Manchester Medieval Sources series

LATE MEROVINGIAN FRANCE

HISTORY AND HAGIOGRAPHY 640–720

Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding

LATE MEROVINGIAN FRANCE

Manchester Medieval Sources series

series adviser Janet L. Nelson

This series aims to meet a growing need amongst students and teachers of medieval history for translations of key sources that are directly usable in students' own work. The series will provide texts central to medieval studies courses and will focus upon the diverse cultural, social as well as political conditions that affected the functioning of all levels of medieval society. The basic premise of the new series is that translations must be accompanied by sufficient introductory and explanatory material and each volume will therefore include a comprehensive guide to the sources' interpretation, including discussion of critical linguistic problems and an assessment of the most recent research on the topics being covered.

already published in the series

Janet L. Nelson *The Annals of St-Bertin: ninth-century histories, volume I*

Timothy Reuter *The Annals of Fulda: ninth-century histories, volume II*

Chris Given-Wilson *Chronicles of the Revolution, 1397–1400: the reign of Richard II*

R. N. Swanson *Catholic England: faith, religion and observance before the Reformation*

Rosemary Horrox The Black Death

John Edwards *The Jews in Western Europe*

Jennifer Ward *Women of the English nobility and gentry, 1066–1500*

P. J. Goldberg *Women in England, c. 1275–1525*

LATE MEROVINGIAN FRANCE

HISTORY AND HAGIOGRAPHY

640–720

by Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding

Manchester University Press
Manchester

Published by Manchester University Press
Altrincham Street, Manchester M1 7JA
www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloging in publication data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 0 7190 4790 0 *hardback*
ISBN 0 7190 791 9 *paperback*

First published by Manchester University Press 1996

Typeset in Monotype Bell
by Koinonia Ltd, Manchester

For our families: Nickie, George, Joanna, Jim, Dorothy and Louise

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Hagiography is a difficult genre for historians, but it is also the genre in most plentiful supply for the notoriously under-documented later Merovingian period. Both the genre and the period have recently been undergoing a revival of scholarly interest and Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding, connoisseurs of both, have been at the forefront of the revival. In *History and Hagiography* their skilled readings of the hagiographical evidence yield a plausible reconstruction of what has hitherto often been seen as a dauntingly repellant age of economic decline and political chaos. Later Merovingian Francia emerges here as a world with its own structures, values and rhythms of change – distinctively interesting, not just as a prelude to the Carolingians, but on its own terms. Fouracre and Gerberding, far from skirting the methodological problems of their material, tackle them with zest, and invite readers to share the effort and the rewards. Language and structure are explored with rare finesse. Since much of the material translated here is relatively little known and has seldom been used in teaching, this book will be indispensable to scholars as well as students, offering new approaches to an exceptionally interesting period.

Janet L. Nelson

PREFACE

Two teachers of medieval history, one on each side of the Atlantic, have planned and written this book in the hope that it will make their chosen field of study, Merovingian history, accessible to a wider audience. The aim has been to present the essential sources for the period in a way which will allow us to demonstrate how its history can be constructed. To this end we have translated eight narrative texts which cover the eighty-year period 640–720, a time in which Merovingian Francia is often said to have been in political and economic decline. We hope to show that there is rather more to the period than that. Seven of our sources are contemporary, but one, the Annales Mettenses Priores, was written some eighty-five years after the period. We have included it as a kind of postscript which shows how Merovingian history would be rewritten by later generations, starting with the Carolingian denigration of the reputation of their royal predecessors.

Our central concern has been with a kind of political history. Much of what we say is about the texts themselves and about the identity of the people who figure in them. We spend much effort simply trying to ascertain all that can be known about a given subject, not an easy task in most cases. Only then do we fit the pieces into a jigsaw of political history, and this we do not because we think that political history is generally the most important or the only way of looking at the past, but because it best serves the purpose of drawing the behaviour and actions of our particular subjects into a coherent pattern. This pattern we have always attempted to shape in accordance with the conceptions of contemporaries rather than with those of historians. And we can do so because our Merovingian writers were themselves very much concerned with the political behaviour and the political relationships of the leading members of their society. By politics we certainly do not mean simply a narrative of the deeds of queens, kings, warriors, monks and bishops, although we shall have many delicious things to say about all of these, but rather an investigation into the way in which this early medieval society organised itself for political ends.

We have tried to keep our translations literal and our discussions explicit in order to show how our material can be used by the historian. Since our sources are frequently difficult to interpret, the Merovingian period has often been subject to some fairly heavy-handed historical analysis, much of which seeks to confirm preconceived ideas about 'Dark Age' disorder. To counter this we have taken pains to comment on each of our sources at length and in a way which will allow the reader to engage with matters such as their originality and reliability, as well as to understand the various interpretations which may be placed upon them. The introduction, in fact, consists of substantial discussions, of the historical background, of the Latin of the texts, and of methodology, hagiography and historiography. These are intended to explain the issues which will

be encountered later when each source is discussed. For it is our experience as teachers that when scholars assume too high a level of prior knowledge in this area they tend to choke off the interest of the uninitiated. Though in planning our book like this we had the student reader in mind, when actually working on our translations and interpretations we found time and again that we had to advance our own views on matters either not previously considered in the secondary literature or in need of re-examination in the light of recent research. In consequence the book contains much material which will be of interest to scholars as well as to students. We hope that we have succeeded in writing in a way which will stimulate both audiences.

The work has been our intermittent occupation for the last seven years. We are both immensely grateful to colleagues and friends who have helped and encouraged us. In particular we should like to thank Marie Adams and Rupert Segar, whose kindness made our work together possible. The University of Alabama in Huntsville, Research Institute and Humanities Center, provided travel expenses over the years. Rosamond McKitterick, Janet Nelson and Ian Wood kindly commented on drafts of various chapters and were typically generous with their advice. Janet Nelson also made essential improvements in the translation of the *Passio Praejecti*. David Ganz gave invaluable help with questions of manuscripts. David d'Avray, Peter Christian, Cyril Edwards, Andrew Louth and Anthony Pryer all cast light on matters liturgical, dramatical, theological and musical, which allowed us to cloak our ignorance. Our sincere thanks are also due to Gerard Velay of the University Library in Montpellier for kindly sending us a photocopy of ms. Montpellier, H 55, and to William. M. Daly for making available John Cox's translations of the *Vita Balthildis* and the *Vita S. Geretrudis*.

As with all long-term projects, this one has produced many joys and frustrations for us both. At the end of it we are still good friends and sign this preface in the hope that our work will make other good friends for the study of Europe in the early Middle Ages.

Richard Gerberding,
Huntsville, Alabama

Paul Fouracre, London

ABBREVIATIONS

AASS—Acta Sanctorum

ASSOB—Acta Sanctorum ordinis S. Benedicti

Archiv—Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde

BEDC—Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes

ChLA—Chartae Latinae Antiquiores

CLA—Codices Latini Antiquiores

DA—Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters

MGH, Dipl.—Monumental Germaniae Historica, Diplomata Imperii

MGH, Epistolae—Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae

MGH, Leges—Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Leges

MGH, SS—Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores

MGH, SSRG—Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum

MGH, SSRM—Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum

MGH SSRL—Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Langobardicum et Italicarum

MIÖG—Mitteilungen de Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung

NA—Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde

PL—Patrologica Latina

Settimane di Studio—Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo (Spoleto)

Introduction

The seventh century in its historical context

Peter Brown has described the Roman Empire as an exquisite border of lace sewn to the sackcloth of the hinterland around the shores of the Mediterranean.[1] The Roman Empire was an urban phenomenon. Where the Romans conquered, they either took over existing cities or built new ones, and it was in the cities that their culture flourished. The hinterlands produced; the cities consumed. The hinterlands worked; the cities ruled. The cities taxed; the hinterlands paid. The hinterlands remained largely as they were; the cities became Roman. And although land was the economic base of Roman life, the political use of land was filtered through the medium of the cities. The cities through the use of money, among other things, ruled through permanent bureaucracies, paid troops and aristocratic magistrates who had vast rural estates but who lived in the cities and were the guiding force of the urban culture.

Medieval culture, on the other hand, is not urban but rural. Medieval Europe, to be sure, had its urban centres, but they were generally small by Roman standards. By the seventh century they no longer housed Europe's rulers and their culture was not foreign to the hinterlands round about them. For the most part, they did not contain the dominant aristocracy, a permanent bureaucracy or an organised taxing structure, nor did they sponsor paid armies. In other words, they were no longer the medium between the wealth the land produced and the use of that wealth for political ends. Europe's political structure had come to sit upon the land directly and nothing was more fundamental to its political history. It is in the seventh century, the period of our study, that we can first see many important facets of the new politics.

