THE PROPOSED MEROVINGIAN ANCESTRY OF CHARLEMAGNE (748–814)

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The Merovingian dynasty, descended from the eponymous chieftain Merovech or Merovée (d. 456–457), ruled the Frankish people from the fifth to eighth centuries. In 751, the last Merovingian king, Childeric III, was deposed by the *de facto* head of state, the mayor of the palace Pippin (ca. 714–768), who took on the additional title of king, the first of a new royal dynasty. Pippin's son Carolus (748–814), known in German as Karl der Große and in French (and usually in English) as Charlemagne, gave his name to this new dynasty, the Carolingians.[1]

In one sense the Merovingians are the best-known ruling dynasty of all the early medieval Germanic kingdoms, in part because the early Merovingians were so vividly witnessed in writing by Gregory, Bishop of Tours (538–594).[2] Aside from Gregory's detailed (but hardly unbiased) character vignettes of some of the Merovingians, surviving evidence to reconstruct a genealogy of the whole dynasty is quite sparse. A detailed tabular genealogy (in German) with biographical and source annotations and special attention to onomastics (naming patterns) was published by Eugen Ewig in the journal *Francia* in 1991.[3] Because it is now freely available online, Ewig's work is more accessible than the genealogical tables in Detlev Schwennicke's multi-volume tabular genealogical compilation, *Europäische Stammtafeln* (volume 1, part 1, latest edition, 1998, corrected reprint 2005),[4] though Schwennicke's work was intended as a reference-room staple. A comprehensive narrative genealogy (in French) by Christian Settipani was published in *La préhistoire des Capétiens, 481–987*, part 1, *Merovingiens,*

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[1] Charlemagne's male-line kindred is now called *Arnulfings* after the (putative) first male-line ancestor Arnulf, bishop of Metz; a similar term, *Pippinids*, for descendants of the mayor of the palace Pippin of Landen, was first used in the Annals of Metz about 805. The term *Carolingians* for the ruling dynasty is also modern.

[2] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Penguin, 1976).

[3] Eugen Ewig, "Die Namengebung bei den ältesten Frankenkönigen und im merowingischen Königshaus[:] mit genealogischen Tafeln und Notizien," *Francia* 19 (1991), 21–69 (https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb00016294). Ewig had previously published a narrative history of the dynasty as *Die Merowinger und das Frankenreich* (1988; several subsequent editions).

[4] Detlev Schwennicke, *Europäische Stammtafeln . . .* , [new ser.,] vol. 1, part 1, 2nd ed. (Vittorio Klostermann, 1998, reprinted 2005), tables 1–2. Volume 1 of Schwennicke's *Europäische Stammtafeln*, new series, originally appeared in 1980 and was then expanded into a three-part second edition in 1998; the Merovingian table was revised from 1 page (table 1 of the 1980 ed.) to two pages (tables 1–2) in the 1998 edition of vol. 1, part 1.

Carolingiens et Robertiens (1993).[5] Based partly on Ewig's work, Ian Wood produced a series of summary tables with an alphabetized prosopography (biographical index), of the Merovingians, in English, as an appendix to his authoritative historical survey, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751*, published in 1994.[6]

Since nothing is known of possible male-line descendants of the Merovingian dynasty past the mid-eighth century, descents from the Merovingians all hinge upon daughters or sisters in the dynasty. But knowledge of the dynasty's women is woefully incomplete: women in the Merovingian royal family are undercounted in surviving primary sources by a ratio of from 4:1 in early generations to as much as 8:1 in later generations.[7] The Merovingian kings must have had more daughters than are identified in the surviving sources. In recognition of the relative dearth of information about Merovingian wives, concubines, and daughters, Justine Cudorge has recently argued that the Merovingian dynasty was overtly polygynous, and that this reality has been ignored by later writers (medieval and modern) anachronistically applying standards of Christian marriage which evolved in Europe only after the eighth century.[8]

In 1975, Sir Anthony Wagner wrote, conservatively but correctly, "Though there are possible maternal descents from the Merovingians to the present day, none is proved beyond doubt."[9] No lines of descent from the Merovingians appear in standard sources without caveats. Only a few Merovingian daughters are known to have married, including royal marriages in Visigothic Spain and Anglo-Saxon Kent, none of them resulting in unimpeachable traceable descents to later medieval or modern families.[10] Speculative connections have been made in traditional

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[5] Christian Settipani, *La préhistoire des Capétiens, 481–987: Première partie: Merovingiens, Carolingiens et Robertiens*, Nouvelle histoire généalogique de l'auguste maison de France, 1 (Villeneuve d'Asq, France, 1993), pp. 47–135. Cited here throughout as "*Préhistoire*," [part] 1.

[6] Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (Longman, 1994), 344–49 (tables), 350–63 (prosopography).

A summary genealogy in English available online, based for the most part on Schwennicke's *Europäische Stammtafeln*, is the section "Franks, Merovingian Kings," in Charles Cawley's online compilation "Medieval Lands" (https://fmg.ac/Projects/MedLands/MEROVINGIANS.htm; current version for this page, "v4.0, updated 08 June 2018"). "Medieval Lands" is a presentation of hypertext-linked indented narrative-style genealogies of many royal and noble genealogies from throughout Europe, compiled from diverse published secondary works and supplemented with details drawn from secondary and primary sources. While these summaries should not be regarded as exhaustive or definite, they furnish convenient bibliographical references and genealogical summaries reflecting the works on which they are based (for example, for the Merovingians, *Europäische Stammtafeln*), with some editorial notes on problems and citations of primary-source-based details.

[7] Ratios based on tables in *Europäische Stammtafeln* [note 4]. Contrast p. 1 (ca. 450–ca. 613), 29% women (56 persons, 16 women), with p. 2 (ca. 540–751), 12% women (34 persons, 4 women).

[8] Justine Cudorge, "Structure et enjeux des systèmes polygynes dans la société franque: la place des femmes dans le palais mérovingien du Ve au VIIIe siècle" (Thesis, Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne, 2023). The thesis includes a prosopography of Merovingian women and others, including clergy, in their circles (https://researchportal.unamur.be/fr/studentTheses/structure-et-enjeux-des-syst%C3%A8mes-polygynes-dans-la-soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9-franqu).

[9] Anthony R. Wagner, *Pedigree and Progress* (Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 1975), 53.

