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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Hagiography and the Secular Role of Bishops in the Reigns of
Chlotar II and Dagobert: The Examples of Desiderius,
Eligius, and Ouen.

by

William Arlie Woodward

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF Master of Arts

History

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

Fall, 1986

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Hagiography and the Secular Role of Bishops in the Reigns of Chlotar II and Dagobert: The Example of Desiderius, Eligius and Ouen. submitted by William Arlie Woodward in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Medieval History.

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Date...*29 July*...*1956*.....

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Florence and Cecil Woodward. Their fondness for the 'arts' sparked my historical interests and their encouragement and support have helped to make it possible for me to pursue them.

ABSTRACT

This study focusses on the *Vitæ* of three seventh century bishops, Saints Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen. The seventh century was a period when the relationship between bishops and their secular ruler entered a more amicable stage. The *Vitæ* of these three men illustrate this and provide valuable information in determining the nature of this relationship and how it was cultivated and maintained.

The nature of the source material of this study necessitated a separate section dealing with the problems of interpreting such material. Hence the utility of hagiographical works to the historian is also discussed.

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I would especially like to thank my advisor, Professor Carola Small, for her conscientious and patient supervision of this thesis. I have benefited greatly from her knowledge, constructive criticism, and continuous encouragement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Chilperic, King of the Franks, from 561 to 584, once complained bitterly: "There is no one with any power left except the bishops. Nobody respects me as king: all respect has passed to the bishops in their cities." It is impossible to read the chroniclers of the age, Gregory or Fredegar, without becoming aware of the enormous power and prestige of these ecclesiastical officials. The *History* of Gregory of Tours, which is the most important source for the sixth century Frankish kingdom, provides a picture of bishops at work in the new regime acting as ambassadors, spokesmen, patrons, builders and fulfilling many other roles. Clearly these were important officials. Gregory, himself a bishop, appears in his own narrative standing up to kings,¹ dining with them,² intervening to save the lives of condemned men,³ and even as the subject of a Queen's bribes.⁴

In agreement with contemporaries, the distinguished modern scholar, Sir Samuel Dill, whose overall treatment of the Merovingian period is still one of the best, wrote: "In the wreck of old [Roman] institutions only two figures

¹ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, translated and edited by L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 380. All subsequent references are to this edition.

² *ibid.*, p. 380.

³ *ibid.*, p. 434.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 341.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 279.

emerge with unchallenged authority, the king and the bishop." "Bishops have been described as the most important figures of authority at the local level in the emerging Frankish kingdom. Edward James goes so far as to say: "For the ordinary inhabitant of Merovingian Gaul, the bishop must have loomed larger than the king."

This paper addresses the issue of the evolution of episcopal authority in Merovingian Gaul. Since the method chosen is to discuss the secular role of seventh century bishops by examining evidence drawn primarily from the *Vitae* of Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen, certain problems and guidelines are self-evident. Chronologically, this study focusses upon the years when these men were active as palace officials and, subsequently, as bishops; a period which spans the years from A.D. 618 when, probably^{*} Desiderius was appointed royal treasurer, to 684, when Ouen, the last survivor of the three, died. However, because comparison is the best method of considering the development of the episcopal office, many examples illustrating the role of bishops in the sixth century administration are also provided.

Bishops were, of course, only one category of official in the Merovingian administration. The particular

^{*} Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age* (London, 1926), p. 116.

[†] Edward James, *The Origins of France: From Clovis to the Capetians, 500-1000* (London, 1982), p. 48.

[‡] See René Poupardin, *La Vie de Saint Didier, évêque de Cahors (630-655)*; *Collection de textes pour servir à l'étude et à l'enseignement de l'histoire* (Paris, 1900), p. xi.

significance of their office becomes apparent only within the context of the system as a whole. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the nature of the Merovingian supremacy. The foundations of regal power and the delegation of authority are discussed. Thus the principal officials at court and at the local level are noted and their functions related. This administration and its offices developed, of course, in part to meet particular needs in society. Therefore a discussion of the major political events which shaped this period introduces the first chapter.

While this study examines many aspects of the bishop's function, one role, that of patron, is singled out for particular treatment. It is important to realize how imperative it was for seventh century bishops to establish themselves as local patrons; a great deal of their authority, prestige, and influence was related directly to this. Thus the building projects of bishops, their deliberately cultivated relationships with saints and cult centres, and their calculated display of classical knowledge can all be attributed, in part, to a desire to fulfil this requirement.

The source material for this study posed unique problems. Hagiographers did not write to record history nor was their work truly biographical. Hagiography is a genre which blends the characteristics of other literary types and was written with a specific purpose; to edify and increase the devotion of its Christian readers. The problems of

interpreting such material are addressed in a separate section. It will be shown that while hagiography does not provide literal truth, it does furnish an indication of the values of the age.

It is this writer's contention that the evidence presented suggests that there was not a significant change in the role of bishops during the seventh century. However, the relationship between bishops and their monarch does enter a new phase. A tumultuous alliance of convenience which is evident in the sixth century is replaced by a relationship mutually desired and beneficial, but cultivated and controlled by strong seventh century rulers such as Chlotar II and Dagobert. The seventh century is a period when bishops are welcomed into the administration of the king and allegiance to the king is an accepted mark of a saintly bishop.

PART ONE:**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

II. THE POLITICS OF MEROVINGIAN GAUL

In order to comprehend the roles of bishops in seventh century Frankish society, it is first necessary to understand the structure of the government within which they fulfilled their episcopal office.

A. The Merovingian Succession

During the course of the fifth and sixth centuries, the Merovingian house maintained itself despite vicissitudes as the Frankish ruling dynasty.

Clovis

The Frankish kingdom was founded and dominated, during its infancy, by one man, Clovis (481-511). He successfully eliminated rival 'kings' or chieftains and established a semblance of order in much of Gaul. Under him a new administration based both on old Roman institutions and German customs was established. Clovis recognized the importance of the Catholic Church as a potent and unifying force in his domain. His conversion to Catholic Christianity, whether inspired by religious devotion or by other political concerns, made him a suitable friend and ally of church officials. But under Clovis the Frankish polity began to take form. His death, in 511, and the

¹ James, *The Origins of France*, p. 127.

subsequent partition of his kingdom among his four sons ushered in a long period of familial rivalry and civil wars.

The Successors of Clovis: Instability, 511-613

The most striking trait of the politics of the Merovingian kingdom during the sixth and seventh centuries was instability. As the end of the sixth century approached, the conflicts continued unabated. Indeed just three years after the birth of Desiderius in 581, King Chilperic was assassinated. This murder was but one act in the struggle between the grandsons of Clovis. One brother, Childebert, had died early, probably of natural causes. Another, Sigibert, had been murdered at the instigation of Chilperic's wife, Fredegund. After Chilperic fell victim to a vengeance contrived by Sigibert's wife, Brunhild, the remaining brother, Guntrum, understandably unnerved, pleaded for his life before his own subjects.¹⁰

The account of these developments in Gregory of Tours' (c. A.D. 539-594) *History* makes remarkably entertaining reading. To us, however, their importance is in illustrating the state of anarchy that prevailed in Merovingian Gaul during the late sixth century. Gregory's history provides numerous accounts of broken treaties, assassinations, assassination attempts and full-fledged battles.¹¹ Perfidy and treachery are synonymous with these times.

¹⁰ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, p. 393.

¹¹ See, for example, chapters V, VI and VII.

Chilperic's death did not end the strife. His widow Fredegund and her arch-rival Brunhild continued to orchestrate a feud notable for its bloodiness. Sons and grandsons were paraded on the Austrasian and Neustrian thrones while the two women wielded effective power. Fredegund died in 597 but the civil war continued until 613 when her son Chlotar captured the aging Brunhild and had her "tormented for three days with a diversity of tortures..." and then "...tied by her hair, one arm and one leg to the tail of an unbroken horse, she was cut to shreds by its hoofs at the pace it went."¹²

The Return to Order, 613-639

Chlotar had emerged as the sole ruler of the Merovingian kingdom. His reign was a welcome respite from the chaos that preceded it. The chronicler Fredegar,¹³ one of our main sources for the period, portrayed Chlotar in glowing terms: Chlotar was "king for sixteen happy years during which he kept peace with all the neighbouring peoples. This Chlotar was strong-minded and wellread, and was also a God-fearing man, for he was a munificent patron of

¹² *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, translated and edited by J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (London, 1960), p. 35. All subsequent references are to this edition.

¹³ Very little is known of Fredegar. It has been argued that 'his' chronicle may, in fact, have been the work of three different men who lived during the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Whether the work was composed by one or more men, it definitely contains an Austrasian bias, which leads to the logical conclusion that the author (or authors) was Austrasian. See Wallace-Hadrill's introduction to *The Fourth Book of The Chronicle of Fredegar*, pp. ix-lxiii, for a complete discussion of the author and his work.

churches and priests, an almsgiver to the poor, kindly disposed to all and full of piety."¹⁴ Fredegar did add, however, that the king's "devotion to the chase was excessive and he took too much notice of the views of women;"¹⁵ serious indictments indeed! It was under Chlotar that Desiderius, Ouen and Eligius, as well as many other notables such as Arnulf of Metz, arrived at court to pursue their careers.

The relative stability that Chlotar had brought to the Merovingian state continued under his son and successor, Dagobert. He had been made co-ruler, king of Austrasia, in 622 and had little difficulty in securing the succession upon his father's death in 629.¹⁶ Dagobert's short reign - he died in 639¹⁷ - witnessed a further restoration of royal authority which had begun with his father's reunification of the Merovingian kingdom. Some historians credit Dagobert with developing a workable balance between the powers of the church and state. Indeed a recent biographer wrote: "C'est qu'il incarne le modèle des rapports possibles entre le pouvoir temporel et le pouvoir spirituel, entre la royauté et l'Eglise."¹⁸

¹⁴ Fredegar, pp. 35-36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 36.

¹⁶ Christian Pfister, "Gaul under the Merovingian Franks: Institutions" in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. II, H. Gwatkin and J. Whitney, eds. (London, 1913), pp. 124-5.

¹⁷ Laurent Theis, *Dagobert; Un roi pour un peuple* (Paris, 1982), p. 74.

The Erosion of Central Authority: 639-687

This short period, 613-639, marked by strong central leadership and relative political calm, ended with Dagobert's death. His sons, Sigibert III (630-656) and Clovis II (634-657), were only nine and five respectively at his death. During their minorities, effective power was wielded by the Austrasian and Neustrian mayors. Aega and then Erchinoald dominated in Neustria while in Austrasia, Pipin remained as mayor until his death in 640, when his son, Grimoald, was able to secure that office after a brief dispute with another candidate. It should be noted that during this twenty-five period, while the kings and mayors co-existed relatively peacefully,¹ the rival mayors were often at odds. Clovis and Sigibert also left their thrones to children and, more importantly, these were only the first in a long sequence of minors that succeeded to the throne. As a result, from 639 on (but especially after 656), one detects an erosion of royal authority. Many of the kingdom's officials, whether through calculation or out of necessity, gathered more power. Also, regional differences, in particular those between the Austrasians and Neustrians, were heightened.

Chlotar and Dagobert had been able to control the schism; their young successors, burdened as they were with mayors who had strong regional interests and loyalties, could not.

¹ See James, pp. 145-47.

The period of the 60s, 70s, and 80s is characterized by an intense rivalry between the officials of the Neustrian and Austrasian kingdoms. Just three years after the death of Ouen in 684, the conflict reached its climax when, Pipin, the Austrasian mayor of the palace, crushed his Neustrian rival at Tertry.¹

This brief sketch of political developments reveals a polity in a state of flux. At times the kingdom was divided into two or even three co-kingdoms (Austrasia, Neustria and Burgundy). Then it would re-form into a single entity. Borders and boundaries were flexible and often changed. These convulsions affected all of the kingdom's officials.

B. The Foundations of Royal Authority

Such conditions raise serious questions concerning the nature of Merovingian kingship and administration. What were the foundations of royal power? How was authority delegated?

Royal Descent

The most important element in the Merovingian polity was the king and his court. Kingship was hereditary; sons succeeded by an undisputed right. Every son had a claim to an equal portion of the state; daughters had no claim whatsoever. Each king, whether ruling alone or as a co-king, took the title *Rex Francorum*.² Traditionally the

¹ See Dill, *op. cit.* p. 212 and also James, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-50.

² Pfister, "Institutions", p. 133.

guardianship of a minor went to his closest relatives, until the child reached the age of twelve, when according to the Salic law, he was declared to be of age.²¹ In the course of the seventh century, however, this right seems to have passed to the mayors of the palace. Fredegar reports that when Dagobert was on his deathbed "he sent in haste for Aega [the Neustrian mayor] and commended to him his Queen Natechildis and Chlovis, his son."²²

Wealth

The most tangible source of power of the Merovingian kings was their wealth. This included land; their territorial holdings were enormous. But while land provided the basic resources needed by the king, men and food, his "political power depended on supplies of treasure."²³

The wealth of these rulers was staggering. Gregory of Tours records that Rigunth, the daughter of Chilperic and Fredegund, was provided with a dowry and personal treasury of "such a vast assemblage of objects that the gold, silver and other precious objects filled fifty carts."²⁴ Dagobert's court was famed for its opulence. Indeed it is no coincidence that his treasurer, Eligius, became the patron saint of goldsmiths. However, it is important to note that as one examines developments of the latter half of the seventh century, it becomes apparent that the Merovingians'

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 133.

²² Fredegar, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

²³ James, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

²⁴ Gregory, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

resources were declining. Wallace-Hadrill argues: "The late Merovingians had less land and less money than their predecessors and consequently their power was less felt and less relied on."¹⁵ Correspondingly by the 680s certain noble families, such as the Pippinids in Austrasia, had amassed treasures and landholdings which challenged those of the ruling dynasty itself.

The royal treasury was supplied by various means. Tribute and gifts provided enormous additions to the treasury. On one occasion Dagobert was promised a 500 pound gold dish by the Visigothic king of Spain. When this was not delivered, the Merovingian monarch accepted 200,000 gold *solidi* in its place.¹⁶

Taxation also was used to raise revenue. Most historians agree that many direct and indirect taxes which had been established by the Romans were continued in the Merovingian period and that sixth century rulers had a great capacity to raise taxes.¹⁷ Both men and land were taxed according to registers of tax-assessments which were periodically updated.¹⁸ Thus, for example, the tax-assessments of clerics in Clermont were renewed by Childebert II in 590.¹⁹

However, by the end of the sixth century, a trend develops, which grows throughout the next century, whereby

¹⁵ J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-haired Kings and other studies in Frankish History* (London, 1962), p. 9.

¹⁶ Fredegar, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

¹⁷ See for example, *ibid.*, pp. 126-35.

¹⁸ James, *op. cit.* p. 133.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 133.

kings treat their right of taxation like any other of their powers and certain privileged parties were exempted from it; churches in particular came to enjoy exemption. It is known that by the late sixth century both the church of Saint Martin of Tours and that of Saint Martial at Limoges were already exempted from taxation.³⁰ Gregory, himself, had convinced Childebert's tax collectors that the church at Tours was not liable to taxation.³¹

Chlotar's Edict of Paris, promulgated in 613, is the first official, general recognition of these immunities.³² There has been a fierce debate among scholars to explain this development. Some, noting that many immunities were granted to ecclesiastical officials, have argued that the Merovingian monarchs were enlisting the support of the church in a power struggle against the Frankish nobility, just as Otto I was to do in the tenth century.³³ Dill believed that it was part of a general policy whereby the Merovingians sought to equalize the fiscal burden imposed on their Gallo-Roman subjects and the Franks, who, it is thought, had not been taxed at all until the late sixth century.³⁴

Neither explanation is totally satisfactory. There is in fact little evidence to suggest a movement among Frankish

³⁰ James, *Ibid.* p. 133.

³¹ Gregory, *op. cit.*, pp. 515-17.

³² See Heinrich Mitteis, *The State in the Middle Ages; A comparative constitutional history of feudal Europe*, English translation by Orton (New York, Oxford and Amsterdam, 1975), p. 50.

³³ *Ibid.* pp. 50-51.

³⁴ Dill, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-35, esp. pp. 130-1.

magnates to undermine the authority of their kings." It is likely that some grants of immunities can be linked to the civil wars and the need of the various members of the royal family to purchase support. Of course, to seventh-century Merovingians, church lands were gifts to God and owned by Him. Exempting His lands from taxation was one means for the Frankish kings to cultivate a closer relationship with Him. This must also have been the motivation behind many other grants of immunities.

The ramifications of this development are more easily explained. As the Merovingians undermined their fiscal base, their means to wield power also decreased.

Military Prowess

Warfare was an important source of both booty and land. Gregory and Fredegar provide many examples of financially successful expeditions.³⁵ However it has recently been suggested that the tenor of Merovingian warfare changed subtly during the seventh century. The thrust of the argument is that the military expeditions which Chlotar and Dagobert directed against the east were no longer treasure hunts. They were now "in defence of what amounted to the territorial interests of a settled people."³⁶ These kings were reinforcing their authority not only by obtaining and distributing booty, but also by stressing the military

³⁵ See Wallace-Hadrill, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-15.

