MARRIAGE AND ALLIANCE
IN THE MEROVINGIAN KINGDOMS,
481-639

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The sources for studying the early Middle Ages make it clear that many saw kinship, both by blood and marriage, as an important and meaningful connection to others which should regulate one’s behavior. In examining more closely the history of the relations between kinsmen, however, it becomes quite evident that theory did not always meet practice. In fact, while no one necessarily denied the demands of kinship, other considerations often took precedence. What resulted was as much bloodshed and animosity between kinsmen as cooperation, and nowhere is this made more clear than in the Merovingian Frankish kingdoms of the sixth century.

An explanation of the meaning, motives and practical implications of the kinship connections of the Merovingians, both those by blood and those made through marriage to other royal families, is rooted in the particular nature of the Merovingian kingdoms and Frankish kingship. For most of the sixth century, there was more than one ruling Frankish king at a time. This created a situation, therefore, where the resources of the Frankish kingdom were divided among multiple kings. These kings, who were also close kinsmen, fought with each other, both directly and indirectly, for control over a greater portion of the wealth, land, and leudes (sworn followers) of the kingdom.
This dissertation offers a narrative interpretation of Merovingian history from the reign of Clovis I (r. 481-511) through the reign of Dagobert I (r. 629-639). The narrative focuses on the competitive nature of the Merovingian kingdoms and the role that foreign marriages could play in that competition. The Merovingians made alliances without reference to kinship when they needed military or political support, or sought opportunities for plunder and expansion. Good relations with their neighbors could lead to a marriage between them, but marriage was not the precursor to peace and cooperation. Rather, marriage with prestigious foreign kings, princes and princesses served to enhance the royal status of the Merovingians. This is why discussions of the foreign marriages of the Merovingians in the sources reveal a strong emphasis on wealth, status, royal blood, character and beauty rather than alliances, treaties, and peace.
Dedicated to my wife, Elizabeth
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ABBREVIATIONS

Cass. Var. = Magni Aurelii Cassiodori Variarum Libri XII, cura et studio A. J. Fridh (Turnholti Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii MCMLXXIII) CCSL XCVI.

Fred. III = Fredegarii et aliorum chronica. edidit Bruno Krusch (Hannoverae Impensis Bibliopoli Hahniani MDCCCLXXXVIII) Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum II.


GTH = Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Libri Historiarum X, editionem alteram curaverunt Bruno Krusch et Wilhelmus Levison (Hannoverae Impensis Bibliopoli Hahniani MCMLI) Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum I.

LHF = Liber Historiae Francorum. edidit Bruno Krusch (Hannoverae Impensis Bibliopoli Hahniani MDCCCLXXXVIII) Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum II.

PD HL = Pauli Historia Langobardorum edentibus L. Bethmann et G. Waitz (Hannoverae Impensis Bibliopoli Hahniani MDCCCLXXXVIII) Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Langobardarum et Italicarum Saec. VI-IX.

In the year 507, Clovis, the King of the Franks, was preparing for war against the Visigoths, who were led by their king, Alaric II. Both kings were related by marriage to the Ostrogothic king in Italy, Theodoric the Great. Alaric had married the daughter of Theodoric, who was himself married to the sister of Clovis. As these two mighty kings prepared for war, Theodoric was engaged in his own confrontation with the Byzantine emperor, Anastasius, over the question of Theodoric’s rule in Italy. To Theodoric, therefore, it was a time for the West to present a united front to the East, and he was counting on his marital kinship with Clovis and Alaric to quickly settle their dispute, re-establish peace in the West, so that he could focus his attention on his problems coming from the East. To this end, he, through his quaestor Cassiodorus, wrote letters to several of the Germanic rulers of the successor states to the Roman Empire in the West. In those letters, he expressed his desire to mediate a peace between the disputing parties, and he made explicit reference to their kinship by marriage (affinity, or affinitas in Latin) with himself as a reason why they should accept his involvement and settle their differences. His letter to Clovis is a particularly good example of his attitude: “The holy laws of
kinship by marriage [*affinitatis iura divina*] have purposed to take root among monarchs for this reason: that their tranquil spirit may bring the peace which peoples long for. For this is something sacred, which it is not right to violate by any conflict. For what hostages will ensure good faith, if it cannot be entrusted to the affections? Let rulers be allied by family [*sociantur proximitate*], so that separate nations may glory in a common policy, and tribal purposes join together, united, as it were, through special channels of concord.\(^1\)

Theodoric’s belief in the efficacy of his ‘marriage alliances’, however, was not borne out by the end results of his diplomacy. Clovis defeated and killed Alaric at the Battle of Vouillé later that year, and was supported in this enterprise by Gundobad, the King of the Burgundians, whose son was married to another of Theodoric’s daughters. Theodoric could only march in after the fact, secure a limit to Frankish expansion, and vengeance upon the Burgundians, while Clovis marched off to Tours and there received some kind of official imperial favor, which may have marked his ascension to the position of most favored Germanic ruler of the West, supplanting Theodoric.\(^2\) Thus, when the situation moved from theory to practice, Theodoric’s efforts to use the bonds of

\(^1\)Cass. *Var.* III.4: “*Adeo inter reges affinitatis iura divina coalescere voluerunt, ut per eorum placabilem animum proveniat quies optata popularum. Hoc enim sacram est, quod nulla permittitur commotione violari. Nam quibus obsidibus habeatur fides, si non credatur affectibus? Sociantur proximitate domini, ut nationes divisiæ simili debant voluntate gloriar et quasi per alveos quosdam concordiae adunata se possint gentium vota coniungere.*”

kinship to control, administer, or influence the diplomatic and military relationships among the rulers of Western Europe were a failure.

Our sources for studying the early Middle Ages make it clear that many saw kinship, both by blood and marriage, as an important and meaningful connection to others which should regulate one’s behavior. In examining more closely the history of the relations between kinsmen, however, it becomes quite evident that theory did not always meet practice. In fact, while no one necessarily denied the demands of kinship, numerous examples such as that just described between Theodoric, Clovis and Alaric, reveal that other considerations often took precedence among early medieval kings over the demands of kinship. What resulted was as much bloodshed and animosity between kinsmen as cooperation, and nowhere is this made more clear than in the Merovingian Frankish kingdoms of the sixth century.

**Frankish Kingship and Rivalry**

An explanation of the meaning, motives and practical implications of the kinship connections of the Merovingians, both those by blood and those made through marriage to other royal families, is rooted in the particular nature of the Merovingian kingdoms and Frankish kingship. The political world of the Merovingians of the sixth century had its own special features. For most of the sixth century, there was more than one ruling Frankish king at a time. This created a situation, therefore, where the resources of the Frankish kingdom were divided among multiple kings, a situation often referred to as the
Teilreiche (divisions of the kingdom). These kings, who were also close kinsmen, fought with each other, both directly and indirectly, for control over a greater portion of the wealth, land, and leudes (sworn followers) of the kingdom. As Ian Wood puts it: “the Merovingians were regularly at each other’s throats”. Of course, they also considered these rivals to be their natural allies, both against their other rivals, as well as against foreign foes. Henry A. Myers has summed up Merovingian kingship thus:

Frankish kingship turned out to be a very successful amalgam of German and Roman elements. Merovingian kings gained something from the Germanic conception of magic power inherent in the royal blood. Their attachment to their Germanic heritage is shown in their choice of names: with two significant exceptions [Samson and Corbus — see Appendix C], Merovingian kings gave their heirs purely Germanic names. They also kept their own royal blood remarkably pure, in spite of allowing their subjects to cross ethnic lines in marriage: with only two exceptions [Deuteria and Veneranda] — see Appendix C], Merovingian kings confined themselves to Germanic wives and even concubines. . . . On the other hand, Frankish kingship under the Merovingians took on late-Roman aspects, too, enlisting Roman concepts of law, administration, and (after some rough false starts) taxation. . . . The main thing which Gregory [of Tours’] portraits of royal personages of his own time in the second half of the

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sixth century indicate is that several generations after Clovis a great deal of agility was still in reality demanded of Frankish kings bent upon surviving, let alone maintaining their kingdoms intact for subsequent divisions among their heirs. Kingship was still the art of playing one potential enemy off against the other, of grabbing weakly defended territory, and of staying alive largely by seeing that persons with the means and motive to commit regicide are themselves done away with first. . . . Everyone seems to agree that it is unfortunate that kings and brothers do not keep their word for any longer than their immediate interests coincide and that royal rivalries have indeed contributed to making the times uncertain ones."

J. M. Wallace-Hadrill has also given a good description of the nature of Frankish kingship, which demanded that the king act like a king in order to maintain his position and beat out his rivals for power. Thus, on the one hand, Merovingian kings tried to live up to the Gallo-Roman bishops’ view of a proper Christian king. They rebuke sin, and try to be pious, generous and active. They also issue and re-issue law codes. “Clovis’ Lex Salica was reissued twice in the sixth century, once by his sons and once by his grandsons.” This is some of the best evidence for kings asserting their own royal position by doing what a strong and exemplary king, as well as Roman emperors, had

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5Henry A. Myers, in cooperation with Herwig Wolfram, Medieval Kingship (Chicago: 1982), 85-6. See also James, The Franks, 162-4: “We are unlikely to find very much in the way of ‘traditional Germanic characteristics’ in Merovingian kingship. The institution grew up within the Roman Empire, partly in response to the need of the Romans themselves to manipulate and organize military support.” (p. 163)


7Wallace-Hadrill, 187.
done before. On the other hand, these kings still had to act like proper Germanic kings. Their warband demanded military activity: “Plunder-raiding remained a principal occupation of the Merovingians; it was expected of them — without it, they sometimes found it difficult to control their warriors.”

Wallace-Hadrill described the Frankish king of the later sixth century as “a wild man: fierce, bloodthirsty and the slave of whim; also master of much treasure, and thus of many followers. This wealth came from taxation, subsidies, loot, inheritance and other sources.” The balancing act of a Merovingian king can perhaps be best summed up with Wallace-Hadrill’s description of Chilperic, “Gregory’s pet aversion”, who “was an able man of a certain cultivation, capable of acquiring some loosely heretical ideas in the field of theology. In him one detects, not perhaps a groping towards the ideal of the philosopher-king, but at any rate some notion that a taste for letters was proper for a king. It fitted in with carousing and hunting and vendettas, along with reverence for the shrines of saints and dependence on a Roman civil service still largely in the hands of laymen.”

Scholars have revealed the sub-Roman nature of the Frankish kingdoms in Late Antiquity. However, the interests of the Merovingian kings in plunder raiding, treasure, and a loyal warband, suggests that in many ways they still operated in a very Germanic

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8Wallace-Hadrill, 190.
9Wallace-Hadrill, 195.
10Wallace-Hadrill, 195.
world. A review of their internal rivalries, alliances, and marriages would seem to confirm this view. The key to their success — to becoming a greater king — was to act the part of a good Germanic king. If various Roman practices and ideas could enhance that position, they did not reject it, but always they had to be concerned to satisfy their warriors’ expectations of a Frankish king.

Being constantly involved in a competition over wealth, territory, and loyal followers, the Merovingians used a variety of means to raise their position within the Frankish world, and even beyond. One way in which Merovingians could enhance their status or prestige as king, both in comparison to their fellow competitors for power and among their subjects generally, was through the establishment of prestigious marriages to members of other royal families. These marriages stand in stark contrast to the political, diplomatic, and military alliances forged both between the competitors and with outside forces, which are usually signaled by specific alliance terminology, such as foedus, pax, or pactum.\(^{12}\) Their marriages with foreign ruling families display a greater stability than their alliances. While alliances were usually made with very specific, short-term goals in mind, and sometimes with a view towards longer-term peaceful relations generally between the parties, these either came to an end after the short-term goal was met, or were often broken when new circumstances demanded a new policy. In the course of the “long” sixth century of Frankish history, from 481 to 639, only one foreign bride was ever sent home, and only one other thought of returning home, that we know of. There is almost no record of breaking these marriages, except with the death of one partner. It

\(^{12}\)For more on the Latin vocabulary of alliance-making, see Appendix B.
would therefore seem impractical to make diplomacy policy or military decisions on the basis of one’s marital connections, and indeed, this dissertation will show that rarely, if ever, occurred.

An explanation of how marriages could play an important role in the competition between Frankish kings can be found in the notion of “competitive generosity”. Barbara Rosenwein’s work on early medieval immunities introduced me to this concept. Immunities were “royal documents that prohibited the king’s agents from entering onto certain lands to collect taxes and carry out judicial functions.”

Earlier historians had viewed such documents as very inflexible, which weakened the king’s position by taking away some of his power and authority — that they had been granted from a position of weakness. Rosenwein argues against this view, suggesting that medieval kings, such as Berengar I in Italy (r. 888-924), granted immunities not out of a position of weakness, but rather strength, and that while granting an immunity may appear to us as a diminution of power, in fact it enhanced the authority of the king. In giving gifts, whether of property or immunity, Berengar fit himself into the mold of his royal predecessors — he acted the way kings were supposed to act. Earlier Carolingian kings had been givers of property and immunity to various churches and nobles in northern Italy, and now Berengar was doing the same. In this way he placed himself firmly in the royal tradition — “As king, Berengar conceived his primary duty to be gift-giving.”


Rosenwein, 5-6.

Rosenwein, 150.
memory of those past kings in this way.  Rosenwein also demonstrated that similar considerations were made in the Merovingian period, when, for example, she suggests that Brunichild and Childebert II made donations to Autun when they inherited King Gunthramn’s kingdom, because that is where he had concentrated his gift-giving during his reign.

Armed with this notion of competitive generosity, we can better understand the nature of the competition among the Merovingian Franks. It especially explains, for example, why a Merovingian king would send his daughter and a large dowry to a foreign king, with little material or even political advantage evident. By doing so, he showed himself to be a generous giver, capable of granting further gifts to loyal followers. The profit lay in creating the potential for future generosity based on previous shows of generosity. By increasing his own prestige vis-a-vis his rivals or competitors, this might serve to attract more followers. In Rosenwein’s example, he may also have been competing with past kings (in this case someone such as Clovis rather than Charlemagne) and with the general image of what made a proper king. The Merovingians gained little in direct diplomatic, political or military support from their in-laws. Rather, marriages to foreign princesses gained them status and honor, which helped them to compete with their rivals in the contentious environment of Merovingian kingship.

\[^{16}\text{Rosenwein, 152-5.}\]
\[^{17}\text{Rosenwein, 50.}\]
THE EXPECTATIONS OF KINSHIP

An argument which places the real meaning and purpose of ‘marriage alliances’ into the context of the internal competition among rival kings goes counter to what many of our primary sources tell us, as well as modern scholarship which has often used ‘marriage alliances’ to try to interpret political policy and explain military action in the early Middle Ages. Some of the best evidence for views about the obligations associated with kinship, particularly affinal kinship, can be found in Theodoric’s letters surrounding the diplomatic crisis of 507. Those letters reveal a definite belief in the efficacy of affinal kinship to regulate the affairs of the western Germanic kings.

Before examining Theodoric’s letters, however, it is important to point out that their form and style are attributable to his quaestor, Cassiodorus, who was a member of an important Roman aristocratic family and became a senator and consul, later retiring to a monastery. In about 537/8, Cassiodorus published his letters, edicts and formulae in a work called the Variae. His motives for publishing the Variae are not completely understood — Cassiodorus may have wished to provide models of his style, spread the fame of those mentioned in the letters, and/or offer an apology for the Gothic regime,

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which he served. Most of the letters collected in the *Variae* were written by Cassiodorus in an official capacity as *Quaestor* or *Praetorian Prefect*. The *quaestor* under the Gothic kings was a legal expert, counselor and secretary. If he published these letters as models for later writers, their contents could be considered to put forward standard views about behavior, since they would have to be applicable in a multitude of situations. The difficulty, of course, is distinguishing Cassiodorus’ own thoughts from what Theodoric actually wanted said in these letters. In general, royal scribes had a certain amount of freedom of expression in their official letters, but the policy itself, especially important policy, was dictated by the king. Given the highly charged diplomatic atmosphere of 506-8, during which most of the letters under consideration were written, it is probably safe to assume that the policies were Theodoric’s, but the expression was Cassiodorus’. These letters express a firm belief in the efficacy of affinal kinship to foster peace and cooperation among the various rulers of Western Europe. They are particularly illuminating since they are among the rare surviving contemporary letters between people who were related by marriage.

Theodoric had married one of his daughters to Alaric II, the King of the Visigoths (484-507), another one to Sigismund, the son of Gundobad, King of the Burgundians (480-516), and he himself had married the sister of Clovis, the King of the Franks (481-511). In a letter of 506/7 to the Burgundian king Gundobad, whose son had married

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20 Barnish, xxviii-xxix.

21 For more on the Latin vocabulary of kinship relations, see Appendix A.
Theodoric’s daughter, Cassiodorus wrote, “It is right that you, who are so joined to us by
kinship through marriage [affinitate], should enjoy our goods.”22 Theodoric sent to
Gundobad a pair of clocks which he hoped would remind him of the peace and order he
had once experienced in Rome. Theodoric hoped that Gundobad would then establish
and promote peace in his kingdom. Gundobad’s son, Sigismund, had recently wed
Theodoric’s daughter. Theodoric thus linked his gift-giving, and his request, to their
relationship as affinal kinsmen, and described it as something right and proper or worthy
[dignum est] of them. In a later letter to Gundobad he described the specific
responsibility they had towards their affinal kinsmen, saying, “If our kinsmen by marriage
[affinium] go bloodily to war while we allow it, our malice will be to blame. . . For harsh
words are our duty, lest our kinsmen by marriage [affines] should push matters to
extremes.”23 Here Theodoric specifically referred to Theodoric and Gundobad’s affines,
Clovis and Alaric, and said that they, as their kinsmen by marriage, had a duty to keep
them safe from destruction, which could best be done by keeping Clovis and Alaric from
coming to blows. If this was an important principle for Theodoric, and not just rhetoric
being used to get what he wanted, his personal dilemma becomes particularly clear. He
was related to both Clovis and Alaric by marriage, and could not let them come to blows
and possibly kill one another without failing in his duty as a kinsman.

affinitate coniugitur.”

. Decet enim nos aspera verba dicere, ne affines nostri ad extremum debeat pervenire.”
Cassiodorus’s letter to Clovis at this time began by recalling the affinal kinship between Clovis and Theodoric: “We indeed rejoice in our kinship by marriage [affinitate] because of the fame of your strength. . .”

He thereby suggested that when his kinsmen by marriage did something great, it reflected well on him, which in the context of this letter may also have suggested that when they did not do great things it also reflected upon him, but in a negative way. Other similar phrases appear in this letter to re-emphasize this point.

After beginning with this praise, the tone of the letter shifted as Theodoric, in a veiled threat, asked Clovis to end his pursuit of the defeated Alamans, saying, “Submit gently, then, to my guiding spirit, since, by common example, kinship [gentilitas] has the habit of yielding to itself. So you will be seen to gratify my requests, and you will have no anxiety over what you know affects me.”

Having reminded Clovis of their affinal kinship, Theodoric now stated that Clovis ought to obey Theodoric’s request, suggesting that such an action was implied by their affinity and could bring a certain amount of honor. Theodoric was clearly suggesting that in general, kinsmen help and cooperate with one another. The word he used to describe their kinship, gentilitas, was one used to describe members of a family descended from a common ancestor (originally a gens), and which is also related to the later English use of the word ‘gentle’ to describe people of honorable or noble birth. The subtleties of such a word, which is

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24Cass. Var. II.41: “Gloriosa quidem vestrae virtutis affinitate gratulamur...”

25Cass. Var. II.41: “Vestra siquidem salus nostra gloria est . . .”

26Cass. Var. II.41: “Cede itaque suaviter genio nostro, quod sibi gentilitas communi remitere consuevit exemplo. Sic enim fit, ut et meas petitionibus satisfecisses videamini nec sitis solliciti ex illa parte, quam ad nos cognoscitis pertinere.”
not the most common Latin word used to describe kinship, were probably not lost on the letter’s recipient. Theodoric sent with this letter, as a gift, a cithara player for whom Clovis had asked. Apparently, Clovis was using their kinship to his advantage as well, and could expect to receive what he asked from one with whom he enjoyed such kinship.

Cassiodorus’ letters became more explicit about the importance of affinal kinship to Theodoric when he wrote to Alaric II, the King of the Visigoths. In asking Alaric to hold off attacking Clovis over the disagreement between them, he specifically stated, “Wait, therefore, until I send my envoys to the Frankish King, so that the judgement of friends may terminate your dispute. For I wish nothing to arise between two of my kinsmen by marriage [affinitate] which may, perhaps, cause one of them to be the loser.”

Theodoric was basing his demand to mediate between the two kings on his affinal kinship with them both. He may very well have felt himself in an awkward situation, being related to both, and thus feeling bound to aid both his kinsmen. Clovis’ son Theuderic may have found himself in a similarly awkward situation a few years later when his half-brothers were attacking his father-in-law in a blood-feud, and although he was asked to join in the attack on his father-in-law, he chose instead to avoid the campaign of his half-brothers altogether.

Theodoric also seemed to be depicting as ‘friends’ all those other kings (specifically Gundobad and the kings of the Heruli, Warni, and Thuringians) whom he was also enlisting in opposition to Clovis. Amicus or amicitia

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27 Cass. Var. III.1: “Quapropter sustinet, donec ad Francorum regem legatos nostros dirigere debeamus, ut litem vestrum amicorum debeant amputare iudicia. Inter duos enim nobis affinitate coniunctos non optamus aliquid tale fieri, unde unum minorem contingat forsitam inveniri.”

28 See Chapter 3.
are words which were often used in this period in connection with political or military treaties and alliances implying a state of peace and cooperation, so he may be implying that he already had a military coalition in place to deal with the dispute and calm the situation.  

He then warned Alaric that despite their own kinship, he would use force and justice to stop him if necessary: “Though you are my relative [cognato], let me set against you the notable tribes allied to me, and justice too which strengthens kings and quickly changes those minds which it finds are so armed against it.” He thereby implied that it was not usual for kinsmen by marriage to go to war against each other. He felt bound to support his kinsmen by marriage, but whichever side he joined would pit him against another kinsman by marriage. In a later letter (533), written under the rule of Athalaric, Theodoric’s successor, Cassiodorus still expressed the principle that war with affinal kinsmen brings dishonor. He recounted how God had recently helped the Goths avert war with the Franks, by striking down Theuderic I through an illness: “This, I believe, was ordained by God, lest war with our kinsmen by marriage [affinium] should defile us, or a justly mobilized army should not enjoy some vengeance.” Cassiodorus may even be suggesting that peace and cooperation amongst kinsmen is somehow sacred and therefore God himself will step in to keep it from being violated — it is a divine law.

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30 Cass. Var. III.1: “Obiciamus quamvis cognato cum nostris coniuratais eximias gentes iustitiamque, quae reges efficit fortiores: cito convertit animos, qui contra se tales sentit armatos.”

31 Cass. Var. XI.1.12: “ordinatone credo divina, ne nos aut affinium bella polluerent aut iuste productus exercitus vindictam aliquam non haberet.”
In another letter to Clovis in 507, Cassiodorus had developed this idea, referring to the divine laws of affinal kinship: “The holy laws of kinship by marriage [affinitatis] have purposed to take root among monarchs for this reason: that their tranquil spirit may bring the peace which peoples long for. For this is something sacred, which it is not right to violate by any conflict. For what hostages will ensure good faith, if it cannot be entrusted to the affections? Let rulers be allied by family [sociantur proximitate], so that separate nations may glory in a common policy, and tribal purposes join together [coniungere], united, as it were, through special channels of concord.”

Here, Theodoric’s most idealistic hopes for his connections through marriage are put into words. He must have hoped, and probably expected, that Clovis would believe them or be persuaded by them. Of course, Theodoric was also a practical politician, and if all the kings of the West would accept the principle espoused in this letter, then he could present a united front of the West against the Eastern emperor. In fact, it was the obvious contravention of this principle — Clovis pursuing his own bellicose policies without regard to Theodoric and the peace of the West — which had sparked all these letters. The unification and pacification of kings and their peoples through marital relations was a principle of behavior which Theodoric certainly wanted to be fully accepted, but Clovis and Alaric chose to pursue war in the face of Theodoric’s letters, suggesting that, in fact, the principle was not accepted by either of Theodoric’s kinsmen by marriage, or at least

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they felt other attitudes and desires could take precedence. Even the enlistment of God — this was a divine law — was not enough to convince them.

Despite the failure of affinal kinship to dissuade Clovis and Alaric from going to war in 507, a short while later Theodoric tried to use the same principle to bind Hermenefred, the King of the Thuringians, to him. The letter opened: “It is my desire to add you to my kin group [parentibus], I unite you, by God’s favor, to the beloved pledge of my niece. Thus may you, who are descended from a royal stock, shine forth still more widely in the splendour of the Amal blood.” It closes with the hope: “May divine favour attend your marriage, that, as friendship has allied us, so may family love [gratia parentalis] bind our posterity.”

This letter echoes the ideas put forward in the earlier letter to Clovis, in the references to deity and the notion of the binding power of affection. Now Theodoric expressed the hope that not only would the marriage alliance be effective immediately, but also for the long-term. He clearly placed great hope in the power of kinship relations to regulate actions and attitudes. What is perhaps most striking about this letter, however, is the way that he sees marriage as a way of adding Hermenefred to his extended family [parentibus] — a word which generally implies a group of relatives by blood. Thus, we might assume that for Theodoric, the expectations of affinity were related to the same principles associated with blood kinship. In the several letters discussed so far, there is an obvious blurring of the lines between affinity and strict blood

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33Cass. Var. IV.1: “Desiderantes vos nostris aggregare parentibus neptis caro pignori propitia divinitate sociamus, ut qui de regia stirpe descenditis, nunc etiam longius claritate Amali sanguinis fulgeatis. . . . Assint vestro divina contigio, ut sicut nos causa iuxit affectionis, ita et posteros nostros obliget gratia parentalis.”

34See Appendix A for further discussion of this word.
kinship as we might understand it. *Affinis, cognatus, parentela, proximitas* are interspersed throughout these letters to men related to Theodoric by marriage not blood. To Theodoric, then, blood kinship and kinship by marriage all fell under the divine laws of kinship.

These last two letters placed great emphasis on notions of affection and unity. His other letters also express related thoughts with similar words. He used words like *honor, affectio* and *caritas* in a letter to Clovis\(^{35}\) and to Gundobad he evoked *unus* and *fraternitas*.\(^{36}\) He also spoke of being like a father to Clovis, and that Clovis was a brother to Alaric, even though their actual biological relationships would not fit these titles.\(^{37}\) This was a manner in which kinship terminology could be used to imply expected behaviors — you are brothers if you act like brothers. Whatever Theodoric felt personally about the other kings to whom he was related by marriage, he displayed an expectation that the kinship created by marriage should bring peace and unity, love and affection to those so related, and these expectations could be evoked through the use of kinship terminology. He conceived of a world where all who were related by marriage shared in the honor or prestige of all. Therefore, the good deeds of a kinsman by marriage added to the prestige of all those associated with him. Theodoric, through his letters written by Cassiodorus, was a great expositor of the principles of kinship behavior,

\(^{35}\)Cass. Var. II.41.

\(^{36}\)Cass. Var. III.2.

\(^{37}\)Cass. Var. III.4: “Iure patris vobis interminor et amantis. . . Quapropter ad excellentiam vestram illum et illum legatos nostros magnopere credimus dirigendos, per quos ad etiam ad fratrem vestrum, filium nostrum regem Alaricum scripta nostra direximus . . .”
but the very fact that he had to use such language and recall the duties and expectations attached to affinal kinship suggests to us that the principles did not always represent reality.

Armed with these letters, full of their expressions of Theodoric’s belief in the efficacy of affinal kinship to regulate diplomatic affairs, and faced with the failure of that affinal kinship to have any practical results on the situation, modern scholars have had difficulty interpreting the relationship between Theodoric’s theory and real historical events. Their comments on Theodoric’s marital connections to the other Germanic rulers of the West express accept that Theodoric intended to use his affinal kinship for practical purposes. They also recognize, however, that the end results suggest that such kinship was not able to bring about those desired practical results. John Moorhead describes Theodoric’s affinal kinship connections as “the establishment of a network of marriage alliances.” But after reviewing the relationships between Theodoric and his affinal kinsmen, he is forced to admit that “The practical advantages of this are difficult to establish.” He concludes his section on Theodoric’s marriages with the rather weak conclusion, “Nevertheless, the various marriages can have done Theodoric’s position in the West no harm.” He later shows that Clovis did as much to upset his brother-in-law Theodoric’s well-laid plans for peace and unity in the West as he did to uphold them, and in the end, Theodoric had no qualms in killing over 30,000 Franks in a battle of revenge.

38Moorhead, Theodoric in Italy, 51.

39Moorhead, 53.
for Alaric’s death. Peter Heather informs us that many have seen Theodoric’s foreign policy as “the construction of a defensive alliance against Frankish expansion. He made, for instance, a series of strategic marriage alliances in the late 490s and early 500s, when Clovis had his eyes on the Visigothic kingdom.” He then observes that after Theodoric had married Clovis’s sister, “Theodoric was polite enough when writing directly to Clovis, [but] his comments about him to others were inflammatory.” He even suggests that Theodoric may have deliberately delayed his support to Alaric in 507, which helped Theodoric to gain control of much of the Visigothic kingdom for himself. Heather clearly sees Theodoric as more interested in personal aggrandizement than in general peace and prosperity, while also affirming that Theodoric meant to use his affinal kinship for practical political goals. Theodoric may have tried to use marriage links with the other Germanic kings to influence them and get what he wanted, but if that failed, he was more than willing to use other methods to meet his aims. Finally, Ian Wood, writing about the Merovingians, notes: “Little is known about the period from 481 until the end of the century, but during this period there were a number of significant marriages uniting the ruling dynasties of barbarian Europe. For the most part these marriages served to strengthen the position of Theodoric the Great . . . but since Clovis was drawn into this web of matrimonial alliances, it is well to note their relevance to his career. Theodoric

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40 Moorhead, 180, 183.
42 Heather, 231.
43 Heather, 232.
himself married Audofleda, the sister of Clovis . . . Whereas Theodoric envisaged marriage alliances as a means of coordinating the policies of the western kingdoms, the bishop of Tours implies Clovis’ choice of a bride was calculated to cause unease."44 Again, Wood clearly understands Theodoric to have been trying to use his affinal kinship to bring about practical diplomatic results, but he also suggests that kinship by marriage could have results inimical to peace and cooperation. However, these scholars’ use of such terms as “network of marriage alliances”, “strategic marriage alliances”, and “web of matrimonial alliances” does not accurately describe the meaning, motives, and efficacy of Theodoric’s marital connections to the other Germanic kings of the West, because in practice those ‘marriage alliances’ had almost no impact on the events that followed. These kings of early medieval Europe were crafty, practical, even ruthless politicians, statesmen, and generals, and we need to explain more adequately the motives, and, most importantly, the practical implications of the marriages among the ruling families of early medieval Europe.

Arguably, the central ruling family of the West in the sixth century — the one with marital connections to most of the other rulers of Europe — was the Merovingians. This, coupled with the fact that the source material, although still deficient in many respects, is richest for the Merovingians, offers us as a logical focus for the study of the meaning and practical implications of ‘marriage alliances’ in western Europe in the sixth century. The secondary literature on the Merovingians also presents us with a similar ill-defined usage of the term ‘marriage alliance’, which begs to be examined in closer detail,

and defined more clearly. Very generally, Eugen Ewig, in discussing the age of the Merovingians at marriage, made this general statement about marriages between royal houses: “In the marriage alliances (Eheverbindungen) between royal houses, which were concluded mainly with political considerations in view, the marital age was naturally very variable.” Jean-Pierre Bodmer likewise argued: “There is hardly any doubt that dynastic marriages were made purely out of political motives.” We have already seen that Theodoric’s marriage to Audofleda, the sister of Clovis, has usually been viewed as one part of Theodoric’s overall strategy of using marriage alliances to influence the other Germanic rulers of the West. John Moorhead described a “network of marriage alliances” of which Audofleda’s marriage was an important part. Peter Heather wrote of “a series of strategic marriage alliances.” Edward James and Ian Wood have described Clovis’ marriage to Clotild as an integral part of Theodoric’s network of marriage alliances. For the next generation of Merovingians, Erich Zollner has cast the marriage between Clotild the younger and Amalaric, king of the Visigoths, as a means of concluding peace between the Franks and Visigoths. Herwig Wolfram has also written

\[46\] Bodmer, Der Krieger der Merowingerzeit und Seine Welt (Zurich, 1957), 19.
\[47\] Moorhead, Theodoric in Italy, 51.
of the pursuit of an alliance through this marriage. He also depicted the engagement of Theudebert to Wisigard, the Lombard princess, as a treaty between the Lombards and the Franks. 

Neil Christie has described the Frankish-Lombard marriages of the 540s as “strategic marriage alliances.” He also applies the term to the later marriage of Chlothsinda to Alboin. Likewise, Ian Wood’s discussion of Frankish relations with the Lombards contains multiple references to “marriage alliances”. He has also referred to the many Frankish-Visigothic marriages as “international marriage alliances”. Janet Nelson has discussed “la politique du mariage” in the marriage of Galsuintha to Chilperic. All of these examples make general assumptions about the meaning, motives and implications of marriages between ruling families, which do not always adequately reflect the issues and events surrounding the marriages. As the example of Theodoric in 507-8 suggests, we should not assume that a marriage contracted between two ruling families will result in peace or cooperation, either diplomatic, political, or militarily.


52 Wolfram, The Roman Empire, 281-2.


54 Christie, 58.


CONSIDERATIONS IN MARRIAGE

The primary sources themselves offer good evidence that the meaning and purpose of Merovingian marriages lies beyond diplomacy and international politics. As a counter-balance to sources such as Theodoric’s letters written by Cassiodorus which present marriage as a means for coordinating military, diplomatic and political relations between kings, there are other sources from this period, such as Gregory of Tours’ *Histories* and Venantius Fortunatus’ *Carmina*, which do not emphasize the potential military, diplomatic or political benefits of marriage. Whether describing an actual marriage, or discussing the concept of marriage in broad terms, the focus is on the prestige and the more personal qualities of the future spouse: their wealth, status, blood, and beauty. There were many issues for potential spouses to consider before entering into a marriage, most of which had little to do with international politics. One source which provides an interesting view of the important considerations for making a marriage in the early Middle Ages is Isidore, the Archbishop of Seville (c. 560-636). Isidore wrote a compendium of knowledge up to his day called the *Etymologiae*. There, he commented:

“In choosing a husband, four qualifications are usually to be regarded: excellence (*virtus*), family (*genus*), looks (*pulchritudo*), wisdom (*sapientia*); . . . In the same way, in choosing a wife, four things drive a man to love: beauty (*pulchritudo*), family (*genus*), wealth (*divitiae*), character (*mores*). Now-a-days, however, people seek wealthy or beautiful wives rather than one of good character.”

Note that Isidore made no mention of

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political considerations in his discussion of how one should choose a spouse. This is not necessarily evidence that political considerations were not taken into account in the choosing of a marital partners, but it does suggest that other factors were prominent in the choosing of a spouse.

*Family*

Isidore’s reference to family (*genus*) is a broad term which could encompass living kinsmen, as well as a distinguished lineage. Through marriage one linked oneself to the honor and prestige of another family which had been created by both the current generation and their ancestors. The Merovingians themselves were a family who protected their royal blood and status, using their long hair as a symbol to distinguish themselves from other Frankish noble families, for example. Marrying a spouse of similar rank and blood emphasized the royal status of the parties, distinguishing them from other important nobles in their kingdom.

Gregory of Tours tells the story of Amalasuntha, the daughter of Theodoric the Great and of Clovis’ sister, Audofleda, which illustrates some of these concerns. When Amalasuntha became an adult, she had amorous relations with a slave, despite her

*quas aut divittae aut forma, non quas probitas morum commendat.* See also, Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford, 1991), 85-119, who provides a list of the kinds of considerations which went into choosing a spouse among the elite Romans of the late Republic and early Empire: birth, rank, wealth, personal qualities, character, chastity, and family connections (*affinitas*). She shows how Isidore fits into a long tradition of Roman moralists commenting on marital choices.

58See Appendix A for more on the meaning and usage of *genus* and related terms.
mother’s counsel against it. Her mother provided her with the son of a king (regis filium) for a spouse, but she decided to run off with her slave (servum suum). Her mother continued to plead with her not to humiliate her noble family (nobile genus), to send away the slave and marry a young man of royal family (genere regio) which her mother had arranged. Two important principles are revealed in this episode. Parents desired a spouse of proper rank and birth — of family — for their children, but children did not always desire the same, and so there was a potential for practice not to meet theory. Gregory, of course, clearly expressed his opinion about who was right in the matter by saying that the daughter was light-minded (per levitatem animi sui).

Gregory also recognized the special prestige that came from being the offspring of a marriage between two royal persons. He recounted the words of Sagittarius, Bishop of Gap. Sagittarius had been brought in judgement before King Gunthramn because he had started spreading rumors against the king. Sagittarius had suggested that Gunthramn’s sons could never succeed him as king because their mother had once been a slave. Gregory then inserted what may be his own counter argument or one used at

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59GTH III.31: “Hic autem cum adulta facta esset, per levitatem animi sui, relictum matris consilio, quae ei regis filium providentia, servum suum Tragulianem nomen accepit et cum eum ad civitatem, quae defensare possit, aufugit. Cumque mater eius contra eam valde frederet petiretque ab ea, ne humiliaret diutus nobile genus, sed demisco servo, similem sibi de genere regio, quem mater providatur, deberet accipere, nullatinus voluit adquiescere.”

60GTH V.20: “Sed Sagittarius felle commotus, hanc rationem dure suscipiens, ut erat levis ac vanus, et in sermonibus irrationabilibus profusus, declamare plurima de rege coepit ac dicere, quod filii eius regnum capere non possint, eo quod mater eorum ex familia Magnacharii quondam adscit, regis torn adisset, ignorans, quod, praetermissis nunc generibus feminarum, regis vociantur liberorum, qui de regibus fuerant procreati. His auditis, rex commotus valde, tam equos quam pueros vel quae cumque haberet poterat abstulit; ipsosque in monasterius a se longiori accessu dimotos, in quibus paenitentiam agerent, includi praecepit, non amplius quam singulos eis clericos relinquens; judices locorum terribiliter commonens, ut ipsos cum armatis custodiere debeant, ne cui ad eos visitandos ullus pateat aditus.”
Gunthramn’s court. He stated that no matter what the origins of the mother, those who are the offspring of the king are called princes. Whether the principle was generally accepted by the Merovingians themselves, or other Franks, Gregory was putting forward an argument about the prestige of royal blood, and a certain understanding about the biology of procreation, but at the same time, as Janet Nelson has suggested, he may also have been purposely reminding his readers of Sagittarius’ argument about the lowness of Gunthramn’s wife’s blood. She, and her offspring, did not enjoy the same kind of prestige that made Brunichild, a Visigothic princess, a better wife than Gunthramn’s low-born wives, and made Brunichild’s son, Childebert II, a better heir of Gunthramn’s kingdom.\(^{61}\)

The Merovingian family’s concern about birth and rank is also evident in the numerous panegyrics of Venantius Fortunatus, even when they are not connected with marriage. Fortunatus’ poem on King Charibert emphasizes the prestige of this scion of the royal family:

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\text{O great offspring } [\text{progenies}], \text{ resplendent with noble } [\text{generosa}] \\
\text{refulgence, whose glory springs from lofty forefathers } [\text{excelsis avis}]; \text{ for} \\
\text{whomsoever of his forebears } [\text{parentum}] \text{ of old I should choose to recall, the royal} \\
\text{lineage } [\text{regius ordo}] \text{ flows from honourable stock } [\text{stirpis}], \text{ whose eminence lofty} \\
\text{faith led to the stars, and advanced upon the peoples, trampled underfoot the} \\
\text{proud, elevated friends, cherished those cast down, and ground down the savage. . . .}\]
\]

When the age merited your birth as king, the day’s light shone with brighter splendour on the earth; your father beholding at last fresh joy in this new offspring [posteritate], declared he was magnified by the honour of a child [prolis].

Among the standard references to prestige and royalty of family are *generosa, regius ordo, stirpis* and *prolis*. With all this flowery language of praise, Venantius Fortunatus specifically declared that Charibert’s birth added to his father’s honor. Thus, by adding a child of royal stock to his household, Chlothar’s prestige was increased, and one might assume the something similar would happen when a wife of royal lineage joined the family. Admittedly, Fortunatus’ panegyrics conformed to standard rhetorical models, which in fact called for an exposition of the subject’s lineage. However, the fact that the Merovingians were supporting the creation of such works either suggests that they approved of such topics, or were influenced by them. It would be difficult to believe a family that was so self-conscious about family would ignore considerations of birth in choosing a spouse.

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62VF, Carm. VI.2, l. 27-34, 45-48: “Maxima progenies, generosa luce coruscans, cuius ab excelsis gloria currit avis./Nam quoscumque velim veterum memorare parentum/stirpis honorificae regius ordo fluit, cuius celsa fides eduxit ad astra cacumen/atque super gentes intulit illa pedes./calcavit hostes tumidos, erexit amicos./favit subjectos conteruitque feros./. . . Cum te nascentem meruerunt saecula regem./lumine maiori fulsit in orbe dies./Posteritate nova tandem sua gaudia cernes/crescere se dixit prolis honore pater.”

63George, 37.
Wealth was also an important consideration in marriage which comes out clearly in our sources. Philip Grierson, in a seminal lecture of 1958, argued that economics in the early Middle Ages worked differently than in later medieval or modern times. Among his arguments, he proposed that regularized trade was less important in early medieval Europe for the circulation of money and goods than in other “more settled and advanced periods.”

“All that we know of the social conditions of the time suggests that the alternatives to trade were more important than trade itself.”

Grierson surveyed a variety of activities in which goods and money moved through Europe. For example, “Plunder and robbery must be accounted factors of major importance in the distribution of valuables in the Middle Ages.” Alongside plunder and robbery, he placed various “payments of a purely political character.” Whether Frankish kings were dividing the spoils of a campaign or being paid by the Byzantine emperor to attack the Lombards, they were helping to move goods about Europe. If spoils and payments were such an important domain for the movement of goods and money in the early Middle Ages, it was because rulers were anxious to be on the receiving end of such transactions. Grierson also included dowries among these alternatives to trade in the movement of goods and wealth.

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65Grierson, 140.

66Grierson, 131.

67Grierson, 131.
in early medieval Europe.\textsuperscript{68} He cited the enormous dowry of Rigunth, daughter of Chilperic I, as an example of how important this could be. Dowries do, in fact, appear to have been an important motivating factor in contracting foreign marriages. And who else but another king could provide a dowry large enough to satisfy the fiscal appetite of a Merovingian king? Merovingian kings may have viewed foreign marriages as a means for increasing their own wealth, and they would not have had to share the dowry with their followers in the way they would the spoils of war.

One interesting example of this consideration for wealth in choosing a spouse goes beyond standard discussions of dowries and gifts. When Ingund sought the aid of her husband, King Chlothar I, to find a spouse for her sister Arnegund, she asked him to find her a ‘\textit{utilem atque habentem virum}’.\textsuperscript{69} This phrase could be translated in a variety of ways, but one valid meaning is ‘a profitable and wealthy man’. Such an interpretation is confirmed a few lines later when Chlothar says that he could not find a rich and wise man for Aregund.\textsuperscript{70} Of course, the punch-line is that Chlothar took the girl for himself, certainly someone who could be considered \textit{utilis} and \textit{habens}.

\textsuperscript{68}Grierson, 136.

\textsuperscript{69}GTH IV.3: “\textit{Praecor, ut sorore meae, servae vestrae, utilem atque habentem virum ordinare dignimini, unde non humili, sed potius exalata servire fidelius possem}.”

\textsuperscript{70}GTH IV.3: “\textit{Et requirens virum divitem atque sapientem, quem tuae sorori deberem adiungere}.”
Beauty

Beauty was certainly a quality high on many Merovingian’s lists of desirable qualities. Many reports of legates returning home from marriage negotiations mention their comments about the prospective bride’s beauty. Many of those non-royal women married by Merovingians were specifically mentioned as being beautiful. For example, Gregory said that when Theudebert saw that Deuteria was beautiful (*speciosa*), he was seized by love for her and took her to his bed.\(^{71}\) Even though Isidore of Seville could argue that it was not proper to marry for wealth or beauty, his comments and our other sources make it clear that many did just that. Which factor had the most influence on a king’s choice of spouse depended on the king’s current interests and needs.

Character

Isidore the moralist valued character above all traits to seek for in a spouse. Within this general category of character he included wisdom, excellence (*virtus*), and for women, chastity. There are examples of such an interest in the character of spouses by Merovingians. Venantius Fortunatus, for example, described King Sigibert as youthful yet mature, a father figure to his people, generous, and forgiving.\(^{72}\) He is a man “in whom whatever worthy things you should require from a king are found.”\(^{73}\) He also developed

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\(^{71}\) GTH III.22: “Deoteria vero ad occursum eius venit; at ille speciosam eam cernens, amore eius capitur, suoque eam copulavit stratu.”

\(^{72}\) VF, Carm. VI.1, l. 80-96.

\(^{73}\) VF, Carm. VI.1, l. 97: “In quo digna manent quicquid de rege requiras.”
the theme of chastity in his poem celebrating the marriage of Sigibert to Brunichild, which will be discussed later in more detail.\textsuperscript{74}

\textbf{Conclusion}

It may seem obvious to point out that the meaning or purpose of marriage differs from time to time and place to place, but a general perusal of literature on the politics of the pre-modern world, both primary and secondary, does present us with a general assumption of the inherent political and diplomatic nature of \textquote{marriage alliances} between members of the ruling classes, whether royal or noble. My purpose is not necessarily to deny the validity of these assumptions, but to point out that the same term, \textquote{marriage alliance}, has been used in a variety situations, where it clearly cannot have exactly the same meaning. The potential value of a \textquote{marriage alliance} changes according to the social, cultural, and political environment in which it is made. Marriages contracted among a closed aristocratic class, for example, are made for different reasons and emphasize different traits in a potential spouse, than those contracted between rulers operating in some kind of international system. If we are to use the term \textquote{marriage alliance} in a meaningful way in a variety of situations, we must be careful to explain how it is being used in a specific context. I can offer two examples of this similar use of the term \textquote{marriage alliance} which are widely separated in time, if not so much in geography. Traditional scholarship on the aristocracy of the Roman Republic, for example, has focused on the development of political factions, which often used marriage to create and

\textsuperscript{74}See Chapter 4.
cement political alliances. Roman senators vied with each other for prestige and honor, which was particularly associated with election to high office and success as military leaders. Thus, marriages could serve as a way of identifying them with a particular political faction, offer them access to votes or the money to buy votes, and bring them opportunities to be appointed to an important military position by the Senate. In late medieval Florence, marriage alliances involved the movement of both people and property from family to family, forging links between families of the ruling class. According to Anthony Molho, marriage alliances enabled these families to further entrench themselves in that class. Ultimately, this meant that Florence was still ruled in the eighteenth century by the same core group of families which had ruled it since the fifteenth century. The strategies behind the formation of ‘marriage alliances’ in these two examples illustrate how aristocrats living in a city-state could use marriage to bring them political or social benefits. Obviously we would not apply our understanding of how marriage worked in these two times and places to the marriages of the Merovingian Franks. They were not aristocrats living in a city-state environment, but Germanic kings ruling over a sub-Roman kingdom, which was dominated by noble families, both Gallo-Roman and Frankish. However, for the same reason that we need to explicitly define and explain how ‘marriage alliances’ worked in both Republican Rome and Renaissance

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Florence, we need to gain a better understanding of what I will refer to as the foreign marriages of the Merovingians, before we should feel completely comfortable employing this term to describe their marriages. This is what I aim to do in this dissertation.

