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HROTSVIT OF GANDERSHEIM: HER WORKS AND THEIR
MESSAGES

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KATHRYN A. MCDONALD-MIRANDA

ABSTRACT

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, a poetess and playwright during the tenth century, created a body of work that both reflected and instructed people in her society. During this period, Europe witnessed extensive societal changes including the reemergence of the Holy Roman Empire, the eastward expansion of Christianity, and a cultural development known as the Ottonian Renaissance. The imperial court, emphatic sponsors of the arts, approved of the legends, dramas, and histories written by Hrotsvit as Christian alternatives to popular pagan literature. The following text presents interpretations of the legends and dramas identifying how they functioned as didactic devices intended to cultivate particular perceptions of non-Christians while simultaneously providing an idealistically defined Christian society. A new translation of her preface to the dramas confirms the argument that Hrotsvit had intended visual productions of her dramas while grammatical analyses of the legends and dramas further support the position of oral deliveries. Transmitted orally, the works could then reach the largely illiterate population without compromising the aesthetic appeal appreciated by the elites. Investigations into the sources Hrotsvit may have used and the changes she made enable a better understanding of how one woman, representing the aristocratic and religious communities, envisioned her world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF MAPS.....	v
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. SCHOLARSHIP ON THE PERFORMABILITY OF HROTSVIT'S WORKS.....	3
III. LINGUISTIC INDICATORS OF HROTSVIT'S INTENTIONS.....	7
IV. THE LEGENDS.....	17
V. THE DRAMAS.....	45
VI. CONCLUSION.....	78
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	82
APPENDIX.....	87

LIST OF MAPS

Map	Page
I. Germany at the time of Hrotsvit's compositions.....	88
II. Enlarged image of Map I showing the cities of Bamberg, Eichstadt, and Gandersheim.....	89
III. The Frankish Kingdom in 768.....	90
IV. Islamic Spain and Sicily during the tenth century.....	91
V. Dionysius' western journey from Athens to Rome to Paris.....	92
VI. Saxony in c. 962.....	93
VII. The Magyar invasions c. 900.....	94

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The reign of Otto I (936-73) marked a pronounced transformation in the social and geographical landscape of the Holy Roman Empire. The Ottonians asserted their secular supremacy in contrast to their Carolingian predecessors, who had received their authority, albeit symbolically, from the pope. Henry I (919-36) had, for example, refused the traditional anointing by the pope upon his ascension.¹ Otto I, Henry's successor and son, received his coronation in 962 with all the pageantry fitting for an emperor. His rule, however, was far from absolute. Internal rebellions and external conflicts marred Otto's reign from the beginning and the frequent warfare represented only one aspect of the tenth century. It was during this time that lay investiture began as well as a cultural resurgence commonly referred to as the Ottonian Renaissance. The three are significant together because it was in the context of the two former that the authors of the latter composed their works. One author in particular stands out for her contributions: Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (c 935-c 1000). Her opus consists of eight legends, six plays, two historical epics, one poem, and a series of letters and prefaces to the works. It is from these letters and prefaces that scholars have pieced together the particulars of her life.

¹ Walter Ullman, *Medieval Political Thought* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1970), 92.

Probably of noble parentage, Hrotsvit came to the royal abbey of Gandersheim as an adult and lived as a canoness. Many believe she spent time at court and one scholar speculates as to who her tutor may have been.² The consensus from the modern academic community ends there. Countless books and essays approach Hrotsvit's works from several different perspectives, including analyzing their Christian messages, inferring their political implications, and, most divisively, arguing whether or not her plays were performed. This paper addresses all three perspectives and also includes the social relevance of the legends and the plays beyond their religious and political dealings. Deciphering the multiple meanings contained in Hrotsvit's legends and dramas helps us better understand who may have received the messages which, in turn, may illuminate part of the Ottonian hegemonic process. To do this, I will describe each of the plots and characters and will, where possible, explain how the changes Hrotsvit made to the original source material illustrate her unique goals and intentions. I then relate some of what we know of the tenth century – the conflicts and the culture to each of the works as well as insights provided by other scholars. Together, the analyses provide a more comprehensive understanding of Hrotsvit's works in the context of the tenth century and the roles they may have played in society. By acknowledging that Hrotsvit's plays were indeed performed, that the legends and epics were read aloud in the tenth century we can identify the various messages the works contained and the purposes they may have served to fulfill in her volatile world.

² Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 56.

CHAPTER II

SCHOLARSHIP ON THE PERFORMABILITY OF HROTSVIT'S WORKS

In the five centuries since Conrad Celtis uncovered Hrotsvit's works at St. Emmeram in 1494, scholars have flocked to the compositions. They have analyzed the plays, legends, and epics for their historical value, their grammatical structure, their classical and patristic sources, and their various messages. Since 1845, however, when Charles Magnin claimed the plays had been performed during Hrotsvit's lifetime and that she may have taken part in their production,³ no other topic has generated as much controversy. Edwin Zeydel, in 1945, chronicled the contrasting views from the previous one hundred years. He joined Anatole France, Christopher St. John, and Evangeline Wilbour Blashfield to Magnin's perspective then opposed them with the views of K.A. Barack, Paul von Winterfield, and Karl Young who argued that Hrotsvit did not intend to have her plays performed.⁴ Though Zeydel himself noted a lack of conclusive evidence,

³ Edwin Zeydel, "Were Hrotsvitha's Dramas Performed during Her Lifetime?" *Speculum* 20 (1945): 443.

⁴ *Ibid*, 444-446; 448.

he endorsed the “performance position” through a brief analysis of the plays and the precedence of other performances during the period.⁵

By the turn of the twenty-first century, more scholars support rather than oppose the tenth century performances of the dramas. Peter Dronke claims that Terence, Hrotsvit’s stylistic source, had been read aloud at court complete with parts assigned to different readers.⁶ Upon the approval given to Hrotsvit by her patrons for the compositions, Dronke asserts that her plays were also performed at court, most likely at the behest of Brun of Cologne, Otto’s brother.⁷ Barbara Gold, while agreeing that productions were held, disagrees with the setting Dronke proposed. She lauds Hrotsvit for her accomplishments as a woman, calling her “not only a chronicler of women’s tales but also creator of women’s history.”⁸ Because of this, she believes the dramas were performed at Gandersheim, by and for a female audience who could relate to Hrotsvit’s “brave, heroic, chaste, Christian female martyrs.”⁹ David Wiles approached his analysis from the perspective of a theater historian. By identifying techniques of medieval theatrical productions present in the works, he concludes that they were not only performed, but they were performed by a male cast for men and women alike either at Gandersheim or at court.¹⁰ Janet Snyder demonstrated through verbal analysis how performable the dramas were. She uses *The Fall and Repentance of Mary* as her example

⁵ *Ibid*, 449; 451; 455.

⁶ Dronke, 57.

⁷ *Ibid*, 58.

⁸ Barbara K. Gold, “Hrotwitha Writes Herself: *Clamor Validus Gandersheimensis*,” in *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*, eds Gold et al (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 61.

⁹ *Ibid*, 57.

¹⁰ David Wiles, “Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim: The Performance of Her Plays in the Tenth Century,” *Theatre History Studies* 19 (1999): 139; 135.

and claims Hrotsvit had imbedded stage directions within the text itself, intending the performances for both the lay nobility and the religious community.

Several scholars have maintained the counterargument to the tenth century productions, conceding instead that the plays may have been recited. Helene Homeyer, for example, “emphatically” argued against staged performances, but she acknowledged that the plays “may have been read aloud.”¹¹ In her introduction to the English translations of Hrotsvit’s plays, Katharina Wilson suggests that we should take the canoness literally when she said the plays were to substitute *readings* of Terence.¹² In concordance with Homeyer, Wilson accepts the possibility that the plays were read aloud even though some of her grammatical findings seem to corroborate visual productions. Stephen Wailes differentiated between the plays, which may have been “presented orally in some kind of impersonation,” and the legends and epics, “which were to be read silently or aloud to others without the reader seeming to be any of the characters.”¹³ Considering the various scholarly opinions, the difference between a “performance” and a “recitation” lies in the definition of “performance.” But, as Zeydel so astutely pointed out, moving “from reading aloud to [a] crude performance is only a step.”¹⁴

The analysis of Hrotsvit’s various messages for their religious and political underpinnings represents another facet of the discourse. Joan Ferrante investigated relationships evident through the writings to, by, and about women during the High Middle Ages. She used Hrotsvit as a prime example of women writing history in a time

¹¹ Zeydel 1945, 448.

¹² Hrotsvit, *The Dramas of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, trans and intro by Katharina Wilson (Saskatchewan: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1985), 15 (emphasis in original).

¹³ Stephen Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics in the Works of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 19.

¹⁴ Zeydel 1945, 450.

when such writing was “usually to further a political agenda, directly or indirectly.”¹⁵

Jane Chance, in her comparison between Hrotsvit’s play *Gallicanus* and the Anglo-Saxon epic *Elene*, claims that the drama served as a feminized founding narrative for the church, feminized in that Gallicanus’ conversion was brought about by a woman.¹⁶ According to Ulrike Wiethaus, the behavioral transgressions evident in many of Hrotsvit’s works was a means of controlling the sexual propriety of the lay nobility as well as a way of communicating that survival for the weak, women specifically, depended on their submission to and the “complete identification” with the strong.¹⁷ Even though these analyses avoid the performance issue, Hrotsvit’s works, whether intended as political propaganda, historical constructions, or social instruction hinged on their ability to have been disseminated to, and understood by the appropriate groups of people.

¹⁵ Joan Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women’s Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 68.

¹⁶ Jane Chance, “Hrotsvit’s Latin Drama *Gallicanus* and the Old English Epic *Elene*: Intercultural Founding Narratives of a Feminized Church” in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Contexts, Identities, Affinities, and Performances*, eds Phyllis R. Brown, Linda A. McMillin, and Katharina M. Wilson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 195.

¹⁷ Ulrike Wiethaus, “*Pulchrum Signum?* Sexuality and the Politics of Religion in the Works of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim Composed between 963 and 973” in Brown et al, 135.

CHAPTER III

LINGUISTIC INDICATORS OF HROTSVIT'S INTENTIONS

The keys to a better understanding of Hrotsvit's intent are to be found in the words and works of the canoness herself. She introduced her dramas with a preface that explained why she modeled them after Terence. The standard modern translation of this preface, that of Katharina Wilson, reflects Wilson's conclusions that they plays were not performed. She renders Hrotsvit's words *Unde ego Clamor Validus Gandesheimensis non recusavi illum imitari dictando dum alii colunt legendo quo eodem dictationis genere quo turpia lascivarum incesta feminarum recitabantur* as "Therefore I, the Strong Voice of Gandersheim, have not refused to imitate him in writing whom others laud in reading, so that in that selfsame form of composition in which the shameless acts of lascivious women were phrased."¹⁸ Here, Wilson translated *dictando* as "in writing," *dictationis* as "of composition," and *recitabantur* as "were phrased." I would argue, however, that a more literal translation sheds a different light on Hrotsvit's purpose.

Many Catholics are found who, for the eloquence of a more cultured conversation, prefer the emptiness of pagan books to the usefulness of sacred scripture of which deed we are wholly unable to defend ourselves. There are also some who cling to the sacred

¹⁸ Hrotsvit "Preface to the Dramas" in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: A Florilegium of her Works* trans Katharina Wilson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998), 41.

books and, although they scorn those of the pagans, they frequently read the creations of Terence. And while they may delight in the sweetness of conversation, they are polluted by the idea of abominable things. Therefore I, the Strong Voice of Gandersheim, have not refused to imitate him in speaking (*dictando*), while others honor in reading, in that same manner of speaking (*dictationis*) in which the unchaste disgraces of licentious women were recited (*recitabantur*), the praiseworthy purity of sacred women would be celebrated close to the capacity of my little ability. This, however, not rarely caused me to be ashamed and to be dyed deep red (to be blushed) because an illegal representation of this kind of speaking compelling the horrible senselessness of lovers and their maliciously pleasant conversations which are not permitted to be suitable for our hearing that I turn my mind and designate the purpose of my pen to composing. But if I would neglect to undertake this on account of my embarrassment, not satisfy my purpose, nor completely display the praise of innocence close to my abilities, as much as the flatteries of the mad are an impetus for doing illicit things, so much more sublime the glory of the divine helper and the higher the victory of the triumphant when female frailty conquers and manly strength submits to disorder.

For I do not doubt that others will object because of the cheapness of this oratory, much inferior, much shorter and wholly dissimilar to the sentences of him whom I was intending to imitate. I concede. To them, however, I declare, I am not able to be reproached in this rightly as though I wished to be similar to those who have, by a long way, surpassed my skill in more sublime knowledge. I am not such a braggart that I presume to compare myself to the most recent pupils of the authors, but I strive for this only even if I am not aptly succeeding that I might turn back the genius received by the devotion of my suppliant mind onto the giver. For that reason I am not such a lover of myself that, in order to avoid reproach, I would cease to preach the virtue of Christ who works in the saints with whatever ability he will give. If, for instance, my devotion pleases anyone, I shall rejoice. If, however, either for my humility or for the rusticity of my faulty prose it pleases no one, it helps to remember what I have done since, while in other little works of my inexperience, the cheapness of my labor has been connected with the heroic strophies, in this, I honor, I cultivate [it], encompassing in dramatic lines [and] I enrich [it] by avoiding the ruinous delights of the pagans.¹⁹

¹⁹ Hrotsvit *Liber Secundus, Praefatio*, translation mine.

Several words emerge as significant. First, *dictando* is the gerundive ablative of means from *dicto* which means “to say,” “to say often,” “reiterate,” or “to say something to be written down.” Hrotsvit used it to describe her own actions both times the word appeared. Similarly, *dictationis* is the genitive of *diction*; a feminine noun meaning “saying,” “speaking,” “talking,” or “oratory.” She used this word three times twice describing her intentions and once defining the nature of Terence’s readings.

Recitabantur can only be from *recito* which means “to read out loud,” “repeat aloud,” or “recite.” It is in the third person plural indicative passive tense literally translated as “they were recited,” with “they” referring to the works of Terence. A few lines later, Hrotsvit says in regards to the works of Terence *quae nec nostro auditui permittuntur accomodari* or “these things are not permitted to be suitable for our hearing,” specifically identifying the auditory reception of the readings. She goes on to say *Ideoque non sum adeo amatrix mei ut pro vitanda reprehensione Christi qui in sanctis operatur virtutem quocumque ipse dabit posse cessem praedicare*. *Praedicare* translates as “to make publicly known,” “publish,” “preach,” “proclaim,” or “to boast.” Her use of this word indicates her intention: to preach the virtue of Christ who works through the saints – the overriding premise of the plays. These examples show, at the very least, that Terence was read aloud during the tenth century, indicated by Hrotsvit’s choice of words and the verbs in the present and imperfect tenses. If she constructed her plays as appropriate substitutions for the Terentian recitations, it stands to reason that her dramas were also recited and probably performed during her life.

Hrotsvit’s use of the demonstrative *ecce*, a word inviting one to behold or to look at something, is further evidence that the plays were performed during the tenth century.

Zeydel calls the canoness' use of the word her "fondness" for it.²⁰ It was in fact more than that; it was the deliberate employment of a literary device. She used *ecce* multiple times in every drama: seven times in *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais*, six times in *The Fall and Repentance of Mary*, five times in *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus*, four times in *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena*, and three times each in *The Conversion of General Gallicanus* and *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Fides, Spes, and Karitas*. Hrotsvit also used *ecce* a total of seven times in three of the legends, each time in the direct quote of a character. The histories, since told in the narrative, did not necessitate the use of the word at all. The exclusive use of *ecce* as spoken by Hrotsvit's characters corroborates the visual productions of the plays and aloud recitations of the legends.

Another indicator of Hrotsvit's intent lay not in the words she used, but how she used them. In 1942, Sister Mary Bernardine Bergman completed her dissertation, *Hrosvithae Liber Tertius: A Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, for Saint Louis University in which she provided the Latin text, the English translation, and grammatical analyses of Hrotsvit's two epics, *Gesta Ottonis* and *Primordia Coenobii Gandersheimensis*. Bergman has contributed greatly to our understanding of Hrotsvit's works by supplying the only complete English translations of the epics to date. The grammatical analyses were as significant a contribution. She carefully deconstructed the grammar to determine Hrotsvit's style and the techniques used in the compositions. While Bergman lacked any analytical arguments other than the sublimity of her Latin, her work remains a useful guide. She grouped the canoness' rhetorical figures into seven different classes: figures of imagery, amplification, repetition, vivacity, what she calls

²⁰ Zeydel 1945, 451.

“minor figures of rhetoric,” instruments of parallelism, and figures of sound.²¹ After defining the rhetorical figures, I will conduct a similar analysis of the dramas and legends. The examinations will show that Hrotsvit had embedded her intent, the oral communication of her works, within her writings.

Hrotsvit employed several figures of imagery to clarify some of her meanings through the use of “pictorial suggestions.”²² First, she incorporated comparisons – a person or thing that is likened to another person or thing. In order for the comparison to be effective, the person or thing of comparison should be familiar to the audience.²³ Hrotsvit included the use of metonymy or the use of a word in place of another related word. Bergman highlighted the phrase *Exortans patris imperio populum dare colla* (encouraging the people to give their necks to the authority of the father) as an example.²⁴ Giving one’s neck, in this phrase, indicates a submission. Hrotsvit, however, most frequently used metaphors, implicit comparisons or allegorical representations applied to a person or thing, in the epics for a total of fifteen times.²⁵

Not all rhetorical figures were used profusely. Bergman identified three figures of amplification (using more words than necessary to express a thought) in the epics. She found few examples of periphrasis, “a parade of words which elaborates in no wise the original thought;” pleonasm, using more words than necessary to finish a concept; and arsis-thesis, a device that “contrasts ideas by a scheme of negation and affirmation.”²⁶ None of these had been used excessively. Hrotsvit used the figures of repetition, the

²¹ Sister Mary Bernardine Bergman, *Hrotsvithae Liber Tertius: A Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (Covington, KY: The Sisters of Saint Benedict, 1943), 19-20.