³⁶ See for example Fredegar, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

³⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

content of their kingship. Therefore when successors were too young to direct campaigns, their authority suffered, while the influence of those officials who did lead them increased. The Merovingians of the late seventh century suffered from dwindling financial resources and lacked the means to redress the situation.

Mystique

Regal authority also rested upon the prestige of the royal bloodline. By the sixth century the Merovingian dynasty had assumed a mystical aura. In a revealing passage from Gregory's history, King Guntrum begs his subjects to spare his life. What is especially significant is the reason that the king offers to them. He warns them that unless he has time to raise his two nephews (also his adopted sons) the kingdom "would perish, for there would be no full-grown man of my line to protect you."³³ Gregory records that "when they had heard what the king had to say, the entire population prayed to God for his safety."³⁴

It is also worth noting that throughout the chaotic period of civil wars, all the candidates for the throne who were brought forth were members of the royal family, or as in the case of Gundovald the Pretender, claimed royal descent.³⁵

³³ Gregory, p. 393.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 393.

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 352.

By the early seventh century, the Merovingians had acquired a mythical ancestry. Fredegar reports that the dynasty's founder was a "*bistea Neptuni Quinotauri similis*."⁴¹ Wallace-Hadrill posits that this was propaganda deliberately conceived by the ruling house. As he notes, Fredegar was not simple minded, but through him "someone nearer the Merovingian house, and better read than he in the literature that would produce [a sea-monster], had managed to associate the dynasty with a fabulous strain that emphasized its remoteness from other Frankish dynasties."⁴²

This argument is convincing, especially when one examines further developments in the seventh century. It becomes clear very quickly that Chlotar and Dagobert were adept at reinforcing the Merovingian aura by associating their family with Christian saints. Of these, Saint Martin was very important but it is Saint Denis who Chlotar calls "*peculiaris patronus noster*."⁴³ Dagobert and his queen were buried at the church of Saint Denis. The Merovingian monarchs were also lavish in their endowments to the church and in granting immunities.⁴⁴

This policy brought results quickly. In the preface to the canons of the Council of Clichy, Chlotar was compared with David. Later Dagobert was associated with Solomon.⁴⁵ By the middle of the seventh century certain Merovingian rulers

⁴¹ Fredegar, *op. cit.*, Book III, chapter 9.

⁴² Wallace-Hadrill, p. 220.

⁴³ See Wallace-Hadrill, p. 224.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 212.

⁴⁵ See J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971), p. 48.

were achieving sanctity. Dagobert, his son Sigibert III and his grandson Dagobert II, all became the subjects of cults shortly after their deaths."⁶⁶

The seventh-century kings took other measures to sanctify their family. The first known Merovingian genealogy dates to Dagobert's reign."⁶⁷ This can be regarded as yet another measure taken to stress the uniqueness of their bloodline.

This deliberate policy pursued by Chlotar and Dagobert was very effective. In 656, when the Austrasian mayor attempted to usurp the throne upon the death of Sigibert III, the Austrasian nobility refused to support him and, instead, handed him over to the reigning Merovingian in Neustria."⁶⁸ Indeed, the Merovingian dynasty remained alive in name long after it had ceased to be an effective ruling power. This is a tribute to the policies of these seventh century monarchs.

Regional Loyalties

The failure of the usurpation attempt of 656 seems to be even more remarkable when one considers that the foundations of Merovingian authority in the seventh century were not national. That is, contemporary sources clearly portray the ruling dynasty as being rooted firmly in

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

⁶⁷ See Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, pp. 221-2.

⁶⁸ See Christian Pfister, "Gaul under the Merovingian Franks. Narrative of Events", in *The Cambridge Medieval History* (London, 1936), p. 126.

Neustria. Fredegar regarded the Seine basin as the anchor of Merovingian authority.⁴⁹ Here were located their greatest estates, their main residences and even "the shrines that were dearest to them."⁵⁰ Indeed, Chlotar, who was himself a Neustrian, "made no attempt to bend the Austrasian Franks to his will, but left them in virtual independence under a deputy."⁵¹ It is interesting to note that in 622 Chlotar made his young son, Dagobert, a co-king, the king of Austrasia: "*Anno XXXVIII regni Chlothariae, Dagobertum filium suum consortem regni fecit cumque super Austrasius regem instituit, retinens sibi quod Ardinna et Vosacos versus, Neuster et Burgundia excludebant.*"⁵² Dagobert was put in the care of two powerful magnates, Pipin and Arnulf of Metz.⁵³ It is likely that Chlotar wanted his son "to identify himself with Austrasian interests."⁵⁴ However upon Chlotar's death, Dagobert returned to Neustria. Fredegar states: "Then he [Dagobert] returned to Neustria and, finding that he liked his father Chlotar's residence, decided to make it his home. But he forgot the justice that he had once loved. He longed for ecclesiastical property and for the goods of his subjects and greedily sought by every means to amass fresh treasure."⁵⁵ Although Dagobert had been established in Austrasia he recognized that his family's

⁴⁹ See Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, p. 206.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 206.

⁵¹ J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West: The Early Middle Ages A.D. 400-1000* (New York, 1962), p. 80.

⁵² Fredegar, p. 39.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West*, p. 80.

⁵⁵ Fredegar, p. 50.

power base was in Neustria. Fredegar, an Austrasian was indignant that Dagobert had returned to the west.⁵⁴ Dagobert's newly displayed cupidity was probably no more than the new king securing and replenishing his father's treasury.

This regionalism is another important aspect of the Merovingian Supremacy.

The King's Presence

While the Merovingian kings could sanctify their line, control great estates and amass enormous wealth in an effort to strengthen their authority, their power still depended greatly upon their personal presence; "their influence was still limited and, like that of the old Roman emperors, heavily dependent on their actual presence."⁵⁵ During the sixth century Merovingian rulers "usually had only intermittent contact with many of the cities nominally under their control; instead, the administration of Gaul resembled a 'segmentary' form of state, in which regions and cities peripheral to the royal courts became largely autonomous, even though they technically remained within the defined sphere of influence of a particular king."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Compare Fredegar's portraits of Dagobert when he resided in Austrasia. See for example p. 49; "Dagobert was happily ruling over Austrasia...and thus ruled Austrasia so prosperously that he earned unlimited praise of all people...."

⁵⁵ Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1985), p. 185.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*; pp. 184-5.

It is true that the kingdom was reunified under Chlotar and remained so under his son. One difficulty is particularly evident. A passage from Fredegar illustrates the importance of the king's presence in this period. During his tenure as king of Austrasia, Dagobert considered it necessary to make a personal appearance in his territory of Burgundy:

The profound alarm that his coming caused among the Burgundian bishops, magnates and others of consequence was a source of general wonder; but his justice brought great joy to the poor. On arrival at the city of Langres he gave judgement for all, rich and poor alike, with equity as must have appeared most pleasing to God. Neither bribe nor respect of persons had any effect on him: justice, dear to the Almighty, ruled alone. Then he went to Dijon and spent some days at Saint-Jean-de-Losne, and did what he could to bring justice to his people throughout his realm. Such was his great goodwill and eagerness that he neither ate nor slept, lest anyone should leave his presence without having obtained justice. On the very day that he planned to leave Saint-Jean-de-Losne for Chalon and while taking his bath before daybreak, he gave orders to kill Brodul, his brother Charibert's uncle; and these were carried out by the Dukes Amalgar and Arnebert and the patrician Willebad."³

The local magnates' discomfort at the king's appearance and their willingness to aid him in eliminating a troublesome relative were results of his presence. However, these Merovingian rulers could not be present everywhere. Regional

³ Fredegar, pp. 48-9.

loyalties remained strong and communication and other problems of distance made it difficult for even a strong king to enforce his will completely throughout the entire kingdom. It is not surprising to see the great magnates of Austrasia or Burgundy flouting the central authority at times. However this fierce independence was only "independence" of the Neustrian rulers and their hangers-on, not of the Merovingians as such."¹⁰ Austrasians hated Neustrian officials not the ruling dynasty and even the most powerful seventh century monarchs, such as Chlotar and Dagobert, had to rely upon the officials in their administration.

C. The Bureaucracy

In the sixth and seventh centuries the Merovingian bureaucracy was centred upon the king's household. By this time a class of officials had developed that assisted in the running of the kingdom. There were *referendaries* who composed diplomas for the king, counts of the palace, who ran the royal tribunal and other lesser officials, such as the *seneschals* whose primary duty was looking after the royal table.¹¹ The treasury was directed by one official; indeed both Desiderius and Eligius occupied this post for a time. The most important of the palace officials, however, were the mayors of the palace.

¹⁰ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, p. 207.

¹¹ Pfister, "Institutions", p. 146.

Mayors of the Palace

The mayors of the palace had originally been the overseers of the royal estate and had been in charge of collecting its revenues. However, these men, aided by their proximity to the king, soon assumed other functions. Indeed as the top official in the administration the mayor was able to direct the activities of others and even to have an influence in appointments.⁶²

It has been calculated that the office of *major domus* is mentioned only three times in the works of Gregory of Tours.⁶³ Yet by 613, the mayors have emerged as powerful figures. Significantly, although Chlotar II reunited the kingdom under his sole rule, its component parts, the *tria regna* of Austrasia, Neustria and Burgundy all retained separate mayors.⁶⁴

Fredegar's chronicle illustrates the rather sudden transformation of these administrative officials into major figures. Chlotar and Dagobert are still predominant. However, Fredegar notes of Dagobert: "From the beginning of his reign, he had taken advice from the blessed Arnulf, bishop of Metz and from Pippin, mayor of the palace" and because of that advice had "ruled Austrasia so prosperously that he earned unlimited praise of all peoples."⁶⁵ Pippin is characterized as "of all men the most careful, a true counsellor, a man of unshakable fidelity and beloved of

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁶³ Dill, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁶⁴ James, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁶⁵ Fredegar, p. 49.

all for that passion for justice that he had prudently instilled into Dagobert."⁶⁶ When Dagobert was dying he entrusted the care of his young heir, Clovis, his wife and the kingdom itself to Aega, the Neustrian mayor, while his other son Sigibert was left in the care of Pippin.⁶⁷ The palace mayors had risen to remarkable heights.

Strong Kings were able to control their mayors. In one instance Fredegar lamented that Dagobert no longer listened to the advice of Pippin.⁶⁸ And Fredegar, himself an admirer of the Austrasian mayors and no friend of Dagobert, still cannot conceal the fear that this monarch inspired nor the authority that he commanded.⁶⁹

However during the minorities that followed Dagobert's death, the mayors began to increase their authority. Only one year after his death, when Pippin also died, the latter's family was able to retain a hold on the office of mayor, which had never before been hereditary.⁷⁰ The latter half of the seventh century is marked by Austrasian and Neustrian mayors ruling in the names of their kings.⁷¹

Thus the mayor of the palace emerged from relative obscurity in the sixth century to hold a position second only to the king himself, and, ultimately, to challenge for supreme authority. However like the king, the mayors' activities centred around the palace and they faced many of

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, See for example pp. 66-7.

⁷⁰ See James, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

the same problems in extending and exercising their authority.

At the local level the king's authority was delegated to counts and bishops.

Local Magnates

As J. M. Wallace-Hadrill states, "undeniably the Merovingians could never have run Gaul at all without leaning heavily, like their Roman predecessors, on the local authority of magnates, lay and ecclesiastical."⁷² Originally counts had been appointed from among those men who had, in effect, formed a *comitatus* around the king. They were created by the will of the king and were dispatched to areas of his choosing. Their status was owed solely to the king's favor; their offices were not hereditary. It is interesting to note that kings could and did raise virtually anyone to the office of count. The episode of one Leudast, recorded in Gregory of Tours, provides a fine illustration of this. He was "the son of a certain Leucadius, a slave who looked after the vines on [an] estate."⁷³ Leudast himself began his working career as a kitchen helper but eventually rose to be count of Tours.⁷⁴

While such rises were possible, a recent study indicates that up to the end of the sixth century at least, the vast majority of the counts south of the Loire were

⁷² Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, p. 7.

⁷³ Gregory, p. 314.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 314.

members of the old Roman aristocracy."¹ There is little evidence to suggest that this situation changed in the course of the seventh century. Indeed when one considers the duties of the count (see below), it is reasonable to suggest that the old Roman nobility or the local magnates had the best experience as well as the education most suited to such an office."²

In the Frankish kingdom of the sixth century the count of each area was arguably "the most influential civil official, since he performed all administrative functions, such as dispensing justice, collecting taxes and calling up and often also commanding the military levies."³ This is confirmed, in part, by a description of his role discovered in the Ripuarian law code. His authority extended over all Franks, Burgundians, and Gallo-Romans. He was to maintain total loyalty to the king and to govern "men "according to law and custom."⁴

We have already noted that counts tended to be chosen from the young nobles who resided at court and that the office was not hereditary. Yet during the sixth and seventh century local dynasties do begin to appear. This trend was aided by a decree contained in Chlotar's Edict of Paris which was promulgated in 613. This clause reads: "*nullus iudex de aliis provinciis aut regionibus in alia loca ordinetur, ut, si aliquid mali de quibus libet condicionibus*

¹ James, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

² See Van Dam, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Dill, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

pertraverit, de suis propriis rebus exinde quod male astolerit iuxta legis ordine debeat restaurare."⁷⁷ While this decree did affect others, counts were the most important judiciary officials at the local level. Scholars have made much of this passage. Mitteis, for example, believed that it "marked the surrender of political power to the Frankish landowning aristocracy."⁷⁸ Others, however, have posited that it may have been a deliberate policy on the part of king to ensure that corrupt judges would be held accountable; their lands or property could be confiscated.⁷⁹ It is likely that this decree was an attempt by the king to secure law and order following the period of civil wars. However, some local families certainly benefited.

As we shall see, the existence of these powerful local lay officials whose territory and duties could overlap with those of bishops created a very real possibility of conflict.

The other local magnate of importance was the bishop.

⁷⁷ *M.G.H.*, vol I, pp. 20-23.

⁷⁸ Mitteis, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

⁷⁹ See James, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

III. THE BISHOP AS ROYAL AGENT

It has been noted in the introduction that bishops were crucial to the administration of the Merovingian monarchs. This section will outline the role of the bishop as an administrator for the king.

A. Royal Influence upon Episcopal Appointments

Originally, of course, bishops had been elected by the clergy and the people of their diocese or town. This system had fallen into disuse by the fifth century. The new barbarian kings regarded the privilege of making episcopal appointments as their own; a bishopric was considered to be an important office worthy to be given as a reward to a loyal follower. Presumably the period of civil wars made it difficult for the various Merovingian rulers to ensure a tight control over their church officials. By the seventh century, Chlotar and Dagobert, intent upon ensuring the loyalty of their officials, were installing their own choices in these offices. Chlotar II ordered that bishops were to be consecrated by the will of the king.¹² Desiderius' appointment to the see of Cahors was made by a decree of King Dagobert: "...jubemus ut, adjuvante Domino, adclamante laudem ipsius clero vel populo, vir illustris et verus Dei cultor Desiderius pontifex in urbe Cadurci debeat

¹² Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, p. 125.

consecration...."

The seventh century does witness a slight, but significant change in the manner of selecting bishops. Chlotar and Dagobert deliberately attracted the sons of many local magnates to court where they were educated in and, no doubt, indoctrinated with pro-Merovingian dogma. Many of these men received palace appointments before then being installed in an episcopal office. The letters of Desiderius refer to the friendships that he developed at court with Eligius and Ouen.¹³ Both he and Eligius occupied the post of treasurer before being appointed to bishoprics.

While the king's choice was decisive it was not, however, unfettered. It was necessary that considerations of the local magnates and the people should also be addressed. This may help to explain why Chlotar, at the Council of Clichy, decreed that bishops should be elected from families within their dioceses. The inevitable result, which will be discussed below, was to place bishoprics in the hands of members of local families, in particular those of the aristocracy.

It is difficult to determine whether the existence of these local ecclesiastical dynasties was, in fact, detrimental to the Merovingian rulers. Indeed they may have played a very significant role in binding the loyalty of

¹³ René Poupardin, ed., *La Vie de Saint Didier, évêque de Cahors (630-655)* (Paris, 1900), pp. 13-14.

¹⁴ *Desiderii episcopi Cadurcensis epistolae*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae*, vol. iii, W. Arndt, ed. (Berlin, 1892), pp. 191-214.

members of their diocese to the ruling family. Certainly the nature of government in seventh century Gaul, which was so dependent upon an official's actual presence, made local aristocrats, who could employ family wealth and influence, logical royal appointees. Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen were all members of prominent families. It is interesting to note that Eligius, the only one of the three to be sent in controvention to the Council of Clichy to a diocese away from his area of birth, faced the most severe difficulties in establishing himself there.

