

LOCKS OF DIFFERENCE: THE INTEGRAL ROLE OF HAIR AS A DISTINGUISHING FEATURE IN EARLY MEROVINGIAN GAUL

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Childebert and Lothar sent Arcadius to the queen . . . with a pair of scissors in one hand and a naked sword in the other. When he came into the Queen's presence, he held them out to her. 'Your sons, who are our masters, seek your decision, gracious Queen, as to what should be done with the princes. Do you wish them to live with hair cut short? Or would you prefer to see them killed? . . . Beside herself with bitter grief and hardly knowing what she was saying in her anguish, she answered: 'If they are not to ascend the throne, I would rather see them dead than with their hair cut short.'

—Gregory of Tours

HUMAN beings rely on a variety of signs to communicate social cues to others. Though it may seem shocking to the modern reader, the above passage highlights the rather curious position of hair in Frankish society. However, rather than dismiss the extraordinary importance of hair as inherently alien, it is important to remember that hair still holds a special place in today's society. The malleability of hair allows its wearer to actively choose which messages to send. Therefore, it is not only important to note what hair does, but what is done to it. The efforts put towards arranging one's hair can carry specific social meanings. For ancient peoples, social meaning was communicated through maintaining the length and style of the hair. In this regard, the role of hair was not so different in early medieval society than it is today. Additionally, just as certain ethnic groups may use appearance to display membership today, so did groups in the Middle Ages. Irish monks, Lombards, Welsh Romans, and Goths, among others, all expressed their social and ethnic

¹ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Baltimore: Penguin, 1974), III.18.

identities through various manifestations of hair.² As an example, in 1066 King Harold's spies returned from Normandy reporting that Duke William's army consisted almost entirely of priests, because of their short hair and shaved chins.³ Furthermore, hair could proclaim other identities such as gender and age. As evidenced by Queen Clotild, the Merovingian-led Franks seem to have ascribed a remarkably high importance to their hair, which goes beyond that of other ancient peoples. The aim of this paper is to understand the meanings that the Franks ascribed to hair and, in this quest, it will survey the different interpretations of hair that existed in sixth century Gaul. To the Merovingians, the significance of hair stemmed from an amalgamation of several traditions—Greco-Roman pagan, Christian, Germanic, and militaristic—and that link is the focus of this research. In doing so, it will contribute to the ongoing historical discussion by supporting the view that there does not seem to have been any major cultural differences dividing the various Merovingian kingdoms, but, rather, that it is possible to view all Merovingian territory as part of one cultural entity.⁴ The mixed ethnicity of the population in Gaul necessitated a sharp difference between a Frankish noble and a "Roman" cleric. This was especially important since they could very well have descended from the same parents, yet be legally distinct and have different privileges and obligations. Hair became one means to illustrate this social distinction. In large part, this distinction was possible due to the continuation of ancient Roman perceptions regarding long hair as a sign of the *other*. This was simultaneously expanded upon both by the Christian church and the Franks' secular circles. In Merovingian Gaul, hair became a multilayered sign of distinction, delineating the different roles of the warrior class and military subculture of the Franks from the 'Roman' religious culture of the Church.

Little attention has been paid to examining possible meanings of Frankish hair. The oldest explanation has been that only Merovingians wore long hair, due to Gregory of Tours' description of Merovingians as

² See Robert Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4 (1994): 43–60.

³ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, trans. John Sharpe (London: George Bell and Sons, 1904), III.

⁴ Ytzhack Hen has argued that the fragmentation and backwardness of Merovingians was artificially created by Carolingian authors to create a picture of the noble Carolingians putting an end to the Merovingian dark ages. Rather he claims that "Merovingian culture was far from monolithic . . . difference between culture of various strata of society is not to be over emphasized. The same elements of popular culture were common to all inhabitants of Merovingian Gaul, laity and clerics aristocrats and peasants." Ytzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 481–751* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 251.

