

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

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

“WE HAVE CHOSEN A FEW THINGS FROM AMONG MANY:” THE ADAPTATIONS AND SUITABILITY OF NUNS’ RULES IN MEROVINGIAN GAUL

presented by Autumn N. Dolan,

a candidate for the degree of master of history

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Professor Lois L. Huneycutt

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Professor Rabia Gregory

For my grandmother, Anna Mae Bustle, whom we miss very much.

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## Introduction

For female monasticism, the sixth and seventh centuries represent a period during which women religious and monastic authorities were struggling to define and organize the monastic community in a way that would best serve the needs of women in the community. This period represents a transition between the Church Fathers, whose ideals regarding women religious were intent on creating the perfect virgin, and the Carolingian churchmen who sought to establish monasticism as a homogenous institution. In 512, Caesarius of Arles (470-542) produced for the convent of St. John the first surviving nuns' rule that was written for a specific female community. Although the rule was never adopted in its entirety, the attention with which Caesarius confronted the monastic life of women left an impression for seventh-century convents and influenced the expectations of monastic legislation. Seventh-century monastic authorities, such as Waldebert of Luxeuil (d. c. 668) and Donatus of Besançon (fl. 624), strove to adapt the popular rules of Caesarius of Arles, Benedict of Nursia and Columbanus to mixed rules that expressed the nuns' spiritual fervor and those aspects of the monastic experience that were unique to women. The rules that churchmen devised to address the communal lives of nuns were those that took into consideration the environmental circumstances of the convent, the spirituality of nuns, the idiosyncrasies of female life, and even the administrative autonomy of the community.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As this thesis will argue, administrative autonomy of a convent is that which allows the abbess and her community to operate without the arbitrary intervention of bishops. This thesis, however, does not intend to suggest that convents, any more than male monasteries, were permitted to operate outside of all ecclesiastic oversight or that they were immune from the decisions of church councils.

The study of female monasticism and women religious in the early Middle Ages has been a topic dominated by well-known authors such as Jo Ann MacNamara and Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg.<sup>2</sup> Their publications concerning women religious and female sanctity have broken through the seemingly monotonous hagiographical sources to reveal the context and patterns of the female religious experience of the early Middle Ages and even beyond. Women in early medieval Gaul have benefited, in particular, from the studies of both MacNamara and Suzanne Fonay Wemple. Even though three decades have passed since its publication, their article “The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe: 500-1100”<sup>3</sup> continues to resonate in more recent scholarship that seeks to consider the influence and social roles of early medieval women. Suzanne Fonay Wemple’s *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-900*, which expanded the historical context of Merovingian and early Carolingian society to include women, still guides historians who are interested in how social norms impact and transform the roles of women, whether in the political or religious realm. The works of these scholars and those who have drawn upon their research have undoubtedly expanded the field’s understanding of early medieval women religious and the monastic trends that pertain to them.

Although these authors have addressed the existence of nuns’ rules in Merovingian Gaul, few have attempted to analyze the specific tenets of the rules or how the adaptations of nuns’ rules reflected enduring customs and transitions in Merovingian female monasticism. The mention of these rules by scholars such as MacNamara and

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<sup>2</sup> Jo Ann MacNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) and Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Jo Ann MacNamara and Suzanne F. Wemple, “The Power of Women Through the Family in Medieval Europe,” in *Feminist Studies* 1 (1973): 126-41.

Wemple is most often combined with a positive interpretation of those monastic authors who developed rules specifically for women. Wemple argues that “the rules for female communities that these men composed or helped to formulate were predicated on the principle that women could and indeed needed to develop their own independent form of spirituality.”<sup>4</sup> In Wemple’s opinion, Caesarius of Arles represents a more egalitarian religious advisor compared to the Church Fathers with their harsh and even misogynistic treatment of women.<sup>5</sup>

More recent scholarship, however, has brought up questions concerning the relationship between monastic rules and their female audiences and regarding the intention of the authors of these nuns’ rules. In *A Conflict of Traditions: Women in Religion in the Early Middle Ages, 500-840*, Donald Hochstetler discusses the development of the monastic ideal for women religious during the early Middle Ages and the way in which the agendas of Frankish nobles transformed these ideals in the eighth and ninth centuries. According to Hochstetler, the religious life of women was not naturally defined by the monastery or its rule, but these instead were imposed on the lives of women religious who had once had the freedom to pursue independent and unregulated ascetic lifestyles. By the sixth century, the churchmen sought through the decisions of councils and the efforts of pastoral care to organize and shape Christian society in such a way that would reflect unity and conformity. For ascetic Christians, this agenda of orthodoxy did serve to define the appropriate condition of women religious as being that of enclosed nuns. Highlighting the religious endeavors of non-monastic women, such as consecrated widows and deaconesses, Hochstetler chooses to present the

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<sup>4</sup>Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-900* (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 192.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

female monastery as an institutional imposition on the expression of female spirituality and religious life. He argues that “monastic rules emphasized restriction and sacrifice as opposed to freedom, duties as opposed to rights.”<sup>6</sup> In his analysis of eighth- and ninth-century women religious, he argues that for the aristocratic nun or abbess, the foundational ideals of female monasticism, as had been laid down in the nuns’ rules of Caesarius of Arles and by the authors of the seventh-century mixed rules, were no longer considered applicable to their religious experience, which had become almost indistinguishable from their secular activities.<sup>7</sup>

Like Hochstetler, Julie Ann Smith does not interpret female monasticism or its rules as a reliable reflection of women religious or their own expectations for the female religious life. Comparing the expectations for women found in the tariffs of penitentials and those in the chapters of monastic rules, Smith has determined that, although it is impossible to assume that these rules provide the historian with any honest image of female religious life during the early Middle Ages, it is evident that they were intended to control and dominate women according to the ideals of male churchmen. As Smith argues, “the texts were not simply designed to condition and constrain the behavior of audiences but were also part of a more comprehensive project of Christianisation and imposition of clerical views of how the world should be.”<sup>8</sup> Despite her doubts regarding the intentions of the male authors of monastic rules, Smith contends that the gender-specific rules, like those of Caesarius of Arles, Donatus of Besançon and Waldebert of

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<sup>6</sup> Donald Hochstetler, *A Conflict of Traditions: Women in Religion in the Early Middle Ages, 500-840* (New York: University Press of America, 1992), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Hochstetler, 117-8.

<sup>8</sup> Julie Ann Smith, *Ordering Women’s Lives: Penitentials and Nunnery Rules in the Early Medieval West* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001), 226.

Luxeuil, did at least attempt to serve their communities better than the unmodified Benedictine rule, which held nuns to the same expectations as those set for monks.<sup>9</sup>

Although the nuns' rule is ultimately the creation of churchmen, this thesis demonstrates that the nuns' rules of sixth- and seventh-century Gaul were neither ineffective documents nor necessarily tools of oppression. Instead, the appeal of the nuns' rule to early medieval women religious was in its capacity to safeguard the convent, to serve as a spiritual guide for the female community, and to express the nuances of female monasticism. The actions of abbesses and nuns to direct the selection or formulation of their community's rule provides some indication as to the attention given by the female community to its rule. In his account of the late sixth-century controversy between the convent of Holy Cross and the bishops of Poitiers, Gregory of Tours notes that Radegund, the foundress of Holy Cross, insisted on attaining and establishing the rule of Caesarius for her community.<sup>10</sup> Many nuns in the seventh century also appear to have taken seriously their monastic legislation, and Donatus of Besançon remarks that the nuns of Jussa had relentlessly demanded that he create a rule that was suitable for their female community.<sup>11</sup> As the monastic rule became more meticulous in its articulation of communal protocol and the daily schedule of the monastery, the female community seemed to become more intent on ensuring that its rule served the needs and expectations of women religious.

Recognizing transitions in the tenets of nuns' rules, however, can be very different from understanding the practical application of such monastic legislation in the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 225.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), 9:40, 530.

<sup>11</sup> Donatus of Besançon, *regula ad virgines*, in *The Ordeal of Community*, trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John Halborg (Toronto, Ontario: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1993), 32.

early medieval convent. Because there is no way to judge from the rule alone whether or not nuns upheld the recommendations of their monastic advisors, this thesis will also examine examples of behavior within the convent, chiefly through hagiographic accounts. The validity of using saints' lives as evidence, however, has encountered criticism from historians who stress the formulaic composition of *vitae* and the frequent manipulation of saints' lives for political purposes. Hippolyte Delehaye, author of *Legends of the Saints*, argues that "it is almost always a waste of time to seek to identify the historical fact which has been responsible for the introduction of such epic incidents in the life of a saint."<sup>12</sup> This assumption that there is no viable history in the accounts of saints has left many entirely disparaging of the historian's use of such sources. John Kitchen asserts that "the attraction historians have for hagiography leads to one of the most mismatched unions perhaps ever encountered in humanistic scholarship. Historians continue to ask the questions that the hagiographic texts are the least likely to answer."<sup>13</sup>

For early medieval women, however, sources are rare, and hagiography has contributed a great deal to what historians understand about the lives of women in Merovingian and Carolingian Gaul. In her discussion of female sanctity throughout the early Middle Ages, Jane Tibbets Schulenberg argues that in conjunction with other documentary and archaeological evidence, "many of the behavioral modes and strategies attributed to female saints – previously dismissed by scholars as wildly implausible, mere hagiographic exaggeration, fantasy, or *topoi* – are in fact in the realm of 'real' contemporary behavior."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, there is some suggestion that saints' lives may

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<sup>12</sup> Hippolyte Delahaye, *Legends of the Saints*, trans. V.M.Crawford (London, 1907), 28.

<sup>13</sup> John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Schulenburg, 51-2.

have served as a pedagogical tool for monastic communities. Hagiography could serve as a powerful unifier for Christian communities, including those female communities that fiercely protected their monastic identity.<sup>15</sup>

There is also a tradition of female authors in the hagiographical tradition of sixth- and seventh-century Gaul that provides some indication as to the extent to which women religious were involved in understanding and interpreting their own monastic experience. The hagiographic texts devoted to Saint Radegund (525-587) were written by those who personally knew her, one of whom was a nun from her community at Holy Cross. It is Baudonivia's account rather than the biography produced by Venantius Fortunatus (530-600), later bishop of Poitiers, that provides insight into the monastic founder's and nuns' concern for the women religious of her community and the sustainability of the convent at Poitiers. Nuns also contributed to the depictions of monastic life during the seventh century. For the convent of Faremoutiers in Austrasia, descriptions of the deaths of nuns were preserved in Jonas' account of Columbanus and his monastic movement in Gaul. These descriptions, however, were not written by Jonas himself but were collected from the community, written by nuns and possibly resembling the "nunbooks" that were so popular in the later Middle Ages.<sup>16</sup> The *vitae* of Queen Balthild (d. ca. 680) and Bertilla (d. ca. 700), the first abbess of the monastery at Chelles, are both considered productions of nuns from within the community. Abbesses also oversaw the composition of saints' lives. Caesaria the Younger, who was abbess of St. John around 550 CE, commissioned

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>16</sup> Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg with E. Gordon Whatley trans. and ed., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 161

the second *vita* of Caesarius of Arles, throughout which the hagiographer highlights St. John.<sup>17</sup>

The hagiography from this period does not abandon the political agenda so often associated with the production of such texts, but the parallels found between the tenets of the nuns' rules and hagiographical descriptions of customs within the monastic community do reveal how nuns from this period may have internalized the expectations held for the female religious life. In the life of Saint Bertilla, abbess of Chelles, the author constantly incorporates instruction from the rules of Caesarius, Benedict, Columbanus and the mixed rules of Donatus and Waldebert. The emphasis that monasticism placed on reading and spiritual instruction suggests that hagiography may have also been employed as a reinforcement of proper behavior as was set down in the nuns' rule. Discussing the connection between hagiography and instruction, McNamara observes that "because [the *vita*] was read to the community at meals and on feast days, it would have translated the abstract demands of the rules into the common life of their own convent."<sup>18</sup> Although it cannot be assumed that hagiography directly mirrors the activity within the convent, these texts do provide glimmers of women religious and their monastic world.

Caesarius of Arles is recognized as the fundamental author of nuns' rules in Merovingian Gaul. Written and edited between 512 and 534 for the monastery of St. John, his nuns' rule was the product of an urban environment, which faced constant concern for physical safety and political machinations. In 508, besieging Visigoths

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<sup>17</sup> William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7-8. See also Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 90.

<sup>18</sup> McNamara and Halborg with Whatley trans. and ed, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 280.

destroyed the initial site and structure of St. John that was outside the city walls. The war between Goths and Franks over Arles also bred suspicion and paranoia into its rulers, and as a bishop, Caesarius constantly dodged accusations of treason. The first chapter of this thesis demonstrates the impact such an urban environment had on the draft of Caesarius' rule for nuns, and likewise on female monasticism in sixth-century Gaul, which shared much of Arles' political chaos. In addition to the nuns' rule, biographies of Caesarius' career as bishop and metropolitan, his *vita* and final testament, and letters he exchanged with popes and other ecclesiastics serve as the main sources for this chapter.

Compared to the more independent female asceticism of previous centuries, the detailed nuns' rule of Caesarius of Arles marks a significant turning point in the conception of female religious life. Of particular interest is Caesarius' initial letter to his sister Caesaria and her nuns before the establishment of St. John, a letter which may have served as a preliminary rule for the monastery. A comparison between this letter and Caesarius' final nuns' rule suggests that, according to Caesarius' expectations for female monasticism, intense concern for the safety of the urban female community had displaced much of his abstract notions of monasticism. Moreover, the building projects Caesarius oversaw at St. John, as documented in his *vita*, illustrated how seriously Caesarius protected the place of women in urban monastic communities. The presumed architecture of St. John along with those chapters that address the specifics of the enclosure of the convent describes a period in Gallic monasticism that was defined by the urban environment.

Besides his concern for the safety of the convent, Caesarius of Arles also intended this nuns' rule to serve as a protective document against the possibility of corruption from

noble and episcopal sources. Several chapters of his rule adamantly insist that the nuns remain distant from their families or the visiting bishop. Other chapters address expectations about particular habits of women religious, in regard to private property and dining arrangements, expectations that, if left unarticulated, could predispose the community to involvement in episcopal politics and familial altercations. I argue that by maintaining strict adherence to the community's rule, convents attempted to distance themselves from episcopal intervention, seeking for themselves some degree of administrative autonomy. Administrative authority, as it was achieved through obedience to the rule, also contributed to the community's ability to gain and maintain financial independence. Caesarius' testament and his letters to various popes in which he sought financial solvency for the community also show how essential Caesarius believed independence was to the legitimacy and resilience of St. John. The ways in which sixth century communities such as St. John and Holy Cross employed Caesarius' of Arles nuns' rule or the tenets he propagated demonstrate that the nuns' rule was a valuable tool to the female community that wished to assert its own interests and remain immune to the political machinations of both lords and churchmen.

When in the late sixth century Irish missionaries swept through the continent in search of spiritual and physical wildernesses, Merovingian monasticism adopted the monastic fervor and ideals often attributed to Irish Christians and monastics. Columbanus, the most notable of the Irish *peregrini*, interacted with Merovingian royalty and recruited ambitious followers from the ranks of Frankish aristocrats. The second chapter of this thesis investigates the possible impact of Irish monasticism on female religious life and spirituality as they are set down in mixed rules and portrayed in the

saints' lives of the seventh century. The rule Columbanus produced for the monks in his Gallic monasteries was brief, only ten chapters, and addressed monastic life penitential concerns almost exclusively, with little recognition for the organization of the monastery. For Columbanus, the monastery was a place of discipline that served to prepare and shape monks in their spiritual journey toward the afterlife. Although he and other Irish churchmen did not produce a rule for nuns, the traditions of Irish monasticism up until the eighth and ninth centuries were markedly egalitarian in regards to the spirituality of men and women. The mixed rule of Waldebert of Luxeuil, a successor of Columbanus, portrays a female monastery that was for the most part spiritually independent from churchmen. Women religious in this period depended on the dynamics of the monastic community to ensure their own salvation, which was measured according to penitential satisfaction. This rule and the lives of saints reveal female communities that, after having been dominated by fear in the previous century, were becoming vibrant centers of female spirituality in which women religious directed and defined their own salvation.

At the turn of the seventh century, nunneries and their rules began to pull away from the Caesarius' notion of unrelenting enclosure. As political power fell more firmly in the hands of Germanic nobles, the center of Gallic monasticism moved from the Gallo-Roman cities of the south to the rural estates of Frankish aristocrats in the northern regions of Austrasia and Burgundia. Nuns' rules reflected this transition from urban to more rural landscapes, and there is an admitted relaxation of enclosure in both the monastic rules and the depictions of female religious life found in hagiography. In this more agricultural environment, monasteries were often isolated, rendering Caesarius' urban anxieties for the most part irrelevant. Mixed rules also reflect the spreading impact

of prominent monastic rules from Ireland and Italy. This thesis examines the mixed rules of Donatus of Besançon (d.660) and Waldebert of Luxeuil (d. 668), both of whom incorporated aspects of the rules of Caesarius, Columbanus and Benedict. The ways in which these authors integrated considerations for the female religious life into the increasingly popular traditions of Columbanus and the appealing structure of the Benedictine rule are the foci of this thesis's last two chapters.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I address the most pervasive influence on nuns' rules in Gaul: the Benedictine rule. Toward the end of the Merovingian period, the renowned rule of Saint Benedict of Nursia (480-547) was gaining recognition as a protocol capable of restoring order and practicality to a community. Over the course of seventy-two chapters, the Benedictine rule appeared to address all aspects of the daily life within the monastery, which later appealed to eighth-century reformers who sought order and stability for the Christian community. Eventually, with the consolidation of political and ecclesiastical power, the Carolingians selected the Benedictine rule as the standard for monasteries, male or female. Donatus of Besançon and Waldebert of Luxeuil both incorporated facets of the Benedictine rule into their nuns' rules, but those chapters that they selected were chosen with consistent consideration for the expectations of religious women's communal life. I argue that, although the Benedictine rule established practical guidelines for communal life, it was not suitable in its entirety as a guideline for nuns. The context in which the Benedictine rule was initially composed and the language that the author uses to describe the community are entrenched in a masculine interpretation of monasticism. Despite the obvious disapproval held for the strict tenets of enclosure laid down in Caesarius' of Arles nuns' rule, Donatus of Besançon nevertheless maintained

many of the bishops' chapters that highlighted the situations in which women religious were most susceptible to external interference. The authority ascribed to the abbess in these mixed rules and the understood relationship between the convent and the local community or its episcopal overseers provide an image of female monasticism that differs significantly from the community described in the Benedictine rule. This final chapter is primarily an analysis and comparison of the chapters of all those rules under discussion, with the exception of Columbanus' brief penitential rule. The contradictions between the nuns' rules and the Benedictine rule reflect the distinctions between the religious life of men and women, which continued to frustrate female communities throughout the Middle Ages.

By analyzing the adaptations and suitability of those rules written for female monasteries in sixth- and seventh-century Gaul, we can see flashes of a dynamic and versatile female monastic life that not only differed from that of monks but whose participants also struggled to promote and ensure its resilience. The nuns' rules of this period offered the female community opportunities for administrative autonomy and spiritual guidance through the gender-specificity of its tenets. Therefore, rather than dismissing nuns' rules as texts of domination, this thesis recommends an evaluation of the nuances and expressions of female monasticism that provide these texts with the ability to empower rather than oppress the female religious life.

## Chapter One

### Caesarius of Arles and the *Rule for Nuns*: Female Monasticism in Sixth-Century Gaul

Between the fifth and sixth centuries, the lives of women religious underwent a dramatic transition as efforts to establish security and orthodoxy moved to the forefront of the episcopal agenda. As political struggles and military campaigns consumed Gaul and the Italian peninsula, independent virgins were encouraged to join the ranks of enclosed nuns, whose growing communities could perhaps offer much-needed security and protection. Striving to attain a firm identity and sense of stability for the Christian community, the episcopate also fashioned the communal monastery into the image of orthodox asceticism, opposing the severe conventions of more isolated ascetics. Physical seclusion from the larger society, so fundamental to the founders of monasticism, was no longer safe in the desert or wilderness, which were now vulnerable to raids and attacks. In this increasingly dangerous and unorthodox landscape, the fortified city alone stood out as a viable option for the spiritual development of women religious and the survival of their communities.

The security and political concerns that initiated this transformation of the female religious life also gave rise to a new approach to monastic legislation. Bombarded by practical concerns regarding the safety of nuns and the appropriate protocol for the ascetic community, sixth-century monastic authorities found themselves forming rules that addressed the daily routine within a religious community rather than the ideal ascetic lifestyle of the individual. As bishop and metropolitan, Caesarius of Arles (470-542)

responded directly to the emerging needs for the stability of female monastics within the city. Sixth-century Gaul and Italy suffered constant threats of invasion, political usurpation and civil wars. In southwestern Gaul, and in Arles in particular, power struggles between the Visigoths and Franks created sudden and chaotic exchanges of authority.<sup>1</sup> Caesarius' efforts as bishop were often devoted to establishing stability throughout the community in spite of the demands and suspicions of Germanic leaders regarding his loyalty. During Caesarius' career, the episcopacy was frequently contested during chaotic exchanges of power and heightened fear of political conspiracy.<sup>2</sup> Caesarius was never forgetful of the arbitrary nature of politics during times of war.

Caesarius of Arles' founding of the convent of St. John in 512 and the development of its nuns' rule reflects the impact of urban threats and politics on the lives of women religious in sixth-century Gaul. Known for its enforcement of strict enclosure, the severity of Caesarius' nuns' rule was in part shaped by vying Germanic leaders' ongoing struggle over a city that had once served as Rome's praetorian prefecture and continued to hold the ecclesiastic authority as the seat of the region's metropolitan.<sup>3</sup> Although Caesarius' emphasis on strict enclosure appeared to subjugate the lives of women religious to the authority of the episcopacy, his ardent support for monasticism and the female religious life suggests that his constant concern was for the safety and autonomy of the convent that now resided within the crowded and chaotic urban population. For Caesarius of Arles, monastic independence depended on the community's ability to distance itself from episcopal influences and maintain religious

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<sup>1</sup> Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 260-263.

<sup>2</sup> William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1994), 111-12. .

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

life according to the community's rule rather than any episcopal or royal machinations. The nuns' rule, as Caesarius fashioned it, therefore, not only sought to promote physical safety, but also provided the convent with the opportunity to preserve the ascetic lifestyle of its female community.

The independent nature of female religious life in the fourth and fifth centuries required little commentary on the communal lives of women religious. Discussions of female spirituality and women's ascetic behavior were grounded in debates regarding virginity and chastity. The pursuit of religious purity and the ascetic lifestyle was achieved through personal responsibility not monastic convention. Foundational concepts of female spirituality stated by church fathers like Jerome were often delivered in the form of personal letters to specific women. In his letter to Eustochium, who is addressed as Rome's first patrician nun, Jerome provides a lengthy discussion of the ideals essential to a prestigious female religious life. In the life of women religious, asceticism served to ensure their reputations as virginal and chaste brides of Christ. Humble dress and abstemious dining, as Jerome notes, was not adopted in order to conform to an empty religious trend, but "because chastity cannot be preserved otherwise."<sup>4</sup> Although these letters were expected to serve as guidance for any religious woman who read them, their advice was designed to create the most perfect female ascetic rather than a stable community of nuns.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, few Christians praised the city for its implications of safety, for most assumed it could only offer the enticement of sin. In fact, the entire movement of monasticism was provoked by the growing disgust among Christians who

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<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Jerome*, with an introduction by Thomas Comerford Lawler, Charles Christopher Mierow trans., Vol. 1 (New York: Newman Press, 1963), 143.

found the episcopal hierarchy, which was based out of urban centers, to be increasingly materialistic and corrupt. Some urban women were able to take control of their spirituality, choosing to seek out religious purity in the life of an anchoress barricaded from the temptations of society.<sup>5</sup> Those who sought a communal existence with other women religious often did so out of necessity, as financial independence was a rarity for the Roman woman. Since these enclosed institutions could only afford to operate if their members donated considerable funds to its efforts, the option to retreat into a desert monastery was usually only available to the wealthy. These monastic communities, nevertheless, could grow quite large, some including as many as twenty thousand women.<sup>6</sup> Although each adapted its own rule, these communities still served the individual woman in her own religious lifestyle, with a nun usually maintaining her own cell and continuing with her own ascetic program.<sup>7</sup>

Influential ascetics of the city, however, were usually not satisfied by such an isolated existence or the absolute dependence it implied. The limitations of this desert existence, which remained in subjugation to the neighboring male monastery, often made this lifestyle unappealing to the more independent female ascetics. The majority of women who pursued an ascetic lifestyle in late antiquity were upper-class women, who used their familial funds and reputations to establish households of independent virgins.<sup>8</sup> Known as *domesticae ecclesiae*, these households were not quiet establishments intent only on contemplation and physical seclusion. Although the elite had translated the

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<sup>5</sup> Jo Ann Kay McNamara, "Muffled Voices," in *Medieval Religious Women* vol. 1 *Distant Echoes*, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, Mi: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1984), 21.

<sup>6</sup> McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 73.

<sup>7</sup> McNamara, "Muffled Voices," 23.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity Studies*, *Women and Religion* vol. 2 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 219-220.

desert monasticism of Egypt to the unequivocally urban landscape of Rome, these women served more as protectors of their religious comrades than threatened nuns in need of defense. As both women religious and pillars of society, many of these women were active patrons and charitable benefactors of their community. Much to the vexation of churchmen, women such as Paula and Melania the Elder took their ascetic lifestyle as a testament of religious authority. Confident in their intellect and understanding of the Christian existence, these women fought to maintain autonomy for all ascetics in the face of episcopal control. They demonstrated this autonomy not only through their ability to participate in theological debates, but also through their willingness to preach directly and interact within the community regardless of the complaints of the episcopate.<sup>9</sup>

Up until the sixth century, sources regarding the practices of ascetic women in Gaul are sparse. The life of Saint Genovefa (423-502), however, provides insight into the urban roles of women religious in the fifth century. As an independent virgin of Paris, Genovefa was most likely to have been of noble blood, probably Gallo-Roman and not Frankish.<sup>10</sup> She gained advice from notable churchmen such as Germanus of Auxerre (c. 378-448) and Parisian holy men, but her religious life was not served from within a community or according to a monastic rule. In fact, it is unlikely that Paris even had a female monastery, leaving women in the area to seek out other options for their spiritual guidance. Some churchmen encouraged the holy woman to seek out shelter and support along with those women who pursued a religious life in virgin households. Genovefa insisted on pursuing an ascetic lifestyle independent of other women religious. Although Genovefa did not manage or instruct a household of virgins as upper-class Roman

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<sup>9</sup> Clark, 187.