It should be noted that these episcopal appointments were regarded as promotions by both appointer and appointee. The power wielded both by court officials and bishops was great, but bishops also exercised authority on behalf of the Lord in his earthly hierarchy. This was especially significant to the people of seventh-century Merovingian Gaul. Metropolitan sees were not necessarily very much greater prizes than ordinary sees. Since most bishops were appointed to the dioceses in which their families were located, it was a matter of chance whether such a see was metropolitan or not. The bishop's birth and family were probably the deciding factors in such appointments. Desiderius' promotion to a regular see was probably inspired, in part, by his family's situation there and should not be regarded as an indication that his secular ruler held him in less esteem than Ouen who became a metropolitan. The appointment of Eligius to Noyon, not in

itself a very notable see, arouses some suspicions that his known hostility with Erchoald, the Neustrian mayor, resulted in this exile from court. Nevertheless, such appointments, even to non-metropolitan sees, seem to have been desired. In his diocese, the bishop exercised very secular power and, of course, also wielded the authority of the Lord.

B. The Bishop as Royal Adviser

Bishops were required to be good statesmen and accomplished politicians. They were often called upon to sit in the king's councils or to serve as personal advisers. As early as 481, Bishop Remigius informed Clovis that:

"you ought to associate yourself with counsellors who are able to do honor to your reputation... You should defer to your bishops and always have recourse to their advice, [for] if you are on good terms with them your province will be better able to stand firm."¹⁵

In 627 when Chlotar convoked a great council "to consider [the] country's problems, the Neustrian and Burgundian bishops and all the other great men of the kingdom" were assembled.¹⁶ Fredegar also shows Arnulf of Metz as an important adviser to Dagobert.¹⁷

¹⁵ Remigius in *The Conversion of Western Europe 350-750; Sources of Civilization in the West*, J.N. Hillgarth ed. (New Jersey, 1969), p. 75.

¹⁶ Fredegar, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, *passim*.

The bishops took their advisory role very seriously. When Chilperic had gathered together a group of bishops to discuss the misconduct of one of their number, Gregory, who was included among them, cautioned his fellows to

Make sure that the advice which you give him [Chilperic] is holy advice and worthy of your rank in the church, for there is a danger that by turning his wrath against one of God's ministers he may destroy himself in his paroxysms and so lose his good name and kingdom."

Their advice could have disastrous effects on others. King Theuderic II (595-612), acting upon the advice of Bishop Aridus of Lyons, had Desiderius, the former bishop of Vienne, stoned to death." In 614 or 615, Bishop Leudemund of Sion assisted an attempt to usurp Chlotar's throne by the patrician Alethius by counselling the Queen to marry that nobleman upon the king's death which he portrayed as being inevitable." Clearly such advice could lead bishops into political intrigue and involve them in feuds. Bishop Leodegar of Autun was patronized by Queen Balthilde, indeed it was through her that he received his see. Unfortunately he became involved in a palace dispute that had arisen between factions supported by the Queen and those under the patronage of the mayor, Ebroin. Ebroin had Leodegar murdered

" Gregory, p. 276.

" Fredegar, p. 21.

" Fredegar, pp. 36-37.

in 673.¹¹

The advice of bishops could be directed at officials in the kingdom's administration. In 613 bishops and secular lords had counselled the Neustrian mayor Warnachar "to ensure that none of Theuderic's sons should escape; all should be killed with Brunehildis and their kingdom given to Chlotar."¹² This counsel was heeded; Fredegar notes that "this in effect is what happened (*quod probavit eventus*)."¹³ Clearly this advisory role allowed bishops to wield great influence and power. As we will see in chapter VI, Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen were all trusted advisers of their kings.

C. The Bishop as Mediator and Ambassador

Episcopal officials could even be called upon to mediate between monarchs. In 573 thirty-two bishops, including seven metropolitans, judged a quarrel between Sigibert and Guntrum.¹⁴ When Chlotar and his co-ruler Dagobert could not agree upon the jurisdiction over certain Austrasian territories, twelve Frankish lords were chosen to mediate. One of these was Arnulf, bishop of Metz, and he was not the only bishop among them for Fredegar refers to him as

¹¹ Friedrich Prinz, "Die bischofliche Stadtherrschaft im Frankenreich vom 5 bis zum 7 Jahrhundert" in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Band 217 (Munich, 1973), p. 26.

¹² Fredegar, p. 34.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ See W.C. McDermott, "Felix of Nantes: A Merovingian Bishop" in *Traditio*, vol. 31, p. 9.

"one of the bishops among those chosen."''

Bishops also used their influence to act on behalf of others. Gregory reunited Childeric the Saxon, who had fallen out of favour with King Guntram, to his wife by sending a series of messengers to the king:

Childeric the Saxon, who had lost favour with King Guntram..., causing others to run away, himself sought sanctuary in Saint Martin's church, leaving his wife behind in Guntram's territory. The King had adjured her not to presume to visit her husband until such a time as he had been restored to royal favour. I sent a series of messengers to Guntram on Childeric's behalf, and in the end I obtained permission for him to be joined by his wife and to go off to live on the other side of the River Loire....''

Kings employed their bishops as agents abroad. They were sent on embassies to other nations.'' Sigibert, the son of Dagobert, dispatched bishop Chunibert of Cologne to his brother's court in Neustria to bring back his share of his father's treasury.''

D. The Bishop As Royal Publicist

Gallic bishops were also royal publicists. This role, a product of their training and their proximity to the people, made them even more valuable to their rulers. Merovingian

'' Fredegar, p. 44.

'' Gregory, p. 450.

'' See Dill, *op. cit.*, p. 479.

'' Fredegar, p. 72.

bishops were not the first to employ their rhetorical skills on behalf of their secular rulers.

Very early on in the Christian Empire, ecclesiastical rhetors had made themselves extremely useful to the emperors. Eusebius, in his panegyric of Constantine, had associated the symbol of the emperor with God Himself. Constantine had been equated with Cyrus and Alexander the Great.¹⁰⁰ This was useful propaganda.

Bishops of late antiquity used their function as preacher to expound on many secular matters. John Chrysostom soothed the populace of Antioch when they rioted against increased taxes.¹⁰¹ Episcopal rhetoric was one of the ancient world's 'mass media'. It was a powerful force.

As the Empire gave way to the barbarian kingdoms, the bishop's role as broadcaster became even more important. These church leaders had a strong unifying function during this period of transition. As the barbarian rulers converted to Christianity, they benefited from the church's preaching. Early in the sixth century, Caesarius, the bishop of Arles, broadcast a powerful unifying message. One important passage reads:

The church has grown great, the peoples have believed, the princes of the earth have been conquered under the name of Christ. In order themselves to attain earthly victories, they have placed their necks under the yokes of Christ. In olden days they persecuted Christians for the sake of idols. Now they

¹⁰⁰ Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, I, 7-8.

¹⁰¹ Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

persecute idols for the sake of Christ.¹⁰¹

The association made between Christ and his earthly princes would have had a profound effect upon those listening. The concept that these barbarian rulers belonged within God's earthly city also suggested that they were the rightful rulers of the *populus christianus*, leading the fight against paganism and evil.

Such an image would have been useful only if it were broadcast to his subjects. By allying himself with the bishops, Clovis harnessed the church's considerable communications network.

Seventh century bishops continued to act as royal publicists. As we have noted above, Clotar was compared to David in the preface to the canons of the Council of Clichy.¹⁰² His son, Dagobert, was associated with Solomon. These images were crafted and broadcast by Gallic bishops. Indeed it may be argued that the images of Frankish rulers were at the mercy of their bishops.

E. The Bishop as Revenue Collector

The collection of diocesan income was another responsibility of the bishop. This was one duty which could attract men of the wrong character to the office. Gregory of

¹⁰¹ Caesarius quoted from W.M. Daly, "Caesarius of Arles; A Precursor of Medieval Christendom" in *Traditio*, Vol. 26 (New York, 1970), p. 18.

¹⁰² See chapter I, A, above.

Tours recorded an amusing incident of two brothers whose desire for personal wealth far surpassed any sense of duty. These two, Salonius of Embrun and Sagittarius of Gap, had just assumed their offices when "their new power went to their heads: with a sort of insane fury they began to disgrace themselves in speculation, physical assaults, murders, adultery and every crime in the calendar."¹⁰³ So great was their greed that they set a mob of their followers upon another bishop, Victor of Saint Paul-Trois Chateaux, who "tore Victor's clothes off his back, beat up his servants, stole his table silver and all the furnishings of the feast (Victor had been celebrating his birthday!) and left him in a sorry state."¹⁰⁴

F. The Bishop As Recipient of Immunities

During the late sixth and seventh centuries, bishops more and more frequently sought immunities from taxation. As was noted previously, Gregory convinced the king's tax collectors that his diocese should not be taxed. Immunities such as this one and others were confirmed by the Edict of Paris. One must be careful when considering the motives of bishops like Gregory. Some, no doubt, were anxious to increase their wealth and authority at the expense of the king. However other actions taken to alter the tax system simply reflected the fact that, at times, the old system was out of date. The bishop of Poitiers demanded a revision of

¹⁰³ Gregory, p. 285.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

the census in 587 because in the interval since the preceeding reign, "many deaths had taken place and the burden now often fell on widows and orphans and impoverished person."¹⁰³ This was not an isolated incident.¹⁰⁴ The kings of the late sixth and early seventh centuries, the era of civil wars, levied new taxes which created great unrest.¹⁰⁵ When Chilperic and his family were infected by the plague, his wife Fredegund attributed this to their greed. God was punishing them for raising taxes. She then tells Chilperic: "What sufficed for king Lothar, your father, should be plenty for our exchequer too."¹⁰⁶

It is clear that the system of taxation was in great need of revision. It is probable that as old taxes became unjust and new ones unbearable, the bishop, as the leader of the local community, would be called upon to rectify the problem. It is highly significant that Chlotar's Edict of Paris removed unjust taxes and tolls.¹⁰⁷

Also diocesan revenues belonged to God. They were required by His officials in order for them to carry out their roles. Episcopal immunities made it possible for bishops to govern their sees, and also enabled the king to establish a closer relationship with God. Thus those historians who seek to prove that tax immunities sought by bishops signal a general trend whereby these local officials

¹⁰³ Dill, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁴ See also Dill, *op. cit.*, pp. 128ff.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Gregory, p. 247.

¹⁰⁷ See above.

attempt to fortify their power at the expense of the king and, further, that Chlotar's Edict of Paris was in effect, a capitulation to these ecclesiastical magnates,¹¹⁰ have neglected to observe that such immunities benefited both parties. This perceived struggle between the king and his officials is an anachronism, very much out of place here. This is also reflected in the new tone of co-operation that is evident in the relationship between this king and his prelates as portrayed by Fredegar. However this development should not be interpreted as a capitulation on the part of the king. It is true that churchmen were now "ready to make claims on kings" because "kings have moved into an ecclesiastical atmosphere",¹¹¹ but it was the king's interest that was being served by this relationship. His kingdom was unified and his dynasty was sanctified; this was well worth the grant of several immunities.

G. The Bishop as Royal Critic

Bishops apparently enjoyed more freedom in censuring their kings' actions than did their secular counterparts. During the sixth century Nicetius of Trier castigated a Frankish princess for marrying the king of the Lombards and "...insisted that she convert her husband to Catholicism."¹¹² Not content with rebuking western rulers he

¹¹⁰ See Heinrich Mitteis, *The State in the Middle Ages: A Comparative Constitutional History of Feudal Europe* (Oxford, New York, and Amsterdam, 1975) pp. 50ff.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹¹² *Epistolae Austrasicae* 7-8, in Van Dam, p. 202.

even wrote to the eastern emperor, Justinian, telling him not to persecute orthodox Catholics.¹¹³

Later in the sixth century, when Chilperic issued a decree concerning the nature of the Trinity, Gregory of Tours rebuked him, stating: "You must give up this illfounded belief, and follow that which the Apostles and after them the other Fathers of the Church have handed down to us."¹¹⁴ Chilperic's refusal to reconsider led to this further remark by Gregory: "Anyone who is prepared to accept your proposals will not be a wise man but a fool."¹¹⁵ Chilperic was furious, but he did, eventually, revoke his decree.

By the seventh century, bishops no longer appear as critics of their kings, but they do appear standing up to them. Eligius incurred the anger of Chlotar when he refused to give an oath of loyalty to anyone except God.¹¹⁶ Arnulf was the subject of Dagobert's wrath when the former decided to depart from court for a time.¹¹⁷ Apparently seventh-century bishops were less inclined than their predecessors to criticise their secular lords, but the ability to confront kings had not been lost completely.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Gregory, p. 311.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ See *Vita Eligii*, book i, vi.

¹¹⁷ *Vita Sancti Arnulfi*, book I, xxvii.

H. The Relations Between Crown and Bishop

It is possible to trace a sequence of stages in the relationships between the Merovingian kings and the bishops of the Frankish church.

Entente Established, to 511

Formal relations between the king of the Franks and the Catholic Church began with the conversion of Clovis. For the bishops, this conversion opened up new opportunities for extending the influence of the church. It had advantages for Clovis as well. Most modern scholars believe that the most enduring and powerful bond between the ruler and his mixture of Gallo-Roman, Frankish, and Burgundian subjects was created when he converted to Christianity.¹¹ His conversion, whether it was due to political calculation or not, mobilized the vast resources of the Catholic Christian church behind him.

Not all of these resources were tangible ones such as wealth. They included the emotional loyalty of conscientious subjects such as Caesarius of Arles. Clearly Caesarius' political world "was one in which a distant and alien Roman Empire had been replaced by a plurality of Germanic kingdoms whose rulers had shown deference to him, his church and his work."¹² This deference had reaped great rewards resulting in their inclusion, even in their leadership of, the earthly

¹¹ See Robert Latouche, *Caesar to Charlemagne; the beginnings of France*, translated by J. Nicholson (London, 1965), pp. 221-223.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 18.

city of Christianity.

This theme also appears in a letter from Bishop Avitus of Vienne to Clovis after his conversion. Whereas others

observe a futile reverence for their parents [by continuing to share their unbelief]... you [Clovis] have willed that your race should derive from you all the glories which adorn high birth. Your ancestors have prepared a great destiny for you; you willed to prepare better things [for those who will follow you]. You follow your ancestors in reigning in this world; you have opened the way to your descendants to a heavenly reign."¹²⁰

The bishop continues in even more glowing terms:

Let Greece indeed rejoice it has elected an emperor who shares our Faith; it is no longer alone in deserving such a favor. Your sphere also burns with its own brilliance, and, in the person of a king, the light of a rising sun shines over the Western lands. It is right that this light began at the Nativity of Our Redeemer, so that the waters of rebirth have brought you forth to salvation the very day that the world received the birth of its Redemption, the Lord of Heaven."¹²¹

Gregory of Tours reported that Clovis was "like some new Constantine [when] he stepped forward to the baptismal pool, ready to wash away the sores of his old leprosy."¹²²

¹²⁰ J. N. Hillgarth, ed., *The Conversion of Western Europe* 350-750, pp. 75-76.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹²² Gregory, p. 144.

Clovis was exhorted to "worship what you have burnt, burn what you have been wont to worship."¹²³ His victories become God's victories. His subjects become a part of the *populus Christianus*.¹²⁴

This barbarian leader is evolving into a Christian monarch who rightfully stands at the head of a Christian people. Such a transformation was, of course, of utility to the church; Clovis would develop some sense of Christian leadership. However the king's needs were also served admirably. As a symbolic head of God's earthly kingdom his task of unifying Gaul was much easier.

Entente Under Strain, 511-613

It is clear that Clovis and his church deliberately co-operated in formulating and disseminating a concept of a Christian king ruling over a unified, Christian people. This process was interrupted by the period of political instability and civil wars which followed his death in 511. Regional and ethnic differences, personal feuds and power politics all drove deep wedges into the Gallic community.

In the course of the disorders of the sixth century, one notices that bishops are no longer at one with their kings. From reading Gregory of Tours' work, it appears that their relationship with the king was often a tumultuous one. Chilperic convoked a council of bishops to hear a case against one of them but none would speak: "They were afraid

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

of the king who had raged at them, the king at whose instigation all this was being done."¹²⁵ The interaction between Chilperic and Gregory concerning the nature of the Trinity ended when the king "gnashed his teeth."¹²⁶ Gregory reports that Chilperic made "bishops...the constant butt of his ridicule and facetiousness." Indeed he would accuse one of "levity, another of superbia, a third of excess and a fourth of luxury"¹²⁷ and would remark: "How empty headed was this bishop, how pompous that!" Chilperic lamented that "There is no one with any power left except the bishops" and "...he made a practice of tearing up wills in which property had been bequeathed to the bishop."¹²⁸ These are not indications of a smooth working relationship. Indeed, it seems to be more one of convenience and one that was based upon confrontation. Gregory's history records a great number of clashes of wills between kings and bishops. Often the advice of ecclesiastical officials was not solicited, it was instead forced upon the king.¹²⁹

Entente Re-established, from 613

It is evident that when Chlotar ended the strife and became sole ruler in 613, he was faced with a great task of repairing, healing, and unifying. He determined to employ the church and its mechanisms to help to heal these ruptures.

