Early Germanic Queenship

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SUMMARY

During the period from the rise of the Merovingian dynasty in Frankia to the death of Charles the Fat and the effective end of the Carolingian Empire, each of the principal Germanic peoples, Franks, Anglo-Saxons, Lombards, Ostrogoths and perhaps also Visigoths, saw, on at least one occasion, the exercise of political power by a queen. It is hoped to show that not only did all these women have in common, to a greater or lesser degree, the means they used to achieve power and the ends they pursued while in possession of it, but also that their eminence was only a development of the possibilities which were available to even these women whose place in history is quite obscure.

The marks of queenly status in terms of title, ceremony and regalia were not fixed throughout the period, though a certain grandeur does seem to be held in common, as does the title 'regina'. Female coronation as such, however, was a Carolingian development, and the first Anglo-Saxon queen known to have been crowned was a Carolingian princess, participant in a diplomatic marriage. Marriages for diplomatic or other political reasons, whether overt or concealed, are another feature common to all the peoples, though a personal element in the choice of bride cannot always be ruled out. Once married, queens seem always to have played a very similar role in the management of the court and the economic side of the royal household, apparently even acting as, in some measure, the keeper of their husband's treasury. Many, if not definitely all queens, also interested themselves in the cultural and religious life of the court, a few even going so far as to achieve sanctity. It is possible to assume furthermore, that a great majority of queens enjoyed, for a time at least, some measure of influence over the conduct of their husbands.

In the cases of those queens who achieved real political power, generally as a kind of regent rather than in their own right, much of their power seems to come from the same roots, to be a more complete utilisation of the possibilities available to any royal wife, rather than something completely new. Ruling queens dispensed/

patronage, gathered and dispensed riches, and even on occasion led military expeditions. There was, however, nothing "feminine" about the policies they pursued, as their interest in, for example, the preservation of their own power and the power of their descendants, can be paralleled in most, if not all, of the male rulers of the period. If there were likenesses between the reasons for marriage, the status of queens, their duties and their chances for power in the various Germanic kingdoms, there were also similarities in the unfortunate ends which could befall these women. In an era when life frequently appears to have been held comparatively cheap, divorce or simple abandonment by their husbands could be the least of their problems.

Despite the overall similarities between the queens of the different peoples, within the Franks themselves, the kingdom most intensively studied, there appear to be some rather marked differences between the Merovingian dynasty and the Carolingians who succeeded them, particularly concerning the kind of women they married and the kind of power their queens controlled. On closer examination, however, these differences appear largely circumstantial, based, among other things, on change in the international situation and on a fortuitous series of adult successions. Over the whole period and the whole area, however, a pattern of queenship seems to be established, with particular regard to the duties expected of a queen and the opportunities presented to her.

1. Introduction

The replacement of the Roman emperors of the West by the Germanic kings of the early middle ages brought many new elements into government. One of these was the existence alongside the kings, of queens, whose role was better established than that of any empress. Reydellet, after admitting the existence of such formidable Roman matrons as Livia, both Agrippinas and Galla Placidia, goes on "Pourtant, dans son essence, le regime imperial est masculin. Meme si quelques femmes recurent le titre d'Augusta, ce fut par un acte délibéré et non par la nature des choses. Le princeps n'a pas de correspondant féminin: la grammaire s'accorde en cela avec le droit constitutionnel. En revanche, a royaute appele le couple rex-regina (1). He attributes the rise of female status to a link with the rise of hereditary monarchy, though remaining undecided about which came first, but it is a fact that some queens rose to power in elective monarchies, even playing a decisive part in elections. It may be possible to suggest that queens gained importance because the slow failure of Roman bureaucracy left a vacuum in court life which anyone close to the king could reasonably attempt to fill. Again, however, there would have to be exceptions --- Amalasuntha, for example, flourished at the Ostrogothic court at the same time, and indeed, with the help of Cassiodorus, who did much to bring Roman order to this particular barbarian kingdom. Perhaps it may even be possible to trace the respect in which queens could be held back to the Germans described by Tacitus, who were urged to war by the cries of their women, and who believed in a particularly female prophetic holiness "so they do not scorn to ask their advice, or lightly disregard their replies" (2). The reasons for the sudden rise to prominence of the distaff side of the monarchy, therefore, were probably complex in the extreme and will not be dealt with here. This discussion will rather attempt to show what marked their high status, how they were chosen for it, and how and with what results, political and personal, they could manipulate events once established.

The most outstandingly documented women are those of the Merovingian Franks. Gregory of Tours' Historia Francorum would be a poor thing indeed if Brunhild and Fredegund, Chrotechildis and all the lesser female lights were removed from it! But in sources from other races and other periods --- Carolingian Franks; Visigothic; Ostrogothic; Lombard; Anglo-Saxon --- queens have a role to play, open or concealed, in the events of their day. By 856, the position of queen is so firmly established that a Frankish chronicler finds it necessary to record, with an air of some surprise, that the West Saxons did not customarily bestow the title of Queen upon their king's wife. This aberration is confirmed by West Saxon sources, both implicitly[1] --- their version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle completely ignores the very real achievements of Aethelflaed, the Lady of the Mercians and a West Saxon by birth --- and quite openly, when Asser confirms that the king's wife is not called queen, or allowed to share his throne (3), justifying this by an extremely highly coloured account of how an earlier queen of Wessex had, by poisoning her husband, discouraged his successors from allowing any other woman the same status. As has been happily remarked, this does not imply the absence of kings' wives. "Aethelwulf did not happen upon his five sons under gooseberry bushes around the royal palace at Cheddar" (4). The point to which attention should be drawn is not so much the cause, or even the downgrading of the king's wife, but the fact that it was seen as something, in every sense, peculiar to that people, and that even in a work written for West Saxons, it was found necessary to justify it by fair means or foul.

Concerning queens, the principal and in some cases, the only (5) information given by the narrative sources, is the date of their death. The next most frequent acknowledgement of their existence occurs at the time of their marriage, though as will be seen, the part they played in this as individuals was, on occasion, minimal. Some idea of the part they played in public life can also be gleaned from these accounts, but their private life tends to receive mention only when scandalous. That side of things is/

perhaps better covered by letters and charters, which can deal more with day-to-day concerns. It might also be suggested that such sources can possibly be used as evidence of the character of the woman concerned, but this should be treated very cautiously. The letters of Pope Paul I to Pippin, for example, in which Bertrada is variously described as "excellentissima regina (6), praecelsa filia ... eximia regina" (8), seem to say more about the pontiff's predilection for the use of the very best butter than about the lady's true character. The most that can safely be said about this matter is probably to suggest that strength of character played some part in the rise to power of the most spectacular queens of the period, but this would be impossible to prove.

The same is true of many other things which it would be interesting to know about these queens, notorious or almost unknown. To take the simplest of examples, we have no very clear idea of the physical appearance of any of them. Chroniclers or poets commonly inform us, when they consider the point at all, that such and such a queen was beautiful --- but it would be a rare royal female for whom that distinction was not claimed! Similarly, their everyday life is hidden, making rare appearances, for example, in a poet's account of Charlemagne surrounded by his family. On many occasions, however, particularly in the more bloodthirsty episodes of the Merovingian period, the most that can be said is that it must have been "very different from the home life of our own dear queen". Even their relations with their husbands are hidden --- Charlemagne's letter to Fastrada, which will be quoted below, is the only extant example of husband-wife communication. Gregory of Tours occasionally regales his reader with snippets of conversation between, for example, Fredegund and Chilperic, but in view of his extreme antipathy for this couple it seems unlikely that he would have access to their private lives, and it is likely that these are no more than gossip. Even when letters written in a queen's name survive, there is seldom anything of a truly personal nature to be discovered in them, except perhaps what is already obvious from other sources, as, for instance, that Brunhild was deeply concerned with the/

well-being of her family.

If any kind of personal history of these women, save that which is almost completely reliant on the imagination, is thereby ruled out, there still remains the possibility of tracing at least their public acts, if not also some details of their private concerns, through the histories and documents of the period. Sometimes the matter is quite explicit --- a queen or empress is recorded in an annal as taking a particular action, for a particular reason and with quite specific consequences --- as involving herself in royal appointments, offering her protection to a cleric, asking her husband for a favour which finds a charter record, but on many other occasions it must be a matter of inference from scanty information. For instance, the fact that a queen is occasionally mentioned as travelling in her husband's company may indicate nothing more than that they were personally happy to be with each other as much as possible, but when she is specifically stated to be accompanying him on a journey to meet an errant son, it is surely possible to suggest that she may have had a role to play there, and that the role may have been that of moderator. Similarly, when powerful men are found to be seeking the queen's support, it must indicate that that support was worth acquiring. From such hints, as well as from the more definite statements of a queen's actions that do, at times, exist, it seems to be possible to outline a pattern of political power and performance even among women the details of whose personal lives could not be more varied.

It has been suggested, with particular reference to the works of Bede, that "the Church ... lacked any definition of the role of queens beyond what was required of all Christian wives" (9). This may have been true at Bede's particular place and time, but models of queenship were not lacking. For a bad queen, Jezebel formed an obvious example, with a rare addition of Delilah (10). Good queens, occasionally the same women as the bad ones viewed in a different light, were compared with Judith and Esther. Even more interesting are occasions that will be covered more fully later when the women of the period overlap, and Chrotechildis'./

granddaughter be urged to follow her example of connubial conversion, or the empress, Judith, be compared with Brunhild. Models of the right and wrong ways that a queen could act, did therefore exist, however nebulous the details may have been. It is hoped to demonstrate that, in fact, and not merely in example, queenship was a thing common to all the Germanic peoples in the duties, responsibilities and opportunities that it required of, or presented to, those women who attained it.

NOTES: CHAPTER ONE

(1) Reydellet 84

(2) Tacitus 108

(3) Asser 11

(4) Stafford 1978 83

(5) e.g. The wives of Charlemagne in AX.

(6) C. Car. 542

(7) C. Car. 556

(8) C. Car. 558

(9) Wallace-Hadrill 1971 92-3

(10) Libri pro Filiis 278

2. The Making of a Queen

It is easy to speak of "queens" but what exactly were the titles used of royal women in this period, and how did a woman gain the right to one of these titles? How far, moreover, was her position reflected in ceremony and in regalia?

A. Titles

The most usual title for a queen is *regina*. In the Merovingian and early Carolingian period, the main variation on this is the addition of the word *domna*, making her not simply the queen, but the lady, queen so-and-so. This compound title is used of Brunhild, interestingly enough in an official document which Gregory of Tours is quoting (1), of Bertrada (2), of Hildegard (3) and of Fastrada (4). Liutgard, alone of Charlemagne's wives, is not given the title of *regina* by the chroniclers, and indeed only once rises to *domna* on its own (5), perhaps reflecting her somewhat ambiguous status as a concubine turned wife. The other early compound of *regina* is *regina mater*, used by the *Liber Historiae Francorum* of Chrotechildis (6), and by Fredegar and the *Liber Historiae Francorum* of Balthild (7). In both cases the title is used of them in the period after their husbands' deaths, when their position may well have been dependent upon their sons, Balthild, in fact, acting as regent. The title is also used of Brunhild precisely at the moment when, after the death of his tutor, she took personal charge of her son's education (8). One peculiar use of *regina* is its application to Rigunth (9), who was never really a queen, but only engaged to a king. This may signify that the engagement was sufficient to give her this status, or perhaps that the title was hers because of her royal birth, as would seem to be indicated by Clotild and Basina when, in the course of their revolt at the Poitiers convent, they claimed that they were *reginae* (10).

The question of titles, however, becomes a complex one in the cases of those women whose husbands were transformed from mere kings to emperors. Charlemagne, at the time of his imperial coronation, was a widower, who took concubines instead of marrying/

again, so that the questinn of the title of empress first arises with relation to Louis the Pious' first wife, Ermengard. Despite the fact that her imperial coronation is recorded, only Thegan ever allows her the imperial title, when he states that the Pope called her Augusta at the time of her crowning (11). Even he, however, reverts to calling her regina when he reports her death (12), while the other source for her crowning, the annals of Xanten, never give her a title at all, merely calling her Louis' wife (13). Omitting Judith for the moment, the next empress was another Ermengard, wife of Lothar I. Again only one source gives her this title, when the annals of Xanten report the death of the nobilissima imperatrix in 851 (14). Referring to the same event, the annals of St. Bertin are content to describe her as regina christianissima (15). The next Frankish empress is Richildis, who is described by the annals of St.Bertin as imperatrix both before (16) and at the time of her actual coronation (17). Engelberga, wife of Louis II, emperor and king of Italy, is also accorded the title by St. Bertin (18), even though her husband is occasionally reduced to "so-called" emperor (19).

In the cases above, the grant or withholding of a specific title appears at times to be a purely arbitrary matter, depending on the whim of a particular writer, but on other occasions it seems to be a propaganda weapon, used to express the author's opinion of the woman concerned. For example, Jonas of Bobbio, author of the Vita Columbani, writing of Brunhild, whom he does not hesitate to compare to Jezebel (20), only once gives her the title of regina, and then prefaces it with the pejorative adjective, miserae (21). Perhaps the most complex case of this kind, however, is that of Judith. St. Bertin consistently gives her the title of empress, both before (22) and after (23) the accusations levelled at her in 830, as does the report of that year's events contained in the annals of Metz (24). The annals of Xanten, on the other hand, which give her the title of imperatrix in 827 (25), then describe her only as Louis' wife through the troubles of the 830s (26),only giving her the title again at her death ./

in 843 (27). Thegan similarly, who had given her the title of Augusta when reporting the birth of Charles the Bald, reduces her first to regina when discussing the charges brought against her and Bernard (28), and thereafter describes her only as Louis' wife, right up to his death (29). It appears possible, therefore, to conclude that the first two sources were for Judith and against the actions of her predecessor's sons, while the others were more doubtful. The position of the annals of Fulda on the subject is even more explicit. Representing the east Frankish view of Louis the German's kingdom, they mention Judith only during the troubled years of 831-4 and then with no higher title than that of Louis' uxor (30). The move from a higher title to a lower is, however, reversed by the Astronomer, who describes her as regina before 830 (31), and only raises her to Augusta when she is returned to Louis from Italy (32).

All the titles mentioned so far come from the chronicles, but in the royal charters it is possible to see what titles were officially used. In the charters of Pippin III, no title is used for Bertrada (33), while among Charlemagne's wives only Hildegard is mentioned by name and given the title of regina (34). His son, Louis the Pious, gives no title to his first wife, Ermengard, but calls Judith, Augusta (35). Of his sons,Louis the German refers to his wife, Emma, without title (36), but their son, Charles the Fat, calls her regina (37). Lothar I, unlike most of the chronicles, gives his wife Ermengard, the title of Augusta(38). Even women who make only the most fleeting appearances in the chronicles, such as Ingeltrude, wife of Pippin I of Aquitaine, are recognised in charters as entitled to be called regina (39). Charles the Bald consistently gives Ermentrude the title of regina, and the promotion of her successor, Richildis, is marked with a change of title from regina (40) to augusta imperatrix (41). Similarly, Engelberga's frequent appearances in the charters of her contemporaries are almost always marked by these titles ; for example, in Carloman's charter she is augusta (42), and in Charles the Fat's, imperatrix (43). Perhaps the most interesting title given to any woman, however, is that of consors

regni. S. Konecny associates it particularly with Engelberga, regarding it as a mark of her peculiarly powerful position in her husband's Italian kingdom, possibly relating to a Byzantine model, and dating from, at the earliest, 863 (44). She certainly appears as consors et adjutrix regni in one of Louis II's charters from 865 (45), but this is far from being the earliest use of the title. It first appears in a charter of Lothar I dating from 848, in which his wife, Ermengard, whose role in political history is negligible, is described as consors imperii nostri (46). Similarly, charters of Charles the Bald use the same terms for Ermentrude from 860 (47). It also appears in a charter of Charles the Fat in 881, when it refers to his wife, Richardis (48). In these other cases, its political significance is, at the very least, doubtful, so it may rather be seen as merely one of the possible phrases which could be used in reference to a wife. In a sense, however, the most interesting charters of all are two in which no titles appear. In 863, Lothar II had, a little optimistically, described Waldrada as amantissime coniugis nostre (49). His lack of success in making anyone else acknowledge this is shown by the fact in 869 he was reduced to describing her as dilectissimae nobis (50), a term which he had found equally useful for the third member of the triangle, Theutberga, some three years earlier (51).

Paul the Deacon habitually uses regina as the title of his royal women, such as Rosamund (52), Theudelinda (53) and Gundeberga (54), and later Lombard women such as Ansa are given the same title in charters (55), while John of Biclarum uses it for the only royal woman he sees as playing an important role, Goiswinth (56). Bede uses it for most of his royal women, whether distinguished as Bertha of Kent (57) and Aethelthryth (58), or almost unknown, as Eafa, originally from the province of Hwicce, then queen of the South Saxons (59). So, for this early period, Anglo-Saxons too, recognised the title. In the period of the supremacy of Wessex, Asser's life of Alfred continues to use the term for the queen of Mercia, daughter of King Aethelwulf of Wessex (60). The Mercian tradition, which will be discussed later, accounts/

for the use of regina as a title in Mercia charters (61). The most problematic Anglo-Saxon title, however, is that accorded to Aethelflaed. In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, the title used is hlaefdige, which, as Stafford points out, can be translated as regina (62). It is more usual, however, for the translation into English to be given as "The Lady of the Mercians". In charters, she herself appears reluctant to use the term, preferring such circumlocutions as "iuvante superna pietate et largiente clementia Christi gubernacula regens merciorum" (63). Her reasons may have been connected with her apparent subordination to her brother, or to the effects of her upbringing in Wessex which may have made her regard regina as an unsuitable, even improper, title. It may be possible to suggest that the title of hlaefdige is ambiguous enough to have been used in whatever sense the writer desired, so that the Mercians may have meant to call her queen, as her predecessors had been, while the West Saxons could use it in a much less definite manner. The favourite overall title, therefore, among all the races, including Anglo-Saxons outside Wessex, is regina, with one or two variants. Imperatrix or augusta may be applied to an emperor's wife, but there is very little consistency in its use. Other titles, such as consors regni, may be used more or less at random, possibly for no better reason than to add a little variety.

B. Marriage

The answer to the question, what makes a woman a queen, appears at first to be a very simple one. A queen is the wife of a king. The trouble, in this period, lies rather in defining the position of a wife. Among the Merovingian Franks, in particular, concubinage seems relatively respectable, in comparison with apparently acceptable marriages which might be polygamous or incestuous. The period does, however, mark a development of marriage in the direction of the classic canonical pattern of respectable monogamy.

One distinction that appears to be constant, is that between a concubine and a wife. The former could not, apparently, be a/

queen, the latter usually was, even if the honour was a shared one. As early in the Merovingian dynasty as Clovis, Gregory of Tours marks the difference between his mistress, the mother of Theuderic, and his wife and queen, Chrotechildis (64). More than a century later, the same line is drawn for his descendant, Dagobert I, by Fredegar, who names his three queens, but finds his mistresses too numerous to be named (65). For the greatest member of the succeeding dynasty, Charlemagne himself, the situation is very much the same. Einhard, his biographer, carefully distinguishes his four wives from his four, or more, concubines (66). As late as Charles the Fat, the Annals of Fulda record his attempts to make Bernard, his son by a concubine, his heir (67).

The last example marks another method of differentiating between the wife/queen and the concubine, which slowly develops during the period. By 885, Charles the Fat had to seek the Pope's support in an attempt to give his illegitimate son an inheritance. The situation would have been unthinkable a few centuries earlier, when Theuderic automatically shared in the division of Clovis' kingdon (68), and Gregory of Tours could express surprise that bishops did not realise that all a king's sons were equally valued, whatever their mother's position (69). As so often, the dividing line appears to come in Charlemagne's reign. Only those sons who stemmed from his legitimate marriages were considered in his ultimate arrangements for his kingdom ; Drogo and Hugo, the sons of his concubine, Regina (70), being left to the care of his heir, Louis the Pious, whose solution to the problem was to have then tonsured (71). The major question mark in the development under Charlemagne concerns the position of his first-born son, Pippin, known as the Hunchback, whose mother was the concubine, Himiltrude. H. Fichtenau has pointed out that the use of the name of his grandfather implies his position as heir, and suggests that Himiltrude was not just a concubine, but a wife according to secular Germanic custom (72). He attributes her removal to Bertrada's political plotting in favour of the Lombard king Desiderius' daughter, and further/

suggests that Pippin the Hunchback's position as heir was undermined by the existence of yonnger, canonically legitimate sons, and by his father's whim. Though he also states that Pippin's deformity did not prevent his designation as heir (73), it is worth considering the possibility that this developed during his life and was, in fact, a factor in his exclusion as well as his mother's equivocal position. If this is so, then the exclusion of concubines' sons becomes a matter of chance within Charlemagne's own family, possibly developing into a definite custom under the clerically influenced Louis the Pious. If theoretical justification for this view was needed, it was provided by a British synod held in 786, attended by Charlemagne's councillor Alcuin, and which refused the royal power to those qui ex legitimo non fuerit connubio generatus (74).

Even for wives, recognised as such by the chroniclers, the position was not always simple. Dagobert I's three queens, already mentioned, would appear to have held their position simultaneously (75). Among the Merovingians this was in no sense unique. Clovis himself stemmed from a union in which his mother, Basina, had simply abandoned her first husband in order to marry his father (76). Even bigamy, however, was relatively restrained. One of their sons, Chlotar I, was married, apparently simultaneously, to Guntheuc, widow of his brother, Chlodomer (77); Radegund (78) ; the sisters, Ingund and Aregund, and Chunsina (79). He also had a brief relationship with Vuldetrada, widow of his great-nephew, Theudebald (80). His sons, with one exception, followed his example. Charibert's 'queens' appear to have included Ingoberga, Theudechild and the sisters, Merofled and Marcovefa (81) ; Chilperic promised to give up a number of unnamed 'uxores' in order to marry Galswinth, one of them possibly being Audovera, both these ladies, of course, yielding to Fredegund (82) ; the good king, Guntram, had two wives, Marcatrude and Austrechild, and an earlier mistress, Veneranda (83) ; Chramn only had one wife, but then he died young. The real exception was Sigibert, perhaps because of his expressed opinion on the unworthiness of his brothers' wives (84), or, /

Perhaps, because Brunhild would brook no rivals. Later Merovingians, being short-lived, lacked opportunity to live up, or down, to these examples. Again, however, this begins to disappear under Carolingian rule. Charlemagne had a number of wives, but in sequence, not simultaneously, with the possible exception of the Lombard princess and Hildegard, and entered on concubinage, according to Einhard, only after the death of the last of them, Liutgard (85), though Fichtenau does suggest that she was his concubine before Fastrada's death (86). After him, the maximum seems to have been two wives in succession, even Lothar II attempting to divorce Theutberga officially before marrying Waldrada.

Another irregularity in Merovingian relationships, which will already be evident, is incest. Chlotar I and Charibert I both married sisters, while the former was also involved with widows of his relations. Similarly Chilperic I's son, Merovech, married his uncle's widow, Brunhild (87), and Theuderic II, according to the Liber Historiae Francorum, had designs on his niece (88). Given this climate, the Liber Historiae Francorum's story of Fredegund's plot against Audovera, which involved making her her own child's godmother (89), in addition to being anachronistic, is also very unlikely. No-one in that family was liable to be concerned about committing incest on a purely spiritual level. Under the Carolingians, this sin, at least, completely disappears, with the possible exception of Louis the German's marriage to his stepmother's sister (90).

The development into canonical regularity, though it appears to coincide with the change of Frankish dynasty, in fact reflects an increasing dominance of religious over secular law. Even in Bishop Gregory of Tours, whose 'indifference' to Chlotar's commission of incest has been noted (91), there are hints of a more rigorous view. Chlotar's relationship with Vuldetrade, for example, had to be given up because of bishops' objections (92), but it is not clear whether they objected because the relationship was at least semi-incestuous, or because it increased/

his polygamy. In the case of Charibert I and the sisters, Marcovefa and Merofled, St. Germanus, Bishop of Paris, went beyond mere objection and excommunicated both the king and Marcovefa. As he refused to give her up, Gregory attributed their deaths soon after to the judgment of God (93). Again, however, the precise reason behind the penalty is not clear, as Charibert was committing the same sins as Chlotar. After Gregory's time, St. Columbanus moved further towards the canon law viewpoint, when he insisted that the sons of concubines could not hold power as if they were the sons of queens (94).

