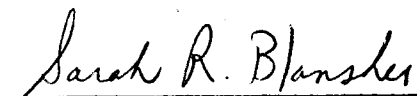


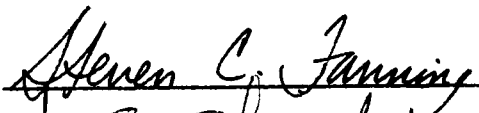
To the Graduate Council:

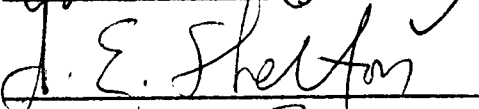
I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Catherine Tuggle entitled "The Power and Influence of Merovingian Women, 493-717." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

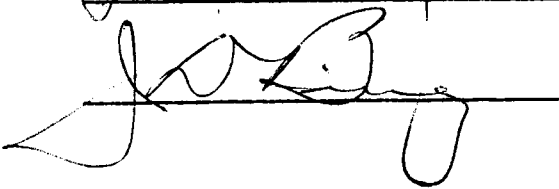


Sarah R. Blanshei, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:



Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

THE POWER AND INFLUENCE OF MEROVINGIAN WOMEN, 493-717

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Catherine Tuggle

December 1980

3046823

For Gary with love and thanks.

ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of the women of the ruling family of Frankish Gaul between the years 493-717. Literary sources from the period depict these Merovingian queens as extremely powerful and yet the source and methods of using this authority is not clearly revealed. This thesis seeks to discover the origins and extent of queenly power by a careful examination of the extant charters, diplomas, letters and law codes of the period.

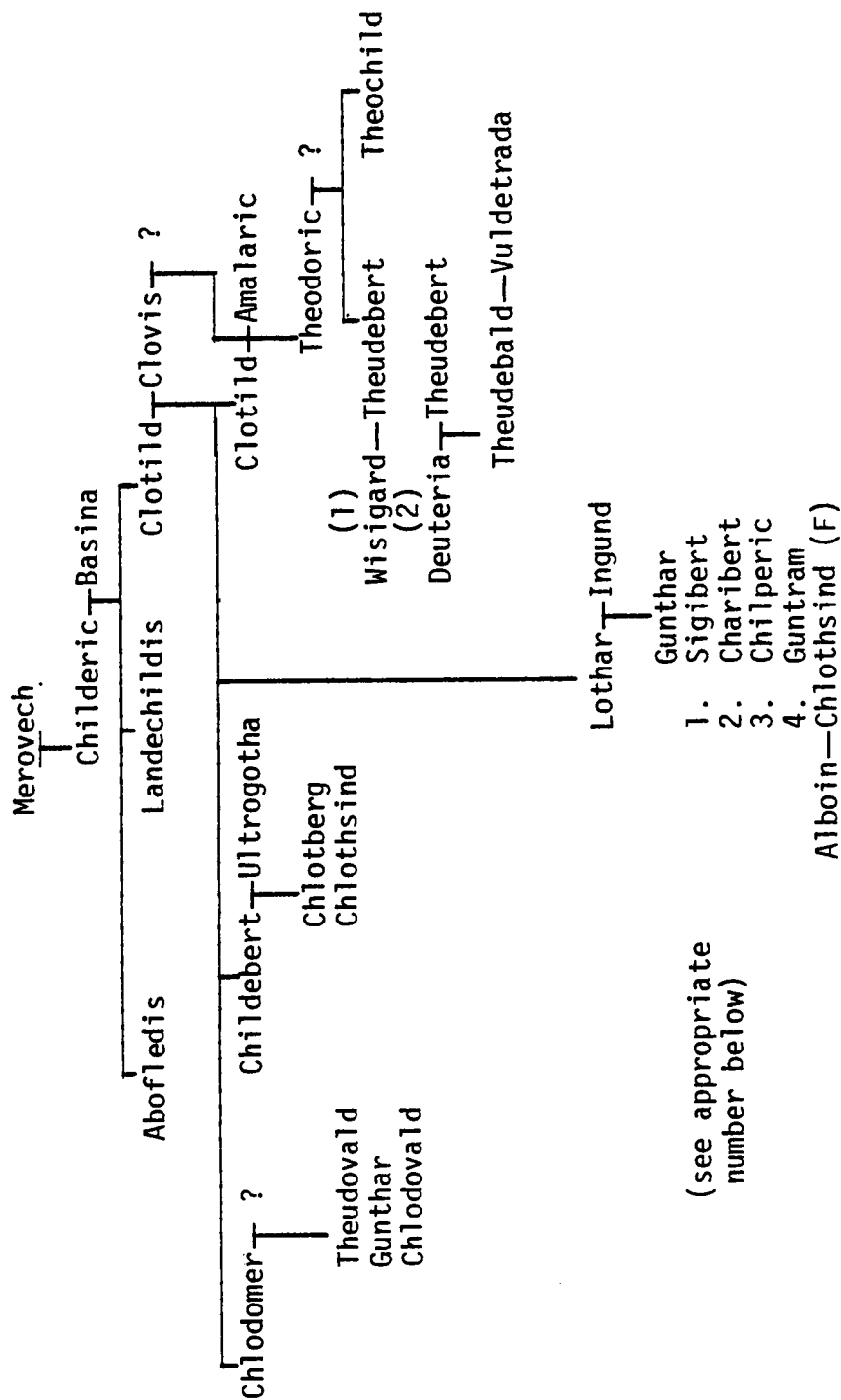
The conclusion reached is that power came to Merovingian women through their relationship to the king. Marriage to a king often brought them tremendous personal influence but little direct power and no legal rights. The unstable nature of marriage in Frankish royal families made the position of wives very insecure. Mothers of sons who were heirs to the throne were much more powerful than mere royal consorts. If the sons were minors when they ascended the throne, their mothers usually became regents. As regent they gained control of the government and the royal treasury. The last and most important way for women to become and remain powerful was through the accumulation of personal wealth. Wealth usually resulted from the woman's position as royal consort or regent.

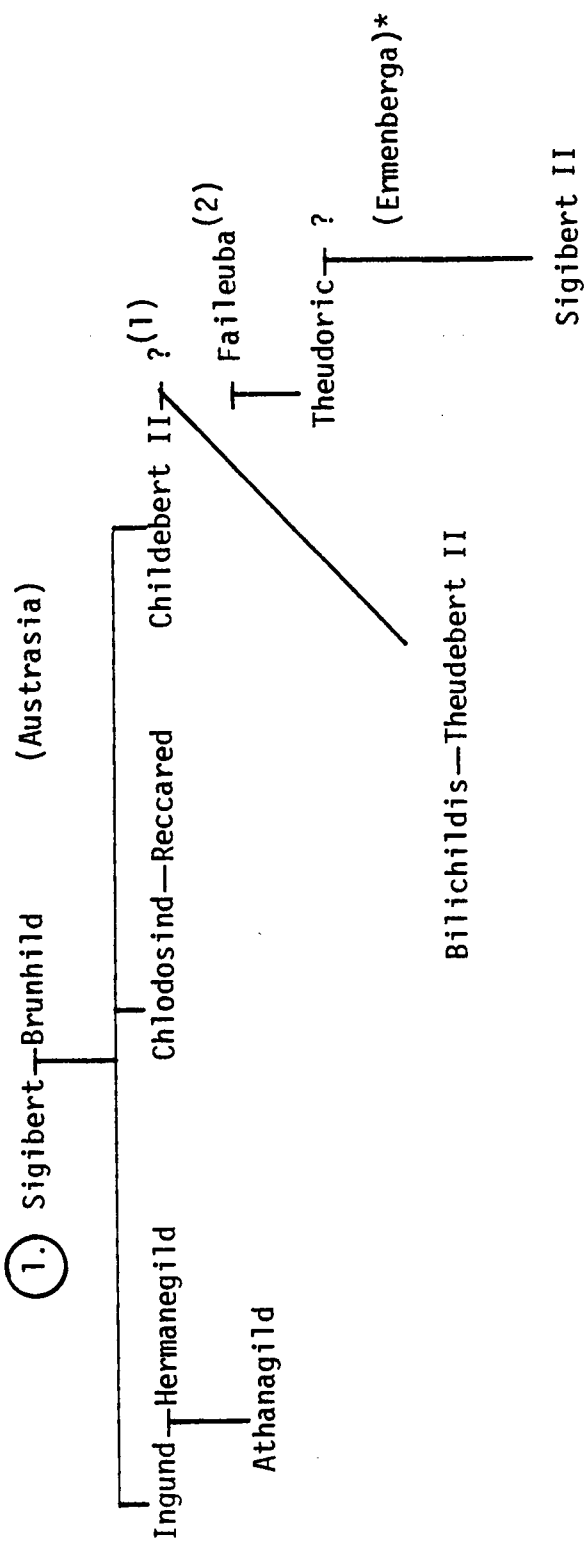
Such a study is necessary to understand the origins of the powers of later medieval queens on whom some work has been done. Research on Merovingian queens is particularly necessary because they ruled the Franks whose institutions had the greatest impact on the development of those of the rest of Europe.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.	1
I. UXOR REGIS.	16
II. MATER REGIS	34
III. DIVITIAE.	59
IV. CONCLUSION.	79
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	95
VITA	101

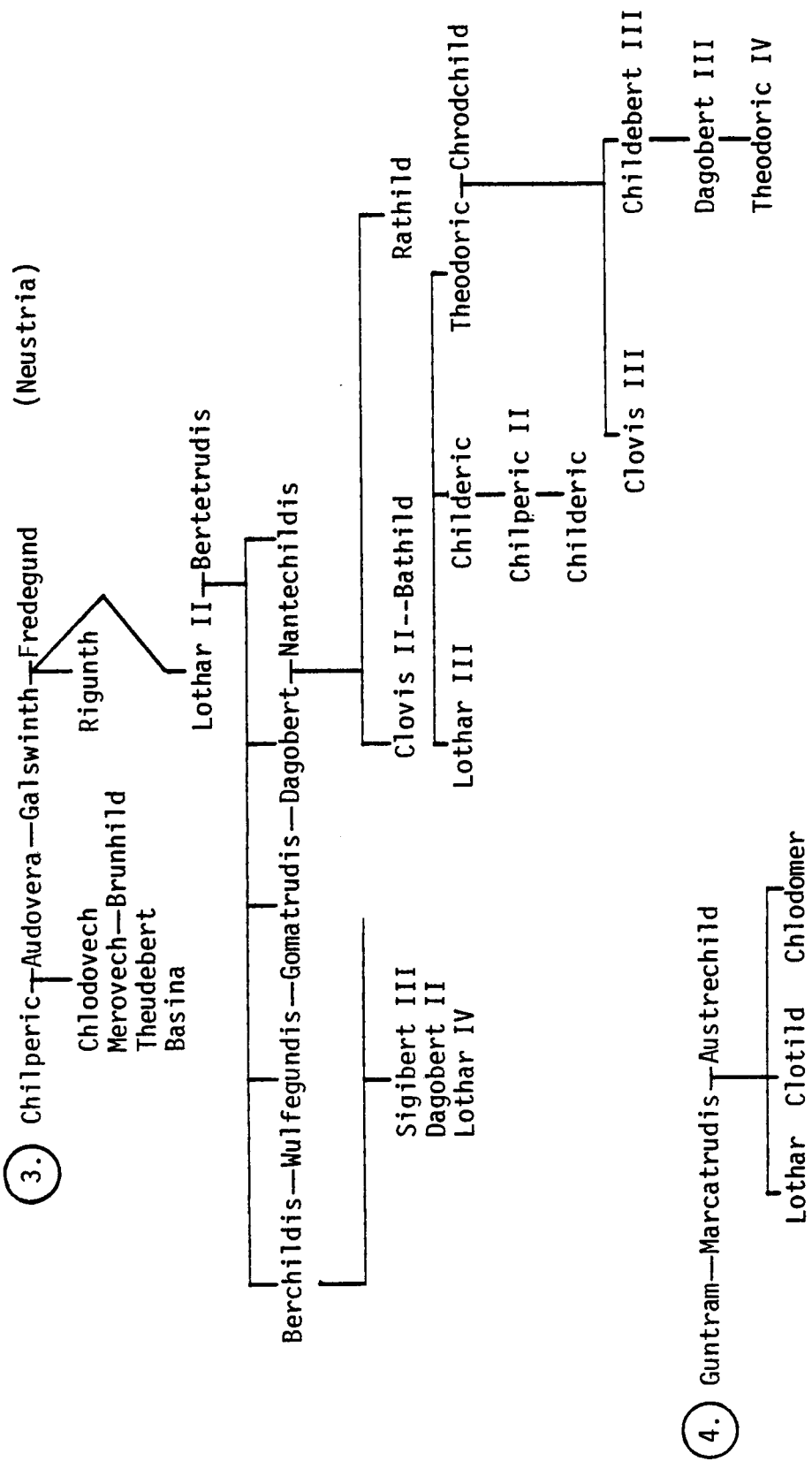
GENEALOGY





*not consummated





INTRODUCTION

The Merovingians ruled the Franks from the mid fifth century under the semi-legendary Merovech until 751 when the mayor of the palace, Pippin the Short, overthrew the last Merovingian king.

Before the ascendancy of the Merovingians to the Frankish kingship the people had little unity of any kind. In fact, the Franks were divided into two main groups: the Salians and the Ripuarians. In the third century the Salians were living along the Ijssel River close to the North Sea. From there they moved first into Texandria and then into Belgium further south until they were stopped near Tournai, a province of the Roman Belgica Secunda. By the fourth century they had moved south as far as the Seine but not below it. The Ripuarians were settled on the western bank of the Rhine around Cologne, Trier and Metz. They slowly fused with the Salians in the area of Lorraine and thus were willing to accept the overlordship of the great Clovis by the late 400's.¹ But the Ripuarian nobility remained fiercely independent and ready to defy the monarchy when they felt their own power was threatened.

Clovis is significant not just because he managed to unite the Franks, but because he was able to set up a society in which Franks and Gallo-Romans lived together without friction. Both groups had equal political and social rights, and by his wise decision to accept Catholicism instead of Arianism, Clovis gave both groups the same

¹J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West (New York, 1962), 67, 72-73.

religious beliefs. By not stripping Roman aristocrats of their lands to reward his followers, Clovis disarmed most of the resistance that might have been mounted against him² and left his successors a loyal group of subjects. His territorial conquests formed the basis for the wealth needed by his descendents to rule effectively this mixed society of Gallo-Franks.

One problem that would plague the Merovingians was continued by Clovis--that was the partitioning of the father's wealth between all the male heirs. In this instance the patrimony consisted of a very large kingdom which was summarily divided into four smaller kingdoms which became in two generations the three kingdoms of Burgundy, Austrasia and Neustria. Burgundy stretched from Champagne to Provence and included one half of Switzerland up to Reurs.³ Austrasia was the most powerful of the three and included the Rhine and the Moselle region, northern Champagne and Auvergne. It always had its own king, always felt autonomous and always fought bitterly with the third kingdom, Neustria.⁴ Neustria included the country settled by the Salian Franks, from the Loire to Champagne, the Netherlands, Picardy, Normandy and Maine.⁵ Neustria and Austrasia fought over the land separating them in the area of Rheims and

²Ferdinand Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages, trans. by Philip and Mariette Leon (New York, 1961), 321.

³Ibid., 362-363.

⁴Ibid., 362.

⁵Ibid., 363-364.

squabbled over Aquitaine as well.⁶ Even if the kings were brothers or cousins, peace never lasted for long between them.

But even though the sons of Clovis fought among themselves, thinking nothing of fratricide, they all agreed on the nature and extent of Merovingian kingship. The kingdom was the king's private estate and he had the right to dispose of it and the people on it as he wished. The "state" had no identity apart from the personality of the king and its only purpose was to satisfy the king's desires.⁷

Early Germanic kings had two responsibilities. First they were war leaders. This role had sacral qualities because the kings were supposed to have had a semi-divine or divine ancestry and this tie to the gods would guarantee victory in battle. Also, the kings had more mundane duties such as negotiating with the Romans, making sure times were good and that there were no famines. Failure to perform these functions meant that they could rightfully be deposed.⁸

By the time the Franks entered and settled in Gaul, the men who ruled them had distinguished themselves by their successful war leadership and their noble blood. They were descended from Merovech who, according to the legend, had been the son of a woman and a sea monster who was half man and half bull. The legend seems to be a compromise because, although it does not make the Merovingians divine, it does not make them ordinary either so that their blood took on a

⁶Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West, 85.

⁷Lot, 346-347.

⁸J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent (Oxford, 1971), 1-20.

mystical quality. Finally the Merovingians proved adept at handling both peacetime problems and dealings with Rome.⁹

The opinion the Merovingians held of their role became more grandiose as time went on. By the seventh century they began to see themselves as having a religious function as well as those stated above. Chlotar II and Dagobert I saw their power as coming from God as a tool for the protection of His church. They were also to use it to promote justice, protect the poor, correct church doctrine, and uplift society's morals. However, although a reverence for the monarchy did develop, kings themselves were never expected to be holy or act as leaders of the church. The Merovingian monarchy significantly lacked the charismatic qualities of the Carolingians who even felt responsible for natural disasters.¹⁰

How much of their power came from God is open to speculation. It is safer to say that most of Merovingian authority came from their noble/mystical blood and their wealth, whether landed or movable. The common people followed the Merovingians because of their ancestry, the aristocracy because of their wealth. The king was set apart from the rest by the fact that he was wealthier than anyone else and therefore could pay more people to serve him.¹¹ The people whom he rewarded with his favors became, if they were not already, aristocrats because they were raised above other members of society by what they owned.

⁹Ibid., 17-18

¹⁰Ibid., 47-48.

¹¹J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History (New York, 1962), 4. Further references to this work will appear as The Long Haired Kings.

At one time the kings depended on the aristocracy for support but after Clovis' conquests this was no longer the case. The huge increase in territory and treasure meant the monarchy could buy what used to be a matter of loyalty. No more assemblies were called and because the army was made up in large part by Gallo-Romans the king no longer needed the military support of the Franks.¹² The king's power was absolute and was to remain so as long as the money held out.