[10] The Kentish marriage of Bertha, daughter of Merovingian King Charibert I (d. 567) is an exception: six generations of her descendants are known among early kings of Kent, but none reliably thereafter. David H. Kelley proposed a line connecting her with Eahlmund, father of Egbert,

genealogical compilations from the early modern period through the twenty-first century, and many are still found online.[11]

King of Wessex and ancestor of later kings of England (Wagner, *Pedigree and Progress* [previous note], 53). While Stewart Baldwin assessed Kelley's specific proposed line skeptically in his sketch of "Ealhmund, King of Kent, fl. 784," in "The Henry Project" (https://fasg.org/projects/henryproject /data/ealhm000.htm), there is still evidence of some connection of the Wessex royal house with that of Kent, and some path by which Kentish royal blood, and possibly Merovingian descent, descended to the kings of Wessex is not implausible.

    Dr. Settipani also notes the hypothesis of J. Pellicer that the Visigothic prince Athanagild, son of the Merovingian princess Ingund, survived infancy and was an ancestor of the later king Ervigius (Settipani, *Continuité des élites à Byzance durant les siècles obscurs. Les princes caucasiens et l'empire du VIe au IXe siècle* [Paris: de Boccard, 2006], pp. 228–31; discussed by Juan Signes Codoñer, "Constantinopla y la península ibérica entre el 626–711," *Studia Historica: Historia Antiqua* 38 [2024], at p. 20).

[11] In early-modern France the idea of the "trois races" ("three dynasties") was in vogue—that the Carolingian and Capetian dynasties both descended in the male line from a brother of Merovech, hence all three French royal dynasties belonged to the same agnatic line. This idea is conveniently summarized in English in James Anderson's compendium, *Royal Genealogies* (London, 1732), table 372, p. 613, "All the Kings of France Together" (https://books.google.com/books ?id=yrqeY839bMwC&pg=PA613); an important exposition in French is that of Gilbert-Charles Legendre, *Des antiquités de la maison de France et des maisons mérovingienne et carlienne* (Paris: Briasson, 1739) (https://books.google.com/books?id=s2JZAAAAYAAJ). As discussed below, the possibility of a male-line link between the family of Arnulf, bishop of Metz, and the early Frankish kings of Köln (likely agnatic cousins of the Merovingians) is by no means excluded.

    W. H. Turton's *Plantagenet Ancestry* (London, 1928) includes several alleged lines from Merovingians, all flawed: Page 8: Regintrude, [alleged] daughter of Theudebert II, m. Theodon, duke of the Bavarians, line down to Swanhilde, [2nd] wife of Charles Martel, and from their daughter Landrade down to Irmengarde, wife of Louis the Pious; Page 38: Ingunde, daughter of Sisibert I (p. 8), m. Ermenegild, line of Visigothic kings down to Pedro, Duke of Cantabria, etc. through León [Pedro's descent, if any, from Visigothic kings is not known]; Pages 54–55: Boggis, Duke of Aquitaine, son of Charibert II, down to dukes of Gascony [a fictitious line based on the notorious medieval forged charter of Alaó]; Page 171: Charibert of Laon, "discontinuous" member of a Merovingian house [no ancestry given]; Page 182: Berswinde, alleged daughter of Sisibert II (d. 656), wife of Eticho, with [claimed] Etichonid descent to Lower Alsace.

    While Turton shows a descent from an alleged Merovingian princess Regintrude and her husband Theodon, duke of the Bavarians, down to Swanhilde, second wife of Charles Martel [from whom, *contra* Turton, modern descents are not actually known], it has also been alleged that Regintrude and Theodon are ancestral to Charlemagne's consort Hildegarde through her Alemanic ducal ancestors (this line had previously been accepted by the Order of the Merovingian Dynasty, apparently based only on its inclusion in Roderick Stuart, *Royalty for Commoners* [Baltimore, 1992], 192–93, line 262). In Hildegard's ancestry, a long alleged connection to duke Theodon of Bavaria through dukes of the Alemans is considered in a pair of monographs by Karl August Eckhardt, *Merowingerblut I: Karolinger und Ihre Frauen*, and *Merowingerblut II: Agilolfinger und Etichonen*, Deutschrechtliches Archiv, Hefte 10–11 (1965) (http://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang_de /suche.php?ts=Merowingerblut; both parts are downloadable even though only part 2 has a link in the index; for part 1, change the URL suffix to "088740+0001.pdf"). This line is exploded by Baldwin in his sketch of Gottfried, duke of the Alemans (d. by 709) in "The Henry Project," https://fasg.org/projects/henryproject/data/gottf000.htm; Settipani covers the same ground and connects Hildegarde's ancestry speculatively with earlier Burgundian and Lombard rulers, but not the Merovingians, in his appendix, "La généalogie d'Hildegarde, femme de Charlemagne," *Les Ancêtres de Charlemagne: Les 2048 quartiers de premier empereur franc*, 2nd ed., 2d printing, Propopographica et Genealogica: Occasional Publications of the Unit for Prosopographical Research, 16 (Oxford, 2015), 267–77. Cited here as "*Ancêtres*, 2nd ed."

    In addition to the line in the forged charter of Alaó, a modern claimed male-line descent from Merovingians to two families—that known as the Bosonids, and that known as the Nibelungen— is