From purely ecclesiastical sanctions, the next move was towards secular backing. In the case of Merovech and Brunhild, his father, Chilperic, described the union as against custom and canon law, but his reasons for objecting were probably political (95). A capitulary, dated by the MGH editor, Boretius, to 596, issued a decree against incest which specifically forbade marriage with a brother's widow or a wife's sister, both of which had apparently been quite acceptable only a generation before. Pippin I in 754-5 extended incest to cover fellow godparents, godmothers, nieces, aunts, a relationship with a mother and daughter or two sisters, the penalty to be a loss of property or imprisonment of those without property, or corporal punishment for a slave (96). By 757, instead of quoting specific cases, he merely ordered the separation of all couples related in the third degree (97). Other developments included Pippin's prohibition of bigamy (98), requirement of marriage as a public ceremony (99), and laws concerning the marriage of free men and slaves, adultery and betrothals (100), all in accordance with the church. The end of the process may be seen in the problems of Lothar II, all of whose efforts to rid himself of one wife and take another ended in failure, as will be discussed more fully below. It is not a problem that one can imagine a Merovingian failing to solve by one means or another. The Carolingians, however, retained some marks of the secular past ; Charlemagne's possible multiple marriages have already been mentioned, and even later, the Annals of St. Bertin show that a father's/

consent was still vital to a Royal marriage in their account of the shortlived link between Louis the Younger and Adalard's daughter (101). Lothar I, whose concubines are reported in a shocked manner by the Annals of St. Bertin (102), was not ashamed to have one of them, Doda, recorded in a charter as his dilectissima ac familiarissima femina (103). Finally, and most markedly of all, there is the succession to the empire of Arnulf, the son of Louis the German's son, Carloman, by a noble concubine (104).

Outside Frankia, things appear, at least according to the historians, much more respectable. Among the Lombards the Edict of Rothari, the earliest Lombard law code, punishes adultery with death (105), but limits incest to stepmother, stepdaughter and sister-in-law (106). It was left to Luitprand in 723 to extend this prohibition under papal influence to cousins' widows and to spiritual relations (107). In Paul the Deacon's history, the kings, on the whole, appear to have led exemplary lives and the exceptions are passed over without comment. Thus, in the case of King Wacho's three wives, it is not made clear whether they existed simultaneously or in sequence (108), while Grimuald's first relationship with a high-born captive named Ita (109), seems to have been concubinage when compared to his later marriage to Aripert's daughter (110). Like the Carolingians, this is marked by the fact that the succession to the throne was given to the son of his royal marriage (111), while the older Romuald, son of the first relationship, received the Duchy of Benevento, from which his father had risen to the kingdom (112). Cunicpert, on the other hand, is represented as having taken a mistress after his marriage to Hermelinda (113). The Anglo-Saxons,as reported by Bede, are similarly restrained in their marital habits. The problem of incest was tackled as early as Augustine who requested a ruling from Pope Gregory on the subject of marriage between cousins, with stepmother or sister-in law, and received the reply that such unions were forbidden (114). The synod of 673 similarly forbids incest and adultery (115). Marriage to a stepmother is the royal marital sin most/

frequently mentioned. After Aethelbert's death, his son, Eadbald, marked his reversion from Christianity to paganism in this fashion (116), but it reappears as late as 858 when Aethelbald marries his father's widow, the Frankish princess, Judith, surprisingly without comment from Hincmar (117). Of marital crimes other than incest, Bede has little to report except that Edwin of Northumbria had two sons by the daughter of Cearl of Mercia, before his marriage to Ethelberga, who is given the title of queen (118), and that Coenwalh of Wessex put away his wife and took another woman (119). The association of the title of Queen with the status of wife appears to hold good with both peoples.

Overall, therefore, it is true to say that a queen was always a wife as distinct from a concubine, even if the marriage would appear to modern eyes to be lacking somewhat in validity. One interesting point is that in two cases, those of Fredegund and of Nantechild, one of the queens of Dagobert I, there seems to have been a position which might be called that of chief wife, implying a superiority to her rivals. The same may have been true in other cases also without leaving a mark on the records. As marriage law developed in the direction approved by the church, the distinction between a king's wife, who was probably also his queen, and his concubine, became more and more marked. It is possible that concubines could still enjoy a certain status, Lothar I and Doda being the most obvious example, but the apparent change in attitude surfaces when it is a question of the position of their sons. For such men, the period saw a change from the Merovingian view, that they were as entitled to a share in the inheritance, to that of the Carolingians, which, for a time at least, relegated them to the Church, precisely because of their "illegitimacy".

C. Coronation

There are two outstanding pieces of evidence for female coronation in the Carolingian period. These are the records/

of the actual services performed in 856 for Charles the Bald's daughter, Judith (120), and in 866 for his first wife, Ermentrude (121). They serve to amplify the references to these events in the Annals of St. Bertin (122), which were partially written by Hincmar, who was also responsible for the form of the services. For all other possible cases of female involvement in coronation ceremonies, we are dependent on passing references which may appear in only one place, other versions of the same event omitting them entirely. Thus at the very beginning of the dynasty in 751, only the Continuator of Fredegar (123), mentions Bertrada on the occasion of Pippin's unction at the hands of Boniface. He was apparently annointed again in 754 by Pope Stephen II in a ceremony shared by his sons, Charles and Carloman, and according to one source (124), by Bertrada again. The next appearance of female coronation is again at a ceremony conducted by a Pope, this time, Stephen IV, who crowned, and possibly anointed, Louis the Pious at Rheims in 816, and according to the Annals of Xanten (125), and the biography of Louis by Thegan (126), his wife Ermengard also. One source, the Annals of Metz (127), suggest that Louis' second wife, Judith, was also crowned without offering any precise information as to date or place. The next recorded female coronation is that of Judith in 856, on the occasion of her marriage to the Anglo-Saxon King Aethelwulf as mentioned above. In 862 Lothar II, in the throes of his marital problems, had his concubine, Waldrada, crowned in an unsuccessful attempt to legitimise their union (128). Three years later, his wife, Theutberga, restored to him by papal decree, appeared with him at mass, both crowned (129). Charles the Bald's first wife, Ermentrude, was crowned in 866, and in 876, his second wife, Richildis, appeared crowned at the conclusion of a synod at Ponthion (130), though her formal imperial coronation by Pope John VIII had to wait until the following year (131).

Three of these cases stand out for two reasons. Bertrada, Ermengard and Richildis, all received coronation and unction at the hands of the Pope, or, in the first case, from his special representative, Boniface. Further, Bertrada and Ermengard/

shared in their husbands' ceremony rather than being individually crowned, while Richildis' coronation followed that of her husband at her first possible meeting with the Pope. These three can therefore possibly be seen as representing coronation of a woman,not so much as an individual but as an appendage of her husband, sharing in his elevation and in the ceremonies which surrounded it. In this connection it may be relevant that none of Charlemagne's wives appear to have undergone formal coronation though Liutgard was recorded as wearing a crown as part of her ceremonial dress (132). At the time of his imperial coronation in 800 he had recently become a widower for the third and last time, and therefore the possibility that his wife might have shared in the momentous ceremony must be left open.

Two of the remaining references are linked by the fact that they seem to refer to crown-wearings rather than ceremonial coronations. In the first of these, that of Theutberga and Lothar in 865, C. Bruhl sees various possibilities including a simple crown-wearing and a coronation intended to strengthen Lothar's uneasy position, but thinks it unlikely that it represented a formal coronation of Theutberga (133). Similarly, he sees Richildis' crowned appearance at the synod of 876 as an example of simple crown-wearing (134), and indeed it predates her formal coronation by more than a year. It is worth noting, perhaps, the exact term used here for Richildis' appearance ... imperatricem coronatam, and her share in the Laudes with which the assembled bishops acclaimed her husband (135). The one explicit report of a crowned appearance of the Empress Judith, the Annals of Metz, similarly describes her as coronata and acclamata, and might therefore refer to a parallel crown-wearing rather than to an official full-scale coronation.

Bruhl, on the other hand, thinks it likely that Judith's coronation accompanied her wedding to Louis in 819 (136). Of the sources that mention this wedding only one hints at this possibility --- Thegan's biography of Louis which states that/

he married Judith eamque reginam constituit (137). Other sources, for example the Royal Frankish Annals, confine themselves to reporting the marriage in normal terms such as duxit uxorem (138), while the Annals of Xanten appear to associate her elevation specifically with the act of marriage itself, when he writes that Louis accepit sibi in conjugium Judith ad imperatricem (139). Unfortunately, as mentioned above, the one source which explicitly describes Judith as crowned and acclaimed does so only in passing, in an account of the events of 830, unexpectedly appearing at the end of a copy of other annals (140). In its favour, though, it should be added that it is considered to show signs of links to the court (141). If Judith was formally crowned on the occasion of her marriage, the ceremony would fall into that group consisting of her grand-daughter and namesake, and Waldrada. In the latter case, the act of crowning, and, according to Bruhl, probably of unction as well (142), is stated explicitly as an addition to the marriage ceremony, coronat et quasi in coniugem et reginam sibi copulat (143). The little word, quasi, as well as clearly indicating Hincmar's damning opinion of the whole affair, probably suggests Lothar's motive for adding coronation to the ceremony. Having, as he hoped, successfully rid himself of his original wife, Lothar would naturally be anxious to offer her replacement every possible support for what, in fact, proved to be her somewhat precarious position. The coronation of Judith "the Younger" similarly marks a unique occasion requiring a ceremonial emphasis for specific reasons. In this case, her marriage was taking her outside the Frankish realm to an area where her position might not be recognised. Indeed Prudentius says as much in commenting that the reginae nomen was not customary in Aethelwulf's English kingdom (144). Her coronation is simply included in the marriage ceremony (145), and was probably intended only to impress upon the foreigners present that Judith was to be respected. It is perhaps worth noting that in Frankia itself the effect of this ceremony seems to have been purely honorary, as, in her widowhood, she was returned to her father's power/

and her escape from it with Baldwin of Flanders was highly scandalous (146).

S. Konecny considers it likely that all female coronations are, to a certain extent, marriage ceremonies, marking the change from an irregular relationship to a formal Vollehe. In two cases already quoted above in other connections, this appears a more or less likely possibility. It is perhaps more likely in the case of Pippin and Bertrada, about whose marriage there is so little information that it is difficult to be certain either way. It has been suggested that marriage came late in their relationship, certainly after the birth of their first son (147). In that case it would at least be possible that the ceremonies of 751 did mark a second ceremony (148), but this view is debated. The position of Louis the Pious' first wife, Ermengard, is however more difficult to judge. Of the two sources, Louis' biographers, which actually report the marriage, one, the Astronomer, describes her as futuram reginam (149), which might, indeed, as S. Konecny believes (150), indicate that, until his father's death, she was no more than Louis' concubine (151). Thegan, on the other hand, states that Louis, cum consilio et consensu patris, reginam constituit (152), which does give the impression that this was, from the beginning, a much more formal relationship. The fact that Ermengard did not take part in Louis' coronation by his father in 813, but had to wait till the 816 ceremony, when his father was dead (153) may be concerned with the nature of the two ceremonies. 813 was a secular ceremony, marking the reality of a transfer of power, a commodity with which women had officially little to do. 816 was a glamorous religious ceremony, the papal icing on the imperial cake, in which a woman might reasonably be allowed a place. Finally, it might be worth considering whether Louis the Pious (154), whose first acts of power were directed at the removal from court of the evidence of the irregularity of his father's life style, would have acted in this manner with an irregular relationship in his own background.

Perhaps the most debatable instance is that of Charles the Bald's first wife, Ermentrude, whose coronation at Soissons is reported by Hincmar, who probably also composed the service (155), in the Annals of St. Bertin (156). S.Konecny regards this as a marriage ceremony (157), as does C.A. Boumann (158), but it is difficult to find any evidence of the change in her status which such a ceremony would seem to assume. Charles' diplomas, for example, always refer to her as his coniux, often with some qualifying adjective indicating either her qualities, such as nobilissima (159), or his affection for her, such as amantissima (160). Further, well before her coronation, she is described in 853 as regina (161), and in 864, rises to gloriosa regina (162). Most marked of all, however, she is described as early as 860 as his consors regni. (163). More important, perhaps, is Hincmar's own way of referring to her. Both before (164) and after (165) her coronation, he describes her as Charles' uxor, which is, incidentally, the same word he uses for Theutberga (166), the complete legitimacy of whose marriage was practically an article of his faith. Over Charles' relationship with Richildis, whom he first took as his concubine before marrying her (167), Hincmar shows that he was perfectly willing to record irregularity in Charles' actions, so he would not have hesitated to do the same in the case of Ermentrude.

The service itself (168), does not resemble the marriage plus coronation of Judith. Even before the service, in the bishop's introductory speech, it is stated that the king wished uxorem suam (169) to be anointed, not have her made his wife. The necessity for further heirs is explained by the dedication of some to religious life, the deaths of others, and, as P. Schramm points out (170), Charles of Aquitaine was an epileptic and Louis the Stammerer's nickname self-explanatory. It is not, at any point, suggested, as it would be later of the Stammerer's sons, that their birth was, in any way, illegitimate. Further, Charles' second marriage, which was, most definitely, a change from an irregular to a formal relationship, was not/

marked by a coronation, and it is hard to believe that, if one had been required to legitimise or strengthen the union, Hincmar would not have been willing to provide a suitable service. Finally, if, as S. Konecny states, Charles the Bald had come to regard coronation as the criterion of royal Vollehe (171), he would surely have supported Waldrada, who was definitely crowned, against Theutberga, who only may have been. The alternative view of this ceremony concentrates on the emphasis given to the need for heirs, already quoted, and suggests that Charles saw unction as a magic power, granting the queen renewed fertility (172). Certainly the bishops stress the example of Abraham and Sarah and their late parenthood. The need that Charles and his supporters felt for a better secured succession appears also in the mention made of Richildis' pregnancy (173) and confinements, though both sons were very shortlived (174).

Outside Frankia, there is evidence for female coronation and anointing in Anglo-Saxon England. The first English queen known to have been crowned was, of course, Judith. Asser, however, makes it very clear, not only that from the Wessex point of view her position was a considerable departure from tradition (175), but also implies that her status as queen could be attributed to her father's will, rather than to an English decision (176). There is then a considerable gap till, in 973, his queen, Aelfthryth, shared in Edgar's ceremony at Bath (177). Here, this does appear to have been, if not an actual marriage ceremony, at least a form of confirmation of the marriage, as it represented a vital argument for the legitimacy of their son, Aethelred, in contrast to his half-brother, Edward, whose mother had not been anointed (178). Corohation does not, however, appear to have been a regular requirement for an English queen (179). There is another mention of consecration, in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, when it is stated that the wife of Edward the Confessor had been consecrated (180). The significance of this cannot be determined in the same terms as that of Aelfthryth, as she was his only wife, and the union was childless. It may be, however, that Earl Godwin felt the/

need to have his daughter's position made as secure as possible.

Coronation should not, however, be considered as implying the existence of a specifically female set of regalia. As late as the end of the ninth century, Schramm noted that the queen was invested only with the crown (181). Instances where a queen was known to be wearing a crown, either at her coronation or merely as a particularly splendid ornament, have already been quoted, but in general, the chronicle sources give only minimal information about the appearance of queens. One instance that gives some idea of the ornaments which a queen might wear occurs at the time of Radegund's renunciation of the world. She gave to various churches ; gemmis, ornamentis stapione, camisas, manicas, cofias, fibulas, cuncta auro, quadem gemmis exornata per arculum (182). On the occasion of a marriage, too, there is now and again a suggestion as to the wealth which might be changing hands, ranging from the ornamenta sponsalia given to Chrotechildis (183), to the expensive jewellery sent with Clothild to Spain (184). Unfortunately, no details are given to show precisely of what these consisted. Chrotechildis was, in addition, pulchra et elegans,(185) while Brunhild was elegans opere and venusta aspectu (186), again remarkably imprecise terms for a description. As to dress, Brunhild, according to the Liber Historia Francorum, went to meet Chlotar II cultu regalia ornatu (187). A similar phrase, regio cultu paratis, is used of Theutberga and Lothar II at their crown-wearing in 865 (188). This seems the kind of occasion on which all possible splendour would be displayed, and it seems reasonable to assume that at her crown-wearing in 876, Richildis would have worn the fine robes and jewelled armills sent to her by the Pope a few days before (189). At the coronation of 973, Aelfthryth is said to have been 'gorgeously attired in a silken gown sewn with pearls and precious stones' (190).

Fortunately, the written record has been supplemented by artistic and archaeological evidence. In the portrait of/

Charles the Bald in the Bible of San Paolo Fuori le Mura, his queen is shown to be splendidly dressed, her gown richly patterned, perhaps by embroidery, and veiled in what looks like lace. Kantorowicz explains the absence of a crown by suggesting that the bible was a presentation volume to mark the king's marriage to Richildis (191), and the representation would thus certainly predate her coronation, while, if it also predated the wedding, she would perhaps be unlikely to wear even a purely ornamental crown. The anonymous Merovingian woman buried in Cologne cathedral possessed a rich collection of gold and garnet cloisonné jewellery, including 'a great necklace of looped gold coins, gold cloisonné and filigree pendants, gold and glass beads', 'a massive gold bracelet', and four brooches. On her head she wore a 'gold-worked and jewelled headband' (192). In the case of Arnegund's tomb in St. Denis, identified by her signet ring in addition to brooches and earrings, sufficient of her clothing survives to show that she was dressed in great style, open from the waist in front. This design of clothing was meant to show off the grand jewellery on her shoes and cross-gartered stockings, 'silver-gilt animal-ornamented buckles and strap-tongues fastened the shoes, and silver strap-tongues with interlace ornaments depended from the garter straps below the knees'. In place of the headband, she wore a red satin veil, hanging to her waist at the back (193). It is particularly worth noting that of two women, even the identified one was not a major figure in the history of the period, being no more than a member of what can only be described as Chlotar I's harem. If she was so superbly dressed, what must have been the appearance of someone such as Brunhild or Fredegund?. Again, however, these women, though distinguished by the splendour of their ornaments, are lacking in anything that would be considered in modern times as specifically royal accoutrements.

Non Frankish evidence is even scarcer. Fredegar describes Gundeberga going on pilgrimage regili ordine and living regio cultu (194), but again, this is very imprecise. Paul the/

Deacon is even less informative, only once remarking on Theudelinda's beauty (195), and saying nothing about ornaments, but she dedicated a jewelled crown to the church at Monza, and it has been suggested that this was a crown she had worn, and not simply a votive piece (196). There is no evidence for the Italian or Spanish Goths, and Bede's only mention of female royal finery occurs in Aethelthryth's declaration that the tumour on her neck was a punishment for earlier wearing of gold and pearls (197). Despite the chroniclers' silence, however, it seems reasonable to assume that other royal women marked their status with the same rich display as their Frankish sisters.

The overall significance of female coronation and unction is difficult to decide. It is, however, perhaps worth repeating that there is very little hard evidence, at least in Frankia, for its use to mark a real change of the woman's status, unless she was a participant in her husband's elevation. On the two occasions when it is indisputably combined with a marriage ceremony, those of Judith 'the Younger' and Waldrada, the first is directed at a non-Frankish situation and the second was unsuccessful in legitimising the marriage it accompanied.

On the whole, therefore, royal wives throughout the period and in all the races under discussion shared the same titles, even Wessex occasionally succumbing to their use, while the development in the Carolingian period of such designation as consors regni appears to be a purely literary device. The right to this title was always conferred by marriage, which became throughout the period steadily better defined, so that there came to be, in general, one queen for each king. Female coronation appears late in the period and may best be described as an optional extra, imprecise and undefined, both in terms of the service itself and of the regalia it conferred. Nevertheless, the undoubted use of honorific titles and the probability of such dress and ornamentation, make it clear/

that a queen, crowned or uncrowned, could make her status obvious to contemporaries and have it accepted by them.

NOTES : CHAPTER TWO

(1) HF 435
(2) ARF 26
(3) ARF 56
(4) ARF 70
(5) ARF 110
(6) LHF 279
(7) Fred IV 80 : LHF 317
(8) HF 389
(9) HF 261
(10) HF 466
(11) Thegan 594
(12) Thegan 596
(13) AX 224
(14) AX 229
(15) AB 67
(16) AB 205
(17) AB 216
(18) AB 144
(19) AB 115
(20) VC 86
(21) VC 88
(22) AB 1
(23) AB 36
(24) AM 336
(25) AX 225
(26) AX 226
(27) AX 227
(28) Thegan 597
(29) Thegan 603
(30) AF 360
(31) Ast. 628
(32) Ast. 639
(33) Char. Pip. 21
(34) Char. Ch/m 116
(35) Char. L/P 573
(36) Char. L/G 159

(37) Char. Ch/F 255
(38) Char. Loth. I 252
(39) Char. Pip. I/Aqu. 107
(40) Char. Ch/B Vol. 2, 314
(41) Char. Ch/B Vol. 2, 467
(42) Char. Carl/G 291
(43) Char. Ch/F
(44) Konecny 1976 118
(45) Char. Emp. L II col. 1414
(46) Char. Loth. I 241
(47) Char. Ch/B Vol. 1, 554
(48) Char. Ch/F 70
(49) Char. Loth II 415
(50) Char. Loth II 441
(51) Char. Loth II 429
(52) PD 87
(53) PD 113
(54) PD 136
(55) Char. Lang III 245-6, 249-50
(56) JB 215
(57) Bede 150
(58) Bede 392
(59) Bede 372
(60) Asser 8
(61) Sawyer 210, 214
(62) Stafford 1982 4
(63) Sawyer 225
(64) HF 74
(65) Fred. IV 50
(66) Einhard 22-3
(67) AF 401
(68) HF 97
(69) HF 228
(70) Einhard 23
(71) Thegan 596
(72) Fichtenau 39
(73) Fichtenau 41

(74) Epp. Alc. 24
(75) Fred. IV 50
(76) HF 62
(77) HF 103
(78) HF 105
(79) HF 136
(80) HF 141
(81) HF 157, 159
(82) HF 160-1
(83) HF 156-7
(84) HF 160
(85) Einhard 22
(86) Fichtenau 40
(87) HF 195
(88) LHF 309
(89) LHF 292-3
(90) AX 225
(91) McNamara and Wemple 1976 99
(92) HF 141
(93) HF 159
(94) VC 87
(95) HF 195
(96) Capit. I 31
(97) Capit. I 37
(98) Capit. I 30
(99) Capit. I 36
(100) Capit. I 38-9
(101) AB 123-4
(102) AB 67
(103) Char. Loth I 309
(104) Reg P 116
(105) Drew 93
(106) Drew 86
(107) Drew 160-1
(108) PD 60
(109) PD 135
(110) PD 142

(111) PD 155
(112) PD 153
(113) PD 157
(114) Bede 84
(115) Bede 350?
(116) Bede 150
(117) AB 76
(118) Bede 186
(119) Bede 232-4
(120) Capit. II 425-7
(121) Capit. II 453-5
(122) AB 73, 129
(123) Fred. IV 102
(124) MGH SS XV 1
(125) AX 224
(126) Thegan 594
(127) AM 336
(128) AB 94
(129) AB 122
(130) AB 205
(131) AB 216
(132) Bruhl 272
(133) Bruhl 288-9
(134) Bruhl 274
(135) AB 205
(136) Bruhl 322
(137) Thegan 596
(138) ARF 150
(139) AX 224
(140) AM 336
(141) Wattenbach-Levison 264
(142) Bruhl 288
(143) AB 94
(144) AB 73
(145) Capit. II 425-7
(146) AB 87-8
(147) Fichtenau 55

(148) Konecny 1976 55

(149) Ast. 611

(150) Konecny 1976 203

(151) Konecny 1976 73

(152) Thegan 591

(153) Konecny 1976 73

(154) Erch. H.L.B. 239, written in the late ninth century, describes him as cesar Lodoguicus cognomento almus, which, though not exactly 'the Pious', does suggest that the qualities recognised in him by his near-contemporaries were those which might be covered by the term.

(155) Boumann 9

(156) AB 129

(157) Konecny 1976 135

(158) Boumann 68

(159) Char Ch/B Vol.1 486

(160) Char. Ch/B Vol.1 493

(161) Char. Ch/B Vol.1 416

(162) Char. Ch/B Vol.2 119

(163) Char. Ch/B Vol.1 454

(164) AB 91

(165) AB 132

(166) AB 93

(167) AB 167

(168) Capit. II 453-5

(169) Capit. II 453

(170) Schramm 1960 23

(171) Konecny 1976 38

(172) Schramm 1960 24, Kantorowicz 1976 87-8

(173) AB 207

(174) AB 197 211

(175) Asser 11

(176) Asser 52

(177) Hart 1977 14-5

(178) Sawyer & Wood 67 (J.L. Nelson, Inauguration Rituals)

(179) Schramm 1937 22

(180) ASC 176

(181) Schramm 1960 59

(182) VR 369

(183) LHF 254

(184) HF 98

(185) LHF 254

(186) HF 160

(187) LHF 310

(188) AB 122

(189) AB 205

(190) Hart 1977 14

(191) Kantorowicz 1965 91

(192) J. Werner 203

(193) J. Werner 212-4

(194) Fred. IV 60

(195) PD 109

(196) Schneider 209

(197) Bede 396

3. The Choosing of a Queen

Given that marriage to a king was the vital factor in queen-making, the next question concerns the type of woman kings married, and, where it is possible to judge, the reasons for marriage.

