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## The governing class of the Gibichung and early Merovingian kingdoms

At the start of his discussion of the origins of the *gens Anglorum* Patrick Wormald argued that there were “perhaps two main ingredients” to the “kingdoms which emerged ... in post-Roman Gaul, Spain and Italy ... One was the Germanic ‘Heerkönig’, the leader of an extended retinue of warriors and their kin, recruited from various tribes of which one was usually dominant and gave its name to the rest ... The second was the indigenous educated class of the province in question, which Christianized and to variable extents Romanized the newcomers, and which, in search of an at least relatively ordered regime, helped promote a single royal authority within the boundaries of that province.” And he went on to suggest that the court circle of king Theudebert provided an illustration of the “indigenous educated class”.<sup>1</sup> Like any characterisation of post-Roman government, this certainly oversimplifies. Thus, the description of the Germanic component in the equation fails to register the extent to which the kings and their followers had already been romanised – in the case of the Franks and the Burgundians, for instance, as a result of spending decades as neighbours of the Empire, or even as settlers within its boundaries. Yet, while this characterisation may be oversimple, it does draw attention to the crucial matter of “the indigenous educated class”, and what it – as opposed to military might – contributed to each kingdom. This indigenous class, transmitting as it did some of the values of the Roman Empire, unquestionably played a role in ensuring the survival of elements of what can certainly be regarded as a state.

Patrick Wormald presented the court of Theudebert as a good example of such a class. One might, however, ask whether that particular circle was representative of the kernels of government in early sixth-century Gaul. In what follows I shall look in some detail at the governing classes of the Burgundian and Frankish kingdoms, up until the death of Gregory of Tours, primarily to investigate distinctions between those different kingdoms, and to see whether the differences indicate a steady rate of change – one might use a loaded word like ‘degeneration’ – from a Roman model. I will begin with the Burgundian kingdom of Gundobad and Sigismund, since it is much better evidenced than that of the Franks under Childeric and Clovis. I will then turn to the Frankish kingdoms of the late sixth century, for which we do have evidence equivalent to that for the Burgundian kingdom, in the narratives of Gregory of Tours, the *Epistolae Austrasicae* and the court poetry of Venantius Fortunatus, before working backwards in time, through the court of Theudebert, to those of the founders of the Merovingian kingdom. But first it is necessary to say a word about the Burgundian military.

Like all the successor states, the Burgundian kingdom depended on military might as well as on an educated class prepared to act as administrators. This military might, however, does not seem to be properly described as that of a ‘Heerkönig’ with ‘an extended retinue of warriors’. There were probably leaders – in the plural – with retinues when the Burgundians first appear to the west of the Rhine,

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Wormald, *Bede, the Bretwaldas and the origins of gens Anglorum*, in: Patrick Wormald, *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and Its Historian*, ed. Stephen Baxter (Oxford 2005) 106–134, at 106–107. I have deliberately left out a phrase in which Wormald suggests that kings might acquire ‘sacral’ status. I can find nothing that I would describe as sacral in late-fifth- and early-sixth-century kingship. Others including Patrick Wormald and, in his later work, J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, have taken a different line. See most recently Régine Le Jan, *Die Sakralität der Merowinger oder: Mehrdeutigkeiten der Geschichtsschreibung*, in: *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Stuart Airlie/Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 11, Wien 2006) 73–92. To some extent, in some though not all instances, this difference of interpretation is a matter of how one defines ‘sacral’.

as enemies of the Alamans, in the pages of Ammianus.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the term ‘Heerkönig’ fits Guntiarus when he backed the usurping emperor Jovinus in the second decade of the fifth century, though he is called a phylarch by Olympiodorus, which might or might not indicate some rather more romanised position.<sup>3</sup> It is also possible that when they were attacked by the Huns,<sup>4</sup> the Burgundians fought as a nation, led by a tribal king. Once the residue of the people had been transferred to Saupaudia,<sup>5</sup> however, we see them only as Roman federates, and their leaders appear not as ‘Heerkönige’: they seem to have wished to present themselves as Roman officers rather more than as kings. Although we find the title of *rex* in Burgundian sources, we rarely find that of *rex Burgundionum*, except in texts written outside the Burgundian kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Gundioc was *magister militum*,<sup>7</sup> as was his brother Chilperic.<sup>8</sup> Probably the full title was *magister militum per Gallias*. Gundioc’s son Gundobad was also *magister militum*, more probably, given his close association with Ricimer and his presence at the imperial court in Italy, *praesentalis*.<sup>9</sup> Even when he left the peninsula he seems not to have given up the title, and indeed he seems to have been concerned that it should be transferred to his son Sigismund in 516.<sup>10</sup> As a Roman general Gundobad certainly had a retinue, and it might well have been drawn largely from a pool of men who defined themselves as Burgundians, though this is no more than a guess. Gundobad’s following, like that of his brother or uncle Chilperic, and of his son Sigismund, could have been called Burgundian, but it was almost certainly ethnically mixed, as was that of Godomar, when he fought the Franks at Vézérone.<sup>11</sup> Wormald, of course, allowed for this, describing retinues as being “recruited from various tribes”. One may, however, question whether use of the word Germanic alongside ‘Heerkönig’ does not lead us to envisage the forces of the Burgundian kingdom as belonging to an archaic tradition that scarcely fits the recruitment of federate forces by an officer of the Roman state. And those forces almost certainly included Romans: this seems to be implied by what we know of Aridius, the man who, according to Gregory of Tours, outwitted Clovis – for he advised Gundobad during the siege of Avignon.<sup>12</sup> And it would also seem to be indicated by some of the documentation that we have for Sigismund’s troops in 507 or 508.<sup>13</sup>

We are on safer ground when we look at the civilian activities of the ‘educated class’ of the kingdom of Gundobad and Sigismund, though it should be noted that both kings seem to have been

<sup>2</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae XXVIII*, 5, 9–14 and *XXX*, 7, 11 (ed./trans. John C. Rolfe, Ammianus Marcellinus: History 3, Loeb Classical Library 331, Cambridge-Mass./London 1964) 164–169 and 358–359.

<sup>3</sup> Olympiodorus, Fragment 18 (ed. Roger C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicizing Historians of the Later Roman Empire*. Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus 2, Liverpool 1983) 182–183.

<sup>4</sup> Prosper Tiro, *Epitoma chronicon* a. 435 (ed. Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA 9, *Chronica minora* 1, Berlin 1892) 342–485, at 475. See also accounts of the defeat of the Burgundians which do not mention the Huns, Hydatius, *Chronicon* a. 436 and a. 437 (ed. Richard W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana: Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1993) 92–95, at 110; *Chronicle of 452* (a. 436) (ed. Richard W. Burgess, *The Gallic Chronicle of 452. A new critical edition with a brief introduction*, in: *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul*, ed. Ralf W. Mathisen/Danuta Shanzer [Aldershot 2001]) 52–84, at 79.

<sup>5</sup> *Chronicle of 452* (a. 443), ed. Burgess 80.

