

CONVERSION POLITICS: MOTIVATIONS BEHIND CLOVIS' BAPTISM AND THE
RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS

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Introduction and Historiography

At the turn of the sixth century CE, Clovis, King of the Franks in northwestern Gaul (northwestern France) converted to Catholic Christianity. While the spiritual decision of one man may not seem that significant in the grand scheme of history, the truth is that this one choice of this tribal sovereign completely changed the course of France as well as of Europe as a whole. His conversion established a relationship between the Frankish (later French) government and the Catholic Church that would persist for over a millennium—until the French Revolution in 1789. Along with this, his entrance into the Catholic Church set the foundation for the European Christendom that existed throughout the medieval period. His decision was not an obvious one since, at the time of his reign, the inhabitants of the region in which he lived and ruled followed various faiths and Catholicism was largely in the minority, especially among the non-Roman elites of Europe with whom he interacted. While no one living during the period knew just how momentous this action would be, some—particularly the Catholic clergy—living then as well as shortly afterwards saw the potential importance of such a choice, especially in regards to the promotion of Catholicism in Europe.

There are several detailed accounts of Clovis' Catholic baptism from these early centuries of the medieval period—particularly the sixth through eighth centuries—that demonstrate just how important these writers viewed his decision to convert to Catholic Christianity, both for the Gallic region as well as for the Roman Church. While these accounts can be helpful for historians to better understand this important event, they are highly flawed and leave many questions concerning this incident. There are no debates that this conversion of Clovis did indeed occur; however, there are many questions concerning its details, most of which these primary

accounts neglect to mention. For one thing, the religious landscape of Gaul at the time of Clovis' rule and baptism is uncertain.

As with the majority of Europe during this period, the invasion of the Roman Empire as well as the Germanic migrations that followed it helped to create a highly heterogeneous society within Gaul, the population of which mainly consisted of those individuals originating from the Celtic, Germanic, and Roman peoples. These societies brought with them their own cultures, laws, and religious beliefs and practices. Clovis began his rule in 481 as the sole king of the Salian Franks—one tribal community of this Germanic society—in northeastern France but ended it as king of the majority of Gaul. Through his conquests he became the ruler of a vast territory that spanned the bulk of modern day France (the exception being Burgundy in the southwest) as well as Belgium, and the southwestern most regions of Germany. In winning this land, he became the ruler of the multiple peoples who lived in the region, including his fellow Germans who settled mainly in the northeastern regions, the Celts who lived throughout the territory, as well as the Romans who primarily inhabited the southernmost areas. He interacted with people of varying backgrounds and faiths and was, therefore, most likely influenced by them to varying extents in their customs and practices. This is significant since he was exposed to the various religions that were practiced in his new kingdom. These faiths included the diverse practices and creeds of those following the myriad of pagan faiths found in this region as well as the newly established Christian sects that had recently settled there and the significant number of those of the Jewish faith who inhabited the land. This made his decision to choose Catholicism above all the rest that much more momentous; especially when the opposing Christian sect of Catholicism—Arianism—was much more popular among his neighboring leaders.

This leads to the next significant piece of information that has been lost to history: the motivation behind Clovis' decision to become a member of the Catholic Church. The possible reasons for his conversion remain highly debatable, leaving historians uncertain as to whether his choice was based on his personal faith, his political self-interests, or some other unknown reason. The region that he ruled in, as well as those that surrounded his small Salian kingdom, were in a period of transition. The authority of the Roman Empire was waning, especially in its peripheral territories such as Gaul, and the lands of this region were gradually divided up and governed by the newly established dynasties of Germanic stock, the vast majority of whom followed the Arian faith. While these leaders were Arian Christians, a large portion of their populace was not, particularly the Gallo-Romans of the South —Romans and their descendants living in Gaul—who were Catholic Christians. Therefore, this significant portion of the Gallic population would most likely have preferred a ruler who also was a member of their Catholic community. It is probable that Clovis was aware of this fact and took advantage of their desire for a ruler of the same faith by providing himself as their Catholic champion in return for their cooperation and support when he invaded their territory to make it his own.

It is possible that his decision to join the Catholic Church was solely out of a sincere change of faith on his part as most of the near contemporary sources make it appear. However, the writers of these accounts often were clerics of the Catholic Church and, therefore, had their own bias towards the Church and its self-promotion. Along with this, many of the accounts written concerning his baptism were written decades after the fact when his successors were well-established as a Catholic dynasty and during a period in which Catholicism was on the rise in Europe. This fact most likely influenced the retrospective accounts of the mindset of Clovis at this crucial period in order to both demonstrate the sincere devotion to Catholicism of the

Merovingian dynasty—Clovis’ descendants—as well as to demonstrate Clovis as the champion of the Catholic Church in Western Europe—the new Constantine—in order to establish him as model for his successors to continue to follow as well as the other rulers of Europe to emulate.

While the true motivations behind his decision to convert to Catholicism have yet to be unequivocally answered, the results of his decision to ally with the Catholic Church over all other available options are better known. By converting to Roman Catholicism, Clovis made this faith the favored religion of his kingdom, which led to large repercussions for the Church, the kingship, as well as the Gallic people. This is especially true concerning its foundation of the relationship that existed between the Church and state in Europe. His baptism also gradually led to the creation of Clovis as a mythological hero of the Catholic faith. He became the new Constantine of Western Europe and the prototypical monarch for all Frankish, and later French rulers, who succeeded him. Future kings of France were linked to him through political and religious imaginings and symbolism in order to evoke the authority and prestige that Clovis was reported to have held as the first Catholic ruler of Europe. This historical legacy was foundational to the coronation rituals that developed over the reigns of successive French kings. Written accounts of Clovis’ baptism that were produced within the century after his death served as models in the organization and decoration of French coronation ceremonies to ritually reenact and embellish what was reported to have occurred at his baptism. By recreating the scene of his baptism, the organizers (the clerics who supported the monarchy) hoped to confirm the new monarch as the legitimate heir to the throne by connecting him with the legendary ruler who set the foundation for Western European Christendom. His ritualized conversion above all became a medium in which to distinguish French monarchs from other European sovereigns as the “elect

of God” since he, according to legend, was the sole European ruler to have been given directly from God the holy oil necessary to be anointed in the consecration of a new king.

As with the history of any region during this early period, there are relatively few reliable sources available due largely to widespread illiteracy, unhindered biases, and loss and destruction of sources over time. Among the primary sources available concerning the religious landscape of Gaul—encompassing modern day France, Belgium, Switzerland, and western Germany—at the time of Clovis’ conversion, those that have been found especially fruitful are the personal and official letters of correspondence, Church records, a few written primary accounts, and near-contemporary accounts. Among the most valuable texts that convey the pagan beliefs and practices of this region and era are Julius Caesar’s *The Battle for Gaul* (c. 50 BCE) and Lucan’s *Civil War* (c. 1st century CE).¹ Although these are helpful sources they only provide an external perspective and, therefore, must be read critically since they are often highly biased against non-Romans living in Gaul, and are overly favorable to Roman beliefs, ideas, and customs. Unfortunately, no contemporary literary sources by non-Roman locals concerning pagan doctrines and customs remain, leaving historians to rely upon “foreign” accounts as these stand in comparison against the rare archaeological sources of that period.

Among the contemporary sources detailing Christian and Jewish residents of this region, Church records are highly useful; particularly Church pronouncements such as the *Nicene Creed* (325) and the primary accounts of the numerous Church councils that occurred throughout the

¹ Barry Cunliffe and Peter Wiseman, introduction to *The Battle for Gaul*, by Julius Caesar, trans. Anne and Peter Wiseman (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, 1980), 9; Bernhard Maier, *Dictionary of Celtic Religion and Culture*, trans. Cyril Edwards (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1997), 178; Julius Caesar, *The Battle for Gaul*, trans. Anne and Peter Wiseman (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, 1980); Lucan, *Civil War*, trans. S. H. Braund (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

first half of the millennium.² Among the works of the prominent Gallo-Roman Christians of that age are those of the bishops and literary figures Caesarius of Arles and Sidonius Apollinaris, who above all document the early organization of the Catholic Church in Gaul as well as the theological debates that occurred over Church doctrine and practice during this foundational period of the Church's development. There are also many near-contemporary sources that are useful in studying the religious history of this region. These texts provide glimpses of both high and low society in the Frankish region during Clovis' time, such as Gregory of Tours' *The History of the Franks* and *The Life of Genevieve*.³ These works were recorded within a century of their events and thus are highly useful as roughly contemporary sources. They too, however, need to be read critically since their authors often incorporate their major personal biases and beliefs into their works while reconstructing history in a way which promoted their own religious and political views.

The least biased primary sources are undoubtedly the archaeological evidence that has been discovered, particularly burial sites and regional church remains. Unfortunately, this collective evidence is limited, and, since so many centuries have passed, the majority of the material culture of this period has been destroyed or lost forever. Despite this lack of primary sources, a sense of the religious situation in Gaul in this early period can be constructed by combining all of these sources to better view the various spiritual beliefs and practices that existed during the fifth century.

² Katharine Scherman, *The Birth Of France: Warriors, Bishops, and Long-Haired Kings* (New York: Random House, 1987), 71; Synod at Nice, *Nicene Creed*, from *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, ed. H. Percival, in the *Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series (New York: Charles Scribners, 1990) Vol XIV, 3, in "The Ecthesis of the Synod at Nice," *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, accessed April 22, 2013, <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/nicene Creed.asp>.

³ Gregory of Tours, *A History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1974); *Vita Genovefae virginie Parisiensis*, M. G. H. SS. R. M. t. III, Hanover, 1896, ed. B. Kusch.

As briefly noted above, the primary source accounts concerning Clovis' conversion are few and those that do exist are significantly flawed. They do not detail Clovis' rationale behind his decision to convert to the Catholic faith nor do they examine his potential motivations. The majority of the surviving records claim that his conversion was solely based on a sincere change of faith due to the intervention of the Christian God. However, in doing so these sources are highly biased in favor of the Catholic Church, since most of them were written by its clerics who would have wanted to depict Clovis as becoming a Catholic because he sincerely believed it to be the right religion. That being said, these clerical sources can be utilized by historians to better understand the true motivations behind his decision if read carefully and used in conjunction with one another. Other primary sources from this time period include Clovis' correspondence as well as the letters of church officials, particularly those of the archbishop Avitus of Vienne and Bishop Remigius of Reims.⁴ Both of these men were individuals with whom Clovis held written correspondence and their letters are some of the only written communication concerning Clovis that still remains. Among the few retrospective historical accounts of the period written shortly after Clovis' death are the previously mentioned account by Gregory of Tours, written in the 580s—about seventy-five years after Clovis' death—and the *Liber Historiae Francorum*—a primarily political account of Merovingian Gaul from the legendary origin of the Franks until 727 CE, when the work was written by an anonymous individual living in Paris.⁵ These accounts provide further opportunities for historians to gain insight relative to Clovis' reasons for

⁴ Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*, in *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, Translated Texts for Historians, vol. 38, ed. Gillian Clark and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002); Saint Remigius of Rheims, "Lettre de Remi à Clovis (1)," in Michel Rouche, *Clovis: Suivi de vingt et un documents traduits et commentés* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1996), pp. 387-388; Saint Remigius of Rheims, "Lettre de Remi à Clovis (2)," in Michel Rouche, *Clovis: Suivi de vingt et un documents traduits et commentés* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1996), pp. 393-394.

⁵ Gregory of Tours; *Liber historiae Francorum*, ed. and trans. Bernard S. Bachrach (Lawrence, KA: Coronado Press, 1973), 11-12, 16.

converting to Catholicism, specifically in their accounts of his baptism, the events that led up to it, as well as the results.

The immediate and gradual consequences of Clovis' conversion can be gleaned from the mentioned retrospective primary sources. As previously noted, the most useful accounts concerning the repercussions of his baptism are the works of Gregory of Tours and the *Liber Historiae Francorum*. Gregory's work particularly provides a myriad of anecdotes discussing the daily life of the common people and the role that the Church played in the society of this region during the era. These anecdotal accounts lead to the conclusion that Clovis' conversion to Catholicism and his public support of the Church greatly changed the lives of the people of Gaul in that the Church and its officials became active participants of the king's governmental bureaucracy and played a large role in the efforts to stabilize regional social order.⁶ That being said, these works are characteristically prejudiced towards Catholicism and the Church, and ultimately provide only a limited account of the influence his conversion had on the religious faiths and practices that the majority of the people sincerely believed and took part in.

Archaeological evidence, especially when used in conjunction with the literary sources, can be helpful in allowing historians to better understand the impact of Clovis' conversion, especially among the common society. Such local material artifacts as grave goods and church foundations are particularly helpful in demonstrating the spread of Catholicism and its wider societal impact resulting from his Christian conversion, in both territorial and temporal terms.

Among the most useful primary sources available to historians concerning the development of the coronation ceremony of future French monarchs and the influence Clovis'

⁶ Bishops often were the leading officials in towns, judging disputes, provisioning people when in need, and collecting taxes for the king; Edward James, *The Origins of France: From Clovis to the Capetians, 500-1000* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 48-52.

baptism had on their organization are the *ordines*.⁷ These were compilations of prayers, hymns, and anthems that the Frankish population of the medieval period used as guides in their religious ceremonies, including coronations. That being said, these liturgical guides that described how the ceremony should happen did not necessarily record what really occurred. Even so, they are the best resources to address the medieval French coronation ceremony and what aspects and rituals were valued most by the French court and clergy: those based in and modeling Clovis' Catholic conversion as a means to confirm the prestige of the French monarchy.⁸

Unfortunately, there were only a few *ordines* written detailing the organization of the coronations of the French kings before 1200. Those available are short and do not provide any evidence that distinguishes them from other recorded European coronation rituals. This was due in large part to the lack of any uniform organized ritual having yet been established for the coronation of a French king. By the time of St. Louis (r. 1226-1270), however, the coronation/consecration ceremony was firmly in place and displayed a unique synthesis of French symbols and identity which can be seen in two detailed *ordines*: the *ordo* of Reims and the *ordo* of 1250. These two *ordines*, written in 1230 and 1250 respectively, are the most valuable in the study of the use of Clovis' baptism in the coronation ritual as a means to associate the new king with the first king, since they were the earliest to incorporate those symbols specifically associated with Clovis' recorded baptism: the Holy Ampulla containing the oil sent

⁷ *Ordines Coronationis Franciae: Texts and Ordines for the Coronation of Frankish and French Kings and Queens in the Middle Ages*, vol. I & II, ed. Richard A. Jackson, Middle Age Series, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

⁸ Richard A. Jackson, *Vive le Roi!: A History of the French Coronation From Charles V to Charles X* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 25-26.

from God for Clovis' baptism, the participation of the peers of France, and the oath of the king to expel all heretics from the kingdom.⁹

There are several secondary sources recounting the history of Gaul, but the vast majority does not examine in detail Clovis' conversion to Catholicism. Among the secondary sources available are vast surveys of French history, monographs focused on particular non-political aspects of this period (primarily the literature of this era and the clerics who wrote it), or political histories of the Merovingian dynasty on a whole.¹⁰ Works focused solely on the various religions in Gaul in the years leading up to Clovis' conversion are also few in number; although increasingly more scholars are examining the diverse religions of this region due to the growing access to material artifacts.¹¹ Among such resources are the remains of cemeteries, burial plots,

⁹ *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, vol. I, 4, 7, 25-26; *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, vol. II, 291.

¹⁰ Among the most prominent of the surveys are Patrick Geary's *Before France and Germany*, Katharine Scherman's *The Birth of France*, and Edward James' *The Origins of France* all of which examine this period of time in Gaul in order to better understand the beginnings of France and Germany. Patrick J. Geary, *Before France & Germany: The Creation & Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Scherman; James, *The Origins of France*; *The Franks* by Edward James is a monograph which examines this specific Germanic tribe and its rise to power in France and western Germany through the Merovingian dynasty. Edward James, *The Franks* (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1988); Ian Wood provides an account of the Merovingian dynasty and the cultural, social, and economic developments of this period (450-751 CE) by analyzing in detail the primary sources available for this age, particularly Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*. Ian N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1994); Michael Edward Moore provides an account of the increasing power of the Catholic Church and its clergy in the Merovingian and, later, Carolingian kingdom which argues that there was a powerful relationship between the Church and the Frankish monarchy in which each institution increased the authority and power of the other; thereby establishing a codependent rule over this vast territory. Michael Edward Moore, *A Sacred Kingdom: Bishops and the Rise of Frankish Kingship, 300-850*, Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law, vol. 8, ed. Kenneth Pennington (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

¹¹ Jean-Jacques Hatt provides a monograph that analyzes the material remains of Gaul from its beginnings to the Roman period. He also includes an examination of the methodology and development of archaeological study of this period and region. Jean-Jacques Hatt, *Celts and Gallo-Romans*, trans. James Hogarth, *Archaeologia Mundi*, ed. Jean Marcadé (Geneva: Nagel Publishers, 1970); A survey over pagan religious faiths and practices, *A History of Pagan Europe*, by Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, provides an account of the various significant polytheistic faiths that existed in Europe prior to the fall of the Roman Empire. In it Jones and Pennick discuss these faiths, their development, their geographical reach, and the main practices of the followers of these faiths. Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, *A History of Pagan Europe* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1995); One work devoted solely to the Jewish population in Gaul, their practices as well as the laws created concerning them, was written in 1937 by Solomon Katz. Solomon Katz, *The Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish Kingdoms of Spain and Gaul* (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1970); A valuable sourcebook that provides primary sources related to the religious groups of late antiquity and the transition to Christian dominance in Europe is A. D. Lee's *Pagans and Christians in Late*

and the foundations of churches that have been preserved over the centuries. The first chapter of this work hopes to add to the historiography by focusing specifically on the varying religious practices and beliefs of all levels of Gallic society in order to better understand the religious landscape of this region. By doing this, it will become more apparent what religious creeds and practices Clovis was exposed to, thereby demonstrating the significance of his conversion to Catholicism above all other potential options.

As noted above, there are few secondary sources that have closely examined both Clovis' life and rule. Nor are there many that examine the motivations behind his decision to join the Catholic Church above all other options. In fact, until only recently, few historians had examined in detail the history of France during Clovis' reign and most of these political histories focused on the Merovingian dynasty, from its beginning to its downfall when the Carolingians took control of the Frankish throne in the eighth century.¹² Lately, a few works, particularly Michel Rouche's *Clovis*, have been written that focus on Clovis' life, rule, and conversion, however, they are few and none were written in nor have been translated into English. All of these historians agree that his decision was significant in the creation of a Catholic French state; however, they do not examine in detail the motivations behind his conversion nor do they elaborate on the religious landscape in which he ruled.¹³

Antiquity. A. D. Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹² The preeminent work concerning the Merovingian dynasty is J. M. Wallace-Hadrill's *The Long-Haired Kings*. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1962); Robert Latouche provides a survey of the origins of France, particularly its monarchy, in his work *Caesar to Charlemagne*. Robert Latouche, *Caesar to Charlemagne: the Beginnings of France*, trans. Jennifer Nicholson (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1968); James, *The Origins of France*; Geary; Scherman; James, *The Franks*; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*.

¹³ Three works devoted solely to examining Clovis, both his rule and his life, were written in the years 1995-1996 by Anne Bernet, Ivan Gobry, and Michel Rouche. Anne Bernet, *Clovis et le baptême de la France* (Condé-sur-Noiareu,

The vast majority of secondary sources written about this era agree that Clovis' conversion to Catholicism was a momentous event in Western European history and most discuss the results of his conversion, particularly the long-term effects. As with many historical works, the elite sector of society was given prominence in several of these sources, particularly in relation to the consequences of Clovis' conversion. This was due in large part to the availability of primary sources, most of which were the written documents of the literate elite, which often solely portrayed the history of the higher class.¹⁴ The increasing availability of material artifacts has changed this trend in recent years with scholars giving more attention to the non-elite groups of Gallic society, particularly in their rate of conversion to Catholicism. By looking at these primary sources, historians have focused on the changes from before Clovis' baptism to afterwards—particularly in burial practices—to examine to what extent Christianity affected all levels of society, as well as to see over what time frame and in which regions it spread.¹⁵

The second and third chapters of this work will further examine the motivations behind Clovis' decision to convert as well as to better understand both the immediate and gradual results of his baptism. In doing this, it will become more apparent just how significant his decision was in the formation of medieval France and Europe. Because of the ramifications that this

France: Corlet, Imprimeur, S.A., 1996); Ivan Gobry, *Clovis le Grand* (Paris: Les Éditions Régnier, 1995); Michel Rouche, *Clovis: Suivi de vingt et un documents traduits et commentés* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1996).

¹⁴ James, *The Origins of France*; Geary; Scherman; James, *The Franks*; Another work by Wallace-Hadrill is his examination of the Frankish Church. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, Oxford History of the Christian Church, ed. Henry and Owen Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹⁵ Bonnie Effros and Guy Halsall provide examinations of Merovingian mortuary practice and ritual based on the archaeological findings found in recent decades. Bonnie Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Guy Halsall, *Cemeteries and Society in Merovingian Gaul: Selected Studies in History and Archaeology, 1992-2009*, Brill's Series on the Early Middle Ages, vol. 18, ed. Bonnie Effros (Boston: Brill, 2010); Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 481-751*, Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions: Medieval and Early Modern Peoples, vol. 1, ed. Esther Cohen, et al. (New York: E. J. Brill, 1995).

conversion helped to create, it is important to analyze the potential reasons behind his decision to become a Catholic above all other choices. This analysis will demonstrate that, while his choice of faith was most likely influenced by several factors to varying extents, his public adoption of the Catholic faith was ultimately based on his aim to increase his political power and authority. The results of this political act will then be examined, demonstrating that his decision had far-reaching consequences affecting the Frankish realm, Europe on a whole, as well as the institution of the French throne.

In relation to the secondary works concerning the French coronation ceremony and its development, there are few works focused solely on this ritual of the French monarchy.¹⁶ Most analyses concerning the coronation ceremony in France are incorporated into general surveys that focus on coronation rituals throughout Western Europe. There are few that examine specifically the French coronation ceremony, the majority of which were written the 1980s and 1990s. Scholarly interest in this topic has unfortunately waned in subsequent decades. Even among those written, the majority were either scholarly articles included in compilation works concerning European coronation ceremonies as a whole or were works that focused on a later time period of French coronation history. There are very few books that focus solely on the early development of this political ritual of France.¹⁷ Of the works written concerning the French coronation ceremony, there are a few that examine the influence that early accounts of Clovis'

¹⁶ Richard A. Jackson's *Vive le Roi!* is the most prominent work concerning the French coronation ceremony and its development. Although his work focuses more on the coronation ceremony of the high medieval period, after 1200, he does examine how the accounts of Clovis' baptism were incorporated into French coronation ritual. Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*; Jackson also has a work that provides all remaining ordines related to the French coronation ceremony in their original Latin and provides an analysis of their contents. *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, vol. I and II.

¹⁷ Cornelius Adrianus Bouman's *Sacring and Crowning* as well as János M. Bak's edited *Coronations*, a collection of essays by several scholars, are both exemplary works discussing European coronation ceremonies, with each providing a discussion concerning the ceremony of the French monarchy. *Sacring and Crowning: the Development of the Latin Ritual for the Anointing of Kings and the Coronation of an Emperor Before the Eleventh Century* (Groningen, Netherlands: J. B. Wolters, 1957); *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. János M. Bak (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1990).

baptism had on the development and organization of this French rite; however, most do so in a cursory way and do not examine this topic in detail.¹⁸ The final chapter of this work hopes to further the study of the influence of Clovis' recorded baptism on the creation of French coronation ritual and the rationale behind emulating this religious event in a political rite. In doing so, the significance of his conversion and the effects it had on the Frankish, and later French, throne and society, particularly in the establishment of a relationship between the French king and the Catholic Church, will be better understood.

The conversion of Clovis, as King of the Franks, to Catholicism was highly significant in the development of Medieval Europe. In becoming a member of the Catholic Church, he established a relationship between the Frankish throne and the Church that would persist for over a millennium and would serve as a model for other European monarchs to follow. Because of this it is necessary to examine his decision to make this spiritual commitment publically and the results of his actions in order to better understand the role that he played in the creation of Western European Christendom. To do so, this work will look at the potential influences and motivations behind his decision to convert as well as the results of his baptism on Gallic society and on the development of the Frankish—and later French—crown. To begin, however, it is necessary to set the stage and examine the world and culture that Clovis lived in, particularly in relation to the religious landscape of Gaul, which is what the following chapter will examine.

¹⁸ As stated previously, Jackson's works examine the role that Clovis' baptism played in the development of the French coronation ceremony. Jackson, *Vive le Roi!; Ordines Coronationis Franciae*. J. Le Goff's essay examining the *Ordo of 1250* also briefly looks into the influence that the recorded accounts of Clovis' baptism had on the development of the French coronation ceremony. Jacques Le Goff, "A Coronation Program for the Age of Saint Louis: The Ordo of 1250," in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. János M. Bak (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 46-57.

Chapter 1
Religious Landscape:
The Religions of Gaul Before and During the Time of Clovis

By the fifth century, Gaul was the home of numerous groups of people. After centuries of invasions, conquests, and settlements by foreigners looking for better resources and sustainable territories, this region had been divided into separate tribal areas under the governance of the declining Roman Empire. These lands varied greatly in composition of their populations with individuals of assorted origins, customs, and faiths. Clovis lived in and traveled through this heterogeneous region where he would have encountered people from diverse backgrounds and who followed many different religious beliefs. Since he was exposed to the multiple faiths which were practiced in this region before his ultimate decision to convert to Catholicism, it is important to examine these different beliefs in order to better understand his spiritual decision.