A. External political marriage.

The almost classical form of royal marriage is diplomatic marriage where two countries or two royal houses use marriage as a means of forming a more or less definite alliance. In the period under discussion the Merovingian Franks married Visigoths, Lombards, Burgundians, Ostrogoths and Anglo-Saxons, while other links were created between Ostrogoths and Vandals, Thuringians and Visigoths and among the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

The alliances between the Franks and Visigoths are possibly the most interesting for two reasons. First, because unlike other links sealed by only one marriage, these two royal houses intermarried repeatedly over three generations, and second, because at one time or another, these marriages appear to illustrate almost every possible reason which could lie behind this particular form of marriage. On only one occasion, during the abortive negotiations over the proposal that Chlodosind should marry Reccared, is it explicitly stated that the reason is a political one, that of the maintenance of peace between the two peoples (1). Otherwise, motives are either not stated at all or are given in personal terms, as in Sigibert's desire to find a wife more worthy than those women married by his brothers, and Chilperic's immediate emulation of him (2). This may, therefore, be described as the prestige motive, an attempt to find, outside the borders of one's own country, a bride of higher standing than those available within. The length of time over which these marriages took place may also suggest that an attempt was being made to retain or renew diplomatic links which might, in particular, have been damaged by a change/

of dynasty among the Visigoths. A final possible motive for seeking a marriage with a foreign bride may have been an economic one, as Gregory of Tours stresses the value of the dowries which passed both to and from the Franks, that of Rigunth being so large as to raise doubts about the remaining contents of the treasury (3). Lastly, these particular marriages may serve as an introduction to all others, because in most cases, they failed, not only not improving relations as they were presumably at least partially intended to do, but actually worsening them.

None of these motives is confined to this series of marriages alone. The political motive, the desire to symbolise an alliance, probably lies behind a great many of the marriages, such as that of Clovis to the Burgundian, Chrotechildis, however much it may be dressed up in stores of his attraction to the description of her as pulchram elegantem atque sapientem (4). It is noticeable, however, that even the Franks seem to maintain a policy of what might be termed local foreign marriages, restricting their alliances to those peoples with whom they shared borders, rather than setting their sights at more distant, perhaps more glamorous matches, as, for example, with the Empire. This latter possibility only appears under the Carolingians, when Frankish expansion had made the Eastern empire a neighbour, and even then was limited to a few abortive sets of negotiations. Local alliances are also a regular part of the Anglo-Saxon scene where Kent and Northumbria, Northumbria and Mercia, Mercia and Wessex, build up an almost bewildering web of relationships. For alliances formed by one family, however, the record must surely be held by Theoderic the Great, all of whose female relations appears to have been pressed into service in his foreign policy. His illegitimate daughters married the Visigothic king Alaric and Sigismund, heir to Burgundy ; his sister, the Vandal Thrasamund; his niece, the Thuringian Hermanfrid. He himself married the daughter of Clovis, while his daughter's marriage was intended to reunite two separate branches of the divided royal family (5).

Again it is worth noting here also, that these matrimonial politics limit themselves to immediate neighbours.

Presumably these marriages were preceded by negotiations in which the more general purpose, of alliance perhaps, which lay behind the particular case, might be made clear. The only example given by the chroniclers is that of Chlodosind where Reccared desires the marriage as a sign of peace between the countries, with a promise of mutual support (6). In this case, also, Gregory records one of the reasons behind Childebert's acceptance of this proposal for his sister, namely the fact that the Visigoths were now Catholic rather than Arian (7). In the case of Rigunth, the ambassadors charged with arranging her marriage are twice mentioned by Gregory, on the second occasion the negotiations being finalised by contract (8). Unfortunately here, no particulars are given of the details that had to be settled. In other instances there is even less information available, and the most that can be said is from which side the suggestion originated. For example, Amalaric made the first moves in the marriage between himself and Clotild (9), and Theoderic seems to have been responsible for the series of marriages involving his female connections, while the initiative for Charlemagne's Lombard marriage seems to have lain with the Frankish queen Bertrada (10). At other times only the marriage itself is recorded, without it even being made clear which party had originally desired it. In such circumstances and given the local nature of most of these connections, it may perhaps generally be presumed that there was some desire for closer links with a neighbouring people, for a concrete symbol of amity.

Unfortunately few, if any, of these marital alliances had any lasting effect on the relations of the two peoples concerned. None of Theoderic's in-laws were of any assistance to him in his developing conflict with the Eastern empire, and the same would appear to be true for other marital allies. On the contrary, many examples show that marital problems could spill over into/

international politics, actually worsening, rather than improving, relations between the two countries. Again the Merovingians and the Visigoths provide perfect examples of this. The first of the series of marriages ended in war when Childebert avenged his sister's ill-treatment by an invasion of the Visigothic kingdom, ending in her husband's death (11). The second and third marriages left the two peoples at peace though Galswinth's murder can scarcely have improved relations. The negotiations for peace between Franks and Visigoths, which included the negotiations over Chlodosind, were part of the aftermath of the fourth marriage, and of her sister Ingund's death in Byzantine custody. Guntram's desire to avenge his niece, which had prompted attacks on Spain, was one of the factors preventing these negotiations from reaching a conclusion. The last marriage, that of Ermenberga to Theuderic II, which ended in her repudiation, has been described as making matters still worse, and led to an attempt at an alliance of Neustria, Austrasia, Spain and Lombard Italy against Burgundy. This tale of repeated troubles has been accurately described as "wretched marriage alliances", (12) and certainly did not promote good relations between the countries. Similarly Charlemagne's repudiation of the daughter of the Lombard Desiderius can only have increased the tension between the two peoples. Outside Frankia altogether, Bede reports that Coenwalh of the West Saxons was driven out of his kingdom by Penda of Mercia as a result of his repudiation of the latter's sister (13). Marital alliance was by no means, therefore, a reliable guarantee of continued peace between peoples, infact it all too often had the opposite effect.

The argument that a foreign royal marriage was viewed as a gain in prestige for a king is a difficult one to prove. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill has explicitly stated that "the Merovingians saw no gain of prestige in their marriage alliances with the civilised byzantinizing Visigoths of Spain" (14), and certainly the examples of Galswinth and Ermenberga show that these kings had scant respect for their consorts' royal blood. In this/

case, Gregory's statement that Sigibert chose to send to Spain for a bride in preference to his brothers' unworthy wives, must be considered to relate only to family politics, to a desire to be different from his brothers, rather than to a desire to introduce a more distinguished bloodline to the Frankish royal house. Chilperic's marriage to Galswinth would therefore fall into the category of a simple case of 'anything you can do I can do too'. The Carolingians seem to have had much the same attitude to distinguished foreign marriages. Louis II, for example, having betrothed his daughter to the Byzantine emperor, only decided against the connection when a patricius of the emperor had already arrived to collect her. It is, perhaps, not surprising that this functionary left very angry! (15). There are, however, other non-Frankish examples where the argument may be put forward that a foreign marriage was pursued for reasons of prestige. P.D. King has described Leovigild's "recognition of the need ... to enhance the status of the (Visigothic) monarchy", a process which he sees behind court organisation, ceremonial and coinage (16). If this was the case, can it be purely coincidental that he attempted to marry both of his sons to Frankish princesses? It is also tempting to wonder if Aethelbert saw a gain in prestige in his marriage to the Merovingian Bertha. If, as has been suggested, the marriage implied a political dependence of Kent on Frankia (17), then prestige would seem to be his only gain, though another author has seen in the marriage, moral support for the Kentish push to the Humber (18). Such moral support might, however, be considered indistinguishable from a simple rise in prestige through the connection with the Franks.

The suggestion that repeated marriages show a desire to retain a link established by a previous marriage can be illustrated almost alone by the Frankish Visigoth marriages already referred to. At first glance it appears that the descendents of the Visigoth turned Frankish queen, Brunhild, attempted to retain links with Spain, first formed through her marriage, by marrying into these dynasties which succeeded that/

from which she originated. There are, however, certain points which tell against this view. First, it is not clear which side originated the marriage between Ingund and Hermenigild, though I have suggested above, that foreign marriages may have formed part of Leovigild's policy. Certainly the suggestion of a Spanish marriage for Brunhild's other daughter, Chlodosind, came from the Visigoths. While the marriage of Ermenberga and Theuderic originated in a Frankish initiative, it was the Visigothic Brunhild herself who is said to have destroyed the match, clearly having no fellow-feeling for her young compatriot (19). This apparent series of marriages may therefore be attributed only to propinquity, and perhaps to the example set by Sigibert, in opening marital links with Spain. The same may be said of the two Lombard marriages, that of Theudebert and Wisigard, and of his son Theudebald and Vultetrada (20), and the Frankish marriages of Aethelbert of Kent and his son Eadbald (21), though we have less information about them, in the last case even the woman's name being unrecorded by English sources.

The possible economic motive for foreign marriage can only be discussed in terms of the Frankish Visigothic links, because again, they are the cases where we have most information. The anxieties roused by Rigunth's dowry have already been mentioned and it is notable that the only detail Gregory gives of the negotiations preceding that betrothal, states that the ambassadors were concerned with financial arrangements (22). The importance of the dowry may also be suggested by the fact that Galswinth, in her appeals to be allowed to return home, strengthened her case by offering to leave behind all the treæures she had brought from Spain (23), while when Ermenberga was returned to her father, her dowry stayed in Theuderic's hands (24). Unfortunately, lack of information prevents any judgment being made on any other foreign marriages, though that of Charles the Bald's daughter, Judith, and the king of Wessex, Aethelwulf, was marked by an exchange of royal gear and gifts (25). It seems likely, however, that each bride would bring with her some collection of precious goods. It might even be wondered whether/

Chilperic's desire to emulate Sigibert was based on Brunhild's person or her possessions.

As far as the Carolingians were concerned, however, perhaps warned by Charlemagne's less than happy Lombard alliance, the disadvantages of foreign marriages appear to have outweighed their benefits. None of the great Carolingian monarchs took a foreign bride after that episode, nor was much opportunity given to other monarchs to create links with the Frankish empire. The abortive end to the proposed alliance between Louis II's daughter and a Byzantine prince has already been quoted, but even more interesting are the marital negotiations between Charlemagne and Offa. The former had desired Offa's daughter as a wife for his son, only to balk at the suggestion that his daughter, Bertha, should in return marry the heir of Wessex (25a). Charlemagne's refuals to accept this proposition may be explained on political grounds, by suggesting that he was reluctant to see his daughter become, in effect, a hostage in the hands of the Anglo-Saxons. Einhard, however, would have attributed it to Charlemagne's wish to keep his daughters always by his side because of his great love for them (25b). This view may gain some support from the fact that he could apparently contemplate with equanimity the possibility that they might marry after his death (25c), though the political wisdom of limiting the diffusion of the blood royal cannot be denied. In the context of Anglo-Saxon links, however, it may be worth noting here, though it will be discussed at more length later, that when the Carolingian princess, Judith, married a West Saxon monarch, her father felt it necessary to bolster her position with all the means available to him.

In Frankish terms, therefore, foreign marriages are almost entirely a Merovingian phenomenon. Outside Frankia they are relatively common, but in very few cases do they represent a lasting success at diplomatic level. They may, however, have played some part in elevating the prestige of a royal house and in transferring fairly large amounts of precious metals and/

stones from one royal treasury to another.

B. Internal Political Marriage

The most important use of a marriage alliance as a tool of internal politics occurs in those cases where a marriage forms part of the events deciding the succession. This is most marked in Paul the Deacon's account of Lombard history, where he states that after the death of her husband, Authari, Queen Theudelinda was allowed by the Lombards to choose a man who would be at once her new husband and the new king (26). According to Fredegar the same thing occurred on the death of King Arioald, when his widow, and Theudelinda's daughter, Gundeberga, beguiled the Lombards into giving the throne to Rothari (27). Both these attempts at controlling the succession appear to have been successful, unlike that of Rosamund, who, having had her husband, Alboin, murdered, married his murderer, Helmechis, who attempted to take the crown (28). In this case they failed and were driven out by the Lombards, perhaps because unlike Theudelinda who was descended from a previous Lombard king (29), Rosamund had no Lombard blood. Grierson, however, considers that the position enjoyed by Theudelinda and Gundeberga owes more to their "character and ability" than to any claim of blood (30). The practice of marrying one's predecessor's widow was not confined to the Lombards. Leovigild married Athanagild's widow, Goiswinth (31), while a later Visigoth king, Erwig, evidently feared attempts to take the crown in such a fashion, for he encouraged the thirteenth Council of Toledo to pass the strongest anathemas on any man who married or associated with Queen Liuvigoto (32). The Anglo-Saxons also occasionally indulged in the practice, the examples of Eadbald of Kent (33) and Aethelbald of Wessex (34) being complicated by the fact that their predecessor's widow was also their stepmother. In its purer form this type of marriage appears again much later when Cnut marries Aethelbald's widow, Emma (35). On other occasions, a newly elevated king would marry some female member of a previous dynasty, as the Ostrogoth Witigis, who married Matasuntha, a granddaughter of Theoderic the Great (36).

Such marriages can be seen simply as in some way 'legitimising' a doubtful claim to the throne, in fact of being almost its only support. It is, however, highly questionable whether the position was ever that simple. Grierson, while not denying a dynastic element in Witigis' marriage, suggests that it may also have served to gratify his pride, presumably by linking him with his race's greatest monarch (37). Schneider also points out that in the case of Agilulf's succession, rather more factors were involved than a simple choice by Theudelinda. He was, in fact, a relative of Authari and a powerful and successful warrior, thus fulfilling the Idoneitatsvorstellungen for the kingship (38). Furthermore, there may well have been a purely practical element in such marriages also. A widowed queen could be seen as 'a repository of royal powers ... a vehicle on which claims to the royal succession could be carried to a second husband' (39), but she could also serve, more frankly, as "an agglutinate or cohesive force" (40) holding together a group of her late husband's fideles, in order to place them at the service of any aspirant to the throne who cared to pay the price of marriage. Such a woman could be an asset no matter what her dynastic background.

Another presupposition for the success of such claims seems to have been the existence of a strong elective element in the normal arrangements for the succession. Grierson, indeed, explicity states that Authari owed his power to the "election of the Lombards" and that his marriage to the Lething Theudelinda played little or no part in it (41). The Franks, however, behaved quite differently. It has been stated that "in no family was hereditary descent more strictly observed and buttressed than in the Merovingian" (42), and it is notable that, though a few attempts at improving claims through marriage can be detected, they meet with a much more limited success than elsewhere. Chlotar I is the most marked exponent of this policy, exercising it first in his marriage to Guntheuc, widow of his brother Chlodomer (43), apparently as part of an attempt to take over the dead king's territory. In this he was only partially/

successful, later being forced to divide the land with another brother, Childebert (44). Later, on the death of his nephew, Theudebald, he again took over both wife and kingdom, and this time succeeded in keeping the latter, though his bishops compelled him to put away the woman, Vultetrada (45). Schneider sees the same policy operating in his marriage to Radegund, believing that Chlothar desired to establish as many claims as possible to Thuringia (46), and states that over all, marriage formed a very important part of the succession (47). Nevertheless, none of these have the simplicity of the linked marriage and successions practised elsewhere. Other Frankish examples are even less successful. During the reign of Chlothar II, it was suggested to his wife, Bertetrudis, that she should gather her treasure in preparation for her husband's expected death, at which time the patrician Alethius would marry her and become king as he could claim royal Burgundian descent. In a manner slightly uncharacteristic of other Merovingian queens she wept and retired to her room. The patrician was executed (48), but it is evident that he, like Chlotar I, was intent on acquiring as many claims to the throne as possible. Other earlier plots centre around Brunhild. Shortly after her husband's death, his nephew, Merovech, married her, but this attempt at gaining power was rapidly cut short by his father, Chilperic, and the couple were separated (49). Although there is no further actual marriage in her life, Guntram accuses her of plotting to marry either the pretender, Gundovald (50) or one of his sons (51), while the writer of the Liber Historiae Francorum rather improbably suggests that she might have married Chlothar II (52). In general, therefore, among the Franks, marriage to a former queen constituted only one of several possible claims to succession, and could be rendered completely useless if another powerful claimant, such as a brother or father, was in a position to dispute it. Under the Carolingians, where hereditary succession is even more strictly organised, it disappears completely.

One final link between marriage and succession occurs in the rare case of succession passing from father-in-law to son-in-law, the latter having apparently been specifically chosen for the purpose. This was the case when Theoderic found Eutharic, a representative of another branch of the dynasty, and married him to his daughter, Amalasuntha, though his succession was prevented by an untimely death (53). It may also have been behind the Visigoth Egica's succession to his father-in-law, Erwig, though here, as Erwig had sons of his own, it is hard to tell whether Egica was chosen as son-in-law and successor or whether he forced his succession from his position as son-in-law.

Marriage could also be used, perhaps less obviously, in internal politics to create alliances between the royal house and its magnate supporters. One sign of this is the manner in which the woman involved becomes less and less important to the writer reporting on her marriage, while her relatives move forward into the limelight. The end of the process is reached, for example, in the chronicle reports of the marriage of Pippin I of Aquitaine. Here his new wife is identified only as the daughter of Count Theotbert of Madrie (54), and it is necessary to consult charters in order to discover her name, Ingeltrude (55). In some cases more than one king marries into the same noble family in order to secure its support. Thus both Lothar II and the Charles the Bald married members of the family represented by Theutberga, Hubert, Richildis and Boso, both at a time when they were anxious to establish their position in the territory later known as Lorraine. The exact significance of a particular marriage appears open to almost endless debate. In the case, for example, of Charlemagne's wife, Hildegard, the most detailed account of her origins comes from her son's biographer, Thegan, who concentrates almost exclusively on her maternal ancestry, which he traces back to the Swabian ducal house (56). This has been seen as an attempt to remove the last memories of an earlier Carolingian slaughter of the Swabian nobility (57), but leaves open the/

question of her paternal descent. Bullough believes that the senior Gerold had already started the rise of his family by his Swabian marriage (58), while Leyser prefers to give most of the credit to Hildegard's 'much greater' marriage (59). It is, in fact, a classic and almost unanswerable chicken and egg question. Did kings marry women from powerful families or did families become powerful because their women married kings? Perhaps the best conclusion would be to suggest that a family whose power in a particular locality was considerable enough to make a match with them valuable to the royal house in a specific set of circumstances, as, for example, the acquisition of a new piece of territory, might, through their new connections, acquire equal or greater power in another area of the empire, with which they had no personal links, as Gerold became virtual ruler of Bavaria. In this case it may be seen as a question of exchanging a semi-independent power base for the power delegated by the king or emperor to his presumably loyal servants.

Whatever the original status, however, there was no real guarantee that a royal connection would actually bind a noble family to the interests of their relations by marriage. Hildegard's family has been described as forming Charlemagne's strongest support in the area that had once belonged to his brother, Carloman, and it is suggested that his takeover of this realm may have prompted the marriage (60). Her brother Gerold's death is recorded in the chronicles for 799 (61), but interestingly he is mentioned only as an individual,no reference being made to his distinguished relations, perhaps because Hildegard had predeceased him. Other families, however, appear to have lacked the Geroldings' outstanding devotion to their in-laws. Boso, for example, brother-in-law to Charles the Bald, repaid the preferment given to him as a result of his sister Richildis' marriage by aiming even higher, and becoming the first breakaway non-Carolingian king within the Frankish empire. By this time, of course, he had added to his position of brother-in-law of one one-time emperor, that of son-in-law of another, by marrying Louis II's daughter, Ermengard, whom the annals of St.Bertin/

make at least partly responsible for his overweening ambition (52). Even more interesting, however, is the position of the Welf Conrad, who appears to emerge in 862 as one of the counsellors of Lothar II during that prince's marital problems (63). He could, however, have taken any side in this dispute -- he was the uncle of Charles the Bald through his sister, Judith ; the brother-in-law of Louis the German through his sister, Emma, and the uncle of Lothar II, having, like Lothar I, married a daughter of Hugh the Timid. It may be curious that he chose to support the son of the man who had been Judith's worst enemy, but the point is that here marriage alliances clearly worked to the benefit of the noble family, allowing them an entry to every camp, while the royal house received only a fragmentary and questionnable support.

On occasion marriage alliances appear to arise out of internal politics on the smallest possible scale, within the family itself. Twice, once among the Merovingians, once among the Carolingians, there is an instance of a man marrying his stepmother's sister, namely Dagobert I marrying Gomatrudis, sister of Sichildis (64), and Louis the German marrying Emma, sister of the empress Judith (65). In both cases the women are identified by reference to their sister, indeed in Emma's case only by that and not by name, so that it is quite clear that, at this point, the queen and the empress were considered the most important members of their family. This marriage within the family also raises the point of how often the choice of a future king's wife, and therefore possible queen, is made by his father, during the latter's lifetime. In these two cases it merely appears likely that the decision was made by the father, but in many others it is quite explicit. Even under the Merovingians there are signs of this practice being followed. Theuderic, for example, betrothed his son, Theudebert, to Wisigard, daughter of the Lombard king, Wacho (66). Similarly Louis the Pious is credited with having arranged the marriage of his son, Pippin I of Aquitaine, to Ingeltrude (67). On the other hand, should a son choose to marry without his father's/

permission, the repercussions could be considerable. When Charles the Bald's son and namesake married the, again unnamed, widow of Count Humbert of Bourges (68), the resulting conflict not only involved the immediate family, but even brought in the Pope, Nicholas I, who seems to have been on the side of the young couple (69). The use of daughters as marital pawns in a political game is perhaps not suprising ; at one point in the negotiations over Rigunth, Chilperic was perfectly prepared to send another daughter instead (70), but it becomes evident, particularly under the Carolingians, that sons were also expected to marry to oblige their fathers. That this was not always to their taste is evident, not only from acts of defiance such as that of young Charles, but also from such things as the seven year delay between Theudebert's betrothal to Wisigard and the actual marriage (71), and Dagobert's later repudiation of Gomatrudis (72).

The idea that marriage into the nobility formed a useful political expedient can also be reversed, with the suggestion that it might be found useful to remain independent of such connections. Thus, it would be possible to deny a noble family the opportunity to use their links to a king's wife in order to secure their own rise through her influence, as may sometimes have been the case among the Carolingian nobility. It is tempting, for example, to wonder if Boso's meteoric rise, which even before Charles the Bald's death, had elevated him to ruler of Italy with ducal rank (73), was due more to ability or importunity. Should such a policy of avoidance of noble marriages actually be pursued, it might well be indicated by those marriages with servants, to which the Merovingians seem to have been so prone. Examples are the sisters Ingund and Arnegund who lived on one of the royal villas and were married by Chlothar I (74) ; Charibert's wives, Marcovefa and Merofled, daughter of a wool-worker, and Theudechild, daughter of a shepherd (75), and, of course, Fredegund, wife of Chilperic, described by the Liber Historiae Francorum as originating ex familia infamia (76). None of these women were likely to/

have relatives capable of creating trouble for the king on their own account, or of supporting anyone else against him. J.L. Nelson sees this as part of a policy of marrying women who were wholly dependent upon their husbands for their position, and further connects this with contemporary royal marriages, believing that a princess who had left her home for her husband's realm might be as deprived of the possibility of family support as any former serving maid (77). The dependence of the servant queen was certainly a fact, but the position of a foreign princess may not have been quite so clear-cut. Gregory unambiguously connects the Frankish attack on the Visigoth kingdom which ended in the death of Amalaric with Childebert's desire to rescue his sister, Clotild, from Arian persecution (78), and also records that the Frankish kings compelled the Ostrogoth, Theodahad, to pay compensation for the death of their cousin, Amalasuntha, threatening him with invasion (79). Similarly, attempts were made by Guntram to avenge Ingund's death, and Brunhild first attempted to get the Franks to help Ingund, though without success (80), and later communicated with the imperial family in Constantinople concerning the fate of her grandson (81). The Franks, having thus shown themselves ready to involve themselves in the fate of their princesses even after a foreign marriage, had surely no right to expect that other peoples would not do the same. In point of fact, in the aftermath of Ermenberga's rejection, Witteric attempted to form an alliance with Neustria, Austrasia and the Lombards to attack Burgundy but failed (82). Nevertheless it can be shown that it was possible for a foreign bride to find support in her troubles from her family, and that her total dependence on her husband could not be completely relied on.