What follows in the next four chapters is a narrative interpretation of Merovingian history in the “long” sixth century (481-639), from the reign of Clovis I through the reign of Dagobert I. This narrative focuses on the competitive nature of the Merovingian Teilreiche and the role that foreign marriages could play in that competition. Clovis used marriages to prestigious royal families (the Burgundian and Ostrogothic ruling families) to surpass and eliminate his rivals for control over the Franks in northeastern Gaul, which when accompanied with his battlefield success brought him not only supreme kingship over a variety of Frankish groups, but also made him arguably the leading Germanic king of the West. With his death the Frankish kingdom was divided among his four sons, who competed with each other for power, sought to eliminate each other if they could, and used marriage connections to other Germanic ruling families to emphasize their status and garner support. When Chlothar, the last of Clovis’ sons, died in 561, the briefly re-unified Frankish kingdom was again divided into four parts. The competitive rivalry of the kings continued in the tradition of their father and uncles, but new twists were added when the young heirs of murdered kings tried to succeed to their father’s positions. Foreign marriage connections again played an important role in emphasizing the royal status of these kings. By following the precedent set by the previous generation of Frankish kings, and acting as people expected kings to act, they solidified and then expanded their control of territory, wealth and followers. The rivalry and foreign
marriages continued into the next generation, but when Chlothar II finally eliminated all of his royal rivals in 613, the need for foreign marriages to bolster the king’s position disappeared as well. Neither he, nor his son Dagobert I, married a royal foreign bride.

The sources which discuss the rivalries and marriages of the Merovingians are important evidence that many other considerations were at work when choosing a spouse than simply the diplomatic, military or political needs of their kingdom. Those sources which try to apply the assumptions which are so clearly witnessed in Theodoric’s letters often prove to be the most unreliable sources for the events and marriages under discussion. Being far removed from the situation either geographically or temporally, these sources try to understand the marriages in this traditional way. Our main, and usually best, source for the marriages of the Merovingians is Gregory of Tours, and significantly, he often focuses not on the diplomatic or political implications of a marriage that he reported, but rather on those considerations for choosing a spouse which were discussed above: family, wealth, beauty, and character.

Gregory, Bishop of Tours, was a Gallo-Roman aristocrat who was heavily involved in the internal politics of the Frankish kingdoms after 573. This involvement influenced his interpretation of history as recorded in both his hagiographical works and his historical masterpiece, the Historiae (now known more commonly as The History of the Franks), which was consciously crafted to assess the Frankish kings according to their attitude towards Catholic bishops, and how they may or may not have pleased God.77

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Recent work on Gregory has added to our understanding of his numerous biases of which we must be aware in using him as a source for Frankish history.\(^7\)\(^8\) Besides those already mentioned, he also displays a distinct disdain for the Arian heresy, seeing the world as divided into those who belong to the ‘ecclesia Christi’ and those who do not. Thus, he often simplified history into good versus evil. However, his Historiae still provides us with the basic narrative for the history of the Franks in the sixth century, and I have relied heavily upon it. Significantly, his descriptions of the marriages of the Frankish kings do reveal that he could interpret their marriage connections to other royal families without reference to international diplomacy, politics and military alliances. Such an interpretation is not always absent, as we shall see, but even when it appears, it is often subordinated to other considerations. This opens the door, then, to asking whether traditional interpretations found in Theodoric’s letters and in other sources for the sixth century, are the best explanation for understanding the motives, meanings and practical implications of these marriages.

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CHAPTER 2

THE REIGN OF CLOVIS, 481-511

When Clovis I inherited leadership over a kingdom of Franks from his father, Childeric, in about 481, he was only one of several petty Frankish chieftains with a claim to administering a small part of the old Western Roman Empire. Clovis’ reign (481-511) saw the creation of a unified and expanded Frankish kingdom in northern Gaul, which came at the expense of the other Frankish kings in northern Gaul, as well as the other already-established Germanic kingdoms of the Visigoths, Burgundians, and Ostrogoths.79 It is in the context of this competition with his rivals for power, both among the Franks, as well as in the West generally, that his sister’s marriage to Theodoric the Great, and his own to Clotild, should be placed. The narrative of his reign reveals how he won this competition, using whatever means were at his disposal. These means included, but were not limited to, victory in battle accompanied by the plundering of booty by himself and his followers, appeals to the traditional expectations attached to kinship which we saw

79On the reign of Clovis generally, the best recent surveys putting Clovis into a Late Antique context are: Ian Wood, The Merovingian Kingdoms, 41-49; Roger Collins, Early Medieval Europe, 104-108; Edward James, The Franks, 72-91; Michel Rouche, Clovis. Other older, but still standard surveys are: Godefroid Kurth, Clovis, 2 vols.; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings, 163-185; Erich Zöllner and Joachim Werner, Geschichte der Franken bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts, 44-73.
expressed in Theodoric’s letters, ruthless contravention of those expectations, and prestigious marital connections. Clovis did what practical politics demanded. His marital connections, therefore, should be seen in this light. He might play upon the traditional expectations associated with affinal kinship as long as it benefitted himself, but these marriages were more important for the prestige they added to Clovis’ kingship than for any real diplomatic or military alliance they created.

In the course of his thirty year reign, Clovis defeated a local Roman ruler, Syagrius; several Frankish chieftains, only some of whose names survive in Gregory of Tours’ narrative; the much-feared Alamans, probably twice; the former Magister Militum and now Burgundian king, Gundobad (r. 480-516); and Alaric II, the King of the Visigoths (r. 484-507). At some point in his reign, he was also baptized as a Catholic Christian, in what some scholars have seen as a shrewd and calculated move to garner further support from the Gallo-Roman nobles, since all of the neighboring Germanic kings were either pagans or Arian Christians. It is difficult not to see in Clovis’ reign a steady progress of expansion against his competitors, both locally and further abroad.

The competition between Clovis and the other Frankish kings of his day was played out

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in both direct confrontations resulting in battles and conquests, which led to the acquisition of greater wealth and status. Within this milieu of royal competition, Clovis gave his sister, Audofleda, in marriage to Theodoric the Great (r. 493-526), the King of the Ostrogoths, and imperial ruler of Italy. He himself married Clotild, the niece of the Burgundian king, Gundobad. Clovis was, therefore, successful in forging a unified Frankish kingdom under his own leadership, at least in part because he made himself more acceptable to the nobility of Gaul, both Gallo-Roman and Frankish, than his rivals through his acquisitions of wealth, territory, and the loyalty of other nobles, and through his Catholic baptism, as well as through the enhancement of his status through marital connections with the most prestigious Germanic peoples in the West, the Ostrogoths and Burgundians. He made himself look like a greater king than the other alternatives, through his success in battle and his marital connections, which meant that ultimately he became a greater king than his rivals.

SYAGRIUS

Clovis’ first challenge as a young new king was to establish his right to rule against the forces which had opposed his father, Childeric, and which now opposed him. Childeric had been ousted from his position as king, and had fled into exile, until the time was right to return and re-assert his position against the man who had usurped his position of leadership, Aegidius, a Gallo-Roman general operating independently in
northern Gaul. Childeric finally killed his rival and enmeshed himself in imperial politics, probably in an effort to enhance his own position in Gaul. Gregory of Tours recorded that Odoacer, probably to be identified with the man who later became magister militum per Italiam, after the abdication in 476 of the Western Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, entered into a foedus, a formal agreement of alliance, with Childeric, which had the specific purpose of bringing about the subjugation of the Alamans. David Frye has suggested that Odoacer may have been an imperial agent at this time, leaving the possibility of seeing this foedus in the tradition of imperial enlistment of foederati in their military campaigns. Childeric, therefore, stands as a firmly documented example of a tradition of competition for the kingship of the Franks in the fifth century, which would

81 GTH II.12. See also the legendary stories about Childeric’s sojourn in Thuringia and visit to Constantinople in Fred. III.2, 12.


83 GTH II:19: “Odovacrius cum Childeric foedus iniiit, Alamannusque, qui partem Italiae pervaserant, subiugerant.”

84 Frye, 8, 9.
continue through the sixth century, and which relied upon Roman military alliances rather than kinship to bring military success and opportunities for plunder.

In 481, Clovis inherited not only his father’s claims to leadership over a body of Frankish warriors, but also the challenge of the family of Aegidius, now in the form of his son Syagrius, for that leadership. By 486, Clovis had organized a campaign against Syagrius, who was based in the civitas of Soissons, defeated him, and took over his kingdom, which probably refers to his claims to leadership in the region. Syagrius fled to Alaric II, the young king of the Visigoths, who handed this exile over to Clovis when the latter threatened him. Syagrius was later killed by Clovis, after he had firm control over Syagrius’ kingdom, which probably meant that Clovis had successfully convinced Syagrius’ Frankish warriors to transfer their loyalty to himself. Clovis had eliminated one of his rivals for power in northeastern Gaul, but he was still only one of several leaders of Franks in the period following the defeat of Syagrius.

**Frankish Rivals**

Even though Gregory of Tours does not discuss Clovis’ rivals for power in northeastern Gaul until the end of his narrative of Clovis’ reign, the competition for power was surely waged against them over the course of his reign, rather than all at the end as the narrative suggests. He may have saved this discussion at the end so as not to

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85 GTH II.27.

86 Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 88, suggests that this was an ongoing process throughout his reign; Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 49 leaves the door open for interpretation since we have no way of proving or disproving Gregory’s chronology. Compare this long process depicted as single event with that described for his conversion by James, *The Franks*, 123 and
disrupt his earlier narrative presenting Clovis as the model Christian and Frankish king. The evidence suggests that following Syagrius’ defeat, Clovis’ power was recognized by other important rulers, including Alaric II who handed Syagrius over rather than offend Clovis, and Theodoric the Great who married his sister just a few years after Soissons. Clovis’ position as king, however, was still tenuous, as witnessed by the famous episode of the ewer of Soissons which followed his campaign against Syagrius, when Clovis’ ultimate triumph was still far in the future. In this early campaign, Clovis’ troops had plundered many churches for rich objects, including a valuable ewer, or pitcher for pouring water.\textsuperscript{87} The bishop of the church which had owned the ewer asked for it back. Clovis was put into a difficult position. He could see the value of making some reconciliation with this important churchman, but also was not so sure of his position among his warriors — he was still a young king. Clovis wanted this ewer, which he planned to return to the churchman, beyond his own full share of the booty. This was a test of his status in his follower’s eyes, and he passed that test with all but one of his warriors, who insisted that Clovis receive nothing but his rightful share by smashing the ewer. Clovis had to acquiesce to this challenge for the moment, receiving the ewer as part of his share of the booty and then handing it over to the bishop, but he took his revenge later by splitting the man’s head open, in an effort to restore whatever prestige may have been lost in the earlier event. Throughout Gregory’s narrative it becomes clear that it was important for a Frankish king to establish himself as a successful warrior, a

\footnote{87GTH II.27.}
provider of booty for his followers, and a protector of his people. By establishing and then maintaining one’s status as a good king, further opportunities to augment that status became possible — more treasure and more warriors meant more prestige which in turn meant more opportunities for gaining treasure and attracting more warriors to one’s following. Gregory of Tours never again reported such a challenge from one of Clovis’ warriors. The only challenges came from Clovis’ royal rivals, and he won all these challenges as well.

In order to establish the nature and complexity of the competition amongst the various Frankish kings ruling at the same time as Clovis, which was the context for his marriages and military campaigns, we can look at the episodes reported by Gregory of Tours at the end of his narrative of Clovis’ reign. The date of these episodes is less important than the tradition of the events which were passed down to Gregory. Clovis had rivals for power, and found ways, both direct and indirect, to surpass them and ultimately replace them. Not only do they reveal the ruthless and pragmatic approach that Clovis took towards politics and power, but also the way that he both used and ignored kinship, according to his own convenience and political necessity.

Perhaps one of the earliest campaigns against his fellow Frankish kings was Clovis’ attack on Chararic. Chararic had hesitated to get involved in Clovis’ victory against Syagrius until the outcome was assured, and Clovis repaid his unwillingness by marching against him and cutting off his long hair, the sign of his right to rule. Gregory of Tours recorded that Clovis took over his kingdom, treasure, and people, which is a nice
summary of the things for which these kings were most interested in competing.\textsuperscript{88} The specific mention of ‘the people’ in Gregory’s text, which probably refers to the Frankish nobles of Chararic’s kingdom, suggests an acceptance by them of their new king, which must have been made possible by his growing reputation. After all, Chararic had failed to provide them an opportunity for plunder in the campaign against Syagrius. Clovis was winning people over with his growing reputation. Gregory’s narrative makes the nature of this competition very clear: either Clovis could eliminate his competition, or they would eliminate him: “And having killed many other kings or close relatives, against whom he held vigilance lest they should carry off his kingdom, he expanded his kingdom throughout the whole of Gaul.”\textsuperscript{89} This quote also reveals the two-fold origins of the challenge to this own authority, both from others of royal status and kinsmen (\textit{parentes}) — those people related to Clovis by blood, and who, by sharing in the same family blood, thereby shared in a claim to leadership over the Franks. To Clovis, such kinsfolk were natural rivals not allies. Gregory clearly indicates that if Clovis had not triumphed over his rivals, they would have eliminated him.

This attitude is made more apparent by Clovis’ treatment of Ragnachar, who was one of these kinsmen (\textit{parente suo}) and who had helped defeat Syagrius.\textsuperscript{90} Neither his kinship with Clovis, nor his cooperation against Syagrius could preserve Ragnachar, whom Clovis, probably rightly, viewed as a temporary ally, but permanent rival.

\textsuperscript{88}GTH II.41: \textit{“Quibus mortuis, regnum eorum cum thesauris et populis advesivit.”}

\textsuperscript{89}GTH II.42: \textit{“Interfectisque et aliis multis regibus vel parentibus suis primis, de quibus zelum habebat, ne et regnum auferrent, regnum saum per totas Gallias dilatavit.”}

\textsuperscript{90}GTH II.27.
Ragnachar and his two brothers were captured and killed by Clovis, and as in the case of Chararic, Gregory concluded: “When they [Ragnachar and his brothers] were dead, Clovis received their whole kingdom, and treasure.” Clovis was so determined to win this competition that he employed a variety of tricks. Gregory followed the report on Ragnachar with this famous quote about the intra-familial and royal competition: “Nevertheless, when he had gathered his people together, because of his misfortune he is reported to have said concerning those relatives [parentibus] he had lost: ‘Woe is me who remains like a pilgrim among strangers, and I do not have any kinsmen [parentibus] who can offer help [adivare] to me if adversity should come.’ But he said this, not sorrowing for their death, but as a trick, if perhaps he might yet be able to find someone else, so that he might kill him.” Thus, Clovis knew of no other kinsmen related to himself by blood — his parentes — and he employed a statement of expected behavior for his own purposes, which also reminds us that expectations do not always reflect actual behavior, even when most people accept them as the proper mode of conduct. When Clovis lamented “Woe is me...”, he restated the expectations that one’s own kin would protect and support in a way that strangers would not. He played on what must have been the accepted principle (or at least Gregory’s understanding of it), that kinsmen give aid and support to the members of the kin group. Clovis expressed the thought that a kinsman would help him if he needed it, as Ragnachar had against Syagrius, but Gregory reminded

\footnote{GTH II.42: “Quibus mortuis, omnem regnum eorum et thesaurus Chlodovechus acceptit.”}

\footnote{GTH II.42: “Tamen, congregatis suis quadam vice, dixisse fretur de parentibus, quos ipse perdiderat: ‘Vae mihi, qui tamquam peregrinus inter extraneus remansi et non habeo de parentibus, qui mihi, si venerit adversitas, possit aliquid adivare. Sed hoc non de morte horum condolens, sed dolo dicebat, si forte potuisset adhuc aliquem repperire, ut interficeret.”}
us that his true motive was to eliminate potential rivals to power within the Frankish kingdom. This is the inherent tension among royal kinsmen, that their kinship implies aid and alliance — *adiuvare* is a word which literally just means ‘help’, but which was often used with the specific context of supplying military aid — but that same kinship also implies competition for supremacy among the kin group.

Another group of Franks under independent leadership, who may have been among his last rivals to be conquered were the Ripuarian Franks. The ruler was Sigibert the Lame, called thus because he had been wounded in a battle between Franks and Alamans at Zülpich. Sigibert’s son, Chloderic, was present at the battle of Vouillé (c. 507) — the only ally at that battle specifically mentioned in Gregory’s narrative — which suggests that the following episode took place in the last years of Clovis’ reign, between 508 and 511. When Clovis turned his attention to these Frankish kings, he was able to manipulate a favorable situation, play up a role as the defender of those traditional expectations attached to kinship, and draw upon his accrued prestige to install himself as a perfectly acceptable new leader of this once-separate Frankish kingdom. Clovis contrived a complex ruse to take over the kingdom of his one-time ally, which only succeeded because he made himself an acceptable alternative to a now extinct dynasty. First, he incited Sigibert’s son, Chloderic, to rebel against his father. He did this by

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93GTH II.37.
94GTH II.37.
96GTH II.40.
promising to Chloderic the continuance of a friendship (*amicitia nostra*) that Clovis had established with Sigibert the Lame, which may have been why Sigibert had sent his son to serve with Clovis against Alaric at Vouillé.⁹⁷ Clovis let the son do the dirty work of killing his father, and even refused the son’s offer of a part of his father’s treasure, in order to keep his hands clean from the affair. When Clovis sent envoys to inspect, but not receive, Chloderic’s newly inherited treasure, they killed Chloderic, presumably during a private viewing of the treasury. Clovis could then step in, disavow any involvement in the two murders, and convince the people to accept him as their new king, handing over to him both the kingdom and the royal treasure.⁹⁸ Clovis specifically calls Chloderic the son of my kinsman (*filius parentis mei*), and asserted his innocence in the whole affair by declaring the traditional expectations of kinship: “I cannot shed the blood of my own kinsmen [*parentum*], because that would be contrary to divine law.”⁹⁹ He then invited the people of Sigibert and Chloderic to accept him as their new king. What he asks them is to give him their loyalty and become his people, and in exchange he would defend them as a king should. Clovis’ growing prestige and proven ability to provide booty must have helped to make that decision easier for them to accept him as their new king.

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⁹⁷GTH II.40: “Ecce! pater tuus senuit et pede dibile claudicat. Si ille, inquid, moreretur, recte tibi cum amicitia nostra regnum illius reddebatur.”

⁹⁸GTH II.40: “At ille ista audientes, plaudentes tam parmis quam vocibus, eum clypeo evectum super se regem constituent. Regnumque Sïgyberthi acceptum cum thesauris, ipsos quoque suae ditioni adscivit.”

⁹⁹GTH II.40: “Nec enim possum sanguinem parentem meorum effundere, quod fieri nefas est. Sed quia haec everunt, consilio vobis praebeo, si videtur acceptum: convertimini ad me, ut sub meam sitis defensionem.”
leader. Once again, Clovis increased his territory, his wealth, and the number of his loyal warriors, at the expense of his rivals, who were also part of that group of people related by blood to Clovis — his parentes.

**Audofleda and Theodoric the Great**

In the context of this on-going campaign against his rivals, Clovis also employed less direct methods of asserting his superiority over his fellow Frankish kings. In particular, he used marriage not only to confirm his power, but also to enhance his prestige in comparison with his rivals. When Clovis married his sister, Audofleda, to the Ostrogothic king, Theodoric the Great, he had not yet achieved his greatest victories, against Alamans, Burgundians, and Visigoths. Still, he had achieved a position in northern Gaul which was significant enough for Theodoric to receive a bride from the young Frankish ruler, and that connection surely must have increased Clovis’ status in northern Gaul, for no other Frankish king of the time could boast such a connection.

As I have already discussed in the Introduction, Theodoric certainly saw the several marriages contracted between the leading barbarian rulers of the West near the end of the fifth century in terms related to the obligations of kinship. These marriages bound the ruling families of the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks and Burgundians to one another, and based on traditional explanations of political marriage alliances, one might expect such bonds to be effective in coordinating general cooperation among the participating rulers. When these expectations are compared to what actually happened in the first decade of the sixth century, however, it is clear that a better explanation should
be sought. The rivalry between the kings of the period was now placed into the context of kinship, albeit affinal kinship rather than blood kinship. From Clovis’ perspective, the marriage was also bound up in the internal competition amongst the Frankish kings in Gaul more than in external political considerations. Marriage with the Ostrogothic Amal dynasty must have enhanced Clovis’ position immensely, making possible the expansion of his scope of activities in the last two decades of his reign. To see anything more in this marriage is to go beyond the evidence which survives.

Audofleda’s marriage to Theodoric the Great took her hundreds of miles away from Clovis’ court, and Gregory’s homeland, and she has thus left little impression in the extant sources, which are not just sparse, but even ill-informed. We do not know anything about this sister and Clovis’ relationship with her, except for brief mentions of her in conjunction with Theodoric in a few sources, and a story about her and her daughter, Amalasuntha, in Book III of Gregory’s History, which directly precedes an account of Theudebert I’s Italian campaign in the 530s. The best information on Audofleda is found in Jordanes and an anonymous chronicle of the reign of King Theodoric, the “Excerpta Valesiana”.\(^{100}\) Jordanes was a Goth, living in Constantinople during the reign of

Justinian I (r. 527-565), writing in Latin. The Excerpta Valesiana are an anonymous history of the reign of King Theodoric, written about 550, and first published by Henry Valesius in 1636.

The Excerpta Valesiana reported: “Next, indeed, [Theodoric] took a wife from among the Franks by the name of Augofladam.” Jordanes wrote a little more on the subject: “in the third year, as we said, of his invasion into Italy, . . . having sent an embassy to Lodoin [Clovis], king of the Franks, he sought his daughter Audefleda in marriage. He, and his sons Celdebert and Heldebert and Thiudebert, yielded that girl willingly and freely, believing that by this agreement [societate] they had allied [sociari] with the Gothic people, a treaty [foedere] having been entered into. But that agreement was not really useful for the concord of peace [pacis concordiam]. . .” In this evaluation of this marriage, Jordanes cited the standard principles for such a relationship, that a marriage should bring peace and alliance. We should not take these statements of traditional explanations of marriage too seriously, however. Besides the factual problems which I will discuss in a moment, his statement does more to reveal his own pro-Gothic

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103 Anon. Val., 63: “Postea vero accepta uscore de Francis nomine Augofladam.”

104 Jordanes, 295-6: “. . . tertioque, ut diximus, anno ingressus sui in Italia . . . missaque legatione ad Lodoin Francorum regem filiam eius Audefladem sibi matrimonio petit. quam ille grate libenterque concessit suosque filios Celdebertum et Heldebertum et Thiudebertum credens hac societate cum gente Gothorum into foedere sociari. sed non adeo ad pacis concordiam profuit ista coniunctio . . .”
and mid-sixth-century views than to add to our understanding of an alliance made through marriage. What he seems to be saying is that Clovis had the privilege of joining himself, through marriage, to the illustrious Goths. The text implies a slur on the barbarian Franks compared with the sophisticated Goths, that having been fortunate enough to marry one of their own to someone like Theodoric, they were foolish enough to think that this amounted to a formal treaty of alliance — a *foedus*. Nevertheless, Jordanes clearly explains the marriage with an expectation that the kinship created by the marriage should have established peaceful cooperation between the two parties, although he lamented that in practice it did not have that intended result. It may be that Jordanes, writing several decades later, misunderstood the meaning and motives of this marriage, as he misunderstood some of the facts surrounding the marriage. In his day, the Franks were a powerful force to be reckoned with in Italian politics, as Theudebert I, Clovis’ grandson, sent several campaigns into Italy and came to control some parts of northern Italy. Thus, he projected Frankish power and influence back into the days of Clovis, whom he knew to have been connected to Theodoric by marriage, even though Clovis was far from the being the same potential force in Italian politics that Theudebert would become.

The factual problems with Jordanes’ details are immediately apparent, and cast doubt on the reliability of his account. Celdebert and Heldebert are essentially the same name, to be equated with Childebert, and Thiudebert was Clovis’ grandson, Theudebert, a son of Clovis’ son Theuderic. Apparently, Jordanes simply threw in some stereotypical Frankish names which he had heard before — Theudebert I (r. 533-548), for example, had campaigned in Italy only a few years prior to his writing. Also, when Theodoric
invaded Italy, in the early 490s, Clovis did not yet have three sons. Furthermore, Jordanes referred to Audofleda as the daughter of Clovis, but Gregory of Tours, a geographically closer witness, wrote, albeit without providing us with her name, that “Theodoric of Italy had the sister of king Clovis in marriage” and “when he died he left behind a young daughter with his wife.”105 Gregory then went on to relate various rumors and stories which had come down to him about this young daughter, Amalasuntha, who also went without name in the narrative (even though the slave, with whom she is supposed to have been intimately involved, is named). Problems obviously abound. While Jordanes is notoriously unreliable about events in the west,106 Gregory of Tours, writing in the late sixth century, is a late source for the reign of Clovis (r. 481-511).107

The closest thing we have to a contemporary source for this marriage are the letters of Cassiodorus, who served as Theodoric’s secretary during some of the years of Clovis’ reign in Gaul. Cassiodorus’ letters confirm the existence of the marriage, and provide a wealth of knowledge about the expectations of marriage in this period, but offer little in the way of concrete details.108 If we can at least accept Jordanes’ specific placement of the marriage in the third year after Theodoric came to Italy, then

105 GTH III.31: “Et quia Theudoricus Italiae Chlodovechi regis sororem in matrimonio habuit, mortuus parvolam filiam cum uxore reliquit.”

106 See, for example, Goffart, The Narrators of Barbarian History, 65-68.


108 Cass. Var. II.41.
Cassiodorus’ letters were written 10-12 years after the marriage was contracted. There is nothing to suggest that Audofleda did not marry the Ostrogothic ruler of Italy in the early 490s, and probably about 493, after Theodoric was proclaimed king, and Odoacer was killed. This makes it clear that Theodoric’s original reason for marrying Audofleda was not directly connected to the issues of 507-8, and considering Clovis’ position in 493, it is unlikely that Theodoric looked to the Franks as an important ally when he married his sister. Theodoric may have placed trust in his marriage connections to help regulate policy in the West, but he cannot have had anything but a vague idea of their potential usefulness in the years to come. Before we can examine the political and diplomatic situation leading up to the battle of Vouillé in 507, we must focus on the other important events in the interim which also played an important role in enhancing Clovis’ position in the competition with his rival Frankish kings.

Audofleda’s life at Theodoric’s court is virtually unknown, but Gregory did suggest that she was an Arian, presumably converted at the court of her husband. We should also keep in mind that Gregory’s narrative of the reign of Clovis is distorted by his emphasis on a Catholic-Arian conflict in this period which probably did not exist.109 There has also been some recent suggestion, however, that Clovis himself had become an Arian Christian, or at least toyed with the notion, and that the Arian influence may have come from Theodoric’s court, perhaps via his sister.110 It might be best to understand any

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toying with Arianism as another example of Clovis looking for ways to increase his prestige compared with the other competitors for leadership among the Franks, by making himself the religious equal of the other barbarian kings of his day: Theodoric, Gundobad, and Alaric II.\textsuperscript{111}

Further evidence for the importance of this marriage to the internal competition that Clovis faced, rather than as a means for cooperation with external forces, is found in the background leading up to the marriage. The evidence for the early part of Clovis’ reign fails to reveal any contact with Odoacer’s Italian kingdom. Clovis was principally occupied with consolidating his control over the former Roman province of Belgica II. In the years leading up to his marriage with Clovis’ sister, Theodoric was occupied with establishing himself as an agent of the Emperor Zeno in Italy against Odoacer.\textsuperscript{112} Thus, the marriage of Theodoric and Audofleda took place before the two great barbarian leaders of the West ever became neighbors or came into conflict. The marriage, therefore, did not serve to broker a peace between two competitors, or to create a specific military alliance between Clovis’ Franks and Theodoric’s Ostrogoths. Jordanes’

\textsuperscript{111}J.M. Wallace-Hadrill sees Clovis’ issuance of the \textit{Lex Salica} as an imitation of Gundobad and Alaric II, who issued their own law codes, and this possible temptation to follow in their Arian footsteps may have a similar motive.

suggestion that there was a hope for peace through the marriage is anachronistic, written after the Franks had become involved in Gothic affairs, particularly in the reign of Theudebert I (r. 533-548). Procopius, another writer from the reign of Justinian, and also not always the most reliable source for western affairs, did not mention the marriage of Theodoric with Audofleda in conjunction with Theodoric’s campaign against Odoacer and his settlement in Italy, but rather, explained:

“But after the fall of Odoacer, the Thuringians and the Visigoths began to fear the power of the Germans [Franks], which was now growing greater (for their country had become exceedingly populous and they were forcing into subjection without any concealment those who from time to time came in their way), and so they were eager to win the alliance of the Goths and Theodoric. And since Theodoric wished to attach these peoples to himself, he did not refuse to intermarry with them. Accordingly he betrothed to Alaric the younger, who was the leader of the Visigoths, his own unmarried daughter Theodichusa, and to Hermenefridus, the ruler of the Thuringians, Amalaberga, the daughter of his sister Amalafrida. As a result of this the Franks refrained from violence against these peoples through fear of Theodoric, but they began a war against the Burgundians. But later on the Franks and the Goths entered into an offensive alliance against the Burgundians...”¹¹³

The reliability of Procopius’ explanation of this historical development is suspect, since his references to Frankish history are so vague, but it does reveal his expectations of the

¹¹³Proc. BG, V.xii.20-22.
motivations and results of affinal kinship. In this explanation, marriages connecting people to Theodoric are a diplomatic tool supposed to keep them safe from the predatory grasp of the Franks. Gregory of Tours reported that Clovis had invaded and conquered the Thuringian kingdom in Clovis’ tenth year of rule (about 491), and the marriage of Hermenefridus and Amalaberga may be a resulting reaction of that campaign, after Clovis had shown himself as a power to be reckoned with. Interestingly, Clovis’ sons seem to have waited until after Theodoric was dead before they completed the conquest of the Thuringians around 531. As I will discuss below, however, Clovis did not let the kinship between Alaric and Theodoric stop him from meeting Alaric in battle. Procopius also failed to mention both the marriage of Theodoric to a Frankish bride, and Clovis’ own marriage to a Burgundian princess, both of which would have contradicted his larger explanation of the development of international relations in this period. Thus, it can be demonstrated that Procopius’ explanation of this period of history is too simplistic, relying too heavily on the traditional expectations of kinship and marriage. When he said that the Ostrogoths and Franks made a military alliance against the Burgundians, he did not refer to any marriage connection between them, and he further demonstrated that reference to kinship was not at all necessary in creating alliances. It therefore makes

\[114\text{GTH II.27: "Nam decimo regni sui anno Thoringis bellum intulit eosdemque suis diccionibus subiugavit."}

\[115\text{See Chapter 3.}

\[116\text{This probably refers to the campaign of conquest by Clovis’ sons around 534, which is discussed further in Chapter 3.} \]
more sense to see in the marriage of Audofleda and Theodoric an effort on Clovis’ part to enhance his status among the other rival Frankish kings.

Moorhead has suggested that some of the marriages contracted between Theodoric’s family and the other Germanic rulers of the West were initiated by these others, seeking “a desirable ally.” Jordanes certainly believed that Clovis was fortunate to gain access to Theodoric’s distinguished Gothic dynasty. This would have set him above any other of the minor Frankish kings, like Sigibert the Lame, Chararic, and Ragnachar, who were still living and competing with Clovis. We should also note that despite a varying relationship (sometimes allies, sometimes enemies) between the Franks and the Ostrogoths, Theodoric never dismissed Audofleda, even though she only bore him one daughter. The fact is that even though the period from 493 to 511 is characterized by constantly shifting military alliances among Franks, Burgundians, Visigoths and Ostrogoths aimed at territorial expansion and the personal aggrandizement of kings, none of those kings who were married to foreign princesses (see figure 1, p. 32) ever repudiated their wives, even when their respective peoples stood on opposite sides of the battle line. The military alliances of this period do not always find much correlation with the marriages of this period, since Theodoric was related to most of the barbarian kings by marriage, and yet fought with these same barbarian kings on several occasions. Despite Jordanes’ use of foedus and sociare in connection with this marriage, there is little evidence of political or military cooperation between Clovis and Theodoric, besides the episode following the defeat of the Alamans and the sending of the cithara player,

117 Moorhead, Theodoric in Italy, 51.
which are discussed further below. The meaning and motivations for this marriage lie in
the status statements it helped each participant make in the context of his own political
situation, whether internally against rival Frankish kings, or externally against other
Germanic kings. Clovis made similar use of his marriage to the Burgundian princess,
Clotild.

CLOVIS AND CLOTILD

Most modern historians have placed Clovis’ marriage to Clotild in the context of
Theodoric’s network of marriage alliances \(^{118}\), but I have just suggested that that network
is not a very useful way of understanding the motivations and implications of these
marriages, particularly from Clovis’ perspective. Ian Wood’s succinct comment,
“Clotild’s influence on relations between Franks and Burgundians is hard to assess” is a
recognition that this marriage cannot be best understood in traditional terms of ‘marriage
alliances’. \(^{119}\) Part of the difficulty, of course, is the nature of our sources. The most
detailed sources for the marriage of Clovis and Clotild are the legendary material to be
found in the Historiae of Gregory of Tours, and the later additions in Fredegar and the
Liber Historiae Francorum. \(^{120}\) Walter Goffart, Ian Wood, Alexander Callander Murray,
and Roger Collins have all discussed the legendary tendencies of these works, while at

\(^{118}\)See, for example, Wood, The Merovingian Kingdoms, 42;

\(^{119}\)Wood, 43.

\(^{120}\)GTH II.28-34; Fred. III.17-23; LHF 11-16.
the same noting their usefulness.¹²¹ Their work has shown that hidden amongst these narratives, there is a basis of fact which can be teased out of the myth. These stories can, therefore, add to our understanding of the forging of a marriage, especially what it meant to these later authors, although the details are probably not to be always trusted. The key to understanding this marriage, though, is to first recognize how the sources tend to explain marriage according to traditional expectations, then to consider how those sources emphasize the importance of status and prestige in a marriage, and finally to place the marriage into the context, not of the international marriage network of Theodoric the Great, but of that internal conflict that Clovis was waging with his competitors for leadership over the Franks.

Michel Rouche’s biography of Clovis places great emphasis on the unequal status of Clovis and Clotild. Clotild was a Burgundian Princess, while Clovis was nothing more than a petty Salian king.¹²² This created what Rouche calls a hypergamic marriage — a marriage involving a woman of higher rank than the man.¹²³ The sources do confirm a reluctance on the part of Gundobad, Clotild's uncle and guardian, to give Clotild in marriage to Clovis. When the marriage probably took place, around 492-494, Clovis could not compete with the prestige of Gundobad, who was a former Master of the Soldiers in the service of the Emperor at Rome. By 508, however, Clovis had at least equaled, if not outstripped, that prestige when he took up an honorary consulship offered

¹²¹Goffart, Narrators, 10; Murray, From Roman to Merovingian Gaul, 589; Wood, The Merovingian Kingdoms, 35; Collins, Fredegar (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1996), 18.


¹²³ Rouche, 241.
to him by the Emperor Anastasius. Gundobad (r. 480-516) was the nephew of the noted Master of the Soldiers, Ricimer (r. 456-472), whom he followed in that office, before returning to be king of the Burgundians. While Gregory does not mention Gundobad’s experience at the Roman court, his presentation of Clotild’s family not only emphasizes her royal ancestry, but also presents Clovis seizing an opportunity to gain access to some of that prestige:

Now Gundioc, the king of the Burgundians, was of the race [genere] of King Athanaric, the persecutor, who was discussed already. To Gundioc were born four sons: Gundobad, Godegisel, Chilperic, and Godomar. Gundobad killed his brother Chilperic with a sword and then he drowned Chilperic’s wife in water by securing a stone about her neck. He condemned her two daughters to exile; the elder, who became a nun, was called Crona, the younger, Clotild. When Clovis sent a legation to Burgundy, this girl, Clotild, was discovered by his legates. When they saw that she was elegant and wise, and found out that she was of royal stock [de regio genere], they announced this to King Clovis. And he did not delay in sending a legation to Gundobad, seeking her in marriage for himself. Gundobad, who was afraid to refuse that thing, handed her over to Clovis' men; and after receiving the girl, they swiftly brought her before their king. When he saw her, the king rejoiced greatly, and joined her to him as his wife, even though he already had by a concubine a son by the name of Theuderic.\textsuperscript{124}
The full extent of Clovis’ motivations in seeking the marriage are not made clear here. Gregory of Tours was writing many decades later and was perhaps armed with information provided by Clotild herself, who spent some of her later years at Tours. This may explain why he focused here mainly on providing grounds for Clotild’s later appeal for revenge against Gundobad for her father’s murder.\(^{125}\) Still, there is a sense of Clovis forcing Gundobad’s hand, finding a way to convince him to marry his royal niece to an up-and-comer like himself. Ian Wood has noted, “the Bishop of Tours implies that Clovis’ choice of a bride was calculated to cause unease.”\(^{126}\) This unease really amounts to the pressure Clovis needed to force Gundobad to give Clotild to him in marriage.

The date of the marriage is significant for understanding the context and motivations for the marriage. Eugen Ewig places the marriage of Clovis and Clotild sometime between 492 and 494.\(^{127}\) He based his conclusion in large part upon extrapolations from an intricate reconstruction of dates for the birth of the children and grandchildren of Clotild. It ultimately rests upon the involvement of Clovis’ grandson Gunthar, the oldest son of Clovis’ youngest son Chlothar I, in his father’s campaign.

\(^{125}\) Some have suggested that the story of Gundobad’s involvement in the murder of Clotild’s parent is just not likely: Moorhead, 214.

\(^{126}\) Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 42.

against the Visigoths in 532. From that, Ewig calculated that Gunthar was born about 517/18, and therefore, Chlothar I could have been born no later than about 501/2. The marriage of Clovis and Clotild would have had to take place about 8-10 years earlier, giving them time to bear their older sons. A. Van der Vyver tried to place the marriage after the Burgundian civil war of 500-501 between the brothers Gundobad and Godegisel,128 which would have given it the role of settling any enmity between Clovis and Gundobad from that conflict. This seems unlikely, however, given Ewig’s calculations — Chlothar I just could not have been born about 510 as Van der Vyver’s argument demands, given what we know about him and his children. Van der Vyver’s argument rests too much upon the expectations often attached to marriages in the Early Medieval period, and cannot overcome the weight of Ewig’s calculations. The marriage of Clovis with Clotild in the first half of the 490s, therefore, comes just a few years after the defeat of Syagrius in 486, and a few years before his victories against the Alamans, the Burgundians, and the Visigoths, in 496, 500, and 508 respectively. It would appear to belong to the period of consolidation of his rule in northern Gaul and the beginning of his expansionary moves against larger foreign threats. That period must have encompassed an effort to expand his power base by attracting more warriors to his war-band, and by establishing his prestige in order to enlist allies in his campaigns. The marriage to Clotild fits well in this milieu.

Gregory of Tours also mentioned in his short description that when Clovis married Clotild, he already had a son, Theuderic I, who was the offspring of an earlier union to an unnamed woman, whom Gregory calls a ‘concubina’. Eugen Ewig would classify this first union as a “Friedelehe” rather than a concubinage, since Theuderic was never considered anything but a rightful son and an heir of Clovis. What is significant about this point is that it is a good indication of Clovis’ rising ambitions. Whether or not he actually gave up his previous mate, as Ewig suggests was expected when Merovingian kings entered into foreign marriages, Clovis was raising the stakes in the competition for Frankish leadership. With this marriage he must have outstripped the other Frankish kings, who probably had unions of a similar status to his own earlier union. Since we know nothing about the unions of the other Frankish kings, this must remain speculative at best, but it would seem logical to expect these minor Germanic kings to have wives from minor Germanic families.

To go beyond Gregory’s short narrative of the marriage, we must turn to the legendary source materials already mentioned above. The seventh-century historian known as Fredegar, in the midst of abridging Gregory’s history, added a lengthy account of Clotild’s marriage. Fredegar may have had access to some local information about the event which he found important enough to interrupt the abridgement of Gregory’s

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130Ewig, Studien, 41.
The story which Fredegar tells adds some intriguing details and is close enough to that of the writer of the independent *Liber Historiae Francorum*, to suggest that both found the story worthy enough to devote significant space to it in their histories. In these accounts, Clotild took a more active role in the marriage negotiations than she had in Gregory’s account. Fredegar related how Clovis’ envoy, Aurelianus, dressed as a beggar, came to Geneva and found Clotild and her sister, who is called Saedeleuba in this account. As in Gregory’s account, Gundobad was reported to have feared to refuse Clovis’ request, but Fredegar also said that he hoped thereby to “enter into a friendship [*amiciciam*] with Clovis.” The actual value of this supposed *amicitia* is discussed below, when Clovis attacked Gundobad during the Burgundian Civil War. Fredegar’s account of the murder of Clotild’s family added two brothers to her family, and a desire on Clotild’s part for revenge. Much of this, however, may simply be a justification of the later actions of Clotild’s son, Chlodomer, against Gundobad’s son, Sigismund, who ultimately lost his kingdom to the Franks in the name

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131See Roger Collins, *Fredegar*, 17-23; and Wood, “Fredegar’s Fables” in *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Anton Scharer and Georg Scheibelreiter (Vienna, 1994), 360; both of which show that Fredegar had access to some good (and some not so good) supplementary sources.

132See also the introductions to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* and Bernard S. Bachrach, trans., *Liber Historiae Francorum*. Alexander Callander Murray, *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul*, 621 states explicitly the independence of the LHF, which is only suggested by the fact that Wallace-Hadrill and Bachrach do not discuss any connection between the two.

133Fred. III.18: “*sperans amiciciam cum Chlodoveo intre, eam daturus spondet.*”

134Fred. III.19: “*quod genitorem Clotichilde, germano tuo, Chilperico gladium trucidasti, matrem eius, lapidem ad collo legata, negare iussisti, duos eiusdem germanos, capite truncato, in puteum fecisti projicere. . . . dixit Chrotechidis: Gratias tibi ago, Deus omnipotens, quod inicium vindicte de genitoribus et fratribus meis video.*”
of avenging the murder of Clotild’s father. In the Liber Historiae Francorum, Gundobad appears more opposed to the marriage, but less afraid of Clovis — it is Gundobad’s advisors who are afraid of the Franks. That account says that he “angrily” (cum ira) gave her over to the Franks.

According to both Fredegar and the Liber Historiae Francorum, Clovis had been sending emissaries to Gundobad before the marriage. Clovis desired to marry Clotild and sent Aurelianus to make the arrangements. Aurelianus met with Clotild and delivered Clovis’ proposal to her in secret. Clotild accepted the offer and received a betrothal ring, but she had to manipulate things to bring the marriage to pass. Now that the marriage was arranged between Clovis and Clotild, Gundobad’s acceptance still had to be secured. At this point the accounts diverge, with Fredegar showing a Gundobad more willing to give Clotild over, in the hope of securing friendship (amicitia) with Clovis, while the Liber Historiae Francorum focused on Clotild’s trick of hiding her betrothal ring among Gundobad’s treasure, which forced Gundobad to accept that he had been out-maneuvered by his rival. The Liber Historiae Francorum claims that Clovis was willing to fight for his betrothed, and that Gundobad was suspicious that Clovis was just looking for an

\[\text{\textsuperscript{135}}\text{See Chapter 2.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{136}}\text{LHF 12: “Acceptamque eam cum ira ipsius Aureliano tradidit.”}\]
excuse to attack the Burgundians. In the end, though, Clovis got his bride and a large treasure. On their wedding night, Clotild asked Clovis to demand from Gundobad the inheritance due to her from her parents.

All of the accounts agree that Clovis wanted to marry the niece of Gundobad who did not want her to marry Clovis. Karl Ferdinand Werner has suggested that Clovis used the pressure of his alliance with Theodoric (that is, threatening Gundobad on two fronts) to gain the hand of Clotild. For Werner, though, the end result of the marriage was Gundobad’s neutrality in Clovis’ upcoming wars with Alaric II. Such expectations do not make much sense, however, in this context. It hardly follows that having forced Gundobad to give Clotild to him in marriage, that Clovis could expect Gundobad’s cooperation or even neutrality based on the fact that he had wrenched his niece from him through the tricks of his legate Aurelianus. Besides, Gundobad was not just a neutral in the war against Alaric, but an ally of Clovis who eventually bore the brunt of Theodoric’s counterattack. In between the marriage and the war against Alaric, however, Clovis stood on the opposite side of Gundobad in the Burgundian civil war. Nevertheless, Fredegar does have Gundobad recognize the inevitability of the marriage and then express the hope that the marriage would bring friendship between the Franks and Burgundians. It should

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137 LHF, 12: “...qualem occasionem querat Chlodoveus adversum nos...”

138 LHF 12: “Et memento, queso, ut requirere debeas porcionem genitoris mei et genetricis meae, quos avunculus meas Gundobadus malo ordine interficit, si sanguinem eorum Dominus vindicetur.”

come as no surprise that these hopes based on traditional expectations of kinship did not meet reality. Only a few years later, Clovis was attacking Gundobad, threatening his life and kingship.

The traditional explanations of marriage as a ‘marriage alliance’ do not fit very well in trying to understand Clovis’ marriage to Clotild. Besides the wish in Fredegar’s account that Gundobad hoped to enter into amicitia with Clovis, there is no reference to this marriage as an alliance. The fact that this expectation for future cooperation based upon marital kinship is stated as a wish is a good sign that that is not what the marriage really meant. Expectations were not reality, and kinsmen were just as likely to be rivals as allies. Gregory of Tours, in particular, saw the marriage as the beginning of the Frankish conquest of the Burgundian kingdom, rather than a political or military alliance between Clovis and the Burgundians. What all the sources do agree upon, however, is what a prestigious bride Clotild was. Since Clotild’s parents were deceased, and her sister was a nun, she was the heiress to her father’s treasure. The sources tell us that Gundobad had control over that treasure as her guardian, but Clovis may have seen an opportunity to gain control of that treasure, and Clotild, desiring to have more control over her own inheritance, worked out a scheme to force Gundobad to hand it over, backed up by the threat of war with the Franks. Thus, Clotild had the marital virtue of wealth. Gregory also took pains to emphasize the nobility of Clotild. When he introduced Gundobad, he described him as being “from the race of King Athanaric” [r. 365-376/81], which would have applied to Clotild, as his niece, as well. Athanaric was an early Gothic ruler, and he linked Clotild with the Goths, the premier race of Germanic peoples of the
fifth and sixth centuries. She, therefore, also had the marital virtue of high birth and rank. Gregory further reported that Clovis’ legates “saw that she was elegant and wise, and born of a royal race.” She was thus of good character, as well.

For Gregory of Tours, the relationship between Clovis and Clotild centered around the king’s conversion to Catholicism. This also made Clotild prestigious, in Gregory’s eyes at least. Clotild may very well have been involved in the conversion of Clovis, although the story told by Gregory is probably a compressed version of the real story. Clovis’ conversion to Catholic Christianity was a long process, which may have involved instruction by Remigius of Rheims, encouragement from Clotild, and even victory in battle against the Alamans. All of this may have eventually convinced Clovis to become a Catholic Christian and be baptized as such. It is, therefore, not unlikely that Clotild played a role in the king’s conversion. Clotild’s Catholicism may have made her more prestigious in Clovis’ eyes as well. Again, chances are that Clovis’ Frankish competitors did not have Catholic wives, and Catholicism was the religion of the Roman emperor, as well as of the Gallo-Romans and their bishops. It is difficult to show that Clovis married Clotild with the thought of converting to Catholicism, but with a Catholic bride, he could hope to ensure good relations and the loyalty of his Gallo-Roman subjects. All of these virtues together — her wealth, beauty, wisdom, royal

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140GTH II.28: “Fuit igitur et Gundivechus rex Burgundionum ex genere Athanarici regis persecutoris . . .”

141GTH II.28: “Qui cum ea vidissent elegantem atque sapientem et cognovissent, quod de regio esset genere. . .”

blood, and her Catholicism — made Clotild a premier bride for a Frankish kinglet with high ambitions, and contributed to Clovis’ efforts to outstrip his rivals for power in northern Gaul.

**THE BURGUNDIAN CIVIL WAR**

After Clovis’ marriage with Clotild, his dealings with the Burgundian kings, who were now his uncles by marriage, are limited in the sources to two episodes: Clovis’ involvement in the Burgundian civil war, and Burgundian participation in the Frankish campaign against the Visigoths. The Burgundian War has been firmly dated to the years 500-501 by the Chronicle of Marius of Avenches, a contemporary of Gregory of Tours who lived closer to the location of the events in question, and who inserted what was for him a lengthy description of the Burgundian Civil War in the midst of his year by year annals. Clovis’ involvement in this war is a good example of his alliance-making with foreign kings, and good evidence that his marriage to Clotild did not create any kind of long-term peace between Clovis and Gundobad.