During this period there were three widely-practiced faiths: paganism, Christianity, and Judaism. The members of these faiths were further divided into sects based on doctrinal beliefs and rituals. Paganism consisted of any number of the polytheistic faiths that were practiced in Europe. Lacking any organized common pagan faith, the practices and doctrines of these individuals were often highly localized and varied in many ways from one another. In Gaul, those pagans influenced by the traditions of three specific cultures were the most prevalent—those of the Romans, Celts, and Germans. Those groups following a pagan faith were not the only ones who differed in their creeds and practices; even Christians were divided theologically during this early period of the development of the Christian faith. There were those Christians who followed the Arian faith, who believed that Jesus, while a deity, was subordinate to God since God created him. The beliefs of these Christians opposed those of the followers of the

Catholic Church who upheld the Nicene Creed which declared the co-equality and co-eternity of God and Jesus.¹⁹ Clovis would have been familiar with all of these faiths, making it necessary to examine them in order to analyze his decision to adopt Catholicism as well as to comprehend the impact his conversion made on Gallic society. This chapter will briefly look at the different faiths of this region and will detail their beliefs and practices, as well as the locations where they were dominant at the time of Clovis' reign. This will hopefully lead to a better understanding of just how significant Clovis' decision to follow the Catholic faith—out of all the choices available to him—was, provide a basis to discover his motivations for making the choice that he did, and demonstrate how his eventual commitment to the Catholic faith was foundational to subsequent Frankish history as well as western European history on a whole.

As discussed above, by the year 500 CE, Gaul already consisted of a highly diverse population. Before the arrival of the Romans in the mid-first century BCE, people from all over Europe had settled in Gaul as far back as 500,000 BCE. The little archaeological evidence that remains, including monuments and grave-goods, clearly demonstrates that multiple cultures and communities had settled in this area, forming a unique society that varied greatly from one location to the next. Therefore, this territory was highly fractured, consisting of various tribes and communities. The fractured nature of these people prevented any unification within the region until the arrival of the Celts, as early as 750 BCE.²⁰ The Celts, of the various bands that settled in Gaul during this early period, were the ones who flourished the most. By the time of Caesar's arrival in 58 BCE, they had been able to create something of a cultural unity over the

¹⁹ James, *The Origins of France*, 15-17, 93-94.

²⁰ J. F. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul: The Three Provinces, 58 BC-AD 260* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1983), 8-9; Cunliffe and Wiseman, 8; James, *The Origins of France*, 13.

Gallic region, due partly to the immense threat that the Germanic invasions from the North and the Roman conquests from the South posed.²¹

Since the Celts were the first people able to accomplish any sort of larger cultural unification in this area, their religion spread and flourished. The pagan religion of the Celts was Indo-European in origin, similar to the other polytheistic religions of the Mediterranean.²² Like those other religions, it revered nature and worshipped multiple deities, all of whom were associated with certain aspects of daily life and had control over them—such as fertility, warfare, and death. These deities were both male and female in nature.²³ In his account *The Battle of Gaul*, Julius Caesar provides a description of the gods that the Gauls—descendants of the Celts as well as the other people living in this region—worshipped. While he does not supply the names that these people gave to their gods, he does describe the deities through *interpretatio romana*: the practice of utilizing the names and terminology of the Roman gods for the Celtic gods based on the similarities of each god's earthly association. For example, the Celtic god of warfare was labeled by the Romans as Mars, the Roman god of that same aspect of life. He states:

The god they worship most is Mercury, and they have very many images of him. They regard him as the inventor of all the arts, the guide of all their roads and journeys, and the god who has greatest power for trading and moneymaking. After Mercury they worship Apollo, Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva, having almost the same ideas about these gods as other peoples do: Apollo averts diseases, Minerva teaches the first principles of industry and crafts, Jupiter has supremacy among the gods, and Mars controls warfare.²⁴

²¹ Maier, 52; Drinkwater, 8-9.

²² Hatt, 133-136.

²³ Jones and Pennick, 81.

²⁴ Caesar, 123.

In this passage, Mercury most likely represented the Celtic gods Esus (an earth god) or Teutates (a god of war). The three main gods the Celts worshipped were Esus, Taranis (the sky or thunder god), and the mother goddess. According to legend, this matronly deity married Taranis and then Esus. She was usually depicted as a group of three richly clothed women—*Matronae/Matres/Matrae*—who provided rich harvests as well as fertility. The mother goddess often was given bynames that varied from region to region. The Gauls also worshipped other minor gods such as Cernunnos, god of the underworld and of wealth, as well as other mythological heroes including Smertrius, the ally and protector of Esus and the mother goddess. Cernunnos was actually the earth god Esus during the winter season. According to legend, the earth god was identified as Esus and was the husband of the mother goddess during the spring when he was needed to promote agricultural growth. However, during the winter when he was not needed to aid in vegetation he turned into a half-man, half-stag monster and become the god of the underworld.²⁵

The Celts highly revered goddesses, particularly goddesses of battle, such as Epona—“Divine Horse”—and Nemetona. Deities of war were important to this society because of the constant tribal warfare that it took part in. Warfare was such a large part of Celtic life that even Caesar acknowledged their overwhelmingly martial nature stating that “before my arrival in Gaul, almost every year saw them involved either in an offensive or a defensive war.”²⁶ He asserts that warriors held a very high social status in Gallic society, being inferior only to the religious officials:

²⁵ Hatt, 245-246; Maier, 190, 261, 264.

²⁶ Jones and Pennick, 86; Caesar, 123.

Whenever a war breaks out and [the knights'] services are required...they are all involved in the campaign, each one attended by as many retainers and dependents as his birth and wealth make possible. The size of a knight's following is the only criterion of influence and power they recognize.²⁷

Considering their warrior lifestyle, it is not surprising that they so highly revered those gods and goddesses associated with war, so much so that the Celts performed specialized rituals for such deities, including ritual sacrifices, all in the hope in gaining their favor in combat. Caesar describes such rites:

When they have decided to fight a battle, it is to Mars that they usually dedicate the spoils they hope to win; and if they are successful, they sacrifice the captured animals and collect all the rest of spoils in one place.²⁸

It was customary for Celts to worship their deities in triads. In particular they believed in triple goddesses including the triads of the Proximae (kinswomen), the Dervonnae (oak-sprites), and the Niskai (water-goddesses). Usually known as the "Three Mothers," these triads were often viewed by those of settled regions as the guardians of place, such as the Mothers of Nîmes.²⁹ There were also masculine triads. Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (Lucan), a Roman born in Spain in 39 CE, wrote a poem recounting the civil war between Caesar and Pompey in which he describes the Gauls worshipping three gods by offering them human sacrifices. This triad of gods consisted of Teutates, Esus, and Taranis:

And the people who with grim blood-offering placate
Teutates the merciless and Esus dread with savage altars
And the slab of Taranis, no kinder than Diana of the Scythians.³⁰

²⁷ Caesar, 123.

²⁸ Caesar, 123.

²⁹ Jones and Pennick, 86; Hatt, 246, 271.

³⁰ Maier, 178; Lucan, 14.

Similar to the other Mediterranean pagan religions, the Celts worshipped their deities in *Nemetona*, sacred groves or wooded areas. These sacred locations were where the Celts performed religious rites and worship and may also have been used as communal meeting places. The sites were revered by the Celtic people as holy places and only priests were allowed to enter their most sacred centers. Unlike the Roman and Greek places of worship, the Celts did not construct extravagant and ornate temples for the images of their deities; rather they utilized the natural resources of the area to honor their gods. Instead of constructing statues of stone and marble to represent their divinities—as was the Roman and Greek custom—the Celts carved the images of their gods and goddesses into tree trunks.³¹ Their use of trees as a source for creating images of their deities was also due in large part to their veneration of trees, a practice so ingrained into their customs that these pagan images continued to be carved into tree trunks even after the introduction and spread of Christianity in Gaul beginning in the second century.³² Tacitus, a Roman historian of the 1st-2nd centuries CE who wrote an account of Gaul and the Germans, provides a description of the Gauls' use of nature for sacred practices:

In other matters, they judge it not in accord with the greatness of the gods to confine them with walls or to liken them in appearance to any human countenance. They consecrate woods and groves, and the mystery that they see only in their awe they call by the names of gods.³³

Along with wooded areas, deities were often worshipped at sanctuaries located near sources of water, such as springs, rivers, and lakes. This is evident by the fact that these

³¹ Jones and Pennick, 81.

³² Jones and Pennick, 81; Scherman, 65.

³³ Maier, 258; Tacitus, *Germania*, trans. J. B. Rives (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 80-81.

waterways were often named after particular gods and goddesses, such as the Seine in France, named after the deity Sequana, where a shrine of healing was located.³⁴ Tacitus provides a description of a sacred location on an island in the ocean and the reverence that the Celts held for it:

On an island in the Ocean is a holy grove, and in it a consecrated wagon covered with hangings; to one priest alone is it permitted so much as to touch it. He perceives when the goddess is present in her innermost recess, and with great reverence escorts her as she is drawn by heifers. There are days of rejoicing, and holidays are held wherever she deigns to go and be entertained...peace and tranquility are only then known and only then loved, until again the priest restores to her temple the goddess....Then the wagon and hangings and, if you will, the goddess herself are washed clean in a hidden lake. Slaves perform this service, and the lake at once engulfs them: there is as a result a mysterious fear and a sacred ignorance about something seen only by those doomed to die.³⁵

As briefly noted above, the Celts also performed ritual sacrifices, including human sacrifice which they are recorded to have practiced until the time of Caesar's conquest. He describes one such ritual in his account of Gaul:

people suffering from serious illnesses, and people involved in the dangers of battle, make, or promise to make, human sacrifice...The Gauls believe the power of the immortal gods can be appeased only if one human life is exchanged for another, and they have sacrifices of this kind regularly established by the community. Some of them have enormous images made of wickerwork, the limbs of which they fill with living men; these are set on fire and the men perish, enveloped in flames.³⁶

³⁴ Jones and Pennick, 81.

³⁵ Tacitus, 93.

³⁶ Caesar, 123.

These human sacrifices that Caesar recorded to have occurred were not reported fifty years later by other travelers, showing that, if such sacrifices were practiced in the mid-first century BCE, those adhering to this pagan practice soon stopped performing such rituals.³⁷

Celtic pagans did look to religious authority figures to guide them in their faith. The most venerated of these were the druids. These spiritual leaders performed the most sacred of the religious rituals including sacrifices, administered to the spiritual need of their people, and were greatly respected by the community. In fact, they were so highly esteemed that they were often involved not only in religious matters, but also in political affairs. They judged disputes and decided on public policy issues, particularly when it was necessary to go to war.³⁸ Caesar discusses their role in Gallic society, describing druids as “greatly honored by the people,” and that they acted

as judges. If a crime is committed...or if there is a dispute about inheritance or a boundary, they are the ones who give a verdict and decide on the punishment...Any individual or community not abiding by their verdict is banned from the sacrifices...reckoned as sacrilegious criminals. Everyone shuns them.³⁹

The druids thus held great power and authority with the majority of Gallic society, which valued their decisions and obeyed their orders. Along with the druids, the bards made up another group of religious authority figures among the Celts. These individuals sang and performed poetry, thereby preserving the history of their community as well as the deeds of their most distinguished warriors. One last group of spiritual advisors was the *vates* who were revered as

³⁷ Jones and Pennick, 84.

³⁸ Jones and Pennick, 84-85.

³⁹ Caesar, 121.

the seers of this society.⁴⁰ All of these religious authorities were placed high in the social hierarchy of the Celtic communities and were greatly influential among the people as well as with their political leaders.

One last distinguishing belief that Celtic pagans held was the conviction of the immortality of the soul. Caesar, Lucan, and Pliny the elder, a Roman historian who lived in Gaul for a period in the first century CE, reported that the Celtic religious authorities promoted this belief in order to encourage warriors to be courageous in battle.⁴¹ Caesar goes into detail about their belief:

The Druids attach a particular importance to the belief that the soul does not perish but passes after death from one body to another; they think that this belief is the most effective way to encourage bravery because it removes the fear of death.⁴²

While this was not an entirely unique belief—the Pythagoreans of Greece had held such an idea before—there were few groups who held it during this period of time, particularly among those of pagan faiths, therefore making this belief a unique aspect of the Celtic faith.⁴³

Julius Caesar's conquest in the first century BCE and the subsequent Romanization of the region only slightly affected the religion of the local people. This was due in large part to the belief of the Romans that there was a "kinship" between the various pagan religions of the Roman Empire and that, because of this, these non-Roman religions and their deities could merge together to form a Romanized pagan faith. Therefore, rather than attempting to either adopt or destroy the various pagan creeds and practices that the Romans encountered in their

⁴⁰ Jones and Pennick, 84-85.

⁴¹ Jones and Pennick, 84-85.

⁴² Caesar, 121.

⁴³ Jones and Pennick, 84-85.

conquests, they utilized the practice of *interpretatio romana*. Following this practice, the Romans labeled the deities of the various barbarian tribes according to their Roman counterparts. Contemporary accounts demonstrate this practice, including Caesar's: "The god they worship most is Mercury...After Mercury they worship Apollo, Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva, having almost the same ideas about these gods as other peoples do."⁴⁴ Undoubtedly the Celts had their own names for their gods and Caesar most likely utilized the Roman gods he knew to explain those of the Celts. Tacitus's work also demonstrates and even acknowledges the practice of *interpretatio romana*, stating "A priest in woman's dress presides, but the gods they speak of in Roman translation as Castor and Pollux: that is the essence of this divine power."⁴⁵

It is unlikely that the Celtic peoples of this region actually worshipped the Roman pantheon, despite the descriptions of the Roman writers. Rather it is more likely that these foreign observers used terminology and nomenclature that they were familiar with in order to describe the new society and culture that they encountered and their similar religious practices and beliefs. It is also possible that the Romans saw that the Celts worshiped gods and goddesses that were parallel to their own and, therefore, believed them to be the same, just with different names due to linguistic differences.

Interpretatio romana was highly useful in the Roman conquest of the region as it made it easier to get the conquered to accept and follow Roman rule. The Romans took advantage of the similarities between their religion and that of the Celts by encouraging them to recognize the Roman gods rather than their own since they provided the same protection and services as the deities that they had worshipped for centuries. Therefore, it was less difficult to follow the

⁴⁴ Hatt, 244; Edith Mary Wightman, *Gallia Belgica* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 177; Maier, 158; Caesar, 123.

⁴⁵ Tacitus, 94.

Roman model, since these individuals did not have to give up their own beliefs, but only to connect their gods with their Roman equivalents. This greatly aided the Romans in ruling over these conquered peoples since the conquered were permitted to continue their religious practices while submitting to Roman authority and religious tradition. Such an example was the Celtic god Teutates, whom the Romans equated with their god Mercury since they both were associated as being the people's god.⁴⁶ By solely putting the various non-Roman pagan religions in Roman terms and context, the Romans were tolerant of the barbarians' religious beliefs and practices, allowing them to continue their religious traditions while incorporating them into the Roman Empire. This greatly aided their efforts in conquering the Gallic population successfully with little resistance.

The Celts did assimilate many of the Roman gods with their own, as is evidenced by the material culture that remains. One such artifact is a silver goblet from the early first century CE that was discovered at the ancient Celtic center of Lugudunum, today Lyons. This goblet depicts the three gods that the Gauls worshipped above all: Teutates, Taranis, and Esus. While the gods are those of the Gauls, the depictions also contain imagery that corresponds with their Roman equivalents. For instance, while Teutates is depicted as he usually was by the Gauls, with a boar, he also is illustrated with a new symbol, a crow, which was commonly associated with the Roman god Apollo. Along with this, the boar also was a symbol of the Roman god Mercury, thus alluding again to Roman tradition while also maintaining Celtic. The depiction of Taranis does not maintain any of his previous symbolism, but rather alludes solely to Jupiter with the image of an eagle fighting a snake: the Roman symbol of the struggle between the celestial and chthonian

⁴⁶ Wightman, 177; Hatt, 271; Jones and Pennick, 89.

gods.⁴⁷ Esus, unlike the others is not depicted with any distinctly Roman symbols in this artifact; rather he is illustrated with symbols representing the localized image of this Gallic national triad, as worshipped during the Augustan period—as a god holding a horn of abundance and a torc while lying on a couch with a stag standing nearby.⁴⁸

While this triad of Taranis, Teutates, and Esus originated in the Celtic religion, the addition of Roman symbols demonstrates the influence of Romanization and *interpretatio romana*. The difference is apparent when another artifact from the first century BCE of northeastern France, the “Idol of Euffigneix,” is examined. This statue in the form of a tree trunk depicts the same triad but without the Roman symbolism. Esus—the god on the goblet of Lyons without any Roman association—is depicted wearing a torc, as he is on the Lyons goblet, but the other two gods have distinctly Gallic symbols. Two eyes are depicted to represent the “far-seeing god” Taranis and a boar represents Teutates as it had done previous to Roman conquest.⁴⁹ This same triad has been found on other artifacts including the Rynkeby cauldron. This cauldron, found in Denmark, was made in the 1st century BCE and is Gallic in origin. It depicts one of the earliest known illustrations of the Gallic divine triad. In it, Esus is depicted as a young man’s head with a torc atop it, a boar represents Teutates, and Taranis is represented by a stylized wheel.⁵⁰

Although the Celts usually depicted their gods with the imagery of their Roman equivalents once the Romans had conquered the territory, they still viewed these deities as having the powers they believed them to have possessed before the arrival of their conquerors.

⁴⁷ Wightman, 177-178; Hatt, 271.

⁴⁸ Hatt, 271.

⁴⁹ Hatt, 271.

⁵⁰ Hatt, 135-136, 271; Matthias Egeler, *Celtic Influences in German Religion*, Münchner Nordistische Studien (EU: Herbert Utz Verlag GmbH, 2013), 130.

Because of this, the *interpretatio romana* did not always work, particularly in that the Gallic gods and their Roman equivalents did not completely correspond every time with each other since Gallic gods tended to have less apparent functions than did their Roman equivalents. For example, the Romans had trouble deciding whether the Celtic gods Esus and Teutates corresponded to the Roman gods Mercury and Mars respectively or the other way around due to the aspects of life each were responsible for.⁵¹

There is also evidence that the Celts did not completely adopt the *interpretatio romana*, specifically in their depiction of the gods. The Gauls at times continued to depict some of their deities in their Celtic form rather than as their Roman equivalents. This can be seen in the continuation of Esus being depicted as he was previous to Roman influence with a torc and horn of plenty in hand as well as Teutates maintaining his boar symbolism in the goblet of Lyons. If Esus had been completely associated with his Roman equivalent, he would have been associated with a boar, as Mercury was, or with a wolf, as Mars was, since the Romans associated both of these gods with Esus. Therefore, *interpretatio romana* was not completely successful on all fronts.⁵² Along with this, the Celtic religion influenced the Romans as well, as can be seen in the case of Epona. This Gallic goddess whose name means “Divine Horse,” was widely revered by soldiers in the Roman cavalry, creating a cult that was found throughout the empire.⁵³

While the beliefs and practices of the Celtic religion of Gaul remained mostly the same after the arrival of the Romans, the foreign presence did weaken some aspects of Gallic tradition. This was especially true concerning the authority of their religious officials. After Augustus prevented an invasion of Germanic tribes into Northern Gaul and annexed this territory around 9

⁵¹ Wightman, 177-178.

⁵² Hatt, 135-136, 271; Jones and Pennick, 31.

⁵³ Jones and Pennick, 86.

BCE, the druids' power waned significantly. This was due in large part to the actions of the Roman emperors—specifically Tiberius and Claudius—who actively suppressed their authority without disturbing Celtic religious deities or customs. Roman tolerance of Celtic religion and the introduction of the similar Roman pagan faith into Gaul further increased the decline of druidic power by making it easier for the Gauls to adapt to the Roman way of life and customs. The druids' loss of power was significant since, previous to Roman interference, they had held the most powerful position in Celtic society.⁵⁴

The gradual demise of druids was but one consequence of Roman influence. Another was the change in the construction of pagan idols. There are few existing Gallic monuments or images that were created prior to Roman conquest while there are more from after the Romans invaded. This most likely was due not to the Romans influencing the Gauls to increase the output of such idols; rather it is probable that the material construction of said idols was greatly influenced by the Roman way. Prior to Roman occupation, the Gauls most likely created the images of their deities out of wood, which would not last forever, leaving few existing examples intact; although there is evidence of remnants which corroborate the likelihood of such images. This changed, however, after the Romans conquered the area. Following Roman example, the Gauls began to make their images out of stone. These monuments continued to depict their native gods, but also began to show signs of assimilation to the Roman religion. As discussed above, these Romanized idols usually included the known symbolism of the Roman god associated with the Celtic deity being portrayed. The Gauls also made many monuments depicting the Roman gods, but with Celtic symbolism, particularly foliage and images of trees. For example, many Celtic columns are depicted with tree imagery which, according to Maximus

⁵⁴ Jones and Pennick, 93; Scherman, 50.

of Tyre living in the second century CE, the Celts associated with Zeus (Jupiter).⁵⁵ This assimilation helped to form a new Gallic paganism that persisted at one level or another long after Clovis' reign. By the reign of Clovis at the turn of the fifth century CE, this assimilated Gallic paganism was still practiced by much of the population.⁵⁶

Right before Clovis' ascent to power, Roman authority was weakening in Gaul because of Germanic invaders. These Germans were pushed from their homelands in central Europe by the invading Huns of the east from 406-407 CE.⁵⁷ Soon after their migration into Gaul, the territory had become divided among three major Germanic tribes: the Visigoths of the southwest, the Burgundians of the southeast, and the Franks of the northeast.⁵⁸ The religion that these Germans brought to Gaul was similar in many ways to those of the Celts and Romans. They were also polytheistic with Woden, Thunor, and Tiw—later depicted as Mercury, Hercules, and Mars respectively through *interpretatio Romano*—as their major gods. That being said, the Germanic pagan faith did differ greatly from that of the Celts and Romans in significant ways.⁵⁹

One way in which they differed from these other polytheistic religions was that those of the Germanic pagan faith highly revered women and believed them to have prophetic powers. Along with this, they viewed women as having healing and protective powers.⁶⁰ Another way in which the Germanic pagans differed was that they emphasized strict observance of morality, much more than did the Romans and Celts. Germanic society austere observed and valued their laws, especially those concerning morality. For instance, monogamy was very common among

⁵⁵ Jones and Pennick, 94-95.

⁵⁶ James, *The Origins of France*, 13, 15.

⁵⁷ James, *The Origins of France*, 13, 15.

⁵⁸ Geary, 73.

⁵⁹ Jones and Pennick, 114-115.

⁶⁰ Jones and Pennick, 114-115.

the Germans and chastity was highly praised, even among men.⁶¹ This can be seen in Caesar's account of German society when he states that

Those who preserve their chastity longest win the highest approval from their friends: some think that this increases their stature, others that it develops their strength and muscles. They consider it the utmost disgrace to have had intercourse with a woman before the age of twenty.⁶²

Caesar also provides discussion concerning the differences between the German and Gallic religious practices of his period, arguing that they varied greatly:

The customs of the Germans are very different from those of the Gauls. They have no Druids to supervise religious matters and they do not show much interest in sacrifices. They count as gods only things that they can see and from which they obviously derive benefit, for instance Sun, Fire, and Moon. Of the other gods they have never even heard.⁶³

While they did not have druids, the Germans did have priests who wore long hair, as evidenced by a statue of a bearded pagan priest found near Calw, Baden-Württemberg.⁶⁴ They also believed in the worship of divine ancestors whom they thought lived on through the king, their present representative. This was foundational to their later practice of absolute obedience to the anointed king, no matter his success, or lack thereof, as a ruler.⁶⁵

Like the Romans and Celts before them, the Germans brought their own religious beliefs and traditions to Gaul; however, the practices and beliefs of these new invaders did not have the same influence in the region as had their Celtic and Roman counterparts. Germanic paganism did

⁶¹ Jones and Pennick, 116.

⁶² Caesar, 124.

⁶³ Caesar, 124.

⁶⁴ Jones and Pennick, 129.

⁶⁵ Jones and Pennick, 130.

exist in a small portion of Gaul by the time of Clovis' rule, particularly in the northeast, but did not spread further inland. Unlike the Celts and Romans who had the advantages of stability, location, and/or authority to help their religious beliefs prosper and spread, the German pagans living in Gaul lost touch with their faith, sacred spaces, and customs in their hurried exile from their homeland. It is because of their unexpected flight from their ancestral lands and sacred places that the only Gallic region in which Germanic paganism flourished was centralized to the northeast corner of Gaul. This was due in large part to the fact that the people who settled in this area, the Franks, did not have to travel as far as the others had to from their homeland and thereby were able to preserve a connection with their ancestral home through physical proximity.⁶⁶

Paganism of the Celtic, Roman, and Germanic varieties—as well as any combination therein—was prominent in Gaul by the time of Clovis, but these Indo-European polytheistic faiths were not the only religious traditions in the region. A significant portion of the Gallic population in the fifth century was Jewish. The followers of this belief differed almost completely from the other polytheistic religions in Gaul. Unlike the Celts, Germans, and Romans, those following the Jewish faith were monotheistic, worshipping only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the ancient Jewish fathers. They followed a strict theological and moral law code and performed austere religious duties including rituals and the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest. While they did perform animal and food offerings, they did not practice human sacrifice as the Celts were reported to have done.⁶⁷ In Roman times, Jews lived in various

⁶⁶ James, *The Origins of France*, 93-94.

⁶⁷ Jones and Pennick, 61.

communities throughout the world. The reasons for their wide distribution included migration due to warfare as well as for better economic opportunities.⁶⁸

As to how Jews arrived in Gaul, it is not certain when or why the first people of this faith settled in the region. According to legend, a number of Jews were placed on three unmanned ships after the destruction of the Temple with each arriving at a different Gallic port—Lyons, Arles, and Bordeaux—solely through the assistance of the wind and the intervention of the Jewish God. Once ashore, these Jews settled and spread throughout the region. Unfortunately, there is no historical basis to support this legend nor does it provide any hint as to when exactly Jews first landed in Gaul.⁶⁹

There are written contemporary sources, particularly letters, that suggest that there were Jews in this region as early as shortly before the time of Christ, but there are many uncertainties with these sources. For one thing, the nomenclature is ambiguous. Mentions of “Gaul” do not necessarily mean the Gallic region in question—perhaps they were referencing another area with this name, especially since there were many regions that were labeled “Gaul” during this period by the Romans. For instance, northern Italy was labeled “Cisalpine Gaul.” Along with this, “Gaul” may have just been a generic term for “far away.” Also, just because individual Jews or groups of them are mentioned to have been from or journeyed to Gaul does not mean that there was a substantial settlement of any sort; rather these Jews most likely were just traders who traveled from place to place according to their wares. Therefore, with the current evidence it is impossible to know when exactly the Jews settled in this territory. Most likely, however, it was at least during the Roman period since the earliest source that provides unequivocal proof of

⁶⁸ Katz, 3.