Other than among the Carolingians, marriages with the nobility are not easy to find, partly owing to lack of information. Thus, with the exceptions already mentioned, we know nothing of the origin of the later Visigothic queens, though Theudis is known to have married a very wealthy Hispano-Roman lady (83). Among the Anglo-Saxons, Alfred's mother, Osburh, seems to have/

been descended from a noble family, while her father served as pincerna to Aethelwulf (84). Later, Edgar married the daughter of an ealdorman (85), and Edward the Confessor married the daughter of Earl Godwin (86), though this may have been forced on him. The Lombard Count of Capua, Transamund, slightly reversed the process by receiving King Grimuald's daughter, plus the Duchy of Spoleto, not as an encouragement for services in the future but in reward for those in the past, when he had helped the king to the throne (87). There is also in Lombard history a possible example of something approaching marriage to a slave, that of Alboin with Rosamund, though she was in fact a prisoner of war (88). Her premarital status was nevertheless negligible.

As already noted, the Merovingians seem, in most cases, to have practised either foreign or slave marriage, and where there is a suggestion that a bride came from a higher level of native Frankish society, there is little evidence of this having been of any benefit to either the royal family or the bride's family. The family of Magnachar, for example, father of Marcatrude, one of Guntram's wives (89), actually suffered as a result of this connection. Magnachar was of sufficient rank to employ servants, one of whom, Austrechild, actually replaced Marcatrude (90), and his sons were later killed for abusing her and her children (91).

Marriages made within the kingdom, like those with foreign royalty, can be shown to have some form of political motive, whatever the status of the woman involved, though marriages with slave women appear to have been almost exclusive to the Merovingian Franks. Like foreign marriages, however, internal alliances were not always entirely successful in bringing support to the royal house.

C. Personal Reasons for Marriage

Foreign marriages, where the couple's first meeting occurred only when the arrangements for the wedding had been completed, can probably be assumed to have been without any personal element despite such romantic stories as that related by Paul the Deacon of Authari's journey, disguised as an ambassador, to see for himself the beauty of Theudelinda (92). There is a possible exception in the marriage of Aethelwulf and Judith, since the betrothal and marriage both took place while the West-Saxon king was at the court of Charles the Bald on his return from pilgrimage to Rome (93). Here, therefore, he must at least have met her before their wedding.

In those cases where a king married a woman from within his own kingdom, however, the chance that he did so for purely personal reasons is obviously much higher. This must be particularly so in the case of slave marriages where it might even be considered to form a perhaps simpler alternative to the political motive outlined above. For example, Gregory attributes Chlothar I's decision to marry Arnegund simply to amore (94). Even in alliances with the nobility, however, the personal element need not be entirely lacking. Louis the Pious, for instance, was said by one of his biographers to have been encouraged to marry a second time for fear that he would give up the kingdom otherwise. Nevertheless, as, according to the same biographer, he inspected eleven young noblewomen before choosing (95), it is evident that she must have had something the others lacked. Unfortunately the problem with this kind of argument is that the kind of personal attractions likely to lead to marriage are exactly those least likely to survive in the chronicles, though an early twentieth century writer did detect in Fredegund 'a fiend incarnate, but incomparable in her powers of fascination' (96). Personal reasons for marriage, however, were not necessarily limited to simple emotional attraction. One of the most enticing is that put forward by S. Konecny for Charlemagne's last marriage, when she suggests that Liutgard achieved her transformation from/

concubine to queen because of Charlemagne's desire to appear respectable when visited by the Pope in 799 (97).

So far, with the somewhat specialised exceptions of Theudelinda and Gundeberga, it has been assumed that, whatever the type of marriage or the reason behind it, the initiative was always male. This may not always have been the case. Indeed the very foundation of the Merovingian house is attributed to the decision of Basina, queen of the Thuringians, to leave her husband and follow the Frankish king, Childeric,because she knew him to be utilis (98). She thus became the mother of Clovis. Other cases are less clear-cut. The Liber Historiae Francorum's version of the events leading up to Clovis' own marriage with Chrotechildis suggests that his envoy asked for her decision before they approached her uncle (99), though this is probably a distinctly romaticised version of events. Among the Carolingians, Charles Martel's daughter, Chiltrudis, decided to marry Odilo of Bavaria without her brother's permission (100), becoming a scandalous example which, two generations later, could be quoted as a reason for Louis the Pious' decision to place his sisters in convents (101). Similarly scandalous were the actions of Charles the Bald's daughter, Judith, whose willingness to leave the convent where her father had placed her and marry Count Baldwin of Flanders, without Charles' permission, was recognised by no less an authority than the Pope (102). Finally, it might be asked whether the initiative for Brunhild's marriage to Merovech came from the young man or from the manipulative woman who had, after all, seen her mother, Goiswinth, marry her first husband's successor. All women were therefore not pieces in the political games played by their male relations, ---- they could play themselves.

Overall, therefore, most if not all marriages of this period can be said to have taken place for one political reason or another. The personal element cannot be ruled out of some of them, but remains quite unprovable. The political reasons behind marriage appear to have been constant from country to/

country, with the possible exception of marriage to slaves or servants, in order to avoid the risk posed to royal power by over-mighty relatives. This seems to be limited to Merovingian Franks and is, curiously enough, the only political motive for marriage that can claim a high rate of success. Other motives, whether of external diplomacy or desire for internal support, can show a quota of failure higher in the former case than in the latter. The one reason for choice of bride that never expressly appears is the idea that the woman in question was in some way particularly suited for the rank of queen. On one occasion when the suggestion that some women are more worthy of this status than others does appear, at the time of Sigibert's marriage to Brunhild, the choice nevertheless appears to owe more to an attempt at fraternal oneupmanship than to a conscious search for a 'good queen'. It is likely, however, that any attempt to prejudge the quality of a woman chosen to be queen on the basis of her pre-marital status would have failed, since the period's pair of most notable royal saints, Radegund and Balthild, as well as its most maligned sinners, Brunhild and Fredegund, in each case contained one royal princess and one slave. Rank was certainly no guarantee of success or even of good treatment by the husband, as in Galswinth's case. Similarly a noble background may have been of questionable value once the marriage was established. Theutberga's powerful relations, for example, who had probably been a factor in Lothar II's original decision to marry her, were unable apparently to prevent his attempts to divorce her, her protection being left to his rivals and to the Church. A successful queen, therefore, was one who whatever her origin, satisfactorily fulfilled the role expected of her after marriage, in which case her family background became unimportant.

NOTES : CHAPTER THREE

(1) HF 431

(2) HF 160

(3) HF 318

(4) LHF 254

(5) Jordanes 134-5

(6) HF 430-1

(7) HF 444

(8) HF 287, 304

(9) HF 97-8

(10) AF 348

(11) HF 107

(12) James 1980 122 (J. Fontaine, King Sisebut's Vita Desiderii and the Political Function of Visigothic Hagiogrphy).

(13) Bede 232-4

(14) Wallace-Hadrill 1962 203

(15) AB 164-5

(16) King 12-3

(17) Wallace-Hadrill 1971 25

(18) Lohaus 9

(19) Fred. IV 20

(20) HF 124, 140

(21) Stenton 1947 61

(22) HF 287

(23) HF 161

(24) Fred. IV 20

(25) AB 73

(25a) Stenton 220

(25b) Einhard 25

(25c) Capit.1 129

(26) PD 113-4

(27) Fred. IV 59

(28) PD 88-9

(29) Foulke 140

(30) Grierson 20

(31) HF 170

(32) Conc. Tol XIII 1067

(33) Bede 150

(34) AB 76

(35) EHD 251

(36) Jordanes 137-8

(37) Grierson 10

(38) Schneider 30

(39) Nelson 1978 37

(40) J. Orlandis, La Reina en la Monarquia Visigoda, Anuario de Historia del Derecho Espanol, Madrid, 1957, 1-29. (partial translation by P. Odber) 14.

(41) Grierson 19

(42) Wallace-Hadrill 1971 45

(43) HF 102

(44) HF 119

(45) HF 203

(46) Schneider 76

(47) Schneider 84

(48) Fred. IV 36-7

(49) HF 195-6

(50) HF 447

(51) HF 451

(52) LHF 310

(53) Jordanes 134-5

(54) ARF 159

(55) Char. Pip. I/Aqu 106-7

(56) Thegan 590

(57) Leyser 1968 35

(58) Bullough 1970 79

(59) Leyser 1970 129

(60) Mitterauer 10

(61) ARF 108, AF 352

(62) AB 239

(63) AB 95

(64) Fred. IV 44

(65) AX 225
(66) HF 121
(67) ARF 159
(68) AB 90-1
(69) Epp. Nic. I 275
(70) HF 305
(71) HF 124
(72) Fred. IV 49
(73) AB 200
(74) HF 136-7
(75) HF 158
(76) LHF 292
(77) Nelson 1978 35
(78) HF 107
(79) HF 121
(80) HF 387
(81) EPP Aust. 150
(82) Fred. IV 20-1
(83) Thompson 1969 10
(84) Asser 4
(85) EHD 227
(86) ASC 165
(87) PD 151
(88) PD 69
(89) HF 156
(90) HF 228
(91) HF 215
(92) PD 109
(93) AB 73
(94) HF 136
(95) Ast. 624
(96) Foulke 104
(97) Konecny 1976 69-70
(98) HF 62
(99) LHF 254-7
(100) Fred. IV 98
(101) Ast. 618
(102) EPP Nic. I 273-5

4. The Queen as Consort

It seems possible that the idea that behind every great man there's a woman, could have represented just as much of a cliché in the early middle ages as at any other period of history. The difficulty lies in discovering what means were available to the average woman, or in this case, queen, to make her background presence felt, and in what areas she was particularly successful.

A. Court

In his treatise De Ordine Palatii Archbishop Hincmar of Reims deals with what he sees as the proper organisation of the duties of everyone involved in the running of the royal palace, from the king himself down to the men who had the responsibility for arranging the royal hunts. The queen makes three appearances in this catalogue. In the first two she is merely an associate of the king, firstly in chapter 13, at the head of the hierarchy of palace officials (1) and secondly, in chapter 19, in much the same context, as one of those entitled to give orders to the very highest among these (2). The third reference, however, deals with the queen's duties as an individual and may be quoted at length.

"De honestate vero palatii seu specialiter ornamento regali necnon et de donis annuis militum, absque cibo et potu vel equis, ad reginam praecipae et sub ipsa ad camerarium pertinebat : et secundum cuiusque rei qualitatem ipsorum sollicitudo erat, ut tempore congruo semper futura prospicerent, ne quid, dum opus esset, ullatenus opportuno tempore defuisset. De donis vero diversarum legationum ad camerarium aspiciebat, nisi forte iubente rege tale aliquid esset, quod reginae ad tractandum cum ipso congrueret". (3)

In Hincmar's view, therefore, the queen had particular responsibility for what might be described as the economic side of the palace, aided by the chamberlain whom he had already/

described as belonging to what might be termed the second rank of palace officers, just below the chaplain and chancellor (4). This pair are together concerned with the supplies coming into the court and with their distribution in the form of gifts, both to royal servants and to visitors, the queen presumably dealing with those foreigners of higher rank or more useful origin. Thus the king, untroubled by "omni sollicitudine domestica vel palatina" could give his mind to the running of the country. The problem with this is that it is all purely theoretical, designed as an ideal to which palace organisation should aspire, a fact most clearly indicated by the stress given to everyone's religious duties. There is, therefore, no guarantee that historical queens actually conformed to the model, although there are some indications that a number of them did.

The same charge, of being theory rather than fact, may be laid at the door of another earlier piece of evidence as to the queen's role at court, that of the Vita Balthildis, which may again be quoted, "ipsa, conlatam sibi a Deo prudentiae gratiam, vigilanti studio et regi obtemperabat ut domino et principibus se ostendebat ut mater, sacerdotibus ut filia, iuvenibus seu adolescentibus ut optima nutrix, eratque amabilis omnibus, diligens valde sacerdotes ut patres, monachos ut fratres, pauperes ut pia nutrix, largasque elemosinas distribuens singulis, principum honorem conservans consiliaque eorum congrua retinens, iuvenes ad religiosa studia semper, exortans, regi humiliter et assidue pro aecclesiis et pauperibus suggerens" (5).

The principal problem with this is that it is a picture of a queen so ideal as to be actually saintly, a point made here by the insistence on her excellent relationship with the religious hierarchy. Her sanctity, however, has been said to rest on "her public character" (6), so that this list of virtues may also be thought to represent her carrying out of the duties assigned to her. There is a possible area of common ground with the queen as seen by Hincmar in the large alms/

which Balthild is said to have given, their source perhaps lying in the royal goods with which the later queen was supposed to concern herself. Similary, and again perhaps more as a model than as historical reality, the author of Beowulf shows Wealhtheow, Hrothgar's queen, offering drink to the members of his court (6A) and gifts to the victorious hero (6b).

The economic aspect of a queen's life appears again in a final, perhaps less theoretical, piece of evidence for the queen's proper role, in Charlemagne's Capitulare de Villis:- "Volumus ut quicquid nos aut reginae unicuique iudici ordinaverimus aut ministeriale nostri, senescalcus et butticularius de verbo nostro aut reginae ipsis iudicibus ordinaverit, ad eundem placitum sicut eis institum fuerit impletum habeant".

Further, those who have neglected their duty must seek forgiveness in "praesentia nostra aut reginae" or could receive a sentence from the same double source (7), while those travelling to or returning from the palace must have permission "iussio nostra aut reginae" (8). The queen could also give orders for the support of royal hunters or iudices from the produce of royal villas as they went about their duties (9). Although here the queen is always associated with the act of giving her orders, she is again apparently charged with a particular responsibility for the household, whose officers take their orders from her. The particular value of this evidence is that it does not represent a theory propounded by an observer of the queen's place within the palace, but an order which Charlemagne presumably intended to have obeyed, thus stating his view of the position his wife ought to occupy.

Overall therefore, theoretically and possibly in practice, the queen functioned as the head of the household side of the kingdom. The palace is in her particular care with all that that implies of access to treasure, of contact with royal servants, and possibly with the training and education of/

the younger members of the household, --- Balthild was "iuvenes seu adolescentibus optima nutrix". How far can the recorded careers of the queens of the time be fitted into this model?

There is very little evidence for the queen as the centre of the young men trained at the palace other than her own sons or stepsons, but it might well be suggested that the group of supporters which, as suggested previously, a widowed queen might bring to a second husband, could well have been formed of men who had been loyal to her from their formative years. As for her role as governor of the household, again evidence is sparse, but what there is can be shown to meet exactly some of the requirements outlined above. Charlemagne had involved his wife in the movements of court officials, and Einhard, writing in 830, is quick to explain to the empress Judith, that illness has prevented him travelling and to seek her permission to return home by another route (10). Even in a letter to Louis the Pious of about the same date, it is the orders of domina mea that Einhard quotes, and the emperor seems to be only indirectly concerned in the matter (11). Also concerning Judith, there is one piece of what might be called negative proof. Agobard of Lyons, writing in support of Louis the Pious' rebellious sons, asks rhetorically with regard to Judith, "si qua regina semet ipsam non novit, quomodo de onestate palacii curam habebit?" (12). If she could be seen as failing in this respect, then presumably comparisons were being made with other queens who had been more successful at this task. Similarly, for the supposed alliance between the queen and the chamberlain to ensure the smooth running of the palace, one piece of evidence shows the relationship broken down, when Queen Richildis has the chamberlain Engilramn dismissed (13). It is perhaps possible to argue that in other cases where the narrative sources are silent, it is because the arrangement was working well, and it is the very failure of Richildis and Engilramn to work peaceably together as others had done which makes it worth recording. Indeed it may be suggested for all this area that it is the queens'/

success in dealing with the household, whether considered from a purely domestic point of view or as a nursery for the next generation of officials, that keeps her role out of the records, and that a breakdown of good order, such as that which Agobard attributes to Judith, would rapidly have attracted the attention of annalists.

The idea that the queen was responsible for gifts to the 'soldiers' ---- perhaps the royal guard ---- outside their usual supplies of food, drink and a horse, and for gifts to ambassadors, strongly suggests that she had access to the royal treasury, and here, unlike other cases, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that this was the case. Even the first phrase of Hincmar's chapter, which makes her above all concerned with the ornamento regali, can find a parallel in actual events. After the death of Charles the Bald, Richildis at first opposed the accession of her stepson, Louis the Stammerer. Negotiations between them having been successful, however, she joined him at Compiegne, bringing with her the sword of St. Peter, the royal robes, the crown and the sceptre (14). Here, therefore, the queen has charge of the most vital elements of the royal regalia, but the connection between the queen and a more generalised royal treasure can be shown to exist in a considerable number of cases, Richildis herself had already been noted travelling through Italy in company with a vast collection of valuables (15). Earlier, in the Merovingian period, Fredegund denied having used the resources of the public treasury in order to dower her daughter, Rigunth, which leads to the assumption that the possibility of her having done so did exist (16). Similarly the treasure which queens such as Theudechild (17) or Bertetrudis (18) might bring to a new husband, could probably be assumed to have originated, at least in part, in the treasures of their first husband. Even women who were not strictly queens could find themselves in control of, or at least with access to, royal or quasi-royal resources. Thus Plectrude, widow of Mayor Pippin of Herstal, like Richildis, withheld her husband's/

treasure from her stepson, Charles Martel, until forced to give it up (19), while Fredegar earlier considered it quite possible that Chrotechildis should have been able to leave Clovis' ring in thesaurum avuncoli sui, Gundobad, King of Burgundy (20). Hincmar's implication that the queen was considerably involved in the control of royal finances can therefore be shown to be backed by what might be described as a firm tradition linking the queen with her husband's treasure.

Aside from involvement in her husband's court there is a little evidence which suggests that queens had their own staff. Thus there are references to such characters as Queen Ultrogotha's Referendary (21) or Rigunth's major domo (22) while Einhard later writes to the Capellano Domne Imperatricis (Judith) (23). It is tempting to see this as typical and assume perhaps that each queen ruled her own household as well as being concerned in that of her husband. If this was the case their own staff may have been intended to deal with the lands and property which a queen might possess, either by inheritance or by gift from their husbands. One of the best recorded morgengaben was that given to Galswinth by Chilperic and later passed on to Brunhild, and which consisted of the cities of Bordeaux, Limoges, Cahors, Lescar and Cieutat (24). To take another example, Louis the German gives Charles the Fat certain properties specifically dotare uxorem (25) ,the future Empress Richardis, while her later foundation at Andlau was said to be in proprietate sua paterna (26). Obviously such personal wealth might also form a part of those queens' treasures discussed above.

So far all the evidence quoted has been Frankish, but it is possible to find some parallels among the other Germanic kingdoms. Theories on queenly duties, such as those of Hincmar, do not seem to have existed, but the fact that after having connived at the murder of her husband, Alboin, Rosamund was able to take his treasure with her on her flight to the Byzantine forces leaving the Lombards, according to John of/

Biclarum sine rege et thesauro (27) does suggest that the link between the queen and the treasury and, therefore, possibly the household is valid for this people also. Mention is also made of the murder of a man who functioned as the gasindus of Queen Ansa, wife of Desiderius (28). Similarly, though at a later date, The Anglo-Saxon queen, Emma, is deprived of all of Cnut's best valuables after his death (29), while a reference to Aethelthryth's chief thegn and stewards of her household (30) may reflect the same kind of double arrangement as was suggested above. For the Visigoths the evidence is even less, though the existence of officers such as the comites cubiculariorum (31) may suggest that the palace was organised on lines that left little opportunity for the queen to perform any vital function. A letter of consolation to King Gundemar on the death of his wife, Hildoara, however, describes her in terms- noxiorum remedium, pauperum gubernatricem et catholicae fidei prompta devotione cultricem, generositate praeclaram (32), which suggest that she may well have been a queen along the lines envisaged by Balthild's hagiographer if not along those desired by Archbishop Hincmar.

What might be described as the approved pattern of a queen's life, then, saw her as the head of her household, presumably like any other woman of the period. The fact that there is so little reference to her position in the Annals and Histories probably reflects the fact that this was regarded as a woman's normal place and that most women filled it at least adequately. There is, for example, no trace of any feeling that those women whom the Merovingians raised from slavery to the throne had any more problems in running the household than royal brides had, indeed Balthild herself was a slave of Anglo-Saxon origin. The fact, however, that as well as being a household in the normal sense of a family home under a woman's control, the royal household was also a centre of power for the kingdom, gave queens a position of influence which was either ignored or not envisaged by men such as Hincmar and Charlemagne who laid down its rules. In particular, the opportunity of controlling/

the royal treasury was one which could be exploited by a queen in a way that might not be entirely to the service of the royal house. Thus both Richildis and Emma, at different times and in different contexts, seem to have attempted to keep their husbands' treasure from his successor, while Theudechild and Rosamund were both prepared to hand over what treasure they had amassed to another kingdom and, in the latter case, even to another people. On the whole, particularly if it is assumed that Charlemagne's capitulary represented merely an organised form of something which was already in existence, many if not most queens seem to have been content to limit themselves to the management of the household in its simpler form, and the apparently smooth organisation of the peripatetic court is a tribute to their otherwise unsung efficiency.

B. Religion

Outside their duties and responsibilities in the organisation of the palace, the main preoccupation of many queens of this period seems to have been the part religion played in their lives, and that they played in the wider religious life of their people. This religious activity took many forms. The most extreme was that practised by Radegund who left her husband, Chlotar I, and entered the religious life at a convent of her own foundation in Poitiers, thus setting herself on the road to eventual canonisation (33). Less dramatically perhaps, Chrotechildis, who waited until she was widowed before withdrawing to Tours to live the religious life, proved capable of averting war between her sons by the power of prayer alone (34), and was also to be canonised. Balthild, who completes the trio of Merovingian saintly queens, is a more difficult case as her religious withdrawal may have been forced upon her and will be discussed below.

Perhaps the best evidence of religious devotion available/

was the building of new churches. Radegund's foundation of Holy Cross at Poitiers has already been mentioned, while Balthild built Chelles, and Chrotechildis, if not herself an independent builder, encouraged her husband, Clovis to build the church in Paris where they were both buried and which later came to be known as St. Genevieve (35). Bertrada shared with Pippin in the foundation of Prüm (36), and later Richardis founded a convent at Andlau (37), to which she would later retire. Outside Frankia, Theudelinda built a Church of St. John the Baptist at Monza (38) and her daughter, Gundeberga, built another with the same dedication at Pavia (39). Once built, churches had to be endowed and queens again played their part. Their involvement might take the form of making a grand of land to the church themselves,as, for example, Louis the Pious' first wife, Ermengard, did for Aniane (40), or that of encouraging their husbands to make grants to the church as in the case of Ermentrude, who was behind Charles the Bald's grant to the monastery of St. Urban in 862 (41). They might also give gifts to the church on a smaller scale. Alcuin's letters twice show him following up gifts made by Liutgard, first of gold armills to the church of Aquileia (42), and second, of a silver salver and an incense burner to Milan (43), reminding the recipients to include her in their prayers. Similarly Judith gave a golden chalice to Le Mans (44), and the Empress Ermengard a silken stole to St. Peter (45).

Queens concerned themselves not only with the property of the church but also with its personnel. The grant to St. Urban quoted above came about as the result of a joint request of the queen and Bishop Erchenraus of Chalons, and there are other examples of the same thing. The same bishop sought her help in 856 and 859 when requesting from Charles, the restoration of property to his own church, and in 864 when seeking the establishment of a mint (46) ; she joined with the monks of St. Germaine Auxerre in seeking a grant from her husband, as well as confirmation of other grants (47). Similarly, Adelaide/

and Abbot Gauzlin together urged Louis the Stammerer to confirm Charles the Bald's grants to Paris (48), and Abbess Bassilla is supported by the Empress Ermengard in her attempt to gain from Lothar I immunity for St. Stephens Strasbourg (49). On a less official level Charlemagne's queen, Hildegard, is represented as one of the closest friends of Boniface's ally, St. Leoba, and as desiring to keep her at court (50). In the Merovingian period Gregory of Tours is invited by Queen Ingoberg to help her make her will (51), while Chrotechildis is shown not only as a friend of the bishops of Tours but also as the force behind their appointment (52). Given the vital role that religious figures could play throughout this period, queens were probably wise to befriend them, though it may also be possible to suggest that the reverse was equally true.