So far we have used the rather abstract phrase 'political ends'. Let us be more specific; our sources certainly were. Seventh-century chroniclers and hagiographers had no great love of the abstract; for them the

1 P. Brown, *The World of late Antiquity* (New York, 1980), p. 12.

purpose of political power was contained in one concrete and comprehensible word: peace. Peace could be broken in two ways: from without, i.e. by the invasion of foreigners, or from within, i.e. by internal disputes of all sorts, ranging from local vendettas to larger-scale civil wars. And here we have the two basic political responsibilities of their kings: to keep foreign peoples out, usually by conquering them, and to settle internal disputes, usually through a judicial system, but if need be also with armies. Thus the fundamental political problem the seventh century faced was: how would society now keep the peace, given that the urban or Roman system had disappeared or was dying? Our sources provide the answer, or, better, answers, in that they let us see, however dimly, the new political, religious, economic and judicial systems which developed to this end. Two things are significant here. One, these systems developed using resources coming directly from agriculture to finance them; there was no other significant source. Two, they seem to have been rather effective and well adapted to their rural European environment, for they lasted a very, very long time.[2]

By the year 500 every part of what had been the Roman Empire in the West was now governed by barbarian kings. In the sixth century, in what has become modern France, Luxembourg and parts of modern Belgium and Germany, that is, the area which the Franks ruled, three kingdoms developed: Neustria, centred on the Seine–Oise valley around Paris, Burgundy, along the Rhône, and Austrasia, with its heart in the eastern Champagne and the Meuse and Moselle lands. These three carved up the land south of the Loire into various appanages and thus came to rule a vast area of former Roman territory. We shall refer to them by the term 'Francia' because their rulers were Frankish. This is the first point about the new politics: political life now revolved around the courts of the Frankish kings.

Although the political system which developed in the Frankish lands revolved around the royal courts, political power was in the hands of a rural hereditary class, which modern analysts sometimes refer to as a nobility, sometimes as an aristocracy. The mechanism it used to organise and to exercise political power on a scale larger than the local one was the royal court, headed by a king, who was not, and obviously could not be, one of their number. Much fine scholarship has carefully

2 See below, pp. 52–8, for further comment on the nature of Merovingian political culture. For a survey of that culture across early medieval Europe see P. Fouracre, 'Cultural Conformity and Social Conservativism in Early Medieval Europe', *History Workshop Journal*, 33 (1992), 159.

explained the nature of early medieval kingship,[3] but we can content ourselves with a few important observations. First and foremost, the king was different from the nobility; there was an unbridgeable gap between them. We find what can appear at first to be a remarkable commitment by the Franks to exclusive rule by their hereditary Merovingian kings. But this state of affairs obviously served to dissuade non-royal aspirants from breaking the peace in attempts to gain the throne. Modern descriptions of early medieval kings emphasise their hereditary legitimacy. Legitimacy, however, is a misleading word. The Frankish sources do not use it to describe their kings, probably because the authors, writing in Latin, were very aware of its base in the word for 'law' (*lex*, *legis*). The Merovingians' status was based not at all in anything as changeable or open to interpretation as law, but in their bodies; they were born royal. Rather than talk about a king's legitimacy, the sources, following their preference for the concrete rather than the abstract, will list his father and perhaps his grandfather. Aristocracy and nobility, likewise, are words not found in our sources. We would not expect to find 'aristocracy', since it is Greek, and to express the idea of nobility the sources use the adjective *nobile* (famous or excellent) modifying the word *genus* (high birth). Modern discussions juxtaposing a nobility which enjoyed its privileged position because of its lineage (*Geburtsadel*) against one which did so because of the functions or service it performed (*Dienstadel*) offer refinements not found in our sources. In the contemporary view, the aristocracy and the king both enjoyed their position by the right of birth.

By the seventh century the Franks had long since been Catholic Christians. In a system such as the Roman, all the urban characteristics mentoned above, and especially the cities' concentration of movable wealth, acted as mediating and stabilising mechanisms between the land which produced wealth and the rulers who used it. Without a flourishing urban culture, however, early medieval society had need of other institutions to perform the mediating functions, and to a large extent it was the Church which did so. The Church began to collect land very early on, in fact, three-quarters of the land the Church was ever to own was already in its hands by the seventh

3 Cf. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971); P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (eds), *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1971); and T. Mayer (ed.), *Das Königtum. Seine geistigen und rechtlichen Grundlagen. Vorträge und Forschungen*, 3, (Lindau and Konstanz, 1956).

century.[4] If for no other reason, then certainly because of its landed wealth, the seventh-century Frankish Church had become a very important part of the political system.

The seventh century has left us many written 'deeds', or charters, recording land transactions. Most of these charters concern ecclesiastical land in some way, because it was the Church which kept or copied them throughout the centuries. Nonetheless, the facts that written deeds survive at all from a period when every other form of written culture in Francia was in steep decline, that we can clearly see the Church involved in important land transactions, and that many of the charters are royal instruments, all underscore how important the documents originally were, and this in turn emphasises the important new political role of land and the Church's involvement in it.[5]

For centuries the Christian bishops had been assuming more and more of what had been secular governmental functions in the cities in all parts of the Empire. In Gaul in the fifth and sixth centuries, most bishops had been members of the Gallo-Roman senatorial aristocracy, often proud and erudite men, very used to acting as local rulers and judges.[6] A bishop's assumption of the judicial authority especially put him in competition with the count, the Frankish king's local representative.[7] We have from one of them, the sixth-century bishop and historian Gregory of Tours, gruesome details of the type of bitter struggle that could arise between bishop and count.[8] By our period, the later seventh century, most of Francia's bishops had become Frankish, that is, they were strongly connected by family or factions with the Frankish royal court. This was true even in the south, where the local Gaulish senatorial aristocracy had long controlled the

4 E. Lesne, Histoire de la propriété ecclésiastique en France, vol. 1, (Lille, 1910), pp. 143–94 and 453–4.

5 See the discussion of Merovingian charters below, pp. 28–30.

6 K. Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien* (Tübingen, 1948, reprint Darmstadt, 1970), pp. 72–4; D. Claude, 'Die Bestellung der Bischöfe im merowingischen Reiche', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, 80, *Kanonistische Abteilung*, 49 (1963), 18; and P. Riché, 'Centres of Culture in Frankish Gaul between the 6th and the 9th Centuries', in his *Instruction et vie religieuse dans le Haut Moyen-âge*, (London, 1981), p. 227.

7 M. Heinzelmann, *Bishofsherrschaft in Gallien. Zur Kontinuität römischer Führungsschichten vom 4. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert. Soziale, prosopographische und bildungsgeschichtliche Aspekte*, Beihefte der *Francia*, 5 (Zurich, 1976), p. 182.

8 Gregory, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, V, 48–9, eds. B. Krusch and W. Levison, *MGH, SSRM*, I ed. alt. (Hanover, 1951), pp. 257–63 *et passim.*

episcopate.[9] By this time, too, the selection of a bishop depended on royal appointment.[10] In other words, in addition to their spiritual functions, bishops had begun to play an important part in the larger political system based on the royal court. It is important to note, however, that a bishop's strong connection with the court does not necessarily mean that the 'central government' was using him to exert its influence over his diocese. It could work the other way as well, that is, the local diocese could benefit if its bishop had connections and influence at court.[11] As in most parts of the political system, so too with the bishops, the lines formed were reciprocal, and the personal element was more important than the institutional one.