<sup>10</sup> Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg with E. Gordon Whatley trans. and ed., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 18.

women did, her relationship to the city emphasizes the role of women religious as patrons and protectors of the urban population. According to her biographer, Genovefa's efforts to organize the prayer of Parisian women served to fend off the onslaught of Attila, whose army of Huns had been sacking cities in Gaul and on the Italian peninsula throughout the fifth century. Rather than encouraging citizens to flee and relocate, Genovefa "summoned the matrons of the city and persuaded them to undertake a series of fasts, prayers, and vigils in order to ward off the threatening disaster, as Esther and Judith had done in the past."<sup>11</sup> These Parisian matrons were not virginal women religious, yet their participation in the city's defenses provided a role for women's prayer in a public urban context.

When Caesarius was elected bishop of Arles in 502, his decision to found a female monastery was described in the language of urban security. Installing a community of women religious attached to the city not only provided prestige for Arles and its bishop, but it also represented another rank of spiritual warriors in Christianity's eternal battle against evil. According to his biographers, "the man of God formulated the idea by divine inspiration from the ever-reigning Lord that the church of Arles should be adorned and the city protected not only with countless troops of clergy but also by choirs of virgins."<sup>12</sup> In the early years of Caesarius' episcopacy, before Arles became a center of Germanic warfare, the strategies of defense of the region's churchmen had momentarily switched from the protection of the earthly city to the stabilization of the city of God. The efforts to reform the church in the sixth century were often defined in the comparison between urban orthodoxy and more rustic customs. In 506, the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>12</sup> *The Life of Caesarius of Arles*, in *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters*, trans. William E. Klingshirn, Translated Texts for Historians vol. 19 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), 22.

Visigothic King Alaric II (484-507) called a council of regional bishops to convene at the nearby city of Agde. At this council, which Caesarius headed, the city was upheld as the center of orthodoxy, and many of the decisions made were designed to emphasize the superiority of urban religion to that of the religion of the *paganus*.<sup>13</sup> In order to organize the Christian community and its religious practices more firmly around the example of its ecclesiastic leaders, all of the Christians nearby were expected to worship on holy days within Arles rather than in their local community. The celebration of Easter, in particular, was a day on which the city and its bishop encouraged the presence of all nearby Christians, with the purpose of creating a more homogenous and united Christian community.<sup>14</sup>

These decisions also addressed procedures pertinent to the ascetic community, placing them more securely under the authority of the bishop. According to the Council of Agde (506), ascetics were no longer allowed to freely establish their communities without gaining episcopal permission. Furthermore, monks within the community were more firmly tied to their abbots, who had the authority to prevent their transfer to other monasteries or limit any intentions they had of establishing themselves as hermits or independent ascetics. For women religious, in particular, this council entailed instructions as to the minimum age of nuns and set limitations on the placement of new female monasteries.<sup>15</sup> Overall, independent religious practices were being replaced by organized institutions that were overseen by bishops.

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<sup>13</sup> T. Scott Holmes, *The Origins and Development of the Christian Church in Gaul during the First Six Centuries of the Christian Era* (London: MacMillan And Co., Limited, 1911), 525-6.

<sup>14</sup> Klingshirn notes that the decisions of the Council of Arles were more a statement of ideology rather than laws to be enforced.

<sup>15</sup> Holmes, 530 and Klingshirn, 105.

It was according to the guidelines of the Council of Agde that Caesarius built Arles's first community for religious women in 508. At this time, it was rarely advisable to build a convent beyond cities and populated areas,<sup>16</sup> but lured into a sense of security because of Arles' reprieve from violence, Caesarius sought only to ensure that his foundation complied with Agde's statement that female monasteries be kept at a distance from male communities. Caesarius attempted to build his convent outside the city walls of Arles, across on the banks of Alyscomp southeast of the city. Alyscomp also served as an appealing site for a monastery because of its proximity to the vestiges of the grave of St. Genevius.<sup>17</sup> Assuming that the convent was safe enough in the shadow of such an influential city as Arles, Caesarius moved forward with his building project.

Caught in this transition between the upper-class holy woman and the enclosed nun, Caesarius of Arles' own ascetic upbringing initially led him to continue the discussion of female religious practice along the same lines as Jerome's letters. Intending to instate his sister, Caesaria, as the new monastery's first abbess, Caesarius wrote to her of the appropriate life of an ascetic woman. Echoing the sentiments of Jerome, Caesarius' main argument regarding the religious life of women is focused on the importance of chastity and seclusion from worldly temptation. Caesarius continually stresses the dangers of "intimacy" and even seeks to dissuade the virgins from physical temptation by reminding them of the inevitable "plague and pestilence" that accompanies sexual capriciousness.<sup>18</sup> Caesarius' advice continues the tradition of emphasizing the individualistic nature and agenda of female spirituality. His letter seeks to encourage the

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<sup>16</sup> McNamara, "Living Sermons: Consecrated Women and the Conversion of Gaul." in *Medieval Religious Women* vol. 2 *Peaceweavers*. ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, Mi: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 25.

<sup>17</sup> Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul*, 105.

<sup>18</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Letter 21*, in *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters*, 137.

nuns of his sister's community toward a more holy existence, as determined by their personal objection to temptation and sin. At one point, he announces, "Be therefore a fugitive from desire if you wish to be an outstanding warrior for chastity."<sup>19</sup> Because the main goal of the female religious life was to make oneself an "outstanding warrior," the daily lives of these women were not described in terms of communal efforts. Caesarius reiterates Jerome's approval of reading and the study of the scriptures, and also his warning against the temptations of luxurious garments, greed, and private property. Caesarius' intention that this letter serve as a rule is supported by his sharp warning that "if anyone, God forbid, neglects to obey this letter, it will be a witness against her; whoever willingly accepts it, may she be rewarded with joy not temporary but permanent."<sup>20</sup> Enclosure for Caesarius at this junction in his life reflects only the ascetic ideals one would expect from a bishop whose monastic education stemmed from the renowned Gallic monastery of Lerins.

Removed from the protection of the city as it was, though, the progress Caesarius had made with the nunnery quickly met with destruction at the hands of besieging Burgundians and the resurgence of violence between the Franks and the Visigoths. Following Clovis' victory over the Visigoths at Vouille, the Burgundians successfully overthrew Visigothic control in Arles in 507 and 508. Alarmed by the dramatic shift in power from his own Visigothic allies to the invading Franks and Burgundian armies, Theodoric directed his Ostrogothic army from Ravenna to besiege Arles once again in 508, hoping to regain control of this important urban center. Enduring their attacks for

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<sup>19</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Letter 21*, 133.

<sup>20</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Letter 21*, 139.

almost two years, Arles eventually capitulated to Ostrogothic control in 510.<sup>21</sup> As a result of this oscillating rulership, the fear and paranoia regarding the security and administration of the city escalated. Because of his Burgundian lineage, Caesarius was suspected of treason by Arles' Visigothic leaders and then was arrested and summoned to Ravenna when the Ostrogoths gained control. Although Caesarius was eventually acquitted and reinstated as bishop, his efforts to build a female monastery on the outskirts of Arles were devastated. Caesarius' *vita* records the consequences of having placed the monastery outside of the city walls. His biographers note that "during this siege the monastery that Caesarius was beginning to have built for his sister and the other virgins was almost completely destroyed; its beams and upper rooms were ripped apart and overturned by savage barbarians."<sup>22</sup> His sister, Caesaria, had been sent away to Marseilles with her religious sisters until Caesarius was able to call them back for the completion of St. John, which was moved just within the southeastern walls of Arles.<sup>23</sup>

This dramatic period of violence provides the context for the sudden appeal of strict enclosure that emerged in Caesarius' rule for nuns and the tone of his monastic legislation alters drastically after the siege of 508. The consolidation and relocation of women religious into the chaotic urban environment of early medieval Gaul made it impossible to consider spiritual instruction outside of communal conduct and stability. Unlike his informal letter to Caesaria, the rule he presented in 512, and the one he officially revised in 534, provided an extensive and detailed breakdown of communal life in the female monastery of St. John. Like Benedict of Nursia's renowned rule, Caesarius' rule for nuns is a pragmatic approach to communal life that draws the focus of

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<sup>21</sup> Wolfram, 260-3.

<sup>22</sup> *The Life of Caesarius*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Klinghsirn, 105.

monasticism away from the cultivation of independent asceticism and towards the preservation of communal order and self-sufficiency. With forty-seven initial chapters followed by a recapitulation and instructions regarding the divine office, Caesarius' rule provided the nuns of St. John with seventy-three chapters on communal life within a female monastery. Replacing the emphasis on chastity with an agenda for security, stability, and communal order, Caesarius' rule incorporates monastic ideals from those who have more experience regarding the communal life of monastic men and women. Although Caesarius' rule was inspired by the monastic commentary and rules of Cassian and Augustine, the bishop of Arles' rule for St. John stands out as the first known nuns' rule written specifically for a particular nunnery.

Since the early fifth century, the voice of monastic legislation in Gaul had resided at Marseilles and in the works of John Cassian (c.360-435). Although Cassian did not author a specific monastic rule, his monastic instruction, as written in his *De Institutis coenobiorum* and *Conference*, became renowned in the Christian world. Between 413 and 416<sup>24</sup> he founded two monasteries, one for men and the other for women. His sister was the abbess of Holy Savior, which taught many of Gaul's leading nuns, including Caesarius' sister, Caesaria. Like monastic leaders before him, Cassian preserved the foundational guidelines for religious communities that were set down in Pachomian rules and the ascetic teachings of Basil (330-379). Cassian's personal experience with eastern monasticism served to translate eastern traditions to the developing monastic centers of the west. With eleven books and over two hundred chapters, Cassian's *Institutes* stresses

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<sup>24</sup> MacNamara *Sisters in Arms*, 92.

the guidelines set down by eastern monastic leaders.<sup>25</sup> His location in the city of Marseilles, however, does imply that he faced the challenge of compromising between the desert ideals of the east and an increasingly urban west. Despite his evident preference for eastern monasticism, Cassian was able to create a complementary combination of western and eastern, urban and desert, monastic traditions. As extensive as his discussion of monasticism is in the *Institutes*, the last eight books mainly address the sexual temptations faced by monks, which makes Cassian's vision of monasticism more applicable to the ascetic's personal spiritual journey rather than those religious practices that contribute to the community's religious life.<sup>26</sup>

For Caesarius and most other churchmen of the sixth century, the works of Augustine (354-430) were highly regarded when considering practical administration of the urban Christian community. Before accepting his post as bishop of Hippo, however, Augustine had entertained the notion of entering into a life of contemplation as a monk. His responsibility as an urban administrator in addition to his interest in the monastic life led Augustine to produce his own monastic rules that emphasized harmony and stability within the community.<sup>27</sup> Written as late as 423, Augustine's rule for nuns included only eight chapters, the subject material of which differed little from those chapters assigned to monks. From the first chapter of the rule, it is evident that Augustine is attempting to address the dynamics of the community as an entirety rather than its individual ascetics. He opens his rule for nuns with the instruction to "live then, all of you, in harmony and

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<sup>25</sup> Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Malden, Ma: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 74.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 77-8.

<sup>27</sup> Dunn, 65.

concord; honor God mutually in each other; you have become his temples.”<sup>28</sup> Caesarius draws frequently from Augustine’s monastic rules in those chapters that criticize private property and praise the harmony of communal life. Echoing the bishop of Hippo’s advice, Caesarius informs the nuns of St. John to “pass your lives in unanimity and concord, and honor God in one another, Whose temples it has been given you to be.”<sup>29</sup>

Caesarius’ writings reveal an admiration for the monastic rules of Augustine and the ascetic teachings of John Cassian, but his rule and episcopal career in Arles emphasized a new awareness of the needs and daily routine of convents in close relation to often unreliable governments and manipulative bishops. Considering the dramatic founding of St. John following the siege of Arles, Caesarius’ nuns’ rule and its emphasis on security stand out in sharp contrast to the more general advice he had once provided to women religious. Compared to his letter addressed to Caesaria, Caesarius’ rule for nuns includes only two chapters on avoiding sexual temptation and protecting one’s reputation.<sup>30</sup> Instead, the rule is dominated by Caesarius constant insistence on strict enclosure and the separation of the community from its lay and episcopal influences. By the rule’s second entry, Caesarius introduces the nuns to the limits of their strict enclosure: “If a girl, leaving her parents, desire to renounce the world and enter the holy fold to escape the jaws of the spiritual wolves by the help of God, she must never, up to the time of her death, go out of the monastery, nor into the basilica where there is a door.”<sup>31</sup> In the recapitulation, Caesarius abandons all attempts at metaphor and bluntly

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<sup>28</sup> G. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 111.

<sup>29</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns*, Maria Caritas McCarthy trans., *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles: A Translation with a Critical Introduction*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Mediaeval History New Series Vol. XVI (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1960), c. 21, 176.

<sup>30</sup> Caesarius of Arles: *Rule for Nuns*, c. 23 and 36, 177 and 182.

<sup>31</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns*, c. 2, 171.

informs the sisters that “this is what we especially wish to be observed by you without any relaxation, that no one of you up to the time of her death, be permitted to go forth from the monastery or into that basilica in which you have a door, or presume on her own to go out.”<sup>32</sup> Caesarius’ anxiety arises again only nine chapters later, when he suddenly interjects to “never let a door of the monastery outside the basilica be made by your wish or permission.”<sup>33</sup> In the conclusion of the entire rule, Caesarius mentions other specific doors which are to remain closed at all times for the safety of the community and the preservation of its order. He announces that

for the sake of guarding the monastery, I have closed and forbidden the use of some doors, in the old Baptistry, in the *scola* and in the weaving room, and in the tower next to the *pomerium*, let no one ever presume under any pretext of utility whatsoever to open them: but it shall be allowed to the holy congregation to offer resistance, and they are not to permit that to be done which they know to be against their good reputation or peace.<sup>34</sup>

Any intention Caesarius might have had to encourage the individual nun toward a more perfect female spirituality is barely recognizable over his almost frantic insistence on the security of the female community’s enclosure.

In addition to the monastery’s violent beginnings, the general risks of abduction that existed for women during the sixth century make it easier to sympathize with Caesarius’ insistence on a strict enclosure and his stern, and frequent, cautions about doors. The anxiety over women’s safety was not reserved for Caesarius’ siege-weary Arles. Gregory of Tours’ (538-594) writings illustrate the constant dangers that threatened women during the sixth century. In one account, he describes the kidnapping of a woman whose attempt to seek sanctuary in a church was foiled by an open door.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, c. 50, 188.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, c. 59, 189. See also *PL* 67: 1118, n. IX and McCarthy, 189-90, n. 25.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, c. 72, p. 204.

Passing too closely by the door was the only provocation necessary for her assailants. Once snatched out of the church, the woman had little ability to resist her captors.<sup>35</sup>

Caesarius' apprehension regarding doors also represents a significant difference between the bishop's concept of enclosure as it applies to nuns and for monks. In his rule for monks, the men of the community are expected to remain until death in the enclosure, but there is no metaphor of wolves nor are there orders to avoid doors and stay out of the basilica.<sup>36</sup> Unlike their religious sisters, the monks in Caesarius' rule maintained their role as spiritual warriors as their rule notes the spiritual weapons that they wield against the devil. Whether due to their fear of abduction or their devotion to the rules of the convent, the extent to which the nuns upheld their founder's tenets for strict enclosure was extreme. During a fire, the nuns were said to have thrown themselves into the well of the monastery rather than seek safety outside of the community. Although a city did assure its nunnery some sense of protection, it did not necessarily reassure its nuns of their safety among its urban populace. The nuns' protection fell solely to the efforts of their founder and bishop, who responded urgently to this threat against the convent. Caesarius' miraculous extinction of the fire at St. John demonstrated the protective and vigilant role he expected each convent's founder or bishop to play.

The female monastery's vulnerability against attack had since rendered women religious' reputation and virtue as something to be guarded rather than proudly professed; therefore, the enclosed monastery rather than the warrior of chastity became the ideal illustration of female spirituality. Caesarius' architectural plan for the new convent suggests the extent to which he implemented his new program for female religious life.

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<sup>35</sup> Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* 4:13, trans. Ernest Brehaut (New York: Columbia University Press: 1916), 83.

<sup>36</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad monachos*, PL 67, c. 1, 1099.

Following its relocation within the city's southeastern wall, St. John was rebuilt near Arles' first baptistery. More importantly, perhaps, it now stood on one of the city's highest elevations. Positioned up against the wall, the monastery's architecture is thought to have been directly incorporated into the city's exterior wall, appropriating for the nuns the fortifications intended to protect the city. Seeking to protect the community from its own urban neighbors, Caesarius is said to have "built a triple basilica in a single enclosure."<sup>37</sup> Although this construction suggests the bishop intended to create a cloister for St. John, the architectural convention of the cloister was not yet standard in monastic architecture.<sup>38</sup>

Beyond his discussion of doors, Caesarius rule and *vita* do not elaborate on the exterior of St. John, but in Poitiers, descriptions of Radegund's (521-587) convent Holy Cross provides illustration of a community which lived according to Caesarius' rule for nuns. In an account of Radegund's funeral, Gregory of Tours recalls that "as we passed beneath the wall, a crowd of virgins began to cry and weep from the windows of the towers and from the tops of the fortifications of the wall."<sup>39</sup> This haunting description of Holy Cross creates an image of the urban nunnery as a looming and intimidating structure designed to impart to all its observers the role of the convent as protector and guardian. Caesarius ensured that even in death the nuns would be guarded from the public eye. For the burial of the nuns, the bishop prepared impressive sarcophagi, which were lined up on the floor of the basilica. Initially, this burial site was reserved for the nuns of St. John, and in an addendum to the nuns' rule, the convent was allowed to refuse to host the burial

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<sup>37</sup> *The Life of Caesarius*, 38.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Horn, "Origins of the Medieval Cloister," in *Gesta* 12 (1973), 18-19.

<sup>39</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Confessors*, trans. Raymond Van Dam (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), 80.

of bishops and other churchmen.<sup>40</sup> Instead of a fort armed with “warriors for chastity,” as Caesarius may have initially intended, the female monastery of this rule appeared as a city under siege.

Although the relocation of women religious from independent households or desert enclosures to the urban environment was at its core a safety precaution, urban monasticism appeared to threaten and even eliminate the efforts of women to establish and define their own spirituality and the religious program of their female community. The fading activity of the independent virgin in return for the cloistered nun has led many to question the monastic motives of bishops and ecclesiastic legislators. By drawing women religious under the jurisdiction of episcopal officials and later royal inclinations, monasteries in urban centers offered little escape from the encroaching politics of the city. The limitations of strict enclosure and the instability of a community whose religious life was susceptible to the whims of its episcopal and royal overseers seemed suffocating in comparison to the passionate religious lives of independent female ascetics. For bishops, convents became their responsibility and they increasingly saw themselves as the spiritual head of this female body of nuns. Although the abbess oversaw the daily life of the community, the bishops were never comfortable with relinquishing their role as its superior.<sup>41</sup>

More monk than bishop, Caesarius never envisioned the monastic community as subservient to its bishops, nor did he approach the enclosure of women religious with the intention of undermining the spirituality and religious life of nuns. Although the developing organization of the Christian church had ensured that the female monastery

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<sup>40</sup> Bonnie Effros, *Caring for Body and Soul: Burial and the Afterlife in the Merovingian World* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 151-2.

<sup>41</sup> Hochstetler, *A Conflict of Tradition*, 17.

could not survive without some degree of male patronage and protection, Caesarius understood that these external forces were only to serve as benevolent intercessors or vigilant guardians in the case of natural or malicious threats to the community. The political and social ties between bishops and the nobles of Germanic families had not yet come to dominate and define the makeup of the church hierarchy or the agenda of its officers.<sup>42</sup> During the sixth century, most bishops in Gaul were members of the Gallo-Roman senatorial family and still considered the Germanic ruler as an outsider. Even though Caesarius required the cooperation of local aristocrats and clergymen in order to promote his reforms of pastoral care for the city, he did not consider the monastic community as a source of resources or power for either churchmen or secular rulers.<sup>43</sup> Moreover as bishop, it was his responsibility to ensure that the Christian community, monastic or lay, was not exploited according to secular inclinations.<sup>44</sup> When circumstances forced him to seek assistance in securing the financial solvency of the community, the bishop implored the pope rather than enlist the aid of regional nobles or bishops.<sup>45</sup> In her foundation letter for Holy Cross, in which Radegund claimed the rule of Caesarius for her community, the queen and nun admonished bishops “who 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.”<sup>46</sup> Free from any binding ties to Arle’s rulers, who during his time were in constant flux, Caesarius’s rule for nuns and his philosophy regarding the

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<sup>42</sup> Patrick Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 168.

<sup>43</sup> Klingshirn, 253.

<sup>44</sup> Geary, 132.

<sup>45</sup> *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters*, trans. William E. Klingshirn, *Translated Texts for Historians* vol. 19 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), 119-21.

<sup>46</sup> Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), 9:42, 536.

female monastery sought only to ensure that St. John remained stable in spite of the unpredictable events that might unfold in the city.

The groundwork that Caesarius of Arles established for female monasticism at St. John, therefore, was one designed to empower women religious with the ability to govern their community without interference from political agendas. As harsh as Caesarius' monastic ideals were regarding the strict enclosure of nuns, his legislation calls attention to the relationship between the gender-specific rule and the convent's attempt to protect itself from outside forces. Jane Tibbets Schulenberg argues that "Caesarius saw [the cloister] simply as an integral part of a total monastic policy (along with economic self-sufficiency and exemption from episcopal jurisdiction) which would in turn insure the community's *autonomy* and *spiritual independence* under the authority of its abbesses."<sup>47</sup> The chapters that Caesarius chooses to include in his rule for nuns address those aspects of female community life that made the convent most susceptible to the predatory intentions of both secular and ecclesiastic powers. Rather than simply passing on the rules of previous authors, such as Augustine, Caesarius notes that "we have chosen a few things from among many, according to which the elder religious can live under rule with the younger, and strive to carry out spirituality what they see to be especially adapted for their sex."<sup>48</sup> The rule's efforts to preserve the authority of the abbess and limit the nuns' interaction with the world, their charitable presentations and even their dress can be seen as preventative measures designed to bolster the community and discourage bishops or influential relatives from assuming control of the community's resources. For Caesarius,

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<sup>47</sup> Jane Tibbets Schulenberg, "Strict Active Enclosure and Its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience (ca. 500-1100)," in *Medieval Religious Women* vol. 1 *Distant Echoes* (Kalamazoo, Mi.: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 78. Emphasis is Schulenberg's.

<sup>48</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns*, c. 2, 171.

even though the monastery was entrenched in an urban environment, a stable and structured communal life as maintained by the strict adherence to a rule could enable a community to remain a site of devout asceticism.

The nuns' rule and its stipulations regarding the election of the abbess and her authority provide an illustration of Caesarius' efforts to promote the autonomy of the monastery. Striving to undercut any temptation, on the part of either a bishop or ruler, to make the monastery an arm of the nobility, the rule declares that the congregation should choose a capable abbess from among themselves.<sup>49</sup> Once Caesarius stated that new abbesses were not to be transplanted in episcopal machinations, he reminded abbesses of their loyalty to the monastery and their responsibility to preserve and maintain its rule regardless of secular ties or episcopal pressure. He lectures that:

If at any time any abbess should try to change or to relax something of the essence of this rule, and, either because of kinship, or for any kind of circumstance, should desire to be subject to and to be within the household of the bishop of the city, under the inspiration of God, with our permission, resist on this occasion with reverence and with dignity, and on no account permit it to be done.<sup>50</sup>

These final acerbic remarks about bishops are anything but subtle, and they bring the rule's allusions to episcopal interference into sharp focus. In such close proximity to conniving bishops or kinsmen, the individual ascetic, even the abbess, could no longer be trusted to preserve the monastic life. Even though the community was to revere its abbess as its mother and provider, if her conduct began to reflect the agenda of episcopal or secular leaders, this chapter reminds the nuns that their loyalty to her was never to exceed their obedience to the rule.

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<sup>49</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns* c. 61, 190.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 64, 192.

The responsibilities of the abbess to provide for her community and to represent it, however, did require the rule to relax its tenets of strict enclosure when it came to the abbess' daily duties. In reminding the abbess of her responsibilities, the rule reveals the extent of this necessary leniency: "The mother of the monastery has to be solicitous for the salvation of souls,, and, concerning the temporalities of the monastery, has to think continually of the need for bodily nourishment, and also to entertain visitors and to reply to letters from the faithful."<sup>51</sup> The abbess was granted some measure of freedom, but only enough to allow her to fulfill her responsibilities as the administrator of the convent. She was not to greet guests alone, and at least two nuns were to accompany her during all visits.<sup>52</sup> The abbess was also forbidden to dine outside of the convent unless she was retained for some pressing reason.<sup>53</sup>

The insistence that no nun, not even the abbess, be allowed to conduct meetings in private was not necessarily a measure to ensure safety. Instead, this restriction was most likely an effort to prevent secretive or conspiratorial meetings between nuns and more influential members of the outside world. Caesarius does not presume that because noble women are consecrated they have abandoned all ties to or considerations for the secular world. Fathers and mothers of the nuns were afforded some degree of freedom to visit their daughters, but the rule indicates that these visits were to remain brief and supervised by the abbess or by a more experienced nun.<sup>54</sup> The abbess and those nuns assigned to the position of prioress or portress were also entitled to monitor every piece of correspondence passed between nuns and worldly relatives. The concealment of secret

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<sup>51</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns*, c. 27, 179.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, c. 37, 18.

<sup>53</sup> The chapter states, "The abbess shall never eat outside the congregation unless some unusual occurrence or illness or business demands it." Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns*, caput 41, 184.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, *Rule for Nuns*, c. 40, 184.

letters or gifts is one of the instances in which the rule blatantly demands swift discipline for the misbehavior of nuns.<sup>55</sup> Although the allowance of chaperoned visitations softens the rule's initial demand for unrelenting enforcement of strict physical enclosure, Caesarius' meticulous consideration of the community's social interactions underlines his concern for the monastery's administrative autonomy.<sup>56</sup>

In a period when the monastery often represented the center of education and literary instruction, Caesarius also anticipated any attempt made by the local community to treat St. John as the private school of the nobles or other townsmen. He argues that "the daughters either of nobility or of common folk are never to be received so that they may be reared or taught."<sup>57</sup> Endeavoring to preserve the community's spiritual separation from urban concerns, Caesarius also discourages the monastery from allowing itself to evolve into an orphanage. Young girls were rarely considered appropriate candidates for the veil, and Caesarius demands that those few who are accepted must have reached an age in which they are capable of reading. This requirement reminds the community, and those who would wish to join it, that the purpose of becoming a nun and living within a religious community was to pursue an existence devoid of worldly ambitions and devoted completely to God.

The relationship between the rule's restrictions on visitation and the anxiety it expresses regarding political interference is most notable in those chapters that address the customs of banquets and charity. Caesarius is exhaustive in his decree that the abbess should never attempt to entertain or host banquets. The emphasis is definitively on male diners of all stations. Moreover, he insists on singling out each religious man who might

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, *Rule for Nuns*, c. 25, 178.

<sup>56</sup> Hochstetler, 132.

<sup>57</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns.*, c. 7, 173.

attempt to feast within the convent, or whom an abbess might feel obliged to entertain. In particular, though, he orders the convent not to “let a repast be made for the bishop of this city, nor even the provisor himself of the monastery.”<sup>58</sup> The only leniency the rule provides in the matter of guests is the rare holy woman, and her reception was only allowed if it would enhance the monastery’s reputation.<sup>59</sup> In general, the rule never describes the protocol for meals in the monastery beyond those taken among the nuns themselves.

The nuns’ participation in charitable events was also restricted and their personal contact with the poor all but eliminated. Caesarius recognizes the convent’s duty to aid the poor, but to maintain strict enclosure the nuns could not conduct extravagant displays of community service. He warns that “because of too much disturbance at the entrance to the monastery, there should not be daily assiduous begging.”<sup>60</sup> The loitering of beggars and the commotion that they stirred up were markedly scenes commonly played out in the urban environment. Seeking to preserve the contemplative spirituality of the female ascetics within, Caesarius continues to use his rule to clarify the separation between monastic and civil community.<sup>61</sup> These measures served not only to protect against political intrusions but to maintain and encourage the female monastery to grow as a spiritual community rather than a civic institution.

The elimination of public hospitality and charity, however, may have been the most challenging aspect of Caesarius’ rule. The attributes of a generous hostess and benevolent community servant were commonly used to describe the role of the medieval

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, c. 39, 183.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns*, c. 42, 184.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, 164.

abbess. The abbess's ability to influence the local community and command the attention of dining churchmen was an indicator of her authority and influence.<sup>62</sup> In Merovingian hagiography, Saint Radegund (ca.525-587) and her convent Holy Cross were renowned for their contribution to charity and reception of guests. Radegund's biographer, Venantius Fortunatus, revels in the descriptions of the saint's extravagant banquets for the poor and her hospitality toward priests. Fortunatus' boasts about these elaborate entertainments, which are contradictions to Caesarius' rule, remarking that "standing like a good hostess before the diners, she cut up the bread and meat and served everyone while fasting herself. Moreover, she never ceased to offer food to the blind and weak with a spoon. In this, two women aided her but, she alone served them, busy as a new Martha until the 'brothers' were drunk and happily satisfied with their meal."<sup>63</sup> The biographer also describes meals in which "she would meet the priests invited to her table for it was her royal custom not to let them return home without a gift."<sup>64</sup> In Fortunatus' depiction of the nun, Radegund's manipulation of food through banquets allowed her to gain prominent status in the community and recognition from the episcopate.<sup>65</sup>

Fortunatus' portrayal of Radegund is reminiscent of the patrician ascetics of Rome, who sought religious authority through charity and patronage. This depiction, however, is an idealization of women religious whose lives had since changed drastically in light of urban threats and political practicality. Fortunatus' desire to depict Radegund as the new Martha is a failure to recognize that the strictly enclosed female monastery

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<sup>62</sup> Bonnie Effros, *Creating Community with Food and Drink in Merovingian Gaul* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 47-48.

<sup>63</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *The Life of the Holy Radegund, Bk. I*, in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, trans. and ed. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg with E. Gordon Whatley (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 77.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>65</sup> Effros, *Creating Community with Food and Drink in Merovingian Gaul*, 53.

was no longer an ascetic household seeking to proselytize through open patronage and charity to the community. This is not to say that charity had ceased to be a major responsibility of monastic communities, but that the channels through which holy women accomplished it had changed. According to Caesarius' rule, the nuns' protection and separation from society was more important than their direct interaction with the community. He makes no big discussion of charity and simply informs the abbess to select what is not needed by the community for donation to the poor. Perhaps guarding the strained resources of the convent, Caesarius reminds the nuns that alms should only be as much "as it can be set aside from the needs of the monastery."<sup>66</sup> These donations were made through the prior outside the doors of the community, however, rather than through tireless patronage as portrayed by Fortunatus' Radegund.

This portrayal of Radegund changes in her second *Vita*, possibly reflecting a more plausible interpretation of a nun in Radegund's position. According to Baudonivia, who was also a nun at Poitiers, Radegund was intent on reading, praying, and moderate ascetic training.<sup>67</sup> As John Kitchen observes, "instead of lavish, bibulous, and bountiful banquets described in the first *Vita* Baudonivia simply mentions that the saint served food to the needy."<sup>68</sup> Given Baudonivia's testament and seventh-century mixed rules that maintained this ban on banquets, it seems that such grandiose displays of charity were never encouraged in the female cloister.<sup>69</sup> The Radegund of Baudonivia's accounts was a nun whose overt patronage was subdued by her concerns for the administration of the convent

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<sup>66</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns*, c. 42, 184.

<sup>67</sup> Baudonivia, *The Life of the Holy Radegund, Bk. II*, trans. and ed. McNamara and Halborg with E. Gordon Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 90-91.

<sup>68</sup> Kitchen, 144.

<sup>69</sup> Donatus of Besançon, *regula ad virgines*, in *The Ordeal of Community*, trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John Halborg (Toronto, Ontario: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1993), c.. 58, 63.

and its enduring financial stability.<sup>70</sup> As female communities struggled to draw further away from outside interference, the nunnery of the sixth century had become one of relentless practicality in an attempt to maintain its internal stability and legitimacy as a religious community.

Besides the obvious risk to the nuns' reputation in having guests in the convent, banquets and public entertainments also posed a direct threat to the communal order among the nuns. As Radegund's *vitae* demonstrated, banquets could provide the opportunity for one to exercise the advantages of her status. Queens, princesses, and other royal women frequently joined nunneries, by choice or by coercion. This period in female monasticism, however, was marked by diversity of status within convents. In addition to queens, there were also freedwomen and slaves who took vows as nuns. Caesarius anticipates the likely conclusion to such a wide mix of women, and uses his rule to denounce any indications of status or hegemony. Caesarius announces that no one, "not even an abbess," should have servants.<sup>71</sup> Women who might think themselves above manual labor are reminded too that everyone is to accept her chores, accomplishing them efficiently and without idle chatter.<sup>72</sup> Caesarius also undermines any intentions nuns might have to reside in single chambers, embellish their surroundings with ostentatious decorations, or to clothe themselves in richly dyed fabric, which he notes "do not befit the humility of a virgin."<sup>73</sup> That these luxury items could stand as banners of each member's status is evident. In his meticulous elaboration on the fabrics used in the convent, Caesarius specifies that "nothing should be put on them except black

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<sup>70</sup> Baudonivia, *The Life of the Holy Radegund*, Bk. II, 98-9.

<sup>71</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns*, c. 7, 163.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, c. 16, 175.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, c. 45, 186.

or white crosses, of simple workmanship only on ordinary cloth or linen.” The bishop’s focus on embroidered patterns and plain thread implies that these nuns were accustomed to stitching fabrics with material that reflected their rank and the ties to their secular family.<sup>74</sup> Along with his derision of private property, these attacks on expressions of status within the convent were designed to preserve order within the convent.

Caesarius’s tenets addressing the exhibition of personal property and clothing suggest that the tranquility inside convents was more susceptible to effects of inequality, which often resulted in theft or fights. The bishop admonishes unruly sisters that

Even though it ought never to be thought of nor to be believed at all, that holy virgins would assail one another with harsh speech and reproaches, if perchance human frailty so behaves that some of the sisters should dare, at the instigation of the devil, to break forth into such impiety as to steal, or to strike one another, those who have violated the precepts of the Rule should receive chastisement as is just and lawful.<sup>75</sup>

This lecture was not borrowed from the rules of Augustine or the recommendations of Cassian, and the Benedictine rule does not express any concern for theft among monks. The warning likely stems, therefore, from those instances of discord that Caesarius himself witnessed as St. John’s founder and bishop. His determination to create a humble community of equals underneath the leadership of the abbess and his outright censure of theft suggest that private property and status were at the center of many of the disputes that erupted in convents.

The admiration Caesarius holds for communal harmony and mutual compassion was a continuation of Augustine’s own philosophy regarding monastic legislation and the daily life of coenobitic monks and nuns. Out of Augustine’s eight rules, he addressed two of them to nuns. Almost indistinguishable from his more standard policies,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, c. 45, 186.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, c. 26, 178-9.

Augustine's rules for nuns do not reveal the routines of the convent. The bishop's letter, *Reprimand to Quarreling Nuns*, however, provides a brief, but vivid, glimpse into the community life of women. The nuns to whom he writes had staged a revolt against their abbess, and Augustine surmises that this conflict arose from the political struggles among the nuns, the abbess, and the community's new priest-superior.<sup>76</sup> Hoping to preserve the peace within the community, Augustine tried to persuade the nuns to cooperate with the abbess by reminding them of her responsibilities and role as mother within the convent: "She guided your early training; she supervised your taking of the veil; you saw your numbers increase and now you are on the verge of riot for us to remove her."<sup>77</sup> In the end, the evident solution for Augustine was to replace the priest in hopes of salvaging the authority of the abbess and the rule of the community.

An indication of how essential it was that the convent's nuns' rule maintain order is evident when exploring further examples of nuns' revolts. The concern for order within nunneries reemerges in 589 in Poitiers at Radegund's convent of Holy Cross. Following the death of the sainted queen and Agnes, the convent's first abbess, a vicious feud erupted between the abbess successor and her nuns, and the community collapsed into violence and self-destruction. Once the revolt had escalated beyond the control of the convent, King Childebert recommended that bishops intercede and end the rebellion with the authority of canon law rather than monastic legislation.<sup>78</sup> In the tenth book of his *History of the Franks*, Gregory of Tours gives an account of this astounding rebellion and

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<sup>76</sup>Augustine, "Reprimand to Quarreling Nuns," in *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, trans. George Lawless (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 107.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* 10:15, trans. Lewis Thorpe, 569.

a copy of the bishops' final judgment.<sup>79</sup> The accusations made against the abbess were based on those rules of Caesarius' that were specifically addressed to women. One of the rebellious nuns, Chrodiel, had charged the abbess with keeping a transvestite eunuch as her companion. Pointing at a man dressed in women's clothes, Chrodiel demands of the bishops "What holiness is there in this abbess who makes men eunuchs and orders them to live with her as if she were an empress?"<sup>80</sup> Implying that the abbess held herself as royalty, Chrodiel argued that the abbess had disregarded the rule's rejection of noble status.

Later in her testimony, an embittered Chrodiel listed the other instances in which the abbess had disregarded monastic law. According to her incriminations, the abbess had abandoned the rule's stipulations against male visitors, dinner parties and social events, and luxurious fabrics. To her defense, the abbess argued to the bishops that her role as hostess was in the tradition carried down from Radegund. The bathrooms, she reminded the ecclesiastic judges, had been available to the workmen since the guest baths had fallen into disrepair. In reference to her time spent participating in games, the abbess contested whether playing them was even a sin. And as for the accusation that she had organized and hosted an event for her family, the abbess defended her actions with the testimony of a "nun of noble family."<sup>81</sup> By not involving the funds of the nunnery, the abbess assumed that her niece's event was permissible. The abbess was willing to seek penance if the bishops advised it, but her rebuttal to the charges implied that she felt no honest guilt for any of her actions.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 567-580.

<sup>80</sup> Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* 10:15, trans. Ernest Brehaut, 239.

<sup>81</sup> Gregory of Tours, trans. Ernest Brehaut, 10:16, 241.

Despite her obvious infractions against Holy Cross's rule, the abbess was acquitted. The ecclesiastic court, however, did not base this decision on the tenets of Caesarius' rule. The bishops had justified the abbess' innocence on the basis of the fact that she did not commit any harrowing crimes against more traditional laws. After hearing the abbess' defense, the episcopal judges turned back to Chrodiel and the other nuns, inquiring, "whether perchance they imputed adultery to the abbess, which God forbid, or whether they could say she had committed a murder or a sorcery or a capital crime for which she should be punished."<sup>82</sup> The nuns' response expressed their frustration with the episcopal system and its unwillingness to recognize how essential adherence to these nuns' rules was for monastic order and the spirituality of women religious:

They had nothing to say to this [question regarding capital crimes]; they only asserted that she had acted contrary to the rule in the matters they had mentioned. Finally they said that nuns whom we believed to be innocent were with child because of these faults, namely, that the doors were broken open and the wretched women were at liberty to do what they would for many months without discipline from their abbess.<sup>83</sup>

The nuns did not relate the order within the convent to anything other than the monastic rule set down by Caesarius of Arles.

The brutal and dramatic events involved in this rebellion attest to the nuns' absolute disregard for law outside of the convent. Considering the rule at Holy Cross defunct after the reproachable actions of the abbess, the nuns exercised their power as noble daughters rather than as than nuns. The two leaders, Chrodiel and Bassina, were both daughters of kings. As such, they organized the revolt with the funds and manpower available to them. Chrodiel's hired assassins kidnapped the abbess, and the princess

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<sup>82</sup> Gregory of Tours, 10:16, trans. Ernest Brehaut, 241.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

threatened to kill her if any rescuers appeared. When she was finally arrested, Chrodiel attempted to intimidate her enemies by professing her status: “Do no violence to me, I beg of you, for I am a queen, a daughter of one king and cousin of another; don’t do it, lest a time may come for me to take vengeance on you.”<sup>84</sup> Chrodiel’s use of her royal standing to wage this rebellion proves Caesarius’ point regarding the dangers status posed in the convent. Perhaps status was at the heart of this war from the beginning, but regardless, the inability of a convent to adhere to those rules set down specifically for nuns could provoke drastic responses that degraded the reputation of the convent and cost it its independence from episcopal intervention. Toward the end of the sixth century, though, the church and Frankish nobility had become increasingly intertwined, making monastic autonomy more of a challenge for religious communities.

When nunnery rules were followed closely, though, they could provide the convent with a sense of authority and financial independence. Discussing the reason why Caesarius may have enforced such strict enclosure in his rule, William E. Klinghirn notes that in addition to safety precautions, “cloister regulations served another practical purpose as well: by emphasizing the self-contained status of the monastery, they reinforced its image of self-sufficiency and independence, and helped to protect it from outside interference.”<sup>85</sup> In the hagiography of Rusticula and Radegund, both nuns invoke Caesarius’ rule in order to avoid royal trials and harassment. Charged with treason, Rusticula argued to the King Clothar’s soldier, who was seeking her arrest, that leaving St. John would be a severe violation of the monastic law: “She protested that she would rather obey the King of Heaven than of earth and would die rather than transgress the

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<sup>84</sup> Gregory of Tours, trans. Ernest Brehaut, 10:15, 238.

<sup>85</sup> Klinghirn, 120.

precepts of the holy father Caesarius.”<sup>86</sup> Radegund sought to escape her violent marriage, and the enforcement of Caesarius rule may have been one way she intended to guarantee that she never had to return to her husband.<sup>87</sup>

Although enclosure was most often a tool to keep intruders out, as the stories of Rusticula (ca. 556-632) and Radegund illustrate, strict cloistering could also benefit the monastery by keeping wealthy captives and their resources tied to the community. The third abbess of St. John, Liliola, agreed to hold a wealthy widow of Charibert captive for Guntram in the convent, perhaps guaranteeing the convent some share of her riches.<sup>88</sup> Some women who joined monasteries brought with them substantial fortunes, thus relieving monasteries that struggled with waning endowments. Caesarius’ rule instructs that “those who had something in the world shall, when they enter the monastery, humbly offer it to the mother to use for the common needs.”<sup>89</sup> Rusticula had begun her life at St. John as a fugitive heiress. Liliola had received Rusticula when she was five year old, and despite the lamentations of her mother and later marriage proposals, Rusticula never left the community. The financial advantage of having Rusticula in the community seems obvious, for as abbess, she supervised several large building projects. Upon her death, Rusticula’s inheritance had afforded St. John with new fortified temples and seven more altars.<sup>90</sup>

Financial independence was important in monasteries, both male and female. The Benedictine rule stresses that the monastery should be self-sufficient in as many

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<sup>86</sup> *Life of Rusticula*, trans and ed. Jo Ann McNamra and John E. Halborg with E. Gordon Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 128.

<sup>87</sup> McNamara, “Living Sermons,” 27.

<sup>88</sup> McNamara and Halborg with Whatley trans. and ed., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 119.

<sup>89</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns* caput 21, 176.

<sup>90</sup> *Life of Rusticula*, 126-7.

ways as possible: “A monastery, moreover, if it can be done, ought so to be arranged that everything necessary, - that is, water, a mill, a garden, a bakery, may be made use of, and different arts be carried on, within the monastery; so that there shall be no need for the monks to wander about outside.”<sup>91</sup> Caesarius advises the nuns that “the clothing should be made in the monastery with such great diligence that it will never be necessary for the abbess to provide from outside the monastery.”<sup>92</sup> Nowhere else in Caesarius’ rule does he elaborate on the self-sufficiency of St. John, though. In the case of St. John, the self-sufficiency of the convent posed particular challenges as its urban environment was not always conducive to agricultural undertakings. Among the many posts listed and chores described, none involve the production or attainment of the food supplies that filled the monastery’s cellar. Besides this obvious oversight, there were a variety of stations mentioned that suggest that St. John was an active community. In addition to the abbess and the prioress, St. John was staffed by a portress, a novice mistress, a treasurer, a cellarer, a wine-cellarer, a librarian, a choir mistress, a weaving mistress, and a woman in charge of the cloth storeroom. Although writing is not addressed in the rule, book two of Caesarius’ *vita*, which Caesaria II likely commissioned, describes the extraordinary scribe work St. John’s nuns accomplished. Describing the succession of Caesaria II, the *vita* boasts that “her work with companions is so outstanding that in the midst of psalms and fasts, vigils, and readings, the virgins of Christ beautifully copy out of holy books,

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<sup>91</sup> Benedict of Nursia, *regula monachorum* in *The Rule of Saint Benedict: Latin & English*, trans. Luke Dysinger (Trabuco Canyon, Ca: Source Books, 1996), c. 66, 159.

<sup>92</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns* c. 28, 179.

with their mother herself as teacher.”<sup>93</sup> Book production was not only a respectable craft for nuns, but it also may have elicited a substantial contribution to St. John’s funds.<sup>94</sup>

As optimistic as Benedict is about a monastery’s ability to remain self-sufficient and as active as St. John appeared to be, financial independence was a challenge to medieval convents. Often, the cloister had to rely on donations, but the generosity of the contributors could depend on the nuns’ obedience to their rule. Conrad Leyser discusses an odd entry in Caesarius’ rule that reads “the hair should never be tied up higher (*altiora*) than the measure which we have made in this place with ink.”<sup>95</sup> According to Leyser, “such a mark was meant to underscore the claustration of the holy virgins, serving as a sign that theirs was a life of consummately regulated purity, fully deserving of the church’s financial support.”<sup>96</sup> Maintaining economic control and financial independence was a priority of all convents, and the nuns’ rule provided each community with a statement of the monastery’s legitimacy. The efforts to which Caesarius went to guarantee St. John’s endowment attests to the importance convents placed on economic autonomy. Although the *regula ad virgines* itself was St. John’s first step toward fiscal independence, Caesarius also intervened on behalf of St. John, violating the rulings of two councils in order to gain certain lands and the profits of their sales for the monastery.<sup>97</sup> Economic independence was necessary to reinforce the convent’s distance from episcopal authority as outlined in the rule. Addressing Caesarius’ situation, Donald Hochstetler argues that “economic independence would limit the interference of powerful

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<sup>93</sup> *The Life of Caesarius*, 39.

<sup>94</sup> McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 135.

<sup>95</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns* c. 56, 189.

<sup>96</sup> Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 89.

<sup>97</sup> McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 108.

political and ecclesiastical leaders, including the bishop of Arles, in the functioning of the community.”<sup>98</sup>

In order to guarantee these profits to the monastery, however, Caesarius had to attain papal permission. Written between 514 and 523, the bishop’s letter to Pope Hormisdas showed his concern for the political and economic autonomy of St. John. Given Hormisdas’ response, William E. Klingshirn determines that Caesarius appealed to him on two accounts: “that [St. John] be given immunity from direct control by Caesarius’s successors and that it be permitted to keep the proceeds made from the sale of church property.”<sup>99</sup> The Pope was willing to support Caesarius’ demand for political immunity, reassuring that “we most willingly approve the request of your brotherhood, and affirm and decree by apostolic authority that none of your episcopal successors should ever dare to appropriate for himself any power in the monastery.”<sup>100</sup> As for his intentions to gain economic autonomy for St. John, Hormisdas allowed the convent to keep its funds, but the Pope hesitated to set a precedent for the alienation of church property on the account of monasteries.<sup>101</sup> Along with the rule and papal correspondence, Caesarius’ final testament secured for St. John further donations and gifts. As Caesarius’ heir, the monastery was protected from Caesarius kin and any episcopal successors with avaricious intentions.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Donald Hochstetler, “The Meaning of Monastic Cloister for Women According to Caesarius of Arles,” in *Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Richard E. Sullivan*, ed. Thomas F.X. Noble and John J. Contreni (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1987), 35.

<sup>99</sup> Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, and Letters*, 119.

<sup>100</sup> Caesarius of Arles, “Letter 18,” *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, and Letters*, trans. William E. Klingshirn 121.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>102</sup> Caesarius of Arles, “Testament,” in *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, and Letters*, trans. William E. Klingshirn, 68-76.

The degree to which Caesarius justified St. John's autonomy was impressive, making his rule and its implication an appealing regulation to consider for other convents concerned about inadequate or interfering bishops. After years of enduring the negligent behavior of Poitiers' bishop Meroveus, Radegund sought to empower the community of Holy Cross through a change in monastic legislation. Gregory of Tours notes that "down the years Radegund had frequent occasion to seek out the help of the Bishop, but she received none, and she and the Mother Superior whom she had appointed were forced to turn instead to Arles."<sup>103</sup> In 567, she is said to have traveled to Arles to attain a copy of Caesarius' rule and his final testament. To Radegund and the members of other convents, the monastic rule did not merely represent a standard list of expectations for the lives of women religious. The nuns' rule was capable of legitimizing the female community's efforts, perhaps even their right, to preserve and further the convent's self-sufficiency and political autonomy.

Aurelian of Arles (d. 551), Caesarius' successor as bishop, borrowed heavily from Caesarius' rules for monks and nuns. Aurelian extended many of the tenets demanding strict enclosure to monks as well. His rule for monks, in fact, is more detailed regarding enclosure in its discussion of the religious life of monks than Caesarius' own rule. Aurelian's monks were forbidden to dine with bishops or other officers of the church, a restriction Caesarius only discussed in length in his rule for nuns.<sup>104</sup> Enclosure for nuns, as articulated by Aurelian, however, appeared to be solely physical and less a device of political autonomy. In his nuns' rule, Aurelian admits that infants, or *parvulas infantes*,

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<sup>103</sup> Gregory of Tours, trans. Lewis Thorpe, 9:40, 530.

<sup>104</sup> Aurelian of Arles, *regula ad monachos*, PL 68, c. 48, 392. See also Caesarius of Arles, *regula ad monachos*, PL 67, 1099-1104. Aurelian's rule for monks has fifty-five chapters, while Caesarius only provided twenty-six for monks.

were allowed in the monastery, for they along with the very old were not expected to participate in all the community's religious offices and duties.<sup>105</sup> More notably, Aurelian did not include those chapters that discussed the banquet and charity customs of the nunnery. Although he goes into further detail than Caesarius regarding the appropriate menu for women religious, he includes none of the warnings against providing feasts for bishops or noblemen.<sup>106</sup> The procedure for doling out charity, however, is not discussed at all. As for Caesarius' anxious statements disparaging private cells, ostentatious decorations or luxurious garments, Aurelian only states that the nuns are to wear white clothes. Surprisingly, he does not address sleeping arrangements or provide any tenets that clearly discouraged the nuns' exhibition of status.<sup>107</sup>

This continuation of strict physical enclosure combined with a relaxation and even removal of the political barriers between the convent and local community reflects the developing relationship between the Merovingian nobility and the religious institutions of Gaul. By the time Caesarius died in 542, the Franks had attained control over Arles and were quickly gaining authority over Gaul. In 546, following the short episcopacy of Auxanius, King Childbert appointed Aurelian, who some historians suggest was his own son, to the bishopric of Arles.<sup>108</sup> With such intimate connections to the Merovingian throne, Aurelian's work as bishop and monastic founder served to introduce Frankish royalty and influence into the realm of the ecclesiastic administration in southern Gaul. Although Arles already boasted the convent of St. John, Aurelian's two additional monasteries, both founded with the generous funds of Childebert,

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<sup>105</sup> Aurelian of Arles, *regula ad virgines*, PL 68, c. 18, 402. The entire rule includes forty chapters.

<sup>106</sup> For the chapters on dining protocol within the nunnery see Aurelian, *regula ad virgines*, PL 68, c. 32-36, 403.

<sup>107</sup> For the chapter on dress see Aurelian, *regula ad virgines*, PL 68, c. 22, 402.

<sup>108</sup> Klingshirn, 262.

represented the Merovingians' attempt to establish a religious presence in the urban center. The timing of Caesarius' second *vita*, which his niece and the abbess of St. John had commissioned, also suggests that St. John attempted to remind Arles of the convent's prestigious founder and the importance of its establishment in contrast to the newer monasteries founded by Aurelian and Childebert.<sup>109</sup>

Caesarius' emphasis on cloistering remains his most memorable contribution to female monasticism, but these strict tenets also contributed to the rule's limited diffusion. The rule made little impact outside of Gaul and was never adopted in its entirety after the sixth century. There is some suggestion that Glodesind (ca. 600), an Austrasian noblewoman whose convent resided within the city of Metz, may have adopted for her convent the rule of Caesarius,<sup>110</sup> thus supporting the implication that the bishop's rule for nuns was particularly appealing to those nuns whose communities operated in an urban context. In the seventh century, most nunneries borrowed various recommendations from Caesarius' rule, but were vehemently adamant that his views on cloistering were too extreme. Moreover, Gaul's monastic center had since moved from the cities of the south to the more primitive landscapes of Burgundy and Austrasia, making it harder to sympathize with Caesarius' urban anxieties. Donatus of Besançon expresses this critique when he remarks to his mother's convent that the rule's "enclosure of place is not in the least suitable to your circumstances."<sup>111</sup> The other monasteries in which Caesarius' instruction is apparent primarily resulted from the missionary efforts of Poitiers and Besançon.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 263-4.

<sup>110</sup> McNamara and Halborg with Whatley trans. and ed., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 140.

<sup>111</sup> Donatus of Besançon, 32.

<sup>112</sup> McCarthy, 161.

Despite the brief institution of the *regula ad virgines*, Caesarius' ideals regarding strict cloistering reappeared in the Carolingian monastic reforms of the eight and ninth centuries. Jane Tibbetts Schulenberg notes that "one of the major reform issues of the period was strict, unbroken claustration for female religious, a policy which had in fact been carefully articulated by Caesarius of Arles but little developed by Benedict."<sup>113</sup> During these reforms, episcopal authority over monastic communities tightened and the authority of convents receded under the allegations that women were a threat to Christianity's ritual purity.<sup>114</sup> Although reformers adopted Caesarius' succinct statements regarding enclosure, they neglected to recognize that its tenets had been designed predominantly to address the relocation of monasticism and the challenges of preserving female asceticism within the urban environment of the sixth century. For the nuns of St. John and subsequently Holy Cross, the *regula ad virgines* was not a document void of meaning or practicality. In Caesarius' time, the monastic rule and the act of adhering to its chapters was a powerful statement of intent. The female monastery, although forced to reside inside the walls of the city under the eyes of bishops and kings, would maintain and cultivate an ascetic spirituality that served God and not the unreliable whims of men.

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<sup>113</sup> Schulenberg, "Strict Active Enclosure and Its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience (ca. 500-1100)," 56.

<sup>114</sup> Wemple, 130.

## Chapter Two

### A Revival of Female Spirituality: Adaptations of Nuns' Rules during the Hiberno-Frankish Monastic Movement of the Seventh Century

For women religious of seventh-century Gaul much had changed since the days of Caesarius of Arles and the monastic regulations of the sixth century. By the seventh century, the Irishman Columbanus (540-615) and his disciples had revitalized the Frankish countryside, establishing around two hundred monasteries, many of which housed women in either convents or double monasteries.<sup>1</sup> Although Columbanus' monastic legislation did not include a rule written specifically for nuns, the mixed rules of Waldebert of Luxeuil (d. 668) and Donatus of Besançon (d.660), both students of Columbanus' monastic center at Luxeuil, reveal the impression that Irish monasticism had on the expression of female monastic life in the seventh-century nunnery. With the move from an urban to a rural environment, the anxiety regarding safety that had dominated the rule of Caesarius of Arles began to fade from the memory of women religious and their monastic advisers. Moreover, the divide that had once existed between Gallo-Roman bishops and their Germanic kings was replaced by an increasingly involved Frankish nobility whose participation in new monastic settlements made the boundaries between monastic and secular politics more permeable.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the tenets of strict enclosure, so essential to the mood of sixth-century female monasticism, were no

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Riché, "Columbanus, His Followers and the Merovingian Church" in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. H.B. Clarke and Mary Brennan. B.A.R. International Series 1113 (Oxford, 1981), 59.

<sup>2</sup>Dunn, 158.

longer present in the regulations of seventh-century nunneries. Instead, the rural environment of northern Gaul and religious ideals of Columbanus' Irish upbringing influenced nuns' rules in such a way that they revived an intimate and personal dimension of asceticism that had been neglected for the sake of safety and stability. Along with the images of female religious life found in the lives of seventh-century saints, these mixed rules demonstrate that Irish monasticism imbued the communal life of Gallic female monasticism with the intense fervor once ascribed only to independent ascetics.

No longer located in the urban landscape of southern France, monastic centers in the seventh century began to take shape on rural and overgrown sites in the Burgundian and Austrasian regions of Gaul. When Columbanus arrived in Gaul from Ireland around 590 with his twelve fellow *peregrini*, he acquired Annegray, an abandoned Roman fort in the Vosges, from King Guntham.<sup>3</sup> According to Jonas of Bobbio, Columbanus' biographer, the Irishmen did not immediately set out to establish a monastic center in these woods but instead only sought a secluded area that would be ideal for contemplation and their eremitic lifestyles. Jonas describes the monks as fasting or sometimes even starving, eating only the herbs and bark they could gather from the forest.<sup>4</sup> As with many ascetical demonstrations, however, the activities of the Irish monks soon attracted followers, who eventually required a more permanent ascetic settlement. The process of taming the wilderness and clearing the land was labor-intensive, and

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<sup>3</sup> T. M. Charles-Edwards, 354-5. Charles-Edwards corrects Jonas' inaccurate account of which king gave the land to Columbanus. In the *vita Columbani*, Jonas claims that Sigibert I was the benefactor of Columbanus' mission, even though the Merovingian king had been dead since 575. Edward posits that Jonas chose to substitute Sigibert for Guntram because it was his sons who patronized Columbanus' mission later.

<sup>4</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *Life of Columban*, in *Original Sources of European History*, trans. Dana Carleton Munro (Philadelphia, Pa: The Department of History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1899), 8.

before the arrival of Columbanus, the Franks showed little interest in taking advantage of the agricultural opportunities of uncultivated land.<sup>5</sup> Columbanus' first monastery was founded at Luxeuil, only eight miles from the Irishmen's more humble beginnings at Annegray. The popularity of Columbanus and his monastic movement showed no signs of lessening and soon another foundation, Fontaines, was built to receive yet more Franks whom the example of the Irish monks had spurred to take up the monastic life.<sup>6</sup>

There is some historical debate regarding the monastic regulations that Columbanus authored for the growing system of these Hiberno-Frankish monasteries. Before Columbanus, the Irish abbots demonstrated little interest in producing monastic rules as we know them from the traditions of Benedict of Nursia and Caesarius of Arles. Preferring instruction by example to any documented tenets, the custom in Irish monasticism for monastic regulation emphasized the conduct of the founding or ruling abbot or abbess as model to imitate. *Vitae*, therefore, also served as appropriate guidelines for monastic behavior, and they were often composed with the intention of reflecting their subjects' most admirable, and often conventional, habits. Arguing that hagiography represented an important medium of instruction in the Hiberno-Frankish monastic movement, T. M. Charles-Edward posits that "a Life, thus understood, had a direct application for the monasteries that looked to the saint as did even a Rule written by the saint himself."<sup>7</sup>

By the seventh century, though, women in Frankish convents began to expect that their monastic advisors would provide for their communities instruction in the form of a detailed rule. Although Caesarius of Arles' rule was never implemented in its entirety

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<sup>5</sup> Dunn, 163.

<sup>6</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *Life of Columban*, in *Original Sources of European History*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Charles-Edwards, 390-1.

after the sixth century, his meticulous rule for nuns did set a precedent for female monasteries in Gaul. In the prologue to his mixed rule for nuns, Donatus of Besançon recognizes that the nuns of Jussa were eager to gain instruction for the female monastic life. He tells them that

you have often urged me that, having explored the rule of the holy Caesarius, bishop of Arles, which was especially devoted to Christ's virgins, along with those of the most blessed Benedict and the Abbot Columbanus, I might cull the choicest blooms...promulgating all that is proper for the special observance of the female sex.<sup>8</sup>

This innovation, that is the writing of rules specifically for convents, was not something that came along with Columbanus or his disciples but a tradition that Frankish nuns, if not monks as well, seem to have encouraged and even demanded.

The rules that are attributed to Columbanus for the monks of these new Hiberno-Frankish monastic communities, tucked into the natural landscape as they were, were quite different from those monastic regulations composed for the sixth-century monastery. In the *Monk's Rule*, Columbanus discusses ten preferential qualities of the monk, including obedience, silence, chastity, discretion and even monastic perfection. Other than discussing the choir office and rules for dining, the abbot contributes little to the understanding of the practical administration of a monastery. Columbanus' *Communal Rule* organizes instruction for monks in the form of a penitential text that outlines improper behavior and the appropriate discipline for insubordinate monks. As a penitential text, the format of the rule only provides instances of misconduct rather than a reflection of the monastic community as a whole. With only ten or fifteen chapters each,

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<sup>8</sup> Donatus of Besançon, 32.

Columbanus' rules do not pretend to address the more practical concerns of the monastery.<sup>9</sup>

Intent more on conveying the importance of spiritual development than on providing the practical aspects of daily activities, Columbanus' rule lacks any emphasis on the enclosure of monks. Columbanus did not personally address women religious with a guideline for the female community, but the abbot would have grown up in a monastic culture that made little effort to restrict its nuns and abbesses to the confines of their convent walls. When Columbanus was born in 540, monasticism was flourishing in Ireland. In a land without cities, the monastery became an expression of Ireland's pastoral society and culture. Irish society, which depended on livestock not only as a food source but also as a means of estimating worth, was incredibly mobile, accustomed to herding cattle, pigs or sheep as needed. This bucolic environment, likewise, produced an itinerant characterization of the Irish abbot and abbess. The *Synod of Patrick*, a letter to the Irish clergy that dates possibly to 457 C.E., addresses the traveling of clerics and holy women, warning that "a monk and a virgin, the one from one place, the other from another, shall not take lodging in the same inn, nor travel in the same carriage from village to village, nor carry on prolonged conversations together."<sup>10</sup> In a seventh-century *vita* of Brigit, the abbess of Kildare in Leinster, Cogitosus depicts the holy woman as a skilled horsewoman, charioteer and constant traveler.<sup>11</sup> Recognizing this relaxation of

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<sup>9</sup> Columbanus, *Monk's Rule*, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. G. S. M. Walker, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* vol. 2 (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1970), 122-143; Columbanus, *Communal Rule*, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. G. S. M. Walker, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* vol. 2 (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1970), 143-169.

<sup>10</sup> *Synod of Saint Patrick*, in *The Irish Penitentials*, ed. Ludwig Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* vol. 5 (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), c. 9, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Cogitosus, *The Life of Saint Brigit, Celtic Spirituality*, in *Celtic Spirituality* trans. Oliver Davies with Thomas O'Loughlin and James Mackey, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 128-9.

enclosure in the ideals of Irish female monasticism, Christina Harrington notes that “the Irish hagiographers of the seventh and eighth centuries, in their portrayal of the earliest Christian female communities... silently rejected notions that God’s virgins should be enclosed, non-travelling, and subservient to the male clerics.”<sup>12</sup> Harrington contends that this discouragement of cloistering among Irish monastics lasted through the seventh century and was only entertained by those in the Irish church who preferred Roman Catholic customs.<sup>13</sup>

In seventh-century Gaul, the lives of female saints and the monastic rules recommended for them suggest that, although occasional concerns for the safety of female communities remained, the need to enforce strict enclosure for protection rarely dominated the writing of monastic authorities or the lives of nuns. In the life of Saint Sadalberga (ca. 605-670), the abbess of Laon, Sadalberga reluctantly decides to lead her religious community to settle in the city of Laon rather than in the more deserted outskirts of Luxeuil as she had first intended.<sup>14</sup> Her hagiographer praises the wisdom of this decision considering the feud between Theudric and Dagobert II that would wreak havoc in the area during the abbacy of Sadalberga’s daughter, Anstrude (ca. 645 - d. before 709).<sup>15</sup> Unlike sixth-century Arles, however, this city in no way represented the epitome of Christian orthodoxy. Just the arrival of the holy women seemed to purge the city of ancient heresies and barbaric customs. Sadalberga’s hagiographer marvels that “what else could they suppose but that, unable to tolerate the holiness and vigor of God’s

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<sup>12</sup> Christina Harrington, *Women in a Celtic: Ireland 450-1150*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 68.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>14</sup> *Sadalberga, Abbess of Laon*, in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, trans and ed. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg with E. Gordon Whatley (Durham, Duke University Press), 185-6.

<sup>15</sup> *Sadalberga, Abbess of Laon*, 186; see also McNamara and Halborg’s discussion in n. 37, 186.

handmaids, the ancient enemy was fleeing with his satellites?”<sup>16</sup> Although Sadalberga chose to found her convent in Laon based on its reputation for protection, she travelled to the city with a caravan of over one hundred nuns,<sup>17</sup> a sight that not only testifies to the leadership of abbesses but also to the mobility of women religious during this century. Even if it was not common to see nuns traveling *en masse* in seventh-century Gaul, Sadalberga’s expedition to Laon does point toward a freer and less threatening environment for the seventh-century nun than what had existed for religious women of the sixth-century.

Waldebert’s rule, which some historians such as Jo Ann McNamara believe was written for Sadalberga’s community at Laon, provides no indication that strict enclosure was ever a consideration for the convent. The adaptation Waldebert makes in order to compose an appropriate rule for women in the spirit of Columbanus suggests that there could be impartial considerations regarding enclosure for both monks and nuns. In his rule, Waldebert adapts for nuns a chapter of the Benedictine rule in which the author suggests a more relaxed enclosure as it applied to monks. Benedict allows the monk up to three opportunities to return to the community if he “through his own evil action departs from the monastery.”<sup>18</sup> Once readmitted, the monk was expected to make amends for his faults after which he returned to the community in the lowest rank.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Waldebert reassures the community that, “if a sister is ever lost to the Christian religious and flees from the walls of the monastery, and, having fled outside, later recalls her original religion and returns full of fear of eternal judgement, she must first make all

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 186.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 29, 81.

<sup>19</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 29, 81.

emendation to the monastery. Afterwards, if the penance is believable, then she may be received again within the monastery walls. Even if this happens two or three times, she shall be extended like piety.”<sup>20</sup> Although the language of the chapter that Waldebert included is certainly that of Benedict, the spirit of the chapter as it was directed to women was decidedly that of Columbanus and the Irish. Wemple notes that, unlike many of his Frankish contemporaries, Columbanus did not eschew women, and in Jonas’ life of the saint, the Irishman more often than not overlooks the sons of his hosts to bless their daughters.<sup>21</sup>

This suggestion of gender equality in Columbanus’ monastic tradition is grounded in the Irish Christian’s understanding of penance. Although monastic life under the penitential rule of Columbanus and Waldebert might seem to make living conditions harsh and unreasonable, the implications of penance provided for a forgiving and hopeful interpretation of salvation. As Catherine Thom has observed, “it is evident from statements in all the Irish penitentials...that the primary purpose was to heal the penitent and to return the sinner to the community and community worship.”<sup>22</sup> In Columbanus’ rule, which is expressed much like a penitential, the opportunities for transgressions seemed ubiquitous, but the use of private penance and confession sent the message that very few were without hope of salvation. Those who confessed swiftly and made satisfaction were in fact wiping the spiritual slate clean.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the penitential was no less forgiving of holy women than it was of clerics. According to the *Penitential of*

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<sup>20</sup> Waldebert, *Rule of a Certain Father to the Virgins*, in *The Ordeal of Community*, trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg (Toronto, Ontario: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1993), c. 21, 98.

<sup>21</sup> Wemple, 159.

<sup>22</sup> Catherine Thom, *Early Irish Monasticism: An Understanding of Its Cultural Roots* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 74.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), 251-2.

*Finnian*, which Columbanus draws from to form his own penitential instructions, the nun, if she made satisfaction, was to be welcomed back into the community even if she had strayed so far from her vows as to have had children.<sup>24</sup> Penance was also often the same for clerics as it was for holy women. The *First Synod of Saint Patrick* orders that a pregnant nun “who bears a child and her sin is manifest, < she shall do penance > for six years < with bread and water >, as is the judgment in the case of clerics, and in the seventh year she shall be joined to the altar, and then we say her crown can be restored and she may don a white robe and be pronounced a virgin.”<sup>25</sup> Even though Columbanus did not directly address women religious with a rule, the religious outlook of his predecessors, who saw no reason to differentiate between the penance and satisfaction of clerics and holy women, no doubt influenced his mindset and that of his Frankish successors. Waldebert, therefore, saw no reason why Benedict’s allowances for the errant monk could not also be extended to the nun.

Although Waldebert’s rule suggests that nuns were given the opportunity to leave and return to the monastic life as they needed up to a point, we should not assume that seventh-century nuns in Merovingian Gaul became accustomed to freely abandoning the religious life or venturing far from their convents. Gallic monasticism’s own tradition and church councils implied that some sense of enclosure, if not strict enclosure, was expected of women religious. According to the ecclesiastic councils of the sixth century, such as the Council of Mâcon (581) and the Council of Lyons III (583), the threat of excommunication existed for any nun who strayed from her convents.<sup>26</sup> Monks on the

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<sup>24</sup> *Penitential of Finnian*, in *The Irish Penitentials*, ed. Ludwig Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* vol. 5 (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), 81. See also Harrington, 38.

<sup>25</sup> *First Synod of Saint Patrick*, c. 21, 81.

<sup>26</sup> Holmes, 530.

other hand, although they were expected to obey their abbots, were given the option of returning. Even if monks had abandoned the religious life and married, the punishment exacted was merely their exclusion from holding church offices.<sup>27</sup> Donatus of Besançon notably did not choose to include Benedict's chapter on allowing monks to leave and reenter the monastery into his own mixed rule for nuns, even though it practically mirrors the Benedictine rule in its organization. Furthermore, although Waldebert extended to nuns the Benedictine option to leave and return to the community, as an author of a nuns' rule he warns that the sister who departs "incurs the stain of sinful flight."<sup>28</sup>

The hagiography of the seventh century addresses instances when nuns chose to leave the nunnery in a way that also indicates that monastic authorities and churchmen on the continent were less willing to relax tenets of enclosure to the extent of the Irish tradition. Rather than allow them to leave on their own accord these *vitae* suggest that nuns were encouraged to return by the means of divine intimidation or, in a perhaps a more likely event, by the search efforts of the convent. At Faremoutiers, Burgundofara's convent and a daughter house of Luxeuil, a nun gave accounts of fellow sisters who sought escape from the convent and the demanding discipline to which they were held there.<sup>29</sup> In one case, the discontented nuns had appropriated a ladder for their flight, but even as they prepared to climb toward the ground, the monastery was shaken by divine flames that spread toward the convent's three gates and promptly blocked the nuns' exits. This dramatic demonstration of heavenly displeasure was effective as it provoked the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 529.

<sup>28</sup> Waldebert, c. 21, 98.

<sup>29</sup> According to Jo Ann MacNamara and John E. Halborg, these accounts from within the convent may have been sent to Jonas during the 640s while he was in Gaul researching for his *vita* of Columbanus. See *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 160.

nuns to immediately make their confession and return into the good graces of the community.<sup>30</sup>

Another set of fugitives from Faremoutiers did manage to escape beyond the convent walls and to flee toward their families. The *vita*, however, claims that “pursuing searchers” returned the resentful nuns back to the convent.<sup>31</sup> They were not excommunicated as the Gallic church councils would have advised, but instead they underwent a program of discipline according to the rule. Their admission back into the community depended on their confession and the subsequent satisfaction of an assigned penance. The nuns, however, refused to confess, an example of insubordination that would have warranted separation from the community according to Waldebert’s rule. In the hagiography, which often served as a narrative of proper conduct for women religious, the contentious nuns who refused to repent did not leave as monastic anathemas but came to swift deaths. The hagiographer makes it evident that only those possessed by the devil would have been so eager and determined to leave the community.<sup>32</sup> In her narration of the circumstances leading up to the nuns’ escape, the author surmises that

When the lie-bearing serpent had gradually infused his venom into their hardening hearts, he was ready to reveal the evil his deception had instilled in their minds and then he struck. One night, they took flight outside the monastery walls, wishing to return to their own people. When they got out into the dense night, they could hardly have found a straight way through the fog except that the Devil assisted them in their rebellion with light in the form of an oil lamp which he was able to counterfeit through his arts. Then he showed them the way back to the world and so aggravated their desertion.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *The Life of the abbot Saint Columbanus and his disciples, Bk II*, in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, trans. and ed. McNamara and Halborg with Whatley (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 171.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

For these nuns, it was not the rule that dictated the enclosure of the convent but rather divine judgment and the mischief of devils.

Although the complete abandonment of the convent and the religious life it supported was strongly discouraged for nuns, there is also some evidence in hagiography and mixed rules that the world in which the seventh-century nun existed had expanded since the monastic age in which Caesarius wrote. Sadalberga herself is depicted as walking beyond the enclosure of her convent and even outside the city walls of Laon when she made requests to the monks who gardened for the female community. This journey outside of the monastery may not be an illustration of the freedom extended to the entire community. As abbess, it was Sadalberga's responsibility to ensure that the convent received the appropriate amount of supplies, which in this particular case was lettuce. Nevertheless, Sadalberga's interaction with the monk Landefrid reflects a modest display of authority, which only served to enhance her reputation as a chaste holy woman. According to her hagiographer, the abbess asked that he bring the lettuce, "communicating with him more by intimation than enunciation as the brother, who is still here, is wont to tell the tale. Wonderful to say! The voice which was but a breath of air heard by no other, came to the brother's ears as though she had spoken directly to him. Yet there was a distance of four stadia or more between them."<sup>34</sup> Although Sadalberga interacted directly with Brother Lindefrid, she did so at a respectable distance of about eight hundred yards. It seems, then, that even if the relaxation of enclosure were extended beyond the abbess to other members of the community, this applied only to enclosure in the physical sense, for ensuring that one's chastity remained unquestionably pure was a timeless concern of the virtuous nun.

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<sup>34</sup> *Sadalberga, Abbess of Laon*, 191.

Sadalberga's journey outside of the monastery and the image of the garden does support, though, an image of a seventh-century female monastery that was more physically free than those in the previous century. In the case of Sadalberga, this physical freedom was primarily related to the more rural environment in which the seventh-century convent was located. As historians have noted and as had been the case in Ireland since its conversion, the agricultural or pastoral implications of a more rural environment made the tenets of strict enclosure no longer appropriate for the lives of nuns in seventh-century Gaul. Perhaps recognizing the difference between the urban setting of Arles and that of his mother's rural Burgundian convent, Donatus of Besançon notes in the prologue of his rule that, "though holy Caesarius dedicated his own rule to virgins of Christ, like yourself, their enclosure of place is not in the least suitable to your circumstances."<sup>35</sup> Although Sadalberga's convent was located within an urban population, evidently the gardens it shared with the male monastery were located outside of the city walls. Unlike Caesarius of Arles, whose rule gives no indication of where exactly the urban monastery of St. John in Arles may have been able to attain its food supply or whether the community itself participated in any agricultural ventures, Waldebert's chapter on manual labor does mention the picking of ripe fruit. He even notes that that these agricultural duties were such "pressing work" that it could take precedence among all the chores of the nuns.<sup>36</sup> Since historians believe that Waldebert formulated this mixed rule for Sadalberga, whom he had encouraged to take the veil after her husband died, this reference to fruit suggests that the convent and monastery in Laon may have shared an orchard in addition to a garden. This cooperation of monks and nuns

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<sup>35</sup> Donatus of Besançon, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Waldebert, c. 12, 90.

in the cultivation of rural estates as implied by the life of Sadalberga and Waldebert's rule does give some indication of the possible breadth of enclosure for nuns during this century in Gaul.

In addition to the relaxed tenets of enclosure implied by the agricultural responsibilities of the convent, there are other duties of the nuns and their abbess that are explicated in the chapters of Waldebert's rule that also suggest that the community was not shut away from the surrounding population. Compared to Caesarius' rule for nuns, Waldebert's monastic regulations indicate that the female monastery served a more active role in providing charity and hospitality to outsiders. As the gatekeeper of the convent, the portress was charged with the task of tending to any approaching visitors. According to the rule, she "should take all care for paupers, pilgrims, and guests for in them [the nuns] receive Christ."<sup>37</sup> The chapter further elaborates on the charitable function of the monastery, mentioning the meals and services available to pilgrims. Even though the nuns were never allowed to dine with pilgrims, these religious visitors were fed in the kitchen with the cook and servants.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, unlike the charitable efforts that Caesarius of Arles notes in his nuns' rule, the nuns of Waldebert's rule did not require the services of a male prior to represent the female community to the poor. It would seem, then, that for those convents that chose to follow the abbot of Luxeuil's rule for nuns, the activities of their community required a less restrictive concept of enclosure.

More indicative of the nuns' active charity is the mention of the hospice. For the sake of those guests in need of care, Waldebert states that the community "shall minister to all comers outside in the hospice (*hospitali*), as honor demands through the ordination

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<sup>37</sup> Waldebert, c. 3, 79.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, c. 3, 80.

of the abbess.”<sup>39</sup> Historians such as Andrew T. Crislip have traced the connection between monasteries and public health facilities to the earliest centuries of monasticism, with Basil of Caesaria’s community serving as the most prominent example of the monastery’s ability to provide aid to the poor and sick. According to Crislip, the fact that the monastery identified itself as an outsider to society, where it would be responsible for its community’s own care, made the monastery particularly suitable as a caretaker for other social outcasts such as the sick and poor. Although Irish Christianity and its reliance on the penitential often emphasized spiritual rather than medical healing, charity and hospitality were no less stressed in the customs of Irish society.<sup>40</sup> In the sagas and the *vitae* of native Irishmen, hospitality is a moral requirement. Regarding the essential role of hospitality in Irish culture, Lisa Bitel argues that “hospitality meant more than just obligatory feasting and gisting: It lay at the core of a code of honorable behavior.”<sup>41</sup>

The strain between the spiritual duties of the monastic community and its charitable endeavors on behalf of society was somewhat relieved by how the nuns may have interpreted their services for the sick and poor. In his chapter discussing the behavior of the abbess, Waldebert makes it evident that efforts of charity and hospitality were priorities for the convent. He instructs the abbess that “she should lead the way in solicitude for pilgrims and guests and thoughtful care for the sick and [for] the needy poor with her wealth.”<sup>42</sup> Waldebert’s address to the abbess and his entreaty that the nuns

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, c. 3, 80. For the Latin see, *PL* 88, 1057.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of spiritual and medicinal healing as understood by Irish churchmen see Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 78-88.

<sup>41</sup> Lisa M. Bitel, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlements and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 197.

<sup>42</sup> Waldebert, c. 1, 76. McNamara and Halborg inconsistently translated it as “thoughtful care for the sick and in the needy poor.” The Latin reads “*Sit charitatis benevolentia ornate, ut omnium fidelium laetificet*

provide service in the hospice “as honor demands” suggests that for the nuns at Laon charity to the public was expected and may have even served as a part of the nuns’ ascetic program. Based upon Basil’s enduring model of the monastic hospital, the monk’s or nun’s participation in the hospice was not necessarily a contradiction to or infringement on their monastic vows. As Crislip has notes, “in Basil’s monastic system, the care for the sick outsiders became an ascetical labor like any other but regulated in such a way that monastics were neither overburdened nor distracted from their prayers by worldly concerns.”<sup>43</sup>

In the eighth century, the Irish monastic reform movement of the Céli Dé sought to revive the ascetic prestige of monasticism and placed at the center of its monastic duties the care of the sick. According to Frederick Paxton, the “documents concerning the Céli Dé and the way of life at Tallaght suggest that the pastoral care of the sick and dying was of central importance in their spirituality.”<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the ascetic ideals that the Céli Dé strove to revive were similar to those defined by Basil’s monks and the same ideals that had motivated the nuns at Laon to incorporate the care of the sick into their own monastic identity. Notably, there is no mention of a hospice in either the nuns’ rules of Caesarius of Arles or that of Donatus of Besançon. Even the Benedictine rule, which describes in some detail the administration of the monastery’s guest house, does not mention a hospice or any other charitable facilities that were located outside of the monastery. This relaxation of enclosure, without which the nuns of Laon would have never been able to pursue the “ascetical labors” of tending the sick, provided this female

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*corda. Erga peregrinorum et hospitem sollicitudinem praesto: erga infirmantium curam sollicita: erga inopum et egenorum iuvamen opulenta.*” in PL 88, 1053.

<sup>43</sup> Crislip, 141.

<sup>44</sup> Paxton, 85.

community of seventh-century Gaul with new opportunities for ascetic and spiritual expression.

In addition to the relaxation of enclosure, female communities of seventh-century Gaul were more closely tied to local ruling families than the Gallo-Roman communities of Caesarius of Arles' era. Although the sites of the Hiberno-Frankish monastic movement are often described lying on the frontiers of the Christian world, the land was closely connected to the rising families of the Frankish nobility who, since the reign of Clovis (466-511), had attempted to meld their heritage with the prestige of the Christian Church. Just as Annegray had belonged to an aristocrat and his noble descendants, so did every other monastery established during this period. Nor did the traditions of Irish monasticism with which Columbanus was accustomed discourage the interaction between abbatial authorities and the likes of kings and nobles. In fact, unlike the monasteries of the Desert Mothers and Fathers they desired to emulate, Irish monasteries primarily received members from elite social ranks. Moreover, most monasteries in Ireland were tightly intertwined with the lives and agendas of noble kin-groups. For instance, the renowned Irish monk and founder of Iona, Columcille, was a prince of a branch of the powerful *ui Neill* family, and his religious efforts were not always distinct from political machinations. Recognizing the extremes to which Irish monastic communities could participate in political agendas, Liam de Paor argues that "as the dominant kin-groups moved towards dynastic and aggrandizing politics by means of what is, in detail, a prolonged tedium of ferocious family quarrels, the monasteries served to keep records, to produce propaganda, to provide resource-bases in various ways."<sup>45</sup> As

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<sup>45</sup> Liam de Paor, *The Peoples of Ireland: From Prehistory to Modern Times* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 63.

much as Jonas of Bobbio depicts Columbanus taking ascetic excursions into the forest, a large portion of his life in Gaul was spent interacting with and advising kings and noble families.<sup>46</sup> Columbanus' monastic movement tapped directly into the network of aristocratic families in Gaul. Both of his successors at Luxeuil, Eustasius and Waldebert, were the sons of dukes. Burgundofara, whom Columbanus personally consecrated, and Sadalberga, whom both Eustasius and Waldebert recruited, were daughters of the landed nobility.

The connection between the rising Frankish nobility and the explosion in monastic development is evident in the lives of seventh-century female saints, whose decision to take religious vows usually provoked family controversies. While the lives of sixth-century nuns suggest that women took the veil as captives or in response to violence or death, the hagiography of seventh-century saints stresses the dramatic break between nuns and their families, with daughters often making every effort to evade their fathers' marriage plans.<sup>47</sup> The argument between daughters and their families that arose from the intentions of young women to take religious vows is sometimes disregarded as a literary trope. Once the Frankish nobles had gained control over Gaul, however, the stability and prosperity of these noble families depended upon the marriages of their sons and daughters. Suzanne Wemple argues that "an aristocratic group could maintain political leadership only as long as it had a number of compliant daughters and sons of

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<sup>46</sup> Friedrich Prinz, "Columbanus, the Frankish Nobility and the Territories East of the Rhine" in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*. eds. H.B. Clarke and Mary Brennan. B.A.R. International Series 1113 (Oxford, 1981), 81-2.

<sup>47</sup> Monegund (d. 570) decided to adopt the life of a recluse after her daughters died from fever. Before she founded Holy Cross, Radegund (525-587) had been a Thuringian princess whose family's war against the Franks had led to her capture and subsequent marriage to Chlotar. Her vita and the surviving poetry of Fortunatus Venantius also reveal that her husband's assassination of her brother contributed to her overall dissatisfaction as Chlothar's queen. And finally, the religious life of Rictrude began as a young girl when she was imprisoned at Arles

marriageable age.”<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the most explicit example of this conflict between political and religious ambitions is the life of Saint Gertrud (628-658). As the daughter of Pepin the Elder (c.580-640), Gertrud was expected to make a marriage that would further her family’s political aspirations. Evading her father’s marital schemes until his death, Gertrud eventually took religious vows and founded the monastery of Nivelles along with her mother.<sup>49</sup> Although Gertrud’s *vita* only casts the saint’s suitors as the pawns of the king and her father’s machinations, Wemple notes that “the church might have lost a saint, and Carolingians might have gained political ascendancy sooner, had Pepin the Elder lived long enough to prevail upon his second daughter, Gertrud, to marry the son of an Austrasian duke.”<sup>50</sup>

The seemingly clichéd demonstration of holy devotion and determination that daughters used to evade their secular responsibilities also masks the Frankish aristocracy’s firm connection to monastic properties. The *vita* of Glodesind (ca. 600), one of the first in a long line of Austrasian nobility to take the veil, elaborates on the young girl’s struggle to have the legitimacy of her religious life recognized, which she eventually achieves through her own perseverance and effort. Almost as a side note to her rise to abbatial authority, her hagiographer briefly mentions that her noble family endowed the nun with the land on which she had built her monastery.<sup>51</sup> Although families did not always applaud their daughters’ unrelenting perseverance for the

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<sup>48</sup> Wemple, 53-4.

<sup>49</sup> *Gertrude, Abbess of Nivelles*, In *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, trans. and ed. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg with E. Gordon Whatley (Durham, Duke University Press), 224. See also, McNamara and Halborg with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 220-1.

<sup>50</sup> Wemple, 54.

<sup>51</sup> *Saint Glodesind, Virgin of Metz in Belgica Prima*, in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, trans. and ed. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg with E. Gordon Whatley (Durham, Duke University Press, 1992), 143-5,

religious life, once their daughters took the veil, the family often became as invested in their religious careers as the women themselves.

In part, this link between the monastery and its noble benefactors represented the essential exchange of earthly protection for heavenly assurance. In exchange for prayers and spiritual intercessions, the nobleman and his family were eager to establish and support monasteries and convents. Another result of this enthusiastic participation in the spread of monasticism was the cooperation of family, often brothers and sisters, in the administration of the convent or double monastery.<sup>52</sup> But as this new monastic movement was spreading alongside the growing influence of the Frankish aristocracy, the endowment of monasteries was not without political repercussions. Even though Frankish nobility desired and managed to dominate administrative roles in the operation of monasteries, it was important to emphasize that these estates were developed by and for the sacred and, therefore, off limits in the political agenda of other aristocratic families or from the encroaching authority of the king.<sup>53</sup> Brides and the property that their husbands would gain from marrying them made the unwed woman a political commodity for aristocrat or monarch. As Jo Ann McNamara and John Halborg note in their introduction to the life of Saint Sadalberga, “the nobility’s willingness to allow their women to choose a religious life should also be seen as a means of using their human capital to [their] best advantage.”<sup>54</sup> Regarding King Dagobert (603-639) and his dramatic interference in the marriage plans of the aristocracy, these efforts only contributed to his ability to limit the independence and authority of noble families.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Schulenberg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 274.

<sup>53</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *The Life of the abbot Saint Columbanus and his disciples*, Bk II, 159.

<sup>54</sup> *Sadalberga, Abbess of Laon*, 177.

<sup>55</sup> *Sadalberga, Abbess of Laon*, 177.

With such close connections among Frankish nobles, bishops, and monastic leaders, the autonomy of the Gallic monastery was at times questionable. Donatus of Besançon included in his mixed rule chapters from Caesarius' of Arles nuns' rule that discouraged episcopal interference and expressions of secular alliances. At first glance, however, Waldebert seems unconcerned about addressing the risks to the convent's administrative autonomy. Besides a general statement warning that the nuns should dine alone, throughout the rule he makes no specific mention, much less caution, regarding bishops and churchmen. There is, however, a notable absence of secular clergy in the lives of the female saints from this period. In an effort to demonstrate the humility of Sadalberga, her hagiographer recalls an instance when the abbess cooked a large fish for the entire community. The fish had been a gift from the archdeacon Basnius, but the *vita* gives no indication that the nuns entertained him with a feast or banquet inside the monastery.<sup>56</sup> The *vita* does note that Sadalberga summoned a priest to confirm the occurrence of a miracle in the kitchen, but he only praises the abbess' well-disciplined community.<sup>57</sup> There is no reference to his other duties or the sacramental role of churchmen in the community. For instance, while the death of a nun was a prominent theme in the hagiography at this time, a priest never appears at the deathbed of a woman religious. Surrounded by their spiritual sisters, the nuns at Faramoutiers die only to the sound of religious chanting. Nor is there is any indication that ailing nuns waited to receive extreme unction from a priest; once a nun had confessed to the abbess and made satisfaction for her sins, her soul was free to leave.<sup>58</sup> In one instance, Burgundofara

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>58</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *The Life of the abbot Saint Columbanus and his disciples*, Bk II, 168.

herself issued the Eucharist to dying nuns and Jo Ann McNamara theorizes that the abbess may have kept a consecrated supply for such occasions.<sup>59</sup>

Although men and women did cooperate in the founding of monasteries in seventh-century Gaul, the actual administrator and spiritual mentor of the community was unequivocally the abbess. For Columbanus, monastic autonomy was not something guaranteed through the enforcement of monastic rules, but more often than not through the stern principles of monastic leaders. In Ireland, where the monasteries were closely integrated into the local community, episcopal overseers were rarely given authority beyond what was necessary to issue the sacraments, and even then monastic communities could render this responsibility unnecessary by ordaining a monk to the priesthood. As Katherine Hughes notes, “bishops within such monasteries fulfilled their own functions of order, but under the abbot’s jurisdiction, and the abbot’s authority was so far accepted that a bishop might be forced into action of which he disapproved.”<sup>60</sup> To make these monastic leaders more powerful, the abbacy in both Ireland and in seventh-century Gaul was often treated as a hereditary post. Unlike the rules of Caesarius, Benedict, and Donatus, those of Columbanus and Waldebert do not make any effort to ensure that abbatial elections occurred in the community. More often than not, the abbot or abbess in these communities selected his or her own successor.

We find images of this abbatial power in the hands of women in the administration of large nunneries and double monasteries. Faremoutiers, established around 617, was likely France’s first double monastery, and Burgundofara ruled there over a community of both men and women. At Laon, Sadalberga oversaw approximately

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<sup>59</sup> McNamara and Halborg with Whatley trans. and ed. , *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 161.

<sup>60</sup> Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 63.

three hundred nuns in her convent in addition to those monks that resided in the attached monastery.<sup>61</sup> According to Jo Ann McNamara, these abbesses “enjoyed many of the administrative (but not the sacramental) prerogatives associated with bishops and expressed by the shepherd’s crook, which they bore as an iconic attribute.”<sup>62</sup> Besides the extensive authority of the abbess, monastic autonomy was also attained through the legal efforts of royal patrons. In particular, Queen Balthild (d. ca. 680) was responsible for gaining exemptions from episcopal interference for both male and female monasteries.<sup>63</sup>

Although the seventh-century convents appeared to provide considerable resistance against prying bishops, the proprietary relationship that churches shared with their noble patrons made it more challenging to ensure that the religious community stayed free from the political concerns of family and secular lords. Despite the evidence that Columbanus served as the mentor of monarchs and the close advisor of noble families and their children, he did not permit his monastery to become a pawn of the secular government. He refused to admit the king’s own men into the center of the monastery and threatened to refuse gifts and aid from the king, thus breaking the monastery’s pledge to provide intercessory prayer for the royal family.<sup>64</sup> Columbanus’ platform of monastic independence from royal or episcopal intervention, which likely stemmed from his Irish upbringing, came to define the religious experience of the Hiberno-Frankish movement. G. S. M. Walker argues that “the exemption of monasteries from diocesan control, destined later to raise whole armies of independent monks, was practically initiated by Columban in his struggle with the French

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<sup>61</sup> *Sadalberga, Abbess of Laon*, 188.

<sup>62</sup> McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 127.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Jonas of Bobbio. *Life of Columban*, in *Original Sources of European History*, 20.

hierarchy.”<sup>65</sup> As an Irish *peregrinus*, though, Columbanus’ decision was not clouded by familial loyalties in Merovingian Gaul.

In the female community, whose members were closely tied to local families, the most effective way to separate the convent from its secular influences was to enforce the rule and immerse the nuns in a communal spirituality. Columbanus’ emphasis on discipline and penance, which Waldebert adopts in his mixed rule, served to provide the religious community with a cohesive, and codependent, spiritual identity. Suzanne Wemple suggests that “to discourage the formation of kinship circles in double monasteries, Waldebert’s Rule stressed spiritual sisterhood as the essence of communal life.”<sup>66</sup> Waldebert is not subtle in his criticism of familial ties and he forthrightly announces that “in no way do we consent to permit anyone to defend a neighbor or relative in the monastery.”<sup>67</sup> As nuns, these women were expected to have abandoned their secular ties in exchange for the shared love and religious life within the community. The expression of female spirituality in the context of a monastic rule reflects a revival of female spirituality that had been left unaddressed in the previous century’s regulations. Spiritual programs that emphasized the individual’s asceticism and the mortification of the physical body were not innovations of the seventh century, nor did they originate from Celtic Christianity in the monasteries of Ireland. Caesarius himself was well versed in ascetic ideals. The abbot of Lerins sent Caesarius away from the prestigious island monastery on account of his over ambitious devotion to mortification and his severe

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<sup>65</sup> G. S. M. Walker ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* vol. 2 (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1970), xxxiii.

<sup>66</sup> Wemple, 163.

<sup>67</sup> Waldebert, c. 23, 100.

demonstrations of ascetic endurance.<sup>68</sup> As is evident from his rule for nuns, however, the responsibilities and pressures of urban monasticism in the sixth century overwhelmed any intention he might have had of using the monastic rule to articulate the spiritual pursuits of nuns. Besides his concern for the enclosure and safety of the community, the bishop provided little input regarding the specific methods of discipline and he made no effort to link one's obedience to the rule to her spiritual wellbeing.

According to Venantius Fortunatus, Radegund of Poitiers participated in a remarkably strenuous ascetic tradition. In addition to wearing hair shirts and fasting, the royal nun is also described using a mechanical contraption to restrain herself and even to have burned the sign of Christ onto her flesh.<sup>69</sup> These extreme efforts of self-mortification and examples of independent asceticism were not necessarily applauded at this time. In a letter to Radegund, Caesaria II, the niece of Caesarius of Arles, warns against pursuing harsh ascetic practices, which tend to place the needs of the individual before the well-being of the community. Caesaria reminds Radegund to “do everything reasonable if you would live for [Him] and do as you are able. For if you fall ill through excess, which God does not will, afterwards you will need delicacies and you will lose time and you will not be able to govern the blessed ones.”<sup>70</sup> This admonition is an indication of the more moderate spirituality that is associated with the rise of the Benedictine rule, and that began to replace the more independent asceticism of the Cassian tradition. For Radegund, and other ascetics who chose to endure physical hardship, however, these personal demonstrations of spiritual might were an example of martyrdom. Describing an example of self-mortification in which Radegund hugged a

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<sup>68</sup> *The Life of Caesarius*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Fortunatus, *The Life of the Holy Radegund*, Bk I, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Caesaria II, *Epistolae*, in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 117. See also Schulenberg, 388-9.

basin of hot coals to her body, Fortunatus recognizes that “she drew it to herself so that she might be a martyr though it was not the age of persecution.”<sup>71</sup>

While Radegund’s contemporaries frowned upon her severe asceticism, the example of Columbanus and the Irish *peregrini* ushered in a new way to conceive of martyrdom and self-mortification. Like Cassian, whose interpretation of monastic practice initially inspired the religious practices of Irish Christians, Columbanus approached monastic guidance with a focus on the individual rather than the community. The penitential discipline of his rule was designed to keep the monk constantly vigilant and to raise an awareness of the condition and the purity of the soul.<sup>72</sup> For sinners, penance was a form of spiritual medicine and a way to purge the soul of sins. Confession and penance were mandatory according to the rule of Waldebert, and the abbot admonishes the nuns that “revealing sins strengthens the soul. Strive daily to reveal them through confession so that daily medicine will heal your wounds.”<sup>73</sup>

The variety of asceticism that arises from Columbanus’ penitential interpretation was not that of the religious athletes that frequently comes to mind when the ascetic trials of the Irish are considered. The discipline required of monks and nuns under the rules of Columbanus or Waldebert was related to efficiency in labor, devotion in religious work, forgiveness in relationships and willingness to learn through confession and penance. Although Waldebert’s rule is not as extensive as that of Benedict or even his contemporary, Donatus of Besançon, it relies on the spiritual ambition of the community and the discipline of the abbess and other superiors to ensure that day- to-day life flowed seamlessly. If anything, Waldebert borrowed from Benedict his organization and

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<sup>71</sup> Fortunatus, *The Life of the Holy Radegund, Book I*, 81.

<sup>72</sup> John Ryan, *Irish Monasticism* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972), 279.

<sup>73</sup> Waldebert, c 6, 84.

attention to detail. But while he borrowed specific chapters such as those naming the officers of the monastic community, he infused these posts with the penitential discipline of Columbanus.

When discussing the responsibilities of the portress and cellaress, Waldebert goes beyond the common explication of their responsibilities and qualities to include a penitential framework for their behavior. Waldebert writes these chapters noting not only the practical requirements of each position but more intimately also the spiritual ramifications of each officer's conduct for both the nun and her community. As one of the convent's ties to the outside community, the portress was in a position to witness or hear the activities of the surrounding local community. Seeking to distance the community from society's political or cultural influence, Waldebert stresses that the portress' decision not to entertain or spread the rumors of secular society to other nuns reflected directly on her salvation. He warns portresses that "in no way shall they pay attention to any gossip which they hear at the gate or from secular people. And if they unwillingly hear anything, they shall not pass it on to their companions. If anyone transgresses against this, they will be punished with regular penance. If they make humble satisfaction, which conforms to the humility we confess, they will be considered free from sin."<sup>74</sup> As for the cellaress, her behavior as such had implications not only for her own salvation but for that of the community. In charge of the convent's essential supplies and the distribution of them, the cellaress held a position that invited negligence and preferential behavior toward certain community members. Waldebert advises that the monastery select a cellaress "who will not be pleased to serve herself or do her own will but justly and piously serve the whole congregation. Nor should she strive to please

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<sup>74</sup> Waldebert, c. 3, 79.

in doing so, which might bring the ruin of sin upon herself and lead others to transgress by consenting to evil.”<sup>75</sup> Although other rules set guidelines for the portress and cellaress, the adaptation of these posts in a penitential style provides the nuns with a spiritual interpretation of what had been generally described in the terms of practical labor.

In addition to these specific offices, the entire community completed daily activities in the spiritual context of a penitential system. As the duties of the prioress illustrate, every deed of the nun was examined for evidence of negligence. The prioress was the abbess’ deputy and an officer whose responsibilities centered on the identification of negligence, the apprehension of disobedient nuns, and the correction of sin. According to Waldebert, the proper prioress was a nun with “grave behavior, clever words, strong craft, watchful consideration, swift running, pious correction.”<sup>76</sup> When the prioress or other monastic superiors corrected wayward nuns, the severity of the discipline could be considered harsh and abusive in the eyes of modern critics. According to Columbanus, the monk who lied was to receive fifty lashes; in Waldebert’s rule, the abbot establishes twenty-five slaps as an appropriate punishment for the negligent cellaress or cook.<sup>77</sup> As abrasive as the correction was in these monasteries, discipline and penance were key to spiritual fulfillment for many communities of monks and nuns.

Expectations for obedience and the exaction of discipline can also be found in the chapters of the Benedictine rule, but for Columbanus and those trained in the nuances of Irish Christianity, the discipline of the body through penance enabled the obedient monk

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<sup>75</sup> Waldebert, c. 4, 80.

<sup>76</sup> Waldebert, c. 2, 77.

<sup>77</sup> Columbanus, *Communal Rule*, c. 13, 161; Waldebert, c. 12, 92.

or nun to achieve a status equivalent to that of the early Christian martyrs. In early Christian sources, Church Fathers described two varieties of martyrdom: one which was a sacrifice of life and the other an indication of seclusion. Christians of the Irish church associated martyrdom with the colors red, white, and blue (or green), but blue martyrdom stands out as an adaptation on the part of Irish Christians in particular. Red, the color of blood, was used to describe those most honorable martyrdoms in which Christians died at the hands of nonbelievers. By the end of the fourth century, however, Christianity was not only legal but the official religion of the Roman Empire, and demonstrations of Christian faith had already evolved to include expressions of sacrifices other than death. No longer able to emulate Christ in death, ascetics sought martyrdom in the deserts and wildernesses away from society. This seemingly non-confrontational expression of religious sacrifice was referred to as white martyrdom.

According to the religious outlook of Irish Christians, whose late date of conversion made red martyrdom unlikely, the act of rejecting the world and disciplining the desires of one's earthly body was in fact a form of sacrifice for Christianity.<sup>78</sup> Given the principal role of private penance in the Irish Church, in addition to the red and white variety of martyrdom, the Irish also recognized martyrdom in acts of satisfaction and mortification. In his rule for monks, Columbanus assigns one of his ten chapters to the discussion of mortification. Addressing the sin of pride, Columbanus argues that mortification of the body was the route to true humility that secured for the soul the peace of being under Christ's yoke. He also connects mortification to martyrdom, adding in the same chapter, "we must know that neither this bliss of martyrdom nor any other benefit

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<sup>78</sup> Ryan, 400.

that follows can be perfectly fulfilled by any, save him who has given particular attention to this, that he be not found unready.”<sup>79</sup>

Discussing continental references to this form of martyrdom, Clare Stancliffe notes the writing of a fifth-century monk by the name of Bacharius, who claimed that “through penitence, his friend may be able to wash his robe, not in blood, but in tears; if penitent, his friend will blush for his sins; and in penitence, he should bring his body into subjugation.”<sup>80</sup> Although the disciplinary methods of penance could be daunting, the promise of satisfaction it entailed was better than the eternal damnation of excommunication.<sup>81</sup> By Bacharius’ statement it is evident that some Christians were aware of this connection between private penance and martyrdom before the arrival of Irish missionaries on the Continent, but only with the monastic movement of Columbanus did Gallic Christians begin to embrace the concept of private and repeatable penance. Stancliffe and many other historians attribute the galvanization of monastic and lay spirituality in Gaul to Columbanus’ and other Irishmen’s preponderance for private penance and the emphasis they placed upon the interpretation of penance and mortification as a form of martyrdom.<sup>82</sup>

In the lives of women religious, in particular, this revival of martyrdom, although bloodless, restored an expression of devotion and sacrifice that had once created equality between the sexes. For early Christian women, red martyrdom served as a way of conquering their female bodies, which churchmen often interpreted as obstacles to true

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<sup>79</sup> Columbanus, *Monks’ Rule*, c. 9, 141.

<sup>80</sup> Clare Stancliffe, “Red, White and Blue Martyrdom” in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, Rasamond McKitterick, and David Dumville (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 34.

<sup>81</sup> Tomas O Fiaich, “Irish Monks on the Continent,” in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, ed. James P. Mackey (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 109.

<sup>82</sup> Stancliffe, 46.

religious virtue. Through the voluntary acceptance of physical torture and eventual execution, female martyrs demonstrated that their spiritual determination and virtue was not only strong enough to resist concerns for the body, but that as martyrs their spirituality and virtue matched that of other Christians, including men. Since the legalization of Christianity, however, martyrdom was rarely, if ever, an option, and discussions of female spirituality were constantly overwhelmed by the struggle to reconcile the proposed spiritual equality of Christians with the notorious physical disparity between men and women. Yet with the arrival of Columbanus, his Irish concepts of martyrdom reawakened the spirituality of Gallic women religious and provided their communities with a revived fervor for religious perfection. The life of the abbess of Chelles, Bertilla, who had trained at the Hiberno-Frankish abbey of Jouarre, demonstrates the eagerness with which seventh-century nuns approached this new opportunity of martyrdom. As her hagiographer comments, “blessed Bertilla would gladly have bowed her neck to gratify her great desire for martyrdom, had there been a skilled executioner ready for the task. But we believe that even though that passion was not fulfilled, yet she completed her martyrdom through mortification of her own body and blood.”<sup>83</sup>

Although the penitential rules of Columbanus and Waldebert called for an individualistic sense of responsibility, the maintenance of the community’s spiritual wellbeing remained essential. Mortification, according to Columbanus, was not a source for religious independence or ascetical pride. Unlike the ascetical activities of Radegund, for example, which set her apart from the community, mortification and penance

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<sup>83</sup> *Bertilla, Abbess of Chelles*, In *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, trans. and ed. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg with E. Gordon Whatley (Durham, Duke University Press, 1992), 287.

according to Columbanus were designed to bring the community closer together, forcing them to depend on each other for spiritual approval. In his rule, the abbot notes that “thus there is a threefold scheme of mortification: not to disagree in mind, not to speak as one pleases with the tongue, not to go anywhere with complete freedom.”<sup>84</sup> By conditioning herself according to the guidelines of the rules, the nun not only ensured the salvation of her own soul but also contributed to the creation of a more holy community. It was the nuns’ responsibility to monitor each other and promote spiritual advancement for all. On her deathbed, Ercantrude, a nun of Faremoutiers, identifies the presence of an uncommitted sister in the community, and she informs the onlookers to “quickly, isolate the dead one in your midst and cast her out from the society of the others. For it is not fitting that those who are crucified with the pure Christ should live with her and keep among themselves a woman who is dead and cut off from life.”<sup>85</sup> If each person continued to advance in her spiritual education, then it only meant for a more efficient community. By intertwining ascetic performance with the spiritual well-being of the community, the monastery no longer had to be a “wrestling arena for monks,” as Cassian’s monastic environment is termed, but rather a spiritual family whose goal was to create the most deserving monastic community.<sup>86</sup>

The rule of Waldebert and the penitential tenor of Irish Christianity made the practical aspect of communal life merely the checks and balances of spiritual development along the journey to salvation. By aligning the obedience accorded to the rule with the salvation of the soul, communal life within the convents took on a dynamic that reflected the constant development of its members’ spirituality. Moreover, the

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<sup>84</sup> Columbanus, *Monk’s Rule*, c. 9, 141.

<sup>85</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *The Life of the abbot Saint Columbanus and his disciples*, Bk II, 165.

<sup>86</sup> Leyser, 58.

hagiography and the nuns' accounts from convents such as Faremoutiers and Laon provide a detailed illustration of the vibrant communal spirituality of this rule as nuns witnessed and participated in each other's struggles to gain entrance into heaven.

While they maintained peace and efficiency within the monastery according to the rule, nuns were likewise following a strict spiritual program. In a chapter stressing communal love and obedience, Waldebert emphasizes the importance of forgiveness. Invoking the biblical adage, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," Waldebert reminds the community that as its members forgive each other so shall God forgive them.<sup>87</sup> When the resentful maintain grudges, they not only disturb the harmony of the community, but they also risk being denied admittance into heaven. Gibtrude, a nun in the community of Faremoutiers, died only to be returned to life because of the residual bitterness she held toward another sister in the convent. When her body released her soul, Gibtrude recalls that:

Angels lifted her into the ether and brought her before the tribunal of the eternal judge....she saw the white-garbed troops and all the militia of heaven standing before the glory of the Eternal Judge. She heard a voice from the throne saying: "Go back, for you have not fully relinquished the world. It is written: 'Give, and it shall be given unto you': and elsewhere, in the prayer: 'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.' But you have not settled with all your companions and you still nurse grievances for slights inflicted upon you. Bear this in mind: three sisters have borne witness against you for their wounded souls which have not been healed by the medicine of full forgiveness for the inflicted injury. Therefore, mend you ways: soothe these souls which you have soiled from indifference or neglect."<sup>88</sup>

Gibtrude was given thirty days to complete her penance before her soul would be released again from the world, purer and cleaner than before. Gibtrude's vision reinforced the communal ties among nuns, encouraging the nuns to seek their spiritual

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<sup>87</sup> Waldebert, c. 5, 83.

<sup>88</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *The Life of the abbot Saint Columbanus and his disciples*, Bk II, 164.

salvation in the harmony of the community. For instance, Gibtrude likely satisfied her penance in the service of her sisters rather than according to any isolated discipline.

Waldebert remarks that “each Saturday, penitents should wash the heads of every sister or prepare the baths to be used on solemn festivals or do any other particularly difficult job.”<sup>89</sup> The nun’s salvation depended not upon her ascetic independence so much as her efforts to reinforce communal harmony and spiritual sisterhood.

Waldebert and the authors of saints’ lives also interpreted the correction and discipline of nuns in terms of communal spirituality and education. Although nuns confessed to cleanse themselves of sin, the purging of sin also prevented the corruption of the entire female community. Waldebert warns that “if anyone has committed a major fault which might lead to the damnation of more souls, she should reveal it to the abbess privately through pure confession lest, ashamed for a time to uncover her soul’s guilt, she conceals the face of the devil within when accused of crime.”<sup>90</sup> Those nuns who refused to give their confession, nuns like the runaway women from Faremoutiers, encountered an example of the spiritual consequences of ignoring confession. When the girls refused to confess the sins of their escape from the convent, the “doors were forced open with resounding blows and they saw black shadows standing there and heard numerous voices calling the pair by name.”<sup>91</sup> The abbess buried the tombs of these contentious nuns away from the community, and when Burgundofara went to check on the bodies, all that was left in the tombs was glowing ash. Assuming that this was the verdict of a “just Judge,” the narrator of the account considers this a lesson to the community. The narrator claims that “the punishment imposed on the dead was a correction to the living and the health

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<sup>89</sup> Waldebert, c. 12, 91.

<sup>90</sup> Waldebert, c. 16, 94-5.

<sup>91</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *The Life of the abbot Saint Columbanus and his disciples*, Bk II, 172.

which threatened to fade from religion because of negligence or indifference or even hardness of heart was thus increased through the energetic efforts of the survivors.”<sup>92</sup> In instances such as this, the pedagogical role of hagiography is evident. At the point when a nun prepared for death, her cell was crowded with members from her community who were there to chant at the passing of their sister and, more importantly, who stood to observe the judgment of a nun. With an emphasis on confession and penitence, the ability to learn from the mistakes of others was key to nuns’ spiritual training.

Just as nuns observed the impact of disobedience on spiritual health, they also witnessed models of the ideal nun and the rewards of preparing a pure soul. Warned of her approaching death, angels instructed Faremoutiers’ Leudebertana to quickly fulfill her requirements of confession before her soul was released to its judge. As she lay on her deathbed, her soul purged of sin, the nun announced the arrival of Saint Peter, who had arrived to usher her soul to heaven. To have earned such an illustrious escort, Leudebertana’s virtue and spiritual devotion is assumed. According to the hagiographers of Irish saints’ lives, the most pure abandoned their physical restrictions and interacted with celestial figures.<sup>93</sup> Although Leudebertana’s vision of Peter was not visible to her companions, the expression on her face, delighted at her soul’s joyous release from the world, made a notable impression on her companions. The narrator observes that “the Makers of things had permitted her tongue to testify in that shaky voice so that others would be moved to follow the example of her life. And so He showed those who were leaving this light in awe and love, the abundance of His endless gifts from above.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>93</sup> Thom, 33.

<sup>94</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *The Life of the abbot Saint Columbanus and his disciples*, Bk II, 170.

According to the spiritual experiences of women such as Gibtrude and Leudebertana, the community at Faremoutiers does not appear institutional or devoid of spiritual energy. The essential role of confession and penitence for the salvation of the soul, as implied in the monastic rule of Waldebert, created a community that appeared to thrive on the religious experiences of its members. With spiritual incentives such as martyrdom, the harsh discipline associated with the penitential tradition of Columbanus was tolerable and even welcomed. This is not to suggest that women of the sixth century, who lived under notable rules such as that of Caesarius of Arles, were void of a vibrant female spirituality. In seventh-century Gaul, however, there were factors that reshaped female monasticism in such a way as to permit monastic authorities to use the nuns' rule to express more than the anxieties regarding safety and stability. The arrival of the Irish *peregrini* and Columbanus' influence on the Frankish nobility's participation in a primarily rural monastic movement created an environment for convents in which strict enclosure, and the monastic regulations that accompany it, were no longer necessary. Without these overwhelming physical concerns, monastic authorities were able to use rules to direct women in their spiritual journey, which depended to a great extent on their relationships with their spiritual sisters.

### Chapter Three

#### “We have chosen a few things from among many:” The Benedictine rule and the Suitability of Nuns’ Rules

Although the popularity of the Hiberno-Frankish monastic movement had galvanized the monastic culture of the seventh century, drawing the patronage of landed nobility and kings, the introduction of the Benedictine rule to Gallic monasticism around the turn of the seventh century marked the beginning of a new era in monasticism for Western Europe. Analyzing the ways in which the authors of seventh-century mixed rules such decided to incorporate, or not incorporate, the chapters of the Benedictine rule into their nuns’ rules, reveals enduring concepts of gender differences and how they affected the articulation of female monastic life and spirituality. Even though mixed rules in northern Gaul adopted many aspects of the Benedictine rule for nunneries, it is evident that their authors edited the selection according to the specific needs of women religious. The masculine undertones of Benedict’s discussion of abbatial authority, the monastery’s relationship with those from outside the community, and the personal habits of its members indicate that Benedict had had little consideration for the nuances of female monasticism when he had first composed his rule. Despite its burgeoning support from eighth and ninth-century churchmen, when the Benedictine rule appears in the early seventh century, convents rarely ever adopted it in its entirety. With the development of the nuns’ rule by Caesarius of Arles’ in the sixth century and the adaptation of Columbanian monasticism to female communities of seventh-century Gaul, the gender-specific rule had become almost expected by the female communities in Merovingian

Gaul. The gender-specific rule not only provided convents with practical chapters that addressed the idiosyncrasies of female monastic life, but the preference for rules tailored purposely to the female community also implied that women religious viewed female spirituality as separate from that of male monastics.

Historians do not completely understand the specifics of the Benedictine rule's incorporation into Gallic monasticism. Many have sought to locate the growing influence of Benedictine monasticism in the papal administration of Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540-604) and even in the monasticism of Columbanus. The first *vita* of Benedict of Nursia is attributed to Gregory the Great, whose admiration for the abbot and his monastic efforts some historians think encouraged the spread of the Benedictine rule.<sup>1</sup> In his *Dialogues*, Gregory hoped that the legacy of Saint Benedict would inspire and edify the Christian community.<sup>2</sup> Like many bishops of the early Middle Ages, Gregory the Great began his religious vocation as an eager member of the regular clergy. Once pope, he sought to unite and extend Christendom through the efforts of missionaries and the establishment of monastic centers. These missionaries were proponents of the Benedictine rule, and through their travels they spread its tenets to England and into the wilderness of Germany. Gregory's most notable mission, however, was to England, and the journey of Benedictine monks from Rome to England may have also cultivated Benedictine monasticism in Gaul. In 596, these Benedictine missionaries arrived in Metz, where Brunhilde's court welcomed them.<sup>3</sup> Some historians, such as Adalbert de Vogüé, have suggested that Columbanus, who was a regular correspondent of Gregory

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<sup>1</sup> R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 68-9.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory I, *The Life and Miracles of St. Benedict (Book Two of the Dialogues)*, introduction and translation by Odo J. Zimmerman and Benedict R. Avery (Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1949), iv-v.

<sup>3</sup> McNamara and Halborg with Wheatly trans. and ed., 140.

the Great, had been a prominent advocate of the Benedictine rule and had even initiated the composition of the mixed rules that combined his own traditions with the stability of Benedictine monasticism.<sup>4</sup> Even if the Irish abbot had not been such an enthusiastic promoter of the Benedictine rule, the Benedictine mission to England may have inspired the Merovingian rulers to launch their own missions into the wilderness with similar standards.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, though, these theories are not supported by extant documents or any degree of historical surety.<sup>6</sup> The first documented evidence of Gaul's adoption of the Benedictine rule does not emerge until the 620s in the letters of the abbot of Alta Ripa to the bishop of Albit. It was also in this decade that Gallic bishops began to refute the Irish traditions that had arrived with Columbanus and other *peregrini*. By 626/7, the Synod of Mâcon sought conformity from Luxeuil and other Columbanian monasteries, attacking the Irish church's Easter calculations and addressing other divisive elements such as tonsure.<sup>7</sup> Although no mixed rules combining Benedictine and Columbanian tenets exist for male monasteries in the seventh century, Donatus of Besançon formed a mixed rule for his mother's community of Jussa, which was established around 632. It seems then that the spread of Benedictine monasticism throughout seventh-century Gaul was gradual at best.

For monastic authorities Waldebert of Luxeuil and Donatus of Besançon, who produced mixed rules in the seventh century, the Benedictine rule was not without its

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<sup>4</sup> Charles-Edwards, 386.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (New York: Longman, 2001), 32.

<sup>6</sup> Francis Clark is the most stalwart critic of the historical veracity of the *Dialogues* and Gregory's support of the Benedictine rule. His criticism has met with a fierce rebuttal, however, by scholars. See Francis Clark, *The 'Gregorian' Dialogues and the Origins of Benedictine Monasticism* (Boston: Brill, 2003). For a bibliography of the counterargument see Markus, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Charles-Edwards, 364.

appeal. Compared to the monastic traditions encouraged in Columbanus' Hiberno-Frankish movement, which was less concerned with the daily affairs of the community than with the spiritual discipline of its members, the Benedictine rule offered the community structure and an ideal model of monastic legislation. Also, its emphasis on moderation made the Benedictine rule and its community less demanding than the penitential regimen of the Columbanian monastery. Like Caesarius of Arles, Benedict of Nursia (480-547) had created a detailed rule of daily monastic life that sought to ensure stability for the religious community.<sup>8</sup> The Benedictine rule, however, did not impart the same anxiety regarding protection or the strict tenets of enclosure that so dominated the rule of Caesarius of Arles. For these reasons, the Benedictine rule appeared particularly suitable for monasteries of the seventh century, whose rural environment had rendered strict enclosure unwarranted yet had not diminished the desire for detailed guidelines regarding monastic life.

By the eighth century, however, the spirit of Gallic monasticism was dominated by the Benedictine tradition, and at the height of its power, the Carolingian Empire presented a homogenous image of Gallic monasticism, one dominated by the episcopate and regulated by the Benedictine rule.<sup>9</sup> As early as 742, Anglo-Saxon Saint Boniface (d.755) initiated monastic reforms to institute the Benedictine rule throughout all

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<sup>8</sup> There is some debate as to whether these two contemporary monastic authorities were aware of each other's contributions to monastic legislation. Authors such as Aldabert Vogue and C.H. Lawrence have argued that Caesarius of Arles and Benedict of Nursia were not only aware of each other's rules but that they also shared a similar source, the Rule of the Master. In fact, the Benedictine rule is closely aligned with the structure and tone of the Rule of the Master, which interprets monasticism in a strictly patriarchal context. See Adalbert de Vogüé *Community and the Abbot in the Rule of Saint Benedict* volume 1 (Kalamazoo, Mi: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1978). See also C.H. Lawrence *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (New York: Longman, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Mary Skinner, "Benedictine Life for Women in Central France, 850-1100: A Feminist Revival" in *Medieval Religious Women* vol. 1 *Distant Echoes*, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, Mi.: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 89.

Frankish nunneries and monasteries.<sup>10</sup> The church reforms of Benedict of Aniane (745-821) and Louis the Pious (778-840) later marked the tightening of royal power and its more centralized governance over ecclesiastic matters, including the organization of monastic houses. The Benedictine rule was considered to be a thorough and detailed monastic rule, and with its enforcement, Carolingian monks and nuns reluctantly began to abandon the nuanced monasticism of the previous dynasty. Although religious men, such as Boniface and Benedict of Aniane, assumed that the Benedictine rule was suitable for both sexes, these church reforms and the standardizations of monastic rules had severe consequences for female religious life. Female monastic houses fell into decline and religious women were restricted not only physically to their nunneries, but also spiritually as they were increasingly depicted as risks to ritual purity.

When in the ninth century the Benedictine rule became the standard regulation for most monasteries, there was less recognition for mixed rules or rules for nuns. As kings centralized their control over the church and extended their authority to monasticism, convents and monasteries were less able to escape the control of the royally-dominated episcopal system.<sup>11</sup> Still, abbots were able to negotiate with bishops and kings in these new channels of power, leaving abbesses and the concerns of their female communities underrepresented. In church assemblies and councils, abbots and not abbesses served as the voice of Gallic monasticism. Suzanne Wemple notes that “in 816, a year after the Council of Aix issued the *Institutio sanctimonialium*, another Aachen assembly was held to formulate detailed rules for Benedictine monks. No attempt was made to adapt the

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<sup>10</sup> Wemple, 166.

<sup>11</sup> Wemple, 194.

Benedictine rule for use by nunneries.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore Louis the Pious’ advocacy of the Benedictine rule did not include establishing a model convent for the rule as he had done for male communities.<sup>13</sup>

Although the Benedictine rule was remarkably inclusive regarding community routines, in that it provided a vision of monastic life that encouraged the average monk rather than championing the ascetic athlete, it was not informed according to the monastic life of women. The commonly accepted date for the origins of the Benedictine rule is 530, but Adalbert de Vogüé’s recent studies have suggested that the saint completed this rule as late as between 550 and 560.<sup>14</sup> The rule was written while Benedict of Nursia was abbot of Monte Cassino, a monastery near Rome, but the rule makes no indication that Benedict intended it specifically for the community of Monte Cassino or any other specific community of monks.<sup>15</sup> John Chapman argues, perhaps too ideally, that Benedict’s rule was intended to adapt to all communities, as “a Rule for many monasteries, many climates, many provinces.”<sup>16</sup> The impersonal relationship between the author of the rule and his audience implies Benedict’s dissatisfaction regarding early medieval monasticism in general, which he saw as dilapidated and disorganized.<sup>17</sup> According to Jo Ann McNamara, the Benedictine rule was a “solution to the problems of monastic instability and disobedience, reinforcing the bonds of community life by a strengthening of powers of the abbot, an insistence on absolute obedience and a severing,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>14</sup> Adalbert de Vogüé, *The Life of St. Benedict: The Man and His Work*. trans. Gerald Malsbary (Petersham, Mass.: St. Bede’s Publications, 2006), 13. This estimation also requires a reconsideration of Benedict’s birth and death dates, which for this chapter have been taken from the Catholic Encyclopedia.

<sup>15</sup> Chapman, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>17</sup> Dunn, 115.

as far as possible, of contacts with the secular world.”<sup>18</sup> During the Carolingian reforms, churchmen who sought to organize and centralize religious institutes expected the Benedictine rule to provide a welcomed standard and structure for monastic life.<sup>19</sup>

Neither Benedict’s rule nor the accounts of his life reveal any particular concern for the religious training of women. Benedict’s rule has seventy-three chapters that express a common theme of obedience, humility, and silence; yet despite the amount of detail in the Benedictine rule, it makes no recommendations specifically to women’s communities or the life of women religious. The language and style is notably designed to address monks rather than nuns, and the image of religious life derived from the rule is akin to that of soldiers in a military camp. Benedict was not the first, however, to depict monastic life in military terms. Pachomius, the father of cenobitic monasticism, founded monasteries whose rules were almost indistinguishable from the regulations set for military camps. According to commentators such as St. Jerome and Palladius, Pachomian’ religious communities appeared to be almost too militant in their laborious monastic structures and routines.<sup>20</sup> It is not surprising that Pachomius may have tailored his monastic guidelines to reflect the order of a military camp, since he had served in the Egyptian army during a period of raging barbarian invasions.<sup>21</sup> Philip Rousseau observes that there “is little help when we are trying to decide precisely by what changes Pachomius transformed himself from a pagan military recruit into the founder of a

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<sup>18</sup> McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 127-8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Merton, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 2*, edited by Patrick F. O’Connell, Monastic Wisdom Series 9 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 2006), 74.

<sup>21</sup> Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 4.

monastery.”<sup>22</sup> The Pachomian rule depended on unyielding obedience, and heavily enforced a strict schedule of activities for each monk’s entire day.

Despite the militaristic nature of his rule, Pachomius nevertheless composed a rule for his sister’s nearby community. The tradition of brothers providing monastic rules for their sisters’ convents is common and almost expected in the history of monasticism. Basil of Caesarea answered the request of his sister Macrina.<sup>23</sup> Augustine of Hippo devised rules for nuns and addressed letters of instruction to his sister’s convent.<sup>24</sup> Both John Cassian and Caesarius of Arles established nunneries for their sisters in addition to providing additional ascetic guidance to their communities. But it seems that unlike his monastic predecessors, Benedict never felt inclined to establish a convent for his sister, Scholastica. Benedict’s life introduces Scholastica as a consecrated virgin who visited her brother once a year, eager to pray and discuss the religious life with the abbot. Although the siblings proved to gain from each other’s discussion of religion, Scholastica was forced to invoke a miracle of God, a torrential downpour to match her flooding tears, to keep Benedict from returning to his monastery at the end of the day.<sup>25</sup> With little or no apparent consideration for his sister’s religious life beyond an annual reunion, Benedict stands out from his monastic predecessors.

Benedict’s apparent disregard for the feminine in the monastic life provides some indication of the gendered concept of monasticism and the Christian mission in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Jo Ann McNamara suggests that “possibly Benedict, like Martin of Tours before him, saw his monastery as a battlefield on which

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<sup>22</sup> Rousseau, 58.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, 115.

<sup>24</sup> See Augustine’s “Reprimand to Quarrelling Nuns” *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* trans. George Lawless (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 107.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory I, *The Life and Miracles of St. Benedict*, 67-69

women had no place.”<sup>26</sup> After the fourth century, the ideal saint was no longer one who sacrificed his life for the faith, but one who infiltrated communities to eradicate the vestiges of paganism and to stamp out any sparks of heresy. The most effective agents in these efforts to establish an orthodox Christian society were those whose responsibilities included the pastoral care outside the monastery. Both Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus produced hagiography in the sixth century that praised the rise of the holy bishop, drawing on the life of Martin of Tours (c. 316-397) whose shrines and hagiography celebrated the fourth-century bishop’s valiant mission to convert and instruct the local community. By the seventh century, the majority of those deemed saints in Merovingian Gaul were political bishops.<sup>27</sup> Such a position in the ecclesiastic hierarchy was unequivocally masculine, though, and closed to women.

Bishops of the late antique and early medieval periods more often than not began their religious careers not as secular clergy but as monks and often devout ones. Martin of Tours is considered the father of monasticism in Gaul, yet his *vita* depicts him as a bishop constantly concerned with the behavior of Christians in secular society. The monastery in these early periods, therefore, was not only a community of contemplative ascetics but a training ground for bishops. In the sixth century, the island monastery of Lérins produced a number of bishops and maintained close ties to the bishopric of Arles in particular.<sup>28</sup> While Frankish nobles rushed to fill the ranks of Columbanus’ new monastic following, these monasteries also groomed the next generation of Gallic bishops

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<sup>26</sup> McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 100.

<sup>27</sup> J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 87-9. See also Thomas F.X. Noble and Thomas Head eds., *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints’ Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press), xxvi.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, 111-2

who represented the growing authority of the Frankish rulers.<sup>29</sup> Sharing similar training, the monk and bishop both considered themselves *milites Christi*, armed with spiritual weapons and conditioned to battle demons and offenders of the faith. In the earliest centuries of monasticism, the monk was often defined by his ability to undertake spiritual battles against demons and pagan gods. Considering the military backgrounds of notable monastic leaders such as Pachomius and Martin of Tours, the conflation between the ideals of monasticism and warfare could easily cast monasticism in a definitively masculine manner.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the masculine and militaristic lens through which late antique and early medieval Christianity was considered, Benedict's personal experience in sixth-century Italy also may have affected his interpretation of monasticism. As John Chapman observes, the style with which Benedict produced his now renowned rule is "strikingly legal," a product perhaps of the same cultural forces that engendered Justinian's law codes.<sup>31</sup> Chapman argues the plausibility that "Benedict, who had made so thorough and penetrating a study of all the monastic literature available, would not omit to make himself acquainted at first hand with the authoritative sources of civil law and Church law regarding monasteries and monks."<sup>32</sup> In addition to his proposed background in law, the tumultuous period of Italian history in which Benedict lived also shaped the tone of his rule. Although Caesarius of Arles witnessed the violent exchanges of power between the Goths and Franks in Gaul, the political unrest and constant warfare

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<sup>29</sup> Dunn, 166-7.

<sup>30</sup> Although holy women could participate in spiritual battles, they did not do so as feminine beings but as masculinized martyrs or transvestite saints who had shed any evidence of their weak, female bodies. See David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 193-5.

<sup>31</sup> Chapman, 35.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

that plagued the Italian peninsula in the early Middle Ages permanently altered the image of government and Italian society. Chris Wickham, in *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society, 400-1000*, concisely portrays the stark circumstances that existed in sixth century Italy: “In reality, the army had run those parts of Italy it controlled ever since the 530s; civilian administrators were entirely subordinate to it, and continued to be.”<sup>33</sup> It may be unfair to attribute Benedict’s interpretation of monasticism as a response to his own environment’s increasing instability, but it would be naïve to assume that his vision of monastic communities was not in some way affected by his experiences in early medieval Italy.

The conditions in which Benedict developed his rule lent his monastic legislation a militaristic tone and a patriarchal approach to monastic governance within the community. Benedict’s description of the monks’ sleeping arrangements imparts an image of military barracks where armed soldiers awaited their orders. He advises that the monks

are to sleep clothed and girded with belts or cords, but that they should not have their knives at their sides while sleeping lest they wound [the sleeping]; and thus monks will always be prepared when the signal is given to rise without delay, and to compete with one another in hastening to the Work of God with all gravity and modesty. And let the monks be always alert; and, when the signal is given, rising without delay, let them hasten to mutually prepare themselves for the service of God.<sup>34</sup>

This martial imagery can also be seen in the organization of the community and the protocol expected among its members. As was customary in both male and female communities, rank was not determined by age but according to the duration of time spent

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<sup>33</sup> Chris Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society, 400-1000* (New York: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1981), 27.

<sup>34</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 22, 29. Dysinger translates *ne forte per somnum vulnerent dormientem* as “lest they wound themselves in their sleep.” With no indication that this phrase is intended to be reflexive, I have chosen to edit the translation as seen above.

at the monastic's current monastery. Juniors were to constantly demonstrate their reverence for elders, rising when senior monks passed and asking a blessing from their elders. The way in which these communal ties were described in the Benedictine rule, however, are recognizably masculine and reminiscent of the bonds shared among soldiers and between an army and its leader. According to Benedict, the male monastery was bound together in a protocol based primarily on honor and under the supreme authority of the abbot, who the rule states "is to be called 'lord' and 'abbot.'" The entire community was immersed in this code of behavior, and the Benedictine rule considers, in detail, the disciplining of young children and their incorporation into the ranks of the monks.<sup>35</sup>

The comparison between the dynamics of the monastic community as it is depicted in the Benedictine rule and as it is described in Donatus' mixed rule demonstrates that for the female community certain aspects of the Benedictine rule that provided military connotations to the religious life were not always considered apt in the context of female religious life. As C.H. Lawrence observes, Benedict's "monastery was not a place of quiet retreat or leisure, nor a school in the academic sense; it was a kind of combat unit, in which the recruit was trained and equipped for his spiritual warfare under an experienced commander – the abbot."<sup>36</sup> Although Donatus of Besançon includes a chapter based on Benedict's description of rank, the female community was held together not according to the honor due other monks but in the expectation of mutual love. Moreover, if the hierarchy within a female community was intended to represent an army of Christian soldiers, it was an army without a general, for Donatus of Besançon chose not to include in this chapter a reference to the abbess or her superior rank. The soldier

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<sup>35</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 63, 149.

<sup>36</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (New York: Longman, 1984), 28.

imagery invoked by Benedictine rule is hard to relocate within the confines of a nun's cloister.

The discussion of abbatial authority in particular reflects the distinctions between the masculine and feminine in the monastic experience. Although both Benedict and Donatus consider the abbot and abbess respectively as the overseers of the monastery, the language that these two monastic authors choose to address authority demonstrates that for Donatus, the masculine definition of authority that Benedict upholds was unsuitable when describing the powers accorded to the abbess. In Benedict's chapters on the qualities and behavior of the abbot, the abbot's responsibilities as the general of a community of Christ's soldiers attributes to his posts the responsibility for the safety and judgment of his monks. Chapter two reads, "let him always ponder that he who has received the ruling of souls must render an account of them."<sup>37</sup> Just as the monks answer to the abbot, he too has a superior officer, and on Judgment Day he is judged according to the flock of souls assigned to him.

Furthermore, the way in which the abbot reigns over the congregation and maintains order throughout the community is decidedly masculine and patriarchal. For instance, the ceremony for the satisfaction of the excommunicated illustrates the abbot's role as judge and patriarch:

He who for more serious faults has been excommunicated from both the oratory and the table is...to cast himself prostrate before the entrance to the oratory, saying nothing, without asking anything, he is to lie face down, prone on the ground at the feet of all as they leave the oratory; and he is to do this until the abbot judges that satisfaction has been made. When he then receives the abbot's order, he is to prostrate himself first at [the] abbot's feet, then at the feet of all so that they may pray for him.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 2, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 44, 106-9.

In this ritual of satisfaction, the abbot's regal bearing is apparent, and he sits at the center of his community as a king would among his followers. Although the excommunicated monk is honor bound to give a demonstration of contrition to his comrades as well, it is the abbot whom he approaches first. There is little consolation for the monk, and he makes his satisfaction by means of his complete subjugation to the will of the abbot. The abbot's commands and judgments are not only the orders of a superior but they are also a direct transmission of divine justice.<sup>39</sup> Even though Benedict's image of monastic life is notably more mild than his even more patriarchal monastic predecessors, Benedict nevertheless instructs the abbot to remain firm and confident in his rank, for "an abbot who is worthy to govern a monastery must always remember what he is called and fulfill the name 'superior' in his deeds."<sup>40</sup>

As the monastic community grows, the abbot's authority and the structure of the community begin to resemble the political structure of a secular society. In large communities, Benedict recommends that a council of deacons buttress the authority of the abbot and aid their superior in maintaining an orderly community.<sup>41</sup> The deacons also served to create a constant awareness of the abbot's authority and extend it throughout an expansive community, and C.H. Lawrence argues that "Benedict's main concern here seems to be to preserve the monarchic regime of the abbot from any dilution. All the monastic officers are to be appointed by him and to be directly subordinate to him."<sup>42</sup>

The Benedictine rule's description of abbatial authority and communal order creates an

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<sup>39</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 2, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 2, 13. The Rule of the Master, from which Benedict liberally copies, makes no attempt to limit the abbot's complete power over the community. See C.H. Lawrence, 23. Also see Aldabert de Vogüé *Community and the Abbot in the Rule of Saint Benedict* vol. 1 (Kalamazoo, Mi: Cistercian Publications, Inc.1978).

<sup>41</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 21, 71.

<sup>42</sup> C.H. Lawrence, 27.

image of a monastic hierarchy that mirrors the political organization of secular government, which notably held few opportunities for women.

Although the authors of nuns' rules admired the Benedictine rule for its practical approach to monastic life, its emphasis on the authority of the abbot, as it was defined by his role as a leader of Christian soldiers and a governor of a community, was incompatible with the way in which they construed feminine authority. The use of the words "rule" and "govern" to describe the Benedictine abbot's authority over his community is an interpretation not adopted for female communities in either the rule of Waldebert of Luxeuil or of Donatus of Besançon. In fact, Donatus directly rejects Benedict's use of the word *praeesse* for "to govern" when he informs the abbess that "she should know better how to subordinate herself than to rule (*praeesse*)."<sup>43</sup> The abbess was not expected to have the qualities of a superior leader; instead, the mother of the community was to exhibit the skills of a dignified administrator. Rather than encouraging the abbess in her right to rule, Donatus advises that the "mother of the monastery... must always be mindful of the burden she has taken up and of Him to Whom she must give account of her stewardship."<sup>44</sup> The word translated here as stewardship is *villicationis*, which refers to the work of an estate manager or farm overseer.<sup>45</sup> As the manager of the monastery, the abbess' successes were judged not according to her ability to protect the flock entrusted to her but according to "her profit from the talents lent to her."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Donatus of Besançon, c. 1, 34. For the Latin, see *PL* 87, 273.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Donatus of Besançon, *PL*, 87, 273.

<sup>46</sup> Donatus of Besançon, c. 1, 35.

Waldebert of Luxeuil does not explicitly state in his rule that the abbess is the steward of the female community, but her responsibilities are articulated in terms of finance and production that would be recognizable to someone whose duties were akin to that of an estate manager. Speaking of profit and price, Waldebert promises that the careful abbess “will receive the profit she has earned for every gain and, whenever she is removed from the corruption of the present life, she will receive the price of her labor, for her compensation will be increased by as much as she contributed to the conquest of the enemy.”<sup>47</sup> The seventh century was still considered a period of flourishing female monasticism and influence, but the administrative language used to describe the authority of the abbess in these two seventh-century rules foreshadows a transition in female monastic roles, which by the Carolingian period became defined by a woman’s skills as the overseer of a household.<sup>48</sup>

These authors did not adopt for the abbess Benedict’s regal and judicial depiction of the community’s leader; there is no mention of a council of deacons nor do the mixed rules of the seventh century indicate that the convent held ceremonies of satisfaction, which served as much to emphasize the supreme authority of the abbot as they did to reintegrate excommunicates into the community. The apparent discrepancies between the authority available to the abbot and to the abbess, however, are rarely acknowledged since most assume that the Benedictine rule provided a suitable depiction of religious life regardless of gender. As Felicia Lifshitz has observed, “the Carolingian tradition of gendering even female monasticism as masculine has reinforced the tendency of scholars to ignore women by facilitating the fantasy that, having discussed the role of the male

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<sup>47</sup> Waldebert of Luxeuil, c. 1, 76-77. *PL* 88, 1054B.

<sup>48</sup> Wemple, 172. The transition of female roles between the Merovingian and Carolingian periods is the main discussion of Suzanne Wemple’s *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-900*.

religious superior, one has effectively also discussed the role of the female religious superior.”<sup>49</sup> But because models of authority during the Middle Ages were more often masculine rather than feminine, seventh-century monastic legislators struggled with determining the most valid depiction of female authority within the monastery.

According to Waldebert of Luxeuil, while the abbess was not the supreme judge or governor of the community, her post as monastic administrator permitted her the right to know every occurrence in her community’s daily life. Directly after his chapter discussing the qualities of the abbess, Waldebert arranges those chapters that describe the duties of monastic officers, such as the prioress, the portress, cellaress. In every account, these officers are expected to keep their abbess informed in the matters of discipline, deliveries to the convent and matters regarding the community’s supplies. As the head of the monastic household, the abbess always kept the keys of the monastery with her at night until the portress returned to her station in the morning.<sup>50</sup> It was the abbess’s role as supreme disciplinarian and instructor, however, that garnered her the most authority in Waldebert’s rule. Preventing the nuns from hearing each other’s confessions and administering their own penances, Waldebert reminds the community that “none of the *monachas* should presume to receive the confession or to give them penance without the ordination of the abbess lest vice committed is hidden from the abbess for all must be done with her knowledge.”<sup>51</sup> The abbess of this rule maintained order by means of her charisma, a characteristic that was expected in the Irish tradition of monastic leaders. In

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<sup>49</sup> Felicia Lifshitz, “Is Mother Superior?: Towards a History of Feminine *Amtscharisma*” in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 119.

<sup>50</sup> Waldebert, c. 3, 79. In his recapitulation, Caesarius commands that the abbess retain the keys to the convent during “Vespers and the Nocturns and the noonday hours” and during meals. See Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns*, c. 59, 190.

<sup>51</sup> Waldebert, c. 7, 85.

the custom of Irish monasticism, where written legislation was rarely considered necessary, the abbot and abbess were expected to be models of ascetic perfection whose sheer charisma was more impressive than the authority assigned to them in a monastic rule.

In his chapters on the qualities and behavior of the abbess, Donatus emphasizes often the obedience of the community more than the authority of the abbess herself. His chapter regarding the behavior of the abbess is dominated not by any description of the abbess herself so much as by Donatus' entreaty that the community love and obey its superiors:

Whence by holy obedience, you should take more pity on them than on yourselves; for the more superior in their order some among you are seen to be, the more serious are the perils they face. For that reason, you are to obey not only the mother but also the prioress, the chancelloress, or the *formariae*, with humble reverence.<sup>52</sup>

Compared to Benedict's discussion of abbatial power and even the abbess as she is described in Waldebert's rule, Donatus chooses to restrict the abbess in terms of her disciplinary and incontestable authority over the community. Although Donatus does share Waldebert's opinion that the nuns should confess daily, he describes confession as a Christian tradition rather than as any right of the abbess. Donatus states that "nothing shall be hidden from the spiritual mother because the holy fathers ordain that confession should be made before meals or before going to bed or whenever it will be convenient because confession frees us from the pain of death."<sup>53</sup>

In many ways, though, Donatus' understanding of abbatial authority in the female monastery mirrors Caesarius' of Arles sixth-century nuns' rule. According to the sixth-

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<sup>52</sup> Donatus of Besançon. 4, 38.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, c. 23, 47.

century bishop, the abbess' greatest responsibility was to serve as the guardian and keeper of the nuns' rule.<sup>54</sup> In the final five chapters of his nuns' rule, Caesarius instructs, beseeches, and threatens the abbess, prioress, and all the nuns to uphold the tenets of his rule at all cost, even giving them permission to resist any who might attempt to edit or relax its principles.<sup>55</sup> Donatus echoes Caesarius sentiments and goes as far as to link the abbess' own salvation to her ability to enforce the rule in its entirety, lecturing that "if she keep the present rule in all things then, having served well, she will deserve to hear from the Lord what the good servant deserved to hear, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'"<sup>56</sup>

The emphasis Caesarius and Donatus laid on the preservation of the monastic rule relates directly to the female monastery's ability to attain administrative autonomy. In this respect, Donatus diverges markedly from Benedict in his interpretation of the dynamics of the monastic community and politics. Both Benedict and Donatus establish that the community members elected their leader from among themselves, yet Donatus' concern for the autonomy of the community is evident in the way in which he and Benedict differ in their description of how inappropriate abbots and abbesses come to power. For Benedict, because he assumes that the community is indeed responsible for its abbatial candidates, an immoral abbot was the product of an immoral community and therefore a sign of internal corruption. In order to return the community to its proper and devout condition, the monastery depended on the intervention of the bishop who was the designated overseer of the monastery. Benedict instructs that:

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<sup>54</sup> Caesarius of Arles, c. 61, 190.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, c. 64, 191-2.

<sup>56</sup> Donatus of Besançon, c. 1, 35.

even if it were the entire community that acted together in electing a person (and may this never happen!) who consented to their vices, if these vices somehow came to the notice of the bishop in whose dioceses the place belongs, or if they were perceived by the neighboring abbots or Christians, then they would be obliged to prevent this depraved consensus from prevailing and to constitute instead a worthy steward for the house of God.<sup>57</sup>

Since both the abbots and bishops were active members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, it was only appropriate that the bishop intervene in order to ensure that the abbot was a legitimate candidate.

Donatus, however, implies that the election of a corrupt abbess was not the symptom of a depraved community; instead, corruption was the result of external forces and the interference of bishops and families, the same forces that Benedict relies on to ensure that the male community remained legitimate. Drawing almost directly from Caesarius' rule, Donatus states that "once a holy abbess migrates to God, none should let carnal affection or advantages of birth, talent or connections guide her choice."<sup>58</sup> More explicitly, Donatus adopts Caesarius' warning that:

If, which I do not believe, God in His mercy should suffer the abbess to relax or change the rule in any way, or if her relatives or the bishops of the city should wish her to do so for any condition of subjection or familiarity, it will in no way be permitted and she has our permission to resist with God's inspiration, gravely and reverently.<sup>59</sup>

Waldebert does not include a chapter on the election of the abbess, but unlike Caesarius and Donatus, who were bishops, it is likely that the abbot of Luxeuil echoed the sentiments of his Irish mentor in believing that bishops had no legitimate authority over

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<sup>57</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 64, 151.

<sup>58</sup> Donatus of Besançon, c. 77, 73.

<sup>59</sup> Donatus of Besançon, c. 77, 73. In chapter 64 of his nuns' rule, Caesarius commands that "Even though I trust that this will not be done, nor that God on account of his mercy will allow it, if at any time any abbess should try to change or to relax something of the essence of this rule, and, either because of kinship, or for any kind of circumstance, should desire to be subject to and to be within the household of the bishop of this city, under the inspiration of God, with our permission, resist on this occasion with reverence and with dignity..."

the monastery or its leader. To a bishop, however, the boundaries were more blurred and the secular clergy, the monastery, and the surrounding community could quickly become entangled in the web of family and ecclesiastical politics, with the monastery often serving the needs of its secular benefactors and episcopal overseers. It is because of this fear of meddling outsiders that monastic authorities such as Caesarius and Donatus place so much stress on the preservation of the nuns' rule. Ultimately, the abbess and her community's concern should always be their obedience to the rule, which unlike the judgment of abbots and abbesses was incorruptible.

According to Felicia Lifshitz, the decision of Caesarius, and subsequently that of Donatus, to separate the abbess from ecclesiastical hierarchy, and thus make it impossible for the abbess to gain political support from the bishop, served only to diminish her authority. Lifshitz argues that "one of the best ways to guarantee to a noncharismatic superior the ability to control religious subordinates is to enmesh that superior within a broader chain of command which will reinforce his or her position; in other words to subject him or her to a superior."<sup>60</sup> Without ecclesiastical support, only the most intimidating and charismatic of abbesses could prevent communal discord and revolts, which could be justified if they sought to reestablish obedience to the rule.<sup>61</sup> Donatus' decision to isolate the administration of the community and its abbess in the Caesarian tradition seems to have, in Lifshitz's opinion, perpetuated the notion that abbesses were

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<sup>60</sup> Lifshitz, 123.

<sup>61</sup> Lifshitz specifically mentions the nuns' revolt at Holy Cross in Poitiers, which according to her could have been prevented had the abbess, regardless of the rule, had strong command of her community through official ecclesiastic channels. It is unreasonable, I argue, to judge Caesarius, and now Donatus, for not establishing the abbess in an ecclesiastic hierarchy that simply was not open to women because of the assumed gender roles of the period. In the first chapter of this thesis, I maintain that it is for this very reason that Caesarius so vehemently argues that the rule must be preserved, for it is only in the legitimacy of their own rule and communal conduct that convents can assert any authority or administrative autonomy at all.

not capable of commanding authority in the same manner as abbots and other male members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Even as Lifshitz criticizes the rules of Caesarius and Donatus for undercutting and hindering the authority of the abbess, the authority for women, religious or secular, in the sixth and seventh centuries was more often found in ties of family rather than the mandates of official offices. Although Donatus' rule borrows heavily from Caesarius' concerning those chapters that directly address the customs of women religious, the bishop of Besançon elects to refer to the abbess more as *mater* rather than as *abbatissa*.<sup>62</sup> The appearance of *abbatissa* in Caesarius' sixth-century nuns' rule is one of the first uses of this feminized version of abbot. For Caesarius, who sought through his pragmatic rule mainly to protect the nuns and establish administrative autonomy for the community, the abbot and abbess were primarily offices of the monastery. There were few role models of feminine authority that might have influenced Caesarius' interpretation of a female leader. By the seventh century, however, Donatus would have witnessed the rise of the Merovingian dynasty and its notable examples of feminine influence. As Suzanne Wemple has shown, the expressions and images of female authority in the Merovingian period were most apparent in the charismatic ambitions of wives and especially mothers.<sup>63</sup> According to Lifshitz, however, the authority of the mother was particularly precarious in the heroic age of Gallic monasticism, for the recalcitrant daughter was accustomed to being praised for disobeying her mother and joining the convent.<sup>64</sup> Although this is an intriguing argument that reveals potential challenges to the authority of abbesses, and all female authorities, the period is no less dominated by examples of

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<sup>62</sup> Lifshitz, 127.

<sup>63</sup> Wemple, 53.

<sup>64</sup> Lifshitz, 121.

powerful and even loving women and images of impressive maternal authority and instruction.

The most notorious example of maternal authority found in the Merovingian period is likely the reign of Brunhild (543-613), whose bloodfeud with Fredegund (d. 597) and her progeny spanned generations. Following the death of her husband, Sigibert (d. 575), Brunhild directed the kingdoms of Austrasia and Burgundy through the manipulation of her sons, their wives, and eventually even her grandsons and great-grandsons. The influence available to Merovingian women through family lines did not go unnoticed by churchmen of the period either. In a poem to the queen, Venantius Fortunatus, the bishop of Poitiers, commends the queen for her long line of progeny who in turn represent her own power to rule. He writes, “may your offspring rule alike with twin peoples, and may this place and that present you with fruit, whereby a splendid crown of grandchildren, good queen may encircle you.”<sup>65</sup> Although in many of his poems, Fortunatus distinguishes Brunhild’s feminine attributes, such as beauty, he nevertheless indicates her skill in matters of patronage and policy that would have been admired regardless of her gender.<sup>66</sup> Once her lineage had expired, however, and her great-grandson had died, Brunhild lost any legitimate right to power.<sup>67</sup> Maternal ties were crucial to establishing a foundation for feminine rule in the Merovingian period, and Donatus was undoubtedly aware of this when he chose to refer to the abbess consistently as mother rather than abbess.

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<sup>65</sup> Judith George trans., *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems*, Translated Texts for Historians vol. 23 (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 118-19. For the Latin, see Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat: Poèmes* Tome III (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004), 147.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 159.

<sup>67</sup> Wemple, 63.

In addition to the example of influential mothers from the Merovingian royal courts, the abbess was increasingly depicted as the spiritual mother of her community. Historians such as Caroline Walker Bynum have demonstrated how Church fathers and later Cistercian abbots gendered religious instruction, often even attributing imagery of feminine nurturing to those acts of guidance and fostering that were performed by male churchmen.<sup>68</sup> In the early Middle Ages, however, the abbess personified the maternal nurturer not just simply in her role as advisor to the community but also in the female physical imagery applied to her monastic instruction. Descriptions of abbesses found in Merovingian poetry and hagiography portray abbesses as maternal nurturers of their spiritual daughters and even sons. In a poem to Radegund and Agnes, the founder and abbess of Holy Cross in Poitiers respectively, Venantius Fortunatus describes the spiritual instruction of Radegund in terms of a nursing mother, whose breast milk had nourished both Venantius and Agnes in their religious infancy: “And if in one birth the mother Radegund had brought forth from chaste flesh both, I was to you. And as it were, the breasts of the blessed Radegund fed us two equally with one flowing milk.”<sup>69</sup>

The admiration for the religious instruction and spiritual mentorship of abbesses reached a level of distinction by the seventh-century. Double-monasteries, which combined the communities of monks and nuns usually under the authority of an abbess, quickly became schools of Western Europe’s most qualified monastics.<sup>70</sup> The double monastery of Chelles in Neustria, which was founded by Queen Balthild (d. ca. 680) and overseen by the abbess Bertilla (d. ca. 700), is mentioned in Bede’s history as one of the

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<sup>68</sup> For the background to the patristic use of nurturing images see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 125-6.

<sup>69</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, 11.6 in Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat: Poèmes* Tome III (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004), 116-117.

<sup>70</sup> Wemple, 161-2.

most respected monasteries of instruction for Anglo-Saxon nuns. The influence of abbesses was not reserved for nuns either. Bertilla's hagiographer boasts that

men and women hastened to her, not only from neighboring provinces but even from across the seas, leaving parents and fatherland with love's strongest desire. And with pious affection, God's servant Bertilla received them all as mother to her darling little ones and cared for them lovingly, instructing them with the holy lessons to live justly and piously that they might be pleasing to Christ the King.

It was also at the double monastery of Whitby in Northumbria that the abbess Hilda (614-680), whose sister had once been instructed at Chelles, welcomed and encouraged the training of Caedmon, one of Anglo-Saxon's most celebrated monks and poets.<sup>71</sup>

In this early medieval society, where women achieved the most authority through their maternal acts and their progeny, Donatus' decision to refer to the abbess as mother should not be construed as a dismissal of all authority. Moreover, if Donatus was truly attempting to create a gender-specific interpretation of the Benedictine rule, he may have found Caesarius' *abbatissa* to be an inaccurate foil to the Benedictine abbot. The meaning of the word *abba* is not merely the office of a monastery's leader, but it stands for the father and paternal guardian of the community. For Donatus, the term *abbatissa* may have lacked this parental connotation and therefore did not seem appropriate for the spiritual mentor of a female community. Stressing this difference of language, Felicia Lifshitz has argued that "an *abbatissa*, or abbess, is *not* a mother; an *abbatissa* is a female father."<sup>72</sup> Choosing to substitute *mater* for *abbatissa* was perhaps not so much an attempt on Donatus' part to dilute the authority of the abbess as it was his struggle to portray the abbess in a similar, familial context as the Benedictine abbot, a concerned maternal advisor for her daughters in Christ. The abbess' ability and responsibility to serve as a

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<sup>71</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. D. H. Farmer and Ronald E. Latham with trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Penguin Classics, 1991), 4:23, 243-47.

<sup>72</sup> Lifshitz, 122.

spiritual instructor to her community is alluded to in the chapters of both the rules of Caesarius and Donatus and specifically in those chapters that explain the election of a proper abbess. Donatus remarks that abbess should be able to “respond to circumstances with edification and compunction and render wise judgment with holy affection. Thus, anyone may turn to her for edification with great confidence and richly bless God and rejoice spiritually over your way of life and her whom you have chosen.”<sup>73</sup> Donatus’ decision to edit the Benedictine rule to reflect the maternal role of the abbess only served to echo the interpretation of maternity in the seventh century: that it had the potential capacity for both influential authority and significant educational direction.

The emphasis Caesarius and Donatus placed on preserving the rule and properly inculcating the community with its tenets, both by the direct request of the rule’s author and the responsibility assigned to the abbess, provides some indication as to the importance monastic authorities and the women religious who sought their advice placed on the explication of gender-specific monastic rules. In addition to editing Benedict’s masculine interpretation of abbatial authority, Donatus also chose not to adopt for the female community Benedict’s recommendations for dining, private property, and manual labor. Even as Donatus sought to create the most suitable rule for women religious, the growing popularity of the Benedictine rule and the monastic reforms that adopted and eventually propagated it eventually abandoned any honest appraisal of the rule’s account for both male and female religious life.

Although we do not have any early medieval nuns whose criticisms of the Benedictine rule remain, there are questions raised in later centuries that, when compared to the rules of Caesarius and Donatus, shed light on those aspects of the Benedictine rule

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<sup>73</sup> Donatus of Besançon, c. 77, 73.

that most contradicted the customs of the female religious life. The complaints of Heloise (1101-1162) to Abelard (1079-1142) regarding the inappropriate nature of the Benedictine rule represents the enduring resentment and confusion that nuns held toward the standardization of monastic rules and the abandonment of gender-specific rules. Heloise protests that “at present the one Rule of St. Benedict is professed in the Latin Church by women equally with men, although, as it was clearly written for men alone, it can only be fully obeyed by men, whether subordinates or superiors.”<sup>74</sup> As her letter continues, Heloise struggles to reconcile her obligation to remain in complete obedience with the rule even as it advises inappropriate conduct for nuns.<sup>75</sup> Her critique of the incongruous match between the Benedictine rule and strictly enclosed convents expresses the likely frustration felt by nuns whose monasteries were governed not only without consideration for their gender, but with a clear emphasis on masculine communities.

In Heloise’s opinion, the discrepancies between the Benedictine rule and female religious life were too stark for the rule to be acceptable in a convent. She demands that Abelard, “prescribe some Rule for us and write it down, a Rule which shall be suitable for women, and also describe fully the manner and habit of our way of life, which we find was never done by the holy Fathers.”<sup>76</sup> This request harkens back to the sentiments of Caesarius of Arles and Donatus of Besançon, whose rules suggested that the customs of female religious life were in fact different from those of their monastic brothers. As an introduction to the *regula ad virgines*, Caesarius observes that: “Because many things in monasteries of women seem to differ from the customs of monks, we have chosen a few

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<sup>74</sup> Heloise, “Letter 6” *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice and revised by M.T. Clanchey (New York City New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 94.

<sup>75</sup> Heloise, 95.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

things from among many, according to which the elder religious can live under rule with younger, and strive to carry out spiritually what they see to be especially adapted for their sex.”<sup>77</sup> In the prologue to his mixed rule, Donatus relays the frustration that the nuns of Jussa experienced regarding the rules that were available to them at the time. He informs the community that he has decided to write the rule because “you say that, since the rules of the aforesaid fathers were written for men and not for women, they are less suited to you.”<sup>78</sup> The “aforesaid fathers” are Benedict of Nursia and Columbanus, whose monastic rules addressed specifically the communities of monks.

The matter of dining and banquets highlights one of the most enduring discrepancies between the Benedictine rule and the assumed expectations for conduct within nunneries. Like Caesarius of Arles, Donatus forbade the abbess from eating outside of the community for reasons other than sickness or “compelling business.”<sup>79</sup> He also repeats Caesarius’ prohibition against entertaining:

bishops, abbots, clerks, secular men, women in secular dress, relatives of the abbess, or sanctimonials from the monastery, or outside the monastery. Nor should you make a banquet for the bishop of the city nor even the supplier to this monastery, nor should the abbess or any other sister presume to go to a banquet with the bishop or parents or anyone else within or without the monastery.<sup>80</sup>

Donatus, however, makes no allowance for visiting women religious and only advises that if the nuns wish to share something with an outsider, they are to prepare it and send it through the portress.<sup>81</sup> Even in Waldebert’s rule, which encouraged active charity on the part of the nuns and suggested a more relaxed enclosure, there is no indication that the

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<sup>77</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Rule for Nuns*, caput. 2, translated by Maria Caritas McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles: A Translation with a Critical Introduction*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Mediaeval History New Series Vol. XVI (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1960), 171.

<sup>78</sup> Donatus of Besançon, 32.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 59, 64.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 58, 63-4. See also Caesarius of Arles, c. 38, 183.

<sup>81</sup> Donatus of Besançon, c. 58, 64.

abbess or her community entertained banquets or dinner guests. In the *vita* of Sadalberg, for whom Waldebert is thought to have written his rule, her hagiographer indicates that, although the Laon community received food donations from community members and churchmen, they did not welcome and entertain these benefactors in the monastery.<sup>82</sup>

For monks, however, the reception of guests was to resemble the reception of Christ, himself. The Benedictine rule encourages that “when, therefore, a guest is announced, he is to be met by the superior and the brothers with every ceremony of love.”<sup>83</sup> The rule also allows the prior to break his fast and join his guest in refreshments, a leisure that the abbess in nuns’ rules was never permitted.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the table of the abbot was depicted as symbol of hospitality to welcomed guests and as a symbol of preference to members of the community. The abbot always dined with his guests and could summon brothers to fill seats if the table was not full.<sup>85</sup> The male monastery was also open to the pilgrim monk, but the rule recommended more consideration before welcoming members of the episcopacy. Ultimately, as long as guests recognized the authority of the abbot and followed the rule of the monastery, monks warmly received them.<sup>86</sup>

The general acceptance of Benedictine tenets for female communities after the Carolingian period often overshadowed and ignored the distinctions between the dining customs of the nun and monk. Even over five hundred years later, the discrepancies still remained and still aroused confusion and resentment among women religious who were unable to reconcile their understanding of the acceptable female religious life with the

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<sup>82</sup> *Sadalberga, Abbess of Laon*, 190.

<sup>83</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 53, 121.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, c. 53, 123.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, c. 56, 131.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, c. 60-1, 141, 143.

precepts of the Benedictine rule. In her famous correspondence with Abelard, Heloise expresses her frustration at the contradictions between the Benedictine rule and female communities in regards to dining. If, in spite of enclosure, the abbess was to dine with guests, what is to say who she dines with and who she does not? Heloise, with no lack of annoyance, questions

which is more fitting for our religious life: for an abbess never to offer hospitality to men, or for her to eat with men she has allowed in?...And even if they admit to their table only women to whom they have given hospitality, is there no lurking danger thereof?... Finally, if we exclude men from our hospitality and admit women only, it is obvious we shall offend and annoy the men whose services are needed by a convent of the weaker sex, especially if little or no return seems to be made to those from whom most is received.<sup>87</sup>

The disconnection between her understanding of the recommendations for women religious regarding dinner guests and the commands of the rule to be hospitable is startling, and Heloise has no suggestions as how to resolve the two.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, even though the Benedictine rule eschewed the outside world as expected in monastic communities, the monastery it addressed was undeniably more open and connected to worldly affairs than was possible for nunneries, even those of the seventh century that were not strictly enclosed.

Concerning the appropriate clothing and personal items that were assigned to monastics, Donatus also refers to the gender-specific tenets of Caesarius rather than those addressed to Benedict's masculine audience. The clothing and belongings of the monks were intently monitored, ensuring that they only kept what was necessary to survive in the monastery or on assigned journeys. Where Benedict and the authors of nuns' rules differ in their treatment of monastic garb and accessories resides in what aspect of this

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<sup>87</sup> Heloise, 94-5.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

rule they emphasize. The necessities that Benedict mentions include, “a cowl, a tunic, stockings, boots, belt, knife, stylus, needle, handkerchief, and writing tablets.”<sup>89</sup> Each piece of bedding is also described.<sup>90</sup> Unlike Caesarius and Donatus, though, Benedict does not specify any particular luxury items that the monks might intend to display or hide away.

With his simple catalogue of clothes and goods, Benedict’s rule lacks the intensity and exasperation found in Caesarius’ or Donatus’ account of extravagant decorations and fabrics.<sup>91</sup> Caesarius devotes a great deal of attention to the problems of material excess even to the point of naming specific fabrics that were forbidden, types of wall hangings disallowed, inappropriate bedding, and limiting the designs that the nuns were allowed to embroider on cloths.<sup>92</sup> Although Donatus is not as intent on articulating all the possible instances in which nuns might flaunt their status, he does repeat Caesarius’ restriction on the dyeing of fabric, adding that the nuns were not to wear *bebrina* or beaver. Like the women religious of St. John, the nuns Donatus addressed in his rule were to be garbed in milk-white. He also takes the time to mention that the nuns were to avoid making “feathered ornaments and damask” or using worldly decorations and bedding.<sup>93</sup>

Interestingly enough, Heloise also remarks on the impracticality of the Benedictine rule as it discussed the clothing for monastics. Perturbed by the rule’s obvious bias toward monks, she wonders, “how can women be concerned with what is written there about cowls, drawers or scapulars? Or indeed, with tunics or woolen garments worn next to the

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<sup>89</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 55, 131.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>91</sup> Caesarius, *Rule for Nuns*, c. 44-5, 185-6.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, c. 44-5, 185-6.

<sup>93</sup> Donatus of Besançon, c. 63, 66.

skin, when the monthly purging of their superfluous humours must avoid such things.”<sup>94</sup>

In instances such as this, where the Benedictine rule seems nothing if not practical, the nuns’ rules’ detailed account for the clothing and personal items in addition to Heloise’s pointed comment indicates that in some instances monastic customs and experiences were undeniably gendered.

The sensitivity for gender with which Donatus approached the composition of his mixed rule did not only serve to better describe the expectations for nuns but it also served to better ensure that the community would maintain the degree of communal order and financial solvency that was essential to the convent’s survival. By reviving those chapters of Caesarius’ rule that address the regulations of dining and private property within the female community, Donatus also reinforced the implied connection between the behavior of nuns and the vitality of their community. As demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis, Caesarius’ preoccupation with monastic clothing and décor was evidence of the convent’s most pervasive obstacle to a humble community: worldly connections. It also, however, highlighted the close connection between conduct and obedience to the rule and the prosperity of the community.

Self-sufficiency in the opinion of many female communities was not found in Benedict’s pragmatic recommendation that the monastery provide itself with as much of its own resources as possible. The rule recommends that “all necessities, such as water, mill, garden, and various crafts may be practiced within the monastery so there will be no necessity for the monks to wander outside.”<sup>95</sup> For the Benedictine monastery, self-sufficiency was a product of manual labor, and the monks were encouraged even to revel

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<sup>94</sup>Heloise, 94.

<sup>95</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 66, 159.

in bringing in the harvest if poverty rendered it necessary.<sup>96</sup> Waldebert attempts to compose a version of Benedict's chapter on manual labor for nuns, and his chapter reveals a community whose members were well versed in the brewing of beer and the baking of bread. The abbot also mentions the picking of fruit, although there is no indication that the nuns harvested crops.<sup>97</sup> In Donatus' rule, however, a chapter on manual labor is conspicuously absent and he does not adopt either Benedict's or Caesarius' recommendations for self-sufficiency. It is possible that the monastery of Jussa was not equipped with the facilities to support brewing or perhaps lacked any considerable amount of arable land. Donatus may have also had concern for the suitability of agrarian labor for nuns, though. In her letters to Abelard, Heloise criticizes the Benedictine rule for its unreasonable demand that the cenobite harvest the community's own food. Frustrated with the absurdity of applying this rule to nuns, Heloise presses that "however, to pass over those provisions of the Rule which we are unable to observe in every detail, or cannot observe without danger to ourselves what about the gathering of the harvest – has it ever been the custom for convents of nuns to go out to do this, or to tackle the work of the fields?"<sup>98</sup>

Although Donatus neglected to include any chapter on manual labor or self-sufficiency, he does adopt from Caesarius the chapter that specifically restricts the height (*altiora*) of a nuns' hair. If Conrad Leyser's interpretation of Caesarius of Arles' rule and this chapter are correct, then Donatus may have intended that this measure of propriety would likewise represent the continuing obedience and humble conduct of the female

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, c. 48, 113.

<sup>97</sup> Waldebert, c. 12, 90-91.

<sup>98</sup> Heloise, 95.

community, for which the convent was to be rewarded with financial aid.<sup>99</sup> As the Frankish families became more involved in both the episcopate and monasteries, it must have been incredibly challenging for convents to maintain any distance between community members and their relatives. The convent for which Donatus wrote his rule was a family monastery founded by his mother and therefore likely relied on the resources entailed to it by the family estate and patronage of relatives who wished to establish their lineage and secure their salvation.<sup>100</sup> Although the convent could very well be involved in the exchange of patronage for prayers, Donatus' evident concern for the risks of external influence for the female community suggests that for the bishop, absolute adherence to the rule was the way in which a community might retain its legitimacy as a spiritual intercessor for the community and at the same time safeguard its coffers from the hands of machinating or greedy relatives. Toward the end of the eighth century, there are accounts of noble women who as monastic founders juggled the responsibilities of both secular landowners and abbesses. For those abbesses who saw no reason to abandon their secular ties, their communities often suffered the loss of properties and the income associated with them, costing convents their economic independence and leaving them impoverished.<sup>101</sup> Again, according to the monastic tradition of Caesarius and Donatus, the nuns' rule was incorruptible and in order for it to successfully secure the community's administrative and financial autonomy it had to address those instances in which the female community was most at risk for forming political or social ties to outsiders, such as at banquets or through displays of personal

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<sup>99</sup> Leyser, 89.

<sup>100</sup> Gerd Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Medieval Europe*, trans. Christopher Carroll (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 48-50.

<sup>101</sup> Hochstetler, *A Conflict of Tradition*, 162-3.

property, and these situations clearly require a distinction between the religious life of women and that of men.

The formation of a rule suitable to the lifestyle of the female community was essential considering that for nuns there were few opportunities to leave the community. Although the Benedictine rule was known for its emphasis on the stability of the community over the ascetic ambitions of individual monks, it nevertheless depicts the monk as neither restricted to the community nor forbidden to abandon his vows. Unlike nuns, monks had more options if their abbot became tyrannical or, for the abbot, if the congregation turned mutinous. In the Benedictine rule, monks were availed three chances to abandon the monastic community and return.<sup>102</sup> And church councils suggest that indeed this was possible for the monk should he be willing to surrender any future as a churchman. Moreover, it was not unusual to see monks venturing outside of the community. Even though monks were encouraged to distance themselves from secular society, in several chapters the rule recognizes that monks traveled outside the monastery as messengers on short or even long journeys.<sup>103</sup> In her essay “The Ordeal of Community,” Jo Ann McNamara argues that “men whose temperaments clashed with those of their fellow monks could take to the road and found new communities. Or they could work as wandering preachers.”<sup>104</sup> Communal order in male communities was also constructed firmly according to pre-existing political bodies, which were reserved for men in the secular world. As already discussed, the abbot in a Benedictine community

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<sup>102</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 29, 81.

<sup>103</sup> Benedict of Nursia c. 50-1 and 67, 119, 161.

<sup>104</sup> Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, *The Ordeal of Community* (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1993), 9.

was supported by a council of deans and his authority was emphasized through public ceremonies of discipline and satisfaction.

Even though Donatus recognizes in his prologue that the mandates for strict enclosure that Caesarius instituted were inappropriate for the rural monasteries of the seventh century, he still elected to omit Benedict's chapters on the travelling monk or those who might wish to abandon their religious vows. And despite the fact that Waldebert does incorporate Benedict's rule allowing the monk three opportunities to abandon and return to the religious community, we have seen that it was often the opinion of church councils and even women religious themselves that those nuns who fled the community were in fact fugitives from God. Evidence of the limitations on the nuns' ability to leave the community completely is also found in those chapters of Waldebert's and Donatus' rule that confront the appropriate disciplinary action for those nuns who do not improve upon correction. According to the Benedictine rule, these particular insubordinates were cut off from the community, and quoting from 1 Corinthians, the author announces that "if the unfaithful one departs, let him depart."<sup>105</sup> Donatus follows Benedict's chapter very closely, even including the verse that implies a permanent separation between the community and the unfaithful. Because nuns were discouraged from physically leaving the community, though, Donatus adds the recommendation that "thus she must be sequestered in her cell until she learns good will."<sup>106</sup> Waldebert, on the other hand, does not even include Benedict's reference to the

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<sup>105</sup> Benedict of Nursia, c. 28, 81. The verse Benedict quotes is from 1 Corinthians 7:15.

<sup>106</sup> Donatus of Besançon, c. 73, 71.

departure of the excommunicated, but instead stresses the ongoing necessity to repent and seek satisfaction from within the community.<sup>107</sup>

For most women religious the convent was their permanent home and as such it seems only reasonable that they might seek out a rule that thoroughly addressed the female monastic experience and the controversies most prevalent in the female community. Only by confronting those customs that contributed most to the disorder of the female religious community, could the convent hope to maintain a peaceful and stable community. The seventh century represented a precursor to the monastic reforms of the Carolingian Empire, yet even as Donatus of Besançon and Waldebert of Luxeuil attempted to incorporate the increasingly popular Benedictine rule and its practical tenets, their mixed-rules demonstrate that for women religious their monastic rule was expected to reflect the idiosyncracies of female religious life. Without any implications of ritual impurity or misogyny, which dominated discussions regarding women religious during the Carolingian period, early medieval authors of nuns' rules provided a detailed guideline for female communities in order to address the idiosyncracies of female religious life. Suzanne Wemple contends that "the rules for female communities that these men composed or helped to formulate were predicated on the principle that women could and indeed needed to develop their own independent form of spirituality."<sup>108</sup> The activity of convents and the Caesarian tenets that Donatus preserved in the seventh century provide some indication of those aspects of the monastic rule that continued to represent, in the ideas of both churchmen and women religious, the ideals of female religious life within monastic communities. By the Carolingian period and the

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<sup>107</sup> Waldebert, c. 20, 97-8.

<sup>108</sup> Wemple, 192.

enforcement of the Benedictine rule, however, female monasticism had garnered a duplicitous image that depicted women religious as both different and the same as monks. As Penelope Johnson has noted, “women were suspect as sexual threats to male chastity and hence unwelcome, while in a dizzying contradiction, spiritual commonality rather than gender differential was the ideal of the rule and hence of monasticism.”<sup>109</sup>

These particular nuns’ rules themselves made little impact beyond the seventh century or outside of Merovingian Gaul, but nevertheless the relevance of gender-specificity in the monastic experience and the rules that addressed it continued to resonate in convents throughout the Middle Ages. The contradictions between the female religious life and the tenets of the Benedictine rule seem evident in the comparison between the nuns’ rules and that of Benedict. Moreover, there is no evidence or surviving texts that suggest any female version of the Benedictine rule existed in the early Middle Ages.<sup>110</sup> According to Julie Ann Smith, the Carolingian reforms and the blanket enforcement of the Benedictine rule only “ignored or demoted the place of the sisters in the spiritual life.”<sup>111</sup> There is also an indication that nuns continued to struggle with the tenets of Benedict’s rule through the high Middle Ages. JoAnn McNamara notes that up through the high Middle Ages many female monasteries, seeking to ensure their protection and purity, held onto the tenets of Caesarius nuns’ rule, despite the seven hundred years that had passed since the life of its author.<sup>112</sup> After taking control of Chelles, which had once dominated early medieval monasticism under the guidance of Bertilla, in 1196, the bishop had seen that the Benedictine rule was enforced throughout

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<sup>109</sup> Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 4.

<sup>110</sup> Smith, 121.

<sup>111</sup> Smith, 148.

<sup>112</sup> McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 291.

the community. It was not until 1613, however, that the nuns officially abandoned the white habits that their community had donned beginning in the seventh century on the recommendation of Caesarius's of Arles nuns' rule.<sup>113</sup>

No doubt, the complaints of Heloise during the twelfth century represented one voice of many who found that the legislation most often devised for monasteries was inappropriate or contradictory to the traditions of female monasticism. Although much of what the Benedictine rule laid out for the cenobite's humility and discipline was edifying for the religious life of both men and women, to assume that its tenets were gender-neutral is to conceal the fact that women religious often pursued and demanded distinctive monastic tenets that reflected and even preserved their communal religious life. The decision to incorporate female religious life under the same expectations as those held for men only served to hinder the conception of spiritual equality between the sexes. As Julie Smith has observed, "ironically, eliminating specialized women's rules and ensuring that women's religious life was guided by exactly the same rule as monks diminished any possibility of equality between the experience of the female religious and that of her male counterpart."<sup>114</sup> The efforts of these sixth- and seventh-century authors to explicate the practical and even spiritual aspects of the female monastic life provided nuns a monastic guideline that took into consideration the dynamics not only within the community but also between the convent and secular families or churchmen. The contrasts between the life of women religious and those expectations maintained for monastics in the Benedictine rule highlight the ways in which convents and their rules sought to protect and secure the stability of the female religious community.

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<sup>113</sup> McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 416.

<sup>114</sup> Smith, 225.

## Conclusion

The rules composed for female monasteries during the sixth and seventh centuries in Gaul were not always texts of domination as historians Donald Hochstetler and Julie Ann Smith have argued. The rules of Caesarius of Arles, Donatus of Besançon and Waldebert of Luxeuil suggest that for the female community, the monastic rule was in fact 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.

The consideration that monastic authors had for the environment in which the convent operated is a testament to the versatility of the nuns' rule during this period. As demonstrated by the transition from the strict enclosure of Caesarius' of Arles to the more relaxed enclosure indicated in the rules of Waldebert of Luxeuil and Donatus of Besançon, strict enclosure in the sixth and seventh centuries was not in itself a defining or universal characteristic of female monasticism. The urban environment in which Caesarius of Arles produced his nuns' rule reflects the extent to which environmental circumstances affected the shape and tone of monastic rules. Unlike the ascetic guidelines composed by the Church Fathers, which were tailored to the independent holy woman, the nuns' rule of Caesarius of Arles addresses female religious life according to the communal experience that was coming to dominate western monasticism. The close proximity of the convent to an urban center such as Arles, which also represented a powerful ecclesiastic center, made it essential to safeguard not only the physical security of women religious during political transitions but also the administrative autonomy of the convent. The nuns' rule of Caesarius of Arles represented for female communities a powerful statement of independence that depended on the community's ability to maintain unquestionable order according to the nuns' rule.

When the monastic center of Gaul relocated from the urban Gallo-Roman south to those rural estates ruled by the Frankish aristocracy, enclosure no longer dominated the rules for convents. Buried in the rule of Waldebert, are brief images of women religious who worked in orchards, attended the sick in hospitals, and may have even been given the option to abandon their religious vows. Certain *vitae*, such as that of Sadalberga, illustrate the abbess overseeing the monastery's cultivated lands out of doors and

traveling not only outside of the convent but even outside the walls of the city. In this century, enclosure was enforced not through monastic legislation but likely by the renderings of the verdicts of church councils, which considered nuns who escaped the convent as excommunicates. The images of fugitive nuns in accounts from St. Sadalberga's convent at Laon and St. Burgundofara's double monastery at Faremoutiers suggest that enclosure was something enforced by the surrounding community and eventually internalized into the woman religious' own conception of female religious life and female spirituality.

In the seventh century, when the political anxiety of the sixth century had passed, authors of monastic rules composed for nuns had more opportunities to focus on the relationships within the community rather than only on the way in which communities were to avoid external interference. Where Caesarius of Arles sought to secure a stable and uncorrupted community in which female spirituality could blossom, Waldebert's rule reveals a female community that focused intently on achieving spiritual satisfaction and salvation. Evidence of this dynamic spiritual atmosphere can be found in the hagiography of the period, which depicts nuns as closely tied to each other in their pursuit of salvation. The influence of Columbanus and the Irish traditions perpetuated in the Hiberno-Frankish monastic movement encouraged a spirituality among nuns that absolutely depended on the interactions among members of the community. Columbanus' emphasis on penance provided women religious with an incentive to measure their own progress toward salvation on the basis of their relationships with other members of the community. Following the tenets of the nuns' rule, confessing wrongdoings to the abbess, and maintaining charitable relationships with other nuns

through the satisfaction of penance ensured the nuns' salvation. Hagiography from the seventh century is dominated by depictions of women religious on their deathbeds, facing judgment for the satisfaction they owed their fellow community members. Also, the Irish Christian interpretation of penance, which envisioned discipline as another route to martyrdom, revived the notion for women religious that their opportunity to achieve spiritual salvation was equal to that of monks.

Although the mixed rules of the seventh century lost the anxiety that propelled Caesarius' nuns' rules, monastic advisors and women religious were still concerned about the autonomy of female communities. The understanding of monastic autonomy, however, differed between Waldebert of Luxeuil, who was an abbot, and Donatus the bishop of Besançon. Adopting the interpretation of monastic authority that was upheld by the Irishman Columbanus, Waldebert assumed that monastic independence was inherent for abbesses and their communities. His rule does not struggle with the question of external interference, because according to him the bishops had no authority to intervene in the administration of monastic communities. As a bishop, however, Donatus of Besançon was only too well aware of the political interconnections among bishops, nobles, and nuns. His decision to deviate from the rule of Benedict to emphasize the femininity of the monastic experience or to include tenets of Caesarius' rule suggests that for the female community's administrative autonomy was still being pursued by means of a gender-specific monastic rule.

By the seventh century, when the Benedictine rule began to attract followers in monastic communities throughout Western Christendom, the gender-specific monastic rule became even more important as female communities struggled to sustain monastic

tenets that addressed the idiosyncrasies of female communal life. Historians have frequently given short shrift to monastic rules of medieval communities, assuming that the dominance of the Benedictine rule was likewise an indication of its suitability for all communities. Yet the contradictions between the Benedictine rule and the nuns' rules of the sixth and seventh century demonstrate that women religious and their advisors were aware of key differences between the communal lives of nuns and monks. These differences are not indicative of spiritual inequality; the nuns depicted in the hagiography of this period certainly did not imply that they were less deserving of salvation. These nuns' rules recognize, however, that female monastic spirituality required a monastic space tailored to the needs of women religious. By ensuring the security and administrative autonomy of female communities, accomplishments that required the underscoring of those idiosyncrasies of female communal life, nuns' rules provided women religious with the opportunity to pursue their spirituality free from the interference of noble and episcopal intervention. The assumption that the Benedictine rule outlined a community that would encourage the spiritual discipline of both monks and nuns only served to dampen the expression of female monasticism and therefore reduced the ability of women religious to engage in spiritual pursuits.

This thesis has demonstrated that the monastic rules composed for nunneries in sixth- and seventh-century Gaul were rules that expressed the nuances of female monasticism in ways that were essential to female spirituality and the female religious life. Adaptable to urban or rural environments, female monasticism sought in its rules to preserve the female community's autonomy and spiritual unity. Although the Benedictine rule is often considered a standard monastic rule, the gender-specificity of its

tenets is evident. Benedict of Nursia illustrated the ideal monastic life according to his understanding of the male religious community, and the gender-specific nuns' rules put forward by Caesarius of Arles, Waldebert of Luxeuil, and Donatus of Besançon sought to achieve this same monastic ideal for women religious. Moreover, women religious were vocal and active participants in the establishment and development of these rules, which even they considered distinct from the articulations of rules addressed to male communities. The versatility of the nuns' rule was also such that women religious attempted to direct the composition and the shape of the monastic rule that applied directly to their communal environment. On behalf of her community at Holy Cross, Radegund established the rule of Caesarius for its reputation as a statement of administrative autonomy. In the seventh century, when the mixed rule was most appealing to monastic communities in Gaul, women religious were outspoken concerning the composition of nuns' rules. Donatus's decision to formulate a mixed rule for the convent of Jussa was primarily a result of the adamant demands of the nuns in the community who were dissatisfied with those rules produced for male communities and the tenets laid down for Caesarius' urban convent in Arles. Before eighth-century churchmen began to push for the enforcement of the Benedictine rule, female monasticism was dynamic and its rules were texts to be shaped by female communities rather than imposed on them.

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