reges crinitis, “long-haired kings.”⁵ This led to historians almost exclusively equating the long-haired Franks with Merovingians.⁶ The explanation of the royal long hair was famously laid out by Marc Bloch, who described the Merovingian hair as a symbol of the sacred order of kings, which maintained its legitimacy by containing a “strain of magic.”⁷ In other words, Merovingian hair was ascribed a magical and sacral quality assumed to be inherent in *königsheil*, sacred kingship, where the hair of the Merovingians was a symbol of their royal blood.⁸ This supernatural element was further supported by the Carolingian chronicler Fredegar in his story concerning the origins of the founder of the dynasty, Merovech, as the son of a sea monster. This story was accepted as supporting the sacrality of kingly hair, despite its anti-Merovingian intentions and the curious absence of long hair in the story.⁹ In fact, the very absence of long hair in this story may indicate that the seventh century Fredegar saw nothing to gain by criticizing this sign of the kings.¹⁰ Yet, this magical hair theory was accepted because it helped to explain the survival of the supposedly weak Merovingian dynasty until the usurpation of Pippin III in 751, thereby beginning the Carolingian reign. However, there has been some criticism of this explanation mainly due to the fact that “the practice of ecclesiastical tonsure . . . seems, in fact, rarely to have been a successful means of eliminating opponents.”¹¹ Most historians have regarded a broader Frankish interest in hair as a common feature of a general Germanic culture, as evidenced by classical writers such as Tacitus.¹² However, explaining fifth century practices using first century evidence is inherently problematic and anachronistic. In addition, in the few studies of hair and signs of identity in the Middle Ages that have been published in recent years, little has been added to

⁵ Gregory, *Decem Libri*, II.9.

⁶ For the most extensive defense of long hair as sign of kingship, see Averil Cameron, “How did Merovingian Kings wear their hair?” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 42 (1965): 1203–1216.

⁷ “Une Valeur magique.” Marc Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges; étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London; Routledge and K. Paul, 1973), 61.

⁸ Maximilian Diesenberger, “Hair Sacrality, and Symbolic Capital in the Frankish Kingdoms,” in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Artifacts, and Resources*, ed. R. Corradini, M. Diesenberger, and H. Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 176.

⁹ See Alexander Murray, “Post vocantur Merovingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and ‘Sacral Kingship,’” in *After Rome’s Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History: Essays presented to W. Goffart*, ed. A. C. Murray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 121–152.

¹⁰ Diesenberger, “Hair Sacrality,” 181.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹² Cameron, “Merovingian Kings,” 1204.

the specific question of Frankish hair.¹³ The most recent study on the topic was presented by Maximilian Diesenberger in his article "Hair, Sacrality, and Symbolic Capital in the Frankish Kingdoms." In his article, Diesenberger stressed the many different meanings that hair had, and tried to explain its importance in Merovingian society by applying Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *symbolic capital*.¹⁴ In this way, Diesenberger suggested that Franks applied "emotional" and "authoritative" attributes to the Merovingians' hair, which allowed the royal family to maintain a special place in Frankish society.

The most obvious meaning of the Franks' long hair was as a sign of royalty, though there is insufficient evidence to support that this was exclusively the case. That the Merovingians had long hair is beyond any doubt; this seems to have been the custom from Chilperic and Clovis until the last Merovingian king, Chilperic III.¹⁵ The straight forward symbolism of royal hair is given to us by Einhard's *Vita Karoli Magni*, which recounts how the last Merovingian king would sit on "the throne with his flowing hair and long beard, and pretend to rule, satisfied only with the royal name."¹⁶ Einhard presents us with a king left with only empty symbols of royalty—throne, hair, beard, and name. An earlier source, the Greek writer Agathias, supports the symbolism of royal hair by claiming that "custom has reserved this practice for royalty as a sort of distinctive badge and prerogative, subjects have their hair cut all around and are strictly forbidden to grow it any longer."¹⁷ However, it has also been suggested that Agathias was prone to exaggerations when using comparatives, and in stating "longer" he may simply have meant "very long."¹⁸ Therefore, this should not be seen as an indication that all other Franks had short hair. Further evidence of royal hair can be seen in the scenario with Queen Clotild: Gregory of Tours describes the two kings, Lothar and Childebert, saying "Ought we cut off their hair and so reduce them to the status of ordinary individuals? Or should we have them killed and then divide our brother's kingdom equally between us?"¹⁹ The Latin word that has been translated as "ordinary individuals" is the word

¹³ For general discussion, see Walter Pohl, "Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity," in *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, ed. Thomas Noble (London: Routledge, 2006), 120–167; and Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings of Hair."