¹²⁵ Gregory, p. 276.

¹²⁶ *ibid.* p. 311.

¹²⁷ *ibid.* p. 380.

¹²⁸ *ibid.* p. 380.

¹²⁹ As when Gregory attacked Chilperic's views concerning the Trinity. See above.

His own image and those of his family were associated more closely with Christian imagery. As we have noted previously, Chlotar was soon being compared to David and his son to Solomon. His dynasty developed a close attachment with Saint Denis. The accession of Chlotar's son Dagobert "was welcomed by Fredegar in well-nigh biblical terms."¹³⁰

Fredegar's chronicle suggests that a shift in this relationship has occurred. In 616 Chlotar summoned the bishops and magnates of Burgundy so that he might listen "to all their just petitions and confirm his concessions in writing."¹³¹ Later, in 627, he assembled all of his Neustrian and Austrasian bishops and "the other great men of his kingdom...on the king's business and to consider their country's problems."¹³² Dagobert, too, willingly listened to and acted upon the advice of bishops.¹³³ The tone of these statements indicates that these kings were perfectly willing, even anxious, to listen to petitions from their bishops and to accept their advice. Indeed Fredegar recorded that Dagobert was counselled by Bishop Arnulf of Metz until the latter withdrew his services. He was replaced by Pippin and Chunibert, the bishop of Cologne.¹³⁴ These seventh century bishops seem to have received much better welcomes at court than their sixth century predecessors. Why?

¹³⁰ J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, p. 48.

¹³¹ Fredegar, p. 37.

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 46.

¹³³ See for example Fredegar, p. 63.

¹³⁴ Fredegar, p. 49.

We have already noted that the seventh century Merovingians had deliberately sought to create an apparent link between their dynasty and certain Christian cults. Is it possible that this and a perceptible warming to the church's officials are results of the same phenomenon? We must be very much aware of the fact that the period of the sixth and seventh centuries was a transitional one for Gaul and its rulers. There are signs which indicate that the monarchs of the seventh century determined to associate their rule more closely with their bishops. The policy of Chlotar and Dagobert of educating young aristocrats at court and then appointing them to episcopal offices is one illustration. The Edict of Paris reflected Chlotar's concern to re-establish order and to bring back an equitable administration but it also indicated that the ruler was most willing to listen to and act upon the complaints and recommendations of his bishops.

Chlotar's concessions of church immunities may be interpreted in this light. He required the co-operation of his bishops in the act of unifying his people. Indeed a subtle change in the relationship between this king and his bishops and that of his predecessors is apparent. While the functions of the bishops have changed little, if at all, the attitude of the kings towards them has been transformed.

IV. THE BISHOP AS LOCAL AUTHORITY

While some seventh century Merovingian bishops such as Arnulf of Metz and Leodegar of Autun apparently maintained a continuous high profile at court, they were a minority. It was locally that bishops were important.

A. Local Factors in Episcopal Appointments

A decree from the council of Clichy, convened in 616, stipulated that when a bishop died, his successor was to be chosen from the same *civitas*. This was reconfirmed at the first synod of Rheims held in 624; "If a bishop dies, only a native of his city shall be chosen as his successor...."¹³⁵ This decree was probably intended to ensure the accountability of bishops when they fulfilled their role as judges, just as the decree from Paris noted above had made them and other officials accountable. However it may also have contributed to the continuance of local dynasties and even to the creation of new ones.

It is also apparent that the people themselves preferred to have their bishop appointed from among their community. Eligius was sent as an outsider to the see of Noyon, a most unusual event in-itself, and he encountered strong opposition on several instances. Indeed he had a

¹³⁵ C.J.Hefele, ed., *A History of the Councils of the Church, From the Original Documents*, translated from the German and edited by William Clark, vol. IV, A.D. 451 to A.D. 680 (Edinburgh, 1895), p. 447.

great deal of trouble establishing his authority.¹³⁶ This may help to explain why Chlotar, in the Edict of Paris, had determined that bishops would be elected from families within the diocese. It could be difficult for a newcomer to gain the respect and the cooperation of the local people. Therefore while bishops were appointees of the king, local pressures limited and influenced his choices.

B. Bases of Episcopal Authority

Though bishops owed their appointments to their training at court and to the patronage of the king at the local level their authority rested upon other foundations. The ability to protect a community, to add to its public buildings and to look after its poor all contributed to a bishop's prestige. These were manifestations of his virtue; they publicized his worthiness to be a patron. This was the key to establishing authority locally.

Secular Patronage

It has been stated that above all else a bishop "was a patron to his city"¹³⁷ Patronage is by nature a reciprocal arrangement. A patron must be in a position to provide financial aid, counsel or to exercise influence on behalf of others with more powerful figures. In return the patron

¹³⁶ See for example, *Vita Eligii*, II-20.

¹³⁷ Ian Wood, "The Ecclesiastical Politics of Merovingian Clermont" in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society; Studies presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill*, P. Wormald ed. (Oxford, 1983), p. 34.

receives great prestige, influence and power.

Patronage was, of course, a principle upon which the ancient world, Rome in particular, had thrived. It had been an important social factor during Rome's republican period and, most historians would agree, became even more so during the principate when it was, in effect, systematized.¹³⁸ During the principate the emperors were the ultimate patrons. Among their clients were local aristocrats and *literati* who, in turn, looked after the interests of their communities.¹³⁹

The conversion of Constantine and the emergence of Christianity as the official state religion legitimized a new group of local patrons; the bishops. The barbarian invasions rearranged the patron/client system but did nothing to harm it. Indeed, the withdrawal of the imperial administration and the reduction of the landed aristocracy through deaths or migration provided opportunities for bishops to increase their authority.¹⁴⁰ It is not unusual to discover bishops negotiating with barbarian leaders on

¹³⁸ See R. Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 30. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix posits that the growth of patronage "provides the key to the working of the Roman constitution of the imperial period" because "with the collapse of the Republic and the virtual elimination of the democratic features of the constitution in the last half century B.C., patronage and clientship became as it were the mainspring of Roman public life." "Suffragium: From Vote to Patronage" in *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. V (London, 1954), p. 137.

¹³⁹ See G. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 30ff.

¹⁴⁰ See Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1985), p. 149.

behalf of their communities during the fifth century.¹⁴¹ Bishops were effectively strengthening their positions as patrons.

Access to Spiritual Patronage

One of the most important sources of episcopal authority was the ability for bishops to establish control over existing centres of cults of saints and to create new ones. To the inhabitants of sixth and seventh century Gaul, a saint was the ultimate patron because he had influence with God Himself. The saint was the "Ideal Companion" for he now "stood secure in the other world."¹⁴² Indeed it has recently been argued that appeals to the saints as recorded in Gregory of Tours were "one form or manifestation of the Roman ritual of appeal to a patron."¹⁴³

Saints were, of course, men of great *merita*. Another man's personal prestige could be greatly enhanced by developing some form of relationship with them. Thus it was imperative for bishops to establish their control over cult centres and to take an active and very visible part in the transfer and display of newly discovered relics. As Peter Brown has stated: "The physical remains - the relics - ... did not merely heal and bless: they answered the question of

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁴² Peter Brown, "Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours" in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), p. 240.

¹⁴³ John Corbett, "The Saint as Patron in the Work of Gregory of Tours", *Journal of Medieval History*, vii, 1981, p. 5.

merita of those who stood, with far less unambiguous security, at the head of the Christian communities of the Gallic towns."¹⁴⁴ Thus the discovery of relics and their subsequent placement in churches, shrines or monasteries founded and/or controlled by the local bishop was solid irrefutable evidence of his worthiness to be a patron."¹⁴⁵ The epitaph of a fifth-century bishop of Tours who had constructed a memorial to Saint Martin helps to illustrate this relationship. It reads: "Perpetuus did not build such a grand tomb for Saint Martin alone, he also constructed it as a memorial for himself."¹⁴⁶

It should be noted that this tactic of the seventh-century bishops to acquire mystique was merely an imitation of a basic policy of their rulers. We have already noted the move by Chlotar and Dagobert to sanctify their families."¹⁴⁷ These links with Christian holy men benefited both king and bishop and also helped to create a unifying bond for the Frankish people.

The *Vitae* of Desiderius, Ouen and Eligius provide a great deal of evidence to support this premise. While there is no account in the *Vita Desiderii* of the discovery of relics, Desiderius did build a basilica in honor of Saint Julien: "*in valle quae in hariago vel Spennio tenditur,*

¹⁴⁴ Peter Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-2.

¹⁴⁵ Note that this use of relics was not just a phenomenon of the Christian world. Theseus' bones were discovered and returned to Greece where they were placed in a suitable building and became the subject of a cult. Orpheus' relics were employed in a similar way.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted from Van Dam, p. 209.

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter One, above.

aedificavit basilicam in honore sancti martyris Juliani fundatum, quam cum terris et cum appendiciis monastero suo dedist."¹⁴⁴ He constructed another on the spot where his brother Rusticus had been murdered and dedicated it to Saint Peter: "*Aedificavit etiam ultra amnis ripam...basilicam formae convenientissimae combtam, scilicet in loco quo germanus ejus Rusticus quondam fuerat interemptus, quam mirabiliter perficiens in honorem beati Petri apostolorum principis dedicavit...*"¹⁴⁵ This would seem to be a none too subtle attempt to sanctify his brother. Desiderius also reinforced his connections with the saintly world by introducing Columbanian monks to Cahors:

*Nullus quidem eo tempore in urbe Cadurca propositum monachi, neque habitum religionis, aut regulae coenobialis iter intraverat; secta Columbani procul aberat, instituta beati Benedicti longe distabant; ignominiosum, ut putabatur, monachorum genus omnes omnino spernebant. Desiderii autem sub tempore haec secta Cadurcae intravit, hujus sub tempore haec religio adolescere coepit.*¹⁴⁶

Desiderius' hagiographer considered another monastery that he founded to be especially noteworthy because of its distance from Cahors; "*Desiderius...aedificavit monasterium sub ipso Cadurcae municipio, in caeteris aeditibus eximium, septingentos circiter et quinquaginta passus a praecipua*

¹⁴⁴ *Vita Desiderii*, p. 18..

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

*pontificum sede distans...*¹⁵¹ The bishop of Cahors was extending his authority out into the surrounding area.

The *Vita Eligii* is richer in examples illustrating the importance of this link between bishops and saint. Eligius actively sought and discovered the remains of several saints. This is not surprising. Eligius, appointed as an outsider to his see, had no family connections to aid him in establishing his authority. His hold on his see was slight. The fostering of a close and very visible relationship with saints was especially important to him. During his search for the body of Saint Quentin, he came into conflict with another relic hunter, This "*vir inprobus*", Maurinus by name, had sung at the court of the king and had instructed his children.¹⁵² *Vita Eligii* records the intervention of God on behalf of the bishop which brought about the end of the unfortunate Maurinus:

*Maurinus...mente tumidus, corde protervus
atque actione dissipatus, qui audacia suae
praesumptionis deceptus, coepit verbis
extollere, a se corpus martyris Quintinii et
inquiri posse et invenire; sed ut et eius
proterviam ilico et Eligii merita demum
Dominus declararet, mox ut terram sarculo
scabere coepit, manubrium fossorii manibus
eius inhaesit, sicque miser opus praesumptum
relinquens, sequenti quoque die, in manibus
suis vermes ebullientes, miserabiliter
expiravit.*¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁵² *Vita Eligii*, Book II, 6.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Only the canonization of Eligius prevents one from entertaining the suspicion that he may have helped God's hand just a little.

What Maurinus' intention was is difficult to determine. It has been suggested that he may have wished to add this relic to the collection of the king.¹⁵⁴ This is unlikely given the fact that Eligius had just been appointed to head the see by the king. It would serve the ruler no purpose to undermine his own appointee nor, indeed, for the appointee to undermine his ruler. It is more likely that Maurinus wanted the relics for himself; they were extremely valuable. Clearly Eligius perceived Maurinus' action to be a direct challenge to his authority. This is illustrated both by the demise of Maurinus and by the detailed treatment of the entire episode given by the hagiographer. After Maurinus' death Eligius was careful to put this great relic on display to the people. The bishop was central to the entire procedure.¹⁵⁵ His prestige was greatly enhanced by his discovery of and control over this relic.

Eligius did not stop after he had discovered the relic of Saint Quentin. He then successfully sought the body of Saint Piato. He not only discovered the saint's remains but even recovered the nails which had been ~~driven~~ through his body. These were displayed to the people; once again Eligius

¹⁵⁴ See Paul Fouracre, "The work of Audoenus of Rouen and Eligius of Noyon in extending episcopal influence from the town to the country in seventh century Neustria" in *The Church in Town and Countryside*, Studies in Church History, vol. 16, Derek Baker, ed. (Oxford, 1979), p. 87.

¹⁵⁵ See *Vita Eligii*, Book II, 6.

himself was central to the ceremony.¹⁵⁶ Eligius then constructed a mausoleum over the body.

These two quests were not enough for the bishop. At Soissons Eligius uncovered the bodies of Saints Crispin and Crispian. These too were put on display and then interred in an appropriate building.¹⁵⁷ He also constructed memorials for Saints Chryfolius, Eubertus, Bavo, and Frufaeus.¹⁵⁸ Eligius' actions are good indications of his needs. He was anxious to enlist the support of any saint. It is true that Bavo was notable, but the others were less than prominent saints. Also, Crispin and Crispian had been thrown into molten lead so it is unlikely that their bodies had been preserved. Apparently Eligius was willing to invent relics when none, from even the least well-known saints, were available.

These searches and public displays were crucial in establishing his authority. Eligius' power and influence, his worthiness to be a patron, were all at issue. When he discovered these relics and constructed monuments over them, his own *merita* was greatly enhanced and his grasp on the diocese strengthened.

How important it was to maintain a monopoly over saintly relics can be seen from an episode which involved

¹⁵⁶ *Vita Eligii*, Book II, 7.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ See *Gallia Christiana in Provincias Ecclesiasticas Distributa Qua Series et Historia Archiepiscoporum, Episcoporum et Abbatum Franciae Vicinarumque Ditionum ab Origine Ecclesiarum ad Nostra Tempora*, vol. IX, D. Sammarthani and P. Piolin, eds. (Paris, 1873), p. 983.

Gregory of Tours. A man appeared at Tours claiming to have in his possession relics of Saints Felix and Vincent.¹⁸⁸ Gregory refers to this man as an "imposter", as "impudent", and implies that he was practising witchcraft. This fellow soon left and turned up at Paris where he soon seems to have attracted a great crowd to him.¹⁸⁹ He was soon in conflict with Bishop Ragnemod of Paris who eventually had him committed to prison. One speech of the bishop is especially significant to us. He told the man: "If you have some holy relics to show me...deposit them for the time being in the church and celebrate these holy days with us."¹⁹⁰ These relics were particularly worrisome to the bishop. Evidently relics in the hands of anyone could give the holder power.

In the same way as men with relics in their possession, living holy men were perceived as threats to the authority of bishops. Recently Peter Brown has shown that one striking feature of the Merovingian world was a "marked shortage of living holy men."¹⁹¹ He observes that a society which knew and approved of eastern ascetics such as Symeon Stylite "somehow did not want one of its own."¹⁹² Indeed Gregory of Tours records that when one Vulfoliac began to practice the method of the eastern stylites "There came to him certain bishops..." who said "It is not right what you are trying to

¹⁸⁸ Gregory, p. 484.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 485.

¹⁹⁰ Gregory, p. 485.

¹⁹¹ Peter Brown, "Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: a parting of the ways. The Orthodox churches in east and west", *Studies in Church History*, Vol. 10, Derek Baker ed. (Oxford, 1975), p. 16.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

do! Such an obscure person as you can never be compared with Simeon the Stylite of Antioch."¹⁴⁴ The bishops even went further; after they had talked him down from his column they "sent workmen with wedges, hammers and axes and they dashed to pieces the column on which [Vulfoliac] used to stand."¹⁴⁵

Family Connections

We have already noted that prominent families were often able to secure and even to monopolize episcopal appointments in certain dioceses.¹⁴⁶ Bishops who received their diocese in such a manner would also be able to use their family's influence and power to aid them in establishing their authority locally. The lineage of a bishop's family seems to have been as important as that of his ruler. When Gregory of Tours faced a challenge to his authority by a local, one Riculf, it was the prestige of the former's family which apparently decided the dispute in his favour: "The poor fool (Riculf) seems not to have realized that, apart from five, all the other bishops who held their appointment in the see of Tours were blood-relations of my family."¹⁴⁷ Thus a bishop appointed to his family's diocese could use its influence and power to heighten his own.

¹⁴⁴ Gregory, p. 447.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ See chapter II, A, above and iv, B below.

¹⁴⁷ Gregory, p. 321.

Wealth

Previously we noted that the foundation of Merovingian power was their wealth. Treasure and land made it possible for these rulers to attract and hold large numbers of clients. The same observation may be applied to bishops.