The Burgundian civil war was mainly fought between Gundobad (r. 480-516) and his brother Godegisel, a Burgundian sub-king. During the war, Godegisel secretly sent envoys to Clovis to enlist his auxilium (solatium and adiuturium are also used in this passage, probably for variety’s sake). Godegisel promised to Clovis “however much

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143Chronicle of Marius of Avenches, MGH AA XI.1.

144GTH II.32: “Cumque se invicem inpugnarent, auditas Godigisilus Chlodovechi regis victorias misit ad eum legationem occulte, dicens: ‘Si mihi ad persequendum fratrem meum praebueris solatium, ut eum bello interficere aut de regione eiecere possim, tributum tibi, quale tu ipse vellis iniungere, annis singulis dissolvam.’ Quod ille libenter accipiens, auxilium ei, ubicumque necessitas poposcerit.
tribute you wish to impose, every year.” Clovis readily accepted and promised to come to Godegisel’s aid “whenever necessity should demand.” Then, according to Gregory, they made specific arrangements as to when Clovis would come, for Clovis moved his army against Gundobad “at the appointed time”. Gundobad, probably relying on their blood kinship, called upon Godegisel for adiuturium against Clovis’ attack, and as expected Godegisel raised his army and joined him at Dijon. Because of Godegisel’s deceit, however, Gundobad was routed by the combined forces of Godegisel and Clovis, and driven into the city of Avignon.

It appears from Gregory’s narrative that Godegisel now considered the terms of his agreement with Clovis fulfilled. He offered Clovis a part of his kingdom, and then went to Vienne to celebrate his newly enlarged kingdom. Clovis besieged Gundobad in Avignon until he exacted a promise of yearly tribute from him as well, and then went home himself. Even though Clovis had the opportunity to finish off Gundobad, he was content to accept the booty he had plundered, plus the promise of future tribute, and return back home.145 A tributary Burgundian king may have been worth more, in terms of prestige, and perhaps monetarily as well, than a dead Burgundian king who had brothers and sons to succeed him. Gundobad paid the tribute for the first year, but reneged on the


145GTH II.32.
deal after he marched against his brother and killed him.\textsuperscript{146}  Gregory’s general account is confirmed in the \textit{Chronicle of Marius of Avenches}.\textsuperscript{147} Whether Gregory’s details are completely accurate is irrelevant, however. It is enough to know that his audience would have considered these kinds of negotiations and promises as plausible. This episode is not only based upon expectations of behavior between brothers — Gundobad called upon his brother for aid when Clovis invaded, and Godegisel came — but also on the fact that no bond of kinship was necessary for Clovis to ally militarily with Godegisel. Even though Godegisel was also Clotild’s uncle, the affinal kinship with Clovis does not appear in the sources as an explanation for their alliance, and this is not surprising. When the sources discuss Clotild’s marriage, they always refer to Gundobad’s involvement without mention of Godegisel, and since the affinal kinship to both of Clotild’s uncles was arguably of equal weight, it does not make a lot of sense to see the alliance between Clovis and Godegisel in such terms. Indeed, the whole civil war involved kinsmen fighting with each other. For Godegisel, the alliance with Clovis trumped his kinship to

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\textsuperscript{146}GTH II.32: “Godigisilus vero, obtenta victoria, promissam Chlodovecho aliquam partem regni sui, cum pace discessit Viennamque triumphans, tamquam si iam totum possederit regnum, ingreditur. Auctis adhuc Chlodvechus rex viribus post Gundobadum abiit, ut eum de civitate extractum interemeret. . . Mitte potius legationem et tributum, quod tibi annis singulis dissolvat, inpone, ut et regio salva sit et tu tributa dissolventi perpetuo domineris. Quod si noluerit, tunc quod libuerit facies. Quo consilio rex accepto hostem patriae redire iubet ad propria. Tunc missa legationem ad Gundobadum, ut ei per singulos annos tributa inposita reddere debeat, iubet. Ad ille et de praesenti solvit et deinceps solviturum se esse promittit.”
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\textsuperscript{147}Chronicle of Marius of Avenches, MGH AA XI.1: “1 His consulibus pugna facta est Divione inter Francos et Burgundiones Godegeselo hoc dolose contra fratem suum Gundobagaudum machinante. in eo proelio Godegeselus cum suis adversus fratrem suum cum Francis dimicavit et fugatum fratrem suum Gundobagaudum regnum ipsius paulisper obtinuit et Gundobagaudus Avinione latebram dedit. 2 Eo anno Gundobagaudus resumpit viribus Viennam cum exercitu circumdedit, captaque civitate fratem suum interfecit pluresque seniores ac Burgundiones, qui cum ipso senserant, multis exquisitisque tormentis morte damnavit, regnumque, quem perderat, cum id quod Godegeselus habuerat, receptum usque in diem mortis suae feliciter gubernavit.”
\end{flushright}
Gundobad. This is reminiscent of Clovis’ own approach to the traditional principles attached to kinship: useful, but subordinate to political necessity. Like Clovis’ attempt to lure out unsuspecting kinsmen based on the expectations of kinship, Godegisel’s secret alliance with Clovis worked so well because he could count on Gundobad to call for him and his army to aid him when Clovis attacked. Thus Gundobad was not alarmed when Godegisel appeared, and surprised when Godegisel did not act according to the expected behavior connected with kinship.

As for the alliance between Clovis and Godegisel, we can conclude that Clovis and Godegisel agreed upon a designated time for the action, and placed a price upon Clovis’ aid. It was, however, an agreement of limited ends and duration. Clovis did not come back later to help Godegisel against his resurgent brother, and he even had to accept the loss of Gundobad’s promised tribute shortly thereafter. Still, he surely took something home with which to reward his army and fill his coffers. Neither Gregory nor Marius of Avenches, however, mentioned the marriage of Clovis and Clotild in their discussion of the war, which suggests that they, at least, did not see any connections between the marriage and the auxilium provided by Clovis. Clovis and Godegisel could make an agreement without relying upon kinship. It would appear that the competition among kinsmen for the Burgundian kingdom was as fierce as that among the Franks.

**Alamans**

The Burgundian Civil War is just one example of how Clovis was becoming not just an important Frankish king, but an important figure on a wider stage as well. As we
move into the sixth century, Clovis’ involvement in affairs outside his own kingdom expanded dramatically, as he defeated first the Alamans, then the Visigoths. These two victories must be seen not just in the light of his internal competition with the remaining Frankish kings, but even more in the context of his rivalry with the other Germanic kings whom he also sought to eclipse, thereby expanding his power and his kingdom into lands not previously held by Franks. By 506, Clovis had firmly established himself as the leading Frankish king, even if he had not yet eliminated all of his rivals. He was married to a prestigious Catholic Burgundian princess, was connected by marriage to the most prestigious of the Germanic rulers in the West, Theodoric the Great, and had proved himself a successful general and politician in his involvement in the Burgundian Civil War. Still, if he did not defend his realm against the peoples on his borders, there were potential leaders, men like Sigibert the Lame, ready to step into his position. Thus, in the early sixth century, Clovis sought to confirm his position and increase his power further, by engaging in war with his two most threatening neighbors. These neighbors, the Alamans to the east, and the Visigoths to the south, were Germanic peoples with a long, prestigious history of involvement in Roman affairs. To beat them decisively in battle would certainly confirm that the new power in the north and west was Clovis, King of the Franks. These two campaigns are also illustrative of the limited value of kinship in regulating international relations.

Clovis so soundly defeated the Alamans in 506 that many of them fled south to Italy, seeking refuge in Theodoric’s kingdom. In response, Theodoric sent a letter, written by Cassiodorus, asking Clovis to end his pursuit of the Alamans. Before sending
this letter, Theodoric had also written to Boethius, the eminent Italian scholar of the age, requesting that he choose a cithara player to send to King Clovis, who had earlier requested one from him.\textsuperscript{148} Theodoric’s view of his relationship to Clovis becomes clear from his comment near the end of the letter, expressing the hope that the cithara player “might tame the wild hearts of that people with a sweet sound.” Theodoric saw himself as more cultured and civilized, even of higher status than Clovis. Such representations of Roman civilization, to which Clovis’ marital connection to Theodoric granted him access, must have enhanced Clovis’ status and prestige in comparison to the other Frankish kings who had no such connections. Thus, in Theodoric’s letter to Clovis, he informed the Frankish king that he had sent the cithara player to him.\textsuperscript{149} Theodoric acts as the superior monarch, bestowing gifts upon a subordinate king. Such a gift, which arose out of previous contact which has not been preserved in our sources, suggests a state of gift-exchange and peace between the two courts, surely a prestigious situation for the Frankish king. Both sides enjoyed the benefits of the relationship, as they each interpreted it, but there was a limit to its practical usefulness. Theodoric could appear as the most civilized and respected king in the West, while Clovis could flaunt his connections to that civilization. Even though Clovis did relent in his pursuit of the Alamans across the Ostrogothic border in 506, it is just as likely that he did so because of the imprudence and

\textsuperscript{148} Cass. Var., II.40: “Cum rex Francorum convivii nostri fama pelluctus a nobis citharoedum magnis precibus expectisset. . . citharoedum, quem a nobis diximus postulatum, sapientia vestra eligat prae senti tempore meliorum, facturus aliquid Orphei, cum dulci sono gentilium fera corda domuerit.”

\textsuperscript{149} Cass. Var., II.41: “Citharoedum etiam arte sua doctum pariter destinavimus expetitum, qui ore manibusque consona voce cantando gloriam vestrae potestatis oblectet: quem ideo fore credidimus gratum, quia vos eum iudicastis magnopere dirigendum.”
impracticality of attacking Theodoric in his own kingdom, than out of any respect for their kinship. Clovis had already proved himself the mighty warrior, general, and king against the Alamans, and by not pursuing them into Theodoric’s kingdom, he could continue to enjoy the benefits of his relationship with Theodoric.

**The Battle of Vouillé**

That Clovis was not just a pawn, or even a knight, in Theodoric’s chess game of politics and diplomacy is further demonstrated by the events of the following year, which led to arguably his greatest victory, over the Visigoths at Vouillé. In the first chapter I have already discussed the diplomatic exchanges leading up to the battle from Theodoric’s perspective. There the real diplomatic worth of the network of kinship was revealed. Theodoric, despite his efforts to the contrary, could not avert the Battle of Vouillé, in which the Franks and the Burgundians allied against and defeated the Visigoths, killing their king, Theodoric’s son-in-law, Alaric II. Theodoric sent a force in support of the Visigoths, but it only arrived in time to halt the expansion of the Franks and Burgundians. At the same time that Theodoric’s prestige in the West was being challenged by Clovis, his position in Italy was coming under great pressure from Constantinople, and war was about to break out with the Byzantines. Following Clovis’ victory at Vouillé, the Emperor Anastasius rewarded him with an honorary consulship, which represented a formal imperial recognition of Clovis’ position in the West and a

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supplanting of Theodoric as the emperor’s most favored barbarian ruler in the West. In the wake of his victory, Clovis took control over much of the northern part of Aquitaine, and worked to keep Theodoric from becoming the king of the Visigoths, while Theodoric established a stronger Ostrogothic presence in Provence and even beyond, at the expense of the Burgundians. Clearly, political ambition was triumphing over kinship obligations for Theodoric and Clovis.

The reality of the situation was that Theodoric and Clovis could use their relationship with each other to enhance their status within their own political worlds, but when those worlds came into conflict, each of them approached the situation with his own political aspirations at the fore. Theodoric tried to emphasize his position as the most prestigious of the barbarian kings by dictating policy to those he had thought to have subordinated to him. Herwig Wolfram has shown how this war was not just a one-time battle, but an extended conflict beginning in the 490s which culminated at Vouillé. Theodoric’s letters trying to mediate the conflict in 506/507 reveal Theodoric posing as a ruler who has control over the West, at a time when his position in Italy was being questioned by the Byzantine court.

Peter Heather sees Theodoric as more interested in personal aggrandizement than in general peace and prosperity. Theodoric may have tried to use marriage links with the

151 See Wood, The Merovingian Kingdoms, 49, 165; Moorhead, Theodoric in Italy, 185-6; Jan Prostko-Prostynski, The Emperor Anastasius I’s Gothic Policy (Poznan, 1996), 278.


other Germanic kings to influence them and get what he wanted, but if that failed, he was willing to use other methods to meet his goals. Heather makes the observation that “while Theodoric was polite enough when writing directly to Clovis, his comments about him to others were inflammatory.”\textsuperscript{154} He even suggested that Theodoric may have deliberately delayed his support to Alaric, in order to gain control over much of the Visigothic kingdom for himself after Alaric’s death.\textsuperscript{155} When war broke out, each participant had to adopt a course of action suited to his own political position.

On the other side, Clovis could not back down from Alaric’s challenge, as his own position as one of the most powerful, even if also the most recently arisen, of the barbarian kings would have been compromised, as well as his status among the Frankish peoples. Gregory of Tours tells us that before Vouillé, Clovis and Alaric had made an \textit{amicitia}. Yet, Theodoric’s letters seem to indicate that the quarrel which arose between them leading up to Vouillé was rather minor — an excuse for the two to go to war. In such a case, it is no surprise that Theodoric was unable to work out a diplomatic situation — both were bent on war. We might even view this battle as one over status and prestige — who was to be the pre-eminent barbarian ruler in Gaul? What is perhaps surprising is the way the supposedly carefully constructed alliance network broke down. Gundobad preferred to back Clovis against Alaric II and Theodoric the Great. Clovis, whose sister was married to Theodoric the Ostrogoth, and Gundobad, whose son was married to Theodoric’s daughter, invaded the Visigothic kingdom of Alaric II, who was married to

\textsuperscript{154}Heather, 231.

\textsuperscript{155}Heather, 232.
another of Theodoric’s daughters. During the run-up to the actual military campaign, Theodoric sent letters to Clovis, Alaric and Gundobad, as well as to the kings of the Heruli, Warni, and Thuringians, Clovis’ neighbors to the northeast. While these letters display Theodoric’s own belief that their common kinship by marriage should be enough to stop the impending war, they were of little avail in the end. Theodoric’s letter to Gundobad tried to convince him to help settle the quarrel between Clovis and Alaric peacefully. His letter to the Thuringians suggests that Gundobad was sending legates to Clovis, along with those of Theodoric, to help convince him against the war.156 This would seem to suggest general cooperation between Gundobad and Theodoric, leading up to the war. Herwig Wolfram has also argued that Alaric had actually supported Gundobad in the Burgundian civil war, in exchange for control of the city of Avignon.157 According to the traditional understanding of marriage alliances, it would appear that Gundobad was firmly in the camp of Theodoric and Alaric. Despite these connections, however, once Clovis’ war against the Visigoths started, Gundobad saw an opportunity for expansion (or at least to get Avignon back) and joined Clovis. He turned his back on the 'marriage alliance' with Theodoric and his former ally Alaric, to join with the man who had besieged him at Avignon only seven years earlier and exacted a promise of tribute from him. Victory was secured against Alaric II, but when the avenging counter-

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attack came from Theodoric, it was Gundobad who bore the brunt of it. All of this is
difficult to understand in terms of traditional theories about marriage alliances. It is better
to see these shifting alliances as unrelated to their affinal relations. Each king had their
own interests, concerns, and outlook on the political landscape of the early sixth century.
A king would only cooperate with outside forces when he thought it beneficial to his own
position. Conflicts and opportunities to enhance their own position could come and go in
an ever changing landscape of political maneuvering, and could not be simply determined
by whom one was married to. Clovis, Gundobad, Theodoric, and Alaric knew how to
make political, military and diplomatic alliances, and they also knew how to use the
status and prestige of royal blood, wealth, and success in battle, to enhance their own
positions within their own political environment.

To add to our understanding of Clovis’ competition, not just with his rivals for
Frankish leadership, but also for an enhanced status among the other barbarian rulers, we
should consider Gregory of Tours’ statement that before the Battle of Vouillé in 507
many people in southern Gaul wanted Clovis to come and liberate them from the Arian
Goths. We may be witnessing the same kind of process we observed in Clovis’
campaigns against his Frankish rivals: a desire on the part of the elites of that region to
move themselves from the loyalty of one barbarian overlord to another based on his
success, and his consequent prestige — no one wants to be on the side of a loser, and it

\footnote{Moorhead, \textit{Theodoric in Italy}, 180-183 discusses Gundobad’s relations with Theodoric in this
period. See also Wolfram, \textit{History of the Goths}, 311-12.}
was becoming clear that Clovis was a winner. Alaric may have welcomed the opportunity to try and re-establish his own prestige against the newcomer, Clovis.

When Clovis defeated Alaric II at Vouillé, he brought as much of Alaric’s old kingdom under his direct rule as he could, expanding his own territory and resources. In order to win such a battle, however, Clovis had had to attract to his side auxiliary forces, including a contingent of Franks under the rule of another Frankish king, Sigibert the Lame, and apparently some Gallo-Romans under the command of men of senatorial rank. For Clovis, this was a war of conquest which brought him a great reputation as a conqueror, but at the same time it must have enhanced his status as a Frankish king by offering his Frankish allies a great opportunity for plundering. Clovis used his success in battle to establish his personal prestige as a Germanic king. As well as adding to his territory, his treasury and his army, and thereby his status, through conquest, he also augmented his status by contracting two prestigious marriages for his family, with which none of the other Frankish chieftains could compete. In spite of some of the traditional

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160In Theodoric’s 506/507 letter to Alaric discussed in chapter 1 and further below, Alaric appears ready and even anxious to go to battle against Clovis, while Theodoric reminds him that he hasn’t had the same kind of battle experience that Clovis has had.


162GTH II.37.
statements connected to these marriages, the reality was that these marriages did not bring Clovis military allies, or direct political support from his kinsmen by marriage, but prestigious royal connections to the two most prestigious Germanic rulers of his day — Theodoric and Gundobad. This prestige helped Clovis to win his internal Frankish competition rather than providing for external cooperation.

**Conclusion**

There can be little doubt that Clovis was engaged in a competition for power, based on the control of territory, wealth, and nobles. By the end of his reign in 511, he was clearly the master of the Franks and most of Gaul. This represented a massive increase in his position from when he inherited a claim to leadership over the Franks in the former Roman province of Belgica II. It happened because of a sustained effort to best his rivals and establish himself as, arguably, the greatest of the barbarian kings of his day. Only Theodoric the Great could challenge him for that title by 511, but Clovis had also made significant inroads against the position of Theodoric in the West. Clovis was successful because he was able to increase his control over the resources which marked him as a successful king: treasure, territory, and warriors. Control over such resources facilitated his ability to further increase those resources. It was a perpetuating cycle, and Clovis demonstrated himself a master at working the cycle to his advantage.

What also becomes clear is that Clovis knew the value of kinship, or at least how to use it to his advantage. Furthermore, he knew when to ignore it and to rely on other sources of strength. Even if some of his military alliances were based upon an
underlying assumption of kinship, it is difficult to explain his success only in such terms. Clovis, as often as not, was engaged in fighting against those to whom he was related, whether it was other Frankish kings, like Chararic and Ragnachar, or his wife’s uncle, Gundobad. The battle of Vouillé offers the best example of how kinship was subordinated to politics. Clovis and his one time foe, Gundobad, allied against Alaric II, probably Gundobad’s one time ally, and Theodoric, to whom both Clovis and Gundobad were related by marriage. It is therefore best to look beyond kinship and marriage to understand the political choices of the leaders of Western Europe at this time.

Marriage served other useful functions. Clovis’ marriage to Clotild brought him a prestigious bride, which meant that his sons by Clotild shared in her prestigious blood as well. This helped to ensure the continuation of Clovis’ relatively young dynasty as kings of the Franks. Both this marriage, and that of his sister to Theodoric, must have also enhanced his status vis-a-vis the other Frankish kings of his day. As he accumulated victories in battle, treasure from plunder, territory from conquest, and connections to prestigious blood lines, his rule must have become a juggernaut against which the other Frankish kings, and even the other Germanic kings in the West, could not keep up.
CHAPTER 3

THE HEIRS OF CLOVIS, 511-561

The period encompassed by the reign of Clovis’ youngest son, Chlothar I (r. 511-561), which includes the reigns of Theuderic I (r. 511-531), Chlodomer (r. 511-524), Childebert I (r. 511-558), Theudebert I (r. 531-548), and Theudebald I (r. 548-555), was the great age of foreign marriages for the Merovingians. Like their progenitor, Clovis, these kings’ marriages were intricately connected to the competition among the Frankish kings for treasure, territory, and loyal followers. The competition had changed, however.

Clovis had united all the Frankish peoples under his rule, and established a greatly enlarged Frankish kingdom which included much of northern Gaul and parts of southern Gaul and western Germany. At his death, rulership of his kingdom was divided into four regions, each ruled by one of his sons — these divisions are often referred to as the Teilreich. There remained the concept of a single Frankish kingdom (Regnum Francorum), but ruled by four kings, each with their own demarcated territory and followers. The history of the Frankish kingdom from Clovis’ death in 511 to the death of Chlothar I, his last remaining son, in 561, is one of constant competition among the heirs

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of Clovis, whose rivals for power were not any remaining claimants to the Frankish kingship outside the Merovingian family, as Clovis had faced, but rather their own brothers, uncles and nephews.

Within this milieu of competition, each of the four heirs of Clovis looked to foreign marriages as a way to confirm and enhance their status as co-kings over the Frankish kingdom, and as an effort to keep up with each other in the race for power, land, and wealth, which would add to their prestige as kings, and improve their ability to compete for more power, land and wealth. When these kings needed military support, or sought further opportunities for plunder, however, they did not turn to marriage, but rather to military and political alliances with strict terms and definitions which set forth the specific aid expected and the reward for that aid. Such alliance-making was also employed among the Merovingians themselves, and these alliances made little reference to kinship, since they were usually against another kinsman. Rather, their internal alliances were very much in the mold of their external alliances, backed by oaths, hostages, and promises of booty. Marriage played an important but alternative role in their incessant competition.

**Inheritance**

The foundation of the competitive nature of Frankish royal politics in the sixth century was laid at the death of Clovis in 511. For Gregory of Tours, the civil wars that this competition induced in his own day were lamentable, in part because of the threat they represented to the church. Gregory had seen how churchmen had become involved
in, as well as casualties of, these civil wars. He also saw in his own day the depredations of church property which were inherent in wars over territory, property, and wealth. Therefore, as Gregory wrote the history of the Frankish kings before his own day, he consciously emphasized the benefits of cooperation as a contrast to the civil wars of his own day. For example, when Gregory described the division of Clovis’ inheritance to his four sons in about 511, he portrayed it as an equal division: “the four sons received his kingdom and divided it amongst themselves on an equal scale.” In reality, Theuderic, as the eldest brother who had reached adulthood before his father died in 511, received a larger portion of Clovis’ kingdom, and Chlothar as the youngest seems to have received the smallest portion, but Gregory wanted to emphasize that the division was considered equal even if it was not in actual fact. In this way he could indirectly criticize the constant campaigns of the kings of his day to expand their kingdoms at the expense of their brothers’ kingdoms in the name of their fair share. Gregory wanted the Frankish kings to accept the principle that divisions of inheritances and conquests were to be made on an equal scale and then respected by everyone. Like Theodoric’s desire for cooperation through kinship, reality did not always follow theory, and Gregory’s narrative of the history of the Frankish kingdom from 511 to 561 presented theories of cooperation which can obscure the actual picture of competitive politics amongst the heirs of Clovis.

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164GTH III.1: “quattuor filii . . . regnum eius accipiunt et inter se aequa lantia dividunt.”

The Marriages of Clovis’ Heirs

The division of the kingdom amongst the heirs of Clovis resulted in considerable conflict. In the 510s and 520s, the conflict pitted Theuderic I against his half-brothers. Yet, like Clovis, they sought to balance the natural alliance of blood kinship with the superceding demands of politics. The brothers turned to each other for help in their military campaigns and support in other political enterprises, but often these campaigns and enterprises were aimed against other kinsmen. In the period immediately following Clovis’ death, it was important for each son to establish himself as king, and to this end we consider their marriages. We know very little about most of the international marriages of this period — sometimes nothing more than a name — but we also know that few of them were discussed in terms of alliance-making in the sources. They lie in the background to the military campaigns and political machinations of the period, but their role in the raging competition between Theuderic and his half brothers cannot be denied.

Theuderic had probably married his first wife, Suavegotha, around the turn of the century. Her name suggests a connection with the Goths, but we cannot say much more than this. She bore Theuderic at least two children, Theudebert and Theudechild. Around 522, however, he married a second wife: the daughter of Sigismund, the King of the Burgundians, who was also a granddaughter of Theodoric the Great. Her name has not survived. A few years before, Chlodomer and Childebert also made Gothic and

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Burgundian marriages of their own. Theuderic’s second marriage to the prestigious daughter of the Burgundian king must have confirmed his position as the greatest of the Frankish kings, just as Clovis’ marriage to Clotild had done. Theuderic’s half-brothers were trying to raise their own prestige through marriage. When Theuderic married the Burgundian princess, they responded by attacking the Burgundian kingdom, under the pretext of avenging the death of their grandfather, Chilperic. Chlodomer had married a woman named Guntheuca, and Childebert I married Ultrogotha. Unfortunately we know almost nothing about these women except their names, but those names are revealing. In Ultrogotha, Ewig has noted, we should see similarities to other women of known Gothic royal families: Thiudigotho, Ostrogotho, and Suavegotho. Guntheuca’s origins are more difficult, but it does not seem unreasonable to see in her name an association with the ‘gun-’ aspect of the Burgundian royal family (Gundobad and Gundomar), which also had many other members with ‘G-’ names even if not ‘gun-’. This is far from a certainty, but it makes sense in the context of the 510s. When Chlodomer died in 524, his brother, Chlothar, set his own wife aside in order to marry the widow Guntheuca. He may have been interested in her as a bride from a royal family, or as the former wife of King Chlodomer, and probably both.

Chlothar had first married a girl, Ingund, whose origins are surely not on par with the rest of the brothers’ brides. The marriage of Chlothar and Ingund is an obvious exception to the trend of marriages to foreign girls of royal stock in this period, but is a


good corrective to remind us that general trends and patterns do not require 100% adherence to be valid. It is possible that Chlothar saw in Ingund another important asset for the competition between kings, such as wealth, and her ability to produce male heirs, but it is also likely that, as Gregory described him, he ‘was too given to woman chasing’ and chose not to follow in his brother’s footsteps. It may even be that Chlothar and Ingund were not married when they first started having children, and they only married later, after the death of Guntheuca.

As Ian Wood has pointed out, Gregory’s narrative of the events in Book III of his *Historiae* is not always reliable, and sometimes confused.\(^{169}\) Gregory tried to give a coherent narrative to a series of complicated and simultaneous events, but was not altogether successful because he had few dates to rely upon and probably misidentified some of the protagonists.\(^ {170}\) For the chronology of the period, there is the Chronicle of Marius of Avenches, but it remains rather sparse for filling in many of the details. To put these marriages into their context, and see the cooperation and competition amongst these brothers, we need to examine three main events: The conquest of the Burgundian kingdom led by Clotild’s sons, the conquest of the Thuringian kingdom led by Theuderic, and Clotild the younger’s marriage to Amalaric, the king of the Visigoths.

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**The Burgundian Campaigns**

Gregory of Tours mentioned the marriage of Theuderic and the daughter of King Sigismund of Burgundy in connection with the campaigns which resulted in the conquest of the Burgundian kingdom (524-534). Even though most modern scholars have not made much of Theuderic I’s marriage to the daughter of Sigismund, it served as a catalyst to action in the Frankish kingdoms, even though the groom himself took little action as a direct result of the marriage. Around 522, Sigismund had his son, Sigeric, killed, perhaps at the instigation of his second wife. Sigismund’s first wife was Ostrogotho, a daughter of Theodoric the Great. Peter Heather has argued that the Burgundians probably saw Sigismund’s marriage to this daughter of Theodoric as a symbol of Ostrogothic domination over the Burgundians. Therefore, the killing of Sigeric may have represented an effort by Sigismund to escape from this foreign domination. Shortly thereafter Theuderic married Sigismund’s daughter, who was the offspring of Sigismund’s first wife, and therefore a grand-daughter of Theodoric. For Gregory of Tours, divine vengeance for the murder of Sigeric came in the form of Theuderic’s marriage to Sigismund’s daughter, because it spurred Clotild to call upon her sons, particularly her eldest, Chlodomer, to attack the Burgundians in revenge for her murdered daughter.

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173 GTH III.5. There has been some confusion over the identity of Theuderic’s wife. Eugen Ewig has shown, however, that Theuderic’s first wife, the mother of his son Theudebert and daughter Theudechild, was Suavegotha, and she could not have been the daughter of Sigismund that he married sometime between 517 and 523. Thus, his first wife, Suavegotha, may have been of unknown Gothic origin, but his second wife, of unknown name, was indeed the daughter of Sigismund and Ostrogotho. Ewig, “Die Namengebung...”, 50.
parents.¹⁷⁴ The course of events suggests that this war had little to do with revenge, and much more to do with power politics. As Ian Wood notes, “Gregory associates the attack with Clotild’s bloodfeud, but more likely it was an opportunist move prompted by the crisis following the murder of [Sigeric]”¹⁷⁵, and I would also add, the marriage of Theuderic to Sigeric’s sister.¹⁷⁶ Theuderic was the senior Frankish king by many years (he had a son almost as old as some of his half-brothers), and any strengthening of his position would have threatened his younger half-brothers.¹⁷⁷ By contracting a marriage to a granddaughter of both Theodoric the Great and Gundobad, one-time Master of the Soldiers as well as King of the Burgundians, Theuderic surely added to his personal prestige and status, which must have already been a concern to Clotild and her much younger and less experienced sons. Clotild’s reaction (calling her sons together), as described by Gregory of Tours, would seem to suggest this very thing: that the marriage of Theuderic to Sigismund’s daughter represented some sort of threat to their position, which Clotild, who must have served as her sons’ protector since the death of Clovis, determined to negate.


¹⁷⁵Wood, The Merovingian Kingdoms, 52.


¹⁷⁷White, 117 discusses the implications for this marriage in further detail.
Wolfram has viewed the murder of Sigeric, Sigismund’s son by an Ostrogothic wife, as an outward sign of Sigismund’s breaking of an alliance with the Ostrogoths. More specifically, though, as Wood pointed out, Sigeric was a potential heir to Theodoric, his grandfather, in Italy, and may have been stirring up rebellion against Sigismund, who was thus protecting his own kingship against his son, and maybe reacting to Ostrogothic support of that rebellion. With the death of his son, Sigismund needed to strengthen his position against the Ostrogoths, by securing special titles and recognition from Justin I, the emperor at Constantinople. There may have also been a potential challenge for power coming from his brother Godomar, who may have been a sub-king already, or at least might have become so in the wake of Sigeric’s death.

In 523, Chlodomer, and presumably his two full brothers, attacked the Burgundians, capturing Sigismund and his family, whom Chlodomer killed, throwing their bodies down a well. What really suggests that this campaign was less concerned with the bloodfeud than with conquest and plunder is that after Sigismund’s death, which would have satisfied the demands of vengeance, Chlodomer returned to Burgundy the next year, at Vézeronce (524), to attack the new king of the Burgundians, Sigismund’s

178 Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, 256.


brother, Godomar. Chlodomer was clearly bent on conquest of the Burgundian kingdom, and found in the demands of kinship a useful justification for his actions.

Gregory of Tours used the episode to say something about the expected behavior of a kinsman by marriage. Theuderic I had failed to come to the aid of his father-in-law, Sigismund, in 523 when he was attacked by Theuderic’s brother Chlodomer. It was an awkward situation for Theuderic, where he had to weigh the demands of blood versus those of affinal kinship. Gregory seemed to place the affinal demands above those of blood. Chlodomer was Theuderic’s half-brother, but when Chlodomer attacked Sigismund he was attacking Theuderic’s father-in-law. Theuderic avoided involvement on either side. In discussing the feud aspects of the Frankish-Burgundian war, Stephen White depicts Theuderic’s dilemma of whom to support as one fraught with peril: either giving or withholding support to either side would anger the other side, but any efforts to mediate between the two could be viewed as duplicitous. Gregory, however, makes no mention of any appeal from either side in the opening campaign — perhaps both Chlodomer and Sigismund understood Theuderic’s situation and preferred to have him uninvolved than involved on the other side. Only after Sigismund was dead did Theuderic, according to Gregory, agree to join Chlodomer against the Burgundians, earning the castigation of Gregory of Tours for not avenging his father-in-law’s death,

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181 GTH III.6.

182 Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, 256: “The Goths were out to revenge a dead Amal, the Merovingians a dead relative, explanations that may well have been intended merely to veil hard power politics.”

suggesting that, at least from Gregory’s perspective, the expectation would have been for Theuderic to do so. As Chlodomer planned a fresh campaign against Sigismund’s successor, Godomar, Gregory specifically pointed out Theuderic’s failure to avenge the wrongs against Sigismund, saying: “That man, however, not wishing to avenge the injury to his father-in-law [soceri] promised to come [to the aid of Chlodomer].”

It is a statement which does not completely fit with Gregory’s sustained campaign against fratricidal war in the Historiae, but it reveals how strongly he viewed the obligations of kinship by marriage. His attitude may also reflect his own times when Merovingians regularly attacked each other with their armies. In the age of Clovis’ heirs, however, such a case is only reported once, and it was accompanied by strong signs from heaven against it. Theuderic may have considered directly warring against a fellow Frankish king as a wrong act — contra his own beliefs about how kinsmen should treat each other — or at least one that his own followers would not have supported.

Furthermore, if the Burgundian campaigns were meant to enhance Chlodomer’s position at the expense of Theuderic’s, it does not make a lot of sense for Chlodomer to seek Theuderic as an ally. Ian Wood has argued that Theuderic was not even present at Vézeronce, Gregory having confused Theuderic with Theodoric the Great, whose forces appeared at the battle instead. Procopius does mention an alliance between the Franks

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184GTH III.6: “Ille autem iniuriam soceri sui vindecare nolens, ire promisit.”

185GTH III.28. This campaign where Theudebert and Childebert attacked Chlothar is discussed further below.

and the Ostrogoths to share the spoils of a Burgundian campaign, which in spite of chronological confusion may well refer to this instance.\footnote{Proc. BG, V.xii.24-5.} If this is the case, it does fit nicely with the theme of competition between Theuderic and the sons of Clotild. Chlodomer found a ready ally in the Ostrogothic king as he attempted to conquer the Burgundian kingdom and thereby expand his kingdom, his wealth, and his power. If the campaign was meant to check the growing power and influence of Theuderic, who was married to a Burgundian princess with connections to Theodoric the Great, what better counter could he find than to ally with that same Theodoric to conquer the Burgundian kingdom?

Chlodomer’s challenge to Theuderic’s position ended at the Battle of Vézeronce, however, when the former died during the battle.\footnote{GTH III.6.} The Franks are still reported to have completed the conquest of the Burgundian kingdom, although Godomar took back the kingdom a short while later. The death of Chlodomer had immediate ramifications for the Frankish kingdom. Chlothar married his widow, Guntheuca, perhaps in a bid to gain control over his kingdom, but it appears that Clotild stepped in, and protected Chlodomer’s sons. She planned to raise them until they came of age, at which point they were to inherit Chlodomer’s Teilreich.\footnote{GTH III.6, 18.}
**THURINGIAN WAR**

With the end of Chlodomer’s challenge to his supremacy in the Frankish kingdoms, Theuderic could turn his attention to the Thuringians, and reassert his power and influence. In the early 520s, Theuderic had made an alliance with one of the Thuringian kings, Hermenefred, to support him against another Thuringian king, his brother, Baderic. It was a situation not unlike that of Clovis’ involvement in the Burgundian civil war between Gundobad and Godegisil. It is an episode which is instructive about theories of cooperative kinship and alliance-making.

Gregory of Tours used this story to make an explicit statement about the proper behavior of close kinsmen or brothers, and against civil war. Hermenefred, with his brothers Baderic and Berthechar, had inherited and divided their father’s kingdom. Gregory reported that Amalaberga, the wife of Hermenefred, and the daughter of Theodoric’s sister, had stirred up her husband against his brother. Hermenefred had already defeated his brother, Berthechar, and taken his kingdom, when Hermenefred’s wife urged her husband to seize the rest of the Thuringian kingdom from his other brother, Baderic. Gregory therefore called her iniquitous and savage. Gregory may be making a veiled comment on the role of Fredegund in inciting civil wars in his own day.

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191 GTH III.4: “uxor iniqua atque crudelis Amalaberga nomen inter hos fratres bellum civile dissimenat”
When Hermenefred decided to attack his brother and take his kingdom, he sent secret messengers to Theuderic to arrange for his solatium. He offered him half of Baderic’s kingdom if he would help kill him. Theuderic was overjoyed at the opportunity, and responded by bringing his army over. After they met and swore faith one with another, they set off against Baderic’s army and killed him. Theuderic then returned home, and Hermenefred reneged on his promise. Gregory of Tours vividly portrayed the important details of this alliance: There are the secret envoys, the request for help, a specified reward, and the immediate response of Theuderic and his army. Theuderic carried out his end of the bargain. When Hermenefred did not fulfill his promise, Theuderic was compelled to exact vengeance.

A decade later, in the early 530s, Theuderic was still contemplating revenge, and with the death of Chlodomer, the time was ripe. As the pretext for the campaign, Theuderic reminded his warriors of a pax of recent memory which had been made and broken by the Thuringians. After the Thuringians had attacked the Franks, hostages had been exchanged which was to lead to the establishment of peace between them, but the Thuringians killed their hostages and attacked the Franks again. This was enough to

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192 GTH III.4: “... contra fratrem insurgit ac per occultus nuntius Theudericum regem ad eum persequendum invitat, dicens: ‘Si hunc interfecis, regionem hanc pari sorte dividimus.’ Ille autem gavisus, haec audiens, cum exercitu ad eum dirigit. Coniunctque simul fidem sibi invicem dantis, egressi sunt ad bellum. Confligentisque cum Baderico, exercitum eius aderunt ipsumque obturant gladio, et obtenta victuria, Theudericus ad propria est reversus. Protenus Hermenefredus oblitus fidei suae, quod regi Theudorico indulgere pollicitus est, implere dispexit, orta que est in eos grandis inimicitia.”

193 GTH III.7: “Convocatis igitur Francis, dicit ad eos: ‘Indignamini, quaeso, tam meam inuiri quam interitum parentum vestrorum, ac recolite, Thoringus quondam super parentes nostros violenter advenisse ac multa illis intulisse mala. Qui, datis obsidibus, pacem cum his inire voluerunt, sed ille obcedes ipsus diversis mortibus pereremur et inruentes super parentes nostros...’”

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incite the Frankish warriors to battle, and Gregory reported that Theuderic, accompanied by Chlothar and his son, Theudebert, led his army to a rout of the Thuringians and that he took over rule of the Thuringians.\(^1\)

This conquest must have enhanced his position amongst the Franks, but Chlothar had been there, too, and had won for himself the Thuringian princess Radegund as part of his share of the spoils.\(^2\) Theuderic then proved to be as fickle an ally as Hermenefred when he tried, unsuccessfully, to kill his half-brother after the battle.\(^3\) Even though Theuderic had recognized the necessity of engaging extra help to win the battle, he was loathe to share the spoils and the prestige of such a victory with his sometime ally, sometime rival. Still, the Thuringian kingdom became subject to Theuderic, adding territory, wealth, and even warriors to his resources.

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\(^1\)GTH III.7: “Post Theudoricus non inmemor periurias Hermenefrede regis Thoringorum Chlothacharium fratrem suum in solatio suo vocat et adversum eum ire disponit, promittens regi Chlothachario partem praedae, si eisdem munas victoriae divinitus conferrit ur. Convocatis igitur Francis, dicit ad eos: 'Indignam ini, qua eso, tam meam iniuriam quam interitum parentum vestrorum, ac recolit, Thoringus quondam super parentes nostros violenter advenisse ac multa illis intulisse mala. . . .' Quod ille audientes et de tanto scelere indignantes, uno animo eademque sententiam Thoringiam petierunt. Theudoricus autem, Chlothacharium fratrem et Theudobertum filium in solatio suo adsumptos, cum exercito abit. . . . Denique cum se Thoringi caedi vehementer viderent, fugato Hermenefredo rege ipsorum, terga vertunt et ad Onestredum fluvium usque pervenient. Ibique tanta caedes ex Thoringis factura est, ut alveos fluminis a cadaverum congeriae repleretur et Franci tamquam per pontem aliquid super eos in litus ulteriore transirent. Patratam ergo victuriam, regionem illam capessunt et in suam redigunt potestatem.”

\(^2\)See below.

\(^3\)GTH III.7.
Theuderic had died while in Thuringia, and that he should come to the Auvergne region around the city of Clermont to take possession of it. Whether or not Childebert believed the rumors of Theuderic’s death, he came to Clermont, but found the gates locked to him. Apparently, Arcadius did not have the full support of the people of Clermont, and was forced to cut through the bar of a gate in order to let Childebert in.

Childebert was happy to have an excuse to get out of Clermont when he saw the situation and the rumor of Theuderic’s death was confirmed to be just that. His excuse came in the form of a plea for help from his sister, who had been married to Amalaric, the King of the Visigoths (r. 511-531), since 526. Gregory reported this marriage at the beginning of his account of the reigns of Clovis’ heirs, just after the division of the kingdom, and there suggested that all the sons of Clotild had agreed to the match, and sent her with a great amount of treasure (‘cum magnorum ornamentorum mole’) to Spain. If she was not married until 526, however, as was probably the case, then Chlodomer was already dead, and we might assume that it was Childebert, the eldest living male of that family, who made the final arrangements for the marriage. Certainly it was he alone who took responsibility for rescuing Clotild in 531. The emphasis on the size of the treasure — a heap of great ornaments — indicates the important role this marriage played in the competition within the Frankish kingdom. Childebert was playing up his role as a generous king, who had arranged a prestigious match for his sister. As

197GTH III.1: “Cumque magna virtute pollerent et eis de exercitu rubor cupiosus inesset, Amalaricus, filius Alarici, rex Hispaniae sororem eorum in matrimonio postolat, quod ille clementer indulgent et eam ipse in regionem Hispaniae cum magnorum ornamentorum mole transmittunt.”
Jussen argues for baptismal sponsorship, rituals or ceremonies were acts of prestige\textsuperscript{198}, and Gregory’s comment about the treasure sent with Clotild suggests that an open display of such things was made in celebration of the marriage, even if the ceremony of marriage itself did not take place until she reached Spain. Marriages to important, powerful, wealthy, or prestigious people helped to emphasize the status and power of the Merovingian kings to others.

After the mention of the marriage at the beginning of Book III, we hear nothing more about Clotild and Amalaric until the tenth chapter of that same book.\textsuperscript{199} There Gregory reported that she was beaten to the point of bleeding and maltreated by her husband, because she was Catholic and he was Arian.\textsuperscript{200} Clotild sent a handkerchief soaked with her own blood to her oldest living brother Childebert,\textsuperscript{201} who was moved to action, and attacked Amalaric. According to Gregory, Amalaric began preparations to flee as soon as he heard Childebert was coming against him. His greed, however, led him

\textsuperscript{198}Jussen, 228-9. His comments on the prestige factors of baptismal sponsorship apply equally well to marriage.

\textsuperscript{199}GTH III.10: “Childeberthus . . . Hispaniam propter sororem suam Chlotchildem dirigit.”

\textsuperscript{200}GTH III.10: “Haec vero multas insidias ab Amalarico viro suo propter fidem catholicam patiebatur. Nam plerumque procedente illa ad sanctam eclesiam, stercora et diversos feters super eam proieci imperabat, ad extremum autem tanta eam crudilitate dicitur caecidisse . . .”

\textsuperscript{201}GTH III.10: “. . . ut infectum de proprio sanguine sudarium fratri transmitteret, unde ille maxime commotus, Hispanias appetevit.”
to return for some gems he had forgotten and he ran into Childebert’s soldiers who killed him and took Clotild and a great amount of booty home with them. Clotild, however, died on the way home.

The background to this marriage goes back to the Frankish-Visigothic War of 507-8. Alaric II had died at the Battle of Vouillé, and was succeeded by his illegitimate son Gesalic, who was eventually chased from the kingdom. Around 511, the year of Clovis’ death, Theodoric installed his young grandson Amalaric on the Visigothic throne, while he served as regent, and effective ruler, for the next 15 years. E. A. Thompson has suggested that this was a period of relative peace between Franks and Visigoths, although he does admit that the Visigoths did retake some of their lost territory from the Franks.

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202 GTH III.10: “Porro iniminite Childebertho, cum Amalaricus navem deberet ascendere, ei in mentem venit, multitudinem se praetiosorum lapidum in suo thesauru reliquisse. Cumque ad eosdem petendus in civitatem regrederetur, ab exercitu a porto exclusus est. Videns autem, se non posse evadere, ad ecclesiæ christianorum confugire coepit.”

203 GTH III.10: “Sed priusquam limina sancta contingerit, unus emissam manum lanciam eum mortali ictu sauciavit, ibique decidens reddedit spiritu. Tunc Childeberthus cum magnis thesauris sororem adduxat secum adducere cupiebat. . .”

204 GTH III.10: “. . . quaæ, nescio quo casu, in via mortua est, et postea Parisius adlatum, iuxta patrem suum Chlodovechum sepulta est.”

205 GTH II.37; Proc. BG V.xii.33-49; Chronicorum Caesaraugustanorum Reliquae, MGH AA XI.1, ed. Theodor Mommsen, s.a. 507-531; Isidore of Seville, Historia Gothorum, Vandalorum et Sueborum, MGH AA XI ed. Theodor Mommsen, 39-40;

206 Wolfram has argued that Theodoric was more than just a regent. See The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples, 261-2.

207 Thompson, Goths in Spain (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 9: “. . . the period of the regency was marked by few domestic or foreign wars, though the Visigoths managed to recover some places Clovis had overrun. . .”
warfare between the two peoples.\textsuperscript{208} Gregory of Tours reported that in the period immediately following Clovis’ death, the Visigoths recovered some of the territory they had lost to the Franks.\textsuperscript{209} This would suggest that the ordinary state of affairs between Visigoths and Franks in this period was one of hostility rather than peace, although the possibility of short periods of peace interspersed with war is not unlikely.

Arguments about Frankish-Gothic relations during Amalaric’s reign will always remain speculative because the sources are so sparse. Narrative information is limited to Gregory’s report about the loss of Frankish territory to the Visigoths in this period, and Childebert’s military response to his sister’s unhappiness in Spain, allowing him to carry her off with a great amount of treasure.\textsuperscript{210} The heavy emphasis on treasure and plunder in connection with Frankish-Visigothic relations (Clotild was sent to Spain with great treasure; Amalaric went back for his treasure; Childebert carried off great treasure; and in Childebert and Chlothar’s later campaign, Gregory reported that they took home great spoils) is further evidence of how important an increase in wealth as well as providing one’s warriors with opportunities for booty was in the competition for power in the Merovingian kingdoms.\textsuperscript{211}

\textsuperscript{208}Heather, \textit{The Goths}, 277; James, \textit{The Franks}, 92.

\textsuperscript{209}GTH III.21: “Gothi vero cum post Chlodovechi mortem multa de id quae ille adquaesierat pervasissent . . .

\textsuperscript{210}GTH III.21 (see above, n. 35); GTH III.10: “Tune Childeberthus cum magnis thesauris sororem aediumtum secum adducere cupiebat.”

\textsuperscript{211}GTH III.1, 10, 29: “Tamen adquisitam maximam Hispaniae partem, cum magnis spoliis in Galis redierunt.” Gregory’s report of this last campaign conflicts with other reports, like that of Isidore who said that the Franks paid the Visigoths great amounts to extract themselves from a bad position (See Isidore, \textit{Hist.}, 41).
Not surprisingly, in Gregory’s account, the Arian-Christian conflict inherent in this marriage came to the fore — Gregory was continuing his theme from Book II, that Arians always get their just punishment in the end — like Alaric II at Vouillé who made the mistake of fighting against Catholic Clovis. In point of fact, though, Amalaric’s actions, as reported by Gregory, are difficult to understand. He sought and accepted a bride he must have known was Catholic, expecting her to convert. Then, he beat this bride, only to run away as soon as one of her brothers came to exact vengeance. Either Gregory is using this episode to carry on his “God punishes Arians” theme, and so distorts the story, or there is some other explanation for Amalaric’s behavior. Thompson posed similar questions: “His motives in requesting the marriage are not clear. If she were to become an Arian she could not act as intermediary between her husband and her brothers, the Frankish kings. If she remained Catholic her position in Amalaric’s court would be untenable, as in fact it became.”