¹⁴ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

¹⁵ The letter from Bishop Avitus describes Clovis "with flowing long hair." Diesenberger, "Hair Sacrality," 182.

¹⁶ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, trans. Evelyn Scherabon Firchow and Edwin H. Zeydel (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1972), 1.3.

¹⁷ Agathias, *The Histories*, trans. Joseph D. Frendo (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1975.) I.4.

¹⁸ Cameron, "Merovingian Kings," 1204.

¹⁹ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri*, III.18.

plebs, which is very rarely used for describing Franks, so in this instance it might mean non-Franks rather than non-royals. This would suggest that long hair was what separated Franks from plebs, but not necessarily what separated a Merovingian king from a Frank. Overall, the picture that emerges is not that long hair was only reserved for royalty but, perhaps, that a specific *style* of long hair was kingly.²⁰

The Merovingians were made distinct by a specific style of hair and were probably allowed to wear it the longest. Again, it is Agathias that provides the best evidence for a distinct royal hairstyle:

It is the practice of the Frankish kings never to have their hair cut. It is never cut from childhood onwards and each individual lock hangs right down over the shoulders [or shoulderpads], since the front ones are parted on the forehead and hangs down on either side. It is not, however, dry and dirty, and tied up in an unsightly knot.²¹

The parting on the forehead means that this could be the same style Chilperic is wearing on his famous signet ring. The hair in back cannot be seen since it is a frontal image.²² Both Theophanes and Gregory of Tours equate hair hanging down the back with royalty.²³ However, it is uncertain that long hair was only reserved for royalty—certainly it is possible that the kings were supposed to have a specific hair style, but this does not mean that Franks in general did not have long hair. There are examples of non-royal Franks having long hair as well, but in a different style. One such example of non-royal Franks with long hair can be found in Sidonius Apollinaris' panegyric on Majoranus. While describing how the Roman emperor Majoranus raided a Frankish wedding party, Sidonius describes the Franks' hair, stating that "on the crown of whose red plates lies the hair that has been drawn towards the front, while the neck, exposed by the loss of its covering, shows bright."²⁴ This seems to indicate that there were Franks who had hair long enough to be braided, but otherwise seems the opposite of the royal style with hair running down the back, since the neck was exposed. Nevertheless, the length of the hair was clearly important, since this seems to have determined status eligibility.

²⁰ This is the argument presented by Averil Cameron.

²¹ Agathias, *Histories*, I.2.

²² See Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1988), 62.

²³ Theophanes states that Merovingians were "crested, which is translated into Greek as having hair on the back," quoted in Cameron, "Merovingian Kings," 1212; Gregory of Tours: "Gundovald wore his hair long down his back, as is the custom of the Frankish kings," Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri*, VI, 24.

²⁴ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina V, Panegyrici Maiorani*, in *Sidonius Poems and Letters*, trans. W.B Anderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

Another common reference to hair in our sources was the practice of tonsuring kings so as to remove them from power.²⁵ This seems to have been a very early practice, since even Clovis has the Salian-Frankish king Chararic and his son tonsured.²⁶ A common explanation for this practice is that tonsuring was understood in Christian terms as joining a monastic order. In this way it could be that the purpose of tonsuring was that if the deposed king were to take up arms and regain the throne, he would be breaking his consecration to the monastic profession, and thus forfeiting the throne through excommunication. However, Chararic's son's response makes it doubtful that this was his interpretation of tonsuring, explained metaphorically: "These leaves have been cut from wood which is still green and not lacking in sap. They will soon grow again and be stronger than ever; and may the man who has done this deed perish equally quickly."²⁷ After which Clovis has the pair killed rather than risk the threat. Furthermore, the fact that Clovis had the Salian king tonsured before his own conversion, seems to indicate that this was perhaps not a Christian practice. Rather, the real symbolism might be seen in the Salian king's reaction, which was that, "[he] objected to this humiliation and burst into tears" indicating that this was a concern of personal honor rather than religion. Again, when Clovis' great grandson Merovech was freed, after having being captured and tonsured, he "was forced to cover his shaven head with a hood until his hair had grown back again."²⁸ It would seem that for kings, their hair was a sign of authority, and the loss of this sign meant the loss of *nobilitas*, the quality that singled them out as leaders of men.²⁹ Yet, it was not just the Frankish kings alone who ascribed this importance to hair, their subjects, who were in large part Gallo-Roman, seem to have understood the importance of hair as well.

It is important to understand the traditional Roman views of Germanic and barbarian hair in order to grasp the full meaning of long hair in Merovingian Gaul. The Roman world had been familiar with the image of the red-haired Northern-dwelling barbarian ever since the writings of Herodotus, but it was not until the writings of Julius Caesar that the

²⁵ Tonsuring, from the Latin *tondere*, means to shear or cut, usually in regards to hair. This essay uses tonsuring to mean both ecclesiastical as well as the seemingly non-religious Frankish practice of hair cutting.

²⁶ Gregory, *Decem Libri*, II.41. Strangely Clovis does not have the Ripurian Frankish king, Chloderic, tonsured, preferring to kill both him and his son, perhaps this was only a Salian practice. See *ibid.*, II.40

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II.41.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, V.14.

²⁹ "To be tonsured . . . was meant as a humiliation that no ruler could survive." J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1962), 246.

stereotype of the long-haired Germanic barbarian developed.³⁰ During the first century CE, the increasing interaction between Romans and Germanic barbarians along the Rhine River gave rise to specific images of Germanic barbarian hair. This was not just an ethnic difference, but also carried with it the stigma of savagery, as evidenced when Seneca asked a fellow Roman, “Why do you comb your hair so diligently? Whether you let it flow after the Parthian habit or fix it in the Germanic way or spread it out like Scythians do—in any horse’s mane it will be denser, bristle more beautifully in the lion’s neck.”³¹ Thereby, Seneca was equating long hair with bestial traits. Half a century later, the ethnographic writer Tacitus immortalized the theme of the uncivilized German in his enormously influential *Germania*. More than anyone else, Tacitus established a value-laden dichotomy between Romans and Germans: the Germans were a moralizing example for the decadent Romans to follow. Interestingly, it is also in Tacitus that the first reference of hair used as a social symbol in Germanic society is found, “A sign of the gens is to comb the hair sideward and tie it into a knot: thus the Suebi are distinguished from the other Germans and *the free Suebi from the slaves*.”³² There is also archeological support that this practice actually existed among certain Germanic peoples, based on evidence from the so-called “bog-bodies” found in Northern Europe.³³ For the Romans, however, long hair was still primarily a feature that marked one as a barbarian.³⁴ In the later empire, views of hair slowly began to change, specific hairstyles were no longer commonly described and a more general long-hair-theme can be seen in such authors as Ammianus Marcellianus. Curiously, we also find indications of Romans adopting barbarian hairstyles as an act of rebellion: in the sixth century, Procopius describes how the circus factions of Constantinople would wear their hair in a Hunnic fashion, seemingly just to outrage their fellow Romans.³⁵ At the same time, in the Roman west, specific hairstyles became synonymous with Roman identity. In the First Synod of St. Patrick, it was ruled that clerics should tonsure their hair in

³⁰ A similar symbol of barbarism in the Greco-Roman world was the *braccia*, trousers that various barbarians wore.

³¹ Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Dialogues and Letters*, trans. C. D. N Costa (New York: Penguin, 1997), CXXIV:22.

³² Tacitus, *Germania*, trans. J. B Rives (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 38. Emphasis added.

³³ Malcolm Todd, *The Early Germans* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 113.

³⁴ Suetonius describes a mock triumph of Caligula in which Gauls playing Germans would “dye their hair reddish and let it grown long.” Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (New York: Welcome Rain, 2001), 47. Similarly, in their very first appearance in the writings of Agathias, the Avars were immediately identified by their hair. Pohl, “Telling the Difference,” 145.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

the “Roman” way.³⁶ Thus, the Roman hairstyles were subsumed, together with most things Roman, into the structure of the Christian Church.

At the same time as the Merovingians rose to power in Gaul, the Christian Church was beginning to issue regulations mandating that clerics avoid long hair and perform proper tonsuring. In Roman Gaul, Christian identity was not as obviously civilian as perhaps in the rest of the empire, especially considering the early military background of major religious figures, such as St. Martin of Tours. Therefore, in order to avoid conflicts of authority and identity, it was necessary for the religious community to find a more distinct separation between “professed religious leaders and their lay contemporaries.”³⁷ This was done through embracing the opposite of lay culture, which meant austerity in dress and tonsured hair. The first ecclesiastical canon concerning clerical tonsuring, the *Statua Ecclesiae Antiqua*, was issued in 475 CE and stipulated that “clerics should not grow their hair, [or] shave their beards.”³⁸ The Council of Agde in 506 CE and the council of Macon in 581–583 CE later repeated and reinforced this mandate.³⁹ The need for multiple canons reinforcing the rule of tonsuring may indicate that there was reluctance among certain clerics to give up a secular lifestyle. However, the canons of tonsuring were not supported with a spiritual interpretation until the sixth century, thus indicating that these interpretations came about as a result from the rule of tonsuring, not the other way around. In his *Moralia of Job*, Pope Gregory the Great compared hair to thoughts flowing down from the spirit, and therefore, using the example of Job, he explained that shaving his head allowed Job to “cut the superfluous thought from the mind.”⁴⁰ St. Isidore of Seville later echoed Gregory’s explanation and further described tonsuring as “the vices in religion are cut off and we strip off the crimes of the body like hairs. This renewal fittingly takes place in the mind, but it is shown on the head, where the mind is known to reside.”⁴¹ This soon became the

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

³⁷ Bonnie Effros, “Appearance and Ideology: Creating Distinctions between Merovingian Clerics and Lay Persons,” in *Encountering Medieval Dress and Textiles: Objects, Texts and Images*, ed. Janet Snyder and Desirée Koslin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 9.

³⁸ There are a few biblical precedents for short hair, such as St. Paul in I Corinthians II.14, “to let the hair grow is a shame for a man and a glory for a woman.” Though this does not appear to be specifically aimed at clerics. In addition the second century Pope Anicetus is depicted in the *Liber Pontificalis* to have ordered that clerics not wear long hair, the extent and effectiveness of this decree is unknown. Constable, “Introduction on Beards in the Middle Ages,” in *Apologia Duae*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), 103.

³⁹ These two councils also insist that clerics wear appropriate and non secular clothing. Effros, “Appearance and Ideology,” 8.

⁴⁰ Constable, “Introduction on Beards,” 70.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

accepted explanation for tonsuring in the later Middle Ages. Taken together these explanations seem to indicate a general wish to escape from the temptations of material life and worldly involvement: a secular lifestyle.

In Merovingian Gaul, tonsuring became a clear sign of an active rejection of secular, Frankish lifestyle. The opposite of tonsuring, long hair, became seen as the opposite of this: an involvement in vice and crimes of the body. Considering the rambunctious and opulent lifestyle of the warrior elite of Merovingian Gaul, this was perhaps not far from the truth. Certainly, from the point of view of the clerical community, the secular warrior class would have been just as savage as the ancient Germans.⁴² Spearheading this rejection were the ascetics. In Gaul, Gregory of Tours describes the example of the Frankish ascetic Leobardus, who “was not like those who delight in wearing long hair and long beards.”⁴³ Shedding these hairs therefore meant loss of secular status and a rejection of worldly power, which is curiously similar to how the same act was understood by the Merovingian Franks, since short hair made it impossible to rule. Therefore, it would seem that the symbolism of hair evolved simultaneously in the context of the Christian church, and also in the Merovingian secular sphere. A telling example of the confluence of these two views was the practice of ritual haircutting known as *Capillatura*.

The *Capillatura* or *Barbatoria* was a curious practice based on a pre-Christian Roman hair ceremony and was adopted by the Church and the Merovingian Franks. The practice is described both as beard shaving, *Barbatoria*, and hair cutting, *Capillatura*, though it seems that early writers used these terms interchangeably.⁴⁴ Although not much is certain about this practice, since we lack a detailed description, it seems to have centered on the ritual shearing or shaving of a child by an older father figure. The practice seems to have been fairly widespread in Merovingian Gaul and is believed to have precedents in classical culture where cutting hair was sometimes celebrated and the hairs were then ritually sacrificed to a deity.⁴⁵ The earliest recorded example of *Capillatura* in Gaul is the ceremony between Clovis and Alaric in which the latter touched the hair of Clovis and became his godfather.⁴⁶ This example has led to a general

⁴² Certainly this seems to be Gregory of Tours' views of the Merovingians, see Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri*, I.1.

⁴³ Gregory of Tours, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, trans. Edward James (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1985), 20.

⁴⁴ Hen, *Culture and Religion*, 139 n. 1127.

⁴⁵ Deisenberger, “Hair Sacrality,” 184.

⁴⁶ Fredegar, *Liber Historiae Francorum*, trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), II.58.

agreement among scholars that this was not just passing ceremonial practice, but rather established some sort of kinship between the principle participants. In essence, the ceremony was one of adoption, as we see in a later example of the Lombard king, Liutprand, who by cutting Pippin III's hair "became his father and sent him back to his father enriched with many royal gifts."⁴⁷ The earliest Christian evidence comes from Paulinus of Nola who describes himself as ritually shaving and praying to God.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the mention in the old Gelasian sacrament of an "Oration for he who shaves [his] first beard," would seem to indicate this practice also took place in a church setting.⁴⁹ Why the Church decided to accept this pagan practice is uncertain. However, it is possible that the Church viewed shaving as an act of submission and obedience, a belief prevalent in traditional Mediterranean societies.⁵⁰ The entrance of the Church as the shaver placed it in the position of godfather. However, the significance of the ceremony for the person having his hair cut is less certain. Perhaps the ceremony served as a rite of passage. The connection between long hair and adulthood, as seen in the Salian Laws, could be evidence supporting this position.

As a rite of passage, the growth of long hair served to grant a young boy the legal rights of an adult, as well as the prerogatives of the masculine gender. There seems to have been a legal distinction between long hair and short hair in Frankish society. The evidence for this comes from the Salian Laws, the earliest known laws aimed specifically at Franks. It is among these that we find a curious law, which outlaws the "shearing long hair of a freeborn boy without his parents' consent."⁵¹ Since the *Capillaturia* deals with cutting the hair of a young boy, it would seem reasonable to connect it with the early Frankish Salian Law. The prohibition against the practice of *Capillaturia* without parents consent may be aimed at illegally establishing oneself as a godfather to the young boy.⁵² However, it is possible this law has deeper meaning. The term "long-haired boy" appears frequently in the Salian Laws, each time establishing the fine, *Vergeld*, to be paid for the death of the individual. The *Vergeld* established for a Frank is the highest, while that of a Roman seems to

⁴⁷ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, trans. William Dudley Foulke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), VI.53.

⁴⁸ "Then too, I shaved off my first hairs as an offering before your tomb, almost as if you plucked them out of me." Paulinus of Nola, *The Poems*, trans. P. G. Walsh (New York: Newman Press, 1975), XXI.3778.

⁴⁹ "Oratio pro eo qui prius barbam tundit." Hen, *Culture and Religion*, 142.

⁵⁰ Constable, "Introduction on Beards," 60.

⁵¹ *Pactus Legis Salicae*, trans. Katherine Fischer Drew (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 24.4.

⁵² Hen, *Culture and Religion*, 140; also Diesenberger, "Hair Sacrality," 185.

have been the lowest.⁵³ However, the *Vergeld* assigned for killing a long-haired boy—six hundred solidi—is much higher than a mere short-haired boy. The long-haired boy's *Vergeld* is also the same as that of a boy who has just reached manhood, i.e. attained age twelve.⁵⁴ The loss of hair could then denote a loss of adult status. The high *Vergeld* of both a boy with long hair, and one who has become an adult, may indicate that long hair suggested an increase in status due to coming of age. It is further possible that this would also have been the age when a boy would have been introduced into Frankish military service. Frankish society was intrinsically connected with military service, which also brought with it very clear monetary benefits, in this context, long hair may have been a symbol of privileged status. Frankish identity was formed during the late empire through intensive involvement in the Roman army. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that later post-Roman Frankish identity was still very much based on the model of the late Roman army. Just as soldiers in the late Roman army, Franks were subjects to their own laws and exempt from some forms of taxation; in return they were expected to perform military service on behalf of their commander, the king.⁵⁵ The difference between Franks and Romans was becoming more performative rather than ethnic: Franks fought and Romans paid taxes.⁵⁶ In addition, Frankish kings seem to have used annual assemblies to display royal power and distribute gifts as a sign of royal favor.⁵⁷ This meant that enrollment in the army could bring gifts and appointments by the ruler. In addition, the late Roman practice of giving land allotments to barbarians, *tertia*, was becoming hereditary in this period, yet only for Franks.⁵⁸ This meant that acquiring Frankish identity could offer substantial benefits; it is perhaps not surprising that by 600 CE "Frankish ethnicity had become more or less universal north of the Loire."⁵⁹ In addition, violence through arms was the prime means through which to

⁵³ See *Pactus Legis Salicae*, 41.1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.1–4. The connection of attaining long hair and manhood may also be seen in linguistic remnants of the French word *tos*, young boy, which is derived from the Latin *tonsus*, of one who has been tonsured. Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings of Hair," 48.

⁵⁵ Guy Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 41–42.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁸ Coupled with traditional tax exemptions of *foederati*, this could explain the problems of Merovingian rule when collecting taxes, sometimes seen in Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri*, III.36, VII.15.

⁵⁹ Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, 47, 59. For spread of Frankish identity, see also Guy Halsall, *Settlement and Social Organization: the Merovingian Region of Metz* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

demonstrate one's masculinity.⁶⁰ The monopolization of legitimized violence by Franks could therefore have created an atmosphere in which Frankishness was equated with masculinity.

An association of Frankish identity with military service may have had enormous impact on both Roman and Frankish views of masculinity. Once again the Salian Laws can offer some insight into Frankish concerns of masculinity. Several Salian Laws dealt with insults that appear to have very strong militaristic connotations, such as a taunt that someone "cast away one's shield" or that someone was *cintum* or *concagatum*, "someone who has soiled themselves in fear."⁶¹ These laws deal with calling someone a coward, which is an obvious threat in a society where masculinity was constructed around martial values.⁶² In addition, traditional Roman concepts of masculinity were integrally connected with the ability to engage in the secular sphere, which was becoming increasingly reserved for Franks. This fit with traditional Roman values about masculinity, which held that, "the key signifiers of the successful upper-class male remained the virility expressed in military service and the devotion to the state expressed in office holding."⁶³ Thus, the act of tonsuring worked on several layers to damage this masculine image—it would have reduced one's *Vergeld*, and perhaps reduced the sign of one's age. In effect, loss of hair meant either a transfer in legal status to that of a Roman or a child, neither of whom would have been able to perform the military service needed to maintain a strong masculine identity. Therefore, the loss of one's hair would mean becoming less masculine or even feminine, since "within a system where those virtues deemed masculine are considered normative anything that falls outside of that are considered inferior and feminized."⁶⁴ In the Frankish secular versus Roman Christian dichotomy, the Franks possessed the greater masculinity and the Roman clerics became increasingly feminized. This may be why ecclesiastical laws of tonsuring, like laws against carrying weapons, were often difficult to enforce. Furthermore, the association of the Church with Roman identity, and therefore unmanliness, may have caused social groups such as Gallo Romans to feel that they needed to become more Frankish in order to maintain their masculinity.⁶⁵ The gendered symbolism of hair might also be revealed in the differences in

⁶⁰ Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, 33.

⁶¹ *Pactus Legis Salicae*, 30.1–5.

⁶² Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, 11.