⁶⁹ Katz, 5-7.

their presence in Gaul was the Theodosian Code of 321.⁷⁰ Therefore, it is only by 321 CE that people of the Jewish faith can be safely placed in Gaul.⁷¹ These Gallic Jews most likely were converts or the descendants of converts rather than individuals who migrated from the Middle East to Gaul. Converts to Judaism were prevalent in the region during later Roman rule as many Gauls converted to Judaism during the 3rd-4th centuries CE; likely even more than had converted to Christianity during this period.⁷²

Because of this pattern of Jewish conversion, a significant proportion of Gallic society was Jewish by the time of Clovis. The Jews of this region lived largely within their own communities in the towns of Gaul. They primarily settled in maritime cities including Narbonne, Bordeaux, and Arles, but also have been recorded as living in other towns including Bourges, Clermont-Ferrand, and Lyons.⁷³ They lived in peace among the Gauls in these towns and, under Roman law, were officially tolerated by the state. Overall, Jews tended to be accepted by the Gauls of other faiths. They were able to hold the same occupations as other inhabitants and were able to conduct the business of daily life in peace. During the fifth century, there was no recorded persecution of the Jews in quantities that approximated the persecution described in the medieval period. However, there were restrictions placed on Jews in relation to their religious practice and institutions, particularly those focused on proselytizing. For instance, they were prohibited from converting others to their faith and the building of synagogues was restricted by the state. Also, under Roman law during the fifth century, an individual could not convert to Judaism from another religion, but a Jew could, and was often encouraged to, convert to

⁷⁰ Katz, 3-9.

⁷¹ Katz, 6-9.

⁷² James, *The Origins of France*, 101; Lee, 151-152.

⁷³ Katz, 6, 24, 26-27, 80; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 390-391; James, *The Origins of France*, 15, 70; Gregory of Tours, 207, 265-267.

Christianity.⁷⁴ Therefore, while the Jews were tolerated by the Christian and pagan Gallo-Romans during the time of Clovis, they were actively prevented from spreading their faith by the state. This legislation was probably due to the growing prevalence of Christianity among the Romans and in the Gallic provinces as well as the state's endorsement of Christianity during the fifth century. It was most likely a means to prevent potential and newly-won converts from becoming Jewish instead. This tolerant environment changed in the succeeding decades after Christianity was established as the dominant religion in Frankish Gaul and Europe.

Christianity first came to Europe in 50 CE when St. Paul traveled there to preach the Gospel. In 62, he arrived in Rome to find that already a number of followers of Christ had settled there. This number grew and by 250, this monotheistic religion had already become fairly established in the heart of the Roman Empire with around one hundred nascent bishoprics in Italy alone. While Christianity came a little later to Gaul—the first Gallic bishopric was established in Lyons in the middle of the second century—once it did, it found fertile ground. This was mainly because the Gallo-Romans currently living there were uniquely open to various faiths and beliefs having been surrounded by peoples of numerous traditions (Celtic and Roman pagans of a myriad of variations as well as Jews).⁷⁵ According to Gregory, the sixth-century bishop of Tours, when the bishopric was established in the second century, Lyons was not a solely Christian society but did include a large community of Greek-speaking Christians. It was because of this community that this first Gallic bishopric was created in order to serve the needs of these Christians. Once the bishopric was established, Gregory of Tours argues that a later bishop of this city in the second half of the second century was able to “[convert] the whole city

⁷⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 390-391; James, *The Origins of France*, 15, 70.

⁷⁵ Scherman, 65.

to Christianity,” thereby demonstrating the openness to Christianity of the Gallo-Romans living in the southern part of Gaul.⁷⁶

During this early period of Christianity, the Roman empire, usually tolerant of other faiths so long as those of other religions paid due reverence to the traditional Roman deities, could not permit Christians to practice their faith since this monotheistic religion forbade the worship of any deity except for the Christian God. Therefore Christians, like the Jews, would not worship the traditional deities of the empire as Rome required. This angered the Roman emperors, forcing them to take actions against those who refused to submit to Roman authority. Although the Jews also refused to worship the Roman deities, their long history and ancient religious traditions were respected by the Romans for their longevity thus allowing the Jews a special position and permitting them to adhere to their monotheistic worship. Christianity, on the other hand, was a new faith that did not have this legacy and promoted the idea that God was the only authority figure to which they must submit. Therefore, this new faith was seen as a threat to Roman authority that had to be made to submit to Roman demands or be destroyed altogether.

It is because of this struggle between faith and state authority that the second and third centuries included a series of persecutions against Christians, affecting those of this faith throughout Europe, including those in Gaul. One such state-sanctioned persecution of Christians occurred in the latter half of the second century. In 177, Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius implemented a persecution of Christians, affecting this religious community in Lyons where anti-Christian riots occurred with the bishop, Pothinus, being imprisoned, tortured, stoned, and eventually executed.⁷⁷ This was not the only example of Christian persecutions in Gaul. In 275,

⁷⁶ Scherman, 65; Gregory of Tours, 86.

⁷⁷ Scherman, 65-66; Lee, 151-152.

Diocletian, a professional soldier, became emperor and reasserted the pagan religion of Republican and Imperial Rome, reinstating and enforcing the traditional faith of the empire led by Jupiter, Hercules and Victory. In 303, after the empire had suffered inflation and natural disasters, Diocletian instituted the “Great Persecution” of the Christians, calling for the destruction of their places of worship as well as their writings.⁷⁸ Gregory describes these centuries as horrific for Christians, stating

Then the persecution began again...and so great a number of Christians was put to death for confessing our Lord’s name that rivers of Christian blood ran through the streets. We cannot tell how many were killed or what their names were.⁷⁹

Along with this, in Lyons at the beginning of the third century Saint Irenaeus was killed. As Gregory recounts, “After having had him tortured repeatedly in his presence, the executioner dedicated Saint Irenaeus in martyrdom to Christ our Lord.”⁸⁰

The tide of state-sanctioned Christian persecutions was stemmed in the fourth century due to a change of heart of later Roman emperors beginning with Diocletian’s successor in the East, Galerius. During his reign, Galerius conducted an even more intense persecution program; however, at his deathbed in 311, he issued an edict which officially recognized the Christian faith and accepted it as a legitimate religion of the Empire, changing the future of Christianity. This Edict of Toleration allowed Christianity to grow and its followers to spread. After the death of Galerius, the Roman Empire went through less than a year-long series of emperors and coups with sporadic persecution programs; however, this changed when Constantine became emperor in 312. This man had no apparent religious allegiance, but, according to Christian legend, was

⁷⁸ Jones and Pennick, 63-64.

⁷⁹ Scherman, 65-66; Gregory of Tours, 86.

⁸⁰ Scherman, 66; Gregory of Tours, 86.

able to conquer Rome after calling on the Christian God for aid. This momentous occasion led to Constantine favoring Christianity through a series of actions that greatly aided the Catholic Church and its followers including the Edict of Milan of 313 which permitted the freedom of religion in the Empire. Constantine also convened the Council of Nicaea (325), which established the Nicene Creed of the Catholic Church against the Arian belief of the inferiority of Christ to God. Finally in 337, on his deathbed, Constantine converted to Christianity, making this faith the imperial religion that his immediate successors continued. After this, there were periods of pagan rule, but never to the same extent and Christianity continued to prosper.⁸¹

Throughout the persecutions, Christianity still persisted in Southern Gaul; however, its migration north was slower to occur than it had been in the south. This can be seen in the existing archaeological evidence, including the lack of common Christian grave-goods and ecclesiastical building foundations, thereby indicating the absence of bishops and other higher clergy in this region until the later third century. That being said, while this suggests the lack of organized Christianity and, most likely, a large Christian presence, it is possible that there may have been Christian communities in the north before the arrival of these higher clerics.⁸² The lack of known martyrs in the northern region during the periods of persecution also argues the lack of a large Christian presence as well as the slower establishment of Christianity in this region. The fact that there were no northern martyrs recognized during this period points to the conclusion that it is unlikely that there was an established Christian presence in the north. While there are now recognized martyrs of the north who died for their Christian beliefs during these persecutions, they were only discovered and promoted to martyrdom after the fact, once

⁸¹ Jones and Pennick, 64-69; Scherman, 63-65.

⁸² Scherman, 66-67; Wightman, 286.

Christianity had been established in the region. This differs greatly from the martyrs of the south who were recognized during the time of persecutions—often at the time of their deaths—thus demonstrating the already large and established Christian community.⁸³

In both northern and southern Gaul, Christianity was not established overnight and had to be introduced by individuals of the faith. It is most likely that Christianity was brought to and spread throughout Gaul by both Greek and Italian Christians. Once it was established in southern Gaul, it is probable that the native Gauls who had already converted to Christianity—due to the efforts of these eastern missionaries—helped spread this faith northward. As to which social classes were more prone to conversion and why, it is impossible to know. It is plausible that conversion to Christianity appealed to individuals of all ranks of society to one extent or another. Christianity permitted commoners to feel an important part of society since it preached the equality of all people, while it allowed those of the elite to attain more of a role in court society since Gallo-Roman administrators tended to adhere to this faith.⁸⁴ No matter the conversion patterns, a complete and sincere adherence to the creeds of Christianity was unlikely in all ranks. The majority most likely followed a Romanized version that slightly resembled the Christianity that Constantine adhered to, believing that Apollo was the only god of the Roman pantheon who was a companion to the people. Those of the higher social ranks who did convert to Christianity probably did so at least partly in order to be able to participate in court society of that time. Because of Emperor Theodosius I's official sanction of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire in 381 and his—as well as his successors'—edicts against paganism during the late fourth and fifth centuries, Christianity had been overwhelmingly adopted by the higher social

⁸³ Wightman, 286-287.

⁸⁴ Wightman, 296-297.

ranks. These individuals, rather than pledging themselves to the Christian faith, paid their respects to the Christian God but still enjoyed pagan literature and entertainment.⁸⁵

During this period of quasi-conversion, the Christian Church in Gaul gained power with a large increase in the number of cathedrals and other churches during the fifth century. Along with this, the power of the bishops increased as the presence of Roman officials and power decreased in Gaul.⁸⁶ While under Roman rule, the bishops in Gaul acted as intermediaries between the imperial power and local society. Once the Roman presence began to decline and the Germanic tribes from the east began to arrive in Gaul, these bishops became the intermediaries between society and the various tribal kings. Even though these kings were not Christian, bishops saw their role as leaders of the community in as much a political light as religious, believing it their duty to protect their religious space—the community in which they lived and preached. In defending their own interests, they continued to fill the role that linked common society with its leader, both political and spiritual.⁸⁷ This led to the establishment of a relationship between the authorities of the Church and those of the state in maintaining stability and order.

During the fourth century, a new sect of Christianity that had originated in the Eastern world began to spread throughout Western Europe, including Gaul. This sect, known as Arianism, was based on the beliefs and teachings of Arius—a fourth century priest from Alexandria. Around 320 CE, Arius developed a theory about the nature of Christ, by which he argued that God was “eternal, unknowable and indivisible” and that, because of this, Christ, who was born a mortal, could not be the same as God. Arius argued that God had created Jesus before

⁸⁵ Wightman, 296-297; Jones and Pennick, 72-73; Scherman, 70-71.

⁸⁶ Wightman, 298-299.

⁸⁷ Moore, 21.

creating the world, thus making Christ divine, but subordinate to Him. Therefore, according to Arius and his followers, Christ was not equal to God nor was he eternal.⁸⁸

Since this made it appear that Jesus Christ was a demigod, Arius's beliefs were highly popular to former pagans who were used to various gods and demigods, particularly in Constantinople. This can be seen in the account of Gregory of Nyssa, who states that

Because like those Athenians, there are those today who spend their time doing nothing else except discussing and listening to new things coming forth yesterday or a little earlier from craftsmen, off-hand pontificating on theology, perhaps servants and slaves and fugitives from domestic service, grandly philosophising to us about matters difficult to understand. . . . Everywhere through the city is full of such things—the alleys, the squares, the thoroughfares, the residential quarters; among cloak salesmen, those in charge of the moneychanging tables, those who sell us our food. For. . .if you ask about the price of bread, the reply is, 'The Father is greater, and the Son is subject to him.' If you say, 'Is the bath ready?', they declare the Son has his being from the non-existent. I am not sure what this evil should be called—inflammation of the brain or madness, or some sort of epidemic disease which contrives the derangement of reasoning.⁸⁹

This upset the Catholic Church because it adhered to the belief that Christ was equal to God and was eternal as well. This became such a controversy that in 325 Emperor Constantine called together a council at Nicaea to discuss and decide on the nature of Christ, concluding on the side of the Catholic Church: that God and Christ were of the same essence, thus were equal to each other and were both eternal. The Nicene Creed declared:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. By whom all things were made, both which be in heaven

⁸⁸ Scherman, 70.

⁸⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Divinity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (PG 46.557), in A. D. Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 110.

and in earth....And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion—all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.⁹⁰

This creed made it possible for the state to recognize the orthodoxy of the beliefs of the Catholic Church—as opposed to those of the Arian faith—and led to Emperor Theodosius I declaring Catholicism the official state religion in 381 CE, thereby ending any official recognition in the East of the Arian faith.⁹¹

While Theodosius's action ended Arianism in the Roman East, this sect continued to flourish in the Roman West, due in large part to the actions of Wulfilas, a fourth-century Gothic Arian preacher who was introduced to the Arian faith in Constantinople.⁹² In the early fourth century, Wulfilas returned to his Gothic homeland, Dacia, to preach and spread the Arian faith. While his teaching was not accepted at first, particularly by the pagan Visigothic leader of the region, he and his followers went south to modern day Bulgaria where he remained for the next thirty years preaching his faith and translating the Bible into his Gothic language. This translated Bible, which the literate Germans could read, coupled with his preaching efforts were eventually successful in spreading Arianism throughout Western Europe. In fact, his efforts were so successful that by the end of the fourth century the vast majority of the barbarian leaders of Europe openly adhered to the Arian faith, including most of those in Gaul, particularly the

⁹⁰ Scherman, 70-71; Lee, 87; Synod at Nice, *Nicene Creed*.

⁹¹ Scherman, 70-71.

⁹² Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Malden, Ma.: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 30-31; Scherman, 72.

southern Visigoths. The exceptions to this were the leaders of the Franks, who did not join the Arian faith, but rather maintained their pagan beliefs and practices.⁹³

That most of the political leaders in fifth century Gaul were Arian did not mean that the majority of the Gallic population was as well, especially in the case of the Gallo-Romans. Even when these leaders tried to impose their Arian beliefs on the Gallo-Romans, they were rarely successful. These children of Rome maintained their orthodox Catholic faith, making it so that many individuals living in Gaul were members of the Catholic Church, completely opposing the Arian doctrine. This created problems for the Arian leaders, but later greatly aided the Frankish ruler Clovis in his rise to power over the region.⁹⁴

As this chapter demonstrates, by the time of Clovis (r. 481-511), Gaul was not a unified and homogenous society, particularly in regards to religion. Over the previous centuries, Gaul had become a crossroads where people from a myriad of regions and of various faiths came to either improve their economic status, to flee from a foreign threat, or to increase their territory and power. This helped to create a uniquely diverse Gallic society that both maintained its religious divisions while also allowing for fluidity in belief and the assimilation of differing creeds and practices to create a unique localized form of these various religions. The presence of so many accessible faiths and the lack of any organized dominant religion is what made Clovis' decision to convert to Catholicism so significant. By doing so, he helped set in motion the future of medieval Europe by improving his own chances of conquering the majority of Gaul as well as by setting the stage for the gradual domination of Catholic Christianity throughout Western Europe. For this reason, the motivations behind his decision, as well as the results of his actions,

⁹³ Scherman, 72; Geary, 84; James, *The Origins of France*, 17.

⁹⁴ Scherman, 72-73.

are significant and need to be examined in order to see why he was such a monumental figure in the creation of Medieval Christendom. The goal of the next chapter is to provide an account of Clovis' life, his ascent to power, and his conversion to Catholicism as well as the potential reasons behind this important decision in order to better understand why he, as well as his successors, chose to commit to the Catholic Church above all other options.

Chapter 2

Conversion Politics: The Motivations Behind Clovis' Baptism

Sometime after Clovis first came to power in 481 CE, this Germanic king was baptized into the Catholic faith becoming the first of the new Germanic rulers of Europe to do so. Gregory of Tours provides an account of this event in his *History of the Franks* and claims that Clovis' decision was—similar to the conversion of Constantine—due to witnessing a miracle while fighting in the battle of Tolbiac against the Alamanni, a rival Germanic tribe. According to Gregory, when Clovis and his men were engaged in this battle and close to defeat, he prayed to God and Jesus Christ for aid. Appealing to Jesus, Clovis promised: “If you will give me victory over my enemies...I will believe in you and I will be baptized in your name.”⁹⁵ While Gregory depicted this scene to demonstrate that Clovis' conversion was the result of Christ answering his prayer, it also illustrates Clovis' determination to do whatever necessary to serve his own political self-interests; even appealing to a god he had continually refused to acknowledge if it brought him victory over his political enemies. Among the other actions that he took, Clovis' appeal to the Christian God as well as his subsequent public acceptance of the Catholic faith demonstrate that Clovis made decisions with his ultimate political goals in mind. While the miraculous intervention of the Christian God may have convinced him of this deity's existence and power, had the benefits of a public conversion not outweighed the costs, his baptism into the faith might not have occurred, at least publically, and his alliance with the Church might not have existed. Therefore, his ultimate decision to become a member of the Catholic Church was significant because it led to the creation of an association between the Catholic Church and the French monarchy that existed until the French Revolution in 1789.

⁹⁵ Scherman, 107; Gregory of Tours, 143.

While the consequences of his action are well-known, the motives for his conversion are less clear and need to be examined since his adoption of Catholicism helped to set the foundation for Medieval Christendom in Western Europe. Gregory and other contemporary writers argue that his conversion was due to his sincere acceptance of the Catholic faith. Until only recently, the vast majority of historians have continued this belief, arguing that Clovis' decision to convert was based on a sincere change in faith.⁹⁶ This has changed in the last few decades with historians looking at the non-spiritual benefits that could be gained from his entrance into the Catholic community and arguing that Clovis most likely was aware of the political benefits his alliance with this up-and-coming religious institution could provide.⁹⁷ Based on primary source documents and the actions that Clovis took which demonstrate his consistent focus on furthering his political goals, historians have sufficient resources to discover the main reasoning behind his choice to commit to Catholicism over all his other spiritual options during this period. Ultimately, Clovis decided to publically become a follower of Catholicism in order to cement his political power and establish his rule over Gaul. This chapter aims to examine Clovis and his political actions—particularly the potential motivations behind his decision to be baptized into the Catholic faith—and argues, above all, that Clovis' decision to openly join the Catholic faith was based primarily on the potential political benefits he would receive as a Catholic. To do this, it is important to begin by surveying Clovis' background, including his political decisions as well as his religious beliefs.

⁹⁶ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West 400-1000* (London: Hutchison & Co. Ltd., 1959), 70-71; James, *The Franks*, 121-123.

⁹⁷ Wood argues that the other primary sources from this period (not Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*) as well as the actions that Clovis took during his rule demonstrate his understanding of the benefits of having the support of the Catholic aristocratic class and clergy for his reign as well as the benefits of having the established Church bureaucracy at his disposal. Scherman argues that, as a ruler of devout pagans, it was a courageous step for Clovis to publicly convert to Catholicism and demonstrates his advanced perceptiveness of the turning tide in European power over his fellow barbarian rulers. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 48-49; Scherman, 113.

At the time when Clovis assumed power in 481, Gaul was divided into multiple Germanic tribal territories with the Franks inhabiting northeastern Gaul near the mouth of the Rhine. The Franks were further divided with several tribal leaders ruling different Frankish groups. Among these leaders was Childeric—Clovis' father—who, while leading the Salian Franks, had expanded his power and authority, establishing himself as the leader of *Belgica Secunda* (northeastern France) by 463. After Childeric died, Clovis succeeded his father as leader of the Salian Franks.⁹⁸ As ruler, Clovis was a successful warrior and furthered his father's conquests by expanding his territory throughout most of northern Gaul.⁹⁹

Once in power, Clovis continued the policies of his father. He maintained peaceful relations with those groups who were not a threat to his authority but were beneficial allies, such as the Gallo-Romans—the Roman and Romanized population of Southern Gaul. He also maintained peace with those leaders around him whom he was not actively trying to conquer; however, this was usually only temporary, lasting for as long as was necessary for him to defeat another political enemy so that he could focus all of his attention and resources on conquering his current target. Once victorious, he would move on to fight with the next leader of the territory that he wanted to obtain, usually one with whom he had previously maintained peaceful relations.¹⁰⁰

Clovis was a skillful diplomat, as evidenced by the political actions that he took. One method of diplomacy that he greatly utilized was marriage alliances. He would establish these marital relationships in order to cement peaceful associations between him and other powerful individuals in Western Europe. One such example of this was his role in arranging the marriage

⁹⁸ Geary, 80-82; James, *The Origins of France*, 26-28; Gregory of Tours, 128-129; James, *The Franks*, 75.

⁹⁹ Geary, 82; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West 400-1000*, 71-74; James, *The Franks*, 72, 77.

¹⁰⁰ Geary, 84; Rouche, 223; James, *The Franks*, 85; Gregory of Tours, 187.

of his sister, Audofleda, to Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths of Italy, in 494.¹⁰¹ He also chose a bride for himself who would benefit him politically. In 493, he married Clotild, the niece of King Gundobad of the Burgundians. While contemporary accounts of the marriage provide an overly romantic depiction of the affair and suggest that Clovis married Clotild for her beauty and intelligence, it is unlikely that the political benefits that came with the marriage escaped his attention.¹⁰²

Clotild was the daughter of Chilperic II, the former king of Burgundy. When she was a child, her uncle Gundobad killed her father in order to eliminate Chilperic as a rival to the throne. At the same time, he also drowned her mother “by tying a stone around her neck.”¹⁰³ After killing her parents, Gundobad, an Arian, permitted Clotild to reside at his court and to be educated, along with the other girls at his court, by the few Catholic prelates whom he tolerated. Bishop Avitus of Vienne was one of these prelates who educated her and encouraged her to adhere to the Catholic faith, of which she became a devoted follower.¹⁰⁴ Gundobad’s decision to allow his niece to be educated by the Catholic clerics ended up being unwise. Avitus and the other Catholic prelates in his court communicated with their fellow bishops in the north, particularly with St. Remigius. In some of these correspondences, the southern bishops described Clotild’s beauty and intelligence to this northern bishop. St. Remigius believed that it would be beneficial to the Church if Clovis married a devoted Catholic woman, presumably in the hopes that she would influence him to join the Church as well. Because of this he related these praises

¹⁰¹ Geary, 84; Rouche, 223; James, *The Franks*, 85; Gregory of Tours, 187.

¹⁰² Scherman, 110-111; Bernard S. Bachrach, introduction to *Liber Historiae Francorum*, ed. and trans. Bernard S. Bachrach (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1973), 18-19; Gregory of Tours, 141; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 36-37; James, *The Franks*, 85.

¹⁰³ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 43; Scherman, 110; James, *The Franks*, 84-86; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ Scherman, 110.

concerning this Burgundian princess to Clovis and encouraged his marriage to her in the hopes of ultimately converting Clovis to Catholicism, thus gaining a powerful supporter for the Catholic Church.¹⁰⁵

Clovis' marriage to Clotild was also beneficial to his political goals in many ways, of which he most likely was aware. Through this marriage he obtained a legitimate reason for invading and conquering Burgundy—avenging his wife's family—thereby justifying his later efforts to increase his territory. The contemporary account called the *Liber Historiae Francorum* (LHF) addresses this justification for conquest recording that Clotild openly asked Clovis to avenge her as well as to reclaim her inheritance. She states that she wanted him to “demand the estate of [her] father and of [her] mother whom [her] uncle Gundobad evilly killed.”¹⁰⁶ Clovis responded that he would do all he could to regain her parents' estate.¹⁰⁷ While the accuracy of this account can never be truly known, the fact that the idea of vengeance was mentioned, as well as his later utilization of it as a legitimate justification to conquer Burgundy in 523, demonstrates that Clovis probably realized that a marriage to Clotild was valuable in legitimizing the Frankish claim in attacking Burgundy.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, his marriage to the daughter of Burgundian royalty with a long lineage increased his own recently established royal lineage and social standing, which equalized his stature in comparison to other more established barbarian leaders who were his peers, particularly the Ostrogoths.¹⁰⁹ Finally, by making Clotild his wife, he also acquired the approval and support of the Catholic Church officials in Gaul by marrying into the faith.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Scherman, 110.

¹⁰⁶ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 39.

¹⁰⁷ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 39-40.

¹⁰⁸ James, *The Franks*, 86; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 43.

¹⁰⁹ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 43; James, *The Franks*, 85-86; Rouche, 241-242.

¹¹⁰ Scherman, 110; James, *The Franks*, 85-86.