Roger Collins accepts Gregory’s basic narrative as correct: Amalaric’s “ill-conceived and violent attempts to force his wife to renounce her Catholic beliefs in favour of Arianism gave her Frankish relatives an excuse for intervention.” He also points to Isidore’s *History* which suggested that Amalaric was killed by his own men while trying to flee. Clearly there is more to Childebert’s campaign than just settling a

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212 Thompson, *Goths in Spain*, 12.


domestic squabble. Amalaric’s position as king was not unchallenged.\textsuperscript{215} There is further evidence to consider from Procopius, who may not be completely trustworthy, since he calls the bride the sister of Theudebert.\textsuperscript{216} Because most of his other details, however, are supported by the other sources, he may have something worth considering. In his account, Amalaric gave offense to his wife in not allowing her to practice her Catholicism. He reported that she could not bear the dishonor he showed to her and revealed this to her brother, resulting in war.\textsuperscript{217} Apparently, Clotild was unable to establish herself at the Visigothic court without becoming an Arian, which she was unwilling to do. She was, therefore, useless as a wife for Amalaric the Arian king. She could not participate in royal functions which must have been surrounded by Arian rituals and bishops. Thus, he went to great, even extreme, measures to try to convince her to change her mind and make herself useful at his court.

While Procopius spoke of Amalaric’s fear of the Franks as the motivating factor in seeking the marriage,\textsuperscript{218} Jordanes mentioned the “snares of the Franks” when discussing Amalaric’s marriage.\textsuperscript{219} To the one, the marriage was meant to bring peace, to the other, war. Thompson has discussed the Franks’ long and frustrated desire to complete their conquest of Gaul by taking Septimania, an which existed whether there

\textsuperscript{215}See further discussion below.
\textsuperscript{216}See for example, James, \textit{The Franks}, 92.
\textsuperscript{217}Proc. BG V.xiii.4-10.
\textsuperscript{218}Proc. BG V.xiii.4.
\textsuperscript{219}Jordanes, \textit{Getica}, 302: “\textit{qui Amalaricus in ipsa adolescentia Francorum fraudibus inretitus regnum cum vita amisit.”}
was peace between them or not. Of course, we must return to the strange behavior of Amalaric towards Clotild. If Gregory’s description, supported by Procopius, of Amalaric’s behavior towards his wife is accepted, as it has been by Collins and Thompson, then this is hardly the action of a man concerned to maintain peace with the Frankish kings. Why does he ask for a Frankish bride, only to heap abuse, and according to some reports, worse things upon her? Why does he fall for the trap that Jordanes says the Franks set for him?

Events in the Visigothic Kingdom offer an explanation. In 526, Amalaric was emerging from under the great shadow cast by his grandfather, Theodoric, who had been ruling the Visigoths for the past 15 years, at least in a de facto sense. He was still somewhat under the shadow of Theodoric’s military commander in Spain, Theudis, who defied Theodoric’s authority and eventually succeeded Amalaric in the kingship. In recognizing that Theodoric’s regency in Spain was a necessary but rather unpopular measure among the Visigoths, Amalaric may have sought in his early years to distance himself from the Ostrogothic party in the Visigothic kingdom, and surpass in prestige

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222 GTH III.1, 10; Proc. BG V.xii.4-13. Thompson, *Goths in Spain*, 9-12; Collins, *Early Medieval Spain*, 34. See Chapter 1.

223 *Chron. Caesaraug*. s.a. 513.


Theudis, who probably represented a threat to his own position. Peter Heather has argued that “Amalaric’s succession was the result of new power structures, not old ones.” One way to indicate a definite change in policy would be to marry a Frankish princess. While the Franks were probably even less popular than the Ostrogoths among the Visigothic aristocracy, marriage to a foreign princess who was not an Ostrogoth would signal Amalaric’s desire to be independent of the Ostrogoths. He had already signaled this intention when he negotiated with Athalaric, Theodoric’s successor in Italy (r. 526-534), to whom he granted “an exceedingly favourable treaty” which severed the ties of the two kingdoms following Theodoric’s years of domination over both. The prestige, and the accompanying treasure, which came from a marriage with a Frankish princess probably also helped to solidify him in his position as king. It was expected, however, that Clotild would convert to Arianism in order to allay any fears of Frankish influence within the Visigothic realm, or of her serving as a focal point for Hispano-Roman Catholic rebellion. It would have been in her best interest as well, since she could never hope to wield much influence at an Arian court while remaining a Catholic. Amalaric miscalculated, expecting that common sense would see her become Arian, and

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226 Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, 310, says that Theudis had used a marriage himself to help fund his own private army, and he retained the reins of power even during Amalaric’s short independent reign.

227 Heather, *The Goths*, 277. See also p. 234, where he argues that Amalaric was not originally intended to succeed Theodoric in Spain at all.

228 Proc. BG V.xiii.4-12, and Thompson, *Goths in Spain*, 10-11.
when that failed, more violent methods of persuasion were employed. Clotild had to convert to Arianism to make the marriage work on all levels, and she refused, thereby bringing about Amalaric’s fall and death.

According to the traditional expectations of kinship, one might expect general peace between Franks and Visigoths in this period when a Frankish princess was married to the Visigothic king. This marriage, however, reveals how insignificant such external concerns were compared to internal pressures and competitions. The marriage of Clotild to Amalaric must represent an attempt to raise the status of the sons of Clotild against Theuderic. A marriage to the grandson of Theodoric the Great would certainly counterbalance the marriage of Theuderic to the grand-daughter of Theodoric. Even when the principles of cooperation among kinsmen did come into play, as Childebert marched to the rescue of his sister, we should consider that Childebert, as the eldest living son of Clotild the Elder, had to perform a duty expected of him in order to maintain the respect of his followers, and show himself a worthy king. That Childebert was concerned to make a display of his good kingship is evident in the way that he was credited with giving much of his booty to the churches of Gaul. Not only was he successful in battle, but he was also a generous king. All this must have served to enhance his status and prestige within the Frankish kingdom.

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229GTH III.10.
THE FINAL CONQUEST OF BURGUNDY

After he returned from his campaign against the Visigoths, Childebert allied with Chlothar to re-conquer the Burgundian kingdom. The chronology of this event is unclear, however. Marius of Avenches does not report a Frankish attack on the Burgundians in 531, but Gregory places this campaign as immediately following Childebert’s return from his campaign against the Visigoths, which definitely occurred in 531. Gregory, however, does not report another campaign in 534, which is recorded by Marius of Avenches, who also says that King Theudebert, Theuderic’s successor, was present. Gregory reported that they even invited Theuderic, who declined the invitation, rather than share in a joint enterprise with his half-brothers, one of whom he had tried to kill on their last campaign together (Chlothar), while the other had tried to seize part of his kingdom (Childebert).

When he was pressed by his followers, who were eager for the plunder a campaign against the Burgundians offered, Theuderic chose to make a statement of his superiority compared to the other Frankish kings. This was a critical moment in the competition among the Frankish kings. Theuderic’s warriors expected their king to provide opportunities for plunder, and could not understand abstaining from the Burgundian campaign. The threat was out in the open: “If thou refusest to go into Burgundy with thy brothers we shall desert thee, for we choose rather to follow them.”

This was a crisis for Theuderic in the competition for power in the Frankish kingdom — he had been challenged by the rebellion of the Auvergnats, and now by his own warriors.

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230GTH III.11: “Si cum fratribus tuis in Burgundiam ire dispexeris, te relinquimus, et illos sequi satius praeoptamus.”
His solution was to not simply accompany his half-brothers on their campaign, but to lead his own, against the very people who had dared to rebel against him. He led his warriors on a retributive campaign to the Auvergne region, where they were free to loot and pillage as a punishment for the inhabitants’ recently attempted rebellion.\(^{231}\) He thereby made a statement about rebelling against him, and about how powerful he was in providing booty to his warriors.

Theuderic was almost 50 by this time, and that his younger half-brothers were in the prime of their lives.\(^ {232}\) For a people who expected full weapon and leadership competency at age 15, he was indeed old, older even than the long-lived Clovis, who probably died at age 45. There may have been growing doubts among the Frankish warriors about Theuderic’s ability to provide opportunities for plunder, compared with his younger fellow Frankish kings. When Childebert and Chlothar reached a similar age, there were no younger alternatives, except Theudebert’s son and heir, Theudebald, who did not rule long, and Chlothar’s sons, one of whom, Chramn, did challenge his father’s authority. In the later years of Theuderic’s reign, however, there is an emphasis on preparing the way for his son, Theudebert, to succeed him and overcome any challenges to his inheritance.

It is perhaps in this light that we should see yet another challenge to Theuderic’s authority, in the form of the pretender Munderic. His statements, as reported by Gregory of Tours, are illuminating: “Munderic, who claimed to be a member of the royal family

\(^{231}\)GTH III.11-12.

\(^{232}\)Ewig, “Die Namengebung…”, 50.
[parentem regium], was puffed up with great pride, and said: 'What is King Theuderic to me? For indeed, the throne of the kingdom ought to be mine as much as his. I will go forth and gather my people together, and exact an oath from them, that Theuderic may know that I am a king, just as he is.' Whether Munderic was really a part of a king-group related to a king or not, the point is that he had to make himself look like a king, by doing the things a king was supposed to do. Thus, he would claim to be a Merovingian, and thereby enter into the royal competition for wealth, territory, and most importantly for a king trying to defend his claims to the kingship, loyal followers. Like a king, he would bind them to him by oath. The importance of wealth is also made clear, as he specifically sought refuge within “the walls of the fortress of Vitry with all his goods”, and when Theuderic finally beat him, “the king received his treasury.”

It is in the context of these challenges to Theuderic in the last years of his reign that we should see the foedus made by Theuderic and Childebert with the specific provision that neither would attack the other. This foedus involved oath making as well as an exchange of hostages. The treaty, therefore, was the resolution of the conflict which had begun with Childebert’s actions in the Auvergne, and it conforms to Isidore’s depiction of the foedus as serving the purpose of making peace after a conflict. The oaths

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234 GTH III.14: “. . . Victurici castri murus expetens cum rebus omnibus, in eo se studuet commonere, his secum quos seduxerat adgregatis . . .”; “Quo interfecto, res eius fisco conlatae sunt.”

235 GTH III.15: “Theudoricus vero et Childiberthus foedus inierunt, et dato sibi sacramento, ut nullus contra alium moveretur, obsedes ab invicem acciperunt, quo facilius firmarentur quae fuerant dicta.”

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and hostages may have facilitated the creation of the *foedus*, but they did little, in the end, to preserve it.\textsuperscript{236} The use of hostages and oaths also tells us that the blood kinship which existed between Theuderic and Childebert I — they were half-brothers — was not enough by itself to guarantee or facilitate the treaty. The obligations of kinship, as discussed in the Introduction, had already failed, since Childebert had been involved in the uprising at Clermont. Something besides kinship was needed to restore trust between the half-brothers, again reminding us of Isidore’s description of the concluding of a *foedus* ‘by faith’. Thus, the *foedus* was made not because of their kinship, but rather in spite of it and without reference to it. They recognized each other as potential allies, but mainly rivals. It was probably little surprising to them that the *foedus* did not last long. Its real purpose had been to settle the specific issue of Childebert’s involvement in the Clermont affair.

Around the same time, Clotild’s plans for her grandsons by Chlodomer came into conflict with those of her surviving sons, Childebert and Chlothar, who wanted to add parts of Chlodomer’s kingdom to their own rather than share it with his young heirs. Thus, in the early 530s, they joined together to challenge Clotild, tricking her into thinking they wished to raise the boys to the throne, and instead offering her the choice of cutting the boys’ hair or killing them.\textsuperscript{237} Their cooperation has all the signs of a

\textsuperscript{236}GTH III.15: “*Multi tunc fili senatorum in hac obsidione dati sunt, sed orto iterum inter reges scandalum, ad servicium publicum sunt addicti.*”

\textsuperscript{237}GTH III.18: “*Dum autem Chrodigildis regina Parisius moraretur, videns Childeberthus, quod mater sua filius Chlodomeris, quos supra memoravimus, unico affectu diliget, invidia ductus ac metuens, ne favente regine admitteretur in regno, misit clam ad fratrem suum Chlothacharium regem, dicens: ‘Mater nostra filius fratris nostri secum retinet, et vult eos regno donari; debes velociter adesse Parisius, et habito communi consilio, pertractare oportet, quid de his fieri debet, utrum incisa caesariae ut reliqua
traditional alliance: secret envoys arrange the matter, then they come together (*coniuncti*) to make the attack, and in the end split the spoils. Even if Theuderic did receive some part of Chlodomer’s kingdom as well, perhaps to forestall any punitive measures on his part, this disinheritance of Chlodomer’s sons must have greatly increased the territory and wealth of Chlothar and Childebert.238

**Theudebert**

Many of Theuderic’s actions in the early 530s suggest a concern for ensuring that his son, Theudebert, inherit his kingdom. He had seen how Childebert and Chlothar had ruthlessly eliminated Chlodomer’s heirs, and indeed, when Theuderic died in 533, they did try to keep Theudebert from taking over his father’s kingdom. Ironically, when word came to Theudebert of his father’s death, he was campaigning in the south, retaking land Clovis had once conquered from the Visigoths, but had since lapsed back under Visigothic control.239 These independent commands, which had begun over ten years earlier when Theuderic had sent Theudebert against Danish invaders,240 helped establish Theudebert’s own abilities as a warrior and future king, but being away from his father’s kingdom at the moment of his death made it more difficult for him to return and take up

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239GTH III.21.

240GTH III.3.
his inheritance. When Theuderic died, said Gregory, “Childebert and Chlothar, rising up together against Theudebert, desired to take away his kingdom, but he, by offering gifts, was defended by his own followers [leudes] and established in his kingdom.”241 The importance of wealth and loyal followers is made clear. Fortunately for Theudebert, his father had given him opportunities to secure both. Before sending him on this campaign, Theuderic had also arranged a marriage for his son with a Lombard princess, which must have also been designed to confirm his royal status.242

With the death of Theuderic around 533, the competition in the Frankish kingdom changed. Like Childebert and Chlothar, Theudebert was probably in his early 30s, and the competition became less concerned with challenging a clearly senior co-ruler, and thus more equal. Childebert was just as likely to ally with Theudebert as against him. The net result was a general maintenance of the status quo, although Theudebert, who controlled the eastern portion of the Frankish kingdom, exploited his opportunities to campaign in the east and the south, including Provence and Italy, both to expand his territory as well as to flaunt his ‘imperial’ position, creating a sphere of influence in the east which enhanced his own status.243 The other kings had only the southern theater open to them. Whichever king came to control Theuderic’s old kingdom could step into

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241 GTH III.23: “Consurgentes autem Childeberthus et Chlothacharius contra Theudobertum, regnum eius auferre voluerunt, sed ille munereibus placatus, a leodibus suis defensatus est et in regnum stabilitus.”

242 GTH III.20.

the position of hegemon of the eastern German lands, and campaign in the east and Italy. After the death of Theuderic’s son, Theudebald, around 555, Chlothar I seized that kingdom for himself. Because of their geographical location, the kings of the easternmost kingdom also had relations with the kings of the Lombards, a rising power in central Europe which eventually invaded and settled in Italy. This relationship was put to good use in the never-ending competition for power within the Frankish kingdom, and in Western Europe generally.

The nature of the evolving cooperation and competition in the 530s can be illustrated by two examples, which provide some context for the foreign marriages of the 530s. Once Theudebert was firmly established in his father’s kingdom, Childebert made overtures of peace to him, to the extent of offering to make him his heir, and giving him great gifts.\(^\text{244}\) Being thus reconciled, they later launched a joint campaign against Chlothar.\(^\text{245}\) As Walter Goffart has shown, Gregory was a “contemporary historian” and the Historiae “didactic literature.”\(^\text{246}\) One of the points Gregory of Tours tries to make in his Historiae, is that wars between the kings of the Franks are disruptive and destructive to the Frankish kingdom. This theme against civil wars runs heavily throughout Gregory’s narrative, and discussions of this kind of campaign were meant to inform and instruct his audience about the terrible times they now lived in. When Theudebert I and Childebert I joined forces against Chlothar I, he was saved from destruction through

\(^{244}\)GTH III.24.

\(^{245}\)GTH III.28.

divine intervention.\textsuperscript{247} Gregory reported that upon hearing news of Theudebert and Childebert’s approach, Chlothar retreated into the forest and put his hope in God.\textsuperscript{248} Chlothar’s mother, Clotild, prayed all night long to St. Martin that civil war might be averted.\textsuperscript{249} Theudebert and Childebert were assailed by a mighty storm and forced to give up their quest and to acknowledge their fault.\textsuperscript{250} Here is a statement by Gregory on the expected behavior of kinsmen: God is not pleased when one fights against one’s own blood kinsmen. When referring to the three kings as kinsmen, he specifically refers to the blood relationship (\textit{sanguinem suum}) among them. This is the only place in his \textit{Historiae} where Gregory uses \textit{sanguis} in the sense of kinsman. Everywhere else it literally means blood. In this instance, Gregory borrowed a phrase from Proverbs 1:18, where that author was counseling against joining sinners, who even lie in wait to kill their own kinsmen.\textsuperscript{251} The principle is being expressed by Gregory in generic terms to establish it as a general principle — the righteous do not lie in wait to kill their blood kinsmen.

Past conflicts like this, once settled, were no barrier to subsequent joint campaigns, such as that between Childebert and Chlothar against the Visigoths in 541. Enemies now became allies, and Gregory reported, “having conquered a large part of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{247}GTH III.28.
\item \textsuperscript{248}GTH III.28: “\textit{totamque spem suam in Dei pietate}”
\item \textsuperscript{249}GTH III.28: “\textit{Chrodichildis regina haec audiens, beati Martini sepulchrum adiit, ibique in oratione prostermitur et tota nocte vigilat, orans, ne inter filios suos bellum civile consurget}.”
\item \textsuperscript{250}GTH III.28: “\textit{Tunc illi a lapidibus, ut diximus, caesi et humo prostrati, paententiam agebant ac veniam praecabantur Deo, quod ista contra sanguinem suum agere voluissent}.”
\item \textsuperscript{251}Prov. 1:18: “\textit{ipsique contra sanguinem suum insidiantur et moliuntur fraudes contra animas suas}.”
\end{itemize}
Spain, they returned with great spoils to the Gauls."^252 Gothic sources tell a different story, wherein Chlothar and Childbert were forced to buy their way out of Spain after being defeated by Visigothic forces.^253 The significant point, here, however, is that Gregory reported what was important to the Frankish kings: victory in battle, opportunities for plunder, and treasure. As Thompson noted in this regard, "The motives of Kings Childbert and Chlothar for launching this attack are unknown; and since Gregory of Tours on this occasion cannot supply them with an excuse it may seem that their aggression was unprovoked and was due to their desire to collect treasure and fame."^254 Why would they need treasure and fame? Because their rival Theudebert was winning such for himself in Italy.^255 Competition drove these kings towards conquest, and also marriage, to which we turn now.

**Theudebert and Wisigard**

The marriage of Theudebert I (r. 533-547) to the Lombard princess Wisigard in about 540 illuminates the internal pressures influencing marriage decisions. Theuderic had betrothed Theudebert to Wisigard in about 533, just before his campaign against the Visigoths in the south. While Theudebert was on campaign, he formed a union with

^252GTH III.29: "Tamen adquisitam maximam Hispaniae partem, cum magnis spoliis in Gallis redierunt."


^255GTH III.32: "Theudobertus vero in Italia abiit et exinde multum adquisivit."
Deuteria, a Gallo-Roman woman who was already married. Gregory’s description of her gives her a place of importance in the town of Cabrieres, which Theudebert was besieging at the time, and also the attributes of competence (utilis), wisdom (sapiens) et beauty (speciosa). Theudebert was attracted to the significant, intelligent and beautiful woman — all important characteristics for a potential bride — and when he became king, he brought Deuteria to his court and married her.

Seven years later Theudebert gave up Deuteria, by whom he had already had a son, Theudebald. According to Gregory, he only married Wisigard at the behest of his followers who found his situation rather scandalous. Theudebert was living with a Gallo-Roman woman, perhaps of noble birth, but not royal, while engaged to the Lombard princess. It was not the Lombards who reproached Theudebert for this situation, but his own Franks. In this milieu of competition based on the perception of being a good, powerful and prestigious king, it appears that Theudebert’s Frankish followers desired him to put away this Gallo-Roman woman, and marry a Germanic princess. That he was not able to ignore their complaints suggests how important such concerns were in

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257 GTH III.23: “Mittens postea Arvernum, Deoteriam exinde arcessivit eamque sibi in matrimonio sociavit.”

258 GTH III.27: “Cumque iam septimus annus esset, quod Wisigardem dispensatam haberet et eam propter Deuteriam accipere nollet, coniuncti Franci contra eum valde scandalizabantur, quare sponsam suam relinqueret. Tunc commotus, relicta Deeteria, de qua parvolum filium habebat Theodobaldum nomen, Wisigardem duxit uxorem. Quam nec multo tempore habens, defuncta illa, aliam accepit. Verum tamen Deuteriam ultra non habuit.”
maintaining his position in his kingdom and against his uncles. The important point for Theudebert’s Franks may have been Deuteria’s Gallo-Roman origins, since Gregory reported that when Wisigard died, he did not return to her, but married someone else, who was probably not of royal birth either. When Gregory described Wisigard, he did not even report that she was a Lombard, just that she was the daughter of a certain king.\footnote{GTH III.20: \textit{Theudoricus autem filio suo Theudoberto Wisigardem, cuiusdam regis filiam, dispensaverat.}} It was her royal status which was most important to Gregory, and probably to Theudebert and his Frankish followers as well.

Paul the Deacon, a Lombard historian writing in the eighth century at the court of Charlemagne, supplements our knowledge of this marriage. Just as Gregory did not report the Lombard origins of the bride, Paul was confused in his discussion of the Merovingian Franks. It is from his work, though, that we know that Wisigard was the daughter of King Wacho (r. c. 510-540).\footnote{PD HL, I.21: \textit{Habuit autem Waccho uxores tres, hoc est primam Ranicundam, filiam regis Turingorum; deinde duxit Austrigusam, filiam regis Gepidorum, de qua habuit filias duas: nomen uni Wisigarda, quam tradidit in matrimonium Theudiperto regi Francorum;}} Paul only mentioned the marriage amidst a larger discussion of the marriages of King Wacho, who had contracted three prestigious marriages for himself: he married a Thuringian princess, a Gepid princess, and a Heruli princess. It was clearly his habit to marry women of the highest rank from among his neighbors, and he did no different with his daughters and their Frankish husbands. As the founder of a new dynasty of kings, this would have helped him to assert his status as king before any rivals. István Bóna suggests: “Wacho’s political security was greatly
enhanced by the perfect matches he found for the two daughters." Wacho’s three marriages and those he arranged for his daughters were just part of his grand strategy “to legalize and secure his power through advantageous marital connections.” Bóna argues that Wacho was able to use his family connections to subjugate old foes and expand his kingdom. Although he may be asserting that the marriages themselves were the keys to important alliances with these military and political results, it is more likely that Wacho used prestigious marriage alliances in the same way as the Franks, to establish his position within his own kingdom, as an effective, powerful, and prestigious king.

There is no record of Frankish-Lombard interaction before the marriage of Theudebert and Wisigard. In the wake of Theodoric the Great’s death in 526, the Lombards under the leadership of King Wacho had moved into part of the region of Pannonia, and become foederati of the Byzantines. In the 530s the Franks, under Theuderic I and then Theudebert I, were expanding into central Europe, first against the Thuringians in 531, and then into the old Roman provinces of Noricum and Raetia in 535 or 536 where they became more involved in the struggle between the Ostrogoths and Byzantines in Italy. Theudebert I’s engagement to Wisigard was made after Theuderic’s conquest of the Thuringian kingdom in 531, when the Franks would have become neighbors to the Lombards. By 537, southern Gaul had been handed over to the Franks by the Ostrogoths, and in 545 Theudebert came into control of the province of Venetia in

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262 Bóna, 25.

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The Lombards in this period concerned themselves mainly with central European affairs, consolidating their position against their old rivals — the Thuringians, Heruli, and Gepids. When Wacho, Wisigard’s father, died in 540, he was succeeded by Audoin, who served as regent for Wacho’s young son, Walthari, and then ruled on his own after the boy’s death in 547. After the deaths of both Walthari and Theudebert I, Audoin eventually allied himself with the Byzantines, who granted him control over Theudebert’s former territories of Noricum, Raetia, Venetia, as well as the Gothic part of Pannonia.

Gregory has little more to say concerning Wisigard beyond her marriage and death, but at one point in his narrative he does tell his readers about Wisigard’s role in a quarrel between two of Theudebert’s advisors. Secundinus and Asteriolus competed with each other for Theudebert’s favor. When Asteriolus was put under the power of Secundinus, he was humiliated, but Gregory reported that Queen Wisigard helped to restore Asteriolus to his former position. When she died, Secundinus killed Asteriolus. This episode indicates that Wisigard had integrated herself into the Frankish court enough to intervene in such a dispute, and that her patronage was enough to help Asteriolus at court and protect him from bodily harm. She was an important member of Theudebert’s court.

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264 GTH III.33: “et rex suscipiens Secundini causam, Asteriolum in eius potestatem dedidit. Qui valde humiliatus est et ab honore depositus; sed per Wisigardem reginam iterum est restitutus. Mortua autem illa, consurgens iterum Secundinus, eum interfecit.”
Herwig Wolfram has portrayed this marriage, or at least the engagement, as creating a treaty between the Lombards and Franks.265 Because the Lombards were currently living in Pannonia, it is tempting to see this engagement in the context of Theuderic’s wars against the Thuringians. If the engagement was associated with an official peace treaty between the Franks and Lombards, it is perhaps telling that Theudebert felt no need to finalize the marriage for seven years. The agreement, therefore, probably did not rest upon the marriage, or even the promise of marriage. Rather, the marriage was simply a sign of peaceful relations between the Franks and the Lombards. Theudebert only finalized the marriage because he was coming under pressure from his followers, not because he needed an alliance or peace treaty with the Lombards. Theudebert was under pressure to act like a king, and fulfill his agreement to marry Wisigard, a Germanic king’s daughter, not a Gallo-Roman. We can perhaps sympathize with Theudebert’s situation. His father had engaged him to a princess, whom he may never have seen until he married her. He fell in love with Deuteria, who had all the makings of a good match, except her lack of royal blood, and had no desire to fulfill the obligation forced upon him by his father and his advisors. It should also be noted that the marriage took place about 540, the same year that Wacho died. Wisigard herself died soon thereafter. We cannot say which happened first, but the marriage clearly had little to

265 Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, 281-2: “The shift of focus of Longobard interests from the Thuringian northwest to the Gepid east allowed Wacho during the next decade or two to make pacts with the western Franks. As a result, the Longobards remained neutral in the Frankish-Thuringian wars of 531 and also tolerated Frankish expansion in 536/537 into the Gothic-Italian provinces of Rhaetia and Noricum. “Several intended and actual marriages consolidated the young Longobard-Frankish friendship. During the lifetime of Theuderic I (511-533), the victor over the Thuringians, Wacho betrothed his older daughter Wisigarda, born to him of his Gepid wife, to Theuderic’s son and future Frankish king Theudebert (533-647/548). This first Longobard-Frankish treaty was probably concluded in 532/533.”
do with military or diplomatic affairs. If Theudebert did not seek another princess when Wisigard died, perhaps it was because he was involved in the Byzantine imperial effort to reconquer Italy. This campaign could do more for his status and prestige than any royal bride, and as arguably the most powerful of the Frankish kings at this point, he perhaps felt he did not need one. It is also telling that he did not immediately turn to another foreign marriage to seek military support in Italy.

**CHLOTHAR I AND RADEGUND**

The marriage of Chlothar and Radegund is different from the other foreign marriages of the Merovingians, but yet not so different. Rather than being arranged through the visits of legates and the exchange of gifts, Chlothar took Radegund as his share of the plunder from the campaign of 531 against the King of the Thuringians, Hermenefred (r. c. 507-532). Radegund was living in the house of her uncle, Hermenefred, who had killed her father, Berthechar. It is a situation reminiscent of the elder Clotild’s experience among the Burgundians. The marriage fits well into the context of competition between Merovingian kings. Chlothar was trying to tap into the royal blood of the eastern Germanic peoples to make himself equal to the other kings, particularly Theudebert who married a Lombard princess around the same time. As the youngest Merovingian king of his generation, Chlothar, who is often remarked upon for his series of brides, was constantly using marriage to enhance his position, either by trying to marry prestigious brides, such as Guntheuca, Radegund, and later Wuldetrada, or having many heirs from lower-born women.
Venantius Fortunatus (ca. 540-600), who knew Radegund well, recounted some of her story in his Life of St. Radegund (written shortly after her death in 587), a source which may offer more reliable details than Gregory of Tours, who really did not have much to say about the marriages of the 530s in general. Venantius Fortunatus told how an argument ensued over possession of the Thuringian princess, still a young girl, and it was Chlothar who ultimately drew the winning lot and took Radegund home with him.\textsuperscript{266}

She was raised in a royal villa until she was old enough to marry Chlothar in the late 530s or early 540s. When, after living with Chlothar for several years as his queen, he killed her brother, she left him to become a nun.\textsuperscript{267} Venantius Fortunatus’ account suggests that the situation may have had significant political implications. There was some disagreement over whether Radegund should be allowed to take up the monastic habit. The bishop, Médard, hesitated to do it without her husband’s consent, and certain nobles, probably sent by the king, attacked the bishop to keep him from consecrating her. She took matters into her own hands, put on a habit and forced the priest to consecrate her as a deaconess.\textsuperscript{268} Even after this episode, though, she appears to have still had access to a

\textsuperscript{266}Venantius Fortunatus, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, MGH AA IV, 2.


\textsuperscript{268}Venantius Fortunatus, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, 12: “Directa igitur a rege veniens ad beatum Medardum Novomago, supplicat instanter ut ipsam mutata veste domino consecraret. Sed memor dicentis apostoli: Si qua ligata sit coniugi, non quaeret dissolvi, differebat reginam, ne veste tegeret monachum. Adhuc beatum virum perturbabant proceres et per basilicam graviter ab altari retreaebant, ne velaret regi contuncam, ne videtur sacerdoto, ut praesumeret principi subducere reginam non publicanam sed publicam. Quo sanctissima . . . monachica veste induitur . . . Quo ille . . . manu superposita consecravit diaconam.”

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treasury, whether hers or her husband’s is not clear, as she traveled about giving her
clothes and other alms to the poor. Both Gregory and the nun, Baudonivia, who added to
Venantius Fortunatus’ *Life of St. Radegund* from her own experiences with Radegund at
Poitiers, reported that Radegund built the monastery at Poitiers “for herself” (*sibi*), albeit
with the king’s permission.269 Some poems of Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory’s
*Historiae* show that even when she finally settled down into the nunnery of Poitiers, she
remained in contact with the courts of the Merovingian kings, and even the Byzantines.270
Baudonivia said that Chlothar tried to take her back as his wife at one point.271

From all this, it appears that Radegund was considered a great prize, a prestigious
queen, and an important nun. Chlothar did not want to let Radegund go to the monastery,
but she was not content living with the man who had waged war on her people, captured
her, and then killed her brother. The various stories in the hagiographical works suggest
that she was an active, if overly pious (in Chlothar’s view), queen. The struggle over her
becoming a nun may have had as much to do with prestige as anything else. She was still
a foreign princess become queen and as Chlothar’s war prize she represented a kind of
wealth as well. Chlothar tried more than once to marry women for their status:

269GTH III.7: “... mutata veste, monastyrium sibi intra Pectavensem urbem construxit.”
Baudonivía, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis*, MGH SRM II, II.5: “Post hoc dictum supradicta domina
Radegundis, mens intenta ad Christum, Pictavis, inspirante et cooperante Deo, monasterium sibi per
ordinationem praecelsi regis Chlotarii construxit.”

GTH VI.34, IX.40.

271Baudonivía, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis*, MGH SRM II, II, 4: “Dum in villa ipsa adhuc esset,
fit sonus, quasi eam rex iterum velter accipere, se dolens gravi damno pati, qui talem et tantam reginam
permississet a latere suo discedere, et nisi eam recuperet, penitus vivere non optaret.”
Guntheuca, the widow of his older brother Chlodomer, who may have been of foreign extraction as well; and Wuldetrada, a Lombard princess, widowed by Theudebald’s early death, which is discussed below.

Radegund may have served an important role at Chlothar’s court, particularly with regard to eastern affairs. It is tempting to see her retirement from the court in connection with the Saxon revolt against Chlothar in 555, when he inherited the eastern Frankish kingdom from Theudebald.\textsuperscript{272} The death of her brother, the inheritance of Theudebald’s kingdom, the revolt of the Saxons, and Radegund’s taking up the monastic habit all occurred in the mid-550s. Theudebald’s death was probably long-expected, since Gregory reported a slow disease involving paralysis.\textsuperscript{273} Chlothar must have been prepared to take over his kingdom, which included Thuringia. Did he murder Radegund’s brother to eliminate any potential competition or focal point for revolt among the Thuringians? As the husband of a Thuringian princess, Chlothar might have expected to exploit that marriage to take over good relations with the subject Thuringians — he may have married Radegund in the first place to provide a possible counterweight of support against Theudebert and his heirs in the eastern kingdom. Radegund, already exhibiting pious tendencies, was upset by the murder of her brother, and sought to retire to a monastery. Chlothar was loathe to allow this, given his current position, but Radegund forced the issue, and so he took care to provide well for her, to at least emphasize his generosity as

\textsuperscript{272}GTH IV.10.

\textsuperscript{273}GTH IV.9: “Credo, haec signa mortem ipsius regis adnuntiasse. Ipse vero valde infirmatus, a cinctura deorsum se iudecare non poterat. Qui paulatim decidens, septimo regni sui anno mortuos est, regnumque eius Chlothacharius rex accept. . .”
king. His attempt to marry Wuldestrada, and the Saxon revolt of 555, which was supported by the Thuringians, will be discussed more below, but his failure in these events may have been the impetus for him to seek Radegund’s return as queen. She refused, and he found other ways to subdue the Saxons and take back control of the situation.

Even as a war-prize, Radegund was still a valuable asset to Chlothar, in prestige, in wealth, and perhaps politically as well. It is not surprising that no one has tried to represent this union as a traditional marriage alliance. A bride taken as plunder is not likely to serve as a guarantor of peace or the linchpin of a military alliance, but she was probably still related in some way to the Thuringian rulers who followed Hermenefred. There may have been a general expectation of Thuringian support on Chlothar’s part following the marriage, but there is little evidence to think that Radegund represented anything more than a bride of great status who adorned Chlothar’s court for several years, enhancing his own prestige against that of his fellow Frankish kings.

**THEUDECHILDE AND HERMIGISCLUS**

While Chlothar was married to Radegund, Theudebert countered the prestige of such a bride by marrying his sister to a Germanic king in the east. Theudebert’s marriage arrangements with important foreign kings, along with his general overlordship of the region to the east and southeast of his Frankish kingdom, may explain why our sources

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274 Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis*, 4.
present Theudebert as the greatest of the Frankish kings of his day. Throughout his reign, Theudebert was able to maintain his position of at least equality with his uncles, and arguably superiority.

The marriage of Theudechild, the daughter of Theuderic I (r. 511-533), and Hermegisclus, king of the Varni, fits into this milieu. The Varni were a Germanic people, first mentioned in the extant sources by Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* and Tacitus’ *Germania*. When Pliny discussed the various Germanic tribes in the north, he told of the Varinnae, who are listed with the Burgundians and two other tribes as a subgroup of the Vandals. Tacitus did not have much to add, but listed the Varini with the Angli and other northern Germanic tribes of lesser note. Procopius, who mentioned the Varni three times in his *History of the Wars*, first discussed them in connection with their place on the path of the migrating Heruli, a group of whom passed through their territory on their way north to Thule, after a defeat by the Lombards. They are next encountered in Procopius’ text when they harbored Risiulfus, a Lombard prince, from his uncle King

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277 Tac. Germ. 40, 1: “Reudigni deinde et Aviones et Anglii et Varini et Eudoses et Suardones et Nuithones fluminibus aut silvis muniuntur.”

278 Proc. BG II.xv.2: Ὀὐάρνους
Wacho (or Vaces), and then were bribed to kill the nephew.\textsuperscript{279} Finally, Procopius told the story of the marriage of Theudechild and Hermegisclus.\textsuperscript{280} He recorded:

At about this time war and fighting sprang up between the nation of the Varni and soldiers who live on the island of Brittia;\textsuperscript{281} and it came about from the following cause. . . . The Varni, not long ago, were ruled by a man named Hermegisclus. He, being eager to strengthen his kingdom, had made the sister of Theudibert, ruler of the Franks, his wedded wife. For his previous wife had died recently, having been the mother of one child, Radigis by name, whom she left to his father; and he sought a marriage for this child with a maiden born in Brittia, whose brother was then king of the nation of the Angili, and had given her a large sum of money because of the wooing. . . . [Hermegisclus was warned of his impending death, and before he died addressed the leading men of his kingdom.]

“Now I,” he said, “making provision that you should live most securely and at your ease, have related myself with the Franks by taking from their country the wife who is now my consort, and I have bestowed Brittia upon my son by betrothal. But now, since I expect to die very shortly, and, as far as this wife is concerned, I am without issue male and female, and my son furthermore is still

\textsuperscript{279}Proc. BG III.xxxv.15: Ωὐάρνους

\textsuperscript{280}Proc. BG IV.xx.1: Ωὐάρνων

\textsuperscript{281}This name is thought to refer to the south-east part of Britain, or perhaps the Isle of Wight, but the evidence is not clear enough, and scholars still debate. See, for example, Ian Wood, “Frankish Hegemony in England,” in The Age of Sutton Hoo: the seventh century in north-western Europe, ed. M. O. H. Carver (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 1992), 235. E. A. Thompson, “Procopius on Brittia and Britannia”, op. cit.
unwed and without his bride, come now, let me communicate my thoughts to you, and if it should seem to you not without some profit, do you, as soon as I reach the term of my life, put upon it the seal of your approval and execute it. I think, then, that it will be more to the advantage of the Varni to make the alliance by marriage with the Franks than with the islanders. For the men of Brittia, on the one hand, are not even able to join forces with you except after a long and difficult journey, while the Varni and Franks, on the other hand, have only yonder water of the Rhine between them, so that they, being very close neighbors to you, and having achieved an enormous power, have the means ready at hand both to help you and to harm you whenever they wish; and they will undoubtedly harm you if the said marriage alliance shall not prevent them. . .

Procopius filled his account of this story with his own theoretical notions about acceptable behavior among kinsmen. Whether Procopius casts them as statements of thought and purpose, or even direct dialogue placed in the mouths of those he was writing about, however, they may or may not reflect the actual thoughts and purposes, or speech, of the parties involved. Take, for example, the speech of Hermegisclus, who explained that he had married a Frankish wife in order to strengthen his kingdom and that he had made provision for his people to live securely thanks to this marriage arrangement. He then went on to calculate that marriage with the Franks would be better than marriage to a girl from Brittia because they could offer to the Varni either military aid or military attack. This, like Theodoric’s letters discussed already, presents some of the traditional

\footnote{Dewing, VIII.xx.1, 11-18.}
rhetoric about the potential for marriage alliances to bring peace, security, and even military aid. Yet, we must ask how much we can trust this narrative to reflect faithfully the thoughts of the Germanic Varni. Procopius was living in Constantinople, writing about events which were related to him several months or years after the fact, by foreign emissaries to the Byzantine capital. His telling of the story is more likely to present his own interpretation of the events. When Procopius reveals reputed thoughts or opinions, they are more likely to be his own, reflecting his understanding of the situation, according to his own views of the theoretical expectations of kinship relations. And, of course, statements of such principles tend to be more idealistic than realistic.

Gregory of Tours never mentioned the Varni or this marriage, but even though Procopius can be rather unreliable, at least in things regarding northern Europe, most scholars have accepted this story as generally reliable.283 E.A. Thompson, following Bury’s comments in his edition of Gibbon, describes the story as legendary.284 He cites the work of H. M. Chadwick and C.M. Bowra who showed that this story contains many of the hallmarks of heroic poetry, although they also suggest that there was a historical basis for the poem, as does A. R. Burn.285 Thompson also cites R. S. Lopez and John Morris who, erroneously in his opinion, did not hesitate to base historical arguments on

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283On the general problems of Procopius and the Franks, see Averil Cameron, Procopius and the Sixth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 210-3.

284E. A. Thompson, “Procopius on Brittia and Britannia” Classical Quarterly n.s. 30:2 (1980), 504.

the tale. Nonetheless, Eugen Ewig, P. Wareman and J. R. Martindale, the editor of the Procopography of the Later Roman Empire, have all referred to the marriage with little hesitation concerning the background story.

Whatever truth there is in Procopius’ tale, there is also confusion. Procopius did not know the name of Theudebert’s sister, although we know from a poem and an epitaph by Venantius Fortunatus that is was Theudechild. Gregory of Tours never mentioned any involvement of the Franks with a people called the Varni, neither marriages nor alliances nor battles. That does not, however, eliminate their possibility. There is also the seeming contradiction between Procopius’ statement that Hermegisclus and his new bride had no offspring, and Venantius Fortunatus’ poem which suggests that she did. Given his temporal and geographic proximity, Venantius is probably to be followed here.

Eugen Ewig places the marriage of Theudechild and Hermegisclus in the 540s, and the break up in 548/9, at the death of Theudebert I. This is based mainly on the placement of the story in Procopius’ narrative for the years 551-553. This would have given time for such information to reach Procopius. Ewig has shown that Theudechild

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288 VF Carm IV.25; VI.3.

289 VF Carm. VI. 3, l.10: “cum sis prole potens, gratia maior adest.”

290 Ewig, “Studien...”, 47. See also, Ewig, “Die Namengebung...”, 51.
was probably born sometime in the first decade of the sixth century.

Venantius Fortunatus’ poems for Theudechild suggest that she maintained her status as a queen even after returning home.

The Varni, Warni, or Guarni — there are several spellings found in the sources — are usually associated with the Thuringians. They were probably a western branch or subordinate tribe of a larger confederation of Germans usually referred to as the Thuringians. Theodoric the Great sent letters to the king of the Varni on two occasions, affirming some sort of alliance or friendship with him. Fredegar’s Chronicle described the Warni as a rebellious people put down by Childebert II (r. 575-596) at the end of the sixth century. Rebellion implies earlier submission. Furthermore, the name Hermegisclus (Ἐρμεγήσκλος) can be compared to Hermenefred, the Thuringian king conquered by Theuderic I, and Radigis (Ῥάδηγις) to Radegund, Berthecharius’ daughter, taken as booty by Chlothar I in the Thuringian war. This might imply a close relationship between Thuringians and Varni. It is interesting to note that Hermenefred’s

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292 VF Carm. IV.25, VI.3: “Theudechildis regina”


295 Fred. IV.15: “Eo anno exercitus Childeberti cum Warnis qui revellare conaverant fortiter demicavit, et ita Warni trucidati victi sunt ut parum ex ipsis remansisset.”
name was unlike those of his brothers, Badericus and Berthecharius, suggesting perhaps a
different mother, as was the case of the name Theuderic compared with his half-brothers
Chlodomer, Childebert, and Chlothar, or position, as when Gunthramn gave one of his
sons the traditional Burgundian name Gundobad, with the obvious intention of his
succeeding him in ruling the Burgundian kingdom. Were these three (Badericus,
Berthecharius, and Hermenefred) the kings of the Thuringians, Heruli and Warni, to
whom Theodoric’s letter (Cass. Var. III.3) was addressed? The potential confusion is
enough to excuse Gregory of Tours for not distinguishing among them — they were all
Thuringians to him. There was clearly some kind of association between the Thuringians
and the Varni.

In the sixth century, the Thuringians, probably including smaller groups such as
the Varni and Angli in their confederation, were an important people lying on the Franks’
eastern border. Childeric, Clovis’ father, had some sort of relationship with the
Thuringians in the late fifth century (Clovis’ mother may have been a Thuringian queen
or princess). Clovis is said to have conquered the Thuringians in his tenth year (perhaps
meaning simply that he exacted some tribute from them). His son Theuderic allied
himself with Hermenefred in the latter’s struggle against his brother, Baderic.296

Theodoric the Great even deemed the Thuringians important enough for a marriage with
one of his kinswomen.297 So, it is not strange to see Theudebert marry his sister to a king
of the Varni, who was perhaps a Thuringian sub-king. Since his uncle was married to the

296See GTH II.12 for Childeric; GTH II.27 for Clovis; and GTH III.4, 7 for Theuderic.

297See eg., Cass. Var. IV.1.
Thuringian princess, Radegund, it makes perfect sense. It may be significant that after the Thuringian campaign of Theuderic in 531, there is no more mention of military action in the east for several years. Theudebert himself campaigned most heavily in southern Gaul and Italy during his reign, but drew his support from the eastern lands of the Frankish kingdom.

Despite Procopius’ view of the marriage as creating diplomatic relations with military consequences, he provides no evidence that the Merovingians viewed the marriage in this way. Instead, the marriage served more to confirm Theudebert’s base of support in the east, and his interest in defending his position of authority in the east against the machinations of his uncle, Chlothar. The sources are just not good enough to say much more than this, but the marriage does fit into a context of internal competition within the Frankish kingdoms, with Theudebert marrying his sister to the King of the Varni as an important sign of his status as a powerful king.

**Theudebald and Wuldetrada**

After Theudebert’s death around 548, his son Theudebald, who may not have quite reached the age of his majority (15), succeeded him. Shortly after his accession, when he came of age, he married the Lombard princess, Wuldetrada. Gregory’s account of the reign of Theudebert’s son, Theudebald I (r. 548-555), is confined to a single chapter, and his discussion of the marriage with Wuldetrada garnered but a single
sentence. He said that when Theudebald became a man, he married Wuldestrada. Then, when he died, Chlothar took over his kingdom and his widow. Chlothar came under pressure from the bishops for taking the widow to his bed, and was compelled to give her over to Duke Garibald of Bavaria. Chlothar’s actions should lead us to understand that she, like her sister, was a prestigious bride, worth associating himself with as he took over that kingdom. It should also be noted that her father, Wacho, was eight years dead when she married Theudebald, and that the King of the Lombards, Audoin, was not even her kinsman. The last ruler of her father’s dynasty, Walthari, had died in 547. It may have been Walthari who helped arrange the marriage, but his death meant the marriage could have no value as a marriage alliance connecting two kings through marriage, but it could have been very useful to a young king like Theudebald trying to secure his position against his older and experienced uncles.

Paul the Deacon’s account of the episode does not much agree with Gregory’s. Paul wrote that Wuldestrada [Walderada] married Cusupald [Theudebald?], a Frankish king, who hated her and so gave her to Garibald, one of his men. This narrative confuses the actions of Theudebald and Chlothar, as reported by Gregory, who lived closer to the event and as his focus was on the Franks, was presumably working with better sources for this event. Paul’s language in discussing the Frankish marriages of

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298 GTH IV.9: “Theodovaldus vero cum iam adultus esset, Vuldtradam duxit uxor... septimo regni sui anno mortuos est, regnumque eius Chlothacharius rex accepit, copulans Vuldtradam, uxor... eius, stratui suo. Sec increpitus a sacerdotibus, reliquit eam, dans ei Garivaldum ducem...”

299 PD HL I.21: “secunda autem dicta est Walderada, quae sociata est Cusupald, alio regi Francorum, quam ipso odio habens, uni ex suis, qui dicebatur Garipald, in coniugium tradidit.”
Wacho’s daughters does strengthen the impression that the status of the marriages was the important thing. Alongside Wacho’s three marriages to the daughters of kings, his daughters married kings.