²² *Ibid*, 19.

²³ *Ibid*, 19.

²⁴ Hrotsvit, *Gesta Ottonis*, line 613, translation mine.

²⁵ Bergman, 20.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 20, 21.

repeating of words already used, and figures of vivacity, a device that enlivens and gives “movement, and force to the composition” as sparsely throughout the epics.²⁷ Bergman found only one example of anadiplosis, the immediate or interval repetition of a word: *Sic sic maerentis toto conamine cordis* (thus thus with the total effort of a grieving heart).²⁸ Examples of epanaphora, the repeating of a word in two separate phrases or sentences, occurred at least ten times in the epics.²⁹ Bergman catalogued only twelve examples of the five figures of vivacity: asyndeton, neglecting to use connecting participles between arranged groups; rhetorical question, the asking of a question for effect rather than an answer; exclamation, a sudden remark conveying strong emotion or pain; apostrophe, a break in the dialogue to address a person not present such as a prayer to God; and litotes, affirming something by denying its opposite.³⁰

The “minor figures of rhetoric” occurred quite frequently in the epics and served as means by which the author could manipulate her writing for specific purposes.³¹ Hrotsvit, like many of her contemporaries, used hyperbaton, the changing of proper word order for emphasis or rhyme. Bergman counted over 900 examples of hyperbaton in the two epics and classified them into four categories: the separation of a noun and its modifier, the separation of a preposition and its object, the separation of an adverb and the word it modifies, and the separation of a participle and its auxiliary verb.³² Hrotsvit also favored antonomasia, the reference to a subject by its characteristics. She called *Otto rectorem plebi* (leader of the people), *rex pius* (devout king), and *nato amando*

²⁷ *Ibid*, 24.

²⁸ Hrotsvit, *Gesta Ottonis*, line 361, translation mine.

²⁹ Bergman, 22.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 25.

³¹ *Ibid*, 26.

³² *Ibid*, 26.

(loving son) to avoid repeating his name.³³ According to Bergman, Hrotsvit used hyperbole, an exaggerated statement, only once in either of the epics.³⁴

Hrotsvit skillfully used different instruments of parallelism, usually in combination with other figures, to inject variety while preventing monotony in the epics.³⁵ Bergman found instances of isocolon, the “approximate syllabic equality” of the following sequence in a rhythmic period; parison, the “approximate equality in structure and length” of the following sequence; and chiasmus, the inversion of a pair of words in succeeding phrases.³⁶ Bergman identified homoioteleuton, the rhyming of the final syllable in succeeding phrases, as having occurred “in almost every line” of the epics.³⁷

The figures of sound and the classical definition Bergman outlined emerge as the most remarkable findings in her analysis. She defines these figures as “rhetorical devices in which the phonetic element plays an important role.”³⁸ Bergman sought reinforcement from Quintilian, a Roman rhetorician, who said the goal was “to attract the ear of the audience and to excite attention through verbal resemblance, quality, or contrast.”³⁹ The canoness used four different devices in significant quantities: paronomasia, the existence of words with the same root, but with different meanings; polytoton, the use of the same word in different cases; cacophony, “a conscious juxtaposition of two words in which the last syllable of [the] word immediately preceding is identical with the first syllable of the word immediately succeeding;” and alliteration and assonance, the repetition of the same letter in words “immediately successive or at close intervals” and the “intentional

³³ *Ibid*, 27, translation mine.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 28.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 28.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 29.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 30.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 22.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 22.

repetition of the same letter or letters at the end of succeeding words.”⁴⁰ Bergman counted fourteen examples of cacophony and over 300 instances of alliteration and assonance in the epics.⁴¹ The liberal use of figures of sound and end-of-line rhyme throughout the epics is consistent with an intention to have the works recited aloud as well as read silently.

In addition to replicating leonine hexameter, a verse rhyming at the middle and the end of the line that can incorporate alliteration and assonance, Hrotsvit utilized other techniques in the legends than she did in the histories. Writing in leonine hexameter was widely popular during the tenth century, but the results were often “clumsy and monotonous and encourages padding for the sake of the rhyme.”⁴² From the pen of Hrotsvit, however, “if it does not reach the level of great poetry, it at least avoids the worst faults of the same form at the hands of her contemporaries.”⁴³ The decisions she made for stylistic purposes tells us a few things. First, her rhymes, and the sounds they were meant to create, were not incidental. The goal may have been, as Quintilian said, “to relieve monotony by variation of [the] language” since the goal of the majority of the figures of speech were an “aim at delighting the hearer.”⁴⁴ Second, the extensive use of leonine hexameter attests to the popularity of the technique that Dales referred to, placing the canoness stylistically similar to her contemporaries. Finally, if an orator utilized the various rhetorical figures so that “every sound may bewitch the hearer with all the charm of music,”⁴⁵ then the works had been intended to be spoken aloud.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 23-24.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 23-24.

⁴² Richard C. Dales, *The Intellectual Life of Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1980), 107.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 122.

⁴⁴ Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* IX. I. 21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, IX. II. 5.

Although the canoness relied heavily on her rhyming scheme, she continued her use of various rhetorical devices in the legends. One such example is the synecdoche, *eius et imperio gentes omnes dare colla* (“and all foreigners gave their necks to his authority”) found on line 88 of *Pelagius*, which can be compared to line 613 of *Gesta Ottonis*: *exortans patris imperio populum dare colla* (“encouraging the people to give their necks to the authority of the father”). She used polytoton, *regem regum* (“king of kings”)⁴⁶ and *hac tam tristifica tandem ratione peracta / mente satis tristi componit membra quieti* (“when he had finally completed this doleful discourse, he composed himself to rest with a very sad heart”),⁴⁷ cacophony, *remeare relictam*,⁴⁸ and epanaphora, *quod credi maius vel quod posset fore maius* (“and what can be believed to be greater, or what will be able to be greater”).⁴⁹ She also employed alliteration and assonance throughout the legends. In *Pelagius*, for example, Hrotsvit says *dixit nolle ducem populo dimittere dulcem* (“he said he refused to dismiss the sweet duke to the people”),⁵⁰ *sintque tibi socii servi qui sunt simulacri* (“and they may be allies to you who are servants of idols”),⁵¹ *descripsisse diem dignum ducebat et annum* (“he thought it proper to note this day and year”),⁵² and *astans astrigeram mox ascensurus ad aulam* (“when he was about to ascend into the starry heaven”).⁵³ Hrotsvit complemented the leonine hexameter with assonance as in *ipse sed adveniens animam sumam bendictam* (“but I myself will come and will receive

⁴⁶ Hrotsvit, *Pelagius*, line 87, translation mine.

⁴⁷ Hrotsvit, *Dionysius* in *The Non-Dramatic Works of Hrosvitha: Text, Translation, and Commentary* trans Sister M. Gonsalva Wiegand, O.S.F. (St. Louis, MO: s.n., 1936), line 65-66.

⁴⁸ Hrotsvit, *Maria*, line 310.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, line 299, translation mine.

⁵⁰ Hrotsvit, *Pelagius*, line 139, translation mine.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, line 249, translation mine.

⁵² Hrotsvit, *Dionysius*, in Wiegand, line 12.

⁵³ Hrotsvit, *Ascensio*, in Wiegand, line 21.

thy blessed soul”),⁵⁴ *postquam naturam iam de busto redivivam* (“and now, after which time the form returned from the grave”),⁵⁵ and *illic forte tuum summa cum pace reversum* (“therein, by chance and with greatest peace, your reversal”).⁵⁶ Thus, the combination of leonine hexameter with other figures of speech, specifically the figures of sound, in significant quantities evident in the legends as well as the histories suggest that Hrotsvit’s desired effect was achieved through auditory reception, that is, through spoken recitations.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, line 86.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, line 141, translation mine.

⁵⁶ Hrotsvit, *Maria*, line 248, translation mine.

CHAPTER IV

THE LEGENDS

Considering the rhetorical devices and the content she chose; Hrotsvit crafted her series of legends in a way that could have allowed them to be used for instruction. And while we do not know where she obtained her sources or what some of those sources were, most scholars, notably Helene Homeyer, cite the *Acta Sanctorum* as modern collections of Hrotsvit's hagiographic source material.⁵⁷ It includes the *Vitae Patrum* begun by Father Rosweyde in 1615 as well as an extensive collection of saints' legends. In 1632, John Bollandus began expanding the undertaking and, over the centuries, his initiative has become the massive collection it is today. The itinerary to obtain copies of manuscripts took the Bollandists through much of Italy and France, but never into Sicily or the Scandinavian countries.⁵⁸ While the *Acta* may be one of the better sources scholars have at their disposal when researching medieval hagiography,⁵⁹ for the purposes of this paper, I will rely on the *Golden Legend* over the *Acta* when no other source material can

⁵⁷ Katharina Wilson, "Gallicanus Notes;" in *The Dramas of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim* trans Katharina Wilson (Saskatchewan: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1985), 51; "Notes to Dulcitius," 61; and "Notes to Sapientia," 131.

⁵⁸ Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Work of the Bollandists Through Three Centuries, 1615-1915* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1922), 79; 73.

⁵⁹ Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 17.

be identified because Jacobus de Voragine compiled his five volumes closer to the time of Hrotsvit. The popular volumes of de Voragine may reflect a more similar perspective regarding saintly veneration having been written almost four hundred years before the Bollandists began the *Acta*. It must be noted, however, that neither should be relied upon as conclusive source material that Hrotsvit had access to. I will also use the apocryphal sources for comparison in the cases that Hrotsvit did even though stories like the Harlot Thais appear in the *Golden Legend*. Finally, there are incidents where the canoness relied on oral stories as the basis for her works. No comparison will be possible in those cases, but since she was the first person to pen the narratives they will yield valuable information regarding her perception of the received stories.

Hrotsvit's began her first legend, *History of the Nativity and of the Praiseworthy Conversation of the Immaculate Mother of God, Which I Have Found in the Works of Saint James, the Kinsman of the Lord*, with an exaltation of Mary's greatness. She traced Mary's ancestry from the royal house of David and identified Mary's parents as Joachim and Anna. For the first twenty years of their marriage, Anna remained childless – a sign of disgrace in the ancient world. Anna, beside herself with grief, prays to God and a received a message in return. A winged angel appears before her to tell her she would indeed conceive. Another angel appears to Joachim, who had left his wife on account of the disgrace, at the same time. Joachim learns of God's plan for Mary, his child with Anna, Mary's blessed nature, and God's plan for Him. Joachim returns to his wife to fulfill the prophecy.

Mary spends her life in true devotion to God. She prays most of the day and never has an unkind word to say. Mary gives herself so completely to God that she refuses

marriage, intending to remain a virgin and uses the lives of Abel and Elias as support for the righteousness of her decision. As was Jewish custom, the priests determine Mary is to be wed regardless of her decision. The aged Joseph of the tribe of Juda is chosen to be her husband.

Hrotsvit relayed an account of the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary. The canoness, however, refrained from going into detail because "these things are all told in the Gospels, and they far exceed our feeble effort of narration."⁶⁰ She instead told about Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, and the subsequent events. Two years after learning of the birth of the King of the Jews, Emperor Herod orders the death of all infants in Bethlehem. Joseph avoids this fate for Jesus by leading Him and Mary into Egypt where the Son demonstrates his powers. He orders a tree to bend from great heights so Mary could pick the fruit, a spring to swell so Joseph could drink, and uses his words to subdue the savage beasts. When Joseph, Mary, and Jesus enter the city Sotines, the pagan statues fall face down to the earth. The leader of the city prostrated himself before Mother and the Child and immediately converts.

Hrotsvit obtained the source for *Maria* from the apocryphal (hidden writings) Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. The writings, unknown in the East, were written for the "further veneration of Mary" in the West with prefaces connected to Jerome and were compiled in the eighth or ninth centuries.⁶¹ In a letter addressed to Jerome and the bishops Cromatius and Heliodorus, the author acknowledged the use of apocryphal writings by heretics. He said his Latin translation served "to counteract the craft of heretics" who legitimize their works by incorporating the births of Mary and Jesus and stated that the goal of the

⁶⁰ Hrotsvit, *Maria* in Wiegand, line 539.

⁶¹ J.K. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M.R. James* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 85-86.

translations was not to add them to the canonical writings, but rather to “disclose the falsehood of heresy.”⁶² The canoness’ preface to her series of legends includes the statement: “Portions of this work have been borrowed from apocryphal sources . . . When I discovered the real state of affairs, I declined to discard my subject matter, on the plea that what appears to be false, may eventually be proved to be true”⁶³ which initially appears to contradict the preface to the translation of the compilation. Most likely, Hrotsvit would have had access to the preface as well. While Hrotsvit argued for the truth in what had been deemed false, she did not refer to the heresies associated with the texts. She argued for the validation for the texts themselves, possibly even the inclusion of such works as canon. Her works, therefore, support the apocryphal works as vital to the worship and understanding of the Christian faith.

Hrotsvit deliberately omitted some details from the apocryphal source to frame the perception of the Holy Family. For example, her legend does not include passages from the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew’s account of Jesus’ youth that tell of Him striking other children dead, questioning the adults around Him, and challenging His teachers. While Hrotsvit may have eliminated the sections to preserve the brevity of the legend, it is more likely that her goal was to preserve the benign perception of Jesus. To an audience of new Christians or those reaffirming their faith, Jesus must remain forgiving and kind without the possibility of being perceived as proud or malevolent. The virtuous saints whose stories follow cannot perform miracles through the power of a hostile Christ.

⁶² *Translations from The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew in The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M.R. James* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 91-92.

⁶³ Hrotsvit, *First Book, Preface* in Wiegand, line 11; lines 15-16.

Thus, Hrotsvit could not have included the sections as a part of her opus and intentionally excluded certain passages.

Hrotsvit constructed her second legend at a fraction of the length of her first, totaling only 150 lines. *The Ascension of our Lord* begins forty days after Jesus' death when He appears to His disciples and orders them to preach His word to "all nations" (*gentes*).⁶⁴ They must teach the Commandments and the nature of the Holy Trinity while baptizing others. Jesus also tells his disciples to convert others, cure diseases, and preserve charity. He then recalls the nature of His physical death at the hand of the Jews and His pleas for the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus ascends into heaven, not leaving His flock but remaining with them always with the Holy Spirit till the end of time. King David is among the "throng of angels"⁶⁵ welcoming Jesus into heaven. Jesus then delivers a final farewell to his disciples as He reaches heaven. Suddenly, two men in white stood near the disciple and asked:

Tell us, we pray you, men of Galilee, why do you stand here gazing in astonishment with your faces and eyes fixed upwards? This same Jesus, Who alone before your wondering gaze has raised Himself up and has ascended into heaven, will assuredly come as Judge in the form in which He now rises above the skies.

Hrotsvit closed the legend with the disciples hearing the Voice of God placing Jesus at His right hand.

Accounts of the *Ascensio* were abundant throughout the Middle Ages and, most certainly, during Hrotsvit's lifetime. She had access to many of those as a learned woman in a religious community and incorporated elements of several into her legend. The canonical accounts include the Gospel of Luke 24:50-51, Mark 16:14-19, and the

⁶⁴ Hrotsvit, *Ascensio* in Wiegand, line 25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, line 93.

first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus' words in Mark 16:15 resemble Hrotsvit's – both accounts have Jesus instructing His disciples to preach, to baptize, and to cure illnesses. Luke's brief version includes the location "near Bethany,"⁶⁶ presumably Mount Olivet. Hrotsvit obtained the information about the two men in white from the Acts of the Apostles where they say to the disciples:

Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at the skies? This Jesus who has been taken from you will return, just as you saw him go up into the heavens.

This report also fixes the location of the *Ascensio* at Mount Olivet. Hrotsvit, however, made one significant change from the material she obtained from the Acts of the Apostles. She changed the passive action of Jesus' ascension related by the angels to an active one; from "Jesus has been taken" to Jesus who "has raised Himself up."

Throughout the Middle Ages, church fathers had worked to create a set of dogmatic beliefs about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Hrotsvit reflects the Catholic conviction that Jesus ascended into heaven of His own will. The only information Hrotsvit did not glean from the orthodox accounts was Jesus' version of His death at the hands of the Jews, His farewell to Mary, the inclusion of David, and the disciples hearing God's words to Jesus. While it is not immediately clear where Hrotsvit obtained these details, each piece has a parallel somewhere in the rest of her works. In *Theophilus* and *Basilius*, she relays the mistrust of Jews; Mary is essential to Theophilus' salvation and the namesake of the main character in *The Fall and Repentance of Mary*; Otto is compared to King David in the *Gesta Ottonis* as is Gongolf in the legend that bears his name; and finally God appears to several people in *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus*.

⁶⁶ Luke 24:50.

Sister Gonsalva Wiegand referred to Hrotsvit's apocryphal source for *Ascensio* as based on a narration from a Greek source translated by an ambiguous, "John the bishop." Katharina Wilson concurs, but neither identify the "Greek source."⁶⁷ Initial attempts to locate the source yielded nothing. The *Golden Legend*, though very different than Hrotsvit's version, includes David speaking at the Ascension, the multitude of angels present, and God speaking to Jesus. De Voragine appears to have gotten his information from the annals of St. Denis in Paris. Further research must be done to determine Hrotsvit's source and St. Denis may be a logical starting point, especially considering the western influences of her other works.

Ascensio emerges as a pivotal piece in Hrotsvit's collection because it contains information that frames the rest of her work. Hrotsvit, in her own words, intended to show how Christ manifests Himself through the saints. *Ascensio* first relays Christ's ascension, His veneration of Mary, and an account of His death: a death to be imitated by the martyrs who follow Him. It introduces the important themes of preaching, something Hrotsvit herself admitted to doing as well as something that each of the martyrs in her legends do; baptism, a sacrament critical to the sequence of events in each of the following legends; and miraculous curing of illnesses, acts that the martyrs themselves do or that happen at their tombs. Thus, she prepared her audiences for what they are about to experience in the subsequent stories and provided them with a point of reference. By showing what Christ's ascension was like she can show how the various saints imitated Him.