A display of wealth and generosity provided evidence of a bishop's worthiness to be a patron to the people of his diocese. Desiderius began his episcopate by giving alms to the poor and by starting a number of building projects:

*Pauperibus vero et fratribus refrigeria sumtum ita praevidebat ut ulli nihil deesset. Si pusillanimum vidisset, consolabatur... Ab ipso quippe exordio episcopatus sui initia extrendae immoque recuperendae moeniae studium dedit, ubi instantissime desudans paene sine intermissione dies in opere continuabat.*¹¹¹

Ouen too provided for the poor and endowed his church with more land and money.¹¹² There is less evidence for Eligius but he constructed and endowed a "*monastarium ancillarum Christi*."¹¹³

Such projects required large sums of money, yet bishops were not expected to expend the accumulated wealth of their diocese.¹¹⁴ Clearly an alternative source of wealth was

¹¹¹ *Vita Desiderii*, pp. 16 and 17.

¹¹² *Vita Audoeni*, Book III, 22-24.

¹¹³ *Vita Eligii*, II, 5. See also Fouracre, p. 80.

¹¹⁴ See for example Decrees 13 and 20 from the Synod of Rheims of 624 in *A History of the Councils of the Church, From the Original Documents*, C.J. Hefele ed., translated from the German and edited by W. Clark, vol. IV (Edinburgh, 1895), pp. 446-447.

required initially in order for newly appointed bishops to establish themselves. Young men from noble or prominent families could employ family wealth to secure their authority. This advantage was apparent to seventh-century rulers such as Chlotar and Dagobert and their appointments were, in part, determined by it.

Residence

The presence of the bishop in his see was as important in establishing his authority as the presence of the king in his kingdom. Bishops could expect challenges from their people and, probably more frequently, from other secular officials. Therefore it was imperative for new bishops to make themselves as visibly active as possible in their sees. It is interesting to note that shortly after being appointed, Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen all took steps to establish themselves in the capitals of their sees.

Some bishops were able to use the presence of their family to a similar end. Arnulf spent little time at his diocese; his family upheld his authority. Desiderius had few family members left when he became bishop. Eligius' family was not located in his see. These factors, in part, necessitated their presence locally.

Cultural Superiority

It has been observed that "with the Christianization of the state, church leaders had need for public address on a

larger and more varied scale."¹¹² In order to broadcast their messages Christian prelates had to be skilled orators. Indeed by the end of the fourth century, Saint Augustine was describing rhetoric as a weapon and demanding that Christian leaders should arm themselves with it.¹¹³ The ability to speak well was vital to anyone who wished to act as a patron. This skill at broadcasting ideas helped a bishop to exercise his authority. His rhetorical skills also made him recognizable as a man of influence.

Seventh-century bishops could still use their knowledge of classical heritage to fortify their positions. This heritage could make a profound impact on the inhabitants of Gaul. Symbols from the Roman past, images of its culture and administration, were effective devices in instructing the people. Thus when Basques raided the diocese of Cahors, Desiderius presented the event as a conflict between Romans and barbarians:

*cum autem inrupciones gentium circumquoque audiret dicebat: "Nostris peccatis Barbari fortes sunt; nostris viciis Romanum subcumbet imperium. Infelices agebat, nos qui tantum displicemus Deo, ut per rariam Barbarorum ira in nos illius desaeviat. Poenitentiam, inquit, agamus ut tandem repropiciatus Deus misericordiam suam nobis tribuat in sempiternum."*¹¹⁴

¹¹² George Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors* (Princeton, 1972), p. 214.

¹¹³ *On Christian Doctrine*, translated by D. W. Robertson (Indianapolis, 1958), pp. 119-125.

¹¹⁴ *Vita Desiderii*, pp. 31-32.

The barbarians had overcome these 'Romans' because of the sins of the latter. In this way Desiderius was also able to explain his failure as a protector.

Desiderius' culture was noteworthy because he displayed the skill of a Roman in speaking: "*Ubi post insignia litterarum studia Gallicanamque eloquentiam quae vel florentissima sunt vel eximia, contubernii regalis aduiscisce indidit dignitatibus, ac deinde legum romanarum sermonis gravitas romana temperaret.*"¹⁷⁵ Ouen's *Vita* makes it clear that much of his work relied upon his ability to preach.¹⁷⁶

Eligius too was a skilled orator. In one instance he visited a town near Noyon to preach against local superstitions and un-Christian practices. He met strong opposition from leaders of the community. They shouted that "Roman that you are, although you are always bothering us, you will never uproot our customs but we will go on with our rites as we have always done, and we will go on doing so always and forever."¹⁷⁷ This title of "*Romanus*" is at first glance rather puzzling. It has been suggested that it was meant to show the locals' contempt for an outsider and that "racial fusion between the Gallo-Roman and Frankish elements in the area had not taken place to the extent that it had elsewhere in the kingdom."¹⁷⁸ Another historian believes that one should translate this as '*Aquitanian*' because

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ See Fouracre, p. 81.

¹⁷⁷ *Vita Eligii*, Book II, 20. This is Fouracre's translation. See *op. cit.*, p. 82.

¹⁷⁸ Fouracre, p. 83.

Eligius was from that region which was more Romanized than the north. This title then was an insulting reference to his birthplace.''' Neither explanation is convincing. Indeed when one considers Eligius's task and his methods of carrying it out, another explanation presents itself. Eligius was preaching against local customs. He was opposed by *praestantiores* who had powerful friends; indeed one of these was the Neustrian mayor Erchinoald. The prestige of both sides, their worthiness to be patrons was at issue. Eligius triumphed by wielding a powerful weapon, rhetoric. This victory was recognized by his opponents even as they denied defeat. Eligius' hagiographer has preserved the situation's irony by recording the title *Romanus*. This was no reference to ethnicity. Rather it was a grudging tribute to his Roman-ness, his skill at rhetoric. Eligius' oratorical expertise heightened his prestige and his effectiveness.

"A knowledge of constructing buildings also helped to establish a bishop as a patron and to enable him to exercise his authority. Here again a link with *Romanitas* was desirable. Desiderius impressed his people with his building skills. For at least one of his works, a basilica, was not even built according to local standards but in the ancient manner:

Denique primam inibi basilicam more antiquorum praeripiens, quadris ac dedolatis

'' Edward James, *The Origins of France: From Clovis to the Capetians, 500-1000* (London, 1982), p. 141.

lapidibus aedificavit, non quidem nostro
 galli[cano]que more, sed sicut antiquorum
 murorum ambitus magnis quadris extrui solet;
 ita a fundamentis usque ad summa fastigia
 quadris lapidibus opus explevit; cui geminos
 summo porticus adiciens, opere
 adsimilavit.'''

This knowledge impressed many people and reinforced his authority.

Eligius' metalworking skills brought him to the notice of his king as well as common people. Indeed the king selected him to do particularly difficult work:

Crucem etiam magnam, quae retro altare aureum poneretur, ex auro puro et pretiosissimis gemmis insigni opere ac minutissima artis subtilitate fabricari iussit, quam beatus Eligius, eo quod illo in tempore summus aurifex ipse in regno haberetur, cum et alia, quae ad ipsius basilicae ornatum pertinebant, strenue prepararet, eliganti subtilitatis ingenio, sanctitate opitulante, mirifice exornavit. Nempe moderminores aurifices asseverare solent, quod ad praesens vix aliquis sit relictus, qui quamvis peritissimus in aliis extet operibus, huiusmodi tamen gemmarum et inclusoris subtilitate valeat per multa annorum curricula, eo quod de usu recesserit, ad liquidum experientiam consequi.'''

100 Vita Desiderii, p. 38.
 101 Gesta Dagoberti, p. 407.

C. Local Activities of the Bishop

Set aside for the moment the pastoral activities of the bishop, we may look at his contributions to local administration.

The Bishop as Builder

We have already seen that some building projects of seventh-century bishops were a result of the need to create visible ties with saints. However, other construction works had no such relationship. Desiderius laid water pipes in Cahors.¹¹² In the middle of the sixth century, Nicetius of Trier built an impressive fortification; "...his castle was...the most secure building in the region, fortified by thirty towers,[and] a catapult."¹¹³ Desiderius also was very active in constructing defence works:

*Ab ipso quippe exordio episcopatus sui initia extruendae immoque recuperendae moeniae studium dedit...Praeter civitatis autem opera, castellorum quoque, municipia, Cadurcum, quibus antea nudus pene ac exiguus locus ille videbatur, copioso opere conspicandaque municione ampliavit, erexit ac firmavit.*¹¹⁴

Some historians have argued that these activities were outside of the normal jurisdiction of a bishop and,

¹¹² See *epistolae* I, xiii and II, xx in *Desiderii Episcopi Cadurcensis Epistolae, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae*, vol. III, B. Krusch ed. (Berlin, 1892), pp. 191-214.

¹¹³ Van Dam, p. 203.

¹¹⁴ *Vita Desiderii*, pp. 18 and 19.

therefore, are evidence of a gradual usurpation of the authority of counts during the seventh century.¹¹³ Such a view seems to be untenable. When a city required water works and defence works, the bishop was not only in a position to build them, he was expected to. Moreover, he always had been. As we have seen, Nicetius constructed a formidable fortification at Trier in the sixth century. Sidonius had been active building such works even earlier. However, it is interesting that the bishop and not the count should be involved in this; especially in defence matters.

Desiderius' defence works should not, then, be considered to be signs of an usurpation of authority. Indeed it is difficult to believe that he wanted to undermine the authority of the king or any of his officials. His predecessor had been murdered by locals. His preoccupation with constructing defences suggests that his own grasp on the diocese may not have been as firm as he would wish. It would have been sheer folly to anger a local official of the king or the ruler himself at this time. Also Desiderius had been hand picked by the king. Dagobert had made him bishop. It would be surprising indeed if Desiderius was not completely loyal to his monarch. Clearly his building projects must be considered in light of his role as patron and the expectations which his community had.

¹¹³ See Prinz, *op. cit.* and also Jean Durliat, "Les attributions civiles des évêques mérovingiens: l'exemple de Didier, évêque de Cahors (630-655)" in *Annales du Midi*, XCI, 1979, pp. 231-40.

The Bishop as Defender of the Community

Friedrich Prinz states that some sixth century bishops were actually involved in battles as warriors.¹¹¹ The *Vitae* of Desiderius suggests that not only did he build defences but that he was also actively involved in defence itself. His hagiographer seems to explain an apparent failure of Desiderius in this role by blaming the peoples' sins for the successes of marauding *barbari*.¹¹² This apparent overlap in the functions of counts and bishops is difficult to explain. However, it is possible to maintain that when the Church itself and its people were threatened by raiders, the bishop was expected by the community to act as a spiritual defender, being close to the saints and therefore to God Himself. The bishop could call upon supernatural powers to aid him in defending the community; a count only had his soldiers. Evidence for this is a remark recorded by Gregory of Tours. A duke addressed King Theuderic when he was besieging Clermont. The duke warned him: "Behold, the walls of this city are very strong and huge fortifications surround it. So that your magnificence may clearly understand, I am speaking about the saints whose churches surround the walls of this city; and furthermore, the bishop of this city is considered to be influential in the presence of God."¹¹³

¹¹¹ Prinz, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹¹² *Vita Desiderii*, p. 31.

¹¹³ Gregory of Tours quoted from Van Dam, p. 191.

Of course bishops could count on non-spiritual aid. As important local patrons they had many clients. We have already observed that bishops performed many services for these people. In return the bishops could expect their clients to perform military service.

The Bishop as Judge

It is often held that another vital function of episcopal officials was that of magistrate. Bishops are portrayed sitting in judgement over a great variety of criminal disputes including murder.¹⁰⁰ Yet there is a curious dearth of evidence to support this premise.

An examination of decrees from contemporary church synods indicates that the bishop's judicial role was quite limited. One sixth century decree states that: "No bishop, or presbyter or cleric shall sit in judgement on Sunday. They may, however, settle quarrels on other days with exception of criminal cases."¹⁰¹ Criminal cases were not to be tried by bishops. Admittedly this decree was promulgated in a Spanish council but it is not unreasonable to suggest that a similar attitude prevailed in Gaul.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ See Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age* (London, 1926), p. 145.

¹⁰¹ The Synod of Tarragona, A.D. 516, quoted from *A History of the Councils of the Church*, Hefele ed., p. 103.

¹⁰² A decree from the Fourth Synod at Orleans, A.D. 541, implies that the situation was the same: "If anyone has intentionally committed a murder, even if he is freed from punishment by the prince or by the parents (of the dead man), he must have suitable penance imposed by the bishop." *ibid.*, p. 213. The bishops impose penance not a criminal judgement.

However in cases concerning the criminal behaviour of a cleric or of another against a cleric, bishops became involved. The Fourth Synod of Orleans in 541 declared that: "No layman may arrest, try or punish a clergyman without permission of the bishop or other ecclesiastical superiors."¹¹² This is stated even more forcefully at the First Synod of Rheims in 624 which declared: "The secular judge who punishes or dishonours a cleric without knowledge of bishop, and on any ground whatever is to be excommunicated."¹¹³

Bishops exercised certain controls over secular judges. At a synod held in 589 it was stipulated that: "The bishops too by the will of the king, must exercise oversight on the conduct of judges and must censure them if they are guilty of insolent behaviour or inform the king or excommunicate them, if they do not amend."¹¹⁴ At the synod of Rheims it was decreed: "Judges who violate the canons in opposition to the royal commands and the edict issued by the king at Paris, are to be excommunicated."¹¹⁵

Occasionally Bishops became involved in civil disputes. It is likely that these disputes were the main reasons for bishops to exercise a judicial role. Eligius settled a dispute over ownership of the fruit of an orchard.¹¹⁶

¹¹² *A History of the Councils of the Church*, p. 213.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p. 445.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 421.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ See *Vita Eligii*, book II, 22.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the bishop's judicial role was limited. He was expected to safeguard his people from unjust or morally crippled judges, to judge certain civil disputes, and to become actively involved in cases involving clerics. One remarkable episode in the *Vita* of Eligius, however, raises several questions concerning the tension between the bishop's judicial role and his obligation to show mercy.

Eligius travelled to Bourges where he planned to visit the church of Saint Sulpicius I (d. c. 600). Near Bourges he overhears people talking about several convicted murderers who are being held in a jail; "*audit conplures nuper mortis sententia damnatos teneri in carcere fiscali vinctos; interficerant enim quendam fiscalem iudicem et idcirco habebantur in vinculis.*"¹¹¹ Eligius tried to visit the condemned men but was sent away by soldiers. However a short time later these men again occupy his thoughts: "*stimulabat enim animum eius, quoniam reos qui tenebantur in carcere nihil prius iuvatus fuisset nec quivisset liberare eos.*"¹¹² Then Eligius, aided by divine might, shatters the jail door and shackles, freeing the criminals. These are instructed by Eligius; "*ut mox egredientes ergastulum ecclesiae peterent confugium....*"¹¹³ This they do but discover the door of the basilica of Saint Sulpicius to be locked. Undeterred, "*...fracta est subito una ex vitreis maxlmis; quae erant in*

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, book II, 15.

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

fronte basilicae..."²⁰⁰ thereby adding breaking and entering to their records.

Eligius arrives at the church just ahead of a troop of soldiers searching for the escapees. What follows is a fine example of the bishop acting as authority with the aid of a saint. Eligius informs the soldiers that "...*non ego, ut vos putatis, sed sanctus Sulpicius ad se fugientes defendit reos.*"²⁰¹ Eventually God intervenes and the soldiers, suitably humbled, depart.

Apparently Eligius considered it to be morally wrong for convicted murderers to be held in prison, even in areas outside of his diocese. Such an attitude is not indicative of a person accustomed to exercise secular jurisdiction. Clearly the bishop was adhering to Christian moral precepts. However, there is another explanation for the affair of Eligius and the prisoners.

We have already noted that bishops could and did come into conflict with other officials. Eligius' excursion occurred sometime during the early or mid-40s. (He was appointed bishop only in 641.) It is also known that Sulpicius II, bishop of Bourges had died in about 644 and that the next bishop was not ordained until four years later.²⁰² Thus it would seem that Eligius was visiting Bourges at a time when that episcopal see was vacant. Eligius' hagiographer makes it clear that the bishop's

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² See *Gallia Christiana*, vol. II, pp. 17-18.

interest in the prisoners was greatly intensified when the soldiers refused his admittance. These soldiers were presumably in the hire of the local count. When examined in this light the entire episode begins to take on the characteristics of a conflict between a lay and ecclesiastical official. In the absence of a bishop the local count's authority would have been enhanced considerably. Indeed Eligius himself was only able to challenge this authority with the aid of Saint Sulpicius and God Himself.

This still leaves some problems unsolved. Why was Eligius straying so far from his see and deliberately confronting the existing local authority? Part of the answer may be that as a visiting bishop he felt obliged to perform certain episcopal functions while the see was vacant. It is also likely that the political situation in Neustria at that time was not stable. We have already observed that Dagobert's heir was only a child. The four-year delay in appointing a new bishop at Bourges may be an indication that the new regency was in some difficulty. Eligius was, perhaps, attempting to restore order in this see at a time when the central authority had broken down.

