

## REMEMBERING EBROIN, MAYOR OF THE PALACE, IN THE CAROLINGIAN PERIOD AND BEYOND

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### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Ebroin was the mayor of the palace in the Frankish kingdom of Neustria in 659-673 and 675-680 CE. His career as mayor was controversial: his enemies called him an unjust tyrant for acting against the interests of the Frankish aristocracy, and he became infamous for ordering the blinding and murder of Bishop Leudegar of Autun.<sup>2</sup> After his assassination in 680, Ebroin's legacy fell into the hands of his enemies, who used it to further their own agendas. Two of his enemies, the followers of Leudegar's cult and the Carolingian dynasty, twisted Ebroin's legacy in order to promote the interests of their martyr and the new ruling dynasty, respectively. Texts treating Ebroin in a positive or neutral light fell to the wayside while this negative portrait of the mayor predominated writings in the Carolingian period and beyond.<sup>3</sup> Sources continued to mention Ebroin well into the eleventh century, but the context changed. Leudegar's cult persisted to caricature Ebroin in opposition to their martyr, while regional chronicles misrepresented or invented his actions to emphasize his evil character for their own purposes. Ebroin's legacy lost much of the historical nuance and complexity found in earlier sources in favor of advancing a particular narrative in later sources.

Because of the successive rewritings of the source material, Ebroin and the later reception of the Merovingian period remain popular topics for historians of the early Middle Ages. Scholarship related to Ebroin has drifted away from his life and political career, but there still is newer work that evaluates lesser-known

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London: Longman, 1994), 221-38.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of non-negative depictions of Ebroin, see *Ex Miracula Sancti Martialis*, Chapter 3, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores 15.1* (Hanover: Hahn, 1887), 281-82; and Audoin of Rouen, *Vita Eligii Episcopi Noviomagensis II*, Chapter 56, ed. Bruno Krusch,

*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum 4* (Hanover: Hahn, 1902), 730.



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parts of his tenure.<sup>4</sup> Recent scholarship looks at Ebroin with several different approaches. He features heavily in works involving monasticism and Merovingian hagiography.<sup>5</sup> There are many works that discuss the memory and reception of the Merovingian era in later parts of the Middle Ages, but Ebroin himself is normally not the focus.<sup>6</sup> Ebroin continues to be studied mainly due to his involvement with other contemporaneous figures, such as Leudegar of Autun or Pippin II, and his association with monasteries, hagiographical texts, and the perception of the late Merovingian period.

This essay puts the focus back on Ebroin to illustrate the success of Leudegar's cult and the Carolingian dynasty in achieving their respective goals: the sanctification of their martyr and the legitimization of their rulership. The negative portrayal of Ebroin in these sources—a byproduct of their goals—was highly successful because later writings made centuries after Ebroin's death relied on these earlier texts to describe the mayor. Even after Ebroin served his purpose in these works, the power and reach of these writings ensured that the distorted legacy of the mayor persisted throughout the Middle Ages, demonstrating the mutability of memory and the strength of the written word.

#### EBROIN IN CAROLINGIAN MEMORY

Merovingian-era sources could not freely call Ebroin a tyrant. Even sources hostile to Ebroin, such as the *Passio Leudegarii*, had to moderate their language because Ebroin's allies were still alive and able to act against the writer.<sup>7</sup> Other

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<sup>4</sup> In-depth works on Ebroin's life and career include Johannes Fischer, "Der Hausmeier Ebroin" (PhD diss., University of Bonn, 1954); and Paul Fouracre, "The Career of Ebroin, Mayor of the Palace c. 657-680," (PhD diss., King's College, 1981). For a recent work on an episode of Ebroin's life, see

Alban Gautier, "Pourquoi Ebroin se méfiait-il l'abbé Hadrien? Autour d'un épisode des années 660," in *Faire Lien: Aristocratie, Réseaux et Échanges Compétitifs. Mélanges en l'honneur de Régine le Jan*, ed. Laurent Jégou, Sylvie Joye, Thomas Lienhard, and Jens Schneider (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015): 55-62.

<sup>5</sup> Yaniv Fox examines Ebroin's role in establishing monasteries and his relationships with the institutions in Yaniv Fox, *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul: Columbanian Monasticism and the Frankish Elites*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 98 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 243-46. For Ebroin's presence in hagiographical works, see Paul Fouracre, "Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography," *Past & Present* 127, no. 1 (1990): 3-38; Ian Wood, "The Use and Abuse of Latin Hagiography in the Early Medieval West," in *East and West: Modes of Communication: Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Merida*, ed. Euangelos K. Chrysos and Ian N. Wood, *The Transformation of the Roman World* 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 93-109; Jamie Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography in the Merovingian Kingdom*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 96 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 243-54.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see Helmut Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Identity, 550-850*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 101 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), esp. 295-409; Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. 84-132; Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. 57-71; and Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors: Memory and Forgetting in France, 500-1200*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 106-25.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, ed. *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640-720*, Manchester Medieval Sources Series (Manchester: Manchester University

writers opted to omit any mention of Ebroin in their narratives. For example, Ebroin's ally Bishop Audoin of Rouen wrote positively about Ebroin in the *Vita Eligii*, which was written during Ebroin's career in the 660s, but by the time of Audoin's death in 684 his hagiographer distanced his connection to the mayor.<sup>8</sup> Ebroin was a sensitive subject after his death, and the writings of Frankish political actors needed to tread his career carefully in order not to anger Ebroin's allies or appear as one of his close associates.

These problems became a non-issue in the Carolingian period. Written chronicles continued to mention Ebroin as key parts of their narratives. Three such sources reflect a new, Carolingian-oriented (or, at least, non-Neustrian) viewpoint: the *Chronicon Fredegarii*, the second version of the *Passio Leudegarii*, and the *Annales Mettenses Priores*. All of these sources covered the palace politics of the mid- to late-seventh century and used prior works such as the *Liber Historiae Francorum* as their basis, but each source depicts a viewpoint conditioned by Carolingian and Austrasian writers and the narrative of the first version of the *Passio Leudegarii*.<sup>9</sup>

#### THE *CHRONICON FREDEGARII*

The continuations of the fourth book of the *Chronicon Fredegarii* and the *Liber Historiae Francorum* are similar in several regards. The *Liber Historiae Francorum* was written in 727 and the first continuations of the *Chronicon Fredegarii* were written in 736.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, much of the *Chronicon Fredegarii*'s narrative of the mid- to late-seventh century is taken directly from the *Liber Historiae Francorum*. The *Chronicon Fredegarii*, however, shows "an early stage in the rewriting of Merovingian history from an Austrasian and (later) Carolingian viewpoint."<sup>11</sup> The counts Childebrand and Nibelung, the uncle and cousin of Pippin III, respectively, commissioned the chronicle to help legitimize the Carolingian takeover.<sup>12</sup> The differences in the chronicle demonstrate the influence of an Austrasian writer and the first version of the *Passio Leudegarii* in the chronicle's discussion of Ebroin's career.

