The Ideals of Female Sanctity in Merovingian and Carolingian *Vitae*

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Preface

As a twenty-first century American Catholic woman, I take for granted the fact that my perception of correct living is no longer primarily dictated by the teachings of the Church or any other religious/spiritual institution.[1] While I am made aware of the ways in which the Church instructs her flock regarding their lives and sanctity—often with particular emphasis on the female portion of that flock—I feel free to completely disregard those expectations without facing any dramatic ramifications. This seemed like "progress" from a bygone era where rigid religious-institution-based standards restricted women to certain gendered roles. It is perhaps with this "progress" in mind that I came into my college history classes expecting to see the role of women most "restricted" in the early years of the Church and less "restricted" as time progressed. Of course, any student of history or sociology knows that such statements are fatally simplistic on a multitude of levels; history is not a progression, "progress" is relative, gender and gender roles are fluid, freedom/restriction are matters of perspective, etc. Yet even with this more nuanced perspective in mind, I was startled with the historical realities that I found in the primary literature.

Take, for example, a simple comparison of the gendered effect of clothing on two Catholic saints: St. Papula (fourth-fifth century?) and St. Joan of Arc (1412-1431).[2] Both saints were, to the best of our knowledge, female. Both lived in modern-day France. Both saints lived under a common religion (at least by name) and operated through the interpretation of many of the same texts. Papula was venerated for cutting her hair, disguising herself like a man, and

[1] I understand that such expectations are also (and have also historically been) the result of other sociocultural and political factors and that such a statement is limited to a very Western European-influenced mode of thought.
[2] This particular comparison resulted from the research that I did for Dr. Karen Spierling's class "Witches, Saints, and Skeptics" in Fall 2013.

entering into a monastery near Tours so she could live "like a man among men."[3] Joan of Arc cut her hair and wore men's clothing and was burned at the stake. Clothing (or these women's refusal to conform to gendered expectations regarding their clothing) is a central theme of the texts, yet the role of clothing is quite different in each historical case; moreover, one does not find a simplistic march to "progress," since the chronologically later individual, Joan of Arc, was the one who was executed. Obviously the gendered role women performed was far more complicated than a simple instruction on how to dress—the experiences of these women were the result of a complex interaction between historical, social, religious, political, and cultural realities. My interest, then, is in understanding the ways in which these complex realities change over time to produce such diverse expectations for what constitutes correct living.

To frame this historical question, I harkened back to my first college history class, "Late Antiquity" with Dr. Adam Davis. In that class we read an excerpt from a *Life* of the sixth-century Frank, Saint Radegund. The document was particularly memorable because Radegund deviated from the cynical impression I had of Frankish saints whose claim to fame was simply conversion and the acquisition of lands for the Church—Radegund was described as kissing lepers, freeing prisoners, and pulling maggots from festering wounds. In short, I chose to start an analysis of portrayals of sanctity with St. Radegund simply because I was personally impressed with the portrayal of her accomplishments. When I explored the historiography on St. Radegund, I came upon Julia M.H. Smith's 1995 article "The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe," which compared Radegund to the portrayals of other female saints and the ways that the portrayals changed from the Merovingians to the

[3] Jo Ann McNamara, "Chastity as a Third Gender in the History and *Hagiography* of Gregory of Tours," in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood, (Boston: Brill, 2002), 205.

Carolingians.[4] I limited my analysis to the same time frame, choosing two saints from each time period and one saint represented in both periods in order to lend some perspective about the gendered expectations of sanctity as experienced in each era.

It is interesting to note that of my chosen saints and holy women—Genovefa, Radegund, Liutbirga, Hathumoda, and Clothild—only Genovefa has retained a widespread religious following into the twenty-first century, as St. Genevieve, patroness of Paris. St. Radegund, while officially the patroness of Jesus College, a constituent of the University of Cambridge, and St. Clothild, patroness of queens and widows, are more often than not left out of saints books. St. Liutbirga is remembered as an "executive housekeeper" by religious historians but enjoys no modern veneration.[5] Hathumoda is not even venerated as a saint. She does not have her own feast day or even an English Wikipedia.org page.[6] Though these women may not enjoy a vast modern following, they nevertheless were all commemorated by authors who presented their lives in saintly *vitae.*

[4] Julia M. H. Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe c. 780-920," *Past & Present* 146 (1995), accessed September 25, 2015.
[5] Margaret Wade Labarge, *Women in Medieval Life*, (Hamish Hamilton: 1986), chapter 2.
[6] Although Hathumoda is not recognized as a saint by the modern Catholic Church I chose to include her *Life* in my analysis because the construction and survival of her *Life* suggest that it included some elements of Carolingian expectations of sanctity. The conferring of the title "Saint" is often a complicated political process, and individuals can be named saints by their contemporaries (like Saints Genovefa and Radegund) or by political actors centuries after their death (like Saints Clothild and Joan of Arc). The failing of Hathumoda's legacy to obtain this title may have been the consequence of political actions taken decades after her death (see discussion page 102) rather than an indication of her contemporaries' judgment on her sanctity.

Introduction: Sanctity, Sainthood, and Hagiography

Sanctity as a socio-religious phenomenon is, by definition, the "state or quality of being holy, sacred, or saintly."[7] However, the behaviors which qualified individuals as being holy or saintly have changed over time. The ideals of sanctity were renegotiated in times of political or cultural turbulence, such as the transition experienced in the fall of the Roman Empire or the rise of the Carolingian dynasty.[8] Sanctity was also "negotiated, contested, and shaped" on a much smaller scale by the needs of the authors, storytellers, preachers, and their audiences.[9] Yet despite the tendency of models of sanctity to change considerably over time periods and between sociopolitical groups, the correct performance of sanctity at any given time was often crucial to an individual's role in society. [10] In order to understand the complicated nature of ever-changing expectations of sanctity, historians often turn to the ultimate exemplars of sanctity: saints.

Saints, recognized as being worthy of immediate admission into heaven, were holy people who served as the Christian religion's greatest human heroes.[11] Honored for their portrayal of sanctity, saints served important political, social, religious, and cultural roles in life and even afterward, since they were expected to work miracles after death, interceding on behalf of those who asked for their help.[12] The developing early Church upheld saints as purveyors of correct living, creating a "cult of the saints," a reverence which broke most of the "imaginative boundaries which ancient men placed between heaven and earth, the divine and

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[7] definition courtesy of the Google search engine
[8] Leslie Brubaker and Julia M.H. Smith, *Gender in the early medieval world: east and west, 300-900,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 18 .
[9] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 5.
[10] Thomas F.X. Noble and Thomas Head, eds. *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages,* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), xviii.
[11] Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ, xiv*.
[12] Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France,* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 45.

the human, the living and the dead, the town and its antithesis," making the supernatural world accessible to the men and women who participated.[13] Just like the ever-changing expectations of sanctity, the portrayals of, historical memory of, and reverence for saints was constantly adapted to time periods and populations.[14]

The lives of saints were recorded in texts known as hagiographies, *vitae* (singular: *vita*), or simply *Lives.* Hagiographies, literally a compound of the Greek words meaning "holy" and "writing," were a vast part of medieval literature in both Latin and vernacular languages.[15] They were not historical texts necessarily intended to accurately represent the life of a historical figure. Rather, they were literary productions with a variety of motivations.[16] Texts were produced to inspire readers to better living, honor saints postmortem, or make a case for official canonization.[17] The *Lives* often served as a "template of Christian virtue, a map of the path to salvation," and as such they were meant to be read or listened to by the populace.[18]

The "holy instruction" of hagiographies was intended to "make barren minds generate the knowing of perfect faith," a tall order for a document that is also, in part, supposed to represent the life of a real human being.[19] Therein lies a tension—how do authors assimilate saints into a model of exemplary (and probably unrealistically unobtainable) holiness without destroying the individuality of any one person?[20] Earlier texts were used as a "formula through which sanctity could be constructed," models through which the possibly problematic elements

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[13] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 21.
[14] Janet L. Nelson, "The Merovingian Church in Carolingian Perspective," in *The World of Gregory of Tours,* ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood, (Boston: Brill, 2002), 243.
[15] Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ,* xvii.
[16] John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16.
[17] Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 8.
[18] Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ,* xviii.
[19] Giselles De Nie, "History and Miracle: Gregory's Use of Metaphor," in *The World of Gregory of Tours,* ed. Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood, (Boston: Brill, 2002), 261.
[20] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 16.

of an individual's life could be smoothed to fit expectations of sanctity.[21] Sometimes hagiographers repeated phrases and whole passages verbatim from earlier hagiographies, perhaps in part to erase some of the particularity of the individual saint and fit him or her into something deemed acceptable by the author, his or her commissioner, the audience, and the church establishment.[22] These texts, then, serve as a historical record with insight into the society's concerns and preferences.[23]

Hagiographies, the most basic and widespread reference "to the culture of sanctity in Western European society," have recorded representations of sanctity for millennia, providing ample opportunities for the scholarly study of sanctity.[24] However, the study of hagiographies can be complicated by the peculiarities of the texts themselves. It is important to note that historians can only interpret how a saint was perceived, since hagiographies only provide an author's perspective on a saint's reputation.[25] While we cannot discuss the veracity of the activities portrayed in the *vitae* or the effects that the particular *vita* may have had on society, historians can analyze the portrayal to comment on the intentions of the author or the importance of particular virtues, regardless of whether or not the saint was even a real historical figure.[26] Hagiographies which feature mythical saints, spiritual metaphors or parables, or formulaic presentations of generic saints are therefore still useful to historians.[27] Finally, it is also important to recognize that extant hagiographies are often representative of canonically approved saints who were designed as holy by a Church that was "organized,

[21] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France,* 44.
[22] Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ,* xviii.
[23] Jason Glenn, "Two Lives of Saint Radegund," in *The Middle Ages in Texts and Texture,* ed. Jason Glenn, (Toronto: Toronto Press Inc., 2011), 69.
[24] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France,* 37.
[25] Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society,*9.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

clerical, and patriarchal."[28] It seems logical to hypothesize that such an institution would only promote the individuals that reflect its concerns and ideals of sanctity, leaving out the "more free-spirited women and men whose biographies would never be written."[29] Therefore, the deductions made by analysis of hagiography may not be representative of the true realities of sanctity experienced by individuals of that particular time period. However, faced with the relative dearth of sources regarding the experiences of holy women in Frankish Gaul, hagiographies are still the best candidate with which to study the expressions and construction of sanctity.

Introduction: Studying Female Sanctity in Frankish Gaul

Thomas Merton, in his 1954 book *The Last of the Fathers,* stated that "the enigma of sanctity is the temptation and often the ruin of historians."[30] Despite his pessimism and warning, the interpretation and analysis of sanctity has been pursued by Church historians for centuries. Bollandists, Jesuit hagiographical scholars who began operating in the seventeenth century, preserved, translated, and analyzed *vitae* as historical sources for the early Church.

Hippolyte Delehaye (1859-1941), a Belgian Jesuit and Bollandist, authored *The Legends of the Saints,* in which he identified historiographical conventions in order to establish which elements were unique to each individual *vita.*[31] Delehaye significantly called for the analysis of hagiographies not as literal historical accounts but as historical literature, altering the methodological approach of the historians who followed.[32] Similarly influential has been Peter Brown, who in addition to "bringing coherence to the study of Late Antiquity," brought a

[28] Kitchen, *Saints' Lives, 159.*
[29] Ibid.
[30] Thomas Merton, *The Last of the Father*s 1954, p 23; found in Kitchen, *Saints' Lives,* 3.
[31] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France,* 38.
[32] Kitchen, *Saints' Lives,* Introduction.

social historian's lens to the study of the time period and hagiography.[33] Brown's scholarship opened up a time period once thought of as a "Dark Ages," devoid of credible and diverse source material, though he does not specifically examine female saints in his analyses.

The gender-based study of Frankish saints has featured a variety of approaches and critiques. Some academics have approached the time period by studying the "high-profile women saints of late antique and medieval Christianity," using the hagiographies as case studies to construct an argument about the realities of gendered sanctity.[34] Others have produced scholarship "on the gendered aspects of Christian ethical and moral teachings," interrogating religious edicts, rules, and treatises to speak to the ways femaleness was defined, regulated, and produced.[35] Still others have used gender as a probe through which to understand "power and cultural strategies."[36]

One of the earliest practitioners of these approaches, Janet L. Nelson, entreated her colleagues to "redress the gross unfairness of [female saints'] posthumous reputations," by considering them not only as women, but "as human beings."[37] Her peer, Suzanne Fonay Wemple, published just such a study within a few years, an extensive and well-researched book about the experiences of individual Frankish women titled *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500 to 900.* In her book, Dr. Wemple explores everything from antique Church documents to Frankish law codes to the hagiographies of women in monasteries in order to explore the lives and legacies of Merovingian and Carolingian women. While at times Dr. Wemple appears to let her own views of gender roles get in the way of her

[33] For a good overview of the contributions of Delehaye and Brown, see Kitchen, *Saints' Lives,* Introduction.
[34] Brubaker and Smith, *Gender in the Early Medieval World,* 10.
[35] Ibid
[36] Brubaker and Smith, *Gender in the Early Medieval World,* preface.
[37] Janet L. Nelson, "Queens as Jezebels: the careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian history," in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Padstow: T.J. Press, 1978), 77.

analysis—such as when she rebukes the Carolingian woman Dhuoda as "pathetic," or when she declares that the disciple Paul's ambivalence towards women stems "not from his ascetic temperament, as some historians have claimed, but from his social conditioning which predisposed him to a respect for male authority"—her analysis nevertheless is a treasure trove of information about the daily lives of Frankish women.[38]

Other historians, instead of attempting to describe women's experience in general, used gender as a lens through which to examine a specific aspect of a saint's life. In 1985 Caroline Walker Bynum critiqued the "modern scholars" who attempted to diagnose saints' "miraculous abstinence and Eucharistic frenzy" as simple "eating disorders," instead interrogating the hagiographies within a historical context to provide evidence of an association between gendered portrayals of the body and extreme fasting.[39] Her analysis was quite different from Julia Bolton Holloway's assertion in the introduction to her 1991 book, which hypothesized that women were "driven to anorexic fasting…in the face of their powerlessness" in a society that restricted female authorship and learning.[40]

The analysis that is closest in scope to my own is Julia M.H. Smith's "The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe c 780-920." Dr. Smith discussed the portrayal of female sanctity in Carolingian hagiographies, linking the themes to historical context and comparing them to Merovingian expressions of sanctity. She provided a details-rich analysis that examined female sanctity on political, social, and cultural levels, primarily using female hagiographies. At times she included terminology that seems inappropriately applied to a time

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[38] Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister: 500 to 900,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 99.
[39] Caroline Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," in *Food and culture: a reader,* ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 128 .
[40] Julia Bolton Holloway, Constance S. Wright, and Joan Cechtold, eds, *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages,* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 6.

period which has little context for her feminist sociopolitical agenda—such as when she says that images of female saints were "subordinated" to literary conventions—yet her bias does not detract from the utility of the examples she provided.[41] Smith ultimately argued that women were portrayed "in terms of an essentially male notion of sanctity," in a dominant hagiographical condition that was "male, patrisitic, [and] canonical."[42]

The feminist and oppression-centric interpretation of female hagiography was controversially challenged by John Kitchen in his 1998 book *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender*. Kitchen claimed that authors like Smith, who had as their goals "peculiarly modern concerns," had left the field bereft of "a basic methodology for even considering the question of female saints and writers."[43] In his understanding, the "scholarly consensus" regarding Merovingian female saints and misogynistic authorship was not adequately substantiated because in completely focusing on texts about females in order to distinguish the female elements of the literature from the male, the authors had ignored historical realities.[44] Instead of attributing the differences in female hagiographies "only to the misogyny of the hagiographers and their patriarchal church," Kitchen attempted to "offer a literary explanation based on the depiction of women in the hagiography" before the Merovingian era and compared to their male contemporaries.[45] He compared the works about male and female saints written by Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus, contrasting the ways that the men constructed gendered texts. Using this altered methodology, Kitchen showed that the depictions of saints were remarkably similar regardless of the gender of the saint or the text's

[41] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 17, 18, and 25.
[42] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 20 and 17.
[43] Kitchen, *Saints' Lives,*15.
[44] Kitchen, *Saints' Lives,* Introduction.
[45] Kitchen, *Saints' Lives,*124.

author, suggesting that historical realities may have been more important than individuals' gendered experiences.

Despite Kitchen's critique, historiography focused on the oppression of historical actors continued. In the introduction to their1999 book about female-centric history, Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser declared that "European women…would live in a culture whose values, laws, images, and institutions decreed their inferiority and enforced their subordination to men. Female subordination was the most powerful and enduring tradition inherited by European women."[46] Instead of focusing on the ways in which women were active participants in European culture, values, laws, images, and institutions, Anderson and Zinsser represented European men as the sole political and cultural actors.

Similarly, Jo Ann McNamara's "Chastity as a Third Gender in the History and Hagiography of Gregory of Tours," was framed with a discussion about the subservience, oppression, and domination of Merovingian women. At times her analysis seemed to be biased with her own opinion about marriage, such as when she stated that "the virginity movement freed women from the subordination of marriage" or that nuns were women who had "escaped the domination of their husband."[47] In the end, she concluded that Gregory of Tours used a third gender to "depress" women, and that women were "forever relegated to some degree of unmanliness," arguing that the making of sanctity was a male-centric endeavor.[48]

The previous three decades of gendered historiography were well summed up in the introduction to Brubaker and Smith's collection *Gender in the Early Medieval World.* The authors presented a useful discussion of "gender politics and gender studies," especially noting

[46] Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present,* (New York: Harper, 1988), 84.
[47] McNamara, "Chastity as a Third Gender," 204.
[48] McNamara, "Chastity as a Third Gender," 207, 199.

those texts studying the lives of Merovingian and Carolingian female saints.[49] By divorcing the "gendered individual from genital anatomy and…biological determinism," Brubaker and Smith instead looked at the ways in which "language, social situation, and power" effected the lives of individual women.[50] Brubaker and Smith attempted to break free from analyses which study "women" as a single homogeneous group, instead looking to establish the "distinctiveness of women's lives and cultural expressions."[51] These goals were represented in the included texts. In "Gendering Courts in the Early Medieval West," Janet Nelson explored the role of women as "negotiators, as emblems and purveyors of symbolic status, as nurturers and educators of young of both sexes," and as conscious actors in the construction of court society.[52] In "Men, Women, and Liturgical Practice," Gisela Muschiol was quick to agree that "men created this image of female sanctity," yet went on to argue that it is then "particularly remarkable" that the image the male authors created for women allowed them to live in an "equality of the sexes," since "spiritual prowess remained independent of early medieval notions of gender."[53] By establishing gender as a lens to study cultural and political expression rather than simplified hierarchical power structures, the authors included in *Gender in the Early Medieval World* made observations about the contributions and experiences of women rather that went beyond identifying their "oppression."

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[49] Brubaker and Smith, *Gender in the Early Medieval World,* 7.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Brubaker and Smith, *Gender in the Early Medieval World,* 9 and 10; for a comprehensive overview of gender as a historiographical tool, see Brubaker and Smith, *Gender in the Early Medieval World,* 7.
[52] Janet L. Nelsen, "Gendering courts in the early medieval west," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World,* ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 195.
[53] Gisela Muschiol, "Men women and liturgical practice in the early medieval west," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World,* ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 212.

The study of gendered sanctity, motivated and complicated by the postmodern social history and feminist theory movements, provides a complicated lens through which to examine the lives of Frankish women.

The Ideals of Female Sanctity in Merovingian and Carolingian Vitae

I begin by examining the expectations of gender and sanctity that the Frankish people inherited from their Roman and Germanic predecessors in order to contextualize my analysis of Frankish gendered expectations. I do not seek to provide a complete historical background of the complex and bewilderingly large (five-hundred year) time period in which the Frankish kingdoms ruled, but I will present a brief summary of the most relevant social, political, cultural, and religious features of the Merovingian and Carolingian eras in order to contextualize my analyses of the primary sources.

I will analyze Merovingian sanctity in the context of two saints' hagiographies: Genovefa of Paris and Radegund of Poitiers.[54] For the Carolingians, I will use hagiographies of Liutbirga of Wendhausen and Hathumoda of Gandersheim.[55] I will summarize what historians know of each holy woman and the author of her *vita.* I will provide an analysis of each *vita*, focusing on the thematic elements which the author used to represent the sanctity of the subject. I acknowledge that my analysis of each text is severely limited by my inability to read the documents in their original language, though I am emboldened by Fouracre and

[54] Genovefa is also known as Genevieve and Genoveva. Radegund is also known as Rhadegund, Radegonde, and Radigund. I chose to represent the saints using the Merovingian Latin spelling along the lines of Jo Ann McNamara, who translated their *vitae.*

[55] I spell these women's names along the lines of Paxton, the translator of their *vitae.*

Gerberding's assertion that the hagiographical genre features little "sub-text of opposition or dissent" which I could miss in translation.[56]

I will compare the themes represented in the *vitae*, identifying the common elements as candidates for the time period's expectations of female sanctity. I will attempt to contextualize my analysis in relation to the larger hagiographic corpus of the time period, including male hagiography, but I do not seek to build an argument about the ways in which female sanctity differs (or does not differ) from expectations of male sanctity—such an analysis would require a close reading of male hagiography in addition to an analysis of female hagiography. Similarly, I will avoid making comments relating the experiences of Frankish women to my post-modern notion of gender roles, though I acknowledge that my personal bias is impossible to completely avoid.

By comparing the Merovingian and Carolingian expectations of sanctity, I will link the differences in gendered construction of sanctity to differences in the sociopolitical context between the eras. The limited scope of this project restricts me from broadly applying the results of my analysis to the time periods studied, but I will make suggestions regarding the applicability of my proposed model(s). Finally, I will end my analysis by examining the *vita* of Clothild, a Merovingian woman whose text was constructed by a Carolingian author, providing an example of the ways in which the different Merovingian and Carolingian expectations of sanctity are expressed over the evolution of the historical memory of a single saint.[57]

Using this methodology, I will argue that the ideals of sanctity presented in the hagiographies of female saints in Frankish Gaul evolved over time and were predicated on

[56] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 42.
[57] Clothild is also spelled Clotilde, Clotilda, Clotild, Rotilde, Chrodechildis, Chlodechildis, etc. I chose to use the Merovingian spelling proposed by Jo Ann McNamara.

political, cultural, and social realities. Merovingian saints, tasked with exemplifying sanctity and the power of the Church in the sociopolitical chaos following the fall of Rome, produced sanctity through lifelong piety, political activity, grandiose miracles, ascetic self-limitation, and a complicated negotiation of gender ideals inherited from Roman and Germanic sources. Carolingian saints, faced with a strong, centralized, and ritualized empire, were tasked with promoting sanctity that inspired readers and listeners to conform to standardized institutions. In order to do so, their sanctity was constructed with an emphasis on lifelong piety, ascetic self-limitation, family structure, ritualistic practices, and deference to Church elites. Saints' hagiographies were conformed to the standards of sanctity experienced by the author, rather than the expectations of sanctity that would have been experienced by the saint in her own life. Using these saints as a case study, I look beyond the scope of previous authors analyzing gendered "oppression" to situate Frankish female sanctity in a dialogue with the more complex historical realities inherent in the construction of gender and sanctity.

Chapter 1: Merovingian Sanctity

Inheritance of Frankish Gaul

The expectations of female sanctity foisted upon the saints of Frankish Gaul and addressed by their biographers did not appear in a vacuum—rather, they were the product of the religious and social realities of the time. Merovingian culture was rooted in an amalgamation of a Christian heritage that they purported to share with Rome, a distinctly Germanic legacy, and the experiences of pre-Merovingian inhabitants of Gaul. Drawing on this complicated legacy, the founders of Frankish Gaul carried different perceptions of sanctity and the role of women in society, thereby creating a set of contradictory ideals that set the stage for the gendered *vitae* of the female Merovingian saints.

Legacy of Gendered Expectations

Roman Christianity was founded on religious conflict; the supposed execution of the Messiah at the hands of the Roman state elite and the persecution of the followers of the religion during state-sponsored executions forged a religion set in conflict with the established government and larger Roman society. The Roman patriarchs, though free of state-sponsored persecution since the conversion of Constantine I in 313, continued to represent their faith as besieged by the heresies and moral ineptitude around it. The dominant theology at the time, which would come to be known as Catholicism, defended itself staunchly against the heretical Arian and Manicheism interpretations of the Christian canon and the real or imagined threat of paganism. Defending themselves against these heresies required the patriarchs to work diligently through sermons and various writings to establish "correct" Christian thinking, and they wrote about topics ranging from soul-body dualism to the meaning of time (and this just

in St. Augustine's *Confessions* alone!). One particular target of their ruminations was the role of women, both in the church legal structure and in the world as a whole.

While late Roman women were afforded some legal rights, including the freedom to inherit property, they were not free of the double standard of sexual behavior which existed within society.[58] Upper class women were held to their role as dutiful wives and mothers, while lower class women were often sexually exploited, leading to a characterization of such women as licentious.[59] While the Christianization of the late Roman Empire allowed women to "develop self-esteem as spiritual beings who possessed the same potential for moral perfection as men," its impact on the role of women was tempered by the dialogue of church patriarchs at the time, whose texts often mirrored the polarizing view that Roman society held of women as dutiful mothers or sex objects. [60]

To late antique Christian writers, women were "a creature of extremes: as the daughter of Eve, a vain and deceitful temptress, or as a chaste and dutiful virgin and mother imitating Mary."[61] The moral deficiency of Eve, seen as the legacy of all women, was viewed by Avictus of Vienne, a Gallo-Roman prelate, as an argument for legal subjection; "for acting as temptress," he wrote, "woman was to serve and fear the man who had been her companion before the Fall."[62] Some fathers, such as Ambrosiaster, justified the legal subjugation of women by questioning whether women were even made in the image of man:

> How can one say about the woman that she is in the image of God when she is subject to the domination of her husband and is not allowed to have any authority. She cannot teach, testify, act as a surety, or serve as a judge; hence, she surely cannot rule.[63]

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[58] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 16.
[59] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 17.
[60] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 19.
[61] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 22.
[62] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 30.
[63] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 23.

On the other hand, Ambrose insisted that women held a role in the redemption of the world:

> As sin began with women, so the good also begins with women, that women too, leaving aside female doings, abandon their weakness, and the soul, which has no sex, like Mary who makes no mistake, devotes itself to the religious care of chastity.[64]

In order to fulfill this role, women had to discard their licentious nature and present themselves in "meekness, modesty, humility, and obedience," establishing a gender role modeled after Mary but not necessarily representative of realities of Christian women at the time.[65] The late Roman perception of the dual nature of women was manifested in the late antique notion of women as temptresses too morally and spiritually weak to serve the church, and women as humble purveyors of the Mary-like mercy in the world.

In writing, this dramatic polarity regarding female morality seems to severely restrict the ways in which females could express their gender and their gendered sanctity. However, there also existed an ancient precedent of gender transgression—that is, the rejection of the expectations that modern scholars may identify as "gender roles." Women who surpassed the expectations of their gender, often through their adoption of qualities considered to be more representative of male gender expression, could be elevated to the status of *femina virilis* (literally "manly woman") or *virago.*[66] Christian women whose ascetic powers transcended their expected gender roles were recognized as *viragos,* exemplars not of correct female living but of a correct Christian living which transcended gender.[67] Roman Christian women, then, could be weak temptresses, chaste Marys, or sexless *viragos* elevated above their gender.

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[64] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 23.
[65] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 22.
[66] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 18.
[67] It is interesting to note that while "virago" had an apparent positive connotation during the time periods here studied (or at least was associated with sanctity), modern usage of the word often carries a less positive connotation. The Google search engine result for "virago" features the definition "a domineering, violent, or bad-

Germanic societies left fewer sources than their Roman contemporaries—much of the legacy of these people was left to the texts of the Roman historian, Tacitus (56-117), who presented a glorified view of what he considered barbaric culture as a counterpoint to the flaws he perceived in Roman culture. Tacitus mentioned women frequently in his description of the Germanic tribes. German women were respected as mother and wife, and expected to "share hard work and peril" alongside men, even sometimes operating in leadership roles alongside their husbands.[68] The women were held in high esteem for their "uncanny and prophetic sense," and the Germanic men purportedly consulted them for their wisdom.[69] The women were sexually reserved, nursed their own children, and had the "same dress as men," all potential critiques of Roman women's behavior rather than accurate portrayals of Germanic women.[70]

Tacitus presents Germanic women as pious yet respected leaders within society, a view that may not be representative of reality and was more likely constructed to show the barbarism of Germanic culture (to show that even barbarians who allowed women to lead society were capable of more moral lifestyles than the degenerate Romans). Recent research makes it appear more likely that women in Germanic tribes were regarded as helpmates or chattel to their male relatives, who could legally allow her purchase for marriage, or sorceresses capable of divining the future and affecting health and prosperity.[71] Whatever the true reality of the Germanic gender role expectations, it is clear that Germanic women operated in a society that

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tempered woman." The alternate definition, "a woman of masculine strength or spirit; a female warrior," is labeled "archaic."

