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**Early Nineteenth-Century French Historiography  
and the Case of the Merovingian Queens**  
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## Early Nineteenth-Century French Historiography and the Case of the Merovingian Queens

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“Brunichilde, vulgarly named as Brunehaut, and Fredegonde are these furies who seemed vomited by the Hell for the misfortune of their century.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1825, French historian<sup>2</sup> and archeologist Jacques Antoine Dulaure (1755-1835) expressed his direct dislike for the two most famous Merovingian queens, Brunhilde (d. 612) and Fredegonde (d. 597), by describing them as infernal. There are few women in the history of France who can compete with these two women in their dark reputation among later historians. I will examine the ways in which five most famous Merovingian queens, including Brunehilde and Fredegonde, were represented in early nineteenth-century historiography and how interaction between various genres of historiographical literature affected the representations. This article argues that the queens were presented differently according their perceived religious role in the history of France. Furthermore, I will show that it is necessary to study the Merovingian queens in all categories of historiographical writing, including the historical novel and text books, in order to reach a comprehensive image how the queens were imagined and used in early nineteenth-century France.

I will start the article by introducing the queens and sources related to their lives. To demonstrate what the historians' interpretations were based on, I will focus on sources that were used during the nineteenth century. The multiple genres of historiographical writing shall be examined after the queens and will be followed by an examination of the interaction's visibility in the queens' representations. The article and themes presented here are based on my ongoing Ph.D. dissertation which focuses on the representations of Merovingian queenship in early nineteenth-century historiography from the perspectives of gender, nation-building and the formation of new historiographical tradition.

During the French Restoration and the July Monarchy, between the years 1815 and 1848, French monarchy was first restored and later overthrown. Between the restoration and the 1848 revolution, the monarchy went through a transformation from an imitation of the Ancien Régime to a constitutional monarchy ruled no longer by the king of France but by the king of the French. The restored French monarchy caused great debates among the French politicians and intellectuals,<sup>3</sup> and knowledge about “national” history was considered significant, as history was perceived as offering solutions for contemporary social and political issues tormenting the French people.

Historians used historical figures as justifications for their arguments concerning the contemporary society and especially in multiple debates concerning the French monarchy.<sup>4</sup> During the first half of the nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Dulaure, *Histoire civile, physique et morale de Paris*, tom. 1 (Paris: Baudouin Frères, 1825), 410. “Brunichilde, vulgairement nommée Brunehaut, et Frédégonde sont ces furies, qui semblent vomies par les enfers pour le malheur de leur siècle.” My translation.

<sup>2</sup> I will use the terms “historian,” “writer” and “author” as synonyms in my article because I consider in this context all persons writing about history equals. I do not wish to value the “professional historians” over the so-called amateurs by referring to them with different terms.

<sup>3</sup> During the Restoration and July Monarchy, many historians and intellectuals became politicians and vice versa. This interaction of politics and historiography was an unique feature for the period between the French Revolution and the IIIe Republic. Jacques Juillard, “*Hommes politiques: la quête de légitimité intellectuelle*,” in *Dictionnaire des Intellectuels français: Les personnes, les lieux, les moments*, ed. Jacques Juillard and Michel Winock (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), 593-594.

<sup>4</sup> On the uses of historical figures in France, see, for example, Christian Amalvi, *Les Héros des Français: Controverses autour de la mémoire nationale* (Paris: Larousse, 2011), 11, 17-45.

century, the interest related to Merovingian royalty, and especially to queens, was connected in a larger scale to the transformation of French monarchy. French queenship, along with kingship, changed considerably during the French revolution and Napoleonic era. The new bourgeois ideal of the French queen, which emerged in the 1830s, was justified by the historians with historical examples. Thus the historical queens were not only seen as former royals but as means of justification of the monarchy's new role. Of course, the early medieval queens were not the only queens used as means of justification by the early nineteenth-century historians, but many late medieval and early modern queens were also presented as good or bad examples of French queenship. The Merovingian queens, however, present to us the most interesting case as historiography related them to the birth moments of French monarchy and indirectly, to the birth moments of French nation.