<sup>6</sup> Ian N. Wood, *Gentes, kings and kingdoms – the emergence of states. The kingdom of the Gibichungs*, in: *Regna and Gentes. The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz/Jörg Jarnut/Walter Pohl (*The Transformation of the Roman World* 13, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2003) 243–269, at 254 with n. 61.

<sup>7</sup> *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 19 (ed. Wilhelm Gundlach, MGH EE 3, Berlin 1892) 1–83, at 28–29.

<sup>8</sup> *Vita patrum Iurensium* II, 10 (=92) (ed. François Martine, *Vie des Pères du Jura*, SC 142, Paris 1968) 336–339.

<sup>9</sup> *Fasti Vindobonenses priores* a. 472 (ed. Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA 9, *Chronica minora* 1, Berlin 1882) 249–339, at 306.

<sup>10</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae* 78, 93 and 94 (ed. Rudolf Peiper, MGH AA 6, 2, Berlin 1883) 29–103, at 93 and 100–102, engl.: Avitus of Vienne, *Letters and Select Prose* 78, 93 and 94 (trans. Danuta R. Shanzer/Ian N. Wood, *Translated Texts for Historians* 38, Liverpool 2002) 143–153.

<sup>11</sup> The mixture is implied by what the *Liber constitutionum* reveals of non-Burgundian incomers entering the kingdom, cf. *Liber constitutionum sive lex Gundobada* 47, 1 and *constitutiones extravagantes* 21, 6 (ed. Ludwig Rudolf von Salis, MGH LL nat. Germ. 2, 1, Hannover 1892) 29–116, at 77 and 117–122, at 120.

<sup>12</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II, 32 (ed. Bruno Krusch/Wilhelm Levison, MGH SS rer. Merov. 1, 1, Hannover 1951) 79–80; Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula* 50, ed. Peiper 78–79; cf. Avitus of Vienne, *Letters and Selected Prose* 50, trans. Shanzer/Wood 326–330, for notes and commentary.

<sup>13</sup> Justin Favrod, *Histoire politique du royaume burgonde*, 443–534 (Lausanne 1997) 397.

remarkably well educated themselves<sup>14</sup> – as indeed were the late sixth-century Merovingians.<sup>15</sup> When we turn to the administration of the Burgundian kingdom, we have to acknowledge that there was no exact equivalent to Cassiodorus or his *Variae*. This may not mean that there was no office of *magister scriniorum*. Indeed there must have been some administrators: a *magister militum* would have had a staff, and administrative centres and provincial capitals like Lyon, Vienne and Geneva would have boasted some officials. But it is worth noting what happened when Sigismund wished to write to the emperor. He or someone at court sketched out the message and then asked Avitus, bishop of Vienne, to dress it up in appropriate language.<sup>16</sup> Avitus demurred, but seems eventually to have agreed. For whatever reason, a number of letters addressed to the emperor have survived in the Avitus collection, purporting to have come from Sigismund.<sup>17</sup> These letters are not unlike those of Cassiodorus, in their language and diplomatic tone: indeed, Avitus was as able as Cassiodorus to produce an appropriate letter.<sup>18</sup> It is, however, notable that while Theodoric turned directly to his *magister scriniorum*, Sigismund had to employ his most literate bishop to produce a letter to the emperor.

Of course, Avitus was not merely called upon to write letters for the Burgundian ruler. He can also be seen offering advice to both Gundobad and Sigismund, above all to the former. Thus, he counselled Gundobad in times of personal crisis – when the king's daughter died and he was overcome with grief.<sup>19</sup> More important, there are a number of letters from the bishop explaining points of theology to Gundobad:<sup>20</sup> some of these seem essentially private and largely academic, though an undercurrent in almost all of them is a desire to persuade the king to convert from arianism to catholicism, or perhaps rather to acknowledge publically his preference for catholicism:<sup>21</sup> points which naturally had a political aspect to them. More generally, as the senior metropolitan in the kingdom, Avitus was also a leading figure in the preparation and propagation of ecclesiastical legislation. He, together with Viventius of Lyon, sent out letters summoning their fellow bishops to the Council of Epaon in 517,<sup>22</sup> a council which, dealing as it did with the aftermath of the succession of the catholic Sigismund to his father's throne, was of more than ecclesiastical significance for the kingdom. Nor was Avitus the only bishop to offer advice to the Burgundian rulers. Already in the 460s Patiens of Lyon seems to have had some influence with king Chilperic and his wife.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, despite the existence of letters from Avitus himself to Sigismund, among the clergy it would appear to have been Maximus of Geneva who most influenced Gundobad's son.<sup>24</sup> Further, an edict of Sigismund issued on 8<sup>th</sup> March 516, and subsequently incorporated into the *Liber constitutionum*, is expressly inspired by bishop Gemellus of Vaison, who was concerned that carers would not come forward to shelter foundlings if there were any chance that the children could legally be reclaimed.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ian N. Wood, *The Latin culture of Gundobad and Sigismund*, in: *Akkulturation. Probleme einer germanisch-romanischen Kultursynthese in Spätantike und frühem Mittelalter*, ed. Dieter Hägermann/Wolfgang Haubrichs/Jörg Jarnut (RGA Erg. Bd. 41, Berlin/New York 2004) 367–380.

<sup>15</sup> See the description of them as long-haired and literate in Gregory, *Historiae* VI, 24, ed. Krusch/Levison 291.

<sup>16</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula* 49, ed. Peiper 77–78; Avitus of Vienne, *Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Shanzer/Wood 141–143.

<sup>17</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae* 78, 93 and 94, ed. Peiper 93, 100–102.

<sup>18</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Shanzer/Wood 8.

<sup>19</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula* 5, ed. Peiper 32–33; cf. also *ibid.* 6 and 44, ed. Peiper 33–35 and 73–74; Avitus of Vienne, *Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Shanzer/Wood 208–219.

<sup>20</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae* 4, 21, 22, 30, ed. Peiper 29–31, 54–55, 60–62; Avitus of Vienne, *Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Shanzer/Wood 163–207.

<sup>21</sup> See above all Alcimi Ecdicii Aviti Viennensis Episcopi *Homilia dicta in dedicatione superioris basilicae* (ed. Charles Perrat/Aristide Audin, *Studi in Onore di Aristide Calderini e Roberto Paribeni* 2. *Studi di papirologia e antichità orientali*, Milano 1957) 433–451; Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II, 34, ed. Krusch/Levison 81–82.

<sup>22</sup> Council of Epaon (517 September 15) (ed. Jean Gaudemet/Brigitte Basdevant, *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens* 2, 1, SC 353, Paris 1989) 93–125.

<sup>23</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistula* VI, 12, 3 (ed. André Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire 3: Correspondance*, Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1970) 26–27.

<sup>24</sup> *Vita abbatum Acaunensium sine epitaphiis* 3 (ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH SS rer. Merov.* 7, Hannover 1920) 322–336, at 331.