Chlotar II was the first king to have to deal with an aristocracy that was beginning to rise in wealth and thus in power. In the Edict of 614 he was forced to recognize their rights and he gave them a head to top their hierarchical social structure in the guise of the *maior domus*.¹³ By the time of Dagobert I the kings were apparently becoming impoverished from giving too much land to followers and squandering too much treasure. As they became poorer the Arnulfings grew richer. When Dagobert died in 639 the real power was no longer the king's but resided with the mayor of the palace.¹⁴

In contrast to the Merovingians, other German tribes had kings who were denied the same sacral character. Until 633, for example, Visigothic kingship was not hereditary, as individual kings were chosen by bishops and nobles. After this, Visigothic kings became influenced by their intercourse with Byzantium and began to yield to eastern ideas of the exalted nature of monarchy.¹⁵ However, there was never

¹²Lot, 348-349.

¹³Ibid., 358.

¹⁴Ibid., 346.

¹⁵Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 48.

the same aura surrounding their blood as the Merovingian. Ostrogoths too did not view the character of their king's blood as sacred although the blood of Theodoric as it was passed down through his daughter, grandson and granddaughter was considered an important component of their monarchy. Several men aspiring to be the new king of the Ostrogoths during the Gothic Wars with Justinian for control of Italy (535-554) felt it wise to seek marriage to Theodoric's granddaughter Matasuntha. But Theodoric's blood was not essential to their kingship. Nevertheless, all Germanic kings had in common a rather extensive range of power (sometimes limitless) and a resulting conflict with the aristocracy in their respective societies.

Extensive research has been done in the last few decades on the nature of Germanic kingship because it and the Church were the only institutions in barbarian society. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill has written a book on the broad topic of Germanic kingship as well as an essay specifically on the Frankish monarchy. Katherine Fischer Drew has compiled research on the barbarian king's role of legislator and judge; and a book has recently been published on early medieval royalty. It is a compilation of essays on various aspects of kingship, the most interesting and controversial of which is that by Ian Wood.¹⁶

¹⁶Wallace-Hadrill, Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent and The Long-Haired Kings; Katherine Fischer Drew, "The Barbarian Kings as Lawgivers and Judges," Life and Thought in the Early Middle Ages, edited by Robert S. Hoyt (Minneapolis, 1967); Ian N. Wood, "Kings, Kingdoms and Consent," Early Medieval Kingdoms, edited by P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds, 1977).

Little has been published on early medieval queenship beyond articles on various individual queens. Yet this topic should be studied. To be sure work has recently been done on later medieval queens, notably by Jean Francois Lemarignier on the Capetian Monarchy.¹⁷ But Capetian queens were the heirs of the earlier Frankish queens whose power and influence is so striking to the reader of Merovingian history. A complete understanding of later queens would necessarily incorporate a knowledge of the origin of their role and power in the earlier period. Further, the Merovingian queens are in need of closer examination because their people, the Franks, and its monarchy were the victors in the struggle for the conquest of Europe. While the Visigoths, Lombards and Ostrogoths were conquered and the greater part of their influence died with them, but Frankish customs and institutions remained and formed the structure of medieval culture and society.

A study of Merovingian queens, however, is full of problems. For example, even the terms "queen" and "queenship" are misleading. "Queen" or "regina" is a term used most commonly to mean the mother or the wife of a king. Although in this paper I will indeed focus on these two roles, the term "regina" in Merovingian Gaul meant something else. On the one hand any woman who had the blood of a Merovingian king was called "regina." On the other hand a woman married to a Merovingian king but not sharing Merovingian blood did

¹⁷ Jean Francois Lemarignier, Le Gouvernement Royal aux Premiers Temps Capétiens, 987-1108 (Paris, 1965).

not share this royalty even if she herself was a princess from another kingdom. However, a non-Merovingian woman could share in Merovingian royalty only if she had a son who became king. Then the title of "regina" applied to her also although that title did not mean that she was considered royal apart from her son or that her royalty equalled his. Nevertheless, for lack of a better English term, I will use the word "queen" in the body of the paper with the above nuances understood. The term "queenship" implies an institution in the same sense as kingship. Queenship depended completely on kingship, it had no life on its own, and it was not an institution with an organization, permanency or specific rights and privileges. Power came to those women in Frankish Gaul who were married to a king, gave birth to one or were otherwise related by blood to the monarch. This power had nothing to do with their social status for in many cases queens were former slaves such as Fredegund and Bathild. Neither was it just a matter of an aggressive female with a strong personality who could get her own way. This paper will try to discover the origins and extent of a Merovingian queen's authority.

The sources used in this paper also present many problems, the solutions to which I must clarify. I am using many literary sources to give color and life to the individual women who collectively make up this topic. I have chosen specific works to both cover the period of the Merovingian dynasty and bring in information about other Germanic tribes. Tacitus and Ammianus Marcellinus provide the background for the early history of the early Germanic migrations. I have brought in information on the Ostrogoths from Procopius, on

the Lombards from Paulus Diaconus, and on the Visigoths from Isidore of Seville. My main sources for the Merovingians are Gregory of Tours' History of the Franks (HF), the fourth book of Fredegar's chronicle, and the Liber Historiae Francorum (LHF). I am only consulting the fourth book of Fredegar because that is the portion most scholars consider to be his own and it covers the years 625-642.¹⁸ The earlier segments came from HF. The years after 721 are also original but not by Fredegar. The years 642-721 are a version of the LHF.¹⁹

There are also three vitae of "saintly" queens incorporated into this paper. The Vita S. Chrothildis is a biographical story about Clovis' great queen. However, it was not written until the tenth century or sometime after Hincmar and there is very little original in it as most of it comes from the LHF.²⁰ De Vita Sanctae Radegundis was composed shortly after the queen's death in 587. The Monumenta Germaniae Historica editions used here are two: the first is a virtual copy of Fortunatus' life and the second was composed by a nun living in Radegundis' convent in Poitiers who probably did not know her personally but was in contact with people who did. Thus this vita is written by those who had first hand information about

¹⁸Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 76.

¹⁹The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with Its Continuations, trans. by J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (New York, 1960), xiii-xiv.

²⁰Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum, Volume Z: "Fredegarii et Aliorum Chronica. Vitae Sanctorum," edited by Bruno Krusch (Hanover, 1956), Vita S. Chrothildis, 341.

the queen and therefore might seem more reliable. Of the three, it is the most hagiographic in character and it stresses the queen's saintly qualities²¹ (probably because she has the most justifiable claim to sainthood of the three). Unfortunately it gives little insight into the secular part of her life when she was still a queen. The Vita S. Bathildis also has two versions: the first is very similar to Fortunatus' life of Radegund, and the second is based on the first, only it polishes and clarifies the literary style. It, however, was not written until the mid ninth century almost two hundred years after Bathild²² and thus is essentially a compilation of facts from other sources with little original information.

It seems on the surface that these vitae are quite inadequate sources for any reliable information and in some ways they are. And yet I was able to pull together the names of religious institutions built and endowed by Bathild and Clotild from their vitae. For example, information on the convent of Cala and the monastery of Corbie is abundant in Bathild's vita. Radegund's vita gives some information on the founding of S. Crucis in Poitiers but its authors were mostly preoccupied with miracles and saintly deeds. The biographers of Bathild and Clotild sought holiness for their subjects in their monetary gifts to religious institutions, therefore the vitae of Bathild and Clotild are invaluable to my chapter on the wealth of Merovingian queens.

²¹Ibid., De Vita S. Radegundis, 358-360.

²²Ibid., Vita S. Bathildis, 478.

Of course to deal properly with the topic literary sources alone are not sufficient. The documentary evidence that we have for the Merovingians are mainly in the form of the Lex Salica charters and diplomas. The Lex Salica and law codes of the Visigoths, Burgundians and Lombards will be used mainly to construct a legal framework for a discussion of the rights of women in barbarian society. The diplomata are mainly written records of gifts and grants made by the monarchs to individuals and institutions.

The Lex Salica is a collection of customary law begun in the fifth century and reworked throughout the seventh and eighth centuries.²³ No manuscript survives that predates the late 700's and though some believe that they are forgeries of Hincmar, others believe them to be copies of the original Merovingian manuscript.²⁴ I share this latter opinion. The Lex Salica is vulgar Roman law absorbed by the Franks when they came into contact with the Roman villae north of the Loire and even more so when Clovis and his sons conquered southern Gaul where the Roman legal traditions were strong. They also encountered the Visigothic legal practices.²⁵ Hence the Lex Salica cannot be studied without some reference to the Theodosian, Burgundian and Visigothic codes which greatly influenced it.

²³Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West, 76.

²⁴Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 106-111. M. S. Stein is a believer in the forgery theory, but Wallace-Hadrill gives a convincing argument for the copy theory. Stein's ideas are put forth in three articles: "Lex und Capitula," Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung 41 (1926); "Etude Critique des Capitulaires Francs," Le Moyen Age 41 (1941); "Lex Salica," Speculum XXII (April and July, 1947).

²⁵Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 8.

The Theodosian Code was taught in the cities of Gaul and it was the major influence on the barbarian law codes. Gallic lawyers trained on the Theodosian Code served the Visigoths and Burgundians.²⁶ These two civilizations in turn influenced the Merovingians. All barbarian laws drew heavily on the Theodosian Code as a model for setting down their own customs which were used to instruct Romans on how to live under barbarian rule.²⁷

The Burgundian Code was begun by Gundobad who died in 516 and finished by Sigismund (d. 523). The additional enactments probably date from Godomer's rule between 524-532. Burgundy became a part of the Merovingian kingdom with Guntram the Merovingian king ruling it beginning in 561 and, therefore, its laws would have been influential on the developing Lex Salica. As the Burgundian Code was surely influenced itself by Euric's Lex Visigothorum (c. 483)²⁹ so the latter would have had an effect on the Lex Salica.

The Visigothic law codes of the 500's are divided into laws which pertain to native Romans and those which pertain to the Goths. At least until the reigns of Reccasvinth in the mid seventh century there is no concept of a legal fusion between the Roman and Gothic societies but rather a distinct separation in law. At this time, however, the Lex Gundobada of Burgundy showed a more pronounced

²⁶ Ibid., 37-38.

²⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West, 32.

²⁸ The Burgundian Code, trans. by Katherine Fischer Drew (Philadelphia, 1972), 2-7.

²⁹ Ibid.

fusion.³⁰ Leovigild in the 570's tried to break down these legal barriers to fusion and Chindasvind (640's) and Reccesvind finally unified the laws.³¹ Visigothic laws remained more Roman than either the Frankish or Burgundian because the Visigoths had been living among and trading with the Romans the longest of any Germanic tribe. Their private law developed in fact out of their longstanding commercial ties with Rome. Most of the extant transactions are highly influenced by Roman law, other parts of the code are purely Germanic and some are neither Germanic nor Roman.³² Nevertheless, it is inconceivable that these laws could not have had a great impact on the formulation of the Lex Salica.

In contrast to the highly romanized Frankish, Visigothic, and Burgundian laws, I will occasionally refer to the Lombard laws which were on the whole very Germanic in that they were faithful to old customs and traditions like the Anglo-Saxon laws. The Lombard laws were applicable only to Lombards, while the Romans were ruled by their own laws so that the former remained juridically separate from the latter.³³ The very concept of codifying laws and the method of doing so was Roman but I will often refer to these laws because they were nearly contemporary with the Lex Salica (640's) and they emphasize the Germanic traditions.³⁴

³⁰Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 39-40.

³¹P. D. King, Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom (London, 1972), 18-20.

³²Ibid., 8-9. ³³Lot, 292-296.

³⁴Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West, 55-56.

The other documents available for this period are only of three types including diplomata, charters, and epistolae. On the whole the documents used as evidence in this paper will be those considered authentic by most authorities.³⁵ If I include a document which is controversial, I will point out that its authenticity be debated. In a few instances I will use fraudulent documents if there is a reason to believe that they are based on original ones. I may also use a spurious document if other valid documents seem to indicate that it is probably based on some truth, but again I will always explain this. Finally, a false document may be warranted if it illustrates a point that I am making which I can also prove by authentic documents. Occasionally archeological sources will be used as well because the queens listed below were all buried in churches and some archeological evidence remains.

I have chosen a sampling of Merovingian queens for close study who were selected for their interesting lives and for the years in which they lived, that is, to cover as much of the 493-715 A.D. period as possible. They are Clotild (500), Fredegund and Brunhild (late 500's), Nantechildis and Bathild (mid to late 600's) and Plectrude (early 700's). Plectrude was the wife of Pippin of Heristal, the mayor of the palace and father of Charles Martel. She

³⁵ The source collections will hereafter be cited in the following abbreviated manner: Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France, Vol. 4, edited by Martin Bouquet (Paris, 1741) = RHF; Diplomata: Chartae, Epistolae, Leges aliaque Instrumenta ad res Gallo-Francicas Spectantia, 2 volumes, edited by Jean Marie Pardessus (Aalen, Germany, 1969) = DPL; Monumenta Germaniae Historica = MGH; and for the collections within the MGH the following abbreviations will be used: Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum = SRM; Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum = SRL; Auctores Antiquissimi = AA.

was not a queen but she employed power as the queens did and, interestingly enough, often had more of it since she was also a private person with specific legal rights. She will provide the control and a foil for my comments on the queens.

CHAPTER I

UXOR REGIS

As the wife of a Merovingian, a woman could gain and exercise power in Frankish Gaul. Unfortunately it was also a very precarious and easily lost position. This would not appear to be the case from an examination of the law codes alone. In the Theodosian Code of the late Roman Empire the rights of the family, particularly the father, were weakened and, as a result, the rights of wives and daughters were strengthened. "Sine manu" marriages became common and placed the bride under her father's protection, not her husband's, allowing her to own land with her father apart from her husband. And though she had no public rights, her own landed wealth could exert a powerful influence on events and people touching her.¹ Thus these were relatively liberal times for women.

It is not odd then that the Visigothic law code which was the most Roman was also the most liberal of all the Germanic codes. Upon marriage a Visigothic woman became the property of her husband and he had complete control over the household.² A dowry was paid

¹Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, "The Power of Women Through the Family in Medieval Europe: 500-1100," in Clio's Consciousness Raised, edited by Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner (New York, 1976), 103-118.

²King, 233-234.

by the man for the woman equalling one tenth of his property or more if he were a noble. This dowry was to be matched by the woman's parents. It was the dowry which gave the man "free use and disposal of the woman."³

There were limits to a husband's power over his wife however. He could not repudiate his wife without reason for example. Divorce was possible, but only if the wife had committed adultery or was forced to do so by her husband or if both partners agreed to the dissolution of the marriage.⁴ Of all of these reasons for divorce, adultery was the most serious because it meant the wife's death if proven. An adulterous husband was not subject to death or to many punishments should he succumb.⁵

Although husbands did control their wives in Visigothic law, there was more emphasis placed on making sure the wife agreed to any transaction made by the husband, especially if it concerned property held in common. Women were permitted to conduct their own cases in court but could not act as their own attorney--this position normally being reserved for their husbands. But the husband could not act as her attorney without the wife's permission.⁶ In contrast to the Visigothic legal liberalism, the Lombard laws forbade any woman to be under her own legal control or be considered legally competent. Neither could a woman give away or alienate any property without the consent of her husband,⁷ whereas a Visigothic

³Ibid., 226.

⁴Ibid., 235-236.

⁵Ibid., 233-234.

⁶The Visigothic Code, trans. by S. P. Scott (Boston, 1910), 50.

⁷The Lombard Laws, trans. by K. F. Drew (Philadelphia, 1973), 92.

woman had complete control of all property she brought into her marriage.

The Burgundian laws, so influential on the Lex Salica, were basically similar to the Visigothic as far as the nature of marriage, but more restrictive of women. Should a woman give herself to a man voluntarily in marriage, he then got complete control of her and all of her property and possessions.⁸ Divorce was somewhat easier however. A man could put his wife away for adultery,⁹ witchcraft or violation of graves, but no woman could put her husband away without risking death. More significantly, a man could simply repudiate his wife, but then he had to give her the household goods and the children or pay her marriage price and a fine of 12 solidi.¹⁰ The Franks seemed to prefer this method of easy repudiation.

Marriage between private persons in Frankish Gaul seemed to be of the same type as it was in the Visigothic, Lombardic, and Burgundian societies. However there were no divorce rights for women and wives could be repudiated at will.¹¹ Thus women's rights

⁸The Burgundian Code, trans. by K. F. Drew (Philadelphia, 1972), 85.

⁹Ibid., LII. The story of Aunegild and Balthamodus illustrates the complex nature of the laws concerning adultery. Aunegild committed adultery with Balthamodus while she was betrothed to Fredigisil. For her crime she had to pay her wergeld before being executed. Balthamodus paid his wergeld to Fredigisil but was given the chance to avoid that if he swore that he had not known that Aunegild was betrothed, which I feel he did. Betrothal was as sacred a bond as marriage and so Aunegild had to pay the same price as a married woman.

¹⁰Ibid., 45-46.

¹¹Lot, 398.

were severely reduced in Frankish society. The marriages of Frankish kings were not governed by any rules at all. Tacitus and all the Frankish chroniclers admit that the royal families were polygamous and that the kings kept numerous concubines as well.¹² The dual evils of polygamy and easy repudiation along with concubinage prevented Merovingian wives from achieving any type of stable position in the royal household and from developing an institution of queenship with its own rights and privileges.

Polygamy as it existed in Merovingian families meant that the king married whenever and whomever he pleased. It was most practiced by the sons and grandsons of Clovis I. Lothar I, Charibert and Chilperic were fond of marrying whenever the whim struck them. Though polygamy never died out in Frankish royal families, monogamy became the norm after 600.

Examples of polygamy are numerous throughout the Frankish chronicles, especially in Gregory of Tours' history where they virtually pepper the pages. Lothar I was married to two sisters at the same time. Lothar also married Radegund, a Thuringian princess he had obtained as a spoil of war.¹⁴ He also married Vuldetrada

¹²Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne F. Wemple, "Marriage and Divorce in the Frankish Kingdom," in Women in Medieval Society, edited by Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia, 1976), 99.

¹³Gregory of Tours, The History of the Franks, trans. by O. M. Dalton, Vol. 2 (Oxford, 1927), IV 3 (hereafter cited as HF). See also: MGH, SRM, Vol. I, pt. I, 136: ". . . uxoris (Ingund) suae sororem (Aregundis) acciperet . . . (Lothar) dirigit eamque (Aregundis) sibi in matrimonio sociavit."

¹⁴MGH, SRM, Vol. 2, De Vita S. Radegunda, 365, 379-381.

and Guntheuc. His sons were no better. Charibert married Theudechild, Ingoberg and two sisters, Merofled and Marcovefa. Chilperic married in succession Audovera and Galswintha while sometime in the process also marrying his concubine Fredegund. Fredegund kept him enamoured thereafter until his death.