The Merovingians, who ruled the Frankish kingdoms from the late fifth to mid-eight century, held an important role in consequent French historiography as they were, despite being a Frankish tribe, often seen by historians and text book authors as the first “French dynasty.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, they were seen as the first Christian dynasty. Yet in many cases historians seemed to perceive the long gone humans, except the early medieval saints, as less human – more uncivilized or even beast-like figures. Indeed the Merovingians were simultaneously seen as the forefathers of French monarchy and as a primitive version of it.<sup>6</sup>

Each representation of a Merovingian queen was constructed in an interaction with previous interpretations about the queen, with the historiographical conventions and with the author's intentions. One cannot be conclusive about the author's intentions since only the result, not the process of creation, is visible. No representation is born in a vacuum but always in an interaction with the contemporary society and its historiographical traditions. French nineteenth-century historiography was not, despite the words of the historians, objective and factual but conflicted with political ideas and used as a justification in contemporary debates about French society and monarchy.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Merovingian Queens*

In nineteenth century France the Merovingian queens only existed as representations but each representation was based on a real person. I have chosen to focus on five queens because they were the most visible in early nineteenth-century historiography and historical literature. There were, naturally, more than five queens in the Merovingian dynasty, but due to the lack of sources, most of them have fallen into quasi-oblivion. The first well known Merovingian queen is saint Clotilde (d. 545). She was the wife of the first Christian king Clovis (d. 511) and, in a sense, a mother figure for the French nation, as she was often pictured converting her pagan husband to Christianity.<sup>8</sup> She was a Burgundian princess and bore at least five children to Clovis. Relatively little is known about her besides the scenes of conversion in Gregory of Tours' *Ten Books of Histories* and later hagiographical texts.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Laure de Saint-Ouen, *Histoire de France* (Paris: L. Colas, 1827), 5; Louis E. Gaultier, *Leçons de chronologie et d'histoire* (Paris: Renouard, 1832), Xij.

<sup>6</sup> Even the term “Merovingian” itself has had often a negative connotation among historians. See Agnès Graceffa, *Les historiens et la question franque: Le peuplement franc et les Mérovingiens dans l'historiographie française et allemande des XIXe -XXe siècles* (Paris: Brepols, 2008), 8.

<sup>7</sup> On historiography as a field of political debates, see, for example, Christian Amalvi, “Le Baptême de Clovis: Heurs et Malheurs d'un Mythe Fondateur de la France contemporaine, 1814-1914,” in *Clovis chez les historiens*, ed. Olivier Guyotjeannin (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996), 244.

<sup>8</sup> About Clotilde in nineteenth-century historiographical imagination, see Amalvi, *Les Héros*, 28.

The second queen is Thuringian princess Radegonde (d. 587). She was Clotilde's daughter-in-law and famous for the monastery she founded in Poitiers.<sup>9</sup> The poet Venantius Fortunatus (born c. 540) lived in her monastery and wrote poetry and hagiographical texts about his contemporaries, including Radegonde.<sup>10</sup> Fortunatus' works were in the nineteenth century, and still are, important sources about the late sixth-century society and life in Radegonde's monastery. The third queen is Fredegonde, and the fourth is Brunhilde. Fredegonde died peacefully in her bed in 597, whereas Brunhilde was executed in 612 by Fredegonde's son.<sup>11</sup> Brunhilde and Fredegonde are highly interesting figures, as their histories were always tied to each other in the minds of the historians, and they presented to readers counter forces of civilization and barbarism, femininity and masculinity in women.<sup>12</sup> But they were each other's negative mirrors in real life as well. Brunhilde was a Wisigoth princess, and she has known to have written letters to Byzantine empress Constantina.<sup>13</sup> Fredegonde was born as a servant and no letters from her have survived, signifying there is no evidence she was literate. Brunhilde and Fredegonde were married to brothers Sigebert, who ruled in Austrasia, and Chilperic, who ruled in Neustria. They were sons of King Clothar, the husband of Radegonde. Radegonde was not, however, either of the kings' mother, since Clothar had had several spouses simultaneously. In 612, Brunhilde was executed by her husband's nephew after long years of war between the kingdoms of Austrasia and Neustria.

The fifth queen studied here is Bathilde (d. 680), originally a Saxon and of a humble birth. She was the wife of Clovis II, Fredegonde's great-grandson.<sup>14</sup> Bathilde had three sons and, like Fredegonde and Brunhilde, she acted as a queen regent when her husband died at the age of eighteen in 657.<sup>15</sup> Three of these queens are saints, Clotilde, Radegonde and Bathilde, and two of these were, and still are, categorized as *reines noires*—negative female figures. In large collective biographies on famous women, the division between the saints and non-saints was highly visible and was often underlined in order to emphasize the saintly queens' religiousness.<sup>16</sup> It was very important for the early nineteenth-century historians to have so many saints during the “first” dynasty of French monarchy as the number of saints seems to have sanctified the whole monarchy and partially even given it a sort of a legitimation during the Restoration years. The *reines noires* thus worked often as negative mirrors for the “good” queens.

<sup>9</sup> About Radegonde, see, for example, Bruno Dumézil, *La reine Brunehaut* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 12, 237, 477.

<sup>10</sup> About Venantius Fortunatus, see Judith George, transl., *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), XVII-XXIV.