Along with continuing his father's diplomatic policies to gain power and territory, Clovis also maintained and furthered his father's strategic conquest of the lands of Gaul out from the power of other rival leaders—starting in the north and continuing southward—by means of military campaigns. Early in his reign, Clovis defeated the last independent Roman ruler in Gaul, Syagrius, and took over his land in the north, which encompassed the majority of northern modern-day France. He further cemented his power throughout his rule by conquering other Germanic groups living in the region including the Alamanni in the northeast and the Visigoths in southern Gaul.¹¹¹ Clovis was more than willing to use violence, even against his own relations, to further and preserve his power and was successful in doing so. He killed several members of his family throughout his reign in order to eliminate potential rivals and to unite all of the Franks solely under his power. When Ragnachar, one of his relatives, led an attack against Clovis and lost, the king captured and killed him. He then proceeded to kill Ragnachar's two brothers.¹¹² Gregory alleges that Clovis killed anyone whom he felt threatened his rule and—since his relatives were legitimate potential rivals to the throne—that he had no qualms in killing them. In fact, Gregory demonstrates Clovis' willingness to kill his relations in order to protect his rule by providing an account in which Clovis remarked that he was upset that he no longer had any relatives to ask for aid, since he had murdered them all. His appeal for any still alive to come to his aid, Gregory argues, was not out of a desire to embrace those relations to him that were still alive, but rather because “he hoped to find some relative still in the land of the living whom he could kill” in order to prevent any still existent potential threats.¹¹³ Thus, through diplomacy and

¹¹¹ Geary, 82; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West 400-1000*, 71-74.

¹¹² *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 54-55; Gregory of Tours, 156-158; James, *The Origins of France*, 30; James, *The Franks*, 90-91.

¹¹³ Gregory of Tours, 158; James, *The Franks*, 91.

bloodshed, Clovis increased his power and united the Franks under his sole rule by expanding his authority throughout the majority of Gaul.

As evidenced above, Clovis' military and political skills greatly aided him in his conquest of the majority of Gaul. However, it was his conversion to Catholic Christianity that truly cemented his leadership over the Franks by gaining the support of the Gallo-Romans as well as the Catholic clergy for his rule. This action allowed him access to the bureaucratic infrastructure that the Church had already set in place in Gaul. Therefore, it is necessary to examine in detail his baptism into Catholicism and the events that led up to it.

Clovis converted on Christmas Day around the year 500—the date is uncertain and historians debate as to whether it was in 496, 498, or even as late as 506. It is also unclear what religious beliefs he adhered to prior to his conversion. Both the *LHF* and Gregory of Tours state that he was a “pagan,” which is probable considering that the region in which Clovis lived—northeastern France—was almost completely pagan.¹¹⁴ That both of these sources label him as a “pagan” is significant since it can only mean that they believed he practiced one of the polytheistic religions of the region. While some historians have questioned whether the term “pagan” in these primary source accounts specifically refers to a follower of one of the polytheistic religions of Europe or just a non-Catholic in general—as other later accounts tend to do—the overall consensus is that it is the former. There is no evidence that writers during the fifth century generically labeled all non-Catholics “pagan” since there is ample evidence of them specifically labeling other sects of Christianity, particularly Arian Christians, as such. For instance, these accounts label both Gundobad and King Alaric of the Goths, as “Arians” or

¹¹⁴ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 34; Gregory of Tours, 141; Scherman, 111.

“heretics,” but not “pagans.”¹¹⁵ More specifically, Gregory of Tours states that Clovis’ sister, Lanthechild, was an Arian when she converted to Catholicism with her brother, while stating that Clovis himself was a pagan, thereby distinguishing between the two faiths.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the statement that Clovis was a pagan, as purported by the near-contemporary accounts, can be taken to mean that he was a follower of one of the polytheistic religions of the region, not a heretical sect of Christianity or any other faith.

There is no doubt that Clovis was a pagan at some point in his life and, as one, he most likely followed the beliefs and practices of the syncretistic pagan religion of this region. As discussed in the previous chapter, this was an assimilation of Celtic, Germanic, and Roman creeds and practices.¹¹⁷ Gregory of Tours demonstrates this syncretion and Clovis’ adherence to it stating that, as a pagan, Clovis incorporated aspects from each of these pagan religions into his practices. He states that Clovis worshipped the Roman gods, “Saturn” and “Jupiter,” who—according to Celtic and Germanic practice—were “carved out of stone or wood or some old piece of metal.”¹¹⁸ The argument that Clovis was a pagan at the time of his conversion has long been agreed upon by historians. However, recent scholarship, particularly the work of Ian Wood which looks closer at the letters of Avitus, has argued that Clovis had briefly adhered to Arianism prior to his ultimate conversion to Catholicism.¹¹⁹

As discussed in the previous chapter, during this period Arianism was highly popular in Europe, particularly in Gaul. Despite the fact that the Catholic Church deemed this sect heretical

¹¹⁵ Gregory of Tours, 148; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 50.

¹¹⁶ Gregory of Tours, 145.

¹¹⁷ Geary, 84-85.

¹¹⁸ Gregory of Tours, 141; Jones and Pennick, 81, 94-95.

¹¹⁹ Ian N. Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis,” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 63 (1985), 249-272, http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/rbph_0035-0818_1985_num_63_2_3503, 265-267; Friedrich Prinz, *Grundlagen und Anfänge: Deutschland bis 1056. Neue Deutsche Geschichte*, ed. Peter Moraw, Volker Press, Wolfgang Schieder, vol. 1 (Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1985), 63-64.

and worked to prevent its spread, the vast majority of the barbarians who ruled over the kingdoms of Western Europe, including those of Gaul, converted to Arianism. The Franks, who remained pagan, were one of the few exceptions. Given Clovis' diplomatic history, which was discussed above, it is possible that he had converted to Arianism prior to his ultimate conversion to Catholicism in order to form political ties with his neighboring Arian rulers.¹²⁰

The letters of Bishop Avitus of Vienne—the same bishop who educated Clotild—may provide proof that Clovis was a follower of Arianism for a period of time before his ultimate conversion to Catholicism. One of these letters written by Avitus was addressed to the pope. In this letter, Avitus asks the pope for relics for a newly converted king from Arianism to Catholicism. The king in question is never named, but historians have generally assumed that it was either Clovis or King Sigismund of Burgundy.¹²¹ Most historians have long argued that Sigismund was the recently converted king because Avitus states that the people of the king were already Catholic at the time of his conversion. This points to the king in question being Sigismund because Burgundy had a large Catholic population during this period while there were not many Catholic Franks before Clovis' conversion.¹²²

Recently, however, some historians, including Ian Wood, have begun to look more critically at this letter and, in consequence, have argued that the king in question was, in fact, Clovis. There are two statements that Avitus makes that point to his referencing Clovis rather than Sigismund. Firstly, the fact that Sigismund converted to Catholicism before he became king

¹²⁰ Wood, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis," 265-267; Prinz, 63-64.

¹²¹ Wood, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis," 265-267; Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, introduction to *Epistula 8* by Avitus of Vienne in *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, Translated Texts for Historians, vol. 38, ed. Gillian Clark and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 220-221.

¹²² Shanzer and Wood, introduction to *Epistula 8* by Avitus of Vienne, 220-221.

and that Avitus references a cathedral that was built in the capital of the kingdom in question: “he has built an orthodox basilica in the city which is the capital of his kingdom.”¹²³ At the time in which this letter was written, there was no cathedral built in the capital of Burgundy, thus leaving some doubt as to whether Sigismund is truly the king being discussed.¹²⁴ Secondly, Avitus’ reference to the man he speaks of as “only one of the *kings* who has not been ashamed to come over to the good [side]” also argues against the belief that he is referencing Sigismund since, at the time of his conversion, Sigismund was not king.¹²⁵ Therefore, the assumption that Avitus was speaking of Sigismund in his letter is flawed since there are two references in the letter that do not substantiate this conjecture. Clovis, on the other hand, was already king when he was baptized and did build a cathedral in Paris, the Frankish capital. Therefore, it is necessary to remain open to the possibility that Clovis was the king mentioned in Avitus’ letter and was, therefore, Arian at the time of his Catholic conversion.¹²⁶

Another letter from Avitus also points to the conclusion that Clovis may have been a follower of the Arian faith at the time of his conversion. This letter, written to Clovis himself shortly after his baptism, demonstrates that he was at least tempted to join the Arian faith, if not a follower of it. This letter—discussing his baptism—starts by addressing the Arian heresy, stating that Clovis was able to “[uncover] by keen intelligence” the “lies” of this sect.¹²⁷ This makes it

¹²³ Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis,” 266; Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula 8*, in *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Translated Texts for Historians*, vol. 38, ed. Gillian Clark and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 222-224.

¹²⁴ Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis,” 266; Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula 8*, 223.

¹²⁵ Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis,” 266; Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula 8*, 223.

¹²⁶ Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis,” 266.

¹²⁷ Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis,” 266-267; Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, introduction to *Epistula 46* by Avitus of Vienne, in *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Translated Texts for Historians*, vol. 38, ed. Gillian Clark and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 363; Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula 46*, in *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Translated Texts for Historians*, vol. 38, ed. Gillian Clark and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 369.

appear that Clovis at least contemplated following Arian Christianity, if he was not already a follower of it, since Avitus praises Clovis for making—in his opinion—the right choice in opting for Catholicism.

While the near-contemporary accounts addressed above recording Clovis as being a pagan at the time of conversion, including Gregory of Tours' work, refute this argument, these accounts are less reliable because they were written decades after the event in the late sixth century. The letters of Avitus, which were written in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, are more reliable sources since they were written at the time of Clovis' conversion.¹²⁸ Along with this, these retrospective sources written after-the-fact should not be taken with much credence since they are overwhelmingly biased toward the Catholic faith and the promotion of the Church, causing them to portray a highly unfair portrait of other heterodox sects, such as Arianism. This is especially true of Gregory's account whose ultimate goal in relation to Clovis was to depict him as a hero; the new Constantine; a pagan, unsullied by the Arian faith, who converted from paganism to Catholicism with no heretical detours, thus helping to establish Catholicism in Europe.¹²⁹

The other near-contemporary accounts stating that Clovis was a pagan, such as the *LHF*, were also highly biased towards Catholicism and their authors may have chosen to neglect mentioning that Clovis practiced Arianism at all with the goal of continuing this unsullied portrayal. Moreover, to promote Catholicism and the Church, the authors of these sources may have wanted to prevent posterity from knowing Clovis' brief encounter with this heresy, thereby refusing to give Arianism any more credence than it already possessed. It is also possible that the

¹²⁸ Wood, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis," 266-267.

¹²⁹ Wood, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis," 265; Geary, 84; James, *The Origins of France*, 29; James, *The Franks*, 123.

authors of these early accounts, who wrote decades after Clovis died, were not aware of his brief foray in Arianism and, thus, would not have known to mention it.

If Clovis did indeed convert to Arianism prior to his conversion to Catholicism, his motivation to do so may offer an explanation for his later conversion to Catholicism. As briefly noted above, Arianism was popular in Gaul, particularly among the Gallic rulers. Its depiction of Jesus Christ as a kind of demigod who was subordinate to God appealed to them since it was similar to their pagan doctrine. They were used to the idea of various gods at different levels and preferred Arianism to Catholicism for this reason.¹³⁰ Therefore, it is likely that Clovis, who also had been a pagan for the first part of his life, was more willing to follow Arianism than Catholicism, at least at first. Arianism may also truly have appealed to Clovis, as it had his fellow sovereigns, and it is possible that he had at least partly converted to it because of sincere devotion to the faith.

That being said, his past actions and his quick turnaround to Catholicism demonstrate that it is more likely that his conversion, to either faith, was not solely out of a sincere desire to change faiths, but that he did what would best aid him in furthering his political goals. Converting to Arianism, the faith of the majority of his neighboring leaders, and particularly the Visigoths of southern Gaul, would have been a shrewd political move in order to form diplomatic ties and to gain their trust and cooperation. Therefore, it would not be surprising, based on his past diplomatic actions, if Clovis did utilize religion in order to further his political

¹³⁰ Scherman, 70.

goals, briefly converting to Arianism for the political alliances that it could forge and then converting to Catholicism because it presented better political opportunities for him.¹³¹

No matter his previous religious convictions, Clovis ultimately converted to Catholicism, thus setting the stage for a Catholic Frankish realm. After defeating the Alamanni at the Battle of Tolbiac at the turn of the sixth century due to the supposed intervention of the Catholic God, Clovis returned to his wife from the battlefield and told her about the results of his appeal to her god. Clotild quickly sent for St. Remigius, Bishop of Reims, to further convince the king to be baptized. Through the efforts of his wife and this bishop, Clovis finally agreed to be baptized. Remigius conducted the sacrament at the church in Reims where “King Clovis asked that he might be baptized first by the Bishop. Like some new Constantine he stepped forward to the baptismal pool.”¹³² Clovis was followed by his sister Lantechild, a known Arian, and three thousand of his soldiers.¹³³ It was recorded that, before he allowed the bishop to baptize him, Clovis sought the approval of his people and that, once asked, they overwhelmingly agreed, so much so as to convert with him.¹³⁴ While these accounts are highly romanticized, there likely is some truth to them and can help determine the possible motivations behind Clovis’ decision to convert.¹³⁵

These early accounts explicitly state that Clovis’ conversion was a sincere change of faith according to Catholic doctrine and practice. His contemporaries, as well as those who lived

¹³¹ Geary, 84; Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis,” 249-272; Prinz, 63-64; James, *The Origins of France*, 16-17.

¹³² Sherman, 112-114; James, *The Franks*, 122-123; Gregory of Tours, 144.

¹³³ Scherman, 112-114; James, *The Franks*, 122-123; Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis,” 267; Gregory of Tours, 144-145.

¹³⁴ Gregory of Tours, 143-144; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 46.

¹³⁵ Latouche, 225; Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis,” 265; Geary, 84; James, *The Origins of France*, 29; James, *The Franks*, 123.

shortly after him, claimed that this was the sole reason for his conversion. His decision was the product of sincere persuasion rather than out of any ulterior motive. They argue that, due to the perseverance of a few devoted individuals, he was genuinely influenced that Catholicism was the true faith and that he should become a servant of the Catholic Church.¹³⁶

One of these devoted individuals who worked to convert Clovis was his wife Clotild. As an ardent Catholic, she wanted her husband to share in her faith. Contemporary accounts emphasize her numerous attempts to convert the Frankish king prior to the Battle of Tolbiac. They state that she pleaded with him to convert and even argued with him over the feebleness of his pagan gods. She claimed that his pagan gods were not “good” and that they were powerless “to help themselves, let alone others.”¹³⁷ Clotild even baptized her sons in the hopes that the ceremonial aspects of baptism might awe her husband and convince him to convert as well.¹³⁸ While the ceremonies failed to convert Clovis, the continual efforts of his wife demonstrate that he most likely was very familiar with the Catholic faith. Moreover, her persistence demonstrates that he presumably respected his wife’s wishes and faith since he let her discuss religion with him and did not prevent her from baptizing their second son, even after the first one died soon after the child’s baptism.¹³⁹

Since Clovis’ actions demonstrate that he respected Clotild enough to allow her to argue her faith to him and to baptize their children, it is possible that her efforts also played a role in persuading him to convert to Catholicism. If so, her attempts proved unsuccessful until the Battle of Tolbiac when Clovis and his army faced near defeat and he prayed to his wife’s god: “Oh

¹³⁶ Gregory of Tours, 143-145; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 46; Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula* 46.

¹³⁷ Gregory of Tours, 141-143; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 39-40, 43-44.

¹³⁸ Scherman, 111-112; Gregory of Tours, 142.

¹³⁹ Scherman, 111-112; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 36.

Jesus Christ whom Clotild, my wife, proclaims to be the son of God....I wish to believe in You, the true God, and I call upon Your Lordship, so that I might be free of my enemies.”¹⁴⁰ By making this statement, Gregory of Tours indicates that Clovis prayed to both Jesus and God as the same entity, thus demonstrating that he was willing to accept Catholicism—as opposed to Arianism or a pagan faith—provided that God displayed His power to Clovis. Apparently, his appeal was not in vain. After his bargaining with the Catholic God, and promising to convert to Catholicism if given victory, the Alamanni immediately stopped fighting and surrendered. According to Gregory and the *LHF*, this opened Clovis’ mind to Catholicism and provided an opening for Clotild and St. Remigius to further persuade Clovis to finally join the Catholic faith.¹⁴¹ Because of this opportunity, St. Remigius assigned a fellow cleric, St. Vedast, to instruct and prepare Clovis for his baptism. According to tradition, St. Vedast had cured a blind man and, in doing so, further convinced Clovis and some members of his court to convert to Catholicism. For the role that he played in preparing Clovis for baptism, St. Vedast was made Bishop of Arras and later of Cambrai, connecting these two dioceses.¹⁴²

Even though these sources clearly state that Clovis’ conversion was solely out of a sincere change in belief, there are a few factors that make these accounts highly unreliable for historians to use as evidence of his reasoning. As discussed above, these sources are highly biased towards Catholic doctrine and the promotion of the Church as the only institution of which true Christians could legitimately become members. Because of this, the authors of these works would have made efforts—even possibly twisting the truth to fit the story to their liking—

¹⁴⁰ Gregory of Tours, 141-143; Latouche, 225-229; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 45.

¹⁴¹ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 45-46.

¹⁴² David Hugh Farmer, “Vedast (Vaast, Foster),” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 5th rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), accessed June 13, 2015, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.bsu.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-1578?rsk=x9Sbjd&result=1588>.

to depict Clovis' decision to convert due to God's direct intervention after Clovis appealed to the Catholic God of his wife. This story is conveniently similar to another well-known conversion story: that of Constantine.

Constantine, who lived during the fourth century, was the first Roman Emperor to publicly convert to Catholicism and, more importantly, supported the Nicene Creed, thereby recognizing Catholicism as the orthodox institution of Christianity.¹⁴³ To the authors of these contemporary sources, most of whom were clerics, Constantine was the prime example of how they wanted their own king to behave. Essentially, he should be a defender and supporter of the Catholic Church. Therefore, it is likely that Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries may have embellished the story of Clovis' conversion in order to associate him with Constantine. In doing so, they portrayed Clovis as the ultimate supporter of the Catholic Church. This leads to another factor that makes these sources unreliable: the intended audience.

These writers, and particularly Gregory, wrote these works partly in order to provide a model for contemporary Frankish kings and their successors to follow. For these writers the ideal royal model was pious and a generous supporter of the Catholic Church. Therefore, it would have been important for them to portray Clovis as the ideal Catholic monarch, one sincerely devoted to the Catholic faith, since he was the one to establish the Catholic Merovingian dynasty that ruled Francia during their time. Because of this desire to portray Clovis in such a pious light, the possibility that these authors may have exaggerated the extent of Clovis' devotion is high and, therefore, it is necessary to avoid reading these sources as the absolute truth. That being said, these sources are still valuable, particularly in collaboration with other, less biased sources

¹⁴³ Jones and Pennick, 64-69; Scherman, 63-65.

such as the letters of Avitus. For instance, these early accounts argue that Clotild and others played a large role in persuading Clovis to convert. The letters of Avitus and others living during this period corroborate this information thereby making it probable that Clotild and others in Clovis' inner circle did indeed make efforts to convert him to the Catholic faith.

Whether or not Clovis' conversion was the result of a change in faith cannot be proven based on the evidence available. However, the actions that he took to consolidate and expand his power are well documented and demonstrate that he was a shrewd politician who did whatever was necessary to further his political goals. Therefore, it is likely that, in making his religious decision, he perceived the political benefits that could be gained from openly accepting the Catholic faith. These potential advantages probably played a greater role in his decision to publically convert to Catholic Christianity than any newfound devotion to the Holy Trinity.

The greatest benefit that Clovis gained by publically becoming a Catholic was the additional support of the Catholic Church, its officials, and its followers in his political goal of conquering the majority of Gaul. Once Clovis did convert, the majority of the followers of Catholicism of this region favored him as ruler, especially in opposition to the Arian rulers. This greatly helped him in conquering the territories of this area since Catholics living in Gaul were willing to submit to his rule as well as to provide him with aid in conquering their territory whenever they could. For instance, St. Geneviève, the patron saint of Paris who had previously prayed for aid in hindering Clovis' father from taking the city, now encouraged Parisians to allow Clovis to conquer the city without resistance since he was Catholic.¹⁴⁴

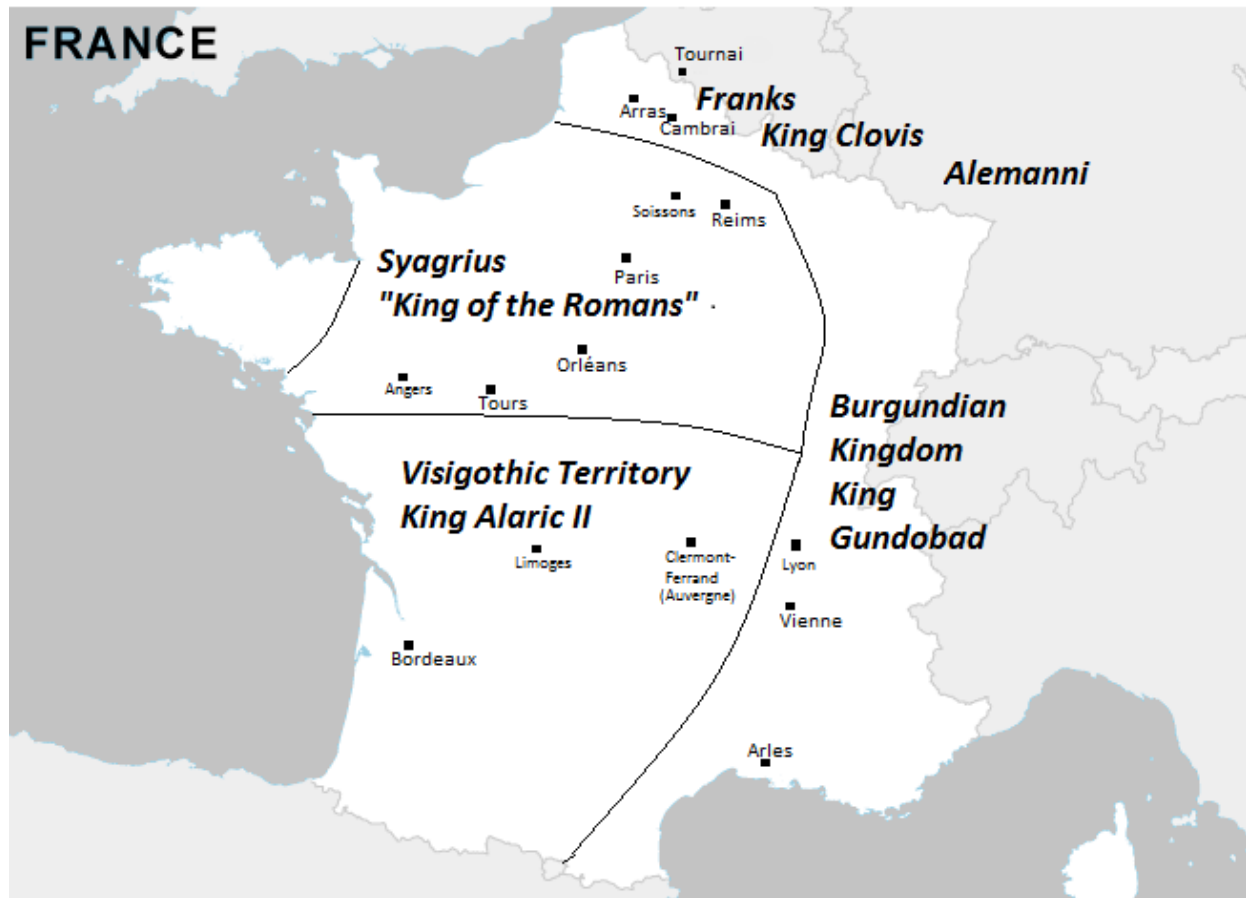
¹⁴⁴ Scherman, 113.

Even more significant was the support and aid that he gained from the Catholic clergy. To better understand the importance of the assistance that he received from these Church officials, it is necessary to look at the territories that he conquered and the position of the bishops in these regions (as shown on Maps 1 and 2 on pages 62 and 63). The fifth and sixth centuries were a transitional age in Gaul in which this region went from being under Roman rule to being under the sovereignty of Germanic warlords who became kings. This created much disruption within Gallic society, particularly for the local leaders of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy. Under the Roman Empire, these aristocrats had been able to hold local authoritative positions within the Roman administration. As the Roman Empire declined and withdrew from its peripheral territories, the administrative positions and the power that was attached to them waned in Gaul. Because of this, many members of the Gallo-Roman nobility sought other avenues that would allow them to maintain their authority and aristocratic lifestyle. During this period, the other popular path for these elites to follow that would allow them to maintain their powerful status was to join the Catholic Church hierarchy. Increasingly, more former Gallo-Roman aristocratic secular authorities entered into the Church hierarchy in order to maintain their local power as well as to further their familial prestige.¹⁴⁵

While many of those who did enter the Church were successful in transitioning their power from a secular source to their new spiritual position, a threat to their clerical authority emerged with the rise of non-Roman rulers in Gaul. The rise to power of these Germanic warriors put the newly established power structure that the Gallo-Roman nobility had created at risk. Eager to maintain their local authority and distinguished status, these prominent Gallo-

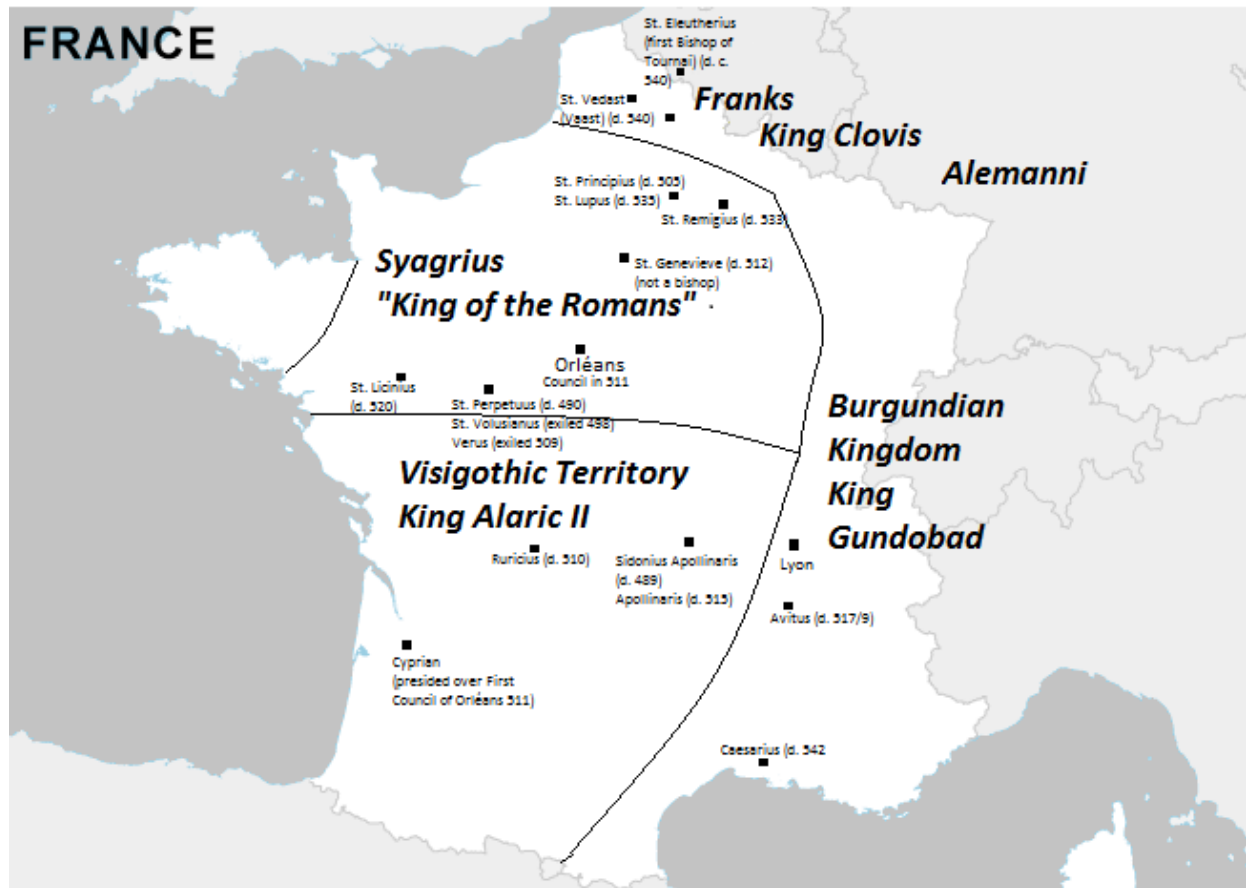
¹⁴⁵ Ralph Whitney Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul: Strategies in an Age of Transition* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993), x-xiv, 32, 90-93.