Herwig Wolfram says that during Theudebald’s reign the Lombards and Franks became “mortal enemies”. In 552, the Lombards served under the Byzantine general Narses and defeated the Ostrogoths at the Battle of Busta Gallorum, despite the opposition coming from the Franks in Venetia. After Theudebert’s death, Audoin seized, with Byzantine permission, the Frankish territories of Noricum, Raetia and Venetia north of Italy. At the same time, the Lombards were also working against the Gepids. Yet, this is the same period that Theudebald was marrying Wulderada. Eugen Ewig dated Theudebald’s marriage to around 551, and his death to the end of 555. But given the inexact nature of the sources, as Ewig himself admitted, the marriage could fall anywhere between about 548 and 552. This makes it unlikely that the marriage was designed to serve external political or military functions. Rather, like his father before him, Theudebert may have betrothed his young son to a Lombard princess in order to help his son secure his kingdom after he died. Theudebert is said to have died a slow death from illness, which would have given him the time and inducement to make such arrangements.

300Wolfram, The Roman Empire, 283.

301Wolfram, The Roman Empire, 283-4.


303GTH III.36.
CHILDEBERT VS. CHLOTHAR

Roger Collins has discussed the grandiose claims of Theudebert, who is called ‘Rex Magnus Francorum’ by Marius of Avenches. Theudebert as the most prestigious of the Frankish kings, with his large eastern kingdom, prestigious marital connections for himself and his son, and his conquests in Italy. His young son’s early death brought those efforts to an end. Chlothar seized control over Theudebald’s kingdom, and with it the claims to hegemony over the eastern peoples subjected to Theuderic, Theudebert, and Theudebald. Childebert was Chlothar’s only remaining rival, and was probably behind many of the challenges Chlothar faced in getting control over Theudebald’s kingdom. Events in the Frankish kingdom between 555 and 558 need to be seen in this light.

First, Chlothar tried to marry Theudebald’s Lombard widow. This marriage must have been aimed at helping to bolster Chlothar’s claim to Theudebald’s kingdom against any claims of his brother Childebert. One suspects that it may have been Childebert who helped to rally the bishops against this act, for no one appears to have raised any objections when Chlothar had married Guntheuca, Chlodomer’s widow. The bishops of Theudebald’s kingdom may have hoped to receive better patronage, or more independence, under Childebert. At any rate, their objection was enough in this unstable situation to convince Chlothar to give her up. He gave her to the Duke Garivald of

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305 GTH IV.9: “Qui paulatim decidens, septimo regni sui anno mortuus est, regnumque eius Chlothacharius rex accepit, copulans Vudetradam uxorem eius strato suo. Sed increpitus a sacerdotibus, reliquit eam, dans ei Garivaldum ducem, dirigensque Arvernum Chramnum, filium suum.”

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Bavaria, whose favor he may have gained in this way. Giving a duke a Lombard princess was a rare gift indeed, and Chlothar needed supporters to his claim for Theudebald’s kingdom.

In a further effort to gain control over Theudebald’s kingdom, he sent his son Chramn to govern the Auvergne, which Childebert had once tried to possess during Theuderic’s reign. Chramn appears to have gotten out of control once he settled at Clermont, and as Gregory put it, he “was led astray by the counsels of evil men”. He now began to plot with his uncle, Childebert, who swore (coniuratio) to each other against Chlothar I and made a foedus. The details of the oath are not explicitly given, but Gregory reported immediately after this that Chramn conquered Limoges. This must have been at least part of the treaty made between uncle and nephew. Gregory used the incident to instruct his audience concerning the supposed proper behavior between a son and father: that it was Childebert’s duty to counsel his nephew not to be an enemy to his father. When Chlothar sent two of his other sons to capture Chramn, divine portents once again, as they had twenty years earlier when Theudebert and Childebert had attacked Chlothar, averted open conflict among brothers. Even later, after Childebert’s death, Gregory said that Chramn was not afraid to fight his father, which would seem to imply

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306 GTH IV.16: “seductus per malorum consilium, ad Childberthum patruum suum transire cupit, patri insidias parare disponens.”

307 GTH IV.16: “Tunc per occultus nuntius inter se coniurati, contra Chlotarrium unanimiter conspirant. Sed nec memor fuit Childeberthus, quod, quotienscunque adversus fratem suum egit, semper confusus abscessit. Chramnus vero, hoc foedere inito, Limovicino rediit et illud, per quod prius ambulaverat in regno patris sui, in sua dominatione redigiti.”

308 GTH IV.16: “Ille vero dolosae quidem, sed suscipere eum promittit, quem monere spiritualiter debuerat, ne patri exsisterit inimicus.”
that Gregory’s Roman- and Christian-based principle was that one should be fearful, presumably of divine consequences, for such behavior. 309 To really make the point, he restated the principle, now putting it into the mouth of Chramn’s Breton ally: “I do not think it is right that you should go forth against your father.” 310 Chramn’s eventual defeat and death was attributed to divine judgement, with Gregory recalling the biblical struggle between David and his son, Absalom. Absalom had sought his father’s kingdom while his father still reigned, and David had been forced to send an army against him and kill him. Here Gregory put into Chlothar’s mouth, as he marched against Chramn’s army, the following words, borrowed in part from the Psalms: “Look down, Lord, from heaven and judge my cause, because I unjustly suffer injuries from my son. Look down, Lord, and judge justly, and impose your justice just as once you did between Absalom and his father, David.” 311 Gregory certainly saw the rebellion of Chramn as a parallel to this biblical event. But he was also presenting a Judeo-Christian principle which, despite their official religious affiliation, may not have been accepted as the most important principle of behavior by the principal parties in the conflict. Of course, few people of the time probably thought it was a good thing for sons to rebel against fathers, but there were enough people willing to support and encourage Chramn, including his uncle Childebert,

309 GTH IV.20: “Sed nec ille contra patrem egredi timuit.”

310 GTH IV.20: “Iniustu censeo, te contra patrem tuum debere egredi.”

that the Old Testament principle of ‘honor your mother and father’ may have been willingly overlooked in the highly competitive arena of Merovingian politics.

Chlothar’s problems with Chramn were compounded by a rebellion of the Saxons, in 555, which had been helped (solatium) by the Thuringians. These peoples may have found the unstable situation in the eastern Teilreich an opportunity to break free from Frankish hegemony. In the next year, just as with Chramn, the Saxons were said to have been stirred up by Childebert as well. The fact that Gregory emphasized the damage done by the Saxons in his account, suggests that the Childebert’s goal was to undermine Chlothar’s authority in the region.

CHLOTHSINDA AND ALBOIN

It is, therefore, in the midst of this conflict over Theudebald’s kingdom that we must place Chlothar’s giving of his daughter, Clothsinda, in marriage to Alboin. Clothsinda’s marriage to the son of King Audoin, Alboin, the future King of the Lombards (r. 560-72), can only be roughly dated to sometime between 556 and 560. The marriage was not a long one, as Clothsinda probably died shortly thereafter, since both Gregory of Tours and Paul the Deacon report only her death and the fact that Alboin

312 GTH IV.10: “Eo anno rebellantibus Saxonibus, Chlothacharius rex, commoto contra eos exercito, maximam eorum partem delevit, pervagans totam Thoringiam ac devastans, pro eo quod Saxonibus solatium praebuisset.”

313 GTH IV.16: “Fortiter tunc rex Chlotharius contra Saxones decertabat. Saxones enim, ut adserunt, per Childeberthin commoti, atque indignantes contra Francos superiore anno, exeuntesque de regione sua in Francia venerant et usque Divitiam civitatem praedas egerunt nimiumque grave scelus perpetrauri sunt.”

314 Ewig, “Die Namengebung...”, 55 fixes it more firmly in 560/561, but Ewig, “Studien...” gives this a wider range; GTH IV.3.
married again.\(^{315}\) Paul the Deacon cited as the reason for the marriage the fact that Alboin had gained an illustrious and distinguished name. This suggests that Chlothar was anxious for a marriage to a prestigious Lombard prince. A marriage to the Lombards shows Chlothar acting like the previous eastern Frankish kings, Theudebert and Theudebald, and must have been a response to Childebert’s challenge over Theudebald’s kingdom. Even if the marriage came after 558, however, Chlothar still needed to establish his position over the various subject peoples east of the Frankish kingdom, by emphasizing his abilities not only to wage war on rebellious peoples, but also to connect himself with prestigious royal houses.

The difficulty in understanding this marriage is increased by the lack of informative sources for the 550s. Procopius ended his history in the middle of that decade and Gregory of Tours seemed to know very little about Italian affairs. The marriage makes sense, however, in the context of Chlothar’s seizure of his grand-nephew’s kingdom. Chlothar was probably not looking for military aid against his brother, or even against the Saxons — at least none is ever mentioned — but rather sought to confirm his superiority over his brother, by showing himself a prestigious king who could take up the mantle of the previous kings of the eastern *Teilreich*.

\(^{315}\)GTH IV.41: “Alboenus vero Langobardorum rex, qui Chlothosindam, regis Chlothari filiam, habebat, relecta regione sua, Italia cum omni illa Langobardorum gente petit. . . . Mortua autem Chlothosinda, uxore Alboeni, aliam duxit coniugem . . .” ; PD HL I.27: “Mortuus itaque est Audoin, ac deinde regum iam decimus Alboin ad regendum patriam cunctorum votis accessit. Qui cum famosisimun et viribus clarum ubique nomen haberet, Chlotarius rex Francorum Chlotsuindam ei suam filiam in matrimonio sociavit. De qua unam tantum filiam Alspuindam nomine genuit. . . Alboin Cunimundum occidit . . . cuius filiam nomine Rosimundam cum magna simul multitudine diversi sexus et aetatis duxit captivam; quam, quia Chlotsuinda obierat, in suam, ut post patuit, perniciem, duxit uxorem.”
CONCLUSION

Chlothar ultimately won the competition for control over the Frankish kingdom when his brother Childebert died without any sons in 558. For more than 50 years, he had been the aggressor, the defender, the ally, and the opponent of his kinsmen. The history of his 50 year reign encompassed a variety of alliance making (and breaking) and several marriages to foreign royalty. It also reconfirmed what the reign of Clovis taught us about the relationship between theories of kinship relations and reality. Whether the Frankish kings needed aid in a military venture or an end to hostilities with a foe, they turned to traditional forms of alliance making, which are usually signaled by alliance-making words. Theuderic brought *solatium* to the King of the Thuringians, the sons of Clovis embarked on joint military ventures (*coniuncti*) against the Burgundians and the Visigoths, and Theuderic agreed to a *foedus* with Childebert to end a period of conflict with each other. The goals of these alliances were different from those of their marriages, so they should not be confused with them.

With such a variety of alliance options before them, without recourse to marriage, we should not expect marriages to serve the purposes of an alliance. Rather, marriages served to enhance, display, and confirm the royal power of a Merovingian king. In the competition for land, wealth, and the loyalty of followers, image was important, and followers in particular could influence royal practice by threatening to give their loyalty to another, perfectly acceptable, Frankish king, who would act according to their view of kingship.
Gregory of Tours, Procopius, and Jordanes, for example, presented their own view of the expectations of kinship, and even judged their subjects according to those principles. But their theoretical expectations of behavior did not always reflect reality. Blood kinsmen among the Merovingians were more likely to be rivals than allies, although they often moved back and forth between these designations. Even when working with their kinsmen, they probably never forgot that they were rivals as well. That could cost one dearly — as Chlothar almost found out when Theuderic tried to arrange for his demise in Thuringia. Kinsmen by marriage, alternatively, were practically off the radar screen. Not once do the sources reveal a cooperative effort between royal affinal kinsmen. Even though Theuderic might have come to the rescue of his father-in-law, Sigismund, for example, he did not. Only in the case of Clotild and Amalaric do we even hear of relations between kings related by marriage, and that was not peaceful.

Thus, the foreign marriages of the Merovingians in this period reflect the conflict among the heirs of Clovis, specifically Theuderic against his half-brothers, as they sorted out the nature of their control over Clovis’ newly-won Frankish kingdom. Like Clovis’ use of military success, of playing the part of a good king, and of prestigious marriages, his heirs used similar methods in their competition for territory, wealth and followers.

Theuderic married a daughter of the Burgundian king Sigismund, while Chlodomer and Childebert, married women who were probably also of prestigious royal Germanic blood. While we do not have enough information about Guntheuca and Ostrogotho to devote any serious attention to them, their names do suggest such an origin. Theuderic also engaged his son to a Lombard princess, while Chlothar seized a Thuringian princess as a war
captive, and later married her. Even after Theuderic and Chlodomer died, the eastern
Merovingian kings, Theudebert, Theudebald and then Chlothar, turned to campaigns in
Italy and marriages with Lombards to enhance their own status and prestige, and show
themselves to be powerful rulers of great territories and peoples.
CHAPTER 4

THE HEIRS OF CHLOTHAR I, 561 – 592

The reigns of Chlothar I’s four sons, Charibert I (r. 561-7), Gunthramn (r. 561-92), Sigibert I (r. 561-75), and Chilperic I (r. 561-84), are better documented than those of the sons of Clovis because the historian Gregory of Tours was actively involved in the Frankish politics of this period. His *Historiae* becomes fuller and more detailed, providing a vivid portrayal of the intra-familial rivalries and competition among the Merovingians. In this competition, the kings each had personal agendas they pursued through a variety of methods. The older brothers, Charibert and Gunthramn, did not seek after prestigious foreign marriages, but rather tried to produce heirs through a multitude of liaisons with women, mostly of lower birth. The younger brothers, Sigibert and Chilperic, became bitter rivals in their attempts to garner more land, treasure and followers for themselves, and make themselves the equal, or even superiors, of their older brothers. Marriages with prestigious foreign brides played an important role in this rivalry, as each tried to match and out-do the other. Like their father’s generation, all four brothers constantly used military agreements, territorial divisions, and diplomatic alliances to further their own cause in the competition for power within the Frankish
kingdom, often at the expense of another brother. When Sigibert died, the guardians of
his young son, including his wife, the Visigothic princess Brunichild, continued to use
prestigious marriages to enhance the position of the king, now the young Childebert II (r.
575–596). What the narrative of this period demonstrates is that there was an intense
rivalry between the Frankish kings, and that being perceived as a good, strong, and
generous king was an important key to success in this competition. Marriages with
prestigious foreign spouses gave these kings an opportunity to enhance their status and
power, and demonstrate their wealth and generosity to their followers.

INHERITANCE

When Chlothar I died in 561, he had brought all the former Teilreiche under his
control. When he died, however, his four surviving sons divided up his kingdom in the
same way that Clovis’ sons had a generation earlier, to the extent that they even defined
their Teilreiche according to the earlier division by Clovis’ sons. Thus, even if the
correlations were not exact, Charibert was said to have inherited the kingdom of
Childebert I based in Paris, Gunthramn got Chlodomer’s kingdom based at Orleans,
Chilperic received his father’s kingdom based at Soissons, and Sigibert inherited the
eastern kingdom of Theuderic, based at Rheims. Even before this division was made,
though, the fraternal competition had begun, when Chilperic took possession of
Chlothar’s treasury, bought the loyalty of some of the “more able” Franks, and seized
Paris, thereby staking a claim to Childebert’s old kingdom. The other brothers were forced to ally (coniuncti) with each other in order to expel him from Paris and make a “lawful division” of Chlothar’s kingdom. Chilperic’s desire to gain control over what he must have deemed as the best territory, his father’s treasury, and the best followers is not only typical of this period, but includes all those things that Frankish kings sought to control in their competition: land, wealth, and warriors.

Chilperic did not wait long to try again, invading Sigibert’s Teilreich in 562 while the latter was engaged in battle with the Avars (called the Huns in the sources) on his eastern border. According to Gregory, the Avars were taking advantage of the apparent weakness or division among the new rulers of the Franks after the death of Chlothar. Sigibert proved the strength of his eastern kingdom by defeating the Avars, and agreeing to an amicitia with them. This treaty of friendship allowed him to turn his attention to the invading forces of Chilperic.

Sigibert countered Chilperic’s capture of his capital at Rheims by invading his territory and taking Chilperic’s capital at Soissons, where he found Chilperic’s son Theudebert. After defeating Chilperic in battle, Sigibert “brought his own cities back

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316GTH IV.22: “Chilpericus vero post patris funera thesaurus, qui in villa Brannacum erant congregati, accept et ad Francos utiliores petit ipsusque muneribus mollitus sibi subdidit. Et mox Parisius ingreditur sedemque Childeberthi regis occupat; sed non diu et hoc licuit possedere; nam coniuncti frates eius eum exinde repulerunt, et sic inter se hii quattuor, id est Charibertus, Gunthramnus, Chilpericus, atque Sigibertus, divisionem legitimam faciunt. Deditque sors Chariberto regnum Childeberthi sedemque habere Parisius; Gunthramno vero regnum Chlodomeris ac tenere sedem Aurelianensem, Chilperico vero regnum Chlothari patris eius, cathedramque Sessionas habere, Sygiberto quoque regnum Theuderici sedemque habere Remensis.”

under his control”. Sigibert displayed remarkable political sense in the aftermath of his campaign against Chilperic. He restored Chilperic’s territories to him, but held Theudebert captive for a year. Theudebert was probably fourteen when he was captured, and fifteen, the majority age among the Franks, when he was released after taking an oath never to fight against Sigibert again. Sigibert recognized that Chilperic, even though a current rival, could also serve as an ally later. Sigibert therefore treated Chilperic more than fairly, but held on to his son, as a sort of hostage, to ensure Chilperic’s agreement to the settlement. Then, when the boy was old enough to make an oath as an adult, Sigibert exacted it and let him return home. Sigibert had proven himself superior to Chilperic on the battlefield, but also magnanimous in victory.

Between 562 and 567, the oldest of the brothers, Charibert, went through a succession of wives, all of whom appear to have been low-born. They certainly were not foreign princesses. Some of the Merovingian kings married low-born or even slave women (Gregory often uses the term *ancilla* [slave girl] to describe them, and sometimes refers to them as *concubina*). These marriages are an important reminder that marriage served different purposes for different people. For a king like Charibert, as well as his brother Gunthramn, the two best examples from the sixth century of this practice, the prestige which could come from marriage to a foreign princess was of less concern than other issues, such as beauty, love, or wealth, for example. The choice of such brides still

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318GTH IV.23: “Dum autem cum eis esset turbatus Sigiherthus, Chilpericus, frater eius Remus pervadit et alias civitates, quae ad eum pertinebant, abstulit. Ex hoc enim inter eos, quod peius est, bellum civile surrexit. Rediens autem Sigiherthus victor a Chunis, Sessionas civitatem occupat, ibique inventum Theodoberthum, Chilperici regis filium, appræhendit et in exilio transmittit. Accedens autem contra Chilpericum, bellum commovit; quo victo atque fugato, civitatis suas in sua dominacione restituit.”
emphasized the king’s royal status, since this was a practice which only someone sitting at the apex of power, wealth, and status could afford to do. For a Merovingian king, apparently, the kind of girl to be most avoided was one of noble but not royal blood, because this would show the king to be no better than any other noble. As far as our evidence suggests, only kings married princesses or slaves. What this practice also demonstrates is that a marriage might have little diplomatic import, and should lead us to be wary of assuming that every marriage had military or diplomatic implications.

These marriages with slaves and servants should serve to remind us of the human character of our subjects, in this case, the Merovingians, and of the variety of motives and feelings connected to an age-old practice like marriage. As Jussen reminds us in his discussion of Gunthramn’s motives and actions towards Chilperic’s followers after the latter’s death in 584, “He may have had other priorities, interests not discussed here, or moral scruples that did not allow for certain actions.” In the same way, for the Merovingians, marriage sometimes served to fulfill certain human desires, sometimes helped to legitimate or enhance their power or status, but at the least always served the involved parties’ interests. And those interests are not always easy to discern through the filter of our sources.

The cases of Charibert and Gunthramn are illustrative. Charibert was the eldest of the surviving sons of Chlothar, and was about 40 years old at his father’s death. His three marriages to ancillae in the 560s demonstrates a keen awareness that he was without an heir and growing old. As the inheritor of part of the Frankish kingdom he must have also

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319 Jussen, 111.
wondered how much longer he might live, given the competitive nature of the division right from the start. For him, as the eldest of the Merovingians, producing a son would add more to his kingship than the prestige from a royal bride from a distant land, who might not be able to produce what he wanted in time. He had only had a daughter by his first wife, Ingoberga. Even though his third wife, Theudechild, did produce a son, he did not live very long after his birth. For Charibert, time ran out, and he died in 567 without a male heir.

Charibert’s queen, Theudechild, the daughter of a shepherd, sought to use the prestige that came from being Charibert’s queen to maintain her power. Gregory wrote that Theudechild offered to marry Gunthramn, who invited her to his court, and when she arrived, took the treasure she had brought with her. He then sent her into a nunnery, from which she tried to escape by arranging a marriage to a Goth, offering him the remainder of her treasure. The importance of wealth as a consideration for marriage is evident in this story. Even though Gunthramn speaks of Theudechild’s unworthiness (indigne) of sharing his brother’s bed as an excuse for not marrying her, he was perfectly willing to share his own bed with other women of low status. Gunthramn, too, appears to have had

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320 GTH IV.26: “Ne multo post et ipse rex post eam decessit. Cuius post obitum Theodogildis, una reginarum eius, nuntius ad Gunthchramnum regem dirigit, se ultro offerens matrimonio eius. Quibus rex hoc reddidit in responsis: ‘Accedere ad me ei non pigeat cum thesauris suis. Ego enim accipiam eam, faciamque magnam in populis, ut scilicet maiorem mecum honorum quam cum germano meo, qui nuper defunctus est, potiatur’. At illa gavisa, collectis omnibus, ad eum profecta est. Quod cernens rex, ait: ‘Rectius est enim, ut hi thesauri penes me habeantur, quam post hanc, quae indigne germani mei torum adivit’. Tunc ablatis multis, paucis reliquis, Arelatinsi eam monasthirio destinavit. Haec vero aegre acquiescens ieiuniis ac vigiliis adfici, per occultus nuntios Gothum quendam ad vitum, promittens, si se in Hispaniis deductam coniugio copularet, cum thesauris suis de monasthirio egrediens, libenti eam animo sequeretur. Quod ille, nihil dubitans, repromisit. Cumque haec collocitis rebus, factisce volucris, a cenobio pararet egredi, antecedavit voluntatem eius industria abbatissae, depraelensamque fraudem, eam graviter caesam custodiae mancipare praecipit, in qua usque ad exitum vitae praesentis, non mediocribus adtrita passionibus, perduravit.”
concerns for an heir, although he was more successful in producing male heirs, just not in keeping them alive.\textsuperscript{321} He was forced, in the end, to adopt his nephew, Childebert II, as heir, after all of his sons died or were murdered. Perhaps what made Theudechild so unwanted by Gunthramn as a bride was her inability to provide Charibert with a surviving heir.

Sigibert was the youngest of the inheritors of Chlothar I, but found a way to enhance his own position as king which was in direct contrast to those of Charibert and Gunthramn. The chronology is not very certain, but around 566, Sigibert ran into some difficulties. First he was defeated by the Avars, then his attempt to take the city of Arles from Gunthramn was thwarted, and so, perhaps in response to these debacles, he married the Visigothic princess Brunichild. Not only did the Avars defeat Sigibert, but they also captured him.\textsuperscript{322} The defeat to the Avars, however, did not turn out as disastrously as it might have, and Gregory of Tours put a good spin on the incident, blaming the defeat on the Avars’ use of the magical arts, and casting Sigibert as a good king who used all his

\textsuperscript{321}GTH IV.25: “Gundechramnus autem rex bonus primo Venerandam, cuiusdam ancillam, pro concubina toro subianxit; de qua Gundobatum filium suscepit. Postea vero Marcatrudem, filiam Magnarit, in matrimonium acceperit. Gundobadum vero filium suum Aurilianis transmissit. Aemula autem Marcatrudis post habitum filium in huius morte crassatur; transmissum, ut aiunt, venenum in potu maedificavit. Quo mortuo, ipsa judicio Dei filium, quem habebat, perdidit, et odium regis in currit, demissaque ab eodem, ne multo post temporae mortae est. Post quam Austerchilde cognomento Bobillam accepit, de qua iterum duos filios habuit, quorum senior Chlotharius, minor Chlodomeris dicebatur.”

abilities to protect his people and turned defeat into a victory. Sigibert gave gifts to the Avar king, and thereby procured a *foedus* with him, which seems to have been effective, since we never hear of another Avar invasion of Frankish territory in the sixth century. One wonders whether Gregory did not get some of his argument directly from the court of Sigibert or his successor, Childebert II. The fact that Gregory described the outcome of this incident as a praiseworthy thing, and nothing to be ashamed of, suggests that there were some who were saying that very thing — perhaps Chilperic, Sigibert’s longtime rival. It should also be noted that Sigibert dealt with this foreign threat without any reference to kinship. The Avars broke the earlier *amicitia*, Sigibert responded with his own military force, and then negotiated a treaty by offering gifts to the king. This was a military issue, not a familial one.

Even in dealing with family, Sigibert did not adhere to the theory of familial unity and cooperation. Gregory reported that Sigibert wanted the city of Arles, which belonged to his brother Gunthramn, so he ordered his counts to attack and take it, which they did. In response, Gunthramn’s army took Sigibert’s city of Avignon, and then wrested Arles back under his control. Like Sigibert, Gunthramn was a crafty politician, and returned Avignon to his brother at the end of the campaign. Of course, in the end, Gunthramn proved himself the best politician or diplomat among the heirs of Chlothar, since he outlived all of his brothers throughout the internecine wars, and assassination attempts, of the 570s and 580s. Having been bested by Gunthramn’s forces, Sigibert turned elsewhere to continue the competition with his brothers and fellow Frankish kings: marriage to a prestigious foreign princess.
SIGIBERT I AND BRUNICHLDF

Gregory of Tours saw in Sigibert’s marriage to Brunichild a proper marriage for a king. Gregory said that when it came time for Sigibert I to marry, in 566, he looked around at his brothers who had been marrying their own servants and slaves, and considered such women “indignas” (unworthy). He decided, therefore, to ask for the hand of Brunichild, the daughter of Athanagild, King of the Visigoths. He accompanied his request for the Visigothic princess with “multis muneribus” — many gifts. The girl was sent off to Sigibert with a great treasure (cum magnis thesauris). The marriage to Brunichild, therefore, represented a prestigious match for Sigibert, who received a wife of the highest status, accompanied by great treasure, and who was noted for her beauty and character. Gregory had spent several chapters describing the low-born wives and concubines whom he thought were disgracing Sigibert’s brothers before he spelled out the virtues of the princess Brunichild: she was refined, beautiful, virtuous and honorable, prudent and charming. As Janet Nelson has suggested, Gregory was also making a positive statement about Childebert II, the son of Sigibert and Brunichild. Sigibert had the best son because he had the best wife and never dismissed her, which contrasts with the early deaths of Gunthramn’s children by ancillae (he was thus forced to adopt

323GTH IV.27.

324GTH IV.27: “Porro Sigyberthus rex cum videret, quod fratres eius indignas sibimet uxorres accipserent et per vilitatem suam etiam ancillas in matrimonio sociarent, legationem in Hispaniam mittit et cum multis muneribus Brunichildem, Athanagilde regis filiam, petit. Erat enim puella elegans opere, venusta aspectu, honesta moribus atque decoris, prudens consilio et blanda colloquio. Quam pater eius non denegans cum magnis thesauris antedicto rege transmisit.”
Childebert II as his own son and heir). Not only was Gregory impressed with Brunichild, but Chilperic, being envious of Sigibert’s prestigious new wife, undertook almost immediately afterwards to secure a similar wife for himself — the sister of Brunichild, Galsuintha (see below). Gregory recorded that Chilperic was willing to dismiss his other wives and concubines in order to be found worthy of the marriage.

Venantius Fortunatus (ca. 540 – 600), a favorite at several Merovingian courts, also reveals the importance of birth and rank to the royal family in the public presentation of themselves. Venantius Fortunatus aimed to please by writing what his audience and patrons wanted to hear, so we can probably take his poems and epitaphs written specifically for the royal family as reflective of their desires and motivations. Venantius Fortunatus wrote an epithalamium (a genre of poetry specifically for celebrating a marriage) for Sigibert and Brunichild. Judith George has noted how “the epithalamium sets the royal couple unmistakably in the tradition of the dynastic alliances of the Roman emperor.” The poem follows the traditional patterns and symbolism of this kind of poetry, but it corresponds with the circumstances surrounding this marriage as described by Gregory of Tours. Not only does the poem demonstrate some of the ways kings like


326 GTH IV.28: “Quod videns Chilpericus rex, cum iam plures haberet uxorres, sororem eius Galsuinham expetit, promittens per legatus se alias relicturum, tantum condignam sibi regisque prolem mereretur accipere.”

327 George, Venantius Fortunatus, 154.
Sigibert tried to emphasize their prestige and power, but its very composition suggests how important it was to compare favorably with one’s rivals for power within the Frankish royal competition.

In the poem, Sigibert’s kingdom is compared with the Roman Empire, and the prestige of Brunichild put the wives of his brothers to shame. Not only is Sigibert’s own birth and rank emphasized, but so too is that of Brunichild. Sigibert was extolled as the greatest of a great and royal lineage. Brunichild’s illustrious Spanish origins were emphasized. Her royal father, King Athanagild is specifically mentioned (genus Athanagildi). Brunichild is also praised for her beauty, even before her lineage. She is a new Venus, beautiful in complexion, a gemstone. Such a description may be mainly attributable to the rhetorical models of this sort of poetry which Fortunatus was following. Gregory of Tours, however, also referred to her beautiful appearance. Fortunatus was also writing after the marriage, when Sigibert had seen his bride and knew of her beauty. We presume that even if he exaggerated, he was not completely fabricating

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328 VF, Carm. VI.1, l. 68-71: “Sigibertus, amor populi, lux nata parentum,/qui genus a proavis longo tenet ordine reges/et reges geniturus erit, spes gentis opimae,/quod crevit natale decus, generosa propago.”

329 VF, Carm. VI.1, l. 124-129: “Nobilitas excelsa nitet, genus Athanagildi/longius extremo regnum qui porrigit orbi/dives opum quas mundus habet populumque gubernat/hispanum sub iure suo pietate canenda./Cur tamen egregii genitoriis regna renarrem,/quando tuis meritis video crevisse parentes?”

330 VF, Carm. VI.1, l. 100-111: “O virgo miranda mihi, placitura iugali,/clarior aetheria, Brunichildis, lampade fulgens,/lumina gemmarum superasti lumine vultus, altera nata Venus regno dotata decoris/nullaque Nereidum de gurgite talis Hibero/Oceani sub fonte natat, non ulla Naphea/pulchrior, ipsa suas subdunt tibi flumina nymphas./Lactea cui facies incocta rubore coruscat,/lilia mixta rosis, aurum si intermicet ostro,/decertata tuis numquam se vulibus aequant./Sapphirus, alba, adamanus, crystalla, zmaragdus, iaspis/cedant cuncta: novam genuit Hispania gemmam.”

331 GTH IV.27: “venusta aspectu”
what the royal couple wanted to hear about Brunichild’s beauty. The fact is that the point of both Fortunatus’ and Gregory’s description of her beauty would have been strengthened if there was truth to the description and made laughable if she were, in fact, ugly. The point is that her beauty was something extolled at the court by both Fortunatus and Gregory. For Gregory, in particular, her beauty may have been a sign of justification for Sigibert’s choice of such a bride.

Venantius Fortunatus’ poetry also developed the importance of the personal character of the new spouses, Sigibert and Brunichild. Sigibert is described as youthful yet mature, a father figure to his people, generous, and forgiving. He is a man “in whom whatever worthy things you should require from a king are found.” What this epithalamium really emphasizes, though, is the virginity and chastity of Brunichild:

Soon, when Cupid with conquering dart saw the gentle king burning with virgin passion, he said in exultation to Venus: “Mother, I have fought my campaigns; a second Achilles is defeated by me by his inflamed heart; Sigibert, in love, is consumed by passion for Brunichild; she pleases him, ready for marriage, of sufficient years to be married, blooming in the flower of her virginity; she will delight a husband with her first embraces, she suffers no hurtful shame, but thus

332VF, *Carm.* VI.1, l. 80-96.

333VF, *Carm.* VI.1, l. 97: “In quo digna manent quicquid de rege requiras.”
growing in power, is hailed as queen; thus, growing all the more mighty, she is hailed as queen. This too is the maid’s desire, though the modesty of her sex holds her back . . .

It is specifically her virginity and chastity which are praised by Fortunatus. This is portrayed as something desirable and honorable, and should probably be seen specifically in contrast to the marriages of Sigibert’s brothers, which were multiple in number and to low-born women, perhaps of questionable chastity. What really connects this poem so strongly to the views of Sigibert and Brunichild themselves is that this was one of Fortunatus’ earliest poems. He needed to write something that would have been well received and which struck a chord with the king and queen. As George says, “For one so recently arrived at court, Fortunatus responded creatively to the king’s ambitions and the political realities implicit in the marriage and conversion of Brunichild.” Those political realities revolved around the competition among the brother-kings, and the need to attract and keep the best (utiliores) followers loyal. This would enable him to defend his kingdom, and expand it, which would also offer opportunities for plunder to those loyal followers. It is clear from Gregory’s narrative that Sigibert also made a great public display of his prestigious new bride. Gregory reported that Sigibert assembled “the chief

334VF, Carm. VI.1, l. 47-57: “Mox ubi conspexit telo superante Cupido/virginea mitem torreri lampade rege/lactus ait Veneri: ‘Mater, mea bella peregi:/pectore flagranti mihi vincitur alter Achilles,/Sigibertus amans Brunichilde carpitur igne:/quae placeat apta toro, maturis nubilis annis,/virginitas in flore tumens, complexa marito/primitiis plactura suis, nec damna pudoris/sustinet, unde magis pollens regina vocatur./Hoc quoque virgo cupit, quamvis verecundia sexus/obstet . . .”

335George, Venantius Fortunatus, 35.

336George, 43.
men of his kingdom, and making ready a feast, received her as his wife with boundless rejoicing and delight.\textsuperscript{337} Sigibert was making a statement about himself and his aspirations with this marriage, and he was using the public ritual of marriage to impress and attract the important men of his kingdom.

This is also a marriage which displays the variety of purposes and values that could be attached to foreign marriages. Sigibert certainly had interests in southern Gaul, where his territory bordered upon Visigothic Septimania. Around this same time, he is recorded attacking Gunthramn’s city of Arles, which also lay on the border with Visigothic territory.\textsuperscript{338} Whether Sigibert desired to confirm peace with the Visigoths in order to concentrate his resources in the south on his brothers’ territories, sought Visigothic support in such campaigns, or used an offer of peace in the region in exchange for the prestigious bride, we may not be able to completely discount the diplomatic implications of such a marriage. Still, considering that our primary sources do not discuss the marriage in this way — and the Visigothic sources do not even mention the marriage — or suggest Visigothic support for Sigibert’s campaigns, it seems better to understand the marriage in terms of Sigibert’s royal image. There is, in fact, very little evidence of Frankish-Visigothic cooperation, and the 570s and 580s, like the 530s, were generally characterized by Frankish-Visigothic military conflict in southern Gaul. The sources are quiet about Visigothic-Frankish relations between 540 and 566, but with the

\textsuperscript{337}GTH IV.27: “Ille vero, congregatus senioribus secum, praeparatis aepulis, cum inminsa laetitia atque iocunditate eam accepti uxorem.”

\textsuperscript{338}GTH IV.30.
new generation of Frankish kings, eager to display their military prowess in the expansion of their kingdoms, the threat to Visigothic Septimania was renewed, at the very moment when the rulers of the two peoples began to intermarry.\textsuperscript{339} During his reign King Liuva I (r. 568-573) concentrated particularly on the region called Septimania, which lay along the Frankish border, probably because of this renewed threat, and then in 573 Reccared (r. 586-601) was given command in this region to continue those efforts. Thus, at most, we might see in the marriage of Sigibert and Brunichild a sign of peaceful relations between himself and the Visigothic court, but that may have existed even before the marriage. Ian Wood, following Janet Nelson, has also suggested that Athanagild, in marrying his two daughters to Frankish kings, may have been hoping for a grandson to succeed him.\textsuperscript{340} I have not been convinced by their arguments, given the unprecedented nature of such a suggestion, as well as the generally antagonistic history between the two peoples in the sixth century, but this is a good example of considering alternative motives to foreign marriages besides strict political or diplomatic issues.

Whether or not Sigibert’s marriage to Brunichild in 566 can be used to help understand the contemporary military or diplomatic situation in southern Gaul, it cannot be argued that it had a long-term effect on that situation. When Athanagild died within two years of the marriage, a new dynasty came to the throne to whom Brunichild was unrelated, at least until her mother married the new king, Leovigild. Her connections to and influence at the Visigothic court of Leovigild would have been minimal, and it is best

\textsuperscript{339}Collins, \textit{Early Medieval Spain}, 40.

to see Brunichild after her marriage to Sigibert as a Merovingian queen rather than a Visigothic princess. After all, when Sigibert died, she did not return to Spain, but stayed and became an even more important figure in Merovingian politics.

**Chilperic and Galsuintha**

According to Gregory of Tours, Chilperic married Brunichild’s sister, Galsuintha, as a direct response to Sigibert’s marriage to Brunichild:

Seeing this, King Chilperic, although he already had several wives [uxores], sought her sister Galsuintha, promising through a legate that he would set aside the others, if only he might be deemed worthy to receive a girl worthy of himself and of royal stock [regisque prolem]. Accepting those promises of his, the father sent his daughter to that man, just as before, with great wealth. For Galsuintha was senior to Brunichild in age. Who, when she had come to King Chilperic, was received with great honor, and was joined to him in marriage [coniugio]; by whom she was loved even with a great love. For she had brought with her great treasures. But through his love for Fredegund, whom he had before, there arose between them great discord. For already she had been converted and confirmed according to Catholic law. And when she complained to the king that she had suffered continual injuries and said that she had no honor in his eyes, she sought that she might be permitted to freely return to her homeland, leaving her treasures behind which she had brought with her. That man, dissimulating through clever devices, softened her with gentle words. In the end, he ordered that she be beaten.
by a servant and he found her dead in bed. . .  The king, however, when he
mourned her death, after a few days received Fredegund in marriage. After which
action, his brothers, repute it to him that he had killed the aforesaid queen
by his own order, threw him out of the kingdom.341

This report offers some good insight into the motives for marriage. Gregory tells us that
Chilperic was already married, apparently to more than one wife, and it is interesting to
note that Gregory refers to these women as wives (uxores), not concubines (concubinae).
Chilperic promised in the marital negotiations to dismiss his other wives. On the one
hand, Athanagild appears to have been looking out for his daughter’s future happiness
and success, as well as ensuring that the proper respect was paid for such a prestigious
bride. On the other hand, Chilperic considered the prize worth the sacrifice, at least in the
short term. Chilperic, having already been married to other less prestigious women, was
willing to set them aside, despite his obvious attraction to them, particularly Fredegund,
in order to get access to a more prestigious bride. Galsuintha is specifically noted as
being honorable (condignam) and of royal stock (regis prolem), and she was older than
Brunichild. All of this points to Chilperic’s concern to match Sigibert’s prestigious wife

341GTH IV.28: “Quod videns Chilpericus rex, cum iam plures haberet uxores, sororem eius
Galsuinham expetit, promittens per legatus se alias relicturum, tantum condignam sibi regisque prolem
mereretur accipere. Pater vero eius has promissiones accipienis, filiam suam, simillim sicut anteriorem,
ipsi cum magnis opibus distinavit. Nam Galsuintha aetate senior a Brunichilde erat. Quae cum ad
Chilpericum regem venisset, cum grande honore suscepit eius que est sociata coniugio; a quo etiam
magno amore diligebatur. Detulerat enim secum magnos thesauros. Sed per amorem Fredegundis, quam
prius habuerat, ortum est inter eos grande scandalum. Iam enim in lege catholica conversa fuerat et
chrismata. Cum que se regi quaereretur assiduae iniurias perferre dicereque, nullam se dignitatem cum
eodem habere, petit, ut, relictis thesauris quos secum detulerat, libera redire permetteretur ad patriam.
Quod ille per ingenia dissimulans, verbis eam lenibus demulsit. Ad extremum enim suggillari iussit a
puero, mortuamque repperit in strato. . . . Rex autem cum eam mortuam deflessit, post paucos dies
Fredegundem recepit in matrimonio. Post quod factum reputantes frates, quod sua emissione antedicta
regina fuerit interflecta, eum a regno deieciunt.”

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and even surpass him. Up to this point, Charibert and Gunthramn had not made prestigious marriages, but when Sigibert, Chilperic’s main rival, upped the ante, so to speak, he felt the need to respond.

What is emphasized even more than the prestige of Galsuintha, however, is the wealth she brought with her. Gregory reported that she came with great wealth (*magnis opibus*), which was so important to Chilperic that when Gregory says that he loved her, he immediately followed it with a note that she had brought with her great treasures (*magnos thesauros*). Gregory is obviously suggesting that Chilperic’s love for her was based heavily on the great wealth she had brought with her. Furthermore, Gregory reported that when she arrived, Chilperic greeted her with great honor, which must suggest a great formal reception where her treasure could be displayed to Chilperic’s people, along with the prestigious person of his new bride. When Galsuintha later expressed a desire to return home, she even offered to leave her treasure behind, if only she could leave freely. She, too, understood why Chilperic loved her.

We learn later that as part of the marriage agreement, Chilperic gave to Galsuintha five *civitates* in southern Gaul.\(^{342}\) This is further evidence of how valuable she was to Chilperic, but may also suggest a date for the marriage. Those five *civitates* lay in the region which had been part of Charibert’s kingdom, which means that for Chilperic to be able to give them to his new bride, they must have come into his possession following the death of Charibert in 567. Athanagild died in 568, so the window for him to send his

\(^{342}\)GTH IX.20. *These civitates* eventually passed into the inheritance of Brunichild, her sister.
daughter to Chilperic, and for Chilperic to give those cities to her when she came into Francia, is between Charibert’s death in 567 and Athanagild’s death in 568.

Ian Wood places Galsuintha’s own death shortly after Athanagild’s demise in 568. This certainly would suggest a concern by Chilperic for the potential diplomatic repercussions of killing a Visigothic princess, recalling the earlier case of Clotild the Younger and the vengeance of her brother. It does not have to mean, however, that with the passing of Athanagild, the marriage became useless diplomatically, since there seems no reason to think that the marriage was contracted in the first place with such designs in mind. Gregory clearly placed it in the context of competition with Sigibert, and never tried to explain the marriage as a diplomatic tool. As Chilperic’s multiple wives before his marriage to Galsuintha suggest, he was one who may have placed his highest priority in marriage on beauty, or at least on personal attraction. Hence his marriage to Fredegund after Galsuintha’s demise. His real attraction to Galsuintha had been her prestige and her treasure. This also explains why he could not allow her to return home when it became clear that she was not honored at Chilperic’s court. It was better that such a prestigious wife should die than that Chilperic should appear to lose, or be abandoned by, his prestigious bride. Furthermore, her death might mean that he could legitimately keep the treasures she had brought with her, whereas, for Galsuintha to return home without her treasures, despite her offer to leave them behind when she returned, would surely mean a demand from her father for a return of those treasures. If her death followed that of Athanagild, then perhaps, also, with the passing of her father and the rise of a new

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dynasty among the Visigoths, her prestige may have been lessened, and the potential threat from abroad for her murder was removed. This was Chilperic’s motive: to go back to the woman he loved, and keep Galsuintha’s treasure for himself.

Venantius Fortunatus’ long lamentation on the death of Galsuintha presented further evidence about the date of Galsuintha’s death. The poem focused particularly on the grief of Galsuintha’s mother, Goiswinth, and her sister, Brunichild. At the end of the poem, Venantius Fortunatus mentioned Goiswinth’s still living kin: her daughter (Brunichild), son-in-law (Sigibert I), granddaughter (Ingund), grandson (Childebert II), and her own husband. Does this reference to her husband refer to Athanagild, her first husband, and father of Galsuintha, or to her second husband, Leovigild? The mention of Childebert II indicates that Galsuintha did not die before 570, the year of his birth. Jean of Biclar, a generally reliable source for the period, placed the death of Athanagild in 568. He also placed the marriage of Goiswinth with Leovigild in the next year, 569, the same year Leovigild was raised to the kingship. If he is correct in this dating, it

344VF Carm. VI.5.

345Literary analysis of this poem, as well as some discussion of its political context, can be found in G. Davis, “Ad sidera notus: strategies of lament and consolation in Fortunatus’ De Gelsuintha” Agon 1 (1967), 188-34; K. Steinmann, Die Gelsuintha-Elegie des Venantius Fortunatus (Carm. VI.5): Text, Ubersetzung, Interpretation (Zurich, 1975); Judith George, Venantius Fortunatus, 96-101.

346VF Carm. VI.5.367-8: “tu quoque, mater, habes consultum dote tonantis de nata et genero, nepte nepote viro.”

347I am following the chronology of Ewig, “Die Namegebung”, 58.

348Juan de Biclaro, Chronicon, 79. See Collins’ discussion of his value as a source in Early Medieval Spain, 42.

349Juan de Biclaro., 80.
would seem to suggest that the husband in the poem is Leovigild. Thus Galsuintha died when Leovigild was king, but probably not until 570, which would make the marriage last longer than Gregory and Venantius Fortunatus seem to indicate. This would also suggest that her death was not directly connected to Athanagild’s death, but rather that his death simply made the deed less dangerous when it was decided upon.

Everything about this marriage points to Chilperic’s desire to enhance his position through a connection to a Visigothic princess. Chilperic had to work hard to convince Athanagild to marry her to him — to be found worthy of her — by promising to put away his other wives, for example, and offering her a large gift. Venantius Fortunatus’ elegy on Galsuintha’s death lingers upon the lamentations that accompanied her sending off to Chilperic. Venantius Fortunatus probably knew little about the specific details of the sending off, but he must have known how much she was loved by her parents, and how hard Chilperic had had to work to convince them to part with her. This helps to explain why Brunichild, her younger sister, had been married to Sigibert before she was married herself. Once arrived in Francia, her unique status among Chilperic’s wives was further emphasized in ways meant to display her prestige. Venantius Fortunatus says that the army swore an oath of allegiance to Galsuintha, a sign of the prestige she brought to his kingdom.\textsuperscript{350} Edward James has discussed how oaths of loyalty to Merovingian kings were common in the sixth century, but Judith George also points out that it was rarely

\textsuperscript{350}VF Carm. VI.5.238-240.
done to queens.\textsuperscript{351} Venantius Fortunatus also described her as earning the respect of the people, giving gifts, and being generous to the poor.\textsuperscript{352} She would seem to fit well the criteria of a good wife: she was of royal blood, brought great wealth with her, and was of good character. The main motives behind her marriage to Chilperic must lie in these criteria.

\textbf{CHILPERIC VS. SIGIBERT VS. GUNTHRAMN}

Sigibert and Chilperic appear as the greatest rivals among the brothers of this generation and their marriages to Visigothic princess make sense in this context. After Charibert died in 567, it was Gunthramn who found himself between these two rivals, sometimes allying with one, then changing to the other. Thus, while Sigibert and Chilperic attacked or maneuvered against each other, Gunthramn took advantage of the situation to enhance his own position. His policy of vacillation was ultimately successful as he outlived both Sigibert and Chilperic, and he used his position to manipulate Merovingian politics during the minorities of the heirs of Sigibert and Chilperic. Unlike his brothers, Gunthramn did not turn to marriage to enhance his position. His reign shows how alliances unconnected to kinship played an important role in the competition among Frankish kings.

\textsuperscript{351}George, \textit{Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems}, 47n.; James, \textit{The Origins of France}, 142-3.

\textsuperscript{352}VF Carm VI.5.238-245.
With the death of Charibert in 567, the remaining three brothers worked out a *pactum*, which set forth how they were to divide up the territories of their departed brother.\(^{353}\) The *pactum* served to delineate the bounds of each king’s territory, but did little to encourage cooperation amongst them. When Chilperic violated the agreement, and took the cities of Tours and Poitiers which had been apportioned to Sigibert, Gunthramn and Sigibert appointed Duke Mummolus to help restore the territory to Sigibert, which he did. Gregory of Tours, probably because he lived in the disputed region, recounts in his *Historiae* the on-going struggle between Chilperic and Sigibert, and later Sigibert’s heir, Childebert II, over the cities of Tours and Poitiers. Despite the existence of a written *pactum*, Chilperic still acted according to his own interests.