The addition of a single phrase signals a negative view of Ebroin: *sed Ebroinus fallaciter agens ut solebat*—"but as usual Ebroin acted treacherously."<sup>13</sup>

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Press, 1996), 201-202; *Passio Leudegarii Episcopi Augustodunensis I*, ed. Bruno Krusch, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum 5 (Hanover: Hahn, 1910), 282-322.

<sup>8</sup> Audoin of Rouen, *Vita Eligii II*, Chapter 56; *Vita Audoini Episcopi Rotomagensis*, Chapter 13, ed. Wilhelm Levison, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum 5 (Hanover: Hahn, 1910), 562.

<sup>9</sup> For the utility of the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, see Richard A. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 67-91.

<sup>10</sup> *Liber Historiae Francorum*, ed. Bruno Krusch, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum 2 (Hanover: Hahn, 1888), 218-20; and Fredegar, *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici Libri IV cum Continuationibus*, ed. Bruno Krusch, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum 2 (Hanover: Hahn, 1888), 8-9, hereafter referred to as *Fredegar IV*.

<sup>11</sup> Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> *Fredegar IV*, Continuation 34; Reimitz, *History*, 295-96, 309.

<sup>13</sup> Fredegar, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations*, Continuation 2, ed. and trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 82.

The *Chronicon Fredegarii* ascribes habitual betrayal to Ebroin as one of his chief traits. While consolidating his power after breaking out of Luxeuil, Ebroin killed the mayor of the palace Leudesius, who in this work was Ebroin's godfather (*compater*).<sup>14</sup> The addition of an intimate relationship reinforces the underhanded nature of such tactics, and it paints Ebroin as a figure that would even act against his close relations. Soon after, Ebroin killed Leudegar and his brother Gaerin. While in the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, Leudegar suffered *diversis poenis* ("various punishments") and Gaerin likewise suffered a *dira poena* ("harsh punishment"), the *Chronicon Fredegarii* inflated Leudegar's suffering to the superlative *crudelissimis tormentis* ("most cruel tortures"), and Gaerin received the *diversis poenis* of his brother.<sup>15</sup> Minor additions or changes in word choices such as these demonstrate that the author wished to portray Ebroin as a more dishonorable figure. These changes were deliberate alterations to the base text of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* to emphasize Ebroin's negative qualities.

The following continuations also show the author's pro-Austrasia and pro-Carolingian stance. The *Chronicon Fredegarii* states that Pippin "subjugated the region" of Neustria following the Battle of Tertry (687), while the *Liber Historiae Francorum* states that Pippin merely became mayor of the palace after the battle.<sup>16</sup> As with the *Annales Mettenses Priores*, which describe Pippin assuming "sole leadership of the Franks," the *Chronicon Fredegarii* views the Battle of Tertry as the turning point for Austrasian dominance over Neustria, a fact that shows the author's pro-Carolingian perspective.<sup>17</sup> After Pippin died, his widow Plectrud took control, which caused political strife among the Neustrians and Austrasians: the *Chronicon Fredegarii* describes the resulting Neustrian revolt as a "foolish course of going to war with Theudoald and the erstwhile followers of Pippin and Grimoald," whereas the *Liber Historiae Francorum* explains that the conflict arose from the "instigation of the devil."<sup>18</sup> The author of the *Chronicon Fredegarii* supported the Austrasians and the Carolingian family over the Neustrians. Their words imply that the Neustrian revolt was a misguided and futile effort against the rightful rulers of the kingdom.

Ebroin formed an important part of the Carolingians' efforts to legitimize themselves. They retained the *Liber Historiae Francorum*'s narrative of Ebroin but excised their ancestor Grimoald's own controversial career to sanitize their image.<sup>19</sup> As a result, they exculpated themselves of any past wrongdoing while

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<sup>14</sup> *Fredegar IV*, Continuation 2. In contrast, the *Liber Historiae Francorum* did not note a relationship between the two men, and Fouracre and Gerberding observe that "the breaking of this guarantee or 'given trust' (*data fide*) is a very serious matter which usually evokes a strong reaction from the author. His rather neutral language here in reporting Ebroin's treachery is remarkable and another indication that the author was not influenced by the *Passio Leudegarii* and its condemnation of the powerful mayor," in Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 90n51.

<sup>15</sup> *Liber Historiae Francorum*, Chapter 45; *Fredegar IV*, Continuation 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Fredegar IV*, Continuation 5, trans. Wallace-Hadrill, *Fredegar IV*, 85; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, Chapter 48; Reimitz, *History*, 319-20.

<sup>17</sup> *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. Bernard von Simson, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum* 10 (Hanover: Weidman 1905), 12; *Annales Mettenses Priores*, trans. Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 359; Paul Fouracre, "Observations on the Outgrowth of Pippinid Influence in the 'Regnum Francorum' after the Battle of Tertry," *Medieval Prosopography* 5, no. 2 (1984): 1-31, at 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> *Fredegar IV*, Continuation 8, trans. Wallace-Hadrill, *Fredegar IV*, 87; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, Chapter 51, ed. and trans. Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 94.

<sup>19</sup> Compare *Liber Historiae Francorum*, Chapter 43 and *Fredegar IV*, Continuation 1. See also Roger Collins, "Deception and Misrepresentation in Early Eighth Century Frankish Historiography:

simultaneously making Ebroin appear to have been the only mayor to have revolted against the political consensus of the period. Coupled with the deliberate exaggeration of details throughout Ebroin's career, his image suffered in the *Chronicon Fredegarii* so that the Carolingian dynasty could pursue their greater goal of legitimizing their new royal position.<sup>20</sup>

#### THE SECOND *PASSIO LEUDEGARII*

The monk Ursinus wrote a second version of the *Passio Leudegarii*, dated to the mid-eighth century.<sup>21</sup> The second version substantially differs from the first version. Ursinus compromised historical accuracy and detail in favor of a simplified good versus evil narrative.<sup>22</sup> Ursinus' decisions to summarize or omit elements of the first *Passio Leudegarii* resulted in Ebroin becoming less of a historical figure and more of a one-dimensional villain opposed to the hero Leudegar. These changes also promoted Leudegar's cult in the city of Poitiers over the city of Autun. The two versions of the *Passio Leudegarii* both sought to promote Leudegar's martyrdom, but the circumstances of the writing of the second *Passio Leudegarii* were not the same as those of the first.<sup>23</sup> Removed from the political actors of the mid-seventh century, Ursinus could depict Ebroin freely without needing to clarify or moderate his accusations against him as recorded in the first version.