Map 1: Map of Territories and Significant Cities of Gaul, Fifth and Early Sixth Century



Based upon <http://www.mapsopensource.com/france-outline-map.html> (accessed June 15, 2015).

Map 2: Map of Territories, Bishops, and Significant Catholic Individuals and Events, Fifth and Early Sixth Centuries



Based upon <http://www.mapsopensource.com/france-outline-map.html> (accessed June 15, 2015).

Roman clerics, primarily the bishops of Gaul, made efforts to gain the cooperation of the newly established kings of this region. The existing correspondence between the bishops and these kings demonstrate these efforts. For instance, St. Remigius, Bishop of Reims, composed a letter to Clovis after he inherited the Belgic Province from his father in 481. In this letter, St. Remigius exhorted Clovis to strive to be a “worthy” and good ruler. According to the bishop, this meant that he should rule justly, humbly, and keep in mind that God would ultimately judge his actions. Along with this, St. Remigius asks Clovis to “defer to [his] bishops and always have recourse to their advice.”¹⁴⁶ By being the subjects of a king who respected the bishops’ spiritual and local secular authority, these clerics were able to maintain their local influence and their powerful position. Therefore, it was in the best interests of the higher clergy to cooperate with the new Germanic kings as much as possible, which most did. Later, however, some of these bishops felt that it would better serve the Church as well as their individual authoritative status if they could be ruled by kings who were followers of the Catholic faith since then they would have a king of the faith who would respect, obey, and support the Church and its hierarchy. This led to some bishops including St. Remigius and Avitus of Vienne making efforts to convert their respective rulers.¹⁴⁷

While these bishops made substantial efforts to cooperate with the Gallic kings in order to maintain their authority, they were not without their own considerable power in this society. In fact, these men had such a significant amount of authority within their local communities that the

¹⁴⁶ Michael Naidos, “The Gallo-Roman Bishops, the legitimacy of the Merovingian Dynasty and the Christianization of Merovingian Kingship,” *Roda da Fortuna: Revista Eletrónica sobre Antiguidade e Medievo*, 2014, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 40-58, accessed June 8, 2015 http://media.wix.com/ugd/3fdd18_7dc7404c6a3f4ca8be58f7d1924f86c0.pdf, 41, 44, 46-47, 49, 50.

¹⁴⁷ Naidos, 41, 44, 46-47, 49, 50-51; Gregory of Tours, 143-144; Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, introduction to *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Translated Texts for Historians*, vol. 38, ed. Gillian Clark and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 8-9.

kings of Gaul also had to acknowledge the position of these Church officials and attempted to appease them whenever necessary. As briefly discussed above, the fifth century was a politically transitional period in Gaul. It was a chaotic age in which the secular administrative and legislative system receded. With political governance ineffective during this time, the Catholic Church and its clergy played a large role in maintaining some semblance of order. As an institution, the Church adopted many aspects from the Roman Empire's bureaucratic structure, particularly in its delegation of power, from which the Church hierarchy was modeled.¹⁴⁸

During this period in Gaul, bishops were the highest clerics in the region. As stated in the previous chapter, Gallic bishops during these centuries were frequently the local authoritative figures of a city or town. Often acting as intermediaries between society and the kings of the region, they viewed themselves as leaders of their communities. Although the hierarchy and the institution of the Catholic Church were still in their early development, especially in Gaul, there were a few prominent centers in which the bishops held a great deal of authority including Tours, Paris, Soissons, Reims, Bordeaux, Arles, Auvergne, and Vienne. In these cities, and others, the bishops would not only serve as spiritual advisers, but would also serve as secular leaders, dispensing justice, enforcing laws, and aiding their citizens when needed. This was most likely due in large part to the disappearance of Roman governance in the region as well as the fact that many of these bishops had previously been secular leaders, such as Saint Volusianus, Bishop of Tours from 488-496 and Saint Licinius, Bishop of Angers from 508-520 who had been a senator and a count respectively previous to their clerical status. Even those who did not hold secular office prior to their clerical position often were members of well-established Gallo-Roman noble

¹⁴⁸ Naidos, 41, 44, 46-47, 49, 50-51; Mathisen, x-xiv, 32, 90-93; Moore, 21; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 71-72.

families, such as St. Principius, Bishop of Soissons, and his brother St. Remigius, Bishop of Reims.¹⁴⁹ As examined above, this was quite common of Gallo-Roman nobility, who wanted to maintain their local authority and aristocratic lifestyle during this transitional period.¹⁵⁰

Therefore, not only did the institution of the Church and its administrative system help to maintain a sense of order in Gaul during this chaotic period but also the increase in the number of men with secular administrative experience into its ranks made the established Church bureaucratic system a boon to a newly emerging kingdom. Clovis, a shrewd warrior politician, would have been aware of this fact.

Thus, bishops in Gaul during this age held a great deal of power and Clovis, who often interacted with these Church officials, would have known the extent and strength of their authority. There is existing evidence that demonstrates the regular correspondence that occurred between Clovis and the various bishops of his region. Of these, two letters stand out the most: the letter mentioned above from St. Remigius to Clovis exhorting him to follow the advice of his bishops and a letter from Bishop Avitus of Vienne which praised the king for being baptized into the Catholic faith. Along with Clovis' willingness to interact with these bishops, there is evidence that demonstrates that Clovis made efforts to display his respect for the position and authority that these clerics held. For instance, shortly before he attacked the Visigoths in the

¹⁴⁹ Mathisen, x-xv, 32; L. M. Coffey, "Volusianus of Tours, St.," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2003, accessed June 3, 2015 from Encyclopedia.com, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3407711638/volusianus-tours-st.html>; H. Dressler, "Licinius of Angers, St.," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2003, accessed June 12, 2015 from Encyclopedia.com, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3407706711/licinius-angers-st.html>; "Saint Principius of Soissons," accessed June 3, 2015 from *CatholicSaints.info*, <http://catholicsaints.info/saint-principius-of-soissons/>; W. C. Korfmacher, "Remigius of Reims, St.," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2003, accessed June 12, 2015 from Encyclopedia.com, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3407709449/remigius-reims-st.html>; David Hugh Farmer, "Remigius (Remi)," *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 5 rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), from *Oxford Reference*, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.bsu.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-1378?rsk=y=j6M3TG&result=1387>.

¹⁵⁰ Mathisen, x-xv, 32.

south, he issued a decree addressed to the bishops of Southern Gaul recognizing their position and prohibiting his soldiers from destroying or stealing Church property as they marched south.¹⁵¹ These interactions with the officials of the Church demonstrate that Clovis was aware of the authority that the bishops held and made efforts to obtain these spiritual leaders' favor. This points to the fact that Clovis most likely realized the benefits that could potentially be gained from cooperating with the Church. Initially he did so by being open to their advice and respecting the authority and property of the Church; however, he ultimately allied with the Church through the adoption of its faith.

Clovis most likely would have seen the well-established administrative system of the Church as well as the powerful families who held control over it as potential allies in furthering his political goals. Like the other newly emerging Germanic kingdoms, the Franks lacked any experience in governance and administration over any significant amount of land. This would have made it difficult for any leader to consolidate his power over a large territory and society. By cooperating with the Church and ultimately converting to Catholicism, Clovis secured the loyalty and services of the bishops of the Catholic Church, including their experience in administrative affairs. In obtaining this support, he was better able to establish his power over the majority of Gaul by utilizing the Catholic Church's infrastructure within the region.¹⁵²

Along with this, he gained the loyalty of the families who held these bishoprics, such as the family of St. Remigius whose brother, St. Principius, and later his nephew, St. Lupus, were Bishops of Soissons. During this period, bishopric dynasties were common due to the Gallo-Roman aristocracy's practice of utilizing Church positions as a means to maintain their local

¹⁵¹ Naidos, 43, 51; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 47.

¹⁵² Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 25; Geary, 85-86.

authority and influence. Along with St. Remigius' family, the bishopric of Tours was also in the hands of one family, the family of St. Eustachius, of which Saint Volusianus and then Saint Perpetuus served as bishops. Even more significant were the familial connections between the major sees of Southern Gaul. Bishop Ruricius of Limoges, Bishops Sidonius Apollinaris and later his son Apollinaris of Clermont, and Bishop Avitus of Vienne were all prominent southern bishops and were all from the same family.¹⁵³ These families held a great deal of power in their local communities and Clovis would have known that it would have been beneficial to his political goals to make efforts to gain their support and approval. This willingness to appease the powerful Gallo-Roman bishops can be seen in the actions that Clovis took during his conquest of Gaul.

After inheriting the core region of the Salian Franks in Tournai subsequent to his father's death, Clovis began his conquest, moving south into the northern region of Gaul ruled by the Roman Syagrius. While this "King of the Romans" was living in Soissons, Clovis attacked and defeated him. After doing so, Clovis took over the region, all of which he accomplished before his conversion to Catholicism.¹⁵⁴ This was significant because he, a non-Catholic, became the ruler of a number of prominent Catholic bishops and their sees which included Paris, Soissons, Reims and, to an extent, the border town of Tours. Since, as discussed in the previous chapter, the bishops acted as intermediaries between the people of Gaul and their kings, Clovis, as the new ruler of this northern region, had to interact with these bishops. This can be seen in the letters written to Clovis by St. Remigius urging him to follow the advice of his bishops as well as

¹⁵³ "Saint Principius of Soissons;" Korfmacher; Farmer, "Remigius (Remi);" "Saint Lupus of Soissons," accessed June 3, 2015 from *CatholicSaints.Info*, <http://catholicsaints.info/saint-lupus-of-soissons/>; L. Clugnet, "St. Perpetuus," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911) accessed June 3, 2015 from *New Advent*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/111700a.htm>; Coffey.

¹⁵⁴ Gregory of Tours, 139.

in the concessions that Clovis made to the bishops, such as his order protecting Church property during his Visigothic campaign. As previously discussed, the Catholic officials and the kings of Gaul were aware that they had to cooperate with each other in order for each party to obtain what they wanted. In the case of the bishops, they desired to have a ruler that would protect their powerful position and authority and in the case of the kings, the support of the clergy who could maintain local order among the people. Because of this, the bishops of these northern cities knew that, once Clovis took over the region, they needed to respect his sovereignty in order to maintain good relations with him in the hopes of sustaining the prominent position.¹⁵⁵

Along with this, St. Remigius and other northern clerics may also have aimed to obtain Clovis' support as a means to improve their own spiritual authority within Gaul. At the time of Clovis' reign, the Catholic Church and its hierarchy in northern Gaul were not as well established as they were in the south. Southern Gaul was highly romanized and was populated by several wealthy Gallo-Roman aristocratic families. Because of this, the Church had a better established presence in the south and, thus, held a superior position to those bishops and their sees in the north. Therefore, it is possible that the northern bishops, hoping to increase their own status within the Catholic Church, may have seen the opportunity of supporting this upcoming warrior king who was taking over the region as a means to obtain a ruler who would give them the prestige and status that they desired. This aspiration to improve their own position within the Church can be seen with the ultimate effects of Clovis' conversion and conquest. In 511, Clovis called for the Council of Orléans. This was the first Church council of Gaul under the newly established Merovingian dynasty. There are two aspects of this council that argue that it was called partly to improve the status of the northern hierarchy within the Gallic Church. This first

¹⁵⁵ Naidos, 41, 43-44, 46-47, 49, 50-51; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 47; Mathisen, x-xiv, 32, 90-93.

was the location. The council was held in a northern city. The second factor was that the large majority of bishops who attended the council were from northern sees. This demonstrates that Clovis took actions that aided improving the position of the northern dioceses in the eyes of their more established southern peers. In doing this, Clovis also helped to bridge together the northern and southern bishops and clergy in order to form a united Gallic clergy that supported the Merovingian dynasty and helped maintain stability within the realm.¹⁵⁶

After conquering northern Gaul, Clovis next conquered the Alemanni in the east. While there were no established sees in this eastern territory, his victory over the Alamanni led to his conversion to the Catholic faith.¹⁵⁷ Once converted, Clovis began his campaigns against the Burgundians. His ultimate failure in conquering this region demonstrates the power that the Gallo-Roman clergy held in establishing a kingdom. At the time of Clovis' campaign, Gundobad was King of the Burgundians and was a follower of the Arian faith. As in the northern lands that Clovis had recently conquered, there were a few prominent Catholic sees with distinguished bishops in Burgundy. The most prominent Burgundian bishops during this period were Avitus of Vienne, Apollinaris of Clermont, and Caesarius of Arles. Unlike the bishops of the northern region, these Burgundian clerics were content to be ruled by Gundobad despite his heretical faith. This was due in large part to Gundobad's extreme tolerance for Catholicism and its followers in the realm. Along with this, Gundobad was highly open to religious views and willingly listened to the arguments and advice of the Catholic clergy, particularly Avitus of

¹⁵⁶Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 71-72; Wightman, 286-287; Gregory I. Halfond, "Vouillé, Orléans (511), and the Origins of the Frankish Conciliar Tradition," in *The Battle of Vouille, 507 CE: Where France Began*, ed. Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Boston; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 2012), 160-161, accessed June 3, 2015,

<https://books.google.com/books?id=npw5AgAAQBAJ&pg=PA160&lpg=PA160&dq=cyprian+bordeaux&source=b&l&ots=vMkMAsSX9S&sig=vnB2By09cQLRvLskrOp1JdfI3Zc&hl=en&sa=X&ei=IhBvVc25OCH3yQTY0ILgBA&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=cyprian%20bordeaux&f=false>

¹⁵⁷ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 41.

Vienne. In fact, Gundobad was so open to the Catholic views of Avitus that this bishop believed that there was a good chance that the heretical king could be convinced to join the orthodox Catholic faith.¹⁵⁸ While Avitus and his fellow clergy were not able to publically convert the king, they did come very close to doing so and eventually did convert his son.¹⁵⁹ This openness to the views of the Catholic clergy as well as the efforts he made to seek their advice in both secular and spiritual matters made it so that the Gallo-Roman clergy supported Gundobad as their king despite his Arian faith. They believed him to be a good king and, although hoping for his conversion to Catholicism, were content with his tolerant policy toward the Catholic faith and the respect that he showed to its officials. This is significant since it kept these bishops and Catholic Gallo-Romans from supporting Clovis, as they had in the north, thereby making it so that Clovis' attempts to conquer Burgundy became futile.¹⁶⁰

Despite his failure in Burgundy, Clovis continued his conquest of Gaul and attacked the Visigoths in the south. Gregory of Tours argued that this was because the Visigoths and their king were Arians, but the territory and wealth that could be gained were most likely a stronger motivation.¹⁶¹ Whether spiritual duty or greed were the motivations behind the attack, the actions of both Alaric II, King of the Visigoths, and Clovis demonstrate the power that the large Gallo-Roman population and clergy held in this region. In the immediate years prior to Clovis' victory over Alaric, the Visigothic king made a few efforts to appease the Gallo-Romans of the region. One action that he took was that he put forth laws which gave them distinguished status equal to that of the Visigothic nobility. Then, he convened the Council of Agde in 506 for the Catholic

¹⁵⁸ Shanzer and Wood, introduction to *Avitus of Vienne*, 8-13, 18; Naidos, 44-45; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 45.

¹⁵⁹ It is possible that while King Gundobad did not publically convert to Catholicism, he may have accepted it privately. Shanzer and Wood, introduction to *Avitus of Vienne*, 9.

¹⁶⁰ Shanzer and Wood, introduction to *Avitus of Vienne*, 8-13.

¹⁶¹ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 41; Gregory of Tours, 150-154.

Church and its bishops in the Visigothic kingdom. Despite these attempts, the Gallo-Roman clergy did not support Alaric, as the Burgundian bishops had of Gundobad. Nor did they support Clovis as the northern Catholics had.¹⁶²

That being said, unlike his failure in Burgundy, Clovis was able to conquer the Visigothic realm; however, once victorious, Clovis, aware of the power of the Visigothic bishops, made efforts to cooperate and appease these Gallo-Roman clerics in order to establish his authority over the region. This is most evidenced by Clovis' convening of the Council of Orléans of 511. As stated above, this council was held in a northern city and was attended by a northern majority in order to appease the northern clergy; yet, Clovis also made decisions concerning this council that would appease his newly conquered southern bishops. For one thing, while the council was held in a northern city, it was held in one of the southernmost northern cities, Orléans, a frontier city on the border of the Visigothic realm. Along with this, Clovis, who had spent a winter in the Visigothic city of Bordeaux, chose Cyprian, a religious man from Bordeaux, to preside over the council. In doing this, Clovis recognized the experience and status of the southern Catholic hierarchy while also making it known that the Frankish church was to be a collaboration between the northern and southern clergy.¹⁶³

Therefore, by obtaining the support of the Gallo-Roman clergy through his conversion into the Catholic faith, Clovis gained a powerful ally. As evidenced by the results of Clovis' conquests, particularly in relation to the influence that the Gallic clergy had on them, as well as the efforts that were made by both the Gallic kings as well as the bishops, it becomes apparent that this ecclesiastical group in Gaul held a great deal of power. Not only did this power

¹⁶² Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 47.

¹⁶³ Halfond, 160-161.

influence Clovis to strive to gain their approval in his territorial and authoritative expansion, but it also demonstrated to Clovis how the local influence and administrative system of Church hierarchy could aid him in achieving his political goals of dominating Gaul. Because of this, Clovis' acquisition of the support of this group of Gallic elites was a significant factor in his decision to convert to Catholicism. By committing to this faith, Clovis gained a powerful ally and this fact most likely played a part in his decision to publically convert to the Catholic faith. Below is a relational chart depicting what each party—Clovis, northern Bishops, and southern bishops—gained from allying:

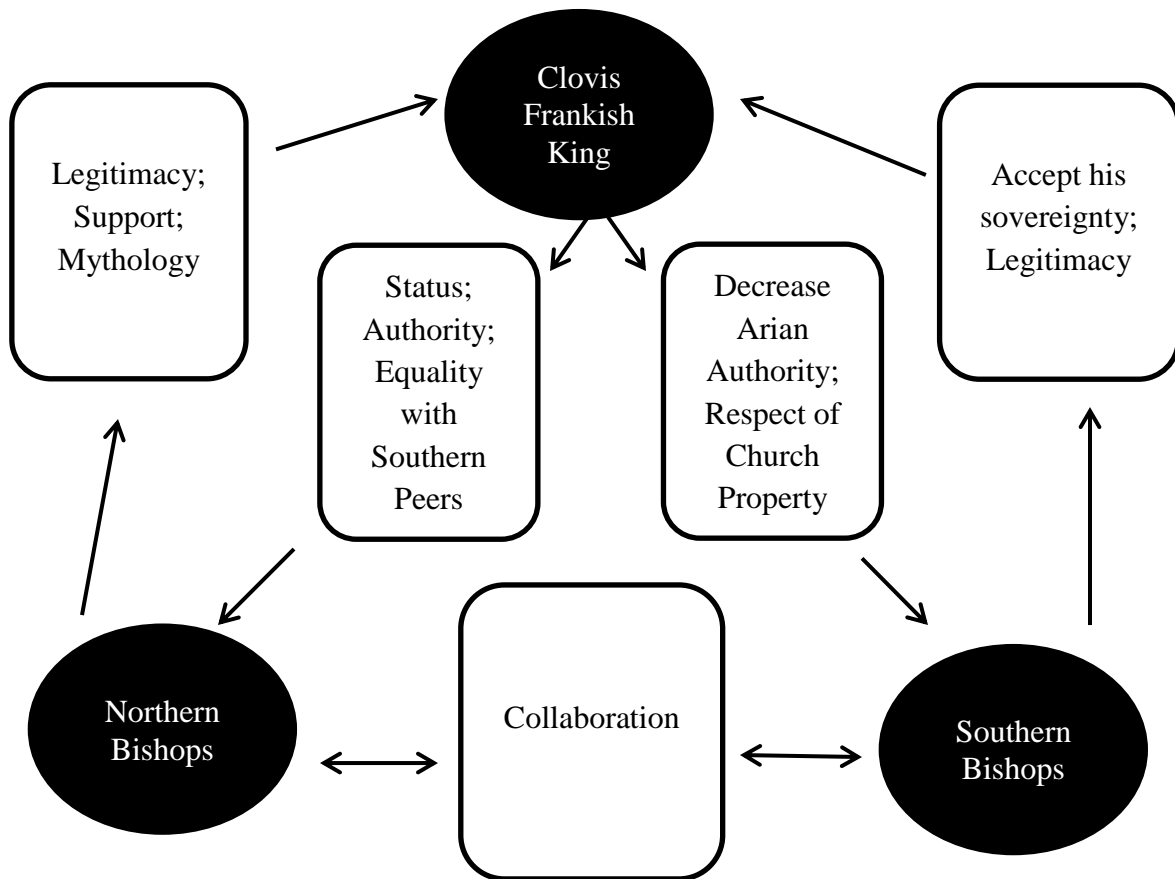


Chart 1: Relational Chart between Clovis and the Northern and Southern Gallic Bishops

The additional Gallic ecclesiastical support that Clovis gained through his conversion was not the only beneficial alliance that he obtained. His conversion also earned the friendship of the Catholic Eastern Emperor, thereby forging an alliance between the two in their efforts to contain and stop Arianism. This alliance not only provided him with foreign support and approval in his labors to conquer the rest of Gaul, but also provided him with a legitimate and esteemed reason to take over the lands of Arian Gallic rulers—to rid the region of this heresy.¹⁶⁴ By converting to Catholicism, Clovis gained a support system that the other Gallic rulers had not taken advantage of, making it so that he was the sole ruler of Gaul receiving the resources and support of the Catholic Church and its adherents.¹⁶⁵

Clovis also benefited from the discord in the Arian Gallic kingdoms that he helped to create by his conversion to Catholicism. While most of Clovis' neighboring leaders were devout Arians, not all of their subjects were. This was particularly significant in the case of the Gallo-Romans. The vast majority of these individuals was Catholic and opposed their regional leaders because of their Arian views. This religious schism created discontent among the populace who viewed the recently converted Clovis as the defender of their Catholic faith and a potential new ruler who could take over the territories that they lived in, thereby allowing them to be ruled by someone with their beliefs.¹⁶⁶ Since a large portion of the population of Gaul was Catholic, they longed for a king who shared their faith, thus undermining the power of the Arian rulers. Therefore, not only did Clovis' conversion aid his military efforts by diverting the attention of the Arian rulers from his actions to their own internal problems—their unhappy populace eager

¹⁶⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 25.

¹⁶⁵ Scherman, 110-111.

¹⁶⁶ Scherman, 72-73; Geary, 85-86.

for a Catholic sovereign—but it also made the Catholic Gallo-Romans willing to cooperate with him and aid him in conquering their land, viewing him as their Catholic champion.¹⁶⁷

This Catholic Gallo-Roman support greatly aided Clovis in his efforts to conquer Gaul. For example, the chiefs of Catholic Brittany—who had adamantly withheld their land and independence from Clovis before he joined the Catholic Church—voluntarily ceded it to him after his conversion since they were willing to subject themselves to a powerful king of their own faith.¹⁶⁸ Gregory of Tours also addresses this phenomenon, stating that many people of Gaul wanted the Franks to be their sole rulers.¹⁶⁹ The significance of the role that Catholic Gallo-Romans played in Gallic politics can be seen in the example of King Gundobad’s ability to maintain control of Burgundy despite Clovis’ attempts to take it over. As discussed above, although Gundobad was an Arian, he knew that it was important for him to appease the Catholic Gallo-Romans of his kingdom since they greatly outnumbered the Burgundians. To do this, he created a law code that placed Gallo-Romans on the same level as their Burgundian leaders, thus giving them a special status. Had he not placated the Gallo-Romans, it is possible that they would also have welcomed Clovis to conquer their land, allowing him to overthrow Gundobad. However, the Gallo-Romans did not and Gundobad was able to maintain control of this territory.¹⁷⁰

Clovis also received the Church’s support concerning his political policy, particularly its approval of his territorial conquests as a means to combat the Arian heresy. By becoming a member of the Catholic Church, he obtained a legitimate claim to expand his power over Gaul

¹⁶⁷ Geary, 86; Scherman, 73.