⁶⁷ Sister M. Gonsalva Wiegand, O.S.F., "Notes on the *Ascensio*" in Wiegand, 84; Katharina Wilson, 1998, 9.

Hrotsvit began the legends of the saints with *The Martyrdom of Blessed Gongolf*.

Gongolf lived during the reign of Pepin in the West Frankish kingdom. Baptized in infancy, Gongolf's mother raises him as a devout Christian. Pepin brings him to court as proconsul on account of his "excellence" where he serves as a "noble example" to "all people" by distributing his wealth to the poor, and "giving a hand to the maimed and a foot to the halt."⁶⁸ His greatness is demonstrated by his victories on the battlefields and is further shown by his fairness; for example, instead of ousting a farmer whose spring he wishes to have, Gongolf purchases it for one hundred silver coins. When the saintly man reaches his wall-surrounded home, he offers the welcoming feast his servants laid before him to the poor and the feeble.

Obliged by custom and by his position, Gongolf finally marries. Despite being of noble descent herself and being quite beautiful, Gongolf's unnamed wife, nevertheless, succumbs to her passions for one of her husband's priests (*clericus*). News of his lady's infidelity spreads throughout the kingdom. Gongolf wrestles with his dilemma: should he punish her according to law or forgive her according to his nature. Upon proof of her guilt by the hand of God, Gongolf decides to send the priest into exile and pardons his wife, but forbids her from living with him. Satan soon manifests himself in the exiled man in the form of a deep hatred for the nobility, specifically Gongolf. He finds his lover and convinces her to help him destroy the general. The cleric mortally wounds Gongolf and, in turn, he is disemboweled "by the avenging hand of God."⁶⁹ Gongolf on the other hand, ascends into heaven because of his saintly virtue.

⁶⁸ Hrotsvit, *Gongolf* in Wiegand, line 51; lines 60-64.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, line 468.

The miracles attributed to Gongolf continue following his burial. The blind visiting his tomb receive their sight and the deaf receive their hearing; the lame can walk and the sick are cured. God punishes Gongolf's wife as well: after denying the sanctity of Gongolf's tomb and publically denouncing God's miracles through the relics, for her pride, the woman releases flatulence with every word spoken for the remainder of her life.

Wiegand proposes two different possibilities Hrotsvit may have used as her source material for *Gongolf*. First, she suggests the legend is based on an oral story of a Burgundian noble who was born in Varennes in 720, served the court of Pepin the Short, and was killed by his wife's lover on May 11, 760. Miracles were performed at his tomb and his relics were later distributed to Langres, Eichstadt, and Bamberg, while his armor remained at a church in Varennes near a warm spring.⁷⁰ On the other hand, she asserts that "one is almost convinced" that Hrotsvit used the *Acta Sanctorum* account because the two accounts contain passages of "striking similarity."⁷¹ Wailes argues against a French Burgundy saying Hrotsvit referred to the Ottonian state ruled by Adelheid's family.⁷² The Duchy of Burgundy, situated just west of Lotharingia, included the cities of Varennes and Langres and was indeed separate from the Frankish Kingdom of Burgundy during the time of Hrotsvit. The many geopolitical changes that had occurred in region in the two hundred years between the dates of Gongolf's life and her composition make any ethnic distinction irrelevant. In fact, the kingdom of Burgundy during the origination of the legend included the duchy of the tenth century. Part of the Ottonian agenda aligned themselves with the Carolingian legacy while at the same time

⁷⁰ Sister M. Gonsalva Wiegand, O.S.F., "Notes on the Saint Gongolf, the Martyr" in Wiegand, 121.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 121.

⁷² Wailes, 249.

carving out a legacy of their own. Gongolf's designation as a Burgundian serving the Frankish king fixed the location of the saint in the West and in the court of a reputable and recognizable leader.

Hrotsvit contrasted the sanctity of Gongolf with his unfaithful wife and the corrupted cleric to introduce the theme of a Christ-like nature in certain lay persons that she developed through the rest of her works. Once Hrotsvit portrayed the ideals as she did with both Mary and Jesus in the first two legends, she moved to drawing comparisons between their agents on Earth. She identified the behaviors one must have to be considered virtuous: victory in battle, fairness in dealings with others, generosity to those who need it, forgiveness in the face of aggression, and, above all, an unrelenting faith in God. She also depicted the opposite: infidelity, selfishness, conspiracy against a leader, amoral clergy, and denial of God and His miracles. By aligning the saintly characteristics with human behaviors, Hrotsvit told her audience, and in fact created a template for the following works on how the saints came to be and why they should be venerated. She likewise created models for the punishments for evildoers: one for crimes against God, punished by God and another against mortals. Hrotsvit instructed her listeners, in this case it is most likely the nobility because of the cleric's expressed hatred of them, that humans have the choice of appropriate punishments, but should choose to forgive like Jesus did; any further punishment will be God's decision. The themes of sexual inappropriateness, Satan's manifestation in humans, miracles at reliquaries, and God's omnipotence recur in the following five legends as well as the six dramas.

Hrotsvit began her fourth legend, *The Sufferings of Pelagius, the Most Precious Martyr, Who in Our Times, at Cordova, was Crowned with Martyrdom*, by describing the

city of Cordova and its current state of affairs: occupation by “the treacherous tribe of the savage Saracens.”⁷³ The Arabs and “the leader of that barbaric race” have conquered the lands and corrupted its Christian origins.⁷⁴ Many years pass and the city came to be ruled by Abdrahamen (Abd al-Rahman III). He, at once instigates war with his Christian neighbors during which time he captures twelve nobles as well as the Gallican king. Pelagius, son of the king, offers his captivity in place of his father the king, whom he is unable to ransom.

Abdrahamen condemns the youth to a dark prison upon their return to Cordova. Those in the court, overcome with Pelagius’ beauty, plead with the king to make the captive a page instead. Pelagius now bathed and arrayed with fine clothes and jewels enters the king’s court and immediately catches the eye of his captor. The king approaches the prince, embraces him, and attempts to steal a kiss. Pelagius turns his head and denounces the king’s advances because of his paganism. Threatening Pelagius with death, Abdrahamen chastises the youth and tries to kiss him again. This time Pelagius struck the king, staining his beard and clothes with blood. Embarrassed, the king orders the youth to be hurled over the city’s walls where he would meet his death. The prince’s body, however, remains unscathed. Thoroughly angered, the king orders Pelagius beheaded and his body disposed of in the waters surrounding the city.

Pelagius’ holy body did not remain in the water for long. Fishermen notice the decapitated body and brought it aboard. They also recover the severed head and recognize the remains as those of Pelagius. The men sell their find to a monastery within Cordova’s walls. The monks construct an appropriate tomb for the youth where people

⁷³ Hrotsvit, *Pelagius* in Wiegand, line 26.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, line 32.

are subsequently cured of their ailments. The pastor decides he must remove all doubt regarding the sanctity of the new saint so he orders Pelagius' head committed to fiery furnace. He prays God will provide proof and, after an hour in the fire, "the head gleamed forth now more resplendently than pure gold, utterly unmarred [by] the mighty flames."⁷⁵

Pelagius was based on an oral account of the saint's martyrdom Hrotsvit received from an eye witness, presumably from one of the trade entourages Otto I commissioned to Cordova. The Spanish version, despite its dissimilarities, dates Pelagius death to c. 921.⁷⁶ Though no comparison to an original source is possible, *Pelagius* is a window to view Hrotsvit's perception of other peoples, specifically Muslims. It may also reflect opinions held by others in the court and the religious community. Whether or not it reflects popular opinion about Muslims in the medieval West is difficult to say with any certainty. On the other hand, given the response to Pope Urban II's call to defend the Holy Land from Muslim forces approximately one hundred years later Hrotsvit's description may be a good indicator of a growing popular sentiment against Muslims.

Wailes' analysis of *Pelagius* divides the play into two distinct sections. In the first part, Hrotsvit contextualizes the play, creating a political history. The story adopts a spiritual focus with the introduction of Pelagius himself.⁷⁷ Wailes contends that the poetess presented *Pelagius* as a treatise intended to provoke Otto into taking action in Islamic Spain; I would, however, challenge this conclusion. First, the play's political implications are not restricted to the first half, they run throughout the legend. Second,

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, line 403.

⁷⁶ Sister M. Gonsalva Wiegand, O.S.F., "Notes on The Pelagius" in Wiegand, 154; Linda McMillin, "'Weighed down with a thousand evils': Images of Muslims in Hrotsvit's *Pelagius*" in Brown et al, 41.

⁷⁷ Wailes, 70.

nowhere in the text does Hrotsvit allude to a Christian re-conquest of the region. She was actually making altogether different implications. By constructing the Muslim society as evil and deliberately portraying it as intolerant Hrotsvit highlighted the perceived cultural differences between her world and that of Muslim Spain. *Pelagius* thus serves as a form of politico-religious propaganda intent upon increasing the gulf between the two societies and demonstrating the moral superiority of Christianity and its leaders.

Writing *Pelagius* fulfilled the primary objective of communicating the saint's legend, but in doing so Hrotsvit also tackled several other issues. First, the canoness helped introduce northern Germany to the behaviors of Muslims in the historical context of a saint's legend. The introduction led to the second goal where Hrotsvit constructed a perception of otherness based on real people and real events. Linda McMillin calls her depictions "misguided stereotypes" and concludes that the specific identification of Abd al-Rahman III was "a bold move to satirize a contemporary figure."⁷⁸ Anti-Semitic representations in the next two legends, however, suggest that Hrotsvit's negative description of this foreign leader was more than satire. Hrotsvit may have used the Muslim leader to personify the evils of Islam while locating them in the city of Cordova. Finally, she presented her perception of another civilization in the orthodox framework of hagiography thus giving her presentation the semblance of spiritual authority.

The fifth legend, *Fall and Conversion of Theophilus, Vicar of His Bishop*, is the story of the renowned and virtuous Theophilus who lives in Sicily when it was "freed . . . from its black darkness of error."⁷⁹ His training begins as an oblate, when he is entrusted to a bishop by his parents. Theophilus eventually reaches the office of vicarate where he

⁷⁸ McMillin in Brown et al, 42; 53.

⁷⁹ Hrotsvit, *Theophilus* in Wiegand, line 3.

serves his bishop and his flock with the utmost devotion and faith. He pays special attention to the poor, orphaned, and widowed to whom he gives clothes and food. When the bishop dies, the congregation and the clergy call for Theophilus to take his place. Acknowledging this, the archbishop summons Theophilus before him, but the vicar refuses to go. A crowd that had gathered there drags him to the archbishop where he pleads to be excused of the office, claiming he was not worthy. The archbishop, convinced by the pleas, appoints another worthy man who, in turn, replaces Theophilus with another vicar.

Theophilus is relieved at first, but that soon yields to treachery and hate. He submits to “lesser powers,” the powers of Satan, and seeks the assistance of a “certain wicked Jew.”⁸⁰ In order for the humiliation to be cured, Theophilus must agree “to live under the sway of the magician’s master.”⁸¹ The “accursed magician” then leads Theophilus to a night ceremony complete with “inhabitants of hell” and presided over by “the iniquitous prince, who is the king of death and the son of perdition.”⁸² Satan agrees to restore honor to Theophilus providing he renounce Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and his own baptism. Theophilus signs a contract that, in exchange for veneration by many, requires him to commit his soul to darkness “throughout endless ages.”⁸³

When Theophilus returns to his city the archbishop and the masses praise him with the former lamenting his decision to reject the holy man. The fallen man enjoys his new position at first, but is soon struck with remorse. His only recourse is to beseech the Virgin Mary to intercede on his behalf. He consigns himself to her temple for forty days

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, lines 82-83.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, line 90.

⁸² *Ibid*, line 95; line 100; lines 102-3.

⁸³ *Ibid*, line 127.

without food or rest. The Queen of Heaven appears to Theophilus when he finally surrenders to sleep. After a lengthy conversation with the sinner, Mary agrees to seek Theophilus' forgiveness from the Father and the Son. She returns to the penitent man in three days and tells him his sins will be forgiven provided that he serves the Lord faithfully. He agrees, but expresses his concern for the contract he signed with the devil. After three more days, he wakes to find the contract on his chest. The next day, Theophilus enters the church, prostrates himself at the feet of the bishop, and recounts the series of events. The bishop sends the message to all sinners that God loves them and wishes them to convert. He burns the contract then says mass. Three days later, Theophilus dies and ascends into heaven escorted by the Virgin Mary.

Hrotsvit's source for the Theophilus story was probably Paul the Deacon, who dedicated a version of the story to Charlemagne.⁸⁴ The legend, as related by both Paul and Hrotsvit in part resembles the life of Pope Gregory the Great, whose life Paul also chronicled. The similarity between the two legends may have caused Paul to pen Theophilus' story as well. Paul, however, did not mention Theophilus' social status, instead noted only his excellent character. Wailes surmises that Hrotsvit designed the bishop's noble heritage, personal history as an oblate, and prideful behavior because she recognized similar behaviors in her connections with members of other religious communities. He, however, suggests that archbishop Brun of Cologne drew Hrotsvit to this particular legend through his worldliness, fondness for secular learning, and the way in which he instructed his pupils.⁸⁵ If Dronke is correct, however, it is unlikely that Hrotsvit would have focused specifically on Brun because he functioned as one of her

⁸⁴ Sister M. Gonsalva Wiegand, O.S.F., "Notes on The Theophilus" in Wiegand, 186; Wailes, 79.

⁸⁵ Wailes, 86-87.

patrons at court.⁸⁶ A more likely candidate may have been one of the leaders of the monastery at Hildesheim with whom the abbesses of Gandersheim had several altercations regarding their autonomy.

The eleventh-century emergence of a legend about Gerbert of Aurillac (Pope Sylvester II) may attest to the popularity of Hrotsvit's writings in her contemporary society.

Gerbert was born c. 938/50 as a peasant in France. Through years of diligent study, dedicated teaching, and imperial sponsorship he was eventually appointed pope by Otto III and was consecrated on Easter Sunday April 9, 999. During his life, he also held the archbishoprics of Reims, Bobbio, and Ravenna. Gerbert's exceptional rise to the highest ecclesiastical office in Christendom caused some to say that, in exchange for his success, Gerbert made a pact with the devil.⁸⁷ The English historian William of Malmesbury perpetuated the legend in his *Gesta Regum* and received his information from "some now lost German source."⁸⁸ Gerbert enjoyed a strong patronage by the Ottos. He was chosen by Otto I to tutor his son Otto II, he witnessed Otto II's wedding to Theophanu as well as their coronation, and he helped secure Otto III's position as emperor in 983 despite the king being a three-year old boy. Gerbert's deep connections to the Ottonian emperors brought him into the same circles as Hrotsvit's patrons, audiences, and possibly the canoness herself. Circulating the legend helped justify to society a peasant's rise to pope. It may thus represent a contemporary conflation of Gerbert and *Theophilus* with Hrotsvit possibly serving as one of the lost German sources William of Malmesbury drew upon.

⁸⁶ Dronke, 57.

⁸⁷ Anna Marie Flusche, *The Life and Legend of Gerbert of Aurillac: The Organbuilder who became Pope Sylvester II* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

Hrotsvit also made other changes including locating the legend in Sicily “when the light of Faith increasing throughout the regions of the world had freed [it] from its black darkness of error.”⁸⁹ While Hrotsvit was referring to a non-Western occupation of the island, the exact time period remains ambiguous. It is unlikely that she would have implied the Byzantine rule of Sicily because of Otto II’s marriage to the Empress Theophanu. She could be alluding to the Muslim control of the island, but this is uncertain. The first full-scale Muslim invasion of Sicily occurred in 827 and they only gradually obtained control of the island. By the end of the ninth century, only condensed sections of Christian resistance remained.⁹⁰ Hrotsvit may have been referring to one of these isolated instances, but further research into the exact time period to which she was referring is needed for any conclusions to be made. Identifying the sources Hrotsvit used not only provides a more complete picture of her works, but it also helps us understand the ways in which ideas and cultural products travelled through Western Europe during the Middle Ages.

Theophilus and its successor, *Basilius* receive copious attention from historians because of the literary significance of the plays. With the two legends, Hrotsvit was the first to introduce the Faust theme in Germany,⁹¹ the first to do so in poetry, and the first female to portray men making pacts with the devil. While the concept of a bargain was new for Hrotsvit and her audiences, the theme of the anti-Christian as liaison for the devil emerged in all of her saints’ tales. It therefore must be viewed as an essential element to her compositions. In her first four legends (*Maria*, *Ascensio*, *Gongolf*, and *Pelagius*),

⁸⁹ Hrotsvit, *Theophilus* in Wiegand, lines 1-3.

⁹⁰ Denis Mack Smith, *A History of Sicily: Medieval Sicily 800-1713* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1968), 3-5.

⁹¹ Wilson, 1998, 10.

Hrotsvit showed how the devil manifests himself in the non-Christian whether they be pagan or Muslim. For her fifth and sixth legends, *Theophilus* and *Basilius*, she portrayed the devil himself with Jewish representative. The deliberate casting not only reinforced the message that non-Christians were evil, but it portrayed Jews as corrupt as the devil not merely corruptible by him.

Hrotsvit framed her sixth legend, originally untitled but later called *Basilius*, in the time of Bishop Basilius of Caesarea (Basil the Great, 329-379). A wealthy noble named Proterius lives with his daughter. He, out of love for her, his only heir, commits her to a monastery thus preserving her virginity. Proterius' servant, "pricked by the arrows of passion," becomes infatuated with the girl and becomes increasingly frustrated because he knew a marriage with her is forbidden.⁹² Therefore, he finds a magician who he thinks can help him, but the magician tells him only "the prince of eternal darkness" can unite a lady to her servant.⁹³ The unnamed servant agrees and is instructed to write his eternal dedication to the "prince of the infernal regions" on paper.⁹⁴ He meets his new master that night at a pagan tomb. The devil angrily admonishes the supplicant about those who approach him with their desires then seek forgiveness in Christ. He, therefore, requires the servant to denounce his baptism and sign the document, finalizing their pact.