<sup>25</sup> *Liber constitutionum, constitutio extravagans* 20, ed. von Salis 119.

In fact bishops emerge in the fifth and sixth centuries as having a central role to play in the post-Roman state. In the fourth century the episcopate had secured a position of considerable influence in the Empire, but in the period of the successor states it effectively constituted one of the foundations of the new governmental structures. By the end of the sixth century the Church had amassed a vast amount of property in Gaul, and probably elsewhere.<sup>26</sup> But it was not just because of its accumulation of wealth that the Church was important: indeed its acquisition of property was essentially a reflection of its centrality in the new scheme of things. Kings needed bishops, for the clergy provided learning and skill. Recognition by churchmen could help legitimate a regime, and indeed aid in the process of integration of Roman and barbarian. And Church councils were one of the major conduits of episcopal influence. Equally, episcopal hostility could present a king with a major problem. Although the accession of the catholic Sigismund would seem to have delighted the Gallo-Roman episcopate of his kingdom, within a very short period he lost their support over his refusal to condemn his incestuous treasurer. Remarkably the bishops as a whole seem to have gone on strike – something which almost certainly contributed to the failure of the king's reign.<sup>27</sup>

It is not only ecclesiastical members of the educated class of the Burgundian kingdom who are known to have influenced the kings. Among men of Roman extraction there is Avitus' correspondent Arigius, who may well be identified with the Aridius who advised Gundobad during the siege of Avignon.<sup>28</sup> More interesting perhaps is Heraclius, a rhetor, who is said by Avitus to have delivered panegyrics for one of the Burgundian kings.<sup>29</sup> He and Avitus seem to have been related, perhaps by marriage, and they were not above exchanging insults. Heraclius may have gone on to become bishop of St-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. If so, he might be compared with Rusticus, who Ennodius tells us held some sort of secular office before becoming bishop of Lyon in c. 494.<sup>30</sup> Another parallel would be the great-grandfather and namesake of Gregory of Tours, who was *comes* of Autun before becoming bishop of Langres.<sup>31</sup> From an earlier generation there is Syagrius, the Solon of the Burgundians in Sidonius' phrase,<sup>32</sup> which may imply that he was influential in the drafting of some of the laws which were to be gathered together by Sigismund into the *Liber constitutionum* of 517.<sup>33</sup> He cannot have compiled the so-called *Lex Romana Burgundionum*, which is better described by the title *Forma et Expositio legum Romanarum*. This would seem to have been put together in c. 500, and it certainly influenced the *Liber constitutionum*: but Syagrius' earlier work may have provided a basis for the collection.<sup>34</sup> And among Roman advisers, there is the nameless courtier of Chilperic, lampooned in the *Vita patrum Iurensium*.<sup>35</sup>

In some ways more interesting are a cluster of men of Burgundian origin, apparently educated, and certainly influential. There is Avitus' correspondent Ansemundus.<sup>36</sup> He may or may not be the same as a *comes* Aunemundus who signs the *Prima constitutio* of Sigismund's law code:<sup>37</sup> the names are

<sup>26</sup> Ian N. Wood, Review article: Landscapes compared, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 15/2 (2007) 223–237, at 236–237.

<sup>27</sup> Ian N. Wood, Incest, law and the Bible in sixth-century Gaul, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 7/3 (1998) 291–303.

<sup>28</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula* 50, ed. Peiper 78–79; Avitus of Vienne, *Letters and Selected Prose* 50, trans. Shanzer/Wood 326–330.

<sup>29</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae* 53, 54, 95 and 96, ed. Peiper 81–83, 102–103; Avitus of Vienne, *Letters and Selected Prose* 53, 54, 95 and 96, ed. Shanzer/Wood 315–323.

<sup>30</sup> Ennodius, *Vita Epifani* 151 (ed. Friedrich Vogel, *MGH AA* 7, Berlin 1885) 84–109, at 103; Avitus of Vienne, *Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Shanzer/Wood 315.

<sup>31</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum* VII, 1 (ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH SS rer. Merov.* 1, 2, Hannover 1885) 661–774, at 687.

<sup>32</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistula* V, 5, 3 (ed. André Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire* 3, 2, Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1970) 180–181.

<sup>33</sup> Ian N. Wood, Disputes in late fifth- and sixth-century Gaul. Some problems, in: *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Wendy Davies/Paul Fouracre (Cambridge 1986) 7–22, at 10.

<sup>34</sup> Ian N. Wood, *Le bréviare chez les Burgondes* (forthcoming).

<sup>35</sup> *Vita patrum Iurensium* II, 10 (= 92–95), ed. Martine 336–341; the anecdote seems to imply that the adviser was Gallo-Roman, see Martine, *Vie des pères du Jura* 336–337, n. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae* 55, 80 and 81, ed. Peiper 83–85, 93–94; Avitus of Vienne, *Letters and Selected Prose* 55, 80 and 81, trans. Shanzer/Wood 291–294, 331–332.

<sup>37</sup> *Liber constitutionum, prima constitutio*, ed. von Salis 34.

actually different, but it is fairly clear from the content of one of Avitus' letters, which concerns judgement in a case of rape, that his correspondent was the *comes* of Vienne. Nor were his contacts with Avitus purely official, for he was also the recipient of festal communications from the bishop. His ability to cope with Avitus' florid Latin suggests that he was perfectly well educated. He may also have been the founder of the Vienne monasteries of St André-le-bas and St Pierre, whose benefactions are recorded in the *Donatio Ansemundi*.<sup>38</sup> In both Avitus' correspondence and in the *Donatio* we see a leading Burgundian (or perhaps two of the same or similar names) acting to all intents and purposes as a Gallo-Roman aristocrat. More elusive is the shadowy figure of Hymnemosus, who was initially a member of Gundobad's court, but who absconded to enter the monastic life in the monasteries of the Grigny federation, and eventually became the first abbot of Sigismund's foundation of Agaune.<sup>39</sup> His name, which is so appropriate for a man who was to be put in charge of a monastery known for its adoption of the *laus perennis*, is presumably a skillfully Latinised version of something rather more Germanic, like *Imnemos*.<sup>40</sup> The fact that he could rise to become abbot of such a prestigious house suggests that his education was more than minimal.

From all these men we can get a picture of what Patrick Wormald called "the educated class of the province". Because of the nature of our evidence for the Burgundian kingdom, we learn mainly about the influence of ecclesiastics, but we do see secular figures, already in the 460s. Nor are these advisers exclusively Gallo-Roman in origin: among Burgundians there is the ecclesiastic Hymnemosus alongside the secular Ansemundus. As we have seen, the rulers they influenced were men of Burgundian extraction, men indeed who clearly had a sense of their own Gibichung dynasty,<sup>41</sup> yet who saw themselves not as 'Heerkönige', but rather as Roman officials, as *magistri militum*.

