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## 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 Merovingians<sup>1</sup>. The small body of relevant source material, virtually all of it from the *Historiae* of Gregory of Tours, has been picked over many times<sup>2</sup>. 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, *Brunchaut*, 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 KÖNIGEN (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)<sup>3</sup>. 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 vicissitudes<sup>4</sup>.

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 outward<sup>5</sup>. 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 them<sup>6</sup>. 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)<sup>7</sup>. 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 future<sup>8</sup>. 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 below<sup>9</sup>); 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«<sup>10</sup>. 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 Charibert<sup>11</sup>, but Charibert's brother, King Sigibert, put an end to this<sup>12</sup>. 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 him<sup>13</sup>. 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)<sup>14</sup>. Born, 540. Presented to Childebert I, 554 (Childebert I dies 558)<sup>15</sup>. 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 enemies<sup>16</sup>. 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 shown<sup>17</sup>.

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 survived<sup>18</sup>. 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 keep<sup>19</sup>.

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 Gund<sup>20</sup>. 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)<sup>21</sup>.

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 heir<sup>22</sup>. 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) successor<sup>23</sup>. 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)<sup>24</sup>. 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.

Hildegard<sup>25</sup>. 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 Merovingian<sup>26</sup>. 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' 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)<sup>27</sup>. 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 throne<sup>28</sup>.]
- 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 year<sup>29</sup>.]
- 581? 582? Duke Guntram Boso, an Austrasian magnate, goes to fetch Gundovald from Constantinople (6.24, 26)<sup>30</sup>. 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 kingdom<sup>31</sup>.]
- 582, Fredegund bears Chilperic a new heir. In celebration, Chilperic releases all prisoners (6.23). [With this birth, the pact of 581 that made Childebert 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 heir<sup>32</sup>, 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 Childebert II (6.33). [Friendship between Guntram and Childebert could be renewed because the Chilperic connection had snapped.]
  - Chilperic's infant son dies (6.34–35). Chilperic is heirless again. [Childebert II's succession to Chilperic and its Austrasian backers should now have regained force.]
  - In talks between kings Guntram and Childebert 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 Childebert II. Fredegund bears him a new son, but Chilperic keeps him hidden (6.41).
  - Childebert 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 Childebert 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 power<sup>33</sup>.]
- 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)<sup>34</sup>.
  - 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 kingdom<sup>35</sup>.]
  - 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)<sup>36</sup>.
  - 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 Childeb-  
ert II are reconciled; Childebert II’s majority is proclaimed and the succession  
treaty of 577 reinstated (7.33).
- Gundovald is in Toulouse<sup>37</sup>. 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. Discus-  
sed 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 terms<sup>38</sup>. [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 kil-  
led. Others manage to scatter (7.39).
- 585, Childebert II has a son, Theudebert. King Guntram is overjoyed (8.37).
- 587, Childebert 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.

## Was Gundovald's Treasure the Source of the Emperor Maurice's Subsidy to Childebert II?

Several matters of detail need to be attended to. The major ones concern Gundovald's treasure, and the role in the usurpation of Brunhild, dowager queen of Austrasia. Recent commentators have emphasized the Byzantine aspect of Gundovald's adventure. It is important, therefore, to give a full airing to the evidence for imperial involvement. Most central to this are the resources available for Gundovald's uprising, both on his arrival in Gaul and on his proclamation as king two years later. Where these riches came from and what became of them are our first concern.

One issue here is the »huge« treasure brought to Gaul by Gundovald, which is presumed to have been supplied by the Byzantine emperor (Tiberius II), and was seized in part by Guntram Boso (*immensum, ut ferunt, argenti pondus et auri vel reliquiarum rerum*, 6.24; *thesauros vero meos, in quibus immensum pondus argenti continetur et auri ac diversarum specierum*, 7.38; cf. 6.26, 7.36, no details)<sup>39</sup>; the other issue is the subsidy of 50,000 *solidi*, sent by Maurice, Tiberius II's successor, to the Austrasian king Childebert II to finance an attack on Lombard Italy (6.42). The case to be argued is that the subsidy derived from Gundovald's Byzantine treasure.

The treasure associated with the beginnings of the Gundovald crisis comes before us in five passages of Gregory's *Historiae*.

- (1) 6.24: after Gundovald's flight to an island, the Austrasian duke Guntram Boso and »King Guntram's duke« divide Gundovald's treasure (7.38 indicates that, in Gaul, Gundovald's treasure was divided into two parts). Guntram Boso takes to Auvergne a »huge weight of silver and gold and other goods«<sup>40</sup>. In a later chapter, he is said by Gundovald to have carried off (*abstulit*) *thesauros meos* (7.36). Gregory never specifies the source of the treasure. Other than the strong circumstantial evidence, the closest one comes to a Byzantine connection is Guntram Boso's (lying) accusation that Bishop Theodore of Marseilles, in welcoming Gundovald, wished to subject the kingdom to imperial control (6.24; discussed below).
- (2) 6.26: after taking the (ostensibly embezzled) treasure to Auvergne, Guntram Boso goes without apprehension to Childebert II's court, then populated by the *seniores* who had sponsored Gundovald's return from Constantinople. [It sounds *e silentio* as though Guntram Boso left the treasure in his Auvergne lands<sup>41</sup>. But if

39 Gregory shows Gundovald telling approximately the same story in 7.36 that is reported impersonally in 6.24 (see the paraphrase above); the narratives in the two chapters are very similar, almost literally. These similarities, frequent in Gregory (see another case, n. 62, below), imply that Gregory wrote the chapters long after the events, in a sustained period of composition.

40 Gregory has Guntram Boso go to *Arvernium* (the word standing by itself), which normally means the territory, not the city now called Clermont-Ferrand, usually qualified by Gregory as *urbs, civitas, ecclesia*, etc., or as *Arvernus* (indeclinable); Auguste LONGNON, *Géographie de la Gaule au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1878, p. 480–481; Denise ST-MICHEL, *Concordance de l'Historia Francorum de Grégoire de Tours*, vol. 1, Montreal n. d. [1979?], p. 89–90. Guntram Boso is likely to have had a dwelling there, in the country or Clermont itself, associated with the state lands granted to him (8.21). See also the next n.

41 WEIDEMANN, *Kulturgeschichte* (as in n. 11), p. 49, says that he secreted the treasure in Auvergne; this goes beyond Gregory. After Guntram Boso's violent death (587), his vast treasure of gold

Guntram Boso next went without apprehension to Childebert II's court, his apparent betrayal of Gundovald and misappropriation of his treasure could not have outraged his sponsors. Keeping faith with his colleagues at court, Guntram Boso might have transmitted (most of) his »gains« to them and the royal treasury. See the discussion of Maurice's 50,000 sol. below.]

- (3) 7.36: at Convenae during the usurpation, Gundovald complains that (two years earlier) Guntram Boso broke his word, took his treasures, and placed them under his control.
- (4) 7.38 (Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2], p. 170): Gundovald says, »Some of my treasure, which contains a huge weight of gold and silver and other valuables, is stored in Avignon; some was snatched away by Guntram Boso.« [These words put what happened in a new light. They may be another way of saying the same as in 6.24: Guntram Boso divided Gundovald's treasure with King Guntram's duke. That this was Mummolus is shown in 6.26: speaking to King Guntram, Guntram Boso says, *Mummolus ... dux tuus* (6.26), identifying him as the *dux* referred to in the phrase *cum duce Gunthchramni regis res Gundovaldi divisit* (6.24). Further confirmation comes in 7.38, just quoted. No third person was involved. Guntram Boso took only »some«; the other part of Gundovald's treasure stayed under Mummolus's protection in Avignon, but is not heard of again<sup>42</sup>.]
- (5) 7.40: Mummolus's vast treasure, including 250 »talents« of silver and 30 of gold, is acquired by King Guntram after his execution<sup>43</sup>. This was said to have come from an ancient hoard that Mummolus had uncovered<sup>44</sup>. [Both parts of the divided Gundovald treasure, very probably originating from Byzantium, vanish without trace, unless there is a connection to the 50,000 sol. sent to Childebert II, below.]

More thinly documented than Gundovald's treasure is the subsidy of 50,000 *solidi*, sent by the Byzantine emperor to King Childebert II of Austrasia to carry out an attack on Italy:

etc. was seized with no comment about specific origins (9.10). If any treasure of his was in his Auvergne property, it had to have been moved elsewhere by 585, when his *res* (consisting of state lands) were confiscated, for a reason unrelated to Gundovald (8.21).

- 42 MARTINDALE, *Prosopography* (as in n. 13), p. 567, 573, and Eugen EWIG, *Die Merowinger und das Imperium*, Opladen 1983 (Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Geisteswissenschaften, Vorträge G 261), p. 38 n. 155, wrongly think that King Guntram's *dux* is unidentified. SCHNEIDER, *Königswahl* (as in n. 1), p. 104, believes there was a division with a homonymous Duke Guntram. BACHRACH, *Anatomy* (as in n. 1), p. 64, mentions the anonymous duke without comment; DUMÉZIL, *Brunehaut* (as in n. 1), p. 259, turns the *dux Gunthchramni* into an army. WEIDEMANN, *Kulturgeschichte* (as in n. 11), p. 49, regrets the lack of an explanation for Guntram Boso's division of the treasure with Mummolus. There is no problem if the division is taken as a political act rather than as private plunder.
- 43 »Talent« is probably a synonym for a pound. See in this sense, Rudolf BUCHNER, *Gregor von Tours, Zehn Bücher Geschichten*, vol. 2, Darmstadt 1956, p. 149 n. 5. Jan Frederik NIERMEYER, *Mediae latinitatis lexicon minus*, Leiden 1976, s. v. *talentum*, gives this definition, citing eleventh-century glosses. Charles DU CANGE, et al., *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, vol. 8, éd. augm., Niort 1883–1887, col. 017b. <http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/TALENTUM1>, basically agrees but also supplies higher multiples (100, 50). Higher multiples might possibly apply here.
- 44 For an interesting comment about this ancient hoard, see HEINZELMANN, *Gregory* (as in n. 3), p. 56.

- (1) John of Biclar, a. 584: »By hire, the emperor Maurice set Franks in motion against the Lombards« (*Mauricius imperator contra Longobardos Francos per conductellam movet*)<sup>45</sup>.
- (2) (Gregory of Tours) 6.42, a. 584 (Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2], p. 141): »King Childebert, however, went to Italy. ... Some years before, Childebert had received fifty thousand *solidi* from the emperor Maurice to drive the Lombards out of Italy. Now the emperor, hearing of the peace just concluded with that people, asked for the money back. But Childebert, sure of his strength, did not wish to provide even a response on the matter« (*Childebertus vero rex in Italia abiit. ... Ab imperatore autem Mauricio ante hos annos quinquaginta milia solidorum acceperat, ut Langobardus de Italia extruderit. Audito autem imperator [sic], quod cum his in pace coniunctus est, pecuniam repetibat; sed hic fidus a solatiis nec responsum quidem pro hac re voluit reddere*). [Note the absence of agents carrying this money from Constantinople to Childebert II. Gregory says nothing about an imperial embassy or messengers from Maurice with a large amount of gold. The transfer was carried out by shadows in a loosely defined past.]
- (3) 8.18, a. 585, »King Childebert, pressed by imperial envoys demanding the return of the gold given the previous year, sent an army into Italy« (*Childebertus vero rex, impellentibus missis imperialibus, qui aurum, quod anno superiore datum fuerat, requirebat, exercitum in Italia diregit*)<sup>46</sup>.

These two groups of source extracts may be interpreted in at least two ways. The normal course, as I understand it, runs as follows: There were two blocks of treasure, sent at different times by two emperors. One treasure was consigned to Gundovald by Tiberius II and accompanied him to Marseilles<sup>47</sup>. In Marseilles, this (Byzantine) treasure was sequestered by Guntram Boso and divided by him with »King Guntram's duke« (identified as Mummolus in 6.26 and 7.38, see n. 42). Guntram Boso took his part to Auvergne and »privatized« it; the other part was held honestly by Mummolus in Avignon. (Gundovald at Convenae implies that only one part of his treasure was misappropriated, 7.38.) Not much later than Guntram Boso's mischief, a wholly different sum of Byzantine gold was sent westward by Tiberius's successor, the emperor Maurice. It must have been borne by separate (undocumented) carriers direct to the Austrasian court for use against the Lombards. The 50,000 sol. were then asked back by a dissatisfied Maurice. This seems to be the normal explanation.

Several problems are embedded in this account of the treasures. We must accept that two successive emperors not many months apart each sent a large sum westward. Besides, to reach Austrasia, the second dispatch of gold with its essential attendants

45 Theodor MOMMSEN (ed.), MGH Auct. ant., vol. 11, Hanover 1894, p. 217.

46 In view of Gregory's writing procedure – he wrote history retrospectively (as we do), not step by step with the events – it is likely that the person who *pecuniam repetibat* in 6.42 was identical with the *missi imperiales* of 8.18. The one obstacle, not insurmountable, is the claim that Childebert did not deign to answer (6.42). There is little time for two sets of *missi*. Gregory's time phrases *ante hos annos* and *anno superiore* are approximations, not to be relied on to be precise and offering a firm base for calculations.

47 For this chronology, see GOFFART, Byzantine Policy (as in n. 1), p. 101–102.

had to travel safely and, to us, invisibly from Constantinople; this risky transfer, unmentioned anywhere, is a conjectural inference. Finally, there is the problem of Guntram Boso's behavior: he crippled Gundovald's rising by seizing his treasure and apparently embezzling a part of it (6.24), but he yielded a large share to Mummolus (6.24, 7.38); he went on to Auvergne, ostensibly deposited his ill-gotten gains, then, surprisingly, proceeded to Childebert II's court for a reunion with his fellow Austrasian magnates, who had sent him to Constantinople. Far from being angry, the magnates soon let him depart unharmed with his family (6.26). In view of these problems, the received explanation cannot be considered unshakable.

The alternative proposed here (and anticipated in 1957) assumes that there was only one treasure – the riches entrusted by Tiberius II to Gundovald (and his escort, Guntram Boso) and brought by him to Marseilles<sup>48</sup>. So understood, Maurice's ostensibly distinct 50,000 sol. for the Austrasians was in fact extracted from the Gundovald treasure. Guntram Boso, rather than being a wholly self-seeking thief, withdrew the sum of this subsidy from the whole treasure when he shared it with Mummolus, then, without depositing it in Auvergne, took it to Childebert II's court as a war subsidy. (Guntram Boso was presumably paid for services rendered, but with modest pickings out of the large total.) This reconstruction both explains Guntram Boso's behavior and makes him the bearer of Maurice's 50,000 sol. to Childebert II; separate imperial envoys to convey this sum become superfluous. The Byzantine subsidy to Austrasia would have a single source, Gundovald's treasure, and an identified intermediary, Guntram Boso. Maurice, in asking for a refund, knew about Gundovald's (Tiberius-sent) treasure and regarded it as prepayment for an Austrasian campaign against the Lombards. This was the sum whose return he demanded.

The main obstacle to this reordering of the facts is the testimony of John of Biclar and Gregory. According to the former, it was Maurice who moved the Franks against the Lombards; and Gregory has Maurice send the subsidy and demand its refund. These assertions that Maurice sent the money are not unassailable; the references to Maurice may be shakier than they appear<sup>49</sup>. The crucial point is the very short time frame imposed by the death of Tiberius II and the succession of Maurice (August 582). John of Biclar and Gregory wrote with limited information: John might reason, because the Frankish forces moved now, in Maurice's time, the hiring and subsidy were Maurice's doing; Gregory of Tours might reason, because Maurice asked for the money back, he sent it. Both reports, though right in fastening on the now ruling Maurice, may embody faulty dating by the reporters<sup>50</sup>. To my mind, neither John's nor Gregory's account excludes the possibility that the arrangement and sending of money were by Tiberius II in connection with Gundovald, and that Maurice, well aware of what his predecessor had done, dealt with the Austrasian court only about the disposition of this gold. Because all this happened at a moment of change in imperial reigns, overlap is very possible.

48 DUMÉZIL, Brunehaut (as in n. 1), p. 258, endorses the idea that Tiberius II sent the 50,000 sol.

49 EWIG, *Die Merowinger* (as in n. 42), p. 37–38.

50 In 7.36, as indicated in n. 24, above, Gregory deliberately updated one statement so as to bring it into line with current circumstances. He was unconcerned with historicity. Similarly, he might have avoided a reference to Tiberius II (his sending the money) in 6.42, so as not to confuse readers by distinguishing the sending emperor from the complaining one.



The chain of events featuring Guntram Boso proposed here involves several hypothetical steps. (I have been chided for the earlier form of my argument<sup>51</sup>.) Nevertheless, the standard explanation is itself far from ironclad; it requires the sending from Byzantium within a few months of two large sums of gold, with the later one of them having wholly conjectural emissaries to negotiate and transfer the sum to Austrasia; and it demands very odd behavior by Guntram Boso. Impaired in these ways, the accepted version is hardly more robust than my alternative, which has claims to being considered more likely.

Several further matters concerning treasure need attention. How much did Gundovald's Byzantine gold amount to? The one precise figure of a Byzantine subsidy is the 50,000 sol. just discussed; this translates into 694.5 pounds of gold, a fair load for about three pack animals (very roughly measured at 72 sol. = 1 pound, using the avoirdupois pound)<sup>52</sup>. This sum was destined for a military campaign. It is hard to tell whether a larger, equal, or smaller sum would have been earmarked for Gundovald's usurpation<sup>53</sup>. The emperor Tiberius II is shown in a Byzantine source sending more than 400,000 sol. to the Italians for them to bribe whomever they could to help against the Lombards<sup>54</sup>. The sums allocated to activities in Francia are unlikely to have come anywhere near that figure.

The notion of a huge treasure is vague. What is *immensum* for one person is modest by comparison with a royal hoard. King Chilperic sent his daughter Rigunth to be married in Spain with precious goods requiring fifty carts for transport; yet Queen Fredegund, the bride's mother, claimed that all of it came from her personal treasure, not the royal one (6.45). Gundovald's silver, gold, and precious articles surely amounted to much less than Rigunth's trousseau. Later, the thirty pounds of gold found in Mummolus's treasure were considered a vast sum (7.40), yet they equal only about four percent of the subsidy of 694.5 pounds sent to Austrasia. Another *inmensa multitudo* of precious metal loosely tied to Gundovald is mentioned late in the *Historiae* (10.21, see below). Gregory's references to huge treasures are not measurable.

We are told that, after Gundovald withdrew to an island, Guntram Boso shared his treasure with »King Guntram's duke« (6.24). This duke is identified as Mummolus in 6.26<sup>55</sup>. Gregory's account leaves several matters unclear. Was Gundovald destitute when he fled to an island to wait for what the future might bring? We know that he remained on good terms with Mummolus, to whose side he returned (7.10); we know

51 ZUCKERMAN, Qui a rappelé (as in n. 1), p. 12 n. 37, calls my proposal »totalement arbitraire«, strong words for a mere argument. EWIG, Die Merowinger (as in n. 42), p. 38 n. 155, while disagreeing, recognizes that I simply developed a hypothesis. I hope the case has been more persuasively argued here than it was in GOFFART, Byzantine Policy (as in n. 1), p. 109–112.

52 BACHRACH, Anatomy (as in n. 1), p. 62, an expert metrologist, conjures up 200,000 *solidi* and distributes them among fifteen or sixteen animals, approximately confirming my figure.

53 The very large sums conjectured by BACHRACH, Anatomy (as in n. 1), p. 60, and DELAPLACE, Affaire Gundovald (as in n. 1), p. 205, leave me skeptical, but this is guesswork.

54 Subsidy to the Italians, see Menander the Guardsman, frg. 22, cited n. 60, below.

55 See n. 42, above. Authors taking the unnamed duke to be a third party conclude that Guntram Boso divided his own share with him; but this is wrong: 6.24 has to be interpreted in the light of Gundovald's statements in 7.38 indicating a division in two only.

too, from his say-so, that a part of his treasure was in Avignon, safeguarded by Mummolus (7.38). Mummolus continued to support Gundovald; he was the leading partisan in the usurpation of 584–585, executed at Convenae.

There is no reason to think that the Byzantine government replenished Gundovald's funding before his main rising<sup>56</sup>; his resources in 584 came from the treasure accompanying Rigunth, whose great size Gregory emphasizes (fifty carts). This treasure was seized in Toulouse by Gundovald's supporters, notably Duke Desiderius. What Gundovald expended in gift-giving at the start of his usurpation (7.26) would have come from this hoard, which needed many pack animals to transport toward Convenae (6.45, 7.9, 32, 35, 36). There is a reference in 10.21 to »the hidden treasure which their father [Waddo, one of the pardoned partisans of Gundovald] had taken from the property of Gundovald«; it turned out to be »a countless hoard of gold, silver, and precious objects« (Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2], p. 229–230). Since Waddo joined the uprising in Toulouse (he was *maior domus Rigunthis reginae*, 7.27), any treasure of Gundovald's in his possession could have come only from those parts of Rigunth's trousseau that reached Convenae with Gundovald and were plundered by *hii, qui primi erant* just before surrendering to King Guntram's army (7.38).

What was left of Gundovald's Byzantine gold did not accompany the rebels of 584–585, but remained stored in Mummolus's Avignon (7.38). Gregory does supply figures of silver and gold for the fabled treasure of Mummolus, seized by King Guntram after Mummolus's execution. None of it is said to have consisted of Gundovald's riches. Its apparent source was the uncovering of an ancient hoard (7.40). There is a mystery here, but no evidence allowing it to be solved.

### Gundovald's Arrival in Constantinople, and the Aims of the Byzantine Emperors

Gregory evokes Gundovald saying that, on arriving from Italy, he was »most kindly received by the emperors« (*ab imperatoribus receptus benignissime*) in Constantinople (7.36)<sup>57</sup>. This description should not be interpreted as a festive occasion at which two emperors turned out with their court to welcome the newly-arrived Frankish pretender with great ceremony and honor<sup>58</sup>. In all likelihood, Gregory means something humbler, namely, the sort of »reception« one is given at a friend's house. Instead of turning Gundovald away from the palace gates with ignominy, the emperors – meaning their officials – accepted him as being worthy of regard, a qualified pretender (perhaps on the strength of Narses's recommendation), taken into the court, and given the wherewithal to live with his children, awaiting the next political step in his life, if any. Constantinople presumably gave a comparable welcome to Queen Brunhild's Visigothic grandson, Athanagild, orphaned infant of Hermenegild and Ingund<sup>59</sup>.

56 DUMÉZIL, Brunehaut (as in n. 1), p. 264; DELAPLACE, Affaire Gundovald (as in n. 1), p. 205.

57 Later in the same chapter Bishop Theodore of Marseilles is said to have received Gundovald *summa benignitate*. Gregory does not normally associate the term with a ceremony; see ST-MICHEL, Concordance (as in n. 40), vol. 1, p. 118.

58 BACHRACH, Anatomy (as in n. 1), p. 26; DELAPLACE, Affaire Gundovald (as in n. 1), p. 206.

The Byzantine government was fully engaged in war with the Persians in the east, with Avars and Slavs in its own European back yard, with the Visigoths in Spain, and with the Berbers in North Africa. It had few resources left for dealing with the Lombard invasion of Italy (568ff). We have three indications earlier than Gundovald of largely diplomatic stirrings by Byzantium against the Lombards, once with money for winning over Franks, another time with 3,000 pounds of gold (426,000 *solidi*) and a suggestion to hire Franks among others; yet again with a few troops<sup>60</sup>. The emperor Maurice supposed that 50,000 sol. had been sent to Austrasia to induce King Childebart II to invade Italy and combat the Lombards (see above). Pressed by Maurice, the Austrasians sent armies into Italy in 584, 585, 588, 589, and 590, with no gain for Byzantium, and little for themselves. One focus of imperial pressure on the Austrasian court was Queen Brunhild's longing to recover her daughter and grandson from Byzantine exile<sup>61</sup>.

These are the attested facts we have apart from Gundovald. In his regard, we know that he arrived in Marseilles with a treasure whose origin is not improbably assumed to have been Byzantine. The bishop who received him and who had a letter of instruction from the Austrasian government (ruling half of Marseilles) was accused by a confirmed, cynical liar, Guntram Boso, of having introduced »a foreigner into Gaul and wanting to subject the kingdom of the Franks to imperial authorities by this means« (*hominem extraneum intromisissit in Galliis voluissetque Francorum regnum imperialibus per haec subdere ditionibus*) (6.24, Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2], p. 131)<sup>62</sup>. In what directions can this evidence be taken? It would be inappropriate to credit Guntram Boso's imaginative accusation about subjecting the kingdom. Even if able to do so, the emperor had no interest in establishing a client king in a new, endangered western bridgehead<sup>63</sup>. The one firm conclusion that may be drawn, given

59 GOFFART, Byzantine Policy (as in n. 1), p. 116. For Brunhild and Athanagild, see *Epistolae Austrasicae* 27, Wilhelm GUNDLACH (ed.), MGH *Epistolae*, vol. 3, Berlin 1892, p. 149.

60 *Epistolae Austrasicae* 48 (as in n. 59), p. 152–153; Roger C. BLOCKLEY (ed. and tr.), *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, Liverpool 1985 (ARCA, Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs, 17), frg. 22, p. 196–197; frg. 24, p. 216–217; GOFFART, Byzantine Policy (as in n. 1), p. 77–82. ZUCKERMAN, *Qui a rappelé* (as in n. 1), p. 10, tries to coordinate several embassies and subsidies; much of this is necessarily conjectural, with imprecise dates.

61 Austrasians in Italy, 6.42, 8.18, 9.25, 29, 10.3. See EWIG, *Die Merowinger* (as in n. 42), p. 42–48. Also GOFFART, Byzantine Policy (as in n. 1), p. 107–117 (which I do not now wholly endorse); DUMÉZIL, *Brunehaut* (as in n. 1), p. 273–280. The daughter, Ingund, died on the way to Constantinople.

62 The English translators (Dalton, Thorpe, Murray) say »a Frankish kingdom«, probably meaning King Guntram's. Gregory actually says »*regnum* of the Franks« (i. e., the totality). With the French translator, Robert LATOUCHE, *Grégoire de Tours, Histoire des Francs*, vol. 2, Paris 1965, p. 40, and the German one, BUCHNER, *Zehn Bücher* (as in n. 43), vol. 2, p. 42, I understand that »the (entire) kingdom« is meant; see further the discussion in n. 31, above. On Guntram Boso's character, see 7.14, King Guntram accuses him, »you are a perpetual liar and never keep your promises«. See also 7.36, and especially 5.14 (MURRAY [as in n. 2], p. 86), Gregory's personal judgment: »As for Guntram [Boso], though good in some respects, he was too ready to perjure himself, and, truth be told, he never took an oath to any of his friends without disregarding it right away (*Gunthchramnus vero alias sane bonus – nam in periuriis nimium prae paratus erat – verumtamen nulli amicorum sacramentum dedit, quod non protinus omisisset*).« Gregory later repeats the same assessment almost verbatim (9.10).

63 To the contrary, DELAPLACE, *Affaire Gundovald* (as in n. 1), p. 205–206.

the precedents, is that the Byzantine government wanted to use Franks against the Lombards and was ready to pay to do so. Accordingly, Gundovald was subsidized in the hope that he would somehow bring about this result, without its being spelled out precisely how this would be done<sup>64</sup>. The use of the great general Mummolus, a famed slayer of Lombards (4.42, 44–45), is likely to have been envisaged; he received part of Gundovald's treasure. Some or most of the other part of the treasure, as I have argued above, went to Austrasia via Guntram Boso to finance an attack by Childebert II; the more traditional account is that extra gold was sent separately by Maurice; either explanation accounts for Austrasian actions. These invasions were repeated several times but, like other Byzantine initiatives against the Lombards, failed to have the desired effect.

### Gundovald's Mediterranean Retreat, the Theme of Aquitaine, and a Possible Visigothic Connection

Betrayed by Guntram Boso, Gundovald withdrew to an island (6.24). It has been suggested recently that this was Corsica or Sardinia – territories under Byzantine control, thus amplifying the imperial aspect of the adventure<sup>65</sup>. No earlier commentator imagined such a distant destination for Gundovald's flight.

Much more likely is a refuge in a nearer island off the easily accessible southern coast: Le Frioul (off Marseilles), Hyères (off Toulon)<sup>66</sup>, or – if one wanted to be a little more remote – the famous Lérins islands (off Cannes)<sup>67</sup>. Gundovald's appearance beside Mummolus when the real usurpation started (7.10) shows that relations between him and the pretender did not sour or were interrupted. Communications between nearby Mediterranean islands and Mummolus in Avignon were much more assured than those from Corsica and Sardinia. Further contacts between Gundovald and Byzantium are unlikely.

The question of Aquitaine needs only a moment's attention. Was Gundovald usurping as a »king of Aquitaine«? Here and there, it is intimated (notably by Dumézil) that he did. Michel Rouche firmly rejects this possibility: »Le but de Gundovald n'est pas de se contenter de l'Aquitaine, mais d'aller s'emparer du royaume de Chilpéric«; there was no Aquitainian national sentiment at the time<sup>68</sup>. This is correct.

64 DUMÉZIL, Brunehaut (as in n. 1), p. 261–262, maintains that Maurice was the promoter of the entire Gundovald enterprise, occasioned by the empire's need for action against the Lombards (p. 258). The idea is not persuasive. The impulse had to come from within Francia, with Byzantium only as a contributor to the plot. ZUCKERMAN, *Qui a rappelé* (as in n. 1), p. 11–12, maintains that Chilperic negotiated with Byzantium about an attack on the Lombards. Geography seems an obstacle; see GOFFART, *Byzantine Policy* (as in n. 1), p. 92–93. On the same issue, EWIG, *Die Merowinger* (as in n. 42), p. 34 n. 136, argues against me that Merovingian kings could engage in military campaigns even in lands not bordering on theirs; he cites Chlothar I. I would reply that the particular circumstances of the 580s were different from those of Chlothar's time.

65 DUMÉZIL, Brunehaut (as in n. 1), p. 263 (the idea may have originated with him); DELAPLACE, *Affaire Gundovald* (as in n. 1), p. 205. BACHRACH, *Anatomy* (as in n. 1), p. 70, comments on the accessibility of Corsica and its Byzantine government, but goes no further.

66 The apparent choice of BACHRACH, *Anatomy* (as in n. 1), p. 70.

67 There are islands off the coast of Mediterranean Francia that I have not named. Without suggesting any basis, ZUCKERMAN, *Qui a rappelé* (as in n. 1), p. 14, evokes islands »du littoral narbonnais« (Visigothic territory).

68 DUMÉZIL, Brunehaut (as in n. 1), p. 263–264, 266–267; DELAPLACE, *Affaire Gundovald* (as in

All the persons involved in the usurpation were proper Frankish officials, associated with the existing courts. Gundovald was put forward as a legitimate Merovingian, entitled to a share of the total kingdom. Royal Merovingians had the potential of being rulers of the kingdom at its widest, like Chlothar I; their *regna* were not fixed entities but existed *pro tempore*, capable of being instantly enlarged or diminished. Desiderius and Bladast, both officials of Chilperic, were Aquitainian specialists without being attached to a distinct southern court. Gundovald was not a candidate king of an Aquitaine he was to carve out and create.

As a third question, did Gundovald make connections with the Visigothic court? The one factual item involving Spain in these matters is the information that Gundovald's sons were in Spain (9.28). Were they in Byzantine Spain? There is no reason to think so except in the unlikely perspective of Gundovald's return being an ambitious imperial initiative. The Byzantine enclave in Spain was far away, cut off from Francia by the Visigothic kingdom; not strong; not in contact with the north; in no position to interfere with Frankish affairs<sup>69</sup>. The likelihood is that Gundovald's sons, in Spain, were with the Visigoths.

The idea that Gundovald sought the help of the talented Visigothic king Leuvigild is undocumented but not chimerical<sup>70</sup>. In going to Convenae, at the outlet of a mountain pass from Spain, Gundovald may have hoped for Visigothic help. Spain was on bad terms with King Guntram, on good terms with Chilperic<sup>71</sup>. As matters looked

n. 1), p. 204. ROUCHE, Aquitaine (as in n. 10), p. 76 (quotation), 71–72. ZUCKERMAN, Qui a rappelé (as in n. 1), p. 14, speaks of Gundovald carving out a kingdom for himself in southern Gaul. GOUBERT, Byzance et les Francs (as in n. 1), also adverts to Aquitaine. It seems to me as though Gundovald's tour of the southwest was only a down payment on a more ambitious goal.

69 For Gundovald's sons going to Byzantine Spain, see ZUCKERMAN, Qui a rappelé (as in n. 1), p. 13; concurring, DELAPLACE, Affaire Gundovald (as in n. 1), p. 205. A very full account of the Byzantine province is given by Edward A. THOMPSON, *The Goths in Spain*, Oxford 1969, p. 320–334. He does not encourage belief in the possibility of Byzantine intervention from there to assist Gundovald. There is no hint of communications between the Franks and the Byzantines in Spain. The impossibility of an active Byzantine role is made clear by Karl Friedrich STROHEKER, *Leovigild*, reprinted and updated in: ID., *Germanentum und Spätantike*, Zurich 1965, p. 183.

70 See in this sense BACHRACH, *Anatomy* (as in n. 1), p. 101; DELAPLACE, *Affaire Gundovald* (as in n. 1), p. 207. A shadowy connection is visible in 8.28: the mother-in-law of Bladast, one of Gundovald's main supporters, was in touch with Leuvigild; possibly, Bladast abandoned Gundovald on learning secretly that there would be no Visigothic help (7.37); but this is pure guesswork. GOUBERT, *Byzance et les Francs* (as in n. 1), p. 46, conjectures that Gundovald's sons were sent to Spain to seek Visigothic help. The idea is attractive but unverifiable. There is no trace of the sons' being with Gundovald in Gaul.

71 The friendly relationship of Spain with Neustria is curious in the light of Galswintha's murder (4.28), but, after quite a few years, the cordiality of Chilperic with Galswintha's stepfather, Leuvigild, was an established fact: there were several embassies (5.41 [a pro-Visigoth action], 43; 6.18, 33, 40), and, in 584, Chilperic's daughter, Rigunth, went to marry Reccared, Leuvigild's son (6.45). A sign of the alignment of Leuvigild with Neustria after Chilperic's death is the letter to Fredegund featured in 8.28, which hints at links between Visigothic Spain and the (Gascon) lands where Gundovald had found most support. For King Guntram's resolute hostility to the Visigoths, see 8.28, 30, 9.1, 16, 28, 31; a serious war between him and Spain broke out in 585, and the hostilities continued for the rest of the decade; besides Gregory, see John of Biclair, Theodor MOMMSEN (ed.), *MGH Auct. ant.*, vol. 11, Hanovre 1894, p. 217–218; also STROHEKER, *Leovigild* (as in n. 69), p. 187–188.

after Chilperic's death, Leuwigild's one firm ally was gone, leaving a hostile Austrasia (because of the in-law Hermenegild's rebellion) and a hostile King Guntram (espousing a lasting anti-Visigoth thread in Merovingian foreign policy)<sup>72</sup>. Gundovald was presumably going to replace the slain Chilperic and maintain his foreign policy. Support of (a successful) Gundovald would have been a good investment against a kingdom of the Franks that now (because Chilperic's heir was an infant) was solidly against Leuwigild's Spain. But, sadly for Gundovald, no instant Visigothic assistance was supplied.

Despite the considerations above, the idea of Visigothic participation cannot be proposed with any confidence. Attacked by King Guntram, the north of the Visigothic kingdom was to be a theater of war with Franks for the rest of the 580s, but that theater was adjacent to King Guntram's territory, well removed from the Pyrenees (and Convenae) to the west<sup>73</sup>. Besides, open hostilities began only after Gundovald was suppressed.

### Queen Brunhild in the Gundovald Crisis

Recent commentators are inclined to make Queen Brunhild a major player in the Gundovald crisis. It is even claimed, against all probability, that Gundovald was invited back to Francia by Brunhild to become her spouse and rule Austrasia<sup>74</sup>. Zuckerman, the proponent of this theory, uses as an *élément-clé* the argument that, when Gregory has Gundovald be a *quodam invitatus* (6.24), the pronoun signifies Brunhild<sup>75</sup>. This identification is out of the question. Gregory leaves us in no doubt

72 Unlike Sigibert and Chilperic, King Guntram did not seek a marriage alliance with the (still Arian) Visigothic court. On this thread of foreign policy, see EWIG, *Frankenreich* (as in n. 1), p. 44.

73 See the account of STROHEKER, *Leowigild* (as in n. 69), p. 185–187.

74 ZUCKERMAN, *Qui a rappelé* (as in n. 1), p. 18, has a thesis: »Gundovald a été rappelé ... pour monter sur le trône d'Austrasie et pour épouser Brunehaut.« HARTMANN, *Aufbruch* (as in n. 1), p. 64–65, takes Brunhild's participation as a matter of fact. GOUBERT, *Byzance et les Francs* (as in n. 1), p. 36, 59–61, 66, calls her »le plus ferme appui du prétendant«. BACHRACH, *Anatomy* (as in n. 1), p. 151–153, considers her possible involvement, personally believes that she had a role, but leaves the matter open. DUMÉZIL, *Brunehaut* (as in n. 1), p. 266–267, conjectures that a definite overture for marriage was made to Brunhild but turned down. Brunhild's prominence is not a new idea. It recycles a contention of DE VALOIS, *Rerum Francicarum scriptores* (as in n. 17), vol. 2, p. 231: »Et Brunichildis quidem Gundobaldo nubere cogitabat ...« The idea is ably refuted by Godefroid KURTH, *La reine Brunehaut* (1891), revised in: ID., *Études franques*, vol. 1, Paris, Brussels 1919, p. 291 n. 1.

75 ZUCKERMAN, *Qui a rappelé* (as in n. 1), p. 7 and *passim*. Also along these lines (considering a *quodam* odd), WOOD, *Merovingian Kingdom* (as in n. 1), p. 95, who intimates that, when Gregory wrote 6.24, he was unaware of what he would say in 6.26. This is followed by DUMÉZIL, *Brunehaut* (as in n. 1), p. 262. It should not be imagined that a moment of ignorance or wavering affected Gregory between 6.24 and 6.26. Gregory's authorship of the *Historiae* was all of a piece (as apparently accepted by ZUCKERMAN, p. 16 n. 47). Wood's theory of the process is impaired by internal evidence (see n. 4, above). Hesitations over a *quodam* have been voiced elsewhere. BUCHNER, *Zehn Bücher* (as in n. 43), vol. 2, p. 42 n. 1: the pronoun had to signify a different person because Gregory had no reason to »spare« Guntram Boso; MARTINDALE, *Prosopography* (as in n. 13), p. 572: in 6.24, Guntram Boso's invitation is »treated as a secret«; ZUCKERMAN, p. 3, »aucune raison de dissimuler son nom«. It defies good sense to imagine that Gregory said one thing four times, with great emphasis, but did not mean the same thing in the first citation.

that Guntram Boso (and his associates, the Austrasian *seniores*) did the inviting; he says so four times: 6.26 (very explicitly), 7.14 (most explicitly), 32 (concurring), 36 (affirmed by Gundovald himself). Twice, Guntram Boso very loudly disclaims his role, even offering to engage in trial by combat to clear his name (6.26, 7.14). These avowals cannot be detached from Gregory of Tours' repeated assertions that Guntram Boso was a shameless perjurer<sup>76</sup>. The pronoun in 6.24 just means that Gregory raises the curtain on Guntram Boso in 6.26 rather than two chapters earlier. His reason for putting off the identification is that the name Guntram Boso as inviter would startle readers in 6.24, since, in the same chapter, Guntram Boso, called by name, is shown betraying Gundovald. Gregory does exactly the same thing with Mummolus in the same chapters: unnamed in 6.24 (»King Guntram's duke«), identified in 6.26. Gregory's use of a pronoun for the first reference to Guntram Boso is deliberate, but its cause is the logic of the chapter, not political discretion<sup>77</sup>.

Four passages starring King Guntram show Brunhild somehow connected to Gundovald. They need to be examined. 7.33 (Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2], p. 167): reconciled to Childebert II (585), King Guntram warns him whom not to consult, notably Bishop Egidius of Reims. He also urges Childebert »not to visit his mother in case this gave her an opportunity to write to Gundovald or to receive letters from him in return«. It is not entirely clear what Childebert II's visiting his mother would have to do with exchanges of letters. A safe inference, nevertheless, is that King Guntram suspected Brunhild of intending to correspond with Gundovald and wanted to prevent this.

7.34 (Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2], p. 167): »At this time Guntram sent a letter to Gundovald in the name of Queen Brunhild saying that [Gundovald] should leave the army and order it to go home while he took up winter quarters farther away, in the city of Bordeaux. [King Guntram] wrote this as a trick so he could better learn what Gundovald was up to.« Again, this is somewhat murky. King Guntram seems to have presupposed that Brunhild was in touch with Gundovald and able to send him virtual commands. There is nothing to suggest that the king's surmise had any foundation in fact. His trick had no effect on the pretender; the ruse achieved nothing.

Gregory's most circumstantial account of King Guntram's suspicions is in an incident occurring four years after Gundovald's death. 9.28 (Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2], p. 215): Brunhild has precious objects made for dispatch as gifts to the Visigothic king Reccared and entrusts them to Ebregisil, her specialist envoy to Spain. King Guntram hears of this, has the roads watched, and intercepts Ebregisil in Paris. »The king said to him, ›Isn't it enough, most wretched of men, that by a shameless counsel you summoned ... Gundovald ... for marriage (*Non sufficit, o infelicissime hominum, quod, impudico consilio ... Gundovaldum ... ad coniugium arcissistis*) ... Now you send gifts to his sons to invite them to commit murder in Gaul once again. You are not going where you think you are but are to be put to death, because your embassy is a danger to our lineage.« Ebregisil denies this and says the

76 For Gregory on Guntram Boso's character, see n. 62, above.

77 For Mummolus as the unnamed duke of 6.24, see n. 42, above. Delaying the appearance of the protagonist (as done with both Guntram Boso and Mummolus) is a convention of heroic poetry.

gifts are related to the marriage of King Reccared to Chlodosind, King Childebert II's sister. »Believing him, the king let him go.«

This anticlimactic passage is decisive for those who assign Brunhild a major role in the Gundovald crisis. Here, some claim, is clear evidence that the summons went out from Austrasia to Gundovald in Constantinople inviting him back to Gaul to become Brunhild's husband<sup>78</sup>. Such a reading requires *arcessire* to be related to a summons from Constantinople (rather than, say, from southwest Francia) and implies, further, that Ebregisil was one of the Austrasian *seniores* in whose name Gundovald was sought out. These inferences from 9.28 are within the range of possibilities, but should this line of interpretation be followed? One would be taking King Guntram's suspicions about a marriage mediated by the Austrasian magnates to be the deep truth about the conspiracy. Yet, from what Gregory says independently about Austrasian conditions, the possibility of such a conspiracy was remote, if not out of the question (see below). The idea of a marriage of Brunhild to Gundovald seems of no advantage to its putative fomenter; it called for a strong woman with a royal son to give up her political standing, to go out of her way, and a dangerous way at that, to surrender the assets of widowhood and subordinate herself and her son to a pretender with sons of his own (even supposing that he might make his way safely to Austrasia)<sup>79</sup>.

What matters more than these negative considerations is the credibility of the source. Without exception, Gregory attributes to King Guntram these suspicions about Brunhild and marriage. How does this source affect their credibility? One more text needs to be looked at before trying to determine how seriously Gregory wishes us to understand the king's testimony.

9.32 (Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2], p. 216): King Guntram's army, sent against Visigothic Septimania, suffers a heavy defeat with much loss of life<sup>80</sup>. Learning this, King Guntram is greatly agitated and orders the roads across his kingdom barred. He is especially incensed at the Austrasians, who have a treaty with Spain and whom he believes have stabbed him in the back and are plotting to seize his kingdom.

78 SCHNEIDER, *Königswahl* (as in n. 1), p. 108, considers the chapter firm proof that Gundovald sought marriage with Brunhild. The extreme theory of ZUCKERMAN, *Qui a rappelé* (as in n. 1), p. 5, 7, and *passim*, putting Brunhild at the center of the crisis, rests principally on 9.28. He asserts that Guntram Boso denounced the details of the plot to King Guntram (without Gregory telling us so) and »on apprend donc de sa [King Guntram's] bouche ... ce que lui a appris Gontran Boso«. This is an imaginative and convenient way to authenticate the king's words, but it lacks any basis in evidence. Gregory's report of the confrontation between King Guntram and Guntram Boso (6.26) makes no allowance for an unveiling of the secret of Gundovald's return. WEIDEMANN, *Kulturgeschichte* (as in n. 11), p. 49, also infers from 6.26 that Guntram Boso betrayed the entire conspiracy to King Guntram. To the contrary, 7.14, 31, show that the king did not know decisive parts of the plot. Taking a different tack, KURTH, *Brunehaut* (as in n. 74), p. 291, concludes that the idea of an involvement of Brunhild with Gundovald was planted in King Guntram's susceptible mind by Fredegund during their interviews in Paris. This theory matters less than Kurth's conviction that Brunhild had no connection with the pretender.

79 DUMÉZIL, *Brunehaut* (as in n. 1), p. 266–267, also takes the view that such a marriage was clearly against Brunhild's interest.

80 Septimania (the seacoast west of the Rhone, centering on Narbonne) was the one remaining part of Gaul continuing under Visigothic rule. It was annexed to the Frankish kingdom only by the Carolingians.



In this context, »He hurled a lot of abuse at Queen Brunhild, saying ... that she wanted to call in the son of the late Gundovald and marry him (*addens etiam, quod Gundovaldi quondam filium invitatum coniugio copulare velit*).« Brunhild clears herself of the king's accusations by oath, and the incident ended<sup>81</sup>.

The notion of marriage with a son of Gundovald's verges on the absurd<sup>82</sup>. Gregory places King Guntram alone at the center of the four reports implicating Brunhild with Gundovald. Guntram was deeply suspicious of Brunhild. His views about her cannot be taken in isolation<sup>83</sup>. Gregory's lengthy, well-rounded, and often sympathetic portrayal of King Guntram shows that the king easily lost his head and temper, and exhibited poor judgment, sometimes with homicidal results<sup>84</sup>. His rage at Ebreghisil in 589, followed by letting him go (9.28), is paralleled by his twice raging at Bishop Theodore of Marseilles in 581 and 582, then acquitting him (6.11, 24); here, he rages at Brunhild and is quieted by an oath<sup>85</sup>. As narrated by Gregory, the two references to marriage suggest the almost certain basis for King Guntram's suspicions: in 575, Brunhild, newly widowed, engaged in the strangest and most questionable act of her life, namely, her courtship by Chilperic's son Merovech, her nephew-in-law, and her short-lived and (by church law) incestuous marriage to him (5.1–2)<sup>86</sup>. Gregory supplies more than enough cause not to treat King Guntram as a reliable witness where Brunhild was concerned. As a family member, he was deeply affected by the scandal of this marriage and allowed it to taint his opinion of Brunhild, whose Visigothic origin and sympathies already told against her.

These four passages do not portray a situation in whose smoke modern historians should see fire. Between the death of Gogo (581) and King Guntram's peace with Childebert II (585), Brunhild was in eclipse at the Austrasian court. Evidence of this includes Gregory's account of Duke Lupus's expulsion from Champagne (6.4) and

81 The sequence of events resembles 8.9 (see n. 36, above): Guntram makes loud accusations; the accused silences him by means of an oath. In the aftermath of Gundovald's rebellion, Brunhild gave her protection to Waddo, a Neustrian participant (7.43). Such intercession tended to be motivated by multiple connections of family or friendship; it cannot turn Brunhild into a Gundovald partisan. Gregory of Tours himself protected incriminated persons, including Bladast, one of the ringleaders (8.6).

82 Brunhild was one generation ahead of a Gundovald son, and their connection would have been barred as incestuous by church law. Also relevant is the question of what such a (geographically remote) union would have achieved.

83 He is quoted as saying that Brunhild threatened him with death, from which God would protect him (8.4).

84 Gregory's appraisal of King Guntram is discussed in Walter GOFFART, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A. D. 550–800)*, Princeton 1988, p. 225–226. Although stories of King Guntram's »excesses« are listed (n. 496), I should have taken more account of Gregory's presentation of Guntram's failings, which he amply illustrates. The illuminating assessment of Guntram in Gregory's design by HEINZELMANN, Gregory (as in n. 3), p. 51–65 and *passim*, may also make too little allowance for Gregory's candid portrayal of the king's flaws (e. g., the appalling killings in 5.35 and 10.10, and the encounters cited here, clearly dramatizing Guntram's intemperate vacillations). KURTH, *Brunehaut* (as in n. 74), p. 290, calls the king an »esprit faible et impressionable«, a judgment necessarily prompted by Gregory's portrayal.

85 Additional instances are the meeting of King Guntram with Guntram Boso (6.26) and the question of Chlothar II's baptism (8.9, and n. 81, above).

86 See the Additional Note: Brunhild's Marriage to Merovech, below.

his description of Guntram Boso's contemptuous behavior toward her during Childebert II's minority (9.8). One detects her powerlessness again when Childebert II marches into Italy, rather than taking steps against Spain, where Brunhild's daughter and son-in-law needed help (6.40, 42)<sup>87</sup>. There is no credible sign of her reaching out to Gundovald or vice versa. A much more explicit rumor ran about Fredegund than about her: »Many said that [Chuppa] was really sent to entice Gundovald with many promises, in the event he could be found alive, and bring him to Fredegund« (7.39, Murray [tr.], Gregory of Tours [as in n. 2], p. 172)<sup>88</sup>. This, too, was merely gossip, although, circumstantially, an alliance between Fredegund and Gundovald was more politically and geographically credible than one with Brunhild. The wise course is to consider all this smoke as simply that – the cloud of rumors, however improbable, occasioned by a great crisis.

### What Was It All About?

Unsurprisingly, there is little agreement on the goal of Gundovald's return and usurpation. Some think it was to topple King Guntram<sup>89</sup>, others that its target was Chilperic, others still that Brunhild wanted a new husband. These are not the only suggestions. A lack of agreement is to be expected in a set of events that points in multiple directions and stirs the ingenuity of interpreters. Whatever one's preference, it will involve conjectures and be open to dispute.

A central fact in the story is the prominence of powerful men, many of them royal officials – and from all three kingdoms. Led by the metropolitan bishop of Reims, one of the loftiest prelates of the entire *regnum Francorum*, the group of Austrasian *seniores* stands out. They sent Guntram Boso to Constantinople with clear instruc-

87 See n. 32, above. To the contrary, DUMÉZIL, Brunehaut (as in n. 1), p. 263–265, who has her powerful in 584. The chronologically unclear incidents involving Brunhild in 6.37, 39, are among Gregory's ecclesiastical chapters, here illustrating noxious lay interference in church affairs. EWIG, *Die Merowinger* (as in n. 42), p. 37, and DUMÉZIL, p. 209–210, interpret the passages as documenting Brunhild regaining political power in 584, but this inference is not compelling. The deplorable but politically insignificant actions in these chapters do not illustrate any participation by her in Austrasian politics. KURTH, Brunehaut (as in n. 74), p. 288, also sets the queen's political comeback too early. Attributing power to her in 584 implies giving her a leading part, hand in glove with the Austrasian magnates, in dealings with King Guntram right after Chilperic's death (7.7, 14), requiring a highly improbable alliance of Brunhild with her worst enemies. DUMÉZIL, p. 218, 220–222, makes this attribution, but, to my mind, such an idea goes against any acceptable reading of Austrasian politics.

88 Chuppa's stated mission was to locate Rigunth and bring her home – a perfectly appropriate concern for Fredegund, her mother. Malicious tongues could embroider on it. The idea of a marriage of Gundovald and Rigunth is mooted by DUMÉZIL, Brunehaut (as in n. 1), p. 264; if he was Chlothar's son, Rigunth would be his niece, not a possible union.

89 This opinion was already voiced in the Fredegar chronicle (ca. 660); see Fredegar, *Chronicon* 3.89, Bruno KRUSCH (ed.), *MGH Script. rer. Merov.*, vol. 2, Hanover 1888, p. 117. Its report is likely to be the conclusion drawn by an early reader of Gregory's account. For a full development of the (contestable) idea of a wide-ranging plot against King Guntram (including Chilperic as a party), see KURTH, Brunehaut (as in n. 74), p. 285–287. The surprising idea of Chilperic in the Gundovald conspiracy is also found in WEIDEMANN, *Kulturgeschichte* (as in n. 11), p. 213; see the next n. TESSIER, *Baptême* (as in n. 1), p. 201, and EWIG, *Frankenreich* (as in n. 1), p. 45, are further adherents to King Guntram as target.

tions to bring back the pretender. The Austrasian magnates were not alone. The great Mummolus, a transfuge from King Guntram, presumably unhappy with his king, had withdrawn to Austrasian territory friendly to him, and was surely destined for a major role. The comparably great duke Desiderius, a Neustrian magnate, secretly joined the plot at Gundovald's first coming, when Chilperic still lived, and was prominent in the actual usurpation (7.10). We have the makings of a broadly based »barons' rebellion«.

The parlous state of the Merovingian dynasty was the likely stimulus for the instigators, whose designs were not necessarily reprehensible<sup>90</sup>. Weakened by years of almost continual wars among the kings, the great power of the Merovingians, evident since Clovis and still very manifest in the second generation, was in jeopardy. King Guntram was unwarlike, bordering on the ineffectual<sup>91</sup>; Childebert II was a minor with a contested regency and a political mother; Chilperic was on the verge of losing all his heirs. There was a power vacuum not just in individual royal territories (*Teilreiche*) but in the entire kingdom. In this troubled context, with blood running out, a creditable pretender in possession of two sons might, with the support of strong men in all the kingdoms, have a chance to eliminate his rivals or at least to force the other kings' hands, secure some or all of the realm, show himself suitably grateful to the magnates who brought him to power, and, with luck, reanimate the dynasty to the benefit of all concerned.

If all went well – and that was asking a lot – the result might be a Frankish kingdom that again engaged in lucrative foreign war, and that would choose, first, to fall upon a perennial prey, northern Italy, often attacked before by Franks, Burgundians, and Alamans. The goal of help against the Lombards enticed the Byzantine emperors to subsidize Gundovald's undertaking; gaining such aid was their established policy. Byzantium got some of what it paid for – the string of vain Austrasian invasions that punctuated the balance of the 580s.

The plot fell apart as Merovingian blood rallied. King Guntram took to arms; Childebert II engendered sons; Chilperic's infant heir, Chlothar, won support (and eventually became a great king). Although a failure to its sponsors, Gundovald's return is enlightening. It was the climax of the harmful wars among the third-generation Merovingians and merits the attention it has won.

90 One should recall in this connection that Gregory of Tours was himself an »Austrasian magnate«; appointed bishop by Sigibert and Brunhild, ordained by Egidius of Reims; a relative of his was Duke Gundulf, a troubleshooter for the magnate-dominated Austrasian government (6.11, 26). Auvergne, which Gregory hailed from, had long been an Austrasian dependency; this would have affected his relations with Guntram Boso, duke in Auvergne, in whom Gregory found sympathetic traits (5.14, 25; see n. 62, above). Gregory's aversion to Chilperic suggests that he would have leaned toward King Guntram (as emphasized by HEINZELMANN, Gregory [as in n. 3], p. 51–75). But it matters that, regardless of leanings, he was one among the collectivity of Austrasian dignitaries. WEIDEMANN, *Kulturgeschichte* (as in n. 11), p. 57, 213, 214, even supposes that, with Gundulf, Gregory had prior knowledge of Gundovald's return in 582 and was a participant in the plot. (The lack of an index of proper names in WEIDEMANN's work thwarts efforts to trace what, taken together, must be an original conception of the Gundovald crisis.)

91 His conduct in relation to the outrageous brother bishops Salonius and Sagittarius is a good illustration of his shortcomings (5.20).

## Additional Note: Brunhild's Marriage to Merovech, son of Chilperic

The events discussed in this additional note took place very shortly after Brunhild's husband, King Sigibert of Austrasia, was assassinated by Neustrian agents (4.51, a. 575). Merovech was Chilperic's eldest son at the time; it is conceivable that he was alienated from his father (who had abandoned Merovech's mother for Fredegund). Brunhild, presumably, was mourning her spouse and worrying about her future. How these motives combined into a romance and marriage challenges one's understanding. What sort of chance was there for any positive action by these two in the heart of Chilperic's kingdom (they were in Rouen)? As far as one may see, they posed no danger of any kind to Chilperic. The incident was so futile, on the part of both parties (and of Bishop Praetextatus, Merovech's godfather, who married them), as to be baffling. No sooner were they married and fled to a church than Chilperic cornered them and cajoled them out of sanctuary. In haste, he separated Merovech from Brunhild, took Merovech away with him, and soon hounded him to death (5.2, 14, 18). The bridal pair was never together again<sup>92</sup>.

Back when Merovech was in play, what scenario could have been envisaged? A love match moments after King Sigibert's murder? Improbable. An attempt to depose Chilperic and replace him? Out of the question<sup>93</sup>. The most rational hypothesis, saving Brunhild's reputation as a politician, is that, by hastily marrying (without sentiment), she sought a means of being released, with child-daughters, from internment by Chilperic and returned to her son in Austrasia. The marriage from her standpoint was a form of pressure, harnessing Merovech's infatuation to her purposes<sup>94</sup>. Without being explicitly informed, we infer that Brunhild's repatriation took place soon after she was separated from Merovech. Her abandonment of her new spouse was exchanged for safe passage home<sup>95</sup>. That is the best case scenario, but it is just a guess. Merovech himself never had any hope of extracting a settlement from his father, let alone of shaking his throne. It is hardly surprising that he was politically isolated and soon died.

92 SCHNEIDER, *Königswahl* (as in n. 1), p. 247: by marriage to Brunhild »versprach sich Merowech ... eine eigene Königsherrschaft«; if this means an apanage or subkingship, the idea has merit. Another idea about Merovech's motive is that, by this marriage, he sought to stake a claim to Sigibert's succession; so Janet Laughland NELSON, *Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Baldhild in Merovingian History*, reprinted in: EAD., *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, London 1986, p. 11–12 (after Eugen Ewig). One wonders what would have been Brunhild's interest in such hopes. This Merovech was the first Merovingian to be named after the eponymous ancestor of the family; Chilperic, whose sons included a Clovis, favored historical names. See Walter GOFFART, *The Name »Merovingian« and the Dating of *Beowulf**, in: *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), p. 96 with n. 16.

93 According to WOOD, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 90, Chilperic »faced a challenge« by Merovech, but he does not explain what the challenge was if Merovech had no hope of support against his father, as seems to have been the case.

94 Cf. KURTH, *Brunehaut* (as in n. 74), p. 281, »ne voulut-elle pas simplement se servir du jeune prince comme d'un instrument qui devait rétablir sa fortune ...?«

95 Cf. the different proposal of DUMÉZIL, *Brunehaut* (as in n. 1), p. 189. We are both speculating as there is no source. Gregory's sole reference to circumstances after Brunhild's repatriation is that, when Merovech tried to join her in 577, the *Austrasii* refused him admittance (5.14). Whether this was against Brunhild's wishes or not is unknowable. The Austrasians had nothing to gain from espousing Merovech's cause; neither did she.