Proterius' daughter, now infected with an illicit passion for the servant, tells her father she wishes to be the servant's wife instead of a chaste virgin. Disgraced, Proterius finally gives his daughter to the servant after she threatens him with her suicide. He bestows great wealth upon them but gives her a final warning of damnation. The unholy union did not last long for she heard, because God willed it, that her husband-to-be was not

⁹² Hrotsvit, *Basilius* in Wiegand, lines 35-36.

⁹³ *Ibid*, line 49.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, line 55.

Catholic, but a servant of the devil. She falls to the ground crying out “He who does not choose to listen to his well beloved parents will never be saved. This has been proved in the present sad affair.”⁹⁵ She confronts her man and he details his crime after an initial denial.

The couple seeks the counsel of Bishop Basilius who quickly decides what must be done. The bishop locks the sinner in a dark cave to repent. After three days, the bishop returns and inquires of the penance. The penitent man told him of the evil spirits that were verbally and physically torturing him. The bishop leaves and returns again. The spirits threaten the man still, but at a distance. Basilius leaves once more and returns forty days later to find the sinner fully repentant and joyful. The next day, the bishop leads the man to the church. Once the penitent’s feet touch the sacred ground the devil appears and drags his property back. The bishop orders him to release the man, but the devil responds with a reference to the document renouncing his baptism. After Basilius leads the congregation in prayer, the document lands at his feet and the man is saved.

Locating Hrotsvit’s source for *Basilius* has been problematic. Wiegand simply suggests that Hrotsvit used a ninth century *vita* by the subdeacon Ursus.⁹⁶ Wailes agrees, but also defers to Homeyer’s connection between *Basilius* and *De Proterii Filia* in *The Cambridge Songs* - an eleventh century collection of stories.⁹⁷ Ursus’ translation was one among several translations of *Vita Basilii* that existed north of the Alps prior to the tenth century. Hincmar of Riems (806-882), for example, “cited verbatim” the story of the young man who denied Christ because of a woman as a warning against “the kinds of

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, line 153-156.

⁹⁶ Sister M. Gonsalva Wiegand, O.S.F., “Notes on The Basilius” in Wiegand, 186.

⁹⁷ Wailes, 88.

sorcerers and soothsayers” Christians should avoid,⁹⁸ an implicit instruction in Hrotsvit’s version. The Greek translator, Euphemius and the abbot of Santa Maria, Anastasius Bibliothecarius also wrote about the life of St. Basil.⁹⁹ While it remains unclear which source Hrotsvit had access to, she may have used either Hincmar or Euphemius because both resided in the West Frankish kingdom – a region from which she had gained some of her other sources.

Another possible source emerges when one considers the Anglo-Saxon connections to the Ottonian throne. Otto I’s first wife, Eadgyth, was given to him as a political tribute by King Athelstan (r. 924-939), her half brother. Athelstan was himself a patron of royal abbeys endowing them with gifts including relics. A fragment of *Vita Basilii* translated by Euphemius along with Basil’s tooth and crosier have been found in Exeter and traced to Athelstan’s patronage.¹⁰⁰ The monk Aelfric (c. 955-1016) wrote extensively including a chronicle of Basil’s life most likely using the Exeter fragment as his source. What makes Aelfric’s work significant for the purpose here is the inclusion of the legend of Theophilus in his homilies. Aelfric’s homily for the feast of the Assumption of Mary relates Basil’s miracles along with Mary’s intercession on Theophilus’ behalf.¹⁰¹ Aelfric paired the two situations relaying the pacts made with the devil in a similar manner as Hrotsvit. The royal connection does not imply the introduction of Basil in the Holy Roman Empire through the arrival of Eadgyth. It does, however, provide another possibility for it. Euphemius, Aelfric, and Hrotsvit share another detail in their works – the inclusion of Julian the Apostate’s status as a former Christian, information not present

⁹⁸ Gabriella Corona, ed., *Aelfric’s Life of St. Basil the Great: Background and Context* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: UK, D.S. Brewer, 2006), 19.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 39.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 51.

in Ursus' version.¹⁰² Hrotsvit did not introduce the character until the second half of her play *The Conversion of General Gallicanus*.

Hrotsvit may have chosen this particular story for a similar reason as Hincmar, though she may have been warning Christians against Jews specifically with her choice of words. The canoness preserved the reference to the “magician” (*magum*)¹⁰³ also called the “perverse friend of deceit” as well as the character of the devil himself in *Basilus*. She used the phrases “magic fraud” (*magica fraude*)¹⁰⁴ and “accursed magician” (*maledictus magus*)¹⁰⁵ when referring to the deeds and the person of the “wicked Jew” in *The Theophilus*. Therefore, even though she did not explicitly call the magician from *Basilus* Jewish, her use of the same terms implied as much. Her continued depiction of a Jew as agent of the devil mirrors the antagonistic attitude towards Jews Agobard of Lyon relayed to Louis the Pious in c. 827¹⁰⁶ and thus was a deliberate deployment of her, if not a dissemination of a wider held opinion about Jews.

The canoness also introduced into *Basilus* a social hierarchy, absent in the original, that both reflected the world she lived in as well as taught her audiences important life lessons they could relate to. Based on her negative depictions of non-Christians, Hrotsvit almost certainly intended the works for an audience of Christians with the stereotypes reaffirming cultural assumptions. With this legend, as in some of her other works, her depictions of people of varying classes functioned similarly except that she did not negatively portray them. The invented social status of the erring youth was an important

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁰³ Hrotsvit, *Basilus* in Wiegand, line 54; line 45.

¹⁰⁴ Hrotsvit, *Theophilus* in Wiegand, line 85.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, line 94.

¹⁰⁶ Agobard of Lyon, “On the Insolence of Jews to Louis the Pious 826/827,” ed Peter Halsall *Medieval Sourcebook: Anti-Semitism*, 1998, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/agobard-insolence.html> (accessed December 28, 2009).

modification Hrotsvit made from her source and, according to Wailes, was the reason Proterius objects to the marriage.¹⁰⁷ She, however, showed the youth's soul as worthy of salvation as the fallen vicar's from the previous legend. While the servant is clearly not able to legally marry a noble maiden, he is more sympathetically portrayed than Muslims or Jews in the plays, who have no hope for redemption.

The Passion of Saint Dionysius, the Illustrious Martyr is Hrotsvit's seventh legend and is set at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. One day Dionysius, an astrologer in Memphis observes darkness blotting out the sun. He takes note of the phenomenon and searches through his books to find whether the eclipse had been predicted. Since it had not been, he interpretes it as an omen by "some God as yet unknown [but] presently [being] manifested to the world."¹⁰⁸ Dionysius returns to his native land of Athens and builds an altar dedicated to this "Unknown God."¹⁰⁹ He converts to Christianity after a meeting with Paul, "teacher of the Gentiles," who explains the nature of the eclipse.¹¹⁰ Dionysius, his wife, and their entire household are baptized and Dionysius is consecrated as bishop.

Dionysius leaves for Rome where Pope Clement welcomes the foreign Christian. He instructs Dionysius to preach the faith following Paul's example and to "go forth confidently to subject many nations to the empire of Christ" which "unhappily surrounded . . . the West."¹¹¹ Clement directs Dionysius to Gaul specifically. Once he arrives in the walled city of Paris, Dionysius performs many miracles through Christ's power thus converting many people. The Emperor Domitian, however, raging under the

¹⁰⁷ Wailes, 90-91.

¹⁰⁸ Hrotsvit, *Dionysius* in Wiegand, line 16.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, line 24.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, lines 24-25.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, lines 127-128; line 115.

influence of “the ancient serpent,” orders the executions of the faithful.¹¹² Governor Sissinus first tortures Dionysius then locks him in a dark prison with two of his followers. The punishment does not deter the bishop for he continues to say mass for the gathered Christians. When he is about to break the bread, a bright light overwhelms the prison. God then speaks to the bishop telling him to remain ever faithful.

The three men are taken from the prison and brought before Sissinus. They proclaim their faith, saying they would rather die than submit to false gods. The governor brings the men to the executioner. They praise God and are beheaded. Death, however, does not stop their prayers; the severed heads continue praising God. Dionysius’ headless body stands up, lifts its head, and travels two miles to a location appropriate for a tomb. Crowds of Christians gather and, at the tomb, Christ performs more miracles: he gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute, mobility to the lame, wellness to the sick, consolation to the sad, and forgiveness to those who repented at the tomb.

Hrotsvit probably used as her source a version of the legend of Dionysius written by a monk named Hilduin (d. 840). In the work, composed in 814, he conflated the stories of Dionysius the Areopagite and Dionysius the Martyr,¹¹³ more commonly known as St. Denis, patron saint of Paris. Hrotsvit replicated the conflation in her work, but “altered and abbreviated it” as well as depicting the martyrdom itself “more vividly.”¹¹⁴ Several theories posit where Hrotsvit may have obtained her source. Wiegand claims Dionysius’ name became familiar to Saxony through the donation of the martyr’s relics to Henry I in Quedlinberg.¹¹⁵ Wailes, however, argues that the saint became popular when Otto

¹¹² *Ibid*, line 152.

¹¹³ Sister M. Gonsalva Wiegand, O.S.F., “Notes on The Dionysius” in Wiegand, 231.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 231

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 231.

entered Paris in 946 and visited the royal abbey at St. Denis, becoming a saint of special importance to the dynasty.¹¹⁶ Another possibility emerges when one considers Hilduin's exile by Louis the Pious in 830. He was relieved of his abbey at St. Denis near Paris and was relocated to Paderborn – a town geographically closer to Gandersheim than Quedlinberg. It is also possible that Hrotsvit did not use Hilduin's work as her source. John Scotus, at the request of Charles the Bald, conducted a new translation in 862 because Hilduin's translation was "almost unintelligible."¹¹⁷ The works were again updated by Anastasius in 875.¹¹⁸

While it may appear that the story of St. Denis as relayed in *Dionysius* did not reflect her world, Hrotsvit may have used the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite to help clarify what she saw in her world. Dionysius believed that a hierarchy of three, intended to preserve harmony in the world, existed in the church: the papacy, the episcopate, and the priesthood.¹¹⁹ Hrotsvit imbued her seventh legend with representatives from each division: *Dionysius* is the only legend in which the pope spoke, and Dionysius himself was a bishop who encountered the priest, Carpus. Not only did she demonstrate an understanding of the saint's works, she may have, in fact, elaborated on the tripartite to include the rest of society. She created a social hierarchy not present in her sources for *Basilius* and the drama, *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus*, and highlighted the hierarchy in *Gallicanus*. The drama, *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais* begins with an exposition on the value of a harmonious existence and the importance of preserving it. The tripartite division of medieval society was also versified by the authors Aelfric of

¹¹⁶ Wailes, 98.

¹¹⁷ Jean Leclercq, "Influence and Noninfluence of Dionysius in the Western Middle Ages" in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 26.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 26-27.

¹¹⁹ Dionysius the Areopagite, "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy" 5.1.

Eynsham, whose possible source connections with Hrotsvit's are discussed here, and Bishop Adalbero of Laon (977-1031); their works divided people into those who work, those who fight, and those who pray.

The final legend, *Here Begins the Passion of Saint Agnes, Virgin and Martyr*, begins with a short exposition about the sanctity of both virginity and martyrdom. Hrotsvit then moved to the story of the virtuous Agnes – a baptized virgin of noble descent living in Rome. The son of Simphronius, prefect of the city, adores the girl. He brings her gifts, but she rejects him explaining her choice in lengthy detail. Grief strikes the suitor so much so that it masks itself as a great illness. Simphronius seethes with anger for the girl. He, thinking it is her chastity at stake, orders her to worship the goddess Vesta. The maiden answers him rhetorically, asking him how she can hope to live eternally by worshipping idols. He threatens to send her to a brothel thereby doubly punishing her with bodily violation and a disgraced family. Agnes remains steadfast in her opposition, infuriating the prefect further. He demands that she be stripped of her clothes and dragged through the crowd of people to the brothel. God, however, intervenes. As the guards remove her clothes, Agnes' hair grows so that her body remains covered.

Once in the brothel, an angel appears to Agnes and provides a “gleaming garment of snowy splendor” to contrast the darkness of the sinful location.¹²⁰ A mob of youths collect, each “vying in the sinful lust of their perverted hearts as to who would be the first to enter.”¹²¹ The lust, however, ends when each beholds the virgin in her resplendent gown. The youths fall to the ground begging for forgiveness of their sins, transforming

¹²⁰ Hrotsvit, *Agnes* in Wiegand, lines 226-227.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, lines 235-236.

the brothel “into a house of prayer.”¹²² Soon the prefect’s son enters, hoping to gain access to the girl who once rejected him. Christ, still protecting Agnes from the evil intentions, causes the son to fall dead instead. Simphronius approaches Agnes asking her why she provoked his son’s death. She tells him it was the youth himself who brought about his demise, but to demonstrate Christ’s power she asks God to revive him. Simphronius’ son rises and immediately gives thanks and praise to God. He approaches his father who also converted to the faith.

Simphronius leaves his post as prefect of Rome and his successor, Aspasius supports the pagan priests of the city in their persecution of the girl. He commands that she be cast into a fire, but she remains unharmed. The flames, responding to her prayers, explode, killing the executioners and many of the onlookers. Agnes next prays to be relieved of her bodily form. God extinguishes the flames and chills even the cinders. Aspasius then thrust his sword through Agnes’ throat. She ascends into heaven as a bride of Christ celebrated as “victrix in a double battle, that of the body and that of the mind.”¹²³ She soon appears with a white lamb in her right hand to her parents who were grieving at her tomb. She tells them to rejoice in her presence of Christ.

Hrotsvit’s version may have been influenced by those of the church father, St. Ambrose and the author, Prudentius. St. Ambrose dedicated his book, *De Virginibus* to his sister, Marcellina in 377.¹²⁴ The book was a collection of his sermons with one attesting to the purity and sanctity of the martyred girl given on her feast day.¹²⁵ Ambrose lauded the girl for her spiritual strength in the face of her mortal death, but did

¹²² *Ibid*, line 253.

¹²³ *Ibid*, lines 425-426.

¹²⁴ James Shiel, *St. Ambrose: Given to Love* (Chicago, IL: Scepter Publishing, Ltd., 1963), 9.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 10; Ambrose, *De Virginibus: The First Book*, 5.

not detail the nature of her execution. Prudentius, on the other hand, included more information about the events prior to Agnes' death. He spoke of the youth struck down because of the lust he had for Agnes. As in Hrotsvit's version Agnes implores Christ and restores the youth's health.¹²⁶ The recent work by Jane Chance demonstrates that the canoness most likely drew upon Aelfric's version of Agnes' life written in the late tenth century.¹²⁷ Chance not only shows the similarities between the two, but explains how Hrotsvit may have obtained access to Aelfric's work. Since Hrotsvit's legend is significantly longer than the other two versions (over three hundred lines longer than Prudentius') and includes more dialogue as well as a more detailed context in which Agnes finally perished, Chance's position makes sense. The only problem with her theory is the timeframe. Aelfric wrote his *Lives of the Saints* in c. 996-997. Hrotsvit completed her *oeuvre* much earlier and since *Agnes* acts as the link between Hrotsvit's last legend and first drama,¹²⁸ the use of Aelfric's work is unlikely. The connection between Hrotsvit and Aelfric mentioned earlier and here again may mean each drew on a common source. Regardless of the source material, Hrotsvit presented an elaborate tale where a young girl suffered terribly at the hands of her pagan persecutors while maintaining her faith, preserving her chastity, and aiding in the resurrection of the dead. Agnes, as presented by Hrotsvit, serves as an appropriate female martyr to be venerated.

Agnes, positioned at the end of the Hrotsvit's sequence of legends, acts as an apt transition piece between the legends and the dramas. Scholars, such as Wilson have identified the "symmetry" and unity present in each of Hrotsvit's books, binding each of

¹²⁶ Prudentius, "The Passion of Agnes" in *The Poems of Prudentius* trans Sister M. Clement Eagan (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), lines 43-60.

¹²⁷ Jane Chance, *The Literary Subversions of Medieval Women* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 26.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 24.

the works together into a cohesive whole.¹²⁹ In the legends, the canoness detailed saints' lives that contained messages worth disseminating. She began with Gongolf, moved to Pelagius, then to Theophilus, Basilius, and Denis. To this point, her subjects had been male. *Agnes* thematically connects to *Dionysius*, but presents a new type of subject – a female – which will prepare her listeners for what they will encounter in most of her plays.

¹²⁹ Wilson, 1985, 4.

CHAPTER V

THE DRAMAS

For the dramas, Hrotsvit chose a rhymed prose over the leonine hexameter she used in the histories and legends, but continued to utilize the rhetorical figures. Polytoton occurs in *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena* when Hirena says to Diocletian *et que in honestas turpior / que turpitudine maior* (“and what dishonor is more disgraceful / what disgrace is any more shameful”).¹³⁰ Hrotsvit also used the device in *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus* when, for example, Callimachus confessed his love to Drusiana saying *mea Drusiana / ne repellas te amantem / tuoque amore / cordenus inherentem / sed impende amori vicem* (“My Drusiana, do not repel him who loves you / who with the passion of all his heart adores you / but return my love”).¹³¹ Several examples of epanaphora can be found in the same play: Dulcitius’ command to his guards *producite milites / producite quas tenetis in carcere* (“Bring forth soldiers the girls whom you sequestered”),¹³² Hirena to her sisters as they observe Dulcitius in the kitchen *adeo sordidata / adeo coinquinata* (“so soiled, so filthy and so

¹³⁰ Hrotsvit, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena* in Wilson 1985, 54.