The use of alliances and treaties within this competition tells us something about the attitude of those involved in it. Not only did the brothers create a *pactum* to settle the division of Charibert’s territory, but they used the *foedus*, the same kind of treaty agreed between Sigibert and the invading Avars, to settle their disputes, at least temporarily. The civil wars between brothers were not just family squabbles over territory, but military and diplomatic events to be settled through military and diplomatic means. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill highlighted the fact that traditionally, the *pactus* was used as an international, not a domestic, peace agreement to allow kings to pursue criminals beyond their borders without starting a war.\(^{354}\) These brothers saw each other as fellow Frankish kings, all

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\(^{353}\) GTH IV.45: “Nam post mortem Chariberthi, cum Chilpericus Toronus ac Pectavis pervasisset, quae Sigybertho regi per *pactum* in partem venerant, coniunctus rex ipse cum Gunthchramno fratre suo, Mummolun elegunt, qui has urbes ad verum dominium revocare deberet.”

ruling a single Frankish kingdom together, but they still considered the other kingdoms as foreign kingdoms, with whom diplomatic relations had to be conducted.

Chilperic, Sigibert, and Gunthramn were in a state of war with each other around 573 and 574. Chilperic had tried to take the cities of Tours and Poitiers from Sigibert, but Sigibert had joined with his brother Gunthramn to appoint Mummolus to return the cities to Sigibert. Later, a dispute arose between Gunthramn and Sigibert, which could not be resolved by a council of bishops. At the same time Chilperic sent his son Theudebert to retake the cities of Tours and Poitiers. Sigibert’s response was to call up an army to advance against Chilperic. It was perhaps only natural that Chilperic should call upon Gunthramn for help. They entered into a foedus, agreeing to not allow either to suffer harm — a mutual defense treaty, in a sense. As brother fought against brother, any sense of brotherly kindness was gone. Gunthramn had sent forces against Chilperic when he first invaded Tours, now he was supporting him. Political survival came before all else, and as Sigibert marched forth with a large army, the possibility of his completely destroying one of the other Merovingian kings was a distinct possibility. This foedus was probably designed to insure the continuation of a tripartite division of the Frankish realm to maintain the current balance of power. From Gunthramn’s point of view, it was better,
if that balance should be upset, that Chilperic should be killed rather than himself. Thus, their *foedus* did not last long. When Sigibert threatened to attack Gunthramn instead of Chilperic, if Gunthramn did not allow him to march through his territory in order to more easily cross the Seine River, Gunthramn placed his own preservation above that of Chilperic, his federate, and allowed Sigibert through. This involved not just the breaking of an earlier *foedus*, but the making of new *foedus* between Sigibert and Gunthramn.359

The *foedus* appears here mainly as a means of negotiating a peace between previous enemies, while setting out some specific instructions for both parties. This *foedus* had the specific goal of allowing Sigibert to pass through Gunthramn’s territory to attack Chilperic, who was now forced to make a *pax* with Sigibert and return the captured cities.360

The next year, Chilperic sought a *foedus* with Gunthramn to attack Sigibert.361 Gifts were exchanged between Chilperic and Gunthramn as part of the process, perhaps because of a need to restore a basis of faith between them, given Gunthramn’s weakness

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359 GTH IV.49: “*Sed cum Sigyberthus gentes illas adducens venisset et Chilpericus de alia parte cum suo exercitu resederet, nec haberet rex Sigyberthus super fratrem iturus, ubi Sequanam fluvium transmearet, fratris suo Gunthramnno mandatum mittit, dicens: ‘Nisi me per miseris per tuam sortem hunc fluvium transire, cum omni exercitu meo super te pergam’. Quod ille timens, foedus cum eodem iniit eumque transire permisit.”

360 GTH IV.49: “*Quem Sigyberthus insecutus, campum sibi praeparare petitit. Illi vero timens, ne, conliso utroque exercitu, etiam regnum eorum conruerit, paeem petitit, civitatesque eius, quas Theodoberthus male pervaserat, reddidit. . . Sed nec hoc sine beati Martini fuisse vertutem ambigitur, ut hi sine bello pacificarentur; nam in ipsa die, qua hi paeem fecerunt, tres paralitici ad beati basilicam sunt directi.”

the previous year. The *foedus* settled their differences, and provided specific provisions. After their meeting, Chilperic marched forth against Sigibert, but was subsequently forced to give up the campaign when Gunthramn again made peace with Sigibert.\(^{362}\) This time there was no mention of a *foedus*, but rather Gregory simply said that Gunthramn made peace ("*pacificasset*"). It is not very clear what the difference was between Sigibert’s *foedus* with Gunthramn where he forced Gunthramn to allow him to cross the Seine with his army, and the pacification of Gunthramn, where he simply forced Gunthramn to stay out of his fight with Chilperic, but the whole process of the civil war described by Gregory reveals that the *foedus* was used as part of the peace-making process after a conflict. What is also significant is that these *foedera* did not rely upon or refer to the parties’ common kinship. Just as with foreign foes like the Avars, gifts were often exchanged, and also like the *amicitia* of the Avars, these agreements could be broken when necessary. The making and breaking of alliances, agreements, and treaties, shows not only how intense was the rivalry for power among these kings, but also how temporary these diplomatic measures could be. Marriages are not so easily made and broken, which is another difference between an alliance and a marriage.

Another important provision in the *pactum* signed by Gunthramn, Chilperic, and Sigibert after Charibert’s death, was that none of the kings should enter Paris without the

\(^{362}\)GTH IV.50: “*Chilpericus vero cognscens, quod iterum se Gunthchramnus cum Sigyberho pacificasset, se infra Thornacinsis murus cum uxore et filis suis communivit.*”
permission of his brothers. Paris had been the capital of Charibert’s kingdom, and rather than allow any of the rival brothers to have control over such an important city, it was divided amongst them. Of course, this made Paris a prize of their competition, to see who could gain the advantage of the others and make it his own. We learn the most about this proviso in the *pactum* when, after the death of Chilperic in 584, Gunthramn came to Paris. Childebert II, Sigibert’s heir, also sought entrance into the city, and control over the portions of Charibert’s kingdom which had once been given to his father in the original distribution pact. Gunthramn’s reply to Childebert’s legates is revealing:

> Behold the pacts [*pactiones*], which were made among us, so that whoever should enter Paris against the will of his brothers should lose his share, and the martyr Polyeuctes, with the confessors Hilary and Martin, should be the judge and avenger of him. After this, my brother Sigibert entered into that city, and dying to the judgement of God, lost his share. And Chilperic did likewise. Thus, through their transgressions, they have lost their shares. Therefore, because those two died according to the justice of God and the curses of the pact, I am bringing the whole kingdom of Charibert with his treasures into my keeping, by legal right.

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363GTH VI.27: “Chilpericus rex pridie quam pascha celebraretur, Parisiis abit. Et ut maledictum, quod in *pactione* sua vel fratrum suorum conscriptum erat, ut nullus eorum Parisiis sine alterius voluntate ingredetur, carere possit, reliquias sanctorum multorum praecidentibus, urbem ingressus est...”

364GTH VII.6: “Ecce *pactiones*, quae inter nos factae sunt, ut, quisque sine fratris voluntatem Parisiis urbem ingredetur, amitteret partem suam, esseque Poliuctus martyr cum Hylario adque Martino confessoribus, iudex ac retributor eius. Post haec ingressus est in ea germanus meus Sigibertus, qui iudicio Dei interiens amisset partem suam. Similiter et Chilpericus gessit. Per has ergo transgressiones amiserunt partes suas. Ideoque, quia illi iuxta Dei iudicium et maledictionibus pactionum defecerunt, omnem regnum Chariberthi cum thesauris eius meis ditionibus, lege opitualente, subiciam...”
Chilperic had tried to forestall the curse of the pact by carrying relics with him. For Gregory, the story is a great illustration of the power of the saints. For us, it is a prime example of how these written pacts were kept and used, and what kind of provisions were contained therein.

By 575, Sigibert appeared to be on the verge of winning his competition with Chilperic, whom he had forced to retreat to Tournai. He stood in control of Paris. At this point, Gregory reported that the Franks who had once owed their loyalty to Childebert I, which probably meant that they had also been the loyal warriors of Charibert before his death, after which they had become the followers of Chilperic, would come over to Sigibert if he eliminated Chilperic. The desire to add these Franks to his retinue was enough for Sigibert to advance against Chilperic at Tournai. When Gregory then reported that Sigibert gathered his whole army about him and they raised him up on a shield and made him king, he must be referring to the addition to Sigibert’s forces of warriors from Chilperic’s retinue who now took Sigibert as their king in a public acclamation. Sigibert was on the verge of becoming the most powerful of the Frankish kings by eliminating his main rival, when Fredegund, Chilperic’s wife, had Sigibert assassinated. That the assassins could get so close to do their deed is further evidence that this band of

365 GTH IV.51: “Sigyberthus vero, obtentis civitatibus illis, quae circa Parisius sunt postitae, usque Rhotomaginsem urbem accessit, volens easdem urbes hostibus cedere. Quod ne faceret, a suis prohibitus est. Regressus inde, Parisius est ingressus, ibique ad eum Brunichildis cum filiis venit. Tunc Franci, qui quondam ad Childeberthum aspexerant seniorem, ad Sigyberthum legationem mittunt, ut ad eos veniens, derelicto Chilperico, super se ipsum regem stabilirent. Illi vero haec audiant, misitque qui fratrem suum in supra memoratam civitatem obsederent, ipsi illuc properare deliberans.”

366 GTH IV.51: “Ventiente autem illo ad villam cui nomen est Victuriaco, collectus est ad eum omnis exercitus, inpositumque super clypeum sibi regem statuunt.”
warriors was made up of warriors unknown to Sigibert, those who had once been
Chilperic’s warriors, two of whom appear to have remained loyal to King Chilperic. This
story also allowed Gregory to remind his readers of the expected behavior attached to
kinship, and how far from them Sigibert and Chilperic were. Before Sigibert left for
Tournai, said Gregory, Bishop Germanus warned Sigibert that if he went with the
intention of killing Chilperic, then he himself would die. Their earlier conflicts had
never resulted in the deaths of the defeated, probably because there was some respect for
the idea of not killing a kinsman. It may be a sign of how the war had escalated,
however, that Sigibert ignored this warning, and met his own death.

Gunthram vs. Chilperic vs. Childebert

The aftermath of Sigibert’s death in 575 is particularly revealing about the nature
of the competition within the Merovingian kingdoms. The death of Sigibert seems to
have set in motion a period of uncertainty. Chilperic came to Paris and seized Brunichild,
but her young son, Childebert II, had already been removed from the city and been
proclaimed king in Sigibert’s kingdom. Chilperic grabbed the treasure which

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367 GTH IV.51: “Cui sanctus Germanus episcopus dixit: ‘Si abieris et fratrem tuum interficere
nolueris, vivus et victor redis; sin autem alium cogitaveris, morieris. Sic enim Dominus per Salomonem
dixit: Foveam quae fratri tuo parabis, in ea conues. Quod ille, peccatis facientibus, audire neglexit.”

368 GTH V.1: “Igitur interempto Sygiberto rege apud Victuriacum villam, Brunichildis regina cum
filiis Parisius resedebat. Quod factum cum ad eam perlatum fuisse, et, conturbata dolore ac lucto, quid
ageret ignorant, Gundovaldus dux ad praehensum Childeberthum, filium eius parvolum furtim abstulit
eruptumque ab immenenti morie, collectisque gentibus super quas pater eius regnum tenerat, regem
instituit, vix lustro aetatis uno iam peracto. . . Anno igitur primo regni eius Chilpericus rex Parisius venit
adpraehensamque Brunichildem apud Rodomaginsem civitatem in exilio truxit, thesaurisque eius, quos
Parisius detulserat, abstulit;”

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Brunichild had brought to Paris, while Childebert, or rather Duke Gundovald who had carried Childebert out of Paris to safety, ensured that his father’s people became his son’s people.

The conflict intensified, as Chilperic sent his son to seize parts of Childebert’s kingdom, while Childebert’s forces attacked Soissons, where Chilperic’s wife, Fredegund, was staying. Besides the continuation of the struggle between Chilperic and Sigibert’s heir on the battlefield, Gregory of Tours revealed that others saw this crisis as an opportunity for personal advancement. Gregory told us that the war was to be attributed to a certain Godin, a man who had transferred his loyalty from Sigibert to Chilperic in exchange for gifts of lands from the latter.369 Later, he informed us that Sigibert’s referendary, a man named Siggo, had become Chilperic’s referendary, but that he later went back over to Sigibert’s son, Childebert.370 In fact, said Gregory, many people were changing sides around this time. It is an interesting glimpse into the competition for loyal followers, and suggests that such issues were not insignificant.

Another problem for Chilperic in this period were the actions of his son, Merovech. In 576, during a supposed visit to his mother, then living in exile at Rouen, Merovech married the widow Brunichild, who was also living there in exile. Gregory remarked that this marriage was contrary to canon law — Merovech had married his

369GTH V.3: “Godinus autem, qui a sorte Sigyberthi se ad Chilpericum translulerat et multis ab eo muneribus locopletatus est, caput belli istius fuit; sed in Campo victus, primus fuga dilabitur. Villas vero, quas ei rex a fisco in territario Sessionico indulserat, abstulit, et basilicae contulit beati Medardi.”

370GTH V.3: “Siggo quoque referendarius, qui anolum regis Sigyberthi tenuerat et ab Chilperico rege ita provocatus erat, ut servitium, quod tempore fratris sui habuerat, obteneret, ad Childeberthum regem, Sigyberthi filium, relicto Chilperico, transivit rescque eius, quas in Sessionico habuerat, Ansovaldus obtinuit. Multi autem et alii de his, qui se de regno Sigyberthi ad Chilpericum tradiderant, recesserunt.”
uncle’s widow.\textsuperscript{371} Such a principle was of less concern to Chilperic than the political implications of the marriage. Chilperic was outraged at first and then suspicious of the marriage.\textsuperscript{372} Chilperic eventually had his son tonsured and forcibly made a cleric, but he escaped from this exile.\textsuperscript{373} At this point, Gregory himself became heavily involved when Merovech took refuge in his church at Tours. Merovech’s rebellion against his father is a major topic of Gregory’s Book V, but Brunichild played a background role only — Merovech sought more than once to join her, but was forced to stay on the run. It was Brunichild’s status as a Merovingian royal widow which was her more important role, although there too, there is no reference that Merovech’s marriage to Sigibert’s widow brought him any political support. In fact, when Merovech fled to Sigibert’s kingdom, he was forced to remain in hiding because he could not trust the Eastern Franks.\textsuperscript{374} Janet Nelson has suggested that the rejection of Merovech by the Austrasians in favor of Brunichild’s son, Childebert, was actually of Brunichild’s devising.\textsuperscript{375} This is a good reminder that a prestigious marriage was only part of the act of being a king, and in this case it was not enough to help Merovech to the throne. Still, the fact that Merovech married her at this moment, and tried to win the support of the people of Sigibert’s kingdom continues to illustrate the upheaval caused by Sigibert’s death, and the

\textsuperscript{371}GTH V.2.  
\textsuperscript{372}GTH V.3.  
\textsuperscript{373}GTH V.14.  
\textsuperscript{374}GTH V.18.  
\textsuperscript{375}Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels”, 41.
implication it had for the Merovingian competition. Merovech presumably saw an opportunity to gain the kingdom of Sigibert by marrying his widow and presenting himself as a potential adult king, in contrast to the young Childebert II. Brunichild may have seen in Merovech a potential defender of her son against Chilperic until a better one appeared in the form of Gunthramn.

It was Gunthramn who insured the survival of Childebert II, which demonstrated Gunthramn’s political and diplomatic skills. Rather than challenge Chilperic alone, he helped to preserve Childebert, whom he adopted in 577 as his heir. This adoption probably contributed to Merovech’s death at the hands of his servant the following year — his bid for the kingship was hopeless now, with Childebert firmly entrenched. In Gregory’s narrative, Gunthramn appeared quite concerned over family and the obligations inherent in blood kinship, as well as the question of who would be his heir. Jussen has shown how Gunthramn tried to use the weakness of Childebert’s position to extend his authority into the young king’s kingdom, specifically through the use of adoption. Once Childebert was firmly established, however, it was he who was able to take advantage of the rivalry between Gunthramn and Chilperic. With both older kings out to best the other, and gain access to the resources of Childebert’s kingdom, Childebert could use his middle position to further entrench himself, and eventually establish himself on equal grounds with his two uncles.

There is little point in recounting all of the back and forth machinations between Childebert, Gunthramn, and Chilperic, which Gregory of Tours declaimed so vividly in his prologue to Book V. One example of the alliance-making and -breaking for the
period between Sigibert’s death in 575 and Chilperic’s in 584 should suffice to illustrate the nature of the rivalry among the three kings. In 581, Childebert II, who had earlier made a *pax* with Gunthramn and been adopted by him, broke the *pax* and joined with Chilperic against Gunthramn.\footnote{GTH VI.1: “Anno igitur sexto regni sui Childeberthus rex, reiectam pacem Gunt hchr amni regis, cum Chilperico coniunctus est.”} Gregory’s use of alliance terminology here became rather convoluted.\footnote{377 See Appendix B for more on alliance vocabulary.} Childebert made peace (*pacificatus*) with Chilperic, and Gregory then said that this matter caused great enmity between Childebert and Gunthramn, and so they broke their *foedus* with each other.\footnote{GTH VI.11: “Ex hoc autem gravis inimicitia inter Gunt chramnum regem et Childeberthum nepotem suum exoritur, disruptumque foedus, sibi invicem insidiabantur.”} The agreement between Gunthramn and Childebert is therefore called both a *foedus* and a *pax*, and it is officially broken. The new agreement between Childebert and Chilperic is not specifically called a *pax*, although there are two references to peace associated with it (*in pace* and *pacificatus est*). It is called a *pactio*, a word usually associated with a division of the kingdom. His said that Chilperic and Childebert were joined together in peace, with the specific purpose of working together to deprive Gunthramn of his kingdom.\footnote{GTH VI.3: “Denique cum apud eamdem villam commoraretur, Egidius Remensis episcopus cum primis Childeberthi proceribus in legationem ad Chilpcericum regem venit; ibique conlocutione facta, ut, ablato Guntchramni regis regno, hi se coniungere debeant in pace, ait Chilpericus rex: ‘Filii mihi, peccatis increscentibus, non remanerunt, nec mihi nunc alius superest heres nisi fratris mei Sigyberthi filius, id est Childeberthi rex, ideoque in omnibus quae laborare potuero, hie heres existat; tantum dum advixero liceat mihi sine scrupulo aut disceptatione cuncta tenere. At illi gratias agentes, pactionibus subscriptis, ea quae locuti fuerant firmaverunt et ad Childeberthum cum magnis munibus sunt regressi. Quibus discedentibus, Chilpericus rex Leudovaldum episcopum cum primis regni sui dirixit. Qui data susceptaque de pace sacramenta pactionibus que firmatis, munerati regressi sunt.”} This type of agreement is usually called a *foedus*. As part of the agreement, Chilperic was to make Childebert his
heir, then they took oaths, exchanged gifts, and signed their names to the *pactio*. Gregory may have gained access to this document when he served as a judge in the case of Egidius, who was accused of plotting to kill king Childebert.\(^{380}\) It is in his report of those proceedings that Gregory tells us that the pact also included the negotiated agreement of how Gunthramn’s territory was to be divided. Later, because of this *pactio*, Childebert sent messengers to Gunthramn demanding half of Marseilles which he had earlier given to Gunthramn.\(^{381}\) War then broke about between the two.\(^{382}\) Chilperic attacked Gunthramn and took several cities from him.\(^{383}\) Chilperic made a short-term peace with Gunthramn,\(^{384}\) but then Childebert sent more legates to Chilperic to coordinate an attack on Gunthramn.\(^{385}\) Chilperic raised his force and marched against Gunthramn, but he was

\(^{380}\)GTH X.19: “*Sed puer eius familiaris adfuit, qui haec notarum titulis per thomus chartarum comprehensa tenebat, unde non dubium fuit resedentibus, haec ab eodem directa. Deinde prolatae sunt pactiones quasi ex nomine Childeberthi ac Chilperici regis, in quibus tenebatur insertum, ut, eicto Gunthchramno rege, hi duo reges inter se eius regnum urbisque dividerint;*”

\(^{381}\)GTH VI.11: “*Childebertus vero, postquam cum Chilperico pacificatus est, legatos ad Gunthrannum regem mittit, ut medietaem Massiliae, quam ei post obitum patris sui dederat, reddere deberet.*”

\(^{382}\)GTH VI.11: “*Ex hoc enim gravi s inimicitia inter Gunthramnum regem et Childeberthum nepotem suum exoritur, disruptumque foedus, sibi invicem insidiabantur.*”

\(^{383}\)GTH VI.12: “*Igitur Chilpericus rex cernens has discordias inter fratrem ac nepotem suum pullulare, Desiderium ducem evocat iobetque, ut aliquid nequitiae inferat fratri.*”

\(^{384}\)GTH VI.18.

\(^{385}\)GTH VI.131: “*Denique Chilpericus rex legatus nepotis sui Childeberthi suscepit. . . . dixerunt: ’Pacem, quam cum domino nostro, nepote tuo, fecisti, petit a te omnimodis conservare; cum fratre vero tuo pacem habere non potest . . . ’ . . . Egidius episcopus ait: ’Si cum nepote tuo coniungersit et ipse coniungitur tibi, commoto exercitu, ultio quae debetur super eum velocius infertur’. Quod cum iuramento firmassent odsedesque inter se dedissent, disesserunt.*”

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defeated before Childebert arrived with his forces, and thus had to make peace with Gunthramn. Eventually, Childebert and Gunthramn made peace but Chilperic died soon after.

The primacy of practical power politics over kinship becomes readily apparent in this case. Childebert became the adopted son of both Gunthramn and Chilperic, but the way that the three treated each other was based less on the real or created kinship relationships among them, than on their desires to increase their own territory. Childebert tried to do this by becoming the heir to both his uncles’ kingdoms. Gunthramn and Chilperic tried to use the promise of that inheritance to ally with Childebert against the other king. Gregory used several different words to describe their efforts to manipulate the situation in their favor: pax, foedus, and pactio. The role of the pactio remains clear, but the subtleties of the pax and foedus are lost. What is significant, however, is that these were made with short-term goals in mind. In contrast, marriages could have life-long implications, and while they may be made in the context of contemporary politics, the long-term implications of a marriage to a princess are also an important consideration.

**INGUND AND HERMENEGILD**

As part of his effort to establish himself within his kingdom, and to assert his position in relation to his uncles, Childebert arranged Ingund’s marriage to the Visigothic prince Hermenegild. Ingund was the sister of Childebert, and therefore the daughter of Brunichild and Sigibert. Childebert was only about 10 years old at the time, but by

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386 GTH VI.31.
arranging for a marriage with a Visigothic prince for his sister, his mother, Brunichild, could enhance the position of her young son as king, portraying him as a good and generous king.

Modern scholars often place the Frankish-Visigothic marriages of the latter half of the sixth century within the context of the diplomatic relations between the Frankish and Visigothic kingdoms. The central union in this discussion is the marriage of Ingund with Hermenegild, who was the son of King Leovigild, step-son of Queen Goiswinth, and brother of Reccared, in 579. Their story is complex, but we can supplement Gregory of Tours, who often displays a weak understanding of Visigothic politics and a penchant for judging Arians harshly, with Visigothic sources: Isidore of Seville and John of Biclar. Ingund was also a granddaughter of Goiswinth and the now deceased Athanagild, her mother’s Visigothic parents. Hermenegild was the son of Leovigild, the head of a new royal dynasty which had replaced that of Athanagild.

We are first informed of this marriage in Gregory’s narrative when he announced the betrothal of Leovigild’s sons to the daughters of Sigibert and Chilperic. There the story rested until the next book, when Gregory gave a fuller account of Ingund’s marriage to Hermenegild, but the reference to both betrothals in the same sentence is instructive for showing their context (see below). Gregory’s narrative of this marriage focused on Goiswinth more than the actual parties to the marriage. He began with a castigation of

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388 GTH IV.38: “... duos filios ... quorum unus Sigyberthi, alius Chilperici filiam dispensavit.”

389 GTH V.38.
Goiswinth for her Arianism. At this point he again associated Ingund’s marriage with the betrothals of the two sons of Leovigild with two Merovingian princesses. Ingund was sent to Spain “cum magno apparato” — with great magnificence, or we might also read this as, “with a large treasure”\(^{390}\) The point is that when Ingund was sent to Spain, it was done with great ceremony, putting her and the king’s generosity on display. Gregory then recounted the conflict over Ingund’s Catholic faith with her mother-in-law, Goiswinth, who was also her grandmother. Goiswinth welcomed her granddaughter, but then set about to convert her from her Catholic faith to the Arian one, first by gentle persuasion and ultimately by rough measures. Gregory’s vocabulary in describing Ingund’s arrival in Spain may be significant. He says that Goiswinth received (\textit{suscepitur}) Ingund with great joy (\textit{cum gaudio magno}). Jussen has discussed how this word, \textit{suscipio}, was often used in connection with baptismal sponsorship, but also for the acceptance of an outsider into a community.\(^{391}\) It must be the latter case we are witnessing here, but Jussen places this act of receiving or lifting up in the context of ritual as political strategy. This may refer, therefore, to a public display of Goiswinth’s reception of Ingund — her granddaughter, and a descendant of King Athanagild — suggesting its usefulness for internal Visigothic politics even more than external diplomatic issues.

For Gregory, the affair is more important for its religious overtones than its political ones. Not only did Goiswinth attack Ingund for her Catholicism, but Ingund is

\(^{390}\)Dalton translates it as ‘with a great train’, which is also instructive, but misses the emphasis on treasure I think.

\(^{391}\)Jussen, 187. It is probably not a coincidence that Gregory moves almost immediately on to Ingund’s rejection of a second, Arian, baptism.
credited with helping to induce her husband, Hermenegild, to convert to Catholicism.

While Gregory generally allows his campaign against the Arian heresy to influence his narrative, the fact that he could view Ingund’s situation in such a way without reference to the diplomatic implications of all these actions, might be significant.\textsuperscript{392} John of Biclar, who only noted Ingund’s marriage to Hermenegild, did say of Goiswinth that she had always been hostile towards Catholics, which would confirm Gregory’s description of her efforts to convert Ingund.\textsuperscript{393} Gregory praised Ingund for her steadfastness to the Catholic faith against such determined opposition, then he recounted the rebellion of Hermenegild against his father, which he also viewed in terms of conversion and rejection for his Catholic faith, neglecting any purely political issues.

Collins and Wood have pointed out that Gregory’s account does not fit with evidence more close at hand, and that the religious aspect of Hermenegild’s rebellion can be safely set aside.\textsuperscript{394} Hermenegild’s conversion more likely came a few years after his rebellion, with the aid of Bishop Leander of Seville, whom Pope Gregory the Great credits with aiding in the conversion.\textsuperscript{395} Collins also points out that this conversion may have marked a diplomatic alliance or at least rapprochement with the Byzantines. This,

\textsuperscript{392}Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis” and Martin Heinzelmann, “Gregory of Tours and Heresy in Books I and II” in After Rome’s Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History: Essays presented to Walter Goffart, ed. Alexander C. Murray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 67-82 discuss Gregory’s issues with Arianism. It should also be noted that the stories of Brunichild and Galsuintha’s marriages also include the story of their (peaceful and easy) conversions to Catholicism.

\textsuperscript{393}Juan de Biclar, Chronicon, 97: “Gosuintha vero catholicis semper in festa”

\textsuperscript{394}Collins, Early Medieval Spain, 47; Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis”, 259-60

\textsuperscript{395}Gregory the Great, Dialogues 3.31. See also PD HL 3,21.
he argues, is what may have finally sparked King Leovigild to take action against his son’s rebellion, three years after it had begun.\textsuperscript{396}

Hermenegild must have benefitted from marriage to a Frankish princess who was also the granddaughter of Athanagild, and Leovigild may have arranged it to help insure the succession of his new, insecure dynasty, which is the same reason he probably made his sons kings in his own lifetime. The latter seems to have been a new practice begun by Liuva I (r. 568-573) when he raised Leovigild to the kingship in 569, to ensure the future succession of the dynasty. The marriage to Ingund may have further strengthened Leovigild and Hermenigild’s claims to the throne, by bringing the blood of the old dynasty into the new one. Hermenegild was surely making a point when he named his son Athanagild.\textsuperscript{397} Hermenegild, now married to a Frankish wife with Visigothic royal blood in her, was appointed a sub-king in the southern portion of the kingdom, while his brother Reccared, who had no Frankish bride at this point, was placed in command in the northern theater of operations in Septimania.\textsuperscript{398} This is an interesting choice with important implications for understanding the potential diplomatic value of Hermenegild’s marriage. If any diplomatic or military issues, or even peace in Septimania, rested upon the marriage of Hermenegild and Ingund, it does not make much sense to send Hermenegild south, and Reccared north. The treatment of Ingund by Goiswinth is reminiscent of Amalaric’s treatment of Clotild, half a century earlier, and also makes

\textsuperscript{396}Collins, \textit{Early Medieval Spain}, 48.

\textsuperscript{397}Collins, \textit{Early Medieval Spain}, 46.

\textsuperscript{398}GTH V.38.
sense from an internal political perspective, but not an international diplomatic one. Indeed, Leovigild, according to Gregory, was concerned about Childebert’s reaction to Ingund’s maltreatment. But, before considering that, we need to look at Chilperic’s response to the marriage of Ingund, which was the betrothal of his own daughter to Leovigild’s younger son, Reccared.

RIGUNTH AND RECCARED

As a response to Childebert and Brunichild’s arrangement of a prestigious marriage with the Visigoths, Chilperic set about to arrange a similar marriage to Leovigild’s other son, Reccared (r. 586-601), with his daughter Rigunth. Gregory provided a lot of detail about the marriage of Reccared and Rigunth, which was never actually completed. The case provides some illuminating insight into the motives and practice of making a foreign marriage.

When Gregory of Tours first reported the engagement of Hermenegild, he linked it to Reccared’s engagement to Rigunth, the daughter of Chilperic.399 This was reported in connection with the death of King Liuva I in 573, but the engagements probably should not be placed at this date — Gregory was simply supplying information he had learned in the meantime to supplement his text. The process of negotiation and betrothal was a lengthy one. In his account of the year 582, Gregory reported that Chilperic’s envoys, sent presumably the previous year, returned from Spain. The legates were sent specifically about the upcoming marriage, and their focus on questions of wealth should not be

399GTH IV.38; V.38.
ignored. They had been sent with the purpose of inspecting a dowry.\textsuperscript{400} We do know, however, that two years earlier, in 580, Leovigild had sent his envoy, Agilan, to Chilperic, but Gregory did not provide a reason.\textsuperscript{401} What it suggests, however, is that Chilperic and Leovigild were already on good terms. The year 580 saw a flurry of diplomatic activity between the Frankish kings and Spanish kings. Brunichild had sent an envoy to Spain, perhaps to check on the recently married Ingund.\textsuperscript{402} Mir, the King of the Sueves in Galicia, tried to send envoys to Gunthramn, but they were detained by Chilperic while passing through his kingdom.\textsuperscript{403} They were later sent home, presumably without ever seeing Gunthramn. This too suggests a state of friendship and cooperation between Chilperic and Leovigild. Gunthramn was not only Chilperic’s rival, but often a foe of Leovigild, over the territory of Septimania. Leovigild eventually defeated Mir and took over his kingdom. In 580 none of the allies involved in these conflicts were linked by a bond of kinship or marriage. Further evidence of Chilperic’s good relations with the Visigoths is reported for the year 581. When his envoys to Constantinople returned by ship after a three year embassy, they chose not to sail to Marseilles, a city controlled by Gunthramn, but rather to the Visigothic city of Agde.\textsuperscript{404} Peace and cooperation were already well

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\textsuperscript{400}GTH VI.18: “\textit{Igitur legati Chilperici regis, id est Ansovaldus et Domegiselus, qui ad conspiciendam dotem in Hispanis fuerant missi, regressi sunt.”}
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\textsuperscript{401}GTH V.43.
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\textsuperscript{402}GTH V.40.
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\textsuperscript{403}GTH V.41.
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\textsuperscript{404}GTH VI.2.
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established between Chilperic and Leovigild, which makes sense since both were constant foes of Gunthramn. A marriage between Chilperic and Leovigild’s children would only confirm an already strong relationship.

Gregory reported another visit of Chilperic’s envoys to Leovigild in 583, but he says they returned without concrete results (*nihil certi*).\(^{405}\) We might assume that Gregory was referring to the wedding plans, but it is just as likely that they were sent to settle other issues, concerns, or plans for future cooperation. Perhaps Chilperic sought more specific military support against Gunthramn, but Leovigild could not commit to it at the moment, since he was occupied with fighting a civil war against his son. This is all speculative, and must remain so, but the fact is that Chilperic and Leovigild remained in contact with each other, and if their contact did concern the marriage of their children, no progress was made towards it. In the next year, 584, Chilperic sent envoys once more, but again Gregory did not tell us their purpose.\(^{406}\) His report did follow a notice that Gunthramn and Childebert were returning to good terms with each other, which would have represented a serious threat to Chilperic. Again, we cannot say whether the legates went on the business of the marriage negotiations, military operations against Gunthramn, or both or neither.

Later that year, when Hermenegild was defeated and exiled, legates from Spain came to Chilperic, bringing gifts and seeking an audience. The legates were there to

\(^{405}\)GTH VI.29: “*Legati de Hispaniis reversi nihil certi renuntiaverunt, eo quod Leuvichildus contra filium suum seniorem in exercitu resederet.*”

\(^{406}\)GTH VI.33.
confirm the engagement and settle the details for the marriage, according to an earlier agreement (convenentiam anteriorem). This may refer specifically back to the visit of Chilperic’s legates to inspect the dowry, or to general arrangements which had been decided upon by the various exchanges of legates. On this visit, a specific time was fixed for the traditio, as well as the other details of the marriage (presumably referring to dowries and other marriage gifts). Gregory’s text suggests that the marriage was probably fixed to happen soon, because when Chilperic’s son died just shortly after the arrangements had been made, he called the legate back and postponed the marriage. Gregory then reported that Chilperic now thought of marrying to Reccared another of his daughters by a previous wife, Audovera. The girl was already a nun, however. This episode is revealing for the personal, familial, and even contractual nature of the marriage. Chilperic was always a ruthless political figure, but he could not celebrate the marriage of his daughter while mourning the death of his son. If this had all been a matter of state diplomacy, one wonders whether he would have been so hesitant. Of course, he may also be conforming to certain expectations which would have lost him support if he appeared so cold in the face of his son’s death. His attempted offer of a daughter by another union would seem at first to suggest that he needed the marriage diplomatically and sought to replace one daughter with another — a daughter by Audovera for the daughter of Fredegund. That makes little sense, though. Why would Leovigild be satisfied with a girl who was obviously less valued by Chilperic to fulfill

407GTH VI.34: “Legati iterum ab Hispania venerunt, deferentes munera et placitum accipientes cum Chilperico rege, ut filiam suam secundum conveniantiam anteriorem filio regis Leuvichildi tradere deberet in matrimonio. Denique dato placito et omnia pertractata, legatus ille reversus est.”
their bargain? Rather, we should look at how Chilperic’s effort to postpone the marriage was rejected by Leovigild’s legate. The arrangement had been fixed, and now Chilperic seemed to be backing out of it. Under pressure, Chilperic may have tried to keep his bargain by offering another girl as a bride for Reccared. When Radegund, the former wife of Chlothar I, and abbess of the nunnery at Poitiers, resisted this effort on religious grounds, Chilperic was forced to accept the original deal. It is difficult to say whether any postponement of the marriage was actually allowed, but sometime later that same year, Rigunth was sent off to Spain. The fact that the proposed switch was from a daughter by Fredegund to a daughter by another union is also telling. As we will see in the actual preparations, Fredegund was very involved in the marriage of her daughter, and for the same reason that Chilperic could not celebrate a marriage while mourning his son, Fredegund could not either. The attempted switch would have at least appeased Fredegund. We might also recall Venantius Fortunatus’ emphasis on Goiswinth’s earlier reluctance to send Galsuintha in marriage to Chilperic as another example of the natural difficulty a mother can have in sending her daughter off to marry a man in a foreign country, with the possibility of never seeing her again.

The date fixed for the marriage fits neatly into the picture of Frankish politics. Childebert and Gunthramm had just settled their dispute over Marseille, and a rapprochement between them posed a threat to Chilperic. As Frankish followers were ready to shift their allegiances in an effort to enhance their own positions and be on the winning side of this competition — a frequent occurrence as the Treaty of Andelot revealed — a marriage where Chilperic could demonstrate his beneficence, his
international connections, and his power, would help to keep the loyalty of many of his
followers. Thus, shortly after Chilperic’s son’s death, Leovigild sent another envoy to
Chilperic, which Gregory did not connect to the marriage, but to a fear of a potential
vengeance raid by Childebert for his sister’s disgrace in Spain.\textsuperscript{408} Perhaps this envoy was
coming to re-fix the terms of the postponed marriage, but it seems more likely that he was
coming to arrange for some kind of cooperation between Chilperic and Leovigild in the
face of a potential threat to both of them by Childebert. There is not necessarily any
reason to see this envoy as directly connected to the marriage, which was only the natural
outgrowth of the peace and cooperation already enjoyed by the two kings. Childebert had
firmly established himself in his kingdom at this stage, to the point that Gregory could
report in the next chapter that Childebert felt confident enough in his position to ignore
the Byzantine emperor and make an alliance with the Lombards.\textsuperscript{409} He represented a clear
threat to both kings, and in this same chapter, Gregory did report that Childebert planned
an invasion of Spain, although it never came to fruition.

Finally, after years of negotiation, the time came to send Rigunth to Spain to
marry Reccared. Gregory says that a great legation of Goths came to accompany Rigunth,
and that Chilperic sent his daughter with a vast number of families from his estates,
whom he described as being separated from their kin like the dead (they drew up wills,

\textsuperscript{408}GTH V I .4 0 .

\textsuperscript{409}GTH V I .4 2 : “Audito autem imperator, quod cum his in pace coniunctus est, pecuniam
repetibat; sed hic fidus a solatiis nec respondum quidem pro hac re voluit reddere.”
which were to be valid the moment the entourage crossed into Spain), and treasure. He later told us that the gold, silver and other ornaments filled 50 carts. Rigunth’s baggage train, therefore, was impressive and became such a target for thieves that all along her journey south it was robbed, despite the great escort that Chilperic provided to protect her from her uncle and cousin. Anyone seeing this train pass would have been visibly reminded of Chilperic’s international connections with the Goths, his great wealth and generosity, and even his power in the form of the armed guard. Gregory’s description of a public conversation between Fredegund and Chilperic, which must have been planned ahead of time, is instructive. King Chilperic having called together the better Franks and other loyal followers, celebrated the nuptials of his daughter. And handing her over to the legates of the Goths, he gave to her a great treasure. But her mother also brought forth an immense weight of gold and silver, or clothes; such that, seeing this, the king thought that nothing was left to him. The queen, seeing him so concerned, turned to the Franks and

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411 GTH VI.45: “Nam tanta fuit multitudo rerum, ut aurum argentumque vel reliqua ornamenta quinquaginta plaustra levarent.”

412 GTH VI.45: “Denique haec de Parisius progressa, octavo ab urbe miliario tenturia figi praecipit. Surgentes enim quinquaginta viri de nocte, adpraehensis centum equitibus optimis totidemque frenis aureis ac duobus catenis magnis, ad Childeberthum regem fuga dilapsi abierunt. Sed et per totum iter cum labi quis potuisset, effugiebat, ferens secum quae arripere potuisset. . . . Sed quoniam suspicio erat regi, ne frater aut nepus aliquas insidias puellae in via pararent, vallatam ab exercitu pergere iussit.”
said: ‘Do not think, men, that anything here is taken from the treasures of former
kings; for everything that you see was offered from among my own possessions,
because the most glorious king has bestowed much upon me, and I have gathered
together some things from own labor and from the estates granted to me, and
acquired many things either from revenues or from taxes. But you, too, have
often enriched me with your gifts, out of which come these things which you now
see before you; for none of this is had from the public treasures.\footnote{GTH VI.45: “Promittens vero Chilpericus rex nihil de his contingere, convocatis melioribus
Francis reliquisque fidelibus, nuptias celebravit filiae suae . Traditamque legatis Gothorum magnus ei
thesaurus dedit. Sed et mater eius immensum pondus auri argentique, sive vestimentorum protulit, ita ut
videns haec rex nihil sibi remansisse potaret. Quem cernens regina commotum, conversa ad Francus, ita
ait: Ne potitis, viri, quicquam hic de thesauris anteriorum regum habere; omnia enim quae cernitis, de
mea proprietate oblata sunt, quia mihi gloriosissimus rex multa largitus est, et ego nonnulla de proprio
congregated labore et de domibus mihi concessis tam de fructibus quam tributis plurima reparavi. Sed et
vos plerumque me muneribus vestris ditatis, de quibus sunt ista quae nunc coram videtis; nam hic de
thesauris publicis nihil habetur.”}

It is a masterful speech, which must have been staged specifically as a means of
displaying Chilperic’s wealth and generosity, and thereby making a subtle appeal for the
loyalty of the leading followers. Fredegund reminded them that the wealth was not from
the royal treasury, but her personal wealth. It implied that there was still a great treasure
at the king’s disposal, and that one could prosper personally from the king’s gifts, which
granted access to taxes and revenues. Chilperic, therefore, must have been a great and
mighty king!

The role that this spectacle, including Fredegund’s speech, played in the
competition between kings is apparent from the appearance of Childebert’s envoys at the
ceremony. The speech followed Chilperic’s promise to Childebert’s legates that he
would not include in the dowry anything that he had taken from one of the cities he had captured from Gunthramn (which would one day pass to Childebert, Gunthramn’s heir). Childebert’s envoys were questioning the actual source of Chilperic’s power and wealth, and the speech thus served to reassure those watching that the spoils acquired from Gunthramn were above and beyond the great personal and public wealth that Chilperic already controlled.

The personal nature of the marriage process becomes apparent again in observing Rigunth’s entourage making its way south. Apparently, Rigunth did not want to go to Spain. Having reached Toulouse, Gregory suggested that she began to find ways to create (innectire - literally, to fasten together) delays for travel. While there, delaying and making final preparations to meet her future spouse, word reached her that Chilperic had died. Duke Desiderius took advantage of the situation to take most of Rigunth’s treasure. It was certainly enough for him to survive the immediate aftermath of Chilperic’s death, when Gunthramn retook control of his lost territory and tried to expand his influence over the whole of Chilperic’s kingdom. Eventually, Fredegund sent someone to bring her back, now humiliated, from Toulouse. Nowhere is the personal

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414 GTH VII.9: “Rigunthis, Chilperici regis filia, cum thesauris supra scriptis usque Tholosam accessit. Et cernens se iam ad terminum Gothorum esse propinquum, moras innectire coepit, dicentibus sibi tum praeterea suis, oportere eam ibidem commorari, cum ipsi fatigati de itenere vestimenta haberent incula, calcamenti scissa, ipsoque equorum adque carrucarum apparatos adhuc, sicut plaustris eventi erant, seorsum esse diisunctos. Oportere potius omnia haec prius diligentem stabilire et sic in itenere proficisci ac suscepi cum omni elegantia ab sponso, ne forte si inculti inter Gothos apparerent, inriderentur ab ipsis.”

415 GTH VII.9.

416 Jussen, 72-3, 102-105.

417 GTH VII.39.
nature of these arrangements made so manifest, as opposed to the institutional, diplomatic, official nature usually ascribed to these marriages. With Chilperic dead, the marriage never took place. Of course, any diplomatic agreements between Leovigild and Chilperic were now useless, but still one might expect them to be renewed with his heir, and a marriage with the sister of the new king should have been diplomatically as useful as one to the king’s daughter.

The proposed marriage of Rigunth to Reccared may appear on the surface, therefore, to be diplomatically, even militarily driven, but when examined more closely, its importance as a sign of Chilperic’s power and wealth appears more important. At a time when relations between Chilperic and Gunthramn and Childebert were already strained, a marriage was hardly required to secure Chilperic’s services against his fellow Frankish kings. We have several examples of his cooperation with the Visigoths when there was at most a betrothal. Betrothals were not marriages, however, and could even be broken, as we shall see below. There is no inherent reason why we should assume that all the cooperation between the two kings, and even the repeated sending of legates, should be directly connected to the proposed marriage of their children. Leovigild was the head of a new royal dynasty, and Chilperic involved in the heat of an intense rivalry with Gunthramn and Childebert. For both, the value of a prestigious marriage has been demonstrated. Gregory of Tours never connected the marriage directly with the diplomatic implications of expected kin-based behavior. Rather, when he could break free from his exposition against Arianism, his narrative suggested that questions of
wealth were the most significant issues involved in the negotiations of the marriage. Wealth was a sign of power and authority, and this marriage provided an excellent opportunity to display it.

**CHILDEBERT REX**

Both Chilperic and Childebert II used marriage as part of an overall strategy of portraying themselves as great kings, based in part on the model of the Byzantine emperor — what is sometimes called the *imitatio imperii*. As Jussen notes, Chilperic’s efforts at this are visible in his forced baptism of Jews, his hymn writing, theological treatises, building projects, and in his particular use of baptismal sponsorship on an imperial model. Childebert II also used his connections to the Byzantines to enhance his status in the Frankish kingdoms, but he was also more specifically following the examples of his predecessors, the earlier kings of the easternmost *Teilreich*, which came to be known as Austrasia. In particular, the reign of Theudebert I stood as a model of kingship which both Chlothar I and his own father, Sigibert, had tried to follow. It should not be overlooked that he named his two sons, Theudebert and Theuderic, after the first two kings of the eastern *Teilreich*.

Like his father, Childebert II had arranged for a prestigious Visigothic marriage, albeit for his sister, Ingund, rather than for himself. He followed Theudebert’s model by

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418 Jussen, 174-5.

engaging his other sister to the Lombard king. The thing that always set the eastern
Frankish kings apart from their fellow kings was the assertion of their hegemony over the
eastern Germanic peoples, and their involvement in Italian military campaigns.

Theuderic I had campaigned against the Thuringians and arranged for a marriage with the
Lombards, who were then still in Pannonia. Theudebert had married a Lombard princess,
arranged for his son to do likewise, and had asserted his hegemony over eastern peoples
in a letter to the Byzantine emperor.\textsuperscript{420} He was also credited with gaining control over
some parts of northern Italy during the Gothic wars. His son Theudebald sent his general
Buccelin on a major campaign of conquest to Italy. Thus there was already a long
tradition of involvement of the eastern \textit{Teilreich} in central European and Italian affairs
when Chlothar I finally came into control of that kingdom in the late 550s. His last years
were marked by his problems with revolts of eastern peoples, and marrying his daughter
to a Lombard king. Sigibert had not campaigned in Italy, but he did have to contend with
two Avar invasions. He is also usually reported as drawing upon the eastern Germanic
peoples for the armies he used against his rival, Chilperic.

Childebert continued in this tradition of eastern involvement, and used it to
portray himself as a great and powerful king. In 584, he had led an army against the
Lombards in Italy, because the Byzantine emperor had earlier paid him 50,000 \textit{solidi} to
oust the Lombards from Italy on that occasion.\textsuperscript{421} The Lombards, however, had paid the
Franks to go away. Childebert could have portrayed this as a success, since he had

\textsuperscript{420}Epistulae Austrasicae, 20.

\textsuperscript{421}GTH VI.42; PD HL III.XVII; Christie, \textit{The Lombards}, 86-87.
provided his troops with plunder and could interpret the Lombard payment as tribute. The emperor was not pleased that a pax with the Lombards had been made, and asked for his money back. Gregory reported that “Childebert felt so secure in his strength that he would not even answer.” Childebert must have used this opportunity to display his power and prestige to his followers — he had gained a huge treasure of Byzantine gold for himself, provided plunder to his warriors, and then defied the emperor. Childebert, in this case, had made alliance with one party (the Byzantines), broken it in his own best interest, and established a treaty of peace with his one-time foes (the Lombards).