The author was interested in portraying Ebroin in a negative light, even if it meant that he omitted necessary historical details from the first version of the *Passio Leudegarii*.<sup>24</sup> Ursinus' portrayal of the Frankish political system differed from the first *Passio Leudegarii*'s description. According to Ursinus, Ebroin was the sole disrupting force against the united Frankish kingdoms.<sup>25</sup> Factionalism and the breakdown of consensus were not important factors for him because his focus was on the struggle between Leudegar and Ebroin. As a result, many of the political intricacies depicted in the first *Passio Leudegarii*, such as the moderate language used while discussing the allies of rivals and the interactions between the Frankish kingdoms, are absent in the second *Passio Leudegarii*. This had the effect of simplifying the complex political narrative of the first *Passio Leudegarii* into a good versus evil narrative: Leudegar and Ebroin became the main actors of

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Two Case Studies," in *Karl Martell in Seiner Zeit*, ed. Jörg Jarnut, Ulrich Nonn and Michael Richter (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1994), 229-246 for other examples of the *Chronicon Fredegarii*'s revision of the Carolingians' past.

<sup>20</sup> Reimitz, *History*, 298-99.

<sup>21</sup> Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 206-207. More recently, Jamie Kreiner adopted a broader time span for the text's date, ranging from the mid- to late-eighth century: Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 245-49.

<sup>22</sup> The *Passio Leudegarii* was not the only hagiographical text to undergo this process. Monique Gouillet has described similar processes in other texts in Monique Gouillet, *Écriture et Réécriture Hagiographiques: Essai sur les Réécritures de Vies de Saints dans l'Occident Latin Médiéval (VIIIe-XIIIe S.)*, *Hagiologia* 4 (Turnout: Brepols, 2005), 183-99.

<sup>23</sup> Fouracre, "Merovingian History," 20-21.

<sup>24</sup> Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 208.

<sup>25</sup> Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 251-53.

a story in the backdrop of late Merovingian politics, but without the nuances and understanding of these politics.

Ebroin's introduction was straight to the point: "Ebroin was hated among the Franks, who feared being under his yoke."<sup>26</sup> The first *Passio Leudegarii* reached the same conclusion, but the author described Ebroin's greed, his eagerness to accept judicial bribes, and his denial of the Burgundian magnates from accessing the king before doing so.<sup>27</sup> After Ebroin's exile to Luxeuil, Leudegar replaced him as mayor of the palace and governed effectively alongside King Childeric II.<sup>28</sup> However, the first *Passio Leudegarii* explained that Leudegar acted as one of Childeric's advisors—he was not made mayor in Ebroin's stead, given that a religious official such as himself could not occupy the secular mayoral position.<sup>29</sup> Ursinus also omitted a problematic passage about Leudegar's association with a magnate named Hector. In the first *Passio Leudegarii*, Leudegar helped Hector with a legal issue over the inheritance of his mother-in-law's lands, but other magnates plotted against the two, which resulted in King Childeric exiling Leudegar to Luxeuil.<sup>30</sup> The first *Passio Leudegarii* had to carefully navigate this episode of Leudegar's life to prevent it from tarnishing his reputation.<sup>31</sup> But in Ursinus' version, Hector is not mentioned at all, and Childeric is saddened when he orders Leudegar to enter monastic exile.<sup>32</sup> Just as Ursinus was able to ignore late Merovingian political concerns in order to strengthen Ebroin as an adversary of Leudegar, he too was able to remove any acknowledgement of Leudegar's own controversies while simultaneously elevating his posthumous status.

While the first *Passio Leudegarii* needed to explain why it was justified to portray Ebroin in such a way, the second *Passio Leudegarii* had no such qualms. Jamie Kreiner explains that "Ursinus excised and condensed a lot of information about a mayor with the effect of dulling and diminishing the specific force of the criticism against him, while simultaneously inflating his dramatic persona."<sup>33</sup> As a character within this hagiographical text, Ebroin appears as the clear antagonist. Indeed, Ebroin has the time to perform a monologue before sending Leudegar to

<sup>26</sup> *Passio Leudegarii Episcopi Augustodunensis II*, Chapter 4, ed. Bruno Krusch, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum 5 (Hanover: Hahn, 1910), 327: "*Ipse vero Ebroinus erat tunc odiosus inter Francos, qui metuebant huius ponderis iugo.*"

<sup>27</sup> *Passio Leudegarii Episcopi Augustodunensis I*, Chapter 4-5, ed. Bruno Krusch, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum 5 (Hanover: Hahn, 1910), 286-88.

<sup>28</sup> *Passio Leudegarii II*, Chapter 5. Erik Goosmann notes that Ebroin in the *Passio Leudegarii II* asked to go into exile. This public display of humility reflected the emphasis on outward penance and conversion in late eighth-century hagiographical works: Erik Goosmann, "Politics and Penance: Transformations in the Carolingian Perception of the Conversion of Carloman (747)," in Clemens Gantner, Rosamond McKitterick, and Sven Meeder, ed., *The Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 63-64.

<sup>29</sup> *Passio Leudegarii I*, Chapter 8.

<sup>30</sup> *Passio Leudegarii I*, Chapter 9-12; *Passio Praeiectionis Episcopi et Martyris Arverni*, Chapter 23, ed. Bruno Krusch, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum 5 (Hanover: Hahn, 1910), 239. While the *Passio Leudegarii* downplayed the controversy, another hagiographical text, the *Passio Praeiectionis*, noted that this incident "became a kind of stumbling block in the latter's [Leudegar's] achievement of martyrdom," *Passio Praeiectionis*, Chapter 23, trans. Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 288.

<sup>31</sup> Isabel Moreira, "Hector of Marseilles is Purged: Political Rehabilitation and Guilt by Association in the 7th Century *Passion of Saint Leudegar of Autun*," *Quaestiones Mediaevi Novae* 17 (2012): 201-07; Fouracre, "Merovingian History," 17-19.

<sup>32</sup> *Passio Leudegarii II*, Chapter 6-7.

<sup>33</sup> Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 249.

his death: “In speaking such words, your grandeur convinced many. You consider yourself a martyr, so you display yourself in a rash way. Still you greatly exaggerate; you desire to have such a prize in vain. So now you will accept martyrdom, as you deserve.”<sup>34</sup> His monologue was a retort to Leudegar’s own speech after he captured him:

We worthily suffer these things because we sinned against God; but your mercy is greater, which is worthy to call to such glory. But you, wretched Ebroin, who inflict such punishments on the people of the Franks, it is better for you yourself to be punished, you who want to take away the life of others. Indeed, you deceived many and you were made an exile from your ancestral lands; for you were in a greater exile because you quickly lost your temporal and future glory, since while you desired to conquer all the inhabitants in all of Francia, you will carry away your glory which you, unworthy one, accepted.<sup>35</sup>

In response, Ebroin angrily separated Leudegar and Gaerin to die in different places.<sup>36</sup> Ursinus’ addition of dialogue to the *Passio Leudegarii*’s main actors serves to elevate the good and evil characteristics of Leudegar and Ebroin, respectively. The dialogue, however dramatic it may be, runs against logic. Ebroin did not want Leudegar to become a martyr, fearing that a cult dedicated to him would ruin his reputation, so he ordered his men to kill him in a hidden location and bury him in a well.<sup>37</sup> Ursinus, on the other hand, had no qualms in having Ebroin make a politically detrimental move to instead emphasize his opposition to Leudegar. It is important to note that Ebroin was not personally responsible for Leudegar’s death in Ursinus’ version of the *Passio Leudegarii*; an unnamed assassin (*percussor*), one of a group of four, killed Leudegar.<sup>38</sup> Even if Ursinus did not make Ebroin land the killing blow on Leudegar, he did make his death more cruel by increasing the number of men Ebroin sent to kill the bishop.<sup>39</sup> Ursinus did not completely rewrite the first *Passio Leudegarii*’s historical narrative, though he had no issue changing the details to elevate Leudegar and demonize Ebroin.