[68] Tacitus, "The Germans," in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook,* ed. by Emilie Amt, (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 27.

[69] Tacitus, "The Germans," 26.

[70] Tacitus, "The Germans," 26, 27.

[71] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 12, 16.

presented women as dutifully helpful wives with some sort of spiritual proclivity, expectations that differed from those experienced by Roman women.

The mixing of Roman and Germanic society created an amalgamation of expectations for Merovingian female behavior. From the Christianized Roman Empire came a clear, polarized duality. Women were morally inept and weak of body and spirit; without the guidance and rule of holy men, they would fall to the temptation of sin and sexual licentiousness like the lower-class women of pre-Christian Rome or the biblical Eve. However, women were also chaste, dutiful, and pure; they had the spiritual capacity and religious obligation to overcome their feminine bodily weakness and lead humanity back to God, like the holy Virgin Mary. Roman women were called to act in the Church and further its goal of world redemption, yet they were not given a clear opportunity to do so because of gender-based restrictions, unless they transcended their gender to obtain *virago* status. This contradiction was further complicated by the mixing of Roman and Germanic traditions. Called upon as spiritual guides and mothers for a society ruled by warrior men, most Germanic women held familial and political obligations that Roman elites may not have experienced. Merovingian women needed to perform their gender in a way which took into account these complicated and contradictory gendered expectations.

Legacy of Sanctity: St. Martin of Tours (335-397)

The expectations for sanctity inherited by Merovingian authors were every bit as complicated and contradictory as their expectations of gender. Models of sanctity presented in the inherited hagiographies were variable in tone, event, and purpose. Many saints were martyrs, heroically dying for their faith. Others were ascetics, drawing away from the ungodly

realities of the world, often in solitude in the deserts. Still others were political or military leaders, providing for the Church and the peoples they ruled. The hagiography that stood as perhaps the most important model of sanctity in Gaul encompassed qualities of all three of these models.

St. Martin of Tours (335-397) was a retired military man, monk, and bishop.[72] He founded a monastery outside of Loire, in modern-day France, where he led aristocratic monks.[73] St. Martin "re-enacted…the basic Christian narrative for the spread of faith" in the fourth century by victoriously destroying pagan temples and demons, and became a local hero to a growing Christian population.[74] St. Martin's *Life* was recorded by a contemporary, Sulpicius Severus (363-425), who presented the document the year before Martin's death.[75] In the text, Martin was simultaneously a fierce and protective Christian leader, an ascetic monk, and, in Sulpicius Severus's imagination, a martyr in the sense that he "endured hardship for his faith" without actually dying. [76] This text was widely available to the holy men and women of Merovingian and Carolingian Gaul, presenting a prominent model of sanctity represented in hagiographies drafted centuries after his death. [77] Of all of the saints *Lives* written prior to the Merovingian era, St. Martin's perhaps stands as the best example of an account which could be followed formulaically to produce an acceptable version of sanctity, encompassing many of earlier models of sanctity all at once.[78]

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[72] Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013), 83.
[73] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 83.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France,* 43.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France,* 44.

Conclusions

Expectations for Merovingian female sanctity had to account for the complicated inheritance of gendered expectations and conform them to ever-evolving models of sanctity expressed by previous saints of all genders. From the martyrs of Rome to the ascetics in the deserts of Egypt, Merovingians inherited a variety of examples of sanctity. Perhaps the most influential was the cult of St. Martin, a model of sanctity that is itself often contradictory. It is in these mixed expectations that the Merovingian saints and the authors who commemorated them would ground their portrayals of Merovingian female sanctity.

Fifth-century Gaul: Upheaval and Uncertainty

Catholic Christians in Gaul, like those in the declining Roman Empire, viewed themselves as "a religion on the defensive."[79] The first Germanic group to convert en masse, the Goths, subscribed to the teachings of the Arian "heretics" rather than the orthodox Catholics, forcing Germanic Catholics to fight both pagans and heresies in the towns and countryside.[80] The Catholic church, through a vibrant network of archbishops, bishops, priests, deacons, deaconesses, subdeacons, lectors, exorcists, and a variety of lay men and women, was not officially supported by the majority of Frankish kings and was limited to the Romanized towns.[81] These towns experienced "disruptive…small, vindictive raids" at the hands of

[79] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,*106.
[80] Lesley Abrams, "Germanic Christianities," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Early Medieval Christianities c.600-c.1100,* eds. Thomas F.X. Noble and Julia M.H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 107.
[81] Thomas F. X. Noble, "The Christian church as an institution," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Early Medieval Christianities c.600-c.1100,* eds. Thomas F.X. Noble and Julia M.H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 260.

heretical factions and invading armies, presenting a need for strong leadership in both the physical and metaphysical realms.[82]

In these uncertain times, Christians looked for the manifestation of the holy in their besieged towns. Deceased saints were seen not as a distant reminder of dedication to Christianity but rather as active patrons with great power and influence in "the distant courts of Heaven."[83] The graves of martyrs and ancient cemeteries served as the foundations for the assertion that the church, though persecuted, was steeped in the power of an all-mighty God. In their roles as patrons and patronesses, saints were called upon to protect besieged cities, promote the growth of crops, cure illnesses, and guide the spread of the Church. The saints were not alone in these duties—living men and women, especially bishops in Catholic cities, served as reminders of the presence of God on Earth and acted on behalf of townspeople in their times of need. They promoted the spread of the Church, especially in the form of the buildings themselves. To the struggling towns, the physicality of the church buildings themselves spoke to the "day-to-day determination of cities to survive."[84] The newly constructed churches, "opulent as giant jewel-cases," were visible symbols of the power and grandeur of both the religion and the fortified cities, which presented "an impressive coagulation of wealth and collaborative energy."[85] The combined forces of the saints, the holy living, and the physical churches themselves showed townspeople that Gaul had not become a wasteland, but rather a vibrant center of Christian life and power.

[82] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 107.
[83] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 109.
[84] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 108.
[85] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 108.

Saint Genovefa of Paris (429-512)

Saint Genovefa was born into this period of political and social upheaval. Her hometown of Nanterre and her adopted city of Paris were situated in a wild countryside suffering from the power vacuum in Western Europe. [86] The *Life* of Genovefa, one of the only sources about this holy woman, starts with the journey in 429 of Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes, two bishops who, like their aforementioned contemporaries, were determined to spread 'correct' Christianity and eliminate heretical sects. [87] These men were on their way to Britain to fight the Pelagian heresy when they encountered Genovefa, a Germanic child growing up amidst the remnants of the crumbling Roman Empire. The bishops quickly dedicated her to a life of virgin service to the church and left her behind with her parents.[88] The relatively unstructured Christianity illustrated by their seemingly abrupt decision and the nebulous role afforded Genovefa was representative of this time period and reflected "an age when a saintly woman was free, indeed constrained, to create her own models and her own way of life."[89]

Though a consecrated virgin, "Genovefa was not bound to a rule of stability or claustration," like the saints she preceded, and she consequently enjoyed a level of political control and control over her own personal life. She lived in Paris with her godmother, tending her own fields and walking the city streets.[90] An aristocrat by birth but not part of the ruling family, Genovefa nevertheless assumed some portion of control over the city in 451 when she rallied the population against the advancing armies of Attila the Hun.[91] After rebuffing the

[86] Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Haborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992),18.
[87] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages,* 17.
[88] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages,* 17.
[89] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages,* 17, 19.
[90] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages,*19.
[91] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages,*19., Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,*109.

Hunnish army, she continued to provide for the city's population, performing dozens of miracles and acting as one of the few female patrons during this time period. Even when the city fell under the Merovingian king Childeric's siege in the late fifth century, Genovefa retained some of her political power, as seen in Childeric and his son Clovis's efforts to "maintain good relations" with the woman who "commanded immense influence and respect" in the city.[92] Genovefa died in 512 in the city which she had protected and led; she was enshrined in the basilica that she helped construct.[93]

The Life *of Genovefa*

> "The Bishops Martin and Anianus have been greatly praised for their amazing virtues… aren't the same honors due to Genovefa, who drove away the same army by her prayers so that it would not surround Paris?" –anonymous *Life* of Saint Genovefa[94]

Alhough the *Life* of Genovefa has been dismissed by some as a mere retelling of the tales of "antique Gallic goddesses of corns and rivers," it is more often than not accepted as a portrayal of the Parisian patroness drafted by an anonymous monk around 520.[95] Some aspects of the text, such as its uncompromisingly anti-Arian elements, suggest that the *Life* may even have been commissioned by Clovis's wife Saint Clothild, who promoted Genovefa's cult in Paris after the saint's death.[96] Regardless of the authorship or political intentions behind the document, it serves as a fascinating window through which to view the establishment of the ideals of female sanctity in early Frankish Gaul.

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[92] Marilyn Dunn, *Belief and Religion in Barbarian Europe c. 350-700,* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 90.
[93] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*,36.
[94] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa, Virgin of Paris (423-502)," in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, ed. and trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John H. Halborg, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 24.
[95] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*,17.
[96] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*,18.

In order to identify the traits which the author used to construct Genovefa's sanctity, we look to the common themes repeated throughout the text. One of the most striking thematic features of the *Life* of Genovefa is the constant presence of miracles, illustrating that Genovefa manifested power within society in both the spiritual and political realms. Her spiritual relationship with God and her purity of heart were affirmed by the visions she receives of the "rewards which God prepares for those who love him."[97] She used this relationship with God to produce a truly bewilderingly large array of miracles which showcased her spiritual power and ability to affect the reality of the world around her. Extinguished candles placed into Genovefa's hand "immediately lit up again."[98] The miraculous fragments of these candles often went on to heal "invalids."[99] She cured a girl who had been paralyzed for nine years and a maid who had not been able to walk for two years by touching their limbs.[100] By invoking Christ's help, Genovefa was able to free twelve Parisian men and women from demonic possession.[101] She raised a young boy from the dead, cured illnesses for townspeople, and restored withered limbs.[102] Even the fringes torn from her garments had the capacity to heal those of "diverse infirmities."[103] However, Genovefa's power did not appear to stop with merely raising the dead or curing illness through clothing fragments—she also used her power to assist her community and further her political goals.

Genovefa's *Life* recounts a series of political miracles that showed her devotion to the Church and the saints before her, her promotion of the city of Paris, and even her willingness to break laws to achieve a religious aim. The author showcased her public devotion to Saints

[97] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 22.
[98] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 26.
[99] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 27.
[100] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 27, 28.
[101] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 29.
[102] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 30, 31.
[103] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 31.

Denis, Rusticus, and Eleutherius, recounting how she appealed to the priests of the city Catalacus in order to build a basilica in the area. According to the text, the priests met with her willingly and supported her efforts, but explained that they could not honor her wishes because they had no means of boiling the necessary lime. With divine intervention, Genovefa directed them to never-before-found lime kilns and even refilled the water vessels of workers that later came to help with the construction, using her miracles to publicly promote the Church and her saints by establishing a sanctioned basilica.[104] In addition to reaffirming Genovefa's status as a miracle worker, these cases placed her actions within the context of the established and growing Church, especially in relation to the importance of saintly patrons and physical church buildings in supporting the institution.

Though Genovefa's miracles were by no means restricted to Paris, her *Life* makes it clear that many served to promote and protect her adopted town and its occupants, strengthening the town into a regional capital and promoting her as a local patroness.[105] She protected the city by dispelling bad weather and disease.[106] When Attila the Hun threatened Paris in 451, Genovefa took a leadership role in the city, persuading the "men that they should not remove their goods from Paris;" she convinced the matrons, meanwhile, to "undertake a series of fasts, prayers, and vigils in order to ward off the threatening disaster."[107] Though her leadership was met with resistance from the townspeople, the Hunnish army ultimately retreated and Genovefa was credited in part with their leaving Paris unscathed. When the town was stricken by famine, she used her influence to bring supplies to the Parisians, feeding "those whose strength had been sapped by hunger" with loaves from her own table and soliciting

[104] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 26.
[105] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 34.
[106] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 35.
[107] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 23.

support from other regions.[108] The true miracle in this particular situation occurred not with her Christ-like sympathy for the starving, however; when sailors delivering supplies to the townspeople were stopped by a tree and tormented by sea monsters, they appealed to the patroness, whose guidance and prayers allowed their safe travel and delivered the starving Parisians.[109] These miracles and the others that she performed in Paris led the townspeople to praise God, and they led the saint "from the town singing praises and exulting."[110] The inclusion of Genovefa's miracles in Paris served to establish her as a patroness of the city during a time period when besieged cities were looking to the leadership of both holy men and women.

The author of Genovefa's *Life* made it clear that her leadership was not always well received by the leaders of the town. Despite this, she miraculously managed to evade both laws and the authority of the Merovingian kings, thus showing that her actions had divine sanction. When King Childeric attempted to close the gates of the town to keep Genovefa from saving captives intended for execution, she opened the doors "without a key," doing her heavenly-inspired duty without the interference of the town's secular ruler.[111] When a group of young maidens was forced into undesirable but clearly legal marriages, Genovefa opened the locked gates of the church before the fleeing women, allowing them to escape their betrothed.[112] By transcending the laws of the secular rulers of the land, Genovefa continued to affirm her divine-given power and assert the power of the religion (and, by extension, the Church) over the rulers of the land. The many miracles performed by Genovefa confirmed her status as a

[108] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 23.
[109] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 31.
[110] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 28.
[111] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 28.
[112] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 28.

worker of holy wonders and affirm the role and power of the Church during a time fraught with political, social, and religious uncertainty.

The miracles presented in the *Life* of Genovefa are not the only theme used to establish her sanctity. The *Life* of Genovefa also highlighted the saint's unusually mature religious experiences at a young age, a quality that the author used multiple times to assure readers of her holiness and worthiness as a religious figure, leader, and saint. The *Life* began with the discovery of Genovefa as a child. Saint Germanus, passing through the city, was drawn to the infant Genovefa's presence, holy enough to distinguish her from a large crowd of "both sexes, men, women and children."[113] The bishop called the girl forward, proclaiming her worthiness by saying that the "worshipful offspring" was celebrated as a "mystery of great joy and exultation" by angels upon her birth.[114] The child, though remembered as being an "infant" at the time, responded to the bishop with the markedly mature response, "your servant hears you, holy father. Tell me what you command."[115] The bishop requested that Genovefa take a religious vow at their first meeting without any apparent reservations regarding the child's ability to keep such a promise. After her vow, the young saint performed miracles, healing her mother's deafness before she was old enough to leave the house. [116] When Genovefa was finally old enough to be consecrated, she was deemed both more prepared and more meritorious than other virgins her age. Indeed, Bishop Vilicius noted her "sanctification in heaven."[117] Nowhere in this document was any mention made of adolescent mistakes or growing pains—even the child version of Genovefa was competent, holy, and ready to lead. From the beginning of the *Life* of Genovefa, the saint was portrayed as wiser, more mature, and

[113] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 20.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 21.
[117] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 22.

more holy than her years as she was established not as a child but rather as a growing religious leader.

The worthiness of Genovefa as a religious leader was further confirmed by the endorsement of the saint by various religious figures throughout her *Life*. Simeon of Cilicia, the notable ascetic later known as Simeon Stylites III, was remembered for having "made eager inquiries about Genovefa…and [having] asked [merchants] to greet her and convey his veneration for her."[118] In addition to his explicit endorsement of the young Genovefa, bishop Germanus returned again later in the narrative to reaffirm her sanctity. When Genovefa attempts to take control of Paris to prevent the Hunnish occupation, she was accused of being a "false prophetess" by citizens "conspiring to punish [her] either by stoning or drowning her in the boundless deep."[119] These "unjust" words of the "common people who prefer to carp at goodness rather than imitate it" may have led to the martyrdom of the saint, save for the arrival of Germanus, who dispelled the claim that Genovefa was "not as great as he [had initially] thought she was" by declaring her to be "a most faithful servant of God."[120] This incident is notable for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it provided the author with another place in which to present a notable figure's endorsement of the saint's actions. Secondly, it raises a question about the extent to which women (and other unofficial church leaders) could claim divine inspiration. Genovefa had clearly established herself as a miracle worker and church advocate earlier in her life; why then did it take the word of a bishop to prevent the townspeople from executing her? This conundrum was raised by the author of the *Life* him/herself, who recalled that the Bishops Martin and Anianus "have been greatly praised" following their repelling of the Hunnish army and asked "aren't the same honors due to Genovefa, who drove away the

[118] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 28.
[119] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 23.
[120] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 22-23.

same army by her prayers so that it would not surround Paris?"[121] Though gender was never raised as a reason for this disparity in treatment, it is plausible that Genovefa's actions were not as well received because of her unofficial status as a female holy person. While the endorsements of Genovefa's sainthood served as a reminder of her worthiness as a religious leader, they may have also been used to show that Genovefa was acknowledged by her specifically male religious contemporaries, a notably gendered portrayal.

Genovefa's gender was also notably illustrated in her relationship to her body. Just as the Roman Church Fathers described females as being bodily weak, Genovefa was described as lying stricken during illness, "her severely afflicted body [lying] imprisoned by [the] infirmity."[122] She was remembered as severely restricting her body and bodily needs in order to overcome her weakness. According to her biographer, Genovefa did not break her "Sunday to Thursday and Thursday to Sunday" fast from her "fifteenth to her fiftieth year."[123] Her diet "consisted of barley bread and beans, which she stirred with oil into a new batch every two or three weeks" and she abstained from "wine or any intoxicating beverage."[124] She was reported to only have broken her fast at the behest of the bishops, "whom it is sacrilege to contradict."[125] By specifically rejecting the needs of her afflicted body until requested to do otherwise by leading men of the church, Genovefa seems to have been acting in dialogue with the expectations of feminine bodily weakness preached by the Roman Church fathers. This seemingly deliberate act on behalf of her biographer could illustrate that these ideas regarding the female body were present during the lifetime of Genovefa (or at least during the lifetime of

[121] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 24.
[122] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 22.
[123] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 24.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.

the author) and that at least some perceptions of female holiness necessitated the rejection of the gendered body in order to portray sanctity.

Another expectation of the Church Fathers regarding female sanctity was the rejection of the lust and licentiousness regarded as common in the gender that began with Eve. What better way to "devote [oneself] to the religious care of chastity," as Ambrose had suggested, than to dedicate oneself as a virgin? According to her *Life,* the child Genovefa was approached with the call to religious life, but it was not a call to mere religious practice—she was specifically entreated to "preserve [her] body immaculate and intact, consecrated as a bride of Christ in sanctimony."[126] The bride role here was not the literal motherhood that Germanic tradition would have promoted. Rather, the author had bishop Germanus telling the child virgin to "act manfully," calling upon God for "strength and fortitude."[127] Instead of guiding Genovefa toward the trappings and adornments of worldly feminine life, Germanus "plucked a copper coin bearing the sign of the cross from the ground…and gave it to her as a great gift, recommending that Genovefa "wear [the coin] always around [her] neck," lest a preoccupation "with trivial worldly adornment" lead her to be "shorn of eternal and celestial ornaments."[128] By associating virginity with manliness, strength, and the rejection of female dress and standards, the author of this text seemed to be positioning Genovefa in the role of a *virago.* By casting off their feminine ways, *viragos* could stand amongst holy men as a sort of third gender which, as Ambrose had earlier recommended, "has no sex." By framing Genovefa as a "manly" virgin, the author explicitly portrayed the saint as casting aside her gender for the sake of holiness, suggesting that female sanctity was dependent upon rejection of the female gender altogether (at least in this portrayal).

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[126] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 20.
[127] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 21.
[128] Ibid

The "manly" actions expected of *viragos* were portrayed in instances of Genovefa's violent revenge. When her mother refused to act on Genovefa's wishes to take her to church on solemn feast day, God "demonstrate[d] Genovefa's grace" by striking her mother blind for "two years less three months."[129] The remorseful child eventually helped restore her mother's sight by signing well water with the "power of the cross."[130] When a "little thief" secretly stole her shoes, "Heaven… avenged Genovefa's injury on her" by causing the girl to go blind until she had apologized to the saint.[131] A woman who interrupted Genovefa on the holy day of Epiphany due to curiosity rather than faith was immediately struck blind, though Genovefa restored her sight at the end of the holy observation.[132] When a man refused her advice to forgive his servant, he was struck with a fever and was forced to appeal to her again for help.[133] While each occurrence was not explicitly ordered by Genovefa herself, these incidences nevertheless presented a more sinister side to the saint's miraculous powers. These cases presented an explicit warning against defying God's will and the will of the Church. They provided an outlet in which to portray Genovefa's holy mercy and forgiveness. Perhaps most importantly, they reinforced the power of the *virago* by portraying the more menacing, unfeminine power made capable by the casting off of gender.

Interestingly, there were notable exceptions to the portrayal of Genovefa as a *virago*, rejecting her female body and gender: the constant presence of tears throughout her *Life.* The "cult of tears" was usually associated with twelfth-century private spirituality, but as early as the Merovingian period, Genovefa's tears cured demonic possession and helped raise children

[129] Ibid.
[130] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 22.
[131] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 27.
[132] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 30.
[133] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 33.

from the dead.[134] She "dissolved into tears" every time she "contemplated Heaven."[135] Upon finding the lime kilns necessary to build the basilica for Saint Denis, Genovefa cried "tears of joy" and "spent the whole night kneeling on the ground, weeping and praying."[136] Her tears repelled storms.[137] While this "cult of tears" was not exclusive to women, it nevertheless focused on a bodily function that may have reminded readers more of feminine weakness than bodily rejection.

The *Life* of Genovefa ended with her death at the "ripe old age" of eighty, when she was "buried peacefully."[138] Supplicants found forgiveness and healing at her tomb, which soon became the site of a basilica built by the Frankish King Clovis and finished by Queen Clothild after his death.[139] Thanks in part to the persistence of her *Life* and through the growing importance of Paris as a capital city, Genovefa retained a following centuries after her death; her tomb was one of the dozen ornately decorated by Eligius in the sixth century and her memory is still celebrated by Parisians into the twenty-first century.[140] Genovefa is popularly remembered as a miraculous protector of Paris, a role in which she seemingly excels in death as much as in life.

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[134] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 29, 30.
[135] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 24.
[136] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 26.
[137] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 35.
[138] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 36.
[139] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Genovefa," 37.
[140] Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms: 450-751,* (New York: Longman, 1994), 220.

Conclusion

The sanctity of Genovefa was constructed throughout her *Life* using the repetition of a handful of themes. Most evident, perhaps, is the document's emphasis on miracles. Throughout the text Genovefa performed a multitude of miracles which operated on a variety of scales and accomplished an assortment of tasks. Small, individual, and personal miracles like the lighting of candles and the curing of the sick presented Genovefa's credentials as an active holy woman and a worker of wonders. More public, large-scale miracles promoted the Church in the region, presented Genovefa as a patroness of Paris, and demonstrated her religious authority in the face of political adversity. These miracles, however, were not the only ways in which the anonymous author presented Genovefa's sanctity and religious authority. She was presented as holy from birth and continually drew endorsements of her holiness from other religious figures, illustrating the construction of the saint as a member of both the metaphysical and physical worlds' religious structures. She rejected her bodily needs, such as the need to eat, established herself as a consecrated virgin, and performed a series of vengeful actions, constructing herself as a *virago* outside the Church Father's Eve-Mary duality. However, her miracles were often associated with tears, an interesting aberration from the rejection of her bodily processes and gendered actions. The interplay of themes throughout the *Life* of Saint Genovefa of Paris presented her sanctity and religious power as the product of her rejection of feminine characteristics, though a few exceptions expose the complicated nature of sanctity during the social and cultural upheaval of the fifth century.

Merovingian Gaul

When the Western Roman administration broke down in the late fifth century, northern Gaul became even wilder than it had been at the beginning of Genovefa's life.[141] This wildness and its rejection of structured Roman society was not universally bemoaned; the ultimate victor of the factional structure in Frankish Gaul, the Merovingians, were said not to be descended from the Roman aristocracy but rather from "a Frankish queen who had coupled with a sea monster when swimming in the North Sea, the legendary home of heroes."[142] Leaders were now distinguished not by their learned, senatorial civility, but rather by their battle prowess—they soon were buried with "weapons, fine brooches, and heavy belts."[143] Women played an active role in the righting of this society in upheaval; the amalgamation of the Frankish people was forged in part through aristocratic marriages, placing an importance on women as a transmitter of ethnicities and mixed cultural heritages.[144] Perhaps more importantly, however, pious women served as signs of sanctity, actively serving as a bridge between the ordered Roman world and the unknown society being forged in its wake.

Young women were often used as an example of family piety.[145] Virginity continued to be an important sign of feminine piety and the piety of the family in general. Pious households isolated their virgin at the back of the house so that she was only seen at the local church and the local virgins' choir.[146] The enclosed, faceless virgin became a "human relic, encased in the midst of a city," placing "sanctity in the very heart of the profane world."[147] The sanctity represented by these women's virginity was seen as the tangible proof that their souls were

[141] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 134.
[142] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 134.
[143] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 134.
[144] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 9.
[145] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 226.
[146] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 226.
[147] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 226.

"intact" because their bodies were "intact," since they had not "suffered the penetration of intercourse or the disruption of childbirth."[148] The glorification of the female body was further reinforced in the legal codes, which entitled the family of bodily injured women "to twice the compensation allowed for a man."[149] The presence of unharmed, pious virgins provided a certainty of holiness, made even more spectacular because it was presented in a female body, determined by the late antique church thinkers as weakened by temptation.[150]

The sacred piety of women, whose bodily weakness suggested the profane, presented women with the unique role of "bridge between the new, barbarian, military elites of northern Gaul and what had previously been a largely 'Roman' form of religion" in the civilian south.[151] The martial requirements of kingship left little outlet for monastic retirement or pious religious reflection for royal men, providing an opening for women to "become the 'religious specialists' of royal houses."[152] Merovingian queens "played major roles in conversion narratives," participated in ecclesiastical culture, maintained an active role in dynastic politics, and often became family saints.[153] Of course, not all Germanic queens acted as meek and pious religious helpmates—Fredegund, while acting as a regent for her son, "gathered an army, camouflaged her retainers as trees, and led them in a surprise attack against the Austrasians and Burgundians," returning home with "much booty and many spoils."[154] More commonly, however, women embodied the Christian ideals of "generosity to the poor" and "secret piety." The Burgundian King Chilperic II's wife Queen Caratene (d. 493), despite her status as royalty

[148] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 227.
[149] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 29.
[150] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 227.
[151] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 228.
[152] Lesley Abrams, "Germanic Christianities," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity Volume 3: Early Medieval Christianities, c. 500-c. 1100*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 122.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 28.

in a "hard-driving, largely military court," ministered to the poor and wore a secret hair skirt beneath her royal robes, bringing "a sliver of holiness" to the still-pagan courts of Gaul.[155]

Like his father Childeric (440-482), the founder of the Merovingian dynasty, Clovis (c.466-511) started his rule as a pagan, though the active Catholic bishopric encouraged him to rule justly in the name of their God.[156] Clovis made offers to appease Catholic church leaders, including Saint Genovefa, yet took his queen Clothild, daughter of Chilperic II and Queen Caratene, from the possibly Arian Burgundians and remained carefully pagan.[157] Though he issued laws like a pagan leader while he amalgamated territory for his kingdom, Clovis "deliberately sought an oracle from the Catholic shrine of Saint Martin of Tours" to assist him with an upcoming battle.[158] With the famous saint and the Catholic Church's support, Clovis defeated the rival Visigothic kingdom, solidifying Frankish Gaul in 507. Supposedly in response to a battlefield promise to convert, Clovis was baptized on Christmas Day 508, along with his entire army.[159] For the first time, Frankish Gaul was united under a Catholic king.