Other pieces of evidence show queens taking part in various church ceremonies and possibly showing an interest in extending their religious understanding. Fredegar represents Gundeberga as celebrating her release from captivity by going on pilgrimage (53), while the Visigothic queen, Baddo, wife of Reccared, signs the declaration of newly accepted Catholic faith which opens the third Council of Toledo (54), thus becoming the only queen to play any part in these councils other than that of prospective victim of forced remarriage or cloistering. The Empress Judith plays a role in the conversion of the Danish leader, Heriold, when she becomes his wife's godmother (55), and in the history of Deacon Bodo, who first asks permission of her and Louis to go on pilgrimage to Rome, and then distresses them both by converting to Judaism (56). Perhaps the most interesting link between the queen and royal religious ceremonial, however, occurs in the case of Fastrada to whom Charlemagne wrote in 791, describing in some detail the three days of fasts and services that had been undertaken by the army, and directing her to have the same carried out at court (57). In the matter of religious learning, one of Alcuin's letters to Charlemagne is partly devoted to answering the questions of filia mea, famula vestra fidelissima ---

probably Liutgard, on the meaning of certain psalms (58), while Hraban Maur dedicates his exegesis of the books of Judith (59), and that of Esther to the Empress Ermengard (60). It seems likely, therefore, that all queens would play their part in religion at court, and some involve themselves in any doctrinal discussion that might be taking place there.

By far the most striking effect that a queen might have on the religious life of the court, and indeed of the country as a whole, however, lay in the possibilitythat a Catholic queen could be the means of conversion of her heathen or heretic husband. The model for all such attempts was established right at the beginning of Frankish history when, according to Gregory of Tours, Chrotechildis played a vital role in the conversion of Clovis. Having offered him an example which finally led him to call upon the Christian god in battle, she is said to have been instrumental in summoning Bishop, later Saint, Remigius and in persuading her husband to undergo the final step of baptism (61). She quite literally served as a model for her grand-daughter, Chlodosinde, married to the Lombard Alboin, when Bishop Nicetius of Trier wrote urging her to attempt to turn her Arian husband from his heresy:- Audisti ava tua quomodo domnum Hlodoveum ad legem Catholicam adduxerit (62). If she made the attempt, Chlodosinde was unsuccessful. Arians in general do not seem to have felt the same missionary impulses as Catholics. Both Brunhild and Galswinth converted to Catholicism almost immediately upon their arrival in Frankia (63), while Goiswinth's violent attempts at converting Ingund appear to have been a purely personal effort, there is no indication that her husband or anyone else took any part in them. Ingund, of course, reversed the process completely by converting her husband Hermangild (64). With Bertha's marriage to Aethelbert of Kent the question that arises is how far, if at all, she can be included among those responsible for his conversion. Stenton believed that neither she nor her accompanying bishop, Liudhard, made any attempt to explain their religious practices (65),

but Mayr-Harting believes that Aethelbert's marriage made him aware of the benefits of Catholicism, but that he delayed because accepting conversion by his Frankish wife might have had political implications (66). Lohaus, on the other hand, believes that Liudhard was involved in informing Rome of English willingness to convert (67), and further believes that the example of Clovis must have been 'not unmentioned' in Bertha's talks with her husband on the subject of religion (68). On the whole it seems probable that her presence at the Kentish court must have offered some assistance to Augustine's mission, even if it was only that of sympathy, and possible that she could have played a more active role in keeping with the traditions of her family.

Once converted to Christianity, with or without Bertha's help, Anglo-Saxon England seems to have been the place where the involvement of queens in religious matters may be said to have reached its peak. When Bertha's daughter, Ethelberga, married the Northumbrian king, Edwin, the bishop who accompanied her, Paulinus, made every effort to convert her husband, finally succeeding when, like Clovis, Edwin found Christianity valuable in battle (69) and had discussed the matter with his advisers (70). The later marriage of the Middle Angle, Peada, to Alchfled, daughter of Oswy of Northumbria, was even made dependent on the bridegroom's conversion (71). Once married, queens concerned themselves with churches, both endowing them and arranging for the translation of relics, as Queen Osthryd of Mercia did with the bones of her uncle, Oswald (72), and in creating new foundations, as Alfred's wife, Ealswith, at Winchester (73). Indeed Stenton notes that the history of the Magonsaeton is largely known only because women of the royal family were eminent both as foundresses and as abbesses (74). Abbesses belonging to the various royal houses, without being queens, were relatively common, and mention need only be made of Hild of Whitby to show the eminence they could attain, but a widowed queen, who had probably played a certain part in the religious life of the court during her husband's lifetime,/

might well retire to become abbess of a powerful house. Queen Eanfled, for example, daughter of Edwin, whose adherence to Kentish, and therefore Roman practice, in the matter of Easter, had helped to precipitate the dispute finally settled at the Synod of Whitby (75) later shared the rule of Whitby itself with her daughter, Aelflaed (76), after the death of her husband, Oswy. A saintly queen like Aethelthryth of Northumbria might go further and, having preserved her virginity through twelve years of marriage, withdraw into the religious life while her husband still lived (77). An important factor in this decision may have been her friendship with St. Wilfrid, to whom she gave land for his foundation of Hexham (78), and whose career in the church had originally been encouraged by Eanfled (79). Though nothing that these women did differed, in kind from events among other peoples, there does appear to be a greater concentration of saintly or merely religious women than is recorded elsewhere, though this may only be due to Bede's ecclesiastically oriented concept of history.

The most obvious motive for this involvement in church affairs must be the purely religious one, a desire to lay up treasures in heaven by promoting the interests of the church on earth. Other motives should not, however, be entirely overlooked, even if they are unstated, and even perhaps not consciously realised by the women concerned. One motive which finds expression in some of the Carolingian charters is the desire of queens to provide a secure future, not only for themselves but also for their daughters. Thus Emma, wife of Louis the German, persuades him to grant immunity to the convent of St. Felix and Regula, where their daughter, Bertha, lived (80), while the Empress Ermengard seeks confirmation from Lothar I of the usufruct and Government of a convent in Brescia for herself and her daughter, Gisla (81). Among the Lombards, Desiderius' wife, Ansa, shares with him the foundation and endowment of the convent of S. Salvatore Brescia, the abbess of which was their daughter, Ansilperga (82).

The joint rule of Whitby by Eanfled and Aelflaed already mentioned may also be relevant here. The religious life also functioned as an escape route. Radegund was able to withdraw in this way from a husband whose habits very probably repelled her, and the same may have been true of the relentlessly chaste Aethelthryth. Similarly at the very end of this period, the Empress Richardis retired to her foundation at Andlau after successfully clearing herself of an accusation of adultery (83). In all these cases therefore, it was perhaps less a question of withdrawing from the world as a whole than of freeing oneself from a particular situation which had become intolerable. Entering the church might also provide an outlet for excess energy, for religious houses, particularly in the case of the Anglo-Saxon form of the double monastery "provided the female element of the ruling caste with something to rule" (84). This would be particularly the case for a widowed queen whose possible range of power at her husband's court has been outlined above. His death and her removal from that power, might well cause a form of withdrawal symptoms which could be assuaged by moving into another seat of power, that of abbess. The reverse of this coin would be the trouble that could be caused in a convent when the royal women living there came from a turbulent family like the Merovingians. All the troubles at the convent of St. Radegund in Poitiers stemmed from the inclusion among the nuns of one, Clotild, possibly a daughter of King Charibert (85). Most royal abbesses, however, appear to have ruled their religious houses with efficiency, and their influence, as that of Eanfled on Wilfrid, could be very great.

C. Culture

Religion was not the only strange fashion that a foreign bride might bring with her to her husband's court. It has been suggested that in the case of the marriages of Theoderic's female relatives to the Thuringian and Vandal kings, each woman represented 'une ambassadrice de la civilitas ostrogotique'/

(86), while another author belived that in the second case 'the princess must have helped to open the court at Carthage to scholars' (97). Theoderic, himself, in a letter to the Thuringian king, Hermanfrid, described his niece, Amalaberga, as litteris doctam, moribus eruditam, and suggests that she might introduce meliore institutione to that nation (88). In a different area, Deanesly attributed to the influence of Bertha and her train the appearance of a Frankish form of organisation at Aethelbert's court (89). Certainly these queens and others must frequently have been tempted to apply the standards of their homeland in their new environment, even if the degree of success which they attained must be open to considerable doubt. What appears to be beyond doubt, however,is the degree of learning and culture that these women themselves could reach, even if they were not always able to transmit it to those around them. Reydellet, studying the image of royalty in literature of the period, believes that the first appearance of the idea 'que la culture est un ornement de la dignite royale' occurs in Cassiodorus' description of Amalasuntha which concentrated heavily on her learning (90). Other women receive the same kind of praise,---- Bertha of Kent was also 'litteris docta'(91). Indeed, it has been suggested that "thoughout much of the period, women were often better educated than men" (91A), so that these examples may well be only the tip of a literate iceberg. In addition to their own learning, however, queens could act as patrons of the arts. Here Radegund's role as the friend and, very frequently, the inspiration of the Italian poet Venantius Fortunatus. is an obvious example, while Sedulius Scottus addressed himself to the Empress Ermengard (92). Hraban Maur's dedication of his prose works to Judith and Ermengard have already been mentioned. For the non-literary arts, Paul the Deacon records that Theudelinda had a palace built at Monza where frescoes showed Lombard appearance and achievements (93). It is also possible that such items as the jewels donated by Liutgard to Aquileia and Milan represented her own commissions given to gold or silversmiths. Overall, therefore, it seems/

possible that many queens, whether of foreign or native origin, played an important role in the culture of the court, whether through their own learning or through the inspiration they brought to others.

D. Influence

Most of the foregoing suggestions relating to the kind of power the queen could enjoy and the areas in which she could exercise it are dependent upon the assumption that she could influence her husband, that a suggestion made by her to him, would have a good chance of being put into effect. The most definite evidence of this lies among the charters granted by the kings, where on occasion, it is specifically stated that the person who brought this matter to the king's notice was his wife, or as in the case of Lothar I and Doda, his mistress (94). On the basis of known charters, the queen who most often involved herself in this way was Ermentrude, with ten citations (95) followed by the Empress Richardis with seven (96) and Ermengard with six (97). It might be argued, however, that, in a sense, on this evidence the most influential queen was Adelaide, wife of Louis the Stammerer, who appears only twice in his charters and acts as suppliant on both occasions (98), thus having a hundred per cent record. Other wives, notably those of Charlemagne, are conspicuous by their absence from his charters, except as lay-figures for whom prayers should be offered, but it is entirely possible that such women were as deeply involved as any others, and that the coincidences of survival have obliterated their efforts.

Another powerful piece of evidence for the importance that might be attached to the influence of a queen over her husband lies in the use that might be made of her intercession by others, many of them powers in the land in their own right. No less a person than Alcuin, for example, thought it worthwhile to inform an abbot on whose behalf he was petitioning Charlemagne, that he had secured an adiutricem in the person/

of Liutgard (99). Hincmar of Rheims similarly wrote to Queen Ermentrude asking her to involve herself in the election of a new bishop for Beauvais (100). Again, however, the principal evidence for the use made of the queen in such situations would appear to come from the charters. Most requests for help appear to come from churchmen or women. Ermentrude, for example, has already been shown appealing to her husband in concert with Erchenraus of Chalons, and with the monks of St. Germain d'Auxerre. Her assistance was also sought by the monastery of Corbeï (101) and by Notre Dame de Morienval (102). Indeed of her ten interventions in Charles' charters, only one represents an attempt to assist the interests of a layman, the fidelis Adalgisus (103), while of the two requests made by her successor, Richildis, one is for Nivelles (104) and one for the fidelis Robert (105). Similarly, of Richardis' seven interventions, one is in concert with Archbishop Liubert of Mainz (106), and two with the arch-chancellor, Liutward (107). The latter two are of particular interest in view of the fact that Liutward would later be accused of committing adultery with the empress (108). Queens could also be made use of in inter-family quarrels, the past-master of this art being Lothar II. His success in the attempt to make peace with Charles the Bald in 865 is expressly linked to the intervention of Queen Ermentrude (109), who also accompanied Charles to his meeting with Lothar the following year (110), when he may have intended again to use her presumably sympathetic help.

The episode concerning Lothar and Ermentrude represents one of the few instances when a narrative history makes express reference to the influence of a queen over her husband. More often there are only hints which may suggest their influence without stating it outright. The idea that the queen's influence might be behind the promotion of her family has already been mentioned, in particular connection with those instances where a second member of her family finds a royal spouse. Changes in religion have likewise been/

tentatively linked with a wife's influence, even when it is not made explicit in the sources. A further hint at the possible influence of a queen may be found in the frequency with which she is found, if not actually travelling in her husband's company, than at least established at some point close by, even when as Richildis in 876, she was in an advanced state of pregnancy (111). Even queens whose influence is otherwise quite unremarked, such as Charlemagne's wife, Hildegard, seem to have accompanied their husbands, sometimes on journeys that formed part of a military campaign. Thus, she is with Charlemagne on his return from the defeat of the Lombard Desiderius in 774 (112), and returned with him in 780 to pray at Rome (113). It has been suggested, with particular application to Charles the Bald's wives, that a queen would travel with her husband because of her position as controller of the treasury outlined above, so that the king might have resources available to him even on campaign (114). While this may account for many journeys, others such as that to meet Lothar at Attigny in 866, seem capable of another interpretation, suggesting that the queen was present in order to play a part in events by bringing to bear any influence shet might have on her husband, for the benefit of the others involved in the meeting. Again concerning Ermentrude, the same may be true of her journey with Charles to Melling in 862, where they met their recently rebellious son, Charles (115). Here it might be supposed that her influence was to be used on both parties, as wife and mother, in order to bring about a return of peace.

So far it has been suggested that the queen functioned largely, if not completely, as a force for good. It was not always so, indeed, when specific mention is made of a queen's influence over her husband, it is more often represented as a bad thing. Thus Einhard writing of two conspiracies against Charlemagne, blamed Queen Fastrada for encouraging him in the cruelty which incited them, and which was usually foreign to his nature (116). According to Fredegar, Chlotar II also/

upset his supporters by the attention he paid to the views of women, though which women is not exactly clear (117). These two instances of the evil effects of female influence are somewhat imprecise, ----others are more detailed. On her deathbed, Austrechildis, wife of King Guntram, urged him to execute the doctors whom she held responsible for her failure to recover from her illness. Gregory of Tours, who represented Guntram as a good king to the point of holiness, remarks that he was forced to commit this sin by his iniquae coniugis leaving no doubt of her power over Guntram, or of its more than dubious value (118). Ermentrude may have acted as a peacemaker within her family, but Louis the German's wife, Emma, played exactly the opposite role when in 870 she encouraged her sons, Louis and Charles, to rebel against their father and brother, Carloman (119). Outside Frankia similar characteristics can be found. John of Biclarum oddly blames Hermangild's rebellion on his stepmother, Goiswinth (120), though as he is elsewhere said to have been inspired by conversion to Catholicism, and she was prepared to revolt against Reccared in support of her Arian faith (121), her motive, apart from an innate desire to cause trouble, must remain totally obscure. Reporting Thuringian history, Gregory makes Hermanfrid's Ostrogothic wife, Amalaberga, responsible for stirring up trouble between him and his brother (122), thus possibly disappointing her uncle's expectations concerning her good influence. In Anglo-Saxon England, though St. Wilfrid's greatest supporter was a queen, Aethelthryth, so was his worst enemy, her successor, Iurminburgh. She turned the king against him (123), stole his reliquary (124) and contrived, in concert with her sister and sister-in-law, to drive him from one kingdom to another (125). Nevertheless, even the Jezebel reformed becoming agna Dei et perfecta abbatissa materque familae optima (126). Other queens similarly showed more than one side to their nature. The queen of Redwald of the East Angles, for example, described by one author as his "ambitious, formidable and perceptive wife" (127), first advised the king against killing Edwin while he was a refugee at their/

court (128), and later urged him to turn away from his conversion to Christianity (129), ---- always assuming, of course, that he married only once!

The possibility that a queen could wield considerable influence over her husband, for good or ill, cannot be denied. Unfortunately it is not always possible to find solid evidence of this. Though the evidence of charters showing the intercession of the queen in particular cases is important, perhaps even more telling are the indications that men of great power, intimates of the monarch in question, still found it worth while to gain the support of the queen, in some cases a queen almost overlooked in other records, when they had a favour to ask. There can be no surer measure of their power.

What might be described as the theoretical queen of the period, therefore, had responsibilities which were essentially domestic and family based. These they undoubtedly carried out, ---- her ailing brother-in-law, Carloman, was left in Bertrada's care, for example (130), while Louis the Pious remained with his stepmother, Fastrada, during his father's Avar campaign (131). As discussed above, however, these domestic responsibilities could be raised to the level of responsibility for the household almost in a bureaucratic sense, as the royal court was the centre of power. For those women whose capabilities went beyond that of ordering their servants, on whatever level, there was the opportunity to develop other interests, most often represented by a turning to religion. This could satisfy both spiritual and temporal needs, offering the friendship of powerful men, a chance to acquire some degree of financial security, and a home, and perhaps an occupation, when the death of a husband shifted the responsibilities of the court on to other shoulders. They could also pass their time by indulging in cultural pursuits, personally, by involvement perhaps in the court's learned circle, or occasionally /

by becoming the inspiration of works by others. Any success that they might attain in any of these areas, however, was ultimately dependent upon their ability to influence their husbands, which itself might depend on their success in their original duties. Almost all the women discussed in this chapter, however, remain shadowy figures, only occasionally appearing in records, their power, assuming that they had any, very definitely concentrated behind the throne.

NOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

(1) dOP 522

(2) dOP 524

(3) dOP 525

(4) dOP 523

(5) VB 485-6

(6) Wallace-Hadrill 1971 52

(6a) Beowulf 70-1

(6b) Beowulf 89

(7) Capit I 84

(8) Capit I 86

(9) Capit I 87-8

(10) EPP Ein. 117

(11) EPP Ein. 118

(12) Libri Pro Filiis 276

(13) AB 199

(14) AB 218-9

(15) AB 214-216

(16) HF 318

(17) HF 159

(18) Fred. IV 36

(19) Fred. IV 88

(20) Fred. III 255

(21) HF 249

(22) HF 319

(23) EPP Ein. 143

(24) HF 437

(25) Char. L/G 156

(26) Char. Ch/F 156

(27) JB 213

(28) Char. Lang III 223

(29) EHD 257

(30) Bede 338

(31) King 54

(32) EPP Wis 685

(33) HF 105

(34) HF 125

(35) HF 93
(36) Char. Pip. 22
(37) Char. Ch/F 156
(38) PD 123-4
(39) PD 136
(40) Char. L/P 616
(41) Char. Ch/B Vol. 2 69
(42) EPP Alc. 140
(43) EPP Alc. 317
(44) MGH PC 2 633
(45) Sedulius Scottus 187-8
(46) Char. Ch/B Vol. 1 538-9, Vol.2 117
(47) Char. Ch/b Vol. 2 100
(48) Char. L/S 23
(49) Char. Loth I 221
(50) Talbot 222-5
(51) HF 445
(52) HF 532
(53) Fred. IV 60
(54) Conc. Tol III 983
(55) Thegan 597
(56) AB 27-8
(57) EPP CM 528-9
(58) EPP Alc. 244
(59) EPP Hrab. 420-2
(60) EPP Hrab. 500-1
(61) HF 75-6
(62) EPP Aust. 122
(63) HF 160-1
(64) HF 244
(65) Stenton 1947 105
(66) Mayr-Harting 63
(67) Lohaus 12-3
(68) Lohaus 145
(69) Bede 164-6
(70) Bede 184

(71) Bede 278

(72) Bede 246

(73) Stenton 1947 445

(74) Stenton 1947 46-7

(75) Bede 296

(76) Bede 430

(77) Bede 392

(78) VW 44

(79) VW 6

(80) Char. L/G 159

(81) Char. Loth I 241-2

(82) Char. Lang III 187-91

(83) Reg. P 127

(84) Nicholson 18

(85) HF 460

(86) Reydellet 242

(87) Riche 56

(88) Cass. 114

(89) Deanesly 102

(90) Reydellet 249

(91) Lohaus 28

(91a) Wormald 98

(92) Sedulius Scottus 186-7

(93) PD 124

(94) Char. Loth I 309

(95) Char. Ch/B Vol. 1 446-484-5,493-4,538, 539,562 :
Vol. 2 69, 106,121,228

(96) Char. Ch/F 7,40-1, 65, 70-1, 156-7,168,174

(97) Char. Loth I 95,102,221,241-2, 243,252-3

(98) Char. L/S 23-4, 90-1

(99) EPP Alc. 134

(100) EPP Hinc 3

(101) Char. Ch/B Vol. 1 493-4

(102) Char. Ch/B Vol. 2 228

(103) Char. Ch/B Vol. 1 562

(104) Char. Ch/B Vol. 2 467

(105) Char. Ch/B Vol. 2 431

(106) Char. Ch/F 174
(107) Char. Ch/F 65, 168
(108) Reg P 127
(109) AB 121
(110) AB 129
(111) AB 209-10
(112) ARF 40
(113) ARF 56
(114) Hyam 158
(115) AB 91
(116) Einhard 26
(117) Fred. IV 36
(118) HF 241-2
(119) AB 176
(120) JB 215
(121) JB 218
(122) HF 100
(123) VW 48
(124) VW 70
(125) VW 80
(126) VW 48
(127) Mayr-Harting 66
(128) Bede 180
(129) Bede 190
(130) ARF 12
(131) Ast. 609

5. The Queen as Ruler

The last chapter dealt for the most part with women whose power, in so far as it existed at all, was exercised entirely behind the scenes. Some women, however, succeeded in capturing the centre of the stage, in holding real publicly executed and recognised political power. Where and when did this phenomenon appear ; what were the supports on which it was built, and what ends did they pursue?

A. Evidence

Evidence for women playing a decisive independent role in events can take many forms. Firstly, the chronicles may give an account of a woman's part in the history they are recording. Thus Gregory and Fredegar both give accounts of the careers of Brunhild and Fredegund, and Fredegar alone covers the role played by Nantechildis. The Liber Historiae Francorum covers events in which Balthild was concerned. On Judith, Engelberga and Liutgard, wife of Louis the Younger, the Annales Bertiniani provide information, and the first also finds a place in Nithard's writings. Procopius, in his History of the Gothic Wars, deals with the career of Amalasuntha, while the later Italian queen, Theudelinda, finds her place in Paul the Deacon's History of the Lombards. The Mercian version of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle gives some information on the events in which Aethelflaed was concerned. Writers of narrower, more concentrated, forms of history may also give information, particularly biographers and hagiographers. The most obviously relevant text is that of the Vita Balthildis, which is concerned to show its subject as powerful queen as well as saint, but the writers of the Vita Columbani and the Vitae Desiderii all have a good deal, all bad, to say about Brunhild. In a secular context the Anonymous Life of Louis the Pious gives many indications of the power of the Empress, Judith. When it comes to evidence from charters, Judith plays curiously little role, only twice appearing as intercessor (1). In contrast Engelberga's importance is emphasised by the fact that/

she makes requests, not only of her husband (2), but also of Louis the German (3), his sons, Carloman (4) and Charles the Fat (5), Carloman II of West Frankia (6), and shares a grant made to her husband by Lothar II (7). Even more telling, however, are those Merovingian charters in which a queen makes her mark as co-grantor along with her son, nephew or husband. There is evidence of this practice being carried out by Nantechildis, mother of Clovis II, on one occasion (8), and by Himnechildis, aunt of Childeric II, twice, the second time along with her daughter, his wife, Belechildis (9). On three occasions this practice was carried out by Balthild, acting with her son, Chlotar III (10), and once by Chrodchild, mother of Clovis III (11). Among Anglo-Saxon charters Aethelflaed is found making grants, both in company with her husband (12) and in her own right (13). Letters may also form a useful means of indicating the importance of the role that a queen might play. Cassiodorus' collection of letters, for example, includes four written in the name of Amalasuntha to the Byzantine sovereigns, Justinian and Theodora (14), and to the Roman Senate (15). Gregory the Great writes once to Bertha of Kent, encouraging her to assist in her husband's conversion (16), but four times to Theudelinda (17), and on a total of ten occasions to Brunhild (18). Brunhild also makes an appearance in all three of the letters written by the Visigoth Count, Bulgar, to an unknown Frankish bishop (19), and in the four letters written in her name to The Byzantine Imperial family (20). A much later Pope, John VIII, also wrote a total of ten letters to the empress, Engelberga (21).