¹³¹ Hrotsvit, *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus* in Wilson 1985, 65.

¹³² Hrotsvit, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena* in Wilson 1985, 54.

loathed”),¹³³ Diocletian to the guards *adeo illusam / adeo exprobratum / adeo calumniatum* (“Go greatly deluded / so greatly insulted / so utterly humiliated”),¹³⁴ Sisinnius to the guards *non tardetis milites / non tardetis* (“Do not delay soldiers / do not delay”),¹³⁵ and again later to the guards *frustra parcebam / frustra miserebar* (“In vain I spared her / in vain I pitied her”).¹³⁶ Instances abound in other plays as well, including *subsiste paulisper subsiste* (“Wait for a minute, wait”)¹³⁷ in *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais*, while in *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus*, Hrotsvit treated the epanaphoras in brief dialogue exchanges:

Callimachus: *Primum de amore?* (“First, I’d like to speak of love”)

Drusiana: *Quid de amore?* (“Of what love?”)¹³⁸

Callimachus: *Tui pulchritudo* (“Your beauty does”)

Drusiana: *Mea pulchritudo?* (“My beauty does?”)¹³⁹

There were several instances of anadiplosis including *cede cede mee suasioni* (“Give in, give in to my persuasion”) and¹⁴⁰ *discede discede leno nefande* (“Out of my sight, out of my sight you seducer so vile”).¹⁴¹ Hrotsvit also incorporated chiasmus into the plays: *nam qui superbit invidet / et qui invidet superbit* (“For who is proud of oneself is envious / and who is envious is proud of oneself”).¹⁴²

Because Latin is a highly inflected language, it can be difficult to distinguish alliteration and assonance from normal speech patterns and endings that, not only agree,

¹³³ *Ibid*, 55.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 57.

¹³⁵ Hrotsvit, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena*, XI 2, line 8, translation mine.

¹³⁶ Hrotsvit, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena* in Wilson 1985, 58.

¹³⁷ Hrotsvit, *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais* in Wilson 1985, 102.

¹³⁸ Hrotsvit, *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus* in Wilson 1985, 65.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 65.

¹⁴⁰ Hrotsvit, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena* in Wilson 1985, 58.

¹⁴¹ Hrotsvit, *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus* in Wilson 1985, 65.

¹⁴² Hrotsvit, *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus*, IX. 31, line 14, translation mine.

but also match. Since, however, this particular rhetorical device is evident in her other works as well as the plays, we may infer it was deliberately employed. Phrases such as *alii autumant / non audiri posse propter assiduitatem / alii propter aeris apissitudinem* (“Some assert that this music cannot be heard because it never ceases some say it is because the air is too thick for us to hear”),¹⁴³ *qui amentes dum ceco corde quis illam adeat contendunt / convitia congerunt* (“These fools that come to her are blind in their hearts; they contend and quarrel and fight each other”),¹⁴⁴ and *mea culpa / meum facinus / nam meo hortatu / meo iussu / ipso infelix / impias manus in sanctos martites misit* (“It is my own crime. I am the one to be faulted / for it was by my exhortation and by my command, that the wretched youth raised his hand and the holy martyrs assaulted”).¹⁴⁵ Other devices used were: stichomythia (characters in a dialogue speaking in alternative lines of verse) and aposiopesis (the sudden break of speech) which was used to “provide for rapid, suspenseful dialogue.”¹⁴⁶ She used antiphrasis (using a word opposite to its meaning), paroemia (short, terse sayings), and antonomasia.¹⁴⁷ Ultimately, for the plays, Hrotsvit relied on rhymed prose, accomplished through her use of hyperbaton, to entice her listeners’ ears with phrases like *tres esse dicuntur / sed unaqueque ratione proportionis alteri ita coniungitur / ut idem quod accidit uni / non deest alteri* (“Three are reported to exist, but every one of them is joined in arithmetical relationship to the other, so what characterizes one, does not lack in the other”)¹⁴⁸ dominating throughout them all.

¹⁴³ Hrotsvit, *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais* in Wilson 1985, 96.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁴⁵ Hrotsvit, *The Conversion of General Gallicanus* in Wilson 1985, 49.

¹⁴⁶ Katharina Wilson, “Introduction” in Wilson 1985, 12.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴⁸ Hrotsvit, *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais* in Wilson 1985, 95.

Based on the various rhetorical devices and communication of the works in Latin, scholars have traditionally argued that Hrotsvit's target audiences were the religious community, the lay nobility, or both. I suggest, however, that these conclusions need revision. The arguments superficially contrast literacy and illiteracy without considering the spectrum of literacy of medieval people. The communicative capacities of people during the Middle Ages cannot be described in the binary opposition of literate and illiterate, indeed, oral communication flourished even after the emergence of writing, continuing "to function as an alternative to, or a partner of, the written word."¹⁴⁹ At one end of the "literacy spectrum" lay those who could read and write and had access to the materials necessary to do so. During the tenth century, this group included Hrotsvit and her immediate circle at Gandersheim as well as a select few at court. The spectrum also included those who could understand Latin but may not have been able to read and write: what Franz Bauml called the "quasi-literate."¹⁵⁰ They may have included most of those in Otto's court and the lay nobility. The other end of the spectrum constituted those who were called *illiterati*: people "not unacquainted with the content of the Bible and of written vernacular narrative."¹⁵¹ They were, however, "functionally dependent on orally transmitted directives for the conduct of their lives" which were "in form, proverbial and anecdotal."¹⁵² Since orally delivered directives are short lived, in order for one to commit them to memory, the themes must be "traditional . . . familiar; their delivery rhythmical" and they are "composed primarily of an imagery of action."¹⁵³ While written

¹⁴⁹ Matthew Innes, "Memory, Orality and Literacy in an Early Medieval Society," *Past and Present* 158 (1998): 4, 5.

¹⁵⁰ Franz Bauml, "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Speculum* 2 (1980): 246, 247

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 247, 248.

communication was necessary for all strata of the nobility, moving from quasi-literate to literate was a gradual process that escalated in the second half of the twelfth century.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, much of the lay nobility who had received Hrotsvit's messages from the plays would have done so orally.

Since Latin was a learned language used in administrative and church functions, the reception of a text in Latin reinforced those institutions but need not be directed toward those institutions exclusively. Hrotsvit's plays are orthodox and didactic transmissions of the virtue of Christ manifested through the saints. While her dramas served as appropriate substitutions for other non-sanctioned performances, the fact they were in Latin further bound them to the messages of the church. The messages sent in Latin reinforced the church and the nobility, but did not necessarily exclude the military and peasant classes because they too had a familiarity with Latin on account of church. They had received their religious indoctrination in Latin, specifically the mass. And, according to Bauml, they would have depended on oral communication because of their literacy status.

Religious references were not restricted to church teachings, clerical and lay leaders applied them as they saw fit. Tenth century battle orations, for example, included references to the two books of Maccabees. The biblical significance would certainly have been recognized by the religious clerics and the lay nobility of Otto's army.¹⁵⁵ Charles Bowlus argues that the "rank and file of the army" need not identify the source of the speech, the purpose of the "rousing proclamation," as Widukind of Corvey relayed it, was to "rally his (Otto's) men to charge into a potentially lethal hailstorm of Hungarian

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 249, 244.

¹⁵⁵ Charles R. Bowlus, *The Battle of Lechfeld and its Aftermath, August 955: The End of the Age of Migration in the Latin West* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2006), 120.

arrows.”¹⁵⁶ Another rousing proclamation occurred one millennium later in John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address when he said “ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”¹⁵⁷ The audience, this time an entire country, did not need to identify the president’s use of chiasmus for the quote to have power and meaning. Hrotsvit’s audiences, therefore, did not necessarily need to recognize the various rhetorical devices she used for the plays to have meaning. Based on Hrotsvit’s position in a royal abbey and her connections with the Ottonian court, we can safely argue that both her religious community and the lay nobility saw performances of the plays. Excluding other tenth century peoples from hearing Hrotsvit’s messages or seeing the performances because of language, genre, content, or the nuances of speech predicated on class and gender, assumes an intimate knowledge of the interactions between medieval peoples that, unfortunately, have not been committed to recorded history. Ottonian hegemony, in fact, required support from and communication to members of all social strata.

A general order of succession of Hrotsvit’s dramas has been accepted by the academic community beginning with *The Conversion of General Gallicanus*. Gallicanus is an accomplished general in Constantine’s army sent to subdue the Scythians. Before he departs, he asks for the hand of the emperor’s daughter, Constantia as a reward. Constantine delays his response, speaking first to his daughter. He knows Constantia has taken the vow of chastity as a Christian and that marriage, much less to a pagan, would be in conflict with her beliefs. But Constantia devises a plan. She suggests to her father that he agree to Gallicanus’ request on the condition that his two daughters, Artemia and

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 120.

¹⁵⁷ John F. Kennedy, “Inaugural Address” in *The Uncommon Wisdom of JFK: A Portrait in His Own Words* ed Bill Adler (New York, NY: Rugged Land, LLC, 2003), 39.

Attica, stay with Constantia and that her two attendants, John and Paul, accompany the general. God and prayer, Constantia believes, will take care of the rest. Constantia converts the girls immediately, for they are eager to preserve their virginity. The three women are anxious to see the general converted as well. Constantia summons her stewards before they withdraw with Gallicanus and instructs them teach him the *mysterium fidei*, mysteries of their faith.

On the battlefield, Gallicanus faces a formidable army and is surrounded by his wounded and dying comrades. He urges his men to fight on while the officers, on the other hand, suggest they surrender. John offers another option; he tells Gallicanus that if he converts to Christianity, he will defeat his enemy. Gallicanus thus converts and the Scythians are immediately struck by an invisible malady, forcing them to surrender. Gallicanus stops the fighting and sets the conditions for the surrender. He asks only that any hostages be returned and a tribute be paid to the emperor. Once done, the Scythians may live under Rome's peace. Gallicanus, now convinced of God's power, asks John and Paul to baptize him.

The victorious army returns to Rome. Gallicanus goes to St. Peter's to thank God for his victory instead of paying the appropriate homage to the Roman gods. The general relays his conversion in detail to Constantine and the surrender of the Scythian king. When asked how he treated his defecting officers, he replies: "those who convert to Christianity would have my favors as before / and receive honors even more / but that those who spurned the faith and from converting shrank / would be deprived of my favor and their military rank."¹⁵⁸ Constantine, in turn tells the general that his daughters have too become Christians. Gallicanus is relieved of his marriage to Constantia, distributes

¹⁵⁸ Hrotsvit, *The Conversion of General Gallicanus* in Wilson 1985, 44.

his wealth, and tells the emperor he wishes to go to Ostia to help the needy with the holy man, Hilarius.

The second half of the play depicts a new regime in Rome and is almost totally devoid of the characters from the first half. Constantine's successor, Julian the Apostate, is a former Christian who returned to pagan practices and is determined to rid the empire of Christians. After the audience hears of Gallicanus' martyrdom in Alexandria, they see Julian propose an ultimatum to John and Paul. The saints choose martyrdom instead of worshipping an idol. Hrotsvit closed her first drama with Terentianus, their executioner, witnessing the power of God when he sees his son going mad at the shrine of the two martyred saints and the father and son's subsequent conversion.

Style stands out as the most striking way in which Hrotsvit's hagiography differs from that of the sources she used. The adaptation from narrative to dialogue acts as supporting evidence for the argument, discussed above, that the plays were produced on stage. Regarding content, however, the biggest difference between Hrotsvit's first play and other medieval accounts of the Gallicanus story (here represented by de Voragine's account) is the main characters. Hrotsvit centered her play on the general and God's effect on humanity through the saints, whereas de Voragine barely mentioned Gallicanus. In addition to focusing on the two martyred saints, John and Paul, de Voragine goes into great detail about the deceitful way in which Julian became emperor.¹⁵⁹ The two versions are similar, for example, the reference to St. Agnes appears in both sources as does the city where Gallicanus is martyred, Alexandria. Other than her additions, there is no evidence to conclude that Hrotsvit made any significant changes to the legend of General

¹⁵⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol IV trans William Caxton (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 7.

Gallicanus based on the story told by de Voragine. As with the legends, more research must be done to determine Hrotsvit's actual source material.

Hrotsvit tackled several different themes in *The Conversion of General Gallicanus*. As stated previously, the overriding premise of her plays – the power of Christ working through the saints – emerges in this drama. The audience saw Constantia's prayers answered, God's power on the battlefield once Gallicanus converted, and the subsequent conversion of the pagan Scythians. Peace was restored and Constantine's Christian empire has expanded through faith in God. In the second half of the play, God manifested Himself through the recently martyred John and Paul by causing the insanity of their executioner's son. God's forgiveness healed Terentianus' son once he became a Christian himself. Another favorite theme of Hrotsvit's was the preservation of female virginity. She addressed the topic in *Gallicanus*, but did so succinctly and without incident. Constantia had been a Christian already vowed to chastity who takes in Gallicanus' daughters and converts them. The brevity in which Hrotsvit dealt with the topic of virginity leads one to believe that it was not the main focus of the play; rather, it played a supporting role that indirectly contributed to the conversion of the general.

Hrotsvit's constructed the main theme of *Gallicanus* as conversion. Wailes counts only five "important" converts: Gallicanus, Artemia, Attica, Terentianus, and his son.¹⁶⁰ While these characters played significant roles in the play, the conversion of the defecting Roman officers and the pagan Scythians was as significant, the latter being a point which Wailes says Hrotsvit was unclear on. Mass conversions had, for centuries, been hallmarks of Christianity beginning with Constantine, a direct analogy in the play. Other leaders fall into this category as well: Clovis' conversion of the Franks, Charlemagne's

¹⁶⁰ Wailes, 131.

conversion of the Saxons, and, more recently, Otto's conversion of the Magyars.

Hrotsvit's noble Saxon audiences probably identified the comparison of Otto to the historical figure Constantine. The comparison elevated Otto's rank in the annals of great leaders, part of the Ottonian imperial agenda. The similarities, however, between the conversion of the Scythians in the play and the conversion of the Hungarians during Otto's rule calls for further inspection.

Otto never considered the recently conquered Magyars as imperial subjects following the decisive Battle of Lechfeld in 955. They were, however, incorporated into the growing Christian community and, as such, required a Christianizing campaign in the region. Otto began by sending a monk from St. Gallen named Brun as bishop of the Hungarians.¹⁶¹ Jane Chance's argument that Hrotsvit's play "represents a founding narrative both for the church and for the dramatist's own developing interest in sacred historiography as a working out of Providence"¹⁶² conforms in a region that was in need of a Christian foundation. Its performance may also, I suggest, have introduced several new concepts. First, it may have helped bring the Christian message to the pagan Magyars, who through the twelfth century had been referred to as Scythians.¹⁶³ Second, it may have introduced a new form of leadership. Hungarian governance consisted of seven decentralized tribes led by autonomous chieftans until the Saxon conquest.¹⁶⁴ By 972 and afterwards, one clear leader sought to preserve the sovereignty of the area and the perpetuation of Christianity.¹⁶⁵ Third, the new allies would be less likely to strike

¹⁶¹ Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895-1526*, trans Tamás Pálosfalvi, ed Andrew Ayton (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2001), 26.

¹⁶² Chance in Brown et al, 195.

¹⁶³ Engel, 9.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 26.

again if they viewed the emperor as benevolent and Christianity as a religion of forgiveness and healing. Not only did the Hungarians not invade Saxon lands any longer, but Otto III (983-1002), had endorsed the coronation of Stephen, the founder of the Hungarian kingdom, strengthening their connections.¹⁶⁶ Finally, the visual performance accompanied by the Latin prose may have served to teach the language to the Hungarians. Latin would become the language of the church and administration in the new kingdom as well, in fact no vernacular “except for German in the towns, were ever used by laymen as a written language before the fifteenth century.”¹⁶⁷

Hrotsvit’s second play, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena*, dramatizes the story of three martyred sisters. The play opens with an allocution by the Emperor Diocletian to the young maidens that introduces the main conflict on the play. On account of the sisters’ “free and noble descent and the brightness of [their] beauty,” Diocletian commands them to denounce their Christian faith and marry prominent men of his court. The girls are indignant from the beginning. They profess their faith and their virginity without fail and express their desire for the palm of martyrdom. Diocletian orders the girls to be jailed until Governor Dulcitius can interrogate them. Dulcitius is immediately struck by their beauty and directs them to be moved to the pantry of the kitchen so he can visit them as he wishes. Once the guards have completed their task, the girls hear a noise outside the door. They see Dulcitius approaching and begin to pray for God’s protection. He then mistakes the pots and pans for the girls and proceeds to embrace and kiss them becoming covered in soot. Dulcitius is so unrecognizable that the guards mistake him for the devil and run away, when

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 28.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 193.

Dulcitus attempts to enter the palace he is beaten by the guards. The governor is so enraged by the humiliation the three Christians have caused that he orders they be brought forth and publicly stripped of their clothes. God again prevails and the girls' clothes adhere to their bodies like skin. In the meantime, Dulcitus has fallen asleep while his guards struggle, so they leave to report to the emperor.

Unmoved by the girls' resiliency, Diocletian orders Count Sissinus to exert revenge. The count summons the two oldest, Agapes ("Love") and Chionia ("Snowy"), and instructs them to bring offerings to the gods. They defy the orders once more and as punishment are sent to be burned alive. After a prayer to God for deliverance, the girls' souls are freed from their bodies. The bodies stay untouched by the flames and even the soldiers acknowledge the miracle. Sissinus sends for Hirena ("Peace"), expecting her to submit once she sees her sisters dead. She, on the other hand, hopes to follow their example and defiantly tells the count that the more he tortures her, the "more gloriously I'll be exalted."¹⁶⁸ He orders her to a brothel, hoping the loss of her virginity will compel her to submit. Two unknown youths (*ignoti iuvenes*), however, intercept the mission and take Hirena to a mountain's peak. Sissinus mounts his horse and follows, but is unable to ascend the mountain. He then orders his soldiers to shoot Hirena with an arrow, but before she dies she tells him of her victory and of his eternal damnation.