In the end, Ebroin became the sole person to blame for Leudegar’s death, even if he did not strike the killing blow himself, and he ultimately realized his

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<sup>34</sup> *Passio Leudegarii II*, Chapter 17: “*Multum te,*’ inquit, *’verbi sublimitas persuadet loquendo. Martyr esse suspicaris, ideo te tam temerario ostendis. Adhuc multum,*’ inquit, *’dilataveris; frustra talem desideras habere praemium. Nam, ut merueris, ita eris accepturus martirio.’*”

<sup>35</sup> *Passio Leudegarii II*, Chapter 12: “*Haec digni patimus, quia Domino peccavimus; sed maior est sua clementia, qui nos dignatus est vocare ad talem gloriam. Sed tu, miser Ebroine, qui tanta poena infers Francorum gente, potius in te ulcisceris, qui vitam aliis auferre cupis. Multos equidem decepisti et exolis a solo paterno fecisti; nam magis tu exolaris, quia et temporalem et futuram gloriam cito perdes, quoniam dum superare cupis omnis habitatoris in tota Francia, tuam potius auferis quam indignus accepisti gloriam.’*”

<sup>36</sup> *Passio Leudegarii II*, Chapter 13.

<sup>37</sup> *Passio Leudegarii I*, Chapter 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Passio Leudegarii II*, Chapter 19-20.

<sup>39</sup> *Passio Leudegarii I*, Chapter 34-35, which says Ebroin’s ally Chrodbert sent two of his servants to kill Leudegar; *Passio Leudegarii II*, Chapter 19-20, which describes how Ebroin himself ordered four men to kill Leudegar. In both cases, only one man dealt the killing blow, with the rest having begged for forgiveness instead of murdering the bishop.

mistakes. Ursinus remarks that Ebroin lived by the sword and died by the sword, a sentiment shared in Matthew 26:52.<sup>40</sup> Ebroin had an emotional reaction upon hearing about Leudegar's posthumous miracles:

And so with these miracles being known, Ebroin held them in his heart silently and, trembling within himself, he prepared to reveal very little except to the shame of his wife, lest with his luck, with the glory of the martyr growing, who desired to extinguish such a light, he would be lesser in the eyes of the people.<sup>41</sup>

Kreiner ascertains that this passage is Ursinus' way to force Ebroin to admit defeat to Leudegar, if not publicly, then privately. Despite having no way of knowing what Leutrude's thoughts were and how Leutrude knew what Ebroin was thinking, Ursinus inserted this passage to show that the evil Ebroin ultimately yielded to the righteous Leudegar, which could serve to "satisfy an audience that was more interested in Ebroin as a foil for Leudegar than in Ebroin as a historical actor."<sup>42</sup> In contrast, the first *Passio Leudegarii's* iteration of Ebroin steadfastly refused to believe any evidence of Leudegar's miracles to his death, even after credible reports of his miracles reached him.<sup>43</sup> In the first *Passio Leudegarii*, Leudegar's victory over Ebroin came when Ebroin was killed by Ermenfred. In the second *Passio Leudegarii*, Leudegar had two victories: the first when Ebroin privately admitted defeat, and the second when he was killed. Ursinus' account of Ebroin's reaction to Leudegar's miracles is straightforward: the good martyr conquers the tyrant.

Ursinus had a clear agenda in mind when writing his version of the *Passio Leudegarii*. Indeed, Yaniv Fox described Merovingian hagiography as being "crafted in such a way as to reflect monastic claims to legitimacy, property or authority, whichever the case may be."<sup>44</sup> The second *Passio Leudegarii* was no exception. To promote Leudegar's cult in Poitiers over Autun, Ursinus sanitized the events of Leudegar's life and portrayed Ebroin more as a caricature of a mayor than an actual historical mayor. The second *Passio Leudegarii* lacked the nuances of the first version, and Ursinus chose to portray Leudegar's suffering as a simplified battle between good and evil. Ursinus' revision of this text was particularly influential, and it inspired later works that discussed Ebroin.<sup>45</sup> Leudegar's cult had always considered Ebroin to be an enemy of their martyr, but the second *Passio Leudegarii* made him into a villain.

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<sup>40</sup> *Passio Leudegarii II*, Chapter 23: "Because he killed many with swords, having been struck down by a sword himself he perished" ("*Nam quia gladius multus interimit, percussus gladio et ipse perit*").

<sup>41</sup> *Passio Leudegarii II*, Chapter 22: "*His itaque cognitis, Ebroinus tacete corde retenebat et tremens intra se verecundie praeter coniugem minime manifestare audebat, ne forte, crescente gloria martyris, sua, qui talem lucem extinguere cupiebat, esset deminuta in populis.*"

<sup>42</sup> Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 250.

<sup>43</sup> *Passio Leudegarii I*, Chapter 37.

<sup>44</sup> Fox, *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, 193-94.

<sup>45</sup> For example, on the influence of Ursinus' *Passio Leudegarii* on the near-contemporaneous *Passio Ragneberti*, see Marie-Céline Isaïa, "L'hagiographie contre la réforme dans l'église de Lyon au IXe siècle," *Médiévales*, no. 62 (2012): 91-99.



## THE ANNALES METTENSES PRIORES

The *Annales Mettenses Priores* reflect a synthesis of two trends relating to Frankish writing: a growing pro-Carolingian perspective and an anti-Ebroin portrayal. The first section of the *Annales Mettenses Priores*, covering the years 687-805, was written in 805 or 806.<sup>46</sup> The Carolingian-controlled monastery at Chelles possibly had a hand in its creation.<sup>47</sup> Firmly situated in the Carolingian era, the first part of the text deals with Pippin II's life and political career. Ebroin played an important role in Pippin's story: he was portrayed as an enemy of Pippin and the family at large, and the *Passio Leudegarii* influenced his description in the text. Ebroin remained an important part of the Carolingian propaganda program, and his own career provided justification for Pippin's attack on Neustria.