To find comparable documentation for the Merovingians, we need to move forward in time to the second half of the sixth century. It is in the collection known as the *Epistulae Austrasicae* that we first get a glimpse of Frankish diplomatic writing equivalent to that displayed by Cassiodorus in Italy and Avitus among the Burgundians. Unlike the *Variae* or the Avitus collection the *Epistulae Austrasicae* does not represent the correspondence of a single individual, but rather exemplary letters of a large number of writers stretching over a century.<sup>42</sup> The collection was probably made during the reign of Childebert II. It includes a number of significant clusters, not least a group of letters written in the mid 580s concerned with the fate of a Merovingian princess and her son.<sup>43</sup> Ingund, the daughter of Sigibert and Brunhild, had married the Visigothic prince Hermenegild. After the failure of his revolt against his father Leovigild, she fell into the hands of the Byzantines and was taken to Africa, where she died.<sup>44</sup> Her young son Athanagild was taken on to Constantinople. As a result Ingund's brother Childebert II and his mother Brunhild fired off a series of letters to the East, which, although they failed in their objective of securing the return of Athanagild, demonstrate the diplomatic expertise of the Austrasian court.

The *Epistolae Austrasicae* are not the only letters in which we find Brunhild. She also appears in the correspondence of Gregory the Great.<sup>45</sup> Of course, since Gregory wrote to Æthelberht of Kent, the fact of his writing to the Merovingian court is no guarantee of its sophistication. On the other hand, Gregory's correspondence does add to the impression that the Austrasian and Burgundian courts

<sup>38</sup> *Diplomata, chartae, epistolae, leges aliaque instrumenta ad res Gallo-Francicas spectantia* 1 (ed. Jean Marie Pardessus, Paris 1843) 2. See also Patrick Amory, *The textual transmission of the Donatio Ansemundi*, in: *Francia* 20 (1993) 163–183.

<sup>39</sup> *Vita abbatum Acaunensium sine epitaphiis* 1–8, ed. Krusch 329–336.

<sup>40</sup> I am indebted to Wolfgang Haubrichs for this suggestion.

<sup>41</sup> Apparent from the regnal list in the *Liber constitutionum* 3, ed. von Salis 43.

<sup>42</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* (ed. Wilhelm Gundlach, MGH EE 3, Berlin 1892) 110–153. The fullest study remains Paul Gouibert, *Byzance avant l'Islam* 2. *Byzance et l'occident sous les successeurs de Justinien 1: Byzance et les Francs* (Paris 1955) 94–202, but it is primarily concerned with the latest letters in the collection.

<sup>43</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 25–39 and 43–45, ed. Gundlach 138–145 and 149–151.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* VI, 40, 43 and VIII, 18, 21, 28, ed. Krusch/Levison 310, 314–316 and 384, 387, 390–391.

<sup>45</sup> Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum* XI, 49 and XIII, 5 (ed. Dag Norberg, CC SL 140–140A, Turnhout 1982) 948–949 and 997–1000; for the context of Gregory's letters to Brunhild cf. Ian N. Wood, *The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English*, in: *Speculum* 69 (1994) 1–17; id., *Augustine's Journey*, in: *Canterbury Cathedral Chronicle* (1998) 28–44.

during the time of Brunhild's grandchildren were fully integrated into the world of international diplomacy.

We do not know who penned the letters of Childebert II and Brunhild. Although Merovingians of the late sixth century were literate,<sup>46</sup> as was Brunhild, to judge by Venantius Fortunatus' comments on her, royalty are unlikely to have written their own letters. We do, however, know one of the men who formulated the legislation of Childebert's reign.<sup>47</sup> The king's Cologne decrees of c. 594 are authenticated by Asclepiodotus.<sup>48</sup> He is probably to be identified with Asclepiodotus, Guntram's referendary, who delivered letters from the king to the council of Valence in 585.<sup>49</sup> This being the case, he may have been involved in the drafting of Guntram's highly civilized edict addressed to the bishops, priests and judges of his kingdom on 10th November in the same year.<sup>50</sup> He may also be identified with the patricius of Provence who received letters from Gregory the Great in 599 and 601.<sup>51</sup> Other official documents have been attributed to him, including the shorter prologue of *Lex Salica*,<sup>52</sup> but it is probably safer to regard these as the products of other men who had been similarly educated.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, they are evidence of the official style of the late-sixth- and early-seventh-century Merovingian court.

We know a good deal about the court circle of Childebert II, and not just because of the group of Ingund letters in the *Epistulae Austrasicae*. Among the early influences on Childebert was his *nutricius*, Gogo, who continued to serve him after his father's murder, writing at least one letter on his behalf over the Frankish intervention in the Lombard wars.<sup>54</sup> He was clearly a man of some learning,<sup>55</sup> and was among Fortunatus' early patrons.<sup>56</sup> Not surprisingly he appears frequently in Fortunatus' poetry<sup>57</sup> and briefly in Gregory of Tours' *Historiae*.<sup>58</sup>

Gregory himself has much to say about court politics, knowing them from the inside as a subject first of Sigibert, then of Chilperic, Guntram and finally of Childebert II. As a result, we see bishops and laymen advising the kings on a variety of matters. One of the most interesting of these figures is Egidius of Rheims, the bishop who consecrated Gregory to the see of Tours.<sup>59</sup> He first appears in Gregory's *Historiae* as a suspected supporter of prince Merovech.<sup>60</sup> Subsequently he was a member of two embassies from Childebert's court, which tried to persuade Chilperic to help overthrow Guntram, but when the alliance failed, Childebert's army turned on him.<sup>61</sup> He was later used by Childebert as an ambassador to Guntram, and not surprisingly was badly received.<sup>62</sup> Guntram warned Childebert against him when the two kings met face to face.<sup>63</sup> As a result the bishop found it necessary to make

<sup>46</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* VI, 24, ed. Krusch/Levison 291.

<sup>47</sup> Patrick Wormald, The decline of the Roman Empire and the survival of its aristocracy, in: *Journal of Roman Studies* 66 (1976) 224; Ian N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (London 1994) 107–108.

<sup>48</sup> *Decretio Childeberti* 3 (ed. Karl August Eckhardt, *Pactus legis Salicae*, MGH LL nat. Germ. 4, 1, Hannover 1962) 267–273, at 269.

<sup>49</sup> Odette Pontal, *Die Synoden im Merowingerreich* (Paderborn 1986) 143–145.

<sup>50</sup> *Guntchramni regis edictum* (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL *Capitularia regum Francorum* 1, Hannover 1883/ND 1984) 10–12.

<sup>51</sup> Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum* IX, 226 and XI, 43, ed. Norberg 800 and 940–941.

<sup>52</sup> Patrick Wormald, *Lex scripta and verbum regis. Legislation and Germanic kingship from Euric to Cnut*, in: *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. Peter Hayes Sawyer/Ian N. Wood (Leeds 1977) 105–138, at 108.

<sup>53</sup> Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms* 107–108.