Merovingian Christianity was heterogeneous and "intensely localized."[160] By the sixth century, each city identified with its bishop and its "own galaxy of local saints," and came to resemble ceremonial centers "of the holy in midst of a profane and violent world" through the construction of dozens of churches and religious centers.[161] Bishops in this time period "poured wealth and energy into maintaining an entire urban community," solidifying "the image of the good Catholic bishop as a 'father' of his city."[162] Church men and women brought the faith

[155] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 228.
[156] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 135.
[157] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 136.
[158] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 137.
[159] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 137.
[160] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 158.
[161] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 158.
[162] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 158.

into pagan and Arian lands, spreading Catholic Christianity from the Roman Christianized town to the countryside.[163]

The efforts of active clergy and lay men and women ensured that they seldom faced "stubborn rural paganism."[164] Instead the sixth-century bishops found the countryside plagued with "home-grown Christianity," local interpretations of religious practices that claimed to be Christian yet did not align with the teaching of the church leaders.[165] Active preaching did not have as great an effect on the average person's experience of Christianity as did the spread of the Christian cult of the saints.[166] This phenomenon aimed to create "tenacious religious habits that could be observed by all members of the population," through active devotion rather than the "'ceaseless voice' of a sermonizer."[167] Royalty and peasant alike called upon their particular patron saints to intercede in their everyday lives, and the active reverence for saints grew across the countryside.

Christians looking to find manifestations of the holy also turned to their local monasteries, which underwent a similarly important transition in the sixth century. Since the Christianization of Rome, aristocratic families had diverted personal property into ecclesiastical endowments, establishing monastic communities which were subject to the rights of kin and "manifest[ed] the glory of God and of their founders in equal measure."[168] Monastic life in Gaul developed first in the southern, Romanized sections near the Mediterranean.[169] Under the protection and leadership of the local bishop, nuns clustered within the city walls

[163] Abrams, "Germanic Christianities," 108.
[164] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 550.
[165] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 147.
[166] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 154.
[167] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 154.
[168] Abrams, "Germanic Christianities," 122.
[169] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 221.

and monks populated the suburban reaches of the city, often in very small numbers.[170] Like the converted townhouses and farmhouses that held them, monasteries and convents were often inconspicuous, mere "adjuncts to religious life in the cities."[171] Life in monasteries and convents was dictated by the rules of the bishop or the other patrons of the institution, leading to variable experiences between communities and conflicted sentiment about the role of the institutions in Catholic Christian life.

The late fifth and early sixth centuries produced a variety of rules which would be used to standardize many convents and monasteries in the years to come. The *Rule* of Saint Benedict was produced in the late fifth or early sixth century for the monks at Monte Cassino.[172] Drawing from theology that declared all individuals to be converted sinners, Benedict (480-547) produced a *Rule* which went back to the "basics," educating grown men in elementary morals like a Roman school, subjecting their behavior to "meticulous supervision" and even punishment.[173] The monks were treated equally, a sentiment reinforced by a standardized dress code that required the men to wear "cheap reach-me-downs bought in a local market."[174] Under Benedict's *Rule,* monasteries became highly structured institutions dedicated to the service of the Church.

The lives of nuns in convents were similarly affected by another sixth-century *Rule,* a document produced by Caesarius of Arles (470-542) in 512 for his sister Caesaria's convent. He formed an unusually large community of two hundred women in St. John and placed their buildings up against the walls of the city of Arles, which at the time was "under constant

[170] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 221.
[171] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 221.
[172] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 225.
[173] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 225.
[174] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 225.

danger of siege."[175] Unlike many other communities which allowed the women to leave the institution at will and interact with the public and their relatives, Caesarius's nuns were kept in total seclusion and retained within the walls.[176] Like Benedict's monks, these women were subject to meticulous control as Caesarius regulated their every action, even down to their haircuts.[177] The convent that Caesarius created with his *Rule* was not an adjunct to the religious life of Arles but rather a holy place "as effective as the shrine of any local saint."[178]

The adoption of strict *Rules* helped lead a change in the way that convents and monasteries were perceived in the sixth-century West. Instead of merely being places where sheltered individuals sought holiness, convents and monasteries came to possess "a collective power of prayer that was somehow stronger than the prayers offered by any one holy person," and came to be seen as holy places in themselves.[179] Holy women "led the way" in this revolution.[180] The collection of virgin women, long held as a sign of intact purity, appeared to create the most effective "powerhouse of prayer."[181]

Caesarius's *Rule* and other works, widely read in monasteries, led to the active questioning of the patristic writings' portrayals of female sanctity.[182] Through his *Rule* and his sermons, Caesarius actively promoted a rethinking of the classical Church teaching that women were morally inferior to men, unmasking the "hypocrisy of men who wanted to marry virgins, expected fidelity from their wives, and loved chastity in them and required it from their daughters while they sought sexual exploits and even boasted about them to their friends."[183]

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[175] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 228.
[176] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 228.
[177] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 228.
[178] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 228.
[179] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 226.
[180] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 226.
[181] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 227.
[182] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 25.
[183] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 24.

While Caesarius certainly did not motivate a revolution in regards to the understanding of female sanctity (a late-century synod at Auxerre asserted that "women by nature were impure" and "had to be veiled in the presence of sacraments") it nevertheless provided another option for the portrayal of female sanctity. [184] It was no longer necessary (or perhaps no longer an option) for women to be declared virgins and lead a city like Genovefa had less than a century before. Now women could establish or join female-only convents that served not as a place to hide away licentious women but rather as a powerhouse of prayer designed to save cities and even whole monarchies.

St. Radegund of Poitiers (518/520-587)

The famous Frankish queen Saint Radegund was not born Frankish, but came into her relative political power as a spoil of war. To the east of the Frankish lands sat the kingdom of Thuringia, under the rule of the brothers Berthar, Heremenefrid, and Baderic. In the early sixth century, Heremenefrid approached the Frankish king Clovis's son Theodoric I, asking for assistance in defeating Baderic and, according to the Frankish author Gregory of Tours, offering half of the Thuringian kingdom in exchange for help.[185] Baderic and Berthar were killed by Heremenefrid, whose wife Amalaberga was left to raise Berthar's surviving son and young daughter Radegund, who had been born at Erfut around 518/520.[186] When Heremenefrid failed to keep his end of the bargain with the Franks in 531, the kingdom of Thuringia was attacked and destroyed by Theodoric I and his brother, Blothar I. When the brothers had sacked

[184] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 141.
[185] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms,* 50.
[186] Marcelle Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women: An Anthology. Second Edition,* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1994), 85.

the kingdom, Clothar I won Radegund and her brother "by lot or combat at his share of the spoils."[187]

In Clothar's court at Athies Radegund was converted to Christianity, though it is not known from what belief system she was converted, and taught in the ways of the Church Fathers.[188] In 540 Radegund became the fifth of Clothar's seven official wives.[189] Her contemporary, Fortunatus, describes her time at court of one as conflict; Radegund's piety often clashed with her roles in the Merovingian ruling household, including her obligations to the king. Though she "provoked the king's annoyance for her many pieties and mortifications," Clothar appeared to tolerate Radegund's shirking of her duties.[190] However, when Radegund learned that Clothar had ordered her brother killed she "fled to Noyon, where she persuaded Bishop Medard to consecrate her as a deaconess."[191]

Radegund's status meant that she had supporters in the Church like the Bishop Medard, who "could shield her from the brutality of her husband and ease her transition into widowhood or divorced status."[192] Medard agreed to her request, despite the threat of Clothar's pursuing army, when she "placed her jewels and richly ornmented robes on the altar and demanded consecration."[193] By dedicating her to the consecrated life, Medard established Radegund as one of two deaconesses in the first quarter of the sixth century (the other being Helaria, the daughter of Remy, bishop of Reims), confirming her in a fairly nebulous religious role that, like clergy, ranked higher than virgins or holy widows.[194]

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[187] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women,* 86.
[188] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women,* 86; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms,*50.
[189] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women,*86.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society,* 61.
[193] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women,* 86.
[194] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society,* 139-140.

Free from her husband for a time, Radegund made a pilgrimage to St. Martin's tomb at Tours before continuing on to a villa in Saix, "where she extended food, baths and treatment to the sick and needy."[195] She traveled to Poitiers where she was pursued again by Clothar. With the help of Bishop Germanus of Paris, she dissuaded Clothar from insisting on her return. Clothar accepted Radegund's request and donated the buildings that Radegund used to establish her female monastery of Notre Dame at Poitiers. The buildings were consecrated and the nuns professed by Bishop Germanus in 553, forming a community run under the *Rule* of Caesarius.[196]

Poitiers, as a "royally patronized convent" became "an ancillary form of courtly society," allowing educated elite Christian women to live out more roles than simply converting their husbands.[197] Though Radegund attempted to take on the role of a normal nun by appointing Agnes as abbess over her, she was still a former queen.[198] She retained some benefits of her royal status, keeping up her outside contacts and wielding considerable influence, especially with the Merovingian royal family.[199] According to Gregory of Tours, when Gundovald made his 580s bid for the throne "based on his claim to Merovingian blood" as a son of Clothar I, he claimed to "have the support of Radegund" and another wife, Ingitrude.[200] In another example, Radegund intervened when Reccared attempted to marry Chilperic's daughter Basina, a nun at Poitiers, forcing the Visigothic prince to marry Rigunth instead.[201]

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[195] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women,* 87.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Nelson, "Gendering Courts," 185-198 187-188.
[198] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms,* 137.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms,* 94.
[201] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms,* 138.

Radegund's connections did not stop with just the royal Merovingian family and the bishops—she carried on a correspondence after 567 with Caesaria, who helped guide the nuns at Poitiers through the *Rule* dictated by her brother, St. Caesarius.[202] Radegund regularly called for "intercessory prayers on behalf of king, people and country," situating her monastery firmly in the spiritual and political niche created by Caesarius's convent at Arles.[203] Though Caesaria had warned Radegund to "flee from the presence of men" to avoid lust, she nevertheless kept up a steady patronage with the important men of Poitiers and the greater realm, especially with eventual biographer, Venatius Fortunatus.[204]

Radegund's patronage network would become especially important during her attempts to obtain holy relics, most notably a fragment of the True Cross from Emperor Justinian in Constantinople. Her ability to request and eventually obtain these relics showed that she had some "international status," regardless of whatever political motivations the owners of the relics may have had in granting her requests.[205] The local Frankish bishops, continuing to attempt to establish their control over the development of Christianity in the countryside, were most likely threatened by Radegund's obtaining and installing the True Cross relic at Poitiers. The bishop of Poitiers, Maroveus, left town before installing the relic, most likely because "his own cathedral could not boast anything to compare with a fragment of the True Cross."[206] Radegund was forced to temporarily house the relic at a men's monastery that she had established at Tours before her pleas to her step-son King Sigibert forced the bishop of Poitiers

[202] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women*,89.
[203] Muschiol, "Men women and liturgical practice," 215.
[204] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 147.
[205] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 138.
[206] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 73-74.

to accept her will.[207] With the addition of the relics, Notre Dame at Poitiers was renamed Sainte Croix—Holy Cross.[208]

Radegund continued to act as a political and spiritual leader of Holy Cross until her death on 13 August 587.[209] Bishop Maroveus, the same bishop who had fled rather than install her relic, refused to attend her funeral, leaving Bishop Gregory of Tours (538-594) to officiate.[210] The mourning practices and devotionals exhibited at her funeral and tomb appeared to show an established cult at the moment of her death.[211] In the years that followed, she was to become "perhaps the most richly documented individual of her time," with the production and preservation of *vitae* from her contemporaries Venantius Fortunatus and Baudonivia, correspondence from various political and religious deals, and even a verse poem about the Thuringian war potentially written by Radegund herself.[212] The *vitae* and example of Saint Radegund would continue to inspire productions of female sanctity through the late Merovingian and Carolingian eras.

Venatius Fortunatus and the first Life *of St. Radegund*

> "[The] attendant presumed to chide her softly: 'Most holy lady, when you have embraced lepers, who will kiss you?' Pleasantly, she answered, 'Really, if you won't kiss me, it's no concern of mine.'"- Saint Radegund in Fortunatus's *Life* [213]

[207] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms,* 138.
[208] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women,* 89.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms,* 74.
[211] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*,63, 103.
[212] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*,61, 70, 86.
[213] Venantius Fortunatus, "The *Life* Radegund, Queen of the Franks and Abbess of Poitiers (ca. 525-587)," in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, ed. and trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John H. Halborg, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 78

The first *Life* of Radegund was produced by the bishop Venatius Fortunatus, a prolific sixth century writer and friend of the saint. Born around 530 in Venetia, Italy, Fortunatus was a Roman-trained Latin poet. In 565, when he experienced a miraculous cure through the intercession of St. Martin, he took a pilgrimage to Tours before eventually settling in Poitiers.[214] A friend of the wealthy and the influential, Fortunatus made his living constructing poems and prose on behalf of secular and religious clients, who included the royalty, bishops, Gregory of Tours, and the nuns of Poitiers. The relationship between Radegund, her abbess Agnes, and Fortunatus exploited Radegund's "courtly skills," as the Poitiers nuns would send Fortunatus gifts of food and he would reply with equally modest tokens or by assisting in Radegund's "plans for making peace between feuding kings and collecting earthly relics of the immortals of heaven." Their game of "social power, political influence, and saintly patronage" was important not only for the completion of their requests during life but also to Radegund's saintly reputation after death.[215]

Like Genovefa before her, Radegund was described as the purveyor of a diverse range of miracles, many of which focused on healing and feeding the needy.[216] Fortunatus described her as helping the blind see, curing a child of contortions, curing a girl with a worm under her skin, helping a sister recover from a deathlike sickness, and trampling demons.[217] Plants grew green again on her command, and seafarers were saved from a storm by asking for her intercession.[218] She raised an infant from the dead, and her haircloth alone was powerful enough to raise another.[219] He even mentioned that she performed more miracles than he

[214] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 26-27.
[215] Julia M.H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: a new cultural history 500-1000*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 202-203.
[216] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 78, 79.
[217] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 82.
[218] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 83.
[219] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 84.

recounted in the *Life*, for fear of readers not taking such a long list seriously.[220] Fortunatus established Radegund's spiritual credentials in part by relating a series of miracles which she performs.

While Genovefa had obtained a sort of governing status through her political maneuvering, Fortunatus showed that Radegund was born of royal status and played the role of a queenly benefactor throughout her life, using her wealth and influence to support the poor, the Church, and her other religious endeavors . The very beginning of Fortunatus' *Life* stated that Radegund was born "of the highest earthly rank, born from the seed of the kings of the barbarian nation."[221] She was a "queen by birth and marriage, [and] mistress of the palace."[222] Despite her royal status she ground her own flour and fed it to the needy. [223] She kissed the faces of lepers, treating them and feeding them in her palace. [224] She "gave herself energetically to almsgiving," building "a house at Athies where beds were elegantly made up for needy women," and providing for the poor around the palace. [225] Fortunatus described her bathing the "paupers" in great detail, not shrinking from a detailed description of the "scurf, scabs, lice, [and] pus" that Radegund encountered as she "plucked off the worms and scrubbed away the putrid flesh." [226] She did not stop at just washing each individual—she also combed their hair, "applied oil to their ulcerous sores…reducing the spread of infection," revived them with a "potion," replaced their worn clothing, personally served them dinner (while she herself fasted), and even "cleaned the mouth and hands of the invalids herself." [227] Fortunatus noted that all of this was done "as in the gospel," explicitly reminding his readers of the religious

[220] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 85-86.
[221] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 70.
[222] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 72.
[223] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 77.
[224] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 78.
[225] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 72.
[226] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 77.
[227] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 72, 77.

implications of her charity. [228] Fortunatus's account firmly established Radegund as a compassionately charitable queen, utilizing her royal resources to help the needy around her.

Fortunatus portrayed Radegund as giving to the Church establishment as readily as she gave to the poor. She invited priests to eat at the palace every Sunday, giving them gifts every week per her "royal custom." [229] She would meet any travelling holy men with water and food, hastening out in night or day and "through snow, mud or dust." [230] If anyone mentioned that her clothing was beautiful she "would send it to some holy place in the neighborhood where it could be laid as a cloth on the Lord's altar." [231] When she left her queenly station to dedicate herself as a religious person, she "emerged as a gift-giver in a truly royal style" by placing her Merovingian jewels, the "physical condensation…of the magical aura of royalty," on the altars of churches.[232] Fortunatus portrayed Radegund as a royal patroness of the Church, giving freely in support of the Church functions and seemingly never questioning the Church's authority.

Just as Genovefa had been described as a mature holy individual at a young age, Fortunatus stressed Radegund's meritorious religious living, even in the face of a turbulent childhood. Her capture was described as a "departure and migration" and compared to that of the Israelites, establishing Radegund in a Bible-esque narrative.[233] She "endured persecution from her own household,"[234] meeting her adversity with the "merits of a mature person."[235] Like Genovefa, she was not only mature but also very holy, even at a young age. As a "small child" she fed and bathed the poor, carried a cross around singing psalms, and cleaned the altar

[228] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 77.
[229] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 78.
[230] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 75.
[231] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 74.
[232] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 229.
[233] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 71.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid.

with her own dress.[236] These childhood actions "represented an attempt to imitate the services women religious rendered in churches and oratories" and can be seen as "a good example of the daily life of professed virgins and widows," despite Radegund's status as Clothar's queen-to-be.[237] Even as a child isolated in a royal villa, Radegund "sheathed herself with an intense sense of the sacred," representing the mature holiness befitting a queenly saint.[238] Fortunatus established Radegund's religious and saintly authority in part by emphasizing her pious childhood and her virgin-like behaviors.

As with Genovefa, it is interesting to note the ways in which Radegund's female gender was portrayed throughout her *Life.* Historians have argued that the different modes of patronage in which Fortuantus was required to operate demanded that he portray his patrons as males of military prowess, justice, and culture, females as pious and honourable housewives, or holy people seen in the light of monastic affiliation in addition to gender.[239] In the case of Radegund, he portrayed her as a little bit of both of the latter: a pious housewife putting up with her barbaric husband and a holy ascetic transcending her weak feminine body.

Fortunatus's descriptions of Radegund as queen and pious housewife were quite gendered. He described the young Radegund as being taught letters "and other things suitable to her sex."[240] She gave from her "women's wealth" of jewelry.[241] She wept "unchecked tears," at holy sites.[242] While Radegund was described as holy from birth, a true spiritual wife of God, she was also noted as a meek young woman and dutiful wife to Clothar. Her relationship with her earthly husband was not described as being a happy one—according to Fortunatus the king

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[236] Ibid.
[237] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 155.
[238] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 229.
[239] Yitzhak Hen, "Gender and the patronage of culture in Merovingian Gaul," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World,* ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 224-225.
[240] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 71.
[241] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 76.
[242] Ibid.

often "compensated her with gifts for the wrong he did her" during their times of "strife." [243] One of seven wives, she did not hold very much sway over his decision making. She became "near dead with torment" when the king sentenced a criminal to death and would "rush about among his trusty men, ministers and nobles" in order to convince them to placate the king and free the prisoners. [244] Whether because of her gender or because of her specific relationship with the king, Radegund was described as having little autonomy or political power. Despite this, she was remembered as putting up with the king meritoriously until he ordered the execution of her last surviving brother and she fled to the consecrated life.

Here Fortunatus portrayed a shift from pious queen to a holy ascetic of monastic affiliation. Where Radegund had once obeyed Clothar dutifully, now she entered the church against his will, proceeded "straight to the altar," and demanded to be consecrated.[245] In Fortunatus's version of this event, the Bishop Medard hesitated to follow her will, quoting the Biblical scripture to ask "Art though bound unto a wife?"[246] Fortunatus emphasized the way that gender made this situation even more precarious by saying that the king's men pursuing Radegund attempted to drag Medard out of the basilica "lest the priest imagine he could take away the king's official queen as though she were only a prostitute." [247] Despite all of this, Radegund was described as plowing ahead with her demands, presenting Medard with an argument that left him "thunderstruck," and he consecrated her on the spot. [248] No longer the meek wife, the queen took action in securing her monastic position, yet still depended upon the approval and protection of the male Bishop Medard.

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[243] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 73-74.
[244] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 74.
[245] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 75.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Ibid.

Freed from her husband, whose later pursuit of her was all but ignored in Fortunatus's text, Radegund took on the second of Fortunatus's gendered roles: that of a holy monastic, not separate from her female gender but transcending the weakness of her sex like a *virago*. While certainly praising Radegund throughout the text, Fortunatus was not glorifying the female gender as a whole, referring to them instead as imbecilic without the strength of God:

> By faith, Christ makes them strong who were born weak so that, when those who appeared to be imbeciles are crowned with their merits by Him who made them, they garner praise for their Creator who hid heavenly treasure in earthen vessels.[249]

Fortunatus separated Radegund from these "imbeciles" by providing the evidence that she has the requisite faith. In Radegund's case, God won "mighty victories through the female sex," conferring "glory and greatness on women through strength of mind" despite "their frail physique."[250] Though Radegund was a married queen, Fortunatus established her among the "glorious company of pious virgins" by celebrating her ascetic virtue in miracles, her acts of charity, and, perhaps most importantly, her rejection of her body through fasting and mortification.[251]

Perhaps the most striking and notorious theme of Fortunatus's *Life* is seen in the many detailed descriptions of Radegund's fasting and extreme bodily mortifications. Radegund was remembered as keeping a strict diet all days of the year. She "ate nothing but legumes and green vegetables…[and] drank no drink but honeyed water or perry."[252] During the holy season of Quadragesima (now more often referred to as "Lent") she "ate no bread, except on Sundays but only roots of herbs or mallow greens without a drop of oil or salt for

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[249] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 70.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Simon Coates, "Regendering Radegund? Fortunatus, Baudonivia and the Problem of Female Sanctity in Merovingian Gaul," in *Studies in Church History Volume 34: Gender and Christian Religion,* ed. R. N. Swanson (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998), 40.
[252] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 76.

dressing…[and] consumed only two sestaria of water."[253] Even at the royal table, surrounded by rich banquets, "she secretly chewed rye or barley bread which she had hidden under a cake to escape notice."[254] This "contempt for food of the belly" was explained away by Fortunatus as a "hunger…for Christ."[255] Yet despite the extreme nature of Radegund's fasts, they paled in comparison to Fortunatus's descriptions of her bodily mortifications.

As described by Fortunatus, Radegund's piety was "a piety grounded on her own body."[256] As a queen she "would prostrate herself in prayer under a hair cloak by the privy so long that the cold pierced her through and through."[257] When her "whole flesh [was] prematurely dead, [and] indifferent to her body's torment" she would return to the king, bearing his "brawling modestly."[258] In the monastery she wore a hair cloth instead of linen, kept a "bed of ashes" instead of a couch and kept herself awake at night working, tending pots in the kitchen and not bothering to "flinch if she hurt herself."[259] She carried basins of hot coals in her bare hands, burning her body "to cool her fervent soul."[260] She branded herself with a brass plate made into the shape of the cross, causing her flesh to roast through and her "limbs to burn."[261] Though she "concealed the holes" in her skin, the "putrefying blood betrayed the pain that her voice did not reveal."[262] With a soul "steeled for pain" she:

> bound her neck and arms with three broad iron circlets. Inserting three chains in them, she fettered her whole body so tightly that her delicate flesh, swelled up, enclosed the hard iron. After the fast was ended, when she wished to remove the chains locked under her skin, she could not for the flesh was cut by the circlet

[253] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 79.
[254] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 76.
[255] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 73.
[256] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 229.
[257] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 73.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 80.
[260] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 81.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.

> through her back and breast over the iron of the chains, so that the flow of blood nearly drained her little body to the last drop.[263]

Fortunatus used the horrors of Radegund's mortifications to build the case that through her "fasting, services, charity, suffering, and torment" Radegund was both "confessor and martyr."[264] He does not make this proclamation idly—rather, he explicitly stated that Radegund hurt herself "so that she might be a martyr though it was not an age of persecution" and to "avoid becoming cheap in Christ's eyes."[265] In addition to confirming "the depth of her self-abasement," Fortunatus's portrayal of Radegund's extreme mortification "showed her determination to be outstanding in her chosen life."[266] It is also interesting to note the observation of historian John Kitchen, who wrote that Radegund's tortures were often centered on "that region of the saint's body that is most ostensibly female," including her breasts and her naked torso, linking the self-harm to her gender.[267] Fortunatus's rich detail concerning Radegund's rejection of her earthly body portrayed the saint as a *virago*, a sexless holy woman overcoming her gendered roles through her religious asceticism.

As portrayed by Fortunatus, Radegund was a model ascetic. A saintly queen, pious from birth and holding some level of miraculous power, Radegund filled the role of the holy wife alongside the rough Merovingian king, supporting the needy and the Church establishment. When she embraced the ascetic life, she rejected her body and its gendered limitations, living a life "detached from worldly concerns."[268] Despite her married status and her death from old age, Fortunatus managed to cast Radegund as both martyr and virgin, allying her with the Church Father's expectation of women as pious Mary-like figures and as

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[263] Ibid.
[264] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 79.
[265] Fortunatus, "The *Life* of Radegund," 81, 73.
[266] Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms,* 137.
[267] Kitchen, *Saints' Lives,* 120.
[268] Coates, "Regendering Radegund," 49.

sexless ascetic *viragos.* Fortunatus's *Life* of Saint Radegund constructed her sanctity through miracles, charity, obedience to the Church, and rejection of her weak feminine body.

Baudonivia and the second Life *of St. Radegund*

> "In prosperity, in adversity, in joy, in sorrow, she was always even-tempered. She neither lost heart in adversity, nor grew proud in prosperity." –of Saint Radegund, in Baudonivia's *Life*[269]

Unlike the rest of the saints studied here, Radegund was the subject of a second contemporary *Life,* this one written by Baudonivia, the first known female hagiographer in Merovingian Gaul.[270] Baudonivia wrote her *Life* at the behest of Abbess Dedimia of Holy Cross at Poitiers, likely between 605 and 610. A member of the Poitiers community, Baudonivia both knew Radegund and was surrounded by individuals who had known the saintly queen. Like Fortunatus, she was well educated and drew upon available hagiographies for much of her work, including Fortunatus's own *Life of St. Hilary* and his previously written *Life* of Radegund.[271] Baudonivia did not attempt to rewrite Fortunatus's *vita*; she stated that she will "not repeat those things that the apostolic man, the bishop Fortunatus, wrote in his Life of the blessed lady, but supply those things that he despite his comprehensiveness passed over."[272] She gave comparatively little detail about Radegund's early life, focusing more on her time at the monastery than Fortunatus. [273] Comparing the two texts can provide valuable insight into what events and themes Baudonivia, as a female nun herself, viewed to be as important or more important than the events and themes Fortunatus included to relate Radegund's sanctity.

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[269] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," in *The Writings of Medieval Women: An Anthology. Second Edition,* trans. by Marcelle Thiebaux (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1994), 109.
[270] Coates, "Regendering Radegund," 37.
[271] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women,* 92.
[272] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 107.
[273] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 108.

Like Fortunatus, Baudonivia included mention of Radegund's miracles. Some of the events related are the same; in Baudonivia's account, Radegund also saved a boat of searfarers from a storm of "biblical proportions."[274] However, where Fortunatus had claimed to abstain from listing all of Radegund's miracles, Baudonivia simply proclaimed that "whenever there was a sick person, afflicted with any illness whatever that person would call upon [Radegund] and be restored to health."[275] Baudonivia did not contradict Fortunatus's list of Radegund's miracles, including the saint's miraculous ways in the second *Life*, reiterating the importance of miracles as evidence of Radegund's sanctity.

Similarly, Baudonivia included descriptions of Radegund's fasting and self-mortification. Baudonivia's language quite specifically linked these actions to Radegund's contempt for the body. Radegund was not simply fasting and mortifying her flesh as expressions of her spiritual devotion; she sought to "conquer her own body," "making herself the jailer of her own body to keep awake at night."[276] When Baudonivia related the story of Clothar's attempt to reclaim Radegund as his bride, the text presented the most extreme portrayal of self-harm yet when Radegund stated that "she would rather end her life than have to return to be joined again to this earthly king."[277] By having Radegund specifically reject her own body through fasting and mortification, and threaten suicide in order to preserve her monastic status, Baudonivia reiterated the importance of this martyr-like bodily rejection to Radegund's projection of sanctity.

While Baudonivia's emphasis on miracles and Radegund's rejection of the body mirrored themes in Fortunatus's life, it is also interesting to note the many ways in which her

[274] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 120.
[275] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 116.
[276] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 113.
[277] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 110.

Life differed from his portrayal of Radegund. Baudonivia conveyed a different understanding of the biographical elements of the life of Radegund by emphasizing different aspects of the events than Fortunatus, portraying Radegund less as a humble nun staying up at night fasting and more like a stern, respected political leader.

One specific deviation between the two *Lives* was the differing levels of autonomy enjoyed by Radegund as she defied the will of her husband. In Fortunatus's *Life*, Clothar's attempt to reclaim his deaconess queen was barely mentioned, perhaps for fear of angering the royal family by emphasizing the king's failure. [278] Baudonivia has no such compunctions. In her version of the story, Radegund was certainly in charge of her own future and weilded considerable influence. She not only had the political connections with which to entreat the bishop Germanus to assist her in refusing Clothar's will—she also sent him a gift with an official seal via an agent.[279] Clothar, the mighty Merovingian warrior-king, here deamed himself "unworthy…of such a queen," begged Radegund for forgivenness, and was ultimately the subject of "divine vengeance" before his ex-queen forgave him.[280] Interestingly, though, where Fortunatus described in detail the steps which Radegund had to take to initially leave Clothar, Baudonivia skirted over them completely, mentioning briefly that Radegund left the king before continuing on to talk about her divine visions.[281] By choosing to include the tale of Radegund resisting Clothar's attempt to retake her as a wife, Baudonivia portrayed the saint as wielding a political power and influence not seen in Fortunatus's account.

Another major life event on which Baudonivia focused was Radegund's acquisition of relics, especially the piece of the True Cross. While Fortunatus had gone into detail about the

[278] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 112.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 109.

Cross in his other writings, he made little mention of the relic and Radegund's quest to obtain it in his *Life.*[282] This was not necessarily because he did not want Radegund associated with this feat; the cross was certainly an "appropriate relic for a woman to obtain" as it linked Radegund to Saint Helena, who had supposedly uncovered the True Cross centuries earlier.[283] It seems more likely that Fortunatus was again avoiding the awkward political situation associated with the Cross, since Radegund's acquisition had deepened a split between her and the Bishop Maroveus.[284] From her formation of the Holy Cross monastery until her death, Radegund "consistently used her political and social connections to go over the head of her local diocesan bishop," Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers.[285] Instead of Maroveus, it was Germanus, the Bishop of Paris (and later, Tours) who performed the consecration of Agnes, the first abbess, and intervened on Radegund's behalf against Clothar. In her letters, Radegund placed Holy Cross "under the protection of outside bishops as well as kings," rather than under the protection of Maroveus.[286] Radegund sought the permission of King Sigibert, rather than Maroveus, when she sought the True Cross and other relics, which once in the hands of the Holy Cross monastery could only be used by Radegund's community. By excluding Maroveus from the Holy Cross, she was excluding him from the powerful mysteries of the Mass itself.[287] Acting then as an "apostle to her nuns," as she was remembered by Gregory of Tours, and holding relics symbolic or rulership, Radegund stood as a legitimate political rival to Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers and even to his local cult, the cult of St. Hilary.[288] Again, Baudonivia did not appear to bother to take Fortunatus's reservations into account, "fearlessly" recounting the

[282] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 230.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women,* 93.
[285] B.H. Rosenwein, "Inaccessible Cloisters: Gregory of Tours and Episcopal Exemption," in *The World of Gregory of Tours,* ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood, (Boston: Brill, 2002), 191.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Rosenwein, "Inaccessible Cloisters," 192.
[288] Ibid.

story of the acquisition in detail, linking Radegund explicitly to St. Helena, and even describing the "hostility of local persons jealous of Radegund's success."[289]

Baudonivia's account started with Radegund learning of the relics. Her reaction upon hearing of relics was described using a metaphor seemingly intended to contrast her holy desire with her abstaining from earthly food and drink; she "drank the news in avidly and thirstily."[290] Though Radegund partook in "fasts, vigils, and the copious shedding of tears," her efforts to have the True Cross formerly brought to Poitiers, as portrayed by Baudonivia, were not merely a passive supplication performed by an ascetic.[291] Baudonivia portrayed her as going through all the correct diplomatic channels, exhibiting her courtly intelligence and political strength. Radegund sent a message to her stepson, the King Sigibert, "with blazing spirit and beating heart."[292] She asked for the permission of the king to "obtain the wood of God's Cross," not only presumably for the prestige of her monastery at Poitiers but also for "the whole country's well-being and the stability of the realm," and was granted permission to send travelers to Justinian with her plea.[293] When the arriving relic was met with jealousy by the local bishopric, Radegund went through the correct political channels again, appealing to King Sigibert and having the Cross placed at Poitiers against the bishop's wishes. Baudonivia's recounting of the story ended by corroborating Gregory of Tours' assertion that the True Cross worked miracles, seemingly justifying Radegund's determination by showing that the acquired relic was worth the effort it took to obtain it.[294] In relating the story of Radegund's efforts to acquire the relic of the True Cross, Baudonivia established Radegund as a competent leader, willing to go head-to-

[289] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women*, 93.
[290] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 115.
[291] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 118.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 117.
[294] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 119.

head with local authorities and capable of utilizing the correct political channels to work toward her divinely inspired goals.

The theme of the powerful, respected leader was again reiterated in Baudonivia's accounts of vengeful and/or aggressive actions taken by Radegund. Like those described in the *Life* of Genovefa, these actions may, at first glance, seem to clash not only with gendered expectations but also with the expectations of merciful and peaceful Christian living in general. The first such case is Baudonivia's description of Radegund's destruction of a pagan temple. While traveling, Radegund happened upon pagan worshippers. Like St. Martin had centuries before, Radegund proceeded to destroy their temple, despite the mob's attempts to stop her. When the mob confronted her, "attempting to defend the temple with swords and cudgels," Radegund "remained persistent and unmoved," praying for the people until they "made peace among themselves" and their temple burned to the ground.[295] In this example, the action undertaken was decidedly aggressive, though completely in line with expectations of Christian leaders (albeit male Christian leaders) at the time. However, despite the nature of the action, Baudonivia's language still portrayed Radegund as peaceful, though stern and in charge, a powerful leader respected even by angry pagan mobs.

A similarly aggressive miracle took place after Radegund's death. In an example that contrasts startingly with the portrayals of Radegund as caring, merciful, and humble, Baudonivia related the tale of the servant girl Vinoperga, who was lit on fire and burned for three days for the "reckless presumption to sit on the blessed queen's cushioned chair after she had died."[296] This Radegund, apparently protected by "God's judgment" and still enjoying the privilege of her status despite her role as a nun and even her death, does not sit on Fortunatus's

[295] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 109.
[296] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 114.

ash couch, but rather a cushioned throne.[297] However, Radegund was not described as the actor here—she did not light Vinoperga on fire, God did, and Radegund's mercy actually saved the girl in the end. This example corroborated Baudonivia's previous description of the stern yet merciful Radegund; the girl's punishment "made everyone wary and respectful" of the holy queen, even after her death.[298] Interestingly, this example also drew heavily from the accounts of St. Martin of Tours, who supposedly burned the emperor Valentinian by causing the imperial throne to catch fire, reiterating Radegund's relationship to the powerful fourth-century saint.[299] In these examples of aggressive and vengeful actions, omitted from Fortunatus's accounts, Radegund was portrayed as a stern, respected, yet merciful leader along the lines of the famed St. Martin.

By portraying Radegund as a powerful and even St. Martin-like leader, Baudonivia seemed to be renegotiating the gendered role in which Fortunatus had placed the saint. From one standpoint, Baudonivia appears to be portraying Radegund as a *virago*, the female saint who had transcended her sex to attain the role of a male. [300] The words with which Baudonivia used to describe Radegund are in some places quite martial; when describing her giving up her earthly pleasures in order to live a holy life, Radegund was remembered as having run "unshackled, a light-armed footsoldier, in the footsteps of Christ."[301] However, Baudonivia's *Life* also assigned Radegund more typically feminine attributes such as motherhood and peacemaking, using language which emphasized these qualities. [302] She was described as pure hearted, loving the "heavenly Bridegroom" and allowing Christ to dwell within her through a

[297] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 114.
[298] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 115.
[299] Coates, "Regendering Radegund," 46.
[300] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society,* 183.
[301] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 111.
[302] Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society,* 183.

"surrender [of] herself."[303] She was remembered as preaching unceasingly "with devout concern and motherly affection."[304] At one point, Baudonivia even described her as having "modesty with seemliness, wisdom with simplicity, sternness with mercy, [and] erudtion with humility," combinations of qualities seemingly at odds with the aggressively manly *virago* portrayal.[305] While some authors have asserted that these descriptions were a gendered response intended to emphasize the "womanly" strengths which Fortunatus left out of his *Life*, it may be more likely that Baudonivia believed that a combination of elements of the sexless *virago* and more feminine qualities could create the "prototype of the ideal nun." [306]

The Radegund of Baudonivia's *Life* was not the meek pious wife or ascetic of Fortunatus's account. She was not a child growing up sweeping altars or a queen secretly fasting. Instead this Radegund was a leader and a peace maker, actively engaged with politics and her community.[307] This queen's role "in building her arklike monastery…stocked with potent relics was that of founder, teacher and reliable intercessor when it came to saving her faithful from the perils of worldly and pagan temples."[308] Her authority was exercised with feminine motherhood, yet was respected by pagan, politician, and peer alike. By describing Radegund as both a competent political leader and a peaceful, pious miracle-working holy woman, Baudonivia created a conflicting portrayal of sanctity which allowed female holy women to operate both within and outside of the context of Merovingian gendered expectations.

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[303] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 111.
[304] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 113.
[305] Baudonivia, "The *Life* of Saint Radegund," 114.
[306] Anderson and Zinsser, *A History of Their Own,* 185; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society,* 183.
[307] Coates, "Regendering Radegund," 43.
[308] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women,* 93.

Conclusion

Both *vitae* of St. Radegund persisted widely through the Merovingian and Carolingian eras, and would affect portrayals of sanctity in the centuries which followed. The model of sanctity portrayed by these *vitae* was a complex reflection of both the social and political realities of the time and the Roman and Germanic legacies inherited by Merovingian Gaul. Radegund's monastery, Holy Cross at Poitiers, was a product of the monastic rise of the sixth century. Her community, situated within the city walls and occupied in prayer for the good of the realm, was modeled directly off of the work of her contemporaries Caesarius and Caesaria at Arles. Fortunatus's attempts to recast Radegund as a virgin despite her marriage allude to the renewed emphasis on virginity seen during this time period. Her collection of relics and her *vitae*'s nods to St. Martin of Tours were the direct result the promotion of his cult at the time. King Sigibert's involvement in Radegund's conflict with the bishop of Poitiers and the bishops Medard and Gregorious's intervention on behalf of Radegund when she was attempting to evade Clothar's wishes are examples of the struggle between local kings and bishops as they fought to shape patronage and control towns. While Radegund's elevated status does not give us a glimpse into the social mobility which women were enjoying during this time period, we do see the Church act as an alternative to marriage. Radegund's relationship with Clothar is reminiscent of other Merovingian queens whose religion stood as a pious example in contrast to the martial ways of their husbands, yet managed to not get in the way of their active role in dynastic politics. Even the transition from the Roman elite to the Merovingian elite was alluded to in these documents when Radegund handed her fine brooches and heavy belts over to the Church. The constructions of sanctity in the *Lives* of Saint Radegund were directly linked to the social and political situation of fifth century Merovingian Gaul.

The *Lives* of St. Radegund also feature portrayals of sanctity which reach back beyond Merovingian Gaul, to the Roman and Germanic heritage of the region. Radegund was portrayed as both a meek wife and a saintly queen. As an ascetic, she was portrayed as a *virago*, overcoming the perceived weakness of her gender, a viewpoint inherited from the Roman Church Fathers. She was portrayed as a strong, respected leader, perhaps more reflective of the Germanic tribes' spiritual leading women than any legacy of Roman Christianity. With the persistence of her *vitae,* Radegund became the "model pious foundress for Europe's women," standing as a model of complex sanctity for centuries to come.[309]

Merovingian Sanctity: Saints Genovefa and Radegund

Genovefa and Radegund lived almost a century apart and experienced a vast difference in their political and personal realities. Genovefa, who lived during the fall of the Western Roman Empire, lived in a political and religious power vacuum. When Paris came under invasion, it was up to her to defend the city due to the lack of strong leadership. When she attempted to find her place in the Church, she was able to forge her own path due to the unstructured nature of the Church at that time. Consequently, Genovefa was able to take on vast political and religious power, serving as the patroness for her town of Paris until her death. Radegund, a century later, was part of a thoroughly Merovingian system. As a queen, she had many fewer options for personal and religious autonomy, yet she managed to dictate her life as an ascetic due to her connections and willpower. Radegund served as a spiritual leader for her community until her death. Despite the differences between the circumstances experienced by Saints Genovefa and Radegund, their lives and holiness are described in remarkably similar

[309] Anderson and Zinsser, *A History of Their Own,*75-76.

ways, suggesting that some of the values which they embodied were integral to the Merovingian understanding of sanctity and, specifically, female sanctity.

Both women were remembered as being pious and pure from birth, exhibiting maturity and religious understanding well beyond their years. Genovefa took a vow of chastity as a child and was performing miracles before she came of age. Radegund, in the eyes of Fortunatus, was already acting out the life of a virgin ascetic. Even Baudonivia, who speaks very little about Radegund's childhood, had taken the time to note that she was pious at a young age. The emphasis on holy childhood was not only associated with female saints. Male Merovingian saints were also described as being children "predestined to holiness, as wise as an old man, ascetically disciplined, and ready to wage war against Christ's enemies."[310] The emphasis on childhood piety in all three *vitae* suggests that this was representative of ideal sanctity in Merovingian Gaul.

Both saints were politically active and publicly supportive of the Church at most points during their *vitae.* Genovefa rallied the city of Paris against the Huns and built the Priory of Saint Denis to support the Church. Radegund retained some of her political power as queen, founded the monastery at Poitiers, helped lead the Holy Cross monastery, secured the relics of the True Cross for her community, and supported the Church through donations of her royal wealth. Notably, all of the political actions undertaken by these women were justified in their *vitae* by the assertion that they were approved by holy men. Genovefa had Germanus's support for her political control of Paris during the Hunnish invasion, and approached priests about building the Priory. Radegund had the support of the Bishops Medard, Gregorious, Gregory of Tours, and Venantius Fortunatus, calling upon them in times of conflict and relying on their official judgement regarding her status. These similarities suggest that the Merovingian

[310] Kitchen, *Saints' Lives,* 34.

perception of female sanctity included political activism (or at least allowed political activism) if it was officially condoned by a male church official.

All three *vitae* for these two saints note many miraculous deeds. Both saints freed prisoners, saved sailors from shipwreck, calmed the weather, cured illness, healed disabled bodies, cast out demons, and resurrected dead children. The miracles of both Genovefa and Radegund were directly tied to the needs of their times. Genovefa, faced with near constant social and political upheaval, performed miracles which kept her city of Paris at peace and out of harm's way. Running a wealthy monastery in a time "of upheaval and of scarcity," Radegund was able to feed, clothe, and heal her sisters and the needy in the area.[311] Both saints had visions of God, and healed from their tomb. Even their non-miraculous deeds were similar—both served the hungry with their own bread, travelled on pilgrimages, and guided others in prayer. The many similarities in the miraculous and even non-miraculous deeds for which Genovefa and Radegund were remembered suggest that these types of activities were associated with sanctity at the time—miraculous healing, protecting supplicants, charity, promotion of the cult of saints, and prayer.

Both women rejected bodily comfort in an attempt to reject their bodies and bodily weakness. They did not adorn themselves with fancy clothing or jewelry. Genovefa dressed simply and wore no jewelry except for the simple cross necklace given to her as a child. Radegund donated any garment that she believed to be too fashionable or beautiful, and wore a hairshirt under her clothing. The women's rejection of fine clothing and jewelry may seem like a natural response to scriptural restrictions on greed and material wealth. However, it may also exhibit a reaction to an explicit association of fine clothing with the spiritual weakness of the female gender. Tertullian's (c. 155- c. 240) works confronted women for their dress,

[311] Thiebaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women,* 92.

exasperatingly berating them for thinking to cover their tunic with "ornaments" when the devil himself was inside their bodies.[312] St. Jerome (374-420) addressed the weak qualities of women, including their tendency to "want many things," including material trappings like "costly dresses [and] gold jewels."[313] In order to maintain holiness, the *Rule of Caesarius* (ca. 512-34) instructed its nuns to "let not your apparel be notable," and described the strict attire to which the women should keep.[314] In rejecting fancy clothing, Genovefa and Radegund were establishing themselves as ascetics and reacting to gender expectations which linked feminine weakness and licentiousness with female clothing.

Both saints also practiced bodily rejection in the form of fasting. They fasted constantly, supposedly subsisting on very limited food throughout their lives. Genovefa only ate barley bread and beans. Radegund ate only plain bread, beans, and lentils. Fasting was routinely experienced by religious men and women alike as a way to observe parts of the liturgical calendar and to attempt to defeat the needs of the physical body, and is often featured in other descriptions of correct sanctified living.[315] However, the degree to which fasting was used to represent sanctity often differed between men and women.[316] While some modern scholars suggested that women's *Lives* were more likely to feature fasting because modern women are more likely to suffer from eating disorders, perhaps the actions of these saints were representative instead of a specific gendered expectation regarding the consumption of food.[317] Tertullian and Jerome had warned women about the dangers of food specifically because it

[312] Monique Alexandre, "Early Christian Women, " in *A History of Women,* ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1992), 409.
[313] Emilie Amt, *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook,* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 18.
[314] Amt, *Women's Lives,* 186.
[315] Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh," 122.
[316] Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh," 123.
[317] Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh," 128.

"excited lust."[318] By connecting food specifically to sexual desire and women's weakness to resist sexual temptation, these writers constructed an association between "food abstinence and chastity."[319] By rejecting food, these women could have been explicitly "controlling their sexuality" in addition to performing liturgically routine fasts expected of all ascetics.[320]

Both saints repudiated their own bodies and bodily health. Genovefa was drawn closer to God through paralysis. Radegund took bodily rejection to a whole new level, mimicking the martyrs by torturing and mortifying herself throughout her life. Like the other themes studied, self-mortification was not unique to female saints—it was seen as a form of ascetic practice. However, the emphasis on self-mortification in Fortunatus's *Life* of Radegund was so strong that it "assumes a primary place" as an ideal of sanctity unto itself and may even distort the other elements of the story to present an "unbalanced" picture of the saint's life.[321] In both saints, this self-mortification seemed to be linked to a specific rejection of the weakness of the female body.

Though the bodily rejection of both women enabled them to be portrayed as *viragos,* the texts had notable exceptions to this "sexless" portrayal. Both women notably cried in reverence. Radegund was specifically noted as being "motherly" by Baudonivia. Both saints present a complex view of gendered sanctity which left room for both a traditional understanding of the spiritual and physical weakness in women and a negotiated feminine power that retained female-like qualities while demanding and receiving the respect and reverence of male peers.

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[318] Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh," 130.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid.
[321] Kitchen, *Saints' Lives,* 117, 122.

The saints Genovefa and Radegund, "noble women who participated in Gaul's violent transformation into the Merovingian kingdoms," were each remembered in *vitae* which provide some perspective on the nature of female sanctity in this time period. The traits emphasized in each portrayal—childhood piety, political and religious activism, miraculous deeds, an ascetic rejection of the body, and a complex interaction with gender expectations—may be examples of the traits seen as befitting extraordinary holy women of Merovingian Gaul.

Chapter 2: Carolingian Sanctity

Carolingian Gaul

Carolingian historians, writing from their halls of learning in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, constructed the end of the Merovingian dynasty as a "dark age" of "aimless barbarism," a decentralized chaos that cried out for the ruling power of the usurping party.[322] The glorious overthrow of the ineffective Merovingian kings was certainly a myth perpetrated by the Carolingians, who were perhaps more similar to the Merovingians than they readily admitted. However, there is no denying that many individuals living in the early eighth century viewed their state of affairs with the pessimism of an era in decline.

In the early 740s, St. Boniface presented a bleak assessment of a Frankish Church filled with adulterous clergy, bishops, and priests.[323] Pope Zacharias declared that "many who call themselves priests hardly know what the priesthood is."[324] This crisis of faith in the clergy was only exasperated by the growing fears of a populous threatened by interkingdom conflict at home and an invading Muslim army to the south. Despite the fear and pessimism, though, the Church was not sitting idly. The Christian experience on the continent continued to develop features that would be recognizable to modern Christians, including a "highly individualized notion of the soul," a concern about the afterlife, the beginnings of the doctrine of Purgatory, a linking of the Mass to the deliverance of the soul, the establishment of prestigious monasteries, and a "widespread emphasis on confession as a remedy for sin."[325] Mid-eighth-century councils laid out ambitious reforms, including instructions on the regulation of marriage, the order and hierarchy of the Church, a commitment to education and discipline, a suppression of

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[322] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 438.
[323] Giles Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," in *Carolingian Culture: emulation and innovation*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 11.
[324] Giles Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 11.
[325] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 265.

paganism, a uniformity of religious observances, a renewed emphasis on the papacy, and "above all a determination to organize life in every department."[326] Though many of these reforms were not widely implemented, they nevertheless show that the Church remained actively interested and evolving, attempting to provide for its dependents in an uncertain and changing world.

Though the clergy and Church hierarchy may not have recognized it at the time, the Church's fate rested not in their reform attempts but rather in the hands of a single family which rose to power in the eastern Merovingian kingdom of Austrasia in the late seventh and early eighth century. Pippin of Herstal (d. 714) was a "mayor of the palace," a vice-king to the Austrasian Merovingians, and the eventual progenitor of the Carolingian dynasty. Pippin's steady climb to power within the Merovingian kingdom allowed him to provide resources for his son, Charles Martel. Martel (d. 741), known as Charles the Hammer, was a successful military man who heroically stopped the Muslim assault on Tours (733) before systematically ravaging the south of France himself.[327] With the wealth of southern France and the support of a respected army, Charles moved on Frankish Nuestria, the most prosperous Merovingian kingdom, centered on Paris and the rich lands around the Seine.[328]

The last reigning Merovingian, Childeric III, was overthrown by Charles's son Pippin I (d.768) in 751/2, an "unprecedented step," which required the Frankish bishops seek the blessing of the pope in Rome, who welcomed the respectful approach as the beginning of a new era of collaboration between the Carolingian Franks and the papacy.[329] The collaboration was further strengthened on Christmas Day 800, when Pope Leo III crowned Pippin I's son

[326] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 13.
[327] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 410.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 428.

Charlemagne (c. 742-814), declaring him an "Augustus," the ruler of a new Empire.[330] The Carolingian dynasty had accomplished what had not been done since the reign of Clovis—they had united the Frankish lands under one man, and in doing so secured the support of the pope in their quest to create a new Roman Christian empire.

The Carolingians are perhaps most notorious for their "Renaissance," a cultural awakening present in the courts of Charlemagne and his son, Louis the Pious (reigned 814-43). This movement was not an isolated event, but was rather part of a general movement across Europe as the political systems gathered the financial resources necessary to support the intellectual life that reflected their values.[331] It was not as if Merovingian kings had not attempted to shape their society as the Carolingians did—the Carolingians just had more resources, purpose, and ultimate success.[332]

The Carolingian Renaissance was like "an exercise in patronage on a grand scale."[333] The elites harnessed Church resources for the service of the realm and brought in intellectual outsiders to promote learning.[334] Charlemagne and his retinue were "sincerely concerned to save souls," and considered it their duty to "lead the people of God to the pastures of eternal life," with correct Latin culture, texts, and teachings.[335] It was only natural, perhaps, that the Carolingians turned toward the Church in an attempt to correct society and bring order to the land.

Carolingians continued in the footsteps of the later Merovingian Church reformers, establishing new laws and guidelines with a strong emphasis on obedience, hierarchy, order,

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[330] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 435.
[331] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France,* 6.
[332] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 6.
[333] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 44.
[334] Nelson, "The Merovingian Church," 249.
[335] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 449.

and discipline.[336] The kings promoted a uniform liturgy across the empire. [337] The 789 *Admonitio Generalis* regulated the clergy, "correcting things which need correcting."[338] The law specifically forbade innovation and uncanonical practices, a strict control over expressions of sanctity that extended even to the realm of the holy dead.[339] The number of contemporary individuals named saints was greatly reduced by the 813 Synod of Mainz, which declared that "no new saint was to be recognized without 'the council of the prince or license form a holy synod of bishops.'"[340] Carolingian reforms promoted order within the Church and controlled the expressions of sanctity in an attempt to promote correct, standardized Christian living.

The Carolingian reforms fundamentally altered the structure and identity of the Church hierarchy. If the Merovingian Church had been built on the charisma of notable individuals, the Carolingian Church was built on the routinization of the liturgy and ordering of the hierarchy.[341] There was no room within the Carolingian Church for holy men and women who operated outside the strict order that the leaders imposed, so few Carolingian bishops were notable for their individual achievements.[342] Unlike their Merovingian predecessors, these Carolingian bishops would never be recognized as important saints—instead they were "organization men," regulating sanctity and religious expression.[343] They were in turn regulated by the Carolingian royal family, which frequently intervened in senior church appointments, constructing a self-serving circle of royal and religious patronage.[344] The

[336] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 18.
[337] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 21.
[338] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 17.
[339] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 18.
[340] Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ*, xxxvii .
[341] Nelson, "The Merovingian Church," 250.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid.

Carolingian Church hierarchy was an ordered, disciplined structure, intimately linked to the royal family and averse to innovators and exceptional individuals.

The extensive corrective reforms taken on by the Carolingian leadership did not stay in the halls of the elite or in the Church hierarchy. The Church, which had acquired "between half and a third of the land in most villages" in modern-day Germany was now "an overwhelming presence in every locality."[345] An "ever-present, dominant neighbor," the Church presented everyday Carolingians with the ordered reforms of their rulers, which emphasized respect for the Church and its teachings.[346] Prayers in abbeys and services in churches were standardized and regulated.[347] The celebration of the Mass became a more fundamental part of Christian living.[348] The strict structure of the Church hierarchy found its way into Carolingian society, where "each category of person has a definable code of conduct, and an obligation to live by it."[349] The reforms of the Carolingian Church promoted a religious experience for the everyday person that drew him or her to a structured Church and a defined societal order that promoted Carolingian ideals of Christian living.

The strict ordering of the Carolingian liturgy, hierarchy, and society had a significant effect on the lives and religious experiences of women. The intellectual Renaissance was experienced by women as well as men; works like the handbook of Lady Dhuoda reveal that Carolingian noblewomen were using correct Latin to express their own ideas about daily religious practice and behavior.[350] The reformed liturgy changed the ways in which religious women could operate. Gender-based separation of church space, enforced in the Eastern

[345] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 443.
[346] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 26.
[347] Nelson, "The Merovingian Church," 251.
[348] Muschiol, "Men women and liturgical practice," 209.
[349] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 24.
[350] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 448.

Orthodox Church tradition but not by the Merovingians, was reintroduced in Carolingian churches, altering the way that both religious and lay women interacted with male community members.[351] The *Admonitio Generalis* and the 829 Synod of Paris took steps to reduce the liturgical activity of abbesses and the influence of convents.[352] Consequently, the number of religious houses for women shrank in the ninth century, leaving women with fewer alternatives to family life.[353] Family life itself was altered for the noblewomen who populate the extant sources. Merovingian royalty and noblemen often had multiple wives, creating a social system where women shared domestic duties, sometimes even with unmarried female relatives. Now, Carolingians promoted a strict monogamy, leaving married mothers to run domestic estates on their own—here again Dhuoda stands as an example of a woman left alone to run her household.[354] The emphasis on monogamy also promoted a renewed celebration of the nuclear family and gendered family roles. Carolingian reforms changed the social realities of lay and religious women. How did the changes, then, affect the ways in which these women could portray their sanctity?

As with the Merovingians, we look toward the *Lives* of Carolingian female saints in order to analyze the construction of their gendered sanctity. However, unlike the Merovingians, few Carolingians were promoted to sainthood in the heartland of Gaul. As mentioned previously, this was partially the result of the reforming Church's control over the production of sanctity and the naming of saints. However, it may have also been the result of a changing role of saints in Frankish society. Saints cults, once needed as a local representation of sanctity

[351] Muschiol, "Men women and liturgical practice," 214.
[352] Muschiol, "Men women and liturgical practice," 211.
[353] Muschiol, "Men women and liturgical practice," 209.
[354] It is interesting to note that Charlemagne promoted monogamy and discouraged divorce in a variety of laws and declarations. However, Charlemagne himself had at least five legal wives over his life (though not simultaneously) and fathered at least eighteen children with his wives and numerous concubines. While his written laws may have promoted marriage, his contemporary biographer Einhard suggests that he discouraged the marriage of his daughters. For more information, see Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*,76.

in threatened Merovingian towns and countrysides, were in "plentiful supply" in the heart of the Carolingian lands and firmly in the control of rulers and leading families. [355] If the demand for saints was linked to the spread of the Church in Merovingian Gaul, it is fitting then to look for saints not in the Carolingian heartland, where the Church was already present and firmly structured, but to the Carolingian frontier, which was still in need of local and contemporary representations of sanctity.[356] A logical place to look for contemporary saints, then, would be newly acquired territories in a Christianized frontier, such as the kingdoms of Saxony in what is now modern Germany.

Carolingian Saxony

Though they had not known it at the time, religious missionaries had been paving the way for Carolingian expansion into northern Germany well before the fall of the Merovingians. At the end of the seventh century, Anglo-Saxon monks and nuns from the British Isles moved in great number to the northern half of the Continent, seeking to convert the still-pagan Germanic tribes to the northeast of the Frankish kingdoms. They operated with the "enthusiastic patronage and support of the Frankish kings" as they methodically converted the pagan countryside.[357] The missionaries constructed small churches served by converts and missionaries, built monasteries to train new missionaries (such as the communities in the Germanic towns of Fulda and Corvey), and constructed nunneries.[358] The Saxons and other pagan Germanic tribes fought back—in 752 "the Saxons destroyed some thirty mission

[355] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France,* 51.
[356] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France,* 42.
[357] Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ,* xxxvi .
[358] Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ,* xxxv.

churches," presenting missionaries with ample opportunities for heroism and martyrdom.[359] However, in the end, the leaders became bishops of newly created dioceses and traveled to Rome to receive the papal blessing, linking the churches of the newly converted Germanic regions and their Frankish supporters directly to the papacy.

Though the Saxon aristocracy was mostly Christianized by the mid-eighth century, when Charlemagne attempted to annex the lands into Carolingian control, many were vehemently opposed to joining the empire. Charlemagne took the land through a series of battles for hill-forts, a "prolonged misery" with no option for the complete surrender of the fragmented Saxon people.[360] For over a decade, the Franks fought the Saxons, frequently renegotiating broken treaties with lavish gifts and the promise of incorporation "in a new social order," which lured many Saxon nobles over to Charlemagne's support.[361] In 785, when the fighting had finally ended, Charlemagne issued an uncharacteristically brusque set of administrative rulings known as the *Capitulary on the Region of Saxony,* which imposed Christian Carolingian order and loyalty on the pain of a fiery death.[362]

Despite the seeming finality of these harsh proclamations, Christianity and cooperation in the region still depended upon the alliance between the Frank and Saxon aristocracy. This fragile alliance broke down in 841, when local aristocrats turned to their peasants for support. The peasants in turn revived an assembly of pagan warriors known as the *Stellinga,* which was brutally suppressed by the Saxon lords and their Frankish allies. The uprising showed that the

[359] Ibid.
[360] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 432.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid.

"Christian order…required constant vigilance."[363] Who better, then, to help maintain the Christian order than the soldiers of God—the Christian saints?

While the Church hierarchy in the center of Carolingian controlled territories may have been hesitant to elevate their peers to sainthood, the Carolingians on the fringe of the territory apparently had no similar compunctions. The Saxons "faced the frontier with the still-pagan peoples of Denmark and the lands beyond the Elbe" putting them in the position of being "essential to the further propagation of Christianity in northern Europe."[364] These newly Christianized peoples had to both establish the "correct" Carolingian Christianity amongst themselves and quickly make it available to propagate to their neighbors, a tension that could be marginally eased by the production and propagation of *vitae* as manuals for correct living.

One particular motivation for the establishment of such manuals was the options for religious life enjoyed by these women on the Christian frontier. In the center of Carolingian lands cloisters were firmly established and even falling in number. In Saxony the number of convents was growing, and the way in which the convents would be ruled could be determined by the founders and foundresses. Church councils in the 740s had instructed that all convents and monasteries should follow the Benedictine *Rule,* which kept its members secluded from outsiders and restricted to the monastery or convent for life.[365] However, in a reform council of 816/17, Louis the Pious granted newly forming communities the right to designate themselves as canonesses. Although canonesses were designated holy women like the Benedictine nuns, they were not as severely restricted in their mobility; for example, it was possible for canonesses to leave their convent to run family estates or get married. This mobility was

[363] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* 452.
[364] Frederick S. Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess in Ninth-century Saxony,* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 7.
[365] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 13.

favored by local Saxon elite, who could establish their daughters as canonesses to protect family wealth, yet retain the option of marriage or domestic service as needed.[366] The establishment of new convents in Saxony, therefore, was a struggle between the Church elites, which favored Benedictine establishments, and the lay officials, who often preferred canonesses. By presenting saints' *Lives* as representing one type of community or the other, authors could promote their view of "correct" religious living in Saxony. In addition to performing characteristics of sanctity to instruct the developing Christian communities about the ways in which exemplary Christian women behave, female Carolingian saints could also promote a certain political agenda in the founding of convents.

The production of female hagiography in the newly Christianized and particularly vulnerable Carolingian Saxony was motivated by the need for exemplars of the standards for correct religious living. In what ways, then, did the authors of these texts exemplify female sanctity? How do the themes present differ from those emphasized in Merovingian *vitae,* and how may those differences be the result of the developments in Carolingian society? To address these questions, we turn to the *Lives* of two Carolingian Saxon women: Liutbirga of Wendhausen (786-865) and Hathumoda of Gandersheim (840-874).

[366] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 9.

Saint Liutbirga of Wendhausen (786- c. 865)

Liutbirga of Wendausen hailed from East Saxony, a land of dense woods and valleys, connected to the Frankish south by the River Weser.[367] Though the exact details of her childhood are controversial, Liutbirga's parents have been "plausibly identified as a Frankish count, Fridecho, and his wife, Fastrat, who along with their two daughters granted land in 782 to the abbey of Lorsch."[368] Liutbirga's family, seated at the fortress villa of Salzburg, probably had connections to both the Carolingian royal court and to the extended family of the local Saxon count Unwan and his wife Gisla (b. 776), daughter of the count Hessi, one of the first Saxon leaders to submit to Charlemagne in 775.[369] Liutbirga was born around 786 and by age fourteen or fifteen had entered the cloister at the abbey of Fulda.[370]

After the death of count Unwan in 795 and her father Hessi in 804, the twenty-eight year-old-widowed Gisla arrived at Liutbirga's cloister, looking for a vassal to help her care for three young children and her deceased husband's estates.[371] Supposedly impressed by Liutbirga's maturity and competence, Gisla took in the young girl as an adopted spiritual daughter, training her in the running of the estate before Gisla's death around 830.[372] Gisla's landholdings passed into the hands of her son Bernhard, who retained Liutbirga as his manager per his mother's wishes, until Liutbirga asked to be allowed to pursue the life of an anchoress sometime between 835 and 840.[373] Bernhard and the local bishop granted her wish, allowing Liutbirga to be walled into a single-room cell accessible only by a small window. She lived in the cell for approximately thirty years, ministering to the community before passing away

[367] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,*5.
[368] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 31.
[369] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 34, 29.
[370] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 34.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 34, 35.
[373] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess* 35.

around the year 870.[374] Alhough there is no evidence that Liutbirga was commemorated as a saint upon her death, she was so renown for her skills at dyeing and embroidery that "an oral tradition still circulating in Sweden in the early twentieth century claimed that she and her students had provided the altar cloths that Archbishop Anskar used for his small congregation of newly converted Swedes over eleven hundred years before."[375]

The Life *of Liutbirga (before c. 876)*

> "She was so gifted in the various arts that women pursue that, in those places in which she was known, the inhabitants spoke of her above all others around as if she were a female Daedalus…As the common people spread her happy fame, many important men and women among the Saxon aristocracy did everything they could to gain her acceptance and friendship. They, (in a wonderful manner) loved her even before they met her face to face…"-Anonymous *Life* of Saint Liutbirga.[376]

The *Life* of Liutbirga was prepared by an anonymous contemporary within a decade of her death.[377] The detailed text indicates that the author probably "knew the saint personally," and the text itself included only scriptural references in poor Latin, suggesting that the author was not terribly well read, though much more detail is indiscernible.[378] Even the gender of the author is open to debate; while most historians agree that the author was "most likely a monk from Halberstadt or Fulda," it has been suggested that the author may have been a woman.[379]

Whatever the identity of the anonymous author, his intentions behind writing are seemingly easier to deduce. The text was in part a memorial to Gisla and her kin, "a family that was one of the agents of Carolingian imperial control in a region still undergoing

[374] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 36.
[375] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 50.
[376] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 86.
[377] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,*36.
[378] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 20.
[379] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,*17.

Christianization," suggesting the descendants of her son Bernhard as one of the primary target audiences.[380] On the other hand, the text served as a description of the penitence of Liutbirga, who the author thought "displayed signs of not just exceptional commitment to her faith but also of divine favor."[381] By immortalizing Liutbirga, who the author never declared a saint, perhaps due to Carolingian restrictions on official sanctification, he may have been targeting the community of Wendhausen as a second potential audience.[382]

The *Life* of Liutbirga was included in a manuscript on the saints and distinguished men and women of the Benedictine Order prepared by Andreas Lang, abbot of St. Michaels's-on-the-Mountain in Bramberg (1483-1502).[383] The text, tacked on to the end of the manuscript as if by afterthought, was venerated as a saint's *vitae* even if Liutbirga's contemporaries did not recognize her as such.[384]

Perhaps the most striking theme in the *Life* of Liutbirga is the presence of families and family metaphors. Instead of beginning the *Life* of Liutbirga with background on the saint's childhood or a prayer on behalf of the biographer, the author instead presented two paragraphs about the history of the family which Liutbirga served. The first paragraph served as a brief biography of the count Hessi, who "divided up his extensive properties among his daughters" and died as a monk at Fulda.[385] The second paragraph introduced Hessi's daughter Gisla, describing her role in the foundation of the convents at Wendhausen and Karsbach and ascribing to her a "manly soul and [a] sharpness of…character skilled in many things."[386] By

[380] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 48, 19.
[381] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 56.
[382] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,*19.
[383] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,*11.
[384] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 58.
[385] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 83.
[386] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 84.

starting the *Life* with a history of Gisla's family, the author memorialized the family and established family as an important component of Carolingian religious life.

The narrative of the *Life* began in the third paragraph, which featured the meeting of Gisla and the young Liutbirga. Travelling "for reasons of necessity, because she had to manage properties in many places," Gisla sought hospitality in a monastery of virgins.[387] The meeting of Liutbirga and Gisla, the very starting point of Liutbirga's saintly life as imagined by this biographer, was the direct result of Gisla's role as the manager of the household—a role that became especially important for women due to the Carolingian emphasis on monogamy. The widowed Gisla identified Liutbirga as a suitable assistant and immediately symbolically incorporated her into the family; she "exhort[ed Liutbirga] to go with her and commit herself to her faith, confirming under divine witness that she would love her as much as her own daughters and keep her with her for all time."[388] Liutbirga's incorporation into the family structure was reiterated through the rest of Gisla's life. Even on her deathbed, Gisla specifically declared Liutbirga a daughter "adopted… through a promise of faith" and begged her son Bernhard to "consider [Liutbirga's] advice before that of others."[389] As portrayed by her biographer, Liutbirga was symbolically incorporated into Gisla's family, participating in the most important social structure in Carolingian society.

The symbolic incorporation of Liutbirga into Gisla's family was illustrated in the way that she interacted with the family and its estate. She was very often described as the giver and recipient of motherly love. She persisted "with love" in her duties and was described as having many friends who all "loved her."[390] She was loved by the servants of the household and

[387] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 84.
[388] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 85.
[389] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 87.
[390] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 85, 86.

honored by "servants of both sexes."[391] It was her "profound love and devotion" which inspired Gisla's children to call "her mother rather than nurse."[392] Though not a member of the family by birth, Liutbirga was soon recognized as "the mother of the whole household."[393] As Gisla had illustrated, Carolingian mothers were tasked with controlling and running their estates, and Liutbirga's symbolic motherhood did not provide her an exemption from this task.

Liutbirga's control of the household was not only observed by the servants and the children; she was also treated with respect by Gisla's son, count Bernhard. Though Bernhard was the technical owner of the estate, he saw her as "the faithful steward and overseer of everything he owned," since she had taken over "the governance of the things he possessed to such a degree that she had complete control over the domestic affairs of the household."[394] Bernhard seemingly heeded his dying mother's advice to listen to the saint and guide her as one of his sisters. In a detailed scene, he confronted her about the effect her religious observances were having on her health "with soft and respected words," which was his "accustomed way."[395] She ultimately reassured him that her practices are "more God's than [her] own" through an argument that the biographer described as incorporating twenty different biblical verses.[396] However, despite Bernhard's clear respect for her as the governor of the household and Bernhard's perception of her holiness, Liutbirga still spoke to the count in a "submissive voice."[397] The apparent contrast between her role and the deference which she gave to Bernhard as the male head of the household is akin to her portrayed deference to male religious elites.

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[391] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 87.
[392] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 88.
[393] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 87.
[394] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 87-88.
[395] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 90.
[396] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 90-92.
[397] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 90.

Like Liutbirga herself, the male religious elites in the *Life* were incorporated into an elaborate family metaphor. As the religious fathers, bishops provided advice, blessing, and reassurance for Liutbirga throughout her life. The bishop Haimo "frequently visited with paternal love," instructing her and providing her "with bodily necessities."[398] The bishop who blessed her cell was described as a father who "fortified her with his teachings and blessings."[399] A later passage was even more explicit:

> Anskar, archbishop of Bremen, cherished her with a love of holy parenthood. He loved her so much that the devoted father rushed with greatest goodwill on a journey of great length in order to visit her. The venerable bishop and willing supporter of her every need, in his great munificence, comforted her not only with his words when he visited, but also with bodily assistance.[400]

Even visions of deceased bishops acted in this elaborate family metaphor; St. Martin advised and consoled her "with the words of a father."[401] The importance of the Carolingian family structure was reiterated in the use of familial terms and qualities to describe Liutbirga's relationship with male bishops and holy men.

The bishops' fatherly role often goes beyond giving helpful advice and support to Liutbirga. Throughout her *Life*, Liutbirga deferred to the male religious elite's decisions regarding her own autonomy and practices, both respecting the bishops' role in the Carolingian familial metaphor and showing her own acquiescence to the Church hierarchy. Liutbirga's most unique quality, her building of the small cell from which she would serve as anchoress, was noted as "a form of religious life which no one in this region has yet attempted."[402] According to the author, she was passionately called to this path, knowing that it would fill her

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[398] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 115.
[399] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 99.
[400] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 116.
[401] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 115.
[402] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 93.

"exultant heart" with "joy and delight."[403] Yet, despite her clear will, she first sought permission from Bernhard, who decided that "the counsels of priests and…bishop are certainly more fitting than those of laymen," and that "the case would have to be discussed wisely and deliberated for as long as necessary by the bishop and priests in council."[404] In order to receive the blessing of the bishop, Liutbirga literally threw herself at his feet.[405] When the bishop agreed to grant Liutbirga her wish, the cell itself had to be blessed by the bishop as well as "no small number of priests and a large group of clerics of the second order and the lower ranks."[406] Throughout her *Life* Liutbirga deferred to the male Church hierarchy, seemingly respecting both their position and their symbolic family role as the fathers of the Church.

In addition to the emphasis on Carolingian family structure and deference to Church elites, the *Life* of Liutbirga built a case for the saint's merits by describing her youth and her admirable traits during adulthood. However, unlike the previously studied *vitae*, this text did not begin by emphasizing strictly religious-based personal merits. Instead, by starting the text with Gisla's decision to enlist Liutbirga's help in the running of the estate, readers are instead granted an image of the traits which make Liutbirga an effective Christian leader and aid. Gisla took into account Liutbirga's "actions and deportment," especially taking note of the young girl's leadership abilities and attention to detail.[407] Liutbirga was "obliging" in the way she served Gisla's "every need" and "clever" in the way she "directed others with a nod of her head.[408] In addition to being a clever and dutiful leader, the young woman was intelligent and "full of reason for one so young."[409] As she ages, Liutbirga was described as being competent

[403] Ibid.
[404] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 93-94.
[405] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 98.
[406] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 99.
[407] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 85.
[408] Ibid.
[409] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 84, 85.

with a variety of domestic tasks, especially with those expected of women; "She was so gifted in the various arts that women pursue that, in those places in which she was known, the inhabitants spoke of her above all others around as if she were a female Daedalus."[410] In another section she was remembered as being "skilled in the many arts of women," specifically keeping "a small charcoal fire burning in her cell for dyes of different colors."[411] Liutbirga was initially described not through examples of her religious piety, but rather through her competency with the domestic tasks necessary in aiding Gisla.

Of course, the author did not fail to describe Liutbirga's religious competencies as well, simply placing them after the domestic merits. Many of the young girl's pious traits were listed without providing any example: she "was prudent in counsel, truthful in speech, faithful in carrying out commissions, generous with alms, constant in work, outstanding in piety, foremost among everyone in goodness, a caregiver to the sick, a mediator of disputes."[412] She visited the churches of God and frequented them "day and night," and fed the poor, cared for the sick, and ministered to the prisoners.[413] She was "persevering tirelessly in divine praises" and provided "distinguished examples of virtue."[414] Her rejection of worldly ways was both complete and completely necessary: "she stepped back from the evil allurements of the world as if from the edge of an abyss."[415] Her piety was linked directly to the tradition of St. Martin; the man himself came to her "in a genuine vision," instructing her on everything from her clothing to her prayer, advising "her on her whole way of life."[416] Despite the many sections praising the many virtues of her piety, the author failed to give many details of the ways in

[410] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 86.
[411] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 99.
[412] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 85.
[413] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 88, 116.
[414] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 89, 86.
[415] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 86.
[416] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 115.

which Liutbirga fulfilled these sentiments, providing examples of the types of piety that were deemed sanctifying at the time, but not examples of how these qualities were met.

The exception to this rule was the descriptions of Liutbirga's dietary and behavioral restrictions. Like Genovefa and Radegund, Liutbirga's piety was expressed in part through actions which inflicted bodily harm. Just as she would walk at night to the church on bare feet, she would persist in prayer "day and night," giving "only so much time to eating and sleeping as the fragility of human nature demanded."[417] Her diet was restricted through a "continuous burdens of fasts and vigils to such an extent that she fed on no more than bread with salt and herbs, eating on Sundays and feast days only beans and the tiniest amount of fish, and only rarely and in small amounts."[418] The importance of dietary restrictions can perhaps be best seen in the contrasting ways that the author described real food and "spiritual food." With real food, Liutbirga restricted herself to "at most strawberries and wild apples."[419] However, when the food provided was the "consolatory conversations" granted by her vision of St. Martian, Liutbirga feasted upon them "as on sumptuous dishes dripping with honey."[420] By contrasting the real and the spiritual food, the author showed that the saint limited her pleasure in the real world in order to feast on the benefits of religious life. Liutbirga's sanctity was in part constructed around her refusing the needs of her physical body through the limitation of sleep and fasting.

Liutbirga's rejection of the needs of her physical body was further complicated by the conflicting language used to describe her physicality. In many passages throughout the course of the text she was a weak-bodied female, wearied and depressed by her inability to affect

[417] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 110.
[418] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 99.
[419] Ibid.
[420] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 115.

changes in the world around her. Her nightly vigils to and from the church on bare feet put her in "terrible danger," which resulted in her looking "thin and drawn."[421] Her heart, "weakened by sadness" when she failed to baptize a child before its untimely death, was "weighed down by the pain" that kept her from productive work.[422] She was described alternatively as "weak," "diminished," and "miserable," hardly terms depicting the power of a disciple of God.[423] In many cases, Liutbirga was seemingly caged by her frail human body, limited by her physical and mental weakness.

Yet in other portions of the text this supposedly weak woman was described as persistent and active. The same passage that saw the saint "thin and drawn" stated that she "never succumbed to fatigue or even let her head droop."[424] In some cases, such as in her discussion on piety with Bernhard, Liutbirga painted herself and her piety in a very martial, active light through very specific use of language. Poisoned lances, "wedge-shaped formations of enemy troops," multitude of armed soldiers, "dreadful hand-to-hand combat," and "legions of enemies with their war machines of wickedness," all featured in the conversation.[425] The author compared her to "the bruised men in the wrestling school, joined in the contest against the temptations of the world and the filth of the flesh" and imagined her as a digging up "the prickly thornbush of worldly delights by the roots," both metaphors which constructed Liutbirga as actively laboring.[426] Even though the achievements were ultimately credited to "the breath of God," rather than her own "weak body" or tenacity, at times Liutbirga was not weak, wearied, or depressed.[427] The conflicting imagery presented describes Liutbirga as being

[421] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 89-90.
[422] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 114.
[423] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 89, 99, 112.
[424] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 89.
[425] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 97-98.
[426] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 89.
[427] Ibid.

either physically and emotionally weak, or physically and spiritually strong, even at times within a single conversation. This complicated portrayal of Liutbirga's body and self contributed to a similarly complicated conversation about Liutbirga's gendered identity.

The anonymous author of this *Life* was at times very explicit in his portrayal of Liutbirga as a *virago*. She was described as a "manly woman" with an "exceedingly manly soul."[428] At one point, he even identified her explicitly as a "happy virago," despite any contradiction that this may create with his portrayal of the saint as a mother figure.[429] In some instances, this *virago* status appeared to allow Liutbirga to operate outside the restrictions set for women in the Church. When asked to perform a baptism, a rite by this point in history reserved for male holy persons alone, Liutbirga:

> was hesitant, saying 'without the license of our bishop or the order of priests, there is nothing that I can presume to do, except what has been decreed beforehand. It is necessary first to obtain their advice and also to make sure that it would be permitted according to their counsel, especially when I am compelled by decree not to do anything of my own volition. But if others allow it, I will not resist.'[430]

This detailed deferral was ultimately resolved when the priests gave her permission to perform the rite despite her gender, and while the baptism ultimately did not come to pass, the problem was explained as lying not with Liutbirga's actions (and, by extension, not with her being allowing to perform the baptism) but rather with the child itself.[431] In the case of this baptism, Liutbirga appeared to be allowed to operate outside of the published religious law with the permission of her local priests. However, there are many cases where Liutbirga's status as a *virago* did not allow the saint any exemption from strict gendered laws and restrictions.

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[428] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 86, 93.
[429] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 86.
[430] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 110.
[431] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 112.

Though she was physically isolated in her cell, Liutbirga was by no means intellectually isolated from holy and lay men and women. She had "discussions with men of distinguished sanctity," and "friendly disputations with those…learned and accomplished in the divine law," including abbots and bishops.[432] Despite their willingness to discuss religious law with the saint, however, the male Church hierarchy did not seem receptive toward letting her pass her learning on to others. In one incredible passage, the author placed Liutbirga's competence in direct dialogue with the gendered expectations of the time:

> she occupied herself unceasingly with the study of the holy scriptures, and by daily meditating on some small thing, she became ever more proficient until she arrived at such a depth of understanding that, if the weakness of her sex had not impeded her, she would have been able to teach others.[433]

Despite her proficiency and even her status as a *virago,* Liutbirga was not allowed to teach scripture to others because of her gender, an apparently accepted truth, stated quite matter-of-factly by the author. Historian Frederick Paxton raised the possibility that this sentence was included not as a restatement of commonly held truth, but rather as a tongue-in-cheek rebuttal to gendered expectations by a female-sympathetic author.[434] While this conclusion is certainly a possibility, this sentence nevertheless illustrates that female holy women were not acceptable teachers of scripture and that Liutbirga's status as an anchoress and *virago* did not exempt her from this limitation.

Despite Liutbirga's being restricted from teaching others scripture, she did teach and minister about other topics from the confines of her cell. Although the saint was described as communing with both men and women, the author carefully noted many examples of the ways in which she specifically provided for women in need. She instructed the women who came to

[432] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 115.
[433] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 86.
[434] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 16.

her since she was "skilled in the many arts of women."[435] When the bishop sent young women to Liutbirga's cell, she "educated them in psalmody and handiwork and, when they had been taught, she granted them their liberty and permitted them to go either to their relativities or wherever they wished," suggesting that she ministered to lay people rather than just cloistered women.[436] She consoled "widows, orphans, and children."[437] In some cases, the author provided very specific examples of the ways in which the saint assisted the women around her cell. When an unnamed young woman attempted to sneak past Liutbirga in order to meet a young man for an illicit affair, the saint called upon the girl to for assistance with a "beneficial labor," and "admonished [the girl] in a motherly fashion.[438] This distraction saved the girl from the eternal damnation that the young man received soon after the attempted affair.[439] In another incident, Liutbirga was approached by a woman whose child had died before baptism. The saint "consoled the tearful woman," and agreed to assist with her next child's baptism.[440] She guided one woman to "pay her respects for her mother, denying that she knew anything about the mother's fate even though she had foreseen that the woman would die in three days."[441] When asked why she did not tell the girl the truth, she exhibited her compassion by saying that the knowledge would have burdened the girl and kept her from accomplishing the task that needed to be done.[442] Although Liutbirga was restricted from teaching scripture due to her gendered identity and physically restricted by the confines of her cell, she remained a community leader and source of guidance, especially focusing her compassion on the needs of women and continuing her motherly role established on Gisla's estate.

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[435] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 99-100.
[436] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 116.
[437] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 116.
[438] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 108-108.
[439] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 109.
[440] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 109.
[441] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 113.
[442] Ibid.

Although her guidance and leadership were exceptional and admirable, the author also dedicated a large portion of his text regarding Liutbirga's life as anchoress to the spiritual abilities that she honed in the solitary confinement of her cell. The author of the text was quite confident about some of the particular spiritual abilities Liutbirga possessed, declaring that "she had been granted the spirit of prophecy by God," an ability she rarely admitted "in order to avoid being labeled a saint."[443] She predicted the death of community members.[444] Although she professed to not knowing the day of her death, she did know that she "was to spend thirty years in her cell."[445] The "innumerable miraculous visions and signs" which she received "occupied [her] daily," but they were not always of a divine nature—some were "committed through the deceitfulness of demons," who created "innumerable monstrous illusions."[446] Alone in her simple room, Liutbirga was beset by daily visions of both a divine and demonic nature, and one of her greatest strengths came from learning to separate the two.

Liutbirga, a saintly, loving mother-figure with a submissive voice, waged constant battle with her contrast: the devil, a clamorous evil with a "timorous voice."[447] He was described as pursuing her relentlessly day and night, disguising himself as "an angel or an apostle or one of the saints," and even as Christ himself.[448] She described being "swallowed up in the lake of despair" over her inability to accurately identify the devil in his many disguises.[449] Only after much reflection did she learn to correctly discern an evil spirit; a heavenly voice told her that "no matter what color it might be dressed in, you will see a stain of

[443] Ibid.
[444] Ibid.
[445] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 114-115.
[446] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 112.
[447] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 106.
[448] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 105.
[449] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 106.

the blackest sort on its backside."[450] Armed by the knowledge that she could discern the true origin of the apparitions that daily plagued her, the saint was shored up against the spiritual attacks of her adversary.

The ability to discern the devil did not keep him from terrorizing the saint in her cell—instead he merely "gave up assuming angelic forms, and often showed the terrible shape of his own deformity."[451] In one detailed sequence, the devil appeared as a dog, a he-goat, and a multitude of mice to terrify her, yet she replied "Why should I fear you, who has no power except that which is given to you by God, in whose hands all power lies?"[452] The concerns which tormented Liutbirga were not merely those of her immediate community, but often included regional and even global concerns—frustrating, perhaps, for a woman permanently walled into a cell. The devil subjected her to visions of "whatever evil deeds had occurred among Christians anywhere in the world: at one time reporting domestic discord, others civil war or parricide, and telling of conjugal adultery and incest with children, and other acts of evil."[453] The devil mocked her lifestyle and her helplessness, even comparing her to a criminal in a jail cell.[454] However, the devil in this text most often went out of his way to torment Liutbirga with her own guilt.

Liutbirga's guilt was often laid out explicitly by her harassing devil. At one point he reminded her of the time that she broke her needle and switched her broken needle with another girl's.[455] In a separate incident, he reminded her of the day she ignored church teaching by failing to purify water after finding a dead mouse in it.[456] In both cases, she had completely

[450] Ibid.
[451] Ibid.
[452] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 103.
[453] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 106.
[454] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 102.
[455] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 105.
[456] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 104.

forgotten the sin, so the author of the *Life* related that the devil's reminders were actual fortuitous because they allowed her to complete her confession.[457] In other instances, however, the devil reminded Liutbirga of potentially more damning transgressions.

In many of the recorded scenarios, the devil was involved in the punishment or elucidation of sins involving sexual immorality. For example, Liutbirga had a vision of the devil stripping the face off of a young man damned for his role in an illicit affair.[458] When her prayers were unable to save the young man, she descended into a deep sadness. In one detailed instant, a child was eternally damned due to the "sins of its parents: the child had been conceived on a prohibited feast day."[459] Liutbirga's reaction to the instance was similar; she berated herself, saying:

> woe to you, most miserable Liutbirga, for your sins take hold of you now and the enemy of the human race has made bitingly good on his threats to me, just as he often said he would. Who other than I is guilty of this homicide, since I put off the time of the baptism until this day, and on account of my sins.[460]

Her guilt over the incident was so debilitating that "she was consumed nearly to extermination, and no one was able to console her," until a divine voice reassured her that the child's death was not her fault, rather the result of the parents' wrongdoing.[461] In these cases, sexual wrongdoing was explicit and not related to Liutbirga herself. However, there are some cases that suggested that some of her expressed guilt may have stemmed from similar immorality in her own past.

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[457] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 105.
[458] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 109.
[459] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 112.
[460] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 111.
[461] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 111, 112.

In his thematic analysis of the *Life* of Liutbirga, Paxton pointed out a few seemingly unrelated incidences which may have alluded to Liutbirga's own sexual immorality.[462] The most obvious event was the devil's coming to her as "certain turner… [known] from her former life," a servant who presented her with bowls that turned out to be made of rotten wood.[463] In another, the devil tormented her about her bed, upsetting her to the point that she smashed the furniture to bits and shoved the pieces out of the window of her cell.[464] Every evil spirit that tormented her was remembered as being a male despite the manikins' many disguises: a young boy on her windowsill, a male servant, and even a male goat.[465] While none of these instances point explicitly to sexual wrongdoing on the saint's part, it could explain why the author made no mention of Liutbirga's virginal status, despite the fact that Gisla had found Liutbirga in a "monastery of virgins."[466]

Even if Liutbirga was not feeling guilt for past sexual mores, her guilt nevertheless was portrayed as another common theme throughout her *Life.* She begged Bernhard for her small cell by drawing upon her guilt for the actions, saying:

> I am a great sinner, my lord, held prisoner by many chains, who has led up to now an uncertain life among the many temptations and luxuries of this world. …At last I beseech you now out of your love for me for a place somewhere, where I might spend what remains of my life doing penance for my sins and begging God for benefit for those who, by His will, performed works of mercy by having mercy on me.[467]

When she confessed her sins to the bishop, he immediately granted her wish to live the life of an anchoress. Even in her holy retreat she "confessed to priests daily and asked for their

[462] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,*52.
[463] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 101.
[464] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 101.
[465] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 101-103.
[466] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 89.
[467] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 93.

forgiveness and that of her sisters."[468] Often her guilt was accompanied by tears; her eyes were "wet with tears" when the oft-mentioned unbaptized child died and when the devil reminded her of her minor transgressions.[469] The devil himself made note of her frequent tears, saying "if you like to cry, I will give you plenty to cry about and show you plenty of painful stuff."[470] Liutbirga's guilt, expressed in her tears and in her frequent asking for forgiveness, wass the final defining feature of this description of her sanctity.

Very little attention was paid in the *Life* of Liutbirga to her death, and no additional themes can be drawn from it. As described by the author, she died in her cell, surrounded by admirers, "arms spread out in the shape of a cross," quoting the thirtieth psalm and the dying words of Jesus in Luke's Gospel.[471] She was not venerated as a saint at the time (or, indeed, anywhere in the text) and performed no miracles upon her death, but passed away having confessed her sins to the priests one final time.

The *Life* of Liutbirga highlighted themes that illustrate the conflicting traits attributed to female sanctity on the fringe of the Carolingian Empire. The nuclear family structure, made more important by strictly enforced monogamy among elites, was portrayed in the literal and metaphorical relationships between the saint, the family she serves, and the holy men which guided her life. Deference to the Church elite, which was still establishing itself in Saxony, helped dictate what Liutbirga was capable of accomplishing as an anchoress. As a spiritual member of an adopted family, Liutbirga was remembered first for her domestic qualities, followed by vague lists of pious qualities—only her rejection of her bodily needs was elucidated in any great detail. Her body, rejected through fasts and sleep deprivation, was

[468] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 117.
[469] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 111.
[470] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 106-7.
[471] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Liutbirga," 117.

described as both weak and strong in varying passages. This complicated image was further muddled by the ways that the saint's gender was described. In some cases, she was a *virago,* capable of religious tasks in which most women could not partake. In other cases, she was a weak female, restricted from teaching the scripture due solely to her gender. Despite these limitations, Liutbirga was remembered as a leader and guide who especially made time for women's needs—lay and holy alike—training her fellows in domestic tasks and morality and supporting them in their distress. When she was not assisting her community as anchoress, the saint was receiving daily visions of a divine and demonic nature. Her holy recess gave her the grace to discern the disguised devil's true nature, even as he attempted to frighten her with the woes of the world and discourage her with reminders of her past transgressions. Through it all, Liutbirga was guided by her guilt, actively seeking redemption for her sins, no matter how minor or major. This messy portrayal, filled with contradictions, could indicate the complicated nature of female sanctity on the edge of the Carolingian Empire.

Hathumoda of Gandersheim (840-874)

Hathumoda was born in 840 to a wealthy and powerful East Saxon nobleman, Liudolf, and his Frankish wife Oda.[472] Liudolf was likely descended from a family which converted to Christianity and supported the advancing army of Charlemagne at the end of the eighth century.[473] The couple had "at least eleven children," including the abbess; brothers Brun and Otto, dukes of Saxony; sister Liutgard, wife of the king's son Louis the Younger; and brother Otto "the Illustrious," the progenitor of the Ottonian Empire, which would eventually topple

[472] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,*40-41; Also note Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 42: "In Old Saxon, *Hathumot* meant 'battle courage,' a surprising name for a woman, especially a Christian one, but perhaps simply traditional by the ninth century. It is nevertheless a reminder of how close to the pagan past of Saxony her parents' generation still was."
[473] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 40.

the Carolingians in the early tenth century.[474] The rise of Hathumoda's family, the Liudolfings, is considered by some to be "one of the great success stories of the early Middle Ages."[475]

Hathumoda was educated at the Herford Benedictine abbey in Westphalia. [476] Her parents, perhaps motivated by the anti-Christian *Stellinga* uprisings, traveled to Rome to seek papal permission to establish a female cloister on their lands at Gandersheim.[477] Pope Sergius II (reigned 844-47) approved their plan, granting them the relics of Saint-Popes Anastasius and Innocent. [478] In 852, when Hathumoda turned twelve, the minimum age set by canon law, she became the abbess of the female-only cloister, which was temporarily seated next to a monastery in Brunshausen before the buildings were built at Gandersheim.[479] Hathumoda and her sisters soon won the respect of the monks at Fulda for their strict adherence to the Benedictine *Rule* and for their interpretation of heaven-sent prophecies.[480]

Disaster struck northwestern Europe in 874, when "nearly a third of the population was destroyed" by a "hunger and pestilence."[481] The women of Gandersheim were not spared, and the abbess Hathumoda cared for her sisters until she herself fell ill.[482] She died at the age of thirty-four in 874 and was buried at Brunshausen.[483] Gandersheim fell under the control of Hathumoda's sisters Gerberga and Christina, and housed Hathumoda's mother Oda until her death in 912.[484]

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[474] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 41, 7.
[475] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 7.
[476] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 3.
[477] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 42.
[478] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 42.
[479] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 42, xiv.
[480] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 3, 44.
[481] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 44.
[482] *Ibid.*
[483] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 3, 44.
[484] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 44 ; interesting note: Oda died "just eight years before her great-grandson Henry became the first Saxon king of Germany"

Agius and the Life *of Hathumoda (876)*

> "They mourned with one voice that they had lost the best abbess, the most merciful mother, that there was no longer anyone to love everyone with such charity, to receive them with such humanity, to gather together guests with such liberality, to give succor to the poor with such mercy."—The *Life* of Hathumoda[485]

The *Life* of Hathumoda was most likely completed within two years of her death by a Benedictine monk named Agius.[486] Agius was a monk and a priest, most likely from Corvey, whose sister house, Herford, was Hathumoda's home until Gandersheim was founded.[487] Agius has been described as the friend, doctor, brother, and uncle of Hathumoda—at the very least he was her "confessor and confidant."[488] This close personal relationship with the abbess was reiterated multiple times in both the *Life* of Hathumoda and in an accompanying verse poem, the *Dialogue* of Hathumoda, which was written after her death as instructions to her grieving sisters.[489] Agius's learned background, his life at the Benedictine monastery of Corvey, and his close personal relationship with Hathumoda figured heavily in the composition and themes present in the *Life* of the holy woman.

The Latin text drew heavily from scripture and a variety of religious texts to which Agius would have had access at Corvey. Some of the passages purportedly describing the life and actions of Hathumoda were actually copied directly from other religious texts, including the *Rule* of St. Benedict, commentary on the *Rule*, and even a poem by Fortunatus about the

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[485] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda, First Abbess of Gandersheim," in *Anchoress and Abbess in Ninth-Century Saxony*, ed. and trans. Frederick S. Paxton, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 140.
[486] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, xiv
[487] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 21.
[488] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, 2, 22.
[489] The *Dialogue* of Hathumoda, while serving to reiterate that Agius was well-versed in scripture, that Agius was motivated by funeral ritual and that Hathumoda's sisters were distressed by her passing, contain no new thematic features not seen in the *Life* of Hathumoda. Therefore, I chose not to pursue a detailed analysis of this text for this paper.

Merovingian royalty.[490] For example, when describing the way that the sisters cared for the dying Hathumoda, Agius drew heavily on the texts of Saint Jerome, written almost five hundred years before the death of the abbess.[491] However, despite the clear influence of these other texts, Agius did not simply repeat the style of the classical hagiographies to which he surely had access. Instead, he chose to focus a full two thirds of his *Life* not on the life of Hathumoda herself, but rather on a description of her death and funeral.[492] This detailed description, which may have served as Agius's guide to correct bed and graveside behavior, was a clear deviation from the style in which other saints had been commemorated.

The *Life* of Hathumoda served multiple roles in addition to Agius's possible attempt to instruct behavior toward the dying and deceased. In the text, Agius explicitly called for the community of Gandersheim to be protected by a royal charter of immunity, which would grant the community royal protection and the independence to self-govern.[493] Secondly, Agius seemed to promote the Benedictine *Rule* as a governance system for the cloister, perhaps in an attempt to model Gandersheim after his own home at Corvey. Although the text was dedicated to Hathumoda's monastic sisters "as a guidebook for correct monastic living," the text served as a Benedictine rebuttal to the Carolingian canoness system.[494] Hathumoda stood as a "model of monastic leadership," keeping herself and her sisters separated from outsiders rather than allowing the sisters to leave Gandersheim to marry or manage estates, as canonesses might.[495] Finally, like the anonymous author of the *Life* of Liutbirga, Agius used this text to create a family history alongside the story of the abbess herself.[496] Although the text was addressed to

[490] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 26.
[491] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 64.
[492] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 58.
[493] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 24.
[494] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 3.
[495] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 62.
[496] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 59.

the "sisters of Gandersheim," most of the named women featured in the story were Hathumoda's biological sisters or her mother, who was held with as much esteem in the text as Hathumoda herself.[497] In the *Life* of Hathumoda, Agius explicitly called for royal immunity for the community at Gandersheim, promoted the Benedictine *Rule* for the women of the community, and commemorated the Liudulfing family which founded the cloister.

While Agius did succeed in convincing the East Frankish king to grant the community royal immunity, he seems to have failed in part on his quest to promote the Benedictine *Rule* and promote the memory of Hathumoda and her family members. The Gandersheim women did not become the Benedictine haven that the monk seemingly promoted in his description of its first abbess, instead becoming a community of canonesses.[498] Hathumoda and her family members were no longer commemorated in any sort of widespread manner by the turn of the millennium. Paxton suggested that it may have been the Ottonian Queen Mathilda herself who, in an effort to promote her own newly founded monastery over Gandersheim, erased the Liudolfing women from the list of those remembered for their sanctity. [499] If not for the late fifteenth century monk Andreas Lang, who preserved the *Life* and *Dialogue* of Hathumoda alongside the *Life* of Liutbirga, no record of the abbess's life would exist today.[500]

As mentioned above, Agius was not above relating his motivations for writing the *Life* of Hathumoda or the closeness of his personal relationship with the holy woman. Writing in first person, he used the first three paragraphs of the document to express his supposed rationale for preparing the text.[501] He stated humbly that he was "in no way up to the task" of

[497] Ibid.
[498] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 45.
[499] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 47.
[500] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 11.
[501] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 119.

expressing how much he owes to Hathumoda and the charity of the sisters of Gandersheim.[502] He addressed the *vita* to these blessed sisters, so that "although [they were] no longer able to hold or gaze at [Hathumoda] in the flesh… [they] may possess a certain image of her in life, and in her deeds and actions think that [they] have her herself."[503] He asserted that he was qualified to present this image because of his close personal connection with Hathumoda, since he was "thoroughly acquainted with her in life and present at her death."[504] The intimate relationship between the author and his subject was made clear both in the introduction to and throughout the text of the *Life* of Hathumoda.

As in the *Life* of the other Carolingian saint, Liutbirga, the importance of family was made apparent in the beginning of the text. Right after his introduction, Agius related Hathumoda's ancestry, noting that "her brother is married to the granddaughter of kings and her sister has been joined to a king and son of a king," and that her father was a "duke of the East Saxons; her mother, descending from the equally noble stock of the Franks."[505] The role of Hathumoda's family far extended this brief introduction—they were present as actors throughout the entire text. Her parents established the cloister at Gandersheim by traveling to Rome to obtain permission from the pope.[506] Her paternal aunt, despite her age, "assisted her tirelessly" during the abbess's illness and eventual death.[507] Her biological sister and eventual successor, Gerberga, appeared as Hathumoda's confidant and caretaker, and the rest of her biological sisters at Gandersheim were seen in an exhaustingly detailed description of their bedside care:

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[502] Ibid.
[503] Ibid.
[504] Ibid.
[505] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 120.
[506] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 122.
[507] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 136.

> They stood by the bed, tirelessly assisted the one lying there, arranged the bed[clothes], supported her head with pillows, kept her body elevated, rubbed her hands, warmed her feet and stomach, cooled her fever with a fan, wiped the flowing sweat with linen cloths, regulated the hot water for washing, prepared food and brought it to her, and anticipated everything that needed to be done.[508]

However, the member of the holy woman's family most often seen in the *Life* of Hathumoda was not one of her sisters but rather her mother, Oda.

Hathumoda's mother, Oda, maintained a constant presence throughout the text, from her founding of the cloister at Gandersheim to her interactions with Hathumoda as abbess to her mourning over the loss of her daughter following Hathumoda's death. The first detailed glimpse that Agius gives of Hathumoda and Oda's relationship came at the end of a story regarding a disagreement that Hathumoda had had with her sister Gerberga. When Oda attempted to intervene, Hathumoda ignored her mother as she was ignoring Gerberga, an action that Agius noted as surprising since "she always loved and respected [Oda] to an extraordinary degree."[509] He went on to quickly summarize the relationship between mother and daughter:

> Hathumoda had always fawned over [Oda] so, like a little girl, that in all things she had accommodated her like a maidservant. If ever Hathumoda saw Oda somewhat sorrowful, she tried by various ways and wonderful acts of service to soothe her troubled soul, and, because she knew how much her mother loved to read books, she would say that she herself had found something pleasant to hear and useful to remember that she ought to read to her.[510]

This description, which notably lacked any explicit reference to scripture, sanctity, and Hathumoda's role as abbess, was not the only time that the mother-daughter relationship was described in surprisingly secular terms. Agius described the way that Oda was caught between

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[508] Ibid.
[509] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 134.
[510] Ibid.

"maternal affection" and sorrow during Hathumoda's illness, explaining that Oda would "enter the cell, but could not bear seeing her daughter burning up in death. She would leave, but could not bear being away from her suffering child."[511] Even though Hathumoda was by then thirty-four years old, she was imagined here as a mother's child rather than a dying abbess. Upon Hathumoda's death, the "admirable" Oda extended her motherly qualities to the congregation at large, "consoling the sorrowing ones, restraining those crying, soothing each with her conversation."[512] Hathumoda's mother Oda was a respected motherly presence and an actor throughout the *Life* of Hathumoda.

After introducing the Liudolf family, Agius described the childhood qualities of Hathumoda. The holy child, a "most delightful blossom" was already noble in "sanctity of mind."[513] She "derided as vain" the "jokes and games, however harmless, that are familiar to children her age."[514] "Mature in soul," she exuded a "Christian gravity" that provided "a glimpse of her future nature."[515] She rejected the "gold and precious baubles," that children desired, begging instead to simply "be in the church" or to learn her "letters…through tireless study."[516] Because the child already preferred "the dwelling place of the maidservants of God to the splendid houses of her family," she was placed in the monastery of Herford before the founding of Gandersheim.[517] Agius described the child Hathumoda as already representing qualities such as seriousness, sanctity, love of the Church and learning, and a rejection of worldly goods.

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[511] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 137.
[512] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 136.
[513] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 120-121.
[514] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 121.
[515] Ibid.
[516] Ibid.
[517] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 121-122.

The qualities exemplified by the pious child were expanded upon further in Agius's description of Hathumoda's piety as an adult. She continued her learning to stoke her "healthy intellect," devoting herself "zealously to the reading of scripture."[518] Just as the child had shunned games and baubles, the abbess shunned things that others enjoyed, like "the pleasures of marriage, the eating of meat, the wearing of softer and more elegant garments."[519] In many instances, Agius listed her pious qualities without providing any examples or details: "Her charity was admirable, her humility deep, her patience great, her liberality incredible, her piety incomparable."[520] Obsessed with the state of her soul and her need for reconciliation, she emulated scripture by going hungry "so that the poor would not go hungry," providing for strangers, and caring for the sick, with "the prayers of the Lord…always in her mouth [and] Christ always in her heart."[521] The all-encompassing nature of her piety was related at the very end of Hathumoda's *Life*, when Agius states that at her funeral she was "wrapped in someone else's shroud," having given away all of her possessions as a pauper of Christ, despite being "born to high station."[522] The piety that characterized the childhood of Hathumoda was seen throughout the abbess's life and death.

As with the other saints here studied, Hathumoda's sanctity was represented not only in her pious characteristics but also in her rejection of her body. She fasted, abstaining "from meat so much that she would eat bread most sparingly with other food and necessary drink."[523] Though never explicitly sleep depriving herself, Hathumoda was "the last to go to bed and the first to rise."[524] While she was not described as self-mortifying, she "rejected softer garments

[518] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 126.
[519] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 125.
[520] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 126.
[521] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 127, 137.
[522] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 142.
[523] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 125.
[524] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 124.

so much that she could not have had much rougher attire," and refused to receive clothes "prepared with gold, headbands, chaplets, hair-bands, earrings, lunulas, necklaces, bracelets large and small, breast-bands, and perfumes, for which the vanity of many women burns to have and to wear."[525] Like the saints that came before her, Hathumoda practiced a form of bodily rejection through fasting, possible sleep deprivation, and abstaining from comfortable and fashionable female clothing.

The detailed description of female clothing items and the seemingly flippant remark about the vanity of many women was, perhaps surprisingly, one of the few times in which gender was brought up explicitly in the text. [526] Instead of mentioning the fragility of the female body and condition, as previous hagiographers had done, Agius instead referenced the broader "taint of human fragility," of which Hathumoda was cleansed by her "severe death."[527] While Hathumoda practiced some variation on bodily rejection, Agius did not explicitly relate the gendered female body to weakness, as presumably some of his source materials had done, and never brought up the term "virago," or a similar concept of manly womanhood. Instead, Agius seemed to represent Hathumoda's gendered identity through the lens of virginal bridehood and spiritual motherhood.

Hathumoda's role as virginal bride was reiterated throughout the text. According to Agius, she "enthusiastically embraced and perseveringly observed" the "observation of virginity."[528] In one section she was remembered as preserving "the commitment to virginity so carefully that no opportunity was given to the malicious for criticism," which not only

[525] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 125, 121.
[526] One example of gender in the text is Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 40: Oda, consoling mourning sisters "with incredible patience of mind," is described as performing a male action—"a woman, she performed the service of men"—as if the act of putting aside one's mourning to comfort others was a gendered behavior.
[527] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 142.
[528] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 125.

reinforced her status but also suggests that criticism of one's status as a virgin was a potential downfall for women during this period.[529] The benefit of maintaining the status was not only to avoid criticism of course. By preferring "Christ the celestial bridegroom over a terrestrial spouse," Hathumoda sought a heavenly reward.[530] She was described as the "most chaste bride" of Christ following her death, linking her virginal status to her relationship with God in heaven.[531] In another section, the correlation between her virginity and her status with Christ was laid out even more explicitly when Agius said that "she, as a virgin, truly follows him wherever he may go."[532] As a virgin, Hathumoda accepted the status as a bride of Christ, a position that may have facilitated her other role as a spiritual mother to the women of Gandersheim.

In addition to serving as a pious example for her contemporaries at Gandersheim, Hathumoda was described as taking on another role in her job as abbess: the role of mother. "Elected spiritual mother" by "apostolic authority and with the blessing of her bishops" upon the founding of Gandersheim, Hathumoda's maternal qualities featured heavily in her adult life.[533] According to Agius, motherhood shaped her approach to leadership: "She pondered what it meant to be called mother, thought about how she was distinguished with the name of abbess, and therefore she rejoiced to serve rather than to rule and desired to be loved rather than feared."[534] She served the monastery by pleading for the protection of the royal family, which would not be granted until after her death.[535] Leading the sisters by example, she "never forbade anyone at any time to do something that she herself had done, nor commanded anyone

[529] Ibid.
[530] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 121.
[531] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 142.
[532] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 141.
[533] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 123.
[534] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 124.
[535] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 128. (also seen footnote Paxton pg. 128)

to do something that she had not already done herself."[536] Like a mother, she "affectionately loved or reverently honored all," lamenting "their faults as her own."[537] The importance of motherhood, already so evident in the descriptive portrayal of Hathumoda's mother Oda, was also apparent in the emphasis on the abbess's spiritual motherhood and the effect that the role had on her leadership as an abbess.

Hathumoda's leadership at Gandersheim was not only framed as that of a thoughtful and beloved mother but also as that of a strict adherent to the Benedictine *Rule*. Agius carefully mentioned that as a child she was "raised under regular discipline at the monastery of Herford," a Benedictine cloister.[538] As Agius portrayed it, she took the *Rule* with her to Gandersheim rather than allowing the women the relative freedom of canonesses. The women ate together, slept together, prayed together, worked together, and lived together, enjoying a "common life," with plain clothing and food.[539] They did not speak to relatives or guests without permission, especially male relatives or guests, in contrast to canonesses who could leave the cloisters to marry or, in the case of Liutbirga, assist families. In fact, Agius noted, "their separation from men was so complete that not even priests entered their cloister unless illness required it or some reasonable cause demanded the ministry of their office."[540] Agius also drew a specific comparison between the women of Gandersheim and the canonesses who could maintain control over their family land holdings: "They did not go outside the convent (as is the habit of many cloistered women) to visit either their relatives or dependent properties."[541] By describing Hathumoda's leadership explicitly as that of a Benedictine

[536] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 124.
[537] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 126.
[538] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 122.
[539] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 123.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Ibid.

adherent, Agius was attempting to establish Gandersheim as a Benedictine convent in the style of his own monastery at Corvey.

In the description of the establishment and maintenance of the Benedictine Gandersheim convent, another theme of the *Life* of Hathumoda is present: the deference for the established Church and Church tradition. The foundation of Gandersheim was dependent upon the Luidolfing's request of papal permission. Oda and Liudolf traveled to Rome (an incredible 900 mile journey from Gandersheim) for the "apostolic blessing" and were rewarded with a relic of the papacy itself: "the bodies of the Saint-Popes Anastasius and Innocent."[542] This story was representative not only of the power that the family must have had to be able to undertake the journey but also of deference for the papacy not seen in previous hagiographies. The verdict of the papacy was then validated by the local bishop, who gave his blessing over the election of Hathumoda as abbess.[543] And just as the beginning of Hathumoda's service as abbess was validated by the Church elites, so too was the end. "Bishop Marcwardus was present at that time [of her death] with his priests," and they performed everything that "ought to be done before the departure of the soul," including anointing with oil, reconciliation, and communion.[544] Throughout the *Life* of Hathumoda, the actors deferred to the approval, blessing, authority, and practices of the Church and its elites.

In addition to being a pious leader and faithful follower of Church teaching, Hathumoda and her sisters were also the recipients of divine visions of their future. Before the onset of the illness that would decimate their ranks and kill their abbess, the "elder sisters" saw "the great bell of the church fall down and break into pieces…[and] the sarcophagus of the

[542] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 122-123.; Mileage between Gandersheim (modern town Bad Gandersheim, Germany) and Rome, Italy calculated using Google Maps.
[543] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 123.
[544] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 138, 139.

saints collapse and gradually disintegrate," symbolizing a danger to the leader and authority of their convent.[545] Hathumoda had a nightmare where she was caught on a waterwheel, unable to prevent the destruction.[546] In one vision she "saw in the church what seemed to be a large cleft in the earth," which a voice revealed to be her own grave.[547] She informed her sisters that at times she felt like she was already "stripped of her body," flying "weightlessly through the air between heaven and earth," as if experiencing her impending death before she became ill.[548] When she refused to let Agius leave when one of his visits with her had ended, he interpreted her actions as signaling that she was aware that her time of death was rapidly approaching, as if it had "been revealed to her beforehand."[549] The visions did not cease when the illness revealed itself. She had a vision of her sisters "in the bloom of youth" as a "large field brightly blooming with diverse flowers" which suddenly burst into flames.[550] She commended her suffering sisters to Saint Martin, who she "always venerated…with special reverence," and asked her sisters to honor the saint with "particular veneration and service."[551] The final vision related by Agius included Saint Martin personally. From her bed, Hathumoda began "to shout that Saint Martin was there and walking around on the floor," and followed him around with her eyes even though none of the other sisters could see the apparition.[552] The women of Gandersheim and especially Hathumoda were remembered as recipients of the gift of divine visions and the interpretation of those divine visions.

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[545] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 128.
[546] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 129.; Also note the footnote which makes the interesting assertion that waterwheels of the type described were exceedingly rare in Saxony during this time period.
[547] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 129.
[548] Ibid.
[549] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 130.
[550] Ibid.
[551] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 131.
[552] Ibid.

The final two thirds of the *Life* of Hathumoda were dedicated to her illness, death, and burial. Agius blamed her acquisition of the disease on the fact that she "was running back and forth zealously among the sick," and stated that she continued to care for her sisters even when ill, struggling against her own disease, "trying to conquer or rather elude it."[553] Throughout her episodes of fever she was cared for by family and the prioress, dean, and sacristan of the monastery.[554] When the priests and bishop had offered her the last rights, she "devoutly kissed the wood of the holy cross" despite her paralysis, and attempted to recite the psalms before passing away.[555] Agius related that an uncountable number of people "flowed into the church" amongst the "groaning and moaning" mourning sisters.[556] The sisters washed the body "in the customary way" and recited "psalms and prayers" on Hathumoda's behalf.[557] It was in this washing that Hathumoda's only recorded post-death miracle occurred, when she "like a person still alive, raised her eyes and moved her lips as if speaking."[558] After wrapping the abbess in a borrowed shroud (both a representation of her status as a pauper of God and perhaps as a reminder of Jesus's own supposed burial in a borrowed shroud and grave), the body "was carried to the church on the shoulders of priests accompanied by a worthy choir of virgins singing psalms and led by the young girls carrying candles."[559] According to Agius, who professed to be present at her burial, "it was impossible to separate the voices of those chanting from the lamentations" because "the whole church resounded with the voices of the mourners" decrying the loss of their "best abbess" and "most merciful mother."[560] The incredible detail provided regarding the illness, death, and burial of Hathumoda may have Agius's attempt to

[553] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 130.
[554] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 136.
[555] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 139.
[556] Ibid.
[557] Ibid.
[558] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 140.
[559] Ibid.
[560] Ibid.

reinforce his notion of correct procedure regarding the dying and dead. Paxton suggested that this emphasis may be an explicit rebuttal to the comparatively lackluster care and respect paid toward the late monk Arno Borst, who died alone in 824 when none of his brothers believed his vision of his impending death.[561] By providing evidence that the women of Gandersheim did not fail Hathumoda as Borst's brothers had failed him, Agius may have been using Hathumoda's illness to further promote the convent itself.

As may be expected of a *vita* focusing primarily on illness and death, crying and tears were featured very heavily throughout the text of the *Life* of Hathumoda. Before her illness, Hathumoda "showed the simplicity of her serene soul amidst sadness and tears."[562] Her mourners cried upon her death, and the many tears shed at her passing were used to show how beloved she was.[563] Her mother, while maintaining a strong presence in public following Hathumoda's death, "yielded herself to more abundant solitary tears" alone and in secret.[564] Though Agius warned that God forbids crying in excess, he admitted that crying for Hathumoda was a worthy gesture.[565] Interestingly, though, the text included no mention of crying for Jesus or weeping in holiness, other than perhaps the first statement regarding Hathumoda's simplicity of soul.

The final major theme apparent in the *Life* of Hathumoda, her quarrelsome and often petty nature, has been viewed by analysists, including Paxton, as detracting from the sanctity of Hathumoda rather than promoting it. In multiple cases in the text, Hathumoda was portrayed as acting more like a haughty child rather than a wise and mature abbess. Agius admitted that "nothing displeased her more" than her secrets being shared with others. When she attempted

[561] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 65-66.
[562] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 126.
[563] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 127.
[564] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 141.
[565] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 144.

to tell her sister Gerberga in private of "a certain vision of such beauty, splendor, and sweetness as she had never seen or heard," Hathumoda suddenly began to shake. Gerberga, "out of fear" and "not daring to simply stand there by herself" called upon a priest. When the priest entered, "Hathumoda did not wish afterward to tell him or even her sister, complaining not a little that Gerberga, against her promise and Hathumoda's will, dared to divulge and reveal this secret to others. She acted in exactly the same way with her mother."[566] Agius elaborated, saying that she placed "her finger to her mouth, she vowed that now she would tell neither Gerberga, nor even her mother, nor anyone."[567] During her illness Hathumoda refused to eat, yet "could be persuaded" if the sisters claimed that Agius himself had sent the food.[568] She would "order" Agius to come over, and even when they both admitted that he had sinned for staying as long as he had at her bedside, she "would not by any means permit" him to leave.[569] In multiple cases throughout the *Life of Hathumoda*, the holy woman was described as reacting childishly and petty, characteristics seemingly at odds with portrayals of sanctity.

While Agius appeared not to focus on the possibly negative interpretations of these events, attributing Hathumoda's reluctance to share her visions as a function of their splendor and her reluctance to let him leave as a credit to her love for him rather than pettiness, the portrayals do seem to contrast with his descriptions of the abbess as experiencing "no impudence, no frivolity or incontinence" and his statement that "no one saw her angry."[570] Paxton suggested that these less pious aspects of the portrayal may have prevented Hathumoda's veneration past the millennia.[571] It is interesting to speculate, therefore, as to why

[566] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 133.
[567] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 134.
[568] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 135.
[569] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 130.
[570] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 125.
[571] Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess,* 46.

Agius included these descriptions if he was attempting to promote Hathumoda's dignity. Perhaps he felt obligated to accurately portray the character of the abbess that he knew so well, especially if the readers of his texts were likely to be the women that would have known the truth about Hathumoda and recognized any omissions. However, it is also possible that Agius did not see these incidents as detracting from Hathumoda's sanctity; indeed, he claimed at the beginning of the text that everything contained (which presumably included these stories) was "nothing that is not proclaimed up and down by the common folk and judged sound by their betters."[572] Were these stories also "judged sound" by the individuals proclaiming Hathumoda's holiness, or did they humanize the abbess to the point where she appeared no longer worthy of sainthood, as Paxton suggests?

The *Life* of Hathumoda included themes that showed the importance of representations of Church-sanctioned sanctity on the outskirts of the Carolingian Empire. After giving credence to his portrayal by discussing his personal relationship with the abbess, Agius described her family and the active role they played in the establishment of the family cloister at Gandersheim and the care of the ill. In particular, Hathumoda's mother, Oda, was presented as a model of sanctity herself and an important player in the development of the abbess's life. As a child Hathumoda was represented as rejecting worldly joys and wanting to instead focus on monastic learning, pious qualities that she continued to represent throughout her life. Her piety was also illustrated in her rejection of her body, which interestingly did not emphasize the weakness of females but rather their potential as virginal celestial brides and spiritual mothers. By encouraging women to elect to take on these roles, Church leaders could promote the growth of leaders who could build the Church on the fringes of the Empire but whose power was gendered enough to remain unthreatening to Church elite. This unthreatening

[572] Agius, "The *Life* of Hathumoda," 119-120.

quality was further exemplified by Hathumoda and her family's regard for the Church establishment and rules, including the strict Benedictine *Rule* rather than the canoness system which the Frankish-Saxon elite favored at the expense of direct Church control. Though few miracles are associated with Hathumoda, she nevertheless provided evidence of her divine inspiration in the visions which she interpreted and by her body's appearance after death, confirming heaven's approval of her lifestyle and, by extension, the aspects of Christianity which Agius had us believe that she was promoting. The final portion of the document included instructions on how to properly care for the dying and dead, directions that were perhaps needed in the newly established Christian communities on the religious frontier. Though the description of Hathumoda's sometimes child-like pettiness may have detracted from her sanctity in the eyes of some readers who viewed her as too humanized, her *Life* was nevertheless recorded because some individuals (at the very least Agius alone) found her to be an adequate representation of female sanctity in late-Carolingian Saxony.

Carolingian Sanctity: Liutbirga and Hathumoda

What themes represented in the *Lives* of Liutbirga and Hathumoda could potentially be representative of the Carolingian ideals of female sanctity? In what ways were these themes similar to or different from the themes used to construct Merovingian female sanctity? What historical realities could account for the shift in the expectations? What purpose did these texts serve in espousing these ideals?

Some expectations of sanctity performed by the Carolingian holy women were shared with their Merovingian predecessors. All four women practiced some form of ascetic bodily rejection, limiting their meals, their clothing, and their sleep. All four expressed qualities of

sexless *viragos*, while remaining in dialogue with other gendered expectations, such as bodily weakness, motherhood, and excessive crying. The influence of the Roman Church Fathers can be seen in all four texts, as can specific references to personal devotions to St. Martin, whose *vitae* would have been available to all four authors.[573] All of the women expressed exceptional piety from birth, establishing themselves as learned practitioners of their religion. The inclusion of all of these traits in the *vitae* of both time periods suggests that they were general expectations for female sanctity in Frankish Gaul, and that *vitae* served to promote these expectations to a larger audience.

On the other hand, some of the themes expressed in the Carolingian *vitae* were different than those expressed in the texts of their Merovingian predecessors. Both Carolingian women's *Lives* heavily feature families or imagery related to nuclear families. The family structure, once an obstacle that Merovingian saints had to overcome, was now an immediately beneficial part of the saint's daily experience. [574] Mothers (or adopted mothers) guided the saints in correct action until their death, and saints adopted motherly representation in their interactions with their subordinates. Father-figures, as represented by church elites, instructed and protected the saints. This new emphasis on family was likely the result of the Carolingian nobility's shift from the loose, polygamous family structures of the Merovingians to a more rigid monogamy focused on the nuclear family. It is also possible that the family-based nature of Carolingian women's monasticism could also have contributed to the emphasis on family in the texts that were perhaps commissioned by the monastic establishments themselves.[575] In framing the *Lives* of their saints and holy women within the context of the family structure, the authors of these Carolingian *vitae* may have been promoting the establishment and confirming the

[573] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 13.
[574] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 25.
[575] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 27 .

importance of the rigid, proper marriage structure in the developing Christian frontier of Saxony.

The second theme shared between the two Carolingian portrayals of sanctity was a conscious respect for and deference to the Church elite. Liutbirga and Hathumoda were no Radegund, standing in opposition to their local bishop. Instead, both women operated only with the express approval of their priests, monks, bishops, and even the pope. This emphasis on deference to the Church was almost certainly the result of the strengthening of the Carolingian Church hierarchy. As the Church created a stricter hierarchy and tried to enforce uniformity, the support of a prominent male Church leader became more important for holy women.[576] This Church leader could, significantly, now be the pope himself because of the close ties between the Carolingian ruling family and the papacy. Belief in the importance of the Roman bishopric—the papacy—went back at least to the early fifth century, but ties between the Carolingians and the pope were much stronger than their predecessors'.[577] It is also possible that increased stability under Carolingian rule made the route to Rome safer for travelers seeking blessing. In promoting deference to the structured church elites, the authors of these documents were providing example of the respect due to the Church and its leaders, a message made especially relevant in the Saxon frontier by the memory of uprisings against Christianity in the not-so-distant past.

The final unique theme seen in the Carolingian *vitae* but not in the Merovingians' was the emphasis on Church structure and ritual. Liutbirga's cell was erected with a ritualistic prayer performed by a priest. The saint herself was called upon to perform the baptismal rite. She took part in frequent official confessions. Her death occurred during a recitation of the

[576] Anderson, *A History of Their Own*, 76.
[577] D.A. Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal: sources and heritage,* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 2.

psalms. Hathumoda's *vita* was even more extreme. Her parents followed a strict procedure to set up the convent. She was tended to in her illness by the administrative structure of the convent. Her death was ritualistic and her funeral followed strict procedure. The emphasis on structure and ritual was most likely the result of Carolingian liturgical reforms, which promoted specific Church rituals, requiring their performance for sanctity. If the rituals were not required, such as the correct burial rituals promoted by Agius or the baptisms required for resurrection asked of Liutbirga, they were strongly suggested by the Church elite, such as the practice of the Benedictine *Rule* that Hathumoda was used to promote.[578] Many of these rituals had not been standardized (or at least were not widespread in practice) for the Merovingian saints. In promoting these rituals, the Carolingian *vitae* provided examples of the correct way to perform sanctity in the eyes of the Church establishment.

The Carolingian holy women also notably failed to perform some of the Merovingian expectations of female sanctity. Unlike the Merovingian saints, the Carolingian women were no longer presented as wonder-workers, but rather as "exemplary lives," and "models of 'religious faith and good conduct.'"[579] The miracles they performed were not public miracles—they did not resurrect, exorcise, or convert. [580] Instead they were the "private visionary insights" of cloistered religious women, an "inner, private, and mystical" female sanctity that did not publicly threaten the spiritual authority of male church elites. [581] Part of this evolution may have been the growing importance of the Church hierarchy, but it was also certainly the result of the Carolingians' indifference to or even suppression of exceptional religious individuals of all genders. The Carolingians' culture of sanctity was less likely to recognize

[578] Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 13.
[579] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 30.
[580] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 31.
[581] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 35.

saints for grandiose (or even hyperbolic) expressions of sanctity, regardless of whether they were male or female and whether or not they were operating within the Church structure. This stands in contrast to the Merovingians, whose culture supported wonder workers who supposedly stopped armies, altered weather, and cast out multitudes of demons. The changing ideals of miraculous sanctity are reflected in the Carolingians *Lives*' expression of fewer miraculous achievements.

Another major difference was the Carolingian women's relatively apolitical actions. The Merovingian women had led cities, interacted with secular leadership, and took an active role in founding Church establishments. Even though the Carolingian women lived in a part of the empire where political structures and religious establishments were still being negotiated, their interactions with the political system were almost nonexistent (even when convents were founded in the texts, the task was accomplished by family, not the subject herself). That is not to say that they were indifferent to politics—Hathumoda was aware of the Carolingian secular government's role in the protection of her convent, and Liutbirga was reminded of the woes of the world in her interaction with common people and apparitions of the devil—they were just not directly interacting with the political structures. Julia Smith suggested that this expression of female sanctity was particularly representative of an increase in misogynistic restrictions on women, who were being relegated to the role of "pawns" or "bystanders."[582] While I do not dispute that the Church patriarchy was operating in ways that postmodernists would identify as "misogynistic," I do not share her opinion that the political restriction was a particularly gendered one—it was probably more representative of broad Carolingian sanctity. In both texts, other women participated in political roles as often as the men—Gisla ran her estate, negotiating secular politics, just like Bernhard, and Oda traveled to Rome to found

[582] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 24.

Gandersheim, just like her husband. All of the political actions undertaken in the texts (of which there are fewer overall than in the Merovingian texts) were undertaken by males and females alike—just not the saint herself. In the relatively chaotic and decentralized Merovingian kingdoms, saints' political intervention was necessary in the running of the cities, but in the Carolingian empire, where political systems were more standardized and structured, it seems that holy ascetics were expected to not interfere with the political systems.

The differences between the expectations of female sanctity expressed by Merovingian and Carolingian female women's *vitae* appear to be more representative of changes in cultural, social, and political expectations of sanctity in general, rather than a systemic "repression" of female expressions of sanctity.

Chapter 3: Merovingians from a Carolingian Perspective

Who Controls Sanctity?

The influx of scholars and the ecclesiastical reform of the Carolingian Renaissance inspired a great output of hagiographies, producing a rich, complex, and distinctly Carolingian hagiographical tradition.[583] As we have seen, Carolingians were hesitant to promote their contemporaries to sainthood, producing contemporary hagiographies only on the fringes of the empire where Christianity was most in need of examples to establish Christian and Carolingian tradition and authority. [584] The vast majority of the Carolingian hagiographies, then, commemorated saints long dead.

Carolingian authors produced *vitae* for early saints who had no hagiographies, resulting in texts which sometimes had little to no historical accuracy.[585] Other texts were merely revisions of older *vitae.*[586] .[587] The historical detail in saints' lives often decreased over the passage of time, leaving saints with more miracles and "looking much holier" than in the original iterations of their *vita.*[588] While authors would sometimes include disclaimers stating that they were revising texts only to improve their Latin, they sometimes shifted the emphasis of the documents to bring the saints' behavior to match Carolingian expectations of sanctity In some cases, the direct imposition of the ideals of Carolingian sanctity can be deduced in these edited texts by comparing the original *vita* to the updated Carolingian text. [589]

By comparing accounts of Merovingian saints written by their contemporaries to the accounts constructed by Carolingian authors, we can identify the places where these texts

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[583] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 6.
[584] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 8.
[585] Ibid.
[586] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 7.
[587] Ibid.
[588] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France,* 51.
[589] Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity," 4.

underwent changes in theme or focus. Did Carolingian authors impose their ideals of sanctity on Merovingian saints? Did they emphasize the qualities celebrated by Carolingians, such as family life, deference to Church elites, or proper ritual? Did they retain or downplay qualities celebrated by Merovingians, like the practice of political power or the production of grandiose miracles? Did their editing introduce any detectable historical inaccuracies? In the end, who controlled the saint's construction of sanctity, the original Merovingian text, or the updating Carolingian author? To answer these questions we turn to our final saint, Clothild, Queen of the Franks.

Saint Clothild, Queen of the Franks (c. 475- 544)[590]

Clothild was a Burgundian princess, born to King Chilperic II and Queen Caretena around 475.[591] According to some accounts, Chilperic was killed by his brother, Gundobad, around 493, and Caretena was drowned with a stone tied around her neck.[592] It has been suggested, though, that this tale is apocryphal and that following her husband's death, Caretena moved to a monastery at Godegisil in Geneva with her daughters, Chrona and Clothild.[593] It was there at Geneva that Clothild was pursued by attendants on behalf of the Frankish king, Clovis.

Clovis (c.466-511) started his rule as a pagan, though he maintained connections with the Church hierarchy and elites.[594] Clothild accepted Clovis's marriage proposal and was married in 493 or 494, despite the king's staunch refusal to accept her Christian religion.

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[590] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women*, 38.
[591] Godefroid Kurth, "St. Clotilda." In *The Catholic Encyclopedia: Volume Four*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), accessed 23 March 2016 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04066a.htm>.
[592] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women*,41.
[593] Kurth, "St Clotilda."
[594] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 135.

Clothild gave birth to five of Clovis's children over the next six years. Her first child, Ingomer, died soon after birth—according to Gregory, Clovis blamed the death on his wife's religion. Her next child, Chlodomer, also grew ill but recovered before his baptism, supposedly thanks to his mother's prayers.

Like a Roman leader, Clovis issued Latin law codes for the Franks and retained a rigid control over his populace. As Clovis solidified his power in northern Gaul, the Arian Visigothic king of southern Gaul, Alaric II (d. 507), actively courted Catholic support against Clovis's advancing armies by holding a kingdom-wide Catholic council in Agde in 506.[595] The following year, presumably in an effort to prevent Catholic support for his sudden rival and to appease Clothild's attempts to convert him, Clovis "deliberately sought an oracle from the Catholic shrine of Saint Martin of Tours."[596] With the saint and the Catholic Church's support, Clovis invaded the Visigothic kingdom, defeating the army of Alaric II at Vouille in the summer of 507. On Christmas Day 508, the Catholic bishop of Rheims, Remigius, baptized Clovis and his entire army.[597]

Clothild encouraged her newly converted husband's Christian deeds, including his baptism and his foundation of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Paris (which would later be renamed the Abbey of St. Genovefa after that saint's death in 512). Clothild actively promoted the cult of St. Genovefa, and may actually have commissioned the saint's *Life.* Upon Clovis's death in 511, Clothild retired to the Abbey of St. Martin in Tours.[598] Though supposedly retired from the royal life, Clothild remained influential in local regional politics as she attempted to

[595] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 136.
[596] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 137.
[597] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 137.
[598] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women*, 40.

influence the actions of her oft-warring sons Chlodomer (495-524), Childebert I (496-558), and Clothar I (497-561), who had split the kingdom upon their father's death in 511.[599]

In 523 Clothild provoked the Burgundian War in retaliation for her uncle Gundobad's murder of her father (and possibly mother). Her son, Chlodomer, was killed during the Burgundian campaign and her daughter, also known as Clothild, was killed during a mission intended to rescue her from an abusive Visigothic husband.[600] Clothild attempted to raise Chlodomer's three sons, but their uncles, fearing that they would succeed Chlodomer to his portion of the throne, murdered two and forced the third into hiding. Clothild continued her work restoring and founding monasteries until her death in 544. She was buried beside her husband and St. Genovefa in Paris.[601] Clothild was not the subject of a contemporary cult, perhaps, as historians have suggested, due to her "failure to establish a lasting convent to serve as a center of her worship."[602] She was, however, memorialized in a variety of texts throughout the centuries, including Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* and an anonymous Carolingian hagiography.

[599] It is interesting to note that Chlothar I would go on to marry St. Radegund in 540.
[600] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women,* 46.
[601] Kurth, "St Clotilda."
[602] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women,* 38: "As Graus, Volk, Herrscher, 406, points out, hers is a rather artificial ecclesiastical cult whose narrowness may be due to her failure to establish a lasting convent to serve as a center of her worship."

Saint Gregory of Tours (538-594) and the History of the Franks

> "Queen Clothild earned the respect of all by her bearing. She gave alms to the poor and spent her nights in prayer. in chastity and virtue she lived out her blameless life….In all humility she moved forward to heavenly grace."—Gregory of Tours, the *History of the Franks*[603]

Gregory of Tours was a Merovingian contemporary of Clothild and a prolific author. Born in 538 in northern Frankish Gaul, Gregory was a loyal subject of the Merovingian Frankish kings and served as bishop of Tours from 573-594.[604] The great-grandson, grandnephew, and nephew of Catholic bishops, Gregory joined a familial tradition of serving the community and the saints that protected it.[605] His personal devotion to Saint Martin of Tours (336-397) was reflected in both his everyday life, which manifested his expectations for the Catholics he led in Tours, and through his prolific writings.[606]

Gregory's major texts revealed both his interpretation of the will of God and his insistence that the Frankish world was steeped in holiness waiting to influence the lives of everyday Christians. Gregory's *History of the Franks* painted the politics of his own time as a lesson about the divine retribution enacted on those who offended God and his saints.[607] The text, which related a highly mythologized account of the Frankish ruling families, was written between 539 and 594 over a series of ten books. Clothild's life was detailed in books three and four, which contained information ending in the year 575, thirty-one years after the saint's death. Interestingly, despite Gregory's ability to find sanctity all around the Frankish landscape, he never identified Clothild as a saint, referring to her instead as a holy queen throughout his interrupted narrative of her life.

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[603] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 182.
[604] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 154.
[605] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 159.
[606] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 159.
[607] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 160.

The Carolingian Life *of Clothild*

> "Oh happy Gaul! Rejoice and exult, praise the Lord, delight in the true God! For through the prayers of Saint Chrothilda [Clothild], the mystical embodiment of the church, your first king was chosen by the King of Heaven and torn from the cult of demons." – Anonymous *Life* of Saint Clothild[608]

The *Life* of Clothild is a late ninth or tenth century *vita* drafted by an anonymous author. The author drew heavily from Gregory's sixth-century text but also from Hincmar of Reims' (806-882) ninth century *Life* of Saint Remigius, a contemporary of St. Clothild. The text was collected in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum merowingicarum,* a nineteenth century compilation of Germanic sources from the Roman Empire to 1500.[609] In the Carolingian version of Clothild's life, her family history was recounted in a way that was "far removed from the complicated politics of early Merovingian times."[610] The text retains no mention of the relationship between Clovis and Clothild's Burgundian relatives, and makes no mention of the Arian heresy which so plagued the framing of the *History of the Franks.*[611] The text was also quite different stylistically. McNamara suggested that this *Life* was representative of the "more formal hagiography of the Carolingian period," despite the Merovingian subject material.[612] The translation of this document provided a unique opportunity to compare the *Life* to its original source material in the *History of the Franks*. By studying the ways in which Clothild's sanctity was constructed in these documents from different periods, historians can assess the evolution of social and religious ideals regarding female sanctity.

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[608] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild, Queen of the Franks (d. 544)," in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, ed. and trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John H. Halborg, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 45.
[609] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women,* 38.
[610] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 39.
[611] Ibid.
[612] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women,* 38.

Comparing the History of the Franks *and the Carolingian* Life *of Clothild*

Many of the themes and tales related in these accounts of the life of Clothild were quite similar. For example, both emphasized Clothild's extended family. For Gregory, the ruling family's affairs were central to his larger *History of the Franks*. For the Carolingian author, the family history served to frame the story of Clothild and her role in the nuclear family, a common theme in Carolingian hagiography. In some instances, the two accounts were almost exactly the same, with their few wording differences more likely the result of translators' differences than true differences in substance. For example, when describing Clothild's life after her husband's death, Gregory of Tours related that the queen continued her good works, "all the days of her life, rarely visiting Paris."[613] Her Carolingian biographer, three or four hundred years later, wrote that the queen "pursued good works in God's service. She rarely went to the city of Paris."[614] It seems apparent, as McNamara has suggested, that the Carolingian author drew much of his text directly from Gregory's, resulting in similar documents showing a direct lineage of historical memory.

However, the two accounts also have some notable differences. For instance, in the lines directly preceding those recounted above, Gregory insisted that "Queen Clothilda [Clothild] came to Tours after the death of her husband and served there in the church of St. Martin."[615] The Carolingian biographer instead noted that "After King Ludovic's [Carolingian spelling of Clovis] death, Queen Chrothilda [Clothild] often went to the Basilica of Saint Peter in the city of Tours."[616] As McNamara pointed out, this was an error; St. Peter's was in Paris,

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[613] Gregory of Tours, *Sourcebook: History of the Franks*, in *Records of Civilization 2*, trans. Ernest Brehaut, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), section 43.
[614] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 46.
[615] Gregory of Tours, *Sourcebook: History of the Franks*, section 43.
[616] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 46.

not Tours.[617] While these deviations are interesting to identify, as they signify a way in which historical memory of Clothild was altered as her tale was recounted over time, they pale in importance to the major differences which exist between the texts' thematic emphases.

The first major thematic differences are visible in the ways in which Clothild's agency and role in her marriage and the conversion of Clovis were portrayed between the two texts. Gregory of Tour's account of the marriage of Clovis and Clothild and the conversion of Clovis to Christianity was not focused on Clothild, reading instead like a family history. In his version, emissaries to Burgundy located Clothild and reported upon her bearing and wisdom to Clovis, who scared Gundobad into letting Clovis take the girl in marriage. Clothild has no agency in this sparse account of her early marriage. Gregory simply said that "the king was very glad when he saw her, and married her, having already by a concubine a son named Theodoric."[618] The couple's relationship was explored in their argument over the baptism of their sons, whom Clothild had had baptized despite her husband's disapproval. This section, when translated into English, is a massive two hundred twenty words, including detailed references to pagan and Christian religions, using the couple's argument as a metaphorical frame for the conflict between paganism and Christianity in general.[619] This discussion was not unusual in the context of *The History of the Franks,* which used historical figures as allegorical players in a greater struggle between the good force of Christianity and the bad forces of paganism and heresy. Gregory of Tours used the history of Clovis and Clothild's early marriage to frame an argument about the merits of Christianity in the light of his struggle with pagan and heretical contemporaries.

[617] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women,* 46.
[618] Gregory of Tours, *Sourcebook: History of the Franks,* section 28.
[619] Gregory of Tours, *Sourcebook: History of the Franks,* section 29.

The turning point of Clovis and Clothild's marriage came with his conversion to Christianity, and Gregory of Tours imagined Clothild's role in the story like that of Radegund and the other Merovingian queens who suffered for their Christianity at the hands of their pagan or less-pious warrior husbands. Pre-Christian Clovis was not respectful of Clothild, reproaching her "harshly" when she "gave command to adorn the church" for the baptism.[620] Like Radegund, whose piety caused her husband a change of heart, Clothild played a role in Clovis's conversion, though the role was very minor. During his war with Alamanni, amidst the fierce fighting and slaughter, when his army "began to be in danger of destruction," Clovis remorsefully called upon "Jesus Christ, whom Clothild asserts to be the son of the living God," promising his baptism in exchange for a victory.[621] Though Clothild's influence was identified in the way in which Clovis addresses God, her role in his conversion was very minor relative to Clovis's own motivation in ensuring his victory. Clothild was not even mentioned in the section about his baptism, where Clovis took his own initiative as "another Constantine."[622] In Gregory of Tour's account of the conversion of Clovis, Clothild took on the role of a maligned Christian Merovingian queen who was at the mercy of her pagan husband until he, in his desperation, remembered her God and turned to a Christian baptism.

In her Carolingian *Life,* Clothild took a much more active role in her marriage, the conversion of her husband, and his baptism. As a child she was given direct agency in the initiation of her marriage. The emissary approached Clothild as she was on her way to Mass, "distributing alms to the poor."[623] Disguised as a pauper, he kissed her hand and pulled off her

[620] Ibid.
[621] Gregory of Tours, *Sourcebook: History of the Franks,* section 30.
[622] Gregory of Tours, *Sourcebook: History of the Franks,* section 31.
[623] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 42.

cloak, beseeching her to speak with him in private.[624] He presented her with the marriage proposal personally, offering her Clovis's ring and betrothal regalia, which she deposited in her uncle's treasury.[625] Though the emissary followed proper procedure, Clothild rejected Clovis's offer, saying that "it is not lawful for a Christian to marry a pagan," and sent the emissary back to Clovis.[626] Enraged, Clovis threatened war against Clothild's uncle, who stood up for his niece with a bold proclamation: "Let [Clovis] come when he likes. He will perish and die and thus all those whose blood he has shed may be avenged."[627] However, when the fearful Burgundians counseled Gundobad on the merits of "friendship" with the Franks he relented, allowing the king to joyfully and legally marry Clothild.[628]

This account, given with much more detail than Gregory of Tours, featured a few important thematic differences. Clothild acted on her own here, using her faith as a route around a political situation, echoing Radegund's rejection of her marriage and Liutbirga's establishment as anchoress despite the wishes of her adopted family. Though she ultimately is married against her will, Clothild's marriage is defended by her family members, reiterating the importance of the nuclear family that would perhaps resonate more with the Carolingian author than it would with the Merovingian Gregory, who most often framed families and marriage in the context of complicated political maneuvering. The Carolingian Church's focus on a single marriage as the unity of family, rather than the polygamous model favored by Merovingian rulers, and the Church's emphasis on proper ritualistic procedure may have contributed to the Carolingian author's focus on the ritual of the single marriage. Finally, there was no mention here of Clovis's concubine or illegitimate children, perhaps again in deference

[624] Ibid.
[625] Ibid.
[626] Ibid.
[627] Ibid.
[628] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 43.

to the Carolingian emphasis on nuclear family. The marriage of Clothild in her Carolingian *Life* credited her as an actor in the initiation of her marriage, with more emphasis placed on the ritual and family-centeredness of the marriage than in Gregory's Merovingian account.

As the sole female heads of the now-monogamous Carolingian nuclear families, mothers often were charged with more domestic power and responsibility than their Merovingian counterparts who split their domestic roles with others. This shift may be the reason why the Carolingian *Life* of Clothild afforded her more power and respect in her early marriage and in the conversion and baptism of Clovis. Here Clothild directly asked her husband to "believe in almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," a request he denied by saying that he would do anything else for her besides deserting his pagan gods.[629] Though Clovis converted in this narrative because his men "began to give way" in their fight, the author proclaimed that the "unbelieving man" was saved "through the faithful woman," who had been praying to God incessantly and "beseeching that He might snatch the king and his people from the snares of the Devil."[630] She decorated the church for Clovis's baptism and summoned the bishop Remigius, an action that had been undertaken by Clovis instead in Gregory's version.[631] Remigius played the "role of Jesus Christ" and Clothild "the embodiment of God's Church," in a carefully orchestrated and miraculous baptismal ritual. The ritual itself differed from Gregory's account and seems to represent the "symbolism of Carolingian imperialism" rather than historical reality.[632] Even Clovis's post-baptismal actions were directly influenced by Clothild. With "the counsel of Blessed Clothild, the king began to

[629] Ibid.
[630] Ibid.
[631] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 44.
[632] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women*, 45.

destroy the fanes and build churches in the land."[633] She advised him to build churches, which she would then continue after his death.[634] Clovis "led a religious life even to the end," as "he had promised Saint Remigius and Saint Clothild."[635] As a wife to Clovis, Clothild took an active role in his religious conversion, baptism, and religiously-motivated ruling choices. This power and responsibility seen in the Carolingian but not the Merovingian text was more representative of Carolingian domestic realities than the role of a Merovingian warrior queen.

Both texts noted that following the death of Clovis, Clothild retired to Tours. However, their rendering of her "retirement" could not be much different. In *History of the Franks,* Gregory of Tours imagined Clothild as a politically motivated actor who attempted to influence her ruling sons. She appealed to her sons' sense of duty to their extended family, entreating them to "avenge the death of [her] mother and father," and correct "the wrong which has been done to me" in her uncle's treatment of her parents, a cause which the Merovingian kings took up gladly, immediately setting out for Burgundy.[636] Here Clothild was clearly using her secular influence to dictate the actions of the ruling party from which she had supposedly retired. Another example of her political influence was seen in her prevention of a Frankish civil war. When her sons were fighting, she went to the tomb of St. Martin and prayed that "civil war might not break out between her sons."[637] Following her supplication, "a great storm blew up over the spot where they encamped," preventing the sons from fighting and forcing them to do penance.[638] This miracle, "wrought by Saint Martin through the intercession of the Queen,"

[633] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 45.
[634] Ibid.
[635] Ibid.
[636] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks,* 166.
[637] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks,* 186.
[638] Ibid.

showed that she used her holy influence in addition to her secular political influence to affect the ruling members of the realm.[639]

The most detailed example of her political activity, though, was seen in her role in the deaths of her grandsons. According to Gregory, Clothild was living in Paris and raising the sons of her son Chlodomer, who had been killed in the Burgundian conflict. Clothild's other sons Childebert and Clothar were jealous of the attention that the queen was paying to their nephews and were fearful that "this favour which the Queen was showing them might bring them into the line of succession."[640] The power to influence royal succession in itself appears to be a lot of political power for a woman supposedly living in retirement at Tours. Childebert and Clothar tricked Clothild into sending them the boys, who the uncles claimed would be raised to the throne, a prospect which "pleased Clothild very much, for she knew nothing of their plotting."[641] Instead of seeing them succeed, she was approached by her sons' henchmen Arcadius, who, waving a sword and a pair of scissors, asked the queen whether she would prefer to see her grandsons killed or removed from the line of succession through the symbolic act of hair-cutting. Clothild, described as both "terrified by what he had said, and very angry indeed," and "beside herself with bitter grief and hardly knowing what she was saying in her anguish," doomed her grandsons to death by saying "If they are not to ascend the throne, I would rather see them dead than with their hair cut short."[642] Arcadius returned to Childebert and Clothar and together they murdered the boys, as detailed in a particularly gruesome section of the *History*. Queen Clothild, "grieving her heart out as the psalms were sung…buried [the

[639] Ibid.
[640] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks,* 181.
[641] Ibid.
[642] Ibid.

boys] side by side" in the church of Saint Peter, her political maneuvering on the boys' behalves thwarted by her own sons.[643]

The murder of Chlodomer's sons was also recounted in the anonymous Carolingian's *Life* of Clothild, but here her role was very different. In the *vita* Clothild was still living in Paris raising the boys and inspiring the jealousy of Childebert and Clothar. The jealous sons decided to either "shear or kill" the boys, and go about their plan without any input at all from their saintly mother. In this version she was neither responsible for handing over the boys nor given the option to control their ultimate fate; a passive and blameless actor, she handled the boys only after their death. "With great psalm singing and immense lamentation, and worn out by her great grief" she buried the boys, murdered in this version due only to jealousy, and not from any of Clothild's political activities.[644]

The anonymous Carolingian author did not only eliminate Clothild's political agency in the death of her grandsons—he eliminated it from her post-retirement life altogether, as if the death of Clovis eliminated any political clout she may have had. Instead of preventing civil wars or inspiring her sons to wage war in Burgundy, the Carolingian-imagined Clothild instead focused her time on building monasteries. She built "the one in honor of Saint Peter the Apostle in the suburbs of Tours before the gates of Saint Martin's castellum" perhaps a reference to the monastery of St. Martin in Tours, which was erroneously identified as a basilica to St. Peter elsewhere in the text.[645] She rebuilt the monastery of Saint Denis which Genovefa had built in Rouen, and "collect[ed] no modest congregation of the clerks for the service of God."[646] According to her *Life*, "she built another monastery in the name of the

[643] Ibid.
[644] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 47.
[645] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 48.
[646] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 49.

Mother of God on the river Seine in a place called Les Andelys, not far from the walls of the city of Rouen," a foundation that was absent from contemporary chronicles and may have been constructed by the Carolingian author or the author of another source from which he drew.[647] It was at the site of this last foundation that Clothild's only miracle occurred. When the laborers constructing the monastery called out to the queen for wine, she sent a servant to the men with a glass of water which miraculously turned to wine.[648] The fountain inside the monastery, while giving a "natural taste of water" to most that drank from it, provided the monastery builders instead with "wine every day until the monastery was built."[649] The Carolingian author of Clothild's *Life* eliminated her interactions with the politics almost entirely, instead focusing his narrative on her service to Church establishment and the minor miracle associated with her foundation of potentially mythical monasteries.

Even the death of Clothild was rendered differently between Gregory of Tours and the anonymous Carolingian's account. Gregory of Tours opened his fourth book of his *History of the Franks* with "the death of Queen Clothild." The chapter is a mere four lines long. The first states that the queen died "full of days and rich in good works" and noted the time relative to the rule of Bishop Injuriosus.[650] The second states that she was buried by her sons alongside her husband, "with great singing of psalms."[651] The final two lines were short and lacking in detail: "She herself had this church built. Saint Genevieve [Genovefa] is also buried there."[652] This short chapter is seemingly reminiscent of the *Life* of Genovefa and Fortunatus's *Life* of

[647] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women*, 48.
[648] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 48.
[649] Ibid.
[650] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks 197.*
[651] Ibid.
[652] Ibid.

Radegund, where the Merovingian women's deaths were mentioned simply, without much detail, almost as an afterthought to a meaningful holy life.

The Carolingian author of the *Life* of Clothild may not have been a contemporary of Hathumoda's biographer Agius, but his detailed description of Clothild's death and burial was much more similar to Agius's careful description of Hathumoda's than to Gregory's Merovingian account of Clothild. Clothild was described as the "handmaid of the paupers and servants of God," and just like the pauper handmaid, Hathumoda, Clothild "receive[d] from Christ her everlasting reward."[653] While "sojourn[ing] for the love of Saint Martin," Clothild received revelation of the time of her death, just as Hathumoda received revelations and visions of the saint.[654] Clothild was "weighed down with corporal sickness" and "never ceased from her prayers and almsgiving," yet had nothing to give because she had "diminished the … treasury" through her almsgiving, all phrases which would have equally served Hathumoda in Agius's *Life.*[655] The similarities between the anonymous Carolingian's account of Clothild's death and Agius's account of Hathumoda's suggest that the anonymous Carolingian author was also aware of the importance of correct treatment for the dead and dying, a point possibly intentionally made in the *Life* of Clothild as it had been by Agius in the *Life* of Hathumoda.

The final major thematic difference between the texts was the different ways in which the authors represented Clothild's piety and saintliness. Throughout his account of the life of Clothild in his *History of the Franks,* Gregory of Tours did not elevate Clothild to sainthood, despite the many examples in which he did this for other holy individuals. This apparent judgement on her sanctity may have been the result of Clothild's failing to meet certain standards for piety at the time—or perhaps Gregory's failure to include some of the elements

[653] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 49.
[654] Ibid.
[655] Ibid.

seen in the portrayals of Merovingian sanctity was the result of his own personal judgement that the queen was not worthy of sainthood. The piety of Clothild's Merovingian near-contemporaries Genovefa and Radegund was represented through holy maturity from birth, bountiful miracles, and the rejection of the body and bodily comforts, yet all of these elements are absent from Gregory's portrayal of Clothild. Like the other holy women, she "gave alms to the poor and spent her nights in prayer," living a "blameless life" of "chastity and virtue," though Gregory only represented these traits in the adult Clothild rather than the pious child.[656] She gave generously as she "endowed churches, monasteries, and other holy places," like the other holy women, yet did not produce a single miracle on her own (though she did produce miracles through prayers to St. Martin). Although the "royal status of her sons…worldly goods…[and] earthly ambition could not bring her disrepute," Clothild was never described as rejecting the comforts of the world and the body like her contemporaries, who fasted and practiced self-harm.[657] Although Clothild was described as having humility, chastity, virtue, and "heavenly grace," Gregory of Tours failed to connect her to many of the signifiers of sanctity seen in the *vitae* of other Merovingian saints in his *History of the Franks.*

The anonymous Carolingian *Life* of Saint Clothild, on the other hand, appeared to identify in the saint the majority of Carolingian elements of sanctity. The Carolingian author's intent in writing was quite clear: "Angelic hands guided her soul to heaven and placed her amidst the multitudinous armies of saints."[658] She was placed among the "assembly of holy widows and faithful wives," who followed the "flock of virgins" in praising God, establishing her sanctity relative to Carolingian ideals about virginity, wifehood, and gender.[659] The

[656] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 182.
[657] Ibid.
[658] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 49.
[659] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 41.

Carolingian focus on family was present in her role as wife and mother; at one point the author specifically identified Clothild as the mother of the Holy Roman Emperors, adding a "nonexistent continuity between Merovingians and the imperial successors," linking the Carolingians explicitly to the holy lineage of the saint despite the historical reality.[660] In the Carolingian *Life* of Clothild, the queen was identified as a saintly widow, faithful wife, and mother of the Carolingian ruling family, situating the saint's sanctity not in the contemporary Merovingian expectations of sanctity, whose sexless *viragos* focused little on their immediate families, but in the Carolingian imagination of family-centric sanctity.

As imagined by her Carolingian biographer, Clothild did not take the political action that her Merovingian contemporaries did in proving their sanctity, even though Gregory suggested that she was politically active throughout her life. Instead, in this rendering, she took a religious leadership role as a queen when she converted "a pagan and ferocious people," yet did not threaten Clovis and the royal family's authority when she retired from political life to focus on monastery-building.[661] Likewise, she did not threaten the authority of the Church establishment: "Saint Remigius took the lead" during the baptism, and continued to help her advise Clovis until his death, and she maintained a reverence for Saint Martin.[662] Even her miraculous conversion of water to wine was small, personal, and nonthreatening to Church authorities, unlike the major miracles accomplished by her Merovingian contemporaries. As presented by her Carolingian biographer, Clothild did not lead cities and practice political power like other Merovingian saints—instead she worked within the Church establishment to accomplish more personal miracles and achievements which did not threaten Church authority

[660] McNamara and Halborg, *Sainted Women,* 50.
[661] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 47-48.
[662] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 42.

and served to build the Church on the edge of pagan territory, a role expected of Carolingian female saints.

Whereas Gregory of Tours failed to identify Clothild's piety as representative of saintliness, her Carolingian biographer represents her piety throughout her lifetime. In this account, Clothild was not only pious from birth—she was chosen by God before her birth, and as a youth spent her time going to Mass and giving alms.[663] Where Gregory had failed to mention bodily rejection at all, here Clothild rejected her body like the author's contemporary Carolingian saints, through symbolic martyrdom, fasting, vigils, and the rejection of bodily comforts. The author identified Clothild as suffering bodily harm in a symbolic martyrdom by saying that she "suffered pain and torment in life since she did not share the fire and sword of the martyr."[664] She was remembered as mortifying herself "with abstinence, fasting, vigils, prayers, and bodily penances."[665] She rejected her "most precious gilded garments" to dress in wool, and rejected "delicious royal food" choosing instead bread, legumes, and water only.[666] Her death was remembered as the correct way to treat a pious woman, unlike in the earlier Merovingian account, when her death and burial is presented in a short paragraph that would fail to represent Carolingian ideals of piety. In representing her piety, the anonymous author of the Carolingian *Life* of Clothild confirmed her sainthood in a way that Gregory of Tours could not.

[663] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 47.
[664] Ibid.
[665] Anonymous, "The *Life* of Clothild," 48.
[666] Ibid.

Conclusion

Saint Clothild, a Merovingian Queen, was included in historical texts written by her contemporaries and venerated as a saint in a Carolingian *vita* written centuries later. In the Merovingian portrayal she was a benevolent Christian queen, taking part in the riotous politics of the day, standing as an example of Christian living for her converting husband, and performing her piety through prayer. This portrayal fails to meet some of the Merovingian standards for piety as portrayed in the *vitae* of Genovefa and Radegund: though pious and politically active, Clothild performed no grandiose miracles and does not practice ascetic self-limitation. These limitations were perhaps the reason that Clothild was not recognized by her contemporaries as a saint (or perhaps because she was not recognized as a saint, the author failed to construct her life using these models of sanctity). In this Merovingian portrayal, Clothild did not meet the requirements for Carolingian sanctity either: in addition to self-limitation, she was missing an emphasis on family, deference to Church elites, and liturgical ritual, and she was more active in politics than the Carolingian saints studied here. However, in the Carolingian *vitae,* Clothild met each of these "requirements," as the author changed the emphasis of the existing text and inserted elaborate passages to fit the life of the queen to the model of Carolingian female sanctity. The conscious alteration of the life of Clothild to fit contemporary models of sanctity artificially constructed her cult and illustrated that the perception of the sanctity of this saint was dependent upon her conforming to the expectations of sanctity at that time.

Conclusion

What made a woman of Frankish Gaul holy enough to be a saint? As we have seen, the construction of female sanctity evolved over time, and Merovingian women were not portrayed as performing the same aspects of sanctity as the Carolingian women centuries later.

Merovingian female saints, as represented in the hagiographies of Saints Genovefa and Radegund, were pious from birth, politically active, intensely miraculous, ascetically self-limiting, and they portrayed their gender in a complicated dialogue with gendered expectations inherited from Late Antiquity. These thematic expressions of sanctity were the result of the political, social, cultural, and religious realities of a time period characterized by political transition, Church expansion, and regional instability. In their expressions of sanctity, the hagiographies of these Merovingian women provided the residents of chaotic Merovingian Gaul with access to exemplars of correct behavior, reaffirmations of the miraculous power of Christianity, and almost mythical examples of the unyielding protection gained through faith in the Christian God.

Carolingian holy women, as represented in the hagiographies of Saints Liutbirga and Hathumoda, shared many traits with their Merovingian predecessors: piety from birth, ascetic self-limitation, and complicated gender portrayals. However, in the place of grandiose miracles and political activity, these Carolingian women exemplified the importance of family, deference to the Church elite, and an emphasis on correct Church ritual. These thematic expressions of sanctity were also directly related to the historical realities experienced by Carolingian women. Though physically located in the relatively chaotic Saxon frontier, the women were part of a Church which was undergoing the ordering and specification of "corrected" liturgy, controlled by a stronger, more centralized Empire obsessed with

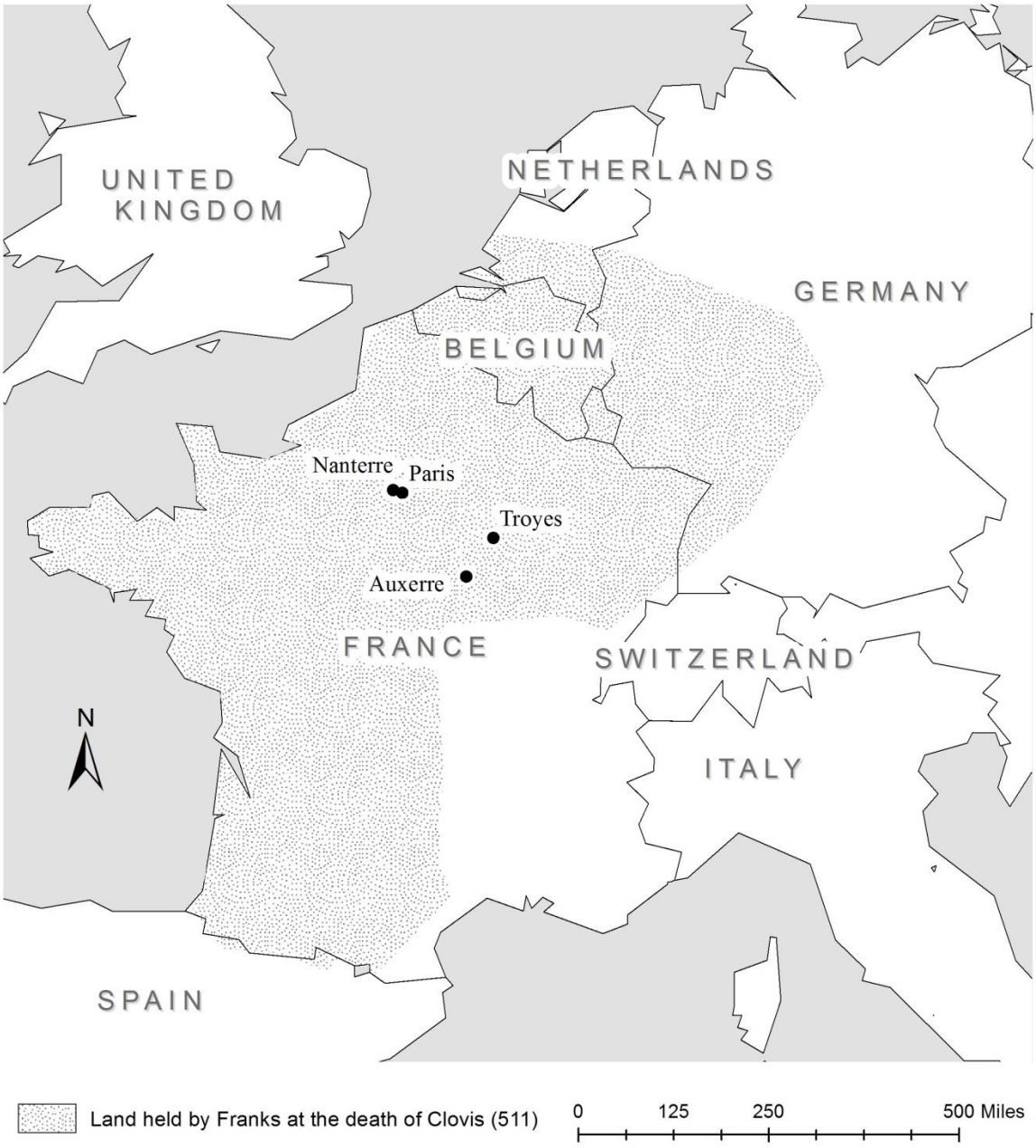
standardization. These women, therefore, operated within these strict standards, performing within stricter models of marriage, hierarchy, and daily practice. In this culture, holy men and women were expected to operate within these models without threatening the stability of the social system, so sanctity was performed in a more standardized and private manner. By providing examples of correct living within the Carolingian Church and societal structure, these *vitae* served as exemplars to a Saxon population in the process of configuring their societal and religious expressions to Carolingian expectations.

How did these models of sanctity, which were predicated on political, cultural, and social realities, and which evolved over time, affect the different portrayals of a single historical figure? An analysis of the portrayals of Saint Clothild showed that the Carolingian author manipulated the existing texts about the queen in order to fit her expression of sanctity to the model of Carolingian sanctity proposed above. The cult of Saint Clothild, then, was created through the intentional construction of her sanctity to conform to models relevant centuries after her death, illustrating the importance of these expectations of sanctity to the perception of sainthood in Frankish Gaul.

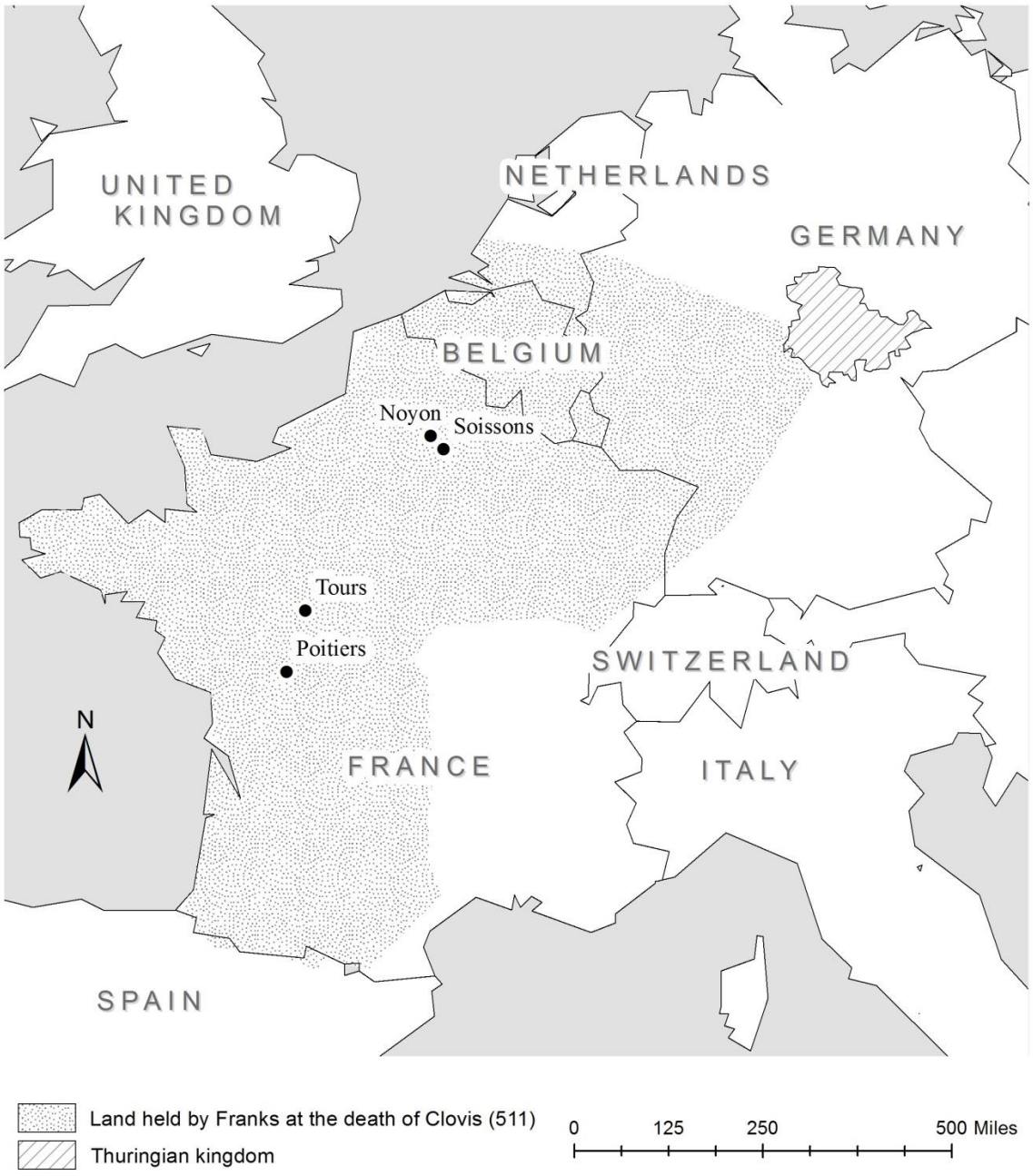
The applicability of the models of female sanctity proposed here is severely limited, as my analysis was limited to just five saints' hagiographies, which of course are constructed with the biases of their authors. I cannot assert that the expectations for female sanctity exhibited in these documents are representative of the expectations experienced by all female saints in Frankish Gaul, or that all expectations of sanctity are the result of the political, social, cultural, and religious needs of a specific historical time period and region. However, I suggest that historians keep the historical context in perspective when analyzing sanctity and portrayals of sanctity over time, and that future scholars pursue female sanctity not only in the scope of

gender oppression but also with recognition of more complex historical realities inherent in the construction of gender and sanctity.

Appendix: Maps and Timelines



Year	Event
c. 429	Genovefa born in Nanterre
429	Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes meet Genovefa in Nanterre
	moved to Paris as a young woman
451	Attila the Hun threatens Paris
512	Genovefa dies in Paris



Year	Event
518/520	Radegund born in Kingdom of Thuringia
531	Sons of Clovis attack Thuringia, Radegund captured by Clothar I and brought to Soissons
540	Radegund marries Clothar I
	Radegund flees Clothar, with the help of the Bishop of Noyons, vising Tours before settling at Poitiers
553	Radegund founds Notre Dame in Poitiers
587	Radegund dies in Poitiers

Year	Event
786	Liutbirga born in Salzburg
c. 804	Gisla removes Liutbirga from cloister at Fulda, brings her to Lorsch
c. 835-840	Liutbirga moves to cell at Wendhausen
870	Liutbirga dies at Wendhausen

Year	Event
840	Hathumoda born, raised at Herford abbey
before 852	Hathumoda's parents travel to Rome to seek papal blessing
852	Hathumoda established as abbess of Gandersheim
	Hathumoda maintains correspondence with biographer Agius of Corvey
874	Hathumoda dies at Gandersheim

Year	Event
c. 475	Clothild born in Lyon
493	Father Chilperic killed, Clothild flees to Geneva
c. 494	Clothild marries Clovis, moves to Paris
511	Clovis dies; Clothild moves to Tours
523	Clothild provokes the Burgundian War
544	Clothild dies, is buried in Paris

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All maps and timelines were constructed by the author using material from the above sources and a European base map provided by ESRI.