The *Annales Mettenses Priores* sought to construct and cultivate a particular image of the Carolingian dynasty in order to promote the ruling family to a group of potentially rebellious magnates.<sup>48</sup> The text disregarded the difficulties in the Carolingian rise to power that were exhibited in other sources such as the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and the *Chronicon Fredegarii*.<sup>49</sup> The text also asserted Charles Martel's legitimacy and emphasized a direct line of rulership from Pippin I to Charlemagne.<sup>50</sup> The writer needed to emphasize the positive qualities of the Carolingian dynasty in opposition to some hostile force: Ebroin, other Neustrian mayors of the palace, and the Merovingian kings were the ideal figures to demonize in order to elevate the Carolingian dynasty.

The *Annales Mettenses Priores'* description of Ebroin was not flattering. Ebroin is introduced early in the text's narrative and referred to as a "cruel man and prone to several vices."<sup>51</sup> The text specifically indicts Ebroin on two counts: especially after his return from exile, Ebroin had a tendency to unjustly deprive people of their freedom, their property, and their lives; and that Leudegar was killed for trying to stop him.<sup>52</sup> The text uses the phrase "Leudegar was crowned with martyrdom" (*Leodegarius... martirio coronatur*) in the passive voice, making it less clear if Ebroin was the one who personally killed Leudegar, though we know from other sources that Ebroin ordered his men to kill him.<sup>53</sup> The text

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<sup>46</sup> Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 332-33.

<sup>47</sup> Hartmut Hoffmann was the first to propose Chelles as the *Annales Mettenses Priores'* creation place: Hartmut Hoffmann, *Untersuchung zur Karolingischen Annalistik*, Bonner Historische Forschungen 10 (Bonn: L. Röhrscheid, 1958), 53-61. See also McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 61. Fouracre and Gerberding favor Metz as the writing location, but they admit there is not enough evidence for a definite answer: Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 337-39. Yitzhak Hen cautions against fully accepting the Chelles hypothesis, though he admits it is the most convincing argument: Yitzhak Hen, "The Annals of Metz and the Merovingian Past," in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 175-90, at 176-77.

<sup>48</sup> Hen has argued that 806 was a tenuous year for Charlemagne due to a mix of natural disasters and his uncertain succession that may have caused discontent among the Frankish magnates: Hen, "The Annals of Metz," 179-85.

<sup>49</sup> Hen, "The Annals of Metz," 189.

<sup>50</sup> Bouchard, *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors*, 117-19; Reimitz, *History*, 368-75.

<sup>51</sup> *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. Bernard von Simson, 5; *Annales Mettenses Priores*, trans. Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 353.

<sup>52</sup> *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. Bernard von Simson, 5-6.

<sup>53</sup> *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. Bernard von Simson, 5; cf. *Liber Historiae Francorum*, Chapter 45.

inches closer to condemning Ebroin as the one who dealt the killing blow to Leudegar, but it does not explicitly call him Leudegar's murderer. The charge of Leudegar's death was clearly taken from the *Passio Leudegarii*, and the charge of depriving property factored into Pippin's justification to attack Neustria. The portrayal of Neustria in the text is similarly negative. Neustria was a kingdom in need of rescuing from tyrannical mayors and the unjust Theuderic. The Neustrian king is depicted as an arrogant and impious ruler who made no effort to rectify the mistakes of his mayors.<sup>54</sup>

During Berchar's mayorship in 684-687, Pippin asked Theuderic to return the land taken away from Neustrian exiles during Ebroin's tenure.<sup>55</sup> Ebroin's legacy continued to be worrisome in Austrasia, and even after Ebroin's death Pippin was more concerned about Ebroin's legacy than the actions of the incumbent mayor, Berchar. Theuderic refused to comply, and Pippin felt forced to attack the western kingdom. Making a speech to his men, Pippin gave three reasons to justify his invasion of Neustria. First, he wished to fight for priests and religious officials who lost their property under Theuderic and his mayors. Second, he wished to restore the property and holdings of all the Neustrian exiles who fled to him for safety. Third, he wished to end Theuderic's oppressive rule over the Neustrians.<sup>56</sup> After securing victory at the Battle of Tertry, Pippin "set right all the confiscations which in those regions had come about over many years through the greed and injustice of the leaders."<sup>57</sup> The word "leaders" (*principum*) suggests that both the king and his mayors were responsible for these confiscations; this implicates the entire upper Neustrian leadership as obstacles to Pippin's new and just rule—anyone that opposed the rising Carolingians was painted harshly in the text.<sup>58</sup>

Given such leadership, the *Annales Mettenses Priores* made sure that Pippin's new role in Neustria was that of a corrector of wrongs. Pippin was the direct antithesis of Ebroin: while Ebroin was a sinner, a murderer of bishops, and a tyrant who exiled nobles and seized their property, Pippin was a just and virtuous defender of the poor, the weak, and the Church.<sup>59</sup> First and foremost, he restored the property of the Neustrians who were exiled under former mayors of the palace, then he "governed the kingdom of the Franks internally with justice and peace and externally with most prudent policies and the unconquerable protection of arms, with the Lord helping."<sup>60</sup> Similarly to how the second *Passio Leudegarii* exaggerated the good and evil traits of Leudegar and Ebroin to emphasize Leudegar's holiness, the *Annales Mettenses Priores* distinguished between the

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<sup>54</sup> *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. Bernard von Simson, 6-7; Reimitz, *History*, 370-71.

<sup>55</sup> *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. Bernard von Simson, 6-7. After Ebroin's death, Waratto became mayor of the palace in Neustria. His son Ghislemar overthrew him in 682, but he died in 684, allowing Waratto to become mayor again. After Waratto's death later that year, the magnates elected Berchar as mayor and he held the position until 687.

<sup>56</sup> *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. Bernard von Simson, 8-9.

<sup>57</sup> *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. Bernard von Simson, 12; *Annales Mettenses Priores*, trans. Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 359.

<sup>58</sup> Hen, "The Annals of Metz," 188-89.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Fouracre, "The Long Shadow of the Merovingians," in *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 9.

<sup>60</sup> *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. Bernard von Simson, 14-15; *Annales Mettenses Priores*, trans. Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 361.

failings of Neustria's leadership and the benefits of Pippin's new administration to champion the Carolingian family as superior rulers to the Merovingians.

Ebroin and his legacy were important components of the *Annales Mettenses Priores'* goal to promote the Carolingian dynasty. While the text at times broadly implicated the leadership of Neustria, it often used examples from Ebroin's career to condemn the shortcomings of the mayors and kings. Ebroin was a foil to Pippin; even when he was not overtly mentioned, Pippin's actions and reforms in Neustria were in reaction to Ebroin and the repercussions of his time in power. The Battle of Tertry occurred because Pippin sought to restore the properties of the Neustrian exiles in his court, who were deprived of their property by Ebroin—even though by this time Berchar was mayor. Ebroin was the focal point for many of the author's criticisms of the Neustrian political system. While the text was critical of King Theuderic, it was mainly because of his unwillingness to reverse the decisions of his mayors. The mayors Ghislemar and Berchar were portrayed negatively, but to a similar extent as their depictions in the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and the *Chronicon Fredegarii*.<sup>61</sup> Ebroin, on the other hand, remained a consequential and worrisome figure even after his death. His career inspired Pippin to action, and his actions were held as the most visible symptoms of a failing Frankish political system that the Carolingian dynasty was trying to save.