<sup>54</sup> *Epistolae Austrasicae* 48, ed. Gundlach 152–153. He was also the author of *Epistolae* 13, 16 and 22, ed. Gundlach 127–128, 130 and 135. On the wars cf. Ian N. Wood, *The frontiers of western Europe. Developments east of the Rhine in the sixth century*, in: *The Sixth Century. Production, Distribution and Demand*, ed. Richard Hodges/William Bowden (*Transformation of the Roman World* 3, Leiden/Boston/Köln 1998) 231–253.

<sup>55</sup> Dag Norberg, *Ad epistolas varias merovingici aevi adnotationes*, in: *Eranos* 35 (1937) 105–119, at 111.

<sup>56</sup> Judith W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus. A Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford 1992) 136–140.

<sup>57</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen* VII, 1–4 (ed. Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat* 2, Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2003) 85–90; see also the useful entry on Gogo in the biographical notes appended to Judith George, *Venantius Fortunatus. Personal and political poems* (Liverpool 1995) 126–127.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* V, 46 and VI, 1, ed. Krusch/Levison 256 and 265.

<sup>59</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina* V, 3 and 13–16, ed. Reydellet 2, 2 and 17.

<sup>60</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* V, 18, ed. Krusch/Levison 225.

<sup>61</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* VI, 3 and 31, ed. Krusch/Levison 267 and 301.

<sup>62</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* VII, 14, ed. Krusch/Levison 335.

<sup>63</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* VII, 33, ed. Krusch/Levison 354.

his peace with the younger king.<sup>64</sup> He was, however, exposed as a member of a plot against Brunhild and Childebert when one of the conspirators, Sunnigisl, confessed under torture.<sup>65</sup> Egidius claimed to be innocent, but was exposed through an examination of documents which were proved on paleographical grounds to be forged, and through an inspection of the shorthand copies of his own letters which had been kept by a scribe. As a result he was removed from his bishopric and exiled to Strasbourg. A good deal of secreted wealth was found in his treasury.<sup>66</sup>

It is easy to fall into the trap of seeing Egidius as a ruthless schemer, who gets his just deserts, which is the first impression given by Gregory's narrative. In fact, however, rather than seeing him as a villain, it is perfectly possible to read him partly as a victim of changing circumstances. That a faction of Childebert's court decided to ally with Chilperic rather than Guntram may not have been so foolish after Sigibert's murder, not least because Chilperic had taken over large amounts of Sigibert's territory, including Tours, and there was a need to survive in new political circumstances. Gregory himself, as a one-time subject of Sigibert, may well have been Egidius' main contact among Chilperic's bishops.<sup>67</sup> Certainly he had some sympathy for the man, and he may have helped protect him from the full force of the law when he was finally tried and convicted.<sup>68</sup> The somewhat critical impression given by Gregory's narrative may have been an intentional screen to keep the reader from realising that the bishop of Tours himself had been involved in many of Egidius' schemes. What left the bishop of Rheims and his co-conspirators high and dry was the murder of Chilperic. But from our point of view, the fact that some sort of logic can be found in the position taken by Egidius is less interesting than the manner of his fall: he was exposed by a paleographical exercise, which demonstrated that one of his claims was based on a forged document, and he was further incriminated by the shorthand copies of his correspondence. He was clearly a somewhat underhand politician, but he was also a bureaucrat. Fortunatus additionally presents him as a reforming bishop and a keen opponent of heresy.<sup>69</sup>

We meet Egidius as an envoy for Sigibert and Childebert II to both Chilperic and Guntram.<sup>70</sup> But the most interesting agent of all is arguably Gregory of Tours himself.<sup>71</sup> He was certainly involved in discussions following the Treaty of Andelot (587), in which Guntram and Childebert had come to terms over a number of issues, not least the problems of jurisdiction over several of the *civitates* of Gaul which had been matters of dispute since the murder of Sigibert and, indeed, before.<sup>72</sup> The following year Gregory was sent as a legate of Childebert to Guntram's court at Chalon, to hear the latter king's complaints about his nephew's failure to abide by the treaty. The bishop's involvement at this stage is emphasised by the fact that Guntram produced the document for him to see, even though he apparently already knew its contents and was ready to testify to Childebert's concern to abide by them. He was subsequently able to transcribe the entire treaty into his *Histories*, where it stands out as one of the longest documents to be preserved in the text.<sup>73</sup> Exactly what this tells us about Gregory's purpose at this stage of the *Histories* is unclear, but there can be no doubt that he was at the heart of political discussion: one might even wonder whether he had been involved in drawing up the treaty – which would help explain how he was in a position to copy the whole text into his *Histories*.

<sup>64</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* IX, 14, ed. Krusch/Levison 428.

<sup>65</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* X, 19, ed. Krusch/Levison 510–513.

<sup>66</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* X, 19, ed. Krusch/Levison 513.

<sup>67</sup> For one visit to Egidius cf. Gregory of Tours, *Libri de virtutibus sancti Martini* III, 17 (ed. Wilhelm Arndt/Bruno Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 1, 2, Hannover 1885) 584–661, at 636–637; on the political situation involving Gregory cf. Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton 1993) 73–76.

<sup>68</sup> Van Dam, *Saints* 75–76.

<sup>69</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen* III, 15 (ed. Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat* 1, Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1994) 113–115.

<sup>70</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* VI, 3 and VII, 14, ed. Krusch/Levison 267 and 335.

<sup>71</sup> Guy Halsall, *Nero and Herod? The death of Chilperic and Gregory's writing of history*, in: *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. Kathleen Mitchell/Ian N. Wood (*Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions* 8. Medieval and Early Modern Peoples, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2002) 337–350, at 345–346.

<sup>72</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* IX, 20, ed. Krusch/Levison 434–441.

<sup>73</sup> The others concern Radegund's monastery at Poitiers; see Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* IX, 39 and X, 16, ed. Krusch/Levison 460–463 and 505–509.

While Gregory gives us the seedy narrative of Merovingian politics, and his *Histories*, together with the *Epistulae Austrasicae* and the *Decretum Childeberti*, provide the evidence of the bureaucracy in action, it is in the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus that the ideological pretensions of the Merovingian kings of the second half of the sixth century – and their subjects – are most clearly expressed. Charibert, Sigibert and Chilperic are all dignified with panegyrics, and each is differently characterised: Sigibert who merits an *epithalamium* is presented in essentially Roman terms,<sup>74</sup> Charibert is a new David and Solomon,<sup>75</sup> while Chilperic is described in terms appropriate for the precise context in which the panegyric was delivered: Fortunatus seems to have used his verse to influence the outcome of the trial of Gregory of Tours at Berny-Rivière, praising the king's clemency.<sup>76</sup> Chilperic would also have wanted to be described in the same language as Fortunatus had used for Sigibert. He had considerable pretensions when it came to matters of culture, entirely unjustified in Gregory's eyes.<sup>77</sup> He deliberately tried to ape the practices of Roman emperors, having a large salver made to the glory of the Franks – Gregory implies that the king was intent on rivalling gifts he had been sent by the emperor Tiberius.<sup>78</sup> He also revived circus races at Soissons and Paris.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, by the time of Asclepiodorus at least, if not of the arrival of Fortunatus in Gaul, the Merovingian state boasted a style of government which is comparable in certain respects to that of the Burgundians under the Gibichungs or the Ostrogoths under Theodoric. Can we infer, however, that the Merovingian state was as advanced in the first half of the century as it was in the second? For Austrasia, at least in the 540s, we can answer in the affirmative: it was not without reason that Wormald cited the court of Theudebert as an example of a court influenced by an educated elite.