An institution even more responsive to the changing political requirements than the dioscesan Church was the monastic one. Sixth-century Gaulish monasteries were largely urban and not dedicated to missionary effort. The foundations of the mid to late seventh century, however, tended to be outside the cities, and those influenced by a startling new religious enthusiasm from the British Isles gave themselves wholeheartedly to missionary work, preaching and converting in the world. The monasteries too became land-rich, and, since their number was not fixed by extant dioscesan boundaries, they could and did spring up anywhere. As we shall see, this rapid growth of institutions had marked effects upon the development of hagiography in our period. Although it will not be until the eighth century that the abbots in the councils of the king carry more political weight than the bishops, the number of monasteries and their growing wealth in our period bear testimony to their increasing importance. Of some 550 monasteries we know to have existed in Gaul by the year 700, far more than half, about 320, had been founded within the preceding 100 years,[12] placing the

9 K.-F.Werner, 'Bedeutende Adelsfamilien im Reich Karls des Grossen. Ein personengeschichtlicher Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Königtum und Adel im frühen Mittelalter', in W. Braunfels (ed.), *Karl der Grosse*, vol. I (Dusseldorf, 1965), pp. 83–142; trans. T. Reuter: 'Important families in the Kingdom of Charlemagne', in T. Reuter (ed. and trans.), *The Medieval Nobility* (Amsterdam, 1978), pp.137–202. The career of Aunemund, bishop of Lyons, provides a clear illustration of the links between the southern bishops and the royal court. See below, pp. 177–9.

10 Claude, 'Die Bestellung', 19–26.

11 Claude, 'Die Bestellung', 3, and see G. Scheibelreiter, *Der Bischof in merowingischer Zeit*, *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 27 (Vienna, 1983) for a full discussion of the relationship between bishops and the royal courts in the seventh century.

12 H. Atsma, 'Les monastères urbains du nord de la Gaule', *Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France*, 62 (1976), 168.

bulk of another important development squarely in the seventh century.

In this political (peace-keeping) system, based on a rural hereditary nobility supported directly by landed wealth, movable wealth in the form of money, or what the sources call 'treasure', still had a political role to play. There certainly was gold and silver about; the sources love to mention them. Up to the later seventh century, Francia had many royal and episcopal mints striking gold coins. Some thirteen centuries later we are still finding their coins in buried treasure hoards. As might be expected, it is at the top of the political structure that we can see the political uses of gold: tribute payments, gifts between kings, royal dowries and, presumably, rewards for military commanders. These all are obviously important, but exceptional, events in Frankish political life. Silver coins, on the other hand, could be used for smaller, more basic and more normal transactions of a local and agricultural nature, as well as for rewarding the mass of soldiers.[13] It was in our period that gold coins stopped being produced all together and the currency became a monometalic silver one.[14] The shift was due in part to the shortage of gold in the Western economy, but it also indicates the increasingly rural nature of society. The use of silver eased commercial activity in the countryside, as it was more suited to transactions on a smaller scale. Cattle and slaves should also be included in the category of movable wealth. The desire to acquire movables remained a very important factor in political behaviour throughout our period, although it was land which provided the resources needed to hang on to power in the long term.[15]

The splendid cultural life so evident at the courts of Charlemagne (768–814) and his son, Louis the Pious (814–43), forms the central part of the cultural awakening historians like to call the Carolingian Renaissance. The phrase perhaps unduly centres attention on the Carolingians, for the revival was part of a general European movement whose boundaries both geographically and temporally extended beyond the Carolingians' direct sphere of influence. Its immediate causes

13 See below, p. 31–2, 242.

14 P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage. With a Catalogue of the Coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge*, vol. I: *The Early Middle Ages (5th–10th Centuries)* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 93–5.

15 On the part played by plunder and tribute in the political economy of the Carolingian age see T. Reuter, 'Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 35 (1985), and T. Reuter, 'The end of Carolingian military expansion', in P. Godman and R. Collins (eds.), *Charlemagne's Heir* (Oxford, 1990).

were certainly such things as the increase in travel and the exchange of ideas across Europe, from Northumberland to southern Italy,[16] as well as the emphasis on study and contemplation in the monastic life. But the underlying cause lay in the fact that northern Europe's new political system was developing an intellectual life that reflected its values, and in the fact that the system itself had matured to the point where it could effectively gather the financial resources to support intellectual activity. Once again it is no coincidence that it is in the late seventh century that we see the first glimmer of this nascent cultural movement. For example, the first surviving dated manuscript from the monastery at Luxeuil comes from 669,[17] the famous scriptorium at Echternach began production shortly before 700, and the earliest surviving manscripts from Corbie indicate that production also began there sometime before 700.[18] It was the seventh century as well which was the century *par excellence* for the production of saints' lives.

Before the Merovingian period Europe's most important cultural and political centres were in the south, in the cities around the Mediterranean. By the Carolingian age we find them in the north. The Arab depredations in Spain and Provence played a role in this extremely significant geographical shift, but of far more consequence is the simple fact that the land of northern Europe began to produce more agricultural wealth than land in the south, and political power and cultural leadership will usually migrate to the areas which can best support them.[19] Francia in the seventh century saw two important steps in this long-term political development. By about the year 567 we see the existence of what Eugen Ewig has termed the *Teilreiche*, or separate kingdoms.[20] The great political divisions of Gaul in the sixth century had split the country into varying numbers of pieces, with a Merovingian king at the head of each. By the seventh century, the

16 Riché, 'Centres of Culture', p. 232.

17 Ms New York, Pierpoint Morgan M-334. E. A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, XI (Oxford, 1966) no. 1659, p. 23.

18 D. Ganz, *Corbie in the Carolingian Renaissance* Beihefte der *Francia*, 20 (Sigmaringen, 1990), pp. 38–40 and 124–6.

19 See K. Werner, 'Le rôle de l'aristocratie dans la christianisation du nord-est de la Gaule', *Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France*, 62 (1976), 67, for a list of the relevant secondary literature which points to the rise of the area in north-east Francia economically just before Martel's take-over.

20 E. Ewig, 'Die fränkische Teilreiche im 7. Jahrhundert (613–714)', *Trierer Zeitschrift*, 22 (1953), 85 reprinted in Ewig, *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien. Gesammelte Schriften (1952–1973)*, vol. I, Beihefte der *Francia*, 3 (Munich, 1976), p. 172.

number of pieces had settled at three, as the separate Merovingian kingdoms of Neustria, Burgundy and Austrasia became established political entities. In the course of the century the number dwindled to two, and eventually to one as all Francia united in reasonably permanent fashion under one court. The older system reflected a less developed political organisation, which by the seventh century had become more established and better able to govern a wider area permanently as a single unit. In the course of the seventh century the nobility in the north-eastern kingdom, Austrasia, developed a strong enough political basis to assert their independence of the nobility around the kings of Neustria, based near Paris and Soissons. On two important occasions the Austrasians demanded their own king and established their own court when accidents of royal death and Merovingian succession had placed them under the king of Neustria. The seventh century also saw their 'capital', if we can use the word, shift farther away from Paris. It moved from Rheims to Metz.

The end of the seventh century saw the second and even more significant shift of the cultural and political centres away from the Mediterranean. The Pippinids, soon to be known as the Carolingians, became politically the most powerful family in all Francia, beginnng their take-over of Neustria in the 680s and 690s and completing it in the 720s. They were based not on the Seine and Oise, as the dominant families had been until then, but on the Meuse, the Moselle and the Rhine.

Culturally we can observe the same shift northwards that we can see in the political life of Francia. One good indication of this geographical shift in culture comes from an analysis of the seventh century's 320 new monastic foundations we spoke of, since it was in the monasteries that the new cultural life began. Of the 320 founded in the seventh century, only ninety were founded in the south, whereas the north of Gaul established 230 new houses.[21]

To review: the Merovingian period saw the important centres of Europe's political life shift from the cities to the countryside and consequently from the Mediterranean areas to the northern part of the continent. In Francia it is in the seventh century that we discern many important aspects of this underlying development: members of the Frankish elite increasingly filled the high ecclesiastical offices, the first surviving written records of land transactions appeared, monasteries developed rapidly, the minting of gold coins was replaced by the

21 Atsma, 'Les monastères', 168.

Figure 1 Late Merovingian France. The area of Neustria and western Austriasia within the 'box' is shown in greater detail in Figure 2.