As with several other stories relayed by Hrotsvit, identifying her source material for this play is difficult. The *Golden Legend* contains the story of St. Anastasia and her three servants which appear to be the same three maidens Hrotsvit referred to, but de Voragine told the story of the virgins' death very differently than Hrotsvit. In de Voragine's account, the sisters are not the focus of the legend; rather, they play minor roles and are,

¹⁶⁸ Hrotsvit, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena* in Wilson 1985, 58.

in fact, unnamed in the thirteenth century source.¹⁶⁹ Hrotsvit appears to have adopted the social status of St. Anastasia and applied it to the girls as a way of eliminating the saint from the story. The situation causing the girls to be brought before Diocletian is similar to the reason why St. Anastasia had been jailed in de Voragine's version. Very little information contained in Hrotsvit's account resurfaces in de Voragine's. The kitchen scene and the first attempt to defile the girls remain the only constants in both legends. De Voragine's description excludes any mention of the emperor and places the sequence of events in 280 CE, four years before the reign of Diocletian. Based on the similarities and differences, Hrotsvit and de Voragine each told versions of a legend of unknown origin and pinpointing who made the changes to the story remains unclear. I would argue that Hrotsvit made the changes to St. Anastasia's legend because the canoness established a pattern of altering the social status of some of her characters. Since Hrotsvit eliminated the saint whose story the girls comprise, it is possible she manipulated the original legend of St. Anastasia to construct her drama as a way of focusing specifically on the sister's desirable behaviors and the ordeals they overcame.

Hrotsvit's second play has several meanings depending on social perspective. She had rearranged the story of St. Anastasia to focus on Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena in an attempt to further elevate the status of the nobility. Hrotsvit was not content with merely relaying another saint's story here or in her previous drama. The changes she made in both *The Conversion of General Gallicanus* and *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena* shift the focus from the saints and places the deeds of the nobles at the fore. In the latter, and presuming her source material was similar to de

¹⁶⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol II trans William Caxton (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 149.

Voragine's, the canoness manufactured the social status of the girls, elevating them from servants to girls of noble descent (*parentelae claritas ingenuitatis*). The play lauds the virginity of aristocratic maidens, demonizes pagan worshippers, and elevates the religious fortitude of the laity. To the nobility, the play would have been an affirmation of their purity and strength in the face of evil. The play does not, however, alienate those of lesser social standing. Hrotsvit's depiction of the maidens provides an ideal for them to live up to and a way for them to define themselves through a pictorial definition of otherness. The canoness used a similar tactic in her presentations of *Pelagius*, *Theophilus*, and *Basilus*. While marriage and family benefitted lower class women, they still needed to be taught strong Christian mores. The play showed the benefits of refusing pagan worship and the comic situation in the middle of the play appealed to all strata of society. Hrotsvit retold saints' tales allotting them a secondary role, describing instead the praiseworthy and imitative acts of martyred aristocrats. Regardless of social position, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chionia, and Hirena* is a perfect example of both of Hrotsvit's articulated premises: the virtue of Christ shown through the saints and female frailty reducing masculine strength to disorder.

A fifteenth century Hungarian translation of the play provides insight into the motivations for Hrotsvit's adaptation of the story. The Hungarian version is the first vernacular translation of the play predating Western versions by 200 years.¹⁷⁰ The Turkish setting reflects situations Hungarians encountered during the Ottoman expansion.¹⁷¹ Wilson argues that the translator sought "to give advice and to provide a practical example for virgins, presumably [the translator's] sister nuns, who might very

¹⁷⁰ Katharina Wilson, "The Old Hungarian Translation of Hrotsvit's *Dulcitus*: History and Analysis," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 1 (1982): 177.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 178.

well find themselves in the same predicament as the heroines of the play.”¹⁷² Hrotsvit may have adapted her tenth century version for some of the same reasons as the Hungarian translator. The frequent raids in Saxon lands by various barbarian tribes may have compelled Hrotsvit to show her audience how they should behave in a similar situation. The play may have also given advice to the Hungarians struggling to form a new political order during the end of the tenth century. Hrotsvit did not frame a setting in the play; she only contextualized it as having taken place during the end of the third century CE. The geographic ambiguity of the play allows it to take place in any area without a direct reference to any current political situations, thus avoiding political conflict. The play refers to a particularly heinous time to those familiar with Christian history: to those unfamiliar, Diocletian is an example of an evil pagan leader with no implied contemporary meaning. Furthermore, the dissimilarities between the fifteenth century version and the St. Emmeram codex imply a manuscript no longer in existence¹⁷³ and could mean the introduction of Hrotsvit’s works into the region closer to the time the canoness lived.

The third of Hrotsvit’s six dramas, *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus*, begins with a conversation between Callimachus and his friends during which time he confesses his love for Drusiana, the *principis coniugem* (wife of the political leader). The friends attempt to dissuade him because he is destined to fail; in fact, the Christian woman will not even visit the bed of her husband, Andronicus (who is also a Christian). Not heeding the warning, Callimachus confronts Drusiana and professes his love for her to which she replies “What bond of kinship / what legal relationship / compels you to

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 180.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 179.

love me?”¹⁷⁴ She remains defiant toward her pursuer and when it is clear she cannot be free of his desires, she prays to God for deliverance from the situation. God answers. Andronicus and St. John bury Drusiana in a marble tomb and place Fortunatus, Andronicus’ steward, as the guard. Shortly afterwards, Callimachus approaches Fortunatus with an egregious proposition: he offers the greedy guard money to be allowed access to the dead woman. Just as he is about to defile Drusiana, a snake appears killing Fortunatus and scaring Callimachus to death.

As was the custom of honoring the dead, Andronicus and John proceed toward the tomb. They are approached by God manifested in the form of a “handsome youth.”¹⁷⁵ God tells the two men he has come to resurrect Drusiana and “the youth who lies next to her grave.”¹⁷⁶ Andronicus solves the mystery of his wife’s sudden death once they reach the tomb and survey the scene. He says to John: *Iipse Callimachus / Drusianam dum viveret illicite amavit / quod illa egre ferens / in febrem prae tristitia incidit / et mortem ut adveniret invitavit* (“This here is Callimachus who loved Drusiana illicitly and with forbidden passion; this was the reason why she, ill with sorrow, caught a fever and prayed that death might take her”).¹⁷⁷ The two men, through their conversation, describe the sequence of events, including the bribing of the *improbum servum* (disloyal servant), Fortunatus.¹⁷⁸ The dialogue continues as John comments on the distinction between the sins of the two dead men: Callimachus had sinned out of ignorance while Fortunatus had sinned out of malice, concluding that God’s judgment is not for mortals to question or understand. John expels the coiled snake covering Callimachus and brings him back to

¹⁷⁴ Hrotsvit, *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus* in Wilson 1985, 65.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

life with a prayer. The revived Callimachus confirms the men's suspicions, but says that his remorse has led him to God. John baptizes him and then raises Drusiana. She awakens and asks the holy man to do the same for Fortunatus. Callimachus disagrees saying that the guard did not deserve to live. John tells him "the law of our religion teaches us to forgive those who trespass against us if we hope that God forgives us our trespasses against him, so we must."¹⁷⁹ He continues to provide an explanation of why no one should envy God's mercy. John passes the responsibility of resurrecting the guard to Drusiana. Fortunatus, however, shuns his gift saying he would rather be dead than see God's grace living in Drusiana and Callimachus. His snake bite swells and then he dies a second time. The four Christians decide to spend the day rejoicing in the conversion of Callimachus and the resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus.

Hrotsvit obtained the content for this play from the *Apocryphal Acts of John*. An anonymous author composed the works in the second or third century CE as supplementary "stories and details about the apostles."¹⁸⁰ The Manichaeans, a religious group considered heretical and condemned by the Roman church, collected five sets of stories: The Acts of Andrew, John, Paul, Peter, and Thomas, and provided them as an alternative the sanctioned New Testament.¹⁸¹ The heretical source of the play explains why Hrotsvit, as discussed above, disclosed in the introduction to her legends that "if the objection is made that, according to the judgment of some, portions of this work have been borrowed from apocryphal sources: to this I would answer that I have erred through ignorance and not through reprehensible presumption . . . when I discovered the real state

¹⁷⁹ Hrotsvit, *Resuscitatio Drusiane et Calimachi*, IX.4, translation mine.

¹⁸⁰ J.K. Elliot, "Introduction to the Apocryphal Acts" in *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M.R. James* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 229.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 229.

of affairs, I declined to discard my subject matter, on the plea that what appears to be false, may eventually be proved to be true.”¹⁸² Even though this statement is part of the preface used to introduce her series of legends, the parallel between her sin of ignorance and Callimachus’ indicates a unity throughout her works. Her apology may have been meant to apply to the dramas as well.

Hrotsvit’s tale of Callimachus made subtle yet significant changes to the third century story. The original narrative focused on John’s acts, his words, and the power of prayer. The original story provided background information about Andronicus and the nature of his conversion, but the focus remained on John as the mediator between the sacred and the profane. John functioned as the center of the story, as the one who knew the proper rites. Hrotsvit began by eliminating the original source’s tales of the unsavory actions of Andronicus towards Drusiana prior to his conversion.¹⁸³ I would argue that this was because she did not wish to portray a noble man as a pagan or as one who would bury his wife alive as Andronicus had done. Most significantly, however, Hrotsvit changed Callimachus’ social status. In the scene in which Andronicus and John discover the bodies at Drusiana’s tomb, Hrotsvit writes that John merely said “this here is Callimachus.”¹⁸⁴ The original source, however, described the scene as John turning “to the other side of the tomb and saw a young man, the very prominent Ephesian Callimachus – for this is what he was called.” Hrotsvit thus deliberately chose to reduce Callimachus’ status to that of a commoner, perhaps suggesting that she did not think a man of prominence could not have been capable of committing such an offense.

¹⁸² Hrotsvit, *First Book Preface* in Wiegand, line 10-16.

¹⁸³ *Acts of St. John* in Elliot, chap. 63.

¹⁸⁴ Hrotsvit, *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus* in Wilson 1985, 68.

Hrotsvit's change to John's dialogue also eliminated any geographical reference, leaving the location, although temporally distant, spatially ambiguous.

Her changes accomplished several things for a tenth-century audience. First, she assigned familiar societal roles that aligned with the behaviors portrayed by the characters. The device helped bridge the gap between the ancient setting and contemporary Christendom. The setting, though distant, was still recognizable. The geographic obscurity, as in the previous play, permits audience members to see themselves and aspects of their society in the performance without political, or in this case, social disruption. Finally, the social assignments and the behaviors associated with those roles denoted particular sentiments about how Christian subjects should act. Wiethaus refers to Callimachus' acts as "class-inappropriate liaisons," with dual "transgressions."¹⁸⁵ The attempted sex act, he argues, accounted for the primary message - an allegory for the "violation of property rights of a high status male by a low status male."¹⁸⁶ Since Wiethaus envisions only Saxon nobles viewing the production, the message justifies elitist apprehensions, but does not *teach* anything. Wailes, on the other hand, asserts that the violation of religion, Callimachus's pagan beliefs, surpassed the violation of "social hierarchy" in importance.¹⁸⁷ The answer may lie somewhere between the two interpretations. While Callimachus' conversion remained the main narrative, signifying social roles constituted enough of an issue for Hrotsvit that she manufactured it in the play. From this significant change, we can conclude that Hrotsvit presented normative behavior patterns based on religious and social status.

¹⁸⁵ Wiethaus in Brown et al, 132.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 132.

¹⁸⁷ Wailes, 151.

The class construction in the play conveyed different messages depending on the social position of the audience. Wiethaus argues that the play, as experienced by the upper class, was an attempt at to prescribe proper sexual behavior as it related to Saxon politics. He reasons that “from the ruling classes’ point of view sexuality was firmly tied to procreativity in its dual aspects of either legitimately continuing the royal lineage or wreaking havoc through dynastic politics that could lead to rival claims to power.”¹⁸⁸ While this certainly was the case in tenth century politics, such was not the situation Hrotsvit described in the play. Hrotsvit had relegated Callimachus, the “prominent Ephesian” to a commoner and removed Andronicus’ pagan past from the story, thereby showing a distinct contrast between pagan and Christian, elite and non-elite behavior. In doing so, she clearly described the upper class as piously devout Christians and reaffirmed their place in Christian society. An audience of lower class, possibly new, student Christians would have interpreted these messages differently. To a commoner, the play reinforced the position of a lord as superior and his wife as unobtainable. The play socially distanced nobility from commoners, possibly a reflection of society as Hrotsvit knew it. Callimachus’ payment to Fortunatus reinforces Callimachus’ subordinate social position by evoking the taxes that commoners paid to their lords through their stewards. Inferiority, however, had its benefits. God could appear to anyone, and everyone belonged to the Christian community. Symbolically, Callimachus’ intention and subsequent forgiveness presented a situation where, despite the worst carnal mistake a person could make repentance was possible and a divine gift.

Hrotsvit’s next two plays tell tales of penitent sinners. The first play, *The Fall and Repentance of Mary*, opens with a conversation between the two hermits, Abraham and

¹⁸⁸ Wiethaus in Brown et al, 127.

Effrem. Abraham informs his colleague that Mary, Abraham's niece, has become orphaned. He fears her beauty may lead her down a path of infidelity, so he takes the girl in and redistributes her wealth to the poor. The two men go to her with the intentions of persuading her to live a pious life. After they teach her the origin and sanctity of her name, she agrees to renounce the world and live as they do. Abraham builds a small cell for Mary and teaches her through the window.

Twenty years pass and Abraham again approaches Effrem, this time rather upset because Mary is gone. She left once she realized the grave mistake she made. Effrem hears of the man who visited Mary disguised as a monk and deceived the girl. The imposter convinced the girl to leave her cell and "to perform that awful deed."¹⁸⁹ The men fear she has returned to the world "to serve its vanities" before attaining forgiveness.¹⁹⁰ Effrem, however, wants to know how Mary escaped from such a close vicinity to her uncle. Abraham says a troubling vision of a dragon trapping a dove distracted him. The hermit had interpreted the dream as an attack against the church until Effrem corrected him. The vision was about his niece – Mary was the dove. For three days Abraham prayed to understand his vision, but succumbed to sleep. He saw a similar vision only this time the dove escapes. He wakes to find his niece has been gone now for two days.

Two years later, the friend Abraham sent to find his niece returns with her whereabouts: she works as a prostitute in a nearby city. Abraham, disguising himself to gain access to the woman as a lover, relinquishes his habit and dons soldiers' clothes. He makes his way to the inn where Mary stays and offers gold to the innkeeper for a meal

¹⁸⁹ Hrotsvit, *The Fall and Repentance of Mary* in Wilson 1985, 80.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 81.

and a meeting. Asides by Mary and Abraham intertwine with their conversations to convey the anxiety and apprehensions of each. The couple retires to Mary's bedroom where Abraham reveals his true identity to her. He takes the opportunity to ask her what happened, who did it, why did she not go him, and why she left. The hermit comforts Mary by saying "it is human to err but evil to persist in sin; he who fell suddenly is not the one to be blamed / but he who fails to rise promptly again."¹⁹¹ He then reminds her of the sacrifice he made for her by leaving his cell as well as God's forgiveness to those who repent. Abraham convinces her to return with him after she has again distributed the wealth she accumulated. At dawn, he places her on his horse and the two return to the hermitage. Effrem greets the two travelers and asks Abraham how Mary will perform her penance. To this the hermit replies "entirely according to my will."¹⁹² Mary becomes a model penitent, praying and fasting in her cell.

Hrotsvit made few modifications in her adaptation of this story from its fourth century source – a narrative written by Archdeacon Ephraim. Her most significant modification, as in the rest of her plays, was the shift from narration to dialogue. In this play, however, Hrotsvit integrated the narrator himself into the dialogue of the play. She also inverted the time lapses found in the original. The two days Abraham spent praying to God were, in the original source, two years and the two years the friend spent searching for Mary were immediate in the original. Hrotsvit's motivations for the change, though not explicit, are obvious: she could not imagine (or condone) a man of God allowing someone in his spiritual charge to fester in sin for two years. Hrotsvit changed the time frames to portray the holy man as blameless in the tenth century version. For the same

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 87.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 90.

reason, Hrotsvit eliminated the physical contact initiated by the hermit in the fourth-century version, instead making Mary the initiator of the embraces and kisses.¹⁹³

Hrotsvit also introduced the biblical significance of Mary. In her version, the audience is reminded of Mary's namesake: the Virgin Mary, a detail not in the original. Archdeacon Ephraim, however, tells of the prostitute who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair as the biblical point of reference for the girl.¹⁹⁴ An affiliation with the former reference may have been included for the benefit of Hrotsvit's noble audience.

While repentant prostitutes represented the epitome of the penitent sinner,¹⁹⁵ Mary, niece of Abraham was not a common whore. She was woman of wealthy parents who had spent the past twenty years piously. And though she sinned, she could achieve forgiveness by returning to her cell, by returning to a pious life. Hrotsvit made one final alteration. She eliminated the end of the story from Ephraim's version for the same reason she included the storyteller into the action. If Hrotsvit told the rest of the story as relayed by the archdeacon, she would have taken the play back into the narrative. The canoness also excluded the final pieces of information, Abraham living for ten more years and Mary for five, again for stylistic purposes.

For the most part, however, Hrotsvit kept most of the original story intact. She copied the relationship between Mary and Abraham, the vision and Abraham's misinterpretation, and Mary social status. She also preserved the nature of human sin as relayed by Abraham. In the original he says "sin is only part of being human; it happened to you

¹⁹³ Archdeacon Ephraim "Life of Maria the Harlot" in *Harlots of the Desert: A study of repentance in early monastic sources* trans Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1987), *Cap VII*; Hrotsvit, *The Fall and Repentance of Mary* in Wilson 1985, 85.

