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The growth of an Austrasian identity

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Propositions with the thesis “The growth of an Austrasian identity. Processes of identification and legend construction in the Northeast of the Regnum Francorum, 600-800” by Johan Lammert Stegeman

I.

Ewig’s supposition that the various Frankish kingdoms – specifically Neustria and Austrasia – shared “profound roots with common concepts of justice” is at variance with the fact that at two key moments in the VIIth century disparities between the kingdoms were explicitly recognized in royal edicts: in 614 by Chlothar II and in 673 by Childeric II, in both cases in a context involving the aristocratic leaders from both Neustria and Austrasia.

Contra: Ewig, ‘Die fränkischen Teilreiche im 7. Jahrhundert (613-714)’. Reprinted in: H. Atsma ed., Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien. Gesammelte Schriften (1952-1973) I. Beihefte der Francia 3 (Munich 1976), 173.

II.

Regarding the baptism of Sigebert III (c. 630), there are good grounds to credit the account of Fredegar rather than the very different report given in the various *Vitae Amandi*, the discrepancy between the two versions providing a valuable indication of the growing significance of legend construction in the period between c. 650 and c. 750.

III.

Collins’ notion that the *Historia vel Gesta Francorum* provide a mainly West-Burgundian or Aquitanian perspective, though plausible in itself, should be reassessed in view of the work’s Austrasia-related content and contextual information.

Contra: Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken* (Hanover 2007), 89-91

IV.

Assuming that the growth, between 600 and 800, of an Austrasian identity (Austrasianness) represents a case of regio-genesis rather than of ethnogenesis, nevertheless applying Wenskus’ paradigm of ethnogenesis to this process – viz. identifying the role of “Traditionskerne” as well as a “primordial event” and a “change of religion” – provides clarifying insights into it.

Compare: Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung. Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen Gentes* (Vienna 1961).

V.

The desire of the Austrasians to have a king of their own, easily accessible and open to their advice, lost much of its urgency when, following the war with Samo and the subsequent revolt of Radulf (630-639), the authority of Austrasian kingship evaporated in large parts of Germany. This diminished authority brought with it a decline of royal resources, which nudged Austrasian leaders toward a gradual reorientation on the Neustrian court and led ultimately to the battle of Tertry (687).

VI.

Applying the methodology as developed within the framework of “Texts and Identities” to identify links between conceptions on kingship in Austrasia on the one

hand and forms of devotion and the role of the aristocracy on the other, allows us to envisage a specific Austrasian “grammar of kingship”, analogous to the “grammar of identity” developed by Pohl.

Compare: Corradini, Texts and identities in the Early Middle Ages, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 12(Vienna 2004), as well as the Wittgenstein Project 2005-2010: <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/gema/Wittgenstein/home.html>

VII.

The fact that the perceived gap between citizens and politicians became a topic for discussion during a period when the latter increasingly strove to accommodate the *vox populi* fosters the conjecture that detached authority ultimately inspires more trust than skittish pliability.