The history of Chilperic's marriages is illustrative of the shaky ground upon which Merovingian marriages were built. He repudiated Audovera because, so he said, she had stood as godmother to her own child. His second marriage to the Visigothic princess Galswintha ended in her murder on Chilperic's instigation. Gregory of Tours makes it plain that behind the repudiation of Audovera and the death of Galswintha was the scheming of Chilperic's concubine Fredegund to become the only queen. Here all the abuses of Merovingian marriage are exhibited.

There are many examples of the easy repudiation of wives by Merovingians. Interestingly enough, the first reference to repudiation is to a woman who repudiated her husband in Gregory's account of Clovis' mother and father, Basina and Childeric. Childeric met her while he was in exile in Thuringia and she was the wife of the king of that country. When it was feasible for Childeric to return to the Franks, she followed him, saying that he was the best man around and she wanted to live with him.¹⁵ Though she was repudiating her

¹⁵HF, Vol. 2, II 9(10)-12(13). See also MGH, SRM, Vol. 1, 62: Basina explained her action to Childeric like this: "Nova inquit, utilitatem tuam, quod sis valde strinius, ideoque, veni, ut habitem tecum. Nam noveris, si in transmarinis partibus aliquem cognovissem utilitorem tibi, expetissem utique cohabitationem eius."

husband who was also a king, she was only able to do so because Childeric was an even stronger monarch. No woman ever repudiated her Merovingian husband except perhaps Radegund who left Lothar I for the Church.

One more instance of a woman repudiating her husband for a Merovingian occurs when a Roman woman named Deuteria left her husband for King Theudebert. She became first Theudebert's mistress and then his queen. But all the while Theudebert was betrothed by a sacred oath to Wisigard, the daughter of Wacho, king of the Lombards. The Franks became more and more upset about this shameful oath breaking and finally after seven years he repudiated Deuteria and married Wisigard.¹⁶ Deuteria like Basina was only able to repudiate her first husband because the king was her suitor. The king was able to put Deuteria away because no one could stop him.

In every instance of Merovingian repudiation the king is the partner who does the repudiation. Vuldetrada was the queen of Theudebald and when he died she married the much wed Lothar I. He, however, was convinced by the bishops that he must put her away as she had been his grandnephew's wife and that was incest. He paid her off by marrying her to Duke Garivald.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., Vol. 2, III 21-III 28. See also: MGH, SRM, Vol. 1, 124: ". . . relicta Deuteria."

¹⁷ Ibid., Vol. 2, IV 6(9). See also: MGH, SRM, Vol. 1, 141: Lothar ". . . copulans Vuldetradam, uxorem eius stratusuo. Sed increpitus a sacerdotibus, reliquit eam"

Repudiation was not uncommon in private marriages in Frankish Gaul either. For example, Pippin set Plectrude aside for a girl by the name of Alpaide. After he had lived with her for less than a year, which was just long enough to father Charles Martel, he was reconciled to Plectrude. No one is sure why he abandoned Alpaide but he remained married to Plectrude until his death.¹⁸

Concubinage was as much a threat to a queen's position as polygamy and repudiation. Although polygamy became less a problem as time went on, repudiation and particularly concubinage continued to pose monumental threats to the institution of marriage. Concubinage was fostered by the institution of slavery and the presence of female slaves in the royal households. In fact, many queens were themselves former slaves such as Fredegund, Nantechildis and Bathildis.¹⁹ Merofled and Marcovefa were the daughters of a weaver, and Theudechild was the daughter of a shepherd. It appears that Merovingians did not put any emphasis on the social position of their wives. The question immediately arises: why was the social class of a queen not a matter of concern since her role was to produce the heir to the throne? Any why was a mere concubine such a threat to a real Merovingian queen?

These questions did not worry many Merovingians. The only king to show some concern was Sigibert who was said to have married

¹⁸DPL, 212-213.

¹⁹Other wives who were slaves include Austrechild, wife of Guntram, Bilichildis, wife of Theudebert II, and the sisters Ingund and Aregund, wives of Lothar.

the Visigothic princess Brunhild because he was disgusted by the low marriages of his brothers.²⁰ But he was alone in his sentiments because Merovingian blood was considered so sacred no marriage alliance could improve it or degrade it. Every child of a Merovingian king was considered royal.²¹ When Sagittarius, bishop of Gap, remarked that Guntram's sons could not succeed to the throne because their mother Austrechild had been a slave, Gregory of Tours commented: "He overlooked the fact that, irrespective of their mother's birth, all male children begotten by kings are called king's sons."²² The truth of this statement is borne out by Theuderic, the son of Clovis and a concubine who became king of Metz and Chlotar II who was the king of all the Franks and the son of the slave Fredegund.

Further, if the mothers were of varying social status to begin with, their children were of equal status. Fredegund's son was equal to Brunhild's. Legitimate and illegitimate Merovingian children had equal status as shown by the two sons of Dagobert I. Both were kings although only one was legitimate. But the status of royal children was always higher than that of their mother.²³

²⁰HF, Vol. 2, IV 21(28). See also: MGH, SRM, Vol. 1, 160: "Porro Sigyberthus rex cum videret quod fratres eius indigna sibimet uxores acciperent et per vilitatem suam etiam ancillas in matrimonio sociarent, . . . Brunichildem Athanagilde, regis filiam, petit."

²¹Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 203-204.

²²HF, Vol. 2 (20). See also: MGH, SRM, Vol. 1, 228: ". . . praetermissis nune feminarum, regis vocitantur literi, qui de regibus fuerant, procreati."

²³Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 203-204.

This even applied to Merovingian daughters. Rigunth made this perfectly clear when she said that she was the real mistress of the royal household after Chilperic's death because she was a Merovingian while her mother Fredegund had just been a slave.²⁴

This was not an idle claim by Rigunth for throughout the HF she is referred to as "queen." Duke Ursio once reminded Brunhild, a princess in her own right, that her son's royalty was not her own. And Galswintha complained after suffering many abuses in the Frankish court that she had no part in the Merovingian royalty.²⁵

Thus, a queen had to turn a blind eye to her husband's incessant adultery because no Merovingian took seriously the Christian admonition against it. Queens too were not always adverse to adultery though it was dangerous for if caught, she would be executed. Fredegund was accused of adultery twice. The first time by Leudast who said that Gregory of Tours had made the accusation. Fredegund saved herself by an oath but she had Leudast killed for placing her life in such peril.²⁶ Later after Chilperic's death, Gregory reports that Fredegund tried to seduce the treasurer Eberulf but he denied her and for his lese majeste he also died.²⁷ Brunhild was also rumored to have had a lover in Protadius.

Adultery as well as polygamy and concubinage were certainly evils as far as the Church was concerned but its efforts to put an end to them were meagre indeed. S. Germanus excommunicated Charibert

²⁴HF, Vol. 2, IX 34.

²⁵Ibid., Vol. 2, V 49.

²⁶Ibid., Vol. 2, V 33(50).

²⁷Ibid., Vol. 2, V(49).

for marrying Marcovefa not because it was polygamous but because it was incestuous and she was a nun. The only other attempt to take a stand in favor of the rightful Christian marriage was that of S. Columban who denounced Theuderic's concubines. In this case it was a more than justified complaint since Theuderic had children by his concubines in his fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth years!²⁸ S. Columban was not successful because Theuderic's grandmother Brunhild refused to let him marry fearing that a new queen would lessen her power over the young king.²⁹

Apparently one of the reasons that the Church failed to convince the Merovingians to abandon polygamy and adultery was that it had to clean its own house first. All the Church councils in the sixth century repeated a prohibition against the use of household slaves in clerical institutions because the temptation to fall into concubinage was too great. Such a problem was not easily solved and the abuses reached even to the highest clerical position. Bishop Bertram of Bordeaux and Bishop Palladius of Saintes accused each other of this type of licentiousness.³⁰

A Church in such a state as this was in no position to halt the even more serious offense against Christian marriage--incest. The examples of it are astounding. Brunhild married her nephew Merovech.

²⁸S. Dill, Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age (London, 1966), 288.

²⁹The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar, op. cit., 24 (cited hereafter as Fredegar).

³⁰Dill, 288.

Chilperic raised a protest against this marriage on grounds of incest³¹ but it was little more than an excuse to stop a marriage he feared would threaten his power. After all, his father and brother had also committed incest. Lothar had married the sisters Ingund and Aregund (Chilperic's mother) and Charibert had married the sisters Marcovefa and Merofled.³² Incest worried queens no less than it did the Church. When the daughter of Deuteria grew up, the mother feared that her husband Theudebert might put her away for the girl and therefore had her killed.³³

It seems then that there was no institution of marriage in the Christian sense in Merovingian royal families. Rather, the theory of Christian marriage was loosely grafted onto the customary pagan type of marriage. Without a clearly defined institution, the queen had no rights or privileges accruing to her position as a legitimate wife. And the Church did not make much of an attempt to protect her position. So what did these women get from their marriage to a king? The literary sources indicate that many queens who were able to maintain their popularity with their husbands were also able to exert a tremendous personal influence over them. Since the king held all the power in the "state," such a queen could conceivably obtain immense but indirect power.

³¹HF, Vol. 2, V 3, V 11(17). See also: MGH, SRM, Vol. 1, 195: Merovech and Brunhild married ". . . *contras legemque canonicam*"

³²Another example of incest is the marriage of Theudebald's widow Vuldegrada to his uncle, Lothar.

³³HF, Vol. 2, III 28.

Clotild exerted much influence over her husband Clovis. She is given the credit for helping to convert Clovis to Catholic Christianity. Rade Gund also managed to get what she desired when she convinced Lothar to build the famous convent of S. Croix where she lived for the rest of her life. Austrechild, the queen of Guntram, made him promise to kill her physicians because she felt that their ineptitude had been responsible for her fatal illness.

Fredegund exerted an almost hypnotic power over Chilperic. Chilperic not only let her sway his own opinions, but also let her do as she pleased almost all the time. The most startling example of this is the fact that he turned his last son by Audovera, Chlodovech, over to her to be murdered. This is even more amazing when one remembers that his sons by Fredegund were dead and by thus sacrificing Chlodovech he was taking a chance on having no heir. Fredegund persuaded Chilperic to help her take revenge against Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen for whom she felt great hatred. Chilperic brought charges against the Bishop for breaking the Gallican canons by marrying an aunt and a nephew. But when unable to convict Praetextatus, the king asked the bishops present, ". . . what shall I do that the queen's will be accomplished on him."³⁴

Brunhild married twice. Her first husband was Sigibert to whom she remained married for five years. He was a strong willed man and was little influenced by anyone, even his wife. Her second husband was Merovech and they were separated soon after their marriage by

³⁴HF, Vol. 2, V 12(18).

Chilperic. She did not appear to have the same amount of influence over her spouses that Fredegund had over hers although she was dominant over her son and grandsons. She did have some competition from her granddaughter-in-law Billichildis who was the wife of Theudebert. When an attempt was made to make peace between the warring brothers, the two queens were called on to meet and end the conflict. Obviously, the nobles felt that if the two queens could be convinced, they in turn would convince Theuderic and Theudebert.³⁵

That popular queens could have a very powerful influence over their husbands is best attested to by Brunhild's obstinate refusal to allow her grandson to marry. Fredegar explains that if there were another queen, she would become the head of the court and Brunhild would lose a great deal of power. Hence Brunhild prevented the consummation of Theuderic's marriage to Ermenberga.³⁶

Nevertheless, this type of power was purely personal; it was not a right nor does it indicate an institution of queenship. It was not a constant source of power either, because it could be easily lost. If queens had any power of their own emanating from their position as the royal consort it would manifest itself in the royal diplomas, charters and letters of their husbands. The references in the documents of kings giving land or gifts jointly with their queens are predictably rare.

³⁵Fredegar, 23: ". . . duas reginas pro pacem inter Teudericum et Teudebertum coniungerint conloquendum."

³⁶Fredegar, 24.

Clotild married Clovis in 493. She was surely one of the most influential and important of the Merovingian women. Because of her role in the conversion of the Franks, she had the support of the bishops. She was always popular with her husband who is not known to have taken another wife. And yet her name only appears in two documents attributed to Clovis and they are inauthentic.³⁷ Thus there is no evidence surviving to prove that Clotild had any power other than her personal influence over the king. No documents exist in which Fredegund or Brunhild are mentioned jointly with their husbands.

In 633, Dagobert I founded a monastery in Hasela in the diocese of Argentan. The land came from the royal fisc and was given to Florentius. In order to prevent the revocation of this gift after his death by any of his male family members, Dagobert had their names added to the grant. But his wife Nantechildis and daughter Rathildis also are mentioned as being present at the gift giving as witnesses.³⁸ Nantechildis' presence there and her silent acquiescence were important since their son, the heir to the Neustrian throne, was a minor and should Dagobert die, his queen would become regent. However, she did

³⁷DPL, Vol. 1, LXIV, 36-37. This is a land grant to the monastery at Sens called St. Peters. It is believed to be spurious because it mentions land which came to Clovis from Clotild's dowry. Pardessus says in a footnote to the document that it was the custom of the Franks to give land to the wife not visa versa. Further, the reason for the land grant is to found a monastery for his daughter, Theochild, but he had no such daughter. DPL, Vol. 1, LXV, 38-40: This document is a continuation of the first and again mentions the mythical Theochild.

³⁸Ibid., Vol. 2, CCLXI, 23-25: "Huic traditioni interfuerunt Nanthildis, regina Francorum, nostra legitima, cum filia nostra Rathilde."

not sign it since she had no part in the giving of the land which belonged to the king alone.

Bathildis, the wife of Clovis II, is mentioned in passing with her husband in one document and it has many irregularities.³⁹ It is a private gift of land by the abbot of Aniane, Leodebod, which states that he decided to make the gift during the time of the reigns of Clovis and Bathild,⁴⁰ but that is the only reference that exists for Bathild in conjunction with her husband and she is not involved in any transaction with him.

In sharp contrast to these queens Plectrude, the wife of the mayor of the palace, Pippin, who was not a Merovingian and therefore a private person, was often mentioned jointly with him in legal transactions. The earliest document which dates from 687 and which may also be inauthentic names Pippin and Plectrude as co-donors of the fortification Ambra in Ardennes to a certain Beregisius to found a monastery.⁴¹ Plectrude also signed this document with her sons

³⁹Ibid., Vol. 1, CCCLVIII, 142: The date given is in the second year of the reign of Clovis. Pardessus says if this is correct then he would have been too young to be married. If there was a scribal mistake and the year was 12, this would have been more correct or if he meant Chlotar instead of Clovis. But this would be an error that would throw much doubt on the veracity of this document and since he refers to Bathild as the wife and not the mother of the king, this would seem to indicate Clovis to be the intended monarch.

⁴⁰Ibid., 142: ". . . gloriosa domna uxore eius Bathilde regina"

⁴¹Ibid., Vol. 2, CDIX, 203. Pardessus argues that this is a fraud because this monastery was not founded until the eighth century and this document is dated 687.

Drogo and Grimoald and various counts and nobles, something no queen ever did. Even if this document is spurious, its format is confirmed by many that are not. For example, in 691⁴² a charter was written in which Plectrude and Pippin jointly gave the village of Nugartum to the church of the S.S. Apostles near Metz. Because this village is mentioned as belonging to both husband and wife, the gift came from both.⁴³

In 702 a charter was issued by Pippin and Plectrude, Armonius, bishop of Verdun, and Anglebert, archdeacon of S. Vanne, by which they all conferred gifts on S. Vanne. In this instance Pippin and Plectrude were giving a place called Parurito and/or Commenarius.⁴⁴ Four years later the two gave the community of Epternac in order to found the monastery of Echternach. This land came to Pippin and Plectrude from the previous owners Theodarius and his son Theobard and when added to property given to Bishop Willibrord by Irmine, formed the land of the monastery of Echternach. It was made a donation at a meeting of bishops called to witness it and was signed by Pippin and his wife.⁴⁵

⁴²Ibid., Vol. 2, CDIX, 212-213. There is some argument about the date but I have decided to use Pardessus' date of 691.

⁴³Ibid., Vol. 2, CDIX, 213: "Ego Pippinus dux et uxor mea dedimus . . . villam nostram, nomine Nugarentum . . . ego iterum Pippinus et uxor mea, nomina Plectrudis . . . tradidimus ad basilicam Sanctorum Apostolorum . . . villam . . . Nugarentum."

⁴⁴Ibid., Vol. 2, CDLIV, 259-260: ". . . Pippinus ejusque illustra matrona Plectrudis"

⁴⁵Ibid., Vol. 2, CDLXVII, 273-274: The first to sign were "Pippinus et conjux ejus Plectrudis."

A very significant document for this work was written in 714. Pippin and Plectrude gave to the same Willibrord the monastery of Suestria which Plectrude bought from Alberic and Haderic.⁴⁶ Plectrude then is buying land and giving it but with her husband's approval for as he could not alienate property without her consent, she needed his consent as well. More importantly, this document was signed at the villa Bagolosus by Plectrude, who was given permission to do so as her husband was too ill to represent them himself.⁴⁷ This power of attorney so to speak was never given by a king to his wife. Bishop Willibrord, the recipient of so many gifts from the family of Pippin acknowledged them in his testament. He left many gifts to the monastery of Epternac and in doing so mentioned that many came to him as a result of the generosity of the Franks and among the gift-givers he recalled Pippin and Plectrude and Charles Martel.⁴⁸

It appears, therefore, that private wives had legal rights as far as alienation and control of property acquired through marriage. They were always a part of transactions concerning their own property or that which they held jointly with their husbands. Though they could be repudiated, divorced or subjected to their husband's adultery and

⁴⁶ Ibid., Vol. 2, XD, 298-299. This was land which ". . . Blictrudis dato pretio ab Alberico et Haderico comparavit."

⁴⁷ Ibid., Vol. 2, XD, 299: "Et quia nos, propter aegritudinem, in ipsa carta scribere non potuimus, Blictrudis conjugem nostram rogavimus et potestatem dedimus, ut ipsam fumare ad nostram vicem deberet"

⁴⁸ Ibid., Vol. 2, MXL, 349-350: "Similiter illas res, quas dominus Pippinus mihi condonavit, vel delegavit, seu matrona sua Plectrudis, sive filius suis dominus, noster Carolus"

faithlessness, on the whole their position as legitimate wives was protected and stabilized by rights written down in the laws. Women married to Merovingian kings had no such rights.