#### EBROIN IN THE LATE- AND POST-CAROLINGIAN PERIODS

Ebroin's legacy endured long into the Carolingian period and beyond. He remained an important part of Leudegar's story, and written works about Leudegar's life and martyrdom continued to incorporate Ebroin into their narratives, which maintains Ursinus' trend of exaggerating the actions and conduct of Ebroin and Leudegar to emphasize their traits. Ebroin no longer figured into the "official" histories of the Carolingian dynasty; neither Einhard's *Vita Karoli* nor the *Annales Regni Francorum* mentioned Ebroin or the late Merovingian period in detail.<sup>62</sup> However, some chronicles do mention Ebroin in their narratives. Any tacit acknowledgement of any of Ebroin's achievements was long gone; only his controversies remained. Indeed, these chronicles even invented new historical facts and events to further condemn Ebroin as a wicked figure. Ebroin no longer served a political purpose to the Carolingian dynasty, but he continued to be an emblematic symbol of the flaws of the Merovingian period.

Subsequent written works about Leudegar do not add much to our understanding of Leudegar's life and career, but they do reveal what the writers found important about the original *Passiones Leudegarii* in their time period.<sup>63</sup> A poetic life of Leudegar based on Ursinus' *Passio Leudegarii*, the *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris*, was written in the mid-ninth century.<sup>64</sup> Following Ursinus' model, the writer excised historical details and exaggerated events in order to

<sup>61</sup> See *Liber Historiae Francorum*, Chapter 47-48; and *Fredegar IV*, Continuation 4-5.

<sup>62</sup> The *Annales Regni Francorum* instead focused on the unity of the Franks; see McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 113-19.

<sup>63</sup> Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 209.

<sup>64</sup> *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris*, ed. Ludwig Traube, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae* 3 (Berlin: Weidman, 1896), 1; Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 208.

emphasize Leudegar's sanctity. Ebroin remains a caricature in the poem, relegated to doing evil for the sake of being evil. Lamenting that Leudegar remained unharmed by him, Ebroin declared: "That uninjured man escapes my grasp ... if any of my companions may punish this anger for me, come here, anyone who knows such an injury."<sup>65</sup> Two men, Diddo and Waimer, took up the cause, much to Ebroin's delight: "I always support you, my loyal men—now, go, prepare your treacheries and drive out the bishop from his see."<sup>66</sup> The characters of the poem often speak long passages of dialogue which serve to solidify their personalities: Ebroin's malicious character showed in his words, and Leudegar's saintly actions similarly were on display in his dialogue.

The poem adopted Ursinus' revised narrative of Leudegar's death. Ebroin sent out four men to kill Leudegar, and while three of them asked for Leudegar's forgiveness, the fourth assassin followed through with the plan to kill Leudegar.<sup>67</sup> After Leudegar's death, Ebroin learned of his posthumous miracles. He was exasperated, and he sent men out to investigate the veracity of these rumors.<sup>68</sup> Discovering them being true, Ebroin had a dramatic reaction. Only speaking in a whisper, he questioned his actions: "What are we doing? Now his glory grows widely, our prior deeds are disgraced too much. His fame flies with a brilliant rumor and, driven on, we are carried by the voices of the rest."<sup>69</sup> While Ursinus consigned Ebroin to a silent defeat in the presence of his wife, the poem makes Ebroin admit out loud that his plot to kill Leudegar backfired. In one last defiant act, however, Ebroin strived to demonize Leudegar to improve his own public opinion: "But, lest by chance the fame of this man overflows too much with a gentle sermon, let us try to expose with sinister chance the evils of that man and his false speeches, lest the glory of our praise is diminished in the eyes of the people."<sup>70</sup> Diverging from Ursinus' narrative, the poem gave Ebroin one last audacious action to drive home the point that he was a wicked person—not only did Ebroin order Leudegar's death, but he also tried to pervert his legacy.<sup>71</sup>

Rather than referencing the original *Passio Leudegarii*, the *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris* relied on Ursinus' version of the *Passio Leudegarii*. The writer continued to disregard historical events in favor of the martyrdom narrative.<sup>72</sup> The genre shift to a poem also ensured it could be taught easily in a cathedral school setting, allowing students to learn about the struggle between the two men as depicted through the poetic life.<sup>73</sup> The omission of problematic

<sup>65</sup> *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris*, 1.367, 375-76: "Ille meis, inquit, palmis inlesus abidit... / O mihi si quisquam fidus hanc vindicet iram: / Huc ades, o quisquis, cernens, iniuria qualis."

<sup>66</sup> *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris*, 1.385-86: "Semper vos firmos tenui—nunc ite, parate / insidias, dixit, vatem depellite sede."

<sup>67</sup> *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris*, 1.665-717.

<sup>68</sup> *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris*, 2.66-79.

<sup>69</sup> *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris*, 2.108-11: "Quid facimus? Late cuius nunc gloria crescit, / nostra etiam nimium turpantur gesta priora. / Fama volat huius redolens rumore corusco / nosque rei ferimur cunctorum vocibus acti."

<sup>70</sup> *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris*, 2.112-15: "Sed, ne forte magis placido sermone redundet / huius fama viri, conemur sorte sinistra / obiectare malas illi falsasque loquelas. / Ne nostrae in populo minuat gloria laudis."

<sup>71</sup> In *Passio Leudegarii II*, Chapter 22-23, Ebroin made no efforts to squash the rumors of Leudegar's miracles, and he died soon after his private defeat.

<sup>72</sup> Fouracre, "Merovingian History," 20. Fouracre points out that the setting of this poem takes influence from Classical Rome, wherein senators and plebeians figure into the story.

<sup>73</sup> Anna Lisa Taylor, *Epic Lives and Monasticism in the Middle Ages, 800-1050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11-20.

passages of Leudegar's life and the exaggeration of other passages resulted in a more saintly Leudegar and a more despicable Ebroin; both were caricatures of their historical selves in this poem.

Leudegar's story also entered the vernacular. A mid-tenth century Old French poem, the *Vie et Passion de Saint Léger*, also depicts the life of Leudegar.<sup>74</sup> It too drew on Ursinus' *Passio Leudegarii* for its narrative foundation, and it too made its own changes to Leudegar's story.<sup>75</sup> As with the *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris*, the writer made changes to the historical reality to elevate Leudegar and to demonize Ebroin. For example, when the Franks overthrew Ebroin after he raised Theuderic as king, Ebroin himself begged to go into exile at Luxeuil, as opposed to Leudegar and allied bishops vouching for him in the original *Passio Leudegarii*.<sup>76</sup> In this poem, Ebroin was not just a tyrant, he was an incompetent and cowardly one at that. The poem alludes to Leudegar's involvement with Hector, but it portrayed this event in such a way that it improved Leudegar's sanctity. Childeric unwillingly sent Leudegar into exile; in fact, Leudegar himself wanted to go into exile in order to seek a life without secular affairs.<sup>77</sup> This was quite the departure from the original *Passio Leudegarii*. The first text said that Leudegar went into exile involuntarily by mistake and by the order of a wicked king—now, Leudegar willingly went into exile to pursue the monastic lifestyle.<sup>78</sup> The writer set aside the historical nuances of earlier versions of Leudegar's life in order to promote his sanctity.

