

Public Abstract

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Graduation Term:SS 2009

Department:History

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Title:We have chosen a few things from among many: The Adaptations and Suitability of Nuns' Rules in Merovingian Gaul

The nuns' rules of Caesarius of Arles (470-542), Donatus of Besancon (fl. 624), and Waldebert of Luxeuil (d. c. 668) suggest that for the early medieval female community in Merovingian Gaul, the monastic rule was a versatile and influential text that could be used to express the idiosyncrasies of female religious life, to serve as a spiritual guideline, or even to exert the administrative autonomy of female monasteries. These early medieval nuns' rules were a product of a transitional era in western monasticism, during which churchmen and women religious were attempting to define female monasticism according to rapidly changing political situations and the hardening of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Rather than enforce the tenets of any one rule, these monastic authors and the communities they addressed adapted the expectations of female religious life to the circumstances of the individual physical and political environments. Furthermore, in order to preserve the female community and the spiritual life of women religious, it was necessary to address the ways in which the female community differed from male communities. Even as the Benedictine rule presented what seemed like a suitable rule for either sex, the ways in which seventh-century churchmen organized mixed rules for nunneries, often at the request of women religious, demonstrate that although female and male communities were both capable of pursuing the monastic ideal, the route to achieving this was not the same for both monks and nuns.