Once again our best evidence comes from the *Epistulae Austrasicae*. Most notable are two letters addressed by Theudebert to Justinian, one of them dealing with the failure of the king to supply troops for the Italian campaign,<sup>80</sup> and the other famously expounding his titles and claims to rule.<sup>81</sup> This boastful letter has been linked to Agathias' astonishing account of Theudebert's pretensions, in which the Byzantine historian claimed that the Frank even had his eye on Constantinople.<sup>82</sup> Theudebert's ambitions, at least in Italy, are more certainly displayed on his coinage, notably the gold *solidi* minted with his name and image,<sup>83</sup> which seem to have attracted the scorn of Procopius.<sup>84</sup> The king's reputation in Francia is better seen from a further letter in the *Epistulae Austrasicae*, in which Aurelian, once identified with the bishop of Arles, provides what has been described as "a letter of adulation and exhortation" and "a complete little *Mirror of Princes*".<sup>85</sup> To this material may be added the letter sent to Justinian by Theudebert's son, Theudebald, when he took over his father's kingdom.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen VI*, 1, ed. Reydellet 2, 43–50; see the analysis of Marc Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Seville* (Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, Rome 1981) 321–322.

<sup>75</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen V*, 2, ed. Reydellet 2, 53–57; Reydellet, *Royauté* 328–330.

<sup>76</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen IX*, 1 (ed. Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat 3*, Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2004) 8–15; Judith W. George, Poet as politician. Venantius Fortunatus' panegyric to king Chilperic, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 15 (1989) 5–18. A different view is taken by Halsall, *Nero* 341.

<sup>77</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae V*, 44, ed. Krusch/Levison 252–254.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae VI*, 1, ed. Krusch/Levison 265–266.

<sup>79</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae V*, 17, ed. Krusch/Levison 216.

<sup>80</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 19, ed. Gundlach 132.

<sup>81</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 20, ed. Gundlach 132–133.

<sup>82</sup> Agathias, *Historiarum libri quinque A*. 4, 1–4 (ed. Rudolfus Keydell, *Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae*, Series Berolyniensis 2, Berlin 1967) 13–14, trans.: Agathias, *The Histories*. Translation with an Introduction and Short Explanatory Notes (ed. Joseph D. Frendo, *Corpus fontium Byzantinae*, Series Berolyniensis 2A, Berlin 1975) 12; Roger Collins, *Theodebert I. Rex magnus Francorum*, in: *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. Patrick Wormald (Oxford 1983) 7–33, at 9–10.

<sup>83</sup> Collins, *Theodebert* 27–30.

<sup>84</sup> Procopius, *De bello Gothico VII*, 33, 5–6 (ed. Henry B. Dewing, *Procopius: History of the wars* 4, Loeb Classical Library 173, Cambridge-Mass. 1961) 438–439.

<sup>85</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 10, ed. Gundlach 124–126; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings* (London 1962) 191–192; the identification with the bishop of Arles is questioned by Collins, *Theodebert* 18–22.

<sup>86</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 18, ed. Gundlach 131–132.



Another group of letters included in the Austrasian collection show us one of the leading ecclesiastical figures of the kingdom at work. Nicetius of Trier outlived Theudebert and Theudebald, but he was active under both of them. Gregory of Tours presents him as a moralist, and in particular as a critic of Theudebert's marital life.<sup>87</sup> The Nicetius letters deal with Frankish intervention in affairs in Italy relating both to the Gothic wars and to the Tri-Capitoline schism.<sup>88</sup> The Three Chapters controversy probably prompted a stern letter of rebuke from the bishop to Justinian himself over matters theological.<sup>89</sup> Nicetius' correspondence also stretches to the somewhat later letter to Chlodowintha, encouraging her to convert her husband Alboin from arianism.<sup>90</sup> Some of this correspondence may be seen as concerned with diocesan or even private matters: there is an anonymous epistle praising the bishop's theology,<sup>91</sup> and a note written by Rufus of Sion, accompanying a group of Italian workers.<sup>92</sup> But it is probable that other of the bishop's letters (including those addressed to Italy and that to Chlodowintha) were written with the approval of the king, and represented official views of the court. That he had the king's ear is indicated by a letter from Mapinius of Rheims, apologising for his inability to attend a council summoned by Theudebald, which was to convene in Toul on the first of June.<sup>93</sup> Mapinius wanted Nicetius to make his excuses to the king.

We can add a little to what the *Epistulae Austrasicae* tell us about the court circle of Theudebert if we turn once again to Gregory of Tours. We get one, positive, glimpse of Theudebert's financial administration from the pages of Gregory, who tells us that, at the request of bishop Desideratus, the king made a loan of seven thousand *aurei* to help revive commerce in the city of Verdun, and that when the time came for the loan to be repaid, the king remitted it, saying he had no need of the money.<sup>94</sup> More illuminating is what Gregory has to say about the tax-collector Parthenius.<sup>95</sup> He was particularly hated by the Franks for having levied taxes on them, and they took advantage of the king's death to kill his agent. There has been some debate as to whether Parthenius was instituting new taxes or not:<sup>96</sup> what is important is that he shows us that under Theudebert there was some attempt to have a working tax-system, and that the system was being implemented by a man of Gallo-Roman aristocratic family, indeed he was the grandson of Ruricius of Limoges, and was distantly related to Avitus of Vienne.<sup>97</sup>

If we turn to Theudebert's uncles, the sons of Clovis and Chrotechildis, it is harder to reconstruct a picture of the educated classes advising Merovingian kings. Of course this may simply be a question of a lacuna in the evidence. We can, however, deduce a little about the courts of Chlothar and Childobert from their legislation.<sup>98</sup> The *Pactus pro tenore pacis* is made up of two decrees, one issued by each king. The legislation is important for what it shows of the implementation of law in small communities, especially by the *centena*.<sup>99</sup> It may be basic, and it is certainly a good deal less advanced than the Treaty of Andelot, but it demonstrates a clear concern for peace. It reveals nothing, however, of the input of Gallo-Roman advisers. On the other hand, nor would the *Decretum Childoberti*, but for the

<sup>87</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum* XVII, 2, ed. Krusch 729–730.

<sup>88</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 5, 6, ed. Gundlach 116–118; on the Gothic wars, Wood, *Frontiers* 231–254; On Frankish involvement in the Tri-Capitoline schism cf. Ian N. Wood, *The Franks and Papal Theology*, in: *The Crisis of the Oikumene. The Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity in the Sixth-Century Mediterranean*, ed. Celia Chazelle/Catherine Cubitt (*Studies in the Early Middle Ages* 14, Turnhout 2007) 223–242.