D. Local Challenges to Episcopal Authority

Seventh-century kings could appoint a candidate to head a diocese but they could not guarantee his local dominance. For example, Gregory of Tours and Leudast, the count of

Tours were involved in many conflicts. Gregory, being the writer, had the last say: "It would be tedious to relate one by one all Leudast's perjuries and other misdeeds. Let me instead move on at once to his attempt to have me expelled from my bishopric by means of unjust and wicked calumnies and to how he was punished by the vengeance of God...."²⁰³ Leudast's attempt to remove Gregory from his diocese was nevertheless a very near thing.

In the seventh century, Rusticus, Desiderius' brother and predecessor at Cahors was assassinated by locals: "*eo amplius anno pontificatus sui administrato, a perfidis et scelestis incolis interemptus est; ob quod conturbatio magna facta est in ecclesia*".²⁰⁴ This was not a regional disturbance; "*nec solum in urbe Cadurca, sed etiam in regis aula*".²⁰⁵ It would appear to be a failed rising against the king. This uprising occurred in 629, the same year as Chlotar's death. It is possible that it may have been a reaction to this death; a rebellion against the heir, possibly a bid for independence. The region of Aquitania was not noted for its loyalty to their Frankish rulers. However, because the exact sequence of events is not known, one can also speculate that the revolt was related to the practice of installing prominent local aristocrats in episcopal offices, although as we have seen, this practice was not new. What is particularly remarkable is that Rusticus, who

²⁰³ Gregory, p. 316.

²⁰⁴ *Vita Desiderii*, pp. 879.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

certainly had the support of his king and was from a comital family from Cahors, was unable to preserve his life. Evidently it could be hazardous being a bishop at this time.

Eligius too had a difficult time establishing his authority in parts of his diocese. At one point his life was threatened by local nobles:

...Quam eius praedicationem praestantiones
quique loci illius valde aegre ferebant,
scilicet quod ferias eorum everteret ac
legitimus, ut putabant, consuetudines
exinaniret. Tunc pravi quique inientes
consilium et praecipue ex familia
Herchenbaldi qui erat eo tempore praepositus
palati, emulabatur Eligium, sed non ad
bonum - decreverunt simul, ut si ulterius
huiusmodi nugis eorum contraheret Eligius,
ilico inruentes interficerent eum.²⁰

This local conflict also had overtones of a court quarrel. The young nobles who confronted Eligius had the support of the mayor of the palace. This may well be an instance where ecclesiastical and secular officials were in conflict over a matter of jurisdiction.

This episode and others which more clearly identify conflicts of jurisdiction also indicate that, while bishops were most important locally and had to concern themselves most with establishing their authority at that level, they could not afford to remove themselves from the politics of a higher level. Those that did faced the peril of encountering powerful enemies at court without the benefit of powerful

²⁰ Vita Eligii, book VI, 20.

patrons of their own or even at the local level, of entering into conflicts with men whose connections at court were stronger than the bishop's. Thus bishops were well advised to remain as active as possible in the in the service of the king.

V. OTHER ROLES OF THE BISHOP

We have now discussed the most prominent roles of the bishop; however, certain others should at least be mentioned.

A. The Bishop as Churchman

Little has been said so far regarding what might be thought to be the bishop's most obvious role, that of spiritual leader. It is true that in the seventh century, the secular and sacred were not well differentiated. Probably the bishops of the day saw little difference between their political and their pastoral roles. Nevertheless the latter does call for separate, if brief, consideration here.

Bishopal Appointments not made for Churchmanship

By the sixth century bishops were rarely chosen from among the clergy. Gregory records that during the reign of Chilperic "churchmen were rarely elected to bishoprics."²⁰⁷ This development may have been influenced by a popular movement which wanted to see a holy man, such as Saint Martin of Tours, occupy the office since such a man would certainly be able to communicate directly with God; yet such people rarely took orders.²⁰⁸ Unfortunately by the seventh

²⁰⁷ Gregory, p. 380.

²⁰⁸ James, p. 50.

century, living holy men were not common in Gaul.²⁰ It is more likely that the lack of appointees from among clerics or holy men can be explained by the fact that local aristocrats were better suited to the office. Their influence, wealth, and family connections were important to the pursuit of their secular roles. Also, it is likely that these men were better able to attend to spiritual affairs. As the educated elite of this society, such men were extremely well-versed in Christian literature.²¹ This education and the ability to speak well were important. Gregory of Tours noted of one 'holy man': "He spoke the language of the common people, his accent was poor and the words he used vulgar."²² It would seem that bishops of the late sixth and seventh centuries required and were expected to have all the skills and eloquence of old Roman nobles.

The Structure of Ecclesiastical Government

In general, the bishoprics of the Merovingian era were centred upon the old *civitates* of the Roman period. Indeed it is often argued that the presence of a bishopric may have been crucial to the survival of a *civitas*.²³ Boundaries were usually traced from those of the Roman episcopal dioceses. However, at times during the Merovingian period, new bishoprics and dioceses were created or borders were

²⁰ See chapter II, above.

²¹ Note that Eligius and Ouen were educated in a Christian way. See *Vita Eligii* I, 1 and *Vita Audoeni* I, 3-5.

²² Gregory, p. 485.

²³ James, p. 49.

changed as the kingdom continued to evolve.²¹³

Above the bishop was the metropolitan. In general metropolitan sees were located in the major towns of the old Roman provinces. By the seventh century twelve such sees existed; Vienne, Arles, Trier, Rheims, Lyons, Rouen, Tours, Sens, Bourges, Bordeaux, Eauze, and Narbonne.²¹⁴ Metropolitans convoked and presided over provincial councils. They also had the right to judge over bishops. Throughout our period metropolitans are referred to simply as bishops; the title archbishop appears at the end of the Merovingian era.

The metropolitans and their councils were subordinate to the Frankish church as a whole. Its authority was exercised through general, national councils which were always convoked by the king. The monarch exercised great influence in the deliberations of these bodies.²¹⁵

The bishop of Rome was recognized by the Frankish church as the successor to Saint Peter. Indeed Gregory referred to him as the "head of the church"²¹⁶, but he wielded little effective power in Merovingian Gaul. The pope played no part in the appointing of bishops although in one incident, recorded by Gregory, the pope interceded on the behalf of two bishops who were deposed by the king.²¹⁷ Frankish bishops had little cause to enter into any

²¹³ Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age*, pp. 476ff.

²¹⁴ Pfister, "Institutions", p. 145.

²¹⁵ See for example, Gregory, p. 276.

²¹⁶ Gregory, p. 276.

²¹⁷ Gregory, p. 285.

relationship with the pope while governing their sees. Without exaggeration the Merovingian church of the sixth and seventh centuries may be described as being a national body.

The Bishop as Pastor

Bishops were extremely busy officials. They exercised a dual role as the keeper of the Lord's Flock and as an official of the king. Despite their involvement in politics, their strictly pastoral duties must have occupied them a great deal. One must not suggest that these were marginal or were taken lightly. Eligius, for example, travelled extensively within his diocese converting pagans, destroying their cult centres and preaching the Word of God.

B. The Bishop as Clansman

Another obligation of every bishop was to promote the interests of his family. In a society in which family connections were so important, this must never have been far from a bishop's thoughts.

Family Considerations in Episcopal Appointments

During the fifth and sixth centuries an increasing number of aristocrats were attracted to the episcopate. Some families, especially during the sixth century, produced dynasties of bishops. Indeed the poet Fortunatus wrote of Bishop Cronopius of Perigueux: "From both his father and

Vita Eligii, See Book II, 2-3.

mother he inherited membership among bishops, and his episcopal see was part of the family legacy.²¹⁹ An uncle of Gregory of Tours was the bishop of Clermont, another was bishop of Langres, while a family member also occupied the episcopal office of Lyons. Eufronius, Gregory's predecessor at Tours was his mother's cousin. Gregory reports that Eufronius "came from one of the senatorial families which I have mentioned a number of times."²²⁰

By the seventh century, very few men from outside of the aristocracy were appointed to head dioceses. Desiderius, Eligius, Ouen, Arnulf, Sulpicius and Paul of Verdun all belonged to noble families. Bishop Desiderius succeeded his brother Rusticus to the see at his birthplace of Cahors.²²¹ Indeed a letter to Desiderius from his mother describing the woes which have befallen the family allows one to speculate whether this appointment was also made so that that family could maintain its position in Cahors:

*Semper desiderabili et dulcissimo filio
Desiderio Herchenfreda misera mater. Jam
credo tibi nunciatum esse qualiter
dulcissimus germanus tuus domnus Rusticus
episcopus a perfidis Ecclesiae incolis
interfectus sit. Propterea, dulcissime fili,
dum et pater tuus jam discessit, et Siagrius
frater tuus hinc migravit, tu viriliter
istam causam prosequere, fatias ut grande
exemplum futuris pro hoc fiat. Ego infelix
mater quid agam, cum fratres tui jam non
sunt. Si tu discesseris, ego orbata absque*

²¹⁹ Fortunatus quoted from Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1985. p. 21).

²²⁰ Gregory, p. 600.

²²¹ *Vita Desiderii*, vii, p. 12.

*liberis ero...*²²²

The family of Arnulf of Metz also retained a tight grasp on that diocese. In fact, this writer was unable to discover one seventh century bishop who was not a member of a prominent family.

It has been argued that this trend developed because while the old aristocracy had adapted to the fall of the empire and many served the new barbarian rulers as advisers, ambassadors and teachers, others recognized the advantages a bishopric offered in establishing a prominent position for themselves in the new kingdoms.²²³ Indeed by obtaining an episcopal office an aristocrat could lead a life very similar to that of his noble ancestors. For: "Once a man became bishop, he could continue to finance the construction of buildings and monuments, either with his wealth or from donations made to his church; the difference, of course, was that now these public monuments were usually churches and shrines rather than theatres or hall."²²⁴ As a member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy an aristocrat was also able to intervene more easily with the barbarian rulers. Bishops could even found family fortunes. Celibacy was not a bar to a dynastic policy. Arnulf was succeeded by his son at the see of Metz.

²²² *Vita Desiderii*, p. 12.

²²³ See Van Dam, pp. 152-4 and Friedrich Prinz, pp. 8-10.

²²⁴ Van Dam, p. 154.

One reason for predominance of aristocratic bishops was no doubt the calculated ambition of their families. But one must also be aware that these appointments suited the king; indeed, they were made at his discretion. The education of these men must also have made them suitable choices. It will be clear that there was no single criterion.

C. The Reconciliation of loyalties

Thus it is evident that the bishop's roles in his family, church, and with his king made the possibility of a conflict of loyalties very real. Traditionally bishops had been forced to balance their loyalties. They walked a fine line, being neither wholly secular nor ecclesiastical officials. However, we must be aware that this would not have been as apparent to these seventh century bishops themselves. The distinction between church and state was not nearly so great then as it is in modern society. It was not difficult to promote the interests of the Church when the Merovingian kings themselves were involved in the same process. Also, family interests could usually be pursued with no cost to church and polity. Strong families were of benefit to both church and state. Thus seventh century bishops could pursue the interests of several distinct parties with few problems.

PART TWO:**HAGIOGRAPHY**

VI. HAGIOGRAPHY AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

The great Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye described hagiography as a type of literature defined not merely by its subject matter, the lives of saints, but also by its purpose, an intention to edify: "The term ... must be confined to writings inspired by religious devotion to the saints and intended to increase that devotion."²²⁵

A. The Evolution of Hagiographic Genres

Delehaye distinguished several sub-types within the genre. Of these, the earliest focussed upon the martyrs and their passions.²²⁶

Acts of Martyrs

The early hagiographer's primary task was to illustrate the martyr's *pietas et virtus* as manifested in his passion. The readers of these lives were to be inspired by the qualities of the saint. During the evolution of the genre in the Middle Ages, many of these examples became conventional or purely fictitious.²²⁷ Delehaye argued that the acts of martyrs spawned at least six different types of hagiographic

²²⁵ H. Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, translated by Donald Atwater (New York, 1962), p. 3.

²²⁶ See also Charles Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England* (Cornell, 1947), p. 52.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, and also see D. Weinstein and R. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom* (Chicago, 1982), p. 8.

literature: (1) genuine acts of martyrdom; (2) the same but including the accounts of witnesses; (3) the legends which develop from the first two categories; (4) legends which have no historical or written base; (5) legends which are almost completely invented; and (6) forgeries.¹¹¹

Lives of Holy Men

Of course not all saints were martyrs. Therefore Delehaye recognized a second subspecies of the genre. This included works, more biographical in character, whose subjects were other Christian holy men.¹¹² This form of hagiography was descended from the biographical tradition of the classical period. Patricia Cox posits that while one could consider "the biography of holy men as a literary phenomenon in its own right", it should be "treated as a stage in the history of Graeco-Roman biography, sharing certain features of that genre...."¹¹³ In particular both classical biography and hagiography were written in order to edify, by example or counter-example, and both used a considerable number of anecdotes to depict character.¹¹⁴ On the other hand hagiography also contained some new features. The most obvious of these was the selection of subjects.

¹¹¹ Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, translated by Donald Attwater (New York, 1962), p. 28.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹¹³ Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1983), p. 54.

¹¹⁴ See Suetonius, in particular his chapter dealing with Augustus for an example of idealization and his chapter on Caligula for vilification. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, (Harmondsworth, 1981), pp. 54-112 and 153-185.

Christian heroes replaced classical subjects such as the Caesars.

These lives of Christian holy men evolved to fulfil particular needs in the society of late antiquity. Thus, for example, Eusebius' *Life of Origen*, which was written early in the fourth century, was a polemical work aimed at Origen's Christian detractors who questioned his theology and at pagans who attacked his philosophical integrity. It was also apologetical in that it attempted to establish Origen as a unifying figure in the persecuted Christian communities."²³²

Biographies such as this provided highly idealized portraits of their subjects because of the purposes for which they were written. As Patricia Cox observes, the content of "holy man biographies is suggestive of the biographers' propagandistic intentions."²³³

Lives of Ascetics

When in the fourth century exceptionally conscientious Christians felt the need to retire from society and lead lives of asceticism in the desert, it was natural that a third subspecies of hagiography should arise to record their careers. Characteristics from Christian polemical biographies merged with certain traits of the acts of the martyrs in this new type of hagiography, of which Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*, written in about 357, is the first

²³² Cox, *Biography*, p. 49.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

example. Now ascetic monks had joined martyrs and holy men such as Origen as Christian heroes whose lives were worthy of being recorded and imitated.²³⁴ Saint Jerome promoted this development by composing lives of three other monks. The purpose of these works was to identify and promote the ascetic ideal as a model of Christian piety. This was accomplished; these works became extremely popular.

Lives of Bishops

The *Vita Martini* of Sulpicius Severus, written about 394-6, inaugurated a fourth phase in the evolution of hagiographic literature. Martin was, of course, a monk whose ascetic life was indeed remarkable. But more than that, he was also a member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy; he was a bishop whose career could furnish a model for other bishops.²³⁵ Shortly afterwards, by the end of the fourth century, Augustine was urging Paulinus of Milan to set down the life of Bishop Ambrose of Milan in a *Vita*.²³⁶ A few decades later Augustine himself became the subject of such a work. Bishops had become appropriate subjects of hagiographers. Just as the martyrologies and the biographies of non-saints were, these lives were written to serve a purpose. They were written to edify and to increase the readers' devotion. But more than that, they were also intended to provide models of churchmanship in an age when

²³⁴ See Clare Stancliffe, *Saint Martin and His Hagiographer* (Oxford, 1983), p. 6.

²³⁵ Stancliffe, *Saint Martin*, pp. 265ff.

²³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 99.

bishops 'increasing' set the tone in a newly Christianized society. The single most striking feature of seventh-century *Vitae* is the number of them, which make bishops their subjects. It would appear that 'successful' bishops could look forward to the rewards of sainthood. In part this may be attributed to the fact that bishops were likely the most frequent authors of *Vitae*.

This fourth subspecies of hagiography quickly crystallized into a standard form. Regis Boyer has shown that by the fifth century a good *Vita* was composed according to a typical scheme which generally consisted of nine steps. These were: (1) the origins of the saint; (2) his birth; (3) childhood where the saint reveals certain qualities or virtues; (4) education; (5) an account of the saint's piety; (6) martyrdom or death; (7) *inventio*; (8) *translatio*; and (9) miracles.²³⁷ One or more of these steps may be left out but the general structure remained the same. This form remained virtually unaltered through the seventh century when the *Vitae* of Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen were composed.

B. Hagiography as Historical Source Material

Hagiography presents special problems to the historian. The authors of these works wrote to edify, not to record history. Gregory of Tours wrote: "It is necessary for me to

²³⁷ See Regis Boyer, "An attempt to define the typology of Medieval Hagiography" in *Hagiography and Medieval Literature: A Symposium* (Odense, 1980), pp. 32-33.

investigate, write up and speak about these things which build up the church of God."²³⁸

• The Composition of Hagiography

Each *Vita* focussed upon a particular theme determined by the hagiographer. The author was highly selective in choosing material that would best illustrate his theme. Desiderius' hagiographer stressed his subject's piety: "*Pauperibus vero et fratribus refrigeria sumptuum ita praevidebat ut ulli nihil deesset. Si pusillanimum videssit, consolabatur....*"²³⁹

Another characteristic of these lives which must be recognized is the use of omission by the hagiographers. Material which did not enhance the idealized image of their subject which they wished to present, was left out. Any failure or other episode that could portray the saint in a negative light, was excluded. Even accounts of normal every-day living are rare. These men were born and died but few other details from their lives were included. Hagiographers concentrated on recording distinctive features or events, not those which were shared by other 'normal' men.

As Delehaye recognized, even early on in the development of martyrologies, fiction was recorded as often as fact. Considering the nature and purpose of these *Vitae*,

²³⁸ Gregory quoted from Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1985), p. 189.

²³⁹ *Vita Desiderii*, p. 16.

a certain number of miraculous episodes would be virtually required. They provide evidence to the people of the saints' close relationship with Christ. Miracles also were crucial in the battle to strengthen the church. Miracles, as manifestations of divine favor served as warnings to unbelievers and believers alike. Thus Saint Martin halted a pagan procession in a most remarkable fashion:

He raised the sign of the cross upon those in front of him, and commanded the crowd not to move from the place, and to set down their burden. Then indeed in an astonishing way, you might see the wretched men at first frozen like rocks...But when the blessed man learnt that the gathering was for a funeral, not for pagan rites, he raised his hand again and gave them the power of moving off and taking the body. Thus when he wanted he compelled them to stand, and, when it pleased him, he allowed them to go.²⁴⁰

It is obvious that many of the miraculous elements in saints' *Vitae* are *topoi*. Often these are drawn from Biblical episodes; thus Eligius is shown exorcising demons, and even making a single cup of wine suffice for a large number of people.²⁴¹ Most *Vitae* contain examples of the saint healing the sick or driving out demons. Sulpicius' *Life of Saint Martin* relates numerous instances of that saint's healing powers.²⁴² As the genre of hagiography developed it became

²⁴⁰ *Vita Martini* book XII, iii-v quoted from Stancliffe, *Saint Martin*, p. 232.

²⁴¹ Bruno Krusch ed., *Vita Eligii* in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*, tome iv (Berlin, 1892), Book II, xi-xii.

²⁴² See Stancliffe, *Saint Martin*, p. 231.

perfectly acceptable not only to borrow episodes from the Bible, but if other material was lacking, even to borrow whole chapters from the lives of other saints: "Lives of saints filled with extracts from lives of other saints are very numerous, and some are no more than patchworks of such borrowing."²⁴³

The Factual Content of Hagiography

The historicity of hagiography is, as it were, accidental, a by-product of the author's method. Thus while *Vitae* do record information that is useful to social, religious, or political historians, extrapolation is necessary.

Often miraculous episodes were probably grounded in fact. When one removes the demon from an episode in Eligius's *Vita*, one is left with a very unhappy or sick woman whom Eligius was able to console while visiting her church.²⁴⁴ On another occasion when Eligius comes into conflict with a group of soldiers who are intent upon apprehending criminals who have sought sanctuary in a church, the Lord intervenes.²⁴⁵ The conflict and the characters involved were probably real; however the means by which the dispute was resolved is open to question.

In general, the more removed in time that a hagiographer was from his subject, the more difficult it is

²⁴³ Delehaye, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²⁴⁴ *Vita Eligii*, Book II, xv.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*,

to sift through the legendary material to discover facts. Thus, where possible, the chronological relationship between the hagiographer and his subject must be determined by any historian who would work with *Vitae*. Sometimes it is possible to control the data presented in a *Vita* by reference to other surviving documents. For example, several letters to and from Desiderius have also been preserved and may be used to corroborate evidence from his *Vita*.²⁴⁶

The Ideal Content of Hagiography

Even when the legendary nature of hagiography is recognized and, to a certain extent, addressed by establishing a chronological framework, the historian is still faced with a work that was deliberately crafted by its hagiographer to portray a highly idealized subject. These idealized images provide illustrations of those characteristics which were regarded as outstanding in that society. Therefore, hagiographical works record evidence which may be used to construct a picture of aspects of contemporary society and, also, provide evidence which can give us an insight into the distinctive features of Christian heroes as perceived by their hagiographers.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ See *Desiderii episcopi Cadurcensis epistolae*, W. Arndt ed., in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae*, vol. iii (Berlin, 1892), pp. 191-214.

²⁴⁷ It is apparent that many of the characteristics of hagiography are similar to those of Suetonius' work on the Caesars. Suetonius was selective and he too intended his work to be edifying. It is likely that Suetonius' *Caesars* directly influenced the hagiographers of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. See Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The scholar and his Caesars* (London, 1983), esp. chapters I-III.

C. Examples of Hagiography: the *Vitae* of Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen

The *Vitae* of Eligius, Desiderius, and Ouen are among the more notable examples of the seventh-century hagiographical genre. For this reason and because these men were all politically important, I have concentrated upon them in this study. The *Vita* of Arnulf of Metz, a man whose presence looms over much of the seventh century, has also been consulted. These were certainly some of the most influential bishops of that time and may be numbered among the most powerful officials, lay or ecclesiastical, in the regimes of Chlotar, Dagobert, and their successors.

VII. THREE SUBJECTS OF HAGIOGRAPHY: DESIDERIUS, ELIGIUS, AND OUEN.

The lives led by Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen shared some interesting characteristics. As will be seen later, these common aspects help to illustrate both the requirements needed to become a bishop during the seventh century and also the influence and power which a bishop could wield.

A. The Life of Desiderius, c. 580-655

Desiderius was born at the town of Obrege, modern Albi, which was situated near the border between Aquitaine and Narbonnaise.²⁴⁴ The exact year of his birth is not known, but most scholars accept 580 or 581 as the probable date.²⁴⁵ His father, Salvius, is described as "*Christianissimus*" while his mother, Haerchenfreda, was "*honestā et religiosa*."²⁴⁶ Desiderius had two brothers, Rusticus and Siagrius, and two sisters, Silva and Avita.²⁴⁷

All three boys pursued successful careers at the court of Chlotar II. Rusticus "*a primis pueritatis annis. clericus factus, archidiaconatus est adeptus officium in urbe Rutena et abbatiæ regalis basilicæ sub Chlotario rege*

²⁴⁴ *Vita Desiderii*, p. 1.

²⁴⁵ See Poupardin, *op. cit.*, p. x and also Fortier, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

²⁴⁶ *Vita Desiderii*, p. 1.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

administravit."²⁵² Later he was promoted to head the diocese of Cahors.²⁵³ Siagrius governed Massilia and was also made count of Alba: "*Siagrius autem Massiliae gubernacula et Albiensium comitatum annis plurimus a[d]ministravit.*"²⁵⁴

Desiderius, who was the youngest, received a good education before going to court: "*Desiderius vero summa parentum cura enutritus, litterarum studiis ad plenum eruditus est.*"²⁵⁵ Upon his arrival at court, he soon attracted the notice of Chlotar and was put in charge of the treasury: "*Desiderius vero, junior tempore sed non inferior dignitate, sub indoles adhuc annos tesararius regis effectus valde strenue se accinxit.*"²⁵⁶

At this time Desiderius made the acquaintance of many other young nobles who had also been attracted to the court. Among these were Ouen and Eligius as well as Arnulf, who would become the bishop of Metz, and Paul, later the bishop of Verdun. Desiderius' hagiographer stresses that these were good and trusted friends: "*Habebat enim amicos bonae fidei viros, Paulum scilicet, Arnulfum, Eligium et Audoenum....*"²⁵⁷ This was an impressive collection of amici.

Chlotar's death in 629 did not impede Desiderius' career. The new king, Dagobert, "*diligebat eum [Desiderius] ... quia noverat eum strenuum virum et sibi fidelem et in*

²⁵² *ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁵³ *ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 5.

Del timore jam esse solidatum."²⁵⁵ Desiderius also seems to have been a particular favorite of the queen; "*regina autem Nanthildis unice ipsum diligebat*".²⁵⁶

Desiderius' influence at court seems to have been considerable at this time. He was even the subject of praise from fellow nobles; "*multi nobilium sibi eum gratificari gaudebant*".²⁵⁷ Thus in 630, when Rusticus was murdered during a great upheaval in the church,²⁵⁸ Dagobert appointed Desiderius to replace him as the bishop of Cahors. As we noted previously, a letter from Dagobert to the bishops and dukes of Gaul announcing this appointment has been preserved in the *Vita*.²⁵⁹ This document makes it patently clear that Desiderius' promotion was made solely at the discretion of the king; "...*jubemus ut, adjuvante Domino, adclamante laudem ipsius clero vel populo, vir illustris et verus Dei cultor Desiderius pontifex in urbe Cadurca debeat consecrari*...."²⁶⁰ This was an appointment of a chosen trusted official. However, it is true, of course that he was also the brother of the previous bishop and a member of a comital family. It is possible that the king's appointment was, in part, inspired by the dire straits of a loyal and trusted family. Thus from 630 until his death in 655,²⁶¹ Desiderius exercised his authority in the diocese of Cahors.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁶¹ See Poupardin, p. xiv.

B. The Life of Eligius, c. 590-681

Eligius was born in or near the year 590 at the town of Catalocense, modern day Chaptelat.²⁶⁵ His parents, Eucherius and Terrigia, were prominent Christians who instructed their son in the Catholic faith.²⁶⁶

Like Desiderius, Eligius travelled to the Neustrian court of Chlotar II while still a youth.²⁶⁷ His hagiographer records that only a few days after his arrival he entered the patronage of Bobo, the royal treasurer; "*sub eius tuitione degebat.*"²⁶⁸ It seems reasonable to suggest that this arrangement had been planned in advance by his family, an indication that they were well connected at court.

Eligius' metalworking skills, which his hagiographer shows him displaying accidentally at an early age, and his personal integrity soon brought him to the attention of Chlotar.²⁶⁹ However it was during the reign of Dagobert that his influence rose to remarkable heights. He knew Dagobert well: "*Dagobertus filius eius monarchiam regni solus obtinuit; a quo Eligius tanta familiaritate habitus est, ut plurimum eius felicitas igentem gigneret.*"²⁷⁰ Also, as we have noted, he befriended many young nobles at court. Indeed he and Ouen shared accommodations for a time.²⁷¹

²⁶⁵ See *Vita Eligii*, I, 3.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 4.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 3-6.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 9.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, I, 12.

Shortly after Dagobert became king, Eligius was acting as an unofficial magistrate. Indeed it appears that anyone who wished to speak with the king was required or, at any rate, was well advised, to meet first with Eligius:

*Flagrabat eius ubique fama in tantum, ut si qui ex Romana vel Italica aut Gothica vel quaecumque provincia legationis foedere aut alia quacumque ex causa palatium regis Francorum adire pararet, non prius regi occurrerent quam Eligium adgrederentur vel iubamen alimoniae ab eo poposcentes, vel certe consilium salubre quaerentes.*¹¹¹

In 636 or 637 Dagobert sent Eligius to Britain in order to obtain a treaty.¹¹² His friendship and influence with Dagobert increased upon his return: "*Porro rex Dagobertus torrens, pulcher et inclitus; ita ut nullus ei similis fuerit in cunctis retro Francorum regibus, in tantum diligebat eum, ut frequenter catervas principum, optimatum quoque et ducum atque episcoporum se subtrans, Eligii secreta peteret consilia.*"¹¹³

Not only was he the king's trusted adviser, but Dagobert seems to have made Eligius an unofficial almsgiver:

Nam quicquid eidem Eligius postulasset, absque ulla dilatione inpetrabat; quicquid vero adipisci potuisset, in elemosinis egentium, in praetia captivorum, in remedia debillium expendebat, unde et ipse princeps libentissime praestabat, quod sciebat non

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, 10.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, I, 13.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, I, 14.

uni, sed pluribus prodesse."²⁷⁵

It is also a fair measure of Eligius' influence to note that a full chapter of the *Gesta Dagoberti* deals solely with the work of Eligius, though largely as a metalworker."²⁷⁶

Soon after the death of Dagobert, Eligius was made bishop of the metropolitan see of Noyon. Like Desiderius' appointment this was made solely by the will of the king."²⁷⁷ Eligius remained a prominent figure until his death in 681.

C. The Life of Ouen, c. 595-684

Many fewer details are known concerning the life of Ouen; his *Vita* is considerably shorter than the previous two. He was born at the town of Suessonia "*Temporibus Lotharii gloriosi principis*."²⁷⁸ His family, like those of Desiderius and Eligius, was of noble blood. He was one of three sons, Ado and Rado being the others, born to Audecharius and Aiga."²⁷⁹ All three boys received a fine education, being taught "*ab illustribus viris*."²⁸⁰

The eldest brother, Ado, entered a monastery while Rado served in the palace administration of Chlotar. Ouen, too,

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 14.

²⁷⁶ *Gesta Dagoberti I. Regis Francorum*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* vol. II, Bruno Krusch, ed. (Hanover, 1888), pp. 396-425.

²⁷⁷ See Paul Fouracre, "The Work of Audoenus of Rouen and Eligius", p. 80, note 5.

²⁷⁸ *Vita Audoeoni*, I-3.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, I-3.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

pursued his career at court. As has already been noted, he formed important friendships at court. He also made a strong impression on Dagobert and was soon serving as a palace official.²¹¹

Ouen was made metropolitan of Rouen at the same time as his friend Eligius occupied the see of Noyon. Little else of importance is known of him.

D. The Three Careers Compared

Thus it will be apparent that these three examples of successful, and ultimately sanctified, bishops had much in common. All three men were descended from noble families. All went or were sent to court to pursue their careers; it is likely that their families used their connections to place them under the patronage of prominent palace officials. In this way they developed important relationships with other young nobles and made themselves known to the king. The kings employed these well educated men in their palace administration until they were considered to be seasoned enough or it became necessary to install them in episcopal offices. All three men were trusted confidants of the king. Their appointments were owed solely to the patronage of the king. This would suggest a new relationship which was not found in the previous century. Their support was unquestioned and their advice was

²¹¹ See Eleanor Duckett, *The Wandering Saints of the Early Middle Ages* (New York, 1959), p. 144. Duckett believes that Ouen was Dagobert's secretary and keeper of the royal seal.

often solicited.

Ouen, Eligius, and Desiderius are only a few of the men who could be cited as evidence. Arnulf, Paul of Verdun and Sulpicius of Bourges are other prominent bishops whose careers followed a similar pattern.

E. The *Vitae* of Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen

The *Vitae* of Eligius and Ouen are near contemporary accounts. Ouen was a popular subject; the *Acta Sanctorum* contains several Lives written in different periods. The earliest life, composed by an anonymous author, is extremely short - about four pages in length. It was probably written shortly after Ouen's death²⁸² and was subsequently revised during the Carolingian period.²⁸³ Ouen himself stated that he composed a *Vita* of Eligius²⁸⁴ and it is thought that this work was the foundation used by the author of the surviving version which has been dated to the first quarter of the eighth century.²⁸⁵

The *Vita Desiderii* was written somewhat later. Rene Poupardin comments that "La latinité de la *Vita* est, en effect, bien supérieure à celle d'autres oeuvres du VIIe

²⁸² See *Vita Audoeni* in *Acta Sanctorum*, J. Pinio and G. Cupero eds., *Augusti Tomus Quartus* (Paris and Rome, 1867), pp. 794-805.

²⁸³ See Paul Fouracre, "The Work of Audoenus of Rouen and Eligius of Noyon in extending episcopal influence from the town to the country in seventh century Neustria" in *The Church in Town and Countryside*, Studies in Church History Vol. 16, Derek Baker ed. (Oxford, 1979), p. 78.

²⁸⁴ See *Acta Sanctorum* 38, *Augusti Tomus Quartus* (Paris and Rome, 1867), p. 799.

²⁸⁵ See Fouracre, *op. cit.*, p. 78, note 5.

siècle, de la chronique de Frédégaire par exemple."²¹⁶ Poupardin's conclusion, based upon the latinity of the text which would suggest that the work was composed during the Carolingian renaissance, is that the *Vita* dates from "au plus tôt de la fin du VIII^e siècle ou du commencement du IX^e."²¹⁷ Another historian argues that the text could not have been composed before the end of the ninth century and that parts of the life were not added until the twelfth century.²¹⁸ We may now look at the attitudes and values embodied in these *Vitae*.

²¹⁶ Rene Poupardin, *op. cit.*, p. iii.

²¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. v.

²¹⁸ See Fortier, *La Vie de Saint Didier*, p. 7.