¹⁶⁸ Scherman, 115.

¹⁶⁹ Geary, 86; Gregory of Tours, 150.

¹⁷⁰ Scherman, 117.

and to displace his neighboring rulers since they were Arians and, therefore, needed to be deposed in order to rid the region of this heresy. At the same time, his conquests were viewed by the Church as a means of promulgating Catholicism and the authority of the Catholic Church throughout Gaul. Already ambitious to conquer all of Gaul for his own self-interest, Clovis as a Catholic now had a legitimate reason to do so that the Church, as well as its members, could commend—to eliminate the Arian heresy and promote Catholicism.¹⁷¹ Once baptized, Clovis furthered his territorial conquests, which Gregory of Tours portrayed as, in Ian Wood’s words, a “Catholic Crusade,” arguing that Clovis’ motivation for invading these territories, including the Visigothic territory of Southern Gaul, was out of his zeal to end Arianism.¹⁷² Whether or not he invaded this region out of a Catholic zeal, Clovis was able to gain much territory, particularly from the Visigoths whose leaders he pushed into Spain.¹⁷³ Clovis defeated many such Arian rulers, which pleased the officials of the Catholic Church as well as those of the Catholic faith living in the region. Through his vast conquests, Clovis obtained sovereignty over the majority of Gaul.¹⁷⁴

While there were many people living in Gaul who supported Clovis after his conversion, many of his own people, the Franks, were predominately pagan and did not support him. Thus, Clovis’ conversion was certainly not an attempt to placate those whom he already ruled. Quite the reverse, his conversion risked angering a large portion of his own people. For example, not all of his soldiers followed him to the baptismal pool and many defected to his enemies after his conversion. Only half of the soldiers under Clovis’ command converted with him to Catholicism

¹⁷¹ Geary, 86.

¹⁷² James, *The Franks*, 86; Gregory of Tours, 151-153; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 46.

¹⁷³ James, *The Franks*, 87.

¹⁷⁴ James, *The Franks*, 91.

with many from the other half leaving him and joining his rivals rather than submit to the rule of a Catholic king.¹⁷⁵

Yet, while Clovis knew there was a high possibility that he would lose the support of a significant number of his own men in response to his conversion, he was willing to take that risk because he knew that the potential political benefits of converting far outweighed the loss of his own men. It is possible that he did not care that his conversion would alienate some of his men because he truly believed in the Catholic faith. However, this supposition is unlikely considering his past efforts to consolidate his power. Everything Clovis had done was calculated to best serve in achieving his political goal of assuming control over Gaul. His marriage alliances, his conquests, and, most importantly, the murders he committed were all done in order to further his power and solidify his authority. These actions demonstrate that he did not make decisions solely based on any sense of morality or with any respect to any tenets of faith. If he had converted solely because of his sincere devotion to Catholicism, the likelihood of him killing practically all the male members of his family as well as other individuals would be minimal since Catholics consider murder, especially of relatives, a grave sin. Quite the contrary, Clovis killed even more individuals—including members of his own family—after his conversion in order to consolidate his power over the Franks, thus demonstrating his lack of devotion in adhering to the basic tenets of the Catholic Church.¹⁷⁶

Although it is impossible to know with absolute certainty, Clovis most likely publicly converted to Catholicism more for the political gains he could obtain than because of his sincere devotion to the faith. While there is evidence to show that he was around Catholics who made

¹⁷⁵ Scherman, 113.

¹⁷⁶ James, *The Franks*, 88-89; Gregory of Tours, 155-158.

great efforts to convert him, including his wife, the actions that he took to consolidate his power demonstrate that he was a shrewd warrior king who made strategic decisions that would further his political goals. Therefore, it is likely that his religious convictions were made—and changed—at least publically, in the same way: converting to the faith that would best aid him in his conquests and expansion of power. Clovis most likely was aware that his conversion could greatly aid him in his political goals, believing that even risking the loyalty of a portion of his own followers was permissible since the wider political benefits—the support of the Gallo-Romans and the backing of the Catholic Church—were well worth the cost. Whatever his motivations, by openly converting to Catholicism, Clovis made it the official religion of the majority of Gaul, thus, changing the religious landscape of this region as well as setting the foundation for the future Catholic French state that would persist for centuries. The next chapter will discuss the repercussions of his conversion, particularly in relation to the various religions of this region, as well as the benefits that both Clovis and the Catholic Church gained from his ultimate decision to commit to the Catholic faith.

Chapter 3

Religious Repercussions: The Religious and Political Results of Clovis' Conversion

Whether it was a sincere newfound devotion to Catholicism or the political benefits that could be gained from joining the Roman Church which played the larger role in his public conversion to this faith, Clovis' decision to be baptized into the Catholic Church changed the course of French and European history on a whole. By converting to and allying with the Catholic Church, he turned the tide in Europe from the brink of Arian dominance among its rulers to the ultimate victory of Catholicism as the official religion of the European sovereigns as well as their realms. In doing so, he set the foundation for European Christendom that existed throughout the medieval period in which the various kingdoms and the Catholic Church were affiliated in a symbiotic relationship. The first of these connections began in the Frankish realm, growing exceptionally strong over time with the other religions present during the time of Clovis gradually waning in number or disappearing altogether.

As discussed in the first chapter, the land which Clovis came to rule had been the home of various religions and peoples in the centuries preceding his reign.¹⁷⁷ The major religions that were practiced in this region were various forms of polytheistic faiths (particularly Celtic, Roman, and Germanic paganism), Judaism, and two sects of Christianity, Arianism and Catholicism. While all of these religions had significant followings in this territory prior to Clovis' conversion, eventually, only one persisted as the official religion: Catholicism. This was due in large part to Clovis' decision to become a member of the Catholic Church as well as his and his successors' public support and defense of this institution. By converting to Catholicism,

¹⁷⁷ As stated in the introduction, this included land that encompassed the bulk of modern day France (the exception being Burgundy in the southwest) as well as Belgium, and the southwestern-most regions of Germany.

he established the foundation for it to become the official religion of the Frankish realm—a kingdom which expanded over time through his and his successors’ military conquests to include the majority of Western Europe.¹⁷⁸ His successors continued to follow Catholicism and gradually expected their subjects to do the same. Because of this, the other religions of this region—the multiple pagan variations, Judaism, and the Christian sect of Arianism—were greatly diminished and, in some cases, ceased to exist in the region altogether.

None of these different faiths disappeared immediately after his baptism, but remained in Gaul for varying amounts of time. That being said, the support that Clovis and his successors gave to the Catholic faith did lead to the number of individuals following these other non-Catholic creeds to gradually diminish over time with some of these faiths ceasing to be practiced in Gaul. One religious following which did ultimately disappear from the region was Arianism. This sect of Christianity was the first to lose its ground in the Frankish realm, particularly because of the active role that Clovis took against this faith deemed heretical by the Catholic Church. Already ambitious to conquer more territory, Clovis as a newly devoted Catholic began to aid the Roman Church in its goal to rid Gaul of Arianism by attacking the Arian leaders of the region, such as King Alaric II of the Visigoths in Aquitaine and King Gundobad of Burgundy.¹⁷⁹

Gregory of Tours portrays these military campaigns as a religious crusade in which Clovis, the recently devoted Catholic, targeted the heretical Arian leaders of Gaul in order to promote Catholicism and rid the region of this unorthodox sect. The likelihood that Clovis would have sincerely viewed his military campaigns in such a way is low due to a number of facts that do not corroborate Gregory’s account. For one, the Burgundians—who according to Gregory

¹⁷⁸ This includes modern day France, Belgium, Switzerland, northern Italy and much of Germany, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia.

¹⁷⁹ Geary, 86; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 44-48.

were Arians—joined Clovis and his son Theuderic in attacking the Visigoths after Clovis had defeated and killed Alaric II at the Battle of Vouille in 507. If Clovis truly carried out this campaign as a Catholic crusade, it is most likely that he would not have accepted the aid of Arians. That being said, this does not mean that he did not use this image of him as defender of the Catholic faith to further his political goals and even demonstrates his willingness to take whatever advantage available to increase his territory and power.¹⁸⁰

Along with this, there were economic factors that may have been more influential in Clovis' decision to attack the Visigoths than his sense of Catholic duty. Avitus of Vienne—the archbishop who held written correspondence with Clovis and praised him for his astuteness in following the true faith—wrote a letter to his brother, the bishop of Valence, which alluded to there being a financial factor to this campaign. He states “You would have thought present a corrupted mixture of gold...the harbinger of ensuing disaster, that very recently, the King of the Visigoths [Alaric II] had commanded to the public mints (as) confirming adulteration [of the coinage].”¹⁸¹ This may have been a reference to Alaric debasing the coinage and then paying a tribute to Clovis with it. There is a record of Alaric owing a tribute to Clovis around 506/507, thus making this a plausible factor. If so, Avitus argues that this debased coinage is what led to Clovis attacking Alaric in 507, not out of his duty to rid the region of an Arian leader as Gregory made it seem.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 44-48.

¹⁸¹ Avitus of Vienne, *Epistula 87*, in *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Translated Texts for Historians*, vol. 38, ed. Gillian Clark and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 254.

¹⁸² Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 47; Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, introduction to *Epistula 87* in *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, trans. Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Translated Texts for Historians*, vol. 38, ed. Gillian Clark and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 251.

Be that as it may, while Clovis may not have viewed his campaign as a Catholic crusade, that does not mean that he did not take advantage of being portrayed as the defender of the Catholic faith in his political efforts, nor does it lessen the fact that his victory over Alaric led to diminishing the power of the Arian Church in Gaul. For instance, although Gregory makes it seem like Clovis converted to Catholicism before attacking the Visigoths and Burgundians, other primary sources contradict this account. This places doubt on Gregory's record and leaves the date of Clovis' conversion uncertain. As stated in the previous chapter, there is much debate as to whether his baptism was as early as 496 or as late as 506. Therefore it is possible that his conversion was much later than Gregory records, perhaps even during his campaign against the Visigoths. If so, this could mean that his baptism into the faith may have been a means to gain the favor of the Visigothic Catholic clergy—who, as discussed in the previous chapter, held a great deal of influence in the region—in his campaign by taking advantage of being viewed as the defender of the Catholic Church against the Arian heresy.¹⁸³

Whether or not he used the idea of a Catholic crusade, Clovis' campaigns against the Arian leaders in the region, particularly his victory over Alaric II of the Visigoths, likely led to a decrease in the number of people who continued to follow the Arian faith. By ridding the region of those in power who supported the Arian Church, he took a powerful support system away from this institution. This would have led to the Catholics living in the area gaining a foothold from which they could further their own authority and obtain new converts. Moreover, Clovis

¹⁸³ Unfortunately, given the available evidence there is no record of when Clovis converted making it impossible to know if this could have been the case. That being said, there is a record that demonstrates that Clovis did make efforts to appease the Catholic Church during his Visigothic campaign. Prior to marching south to attack the Visigoths, Clovis decreed that no church property was to be stolen or destroyed while his armies marched south and sent a letter to the Church and the bishops of the region letting them know of his order. This demonstrates, if not his piety, his willingness to go above and beyond to appease the Church in order to achieve his own political goals; in this case territorial conquest. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 47-48; Scherman, 111.

became the new ruler of this Visigothic realm. Therefore, it is likely that, since he was openly a Catholic, others hoping to gain his favor, particularly among the elite, may have converted as well, even if only nominally.¹⁸⁴

In addition to his military campaigns, Clovis also worked to combat Arianism by supporting the Catholic Church in its legislative decrees for converting heretics and promoting the Catholic Church. This is especially true in his convening of the Council of Orléans in 511. This Church council, over which Clovis presided, issued decrees that dealt with both maintaining public order and peace as well as with converting heretics to the Catholic faith. Clovis put his stamp of approval on these decrees and provided the authority needed to enforce them. This greatly diminished the Arian presence in the region since the Catholic Church focused on converting Arians into what they believed was the true Christian faith and Clovis supported their efforts. Although gradually losing followers, Arianism still persisted in the region for quite a while. Even the sons and grandsons of Clovis were exposed to and potentially tempted by it. Gregory of Tours recorded it as still being a threat to Catholicism in the late sixth century.¹⁸⁵ That being said, the authority that the Arian Church had in the Frankish realm disappeared once Clovis defeated his neighboring Arian rulers, particularly King Alaric II of the Visigoths. This played a large role in decreasing the number of Arian followers and permitted Catholicism to become the dominant sect of Christianity in both France and, later, Western Europe.¹⁸⁶

The polytheistic pagan faiths of this region, in one form or another, lasted longer in Gaul than did Arianism. While the Catholic Church wanted to convert all pagans living in Gaul to Catholicism, they did not put forth much effort to do so at first, focusing more on stopping the

¹⁸⁴ James, *The Franks*, 91; Scherman, 133.

¹⁸⁵ Scherman, 120-121; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West 400-1000*, 75.

¹⁸⁶ Scherman, 133.

heretical Arians whom they deemed more dangerous to the Christian faith. This permitted pagan practices and beliefs to persist until at least Charlemagne's period in the eighth century.¹⁸⁷ Even though Clovis converted to Catholicism, he never required that his people or those he conquered be baptized with him. The laws written during his reign demonstrate that there was little to no legislation against those who continued to adhere to their pagan faiths. Even the laws that can be found during this period which banned pagan practice or ritual only applied to the Gallo-Roman clergy, not laymen. For instance, at the Council of Orléans in 511, which Clovis convened, a decree was issued that forbade Gallo-Roman (not Frankish) clergy from practicing divination. This meant that not only could non-clerics do so without fear of punishment but also that Frankish clergy were free to continue their practice of divination. The fact that the Frankish clergy was excluded from this legislation was most likely because the newly established Church hierarchy in the homeland of the Franks did not view divination as a pagan practice in the spiritual sense but rather understood it as a secular tradition that was a part of their culture.¹⁸⁸

Because of this toleration, the polytheistic pagan customs of the region and the practices of these individuals still persisted among the Franks, as well as among those in the areas that Clovis conquered. Even after Clovis' reign when his successors did attempt to legislate against pagan practices, they failed. For example, Clovis' son Childebert I attempted to forbid the creation and possession of images and idols of pagan gods. The fact that there are records of this pagan custom still being practiced and condemned a century later demonstrates that his decree

¹⁸⁷ James, *The Origins of France*, 98-99.

¹⁸⁸ James, *The Franks*, 124-125; James, *The Origins of France*, 85.

was futile because of the strong cultural traditions of these people and their reluctance to give up their customs.¹⁸⁹

Even those individuals who did convert to Catholicism in these early years after Clovis' conversion still held and practiced the pagan traditions of their forefathers. These pagan customs had been ingrained in the Gallic community for centuries, becoming the way of life for the majority of the population, and, because of this, these traditions did not disappear quickly. Clovis himself still held pagan beliefs and practices after his baptism. Although he converted to Catholicism, he adhered to a form of it that appealed to former pagans. According to this "radical monotheism," the new converts to the faith, including Clovis, viewed Christ as a powerful and helpful ally that would aid them if appealed to, similar to what most polytheistic pagans believed about the various gods that they prayed to prior to their conversion. In the case of Clovis, he believed that if he prayed to Christ, then this deity would aid him in his political goals, particularly in his territorial conquests. His appeal to the Christian God of his wife and Jesus Christ while on the battlefield in Tolbiac for victory in return for his conversion demonstrates this traditional pagan belief of appealing to a god for aid in return for the supplicant's loyalty. This view of the Christian God is not what the Catholic Church promoted nor would this image of Christ as a powerful god, as opposed to the son of the only true God, be how the Church would have wanted its new converts to practice the Catholic faith.¹⁹⁰ Despite the attempts of the Catholic Church to have new converts follow the orthodox faith, the newly baptized pagans were familiar with the polytheistic beliefs and practices of their communities, thus making it almost unavoidable that they would have maintained certain traditions and spiritual beliefs.

¹⁸⁹ James, *The Franks*, 124-125; James, *The Origins of France*, 85.

¹⁹⁰ James, *The Origins of France*, 85.

Because of this, it is highly unlikely that the majority of conversions during this time were complete adoptions of the Catholic faith at the cost of their pagan traditions. Rather, it is more likely that these conversions were the adoption of the Catholicism while maintaining and incorporating their familiar pagan traditions into their new faith. Most pagans who had formerly worshipped multiple gods and then converted to Catholicism during this period likely adhered to a paganized version of Catholic Christianity that slightly resembled the Christianity that Constantine had followed. This version believed that Apollo was the only god who was a companion to the people, thus associating the Christian God with Apollo. They did not see the Christian God as a new deity; rather they assumed that, in their worship of multiple gods, they were wrong and that only Apollo or his equivalent was the sole existing deity. The individuals living in Frankish territory who had adhered to the Celtic, Roman, Germanic, or any pagan combinational faith therein probably viewed the Christian God as one of the major pagan gods that they had originally worshiped. They just adapted to Christianity by believing that the god that they associated to Him was the sole deity.¹⁹¹

Even after being baptized into the faith, these individuals continued their pagan rituals and customs. This was due in large part to their view that these customs such as ritual dances, drinking in excess at feasts, and their labels for the days of the week were not associated with the polytheistic worship of their ancestors but rather were just the everyday customs and traditions that were a part of their society.¹⁹² Even the elites who converted to Catholicism in this region did not necessarily devote themselves completely to the Christian faith; rather they paid their respects to the Christian God but still enjoyed pagan literature and entertainment, which the

¹⁹¹ Wightman, 296-297; James, *The Franks*, 124-127.

¹⁹² The days of the week were labeled as they had been in Roman times as *mercredi* for *Mercurii dies*—Mercury's Day—and *dies solis* for Sunday, as opposed to *dies dominicus*, the Lord's day as was common later. Wightman, 296-297; James, *The Franks*, 124-127.

Church condemned.¹⁹³ Because of this the pagan traditions of Gaul persisted in one form or another after Clovis' conversion as well as for the centuries that followed it. The complete conversion to Catholicism of those living in the kingdom of the Franks took a long time and even then many local pagan customs and rituals had already been incorporated and assimilated into the Catholic faith to remain forever. This can be seen in the cult of saints. Former pagans were familiar with the worship and supplication of multiple deities and would have understood the belief in praying to specific saints for their aid.¹⁹⁴ That being said, the polytheistic pagan faith of the Celts, Romans, and Germans as a separate practicing religion did eventually disappear from Gaul, making it so that the vast majority of the population ultimately became followers of orthodox Catholicism.

Unlike the other religions discussed, Judaism as a practicing faith never fully disappeared from this region. This was due in large part to the lack of urgency on the part of the Church, and therefore of Clovis, to remove it. Since the Church was more preoccupied with eliminating the Arian faith, Clovis did not make any attempts to eliminate the Jews from Gaul. Instead, he and his immediate successors continued to follow the custom of Roman law by which Jews in the region were tolerated and allowed to live freely in Gallic society. The only limitations that were placed on them were that they were restricted from converting others to their faith as well as the limit on their construction of synagogues. In the Frankish kingdom an individual could not convert to Judaism from another religion but a Jew could and was encouraged to convert to

¹⁹³ Wightman, 296-297; James, *The Franks*, 124-127.

¹⁹⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 35.

Catholic Christianity. Minus these exceptions, Jews possessed overall freedom throughout the Merovingian period, as they had prior to Clovis' reign.¹⁹⁵

There were a few kings throughout these years who would demand that the Jews of certain cities had to be baptized into the faith or had to leave the kingdom. Often when this occurred, the Jews would submit to the demands while continuing to practice their Jewish faith in secret until the decree was forgotten. One extreme example of Jewish intolerance by a Merovingian king was King Chilperic's (grandson of Clovis) decree that all Jews living in Paris had to convert to Catholicism on the threat of having those who refused having their eyes gouged out. Although Chilperic made this official order, it was never carried out. With the exception of these sporadic and often half-hearted attempts to convert the Jews, the followers of Judaism and their religion were tolerated within the Frankish kingdom. Unfortunately for the Jews, this tolerance gradually deteriorated starting in the ninth century, when Jews began to be increasingly persecuted and vilified due to the Christian fear of the spread of Judaism. Persecution of and prejudice towards Jews increased in the medieval and later periods because of their refusal to follow the official religion of the kingdom: Catholicism. Despite these persecutions, Jewish communities and the Jewish faith have continued to persist in what used to be Gaul and throughout Western Europe up to the modern day.¹⁹⁶

Catholicism, on the other hand, flourished in Gaul under the reign of Clovis and his successors, soon becoming the dominant religion of the Frankish realm which grew over time to include much of Western Europe. According to Gregory of Tours, after Clovis was baptized by

¹⁹⁵ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 390-91; James, *The Origins of France*, 15, 70.

¹⁹⁶ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 390-391; James, *The Origins of France*, 15, 70; Scherman, 192.

St. Remigius, “more than three thousand of his army were baptized.”¹⁹⁷ There is no other record stating the number of individuals who followed him to the baptismal font and it is most likely that the figure as recorded by Gregory was exaggerated. Nevertheless, Clovis’ public baptism almost certainly would have been influential in convincing others—particularly those hoping to gain his favor—to join the Catholic Church, even if only nominally. Even those who converted out of a newfound devotion to the Catholic God would have been more willing to openly be baptized because of Clovis’ acceptance of it.¹⁹⁸

By converting to the Catholic faith, Clovis greatly improved the status of the Catholic Church by giving it authority as the only recognized institution of Christianity in Frankish Gaul, as opposed to the Arian Church. He also provided support to the Roman Church through legislation as well as his royal protection, as can be seen in his decree that no Church property was to be stolen or destroyed by his soldiers as they went south to fight against the Visigoths.¹⁹⁹ This gave the Catholic Church and its doctrine a special status in the Frankish realm which over time led to an increase in the number of Catholic converts in the region. Clovis’ favoritism towards the Catholic Church also greatly hindered the spread of other faiths, especially Arianism. While these converts to the Catholic faith were not drastically changing their religious practices nor completely abandoning their pagan traditions, as described above, they were baptized into the faith. In performing this rite of entry, they vowed to follow the rituals and laws of the Church. This was the main goal that the Church was aiming for in these early years. So long as these new converts openly observed the main Catholic rites, such as mass, the clergy was

¹⁹⁷ Gregory of Tours, 144.

¹⁹⁸ James, *The Franks*, 124-129; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 47-48.

¹⁹⁹ James, *The Franks*, 124-129; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 47-48.

not worried about the lay public fully understanding the creed and doctrine of the Catholic faith; at least not in this early period.²⁰⁰

The baptismal rite marked the new convert's entrance into the Catholic Christian community and his adherence to its major tenets. This was important to both the Church as well as to the king because by converting to Catholicism the convert joined Christian society in the Frankish realm. The increasing number of people who willingly joined this faith helped to maintain an ordered society in which all people were of the same religion and followed the laws of this community. This was significant because it set the stage ultimately for a Catholic Frankish kingdom that would be fully established under the Carolingians in the ninth century.²⁰¹

The archaeological evidence that remains—particularly in relation to burial customs and church foundations—provides proof that after Clovis' baptism, there was a gradual upsurge in the number of Catholic converts. By looking at the graves of the Merovingian period from 450-750 CE, it becomes apparent that burial practices changed over time and many of the changes point to Catholicism being the main reason for this. One such change was the direction of graves. In the third and fourth centuries of Roman Gaul, individuals were usually buried with their head facing the east, or, in some cases, north or south. After Clovis' conversion, this changed significantly with all individuals being buried with their head facing the west. This demonstrates not only a consistent change in burial practices, but also proves that the change was due to an increase in Catholic followers since Catholics always buried individuals with their head facing the west in order to make it so that, at Judgment Day, Christians will sit up facing their Judge.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ James, *The Franks*, 124-127.

²⁰¹ James, *The Franks*, 124-127.

²⁰² James, *The Franks*, 141.

Another change that occurred was the location of burial sites. Before Clovis, individuals were usually buried around the grave of a significant leader or religious authority of their local community. This greatly changed after Clovis' conversion when increasingly more individuals were buried in or around churches, as was customary of Catholic Christians. In fact, the closer an individual was to the church, the better it was for both their soul spiritually as well as for their social status in the world that they left behind. The most coveted burial sites were within the church itself. However, as time went on and more individuals converted to Catholicism, the space inside and near the church decreased making it so that only the most elite or most holy of people were able to be buried in the church. This elevated social status can be seen in the grave goods left behind in these tombs, which often included jewelry and other items made of precious metals. The burial sites directly abutting the church were the most prized and prestige gradually decreased for burials in a series of rings moving outward from the church. The dwindling number of prime plots led to those who could afford it building their own family churches and monasteries in which their family was to be buried. These new churches also served the spiritual needs of those of the local community. The local non-elite would then be buried outside these new churches.²⁰³

It is possible that these individuals laid to rest outside the church were just following their traditional burial practice of interring individuals around a local prominent leader and/or religious authority. Even if this is the case, the burial of the elite in churches, many of which were built by their families, demonstrates that the leading members of society did convert in large numbers to Catholicism and, therefore, most likely influenced those around them to do the same or at least to view Catholicism as a legitimate religious option and means to increase one's

²⁰³ James, *The Franks*, 145-147; Effros, 196-199, 172-173, 211-217.

social status. During the century after Clovis' baptism, there was an increase in the number of these family churches being built as well as an upsurge in the total number of individuals being buried in and around these churches. This proves that there was an increase in the number of Catholics in Gaul as well as its growing influence in the region.²⁰⁴

Grave goods also provide evidence of the gradual spread of Catholicism in Gaul after Clovis' conversion. Prior to this king, the burial sites of various non-Roman tribes in Gaul contained many grave goods. The amount of grave goods and their value depended on the social status and economic worth of the individual buried. Usually the goods included in their burial symbolized what was most valued to both that individual as well as the community on a whole. For instance, warriors were often buried with their weapons and women were usually buried with amulets and other spiritual objects. These burial goods were included in order to provide for the deceased in the afterlife. Often, the individual was buried with items more valuable than he or she would necessarily have used in their lives in order to enhance their social status in the afterlife.²⁰⁵

This changed after the conversion of Clovis as grave goods gradually decreased being included in burials. In Gaul, particularly in the northeast, during the sixth century there were many graves which had containers, perhaps to hold provisions for the afterlife. There were also several in which the apparel of the individual buried was included, such as weaponry or other personal effects as were associated with the individual and their social status. During the seventh century, the frequency of graves with containers decreased but those personal effects were still

²⁰⁴ James, *The Franks*, 145-147.