Merovingian queens were not protected legally because their husbands were above the law, not under it. There was no restraint to the king's power to do as he pleased with his wife or anyone else. He kept concubines and often indulged in polygamy, thereby producing many children of whom a great number were males, all of whom were legitimate heirs to the throne. No royal wife, therefore, could feel secure in the fact that she was married legitimately to the king, that she was of royal blood herself, or that she had a son. Her position rested solely on her popularity with her husband who might at any moment be tempted away from her by another woman.

All property in the marriage, except the morgengabe, was a part of the royal fisc over which the queen had no control. The morgengabe was her own but upon her death it returned to her husband. A Merovingian queen was not totally devoid of any hope of gaining power in her own right. If she were lucky she had a chance to achieve power through a son who became king and her own wealth in the form of movable treasure and land.

CHAPTER II

MATER REGIS

The wife of a Merovingian king was often in an insecure position and her status as queen was always uncertain. If, however, she were able to produce a son who was raised to the throne, she became much more secure and her power increased dramatically if that son were a minor. If she were unable to produce an heir, she could be set aside. This is what happened to Gomatrudis the first wife of Dagobert I.¹ Unfortunately, even if a queen had a son, there was no one tradition among the Merovingians governing inheritance of the throne.

Generally, a royal son had to have the support of the reigning king in order to ascend the throne, although political events at the time of the latter's death could also be influential on the choice of the new king.² For example, on the death of Clovis in 511 he left four sons, three by Clotild and one, Theuderic, by an unknown woman. Theuderic was an accomplished warrior far stronger than his three young stepbrothers and powerful enough to rule on his own. But Clotild was very popular and had the support of the bishops so a compromise had to be reached. The compromise was a four-way division of Clovis' kingdom between all the sons.³

¹Fredegar, 49.

²Wood, 14.

³*Ibid.*, 23. See also: Footnote 1, p. 26-27. Wood's argument that until 511 division of the patrimony of kings was not the norm

Mothers of young princes spent most of their energy in trying to maintain and enhance their child's popularity in the eyes of the king and the optimates. They had no easy task as there was never a shortage of Merovingian male heirs, both legitimate and illegitimate, all of whom had an equal claim to the throne. Some of the methods used by ambitious mothers ranged from the use of personal influence over the king and nobles to the murder of all other possible heirs. The primary motivation for such drastic action might have been a mother's love and fear for her son but more likely it also included a desire for power. A woman whose son became king was a woman with power, especially if he were a minor. In short, once regent or nutritor, a mother shared power with her son as monarch until the son reached his majority.⁴

Most of the queens chosen for this paper were regents at some point in their lives. Clotild as mentioned above had three sons but on the death of Clovis they took over their own kingdoms and she did not act as their regent. Instead she withdrew to her favorite residence in the city of Tours and lived a holy life of prayer and abstinence. Nevertheless she was not without influence, as is clearly seen in her ability to arouse them to avenge the dishonor

is controversial. Indeed his use of a Visigothic example to prove his point does not strengthen his argument.

⁴The documentary evidence for joint rule of mothers and sons is abundant. For example, the phrase ". . . regum Brunechildis et Theoderici . . ." appears in DPL, Vol. 1, CCI, 163-166.

done to her father and mother by her uncle Gundobad, king of Burgundy, beginning a blood feud with the deceased king's sons.⁵

However, on the death of her son Chlodomer, Clotild got control of his three young sons, the eldest of whom was ten years old. Probably these children would have inherited Chlodomer's kingdom of Orleans and though too young to rule alone, their uncles Childebart and Lothar feared they would manage with the help of their grandmother. Gregory says that Childebart realized the great affection Clotild had for the children and ". . . he feared that by her favor they might be admitted to a share in the kingdom."⁶ Clotild's great popularity with the nobles and bishops would indeed have given her grandsons a chance at ruling with her backing but Childebart and Lothar murdered two of the boys before they had a chance. The third escaped and later became a priest.⁷ Thus Clotild never became a regent but she remained a powerful influence because of her immense personal popularity.

Two very powerful regents were Fredegund and Brunhild, contemporaries and arch-enemies whose regencies were tied together by their feud. Neither queen was completely without problems in her regency nor immune from interference from individuals and outside groups. Fredegund's first problem was to eliminate the threat to offspring from the three legitimate sons of Chilperic and Audovera.

⁵HF, III 5. Gregory implies that the Arianism of the Burgundians also may have been a factor leading to and justifying the war.

⁶Ibid., Vol. 2, III 15.

⁷Ibid., Vol. 2, III 18.

Theudebert was slain by his uncle Sigibert after having broken an oath. Merovech committed suicide after having been arrested by Fredegund's henchmen and the queen herself was responsible for the death of the youngest son, Chlodovech. To make sure no one remained alive to threaten her, Fredegund also killed Audovera.⁸

Shortly after this Chilperic also died and Fredegund had to seek asylum in Paris where she found it prudent to accept King Guntram of Burgundy as the guardian of her infant son Lothar II. However, she only thought of his guardianship as a temporary measure, necessary until she could recoup her power. She soon began to thwart Guntram at every available opportunity. Her success in later gaining almost complete control of the regency sprang from her military victories against the hated Austrasians and her ability to stir up nationalism among the Salians while posing as their champion. Of course this nationalism was also used against the foreign domination of Guntram of Burgundy. To further her cause against the Burgundians and Austrasians, she courted alliances with the Bretons and Visigoths. She murdered all who stood in her way such as Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen and sent assassins after Guntram himself and Brunhild of Austrasia. Finally she offered support to dissident Burgundian and Austrasian nobles who were chafing under the yoke of royal supremacy and who longed to break monarchical power over them.⁹

Brunhild was the woman who held the longest regency in Merovingian history because she was regent for her son Childebert II,

⁸Ibid., Vol. 1, 119-121.

⁹Ibid., Vol. 1, 123, 127.

her grandsons Theudebert and Theuderic, and very shortly for her great-grandson Sigibert. However, hers were the most difficult regencies. She was frequently hampered by the interference of Guntram, who was regent for both her son Childebert and Fredegund's son Chlotar, as well as by a rebellious Austrasian nobility which was often aided by Fredegund.

In 575 Brunhild's husband Sigibert was murdered by Fredegund's assassins. Austrasian nobles led by Duke Gundovald acclaimed her five year old son Childebert as king. Since Brunhild had always been a staunch supporter of royal supremacy and in order to check her influence over the young king, the nobles set up a mayor of the palace to represent aristocratic interests to the king. After a short exile, the nobles allowed the queen mother to return to Austrasia where she promptly began to restore royal predominance once again.¹⁰

Her ensuing struggle with the nobility for control of her son was clearly revealed in the feud that broke out between her supporter Lupus, Duke of Champagne, and her enemies, Dukes Ursio and Bertefred. When the latter attacked Lupus, the queen stepped in to protect her friend but she was shouted down by Ursio who put her in her place by telling her that the Austrasian kingdom was ". . . upheld not by thy protection but by ours [nobility]."¹¹

Thus, Brunhild had to deal with a very strong and aggressive nobility. And not soon after, Guntram adopted Childebert as his heir and she found herself contending with him as well for control

¹⁰Ibid., Vol. 2, VI 2.

¹¹Ibid., Vol. 1, 116.

of her son.¹² Her chance for independence came in 585 when Wandelen, the mayor of the palace, died and she managed to block the appointment of another in his place and so became the sole regent.¹³ The Austrasian nobles soon rose in revolt in conjunction with the Burgundian nobles; the former were led by the Dukes Rauching, Ursio, and Berthefred, and the latter by Guntram Boso. The rebellion was quashed and the ringleaders executed. This marked the beginning of a period of ascendancy for the royal house of Austrasia.¹⁴

By 593 Brunhild and King Childebert were at the peak of their power. Guntram had died and left Childebert his kingdom and removed a source of conflict with the queen mother over power. Also, the numerous Gallo-Roman aristocrats in Burgundy were willing to support the monarchy against the ever troublesome Austrasian nobility. But if Guntram's death was a boon to Brunhild, it was also one to Fredegund who at once became free enough to lead an army against Austrasia, defeat them, and snatch back the old Neustrian capital of Soissons. In 595 Childebert died, leaving Brunhild with two young grandsons and another regency. Before she could organize her government, Fredegund seized Paris and met Brunhild's armies at Latifao, defeated her and took the country as far as the Meuse.¹⁵ Luckily, Fredegund died in 597 but Brunhild's problems were far from over.

¹²Ibid., Vol. 1, 120.

¹³Ibid., Vol. 2, VIII 22. MGH, SRM, 389. . No one was appointed to fill Wandelen's place ". . . quod Regina mater curam vellit propriam habere de filio."

¹⁴Ibid., Vol. 1, 128.

¹⁵Ibid., Vol. 1, 131-132.

It was during the regency of Theuderic and Theudebert that Brunhild abandoned her somewhat moderate tactics and became despotic. In 600 the aristocracy rallied around Theudebert, king of Austrasia and Germany, and exiled her.¹⁶ She fled to Theuderic, king of Burgundy, and there fomented war between her grandsons to punish the disloyalty of Theudebert.

When Theudebert and Theuderic were both dead and had left infant sons to be cared for by their great-grandmother, Brunhild could not do the job any more. She had made too many enemies by her domineering personality, her despotism, and the numerous executions she had ordered for those who opposed her. The Burgundian notables deserted her and allowed her to be captured and executed by Chlotar II, the son of Fredegund.¹⁷

The regencies of both Nantechildis and Bathild are more peaceful than those of Fredegund and Brunhild. Nantechildis, the wife of Dagobert I, had by him a son named Clovis. On the death of Dagobert she ruled with Aega, mayor of the palace, the kingdoms of Neustria and Burgundy for her son who was still a minor. When Aega died three years later, she chose Flaochad to be the new mayor.¹⁸ This was a wiser decision than the one made by Brunhild to do away with the mayor altogether. By making this decision, she made it clear that he was responsible to her.

¹⁶Fredegar, 12.

¹⁷Ibid., 34. The nobles did this because they ". . . timentis Brunechildem et odium in eam habentes"

¹⁸Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 142-143.

Bathild was Clovis' queen. When he died she ruled in the name of her young sons Chlotar and Childeric.¹⁹ Very little is said of her regency in the chronicles; it seems uneventful. Chlotar ruled Neustria from 657-673 but ruled all the Franks from 657-673. Bathild's vita gives her the credit for ruling all three kingdoms in peace which is correct since this was the period of her regency and she, not her young son, would have had real control at this time.²⁰ Childeric ruled Austrasia from 661-675 and she was his regent for about five years.

The "regency" of Plectrude was much more turbulent than those above and it was shorter. Plectrude was, as Fredegar put it, a noble and most intelligent woman.²¹ However, she had several problems. First, her sons Drogo and Grimoald had died at about the same time as her husband Pippin. Pippin had installed one of his grandsons, Theodoald, as mayor of the palace just before he died, but the new mayor was still a young boy²² as was the king, Dagobert III. When the chronicles say that Plectrude took over and ruled discreetly²³

¹⁹ Ibid., 80. Chlotar ruled ". . . cum prefata [Fredegund] regina matre."

²⁰ MGH, SRM, *Vita S. Bathildis*, 488. ". . . ut ipsa tria regina que antea dissidebant discordia, tunc inter se tenerent pacis concordiam."

²¹ Fredegar, 85. Fredegar calls her "uxor nobilis et prudentissima."

²² Ibid., 85. Theodoald is called "paruulo."

²³ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, trans. by Bernard Bachrach, (Lawrence, Kansas, 1973), III. (Cited hereafter as LHF). MGH, SRM, 325, "Plectrudis quoque cum nepotibus suis vel rege cuncta gubernabat sub discreto regimine."

this actually means that she had a double regency--one for the king and one for the mayor of the palace.

Plectrude faced two obstacles to her regency. First was the aristocracy, which quickly mounted a revolt, and the other was her formidable stepson, Charles Martel. She immediately imprisoned the latter hoping to thereby control him. But the rebel nobles elected Chilperic as the new king when Dagobert died and went to war against Theodoald forcing him to flee. His mother was compelled to pay them off. It may be that a government run by two minors and a woman gave the nobles the courage and the opportunity to revolt in the first place. It was not until Charles Martel escaped, defeated the nobles and set up his own king, Chlotar,²⁴ that Plectrude realized her days of power were over. Charles met with his stepmother to talk, presumably backed up by a large army, and she was persuaded to hand over the treasure left her by Pippin.²⁵ Charles needed money as well as great military strength to remain in control and now he had both. After this meeting, Plectrude vanished from the chronicles and from politics.

The fact that these women were regents implied that they had tremendous power even though in most cases they shared that position with a male guardian. The title given to them was "nutritor" implying that it was their job to nourish their sons, to support and sustain them. They managed their sons' estates and that estate encompassed

²⁴Ibid., 109-114.

²⁵Fredegar, 87-89. Martel of course claimed the treasure was left to him, not to Plectrude, by Pippin.

the entire kingdom. This right of mothers to manage the patrimony of their underaged sons may come from the laws since all barbarian laws give such a right to women who are private citizens. Some codes are more limiting than others in the amount of power given to a mother.

The Burgundian laws allowed widowed mothers usufruct of one quarter of the patrimony while she lived but she could not alienate or sell the land since it belonged to her sons.²⁶ Visigothic laws gave a mother control until her children were fourteen years of age and this included the right to choose their spouses.²⁷ The Lex Salica also followed the same line, giving mothers the right to manage the patrimony but denying them the right to sell, alienate or inherit it.²⁸

Since this was the custom among barbarian families, it might have carried over into the royal families as well. Queen mothers usually got control of their sons' patrimonies if they were minors when they came to the throne. This was often mentioned in the literary sources. But this type of regency is most notable in the documentary sources, which reveal mothers co-signing with their sons with the passing of a king. They were never allowed to co-sign while the king was alive.²⁹

²⁶The Burgundian Code, XXIV.

²⁷King, 242-245; 228-230.

²⁸Wallace-Hadrill, The Barbarian West, 76.

²⁹DPL, Vol. 2, CCCXXX, 107, fn. 3. Pardessus makes this comment in reference to a document allegedly written by Chlotar III in which

However, one must be careful when drawing conclusions because of the paucity of documents still surviving from the Merovingian period. For example, Fredegund was the regent for her son Chlotar II from 584 to 597.³⁰ This is a period of thirteen years in which she was the real power behind the throne and virtually independent except for occasional interference from Guntram. And yet only three documents survive for this period of Chlotar's youth. One is a peace pact between Chlotar and Childebert in 593 and another is a decree by Chlotar closely tied to it. No signatures appear on either.³¹ The third is not even a royal document. It is a testament or will by Bishop Bertran of Le Mans in which he mentions a village which was given to him by Chlotar and his mother.³² This testament reveals one of the primary powers exercised by queen mothers through their sons--the giving of gifts of land and/or treasure for service or favors to important nobles and ecclesiastics.

Brunhild's regencies are somewhat better documented. She was joint regent with the mayors of the palace, Gogo and Wandelen,

he mentions a grant to St. Denis co-signed by Nantechildis and her son Clovis. But as Dagobert would have still been alive at the time of the grant, only Clovis, not Nantechildis, would have signed it.

³⁰Fredegund got control of her son upon the death of Chilperic in 584. Lothar was not more than a year old at the time. She maintained control until her death in 597, when he was nearly fourteen and almost to his majority.

³¹DPL, Vol. 1, CCIII, 166-168; CCIV, 168-170.

³²DPL, Vol. 1, CCXXX, 197-199: This village ". . . mihi praecelsus domnus Chlotarius rex, suo munere, una cum praecelsa domna Fredegunde regina, quondam genetrice sua . . . reddidit"

for her son Childebert from 575 until about 586.³³ Thereafter she was the only nutritor, although by that time the king had attained his majority. Thereafter, she remained the dominant influence on him. In 595, the year of Childebert's death, he and his mother received a letter from Pope Gregory I.³⁴ In it Gregory praises the king for his zeal for the Catholic faith and Brunhild for the correct education of her son. The mention of Brunhild in this letter indicates that she was still prominent in the government even though her son was twenty-five years old. Only two other documents survive for the period of Childebert's regency. One is the peace pact made between Guntram, Childebert and Brunhild.³⁵ It will be discussed in some detail in the following chapter as it is evidence of the foundations of wealth for a queen. The other is a very interesting letter from Childebert and Brunhild to the Byzantine emperor Maurice.³⁶

Ingund, the daughter of Brunhild and the sister of Childebert, had been married to Hermenegild, the son of the Visigothic king

³³Brunhild began her regency for Childebert upon the death of Sigibert in 575. Childebert was then approximately five years old allowing for an error in the HF. Her regency probably lasted only until 585 or 586, but in reality she became even stronger after that date. Her grandsons Theudebert and Theuderic were born in 586 and 587 respectively. She became regent for them after the death of their father Childebert in 595. She controlled Theudebert until 600 and Theuderic until his death in 613, even though he had reached his majority around 602 or 603. In 613 she became regent for Sigibert who "ruled" for less than one year.

³⁴DPL, Vol. 1, CCVI, 174. The letter concerns the return of Gallia to the patrimony of St. Peter.

³⁵DPL, Vol. 1, CXCVII, 157.

³⁶DPL, Vol. 1, CXCVIII, 159.

Leuwigild. After she managed to convert him from Arianism to Catholicism, Hermenegild raised a revolt against his father. But in 584 he was defeated by Leuwigild. The Byzantines who held part of Spain at the time turned him over to his father for 30,000 solidi but took Ingund and her son Athanagild back to Constantinople. Although Ingund died on the way, the Emperor Maurice held Athanagild as a hostage in order to force the Austrasians to invade Italy and fight the Lombards.³⁷

In 588 Brunhild and Childebert sent a letter to the emperor Maurice.³⁸ Apparently Maurice had asked for the return of the money paid to Childebert to invade Italy. Childebert refused to discuss the matter by changing the subject to the abduction of his sister and the holding of his nephew as hostage. The dual significance of this letter is that it concerns relations between the Austrasians and the Byzantines and that it is sent in the names of both mother and son. Since Childebert was now eighteen years old, technically Brunhild was no longer regent; but it is obvious that she actually retained her position by her prominence in this letter.