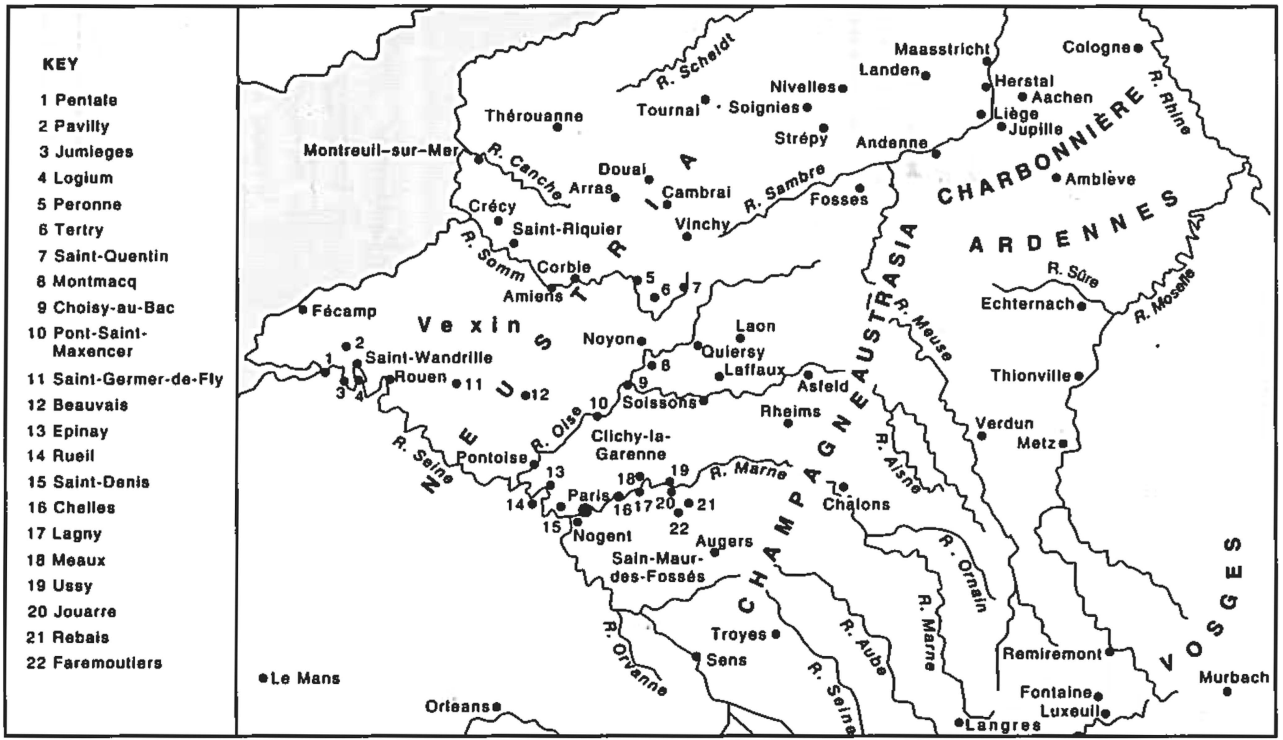

Figure 2 Neustria and western Austriasia

minting of silver ones, the cultural 'reawakening' began, the political system in the north-eastern realm matured and solidified, and, in the last decades of the century, that north-eastern area became the place in which Francia's most important political family was to be found. Having mentioned the foregoing general considerations in setting the seventh century in its broader context, let us turn to a brief overview of the events in Francia during the century itself.

The seventh century began with a political map that was anomalous and soon passed to another which was equally so. In the first years of the century the politics of faction and allegiance had left the Neustrian king, Clothar II (584–629), in control of only three districts (*civitates*) all tucked up against the English Channel. The rest of Francia had fallen to the control of two brothers: Theudebert II, king of Austrasia (595–612), and Theuderic II, king of Burgundy (595–613). According to the chronicler known as Fredegar, the royal politics were not really in the hands of the brothers but in those of their grandmother, the cunning dowager, Queen Brunhild, bitter enemy of the Neustrian royal line since the days of Clothar's father, King Chilperic II (561–84). In 612, so the story goes, Brunhild induced Theuderic to attack Theudebert by declaring that the Austrasian king was not really his brother. The Burgundians were successful, Theudebert was killed, and all Francia, except Clothar's small piece, was united under Theuderic and Brunhild.[22] Not satisfied, grandson and grandmother pushed to the west to attack Clothar as well. On the campaign Theuderic died of dysentery, but Brunhild, now with her infant great-grandson, Sigibert II, as king, pressed forward undaunted. But at this point the tide changed and the reasons are well worth noting because they reveal how the political system worked.

In 613 the strongest faction of the Burgundian nobility was led by Warnachar, the Burgundian mayor of the palace. The mayor of the palace (*maior domus*) played a vital role in the court system in each of the three kingdoms. It was he, as the Latin words of his title imply, who held a position more senior than the other nobles at the king's court. It was a position much sought after by the nobles and one from which a powerful lord could exert a great deal of authority because it controlled access to the king. Warnachar's faction in Burgundy, along

22 Fredegar, *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici Libri IV cum Continuationibus* (hereafter Fredegar, *Chron.*), IV, ch. 38, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SSRM,* II, (Hanover, 1888), pp. 139–40; and ed. and trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations,* (London, 1960), pp. 30–2.

with a faction of the Austrasian nobility headed by Pippin I and Arnulf, later bishop of Metz, invited Clothar to invade Burgundy and Austrasia and to rid them of Sigibert and Brunhild. The Neustrian king siezed the opportunity. Fredegar tells us that the infant Sigibert was killed and goes on to relate in gruesome detail how Clothar had Brunhild tortured to death. Although Clothar was now sole king of Francia, each of the three separate kingdoms retained its own identity and its own mayor of the palace. Warnachar retained the position in Burgundy, but in Austrasia it fell neither to Pippin nor to Arnulf but to Rado, leader of another faction with close ties to Neustria.[23]

In these events of 613 let us note three significant characteristics. First, the contemporary seventh-century chronicler Fredegar was aware that the nobility worked towards its political ends in factions; he uses the word.[24] Second, large-scale political and military action demanded co-operation between a born Merovingian king and a faction of the nobility. Neither could accomplish the objective without the other. Clothar was obviously dependent upon the Austrasian and Burgundian nobility, and without the rallying power of Clothar neither Arnulf's and Pippin's nor Warnachar's designs would have attracted enough followers to allow them to succeed. Third, the political system does not seem to have yet been capable of maintaining large areas as single political units. Clothar's sole rule was not such that it effaced the political identity of the three component parts and made them one realm, and even what unity his single royal authority provided was to last less than a decade before the Austrasian nobles demanded and recieved Clothar's son, Dagobert I, as their own king.[25] In other words, Frankish society had not yet developed mediating mechanisms capable of concentrating wealth and power from a large area. It would do so, however, in the course of the seventh century.

A significant early step towards this end seems to have come about in 613 or 614, shortly after Clothar's successful assumption of the eastern realms. The nobility and the king obviously needed to establish certain ground rules of how they were to govern in the new situation. We have a good written indication of what they decided in the form of a

23 A. Friese, *Studien sur Herrschaftsgeschichte des fränkischen Adels. Der mainländisch-thüringische Raum vom 7. bis 11. Jahrhundert Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 18 (Stuttgart, 1979), p. 22.

24 … *factione Arnulfo et Pippino vel citeris proceribus Auster ingreditur.* Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 4, p. 140.

25 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 47.

royal capitulary from 614 which has come to be known as the Edict of Paris.[26] Of its twenty-four chapters, two in particular, chapters twelve and nineteen, show how the nobility used the royal authority to organise and to control its rule. In chapter twelve the king decrees that his counts (*judices*) in the various regions must be residents of the locality and not from outside it. By requiring that the official should be one whose land was in the local area, this measure made the royal official more responsible, since abuses of his authority could be punished by sequestering his land. The measure also had the effect of preventing an ambitious faction based elsewhere from attempting to use the office of count to extend its authority into an area where its members did not live. Chapter nineteen stipulates the requirement of local residence for bishops, although, as we shall see, this provision was not often enforced.

From various sources which describe the royal court in the first half of the century, sources which we shall have occasion to explore in some detail when we examine the career of St Audoin,[27] we can see a little more of the nature of the Frankish political system. We are first introduced to many of its important characters as they served at court under Clothar II and then under his son, Dagobert I. As we have mentioned, Dagobert was sent to rule Austrasia in 622 or 623 while his father retained rule in Neustria. When Clothar died in 629, Dagobert acceeded to the throne in Neustria as well and moved his court out of Austrasia to the area around Paris. At the same time he created a kingdom south of the Loire for his half-brother, Charibert. The area south of the Loire had never been, nor would it ever be, very tightly bound to Merovingian rule. Charlemagne, too, would try the same method of establishing a separate royal court in the area in order to bind it more closely to Carolingian rule. Neither his nor this earlier attempt seems to have worked. When King Charibert died after only three years, Dagobert had his young son killed and the court was disestablished.