¹⁹⁴ Archdeacon Ephraim, "Life of Maria the Harlot," *Cap IX*.

¹⁹⁵ Ruth Mazo Karras, "Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990): 3.

very quickly and now by the help of God you are coming out of it even more quickly, for he does not will the death of sinners, but rather that they may live.”¹⁹⁶

Wailes’ asserts that “no historical or political messages are present” in this play.¹⁹⁷ I would argue, however, that it was meant to convey a message contrasting the clergy and laity. It was a man posing as a monk who deceived Mary and she, not of any religious order herself, yielded to those desires, escaping her cell and eventually stealing away to a life of sin. In this scenario, Hrotsvit showed that both laymen and women had the capacity for sin. The grace of God manifested through the hermit brought the stray believer back to the faith, but he was not without fault himself; the misinterpreted dream caused valuable time to lapse. As a lesson to the faithful, *The Fall and Repentance of Mary* elevated the status of the clergy over that of the laity. It was not God’s will that would instruct the girl to repent, it was Abraham’s. Therefore, the clergy were shown as necessary mediators between God and man. Hrotsvit made the bold assertion in a time when the secular rulers were extending their reach into church appointments. Hrotsvit diluted this particular message by distancing the setting from her contemporary society.

Hrotsvit’s second “penitent sinner” play, *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais*, provides another image of the repentant prostitute. The play begins with the teacher, Pafnutius giving his pupils a music lesson and instructing them about the relationship between God and man. From there he moves into a discussion about God’s just punishment of sinners saying “Whoever deals in sinful things, whether foolish or wise / deserves God’s punishment and reprise,” in effect, setting the tone for the play.¹⁹⁸ His eager students beg to hear about whom their teacher speaks. He tells them that “A certain shameless woman

¹⁹⁶ Archdeacon Ephraim, “Life of Maria the Harlot,” *Cap IX*.

¹⁹⁷ Wailes, 164.

¹⁹⁸ Hrotsvit, *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais* in Wilson 1985, 97.

dwells in this land.”¹⁹⁹ The woman, Thais, is vile and dangerous not just because she commits carnal sins herself, but because she also damages her lovers. The men who visit her reduce themselves to poverty by lavishing her with gifts in addition to fighting each other for her affection.

Pafnutius decides to disguise himself as a potential lover to lead her away from such a sinful life. He arrives in the town in which Thais lives and receives directions to the prostitute’s house from a group of young men who know the way quite well. Once he meets the woman, Pafnutius tells her that the nature of his conversation calls for a more private setting. To this she replies “there is one [room] so hidden, so secret, that no one besides me knows its inside except for God.”²⁰⁰ The teacher is truly surprised to see a woman of her reputation familiar with God. His surprise soon yields to fear for Thais because she knowingly “sent many a man’s soul to Hell.”²⁰¹ The revelation incites guilt, fear, and sorrow in the woman who is now unable to continue sinning. She asks about an appropriate penance that could elicit forgiveness. Pafnutius tells her the only way she can be saved requires her to seclude herself from the world so she can reflect on her past and grieve deeply for her sins. He stops her as she gathers her things, instructing her to leave the wealth she has accumulated. She corrects him, saying, “I was not planning on saving it for myself nor giving it to friends. I don’t even wish to give it to the poor because I don’t think that the prize of sin is fit for good.”²⁰² Instead, Thais gathers her lovers together so they can watch her burn the four hundred pounds of gold and jewels

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 98.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 100.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 101.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 101.

she has amassed. Against their wishes, she publicly renounces her former life and leaves – going somewhere she will not be found.

Pafnutius takes Thais to a cloister for women where she will spend the rest of her life performing penance. He presents her to the abbess, saying, “She must be sequestered from the tumult of the world, / obscured in a small cell, so that she may contemplate her sins undisturbed.”²⁰³ The cell should have no door, only a window through which Thais shall receive a small amount of food. As further punishment, the woman shall also be forced to smell her own excrement daily to make amends for “the evil sweetness of alluring delight.”²⁰⁴ Pafnutius tells her she must pray for forgiveness with tears and humiliation; her polluted lips prevent her from speaking God’s name. He relinquishes care of Thais to the abbess and returns to his students.

Three years later, Pafnutius approaches his fellow hermit, Antonius, and asks him and his associates to pray for the knowledge of Thais’ forgiveness. Paul, a student of Antonius, receives a vision that revealed a bed of white linen in heaven surrounded by four virgins. He interprets the vision as intended for his teacher Antonius, but a divine voice corrects him: “This glory is not as you hope for Antonius, but is meant for Thais the whore.”²⁰⁵ Pafnutius, after hearing this, returns to the woman’s cell to give her the news and offers to remove her from the filth. She declines, learning from him that she will die in fifteen days. Pafnutius stays with her and, at the end, the two pray together glorifying God.

Like her previous “penitent prostitute” play, Hrotsvit adapted *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais* from an eastern source while making several key changes to the

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

anonymously written Greek legend. First, she turned a brief account about a wayward prostitute and the monk who saved her into lengthy play. She accomplished this, in part, by the creation of dialogue between characters that elaborates on elements from the original source. She also expanded on minor characters or invented them completely. In the original source, Thais' lovers do not partake in the action of the play. They are only referred to indirectly: "She went out and collected together all the goods that she had received by her sins and piled them together in the middle of the city, while all the people watched, saying, 'Come here, all of you who have sinned with me, and see how I am burning whatever you gave me.'"²⁰⁶ Hrotsvit, however, created an entire scene from the interaction between Thais and her lovers as she burned her belongings. The canoness also created the young men Pafnutius meets in the city and the abbess in the women's cloister as well as the exchanges between the different characters. The dialogue of the lovers balances that of Pafnutius' pupils while the introduction of the maternal abbess tempers the harsh perspective of the hermit.

Hrotsvit elongated the original legend by fashioning Pafnutius' lessons to his pupils at the beginning of the play. She began by describing the harmony of man as the microcosm of God consisting of the four elements that constitute a mortal body coexisting with, while remaining contrary to the immortal soul.²⁰⁷ She defines music similarly. Just as the contrary elements combine to produce a single world, "high and low tones, joined harmoniously, produce music."²⁰⁸ Music, she goes on to explain, comprises philosophy along with arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy called the

²⁰⁶ "Life of St. Thais the Harlot" in *Harlots of the Desert: A study of repentance in early monastic sources* trans Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1987), *Cap I*.

²⁰⁷ Hrotsvit, *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais* in Wilson 1985, 94.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 94.

quadrivium.²⁰⁹ The lesson continues with the students and the teacher admitting the difficulty of the content.

The question that scholars have wrestled with for years is why Hrotsvit chose to introduce the main action of the play in this manner. Wilson explains it as an ironic demonstration of female intellectuality and knowledge to Hrotsvit's contemporaries.²¹⁰ Wailes, on the other hand, claims the drama portrays "universal truths" with Thais representing musical discord and Pafnutius representing its harmony.²¹¹ His argument reflects that of David Chamberlain who said Hrotsvit proposed "Boethian images and ideas . . . [while] the action shows Pafnutius in a series of scenes with different musical implications, bringing the discordant sinner Thais back to the norms of concord."²¹² Ultimately, Hrotsvit demonstrated the "relevance" of learning to "moral action and edification."²¹³ While the perspectives are indeed insightful they do not extend beyond the play itself to place the lesson in the context of the tenth century.

The allegorical representation of music in Hrotsvit's play may have been included because writers of the tenth century paralleled the "rigorous principles"²¹⁴ of civil harmony. Fichtenau defines civil discord during this period as anything disruptive to the status quo often articulated as a battle between good and evil.²¹⁵ He lists different sources that exemplify the rhetoric including: an Irishman to a Frankish bishop, the bishops of the synod of Trosly, Bishop Gerald of Cambrai, the monk Ekkehard IV,

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 95.

²¹⁰ Katharina Wilson, "Introduction" in Wilson 1985, 10.

²¹¹ Wailes, 183.

²¹² David Chamberlain, "Musical Learning and Dramatic Action in Hrotsvit's *Pafnutius*," *Studies in Philology* 4 (1980): 321.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 343.

²¹⁴ Fichtenau, 381.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 382.

Gerbert of Aurillac who later became Pope Sylvester II, and Rather of Verona.²¹⁶

Hrotsvit's drama depicts, like Chamberlain and Wailes identify, the civil discord portrayed by Thais because she disrupted the social and economic harmony of where she lived. Hrotsvit incorporated the rhetoric of the tenth century – peace and complacency in society – into the musical terminology of Boethius and Cassiodorus. While the canoness may have been showcasing her talents to her contemporaries, she certainly engaged in the discourse of her age that lamented the evil in the world and the desire to correct it.

Hrotsvit made several other minor yet notable changes to the original story of Thais. As with the tale of Callimachus, she eliminated any geographical reference from the original source which placed Thais in “a certain city in Egypt,” presumably Alexandria.²¹⁷ Hrotsvit, in keeping with her theme of geographic ambiguity, locates Thais *in hac patria* (in this land).²¹⁸ Phrased as such, the situation refers to any place the production takes place. The absence of a specific location allows Hrotsvit to address the sins of Thais and their discordant effects on others without offending local residents or leaders. Hrotsvit also changed the value of the wealth burned by Thais from forty to 400 pounds of gold and jewels. From a modern perspective she increased the value of the gold from approximately \$630,000 to over six million dollars.²¹⁹ The exaggeration could have implied how successful Thais really was while at the same time demonstrated the economic suffering she caused by her actions. The final modification appears in the number of virgins in Paul's vision, an increase from three to four. Chamberlain claims that “Hrotsvit wished to signify both the cardinal virtues and the quadrivial arts in the

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 382.

²¹⁷ “Life of St. Thais the Harlot,” *Cap I*.

²¹⁸ Hrotsvit, *Conversio Thaidis Meretricis*, I.23, translation mine.

²¹⁹ “Life of St. Thais the Harlot,” *Cap I*; Hrotsvit, *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais* in Wilson 1985, 102.

four maidens.”²²⁰ She may have also wished to unify the reference of the four elements from the lesson to the body of the play and show how Thais’ conversion brought harmony to herself, her area, and the world.

Hrotsvit’s final play, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Fides, Spes, and Karitas*, begins with Emperor Hadrian hearing of Sapientia’s arrival in Rome with her three daughters. The foreign family has been actively converting Romans since they arrived, causing spouses to refuse to eat and sleep with each other. Hadrian invites the four to the palace where, stunned by the girls’ beauty, he cordially invites Sapientia to renounce God and worship those of the Romans. She introduces herself as Sapientia (“Wisdom”), descendant from the “illustrious race” of Italian princes.²²¹ When Hadrian inquired about the names and ages of the girls, Sapientia turns to her daughters and asks “Would it please you, children, say, / if I fatigued this fool / with a lesson in arithmetic rule?”²²² She proceeds with a description of the ages as either Olympiades (a period of four years) or lustra (a period of five years). From there, with Hadrian playing the inquisitive student, Sapientia explains the difference between augmented and diminished numbers as well as definitions of evenly even and evenly uneven numbers, denominators and quotients. Following the lecture, Hadrian places the family under guard for three days to reconsider his proposition before he resorts to torture.

After the three days have passed, the family is again brought before Hadrian for yet another opportunity to follow the Roman way. Hadrian calls for Fides (“Faith”) first and orders her to bring offerings to Diana. She refuses, insulting the emperor and his guard, Antiochus. Fides remains obstinate even when Hadrian commands his army to flog the

²²⁰ Chamberlain, 340.

²²¹ Hrotsvit, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Fides, Spes, and Karitas* in Wilson 1985, 118.

²²² *Ibid*, 118.

girl. Hadrian then orders her nipples to be cut off when he sees the ineffectiveness of the flogging, but milk flows instead of blood from the new wounds. She “rests comfortably” on a “fiery hot grill,” the next ordeal Fides must endure. Surviving that, Fides swims joyously in boiling pot of wax and pitch. She is finally beheaded after she bids goodbye to her mother and sisters. Spes (“Hope”) is next. She is first whipped and then suspended so the executioners can disembowel her and sever her limbs, but from the wounds emerge a “fragrant heavenly scent.”²²³ Just as she were to be thrown in a pot of boiling oil, wax, fat, and pitch the pot burst. Antiochus reports to Hadrian the explosion “destroyed the servants and that witch appears to be unharmed.”²²⁴ She too is beheaded. Hadrian calls for the youngest sister, Karitas (“Charity” or “Love”). The lashes she receives do not break her skin and the furnace she is forced into explodes, killing five thousand men. She walks away from the fire with three men dressed in white. Karitas bids farewell to her mother and offers her neck to Antiochus. The women of the city help Sapientia bury her children “at the third milestone out of town.”²²⁵ After the matrons had stayed for three nights, the mother compels them to leave so she can pray to God and die at her daughters’ tombs.

The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Fides, Spes, and Karitas bears a striking resemblance to the legend of “Saint Sophia and Her Three Daughters” in the *Golden Legend*, albeit in much greater detail.²²⁶ Hrotsvit, however, progresses the action and elaborates the narrative through her imaginative dialogue. She injects the arithmetic lesson at the beginning and eliminates Hadrian’s fate, which is included in de Voragine’s

²²³ *Ibid.*, 125.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

²²⁶ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol II trans William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 185.

account. Despite lacking evidence, it is possible that both Hrotsvit and de Voragine, as in some of other works, drew from similar versions of the same legend.

The play is set in Rome during the reign of Emperor Hadrian (r. 117-138 CE) and is the only one of Hrotsvit's plays with a fixed location. Hrotsvit's choice of location is less of an anomaly and supports the overall unity of her works; it parallels her final legend, the story of Agnes, which was also set in Rome. While both stories laud chastity and martyrdom, *Agnes* serves as an introduction to the dramas by introducing the new theme of conversion Hrotsvit will address in the plays. The final play acts as a conclusion to the entire opus by uniting the themes of chastity, martyrdom, unrelenting faithfulness in Christ; the evilness of paganism, family, intellectual discourse, and the power of prayer set in the holiest city in all of Christendom.

Several scholars speculate on the meaning and intentions behind Hrotsvit's decision to include the arithmetic lesson in *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Fides, Spes, and Karitas*. On one end of the spectrum, Wailes argues that Sapientia's performance "lacks evident connection to matters of human nature or religious truth and may carry no other than its literal meaning in the play."²²⁷ Wilson again refers to Hrotsvit's intellectual prowess by calling it her "Boethian exposition of numerical values"²²⁸ while Wiles says the "neat mathematical structure" of the play and Sapientia's lesson in particular demonstrate "the mysterious order that lies behind material things."²²⁹ Daniel Kline, representing the other end of the spectrum, says the "math lesson encapsulates the play's key insights," with the children's ages acting as an "interpretive guide" to Christian

²²⁷ Wailes, 191.

²²⁸ Wilson, 1998, 11.

²²⁹ Wiles, 141.

mysteries.²³⁰ In fact, all these scholars are correct. While showcasing her mastery of Boethian mathematics, Hrotsvit depicted one of her stated goals from the preface: depicting the victory of female frailty while submitting manly strength to disorder. Sipientia's instruction may have been, as the literal interpretation would suggest, a mere reference to mathematical lessons an audience of the formally educated would have been familiar with. The fact that Hrotsvit carefully wove the different perspectives into a lively dialogue enhancing a visually compelling drama further proves her talent and cleverness.

²³⁰ David T. Kline, "Kids Say the Darndest Things: Irascible Children in Hrotsvit's *Sipientia*" in Brown et al, 82-83.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the individual work: legend or drama, male subject or female, Hrotsvit imbued each with the basic tenets of Christianity. Biblical characters appeared throughout her works. She speaks of King David in *Maria*, *Ascensio*, and *Theophilus*; Adam in *Maria*, *Ascensio*, and *Basilius*; Abel and King Solomon in *Maria*; Job in *Gongolf*; and the Magi who visited Jesus in *Maria*. She also introduced the Holy Family in her first two legends. Hrotsvit included the important Christian locations of Rome, Bethlehem, Mt. Olivet, and Egypt while at the same time incorporating the fundamental concepts of the Trinity, baptism, relic worship, miracles, the virgin birth, Christ's resurrection and ascension, and the serpent.²³¹

The recurrence of particular numbers throughout the legends and dramas refers to significant numbers in the Catholic faith. Hrotsvit mentioned the number thirty twice in *Maria* which, because the subject was Mary, contrasts the thirty pieces of silver Judas received for handing over Jesus. Mary ascended fifteen steps in *Maria* and Thais had only fifteen days to live after being reunited with Pafnutius. The number fifteen is a product of the five wounds of Jesus multiplied by the sacred number three and an

²³¹ Hrotsvit, *Maria*; *Ascensio*; *Maria*; *Gongolf*; *Theophilus*; *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Fides, Spes, and Karitas*; *The Fall and Repentance of Mary*.

indicator of divine grace. Three, a direct reference to the Holy Trinity, was incorporated eight different times: three times in *Theophilus*; once in *Basilus*, *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais*, and *Dionysius*; and twice in *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Fides, Spes, and Karitas*. The instances, however, do not include the three martyrs each in *Dionysius*, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agape, Chionia, and Hirena* and *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Fides, Spes, and Karitas*. The number forty, the number of days Jesus fasted in the wilderness, emerges one time each in *Maria*, *Theophilus*, and *Basilus*. Twelve apostles accompanied Jesus during His life and Hrotsvit placed twelve nobles with Pelagius' father as he was captured.

Hrotsvit also presented major historical figures in the context of her writings. The apostles Peter, Paul, and John each appear in her works as do the leaders Constantine and Pepin the Short.²³² She personifies evil with the Emperors Domitian, Julian the Apostate, Diocletian, and Hadrian as well as the Muslim leader Adbrahamen. The introduction of the biblical and historical characters, the use of significant numbers and locations indicate more than an awareness of her Christian history. While the references were certainly not lost on Hrotsvit's learned audiences, the redundant manner in which she presented the information may have served as reinforcement techniques to new Christians and supports the use of her works as instructional tools. For not only did Otto need to Christianize the defeated Magyars, but also the Bohemians and the Slavs.²³³ The didactic nature of the legends and dramas spoke directly to these groups of people. The oral delivery aided in their comprehension while at the same time remained aesthetically appealing to the *literati*.