When Childebert died in 595, Brunhild became regent for his sons Theudebert and Theuderic. She lost control of the former in 600

³⁷Walter Goffert, "Byzantine Policy in the West Under Tiberius II and Maurice: The Pretenders Hermangild and Gundovald (579-585)," *Traditio* 13 (1957), 107-108.

³⁸DPL, Vol. 1, CXCVIII, 159-160. The letter is sent ". . . a se et Brunhilde matre." A further explanation of Brunhild's participation in this letter is her obvious concern for the safety and return of her grandson.

but she completely dominated the latter until his death in 613, although her regency probably ended around 603. For the period between 595 and 603, only six letters still exist and are all from Pope Gregory I; five concern Brunhild.

Three letters are sent to the grandsons and are very short requests by the Pope at the bottom of which he states that he has sent a copy to Brunhild.³⁹ This implies that in order to make sure his requests were honored he had to have the consent and aid of the queen mother as well. In 601 he sent a message to Brunhild alone asking her to use her authority to rid the Frankish clergy of some of its worst abuses and sins.⁴⁰ Finally there is a grant of privileges to S. Medard's monastery in Soissons by the Pope⁴¹ on the requests of Theuderic and Brunhild.

These letters, as few and as short as they are, do however indicate clearly that Pope Gregory realized that at least part of the power of the Austrasian and Burgundian kings lay with the queen mother. He paid particular attention to her when he wanted to get something done. When Theuderic died in 613, Brunhild tried to raise his son Sigibert to the throne but she failed.

³⁹DPL, Vol. 1, CCIX, 175; CCXII, 176; CCXX, 186.

⁴⁰DPL, Vol. 1, CCXIX, 186.

⁴¹DPL, Vol. 1, CCI, 163-166. There is much debate over the authenticity of this grant. I also do not trust its validity as the document is dated 593 and refers to the reigns of Brunhild and Theuderic which did not begin until 595. However, the transcriber could have made a mistake and misread DXCIII for DXCVI which would correct the date.

When Dagobert I died in 639, Nantechildis began her regency for her son Clovis II which lasted until around 642.⁴² Only three royal documents survive from this period and two are inauthentic.⁴³ One valid document which was written in 638 granting Deacon Blidegifulus land to found the monastery of Fossa was witnessed by Nantechildis.⁴⁴ In another, Clovis confirms a donation made by his father Dagobert to S. Denis of land called Cotiraco in the country of Chemille. It is signed by both Clovis and Nantechildis.⁴⁵ Thus Nantechildis' name appears on all the surviving diplomas of gifts and grants which are considered valid from the time of her son's minority. It seems reasonable to assume that as regent she had much to say in the choice of who should be rewarded and with what.

The minority of Chlotar III lasted from around 657 to 662 and during it his mother Bathild, a former Anglo-Saxon slave, was in

⁴²Fredegar, Book 90, 76. Dagobert died in 638. There was an interregnum of two years before Clovis was proclaimed king in 640; then Nantechildis ruled with Aega and then Flaochad until her death in 642.

⁴³DPL, Vol. 2, CCCXXX, 107. See reasons for the spurious nature of this document in note 31, above. DPL, Vol. 2, CCXCII, 60-61. See footnote 2 on p. 60.

⁴⁴DPL, Vol. 2, CCXCI, 58-60. This document may be spurious. It exists in an adulterated form with numerous interpolations and is dated by Pardessus at 638, which was two years before Clovis became king. But since the document itself has no date but only indicates that it was written in the first year of Clovis' reign, it may be Pardessus' mistake. DPL, Vol. 2, CCXCIII, 61-63; in this document the Deacon gives the land to Fossa and mentions its original donation as a grant from Clovis and Nantechildis.

⁴⁵DPL, Vol. 2, CCXCIV, 63. "Sig. praecelsae Nantechilde reginae."

control of the government.⁴⁶ Bathild made her name with the Church by endowing many ecclesiastical institutions⁴⁷ and she was particularly important to the founding of the monastery of Corbie. She co-signed with her son the original land grant to Abbot Theodefrid in 659.⁴⁸ Included with the land of Corbie are many villages and extensive immunities. This generosity is an indication that she wanted this monastery, so closely tied to her, to be very wealthy and ultimately prestigious and influential.

In 660 the monastery was made immune from all tolls. This document also informs the reader that Bathild had already constructed the buildings of the monastery,⁴⁹ and it bears her signature along with that of her son. The monastery grew and Chilperic II, after the death of Chlotar and Bathild, confirmed the privileges granted to it by them and added more gifts. He goes on to say that his father before him had also confirmed the grants and privileges.⁵⁰ Thus,

⁴⁶DPL, Vol. 2, CCCXXX, 107; CCCXXXI, 107-108; CCCXXXII, 108-109; CCCXXXIV, 111-112: These documents are extant concerning gifts to St. Denis and other transactions involving that monastery written by Chlotar III. None have signatures or seals and all are full of lacunae. Thus, they have little to say about Bathild's role, although it is probable that she was involved since St. Denis had become the family burial ground.

⁴⁷See Chapter III for a detailed list of churches established by her.

⁴⁸DPL, Vol. 2, CCCXXXVI, 114-115.

⁴⁹DPL, Vol. 2, CCCXXXVII, 115-116. This was a monastery: ". . . quod domna [et] genetrix nostra Baldechildis regina suo opere construxit"

⁵⁰DPL, Vol. 2, MI, 308-309. Chilperic's father was Childeric, Bathild's younger son.

Corbie became tied to the children of Bathild and was protected and enriched by them. There is little doubt that it was first conceived and nurtured by the queen mother.

In 657 Chlotar confirmed a gift of land near the city of Troyes to the monk Frodobert made by his father Clovis. It is significant that Clovis' wife Bathild had no part in the first land grant since she was merely the wife of a king, but in this confirmation she was the nutritor of her son and as such affixed her seal to it.⁵¹ Her position and power had greatly increased.⁵²

Bathild was also the regent for Childeric for a short time while he was in his minority as king of Austrasia. She is mentioned in an early document dated 661. In it is a precise statement of the role of a regent for it says simply that since he is still at a young age his mother will also sign it:

. . . ego, dum propter imbecillem aetatem minime potui
subscriber, manu propria subter signavi et regina subter
scripsit⁵³

⁵¹DPL, Vol. 2, CCCXXIX, 106.

⁵²DPL, Vol. 2, CCCXLIII, 121-123. Two other documents remain concerning Chlotar's regency. In one Bathild sealed a diploma confirming an exchange of land between Mummoleus, bishop of Noyon, and Bertinus, abbot of Sithiensis. The other is written by Childebert III reaffirming rights granted by Bathild and Chlotar to Bishop Belisarius of Le Mans. Like so many of the Merovingian documents, the original diploma of Chlotar and Bathild does not exist any longer. DPL, Vol. 2, CDXLVI, 248-249. The date on this document is 698 but the man making the petition, Bishop Herlemunchis, would not have been bishop that early. Pardessus thinks the document could be spurious but other critics think it debatable.

⁵³Cited in: Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 236. The origin of the quote: MGH, Dipl. I, No. 25, 26.

Plectrude ruled for the interval between the death of Pippin in 714 until the takeover by Charles Martel in 715. This period was less than a year. There are no documents extant from the reign of Dagobert from 714 to 715 and he died sometime in 715. Only two remain for the period between 711 and 714. Thus there is no documentary evidence to show what Plectrude's role actually was. However, it is clear from the LHF that it was she who ruled, not Dagobert.

The scarcity of the documentary evidence is a hindrance to any unshakeable conclusions about the power of queen mothers. But it does seem that they were able to influence people and institutions by their grants and their gifts, and in so doing they made themselves more influential with those who received the gifts. The description of the regencies of these women in contemporary literature portrays a wide range of power.

For example, women sometimes used the money and armies of their royal sons to engage in blood feuds. The Frankish blood feud was defined the best by J. M. Wallace-Hadrill who called it ". . . the threat of hostility between kins, then the state of hostility between them, and finally, the satisfaction of their differences and a settlement on terms acceptable to both."⁵⁴ Satisfaction did not always mean blood, it could mean payment of the wergeld. But blood was always a moral if not legal right. Frankish society was torn by blood feuds and some of the most cruel combatants were women and queens.

⁵⁴Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 122.

In 516 the "saintly" Clotild persuaded her sons to avenge the death of her parents at the hands of her uncle Gundobad, king of the Burgundians. As he was already dead, vengeance was taken against his sons Godomar, Sigismund and his wife Amalaberg and their children. Of interest here is the fact that this feud did not begin until after the death of Clovis⁵⁵ possibly because she could not persuade him to take this type of action.

Nantechildis, angered by the murder of Chainulf at Angers by Ermenfred, urged the former's kin to seek revenge on the latter.⁵⁶ Tired of a lingering blood feud in Tournai, Fredegund beheaded the leading beligerants. This was plainly against Frankish customs and the affronted families demanded Childebert to arrest and execute her. But he was too slow and she escaped.⁵⁷ Of course, such a response to feuding from the most daring and brutal murderess of her times is hard to fathom.

Fredegund herself carried out perhaps the most famous feud ever against Brunhild. She tried numerous times to kill Brunhild with assassins and failed, though she managed to kill Sigibert. The feud arose over the death of Brunhild's sister Galswintha by agents of Chilperic on the prompting of Fredegund. Brunhild perceived this as murder and demanded Galswintha's morgengabe be turned over to her as her wergeld but this did not happen. Fredegund took a rather intense dislike to Brunhild and spent the rest of her life trying to

⁵⁵ HF, Vol. 2, III 6.

⁵⁶ Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 142.

⁵⁷ HF, Vol. 2, X 27.

kill her. She instilled her son with the same burning hatred as witnessed by his inhumane treatment of Brunhild when she was captured by him in 613. Her sins were far less than Fredegund's but her death was probably the most horrible recorded in the chronicles. Fredegund died in bed.

The life of Fredegund also illustrates another method of exerting power open to mothers of young kings. Fredegund became a first rate military leader assuming the old role of the Germanic kings who used the glory of war and the spoils of victory to inspire loyalty and attract followers. Her military career was extremely successful. Of course, the objects of her aggressive nature were Guntram and Brunhild and her children. Against Guntram and his Duke Beppolen who was an enemy of Fredegund, she ordered the Saxon settlement in Brittany to revolt under the leadership of the Breton leader, Waroch.⁵⁸ He was successful although when Chlotar felt ill, Fredegund, realizing her own personal danger should he die, asked Waroch to release the captives he had taken from Guntram.⁵⁹

Fredegund was victorious over Brunhild in battle also. She defeated the army of Childebert which he sent to take Paris after the death of Chilperic. In the name of her son, calling on Salian patriotism, she raised an army. She is credited with devising the strategy of camouflaging the army with branches and attacking the Austrasians at night in order to keep the element of surprise.⁶⁰ She also moved the troops from Paris which defeated Theudebert and

⁵⁸HF, Vol. 2, X 9.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰LHF, 90-91.

Theuderic at a later date at Laffaux (Latifao).⁶¹ She ultimately regained all the Neustrian territory lost to Brunhild and Guntram after the death of Chilperic.

A few other powers devolved to queen mothers who were regents or nutritors. There seems to have been some feeling that they were immune from prosecution for even the most flagrant crimes they committed. Immunity gave them a mighty tool to rid themselves of enemies and ambitious aristocrats. For example, Fredegund was responsible for the deaths of Childebert's aunt (Galswintha), father (Sigibert), and cousins (Merovech and Chlodovech). When Chilperic died, Childebert asked Guntram to turn her over to him for punishment. Guntram refused saying no mother of a king could be handed over.⁶²

After the murders of bishops Praetextatus and Romachar by Fredegund and the confession of the accomplices that the crimes were accomplished on her prompting, she went free on her oath that she was innocent.⁶³ But she had a son who was accepted as king and she died before he did. Her life was protected by his and by the devotion of the Salian Franks to her. Brunhild on the other hand was tried and executed because she had no son and no loyal following to protect her.

⁶¹Fredegar, 12.

⁶²HF, Vol. 2, VII 14. See also: MGH, SRM, 335: "Tradi ei, 'inquit' in potestate non potent quia filium regem habet."

⁶³HF, Vol. 2, VIII 31. See also: MGH, SRM, 399: ". . . sed et, ea defensante, ulciscere non potuit."

Another power controlled by the nutritor was the choice of the young king's spouse. A really good match with a foreign royal house could mean an improvement in alliances, a stronger military position and great prestige. Brunhild married both of her daughters to Visigothic princes. But she saw the right to control her grandson's marriage in a different light. As has already been mentioned, Brunhild felt a daughter-in-law would severely lessen her power in the court and diminish her influence over her grandson. On Theuderic's death she got control of his four sons, all of whom were products of unknown concubines.

It is also possible that Brunhild had a healthy distrust of women in power, especially daughters-in-law. There were rumors that Childebart had died of poison administered by his wife Faileuba. Theudebert's wife Bilichildis gave Brunhild a lot of trouble. Fredegar tells us that Brunhild bought her as a slave but once she became queen she also became haughty and sent Brunhild contemptuous messages.⁶⁴

The powers of the regent varied with the time and place of the regency, as well as the nature and ambitions of the aristocracy. Perhaps of all the opposing forces that a queen mother had to face the aristocracy was the most dangerous. The Neustrian aristocracy on the whole was more willing to accept the predominance of the royal house because kings had controlled them for a very long time. Thus Fredegund got much more support from the nobility than did Brunhild or Guntram who had to deal with strong aristocracies. Indeed, after

⁶⁴Fredegar, 23.

Chilperic's death, Guntram ordered Fredegund to go to her estate at Rueill in the country of Rouen where the nobles were to be responsible for the care of her son. But these nobles served her and her son with a devotion which would have been unheard of in Austrasia or Burgundy.⁶⁵

The Austrasian nobility was the hardest to handle. It was more Teutonic than the Neustrian and the nobles were more desirous of enhancing their political power. Under the regencies of Brunhild and the extensive periods of rule by child-kings, this aristocracy was more than willing to take advantage of the weak government.⁶⁶ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill believes that to explain the problems of the Austrasian government merely in terms of an aristocratic-royal struggle for power is simplistic. Instead he emphasizes that Brunhild made some unpopular decisions such as to reinstate the old Roman tax system. He also blames her lifelong feud with Fredegund and Chlotar for the chaos of Austrasian politics and the savagery of her rule. Finally he points to a growing division between localism which was increasing in strength and the political centralism demanded by a monarchy.⁶⁷

Nevertheless the minority of a king did not only mean an increase in power for his mother but also the excuse for an assertion of power by the aristocracy. To be truly successful the nurtitor had to have a rapport with her aristocracy and their support.

⁶⁵HF, Vol. 2, VII 19.

⁶⁶HF, Vol. 1, 73.

⁶⁷Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 204-205.

Most queen mothers had to deal with men who shared the job of regent with them. For example, Fredegund and Brunhild had to work with Guntram. During the reigns of these two queens, the mayors became prominent in the government. Brunhild had two powerful mayors to deal with, Gogo and Wandelen. Nantechildis ruled with Aega and after his death she picked his successor, Flaochad, herself. The success of joint regencies between the mayors and the queen-mothers depended on the personalities involved, and the goals perceived as the object of the regency by both parties. If the goals were at variance, then friction often resulted. The chronicles reveal a peaceful coexistence and community of interests between the mayors and the queens most of the time. The queens who were most successful were those most compatible with the mayors and hence the aristocracy.

The position of regent carried with it some powers that were institutional in nature. The regent assumed control of the kingdom in every way: economically, militarily and politically. Such power ultimately belonged only to the king, however, and the regent's use of it was always done in the name of the king. In this way the authority of a regent was not the same as a king's because the former's lasted only as long as the minority of the latter. Yet it cannot be denied that mothers who became the regent for their sons became much more powerful than when they were merely royal consorts. Fredegund made this clear when she sent assassins to kill Childebert because

without her son Brunhild would have no reason to be so haughty. Her power would die with him.⁶⁸

No mother of a Merovingian king was guaranteed the right to be his regent. Deuteria, the mother of Theuderic, was not allowed to be her son's nutritor because she had been repudiated earlier by her husband Theudebald.⁶⁹ But every Merovingian queen did have not last avenue to power open to her--that was the accumulation of wealth. Money and power were synonymous in Merovingian Gaul. Gifts to powerful people from the royal fisc brought even more influence to queens. Gifts from influential people to buy royal favor made queens very wealthy. Consequently, with this money they could buy more loyalty. Thus it is necessary to examine the economic power of Merovingian women to understand their most stable means of power--riches or divitiae.

⁶⁸HF, Vol. 2, VIII 29. See also: MGH, SRM, 392: ". . . quae [Brunhild] ab illo [Childebert] adrogantiam sumit"

⁶⁹HF, Vol. 1, 107.

CHAPTER III

DIVITIAE

The possession of riches was crucial for obtaining and maintaining the power of queens and kings in Frankish Gaul. Wealth to a king meant land and movable treasure in quantities sufficient to buy people to serve him. The fact that he was wealthier than anyone else in the realm might have been a major reason for his being or at least remaining king. Certainly without a following he was significantly less powerful.¹ The decline in Merovingian power can be directly linked to the reduction of their wealth.

Loyalty was the main expense encountered by a Merovingian. The army cost nothing since all Franks were expected to serve in the military. Clovis' sons had gone further in extending the duty of military service to all subjects including Gallo-Romans. All people near the site of battle were to serve in the infantry also;² but any army needed commanders and the royal government needed administrators and both had to be paid. The old Germanic nobility which was bound to the king by a personal bond of loyalty had died out. The Frankish nobility of the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries was determined

¹Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 4. See also: Georges Duby, The Early Growth of the European Economy (Ithaca, N.Y., 1974), 52-53.

²Lot, 353. See also: Bernard Bachrach, Merovingian Military Organization 481-751 (Minneapolis, 1972).

not by blood or loyalty but by service to the king and the special privileges and wealth that entailed.³

This service nobility was paid in land and booty and in time they became very wealthy. Their fortune depended on whether they kept the favor of the king, for he was the most generous gift-giver of all. An attempt was made by the kings to keep the lands and privileges they gave away from becoming hereditary but over the generations the offices and the benefices did become the family property of certain nobles.⁴ The alienation of a large part of the royal fisc led to an impoverishment of the Merovingians and a strengthening of the nobility in direction proportion.

