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Hist. 495 Senior Thesis

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Carolingian Propaganda: Kingship by the Hand of God

Introduction and Thesis Topic:

The Carolingians laid the foundation for their successful *coup* in 751 very carefully, using not only political and religious alliances, but also the written word to ensure a usurpation of Merovingian power. Up until, and even decades after Pippin III's *coup*, the Carolingians used a written form of propaganda to solidify their claims to the throne and reinforce their already existent power base. One of the most successful, powerful and prominent features of the Carolingians' propaganda campaign was their use of God and divine support. By divine support, I mean the Carolingians stressed their rightful place as rulers of Christendom and were portrayed as both being aided in their actions by God and being virtuous and pious rulers. This strategy of claiming to fulfill Augustine's vision of a "city of God" politically would eventually force the Carolingians into a tight corner during the troubled times of Louis the Pious.

The Word Propaganda and Historiography:

The word propaganda is a modern word which did not exist in Carolingian Europe. It carries powerful modern connotations and should not be applied lightly when discussing past documents without keeping its modern usage in mind at all times. As Hummel and Huntress note in their book *The Analysis of Propaganda*, "'Propaganda' is a

word of evil connotation . . . [and] the word has become a synonym for a lie.”¹ In order to avoid the ‘evil connotations’ of modern propaganda in this paper I will limit my definition of propaganda to the intentional reproduction, distribution and exaggeration or fabrication of events in order to gain support. In the Carolingians’ case, this translates into support from the nobility against the Merovingian kings.

Many of the sources I will be looking at during the course of my paper were first discovered, collected and translated by positivist historians working for the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* in the late nineteenth, or early twentieth centuries. While the historical community is greatly in-debted to these earlier historians, many of the documents have only recently begun to be analyzed in-depth. Bruno Krusch is perhaps the most important historian from this period for the documents I will be dealing with. He worked to translate, among other things, *The Liber Historiae Francorum*, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations* and several of the chronological listings of Carolingian and Merovingian kings historians have come to rely upon.² In

¹ William Hummel and Keith Huntress, *The Analysis of Propaganda* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1949), p. 1.

² Some of Krusch’s works include, “Zur Chronologie der merowingischen Könige” in *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte*, vol. 22, 1882, *Die älteste Vita Leudegarii*, 1891, *Die älteste Vita Praejecti*, 1893, “Der Staatsstreich des fänkischen Hausmeiers Grimoald I” in *Festgabe für Karl Zeumer*, 1910, and “Chronologica Regum Francorum Stirpis Merovingicae” in *The Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, 1920. For a discussion of his work on the *Liber Historiae Francorum* see Richard A. Gerberding’s treatment in his book *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historia Francorum*. Also, for a description of his work on *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations*, see J. M. Wallace Hadrill’s discussion in the introduction of his own translation of *Fredegar* published in 1960.

many of his works, however, Krusch drew many of his conclusions directly from the texts themselves without questioning possible motives or mistakes by the respective authors. In his book *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum*, Richard Gerberding challenges some of Krusch's treatment of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and the chronological listings of kings. Gerberding points out that the *Liber Historiae Francorum* differs in its account of many of the events recorded in other annals, hagiographies and the royal lists of Merovingian kings. Many of these discrepancies were pointed out by Krusch, and thus led several historians to "to dub its [*The Liber Historia Francorum's*] author the *fabulator*" and ignore it as a reliable historical source.³ Gerberding sees the *The Liber Historia Francorum* as a valuable and accurate source and suggests that the reason the *The Liber Historia Francorum* is alone in its treatment of Grimoald's *coup*, for example, is because of its location of composition. Therefore the motivation of its Neustrian author differs from the Austrasian authors who wrote later treatments of Grimoald's activities. Gerberding points to the motivation and royal backing of the author of *The Liber Historia Francorum* as the basis for the document's different stance on the Grimoaldian *coup*, denying its inaccuracy as an historical document.⁴

Similarly, Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding call the *Annales Mettenses Priores* (*The Annals of Metz*) into question in their book *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640-720*. Fouracre and Gerberding investigate the manuscript of the *The Annals of Metz* discovered by Karl Hempe in 1895 and translated for the

³ Richard A. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum*, (New York: Oxford university Press, 1987), p. 47.

⁴ I will deal with the specific differences presented in documents concerning Grimoald's *coup* below. Also, for a discussion of the dating of the *coup* raised by Gerberding and others see Appendix One of this paper.

Monumenta Germaniae Historica by Bernhard von Simson in 1905. In their analysis they question the location of the creation of the source and the motivations of the author(s) behind its composition, eventually stating that *The Annals* “see the Merovingian age through Carolingian eyes, and that vision has produced a warped view.”⁵

The questioning of the motivations of the authors of these documents has led to the recent use of the term ‘propaganda’ to describe the “warped views” of many of these documents. Yitzhak Hen, in his article “*The Annals of Metz and the Merovingian Past*” actually describes the *Annals* as “as a piece of propaganda, designed to glorify the house of the Carolingians.”⁶ The use of the word propaganda in this piece is an historiological step forward for understanding the motivations behind many Carolingian documents. Gerberding, Fouracre and Hen are right in their treatment of the sources and in observing the motivations behind their authors. Hen understands the implications of the word propaganda and sees it as an accurate description of many Carolingian documents. I agree that several of the sources are “a systematic attempt by an interested individual (or individuals) to control the attitudes of groups of individuals through the use of suggestion and, consequently, to control their actions” — in other words, propaganda.⁷ The word, even with all its connotations, is not only the best description for the documents I will be examining during the course of this paper, but also an accepted term by the historical community.

⁵ Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640-720* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), p. 330.

⁶ Yitzhak Hen, “*The Annals of Metz and the Merovingian Past*” in *The Use of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 2.

⁷ Leonard W. Doob, *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1935), p. 89.

General Background Information:

During the decline of the power base of the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries CE, individuals and groups of warriors began to take over the duties of policing sections of the empire. Eventually these small armies and duties became inheritable and, in essence, small kingships formed under the retreating tide of the Roman imperial government. By the early sixth century one family, the Merovingians, under their leader Clovis, had succeeded in extending its sphere of military and political power over much of what is now northeastern France, Belgium, part of the Netherlands and some small sections of western Germany.⁸ Upon Clovis's death in circa 511, his kingdom was broken into three sections and divided among his sons, Chlodomer, Childebert I and Lothar I. These three kingdoms or the *Triregna* as they were called, were known as Austrasia (the far northwest portion), Neustria (the section of northern France with its capital at Paris) and Burgundy (the more southern portion of the empire). While there was a great deal of infighting between the families over the years, they managed to keep their empire in familial hands for over two centuries by way of their military power and affective system of government.⁹ Perhaps the most important position in the Merovingian government was that of Mayor of the Palace, a second in command so to speak, to the Merovingian king. The Mayor of the Palace helped run virtually every aspect of the government and literally served, in some instances, as the head of state with the Merovingian king filling the role of figurehead.

Over time the position of Mayor of the Palace became inheritable in the same way a king might pass down his throne to his son. By the seventh century the family later

⁸ See the map in Appendix Two at the end of this paper for a clearer understanding.