<sup>89</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 7, ed. Gundlach 118–119.

<sup>90</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 8, ed. Gundlach 119–120.

<sup>91</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 24, ed. Gundlach 137–138.

<sup>92</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 21, ed. Gundlach 133–134.

<sup>93</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 11, ed. Gundlach 126–127.

<sup>94</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* III, 34, ed. Krusch/Levison 129–130.

<sup>95</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* III, 36, ed. Krusch/Levison 131–132.

<sup>96</sup> Walter Goffart, *Old and new in Merovingian taxation*, in: id., *Rome's Fall and After* (London 1989) 213–231, at 224.

<sup>97</sup> On his family, Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* III, 36, ed. Krusch/Levison 131–132; Karl Friedrich Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien* (Tübingen 1948) 199. See Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford 2005) 167–168.

<sup>98</sup> *Pactus pro tenore pacis* (ed. Alfred Boretius, *MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum* 1, Hannover 1883/ND 1984) 3–7.

<sup>99</sup> Alexander C. Murray, *From Roman to Frankish Gaul. 'Centenarii' and 'Centenae' in the administration of the Frankish kingdom*, in: *Traditio* 44 (1988) 59–100.

presence of Asclepiodorus' name. And there is evidence to give us a fuller sense of a court culture under Childebert I. Although this last king was dead by the time Venantius Fortunatus arrived in Francia, the Italian poet did include what has been seen as a genuine panegyric of him in his poem on a church in Paris.<sup>100</sup> Like Fortunatus's presentation of Charibert, that of Childebert is essentially biblical, concentrating primarily on the image of Melchisadek. This religious representation of the king comes as something of a contrast to that given by Gregory of Tours, for whom Childebert is an essentially opportunistic figure.<sup>101</sup> The canons of the Church councils, however, provide some reason for thinking that the image presented by Fortunatus was not wholly without foundation. The king joined with his fellow rulers Theuderic and Chlothar to summon the second council of Orléans,<sup>102</sup> but the canons of the third and fifth councils held in that city are dated by his reign alone.<sup>103</sup> The last of these is significant for its protection of the *xenodochium* founded by the king and his wife Ultrogotha.<sup>104</sup> And Gregory the Great in his correspondence was aware of Childebert's support for the monastery of Arles.<sup>105</sup> The king's legislation restricting the movement of Jews during Easter was remembered by the bishops at the first council of Mâcon.<sup>106</sup> Equally the piety of Ultrogotha was remembered as a model in the *Vita Balthildis*.<sup>107</sup> Her garden, laid out by Childebert, is the subject of a poem of Fortunatus.<sup>108</sup> The evidence for Childebert, therefore, allows us to conclude that there was more to him than is implied by Gregory of Tours' account, but we scarcely have a picture of a king whose court was deeply influenced by an educated elite of Gallo-Romans.

The evidence for such influence on Clovis is perhaps a little more impressive. Gregory's narrative, of course, is a good deal more favourable, though it is from Fredegar that we learn of the role of Aurelianus in securing Chrotechildis as a bride for the king.<sup>109</sup> In fact he looks remarkably like a counterpart for Gundobad's adviser Aridius, and one may well conclude with the text's editor that he is "wohl unhistorisch"<sup>110</sup>. Equally problematic is Paternus, the other Roman supporter of Clovis who appears in the pages of Fredegar.<sup>111</sup> We are on safer ground if we turn once again to the *Epistulae Austrasicae*. A group of four letters from Remigius give us some slight evidence for Gallo-Roman influence on Clovis. The first of them is a letter of consolation, written to the king on the death of his sister Albochledis,<sup>112</sup> which forms an interesting counterpart to Avitus' address to Gundobad on the death of his daughter.<sup>113</sup> Probably earlier in date, and certainly more famous, is the letter written by Remigius to Clovis on his acquisition of the province of Belgica Secunda.<sup>114</sup> As Wallace-Hadrill commented, "It is a hortatory letter of a recognized pattern", but he goes on, "[t]he tone of the letter is patronising: the pagan barbarian will wish to reflect on the advantages of having the Gallo-Roman Church on his side."<sup>115</sup> Clovis did, of course, come to realise those advantages, not least in the Vouillé campaign,

<sup>100</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen* II, 10, ed. Reydellet 1, 66–67; Reydellet, *Royauté* 322–327.

<sup>101</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* III, 9, 18, 23, 24, 31 and IV, 16, 17, 20, ed. Krusch/Levison 106, 117–120, 122–123, 127–128 and 148–150, 152.

<sup>102</sup> Council of Orléans (533 June 23) (ed. Jean Gaudemet/Brigitte Basdevant, *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens* 2, 1, SC 353, Paris 1989) 194–207.

<sup>103</sup> Council of Orléans, ed. Gaudemet/Basdevant 1, 227–229 and 300–349.

<sup>104</sup> Council of Orléans 5, 15, ed. Gaudemet/Basdevant 1, 310–313.

<sup>105</sup> Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum* IX, 217, ed. Norberg, 780–781.

<sup>106</sup> Council of Mâcon 14 (581–583) (ed. Jean Gaudemet/Brigitte Basdevant, *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens* 2, 2, SC 354, Paris 1989) 426–485, at 436–437; this is perhaps linked to Council of Orléans 3, 14, ed. Gaudemet/Basdevant 1, 242–245.

<sup>107</sup> *Vita sanctae Balthildis* 18 (ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH SS rer. Merov.* 2, Hannover 1888) 475–508, at 505–506.

<sup>108</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen* VI, 6, ed. Reydellet 2, 76.

<sup>109</sup> Fredegar, *Chronicae cum continuationibus* III, 18 (ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH SS rer. Merov.* 2, Hannover 1888/ND 1984) 1–193, at 99–100, trans.: *Quellen zur Geschichte des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts* (ed. Andreas Kusternig/Herbert Haupt/Herwig Wolfram, *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters* 4a, Darmstadt 1982) 3–325.

<sup>110</sup> Ed. Kusternig 103 n. 23.

<sup>111</sup> Fredegar, *Chronicae* II, 58, ed. Krusch 82–83.

<sup>112</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 1, ed. Gundlach 112–113.

<sup>113</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula* 5, ed. Peiper 32–33.

<sup>114</sup> *Epistulae Austrasicae* 2, ed. Gundlach 113.

<sup>115</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Long-Haired Kings* 166.

when he presented himself as a catholic.<sup>116</sup> His baptism prompted a famous letter of advice from Avitus, albeit bishop of another kingdom.<sup>117</sup> Subsequently Clovis summoned the Council of Orléans, which in large measure dealt with newly acquired territory in Aquitaine.<sup>118</sup> In religious matters, then, we do see the Gallo-Roman episcopate influencing and being used by Clovis.