As for Ebroin, the poem blames him for Leudegar's death, but it was one of the four assassins Ebroin sent that dealt the killing blow.<sup>79</sup> As with previous versions of written portrayals of Leudegar's life, the writer went into great detail about the tortures that he suffered while in Ebroin's custody.<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, the poem ends after Leudegar's death, and therefore it said nothing about Ebroin's demise, though it did portray Ebroin accepting the veracity of Leudegar's miracles and ordering his death as a result.<sup>81</sup> The enduring cult of Saint Leudegar continued to retell their martyr's story centuries after his death. To promote his holiness, writers modified the original narrative of the first *Passio Leudegarii*, removing much of the historical nuance in order to make a good story. By the time of the *Vita Beati Leudegarii Martyris* and the *Vie et Passion de Saint Léger*, the original narrative transformed consistently into a simplified battle between good and evil. Being the antagonist of the tale, Ebroin's actions became even more severe and egregious from text to text in order to emphasize his evil behavior against

<sup>74</sup> *Vie et Passion de Saint Léger*, ed. Jacques Joseph Champollion-Figeac, in *Documents inédits tirés des Collections Manuscrites de la Bibliothèque Nationale et des Archives ou des Bibliothèques des Départements* (Paris: Firmin-Didot Frères, 1841), 4: 446-56.

<sup>75</sup> Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 208-09.

<sup>76</sup> *Vie et Passion de Saint Léger*, verses 10-11; cf. *Passio Leudegarii I*, Chapter 6.

<sup>77</sup> *Vie et Passion de Saint Léger*, verses 13-17.

<sup>78</sup> Fouracre, "Merovingian History," 20-21; cf. *Passio Leudegarii I*, Chapter 9-12.

<sup>79</sup> *Vie et Passion de Saint Léger*, verses 2, 37-38.

<sup>80</sup> *Vie et Passion de Saint Léger*, verses 26-29. Jean Rychner's analysis of the poem also paints Ebroin in a negative light. Rychner contends that Ebroin's tortures were meant for Leudegar to denounce his salvation in Christ, and he observes that Ebroin's primary enemy in the poem appeared not to be Leudegar, but God himself. See Jean Rychner, "Observations sur le style des deux poèmes de Clermont: la *Passion du Christ* et la *Vie de Saint Léger*," in *Orbis Mediaevalis: Mélanges de langue et de littérature médiévales offerts à Reto Raduolf à l'occasion de son quatre-vingtième anniversaire*, ed. Georges Güntert, Marc-René Jung, and Kurt Ringger (Bern: Francke, 1978), 353-71, 361-64.

<sup>81</sup> *Vie et Passion de Saint Léger*, verses 32, 37.

Leudegar's own good conduct. The goal of these texts was to promote Leudegar's cult, and Ebroin remained an important foil and fixture of these stories. Ebroin gained more notoriety as time went on, his actions becoming more and more reprehensible as Leudegar became an even more virtuous martyr.

After the *Annales Mettenses Priores* were composed, Ebroin no longer figured into written works sponsored by the Carolingian dynasty. Indeed, by the early ninth century, the Carolingians no longer relied on looking back to their Merovingian origins as part of their efforts at promoting themselves. Rather, the emphasis turned to the dynasty acting as legitimate rulers leading a Frankish people united by a common Christian identity.<sup>82</sup> As such, Ebroin and the Merovingian dynasty were no longer subjects found in Carolingian histories. However, some later chronicles did discuss Ebroin. What they knew about Ebroin came from earlier works that cast him in an unfavorable light, thus his depiction continued to deteriorate over time.

The *Sancti Adonis Viennensis Chronicon*, written in the mid-ninth century, details the events of the 670s and 680s in its narrative.<sup>83</sup> Ado of Vienne incorporated several other narrative sources into his work, including the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and the *Chronicon Fredegarii*.<sup>84</sup> Ado of Vienne's chronicle thus treats Ebroin with a degree of accuracy, but important parts of his life lack the proper context, and Ado even invented events not found in earlier sources. Ebroin was sent into exile at Luxeuil for undefined "treacheries" (*insidias*), and he left the monastery because he was under the belief that he could live for eighteen more years out of exile.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, the fear of old age drove Ebroin to action rather than political concerns. Equally worth mentioning is the relative disinterest in the deaths of Leudegar and Gaerin. In contrast to the emotional narratives of the various *Passiones Leudegarii*, Ado merely describes their deaths as follows: "Immediately, [Ebroin] struck the holy Leudegar, having been affected by various punishments, with a sword. He also killed his brother Gaerin, having been tortured for a long time."<sup>86</sup> In this chronicle, Ebroin is personally responsible for Leudegar's death. Ebroin did not strike the killing blow on Leudegar, even in his depictions in the second *Passio Leudegarii* and the *Annales Mettenses Priores*, but in this ninth-century chronicle, Ebroin also becomes the sole perpetrator in Leudegar's death.

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<sup>82</sup> Reimitz, *History*, 394-409; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 265-73. As the Carolingians were losing their hold on power in the mid-ninth century, they also struggled to reassert their legitimacy as this common identity quickly fell apart; see Reimitz, *History*, 432-43.

<sup>83</sup> Ado of Vienne, *Sancti Adonis Viennensis Chronicon in Aetates Sex Divisum*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 123, Paris, 1879, 23-142.

<sup>84</sup> Marie-Céline Isaïa, "La *Chronique* d'Adon de Vienne (†875). Méthode, projet et public," *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 108, no. 261 (2022): 225-54, 225n1.

<sup>85</sup> Ado of Vienne, *Sancti Adonis Viennensis Chronicon*, 117. A so-called "spirit of fraud" (*spiritu mendacii*) led Ebroin to leave the monastery, not the news that King Childeric was murdered; cf. *Liber Historiae Francorum*, Chapter 45.

<sup>86</sup> Ado of Vienne, *Sancti Adonis Viennensis Chronicon*, 117: "Continuo sanctum Leodegarium diversis poenis affectum gladio percussit. Gerinum quoque fratrem ejus diu excruciatum peremit."