⁶³ Mary Harlow, "Clothes Maketh Man: Power Dressing and the Elite Male in the Later Roman World," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁵ Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, 34.

beards between Eastern and the Western Churches. The Eastern Church insisted upon the need for clerical beards, while the West took a strong anti-beard stance. This may reflect the difference between the two churches over the issue of celibacy. In this way the beard, and perhaps hair in general, could have been a sign of virility, and the cutting of hair in the West would have been a symbolic castration to indicate the vows of celibacy of the cleric.⁶⁶

The complex dialogue between a Frankish machismo and the Roman *other* can perhaps be seen in the example of the tragic figure of Gundovald the Pretender. According to Gregory of Tours, Gundovald was the unrecognized son of Lothar I. Gundovald was born, and educated in Gaul. He even wore his hair in the royal style.⁶⁷ After being captured by Lothar, he was tonsured and disowned. At the time of his father's death, Gundovald was taken in by his brother, Charibert. He was tonsured a second time by his other brother, Sigibert. After these repeated humiliations, Gundovald fled to the Byzantine commander, Narses, in Italy, and settled there and married before moving to Constantinople. A few years later, Gundovald was contacted by a group of nobles, including priests, who invited him to come back to Gaul presumably to assume the throne. Upon landing in Gaul, Gundovald was greeted by Bishop Theodore of Marseille. Both of them were arrested and Theodore was charged with, "having introduced a foreigner into Gaul, with the intention of subjecting a Frankish kingdom to the Imperial rule."⁶⁸ This is interesting because it implies that Gundovald had ceased to be a Frank because of his stay in Constantinople. Gundovald later went into exile on a Mediterranean island; and, when he returned, he launched a rebellion against his brother, King Guntram. However, he failed miserably and ended up besieged in the town of Comminges. As Gundovald was besieged, his enemies taunted him—calling him, a "painter-fellow" and that "every now and then" he was tonsured by Frankish kings.⁶⁹ The point of contention here seemed to have been Gundovald's masculinity: he never shows himself as a warrior. Rather, he was constantly dependent on others to provide him protection, yet, he still claimed the long hair of the kings, which is why they called him a *Ballomer*, a pretender.⁷⁰ When his own men tricked him into surrendering, he burst out crying and blamed

⁶⁶ See Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings of Hair," 57. This might also explain why eunuchs were always seen as opposed to "the bearded" in the East. See Shaun Tougher, "Social Transformation, Gender Transformation? The Court Eunuch 300–900," in Brubaker and Smith, eds., *Gender in the Early Medieval World*, 70–82.

⁶⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri*, VI.24

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, VI.24.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, VII.36.

⁷⁰ For *Ballomer*, see *Ibid.*, 397 n. 18.

them for his fate. Gundovald clearly lacked the *nobilitas* to call himself a Frank, let alone a Merovingian. As final proof of his offence, after his death a mob of angry Frankish soldiers dragged “him through the whole army encampment. They pulled out his hair and his beard. Then they left his body unburied on the spot where he had met his death.”⁷¹ Gundovald’s crime was summed up in his hair: he was Romanized, and well educated, and he was no warrior; therefore, he could not be allowed wear the hair of a Merovingian.

The creation of a Frankish military masculinity and a lesser Roman religious masculinity in many ways indicated an ongoing dialogue between the division of temporal and sacred spheres. This division was given real substance during this period by St. Augustine. Augustine claimed that although the world had been filled with many different people, each with their own customs, the only real distinction that mattered was between the *civitas terrene*, the city on Earth, and *De Civitate Dei*, the city of God.⁷² However, there could be no difference between these two institutions if they did not exist side by side. As Pierre Bourdieu explained, the difference only mattered as long as there is someone present to make the difference; it is a relational concept that can only be established through a social contract. In Gaul, hair became one of the signs of this contract between the tonsured “Roman” religious community and the longhaired Frankish warrior aristocracy. The move from one group to another meant not only a transformation of status, but also of masculinity. Further, it meant that a son born of a Frank, who lost his hair—the symbol *par excellence* of his Frankish identity and warrior status—suffered a sort of symbolic castration, which would have made it very hard for him to be seen as a respectable, military authority. Likewise, a cleric, perhaps of Frankish heritage, who maintained a secular image of masculinity through hair would lose all religious credibility and even risk excommunication. Hence, the growing insistence on a division between a spiritual sacral realm and a temporal one became a very real concern. This insistence survived in the medieval concept of the three orders and the nascent origins of this concept can, in some ways, be seen in the hairstyles of Merovingian Gaul.

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⁷¹ Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri*, VII.36.

⁷² Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, trans. Thomas Merton (New York: Modern Library, 1950), XIV,1.