Leaving aside the evidence of the Council of Orléans, the sources do not provide information about the Frankish king's court or his administration at work. One might see this as a mere lacuna in the evidence. But, unlike the *Liber constitutionum* or the *Decretum Childeberti*, the *Pactus legis Salicae* gives little away as to how it was created. The shorter prologue, with its account of the work of Wisogast, Arogast, Salegast and Widogast,<sup>119</sup> is not usually thought to amount to an accurate narrative of how the text was compiled, but it scarcely leads the reader to suppose sophisticated work by Roman lawyers on the scale we can infer for the *Breviary of Alaric* or even for the Burgundian compilations. We may guess the existence of models in Roman provincial law and of some Germanic tradition,<sup>120</sup> but the extent of Roman influence is paltry by comparison with the evidence of the near-contemporary Burgundian *Forma et Expositio legum Romanarum* and the *Liber constitutionum*.

As Wallace-Hadrill remarked, "Clovis is Gregory's Clovis, whether we like it or not."<sup>121</sup> We can compare aspects of his portrait with aspects of those of Gundobad. But we can get very little beyond that. We know that the emperor bestowed some title on Clovis in 508, but it is not clear that it made any difference to his authority or style of rule.<sup>122</sup> Arguably we can do rather better with Childeric, where there is a case for seeing him as holding a Roman military position,<sup>123</sup> but this is complicated by the evidence of the grave, which reveals him both as an official proud of his association with empire, and equally as a leader who drew on a very non-Roman symbolic world.<sup>124</sup> Although the description of 'Heerkönig' does not seem quite adequate for Childeric or for Clovis, it seems a good deal more apposite for them than it does for any of the Gibichung rulers after Gundioc – or indeed for the immediate descendents of Clovis, the make-up of whose armies are far from certain.<sup>125</sup>

The difference between the Gibichungs and the Merovingians before the reign of Theudebert may be no more than a matter of the survival of source material. But there is a case for thinking that Merovingian government, at least before the 530s, was not as sophisticated as that of the Gibichung kingdom. Indeed, we may guess that the sophistication of the Merovingian kingdom grew as a result of its military take-over of Aquitaine and Burgundy, and its diplomatic acquisition of Provence. The negotiations surrounding this last episode may well have been a good deal more important in relations between the Merovingians and the Byzantines than the far more famous 'consulship' of Clovis,<sup>126</sup> and they may well have been a spur to developments in Frankish diplomacy.

Following the expansion of Merovingian power Roman aristocrats from central and southern Gaul could end up as hostages in the Frankish North, as a result of the conflicts between the Merovingians: most famously there is Gregory's relative Attalus.<sup>127</sup> At the same time some Gallo-Romans were given significant employment in the environs of the Austrasian court: Theuderic brought clerics from

<sup>116</sup> Ian N. Wood, Gregory of Tours and Clovis, in: *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 63 (1985) 249–272, at 270.

<sup>117</sup> Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula* 46, ed. Peiper 75–76.

<sup>118</sup> See the concise analysis by Wallace-Hadrill, *Long-Haired Kings* 177.

<sup>119</sup> *Pactus legis Salicae*, prologus, ed. Eckhardt 2–3.

<sup>120</sup> Patrick Wormald, *The Leges Barbarorum. Law and ethnicity in the post-Roman West*, in: *Regna et Gentes. The Relationship between Late Antique Peoples and Kingdoms*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz/Jörg Jarnut/Walter Pohl (*The Transformation of the Roman World* 13, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2003) 21–53, at 28–33.

<sup>121</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Long-Haired Kings* 163.

<sup>122</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II, 1, ed. Krusch/Levison 38; Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge 1986) 335–337.

<sup>123</sup> Patrick Périn/Michael Kazanski, *Das Grab Childerichs I.*, in: *Die Franken. Wegbereiter Europas. Vor 1500 Jahren: König Chlodwig und seine Erben* (Mainz 1996) 173–182, esp. 178–182.

<sup>124</sup> Périn/Kazanski, *Grab Childerichs I.*; there is a convenient survey of the finds from both the 1653 and the 1983 excavations in Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford 1988) 58–64.

<sup>125</sup> Guy Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900* (London 2003) 40–53.

<sup>126</sup> Ian N. Wood, *The Fall of the Roman Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*, in: *Cross, Crescent and Conversion*, ed. Simon Barton/Peter Linehan (Leiden, 2008) 327–347, at 341–343.

<sup>127</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* III, 15, ed. Krusch/Levison 112–116.

Clermont to serve in the Church at Trier, among them Gregory's uncle Gallus.<sup>128</sup> More important is Parthenius. Exactly where he originated we do not know: but he certainly belonged to the bloc of aristocratic dynasties made up of the Ruricii, the Sidonii and the Aviti,<sup>129</sup> whose property stretched across from Limoges, through the Auvergne, to Vienne and Lyon. His service in the administration of Theudebert, therefore, illustrates the drift northwards of cultivated men from the centre of Gaul.

It may be possible to dismiss Theodoric's, or rather Cassiodorus', view of the backward nature of the Burgundian state,<sup>130</sup> but to accept that his critique of the Frankish kingdom has more to it.<sup>131</sup> In this reading, far from getting less Roman as time went on, the Merovingians became more so, at least during the sixth century: and the sources – Gregory, Venantius Fortunatus, the *Epistulae Austrasicae* and the *Decretum Childeberti* – show the Frankish rulers gradually putting together the pieces of an increasingly sophisticated governmental organisation. Gregory's narrative is not a good guide to changing patterns of government, because they really did not interest him, at least not as a subject for history writing. But the fact that we can reconstruct something of a career for Asclepiodus, but can say nothing of those involved in drawing up the *Pactus Legis Salicae* or the *Pactus pro tenore pacis* may be telling. So too may the changing subject matter of the *Epistulae Austrasicae*.

If it is fair to conclude that the government of the Frankish kingdom became increasingly sophisticated as the sixth century wore on, there are interesting conclusions to be drawn. The post-Roman period is not simply one of decline, whether steady or catastrophic, from Roman governmental practice. Instead, we may be faced with a variety of patterns in which some states – for example, those of the Visigoths before 507, of the Ostrogoths, Burgundians, and Vandals – managed to continue elements of Roman government and administration from the start, while others – notably the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons, but arguably also the Visigoths in Spain<sup>132</sup> – had to reconstitute them. The history of post-Roman government may be as regional and as varied as the history of the post-Roman economy, and indeed at times it may be bucking any trend towards decline altogether.

<sup>128</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum* VI, 2, ed. Krusch 681.

<sup>129</sup> Stroheker, Adel 199.

<sup>130</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* I, 45–46 (ed. Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA 12, Berlin 1894) 1–398, at 39–42; Wood, *Latin Culture* 367–380.

<sup>131</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* II, 40–41, ed. Mommsen 70–73.

<sup>132</sup> The extent to which that reconstitution was effected by Leovigild rather than his predecessors is open to question, but it is clear that he instituted a new court style, Edward Arthur Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford 1969) 57.