²⁰⁵ Effros, 124-127, 171-173.

widely buried with the deceased. In the eighth century, grave goods ceased to exist altogether.²⁰⁶ Catholic Christians did not bury their dead with grave goods as had their pagan predecessors. Therefore, the widespread decrease in the number of grave goods likely demonstrates that Christianity was spreading and influencing burial practices. It is possible that there were other reasons for this decrease including economic stagnation due to warfare—which would decrease the number of resources available to bury with the dead—as well as the increasing popularity of external monuments which were visible to the living in the hopes of maintaining the memory of the deceased; however, when taken in conjunction with the change in burial location and the increasing number of churches, it is likely that Christianization did influence burial practice by stopping the obligation for grave goods.²⁰⁷

It is interesting that this decrease in the number of grave goods was gradual enough that its practice persisted for centuries after Clovis' conversion. As stated above, one likely reason for this is the gradual spread of Catholicism, and particularly the orthodox practice of it, which took centuries to fully occur throughout Gaul. Another reason for this slow development was because of the recently converted individuals' hesitation to give up this pagan custom. This was especially true of the elite. Even after being baptized into the Catholic faith, the Church permitted individuals to be buried with the grave goods as was customary of their ancestors. The Roman Church did not condemn this practice in the fifth to seventh centuries; rather the Church allowed Catholics to bury their loved ones with the grave goods that were a part of their culture so long as these objects were not sacrilegious to the Catholic Church and its doctrine, such as burying the deceased with the consecrated host in his or her mouth.²⁰⁸ This most likely was

²⁰⁶ James, *The Franks*, 139.

²⁰⁷ James, *The Franks*, 139; Effros, 88-97, 171-173, 175-182.

²⁰⁸ James, *The Franks*, 139.

because it was next to impossible to prevent people from practicing the customs that were most valued to them, such as providing for their dead loved ones, without causing them to leave the Catholic faith. The Church in this case, most likely felt that it was acceptable to allow for this formerly pagan custom so long as it did not directly attack Christianity and helped in maintaining the allegiance of the newly converted. Ultimately, however, the practice of grave goods in Gaul ceased to exist, demonstrating the spread and eventual dominance of Christianity in the region. While this does not necessarily provide proof that Catholicism was the expanding faith since neither Judaism nor Arianism buried their dead with grave goods, the other remaining material objects provide evidence that demonstrates that Catholicism was the growing faith of this period and was the most likely cause for the reduction of grave goods.

As briefly mentioned above, there was an increase in the number of churches being built in the centuries after the conversion of Clovis. The remains of the foundations of these churches—an increasing number of which were built after Clovis—provide archaeological evidence that demonstrates a rise in the number of Catholic followers. These archaeological sources are rare due to the destruction of most churches built during this period over the centuries; however, previous excavations recorded from earlier centuries and written documents composed nearer the time period in question provide an idea over their rate of construction. Based on the resources available, there was indeed an increase in church construction in the centuries after Clovis' baptism. Gregory of Tours makes many remarks in his *History* about the myriad of churches that were built during his time, thirteen having been constructed in Tours alone. As stated above, many of these churches were built by elite families with the goal of creating a coveted burial site as well as to promote their family's status and legacy within the local community. In fact, there were so many churches built in the sixth and seventh centuries

that even small towns with very relatively small populations had multiple churches within them.²⁰⁹

Like burial plots, the location of churches built during this early Christian period in Frankish Gaul were deliberately chosen and, once built, the church structure and its surrounding territory were viewed with reverence. The fact that these churches were built on these plots of land were not what made the sites sacred. Rather, the land on which the churches were built had already been seen as hallowed before the churches were constructed. Their holy history was the reason that individuals chose to build these churches on these well-known venerated sites. Such a site was viewed as sacred for one of two reasons. One reason was that the site was believed to be the burial place of a Catholic martyr and/or a higher cleric. Another reason for the site's sacred status was that it was the site of a pagan holy place, such as an altar or *nemetona* (sacred grove). Therefore, people respected and placed value on spiritual spaces, whether pagan or Christian, and utilized such sites to build their churches on in order to further these structures' sacrality.²¹⁰ This large increase in the number of churches being built after Clovis' conversion and their association as holy places, particularly those built on former pagan sacred sites, demonstrate that Catholicism was gradually spreading throughout Frankish Gaul.

Clovis' conversion to the Catholic faith not only led to the increase in Catholic converts in the Frankish realm but also established the relationship that existed between the Catholic Church and the Frankish monarchy that would persist for centuries. In this relationship, both parties greatly benefitted from the aid of the other. The support and aid that the Frankish monarchy provided the Catholic Church—especially in relation to law and the promulgation of

²⁰⁹ James, *The Franks*, 148-152.

²¹⁰ Wightman, 292.

the Catholic faith—greatly assisted in the spread of this religion throughout Europe and firmly established the Catholic Church as the sole authoritative institution of Christianity. The Frankish monarchy also benefitted from working with the Church, particularly in relation to establishing order and stability in this new kingdom via the bishops, as discussed in the previous chapter, as well as in obtaining the legitimacy of the right to rule for the Merovingian dynasty which was to reign for the next few centuries.

One of the primary benefits that the Church gained from Clovis' adoption of the Catholic faith was his role in diminishing the Arian faith within Gaul. As stated above, by becoming a Catholic, Clovis influenced his subjects to also adopt the faith thus increasing the number of Catholic converts among the Franks, including those who were previously Arian, such as Clovis' sister. Clovis' conquest over the rest of Gaul and over its Arian rulers further prevented the spread of Arianism by ridding the region of those powerful leaders and their support of this heretical faith. Since the Arian leaders, especially Alaric of the Visigoths, were overthrown, not only was their support to Arianism gone but also the new subjects of Clovis were likely to be open to joining the religion of their new leader, thereby decreasing the number of Arian followers within the Frankish realm.²¹¹

Clovis also defended the Catholic Church and helped to prevent the spread of Arianism in Gaul by promoting Catholicism and openly supporting its establishment in his kingdom. This is most apparent in Clovis' convening of the First Council of Orléans in 511. At this council, the bishops discussed and made laws concerning the important issues of the day including criminal activities and the conversion of heretics. Throughout this council, Clovis acted as adviser, putting

²¹¹ Scherman, 120-121.

forth which matters he felt the bishops should legislate on. In doing this, Clovis established a legislative relationship between the Church and kingship in France that continued to exist for centuries. Through this relationship, the Church would legislate to maintain and promote stability and order within the realm while the state would provide the resources and authority necessary to enforce it.²¹²

He also rewarded and favored those of the Catholic faith, particularly the Gallo-Romans and Catholic clergy, by giving them “titles” and land.²¹³ In doing this, he established fellow Catholics in positions of power, thereby providing Catholicism a strong foothold in what would later become the French kingdom. In this way, Catholicism eventually became the dominant religion of Gaul with Clovis’ successors continuing to aid the Church. Later Frankish rulers provided the Church with military defense when needed, particularly in conquering the eastern pagan lands and aiding—sometimes through force—in converting the people to Catholicism.²¹⁴ This is evident in King Dagobert I’s support of the Bishop St. Amandus’ forcible conversions of people in Ghent who had relapsed into paganism in the seventh century.²¹⁵ Moreover, starting in the eighth century, Charlemagne and his successors continued expanding their conquests into the east and promoted missionary work in the new territories. These Frankish sovereigns also provided the Church with authority in the kingdom by declaring it the official religion, adopting

²¹² Moore, 141-142.

²¹³ Moore, 141.

²¹⁴ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 147, 311-313; Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians: A Family who Forged Europe*, trans. Michael Idomir Allen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 96-116, 298-302.

²¹⁵ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 313.

laws that promoted the interests of the Church, and even calling Church councils in order to resolve disputes and other Church issues when necessary.²¹⁶

While the desire to expand his territory as well as his power was no doubt a motivating factor for his military campaigns, there are also records arguing that Clovis largely targeted those territories ruled by Arian leaders, such as the Visigoths in southern Gaul, in order to stop this heretical sect. As stated previously, Gregory of Tours makes this argument. He records that when meeting with his ministers Clovis said, “I find it hard to go on seeing these Arians occupy a part of Gaul...with God’s help let us invade them. When we have beaten them, we will take over their territory.”²¹⁷ According to many of these early accounts, the king saw it as his Catholic duty to defeat and depose those heretical rulers of Gaul practicing Arianism as well as to support the Church, its clergy, and its decrees. Clovis’ Catholic zeal can be seen in a letter written to him that was included at the beginning of the proceedings of the First Council of Orléans: “You, who with so much concern for the cultivation of the glorious faith of the Catholic religion will have bid the bishops gather.”²¹⁸ This passage, along with the statement he made to invade those territories ruled by Arians, as recorded by Gregory of Tours, presents Clovis’ political and military decisions as based on a desire to promote Catholicism, and thereby portrays him as a zealous follower of the Catholic faith.

While it is impossible to know with absolute certainty whether or not his decisions were based largely on his Catholic zeal, there is evidence that demonstrates that the actions he took were also politically and militarily strategic, thus corroborating the argument that he was a shrewd politician. This can be seen in his invasion targets. As briefly stated in the previous

²¹⁶ Riché, 96-116, 298-302.

²¹⁷ Scherman, 120-121; Gregory of Tours, 151.

²¹⁸ Moore, 141.

chapter, Clovis, after one unsuccessful attempt, did not again endeavor to invade and conquer Burgundy despite its leader being Arian. This was largely due to the fact that King Gundobad of Burgundy was highly tolerant of the Catholics in his realm and took measures to ensure the support of his large Catholic population by granting them vast legislative rights as well as a Catholic Church council.²¹⁹ Therefore, Clovis, lacking the local support necessary to successfully conquer this territory, did not again attempt to invade Burgundy. This is significant because it demonstrates that Clovis as a conqueror was not a fool and knew that it was not worth attempting to obtain this land from its Arian leader when it most likely would be a failure due to the lack of local support. Moreover, Clovis ceased his attempt to invade this land because he did not want to make enemies with the King of the Ostrogoths in Italy, Theodoric, who wanted Burgundy to remain independent as a buffer between Italy and Frankish Gaul. Clovis was an intelligent ruler who knew that it would not be a sound decision diplomatically to promote conflict with Theodoric, who had a large and powerful network of alliances throughout Western Europe. For this reason, Clovis also never attempted to invade Italy despite Theodoric's Arian faith.²²⁰ Both of these examples of Clovis' selective targeting of Arian rulers demonstrates that, while he may have targeted Arian leaders out of his desire to promote Catholicism and end Arianism, he did so in a politically and diplomatically judicious way. This demonstrates that he was, above all, a shrewd politician and points to the possibility that his recorded religiosity was either exaggerated or was a tool of justification for expanding his own territory and power, as discussed above.

Clovis and his successors also benefitted greatly from this relationship with the Catholic Church. The immediate benefit that Clovis received from his conversion was the support and

²¹⁹ Scherman, 117.

²²⁰ Scherman, 117-120.

approval of the Catholics living in Frankish territory, as well as in those regions which Clovis would conquer. This greatly aided him and his kingship by allowing him to conquer many territories with relatively little effort since the Catholic population within them was quite willing to become his subjects. Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, Clovis and his successors gained the aid of the Gallo-Romans living in southern Gaul who already had an efficient civil administrative system in place, which the Frankish monarchy was able to utilize. This greatly aided these kings by making it much simpler for them to govern over the vast territories that they conquered since a system was available to them that had already been established, thus saving them the time and effort necessary to create such an essential system. This relationship also provided a legitimate right to rule for the Merovingian dynasty. By becoming a member of the Catholic Church, Clovis gained the support of the Church in his status as King of the Franks, thereby making it harder for any potential rivals to make claims to the throne.

As discussed above, the Church also provided Clovis with a potential justification for conquering the vast territories that he desired: to combat and destroy the Arian heresy. Since all of Clovis' neighbors were Arian rulers, as the sole Catholic monarch he was fully supported by the Church in his military campaigns against other non-Catholic rulers. The support provided was the legitimization of his conquests as 'holy wars' as well as the cooperation of the members of the Catholic Church in the lands that they conquered.

The Frankish monarchy also benefitted from working with the Church in that it helped establish order and stability in this new kingdom. As discussed in the previous chapter, during the time of Clovis and his successors there was much uncertainty and chaos in Gaul due to the fall of the Roman Empire and the vacuum of power that it left behind. By converting to

Catholicism and declaring it the official religion of the Frankish kingdom, Clovis and his successors helped to create a more unified society that, over time, followed one religion, thereby uniting all Frankish people into one community. Even before this unification, the Church officials living within the region also promoted stability and order by preaching the tenets of Catholicism to the people as well as by acting as the local leaders of the community. In many cities, bishops were the men who judged disputes and aided those in need. After Clovis' conversion, the bishops in many of these cities became the enforcers of Merovingian law since in many towns these clerics were also the local ruling authorities and judges.²²¹

The conversion of Clovis to Catholicism greatly changed both the religious and political landscape of Gaul with the Catholic Church—as well as its followers—and the Frankish monarchy as the prime beneficiaries. While the other religions of Gaul survived the immediate impact of Clovis' conversion, as examined above, most of them eventually disappeared from the region. By publically becoming a member of the Catholic Church, Clovis set the stage for the founding of the future Catholic Frankish kingdom. His baptism led to the gradual conversion of a large portion of his people as well as those whom he conquered, thus helping to establish Catholicism in Gaul. Moreover, he defeated one of the primary supporters of Arianism in this region, King Alaric II of the Visigoths, and took over his vast lands in southwestern Gaul on the pretense of defending Catholicism. In defeating this powerful Arian ruler, he greatly diminishing the power and influence of the Catholic Church's greatest threat—the Arian heresy—by taking away this sect's political support and patronage. As a Catholic, Clovis also accepted and favored other Catholics, including the clerics living in his kingdom, as well as the Gallo-Romans of

²²¹ James, *The Origins of France*, 48-52; Moore, 21.

southern Gaul. This gave Catholicism a strong foothold in what would later become the French kingdom and gave authority to the Roman Church as the official institution of Christianity.

Clovis set the foundation for a relationship between the Catholic Church and the French kingdom that lasted for centuries. Through this relationship, the Catholic Church benefitted from having a powerful ally who defended and promulgated the Catholic creed by enforcing its decrees and aiding in converting those people who had yet to join the faith. The Frankish monarchy also greatly benefitted from this alliance in obtaining an already established administrative system for its use in maintaining order while also the institution necessary to establish a society under one religion, thereby creating stability within the realm. Moreover, the Merovingian monarchy and its successors gained legitimacy from the Church as the sole ruling dynasty of the Frankish realm, thereby preventing any rival claims to the throne that were not of the royal blood line. In fact, this aspect of the relationship was so significant that the French monarchy and the Catholic Church created a French coronation ceremony centered on the idea of the new king being the elect of God via the Catholic clergy. This unique coronation ceremony and the Church's role in it to provide legitimacy to the new Frankish ruler will be discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter 4

Catholic Kings:

The Influence of Clovis' Baptism on French Coronation Ceremony

As discussed in the previous chapter, one lasting effect that came about from Clovis' conversion was the establishment of the connection between the Catholic Church and the Frankish, and later French, kingdom. One of the most significant aspects of this relationship was the French coronation ceremony. The Catholic Church came to play an immense role in this highly important political ceremony, as can be seen not only in the participation of the Bishop or higher clergy in the coronation itself but also in the Christian symbolism that permeated its decoration and ritual. Even more significant, was the program to reorganize the coronation ceremony to include the consecration ritual that modeled the record of Clovis' baptism at the church in Reims as recorded by Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries. By incorporating the Catholic higher clergy into the coronation ceremony and by modeling it on the reported accounts of Clovis' baptism with unique rituals and symbolism, the French monarchy associated the new king with Clovis, first King of the Franks, as well as the first Catholic king of Europe. Thereby using these accounts as a model for the coronation ceremony claimed for France a special, sacred status among the sovereigns of Europe that persisted until the eighteenth century.

The coronation ceremony of King Louis XIII on October 17, 1610 demonstrates some of these aspects. When the time came for his consecration, Louis knelt before the altar in the Cathedral of Reims. Meanwhile Cardinal Joyeuse made the sign of the cross with his thumb, which was covered in the ancient holy oil sent directly from God, on Louis's head, chest, between his shoulders, on his shoulders, and at the bend of each arm saying every time: "I anoint you king with sanctified oil. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.” Throughout this anointing, a choir sang and afterwards prayers were said. The Cathedral was decorated with tapestries and cloths and chairs were set up for the thousands who were fortunate enough to witness the coronation.²²² This account is only a small portion of what occurred in the elaborate French coronation ceremonies that were performed throughout the Medieval and Early Modern periods. As can be seen, there was a large emphasis on the sacrality of this political ceremony. This is significant since the French coronation ceremony focused more on the consecration and sacred nature of the new king rather than the constitutional and political nature of a coronation ceremony, as other European monarchies did. This was due in large part to the legacy of the Frankish monarchy, whose founding sovereign was the first of the new Germanic kings to convert to Catholicism. The French took pride in this since Western Europe eventually became Christendom, a supra-national territory in which Catholicism reigned supreme. Not only was the French monarchy the first to join this significant community, but it also played a large role within it. Therefore, it was important to both the monarchs, as well as those involved in the coronation ritual, that this ceremony displayed as much as possible the long Catholic legacy of the French monarchy, in order to remind the French people as well as the neighboring sovereigns that France was a Catholic kingdom above all else. What better way to portray this image than by associating it with Clovis, the man who established this legacy.

The French monarchy did not develop this political ceremony overnight. It took centuries for them to perfect this elaborate ritual and to add the necessary symbols, gestures, and objects to make this ceremony one which was specifically French and Catholic in nature and which displayed the French monarchy’s superiority over the other royals of Europe. While most of the necessary additions were made in the thirteenth century during the reign of King Louis IX (St.

²²²Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 15-21.

Louis), many of these new aspects connected the French past—specifically the baptism of Clovis—with the present. From the reign of Clovis to that of St. Louis, the French coronation ceremony developed and changed over time, eventually culminating in the perfect distinctly French Catholic coronation ceremony that displayed both the values of the French monarchy as well as the power and piety that it possessed. In order to achieve this, those who organized the ceremony, primarily clerics, adopted elements from many post legendary ceremonial recordings, specifically utilizing the symbols and organization of the baptism of the first Catholic king of Europe, Clovis.

Before exploring the influence that Clovis' baptism had on the French coronation ceremony, it is necessary to examine the history behind the development of this ritual as well as what it entailed. The ritual that was performed to establish a new king in the French monarchy was divided into two main parts: the consecration and the coronation. The origin of the consecration ceremony of the French monarchy is not exactly known, although it is clear that it was influenced by the traditions of several cultures. As with most of the various European kingdoms' crowning rituals, the French rite was most likely influenced by the examples put forth in the Old Testament. Most historians agree that the accounts of Moses anointing Aaron provided a model for the consecration of the Hebrew kings of Israel by the High Priests.²²³ This, in turn, became an example for Christians to follow in their own anointings of Church officials and, later, kings. The consecration of kings in Europe was first practiced by the Visigoths of southern Gaul in the seventh century who most likely passed the ritual on to the Franks. Pepin the Short was the first known Frankish king to be anointed in 751 by the Pope of the Catholic Church; however, his secular coronation ceremony was done separately. As founder of the

²²³ Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 4, 203; Bouman, x-xi.

Carolingian dynasty (r. 751-768)—the dynasty to replace the first Frankish dynasty, the Merovingian (c. 457-751)—, his consecration was significant and set the precedent for later consecrations of French monarchs.²²⁴

The origin of the coronation aspect of this ceremony is more recent starting with Constantine, who wore the diadem and established a coronation ritual in the Eastern Roman Empire in the fourth century. While no one is exactly sure why Constantine was crowned in such a way, this tradition may have been influenced by the Roman tradition of the wearing of laurel crowns by some of the Roman emperors. It took a few centuries for this ritual to come to the west, the first recording of which occurred in 800 CE at the coronation of Charlemagne as Roman Emperor of the west in which Pope Leo III crowned the new emperor.²²⁵ Up to this point, the consecration and coronation ceremonies were performed at different times. This changed in 816 when these two ceremonies were combined at the coronation of Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne.²²⁶

Before Pepin's reign in the eighth century, coronation and consecration rituals did not occur in Frankish Gaul. There is no evidence showing that the Merovingian kings, who ruled the Frankish territory from the mid-fifth century until Pepin's consecration in 751, ever participated in a consecration or coronation ceremony.²²⁷ Pepin was the first Frankish king to participate in either of these rites. After him, his successors continued participating in these ceremonies with each ritual differing slightly from the last until an established coronation ceremony was organized during the reign of St. Louis. In order to discuss the development of the French

²²⁴ Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 4, 203.

²²⁵ Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 4-5.

²²⁶ Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 4-5.

²²⁷ Bouman, x-xi.

coronation ceremony from the crowning of Pepin in 751 until that of Saint Louis in 1226, it is necessary to first look at the ceremony that was so influential in its development: the baptism of Clovis.²²⁸

As discussed in the previous chapters, Clovis decided to convert after his prayers to the Christian God were answered at the Battle of the Tolbiac. Once victorious, Clovis went back to his wife and told her what happened. Immediately she sent for the bishop of Reims, St. Remigius, who tried to persuade Clovis to be baptized. After consulting his “people,” most likely the warrior-nobles who followed his command, who unanimously agreed to become Catholic with him, a baptismal ceremony was prepared.²²⁹

A great deal of planning and decorating went into this baptism. Gregory describes this preparation stating that

The public squares were draped with coloured cloths, the churches were adorned with white hangings, the baptistery was prepared, sticks of incense gave off clouds of perfume, sweet-smelling candles gleamed bright and the holy place of baptism was filled with divine fragrance. God filled the hearts of all present with such grace that they imagined themselves to have been transported to some perfumed paradise.²³⁰

The *Liber Historiae Francorum* describes these preparations in much the same way stating that “Cloths upon which holy scenes had been painted were hung in the streets, the baptistery was put in order, and balsam-scented candles wafted redolent odors.”²³¹

Gregory then provides a description of Clovis’ baptism,

²²⁸ Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 4; *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, vol. I, 171.

²²⁹ Gregory of Tours, 143-144.

²³⁰ Gregory of Tours, 144.

²³¹ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 46.

King Clovis asked that he might be baptized first by the Bishop. Like some new Constantine he stepped forward to the baptismal pool, ready to wash away the sores of his old leprosy and to be cleansed in flowing water from the sordid stains which he had borne so long. As he advanced for his baptism, the holy man of God addressed him in these pregnant words: ‘Bow your head in meekness, Sicamber. Worship what you have burnt, burn what you have been wont to worship....King Clovis confessed his belief in God Almighty, three in one. He was baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and marked in holy chrism with the sign of the Cross of Christ.’²³²

The *Liber Historiae Francorum*’s account of Clovis’ baptism provides a similar description,

The new Constantine came to baptism, having denied the ways of the devil. As he entered upon baptism, God’s holy man spoke thus with fine rhetoric: “Bow your penitent neck, Sicamber; adore that which you have burned, burn that which you have adored....” Thus the king confessed his belief in the omnipotent God in Trinity. He was baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He was anointed with holy oil and with the sign of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.²³³

Within these accounts, certain aspects are evident that would become prominent in later French coronation ceremonies.²³⁴ Before examining these aspects in detail, it is necessary to look at the events that led up to the first consecration ceremony of the Frankish realm, specifically the consecration of Pepin, and the early development thereafter of the French coronation ceremony.

Throughout the first half of the eighth century, the Franks were ruled by the last of the Merovingian kings. These kings were politically weak and ineffective, due mainly to the fact that they were quite young while they ruled. Because of this, the French barons held a great deal of power, particularly the baron who held the title of Mayor of the Palace. Essentially, he was the king’s right-hand man. This individual was elected to the position and had a great deal of

²³² Gregory of Tours, 144; The exact year of Clovis’ baptism is unknown, but most historians argue that it was 496 CE. Remigius called him ‘Sicamber’ because the Merovingians claimed to be the descendants of the Sicambri.

²³³ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 46.

²³⁴ Jackson, 4; *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, vol. I, 171.

authority, but was still subordinate to the king and also had to answer to the other barons. During this period of weak rule, the Carolingian family began to rise to power by continually holding the position as Mayor of the Palace. With each newly elected Mayor of the Palace from the Carolingians, this family gained more power, eventually obtaining the ability to take complete control of the throne. In 751, Pepin, the current Carolingian Mayor of the Palace, took the final step to do just this: asking Pope Zachary if he believed it to be right for an able and powerful ruler to overthrow a weak and powerless ruler. The pope agreed that it was right, thereby giving Pepin his approval to take control of the Frankish throne from the last Merovingian king. Pepin then gathered an army and had himself elected king of the Franks.²³⁵ This election initiated what would later be called the Carolingian dynasty, after Pepin's son Charlemagne.