Three things are worth noticing about this evidence for female royal power. First, the fact that, with one exception, all the peoples under discussions are represented ; the exception is the Visigoth kingdom of Spain. Evidence for Spanish queens is very limited indeed, for some kings even their wives' names are unknown, but in one or two cases there is a hint that they enjoyed a degree of political involvement. The most marked example is that of Goiswinth whose debatable/

role in Hermangild's revolt has already been mentioned, and whose involvement in a later rebellion will be dealt with below. Erwig's wife, Liuvigoto, was forced into a convent after her husband's death by their son-in-law, Egica, who had succeeded him (22), apparently to remove her from all worldly troubles. Nevertheless, two years later, in 693, she features on the death-list of a failed conspiracy led by Sisebert, Bishop of Toledo (23). It is very tempting to see these two pieces of evidence as indicating that she had dabbled in affairs to a degree which displeased the representatives of both the state and the church. Second, there is no common ground between these women in terms of their origin. Slave, noble, royal women, are all represented, and as will be shown, no one group had a monopoly on success in the role. The third point about the evidence is that, on some occasions , two kinds of source complement and confirm each other, as when a woman who appears in a chronicle source will also appear in charters or letters. In other instances, as for example, Fredegund, she appears in more than one chronicle and in a good deal of detail, however biased. There are, however, cases where only the merest hint is given to suggest the existence of a powerful queen. Two Anglo-Saxon examples may be quoted. Twice, when referring to Bamburgh, Bede says that it takes its name, originally Bebbanburgh, from Bebba, a former queen (24). Unfortunately, he does not make it clear whether it was so named because she had founded it, or because she had been a notable ruler. Equally mysteriously, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that after the death of Cenwalh of Wessex in 672, "Seaxburh, his queen, reigned one year after him" (25) ---- and that is all! Any attempt to judge the kind of power possessed by these women, of whom only the faintest memory has been preserved, could only be the wildest guesswork.

B. Means

For other better documented women, however, it is possible to see something if not all, of the ways in which they first /

achieved power, and then retained it. The first point that must be made is that these women also made use of all the opportunities possessed by the women discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed some of them have already been mentioned ---- Fredegund, for example, in connection with access to the treasury, the part played by Judith in some of the religious events of Louis' reign, and Theudelinda's cultural and religious importance. Many other examples may also be quoted for all the areas of possible power suggested above. Balthild's central importance at court has also already been mentioned, and it appears that Brunhild, likewise, was involved with her husband's treasure, ---- after his death Chilperic confiscated the treasure she had brought to Paris, when she joined Sigibert there (26). Judith's role at court seems to have been an active one, even if she was accused of having a closer relationship with the chamberlain than that envisaged by Hincmar. Fredegund, like Ultrogotha, had her own referendary, though, as the evidence for his existence dates from after her husband's death (27), it cannot be used to support the theory of separate courts. In the religious sphere, Himnechildis is found urging Childeric II to make grants to the church of St. Gregory in the Vosges in company with Bishop Rothani of Strasbourg (28), while Engelberga requests immunity for the abbey of St. Ambrose in Milan, (29). Balthild, as queen rather than religious foundress, is shown to make use of the assistance of Abbot Genesius, later bishop of Lyons, in the charitable projects shared with her husband (30). Culturally, Brunhild, like Radegund, inspired Venantius Fortunatus (31), while it has been said that Walahfrid Strabo saw "not the Emperor but his wife Judith", as "the patron of letters" (32). They also possessed, or were assumed to possess, the ability to influence their husbands. Engelberga accompanied Louis II on campaign, even at moments of considerable danger (33), and, like Ermentrude, was used as an intermediary by Lothar (34). In a lengthy letter, Bishop Germanus of Paris, later canonised, urged Brunhild to act as peacemaker in the quarrel between Sigibert and Chilperic (35), though it would appear probable that in this/

case, any influence she could exert was directed to the exactly opposite end.

So far nothing has been said of these powerful women that cannot be exactly parallelled by their backstage sisters. The difference between them would appear to have been one of degree. If it cannot be said that these women made "better" use of the opportunities presented to them by involvement in court and religious life, they certainly seem to have played a more active and effective role. All queens possibly allied themselves with court officials, some powerful ones appointed them. Thus Brunhild, according to Fredegar, arranged the appointment of Protadius as mayor of the Burgundian palace (36), while Venantius Fortunatus credits her with the advancement of Gunduarus (37). Indeed in his Vita Columbani, Jonas of Bobbio expressly states that it was fear of losing the dignities and honours connected with the court that compelled Brunhild to break the marriage arranged between Theuderic and Ermenberga (38). Though in this case no explicit reason is given, Fredegar's story that she had been behind the ending of an engagement between Childebert and Theudelinda (39), might well be seen as part of the same pattern. Fredegar later regards Nantechildis as responsible for the appointment of Flaochad, again as Burgundian mayor of the palace, forming at the same time a family alliance with him through his marriage to her niece (40). Another important aspect of court life which these powerful women seem on occasion to deal with successfully is the military side of the household. In connection with Aethelflaed, Stenton writes she "kept the loyalty of a formidable military household, and led the Mercian host in person, on expeditions which she herself had planned" (41). The Liber Historiae Francorum tells a similar story of how Fredegund, under attack by Childebert's forces, not only planned a night foray against them but apparently took part in it herself along with her infant son, Chlothar, going on with the army as far as Rheims(42).

Brunhild, according to Fredegar, limited her involvement to instructing the army of her great-grandson, Sigibert (43). In the period of fraternal rivalry following the death of Louis the Pious, Nithard's account of the movements of Charles the Bald's Aquitanian supporters seems to suggest the possibility that his mother,Judith, led one group to join him (44). Finally, one of the mysterious, once mentioned Anglo-Saxon queens, Aethelburh, is said to have destroyed Taunton in 722 (45), an action which surely assumes that she could count on military support. This evidence that a queen could find acceptance as a military leader may well be linked to the idea that she was responsible for the care of the young men educated at court, who might have gone on to hold vital offices in the military hierarchy, while retaining their loyalty to her, thus forming a ready-made source of support.

In the religious field there is also evidence of a very similar difference of scale. One neat expression of the difference is the already mentioned fact that some of these women could establish relations, not just with local bishops, but with the Pope himself. Engelberga not only corresponded with John VIII but had earlier given her safe-conduct to Nicholas I at a time when he and Louis II were at loggerheads over the case of Lothar II (46), and was later used by Lothar as an intermediary between him and Hadrian II (47). In a sense, however, this is a very special case, as in an empire more or less limited to Italy, the Pope could be considered to be Engelberga's local bishop. Where bishops within the Frankish kingdoms are concerned, there is evidence that, like the officers of state, they were not only the queens' supporters, but also their appointees. Gregory of Tours reporting the election of Innocentius to the See of Rodez, adds the comment that he was the candidate favoured by Brunhild (48), with the air of believing that to have been responsible for his success. Indeed, according to Venantius Fortunatus the favour of Brunhild had been as vital as that of Sigibert in Gregory's own elevation (49). Fredegar similarly relates that Brunhild/

had a poor man who had helped her raised to the bishopric of Auxerre (50), and though doubt has been cast on this story, it is at least suggestive that the chronicler believed it possible for her to have done so. Equally suggestive perhaps is the fact that two abbots, Gemesius (51) and Theudofredus (52), who appear as allies of Balthild, both became bishops, though her Vita stops short of claiming that she arranged this. Queens could therefore hope to have friends in positions of spiritual as well as secular power, on whom they could call for supportwhen necessary. In this connection it is perhaps worth noting that one of the few pieces of Visigothic evidence, that for Goiswinth's connection with an Arian rebellion against Reccared, shows her acting in collusion with Bishop Uldida (53).

Where personal wealth is concerned, there appears to be more evidence concerning these women than there is for others. Amalsuntha, for example, had four hundred centenaria of gold among the possessions she planned to take with her at the time when she contemplated flight to Constantinople (54). Fredegund claimed to have dowered Rigunth from gifts made to her by Chilperic and other Franks, from lands granted to her and from revenues and taxes (55). Brunhild's possession of the five cities which had formed Galswinth's morgengabe has already been quoted, while she also received two towns from Reccared, possibly at the time of the negotiations over Chlodosind, though they were taken from her again in the troubles following Ermenberga's repudiation (56). Both these women could also dispose of considerable movable wealth. Fredegund at one time almost strangled Rigunth with the lid of a chest full of jewels and precious ornaments (57), while Brunhild, in her early widowhood, left five bundles of her possessions with Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen, two of which were valued at three thousand gold pieces (58), and later sent a golden gemmed salver 'of incredible size' to Reccared along with other gifts (59). At a later period too, all Engelberga's involvement in charters is concerned with amassing every possible guarantee of her rights to properties granted her by Louis II, while probably at her/

instigation, Pope John VIII utters a series of threats against anyone who in any way disturbs her possessions. These riches firstly provided a cushion against any problems which might arise and, secondly, added to the possibilities opened up by loyalty and patronage, that of gaining support quite simply by buying it.

As has already been mentioned, it may fairly be assumed that all women possessed some degree of influence over their husbands. Some women, however, carried this influence to such a pitch that it alone was sufficient to give them real power over events. One such case appears to be that of Liutgard, wife of Louis the Younger. Her appearance in history is limited to being named as his wife in the work of Regino of Prüm (60), and a few references in the Annales Bertiniani for the years 879 to 80. Here she appears as someone whose friendship is to be valued (61), who shares in her husband's plans (62) and who travels with him (63). The most interesting part of her story, however, occurs when Louis, on this occasion alone, had accepted a deal with the heirs of Charles the Bald, by which he received that monarch's share of what had once been Lothar II's kingdom, in return for his withdrawal of any other claims in western Frankia. According to Hincmar, Liutgard's reaction was to say that si illa cum eo venisset totum istud regnum haberet (64). Whether she could have hoped to play an active part in negotiations is unclear, but she certainly seems to belive, possibly with good reason that her presence would have stiffened her husband's resolution and prevented him from making any concessions. By far the most striking case of this, however, is the Empress Judith. Paschasius Radbert, writing the Vita of one of her worst enemies, put the position as he saw it, absolutely clearly, when he says of Louis the Pious: Non enim alium in fide recipiebat nisi quem Justina (Judith) vellet ; neque alium aut audire, aut diligere valebat, aut assentire, quo usque ista viguerunt, nisi quem illa ei in fide commendabat, et, quod prodigiosius est, ut aiunt, nec aliud velle, praeter/

quae ipsa vellet (65). More modern historians have tended to agree with this view. Folz states that Judith "had great influence over her husband" (66) ; Calmette writes of her "ascendant croissant sur l'esprit de son vacillant mari" (67), and Fichtenau believes that Einhard's structures on Fastrada really represent a concealed warning to Louis about Judith (68). Again, however, the most striking mark of her influence is the use which others, in this case those most virulently opposed to her, were prepared to make of it, apparently with every expectation of success. In 830 when her stepsons were attempting for the first time to take power away from their father, it was, according to one version, to Judith that they turned to persuade Louis, under threat, to abdicate power and enter monastic life (69). Certainly Judith's history, and possibly that of Liutgard, though lack of information makes her case difficult to judge, indicates that all a queen really needed to achieve solid political power was a husband whose personality was sufficiently malleable to permit the complete imposition of her will on his. Nevertheless, this still only represents a development, albeit an extreme one, of the position occupied by all queens. What elements of their background further distinguish powerful women from the average mass?

For one thing they were all wives, considered as legitimate in contemporary terms. More than that, they were either their husband's only wife, whether by a first marriage or, as in Judith's case, by the second marriage of a widower, or they had succeeded in gaining some kind of pre-eminence among the others with whom their husbands were involved. The second group obviosuly finds its outstanding representative in Fredegund. Concubines, and wives who were members of what can best be described as a harem, as in the case of Chlothar I, were by no means debarred from some degree of influence, but none of them achieved any decisive power. Possibly their efforts were too much concentrated on squabbles within the group to allow them to consider reaching for power at a national/

level. It may even be permissible to consider the tempting possibility that a king who acquired a multiplicity of wives was acting, at least partly, out of a desire to avoid offering any woman the chance of monopolising the influential position of queen ---- running their private lives in fact on the sound principle of divide and rule.

Once established as only or chief wife, the next requirement for opening up the possibility of power seems to have been the birth of a son, and his succession to his father while still a minor. With the exceptions of Aethelflaed and Engelberga, whose routes to power will be discussed below, and possibly of the Visigoths, again unclear through lack of evidence, all the women dealt with in this chapter functioned, for atleast part of their career, as regent for a youthful king, most often, though not necessarily, their son. Amalasuntha, according to Procopius, "as guardian of her child, administered the government" (70), the child being her son, Athalaric. Paul the Deacon, writing of the succession of Adaloald to Agilulf, remarks that the former was still a boy and that his sovereignty was shared by his mother, Theudelinda (71). Fredegar offers an account of the regency exercised by Nantechildis on behalf of her son, Clovis II (72) which is confirmed by her subscription of a charter in his name (73). There is very little evidence for the role played by Chrodchild, wife of Theuderic III, --- she is mentioned only once in the Liber Historiae Francorum, as the mother of his son, Clovis III (74). Schneider, however, regards the fact that she subscribes one of the latter's charters (75) as sufficient proof that she held the position of regent (76). The Liber Historiae Francorum also provides a narrative sources for Balthild's position as regent for her son, Chlothar III (77), which is again confirmed by her subscription of his charters (78). Her Vita, while also confirming this, additionally makes her responsible for securing the acceptance of another of her sons, Childeric II, as king of Austrasia (79). Charter evidence, however, shows that this regent was Himnechildis, widow of Sigibert III, and/

at once his aunt and his mother-in-law (80). Schneider belives that the Vita deliberately excludes any mention of the role of the latter in the elevation of Childeric and regards charter evidence as possibly indicating that Himnechildis was not only his regent but also his co-ruler (81). Outstanding, however, in any consideration of regency, must be the career of Brunhild. If not exactly regent for her son, Childebert II, ---- the point will be discussed below, ---- she certainly dominated his court to the extent that at times he seemed hardly to make a move without her. Upon his death, she ruled his kingdoms, first with both his sons (82), then with Theuderic II alone (83). When the latter also died, almost her last political act before her downfall was an attempt to settle the kingship on his son, Sigibert III (84). Had she succeeded, she would, including her influence over her husband, have dominated Austrasian politics for four generations.

The means by which women achieved the position of regent were varied. The simplest, which would seem for lack of information, to apply to Amalasuntha, Theudelinda and Chrodchild, was their availability. When their husbands died they were there, close to their sons, and ready, backed by all the means of support already outlined, to take over the reins of power. In other cases, additional information on the course of events is given by the sources. Thus, for Nantechildis, Fredegar appears to suggest that it was Dagobert's own decision that his widow should be involved in the regency, in that, during his last illness, he commended her, along with their son, to Aega, who appears after his death as her ally in government (85). For Balthild, the Liber Historiae Francorum states that the Franks appointed Chlothar III to his kingdom, to rule 'cum regina matre' (86) while her Vita mentions the names of Bishop Chrodobert of Paris, of Audoin and the mayor of the palace, Ebroin, going on to link the advice quidem seniorum with the Austrasians' acceptance of Childeric II (87). Should Schneider be right in his supposition that these negotiations also involved Himnechildis, it would presumably have been with the/

consent of the seniores that she entered upon her regency. Again, however, the most interesting case is that of Brunhild. As regent for Theudebert and Theuderic and then for Sigibert, she seems to have followed the simple pattern of being the woman on the spot at the vital moment. For Childebert, however, the case was different. Though she was with him at the time of Sigibert's murder in 575, he was immediately removed from her care by Duke Gundovald, apparently for his own protection. He was at that time barely five years old (88). It was fully ten years later that, on the death of his nutritor, Queen Brunhild herself took charge of him (89). While her power did not completely vanish in the intervening period, ---- it includes, for example, the appointment of Bishop Innocentus referred to above, ---- it undoubtedly diminished to the point where one of her enemies could tell her to her face that they, not she, were now running the country (90), while Guntram, at one point, expressly warned Childebert against visiting her (91). When she did return to his side he was fifteen, and probably no longer in need of a regent, so that her position was more likely to have been that of powerful, indeed possibly over-riding, influence than anything more official.

The most explicit, and the most vivid, statement of the importance of sons in the life of a powerful and ambitious queen, however, occurs in the case of Fredegund, as recorded by Gregory of Tours. The importance placed on it by others appears in Guntram's statement when Childebert demanded that she be handed over to him to pay the penalty for her countless crimes. Guntram refused, and his grounds were quia filium regem habet (92) ---- in his eyes it was the king, her son, not the king, her late husband, and his brother, that mattered. Fredegund's own belief, that the possession of a son, more ---- a legitimate son, was vital to her future, appears again and again in Gregory's anecdotes concerning her. When Chlotar's older brothers are ill, she is prepared to sacrifice the taxes paid, both personally to her and to the treasury, in a desperate attempt to bargain with God for their lives (93). When a /

third son dies, she takes a terrible revenge on the man she holds responsible for causing the death by witchcraft, and she destroys all her son's belongings to avoid reminders of her grief (94). Chlothar himself falls ill, sometime after his father's death, and she makes rich promises to St. Martin and arranges the freedom of prisoners of war, again bargaining, though this time successfully, for his health (95). It would be unjust, even to Fredegund, to suggest that simple maternal anxiety had no part to play in all this, but it appears likely that she also recalled the moment when, faced by an enemy, she had no son left to take up her cause, and could only, in tears, submit herself to Christ (96). Even a living son had to be acknowledged by others, and, when Guntram was driven to express doubts as to Chlothar's paternity, she assembled three bishops and three hundred of the kingdom's leaders to swear that Chilperic was indeed his father (97). To really ensure the succession of her son, any of her sons, she was, if Gregory can be believed, responsible for the deaths of two of her step-sons, Merovech (98) and Clovis (99). There can surely be no greater tribute to the vital emphasis which a queen placed on the life and, by whatever means necessary, unhindered succession, of her son than this chequered career.

There is also evidence that a woman who had no son could still play a vital part in her country's affairs. Above, it was suggested that one factor contributing to this might be her husband's weakness, but there were circumstances in which even a strong king might delegate power to his wife. One of these is his preoccupation with other problems, most markedly perhaps, military ones. This possibility seems particularly applicable in the case of Engelberga. In 871 Louis II was heavily involved in a campaign against Benevento, but had previously arranged an assembly at Ravenna. He accordingly sent Engelberga there to take his place, ordering the leading men of Italy to join her there (100), thus making her, in a sense, his regent. The following year saw her involvement in a major diplomatic initiative,negotiating with both Charles the/

Bald and Louis the German in an effort to settle the succession to the Empire since she and Louis had no son (10). Again, at this time, Louis was involved in Benevento, and it seems likely that she was acting once more as his representative, though some doubts as to their relationship at this time may be raised by the abortive attempt initiated by the Italian magnates to supplant her. If this was an independent action on her part, it does not seem to have had a permanent effect on their marriage, as she rapidly reinstated herself in Louis' favour, while still continuing her attempts to gain the friendship of Charles the Bald (102). Another opening for female power might occur if a husband was unable to rule through illness or injury. Stenton suggests that in the case of Aethelflaed, her independent rule of Mercia might have predated Aethelred's death by about a year, and attributed this to his possibly having "been incapacitated for sometime before he died" (103). Should this have been the case, a period of rule with her husband still there in the background would obviously have provided an excellent proving ground, for both herself and her subjects, for her full independent power after his death.

In Aethelflaed's case, however, another factor seems also to have had a vital part to play. Stafford describes her as "the beneficiary of a tradition of queenly power in Mercia" (104). Her immediate predecessors, for example, her aunt, Aethelswith, wife of King Burgred, and Saethryth, wife of Berthwulf, subscribed their husbands' grants in a form which implies perhaps some degree of consultation (105), or at the least a feeling that the queen had a right to a place in the formula used. Even more markedly, Cynethryth, wife of Offa, is "the only Old English queen who is known to have issued coins with her own image and superscription" (106), a remarkable tribute to her power, even if Offa, and not she, was the originator of the idea. It is possible that it was some attempt by Eadburh to introduce these Mercian ways into the male chauvinist atmosphere of the West Saxon court, that was/

responsible for her tarnished reputation. Going from that court to Mercia, however, Aethelflaed seems to have had no difficulty in adjusting to the wider horizons presented to her, and in becoming an extremely successful ruler, apparently, unlike other women discussed, in her own right. In the same territorial vein, though over a longer period, with much greater divisions of time, it may be worth considering whether it is more than a coincidence that the most openly powerful of the Carolingian royal wives, Engelberga, should belong to the branch of the family which ruled Italy, that country of Amalasuntha and Theudelinda. It is obviously quite impossible to put forward any claim to a continuous history of female power here, but it may be that the remnants of the Goths and Lombards, still resident in Italy, had happier memories of female rule than the Franks, and therefore found it more acceptable.

A final point which may be considered is whether heredity had any part to play in the success of some of these women. The fathers of Amalasuntha and Aethelflaed, Theoderic and Alfred, both earned themselves the title of "the Great" and it is tempting to wonder if their daughters had not inherited some of their abilities or prestige. At the very least, some of their reputation must be rubbed off on their families, perhaps enough to allow a sympathetic reception for their daughters' attempts to gain power. Indeed Totila, recalling the Ostrogoths' glorious past, finds Theoderic and Amalasuntha the only monarchs worth mentioning (107). In the same connection, it may be worth noting that the only Visigoth queen of whose power there is any real information, is Goiswinth, mother of Brunhild, the most lasting of Merovingian female rulers. Like mother, like daughter?

Overall therefore, female power can arise out of a development to its fullest extent of her position as consort, out of an accident of succession which leaves the way open to regency, out of male weakness or occupation, or out of local/

circumstances. Out of these, most power is, as a rule, available to the woman who can establish herself as a regent, most others tending to be dependent still upon the passive acquiescence, if not the active permission and encouragement, of her husband. All of them, however, depended upon the support of at least a part of the power structure, temporal or clerical. Admitting all these circumstantial factors in the emergence of female power, it would certainly be unfair to the women concerned, not to suggest that they owed something, possibly a good deal, to their own abilities. Again, Stenton, writing of Aethelflaed's policy of fortification, states "she had an eye for country and the ability to forecast the movement of her enemies (108), and a writer on Engelberga sees her as "a diplomat of real talent" (109). In a more contemporary context, Procopius writes of Amalasuntha's "wisdom and regard for justice", attributing to her, apparently as his compliment, " to a great extent, the masculine temper" (110). Granted that they possessed such abilities, it should not be surprising that when circumstances offered them the opportunity to take power, they should be more than willing to do so, and, as in the case of Brunhild, remarkably reluctant to surrender it.

C. Ends

Having gained power, by whatever means, what did these women do with it? For many of them, their primary concerns seem to be those of their family, which, in the case of the regents, means that they did their best to secure the position and power of their sons, or whatever relation served as the reason for their regency. Fredegund's desire to establish her son, Chlothar, as firmly as possible as Chilperic's son and successor has already been partially discussed, but Gregory reports her repeated attempts to bring Guntram into their camp. Immediately after her husband's death in 584 she sent to Guntram for protection, speaking of the infant whom she longed to place in his arms (111) and as much as seven years later, she was still begging him to become the boy's godfather and treat him like his own/

son (112). The actions of Brunhild and Balthild in arranging the succession of their sons, and, in the former case, grandsons and great-grandsons, has already been discussed, but there was also another side to this maternal concern. Once established, youthful kings had to be educated, here again their mothers played their part. Brunhild did not arrange a replacement for Childebert's nutritor because she wished to continue his upbringing herself (113), and Gregory the Great informs her that she pleases God, both in gubernacula regni and in educatio filii (114), both of apparently equal importance. Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen warns Fredegund of the need to amend her evil ways in order to be better able to bring up her son (115), while Procopius has much to say of Amalasuntha's attempts to give Athalaric a good Roman style education (116). A boy brought up by a female regent might well carry on her policies into adult life, as was certainly the case with Childebert who remained dependent upon his mother's will until hs death, and probably the case with Chlothar, who certainly carried out what would have been his mother's wishes with regard to Brunhild. The alternative as shown by the examples of Athalaric (117) and Theudebert (118), was a violent reaction against the teaching, which in neither case quoted had a permanent effect on the power of Amalasuntha or Brunhild. Again, there was decidedly mixed results in the reported cases of the involvement of these women with the lives of other members of their families. Brunhild attempted to persuade the Franks to assist Ingund in her troubles in Spain, but without success (119), and her letters to the Byzantine court are concerned with Ingund's son, Athanagild, though again she has no success. Fredegund certainly concerns herself with bringing her humiliated daughter, Rigunth, home (120), but once living together they quarrel bitterly, one row nearly ending in Rigunth's murder (121). Family concerns, therefore, to which a great deal of attention undoubtedly had to be paid, as they frequently formed the centre of power, were not a source of unmixed joy on a personal or political level.

Also on a political level attention had to be paid to keeping supporters happy. The use of patronage, in court and church, and the possibility of simple bribery have already been dealt with, but there are other, smaller instances of powerful queens using that power to assist friends who had been useful in the past or might be useful in the future. Although Aethelflaed is found granting land to a minister (122), most of the extant information comes from Gregory of Tours and concerns Fredegund and Brunhild. The former takes the judge, Audo, an earlier associate, under her protection in the aftermath of Chilperic's death (123), and both gave, and promised, large rewards to a certain Claudius (124). Brunhild is reported making a dramatic battlefield appearance, praecingens se viriliter, in order to protect Lupus, Duke of Champagne, from his enemies (125), receiving and rewarding Waddo, once a member of Rigunth's household (126), and raging over the death in a feud of Sichar, who had been under her protection (127). There is also a story in Fredegar, of Nantechildis' support for the family of Count Chainulf in a later feud (128). All this information provides glimpses of the establishment of the base of the pyramid of relationships on which all the queens must have relied for support for themselves, their families, and the policies they desired to pursue.

Some of these policies can occasionally be discerned. The Vita Balthildis, as might be expected in view of its form, concentrates heavily on Balthild's religious policy, concerning her acts against simony as well as her foundation of Chelles and Corbie (129). Gregory's letters to Brunhild concern themselves with simony (130), with her foundation of St. Martin's Autun (131) and with Augustine's mission to England (132). Engelberga was also responsible for the foundation of a convent at Piacenza (133). On a more wordly level, concern for a smooth succession was not limited to those women who functioned as regents. The fact that both Theudelinda and Goiswinth/

married their first husband's successor has already been discussed, and in the case of the latter, Gregory believed that her stepson, Reccared, found it necessary to make his peace with her upon his accession (134). Amalasuntha also took a hand in the succession after her son's early death, attempting to secure her own continued power, not by marriage, but by requiring her candidate, Theodahad, to swear an oath to be king in name only (135). Both she and Theodahad made it quite clear in their letters to the Senate and to Justinian that the initiative had been hers (136), though it was not restricted to these two alone. Thus Gregory the Great praises Theudelinda's work in causa pacis (137), and the Vita Balthildis deals with the peace and unity of the Franks under her rule (138) while Louis the Pious' biographer twice represents Judith as attempting to secure the position of Charles the Bald after her husband's death, by allying herself with her stepson, Lothar, previously one of her worst enemies (139). Engelberga's already mentioned diplomatic initiatives may well have been intended, both to settle the succession, and to attempt to heal some of the breaches caused by the case of Lothar II, while she also helped to smooth over her husband's quarrels with Nicholas I (140) and with Lothar II (141). Her contacts with other Carolingian monarchs may be considered as a form of foreign policy, another field in which some of these queens can be shown to have been active, though it would probably be an overstatement to claim that they pursued specific policies. As already mentioned Brunhild and Amalasuntha both had contacts with Constantinople, the latter at one time planning to flee there from Italy. Brunhild also maintained some kind of links with Spain, ---- for a time. Bishop Elafius of Chalons-sur-Marne died there on business for her (142), and she sent rich gifts to Reccared (143), ---- but towards the end of her life, after the repudiation of Ermenberga, these links were completely broken and the letters of the Visigothic Count Bulgar and King Sisebut's version of the Vita Desiderii are both evidence of an unremitting Spanish hostility towards her and her memory. Curiously enough, even before this, Gregory/

states that a document was found linking Fredegund and the Visigoth Leovigild, in a plot to kill Brunhild and Childebert (144), and reports on another occasion that she sent envoys to Spain (145). If this was the case, it may have been an attempt to carry their notorious rivalry outside their own borders.

Concerned with their families, anxious for the welfare of their supporters, peacemakers, ---- it is very tempting, perhaps especially for a female writer, to leave it there, with the powerful queens representing the forces of peace and sanity in the violent early medieval world. Unfortunately, there is more than sufficient evidence to prove that it was not entirely so. Even some of the things already quoted can be viewed in another light. Nantechildis' support for Chainulf's family, for example, was expressed by her consent to their attacks on another family; Amalasuntha decided against going to Constantinople when her arrangement to murder her three leading opponents met with success (146) ; Aethelflaed's whole career was devoted to war against the Vikings, in association with her brother in the Midlands, more independently in the west and north (147). Again, however, Brunhild and Fredegund are outstanding, whether in Gregory's view that the latter was a fitting consort for Chilperic, the Nero and Herod of his time (148), and the former a charming woman, or Fredegar's opinion that if Fredegund was bad, Brunhild was probably worse! Good friends in some cases, they were also, as the history of relations between them would prove alone, bad enemies, each accused of kiling the other's husband (149). In addition to her stepsons, Gregory blames Fredegund for the deaths of Leudast (150), Bishop Praetextatus (151) and three men involved in a feud who had refused to obey her orders to make peace (152) the torture of Mummolus (153) and the sequestration of the property of Duke Beppolen (154). Brunhild, in Gregory's version, threatens Lupus, Abbot of St. Privatus Javols (155), tries to spare Berthefried from her anger against Ursio (156),/

and sequesters Chramnesind's property in revenge for Sichar (157), but was not directly responsible for any deaths, though he admits that Guntram accused her of threatening to murder him (158). Fredegar, however, gives a list of her victims, --- Duke Wintrio (159), Aegyla (160), Wulf (161) and Bishop Desiderius (162). On a political level, both were accused of involvement with the pretender, Gundovald (163), and Fredegar regards Brunhild as responsible for inciting Theuderic to attack his brother, Theudebert (164), while Count Bulgar believed that she was ready to invite the Avars into Frankish territory for this campaign (165).

Overall, therefore, the ends pursued by these powerful women seem, to a large extent, to have been common to all of them. But, if a specific piece of policy from this period was quoted without the name of its originator, it would be extremely difficult to state whether it emanated from a male or female sovereign. The succession, the securing of support, peace and war, were the common concern of rulers of either gender, and add up to a concern for the smooth running of the kingdom. Even their concern with the continuance of their own power is not entirely female concern.

In each of the Germanic kingdoms, therefore, throughout this period, it was possible for a woman to attain effective power. The office of regent, which perhaps offered the most obvious opportunity, is, by coincidence, concentrated in the Merovingian Franks, but is not unknown among the Ostrogoths, the Lombards, and perhaps, if more were known about Seaxburh, the Anglo-Saxons. Whether regent or merely exceptionally powerful wife or widow, power can be shown, in all cases, to be linked to an exploitation, to their utmost extent, of the resources open to every queen, to the establishment of a network of support and probably to sheer force of personality. If there is one exception to the general rule it is that of Aethelflaed, whose position as a form of queen regnant,without the smokescreen of a regency or a complaisant husband, finds/

no continental parallels. Her case comes from an exceptional situation, when there appears to be no male heir to her husband, and her only rival for power was her brother, Edward, who was content, for her lifetime at least, to leave her to run Mercia, allowing him to pay greater attention to the Viking problem. As has been shown, however, her military ventures are not unparallelled, and it would probably be best to see her position as an extreme example of the possibilities available, rather than as something completely unique. If the means used to gain power were very similar, so were the ends to which it was put, but it would, as stated above, be unfair to regard these as something peculiar to female rulers. Procopius' praise of Amalasuntha's "masculine temper", already quoted, could equally be applied to the other women dealt with here. The kingdoms they ruled remained stable or even expanded, the could claim military successes, they could be seen, in fact, as successful rulers judged by any criterion, even, on occasion, that of willingness ruthlessly to dispose of opposition.

NOTES : CHAPTER FIVE

(1) Char. L/P 573, 583. This view may be changed by the publication of the MGH edition of Louis the Pious' charters.

(2) Char. Emp. L. II 386-7, 430-2

(3) Char. L/G 242

(4) Char. Carl/G 307

(5) Char. Ch/F 37-8, 253, 269-70

(6) Char. Carl II 208-9

(7) Char. Loth II 432

(8) Char. Mer. 19

(9) Char. Mer. 25-6, 28-9

(10) Char. Mer. 32, 35, 37-8

(11) Char. Mer. 52-3

(12) Sawyer 126, 127, 162

(13) Sawyer 127

(14) Cass. 296, 303, 304

(15) Cass. 298-9

(16) EPP GI, Vol.2 304-5

(17) EPP GI, Vol.1 236, 268-9 ; Vol.2 87-8, 431-2

(18) EPP GI, Vol.1 383-4, 430, 431-2 ; Vol. 2 5-8, 197,198-200, 318-9, 320-1, 321-2, 371-3

(19) EPP WIS 677-8, 679, 680-1

(20) EPP Aust. 139, 140, 141, 150

(21) EPP Joh VIII 42-3, 77-8, 87, 89, 99, 190-1, 278, 302, 311, 312

(22) Conc. Caes III 45-6

(23) Conc. Tol XVI 77

(24) Bede 230, 262

(25) ASC 35

(26) HF 194-5

(27) HF 400

(28) Char. Mer 26

(29) Char. Emp. L.II 430-2

(30) VB 486-7

(31) Ven. Fort. 280

(32) Raby 232

(33) AB 183
(34) AB 154
(35) EPP Mer. 122-4
(36) Fred. IV 18
(37) Ven. Fort. 172
(38) VC 86
(39) Fred. IV 22
(40) Fred. IV 75
(41) Stenton 324
(42) LHF 304-6
(43) Fred. IV 34
(44) Nithard 23
(45) EHD 717
(46) AB 106
(47) AB 154
(48) HF 309
(49) Ven. Fort. 106
(50) Fred. IV 13
(51) VB 486
(52) VB 491
(53) JB 218
(54) Proc. Vol III 23
(55) HF 318
(56) EPP WIS 681
(57) HF 455
(58) HF 221
(59) HF 446
(60) Reg. P 118
(61) AB 235
(62) AB 236
(63) AB 240
(64) AB 238
(65) V Wal. 554
(66) Folz 186
(67) Calmette 31
(68) Fichtenau x
(69) Ast. 633

(70) Proc. Vol III 15
(71) PD 133
(72) Fred. IV 68
(73) Char. Mer.19
(74) LHF 323
(75) Char. Mer. 53
(76) Schneider 175
(77) LHF 317
(78) Char. Mer. 32, 35
(79) VB 487
(80) Char. Mer. 26
(81) Schneider 164
(82) VC 86
(83) Fred. IV 13
(84) Fred. IV 32
(85) Fred. IV 67-8
(86) LHF 317
(87) VB 487
(88) HF 194
(89) HF 389
(90) HF 258
(91) HF 354
(92) HF 335
(93) HF 240
(94) HF 306
(95) HF 495
(96) HF 305
(97) HF 376
(98) HF 224
(99) HF 247
(100) AB 184
(101) AB 185-7
(102) AB 188
(103) Stenton 1947
(104) Stafford 1982
(105) EHD 86, 87, 90, 91, 92
(106) Dickins

(107) Proc. Vol. IV 225
(108) Stenton 1947, 324
(109) Odegaard 94
(110) Proc. Vol.III 15
(111) HF 328
(112) HF 520
(113) HF 389
(114) EPP GI, Vol. 1 384
(115) HF 397
(116) Proc. Vol. III 17
(117) Proc. Vol. III 19
(118) Fred. IV 12
(119) HF 387
(120) HF 363
(121) HF 455
(122) Sawyer 225
(123) HF 337
(124) HF 347
(125) HF 258
(126) HF 364
(127) HF 433
(128) Fred. IV 70-1
(129) VB 488-91
(130) EPP GI, Vol. 2 5-8, 199-200, 321-2
(131) EPP GI, Vol. 2 371-3
(132) EPP GI, Vol. 1 431-2
(133) Char. Emp. L. II 396-8
(134) HF 414
(135) Proc. Vol. III 35-7
(136) Cass. 296-301
(137) EPP GI. Vol. 2 87-8
(138) VB 488
(139) Ast. 640, 644
(140) AB 106
(141) AB 154
(142) HF 247
(143) HF 447

(144) HF 39

(145) HF 409

(146) Proc. III 22

(147) Wainwright

(148) HF 319

(149) HF 248 ; Fred. III 118

(150) HF 303

(151) HF 397-8

(152) HF 520

(153) HF 306

(154) HF 408

(155) HF 308

(156) HF 424

(157) HF 434

(158) HF 374

(159) Fred. IV 12

(160) Fred. IV 14

(161) Fred. IV 19

(162) Fred. IV 21

(163) HF 363, 514

(164) Fred. IV 19

(165) EPP WIS 677

6. Unhappy Endings

So far queens have been considered, whether as consorts or rulers, freom the point of view of their achievements, of which they might have been justly proud. Unfortunately, for many of them, there was also the fall.

A. The End of Power

It was very rare for women who had achieved real power still to be in possession of that power at their deaths. Of the Frankish regents, Himnechildis and Chrodchilde simply disappear from the records, leaving it unclear whether or not they predeceased their charges. For Nantechildis, it is certain, her death is recorded by Fredegar in the chapter immediately following upon that which describes her installation of Flaochad as mayor of the palace (1), so that she appears to have retained control of affairs at least till very near the end. The best example of retention of power, however, is that of Aethelflaed, outstanding in this, as in other aspects. According to the Mercian Register, just before her death in 918, her career of conquest had reached its peak, with the peaceful possession of Leicester, and the agreement of the people of York to accept her as ruler. An even greater mark of her success and prestige is that, on this unique occasion, there appears to have been the possibility of a female succession. In the entry for the following year, the Mercian Register records that Aelfwynn, daughter of Aethelred, and therefore of Aethelflaed also, was "deprived of all authority in Mercia" and taken to Wessex by her uncle, Edward (2). Short-lived as this was, it is eloquent testimony, not only to the tradition of Mercian queenship discussed above, but also the popularity of Aethelflaed's rule, since at least a party among the Mercians was willing to grant her daughter the authority of which she was to be deprived. Once in Wessex she simply disappears.

For most, if not all powerful women, however, the problem was that their power made enemies, though generally not, as/

in Aelfwynn's case, out of relations. Something has already been said of Brunhild's and Fredegund's moves against those who crossed them, and in the case of the former it is also possible to add that Guntram Boso abused her and encouraged her enemies (3) ; that palace officials conspired against her and against Childebert's wife, Faileuba (4), and that Egidius confessed to having conspired many times against that king and his mother (5). Amalasauntha, too, had to face the plots of her opponents (6), while at a later date, Engelberga made herself so resented by the Italian magnates that they attempted to engineer her divorce from Louis II and her replacement by the, presumably, more malleable, daughter of Winigis (7). At any crisis in a powerful queen's life, therefore, there was liable to be those who were ready to make use of it to pull her down.

The first possible crisis, for powerful women as for others, occurred on their husbands' death. For consorts, this was indeed also likely to be the last crisis of their public life, and mark their disappearance into obscurity. Ultrogotha, wife of Charibert, for example, was exiled by Chlothar I after his death (8), and seems to have spent the rest of her life cultivating her garden. Richildis similarly holds the annalists' attention for a time after the death of Charles the Bald by intriguing against his successor, but once she hands over the royal insignia, she too vanishes from the records (9). Powerful women also could find themselves in temporary or permanent eclipse at their husbands' death. Gregory of Tours adds a rare touch of pathos to his picture of Fredegund when he recounts how, after Chilperic's murder, only one bishop was prepared to involve himself in the burial of the corpse, which was taken to the church of St. Vincent in Paris while the queen remained derelicta in the cathedral (10). Fredegund's position in early widowhood seems open to some doubt. According to Fredegar and the Liber Historiae Francorum, she was quite simply in control of her son, and as has already been mentioned, of his troops, while Gregory himself shows her, over a considerable/

period, involved in the boy's upbringing and in the manipulation of his supporters. But he also relates how she was taken to the manor of Rueil on the orders of Guntram and left there with Bishop Milanius, while the magnates took over her son's education (11). This occurred early in her widowhood and does not seem to have represented a permanent banishment, but Gregory unfortunately makes no reference to her return to power. If she did make a comeback, it represents proof that, just as enemies could use the effects of a husband's death to threaten the power of a queen, so friends could help to lessen the evils which might ensue. By far the best example of this, however, is the Empress Engelberga. All the complete letters written to her by Pope John VIII date from after the death of Louis II, as do those which he wrote to various Italian magnates and churchmen urging them to respect and protect her property. Most markedly of all, when Charles the Fat had removed her from Italy, probably as a result of her daughter's alliance with Boso, The Pope's efforts to secure her return to Rome are attested, not only by his letters on her behalf to Louis III and Carloman IV (12) and Richardis and Liutward (13), but also by the Annales Bertiniani which state that she was returned to Pope John sicut petierat (14). Though powerless, therefore, but possibly still involved in intrigue, Engelberga does not disappear completely, because a friendship made in her days of power remained valuable to her.

Even if she attempted to gain or retain power through a regency, a queen's problems were not yet over. On at least two occasions there may have been attempts at establishing a regency that never, in a manner of speaking, got off the ground. The first case is that of Bertrada, mother of Charlemagne. According to the Fulda annals (15) and to Einhard (16), she was responsible for his first, Lombard,marriage, and in 771 Pope Stephen still wrote joint letters to her and to her son (17). This is not, however, backed by any suggestion that her position was officially that of regent, and her arrangement of her son's marriage was a mistake, for as Einhard states, his/

repudiation of the Lombard princess marked his only real quarrel with his mother (18), and she thereupon disappears from the histories until her death. The second example is that of Judith. For approximately the first year of his reign, as recorded by Nithard, Charles the Bald seems frequently to have been in his mother's company, while her possible leadership of some of his supporters has already been referred to (19), but in 841 she disappears from the records, and at her death, two years later, the annals of Xanten state that she was predata a filio substantia omni (20). In both these cases the son seems to have become impatient quickly with his mother's rule. On other occasions, female power could be cut short by the untimely death or illness of the son in whose name a woman ruled. Both Amalasuntha and Theudelinda had to face this problem, the former on Athalaric's death in 534, when she attempted to continue to rule through Theodahad (21), the latter when Adaloald went mad and was deposed (22). Even a long-term well-established regency ended with a son's majority ----- as Nelson wrote of Balthild ----- "regency imposed its own time limit and tenure was non-renewable" (23). This is particularly true in Balthild's case, as her son's majority coincides, rather too neatly for comfort, with her retiral to live the religious life at Chelles. Here again it was probably his decision to free himself from his mother's influence, but his youth would suggest that any enemies she had might well have been ready to encourage him.

It is against such failures to surmount the crises of female royal life that the achievement of Brunhild can best be measured. At her husband's death she was separated from her son and deprived of control over the royal treasure (24), and during her widowhood her enemies were able to taunt her with the fact that her power had ended with her husband's life (25). She succeeded in regaining control of her son and in dominating him, only to see him die young. Her power then came through his sons, but when Theudebert, the elder, reached his majority, she was forced out of his kingdom (26). She reacted/

to this by turning to the younger brother, Theuderic, dominating his life as absolutely as she had done his father's, and, incidentally, using him to destroy his brother. Up to this point, therefore, she had succeeded in overcoming all the crises with which it was possible for a female ruler to be faced. When Theuderic, in his turn, died young, however, the accumulated animosity of the enemies she had made during her rule finally overwhelmed her. Attempting to exercise power in the name of her greatgrandsons, she was betrayed into the hands of Fredegund's son, Chlothar II, accused of ten murders, --- in spite of the fact that he himself had been responsible for some of these deaths ----- tortured, paraded through his army on a camel, and finally dragged to her death behind an unbroken horse (27). Her case proves that though long-term success was possible, any weakness could still lead to destruction.

Brunhild's fate is unique only in its dramatic flourishes, ----- other queens also found power could lead to worse things than a descent into obscurity. In Amalasuntha's case, Procopius is quite explicit ; having been imprisoned by her protegē, Theodahad, she was then killed by her enemies, with his permission (28). According to Bede, Osthryd, a queen of Mercia, was killed by her own people, though unfortunately he gives no details of why they did so (29). Other instances are even less specific, but can be suggestive, particularly when a death occurs at a convenient moment for those who could have arranged it. Thus Theudelinda apparently died very shortly after her son's deposition and death (30), while Goiswinth's death is reported after the story of her conspiracy against Reccaréd, and the condemnation to exile of her fellow-plotter, Bishop Uldida (31). On such sparse evidence, it is possible to suggest either that these ladies, deprived of their power, decided on suicide or that they were disposed of by their successful opponents. It is also possible, of course, that their deaths were quite natural, but if so, they were wonderfully well timed!

In some cases, not even death was sufficient to free a queen from her enemies and once she herself had been destroyed, her reputation also suffered. In Brunhild's case, the Vitae of Columbanus and of Desiderius of Vienne agree in representing her as a second Jezebel, as the evil genius of the boys she manipulated, and Fredegar follows the former particularly closely. So well established did her reputation for evil become, that two and a half centuries later Paschasius Radbert used it for comparison in his attack on Judith (32). It is tempting,too, to see Gregory's very highly coloured account of the life of Amalasuntha, which includes her elopement with a slave, and her poisoning of her own mother (33), as a reflection of stories spread to blacken her name after her death. Even the virtuous Balthild did not entirely escape calumny. Her apparent involvement in the death of Bishop Aunemundus was recorded by Eddius in his Vita of St. Wilfred, where she too is seen as Jezebel (34), and from there found its way into Bede (35). One of the best English examples of character assassination, however, is Asser's story of Eadburh (36), which may, as suggested above, arise out of an attempt to introduce a degree of female power into Wessex, while the West-Saxon Chronicle deals with Aethelflaed's real power simply by ignoring it. Perhaps the easiest way of defaming a queen was to claim that she was adulterous. This was particularly so in the case of Judith, accused of adultery with Bernard, not only in the writings of such of her enemies as Agobard of Lyons (37), but in public court, so that she was compelled to declare her innocence on oath (38). Fredegund is also accused of having taken as her lover, Landeric, the mayor of the palace, and of having arranged her husband's murder because he found out (39), while Brunhild is said to have been the 'bedfellow' of Protadius (40), though as a widow her case was presumably slightly less reprehensible.

Women who sought power were, therefore, unlikely to find their path a smooth one. Power could be lost through the /

the death of a husband, son, or through that son's hostility when he was of an age to make his decisions effective, while opponents were always willing to exploit any such vulnerable moment. Violent death was also a possibility to be reckoned with, while there was no guarantee that they would leave a good name behind them, and every likelihood that they would not.

B. The End of Marriage

For most queens, the most important role was that of wife, but that too could be taken from them. The most obvious end to marriage came with the husband's death, and, if she could not control his heir or marry his successor, his widow probably disappeared into obscurity. Even a queen with the influence of Chrotechildis,once widowed, concentrated on good works, went only occasionally to Paris (41), and, most markedly of all, was unable to protect her grandsons from their uncles' consuming ambition (42). For some royal widows there was possibly compensations to be found in the religious life, even Engelberga was addressed by Pope John as a woman Christo dicata (43). Mayr-Harting wrote that "the position of abbess was an ideal one for royal widows ... in a barbarian society where men died younger than women" (44), and it has already been suggested that such a position offered a tempting continuation of influence, while Leyser also believes that the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks, like the Old Saxons, found the religious life a useful means of disposing of surplus female connections (44a).