Of all proposed descents from the Merovingians, the clearest are those which lead to Charlemagne himself. Christian Settipani has carefully studied such proposals in the contexts of two complementary systematic approaches: first, a compiled genealogy of the Merovingian dynasty; and second, systematic exploration of the known and conjectured ancestry of Charlemagne. The first approach is encompassed in the already-mentioned book *La préhistoire des Capétiens, 481–987*, part 1, *Merovingiens, Carolingiens et Robertiens* (1993). That book has a projected companion volume, *La préhistoire des Capétiens, 481–987*, part 2, *Les aristocraties mérovingienne et carolingienne de Clovis à Hugues Capet: Continuités et ruptures*, not yet published, of which Dr. Settipani has graciously shared excerpts in draft, which has relevant discussions updating the 1993 work. The second approach—working backwards from Charlemagne—was covered systematically in a book, *Les ancêtres de Charlemagne: Les 2048 quartiers du premier empereur franc*, first published in 1989 and comprehensively expanded in a second edition published in 2014–2015. Dr. Settipani has also written articles on the historiographical and genealogical question of ancestral connections between the Carolingians and the Merovingians: "L'apport de l'onomastique dans l'étude des généalogies carolingiennes" (2000);[12] "Des Carolingiens aux Mérovingiens: Avatars d'une légitimité entre mythe historiographique et vœux pieux généalogiques" (2020);[13] and "Les Carolingiens et leurs généalogies: Mémoire des origines ou fabrication érudite?" (presented in 2019, forthcoming in print).[14]
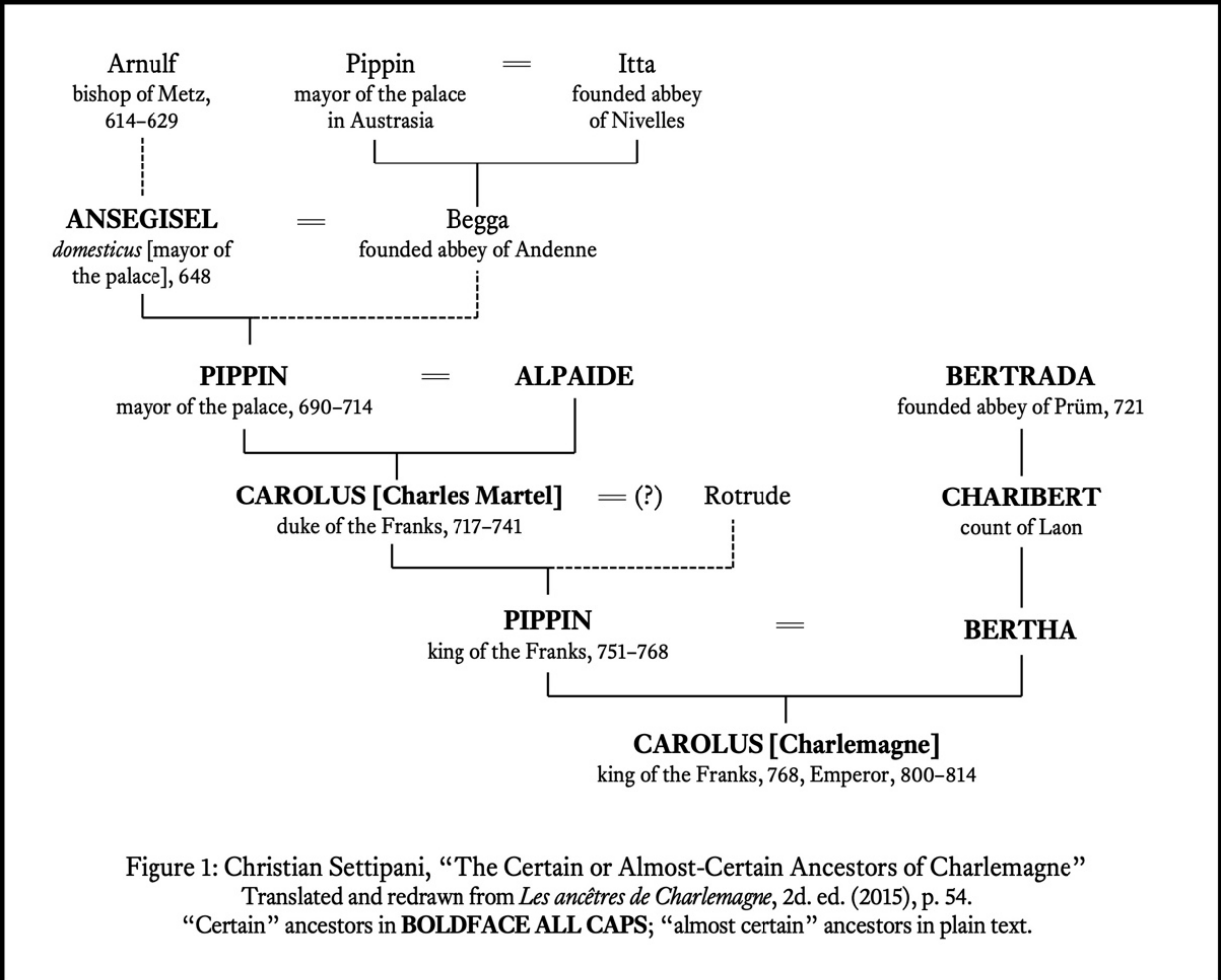
The introduction of Dr. Settipani's book on the ancestors of Charlemagne provides an important lens through which to frame all such inquiries. As Settipani counted them in 2015, Charlemagne has only eight *proved* ancestors, in four generations, with another five almost-certain ancestors ("quasi-certains"), all

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found in Willy Posecker, "Die Buzici als Vorfahren der Wettiner und Posecker," *Genealogisches Jahrbuch* 15 (1975), 25–69. Posecker's amateurish article does not even show the basis of his claim linking these two families and making them male-line Merovingians and is mentioned here only because it was published in the same issue of *Genealogisches Jahrbuch* as the much more consequential article by Szabolcs de Vajay cited below [note 27]. Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], does suggest agnatic Pippinid descent (i.e., agnatic kinship with the Carolingians) for both the Nibelungs (1:341–354) and, possibly, the Bosonids (1:363–390), but not shared agnatic Merovingian ancestry. A conventional summary of the Bosonids is at *Europäische Stammtafeln* [note 4], new ser., II:186 Neu (family of Boso, King of Arles). Settipani has deepened his examination of both families in his forthcoming next volume of *La préhistoire des Capétiens* (see below and note 35). An online summary of the Nibelungs, based on Settipani's earlier publications, appears in Cawley's "Medieval Lands" (https://fmg.ac/Projects/MedLands/FRANKISH%20NOBILITY.htm#Toc371156052).

[12] Christian Settipani, "L'apport de l'onomastique dans l'étude des généalogies carolingiennes," in *Onomastique et parenté dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan and C. Settipani, Prosopographica et Genealogica, 3 (Linacre College, Oxford: Unit for Prosopographical Research, 2000), pp. 185–229.

[13] Christian Settipani, "Des Carolingiens aux Mérovingiens: Avatars d'une légitimité entre mythe historiographique et vœux pieux généalogiques," in *Mémoires des origines et stratégies de légitimation du pouvoir. Actes du colloque international de Lyon (12–13 décembre 2013)*, ed. Christian Lauranson and Philippe Delaigue (Lyon, 2020), pp. 131–65.

[14] Christian Settipani, "Les Carolingiens et leurs généalogies: Mémoire des origines ou fabrication érudite?" in *Territoires et mémoire des origines*[:] *Nice, 12–13 décembre 2019*, ed. M. J. Ouriachi and V. Pietri (forthcoming from Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2024).

Figure 1: Christian Settipani, "The Certain or Almost-Certain Ancestors of Charlemagne"
Translated and redrawn from *Les ancêtres de Charlemagne*, 2d. ed. (2015), p. 54.
"Certain" ancestors in **BOLDFACE ALL CAPS**; "almost certain" ancestors in plain text.

within five generations.[15] Dr. Settipani's table of "Les ancêtres certains ou quasi-certains de Charlemagne" is reproduced here as Figure 1. The rest of Charlemagne's ancestry, as explored by Settipani and others, remains based on deductions from indirect evidence, including onomastics (name patterns), most of which cannot be considered proved by modern genealogical standards.