Such a decline in Merovingian wealth did not manifest itself until after Dagobert I. Until then the Merovingians were many times wealthier than any single Frankish family, although the Church was a serious rival in that respect. The sources of Merovingian wealth did not begin to dry up until the late seventh century. Before this, the Merovingians used the old imperial tax system which they found in Roman Gaul but were not extremely successful. For example, because no one knew how to levy the land tax, it became little more than a

³The definition I gave for the aristocracy as well as the interpretation of its role and powers is my own, assimilated from various sources. It may be controversial. The research being done in this area is extensive and no precise definition of the aristocracy has been definitively made. Perhaps the best essay on the subject of the Merovingian aristocracy is that of Eugen Ewig entitled "Studien zur Merovingischen Dynastie," Fruhmittelalterliche Studien 8 (1974), 15-59.

⁴Lot, 354-358.

customary duty. The Franks refused to submit to a personal tax since it was considered demeaning. Everyone hated the direct taxes and tried to escape them and the Church usually got immunities from them. The Merovingians were more able to collect indirect taxes in the form of tolls, customs, and import taxes. They also made money on judicial fines of which one-third went to the king. Most of their wealth came in the form of gifts from the nobility or other kings and tribute or booty from victories in war.⁵

After Dagobert I, the Merovingians lacked sufficient wealth to give them power and prestige. This was due in large part to the alienation of large parts of the royal fisc and the reduction in revenue from commercial taxes and tolls when trade began to slacken.⁶ The Merovingians lasted for almost a hundred years after Dagobert. The reason was that the Merovingians had a very definite rank and it was not determined by wealth alone. Their blood was considered sacred. A queen had no definite rank and her blood was not considered sacred. Thus wealth was very important in the role of a queen in the power structure of Frankish Gaul.

The possession of wealth meant that she could buy loyal servants. It also meant that when her husband died she could ensure that her son was made king. No prince could be certain that he had the throne for there were too many other competitors around. He had to have the support of his father and on the death of his father, he had to have control of the political events around him. The wealth

⁵Ibid., 351-352.

⁶Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 9.

of his mother could be crucial to the winning of support because before he ascended the throne, he himself would likely be in need of money.⁷

Riches came to Merovingian queens in many ways. Before the late fifth century no woman could inherit property in Salic law. By the late sixth century daughters without brothers could inherit all of the patrimony, otherwise it was divided among both sons and daughters.⁸

In Visigothic law, women inherited an equal share of property with their brothers.⁹ The property laws concerning the inheritance of widows were also liberal. A widow could dispose of all the property if she were childless; with children she got control of one-fourth of her dowry, one-fifth of the gifts coming to her after marriage, one-fifth of the property she brought into the marriage, and the right of usufruct equal to the share of each child of her husband's property.¹⁰ A widow controlled the property of all children who were still minors. A wife got control of all property she brought into the marriage and if the marriage ended, all land acquired while they were married would have to be divided between them.¹¹

The Burgundian laws began to show some movement toward the liberalizing of the inheritance laws but complaints by nobles (males)

⁷Wood, 9.

⁸McNamara and Wemple, 108-109.

⁹The Visigothic Code, 123.

¹⁰King, 236-238.

¹¹David Herlihy. "Land, Family and Women in Continental Europe, 701-1200," in Women in Medieval Society, edited by Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia, 1976), 14-15.

kept them from the same level of equality attained by the Visigothic laws.¹² Basically women could inherit land on the death of their husbands. If there were children, the widow got the right of usufruct of the morgengabe or marriage gift. Significantly, she could not alienate or dispose of this property and it reverted to her relatives or children on her death. She was allowed to do as she pleased with land given to her by her mother or father or husband.¹³ Daughters were able to inherit her mother's ornaments and vestments, and a woman could inherit property left intestate by her sister.¹⁴

The Lombard laws, usually more conservative than the other codes toward the rights of women, were not so in the matter of property inheritance. Daughters got a share in the patrimony with their brothers though it was somewhat smaller and part of the patrimony was reserved for the near relatives as well.¹⁵ Once a woman owned property however, a male relative or the king became her guardian and gave his permission for any transaction concerning it. If she married and the marriage ended, her property reverted to her.¹⁶

If a woman were free and from a wealthy family, she could conceivably be wealthy in her own right upon her marriage to a Merovingian. But many queens were not wealthy when they married; many, in fact, had been slaves. All queens after marriage to a Merovingian,

¹²The Burgundian Code, 61, 71.

¹³Ibid., XXIV, XLII, LIII, LXXIV and LXXV.

¹⁴Ibid., LI. ¹⁵The Lombard Laws, 78-79.

¹⁶Herlihy, 14.

especially queen mothers, were rich, economically powerful women. Therefore, some other avenues to riches other than just inheritance were open to them after marriage.

The pact signed by Childebert and Guntram in November, 587 is illustrative of several of the ways in which a queen could become wealthy.¹⁷ First it reveals that the rules governing inheritance among the private sector of the Franks were also in effect in the royal families. Childebert, Guntram's nephew was to inherit the kingdom of Burgundy because Guntram's own sons were dead. Guntram had a daughter by the name of Clotild and her inheritance was protected by a stipulation inserted into the pact to ensure that she retained complete control over all the property given to her by her father. Further, Childebert swore to protect both her and her property.

Mentioned in this document are a total of four women: Clotild; Chlodosind, daughter of Brunhild; Brunhild; and Childebert's wife, Faileuba. They were given the right not only to possess property but also to dispose of it. Also referred to is the morgengabe or morning gift which perhaps was the most immediate way a bride of a Merovingian became a rich woman. It was given to the bride on the morning after the wedding and often included treasure and land.

The specific morgengabe discussed in the past was that of Galswintha who was murdered by Chilperic. Brunhild, her sister, felt that the morgengabe was owed to her as Galswintha's wergeld. Brunhild was her next of kin. Chilperic had never agreed to this but died

¹⁷HF, Vol. 2, IX 20.

soon thereafter. Guntram then took control of Chilperic's kingdom of Neustria as guardian for Chlotar and was in a position to give Brunhild the five cities contained in Galswintha's morgengabe. These were: Bordeaux, Limoges, Cahors, Lescar and Cientat. Guntram gave her Cahors outright and kept the other four, promising that on his death Brunhild would inherit them. The point is that if such a morgengabe were common with Merovingians, and there is no reason to think it was not since Gregory of Tours expresses no surprise at its extravagance, queens were indeed rich. The taxes and revenues from such cities would have made them financially secure.¹⁸

The morgengabe is a spinoff from the price paid by a new husband to his wife's family for her mundium or the rights held over her by her family. By the late fifth century the mundium payment was a symbolic gesture and the wife received a bridegift (morgengabe) sometimes of money and/or land.¹⁹ Occasionally a new bride could add a rich dowry to her morgengabe as a foundation for her personal wealth, but this was not required for Frankish daughters.²⁰

Not all the Merovingian daughters had large dowries. But some were truly magnificent like that given to Rigunth, daughter of Chilperic and Fredegund, when she left to marry a Visigothic prince.

¹⁸It is unfortunate that I have been unable to find any other specifics about the morgengabe of other queens. Gregory was so matter of fact about Galswintha's that I am assuming it was in keeping with that of other queens and is therefore representative.

¹⁹McNamara and Wemple, 105.

²⁰Ibid., 107.

The interesting part of this story is that the dowry was chosen by Fredegund and was so splendid that the Neustrian nobles objected to the cost. Chilperic himself began to fear he had been impoverished by such largess but Fredegund rebuked him. She told him that the dowry came from her own treasure. Then she enumerated the various sources of her wealth: the king's gifts to her, the revenues and taxes from her own cities and estates, and gifts from courtiers.²¹ This is a valuable indication of the extent and source of a queen's wealth as well as her financial independence.

There is no doubt that Fredegund was an extremely rich woman. When she feared that her sons were dying because of God's anger against herself and Chilperic for over-taxing the poor, she threw the tax lists from her cities into the fire.²² The cities referred to are presumably those she received as a morgengabe. Fredegund acquired property in slightly unorthodox ways as well. After murdering Chilperic's ex-wife Audovera and forcing her sister into a convent, she then confiscated all of their worldly possessions.²³

²¹HF, Vol. 2, VI 32(45). See also: MGH, SRM, 318. She said: "Ne potitis, viri, quicquam hic de thesauris anteriorum regum habere, omnia enim quae cernetis de mea proprietate oblata sunt, quia mihi gloriosissimus rex multa largitus est, et ego non nulla de proprio congregavi labore et de domibus mihi concessis tam de fructibus quam tributis reparavi. Sed et vos plerumque me muneribus vestris ditastis de quibus sunt ista quae nunc coram videtis"

²²HF, Vol. 2, I 29. See also: MGH, SRM, 240: ". . . iussit libros exhibere, qui de civitatibus suis, . . . proiectosque in igne"

²³Ibid., V 29(39).

Fredegund realized the importance of her wealth and on the death of Chilperic she took refuge in the cathedral of Paris and took with her her two sources of protection, her son and her riches. Nevertheless, she lost some treasure which she had left behind at Chelles.²⁴

Brunhild like Fredegund also had some treasure. She was captured in Paris shortly after the murder of her husband Sigibert by Chilperic who then confiscated the treasure she had with her.²⁵ She was not left destitute for she had left much treasure with Bishop Praetextatus in Rouen. Chilperic himself estimated the value of her treasure in Rouen when he tried Praetextatus for treason and for breaking the Gallican canons. There were five bundles which the king said were left by Brunhild and each was worth between 3000 and 5000 solidi.²⁶ Chilperic may have exaggerated since he wanted to convict the bishop but Praetextatus was present and did not deny the evaluation. This evidence points to a queen who, though widowed, was still very wealthy.

Both Fredegund and Brunhild had part of their treasure stolen by kings. The same thing happened to Charibert's wife Theudechild. After Charibert's death, Guntram of Burgundy considered marrying her but decided against it. Before he let her know, he asked her to come to him, bringing with her her treasure. Then he rejected her and

²⁴Ibid., VII 4.

²⁵Ibid., V 1. MGH, SRM, 194-195: Chilperic: ". . . thesaurisque eius [Brunhild's], quos Parisius detulerat, abstulit"

²⁶HF, Vol. 2, V 12(18).

kept her treasure himself.²⁷ Chlotar II's queen, Bertetrudis, was warned to send her treasure to Sion for safekeeping by the conspirators plotting to overthrow her husband.²⁸ Although she did not listen to their counseling, it is noteworthy that the protection of one's treasure was important.

Plectrude on the death of Pippin took control of the government of Dagobert III and became the nurturer of her young grandson who was being groomed to become the mayor of the palace. Her "regency" lasted as long as she possessed Pippin's treasure as she had made no attempt to become the military master of the kingdom. She lost all of the treasure to her stepson Charles Martel when he defeated her and took over the government. He needed the treasure to retain control.²⁹

Archeological finds also reveal that queens were wealthy by the value of the artifacts found in their tombs. One of the best preserved graves was that of Arnegund, the wife of Chlotar I. She was born in 539 and died between 565 and 570. Her burial was very splendid. She wore a linen sheath and a violet tunic covered by a

²⁷ Ibid., IV 19(26).

²⁸ Fredegar, 36. ". . . thesauris . . . ad sidonis . . . transferrit, eo quod esset locum tutissimum." Wallace-Hadrill believes that "eo" could possibly refer to the queen, therefore meaning that the queen, not the treasure, would be safe. But perhaps the queen's safety ultimately depended on the safety of the treasure.

²⁹ Ibid., 89. The union of power and treasure is best expressed in this statement: Plectrude ". . . thesauros patris suis reddidet et [Charles] cuncto suo dominio restituit"

dark red silk gown. Her vestments were elaborately embroidered with gold thread. Her jewelry was of high quality and abundant in quantity. It included gold cloissoné brooches, a silver pin with garnets set into the gold knobs, gold filigree earrings, a nielloed buckle decorated with gold and garnets, a gold ring, silver strap tongues on her girdle, silver gilt animal ornamented buckles and strap tongues on her shoes, and plain silver buckles on her garters.³⁰ Arnegund was a former slave!

Therefore queens had movable wealth, oftentimes in great quantities, which they received from inheritance, marriage gifts and dowries, and gifts from courtiers. Sometimes these gifts included land. The morgengabe especially entailed the granting of one or more cities with municipal revenues to new brides. Perhaps the most significant source of landed wealth came from a queen mother's position as her son's nutritor or regent. As seen in the previous chapter, in this role the queen became the guardian not only of her son but of his patrimony, the royal fisc. The documents reveal many queens parceling out chunks from the fisc to reward followers and endow churches in their sons' names. Indeed they used wealth to ensure and increase loyalty among the Frankish nobility. Most striking in this respect is that queens were even more concerned with buying influence with the second greatest power in Merovingian Gaul, the Church.³¹

³⁰ Joachim Werner, "Frankish Royal Tombs in the Cathedrals of Cologne and Saint Denis," *Antiquity* 38, No. 151 (1964), 201-216.

³¹ More documents exist for land grants by the Merovingians to the Church. However, caution must be exercised here as the Church

Clotild was a magnanimous giver of money and lands to the Church. Gregory mentions her generosity in such respects in his description of her charity.³² Together Clovis and Clotild built the church of the S.S. Apostles in Paris later renamed St. Genevieve. There is a reference to this in both Gregory's history and in a document dated before 508.³³ This document is spurious but the reference in it is not. Clovis and Clotild were both buried there reinforcing their ties to that particular church.³⁴ The same document also mentions a church dedicated to S. Peter in Sens and there is no reason to think that this reference is any less valid than the one to the Paris church. The reference is significant because S. Peter's is said to have been constructed by Clotild on her own.³⁵

Clotild had felt great remorse for the death of her grandsons at the hands of her sons Chlotar and Childebert. She went into mourning and as penance built many monasteries, including the one

has long been adept at maintaining documents concerning its land holdings, either in the original or as copies. Nobles may have been less careful and more prone to misplace or lose through neglect the grants given to them.

³²HF, Vol. 2, III 18. See also MGH, SRM, 16, p. 20: ". . . praedia [landed estates] ecclesiis, monasteriis vel quibus cumque locis sanctis necessaria praevidit"

³³DPL, Vol. 1, LXIV, 35. Clovis said that his daughter wanted to construct a church similar to ". . . ipsius basilicae quam cepimus aedificare ego et uxor mea in conspectu Parisiacae urbis"

³⁴HF, Vol. 2, II 31(43); MGH, SRM, Vita S. Chrothildis, 345.

³⁵DPL, Vol. 1, LXIV, 35. St. Peter's is the church Clovis says ". . . quam construxit uxor mea Clotild"

dedicated to S. Martin in Tours. Others constructed to assuage her guilt were S. Petrus Puellarum on the river Seine in Les Andelys, and a church in honor of S. Peter near the castle Landunus. She increased the lands of many other churches and gave ornaments to the Church of S. Peter in Rheims in thanks for the baptism of Clovis there.³⁶ She died in Tours which she preferred to any other but was buried with Clovis in the church of S.S. Apostles in Paris.

Indeed her attachment to Tours and her construction of a monastery there would seem to indicate that it was the seat of her power. She was responsible for filling the vacant see of Tours twice.³⁷ Such control of the most powerful bishopric in Gaul as well as the fact that Clotild went to live in Tours points to it as being part of her norgengabe. She had influence as far as Clermont where she granted land to a priest by the name of Anastasius.³⁸

Even relatively unknown queens endowed the Church. Ingoberg, the wife of Charibert, gave Bishop Bertran of Le Mans a field for cultivation.³⁹ This is not the only instance of Ingoberg's Christian charity. Gregory relates that when she realized that she would soon die, she summoned him to witness her will. In it she had left

³⁶MGH, SRM, Vita S. Clotild, 346-347.

³⁷HF, Vol. 2, III 17. See also MGH, SRM, 117: "Theodorus et Proculus episcopi . . . ordinante Chrodegilde regine . . . Toronicam rex erunt ecclesiam."

³⁸Ibid., IV 7(12).

³⁹DPL, Vol. 1, CCXXX, 198. In his testament he says: "Ex quo agro medietatem . . . Ingoberga, quondem reginae, ea instantea meoque exigente servitio, Sanctae Mariae dereliquit" This will is dated 615, Ingoberg died in 589.

legacies to the cathedrals of Le Mans and Tours and the church of S. Martin in Tours. She also freed many serfs through deeds of enfranchisement.⁴⁰ A better known queen, Radegund, gave her convent all the property bestowed on her through the royal munificence of her husband Lothar I. She is the most extreme example of royal largess since she gave the Church everything she had.⁴¹

In a privilegium given by Pope Gregory to the abbot of the monastery of Xendochium in the city of Autun he mentions that Brunhild built it with the help of Bishop Siagrius.⁴² S. Martin's church in the same city was also attributed to Brunhild and Siagrius.⁴³ Pope Gregory was involved in the granting of privileges to another monastery built by Brunhild, this time on the Alpine border. He relates in the privilegium that she brought together twenty freemen and twenty slaves to form this monastery in Soissons.⁴⁴

There was an old royal villa in the area surrounding Paris in which Clotild had built a church dedicated to S. George. Bathild,

⁴⁰HF, Vol. 2, IX 26.

⁴¹Ibid., IX 42.

⁴²DPL, Vol. 1, CCXXI, 187-188: ". . . regina constructum est."

⁴³Ibid., Vol. 1, CCXXIII, 190-191. The authenticity of this document is debated because it did not appear until the late tenth century. It is a privilegium and indeed the privileges might be fraudulent but I see no reason to doubt the reference to the church's founding. The letter following seems to validate the reference. In another letter Gregory refers again to Brunhild's connection with the monastery and a church which verifies the first reference. Ibid., Vol. 1, CCXXIV, 191: Gregory talks: ". . . de privilegiis . . . a Brunechilde concessis"

⁴⁴Ibid., Vol. 1, CCII, 164.

the queen of Clovis II, expanded on it and added an altar to the Holy Cross (S. Crucis) and turned it into a convent which was commonly called Chelles. Bathild was an Anglo-Saxon and this convent bore the stamp of the English tradition of learning and produced many scholarly women. Bathild spent the last years of her life at Chelles and was buried there in 680.⁴⁵

Bathild was similarly responsible for the very famous monastery of Corbie. She built it jointly with her son Chlotar in Amiénois. Her vita gives her the credit probably because Chlotar was a minor at the time of the original land grant. The list of the other churches she built is very long. To Filibert she gave an estate, "magnam silvam" from the royal fisc to construct Jumiéges.⁴⁶ She gave gifts to Fontenelles and Logium; she turned over estates to and lavished money on Luxeuil and several Burgundian monasteries; and she granted the Villa Nova to Jouarre. To the monastery of Ste. Fara she sent money, gifts, and land.⁴⁷ The bishop of Aedui, Leodegus, was also a recipient of Bathild's generosity. She delegated to him a tract of land on which to build a church.⁴⁸

Nantechildis and Plectrude were also conscious of the need to give freely to the Church in both land and money. The former gave liberally to the great monastery of S. Denis and the latter to

⁴⁵MGH, SRM, Vita S. Bathildis, 475-477; 489-490.

