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WALTER GOFFART

THE FRANKISH PRETENDER GUNDOVALD, 582–585

A Crisis of Merovingian Blood

In the autumn of 582, a claimant to Frankish kingship named Gundovald landed in Marseilles, returning from exile in Constantinople with covert support from very powerful persons in the kingdom. He made little immediate stir. Two years later, just after a reigning king had been assassinated, Gundovald rose in rebellion, was proclaimed king by major backers, flared briefly, and was brutally suppressed. This cluster of events has not escaped the attention of historians of the Merovingians¹. The small body of relevant source material, virtually all of it from the *Historiae* of Gregory of Tours, has been picked over many times². Nevertheless, much of the story remains disputed terrain.

- 1 Recent writings: Bernard BACHRACH, *The Anatomy of a Little War. A Diplomatic and Military History of the Gundovald Affair (568–586)*, Boulder/Colorado 1994; Constantin ZUCKERMAN, *Qui a rappelé en Gaule le »Ballomer« Gundovald*, in: *Francia* 25/1 (1998), p. 1–18; Bruno DUMÉZIL, *Brunehaut*, Paris 2008, p. 258–269 and passim; Christine DELAPLACE, *L'»affaire Gundovald« et le dispositif défensif de l'Aquitaine wisigothique et franque*, in: *Aquitania* 25 (2009), p. 199–211. A chapter on Gundovald is in Paul GOUBERT, *Byzance avant l'Islam*, vol. 2/1: *Byzance et les Francs*, Paris 1956, p. 29–68. See also Reinhard SCHNEIDER, *Königswahl und Königserhebung im Frühmittelalter. Untersuchungen zur Herrschaftsnachfolge bei den Langobarden und Merowingern*, Stuttgart 1972 (*Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 3), p. 98–109; selective, commendable. Ian WOOD, *Kings, Kingdoms and Consent*, in: Peter Hayes SAWYER, Ian N. WOOD (eds.), *Early Medieval Kingship*, Leeds 1977, p. 15; a too meagre summary. I have written on this subject before (not mainly on Gundovald): Walter GOFFART, *Byzantine Policy in the West under Tiberius II and Maurice: the Pretenders Hermenegild and Gundovald*, in: *Traditio* 13 (1957), p. 73–118. A half-century later, I do not consider myself bound by my earlier views except to the extent that I adopt them here. For older bibliography on the Gundovald crisis, see *Id.*, p. 74 n. 1. General accounts of Merovingian history pay attention to Gundovald; see Georges TESSIER, *Le baptême de Clovis, 25 décembre ...*, Paris 1964 (*Trente journées qui ont fait la France*, 1), p. 201–203; Eugen EWIG, *Die Merowinger und das Frankenreich*, Stuttgart 2006, p. 45–48; Ian WOOD, *The Merovingian Kingdom 450–751*, London 1994, p. 93–98; Martina HARTMANN, *Aufbruch ins Mittelalter. Die Zeit der Merowinger*, Darmstadt 2003, p. 53, 64–65. For a good summary, see Edward JAMES, *The Franks*, Oxford 1988, p. 99–100, 175–178. Little is added by Ulrich NONN, *»Ballomeris quidam«*. Ein merowingischer Prätendent des VI. Jahrhunderts, in: Ewald KÖNSGEN (ed.), *Arbor amoena comis. 25 Jahre Mittellateinisches Seminar in Bonn, 1965–1990*, Stuttgart 1990, p. 35–39, or Marc WIDDOWSON, *Merovingian Partitions: a »Genealogical Charter«*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 17/1 (2009), p. 1–22 (Gundovald is barely mentioned).
- 2 I cite Gregory parenthetically in the text by book and chapter without the prefix »Hist.« and without page references to the standard edition of Bruno KRUSCH and Wilhelm LEVISON (eds.), *MGH SS rer. Merov.*, vol. 1/1, Hanover 1937–1951. My English translations from Gregory depend in large part on Alexander Callander MURRAY, *Gregory of Tours, The Merovingians*, Peterborough/Ontario 2006 (*Readings in Medieval Civilization and Cultures*, 10), which I cite without indicating small changes. It has become customary to call Gregory's *Historiae* by the

With the exception of two incidents (n. 29, 45, below), all our information comes from Gregory of Tours, whose *Historiae* were completed in the 590s, close to the events in question. Gregory's seventh book, addressing less than one year (the shortest span of any of the ten books), is centrally concerned with the aftermath of the assassination of King Chilperic of Neustria and Gundovald's ensuing usurpation (584)³. Every event I shall relate implies the prefix »Gregory tells us«; every passage of direct discourse consists of words placed by Gregory into the speaker's mouth. Readers should recall this limitation without further reminders; the reports are Gregory's selection, edited by him, and seen through his eyes. There is no escaping this one-dimensionality. Also, Gregory's point of view is integral to his reportage. We have no platform of observation independent of him; he cannot be »corrected« or »rectified« on the basis of information that he supplies. Thus, for example, a speech by the Austrasian duke Guntram Boso (6.26, 7.14) carries with it Gregory's view that Guntram Boso was a habitual liar (5.14, 7.14, 36, 9.10); accusations by King Guntram (9.28, 32) are not isolated facts free from Gregory's assessment of the king's character. Any study based on Gregory presupposes these cautions (resembling ordinary source criticism). A third point concerns Gregory's chronology of composition. He portrays vividly contemporary history but wrote from a distance, unmoved by passing vicissitudes⁴.

A moment should be spent setting the stage. The period of Clovis's sons, the second Merovingian generation (511–561), witnessed great enlargements of the Frankish kingdom. Although the kings in question were not averse to quarreling among themselves and taking advantage of one another, they mainly vented their energies outward⁵. This condition changed with the third generation, which came to power at the death of Chlothar I in 561. Expansion ceased and dissension intensified, especially after the death without heir of Charibert in 567 and the redistribution of his territories. A condition of chronic, damaging inter-brother conflict set in, with Chilperic (of Neustria) and Sigibert (of Austrasia) taking the lead and Guntram (of Burgundy) wavering between them⁶. A lower level of hostility prevailed after the assassination of

ponderous title »Decem libri historiarum«. My preference for the brief name »Historiae«, »Histories« (supported by the opinion of F. L. Ganshof), is explained in Walter GOFFART, *From Historiae to Historia Francorum and Back Again. Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours*, in: Thomas F. X. NOBLE and John J. CONTRENI (eds.), *Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages. Studies in Honor of Richard E. Sullivan*, Kalamazoo/Michigan 1987, p. 58 n. 11–13.

- 3 Martin HEINZELMANN, *Gregory of Tours. History and Society in the Sixth Century*, Christopher CARROLL (tr.), Cambridge 2001, p. 53–56, provides a valuable account of the providential dimension of Gregory's narrative in this book.
- 4 On Gregory's chronology of composition, see the authoritative lines of MURRAY (tr.), *Gregory of Tours* (as in n. 2), p. XVIII–XIX: Gregory did not write step by step with the events or was affected by local circumstances.
- 5 For a summary account, see Erich ZÖLLNER, *Geschichte der Franken bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1970, ch. 3. Strictly speaking, the second generation consisted of Clovis's four sons, but the period included their children (and even a grandchild), some of whom wore crowns. All side lines vanished by 558, when the sole survivor, Chlothar I, united the entire kingdom for the three last years of his life, leaving it to four sons (the third generation).
- 6 These territorial names presuppose the prefix »the Frankish kingdom of ...«. On »Neustria« (for Chilperic's kingdom) and »Austrasia« (for Sigibert's, then Childebert II's), see EWIG, *Franken-*

Sigibert in 575, but without turning into peace. The grandsons of Clovis were now reduced to Guntram and Chilperic; for a moment in 581, these two, having once had six living sons between them, became wholly heirless. At Chilperic's court, a saintly bishop said to Gregory, »I see the sword of divine wrath unsheathed and hanging over this house« (5.50)⁷. The murdered Sigibert's eleven-year-old son Childebert II (of Austrasia) was left as the last survivor of the fourth generation and became briefly the sole hope of the dynasty's future⁸. Prospects were good for a usurper having a plausible claim to Merovingian blood. This moment of acute danger for Clovis's feuding descendants was the context of the Gundovald crisis.

Gregory notes Gundovald's arrival in Marseilles in 582. He then offers a synopsis of the pretender's life (6.24), later retelling the same story in direct discourse (7.36). Gundovald was born toward 540 (see the hypothetical chronology below⁹); he was given a royal upbringing and allowed to grow his hair to the long royal length. His mother presented him to Chlothar's heirless brother, Childebert I, saying, »Here is your nephew, the son of King Chlothar. As his father disregards him (*invisus habetur*), take him up, for he is your flesh«¹⁰. Childebert did so, but Chlothar demanded Gundovald's return; he declared »I did not produce this one«, and cut off the boy's long hair. After Chlothar's death (561), Gundovald, with his hair grown back to royal length, was taken in by Chlothar's heirless son, King Charibert¹¹, but Charibert's brother, King Sigibert, put an end to this¹². He had the young man surrendered, sheared him again, and consigned him to Cologne. Gundovald fled from there to Italy and was well received by its governor, Narses. He married, had two sons, and grew long hair again. His wife died, and he moved on to Constantinople. Welcomed at the imperial court, he stayed until invited back to Gaul by an Austrasian magnate, Duke Guntram Boso, who told him of the dynasty's dire straits, adding assurances that the foremost men of Austrasia accepted his legitimacy and would support him¹³. Gundovald obtained multiple promises of safety from Guntram Boso, who swore oaths in twelve Constantinopolitan churches. They then sailed to Marseilles. Gundovald was greeted by the bishop, Theodore, who had instructions from the Austrasian magnates to help him.

reich (as in n. 1), p. 44, 47. I use these terms for identification only (as is commonly done), without concern for when they actually appear in the record. Burgundy, once a kingdom in its own right, does not pose problems.

7 MURRAY (tr.), *Gregory of Tours* (as in n. 2), p. 120. Gregory gave a charming, earthbound reply to the bishop when asked what he saw on the roof: »Why, I see the roof-covering that the king lately had installed.«

8 WOOD, *Merovingian Kingdoms* (as in n. 1), p. 89–90, summarizes these conflicts, best experienced in Gregory, *Hist.*, 4.22–6.46.

9 Gregory does not record his birth year or age.

10 MURRAY (tr.), *Gregory of Tours* (as in n. 2), p. 131.

11 Both Childebert I and Charibert had daughters. Margarete WEIDEMANN, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit nach den Werken Gregors von Tours*, vol. 1, Mainz 1982 (Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Monographien, 3/1), p. 48, goes too far in conjecturing on the basis of 5.14 that Guntram Boso met Gundovald at Charibert's court.

12 In 7.36, Gundovald says that his second shearing was by »his brothers«, suggesting that the degradation was not Sigibert's sole initiative.

13 For an exhaustive account of Guntram Boso's career, see WEIDEMANN, *Kulturgeschichte* (as in n. 11), p. 47–53; also John Robert MARTINDALE, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 3, Cambridge 1992, p. 571–574. About the idea that Brunhild was the inviter, see n. 74–75, below.

A very hypothetical chronology of this life might be constructed as follows (needed hitching posts are supplied)¹⁴. Born, 540. Presented to Childebert I, 554 (Childebert I dies 558)¹⁵. Shorn by Chlothar, 555 (Chlothar dies 561). With Charibert, 562 (Charibert dies 567). Shorn by Sigibert, exiled to Cologne, 562. Flees to Italy (Narses), 562. Marries, has sons, and is widowed, 562–567 (Narses recalled, 568; Lombard invasion of Italy, 568). To Constantinople and resident, 567–582. Returns to Gaul, 582. Usurpation, 584. Killed, 585 (sons in Spain).

Gundovald was the focal point of a domestic, not foreign, crisis, centering on the succession of the Neustrian King Chilperic and of vital concern to the Merovingian dynasty. My coverage does not touch all topics relevant to him. For example, his royal tour of southwest Francia demanding and obtaining the submission of several cities and bishops is passed over. Also disregarded is the insulting surname »Ballomer« used by his enemies¹⁶. The dynastic aspect, whose profile was outlined above, is central to my discussion. The Gundovald crisis has a Byzantine side that has recently been much emphasized but is limited compared to its Frankish impact. Without supplying a comprehensive and continuous narrative of Merovingian history in the years of the crisis, I shall focus here on the topics that have proved most delicate and controversial in the recent literature.

Gundovald's (Rejected) Merovingian Legitimacy

On balance, it is close to certain from the cumulative evidence supplied by Gregory of Tours that Gundovald was a Merovingian. Gregory wrote the *Historiae* when once-threatened royalty was still alive and active (ca. 590); he could obviously not affirm Gundovald's authenticity. But the case for Gundovald that he offers is clearer than has yet been shown¹⁷.

- 14 I underscore that this chronology is loose and provisional. Others are welcome to improve my estimates. So much is unknown that any attempt at precision is vain.
- 15 For the estimated birth date, see the comment below, n. 19, on Gundovald's having been a wall painter in Chlothar's reign. 540 makes him fourteen when presented to Childebert I (but 554 is simply a guess), and twenty-one at Chlothar's death. The birth date is a possible variable. Making him much younger (e. g., born 544, limited by his marriage in Italy) gives him little time as a painter.
- 16 Gundovald's surname (which adds nothing to the subject) is discussed in many of the works cited in n. 1, e. g., NONN, »Ballomeris quidam«. There is a good account of his southwestern tour in SCHNEIDER, *Königswahl* (as in n. 1), p. 105–107; further, Michel ROUCHE, *L'Aquitaine, des Wisigoths aux Arabes*, Paris 1979, p. 71–73, with a map of Gundovald's circuit. WEIDEMANN, *Kulturgeschichte* (as in n. 11), p. 16, makes the interesting suggestion that Gundovald's success in winning these cities stemmed from the desire of the nobility of Childebert I's and Charibert's former kingdom (of Paris) to recreate a royal territory (*Teilreich*) of their own.
- 17 Excellent arguments in support of Gundovald's authenticity are given by Adrien DE VALOIS (Hadrianus Valesius), *Rerum Francicarum scriptores*, vol. 2, Paris 1658, p. 147–148. I have been influenced by BACHRACH, *Anatomy* (as in n. 1), p. 1–11, who is rightly impressed by Gundovald's gentle handling and »careful« upbringing; in the same sense, HARTMANN, *Aufbruch* (as in n. 1), p. 53. Also impressed, even more emphatically and convincingly, is SCHNEIDER, *Königswahl* (as in n. 1), p. 99–100. ROUCHE, *Aquitaine* (as in n. 10), p. 74–75, scathingly rejects the pretender, whom TESSIER, *Baptême* (as in n. 1), p. 201, calls »un aventurier«.

The most general reason for affirming Gundovald's royal parentage is the regard with which he was held, and the indulgence he was accorded, even after having been repelled by his alleged sire, Chlothar I. If his royal paternity had been clearly fictitious, two of the kings would not have kindly harbored him; and, when brought before his reputed father, he would have been unmasked as an obvious impostor and not have long survived¹⁸. This did not happen. Though rejected, he was allowed to live, free (6.24).

Another serious reason for thinking Gundovald royal is that he was »brought up very carefully, as is the custom of those kings (*ut regum istorum mos est*)«, which probably means that he was reared as though a royal son, including, as added by an evidently impressed Gregory of Tours, »instructed in letters« (*litteris eruditus*) (6.24). Gregory would not have spoken as positively as he does if Gundovald's upbringing had been left simply to his family.

While the usurpation was taking place, two derogatory comments were made about Gundovald. Apparently, his father was someone of no eminence associated with a mill (7.14). This is best explained as a reference to the husband of Gundovald's mother. The other disparagement is that, in King Chlothar's lifetime, Gundovald decorated church walls (7.36); doing so was evidently regarded as a mean occupation rather than an exercise of talent. The slur may show that, for some years, Gundovald had to earn his keep¹⁹.

It therefore appears that Gundovald was the son of a woman who had once caught King Chlothar's eye, and that he benefited from a royal upbringing, complete with literacy. It is not wholly improbable that he was reared in company with such legitimate princes (and half-brothers) as Charibert, Sigibert, and Guntram. His mother found no obstacle in bringing him to Chlothar's brother, King Childebert I. Yet, Gundovald's (step)father was allegedly a man of low extraction, perhaps on a royal estate; and Gundovald, despite his delicate rearing, was forced for a part of his life to work for a living. These disparate details cannot be pieced together into a satisfactory biography; we cannot even judge whether they are inconsistent. Too many essentials are missing, such as a reliable idea of the composition and life of a Merovingian royal court – a context for Gundovald's early years.

Gregory has Gundovald say during his usurpation, ask Rade Gund (ex-wife of Chlothar) and Ingeltrude (royal kinswoman) about me (7.36). These were royal ladies, thoroughly familiar with the circumstances of Chlothar's court. They would know his birth one way or the other. Gregory of Tours himself was in an excellent position to question Ingeltrude, who lived in Tours, and he was no stranger to Rade Gund²⁰. But Gundovald's enemies were obviously not going to consult these inform-

18 The same consideration holds for Gregory of Tours himself: if he had believed that Gundovald was an impostor, he would probably have found a way to show it. SCHNEIDER, *Königswahl* (as in n. 1), p. 100, also considers it significant that young Gundovald was not »disappeared«.

19 In the chronological construction given above, Gundovald would have ranged from fourteen to twenty-one in the last years of Chlothar, so as to give him time as a wall painter. His birth date seems to hinge on this variable.

20 About them, see MARTINDALE, *Prosopography* (as in n. 13), p. 1072–74, 619 (see also the entry for Gundovald 2, p. 566–569). HARTMANN, *Aufbruch* (as in n. 1), p. 64, notes the possible connection between Gregory of Tours and Ingeltrude. There is no reason to think that Gundovald corre-

ants. Others, too, claimed to know the truth about Gundovald. The magnates of Childebert II's kingdom affirmed, for what their word is worth, that they were all aware that Gundovald was Chlothar's son (7.36)²¹.

The evidence that Gundovald was reared as though throneworthy and respectfully handled by the kings he claimed were his kin suggests that, in his early years, he was kept in reserve as a possible heir²². Merovingian blood was precious and Merovingian longevity not assured. The danger in a hereditary system, especially one limited to males, is that blood will run out and the line will end. The Middle Ages are full of such incidents (the German emperors are a prominent example). Among the Merovingians, as seen above, the most emphatic sixth-century illustration of dynastic danger concerns Chlothar's sons: Chramn was killed in Chlothar's lifetime; Charibert lacked a male heir; Guntram was predeceased by two sons; Sigibert died violently and had only one heir; and Chilperic had multiple sons who died in one way or another so that, for a while, he was heirless, and, by the merest chance, when murdered, had a single, four-month-old (potential) successor²³. As Gregory points out by an (anachronistic) speech placed in Gundovald's mouth, by 585 the successors of Clovis were about to run out (7.36)²⁴. Gundovald was much needed to sustain the royal line. He even had claims to support from subjects fearing that Frankish kingship would become vacant: »there will be no strong member of our line to protect you« (*cum de genere nostro robustus non fuerit qui defensit*) (7.8, Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2], p. 150).

In light of this danger, Chlothar was well advised not to discard sons prematurely. The pedigree of mothers was irrelevant in the Merovingian system; a casual mistress's son was as qualified for succession as the son of a full-fledged queen (5.20). What made the difference was whether a father accepted the son and designated him as a successor. Among Frankish kings, Charlemagne is the outstanding example of this process: at an early date, he cut his first son Pepin (later called »the Hunchback«) out of the line of succession; he had decided to reserve it for his three sons by

sponded with these ladies while in Constantinople, as proposed by DUMÉZIL, Brunehaut (as in n. 1), p. 260. For comparison, Rade Gund was never able to contact her cousin, Amalafid, at the imperial court (see MARTINDALE, Prosopography, as above). The comment attributed to Gundovald does not imply any personal communication between him and them at any time.

- 21 This is double hearsay: Gregory has Gundovald say that Guntram Boso told him that the Austrasian magnates had this knowledge – not reliable testimony. The plot hatched by these *seniores* to repatriate Gundovald obviously required that the pretender should be authentically Merovingian.
- 22 BACHRACH, Anatomy (as in n. 1), p. 1–2, faintly anticipates this idea. Also along these lines, DUMÉZIL, Brunehaut (as in n. 1), p. 259, who believes less in Gundovald's royal parentage than I do.
- 23 Chramn, 4.20; Charibert lost a son, 4.26; Guntram's sons died, 5.17, 20; Sigibert's son Childebert II, 4.51. Chilperic lost one son in war (4.50), another in rebellion (5.18); a third was murdered by Fredegund, Chilperic's queen (5.39); Fredegund's first four sons died of disease (5.22, 34, 6.34), the fifth survived (6.40). Sigibert and Chilperic assassinated, 4.51 and 6.46.
- 24 In 7.36, Gregory has Gundovald claim that he is reporting what Guntram Boso told him in Constantinople in 582, but what he really supplies is the up-to-date dynastic situation at the time when he is speaking, in 585. Not wedded to historicity, Gregory tacitly updated the situation so as not to confuse readers.

Hildegard²⁵. As for Gundovald, whatever little games Childebert I and Charibert played, the family refused to accept succession by adoption.

Chlothar, at a point in his life (while Childebert I still lived, d. 558), decided that his sons by queens were sturdy enough to assure the Merovingian future; so the one (or more?) who had been kept in a reserve pool, and suitably brought up, lost his utility. Chlothar had him formally removed from the pool; only Gundovald's half-brothers would be heirs, partitioning Chlothar's united kingdom among themselves.

The political threat Gundovald represented was hollow as long as there were vigorous Merovingians in charge of the Frankish kingdom. Gundovald, however royal, was powerless against four grown-up, fully acknowledged half-brothers. He was too negligible to be feared, and too Merovingian to be maltreated. After shearing and degradation, he was evidently treated decently and honorably, even by the second shearer, Sigibert. Royal blood had its privileges; no dungeon for him. His half-brothers never placed him in close custody or forced him into a monastery. They evidently did not consider him dangerous unless patronized by an heirless Merovingian²⁶. No precautions were taken to keep him from approaching Childebert I and later Charibert, or, by the by, from escape to Italy from his Cologne exile. Both Narses, the imperial governor in Italy, with whom Gundovald took refuge, and the emperor in Constantinople were satisfied that he was not an impostor but a potential asset. The signs are consistent with the conclusion that Gundovald, though debarred from succession by his father's wish, was nevertheless Chlothar's son.

At the time of his usurpation, if hailed as an authentic heir, Gundovald was not only a third generation Merovingian, but also the father of two fourth generationers. He would have been a solid addition to the endangered Merovingian line. As the rebellion was collapsing, Gundovald's main supporter advised him treacherously to go to King Guntram and expect a friendly welcome, »the king doesn't want to lose your assistance because too few of your generation survive« (*quia non vult rex perdere solatium tuum, eo quod parum de generatione vestra remanserit*) (7.38). The second clause was true, and it highlights the mainspring of the crisis.

The Relationship of the Gundovald Adventure to Succession Events

The motive force behind Gundovald's usurpation was a succession problem in Neustria; Chilperic, father of many sons, risked ending up with no heir. At crucial moments, Gundovald had credibility in the midst of a fluid situation. Facing him during the rising, the bishop of Bordeaux remarked, »Is it true then that no one of the line of Frankish kings is left ...?« (7. 27; Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2],

25 For details, see Walter GOFFART, Paul the Deacon's *Gesta episcoporum Mettensium* and the Early Design of Charlemagne's Succession, in: *Traditio* 42 (1986), p. 87–91; reprinted in ID., *Barbarians, Maps, and Historiography*, Farnham/Surrey 2009, p. 197–201. There is no early attestation of Pepin's hunchback. See also Peter CLASSEN, Karl der Große und die Thronfolge im Frankenreich, in: Josef FLECKENSTEIN (ed.), *Ausgewählte Aufsätze von Peter Classen*, Sigmaringen 1983 (Vorträge und Forschungen, 28), p. 206–216; he takes a more restrained view than I of the exclusion of the firstborn Pepin.

26 The argument may be run in the opposite direction: Gundovald was not dangerous because he was definitely not royal; but (as said before) an impostor was likely to have been disposed of.

p. 161)²⁷. The dynasty stood on the brink. Sigibert had been cut down in 575; Chilperic was assassinated in 584; and Guntram, last of the third generation, was threatened with the same ax that had felled his brothers (7.14). An all but vacant throne beckoned. Gundovald's opportunity was there, but not fulfilled. He was thwarted in both phases of his return by unpredictable changes in Neustrian kingship.

The course of these events is best illustrated by a chronicle. At the point where it begins, in 577, the Frankish realm was distributed among three kings: Guntram, who became heirless; Chilperic (husband of Fredegund), still having three heirs; and Childebert II, seven years old (son of Brunhild), and not surprisingly heirless. The comments and conjectures that I attach to the attested facts are set off by square brackets.

- 577, Having lost his two sons to disease, King Guntram enters into a treaty making Childebert II of Austrasia his heir (5.17).
- 580, Chilperic's second and third sons by Fredegund die (5.34; the first died earlier, 5.22).
- Fredegund procures the death of Clovis, Chilperic's last surviving son (5.39). [Chilperic, father thus far of six sons, suddenly became heirless.]
- 581, Gogo, the moderate Austrasian regent, dies (6.1). [His successor, Wandelen, was a shadowy figure. Austrasian magnates gained prominence as the power behind Childebert II's throne²⁸.]
- The Austrasian magnates abandon the succession treaty of 577 with King Guntram and negotiate an undertaking with Chilperic to make Childebert II his heir (6.1, 3).
- Mummolus, greatest general of the day, deserts King Guntram, whom he had served outstandingly (e. g., 5.13), and moves his family and great riches to (Austrasian) Avignon, where he is allowed to reside in safety (6.1). [Mummolus's sudden abandonment of his king was a sensational event, also noted by a source independent of Gregory of Tours. It occasioned a council at Lyons in the same year²⁹.]
- 581? 582? Duke Guntram Boso, an Austrasian magnate, goes to fetch Gundovald from Constantinople (6.24, 26)³⁰. The pretender is solicited by all the *seniores* of Childebert II's kingdom; he is told »no one remains in Gaul who can rule that [i.e., the Frankish] kingdom unless you come« (*nec remansit in Gallis qui regnum illum*

27 DUMÉZIL, Brunehaut (as in n. 1), p. 261, momentarily recognizes the relationship of the Gundovald adventure to failing Merovingian blood.

28 Wandelen is not heard of again until he died and was not replaced (8.22, a. 585). Presumably, he acted with the more decisive Bishop Egidius of Reims and other Austrasian *seniores*, such as Guntram Boso.

29 The chronicler Marius of Avenches, Theodor MOMMSEN (ed.), MGH Auct. ant., vol. 11, Hanover 1894, p. 239. WEIDEMANN, Kulturgeschichte (as in n. 11), p. 40–43, has an exhaustive examination of Mummolus's career. The clearest sign of his Austrasian welcome in Avignon is that, when Guntram Boso attacked him, the Austrasian court sent Duke Gundulf to call off the siege of Avignon and further guarantee his safety (6.26).

30 According to BACHRACH, Anatomy (as in n. 1), p. 52 (who thinks in terms of official governmental proceeding rather than a conspiracy), and ZUCKERMAN, Qui a rappelé (as in n. 1), p. 4, Guntram Boso was an official Austrasian ambassador, with instructions from his sponsors for negotiations with the Byzantine emperor; so also TESSIER, Baptême (as in n. 1), p. 201. Gregory gives no sign that he was; he suggests that Guntram Boso's visit was concerned only with the invitation to Gundovald.

- regere possit, nisi tu advenias*) (7.36). [Gregory is consistent in showing that Gundovald's call was to the entire kingdom³¹.]
- 582, Fredegund bears Chilperic a new heir. In celebration, Chilperic releases all prisoners (6.23). [With this birth, the pact of 581 that made Chilbert II successor to Chilperic was undermined, although not necessarily cancelled.]
 - Gundovald, arriving in Marseilles, is instantly abandoned by Guntram Boso, who seizes his treasure (6.24). [The birth of the new son to Chilperic excluded any thought of an immediate Gundovald usurpation. Guntram Boso's seizure of the treasure was politically motivated, not private.]
 - Gundovald joins Mummolus in Avignon, then retreats to an island in the Mediterranean (6.24). He stays in contact with Mummolus (7.10).
 - 583, The Austrasian magnates make an offensive alliance with Chilperic against King Guntram (6.31). [This alliance was a risky step in view of Chilperic's now having a blood heir³², but the magnates retained power despite the impairment of the treaty.]
 - When ordered to advance in support of Chilperic, the Austrasian lower ranks (*minor populus*) mutiny against the magnates, accusing them of betraying the kingdom (6.31). [Now that the alliance with Chilperic was voided by the new heir, a (weak?) pro-King Guntram faction appears to have gained power in Austrasia, ousting the dominant *seniores*.]
 - 584, King Guntram makes friendly gestures toward Chilbert II (6.33). [Friendship between Guntram and Chilbert could be renewed because the Chilperic connection had snapped.]
 - Chilperic's infant son dies (6.34–35). Chilperic is heirless again. [Chilbert II's succession to Chilperic and its Austrasian backers should now have regained force.]
 - In talks between kings Guntram and Chilbert II, an attack on Chilperic is planned (6.41). [This alliance meant that the Austrasian magnates were still sidelined; again, the switchover from one court faction to the other was not instantaneous.]
 - Chilperic is afraid of the coalition of King Guntram with Chilbert II. Fredegund bears him a new son, but Chilperic keeps him hidden (6.41).
 - Chilbert II campaigns in Italy; when he returns, action against Spain is planned
- 31 ZUCKERMAN, Qui a rappelé (as in n. 1), p. 6, has no basis for resolving *regnum illum* (7.36) into Chilbert II's kingdom. The reference to *in Galliis* in 7.36 is decisive. Also, 7.32, *ut debitam portionem regni sui [scil. Chlothacharii] recipiat*. Note King Guntram's reproach: Guntram Boso invited Gundovald *ut ... super regnum nostrum adduceris* (7.14). *Nostrum* does not mean King Guntram's kingdom; »our kingdom« is the *regnum Francorum*, all of which King Guntram himself was placing under his control as it stood under Chlothar I, as explicitly reported (7.13). Gundovald boasts that he will go quickly to Paris to establish his capital, i. e., that of the whole kingdom (7.27). See also n. 62, below.
- 32 The Austrasian political situation between this alliance with Chilperic and the morrow of Chilperic's assassination (7.6, 14) is difficult to decipher. At both ends, the magnates are clearly in charge. The situation in between is fuzzy, with no clearly visible leader. The idea that the dowager queen, Brunhild, was the, or a, leading figure during this interval (as DUMÉZIL contends, n. 87, below) seems unlikely, since it is hard to associate her with a return to good relations with King Guntram (see n. 83 and the accompanying text, below), let alone with cooperation with the magnates.

- but aborted (6.42). [Both initiatives suggest that, with Chilperic still apparently heirless, and Childebert II still his designated successor, the Austrasian magnates had regained power³³.]
- Chilperic's daughter, Rigunth, leaves for marriage in Spain with 4,000 attendants and a treasure-laden cortège (6.45).
 - Chilperic is murdered (6.46)³⁴.
 - He leaves an unpublicized, unbaptized (10.28), and unrecognized four-month-old son (6.41, 46). [This son appears not to have acquired a name until after Chilperic's death; see below, 7.7. His baptism, a bone of contention, was often put off (8.9).]
 - The magnates are in full charge in Austrasia (7.6). [This possibly was when Gundovald left his island retreat and rejoined Mummolus in Avignon, 7.10.]
 - King Guntram goes to Paris. Fredegund asks his protection for herself and her infant (7.5). [The potential heir to Chilperic was first mentioned in public; he had no automatic right to his father's kingdom³⁵.]
 - Rigunth is in Toulouse with her rich trousseau. Rumor comes of Chilperic's death. Duke Desiderius seizes Rigunth's treasure (7.9).
 - Gundovald is proclaimed king at Brives (near Périgueux), supported by Mummolus and the Neustrian dukes Desiderius (7.10) and Bladast (7.28). [Probably, Gundovald's Neustrian backers knew of Chilperic's death, 7.9, but not of the infant heir; to them, Chilperic's kingdom appeared vacant.]
 - King Guntram in Paris is threatened with assassination by an embassy of Austrasian magnates (7.14); he pleads during a church service for the people to keep him safe so as to be able to rear his two nephews, last hopes of the royal family (7.8). He takes security precautions (7.18).
 - Neustrian magnates support Fredegund and the baby, now named Chlothar (7.7); additional Neustrians affirm support of mother and child when they withdraw to Rouen (7.19)³⁶.
 - King Guntram provisionally accepts the baby (7.8) over the protests of the Austrasian magnates (7.14). [As secret supporters of Gundovald, they wanted a vacant Neustria.]

33 The Italian campaign, in lieu of cooperation with King Guntram against Chilperic, suggests that the Austrasian magnates had regained a commanding position. The same holds for the aborting of action against Spain. This action was in support of Childebert II's sister, Ingund, whose Visigoth and Catholic husband had rebelled against his father, the Arian Visigothic king Leuvigild. Ingund's mother, Brunhild (herself of Visigothic origin), seems powerless.

34 The perpetrator escaped and was never detected. A certain Eberulf was falsely accused of the crime and killed, 7.21–22, 29. After Gundovald's toppling, King Guntram expressed suspicion that the pretender's Austrasian partisans procured Chilperic's death. Gregory of Tours, who was present, immediately diverted King Guntram from this thought (8.5); see n. 90, below. The matter was dropped even though the king's suspicion was obviously warranted.

35 Fredegund acted as though confident of King Guntram's benevolence and was right. It was not necessary for the leading Neustrian magnate, Ansovald, to »save« the child (7.7), as claimed by WOOD, *Kings, Kingdoms* (as in n. 1), p. 11, 23. See also the next n.

36 Months later (autumn 585), Guntram raised doubts about Chlothar II's legitimacy, but the boy's hold on kingship was by then beyond contestation. Fredegund had three bishops and 300 laymen swear that Chilperic was the father (8.9). She, rather than Ansovald, was the architect of Chlothar II's accession (see the previous n.).

- 585, King Guntram musters a large army against Gundovald (7.24). The Austrasian magnates are unmasked as Gundovald’s partisans (7.31). Kings Guntram and Childebart II are reconciled; Childebart II’s majority is proclaimed and the succession treaty of 577 reinstated (7.33).
- Gundovald is in Toulouse³⁷. The existence of Chilperic’s heir is learned (7.27).
- Desiderius abandons Gundovald (7.34). [He had presumably heard of support for Chilperic’s son on the part of leading Neustrians and King Guntram.]
- Gundovald and his chief supporters withdraw to Convenae, nursing faint hopes (7.34). [Their destination suggests the possibility of Visigothic assistance. Discussed below.] Bladast flees the usurpation (7.37).
- Although the siege by King Guntram’s army has barely begun and is futile (7.34, 37, 38), Mummolus *et al.* decide to surrender on terms³⁸. [The rebels now knew what had happened in Neustria.]
- Gundovald is betrayed and killed. His remaining supporters surrender on terms (7.38).
- Violating the surrender terms, King Guntram has Mummolus and Sagittarius killed. Others manage to scatter (7.39).
- 585, Childebart II has a son, Theudebert. King Guntram is overjoyed (8.37).
- 587, Childebart II has a second son, Theuderic (9.4). [The living Merovingian males have now increased to five.]

My argument, in brief, is that the turning points of Gundovald’s adventure in 582 and 585 were determined by the circumstances of Chilperic’s succession and by the rate at which these became known. The first Gundovald rising was aborted before starting when Chilperic acquired a new heir; his second rising took place when Chilperic died apparently without heir, and collapsed when a legitimate son materialized, obtaining the support of King Guntram and the leading Neustrians. Despite the centrality of Chilperic in the plot, Gundovald returned to Francia as a claimant to all or part of the entire *regnum Francorum*, not to seize any particular royal territory (*Teilreich*).

37 According to HEINZELMANN, Gregory (as in n. 3), p. 145, 153, Gundovald »does not show reverence either to God or His saints«, and his rising was »godless«. Gundovald was not portrayed as irreverent, though, and he hoped that relics of St. Sergius would help his cause; Mummolus, not he, offended the saint (7.31). Gregory’s Gundovald was an innocent, more sinned against than sinning; his death scene is very reverent (7.38). The idea that the usurpation was »godless« may be exaggerated.

38 Convenae had supplies enough to resist for years (7.34). Preparations for the siege took fifteen days, followed by unsuccessful assaults on the two following days (7.37), so that the besiegers *viderint quod nihil proficere possint* (7.38). This sounds like a siege going badly; in this sense, DELAPLACE, *Affaire Gondovald* (as in n. 1), p. 204. The comment of HEINZELMANN, Gregory (as in n. 3), p. 145, that Guntram’s defeat of Gundovald had »divine support« cannot be directly applied to the campaign (*viz.* 7.35) or the siege. The elaborate interpretation of the siege by BACHRACH, *Anatomy* (as in n. 1), p. 119–144, does not highlight how poorly the assailants were doing. Anyone who has seen the walls of Convenae (now Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges) and their abrupt site – as I did through the kindness of Dr. Christine Delaplace – can easily understand what a formidable task it would have been for an army to reach this fortification and break through it. Bachrach, also familiar with the terrain, was less daunted than I was.