According to Ado, Ebroin also blinded several people other than Leudegar. After Ermenfred killed Ebroin, Ado relates a tale about one of Ebroin's blinded victims:

In that time there was a man deprived of eyesight, one of those whom Ebroin gouged the eyes out of, on the island called Île Barbe in the province of Lyon ... he heard a force sailing down the river, and with great strength of his arms he was going against the strength of the river. And the man asked who he was taking with him, and a voice sounded in his ears: "This is Ebroin, whom we are carrying to hell: there he will suffer the punishments for his deeds." The same man heard this to his consolation, so he may know that the persecutors of the just feel their punishment.<sup>87</sup>

Ebroin was apparently a serial eye-gouger! In near-contemporary sources, Ebroin's blinding of Leudegar made him a controversial figure, but Ado decided to make the one instance of blinding into a habitual occurrence to emphasize his infamy. Through this supernatural event, Ado condemned Ebroin to hell. Authors in the late Merovingian period shied away from predicting where a figure would go after their death, even in the first *Passio Leudegarii*, due to possible retribution from said figure's political allies.<sup>88</sup> Ado, on the other hand, had no such worries. Ebroin not only suffered for his sins during his life, but he awaited an eternity of torture after death as well, a fitting punishment for Ado's portrayal of the mayor.

Marie-Céline Isaïa has recently suggested that Ado of Vienne was writing an ecclesiastical history for the clergy of Vienne, thus Ebroin's negative depiction against the saintly Leudegar tracks with Ado crafting a guidebook for proper clerical conduct.<sup>89</sup> Ado was not interested in recounting Ebroin's life and career. He wanted to show his fellow clergymen the failings of secular government and what role the clergy can play to mitigate them.<sup>90</sup> Ebroin, viewed through the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and especially the *Chronicon Fredegarii*, was a convenient example to portray as an adversary to good clerics everywhere.

The later eleventh-century *Chronicon Hugonis* briefly mentioned Ebroin in its narrative; its author Hugh of Flavigny condensed Ebroin's career to the extent that very few details remained about the complex political landscape he inhabited. There is no explanation of Ebroin's actions that prompted his exile to Luxeuil; the Franks exiled Ebroin and King Theuderic "because of their evil and cruelty" (*propter malitiam et crudelitatem*).<sup>91</sup> Again, it is taken for granted that Ebroin was the big bad mayor figure—there was no need to explain why the Franks sent him

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<sup>87</sup> Ado of Vienne, *Sancti Adonis Viennensis Chronicon*, 117: "Erat tunc temporis vir oculis orbatus, unus de illis quibus Ebroinus effoderat lumina, in insula Lugdunensis provinciae, quae Barbara dicitur... audivit navigantium impetum, et magna vi brachiorum contra impetum fluminis insurgentium. Cumque interrogaret, quo navigium illud tenderet, vox in auribus ejus percipuit: Ebroinus est, quem ad Vulcaniam ollam deferimus: ibi enim facti sui poenas luet. Hoc idem vir audivit ad consolationem sui, ut sciret quam poenam persecutores justorum sentirent."

<sup>88</sup> *Passio Leudegarii I*, Chapter 37.

<sup>89</sup> Isaïa, "La Chronique d'Adon de Vienne," 246-54.

<sup>90</sup> Isaïa, "La Chronique d'Adon de Vienne," 248-50.

<sup>91</sup> Hugh of Flavigny, *Chronicon Hugonis Monachi Viridunensis et Divionensis Abbatis Flaviniacensis*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, *Scriptores* 8 (Hanover: Hahn, 1848), 339.

into exile beyond that fact. Hugh felt it was necessary to make an unflattering comparison between Ebroin and persecuting Roman Emperors of the past to emphasize Ebroin's character to his readers. He explained that "in those days there was such tribulation in the Church, with Ebroin making his wickedness, that he seemed to surpass the times of Nero and Decius with his cruelty."<sup>92</sup> Ebroin's notoriety continued to grow over the centuries. Not only did he kill Leudegar and Gaerin, but he was an equal to the great persecutors of the early Church. For such a contemptible mayor, it was his just punishment to be condemned to hell: the *Chronicon Hugonis* includes nearly the exact same passage about one of his blinded victims learning of Ebroin's ferrying to hell as found in the *Sancti Adonis Viennensis Chronicon*.<sup>93</sup> The *Passio Leudegarii* and Carolingian-sponsored anti-Ebroin narratives succeeded in transforming Ebroin into a *bête noire*; even centuries after his death, Ebroin's reputation continued to worsen.<sup>94</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Ebroin's legacy transformed substantially in the centuries after his death. His controversial career made him an appealing and appalling subject in the writings of his enemies, namely, Leudegar's followers and the rising Carolingian dynasty. These writers incorporated Ebroin into their narratives for a variety of purposes: for Leudegar's hagiographers, he was the perfect opponent to emphasize Leudegar's sanctity; for the Carolingians, he was the representation of everything wrong with the Merovingian era. The writings of Ebroin's enemies succeeded in tarnishing his legacy, and their influence persisted throughout the Middle Ages. The *Chronicon Fredegarii* rewrote late Merovingian history to promote the actions of the Austrasians, and it rewrote Ebroin to be a more controversial figure. Ursinus' version of the *Passio Leudegarii* painted Ebroin as an antagonistic force in opposition to the newly sanitized hero Leudegar; both characters in the text gained exaggerated qualities to emphasize this point. The *Annales Mettenses Priores* upheld Ebroin as a political disruptor that the Carolingian dynasty crushed in order to save Francia.

These texts succeeded in their respective missions. The promotion of Leudegar as a saint ensured that his veneration continued long after his death, and the Carolingian dynasty's hold on power was aided in part by their propaganda program in the later years of the Merovingian era and the first years of their rulership. Ebroin's inclusion in these sources also ensured that a distorted version of his legacy projected into the later Middle Ages. Subsequent additions to the literary corpus of Leudegar's cult followed the more dramatic narrative of Ursinus' *Passio Leudegarii*, further promoting a skewed perspective of the conflict between Ebroin and Leudegar without the political nuances found in the original *Passio Leudegarii*. Later chronicles viewed Ebroin through these earlier

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<sup>92</sup> Hugh of Flavigny, *Chronicon Hugonis*, 339: "In diebus illis tanta fuit tribulatio in ecclesia, Ebroini faciente nequitia, ut videatur crudelitate vincere Neroniana et Deciana tempora." Nero and Decius, unsurprisingly, were emperors who persecuted early Christians.

<sup>93</sup> Hugh of Flavigny, *Chronicon Hugonis*, 339. Aside from a few synonymous words, Hugh directly copies Ado's narrative. However, Hugh leaves out the blinded person's revelation that Ebroin will suffer for his sinful deeds. As a result, there is less of a moral lesson in Hugh's chronicle than in Ado's chronicle: Ebroin will suffer, that is all that matters for the sinful mayor.

<sup>94</sup> Fouracre, "The Long Shadow," 12-13.



texts and accordingly caricatured him as the stereotypical evil Merovingian mayor. This case study of Ebroin's legacy demonstrates the power of these texts and how they could influence later sources hundreds of years after their writing and long after their original purpose was no longer necessary.

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