Childebert’s strength, however, was not such that he could ignore the Byzantine emperor’s continued demands for a return of the paid sum, and the very next year Gregory reported that he sent an army against the Lombards again. This may also have been due to a rumor that his sister, Ingund, having been captured in the aftermath of the civil war in Spain, was being held hostage by the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople. The Byzantines had added some leverage to their claims. By 588, Childebert was even requesting Gunthramn’s solatium in the enterprise and made an appeal to him to help restore what his father had once claimed in Italy. Later that year, he decided to try anyway, and he broke with the Lombards. Not only did he break the engagement of his

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422 GTH VIII.18; PD HL III.XXII.

sister to the Lombard king, but he coordinated an attack on them with the Emperor.\textsuperscript{424} His forces were soundly beaten, however. Despite what Gregory called the worst defeat of the Franks that anyone could remember,\textsuperscript{425} Childebert sent an army back in 590, under the leadership of twenty dukes.\textsuperscript{426} He was providing them an opportunity to distinguish themselves in battle and of course win booty for themselves. They were not very successful, however, and came back with minimal plunder. They had resubjugated those regions said to have belonged to Sigibert.\textsuperscript{427} What followed was an effort by both parties, Lombard and Byzantine, to win Childebert to their side. The Lombards made peace with Gunthramn, but Childebert kept his options open, while the Emperor Maurice tried to convince him by sending those responsible for the murder of his sister, Ingund, to him. In this way, therefore, Childebert sought to assert a position of power in the east, which would allow him to rise above his competitors for power in the Frankish kingdom. The engagement of his sister, Chlodosind, first to a Lombard king, then to a Visigothic one, can be best understood in this milieu.

\textsuperscript{424}GTH IX.25.

\textsuperscript{425}GTH IX.25: “Tantaque ibi fuit stragis de Francorum exercitu, ut olim simile non recolatur.”

\textsuperscript{426}GTH X.3.

\textsuperscript{427}GTH X.3: “...subdens etiam illud, accepta sacramenta, regis ditionibus quod pater eius prius habuerat, de quibus locis et captivos et alias abduxere praedas. Et sic regredientes, ita fame conficiebantur, ut prius et arma et vestimenta ad coemendum victum demerent, quam locum genetale contingenter.”
CHLODOSIND’S ENGAGEMENTS

Sometime before 588, Childebert had engaged his sister Chlodosind to Authari, King of the Lombards. This followed a long tradition of Frankish-Lombard marriages for the kings of the easternmost Teilreich. It must have been made following the peace with the Lombards after Childebert’s first campaign into Italy in 584. The Lombards sought to rely upon the traditional principles of kinship-based cooperation to help, at the very least, keep the Franks out of the equation in their fight for Italy against the Byzantines. When peace with the Lombards became inconvenient to Childebert, however, he broke the engagement and attacked the Lombards. Or rather, other principles superceded those the Lombards had relied upon. Childebert’s position could be enhanced by a marriage tie to the Lombards, but also by the gifts he received from the Byzantines and the plundering opportunities from campaigning in Italy. Either way was a source of prestige for him, but rejecting the engagement with the Lombards offered him further opportunities to challenge his uncle, Gunthramn.

Childebert’s motives for abandoning the engagement with the Lombards to pursue one with the Visigoths lie in the context of his relations with King Gunthramn, following the death of Chilperic in 584. The marriage of his sister to the king of the Visigoths was a way to assert his own prestige and status in what might be viewed as a cold war with Gunthramn. He had become Gunthramn’s heir and adopted son, but Gunthramn was unwilling to hand over Fredegund, his father’s murderer, and stood as a protector and godfather to her son, Chlothar II. Gunthramn was pursuing his own agenda of trying to

428GTH IX.25.
control the entirety of the Frankish kingdom through his relationship to his young nephews, Childebert II and Chlothar II, Chilperic’s infant heir.\textsuperscript{429} Despite the signing of a pact between them, Gunthramn and Childebert were still wary of each other. Gunthramn was trying to control Childebert and his kingdom, while Childebert worked to ensure that he, rather than the young Chlothar II, was Gunthramn’s heir. Thus, for Childebert, a marriage to the Visigoths represented not only a prestigious connection, but a connection to Gunthramn’s main foreign enemy. It was a connection that was arguably more prestigious than one with the Lombards, a more recently risen power than the Visigoths. Lastly, according to Gregory, it was also preferable because Reccared had recently converted to Catholicism, while the Lombards remained Arians.\textsuperscript{430} Given the experiences of Clotild and Ingund among the Visigoths when they were Arians, of which Gunthramn reminded Childebert, this was not an inconsequential explanation.\textsuperscript{431} Since Childebert rarely campaigned against the Visigoths, but often sent armies to Italy, a change in marriage plans also kept his prime area of campaigning open for such activities. A closer look at how the engagement of Chlodosind and Reccared unfolded will make Childebert’s motives and considerations even clearer.

\textsuperscript{429}Jussen, 102-112; GTH VII.13.

\textsuperscript{430}GTH IX.25: “Igitur Childebertus rex cum petentibus Langobardis sororem suam regi eorum esse coniugem, acceptis munerebus, promississet, advenientibus Gothorum legatis ipsum, eo quod gentem illam ad fidem catholicam conversam fuisse cognoscerit, repromisit, ac legationem ad imperatorem direxit, ut, quod prius non fecerat, nunc contra Langobardorum gentem debellans, cum eius consilio eos ab Italia removerit. Nihilominus et exercitum suum ad regionem ipsam capessendam direxit.”

\textsuperscript{431}GTH IX.20: “Non est optimum enim, ut illuc nepotes mea ambulet, quo soror sua est interfecta.”
Reccared still wanted a Frankish bride after the Rigunth debacle, but Chilperic’s young son was in no position to try to salvage the marriage with Rigunth. Reccared also desired peace with the other Frankish kings. He sent envoys to both Childebert and Gunthramn. Gunthramn was unwilling to made peace on the pretext of still desiring vengeance for Ingund. This may have been part of Gunthramn’s strategy for showing himself to be a most pious and good king, eager to prove himself the head of the family by avenging Ingund’s death. Childebert II was more willing to make peace with Reccared, which also reveals his own strategy. He would allow Gunthramn to take up Ingund’s cause while seeking his own leverage by making peace with the Visigoths. First, Reccared’s envoys offered to prove Reccared’s innocence in the Ingund affair through oaths. Then they offered money to establish an alliance of mutual aid (solatium) between them. Only then was the subject of marriage brought up. Gregory reported that Reccared’s envoys argued that such a marriage might make it easier to keep the peace they had just negotiated. This is another example of the traditional expectations of kinship creeping into the narrative, but it should be noted that peace, then an alliance, had already been established before the subject came up. The alliance was made without

432GTH IX.16.

433GTH IX.16: “Haec legati audientes, ad Childeberthum proficiscuntur; a quo et in pace suscepi sunt, dicentes: ‘Vult se dominus noster, frater tuus, Richaridus, de hoc crimine exuere, quod ei inponitur, quasi in mortem sororis vestrae fuisset conscium; quod aut sacramenta vultis aut qualibet conditione, idoneus reddi potest. Deinde, datis gratia vestra decem milibus solidorum, caritatem vestram habere desiderat, ut et ille vestro utatur solatium et vos eius, ubi necesse fuerit, beneficia potiamini’. Haec illis dicentibus, promiserunt Childeberthus rex et mater eius pacem et caritatem cum ipso se integre custodituros.”

434GTH IX.16: “Iussit etiam dominus noster ponere verbum in auribus vestris de filia sive sore vestra Chlodosinda, ut ei tradatur in matrimonio, quo facilius pax, quae inter vos promittitur, confirmetur.”
kinship. Perhaps some people connected to the negotiations did hope the marriage would strengthen the newly created peace, but as we are seeing, other considerations were at least equally important. Childebert and Brunichild were willing to engage Chlodosind, but said that they could not do so without the approval of the senior Merovingian, Gunthramn. This may have been an effort not to offend Gunthramn, who now had an option of adopting young Chlothar II as his heir and disinheriting Childebert.

The next year, Gregory of Tours and others were sent on an embassy to settle some grievances between Childebert and Gunthramn. Gunthramn charged Childebert with contravening the Pact of Andelot which had been signed the previous year (587). After settling their issues, the envoys also besought Gunthramn to agree to the marriage of Chlodosind to Reccared. In the end, he proved willing to agree to the marriage, if Reccared’s innocence in Ingund’s demise could be proved, and if Childebert kept his end of their agreement.435

Suspicions remained, however. Gregory reported the difficulties of Ebregisel, charged with carrying a large golden shield and gems to Reccared from Brunichild and Childebert.436 Gunthramn had him captured while he passed through Paris, charging him with carrying gifts to the would-be usurper Gundovald. He was let go after explaining that the gifts were for Reccared. What is more significant is the way Brunichild and Reccared were using the engagement to display their power and prestige. Gunthramn

435GTH IX.20.

436GTH IX.28: “Brunechildis quoque regina iussit fabricari ex auro ac gemmis mirae magnitudinis clipeum ipsumque cum duabus paternis lignis, quas vulgo bacchino vocant, eisdemque similiter ex gemmis fabricatis et auro, in Hispania regi mittit; in qua re Ebregysilum, qui saepe ad ipsam regionem legationis gratia accesserat, direxit.”
continued his war against Reccared, however, and when his army met defeat he did blame it on Childebert’s peace treaty with Reccared, but, it should be noted, not necessarily on the engagement, since that only followed the peace treaty.\textsuperscript{437} Gunthramn’s defeat by the Visigoths at this time is matched by Childebert’s own debacle in Italy.\textsuperscript{438} Both sides were perhaps trying too hard to prove themselves superior to the other, and both paid the penalty.

The proposed marriage to Reccared drops out of sight in the sources. Reccared eventually married another woman, and the Spanish sources never mention the engagement to Chlodosind. It was an engagement which served temporary purposes for Childebert and Reccared. It gave Childebert an opportunity to show himself a great king, particularly compared to Gunthramn, against whom he was constantly maneuvering in this period.

\textbf{Bertha and Æthelbert}

One other foreign marriage from this period, although difficult to date, should be discussed because it is good evidence that foreign marriages could have little to do with alliance-making. The marriage of Bertha, the daughter of King Charibert, with Æthelbert (d. 616), the eventual King of Kent in southeast England, has long been thought to have represented a sign of Æthelbert’s subordination to the Franks. It does appear to have been different from the other marriages under consideration here, and yet there are also some

\textsuperscript{437}GTH IX.31-2.

\textsuperscript{438}GTH X.3.
important similarities and insights to be drawn from it. Gregory of Tours is the only Frankish source for the marriage, and he reported that King Charibert had a daughter by his wife Ingoberg who went to live with her new husband in Kent. The bride, Bertha, is only mentioned again in passing reference when her mother died. What first strikes the reader of Gregory’s account is how he refers to her Kentish spouse as first, a man — a generic husband — and then later as the son of a certain king in Kent. She was not married to a king, but the son of a king, and perhaps a man who when the marriage was first arranged was not even the son of a king (see below).

The *Ecclesiastical History* of Bede supplements Gregory’s information for this marriage from the Anglo-Saxon perspective. He reported that Æthelbert had a Frankish bride but had to agree that she should be accompanied by a bishop, Liudhard, to help her maintain her Catholic faith. This provision is different from other cases we have examined because it specifically stated that she did not have to convert to her husband’s religion, which appears to have generally been the expectation in the other cases of Frankish princesses moving to foreign courts. She was to enjoy the rights of full queenship and participation at a pagan court while remaining Catholic — something

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439 GTH IV.26: “de qua filiam habuit, quae postea in Ganthia virum accipiens est deducta.”

440 GTH IX.26: “reliquens filiam unicam, quam in Canthia regis cuiusdam filius matrimonio copulavit.”

441 Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I.25: “qui et uxorem habebat Christianam de gente Francorum regia, vocabulo Bercia; quam ea conditione a parentibus acceperat, ut ritum fidei ac religionis suae cum episcopo quem ei adiutorem fidei dederant, nomine Liudhardo, inviolatum servare licentiam haberet.” Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe*, 169-70, uses this example to point out that there may have already been a community of Christians in Kent, in need of a bishop.
Clotild had been unable to do at Amalaric’s Arian court, in the Visigothic kingdom. This is perhaps an important sign of the status or prestige she could bring to her husband.

Owing to the scarcity of sources, it is difficult even to determine the date of this marriage, but it is important for understanding it. Traditionally, the marriage was assumed to have occurred around 560, but D. P. Kirby has presented a good argument for a later date, and Ian Wood concurs.\textsuperscript{442} The problem arises from the conflicting statements of Gregory and Bede. Gregory, by saying that Bertha had married the son of the king of Kent, implied that she married Æthelbert before he came to the throne, and Bede, by saying that Æthelbert had her from her parents (\textit{parentibus}), implied that Bertha’s parents, and in particular Charibert, were still alive. This would have to place the marriage before Æthelbert’s accession, traditionally dated to 560 or 565 and before Charibert’s death in 567. As Kirby points out, however, it is just as likely that Æthelbert did not come to the throne until about 580, and that both Bertha and Æthelbert were not born until about 560. He concludes, “though the possibility that Bertha and Æthelberht married some years earlier cannot be entirely excluded, the balance of probability is that they married c. 580 and were both aged about 20 at the time. Bede’s statement that Æthelberht received Bertha from her parents, therefore should not be taken literally.”\textsuperscript{443}


\textsuperscript{443}Kirby, 26.
Rather, the word *parentes*, as has been shown elsewhere, refers to the kin-group in a larger sense, which certainly included her mother, Ingoberg, who did not die until 589, but not necessarily her father.

The context for this marriage lies in the claims to hegemony over parts of Britain which various Frankish kings expressed in the sixth century. Ian Wood has chronicled these claims in his article on Frankish hegemony in England in the sixth and seventh centuries, as well as in an earlier paper on Frankish hegemony over the various peoples surrounding the North Sea. The claims go back at least to the letter in the 540s from Theudebert I to the Emperor Justinian. Procopius mentioned it, and Gregory the Great referred to such claims in his letters of support for Augustine’s famous mission to kings Theudebert II and Theuderic II, Childebert’s sons. Frankish hegemony in England is fairly well accepted among scholars, although Wood is quick to point out the wide variety of experience which can be included under the word hegemony.

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444Wood, “Frankish Hegemony” and *The Merovingian North Sea* (1983)

445Epist. Austr. 20: “Id vero, quod dignamini esse solliciti, in quibus provinciis habitemus aut quae gentes nostrae sint, Deo adiutore, dicione subiecte: Dei nostri misericordiam feliciter subactis Thoringii et eorum provinciis adquisitis, extinctis ipsorum tunc tempore regibus, Norsavorum itaque gentem nobis placata maiestate, colla subdentibus edictis ideoque, Deo propitio, Wesigotis, incolomes Franciae, septentrionalem plagam Italiaeque Pannoniae cum Saxonibus, Euciis, qui se nobis voluntate propria tradiderunt, per Danubium et limitem Pannoniae usque in oceanis litoribus custodiente Deo dominatio nostra porrigetur.”

446Proc. BG VIII, xx, 8-10.


The question that remains is what this marriage meant to both sides. Ian Wood has remarked,

The fate of Merovingian princesses was a varied one. A very few married into the royal families of the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, and Lombards. Such marriages were high level alliances, involving the daughters of living kings. Bertha is unlikely to fit into this category. Chronologically, it is almost impossible that her father could have been alive at the time of her marriage. She is best compared with the host of secondary Merovingian women who were usually placed in nunneries, or with cast off brides who were married to such men as Garivald, dux of Bavaria. Alternatively, she might be compared with Emma, the wife of Eadbald, Æthelberht’s son, who was the daughter, not of a Merovingian king, but of a major domus, Erchinoald. Neither Bertha nor Emma seem to have been ladies of the greatest importance in Frankish circles. In their cases, therefore, we are not dealing with marriage alliances between dynasties of equal status.449

Stenton had earlier argued that for the Franks, this marriage served to bring the Jutes in Kent “into a more definite relationship to the Merovingian dynasty”450 He argued that “In the sixth century the king of a small people who married into a great family became its dependant. None of the Frankish kings contemporary with Æthelberht would have regarded him as an equal.”451 Wood agrees, noting that “From the Merovingian point of

449Wood, “Frankish Hegemony”, 239.
450Stenton, 3rd, 59
451Stenton, 59.
view she was not a particularly precious commodity”, but, “to the kings of Kent marriage into the Merovingian family would have appeared differently, as an enhancement of their status.” Kirby suggests that “Perhaps one of the consequences of the marriage was to bring such Frankish support to Æthelberht and his father in Kent as to guarantee their acquisition of royal power” from a rival dynasty. Barbara Yorke says, however, that “although Æthelbert married a Frankish princess, albeit a not particularly prestigious one, the circumstances of Æthelbert’s conversion suggest that he was at some pains to distance himself from too close an association with Frankish power.” She also argues that in the negotiations for the marriage, there was a Frankish intention that Æthelbert would at least consider conversion to Christianity as a condition of the marriage. By choosing to accept Christianity from Gregory I’s missionary Augustine, she argues, “Æthelbert effectively asserted his independence from Frankish control.” While not completely unreasonable, these arguments do not mesh very well with the circumstances surrounding the other marriages under consideration here. There is little evidence that rulers were ever expected to convert as a condition of receiving a Frankish bride; rather it usually appears to be the bride who was expected to convert to the religion of her husband. Ian Wood has also pointed out how “in the late sixth century the Merovingians failed to exploit the

452Wood, The Merovingian North Sea, 16.

453Kirby, 27.

454Yorke, 28.

455Yorke, 29.
potential of religion as a means of enhancing Frankish authority.” He argues the opposite of Yorke, that “Æthelberht’s acceptance of Augustine’s Roman mission was in no sense an attempt to break away from Merovingian lordship.” One possible interpretation of the situation, then, suggests that for the rulers of Kent, marriage to a Frankish princess, even the daughter of a dead king, enhanced their status, and perhaps secured their royal position. For the Franks, the value of the gift of a Merovingian bride may have been repaid in a stricter definition of the receiver’s place in the Frankish hegemonic system or at the least put the kings of Kent into their debt. At the same time, Æthelbert was not supplied with a bride who was closely related to a still living and ruling king of the Franks. It should also be noted that nowhere do the claims of the Frankish kings for hegemony over the peoples in Britain or anywhere else rest upon reference to a binding marriage.

CONCLUSION

There were expectations of peace and cooperation implied in the foreign marriages of the Merovingians, but in practice, they were not as important as other considerations. The most important thing was to act as a king was supposed to act, by giving and receiving princesses, displaying one’s generosity, and demonstrating one’s influence and power through marriage connections and the displays which accompanied them. It is therefore no surprise that the kings most interested in securing foreign

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457 Wood, 240.
marriages for themselves or for their children were those who might be considered the
junior partners in ruling the Frankish kingdom. Thus, it is Sigibert, Chilperic, and
Childebert who concerned themselves with such things, rather than Charibert and
Gunthramn.

These marriages also offer good evidence that while political and even diplomatic
issues might drive marital decisions to some extent, more important was the quality of the
bride. Brunichild was hailed as a beautiful princess of good character, Galsuintha was a
prestigious princess who brought great wealth with her, and Rigunth was likewise to be
accompanied by a great display of wealth. This wealth was not important just for its
monetary value, though. It represented the prosperity and generosity of its giver, a sign of
the bride’s value and importance.

Even when the diplomatic value of a marriage cannot be ignored, it needs to be
understood in its context. Marriages were only contracted with people who were already
on good terms with the Merovingians. When Reccared asked for the hand of Chlodosind,
he made peace first, and then suggested that a marriage might make the peace easier to
keep. There are numerous examples, however, of kings at peace with each other, even
cooperating with each other, where no marriage was made or even offered. We should
question, therefore, whether marriage was really considered an important aspect of
diplomatic relations. Kings made treaties and alliances when they needed to, and they
made prestigious marriages when they needed to. These needs and methods did not have
to coincide.
CHAPTER 5

THE REIGNS OF CHLOTHAR II AND DAGOBERT I, 592 – 639

Gunthramn died in 592, and his nephew Childebert II inherited his kingdom. Childebert only survived Gunthramn another four years however and then he died too, leaving his two young sons as his heirs. Theuderic II (r. 596-612) received the Burgundian kingdom of Gunthramn and Theudebert II (r. 596-613) received the former kingdom of Sigibert and Childebert II (Austrasia). The rivalry between the kingdoms continued as before, although all three kings were still minors in 596, with Chlothar II ruling Chilperic’s kingdom (Neustria). The competition drove them to make alliances against each other, both with the other Frankish king and with outside forces, just as their fathers and Merovingian kinsmen had before them. As part of this competition, both Theuderic and Theudebert tried to use foreign marriages to confirm and enhance their royal positions, and to garner greater support from their followers. In the end, however, their early deaths brought an end to the competition as Chlothar was able to seize control over the whole of the Frankish kingdom, and pass on the unified kingdom to his son, Dagobert.
The fourth book of Fredegar’s *Chronicle*, the main source of information about the Franks after Gregory’s *Historiae*, which ends in the 590s, reveals the same kind of motives that had driven earlier generations of Merovingian kings to action. Just as the death of a Frankish king had earlier encouraged the remaining kings to try to seize the deceased’s territory, upon the succession of Theuderic II (r. 596-613) and Theudebert II (r. 596-612), Chlothar II (r. 584-629) seized Paris and other territory. Theudebert and Theuderic joined forces to defend themselves, and their inheritance. Four years later (600), Theuderic and Theudebert united to attack Chlothar in their turn. They took back their territory, and then took some of Chlothar’s territory. The struggle was settled by *pactiones*, the traditional way of dividing up territory among the Frankish kings, which left Chlothar as the junior partner, even though he was the oldest. The desire for supremacy among the Merovingians was such that even the natural alliance of Childebert’s two sons against Chilperic’s son did not last. The cooperation may have begun to break apart when their grandmother, Brunichild, was forced to leave Theudebert’s court for Theuderic’s in 599, but the two kings still worked together against Chlothar, and in a campaign in Gascony. In 607, however, Chlothar was the godfather

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459 Fred. IV.17.

460 Fred. IV.20: “Chlotharius oppressus uellit nollit per *pactiones* uinculum firmavit, ut inter Segona et Legere usque mare Oceanum etBrittanorum limite pars Theuderici haberit, et per Secona et Esera docatum integrum Denteleno usque Oceanum mare Theudebertus recipit. Duodecim tantum pagi inter Esara et Secona et mare lites Oci ani Chlothario remanserunt.”

461 Fred. IV.21.
of Theuderic’s son, and then the next year Witteric, the King of the Visigoths, coordinated a four-way attack against Theuderic which included his brother, Theudebert, and his kinsman, Chlothar, as well as the Visigoths and Lombards. This may be a sign that Theuderic was establishing himself as the most powerful of the Frankish kings, and manipulating alliances to ensure it. Part of this ascension over the others must have been connected to his marriage to Witteric’s daughter, whose sending home, without her dowry had been the instigation of the coalition. The marriage itself may have been a reaction to Theudebert’s own marriage connection to the Lombards.

**Theudebert’s Daughter and Adaloald**

Our only source for the betrothal of Theudebert’s daughter to Adaloald, the son of King Agilulf of the Lombards, is a brief mention in Paul the Deacon’s *History of the Lombards*, but it fits well into the milieu of the early 600s. In Paul’s narrative, the betrothal followed a ceremony where Adaloald was raised to the kingship during the lifetime of his father. It must have been a grand occasion, for he reported that the setting was the circus at Milan. In attendance were envoys from King Theudebert, with whom “perpetual peace” was established and the betrothal of Theudebert’s daughter to Adaloald was arranged. Despite their position in the text, where the peace immediately followed the betrothal, connected with an ‘et’, Paul seems to indicate that the betrothal was not the

462PD LH IV.XXX: “Igitur sequenti aestate mense Iulio levatus est Adaloaldus rex super Langobardos apud Mediolanum in circo, in praesentia patris sui Agilulfis regis, adstantibus legatis Teudeperti regis Francorum, et dispensata est eidem regio puero filia regis Teudeperti, et firmata est pax perpetua cum Francis.”
means for establishing peace, but rather for confirming it (*firmata est*). Thus, peace had already been made, and the betrothal was really a means for both parties to make a public display of the prestigious match.

With this tie, Theudebert II was following in the tradition of Theudebert I who had also had marital connections with the Lombards. The kings of the easternmost *Teilreich* also had a long tradition of involvement in Italian affairs. As Theuderic II worked to assert himself as the greatest of the Frankish kings, Theudebert was challenging that position by acting the part he was expected to play as king of the eastern *Teilreich*. Theuderic reacted to this challenge by arranging a marriage for himself with a Visigothic princess.

**THEUDERIC AND ERMENBERGA**

In 607, Theuderic II sent envoys to Witteric, the king of the Visigoths, to ask for the hand of his daughter, Ermenberga. The envoys had to make oaths that Theuderic would never make any other woman queen above her, and only then were they permitted to take the bride with them back to Gaul. This oath was made even more necessary because he already had four sons by other women. It was a situation reminiscent of

463Fred. IV. 30: “Eodem anno Teudericus Aridium episcopum Lugduninsem, Rocconem et Aeborinum comestaboli ad Bettericum regem Spaniae direxit, qui exinde Ermenberta filia eius Teuderico matrimonio sociandam adducerint. Ibique datis sacramentis ut a Teudericum ne umquam a regno degradaretur, ipsamque accipient et Teuderico Cabillonno presentant, quem ille gaudens diligenter susceptor. Eadem factionem aviae suae Brunechilde virile coitum non cognovit. Instigantibus verbis Brunechilde ava et Teudilane germana effecetur odiosa. Post anni circulum Theudericus Ermengbergam expoliatam a thinsauris Spaniam retransmisit.”

464Wallace-Hadrill translates this as “When the envoys had given their oath that Theuderic would never depose her . . .”
Chilperic’s efforts to marry Galsuintha. Theuderic was reportedly pleased with his new bride, but Brunichild, Theuderic’s grandmother who played the role of Queen Mother at his court, as well as his sister, Theudila, worked to keep the marriage from being consummated. Theuderic wanted the prestige of the marriage, but there were already two women at court who did not wish to see their power thus diminished. After a year, Theuderic sent her back home, but without her dowry. Ermenberga’s father thus organized the coalition against Theuderic for this blatant disregard of his oaths. Chlothar II, Theudebert II, and the king of the Lombards were all committed to helping Witteric get revenge, but in the end it came to nothing, says Fredegar, perhaps because Witteric died that same year.

This account is instructive. Theuderic sought a bride from the Visigothic king, and negotiations ensued. A main point of the negotiations was that Theuderic would never replace her as queen. Such a concern seems to be validated by the actions of Brunichild and Theudila, who obviously saw Ermenberga as a threat to their own high positions at court. It was a point of honor for Ermenberga and her father. When Fredegar reported that Theuderic “received her delightedly” (gaudens diligenter suscepit), he was reporting a public reception of Ermenberga, where she was received by the king and raised up as queen. It was a ceremony designed to emphasize his power and prestige. That the marriage was never privately consummated was less of a concern for a man who already had four potential heirs. When he felt he could do without her anymore, or after

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465 Fred. IV.31.

466 Fred. IV.33.
he had been convinced of this by his mother and sister, he sent her back, but kept the thing that must have added greatly to her value, her dowry. Whether it was the return of the girl, and thereby the breaking of the oath, or the fact that he kept the dowry that angered Witteric the most, we cannot say.

That her value was also connected to her royal blood can be surmised from the larger context of the contemporary debate about the legitimacy of Theuderic’s children by concubines, which Ian Wood has discussed. To Columbanus, a wandering Irish monk who spent some time at the Burgundian court, only children born of a legitimate union could be considered heirs, and thus proper objects of a blessing from him. The episode in which these thoughts are reported is dated after the breakdown of the marriage to Ermenberga, but may reflect the general thoughts and concerns of the period. Theuderic may have sought out a bride of impeccable status, a Visigothic princess, instead of simply marrying one of his concubines ‘properly’, as was urged by Columbanus. As Wood points out, Brunichild was not pleased with such an interpretation, and rather than allow her grandson to complete his marriage to a girl whose status was as good as her own, she convinced him to send her back, and then drove Columbanus out of Burgundy.


Fred. IV. 36: “in tantum ut Teudericus rex ad eum saepe Lossowio venerit et orationum suarum suffragio omni cum humilitate poscerit. Ad quem saepissimae cum venerit, coepti vir Dei eum increpare, quor concubinarum adulteris misceretur et non pocius ex lupinaribus videretur emergi.”
THE END OF COMPETITION

Even though the proposed four-way attack on Theuderic did not develop, it set the stage for the elimination of the competition in the Frankish kingdoms, at least for a while. In 610, Theudebert had succeeded in wresting several regions from his brother, but by 612, Theuderic had defeated and eliminated his brother. This was due in part to an agreement that Theuderic had made with Chlothar, whereby he secured his neutrality (*in solatium non esset*) in exchange for some territory. Of course, Theuderic did not actually want to give the promised territory over once he was victorious, but while he was pursuing Chlothar with his army he died of dysentery.

What followed was typical. Chlothar worked to deprive Theuderic’s heirs from inheriting his kingdom. He received the support of Theudebert’s former followers, and succeeded first in depriving Theuderic’s heirs of their claims to their uncle’s kingdom, the easternmost Teilreich. Likewise, the nobility of Burgundy worked to eliminate Brunichild and her great-grandsons, and Chlothar was able to reunite the entirety of the Frankish kingdom, just as his namesake had in 558. Ian Wood has noted the

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469 Fred. IV.37, 38.

470 Fred. IV.37: *Theuderic legationem ad Chlothario diregit, indecans se contra Theudebertum, eo quod suos frater non esset, hostiliter uelle adgredere: Chlotharius in *solatium* Theudeberti non esset. Docatum Denteleni, quem contra Theudeberto cassauerat, si Theudericus Theudebertum superbat, Chlotarius super memorato Dentelenon docato suae diciene receperit. Hanc conuenenciam a Theudericum et Chlotharium legatus intercurrentes firmatum Theudericus mouit exercitum.”

471 Fred. IV.39.

472 Fred. IV.41.
significance of the nobles not rejecting the Merovingian dynasty at this time, it was simply a question of which Merovingian they wanted.\textsuperscript{473} Chlothar II had won the competition.

He passed on a united kingdom to his son Dagobert I (r. 629-39). The divisions of the kingdom had become so customary, however, that both Chlothar and Dagobert were forced to create sub-kingdoms for their sons before their deaths, but there was no serious rivalry between father and son, or even between their followers.\textsuperscript{474} That would change in the later seventh century. Another significant change which came about with the end of the competition in the reign of Chlothar is the end of foreign marriages.

What did not change was the use of alliances to conduct military campaigns. Like earlier campaigns, these were also monetarily-driven alliances, as was expected of a good Germanic king. For example, when war broke out between Dagobert I and the Wends, in 630, the Lombards provided the *solucio*\textsuperscript{475} of Dagobert in this campaign. The Lombards and the Duke of the Alamans made coordinated attacks in the territory of the Slavs.\textsuperscript{476} These forces were reported to have taken many prisoners, which was probably their incentive or payment for helping Dagobert. Dagobert also entered into an agreement with

\textsuperscript{473}Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 146.

\textsuperscript{474}Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 140.

\textsuperscript{475}J. F. Niermeier, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 979 says this word can mean salvation, absolution, deliverance, wergeld, or decease. Wallace-Hadrill, 57 just translates it as ‘help’, as an orthographical variant of *solutium*.

\textsuperscript{476}Fred. IV.68: “ubi trebus turmis falange super Wenedus exercitus ingreditur, etiam et Langobardi solucione Dagoberti idemque osteleter in Sclavos perrixerunt. . . Alammnorum exercitus cum Crodoberto duci in parte qua ingressus est victuriam optenuit; Langobardi idemque victuriam optenuerunt et pluremum numerorum captivorum de Sclavos Alamanni et Longobardi secum duxerunt.”
Sisanand, the pretender to the Visigothic throne, to provide him with military aid to overthrow the current king in exchange for a very valuable golden dish. Dagobert did lend him an army, and they won fairly quickly. When his envoys came to collect the promised dish, negotiations had to be held since the dish was a prized possession of the Visigoths who were unwilling to part with it. A compensation payment was made. Dagobert found no need to rely upon marriage alliances in order to make alliances or secure peace with his neighbors.

**Conclusion**

While there were rivals for power within the Frankish kingdom, some Merovingians found foreign marriages a useful tool to further bolster their status and attract followers in their fight for more wealth, territory, and power. Theudebert looked to the east where the Lombards had long provided prestigious brides to the kings of the easternmost Frankish kingdom, now coming to be more clearly defined as Austrasia. His half-brother, Theuderic, was then obliged to seek an more prestigious bride from among the most prestigious of the remaining Germanic kingdoms in the West, the Visigoths. Her great prestige made her a threat to the positions of Theuderic’s sister and

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477Fred. IV.73: “cum consilium cytiris Sisenandus quidam ex proceribus ad Dagobertum expetit, ut ei cum exercito auxiliaretur qualiter Sintilianem degradaret ad regnum. Huius beneficiæ repensionem missium aureum nobelissimum ex tinsauris Gothorum quem Tursemodus rex ab Agecio patricio acceperat Dagobertum dare promisit pensamet auri pondus quinquentus. Quo audito, Dagobertus, ut erat cupedus, exercitum in ausilium Sisenandi de totum regnum Burgundiae bannire precepit . . . Dagobertus legationem ad Sisenando regi Amalgario duce et Venerando dirigit, ut missium illum quem promiserat eidem dirigerit. Cumque ad Sisenando regi missius ille legatarius fuisse tradetur, a Gotis per vim toletur, nec eum exinde excobere permiserunt. postea discorrentes legatus ducenta milia soledus missuriae huius praecium Dagobertus a Sisenandum accipiens ipsumque pensavit.”
grandmother at his court, and so the marriage was short-lived. Theuderic already had plenty of heirs, but he had proven his royal abilities by arranging for such a marriage. His repudiation of the Visigothic princess might have been his downfall, had the four-way attack on his kingdom materialized. Instead he died an inglorious death at the height of his power, and opened the way for Chlothar to establish himself over the entire Frankish kingdom. Still, his use of a foreign marriage, and his repudiation of it, is a final testimony to the status value of these unions, and yet at the same time, their separation from the practical diplomatic politics of the day. Because the parties involved were kings, Theuderic’s repudiation of Ermenberga had military and diplomatic consequences, but this was more of a personal issue with her father, than calculated diplomatic policy. Like Childebert I’s campaign against Amalaric over 70 years earlier, or Chilperic’s murder of Galsuintha 40 years before, we should not read high diplomacy into the marriage and or its subsequent break-up, but rather the personal issues of men who happened to also be kings.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In 1993, Thomas F. Madden and Donald E. Queller sought answers to questions that they had about marriage alliances and dowries in Renaissance Venice. 478 Their study is an example of the valuable insights about a society which can be gained by examining the details of a practice previously assumed to be understood according to traditional explanations. Like many of the descriptions of early medieval marriage alliances provided in the preceding narrative, they could cite similar views of Venetian marriage alliances: “It is commonly argued that this relatively small number of noble families together with the desire of each to gain assistance from others created a fiercely competitive marriage market. Fathers used their daughters like playing cards, it is said, playing the best with huge dowries for the benefit of their families and discarding the rest in convents. With everyone playing the same cutthroat game, the ante was constantly raised; in other words, dowries became inflated.” 479 It was a rise in contributions from


479 Queller and Madden, 687-8.
other members of the family, besides the father’s, to a girl’s dowry which caused the dowry inflation, “not the crafty marriage machinations of Venice’s fathers.”\textsuperscript{480} They also noted that “a dowry bought more than a husband, it also purchased honor and status.”\textsuperscript{481} They then posed the question which interests me the most: “What, then, did a bride’s natal family gain from her marriage?”\textsuperscript{482} Their conclusions were equally interesting. They found that “not only did the bride’s natal family make relatively little use of their affinal kin, but they were also equally unwilling (or simply unasked) to assist the offspring of the bride.”\textsuperscript{483} Their “results strongly suggest that the level of cooperation between families joined by marriage was limited.”\textsuperscript{484} They noted that because of the closed nature of the Venetian nobility, it was likely that every family would have many relations within that group, and in fact so many as to make it inevitable that some cases of affinal cooperation should appear before the historian’s eye. Their conclusion, however, was that, “Political alliances in Venice, like alliances anywhere else, were hammered out between families or factions with mutual political or economic interests and in many cases were dissolved when no longer beneficial. At times, families who worked well together no doubt decided to cement their alliances with marriage. . . But the political or economic forging of interests came first. . . . No thinking patrician would bind his

\textsuperscript{480} Queller and Madden, 694.

\textsuperscript{481} Queller and Madden, 698.

\textsuperscript{482} Queller and Madden, 700.

\textsuperscript{483} Queller and Madden, 701.

\textsuperscript{484} Queller and Madden, 701-2.
family’s interest to another’s simply on the basis of a wedding and a dotal sum readily available from scores of other would-be brides.” Instead, marriage alliances in Venice had a different benefit: “The father of the bride maintained or even gained additional honor or status by insuring that his daughters were properly dowered and married.” Their conclusions forced historians to reconsider traditional assumptions about marriage alliances in Renaissance Venice.

In this dissertation, I have shown that a closer study of the marriages of the Merovingians Franks results in an explanation similar to that of Queller and Madden. The Merovingians made alliances without reference to kinship when they needed military or political support, or sought opportunities for plunder and expansion. Good relations with their neighbors could lead to a marriage between them, but marriage was not the precursor to peace and cooperation. Rather, marriage with prestigious foreign kings, princes and princesses served to confirm the royal status of the Merovingians. Only the Frankish royal family made such marriages, by which they emphasized their superior status within the Frankish kingdom. This is why discussions of the foreign marriages of the Merovingians in the sources reveal a strong emphasis on wealth, status, royal blood, character and beauty.

After Clovis secured the whole Frankish kingdom for himself, there was only one serious challenge to the rule of his heirs in the sixth century — the famous Gundovald

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485 Queller and Madden, 703-4.
486 Queller and Madden, 704.
affair, but even then Gundovald claimed to be a member of the Merovingian family.\footnote{See Bernard S. Bachrach, \textit{The anatomy of a little war: a diplomatic and military history of the Gundovald affair (568-586)} (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).} Prestigious marriages to spouses from other royal families may have served to quickly delimit the lines between royal and noble in the Frankish kingdom. Such marriages also enhanced the king’s position, compared to the other Merovingians, in the eyes of their followers. An increase in status could lead to an increase in wealth, territory, or followers. More success in battle, more plunder, and more income meant greater generosity from the king in the form of land and booty, which could lead to more loyal followers, and thus more opportunities for wealth and power. Thus, we can say that these marriages did in fact have a political value, but on the domestic front more than in foreign affairs.

After the attempted marriage of Theuderic and Ermenberga in 607, there are no more known foreign marriages involving Merovingians and other foreign ruling dynasties (Balthild, wife of Clovis II (r. 634-57) was specifically called a foreigner, but she was a Saxon slave already living in the Frankish kingdom, not a princess). This should not be surprising. With the deaths of the heirs of Theuderic II, Chlothar II (r. 584-629) came into full control of the Frankish kingdom, like his grandfather, Chlothar I, and great-grandfather, Clovis I. There would never be another three- or four-way split of the kingdom which had introduced so much conflict among the rival heirs of the Frankish kingdoms. Chlothar II, and his son Dagobert I (r. 629-639), now in full command of the resources of the Frankish kingdom, did not have to compete with rivals for treasure,
territory or subjects. Not only was their position as sole king unquestioned, but the Merovingian family’s unique claim to the Frankish kingship was now firmly established. It would take another 150 years before another family, the Carolingians, could break down that monopoly and assert their claim to the kingship through a coup. After Dagobert, the Frankish aristocracy rose in power, and eventually came to dominate the Merovingian kings, who were often minors. It was not in their interest to raise the prestige of these kings beyond what would reflect upon themselves, or give them greater power. Foreign marriage alliances were not needed. It was, therefore, within the competitive milieu of the sixth-century Frankish kingdom that marriages to prestigious members of foreign ruling houses could play an important role. Then, brother challenged brother, nephew challenged uncle, and even son challenged father for control over the resources of the newly won and expanded Frankish kingdom. Marriages to prestigious foreign spouses raised a king’s status in the eyes of his followers, which allowed him to assert greater control over the resources of his own kingdom, and beyond.

The results of studies such as this one, and that of Queller and Madden, should provide encouragement to others to look more closely at the so-called ‘marriage alliances’ of other times and places. Even when our views of the way marriage worked are based on the theories provided in the primary sources themselves, it is good to examine them. The sources continually present us with the expectations of how kinship should function, even though the actions of the individuals run counter to those expectations, to the point that one would expect that the expectations of kinship would lie not in cooperation but in competition. Theodoric’s letters from the early sixth century are evidence enough that
there has always been a separation between theory and practice. The relationship between theory and practice, between ideas and action, is one of the most intriguing aspects of studying history.
APPENDIX A

SOME NOTES ON KINSHIP AND

KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

There has been much anthropological work done on kinship, the terms used to
discuss it, and the kin-based alliance in primitive societies to support this idea. Taking
a common sense approach to kinship, it is enough to recognize that there is a difference
between biological and social kinship. For example, anthropologists often use separate
terms to distinguish between the person who serves in the traditional role of a parent (ie. the person who generally conforms to society’s expectations of the role of parent), the
\textit{pater} or \textit{mater}, and the biological parent of an offspring, the \textit{genitor} or \textit{genitrix}. In
some cases these two terms apply to the same person, as with a child who is raised by his
or her biological mother and father, but can just as easily be applied to different people, as

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
  \item[488]\textsuperscript{488}See, for example: Claude Levi-Strauss, \textit{Les Structures élémentaires de la Parenté} (1949) and
  \item[489]\textsuperscript{489}Robert Parkin, \textit{Kinship: An Introduction to Basic Concepts} (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 3-4.
  \item[490]\textsuperscript{490}Parkin, 14.
\end{itemize}}
in the case of adoption or step-parents. As Bernhard Jussen puts it, “kinship is an instrument for conceiving of social relations”.

In the introduction to his work on spiritual kinship and adoption in the early Middle Ages, Jussen discussed how kin terms were used to describe behavioral norms and relations of authority. He suggested that “kinship is considered a culturally specific mental construct” used by people to order their social environment and legitimate that order.

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, an anthropologist, has said, “In any given society a certain number of . . . relationships by blood or marriage are recognised for social purposes, i.e. they have attached to them certain rights or duties, or certain distinctive modes of behaviour.” Such a system of consanguinity and affinity in early medieval Europe has been explored, in particular, in the case of feuding amongst early medieval kin groups. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill defined feuding thus: “first, 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.” Such a definition assumes a kinship-based structure within which the feuding parties rely on the rights and duties attached to their kin-based relationships. Alexander Callander Murray, in exploring the structure of kinship in early Germanic society, examined the *Lex Salica*, an early sixth-century

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492 Jussen, 23.


Germanic law code, that he described as one with “a significant body of material on the role of the kindred as a category and personal group.”495 His study of the *Lex Salica* not only adds to our understanding of the way kinship groups and feuding worked, from a legal standpoint, but also how kinship groups operated in other realms as well. Of feuding he states: “The vengeance group was a small ad hoc force composed of the closest kin.... the vengeance group when it appears is best seen not as a strict kin group at all but as a kindred-based group composed of interested relatives, friends, and dependants.”496 Extending his findings beyond feuding, he says, “There can be no doubt that, in principle at any rate, the involvement of kin groups in legal and extra-legal procedure [inheritance, guardianship, marriage, feud, compensation, wergeld, debtors, oathhelpers, etc...] is an ancient and long-lived feature of European legal history in general, and of the northern barbarian peoples in particular.”497 The world that can be viewed through a document like the *Lex Salica* is one which relies heavily upon the rights and duties attached to kinship.498

We should be slow to accept as reality statements which express theories of expected behavior, given the example of their failure to regulate the behavior of Clovis and Alaric in 507. Bernard S. Bachrach has argued, for example, that the Merovingian


496Murray, 136.

497Murray, 118.

rulers of the Franks should not be seen as primitive chieftains who could only conceive of
diplomacy and acts of state in the manner of primitive peoples, relying solely on kinship
as a means for arbitrating peace and war. They should be viewed as late-Roman
administrators operating in a sophisticated governmental system driven by laws, taxation,
customs duties, and other forms of generating revenue and maintaining control. Thus, he
argues, the theories of anthropologists based on the observations and study of primitive
peoples are not very helpful for understanding the Merovingian Franks. The
unexamined acceptance of the ‘marriage alliance’ as a way of understanding early
medieval politics and diplomacy, therefore, which is common even in the most recent
works by the best modern scholars, not only accepts a view of those people as primitive
and unsophisticated, but also assumes that the stated principles of kinship behavior are a
good guide to the actual behavior of people. Of course, the temptation to see the role of
marriage in politics this way comes not only from anthropological studies of primitive
societies, but also from the very sources we use to study the period, as can be seen in
Theodoric’s letters.

Every society has a notion of what is considered normal or acceptable behavior,
whether it is consciously stated through law or more unconsciously taught and passed
from one generation to the next, through such vehicles as poetry, history, literature, and
religion. These are the norms of behavior for that society, and there are usually specific
norms of behavior implied by the terminology of kinship. One potential problem in

“Anthropologists and Early Medieval History: Some Problems” *Cithara* 33:2 (1994), 3-10

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dealing with such norms, and an easy temptation for historians, is to assume or apply our
own norms of acceptable behavior to people of the past. What we today might expect,
behaviorally, in our relationship with a mother or a brother, or a mother-in-law or
brother-in-law can be different from the expected behavior of a mater, frater, or a socer
or a gener in Merovingian Gaul. Likewise, when I call someone a mother or a brother,
who may not be related to me by blood or even marriage, I imply certain characteristics of
behavior and feelings on my part and on the part of that person. This principle is
particularly evident, for example, in the literature on spiritual kinship in the early Middle
Ages. Joseph Lynch has discussed the development of the practice of referring to the
clergyman who performed a baptism as the spiritual “father” of the child.\(^{500}\) He notes,
however, that this term implied little social significance, unless the clergyman also
received the child from the font, and was then “obligated to observe the norms of spiritual
kinship.”\(^{501}\) The ‘spiritual father’ was therefore not the same thing as a ‘godfather’.
Godfathers had specific liturgical and non-liturgical duties to be performed at the baptism
(including gift-giving), but they also had certain obligations which extended beyond the
day of baptism.\(^{502}\) The spiritual kin group formed at the time of the baptism “became a
focus of enduring loyalties. . . there was an expectation, sometimes explicitly stated and
at other times tacit, that respect, protection, and cooperation would govern relations

\(^{500}\)Joseph H. Lynch, Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe (Princeton UP, 1986),
165-9.

\(^{501}\)Lynch, 169.

\(^{502}\)Lynch, 172.
There are two things to be learned from this example. First, the term ‘godparent’ implied certain principles of expected behavior, presumably behavior which had been traditionally applied only to biological parent-child relationships. Secondly, sometimes kin terms are used to describe a relationship which actually has little expected behavior attached to it, as in the case of the ‘spiritual father’. It is difficult to determine exactly what are the expectations implied by kinship terminology in our modern society, since these can vary from family to family, region to region, or even socio-economic group to socio-economic group. This becomes even more difficult in the past when the sources not only limit the information, but may distort the available information through their own bias or agenda. Historians must avoid the danger of understanding past relationships according to modern norms, as well as assuming behavior based on statements about the expected behavior of kinsmen.

**Kinship Terminology**

This danger is particularly present in our use of kinship terminology to describe relationships which still exist today but which might have meant something different in the past, but it must also be balanced by the demands of practicality. As Robert Parkin has explained, even when we recognize the difficulties of using our own vocabulary of kinship to describe the kinship of another people (or in this case, another people and time), it is still our best, or at least most practical, solution for trying to understand it.\(^{504}\)

\(^{503}\)Lynch, 177.

\(^{504}\)Parkin, *Kinship*, 7.
Still, as Bullough pointed out, we must be careful in interpreting and applying kinship terminology. In an article published in 1969, he showed how the modern usage of the Latin terms *agnate* and *cognate*, particularly by social anthropologists beginning in the late nineteenth century, to describe descent through the male and female lines, respectively, does not faithfully correspond to Classical (i.e., late Republican and early Imperial Roman) usage. Bullough showed how the term *agnatio* or *agnatus* had originally had a specifically legal connotation describing a person’s subjection to the *patria potestas* of the *paterfamilias* in Republican Rome, while *cognatio* or *cognatus* referred to any other blood kinship outside of *agnatio*. Only later did *agnatio* lose its legal significance, as the power of the *paterfamilias* diminished in the later Empire. Eventually the *agnatio/cognatio* distinction of paternal/maternal relatives developed. At the same time, *cognatus* was sometimes used to mean an ‘in-law’, and later still, in the early Middle Ages, *cognatio* came to stand for the kin-group or kindred as a whole, with *propinqui* or *parentes* used to describe the individual members of a *cognatio*. The shift in the usage of these terms is a good reminder of how these terms were used to describe specific social situations or expectations, and of the danger inherent in assuming

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506 Bullough, 6.