<sup>11</sup> On Brunhilde and Fredegonde, see Dumézil, *La reine Brunehaut*, 15, 112. See also Agnès Graceffa, “Le pouvoir déréglé,” in *Il Mondo alla Rovescia: Il potere delle donne visto dagli uomini*, ed. Silvia Luraghi (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2009), 25-38.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Augustin Thierry, *Récits des temps mérovingiens*, tom. 1 (Paris: Jost-Tessier, 1842), 363. Chrysanthe Ovide Des Michels also wrote, “Hatred between Brunhilde and Fredegonde sparked a civil war that tore France for a half a century.” See *Précis de l'Histoire de France* 3rd ed. (Paris: Louis Colas, 1828), 26. My translation.

<sup>13</sup> Dumézil, *La reine Brunehaut*, 481-482.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert Folz, “Tradition hagiographique et culte de sainte Bathilde, reine des Francs,” in *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 119, no. 3 (1975): 369-384. See also Sylvie Joye, “Marâtres mérovingiennes,” in *Il Mondo alla Rovescia: Il potere delle donne visto dagli uomini*, ed. Silvia Luraghi (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2009). Even though Joye suggests that at the end of the nineteenth century, Bathilde was sometimes presented as a “bad step-mother,” this was not the case in my material before 1848. Not once she was criticized for anything.

<sup>15</sup> The dates of birth and death of kings like Clothar II vary according to different sources. In any case, he died very young and therefore has sometimes been called the first *roi fainéant*. I use the genealogies established by Dumézil in his study about queen Brunhilde. See Dumézil, *La reine Brunehaut*, 475-479.

<sup>16</sup> On Merovingian queens, see, for example, Alexandrine Bonaparte, *Batilde, Reine des Francs: Poème en dix chants avec des notes* (Paris: Rapet, 1820); Jules Dubern, *Histoire des reines et régentes de France et des favorites des rois* (Paris: A. Pougin Paris, 1837), 1-43; and Josephine Amory de Langerack, *Galerie des femmes célèbres depuis le Ier siècle de l'ère chrétienne jusqu'au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Mellier frères, 1847), 109-211.

Queenship as an institution did not exist in the Merovingian period like it existed in France during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, however, many historians perceived the French institution of queenship to have its roots already in the early medieval period and in most cases the institution was defined through individual queens such as the upper mentioned queens. The question of queenship was thus anachronistic, as the historians transferred their own time's institution to the Merovingian period. Despite the great number of works dedicated to the individual queens, the history of queenship did not raise as many questions as the history of kingship, perhaps because it was not seen as valuable to France as the kingship.<sup>18</sup> Women had for centuries been excluded from the throne, and the restored monarchy in the 1810s was essentially a kingship, as neither Louis XVIII nor Charles X had a living spouse.

As said, Clotilde, Radegonde, Fredegonde, Brunehilde and Bathilde were the best known early medieval queens because there are sources left about them.<sup>19</sup> Especially the visibility of Fredegonde and Brunehilde in the sources was due to bishop Gregory of Tours (d. 594), who wrote extensively about the two women in his chronicles. In addition, Gregory of Tours' chronicle *Ten Books of Histories* widely united the nineteenth-century historiographical genres as all historians writing about the early Middle Ages referred to his texts explicitly or implicitly through other historians' texts. Gregory of Tours' position in historiography is very peculiar as he was simultaneously one of the main sources of the period and a political figure in the history of Merovingian royals.<sup>20</sup>

Gregory of Tours was, and still is, by far the most important source about the Merovingian royals. Yet his chronicle was not the only source the French historians used when writing about the early medieval queens. For example, the chronicles written in the 660s by a monk later named as Fredegair were an important source about the events after the death of Gregory in 594. Fredegair's chronicles were much more criticized than Gregory's works, and already in the early nineteenth century, Fredegair's chronicles were deemed at least partly unreliable by historians such as Paulin Paris.<sup>21</sup> In the early nineteenth century, not all historians used sources and not all historians made references even if they had used sources.<sup>22</sup> It is possible that some historians only read earlier historiographical works written, for example, in the seventeenth century and wrote their dissertations based on earlier interpretations.<sup>23</sup> There was no sudden

<sup>17</sup> About the queenship and the Merovingian period, see, for example, Joye, "Marâtres mérovingiennes," 47.

<sup>18</sup> About the history of French kingship, see Augustin Thierry, *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (Paris: Sautélet, 1827), 62-73.

<sup>19</sup> About the sources concerning women generally in the Merovingian period, see Roger-Xaviér Lanteri, *Les Mérovingiennes* (Paris: Pérrin, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> A lot of studies have been written about Gregory of Tours and one should be especially mentioned: Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, trans. Christopher Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Gregory of Tours was not an impartial observer of his contemporary society but presented subjective views in his Histories.

<sup>21</sup> Paulin Paris, "Dissertation sur les chroniques de Saint-Denis et sur les premières sources de l'histoire de France jusqu'à la mort de Dagobert Ier," in Paulin Paris et Édouard Mennechet, *Histoire de France, par les écrivains contemporains*, tom. 1 (Paris: Techener, 1836), XXXIII. Paris presented in his essay that almost all medieval sources such as *Grandes Chroniques de France* and Aimoin's (d. c. 1010) *Historia Francorum* were based on Gregory of Tours' *Ten Books of Histories* on parts concerning the Merovingians. Aimoin's work and *Grandes Chroniques* were both used as sources about the Merovingian period in the early nineteenth century. Paris, "Dissertation sur les chroniques de Saint-Denis," XXIX.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Henri Martin in his *Histoire de France* only referred to sources in the table of contents but did not mention any of sources again in the main text. Henri Martin, *Histoire de France*, tom. 1 (Paris: L. Mame, 1834), 437-439. Many historians like Martin used other sources in addition to Fredegair's and Gregory's works, but these two sources were the most discussed ones among the contemporaries of Martin.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Louis Pierre Anquetil, *Histoire de France* (Paris: Ledentu, 1825). Anquetil did not mention any sources in his works, only historians such as Francois Eudes de Mezeray (a seventeenth-century historian) and Paul Francois Velly (an early eighteenth-century historian).

change in the way the queens were perceived during the first half of the nineteenth-century but only gradually the eighteenth-century methods of writing history were replaced with new, “scientific,” methods of examining history.

### *Genres of History*

Early nineteenth-century historiography is regarded in my study as a large field of individual representations created by individual minds brought up by the same society. This view does not deny the existence of interaction between different genres of historiographical literature. The interaction is visible, for example, in the historiographical theories created by Francois Guizot (1787-1874) about the French civilization. The theories spread from one genre to another affecting widely the representation of historical figures.<sup>24</sup> In fact, remarkable similarities are visible when a closer look is cast at the various historiographical works. Most works present the history of France in a narrative form from the times of the earliest inhabitants to the tumultuous years of the French revolution—as a progressive story from barbaric times to a civilization.<sup>25</sup> It is reasonable to say, however, that there were variations in the use of history. In religious literature, for example, the historical accuracy was subjugated to morale or to religious values, whereas in other cases the ideal of historical accuracy was more important than the possible moral lessons drawn from the actions of famous individuals.

Historiographical genres offered different interpretations on the Merovingian queens, and therefore the term “historiography” is understood here very comprehensively. According to Pim Den Boer, a work to be called historiographical requires “[...] a minimum sense of chronological order [...]. Historiography that does not satisfy this condition cannot possibly be classified as history. Historiography proper was and is largely the work of a literate (and hence) elitist culture. Historiography is an artifact, an artificial memory [...]”<sup>26</sup> Popular historical literature and historical novels are indeed studied side by side with the period’s academic tradition of historiographical study in order to receive a comprehensive image of the meanings given to the early Merovingian queens and to the early medieval queenship.

As history was one of the most popular themes in nineteenth-century France, there is no lack of material about the early medieval queens. I have gathered together all works where the Merovingian queens were mentioned and I have created four categories of historiographical material. The nascent study of history constructs the best known category of works related to the French history. This group includes historians such as François Guizot and Augustin Thierry (1795-1856). Their works represent the largest category of historiography, the general histories of France. The second category of historiography includes school books from authors such as Laure Boen de Saint-Ouen (1778-1837) and Chrysanthe Ovide des Michels (1793-1866). The third category consists of biographies of famous women written by popular historians such as Adélaïde Celliez (1801-1890) and Jules Dubern (1800-1880), and the fourth category is composed

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<sup>24</sup> Francois Guizot, *Histoire de la Civilisation en France* (Paris: Didier, 1843). For an example of how Guizot used the concept of civilization in the context of the early Middle Ages, see his *Essais sur l'histoire de France* (Paris: Ladrangé, 1836), 69.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Abel Hugo, Preface, *France historique et monumentale: Histoire générale de France depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours*, tom. 1 (Paris: H. L. Delloye, 1836), 1. See also Simonde de Sismondi, Preface, *Histoire de la chute de l'empire romain et du déclin de la civilisation*, tom. 1 (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1832); and Ceri Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism: Thierry, Guizot, The Saint-Simonians, Quinet, Michelet* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 43.

<sup>26</sup> Pim Den Boer, *History as a Profession: The Study of History in France 1818-1914*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (Princeton University Press, 1998), 10-11.

of religious literature concentrating on early medieval saints (Clotilde, Radeconde and Bathilde) from writers such as Elisabeth Brun<sup>27</sup> and Alexandrine Bonaparte (1778-1855).<sup>28</sup>

Despite the large amount of source material from the early nineteenth century, the comparisons between the works are always problematic, as the amount of material about saintly queens and about the *reines noires* Fredegonde and Brunehilde was somewhat disproportional. Many historians considered Fredegonde and Brunehilde to have had more political influence in the Merovingian society than the saintly queens, and therefore they were more often discussed with length in general histories of France. For example, in Swiss historian Sismondi's work entitled *Histoire des Français* (1821), there are six times more subtitles referring to Brunehilde than to Clotilde.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, it is quite clear which one the two queens Sismondi considered to have been more influential.

As there were far more general histories of France than religious or biographical material, the *reines noires* seem to have been better known than the saintly queens among the professional historians. In a sense it is understandable that the queens poisoning their relatives and leading armies, like Fredegonde did, interested a greater number of nineteenth-century authors than the saints praying in their monasteries. As Laure Prus wrote, "Those [women] who were born only with the qualities of their own sex were condemned to oblivion and to become spouses, mothers, eventually dying without leaving any trace behind, in good or bad."<sup>30</sup> Fredegonde and Brunehilde had not been content with the role offered to them, and for that reason, their memory was still vivid in the minds of the nineteenth-century historians. These women had, according to historians, broken the normative rules set to women's behavior and in that sense were dangerous role models for female readers. However, their representation reveals how the norms set for women condemned them to oblivion and only through acting against the rules they could become persons worth remembering.

When considering the interaction between various genres of history and between individual works, it must be kept in mind that borders between genres were not absolute. Especially in the beginning of the 1820s, fictional and purely "scientific" historiographical works had a lot of items in common. Features such as value judgment and the use of early modern historiography as primary sources were very popular in all genres. The interpretations of the queens were highly similar in most genres during the years 1810-1825 but at the same time this moment marked a beginning of differentiation between the genres.

The early nineteenth century was a period of collective biographies' blossoming, and those focusing on famous women almost always included the five Merovingian queens. The blossoming, however, did not last very long, as historian Isabelle Ernot has remarked. According to her, the genre of women's collective biographies almost completely disappeared in the 1860s. The reasons for the loss of popularity were historiographical, as biographies were mainly based on second-hand sources, and the new historiographical discourse of the 1850s discredited the use of second-hand sources. Furthermore, Ernot sees the reasons

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<sup>27</sup> There is very little information left about some authors and even their dates of birth are unknown, as in the case of Élisabeth Brun. Their works are all that there is left to remind us about their existence.

<sup>28</sup> Theater pieces and articles in various journals are left out due to their great number, some 100 titles of other material.

<sup>29</sup> The subtitles were very detailed and covered more than 20 pages describing very closely the contents of the work. Three subtitles were dedicated to Clotilde; Brunehilde had eighteen; and Fredegonde had ten subtitles; Radeconde and Bathilde had no subtitles dedicated to them. See Sismondi de Sismondi, *Histoire des Français*, tom. 1 (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1821), 447-470.

<sup>30</sup> Laure Prus, *Histoire des reines de France*, tom. 1 (London: Chez l'auteur, 1846), 1. "Celles qui naissaient seulement avec les qualités de leur sexe, condamnées à l'obscurité, devenaient épouses, mères, et mouraient enfin, sans laisser après elles aucune trace de bien comme de mal." My translation.

for the disappearance to be also political and social as the number of female biographies went hand-in-hand with women's political rights, and both of these diminished during the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

Historian Bonnie G. Smith has argued that the cult of great men inspired women in early nineteenth century to write about famous queens, heroines and saints, perhaps following the model of Giovanni Boccaccio in his *De claris mulieribus* (1374).<sup>32</sup> As Smith has detailed, the exceptional women who were chosen to star the historical novels or religious novels could be called "the women worthy" and "whose histories offered more identities and demonstrated unparalleled superiority."<sup>33</sup> Even though it was more acceptable for a woman to write biographies, there are also collective biographies written by men in early nineteenth-century France. There is no great difference between the collective biographies written by men or women except that works written by women tend to have more Catholic point of view in history and they highlight more the Christian virtues in historical women's lives.<sup>34</sup>

Not one historical novel, let alone religious fiction, was written about the *reine noire* Fredegonde. Another queen, who was seen by some historians as a *reine noire*, Brunehilde, had a minor role in one historical novel. These two queens were not perceived as "women worthies" same way as saint Clotilde, saint Radegonde and saint Bathilde, of whom religious novels were written especially during the July Monarchy, even though in most cases all five were included in larger biographical collections.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the interest in the queens was different according to genres of historiography. The saints had their place in historical literature, whereas the general histories of France focused more on Brunehilde and Fredegonde.

The teaching of history only started as a compulsory subject in 1819 in colleges and in Lycées. Even then, however, the teaching covered only a minority of French youth since schools was accessible only for a small number of children. It was rather usual in text books to reduce the Middle Ages to a list of rulers starting from the Merovingians (the "first race") and ending up with the Capetian dynasty (the "third race").<sup>36</sup> The Merovingian queens did not have their own entries in these books, but were almost always mentioned in their husband's entries. The text books present, in a sense, a more conservative tradition of historiography during the nineteenth-century, as many text books, like the ones written by Laure Boen de Saint-Ouen, were in use for more than fifty years.

During the years 1820-1880, the most common way for a great number of people to reach the medieval period was through hagiographical sources, or in other words, by reading religious literature.<sup>37</sup> This is why I have included in my sources the text books and religious literature - these are the books enormously

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<sup>31</sup> Isabelle Ernot, "Masculin/Féminin dans les dictionnaires et recueils de biographies féminines (début XIXe siècle-années 1860)," in *Histoire d'Historiennes*, ed. Nicole Pellegrin (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2006), 83-84.

<sup>32</sup> Bonnie G. Smith, "The Contribution of Women to Modern Historiography in Great Britain, France, and the United States, 1750-1940," *The American Historical Review* 89.3 (1984): 714.

<sup>33</sup> Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 51.

<sup>34</sup> Compare, for example, the work of Langerack, where, in the introduction, the moral lessons of the biographies are highlighted, to the work of Prudhomme, where the glories of French nation are emphasized. See Langerack, *Galerie des femmes célèbres*, XV-XVI; and Louis Marie Prudhomme, *Biographie universelle et historique des femmes célèbres mortes ou vivantes*, ed. Louis Marie Prudhomme, tom. 1 (Paris: Lebigre, 1830), V-VIII.

<sup>35</sup> See Dubern, *Histoire des reines et régentes de France*; Langerack, *Galerie des femmes célèbres*; and Prudhomme, *Biographie universelle et historique des femmes célèbres*.

<sup>36</sup> On the teaching of the history of France as a list of rulers, see, for example, Jean Nicolas Lorient, *Histoire de France, à l'usage de la jeunesse* (Lyon: Pélagaud, Lesne et Crozet, 1836), 10-45.

<sup>37</sup> Christian Amalvi, "Légendes scolaires du Moyen Age au XIXe siècle," in *La Fabrique du Moyen Age au XIXe siècle*, ed. Simone Bernard-Griffits et al. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006), 57-61.



popular and truly well read.<sup>38</sup> After years of very few histories of the French saints, 1789-1820, the number of religious biographies grew towards the middle of the century, thus proving a new popularity of the genre. This is noteworthy as it coincided with the growth of bourgeois ideal and marked the birth of a new type of religiosity in the French society. The growth also coincided with the Catholic revival, as it is called by Pim den Boer, which was visible in young clerics' aims to re-establish their position in intellectual spheres by for example studying history and finding their diminished glory there.<sup>39</sup>

### *Interaction*

The interaction between various genres of historiography can be studied in connection with individual notions such as gender, which was highly visible in all dimensions of historiography concerning the early medieval queens. Firstly, the notion created differences between the genres of historiography. Academic historiography, the general histories of France written mostly by men, focused mainly on Fredegonde and Brunhilde, sometimes to Clotilde as well. Religious historiography and historical novels, which mostly focused on the saintly queens, were rather often written by women for women, whereas the academic historiography was mostly aimed for male readers.<sup>40</sup> The interaction of ideas between the genres of historiography was visible but still one-way from academic discourse to popular discourse.

The above-mentioned division thus signifies that a different interpretation was offered to female readers than to male readers. The same difference is visible between those having lower education compared with those having a classical education.<sup>41</sup> This division was due to the fact that not all reading was perceived suitable for women and to young women especially; and for the lower classes, the readings' pedagogical values were most important, and their readings were, in theory, highly controlled. Fiction, especially, was perceived very dangerous for girls' morals, but as historian Christina de Bellaigue has written in her article about girls' reading in nineteenth-century France, it is quite difficult to state how much some "forbidden" books were read in reality as no clear records exist.<sup>42</sup>

Secondly, the construction of gender division is explicit in ordinary terms such as in queenship. Focusing on how the early medieval queenship was defined and how it was paralleled with the contemporary nineteenth-century queenship will help to examine how the queens were perceived as part of French monarchy's history. Queenship is an important concept to take into consideration for two reasons. It defined the women in historiography—they were remembered by their contemporary historians and later historians because they were queens, whatever the term signified to the writers. In the second place, the concept conflated in the context of early nineteenth-century historiography with French monarchy's current difficult situation—seemingly unchanged but underneath being redefined again and again.

The change in French monarchy before and after the Revolutionary Years becomes visible when the last queen of France, Marie Antoinette, is compared with the only queen of restored monarchy, Marie Amalia

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<sup>38</sup> See also statistics about "best sellers": Martyn Lyons, *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France* (Toronto: University of Toronto press, 2008), 20-27.

<sup>39</sup> See Den Boer, *History as a Profession*, 25-26.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Smith, *The Gender of History*, 51, 143-47.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, the differences between Augustin Thierry and Charles Pidoux in how they presented saint Radegonde. Thierry, *Récits des temps mérovingiens*; Charles Pidoux, *Histoire de Sainte Radegonde par Pidoux, revue, augmentée et suivie de l'histoire de sainte Macrine: par Grégoire de Nisse* (Niort: Pathoust, 1843). Whereas Thierry presents Radegonde as a human with flaws, Pidoux's image of her is purely flawless and saintly.

<sup>42</sup> Christina de Bellaigue, "Only what is pure and exquisite: Girls' Reading at School in France, 1800-1870," *French History* 2 (2013): 209.

(1782-1866). The latter was the wife of Louis Philip, king of the French. Marie Amalia was not a public person the same way as Marie Antoinette was, and she identified herself with the bourgeois wife and mother, rather than with previous queens of France. Identifying with the bourgeois ideal signified for Marie Amalia focusing on her family and charity rather than mingling visibly with the politics of her husband.<sup>43</sup> She stayed in the background and took no active political role, for which she was later praised as a “saint” queen.<sup>44</sup> From 1830, France had a king who identified himself as bourgeois, and soon France was given bourgeois fore-mothers as the bourgeois ideals started slowly to penetrate in historiography and even in writing about the early medieval queens.<sup>45</sup>

In most genres, the concept of queenship was presented as an a-historical institution in French history. Interestingly, there are no differences between various genres, between men and women, or between professional historians and “amateurs” regarding this question. In almost all genres, the queen’s role was highlighted uniquely as a king’s spouse, and the queen’s political and social function were in some cases diminished entirely.<sup>46</sup> One must bear in mind that, in France, a woman has never been able to inherit the crown, and the tradition of women’s exclusion from direct power was still strong during the early nineteenth century.

In addition to the notion of gender I will bring forward the notion of nation, or nation building in historiography.<sup>47</sup> The interrelation of gender and nation building is visible in concepts related to queenship: French queenship has been created and modified through the idea of gender differences and affected by the ideas of nation building in various contexts.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, nation building was not limited to defining women through their queenship. In fact, queenship and its additional definitions, such as “queen of the Franks,” did not define the women as persons. The ethnic terms that were used in historiography to define the queens as individual persons bore always value judgments. Clotilde, Radegonde, Fredegonde, and Brunehilde belonged to Germanic tribes (Burgundian, Thuringian, Frankish and Visigoth), but only in Fredegonde’s case was her ethnic background, being Frankish, brought up by several historians. Especially towards the middle of the century, partly due to political issues with rising German states, the Germanic background was perceived as a very negative quality, as uncivilized. Therefore, it was used in a selective way against queens whom the historians wanted to discredit.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> According to historian Jo Burr Margadant, Marie Amalia was in privacy her husband’s counselor. See “*Les représentations de la reine Marie-Amélie dans une monarchie ‘bourgeoise,’*” *Revue d’histoire du 19e siècle* 36 (2008): 108.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, a short biography of Marie Amalia by Auguste Philibert Chaalons d’Argé in which Marie Amalia was described in a nearly saintly manner. The biography was by no means an objective picture of her life but rather a eulogy. Auguste Philibert Chaalons d’Argé, *Marie-Amélie de Bourbon: Note historique et biographiques* (Paris: Librairie Cantrale, 1868), 2-17.

<sup>45</sup> About Louis Philip as a bourgeois king, see Margadant, “Les représentations de la reine Marie-Amélie,” 94.

<sup>46</sup> I ponder this question of queenship’s historical context more closely in my thesis. It is clear that there were a number of historians who wrote about French queens without any interest in the complex nature of French queenship as a living and adaptable institution. These historians include for example Henri Martin, Francois-René de Chateaubriand, Théodore Licquet, Jules Pétigny and Edme Théodore Bourg.

<sup>47</sup> As Anne Cova has also pointed out in *Histoire comparée des femmes* (Paris: ENS Éditions, 2009), 51, three major themes in European history are the rise of bourgeois, nationalism and gender relations. These themes, though worn out, cannot be neglected in the study of French historiography, due to their central position. They can be, however, treated with new perspectives.

<sup>48</sup> On constructing gender, see, for example, Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 55.

<sup>49</sup> For example, Saint Clotilde’s Germanic background was only brought up by very few historians and it seems that only the Franks were truly perceived as a Germanic people. See Simonde de Sismondi, *Précis de l’histoire des Français* (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1839), 20; Théophile Lavallée, *Histoire des Français depuis les temps des Gaulois jusqu’en 1830* (Paris: Paulin et Hertz, 1838), 103.

Early nineteenth-century historians had a clear hierarchical system of early medieval ethnicities; some ethnicities were defined as more “civilized” than others. Different ethnicities were always compared with the “French” ethnicity, which was seen by the historians as the highest level of civilization. This hierarchical perception was included in all historians’ texts, from popular historiography to academic studies. This points to an interaction between genres, as the idea of ethnic hierarchy can be found from all types of historiography.

Similarly to nation building, the importance of social classes in French society was visible in historiography as more historians started to make references to queens’ social classes.<sup>50</sup> The most famous class historian was Augustin Thierry, who saw the Franks as oppressors of the Third Estate. According to Thierry, the history of France was basically a series of struggles between aristocratic oppressors and the oppressed, who only managed to free themselves during the French revolution.<sup>51</sup> This view affected greatly the early medieval queens, especially in freshly born academic historiography, but also in more popular works. Certain queens, especially Fredegonde, became deemed as negative figures due to their Germanic background. Being a Frank or Germanic thus often defined women even more than their gender.

That the thought of social classes had a role in historiography was not surprising taking into consideration that France was still very much a class society in early nineteenth century. One reason why, for example, Fredegonde, who had an obscure background, became in the eyes of the historians a she-monster was that she had broken the limits of her class and reached too high—she was perceived as not worthy of her queenship. This manner of interpreting the queens’ background did not apply to the saintly queens, who were exempt from all criticism due to their position in the Catholic Church. For example, Bathilde’s obscure birth was only perceived as a mark for her humbleness especially by female historians.

It is clear that some queens were prisoners of their ethnicity and gender, some by their religious status. To go even further, the representations of the Merovingian queens were constructed by ethnicity, gender or religious status. The double morals of historians were visible especially in the representation of the saintly queens, Clotilde, Radegonde and Bathilde, who were not truly counted as historical human figures. Their personalities had no place of their own in this categorization. Yet there were differences between the representations of the saintly queens, as well. Clotilde, even though being often pictured as the saint mother of the nation, was described in some rare works as a “cruel queen” who “should be counted among the worst queens”.<sup>52</sup> The negative images seem to have been rarer than the positive ones but show that the historians were far from unanimous in writing about the early medieval period and about its queens. Regarding the genres, only the religious works shared their interpretations about the saintly queens, whereas in other fields, like in general histories and in biographies, the interpretations varied considerably and often according to their authors’ political views.

Indeed, in order to find out why there were such great differences between the representations of saintly queens and more “earthly” queens it is necessary to study all genres of historiography, also the one written by so called amateurs, women and men outside the academic societies, as Bonnie G. Smith has described

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, fervent Catholic Mathieu Richard Auguste Henrion’s *Histoire de France depuis l’établissement des Francs dans la Gaule jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: Bureau de la Bibliothèque Ecclesiastique, 1837), 50. According to Henrion, Frédégonde had “*un courage et un esprit au-dessus de son sexe et son condition.*”

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Augustin Thierry, “Histoire véritable de Jacques Bonhomme, d’après les documents authentiques,” in *Dix ans d’études historiques* (Paris: Just Tessier, 1836), 255-263.

<sup>52</sup> Dubern, *Histoire des reines et régentes de France*, 7, 9.

them.<sup>53</sup> Historian Christian Amalvi has described these amateur historians as “vulgarisateurs,” which refers to writing of popular historiography as separated from the nascent academic historiography.<sup>54</sup> The saintly queens became more venerated as role models in literature aimed at women, though simultaneously they were almost invisible in the evolving academic historiographical discourse. Interestingly, historians claimed to be truthful when criticizing Fredegonde and Brunehilde, or generally the Merovingians, but this truthfulness almost never included questioning the position of Clotilde, Bathilde or Radegonde in the history of France.

The dualist vision was not only due to nineteenth-century historians as the sources they used, starting from the *Ten Books of Histories* by Gregory of Tours, emphasized the role of the saintly queens in the history of France, but wrote more extensively about queens such as Brunehilde and Fredegonde. Regarding the representations of the queens, historians thus rather copied the earlier ideas without critically studying them themselves—only modifying the ideas to fit their own use to support the nationalistic and bourgeois visions of society and its history. It was only towards the middle of the century when the use of sources and archives became truly popular among even the professional historians, even though already in the 1820s, historians like Augustin Thierry had advocated for the use of “original” sources. Considering the Merovingian queens, the advancement in the use of sources made a huge difference as only then the centuries old interpretations based on unreliable second hand sources were abandoned. In literate genres like religious historiography the old ways of writing history persisted much longer, at least until the end of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>53</sup> Smith, *The Gender of History*, 6-9.

<sup>54</sup> Christian Amalvi, *Répertoire des auteurs des manuels scolaires et de livres de vulgarisation historique de langue française: de 1660 à 1960*. (Paris: La Boutique de l'Histoire, 2001), 7-8.