGH Poetae 4:2–3, ed. Charles Strecker (Berlin: Weidmann, 1923), 455–457. For evaluations of Chilperic's poetic efforts, see Dag Norberg, "La poésie du roi Chilperic," in *La poésie latine rythmique du Haut Moyen Age*, ed. Dag Norberg (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1954), 31–40; Udo Kindermann, "König Chilperich als lateinischer Dichter," *Sacris Erudiri* 41 (2002), 247–272. Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.44, expresses the bishop's own low opinion of the king's poetic efforts.

¹⁷⁸Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V.34.

intercession. Their choice of spiritual patrons, as suggested above, was not arbitrary. Those saints whom Chilperic and Fredegund favored, not coincidentally, were largely those with whom the Merovingian family enjoyed an existing relationship. Additionally, the cults of these saints were headquartered in three of the most important ecclesiastical and political centers of the Neustrian Kingdom: Paris, Soissons, and Tours.

During the course of their reigns, Chilperic and Fredegund worked diligently to cement their control over these and other administrative capitals of Merovingian Gaul. They did so by cultivating the goodwill of prelates who enjoyed considerable local leverage. It was for the same reason they frequently appointed former lay office-holders to episcopal seats. Additionally, through their patronage of cults of sanctity administered by these episcopal allies, Chilperic and Fredegund demonstrated the dividends of political loyalty to the Neustrian monarchy. But their patronage also constituted an investment in the spiritual wellbeing of their *regnum*. Both the saints and their episcopal promoters mediated between their kingdom and God. As Venantius Fortunatus reminded Chilperic at Berny, it was the king's faith that saved him in his wars against his brothers, a faith that demanded of the king not merely piety, but also a devotion to the protection of and care for the Gallo-Frankish Church and its clerical governors.

If Chilperic and Fredegund indeed made good on this obligation, how then do we account for their posthumous reputation as scourges of the Church? An explanation might be found not in the royal couple's failure to live up to their obligations, but rather in the failure of certain members of the episcopal elite to reciprocate this good will. There were any number of reasons why an individual bishop might choose not to demonstrate his support for a particular royal regime, ranging from personal prejudice to internal ecclesiastical politics to restrictive regnal borders. Those bishops, like Gregory of Tours whose loyalties did lie elsewhere, naturally were susceptible to reprisals from the monarch. Political factionalism was a consistent feature of the sixth-century Gallo-Frankish episcopate. At its worst, it encouraged the participation of bishops in conspiracies like the Gundovald affair. But such dramatic episodes can too easily distract us from the more beneficial aspects of the involvement of prelates in Merovingian politics. Monarchs, like Chilperic and Fredegund, relied heavily upon the administrative skills, political influence, and spiritual counsel of prelates. They offered, in return for royal backing, generous patronage and access to the court.¹⁷⁹ While it is true that regnal borders and political factionalism could disturb episcopal collegiality, the Roman provincial system that united the Gallic bishops as a corporate

¹⁷⁹Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 49.

body remained vital at least through the late-seventh century.¹⁸⁰ And rather than consciously attempt to undermine this collegiality, the Merovingians, Chilperic and Fredegund included, sought to unify episcopal support for their individual regimes. Such efforts, however, could engender both support and animosity. But lest we consider the royal couple's failures in their efforts to attract episcopal support, we need only recall that it was Guntram who was the primary target of those many episcopal participants in the Gundovald conspiracy. Chilperic was assassinated at the height of his power and influence. But Chilperic and Fredegund surely did fail to win the support of at least one bishop, Gregory of Tours, whose pen recorded their every misdeed and careless utterance. And, like the daggers of so many assassins allegedly employed by the murderous Fredegund, it proved nearly fatal.

¹⁸⁰Halfond, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils*, 67–69 and 200–208.