Widowhood was not, however, the only means by which a marriage could be ended. There was also the possibility tha a queen might find herself divorced. In the early part of this period divorce would seem to be rather too formal a term to be used. Merovingian royal wives like Marcatrude (45) and Ingoberg (46) were simply 'dismissed', while Dagobert disposed of Gomatrudis merely by leaving her at the villa where their marriage had taken place (47). A similar Anglo-Saxon example/

states Coenwalh of Kent "repudiated" the daughter of Penda (48). Like widows, divorced royal women frequently retired to convents like Audovera, dismissed, according to the Liber Historiae Francorum, as a result of a plot by Fredegund (49), or Ingoberg, though by the time her religious life is described, she was also a widow (50). Interestingly, none of these women seem to have made any attempt to recover their position, and in only one case, that of Coenwalh, did their family take any effective action to avenge the slight. In all cases there are no details given of the precise means by which a wife might be "dismissed" or "repudiated", and in Gomatrudis' case the process would appear to have been simple to the point of being casual. As discussed above, however, marriage throughout this period was becoming a more and more precise and even more binding ceremony, largely eliminating the excesses of the Merovingians, and it would be reasonable to assume that divorce would also acquire a more standard form, and probably become more difficult. There are certain signs of this at the very beginning of the Carolingian dynasty, since Pope Stephen, writing to the Frankish king, Charles, and to Carloman, recalled that his predecessor and namesake had succeeded in persuading their father, Pippin, ut nequaquam praesumpsisset dimittere dominam et genetricem vestram (51), Bertrada. The fact that the main burden of this letter is the extreme disapproval, indeed the horror, of the Pope at the idea of either of the Frankish princes marrying a daughter of the Lombard king, may go some way towards explaining why Charlemagne's repudiation of that same Lombard princess was allowed to pass without apparent clerical comment. Even much later in the history of the Carolingian house, however, it remained possible for the repudiation of a wife to be passed over almost in silence. Louis the Stammerer, having married Ansgard against his father's will (52), was, according to Regino of Prüm, compelled to separate from her and to marry Adelheid in her place (53). Werner believed that Regino's statement was quite accurate, associating the second marriage with the rise to prominence of Adelheid's family (54), but a/

recent writer on Hincmar would prefer to make the marriage Louis' own choice and to associate it either with his revolt against his father, or with his accession to the throne (55). The problem is made insoluble by the fact that no source makes any mention of this change, and the only suggestion of irregularity occurs in John VIII's refusal to crown Adelheid along with Louis (56) though Werner would also associate this with the fact that Louis and Adelheid stood within the prohibited degrees (57). Again, however, there is a singular lack of detail about the processes by which a "divorce" could be carried out.

Any consideration of royal divorce in this period must have at its centre the case of Lothar II, if only because of the extent to which it is reported. From 857 onwards the Annalis Bertiniani makes almost yearly reports on its development, while the MGH editors print eighteen "Epistolae ad Divortium Lotharii II Regis Pertinentes" (58), as well as twenty-five letters of Pope Nicholas I and three of Hadrian II. There is also Hincmar's extremely lengthy treatise on the subject. In its simplest form the narrative consists of Lothar's repeated attempts to rid himself of a hated, and barren, wife, Theutberga, in order to replace her with his mistress, Waldrada, and the absolute refusal of the papacy to countenance this. His reasons for divorce were various ---- Theutberga was accused of perversion, incest and abortion (59), and confessed, possibly under compulsion, to the second (60), while Lothar's association with Waldrada was said to have predated his marriage to Theutberga, and to have been approved, indeed arranged, by his father (61), ---- but his opponents objected that only adultery, which he did not claim, could justify the repudiation of a wife, and that even then remarriage was forbidden, the only alternatives open being chastity or reconciliation. Objections were also raised to the validity of the local synods which had allowed the divorce, which led to the excommunication of Gunthar and Theutgaud, the leaders of the Lotharingian church (62). The really remarkable part of the story, however, seems to be/

Lothar's persistence in the face of so many and such powerful rebuffs, in marrying Waldrada, and as discussed above, in having her crowned (63), in trying on a second occasion, in 866, to compel Theutberga to make a false confession and retire to a convent (64), in sending her to Rome to incriminate herself before the Pope (65), and even on the eve of his death, persuading Hadrian II to invest him with a cloak, a palm and a rod, which he could interpret as permission to return to Waldrada (66). In view of the fact that Waldrada herself received, from the same Pope, absolution from an earlier excommunication on condition that she no longer associated with Lothar (67), it may be permitted to wonder if she was just a little less resolute. In this case, therefore, the ecclesiastical view of the necessary grounds and procedures for divorce, unhinted at in other cases, is not only clear, but, eventually, victorious.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a Merovingian king enduring such a long drawn out process as that of Lothar. They retained one absolutely final option which the Carolingians never seem to have exercised ---- they could, and did, have their wives murdered! The most notorious case is that of Galswinth, strangled in her bed on her husband's orders, per consilium pessimum Fredegundis (68), particularly in view of the ensuing renowned vendetta. But Chilperic also disposed of another wife, Audovera, who suffered a crudele morte, after her sons by him had been murdered, and long after she herself had been dismissed (69). In a later example Theudebert II assassinated his wife, Bilichildis (70). The fact that the only examples are Merovingian may be because of the notorious unscrupulousness of that dynasty, or because other royal houses concealed such events better.

Presumably, there was some reason behind each of these dismissals, divorces or murders, but it is almost impossible, to discover what they were. In some cases, and again, particularly the Merovingian ones, it appears to be nothing/

more complex than the appearance on the scene of a more attractive prospect ---- thus, Ingoberg's dismissal came about because she attempted to disgrace her husband's mistresses (71). On other occasions, personal and political motives could be combined. The importance of a son for a queen's position has already been discussed, and complete failure to produce one could, for a king conscious of his need for heirs, provide a more than legitimate motive for repudiation. One last source, the Gesta Dagoberti, which Wallace-Hadrill believes drew on contemporary information (72), attributes the dismissal of Gomatrudis to her childlessness, while Nelson puts forward the same problem as one of the reasons for the murder of Bilichildis (73). Two of Nicholas I's letters also mentions Theutberga's sterility, though he does not regard it as justifying divorce, on one occasion suggesting that it may be a result of Lothar's sins (74), and on the other, drawing attention to the examples of Sarah, Anna and Elizabeth to show that the condition was not always irreversible (75). In this case, however, a political motive lay behind not only Lothar's attempts at divorce, but also behind at least some of the resistance to it. Charles the Bald, who stood to inherit at least part of Lothar's kingdom, has been accused of using Hincmar to pour oil on the fire of Lothar's trouble (76), and would doubtless have been more than happy to comply with Nicholas' request that he support Theutberga (77). Aside from concern with the succession, divorce may have been motivated by a desire to escape from a connection that had become politically embarrassing. This may well have been the case for Charlemagne and Louis the Stammerer, while it has already been suggested that Gomatrudis, his stepmother's sister, may have been a wife Dagobert felt he could do without. A further political motive which Nelson suggests for Bilichildis' murder, is that she had lost the support of her husband's magnates (78), which would find a parallel in the abortive Italian attempt to remove Engelberga. The murder of Audovera may also have had a political purpose, in that it prevented her/

making any attempt to avenge her sons, and, along with enforced entrance of her daughter into the religious life, would thus represent a clean sweep of that particular branch of the royal family. In all these political speculations, however, it should not perhaps be forgotten. that no-one would be likely, for purely political reasons, to deprive hmself of a wife whom he still loved, and that personal dislikes may have played a greater part in these decisions than is now discernible.

C. Joint Ends.

In some particularly unfortunate cases, the death of a royal wife was the result, not of some failure, personal or political, but, in a sense, of her success as a wife, because she shared her husband's fate. Chramn, the son of Chlothar I, had rebelled against his father, to the point where they faced each other in open battle. Defeated, Chramn delayed his escape in an attempt to take his wife and daughters along with him, and was captured by his father's men. On Chlothar's orders, the entire family were than burned alive (79). In this first case, the motive appears to have been a mixture of revenge and, again, a desire to dispose of all possible opponents, but the second and third cases may have more political implications. Frankish historians report Childebert II's death without comment, but Paul the Deacon adds that he was poisoned cum uxore propria (80). It is tempting to see this as an attempt to cut Brunhild off from power, perhaps linked to the earlier conspiracy against her and Faileuba, but, if so, it failed. According to the Liber Historiae Francorum, Childeric II, having been found to be an unsuitable king, was killed by his rebellious subjects, una cum regina eius pregnante, quod dici dolore est (81). This has been described as the 'true succession crisis of the dynasty' (82), and it appears more than likely that it was Belechild's pregnancy that sealed her fate, since here death therefore removed another possible claimant to the throne, as well as disposing of the need for another minority succession. In both these cases,/

however, the fault was the husband's, not the wife's, and their deaths can only be described as due to bad luck, in their marriage, and in their presence at their husband's side at precisely the wrong moment.

As in the chapter on marriage, divorce, or whatever means were used to end a marriage, has so far been described as a purely male decision. This seems particularly true in the case of Theutberga, who left her husband when he wished her to, and returned to him when the Pope decided it was necessary. Given her, perhaps, forced confessions, her imprisonment (83) and her treatment as queen in name only (84), it seems more than likely that Theutberga was just as anxious to leave Lothar as he was to be left, but her desires were not regarded as important by any of the participants except herself. There are cases, however, where the decision that the marriage should end is taken by the wife. The most dramatic examples of this are obviously Rosamund, Fredegund, Eadburh, ---- all those women who were accused of murdering their husbands. More peacefully, the converse of Basina's decision to follow Childeric is, that to do so, she must first desert her original husband (85). The rare capability for a woman to decide her own marital fate is also demonstrated by two of the period's saints, namely, Aethelthryth and Radegund. Of the first, the Vita Wilfridi simply states that she separated from her husband to dedicate herself to God (86), but Bede makes it a longer process, stating that she had to beg Egfrid for her freedom over a considerable period, and that it was only obtained with difficulty (87). Nevertheless, the source of the initiative is unmistakable, though the final decision may have been male. Radegund's entry into religion was somewhat more immediate, consisting of a sudden appeal to Bishop Medard to consecrate her on the spot, which was done in spite of the protests of her husband's supporters (88). Though these examples show that the possibility of a female decision of this kind did exist, it must be stressed that it was very rare, and that most women stayed married, of were divorced or its equivalent,

at the will of their husbands or of the ecclesiastical authorities, ---- also, of course, male.

The overall message of this chapter, therefore, is that no queen was wholly safe, and that nothing she did or neglected to do, could be counted on as a protection. Overwhelmingly powerful or insignificant ; childless, pregnant or a mother of several children ; hated by her husband or happily married,---- at least one example can be found, in every category, of a woman who ended her life unhappily or even violently. Only the drama of her fall from the height of power marks out a case like Brunhild's, ---- she had many sisters under the skin, who had equal problems. Curiously enough, the chance for a woman to make her own decisions seems limited, with one exception, to saints and murderesses,and even in this pious and violent age, the majority of women were neither.

NOTES : CHAPTER SIX

(1) Fred. IV 476
(2) EHD 217
(3) HF 421
(4) HF 458
(5) HF 513
(6) Proc. Vol. III 21
(7) AB 188
(8) HF 152
(9) AB 218-9
(10) HF 321
(11) HF 339
(12) EPP Joh VIII 236-7
(13) EPP Joh VIII 267-9
(14) AB 249
(15) AF 348
(16) Einhard 74
(17) C. Car. 564-7
(18) Einhard 74
(19) Nithard 15-6, 19, 23, 29
(20) AX 227
(21) Proc. Vol. III 35
(22) PD 133
(23) Nelson 51
(24) HF 194-5
(25) HF 268
(26) Fred. IV 12-3
(27) Fred. IV 34-5
(28) Proc. Vol. III 41
(29) Bede 564
(30) Foulke 191
(31) JB 218
(32) V Wal. 568
(33) HF 126-7
(34) VW 14
(35) Bede 520

(36) Asser 12-3
(37) Libri Pro Filiis 275
(38) AB 4
(39) LHF 302-4
(40) Fred. IV 16
(41) HF 94
(42) HF 118-9
(43) EPP Joh VIII 42
(44) Mayr-Harting 151
(44a) Leyser 1979 64
(45) HF 156
(46) HF 157
(47) Fred. IV 49
(48) Bede 232-4
(49) LHF 292-3
(50) HF 445
(51) C. Car. 561
(52) AB 91
(53) Reg. P. 114
(54) K. Werner 440
(55) Devisse 437
(56) AB 227
(57) K. Werner 440
(58) EPP Div.
(59) DLR 629
(60) Capit. II 467
(61) EPP Div. 215
(62) AB 99
(63) AB 94
(64) AB 133
(65) AB 140
(66) AB 155
(67) EPP Had. II 701
(68) LHF 292
(69) HF 247
(70) Fred. IV 29

(71) HF 158
(72) Fred. IV 48
(73) Nelson 1978 44
(74) EPP Nic. I 320
(75) EPP Nic. I 324
(76) K. Werner 437
(77) EPP Nic. I 329
(78) Nelson 1978 44
(79) HF 153-4
(80) PD 120
(81) LHF 318
(82) Wallace-Hadrill 1962 236
(83) AB 78
(84) AB 129
(85) HF 52
(86) VW 40
(87) Bede 390-2
(88) VR 368

7. Conclusion

Having studied how women became queens, what kind of women they were, their private influence and public power, and the end of their careers or lives, what conclusions, if any, can be drawn?

Firstly, in purely Frankish terms, throughout this study it has been suggested, more or less explicitly, that the change of dynasty in 751 also marked a change in almost every aspect of queenship. The Merovingians were polygamous, the Carolingians were not ; The Merovingians married foreign princesses and slaves ; the Carolingians married native noblewomen ; Merovingian queens exercised great power, publicly and privately, the role of Carolingian women, by and large, was insignificant ; the Merovingians casually disposed of their wives by "divorce" or murder, the Carolingians did not, at least not successfully. There was even, perhaps, a difference in the character of Carolingian queens ---- the good ones do not attain the sanctity of a Radegund or a Balthild, nor the bad ones the villainy of Brunhild or Fredegund. The one immediately apparent common feature is the tendency for these women who achieved some degree of power, to lose it, and come to bad, or at least obscure and unhappy ends. How far do these differences really exist, and why?

Some which plainly exist are quite easily explained. The Carolingians no longer married foreign princesses, for example, because there were no longer many foreign princesses available. The Ostrogoths had fallen to the Byzantines, to be replaced by the Lombards, and the Visigoths had been overthrown by the Arabs. Frankish expansion itself had taken care of the rest, culminating in Charlemagne's defeat of the Lombards. From then on, the foreign royalty available was Anglo-Saxon or Byzantine, and attempts at alliances in these directions tended to peter out into acrimony. The reason why slave marriage died out, in favour of alliances with the/

nobility, is slightly more difficult to explain. Perhaps, as a new dynasty, even though one with papal sanction, the Carolingians felt more in need of the kind of support that a noble marriage might secure, or perhaps they had a higher sense of what was due to their new royal dignity, and shrank from lowering themselves to marry their servants. The example of Lothar I and Doda would, by the way, indicate that the latter consideration did not apply to non-marital liaisons. Another explanation might be bound up with a general increase in the attention paid to the importance of noble birth ---- Werner has written "one may say that the Carolingians, even in the period of their greatest power, were much more closely restricted than the early and powerful Merovingians in the choice of their helpers to men of noble birth, and, as we have seen, to men of suitable grade and rank" (1). If this was the case for the Carolingians' male helpers, it presumably also applied to the women they married. Finally, it is possible that marriage to the nobility merely represented a custom of the nobility itself, which the Carolingians carried with them on their rise from that estate to royal power. Boussard, after listing some of the links with the Austrasian nobility established in the ninth century, including Lothar I's marriage to Ermengard and Louis the Pious' choice of Judith, goes on to write "we have every reason to believe that long before this time alliances were being contracted between Austrasian families and the Arnulfians" (2). It is highly unlikely that these motives for a change in the pattern of choice of wife could be separated from each other in such a way as to state that each Carolingian marriage could be given one cause. More likely they all played a part in each marriage, varying in their relations to each other, and occasionally having added to them a strand of purely personal desire. It is also possible to stand the whole argument on its head, and suggest that the renewal of the power of the Frankish monarchy, which the Carolingians represented, made a marriage with the royal family a more attractive proposition for the noble families which they ruled, so that the suggestion that one of their/

daughters should become the king's bride would have a greater chance of being well received.

One factor in the increased attraction of royal marriages must have been the increased security of a wife's position under the Carolingians, since a Merovingian wife appears almost always to have been faced with the risk of losing or having to share her husband. The importance of this transformation, of the growing emphasis on the clerical view of marriage and its insertion in secular law, has already been discussed. Duby believes that "Dans la très longue histoire de la progressive de l'imparfaite insertion du modèle ecclesiastique dans le modèle laique, le IXE siecle apparait comme un moment decisif", giving as one of the reasons the increased co-operation of the Carolingians with the Church (3). The Carolingians, particularly Louis the Pious, undoubtedly did co-operate with the Church and transfer its views to their laws, but only as far as it remained politically convenient for them to do so. The divorce of Lothar II is a case in point. Hincmar and Nicholas II put the church's case for the indissolubility of marriage, but they received the political backing of Charles the Bald and to a lesser extent Louis the German, only because it was expedient for them to give it. Theutberga was barren, and Lothar's kingdom would pass to his uncles on his death ; Waldrada had given Lothar children, who, if recognised as legitimate, would be his heirs. The choice of Theutberga, therefore, became a political imperative. During roughly the same period, Charles the Bald presided over the separation of Louis the German's son from his unapproved wife, and if Regino is to be believed, over the repudiation of Louis the Stammerer's first wife. In neither case do the views of the Church on the matter seem to have received the slightest consideration ---- they did not agree with the political needs of the moment.

In the discussion above, of the increasing distinction/

between wives and concubines, it was suggested that one indication of this was the exclusion of sons of the latter from their fathers' inheritance. Again, however, this capitulation to the will of the Church was also a good thing politically. If the dangers of having too many partakers in the division of the kingdom were not clear from Merovingian examples, they must have become so during Louis the Pious' troubles, which all resulted from his attempt to find a place for his last born son in an already planned partition. A cast-iron Church-backed excuse to disinherit "illegitimate" sons was therefore likely to find a warm welcome among the Carolingian kings, but this welcome only lasted as long as the doctrine of legitimate succession was politically useful. When there were no legitimate heirs partem immatura aetate pereunte ; partem sterilitate coniugem marcescente (4), Arnulf, Carloman's son by a concubine, inherited the title of Emperor. In terms of the greater order of Carolingian marriage, therefore, the only change that stands up to close scrutiny is that from polygamy to monogamy ---- even if, on occasions, it was merely a question of waiting till a wife was dead,or apparently divorced, before remarrying or taking a mistress. As for the apparent changes in the legitimacy of marriage, divorce and children, they can be shown to have been, in terms of the royal house at least, purely cosmetic. Put forward by the church, they were accepted by kings and emperors when they could make use of them, and dismissed when they could not. The Merovingians had nothing to teach the Carolingians about cynical manipulation of the marriage tie.

The one undoubted change, that which, perhaps directly from church influence or just a general change in the habits of society, brought in royal monogamy, may also have had some bearing on the power exercised by queens. A woman made queen by marriage, possibly strengthened in that position by coronation ---- for even though it was not a definite part of the solemnisation of marriage, it cannot have done any harm ---- was much less likely to feel the need to indulge in political/

intrigue, than one who knew herself to be surrounded by rivals, all ready to move into her place. It has already been suggested that where there was a real harem of queens, absorption in in-fighting behind the scenes may have prevented any of them from attaining real political prominence, but conversely it may be suggested that a woman who fought her way out of such a situation to gain the position of chief wife, would have honed her political instincts in so doing, and then be ready to take on the outside world. The obvious example of this possibility is Fredegund. The Liber Historiae Francorum's story of her plot against Audovera may be anachronistic and in some ways plain silly, but it does accurately suggest the atmosphere of intrigue from which she emerged on to the political stage. In this connection it may be worth mentioning again the fact that Engelberga was the only Carolingian queen, aside from the luckless Theutberga, who had to face a threat from a rival for her position ---- a threat she seems to have dismissed by the simple expedient of returning to her husband's side, and presumably making her presence felt (5). Rivalry in spheres other than the purely personal also seems at times to have played a part in female power. Both Judith and Engelberga make their mark on Carolingian history at a time when the partition of the empire is in question and boundaries are being redrawn, as was also the case for a good deal of Merovingian history. When boundaries are settled and kings concern themselves with their own kingdoms, the queen's role tends to diminish as under Charlemagne, Charles the Bald, or Louis the German.

Another reason for the lessening of female power under the Carolingians may be in the generally greater organisation of society. Writing of the disappearance of the great early medieval abbesses, Southern states "as society became better organised and ecclesiastically more right-minded, the necessity for male dominance began to assert itself" (6). The same may, in a sense, have been true of queens. Merovingian/

society was perhaps never very well organised under the rule of kings or queens, but it is notable that in the Carolingian period it is when order is threatened that queens become powerful ---- again. Judith and Engelberga are examples of this, possibly along with Louis the Younger's wife, Liutgard. One difference that does seem to exist is that under the Merovingians a strong king could apparently co-exist with a powerful wife, while strong Carolingians tended to have obscure queens. Increasingly, therefore, female power was becoming something rare and peculiar, associated with weakness in a king, or with preoccupations which distracted him from the everyday business of government. The Carolingians were also, of course, fortunate in that during the period of their greatest power, and even the beginning of their decline, there were no minority successions to open the way to a powerful queen regent. Indeed the question of whether a queen would have been an acceptable regent in this later period must remain open. Merovingian Chroniclers appear to accept female power quite calmly, but a possible lack of Carolingian sympathy for the idea appears in the fact that Judith's enemies found it necessary to turn to witchcraft for an explanation of her power over Louis.

The difference in female power between the two dynasties may also, of course, reflect the apparent difference in force of personality between the women chosen by kings of the two families. It is difficult, if not impossible, to account for the relative absence from Carolingian chronicles of the dramatic females so often encountered among the Merovingians. In the latter dynasty indeed, they are not limited to these women who make their political mark ---- Guntram's wife asking him to kill the doctors who had failed to save her (7) is every bit as forceful and vengeful as Brunhild or Fredegund, though it is almost her only appearance in history. This must be at least partly a result of the style adopted by the writers of the time ---- no Carolingian work is equal to Gregory of Tours for sheer gossipy value ---- but it is also tempting/

to see it as in some way an outcome of the variation in the type of women married. The Merovingian mixture of slaves and princesses might, in this view, provide a more interesting range of personality than the blander Carolingian choice of well-brought up noblewomen. Whatever its causes ---- chance or deliberate downgrading of the female role ---- the difference in power seems to be a real one, and it is depressing to reflect that it may have been combined with an increase in organisation and civilisation.

Overall, however, on close scrutiny, the differences between the two Frankish dynasties tend to appear less marked than at first glance. Only the narrowing in the range of women who became queens is fully proved, and this may not have been entirely a good thing, as the claims of the nobility were strengthened by their increased closeness to the royal house. For the other differences, particularly those concerning the form of marriage, they appear to amount to a greater Carolingian willingness to cover their tracks, to offer public lip-service to the Church's views, while adhering to them in private only insofar as it suited their purposes. The one thing that their adherence to the law does seem to have wiped out, is the possibility that a queen who failed in some way might be murdered, though it is perhaps likely that this restraint, rather than being due to a greater morality, was forced upon them by the knowledge that a noble wife's powerful relatives could take more effective vengeance than was possible for other classes. As for the difference in female power, it undoubtedly exists in number and perhaps in degree, but not in method. As was made clear above, the means to female power were largely the same for Judith and Engelberga as they had been for the great Merovingians, with the exception of the powers of regent. In total, the similarities between the two dynasties outweighed the differences, particularly when an apparent difference can be shown to have been due only to short-term force of circumstance.

Extending the discussion to a comparison of the Franks with the other kingdoms, a very similar picture emerges. As had already been stated in connection with women in power, no queen was unique, another queen from another people could be found acting in exactly the same manner. The same titles ; the same means of acquiring them ; the same preoccupations ; the same duties ; the same possibilities for personal advancement to power ; even the same unfortunate consequences appear again and again among each people and at every point in the period. It would be unwise even to discount Wessex completely in this list of comparisons. Asser's story of Alfred's childhood makes it clear that his mother took an active part in his education (8), recalling the Frankish queens' role in connection with the iuvenes at court, or Amalasuntha's concern for her son. The link with books and poetry also recalls the cultural influence of queens both on the continent and in other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Wessex may have denied the king's wife the title of queen, but it appears highly unlikely that the advantage of having a female involvement in the running of the royal household were entirely ignored, and even more imporbable that she was excluded, as a rule from the upbringing of her children. There is no reason to believe that Alfred's mother was unique, and it should be remembered that Aethelflaed, possibly the most openly powerful of all early medieval royal wives, emerged from the Wessex court.

Though never stated by contemporaries, queenship therefore always took a recognisable form. By coincidence, it was perhaps most fully explored under the Merovingians, but by no means neglected elsewhere. Overall, therefore, it is fair to say that, if a Frankish queen, say of the Merovingian period, had found herself miraculously changed with an Anglo-Saxon queen of two hundred years later, she would have found her position within the household very similar ; she would have been familiar with the responsibilities allotted to her and would if it was to her taste, have had almost the same chance to acquire real power.'

NOTES : CHAPTER SEVEN

(1) Reuter 179

(2) Boussard 69

(3) Matrimonio 26-7

(4) Reg.P. 117

(5) AB 188

(6) Southern 310

(7) HF 241-2

(8) Asser 20-1

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