Among the conjectured extensions of Charlemagne's ancestry beyond the "certain" or "almost-certain" ancestors are five speculative paths to the Merovingians:[16]

> 1–2. Charlemagne's male-line great-great-grandfather is identified as Arnulf, bishop of Metz from 612 to 629. Arnulf and his (probable) father-in-law Arnoald, also bishop of Metz (in 601), have *both* been speculatively

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[15] Settipani, *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], 52–54, including a table, republished in "Des Carolingiens aux Mérovingiens: Avatars d'une légitimité" (2020), 162.

[16] These paths are briefly summarized in Settipani, "Des Carolingiens aux Mérovingiens" [note 13], 151–152 and chart on p. 163.

identified as descendants of Chloderic, king of Köln in 507–8, who was murdered and supplanted by his (male-line) kinsman Clovis I.[17]

3. In addition to the possible descent of Arnoald, bishop of Metz in 601, from the kings of Köln through his father (encompassed in the previous point), it was also claimed in the Metz-based Carolingian genealogies that Arnoald's mother was named Bilichildis and that she was a Merovingian princess, a daughter of King Chlothar I. That identification is most likely wrong because Bilichildis is not mentioned by Gregory of Tours in what seems to be an exhaustive account of Chlothar's children, but it might reflect a different, more distant Merovingian connection.[18]

4. Rotrude, presumed paternal grandmother of Charlemagne, is posited to be a niece of Robert, a missionary to the Bavarians and bishop of Worms, said in hagiographical texts to be of royal blood—i.e., descended from a Merovingian princess—though no specific descent has been hypothesized.[19]

5. Bertrada, a great-grandmother of Charlemagne and one of his few *certain* ancestors, has been identified as a Merovingian princess, specifically a daughter or granddaughter of King Theuderic III.

These possibilities are all shown in stemma form in Figure 2 [last page of this draft], "The Possible Merovingian Ancestors of Charlemagne," redrawn from a chart by Settipani.[20] Of these various speculative connections, it is the last one which has the most evidentiary support and currency among genealogists. This possible connection is explored more fully in the remainder of this article.

BERTRADA

Charlemagne's mother's father's mother, Bertrada, is one of Charlemagne's eight *proved* ancestors. She founded a monastery at Prüm, in the Frankish kingdom of Austrasia, on 23 June 721.[21] Her identity as a Merovingian princess was proposed in 1925 by Maurice Chaume, following an earlier exposition by Joseph Depoin;[22] this pathway was re-examined in 1975 by Szabolcs de Vajay and further elucidated by Christian Settipani in *Les ancêtres de Charlemagne* and incidentally in other works cited here. Over several pages in *Les Ancêtres de Charlemagne*, 2nd

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[17] Explored in Settipani, "L'apport de l'onomastique dans l'étude des généalogies carolingiennes" [note 12]; summarized in *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11]; and explored most recently in "Les Carolingiens et leurs généalogies" [note 14].

[18] Settipani, *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], 174–75, Ansbert and "Bilichilde (?)." For others, e.g. Robert Bartlett, *Blood Royal: Dynastic Politics in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge University Press), 318, this is couched as later invention to introduce a concept of continuity of blood.

[19] Settipani, *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], 104–5, "(Berthe??), mère de Lambert" [and also of Robert, bishop of Worms].

[20] Settipani, "Des Carolingiens aux Mérovingiens" [note 13], 163.

[21] The original edition of the document is that of Heinrich Beyer, *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der mittelrheinischen Territorien* (Coblenz: Hölscher, 1860), no. 8, pp. 10–11 (https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_32HTAAAAMAAJ/page/9/mode/2up).

[22] Joseph Depoin, *Études sur le Luxembourg à l'époque carolingienne*[:] *1. Le domaine de Mersch et ses possesseurs*, 2nd ed. (Luxembourg, 1908, 1st ed. 1905), pp. 78–79; for Chaume see below, note 27.

edition, Settipani reviews the reasoning for deducing that she belonged to the Merovingian dynasty, and where her probable place in it lay:[23] Bertrada, clearly a high-born lady, attested in several contemporary documentary sources, founded a monastery at Prüm on 23 June 721, endowing it with lands she had inherited (so she stated) from her ancestors. She signed the foundation charter together with her surviving son, Charibert, and three other co-signers, magnates (*viri magnifici*) Bernier [Bernharius], Rolande [Chrodlandis], and Theuderic.[24] The given names *Bertrada* (or its hypocoristic (shortened) form, *Berta*, usually in English, *Bertha*),[25] *Charibert*, and *Theuderic*, it has long been noticed, are all characteristic of members of the Merovingian dynasty (example: King Charibert, d. 567, a grandson of Clovis, had a daughter Bertha, who married Aethelberht, King of Kent). For this reason, many historians have come to accept that Bertrada was a Merovingian, even without agreeing on her exact place within the dynasty. As to Bertrada's landed estate, some of her possessions were held as half portions, for which the other half-portioner was in fact Charles Martel (ca. 690–741), mayor of the palace, Charlemagne's paternal grandfather. Later, when Bertrada's granddaughter, also named Bertrada or Bertha, married Charles Martel's son Pippin, they each had inherited their respective parents' shares of properties at Rommersheim and one other non-contiguous location, Rumbach in the Lower Rhine. These parallel inheritances imply that Bertrada and Charles Martel were closely related. They could not have been siblings, but it has been suggested that their respective inheritances might not have gone intact to kin more distant than first cousins. Finally, it was stated in one (admittedly late) chronicle that Charles Martel was a cousin (*consanguineus*) of the short-lived Merovingian King Chlothar IV (reigned briefly in Austrasia, 718–719).[26] On these bases, Maurice Chaume suggested that Bertrada was probably a sister of Chlothar IV.[27] Chlothar IV's place in the

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[23] This paragraph generally follows Settipani, *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], 92–98, augmented by a longer discussion of Bertrada in his forthcoming *La préhistoire des Capétiens, 2e partie: Les aristocraties mérovingienne et carolingienne de Clovis à Hugues Capet: Continuités et ruptures* [not yet published], pp. 916–32.

[24] Document cited and linked (text edition), note 21. The document is from the "Goldene Büch der Abtei Prüm" or "Codex aureus Prumensis," now Stadtbibliothek Trier, Manuscript 1709. A facsimile of this manuscript, published in 1997, is not readily available to me, nor does the manuscript appear (as of May 2024) among those from the Stadtbibliothek Trier digitized online at the "Virtuelles Skriptorium St. Matthias" (http://stmatthias.uni-trier.de/).