507 Bullough, 8.

508 Bullough, 9.

509 Bullough, 9.

510 Bullough, 12.
that these terms always meant the same thing or even had the same legal implications. He clearly showed that there was no consistency in usage even among contemporary authors.

The authors of the sources for the sixth century did attach their own expectations of behavior to kinship terminology, and sometimes they may even have had the specific legal implications of a kinship term in their mind. Most importantly, though, they expected their audience to understand the principles of expected behavior implied by this terminology, or at least agree (or be convinced by their argument) with the expectations put forward in their texts. We should heed the counsel of Bullough, who said in the conclusion to his article, “it is — or it should be — a matter for concern that though ‘kinship’ and ‘kindred’ figure in every book on early medieval society some of the most elementary questions about them are not answered or even asked. This is only one of a number of fields in which the professed historian is unlikely to find relevant questions and meaningful answers without a knowledge of the concepts and terminology of other disciplines, ‘new’ and not-so-new. His texts and other sources and their exposition remain, however, the historian’s primary objects of study and specific task. For a medievalist this will always involve the collation and interpretation, with strict reference to context, of the Latin terminology of the period.”\footnote{Bullough, 18.} Let us look briefly at some of the Latin kinship vocabulary used in the sources for studying the sixth-century, to see what it meant and how it was used to express expected behaviors attached to kinship.

The main secondary source of information about the meaning and usage of kinship terminology in the Middle Ages is Anita Guerreau-Jalabert’s article on this
subject. Unfortunately, the sources she used do not date before 800, but her work is broad enough to be of some use in determining how later medieval authors used and understood these terms, which must have developed out of early medieval usage to some extent. The main primary source that defines and discusses kinship in a theoretical manner is Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies*, which is also a little late for our period (seventh century), but he was a compiler of earlier knowledge up to his day, and offers us perhaps the most detailed look at an early medieval understanding of kinship, based, of course, on both earlier Roman materials as well as ecclesiastical works. I will also briefly discuss Gregory of Tours’ usage of kinship words in his *Historiae*, which should serve as something of a corrective for the chronological lateness of our main sources. However, it should also be noted that Gregory does not present us with a consistent employment of kinship terminology.

**CONSANGUINITAS**

*Consangunitas* is defined in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* as a blood relationship or kinship, and is associated with *consanguineus*, meaning one related by blood, kindred, or a kinsman. The obvious root of the word is *sanguis* — blood — which is also sometimes used or referred to in the sources (see below). Isidore likewise related

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consanguineus to those sharing in the same blood, and even made a connection between semen and blood.\textsuperscript{514} He also noted that the consanguineal relationship slowly dissipated the further apart two consanguines are related.\textsuperscript{515}

Concerning the meaning of \textit{consanguinitas} in the High Middle Ages, Guereau-Jalabert cites the definition of Stephen of Tournai, who describes a community defined by their biological or blood connection.\textsuperscript{516} Its usage however, was usually associated with canonists concerned to restrict marriage among blood kindred, so it was used especially to refer to more distant relatives, beyond parents, siblings, and children.\textsuperscript{517} She notes that \textit{consanguinitas} was not used, generally, as much as \textit{cognatio} (see below), even though it had a similar meaning.\textsuperscript{518} What is particularly interesting for us, is that she noted that

\textsuperscript{514}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} VI.4: “\textit{Consanguinei vocati, eo quod ex uno sanguine, id est ex uno patris semine sati sunt. Nam semen viri spuma est sanguinis ad instar aquae in scopulos conlisae, quae spumam candidam facit, vel sicut vinum nigrum, quod in calice agitatum spumam albentem reddit}.”

\textsuperscript{515}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} VI.29: “\textit{Haec consanguinitas dum se paulatim propaginum ordinibus dirimens usque ad ultimum gradum subtraxerit, et propinquitas esse desierit, eam rursus lex matrimonii vinculo repetit, et quodam modo revocat fugientem. Ideo autem usque ad sextum generis gradum consanguinitas constituta est, ut sicut sex aetatibus mundi generatio et hominis status finitur, ita propinquitas generis tot gradibus terminaretur}.”

\textsuperscript{516}Guereau-Jalabert, 79.

\textsuperscript{517}Guerraur-Jalabert, 80-1.

\textsuperscript{518}Guerraur-Jalabert, 80.
consanguinitas was used to define norms of behavior, and that sometimes people were addressed as a consanguineus to refer to what she calls “une pseudo-parenté” akin to later vernacular usage of the term “cousin”.

Gregory of Tours never used the words consanguinitas or consanuineus in his Historiae. He used the word sanguis once in connection with kinship, but otherwise the word is restricted to its literal meaning of the life-giving liquid which flows through the body, and, in Gregory’s Historiae, is often being shed, particularly by Christ or the saints. Perhaps his non-use of consanguinitas may indicate to us just how little Gregory’s interests flowed towards the technical, canonical, or theoretical meaning of words. That is, the historian Gregory does not offer direct discourse or philosophy on the general subject of kinship, as does the encyclopedist Isidore, for example. If this is indeed the case, we should be wary of attaching too much significance to his word usage, since his word choices may simply reflect a desire to vary his usage. He may have specifically sought variety in his vocabulary, or chosen some words for aesthetic reasons. He could also imply certain expectations of behavior between kinsmen with certain words. His use of kinship terminology seems to suggest that he employed vocabulary which fit the actions he was describing, rather than presenting theoretical expositions of kinship.

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519 Guerreau-Jalabert, 79: “... il engendre un mode de conduite social (‘des sentiments’) que l’on ne devrait pas enfreindre;”

520 Guerreau-Jalabert, 81, n.18: “Une étude attentive d’un certain nombre de vocables pourrait faire apparaître comme assez fréquentes ces manipulations sociales manifestes des relations de parenté, aboutissant à dénommer comme parents et même comme consanguins des individus qu’aucun lien biologique, même très lâche, ne rattache. Dans la société médiévale, l’extension considérable des réseaux de parenté réelle et de parenté spirituelle facilitait certainement ces glissements.”

521 See Denise St-Michel, Concordance de l’Historia Francorum de Grégoire de Tours (Montreal, 1979), 910, which cites 51 uses of sanguis or its derivatives.
vocabulary. This would seem to be confirmed by his lack of use of the other abstract Latin terms for kinship, *cognatio* and *affinitas*, as well.

**COGNATIO**

*Cognatio*, like *consanguinitas*, is an abstract noun referring, according to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, to blood kinship, consanguinity, or any group related by blood. There are instances in the classical period of its being used more generally to refer to any kind of affinity or kinship. Isidore connected the word *cognatio* etymologically with *gens*. He distinguished varying degrees of relationship within the *cognatio*, and had a very fixed view of who should be included within a family or kin-group. He specifically said that a great-great-great-great grandfather marked the limits of *cognatio*. But he also used the contrast, discussed above, of connecting *cognatio* with

522OLD, s.v. *cognatio*, 3.

523Isidore, *Etymologiae* VI.10: “*Vocabula a gente haec videntur declinata: genitor, genetrix, agnati, agnatae, cognati, cognatae, progenitores, progenetrices, germani, germanae.*”

524Isidore, *Etymologiae* VI.28: “*Stemmata dicuntur ramusculi, quos advocati faciunt in genere, cum gradus cognitionum partiantur, ut puta ille filius, ille pater, ille avus, ille agnatus, et ceteri, quorum figurae haec:*” What follows is a chart depicting the various degrees of cognition. These kinds of charts were connected with ecclesiastical efforts to control marriages within kin-groups, and to combat those which were made between kinsmen who were too closely related. See, for example, Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1983); Maybe De Jong, "To the limits of kinship: anti-incest legislation in the early medieval west (500-900)" in *From Sappho to de Sade: Moments in the History of Sexuality*, ed. Jan Bremmer (Routledge, 1989), 36-59; Maybe De Jong, "An Unsolved Riddle: Early Medieval Incest Legislation" in *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: an ethnographic perspective*, ed. Ian Wood (Boydell Press, 1998), 107-140; Ian Wood, "Incest, law and the Bible in sixth-century Gaul" *Early Medieval Europe* 7, no. 3 (1998): 291-304.

525Isidore, *Etymologiae* V.10: “*Tritavus atavi pater, quasi tetravus, id est quartus super avum. Sed tritavus ultimum cognitionis nomen est. Familia enim oritur a patre, terminatur in tritavo.*”
the female line.\textsuperscript{526} Perhaps his most interesting use of \textit{cognatio} for our purposes is in his description of the different kinds of brotherhood. He found in scripture four kinds of brothers: those by nature, by tribe, by blood relationship (\textit{cognatio}), and by feeling.\textsuperscript{527} In this description, the principles of behavior attached to brotherhood were set forth to some degree. Natural brothers are those that fit the standard definition of brotherhood, namely boys sharing the same birth parents.\textsuperscript{528} Tribal (\textit{gens}) brothers seem to be those who belong to the same community which is considered to descend from a founding father, as in the case of the Hebrews or Israelites.\textsuperscript{529} Isidore indicated that such an association has certain rights or obligations attached to it. Brothers by \textit{cognatio}, or kinship, are those who belong to the same family and share a parent. That parent did not have to be the direct birth parent, but could include extended family members.\textsuperscript{530} Isidore cited the example of Abraham and Lot, who were from the same extended family, but treated each other like brothers. Finally, there are emotional brothers. Those who are called brothers

\textsuperscript{526}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} VI.2: “Cognati dicti, quia sunt et ipsi propinquitate cognitionis coniuncti. Qui inde post agnatos habentur, quia per feminini sexus personas veniunt, nec sunt agnati, sed alias naturali iure cognati.”

\textsuperscript{527}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} VI.8: “Quattuor autem modis in Scripturis divinis fratres dici: natura, gente, cognatione, affectu.”

\textsuperscript{528}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} VI.8: “Natura, ut Esau et Iacob, Andreas et Petrus, Iacobus et Iohannes.”

\textsuperscript{529}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} VI.8: “Gente, ut omnes Iudaei fratres inter se vocantur in Deuteronomio (15, 12): ‘Si autem emeris fratem tuum, qui est Hebraeus.’ Et Apostolus (Rom. 9, 3): ‘Optabam,’ inquit, ‘ego Anathema esse a Christo pro fratribus meis, qui sunt cognati mei secundum carnem, qui sunt Israelitae.’”

\textsuperscript{530}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} VI.9: “Porro cognatione fratres vocantur, qui sunt de una familia, id est patria; quas Latini paternitates interpretantur, cum ex una radice multa generis turba diffunditur. Et in Genesit dixit Abraham ad Loth (13, 8): ‘Non sit rixa inter me et te et inter pastores tuos et pastores meos, quia omnes fratres nos sumus.’ Et certe Loth non erat frater Abraham, sed filius fratris eius Aram.”
specifically because of the way one should feel and act towards each other. To Isidore, all Christians share in a certain kind of emotional brotherhood which binds them together and dictates their behaviors. Such conceptions of brotherhood are exactly the kinds of theoretical principles attached to kinship vocabulary that need to be better understood in order to clarify the meaning of a term like ‘marriage alliance’.

Guerreau-Jalabert found evidence of the closeness in meaning between *cognatio* and *consanguinitas* since *cognatio* was used in the High Middle Ages to refer to consanguines through both the male and female lines. I have already discussed above Bullough’s treatment of the modern distinctions between *cognatio* and *agnatio* and their historical development. Guerreau-Jalabert cites specific examples of the medieval juxtaposition of the two to distinguish the male from the female line. When we take into consideration its frequent use in connection with spiritual kinship (*cognatio spiritualis*), and the practice of referring to in-laws with this term (a practice which was denounced by Gratian) it becomes clear that *cognatio* was a word with a wide variety of meanings and uses. Guerreau-Jalabert, suggests, however, that it was mainly used to refer to a group of kinsfolk rather than a specific relationship between two people (where

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532 Guerreau-Jalabert, 72, 77: she notes that in some sources, consanguines were called *cognati*.

533 Guerreau-Jalabert, 72, 77.

534 Guerreau-Jalabert, 74, 78.
the related *cognatus* might be used).\textsuperscript{535} This group, the kin group, was defined in practical terms by those who participated in family affairs, especially feuds and other conflicts.\textsuperscript{536} The Merovingian kin group or *cognatio* was fairly narrowly defined (essentially, the descendants of Clovis I), and some who may have had biological claims to be part of the *cognatio* were specifically excluded from participation in it (Munderic and Gundovald are two prominent examples).

Perhaps significantly, then, Gregory of Tours’ use of *cognatio* is severely limited in his *Historiae*. He never used the word *cognatio* in the abstract sense discussed above to describe a kin-group, or to speak directly about kinship. He did use variants of *cognatus* four times, but only in order to refer to a specific relationship (twice as in-law, twice more generically as kinsman of some sort) between two people.\textsuperscript{537} Two of the examples illustrate the cooperative nature of *cognatio*. Beregisel served as a kind of legate to the king for his relative (*cognatus*) Eufrasius, bearing gifts to help buy a bishopric for him.\textsuperscript{538} Firminus watched over his brother-in-law (*cognatus suus*), Palladius, to prevent him from committing suicide when he feared for his life during a

\textsuperscript{535}Guerreau-Jalabert, 75: “Contrairement à l’affinitas, la cognatio se rapporte assez régulièrement non plus à une relation, mais à un groupe d’individus désigné comme parents principalement en vertu d’un lien de consanguinité d’extension variable, mais peuvent atteindre, en ligne paternelle comme en ligne maternelle.”

\textsuperscript{536}Guerreau-Jalabert, 76: “La cognatio est enfin un ensemble plus ou moins vaste de parents, qui manifeste matériellement et solidaremement son existence dans certaines situations (conflits, guerre, meurtre).”

\textsuperscript{537}St-Michel: GTH IV.35, IV.39; VI.43, X.27.

\textsuperscript{538}GTH IV.35.
power struggle for the office of count in Javols. The other two examples reveal the potential rivalry between *cognati*. King Euric of Galicia was attacked and deposed by his *cognatus*, Andica, who was also betrothed to his sister. Finally, two Frankish families wiped themselves out in a feud which began over charges against a brother-in-law (*cognatus*) who was not treating his wife, the other’s sister, properly. Because the exact relationship between the *cognati* is not always made clear, it is possible that all four of Gregory’s uses of the word *cognatus* could be translated as brother-in-law. The most important observation, here, however, is that such kinsmen were expected to get along and cooperate, but there was also the potential for them to become bitter enemies or rivals.

*AFFINITAS*

The classical word used to describe those who were related by marriage was not *cognatus*, but *affinitas*, or the derivative *affinis, -e*. Over time, this came to be used sometimes to refer more generically to relatives in general. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* also includes the definition of ‘a bond of union’. Isidore did not use the word *affinitas*

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539 GTH IV.39.

540 GTH VI.43: “Quo defuncto, filius eius Eurichus Leuvichildi regis amicitias expetit; datoque, ut pater fecerat, sacramento, regnum Galliciense suscepit. Hoc vero anno *cognatus* eius Audica, qui sororem illius despensatam habebat, cum exercitu venit, apprehensumque clericum facit, ac diaconatus sive presbyterii et imponi honorem iubet: ipse vero accepta soceri sui uxore, Galliciense regnum obtinuit.”

541 OLD, *sv. affinitas*
much in his discussion of kinship, and when he did, it was used in conjunction with the idea of degrees of kinship. It was not directly connected to marriage at all.\textsuperscript{542}

Guerreau-Jalabert defines \textit{affinitas} as “the affinal relationship produced by a marriage alliance.”\textsuperscript{543} She remarks that \textit{affinitas} is often specifically placed in contrast to \textit{consanguinitas}, and therefore used to define another circle of relations within which one cannot marry.\textsuperscript{544} She also found uses of the word describing a relation of great closeness but not by marriage alliance.\textsuperscript{545} She concludes that “in the domain of kinship, \textit{affinitas} fairly clearly represents kinship as a collection of relations rather than as a collection of individuals united by these relations.”\textsuperscript{546}

Gregory of Tours never uses the word \textit{affinitas}, nor \textit{affinis}, but that he does use other more specific words to describe affinal relations. Besides his use of \textit{cognatus} for brother-in-law, for example, he also used the word \textit{socer}, which the \textit{Oxford Latin Dictionary} defines as the father of a husband or a wife’s father, so father-in-law, seven times.\textsuperscript{547} All of Gregory’s uses of \textit{socer} follow the standard meaning of father-in-law.\textsuperscript{548}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[542]See Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae}, V.1, VI.23.
\item[543]Guerreau-Jalabert, 67: “\textit{la relation d’affinité produite par l’alliance matrimoniale}”
\item[544]Guerreau-Jalabert, 68.
\item[545]Guerreau-Jalabert, 68.
\item[546]Guerreau-Jalabert, 70: “Dans le domaine de parenté, l’\textit{affinitas} représente donc assez nettement la parenté comme un ensemble de relations plutôt que comme un ensemble d’individus unis par ces relations.”
\item[547]St-Michel: GTH III.6, III.15, IV.20, V.5, VI.32, VI.43, VII.46
\item[548]There has been some debate over the one instance, although it appears in most manuscripts, and in both of the MGH editions of the text, of \textit{socerae}, the feminine form, in GTH X.8. Most translators adopt the more rare \textit{sororis} to make sense of the passage. See Bonnet, \textit{Le Latin de Grégoire de Tours} (Paris, 1890), 355 and 394.
\end{footnotes}
He also used gener, a word which means son-in-law, four times just as he used socer.\textsuperscript{549} Isidore only devoted one small section to kin by marriage, but defined these terms in a telling manner: “A socer is he who gives a daughter [in marriage]. A gener is he who takes a daughter [in marriage]. A gener [son-in-law], on the one hand, is said to be he who is adopted for the purpose of increasing the family. A socer [father-in-law], on the other hand, and a socrus [mother-in-law] are those who ally a gener or a nurus [daughter-in-law] to themselves.”\textsuperscript{550} Isidore, therefore, does attach certain expectations of behavior to the act of becoming related by marriage — giving and taking for the purpose of increasing the family and its allies. Gregory never mentioned a ‘nurus’, but perhaps only because he never had need to refer to a daughter-in-law in his story.

\textit{PARENS}

\textit{Parens}, according to the \textit{Oxford Latin Dictionary}, refers not only to one’s immediate parents (father and mother), but also more generally to progenitors.\textsuperscript{551} Isidore connected parentes to the word parientes, ‘to bring forth’, thereby implying a very

\textsuperscript{549}St-Michel: II.8, III.15, IX.12, IX.35.

\textsuperscript{550}Isidore, Etymologiae, VI.19: “Socer est, qui filiam dedit. Gener est, qui filiam duxit. Gener autem dictus, quod adsciscatur ad augendum genus. Socer autem et socrus, quod generum vel nurum sibi adsocient.”

\textsuperscript{551}OLD, s.v. “parens”
biologically-dependent relationship\textsuperscript{552} His other use of the word attaches a certain social significance to parents — one’s social status derives directly from them.\textsuperscript{553}

Guerreau-Jalabert does not discuss \textit{parens}, but rather \textit{parentela}, a word which she notes is not classical in origin.\textsuperscript{554} A \textit{parentela}, she says, relates principally to a group of kinsfolk rather than a specific kinsman. It is a group which is defined as kinsmen to a specific individual, and which can be called his relatives — his parentage.\textsuperscript{555} A \textit{parentela} was usually associated with the same group among which one could not marry.\textsuperscript{556} It could sometimes be used to refer specifically to all relatives, excluding one’s immediate family.\textsuperscript{557} A \textit{parentela} was a group, she notes, which could act collectively, particularly in legal issues.\textsuperscript{558} But interestingly, she describes a \textit{parentela} as a social referent which could help to situate an individual either generally, or more specifically with respect to a notable or well-known individual.\textsuperscript{559} However, although it could be used as an

\textsuperscript{552}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} V.4: “Genitores autem a gignendo; et parentes quasi parientes. Idem et creatores.”

\textsuperscript{553}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} V.18: “Semper enim qui nascitur deteriorem parentis statum sumit.”

\textsuperscript{554}Guerreau-Jalabert, 81.

\textsuperscript{555}Guerreau-Jalabert, 81: “parentela se rapporte d’abord et avant tout non à une relation, mais à un groupe de parenté, celui que forme, autour d’un individu donné, l’ensemble de ceux qu’il peut appeler ses ‘parents’, -- soit sa ‘parentèle’.”

\textsuperscript{556}Guerreau-Jalabert, 82.

\textsuperscript{557}Guerreau-Jalabert, 83.

\textsuperscript{558}Guerreau-Jalabert, 83.

\textsuperscript{559}Guerreau-Jalabert, 83: “La parentèle est un référent social qui aide à situer un individu soit de manière générale . . . soit par rapport à un personage connu ou notable”
approximation of *cognatio*, it was always used to refer to blood kinship.\textsuperscript{560} She also notes, in conclusion, that the Latin word *parentes* was usually used in the same way as *parentela*.\textsuperscript{561}

Since *parentela* did not exist yet, Gregory of Tours only uses *parentes*. *Parentes* is used 68 times in the *Historiae*, and coincides with Guerreau-Jalabert’s analysis. So, for example, young Clotild, the daughter of King Charibert, incited a revolt at the nunnery of Poitiers because she defined herself as being ‘*de parentibus . . . regibus*’ (of royal parentage) and did not consider the treatment she received from the abbess to be proper to one with her parentage. She led a group of nuns ‘*ad parentes meos reges*’ (to my royal kinsfolk), whom she refers to as a group who will sets things aright.\textsuperscript{562} Likewise, in his other uses of *parens*, Gregory meant either parentage, or kinsfolk, and it often was meant to place a person in a specific group of biologically-related individuals.

\textit{PROXIMUS}

While *proximus* is an adjective meaning near or close, it was also used classically to refer to the nearest of kin, a close relative, or even the next of kin. Likewise, it could

\textsuperscript{560}Guerreau-Jalabert, 85.

\textsuperscript{561}Guerreau-Jalabert, 85.

\textsuperscript{562}GTH IX.39: “\textit{In monastirio vero Pectavinse, insidiante diabolo in corde Chrodielidis, qui se Chariberthi quondam regis filiam adserebat, orto scandalo, ipsa quoque quasi de parentibus confisa regibus, exacta sacramento sanctimonialibus, ut, iniectis in abbatissam Leuboveram criminibus, eam monastrium deiecta, ipsam substituerunt principalem, egressa est cum quadraginta aut eo amplius puellis et consubrinam suam Basinam filiam Chilperici, dicens, quia: ‘Vado ad parentes meos reges, ut eis contumeliam nostram innotiscere valeam, quia non ut filiae regum, sed ut malarum ancillarum genitae in hoc loco humiliamur.’}”
refer to an intimate friend, with whom one was close in affection or association.\textsuperscript{563} Isidore does not have much to say about it beyond the obvious observation that a *proximus* is one who is closely related by blood.\textsuperscript{564}

In Guerreau-Jalabert’s research, she found that the word *proximitas* was used principally in conjunction with *spiritualis*, referring to spiritual kinship, and only secondarily for close biological kin.\textsuperscript{565} *Proximus*, however, was attested in her sources to describe close biological kinsfolk, as well as close friends and neighbors.\textsuperscript{566}

In Gregory of Tours’ *Historiae*, the word *proximus* and related words, are used 16 times, but only six of those refer to close kinsmen, the others are used in the more general sense of near or close.\textsuperscript{567} In two of those cases, the word is attached to *parens* to emphasize the particular closeness of the kinship.\textsuperscript{568} In two others, it used as a generic extension of the kin group in connection with more specific words like sister or brother.\textsuperscript{569} He thereby implies co-centric levels of kinship, moving from the immediate family, outward to more general near-relatives.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{563}OLD, s.v. ‘proximus’

\textsuperscript{564}Isidore, *Etymologiae* VI.3: “*Proximus, propter proximitatem sanguinis appellatus.*”

\textsuperscript{565}Guerreau-Jalabert, 87.

\textsuperscript{566}Guerreau-Jalabert, 88.

\textsuperscript{567}St-Michel: I.25, II.10, V.0, VII.29, X.12, X.31.

\textsuperscript{568}GTH VII.29: “*Corpus vero Claudii vel reliquorum parentes proximi auerentes...*”; X.12: “...*qua parens eius proxima habebatur.*”

\textsuperscript{569}GTH I.25: “...*matris, sororum ac proximarum...*”; V.0: “*filius in patrem, frater in fratrem, proximus in propinquum.*”
\end{footnotesize}
PROPINQUUS

The adjective *propinquus* described one who was near in kinship, closely related, and when used substantively, referred to a relative or kinsman.\(^{570}\) *Propinquitas* was another related substantive referring to the closeness of family relationships, or more generally, kinship.\(^{571}\) Isidore discussed *propinquitas* in the context of both *cognatio* and *consanguinitas*, emphasizing again the nearness of the relationship, and the potential for that bond to diminish as the nearness dissipated.\(^{572}\)

Guerreau-Jalabert links the word *propinquitas* closely with *consanguinitas*, and notes its common usage in the more general sense of ‘relative’.\(^{573}\) It is usually used in conjunction with other words, such as *carnis, generis*, and *sanguinis*, to specify the biological kinship.\(^{574}\) *Propinqui* are those who are close to the subject, but they do not have to be close kinsmen, since used alone, it can just mean those who are close and familiar to the subject.\(^{575}\)

\(^{570}\) OLD, s.v. ‘*propinquus*’

\(^{571}\) OLD, s.v. ‘*propinquitas*’

\(^{572}\) Isidore, *Etymologiae* VI.2: “Cognati dicti, quia sunt et ipsi propinquitate cognitionis coniuncti.” and VI.29: “Haec consanguinitas dum se paulatim propaginum ordinibus usque ad ultimum gradum subtraxerit, et propinquitas esse desierit, eam rursus lex matrimonii vinculo repetit, et quodam modo revocat fugientem. Ideo autem usque ad sextum generis gradum consanguinitas constituta est, ut sicut sex aetatibus mundi generatio et hominis status finitur, ita propinquitas generis tot gradibus terminaretur.”

\(^{573}\) Guerreau-Jalabert, 85-6.

\(^{574}\) Guerreau-Jalabert, 86.

\(^{575}\) Guerreau-Jalabert, 86.
Like *proximus* above, *propinquus* tended to be used by Gregory in his *Historiae* to mean close or near, more than a kinsman. Of the 37 times Gregory used some form of *propinquus* (and note, again, never the general, theoretical word *propinquitas*), only twelve meant a relative of some kind. It is sometimes used with other kinship-related words, like *parens*, but just as often it is used alone. In Chapter 5 of Book V, Gregory tells the story of a feud in which his own family was involved, and which had resulted in the death of his brother, Peter, who was a deacon in Langres. When the bishop of Langres, Tetricus, died, Sylvester was appointed to the see. Sylvester was, Gregory informed us, a kinsman (*propinquum*) of both Tetricus and himself. When Sylvester died from epilepsy a short while later, Peter was accused by Sylvester’s son of bringing on the fit through sorcery (*maleficium*). Peter cleared himself through oaths at Lyons, where his maternal uncle (*avunculi matris*) Nicetius was bishop. Later, though, Sylvester’s son killed Peter, who was then buried in Dijon near Gregory, his great-grandfather (*proavus*). Divine justice came to the son of Sylvester when he one day killed “an innocent man” while traveling. The man’s relatives (*parentes*), reported Gregory, out of grief for their kinsman (*propinquum*), avenged his death and literally tore the offender to pieces. Thus, said Gregory, the man who slew an innocent kinsman (*propinquum*) did not survive for long. It is unclear whether the *propinquus* referred to here at the end is Gregory’s own

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576 St-Michel: II.24, II.29, II.42 (2X), V.0, V.5(2X), VI.36, X.24, X.28, X.31 (2X)

577 GTH V.5: “Quo abeunte iterum Lingonici Silvestrum *propinquum*, vel nostrum, vel beati Tetrici, episcopum expetunt. . . Quod cum factum fuisset, de eo loco elevatus, et ad Divionensem delatus castrum, secus sanctum Gregorium *proavum nostrum* sepelitur. . . Cuius *parentes* condolentes *propinqu quam* exitum, commota seditione, extractis gladiis, eum in frusta concidunt, membratimque dispersunt. Tale iusto iudicio Dei exitum miser acceptit, ut, qui *propinquum* innocentem interimerat, ipse nocens diutius non maneret.”
O. M. Dalton was so confused by it, that he rendered it as ‘neighbor’ in his translation — just one who lived close by, probably meaning that Peter and Sylvester’s son lived in the same city of Langres.

Isidore, Etymologiae VI.22: “Vocabula a gente haec videntur declinata: genitor, genetrix, agnati, agnatae, cognati, cognatae, progenitores, progenetrices, germani, germanae.”

brother or the man who was avenged by his kinsfolk. The ambiguity may purposely suggest both.\textsuperscript{578} What the story demonstrates is the thin line between, for example, the 
\textit{parentes} and a \textit{propinquus}, but it is consistent with the definitions offered above. The \textit{parentes} were the kin group who were activated into seeking vengeance for their murdered \textit{propinquus}, the individual to whom they were all related. Likewise, Sylvester was the individual to whom both Tetricus and Gregory were related, and although unstated, Gregory and Tetricus belonged to that group which might be identified as the \textit{parentes} of Sylvester.

\textbf{GENS (GENUS, GENITOR)}

In classical usage, \textit{gens} is a word which was used in a wide variety of instances. It could refer to a race or people, its main usage, but also to a country (in the geographical sense), to a Roman clan sharing a \textit{nomen} and a common ancestor, or finally, to a descent or birth.\textsuperscript{579} The perceived tribal origins of society are thus inherent in the use of this word, and its connection to \textit{cognatio}, discussed above, is also clear. According to Isidore \textit{gens} is related to many of the kinship vocabulary words under discussion here.\textsuperscript{580} Isidore used

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{578} O. M. Dalton was so confused by it, that he rendered it as ‘neighbor’ in his translation — just one who lived close by, probably meaning that Peter and Sylvester’s son lived in the same city of Langres.
\item \textsuperscript{579} OLD, s.v. ‘gens’
\item \textsuperscript{580} Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} VI.22: “Vocabula a gente haec videntur declinata: genitor, genetrix, agnati, agnatae, cognati, cognatae, progenitores, progenetrices, germani, germanae.”
\end{itemize}
the word once in connection with his discussion of the word *filius*. Like his treatment of brothers, discussed above, here too he suggests that certain kinship words imply an expected behavior. First, sons are the literal descendants of a father, and he sees the Jews as the sons of Abraham. I have already discussed above the concept of *gens* as a tribe in Isidore, in connection with *cognatio*. But, secondly, one can also be a son of Abraham (ie. join that *gens*) by imitating the faith of the patriarch. Here, he connects actions and behaviors to the meaning of the word, when he cites Christ’s teachings in the New Testament that some Jews can also be called the sons of the devil. Thus, one can be adopted into a *gens* as a *filius*, and similarly, the student of a teacher can be called a *filius*. All this implies the extension of a very basic kinship word into several social contexts, which are not unrelated to the notion of a *gens*. Moving back to a more biological connection, it is from the *gens*, said Isidore, that one who may act for another in a kinship position should be drawn. I have already discussed above the concept of *gens* as a tribe in Isidore, in connection with *cognatio*.

*Genus* is a word which appeared frequently in Isidore’s discussion of kinship. It is depicted as the main kinship group, descended from a *pater*. It is within this group

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581 Isidore, *Etymologiae* VI.22: “*Quattuor etiam modis filii appel·lantur: natura, imitatione, adoptione, doctrina. Natura, veluti quem dicuntur filii Abrahæ Iudaei. Imitatione, ut ipsius Abrahæ fidel imitantes ex gentibus, dicente Evangelio (Luc. 3, 8): *Potens est Deus de lapidibus istis suscitare filios Abrahæ*; veluti sicut eosdem Iudaeos Dominus filios esse dicit diaboli; a quo non nati, sed quem fuerant imitati.*”

582 Isidore, *Etymologiae* VI.22: “*Agnati dicti eo, quod accedant pro natis, dum desunt filii. Qui ideo prius in gente agnoscantur, quia veniunt per virilis sexus personas, veluti frater eodem patre natus, vel fratris filius neposve ex eo; item patruus.*”

583 Isidore, *Etymologiae* V.3: “*Pater est, a quo initium nascitur generis.*”; VI.23: “*Auctor mei generis mihi pater est, ego illi filius aut filia.*”
that consanguinity is measured.\textsuperscript{584} One’s lineage is also an important consideration in the choice of a bride.\textsuperscript{585} He only briefly mentioned \textit{genitores}, deriving it etymologically from both \textit{gigno} (to beget) and \textit{gens}.\textsuperscript{586}

Anita Guerreau-Jalabert decided not to deal words such as \textit{gens}, because of certain difficulties attached to them. She does assign \textit{gens} to a group of words used to discuss kinship understood as groups.\textsuperscript{587} However, she argues that medieval society did not use such words in a way that is directly compatible with such notions in other societies studied by anthropologists, and she excuses herself from exploring the meaning and usages of words like \textit{gens} because it would take very close observation in the sources to determine how the group defined by a word like \textit{gens} relates to the general kinship groups already discussed.\textsuperscript{588}

For Gregory of Tours, however, \textit{gens}, and its related words (\textit{genus}, \textit{genitor}) may have been his most popular choice to describe kinship groups. He did seem to follow Isidore’s general pattern of usage. \textit{Gens} is used to describe whole peoples, who are considered to be tribes, purportedly descended from a single ancestor. Thus, the Franks,

\textsuperscript{584}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} VI.29: “\textit{Ideo autem usque ad sextum generis gradum consanguinitas constituta est, ut sicut sex aetatis mundi generatio et hominis status finitur, ita propinquitas generis tot gradibus terminaretur.”

\textsuperscript{585}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} VII.28: “\textit{In eligendo marito quattuor spectari solent: virtus, genus, pulchritudo, sapientia.”} See below for more on this.

\textsuperscript{586}Isidore, \textit{Etymologiae} V.4: “\textit{Genitores autem a gignendo . . .}” VI.22: “\textit{Vocabula a gente haec videntur declinata: genitor, genetrix, agnati, agnatae, cognati, cognatae, progenitores, progenetrices, germani, germanae.”

\textsuperscript{587}Guerreau-Jalabert, 91: “à la parenté entendue comme groupe.”

\textsuperscript{588}Guerreau-Jalabert, 91-2.
Lombards, and Alamans are each described as a *gens*.\(^{589}\) It is *genus*, however, which is usually used to describe lineage or family, and Gregory displayed an interest in the family connections or descent of various individuals. Many are described as being of royal, noble, or senatorial birth or lineage (*genus*).\(^ {590}\) It is usually preceded by an adjective to give greater precision to his meaning. This is the word he uses with *humanum* to indicate the human race, whom Gregory would consider to be one large family, all descended from Adam.\(^ {591}\) Of less frequent usage, is *genitor*. Gregory used this, and the feminine, *genitrix*, to refer to a birth father (or mother), since it is etymologically related to *genitum* (past participle of *gigno* — ‘born’).\(^ {592}\) He attached some specific principles of behavior to the *genitor*, and made negative comments about people who acted contrary to those expectations, such as Eunius Mummolus, who was said to have worked against his father (*genitor*), to usurp his position, rather than supporting him.\(^ {593}\)

\(^{589}\) A few examples should suffice: St-Michel: VI.06: *gens* - people or race (Lombards); I.32: *gentem* - people of the Alamanni; II.09: *gentes* - peoples (Germanic); II.12: *gentem* - people (Franks); II.32: *gentes* - enemy people (Franks); II.32: *gentes* - conquered peoples (by the Franks); II.35: *gentes* - conquered peoples (by the Franks).

\(^{590}\) St-Michel: II.28: *genere* - lineage of Athanaric; II.28: *genere* - royal lineage; II.29: *genere* - race of the gods; III.31: *genere* - royal lineage; IV.21: *genere* - free birth; V.07: *genere* - of a certain family by birth; V.12: *genere* - a Thuringian by birth; V.45: *genere* - of senatorial rank by birth; VI.11: *genere* - senatorial rank; VI.36: *genere* - woman of free birth; VII.08: *genere* - (royal, familial) lineage; VIII.15: *genere* - Lombard by birth; X.2: *genere* - Frank by birth; X.26: *genere* - Syrian by birth; X.26: *genere* - from his own kin (Syrian); X.31: *genere* - senatorial rank; X.31: *genere* - senatorial rank (of his own family); X.31: *genere* - senatorial rank (of his own family); X.31: *genere* - senatorial rank; II.42: *genus* - family, lineage humiliated; III.31: *genus* - noble lineage; IV.46: *genus* - lineage; V.48: *genus* - family or lineage of Leudast.


\(^{592}\) St-Michel: IV.42, VI.43; VII.1, 14, 17; IX.8, 15, 20, 33, 34, 35, 42; X.1, 5, 8, 15, 29.

\(^{593}\) GTH IV.42: “... *supplantavitque genitor em, quem sublevare debuerat.*”

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CONCLUSION

This brief survey of Latin kinship terminology should establish, for clarity’s sake, the general meaning and usage of most of the standard Latin vocabulary words related to kinship. The range and variety of so many kinship words shows how important kinship was in early medieval society, but the wide variety of meaning and uses also implies certain expectations about behavior in these words. By defining a kin group, whether with the word *cognatio*, *gens*, or *parentela*, there is an implied group which should have certain attitudes and responsibilities — norms of behavior — such as the vengeance group discussed above. Gregory’s use of kinship words specifically to describe a biological relationship, even if he attached expected behaviors to that relationship, is also a reminder that sometimes there is not a hidden meaning behind the terminology — sometimes a *pater* is just a biological father — but, of course, even the most typical *pater* has certain norms attached to his title, even if they go unmentioned or even hinted at.
APPENDIX B

SOME NOTES ON ALLIANCE-MAKING AND ITS VOCABULARY

AS IT APPEARS IN GREGORY OF TOURS’ HISTORIAE

The early medieval vocabulary used to describe what we usually translate as agreements, alliances, or treaties is quite complex, and not always consistent. Margret Wielers wrote a dissertation in 1959 wherein she examined the legal meanings and implications of some of these alliance-making terms: *pax*, *foedus*, *amicitia*, and *fraternitas*. Her study is of limited value, however, because she often applied too strict a legal definition to many of the words and cases she examined, and made too many parallels between early medieval usage and modern usage. While these terms, and others used to describe alliance-making, did have specific meanings, they were also interchangeable to some extent, and many early medieval authors, like Gregory of Tours, did not always apply a consistent usage of each word.

Wielers did make a brief study of the concept of the marriage alliance in the early Middle Ages. She observed that the marriage alliance was not legally or effectively binding on the parties, which meant that the parties had to conclude a further treaty

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(foedus) if they sought such a binding effect.\textsuperscript{595} Again, this may be too restrictively legal in its approach, but the clear separation of alliance-making and marriage-making is significant and well supported by the sources. But did the marriage still have the quality of a treaty, as she went on to argue? There is very little evidence to support such a claim, and is so vague as to be rather meaningless. The Merovingians regularly made political and diplomatic alliances without reference to kinship or marriage, and marriages without reference to treaties and alliances. They were separate acts, which had their own vocabulary. Our sources generally describe alliance-making with words such as foedus, pactio, or pax, which are usually not applied to marriage-making, which are referred to simply as marriages — coniugium, matrimonium, nuptiae. If alliance-making vocabulary is found in connection with marriage-making, it is usually because our source is presenting an explanation for the marriage based upon expected behavior attached to marriage, describing it as an alliance, which may or may not be completely accurate.

More importantly, the wide variety of alliance-making which is indicated by the various Latin words used to describe alliances, treaties and other agreements, and the variety of meaning attached to those individual words, shows how important it is to be specific when discussing alliances. It is not enough say that two parties made an alliance, nor even to use the specific Latin word: foedus, pax, pactio or pactum, coniunctio, and auxilium, solatium, and adiuturium. In sources like Gregory of Tours’ Historiae, the

\textsuperscript{595}Wielers, 63: “Wir müssen daher annehmen, daß die durch eheliche Bindung geschaffene Verwandtschaft allein in den zwischenstaatlichen Beziehungen weder rechtlich noch faktisch große Wirksamkeit hatte. Trotz des Ehevertrags erscheint es den Zeitgenossen zweckmäßig, daß sich beide Herrscher durch weitere Verträge binden, durch das foedus (=Freidensbund), die pax perpetua oder die amicitia.”

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meaning and usage of these terms overlap to some extent, and there are also instances where none of these terms for alliance-making are used, but the actions of the participants are described in ways that make it clear that some kind of agreement had been made. A brief discussion of these words will help to illustrate the varieties of alliance-making, and show how unconnected to kinship and marriage they are.

**FOEDUS**

The word *foedus* is the standard classical word for an agreement, alliance or treaty, and was etymologically related to *fides* — faith or trust. As both the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* and Gregory’s usage demonstrate, *foedus* had a wide range of meaning. In the classical period, the term *foedus* referred primarily to a “formal agreement between states or peoples”, but it could also mean a league or treaty (of both peace and alliance), or even be applied to a truce. It was even sometimes applied to the marriage bond and other sexual unions. Of course, the Franks and other Germanic peoples of Late Antiquity were familiar with the *foedus*, since they had become *foederati* specifically through such treaties. A recent encyclopedia of Late Antiquity also reminds us that most of these treaties in Roman history were not between equals, but rather “formulas for submission.” Isidore of Seville explicitly connected *foedus* with the peace-making process at the end of a war: “A *foedus* is said to be a peace [*pax*] which is made between

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combatants, named either from faith, or from the *fetiales*, that is priests."\(^{598}\)

Unfortunately, his discussion of alliance making is not detailed, so it is difficult to know whether he saw other uses for *foedus* or whether he would have used different words in other instances. In Gregory’s *Historiae* the word *foedus* appeared 15 times, but it is used in a wide range of examples.\(^{599}\) Sometimes *foedus* is made to arrange a mutual attack.\(^{600}\) It could also be used to describe a treaty with the purpose of making peace or providing mutual defense.\(^{601}\) Thus, *foedus* was used by Gregory to describe agreements for mutual action, mutual protection, and as part of the peace-making process after a conflict. This association with ending conflicts and making peace reveals its connection to another important alliance-making word: *pax*.

**Pax**

*Pax*, in the classical period, was primarily used in the sense of “a pact (to end or avert hostilities), settlement, peace”, which would seem to be closely related to some uses of *foedus*.\(^{602}\) Isidore made a close connection between *pax* and *foedus*: “However, four things are done in war: fighting, fleeing, victory, and peace. The word for *pax* seems to be taken from *pacto*. For after a *pax* is concluded, the very next thing is that a *foedus* is

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\(^{598}\)Isidore, *Etymologiae* XVIII.11: “*Foedus est pax quae fit inter dimicantes, vel a fide, vel a fetialibus, id est sacerdotibus, dictum.*”

\(^{599}\)St-Michel: II.9, II.19, III.15, IV.0, IV.16, IV.29, IV.40, IV.49 (2X), V.25, VI.11, VII.10, IX.1 (2X), IX.32.

\(^{600}\)St-Michel: II.19, IV.16.

\(^{601}\)St-Michel: III.15, IV.29, IV.40, IV.49, IX.1.

\(^{602}\)Oxford Latin Dictionary, s.v. ‘*pax*’.
entered into.” He saw pax as the final stage of the process of war, following which, a foedus was created. He even associated pax/pacis with pactio etymologically, suggesting that the word pax implied some kind of pact or agreement. Pax, however, is a far more popular word with Gregory than foedus, at least in terms of usage. This is explained in part because it can also be used in the more general sense of peace and security (simply the absence of war or conflict, without specific reference to a peace treaty or the conclusion of peace after conflict). Still, in Gregory’s usage, pax did generally relate to the end of a conflict, but it also had a close connection to foedus. Once peace was established, then agreements could be made, including military and political alliances against defined foes. Without it, there could be no cooperation. With it, further cooperation was possible. In this way it was related to the foedus, as well as the pactio or pactum.

**Pactio/Pactum**

Pactio and pactum are both derived from the verb pacisco, which was also commonly used in a deponent form: paciscor. The verb means to negotiate an agreement, and was sometimes even used classically to describe marriage agreements.

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604 GTH III.7, III.28, IV.14, IV.40, IV.42, IV.49, V.17, V.26, VI.1, VI.3, VI.31, VI.41, VI.42, VII.2, VIII.35, VIII.38, IX.1, IX.9, IX.11, IX.12, IX.14, IX.29, X.3, X.9.

605 GTH III.13, III.22, IV.16, V.0, VII.33, IX.22, X.4.

The definitions of the nouns carry these verbal meanings, but are also closely related to both *foedus* and *pax*. I have already related how Isidore connected *pax* with *pactum*. A *pactio* or *pactum* (henceforth, *pactio* will be used to refer to both versions of the word) was an agreement or compact, with the sometimes specific reference to a negotiated settlement between belligerents. Unlike *pax* and *foedus*, which were used ambiguously in Gregory’s *Historiae*, Gregory appears to have a more specific idea about what a *pactio* was. All nineteen uses of the word are related to the division of the Frankish kingdom amongst the Merovingian kings. They seem to refer to a written agreement about the terms of the division. By far, the commonest use of the word is in reference to the Treaty (*pactio*) of Andelot (587), which encompassed twelve of his nineteen uses of the word. The *pactio* was, therefore, a negotiated, written agreement between parties in competition, conflict or disagreement with one another, and in Gregory of Tours, specifically refers to the compact governing the division of the kingdom. Gregory’s specific use of the term helps to distinguish it from broader terms such as *pax* or *foedus*.

**Other Words**

Gregory did not always use the specific Latin words, *pax* and *foedus*, that we associate with the English word ‘alliance’. Many of the military and diplomatic alliances of the period are indicated to us only by certain signal words, such as *auxilium*, *solatium*, *adiutorium*, and *coniunctio*. The difference between alliances signaled by these words, and those described by the word *foedus* or *pax*, is not always easy to distinguish, and

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607St-Michel, GTH IX.11, 20 (10 X); X.28.
suggest that Gregory was a little loose in his use of alliance-making vocabulary. Among the most common signal words which indicate some kind of agreement, particularly of a military nature, are the various words meaning help or support: *auxilium*, *solatium*, and *adiutorium*. Gregory of Tours often used *auxilium* in connection with deity — God’s help. Even God’s help sometimes came specifically in the form of military aid, though. Clovis called upon God for help in his battle against the Alamans, for example. In a general sense, it is also used to designate support for a particular enterprise, especially escaping, or in the granting of protection, sometimes from a saint. In conjunction with support for a particular enterprise are the many specific references to military aid. *Solatium* was used in a similar way. By far, the most common use for *solatium* in Gregory’s *Historiae* is to specifically refer to military aid. Even when it was used more generically, it could also be understood to refer to military support. *Adiuturium* was less common, but was used in the same way as *solatium* and *auxilium*. Thus, Gregory had specific words he used to describe military aid which he

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608 St-Michel, GTH I.0, II.5, IV.18, V.49, VII.38, IX.20.
609 St-Michel, GTH II.7, II.30, VII.31.
610 St-Michel, GTH III.18, X.5, X.8, X.15, X.27.
611 St-Michel, GTH VII.15, VII.20, VIII.18, X.15.
612 St.-Michel, GTH II.32, IX.29, X.3.
613 St-Michel, GTH II.32, II.41, II.42, III.6, III.7, III.11, III.32, IV.10, IV.42, V.0, V.14, V.38, VI.42, VI.43, VII.29, VII.34, IX.20, X.3, X.9.
614 St-Michel, GTH VI.11, VII.31, VII.38, IX.16, IX.38, X.8.
615 St-Michel, GTH II.32, 37; III.0, 7.
used fairly consistently, but sometimes interchangeably. When he described joint efforts, where one force came in support of another, he often wrote of them simply joining together — *coniunctio* — and this too serves as a good signal word for an alliance.
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