Since Pepin attained the throne by force, rather than through birth as was customary, he decided to take measures that would further legitimize his rule. To do this, he had his bishops—those of his entourage—anooint him in the same way that clerics were anointed into the Church. This was quite significant for two reasons: his consecration demonstrated publicly the Catholic Church's support of his right to rule and his status as king as well as imbued him with sacred powers, similar to those of the clergy. This went farther in creating a relationship between the Frankish king and God than his predecessors had ever had. Before this, the Merovingian kings had claimed and legitimized their power through their actions and by associating themselves with Roman tradition as well as with the Catholic Church via the clergy. Pepin went further by achieving actual sacred power for himself, making it so that he was not only a servant of God but distinguished as the “elect of God,” who was given the crown directly from God via the clergy. This established the tradition that French monarchs were to be consecrated through sacred

²³⁵ Riché, 65-68.

anointing by a member of the high clergy. The establishment of this royal anointing as part of the coronation ceremony helped to form a permanent bond between the secular throne and Catholic Church.²³⁶

While it was Pepin who established the consecration tradition of the royal anointing of new kings, it was his son, Charlemagne, who set the foundation for the coronational aspect of the new king's accession to the throne. At the same time that Pepin had been anointed by Pope Stephen, he also had his two sons anointed. This was recorded in the entry for year 754 of the Royal Frankish Annals: "Pope Stephen confirmed Pepin as king by holy anointing and with him he anointed as kings his two sons, the Lords Charles and Carloman."²³⁷ In doing this, Pepin hoped to secure the future of his family's reign by establishing the legitimacy of the Carolingian dynasty through consecration.²³⁸ On the ascension of Pepin's sons to the Frankish throne at his death there was no coronation ceremony nor was there another consecration ceremony; rather "The Lords Charles and Carloman were raised to kingship," without any pomp.²³⁹ The lack of a consecration did not break from the newly established tradition that Pepin had instituted of the need for a royal anointing since he had already had his sons anointed at the same time that he was, thus legitimizing the entire immediate family. The lack of a coronation was not strange either since the Frankish monarchy had not yet had such a ceremony for its kings. This changed, however, under the reign of Charlemagne (r. 768-814) who, although already the King of the Franks, set the foundation for the inclusion of a coronation ceremony in the establishment of future Frankish kings by being the first king to be crowned Emperor of the West.

²³⁶ Riché, 68-69; Moore, 113-128; *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, vol. I, 1.

²³⁷ Riché, 69; *Royal Frankish Annals*, in *Carolingian Chronicles: Royal Frankish Annals and Nithard's Histories*, trans. Bernard Walter Scholz with Barbara Rogers (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1972), 40.

²³⁸ Riché, 69.

²³⁹ Riché, 83; *Royal Frankish Annals*, 46.

During the first thirty-two years of his rule Charlemagne was able to conquer the majority of Western Europe, set forth a liturgical and cultural revolution, and greatly aided the Catholic Church in its missionary efforts in Eastern Europe as well as by firmly establishing Catholicism in the Frankish kingdom. In fact, he played such a large role as a defender of the Catholic faith that he saved and helped reestablish Pope Leo III onto his papal throne after the Roman people had “inflicted many injuries on Pope Leo” in the years 799-800. Because of this, as well as the Catholic Church’s belief in the need for an emperor in the west, Leo crowned Charlemagne as Roman Emperor of the West on Christmas Day in 800 CE.²⁴⁰

Leo, himself, prepared this coronation ceremony. Its organization illustrates that he was highly influenced by the ritual that was performed in Byzantium, which consisted of three parts: (1) the acclamation of the people and the army, (2) the coronation itself, and (3) the reverence of the patriarch before the emperor. Unlike the Byzantines, however, Leo inverted the order of the ritual so that he occupied the first part of the ceremony. During this part, he placed the crown on Charlemagne’s head and then asked for those congregated to acclaim the new emperor three times, exclaiming “to Charles, Augustus, crowned by God, great and peaceful emperor, life and victory.” Once done, the pope knelt before the emperor, thereby signifying his willing subjection to Charlemagne as Emperor of the West, but only after he, as pope, had given such authority to Charlemagne.²⁴¹ A description of the event was recorded in the *Royal Frankish Annals* (c. 741-829):

On the most holy day of Christmas, when the king rose from prayer in front of the shrine of the blessed apostle Peter, to take part in the Mass, Pope Leo placed a crown upon his

²⁴⁰ Riché, 83; Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*, in Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, *The Two Lives of Charlemagne*, trans. and ed. David Ganz (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 37-38.

²⁴¹ Riché, 121-122; “*Carlo augusto, a Deo coronato, magno et pacific imperatore romanorum, vita et victoria.*” Friedrich Heer, *Charlemagne and his World* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), 139; Bouman, x.

head, and he was hailed by the whole Roman people. . . . After the acclamations the pope addressed him in the manner of the old emperors. . . he was called Emperor and Augustus.²⁴²

This was the first known coronation ceremony in which a Frankish king was crowned. While it was not the crowning of a man as king but as emperor, it influenced succeeding Frankish monarchs to participate in a coronation ceremony at the start of their reign as king. Moreover, it did not include a royal anointing as part of its proceedings; however, Charlemagne's successors soon combined the two necessary ceremonies for kingship into one, which was first seen in the coronation of the son of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious. After these initial crowing ceremonies, the coronation ceremony developed and grew, gradually adding new prayers, gestures, and objects. By the eleventh century, the ritual had incorporated knightly practices as well as legendary and supernatural sacral elements. The main sacred elements that were added were the Holy Ampulla and the claim that, once anointed, the king possessed supra-lay characteristics, which helped to develop a *religion royale*.²⁴³ During the thirteenth century, there was extensive mythologizing of the kingship, primarily in relation to its sacrality. This was due in large part to St. Louis, who aimed to improve the image of the Capetian monarchy—the dynasty which eventually replaced the Carolingian in 987—and increase its national and international prestige by emphasizing the religious and sacred nature of the king. In doing this, he essentially made the French king an anointed layman with powers similar to ecclesiastical officials but also holding vast secular authority.²⁴⁴

²⁴² *Royal Frankish Annals*, 81.

²⁴³ Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 5; Bouman, x-xi.

²⁴⁴ Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 32-33; Jean-Claude Bonne, "The Manuscript of the Ordo of 1250 and its Illuminations," in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. János M. Bak (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford:

St. Louis's coronation and those of his successors were the first coronation ceremonies that were made to be distinctively French, in that they consisted of the legends and symbols that held great importance in French political and religious culture. They also marked the beginning of a series of coronation ceremonies that followed the same pattern, which persisted to the end of the French monarchy in the nineteenth century.²⁴⁵ The most important of these distinctively French qualities that were added during the time of St. Louis, as recorded in the *Ordo* of Reims (c. 1230), were the Holy Ampulla, the participation of peers, the oath of the king to expel heretics from France, and the investiture of boots and spurs. This new ceremonial order, which was inspired by the records of Clovis' baptism, became the official model for future French coronation ceremonies.²⁴⁶

According to the *ordo* of Reims and the *ordo* of 1250, the two programs detailing the organization of the coronation ceremony, the political ritual was divided into eight parts. Prior to the ceremony, there were two preparatory events: the setting up of the *sedes* in the church, which symbolized the transformation of the new king to his status, and the act of waking the king, which included helping him out of bed and leaving the palace. Once the king was at the church, the ceremony officially began. It commenced with the entry of the king, accompanied by two bishops, into the cathedral with a procession following. Led by the king, this procession went to the choir where the king ended this stage by touching the most sacred part of the church: the altar.²⁴⁷

University of California Press, 1990), 69; Norman Davies, *Europe: a History* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 317, 803.

²⁴⁵ Le Goff, 55; *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, vol. II, 291.

²⁴⁶ Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 25-26; *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, vol. II, 291.

²⁴⁷ Le Goff, 52-53.

The next stage was the processional delivery of the Holy Ampulla to the cathedral. According to legend, this Ampulla contained the Holy Oil that was used on Clovis during his baptism sent to the French people directly from God. The Holy Ampulla was held by the abbot of St. Rémi who, along with his monks, delivered it to the altar for the consecration ceremony. This procession, which was arguably the most important part of the coronation ritual, was both elaborate and reverential. The transfer of the Ampulla was strictly structured and done in a way that would keep this sacred object as protected as possible, particularly from the overenthusiastic crowds. The *ordo* of Reims states the necessity of treating the Ampulla as a holy object, instructing the reader that “Between the first and third should come the procession of the consecrated monk Remigius...with the sacred ampulla, which should be carried most reverentially.”²⁴⁸ This procession began at the abbey of St. Rémi in Reims and continued through the cathedral where the holy oil was carried up to the altar. There are illustrations of this event in the *ordo* of 1250. One depicts the Holy Ampulla being carried under a golden canopy by the abbot who holds the object in outstretched hands. At the altar is a monk who holds a vase that most likely contains the chrism to which only one drop of the holy oil would be added. Based on the image and the detail that went into the description of the execution of this stage in the *ordines*, it is evident that this stage was highly significant and viewed with awe.²⁴⁹

Once the procession of the Holy Ampulla finished, the new king made a series of royal oaths to the clergy and the king’s subjects promising to defend the Catholic faith, the Church, as well as the people. Once these oaths were made, the clergy and people assented to the status of

²⁴⁸ Le Goff, 49, 52-53; Bonne, 65; “*Inter primam et terciam debent venire monachi sancti Remigii processiona....cum sacrosancta ampulla, quam debet abbas reverentissime deferre....*” *Ordo of Reims*, in *Ordines Coronationis Franciae: Texts and Ordines for the Coronation of Frankish and French Kings and Queens in the Middle Ages*, vol. I, Richard A. Jackson ed., Middle Age Series, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 298.

²⁴⁹ Le Goff, 49, 52-53; Bonne, 65.

their new ruler proclaiming: “Let it be done! Let it be done.” Thus they made a pact between the king and the clergy, who represented the people.²⁵⁰ Next was the knighting ceremony in which the king was invested with the sandals decorated with a fleur-de-lys, golden spurs, and the sword that symbolized his status as the secular arm of the Church.²⁵¹

After this, the archbishop began the consecration aspect of the ceremony, anointing the king with the holy oil. Since the French kingdom was the only monarchy to have holy oil that was claimed to have been sent directly from heaven, the *ordines* emphasized the fact that the king of France solely had the privilege of being anointed with such a sacred substance, thus making him superior to other European monarchs.²⁵² There is also an illustration in the *ordo* of 1250 that depicts the unction. In this illustration, the king kneels at the altar where the archbishop anoints the king on his forehead using a golden nail. The nail contains the liquid of the chrism with a drop of the oil of the Holy Ampulla. In order to demonstrate the sacred nature of this act, as well as to symbolize the contract that was formed between the Church and the newly anointed king in which the monarch was given sacred status in return for his defense of the Church, the illustration depicts the oil, which was a clear liquid, becoming red once applied to the king’s head. This symbolized both the blood of Christ as well as the king’s willingness to shed his own blood in defense of the Church. This act and transformation thus associated the new king with Christianity, as well as emphasizing the promise of the king to risk his life in order to protect the Church.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ “*Fiat! Fiat!*” Le Goff, 53-54.

²⁵¹ Le Goff, 54.

²⁵² Le Goff, 54; “...*inungendum regem, qui solito inter universos reges terre hoc glorioso prefulget privilegio, ut oleo celitus misso singulariter inungatur.*” *Ordo of Reims*, 301.

²⁵³ Bonne, 66-67.

The next stage of the coronation ceremony was also distinctively French in nature. During this stage the king was dressed in the royal insignia including a hyacinthine tunic, a cloak that was turned up on the left side (similar to a priest's chasuble), a ring symbolizing royal dignity and the Catholic faith, the scepter, and the rod. Once the king was dressed in these political and religious symbols, the crown was placed on the head of the king by the peers (the leading members of the nobility and clergy), and he was seated on the throne.²⁵⁴ These insignia all played a part in creating the depiction of the king as both sacred and powerful. The color of the tunic, hyacinthine, was the color that the high priests of Israel wore, thus associating the French monarchy with these authoritative religious ancestors of Christianity. This hue soon became the royal and sacred color of France. The style of the cloak paralleled with that worn by a priest, thus associating the king to the Catholic priesthood as well as its sacred powers. The ring, scepter, rod, crown, and throne all symbolized the power of the French monarchy and, once given to the king, demonstrated visually his legitimacy in this institution. Once dressed, the king made a vow to take it upon himself to accept the commitments of the emperors, as was expected of the Frankish, and later French, kings. This stage of the ceremony ended with the kiss of peace and fealty, which the archbishop and peers each took part in.²⁵⁵

A mass followed the ceremony which was not extremely significant in relation to the coronation ceremony, except for the fact that the king partook of both kinds of the communion (both the bread and wine), as only a cleric would, thereby associating himself further to the priesthood. The ritual ended with the "rites of aggregation" in which the newly appointed king

²⁵⁴ Le Goff, 54-55; Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 16-17.

²⁵⁵ Le Goff, 55.

left the church to return to the palace with his newly obtained powers and status. Although it is not mentioned in the *ordines*, it is most likely that a celebratory banquet followed.²⁵⁶

Having discussed the development and organization of the coronation ceremony used by all French monarchs beginning with St. Louis as well as the accounts of Clovis' baptism, it is necessary to discuss how the baptismal ritual of Clovis influenced French coronation ritual. One tradition that the vast majority of French consecration ceremonies, including those before 1200, maintained was the location of the ceremony. With the exception of only one, every consecration ceremony occurred at the cathedral of Reims. This was obviously influenced by Clovis' baptism, which also took place in this sacred city. The necessity of having the ceremony at this particular cathedral was so important that some consecrations were delayed for months until the newly-appointed king was able to be there. In such cases, coronation ceremonies—separate from the consecration—did occur outside of Reims when a king was not able to get to this city in a timely manner in order to avoid any political uncertainty. If crowned outside of Reims, it was imperative that the king go there at some point in order to be anointed, even if it was months later, as was the case of Philip III (r. 1245-1285) who could not get to Reims until a year after his coronation.²⁵⁷

Lacking a consecration ceremony did not lessen the political power of a French king since, between the coronation ceremony and royal succession tradition, his right to political power was covered. However, a non-anointed king did lack the sacred powers that kings were supposed to possess including the power to cure the king's evil (*scrofula*). This power, which the

²⁵⁶ Le Goff, 55.

²⁵⁷ Le Goff, 50-51; Ralph E. Giesey, "Inaugural Aspects of French Royal Ceremonials," in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. János M. Bak (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 36-37; Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 22-23, 32.

French alone believed to be a sacrament of the Catholic Church, was obtained by the king once anointed and would have the power to cure the ailments of those whom he touched.²⁵⁸ Therefore, it was necessary for a French king to be anointed as quickly as possible for him to have the full powers of his status and the unction had to be done in Reims. The fact that there was only one king who was not anointed in Reims demonstrates that it was essential for this part of the ascension of a new king to be performed in this city, and thus illustrating the influence of Clovis' baptism on this vital political ritual.

The decorations used in the cathedral and staging were also influenced by the baptism of Clovis and were present in all coronation ceremonies. As previously stated, much preparation was done for Clovis' baptism. White hangings were hung inside the church and colored cloths, including some depicting holy scenes, were draped throughout the public squares. The baptistery was prepared and perfume and candles were used to fill the church with "divine fragrance."²⁵⁹ The coronation ceremonies of Clovis' later successors, starting with the Carolingian dynasty, also required much preparation and the cathedral in which it was to occur was elaborately decorated. The cathedral walls, pillars, and floors were covered in tapestries, drapery and carpets. The royal insignia were placed on the altar—the sacred center of the place. The king also prostrated himself at the altar in order to demonstrate his subjection to the Christian God and the Catholic Church before being anointed and received the insignia in front of it. At the end, he was seated in a prominent position where all could see him in full possession of his new status.²⁶⁰

While the location and decoration of the ceremony had, for the most part, remained the same since the beginning of French coronation ritual, most elements that were distinctly French

²⁵⁸ Le Goff, 50-51; Giesey, 36-37; Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 22-23, 32.

²⁵⁹ Gregory of Tours, 144; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 46.

²⁶⁰ Le Goff, 50-51.

and were specifically influenced by the baptism of Clovis were not incorporated into the ceremony until after 1200 when St. Louis took measures to depict the French monarchy as a sacred and prestigious entity. The fact that he utilized many aspects that were reported to be present at the baptism of Clovis is not surprising since this not only connected the modern French monarchy with a highly sacred figure but also with the first Catholic sovereign in Europe. In Medieval Christendom, this was a fact that the French monarchy was proud of and used as a means to demonstrate its superiority over the other European kingdoms.

The *ordines* of Reims and of 1250 set the outline for a distinctly French coronation ceremony and were influenced by the desires of St. Louis to increase the reputation of the French monarchy. One element that was incorporated in these *ordines* which was influenced by the baptismal scene of Clovis was the individuals who were expected to be present at the ceremony and the roles that they played. Besides the king, the most prominent individual involved in these ceremonies was the archbishop of Reims. This shows important parallels with Clovis' baptism. St. Remigius, bishop of Reims at the time, baptized Clovis. In fact, Clovis directly "asked that he might be baptized by the Bishop," giving Remigius the prominent position in this rite.²⁶¹ Once coronation ceremonies were again practiced after Charlemagne's reign, the archbishop of Reims maintained this significant role. Another archbishop of Reims who lived in the ninth century, Hincmar, played a significant role in promoting the prominent position of Reims in the political landscape of France, as well as its archbishop. This cleric wrote the *Annals of Bertin* which discussed, among other things, the succession of Frankish kings. In this section of his work, Hincmar intended to establish the authority of the bishops, particularly the archbishop of Reims, as the king-makers of France. St. Louis agreed with him on this point, making it so that the

²⁶¹ Gregory of Tours, 144.

archbishop of Reims would always be the one to anoint the king, unless a cleric with a higher position was present to do so. This gave a great deal of power to not only this archbishop but to the clergy as a whole since it essentially made the archbishop of Reims and the Catholic Church king-makers. They were indispensable for a king to become a fully anointed monarch since they were necessary to perform the unction of the new monarch. If the king was not anointed, he was not viewed as fully a king since he had not gone through this traditional obligation.

Consequently, the king was not endowed with the sacral powers that he would have received once he was anointed with the holy oil. These sacred powers were imperative for a king if he wanted to be respected, revered, and be able to function as was expected of monarchs during the medieval period.²⁶²

Another group of people that was significant in coronation ceremonies after 1200 were the peers—the noble men and distinguished higher clergy of French court. The presence of peers at the coronation ritual was not recorded until the *ordines* of Reims and of 1250 and was probably added for the same reason that other symbols were added: to connect the new king with Clovis' baptism. At the coronation ceremonies, the peers were the ones who crowned the king. Afterwards, they would help support the crown and would accompany the king to his throne. Their role in the ceremony was most likely influenced by the peers that Clovis consulted. According to Gregory of Tours, when Remigius attempted to persuade Clovis to convert to Catholicism and be baptized in the faith, Clovis responded this way:

‘I have listened to you willingly, holy father. There remains one obstacle. The people under my command will not agree to forsake their gods. I will go and put to them what you have just said to me.’ He arranged a meeting with his people, but God in his power

²⁶² Le Goff, 48-49, 54; Janet L. Nelson, “Hincmar of Reims on King-making: The Evidence of the *Annals of St. Bertin*, 861-882,” in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. János M. Bak (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 18; Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 31-32.

had preceded him, and before he could say a word all those present shouted in unison: 'We will give up worshipping our mortal gods, pious King, and we are prepared to follow the immortal God about whom Remigius preaches.'²⁶³

This demonstrates that the peers of Clovis had to approve of his conversion and had to proclaim their loyalty to him and the new faith. While not an approval of Clovis as king, since he already was a monarch, it does parallel the practice of nobles participating in the coronation ceremonies of later French monarchs. These peers were the ones who crowned the king, thereby proclaiming that they accepted his rule and would be loyal to him. This makes it so that the people, who had a say in Clovis' decision to become a Catholic, also, ultimately, were the ones who allowed the coronation of the king. The inclusion of peers, therefore, was added in order to connect the French monarchy with both the sacred and political power of Clovis, the first Catholic king, thereby increasing the status of the French throne since it was his legacy.

The last element that was added was the most significant addition influenced by the baptism of Clovis: the Holy Ampulla and its legend. While there are no accounts that record this legend before the ninth century when Hincmar wrote it down, it became the most important aspect of the French coronation ritual and was the element that truly distinguished the French monarchy from all other European monarchies. According to this legend, at the baptism of Clovis, Remigius had trouble getting the consecrated chrism that was to be used in the baptizing ritual. This was because the cleric who was to bring it could not reach Remigius due to the large crowd that was present to witness Clovis' entrance into Catholicism. Desperate to receive the holy oil to perform the sacrament, Remigius prayed to God for aid. God answered his prayer by having a dove descend from heaven with a small ampulla of chrism to give Remigius the

²⁶³ Le Goff, 49, 55; Gregory of Tours, 143-144.

necessary oil to baptize Clovis, which he then used. This legend was highly valued by the French monarchy as evidence to demonstrate that the French kings were directly chosen by God since they possessed holy oil that God sent them in order to have their first king baptized into the Catholic Church. Therefore, the French monarchy attained a holier status that their neighboring monarchs could not claim.²⁶⁴

Hincmar also promoted this legend, particularly the role of Remigius, to further the importance of Reims and its archbishop. He did so by making it so that the Holy Ampulla and its legend were an essential aspect of the coronation ceremony in the *ordines* that he wrote, including the *Ordo* of Charles the Bald (869). In these *ordines*, he organized the ceremony so that the events concerning the Holy Ampulla were prominent. By incorporating the Holy Ampulla into the ceremony and emphasizing the origin of this holy object at the baptism of Clovis he intended to make Reims and its archbishop indispensable to the consecration of a new king. The holy oil had been given to the Bishop of Reims by God and was thus preserved in this city. This made it so that not only would the king-to-be have to come to Reims, where the oil was, in order to be consecrated, but also that the Archbishop of Reims was the best choice of the clergy to perform this rite since God had chosen to give this cleric the oil necessary to baptize King Clovis into the Catholic faith in the sixth century. Although it took a few centuries before the Holy Ampulla and its procession dominated the French coronation ceremony, Hincmar's promotion of the legend and its association to Reims greatly influenced the clerics who wrote the *ordines* that would be used for all French coronation ceremonies starting in the thirteenth century.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Nelson, 18; Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 31-33.

²⁶⁵ Nelson, 18; Jackson, *Vive le Roi!*, 31-33; *Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, vol. I, 87, 104.

This Holy Ampulla containing the holy anointing oil sent from God was preserved throughout the centuries of French coronations. As stated above, this object was greatly revered and provided the most significant element of the consecration of the new French king: the anointing oil. It also provided the French monarchy with a sacred object that distinguished the French monarch from all other monarchs in that France alone possessed holy oil sent directly from God. This made it appear that the French king and monarchy were directly chosen by God. It is no surprise that this aspect of the French coronation ceremony was the most significant since no other monarchy had such an object. In fact, the *ordines* emphasize the elements of the ritual that incorporated the Holy Ampulla and the ceremony itself centered on the procession and the anointing of the king, making the consecration rite much more valued than that of the coronation.²⁶⁶

Once established, the coronation ceremony of the French monarchy distinguished itself from those ceremonies of other European monarchs. While it took some time for those organizing the ceremony, most likely clerics, to develop this important political rite into a uniquely French event, once done it accurately represented the power and prestige that the French state held in Europe. The French were able to develop a coronation ritual that emphasized both their sacred nature and prestigious status amongst the other European kingdoms. While other sovereigns had ceremonies developed that also emphasized their own prestige and sacrality, the French had the advantage of associating their ceremony with the baptism of their first king who also happened to be the first Catholic ruler of Europe, Clovis. Their effective use of the symbols and events of the baptism of Clovis as recorded by Gregory of Tours, the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, and other contemporary sources in their coronation ritual helped to

²⁶⁶ Le Goff, 53-54.

associate all their succeeding monarchs to this significant figure as well as aided them in establishing this distinctly French political ritual that was able to persist for centuries. Therefore, the baptism of Clovis led to the foundation of both a Catholic French Kingdom as well as the establishment of a powerful relationship that existed between the French throne and the Catholic Church, as can be seen in the development of the French coronation ceremony and the prominent role that the Church played in this political ceremony.

Conclusion

When Clovis entered the church in Reims to be baptized by its bishop, it is most likely that he did not realize how significant his decision would be and how widespread would be its impact. By choosing Catholicism, he not only provided the Catholic Church with a ruling monarch who would actively support it, but he also established a relationship between Church and state that would spread eventually to the other kingdoms of Europe and last for centuries. The ramifications of this one decision would prove to be possibly the most momentous event of the early medieval period. Clovis' entrance into the Catholic faith provided an example for other monarchs—including his own successors—to follow. Most of them did. This led to Catholicism being the religion of European royalty and provided the Church with the secular tools necessary, such as the legislative and material support of the state, to spread and standardize Catholicism throughout Europe, thereby setting the foundation for medieval Christendom.

This decision was not guaranteed to happen as it did, especially considering the various religious options available to Clovis and the fact that Catholicism, at least among Germanic royalty, was one of the least popular choices. That is why the motivations behind his decision to convert are so important. By analyzing them, it becomes apparent that the always shrewd politician Clovis would never have made such a decision unless the political benefits outweighed the costs. Not only does this indicate that there was most likely a significant Catholic presence in Gaul for Clovis to rely upon, but it also demonstrates that he saw the vast benefits he could gain, particularly an established administrative system and a legitimate justification for conquest, from an alliance with Holy Mother Church.

The results of this decision proved that Clovis was correct in his belief that such an alliance with the Church would help him to achieve his political goals of territorial and authoritative expansion. Moreover, his ultimate commitment to the Catholic faith helped to establish a powerful Frankish kingdom that benefitted from the administration and stability that the Catholic Church and its bishops provided. Gradually, his conversion changed the political and, more importantly, religious landscape of Frankish Gaul, making it so that Catholicism would be the dominant religion of this region as well as Western Europe on a whole. Contemporary intellectuals and those in the centuries that followed saw the potential use of this momentous baptism in furthering the prestige and authority of the French throne within its own realm as well as throughout all of Europe. These authors reinforced the positions of the king and clergy by using symbolism in the French coronation ceremony that associated the new monarch with the earliest Catholic king in Europe.

Although no one could have known just how significant Clovis' decision to convert to Catholicism would be, his baptism set the course of Europe becoming Christendom. Even though the reasons for his ultimate decision to be Catholic over all other available options may never be known with absolute certainty, the accounts written during this period help to demonstrate that Clovis' most likely reason for openly choosing Catholicism was due to his desire to further his political goals. In making this decision, Clovis achieved all his goals to further his power, territory, and prestige while setting the stage for drastic change both in Francia and in Western Europe as a whole in ways that he could never have predicted.

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