[25] In this Latin charter [see note 21], the donor's name is given as "Bertrada seu Berta" ("Bertrada or Berta"), probably the full name plus its hypocoristic (shortened, or nick-name) form. (The second of the traditional two name elements of a Germanic personal name is sometime omitted in written records and, perhaps, in spoken usage.) She and her same-name granddaughter, Charlemagne's mother, are identified in modern scholarship, depending on the language, as *Bertrada*, *Berthe*, *Bertha*, or *Berta*. Charlemagne's mother, almost always *Berthe* in French, is usually identified in English as *Bertha* and is so in this article; her grandmother is referred to in this article by the longer form, *Bertrada*.

[26] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:130 and note 579, citing the 11th-century chronicler Adémar of Chabannes, book 1, cap. 51, line 22 (Pascale Bourgain, Richard Landes, and Georges Pon, *Ademari Cabannensis Chronicon* [Turnhout, 1999], 63; an older edition is accessible online: *Adémar de Chabannes*[:] *Chronique*, ed. Jules Chavanon [Paris, 1897], 55: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55627w/f102.item).

[27] Maurice Chaume, *Les origines du duché de Bourgogne*, 2 vols. in 3 (Dijon, 1925–1937), 1:546. (https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1192166m/f602.double). Elaborations: Chaume, "La famille

Merovingian dynasty is uncertain. The consensus is now that he was a younger son of Theuderic III, or, perhaps, a son of one of Theuderic's sons who previously had been, briefly, a king.[28] While it seems clear that Charles Martel had no close Merovingian blood himself, he and Bertrada (and Chlothar IV) could have been first cousins if their connection was through the mother of Chlothar IV and Bertrada, a wife of King Theuderic III. This hypothesis would reconcile three threads of indirect evidence: property held in half-portions by Bertrada and Charles Martel suggesting close kinship; a statement that Charles Martel and Chlothar IV were cousins; and the onomastic evidence of Bertrada's transmission of Merovingian given names to her descendants, including into Charlemagne's family.

This hypothesis has also been criticized, notably by Eduard Hlawitschka and others. In 1965, Hlawitschka published a still-canonical monograph documenting the known ancestry of Charlemagne, "Die Vorfahren Karls des Großen," in the important interdisciplinary scholarly collection *Karl der Große: Lebenswerk und Nachleben*.[29] Hlawitschka, followed by others,[30] focused on the question of Bertrada's evident kinship with Charles Martel (through their co-ownership of certain properties) and also Bertrada's apparent kinship with another noblewoman, Irmina, who in 697 founded the abbey of Oeren in the city of Trier. Following these threads, Irmina is often suggested to have been the mother of Bertrada.[31] For Hlawitschka and those scholars who have followed this issue, exploration of the kinship of Irmina and Bertrada has proceeded generally on the presumption that Bertrada's apparent kinship with Irmina and with Charles Martel excludes any

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de saint Guillaume de Gellone," *Annales de Bourgogne* 1 (1929), 28–56, especially pp. 47–49 and table at 56 (https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k3999423d/f32.double); and Szabolcs de Vajay, "Die Namenswahl der Karolinger. Die Onomastik als Leitfaden zur Bestimmung einer merowingischen Abstammung Karls des Großen," *Genealogisches Jahrbuch* 15 (1975), 5–24.

[28] Eugen Ewig suggested that, chronologically, Chlothar was more likely a grandson than a son of Theuderic III ("Die Namengebung bei den ältesten Frakenkönigen und im merowingischen Königshaus," *Francia* 19 [1991], 21–69, at 68) (https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb00016294?page=31). Settipani, in this passage of *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], places Chlothar IV as a younger son of Theuderic III, coming (briefly) to power as a puppet of Charles Martel only years after the short-lived reigns of two brothers.

[29] Eduard Hlawitschka, "Die Vorfahren Karls des Großen," in *Karl der Große: Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, ed. Helmut Baumann and Wolfgang Braunfels, 4 vols. (Düsseldorf, 1965–67), 1:51–82.

[30] Notably, Matthias Werner [no relation to Karl Ferdinand Werner], *Adelsfamilien im Umkreis der frühen Karolinger*[:] *Die Verwandtschaft Irminas von Oeren und Adelas von Pfalzel*[:] *Personengeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur frühmittelalterlichen Führungsschicht im Maas-Mosel-Gebiet*, Vorträge und Forschungen, Sonderband 28 (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1982), especially "Zur Verwandschaft Irminas," pp. 121–75 (online at the University of Heidelberg: https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/vuf-sb/article/view/18079). Exploration of the kinship of Bertrada and Irmina predates Hlawitschka and can be traced to A. Halbedel, *Fränkische Studien. Kleine Beiträge zur Geschichte und Sage des deutschen Altertums* (Berlin, 1915).

[31] Notably, Hlawitschka, "Die Vorfahren" [note 29], followed by Werner [note 30]. Dr. Settipani has noted that Michel Summer, *Willibrord Between Ireland, Britain, and Merovingian France* (2024), pp. 73–85, questions the historicity of Irmina of Oeren, therefore impugning the reconstruction of her familial connections in the works cited in the previous note. This challenge does not, however, directly affect the hypothesized Merovingian connections of Bertrada of Prüm.

possible close connection she may have had to the Merovingian dynasty. Settipani, however, has pointed out that these two hypotheses are not mutually exclusive.[32]

Aside from the late claim that Charles Martel was a cousin of King Chlothar IV, the most significant evidence for the Bertrada-as-Merovingian hypothesis is the use, in her own immediate family and among her Carolingian descendants, of personal names used by the Merovingian dynasty. But whether or how strongly this evidence should be taken as indicative of Merovingian descent is the subject of long-standing scholarly disagreement. The use of recurring personal names as a clue to reconstructing early medieval noble families was championed by a group of medieval historians from the 1940s to the 1970s.[33] A limitation of the method however, was always evident both to practitioners and critics alike: can certain given names, identical to those found in use by a particular family, *always* be taken as evidence of kinship to that family? To base the reconstruction of a family on the repetition of leading-names, and then to presume that others bearing the same names must also be related to that family, runs perilously close to a circular argument.[34] There are other reconstructed noble families in the Carolingian period in which characteristic Merovingian given names appeared regularly. The best-studied is the family now known as the Nibelungs, allied (probably) to a family called the Guilhemides (the family of Saint William). Possible descents from this family (or these families) come through the wife of the Carolingian count Pippin, father of Heribert I, count of Vermandois; and also from the possible link between the Guilhemides and the ninth-century counts of Angoulême.[35]

In short, the hypothesis of Bertrada's Merovingian identity summarized (and strengthened) most recently by Settipani in 2015 should formally remain a *hypothesis*. It cannot be considered as proved by modern genealogical standards.