Dagobert's move to Paris, that is, the loss of a royal court in Austrasia, had predictable effects: the Austrasian noble factions began to vie and squabble with each other; foreign enemies took advantage and invaded. Pippin I, who had been close to Dagobert since the king had come to

26 *Clotharii Edictum*, in A. Boretius (ed.), *Capitularia Regum Francorum*, I, *MGH, Legum Sectio II*, pp. 20–3. For the argument that the legislation of 614 drew on Justinian's 'Pragmatic Sanction of 554', see A. Murray, 'Immunity, Nobility, and the Edict of Paris', *Speculum*, 69 (1994).

27 See below, pp. 137–52.

Austrasia, followed him to Paris, and Fredegar tells us that the Austrasians at home were so aroused against him for this that they sought to have him killed.[28] In the wake of the internal squabbling, the Wends, a Slavic people living east of Austrasia, pressed menacingly upon its borders.[29]

The solution to Austrasia's problems was obviously the re-establishment of its own royal court. This soon came about when, in 633, the Austrasian nobles demanded that Dagobert should send his three-year-old son, Sigibert, to rule over them. As Clothar had done with Dagobert, so Dagobert now did with Sigibert, and the Austrasian court was recreated in Metz with two powerful local magnates, Bishop Chunibert of Cologne and Duke Adalgisel from near Metz, as regents.[30]

At the same time, in Burgundy, unlike either Austrasia or the lands south of the Loire, the system seems to have to developed to the point where it could organise rule over a wider area. After King Theuderic's death in 613, Burgundy never again had its own king. As we saw, the royal court was kept alive under the mayor, Warnachar, but even that element of local organisation disappeared when Warnachar died in 626. In that year the Burgundian nobility asked Dagobert not to appoint a new mayor; from then on they would travel to the Neustrian court.[31] The Burgundians were thenceforth to do without their own court and without their own mayor, apart from a brief interlude in mid century about which we know little, since *The Chronicle of Fredegar*, which tells us about it, breaks off in mid story. The fact that Burgundy could do without a court of its own can only mean that its nobles were already part of the factions which made up the Neustrian court. There will be much that will show this to have been the case in the later part of the century, not least the fact that the religious movement most closely bound to the Neustrian court will be centred on the Burgundian monastery of Luxeuil and that one of that court's most powerful members, Leudegar, will be made bishop of the important Burgundian see of Autun. The disestablishment of the Burgundian court shows that the development of a single kingdom was well under way early on.

Dagobert I (623–38) is a hero among the later Merovingians. He is often held up as the last effective monarch before the reigns of the do-

28 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 61.

29 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, chs. 74 and 75.

30 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 75.

31 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 54.

nothing kings, the *rois fainéants*, under whose rule the dynasty continued until 751. Indeed, under Dagobert the Frankish political system seems to have worked very well, or, to express the same sentiment in more seventh-century sounding language, Dagobert was able to defeat foreign foes and keep the internal peace. To the east the Franks managed to organise other Germanic peoples – the Thuringians, Alamans and Bavarians – under Frankish dukes for defence against the Slavic Wends and the Asiatic Avars. The growing Lombard power in Italy was kept at bay, and Dagobert mounted armed interventions into Visigothic Spain. It is worth noting that the forces he used against the Visigoths were not from Aquitaine, which borders Spain, but from Burgundy.[32] This is a further indication that the Burgundians had accommodated themselves to the new political system whereas the lands south of the Loire had not. Dagobert's rule also had the Bretons, to the west, under some sort of Frankish overlordship. We know their king, Judicael, came to Dagobert's court in 636 to pay obeisance, but what the relationship was between the two peoples is not clear.[33] The Gascons, too, came to the Frankish court to submit to Dagobert about a year later.[34]

Dagobert is even more famous for keeping the internal peace than for his foreign exploits. Fredegar tells us that the very news of his coming 'struck terror' into the inhabitants of Burgundy when he made a tour dispensing justice there in 628 or 629. The next year he toured Austrasia doing the same. Dispensing justice, of course, means settling disputes, that is, keeping the internal peace, and for this it is important that the king should be known to have a terrible swift sword. By the seventh century, however, the process was not the sort of swift and ruthless royal judgement described by Gregory of Tours in his story about King Clovis and the vase of Soissons where the king arbitrarily killed a soldier to make a point about obedience. Surviving seventh-century charters show that the process was now conducted by the nobility at court through procedures defined both by ritual and by written texts and presided over by the king or his representative.[35]

32 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 78.

33 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 78. See J. M. H. Smith, *Province and Empire. Brittany and the Carolingians* (Cambridge,1992), p.19.

34 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 78.

35 See P. Fouracre, '"Placita" and the settlement of disputes in later Merovingian Francia', in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds.), *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1986).

Dagobert has had the reputation of an itinerant king vigorously enforcing his personal will throughout the realm. But in fact after 631 we have no record at all of his moving from the Paris basin. Fredegar scowls as he tells us that Dagobert became sedentary in Neustria, but this fact is yet another sign that the system was settling in. In other words, the Franks were beginning to be able keep foreign enemies out and to preserve domestic tranquillity from a permanently established court near Paris. The later do-nothing kings would be able to do nothing and yet maintain the borders and internal peace precisely because the system worked so well.

Dagobert died in 638 and Neustria passed to his five-year-old son, Clovis II (638–57), seemingly without a major breach of the peace. The dowager queen, Nanthild, continued as regent and the mayor, Aega, retained his position. Two years later, in 641, we hear of the episcopal ordination of Eligius and Audoin, who had been two of Dagobert's most important counsellors, and of the seemingly peaceful appointment of Erchinoald as Neustrian mayor. In Austrasia, too, Dagobert's passing caused no great upheaval, although here matters became somewhat more agitated. Dagobert's other son, Sigibert III (633–51), also a small boy, had already been king in Austrasia for five years, and his mayor, Pippin I, continued in his position. Pippin, however, died only a year after Dagobert, in 639. At his death the office of Austrasian mayor fell not to his son, Grimoald, but to a certain Otto who was the tutor or supervisor (*baiolus*) of the eight-year-old Sigibert.[36] Otto seems to have led a group of Austrasian nobles who had strong connections with the Neustrian court; he was the son of Uro of Paris and enjoyed the support of Burgundofara, who came from a powerful Neustrian family.[37] By 643 Grimoald apparently felt his position strong enough to snatch the mayoralty. He had Otto killed by Leuthar, an Alamannian duke,[38] and reasserted the Pippinids' position as leaders of the Austrasian nobility. Thus in the decade when the sources which we have included below begin to illuminate Frankish history we can see that the families which were to play prominent political roles in these sources held the power in both kingdoms.

It is also with the 640s that we begin to perceive a clearer picture of the Church's political role. We have already commented briefly on the

36 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 86.

37 Fredegar, Chron., IV, chs. 86 and 87. Cf. Friese, *Studien*, pp. 22–3.

38 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 88.

important economic role the Church played in the political structure as an institution which permanently held and organised large areas of land. We have also mentioned that monasteries were particularly useful in doing this in the interest of powerful families or political factions (*Klosterpolitik*). But the Church had another major political role to play, less concrete perhaps, but no less important. It was the Christian Church that legitimised and expressed the norms of desirable political behaviour within the new system. The christianising of Frankish politics is easily discernible in the changing picture of the ideal Frankish king. For the full development of the ideal of a most Christian king we shall have to wait for the Carolingians, but the tendency is clearly in that direction already in the seventh century. Gregory of Tours's ideal of vigorous, heroic kings is softened, although not totally eliminated, in the rather conservative *Liber Historiae Francorum* (*The Book of the History of the Franks*), written in 727, part of which is translated below. Here the political virtues of loyalty and fairness receive the author's approval but he can also still give us a picture of a Frankish king who destroys his enemy in true barbarian fashion in heroic single combat.[39] In the Carolingian *Annales Mettenses Priores* (*The Earlier Annals of Metz*), also included in part below, a source written some seventy-eight years later, there is none of the latter. Its political heroes operate according to God's plan and are lauded for such behaviour as forgiveness and for tendering offers of peace to enemies, elements which, in turn, are missing in the earlier *LHF*. Although this christianisation of a political ideal is most obvious here at the top of society, when it concerns the king, it was of no less political importance in the way it affected all levels. In the political structure, based on the direct use of land and less and less on the use of mediating urban mechanisms, personal service and personal loyalty became the political virtues *par excellence*. From agricultural worker to mayor of the palace, all needed to share a common value system wherein such basics as the inviolability of service obligations and the high value of personal loyalty went largely unquestioned. In Frankish Gaul it was the Church that preached and taught such values; those values and the behaviour they produce are lauded as pious and deserving of divine reward in all the hagiographic sources included in this volume. It is no coincidence that it was in the second half of the seventh century – that is, when the political apparatus had become

39 *Liber Historiae Francorum* (hereafter *LHF*), ch. 41, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SSRM*, II (Hanover,1888), pp. 310–14. We have translated chapters 43–53 below, pp. 87–96.

based in the countryside – that the Church in northern Gaul also spread out from the towns on to the land. The evidence for this is clear, the most important being the mushrooming growth of rural monasteries, which we have already mentioned.