⁴⁶Ibid., 490-491.

⁴⁷Ibid., 492-493.

⁴⁸DPL, Vol. 2, CCCLXXXIII, 173-174. This is a copy of a lost document. Leodegus describes land ". . . quam michi iamdicta regina [Bathildis] de proprio suo in proprium meum delegavit"

Epternac. Plectrude however always gave in conjunction with her husband Pippin and we have no documents to show whether she continued in her donations after his death.

Why then did Merovingian queens whether regents or royal consorts give to the Church in such great quantities? What did they expect and what did they actually get in return? The gift-givers actually expected rewards for their largess in two spheres: the earthly and the heavenly.

In the worldly sphere queens and clergy worked together for their mutual benefit. The Church was able to prevent the reduction of women to slavery by pointing out that they had an equal spiritual heritage to men. Theoretically the Church made matrimony sacred and permanent and gave women an important role in the family. In practice, women were in a very unstable position in a Merovingian family.⁴⁹ But the Church was able to be a more practical support for queens.

Clotild gave many donations to the Church. One of the tangible rewards she received was the aid of the bishops in securing a share in Clovis' patrimony for her sons. Theuderic, Clovis' eldest son, was old enough and strong enough to be his sole heir, but the backing of the bishops plus Clotild's personal popularity secured a share for her sons.⁵⁰ Nantechildis 150 years later also used the bishops to her advantage in getting Flaochad elected as mayor of the palace.⁵¹

Queens were known for their support of the clergy also. They often gave them places in their households or helped them rise in the

⁴⁹Herlihy, 15.

⁵⁰Wood, 23.

⁵¹Fredegar, 25.

Church's hierarchy. Ursicinus, the bishop of Cahors, was first Queen Ultrogotha's referendary.⁵² Clotild filled the vacant see of Tours with two of her friends, and Brunhild used her influence on the people of Rodez to have her supporter Innocentius, Count of Javols, chosen bishop.⁵³

The power to fill bishoprics was important to queens. The sees were by and large wealthy and carried so much power that they were coveted prizes which a queen could use to buy the support of aristocrats. At this time laymen could enter the priesthood and instantly pass through the various stages of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to the rank of bishop. They only had to have the support of the monarch who ruled the city in which the vacant see was located. The laymen received the bishopric and the queen had a supporter in the highest position of power at the local level.

It was necessary for any monarch and especially a queen to have friends, not enemies, in the episcopal sees in her kingdom. The bishop more so than the count of the city could sway the public either for or against the monarch. This is one of the reasons Fredegund felt that Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen had to be killed. He had directly gone against the wishes of Chilperic and Fredegund by marrying Chilperic's son Merovech to Brunhild, then he had sheltered the wayward son from his father's wrath. Praetextatus did not obey royal authority and his opinion of Fredegund was decidedly low. These were good reasons for Fredegund to dislike him but she did not murder him until after Chilperic's death. Why did she wait?

⁵²HF, Vol. 2, V 29(39).

⁵³Ibid., VI 25(38).

While Chilperic was alive he was a strong king and there was no threat to his throne from any bishop. His death left Fredegund with an infant son and landholdings reduced severely to the country just around Rouen. In fact, her favorite estate was at Rueill, which was just outside of Rouen. Therefore she could no longer take the chance that Praetextatus would stir up problems for her in Rouen where he was bishop. The political threat he posed added to the intensity of the personal dispute between them gave Fredegund the incentive to dispose of him.

The best example of a good relationship of a queen and a clergyman is that of Brunhild and Pope Gregory I. His letters to her indicate the range of her powers in the ecclesiastical sphere. He wrote to her in 597 begging her not to give the episcopal pallium to Syagrius as she would an earthly award and not to promote the laity to the episcopacy suddenly without their spending some time in the clergy.⁵⁴ Here is added proof that queens were indeed investing bishops, and often misusing the episcopal sees. He also asked her to correct the sins and abuses of the clergy and to forbid the owning of Christian slaves by Jews by calling a synod.⁵⁵ Now she is in the position of an agent of reform in the Church! Finally he asks her protection for Augustine who is traveling across Gaul on his way to England.⁵⁶ Hence Gregory is regularly asking favors

⁵⁴DPL, Vol. 1, CCXI, 176.

⁵⁵Ibid., CCXIX, 186. ". . . reginam sollicitat ut sua auctoritate provideat eorum emendatori" See also: Ibid., Vol. 1, CCXII, 176.

⁵⁶Ibid., Vol. 1, CCIX, 175.

from Brunhild and getting them, and Brunhild is having her power in the Church reinforced.

Brunhild must have gotten something from the Church for her trouble. She worked with the Pope when it was feasible and endowed generously ecclesiastical institutions as did all queens. But they all were hoping for something more than just the loyalty and support of the Church. Among the most popular clerical institutions founded by Merovingian queens were many monasteries. A hefty endowment to a monastery could be seen as a form of social security, that is, it reserved them a place to retire to in their old age or widowhood. In many cases it gave them a holy place in which to be buried. Bathild was buried in Chelles, Nantechildis in S. Denis, and Radegund in Poitiers.

Another possible explanation for their gifts and cooperation with the Church might be that they were acts of penance. Clotild's generosity increased greatly after the murder of her grandsons for which she felt responsible. She had been given the choice of their death or having their locks of long hair, symbolic of their royalty, shorn off and she chose the former.⁵⁷

A last reason for donation might be an attempt to buy a place in heaven. Many of the female saints of the seventh and eighth centuries were great founders and endowers of monasteries and churches.⁵⁸ The vitae of Clotild and Bathild are remarkably devoid

⁵⁷HF, Vol. 2, III 18. See also: MGH, SRM, Vita S. Chrothildis, 336.

⁵⁸Jane Tibbetts Schulenberg, "Sexism and the Celestial Gynaecium from 500 to 1200," Journal of Medieval History, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 1978), 122-123.

of references to miracles and yet the authors of these vitae consider these women to be saints because they gave lavishly to the Church. Largess was thought to be able to secure one a seat in the "celestial gynaeceum." For example, Bathild's vitae says that by her generosity she was storing up treasure in heaven.⁵⁹

Queens who had tremendous power and influence also had great reserves of treasure and land with which to win friends. Their influence did not depend on a great family lineage or on legal rights. Rather they often used land from the royal fisc to buy loyalty as evidenced by the documents which they co-signed with their sons when they were regents. They had their own sources of wealth coming from gifts from their husbands, especially the morgengabe, and from courtiers and from the revenues of their own lands and cities. They used their wealth most commonly to buy the support of the Frankish Church by endowing it with land or by constructing churches themselves. As the Church was the second most powerful institution in Frankish-Gaul, this was a wise policy calculated to stabilize the insecure position women held in Merovingian families.

⁵⁹MGH, SRM, Vita S. Bathildis, 492. "Taliter ipsa beata anima cotidie thesaurizabat sibi exterremis pecuniis in caelo thesaurum"

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Wealthy and influential women were not unique to Merovingian Gaul. They had not only been present in highly civilized societies like Egypt, Greece and Rome but they were also found in the barbarian tribes even before they settled down and became Romanized.¹

But to exalt a woman's place in early barbarian society would be a mistake. Marriage took place when a man and a woman exchanged gifts. The woman usually gave her husband weapons symbolizing her readiness to stand with her husband at all times, even in war. There the heroic nature of a woman's role usually ended. The men went out to fight while the women and old men and invalids stayed at home and did all the menial tasks.² In the accounts of Tacitus and Ammianus Marcellinus women are rarely mentioned and then only in general descriptions of the various lifestyles of different tribes. Hence, it seems unlikely that they had too much military or political importance.

¹There are many examples of powerful and influential women in the early barbarian kingdoms and during the migration period. A Brittian (Danish?) princess went to war against a man who scorned her in marriage and won: Procopius, "History of the Wars," in Procopius, trans. by H. B. Dewing, Vol. 5 (London, 1919), VIII, xx, 1-45. The wisdom and judgement of Gambara, the mother of the Lombard leaders Ibor and Aio, was highly prized and sought after: Paulus Diaconus, History of the Langobards, trans. by W. D. Foulke (Philadelphia, 1907), 5, 15. Hunnish women were feared as much as the men and even went into battle with them. Procopius, VIII, iii, 7-16.

²Tacitus, Germania (De Origine et Situ Germanorum), ed. by J.G.C. Anderson (Oxford, 1938; 1961), 8.

Frankish women were not mentioned much in the literature of the time of the migrations. However, it is unlikely that they had any more power than the women of the other Germanic tribes. Gregory of Tours has little to say about them except for Basina, the Thuringian queen of Childeric I and the mother of Clovis. He only mentions her in order to set up some kind of genealogy for the hero of his history, Clovis. It is only with Clotild, the wife of Clovis, that Gregory begins to give some information about Merovingian queens.

In the reign of Clotild one can see the faint outline of the power which later Merovingian queens would have. She was married to a remarkably strong-minded man who seemed to be influenced by her in only one sector of his life, and that was in his dealings with the Church. When he died he left her with four sons. They were all adults and had little need for counseling although she could influence them on matters about which she felt strongly. The best example of such influence is the feud she fomented between them and her cousins in Burgundy.

Many powerful women in Frankish Gaul were related to the king in some way, either through marriage or blood. Such women had various ways of exerting influence but there were three main methods. First, as the wife of a king, a queen frequently exerted personal influence with her husband and could often have her wishes fulfilled by him. In her position as queen and head of the court she was the recipient of gifts from both her husband and the courtiers. As a result, she became independently wealthy.

Second, as mother of a king, her power greatly increased. If her son was an adult she still could exercise personal influence on him as Clotild did. If he were a minor, then she as regent or nutritor became the real ruler of the kingdom. She controlled the royal fisc and from it doled out rewards to faithful followers. As the royal fisc was not hers but her son's, she handled such transactions in the name of her son, but her signature beneath his at the bottom of the grants revealed her power--while her husband was living she was never allowed to co-sign with her son.

The third source of power for Merovingian queens was wealth. Her riches came mostly from the morgengabe given to her by the king, revenues and taxes from estates and cities she owned, and gifts from nobles. In some instances a queen might have inherited wealth as well. Brunhild, a Visigothic princess, had a lavish dowry and was wealthy before her marriage to Sigibert, but the number of queens that were penniless slaves before their marriage and very wealthy after shows that they could accumulate riches easily in the court.

Merovingian kings and queens used their wealth to buy loyalty and influence. However, queens tended to give more to the Church than did kings; although they too were very generous to that institution. There are many reasons why women felt the need to give to the Church. The primary one was to enlist the aid of the prelates. The Church remained a very powerful institution second only to Merovingian kingship in Gaul. Bishops were able to influence their flocks in the various cities to support the queen and could back her up with their own authority in any action she might wish to take.

By endowing monasteries the queens were making sure that they had both a place of retirement when their public careers were done as well as a holy burial place. An auxiliary reason may be that they wished to atone for sins or build up a treasure in heaven by their earthly good works. It appears that most of the women who were considered to be saints in these centuries were those who had conspicuously given great amounts of land and wealth to the Church. True and lasting power depended on the wealth possessed by a queen rather than by her role as wife or mother of a Merovingian.

These ways of using and obtaining power were typical of women in other barbarian tribes. Other queens seemed to have more power and a higher status than Merovingian queens. In Visigothic Spain queens were in much the same situation as the Merovingians. However Visigothic kings were far less stable on the throne than their Merovingian counterparts. Gregory says that after the Visigoth Amalaric, Theuda and Theudigisel were made kings but both died later at the hands of their followers. Gregory comments that ". . . the Goths had adopted the hateful custom of killing in this way such of their kings as did not please them, and appointing the person on whom their fancy fell."³ For the Visigoths, kingship was not a matter of blood as much as it was in Frankish Gaul.

A Visigothic queen faced some of the same challenges as the Merovingian queen. For instance, the mother of Gisaleric, heir of the early sixth century Visigothic king Alaric, was a concubine and

³HF, Vol. 2, III 30.

not the queen.⁴ Focusing for a moment on the career of queen Goiswinth is a better example of the nature of a queen's power in the Visigothic kingdom.

She was married to two kings, Athanagild and Leuvigild, and they were brothers. Thus, incest existed in Spain as well as in Frankish Gaul. It appears that the main reason Leuvigild married Goiswinth was that she had become influential and rich from her marriage to Athanagild. That Goiswinth remained influential is obvious from the fact that Leuvigild's son, Recarred, made peace with her on his father's death and accepted her as his mother (she was his stepmother).

Recarred wanted peace with king Guntram of Burgundy who was angry at the treatment received by his niece Ingund at the hands of the Visigoths. To pacify the king who was threatening to invade Spain, Recarred sent envoys for peace to king Childebert and his mother Brunhild, hoping they could use their influence on Guntram to avoid war. He needed Goiswinth's help in this matter because she was the mother of Brunhild and grandmother of Childebert. We do not know what Goiswinth received in return but it must have included an increase in her power and influence with the young king.⁵ Goiswinth exercised power through her relationship to kings and her wealth as did Merovingian queens.

⁴Isidore of Seville, History of the Kings of the Goths, Vandals, and Suevi, trans. by G. Donini and G. B. Ford (Leiden, 1966), 18.

⁵HF, Vol. 2, IV 25(38); IX 1.

Amalasuntha, daughter of the Ostrogothic king Theoderic, had an exalted role in the government similar to that of the Frankish regents. On the death of Theoderic she became regent for her son Atalaric. Procopius, the Byzantine historian, said that Amalasuntha ". . . as guardian of her child, administered the government, and she proved to be endowed with wisdom and regard for justice in the highest degree, displaying to a great extent the masculine temper."⁶ The Greeks like the barbarians did not see the ability to rule as a feminine quality but admired it when they saw it in women. And, women were only given a chance to display it when they were regents.

Unfortunately the Ostrogoths did not approve of her respect for Romans or her attempt to educate Atalaric in Roman letters. They plotted against her but she murdered the ringleaders and firmly established her rule.⁷ In many ways she had the same trouble as Brunhild with noble opposition. She ended that opposition in the same way as Brunhild. Like Merovingian and Visigothic queens, she was extremely wealthy. Her treasure when packed up amounted to 40,000 pounds of gold or 2,880,000 solidi!⁸

Her position of power was based entirely on her son Atalaric. Atalaric was given to vice and debauchery and he died at a young age from the wasting sickness. Amalasuntha feared his death because ". . . her life would not be safe thereafter, since she had given

⁶Procopius, Vol. 3, V i 35-ii 4.

⁷Ibid., V ii 4-iii 1.

⁸J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, Early Medieval History (Oxford, 1975), 41.

offence to the most notable of the Goths."⁹ Indeed after Atalaric's death she was easily overthrown by Theodatus. The similarity with the overthrow of Brunhild after the death of Theuderic is apparent.

Matasuntha, the granddaughter of Theuderic, also played an important role in Ostrogothic affairs after the death of Atalaric. She, unlike Amalasuntha, had no son through whom she could exercise power. She was, in fact, the last living blood relative of Theuderic and, though his blood was not considered sacred in the same sense as a Merovingian's was, it was still thought to be important. Vittigis forced her to marry him to give some legitimacy to his illegal rule of the Goths.¹⁰ After Vittigis' death, she married a man by the name of Germanus. He planned to overthrow the Goths and thereby win the favor of the Emperor Justinian who was waging war with them for the control of Italy.¹¹ He needed Matasuntha because:

. . . if the woman should be with him in the army, the Goths would probably be ashamed to take up arms against her, calling to mind the rule of Theuderic and Atalaric.¹²

The lives of Amalasuntha and Matasuntha were tragedies but they were each more powerful than most Merovingian queens. Amalasuntha's power was traditional in origin and extent and similar to that held by Merovingian queens, but Matasunth's power sprang from the failure of the male line after Theuderic and Atalaric. Matasuntha's significance would have been greatly reduced if she had a son or brothers. No Merovingian princess ever had the chance to assume

⁹Procopius, Vol. 3, V iii 9-15

¹⁰Ibid., Vol. 3, VI x 8-14.

¹¹Ibid., Vol. 5, VII xxxix 12-19.

¹²Ibid.

such an exalted position because there were always males with royal blood around.

The next barbarian rulers of Italy were the Lombards, whose early queens are rarely mentioned in the sources. Rosemund of course is famous because she murdered her husband, King Alboin. Masane, the wife of King Cleph, is mentioned by Paul the Deacon because she shared power with the king,¹³ but she is unheard of after the murder of Cleph. Soon Lombard queens assumed a rather unique status of power among the barbarian tribes. On the death of the Lombard king Charoald, his queen, Gundaberga, assumed the throne and the Lombards swore allegiance to her. Further, it was her marriage to Rothari and her influence with the Lombard nobles which raised him to the throne.¹⁴ No Merovingian queen ever had such power. Her power was always indirect, coming through her son or husband.

Theudelinda is the most vivid example of one of the Lombard queens who had extensive influence. She was the beautiful daughter of a Bavarian king. She married the Lombard king Authari who died in 590. Rather than choose another king, the Lombards asked her to remain as their queen and to choose a husband who would be their king. She chose Duke Agiluf of Turin. He was then approved by the whole nation.¹⁵ Thus Theudelinda's position was remarkable but it

¹³Paulus Diaconus, 86. See also MGH, SRL, 90: "Astecum annum unum et sex menses cum Masane sua coniuge regum obtinueset"

¹⁴Fredegar, 59: ". . . omnes Lombardi eidem fidem cum sacramentitis firmarent"

¹⁵Paulus Diaconus, 149-150. See also MGH, SRL, 113: "Regina vero Theudelinda quia satis placebat Langobardis permiserunt eam in

is important to note that, as with Gundaberga, the Lombards made their offer provisional on her finding a husband. They thought her wise and just but in the end they also wanted a man to run the kingdom.