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[32] The literature exploring Bertrada's connection to Irmina, including Matthias Werner's book [note 30] is mentioned briefly in Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:184 note 225, and discussed more fully in Settipani, *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], 92–95, and further at 105–117, where Settipani suggests that the [unknown] *husband* of Bertrada may have been a nephew of Irmina of Oeren.

[33] Some representative studies, published in German from 1949 forward, were assembled and translated into English in 1979 in *The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Classes of France and Germany from the Sixth to the Twelfth Centuries*, edited by Timothy Reuter, Europe in the Middle Ages: Selected Studies, 14 (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1979). Particularly useful showing the method is Karl Ferdinand Werner, "Important Noble Families in the Kingdom of Charlemagne: a Prosopographical Study of the Relationship Between King and Nobility in the Early Middle Ages," in *The Medieval Nobility*, 137–203 (originally published in 1965 as "Bedeutende Adelsfamilien im Reich Karls des Grossen. Ein personengeschichtlicher Beitrag zum Verhältnis vom Königtum und Adel in frühen Mittelalter," in *Karl der Große: Lebenswerk und Nachleben* [note 29], 1:83–142).

[34] Reuter, in his introduction to *The Medieval Nobility* [previous note], 3–4, attempted to thread the needle when he wrote, "the evidence of leading-names . . . does not usually suffice for the reconstruction of genealogies of a traditional type, but it frequently enables us to show a vague kinship between different groups or individuals." Werner acknowledged the limitations of the method in his article "Liens de parenté et noms de personne: un Problème historique et méthodologique," in *Famille et parenté dans l'Occident médiéval: Actes du colloque de Paris (6–8 juin 1974)*, ed. Georges Duby and Jacques Le Goff (Rome, 1977), 13–18, 25–34, 35–40.

[35] On the possible Nibelung identity of the wife of Pippin see Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:214–15. Possible modern descents from the Guilhemides are discussed in Nathaniel Lane Taylor, "King David, Saint William, and Makhir: a Controversial Medieval Descent," *The American Genealogist* 72 (1997), 203–21. Settipani's most thorough exploration of the Nibelungs forms a part of his forthcoming *La préhistoire des Capétiens, 2e partie: Les aristocraties mérovingienne et carolingienne* [note 23], pp. 1162ff [not yet published].

Nevertheless, it is currently the best good-faith effort to reconcile all available indirect evidence on Bertrada's identity. If this solution is not precisely correct, it may nonetheless serve as a proxy for a more general, if less satisfying, conclusion: Charlemagne's dynasty was a new one, but it is inconceivable that this new dynasty, nearly plenipotent within the Frankish kingdoms for at least three generations before assuming the kingship in 751, would not have had more than one ancestral blood tie, through at least one maternal link, to the many-branched Merovingian dynasty. For the reasons given above, Charlemagne's great-grandmother Bertrada is very likely to be such a link.

For those seeking a *fully proved* case of descent to modern families from the Merovingian dynasty, and frustrated with the evident flaws of claimed lines among the dukes of the Alemans or the Visigothic kings in Spain, or the uncertainty (at best) of the possible line through Kent to Anglo-Saxon Wessex, the closest solution is still that found closest to home: a combination of new blood and that of the deposed Merovingian Frankish rulers flowing within the Carolingian dynasty itself.

1. CAROLUS (CHARLES) "the Great" or CHARLEMAGNE, king of the Franks and Lombards, emperor (from 800), etc., b. 2 April 748,[36] d. Aachen, 28 Jan. 814.[37] Charlemagne's career continues to be elucidated and his legacy evaluated.[38] For his wives, concubines, and children, Settipani's sketch in *Préhistoire*, 191–210, is still definitive and accessible; Stewart Baldwin's summary online in "The Henry Project," briefly citing the most relevant primary sources, is even more accessible and therefore of great value.[39]

Charlemagne was the son of:

2. BERTHA, d. [8 June or 12 or 13 July] 783;[40] m. ca. 743–744, PIPPIN,[41] b. ca. 715,[42] d. 24 Sept. 768,[43] mayor of the palace, then (from 751) king of the Franks.[44]

Bertha was the daughter of:

3. CHARIBERT, count of (or at) Laon, living 721, d. by 762;[45] m. [GISÈLE?].[46]

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[36] Correcting the long-conventional birth year of 747: Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:191–92, note 3; see also Stewart Baldwin, "Charlemagne," in "The Henry Project" (https://fasg.org/projects/henryproject/data/charl000.htm), citing Matthias Becher, "Neue überlegungen zum geburtsdatum Karls des Grossen," *Francia* 19 (1992), 37–60 (https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb00016296?page=47).

[37] *Annales regni Francorum*, as quoted and cited by Baldwin, "Charlemagne," in "The Henry Project" (https://fasg.org/projects/henryproject/data/charl000.htm).

[38] Two of the three most recent books in English on Charles are organized thematically—Rosamund McKitterick's *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008) and Johannes Fried's *Charlemagne*, trans. Peter Lewis [orig. *Karl der Große: Gewalt und Glaube; Eine Biographie*, 2013] (Harvard Univ. Press, 2016). The most recent is couched more as a biography: Janet Nelson, *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne* (Univ. Calif. Press, 2019). All three are by eminent historians of the institutions of Charlemagne's state and society.

[39] Baldwin, "Charlemagne," in "The Henry Project" [note 36].

[40] Baldwin, "Charlemagne," in "The Henry Project" [note 36], quotes and cites four different chronicle sources with these dates.

[41] Marriage dated 743–44 in the annals of Prüm; the Annals of Saint-Bertin indicate 749, which is too late (Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:184).

[42] On Pippin's birth year Settipani (*Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:181) cites analysis in Richard A. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the* Liber Historiae Francorum (Oxford, 1987), 135.

[43] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:184: d. "le 18 ou 24 septembre"; no sources cited for dates.

[44] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:181–84 (Pippin), 184–85 (Bertha); *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], 69–72. Alain Stoclet ("Pépin dit « le Bref »: considérations sur son surnom et sa légende," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 79 [2001], 1057–1093) has pointed out the inauthenticity of Pippin's byname "le Bref" ("the Short"), coined only centuries after his life.

[45] Berthe is identified only in the Annals of Saint-Bertin as "Cariberti Laudenensis comitis filia" (Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:184 and note 224). Her father was living when named in Bertrada's foundation charter for Prüm [note 24]. Settipani, *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], 77, notes he is not mentioned as deceased in the Annals of Saint-Bertin at the time of Bertha's marriage (744), but was certainly dead by 762, when Bertha gave her inheritance (through him) to Prüm.

[46] Settipani, *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], 77–79, follows an argument deducing her name in Vajay, "Die Namenswahl" [note 27], but admits her identity is not known.

Charibert was the son of:

4. BERTRADA, a noblewoman who has been suggested to be a member of the Merovingian dynasty, living on 23 June 721, when she founded and endowed a monastery at Prüm.[47] The identity of her husband, by then deceased, is not explicit in the primary sources or unambiguously established with indirect evidence.[48] Bertrada is the focus of the hypothesis discussed in this article.

Bertrada *has been proposed to be* a daughter of:

5. THEUDERIC (THIERRY) III, b. ca. 651,[49] d. between 2 Sept. 690 and 12 April 691,[50] after reigning as king of the Franks 17 years, latterly as a puppet of the mayor of the palace Pippin of Herstal;[51] m. CHRODCHILDIS, possibly also known as DODA, bur. Saint-Vaast, Arras, poss. 3 June 694 (their joint tomb bore the inscription "Theodericus rex . . . Doda regina," according to a very late witness). A document of 691 attests Chrodchildis as the name of the mother (then living) of Theuderic's eldest son and successor Chlodovech (Clovis) IV. There have been various interpretations of these divergent evidentiary scraps: Either these were two authentic names for the same person; or the late identification of queen "Doda" is to be discounted as false; or there were two successive queens; or one was a queen and the other a lesser mate (concubine).[52] Whether the name discrepancy is best resolved by positing one queen with two names, or two different queens (or concubines), Settipani has suggested that the mother both of Bertrada and of Chlothar IV was a member of the Arnulfing family and therefore the source both of Bertrada's landed inheritance in Rommersheim (of which a part was also inherited by Charles Martel) and Chlothar IV's stated kinship with Charles Martel.

Theuderic III was the son of:

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[47] See above and note 24. The charter is dated 23 June in the 1st year of Theuderic [IV]. That year is given as 720 in the edition of 1860 cited above, but historians now consider it to be 721.

[48] Settipani, *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], 91–92 and 105–117, explores the hypothesis that he was a son of the seneschal Hugobert and a maternal nephew of Irmina of Oeren.

[49] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:113, note 475, comparing known birth data for his elder brother Chlothar (b. 649–50) and younger brother Childeric (b. 655–57).

[50] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:114 and note 480, citing chronological analysis by Wilhelm Levison.

[51] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:114 and note 481, citing the chronicle of Fredegar's continuator for the events of the reign.

[52] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:116–17 did not focus on the maternity of Bertrada and Chlothar IV distinct from Theuderic's other known children Clovis III and Childebert III; *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed., 119–20 pursued the possibility that Doda was a different wife or (concubine) of Theuderic, distinct from Chrodchildis. Settipani returned to favoring the conclusion that they were more likely one and the same in *La préhistoire des Capétiens, 2e partie: Les aristocraties mérovingienne et carolingienne* [note 23], 926 [not yet published].

6. CHLODOVECH (CLOVIS) II, b. 633 or 634,[53] king in Neustria from Oct. 640, d. Oct. or Nov. 657, bur. Saint-Denis; m. 648, (Saint) BATHILDIS, formerly an Anglo-Saxon slave, d. ca. 680 as a nun at the abbey of Chelles.[54]

Chlodovech (Clovis) II was the son of:

7. DAGOBERT I, b. 610–611, named as co-king by his father between 20 Jan. and 8 April 623 (when he was probably 12 years old), reigned as sole king of the Franks after the death of his brother Charibert in 632, the last Merovingian king to effectively rule all the Franks, d. 16 Jan. 638 or 639, bur. Saint-Denis;[55] m. five known wives, of whom he m. (3) NANTECHILDIS, the mother of Chlodovech (Clovis) II.[56]

Dagobert I was the son of:

8. CHLOTHAR II, b. Spring 584,[57] became king that year on the death of his father, all but deposed in 600 by his cousins kings Theuderic and Theudebert, regained rule in 612, d. [18] Oct 629, bur. Saint-Vincent, later Saint-Germain-des-Prés;[58] m. (1) HALDETRUDIS, mother of Dagobert.[59]

Chlothar II was the son of:

9. CHILPERIC, b. not long before 535;[60] became king of Soissons on the death of his father, 561; recognized as king in Neustria at the death of his brother Charibert, 567;[61] murdered while hunting at Chelles, near Paris, between 27 Sept. and 9 Oct. 584, bur. Saint-Germain-des-Prés;[62] m. (3) 568, FREDEGUNDIS, d. 597, bur. Saint-Germain-des-Prés.[63] Fredegundis, the mother of Chlothar, was a mistress who had apparently masterminded the strangulation of Chilperic's second wife, the Visigothic princess Galswinth.[64]

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[53] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:110 and note 455, noting that Clovis was born in the 12th year of the reign of Dagobert I.

[54] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:111, citing discussions of the date of their union and her background and future monastic career.

[55] These dates with a narrative in Settipani, *Préhistoire*, 1:100–101, citing discussions.

[56] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:102–5, discussion of Dagobert's wives, extrapolating from mentions by the chronicler Fredegar.

[57] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:92, note 351, citing Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 6:41.

[58] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:94 and note 352 on date of death.

[59] Settipani, *Ancêtres*, 2nd ed. [note 11], 183–86, revised his prior work (*Préhistoire* [note 5], 94–97) where he had followed others in identifying Bertrude as Dagobert's mother. Settipani expands this discussion in *La préhistoire des Capétiens, 2e partie: Les aristocraties mérovingienne et carolingienne* [note 23], pp. 666–70 [not yet published]. Cudorge, "Structure et enjeux des systèmes polygynes" [note 8], 2:37, 134, does not concur.

[60] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:88, without discussion.

[61] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:88–89, narrating his career based on testimony of Gregory of Tours.

[62] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:89, citing Claude Fanoux's discussion of Chilperic's death.

[63] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:90, citing Fredegar's chronicle.

[64] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 1:89: the insinuation of Gregory of Tours.