The 640s seem to have been a decade of peace and stability in both kingdoms. In Austrasia Grimoald and the Pippinids held the upper hand among the factions under Sigibert III. The Austrasians had lost a war in which Radulf, duke of the Thuringians, rebelled against them in 639, but the victors did not separate themselves completely from their Merovingian overlords, existing rather in a semi-autonomous state.[40] In Neustria, Erchinoald managed Clovis II's court without major incident. Throughout Francia it was a decade of important monastic foundation and the spreading influence of monks and missionaries influenced by Irish ideas. This relatively tranquil picture would be given a jolt about the century's mid point in both kingdoms. In each the disruption occurred for different reasons and illustrates different points.

In the 650s the events in Austrasia are famous, controversial, and although they make a very good story in the telling they turned out to be less enduring than the less entertaining events in Neustria. When the Austrasian king Sigibert III died, his mayor, Grimoald, did not oversee the elevation of the king's son, Dagobert, to the throne but rather packed the young prince off in exile to a monastery in Ireland, where he was to remain for some twenty years. Grimoald proceeded to put his own son on the throne, giving him the royal Merovingian name Childebert. Grimoald seems to have maintained this rule in Austrasia for about four years. But a non-Merovingian on the throne, even one sporting a proper royal name, represented a dangerous political precedent not only for the Austrasians themselves but also for the Neustrians. Noble factions from both kingdoms combined to remove Grimoald and to bring him before the Neustrian king, Clovis II, for trial. In due course he and, possibly, his son 'Childebert' were put to death, although the boy is not mentioned expressly by our source.[41] Clovis himself then died (657) and was succeeded in Neustria

40 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, ch. 87.

41 *LHF*, ch. 43, below, pp. 87–8. A very plausible alternative explanation advanced by Ian Wood is that Childebert may have married Bilichild, daughter of Sigibert III and Queen Himnechild. With her daughter safely on the throne, Himnechild then abandoned Grimoald to the Neustrians and the adopted Childebert outlived his father. I. N. Wood, T*he Merovingian Kingdoms 450–751* (London, 1994), p. 224.

by his son, Clothar III (657–73), with the new king's mother, Queen Balthild, as regent. In Austrasia, Dagobert was not brought back from Ireland and placed on his father's throne, perhaps because he was not the son of Sigibert's widow, Himnechild. Instead the Neustrian prince, Childeric, son of Clovis II and Balthild and brother of the reigning Neustrian king, Clothar III, was married to his Austrasian cousin, the Merovingian princess, Bilichild, daughter of King Sigibert III and Queen Himnechild, and sent to rule the Austrasians with his mother-in-law, Himnechild, as regent. The position of Austrasian mayor passed out of the hands of the Pippinids to Wulfoald, leader of another Austrasian faction.

This *coup* of Grimoald's has received much more attention than it probably deserves precisely because he was head of the family which would one day produce Charlemagne.[42] There are, however, some less romantic but more important points to be noted in these events. The fact that Grimoald could upset the court system at its core and maintain his non-royal son on the throne for four years shows that even that early in their history he and his family were very powerful indeed. What is surprising is not that his *coup* eventually failed but that it took place at all. The fact that the Neustrians, along with, presumably, Grimoald's enemies and Wulfoald's faction in Austrasia, dislodged him and restored actual Merovingian rule in the form of a boy king shows the Franks' deep commitment to the Merovingians and to the system of rule based on a properly established royal court. And last, the major royal characters in the restoration were women: the regents Balthild in Neustria and Himnechild in Austrasia. The most lasting effect of all this was itself only temporary in that the Pippinids lost the leadership of the Austrasian court for about twenty years. We shall find them back at the fore, however, led by Grimoald's nephew, Pippin II, in the late 670s.

Meanwhile the events in Neustria, although less flamboyant, were probably more significant. In the 640s and up to about 658 or 659 it was Erchinoald who was the Neustrian mayor. He was a man with familial connections both with the Merovingians and with the royal families of the Anglo-Saxons.[43] It was in fact he who provided King

42 E.g. see R. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 47–66 and J.-M. Picard, 'Church and politics in the seventh century: the Irish exile of King Dagobert II', in Picard (ed.), *Ireland and Northern France* (Dublin, 1991), pp. 27–52.

43 See below, p. 102–4.

Clovis II with his queen, Balthild, a woman who had been a slave in his household. His was a powerful family with connections extending far beyond the Seine–Oise valley into Burgundy. It was also he who established an important group of Irish missionaries first at Lagny and then at Peronne. He died shortly after King Clovis but, whereas the royal succession had been peaceful, the Neustrian nobility fought among themselves in a scramble to establish a new mayor. The position in the end was lost by Erchinoald's faction and passed not to his son, Leudesius, but to another group. The new mayor was Ebroin, whose origins and position at the time are largely hidden from us. Nonetheless, it was he who would become the most famous, or perhaps the most notorious, figure in seventh-century Neustrian politics and leader of what would be Neustria's most powerful faction.

Ebroin, along with Audoin, bishop of Rouen, Chrodobert, bishop of Paris, and other unnamed magnates, formed a council under the queen regent, Balthild, for the first years of the boy king, Clothar's, reign.[44] Once the controversy over the mayoral succession had ended, peace returned to Neustria and, it seems, also to Burgundy, where another feud between factions of the nobility had been raging. The Burgundian problem had grown up in the days of Queen Nantild's regency for the young Clovis II between two groups, one headed by Floachad, Nanthild's and Erchinoald's appointee to the temporarilily re-established position of Burgundian mayor, a group with presumably Neustrian leanings, and another group from south Burgundy, led by Willebad, a group presumably comprising the traditional Burgundian as opposed to Frankish nobility.[45] From what we can tell, the regency of Balthild and the council worked well, for it is credited with keeping the peace in Neustria[46] and with restoring it in Burgundy.[47]

During the regency Balthild and her councillors launched an important religious reform in the major cult centres of the realm and placed their nominees on the episcopal thrones of some of Neustria's and Burgundy's most important sees. We shall have much to say about the specifically political aspects of this religious policy later because it plays a major role in most of the hagiographical sources in this

44 *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, ch. 5, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SSRM*, II (Hanover, 1888), p. 487. We have translated this *vita* below, pp. 118–32.

45 Fredegar, *Chron.*, IV, chs. 89 and 90.

46 … *regno quidem Francorum in pace consistenti. Vita Balthildis*, ch. 5, below, p. 122.

47 *Burgundiones vero et Franci facti sunt uniti. Vita Balthildis*, ch. 5, below, p. 122.

volume. Suffice it here to remind ourselves of a perhaps obvious, but important, point: cult centres, bishops, queens, factions, local churches and mayors are interconnected in complex and ever-changing ways in the political sytem of seventh-century Francia, largely because, as we have seen and shall see in some detail, all the people involved move from one position to the other, changing their roles. We shall come to a less than clear understanding of this system if we assume that a position (a local bishop or a mayor) or an institution (the Church, the Crown or an 'Irish' monastery) defined the political interests of the people involved. Rather, it seems to have been the other way round – that is, personal rather than institutional or even local loyalty was the determining political factor.

About 664 young Clothar came of age and Queen Balthild ended her regency, retiring to her favourite monastery at Chelles, near Paris. Balthild's 'retirement' was not as straightforward an outcome as it may seem; behind it lay some bloody shuffling by the nobility which included the murder of Sigobrand, bishop of Paris. Because of our usual lack of information and in this case a strong bias in our major source about Ebroin, the *Passio Leudegarii* (*The Suffering of Leudegar*) we cannot see these events very clearly. It may have been that Ebroin was already beginning to excercise a degree of political control which overstepped the acceptable bounds. He certainly did so later. By the 670s he was preventing Burgundian magnates from coming to court unless they had his permission to do so and in 673, when Clothar III died, he tried to exclude certain nobles from the traditional assembly which would elevate the new king, Clothar's brother and Balthild's son, Theuderic.[48] These acts attacked the system at its core – exclusion from court meant exclusion from the political process – and were too much for the nobility to tolerate. They rose up against both Ebroin and Theuderic, tonsured them both – that is, deprived them of their military and political status – and packed the mayor off to exile in the Burgundian monastery of Luxeuil[49] and the king to the Neustrian monastery of Saint-Denis, near Paris.[50] In the resultant power vacuum, unresolvable internal dissension seems to have raged among the various factions. In the end they turned to Childeric, Balthild's son, who was king in Austrasia, and asked him to come and rule over them

48 *Passio Leudegarii Episcopi et Martyris Augustodunensis I*, ch. 5, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SSRM*, V (Hanover, 1910), p. 287. We have translated this *vita* below, pp. 215–53.

49 *LHF*, ch. 45, below, p. 89.

50 *Passio Leudegarii I*, ch. 6, below, p. 222–3.

as well. The solution did not work. Childeric arrived surrounded by Austrasian advisers and with his Austrasian mayor, Wulfoald. Soon our Neustrian and Burgundian sources are complaining of the king's heedless and oppressive behaviour,[51] meaning, of course, that the Neustrians were not being heard at court. The Neustrian leader was Leudegar, bishop of Autun, in Burgundy, but head of the faction of Neustrian nobility once led by Erchinoald. Tension mounted for about two years and then exploded at Easter 675, when Wulfoald exiled Leudegar to Luxeuil, where he sat imprisoned in the same institution as his old enemy, Ebroin. Within six months the Neustrians had risen in full-scale revolt, driven Wulfoald back to Austrasia and killed King Childeric, along with his pregnant wife, Bilichild.[52] Ebroin and Leudegar both burst out of Luxeuil and each made a bid for power. The system was in serious breakdown. In neither Austrasia nor Neustria was there a king and in neither was there anything resembling a consensus among the nobility.

In the crisis of 675, as opposed to that of the mid 650s, it is not without significance that it was Austrasia which rebuilt with less bloodshed and with more stable and lasting results. Neustria, on the other hand, was to experience a political trauma far beyond the limits of a palace *coup*; it was embroiled in civil war. Leudegar's side got the upper hand at first. They made Erchinoald's son, Leudesius, mayor, fetched Theuderic out of Saint-Denis and took control of the royal treasure. This left Ebroin down but certainly not out, for not all the Neustrians who mattered were in Leudegar's camp. There were powerful interests about who would support Ebroin against Leudegar and Leudesius, probably those which had supported him in his struggle against the same faction in the 650s after Erchinoald's death. Ebroin was no amatuer at the political game and he immediately made all the right moves. He straight away found a Merovingian claimant to the throne, a pretender he called Clovis, for he obviously needed a court. He secured the support of none other than Audoin, bishop of Rouen, long-time counsellor of kings and former fellow member of Balthild's regency council. There was no political figure in all Francia more influential. Ebroin then set forth on a military campaign stretching all the way from Luxeuil in Burgundy to Crécy near the English Channel, gathering support and influence as he went. He defeated and killed

51 *LHF*, ch. 45, below, p. 89; and *Passio Leudegarii I*, chs. 7 and 8, below, pp. 224 and 225–6.

52 *LHF*, ch. 45, below, p. 90.

Leudesius, snatched up Theuderic and the royal treasure, and, with a real Merovingian now in hand, abandoned his pretender. He turned south, attacked Autun, and his got his hands on Leudegar, whom he eventually had tortured and killed. He also eliminated Leudegar's brother, Gaerin, then count of Paris, and drove many of his enemies from their lands into exile.[53] He had done it. The old order seemed restored: a legitimate Merovingian was on the Neustrian throne, and Ebroin and Audoin's faction from the Seine–Oise valley, not Wulfoald's from Austrasia, had the leadership at the Neustrian court.

The crisis of 675 was no less jarring for Austrasia than it was for Neustria. With the murder of Childeric II, Austrasia, too, had lost its king, and its mayor, Wulfoald, had been dislodged and chased back to his own lands, probably around Wissembourg. In the aftermath, the eastern kingdom once again established its own court, but this would be the last time it did so. With Wulfoald's group defeated and out of the way, it was the Pippinids, under Martin and Pippin II, who once again assumed the Austrasian leadership, a position they had not enjoyed since Grimoald's fall some twenty years earlier. As king they recalled none other than Dagobert, the prince and son of Sigibert III, whom Grimoald had exiled to Ireland. In Austrasia, too, the situation now seemed to be political business as usual: a Merovingian on the throne and a leading local faction in charge at court. But there soon came a dramatic sign that there was tension in the system and that political life would not be as it had been. That sign was war.

At a date which is difficult to determine, probably shortly before September 679, the Austrasians attacked the Neustrians.[54] There had not been war between the two countries since the days of Queen Brunhild and Clothar II in the early years of the century. The clash came at Bois-du-Fays in the Ardennes and it was a major encounter, 'a great slaughter', says the *Liber Historiae Francorum.* The chronicle states that it was Pippin and Martin who had instigated the hostilities, but nonethless Ebroin and the Neustrians won the day. This war, after three generations of peace between the two Frankish nations, is an indication that the system was beginning to need adjustment. Another equally significant indication of long-term change came with Dagobert II's assassination shortly after the war, in 679. With his death the Austrasian court was dissolved. From that time forward the

53 *LHF*, ch. 45, below, pp. 90–1.

54 *LHF*, ch. 46, below, p. 91.

Neustrian court would be the only royal court in Francia, and the Austrasians, largely in the form of the Pippinids, would become an increasingly important part of it.

Ebroin was to rule for five years after regaining power until he too fell victim to assassination; significantly the assassins flew for protection to Pippin in the east. The new Neustrian mayor was Waratto, whose family lands were not in the Seine–Oise valley but on the lower Seine, near Rouen. For his position of leadership he probably owed a great deal to his ally, Audoin, bishop of Rouen and the most influential political figure of his day. Audoin, too, died shortly afterwards, some time in the early 680s. In many ways, with the deaths of Ebroin and Audoin, Neustria saw the death of an era. The political system we have described thus far continued to operate for another forty years, but throughout the rest of its life it would have to contend with the disrupting fact that the family which was increasingly becoming the most influential in Neustria was no longer Neustrian at all but from the ever more important north and east.

The 680s were not a quiet decade. Waratto seems to have been willing to keep the peace with the Austrasians but other Neustrian interests were not so disposed. They were led by Waratto's own son, Ghislemar, who actually displaced his father as mayor for a while. When Waratto died there was again disagreement in choosing a successor. Berchar, who married into Waratto's family, was the eventual choice, but he did not have strong support among the nobility and was unable to keep the peace. Once again war broke out between east and west, and this time it was the Pippinids who won. The famous battle of Tertry in 687, thanks largely to the action-packed description in the Carolingian *Annales Mettenses Priores*, has been seen since Charlemagne's day as Pippin's 'conquest' of Neustria.[55] But just as Ebroin's victory over Pippin at Bois-du-Fays did not mean Neustrian conquest of Austrasia, so too Pippin's victory now did not allow him to swallow up the western realm. The Pippinids would eventually rule Neustria as well as Austrasia, but their take-over would come in the slower, more permanent and more personal form of control over land and over those ecclesiastical and secular positions which mattered. Pippin's victory at Tertry obviously opened many doors to this end, but it would not be until the 720s, under Charles Martel, that the Pippinid take-over would be reasonably complete.

55 E.g. … *la victoire définitive de Pepin II* … A. Dierkens, *Abbayes et chapitres entre Sambre et Meuse (VII–XI siècles)*. Beihefte der *Francia* 14 (Sigmaringen, 1985), p. 307.

In the wake of Tertry, Berchar was killed by those wishing to ingratiate themselves with Pippin. Waratto's widow, Ansfled, was involved in the plot and soon Pippin's son, Drogo, married Ansfled's daughter, Anstrud. The marriage was extremely significant, for it gave Pippin's family a foothold on the lower Seine, and it was from there that they spread their influence throughout much of Neustria. The victory at Tertry gave Pippin the mayoralty and the royal treasure, but he did not remain at the Neustrian court. Instead he left a certain Norbert there to watch over his interests and returned to Autrasia. From careful examination of the charters issued by the Neustrian kings over the next three decades it is clear that at first very few of the nobles at court were Austrasians or people connected with Pippin's party;[56] he was obviously not going to make the mistake Wulfoald had made in the 670s. Thanks largely to ecclesiastical records (there are no others), we can see Pippin's supporters taking over episcopal sees and important monasteries in a great arc, starting on the lower Seine, moving up through modern Belgium and back southwards again through the Ardennes and out on to the Champagne, where he made his son, Drogo, duke. Significantly, the see of Paris and the lands and institutions in the Seine–Oise valley, the traditional Neustrian heartland, escaped Pippin's control.[57]

In 690, when King Theuderic III died and was succeeded by his young son, Clovis III (690–94), the Frankish realms were about to enjoy another twenty-five years of relative peace. We have reports of Pippin's foreign wars,[58] but they were foreign wars as foreign wars should be: on foreign soil. Francia's borders were secure and the internal peace was preserved. The system was working well, perhaps better than it ever had, and this in the very heart of the period of the 'do-nothing' kings. The real problem of the later Merovingians was not their supposed inactivity but their youth. The only reign of any length by an adult monarch was that of Childebert III (694–711) and in the eyes of his contemporaries he was anything but *fainéant.* We have some thirteen charters from his reign, most of them *placita*, or legal judgements. The earlier ones contain long lists of the high nobility who took part in the cases, including even the name of Antenor, the *patricius* (ruler) of far-away

56 P. Fouracre, 'Observations on the outgrowth of Pippinid influence in the "Regnum Francorum" after the battle of Tertry (687–715)', *Medieval Prosopography*, 5, pt 2 (1984), 6.

57 Gerberding, *Rise*, pp. 104–9.

58 *LHF*, ch. 49, below, p. 93; *Annales Mettenses Priores* for their years 709–12, below, pp. 363–4; and *Annales Sancti Amandi*, ed. G. Pertz, *MGH, SS*, I (Hanover, 1826), p. 6.

Provence. It may be significant that one of these charters records a case that went against the Pippinids and prevented them from taking some land from the important monastery at Saint-Denis.[59] The Franks were conducting their political business in the traditional way and there was peace in the land.

During these peaceful years, however, Pippin's influence in Neustria continued to grow, quietly and steadily. There is some indication that a natural resentment against him was building strength as well. After Childebert's death in 711 the court seems to have been less and less effective; fewer nobles took part and there are indications that those from the outlying areas ceased to attend altogether. Pippin's son, Grimoald, had been Childebert's mayor, and the withdrawal of support from the royal court may have represented anti-Pippinid feeling.
We know such feeling was deeply rooted in Neustria, for at Pippin's death in 714 it erupted in a full-scale war against the easterners. The Neustrians found a rather dubious Merovingian tucked away as a monk named Daniel in Saint-Denis. They let his hair grow and put him on the throne as Chilperic II (715–21), making one of their own number, Raganfred, his mayor. They then pressed their case militarily in a war lasting several years. This was their grand attempt to restore their old system, free of domination from the east.[60] It was, however, to be a short Indian Summer. By the early 720s Pippin's son, Charles Martel, had defeated the Neustrians and was ruling under Theuderic IV (721–37). The Neustrians' days were now over; the political future of Francia lay not with the old families of the Paris basin but with the family which controlled vast areas along the Meuse, the Moselle, the Rhine and beyond. We begin our translations with one Merovingian source, the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, which laments the passing of the old order and we end our collection with the Carolingian *Annales Mettenses Priores*, which celebrate its downfall.

Sources and historians: hagiography and history

The eight texts translated in this volume represent a selection from what is in fact a far wider range of written sources for Merovingian history. In order to show how our sources have been used to construct

59 *ChLA* no. 587.
60 *LHF*, ch. 52, below, p. 95.

that history we have chosen to concentrate on material which relates clearly to a conventional framework of narrative history. What we would term 'politics', the stuff of narrative history, was of genuine concern to most Merovingian writers, although they saw politics far differently from the way we do. One major narrative source is not translated and is rarely discussed here because it deals with the earlier rather than the later seventh century, and because it already exists in a good English translation and edition. This is the *Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations*.[61] Up to about the year AD 642 *Fredegar* (as the work is commonly called) provides a nearly contemporary and independent account of events from a Burgundian or (less often) Austrasian standpoint. From the late sixth century, when Gregory of Tours stopped writing, up to c. 650, the point at which the *Liber Historiae Francorum* (*LHF*) becomes more helpful in its coverage of events, *Fredegar* is often our sole source for political history, and without it there would simply be no intelligible narrative of events for early seventh-century Francia. It was of course this period that saw the childhood of the people who figure in the sources translated here, and most of them grew up in the milieu that *Fredegar* describes, although only two of them, Erchinoald and Audoin, actually appear in the chronicle. *Fredegar* ends abruptly in 642, but in the eighth century various authors added to it to bring its account up to AD 768. The first of these *Continuations*, completed in 736, is directly based on the *Liber Historiae Francorum* up to the year 721, when the *Liber*'s account terminates. Although the author of the first *Continuation of the Chronicle of Fredegar* made very few alterations to the text of the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, the changes that he did make are nevertheless revealing. What they show is an early stage in the rewriting of Merovingian history from an Austrasian and (later) Carolingian viewpoint. One of the sources translated in this volume, the *Annales Mettenses Priores* (*The Earlier Annals of Metz*), demonstrates how the rewriting of history in this way would develop and reach a highly polished form in the early ninth century.

We have included about half the hagiographic sources surviving from the later seventh century. We have concentrated on those saints' lives, or *vitae*, which illustrate the political history of this period. The sources we have not included are in other respects no less important than the ones we have, and we shall frequently refer to them. Many

61 *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations*, ed. and trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (London, 1960).

more lives of Merovingian saints were in fact written in the Carolingian period than in the Merovingian period itself. We should always consider carefully the extent to which these later works can be used to shed light on Merovingian history.[62] Information from hagiographic sources, both Merovingian and Carolingian, has been used above all to put flesh on the bare-boned narratives of the two chronicles which cover the seventh century, namely the *Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations* and the *Liber Historiae Francorum*. The *vitae* lend themselves to this purpose quite easily for, as we shall see, hagiography of the seventh century was generally highly political, since its subjects (the 'Saints') were drawn from among the political elite in Francia. For instance, one of the saints studied here, Balthild, was a queen, and three others, Aunemund, Audoin and Leudegar, were important political leaders. The subject matter of the narrative sources of the period, both chronicles and saints' lives, is therefore markedly 'regicentric', for even when it is not directly concerned with was what was going on in the royal palaces it is usually about people whose lives touched the palace circles.

Another important category of source material, charters, also reflects this same political culture, and again provides evidence which increases our understanding of the political history of the period. The historian of later Merovingian Francia is fortunate in having available at her or his disposal thirty-seven surviving original royal charters. These originals are of exceptional value not only for the detailed information they give but also for providing templates against which the other eighty or so non-original surviving royal charters can be tested for authenticity.[63] In addition, we also have the *Formulary of Marculf*.[64] This work was most probably written in the late seventh century and

62 For an example of such debate, see chapter 4 below, where a case is made for using the tenth-century *Acta Aunemundi* as a source for seventh-century history. Failure to examine a later source with proper critical attention is likely to invalidate historical analysis, as seems to be the case, for instance, with the speculative political history which J.-P. Poly read into the *Vita Aigulphi*: J.-P. Poly, 'Agricola et eiusmodi similes: la noblesse romane et la fin des temps mérovingiens', in M. Sot (ed.), *Culture, Education et Société. Etudes offerts à Pierre Riché* (Editions Européennes Erasme, 1990).

63 The surviving original charters are published with photostats in *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores*, ed. A. Bruckner and R. Marichal, vols. 13, 14, ed. H. Atsma, J. Vezin (Zurich, 1982). The edition of Merovingian charters of all types which is most widely available is *Diplomata, Chartae Epistolae, Leges, aliaque instrumenta ad res Galli-Francicas spectantia*, ed. J. Pardessus, 2 vols. (Paris, 1843, 1849) (reprinted, Aalen, 1969).

64 *Marculfi Formularum Libri Duo*, ed. and French trans., A. Uddholm (Uppsala, 1962).