Theudelinda was a great influence on her husband Agiluf. She was the one who persuaded him finally to make peace with Pope Gregory and the Romans and end the quarrel between them over the "Three Chapters" controversy.¹⁶ She, as most barbarian queens, was very wealthy. For example, she built herself a splendid palace decorated round and about with murals depicting Lombard life.¹⁷ Thus Theudelinda was using the same sources of power as the Merovingian queens--money and marriage. Nevertheless, her position was more exalted than any Merovingian queen's because she raised her husband to the throne, not the other way around.

Merovingian queens and Visigothic queens seem to share the same amount of power as well as common sources for it. The power of an Ostrogothic queen is harder to pin down because after the death of Theodoric there was no queen in the sense of someone who was married to a king. Amalasuntha was Theoderic's daughter and reigned as regent for his heir, her son Atalaric. Matasuntha's importance came from the fact that she was the last relative of Theodoric alive and that the Ostrogoths still felt loyalty towards his kin. Of all

regia consistere dignitatem, suadentes ei, ut sibi quam, ipsa voluisset ex omnibus Langobardis virum eligeret, tale in scilicet qui regnum regere utiliter possit."

¹⁶Paulus Diaconus, 155.

¹⁷Ibid., 166. See also MGH, SRL, 124: "Ihi etiam praefata regina sibi palatium condidit"

the barbarian tribes, the Lombards were the most willing to give their queens an elevated station in the government. Gundaberga and Theudelinda were both allowed to rule in their own right after the deaths of their husbands. Theudelinda was asked to choose a new husband because a male leader, especially important for the command of the army, was necessary for the protection of the country from Byzantine invasion.

The Lombards were the most liberal when it came to women gaining power. The Ostrogoths, Visigoths and Merovingians restrained their queens in the amount of power they could exercise. This stemmed from the fact that they had the most developed concept of familial kingship, which excluded any participation in or assumption of power by a female. But why were Merovingian queens the most limited of all: Perhaps the answer is that there was no shortage of available male heirs to assume the throne. The unbroken line of male Merovingians precluded any female Merovingian from attaining the presige afforded to a Matasuntha. Even when a Merovingian was overthrown or killed, another could always be found. Thus there was no reason to elevate a woman to the throne as the Lombards did.

Another limitation of the power of a Merovingian queen was the instability of her position in marriage. While most men and kings in all the Germanic tribes had monogamous marriages, Merovingian kings kept virtual harems with one or more legitimate wives, one head concubine and innumerable lesser concubines. This occurred because the older Germanic type of marriage existed in Frankish Gaul side by side with the Christian type of marriage. The result was

that the status of a Merovingian wife was of much less significance than that of her counterparts in other tribes.¹⁸

Merovingian queens retained their tenuous position by maintaining their personal popularity with the king. Queens who became unpopular could be repudiated like Audovera, or murdered like Galswintha. If they were infertile like Gomatrudis they were quietly put aside. If they had political enemies they could be exiled as Brunhild was by Theudebert. This is not to say that repudiation and divorce of unpopular wives was unique to Merovingian royal family, it was just more frequent.

Such instability must derive from the fact that the Christian idea of a monogamous marriage based on strong if not indissoluble ties was not accepted except in theory by Merovingian kings. Merovingian marriages were nothing more than a quenching of the king's lust. No Merovingian king used his marriage as a tool of international policy. As a rule they did not marry princesses from other tribes. Clovis married the Burgundian princess Clotild but it was her uncle, not her father, who ruled Burgundy. Clovis wedded her because she was beautiful and he had little hope of an alliance with her uncle through such a marriage because Clotild was unpopular with her uncle. No alliance ever did come about. Sigibert married the Visigothic princess Brunhild, but his marriage did not cement an alliance with the Visigoths. It was a way of showing his scorn for his brothers' low marriages. After Brunhild arrived and took her place as Sigibert's consort, she in no way assumed his royalty status.

¹⁸

Dill, 283.

Since Merovingian brides were hardly ever princesses of other royal houses, they were deprived of the influence they might have had if they brought with them an alliance with their kingdoms. Of all Merovingian marriages only six were to foreign princesses.¹⁹ Merovingian marriages then lacked the specific purpose of international policy which increased the prestige of such women as Matasuntha or Theudelinda.²⁰ Even the marriage of the Visigothic queen Goiswintha to Leuvigild was a deliberate attempt to hold the state together through a period of transition from one king to another. She had been married to the previous king Athanagild.

Thus Merovingian queens were denied the security of a stable marriage and most lacked the prestige of having royal or for that matter noble blood. There was then no institution of queenship in Merovingian Gaul. To be an institution, queenship would require that a woman on marriage to a Merovingian king would have a specific role and defined rights emanating from that role which were protected by law and custom. Merovingian queens had no such set of privileges and rights protecting them. More often than not they had to beware not to overstep the very clear limits put on their power. Brunhild for example failed because as she got older she lost sight of these limits.

¹⁹The six royal brides were Basina (Thuringian), Wisigard (Lombard), Clotild (Burgundian) and Brunhild, Galswintha and Ermenberga (all Visigothic). Bathild was Anglo-Saxon but she was a slave. The marriages of Basina and Clotild brought no great alliances. Ermenberga's marriage was never consummated and she was sent home. Galswintha was murdered. The marriages of Brunhild and Wisigard seem to be the only ones with any hope of foreign alliance involved.

²⁰Dill, 284.

Brunhild's failure must be examined to understand the extent of a queen's power. Ironically the fact that Brunhild was a foreigner, a Visigoth, and of royal blood was a detriment to her popularity with the Austrasians. Not being a Frank, she was less respected and had more trouble controlling her subjects. She always felt herself superior since as early as Sigibert's death the nobles were trying to make sure she would not be able to increase the power of the monarchy through her son Childebert. She was reminded in a blunt statement by Ursio that she was not considered royal in the same sense as Childebert who was a Merovingian. Ursio said, "Woman . . . your son's royalty is not your's."²¹ Brunhild did not agree with Ursio and her pride was resented by the Austrasians.

Another problem was that she was trying to govern that section of the Frankish population which was least agreeable to rule by a king, the Ripuarian Franks. She found it impossible to subdue them by her own authority because they did not consider the authority of a woman equal to that of a man.²² So she struggled with them through two minorities.

Her femininity cannot be blamed entirely for her failure because her contemporary, Fredegund, also a woman, had no such problems with her sex. Fredegund had a nobility which was supportive of her, and she was a Frank. Her people, the Salian Franks, had long lived peacefully under a monarchy. She was very popular with the people and the nobles which assured her success.

²¹Ibid., 228-229.

²²Godefroid Kurth, "La Reine Brunehaut," Revue des Questions Historiques, L (1891), 78.

Indeed, most of Brunhild's problems sprang not from her background but from the character of the Austrasian nobility. Austrasia was populated by old noble Frankish families who were trying to reassert their rights against the monarchy. Although the chance to assume the role of regent for three kings in their minorities meant an increase in power for Brunhild, it also offered the nobles a tempting opportunity to reassert their rights and privileges.²³ This early attempt at the revival of aristocratic rights by the Austrasians was the preliminary to that conflict of nobility and monarchy for political control that lasted throughout the Middle Ages.

This debate revolved around the issue of the rights of local authority as opposed to the rights of a central authority. Brunhild battled bravely against the aristocratic faction but she failed. As S. Dill put it:

. . . she was striving to arrest a great social and political movement which was destined to triumph not long after her death in the decrepitude of the Merovingian dynasty, and the rise to commanding power of the mayors of the palace.²⁴

Pontus Fahlbeck agrees that the main reason the mayors rose to a prominence is that they made a permanent place for themselves in the government during the regencies of Brunhild and Fredegund. Because these two women were unable to control the government without male help, the aristocracy forced them to consent to the appointment of mayors,²⁵ but popular queens were able to appoint the mayors themselves--Nantechildis appointed Flaochad. The importance of the mayors

²³Dill, 228-229.

²⁴Ibid., 233.

²⁵Lot, 360-361.

of the palace to the power of the queen is that the mayor, after Brunhild, was no longer a representative of the king's wishes to the nobles and therefore not a royal servant. Mayors Gogo and Wandelen and the Arnulfings after them were representatives of the aristocratic will to the king. This subtle change in function meant that they ceased to work for the king and the queen.

Brunhild's death followed the wholesale desertion of the Burgundian nobles after the death of Theuderic. She had already been thrown out of Austrasia by its nobles who hated and feared her. She had executed too many enemies and made too few friends. She made the mistake of trying to circumvent the Frankish custom of dividing the kingdom among all the heirs. She raised only her greatgrandson Sigibert to the throne, leaving his brothers with nothing.²⁶ Her audacity led to her defeat, capture and execution at the hands of Chlotar II.

Brunhild's failure then was a combination of circumstance and perhaps her personality. As Kurth points out, "she was remarkably calm and moderate for her times but she served, in short, the realization of one ambitious goal and a passion to dominate."²⁷ She did not understand the limits nor the extent of her power.

Merovingian Gaul was a society run by males. A woman's role in it was dependent on and restricted by the rights of the men in her life, whether they were husband, son, mayor of the palace or

²⁶Wood, 23.

²⁷Kurth, 78: ". . . elle ne servit en somme qu 'a' la realisation d'un but ambitieux et d'une passion personnelle de dominer."

noblemen. A queen, more so than a private citizen like Plectrude, was severely limited in what she could do. She had no rights if her husband were a Merovingian because he was above the law. She exerted influence on him if she were popular but if she lost favor she could be at best easily repudiated, at worst killed. Her real power came from the care of her son, if he were a minor when he ascended the throne. As regent she could manage the royal fisc in his name and reward her followers. But if she was out of favor when her husband died, she might never assume the role of regent. Once regent, if she angered powerful people, she could be ousted. The only stable source of power was a queen's personal wealth. Too often even that could be taken from her by other monarchs or even by her children. Therefore, though it is tempting to read of Fredegund and Brunhild, Clotild and the formidable Plectrude and marvel at their power, remember the limits on it and the risks they ran by employing it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES

The Burgundian Code. Translated by Katherine Fischer Drew.
Philadelphia, 1972.

Bouquet, Martin, ed. Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et' de la France. Volume 4. Paris, 1741.

The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with Its Continuations.
Translated by J. M. Wallace-Hadrill. New York, 1960.

Gregory of Tours. The History of the Franks. Translated by O. M. Dalton. 2 volumes. Oxford, 1927.

Gregory of Tours. History Book VII. Translated by Bernard Bachrach.
Lawrence, Kansas, 1972.

Iordanes. Getica. Translated by Charles C. Merow. Princeton, 1960.

Isidore of Seville. History of the Kings of the Goths, Vandals, and Suevi. Translated by Guido Donini and Gordon B. Ford. Leiden, 1966.

Liber Historiae Francorum. Translated by Bernard Bachrach. Lawrence, Kansas, 1973.

The Lombard Laws. Translated by Katherine Fischer Drew. Philadelphia, 1973.

The Lex Salica. Translated by Karl A. Eckhardt. Weimar, Germany, 1953.

Marcellinus, Ammianus. Rerum Gestarum Libri qui Supersunt. Translated by John C. Rolfe. Cambridge, Mass., 1935.

Monumenta Germaniae Historica.

Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum. Volume 2: "Fredegarii et aliorum chronica. Vitae Sanctorum." Edited by Bruno Krusch. Hanover (1888) 1956.

Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Libri Historiarum X. Volume 1, part 1. Edited by Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison. Hanover, 1951.

Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum Saeculi VI-IX:
"Pauli Historia Langobardum." Edited by L. Bethmann and G. Waitz. Hanover, 1964.

Auctores Antiquissimus. Volume XI: Isidore of Seville, "Historia Gothorum, Wandalorum, Sueborum." Berlin, 1894.

Orosius. "Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII Accedit eisdem liber Apologeticus." Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Edited by C. Zangemeister. Volume V. New York, 1966.

Orosius. The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans. Translated by Roy J. DeFerrari. Washington, D.C., 1964.

Pardessus, Jean Marie, ed. Diplomata: Chartae, Epistolae, Leges aliaque Instrumenta ad res Gallo-Francicus Spectantia. 2 volumes. Aalen, 1969 (Paris, 1849).

Paulus Diaconus. History of the Langobards. Translated by W. D. Foulke. Philadelphia, 1907.

Procopius. "History of the Wars," (Books 5-8). Procopius. Translated by H. B. Dewing. Volumes 3-5. London, 1919.

Tacitus. Complete Works. Translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. New York, 1942.

Tacitus. Germania. (De Origine et Situ Germanorum.) Edited by J.G.C. Anderson. Oxford (1938) 1961.

The Works of Tacitus. The Oxford Translation, Revised. London, 1898.

The Visigothic Code. Translated by S. P. Scott. Boston, 1910.

II. SECONDARY SOURCES

Bachrach, Bernard. Merovingian Military Organization 481-751. Minneapolis, 1972.

Bachrach, Bernard. "Procopius and the Chronology of Clovis' Reign." Viator 1 (1970), 21-31.

Boyle, Leonard E. "Diplomatics." Medieval Studies: An Introduction. Edited by James M. Powell. Syracuse, N.Y., 1976.

Bullough, D. A. "Early Medieval Social Groupings: The Terminology of Kinship." Past and Present 45 (1969), 3-18.

Coleman, Emily. "Infanticide in the Early Middle Ages." Women in Medieval Society. Edited by Susan Mosher Stuard. Philadelphia, 1976.

Dill, S. Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age. London, 1966.

- Drew, Katherine Fischer. "The Barbarian Kings as Lawgivers and Judges." Life and Thought in the Early Middle Ages. Edited by Robert S. Hoyt. Minneapolis, 1967.
- Drew, Katherine Fischer. "The Germanic Family of the Leges Burgundionum." Medievalia et Humanista 15 (1963), 5-14.
- Duby, Georges. The Early Growth of the European Economy. Ithaca, N.Y., 1974.
- Ewig, Eugen. "Studien zur Merovingischen Dynastie." Frühmittelalterliche Studien 8 (1974), 15-59.
- Herlihy, David. "Land, Family and Women in Continental Europe, 701-1200." Women in Medieval Society. Edited by Susan Mosher Stuard. Philadelphia, 1971.
- Goffart, Walter. "Byzantine Policy in the West under Tiberius II and Maurice: The Pretenders Hermengild and Gundovald (579-585)." Traditio 13 (1957), 73-118.
- John, James J. "Latin Paleography." Medieval Studies: An Introduction. Edited by James M. Powell. Syracuse, N.Y., 1976.
- King, P. D. Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom. London, 1972.
- Lot, Ferdinand. The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages. Translated by Philip and Mariette Leon. New York, 1961.
- Kurth, Godefroid. "La Reine Brunehaut." Revue des Questions Historiques. L (1891), 5-79.
- McNamara, Jo Ann and Suzanne F. Wemple. "Marriage and Divorce in the Frankish Kingdom." Women in Medieval Society. Edited by Susan Mosher Stuard. Philadelphia, 1976.
- McNamara, Jo Ann and Suzanne F. Wemple. "The Powers of Women Through the Family in Medieval Europe: 500-1100." Clio's Consciousness Raised. Edited by Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner. New York, 1976.
- Power, Eileen. Medieval Women. Edited by M. M. Poston. Cambridge, 1975.
- Salin, Édouard. La Civilisation Merovingienne: D'après les Sepultures, les Textes et le Laboratoire. 4 volumes. Paris, 1949.
- Schulenburg, Jane Tibbetts. "Sexism and the Celestial Gynaecium--from 500 to 1200." Journal of Medieval History. Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 1978), 117-133.

- Thompson, E. A. "The Barbarian Kingdoms in Gaul and Spain." Nottingham Medieval Studies, VII (1963), 3-33.
- Thompson, E. A. The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila. London, 1966.
- Wallace-Hadrill, J. M. The Barbarian West. New York, 1962.
- Wallace-Hadrill, J. M. Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent. Oxford, 1971.
- Wallace-Hadrill, J. M. Early Medieval History. Oxford, 1975.
- Wallace-Hadrill, J. M. The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History. New York, 1962.
- Werner, Joachim. "Frankish Royal Tombs in the Cathedrals of Cologne and Saint Denis." Antiquity. Volume 38, No. 151 (1964), 201-216.
- Wolfram, Herwig. "The Shaping of the Early Medieval Kingdom." Viator, 1 (1970), 1-20.
- Wood, Ian N. "Kings, Kingdoms and Consent." Early Medieval Kingship. Edited by P. H. Sawyer and Ian N. Wood. Leeds, 1977.
- Wormald, Patrick. "'Lex Scripta' and 'Verbum Regis': Legislation and Germanic Kingship from Euric to Cnut." Early Medieval Kingship. Edited by P. H. Sawyer and Ian N. Wood. Leeds, 1977.

III. BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND RESEARCH AIDS

- American Bibliographic Service ed. International Guide to Medieval Studies. 12 volumes. Darien, Conn., 1961-1973.
- American Bibliographic Service ed. Quarterly Checklist of Medievalia. 20 volumes. Greenwich, Conn., 1958-1977.
- Bibliographie Annuelle de l'Histoire de France du Cinquieme Siècle à 1939-. Paris, 1955.
- Caenegy, R. C. van. Guide to Sources of Medieval History. New York, 1978.
- Chevalier, Ulysse. Repertoire des Sources Historiques du 'Moyen Age. 2 volumes. Montbeliard, 1894-1899 (reprint: Millwood, N.Y., 1975).
- Dauzat, Albert. Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Francaise. Paris, 1938.

Lalanne, Ludovic. Dictionnaire Historique de la France. 2 volumes.
Geneva, 1977.

Marouzeau, Jules et al. eds. L'Année Philologique. Paris, 1924-
1979.

Paetow, Louis John. A Guide to the Study of Medieval History.
New York, 1931.

Walsh, Richard J. International Medieval Bibliography. Leeds,
1967-1979.

VITA

Catherine Tuggle was born in Jacksonville, Florida on February 28, 1952. Shortly thereafter she moved to Key Biscayne, Florida where she attended elementary school. In June of 1970 she graduated from Coral Gables High School and after two quarters of foreign study at the London campus of Florida State University, she finished her B.A. at the University of North Florida in 1977. Ms. Tuggle entered The University of Tennessee, Knoxville Master's program in January of 1978 and received a Graduate Assistantship the following September. After receiving a Teaching Assistantship for the year 1979-1980, Ms. Tuggle was awarded her Master's degree in History in December of 1980.

She will be spending a year in the Federal Republic of Germany with her husband, Gary E. Weir, the recipient of a fellowship from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst.