

1989

## Complementary contexts for the life of Saint-Queen Radegunde.

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**Complementary contexts for the life of Saint-Queen Radegunde**

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**West Virginia University, 1989**

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COMPLEMENTARY CONTEXTS FOR  
THE LIFE OF SAINT-QUEEN RADEGUNDE

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the College of Arts and Sciences  
of  
West Virginia University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Duey White, M. A.

Morgantown

West Virginia

1989



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## PREFACE

How strange it is that the Merovingian Saint-Queen Radegunde (A.D. 520-587) is not better known in history. As a barbarian queen, an aristocratic nun, and a Catholic saint, Radegunde was a prominent figure during the christianization of Frankish Gaul, and, in this early medieval period when texts and writers were so rare, Radegunde had a dominant textual presence. She wrote letters and poems herself and she was the subject of three lengthy narrative sources written by three very different writers who knew her well: Gregory of Tours, Venantius Fortunatus, and Baudonivia.

Gregory of Tours, who was a Gallo-Roman bishop and historian, Venantius Fortunatus, who was an Italian poet-priest, and Baudonivia, who was a Frankish nun and a scribe, each created a context that interpreted Radegunde's leadership in their society. Each writer's context formed at the convergence of the events of Radegunde's life, the experiences of each writer, and each writer's perceptions of Merovingian society. The Radegunde texts also represented the two main genres of the early medieval period: historia and hagiography. The multiple possibilities

for comparison among the Radegunde texts tempted me to examine the religious restriction of women's participation in society during this formative period of European history.

My historiographical study of the Radegunde sources projects the experiences and intentions of Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia back onto their interpretations of Radegunde's example in their society. For this comparative reading, I define context to mean those personal and cultural circumstances that gave shape to each of the three versions of Radegunde's life. My work may most accurately be described as a comparison of contexts. What Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia wrote about Radegunde had as much to do with their own lives and their own purposes as it did with Radegunde's life.

When I began this study of the Radegunde sources, I was amazed that it had not already been done. The elegant interplay of a powerful woman's life and three interpretations of her life--in two genres, by three writers with three different personal and cultural backgrounds--invited analysis. Now that this study is finished, I have a better idea why this rich body of texts, along with the questions the sources generate, is so often overlooked.

On the most fundamental level, there is a language barrier. Only the History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours is available in critical editions. The Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I by Fortunatus and the Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II by Baudonivia are relatively accessible as part of the Monumenta

Germanica Historia; however, translating the Vitae from the MGH was a daunting task. Fortunatus' Vita and the collection of his correspondence and poetry were last translated into French in the late nineteenth century. A translation of Baudonivia's Vita is still not available in print in a modern language.

On a more comprehensive level, the preponderance of medieval writing, especially the religious writing, is either hostile to women or alien to women's experiences. Questions about religious limitations for women soon became entangled in the broader issue of the cultural devaluation of women throughout the social structure. Although there are many texts covering women and religion, written almost exclusively by male clerics, I found that this written reality had a great deal more to do with preconceived judgments against women than it did with any real experiences among women.

Reading and writing from many of these same medieval texts in the early fifteenth century, Christine de Pisan recorded the disparity between what she observed about women and what men wrote down. She challenged the corpus of received knowledge on women in this passage from The Book of the City of Ladies:

Just the sight of this book made me wonder how it happened that so many different men express both in speaking and in writings so many wicked insults about women and their behavior.... Like a gushing fountain, a series of authorities came to mind, along with their opinions on this topic....As I was thinking this, a great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart... 'Oh, God, how can this be? Did You Yourself not create woman in a very special way and since that time did You not give her all those inclinations which it pleased You for her to have?...I tell you, dear friend, come back to yourself, recover your senses, and do not trouble yourself anymore over such absurdities. For



you know that any evil spoken of women so generally only hurts those who say it, not women themselves.

Even though Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia praised Radegunde as they explained her leading role in Merovingian society, the writers' praise lay submerged in terms of their contemporaries' tolerance and expectations for women's behavior. The writers were ever mindful of the tide of christianization rising across Frankish Gaul, and, Christianity carried with it certain prescribed solutions for social order between men and women. The three versions of Radegunde's life did not disturb the depths of those religious assumptions. In the context of Bishop Gregory's narrative, Radegunde's life was significant as an example of obedience and submission to ecclesiastical authority; for Fortunatus, Radegunde illustrated the superiority of women's renunciation of worldly goods; and, for Baudonivia, Radegunde demonstrated the benefits of a separatist way of life for women. Within these contexts, as long as Radegunde's followers appeared to be subordinate, poor, and segregated, Radegunde's leadership did not threaten the dominant current of Christian society.

In the following chapters, I consider how the writers' explanations of Radegunde's life cast a long-lived image for religious women's place in European history. Is this dissertation a work of women's history? Only in the same way that writing about men in the past is men's history. Only a few white men can afford to write history as if they already owned it; others write history showing the prices paid in the past.

Chapter I introduces Radegunde and reconstructs the events of her life by combining the three focal, primary texts and other sources. Chapter II situates the Radegunde texts in relation to other Merovingian sources and discusses the implications of the Radegunde texts in an illiterate society. I concentrate separately on the narratives of Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia in Chapters III, IV, and V, and I consider the significance of the genres of historia and hagiography for the Radegunde texts. In conclusion, Chapter VI merges the complementary contexts of Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia in order to examine Radegunde's textual presence as evidence for recurring themes in history regarding the images of women.

In the light of recent feminist scholarship, we see that archetypical feminine images, like the images of Radegunde, distort the sources of women's real activities and influence in the development of western civilization and constrict the acceptable range of women's contributions in society to those roles that are subject to control by male-dominant governing bodies.

CHAPTER I  
THE LIFE OF SAINT-QUEEN RADEGUNDE

Some time ago, when I found myself freed from earthly cares, I turned to the religious life. I asked myself, with all the ardour of which I am capable, how I could best forward the cause of other women, and how my own personal desires might be of advantage to my sisters. Here in the town of Poitiers I founded a convent for nuns.  
(Radegunde, A. D. 567)

Saint-Queen Radegunde (A. D. 520-587) lived during the formative, early medieval period of christianization in Frankish Gaul. In her lifetime, Radegunde endured many of the harsh conditions common among women in barbarian societies; she also amassed power and wealth through her roles as a queen, the patron of a nunnery, and a cult leader, and, through her reputation for extreme religious devotion, donations to the poor, care of the sick, acts of charity, and conciliatory politics. When Radegunde used her power and her wealth to establish the Sainte Croix nunnery in Poitiers, she balanced the social realities of Merovingian women's lives against an institutional base in the early medieval Church, "...and she

became so well known that the common people looked upon her as a saint."<sup>1</sup>

Radegunde's saintly example inspired two hundred women throughout the four Merovingian kingdoms to follow her into the Sainte Croix nunnery in 567. What was it about Radegunde's cult that attracted so many women, most of whom had no particular religious zeal, to take on the strictures of an immured life? Radegunde's cult and her institution must have answered unaddressed needs in early medieval society in order to join together so many women. This dissertation looks at Radegunde's life to see how her example responded to those necessary social changes.

Radegunde so influenced the people of the Merovingian kingdoms that three writers--a bishop, a monk, and a nun--wrote the story of her life. The bishop Gregory of Tours, the monk Fortunatus, and the nun Baudonivia were each closely associated with Radegunde, with the Sainte Croix nunnery, and with each other. Bishop Gregory of Tours told Radegunde's story as part

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory of Tours History of the Franks, trans. and ed., Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1974), Bk. III, 7: 169.

of the Historia Francorum<sup>2</sup>. Venantius Fortunatus composed the story of her saintly life in the Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I<sup>3</sup>; and, Baudonivia wrote her version of Radegunde's life in the Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II<sup>4</sup>. The circle of loyalty and friendship that Radegunde, the three writers, and the nuns of Sainte Croix created showed how spheres of Christian influence slowly eclipsed other beliefs in sixth-century Gaul.<sup>5</sup>

Gregory of Tours (539-594) was an aristocratic, Gallo-Roman bishop and historian. Thirteen of the eighteen previous bishops of Tours were Gregory's blood relatives. As the nineteenth

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<sup>2</sup>Gregory of Tours, Historia Francorum, ed. B. Krusch. MGH Script. rer. mer. 1, 1-450. In this dissertation I will use the Latin title Historia Francorum, but cite the readily available Penguin Classics edition of the English translation: Gregory of Tours History of the Franks, trans. and ed. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1974. I consulted two other editions: History of the Franks, Vol. 2, ed. and trans. O. M. Dalton (New York and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972); Gregoire de Tours: Histoire des Francs, ed. Robert Latouche, Vols. 27-28 (Paris: Classiques de l'Histoire de France au Moyen Age, 1963-65).

<sup>3</sup>Venantius Fortunatus, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I, ed. B. Krusch, MGH Script. rer. mer. 2, 364-377; Vie de Sainte Radegonde, ed. and trans. Rene Aigrain (Paris: Bloud, 1918). I find the Aigrain French translation to be remarkably fluid. In some instances critical for this study an English translation of the Latin did not correspond with the French. References cited are my translation from the Latin.

<sup>4</sup>Baudonivia, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II, ed. B. Krusch, MGH Script. rer. mer. 2, 377-395. There is an unpublished English translation of Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II by JoAnn McNamara and John E. Halborg which I received by McNamara's gracious correspondence of March 7, 1984. References cited will be my translation of the Latin in collaboration with the McNamara and Halborg translation.

<sup>5</sup>An excellent summary of the roles of local leaders and their activities in the early christianization of Merovingian Gaul: Raymond Van Dam, Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985), 1-8.

Bishop of Tours from 573 to 594, Gregory controlled the resources and the influence of the shrine of Saint Martin of Tours, the most powerful Christian site in Gaul. Bishop Gregory's authority among the other bishops and his prestige with the kings made him a valuable ally for Radegunde and her community.

Fortunatus (530-610) was a provincial Italian poet turned priest. After several years living as a wandering courtier in the Frankish courts and ecclesiastical households, he settled into the Sainte Marie monastery close to Radegunde's nunnery in Poitiers. Fortunatus served under Radegunde's patronage as an agent for the nunnery's interests by writing letters and visiting the nobles and clerics in the Merovingian kingdoms. Fortunatus' vast correspondence, poetry, essays, and music recorded the details of daily life in the monastic communities of Poitiers. More than sixty letters between Fortunatus, Radegunde, and the Sainte Croix Abbess Agnes traced their many years of close friendship.<sup>6</sup>

Baudonivia (fl. 600) was a humble Frankish nun and a scribe of Sainte Croix. She had been abandoned to the nuns of Sainte Croix when she was an infant and she lived her entire life in Radegunde's community. Writing in about 600, Baudonivia's Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II helped sustain the life of the

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<sup>6</sup>Venantius Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Miscellanae, new ed. M. Frederic Leo, MGH Auct. ant. 4. 1. Nearly all of the letters between Fortunatus, Radegunde, and Agnes are edited as Book XI and the Appendix of this collection.

nunnery, then in its second generation, by attracting new entrants and new endowments. Baudonivia wrote in the Prologue of Liber II that she intended "to speak of what Fortunatus omitted" in the Liber I.

The events of Radegunde's life are the basic common element in the Historia Francorum by Gregory of Tours, the Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I by Fortunatus, and the Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II by Baudonivia. Each of the three writers used the events of Radegunde's life to create a specific context for Radegunde's example in Merovingian society. How differently Radegunde's life took shape in each narrative is part of each writer's context. The context for each narrative forms at the three-fold convergence of the events of Radegunde's life, the experiences of each writer, and each writer's perception of Merovingian society. A comparison of Gregory's, Fortunatus', and Baudonivia's complementary contexts for Radegunde will be the subject of later chapters in this study. The following section presents the experiences of Radegunde's life, drawing from the focal texts by Gregory, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia, and from other sources.

Radegunde was a princess born into one of the three ruling families in Thuringia, a tribal territory bordering Frankish Gaul. The royal Thuringians and Franks were joined by a friedelehe, an outlaw marriage of mutual consent, between the Thuringian queen Basina and the Frankish king Childeric I in the generation of Radegunde's grandparents. Queen Basina, who was

to become the mother of Clovis I, would have been either a grandmother or a great-aunt to Radegunde. Gregory of Tours, who wrote down their story, did not trace their relationship. It would have added interest to their story to know their exact relationship because Radegunde eventually married Basina's grandson, Clothar I.

The inconstant queen Basina and the rogue king Childeric met during Childeric's exile from the Frankish kingdoms. Banished because "his private life was one long debauch to seduce the daughters of his subjects,"<sup>7</sup> Childeric took refuge at the Thuringian court of King Bisinus and Queen Basina. Childeric left half of a gold coin in the hands of a companion with instructions to send the half coin to the king in exile when it was safe for him to return. After eight years in which the Franks lived under the rule of Aegidius, the Roman commander of the armies in Gaul, Childeric's companion searched him out, put the coin in his palm, and assured him that the Frankish nobles clamoured for his return. Childeric regained the throne of the Franks. He also won the queen of the Thuringians.

Basina abandoned Bisinus and followed Childeric to his Frankish kingdom, forthrightly declaring her position:

I know that you are a strong man and I recognize ability when I see it. I have therefore come to live with you. You can be sure that if I knew anyone else, even far across the sea, who was more capable than you, I should have sought him out and gone to live with him instead.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. II, 12: 128.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 129.



Basina's story is representative of the greater personal liberties taken by Radegunde's Germanic ancestors.<sup>7</sup> Especially compelling is the fact that the anecdote lived on for three generations before Bishop Gregory recorded it in the Historia Francorum.<sup>10</sup> Gregory told Basina's story along with other, similar stories about resourceful Germanic women from the earlier generation of the Merovingian dynasty.

In her early childhood, Radegunde suffered the horrors of barbarian warfare; she was an orphan of war when she was about five years old and a hostage of war when she was about ten. She lived through ghastly palace massacres in wars between branches of her own kin and in wars with other barbarian nationes. The devastating effect of Radegunde's early experiences was evident in the raw vividness of her adult memories as she told them to Fortunatus.

Radegunde wrote down her remembrance of the Thuringian wars in a long narrative entitled, "De excidio Thoringiae." Radegunde's writing was collected and edited in the volume of Fortunatus' correspondence along with many other poems, letters,

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<sup>7</sup>The relative freedoms for women afforded by the kin group, compared with Roman legal identity, Katherine Fischer Drew, "The Law of the Family in the Germanic Barbarian Kingdoms: A Synthesis," Studies in Medieval Culture 11 (1977): 17-26.

<sup>10</sup>Basina's story was also written in the Liber Historia Francorum. Liber Historia Francorum, Anonymous, ed. and trans. Bernard Bachrach (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973), 31. The LHF was composed, drawing heavily from the Historia Francorum by Gregory of Tours, by an anonymous monk of Saint Denis in 727. While the LHF is not as commodious or detailed a history as Bishop Gregory's, the LHF is crucial as a counter-balance to Gregory's bias. The H. F. is pro Austrasian; the LHF is pro Neustrian.

and compositions produced during Radegunde's patronage in Poitiers.<sup>11</sup> Both Charles Nisard, editor of the critical edition of Fortunatus' collected works and Rene Aigrain, author of the definitive biography of Radegunde, listed the "De excidio Thoringiae" as one of the pieces Radegunde composed herself.

Radegunde's parents were assassinated by her father's brothers, Baderic and Hermanfrid. Trying, perhaps, to reconcile her own loss and to imagine her mother's feelings, Radegunde recalled a scene during the destruction of the Thuringian palace of the separation of a mother and her child.

There was no one to turn aside the mournful tears for the infant torn out of her mother's arms, suspended still in her embrace...But such a loss of life is less cruel for the child than for the mother. The mother, at the end of her strength, is lost to everything except her tears.<sup>12</sup>

Radegunde's memory also revived an image of one of her aunts. "My father's sister, with her milky skin and auburn hair more glistening than gold, was crouched on the ground where she had been thrown."<sup>13</sup>

The orphaned Radegunde and her brother, seized as prizes of war, went to live in the household of their uncle Hermanfrid, their aunt Amalaberga, who was the niece of the Ostrogoth king

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<sup>11</sup>Venantius Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, new ed. M. Frederic Leo, MGH Auct. ant. 4.1.; Venance Fortunat: Poesies Meles, ed. and trans. Charles Nisard (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1887).

<sup>12</sup>Radegunde, "De excidio Thoringiae," Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, App., I: 267. "Raptus ab amplexu matris puer ore pependit, funereas planctu nec dedit ullus aquas. Sorte gravi minus est nati sic peredere vitam: perdidit et lacrimas mater anhelata piis."

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., "Flammivomum vincens rutilans in crinibus aurum strata solo recubat lacticolor amita."

Theodoric, and their cousin Hermalafred. Amalaberga roused Hermanfrid to make war on his one remaining brother.

One day when Hermanfrid came in to have a meal, he found only half the table laid. When he asked Amalaberga what she meant by this, she answered: 'A king who is deprived of half his kingdom deserves to find half his table bare.'<sup>14</sup>

Hermanfrid allied himself with Theuderic, the King of the Frankish lands on Thuringia's western border. Hermanfrid promised Theuderic half of Thuringia if victory was theirs. Once victorious, Hermanfrid refused Theuderic his portion of the spoils. Counting, too much, as it turned out, on the protection of Amalaberga's family, Hermanfrid kept all of Thuringia for himself. He earned himself the revenge of the sons of Clovis.

A few years later, when Radegunde was about ten years old, Theuderic, his son Theudebert, and his half-brother Clothar overran the Thuringian kingdom.<sup>15</sup> Radegunde was once again a filleul de guerre. This time she and her brother were royal hostages of the Frankish kings. Radegunde's aunt Amalaberga and cousin Hermalafred fled to Italy seeking the protection of their Ostrogoth kin; then, with the fall of Ravenna to the Imperial forces of Belasarius in 540, they followed the Gothic

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<sup>14</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., ed. Lewis Thorpe, Bk. III, 4: 164.

<sup>15</sup>The gruesome descriptions of the Thuringian wars are in both the Historia Francorum, Bks. II, 27; III, 4, 7; and, the Liber Historia Francorum Bks. 10, 22.

captives to Constantinople.<sup>16</sup> Hermalafred eventually gained the rank of magister militum in the Imperial service.

Many years later from her nunnery, Radegunde wrote a letter to Hermalafred evoking their mutual memories of the destruction of Thuringia. She sent the letter as part of King Sigibert's embassy to Constantinople in 566 or 567.

The bitter state of war, envious of human affairs! That lofty kingdoms suddenly are overturned and fall! The palace where happiness long reigned fell to the ground consumed by fire.... There is only a mound of ruins. The dead bodies, alas, strewn together unburied across the field, the one vast tomb of an entire nation. Now not only Troy laments her ruin; Thuringia was lost in a massacre like hers.... The captives were forbidden to press their lips to the threshold of their home, or even to turn their heads to see the places they were never to see again. A wife, bare-footed, walked in the blood of her husband and a sister tread on the corpse of her brother.<sup>17</sup>

Merovingian bishops arbitrated the division of the prizes of the Thuringian campaign of Theuderic and Clothar. Radegunde was awarded to Clothar I (511-561). Clothar possibly intervened to save her life immediately after the battle when "Theuderic

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<sup>16</sup>For a concise narrative of three generations of the Ostrogoths' web of kinship diplomacy between the Ostrogoths, the Thuringians, Franks, and Vandals based on Procopius and Gregory of Tours, see: Thomas S. Burns, A History of the Ostrogoths (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 94-95.

<sup>17</sup>Radegunde, "De excidio Thoringiae," Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, Bk. XI, I: 267. "Conditio belli tristis, sors invida rerum! Quam subito lapsu regna superba cadunt! Quae steterant longo felicia culmina tractu victa sub ingenti clade cremata jacent.... Heu male texerunt inhumata cadavera campum, totaque sic uno gens jacet in tumulo. Non jam sola suas lamentet Troja ruinas: pertulit et caedes terra Thoringa pares... Oscula non licuit captivo infigere posti nec sibi visuris ora referre locis. Nuda maritalem clacavit planta cruorem blandaque transibat fratre jacente soror."

sought to have Hermanfred's young children killed."<sup>19</sup> Because Radegunde and her brother lived at Hermanfred and Amalaberga's court as their wards, Theuderic may not have realized that they were not Hermanfred's heirs. Even if Theuderic did know that Radegunde and her brother were not Hermanfred's children, he would recognize that Radegunde's brother would be a successor to the Thuringian throne and a threat to the Frankish control of the region. The bishops may have decided to promise Radegunde to Clothar because he was a full son to Clovis and Clothilde while Theuderic was the son of a concubine.

In accordance with the bishops' decision, Radegunde was sent to live and work on one of the royal estates near Athies until she reached marriageable age. Radegunde's brother went directly to Clothar's court at Soissons.<sup>19</sup> On the estate Radegunde learned to read and write and she received instruction in the Catholic faith. "Along with other skills which suited her sex, she was taught letters."<sup>20</sup> In addition to her own education, she taught lessons and took care of the children on the Athies estate.

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<sup>19</sup>Liber Historia Francorum, ed. Bernard Bachrach, Bk. 22, 60. Gregory of Tours does not mention Theuderic's threat against the children in the Historia Francorum.

<sup>19</sup>It would seem that the brother's opportunities would be greater at court than his sister's on a country estate. However, the brother's life at Clothar's court would have been a suspect existence at best. As long as he lived he represented a potential coup against Frankish rule in Thuringia.

<sup>20</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 2, ln. 12-13: 365. "Quae puella inter alia opera, quae sexui eius congruebant, litteris est erudita." From Fortunatus' letters and from the Vitae of Radegunde it is clear that she was well read in the early Christian literature, particularly the hagiographies.

[Radegunde] was only a child herself and already she gathered up the poor children and gave them food; she made them seat themselves, cleaned their faces, washed their hands, and, serving them herself, poured them a drink.<sup>21</sup>

The years Radegunde spent on the villa estate were formative ones for her later life as a Merovingian queen and the patron of a nunnery. Radegunde's training at Athies gave her experience with the work of the villa agricultural system practiced by the Gallo-Romans.<sup>22</sup> Radegunde prospered when she looked after the estates which brought in the queen's revenue, and, when she endowed her nunnery with these estates, the bishops praised her skillful production for her community. Radegunde's estate at Saix, for example, provided hand-milled grain for her own community and for neighboring monasteries.

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<sup>21</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, ln. 16-19: 365. "Iam tunc id agens infantula, quidquid sibi remansisset in mensa, collectis parvulis, lavans capita singulis, compositis sellulis, porrigens aquam manibus, ipsa inferebat, ipsa miscebat infantulis."

<sup>22</sup>Germanic cultivation was commonly based on small holds of land with few buildings, or one rambling shelter for people, animals, and work tasks. The landholding was worked by a household group. The Roman colonies' villa system was based on large holdings with several buildings for separate uses, worked by multiple families or servant groups with the estate's products and profits accruing to one landowner. The villa provided for shop-like artisan occupations such as leather and metal work as well as agricultural production such as grinding grains and shearing sheep. This centralization of agriculture and artisan work made the estate more self-sufficient, and profitable, than the holdings of peasant farmers. Three detailed studies of the comparative agricultural practices of late antique and early medieval Gaul are: J. H. Clapham and Eileen Power, eds., The Agrarian Life of the Middle Ages, Vol. 1, The Cambridge Economic History (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1941), 38-42, 89-193, 224-271; J. F. Drinkwater, Roman Gaul (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983; Edith M. Wightman, "The Patterns of Rural Settlement in Roman Gaul," Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, Vol. II, 4th ed. (Berlin, 1975).

Bishop Germanus of Paris was grateful for her charity when she sent wheat to his parish during Lent.<sup>23</sup> Radegunde lived on the Athies estate until her arranged marriage to Clothar I soon after Queen Ingunde's death in about 536.

Radegunde lived as Clothar's queen for more than ten years among his four concubine wives and eight stepchildren. She was the fifth of Clothar's seven wives. The rivalries Radegunde knew among the wives of Clothar's court laid out the pattern of the warring factions in the next two generations. Both the war of the Pretender to the Frankish throne and the feud between Brunhilde and Fredegunde unfolded in the marriage relations surrounding Radegunde in the court of Clothar.

The Pretender to the throne was a repudiated son of Clothar and an unnamed concubine who came to Clothar's bed after Radegunde left the court. The boy's existence and his mother's claim that Clothar was his father created a powerful wedge for dynastic politics because, among the Franks, illegitimate sons held legitimate claims on the kingship of their fathers. Throughout his childhood Gundovald was the object of sovereign maneuvering among childless Frankish kings; in his manhood Gundovald became the object of subsidy diplomacy by the Byzantine Empire toward the Frankish kingdoms. Two childless kings, Clothar's brother Childebert I and Clothar's son Charibert I, latched on to Gundovald's claim to the throne in

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<sup>23</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 16, ln. 24, 1-5: 369-370.

order to secure the inheritance of their own kingdoms. After Clothar's death in 561, his son Sigibert exiled Gundovald. Eventually, Gundovald made his way to the Byzantine Empire and received the protection of Narses. The Byzantine support for Gundovald involved a three-way scheme in which the Empire backed Pretenders to the thrones of the Franks and the Visigoths.<sup>24</sup> Before this Byzantine policy completely unraveled, Queen Brunhilde's daughter Ingunde married the Visigothic Pretender, Hermengild, who was Brunhilde's stepbrother. Hermengild later turned Ingunde and their infant son over to a Byzantine Greek army enroute to Constantinople; Ingunde and the baby were taken captive as far as Carthage where they died.<sup>25</sup>

In the course of the civil war that the Pretender inspired in the Frankish kingdoms, Gundovald called on Radegunde to identify him as one of Clothar's heirs. Gundovald made a speech to an angry crowd from the top of the town wall in the city of Comminges. He tried to explain his long struggle to be recognized as a royal son. He ended with this declaration recorded by Gregory of Tours:

'You must recognize that I, too, am a King, just as much as my brother Gunthram is. If the hatred which you bear me burns too fiercely in your hearts, take me to your King and, if only he will accept me as his brother, he may do

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<sup>24</sup>For Radegunde's role in the war of the Pretender Gundovald: Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. VII, 36: 420.

<sup>25</sup>On Brunhilde's and Ingunde's parts in the Byzantine scheme: Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bks. VI, 40, 43; Bks. VIII, 18, 21, 28. Regarding the Empire's policy to challenge the Frankish and Visigothic thrones: Walter Goffart, "Byzantine Policy in the West under Tiberius II and Maurice: The Pretenders Hermengild and Gundovald (579-585), Traditio 13 (1957): 73-118.



with me what he will. If you refuse to do this, let me return to the place from which I set out. I will go willingly and I will do harm to no man. Ask Radegunde of Poitiers and Ingtrude of Tours, and you will find that what I say is true.'<sup>26</sup>

Before Radegunde had the opportunity to vouch for Gundovald, King Gunthram's forces overtook the Pretender. Gunthram spoke to an audience of the Frankish factions that was also attended by Gundovald's envoys.

All stood silent, but King Guntram answered: 'All of us present should now have one single cause at heart, to ensure that this adventurer, whose father used once to be a mill overseer should be driven out of our lands...His father sat at a weaver's loom and carded wool.' Although it is possible for a single artisan to exercise both of these trades, one of the envoys [for Gundovald] made the following reply to the King's allegation: 'According to you, then, this man had two fathers, a weaver and a miller! It becomes you ill, King, to talk so foolishly. It has never been heard that a man could have two fathers, unless one is speaking of spiritual matters.' At this they all burst out laughing...<sup>27</sup>

Gunthram was so furious at what the envoys said that "he ordered decaying horse-dung to be flung over their heads as they went."<sup>28</sup>

The bloody feud between Queen Brunhilde and Queen Fredegunde had a bitter root in the rivalry between Radegunde's sister wives, Ingunde and Aregunde. Ingunde and Aregunde were Clothar's third and fourth wives and they were blood sisters. Two brothers marrying two blood sisters was a relatively common practice of polygamy and it may have been gratifying for the sisters to share the duties of Germanic husbandry--frequent

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<sup>26</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. VII, 36: 420.

<sup>27</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. VII, 14: 397-398.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

childbearing, almost constant childcare, other wives, and rustic householding--with a blood sister, especially if it was an inter-natione marriage. It was more unusual for one man to marry two sisters. But even this practice was common in Clothar's family. In addition to Clothar himself, his son Charibert married blood sisters who were servants to his queen Ingoberga and the daughters of a royal wool worker. First, he married Merofled; then, her sister Marcovefa, even though she had taken religious vows and wore a habit.<sup>29</sup> A true son of his father, after marrying the wool worker's daughters, Charibert married a shepherdess named Theudechild.

Although it seems that Bishop Gregory took the following anecdote about Ingunde and Aregunde at face value, it is more likely that the irony of their situation was obvious enough to Gregory and his readers to be left unsaid. It would be unlike the astute Bishop of Tours to overlook the significance of Ingunde and Aregunde's competition over the inheritance portion of their sons, since Tours was one of the most contested cities in Clothar's divided domains.

Ingunde, after bearing Clothar's sixth child, suggested to Clothar:

My lord, you have already done what you wished with me, your handmaiden...To complete my happiness, I ask you to choose for my sister, who is also a member of your household, a capable and wealthy husband, so that I need not be ashamed of her, but rather that she may be a source

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<sup>29</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IV, 26: 219.

of pride to me, so that I may serve you even more faithfully.<sup>30</sup>

Ingunde knew her husband very well. Gregory, too, knew him well enough to tell us that, "Clothar was too much given to woman-chasing to be able to resist this." Clothar rode off to the villa where Aregund lived, married her and slept with her before returning to court. Perhaps he plighted her his troth with the jewelry that is now part of her burial treasure at the abbey of Saint Denis. Aregunde was buried wearing a silver-gilt filigree belt inlaid with precious stones; a brooch in gold, silver and garnets; and, a gold, scrolled-work signet ring.<sup>31</sup> Clothar returned to Ingunde to tell her,

'I have done my best to reward you for the sweet request which you put to me. I looked everywhere for a wealthy and wise husband...but could find no one more eligible than myself. You must know, then, that I myself have married. I am sure that this will not displease you.'<sup>32</sup>

Because Gregory did not tell the story from Ingunde's point of view, we can only count her children and speculate why she responded to Clothar's outrageous act by saying, "You must do as you wish. All I ask is that I may retain your good favor."<sup>33</sup>

Queen Ingunde was the mother of four sons and two daughters; Queen Aregunde was the mother of one son. Clothar and his brothers, the sons of Clovis I, inherited the Merovingian kingdom in four partitions. With four sons,

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<sup>30</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IV, 3: 198.

<sup>31</sup>Illustrations of Aregunde's jewelry are in: Robert Latouche, Caesar to Charlemagne (London: Phoenix House, 1965), 242-243.

<sup>32</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IV, 3: 198.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

Ingunde's position, as well as the inheritance for her sons, seemed secure. With the birth of Aregunde's son, rancour was brought to the court. Blood sisters or not, Ingunde and Aregunde competed for the sovereign rights and domains due their sons.

Ingunde and Aregunde's sisterly marriage was compounded in the next generation when Sigibert and Chilperic married sister princesses. Ingunde's son Sigibert made a strategic marriage with Brunhilde, a princess of the Visigoths. Brunhilde's bridal train crossing Gaul from Spain carried not only her dower treasures, but also the prestige of a high placed inter-natione marriage. Aregunde's son Chilperic repudiated his Germanic queen Audovera, and chose Fredegunde, a commoner, as his consort.<sup>34</sup> Fredegunde may have been common but she was beautiful and brutal enough to outlast all of her enemies except Brunhilde.

Chilperic's faction envied Sigibert's marriage. Chilperic quickly imitated his brother's high-ranking marriage by marrying Brunhilde's sister Galswintha. The enmity between Brunhilde and Fredegunde was sealed when Chilperic and Fredegunde conspired to

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<sup>34</sup>LHF, ed. Bachrach, Bk. 31, 77-78. The anonymous monk credited Fredegunde with a clever ruse that resulted in Fredegunde's replacing Audovera. Fredegunde tricked Audovera into being the godmother to her own daughter, hardly a serious offense in those times, but, it was enough to give Chilperic an excuse for what he was going to do anyway. Gregory of Tours does not mention the incident in the Historia Francorum. Audovera and her three sons plotted against Chilperic and supported his enemies. At one point, after Fredegunde had Brunhilde's husband Sigibert assassinated, Brunhilde married Audovera's son Merovech. Audovera's son nearly won out when disease killed both of Fredegunde's sons, but, in the end, Fredegunde urged on Chilperic's enmity until he murdered Audovera and Merovech.

strangle Galswintha in her marriage bed. The feud did not end until 613 when the forces of Clothar II, Fredegunde's son, tortured Brunhilde to death. "She was lifted on to a camel and led through the entire army. Then she was tied to the feet of wild horses and torn apart limb from limb by their hooves. Her final grave was the fire."<sup>35</sup>

The long, earthly marriage between Radegunde and Clothar was a sensitive period for the chroniclers of her saintly life. Fortunatus' and Baudonivia's stories of Radegunde's life are full of contrasts in their description of her marriage. She shared the king's bed, but the king's men told him, "It is a nun and not a queen you have for a wife." She rose each night to pray kneeling on the cold stones of the chapel, but when she returned to her bedchamber, she "warmed herself against the king's body." After his death, Radegunde called Clothar "king of blessed memory," while in his lifetime she twice invited her own death in the nunnery rather than return to him. After her death, the nuns of Sainte Croix believed Radegunde's marriage was "an example for the laity" and "marriage was a sweetness that must be overcome" to live the religious life.<sup>36</sup>

In a time requiring little else of its rulers, Radegunde's husband was a ruthless king who eventually became sole king over the four Merovingian domains partitioned among the sons of Clovis. Issues of Merovingian politics tended to be solved by

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<sup>35</sup>LHF, Bk. 40, 96.

<sup>36</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. V: 366-367; Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 1: 379-380; Bk. 4: 380-381;

murder and sovereignty was largely a matter of longevity. For queens, royal politics and sovereignty centered on sons. Childlessness amounted to disinheritance. A childless queen in that world, Radegunde's position became more and more tenuous. Clothar took up the unnamed concubine who bore the ballomer Gundovald. Calculating with some finesse allowed Radegunde time, barely, to flee the court before Clothar's union with this concubine.

A more probable cause for the beginning of Radegunde's separated life was Clothar's reaction to a Saxon uprising aided by the Thuringians in 555 or 556.

In that year, the Saxons having revolted, King Clotar gathered an army of Franks and marched against them into battle on the Wesser River. He struck down the greatest part of their army and devastated their land. He also went through all of Thuringia and depopulated it because the Thuringians had provided aid to the Saxons.<sup>37</sup>

Radegunde's unnamed brother, the only male survivor of the Thuringian royal families still in Europe, remained a threat to Clothar's possession of Thuringia.<sup>38</sup> Clothar ordered Radegunde's brother to be murdered in an ambush.<sup>39</sup> Family murders were well within Clothar's political prowess. Years before, after the death of his brother Clodomer I, Clothar

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<sup>37</sup>The description of this campaign is nearly identical in the Historia Francorum and the Liber Historia Francorum. The monk of Saint Denis added the geographical precision of the Wesser River. LHF, Bk. 27, 71; H. F., Bk. IV, 9: 203.

<sup>38</sup>Julia Martines O'Faolain called this brother Chlodecharius in her historical fiction about Radegunde's nunnery entitled Women in the Wall. I have found no contemporary source for his name.

<sup>39</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. III, 7: 168.

fatally stabbed Clodomer's sons, still young boys under the care of their grandmother Queen Clothilde, in order to consolidate Clodomer's domains with his own.<sup>40</sup>

Radegunde's correspondence with her family members in Constantinople may have been intended to summon their help after her brother's murder. She wrote first to her cousin Hermalafred; then, when she learned of his death, she wrote to Artachis, the son of Hermalafred's sister and a Byzantine Greek. Radegunde pleaded with her cousins to break their silence and honor the loss of their natione. The language and the emotion Radegunde used in these letters, compared with similar situations retold by Gregory of Tours, is as forceful as other barbarian women's exhortations for revenge from their kinsmen.<sup>41</sup>

Radegunde's letters were full of her recriminations for causing her brother's death because she had begged him to stay among the Franks instead of escaping with others to the Byzantine Empire.

His [Radegunde's brother] fear of causing me pain was the cause of his death. He was still a youth, without a beard, when he was struck down... I, his sister, was not even with him to see the horrors of his end. Not only had I lost him, I had not even closed his eyes, or thrown myself on his body, or heard his last words. I did not warm his icy bowels with my burning tears, I could not kiss his dear

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<sup>40</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. III, 17: 180-181.

<sup>41</sup>In Gregory of Tours, H. F., compare, for example, the outcome of Clothilde's plea with her sons to avenge the deaths of her Burgundian parents, Bk. III, 6: 166; or, Fredegunde's demands that Chilperic uphold her honor after he married Brunhilde's sister Galswintha, Bk. IV, 28: 222-223; or, Brunhilde's revenge of her sister Galswintha's murder, Bk. VII, 20: 401.

lips at the moment of his last breath... The breath that abandoned him, why was it not mine?<sup>42</sup>

Although Radegunde's grief for her brother may be reminiscent of Antigone's, the worship of bodily relics was alien to antiquity.<sup>43</sup> Radegunde's elaborate language of grief and devotion was characteristic of the converted Merovingians' reverence toward the dead. Perhaps in the same mission that carried her letters to family members in Constantinople, Radegunde's agent, a Poitiers priest named Reoval, brought back a sacred finger bone, a relic of Saint Mammetus, for the Sainte Croix nunnery.<sup>44</sup>

After her brother's murder, Radegunde used her resources to seek protection and power through the Church. She left the court and went to the church of Bishop Medard in Noyon. At the altar, she exchanged her queen's jewels for religious garments and she asked Bishop Medard to consecrate her a deaconess. By ordaining Radegunde, Bishop Medard placed himself at risk; the king's men were already waiting outside the sanctuary threatening violence against the Church if the queen did not return to the court under their armed guard. To take on the religious life, Radegunde needed the intercession of powerful

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<sup>42</sup>Radegunde, "De excidio Thoringiae," Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, App., I: 269.

<sup>43</sup>Relic worship was one of the most marked differences between Christian and pagan practices. Peter Brown, The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 4-7, 69-70.

<sup>44</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 14, 386.



Churchmen between herself and Clothar. To gain the Churchmen's intervention, she had to use both her wit and her wealth.

That [Radegunde] live a holy life, [Providence] allowed the killing of her innocent brother. Then she went with the King's permission to Bishop Medard of Noyon asking him to consecrate her to God, to clothe her as a deaconess. But he remembered the apostle's words: If a woman is joined to a man, seek not to separate them. And he dared not to give the queen a religious habit. The Bishop's troubles were increased by the presence of the noblemen who turned him away from the altar and pushed him back into the church to prevent him from giving the veil to the queen, saying: Do not think to take from the king the queen he married as his rightful wife. The saint, dressed as a nun, entered their midst from the anterooms, approached the altar and said to Bishop Medard: If you hesitate to consecrate me and if you fear a man more than God, know, pastor, that the soul of this lamb of God will be required of your soul. The Bishop, struck like lightning by her statement, placed his hands on her and consecrated her a deaconess.<sup>45</sup>

The precedent of Radegunde's separation from her husband, her consecration to the Church as a deaconess, and her subsequent foundation of a nunnery for two hundred other Merovingian noblewomen proved to be unsettling to some of her contemporaries.

Medard also risked the censure of the other Merovingian bishops by ordaining Radegunde; decrees of the councils of Epaon

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<sup>45</sup>Fortunatus, Vita Sanctae Radegundis Reginae, Liber I, ed. B. Krusch, MGH Script. rer. mer. 2, Bk. 12, ln. 20-31: 368. Divinitate prosperante, ...ut haec religiosius viveret, frater interficitur innocenter. Directa igitur a rege veniens ad beatum Medardum Movomago, supplicat instanter, ut ipsam, mutata veste, Domino consecraret. Sed memor dicentis apostoli: Si qua ligata sit coniugi, non quaerat dissolvi, differebat reginam non publicanam, sed publicam. Quo sanctissima cognito intrans in sacrarium, monachica veste induitur, procedit ad altare, beatissimum Medardum his verbis alloquitur, dicens: 'Si me consecrare distuleris et plus hominem quam Deum timueris, de manu tua, pastor, ovis anima requiratur.' Quo ille contestationis concussus tonitruo, manu superposita, consecravit diaconam.

in 511 and Orleans in 533 had nullified the female diaconate by absorbing it into the unordained order of widows.<sup>46</sup> One of the stories Fortunatus told about the Sunday services at Sainte Croix provided further evidence that Radegunde practiced an ordained office.

On Sundays, according to the Rule she had imposed, in summer as in winter, she gathered the poor masses together, she presented a cup full of wine to the first pauper with her own hand, and confiding the duty of serving drink to one of her sisters, she hastened to her oratory to say her prayers and recite the divine office, after which she concerned herself with serving the priests invited to her table.<sup>47</sup>

Although Radegunde's consecration signified that the female diaconate was an ordained order as late as the mid sixth century, the ordination of women was a contentious issue among the bishops in their councils throughout the sixth century.

For the first year of her separation, Radegunde lived on her estate at Saix and probably on other estates for briefer visits. Baudonivia wrote that Radegunde gathered sacred relics from the villa of Athies during this year.<sup>48</sup> This period would have been an opportune time to gather other women together in

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<sup>46</sup>Conc. Epaonense, 21; Conc. Aurelianense, 27-28 in Suzanne Wemple, Women in Frankish Society, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 140. Radegunde's ordination is still the subject of much of the debate about the existence and functions of the female diaconate among Church scholars. See Wemple, notes 73, 80, and 81 on page 274.

<sup>47</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 18, ln. 24-28: 370. "Venerabili vero omni dominico die hoc habebat in canone vel aestate vel hieme, ut pauperibus collectis primo merum sua manu de potu dulci porrigeret, puellae postea committens, ut omnibus illa propinaret, quia ipsa festinabat orationi occurrere, quo et cursum consummaret et sacerdotibus ad mensam invitatis occurreret..."

<sup>48</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 13, 386.

her enterprise. At the end of this period, Radegunde had traveled by boat at least as far as Tours and Chinon before her stay at Saix, and, by the time she entered the nunnery, she took two hundred other women in with her.<sup>49</sup>

Both Fortunatus and Baudonivia mention the many donations Radegunde gave to churches and monasteries from the time she left the court until she entered her nunnery.<sup>50</sup> While she lived at the Saix estate, on at least two occasions, she hastily sent donations to Churchmen appealing for their help to elude Clothar. On one occasion, a rumor in the surrounding countryside warned Radegunde that Clothar and his men were in the region and intended to bring her back to court.

[King Clothar] was so gravely grieved with woeful suffering that he had let so great a Queen leave him that within himself he had no wish to live unless he could get her back again.<sup>51</sup>

Radegunde chose two courses of action to avoid returning to court. First, she announced a regimen of bodily austerities: a harsh hair shirt, a "torment of fasting," a "vigil of prayer," and "greater tortures." Next, she sent a gift of her royal golden ornaments with Fridovigia, one of the nuns who lived with Radegunde on the estate, to Father Jean, a holy recluse who lived in the castle of Chinon. Fridovigia's instructions were

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<sup>49</sup>On Radegunde's various destinations see: Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 14, 369.

<sup>50</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bks. 13, 14, 16; Baudonivia, Liber II, Bks. 4, 5, 7.

<sup>51</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 4, ln. 32-33, 1: 380-381.  
 "...eam rex iterum vellet accipere, se dolens gravi damno pati, qui talem et tantam reginam permississet a latere suo discedere, et nisi eam reciperet, pentius vivere non optaret."

to exchange the "ornament of gold and gems and pearls made of felt joined together with a thousand gold solidi of her own" for Father Jean's prayers and new strips of hair shirt to wear during her prayers. After a night of prayers, Father Jean sent Fridovigia back to Radegunde with the new hair shirt and his message that, "God would not permit the King's desire. Before he could get her back in marriage he would be punished by God's judgment."<sup>52</sup> If Clothar and his men stopped at Chinon, as was customary on journeys from Soissons and Tours to Poitiers, this overnight exchange could have taken place in person.

Another time, Baudonivia wrote that "intermediaries" told Radegunde that Clothar and his son Sigibert were stopped in Tours before starting on their way to regain the queen in Poitiers. In response, Radegunde "most secretly sent Proculus as agent with gifts and greetings," and sent letters "under divine oath" to Bishop Germanus of Paris, who was then with the King. When Germanus received Radegunde's letters and gifts, "he prostrated himself weeping at the King's feet... that he [the King] should not go to the city of Poitiers." Instead, Clothar, "judging himself unworthy to have such a queen for very long," sent Germanus to Poitiers. Germanus stayed in Fortunatus' monastery in Poitiers and sought out Radegunde "to ask blessed Radegunde's

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<sup>52</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 4, ln. 15-17: 381. "...hoc regis esse voluntatem, sed Dei non esse permissum; ante rex Dei iudicio puniretur, quam eam in coniugium acciperet."

forgiveness for the King had sinned against her through evil counsel."<sup>53</sup>

During that year, negotiations between Bishop Eufronius of Tours (Bishop Gregory's immediate predecessor), Bishop Germanus of Paris, Bishop Medard of Noyon, and Clothar eventually enabled Radegunde to build a nunnery in Poitiers. The Poitiers region was a frontier area of Frankish conquest and Christian conversion; Clovis' victory at Vouillé in 507 marked the Franks' first possession of the area from the Arian Visigoths. Most directly related to the choice of Poitiers for the nunnery site was the matter of Clothar's dominion there. Poitiers was one of the cities that had come into Clothar's possession following the death of his brother Clodomer, with the deed sealed by Clothar's murder of Clodomer's sons. The residence of his Queen, even this separated queen, helped mark his overlordship; that her residence was an endowed nunnery marked Clothar's cooperation with the Church. For the people of the region, a nunnery as large as Radegunde's, with all the lands, buildings, services, and workers necessary to support two hundred women, did much to reinforce the Frankish Christian presence in the area.<sup>54</sup>

The location of the nunnery in Poitiers situated Radegunde and the nuns in the middle of on-going rivalries for land and

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<sup>53</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 7: 382.

<sup>54</sup>For a map and a detailed description of Radegunde's monastic foundation see: May Vieillard-Troiekouroff, "Les monuments religieux de Poitiers d'après Grégoire de Tours," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris: A. and J. Picard, 1953), 285-291.

position. Maintaining a community the size of Radegunde's nunnery required some delicate dealings among the factions of kings, queens, nobles and bishops. After Clothar's death in 561 and his son Charibert's death in 567, Sigibert and Chilperic fought over the possession of Poitiers. Sigibert defeated Chilperic, and, by uneasy treaty, Sigibert held on to Charibert's portion.

Radegunde's community allied itself with Sigibert and Brunhilde's faction against Chilperic and Fredegunde's forces. Bishop Gregory of Tours' was also a partisan of Sigibert and Brunhilde. Rivalry over Poitiers intensified after 575 when Fredegunde's agents assassinated Sigibert. The kingdoms then engaged in nearly constant wars over claims of inheritance until Fredegunde's son Clothar II ruled as sole king in 613. In ecclesiastical affairs, especially in the nuns' efforts to avoid Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers' mistreatment of their order, Radegunde's community allied itself with the faction of Tours.

The nunnery was established as an independent, royal foundation. The revenues from estates which were previously part of Radegunde's morgengabe endowed her monastic community. Baudonivia wrote that Radegunde's nunnery was quickly built, "according to directions from the excellent King Clothar" with the help of Bishop Pientius and Duke Austrapius. Duke Austrapius anticipated that his loyalty to Clothar would gain him the bishopric of Poitiers when Pientius died. Instead, Clothar's brother Charibert appointed Pascentius, the former Abbot of

Saint Hilary in Poitiers, and banished Austrapius.<sup>55</sup> Radegunde's community lost an ecclesiastical ally.

Once the nunnery was built, Radegunde strengthened the position of her institution with a charter letter signed by seven of the nine sitting bishops of the Council of Tours in 567. In secular politics, the protection Radegunde sought was necessary because the death of Clothar I's son Charibert at the end of 567 meant that the sovereignty of the kingdoms would once again shift. After Clothar's death in 561, letters from Charibert, Sigibert, Gunthram, and Chilperic confirmed Radegunde's original foundation. Sigibert, who was a supporter of Radegunde and Fortunatus, ruled Poitiers and Tours until his assassination in 575. After 575, the period when Bishop Gregory was eye-witness to most of these events, Gunthram, Chilperic, Brunhilde, and Fredegunde plotted and counter plotted to possess Tours and Poitiers.

In ecclesiastical politics, Radegunde needed the authorization of a charter in 567 because the current Council of Tours abolished the diaconate. When Radegunde established Sainte Croix, she was a consecrated deaconess. The previous councils of Epaon and Orleans in 517 and 533 ruled only on the consecration of widows; the Council of Tours in 567 cleverly ruled that the decisions of the earlier councils applied to all female ordination. Now that the bishops' decisions undermined

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<sup>55</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IV, 18: 214.

her religious office, Radegunde tried to secure the bishops' approval for her institution.

Since the affairs of human beings are unpredictable, and because our times and our circumstances are always changing, for the world is running to its end and some people now prefer to follow their own desires rather than the dictates of God, while I am still alive, and in full devotion, in Christ's name and with God to guide me, I send to you, apostolic fathers, this document in which I have set out all my plans."<sup>56</sup>

By 567, when Pascentius' successor Maroveus was the Bishop of Poitiers under Clothar's son King Sigibert, Radegunde's independent nunnery was prestigious enough to inspire the Bishop's envy and neglect. His most obvious offense was his refusal to install the relic of the True Cross which the community received from the Empress Sophia.

Radegunde sent Churchmen to Eastern lands to search for pieces of wood from the True Cross...As soon as these arrived, the Queen asked Bishop Maroveus if he would deposit them in her nunnery with all due honor and a great ceremony of psalm-chanting. He refused point-blank; instead, he climbed on his horse and went off to visit one of his country estates."<sup>57</sup>

Radegunde, with King Sigibert's permission, called on Bishop Eufronius of Tours to celebrate the installation of the Sainte Croix relic. Accompanied by Fortunatus' glorious processional

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<sup>56</sup>Radegunde "Letter of Foundation," Gregory of Tours, H. F., trans. Lewis Thorpe, Bk. IX, 42: 535-536.

<sup>57</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 530.



hymn Vexilla Regis Prodeunt, the Bishop of Tours installed the relic of the True Cross at Easter in 568 or 569.<sup>58</sup>

The shrine for the relic of the True Cross added the power of praesentia, the physical presence of the holy, to the charitable and healing occupations of Sainte Croix. The infirmary at Sainte Croix was not the first one Radegunde established. When she was still a queen at court she built a hospital for indigent women at Athies as one of her many charities.<sup>59</sup> The medical care at Sainte Croix included all three categories of medicine known in medieval treatises: pharmacy, surgery, and diet.<sup>60</sup>

Pharmacy was the most prominent feature of the treatments recorded at Sainte Croix. Radegunde's sources, however, emphasize the miraculous quality of the cures more than their medicines. If, for example, Radegunde cured a woman's fever with a dose of medicine and a series of baths, the writers told

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<sup>58</sup>The Cross was installed at Easter no earlier than 568 and no later than Easter of 573. There are several known dates which help determine these dates for the installation of the Cross. King Sigibert (reigned 561-575) sent his expedition, including Radegunde's mission, to Constantinople in 568 or 569, returning a year later ("in alium annum in Galliis sunt regressi"). Bishop Eufonius of Tours installed the relic before his death in the summer of 573. The Empress Sophia reigned from 565 to 578.

<sup>59</sup>Fortunatus, Liber II, Bk. IV, ln. 19-20: 366. "Adhuc animum tendens ad opus misericordiae, Adtelas domum instruit quo, lectis culte compositis, congregatis egenis feminis."

<sup>60</sup>Loren C. MacKinney, "Medicine in Merovingian and Carolingian France," in Early Medieval Medicine: With Special Reference to France and Chartres, The Hideyo Noguchi Lectures (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1937), 59-105. This is a formidable work of scholarship with ample, accurate notes from the primary sources. Specific reference to Radegunde, and, to the writings of Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia on pp. 71-12, 75-76, 175.

how amazing the patient's recovery was but not the curative ingredients in the medicine or in the baths.

A nun had suffered for a year from a fever which froze her during the day and burned her at night... Radegunde ordered that a hot bath be prepared and brought to her own chamber where she had the sick one plunged into the bath. Radegunde sent away all her companions and stayed alone for two hours with the poor feverish one for whom she made up a medicine...she touched one after the other of her afflicted limbs and everywhere she touched the affliction disappeared. And so the sick one whom two nuns had placed in the bath got out of the bath herself in perfect health.<sup>61</sup>

Many spices and herbs had known medicinal properties in Radegunde's time. Abrotanum was used for gout, fennel for coughs, chervil for hemorrhage, oregano for constipation, cloves for headaches, motherwort for cramps.<sup>62</sup> Herbs, spices, and other items were usually used in various mixtures, often for a variety of illness. Extant are some contemporary "recipes" (a more accurate description of the compounds than a prescription) for medicines.<sup>63</sup> To clear the head, use ginger and oregano; to cure insomnia caused by inflammations, or ulcers, mix some cinnamon and fifty-six grains of pepper; to cure kidney pains,

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<sup>61</sup>Fortunatus, Liber II, Bk. 29, ln. 31: 373; ln. 1-7: 374. Monacha quaedam toto anno in die gelata frigore, pernoctem cremata igne...tepidam fieri praecepit, ipsam aegrotam ad se facit in cellulam deportari et in tepida deponi...Quantum est corporis forma, a capite usque ad plantam infirma membra conbaiulat. Dehinc, quo manus attingebat, fugiebat dolor de languida, et, quam duae deposuerant, exiit salubris de tepida.

<sup>62</sup>Michel Rouche, "The Early Middle Ages in the West," chap. in A History of Private Life (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Belknap Press, 1987), 439; Herb and Ailment Cross Reference Chart, ed. Leslie J. Kaslof (Woodmere, New York: United Communications).

<sup>63</sup>Jean Lestocquoy cites the work of Marguerite Dubois on Anglo-Saxon medicines as his source for the following remedies in his article, "Epices, médecine et abbayes," Etudes Mérovingiennes, 182.

mash ninety grains of pepper, and some other ingredients, into some wine; to prevent swelling of the stomach, gently boil apple juice and add new honey and twenty grains of pepper; for liver problems, mix honey, vinegar, mustard, and ten grains of pepper. The critical ingredient in these remedies is the pepper. It was so precisely measured out that it must have been both strong in effect and high in price. Evidently there was considerable trade with Eastern sources for spices in the early medieval period.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps these grains of pepper were grains of poppy.

Saint Radegunde's cult was particularly well known for its eye cures. The acts of the saint were, again, more specifically described than her medications. According to Baudonivia, a priest named Leo, who traveled through Poitiers on his way to a synodal council, lost his eyesight "in a cloud of blood." Leo came into Radegunde's oratory, prayed, and prostrated himself on the saint's hairshirt. "The pain ceased, the mist dissolved, the blood coagulated, the vein sealed itself."<sup>65</sup> This is one of several miracles Fortunatus and Baudonivia told in which a

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<sup>64</sup>Jean Lestocquoy, "Epices, médecine et abbayes," Etudes Mérovingiennes, 184. Lestocquoy accounts for this trade through overland routes. That it was an extensive trade Lestocquoy supports with evidence that the Abbey of Corbie bought 125 pounds of pepper, shops in Cambrai bought more than one hundred kilos of spices; and, comparing his early medieval figures with numbers from the early 1300s, he finds that the total recorded purchases of spices are nearly the same. (p. 185)

<sup>65</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 15, ln. 17-24: 387. "oculi eius gravi sunt caligine obducti, sanguinis nube cooperti...dolor discessit, caligo fugata est, coagulatus sanguis se, venis ministrantibus."

person was healed through contact with a fabric Radegunde either touched or used with the person.<sup>66</sup> The cloths could have been soaked in any of many known herbal medicines. After Radegunde's death, "the cloth of her funeral pall, dipped into a cup serving a febrifuge, put a pilgrim into a deep sleep in front of her sepulchre; when the pilgrim awoke, he was cured."<sup>67</sup>

Absinthe, which is a concoction of wormwood, angelica root, sweet flag, dittany leaves, star-anise fruit, fennel and hyssop, was specifically named as the medicine in another eye miracle. One of the nun's eyes was "veiled by a humor of blood...[Radegunde] applied absinthe to the nun's eyes...and that green herb made for her a clear light."<sup>68</sup>

Of the classifications of early medieval medicine, surgery was not as advanced as pharmacy. With the exception of caesarian childbirths, surgery was usually confined to the extremities of the battlefield. The nuns of Sainte Croix devoted themselves more to the care of the sick and wounded than to surgical operations. The Church emphasized and provided for the care of the ill, but was not so committed to surgical practices. Regarding surgery performed by members of the clergy, the Church took an equivocal position in the early medieval

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<sup>66</sup>In Liber I, Bks. 26, 34; Liber II, Bks. 12, 15, 26.

<sup>67</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 28, ln. 33-34: 394; 1: 395.  
"...si pallam...intinxit in calice aquae et dedit febricitanti poculum, non statim, up bibit, ante sanctum eius sepulchrum iacens, sopor accessit, morbus recessit."

<sup>68</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 34, ln. 8-11: 375. "ex humore sanguis contexerat oculum, adprehensa herba absinthii...cum super oculum posuit, dolor et cruor mox effugit, et de viriditate herbae puritas lucis emicuit."

centuries; in 1163, by order of the Council of Tours, surgery by the clergy was forbidden.<sup>69</sup> Radegunde's miracles in the late sixth century included instances of such early medieval surgical practices as cauterizing, cupping glasses, and blood letting.<sup>70</sup> These same procedures continued to dominate surgery in Europe until the early modern centuries.<sup>71</sup>

Gregory of Tours recorded the most notorious example of surgery performed at Sainte Croix as part of the testimony at the trial following the revolt of the Sainte Croix nuns in 590-591. The rebel nun Clotild accused the Abbess of keeping eunuchs about her as if the nunnery were the Imperial court. Gregory wrote down the statement that followed Clotild's pointing out a servant who was a eunuch.

Reovalis, who was a doctor, then stepped forward and made the following statement: 'When this servant was a young lad,' he said, 'he had terrible pains in the groin. Nobody could do anything for him. His mother went to Saint Radegund and asked her to have the case looked into. I was called in and she told me to do what I could. I cut out the lad's testicles, an operation I had once seen performed by a surgeon in the town of Constantinople.'<sup>72</sup>

Diet was the least important of the three types of early medieval healing although dietary regulation was apparently more widely practiced than is obvious from the general narrative sources. While the number of treatises on diet as prescriptive treatment is small, the great number of fragmentary references to

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<sup>69</sup>Edmund Owen, "Surgery," Encyclopaedia Britannica 11th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 127.

<sup>70</sup>Loren MacKinney, Early Medieval Medicine, 73. See: Liber I Bks. 28, 30; Liber II, Bk., 15.

<sup>71</sup>Edmund Owen, "Surgery," Encyclopaedia Britannica 11th ed., 127.

<sup>72</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. X, 15: 570-571.

dietary regimens among the Germanic sources supports the idea that food consumption or restriction was linked with health.<sup>73</sup> For Radegunde and the nuns, rigors of diet were primarily a spiritual exercise. In particular, it was Radegunde's denial of food that was saintly. Pope Gregory the Great, a younger contemporary of Radegunde, pronounced that to fast was to offer to God a tithe of the year.<sup>74</sup>

Except for Sunday, Radegunde made all days days of fast. Her food consisted only of lentils and herbs: never fowl or fish, never fruits, never eggs. She made her delicacies be coarse bread, which, to her eyes, appeared in the guise of a cake.<sup>75</sup>

At Sainte Croix, wine was used for its curative effects as well as for its sacramental function. Baudoniva marvelled at Radegunde's ability to replenish the nunnery's provision of wine. "...Felicity, our cellaress, dispensed [Radegunde's] vintage daily. Yet the wine never diminished...Where did it come from, that new wine that filled her cellar?"<sup>76</sup> After

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<sup>73</sup>Loren MacKinney, Early Medieval Medicine, 45, nt. 75 p. 162.

<sup>74</sup>Gregory I, 40 Homiliarum in Evangelia, Homily 15, par. 5, Patrologia Latina 76, col. 1137 in Caroline Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987), 33.

<sup>75</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 21, ln 21-24: 371. "Ergo venerabilem praeter diem dominicum fuit sacratissimae omnis dies ieiunium, lenticulae vel holeris prope ieiunia refectio, non avem, piscem vel pomum nec ovum habens edulium. Panis vero deliciarum sigillatum fuit aut ordeatum, quem absconsum sub fladone sumebat, ne quis perciperet."

<sup>76</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 10, ln. 23-26: 384. "De vindemai usque alliam omnibus diebus, ubicumque ei sancta iussit, dispensavit; numquam minuit, sed semper aequalis permansit. Ubi novum vinum advenit, quod cellarium inplevit, se tonnella satisfecisse credidit..."

relieving a woman's fever, Radegunde "gave wine to her who, before, could not bear even its aroma, and she was comforted."<sup>77</sup>

Radegunde's miracles show that the people of the Merovingian kingdoms sought out two other kinds of medical help at Sainte Croix: mental treatments and restorative baths. The nuns of Sainte Croix helped people whose minds were "gravely infested by the enemy,"<sup>78</sup> or whose illness was thought to originate with evil spirits.

A woman from the countryside named Leubile was cruelly vexed by an evil spirit. On the second day, with the Saint's prayers, ...the skin between the woman's shoulders cracked open and the spirit went out into a glass; and, so Leubile was delivered before our eyes. After she crushed that glass under her feet, she returned home from here perfectly sound.<sup>79</sup>

The healing baths at Sainte Croix provided simple hygiene as well as mineral and herbal treatments of the sort common well into the twentieth century. Radegunde cured a woman named Animia who suffered from dropsy by bathing her with oils.<sup>80</sup> Fortunatus wrote that this mysterious cure was a new kind of miracle. After Radegunde's death, some of the nuns objected to having so many different and often lowly-born people use their

<sup>77</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 29, ln. 8: 374. "...quae vinum nec odorabat, accepit, bibit et refecta est."

<sup>78</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 27, ln. 20: 394. "...graviter infestabat inimicus;"

<sup>79</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 28, ln. 27-30: 373. "Femina quaedam Leubila, dum vexaretur in rure ab adversario graviter, sequenti die, sancta orante, ...in scapula crepante cute et verme foras exeunte, sana est reddita publice, et ipsum vermem clacans pede, liberata se retulit."

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., Bk. 35, ln. 17-22: 375. "Animia...hydropis... Radegundis in balneo sine liquore nudam iuberet descendere. Deinde manu beatae visa est oleum aegrotae super caput effundere et nava veste contegere. Quo peracto mysterio..."

baths. The use of these bathing houses at the nunnery became a point of friction in the daily life of Sainte Croix.

The Sainte Croix nuns lived according to the Rule of Bishop Caesarius of Arles (d. 640).<sup>e1</sup> Caesarius drew up this Rule for the nunnery of his sister Caesaria, and, their niece, also named Caesaria, gave a copy of the Rule to Radegunde and Agnes, the Abbess of Saint Croix in 559. Radegunde and Agnes put their community under the protection of King Sigibert and traveled to Arles to receive their Rule because their own bishop, Maroveus of Poitiers ignored them.<sup>e2</sup> Fortunatus wrote a letter to Radegunde and Agnes during their journey to Arles. Typical of Fortunatus' epicurean tastes, he envied them their Easter meal together: "Happy the table which reunites at one time your three lights and which multiplies the fruits of paschal communion by your example."<sup>e3</sup>

The Rule discouraged extreme fasting or mortification of the flesh. Hearing that Radegunde was practicing a prolonged fast, Caesaria, the niece, wrote to Radegunde warning her to avoid the pride of overzealousness. According to the Rule the nuns' days were divided between hours for tasks like weaving, copying manuscripts, and needlework, and hours for religious devotions in prayer, hearing lessons, and performing devotions.

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<sup>e1</sup>A translation of this Rule from the Latin is in: M. C. McCarthy, The Rule for Nuns, Studies in Medieval History, n.s. 16 (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University, 1960).

<sup>e2</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 530-531.

<sup>e3</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, App. XIV: 276. "Felix quae retinet pariter tria lumina mensa, et paschale bonum multiplicare facit!"



The most rigorous stipulation of the Rule for a woman entering the nunnery was that "she shall enter the house once and for all and renounce all claims to outside property, it being clear that she has entered of her own free will."<sup>e4</sup>

Once immured, the nun's greatest obstacle was accidie. Accidie was defined as the sin of sloth, a spiritual torpor and apathy.

If accidie has taken possession of some unhappy soul, it produces disgust with the cell, and disdain and contempt of the brethren [sic] who dwell with him. He cries up distant monasteries...and he paints the intercourse with the brethren there as sweet and full of spiritual life... Then besides this he looks about anxiously this way and that, and sighs that none of the brethren come to see him, and often goes in and out of his cell, and frequently gazes up at the sun, as if it was too slow in setting.<sup>e5</sup>

For nuns, the onset of accidie was more likely than for monks. While the monks could at least travel from time to time, the nuns' Rule did not even allow visits to other nunneries. The monastic Rules composed in the sixth century, Rules of Caesarius and Benedict, for example, tried to overcome the bane of accidie by including more regular activities for the religious. Work appeared to be the antidote for the debilitating spiritual, social, and mental ravages of accidie; but, often, the numbing repetition and the menial quality of many necessary tasks behind the nunnery walls did not lessen the the effects of accidie.

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<sup>e4</sup>Trans. in Lina Eckenstein, Women under Monasticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896; rep., 1963), 48.

<sup>e5</sup>Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, trans. in Katharine Scherman, The Birth of France: Warriors, Bishops and Long-Haired Kings (New York: Random House, 1987), 79.

The daily life of the Sainte Croix community was officially regulated by the Rule of Caesaria's community; the life of Sainte Croix more truly gravitated according to the uneven influences of Radegunde's personal austerities, Abbess Agnes' nominal rule, and Fortunatus' worldly spiritualism. Although Radegunde, Agnes, and Fortunatus had very different temperaments, they shared a devoted and affectionate friendship.<sup>e6</sup> Their friendship harmonized the many divergent elements of the monastic communities in Poitiers. The milieu of the Poitier monastic community, like the friendship of Radegunde, Agnes, and Fortunatus, balanced three very different strains of early Christianity: severe asceticism, obedience to authority, and worldly politics. Unfortunately, the balance of so much diversity in their community did not outlive the three friends.

Radegunde, in giving up worldly life, even refused to act as the abbess of Sainte Croix. She appointed Agnes to be the Abbess. Agnes was probably one of the Queen's nutriti, that is, one of the young ones who supped at her side and trained in her entourage at the Merovingian court.<sup>e7</sup> "I appointed as Mother Superior the Lady Agnes, who became like a sister to me, and whom I have loved and brought up as if she were my daughter from

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<sup>e6</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. XI, I-XXVI; App., I-XXXIV.

<sup>e7</sup>Michel Rouche, "Private Life Conquers State and Society," chap. in A History of Private Life From Pagan Rome to Byzantium, ed. Paul Veyne, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Belknap Press, 1987), 427.

her childhood onwards."<sup>ee</sup> Radegunde's personal power allowed Agnes' institutional leadership to be unobtrusive to the royal and aristocratic ladies she ruled. The friendship of Radegunde and Agnes with Fortunatus carried a much needed connection with the secular world into the monastic enclosures of Poitiers. Before entering the priesthood, Fortunatus was a favorite at Sigibert's and Brunhilde's court--a favor he earned by composing a stunningly flattering ode on their wedding day in 566.<sup>ep</sup> Fortunatus' lingering friendships among powerful Merovingians served the interests of Sainte Croix well.

In spite of the many duties necessary to maintain the Sainte Croix community, the nuns' lives had a leisurely, even luxurious quality behind their forbidden walls. The nuns' movements were restricted by their Rule, but they were also removed from importunate husbands and sons. The nuns enjoyed flower and herb gardens, orchards, romanesque baths, fountains, games, books, letters, crafts, weaving, and other touches of refined villa life.

Stringent in her own conduct, Radegunde was perhaps too indulgent of her convent "daughters," who, after all, were the daughters, sisters, mothers and widows of wealthy Gallo-Roman families and royal or aristocratic Frankish families.

For while she was merciful to others, she was hard on herself; dutiful to others, she was severe to herself;

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<sup>ee</sup>Radegunde's "Letter to the Bishops," Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 42: 535.

<sup>ep</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, Bk. VI, I: 154.

generous to all but abstentious herself. She would not relieve her fast until she had triumphed over her body.<sup>90</sup>

Radegunde took on many of the difficult as well as the menial tasks of the community herself.

She was the first to serve the others and she imposed a punishment on herself when she allowed others to exceed her in these services. And so she swept the hall and the recesses of the nunnery, she washed and rearranged the bed linens; and, she had no fear of carrying out filthy loads that others were horrified even to look at. Secretly, without delay, she did the most repugnant household task, and, when she carried out the night soil, she believed herself ennobled by serving all of them in the most lowly way.<sup>91</sup>

Even if the sources exaggerated Radegunde's labors in order to accentuate her sanctity, her willingness to do so many jobs insulated the other members of her community from the hardships of their day to day existence. The nuns divided up their work and performed certain duties in week by week assignments; again, Radegunde did more than her share. The details in the following rather long passage show the variety of tasks at Sainte Croix as well as Radegunde's zealous performance.

Whether or not it was her week, she eagerly took care of the sick, concerning herself with their illness, washing their faces, bringing them hot water; her frequent visits brought them comfort...she ran to do the kitchen duty when it was her week. She carried in all the wood she needed herself, without the help of any other sister, or even the servant,

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<sup>90</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 7, ln. 29-31: 382. "Et cum esset aliis misericors, sibi iudex effecta est, reliquis pia, in se abstinendo severa, omnibus larga, sibi restricta, ut madefacta ieiuniis non sufficeret, nisi et de suo corpore triumpharet."

<sup>91</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk 23, ln. 10-13. "Ergo suis vicibus scopans monasterii plateas, simul et angulos, quidquid erat foedum, purgans et ante sarcinans, quod aliis horret videre, non abhorrebat evehere. Secretum etiam purgare opus non tardans, sed occupans, ferens foetores stercoris, credebat se minorem sibi, si se non nobilitaret villitate servitii."

up to the point of bending under the burden; she went to the wells to draw the water and distributed it among the basins; she peeled and washed the vegetables and herbs. Reviving the fire with her breath, she showed herself eager to prepare the food; she brought back the containers of food from the foyer; waiting to clean the plates and carry them to the table. The meal over, she washed the dishes and straightened up the kitchen, leaving nothing uncleaned. After that she would go to visit the sick.<sup>92</sup>

Judging from the perspective of the nuns' revolt in 590, the easeful life of the Sainte Croix nuns before Radegunde's death in 587 falsely prepared the nuns for the realities of their institutional life in the world of ecclesiastical politics. In her lifetime, Radegunde kept Sainte Croix independent. Her prestige as Clothar's queen, her ties with the other kings and aristocratic families, her reputation for charity and self-discipline, and her submissive stance toward bishops and kings safeguarded the position of the nunnery. Sainte Croix was an independent foundation but its independence did not include the right to conduct its own sacraments. Those essential rites were the sole right of the priesthood. The institutional life of the nuns was always dependent on the

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<sup>92</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 23, ln. 10-16; Bk. 24, ln. 17-23: 372. "Extra suam ebdomadam infirmantibus serviens, ipsa cibos decoquens, aegrotis facies abluens, ipsa calidum porrigens, visitabat quos fovebat...ad coquinam concursitabat, suam faciens septimanam. Denique nulla monacharum nisi de posticio, quantum ligni opus erat, sola ferebat in sarcina. Aquam de puteo trahebat et dispensabat per vascula. Holus purgans, legumen lavans, flatu focum vivificans, et ut decoqueretescas, satagebat exaestuans, vasa de foco ipsa levans, discos lavans et inferens. Hinc, consummatis conviviliis, ipsa vascula diluens, purgans nitide conquina, quidquid erat lutulentum, ferebat ima purgamina. Inde per aegrotantes inferens..."

administration of services the nuns themselves were forbidden to perform.

The events surrounding Radegunde's death presaged the revolt of the nuns. Bishop Maroveus' treatment of the Sainte Croix community on the occasion of their patron's death gave credence to the nuns' grievances against the Bishop's neglect. "When the time approached for Saint Radegunde to die, the disagreement between them was daily becoming worse instead of better."<sup>33</sup> Radegunde died in mid August of 587.

The whole congregation of the blessed woman, weeping and wailing around her bed, struck their breasts with fists hard as stones and raised their voices to Heaven...Early in the morning of the fourth feria of the first ides of August on the thirteenth day, she closed her eyes and was hidden away from us...the angels who bore her away said, 'Now it is done.' What could we have done? Paradise received her...in this world we have lost our lady and mother...Admirably does she make joy in Heaven, but on earth she truly left intolerable grief.<sup>34</sup>

The Mother Superior begged Bishop Maroveus to take the nunnery under his care; "Maroveus...refused."<sup>35</sup> Once again, as in the initiation of the nunnery Rule and the installation of the True Cross, the nuns of Sainte Croix called on another bishop to help them. Bishop Gregory of Tours came to Poitiers within the three

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<sup>33</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 531.

<sup>34</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 20, ln. 16-17; Bk. 21, ln. 23-28: 392. "Beatis omnibus congregatis, luctuosa circaeius thorum flentes et heulantes, pectora duris pugnibus et lapidibus ferientes, voces ad caelum dabant...Quarta feria mane primo Idus Augustas, quod fecit idem mensis dies 13, clausi sunt eius oculi, et obscurate sunt nostri...angeli, qui eam ferebant, respondentes dixerunt: 'Iam factum est.' Quid faciemus? Illam recepit paradisos...nos non de se separat, quae se ei placere voluit, cum quo regnat...Admirabile quidem gaudium fecit in caelis, in terris vero intollerabilem luctum nobis reliquit.

<sup>35</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 531.

days' time between the day of Radegunde's death and her funeral.

"I myself was present at her funeral."<sup>6</sup>

The local bishop was absent. A messenger went to the apostolic Bishop, Lord Gregory of Tours, and he came....They waited for the Bishop of Poitiers so that she might be interred with honor and the whole flock stood psalming around her bed...Thus they delayed for three days...but when he did not come Bishop Gregory processed with her to the basilica dedicated to Saint Mary where the bodies of the holy virgins of the monastery were kept. There he buried her with all honor.<sup>7</sup>

Radegunde's religious sisters and daughters could not cross their walls to process with her bier through the stone streets of Poitiers. It was their Rule that the nuns go out only at their death. The nuns stood wailing on the ramparts of their walls, watching the townspeople walk alongside their saint accompanying her to her tomb.

When they bore the holy body with psalms under the walls, since it was ordained that no living person should come out of the gates of the nunnery, the whole flock mounted the walls lamenting so that their grief might be represented by tears of psalms, groaning of canticles, sighing for alleluia. From above, they cried out as the bier of the saint paused under our tower.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 2: 481.

<sup>7</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 23, ln. 29-30: 392; ln. 4-10: 393. "Non erat ibi pontifex loci. Ambulavit nuntius ad virum apostolicum domnum Gregorium Turonicae civitatis episcopum, et advenit....Expectabatur pontifex loci, ut eam cum digno sepelirent honore. Tota congregatio circa eius thorum stans psallebat...Triduo expectatus est pontifex, quia vicus circuebat; sed quia non venit, vir apostolicus...in basilica sanctae Mariae nomine condita, ubi sacra virginum corpora de monasterio suo conduntur, eam cum digno sepelivit honore.

<sup>8</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 24, ln. 11-15: 393. "Dum sub muro cum psallentio sanctum eius corpus portaretur, quia instituerat, ut nulla vivens foras monasterio lanuam egrederetur, tota congregatio supra murum lamentans...pro psalmo lacrimas, pro cantico mugirum et gemitum pro alleluia reddebant. Rogaverunt desursum, ut subtus turrem repausaretur feretrum, in quo beata portabatur."

They heard masonry workers and other simple folks crying out miracles as their saint's body passed among them. The masons heard angels calling; a blinded one was illumined by her holy body; the candle of a woman servant named Calva took flight and lighted at the foot of Radegunde's grave.<sup>99</sup>

Bishop Gregory rode back to Tours leaving the Sainte Croix community "in great lamentation." He left behind his own niece, Justina, who served as the Prioress of Sainte Croix. Before returning to Tours, Bishop Gregory and others "persuaded Maroveus with some difficulty" to promise that he would foster the interests of the Sainte Croix nuns. In the year of the revolt, Bishop Gregory, looking back, wrote down this observation on Bishop Maroveus.

All the same, or so it seems to me, Maroveus still harbored some resentment against the nuns, and, indeed, they declared that this was one of the causes of their revolt.<sup>100</sup>

Abbess Agnes died soon after Radegunde. Agnes' death so soon after her patron's death and Bishop Maroveus' neglect of Sainte Croix from 587-590 aggravated the deterioration of the community's life. Agnes' successor, a Frankish commoner named Leubovera was the Abbess at the time of the nuns' revolt. The hapless Abbess Leubovera had to govern the community without

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<sup>99</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 22, ln. 21: 392; Bk. 42, ln. 17, 18: 393; Bk. 25., ln. 26-27, ln. 2: 393-394.

"lapidaril...audierunt angelum loquentem; caecum inluminavit; de pueri brachio...unus exilivit in altum..ad pedes beatae posuit..inventum est Calvae nomen."

<sup>100</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk IX, 40: 531.



the overruling presence of their royal patron, and, in the face of the hostility of Bishop Maroveus. Abbess Leubovera's rustic manners and her rude behaviors apparently grated on the well-born nuns' overly cultivated sensibilities, enclosed constantly as they were with each other.

In the early spring of 590, a faction of forty nuns, led by the royal Frankish cousins Clotide and Basina, revolted. The nuns broke the Rule of Sainte Croix and breached their forbidden walls. The rebel nuns lowered themselves down over the walls on ropes.<sup>101</sup> Clotild and her sister nuns went on foot from Poitiers to Tours seeking Bishop Gregory's help. "They had no horses to ride on. They were quite exhausted and worn out. No one offered them a bite to eat on their journey." The nuns reached Tours "on the first day of March. The rain was falling in torrents and the roads were ankle-deep in water."<sup>102</sup> Clotild told Bishop Gregory what she planned to do:

"I am going to my royal relations to tell them about the insults which we have to suffer, for we are humiliated here as if we were the offspring of low-born serving-women, instead of being the daughters of kings!"<sup>103</sup>

Clotild was the daughter of Charibert I (561-567) and Ingoberga. Basina was the daughter of Chilperic I (561-584) and Audovera. Clotild and Basina entered the nunnery because they, and their

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<sup>101</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 532. After their escape, one of these rebel nuns returned to the convent. "She had herself pulled up into the nunnery again by ropes at the very spot from which she had previously lowered herself down." This nun then demanded to be shut into a secret cell to do penance for her wrongdoings outside the convent.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 39: 529.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 526.

mothers, were replaced at court by other queens and their children. Basina had suffered the added indignity of being proposed in marriage to the Visigothic prince Recared only because Chilperic and Fredegunde's daughter, Rigunthe, was too precious for her parents to send away. Basina was unwilling to go. Showing that the nunnery walls could work both ways, Radegunde supported Basina's decision to stay in Gaul. Radegunde told Chilperic, "It is not seemly for a nun dedicated to Christ to turn back once more to the sensuous pleasures of this world."<sup>104</sup>

For nearly two years the nuns migrated from court to court and from nunnery to nunnery across the kingdoms seeking redress of their grievances among the kings and bishops. They found little sympathy. Even the supportive Gregory of Tours held out little hope for their cause. "What you are doing is extremely unwise. If you persist, you will lay yourselves open to criticism, no matter how you proceed."<sup>105</sup>

Bishop Gregory's counsel was, in the end, too true. The kings soon wearied of the disturbances of the nuns and their ever increasing band of followers--"cut-throats, evil-doers, fornicators, fugitives from justice, and men guilty of every crime"--as they journeyed around the kingdoms. King Gunthram and King Childebert II each appointed three bishops to hear the

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<sup>104</sup>Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, Bk. VI, 34: 364-365.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., Bk. IX, 40: 531.

case.<sup>106</sup> In response to a letter from Bishop Gundegisel of Bordeaux about the Sainte Croix revolt, the kings and the bishops meeting in council answered:

The Rule has been broken and great outrage has been done to the Church...You have told us how the nuns who had escaped from the nunnery of Radegunde, of blessed memory, refused to listen to your admonition and also refused to go back inside the walls of their institution...We will discuss how best to bridle the temerity of such offenders."<sup>107</sup>

The rebel nuns and the Abbess Leubovera stood trial late in the year 591. Any changes the nuns sought to bring about were overpowered by the kings' and the bishops' desire "to put things right" and "to bridle" the nuns. "When we have put things right, you must all go back to your convent."<sup>108</sup> Three years after Radegunde's death, the verdict of the Sainte Croix trial placed the nunnery and "all property belonging to the nunnery, as set out in the deeds of gift of our royal masters," under the control of Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Since 587, King Gunthram and King Childebert were allied in their possession of Poitiers according to the terms of the Treaty of Andelot. Text of this treaty: Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 20: 503-504. The third king, Clothar II, as this was not in his domain, did not send bishops.

<sup>107</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 41: 533-534.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 39: 526.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., Bk. X, 16: 575.

## CHAPTER II

## The Merovingian Context of the Radegunde Sources

Contexo-texere-texui-textum:  
to weave together, to connect, to unite

Radegunde's life in Merovingian Gaul was the subject of three narrative sources, in two genres, by three very different writers who were closely associated with Radegunde and with each other. Because Radegunde was a barbarian queen, an aristocratic nun, and a Catholic saint, she lived on the crux of the cultural conversion of Frankish Gaul. The people who wrote about her were a Gallo-Roman bishop and historian; an Italian scholar-priest, and a Frankish nunnery scribe. None of Radegunde's contemporaries stand out in such high relief among the preserved sixth-century texts. No other textual body exists from this formative period which so explicitly contains the flux of contending ideals in Merovingian Gaul. Radegunde's textual example combined Roman, Christian, and Frankish influences to tell one of the most complete stories of the religious accommodation accomplished in barbarian Gaul. This chapter situates the Radegunde sources in their historical setting.

The life of Saint-Queen Radegunde takes its place in history from three complementary texts written between 575 and 610 by Gregory of Tours, Venantius Fortunatus, and Baudonivia. Telling Radegunde's life story was the common subject of the Historia Francorum<sup>1</sup> by Gregory of Tours, the Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I<sup>2</sup> by Fortunatus, and the Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II<sup>3</sup> by Baudonivia. Framing the three narrative sources for Radegunde there is a collected volume of nearly 300 letters which Fortunatus wrote while he served as the agens of the Sainte Croix nunnery.<sup>4</sup> There are more than sixty letters between Fortunatus, Radegunde, and Abbess Agnes. Fortunatus corresponded with more than 200 clerics, nobles, bishops, kings, and queens in the interest of Radegunde's community and the episcopal faction centered at Tours. This vast and diverse correspondence adds many artless details and anecdotes about life in the Poitiers monastic community and in the Merovingian kingdoms.

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory of Tours, Historia Francorum, ed. B. Krusch. MGH Script. rer. mer. 1, 1-450; Gregory of Tours History of the Franks, trans. and ed. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1974; History of the Franks, Vol. 2, ed. and trans. O. M. Dalton (New York and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972); Grégoire de Tours: Histoire des Francs, ed. Robert Latouche, Vols. 27-28 (Paris: Classiques de l'Histoire de France au Moyen Age, 1963-65).

<sup>2</sup>Venantius Fortunatus, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I, ed. B. Krusch, MGH Script. rer. mer. 2, 364-377; Vie de Sainte Radegonde, ed. and trans. René Algrain (Paris: Bloud, 1918).

<sup>3</sup>Baudonivia, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II, ed. B. Krusch, MGH Script. rer. mer. 2, 377-395.

<sup>4</sup>Venantius Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, new ed. M. Frederic Leo, MGH Auct. ant. 4. 1; Venance Fortunat: Poésies Mêlées, ed. and trans. Charles Nisard (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1887).

In this early medieval period when the texts and the writers known to history are so rare, Radegunde's textual presence is so extraordinary that it needs an explanation. The knowledge that Radegunde survived as a dominant image for sixth-century Frankish society is, in itself, an interpretive element. Other contemporary queens, nuns, and saints who were, in all probability, more important figures in their own lifetimes, did not survive in the texts as prominently as Radegunde did.

Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia each created a specific context to interpret Radegunde's leadership in their society and that context, in turn, revealed the different personal and cultural backgrounds of each writer. Each of their narratives is told from a different perspective.<sup>5</sup> In the narrative by Gregory of Tours we see Radegunde from the viewpoint of the aristocratic and episcopal leadership. In Fortunatus' version of Radegunde's story, we find the idealized views of a wandering scholar and monk. In Baudonivia's book about Radegunde's life, we see the activities of a community of nuns. Within this written world, the present day reader finds Radegunde's life transfigured into the exemplary woman's image for early medieval society. In a textual world where another

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<sup>5</sup>For perspective I use the following definition: Perspective is an illusion that creates a sense of reality. This definition is taken from a conversation with Judith Stitzel, Professor, West Virginia University. I find that this definition fits particularly well with the literary term mimesis that I use to analyze a sense of historical reality in the genres of historia and hagiography.

contemporary writer described Queen Brunhilde and Queen Fredegunde as Jezebels<sup>6</sup>, what did it mean when Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia named Radegunde a Saint-Queen?

This study of the Radegunde sources concentrates on a comparison of the Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia contexts. I define context to mean the personal and cultural connections that gave shape to each of the three writer's interpretations of Radegunde's life. My comparison of the writers' contexts projects the writers' experiences back onto their interpretations of Radegunde's example in their society. To do this triangular comparison, I use the method of contextualism.<sup>7</sup> Peter Burke, John Patrick Diggins, Quentin Skinner, and other literary and intellectual historians defined the specific points of contextualism as a method to analyze texts in a volume of New Literary History dedicated to contextual analysis.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this study, I superimpose the following analytical points upon my comparative reading of the three focal

<sup>6</sup>This image of Merovingian queens is taken from the Vita Columbani I, 18, MGH Script. rer. mer. 4, 86, and developed as a historical construct by Janet I. Nelson in "Queens as Jezebels: The Careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History," Medieval Women, Derek Baker, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

<sup>7</sup>The clearest articulation I found for the points of the contextual method is in John Patrick Diggins, "The Oyster and the Pearl: The Problem of Contextualism in Intellectual History," History and Theory 23, no. 2 (1984): 151-169. In Diggins' explication there is no "problem;" his method and his terms are explicit and sensible.

<sup>8</sup>Peter Burke gives an excellent summation of the contextual methods used by the contributors to this volume. Peter Burke, New Literary History 16, no. 1 (1984): 199-200.

sources for Radegunde. First, identify the immediate circumstances of the text. Second, understand the linguistic conventions through which such ideas were communicated. Third, clarify the intent of the writer of the text. Efforts to determine the writer's intent begin with an understanding of the social, economic, and political conditions to which the text responded in order to resolve a specific problem or controversy. The ability to determine the significance of particular word usage comes, slowly, from an immersion in the original language of the sources. Applying contextual analysis to the rhetorical architecture of Bishop Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia makes both Radegunde and Merovingian christianization visible.

For a text to have existed in Merovingian Gaul, even the physical requirement of the parchment used by these writers was problematic and figures into a calculation of Radegunde's value as a contemporary example for her society. In order to have enough sheepskins to write out three long narratives, the writers had to have the resources of surplus flocks. The treated skin of one butchered sheep equaled four folios.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, there were economics involved in the communication of writing and reading during the lifetimes of Radegunde and her biographers. The Fortunatus manuscript #5323 in the

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<sup>9</sup>Michel Rouché, "The Early Middle Ages in the West," A History of Private Life, From Pagan Rome to Byzantium, vol. 1, ed. Paul Veyne, trans., Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 542.



Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, has 13 folios; the Baudonivia manuscript #5343 has 28 quartos. To supply the parchment for a copy of the Gregory of Tours Historia Francorum--542 pages even in a modern paperback edition--would have required a very large flock of sheep.

There is another aspect of interpretation involved in examining the manuscript copies, as opposed to the printed editions, of the Radeconde sources. If a reader sees only the printed texts of the Vitae Sanctae Radecondis, Liber I and Liber II from a collection like the Monumenta Germanica Historia, one would find the two sources equal in appearance and importance. I examined three separate manuscript copies of the Liber I and Liber II. In each case, the Fortunatus manuscript was more richly done: with larger folios, or more ornate illumination, or better quality parchment. In one case, the Baudonivia manuscript was torn and crudely sewn together in several places; in another, the Baudonivia text appeared in palimpsest. None of these manuscripts are from the sixth century. The earliest copy of a Radeconde text is from the

twelfth century.<sup>10</sup> The condition of the manuscripts is, then, a statement about the perpetuation of the Radegunde texts and, perhaps, about the relative wealth of monasteries and nunneries.

Sheepskins were not used only for a writing surface, of course. There was considerable competition for this product. Fortunatus sent a letter to Gregory of Tours, using up a small piece of writing's tangible link with Merovingian agriculture, to show his gratitude for Gregory's gift of several clean, new skins.

These sheets are so admirably put together, this roll of emblazoned skins...I, Fortunatus, pitiful and lowly as I am, give thanks to you, high reaching as you are, with humble prayers, for the snowy white skins you sent. <sup>11</sup>

Merovingians used sheepskins to make shoes and other articles of clothing, harnesses for horses or other draught animals, parts

<sup>10</sup>There is some controversy regarding the dates for this early manuscript copy. The copy in question, known as the "Testement" of Saint Radegunde, is now lost. The dating of the "Testement" depends on the studies of scholars who worked with the original document before it disappeared from the Abbey of Sainte Croix at the end of the eighteenth century and on the description of the original copy by the librarian of the city of Poitiers in 1920. The librarian, M. Ginot, derived his description from the notes of scholars who worked on the document in the 1600s and 1700s. Dom Fonteneau and Dom Mazet attributed this manuscript to the last quarter of the twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth century, based on the style of the script. Another scholar, Dom Estiennot attributed the same manuscript to the end of the eleventh century. Dom Monsabert supported the dating of Fonteneau and Mazet against that of Estiennot in: Pierre Monsabert, "Le 'Testement' de Sainte Radegonde," Bulletin philologique et historique (1926-1927): 129-134.

<sup>11</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, Bk. VIII, XXI, 212. "Egregio compacta situ, falerata rolatu...Me Fortunatum tibi celso sterno pusillum commendo et voto supplice rite tuum... missa, pellibus et niveis..."

of weapons or tools, furnishings, household implements, and many other items. The supply of sheepskins was increased somewhat by the fact that much of the flock had to be slaughtered in the fall to avoid feeding the animals all winter, but the skins' many uses still placed a high value on their use as folios.

In the first half of the sixth century, written Latin became recognizably medieval. Latin remained a widely used language, but was used more exclusively as a textual language, that is, the written language of people who spoke a different language but could not write down the language they spoke. The Merovingians displayed an almost endearing awe for the power of a text.

[Because] Guntram Boso was accused of having killed Theudebert, King Chilperic wrote a letter and addressed it to the tomb of Saint Martin, asking that the Saint should write back to him to say whether or not he could have Guntram forcibly ejected from the church. The deacon Baudegil, who brought this letter, placed it on the Saint's tomb, with a blank page beside it. He waited three days, but he received no answer, so he returned to Chilperic.<sup>12</sup>

On the common level, the masses were convinced that texts and shrines held authority, while at the elite level, the royal and the episcopal leaders exchanged signals through their envoys.

In a less naive, but more emotional tone, Radegunde entreated her cousin Hamalafrede to write to her. She had not seen or had word of this cousin since he fled during the Frank and Thuringian battle. He took refuge at the Byzantine court in

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<sup>12</sup>

Gregory of Tours, H.F., ed., Lewis Thorpe, Bk. V, 14: 271.

Constantinople, fought in the Emperor's army and never returned to the West.

Believe me, kinsman, if you would give me word, you would not be wholly gone from me: A page from the hand of a brother is a part of himself.<sup>13</sup>

By the sixth century, the people of the long-Latinized province of Gaul had already accustomed themselves to group after group of Germanic conquerors; eventually, the indigenous people and the Germanic groups conformed their spoken languages with each other. It is difficult for scholars to determine when the people of Gaul stopped speaking the Latin of the literate Empire and began speaking the functional, Frankish Latin which would become the French language. Such a question is complicated by the fact that the remaining evidence on language lies in textual form. Classical written Latin would have lingered on long past the point in time when early medieval speakers stopped following its rules of phonetics, grammar, or syntax. Those few members of society who wrote texts were most unusually learned for sixth century conditions. Dag Norberg and Ferdinand Lot, in twin titled articles, "A Quelle Époque a-t-on Cessé de Parler Latin en Gaule?"<sup>14</sup> disagree with H. F. Muller

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<sup>13</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, App., I, 268.  
"Crede, parens, si verba dares, non totus abesses: Pagina missa loquens pars mihi fratris erat."

<sup>14</sup>These two articles are separated by thirty years of scholarship and their dual explanations touch all points of an examination into the disappearance of a spoken language. Ferdinand Lot, "A Quelle Époque a-t-on Cessé de Parler Latin?" Bulletin du Cange: Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi 5-6, 1930-31: 97-152; Dag Norberg, "A Quelle Époque a-t-on Cessé de Parler Latin en Gaule?" Annales E. S. C. 21, 1966: 346-356.

that Imperial Latin usage lasted until the Carolingian period.<sup>15</sup> Norberg answered that the general population no longer spoke Latin by the year 600; Lot refined the question somewhat to answer that spoken Latin disappeared along with the social identity of those who spoke it. As the senatorial class Gallo-Romans married into the aristocratic Frankish families, the predominance of Frankish Latin overbalanced classic Latin speech.

Walter Ong resolved the problem of usage between spoken Latin and written Latin in more comprehensive terms over a longer period of time. In his explanation, Latin ceased being a vernacular between 500 and 700, meaning that the people who spoke it had not learned it as a mother tongue; those who knew Latin had learned it through the use of writing.<sup>16</sup> Over this period of time, spoken Latin became read Latin. In this text-linked form, Learned Latin also ceased to be a true literary language because its expression was no longer free enough to be used to recreate the experiences and thoughts of the writer's vernacular language. Latin was far from dead but its use was restricted to professional hierarchies.

Pierre Riché demonstrated in his study Education et culture dans l'Occident Babare VI-VIII siècles published in Paris, 1962, that the schools of antiquity disappeared at the beginning of

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<sup>15</sup>H.F. Muller, "When did Latin cease to be a spoken Language in France?" The Romantic Review XII, 1921: 318.

<sup>16</sup>Walter J. Ong, "Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization," New Literary History XVI (Autumn 1984), 6.

the sixth century in Gaul. Learning was then a matter of private tutoring among the wealthy landowners and the churchmen or monastic training for clerics and religious. This may not have been too radical a change for the level of learning because many of the formerly public activities had devolved to the private estates and the Church in sixth-century Gaul. While the Latin spoken for Church services or judicial practices may have remained pure by virtue of its fixity in texts, it was necessary for bishops and other public persons who would have had some classical Latin training to alter their speech in order to carry out their duties among a thoroughly unlettered population. In the midst of the disrupted civic life of the sixth century, bishops, and to a lesser extent monks and nuns, practiced a multitude of functions among the people. Clerics and religious acted as teachers, priests, judges, administrators, nurses, doctors, and counselors, as well as financial managers for the fortune of the Church.

Gaul, under the tandem rule of a Merovingian warrior dynasty and a Catholic episcopate, took up a political life of its own. In much the same way that the loss of Greek language use in the West halved the Roman Empire, the loss of Latin feudalized Gaul. The result for Latin texts was a pronounced provincialism; the common Roman element was lost and the common

Christian element could not overcome the dominant decentralization.<sup>17</sup>

Gregory of Tours apologized for the rustic, provincial quality of his Latin in the "Preface" of the Historia Francorum.

In fact, in the towns of Gaul the writing of literature has declined to the point where it has virtually disappeared altogether. Many people have complained about this, not once but time and time again. 'What a poor period this is!' they have been heard to say. 'If among all our people there is not one man to be found who can write a book about what is happening today, the pursuit of letters really is dead in us!'<sup>18</sup>

This apology was immediately followed by his rationale for using precisely this colloquial Latin in order that he might be better understood in his own time. Gregory relied on his mother Armentaria's argument in favor of popular language, not literary Latin, as the most suitable expression for Frankish history. Gregory wrote that Armentaria appeared to him in a vision while he struggled to write the De virtutibus beati Martini episcopi saying, "Do you not know that on account of the ignorance of our people the way you can speak is considered more intelligible?"<sup>19</sup> In the "Preface" of the Historia Francorum, Gregory continued his argument:

I have written this work to keep alive the memory of those dead and gone, and to bring them to the notice of future generations. My style is not very polished, and I have had to devote much of my space to the quarrels between the wicked and the righteous. All the same I have been greatly

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<sup>17</sup>Erich Auerbach, Literary Language and Its Public Uses in Latin Antique Gaul (London, 1965), 85.

<sup>18</sup>Gregory of Tours, H.F., ed. Lewis Thorpe, 63.

<sup>19</sup>Edward Peters, ed. and trans. "Miracles of Saint Martin, Prefaces, Lives of the Fathers," in Monks, Bishops and Pagans (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 133.

encouraged by certain kind remarks which, to my no small surprise, I have often heard made by our folk, that few people understand a philosophizing rhetorician, but many understand when a rustic speaks.<sup>20</sup>

Increasingly, the use of Learned, written Latin texts prescribed the religious, legal, institutional, and political practices for the whole society. For the vast group who were marginal to literacy, the graphic world represented only a complex set of signs, usually tied to relationships with people holding authority over them.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, the fixity of the written Latin text was necessary for those people in Merovingian society who were concerned with the administration of property, judicial proceedings, and treaty arrangements.<sup>22</sup> The process of christianization, in particular, unrolled its many imperatives amidst this culturally divided, functionally determined "diglossia."<sup>23</sup> It was almost exclusively the clerical class who wrote down the texts which socially and economically described the religious, therefore, politically sanctioned arrangement of

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<sup>20</sup>Gregory of Tours, H.F., ed. Lewis Thorpe, 63.

"Philosophantem rhetorem intellegunt pauci, loquentem rusticum multi."

<sup>21</sup>For a detailed enumeration of these signs showing levels of cultural separation according to the use of written Latin, especially that of clerical culture, see Jacques Le Goff, "Culture cléricale et traditions folkloriques dans la civilisation mérovingienne," Annales. E., S., C. 22 (1967), 783.

<sup>22</sup>For a general treatment of this point for medieval society as a whole, see Franz H. Bauml, "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," Speculum 55 (1980): 237-265; and Walter J. Ong, "Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization," New Literary History XVI (Autumn 1984): 1-12.

<sup>23</sup>Walter J. Ong in "Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization," 8, defines cultural diglossia as a condition in a society whereby the use of one language identifies a "high" culture and the use of another language identifies a "low" culture.



the society as a whole. The new Christian use of texts in barbarian Gaul was more than the ink equivalent of spoken words; the texts carried purposes and social properties of their own.

In societies functioning orally, the advent of the written word can disrupt previous patterns of thought and action, often permanently. Above all it transforms man's [sic] conception of himself in society...A written code can be set up and interpreted on behalf of unlettered members of society, the text acting as a medium for social integration or alienation, depending on its use. Of course, the areas of life subject to textual constraints in the Middle Ages were modest by modern standards...But the important point is not the degree to which writing penetrated oral culture: it was its irrevocability.<sup>24</sup>

In a barbarian society like Gaul in which legal and institutional communication increasingly took place in writing, those who did not have the ability to understand texts were disadvantaged with respect to their capacity to carry out social, economic or political functions requiring access to such texts.<sup>25</sup> Having two language systems, one which codified in texts a higher culture with social and economic privilege overlaying a second language whose primitive and protean oral traditions indicated a lower culture, may have solidified existing social

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<sup>24</sup>Brian Stock, The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 18. The introductory chapter to this work discusses the function of texts in early medieval society.

<sup>25</sup>Franz H. Bauml, "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," 243.

and economic stratification in Merovingian Gaul, ostensibly for the higher values of Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

The sixth-century clerical writers inherited another language problem in addition to a cultural diglossia. Successful Christian rhetoric depended on persuasion voiced in rustic forms in order to be easily understood in the barbarian culture. Bishop Caesarius of Arles wrote about his concern that Latin lectures from Latin texts should be simple enough for the listeners.

Because the unlearned and simple folk cannot come up to the level of the learned, let the learned deign to lower themselves to their level of ignorance. The educated can understand what has been said to the simple, but the simple will in no way be able to understand preaching directed to the learned.<sup>27</sup>

While Gregory of Tours lamented his awkwardness writing Learned Latin in the text of the Historia Francorum, Fortunatus complained that he wrote only "bagatelles" for the Franks because they could not tell "the honking of a goose from the singing of a swan. Instead of singing my poems I warbled a few verses."<sup>28</sup> Both Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours adopted that "rustic" rhetorical skill Caesarius had championed in his sermons in order to unite Germanic peoples under Christian

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<sup>26</sup>That the uses and functions of Learned Latin in early medieval Gaul resulted in social and economic stratification see Franz Bauml, "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," Speculum 55 (1980): 237-265; Brian Stock, "Medieval Literacy, Linguistic Theory, and Social Organization," New Literary History 16 (1984): 13-30.

<sup>27</sup>Caesarius of Arles, Sermones, Dom. G. Morin, ed., Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 86.1.

<sup>28</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, Bk. I, "Prologue," 46.

ideals. Baudonivia, like Gregory and Fortunatus, opened her book by writing another seemingly humble, but possibly artful, apology:

For I recognize in myself that I am pusillanimous and have little understanding of eloquence. For it is as useful for the ignorant to be silent as for the learned to speak out. The ignorant do not know how to say great things about lesser matters and the learned do not know how to discuss lesser things about great matters.<sup>29</sup>

Intensifying any social stratification based on language differences in barbarian Gaul, the Gallo-Roman elite, who had once scorned the lower classes' Christianity, moved to embrace episcopal leadership. These new Christian leaders from the provincial, senatorial class now held on to the growing, town-centered wealth of the Church. After centuries of the Church's relatively undisturbed accumulation of endowments, especially compared to the bartering away of secular fortunes, a bishopric was invested with de facto financial and political power in addition to its religious responsibility.<sup>30</sup>

In the second half of the sixth century, Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus composed three-quarters of the written

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<sup>29</sup>Baudonivia, Vita, 377, ln. 14-17. "Quod in me hoc recognosco, quae sum pusillanimis, parvum habens intellegentiae eloquium, quoniam, quantum doctis proloqui, tantum indoctis utile fit tacere. Nam illi de parvis magna disserere, isti de magnis nesclunt vel parva proferre."

<sup>30</sup>On the connections between social position, the lure of Church wealth, and episcopal leadership, see: Peter Brown, The Cult of the Saints (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981: 36-41; A.H.M. Jones, Later Roman Empire (Oxford and Norman, Oklahoma, 1964): 894-910; Ramsay MacMullen, Roman Social Relations (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974): 101-102.

source material for Merovingian Gaul.<sup>21</sup> Fortunatus wrote poetry, hagiography, history, music, and letters. Working as the agens for the Sainte Croix nunnery, Fortunatus wrote letters to at least 200 different correspondents between the years 556 and 598.<sup>22</sup> The letters from the Fortunatus correspondence furnish much of the historical detail that is so helpful in grounding the other three Radegunde narratives in the world of sixth-century Gaul. This correspondence of 266 letters includes: at least three letters composed by Radegunde; 73 letters directly addressed to Radegunde and Agnes; 19 other letters naming the founder and her abbess in the texts; many letters which, judging by their contents, would have been dictated by Radegunde as the monastic patron then formally composed by Fortunatus. Most of the remaining letters represent either the interests of the Sainte Croix community or the bishopric of Tours. Under Radegunde's patronage for the monasteries of Poitiers, Fortunatus composed liturgical music

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<sup>21</sup>For a discussion of the rhetorical dominance of Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus see Richard Collins, "Observations on the Form, Language and Public of the Prose Biographies of Venantius Fortunatus in the Hagiography of Merovingian Gaul," Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism, eds. H.B. Clark and Mary Brennan, BAR International Series 113 (Oxford, 1981): 105-131; Jacques Fontaine, "Hagiographie et politique de Sulpice Sévère à Venance Fortunat," Revue d'histoire de l'église de la France 62 (1976): 113-140; and Marc Reydellet, "Pensée et Pratique politique chez Grégoire de Tours," Gregorio di Tours (Todi, Italy: Convegno del Centro di studi sulla spiritualite medievale XII, 1977): 173-205.

<sup>22</sup>For Fortunatus' letters to other bishops regarding his work with Radegunde and Radegunde's merit as an "employer," see: Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, Bk. VIII, I-II: 197-199.

and occasional poems. These musical pieces and verses are included in the edited volume of Fortunatus' letters.

The Fortunatus correspondence is collected and edited as the Carmina or Opera Poetica Miscellanae. Neither the Latin edition by M. Frederic Leo (1881) nor the French translation of Fortunatus' letters by Charles Nisard (1887) provides any chronological or topical structure for the correspondence. Both editions rely solely on stylistic categories which can only be indirectly surmised from the letters' contents to separate the various books of letters in the collection. Letters which may have been written by other persons of Sainte Croix are not differentiated from letters written by Fortunatus.

The superior level of Nisard's scholarship is most evident in the detailed support materials he added to this edition of the Opera Poetica. Nisard's annotations and his extensive chapter notes are extremely helpful for understanding the contents of many of Fortunatus' more obscure letters. The Nisard edition includes a French translation by Eugene Rittier of M.A. Lucchi's Latin biography of Fortunatus. This Latin Vita by Lucchi was published in Rome in 1786-87. The text of Nisard's dissertation, "Pourquoi Fortunatus n'a-t-il jamais été traduit en aucune langue?" is also included in this volume which reviewed the four previous editions of the Fortunatus correspondence.<sup>33</sup> Nisard concluded, regarding the criticism of Fortunatus as an author of a decadent literary period, that,

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<sup>33</sup>Venise, 1578; Brower 1603-17; Lucchi, 1786; Leo, 1881.

"It is the privilege of the decadent authors to require greater explication of lesser object than authors from the great periods."<sup>34</sup> This disparagement may hold true for Fortunatus' flowery language, but not for his historical evidence. Fortunatus' letters explain many aspects of his work as a cleric and add many specifics about life in the Sainte Croix nunnery. Nisard's edition of the Opera Poetica is entitled Poésies Mêlées.<sup>35</sup>

During this period of christianization, the persuasive force of Latin texts among the illiterate masses is evident in the works by Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus. Both authors emphasized heroic Christian examples in their writing. Christian texts, inheriting a legacy from oral-formulaic recitations,<sup>36</sup> worked reciprocally in "a type of society in which oral discourse exists largely within a framework of conventions determined by texts."<sup>37</sup> The reciprocal relationship

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<sup>34</sup>Charles Nisard, "Pourquoi Fortunatus n'a-t-il jamais été traduit en aucune langue?" Poésies Mêlées, (Paris: Didot et Cie, 1887), 44. "C'est le privilege des auteurs de décadence de requérir plus d'explications et pour de moindres objets, que les auteurs des belles époques."

<sup>35</sup>Venantius Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, new ed. M. Frederic Leo, MGH Auct. ant. 4.1. There is no English translation of this collection. The nineteenth century French edition contains the Latin from the Leo edition accompanied by a French translation and extensive notes. Venance Fortunat: Poesies Melees, ed. and trans. Charles Nisard (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1887).

<sup>36</sup>Franz Bauml considers the confrontation and accommodation between the oral-formulaic and the textual traditions of early medieval usage in "Medieval texts and the Two Theories of Oral-Formulaic Composition: A Proposal for a Third Theory," New Literary History 16 (1984): 31-50.

<sup>37</sup>Brian Stock, The Implications of Literacy (Princeton, 1983), 12.

between texts and an illiterate population was that the texts must match the conceptual framework of their audience.

Public exaltation using the hagiographies of a cult leader like Sainte-Reine Radegunde strengthened the alliances between the Church and certain powerful, barbarian family groups. The ecclesiastical promotion of such a figure also helped to assimilate divergent ethnic groups into a universal Church.<sup>36</sup> Saint Clothilde's origins were Burgundian; Saint Radegunde was Thuringian. Clothilde and Radegunde were also prizes of war and orphans married to their conqueror-kings, thereby offering a unity between nationes without the threat of extended family factions or fragmentation through inheritance.<sup>37</sup>

Christianization in Gaul, including the popularity of Saint Radegunde's cult and her hagiographies, depended in large part on the clerics' successful manipulation of exemplary texts.

At least in part, the Radegunde narratives belied the cleavage of Merovingian society into social levels according to the restrictive use of written Latin. In fact, Gregory of

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<sup>36</sup>For a description of how the public use of hagiographies provided a means for social integration in sixth century Gaul, see Burnam W. Reynolds, "Familia Sancti Martini: Domus ecclesiae on earth as it is in heaven," Journal of Medieval History 11 (1985): 137-143; Jo Ann McNamara, "A Legacy of Miracles: Hagiography and Nunneries in Merovingian Gaul," Women of the Medieval World, Julius Kirshner and Suzanne F. Wemple, eds. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985): 36-52; and, for the additional point that this use of hagiography reflected the prejudices of contemporary society, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Sexism and the celestial gynaeceum from 500-1200." Journal of Medieval History 4 (1978): 117-133.

<sup>37</sup>To compare this paradigm with other Germanic family models see: Laurent Theis, "Saints sans famille?" Revue Historique 155 (1976), 3-20.

Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia's origins and social positions were so dissimilar that it was only the leveling institution of the Church, including the Church's exclusive use of written Latin instruction, which united the writers of the complementary Radegunde narratives. It was the common element of their clerical culture, not their level in society, which separated these three writers from the masses who heard their texts.<sup>40</sup>

What the Radegunde narratives do reinforce in the Merovingian social structure, with the accompanying economic and political implications, is a cultural divide between those of the Church and those outside Her fold. It is in these orthodox terms that Radegunde's story lives within the historical context of her times and within the contexts of the three written versions of her life.

The Radegunde sources existed in a relation between a literate elite and the illiterate masses. The use of Latin texts underlined the society-wide promotion and assimilation of Christianity. The increasingly chirographic function of Latin texts in the illiterate Merovingian society widened the existing social divisions by isolating those who could not read from the authority of the texts. The Radegunde story represented the use of a Catholic example recited from a Latin text balanced against the heroic deeds the masses remembered

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<sup>40</sup>Refining the idea of social and economic stratification along clerical lines for the use of Learned Latin find Jacques Le Goff, "Culture cléricale et traditions folkloriques dans la civilisation Mérovingian," Annales, E., S., C. 22 (1967): 780-789.



from oral, Germanic traditions. The Vitae Sanctae Radegundis mimic the heroic tales while initiating the authority of textual archetypes. "In the Radegunde Vitae there is a heroic character, a character of Christian heroism, whose adventures are capable of enchanting imaginations and holding hearts."<sup>41</sup>

Radegunde's example in the texts influenced her society in ways that her living example among her contemporaries did not. The extent of Brunhilde and Fredegunde's machinations, not their many successes, tinged their images in the primary sources. The images of covertly active queens like Clothilde and Radegunde were upheld against the examples of openly competitive queens like Brunhilde and Fredegunde. The focal narratives presented a different perspective, not only on Radegunde in particular, but also on Merovingian women and religion in general. Radegunde's continued influence in subsequent history and literature would have been negligible, of course, without the preserved Latin texts.

Charles Samaran, President of the Poitiers Congress to commemorate the fourteenth centenary of the foundation of Sainte Croix, addressed the assembled Merovingian scholars: "A l'époque qui nous occupe, il n'est peut-être pas exagéré de dire que l'histoire religieuse s'apparente de très près à l'histoire

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<sup>41</sup>Etienne Delaruelle, "Sainte Radegonde, son type de sainteté et la chrétienté de son temps," Etudes Mérovingiennes: Actes des Journées de Poitiers (Paris: A.J. Picard, 1953), 73.

littéraire."<sup>42</sup> Hayden White's brilliant critique of historical narrative adds another dimension to Samaran's equation of religious history and literary history in Merovingian texts. In White's analysis, history and literature are textual twins; the texts of history and the texts of literature are internally reciprocal. According to White, "a historical narrative is not only a reproduction of the events reported in it, it is also a complex of symbols that gives us directions for finding an icon of the structure of those events in our literary tradition."<sup>43</sup>

Because each author's life experiences and social position were so different, each of the narratives bestowed meaning onto sets of events from Radegunde's life beyond a linear reproduction of those events. Each writer charged those past sets of events with a symbolic significance and placed those events into a comprehensible structure which was unique to that writer's expression and was, at the same time, universally understood within that writer's society.<sup>44</sup>

The historical narrative points in two directions simultaneously; toward the events described in the narrative and toward the story type or mythos that the

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<sup>42</sup>Charles Samaran, "Discours Inaugural des Journées de Poitiers," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1953), xv. "For the period which we study, it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that religious history allies itself very closely with literary history."

<sup>43</sup>Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" The Writing of History, eds. Robert Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 52.

<sup>44</sup>For an explication of the role of author and narrative and the role of commonly comprehended symbolic structures in historical narratives see Stephen Nichols, Romanesque Signs: Early Medieval Narrative and Iconography (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 1-14.

historian has chosen to serve as the icon of the structure of the events. The narrative itself is not the icon; what it does is describe events in the historical record in such a way as to inform the reader what to take as an icon of the events so as to render them "familiar" to him [sic]. The historical narrative thus mediates between the events reported in it and the generic plot-structures conventionally used in our culture to endow unfamiliar events and situations with meanings.<sup>45</sup>

By accounting for these multiple perspectives, the written form of Radegunde's life indicates as much about the writers and their interpretation of events in their world as it does about Radegunde. Each of the writer's recorded perceptions fleshed out the historical context of Saint Radegunde. The written pattern of the narrative itself makes an interpretative statement.<sup>46</sup> It is the text's construction, its order, and its inclusion or exclusion of content that determines the narrative's meaning. Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia transformed the events of Radegunde's life into a story by suppressing or subordinating certain events while featuring others. Using characterization, motif repetition, variation of tone and point of view, and alternative descriptive strategies,<sup>47</sup> these three writers made Radegunde's life into a meaning-laden example in Merovingian society.

Many scholars have evaluated Gregory of Tours' perspective on Merovingian events and concluded that his history slanted toward the miraculous, or favored the Gallo-Romans, or ignored

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<sup>45</sup>Hayden White, "The Historical Text," 52.

<sup>46</sup>Henry Kozicki, ed., The Writing of History (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), xi.

<sup>47</sup>White, "The Historical Text," 47.

all but the aristocratic Merovingians, or supported the Austrasian faction over the Neustrian faction, or granted faith only to orthodox Christianity, and elevated episcopal privilege above all other considerations for the order of society.<sup>48</sup>

Godefroid Kurth posed the question regarding the objectivity of Gregory of Tours' textual reality: "Grégoire est un témoin bien informé; est-il aussi un témoin véridique? N'altère-t-il pas le récit des événements au gré de ses passions ou de ses préjugés et peut-on se fier sans réserve à sa véracité?"<sup>49</sup> Kurth concluded, after listing Gregory of Tours' explicit preferences as stated in the Historia Francorum and other works, that:

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<sup>48</sup>To survey the scholars' comparative positions regarding the writing of Gregory of Tours, consult: Godefroid Kurth, "De l'autorité de Grégoire de Tours," Etudes Franques Vol. II (Paris and Brussels, 1919), 117-206; Robert Latouche, "Quelques réflexions sur la psychologie de Grégoire de Tours," Le Moyen Age 69 (1963): 7-15; William McDermott, "The World of Gregory of Tours," Monks, Bishops and Pagans: Christian Culture in Gaul and Italy 500-700, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975); Marc Reydellet, "Pensée et pratique politique chez Grégoire de Tours," Gregorio di Tours (Todi, Italy: Convegno del Centro di Studi sulla Spiritualità Medievale XII): 171-205; Raymond Van Dam, "Early Merovingian Gaul: The World of Gregory of Tours," Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul (Berkeley and London: The University of California Press, 1985). Collateral research on Fortunatus which bears on Gregory of Tours' perspective in writing includes: Jacques Fontaine, "Hagiographie et Politique de Sulpice Sévère à Venance Fortunat," Revue d'histoire de l'église de France 62 (1976): 113-140; René-Adrien Meunier, "L'intérêt politique de la correspondance de Saint Fortunat," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris, 1953), 239-248.

<sup>49</sup>Godefroid Kurth, "De l'autorité de Grégoire de Tours," Etudes Franques, Vol. II (Paris and Brussels, 1919), 183. "Gregory is a well-informed witness; is he also a truthful witness? Does he not alter the narrative of events according to his passions or his prejudices and can one trust his truth without reservation?"

Le récit de Grégoire est d'une remarquable objectivité, faisant valoir avec la même force les arguments de l'accusation et ceux de la défense, et évitant d'ailleurs, avec une sollicitude qui n'a pas été assez remarquée, de se prononcer lui-même sur le fond de la question.<sup>50</sup>

This study accepts the privileged, ecclesiastical context of Gregory of Tours' historical objectivity and finds that it is precisely those passions and prejudices showing through the Historia Francorum that illuminate Gregory's story of Radegunde.

To place the Radegunde texts in their Merovingian context, it is more valuable to know the prejudices of the writers by their own hands. Such knowledge is also more reliable than analyzing, at third hand, the motivations and preconceptions of more "objective" writers. Hans Kellner challenges the myth of objectivity and the psychoanalytic origins of linguistic tropes in his response to Hayden White's subsumption of historical writing into a field of linguistic tropes.

Objectivity is...sensitive to the ideological implications of any position within an historical context. Once 'value-neutral' social science itself came under examination as a tool of domination, the universality of ideology came to be taken for granted. Yet, this is not a disabling blow to historical writing... Since the position of the scholar within society is also continuously scrutinized ideologically, the 'ideological skepticism' really becomes a confrontation between two or more reasonably knowable positions...In fact, the loss of willed objectivity which followed the ideologizing of all thought and action offers

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<sup>50</sup>Kurth, "De l'autorité de Grégoire de Tours", 187.  
"Gregory's narrative has a remarkable objectivity, making the arguments of the accusers and those of the defenders with equal force, and avoiding, therefore, with a carefulness which is not remarked upon often enough, declaring his own view of the question.

the sense of a firmer grasp on a 'reality,' however complex and elusive that reality may be.<sup>51</sup>

Kellner argues further that if we consider tropology to be the "irreducible solvent" of historical interpretation, then the levels of tropic analysis are themselves tropological and each of the types of explanation has a priori structures within it which relate to its tropological analogue.<sup>52</sup> Kellner humorously summarizes the ubiquity of linguistic tropes: "'A trope', as Disney's Cinderella might have put it, 'is a wish your heart makes.'"<sup>53</sup>

The friendship among the writers and Radegunde increases the value of both the texts themselves and what the texts disclose about this circle of friends. Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia communicated with Radegunde in person, with each other about Radegunde in her roles relative to them, and with each other about their writings on Radegunde. The following is only a brief listing of their many associations with each other. Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus' letters to each other often addressed Radegunde and discussed the Sainte Croix community;

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<sup>51</sup>Hans Kellner, "A Bedrock of Order: Hayden White's Linguistic Humanism," History and Theory 19 (1980): 12.

<sup>52</sup>Use the chart on p. 26 of the Kellner article cited above to compare Kellner's categories with White's tropology as described in: Hayden White, "Interpretation in History," New Literary History 4 (1972-73): 281-314.

<sup>53</sup>Hans Kellner, "A Bedrock of Order," History and Theory 19 (1980): 14. Subjecting White's tropes to Kellner's chiasmic realignment shows that the trope of metaphor supersedes the plot type; the trope of metonymy supersedes argument type; synecdoche supersedes ideology; and, most inclusively, that all tropology is subsumed by the ironic trope which reconciles its own ambiguities within its own analysis.

Baudonivia named Fortunatus and his work in her "Prologue" and she wrote about the nuns' problems being caught up in the rivalry between the bishops of Tours and Poitiers; Gregory's niece Justina was a Prioress of Sainte Croix; he visited Sainte Croix at least two times while Baudonivia lived in the nunnery; and, he described the miracles that happened to the nuns of Sainte Croix in both the Historia Francorum and Liber in Gloria Confessorum.

The narrative content and the contexts of the Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia texts complemented as well as contrasted with each other. Although each writer's context was singular to that writer, the three sources considered together also have meaning. The three writers' contexts were all consistent with the orthodox, Christian view of society. Considering the three texts in a composite view, the writers aligned Radegunde's roles with other contemporary women's roles and incorporated the female monastery into Merovingian society.

Merovingian nuns, living under strict enclosure in nunneries which were built along the existing walls of the towns, often propped up the seriously slipping images of worldly bishops. In the cities, the episcopate became more and more involved in the concerns of practical government under the Merovingians. According to the religious Rules of sixth century Gaul, women's monasticism instituted heavier restrictions than those required of men in order for women to have the same

privileges of a corporate, institutional identity.<sup>54</sup> Even though they lived within strictures more confining than monks endured, the nuns established a base for their concerted work in the kingdoms' affairs.<sup>55</sup> Religious women used charity, succor, medicine, and monastic endowment to create a sphere of power that filled up the moral void left by the bishops when the centrifugal pull toward secular matters drew the bishops away from matters central to a spiritual life. The textual image of Saint Radegunde's heroic virgin monasticism augmented the dwindling images of many of the magistrate bishops, wandering monks, and unchaste priests in sixth-century Gaul.

Saint Radegunde's new, spiritually potent image<sup>56</sup> remained firmly situated within the structure of the Merovingian aristocracy thereby preserving its privileges of class. Further, the structure of the elite group, although it included Frankish females, predictably preserved male gender privileges; first, by reserving public positions only for exceptional,

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<sup>54</sup>That the nuns were virtually forbidden by the Rule of Saint Caesarius to ever go outside the walls of the nunnery see Radegunde's "Letter to the Bishops" and the Bishops "Letter to Radegunde" preserved in Gregory of Tours, H.F., Bk. IX, 42: 534-538; Bk. IX, 39: 527-529.

<sup>55</sup>Susan Millinger makes a parallel study for Anglo-Norman nuns regarding the goals of tenth century religious women and the limitations placed on those goals through Rules in "Humility and Power: Anglo-Saxon Nuns in Anglo-Norman Hagiography," Distant Echos, John Nichols and Lillian Shanks, eds. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Press, 1984): 115-129.

<sup>56</sup>The most comprehensive study of the cultural setting for Radegunde's sainthood is by Etienne Delaruelle, "Sainte Radegonde, son type de sainteté et la chrétienté de son temps," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris: Editions Picard, 1953): 66-73.



saintly women, and, second, by describing those positions in neutered, but not neutral, terms.

Even though Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia praised Radegunde as they explained her leading role in Merovingian society, the writers' praise lay submerged in terms of their contemporaries' expectations for women's behavior. The writers were ever mindful of the tide of christianization rising across Frankish Gaul, and, Christianity carried with it certain prescribed solutions for social order between men and women. The three versions of Radegunde's life did not disturb the depths of those religious assumptions. In the context of Bishop Gregory's narrative, Radegunde's life was significant as an example of obedience and submission to ecclesiastical authority; for Fortunatus, Radegunde illustrated the superiority of women's renunciation of worldly goods; and, for Baudonivia, Radegunde demonstrated the benefits of a separatist way of life for women. Within these contexts, as long as Radegunde's followers appeared to be subordinate, poor, and segregated, Radegunde's leadership did not threaten the dominant current of Christian society.

Radegunde set an example of militant chastity which contrasted with the militant maternity of other Merovingian queens. Radegunde was childless in a society where bearing children was the legitimizing social act for women that balanced against making war as the empowering social act for men. Radegunde's monastic leadership offered some women a life apart from the roles of the manipulative maternity of Clothilde,

or the militant maternity of Fredegunde and Brunhilde, just as the clerical orders gave some men an alternative to warrior roles.

During the christianization of Frankish Gaul, the role of clerics in relation to military power had changed. In place of the classical Christian, anti-militarist, hypo-political ideals, the people of Frankish Gaul accepted Christian religious values grafted onto the military traditions of both the Empire and the barbarian nationes. By the early fifth century in Gaul, Christianity made the transition from toleration outside of the establishment to the authority of the establishment as signified by the authority of Sulpicius Severus' Vita sanctae Martini.<sup>57</sup>

John Helgeland concluded that a Christian sanction for war moved through three identifiable phases.<sup>58</sup> First, that a value be placed on human life which could be exchanged for a higher value to be gained only through warfare; second, that a religious purpose be attached to an appropriate function for war; and, third, that there be a glorification of military prowess and of a divine decision in victory.

With the Christian transition of religious sanction for a warrior society, women, as non-combatants, were cut off from

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<sup>57</sup>Sulpicius Severus, Vita Martini (Anvers, France: Presses Plantin, 1574) is the first annotated edition comparing several manuscripts; Sulpicius Severus, Opera, ed. Fr. Dubner (Paris, 1890), the first French edition of the Latin text; Vie de Saint Martin, trans. Jacques Fontaine, 2 vols., Sources Chrétiennes 133-134, (Paris, 1967-1968), the most recent translation into French.

<sup>58</sup>John Helgeland, Christianity and the Military, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 73.

full social franchise. Sulpicius Severus' Vita of Saint Martin provided a perfect precedent for this practice which the author laid out in terms of women's prior exclusion from monastic life. The Vita included the writer's narration of a conversation between "an honest hermit" and Saint Martin.

A certain soldier had thrown off his sword-belt in church and taken his vows as a monk; he had made himself a cell in an isolated place, where he might live as a hermit. Meanwhile the Adversary cunningly troubled his untaught mind, so that he wanted his wife, whom Martin had directed to enter a nunnery, to change her mind and live with him.<sup>59</sup>

Saint Martin preached that a wife could not return to live with her husband once he became a monk. The hermit was not convinced, saying that a Soldier of Christ could keep his vow of chastity.

Then Martin said: Tell me, when an army is preparing to give battle, or with bare steel fighting hand to hand with the enemy, have you ever seen a woman take her place in the ranks, or fight?<sup>60</sup>

Protected by the armed force that it reinforced, the Merovingian Church was the greatest benefactor of re-envisioned Christian ideals for Frankish society. The masses benefited somewhat from the Church's amelioration of living conditions under a warrior regime, and the Merovingian noble class gained from the increased efficiency of administration in cooperation

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<sup>59</sup>Sulpicius Severus, Opera, ed, Fr. Dubner (Paris, 1890), 77-79.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 80-81. The French medieval historian Robert Latouche in Caesar à Charlemagne: Les Origines de la France (Paris, 1965) also recounted this anecdote from the Vita Martini but without any comment upon the obvious implications of its moral intent to excise women from the privileges of Christian society.

with the clerical class. Catholic Christianity, having outmaneuvered the Arian belief in Gaul, provided the most comprehensive value structure in Frankish society. Among the barbarian nationes of western Europe in the late fifth century, only the Franks remained pagan. The surrounding peoples, the Visigoths, Vandals, Ostrogoths, Burgundians, and others adhered to Arian Christianity.

The Arians did not believe in the divinity of Christ. Arians believed that Christ, born of his earthly mother, could not be of the same substance, homocousian, as the eternal, unknowable, and indivisible God the Father. In contrast, the ideal of the Catholic Trinity created the Son and the Father of the same substance. In practice, this dogma excluded women in the most essential way. The Trinity compelled a woman to espouse a split consciousness in order to believe that God the Father and God the Son included a female identity. The internalized purport of neutered words like Holy Ghost, or man, homo, or soul, conditioned women to include themselves in a spiritual identity which, in terms of any contemporary Merovingian meaning or Catholic religious practices based on those meanings, limited or excluded women's participation.

In one of their debates at the Second Council of Macon in 585, the bishops exercised themselves about the question of whether women had souls. That is, could women be included in the same word, homo, meaning those beings who possessed a soul. "There came forward at this council a certain bishop who

maintained that woman could not be included in the term 'man.'<sup>61</sup> Bishop Gregory's garbled recording of this debate grudgingly supported some opposing bishops' views that God had included women in the Biblical references to 'man.' It is meaningful to notice that the preceding story in the Historia Francorum related the mortal consequences of a monk's attraction to a woman. The adulterous Abbot Dagulf was axed and burned by his lover's husband. The husband had returned early to his cottage near the monastery and found the intoxicated Abbot sleeping with his wife.

The various points of the bishops' debate at the second Council of Macon are more clearly laid out by Godefroid Kurth.<sup>62</sup> In his analysis of textual references to women's souls, Kurth concludes that contemporary Latin pronoun usage allowed for the existence of women's souls. He makes his argument regarding gender-specific word usage by taking examples from Latin texts dating from the classical through the Merovingian period. In Kurth's view, Latin, "unlike neo-Latin idioms," used the generic homo to include women and used the gender specific vir, or, femina to differentiate Biblical roles by gender.

Kurth's argument is specious. It is not the wealth of, or the lack of, either generic or gender-fixed words in Latin or in its derived languages that determines the cultural bias of a word's meaning. That is fixed by the daily application and

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<sup>61</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Book VIII, 20: 452.

<sup>62</sup>Godefroid Kurth, "Le Concile de Mâcon et l'âme des femmes," Etudes Franques 2 vols. (Paris and Brussels, 1919), 161-166.

enforcement of that term's meaning in everyday social, religious, and political practices. As long as the bishops were debating whether or not women have souls, it does not matter if those men spoke or wrote down a "generic" word like homo or if, as in later centuries, they used "universal" phrases like "all men are created equal."

Like Kurth's analysis, Bishop Gregory's rhetorical tactics are obvious. Debating and then putting aside the anonymous bishop's extreme position of denying women a soul at the Macon Council, he placed the conciliar decrees that limited women to enclosed monasticism and excluded women from sacramental offices in a seemingly moderate light. For Merovingian women in general, and for religious women like Queen Radegunde and her community in particular, the real effect of this conciliar agenda was to keep women in the position of requiring recognition of their souls by conciliar consent in exchange for restrictions on women's public and institutional participation in society.

In her own life among the people of the Frankish kingdoms, "Radegunde was famous for her prayers, her vigils and her charities, and she became so well known that the common people looked upon her as a saint."<sup>63</sup> Because Radegunde was known as a saint and because saintliness was a powerful social identity in Merovingian Gaul, it was important for the three Christian writers to interpret Radegunde's example in terms that were

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<sup>63</sup>Gregory of Tours, Historia Francorum, ed. Lewis Thorpe, Bk. III, 7: 168.

compatible with the assimilation of Christianity. Radegunde's example appears more passive in the texts than her actions would have appeared to her contemporaries. In the context of contemporary Merovingian society, Radegunde's example represented a radical shift for women and their work from their kin group to an institution.

Radegunde's endowment of the Sainte Croix nunnery in Poitiers provided for the livelihood of a community of 200 women. To locate such a large nunnery in the Poitiers area was a strategic decision. The nunnery's extensive agricultural activity, its number of workers and servants, and its charitable, educational, and care-taking occupations provided a substantial Christian presence in this region that bordered the Arian Christian Visigothic kingdom.<sup>64</sup>

It was an episcopal tradition in Merovingian Gaul for the local bishop to write the Rule for a convent in his diocese. Radegunde and her community received no help from the Bishop of Poitiers. "Radegunde and the Mother Superior whom she had appointed were forced to turn instead to Arles."<sup>65</sup> The nuns of Sainte Croix followed the Rule that Saint-Bishop Caesarius of Arles wrote for the convent of his sister Caesaria. Caesaria's niece, who was also named Caesaria, visited Poitiers and

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<sup>64</sup>An explanation of the strategies involved in locating a monastic community on a frontier between Catholic and unorthodox territories is in Charles J. Halperin, "The Ideology of Silence: Prejudice and Pragmatism on the Medieval Religious Frontier," Comparative Studies in Society and History 26 (1984): 442-446.

<sup>65</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 530.

instructed Radegunde in the institution of this Rule for the Poitiers community in 559-60.<sup>66</sup>

Caesarius was the Bishop of Arles from 503 until his death in 543. Caesarius wrote the monastic Rule for the nunnery of Sainte Jean of Arles which his sister Caesaria (d. 529) established in 512. Until Caesarius provided for the Arles nunnery, Caesaria had lived in a double monastic institution established by Cassian (after 410) in Marsailles. This monastery for both nuns and monks reputedly housed 5000 inmates in Cassian's time. Compared with the monasticism of Cassian, Bishop Caesarius' Rule added opportunities for the nuns' learning, increased the nunnery's independence from royal and episcopal control, and changed the scope of the nunnery to more manageable proportions based on the endowments brought in by the nuns.

Once Caesarius' Rule established that the nunnery would be sustained by its own endowments, the nunnery gained a measure of autonomy. This autonomy cost the nuns not only their endowments, but also their freedom to leave the nunnery's walls. Later, as women's endowments decreased because of the economic restrictions of enclosure as well as the changing tendencies in inheritance practices, Caesarius' endowment arrangements

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<sup>66</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, App., XIII, XIV: 276.



resulted in poverty and episcopal dependence.<sup>67</sup> Women's strict enclosure crippled their ability to provide for their own economic continuity. Once the women were enclosed, even their most generous endowments could not support the foundation without the freedom to solicit new donations publicly in the same manner open to monks and abbots. Also, the continued pressure to consolidate inherited wealth in the male line tended to decrease daughters' and widows' inheritance and, therefore, the endowment a woman could bring to a nunnery. Initially, however, Caesarius answered the needs of contemporary religious women. Under his Rule, Radegunde's foundation remained independent during her lifetime.

The establishment of Sainte Croix highlighted the differences between Roman, Christian, and Germanic attitudes and customs regarding women. Sainte Croix community competed so successfully with the aristocratic marriage dowry as an alternate channel for women's economic resources that the

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<sup>67</sup>On the difficulties for enclosed women acquiring land for their nunneries: Lisa Bitel, "Women's Monastic Enclosures in Early Ireland: A Study of Female Spirituality and Male Monastic Mentalities," Journal of Medieval History 12 (1986): 15-36, see pp. 16-19. For the problems of diminished endowments and institutionalized poverty for the nunnery: JoAnn McNamara, "A Legacy of Miracles: Hagiography and Nunneries in Merovingian Gaul," Women of the Medieval World, eds. Julius Kirshner and Suzanne Wemple (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985):36-52, see pp. 45-49. For the irresolvable differences inherent in enclosure, nunnery autonomy, episcopal hostility, and economic security for female religious: Jane Schulenburg, "Strict Active Enclosure and Its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience (ca. 500-1100)," Distant Echoes, eds., John Nichols and Lillian T. Shanks (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1984): 51-86, see pp. 71-76.

warrior hierarchy reacted against the institution for separated women. Some men attempted to retrieve their former wives, sisters, or daughters from the nunnery.<sup>48</sup> Sainte Croix competed so well as a shrine site for holy relics against rival bishops' shrines that the local bishop, Maroveus of Poitiers, protested against the nunnery's display of a relic of the True Cross, refusing to install the Cross. During her lifetime, Radegunde's personal diplomacy maintained the nunnery's independence, but after her death, coinciding with a revolt of the Sainte Croix nuns, the episcopal leadership used judicial means to subordinate Sainte Croix to the local bishop.

Regarding the endowments of wealthy, unmarried women, the orthodox Church leadership was intellectually and organizationally hobbled. Catholic Christian society, like Roman Imperial society, identified itself as a man's domain so completely that women with differentiating characteristics had to be categorized as men in order to resolve the contradiction between their gender and their participation.<sup>49</sup> Religious women like Radegunde became man-like only by adopting a chaste, immured, monastic life. In fact, these women were unlike men because their Rules required more strictures for women's behavior

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<sup>48</sup>Including Radegunde's husband, Clothar I; the rebel nun Basina's father Chilperic I; and the husband of Ingiltrude of Tours' daughter Berthegeunde's husband.

<sup>49</sup>Raymond van Dam, Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1985), 75-76.

than the men's Rules.<sup>70</sup> Even if one concedes that the practice of walling-in women was more an indication of brutal times than it was an indictment of women, strict enclosure did more to hinder the nuns' efforts to make the social and political contacts necessary to maintain the prosperity of their community than it did to protect the nuns' bodies and spirits.

Women as religious leaders, even those enclosed in nunneries within the organizational church, still posed a problem to the hierarchy of Church leaders. Radegunde and another contemporary foundress called Ingritruide of Tours, as leaders of independent monastic communities, brought to light an old, internal dilemma of Church organization: What was to be the place of women in the body of a Church whose priests were only male? The independent nunnery underlined the disparity between a corporate, male-only, hierarchical Church and a church in which spiritually equal men and women participated equitably.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>JoAnn McNamara, "And I Became a Man," chap. in A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries (New York: Haworth Press, 1983), 87-103, shows how the regulation of virgins by the male governing bodies of the Church institutionalized restrictions for women which were not required of male religious. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Strict Active Enclosure and Its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience (ca. 500-1100)," Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women Vol. 1, John Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shanks, eds. (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1984): 51-86, gives an elaboration of the consequences for female monastic communities, particularly economic hardship and diminished property rights, resulting from the different Rules required of nunneries and male monasteries.

<sup>71</sup>For a description of the confrontation and subordination of women in the early Christian church at Rome, comparing that triumph of male-only ecclesiastical organization with its precedent in old Israel, W.H.C. Frend The Rise of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 255-256.

After five centuries of Christianity, the establishment of a separatist community for religious women was still a radical social accommodation in Merovingian Gaul. An institutional base for women to use for their own achievements was a considerable advance from the antique Christian model of sequestering dedicated virgins within their family dwelling.<sup>72</sup> Such a new body for the Church carried radical implications for the society as a whole and for the ecclesia in particular.

In the Radegunde texts we read the judicial, episcopal decisions as well as the literary images which reinforced the subordination of women within the Merovingian Church and in the society at large. These judgments and images were framed in terms of a glorified model for the submissive and servile woman and these images were invoked in the name of organizational expediency. Such prejudicial manipulation of women in Christian

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<sup>72</sup>Suzanne Wemple, Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981) provides an excellent and thorough survey of Merovingian women's achievements through monasticism. JoAnn McNamara discusses the then radical rise of this class of unmarried women who disturbed the social order of the early Christian era in: A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries (New York: The Haworth Press, 1983).

texts was characteristic of Christian writings.<sup>73</sup> Also, it was common that the male views presented in the contemporary texts did not accurately express the extent or the true purpose of religious women's roles in their society.<sup>74</sup> It is understandable, given the separated lives of the Churchmen, that these men could not gauge the meaning of a monastic choice in the life of one of their female contemporaries. What clerics like Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus described as renunciation in their Radegunde texts, a religious like Baudonivia described as affirmation. The Radegunde sources outlived the biases of their writers and continued to influence Christian society for centuries to follow.

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<sup>73</sup>Elizabeth Clark, Women in the Early Church: Message of the Fathers of the Church, vol. 13 (Wilmington, Delaware: Micheal Glazier, Inc., 1983), for an analysis of women as the embodiment of that force which Christian leadership must subdue; Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Mysogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," Women in Western Thought, Martha Osborne, ed. (New York: Random House, 1979); and, Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974). To emphasize the positive gains accomplished by women in the Church, in spite of negative female images in patristic texts, see Elizabeth Clark, Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends. Essays and Translations. Studies in Women and Religion, vol. 2 (New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979); JoAnn McNamara, A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries (New York: Haworth Press, Inc., 1983, and JoAnn McNamara, "Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought," Feminist Studies 3 (1976): 145-158.

<sup>74</sup>To make an important association between this medieval textual bias for the early medieval centuries compared to that bias during the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries see: Carolly Erickson, "The Vision of Women," The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 181-212.

Radegunde's community created religious precedents, a cultural milieu, and literary examples which lasted at least until the early Reformation, in spite of the judicial suppression of Sainte Croix in response to the interests of episcopal leadership. These influences and examples can briefly sketch Radegunde's historical presence and her literary images from the generation succeeding her own until the Elizabethan era. Radegunde's niece Berthe, who was a sister of the Sainte Croix rebel nun Clotild, married King Ethelbert of Kent. In correspondence, Pope Gregory I (590-604) praised Berthe as the King's converter years before Augustine's official conversion of the English in 597.<sup>75</sup> Six other popes also figured in the history of Radegunde's foundation. Popes Alexander II, Gregory VII, Calixtus II, Innocent II, Lucien II, and Alexander III directly addressed the issues of Sainte Croix in documents held by the nunnery from the years 1072 through 1165. In Carolingian times the Empress Judith, the young second wife of Louis the Pious, sought sanctuary at the Sainte Croix nunnery after she was accused of taking a Spanish lover at court. In the 1150's when Poitiers was part of the Angevin Empire, Henri II and his liege Malcolm IV of Scotland fought a campaign near Saint Radegunde's

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<sup>75</sup>Pope Gregory I, Registrum Epistularum, Nova ed. P. Ewald and L. Hartmann, MGH Epist. 1-2, XI, no. 36-38: 304-308. See ln. 17-22: Nam sicut per recordandae memoriae Helenam matrem piissimi Constantini imperatoris ad christianam fidem corda Romanorum accenderat, ita et per gloriae vestrae studium in Anglorum gentem eius misericordiam confidimus operari...ut pro regni et animae suae salute fidem quam colitis sequeretur.

nunnery. Malcolm IV, inspired by the power of the saint's cult, established a convent in Radegunde's name in Cambridge. This foundation to the Virgin Saint Radegunde continued until 1496 when the Bishop of Ely converted the Radegunde nunnery into Jesus College, a male-only college of Cambridge University. Not all memory of Saint Radegunde was lost, however. During the Reformation in England, Edmund Spenser used the image of Saint Radegunde in The Prosopopoia and The Faerie Queene in order to repudiate the virtue of militant chastity; Reformation ideals placed little glory on the virtue of separatist female monasticism. In a final literary example showing Spenser's influence, Laurence Sterne, the great-grandson of the Bishop of Ely and a member of Cambridge Jesus College, wrote prudish epitaphs about Radegunde in his eighteenth century novel Tristram Shandy.

To examine the significance of Radegunde's elevated, indeed sanctified, life in Merovingian sources leads to questions about the more worldly and more successful lives of other Merovingian queens. The textual images of Queen Basina and Queen Clothilde, Radegunde's predecessors, sanctioned covert manipulation in the interests of their sons' continued Catholic conquests, even to the point of instigating wars.<sup>76</sup> Basina abandoned her husband Bisinus, the King of Thuringia, to marry the Merovingian King Childeric (c. 475-481), seeding three generations of conflict between the Franks and the Thuringians. Also, her encouragement

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<sup>76</sup>Gregory of Tours, H.F., Bk. II, 12: 128-129; III, 6: 166-167.

of her son Clovis' conquests connected the long lasting link between Catholic leadership and Frankish territory. Clothilde inspired her husband Clovis' Catholic conversion and persuaded her sons Chlodomer, Childebert, and Clothar to make war in Burgundy to avenge the deaths of her parents.

Queen Fredegunde and Queen Brunhilde, Radegunde's younger contemporaries, openly made war on their rivals by leading their own aristocratic factions. Fredegunde's and Brunhilde's many achievements as vigorous queen-mothers were not projected through contemporary texts as exemplary actions for women. Queen Radegunde, in contrast, continued the early Merovingian practice of alliance with the bishops. In place of the maternal setting of Clothilde's ambitions for her sons, or Fredegunde and Brunhilde's domination over rival court factions, Radegunde established an institutional base for women's lives with an independently endowed nunnery.

Because the early Merovingian conquests took place three generations before Bishop Gregory of Tours wrote his history, it is important to note that the use of queens' demands and their influence over their male family members served a rhetorical purpose in the Historia Francorum that was as old as a patriarch's Eve or Homer's Helen of Troy. This purpose was significant for the perceived, recorded social order; woman as causa belli in contemporary texts rhetorically justified Frankish aggression.



The Radegunde narratives praised certain, selected activities for aristocratic Frankish women while condemning more militarily and politically effective actions. Still, the inclusion of some Germanic models for sanctified behavior marked an advance from the antique mold of the Roman saints. The Radegunde texts upheld worldly renunciation, obedience to the ecclesia, and a passive role in politics and property combined with an active role in charity and care-taking of the poor and the ill. The imposition of these saintly duties at the expense of other accomplishments for women established a social covenant for medieval civilization as surely as Eve's mythic subordination created the beginning of Biblical civilization. In 567 at the Council of Tours, the seven bishops who granted Radegunde's Letter of Foundation for the Sainte Croix nunnery insisted that if a nun, once enclosed, were "urged on by her diseased mind" to cross the convent walls then she would be excommunicated, "cast from us like Eve expelled from Paradise."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Epistula episcoporum ad Radegundam, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 148A, 195-199: "Et ideo si, quod auertat Deus, aliqua insane mentis inlicitatione succensa, ad tanti opprobrii maculam praecipitare suam voluerit disciplinam, gloriam et coronam, ut inimici consilio, sicut Eua eijecta de paradiso...separata a communione nostra, diri anathematis vulnere fereatur."

## CHAPTER III

## GREGORY OF TOURS AND THE OBEDIENT LIFE

In King Clothar's days, when Saint Radegunde founded the nunnery, she herself and all her community were submissive and obedient to the bishops of the period.

(Bishop Gregory of Tours, A. D. 590)

The lives of Bishop Gregory of Tours and Saint-Queen Radegunde intersected in the Books of the Historia Francorum. Much of what we know about sixth-century Frankish Gaul in general and Radegunde's activities in particular comes from the writing of Gregory of Tours. His perception of his world is crucial to our understanding of christianization in Merovingian Gaul as well as Radegunde's role in that society. Throughout the Books of the Historia Francorum, Bishop Gregory placed the events of Radegunde's life within a narrative composed of the events of his personal life, his experiences as the Bishop of Tours, and his ties with Radegunde, Fortunatus, and the religious communities of Poitiers.

Gregory's perspective on Radegunde in relation to their common world makes his version of the Radegunde story unique.

The opening of the history by Bishop of Tours shows how immediate Gregory's observations were, and how lofty his perspective was.

A great many things keep happening, some of them good, some of them bad. The inhabitants of different countries keep quarreling fiercely with each other and kings keep on losing their temper in the most furious way. Our churches are attacked by the heretics and then protected by the Catholics.<sup>1</sup>

With Gregory's words, we see Radegunde and the affairs of the Franks from the viewpoint of a Gallo-Roman of the senatorial class. Gregory of Tours was a member of an aristocratic Gallo-Roman family whose background included four generations of the consolidation of power through positions as senators and bishops, and the consolidation of wealth through strategic marriages. Gregory was a blood relative of thirteen of the eighteen bishops who preceded him as the Bishop of Tours.<sup>2</sup>

Gregory's position as Bishop of Tours drew him into the center of events. He was invested Bishop when he was only twenty-five years old. During the ten years before his investiture he had lived among the powerful episcopal households and traveled widely in Gaul. Gregory had position, power, learning, talent, and communication with great circles of people at all levels of society throughout the kingdoms.

The benefit of all Gregory's advantages would have been lost, however, except for another significant quality he possessed. Gregory constantly recorded the events he observed.

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory of Tours, Historia Francorum, "Preface," ed. Lewis Thorpe, 63.

<sup>2</sup>Gregory of Tours, H.F., ed. Lewis Thorpe, Bk. V, 49: 321.

The Bishop of Tours was nearly obsessed with writing down what happened around him. He must have always had parchment and stylus, or a scribe, close at hand. The Historia Francorum is not a journal, but Gregory's eyewitness details and cursive style often make it easy to imagine the busy bishop making notes on the events of the day. He confessed that his Latin was not polished but that matters pressed him on: "My Latin may be provincial, but I could hardly pass over in silence the things which I have seen, or which I have been told by the faithful."<sup>3</sup>

The first four Books of the Historia Francorum tell the stories of the Franks in the generations before Gregory. For Books V to X of the Historia Francorum, Bishop Gregory was present, as often as not, for the events he recorded. "Gregory looked out at the round world from the windows of the church-house in Tours and indulged occasionally in local tittle-tattle."<sup>4</sup> In fact, Gregory of Tours was the first person to write down a description of church window-glass.<sup>5</sup>

Gregory was privy to the decisive actions of most of the powerful councils in Gaul in his lifetime. He appears in sixty-seven of the 265 chapters of the last six Books of the Historia Francorum.<sup>6</sup> In the remaining chapters of Books V to X, Gregory was often present but did not write himself into the

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<sup>3</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., ed. Lewis Thorpe, Bk. V, 6: 263.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis Thorpe, "Introduction," H. F., 37.

<sup>5</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. X, 31: 553. That this was the first such reference, see: The Timetables of History, ed. Bernard Grun (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 48.

<sup>6</sup>Lewis Thorpe, "Introduction," Gregory of Tours History of the Franks (Harmondsworth, England: Penguins Books, 1974), 31.

text, or he wrote down what people who were present told him. The record of the Historia Francorum often reads rather like a series of depositions from Merovingian witnesses.

Gregory wrote Radegunde's story in the historia genre; Fortunatus and Baudonivia told Radegunde's story as a hagiography. The traits of the two genres structured the writers' content. The literary dictates of sixth-century historia and hagiography help the reader interpret Radegunde's story and her time period. The bearing of the genre historia on Gregory of Tours' record of Radegunde is a focus of this chapter; the scope of hagiography for Fortunatus' and Baudonivia's expression of Radegunde's life will be treated in the following chapters.

Although Gregory's history may be too singularly his own style to be wholly characterized as historia, the Historia Francorum does contain many of the signs of the historia genre. In Bishop Gregory's history the presence of the Divine and the working of miracles are prominent agents in the affairs of the Merovingian world. The participation of the Holy in human affairs was a dominant characteristic for the genre of historia.

Gregory told several stories about the miraculous and visionary occurrences at the Sainte Croix nunnery. The stories Gregory told about the nuns' otherworldly encounters are especially good examples of the curious mental conjunction of precise details of daily life and supernatural experiences that are so typical of Gregory's narrative. In his account of

the death of a nun named Disciola, the niece of the Bishop of Albi, he combined a description of the nursing care she received from the other nuns with Disciola's conversations with the Archangel Michael who stood waiting at her bedside to carry Disciola's soul to heaven. It was common for a Holy Presence and a revelation to appear at the time of a blessed death like Disciola's. Gregory wrote that "a man possessed of a devil, who had come to be cured by the wondrous relic of the True Cross" collapsed at the moment of her death exclaiming, "What a disaster! To think that this soul should have been snatched from us, without those on our side [with the devil] being able to look into matters first!" Then Gregory went back to the details of life in the nunnery by adding that "the Abbess could not find in her cupboard a winding sheet which was whiter than [Disciola] was. They wrapped her in clean linen and committed her to the grave."<sup>7</sup>

In another of these stories, a woman saw a vision which she described to her sisters. In her vision she said she seemed to be on a journey. "She was filled with a great desire to find her way to a certain spring of living water." On her way she met a strange man who walked a long distance with her until they came to a great spring. "Its water shone like gold and the grass around it glowed as if with the sparkling light of myriad gems." The nun drank thirstily from the spring for her companion told her, "'This is the well of the living water.

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<sup>7</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. E., Bk. VI, 29: 356-357.

Drink your fill of this stream, so that it may become for you a well of living water, springing up into everlasting life.'"<sup>e</sup> The nun then saw her Abbess approach the spring from the opposite direction. The Abbess "stripped the nun naked and dressed her in a queenly robe, which shone clear with light and gold and jewels." This Abbess said, 'It is your Husband who sends you this gift.' Bishop Gregory wrote that the nun was so moved by her vision that a few days later she asked Abbess Agnes of Sainte Croix "to prepare a cell and to shut her up there forever." The nun's request to become a recluse was granted.

All the other nuns assembled, with their lamps lighted. They sang psalms together...in procession, the blessed Radegunde leading her by the hand. They all bade her farewell and she gave to each the kiss of peace. Then she was enclosed in her cell and the door through which she had entered was bricked up.<sup>f</sup>

Sometimes it is more difficult to tell where the actions of a saint end and a miracle begins. On one of his visits to the Sainte Croix nunnery, Gregory exchanged remarks with Radegunde about a vessel of oil which was on the altar in devotion to the True Cross. Noticing that the oil was overflowing its lamp, Gregory asked Radegunde if the dripping oil should not be better tended. Radegunde answered quickly, "' No, no. It is the power of the Holy Cross that you see bubbling over in this lamp.' I [Gregory wrote] watched in silence, and then confessed the power

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<sup>e</sup>The nun's vision in the H. E. recalls John 4, 14.

<sup>f</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. E., Bk. VI, 29: 357-358.

of the adored cross." Bishop Gregory wrote down this miracle in the Liber in Gloria Martyrum Beatorum.<sup>10</sup>

The underlying understanding of both historia and hagiography supports divine intervention and intention in contemporary life, and shows the common mental ground of sixth-century writers, readers, and listeners. The story of Bishop Bricius and the amazing talking infant in the Historia Francorum is an example of this common, contemporary understanding of a miraculous interpretation for past events in a text. Bishop Bricius succeeded Saint Martin (c. 316-397) as the bishop of Tours. The angry masses of Tours accused Bricius of impregnating the woman who washed his clothes. This woman no longer wore lay clothes herself and the people of Tours were angry that the Bishop would so use a woman wearing a religious habit. When her baby was only two months old, Bishop Bricius responded to the charges against him in front of a crowd of the people.

'Bring the child to me,' he commanded. The baby was carried in, still only thirty days old. 'In the name of Jesus Christ, the son of God the all-powerful,' said Bricius to the infant, 'If I am really your father, I order you to say so, with all these people listening.' 'You are not my father,' answered the baby.' When the people begged Bricius to ask who the father was, he replied: 'That is not for me to do. I was only concerned insofar as the matter affected me.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Gregory of Tours, Liber in Gloria Martyrum Beatorum, Book V, Miracula, MGH Script. rer. mer. 1, ed. B. Krusch, 586-661; Gregory's hagiographic works are published in French by H. Bordier in Les Livres des miracles et autres opuscules de Georges Florent Grégoire, Evêque de Tours, 4 vols., (Paris, 1857-1864)

<sup>11</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. E., Bk. II, 1: 105.



Literary reality, or mimesis, as it was understood by Radegunde's contemporaries in historia and hagiography, signified that "the multiplicity of events may be translated into the unity of divine creativity viewed from a universal perspective."<sup>12</sup> The genre of historia in sixth-century Gaul gave a figurative interpretation of reality in its reproduction of historical events. Historia rationalized and reconciled present actions with the conception of a continuous historical sequence of events. As a broad mimesis, historia complemented the narrow mimesis of hagiography.<sup>13</sup> The saints' Lives related to historia by giving an example for the workings of divine history in the life of one extraordinary person, the saint. Bishop Gregory told Saint Radegunde's story in the context of the historia for all the Frankish kingdoms.

When Bishop Gregory recreated Radegunde's situation in the Historia Francorum, he placed Radegunde within a broad, figuratively interpreted world order in which the reality of Radegunde's social and institutional world was expressed in terms of holy intentionality at work on earth. In the dual hagiographies of Fortunatus and Baudonivia, the authors

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<sup>12</sup>Stephen Nicols, Romanesque Signs, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 8.

<sup>13</sup>Mimesis is the interpretation of reality through literary representation. See Eric Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) for a discussion of mimesis applied to the episode of Sicharius and Chramnesindus in Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. VII, 47 and IX, 19. For an explication of broad and narrow mimesis as a critical technique applied to medieval texts see Robert Hanning, The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977)

represented Saint Radegunde in terms of a precise elaboration of her experiences as part of a smaller unit of time and space within a specific physical environment. Even the most ordinary, everyday acts in Saint Radegunde's life could be imbued with holy meanings. Baudonivia wrote down a conversation between one of the nuns and Radegunde. The nuns were saying their evening prayers together when "a night bird hateful to mankind raucously invested a tree in the middle of the monastery." One of the nuns asked Radegunde to order it gone. Radegunde replied that the bird was doing no harm and then she made the sign of the cross over the nun. The nun walked over to the tree and said to the bird, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Lady Radegunde orders you to leave this place if you were not sent by God and presume to sing no more within it." Baudonivia believed that Radegunde had earned the obedience of birds and beasts because "the bird took flight as if the words had come from God's own mouth."<sup>14</sup>

Gregory's writing in the historia genre joined together the different parts of his life in his text just as these activities were connected in his daily life. Bishop Gregory's

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<sup>14</sup>Baudonivia, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I, Bk. 19, ln. 28-30: 390; ln. 1-5: 391. "...nocturna avis, quae ab hominibus est ingrata, vociferans in medio monasterio in arbore se infestabat...in verbo tuo eicio avem...si nocet, vade...nihilominus signum crucis super eam faciens. Ambulavit dixitque avi: 'In nomine domini nostri Iesu Christi iubet te domina Radegundis, si no ex Dei parte venisti, ut ab hoc loco discedas, ut penitus hic cantare non praesumas.'...Merito ei aves et bestiae oboediunt, quia illa numquam praeteriit Domini oboedire praecepto."

writings show him to be a man of government as well as a man of the Church and a historian. As the Merovingian scholar David Ganz recently wrote:

It is evident that the line between the secular government of the Merovingian palace and the theological and canonical learning of Merovingian bishops and abbots is not so hard and fast as some diplomatic studies have made it seem...The Merovingians needed the church; a 'scholarly personnel' was essential to a ruler's government, and those of the Merovingians were granted increasing privileges.<sup>15</sup>

Gregory was often at court, he traveled frequently throughout the kingdoms and he maintained associations with hundreds of people from all levels of society whom he named in his correspondence, histories, or hagiographies. It is difficult to imagine, given our sources from sixth-century Gaul, that any other individual, with the possible exception of a king or a queen, was better known than Gregory of Tours.

The value of the intricate Historia Francorum is not compromised by either Gregory's belief in a higher reality of miraculous revelation in everyday life or by his ecclesiastical bias. Although he acknowledged certain acts on earth as divine retribution, Gregory of Tours avoided outright moralizing by adopting a bare-faced tone which sounded more like testimony taken from the people involved than like pious parables. According to Robert Latouche, "Il regardait autour de lui et

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<sup>15</sup>David Ganz, "Bureaucratic Shorthand and Merovingian Learning," Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 74-75.

notait ce qu'il voyait pour le seul plaisir de le raconter sans arrière-pensée moralisatrice."<sup>16</sup>

Gregory himself struggled with the problem of creating historical reality in the Historia Francorum, at first relying on a classical authority, but, in the end, relying on his own initiative to record his barbarian world.

As I tell you this story I cannot help thinking of what Sallust said about those who criticize historians: 'Arduum videtur res gestas scribere: primum quod facta dictis exaequanda sunt; deinde quia plerique quae dilicta repraehenderis malevolentia et invidia dicta putant.' But let me press on with what I have begun.<sup>17</sup>

In his nearly verbatim style, he so scrupulously recorded a multitude of anecdotes in such abundant detail that his history of barbarian Gaul stands open for the reader's judgment in much the same way that evidence rests before a judge. Like any other historical source material, Gregory's textual "evidence" can be skewed by the order of its presentation, by the precision of its detail, and by the substitution or omission of witnesses. In those instances in the Historia Francorum where Gregory of Tours used quoted passages from his contemporaries, the primary text remains Gregory's construct, not his speakers'. However, the comprehensive quality of the specific details Bishop Gregory wrote down for so many contemporary situations enables the

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<sup>16</sup>Robert Latouche, "Quelques réflexions sur la psychologie de Grégoire de Tours," Le Moyen Age 69 (1963): 15.

<sup>17</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IV, 13: 208-209. 'Writing history seems a difficult job: in the first place because what you put down has to correspond exactly to the facts; and secondly because if you permit yourself to criticize any wrongdoing, most of your readers think that you are being malevolent, or even envious.' Sallust, Catilina, Bk. 3.

reader to use Gregory's vantage point to see his subjects clearly. Taking note of the Bishop's biases not only marks the period in which Radegunde lived, but also outlines Radegunde more precisely once those shadings are exposed in his narrative.

In chronological order, Bishop Gregory of Tours was the first to cast Radegunde's life into a text. Gregory compiled the Historia Francorum by recording events almost continuously for twenty-one years from the time he was invested Bishop of Tours in 573 until 591, three years before his death in 594. Writing this history to cover a vast range of activities in the kingdoms of Gaul, Gregory interspersed his stories of Radegunde, the nuns of Sainte Croix, and the ecclesiastical politics of Tours and Poitiers throughout the books of the Historia Francorum.

Gregory's first treatment of Radegunde appeared in two chapters of Book III written before 575, and, his version of the Radegunde story ended with several chapters of Book X written in 590 or 591. Fortunatus and Baudonivia wrote their complementary hagiographies of Saint Radegunde after her death in 587. Fortunatus wrote the Liber I soon after Radegunde's death and before his investiture as the Bishop of Poitiers in 597; Baudonivia added the Liber II in the years between 597 and the year of Fortunatus' death in 610.<sup>10</sup> The most critical element for dating the Radegunde narratives is whether or not

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<sup>10</sup>This range of dates is based on internal evidence from Liber I and Liber II.

the writer included an account of the revolt of the Sainte Croix nuns in 590-591. Gregory and Baudoniva included the nuns' revolt; Fortunatus did not. Fortunatus did, however, discuss the revolt of the nuns in a series of eight undated letters to Gregory of Tours.<sup>19</sup>

Bishop Gregory's arrangement of the Radegunde story formed his singular context for Saint Radegunde's experiences. The other Merovingian episodes which surrounded the narrative segments of the Radegunde story prefigured the purpose of each segment. The longest narrative sequence in the Historia Francorum recorded Radegunde's early life, her foundation of the Sainte Croix nunnery in Poitiers in 567, the revolt of the Sainte Croix nuns in 590, and the trial of the rebel nuns and their Abbess in 591.<sup>20</sup>

The story of Radegunde appears in separated narrative segments throughout the Historia Francorum beginning with a summary of her life in Book III.

At this time three brothers called Baderic, Hermanfrid and Berthar ruled over the Thuringians. Hermanfrid beat his brother Berthar in battle and killed him. When Berthar died he left an orphaned daughter called Radegunde...Such a massacre of the Thuringians took place at the River Unstrut that the bed of the river was piled high with their corpses and that the Franks crossed over them to the other side as if they were walking on a bridge. When their victory was

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<sup>19</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, Bk. VIII, Letters XII, XIIa, XIII-XVIII: 209-211.

<sup>20</sup>Lewis Thorpe, in the "Introduction" to his critical edition of Gregory of Tours refers to the nuns' revolt and trial as the longest single narrative in the History of the Franks. I include the additional segments of the Radegunde and Sainte Croix story as a part of the same narrative.

complete the Franks took over the country and subjected it to their own rule.

When the time came to return home Clothar took with him as his share of the booty Radegunde, the daughter of King Berthar. Later he married her. This did not stop him afterwards from arranging for her brother to be murdered by assassins. Radegunde turned to God, took the habit of a religious and built a nunnery for herself in Poitiers. She was famous for her prayers, her vigils and her charities, and she became so well known that the common people looked upon her as a saint.<sup>21</sup>

Elaboration of the Radegunde story continues throughout the subsequent books of the Historia Francorum, especially in Book IX and Book X. Gregory of Tours abstracted the story of Radegunde's life into its briefest form in Book III; he protracted the story of the nuns' revolt in Radegunde's convent of Sainte Croix into the Historia Francorum's longest single narrative in Books IX and X. With his episcopal oversight of the Merovingian kingdoms, Gregory placed the events of Radegunde's life into a particular pattern among the other narrative segments in the Historia Francorum. For example, the summary of Radegunde's life above was set among stories of other queens who were captives of barbarian wars. Bishop Gregory's arrangement focused on the queens' patterns of influence and the consequences of that influence for three generations of warfare in Frankish Gaul.

Gregory wrote Book III between the years 573 and 575. Book III chronicled events during the lifetimes of the son born to Clovis I and an unnamed concubine, and the sons and daughters

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<sup>21</sup>Gregory of Tours, H.F., ed. Thorpe, Bk. III, 4: 164; III, 7: 168-169.

born to Clovis and Queen Clothilde. The events of Book III took place between the years 511 and 544, that is, the years between the death of Clovis and the death of Clothilde. Book III partially recounted the reigns of Clovis' son by the concubine, Theuderic I (511-533), the reigns of Clovis and Clothilde's sons Clodomer I (511-524), Childebert I (511-558), and Clothar I (511-561), as well as the marriage alliance of their daughter Clotild to Amalric, King of the Visigoths. In chapters four and seven of Book III, amidst stories of other barbarian wars and marriages by conquest, Gregory described how the Franks captured Radegunde during the Frank-Thuringian war. According to the terms of an episcopal judgment, Radegunde was raised and educated in one of the Gallo-Roman villae, then married to Clothar I. About ten years later, after Clothar murdered her brother, Radegunde established a nunnery in Poitiers with the help of several bishops' negotiations.

The next narrative segments of the Radegunde story appear in Book VI which Gregory wrote from 581 to 583. In chapter twenty-nine Gregory gave an account of Radegunde's mission to Constantinople and the Sainte Croix installation of the True Cross relic, and the visions and miracles experienced by the Sainte Croix nuns. In chapter thirty-four, when Chilperic demanded the release of his daughter Basina from Sainte Croix to make a dynastic marriage, Radegunde enforced monastic prerogative and kept Basina, at her own request, inside the nunnery. Other events Gregory recorded in Book VI included the



wars of King Chilperic and Count Leudast to maintain control over Tours and Poitiers after seizing those territories from King Sigibert. Gregory continued the Radegunde narrative in Book VII. The Radegunde story in chapters thirty-four and thirty-six is intertwined with the deadly feud between Queen Fredegunde and Queen Brunhilde and with the war of Gundovald the Pretender during the years 584 and 585. Gundovald called on the oaths of Radegunde and Ingiltrude, both heads of nunneries, to verify his right of succession to Clothar I.

Bishop Gregory wrote Book IX between the years 586 and 590 and he wrote Book X from 590 to 591. The events Gregory recorded in Book IX began in the year of Radegunde's death, 587, and continued through the outbreak of the Sainte Croix nuns' scandal in 589-590. The year of Radegunde's death was also the year of the Treaty of Andelot. According to the terms of Andelot, King Guntram and Brunhilde's son Childebert II regained King Sigibert's lands and Brunhilde reclaimed her estates and revenues.

In Book IX there are an unusual number of stories in which irregular activities of women subjects are judged by official male bodies. Book X began by noting the election of Pope Gregory I (590-604) in Rome, continued with the story of the troubles at the nunnery of Ingiltrude of Tours, Rigunthe's problems with Queen Fredegunde, Beretrude's inheritance difficulties, and the escalating unrest at the Sainte Croix nunnery in Poitiers. Another envoy returned from Constantinople

and King Childebert's army marched into Italy, but the dominant narrative in Book X is the proces-verbal of the Sainte Croix nuns' trial.

The Sainte Croix story was bracketed by a parallel story about the unrest in Ingitrude of Tours' nunnery in Books IX and X. By the end of Book X the issues at the Tours nunnery were decided, the bishops reached a verdict in the trial of the Sainte Croix nuns, and Bishop Gregory completed his yearly catalogue of heavenly disturbances.

Bishop Gregory's dual role as an eye-witness and as a historian of Merovingian affairs began with his writing of Book V of the Historia Francorum in 575. By 575 the association between Bishop Gregory of Tours and the monastic communities of Radegunde and Fortunatus' in Poitiers was well established. Radegunde had established Sainte Croix in 567; Gregory was invested Bishop of Tours in 573; and, Fortunatus came to the Sainte Marie monastery soon after that date with Bishop Gregory's recommendation to serve as an "écrivain client de sainte Radegonde et de Grégoire de Tours."<sup>22</sup>

The active alliance of Gregory of Tours, Radegunde and her Abbess Agnes, and Fortunatus is documented by the many letters they wrote to each other and to other nobles and clerics between 567 and 575 amidst the constantly shifting, rival claims of King Clothar I's sons. This rivalry was most intense between the

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<sup>22</sup>René-Adrien Meunier, "L'intérêt politique de la correspondance de saint Fortunat," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris, 1953), 239; "writer-client for Saint Radegunde and Gregory of Tours."

half-brothers Sigibert and Chilperic, the sons of Clothar's wives Aregunde and Ingunde who were sisters.<sup>23</sup> Gregory had been Bishop of Tours for two years under King Sigibert when King Chilperic's faction assassinated Sigibert, enflaming the on-going feud of their queens, Brunhilde and Fredegunde.

From Gregory's perspective as the ranking bishop in Sigibert and Brunhilde's kingdom, the events from Books V through X of Gregory's history characterized the give and take of Merovingian territorial sovereignty. The possession of that kingdom went from Sigibert and Brunhilde, to Chilperic and Fredegunde, to Brunhilde and Guntram, to Brunhilde's son Childebert II in 587 with the Treaty of Andelot. Finally, in the years following the Historia Francorum, Fredegunde's son Clothar II reigned as the sole king from 613 until 623.

For a man of his time, place, and position, Gregory of Tours was not as much a "rustic" as he exclaimed himself to be in the Preface of the Historia Francorum. The editors of Gregory of Tours, including Bruno Krusch, Lewis Thorpe, Edward Peters, and William McDermott, state that Gregory had some knowledge of, and quoted from, the Old and New Testament, Virgil, Sallust, Saint Jerome, Orosius, Martianus Capella, Eusebius, Severus, Sidonius Apollinaris, as well as a few others whose works are now lost save for their mention in Gregory's

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<sup>23</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Book IV, 3: 197-198 for Gregory's account of how Clothar chose Ingunde and Aregunde as consecutive wives.

works.<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of fourteen centuries' time, what appears to the reader is not Bishop Gregory the unschooled, but Bishop Gregory the innovator. As a "classic barbarian," Gregory fused his colloquial tongue with written Latin and created a narrative record of Frankish events which paralleled his ecclesiastical duties. Gregory's language and style were expressly suited for the narration of concrete events. The overall impression of Gregory's history of the Frankish world is that the stories were recorded by a man thoroughly immersed in the day to day concerns of his office.<sup>25</sup> To write down these stories while also participating in the events surrounding those stories must have engaged Bishop Gregory and his scribes for hours almost every day. Gregory put his world into many books. He wrote in the ending of the Historia Francorum:

"I, Gregory, have written the ten books of the Historia Francorum, seven books of Miracles and one on the Lives of the Fathers. I have composed a book of Commentaries on

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<sup>24</sup>Renatus Profuturus Frigidarius and Sulpicius Alexander, for example. Their works may have been sources for Gregory's early history of Clovis' ancestors.

<sup>25</sup>For contrasting views of the influence of Gregory's professional concerns on the H. F., see: I. N. Wood, "Early Merovingian Devotion in Town and Country," The Church in Town and Countryside, Derek Baker, ed. Studies in Church History 16 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976): 61-79; and, E. Auerbach, Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages (London: pub. n/a, 1965), 25-66. Wood concludes that Gregory of Tours' stories reflect his own professional concerns more than they express the thought-world of the villages (p. 63); Auerbach believes that Gregory's language expressed the preoccupations of his audience (p. 109).

the Psalms. I also wrote a book on the Offices of the Church.<sup>26</sup>

The material recorded in the Historia Francorum can be divided into three categories: part of the history was dependent upon earlier written records; part was drawn up from witnesses of the incidents described; and, part comes from the events Gregory himself witnessed.<sup>27</sup> Of that part of the history for which Gregory himself is the source, his information came from his knowledge of the oral tradition of his family; the stories and writings he learned during his training in episcopal households in his early life, and his personal observation and documentation during his professional life.

Gregory of Tours' account of Saint Radegunde drew from each of these aspects of Gregory's experience. In the early segments of the Radegunde narrative in the Historia Francorum, Gregory relied on the oral tradition, possibly combined with one of his predecessor's written records, to tell the story of the Merovingian dynasty's origin in the seduction episode between the Thuringian Queen, Basina, and Clovis' father, Childeric I (c.475-481). A generation later, oral tradition included the

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<sup>26</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. E., Bk. X, 31: 602-603. The Latin edition titles of these works are: Historia Francorum; Liber in gloria Martyrum Beatorum and Liber de passione et virtutibus Sancti Juliani martyris and De virtutibus beati Martini episcopi in four books, and, Liber in gloria Confessorum to make the seven books of 'Miracles'; Liber vitae Patrum; Psalterii tractatum commentarius, now lost except for the incipit and the chapter headings; De cursu Stellarum ratio.

<sup>27</sup>Eleanor Duckett, The Gateway to the Middle Ages: France and Britain (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1961, 16-17.

story of Radegunde's aunt Amalaberga's role in the Thuringian rivalry that resulted in a war with the Franks in which Radegunde was captured as a war prize to become the bride of Clovis' son, Clothar I (511-561).

From the written records of the Merovingians, Gregory inserted the texts of seven original, contemporary documents into the contents of the Historia Francorum. Four of these documents make up a part of the Radegunde narrative.<sup>20</sup> The chronological order of these documents differs from the narrative order Gregory used to present the texts within the Radegunde story. Two of these documents are Radegunde's undated "Letter of Foundation" for the nunnery of Sainte Croix and the bishop's "Letter to Radegunde," granting her foundation, dated at the Council of Tours in 567. Gregory reversed the order of the two documents in the text, putting the bishops' response before Radegunde's request. Another original document pertaining to Radegunde is mentioned but not inserted in the text: a letter from Bishop Gundegisel of Bordeaux to the kings in council. The third document that makes up part of Gregory's account of Radegunde's story is the text of a letter from King Guntram and his Bishops-in-Council to Bishop Gundegisel in

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<sup>20</sup>Gregory of Tours, Historia Francorum, Lewis Thorpe, ed. The page numbers for the four original documents inserted in the Radegunde narrative segments, in chronological order, are: 1. Radegunde's "Letter to the Bishops", 535-538; 2. The Bishops' "Letter to Radegunde", 527-529; 3. "Reply to Bishop Gundegisel of Bordeaux", 533-534; 4. Text of the "Judgment of the Saint Croix Revolt," 571-575. In narrative order, these texts appear in the following sequence: 2.; 3.; 1.; 4.

response to his excommunication of Sainte Croix's rebellious nuns. The fourth original text Gregory placed in support of the Radegunde narrative is the proces-verbal from the trial in 591 for the Abbess Leuovera and the nuns Clotild and Basina. In the Historia Francorum the letter from King Guntram and the bishops followed the bishops' "Letter to Radegunde" and preceded Radegunde's "Letter to the Bishops."

The preponderance of original texts reproduced to support the narrative of the events at Sainte Croix, already the longest narrative in the Historia Francorum, revealed how preoccupied the ecclesiastical interests Gregory represented were with the right ordering of women religious. The three original documents inserted in the Historia Francorum which did not relate to Radegunde were the texts of: the Treaty of Andelot signed in 587; the address which Pope Gregory delivered to the plague victims of Rome in 590; and, a list of fasts and vigils observed at Tours. Only the Treaty of Andelot had an obvious significance for Gregory's history. Pope Gregory's address was probably distributed to all the bishops; the list of fasts appeared to be incidental, placed at the very end of the text.

Gregory's personal observation of the actions at Sainte Croix dated at least from 566 or 567 when Fortunatus joined the monastic communities of Poitiers <sup>29</sup>, but he could have met

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<sup>29</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Nisard, ed., VIII, I, II: 197-198. Fortunatus wrote two letters to Gregory and other bishops about his choice to remain in Poitiers as part of the Radegunde circle.

Queen Radegunde at court before she established a nunnery in 555 or 556. Queen Radegunde would also have had occasion to know about Gregory of Tours through her many charities and personal connections with Churchmen in the Merovingian kingdoms.

In their actions together, Bishop Gregory, Fortunatus, Radegunde, and her Abbess Agnes were connected to the Merovingian faction of Sigibert and Brunhilde. After Sigibert's assassination by Chilperic's agents in 575, Gregory and Radegunde's sphere of activities and influence supported Brunhilde and Guntram against the claims of Chilperic and Fredegunde.

Gregory suffered the consequences of his loyalty to the house of Sigibert once Chilperic and Fredegunde ruled over Tours and Poitiers. He was involved first in the trial of his fellow bishop, Praetextatus of Rouen. Chilperic and Fredegunde brought charges against Bishop Praetextatus because he had performed the marriage between Brunhilde and her nephew Merovech after Sigibert's murder. Merovech was the son of Chilperic's first wife Audovera and he bore his step-mother Fredegunde no love. Much to the outrage of Chilperic and Fredegunde, Brunhilde's timely marriage consolidated anew her rights to Sigibert's domains. Gregory, like Praetextatus, was tangled up in this affair because he had given Merovech sanctuary in Saint Martin's church after the marriage. Chilperic and his agents hounded Merovech, seized and tonsured him, and threw him into a monastery. Eventually Chilperic's men ambushed Merovech once he



had escaped from the monastery. When surrounded, Merovech commanded his own servant to kill him rather than be captured by his father's men. By this time, Brunhilde had the protection of Guntram in the name of her son Childebert II, who was still a child.

Bishop Gregory sat as one of the judges in the trial of Praetextatus. Gregory's support of Praetextatus at that trial led, in turn, to Gregory's own trial at Berny-Rivière.<sup>30</sup> Another judge, Bishop Bertram of Bordeaux had accused Gregory of prejudice in favor of Praetextatus in Chilperic's presence. Later, Bishop Bertram carried charges against Gregory.<sup>31</sup> Gregory stood accused of starting the rumor that Fredegunde and Bishop Bertram were lovers. With the help of Fredegunde's daughter, and rival, Princess Rigunthe, Gregory was cleared. His fate, perhaps due to his prestige and power, was merciful compared to that of Praetextatus who was murdered in his own cathedral by Fredegunde's men. Until the end of Gregory's history, the mortal tension between the factions of Brunhilde and Fredegunde continued to dominate the affairs of Tours and Poitiers.

Radegunde, too, acted in the interests of Brunhilde's faction. Radegunde refused to release the nun Basina, the

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<sup>30</sup>For Praetextatus' trial see: H. F., Bk.V, 18: 275-281. For Gregory's trial see: H. F., Bk. V, 49: 319-321.

<sup>31</sup>This enmity between Bertram and the See of Tours was a long-lived bitterness; Bertram hated Gregory's predecessor Bishop Eufronius for tonsuring him against his will in order to gain control of his possessions.

daughter of Chilperic and Audovera, to make a marriage alliance between the Chilperic's kingdom and the Visigoths. Basina was unwilling<sup>32</sup> and Radegunde supported her saying, "It is not seemly for a nun dedicated to Christ to turn back once more to the sensuous pleasures of the world."<sup>33</sup> Later, it was arranged that Rigunthe, Chilperic and Fredegunde's daughter, would make the Visigothic marriage to Prince Recared instead of Basina. Unfortunately for Rigunthe, during her magnificent wedding procession across Gaul,<sup>34</sup> Gundovald the Pretender captured Rigunthe and her vast dowry treasure in order to finance his war of succession. Gundovald called on Radegunde and another nunnery patron, Ingitrude of Tours, to justify his claim to the throne as a rightful son and heir to Clothar I.<sup>35</sup> Radegunde and Ingitrude were old enough to recognize Gundovald from his days at the courts of Clothar and Childebert I. Radegunde may also have known of Gundovald's presence in Constantinople since she had ties with Constantinople herself through her relatives who fled to the Eastern Empire after the Thuringian war with the Franks.

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<sup>32</sup>However, this nun Basina is the same nun who, five years later, rebelled against the nunnery life.

<sup>33</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. VI, 34: 365.

<sup>34</sup>Fortunatus recreated a similar wedding voyage as a story for the Sainte Croix nuns. He described the procession of the Visigothic Princess Galswintha, Queen Brunhilde's sister, from Spain through Gaul. Galswintha married Chilperic and was then murdered by Fredegunde. See: Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, VI, V: 158-163.

<sup>35</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. VII, 36: 419-420.

Factional politics between Tours and Poitiers increased the problems of the Sainte Croix nunnery at the time of Radegunde's death. For the Sainte Croix community, Radegunde's death marked a critical point for the survival of their independent, institutional life in Poitiers. The nuns of the Sainte Croix community had to call on Bishop Gregory to perform the funeral rituals for their patron saint because their local bishop, Maroveus of Poitiers, refused to lead them. Bishop Gregory came from Tours to officiate at Radegunde's funeral.

Radegunde's funeral was at least the second time that the nuns of Sainte Croix sought out the sanction of a Bishop of Tours for their devotions in Poitiers. From 571 to 572, while Gregory's predecessor Eufronius was the Bishop of Tours, Radegunde sponsored an ambitious and successful mission, as part of King Sigibert's envoy to Constantinople, in quest of relics for her nunnery. When her clerics returned carrying a piece of the True Cross as a gift from the Empress Sophia (565-578), Bishop Maroveus ignored the nuns' request to install their prestigious relic with an Easter procession and mass.

Saint Radegunde... sent churchmen to Eastern lands to search for pieces of wood from the True Cross...She had King Sigibert's written permission to do this...As soon as [the relics] arrived, the Queen asked Bishop Maroveus if he would deposit them in her nunnery...He refused outright: instead, he climbed on his horse and went off to visit one of his country estates. Then the Queen wrote a second time to Sigibert, begging him to order one of his bishops to deposit the relics in the nunnery...Sigibert deputed blessed Eufronius, Bishop of Tours, to do what Radegunde had asked. Maroveus deliberately stayed away, but Eufronius deposited the sacred relics in the nunnery with

much chanting of psalms, with candles gleaming and with a great burning of incense.<sup>36</sup>

By consecrating this relic for the Poitiers nunnery, Bishop Eufronius enlarged the orbit of power and influence of the Tours bishopric and Bishop Gregory continued his predecessor's relations with the Poitiers nunnery. This liaison between the See of Tours and the Poitiers monastic communities led to more trouble with Maroveus of Poitiers.

The installation of the True Cross relic donated by the Empress of the Empire was the key to Radegunde's threat to Bishop Maroveus' power. Radegunde was the leader of a powerful shrine and pilgrimage site in his diocese;<sup>37</sup> she was the ally of the bishop of another diocese; and, she personified the claims of royal prerogative over the usual episcopal privileges. The friction, jealousy, and competition between Radegunde and Maroveus ended, many bitter years later, with Maroveus' refusal to bury Radegunde.

Notice in the restructured quotation below that Bishop Gregory's construction of the text for Book IX recorded his own presence and his role at Radegunde's funeral out of sequence and

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<sup>36</sup>Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, Bk. IX, 40: 530.

<sup>37</sup>The practical and nearly limitless potential for the local influence of a saint's cult and the relics associated with a saint's shrine were certainly appreciated by the bishops of Merovingian Gaul. Two excellent studies of the contemporary power of shrine sites and monastic or episcopal prosperity see: Peter Brown, "Praesentia," and "Potentia," chaps. in The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 86-127; Raymond van Dam, "The Cult of Relics in Sixth-Century Merovingian Gaul," chap. in Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1985), 177-301.

implanted in a different narrative segment than those parts of Book IX which recorded Maroveus' role in the nuns' revolt.

When the time approached for Saint Radegunde to die, the disagreement between Radegunde and Maroveus was daily becoming worse instead of better. Radegunde died, and the Mother Superior [Agnes] once again begged her own Bishop to take the nunnery under his care. The first reaction of Maroveus was to refuse...<sup>36</sup>

[Radegunde's] death was the cause of great lamentation in the nunnery which she founded. I myself was present at her funeral. She died on August 13, and was buried three days later. In my Liber in Gloria Confessorum, I have described at length the wonders which occurred that day and the circumstances of her burial.<sup>37</sup>

In this instance, Gregory camouflaged his ties with the Sainte Croix community over whom he would later sit in judgment after a faction of the nuns rose in revolt.

The single most important factor in shaping the context in which Gregory placed his story of Radegunde was the influence of his family and episcopal connections. As if genealogy were destiny, Gregory of Tours was born from the union of two "mitered" Gallo-Roman families.<sup>40</sup> His life and his writing stand out as the historic coming together of the antique senatorial order and the early medieval episcopal order for Frankish Gaul. In Gregory's family, the striking example of this integration of the senatorial order and the episcopal offices lay in the generation before Gregory. His father Florentius was the senator for the region of Clermont-Ferrand

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<sup>36</sup>Gregory of Tours, H.F., Bk. IX, 40: 531; Bk. IX, 2: 481-482.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., Bk. IX, 2: 481-482.

<sup>40</sup>Godefroid Kurth, "Les nationalités en Touraine au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle," Etudes Franques, Vol. I (Paris, 1919), 251.

while his father's brother Gallus served as that region's bishop. On his mother Armentaria's side, Gregory's family showed another facet of the new junctures between the senatorial Gallo-Romans and the royal Franks.

King Childebert II (575-595) appointed Armentaria's uncle Gundulf a duke after Gundulf had served in a household position for the King. In a distaff pairing of positions like those in Florentius' family, Armentaria's uncle Nicetius, who was Duke Gundulf's brother, occupied the See of Lyon from 552-573. There are many other examples of senatorial and episcopal brothers among the Gallo-Roman families.<sup>41</sup> An intriguing pair from the Historia Francorum are Nicetius, Count of Aix, and Rusticus, Bishop of Aire, who were involved with the plots and sieges of Gundovald the Pretender. Within two generations, the family of Gregory of Tours had accomplished a fusion of senatorial, episcopal, and courtly offices under the Merovingian dynasty.

In the centuries to come, Bishop Gregory's record of Merovingian affairs in the Historia Francorum brought the emergent relation between the Gallo-Romans and the Franks to the surface. The Merovingian Gaul of Gregory's history formed a recognizable, though rudimentary, polity. When Gregory wrote about the Frankish ambassadors' three year mission to the Byzantine court at Constantinople from 579 to 581, the historian identified himself with the Frankish kingdom, not with the Empire. When King Chilperic displayed treasures from the

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<sup>41</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. VII, 32: 414.

mission for Gregory and other bishops, Gregory honored the Merovingian king's claim to take possession of a treasure with the golden imprint of "a chariot and a charioteer, with the legend Gloria Romanorum."<sup>42</sup>

Bishop Gregory's allegiance to the Roman Papacy is more directly stated than his loyalty to the Empire. Deacon Agiulf of Tours' eye-witness account of the events leading up to the consecration of Pope Gregory I (590-604), including the Pope's address to the people, opened Book X of Gregory of Tours' history. For Gregory's contemporaries, the combination of Bishop Gregory's Catholic allegiance and his loyalty to the Germanic kings held only trace elements of centralized Roman authority amidst the divided rule of the Merovingian kingdoms.

Whatever lingering distinctions or legalities remained for Gallo-Roman senators and bishops, these special signs for leading men blurred together into their identity as members of the wealthy, de facto aristocracy who were the proprietors of

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<sup>42</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk VI, 2: 328. Including Saint Radegunde's mission to find a relic of the True Cross under the auspices of King Sigibert, Chilperic's embassy to Constantinople was the second such mission Gregory of Tours chronicled.

villae<sup>43</sup>, the administrators of public revenues for the civitates, and the magistrates of local justice in the king's name.<sup>44</sup> This functionally defined aristocracy personified the connection and the interdependence between the countryside and the civitates; the same nobles who owned the rural villae or founded the monastic estates were also the nobles who were responsible for urban administration as magistrates or bishops. The Romanization of Gaul, long faded in most aspects of Merovingian life, remained evident in the elite's pattern of using their wealth from the villa agricultural system as the

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<sup>43</sup>The term villa translates in the sense of a Roman "plantation." To which must be added its meaning in Merovingian Gaul as what remained of agricultural commerce as part of a larger economy as contrasted to an individual farmstead. The Roman villa system was the foundation of Gallo-Roman senatorial wealth as well as the defining element of their way of life. Gregory's family was dependent upon the villa system and Radegunde was trained in its traditions, including catholic orthodoxy, before her marriage to Clothar I. Lucid explanations for the workings of the villa system as part of the social history of Gaul are: J. F. Drinkwater, Roman Gaul (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 161-185; Edith Mary Wightman, "The Pattern of Rural Settlement in Roman Gaul," Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, Vol. II, 4, ed. H. Temporini (Berlin, 1975): 584-657.

<sup>44</sup>The body of scholarship concerning the residual consequences of an earlier Gallo-Roman elite for the Merovingian social structure includes: F. D. Gilliard, "The Senators of Sixth-Century Gaul," Speculum 54: 685-697; Franz Irsigler, "On the Aristocratic Character of Early Frankish Society," The Medieval Nobility, ed. T. Reuter, Europe in the Middle Ages: Selected Studies 14 (Amsterdam, 1979); Edith Mary Wightman, "Peasants and Potentates: An Investigation of Social Structure and Land Tenure in Roman Gaul," American Journal of Ancient History 3: 97-128; Raymond van Dam, "The Assimilation of Christianity and Society," chap. in Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul, (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985): 115-177.



foundation for town residence.<sup>45</sup> Accompanying the town life of the wealthy elite came the opportunity for urban enterprise with its access to public monies or properties, including the possibility of establishing a perpetuating corporate entity to attract capital investment.<sup>46</sup> Under the Empire, the State, the res publica, represented such a public corporate identity.

Under the Merovingians, whose concept of property was private with privileged distribution only at the rulers' discretion, the Catholic Church presented the only organizational and financial structure similar to the Roman abstract state. For the Church to consolidate capital resources within the Germanic kingdoms of Gaul, it was necessary to have military protection in support of the corporate Church during its accumulation of donations and it was necessary to have a disciplined body of workers to keep account of those resources. The Merovingian warrior class provided the Church's protection; the clerical class, with its episcopal governance, provided the Church's administrative body.

The town, with its advantage of a resident, literate elite, provided the locus for the early medieval Church's model of

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<sup>45</sup>Edith M. Wightman, "Pattern of Rural Settlement in Roman Gaul," Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II, 4 (1945): 584-657. In this study see pages 619-656 for Wightman's discussion of the first hundred and fifty years of Romanization and her comparison of those early forms with the developed pattern typical of villa agriculture under the Franks.

<sup>46</sup>A. H. M. Jones, The Decline of the Ancient World (London and New York: Longman, 1966), 154-180; 252-270. The Jones chapters entitled "Finance" and "Church" give a thorough review of the technical aspects of late Roman government and provide a helpful threshold from which to survey the development of those practices in the early government of the Merovingians.

consolidated capital resources. The Merovingian civitates formed dense social nuclei ringed by villages where slaves, laborers, artisans, and the farm workers, the coloni, lived in clusters dependent in turn upon both rural agriculture and urban trade. These elemental links between the cathedrals, the courts, the monasteries, the nunneries, the villae, the farms, and the villages bound the Merovingians together as part of an increasingly more complex civic life. In appearance, the cityscape did not strike a grand silhouette across the land; the cities straggled outside the Roman walls of the third century and were increasingly divided into suburbs dependent on the great bishoprics. The wane of late antique Roman life left to the Church the organization of space in the mutable cityscape of Merovingian Gaul, changing the urban character as well as its relation to rural life. <sup>47</sup>

Christianization among families like Gregory of Tours during the early Merovingian period depended upon changing the family members' beliefs away from their adherence to patrician ideals of a politicized, provincial villa system as it was described in the writings of Apollinaris Sidonius (432-c.478). Even though Sidonius eventually ascended to the bishopric of Clermont and confronted the invading Arian Visigoths, his

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<sup>47</sup>See: Jean Lestocquoy, "De l'unité à la pluralité: le paysage urbain en Gaule de Ve au IXe siècle," Annales 8 (1953): 159-172; and, I. N. Wood, "Early Merovingian Devotion in Town and Country," The Church in Town and Country, ed. Derek Baker, Studies in Church History 16 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979): 61-76.

identity remained squarely with Romanesque Gaul, without a trace of Gregory of Tours' fealty to the Franks. Coinciding with the conversion of the Merovingians to the Catholic creed during Clovis and Clothilde's reign, Gregory's parents and grandparents' generations of the former senatorial class adjusted to a newer, dualistic, Catholic faith.

It was evident in the letters exchanged among the bishops and priests that christianization moved through Frankish society by means of person to person contacts and commitments. The correspondance between Bishop Gregory and the priest Fortunatus, as well as the letters that Gregory and Fortunatus wrote to other people in the kingdom, clearly showed the personal web connecting the Catholic influence throughout the kingdoms. This element of personal communication in Christianity was even encoded in the similar Latin words for bishop and letter: the Latin word for a written communication is epistula; the Latin word for bishop is episcopus.

Along with Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus, Radegunde was an outstanding example of the person to person shaping of christianization.<sup>48</sup> Saint Radegunde appeared as a dominant personal connection between the Christian texts and the individual writers Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia.

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<sup>48</sup>Raymond van Dam, Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985), uses a community of man-to-man connections as a paradigm to illustrate christianization in Merovingian Gaul. He does not, however, credit a corresponding friendship system among influential contemporary women.

Much of the content of the Radegunde sources underlined the compromises and the collaboration between the Frankish warrior state and the Catholic Church. By their accord with Clothar's capture of Radegunde as a prize of war, the bishops' sanctioned Christian conquest; Radegunde's marriage to Clothar I held her body as a token of Thuringia's conquest by the Catholic Franks; Radegunde's monastic withdrawal offered the only institutional alternative role for women in a Catholic warrior society; and, the territory for Radegunde's nunnery in Poitiers originated in Clovis' conquest of the unorthodox Visigoths.

Bishop Gregory very effectively documented the localized, particularized development of Catholic institutions and the political relations between kings, queens, nobles and bishops that solidified in writing an intellectually conceived social order. Once Clothilde and Clovis accepted the Catholic faith, its Nicene Creed, and its baptism<sup>49</sup>, Frankish conquest and Catholic hegemony joined together to accomplish the Merovingian domination of Arian nationes along Gaul's borders. As one recent review of studies of the period suggests, "Observance of Christian ritual and practice normally preceded local institutional organization, often by generations."<sup>50</sup> A new, sanctified order for society resulted in the people's

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<sup>49</sup>The ritual observance of water and faith forms the Latin source of the word christianity. The Latin christianitas is the origin of the word for christening as well as the first ritual to identify a Merovingian Christian. See: John van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," American Historical Review 91, no. 3 (June 1986): 540.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 542.

internalized model of a male dominant, hierarchical structure for barbarian society rooted in the interests of priests and warriors.

Gregory of Tours described the conquest of the Visigoths by Clovis' forces in 507 at the battle of Vouille, near Poitiers. In Gregory's story of this campaign, what is emphasized is the mutual sanction and protection between Saint Martin's shrine and the King's troops.

'I find it hard to go on seeing these Arians occupy a part of Gaul,' said Clovis to his ministers. 'With God's help let us invade them. When we have beaten them, we will take over their territory.'...Some of his troops passed through land belonging to Tours. In respect for Saint Martin, Clovis ordered that they should requisition nothing in this neighborhood except fodder and water. One of the soldiers found some hay belonging to a poor man. 'Well, this is fodder.'...He laid hands on the poor man and took his hay by main force...Clovis drew his sword and killed the soldier on the spot. 'It is no good expecting to win this fight if we offend Saint Martin.'<sup>51</sup>

For the population, Merovingian conquest caused physical hardship and competition for foodstuffs. In the story above, Bishop Gregory recorded his gratitude for leniency toward the See of Tours during Clovis' foray. Gregory determined that Clovis had done a good deed for the Church, which, at the cost of a soldier's life, was repaid by a divinely ordained victory at Vouille.

Reciprocally, the Church could be forced to render up resources in exchange for protection or for future influence in conquered territories. During the reign of Clovis's grandson

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<sup>51</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. II, 37: 151-152.

Guntram, troops threatened Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers for his disloyalty and he had to melt a chalice down into coins to ransom himself and the Poitiers inhabitants.

The victories of Merovingian warriors, often accompanied by a corresponding pervasiveness of episcopal influence, enabled the corporate body of the Church to become the repository for aristocratic and royal endowments of extensive landholdings and moveable wealth. For example, Queen Radegunde's endowment of the Sainte Croix nunnery in Poitiers provided estates and provisions to support some 200 women as well as various servants and the estate workers. Radegunde's contemporary, Ingiltrude of Tours, provided for a large nunnery in the forecourt of Saint Martin's church.

In conjunction with the protection of the Merovingian warriors, the increased financial responsibilities and opportunities of the corporate Church attracted increased numbers of the Gallo-Roman senatorial class to Church office. The pull was especially strong toward the more secular, town-centered episcopal offices. Among the kingdom's male elite, including Gregory's ancestors, the attraction toward civil office and monasticism decreased in favor of the offices of the secular clergy.

The historical basis for the social origins of Merovingian aristocracy and government converged, as Frank Galliard points

out, on "the dilemma of philology or prosopography."<sup>52</sup> This historical debate continues to rely on conventional, neutered terminology in order to discuss social and economic class without reference to the gender-specific, male character of social rank and economic status. Galliard summarizes the research of Friedrich Stroheker and Godefroid Kurth regarding the use of the word senator in the works of Gregory of Tours. Stroheker's prosopographical study concluded that "the term senator was a title of honor, and that regardless of a man's reputation, power, or wealth, he was a senator only if he was a descendant of the imperial senatorial aristocracy of the Roman Empire."<sup>53</sup> Kurth's philological study argued that in the sixth century the classical term senator was quite "désaffectée," and was widely used to mean a person of high rank. "Les senatores du sixième siècle ne sont donc autre chose que les riches, c'est-à-dire les grandes propriétaires fonciers."<sup>54</sup> Galliard's synthesis of the two historical horns of the senatores dilemma as he applied it to the social history of Merovingian Gaul concluded, like Kurth, that "to Gregory, senatores meant "the wealthy, landed proprietors usually of Gallo-Roman stock, who were called by the traditional name, senator, which in the provinces, in previous

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<sup>52</sup>Frank Galliard, "The Senators of Gaul," Speculum 54, no. 3-4 (1979): 685-697.

<sup>53</sup>Friedrich Stroheker, "Die Senatoren bei Gregor von Tours," Klio 34 (1942), 296. This article is reprinted in his Germanentum und Spätantike (Zurich, 1965).

<sup>54</sup>Godefroid Kurth, "Les Sénateurs en Gaule au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle," Etudes Françaises, Vol. II (Paris, 1919), 114. "The senatores of sixth-century Gaul are none other than the rich, that is to say the great landowners."

centuries, had been applied indistinguishably to imperial senatores and to municipal curiales."<sup>55</sup>

Brian Brennan continues the Kurth and Galliard analysis of the use of the term senator in the Historia Francorum in order to take note of social mobility among the Franks.<sup>56</sup> According to Brennan's scholarship, Gregory underwrote only those connections through imperial ancestry as the basis for senatorial rank. Contesting Galliard's reappraisal of Kurth's conclusion that sixth-century senators were synonymous with "wealthy landholders," Brennan's study differentiates Gregory's use of the term to denote a family's social rank from Gregory's use of the term to include parvenu landowners labeled senator in recognition of Merovingian political realities.

There was much upward mobility in Merovingian society, and, for ambitious men, the patronage of the Frankish kings may have come to mean more than a highly vaulted lineage from imperial senators. For ambitious women, marriage into higher rank and manipulative maternity over sons substituted for the wider powers and more numerous positions available through offices or patronage. The sole position for sixth century women that was not biologically defined was as a religious. Even that position was bridled by religious Rules for women which institutionalized

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<sup>55</sup>Frank Galliard, "The Senators of Sixth-Century Gaul," Speculum 54: 693.

<sup>56</sup>Brian Brennan, "Senators and social mobility in sixth-century Gaul," Journal of Medieval History 11 (1985): 145-161.



the clerics' fear of a woman's ability to expose the clerics' own weaknesses.

Bishop Gregory's language use in the Historia Francorum identified a plurality of social groups and economic levels among the people of Gaul who lived under the rule of Merovingian kings. The Historia Francorum was no idyll of provincial Romans. Gregory's record of the Franks made it clear that after nearly a hundred years of Merovingian kingship, the affairs of Gaul had become the enterprise of the Franks.

Rien n'est plus étranger à Grégoire que de voir dans les Francs germaniques des étrangers. Il est, avec tout son peuple sincèrement rallié au régime inauguré par la conquête mérovingienne; il partage avec les conquérants ce titre de Franc qui sera désormais le seul nom national des Gallo-Romains. Quand il dit les Francs, il entend son propre peuple; s'il veut parler des conquérants germaniques, il les appelle les barbares, sans aucune intention méprisante et dans le sens que la Loi Salique elle même donne à ce mot.<sup>57</sup>

On the Bishop's pages a reader meets peasants, soldiers, shepherds, merchants, artisans, cooks, slaves, monks, priests, fishermen, weavers, nuns, queens, and kings as they come into the Bishop's judicial view. Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims were no more diverse than Gregory's Merovingian characters.

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<sup>57</sup>Godefroid Kurth, "De l'autorité de Grégoire de Tours," Vol. II, 120. "Nothing would be more strange to Gregory than to see the germanic Franks as foreigners...When he says the Franks, he means his own people; if he wants to speak of the germanic conquerors, he calls them the barbarians." Further linguistic evidence for Gregory of Tours' view on the unity of the Gallo-Roman and Frankish peoples as well as his support of the sovereign rights of the Merovingians is elaborated in two additional studies in the same source: "Francia and Francus," Vol. I, 67-140; "Les senateurs en Gaule au VIe siècle," Vol. II, 97-116.

Gregory's detailed, anecdotal history showed the Frankish kingdoms as a political unity within which he lived without disguising the kingdoms' barbarian fragmentation.

Franz Irsigler takes exception to Kurth's assessment of Gregory of Tours in regard to the leadership elite implied in Gregory's language usage. Irsigler insists that when Gregory of Tours used the word Franci in the Historia Francorum, "he rarely means all Franks by this, but rather, usually, a small circle of leading men."<sup>50</sup> This pattern of leadership among aristocratic Franks and Gallo-Romans included a practice that Irsigler calls "noble table-companionship."<sup>51</sup> Raymond van Dam develops this same idea as "the community of leadership" in Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul.

Typical of this banquet hall politics is a table conversation between Gregory of Tours and Felix of Nantes, Gregory's suffragen bishop and occasional rival. Felix' family was the social equivalent in the Aquitanian city of Nantes for Gregory's family's position in the Auvergne city of Clermont-Ferrand.<sup>52</sup> Gregory set down a gossipy, humorous exchange between the bishops with an understood subtext of the two bishops' competition for episcopal property and elevation in office. Bishop Gregory invited Bishop Felix to be his dinner guest at Tours following the second Council of Tours in 567.

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<sup>50</sup>Franz Irsigler, "On the Aristocratic Character of Early Frankish Society," The Medieval Nobility, 123.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>52</sup>William C. McDermott, "Felix of Nantes: A Merovingian Bishop," Traditio 31 (1975), 3.

With the combined efforts of the Merovingian rulers and their bishops, conciliar activity was vigorous during the sixth century in Gaul, resulting in the constriction of religious orders to an only male hierarchy.<sup>61</sup> These decisions left the clerical wives who were not themselves religious without status in the society. The sixth-century councils provided for the female care of the clerks through a tradition of housekeepers backed up by lenient judgments in the cases of priests who impregnated a concubine instead of a wife.<sup>62</sup> Bishop Felix and Bishop Gregory had signed several conciliar decisions together at Tours including: the decision to abolish the office of female diaconate; the decision to define the order of widows as being without clerical status; and the acceptance of Queen Radegunde's Letter of Foundation for the Sainte Croix nunnery enforcing strict enclosure.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Chapter 6, "The Waning Influence of Women in the Frankish Church," in Suzanne Wemple, Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-900 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 127-148, provides a full discussion of the loss of female religious office and rank in the early medieval period.

<sup>62</sup>The Council of Orleans in 538 ruled that a married priest was not to be deposed if he had a child by a concubine, or if he lived with a concubine after his wife's death.

<sup>63</sup>Radegunde established her nunnery as an independent, royal endowment between 556, the year she left the court and 561, the year Clothar died. Two hundred religious lived in this cloister at Poitiers by the time strict active enclosure was enforced in 567 through the Council of Tours. For a statement of the consequences of strict enclosure on the institution of female monasticism as well as an assessment of its implications for the society as a whole, see: Jane T. Schulenburg, "Sexism and the Celestial Gynaecium from 500-1200," Journal of Medieval History 4 (1978): 117-133.

At dinner, the two bishops' conversation turned to issues of celibacy and clerical chastity, with Felix quoting from one of the recent council's canons on clerical chastity, saying, "Episcopus coniugem ut sororem habeat."<sup>64</sup> Bishop Felix was more directly affected by the chastity canons than Gregory because Felix had put aside his wife while he was bishop of Nantes. Gregory introduced his written account of the more vivid after-dinner conversation, "dum de his confabularemur, audivi." Gregory passed along to Felix the scandal of Bishop Urbanicus of Clermont-Ferrand, a married man who was a convert from a senatorial family. At first, Bishop Urbicus lived apart from his wife who was to live as a religious according to the custom of the Church.

The woman was filled with the Devil's own malice, for he inflamed her with desire for [Urbicus] and turned her into a second Eve. The Bishop's wife burned so hot with passion...that she made her way through the pitch-black night to the church-house. When she found everything was shut up for the night, she started to beat on the doors of the church-house and to shout something like the following: 'How long do you propose to refuse to open these closed doors? Why do you scorn your lawful wife?...I am here! I am returning to you, not as to a stranger, but to one who belongs to me.'...The Bishop forgot his religious scruples and ordered her to be admitted to his bedroom, where he had intercourse with her and then said that it was time for her to go. Later on he recovered his wits, and grieved for the sin he had committed...His wife had become pregnant and she bore a daughter, who passed her life as a religious.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Canons 13-17 of the Council of Tours in 567 govern the chastity of bishops, clerics, and monks. Canon 13: "The bishop should hold his wife as a sister."

<sup>65</sup>Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, Bk. I, 44: 93-94. This story is so strikingly similar to Petrarch's story of the "importunate woman" that these tales appear to be priestly clichés for their forays in the flesh. Petrarch's woman, too, ended up with another child.

Then Felix told Gregory a story, which Gregory quoted in Liber in Gloria Confessorum, about a priest in Nantes who lived apart from his wife. She was convinced that he was with another woman so she broke into the priest's house and went to his bedroom. What she discovered sleeping with her husband was no violation of the chastity canon. Her husband slept with a pure white lamb on his chest.

Scholars differ in their identification of the unnamed bishop who was the subject of Felix' story. Suzanne Wemple identifies the wife in the story as Felix' wife and interprets the tale as evidence of Gregory's intention to discredit Felix with a sardonically virtuous tale.<sup>66</sup> William McDermott identifies the woman as the wife of Bishop Victorius of Rennes, father of Domnola who was murdered in 585 as part of a long-lived property feud.<sup>67</sup> McDermott accepts Gregory's story at face value as a complimentary tale of Felix' celibacy.<sup>68</sup> It seems more likely that Bishop Felix indulged in a sacrilegious twist on the strictures of priestly intercourse with women by invoking an image of sodomy with a well-known Christian symbol.

The social reality of the antique senatorial order existed only as a discourse, an aside, to Gregory's text by the time he wrote the Historia Francorum. After one hundred years of the Merovingian dynasty, the words senator or nobilis appear to be

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<sup>66</sup>Suzanne Wemple, Women in Frankish Society, 134.

<sup>67</sup>See Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. VIII, 32: 465.

<sup>68</sup>William McDermott, "Felix of Nantes: A Merovingian Bishop," Traditio 31 (1975): 19-20.

interchangable for contemporary understanding. Through marriage, clerical office, religious positions, new court duties, and urban opportunities, there was considerable horizontal and vertical integration<sup>69</sup> among various ethnic populations<sup>70</sup>, lower class Gallic and Frankish peoples, Gallo-Roman senatores and the Merovingian nobilitas. Gregory of Tours identified himself as a member of a Merovingian polity; however, regarding family position or matters of social rank as defined by ancestry, Gregory's use of the term senatores denoted an elite of his peers' family members outside of any reference to the wealth or position of other powerful people living in the Merovingian kingdom.

Brian Brennan's analysis of common language usage comparing the writings of Gregory and Fortunatus, concludes that "Fortunatus, unlike Gregory of Tours, did not have a vested interest in maintaining a restricted meaning of nobilitas...[and] is much freer in ascribing nobilitas to individuals both Frankish and Gallo-Roman."<sup>71</sup> For Gregory there was a personal, familiar rationale for keeping whatever

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<sup>69</sup>One study of such a social fusion with particular attention to the social equality based on ideals of sanctity from the fifth century to the eighth century in Gaul see: Laurent Theis, "Saints sans famille? Quelques remarques sur la famille dans le monde franc à travers les sources hagiographiques," Revue Historique 155 (1976): 3-20.

<sup>70</sup>Including groups of Copts, Syrians, Celts, and Berbers who continued to speak their own languages in Merovingian times, according to Jacques Le Goff in "Culture cléricale et traditions folkloriques dans la civilisation mérovingienne," Annales, E. S. C. 22 (1967): 781.

<sup>71</sup>Brian Brennan, "Senators and Social Mobility in Sixth Century Gaul," Journal of Medieval History 11, no. 2 (1985): 151.

languishing meanings might cling to a privileged word like senator or nobilitas.

In spite of the fact that Frankish and Gallo-Roman intermarriage was not prohibited in the Merovingian kingdom as it was among the Visigoths and despite the cultural assimilation occurring in Gaul<sup>72</sup>, it was still common for the senatorial Gallo-Roman families to marry among themselves. The disparate outcomes of this practice were that their large fortunes amassed into ever larger fortunes, but that, over time, the number of their inheritors decreased.<sup>73</sup>

Accompanying the family lineage of Gregory of Tours came a litany of familiar stories that Gregory passed down in writing. With the inclusion of numerous family stories throughout his books, Gregory indicated how much his own identity included his family's past and how much his family history influenced his contemporary history.

The most distant relative Gregory wrote about was Vettius Epagathus<sup>74</sup>, a martyr of Lyons who died in A.D. 177. Soon after

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<sup>72</sup>King Leovigild of the Visigoths lifted the ban on intermarriage c. 580; Fortunatus composed an epitaph to a young woman named Vilitthuta saying she who was born in Paris of noble parents had barbarian blood but a Roman devotion. "Sanguine nobillium generata Parisius urbe, Romana studio, barbara prole fuit." Opera Poetica, ed. Charles Nisard, IV, XXVI: 121.

<sup>73</sup>The traditional scholarly authority for this family tendency among the Gallo-Romans is the prosopography in K.F. Stroheker, "Der senatorische Adel im spatantiken Gallien," (Turbingen: 1948), 141-227.

<sup>74</sup>Gregory of Tours, Liber Vitae Patrum, ed. B. Krusch, MGH Script. rer. mer., I, 661-743, 6.1.

the Bishop of Lyon, Saint Irenaeus, converted the masses to Catholic Christianity, persecutions began.<sup>75</sup> The executioner repeatedly tortured then killed Bishop Irenaeus. The first one of the forty-eight martyrs chosen for execution following Bishop Irenaeus, Gregory wrote, was Vettius Epagathus.

Here was an ancestor befitting Gregory as an early medieval bishop. Like the classical authority of apostolic succession, an ancestor's martyrdom during the late antique period in Gaul gave legitimizing force to a Merovingian family's later claims to govern the Germanic populations as they, too, shifted their social allegiance to the new forms of Christian rule in Frankish Gaul.

Once Catholic Christianity gained leaders and influence in Gaul, note that the hagiographer Sulpicius Severus (365-425) used criteria other than martyrdom to establish Saint-Bishop Martin of Tours (c. 316-397) as a saint in the Vita Sanctae Martini. Martin's virtue was that of the Roman Christian soldier turned first monk, then bishop, thereby establishing a model for the secular clergy as the spiritual equivalent of the monastic clerics. More importantly for Merovingian society,

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<sup>75</sup>For the interplay of persecutions and their martyrs with the spread of the very movement the persecutions were intended to suppress, see: Ramsay MacMullen, Christianizing the Roman Empire, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 29-30; Peter Brown, The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in the Latin Christianity, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 79-85.



Martin's soldier identity established a parity between the warrior's role and the "militant" priest.

Another distant relative, Leocadius, Senator of Bourges, provided a family example for the virtue of donating property to the Church. In Leocadius' lifetime, Catholic Christianity had gained legitimacy through the conversion of Clovis but there remained the problem of amassing enough material resources to assure the continuity of the Church.

[The Christians] had little chance of building a church, so they asked for the use of the houses of...Leocadius, the leading Senator of Gaul...He replied, "If my own house which I possess in Bourges were worthy of being put to such a use, I would be willing to offer it to you." They fell at his feet and they offered him 300 gold pieces for it, together with a silver salver...now he became a Christian and turned his house into a church.<sup>76</sup>

The Catholic Franks and the Gallo-Romans had found a different way to combine their beliefs and their resources. Despite added material resources, the christianization of Gaul did not move monolithically through the society. Old beliefs lingered in the households of the converted. In the generation after Leodadius, Armentaria's uncle Nicetius, Bishop of Lyons, survived a storm at sea, but Gregory wrote that when the storm waters came over the sides of the ship the passengers called out to the old gods Jupiter, Mercury and Juno.<sup>77</sup>

To fill the Sees of Gaul required radical changes in the family structure. Especially difficult was the problem of

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<sup>76</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. I, 31: 88

<sup>77</sup>Gregory of Tours, De Sancto Nicetio, MGH Script. rer. mer. I, 732.

putting aside a wife in order to be a bishop. When Gregory's maternal great-grandfather, Florentius, was named for the bishopric of Geneva, his wife persuaded him to stay with her. According to Gregory's record of this family story, Florentius' wife said: "Beloved husband, do not...seek to become bishop of Geneva. I have conceived a child by you, and I am now pregnant with a bishop."<sup>70</sup> Gregory of Tours' great-grandmother correctly foretold her son Nicetius' life, or, at least did not underestimate her influence over him, because he became the Bishop of Lyon. Later, Gregory's great-uncle Nicetius taught Gregory how to read.

In Clermont, the acts of Gregory of Tours' father and uncle exemplified the ways in which the Gallo-Roman aristocrats associated themselves with Christian cults and with the social process of christianization. Senator Florentius worked with his brother Bishop Gallus of Clermont to revive devotions to the cult of Saint Julian of Brioude and to identify their family members with this devotion. In 543 when plague threatened the city, Bishop Gallus called on the people to undertake an annual pilgrimage to the town of Brioude during Lent; Florentius patterned this worship by taking his family to Brioude every August for the festival of Saint Julian.

Gregory's attachment to the rise of the cult of Saint Julian of Brioude in Clermont contributed to Gregory's own

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<sup>70</sup>Gregory of Tours, Liber Vita Patrum 8, 1; Trans. in Raymond Van Dam, Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985), 204.

success in the promotion of Saint Martin' shrine in Tours. Gregory, as a popular and ambitious bishop, mastered the leadership of saint cults in Tours. In addition to the established cult of Saint Martin, Bishop Gregory founded other cults at Tours. He dedicated relics to Saint Julian, Saint Saturninus, and Saint Illidius on the altar of Saint Martin in the underground oratory of the church next to the Tours cathedral.

There was intense competition among the aristocracy and the episcopate for saints' relics because of the potential prosperity and the political influence connected to the people's devotion to saint cults in the sixth century.<sup>79</sup> In Merovingian government, the Bishop stood beside the Count of each region. The administrative spheres for bishops and counts overlapped and formed the most immediate level of competition for their area's resources and prestige. The Church used the old Roman divisions of diocesan territories; the Merovingians ruled over their various inheritance domains.<sup>80</sup> The rivalry for influence centered on relics was intrinsic to civil and religious control during christianization in the Frankish kingdoms.

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<sup>79</sup>On the economic and political potential of cult promotion, particularly for bishops, see: Peter Brown, The Cult of the Saints (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 31-33; and, Stephen Wilson, Saints and their Cults (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 24-29.

<sup>80</sup>For further explanation of this competition in Merovingian politics: William McDermott, "The World of Gregory of Tours," Monks, Bishops and Pagans, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 120; and, Raymond Van Dam, Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985), 185.

In his version of Radegunde's life, Bishop Gregory of Tours ascribed this same rivalry over the prestige and power of relics as the root of Bishop Maroveus' hostility toward Radegunde and the Sainte Croix nunnery. "All the same, or so it seems to me, Maroveus still harboured some resentment against the nuns, and indeed, they declared that this was one of the causes of their revolt."<sup>e1</sup> Relations between the local bishop and the Poitiers nunnery went from bad to worse beginning with the installation of the True Cross and ending with the nuns' revolt.

As the leader of one of the most powerful ecclesiastical factions in the Merovingian kingdoms, Bishop Gregory's view of Radegunde's life highlighted the connections between Merovingian subjects and the jurisdiction of Catholic bishops.<sup>e2</sup> His account contrasted Radegunde's submissiveness and obedience to the bishops during her lifetime with the younger nuns' rebelliousness in the years following her death.

When Saint Radegunde founded the nunnery [567], she herself and all her community were submissive and obedient to the bishops of the period...

Meanwhile [590-91] the revolt which, at the instigation of Satan, had broken out in the nunnery in Poitiers, became more and more serious as day followed day....Scarcely a day passed without some quarrel or other, scarcely a minute without some person or other having cause for sorrow. Who could possibly set down in words all this violence, all this slaughter, all this evil?<sup>e3</sup>

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<sup>e1</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 531.

<sup>e2</sup>Gregory was a blood relative of thirteen of the eighteen bishops who preceded him as the Bishop of Tours. Gregory of Tours, H. F., ed. Lewis Thorpe, Bk. V, 49: 321.

<sup>e3</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 530; Bk. X, 15: 567, 569.

Bishop Gregory was particularly bound up in the events of the Sainte Croix scandal because his niece Justina was the Prioress. He described the outbreak of the nuns' revolt in great detail.

Clotild was set upon rebellion. She gathered round her a band of cut-throats...These she ordered to break into the nunnery and drag out the Abbess...Justina, the Prioress, blew out the taper and, with the help of her sister-nuns, covered the Abbess with a cloth from the altar...The men slit the nuns' dresses...They laid hands on the Prioress, in the darkness taking her for the Abbess, tore off her veil, let down her hair, dragged her out and carried her off in the midst of a mob to Saint Hilary's church.<sup>84</sup>

Bishop Gregory was one of the six bishops King Childebert and King Guntram appointed to act as judges for the trial which decided the issues of the nuns' revolt.

When King Childebert heard what was happening, he sent messengers to King Guntram to suggest that a group of bishops from the two kingdoms should meet together, in an attempt to end the revolt by canon law.<sup>85</sup>

King Gunthram appointed three bishops who represented a political block from Bordeaux: Gundegisel of Bordeaux, the Metropolitan Bishop; Nicasius of Angouleme; and, Safarius of Perigeux. These three bishops were prejudiced against the issue of the Sainte Croix revolt. Bishop Gundegilisel excommunicated the rebel nuns when they took up residence at Saint Hilary's church in Poitiers and he wrote a letter to the kings and bishops in council insisting that the nuns be punished; Nicasius and Safarius were both knocked down in the riot outside Saint

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<sup>84</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. X, 15: 567.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., Bk. IX, 40: 530; Bk. X, 15: 567, 569.

Hilary's church at the outbreak of the revolt.<sup>86</sup> King Childebert appointed Maroveus of Poitiers, Gregory of Tours, and Ebregisel of Cologne. Of these, Bishop Maroveus was an adversary to the interests of Sainte Croix and Bishop Gregory was an ally of the community. Except for his service on this case, nothing else is known about Bishop Ebregisel of Cologne.

At the time of the nuns' revolt, Gunthram and Childebert were allied in their possessions according to the 587 Treaty of Andelot. The third Merovingian king, Clothar II, son of Fredegunde and Chilperic (d. 584), was not in council with his uncle and cousin, and did not send delegate bishops to the Sainte Croix trial.

Bishop Gregory was the nuns' most sympathetic judge for the Sainte Croix community. At the outset of the nuns' revolt he had told them, "I am afraid, you know, that if the bishops come together in council, they may well exclude you from communion."<sup>87</sup> Gregory had the closest personal ties with the Sainte Croix community through his niece Justina the Prioress and his friendship with Fortunatus. Because of his correspondence with Fortunatus regarding the revolt, Gregory also had more information about the nuns than the other

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<sup>86</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 41: 532-533.

<sup>87</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 531; Bk. IX, 39: 526-527.

Judges.<sup>88</sup> But even Gregory, based on the precedent of the case of Ingiltrude of Tours, did not favor independence for Sainte Croix. In spite of his friendship with Sainte Croix, the Bishop of Tours had a greater interest in placing the nunnery under episcopal control.

In the Historia Francorum, Bishop Gregory presented the case of Ingiltrude of Tours in the same way he presented the case of Sainte Croix. The background information for both disputes appeared in Book IX; the decision for each case was in Book X. The placement of these cases in the narrative showed Gregory's intent.<sup>89</sup> Both cases were meaningful in their relation to each other and to Gregory's decision for Sainte Croix. The two nunnery cases were significant in their bearing on, first, the

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<sup>88</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. VIII, XII: 209; XIIa: 210; XIII: 210. Letters XIV-XVIII also ask for Bishop Gregory's help with the same urgency as the preceding letters, but do not directly name the matter of the request. Reading the whole series, the letters make a meaningful unit, but the last letters in the series are dependent on the first three letters of the series.

<sup>89</sup>Gabrielle Spiegel contrasted the use of paratactic and hypotactic narrative to demonstrate how the meaning in a narrative derives from the positioning as well as the wording in a text. In a paratactic narrative, all the narrative episodes are presented in a seemingly neutral order without wording in the text itself to organize the relative importance of the episodes; meaning and importance comes from the placement of the episodes in relation to each other. This narrative form is most common in early written forms. In a hypotactic narrative, the episodes presented are tagged in the wording of the text itself to show the relative importance of the episodes. This narrative form is most common in later medieval writing. Although the Spiegel study used later medieval texts, the Historia Francorum is an excellent example for her model of the paratactic text. Gabrielle Spiegel, "Social Change and Literary Language: The Textualization of the Past in Thirteenth Century Old French Historiography," Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 17, 2 (1987): 129-148.

order of women's institutions in the hierarchy of the Church, and, second, the order of episcopal versus secular control of Church institutions. The outcome of the dispute at the nunnery in Tours was unfavorable to the interests of the bishop; the verdict for the nunnery in Poitiers favored the bishop.<sup>90</sup>

The verdict of the six bishops had more to do with episcopal politics than it did with the discipline of the nuns and the abbess. Conflicting orbits of power between the Tours faction and the Bordeaux-Poitiers faction encircled the judgment over the nuns. The bishops voted their decision according to their political alignment. Furthermore, it was in the interest of each bishop to decide to reserve the nunnery property to the Church rather than to maintain its original, royal foundation. These political refinements did not change the effect of the judgment on the nuns. Sainte Croix would be subject to episcopal jurisdiction. As Gregory had warned the rebellious nuns Clotild and Basina:

What you are doing is extremely unwise. If you persist, you will lay yourselves open to criticism, no matter how you proceed.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 33: 518-521; Bk. X, 12: 560.

<sup>91</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 531; Bk. IX, 39: 526-527.



CHAPTER IV  
FORTUNATUS AND THE UNWORLDLY LIFE

And in this way is Radegunde a true saint. The daughter  
and the wife of kings and the sovereign mistress of the  
palace, she makes herself the servant of the poor.  
(Venantius Fortunatus, c. 600)

In the complementary hagiographies of Fortunatus and Baudonivia, Radegunde's immediate world appears in a closer focus than in the historia of Gregory of Tours. Both genres shared that sixth-century mental world where people and events formed the warp and weft of a Divine Fabric. Gregory's history described the Merovingian cloth; Fortunatus' and Baudonivia's complementary hagiographies showed the stitches of Radegunde's life. As the subject of two hagiographies, Radegunde's life was spun "on the invisible frontier between the human and the angelic."<sup>1</sup>

After the community gathered together, [Radegunde] sometimes concealed herself at the tombs to pass the night praying for the salvation of her monastery with the sign of the cross from her holy right hand. One time while the blessed one was making this sign, a sister nun saw a thousand thousand demons in the shape of goats standing upright near the

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory of Nyssa, Vita Macrinae, PG 46, 964CD; trans. in Peter Brown, The Cult of the Saints (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 59. Macrina was Gregory of Nyssa's sister. At Macrina's birth, her mother invoked Saint Thecla to protect the baby. Fortunatus also invoked Thecla as Radegunde's protector in Opera Poetica, Bk. VIII, I.

wall. When the saint raised her hand in the sign of the cross, all of this multitude of demons fled, never to reappear.<sup>2</sup>

The ancient background for the saint as an "invisible companion"<sup>3</sup> in this worldly tapestry rose from previous cultures' intimate bonds with nonhuman figures of gods, daimones, or angels. Hagiography is the perfect genre for determining the mentality of the sixth century. The saint's Life was a text that was expressly structured to make intelligible a meta-existence which was understood to be at work in the world by both the authors and the audience of the Saints' Lives. In life and in death, Saint Radegunde, through her hagiographies, was tied to the needs and the hopes of her followers who both promoted and benefitted from her cult.

In practice, sixth century hagiography was not always so other-worldly for Radegunde's contemporaries. Many of the motifs presented in the Radegunde hagiographies challenged the everyday world Radegunde lived in and embodied the process of christianization among the Franks. As early as the sixth century, it was common for priests to read the Vitae to the

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<sup>2</sup>Baudonivia, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II, Bk. 18, ln. 21-25: 390. "Postquam congregatio se recondebat iam ad pausationem, illa ut pernoctans in oratione sua sancta dextera monasterium persignum crucis salvabat. Quadam vice dum beata illud signaret, aliqua de sororibus vidit supra murum milia milium daemonum in specie caprarum adstare; ubi sancta dexteram beatam cum signo crucis elevavit, omnis illa multitudo daemonum fugata nusquam comparuit."

<sup>3</sup>For the transference of ancient devotion models to early Christian saint cults, see the chapter entitled "The Invisible Companion" in Peter Brown, The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 50-68.

masses as part of Church liturgy or as part of religious instruction, especially on the saint's calendar day in the Church year.<sup>4</sup> According to the Jesuit scholar Baudouin de Gaiffier of the Society of Bollandists:

Les Vies de saints subiront nécessairement les contrecoups des transformations de la société chrétienne....Plus soucieux d'enseignement moral et d'édification, l'hagiographie [sera] plus préoccupé des goûts du public que de la recherche pénible de la vérité.<sup>5</sup>

The texts of Fortunatus and Baudonivia displayed Radegunde in the historical context of a Catholic Queen and a monastic foundress triumphant over both pagan customs and Germanic social conventions during the christianization of early medieval Gaul.

When Radegunde was still in worldly garb with King Clothar,...attended by her worldly pomp, she was on her way to a noble banquet, invited by the matron Anafrida. Close to a crossing with the blessed Queen's road, there was a fane where the Franks worshipped. Knowing this, she ordered that the fane revered by the Franks be burned with fire...Hearing of it, a multitude of Franks, muttering diabolically, undertook to defend it with swords and clubs. Christ working in her breast, the holy Queen persevered unmoved, sat her steadfast horse while the fane burned and then pacified the people with prayer. For when it was done,

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<sup>4</sup>August 13 for Saint Radegunde.

<sup>5</sup>Baudouin de Gaiffier, "Hagiographie et Historiographie," La storiografia alto medievale, Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo 17 (1970): 148. "Saints Lives will necessarily submit to the consequences of the transformations in christian society...Being more concerned with moral education and improvement, hagiography will be more preoccupied with the inclinations of the public than with the painful pursuit of the truth."

they blessed the lord, admiring the virtue and constancy of the Queen.<sup>6</sup>

Christianization was not simply a smooth progression eased along with the reading of saintly texts. There was aristocratic opposition to Radegunde's example among other Merovingian women. Her example of leaving her husband and endowing a nunnery with her wealth was not favored by some of her contemporaries. In his Vita of Saint Radegunde, Fortunatus does not include the efforts of Clothar and his men to recapture Radegunde following her consecration.

Some of the noblemen protested when Bishop Medard of Noyon sanctioned Queen Radegunde's separation from Clothar I in 556 or 557. When Radegunde and her unnamed brother were royal Thuringian children, Clothar captured them as hostages of a Frank-Thuringian war c. 530. In 555 during the Saxon natione uprising, the Thuringians fought with the Saxons against the

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Baudonivia, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II, ed. B. Krusch, MGH Script. rer. mer. 2, Bk. 2, ln. 10-22: 380. "Dum esset cum rege adhuc in mundiali habitu...invitata ad prandium Ansifridae matronae, dum iter ageret, saeculari pompa se comitante, interiecta longiquitate terrae ac spatio, fanus, qui a Francis colebatur, in itinere beatae reginae quantanum milliaro uno proximus erat. Hoc illa audiens, ibi a Francis fanum coli, iussit famulis fanum igni conburi...Hoc audientes Franci universaque multitudo cum gladiis et fustibus vel omni fremitu diabolico conabantur defendere; sancta vero regina immobilis perseverans, Christum in pectore gestans, equum quem sedebat in antae non movit, antequam et fanus perureretur, et, ipsa orante, inter se populi pacem firmarent. Quo facto, virtutem et constantiam reginae omnes admirantes Domino benedixerunt."

Franks so Clothar's forces again invaded Thuringia.<sup>7</sup> The Queen's separation from Clothar followed his murder of her brother in 556.

Radegunde's role, if any, in the Thuringian uprising, or her brother's part in it, is not mentioned in the Historia Francorum. Her intervention may be indirectly drawn from the contents of one of her letters from Sainte Croix, written with Fortunatus. Radegunde's epistle entitled "De excidio Thoringiae"<sup>8</sup> chronicled the Franks' defeat of the Thuringians and appealed to her cousin Hamalfrede, who had fled to Constantinople, to avenge the death of her brother. Radegunde expressed her inconsolable guilt about his murder because she had persuaded him to stay among the Franks instead of going to the East with the other members of their family.

Clothilde, Radegunde's mother-in-law, may have been an example for Radegunde's reaction to the assassination of her brother. Queen Clothilde directly intervened in similar dynastic murders. She urged her sons to wage a campaign in

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<sup>7</sup>For two Merovingian accounts of this Saxon uprising see: Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IV, 9: 203; and, Liber Historiae Francorum, ed. and trans., Bernard Bachrach (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973), Bk. 27, 69-70. The Liber Historiae Francorum was written by an anonymous monk of the Saint Denis monastery in the early seventh century. This monk, according to internal evidence, spent much time in the court of Theuderic III (673-690) and finished writing the L. H. F. in 727 at Saint Denis. The Neustrian bias of the L. H. F. is an interesting counterbalance for the Austrasian leanings of the H. F. This anonymous monk used the first six books of the H. F. as well as brief episodes from the Chronicle of Fredegar as his source material for early Merovingian stories. See: The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar, ed., J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (London, 1960).

<sup>8</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed., Nisard, App., I: 267-270.

Burgundy against her uncle in order to avenge the deaths of her parents.

'My dear children, do not give me cause to regret the fact that I have brought you up with such care. You must surely resent the wrong which has been done to me. You must do all in your power to avenge the death of my mother and father.'

Clothar's assassination of Radegunde's brother was another of the strategic, dynastic murders so frequent in Merovingian politics. Clothar helped his brother Childebert to murder two of the three sons of Clodomer, their deceased brother. Clodomer's sons were under Queen Clothilde's protection in Paris. Clothar and Childebert feared that their Queen-Mother would favor Clodomer's sons in the line of succession ahead of Clothar, Childebert, or their sons because Clodomer was killed in the war with Burgundy exacting revenge for Clothilde. Bishop Gregory wrote that Clothilde told Clodomer's sons, "Once I see you succeed [Clodomer] on the throne, I shall forget that I have lost my son." Clothar and Childebert demanded that their mother chose either her grandsons' lives, or, the boys' rights of succession. Queen Clothilde refused to allow Clothar and Childebert cut off the boys' hair, an act which symbolically severed them from their sovereign rights. The Queen said, "If they are not to ascend the throne, I would rather see them dead than with their hair cut short." Clodomer's third son,

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<sup>2</sup>Gregory of Tours, Historia Francorum, ed. Lewis Thorpe, Bk. III, 5: 166.

Clodovald, escaped. He tonsured himself, entered a monastery, and became known as Saint Cloud.<sup>10</sup>

In another dynastic murder, Clothar killed one of his own sons. Clothar had a son named Chramn by his second concubine Chunsina. After Clothar married his sister-wives Ingunde and Aregunde, Chramn allied himself with his uncle Childebert. To escape his father's vengeance when Childebert died in 558, Chramn fled to Brittany and sent his wife Chalda and their daughters into hiding with Chanao, the Duke of the Bretons, but Clothar's army pursued them. After a battle between the Bretons and the Franks, Clothar's men encircled Chramn and his family in a poor man's hut along the seacoast. Clothar ordered his men to set the hut on fire to burn Chramn, his wife, and his daughters to death.<sup>11</sup>

The Merovingian question of whether or not the genre of hagiography rested in this world or the other-world during the lifetimes of Radegunde, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia prefigures the scholarly debate about whether or not hagiographical works belong in a realm of literary fancy or in a world of historical fact. Until recently, scholars examined the hagiographical texts as literary artifacts for a genre dedicated to Christian myth and legend. The more extravagantly wrought the saint's legend, the less likely it seemed to render historical evidence. Eventually, increased familiarity with the critical signs of

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<sup>10</sup>Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, Bk. III, 18: 180-182.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, Bk. IV, 20: 215-216.

this genre inspired scholars like Rene Aigrain to conclude that the historian has much to learn from even the most incredulous narratives.<sup>12</sup> Jo Ann McNamara describes the present work in this field as "a method for separating the historical wheat from this fabulous chaff."<sup>13</sup>

Hippolyte Delehaye in his monumental work Les Legendes Hagiographiques gave a pessimistic assessment of Saints' Lives as objects for historical study. In his view, the hagiography was primarily a work of the imagination, a legend, wherein "saints" are substituted for the abstractions of mythic types.<sup>14</sup> Delehaye defined a legend as a narrative built on a historical fact which has been ornamented or disfigured by popular imagination.<sup>15</sup> For example, he wrote that a historically accurate itinerary of Saint Radegunde's voyage to Arles can never be traced because of the many additional landmark shrines planted in legend by her followers.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to Delehaye, Aigrain supports Flach's proposal that, paradoxically, the more numerous and striking the

<sup>12</sup>René Aigrain, L'Hagiographie: Ses Sources, ses methods, son Histoire (Poitiers: Bloud and Gay, 1953), 285.

<sup>13</sup>Jo Ann McNamara, "A Legacy of Miracles: Hagiography and Nunneries in Merovingian Gaul," Women of the Medieval World, eds., Julius Kirshner and Suzanne Wemple (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 36.

<sup>14</sup>Hippolyte Delehaye, Les Legendes Hagiographiques (Brussels: 1955; reprinted from 1927 edition), 12. In part: "Le travail de la legende est...une substitution de la forme abstraite au type individuel."

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 9. From: "...la legende suppose un fait historique qui en est le sujet ou le pretext...ce fait historique est orné ou défiguré par l'imagination populaire."

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 43.



miraculous motifs in a hagiographic text, the more valuable that text can be for historians.<sup>17</sup> A similar comparison could be made for the way that the contemporary scenes in fifteenth-century Flemish paintings of Biblical stories tell more about the waning medieval world than they do about the Biblical Near East. In studying the hagiographies written by Fortunatus and Baudonivia, the potential anachronisms are reduced because Saint Radegunde lived at the same time as her writers, and the edited versions of her Vitae do not indicate later interpolations.

Examining Radegunde's Vitae gives the reader some idea of: the activities of the saint; the manifestations of her cult; the history of the church or nunnery where her memory and her relics are honored; contemporary language usage; institutional life and training; cultural characteristics of her lifetime; and, the moral disposition of public audiences for the Vitae.<sup>18</sup>

McNamara's straightforward position on the use of hagiography as historical source material begins with her no nonsense observation that:

The texts themselves exist. They were written by someone and they commanded a large and diverse audience. They were

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<sup>17</sup>Jacques Flach, Les Origines de l'ancienne France, III (Paris, 1904), I, 18. Quoted in René Algrain, L'Hagiographie, 286. In Part: "Serait-ce un paradoxe que plus ces anachronismes sont nombreux et saillants, plus le récit a d'intérêt et de prix pour nous." Algrain writes that reading hagiographies so that the texts reveal the times in which they were written is a matter learning the craft of contemporary "déchiffrement."

<sup>18</sup>For a useful list of historical topics to pursue in hagiographical texts: René Algrain, L'Hagiographie, 285-286.

intended to provide inspiration and guidance, not data for the social historian.<sup>19</sup>

It is, then, the historian's labor to analyze hagiographies from the viewpoint of their authors, readers, and listeners. In addition, for this study of Saint Radegunde's historical context, we must consider the saint herself as the subject of the Vitae. McNamara summarized Suzanne Wemple's use of the biographical information in hagiographies for her study of Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500-900 as "a method to establish reliable indicators for its use by scrupulous textual criticism, checks of internal consistency and external conformity with information extracted from other sources."<sup>20</sup>

For McNamara and de Gaiffier the critical element of the historical evidence in hagiographies is the purpose and use of the Vita. The writers' hagiographies, according to McNamara and de Gaiffier, attracted additional women to religious life, increased the influence of their patron's cult in the affairs of the kingdom, and continued the activities of christianization. Determining the purpose and use of a hagiography helps sift out the biographical and historical detail in Saints' Lives. De Gaiffier found that the needs and goals of a saint's cult obliged its hagiographer to create new literary forms. In order to outline the varieties of saintliness that the writers expressed through different literary representations of a saint's life, he traced the Merovingian hagiographies of saints

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<sup>19</sup>Jo Ann McNamara, "...Hagiography and Nunneries," 38.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 37.

Sigismond, Clothilde, Radegunde, Arnould, Gertrude, Bathilde, and Dagobert III.<sup>21</sup> Fortunatus' purpose, in his representation of Radegunde's life, was to build up her image as a Christian queen who transformed her earthly power into heavenly authority. In contrast, Baudonivia's representation strengthened Radegunde's image for Merovingian women as teachers, nurses, mediators, domestic laborers, and charity workers.

With an approach similar to de Gaiffier, Delaruelle follows the changing ideals of Merovingian sanctity through the Vitae of Genevieve, Clothilde, and Radegunde. He places these changing ideals alongside the parallel historical development of increased secularization among the Merovingian episcopacy in cooperation with the administration of the Merovingian kings. Delaruelle characterized Radegunde's type of sanctity as interacting with the contemporary process of christianization.<sup>22</sup>

Radegunde's type of saintliness upheld certain activities for Merovingian religious, as described by Baudonivia, while it simultaneously kept alive the practices of strict Christian austerity and worldly separation, as emphasized by Fortunatus, which the episcopacy had abandoned by the sixth century. Fortunatus praised Radegunde's renunciation of the world; Baudonivia praised Radegunde's useful activities in that world.

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<sup>21</sup>Baudouin de Gaiffier, "Hagiographie et Historiographie," 142-144.

<sup>22</sup>Etienne Delaruelle, "Sainte Radegonde, son type de Sainteté et chrétienté de son temps," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris: Picard, 1953), 66-67, 72-74.

Cet idéal de renoncement au monde fut remis en question, dès le IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, par le prestige des évêques, en lesquels se manifeste une autre conception du christianisme: ce ne sont plus le martyr, la pénitence, la virginité, la contemplation, la séparation d'avec le monde qui définissent la sainteté, mais, au contraire l'efficacité spirituelle, dans la société d'ici-bas, telle qu'elle est, d'une action qu'aient sans doute foi et prière, mais qui est participation à la vie morale, social, économique, voire politique de la Gaule. On sait que les évêques gallo-romains du V<sup>e</sup> et du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle n'étaient pas seulement des pontifes et des docteurs, mais qu'ils furent, dans toute la force du terme, des hommes publics.<sup>29</sup>

Merovingian women were able to take advantage of this increasing spiritual deficit among male religious in the sixth century. The women's extreme austerities did create, in a strange currency, a spiritual surplus for women with which to purchase new roles and activities in religious life from the storehouse of previously exclusive male roles. Feminine hagiographies, like those of Saint Radegunde, continued to promote an ascetic life no longer practiced by bishops, and, female monastics lived with restrictions no longer required of their male counterparts. These different attitudes and Rules of Church and society toward women's communities sprang from

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<sup>29</sup>Etienne Delaruelle, "Sainte Radegonde, son type de sainteté et chrétienté de son temps," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris: Picard, 1953), 67-68. "This ideal of renunciation of the world was brought into question, since the fourth century, by the prestige of the bishops, out of which developed a different conception of being a Christian: it was no longer the martyr, the penitent, the chaste, the contemplative, or he who left the world who defined [the bishops'] sanctity, but, to the contrary, the spiritual effectiveness in the society of this world, just as it is, a movement which no doubt enlivenes faith and prayer, but which participates in the moral, social, economic, indeed the political life of Gaul. We know that the Gallo-Roman bishops from the V to the VI century were not only pontiffs and philosophers, but that they were also, in every sense of the word, politicians."

ambiguous ideas about women's spirituality as well as the common clerical repudiation of women.<sup>24</sup>

Another way to assess the spiritual strength of the feminine ascetic image in the sixth century is to consider the early seventh century renewal of the Merovingian Church by means of the similarly severe ascetism of Columbanus (c.543-615) and his followers. Pierre Riché affirms that before Columbanus' Irish mission to Gaul:

Both urban and rural clergy lived like laymen, were rarely celibate, became rich and simoniac, and were accustomed to appeal more to secular than to episcopal courts. Monasticism was powerless to regenerate the secular clergy, for it, too, had much wrong with it....The bishops were always politicians and often enough the victims of palace intrigues.<sup>25</sup>

The rebellion in Radegunde's monastery was a sign of this time of spiritual strain. The Sainte Croix nuns' revolt was a vigorous example of how episcopal politics and spiritual laxity contrasted with the strict requirements expected of nuns.

[The nuns] made some very critical remarks about their own bishop [Maroveus], alleging that it was by his incompetent handling of their situation that they had been upset and that this was the real reason for their leaving the nunnery....They put themselves under the protection of the King, for they aroused no interest or support in the man who should have been their pastor.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Lisa Bitel, "Women's Monastic Enclosures," Journal of Medieval History 12 (1986): 17; Suzanne Wemple, Women in Frankish Society, 120-136 details the accumulated clerical rulings against women in Merovingian times.

<sup>25</sup>Pierre Riché, "Columbanus, His Followers and the Merovingian Church," Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism, BAR International Series 113 (Oxford, 1981), 59; 63.

<sup>26</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 40: 529-530; 531.

Riche concluded that in the midst of this low ebb for the Merovingian Church, the ascetic spirituality of Columbanus restored the traditions of monasticism in Gaul, just as Gregory the Great was doing in Italy. The lesson to be learned from the reversals suffered by Radegunde's institution would lead to another conclusion. The Sainte Croix example indicated that severe restrictions gained the initial leverage for the institution, but by their very severity also brought about the deterioration of institutional life. Further evidence of the validity of Sainte Croix' example of decline under a too strict Rule was the sweeping acceptance of the more moderate Benedictine Rule.

J. C. Dérouet, a colleague of Riché, catalogues two kinds of sanctity for the late sixth century and early seventh century based on opposite types of miracles in the contemporary hagiographies. The first category identifies 'practical' miracles which are recognizable in the world of sense experience and are attached to a specific geographical setting and to particular aristocratic origins; the second category identifies 'marvellous miracles' which transcend sense reality.<sup>27</sup> The 'practical' miracles are more common in early Merovingian hagiographies and tend to represent the integration and

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<sup>27</sup>J. C. Dérouet, "Les possibilités d'interprétation sémiologique des textes hagiographiques," Revue d'histoire de l'église de France 62 (1976): 151-162; and, "Recherches d'histoire des mentalités sur les textes hagiographiques du Nord et de l'Est de la Gaule au VIIe et VIIIe siècle," (Diss., Paris X-Nanterre, 1973).

assimilation of religious practices into society; the 'marvellous' miracles appear more often in later Merovingian hagiographies and represent religious practices outside mainstream society.

Dérout does not address the hagiographies of women religious. It is interesting to consider, given the contemporary clerical opinion that women religious were by conciliar definition hors de question, whether Dérout would determine that the feminine hagiographies fall more readily into the 'marvellous' identity. The feminine hagiographies would, then, belong with the second kind of hagiographies, those which resemble the Celtic rejuvenation typical of the influence of Columbanus.

While Dérout's categories help organize the miraculous content in hagiographies, his paradigm tends to smother the diversity of miracles recorded in an individual hagiography. Celtic and Roman influences co-existed in Gaul before Columbanus arrived, not only through monastic contacts and pilgrimage routes to and from Rome, but also through sea trade in oil, wine and salt.<sup>29</sup> Both types of miracles tend to appear in the individual Merovingian hagiographies during Columbanus' lifetime.

Radegunde's life and the lives of her hagiographers spanned the era Dérout considers and her Vitae included examples of both

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<sup>29</sup>Archibald R. Lewis, The Northern Seas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 119.

types of miracles. In Fortunatus' and Baudonivia's paired Lives of Saint Radegunde, each writer included examples of 'practical' miracles and of 'marvellous' miracles. Further, Liber I and Liber II also describe miracles of Saint Radegunde that contain elements of both of the Dérouet types. Again, Dérouet's semiological analysis clarifies one of the most difficult aspects of hagiography, its miracle stories, but for the examination of hagiographies as rich as Radegunde's Vitae, Dérouet's types gloss over Radegunde's complexity in the same way Baudonivia wrote that Fortunatus "reputed amplitudes of wonder... for fear of prolixity."<sup>29</sup>

Hearing about miraculous occurrences at Sainte Croix attracted people and their donations to the nunnery. Whether or not the miracles at Sainte Croix were sensory or extra-sensory, they had a very practical purpose. Clearly in the sensory world, Fortunatus and Baudonivia recounted Radegunde's medical miracles. Both hagiographers included Radegunde's cure of dropsy in their books. Fortunatus' version explained that her treatment for excess fluid in the body's tissues was a new procedure.<sup>30</sup> Radegunde immersed the nun Animia who was suffering from dropsy in a bath of oil without any water. Radegunde could also have added bayberry to the oil bath;

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<sup>29</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Prologue, ln.5; 3: 378. "...nec reputetur...agnoscitur amplitudo...sed ea quae prolixitate praetermisit."

<sup>30</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 35: 375.



contemporary herbal knowledge<sup>21</sup> included using the flower and leaves of the bayberry for its astringent and tonic qualities to treat problems of circulation and bodily fluids.

Like the shrine of Saint Martin of Tours, Radegunde's nunnery was known for its eye cures. In Liber I, Fortunatus told how Radegunde cured the blindness of a noblewoman named Bella.<sup>22</sup> Saint Radegunde's method for this miracle, however, transcended the world of experience; Bella kneeled before Radegunde, Radegunde made the sign of the cross upon the noblewoman's eyes, and, suddenly, there was light in her eyes. Radegunde may also have touched Bella's eyes with one of several plants known to have curative effects on the eyes. Using the whole herb centaury had an antiseptic effect, reducing infection in living tissue.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Studies which are especially useful for early medieval medicine available to monasteries include: Jean Lestocquoy, "Epices, médecine et abbayes," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris: Picard, 1953): 179-186; Loren C. MacKinney, Early Medieval medicine with Special Reference to France and Chartres (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1937); Aline Rouselle, "Du sanctuaire au thaumaturge: La guérison en Gaule au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle," Annales 31 (1976): 1085-1107; Emile Thevenot, "Médecine et religion aux temps Gallo-Romains: Le traitement des affections de la vue," Latomus 9 (1950): 415-426. Particularly helpful because of its convenience and because of its concentration of several contemporary sources is the following chart of medieval herbal medicine: Herb and Ailment Cross Reference Chart, ed. Leslie J. Kaslof (Woodmere, N. Y.: United Communications, 1972).

<sup>22</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 27: 373.

<sup>23</sup>Herb and Ailment Cross Reference Chart, ed. Leslie J. Kaslof (Woodmere, N.Y.: United Communications, 1972). This chart illustrates medieval herbal knowledge and includes not only disease symptoms and appropriate medicines available in the sixth century, but also the properties of each plant, the parts of the plant to use, and the effects of each plant's use.

Baudonivia's Liber II included one of Radegunde's most practical miracles. Maintaining provisions for the two hundred member community as well as entertaining visiting Churchmen and nobles continually required a measure of blessing, but Baudonivia and the other sisters were especially struck by the miracle of Radegunde's wine vessel.<sup>94</sup> The Abbess Agnes gave Radegunde an eight-measure goblet. Radegunde charged the cellaress Felicity with the daily task of dispensing the wine from Radegunde's own stores. Miraculously, the saint's vintage never diminished, keeping the same level in the barrel and Radegunde gave wine to all who came to Saint Croix.

Dream vision opened an entry way between the sensory world and a world unseen; Fortunatus and Baudonivia wrote about the visions and dreams associated with Radegunde. There was a difference in the way Fortunatus and Baudonivia recorded this kind of miracle. Fortunatus, perhaps because he lived separately from the nuns, recorded only the visions of other people about Radegunde; Baudonivia, living immured with Radegunde, shared in her dream world and wrote about those visions.

Some of Radegunde's miracles happened through the visions of her followers. Fortunatus wrote down a vision experienced by some Poitiers seamen who were caught in a storm while fishing for the nunnery. They called out to Radegunde to calm the seas and to protect them while they carried out her commands. When

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<sup>94</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 10: 133.

the fishermen invoked their saint, the clouds moved across the sky and the prow of their boat rose up again.<sup>35</sup> This vision was an important indicator of the earthly ties between Radegunde as a patron saint and the people who lived near the nunnery. In many ways, maintaining the nunnery established reciprocal ties between the families of the fishermen, the farmers, and the artisans in the town and the surrounding countryside.

In Baudonivia's book, we see even the most fanciful of Radegunde's visions as a part of her everyday world. During Radegunde's first year as a nun, while she was living at the villa of Saix, she saw a vision of a man-shaped ship, with men sitting on every limb. A man who sat on the knee of this ship spoke to her saying, "So you shall sit on my knee until you find peace in my bosom." Radegunde bade the nuns to tell this vision "only to those who survived her."<sup>36</sup> Baudonivia does not explain why Radegunde would give such a curious command. If this vision had some contemporary overtones, perhaps the reason to suppress it seemed obvious to her, or, perhaps she simply did not understand the vision but was careful to record the saint's words.

Although Fortunatus and Baudonivia wrote in the same genre, the many differences in their own lives resulted in two very different versions of Saint Radegunde's life. In many ways evident in their books, Fortunatus' and Baudonivia's versions of

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<sup>35</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 31: 374.

<sup>36</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 3, ln.25-27: 380.

Radegunde's story are formed as much by their own experiences in life as by the life of their subject. Fortunatus had lived a worldly life before he entered the Sainte Marie monastery in Poitiers. His experiences included an education in the cathedral school in Ravenna, a pilgrimage to Gaul, and scholarly duties in the Frankish courts and ecclesiastical households of Gaul. What is known of Fortunatus' life comes from his own numerous writings as well as several secondary studies on Fortunatus' life and works.<sup>27</sup>

In the Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I and Vita Sanctus Radegundis, Liber II, we benefit from the life experiences of both Fortunatus and Baudonivia in their different, though complementary, contexts for the life of Saint-Queen Radegunde. Fortunatus, like Gregory of Tours, was an important person in the affairs of the Merovingian Church. Baudonivia occupied a

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<sup>27</sup>A partial list of secondary works pertaining to Fortunatus: René Aigrain, Vie de Sainte Radegonde (Paris: Bloud, 1924), Introduction, 3-24; Brian Brennan, "The Image of the Frankish Kings in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus," Journal of Medieval History 10 (1984): 1-11; Eleanor Duckett, The Gateway to the Middle Ages: France and Britain (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1938; Jacques Fontaine, "Hagiographie et Politique de Sulpice Sévère à Venance Fortunat," Revue d'histoire de l'église de France 62 (1976): 113-140; Baudouin de Gaiffier "S. Venance Fortunat, Evêque de Poitiers: Les témoignages de son culte," Analecta Bollandiana 70 (1952): 262-284; D. Leroux, Le poète S. V. Fortunat (Paris: Oudin, 1885); Michel-Ange Lucchi, Vie de Venantius Fortunatus (Rome, 1786-87; trans. M. Eugene Rittier, 1887); René-Adrien Meunier, "L'intérêt politique de la correspondance de saint Fortunat," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris: Picard, 1953); Charles Nisard, ed. and trans, Venance Fortunat: Poésies Mêlées (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1887; Joseph Szoverffy, "A la source de l'humanisme chrétien médiéval: 'Romanus' et 'barbarus' chez Venance Fortunat," Aevum 45 (1971): 77-86; Helen Waddell, Wandering Scholars (New York: Doubleday, 1955.

modest place in society and she was not in the habit of imposing her world view on others. Fortunatus, however, was accustomed to interpreting the world around him, including Radegunde's life, in terms of the aspirations of the Church for social order.

Fortunatus opened Liber I with no reservations about his storytelling and with his own firm view of the Redeemer's intentions for women.

So great is the munificence of our Redeemer that One celebrates brilliant victories even among women and it is because of that fragility of their bodies that One renders women glorious through the strength of their elevated souls.<sup>28</sup>

Fortunatus valued Radegunde's example of a womanly withdrawal from secular activities. In Liber II, Baudonivia valued Radegunde's example of active roles for women in the affairs of the kingdom accomplished within the world of the monastery. The influences which helped shape Baudonivia's context for Radegunde's life are the subject of the following chapter.

Fortunatus expressed Radegunde's virtues and attributes in terms of the ideals most touted in classical Christianity. The Vita Sanctae Radegundis. Liber I praised Radegunde's renunciation of the world, her asceticism, and her miracle working. Being more worldly wise than Baudonivia, Fortunatus tuned his book to what was most efficacious to promote

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<sup>28</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Prologue, ln. 22-24: 364.  
 "Redemptoris nostri tantum dives est largitas, ut in sexu muliebri celebret fortes victorias et corpore fragilliores ipsas reddat feminas virtute mentis inclitae gloriosas."

Radegunde's image among those who were politically powerful in Frankish society.

In his Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Fortunatus did not mention the role of the bishopric of Tours either regarding the relic installation or Radegunde's funeral ritual. He also did not write about the nuns' revolt. The omission of these events does not necessarily determine the date of Fortunatus' version of Radegunde's life. The events that Fortunatus glossed over, modestly abstaining in the name of "prolixity,"<sup>39</sup> may have been the result of his politically astute selection considering his contemporary purpose to promote Radegunde's image and the prosperity of her community.

....Of this number is the woman whose life's journey we felt go before us. We are going to attempt to tell the public this saint's life, just as one may tell it in ordinary conversation, in order that this saint of glorious memory will be multiplied in the world.<sup>40</sup>

Fortunatus' Book also differed from Baudonivia's in its institutional emphasis. Fortunatus, more in keeping with antique Christian traditions, placed Radegunde's convent in the context of a woman's retreat from the world.

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<sup>39</sup>Baudonivia called attention to Fortunatus' "prolixitate" insisting that her book would fill in what he had left out: Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II, ln. 3, 378. Fortunatus, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I, ln. 31-32, 376, defended his own "brevissimum" in the recounting of saintly virtue as preferable to "fastidiatur ubertas."

<sup>40</sup>Fortunatus, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I, 364, ln. 22-24, 30; 364, ln. 1-3. "...In quo est pariter numero illa, cuius vitae praesentis cursum, licet tam privato sermone, ferre temptamus in publico, ut, cuius est vita cum Christo, memoria gloriae relicta celebretur in mundo."

By being dead to the royal world and despising the earthly society of that world, by keeping themselves pure of all earthly contact, distrusting this treacherous ground with its many falls and searching instead to live with God, women are joined together with the glorious Redeemer in Paradise.<sup>41</sup>

In Fortunatus' context for Radegunde's life there is a pattern of reverse admiration. Their two lives could not have been more different; but they were devoted to each other. Fortunatus, having led an adventurous and somewhat self-indulgent life in the world, staunchly admired Radegunde's separation from the world and her vigorous self-discipline. Their obvious regard for each other must have taken root in their appreciation of their different paths through life. In telling Radegunde's story, Fortunatus idealized a way of life that he had managed to ease out of himself.

Fortunatus wore his monk's cloak lightly and late in life. In his early life when he was still in Italy, Fortunatus refused consecration from Vital, the Bishop of Ravenna.<sup>42</sup> Instead, he left Italy, perhaps because of the Imperial occupation of Ravenna by Narses in 554, on his lifelong pilgrimage to Gaul. Even after Fortunatus agreed to work for the interests of Bishop Gregory and other Churchmen in Gaul,<sup>43</sup> and, after he took clerical vows to live and work in the Poitiers religious

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<sup>41</sup>Fortunatus, Vita, Liber I, 364, ln. 27-30. "Quae mortificantes se saeculo, despecto terrae consortio, defecato mundi contagio, non confidentes in lubrico, non stantes in lapsu, quaerentes vivere Deo, ad gloriam Redemptoris sunt copulatae paradiso."

<sup>42</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. I, I: 47-48.

<sup>43</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. I, "Prologue:" 46.

communities,<sup>44</sup> he traveled widely, visited freely, and dined extravagantly.

The internal evidence of Fortunatus' many written works and letters revealed his personal history in greater detail than any other individual in his lifetime, with the exception of his friend Bishop Gregory of Tours. Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus was born four years after the death of the Theodoric the Great, King of the Ostrogoths (490-526), in the territory of Treviso in a place named Duplavilis. Fortunatus spent most of his lifetime in the Frankish kingdom. His contact with the Franks may have originated in the dynastic ties between the ruling families of the Ostrogoths and the Franks. The Ostrogothic kingdom was connected to several northern Germanic nationes through marriage alliances. Fortunatus may very well have been familiar with the Merovingian Franks through the people of the entourage accompanying such marriage alliances.

Theodoric's rule was contemporary with the Frankish king Clovis I (481-511) and Theodoric married the Frankish princess Audofleda, Clovis' sister. An alliance between the Ostrogoths and the Franks may have seemed out of balance at the time, but future events reversed the fortunes of the Ostrogothic kingdom while Frankish fortunes increased. In the last year of his reign, having subjugated the plains and frontiers of Gaul, Clovis attacked and subdued the marginal Ostrogothic lands in Provence, including Arles and Avignon. Nine years after Theodoric's

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<sup>44</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. XI, II: 257.



death, Emperor Justinian (527-565) sent his forces to reclaim the north-eastern river plains of Italy for the Byzantine Empire. Byzantine governors ruled over what had been the Ostrogothic kingdom until the Lombards overran the area in 568. By the time of the Lombard conquest, Fortunatus had been in Gaul for three years.

The house of the Ostrogoths also had allied itself with the Thuringians, a link which connected with the Franks in Fortunatus' generation. Theodoric's niece Amalaberga married Hermenefrid (d. 532) who was one of three brother-kings of the Thuringians. One of Hermenefrid's brothers, Berthaire, was the father of the Thuringian princess Radegunde. Legend and contemporary stories credit Amalaberga's ambition as the source of a Thuringian civil war during which Hermenefrid allied himself with the Franks. In this Frankish-Thuringian war, Clovis' son Clothar I (511-561) took Radegunde hostage to become his wife. Amalaberga returned to Italy after her husband's death, and, when Ravenna fell to the Byzantine general Belisarius in 540, she took her children Hermalafred and Rodelinda to Constantinople. This cousin Hermalafred was the one Radegunde appealed to in order to find vengeance for the death of her brother.

The Franks and the Thuringians were also connected with the Lombards. Radegunde's other cousin, Rodelinda, married Audoin, King of the Lombards, and their son Alboin married Radegunde's step-daughter, Clothar and Ingunde's daughter Clodeswinth.

Alboin was king when the Lombards conquered Fortunatus' native land in 568. King Alboin did not live long after this Lombard victory. After Clodeswinth died, Alboin married Rosamund, the daughter of a Gepid king Alboin had defeated and mutilated, fashioning a drinking cup from the king's skull. Rosamund did not wait long for her revenge; she poisoned Alboin's drink and ran off with one of the king's servants.

Like Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus left his family home early to live in the clerical world. When he was about nine years old, he came to live among the monks of Aquila. Bishop Paul of Aquila tried to convince Fortunatus to take the monastic vows, but Fortunatus went instead to the school in Ravenna with a friend named Felix who was also from Treviso. In 564 or 565, once Fortunatus and Felix had completed their studies in grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and law, Felix returned to their native region along the Piave River to become the Bishop of Treviso, and Fortunatus went off on a pilgrimage to Gaul, never to return to Italy.

While Fortunatus and Felix were still studying in Ravenna, they had suffered from an eye disease. Together, they went to the Church of Saint John and Paul where they appealed to the altar of Saint Martin, whose intercession was often sought for eye cures. On the altar was a burning lamp and a vial of heated oil. By rubbing some of this oil on their eyes, their eyes were suddenly soothed and their vision cleared.

In his Vita s. Martini, Fortunatus recounted this miracle as his reason for dedicating his pilgrimage through Gaul to Saint Martin of Tours. Fortunatus, although educated, was apparently not of a high-born family and his career in the Church may have been limited in Italy. Perhaps he realized that he would not gain a bishopric like his friend Felix, so, he decided to try his fortune abroad. His opportunities may have seemed greater in the more wide-open world north of the Alps.

Fortunatus wrote a letter to Felix to tell him about the long journey through barbarian lands into Merovingian Gaul. His letter to Felix exists now only as a fragment.<sup>45</sup> Reading this letter plus a letter from Fortunatus to Gregory of Tours describing the same journey, we can follow Fortunatus on his pilgrimage from Ravenna, through the Alps, across the Danube, and up the Rhine into the Merovingian kingdoms of Gaul. Like the ancients' marches into Gaul,<sup>46</sup> the route of Fortunatus curved along the river beds and through the mountain passes.

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<sup>45</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. VII, XIII: 185. This letter fragment to Felix is a good example of Fortunatus' hyperbolic phrasing. The opening praised Felix' high position as Bishop as well as recollecting their friendship. "Ardua Pierio cui constant culmina fastu, vix humili valeo tangere claustra manu. Sed quoniam patriae fuit aula sodalibus una adfectu fidens pulso, benign, fores." "I can barely strike with a timid hand at the door of one who is of lofty Parnassus [Pieris is father of the Muses]. But because we were in the same brotherhood and for a long time confidant in our friendship, I am moved, dear friend."

<sup>46</sup>Julius Caesar (102-44 B.C.) and Hadrian (76-138 A.D.) left written records of their journeys through the Alps into Gaul. Tacitus (c. 56-c. 115) did not describe his journey into Germany in particular detail but wrote extensively about the peoples of the region.

Fortunatus identified a dominant Germanic natione with each river region.

...from Ravenna it is in crossing the Po, the Adige, the Brenta, the Piave, the Livensa, the Tagliamento, it is in climbing the peaks of the Julian Alps, crossing their steepest passages, it is in crossing the northern Drave, into the land of the people [Breunes] of the upper Inn, the Bavarians of the Lech, the Danube of the Alamani, crossing over to the Germans of the Rhine, then the Moselle, the Meuse, the Aisne, and the Seine, the Loire, and the Garonne, and the great torrents carrying down snow in July from the Pyrenees... that I write.<sup>47</sup>

Fortunatus told Gregory of Tours about the physical conditions under which he wrote his verses and letters when Bishop Gregory asked him to circulate his writings among Gregory's circle of friends. Enduring the fatigue of horseback, high water, and occasional over-indulgence, Fortunatus felt that his verse-making was too unsteady.

It is in the middle of [these travel adventures], sometimes shaken by my horse, sometimes half asleep, that I composed my verses. During this long voyage across barbarian lands, fatigued from the walk when I was not heavy with wine under a glacial coldness, inspired by a Muse sometimes frozen, sometimes overheated, like new Orpheus I sang to the echoes in the forest, and the forest sent back my songs.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. I, Prologue: 46. "...de Ravenna progrediens Padum, Atesim, Brintam, Piavem, Lipientiam, Teliamentumque tranans, per Alpem Juliam pendulus montanis anfractibus, Drauum Norico, OEnuum Breunis, Liccam Bajuaria, Danuvium Alamannia, Rhenum Germania transiens, ac post Mosellam, Mosam, Axonam et Sequanam, Ligerem et Garonnam, Aquitaniae maxima fluenta, transmittens, Pyrenaeis occurrens Julio mense nivosis...conscripserim."

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., "Paene aut equitando aut dormitando consecripserim; ubi inter barbaros longo tractu gradiens, aut via fessus aut crapula, brumale sub frigore, Musa hortante nescio gelide magis an ebria, novus Orpheus lyricus silvae voces dabam, silva reddebat."

Once in Gaul, in 565 or 566, Fortunatus first found hospitality at the households of the Austrasian nobles including Gogon, Sigismond and his brother Alagisile, Lupus and his brother Magnulfe, Duke Bodegisile and his wife Palatina, and, at the courts of King Sigibert, son of Clothar, in Metz and Rheims. The scholar Dom J. Laporte dates Fortunatus' arrival earlier than the 565 or 566 date used by Rene Aigrain and M. A. Lucchi. According to Laporte, Fortunatus left Ravenna in the fall of 563 or the spring of 564, arrived in Tours by the end of the year 564, traveled as far as the Pyrenees in the spring of 564, and returned to Bordeaux and Poitiers for the winter before attending Sigibert and Brunhilde's wedding in the Austrasian kingdom in 566.<sup>49</sup>

In brief, the difficulties with these dates are due to the uncertainty of the date for Fortunatus' departure from Italy, and, to Laporte's belief that certain letters from Fortunatus, Opera Poetica VI, 10 for example, predate the Austrasian wedding. Although the Sigibert and Brunhilde nuptials mark a verifiable date for Fortunatus' presence in Gaul, Laporte's chronology provides a better framework for Fortunatus' trip to

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<sup>49</sup>J. Laporte, "Le royaume de Paris dans l'oeuvre hagiographique de Fortunat," Etude Mérovingiennes (Paris: Picard, 1953): 169-177. In this article highlighting the Paris region in Fortunatus' writing, Laporte presents his evidence for the wider issue of Fortunatus' itinerary. Compare with the chronologies in: René Aigrain, Vie de Sainte Radegonde, (Paris: Bloud, 1924), 11; M. A. Lucchi, Vie de Venantius Fortunatus ome, 1786-87) trans. Eugene Rittier in Charles Nisard, Poésies Méléés (Paris: Didot, 1887), 8.

the Pyrenees and the establishment of his relations with Tours and Poitiers.

Fortunatus, a more ceremonial kin to the troubadours of later centuries, returned hospitality with courtly verses in honor of his noble hosts. Fortunatus' panegyrics for the Frankish courts "created an idealized portrait of a Merovingian king with all the virtues and characteristics of a Roman emperor."<sup>50</sup> The delivery of these commemorative verses as a part of court occasions contributed to the Merovingians' sense of themselves as sovereign rulers. The phrases were as lofty as air and filled with vague, but high sounding, images of an imperial relationship between the king and his nobles, soldiers, citizens, and subjects, as well as an alliance between the kings and Catholic Church. Although their genres differed, Fortunatus' portrayal of Merovingian politics in court poetry matched the political life described in the Historia Francorum by Gregory of Tours.

In 566, one of the first celebrations Fortunatus attended at court was the spring wedding of King Sigibert and the Visigothic princess, Brunhilde. Of Clothar's sons, Sigibert was the first to make a marriage with another natione. His brothers had married either other Germanic nobles or commoner concubines. Because we have Fortunatus' romantic story of Galswintha,

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<sup>50</sup>Brian Brennan, "The Image of the Frankish Kings in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus," Journal of Medieval History 10 (1984): 1. Brennan examines Fortunatus' role as a provider of poetic trappings for the noble households he visited as well as Fortunatus' poetics.

Brunhilde's sister, and her wedding procession from Spain through Gaul to marry Sigibert's brother Chilperic two years later,<sup>51</sup> we know that Brunhilde's earlier gaudy procession into Gaul would have dazzled the impressionable Franks. Sigibert and Brunhilde's wedding was such a grand occasion, attracting nobles from the four Frankish kingdoms, that it is possible that Fortunatus may have seen Queen Radegunde at this time. This was, however, the same year Radegunde's brother was murdered and she may have already withdrawn to her estate at Saix. Radegunde, like Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus, was loyal to Brunhilde's faction during the following years. Perhaps the Austrasian wedding dazzled Fortunatus, too; he wrote a glittering epithalamium for the wedding in which Sigibert and Brunhilde are fated to meet through the designs of Cupid and Venus.<sup>52</sup>

The correspondence between Fortunatus and some of the Frank nobles tells more about the poet's day to day life. He traveled through Gaul staying in their households in exchange for his poetry and, even more likely, for his banquet table tales about travel and empire. Writing to Sigismund and Alagisile, Fortunatus thanked the brothers for befriending him.

After I left Italy, it was the Rhine which sent family to me; with the arrival of these two brothers I am no longer a wanderer stranger.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. VI, V: 158-163.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., I: 151-154.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Bk. VII, XXI: 189. "Post Italas terras mittis mihi, Rhene, parentes; adventu fratrum non peregrinus ero."

Many of the poet's letters thanked his hosts for meals or for particular foods, often describing the food's presentation, or sauces and condiments, and sometimes describing the food's effect on his stomach or his spirit. Gogon invited Fortunatus to a banquet. In a letter he wrote to Gogon that same evening, Fortunatus showed his appreciation for the dinner with a detailed critique.

You go beyond [my compatriot] Apicius: you satiated me with lovely language and nourished me with good morsels. But I ask for mercy: my stomach is stuffed with beef; I must calm myself. The mixture of beef with some of the other meats would give me a stomach ache. Where beef is placed, there is no place, for me, neither for goose or for chicken; they will take flight. In the battle between horns and feathers the part[s] will not be equal. Meanwhile, weighted down by sleepiness, my eyes close; the weakness of these verses themselves prove that I am already asleep.<sup>54</sup>

Apparently Gogon was not certain if he should feel praised or insulted by Fortunatus' letter. Fortunatus had to explain himself and apologize for his unfamiliar tone in a second letter to Gogon in which Fortunatus explained his views on the ties between food and friendship. Fortunatus often used images of food and sharing food with friends to signify friendship and

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<sup>54</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. VII, II: 176. "Tu noster Apicius extas: Hinc satias verbis, pascis et inde cibis. Sed modo da veniam: bubla turgente quiesco, nam fit lis uteri, si caro mixta fremat. Illic, ubi bos recubat, fugiet, puto, pullus et anser: Cornibus et pinnis non furor aequus erit. Et modo jam somno languentia lumina claudio: Nam dormire meum carmina lenta probant."

Note that Fortunatus refers to the Roman M. Gavius Apicius, the epicure and recipe author who was a contemporary of Seneca. His edited collection of recipes: De Re Coquinaria (Schuch, 1874).



devotion beyond food's physical necessity. As he wrote to Gogon about this same feast:

The fruit[s] of friendship live in the hearts of those who cultivate them.<sup>==</sup>

In the nearly three hundred letters Fortunatus wrote in Gaul he expressed his gratitude to many people for a great variety of gifts and services. He wrote his appreciation to Gregory of Tours for a book and for new leather sandals, to Bishop Villicus of Metz and King Sigibert for helping him recover the boat that the King's cook had stolen, to Placidine for his stay in a villa on the Bordeaux coast, and to Sigoalde for donating food to the poor. He complimented Cantus Blandus on his fruit orchards, thanking him for apples and cuttings from his trees, and, he praised Queen Ultrogothe for her rose garden, thanking her for a vine-stock of white grapes.

Fortunatus' most frequent donors, especially after 567, were the Abbess Agnes and the patron Radegunde of Sainte Croix. He composed a body of poetry, opusculi or bagatelles as he called them, in honor of their gifts: on sharing the strength of wine; a hand woven basket of chestnuts; fresh milk and delicacies made with honey; new white eggs and dark ripe plums; evening feasts with friends; and intimate dinner celebrations together.

During Fortunatus' years in Gaul, including the years before he entered the monastery in Poltiers, he wrote many

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<sup>==</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. VII, III: 176. "Fructus amicitiae corde colente manet."

official letters associated with clerical duties and political influence to nobles and other churchmen. Among these letters are two appeals for justice on behalf of two young women: one to redeem a girl accused of theft and sold into slavery; the other to release a girl imprisoned in Tours because her father could not pay his taxes.<sup>56</sup> Fortunatus' extant correspondence includes letters addressed to each of the Merovingian kings, their queens and nobles, and most of the Merovingian bishops. Fortunatus seemed to attract patrons wherever he went. In the early years his letters do not seem to have a fixed axis of influence. He wrote in the interest of various kings, bishops, or nobles including King Sigibert, Bishop Eufronius of Tours, Bishop Germanus of Paris, Duke Bodegisile, even King Chilperic and Queen Fredegunde.

Once Fortunatus joined the Sainte Marie monastery in Poitiers and established himself as the agens for the Sainte Croix nunnery, his letters in the interest of Radegunde and her community centered on the sphere of activities encircling the affairs of Tours and the Austrasian kingdom of Sigibert and his heirs. When he decided to stay in Poitiers with Radegunde's community, he wrote separately to Bishop Gregory of Tours and Bishop Germanus of Paris explaining why he would no longer be with their episcopal communities, and he wrote a similar letter addressed ad diversos.

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<sup>56</sup>See Opera Poetica, Bk. V, XIV: 143; Bk. X, XII: 247.

I, Fortunatus, greet you humbly. Gaul keeps a child of Italy at her breast; he lives in Poitiers where once Saint Hilary was born...I had no other desire than to visit Saint Martin's tomb: Radegunde asked me to stay here [not to return to Italy] and I will stay...I will do what they want because they have the same affection for me. Even if I go away from here, should I see other [dwellings] and my body be far away, yet I will not leave this place. Here I will be whole, not tearing myself away from either my heart or my spirit.<sup>57</sup>

Despite Fortunatus' dedication to his tasks as "intendant de Saint Croix" and to Radegunde as his "administratrice," the poet-priest's letters show that his "humeur voyageuse" resulted in several trips through the kingdom after he settled in Poitiers.<sup>58</sup> After 570, Fortunatus traveled to the Austrasian region, including a pilgrimage to Agaune. In 580, he went to Berny-Rivière in connection with Chilperic and Fredegunde's trial of Gregory of Tours. Fortunatus also went to Metz in 585 to pay homage to Childebert II and the Queen-Mother Brunhilde. In between these trips, his letters are evidence for other trips that he made to Paris, Nantes, and Angers. Probably during the

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<sup>57</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. VIII, I-II: 197-198.

"Fortunatus ego hinc humili prece voce saluto. Italiae genitum Gallica rura tenent; Pictavis residens, qua sanctus Hilarius olim natus in urbe fuit...Martinum cupiens voto Radegundis adhaesi...Obsequar ambobus, sunt quia corde pares. Nec tamen hinc abeo, quamvis nova tecta videbo: Corpore discedo nec tamen hinc abeo. Hic ego totus ero, nec corde ac mente revellor; sic quoque dum redeo, hic ego totus ero."

<sup>58</sup>René Aigrain describes Fortunatus' duties as an administrator for Sainte Croix in Sainte Radegonde (Paris: Lecoffre, 1918), 88-108.

years of his bishopric in Poitiers, Fortunatus journeyed to Maine and Avranches.<sup>59</sup>

Even before Fortunatus worked as part of the Poitiers religious community, his writing showed signs of a vocation among women. His stories about these other women add dimension to Fortunatus' understanding of Radegunde's story as a displaced queen. His sympathy for the exiled Queen Ultrogothe, the murdered queen-bride Galswintha, the repudiated Queen Theudechilde, and the episcopal wives Placidine and Baudegunde seemed to preface the feelings Fortunatus expressed in his touching essays about the inner life of the Sainte Croix nuns.<sup>60</sup>

In a sequence of narrative segments in Book IV of the Historia Francorum, Bishop Gregory grouped the stories of Ultrogothe, Theudechilde, and Galswintha around the theme of what became of unwanted queens, particularly those queens who threatened the position of their rival wives. Gregory of Tours' history placed the stories of these unfortunate women in their political and social context; Fortunatus wrote them letters of friendship and comfort.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>For a pairing of these journeys and the letters associated with them, read: J. Laporte, "Le royaume de Paris dans l'oeuvre hagiographique de Fortunat," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris: Picard, 1953): 171.

<sup>60</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, "De Virginitate" and "Ad Virgines," Bk. VIII, III-IV: 199-207.

<sup>61</sup>Ultrogothe's story is in Historia Francorum, Bk. IV, 20: 215-216; Fortunatus' letter to Ultrogothe, Opera Poetica, Bk. VI, VI: 165. Theudechilde's story in Historia Francorum, Bk. IV, 26: 219-221; Fortunatus' letter to Theudechilde, Opera Poetica, Bk. IV, XXV: 121.

Ultrogothe's husband, King Childebert, died in Paris in 558 after a long illness. Clothar I seized Childebert's kingdom, with Paris as its capital, along with its treasury. Clothar exiled Ultrogothe and her daughters. According to Fortunatus' letter to Ultrogothe, she and her two daughters led devout lives full of prayers and good works in Paris. Their exemplary lives may have gained them some episcopal support for leniency in their dealings with Clothar. Clothar's usual practice with family widows was to take them into his own house as he did with Guntheaca, widow of his brother Clodomer, and, Vuldetrada, widow of one of his nephews. Another incident in the family's past may have affected Clothar's decision; Childebert and Ultrogothe, who had no sons, took in the boy Gundovald who was the son of Clothar and an unrecognized concubine.

Theudechilde's fate was more harsh than Ultrogothe's. Theudechilde was the fourth wife of Clothar's son Charibert I (561-567). When Charibert died, she sent messengers to King Guntram proposing she be his wife. He accepted her offer and her treasure; then, giving her only a small portion as an endowment, he sent her to a nunnery in Arles. Theudechilde sent another secret message, this time to an unnamed Goth, promising this Goth her remaining wealth if he would take her to Spain and marry her. While making her escape, the Abbess caught her. The Abbess ordered Theudechilde to be beaten and locked into a cell where she suffered until she died. Because there were two Merovingian women named Theudechilde in two generations, there

is some question whether Fortunatus wrote to Theuderic I's daughter, or to Charibert I's fourth wife.<sup>42</sup>

Brunhilde's sister, the Visigothic princess Galswintha, lived out the cruelest destiny of all. Chilperic's marriage to Galswintha was inspired by Chilperic's desire to imitate the rank of his brother Sigibert's marriage to Brunhilde. Galswintha's marriage made her the enemy of Chilperic's second wife, the extraordinarily canny commoner, Queen Fredegunde. Such parallel marriages between royal families were not unusual among the dynastic unions of the sixth century and they sometimes made peace between their kingdoms. This particular double inter-nationes union, however, soon flooded the Merovingian kingdoms with jealousy, intrigue, murder, and warfare. Fredegunde, like a true Merovingian monarch whose sovereignty was at risk, had her rival murdered. When Chilperic could no longer satisfy Fredegunde by insulting Galswintha, Fredegunde and Chilperic conspired to have their agents garrot Galswintha in her bed.

Fortunatus wrote the story of Princess Galswintha as a stirring romance for the nuns of Sainte Croix. Fortunatus' romantic tale for the nuns was also consistent with the politics of the nunnery in aligning itself with Sigibert and Brunhilde's

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<sup>42</sup>According to the text notes, p. 127-128, in Nisard's edition of Fortunatus' letters, Nisard attributes this letter to Theudechilde, daughter of Theuderic I. However, from the existing genealogies, there is no evidence that this daughter became a queen and Fortunatus clearly addressed his epitaph to the Queen Theudechilde.

interests. Two years before Galswintha's marriage, Fortunatus had watched and written about the flamboyant marriage of Brunhilde and King Sigibert. Fortunatus' story about Galswintha's wedding voyage from Toledo, through Poitiers, to Soissons and her wedding-bed murder at the hands of her husband Chilperic and his concubine Fredegunde, justified much of the brutal rivalry between the realm of Brunhilde and Sigibert, and, the realm of Fredegunde and Chilperic.

Toledo sent a pair of girls to you, Gaul, twin towers:  
one is left standing, the other broken and fallen.<sup>63</sup>

Throughout the kingdoms in the years following Galswintha's murder, political alignment coincided with loyalties exacted from the supporters of either Queen Brunhilde or Queen Fredegunde. Their volatile feudal politics ignited with Fredegunde's involvement in the assassination of Sigibert in 575. This deadly enmity between Brunhilde and Fredegunde colored the years of the foundation and the activities of the Sainte Croix nunnery.

Fortunatus' letter to Placidine, wife of the Bishop Leonce II of Bordeaux, told about an experience that was especially meaningful in shaping his life among the nuns of Sainte Croix. When he was on a religious retreat seeking relics, Fortunatus went to a group of islands at the mouth of the Gironde River where solitary monks lived in caves. The monks' isolation and

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<sup>63</sup>Fortunatus, *Opera Poetica*, Bk. VI, V: 158.  
"Toletus geminas misit tibi, Gallia, turre:  
Prima stante quidem, fracta secunda jacet."

devotion attracted Fortunatus to their islands. By chance, a sea storm carried Fortunatus' ship away from those islands and toward Placidine's seaside villa.

In place of the austere and solitary retreat he had envisioned on the coastal islands, Fortunatus discovered a very different religious setting during his stay in the household of Placidine's villa. Because of Bishop Léonce's episcopal duties, this household was abandoned to women, and, in this atmosphere, Fortunatus found a chaste life dominated by gentle, aristocratic manners.

It is a gift of the fury of the ocean's waves that I give you homage; for as I longed for and was impatient to know these shores, the unchained ocean, lifted up by the north wind, pushed me back on the open sea. And yet, because the good fortune you bring to others showed itself in all its plenty, you offered to me in your land what I had vainly demanded of the sea.<sup>64</sup>

The earthly order that Fortunatus appreciated during his sojourn at the Bordeaux villa reappeared in Fortunatus' life as a member of the Poitiers religious community. Later, when he went on another island retreat, Fortunatus sent the following message back to Agnes and Radegunde under the care of his companion

Simplicius:

We visited an island separated from the land by a whirlpool...For me, if I stayed in a town without you, even

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<sup>64</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. I, XVII: 57. "Fluctibus e mediis ut haec daret insula vobis, oceanus tumidas murmure pressit aquas. Quae loca dum volui properans agnoscere ponti, a Borea veniens reppulit unda furens; prosperitas ut vestra tamen se plena probaret, obtulit in terris quod peteretur aquis."



in the middle of thousands of inhabitants, I would be alone.<sup>65</sup>

The views of the Sainte Croix nuns on their own rightful position in Merovingian society made up a part of Fortunatus' collected works. In two long essays entitled "De Virginitate"<sup>66</sup> and "Ad Virgines"<sup>67</sup> there was a sense of what the nuns experienced in their own lives as well as a sense of how they reconciled their own experiences with the expectations of the virginity ideal. Fortunatus expressed a deep understanding of the ways that virgin monasticism rationalized and contrasted with marriage obligations for sixth century women.

Joyous Virginity, there are no number of words, be they sounded by one hundred mouths at once, which can give its righteous ideal. And foremost, [Virginity's] luster is without stain and it is because she guards in all its purity her costly gift that the whole world holds her precious. She protects this precious and perfect richness of her body, keeping out and not thinking about those who would be the thieves of her eternal wealth. She is never encumbered by swollen entrails enclosing an imprisoned embryo nor does she lay sad and crushed under this gravid burden.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Fortunatus, *Opera Poetica*, App., XXIV: 280-281. "Pergimus inclusas a gurgite cernere terras...Ast ego vel si qua sine vobis urbe tenerer, Inter multa tamen milia solus eram."

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., Bk. VIII, III, 199-206.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., III: 206-207.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., III: 205.

Virginitas felix, nullis aequanda loquellis,  
Nec si centenus suppleat ora sonus!  
Quod Prius est: sine sorde nitet venerabilis orbi,  
Naturae proprium non vitiando bonum,  
Corporis inlaesum servans pretiosa talentum,  
Perpetuas retinens nexcia furis opes.  
Non premit incluso torpentia viscera fetu,  
Aut gravefacta jacet pignore maesta suo.

As the confessor for the Sainte Croix nuns, Fortunatus may have heard slanted sentiments from some of the members of the community. For the nuns to tell their confessor what he wanted to hear, or, for the confessor to hear what he wanted the nuns to say would have been understandable considering the Rules of male and female monastic life. Choosing the isolated and severe life of monastic virginity would certainly not have been an easy choice even in those times when childbearing was so threatening to a woman's life.

Radegunde's own impressions may have been more complex than the images of saintly chastity which Fortunatus projected in the Liber I. She was married to Clothar I for more than ten years, from about 540 to perhaps as late as 556. He helped her build her nunnery at Poitiers in 559-560 and he tried to make her return to him as his queen at least twice before she enforced strict enclosure for Sainte Croix under the bishops' protection in 567. Radegunde must have given at least a slightly different version of marriage to the nuns. In Baudonivia's book marriage was a sweetness to be overcome, not a bitter condition easily avoided.

The king wanted her back again. He was so deeply grieved by sorrowful suffering that he had let so good a queen leave him that he felt no desire to live unless he could bring her back again. Hearing this, the saint...martyred her delicate body with a more harsh hair shirt and greater

tortures...she surmounted the sweetness of marriage, keeping out the love of the world.<sup>69</sup>

Another Merovingian nun named Berthegunde expressed a very different view from Fortunatus' about the demands that nunnery life placed on a woman's life. Berthegunde's experiences with the religious life, even as related by an unsympathetic Bishop Gregory, showed the irreconcilable differences between the real pattern of women's lives and the expectations of virgin monasticism as Fortunatus described it.

Berthegunde was married to a man of Poitiers and she had two children. Her mother Ingiltrude founded a nunnery in Tours at about the same time Radegunde established Sainte Croix. Berthegunde's brother Bertram was the Bishop of Bordeaux. Over the years Berthegunde went from her home to the nunnery, to her brother the bishop's household, back to her own home, to her mother's nunnery, and back to her own home. She was obviously in much conflict between the requests of her mother to enter the nunnery "because no married woman can enter heaven," and the demands of her husband to come home because "no woman who leaves her husband shall ever see the kingdom of God," and the encouragement of her brother to live separately in his household "because you married without your parents' consent."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Baudonivia, *Vita*, 380, ln. 32-33; 381, ln. 1-5. "...rex iterum vellet accipere, se dolens gravi damno pati, qui talem reginam permississet a latere suo discedere, et nisi eam reciperet, penitus vivere non optaret. Haec audiens beatissima...se amplius cruciandam tradidit cilicio asperrimo ac tenero corpori aptavit...vicit dulcedinem coniugis, exclusit caritatem mundialem."

<sup>70</sup>Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, Bk. IX, 33: 519.

Gregory of Tours wrote down two contrasting statements from two periods in her life. The Bishop portrayed Berthegeunde as ill-fitted for nunnery life. Berthegeunde's statements more strongly indicated how nunnery life ill-fitted a woman's life.

When Berthegeunde entered the nunnery at Tours she told her husband: "'Go back home and look after the children, for I don't propose to return with you. No one who is married will ever see the Kingdom of Heaven.'" When she left the nunnery, she said,

"What a fool I have been to listen to the advice of my stupid mother! Now my husband has left me and I am cut off from my children! How unhappy I am! Where shall I go, and what shall I do?"<sup>71</sup>

Berthegeunde's experience had little to do with the state of virginity Fortunatus described with so much heartfelt feeling for the nuns of Sainte Croix.

On behalf of Sainte Croix, Fortunatus solidified special ties between the Poitiers nunnery and the bishopric of Tours. This special relationship between Poitiers and Tours was based on Radegunde's alliance with Bishop Eufronius of Tours (d. 573) who installed the True Cross relic in her nunnery and on the close friendships of Fortunatus, Eufronius, and Eufronius' successor, Gregory. During Fortunatus' pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Martin of Tours, Fortunatus and Gregory became personal friends who apparently admired each other and appreciated each other's writing. They agreed to work together

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<sup>71</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 33: 520.

in the interests of the religious communities of Tours and Poitiers.

...Bishop Gregory, when you asked me so urgently to openly make known these small written pieces of mine, I was astonished that my trifles won your praise...invoking the splendid virtues of the most blessed Martin, exhorting me to put aside my modesty and produce for the public...It is good that you require that I give up to you what I have refused to make known to others, I yield to your virtue. ... I implore you that these works come out of friendship alone and are for yourself only, or, to bring only to the ears of your closest group of friends.<sup>72</sup>

After Radegunde's death, her glorious memory was somewhat tarnished in public because many nuns crossed the forbidden convent walls in protest of their neglect by Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers and in revolt against the ignoble, impoverished conditions under the Abbess Leubovera. As a result, the financially weakened nunnery needed to attract more nuns and more endowments.

Fortunatus wrote a series of letters to Bishop Gregory of Tours asking for his intervention in the Sainte Croix nuns' troubles with Bishop Maroveus and the Abbess Leubovera.<sup>73</sup> In one letter, he asked Gregory to intercede directly in their affairs for the sake of Gregory's niece Justine who then served as the Prioress of Sainte Croix.

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<sup>72</sup>Venantius Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. I, Prologue: 46, 47. "...papa Gregori, quia viritim flagitas, ut quaedam ex opusculis inperitiae meae tibi transferenda proferrem, nugarum mearum admiror te amore seduci... divini mysterii et splendore virtutum beatissimi Martini conjurans hortaris sedulo, ut contra pudorem meum deducar in publicum...quod aliis poscentibus patefacere distuli, oboediendo cedo virtuti...aut tibi tantummodo innotescentia relegas, aut intimorum auribus tecum amicaliter, quaeso, conlatura committas."

<sup>73</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. VIII, XII-XVIII: 209-211.

The nuns needed the sanction of a bishop and they needed to promote their patron's cult by using texts. Fortunatus' hagiography of Radegunde, as well as the later hagiography by Baudonivia, kept alive Saint Radegunde's power to attract women to nunnery life. The additional endowments from new nuns made that cloistered life possible for the whole community. "The Vitae served to recommend the saint's influence as a mediator for her earthly clients and to warn the predatory against provoking a powerful protectress."<sup>74</sup>

For about ten years after Radegunde's death, Fortunatus continued his monastic life in Poitiers. In 597, Fortunatus was named Bishop of Poitiers and held this office until his death in 610. Fortunatus had succeeded Bishop Plato, who, like Fortunatus, was a friend of Bishop Gregory and a member of the episcopal faction centered in Tours. During the years Fortunatus was Bishop of Poitiers, Dedimia was the Abbess of Sainte Croix and Baudonivia was a scribe at the nunnery. Baudonivia wrote her Book about Radegunde's life while Fortunatus had the oversight of her community.

By writing the Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber I, Fortunatus helped to promote the reputation of the Sainte Croix community. That his glorified version left something out was expressed in Baudonivia's opening words in the Liber II. Some of the matters that Baudonivia wrote about required a friendly bishop.

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<sup>74</sup>JoAnn McNamara, "Hagiography and Nunneries in Merovingian Gaul," Women of the Medieval World, eds., Julius Kirshner and Suzanne Wemple (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 38.

## CHAPTER V

## BAUDONIVIA AND THE SEPARATED LIFE

Frequently she would say sweetly, in a manner none could understand: "Anyone who has the care of souls must be sore afraid of praise from everyone."  
(Baudonivia, c. 600)

At the bidding of her Abbess Dedimia,<sup>1</sup> Baudonivia was moved to take on the task of writing the Vita Sanctae Rade Gundis, Liber II, even though Baudonivia believed "the work you have imposed on me is as impossible for me as to touch heaven with my fingers."<sup>2</sup> The Abbess commissioned Baudonivia to write the second Book in order to revive the power of their patron saint.

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<sup>1</sup>Dedimia was the third Abbess of Sainte Croix, following Agnes and Leubovera. After Dedimia the line of abbesses is lost until an obscure mention in a manuscript of Berne about a Saint Baldegonde who was Abbess of Sainte Croix in the course of the seventh century. An article by René Algrain traces the manuscript references to the Abbess Baldegonde: René Algrain, "Une Abbess mal connue de Sainte-Croix de Poitiers," Bulletin philologique et historique, (1946-1947): 197-202. The next known Abbess is Gerberga in 814-840. Gerberga was Abbess when the Empress Judith, second wife of Louis the Pious, sought refuge at Sainte Croix after she was accused of taking a Spanish lover at court.

<sup>2</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, "Prologue," 377. "Inilungitis mihi opus agere non minus impossibile, quam sit digito caelum tangere."

Sainte Croix needed to reestablish its reputation after the damages of the revolt of a faction of the nuns in 590 and the verdict of the bishops at the rebel nuns' trial in 591. The verdict placed Sainte Croix under the jurisdiction of the inimical Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers. Because the community felt there was something missing from the Liber I by Fortunatus, Baudonivia wrote in the "Prologue" of the Liber II, "we will speak of what Fortunatus omitted."<sup>3</sup> From the beginning of her Book, Baudonivia raised matters of concern for the Sainte Croix community that were glossed over in Liber I.

Baudonivia was an excellent choice to write such a history because Baudonivia lived within the walls of Sainte Croix from her infancy until her death.<sup>4</sup> There was never a time in Baudonivia's life when she did not know Radegunde, the Abbess Agnes, Fortunatus, and Gregory of Tours. She grew up amidst the bonds between Sainte Croix and the Bishop Gregory of Tours, and, amidst the friction between Sainte Croix and Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers. Baudonivia's text tells us that while she was writing her Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Fortunatus was the Bishop of Poitiers (597-610). With a friend as their Bishop, Abbess Dedimia and her scribe Baudonivia dared "to seize hold and bind

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<sup>3</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, "Prologue," ln. 3: 378. "...sed ea quae prolixitate praetermisit, sicut ipse in libro suo disseruit."

<sup>4</sup>Although there was a dictum in the Rule of Saint Caesarius that prohibited the nuns from giving foster care to infants, this practice was wide-spread in spite of prohibitions because the need for such care was so great.



closely the precious rewards of [Radegunde's] famous works."<sup>5</sup>  
 Acknowledging the sixth-century economy between acts of sanctity and the real wealth of estate revenues, Bishop Gregory of Tours warned the rebel nuns before their trial, "What Saint Radegunde built up by her fasts and never ending prayers and constant acts of charity must not now be dispersed in this wanton way."<sup>6</sup>

The most telling narrative detail among the Radegunde texts is whether or not the writer included a retelling of the revolt of the Sainte Croix nuns in 590-591. Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia were closely involved in the revolt and the trial. During the events of the revolt and the trial, King Gunthram, King Childebert II, ten Bishops in Council, and six other bishops who were appointed as the nuns' judges, focused their authority on the Sainte Croix nunnery.<sup>7</sup> Gregory's Historia described these events at great length in terms of ecclesiastical policy and judicial decisions: "When we have put things right, you must all go back to your convent."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, "Prologue," ln. 19-20: 377.

"...inpeni muneris de eius claro opere, etsi non plene, vel ex parte complexa perstringerem."

<sup>6</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 39: 526.

<sup>7</sup>The Bishops in Council with Kings Gunthram and Childebert II who answered Bishop Gundegisel's letter about the injuries he and his attendant clergy, Nicasius and Safarius, received during the revolt of the Sainte Croix nuns were: Aetherius of Lisleux, Syagrius of Autun, Aunacharius of Auxerre, Hesychius of Grenoble, Agricola of Nevers, Urbicus of Riez, Felix of Chalons-sur-Marne, Veranus of Cavallion, the second Felix of Belley, and Bertram of Le Mans. The Bishop-Judges appointed by Gunthram and Childebert were: Gundegisel of Bordeaux, Nicasius of Angouleme, Safarius of Perigueux, Maroveus of Poitiers, Gregory of Tours, Ebregeisel of Cologne.

<sup>8</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 38: 526.

Baudonivia wrote about the silence and fear of her whole community in the face of so much power against them: "Not only did we not desire to speak out, but were truly afraid of what has been put upon us."<sup>9</sup> Fortunatus' Liber I made no reference to either the revolt or the trial of the Sainte Croix nuns.

Fortunatus also did not write about the occasions when Clothar and his forces tried to take Radegunde back to the Frankish court. Fortunatus' most glaring omission was the lack of any description of the installation of the True Cross relic. He did not mention the mission King Sigibert and Radegunde sent to Constantinople to seek out the relic, or the tense episcopal and royal politics surrounding that Easter ceremony, or the triumphant processional of the True Cross--for which he wrote the great anthem Vexilla Regis.<sup>10</sup> Instead, he included two chapters of vivid details about the rigors of Radegunde's Easter fasts and her mortifications of the flesh.<sup>11</sup>

Fortunatus did write a series of letters to Gregory of Tours requesting his help in "this evil which has penetrated the sacred circle of the walls of our community...Please remember your niece Justina, your pious servant, and intercede for me, you

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<sup>9</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, "Prologue," 377. "...tales non solum per se aliquid dicere appetunt, verum etiam, si quid eis iniunctum fuerit, pertimescunt."

<sup>10</sup>Translation of the Vexilla Regis: Philip Allen and Howard M. Jones. The Romanesque Lyric (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1928), 146-147.

<sup>11</sup>Fortunatus, Liber II, Bks. 22, 25: 371, 372-373.

who are our father and our authority."<sup>12</sup> Either Fortunatus wrote the Liber I during the years between Radegunde's death in 587 and the nun's revolt in 590-591, or, he chose to omit the scandalous episode from his story of Saint Radegunde. There is no record of Gregory of Tours' response to Fortunatus' letters about the Sainte Croix revolt. Bishop Gregory's response to Fortunatus may have encouraged his "fear of prolixity"<sup>13</sup> and urged him to be most circumspect because we read no more from Fortunatus about the matter.

Strictly speaking, the nuns' revolt was not a part of Radegunde's life; the revolt was, however, the most shattering occurrence in Radegunde's community since she founded Sainte Croix in 567. Fortunatus was too intimate a friend, as well as the confessor to Sainte Croix, to be ignorant of this staggering event in the life of the community. Perhaps his omissions "for fear of prolixity" were committed more in the interests of Church authority or his own career. Fortunatus took his vows late in life and he kept them without disturbing his easeful life. His clerical obedience was intact after the nuns' revolt.

Over the years, Fortunatus' "fear of prolixity" was rewarded; he was invested Bishop of Poitiers. Bishop Maroveus died soon after the verdict that placed Sainte Croix under his

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<sup>12</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, Bk. VIII, XII: 209; XIII: 210. "Resit quale nefas intra pia saepta synaxi!...Justinam famulam pietate memento, beate; per te et commender, stirpe vel arce pater..."

<sup>13</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 34, ln. 31: 376. "...ne fastidiatur ubertas, nec reputetur brevissimum..."

control, and, in the years following the trial, the nunnery gained bishops who were allies of Gregory of Tours: first, Bishop Plato, a former archdeacon of Gregory of Tours; then, Bishop Fortunatus.<sup>14</sup> The nuns of Sainte Croix had gained friendly bishops but they had lost their independent institution.

Baudonivia protested that the Vita Dedimia wanted written "should be given to the one among us with the best font of eloquence." Baudonivia's writing has always suffered the comparison with Fortunatus' flowing style from the source editors through the centuries, but, in the following passage, Baudonivia made as poetic an allusion to Fortunatus as he could have written himself.

It should be given to the one among us with the best font of eloquence so that it might be unfolded, by whomever undertook it, watered most copiously with song.<sup>15</sup>

She alluded to Fortunatus' well known fondness for drink and the banquet table "eloquence" this "font" often inspired. She identified his musical talents in combination with his tendency to over-indulge himself by saying that his writing would be

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<sup>14</sup>Bishop Gregory owed much to his Archdeacon Plato. Plato had once been arrested, "loaded down with chains, and paraded before the Queen [Fredegunde], fettered and in their underclothes" because of his support of Bishop Gregory. Gregory was on trial himself for having slandered the Queen. She accused him of having started the rumor that Bishop Bertram of Bordeaux was her lover. Gregory's trial was presided over by Bishop Bertram and Gregory was barely acquitted by the other bishops against the King and Queen. (H. F., Bk. V, 49: 314-322.)

<sup>15</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, "Prologue," ln. 3-4: 377. "Sed istud illis debetur iniungi, qui habentes intra se fontem eloquentiae. Unde quicquid illis iniungitur, carmine irriguo copiosius explicatur."

"watered copiously with song." Baudonivia's writing did not possess the fluid grace of Fortunatus' poetry and prose, but she did know how to make some understated points comparing her community with the congregation of the "doctis," the learned ones: "We [indoctis], on the contrary, are narrow of understanding and have no wealth of eloquence to refresh others, nor can your need be allayed by our dryness." Since the verdict of the Sainte Croix trial, the "wealth" of the nunnery was under the control of others and the nuns' resources were more "dry" than in their patron's day when the nunnery gave freely from their own stores to others.

The most forthright discussion in Baudonivia's version of Radegunde's life story centered on the events surrounding the installation of the relic of the True Cross at the Sainte Croix nunnery. Baudonivia began her story of these events at the point when the relic reached the gates of the city of Poitiers. Fortunatus omitted to mention these events altogether; even Gregory of Tours, usually the most inclusive source, did not record that Maroveus of Poitiers refused to admit the relics into the city walls of Poitiers.

The Bishop of this place [Maroveus of Poitiers] should have wished to to welcome the Cross along with all the devout people but the enemy of human kind worked through his dependents to make them turn away the world's ransom and wish not to receive it [the Cross] in the city.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 16, ln. 22-24: 388. "...et pontifex loci cum omni populo devote hoc vellet excipere, inimicus humani generis per satellites suos egit, ut precium mundi repellerent nec in civitatem recipere vellent."

It appeared to Baudonivia that Radegunde's "spirit was blazing while her soul trembled" when Maroveus "subjected her to tribulation" by rejecting her sacred relic. To overcome the obstacle Bishop Maroveus placed in her path to dedicate a shrine to the Cross, Radegunde "sent messengers to the benevolent King Sigibert." Through the King, Radegunde took action without the approval of the local bishop and "until her messengers could return from the King, she deposited the Lord's Cross and the tokens of the saints for shelter in a monastery at Tours."<sup>17</sup>

Baudonivia's boldest statement against the bishops was also her characterization of the conflict between her patron's work at Sainte Croix and the ecclesiastical opposition to her work. The passage immediately followed her account of the local bishop turning away the Cross.

One faction and the other forming as the orders of Jews...Thus envy inflicted no small injury on the Holy Cross just like the Lord who sustained every malice patiently when he was summoned time and again by the minions of judges and governors so that his creatures might not perish.<sup>18</sup>

These were strong words for a nun who called herself "rusticus" and "indoctis;" Baudonivia compared the factions of bishops with the orders of the Jews. Her description of the "minions of

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<sup>17</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 16, ln. 26-29: 388. "Sed illa, spiritu fervente, animo dimicante, iterum ad benignissimum regem dirigit, quia in civitatem salutem recipere noluerunt. Interim quod missi sui de domno rege reverterentur, in Turonico suo in monasterio virorum quod condidit, ut et ipsum salveret..."

<sup>18</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 16, ln. 25: 388; ln. 2-4: 389. "...pro alio adserentes Iudaico ordine...Non minorem iniuriam est passa sancta crux per invidiam, quam Dominus, qui per cursorem fidelem vocatus et revocatus ante praesides et iudices, omnem maliciam patienter sustinuit, ut quod craeverat ne periret."

Judges," and poor "creatures," and being "summoned time and again" sounded very much like her own viewpoint on the trial of her sister nuns by the bishop-Judges.

By definition, the voices of authority did not come from behind nunnery walls. When Baudonivia took exception to Fortunatus' omissions in his Book of Radegunde's life she was challenging not only the issues involved, but also her right to speak out.<sup>19</sup> Baudonivia, who found herself to be "more devout than learned,"<sup>20</sup> pointed out, in her more wary style, a difference between her writing and Fortunatus' writing regarding

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<sup>19</sup>First, in the "Prologue" of Liber II, Baudonivia quoted the following passage from Liber I: "De beatae virtutibus sufficiat exiguitas, ne fastidiatur ubertas, nec reputetur brevissimum, ubi de paucis agnoscitur amplitudo." (Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 34, ln. 31: 376.) Next, Baudonivia challenged Fortunatus' disclaimer in Liber II: "...ea quae prolixitate praetermisit, sicut ipse in libro suo disseruit." (Baudonivia, Liber II, "Prologue," ln. 3: 378.) Then, Baudonivia answered Fortunatus' brevity saying: "Ergo..non polito, sed rustico temptamus de his quae gessit sermone appetere et de multis eius miraculis pauca complectere." (Baudonivia, Liber II, "Prologue," ln. 7-8: 378.)

<sup>20</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, "Prologue," ln. 2: 378. "...quae sum minus docta, plus devota."

the relation between "great issues" recounted by "important people" and "small matters" known by "unimportant people."<sup>21</sup>

Seeing that when the learned speak out it is better for the unlearned to keep silent...Those learned ones do not know how to speak about small matters and the unlearned do not know how to speak about small matters greatly...and what is sought after by some is feared by others.<sup>22</sup>

Baudonivia's Book spoke as directly to the result of the trial as a common nun enclosed under the jurisdiction of a bishop could allow herself to speak. While in part of her "Prologue" she called herself "humilis omnium," the humblest of all, she also spoke up for those matters which "the most eloquent font among us" neglected to bring out.

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<sup>21</sup>Natalie Zemon Davis, "On the Lame," The American Historical Review 93, no. 3 (June, 1988), 574. Questions about this relationship continue in present day historical studies as seen in Robert Finlay's challenge of Natalie Zemon Davis' method using the source materials from peasants and folk traditions, and, Davis' rebuttal of Finlay's critique in The American Historical Review.

"There is a contrast in our mental habits, cognitive styles, and moral tone. I see complexities and ambivalences everywhere; I am willing to settle, until I can get something better, for conjectural knowledge and possible truth; I make ethical judgments as an assay of pros and cons, of daily living and heroic idealism. Robert Finlay sees things in clean, simple lines; he wants absolute truth, established with no ambiguity by literal and explicit words; he makes moral judgments in terms of sharp rights and wrongs...he plays Savonarola to my Montaigne. Fortunately, historical practice can profit from each stance."

<sup>22</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Prologue, ln. 7-18: 377. "In iugitis mihi opus agere non minus impossibile, quam sit digito caelum tangere, ut de Vita sanctae dominae Radegundis, quam obtime nostis, aliquid dicere praesumanus...tales non solum per se aliquid dicere appetunt, verum etiam, si quid eis iniunctum fuerit, pertimescunt...quoniam, quantum doctis proloqui, tantum indoctis utile fit tacere... et ideo quod ab aliis quearitur, ab aliis formidatur."



In the complementary hagiographies of Saint Radegunde, we benefit from the perspectives of both "doctis" and the "indoctis." Unlike Fortunatus, Baudonivia did provide a view of two rebellious nuns. Baudonivia took the opportunity to minimize the role of the revolt in the life of the Sainte Croix community by placing the revolt in the perspective of the day to day life of the nuns.

Two women gravely infested by the Enemy clamored all night. One of them raved so violently that she shook the whole church with her roaring.<sup>29</sup>

From Baudonivia's position, living within the convent walls herself, the nun's revolt was the outcome of the personal misery of two nuns who could not endure the religious austerities of their lives.

Baudonivia's account of two nuns' rebellion against their institution displaced the emphasis of Gregory's description. She also made known the ordinary associations between the monks of Saint Hilary and the nuns of Sainte Croix. Gregory described the same meetings between the monks and the nuns at Saint Hilary's church as an unusual occurrence in his transcript of the nuns' trial.

After the venerable Abbot Arnegiselus left the Sainted Queen's basilica [Sainte Croix] with his monks to complete the vigil in the basilica [Saint Hilary] which she loved so well, they heard these clamoring women coming after them. They entered the basilica calling out and pleading that Lady Radegunde would spare them. One of them was heavily

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<sup>29</sup>Baudonivia, *Vita*, *Liber II*, Bk. 27, ln. 19-22: 394. "tota nocte clamaverunt...mulieres duas graviter infestabat inimicus; praecipue una tantum baccabatur, ut in eius fremitu tota tremeret basilica."

troubled because her evil spirit had flagellated her for fifteen years. Then, early in the morning, they say, the raging enemy left the body he had invaded and the other one was set free at Terce in front of the gate of the basilica.<sup>24</sup>

The significance of highlighting this particular incident at the outbreak of the nuns' revolt was that during this mob scene, Bishop Gundegisel and his fellow bishops Nicasius and Safarius were knocked to the ground by some of the rough men who had gathered around the group of rebel nuns. Gundegisel immediately excommunicated the nuns. Then he wrote a letter against the nuns and sent it to the Kings and Bishops in Council.

Judging from the letter sent in reply, which Gregory of Tours quoted in full in the Historia Francorum, Gundegisel's letter was obviously a scathing account of the nuns' actions and a caustic treatment of their cause. In response to the "insults done" and the "narrow escape" of Gundegisel and his clergy, Gunthram and Childebert and their bishops agreed to try the nuns in a court of six bishops.<sup>25</sup> The judging bishops included four bishops known to be hostile to the nuns: Gundegisel, Nicasius,

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<sup>24</sup>Baudonivia, Vita, Liber II, ln. 21-28: 394. "Postquam inde vir venerabilis Arnegisselus abbas basilicae beatae reginae cum suis monachis exiit, ad suam vadens basilicam cursum implere, quam illa satis dilexerat, ipsas post se mulieres duas audierunt clamantes venire. Quae ingressae basilicam vociferantes, dominam Radegundem, ut eis parceret, supplicabant. Una ex illis, quae gravius tribulabatur, iam ter quinos habens annos, ex quo eam spiritus nequam flagellabat, tunc, --matutina dicebatur, --seviens imnicus vas quod invaserat reliquit. Illa alla ad terciam ante ostium ipsius basilicae est liberata, it ultra nequissimus hostis eis nocere non valuit."

<sup>25</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk., IX, 41: 533-534.

Safarius, and Maroveus. The other two Judges were Gregory of Tours and Ebregisel. Ebregisel of Cologne was unknown to the nunnery. Gregory of Tours was well known to the community, but he had learned years earlier at his own trial under king Chilperic and Queen Fredegunde that episcopal solidarity was the wisest choice.<sup>26</sup>

Baudonivia did not label the above disruption to be the same "great scandal in the convent in Poitiers," as Gregory called it. In hagiography little of the material is explicitly stated, although Baudonivia, because of her lack of literary finesse, was more direct than usual for the Vita style. She situated the above account of the two nuns in the text of the Liber II immediately following her record of the miracles at Radegunde's funeral. Baudonivia shifted the emphasis away from Bishop Gregory's view of the revolt in terms of an institutional precedent for nunneries toward her own perspective of the revolt in terms of the social displacement or psychological disturbances of two nuns.

Due to the actions of the nuns and the reactions of the bishops, the Sainte Croix nunnery lost its independent status. The hostile Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers had jurisdiction over Sainte Croix until his death in 592 when he was succeeded by Bishop Plato.<sup>27</sup> When Plato was invested Bishop of Poitiers,

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<sup>26</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. V, 49: 316-322.

<sup>27</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. V, 49: 316, names Plato as Gregory's archdeacon and his close friend. Plato was tortured, chained, and publically displayed without his clothes during Bishop Gregory's trial for slandering Queen Fredegunde.

Fortunatus wrote a poem clearly showing that relations between the local bishop and the nunnery of Sainte-Croix were about to change:

The kings, with their foresight, gave a bishop of astounding faith to the people to console them...and he will govern the clergy of the Church of Poitiers with wisdom...The blessed presence of Gregory adds to the public joy, and there will be only one and the same faith between the two cities [Tours and Poitiers]. It is Gregory who enthroned Bishop Platon, his disciple; it is he who gives him to the Church on this solemn day.<sup>20</sup>

Some of the problems of the Sainte Croix nunnery were lessened because Maroveus' successors were loyal to the interests of the faction of Gregory of Tours. Nunnery life at Sainte Croix stabilized under the control of an allied bishop after those treacherous years between Radegunde's death and Maroveus' death. Nunnery life at Sainte Croix was also more dependent and more removed from the nuns' control.

By 600, or by 610 at the latest, all three versions of Radegunde's life existed in a textual form suitable for use either as a part of the Church liturgy and cult promulgation, or, in the case of the Historia Francorum, for use as a judicial precedent for the relative positions of Merovingian nunneries and their episcopate.

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<sup>20</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed. Charles Nisard, Bk. X, XIV, 248-249. "Provida disponunt reges solacia plebia pontificem dantes quem probat alma fides...dirigat hic populum successor honore beato, et clerum ecclesiae qui moderetur ope...Gaudia laeta paret praesentia sancta Gregori et geminas urbes adjuvet una fides. Qui modo discipulo Platone antistite summo sollemnem ecclesiae hic dedit esse diem."

Baudonivia's text, by showing Radegunde in the working roles performed by Germanic women in a warrior society, demonstrated the inclusion of those roles into Catholic religious life. In Baudonivia's narrative, Radegunde settled disputes among the sisters, sent letters to kings and queens at war pressing for peace; she served meals to pilgrims, scrubbed floors, cleaned shoes, washed and tended to the sick, and gave clothing to the poor. Baudonivia's Book of Radegunde's life presented specific, telling details about daily life in the nunnery.

The Liber II also carried a different institutional emphasis. Baudonivia's context situated the nunnery as a center for women's work in the Merovingian kingdoms.

There is nothing that we do not know of how Radegunde lived joined together with her earthly prince and husband, the most high King Chlotar....This was before her soul achieved its destiny as a religious which it shaped while she was in aristocratic clothing. No worldly bonds fettered her who was girdled about with obedience in God's service, careful to redeem captives and generous in giving profuse alms to the needy. For she believed that anything that the poor accepted from her was their own to take. <sup>29</sup>

Reading Baudonivia offered a clearer focus on the independent goals of the female monastic community, in place of that "universal" mold of monastic life portrayed by Fortunatus.

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<sup>29</sup>Baudonivia, Vitae Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II, 379, ln. 39; 380, ln. 1-2, 6-10. "Nulli habetur incognitum, qualis fuit eius actio, dum cum terreno principe et rege praeaelso Clotario....religio iam antecedens animi futurae conversationis adventum, dum saeculari sub habitu religionis formabatur exemplum. In nullo huius mundi conpede catenata est, in servorum Dei obsequio succincta, in redemptione captivorum sollicita, in egenorum erogatione profusa; proprium credidit, quicquid de se pauper accepit."

In the Liber I, Fortunatus emphasized Radegunde's rigorous austerities and her acts of servitude; in the Liber II, Baudonivia gave weight to Radegunde's miracles and cures. Fortunatus brought out Radegunde's withdrawal from the world; Baudonivia added Radegunde's leadership of her nunnery and her involvement in the Merovingian kingdom. For Fortunatus, Sainte Croix represented Saint-Queen Radegunde's retreat from the life of the kingdom. For Baudonivia, Sainte Croix was the center of the Merovingian world, and, that world was full, active, and an essential part of Merovingian life.

The differences between Fortunatus' version of Saint Radegunde's life and Baudonivia's version of Saint Radegunde's life grew out of the writers' divergent experiences in their own lives. Fortunatus traveled widely and led an artist's life at court before he channeled his writing into a career in the Church. Fortunatus and Radegunde, although they, too, were very different from each other, shared some common experiences in the worlds of the courts and among the great people of the kingdoms. Baudonivia, fostered as an infant and raised entirely within the cloister, differed not only from Fortunatus and Radegunde, but also from the women who had entered the convent as adults after

living in the world as daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, step-mothers, widows.<sup>30</sup>

While the bishop Gregory and the monk Fortunatus praised Radegunde's passive politics and her renunciation from the world, Baudonivia valued Radegunde's example for active roles for women. From Baudonivia's perspective within the world of the nunnery, Sainte Croix was not a place of retreat and renunciation. The nunnery provided a place for women to accomplish good work. The many duties that the nuns performed served a great number of the people of the Merovingian kingdoms.

What is known of Baudonivia's life comes from the internal evidence of the Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II and from secondary studies about other Merovingian nuns or nunnery

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<sup>30</sup>Caroline W. Bynum, Holy Feast, Holy Fast, 27, emphasizes a collateral point regarding the difference between women who converted as adults and those nuns who were raised in the convent. Unlike the more fluid Merovingian period characterized in Suzanne Wemple's research, Bynum finds that for the late Middle Ages, nuns who had been raised in convents had an intensified sense of male/female differences closer to the negative stereotype read in the misogynist clerical tradition and were more aware of prohibitions against sacramental functions and teaching to women.

life.<sup>31</sup> The Lives of other contemporary nuns such as Aldegunde, Rusticula, and Salaberga are helpful in constructing a view of Baudonivia's life although the aristocratic origins of their lives contrasted with Baudonivia's beginnings.

In the Liber II, Baudonivia described the circumstances of her earliest life experiences in the Sainte Croix nunnery.

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<sup>31</sup>The following is a partial list of secondary sources for examining Baudonivia's life: René Aigrain, Vie de Sainte Radegonde (Paris: Bloud, 1924), Introduction, 3-24; Rudolph M. Bell, Holy Anorexia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1987); Richard Lyman, "Barbarism and Religion: Late Roman and Early Medieval Childhood," The History of Childhood, ed., Lloyd deMause (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974): 75-100; Sara Hansell MacGonagle, "The Poor in Gregory of Tours," (Ph. D. diss., Columbia University, 1936); Loren C. MacKinney, Early Medieval Medicine (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1937); Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, "Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuits of Medieval Women," Becoming Visible: Women in European History, eds., Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977): 90-118; Jo Ann McNamara, "A Legacy of Miracles: Hagiography and Nunneries in Merovingian Gaul," Women of the Medieval World, eds., Julius Kirshner and Suzanne Wemple (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985): 36-53; Georges Marie, "Sainte Radegonde et le milieu monastique contemporain," Etudes Mérovingiennes (Paris: Picard, 1953): 219-225; Pierre Riche, "La femme à l'époque barbare," Histoire Mondiale de la Femme, ed. Pierre Grimal (Paris, 1965): 35-46; Pierre Riché, "Note d'hagiographie mérovingienne: La Vita S. Rusticulae," Analecta Bollandiana 72 (1954): 369-377; Aline Rouselle, "Abstinence et continence dans les Monasteres de Gaule Méridionale a la fin de l'Antiquite et au Debut de Moyen Age," Hommage à Andre Dupont (Montpellier, 1974): 239-255; Jane Schulenburg, "Strict Active Enclosure and Its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience (ca. 500-1100)," Distant Echoes, eds. John Nichols and Lillian Shanks (Kalamazoo, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1984): 51-86; Emile Thevenot, "Médecine et religion aux temps Gallo-Romains: le traitement des affections de la vue," Latomus 9 (1950): 415-426; Suzanne Wemple, Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500-900 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 175-199.



Baudonivia knew Radegunde first as a mother. Baudonivia's writing showed that she felt Radegunde acted as the mother for each individual child as well as being a mother figure to the whole community: "I am the least of the little ones [Radegunde] nourished familiarly from the cradle as her own child before I could walk."<sup>32</sup> When Radegunde preached to Baudonivia and the other nuns, she often told them:

Daughters, I chose you. You are my light and my life. In you I rest all my happiness, on you, my new plantation. Act with me in this world that we may rejoice in the future.<sup>33</sup>

The nuns of Sainte Croix raised, trained and educated Baudonivia; and, because Baudonivia was not one of the nuns who revolted against the Rule after Radegunde's death, Baudonivia did not leave the walls of Sainte Croix until her death. As she explained, "It was our Rule that no living person could go out of the gates of the our convent."<sup>34</sup>

Even before Radegunde established her nunnery, she took on a mother's role at court by fostering unrecognized children like her god-daughter Agnes. Radegunde was childless herself but she had seven recognized stepchildren by Clothar I's other wives and

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<sup>32</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Prologue, ln. 18-19: 377. "Cum sim ego minima omnium minimarum, quam ab ipsis cumabulis ante sua vestigia peculiarem vernulam familiariter enutrivit."

<sup>33</sup>Baudonivia, Vita, Liber II, Bk. 8, ln.24-25: 383. "Vos elegi filias, vos, mea lumina, vos, mea vita, vos, mea requies totaque felicitas, vos, novella plantatio. Agite mecum in hoc saeculo, unde gaudeamus in futuro."

<sup>34</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 24, ln. 11-12: 393. "...Quia instituerat, ut nulla vivens foras monasterio iamquam egrederetur." The Sainte Croix community lived according to the Rule of Saint Caesarius ( d. 542).

concubines, as well as an unrecognized stepson, Gundovald, by Clothar and an unnamed concubine. The daughters of Clothar's concubines had no valuable claim in the sovereign rivalries among Radegunde's sister-queens or concubines in the interest of their sons. Perhaps Agnes was one of those discarded daughters. After Radegunde left the court, in her "Letter of Foundation," Radegunde wrote about her desire to "forward the cause of other women" like Agnes and Baudonivia who had no one to care for them.

How could [I] best forward the cause of other women...Here in the town of Poitiers I founded a convent for nuns...When it was founded, I made over to it by deed of gift all the property which the King [Clothar I] in his munificence had bestowed upon me...I appointed as Mother Superior the Lady Agnes, who became like a sister to me, and whom I have loved and brought up as if she were my daughter from her childhood onwards.<sup>35</sup>

At best, a young woman's position in Merovingian society was insecure. A life in a nunnery with the support of a patron and the Church was often the best alternative for Merovingian girls of precarious means. In her own words, Baudonivia's life in Radegunde's nunnery held fast to "the precious rewards of Radegunde's famous works and kept faith with her devotion and sedulity in the world."<sup>36</sup>

Baudonivia did not write about how she came to be a foster child in the nunnery when she was an infant but we know that

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<sup>35</sup>Radegunde, "Letter of Foundation," in Gregory of Tours, Historia Francorum, ed. Lewis Thorpe, Bk. IX, 42: 535.

<sup>36</sup>Baudonivia, Vita, Liber II, Prologue, ln.19-20: 377; Bk. 28, ln. 3-4: 395. "...muneris de eius claro opere; fideli devotione et sedulitate debita veneramur."

conditions for life, both physical and social, were harsh for children in the sixth century. These conditions were especially pitiless for girls because if they survived the risks of their childhood mortality, they soon faced their mortality through childbirth, often as not leaving behind another motherless child. Baudonivia was born to a Frankish family but there is no record of any connection to Frankish noble families. For some reason related to poverty or oppression or parental choice, Baudonivia was abandoned to the care of the nuns. Although parental necessity or coercion was more likely in Baudonivia's case, parental choice may also have been the reason for Baudonivia's placement at Sainte Croix. She may have been committed to the nunnery even if her parents were prosperous. Both Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus were placed with the Church when they were very young even though their families were not poor.<sup>37</sup> Radegunde, as royal orphan placed in a villa estate, was also raised apart from family or court life.

[Radegunde] fell to the share of King Clothar and was led off to the Vermandois region to the royal villa of Athies where one commissioned guardians to raise her. In the midst

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<sup>37</sup>The autobiography of Guibert of Nogent (1064-1125) is another poignant example of childhood commitment to monastic life by parental choice: Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent, ed. John F. Benton, trans. C. C. Swinton Bland (New York: Harper and Row, 1970). Guibert's record of his inner dialogue about his mother, his childhood, and his bonds with other monks examined his own memories and emotions surrounding his abandonment within the body of the Church.

of the work of her sex, the young girl was taught literary culture.<sup>38</sup>

Because Baudonivia was abandoned when she was still too young to walk, it is most likely that a relative left her at the gate of the nunnery or on the steps of the monastery church. Historians of childhood describe a shadowy improvement in the evolution of the primary relationship between parent and child during the early Middle Ages.<sup>39</sup> Infanticide was not as widespread in early medieval Gaul as in Roman Gaul, due, in part, to the mitigating influence of Christian institutions that cared for abandoned children.<sup>40</sup> Early christianization instilled ideals for a greater concern for the peril to the soul of a murderous parent but were still not explicit about the inviolate nature of the infant's life. Under Roman law, mostly in response to the effects of the diminishing population of Rome, it was not until 374 that killing an infant was considered to be murder; after the Council of Valson in 442, Church law

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<sup>38</sup>Fortunatus, *Vita, Liber II*, Bk. 2, ln. 10-13: 365. "Quae veniens in sortem praecelsi regis Chlotharii, in Veromandensem ducta, Adteias in villa regia nutriendi causa custodibus est deputata. Quae puella inter alia opera, quae sexui eius congruebant, litteris est erudita."

<sup>39</sup>There are already many works in this relatively new field. For the most helpful bibliographic list of books and articles in childhood history, use: Footnote 8, pp. 55-56, in Lloyd deMause, ed. *The History of Childhood*, (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974). The deMause anthology is an excellent survey of childhood history from ancient to modern times.

<sup>40</sup>This conclusion of a study on the issue of child abuse reverses Gibbon's famous indictment of barbarian times: "We have described 'the triumph of barbarism and religion' over the worst abuses of children in antiquity." See: Richard B. Lyman, "Barbarism and Religion: Late Roman and Early Medieval Childhood," *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd deMause, (New York: The Psychohistory Press, 1974), 76.

declared that finding of abandoned children must be announced to the people in church.<sup>41</sup> A more revealing way of looking at the practice of infanticide under the law is to see that in Anglo-Saxon England the legal presumption was that infants who died had been murdered if not proved otherwise.<sup>42</sup>

A different social order in barbarian Gaul and the political approach of the Church toward the poor weighted early medieval behavior in favor of child abandonment instead of infanticide.

Once parents began to accept the child as having a soul, the only way they could escape the dangers of their own [psychological] projections was by abandonment, whether to the wet nurse, to the monastery or nunnery, to foster families, to the homes of other nobles as servants or hostages, or by severe emotional abandonment at home.<sup>43</sup>

In Roman Gaul there had been many legally defined classes among the poor including slaves, serfs, and coloni. With the decay of

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<sup>41</sup>Lloyd deMause, "The Evolution of Childhood," The History of Childhood, ed. Lloyd de Mause, (New York: The Psychohistory Press, 1974), 28.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 51.

the Roman provincial middle classes<sup>44</sup> and the dislocations of the barbarian invasions, the various divisions of the lower classes were indistinguishable from each other except in name. The coloni and serfs were as dependent upon the great landlords as were the slaves. Largely due to the Church's recognition of the poor as a politically empowering class, the poor in sixth-century Gaul were no longer hindered by unsurmountable class barriers and some people from the lowest social level rose to positions of power in Merovingian society.<sup>45</sup>

The Church, by providing the masses of the poor with subsistence support from the wealth of the Church, could balance the potential violence of the poor against abuses of secular

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<sup>44</sup>While there is general agreement among late antique scholars regarding the decline of the Roman provincial middle classes, there is some disagreement concerning the chronology of that decline. Samuel Dill concluded that this decline of the middle classes was evident in the fifth century under the Merovingians. Read: Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age (London, 1926), 306. C. R. Whittaker and Edith Wightman date the loss of the middle classes, accompanied by changes in the poor laboring classes in the Roman provinces, as early as the third century. Wightman relies more on the continuity of a Celtic social pattern, with its strong vertical ties of interdependency between the wealthy and strong and the poor and weak, underlying the disappearance of Roman middle class settlement in Gaul. See: C. R. Whittaker, "Rural Labour in Three Roman Provinces," Non-Slave Labor in the Greco-Roman World, ed. P. Garnsey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 73-99; Edith M. Wightman, "Peasants and Potentates," American Journal of Ancient History 3 (1978-79): 97-127; Edith M. Wightman, Gallia Belgica (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). J. F. Drinkwater describes the "crisis of the third century" in terms of the collapse of the provincial agricultural system based on great landlords. According to Drinkwater, this collapse occurred as the class of slave labor merged into a dependent, but not owned, coloni or serf laborer: Roman Gaul (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 212-227.

<sup>45</sup>Sara Hansell MacGonagle, "The Poor in Gregory of Tours," (Ph. D. diss., Columbia University, 1936), 22-26, 43.

power. Merovingian christianization motivated great acts of charity to the Church and political precautions were taken to increase and to guard this wealth from which a prescribed portion went to the care of the poor. Legalistic leger de main equated the possessions of the Church with the possessions of the poor. Canon VII of the Council of Agde in 506 stated that the property of the Church was the property of the poor and therefore inviolate; Canon VI condemned as "murderers of the poor" any person who attempted to regain possession of what they or their relatives had given to a church or a convent. Further, at the Fifth Council of Arles in 554, "murderers of the poor" included any of the older clerics who failed to take proper care of Church property entrusted to their care by the bishop. Finally, the Second Council of Mâcon in 585 enforced the payment of the tithe to the Church for the benefit of the poor and the clergy and for the ransom of prisoners.<sup>44</sup>

Richard Lyman, in "Barbarism and Religion: Late Roman and Early Medieval Childhood," claims that some of Saint Augustine's writings softened the early Christian image of children, making them comparatively guiltless and capable of increasing the faith of their parents. Among the early Merovingians, Queen Clothilde influenced Clovis' conversion to the Catholic faith through her insistence on the soul of her first-born infant, who died immediately after his baptism, and the baptism of her second

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<sup>44</sup>J. Hefele, Histoire des conciles, trans. Dom H. Leclercq, (Paris, 1908) in Sara Hansell MacGonagle, "The Poor in Gregory of Tours," 24-25.

son. Other Augustinian works drew attention to a sanctified image for a nurturing mother, stressing the idea that such a care giver need not be the natural mother and making the mother role for a Merovingian nun a rational extension of that image.<sup>47</sup>

In a hymn he wrote about the Virgin Birth, Fortunatus included a verse indicative of the changing Christian views toward children. Fortunatus added a close anatomical interest in maternity and childbirth to the usual holy images.

Wearing skin he then proceeded out of the womb of the untouched Maid. / A baby hidden in the bowels, he wailed his woe inside a manger; / The Virgin-Mother wrapped him with a swath of swaddling clothes; / His hands, his feet, his legs she bound with bands that held him tight.<sup>48</sup>

Caroline Walker Bynum, in Holy Feast, Holy Fast, gives a thorough examination of womanly images as the medieval symbol for physical and spiritual succor. The Bynum study analyzes these symbolic uses of women during the late medieval period but the dominance of this religious image over all other feminine images, except for that of the virgin, is forceful for the early medieval centuries as well.<sup>49</sup>

Saint Radegunde's cult directly applied the new attitudes toward children as part of the daily activities of nunnery life. The community practiced increased charity, teaching, and

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<sup>47</sup>Richard Lyman, "Barbarism and Religion," The History of Childhood, 88-89.

<sup>48</sup>Fortunatus, "Pange, lingua," Medieval Song. An Anthology of Hymns and Lyrics, trans. James J. Wilhelm (New York, 1971), 39.

<sup>49</sup>Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).



practical training for foundlings; Sainte Croix was also widely known for its miraculous cures for children.<sup>50</sup>

Antheredus, a tradesman known to the saint [Radegunde], suffered the loss of his child, hardly having time to see him, each time a son was born. And so the mother, in bringing another child into the world, sighed with sadness that she would have to deliver him up, too. One day, these parents, all in tears, placed the corpse of the new-born on the Saint's hair-shirt; as soon as the body touched the glorious fabric, the infant which was about to be put in the ground rose up all red beneath his covering where just before his pallor seemed near the grave.<sup>51</sup>

The miracles and influence of Radegunde's nunnery provided a spiritual understanding for the suffering of maternity and childbirth, and for a heightened religious significance for the role of a nurturing mother. Sainte Croix's sixth-century example of an individual nunnery providing for abandoned infants was followed by the establishment of separate Church institutions to provide such care. By the early seventh century, Saint Magnebode (606-654) established the first institution of the Church, a foundling hospital, devoted solely to children like Baudonivia, and in 787, Dateo of Milan founded the first asylum for abandoned infants.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Emile Briand, "Le culte de sainte Radegonde," Histoire de Sainte Radegonde (Paris: Oudin, 1898), 255-256.

<sup>51</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 34, ln. 11-16: 375. "Anderedus agens eiusdem beatissimae, cum sibi filii naxcerentur, quos, ut videret, mox perderet, et cogitaret sepelire mater tristis, dum pareret, exanimem infantulum lacrimosi parentes iactant in sanctae cilicium. Qui saluberrimam vestem mox panni nobilis attigit, ad officium vitale redit infans de funere, et rubens levat de pallio pallor vicinus ad tumulum."

<sup>52</sup>J. Hefele, Histoire des conciles, trans. H. Leclercq, Vol. II, Pt. 1 (Paris, 1908), 459-60.

According to the number of documented contemporary stories about nuns entering the cloister, Baudonivia's entrance as an infant was exceptional. Women entered Sainte Croix and other Merovingian nunneries for many different reasons. The recorded anecdotes rarely told the stories of the women who entered by their own choice. Typically, the stories are heavily levered toward instances involving force or duress. It was those points of conflict between the secular and the episcopal world that drew the attention of writers like Bishop Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus.<sup>53</sup> The most common form of nunnery entrance, and, the most revealing practice of the social order surrounding the nunnery as an institution, was the enclosure of royal daughters born to out of favor queens and the retirement of unwanted widows and queens.

Clothilde and her elder sister named Chroma, Burgundian princesses, joined nunneries at different times in their lives and under very different circumstances. As the result of family warfare among brothers exactly like that in Radegunde's Thuringian family, the Burgundian sisters were driven into exile by their uncle Gundobad. Gundobad murdered their father Chilperic and drowned their mother by throwing her into a river with a stone tied around her neck. Envoys from the Frankish court to the court of Burgundy proposed marriage between Clothilde and Clovis I. Clothilde lived to send her

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<sup>53</sup>Donald D. Hochstetler, "A Conflict of Traditions: Consecration for Women in the Early Middle Ages," Ph. D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1981.

sons to war against Gundobad's son Sigismund. Chroma found refuge in exile within a nunnery. In her later life, as a widow queen, Clothilde entered a convent near Paris.<sup>54</sup>

The entrance of the royal daughters Clotild and Basina into Saint Croix typified the circumstances of many members of Baudonivia's community. As royal princesses who were out of favor, Clotild and Basina were examples of the social displacement among aristocratic women in Merovingian society. Clotild and Basina were daughters of Clothar's sons and were grand-nieces to Radegunde. Clotild was the daughter of Charibert; Basina the daughter of Chilperic. The princesses became the stepdaughters to more favored queens whose power eclipsed the positions of Clotild's and Basina's mothers. Radegunde's foundation of the Sainte Croix nunnery alleviated the displacement of some of these women, including herself. That Sainte Croix could not fulfill Clotild and Basina's expectations as an alternative to their displacement in society became clear when they acted as the leaders of the Sainte Croix nuns during their revolt in 590-91.

Clotild's mother Ingoberga, who was Charibert's first queen, lost favor when he became infatuated with two sisters named Marcoveifa and Merofled, the daughters of a wool worker in his kingdom.<sup>55</sup> Charibert was so overcome with his new passions that he took Marcoveifa out of a nunnery to marry her along with

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<sup>54</sup>Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, Bk. II, 28: 141; Bk. III, 5: 166-167; Bk. II, 43: 158.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., Bk., IV, 26: 219-220.

her sister. Marcoveifa's nunnery must have been less strict than Sainte Croix or its patron less powerful than Radegunde to release a nun for marriage. When Basina's father Chilperic tried to take Basina out of the nunnery to make a Visigothic marriage, Radegunde refused his request.<sup>56</sup> The political orbit of Sainte Croix, the bishopric of Tours, and the Austrasian kingdom would not support Chilperic's efforts to ally his kingdom with the Visigoths. Such an alliance would leave the lands of the Austrasian kingdom wedged between the Visigoths and the Neustrian kingdoms. Finally, Chilperic sent his daughter by Fredegunde, Rigunthe, to make the marriage instead.

Queen Fredgunde had not only ousted Basina's mother Audovera from Chilperic's influence, she had also removed Chilperic's second queen, Galswintha, who had been Chilperic's first attempt for a Visigothic marriage alliance. Rigunthe's marriage never took place and Basina was well out of the situation. Rigunthe's bridal treasure was stolen enroute to the Visigoth kingdom by Gundovald the Pretender, bastard son of Clothar and the concubine he took after Radegunde. Gundovald and his allies used Rigunthe's treasure to pay for his war to claim a Merovingian kingdom.<sup>57</sup>

Encircled by their nunnery walls, Baudonivia and her sister nuns continued to find themselves tangled up in the events of the Merovingian kingdoms. When Clotilde, Basina, and their band

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<sup>56</sup>Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, Bk. VI, 34: 365.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., Bk. VII, 32: 415.

of rebel nuns crossed those walls, they carried the nunnery's affairs out into the kingdom. After the trial and judgement of the rebel nuns, Clotild refused to re-enter Sainte Croix and King Childebart moved her onto the Poitiers estate of Count Waddo, who was one of his enemies, claiming the estate for Clotild's endowment. Chilperic's widow Fredegunde made no similar arrangement for her stepdaughter Basina. Basina made her submission to the Abbess Leuovera and came back into the community of Sainte Croix. In a less dramatic way, perhaps, but with a more lasting result, Baudonivia's hagiography carried the nunnery's story throughout the kingdoms after the nuns' revolt and the bishops' judgment.

Baudonivia's sister nun named Goda joined Sainte Croix under different circumstances than the out of favor royal or noble daughters, wives, or widows. Goda joined the nuns after a miracle cure. However, given the popularity of Radegunde's cult and the success of the community's cures and miracles, the attraction of entrants after the experience of a cure may also have been a common situation in Baudonivia's community. Goda entered Sainte Croix after Saint Radegunde cured Goda's sickness and fever.

When living in the world, Goda endured a malady which confined her to her bed for many months. She took many remedies but became more weak than she had been before. Then she called on Saint Radegunde and performed a prescribed ritual that took away her fever. Goda had her servants make a candle as tall as

she was and on the hour when her fever returned she lighted the candle. She held it in her hand, praying to Saint Radegunde, and before the candle consumed itself, Goda's fever vanished.<sup>58</sup>

One of the stories about Radegunde's childhood in the Athies villa gave an idea of what Baudonivia's environment would have been like. Fortunatus used this anecdote from Radegunde's early life as a motif for childhood sanctity, but the episode is also an excellent source for the atmosphere of children raised together in the Merovingian setting of a religious, villa agriculture system. Baudonivia, like Radegunde, would have had duties centered on the other children who were raised in the nunnery. When Radegunde was still a child she gathered together the poor children on the estate, gave them food and drink, and washed their bodies. She organized the other children, with the help of a young cleric named Samuel, to take part in pious processions. Marching with a cross and singing songs, they marched into the oratory of the church.<sup>59</sup> In addition to the evident motif of precocious sanctity, there is also the fact that young girls in this

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<sup>58</sup>Fortunatus, Vita, Liber I, Bk. XXXII: 374. Goda puella saecularis post Deo monacha serviens, dum longo sub tempore lecto flebilis decubaret et, inpenso multo medicamine, plus langueret, facta candela ad mensuram suae staturae, Domino miserante, in nomine sanctae feminae, qua hora frigus speraret, lumen accendit et tenuit, cuius beneficio ante fugata sunt frigora, quam esset candela consumpta.

<sup>59</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 2, ln. 16-20: 365. Iam tunc id agens infantula, quidquid sibi remansisset in mensa, collectis parvulis, lavans capita singulis, conpositis sellulis, porrigens aquam manibus, ipsa inferebat, ipsa miscebat infantulis. Hoc etiam praemeditans cum Samuele parvulo clerico gerebat. Facta cruce lignea, praecedentem subsequens, psallendo ad oratorium...

setting carried out many of the responsible tasks of childcare, discipline, and elementary instruction.

Baudonivia's daily activities, like the routine of her sister nuns, would have been dictated by the day to day duties necessary to provide the food, clothing, shelter, and livelihood for a community of two hundred nuns, plus servants, artisans, and field laborers. The Sainte Croix nunnery operated according to the work patterns of the villa estate system in which Radegunde had been trained for about ten years, from the time of her capture in Thuringia until her marriage to Clothar I. Queen Radegunde received the incomes of various estates, including her estate at Saix, as her marriage portion and it was her management of those estates which enabled her to perform charitable works, donate to the poor, and, eventually, build Sainte Croix.

In order to determine the day to day functioning of Sainte Croix, it is fruitful to compare the pattern for a Roman agricultural estate<sup>40</sup> with the prototype for a Benedictine monastery. The architecture and the operation of a Merovingian nunnery was as paradigmatic of the Roman provincial villa agriculture system that preceded it as was the "Plan of Saint

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<sup>40</sup>For diagrams of the Roman villa system see the drawings in the following works: J. F. Drinkwater, Roman Gaul (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 163, 165; Edith M. Wightman, "The Pattern of rural settlement in Roman Gaul," Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II, 4 (1975), 611, 613, 627, 628, 636, 640, 641.

Gall"<sup>41</sup> for the Benedictine monastic system that preceded it. Although no one monastery may have ever been built from its literal diagram, the Benedictine originators of the Plan intended that its design standardize monastic development. In fact, the sixth-century nunnery of Sainte Croix was the same size as the monastery projected for the idealized schema of the "Plan of Saint Gall." The Plan maps out thirty-seven structures devoted to the monastery's numerous services and functions surrounding the church buildings and three large garden plots along the monastery periphery.<sup>42</sup> In Carolingian times, between 823 and 830, the Plan was traced onto a parchment folio from a lost original of a Carolingian blueprint for an ideal Benedictine community.

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<sup>41</sup>Lorna Price, The Plan of Saint Gall: In Brief (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1982). The Price edition is an overview of the three volume work by Walter Horn and Ernest Born which was published by the University of California Press in 1979. The Price edition, with its emphasis on large scale diagrams and its precision between architectural rendering and monastic duties, is more helpful than the Horn and Born volumes.

<sup>42</sup>The best way to appreciate the complexity, and the self-sufficiency, of monastic life for a large community, is to see the reconstruction by Walter Horn and Ernest Born of the Saint Gall model at twice the Plan's scale, or 1:96. This exhibit is presented by Pro Helvetia, National Council for the Arts and Culture of Switzerland, Zurich, Switzerland, and organized by the University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, with the participation of the University of California Press. Fortunately, this is a traveling exhibit, available to universities and to scholarly conferences. The Exhibit of the Plan of Saint Gall was on display at The University of the South, March 28 - April 22, and was of particular interest for The Fifteenth Annual Sewanee Medieval Colloquium, April 8-9, 1988.



Saint Benedict (480 - c. 550) wrote a Rule for nuns as well as his Rule for the monks of Monte Cassino. Benedict wrote a nuns' Rule that his sister Saint Scholastica (d. c. 543) used in the nunnery of Plombariola which was about five miles from Monte Cassino. The influence of Benedictine monasticism spread quickly through Gaul in the sixth and seventh centuries. The Sainte Croix nunnery adopted a form of the Benedictine Rule no later than the Capitulary of Louis the Pious in 822 or 824.

The tasks that Baudonivia and the other nuns carried out to provide for their community and its visitors ranged from herb gardening to crop farming, from household chores to medical cures, from baking to wine making, from poultry keeping to inn keeping, from teaching to shepherding, from carpentry to pottery, from needlework to leatherwork, from the apiary to the scriptorium, and from the dairy to the orchard. There are many references to the multiplicity and the self-sufficiency of the duties at Saint Croix in the contemporary sources. The nuns' tasks were listed in the testimony of the Sainte Croix revolt trial; in letters of Fortunatus in return for the hospitality of the Sainte Croix nuns; in the description by Baudonivia of the dinners the nunnery provided for visiting Churchmen, pilgrims, and invalids; and, in the records of the Sainte Croix miracles and cures by Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia.

The nunnery's emphasis on self-sufficiency was fundamental to the institution's social and religious goals. Living according to Sainte Croix's Rule of Saint Caesarius established

the community's social distance and its economic independence from the secular world at the same time that it established the nunnery's reliance on its own endowments and its own economic resources. As a religious principle, the separation of the nunnery from the world mimicked the separation of the holy and the unholy. As a social practice, the separation of the nunnery alienated the community from the political influence and the economy of the rest of the kingdom. That this isolation was more strict in the Rule than in life was visible in Sainte Croix's involvement in royal, noble, and episcopal rivalries. That the Rule was still too strict to work was evident in the revolt of the Sainte Croix nuns and in the rapid depletion of the nunnery's resources in just two generations.

Baudonivia's particular duty at Sainte Croix was to be a scribe for the community. As one of the nunnery's scribes she worked closely with the three abbesses of Saint Croix between 567 and 610: Agnes, Leubovera, and Dedimia. She also worked with her patron Radegunde, and the nunnery's écrivain-client Fortunatus to copy books and letters for Sainte Croix. Baudonivia wrote that Radegunde insisted on the importance of reading for her community, often reading aloud to the nuns as well as questioning them from time to time about what they read for themselves.

[Radegunde] would not leave her reading by day or by night...she never ceased to make known what reading held for the well being of the soul. As bees gather to the special blooms to confect their honey, so did she seek to select little blossoms which would lure our souls to bring

forth good fruit from her works and the work of those who followed her.<sup>63</sup>

At Sainte Croix, the Rule of Saint Caesarius provided that one of the nunnery officers be a custodian of books.<sup>64</sup> A catalogue of the manuscripts owned by Sainte Croix does not exist, but there is a secondary source by E. A. Lowe that assessed the number and type of manuscripts that would have been available to Sainte Croix. As one of the major Merovingian monastic foundations of the sixth century, Sainte Croix may have obtained a sizeable portion of these manuscripts. Also, given Radegunde's devotion to reading and her diligence in gathering relics, it seems likely that she had a good collection of books. According to the Lowe catalogue of manuscripts, the Codices Latini Antiquiores, there are about three hundred manuscripts, fragments and membra disiecta extant that can be assigned to the scriptoria of Gaul between the fifth and the mid-eighth centuries.<sup>65</sup> Gregory of Tours indirectly referred to the

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<sup>63</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 9, ln. 33, 3-6: 383-384.  
 "...lectio numquam discessit, non die, non nocte...quod lectio continebat, ad animae salutem praedicare non cessabat. Sicut apis diversa genera florum congregans, unde mella conficiat, sic illa ab his quos invitabat spiritalis studebat carpere flosculos, unde boni operis fructum tam sibi quam suis sequacibus exhiberet."

<sup>64</sup>Caesarius, Regula sanctorum virginum 32, ed. Dom G. Morin Florilegium patristicum, 34 (Bonn, 1933), 12. "...codicibus ...praeponitur, super Evangelium claves accipiant."

<sup>65</sup>E. A. Lowe, ed. Codices latini antiquiores, 11 vols. (Oxford, 1934-66) in Rosamond McKitterick, "The Scriptoria of Merovingian Gaul: A Survey of the Evidence," Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism, H. B. Clark and Mary Brennan, eds., BAR International Series 113 (Oxford, 1981), 173.

distribution of books in the kingdom when he recorded one of King Chilperic's orders.

The King [Chilperic] wrote a number of books of poetry...but his poems observed none of the accepted rules of prosody. He also added certain letters to our alphabet...He sent instructions to all the cities in his kingdom, saying that these letters should be taught to boys in school, and that books using the old characters should have them erased with pumice-stone and the new ones written in.<sup>66</sup>

In the scriptorium, Baudonivia copied out her work in one of the rustic book hands used in Merovingian Gaul: late Roman cursive, uncial, half-uncial, Merovingian cursive minuscule and the various forms of pre-Caroline minuscule, such as the Luxeuil and Laon 'az' scripts and b-miniscule. Even if Baudonivia and her sisters were not skilled writers in each of these styles, they had access to books written in these forms.<sup>67</sup>

Closely related to Baudonivia's job as a scribe were the jobs of the teachers in the nunnery because the training of the scribes of Sainte Croix depended on the level of learning in the convent. In her own words Baudonivia was not "the best font of eloquence" in her community but it would hardly be reasonable to expect a Frankish nun educated in a Poitiers nunnery to possess Fortunatus' "wealth of eloquence" after his education in Ravenna, or to equal the aristocratic and episcopal advantages of Gregory of Tours' education. The Rule of Caesarius

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<sup>66</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. V, 44: 312. Note that boys were often educated, especially at the elementary level, in nunneries as well as in monasteries.

<sup>67</sup>Rosamond McKitterick, "The Scriptoria of Merovingian Gaul," 173. McKitterick includes access to Italian manuscripts or portions of manuscripts palimpsested before the eighth century.

emphasized the importance of education for the nunnery, especially pointing out that reading was more important than the needlework that supported many of the nuns. By Carolingian times in France, coeducation in nunneries was so widespread that an edict to abolish it was included in an imperial capitulary.<sup>68</sup>

Music played a key part in Baudonivia's life in the nunnery. Fortunatus' poetic compositions set to music filled Baudonivia's world within the walls; itinerant musicians who played flutes and guitars performed outside the nunnery walls. Sometimes their music interrupted the prayers in Radegunde's community.

One time, at the hour when the twilight spread its shadow, some worldly ones were carrying on with great noise of flutes and guitars and singing around the monastery. [Radegunde], with two of her sisters, had stayed a long time at prayers. One of the nuns said to her, laughing, 'Lady, I hear that those buffoons just sang one of my songs again.'<sup>69</sup>

Fortunatus' music and the nuns' performance of his songs anticipated the musical forms later named "Gregorian" in honor of Fortunatus' superior, Pope Gregory I (590-604). The liturgical monodies and primitive polyphonies Fortunatus composed made up a repertory for the nuns' devotional services.

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<sup>68</sup>Suzanne Wemple, Women in Frankish Society, 298-299; Capit. eccl. ad Salz. data (803-804), 7, MGH Capit. 1,119: "Omnino prohibermus, ut nullatenus masculum filium aut nepotem vel parentem suum in monasterio puellarum aut nutriendum commendare praesumat, nec quisquam illum suscipere audeat."

<sup>69</sup>Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 36, ln.27-31: 375. "Quadam vice, obumbrante iam noctis crepusculo, inter coraulas et citharas dum circa monasterium a saecularibus multo fremitu cantaretur, et sancta duabus testibus perorasset diutius, dicit quaedam monacha sermone loculari: 'Domina, recognovi, unam de meis canticis a saltantibus praedicari.'"

The characteristics of Fortunatus' music include his use of trope and sequence. In a musical trope, elaborate note by note ornaments are vocalized on one syllable; in a sequence, an embellishment of notes for the last syllable of a line is alternated between two soloists.

Fortunatus wrote the hymn Vexilla regis prodeunt for the grand occasion of the procession of the True Cross relic at Sainte Croix. He also composed the hymn Pange, lingua, gloriosi for that Easter mass.<sup>70</sup> Although the nuns sang without instrumental accompaniment, their performance would have been amplified by the echoing resonance of their voices against the stone walls of their chapel.<sup>71</sup>

Accompanying this glorious Christian installation there was the beginning of a permanent bitterness between the Sainte Croix nunnery and the envious local bishop, Maroveus. Baudonivia devoted a chapter of the Vita Sanctae Radegundis to her description of the circumstances surrounding the installation of the True Cross relic. When Baudonivia wrote her version of

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<sup>70</sup>Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, Bk. II, II and IV: 76, 80.

<sup>71</sup>The compositions of Fortunatus are performed today in the same physical conditions as those of the sixth-century Sainte Croix nuns' choir through the efforts of a group of French musicians known as the Ensemble Venance Fortunat. This group of musicians and musical scholars gives concerts throughout France in venues equivalent to sixth century architecture. I attended an Ensemble Venance Fortunat performance at the Musee de Cluny, June 11, 1983. The Ensemble also publishes their research of musical manuscripts of the sixth to the eighth centuries, sponsors workshops to encourage the performance of this early medieval music, and makes records of their concerts for an international market: Anne-Marie Deschamps, Director, Ensemble Venance Fortunat, 33 rue Georges Pitard, 75015 Paris, France

Radegunde's life, she already knew the outcome of the local bishop's resentment of the installation of the True Cross relic, and, she knew the verdict of the trial of the rebellious nuns.

Since [Radegunde] wished to do nothing without counsel while she lived in the world, she sent letters to King Sigibert asking...that he permit her to ask the Emperor for wood from the Lord's Cross. He consented to the blessed Queen's petition. She who had made herself a pauper for God...sent no gifts to the Emperor. Instead she sent envoys through whom she asked unceasingly...that from the many relics ornamented with gold and gems which the Orient retained, she might obtain the wood of the True Cross...At the Saint's petition, the Emperor sent legates with gospels ornamented in gold and gems and the wood where once hung the salvation of the world came to the city of Poitiers.<sup>72</sup>

Baudonivia was careful in her account to be explicit about the properness of Radegunde's acquisition of and rights to this powerful relic.

A forced level of leisure, which coexisted with the day to day drudgery of the many repetitive tasks in nunnery life, led to disturbances in the inner life of the Sainte Croix nuns. The nuns' testimony at their trial in 590 indicated that the stolid routine of their lives had a deadening effect on their spirits. Also, the spiritual life of the nuns was controlled by a sacerdotal monopoly of the clerical hierarchy. The leisure activities of the nuns seemed pleasant enough. They enjoyed

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<sup>72</sup>"Et quia sine consilio, in mundo dum vixit, nihil facere voluit, tansmisit litteras ad Sigibertum regem...ut ei permitteret...cruis Domni ab imperatore expetere. Quod ille... ad petitionem sanctae reginae adsensum praebuit. Illa...ad imperatorem non munera dirigit, quae se propter Deum pauperem fecit...missos suos direxit. Sed quod sua vota poscebant obtinuit, ut beatum lignum crucis Domini ex auro et gemmis ornatum et multas sanctorum reliquias, quas Oriens retinebat...At ubi lignum, ubi salus mundi pependerit, Pictavis civitatem advenit."

Roman style baths, backgammon, embroidery, and dinners with visiting Churchmen and laymen. However, after years of living immured, many of the nuns succumbed to accidie.<sup>79</sup> The effect of accidie on cloistered lives was a paralyzing boredom in reaction to their unchanging days. Baudonivia seems to have escaped its dissolution, but Clotild, Basina, and forty other rebel nuns did not. Medieval writers recognized accidie, that is the sin of intellectual and spiritual sloth, as the greatest menace of religious life, from which all other sins may follow. Cassian left a detailed description of accidie's effects in his fourth century cloister; Caesarius cautioned against it; Chaucer described its poison in his Parson's Tale; and, Dante cast accidie into the fifth circle of Hell with the Wrathful and the Sullen.

Two other dominant aspects of life at Sainte Croix, bodily austerities and miracles, converged into a meaningful pattern for sixth-century religious life and influenced Baudonivia's writing.

[Radegunde] did not permit her servants to give her comfort but devotedly hurried about doing service herself; so that

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<sup>79</sup>An excellent discussion of accidie as a powerful, psychologically debilitating force among nuns of the late medieval period in England is in: Eileen Power Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275-1535 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).



she came to such ardent self-denial, her mind so intent of God, that she needed no earthly sustenance.<sup>74</sup>

The devout believed that Radegunde's self denial, mortification of the flesh, fasting, and donations brought grace, mercy, and sanctity from the spiritual world that could be exchanged for miraculous cures. Radegunde's spiritual strength attracted many pilgrims and believers who needed physical and psychological care to come to Sainte Croix.

From Baudonivia's words we also know that Radegunde did not always regard the physical and spiritual responsibility for souls to be a blessing.

Frequently she would say softly, in a manner none could understand: 'Anyone who has the care of souls must be sore afraid of praise from everyone.' But no matter how much she wanted to avoid it, the Giver of virtue worked harder and harder to show her to the faithful.<sup>75</sup>

Radegunde knew the Merovingian kings and bishops very well. She understood that universal praise for her would bring with it

<sup>74</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 8, ln. 2-5: 383. "Non famulae permisit sibi dare solatium, quod devota concursitabat implere servitium; se autem in tam ardua abstinentiae districtione conclusit, usquequo infirmitas permisit, ut mens intenta Deo terrenum iam nec requireret cibum."

Two modern scholars who hold connected, but opposing, views on the relation between medieval women's starvation and their spiritual success: Rudolph M. Bell, Holy Anorexia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast, Holy Fast (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1987). See also, the review contrasting Bell's and Bynum's work: Angelyn Spignesi, "Starving for Salvation," Women's Review of Books 3, no. 12 (Sept., 1986): 17-18.

<sup>75</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 14, ln. 11-16: 387. "Frequenter et dulciter quasi in figura, ut nemo intellegere poset, dicebat: 'Cui animarum cura est, fortiter laudem ab omnibus debet timere.' Sed nihilominus, quantum illa hoc vitare volebat, tanto magis ac magis virtutum Largitor sibi in omnibus fidelem declarare studebat, ita ut, ubicumque infirmus, a quacumque detentus infirmitate, eam invocasset, salutem recipiebat."

the bishops' rivalry and their urge to control her institution and its resources. Although Merovingian women continued to profess corporate lives in the nunnery, their institutional lives became increasingly dependent upon the decisions and practices of priests. While the nunnery continued to fill the needs of many women, the nunnery no longer remained the independent institution for women that Radegunde had envisioned.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE COMPLEMENTARY CONTEXTS FOR RADEGUNDE

Keep in mind that everything recounted here is thrown out of perspective by what is left unsaid: these notes serve only to mark the lacunae.

(Marguerite Yourcenar, "Reflections on the Composition of Memoirs of Hadrian, " 1954)

Something was missing from the story of Radegunde's life. There was some unwritten, but vital, connection between Radegunde's textual image and her life as a powerful woman among her contemporaries. The three texts about Radegunde's life by Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia gave only a partial perspective on Radegunde's role during the period of christianization of the Frankish kingdoms. According to the bishop Gregory of Tours and the monk Fortunatus, Radegunde's leadership represented the benefits of women's obedience to the episcopal hierarchy and women's renunciation of the world. According to the nun Baudonivia, Radegunde espoused the advantages of an active, separatist, life for monastic women.

The three writers' contexts, though different, were all consistent with a clerical view of the social order. Even in a

composite view of Radegunde's life, considering the three complementary contexts as a whole, all three writers adopted the male dominant prerogatives of christianization for their society.

What was missing was a sense of the meaning of Radegunde's leadership among contemporary women, and others, who did not share the clerical view of society, or, who had no vested interests in extending the dominance of orthodox Christianity. This missing dimension of Radegunde's influence among her contemporaries explained why two hundred women came to Poitiers and so radically changed their lives that they lived the rest of their days walled into the Sainte Croix nunnery. Clearly, if so many were willing to take on such a severe new life, there was a great need for change in women's lives.

The addition of a feminist perspective to the image of Radegunde in the texts of Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia makes Radegunde's example among her contemporaries more intelligible. In Merovingian society, living an enclosed life was the best way for many women to improve their lot in life without resorting to organized violence. Living immured was a stringent choice, but it was an attainable alternative. The women who became nuns gained a new identity and a corporate strength for their work to replace their kindred roles in a society that no longer sustained or sanctioned those roles.

Given the content and the contexts of the Radegunde texts, and, knowing what feminist scholarship tells us about gender and

society,<sup>1</sup> we can more accurately gauge the meaning of Radegunde's role in the christianization of her society. Feminist studies tell us about the difference between what was written about women in the past and what we can expect women actually did. That knowledge helps us make the unwritten connection between Radegunde's textual existence and her life as a powerful woman in her own time.<sup>2</sup>

Feminist studies support a better understanding of powerful medieval women.<sup>3</sup> These studies reexamine the traditional view

<sup>1</sup>Two of the best studies of the analytical dynamics of gender in history are: Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," American Historical Review 91, 5 (1986): 1053-1075; Natalie Z. Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case," Feminist Studies 3 (1976): 83-103.

<sup>2</sup>Such a triangulation between what was written down about Radegunde and what feminist studies tell us about women in the past makes a convincing measurement for Radegunde's life. As a method, such a triangulation has a lovely parallel with Eratosthenes' ancient, but accurate measurement of the earth's circumference.

Eratosthenes (c. 276 - c. 194 B. C.) very accurately determined the circumference of the earth by calculating the relation between the angle of the sun's rays to the earth's surface at noon on the summer solstice in two cities, Syene and Alexandria, known to be on the same line north to south and of a known distance apart (5,000 stadia). For a diagram explaining Eratosthenes' calculations see: Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, The Fabric of the Heavens: The Development of Astronomy and Dynamics, (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 113.

<sup>3</sup>The following is a selected list of recently published collections in the history of medieval women which emphasize women's use of their own power in their own interests. Derek Baker, ed. Medieval Women (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978); Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, eds. Women and Power in the Middle Ages (Athens, Georgia and London: University of Georgia Press, 1988); Julius Kirshner and Suzanne Wemple, eds., Women of the Medieval World (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Susan Mosher Stuard, ed., Women in Medieval History and Historiography (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); Susan Mosher Stuard, ed., Women in Medieval Society (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976).

of power as public authority. Moving away from that limited view of power makes use of a wider sense of power which encompasses the ability to act effectively, to influence people or decisions, and to accomplish goals. This more inclusive definition of power contrasts the kinds of power perpetuated in public with the many kinds of power at work in the world. To challenge masculinist assumptions about power in the past, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere raised this question: "Why have the kinds of power available to women been ignored while male 'authority' as power is historically perpetuated?"<sup>4</sup>

Men's domination of the public sphere is actually made possible by the advantages they accrue through their rights to female service in the private or domestic realm. Female servicing constructs a firm base for male social solidarity; it defines the common interests of men otherwise divided by class and power.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., Women, Culture and Society (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 21. Other comparative studies for the kinds of power perpetuated in public and the wider practices of power in society: Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case," Feminist Studies 3 (1976); Sandra Harding, ed., Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and the Philosophy of Science (Dordrecht, Holland, London, and Boston: Reidel Publishing, 1983); Barbara Harris and JoAnn McNamara, eds., Women and the Structure of Society (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1984); Joan Kelly, Women, History and Theory (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, eds., Not in God's Name (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1973); Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," American Historical Review 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053-1075.

<sup>5</sup>Eva Gamarnikow and June Purvis, "Introduction," The Public and the Private, Eva Gamarnikow, David Morgan, June Purvis, and Daphne Taylorson, eds. (London, 1983), 4.

Merovingian women's lives often bore a heavy share of the social consequences for the cultural assimilation of Roman administration, Christian beliefs, and Germanic customs. Compared to the position of women in antiquity, the position of women in early medieval society improved. Advances for the position of women occurred at the beginning of medieval civilization, at those barely discernable points where people adjusted to different expectations and experiences, when the cooperation of women was essential for the creation of a new society.<sup>6</sup> Relative to the gains of contemporary men, however, women lost ground.<sup>7</sup>

In a relatively short time, about three generations from the time of Clovis and Clothilde through Radegunde's lifetime, Christianity became the dominant intellectual and social force governing Frankish society. The imposition of its orthodoxy narrowed the range of socially sanctioned roles for women. In the texts of this time, the images of women like Clothilde, Radegunde, Brunhilde, and Fredegunde reinforced the acceptable roles for women through the use of favorable or unfavorable examples. The favorable or unfavorable images of women in texts

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<sup>6</sup>Suzanne Wemple, Women in Frankish Society, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 189.

<sup>7</sup>Barbara Harris and JoAnn McNamara, eds., Women and the Structure of Society (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1984); Joan Kelly, Women, History and Theory (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koontz, eds., Becoming Visible: Women in European History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

were supported in society by religious sanctions, social customs, and military actions.

Efforts by families to consolidate male inheritance diminished female inheritance. Actions by the clergy to enhance their own rights suppressed female religious participation. Making the warrior status the empowering social ideal excluded women. The warrior status included the qualifier "martyrs without blood" that the clergy claimed from the warrior tradition of Saint Martin.<sup>6</sup>

The precedents and privileges claimed by the clergy of the Frankish Church and accorded to monks and bishops in Frankish society derived in large part from the authority of the text of the Vita s. Martini written by Sulpicius Severus (365-425). As the "apostle" of the Frankish Church, Saint Martin was the figure by whose authority other Christian leaders were measured in sixth century Gaul. Saint Martin (c. 316-397) was a Roman soldier from Pannonia who lived most of his life in Gaul. He retired from the Roman army, became a monk, and was raised to the bishopric of Tours from 372 until his death. The Life of Saint Martin is full of paired images that equate the rigors of a soldier's life with the hardships of a monk's life as "a soldier

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<sup>6</sup>Jacques Fontaine, "Sulpice Severe a-t-il travesti Saint Martin de Tours en martyr militaire?" Analecta Bollandiana 81 (1963): 31-58. "Les ascètes--convers et moines--ont effectivement reconnu dans ces martyrs militaires comme l'incarnation héroïque et idéale de leur propre conception de la vie chrétienne: comme si le 'martyre non sanglant' ne faisait qu'intérioriser, et peut-être épurer à leurs yeux, le témoignage chrétien scelle par la mort triomphale de ces soldats." (p. 57)



of God." Sulpicius Severus wrote down an often repeated conversation between Martin and an unnamed monk who wanted to continue to live with his wife.

"A certain soldier had thrown off his sword-belt in church and taken his vows as a monk; he had made himself a cell in an isolated place...Meanwhile the adversary cunningly troubled his untaught mind with various thoughts, so that he wanted his wife, whom Martin had directed to enter a nunnery, to change her mind and live with him...Then Saint Martin said (and I will give you his exact words): 'Tell me, when an army is preparing to give battle, or with bare steel fighting hand to hand with the enemy, have you ever seen a woman take her place in the ranks, or fight?'"<sup>9</sup>

The model of Saint Martin's life outweighed any other example for leadership in Radegunde's lifetime. The bishops' letter to Radegunde which granted the foundation of her nunnery in 567 carefully placed her leadership in the role of Saint Martin.

In that you [Radegunde] came to us from well-nigh that same region whence Saint Martin came, for so we learn [the bishops believed Thuringia, in Germany, was near Pannonia, present day Hungary] it is no marvel if in your work, you mirror him whom we believe to have been your guide. You followed in his footsteps and now by this happy vow you follow his example. As you renounce your claim to any share of worldly wealth, you choose as your associate that most saintly man.<sup>10</sup>

Placing Radegunde rhetorically in the model of Saint Martin elevated her leadership in a dangerous way. More than the

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<sup>9</sup>Sulpicius Severus, Vita Sanctae Martini, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum. Trans. in Robert Latouche, Caesar to Charlemagne (London: Phoenix House; Barnes and Noble, 1965), 142-143.

<sup>10</sup>Bishops Eufronius of Tours, Praetextatus of Rouen, Germanus of Paris, Felix of Nantes, Domnitianus of Maestricht, Victorius of Rennes and Domnolus of LeMans, "Letter to Saint Radegunde," in Gregory of Tours History of the Franks, trans. and ed. by Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1974), Bk. IX, 39: 527-528.

limitations of family customs and legal codes, it was the exclusive prerogatives of warriors and priests that most effectively barred early medieval women from equal participation in society. Personal initiative, like that of Radegunde and the women in her community, could overcome many restrictions in their lives, but there was no way to circumvent the closed ranks of the men of war and the men of God.

Radegunde's nunnery and the cult she inspired served as a social medium to adapt women's lives to the new practices of early medieval society. When Radegunde was in the Sainte Croix nunnery, she wrote about her vision of the world as a barbarian Christian woman. Radegunde believed that she could use her "dolor privatus" to transform the "dolor publicus."

Barbarian woman that I am, even if the drops of my tears poured to overflow a lake, they could not equal the tears spilled by others. Each one has her own sorrows: mine were for all of them and the sorrow in the world became my own sorrow.<sup>11</sup>

The members of Radegunde's cult, by their earthly appeal to the saint, and thus to the authority of a higher celestial order, acted out the new roles themselves. For their contemporaries, these women acted within "an orthodox idiom" which did not appear to disrupt the social structure.<sup>12</sup> This "orthodox" idea that a lifetime of strict enclosure was a workable solution for

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<sup>11</sup>Radegunde, "De excidio Thoringiae," in Fortunatus, Opera Poetica, ed. Nisard, App., I: 267. "Non aequare queo vel barbara femina fletum cunctaque guttarum maesta natate lacu. Quisque suos habuit fletus, ego sola sed omnes est mihi privatus publicus ille dolor."

<sup>12</sup>Peter Brown, Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 14.

women's needs was in itself a demonstration of the strain that the new order of society put on women's lives.

Radegunde's monastic leadership endowed Frankish women's traditional roles with a new purpose and a new importance. Women transplanted many of their traditional practices into the institutional setting in the nunnery. With an institutional foundation in the Church, women's roles in teaching, nurturing, nursing, householding, and peace-making took on a corporate strength which was not possible when women performed the same duties among their own kindred. At Sainte Croix the women's work affected people from all the Merovingian kingdoms instead of one local domain. The nunnery also offered new bonds of loyalty and security to replace the women's ties to their family and kin groups. As one of the Sainte Croix nuns expressed it, Radegunde provided a new form of family devotion for her monastic sisters and daughters:

She so greatly loved the flock she had gathered... that she no longer remembered that she had had a family and a royal husband. She would often say when she preached to us: 'Daughters, I chose you. You are my light and my life. I rest all my happiness on you, my new plantation. Act with me in this world that we may rejoice in the future.'<sup>19</sup>

Radegunde's cult provided a competing kindred structure: the family of the saint. In Sainte Croix, the nuns replaced family connections in the world with ties to an other-worldly

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<sup>19</sup>Baudonivia, Vita Sanctae Radegundis, Liber II, ed. B. Krusch, MGH Script. rer. mer. 2, Bk. 8, ln. 21-25: 383.

"family."<sup>14</sup> Saint cults were essential for christianization in sixth-century Gaul. The promotion of a saint's cult enabled the Church to compete successfully for allegiance and patronage with the strengthened local family groups as well as the royal households. Through the worship services, festivals, pilgrimages, and miracles of a saint, the Church gathered a new group of believers. A saint's cult gave its members a different, supportive identity to replace kindred roles. The cult gave the Church an additional patronage system outside of the family patronage system. Especially effective for christianization was a saint cult devoted to a saint like Clothilde or Radegunde whose competing family lines had already been severed in war. The cult also offered a sustaining spiritual and psychological transference for the saint herself as she gathered her followers into the Church. More importantly for Radegunde's community, the cult supported changes for women's lives during christianization. The saint's cult, especially as a means to modify society, had the added benefit of being "familia everlasting," as well as being "endlessly elastic."<sup>15</sup>

Many women sought out the nunnery because the complicated politics of Merovingian marriages often dislocated women and

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<sup>14</sup>Laurent Theis, "Saints sans famille? Quelques remarques sur la famille dans le monde franc à travers les sources hagiographiques," Revue Historique 155 (1976): 3-20. According to Theis, the hagiographies of the fifth to the eight centuries provide the evidence for this change from family loyalties to Church associations.

<sup>15</sup>Burnam W. Reynolds, "Familia Sancti Martini," Journal of Medieval History 2, 2 (1985): 137.

their children. During the years Radegunde was the patron of Sainte Croix, polygamy continued to be a common practice of kingship and queen-mothers continued to dictate power through their sons. Among Radegunde's contemporaries, upholding an ideal of monogamy while practicing polygamy cast out-of-favor women and their children out of society. Multiple marriage favored women by creating more positions for women among the most privileged men and by allowing common women to raise their status through marriage. However, except for a few extraordinarily beautiful and ruthless commoners like Fredegunde, the ease with which this same system exchanged these "extra women," recirculating them down and out of the social structure, lost women more than it gained them.<sup>14</sup>

As nuns, these women and their female children gained a new role and new duties in society. The Church's promotion of monogamy, supported, in part, by the institution of the nunnery for unmarried, separated, and widowed women, not only reduced the competition among multiple wives vying for their sons' sovereignty, it also eliminated these wives as a source for the concentration of wealth into women's hands through plural inheritance.

To consolidate sovereign inheritance into one male heir born to one recognized Christian wife was, however, much too

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<sup>14</sup>David Herlihy characterizes the marriage patterns of the early medieval Germanic peoples as "~~resource~~-polygyny." Medieval Households (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1985), 55.

precarious for Merovingian kingship. Because of the extreme mortality of infants and mothers, and, the habit of homicide among the heirs, even the succession of kings and queens with children could never be assured. Polygamy scarcely guaranteed a male heir. Five Merovingian kings were either childless or had no sons.<sup>17</sup> The four sons of Clovis I (481-511) and the seven sons of Clothar I (511-561) were survived in the second generation by only two boys who lived to be kings: Childebert II (575-595), son of Brunhilde and Sigibert; and, Clothar II (613-623), son of Fredegunde and Chilperic.

A son was born to Chilperic. He had the child [Clothar II] brought up in the manor of Vitry, for he was afraid that, if he appeared in public, some harm might befall him and he might even be killed.<sup>18</sup>

The machinations of the childless King Gunthram to leverage his kingdom against the claims of his nephews, and the devices of the queen-mothers Brunhilde and Fredegunde to secure their infant sons' inheritance portions motivated most of the warfare in the Merovingian kingdoms from 575 until 613.

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<sup>17</sup>Childebert I (reigned 511-558) was childless; Clodomer (511-524) had two sons murdered by his brothers Clothar and Childebert, and, one son tonsured, that is, dead to the line of succession; Gunthram (511-592), three sons killed by two successive wives; Chilperic I (511-584) death of three sons by 584 left his kingdom heirless, but one son born late in the king's life, survived. King Charibert I (561-567), no male children.

Gunthram and Chilperic lost a total of eight boy children; Gunthram remained childless; Chilperic and Fredegunde's son Clothar II survived to be sole ruler until 623 after the death of Brunhilde's son Childebert II in 595.

<sup>18</sup>Gregory of Tours History of the Franks, trans. and ed. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1974), Bk. VI, 41: 375.

Radegunde and the community of Sainte Croix nuns continued to be connected to the affairs of Frankish Gaul in countless ways through the powerful webs of family, position, property, and intrigue. The nuns, in their work, associated on all levels of society from the royal, noble, and clerical to the common. In addition to their daily religious services, the nuns had many other duties. Their tasks included gardening and household chores, providing lodging and meals for pilgrims and visiting churchmen, spinning and weaving cloth, copying manuscripts, writing letters, nursing the sick and preparing medicines. Some nuns also had the responsibility of overseeing the servants of the nunnery and the agricultural workers on the Sainte Croix lands. The community's most compelling works were their cures, and, in some cases, their miracles. The medicines and the healing that the pilgrims and other visitors experienced at Saint Croix attracted increased numbers of people to Poitiers.

The Lord repaid Radegunde's virtue generously with miracles famed throughout all Francia. There, where once she had been seen to reign, He prepared a kingdom for her more celestial than terrestrial.<sup>19</sup>

The orbit of activities surrounding Radegunde's nunnery and its shrine of the True Cross increased the prestige and power of Saint Radegunde's cult throughout the kingdoms.

In the texts, Radegunde was submissive, unworldly and secluded; during her life she was unyielding in her beliefs,

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<sup>19</sup>Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 10, ln. 7-9: 385. "Dominus virtutum largitor eam in miraculis clariorem reddidit in Frantia [sic]; ubi dum regnare videretur, sibi magis caeleste quam terrenum praeparavit regnum."

wealthy enough to endow a nunnery for two hundred women, and surrounded by people devoted to her. Writing in 567, Radegunde expressed her own vision for her leadership:

Some time ago, when I found myself freed from earthly cares, I turned to the religious life. I asked myself, with all the ardour of which I am capable, how I could best forward the cause of other women, and how my own personal desires might be of advantage to my sisters. Here in the town of Poitiers I founded a convent for nuns.<sup>20</sup>

Because Radegunde was writing to request a charter for Sainte Croix from the sitting bishops of the Council of Tours, she prudently did not reveal exactly what she intended to do to "forward the cause of other women," nor did she name the "advantages" she wanted for her "sisters."

The body of Radegunde's letter quickly faded into the protective coloring of the Rule, the restrictions, and obeisances the nuns would exchange for the bishops' sanction. An ability to judge the intent behind the oblique and deferential language of, and about, powerful women marks one of the critical standpoints for reading the history of women. Consider the language in the bishops' response to Radegunde's letter:

We learn that a number of women from our dioceses have with great enthusiasm flocked to accept your Rule...We most specifically decree that if a woman comes and is considered worthy to be chosen as an inmate of your nunnery in Poitiers, she shall never have the right to leave it.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Radegunde, "Letter to the Bishops," trans. in H. F., ed. Lewis Thorpe, 335-358.

<sup>21</sup>"Letter to Radegunde," trans. in H. F., ed. Lewis Thorpe, 321.



What was it about gender roles in Merovingian society that made it necessary to couch women's social advances in terms of male control?

To understand Radegunde's influence in Merovingian society and her prominent image in history, it is necessary to know not only her multiple textual images, but also to appreciate how she exercised power in order to accommodate women's new roles to the contemporary tolerance of gender differences.

The Radegunde texts demonstrated the most idealized, socially sanctioned, and politically acceptable activities, behaviors, and leadership traits for Merovingian women.

Membership in the celestial city had a terrestrial base: those recruited to sainthood embodied the values and hierarchical order of their earthly society. With changes in the structure, values, and needs of society and the Church, shifts occurred in the opportunities available to women which could provide them with the visibility required for elevation to sainthood. During the early Middle Ages, worldly power, high status, and social and economic prominence were all necessary prerequisites for candidates for sanctity.<sup>22</sup>

The first two narratives of Radegunde's life by Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus qualified the leadership of the Saint-Queen in terms of a militant chastity and a retreat from the secular world. Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus made Radegunde's image conform with the reclusive customs of the ancient virgins and the ascetic, miracle-working tradition of Saint Martin. In the second generation of Sainte Croix, Baudonivia's Vita Sanctae

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<sup>22</sup>Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles, ca. 500-1100," Women and Power in the Middle Ages, Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, eds. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 102.

Radegundis emphasized women's participation in the world rather than women's withdrawal from the world although these roles were understood to be carried out within the nunnery walls. Gregory, Fortunatus, and Baudonivia aligned Radegunde's roles in their texts with other contemporary women's roles and incorporated the female monastery into Merovingian society.

The great popular response to Radegunde's leadership of a separatist female institution required considerable effort by the ruling secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies to circumscribe the benefits of Radegunde's cult within the scope of their control over the contemporary social order.<sup>23</sup> To tolerate an independent nunnery, the ruling hierarchies exacted the exchange that the women live enclosed lives. That both of the ruling male hierarchies, in one generation's time, sought to control the institution of Sainte Croix and to appropriate the nuns' actions under a bishop's jurisdiction underlined the effectiveness of Radegunde's goals for women.

The sixth-century texts about Radegunde's life described her leadership in such a way as to make her followers appear orthodox and obedient. To accept only that interpretation of the complementary contexts for Radegunde's role would ignore the social potential of women's subversive, but nonbelligerent, acts

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<sup>23</sup>For a discussion of comparable efforts by the authoritative male hierarchy to make original, radical actions by women in the later Middle Ages conform to traditional, male-dominant values, see: Brenda Bolton, "Vita Matrum: A Further Aspect of the Frauenfrage," Medieval Women, Derek Baker, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978): 253-274.

in society. When Radegunde and so many other women withdrew to the nunnery it was not a passive action in Merovingian society. From the women's point of view, in exchange for a vow of obedience and chastity, they were left on their own to live long lives free of the greater encumbrances and increased mortality of uncloistered women.

How subversive was Radegunde's obedience? Radegunde's behavior was so seemingly submissive that she accomplished radical changes in the lives of two hundred women as well as influencing the many followers of her cult. Even if we can not read the answer to such a question directly from her texts, we can see the evidence of her effectiveness among those members of contemporary society who were deemed marginal to the public life of early medieval society. The social force of Christianity, too, had once moved submissively only on the margins of society.

To achieve goals for contemporary women and to circumvent unfavorable precedents against women by the ruling male hierarchies, Queen Radegunde amassed influence and used power in ways that were different from the acts of her male peers. Radegunde's virtuous behavior and the popularity of her cult established her saintly reputation and was the base of her power among the Frankish people. She did not rely on her ability to take direct action against an opposing faction or on her capacity to incite confrontation with her enemies. Her power in that male dominant society rested on her reputation for self-denial, charity among the needy, donations for the poor,

her Catholic beliefs, and her nonbelligerence in sovereign politics. Radegunde's leadership avoided actions which would directly threaten male authority and result in reactionary tactics.

Direct female confrontation, typified by the leadership of Brunhilde and Fredegunde, met defeat in the superior resources of male hierarchical unity based on military actions and religious sanctions. Brunhilde and Fredegunde operated aggressively in the male spheres of politics and warfare, even going as far as planning strategy and leading their factions into battles. They were the leaders of their own factions, in the name of their husbands or sons, in the bloody contests of Merovingian sovereignty.

The contemporary sources tended to simplify and romanticize the factional conflict between Brunhilde and Fredegunde. One Merovingian history championed Brunhilde; the other championed Fredegunde. The Historia Francorum by Gregory of Tours was pro Brunhilde, pro Austrasian, and pro Roman; the Liber Historia Francorum by an anonymous monk was pro Fredegunde, pro Neustrian, and pro Frankish. In both histories, making the queens the opposing viragos of their era conveniently concealed the real conflict at stake. Brunhilde's faction was supported by the bishops and their interests; Fredegunde's faction was supported by the Frankish aristocracy and their interests.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Bernard Bachrach, "Introduction," Liber Historia Francorum (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973), 10-11.

Once the compromises were forged between the Frankish lords and the Catholic bishops at the Treaty of Andelot in 587, both queens were undercut.<sup>25</sup> In the end, the interests of Brunhilde and Fredegunde were ignored equally by a coalition of Merovingian warriors and Christian priests under King Gunthram.

Gregory of Tours recorded an intimate conversation between King Gunthram, Bishop Felix of Chalons-sur-Marne, and himself that is valuable for its unguarded look at the attitudes of a king and his bishops. The "humorous" exchanges between kings and bishops that Gregory wrote down in the Historia Francorum were more honestly revealing of the speakers' intent than the same speakers' formal declarations. The conversation between Gunthram and the bishops took place immediately following the signing of the Treaty of Andelot.

The Andelot treaty set out the terms of sovereignty over lands held interregna by Brunhilde for her son against those lands held by Fredegunde. Having just named himself guardian over all Brunhilde's lands, Gunthram traded barbs with the bishops trivializing in jest what was in fact a brutal struggle between the forces of his sisters-in-law Fredegunde and Brunhilde.<sup>26</sup>

'Tell me, Felix,' [Gunthram] said, 'is it really true that you have established warm friendly relations between my sister Brunhild and that enemy of God and man, Fredegunde?'

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<sup>25</sup>The text of this treaty is in Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 20: 503-507.

<sup>26</sup>Mary Jacobus, "Is There a Woman in This Text?" New Literary History 14, 1 (1982): 117-142. Discusses woman as a derisive figure in texts.

Felix said that it was not. I spoke up and said, 'The King need not question the fact that the 'friendly relations' which have bound them together for so many years are still being fostered by them both. The hatred which has kept them warm for many a long year, far from withering away, is still as strong as ever.'<sup>27</sup>

Disclosing the bishops' own rivalry within the Brunhilde and Fredgunde feud, Felix and Gregory chided the king for receiving the envoys of his enemy Fredegunde with more consideration than he received his bishops. Gunthram retorted:

'You may be quite sure in your turn, Bishop, that I receive Fredgunde's envoys in this way simply in order to maintain friendly relations with my nephew Childebert. I can hardly be offering ties of genuine friendship to a woman who on more than one occasion has sent her men to murder me!'<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps even more revealing for a consideration of the the bishops' and kings' exclusion of women is an earlier conversation Gregory noted in which Gunthram made the same joke about Brunhilde, his supposed ally. Talking to the bishops at the baptism of Brunhilde's son Childebert, Gunthram made the following two-faced observation:

'If then, your [the bishops'] prayers attend him, he may well rule the kingdom one day...It is true enough,' Gunthram added as an afterthought, 'that his mother threatened to murder me, but as far as I am concerned that is a matter of small moment.'<sup>29</sup>

The informal exchanges above represent the solidarity of the warriors and the bishops that always had the potential to block female initiative. In public life, the threat of violence combined with religious condemnation supported the ruling male

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<sup>27</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. IX, 20: 507.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 507.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., Bk. VIII, 4: 436.

efforts to control women's activities. In private life, powerful men assured themselves of their control over women rulers through exclusion and ridicule.

It was clear from the examples in the texts that powerful men preferred Radegunde's image of passive politics and enclosed monasticism to Fredegunde's and Brunhilde's aggressive politics and open warfare. Considered as a triptych of textual archetypes, the images of Radegunde, Fredegunde and Brunhilde represented a perfect containment of women in society with male dominion over the good woman, the bad woman, and the strong woman.

Radegunde's leadership created an obtainable, although difficult, alternative to the hardships facing many women who were caught in a social vise between Germanic husbandry, Roman concubinage, and Christian marriage. The monastic alternative strictly regulated women's lives. The social and economic sacrifices women made to enter a nunnery earned them the privilege of withdrawing from the inordinate pressure that the social compromises between barbarian customs and Christian practices put on certain women -- unwanted daughters, childless queens, stepchildren, unmarried women, repudiated wives, royal widows. Life was difficult for these women under any contemporary circumstances. The life that the nunnery offered encouraged many women to avoid the risks of living in the world unattached to a man, or, even worse, the dangers of living attached to the wrong man. For some women the nunnery provided

a way to forgo the many encumbrances and increased mortality of family life.

The aristocratic women who entered the nunnery brought with them endowments in land and revenues to provide for their institutional support. In the place of their worldly positions in the Frankish kingdom, cloistered women found affirmation within the nunnery through active roles in teaching, caring for the sick, mediating factional conflicts, providing for the poor, supporting their community, and influencing affairs beyond their walls. The consolidation of women's resources for the foundation of the nunnery alienated those estates and revenues from their family patrimony, and, often, as was the case of the Sainte Croix community, added those lands and wealth to the accumulated holdings of the Church.

The outcome of the Sainte Croix nuns' trial in 591 showed a dimension of the acquisition of property by the Church. As part of the verdict of the nuns' trial, the bishop-judges appealed to the kings "to exert your royal authority, to order restitution to its proper place of all property belonging to the nunnery."<sup>20</sup> In the transfer of property like that between Radegunde and the Church, the Church used time and property differently than the members of powerful lay families. Unlike individuals or families, the institutional Church was not subject to the losses of inheritance through mortality or through alienation; the Church could use time as an ally, willingly giving up the uses

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<sup>20</sup>Gregory of Tours, H. F., Bk. X, 16: 575.



of their lands for long periods of time with the knowledge that the institution would ultimately gain great profits.<sup>31</sup>

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, the Church acquired vast estates--benefiting from the expansive latifundia bequeathed by the Roman Emperors to the barbarian kings. The kings in turn donated tracts of the latifundia for monasteries and nunneries through mortmain inheritance. From the sixth century on, Church councils forbade the alienation of ecclesiastical property.<sup>32</sup> Often, this pattern of Church acquisition at the aristocracy's expense caused competition and conflict between secular and ecclesiastical leaders.<sup>33</sup>

A specific example of the Church's use of time to gain land was the precarial grant. The precarial grant, which originated in the late Roman Empire, provided that churches, monasteries, and nunneries could make a lifetime grant of its lands in usufruct to a lay person. On that person's death, the land and any additions or improvements reverted to the original owner. In some cases, lay people made a precarial grant to the Church, but in this instance, too, time favored the institution because

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<sup>31</sup>Stephen Weinberger, "Precarial Grants: Approaches of the clergy and lay aristocracy to landholding and time," Journal of Medieval History 11 (1985): 166.

<sup>32</sup>Robert Latouche. The Birth of Western Economy: Economic Aspects of the Dark Ages (London: Methuen, 1961; first pub. in Paris, 1956), 55-56.

<sup>33</sup>On the problems inherent in the aggrandizement of Church lands and episcopal authority at the aristocracy's expense through monastic donations see pp. 52-55 in: Karl F. Werner, "Le rôle de l'aristocratie dans la christianisation du nord-est de la Gaule," Revue d'histoire de l'église de France 62 (1976): 45-73.

the family heirs tended to either die out or, after enough time, concede the ownership.

For the actions of aristocratic Frankish women like Radeconde who were well endowed and personally powerful, the sixth-century confluence of Germanic husbandry, Roman concubinage, and Christian marriage created a fluid and potent cultural environment. The queens' economy was based on Germanic marriage customs, including the morgengabe<sup>34</sup>, and on more equitable, if not equal, inheritance rights. The queens' economy changed with the adoption of Roman administrative practices which were carried out by Gallo-Roman administrators through clerical hierarchies. According to their traditional customs, Germanic women could inherit in their own name and for their heirs through a web of kinship rights and their rights of cohabitation.<sup>35</sup>

A particularly costly change for Germanic women from their traditional customs was the acceptance of the Roman dowry. According to Germanic custom, the bride attracted the wealth of

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<sup>34</sup>Literally, the "morning gift," granted the woman sources of wealth such as certain estates or the revenues from certain duties or customary payments.

<sup>35</sup>For a composite view of the complex Germanic law codes see: Katherine Fischer Drew, "The Law of the Family in the Germanic Barbarian Kingdoms: A Synthesis," Studies in Medieval Culture XI, eds. John Sommerfeldt and Thomas H. Sellar (1977): 17-26. That these limited inheritance rights diminished under Christian practices see: Diane Owen Hughes, "From Brideprice to Dowry in Medieval Europe," Journal of Family History 3 (1978): 262-296; and, JoAnn McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, "The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe 500-1100," Clio's Consciousness Raised, eds. Mary Hartman and Lois W. Banner (New York: Harper and Row, 1974): 103-117.

the bridegroom's family. With the Roman dowry, the bride carried wealth from her family into the groom's household. Only the wealthier Germanic men could afford many wives because adding wives subtracted wealth. In Roman practice, adding more women added wealth. This change in marriage custom did not happen over night or even in one generation. In the first Merovingian generations, the kings continued to have multiple wives. Christian customs favored the Roman dowry, however, the number of wives was limited to one. The restriction of only one wife under Christianity became more attractive with the bonus of not having to pay the bride price.

For Frankish women, the christianization of Merovingian Gaul contained within its religious conversion complex social, political, and economic consequences. At first, women like Queen Clothilde (d. 544) were the converters of pagan husbands and the frequent allies of catholic bishops; the bishops' ties with the women's ample material benefits bought reciprocal influence at court and in the Church. In return for women's sway over kings and warriors, the bishops sometimes intervened in cases of cruelty to children and wives or negotiated the foundation of nunneries for separated women. In the face of contemporary social injustices toward women, the Christian nunnery offered refuge to world-weary women, and over time, women's monastic endowments greatly increased the property of the Church.

Ties in the guise of religion between Frankish, aristocratic women and Gallo-Roman, episcopal administrators demonstrated the cultural and economic amalgamation that was achieved in early medieval Gaul. During the generation of Radegunde, Fredegunde, and Brunhilde, the bishops' positions were more secure than during the previous reigns of Basina and Clothilde. The cooperation of aristocratic women was less useful for episcopal purposes. The bishops' conciliatory efforts toward women devolved to a more openly self-interested strategy relying on the tactic of censuring contemporary women. Particularly open to such censure was the vigorous leadership of the rival queens Fredegunde and Brunhilde. Their factional warfare for sovereignty was as bloodthirsty as their husbands'. The queens assumed political leadership roles in their own interests and openly competed with warrior kings and administrator priests for the resources of the Merovingian kingdoms. Queen Radegunde allied herself with several factions of Merovingian bishops. In place of the maternal setting of Clothilde's ambition for her sons, or, Fredegunde and Brunhilde's domination of rival court factions, Radegunde placed her ambitions within the institutional Church.

Regarding women, the bishops' decisions in Church councils and in council with the kings ranged from their decision in 511

that mulierculae<sup>36</sup> who served the mass polluted the sacrament to their decision in 567 at the Council of Tours that the clerical status of both consecrated widows and deaconesses be abolished.<sup>37</sup> The bishops ruled to restrict the widows' and deaconesses' vocations to the status of a private vow equivalent only to that of any other penitent, with one outstanding exception. The widows' and deaconesses' vows, unlike other penitents' vows, were binding for life and required life-long enclosure.

The derogation of women's official standing in the Church during Radegunde's lifetime satisfied the bishops' fundamental resolutions at the Synod of Auxerre between 561 and 605 that women were by nature impure. Women were not allowed to come near the altar; they had to wear a veil in the presence of the sacraments; they could not take the Eucharist in their hands or touch the altar cloth.<sup>38</sup> The Frankish bishops and kings did not

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<sup>36</sup>The bishops choice of the word mulierculae indicated their contempt for women. The word mulierculae translates as: dishonorable or contemptuous women. Suzanne Wemple draws attention to the connotations of this word usage in Women in Frankish Society on page 139.

<sup>37</sup>For a concise but thorough survey of the Merovingian bishops' and kings' counciliar agenda regarding the female diaconate in the sixth century, read: Suzanne Wemple, Women in Frankish Society, 136-141.

<sup>38</sup>Syn. Dioc. Autiss. 36-37, 42 (Corpus christianorum. Series Latina 148A, 269-270). Suzanne Wemple, Women in Frankish Society, nt. 77, 274, includes this reference plus similar precedents in Church legislation regarding the relationship between women and the sacred from the third century to the sixth century. Jane Schulenburg, "Strict Active Enclosure and Its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience (ca. 500-1100), Distant Echoes, eds., John Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shanks (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 56-58, lists the Carolingian counciliar legislation regarding women.

innocently resolve to purify the Church; their decisions overtly denigrated women in order to consolidate exclusive, male-hierarchical privilege.

The practice of excluding women from full religious participation was concealed under the male cloak of "universal" clerical government. The practices of the Church toward women were disproportionately damaging for women and for society as a whole because the Church was the intellectual, organizational and institutional model for sixth-century Gaul. The cultural consequences of the religious restriction of women's activities in relation to the same activities by men has lived as long as the body of the Church in western civilization.

In 567 Radegunde's "Letter of Foundation" for Sainte Croix responded to the changing character of her Church. After being consecrated in 566 or 567, Radegunde sponsored a monastic community first, in Saix, and then, in Poitiers during the ten years before 567.<sup>39</sup> Her letter to the Frankish bishops may have been necessary to adjust the reality of her community to the increasingly restrictive episcopal policy regarding female monasteries.<sup>40</sup>

Radegunde's letter indicated her recognition that a separatist women's institution of Sainte Croix's size and importance amounted to a radical social adjustment to

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<sup>39</sup>On Radegunde's foundation at Saix before she established Sainte Croix see: Fortunatus, Liber I, Bk. 15; Baudonivia, Liber II, Bk. 13.

<sup>40</sup>Gregory of Tours, "Letter of Foundation," H. F., trans. Lewis Thorpe, Bk. IX, 42: 535-536.

interlocking social pressures. These pressures included multiple inheritance among royal sons, competition among plural royal wives, conflicts between step-children and the favored wives, rivalries over sons' sovereign rights, cruel marriage alliances, succession by murder, and the bitter consequences of childlessness for Merovingian dynastic politics. The nunnery, despite its masking of unsavory practices aimed at walling in unwanted wives or daughters, established a corporate identity for women who took exception to and took refuge from contemporary social expectations in favor of other roles as religious women.

There is also a possibility that Radegunde's foundation letter was composed even later, in 590 or 591, with Abbess Leubovera's knowledge, during the heat of the Sainte Croix nuns' trial in order to save the nunnery. By giving documented testimony of Radegunde's prior submission to the bishops' demands, the Abbess could hope to continue the independent institutional life of Sainte Croix. Sections of the "Letter of Foundation" appear to be perhaps too expressly suited to the particulars of the Sainte Croix trial to have been written a quarter of a century before-hand:

...if the community should rise in revolt, which is surely impossible, and wish to make a change; or if any person, possibly even the bishop of the diocese, shall wish to claim, by some newfangled privilege, jurisdiction of any sort over the nunnery, or over the property of the nunnery, beyond that which earlier bishops, or anyone else, have exercised during my lifetime; or if any nun shall wish to break the Rule and go out into the world;...may that person incur the wrath of God and that of your holiness and of those [bishops] who succeed you, and may all such persons

be shut off from your grace as robbers and despoilers of the poor.<sup>41</sup>

It is generally accepted that the "Letter of Foundation" is genuine, like the other original documents "inserted" in the Historia Francorum. This would mean that Radegunde may have foreseen a judicial infringement on her community because of the jealousy and hostility of Bishop Maroveus' actions and because of her understanding of Merovingian politics. She may have anticipated a rebellion among the nuns because of the privations of enclosure for young women.

In the face of her society's countenance of male dominance by means of royally and religiously legitimated violence, Radegunde's submission to certain bishops, clerics, and aristocratic factions in order to establish an institutional foundation for Merovingian women's roles proved to be acceptable to ruling men as well as beneficial for many women. When Radegunde established the Sainte Croix nunnery, she incorporated activities and duties which were already acceptable to barbarian rulers and episcopal leaders as women's tasks--nurturing, childraising, teaching, healing, peace-making, and managing households and estates--into a new, independent institution for women.

The cruel twist of Radegunde's successful manipulation of male dominance behavior for her own ends is that this practice kept female subordination in place. Radegunde and the nuns

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<sup>41</sup>Gregory of Tours, "Letter of Foundation," trans. Lewis Thorpe, H. F., Bk. IX, 42: 536.



practiced only certain, sanctified activities that were an extension of their traditional charitable and care-taking roles. Although the nuns themselves had withdrawn from society, the practice of these new monastic roles amounted to intervention among the people of the Merovingian kingdoms. Once in practice, however, the nuns' activities indirectly sustained the existing warrior-priest system by alleviating its most obvious failures among the sick and the destitute.

It was even more cruel for the women of Sainte Croix that in spite of Radegunde's compliance with the kings and the priests, Radegunde's independent nunnery was put under episcopal control only three years after her death. A verdict reached by six bishops and upheld by three kings ruled that Sainte Croix would be subject to a Bishop.

The occasion for this trial was a revolt by a faction of forty Sainte Croix nuns. The nuns, in violation of their Rule, left the nunnery in protest of the long neglect of the Bishop of Poitiers and the actions of the their Abbess Leubovera. The issue at the nuns' trial was not the nuns' violation of their Rule. The over-arching issue of the trial of the Sainte Croix nuns was the determination of jurisdiction over the resources of the nunnery. The verdict of the bishop-judges decided that jurisdiction over the nunnery would be granted to the Bishop of Poitiers. With this one decision, six bishops reversed Radegunde's life work of independent institutional achievement. Although the Sainte Croix nunnery did continue a dependent

institutional life for many centuries, this was not the independent institution for women that Radegunde envisioned. The question remains open whether or not an independent women's institution could have survived in the Merovingian kingdoms and through later times without being embedded in the hierarchy of the Church.

Radegunde's textual example simultaneously confirmed women's roles in the supportive spheres of teaching, care-taking, and peace-making; denounced women's participation in the ruling hierarchies of the court, the military, and the Church; and, stipulated that women's activities be subject to the authority of the ruling hierarchies. An image, like Radegunde's, which was created in texts and perpetuated in history in order to reinforce male dominant goals for society, obscures the sources of women's real participation and power in the past.

Images, if they last, reflect the views of those who stayed in power.<sup>42</sup> Radegunde's image has certainly endured. Images, however, can distort contemporary vision. In the future, feminist studies may continue to examine a conclusion that women's subordination in society was an illusion which has been enhanced by the peripheral treatment of women in history.<sup>43</sup> Further, that this illusion was as useful to those on the margin of the pages of history as it was to those writing the pages.

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<sup>42</sup>Julia O'Faolain, Not in God's Image, xv.

<sup>43</sup>Barbara Harris and JoAnn McNamara, Women and the Structure of Society, ix-x.

It is the fundamental purpose of the liberal arts to challenge the graven images of the human past. The images of women in history, even if they have endured through successive eras of civilization, no longer limit our ability to re-envision those women and overcome historical prejudices about women.

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This bibliography is selective and is organized into the following sections:

## PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Radegunde Texts
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## SECONDARY SOURCES

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2. Saint-Queen Radegunde
3. Hagiography
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5. Biography/Critique for the Writers  
of the Radegunde texts
6. Women in the Early Christian Church
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11. The Merovingian Nunnery
12. Miracles and Merovingian Medicine
13. The Saint
14. Theory and Method for the History of Medieval Women

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## COMPLEMENTARY CONTEXTS FOR THE LIFE OF SAINT-QUEEN RADEGUNDE

Duey White

## ABSTRACT

As a queen, nun, cult leader, and patron saint, Radegunde (A. D. 520-587) takes her place in history from three narrative texts about her life written between 575 and 610 by Gregory of Tours, a senatorial Gallo-Roman bishop and historian; Venantius Fortunatus, a provincial Italian poet-priest; and, Baudonivia, a Frankish nun and scribe. Each writer was closely associated with Radegunde and the Sainte Croix nunnery she established for two hundred women in Poitiers. The activities surrounding Radegunde, the three writers, and the Sainte Croix nuns generated a dominant influence during the christianization of Frankish Gaul.

In this historiographical study, my critical triangulation of Gregory's Historia Francorum, Fortunatus' Vita Sanctae Radegundis. Liber I, and Baudonivia's Vita Sanctae Radegundis. Liber II, demonstrates that each writer created a specific context to interpret Radegunde's example and that each context, in turn, revealed the different social circumstances and personal experiences of the writer. Bishop Gregory favored Radegunde's compliance with the episcopal hierarchy. Fortunatus praised

Radegunde's contemplative retreat from the world. Baudonivia emphasized the benefits of a separatist community for women.

In 590-591, a faction of Sainte Croix nuns broke their Rule and crossed the forbidden convent walls. The kings appointed six bishops, including the Bishop of Poitiers, to judge the nuns. However, the central issue of this trial was to award jurisdiction over nunnery property. The bishops' verdict reversed the independent status of Sainte Croix, placing the nunnery under the control of the Bishop of Poitiers.

Although each writer's context was different, all were compatible with the male dominant goals of christianization. The writers' three-fold image of Radegunde simultaneously confirmed women's roles in the supportive spheres of teaching, care-taking, and peace-making; denounced women's participation in the ruling hierarchies of the court, the military, and the Church; and, stipulated that women's activities be subject to the authority of the ruling hierarchies. Adding a feminist perspective to the Merovingian writers' contexts reveals how Radegunde's textual image distorted contemporary understanding and perpetuated historical prejudices about women's full participation in society.

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