⁹ For a more in-depth treatment of the history of the early Merovingians see Gregory of Tours's *The History of the Franks*, trans. and ed. by Lewis Thrope (Penguin Books, 1974) and Ian Wood's *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*. (Longman Press, 1994).

known as the Carolingians had firmly established themselves as perennial heirs to the office of Mayor of the Palace in Austrasia.¹⁰

In 651 Grimoald, the Carolingian holding the office of Mayor of the Palace at the time in Austrasia, attempted a *coup* when the Merovingian king, Sigibert III, died.¹¹ Grimoald thought his power exceeded that of the Merovingian king and he would be able to take hold of the throne itself. However, Sigibert's brother, Clovis II of Neustria, intervened, killed Grimoald, crushed the *coup* and placed Dagobert II, Sigibert III's young son, back on the throne of Austrasia as king. Interestingly though, the Carolingians continued to serve as Mayors of the Palace even after Grimoald's failed *coup*.

The Carolingians did not stop in their pursuit of the Merovingian throne, and eventually, Charles Martel, in the eighth century, succeeded in extending the Carolingian family's power beyond Austrasia and into Neustria and Burgundy as well as the fairly independent area of Aquitaine. While he kept the Merovingian kings in power as figureheads, he assumed the role of Mayor of the Palace of both Neustria and Burgundy as well as his inherited kingdom of Austrasia, and was the real power behind the government. Upon his death Charles was seen as the virtual ruler of the *Triregna*. One particular monk even recorded his death by writing, "October 741, death of King Charles."¹²

After his death in 741, Charles Martel's son Pippin III, or "The Short" as he was

¹⁰ See the early chapters of Pierre Riché's book *The Carolingians: A Family who Forged Europe* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998) for a broad yet sophisticated treatment of the early Carolingians' rise to power.

¹¹ For a discussion on the dating of the Grimoaldian *coup* see Appendix One.

¹² Riché, p. 50.

commonly known, inherited the seat of power built by his father.¹³ In 751 Pippin effected a successful *coup* and proclaimed himself king of the *Triregna*. He tonsured the current Merovingian king, Childeric III, and sent him to the monastery of St. Bertin in an ox cart, where he, and the Merovingian dynasty with him, died in 755.

Pippin III died in 768 and his son Charles, later known as Charles the Great or Charlemagne, took up the reigns of power of the Empire. Charlemagne extended the Carolingian Empire to include what is now northern Italy, western Germany, including Bavaria, Switzerland, parts of Austria, and part of northern Spain. On Charlemagne's death in 814 the Carolingian Empire passed intact to his son, Louis the Pious. Louis, however, was not as lucky as his father had been, for he had three grown sons who could be seen as alternative rulers of the Carolingian Empire.¹⁴ To compound the problem, Louis's wife, Ermengard, died in 818 and Louis married a second wife, Judith of Bavaria, shortly after in 819. By Judith, Louis had yet another son in 823, Charles, who posed as a possible threat to Louis's three older sons, Lothar, Louis the Younger (later known as "The German") and Pippin of Aquitaine. It was not long before the older sons united against their father and tried to remove Charles, and consequently Judith, as possible inheritors to the Carolingian throne.

The first familial revolt occurred in 830 when Louis's son Lothar seized the throne, kidnapped Charles and sent Judith to a monastery. Louis eventually regained control and dismissed Lothar to Italy in early 831. Then, in 833, Lothar and his brothers overthrew their father and took possession of the throne yet again. Louis the Younger and Pippin of Aquitaine eventually turned on their older brother Lothar and helped

¹³ For a genealogical chart of the Carolingian family see Appendix Three.

¹⁴ Charlemagne did have a brother when Pippin III died in 768 and the empire was divided between the two sons. However, Carloman, Charlemagne's brother, died in 771, thus leaving the Empire to Charlemagne alone as sole heir.

reinstate their father, Louis the Pious, as emperor in 834. Lothar continued the civil war in vain and Louis eventually crushed his son's rebellion early in 835. Three short years after Louis the Pious's death in 840 the Empire was divided into three kingdoms between his three living sons, Lothar, Louis the Younger (now known as "The German") and Charles (known as "The Bald").

Continuing Introduction and Thesis Topic:

In order to effect their successful *coup* in 751 the Carolingians needed to gain the support of the nobles against the Merovingian kings. In the words of Thomas F. X. Nobel, in his book *The Republic of St. Peter*, "without the support of [the] nobility" the Carolingians and Pippin "could not hope to become, or to remain king."¹⁵ Therefore it was imperative the Carolingians gain the support of the nobility. One of the most vital features of the Carolingians' *coup*, and therefore a significant part of their persuasion of the nobility, was their use of propaganda. Perhaps the most persuasive and powerful aspect of their propaganda was their claim to be supported by God as the rightful rulers of not only the *Triregna* but also all of Christendom.

In their propaganda campaign, the Carolingians followed many paths to establish their claim of divine support. They linked themselves, through family connections, with saints, most notably St. Arnulf of Metz. By claiming descent from a saint, the Carolingians could lay claim to their holy familial history and close relationship to God. Other members of their family, while not literally viewed as saints, were later portrayed in a saintly or biblical manner. The *Annales Mettenses Priores* (or *The Annals of Metz*), written during the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, link Pippin II with the Bible, stating at one point, "[Pippin II] is not unlike . . . David who . . . deprived the

¹⁵ Thomas F. X. Nobel, *The Republic of St. Peter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 68.

immense Goliath of his life.”¹⁶ By linking Pippin II, and other members of their family (such as St. Arnulf) to the Bible, and, as a result, Christianity and God, the Carolingians gained power, prestige and legitimacy in their claims as rulers of Christendom.

The Carolingians not only portrayed their ancestors as holy men in personal league with God, but they also idealized their military exploits and portrayed themselves as being directed by the hand of God on the field of battle. An excellent example of this is the ‘official history’ of the early Carolingians recorded in the continuations of *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* written under Charles Martel’s brother Childebrand at St. Denis.¹⁷ The chronicler depicts Charles Martel, founder of the Carolingian dynasty, as “victorious [in battle] through Christ his helper, Who is King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen.”¹⁸ Therefore, according to the *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, written by the brother of Charles Martel, founder of the Carolingian dynasty, the Carolingians’ military exploits were not only the work of excellent military leadership, but also actual support from God. This helps to reiterate the Carolingians’ claims of being supported by God.

It appears the Carolingians saw themselves as fulfilling Augustine’s notion of “the city of God” on Earth, in a political christian empire. This Political Ausustinianism was much of the basis for their desire to build a unified empire in not only Europe, but also Christendom, thus creating a political city of God. The Carolingians seem to have

¹⁶ Fouracre and Gerberding, in their commentary on the text on p. 334, they note that the *Annales* treat Pippin II “the way in which hagiographers portrayed their saintly subjects.”

¹⁷ Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 49.

¹⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, J. M. ed. and trans., *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, (London: Tomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1960), p. 91. “*Victor cum pace remaeuit opitulante Christo rege regum et domino dominorum. Amen.*”

wanted to create one Christian empire with themselves as the rulers, thus explaining much of the reasoning behind their claims of divine support. Therefore the Carolingians needed to gain support from the representors of God on Earth, or the clergy, in order to establish themselves as rulers of the “city of God.” Therefore, many Carolingian rulers were personally anointed by bishops, or even the pope, as holy heirs to the empire. Charlemagne himself was personally crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day 800 in a gesture of papal support of the Frankish rulers.

In their propaganda campaign, the Carolingians not only worked to enhance the splendor of their actions, but they also worked to hide any acts that might have been viewed as contradictory to their claim of Godly support. For example, the Carolingians attempted to hide Grimoald’s abortive *coup*. Since one of the main focuses of their propaganda was the support of their rule by God, the failed *coup* attempted in 651¹⁹ by Grimoald would undermine this claim. If the Carolingians were supported by the mighty hand of God as the rightful rulers of the Franks, then how could they have been unsuccessful in usurping the throne a century earlier? To address this question, the Carolingians distanced themselves from Grimoald and the earlier abortive *coup*. *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* does not mention the failed *coup* while the *Annales Mettenses Priores* actually denies the existence of Grimoald entirely.²⁰

The Carolingians wielded the art of the written word so successfully they found

¹⁹ For a discussion on the dating controversy concerning Grimoald’s attempted *coup* see Appendix 1 in this paper.

²⁰ Gerberding, *Rise*, p. 65. Gerberding notes that the *Annales Mettenses Priores* “not only fail to mention Grimoald’s daring usurpation; they deny he ever existed.”

Gerberding goes on to hypothesize, along with other historians, that Grimoald “was most likely omitted in order not to blemish the *Annales*’ account of the Carolingian house’s divinely preordained rise to power.”

themselves backed into a tight corner during the unstable reign of Louis the Pious. After Charlemagne's death in 814, Louis, at the age of 35, was crowned Holy Roman Emperor; yet Louis's oldest son, Lothar, at the age of 20, was old enough to present an alternative ruler of the Carolingian Empire.²¹ Eventually rebellion broke out several times in both the 820s and 830s. Interestingly enough there is a drastic change in tone of many of the annals and biographies covering this period of time when discussing the events surrounding the rebellions and the rebellions themselves. It appears the writers (Nithard, Pascasius, the Astronomer and Thegan), writing after the events themselves, are attempting to explain the reason several rebellions took place under a ruler supported by God. In many of the treatments of the time period, the writers tone down the 'divine propaganda' and portray Louis the Pious as a more human character. He is depicted, in many cases, as an old man who is manipulated by his young wife and her retainers, most notably Bernard of Septimania. It is not the issue of this paper to discuss or hypothesize why Judith, Bernard, along with other Carolingian advisors and intimates were chosen as the recipients of this 'propagandistic explanation' for the rebellions. This paper will focus on the actual change in tone and portrayals that arose as a reaction to the rebellions under the rule of Louis the Pious.

The Written Word:

When dealing with the written word and its use as a form of propaganda two vital questions must be addressed. First, who is creating this propaganda? And second, who is the intended audience?

The first question, while somewhat obscure, can be answered upon close investigation. Historians frequently note that the only people in Carolingian Europe with

²¹ Janet Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (New York: Longman Group Inc., 1992), p. 72.

a mastery of Latin were the highly educated aristocrats, usually bishops or other high church officials. In fact a mastery of Latin was not even instructed to lower members of the clergy and was reserved solely for the aristocratic members of the higher clergy.²² Therefore, it is apparent many of the annals that I will be looking at as propaganda were written at monasteries or at court by highly educated clerics of the higher clergy. But who exactly were these clerics who created this Carolingian propaganda? In some cases they were the Carolingians themselves, in others they were simply pro-Carolingian members of the clergy and in still others they were members of a Carolingian controlled or subsidized monastery.

As I stated above on page eight, the *Continuations of The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* were completed under Childebrand, Charles Martel's brother. It was not unusual for a powerful member of the Carolingian family to enter into the life of the clergy. Both Charles Martel's brother Childebrand and Pippin III's brother Carloman entered the clergy. Gisela, Charlemagne's sister, became the head of the monastery at Chelles and Louis the Pious's brothers Hugo and Drogo became the bishops of St. Quentin and Metz respectively. Pippin III's son Nibelung also helped sponsor *Fredegar*, and his half brother Jerome, bishop of St. Amand, copied the *Life of Saint Arnulf*, a sainted Carolingian relative.²³ In other words, many of the members of the higher clergy, or those capable of writing advanced Latin texts, were Carolingians themselves. Therefore, it is not surprising that the texts written under these men and women were pro-Carolingian in nature.

That still leaves the second question of who exactly are these propagandists

²² Janet Nelson, "Literacy in Carolingian Government" in Rosamond McKitterick ed., *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 264.

²³ Riché, p. 67.

creating propaganda for? While it is extremely difficult to gauge the exact literacy rate of not only the average person, but also the average noble in Carolingian Europe, many documents have left behind small shreds of evidence that may point out a murky answer.

Rosamond McKitterick notes that “writing in the early middle ages was probably practiced by only a small proportion of those able to read.”²⁴ Therefore implying that the propagandists’ audience would be far larger than just those members of the higher clergy. McKitterick goes on to point out that many nobles had servants who would function as secretaries to aid in both reading or writing. Infact, the highly verbal nature of the middle ages made it possible for illiterate persons to have full knowledge of written texts. Brian Stock points out that a text does not have to be read to be understood or abosorbed by the conscousness of a society since in many cases texts were spoken aloud and used as teaching tools.²⁵ Nelson also points out the need for not only every noble to be literate, but also some “*mediocres* and even some *pauperes*” since so many of the legal and beurocratic documents were conveyed in a written medium.²⁶

The Carolingian government relied on writing to such an extent that Charlemagne revised the standard script in the late eighth century in order to create a new, more legible script, Caroline minuscule. Infact, it appears the Carolingians even expanded the primary educations system and male as well as female school children received instruction in Latin.²⁷ The Carolingian government found it important to educate even the more common people in the empire since so much information was conveyed through the

²⁴ McKitterick, *Literacy*, p. 4.

²⁵ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). p.7.

²⁶ Nelson in McKitterick, *Literacy*, p. 269.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

written word. The Carolingians used the written word far more than their predecessors producing over 7,000 manuscripts between c.750 and 900 compared to approximately 500 Merovingian manuscripts written before 750.²⁸ Nelson also points out that the Carolingians created an estimated 28 times the written capitularies of the Merovingians.²⁹ Perhaps one of the main reasons for the necessity of written Latin documents was the result of a language barrier in the Frankish Empire. Since the eastern and western Franks spoke very distinct dialects which would eventually evolved into the primitive vernacular languages of French and German by the mid to late ninth century, Latin served as a universal language for the Empire. If the emperor wanted to convey his message to the entire empire he did so through Latin and the written word.

Therefore, it appears the creators of these texts were, in many cases, the Carolingians themselves or their close supporters. The texts seem to be aimed mainly at the nobles of the Frankish Empire in order to gain military support, but there is the possibility the poorer members of the aristocracy and even some small land owners would have the basic skills to understand and acknowledge the written documents.

Analysis of Core Texts:

Grimoald's Coup and the removal of "undesireables" from the Carolingian family:

In their attempt to effect a successful *coup* in 751, the Carolingians spent decades preparing a foundation of power. They gained backing from the nobles, worked to unite the three kingdoms of Austrasia, Neustria and Burgundy under one puppet king, and, most significantly, they gained support via an extensive propaganda campaign. The key

²⁸ David Ganz, "Book Production in the Carolingian Empire and the Spread of Caroline Minuscule" in Rosamond McKitterick ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Volume II c.700-c.900*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 786.

²⁹ Nelson in McKitterick, *Literacy*, p. 261.

element to their propaganda campaign was their portrayal of themselves as divinely ordained rulers supported by God. In order to effectively demonstrate that the Carolingians were supported by the power of God, the propagandists had to remove any associations with the earlier Carolingian failings of 651. Therefore, a large part of the *coup* of 751 was not only learning from the mistakes made by Grimoald one hundred years earlier, but also distancing themselves from his abortive *coup* of 651. The Carolingians appear to have tried to disassociate themselves from Grimoald and his previous attempt, by several means, among them intentionally failing to record the *coup* in their official histories as an historical event.

The first sign that the Carolingians wiped Grimoald from their ancestral tree is that the *Liber Historiae Francorum* is the only surviving chronicle to record Grimoald's *coup*. Other sources such as hagiographies, personal letters and church histories make mention of the *coup* and are valuable sources when dealing with the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, but the fact remains that the *Liber Historiae Francorum* is the only surviving chronicle that records the actions of Grimoald. This is not because the *coup* was a minor event, little known outside its surrounding area, but it appears the Carolingians did not want the history of Grimoald's *coup* to be widely publicized as it might affect their claim to divine support, and, as a result, the Merovingian throne and all of Christendom.³⁰ Thus, Grimoald does not appear in the official Carolingian histories which chronicle the rise of the Carolingians as rulers of the Franks.

The earlier sections of *Liber Historiae Francorum* which deal with Grimoald's *coup*, as opposed to many of the other annals, were composed most likely by a Neustrian

³⁰ For church records and hagiographies to make mention of the *coup*, it had to be fairly well known and its fame must have spread outside of Austrasia since the *Liber Historiae Francorum* is assumed to be the product of a Neustrian author, thus reinforcing the fact that it could not have been an obscure event.

monk in the eighth century under Merovingian support and supervision.³¹ Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the only direct record of Grimoald's *coup* is recorded in one of the few annals not controlled by the Carolingians. Evidence of the *coup* would be detrimental to their claim of being appointed by God if they only succeeded as rulers on their second attempt, therefore they did not record the failed *coup*.³²

The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations is an important historical document that deals mainly with the seventh and eighth century history of the Franks. In most cases *Fredegar* is well detailed and records many of the same events hagiographies and other annals report.³³ However, when it comes to the subject of the *coup*, as Pierre Riché points out, “favorable to the Pippinids, the Pseudo-Fredegar chronicler does not mention Grimoald's failed usurpation.”³⁴ Actually, the fact that *Fredegar* does not mention the *coup* is more than simple good fortune, it seems to be a planned use of propaganda. If *Fredegar* usually does record the same events as

³¹ For a scholarly and in-depth treatment see the *Liber Historiae Francorum and the Rise of the Carolingians* by Richard Gerberding.

³² See Hen, pp. 2-3. He writes that, “the *Annals [of Metz]* are often perceived as a piece of propaganda, designed to glorify the house of the Carolingians, and to portray their rise to power as the sole worthy, legitimate and, most importantly, divinely ordained surrogate to fill in the political vacuum left by the last Merovingians.”

³³ See J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, ed. and trans., *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, (London: Tomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1960) for further reading. Also, see the *Vita Sanctae Gertrudis* and the *Additamentum Nivialense de Fuilano* for two hagiographies which mention Grimoald's *coup* along with the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and Gerberdings' book *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum*.

³⁴ Riché, p. 23.

mentioned in hagiographies and other annals, and the *coup* is mentioned in these hagiographies and annals, then there must be a reason for *Fredegar's* neglect in this one case. A closer examination of the background and intentions of *Fredegar* yields an interesting answer.

Several different authors composed *The Chronicle of Fredegar* over many decades. One of its most prominent contributors, however, was Childebrand, the brother of the mayor of the palace, Charles Martel. In the words of Pierre Riché, “the mayor’s brother Childebrand sponsored an unofficial chronicle that continues the work of Pseudo-Fredegar, a text Wilhelm Levison called the ‘family chronicle of the Carolingian house.’”³⁵ The family chronicle of the Carolingian house would not mention an event that would diminish the magnitude of the Carolingians, therefore it is not surprising that *Fredegar* does not record Grimoald’s abortive *coup* in 651.

The Chronicle of Fredegar only fails to mention Grimoald and his attempted *coup*, while other sources deny the very existence of Grimoald. The *Annales Mettenses Priores*, also known as the *Annals of Metz*, were written in three stages starting in about 806.³⁶ As Gerberding notes, the *Annals of Metz* “not only fail to mention Grimoald’s daring usurpation; they deny he ever existed.”³⁷ In recording the life of Pippin I, or Pippin of Landen as he was known, the *Annales* record “because offspring of the masculine sex was lacking to him, he left his name along with his leadership to his surviving grandson, Pippin,” omitting any mention of Pippin I’s son Grimoald, author of the abortive *coup* attempt.³⁸ The *Annales* are admittedly “a pro-Carolingian piece of

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁶ Hen, p. 1.

³⁷ Gerberding, p. 65

³⁸ Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding, p. 351. Fouracre and Gerberding also note that “Grimoald’s failure would not fit . . . [the author of the *Annales*] vision of divinely

propaganda” created “to glorify the house of the Carolingians, and to portray their rise to power as . . . legitimate and . . . divinely ordained.”³⁹ When viewing the treatment of Grimoald’s *coup* in the *Annals of Metz* and *The Chronicle of Fredegar*, the dismissal of Grimoald as a figure in these ‘family histories’ is a telling point and can be viewed as a piece of propaganda. The Carolingians removed Grimoald and his actions from their family history in order to remove a threat to their claim of divine support.

Not only did the Carolingians remove Grimoald from their history, they also removed his name from their family. It was Carolingian tradition to use the same distinct names for their family members throughout the generations. The name Grimoald, however, falls out of use and is never used after Charles Martel comes to power and begins the Carolingian rise to royalty. Matthais Becher points out in his article “Der Sogenannte Staatsstreich Grimoalds” that the last use of the name Grimoald in the Carolingian family dies in 714 with Charles Martel’s half brother, Grimoald II.⁴⁰ The

ordained success for the Pippinid family.”

³⁹ Hen, pp. 12, 2-3 respectively.

⁴⁰ Matthias Becher, “Der Sogenannte Staatsstreich Grimoalds” in Jörg Jarnut, et. al., *Karl Martell in seiner Zeit*, (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1994), p. 123. “Man könnte diese *damnatio memoriae* auf den Gegensatz zwischen Karl Martell und Plektrud zurückführen, deren Sohn ja Grimoald der Jüngere war. Dann wäre die Ursache für diese Änderung in der arnulfingischen Namengebung nicht im ›Staatsstreich‹ des älteren Grimoald zu suchen, sondern in der »pippinidisch-karolingischen Sukzessionskrise«. Gegen diese Möglichkeit spricht jedoch, daß Karl Martells Sohn Karlmann seinen ältesten Nachkommen und potentiellen Erben wohl sogar noch zu Bezeiten des Großvaters »Drogo« nannte und damit an Drogo, den Bruder Grimoalds des Jüngeren, erinnerte. Der Name »Drogo« erscheint auch später noch in der karolingischen Familie, während »Grimoald« kein weiteres mal vergeben wurde.”

Carolingians not only tried to abolish the deeds of Grimoald from the historical records, they attempted to cut all family ties to him as well.

While Grimoald was the most prominent figure of the Carolingian family to be removed from the dynasty's official histories, he was not the only person to suffer such a fate. The Carolingians also attempted to remove from their histories an eighth century Mayor of the Palace who presented an early threat to Charles Martel.

Theudoald, son of Grimoald, and grandson of Pippin II, is recorded in both the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and *Fredegar* twice; once as becoming Mayor of the Palace of Neustria in 714 upon the death of his father and again as fighting against, and losing to, Charles Martel at the battle of Compiègne.⁴¹ There is no further reference to him in either document. *The Annales Mettenses Priores*, however, record that “not much later [after the battle] he [Theudoald] ended his innocent life.”⁴² With only the brief information presented by these three sources, it would appear as if Theudoald lost Neustria to Charles Martel and eventually met an unfortunate demise at a seemingly young age (he was only six when he came to hold the office of Mayor of the Palace upon his father's murder in 714). However, as Roger Collins points out in his article “Deception and Misrepresentation in Early Eighth-century Frankish Historiography,” evidence of Theudoald appears years after *The Annales Mettenses Priores* claim he died.

A charter documenting a donation to the monastery of Willibrord at Utrecht from Charles Martel in 723 or 724 bears evidence of Theudoald's continuing existence. One of the signatures of the witnesses to the donation reads “Signum Thiedoldi nepotis

⁴¹ See chapters 50 and 51 in the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and chapters 7 and 8 of the *Continuations of the Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* for the texts' treatment of Theudoald.

⁴² Fouracre and Gerberding, p. 365. “. . . non multo post tempore vitam innocentem finivit.”

ejus.”⁴³ Collins goes on to note that this individual could be no other than Charles Martel’s nephew Theudoald. He reinforces his claim with further evidence of Theudoald’s existence long after *The Annales Mettenses Priores* removes him from the Carolingian family tree. Why go to such lengths to eliminate a seemingly unimportant early Mayor of the Palace of Neustria? A possible answer is that Theudoald was eliminated to preserve the Carolingian claim to divine ordination.

Theudoald was the legitimate son of Grimoald and thus the legitimate grandson of Pippin II while Charles Martel, founder of the Carolingian dynasty, was the illegitimate son of Pippin II by a concubine. Therefore, Theudoald would have a greater claim on the office of Mayor of the Palace than Charles Martel upon Pippin II’s death. Martel, however, was a militarily powerful man, not a weak boy like Theudoald, at the time of Pippin II’s death and therefore he was able to vanquish his family rival without much difficulty. The propagandists may have later removed Theudoald to eliminate any competing views on divine ordination; if a family fights within itself, it reduces the belligerent parties’ claims to divine right as a house and can work to split the support of the nobility between to Carolingian claimants. Also, the propagandists and the ‘official histories’ seem to have a very difficult time presenting two competing rulers as equally ordained by God. In many cases they present the history of the Carolingian family as smoothly progressing from father to son.

Charles Martel:

After the failed *coup* of 651 the Carolingians did not attempt to expand their power base on any great level until Charles Martel came to power in 714. Martel, the

⁴³ Collins, Roger. “Deception and Misrepresentation in Early Eighth Century Frankish Historiography: Two Case Studies” in Jörg Jarnut et. al., *Karl Martell in seiner Zeit*, (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1994), p. 231.

founder of the Carolingian dynasty, worked to lay the foundation for the successful *coup* of 751. Since Martel was the illegitimate son of the Mayor of the Palace, Pippin II, he had to overcome some early challenges to his inheritance and, as I mentioned above, remove Theudoald's claim to the office of Mayor of the Palace. Upon Pippin II's death, Martel was imprisoned by Pippin II's legitimate wife, Plectrude, as an attempt to destroy his claims to the office of Mayor of the Palace in Austrasia. Martel eventually escaped and spent much of his early career increasing his support and wealth through military conquests. Later, Martel's military exploits would be presented as propaganda to increase the Carolingians' strength and prestige. In fact, it appears that Martel fought certain battles with the end intention of using them as propaganda to increase Carolingian power and to increase the likelihood of a future *coup d'état*.

Martel's victory at the battle of Poitiers was able to later be used as an important piece of propaganda in the Carolingians' claims both of Godly support and also as rulers of a political city of God because it pitted the Christian Franks against Muslim invaders. The battle was turned into a massive assault by propagandists, often being depicted as consisting of over one hundred thousand combatants. In truth, however, the Muslim force was not an invasion force, but simply a raiding party, and the Frankish force was hurriedly assembled to help fend off the raid. Therefore, it would seem unlikely that the battle consisted of anywhere near one hundred thousand combatants.⁴⁴ The sources not only succeeded in increasing the size of the battle of Poitiers, but also its importance. The battle was depicted to represent the savior of Christian Europe from the invading Muslims, and the battle's hero was made out to be Charles Martel. Carolingian propagandists made the claim that Odo, Duke of Aquitaine, had pleaded with Charles for his help in engaging a common enemy at the battle of Poitiers in order to discredit the

⁴⁴ Edward J. Schoenfeld, "Battle of Poitiers, October 732" in *The Reader's Companion to Military History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), p. 366.

Aquitainians and embellish Martel's accomplishment. In fact, when writers gave Charles the name Martel or Martellus, meaning "the Hammer," in the ninth century they were most likely linking him to Judas Maccabaeus of the Old Testament.⁴⁵ This would further increase Martel's image as the man who saved Europe from the invading Muslims and tie him to the Bible in much the same way Pippin II or St. Arnulf were shown as pious individuals and linked to the Bible. In fact, since Martel had little to gain from an expedition to Aquitaine, which consequently remained independent long after the battle of Poitiers, and the Arab raid was not a direct threat to his domains, the battle can be viewed as an expedition for the reason of propaganda. Since Martel did not gain any territory or wealth in his incursion into Aquitaine, he may have entered Aquitaine and protected it from a Muslim force in order that his power and influence would grow even more.

The later stages of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and the *Continuations of The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* are both valuable sources of propaganda surrounding Martel. The *Liber Historiae Francorum* depicts Charles Martel as a courageous warrior and a skilled ruler guided and protected by divine power. Charles is said to have escaped from his step mother Plectrude's imprisonment "with God's help"⁴⁶ and in his early battles, Charles is seen as peaceful and fair but a victorious and skilled warrior.⁴⁷ According to J. Michael Wallace-Hadrill, the last entry to the *Liber Historiae*

⁴⁵ Riché, *The Carolingians*, p. 44.

⁴⁶ Bachrach, trans., ed., *Liber Historiae Francorum*, p. 111.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-13. The *Liber Historiae Francorum* states that when "Charles attacked [his foes] they suffered extensive losses." It also goes on to record that when fighting Ragenfred, "Charles asked that peace be made. They [Ragenfred and his allies] refused" Charles then had to fight Ragenfred who ". . . turned his back" and "Charles emerged the victor. . . [Charles] returned to Austrasia with a great deal of booty." This is a positive

Francorum was written in 737, and therefore during the ‘reign’ of Charles Martel.⁴⁸ In fact, Charles Martel was a strong patron of the abbey of St. Denis, where the latter part of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* was most likely written. Plus, Martel’s son, Pippin, was educated by the monks of St. Denis and present during the writing of the *Liber Historiae Francorum*.⁴⁹ Therefore, it could be assumed that Martel was not only conscious of its existence, he possibly commissioned the later sections to be written during his reign as Mayor of the Palace.

Another source of propaganda for Charles Martel’s accomplishments can be found in the *Continuations of The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*. In *Fredegar*, Charles is portrayed in much the same manner as the *Liber Historiae Francorum*. His victories are absolute, and his military actions are brilliant. *Fredegar* never depicts Charles as losing a battle and calls upon his victory at Poitiers as a judgement of Christ. In fact, *Fredegar* goes so far as to conclude his fifteenth chapter by writing, “Then he [Charles] returned in peace, victorious through Christ his helper, Who is King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen.”⁵⁰ *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* was yet another tool of propaganda for the enhancement of Martel’s image. Martel used propaganda to gain power and support throughout his kingdom, and his relatives continued the tradition to bring prestige to the Carolingian family. In fact, Martel and his full brother, Childebrand, are widely viewed as the persons responsible for starting the legend claiming the Trojan origins of the Frankish people and the

description of Charles both personally and militarily.

⁴⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, trans., ed., *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, p. 89.

⁴⁹ Riché, *The Carolingians*, p. 49.

⁵⁰ Wallace-Hadrill, trans., ed., *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, pp. 86-97.

Direct quote p. 91. “*Victor cum pace remaeuit opitulante Christo rege regum et domino dominorum. Amen.*”

Carolingians.⁵¹

Pippin III and his Successful *coup* in 751:

After Charles Martel's death in 741 his one surviving legitimate son, Pippin III, or "The Short", became virtual ruler of the Franks. Pippin III worked carefully to follow the examples set by his ancestors to build his power and influence among the nobles of the *Triregna*. Eventually, Pippin III felt secure enough to attempt an official *coup* in 751 and remove the last Merovingian king from power. The final step in the Carolingian's *coup* was to gain the approval of the highest representative of God on earth. However, at this time, there was no single identifiable leader of the Christian church. Therefore, the Carolingians used the petrine doctrine, which claimed that the bishop of Rome was a direct successor to Peter, the rock upon which Christ would build his church, to identify the bishop of Rome, or the pope as he would be called, as the head of the Christian church. Thus the Carolingians sought to gain the support of the bishop of Rome, and therefore the highest representative of God on earth. In order to gain the approval of the bishop of Rome, in the words of Riché, the "Carolingian propagandists emphasized the notion that a king who did nothing was not worthy to reign."⁵² *The Annals of Lorsch* record this question of who should rule, the rulers or those with the power as presented to Pope Zacharias in 749 or 750.

Anno 749. Burchard, bishop of Wilrzburg, and Fulrad, priest and chaplain, were sent [by Pippin] to Pope Zacharias to ask his advice in regard to the kings who were then ruling in France, who had the title of king but no real royal authority. The pope replied by these ambassadors that it would be better that he who actually had the power should be called king.⁵³

⁵¹ Riché, *The Carolingians*, p. 49.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 66.

⁵³ From the *Medieval Sourcebook* at

Then, with the assurance of the pope's support, Pippin removed Childerich from the throne and proclaimed himself king of the Franks in 751.

750 [751]. In this year Pippin was named king of the Franks with the sanction of the pope, and in the city of Soissons he was anointed with the holy oil by the hands of Boniface . . . and was raised to the throne after the custom of the Franks. But Childerich, who had the name of king, was shorn of his locks and sent into a monastery.⁵⁴

Note how Pippin was “anointed with the holy oil” and officially proclaimed king of the Franks by the pope, thus reinforcing the Carolingians’ divine claim to the throne of the Frankish Empire. By being anointed with holy oil and approved by the pope, Pippin III became the first king to be divinely ordained as ruler of the Franks and his public display of this event left no doubt in the minds of even the common illiterate subjects; Pippin III was ordained by the hand of God as the king of the Franks.⁵⁵

Charlemagne and the latter part of his Reign:

Pippin III, while the first ruler of the Franks to be divinely ordained and approved as king by the pope, was not the last to receive such a spiritually powerful approval as ruler. In fact, the act of being anointed by a bishop or other holy man appears to have become a tradition with the Carolingians. Pippin III’s two sons, Charles and Carloman, were anointed by Stephen II and in 781 Pope Hadrian anointed Charlemagne’s two sons

<<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/lorsch1.html>> taken from Oliver J. Thatcher and Edgar Holmes McNeal, eds., *A Source Book for Medieval History*, (New York: Scribners, 1905), pp. 37-38.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Nobel, p. 70.

Pippin and Louis.⁵⁶ Charlemagne, however, took the custom a step further when he was proclaimed Holy Roman Emperor by the pope himself. This act is perhaps the most important feature of Charlemagne's reign, in reference to divine ordination as a ruler.

Charlemagne's coronation as emperor has created a great deal of debate amongst scholars as to the exact motivations of both parties involved in the act. Einhard's treatment of the coronation would imply that Charlemagne was unsuspecting of Pope Leo III's intentions when he came to mass on December 25, 800. Einhard, Charlemagne's most famous biographer, records the event as follows.

It was on this occasion that he received the title of Emperor and Augustus. At first he was far from wanting this. He made it clear that he would not have entered the cathedral that day at all, although it was the greatest of all festivals of the Church, if he had known in advance what the Pope was planning to do.⁵⁷

Charlemagne had traveled to Rome to defend Pope Leo III from fellow Romans and church members who had attacked him earlier in the winter. However, Charlemagne ended up staying the entire winter in Rome even after putting down the discenterers and reestablishing Leo as the proper spiritual leader of the Roman people. Noble doubts Charlemagne's innocence and surprise at being crowned emperor by Leo. He suggests that Charlemagne most likely spent such a long time in Rome in order to negotiate with Leo. Charlemagne was possibly anointed the divine emperor of the Frankish and Roman peoples as payment, so to speak, for protecting Leo.⁵⁸

The *Liber Pontificalis* or *Book of the Popes* records that the crowd of bishops and

⁵⁶ Raymond Davis, *The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), p. 191.

⁵⁷ Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*, trans. by Lewis Thorpe, (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 81.

⁵⁸ Noble, pp. 294-95.

clergy in St. Peter's "cried aloud with one accord: 'To Charles, pious Augustus crowned by God, great and pacific Emperor, life and victory!'"⁵⁹ There is nothing recorded in the *Book of the Popes* to depict Charlemagne as surprised by his coronation as emperor. Note how the crowd recognizes Charlemagne as "crowned by God" not the human hands of Pope Leo III further enforcing his role as divinely ordained and his role as ruler of the city of God. The first document to bear Charlemagne's new title as emperor was issued six months later on May 29, 801. Charlemagne signed the diploma, "Karlus serenissimus augustus a Deo coronatus magnus pacificus imperator Romanum gubernans imperium, qui et permisericordiam die res Francorum atque Langobardorum" further reiterating his status (and that of the Carolingians as well) as divine emperor of both the Franks and Christiandom.⁶⁰

Louis the Pious and the "Propaganda Problem":

Charlemagne's reign as divine emperor came to a close in 814 with his death. Upon his death, his son Louis the Pious took over both Charlemagne's lands and his title of Holy Roman Emperor. One of Louis's first acts as emperor was to clear the royal palace at Aachen of Charlemagne's advisors and retainers and instate his own loyalists in their places. Louis seemed to want to claim Aachen for himself and stress his claim as emperor from the very beginning of his reign. Louis continued in the same vein as his father and signed his documents, "Louis, by order of Divine Providence, Emperor and Augustus" thus reinforcing his claim to the title of ruler of Christiandom. Louis also continued to use the blessing of the pope as a sign of divine ordination. Louis had himself and his wife crowned emperor and empress by Pope Stephen IV, but this time the

⁵⁹ Davis, p. 191.

⁶⁰ Noble, p. 296.

cremony took place at Reims, not Rome.⁶¹ The empire appears to have made a seamless shift in power from father to son during the earlier years of Louis's reign. However, by 817 this situation began to change dramatically.

In 817 Louis the Pious was strolling in his palace when he was almost crushed to death by a falling archway. Louis's anonymous biographer, often referred to as the Astronomer, records the event as follows.

It came to pass that, when the emperor sought to withdraw from the church to his royal residence, the lower parts of the wooden colonnade through which he had to go, weakened by decay and age and rotten with continual moisture, cracked and collapsed under the feet of the emperor and his counts. Great terror struck the entire palace with the noise of the crash, everyone fearing that the impact of that fall might have crushed the emperor. But he was protected from the immediate crisis by God to Whom he was a beloved son.⁶²

Following this close brush with death, Louis drew up a will and divided the empire among his three sons, Lothar, Pippin and Louis. Louis crowned Lothar, the eldest of his three sons, co-emperor and made Lothar's brothers subordinate kings (Pippin became king of Aquitaine and Louis became king of Bavaria). In essence, Lothar would become the ruler of the Frankish Empire and Christendom after Louis the Pious's death while Pippin and Louis would vassals to their older brother. This division of the Empire as based on primogeniture was an alien concept to the Franks and did not sit well with Lothar's brothers.⁶³

Pippin and Louis, however, appear to have accepted their roles as sub-kings in the beginning and, ironically enough, were not the first members of the Carolingian family to

⁶¹ Riché, p. 146.

⁶² The Astronomer, trans. by Allen Cabaniss in *Son of Charlemagne; A Contemporary Life of Louis the Pious* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1961), pp. 62-63.

⁶³ Riché, p. 147.

rebell against Louis the Pious's divisions of the Empire. Bernard, king of Italy, Charlemagne's grandson and Louis the Pious's nephew by way of his brother Pippin, revolted against his uncle shortly after the decree was signed in 817. Louis quickly crushed the rebellion and captured Bernard and his supporters and brought them back to Aachen. The original punishment handed down to Bernard was that of death, but Louis the Pious reduced the sentence to blinding. The blinding, however, was so severe Bernard died two days afterward. In order to remove any other threats by family members Louis had his half-brothers tonsured and cloistered and called a meeting across Austrasia and Neustria where he forced the nobility to respect his division of the empire.⁶⁴

This is the first instance of the Carolingian family fighting publically amongst themselves since Charles Martel defeated Theudoald at the battle of Compiègne in 714. This is also the point at which many of the annals begin to change their voice in recording Carolingian events. Several of the official biographers and chroniclers of the Carolingian realm reacted to this event by blaming Bernard's advisors for his actions. The Astronomer writes, "his [Louis's] nephew, Bernard, in whose behalf he had been Charles's [Charlemagne's] chief adviser in making him king of Italy, had been maddened by the counsels of evil men to such a degree that he deserted him."⁶⁵ Note both the laying of blame on Bernard's advisors and not Bernard himself and Louis's earlier generosity that made it possible for Bernard to be king of Italy at all. Also, it appears the chronicler attempts to keep all members of the Carolingian family free from blame and impure actions. While Louis is currently the divinely appointed emperor of the Franks, the Carolingians are the divine family from which he sprung. Therefore, in order to keep both Louis's and the Carolingian family's appearance as pure and divine, the chronicler passes some of the blame onto other, non royal parties.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 148.

⁶⁵ Cabaniss, *Son*, p. 65.

Not long after Bernard's revolt Louis the Pious's wife, Ermengard, died in 818. Louis appears to have mourned her loss for several months, then, at the urging of his nobles, chosen a second wife from the young nobility of the Empire. In what must have a memorable display, Louis's retainers paraded the most beautiful aristocratic young women in the empire before the Emperor in what must have amounted to an early medieval beauty contest.⁶⁶ Eventually Louis made his selection, the fifteen year old Judith of Bavaria, daughter of Count Welf of Alamannia and Eigilwi of Saxony.⁶⁷

Judith and the Rebellions of the 830's

I will continue examining the actions of Louis the Pious as emperor and the revolts that plagued his reign. I will look at Nithard's *Histories* and the anonymous account of Louis the Pious written by a man who may have been a court astronomer and I will also examine the epic poem *In Honorem Hludowici* written in praise of Louis the Pious by Ermoldus Nigellus as primary documents. I will contend that once the reign of Louis the Pious became riddled with revolts the propagandists had to explain why such events could occur when a ruler is divinely ordained. The propagandists of the empire were forced, as a result of the previous 200 years of propaganda claiming the Carolingians were appointed by God, to turn the blame for these problems onto a party other than the rightful Emperor Louis the Pious. They eventually turned on Judith, Louis's wife (conveniently an outsider from Bavaria) and her followers. I will contend

⁶⁶ Allen Cabaniss, *Judith Augusta, a Daughter-in-law of Charlemagne* (New York: Vantage Press, 1974), p. 8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

that the Carolingians were, in a way, victims of their own propaganda and no matter what happened during the reign of the dynasty, the emperor (Louis the Pious in this case) could not be dispelled and thus the propaganda foundation destroyed. To attack the divinely ordained Louis the Pious would be the same as destroying the unified empire itself.

Conclusion:

In the conclusion of my paper I will restate my these goals and objectives and encapsulate my findings. I will also reference my historiographical work once again and tie myself in with the historians who have preceded me. Obviously this paper suffers from lacking a general outline and analysis of sources and events concerning Louis the Pious and his wife Judith at this stage.

Appendix One: Grimoald's Coup, 656 or 651?

The common consensus of the historical community is widely based on the work of Bruno Krusch and outlines the events surrounding Sigibert III's death and Grimoald's usurpation of the Austrasian throne via his son Childebert.⁶⁸ According to this theory, Sigibert III, lacking a male heir, accepted a proposal made by his mayor of the palace Grimoald, and adopted Grimoald's son giving him the Merovingian name Childebert the Adopted. Some years later, however, Chimnechild, Sigibert's wife, bore him a son, Dagobert II, thus negating the need to have adopted Childebert as an heir. Sigibert III then died in 656 at the age of 26 and, seizing his opportunity, Grimoald tonsured Dagobert II, gave him to Dido, bishop of Poitiers, who in turn exiled Dagobert II to Ireland while Grimoald placed his own son, Childebert the Adopted, on the throne. According to this interpretation, the *coup* lasted only a short time and then both Grimoald and Childebert were lured to Neustria and killed by Clovis II whose own son, Childeric II, was eventually installed as king of Austrasia by his mother Bathild.⁶⁹ This view, established and propagated by Krusch, has been widely accepted by many historians, among them Pierre Riché, Patrick Geary and Ian Wood.⁷⁰

The account most contemporary to the events in question is recorded in the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, a chronicle produced by an eighth century Neustrian monk. The *Liber Historiae Francorum* states:

After this, [the death of Dagobert I and Clovis's appointment as king of Neustria] however, King Sigibert of Austrasia died and Peppin who also

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-49.

⁶⁹ Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 23-4.

⁷⁰ See above along with Geary, pp. 190-92 and Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, (New York: Longman Publishing, 1994) pp. 222-24.

died was replaced as mayor of the palace by his son Grimoald. Just after Sigibert died, Grimoald had the king's young son who was named Dagobert tonsured and directed Didon, the bishop of the city of Poitiers, to take the boy on a pilgrimage to Ireland. Then Grimoald placed his own son on the throne. The Franks were very indignant about this and they prepared an ambush for Grimoald. They seized him, and sent him to Clovis, king of the Franks, to be condemned. In the city of Paris he was put in prison, tightly bound with the torture of chains since he was worthy of dying as one who had harmed his lord. His death came with a great deal of torture.⁷¹

The *Liber Historiae Francorum* does not mention the fate of Grimoald's son, an interesting point when comparing the text with Riché's summary. Riché, following Krusch's investigation, writes, "According to the chronicler of St. Denis [the author of the *Liber Historiae Francorum*], they [the Neustrians] lured the mayor *and* his son into Neustria and put them to death . . ." ⁷² There is no mention of Grimoald's son not only in Bachrach's translation of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* nor in Gerberding's or Geary's translations.⁷³ Therefore, it is fairly safe to conclude Riché, like many scholars before and after him, assumed Krusch was correct in his concise summary of the events surrounding Grimoald's *coup* thus drawing into question the validity of the entire proposal made by Krusch and followed by many in the historical community. In fact, upon further investigation, spearheaded by Gerberding, not only is Krusch's summary a point of question, but also his proposed dates for the *coup*.

The widely accepted date for Grimoald's *coup* was 656, the year proposed as the death date for Sigibert III. But how was this date determined? Gerberding points out that Krusch, and scholars building on his work, determined the death of Sigibert III solely by

⁷¹ Bernard S. Bachrach, ed. and trans., *Liber Historiae Francorum*, (Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973), p. 101.

⁷² Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 24. My emphasis.

⁷³ See Gerberding, pp. 174-75 and Geary pp. 190-91.

consulting the Austrasian royal catalogs which place his reign at twenty-two and twenty-three years respectively. However, as Gerberding indicates, the years assigned to many of the other rulers are admittedly wrong. In fact, Krusch himself even acknowledges that the Carolingian sources are wrong in all cases save Sigibert III, Childebert the Adopted and Theuderic III.⁷⁴ Therefore, the only basis for assuming Sigibert III died in 656, and thus the *coup* took place in 656, is the unreliable Austrasian royal catalogs, a Carolingian source dealing with Merovingian kings who reigned over one hundred years before the composition of the catalogs.

Gerberding contradicts the tradition established by Krusch, and proposes the date of 651 for Grimoald's *coup*. In his investigation, Gerberding calls attention to the lack of evidence supporting the date of 656, then goes on to mention that the latest date containing evidence of Sigibert III's life is a charter issued in 651.⁷⁵ However, a lack of evidence is not enough to disprove Krusch's conviction which is supported by the Austrasian royal catalogs. Therefore, Gerberding points to the discrepancy in chronology that occurs if the date of Sigibert III's death is indeed 656. First of all, the *Liber Historiae Francorum* clearly records Grimoald being tortured to death at the hands of Clovis II, King of Neustria. Clovis II died between the dates of October 26 and 31, 657 thus putting Grimoald's death sometime before 657.⁷⁶ Secondly, it is commonly agreed upon that Childerich ruled for at least five years.⁷⁷ A charter recording the donation of a

⁷⁴ Gerberding, p. 52.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50. Gerberding mentions that "Four of Sigibert's charters have come down to us along with six pieces of correspondence which directly concern him and none of these dates from after February 651."

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷⁷ Geary, Gerberding, Krusch, Riché, Wood and others all mention the charter and treat its existence as common knowledge among the historical community.

villa in the Saarland by Bonefatus to the monastery of Wissembourg is dated “in the sixth year of the glorious lord King Childebert.”⁷⁸ The letter is addressed to Bishop Dragobod who, according to church records, could have only lived under one King Childebert; Childebert the Adopted. Therefore, when comparing these two pieces of information it becomes obvious that either Childebert ruled after his father was killed or he began ruling five or more years before Clovis II’s death. This is highly unlikely since Childebert would most likely have been overthrown after his father’s demise and the family’s decrease in power, and, several sources, among them the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, record Clovis II’s son as taking over in Austrasia after the fall of Grimoald.

Gerberding then draws attention to another document concerned with the planning of the *coup* between Grimoald and Dido. Apparently the *Additamentum Nivialense de Fuilano* documents the misfortune of a holy man named Foillan who journeyed from Britain to Gaul where he came at odds with the Neustrian mayor of the palace. He decided to flee Neustria and was aided by Itta of Nivelles. Then, some time after the death of Itta, abbess of Nivelles, Foillan returned to Nivelles on the vigil of St. Quentin, October 30. During that same night, he and his party were murdered in a local village and their bodies were not found until seventy-seven days later on January 16. Apparently, when the two bodies were found by Abbess Gertrud, both Grimoald and Dido were in attendance at Nivelles and took part in the service for the murdered men. The source records that the bodies of the men were found after Itta’s death and obviously before Gertrud’s retirement since she was present at the funeral. According to Krusch’s work, Itta died in 652 and Gertrud retired in 658, thus placing the meeting of Dido and Grimoald sometime between January 16, 653 and January 16, 658.

The fact that both Dido and Grimoald appear together so close to the date they

⁷⁸ Gerberding, p. 54.

effected their *coup* seems to be more than coincidence.⁷⁹ It appears Dido and Grimoald were meeting in preparation for their attempted *coup* but the given dates are at least two years after the date of 651 for the coup proposed by Gerberding. However, Gerberding defends himself sufficiently when he traces the path used to arrive at these two figures. Krusch placed Itta's death at 652, which Gerberding contends is two years too late. The *Vita Sanctae Gertrudis* records Itta's death as occurring in the twelfth year after Pippin's death, yet Krusch calculates it as twelve years after Pippin's death. Pippin's death date is arrived at by consulting *Fredegar* which states Pippin died approximately a year after Dagobert I who Krusch indicates died on January 19, 639. However, Wallace-Hadrill, Courtios and several other scholars place Dagobert I's death a year earlier on January 19, 638, thus making Itta's death fall in 650, not 652.⁸⁰

After consulting the *Additamentum Nivialense de Fuilano*, Gerberding proved that Itta died in 650 and Gertrud retired as abbess in 656 as opposed to the dates of 652 and 658 respectively proposed by Krusch. Thus the meeting between Dido and Grimoald must have taken place between January 16, 651 and January 16, 656 meaning Gerberding's proposed date of 651 is not only possibly, but highly likely. Therefore, what seemed like a fatal blow to Gerberding's contention that the *coup* took place in 651 and not 656 is not only not disproved, but the validity of Gerberding's contention is reinforced. If indeed Grimoald and Dido were meeting to discuss the plans of their forthcoming *coup* what better time than on the eve of the *coup*; the year 651.

Gerberding's new research would seem to put a fairly sizeable hole in the earlier views of historians. Many historians, however, while not contributing any evidence to dismiss Gerberding's claims, have been slow to accept his ideas. Patrick Geary in *Before*

⁷⁹ While historians are uncertain as to the exact year of the *coup* they do agree that it most likely took place in February, the agreed upon month for Sigibert III's death.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-61.

France and Germany, a book published one year after Gerberding's *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum*, does not mention Gerberding's work concerning the possibility that the *coup* occurred in 651, and not 656. While he makes no mention of Gerberding or his book, Geary seems to be defending his own adherence to the older system of dating. Geary claims that the passage concerning Clovis II in the *Liber Historiae Francorum* was a mistake by the chronicler who "wrote 'Chlodoveo' (Clovis) by error instead of 'Clothario' and that thus Grimoald's execution actually took place under Chlothar II around 661 or 662" therefore allowing ample time for Childebert the Adopted to rule five years and have the *coup* occur in 656.⁸¹ It seems very unlikely, however, that a writer would mistake the name "Chlodoveo" for "Clothario" and there is no basis to bend a document simply to adhere with custom. Gerberding's argument is very convincing and it is supported by solid evidence. After reading several treatments of Grimoald's *coup*, Gerberding's proposal seems the most likely and historically accurate. Ian Wood makes a slight, footnoted concession to Gerberding when he writes, "...the suggestion of 651 by Gerberding . . . is, nevertheless, not impossible."⁸² As time goes on and Gerberding's contentions settle in the historical community, they will be more widely accepted as the most accurate dates for Grimoald's *coup*, which occurred in 651.⁸³

⁸¹ Geary, p. 191.

⁸² Wood, p. 222.

⁸³ Another interesting influence on Grimoald's *coup*, mentioned by both Gerberding and Geary, is the Neustrian nobility. There has been some debate concerning the possibility that the Neustrian nobles not only supported Grimoald in his *coup*, but actually proposed and directly help effect the *coup*. While an interesting and possible piece of conjecture there is no documented evidence to support this claim. In the words of Geary, it appears "we will never know for sure" what the specific events of the *coup* actually were.

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