VIII. IDEALS REFLECTED IN EPISCOPAL HAGIOGRAPHY

We have already seen that some episodes contained in *Vitae* are factual, or at least based on fact, and that others could be invented or borrowed from the lives of other saints. However, all of the material, whether real or invented, is related. That is, it was all selected by the hagiographer in order that an exemplary Christian life could be recorded. Therefore, *Vitae* record those characteristics and virtues which hagiographers considered to be outstanding. They are records of their society's ideals.

A. Traditional Ideals in Episcopal Hagiography

As was noted earlier, these seventh century *Vitae* were structured in what had become a standard format: (1) the origins of the saint; (2) his birth, (3) childhood where the saint reveals certain qualities or virtues; (4) education (5) an account of the saint's piety; (6) martyrdom or death; (7) *inventio*; (8) *translatio*; and (9) miracles. Our *Vitae* conform remarkably well to this outline. We may look at some of the ways in which the three *Vitae* deal with these topics.

The Ideal of Descent

The authors of these seventh century Lives seem to have been particularly concerned to depict their subjects' noble and Christian blood. Thus, "*Beatus igitur Annulfus episcopus*

prosapie genitus Franconum altus satis et nobilis parentibus atque opulentissimus in rebus saeculi."²¹¹ Ouen's parents

were noble and also "*uterque Christiano apice decoratus*".²¹⁰

The parents of Eligius and Desiderius were also noble and Christian.²¹¹ Clearly this lineage was an important requirement for these saints.

The Ideal of Vocation

Eligius' hagiographer also shows that even as a child, he was predestined for greatness. His mother has a vision concerning her son which at first terrifies her, but a holy man interprets this dream for her saying: "*Noli mater timere, quoniam benedictum partum tibi Dominus dignatus est largiri. Erit enim vir sanctus ac de gente sua electus vocabiturque magnus in ecclesia sacerdos.*"²¹² Desiderius was distinguished by a remarkable intelligence at an early age.²¹³

The Ideal of Piety

Often, as in the case of Desiderius, the writer was intent upon displaying the piety of his subject. Desiderius is depicted helping the poor, visiting the sick and consoling the unhappy: "*Pauperibus vero et fratribus*

²¹¹ *Vita Sancti Arnulfi* in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*, Tome II, Bruno Krusch ed. (Hanover, 1888), pp. 426-446, Book I-i.

²¹⁰ *Vita Audoeni*, Book I, iii.

²¹¹ See *Vita Desiderii*, I and *Vita Eligii*, Book I, i.

²¹² *ibid.*, Book I, ii.

²¹³ *Vita Desiderii*, Book I, ii.

refrigeria sumptuum ita praevidebat ut ulli nihil deesset. Si pusillanimum videssit, consolabatur...."²²⁴

The Ideal of Celibacy

Saints were also expected to be celibate. During the sixth-century, Bertram, bishop of Bordeaux, was accused of consorting with Queen Fredegund.²²⁵ He was not canonized. Eligius, Ouen, and Desiderius - none of them were married before being appointed bishops. But one seventh-century saint, Arnulf of Metz, had children. However, it is likely that Arnulf's canonization was a result of his contributions to the Carolingian dynasty. These men were willing to overlook his un-saintly qualities. Arnulf is the only notable exception among seventh-century saints. Normally, celibacy was a pre-condition of sanctity.

The Ideal of Sanctity

These bishops also had to be portrayed in a close relationship with God. Therefore it is not surprising that each life contains numerous accounts of miracles.²²⁶ Eligius, for example, was effective in driving out evil spirits:

*Ígitur quodam tempore causa extitit, ut
regionem, quae propriae Provinciae*

²²⁴ René Poupardin, ed., *La Vie de Saint Didier, évêque de Cahors (630-655)* (Paris, 1900), p. 16.

²²⁵ Gregory, pp. 317ff.

²²⁶ See *Vita Eligii*, Book II-xi, *Vita Desiderii*, Miracles, pp. 45ff. in Poupardin, *Vita Audoeni*, Book II, and *Vita Sancti Arnulfi*, I-ix.

nuncupatur, adire debuisset. Cumque die quadam nobili quo comitatu iter agens partes eiusdem Provinciae peragraret, occurrit ei vir quidam immundo et nimis saevo repletus spiritu. Is cum vidisset sanctum virum, timore percussus et spumans ac pallens dixit ad eum: 'Quid hic tu, Eligius?' Ad quem conversus sanctus Eligius dixit: 'Et quid ad te, immundissime diabole? In nomine Iesu Christi obmutesce et exi ab illo.' Et continuo vehementer virum pessimus ille spiritus. Statim ergo pristinae sanitati restitutes, homo surrexit in colonis et sanus est ex illa hora.'''

Now, it is difficult to believe that many of these bishops were ideal candidates for canonization. Arnulf was a shrewd politician who was actively involved at the Austrasian court.''' He also had children. Eligius may well have been involved in the murder of a rival relic hunter.''' Yet each was duly sanctified. Desiderius, Ouen, Eligius and Arnulf are only the most obvious examples. A brief examination of the records of just a few dioceses brought to light an incredible number of 'saintly' bishops. Thus Eligius' predecessor and successor at Noyon, Acharius and Mummolinum, were both canonized. At Bourges no fewer than four of six seventh century bishops became saints; Sulpicius I, Apollinaris, Austregisilius, and Sulpicius II.'''

''' *Vita Eligii*, II, 11.

''' See Pfister, "Narrative", p. 126.

''' This is discussed in detail in the last chapter.

''' See *Gallia Christiana*, D. Sammarthani and P. Piolin eds., vol. I, p. 122, vol. II, pp. 17-18 and vol. IX, p. 982.

The Ideal of an Edifying Death

A good death is also central to most *Vitae*. The hagiographer often used the scene of his subject's death as a vehicle to illustrate his saintly qualities. Ouen's death had a profound effect on the kingdom:

Tandem denique commotae sunt omnes palatii fores. Igitur rex cum regina et episcoporum conventu, atque majorum domus, seu priores palatii una pariter conglobati sanctum Virum in feretro deportantes, sanctas exsequias cum moerore celebrabant. Gaudebat quisque et in maximo lucro deputabat, qui mereretur beati Viri corpus in suis humeris deportare. Qui cum maximo honore usque ad pontem Yserae cum digno funeris ornamento deportaretur, tam rex quam et regina, seu et universus populus celebrantes vigilias, noctem totam in Dei laudibus peregerunt. Inde regalis dignitas remeavit ad propria cum magna tristitia.³⁰¹

Desiderius' death had a similar effect on his people:

Cumque aestuaret febribus et venarum fontes calor hauriret, lasso anhelitu triste ministrorum frequentabatur officium. Pro dolore! flante austrolli candor et purpura violicae in pallorem jam sensim migrat universis circa flentibus, ipse valde defessus pio omnes hortatu consolabatur,³⁰² et cum esset fortis animo, in ipsa quoque morte viriliter se agebat....Subitus repente clamor exortus totum villae amplitudinem clangoribus replevit, omnesque plateas currente nuntio confusus rumor obsedit. Quid multa? compositum mox honestissime corpore feretroque inditum, iter arripiunt, profectusque est exercitus copiosus et multa populi turba in obsequio funeris.³⁰³

³⁰¹ *Vita Audoeni*, III, 18.

³⁰² *Vita Desiderii*, p. 43.

The passing of these men was an event which stirred the whole community.

The accounts of these deaths illustrate those characteristics which, in the seventh century, were considered to mark an ideal passing. It is interesting to note that martyrdom was no longer the ideal. Indeed, the murder of Rusticus, the brother of Desiderius and his predecessor at Cahors, shows that such a death may now have been considered to be nothing but a failure. Desiderius seems to have tried to secure his brother's canonization, but to no avail.

The hagiographers also show that even after death the influence of these men is great, possibly even greater than when they lived. Thus a woman goes to the tomb of Desiderius:

*Post aliqua temporis curricula mulier quaedam ex praedio ecclesiae Blandiacense, quod adjacet fluvio Dornoniae, caeca effecta, plurimum tempus laboriose valde ducebat. Haec quandoque Dei miseratione admonita in visionem sibi dicebat jussum ut ad sepulcrum beati Desiderii medendi gratia expeteret. Ducta itaque est ad urbem adque ad basilicam sancti viri a duobus filiis suis et aeterna Christi pietate largiente, lumine recepto ad propria remeavit. Sicque factum est, ut quae alieno ducatu cum labore venerat inpingendo, proprio jam arbitrio usu recepto gaudens rediret ad domum; siquidem cunctis qui aderant stupentibus praebat exultans, viam carpens et viae ducem ulterius non requiriens.*³⁰³

³⁰³ *Vita Desiderii*, pp. 46-47.

This posthumous activity was an essential manifestation of sanctity. Even the *Vita* of Arnulf contains several such episodes.³⁰⁴

B. Seventh-Century Ideals in Episcopal Hagiography

While much of their content reflects traditional values, these seventh century works do have some distinctive features.

The Ideal of Relationship to the Crown

It is interesting to note that each hagiographer describes his subjects' rise under the patronage of the king. Thus Desiderius begins his career as a treasurer before being promoted to the episcopate by an order of the king.³⁰⁵ Eligius was made a palace official by Dagobert and also owed his episcopal appointment to the king.³⁰⁶

However, attempts are made by the hagiographers to show that these relationships were not too one-sided. Thus while these bishops owe their appointments to the king, they are portrayed as being extremely valued and trusted members of the king's *comitatus*. Desiderius' hagiographer records that Dagobert was very reluctant to lose Desiderius as his treasury official.³⁰⁷ Eligius was virtually irreplaceable both as a craftsman and as an adviser to the king.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴ *Vita Sancti Arnulfi*, I, 22-29.

³⁰⁵ *Vita Desiderii*, Book I, vii.

³⁰⁶ *Vita Eligii*, book I, i-ix. See also Paul Fouracre, *op. cit.*, p. 80, note 5.

³⁰⁷ *Vita Desiderii*, book I, ix.

³⁰⁸ *Vita Eligii*, book I, x and I, xxxii.

That these men are not just average nobles is also illustrated by including episodes where these 'saintly' men confronted their secular rulers and defied their anger. When Dagobert grew angry with Arnulf because the latter wanted to leave the court for a time, a noble warned the king: "*Noli imple contra temet ipsum agere, o bone rex; annon vides virum sanctum et cupidum esse ad martirium aut quon non pertimescis Christi domini servum lacescere.*"¹⁰⁹ Eligius incurred Chlotar's wrath when he refused to swear an oath to him.¹¹⁰ However, Chlotar calmed down when he realized that Eligius was devoted to God; this impressed the king and the incident was closed. Thus while these hagiographers do not conceal the importance of the king's patronage to these bishops, they do try to colour the relationship somewhat.

It is also interesting to note that the *Vita Desiderii* alone does not include an episode where the bishop stands up to his king.¹¹¹ Indeed this *Vita* emphasizes the debt of Desiderius to his king. Thus while the fact that Ouen and Eligius owed their episcopal appointments to their king is noted in passing in the *Vita Audoeni*,¹¹² Desiderius' hagiographer includes the letters from Dagobert which announced the bishop's appointment.¹¹³ These letters leave no doubt that the appointment was made solely by the will of the king: "...jubemus ut, adjuvante Domino, adclamante

¹⁰⁹ *Vita Sancti Arnulfi*, book I, xxvii.

¹¹⁰ *Vita Eligii*, book I, vi.

¹¹¹ The Life of Ouen is too short to include in a fair comparison.

¹¹² See Paul Fouracre, *op. cit.*, p. 80, note 5.

¹¹³ *Vita Desiderii*, book I, vii-viii.

laudem ipsius clero vel populo, vir illustris et verus Dei cultor Desiderius pontifex in urbe Cadurci debeat consecrari..."¹¹⁴ These inclusions and the lack of episodes illustrating the saint's ability to stand up to his secular ruler may well reflect the fact that this *Vita* was composed later, during the Carolingian renaissance at a time when the rulers of that dynasty were defining and expanding their authority. The author of the *Vita Desiderii* was working under different conditions and restraints than what prevailed when the other *Vitae* were written. It is interesting to note that this is the only major apparent distinction in the structure of these works.

Other Factors

There were other factors involved in becoming a saint in the seventh-century. Becoming the subject of a *Vita* was obviously helpful but was not essential. Popular opinion was also important. High profile figures, such as bishops, benefited the most from this. Bishops who were sanctified seem to have avoided the more outrageous activities of some of their contemporaries. Most remained celibate and were not vicious or involved in plots and murders.

Connections were also important. Dagobert and his sons were considered to be good 'Christian' rulers. It is not surprising that many of their bishops benefited from this and were sanctified. Rival opinions could sabotage saintly

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* I, viii.

hopefulls. Ragdebod of Paris supported Fredegund in her bid for predominance. Her demise undermined him. He was never canonized. Bishops in Austrasia seem to have benefited when that region's officials came to dominate the kingdom. Often unlikely Austrasian candidates, such as Arnulf, were canonized, while many Neustrian bishops with similar or better qualifications were over-looked. These were all important factors in the canonization of bishops in the seventh-century.

C. The Harmonization of Traditional and New Ideals

Thus it is clear that these *Vitae* record a highly idealized picture of a seventh-century bishop. It is important to note that this image does not contradict the traditional ideal. No conflicting qualities have been introduced. The ideal of loyalty to the king, however, is newly prominent. This reflects the success of Chlotar's policy of bringing the church into the ambit of the royal administration. Contradictions do arise when one compares the ideal with the historical circumstances. Bishops were, as we have seen, extremely active in secular affairs. They were often faced by challenges to their authority. Therefore it is not surprising that living bishops were often unable to live up to the Christian ideal. Circumstances prevented this. What the hagiographers were able to do was to record and preserve the lives of bishops in such a way as to reflect and reinforce the distinctive ideals of their

century.

CONCLUSION

It is clear then that hagiographic material can indeed be useful to a historian. Extrapolation, interpretation, and comparison with information from other available sources can help to shed light upon social, religious and political aspects of eras which provide few other reliable sources. Of course, like all sources, these have certain limitations which must be recognized and, where possible, addressed.

Thus several patterns emerge from the *Vitae* of Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen which can be applied to other bishops of the seventh century. These men were all of noble birth and they pursued their careers at court where they were patronized by the king. Each one was employed first in a secular office until subsequently being appointed to a bishopric. These men were hand-picked, trusted confidants of their rulers who clearly wanted to employ them in the difficult task of establishing order and unity in the Merovingian regime.

Seventh century bishops were trained and promoted by the strong rulers Chlotar II and Dagobert. Their skills were utilized to the fullest. This was a relationship based on a co-operative spirit; something that had been lacking during the preceeding century. This co-operation was necessary in order for both parties to be successful.

The patronage of the king brought episcopal appointments but did not guarantee a newly appointed bishop's dominance at the local level. Therefore seventh-century rulers preferred to appoint men such as Ouen, Desiderius, and Eligius, who could employ the wealth of their families in establishing their authority at the capitals of their sees before attempting to extend their influence further afield. Wealth was not the only means which they employed to establish themselves. Visible links with saints and cult centres were established in order that their worthiness of being a patron was evident to all. Knowledge of *Romanitas* including the skill of rhetoric also reinforced this image. Indeed as one historian has noted "episcopal virtue was Roman virtue writ large."³¹⁵

While the influence and prestige of seventh century bishops was undeniable, it should not be exaggerated. Examples from the *Vitae* of Desiderius and Eligius illustrate the problems that they faced in establishing themselves in their sees and in exercising authority throughout their dioceses. Some bishops were unable to do so at all; the murder of Rusticus shows clearly that episcopal authority depended, at least in part, on a bishop's relationship with his people. Therefore an ability to create an image of his virtue, his worthiness to be a patron, was imperative for any bishop. Clearly bishops were in need of the support of

³¹⁵ Ian Wood, "The Ecclesiastical Politics of Merovingian Clermont" in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society; Studies presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1983), p. 34.

their king or, at least, could ill afford to alienate him. It is difficult to perceive such men as local empire builders. Empires were not easy to construct when so much of a bishop's energy was directed to merely preserving his own official rights. Often many years were required to establish themselves in their sees.

Conversely, it is apparent why such men as Desiderius, Eligius, and Ouen were cultivated and employed by Chlotar and Dagobert. They were men of strong character who had solid backgrounds and education. Dagobert and Chlotar exercised great foresight in employing such men in the episcopate. Through them the Merovingian house tightened its grasp upon its kingdom.

Working with the lives of saintly bishops also tells a great deal about their hagiographers. These authors preserve many of their biases and those of their society. Thus it is clear that the Christian ideal had not changed a great deal by the seventh century. Birth, piety, and culture were still manifestations of a special status with God. Those bishops who were able to protect and improve their communities were destined for greatness. However, seventh century *Vitae* clearly indicate that the bishop's place in society has changed somewhat. By this time saintly bishops are portrayed as close and loyal supporters of their secular ruler. Contemporary hagiographers considered such a relationship to be of the utmost importance. This is the most important distinguishing feature of these *Vitae*. Thus it is clear that

during the seventh century a new relationship of co-operation between the king and his bishops evolved and that this development was nurtured and promoted by both parties.

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