Chilperic was the son of:

10. CHLOTHAR (CHLOTHACHAR) I, b. 501–2, became king in Neustria on the death of his father, 27 Nov. 511; following internal conflicts, by 555 was effectively the most powerful king in Western Europe;[65] d. after 29 Nov 561, in the 51st year of his reign, bur. Saint-Médard, Soissons; m. (5) ca. 532 as his 5th (known) wife, ARNEGUNDIS, sister of his 4th wife, Ingundis.[66] The tomb of a Merovingian queen Arnegundis, probably this woman, was discovered at Saint-Denis in 1957.[67]

Chlothar I was the son of:

11. CHLODOVECH (CLOVIS) I, b. 466 (according to Gregory of Tours), succeeded his father as king in 481–82, baptized as a Catholic probably in 498,[68] d. Paris, 27 Nov. 511,[69] bur. Paris, Saints-Apôtres, later rededicated as Sainte-Geneviève; m. (2) 492, CHROTECHILDIS, d. at the monastery of Saint-Martin at Tours, 3 June 544 (or 548),[70] bur. with her husband, daughter of Chilperic, king of the Burgundians.[71]

Chlodovech (Clovis) I was the son of:

12. CHILDERIC, a Frankish tribal king and Roman *foederatus* (auxiliary military leader) from ca. 456–57, d. ca. 481–82,[72] bur. Tournai, where his grave, endowed with emblems of sovereignty including a gold signet ring (whose seal impression is pictured at right), a gold-and-cloisonné sword, and numerous enigmatic gold bees, was discovered in 1653;[73] m. BASINA, perhaps formerly a wife or concubine of Basinus, a chief or king of the Thuringians.[74]

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[65] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 69, note 151, citing Gregory of Tours and modern chronological discussions.

[66] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 70–71 and notes 154 and 163, reconciling statements by Gregory of Tours with other information.

[67] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 71 note 164.

[68] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 54.

[69] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 55, note 56.

[70] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 57 note 70, citing Eugen Ewig on her data.

[71] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 57, note 69, citing literature on her family.

[72] Settipani, *Préhistoire*, 51 [note 5], note 30: no specific date is known.

[73] Childeric's signet ring was lost before 1831; the best witness is an impression on soft copper in the Musée Dobrée in Nantes, Brittany (shown above), struck from the original ring: Gildas Salaun, Artur MacGregor, and Patrick Périn, "Empreintes inédites de l'anneau sigillaire de Childéric Ier," *Antiquités nationales* 39 (2008): 217–24 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281724145). On the other grave goods see now Thomas Calligaro, Michel Kazanski, and Patrick Périn, "Decoration of the Cloisonné-style Grave Goods from the Grave of King Childeric I († 481/482)," (2022) (https://hal.science/hal-04060182/document).

[74] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 51–52, discusses the implications of the statements of Gregory of Tours on her origin.

Childeric was the son of:

13. MEROVECH, eponymous founder of the Merovingian dynasty, a king or chieftain of the Franks, succeeding the prior king, Chlodio, about 451, to whom he was stated to be kin, but not necessarily a son. The death date of Merovech is not known but can be deduced as 456–57 based on statements by Gregory of Tours concerning the length of the reign of Childeric, his son and successor.[75]
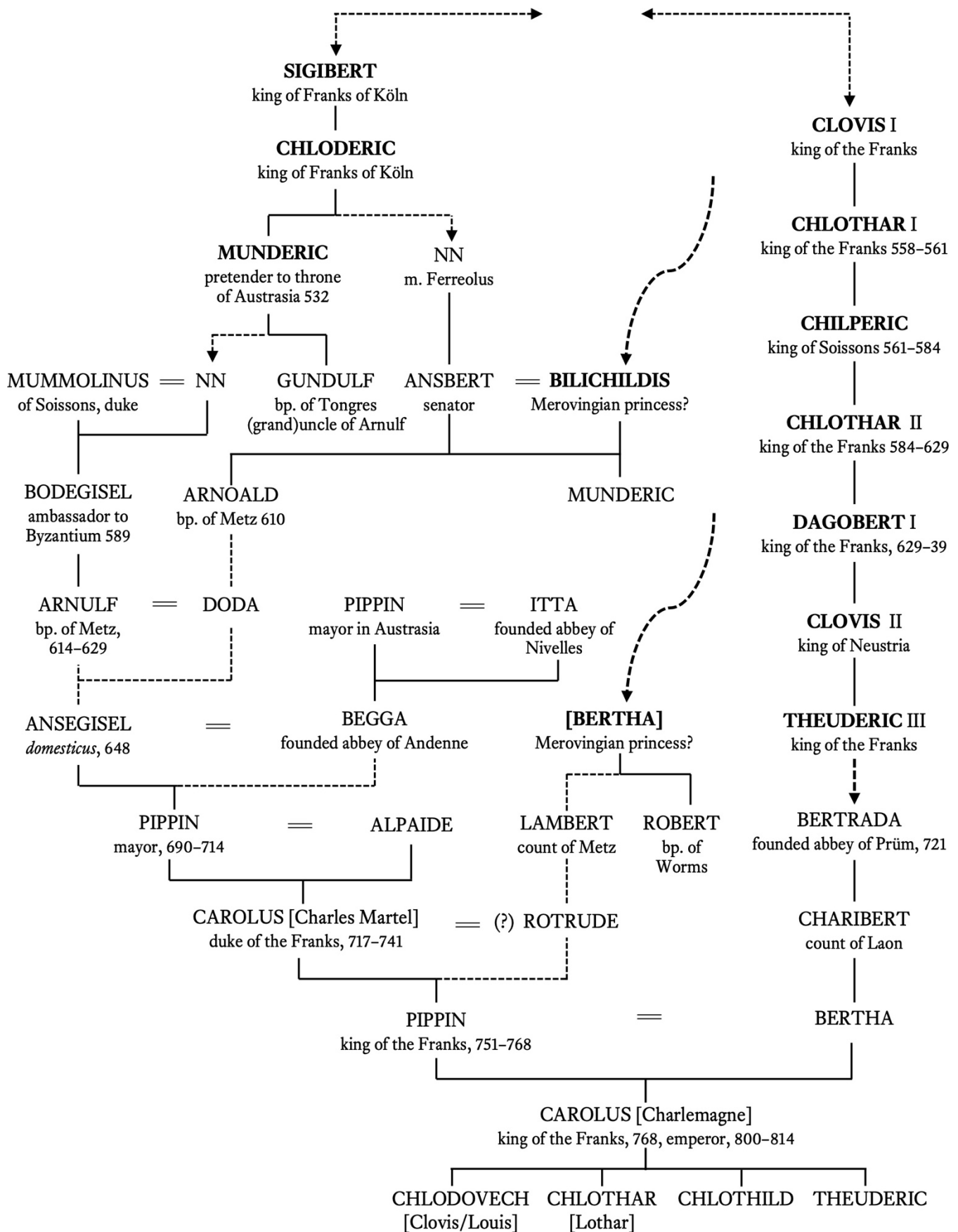
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[75] Settipani, *Préhistoire* [note 5], 49.

Figure 2: Christian Settipani, "The Possible Merovingian Ancestors of Charlemagne"
Translated and redrawn from "Des Carolingiens aux Mérovingiens" (2020), p. 163.
Dashed arrows indicate possible Merovingian ancestral paths. **Boldface** are known or posited Merovingians.