²³² Hrotsvit, *Theophilus*; *Dionysius*; *The Resurrection of Drusiana and Callimachus*; *The Conversion of General Gallicanus*; *Gongolf*.

²³³ Wailes, 108.

In addition to the Christian indoctrination, Hrotsvit wove social instruction throughout her works for the benefit of her audiences. She portrayed non-Christians in such a way as to invoke, at least, a sense of otherness and, at most, a hatred for them. She began by telling her audiences Jews were laden with diseases and then showed how they acted as cohorts to the devil.²³⁴ Hrotsvit demonstrated the perversity of Muslims before moving to depicting the evils of paganism, a practice still relevant in the tenth century. Her carefully constructed gender roles presented women not as an oppositional force to men, but as equals. Her subjects, in fact were almost evenly divided between males and females with both sexes equally capable of repentance and conversion, and worthy of martyrdom. Not only did the canoness create class distinctions in her works, she depicted each rather favorably. By having individuals conducting transgressions such as the servant in *Basilus* and Callimachus, she showed that even though they held an inferior place in society, they were still Christians and worthy of forgiveness and salvation. Based on the content and characters of the legends and dramas, Hrotsvit's audiences may have been comprised of a more diverse population than has been previously argued. The messages contained within her writings targeted both men and women, clerical and lay and of all stations in Christian society.

Hrotsvit had more than access to a sizeable library at St. Emmeram, based on the sources she used she had contact with a wide circle of learned individuals. Her compositions represent the transmission of ideas and widespread communication of ideals, religious and secular, throughout Christendom. The events of the tenth century, specifically the eastward expansion of Christendom necessitated a program of Christianization which included more than just religious instruction. Hrotsvit's legends

²³⁴ Hrotsvit, *Gongolf* in Wiegand, lines 311-317; *Theophilus*; *Basilus*.

and dramas, because of their wide communicative capacities, may have supported this process. Her writings, including the histories not discussed here exemplify the nonviolent persuasive ideological rhetoric that supported and sustained the growing imperial power. Hrotsvit, along with her contemporaries became the “ideological glue”²³⁵ that bound together an expanding Christendom. She most certainly wrote to be read by her patrons, but the nature in which she wrote begged for an oral delivery. Through a program of education and entertainment, the visual productions could tell as well as show the audience what to believe and how to act. The social memory she created in the east based on the literary foundation of the west supported the hegemonic aims and agenda of Christian expansion of the Ottonian Imperial dynasty. Hrotsvit’s writings not only reflected the world she knew, but helped construct the world the Ottonians desired.

²³⁵ John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 15.

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APPENDIX

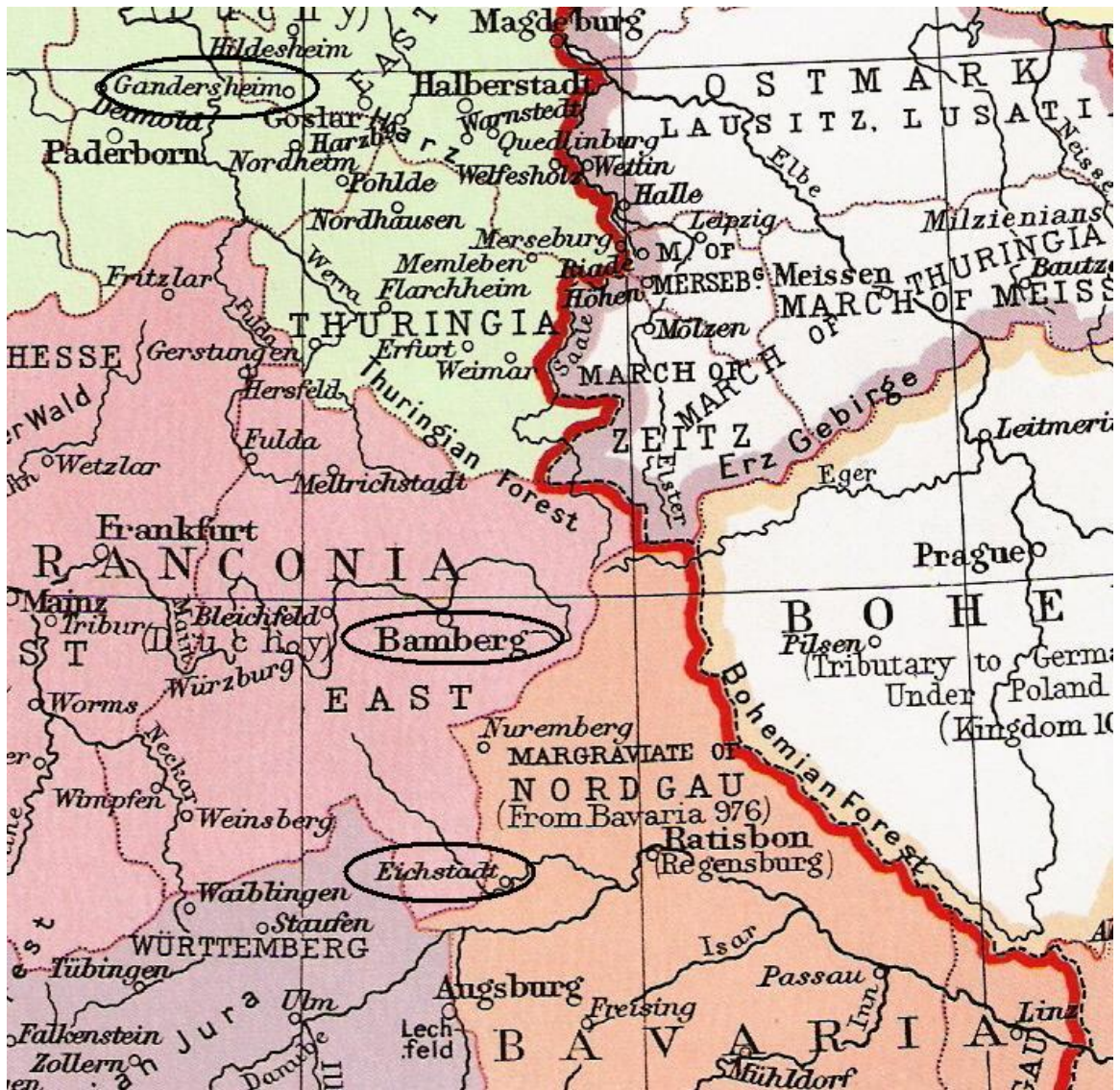
Liber Secundus

Praefatio

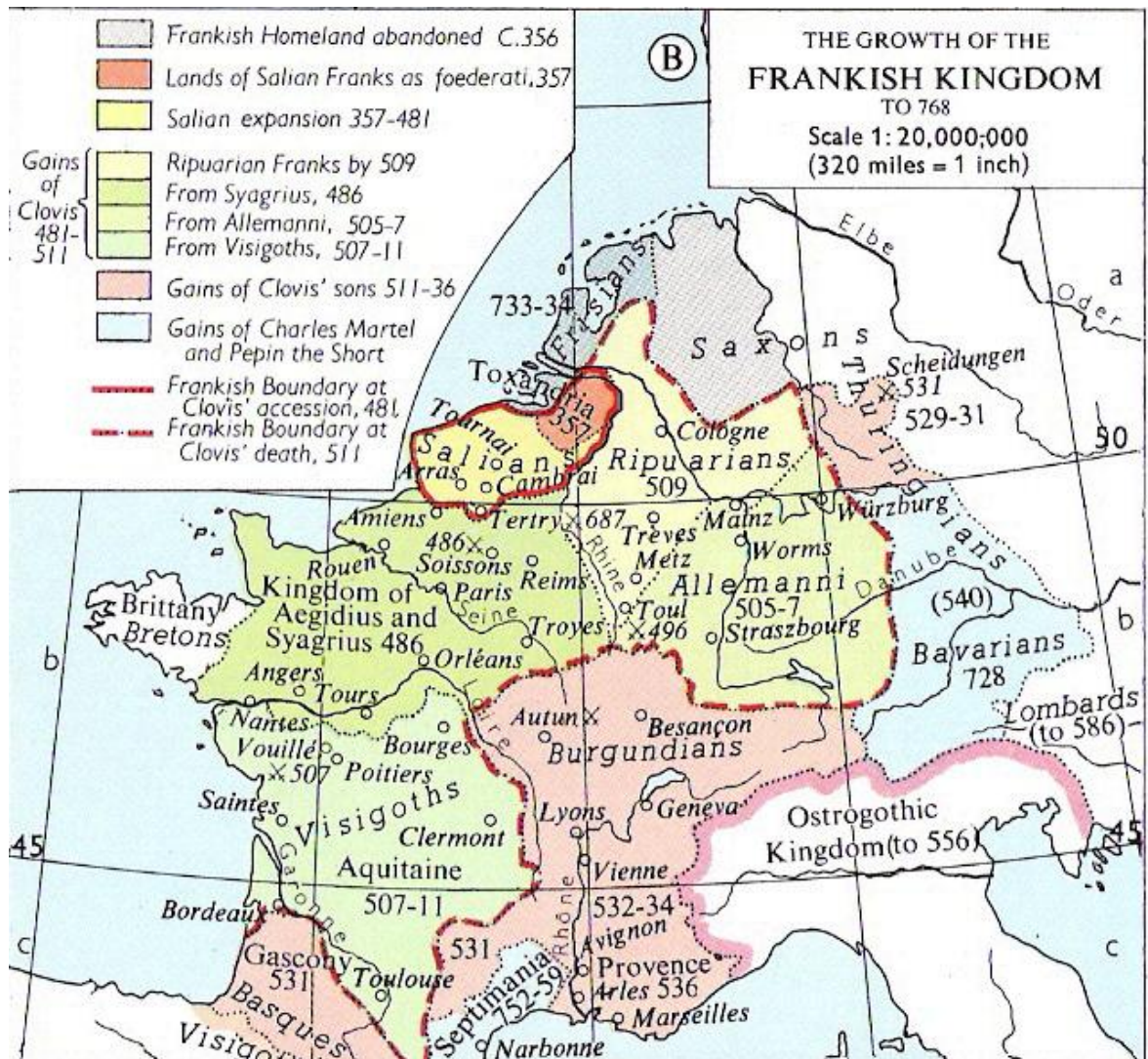
Plures inveniuntur catholici cuius nos penitus expurgare nequimus facti qui pro cultoris facundia sermonis gentilium vanitatem librorum utilitati praeferunt sacrarum scripturarum Sunt etiam alii sacris inherentes paginis qui licet alia gentilium spernant Terentii tamen fingmenta frequentius lectitant et dum dulcedine sermonis delectantur nefandarum notitia rerum maculantur Unde ego Calmor Validus Gandersheimensis non recusavi illum imitari dictando genere quo turpis lascivarum incesta feminarum recitabantur laudabilis sacrarum castimonia virginum iuxta mei facultatem ingenioli celebraretur Hoc tamen facit non raro verecundari gravique rubore perfundi quod huiusmodi specie dictationis congenite detestabilem inlicite amantium dementiam et male sulcia colloquia eorum quae nec nostro auditui permittuntur accommodari dictando mente tractavi et stili officio designavi Sed <si> hæc erubescendo neglegerem nec proposito satisfacerem nec innocentium laudem adeo plene iuxta meum posse exponerem quia quanto blandicię amentium as illiciendum promptiores tanot et superni adiutoris gloria sublimior et triumphantium victoria probatur gloriosior presertim cum feminea fragilitas vinceret et virilis robur confusione subiaceret Non enim dubito mihi ab aliquibus obici quod huius vilitas dictationis multo inferior multo contractior penitusque dissimilis eius quem proponebam imitari sit sentiis Concedo Ipsis tamen denuncio me in hoc iure reprehendi non posse quasi his vellem abusive assimilari qui mei inerciam longe praecesserunt in scientia sublimiori Nec enim tantę sum iactantię ut vel extremis me presumam conferre auctorum alumnis sed hoc solum nitor ut licet nullatenus valeam apte supplici tamen mentis devocione acceptum in datorem retorqueam ingenium Ideoque non sum adeo amatrix mei ut pro vitanda reprehensione Christi qui in sanctis operatur virtutem quocumque ipse dabit posse cessem praedicare Si enim alicui placet mea devotio gaudebo si autem vel pro mei abiectio vel pro vitiosi sermonis rusticitate nulli placet memet ipsam tamen iuvat quod feci quia dum proprii vilitatem laboris in aliis meę inscientię opusculis heroico ligatam strophio in hoc dramatica vinctam serie colo perniciosas gentilium delicias abstinendo devito



Map I: Germany at the time of Hrotsvit's compositions including the various duchies and eastern border regions. From Muir's *Historical Atlas: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* eds R.F. Treharne et al (London: George Philip and Son Ltd., 1965), 10.



Map II: Enlarged image from Map 1 showing the cities of Eichstadt in Bavaria and Bamberg in East Franconia as well as their distance southeast of Gandersheim in Saxony.



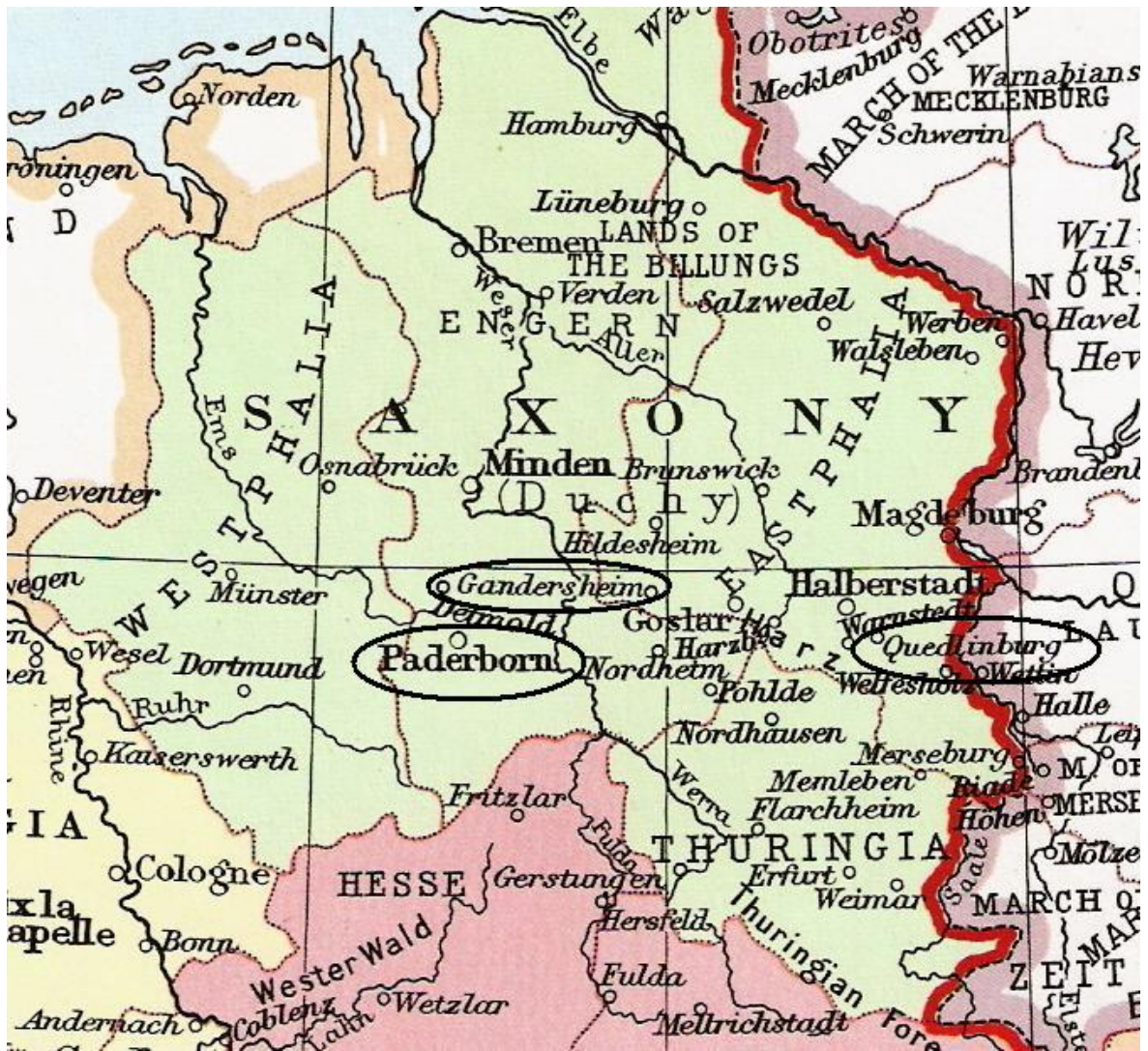
Map III: The Frankish Kingdom, including the region of Burgundy in 768. From Muir's Historical Atlas: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern eds R.F. Treharne et al (London: George Philip and Son Ltd., 1965), 8.



Map IV: Islamic Spain and Sicily during the tenth century. From Muir's Historical Atlas: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern eds R.F. Treharne et al (London: George Philip and Son Ltd., 1965), 6.



Map V: Dionysius' western journey from Athens to Rome to Paris. From Muir's Historical Atlas: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern eds R.F. Treharne et al (London: George Philip and Son Ltd., 1965), 9.



Map VI: Saxony c. 962 highlighting the relative distances between Gandersheim, Paderborn, and Quedlinburg. From Muir's Historical Atlas: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern eds R.F. Treharne et al (London: George Philip and Son Ltd., 1965), 10.



Map VII: The Magyar Invasions c. 900 (see legend). From Muir's Historical Atlas: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern eds R.F. Treharne et al (London: George Philip and Son Ltd., 1965), 9.