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**Behind the Veil: The rise of female monasticism and the double house in Early
Medieval Francia**

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Abstract

Female monasticism occupied an incredibly important position in the world of early medieval Francia. Convents, and the women living within them, were key figures in the political, social, cultural and religious history of the Frankish kingdoms. Contemporary sources, from secular histories to saints' lives to monastic rules are filled with the names of convents and nuns, and recognize their powerful roles in the Frankish world

Yet, in modern historiography, early medieval nuns have been marginalized. Viewed by historians as less important than male monasticism, or as an example of the misogyny of the Carolingian world, female monasticism has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. Indeed, there is a lack of information on some of the most fundamental questions on this subject. Why did monasticism become increasingly attractive in the sixth to ninth centuries? What was the experience of women inside monasteries? How did communities of nuns interact with the world outside their walls? What can we learn from the monastic *regulae* about the perceptions of women and the religious life?

This thesis addresses these questions, among others, in order to reveal the complexity and variety that existed in Frankish female monasticism. The flexibility of early medieval women to adapt the monastic life to their own needs and requirements set up the foundation for female monasticism in the centuries to come. The story of monastic women in the Frankish kingdoms is not one of misogynistic repression of female religious freedom, but rather illustrates the ability of women to shape their own lives with the support of various kings, noblemen, bishops and male clergy. My research is an attempt to restore medieval monastic women to the position of importance and respect accorded to them by their contemporaries.

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Table of Contents

Abstract		ii
Acknowledgements		iii
Table of Contents		iv
List of Abbreviations		v
Introduction	‘Crowds of monks and holy maidens’: The history of female monasticism	1
Chapter 1	Powerful, popular and pious: The nature of double monasteries	10
Chapter 2	Holy queens and noble saints: The politics of patronage	41
Chapter 3	Precepts of the Fathers, Rule of the Mothers: Female monastic rules	69
Conclusion	Piety and power: The role of female monasticism in Frankish history	99
Epilogue:	Something old, something new: The <i>Institutio Sanctimonialium</i>	103
Appendix 1	Monastic sources in Aurelian, <i>Regula ad Virgines</i>	107
Appendix 2	Monastic sources in Donatus, <i>Regula ad Virgines</i>	110
Appendix 3	Monastic sources in <i>Regula Cuiusdam Patris ad Virgines</i>	114
Appendix 4	Common precepts in female <i>regulae</i>	116
Appendix 5	Translation of Aurelian, <i>Regula ad Virgines</i>	120
Bibliography		129

List of Abbreviations

<i>AS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i>
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
	<i>Conc. = Conciliae</i>
	<i>Leges =</i>
	<i>SS = Scriptores</i>
	<i>SRM = Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus, series Latina</i>
<i>RCP</i>	<i>Regula Cuiusdam Patris ad Virgines</i>

Where I have used the translated version of a Latin text, I have indicated this in the footnotes. All other Latin translations are my own. I have followed a general rule of providing my English translation in the body of the text and the original Latin in the footnotes.

Introduction

‘Crowds of monks and holy maidens’: The history of female monasticism

In the seventh century ‘throughout the provinces of Gaul, crowds of monks and holy maidens began to sprout not only through the fields, villages, farms and castles, but indeed even throughout the lonely wilderness, simply from the rule of the holy fathers Benedict and Columbanus, when before that time monasteries had scarcely appeared in that place.’¹ The changing nature of the Frankish landscape, according to the anonymous monk or nun who wrote the life of St. Sadalburga, was a reflection of the positive impact of Christianisation on Gallic society. However, we should not dismiss their view of the ever-expanding influence of the church into the pagan wilds of the Frankish realms as simply an example of Christian propaganda. Rather, it reflects a significant change in the nature of Frankish Christian society. The work of Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg clearly indicates that from the mid-sixth century to the early ninth century, female monasteries experienced a period of dramatic growth.² Large numbers of female houses sprang up throughout the Frankish kingdoms, housing the new kind of monastic female saints, like Sadalberga, who fill our hagiographical sources. These monasteries were often run as double houses, the distinctive form of monastic foundation that arose in the seventh century, where a community of monks was attached to a convent under the rule of an abbess. As the *Vita Sadalbergae* reports, these ‘crowds of monks and holy maidens’ spread throughout Francia, attracting the attention of bishops, the clergy and lay Christians alike.

¹‘Huius tempore per Galliarum provincias agmina monachorum et sacrarum puellarum examina non solum per agros, villas vicosque atque castella, verum etiam per heremi vastitatem ex regula dumtaxat beatorum patrum Benedicti et Columbani pullulare coeperunt, cum ante illud tempus monasteria vix paucis illis repperirentur in locis.’ *Vita Sadalberga abbatissae Laudunensis*, 8, in Bruno Krusch, ed., *MGH SRM*, V, Hanover, 1910, p. 54.

² Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, ‘Women’s Monastic Communities, 500-1100: Patterns of Expansion and Decline’ in *Signs*, 14, 2, 1989, p. 266.

In this thesis I aim to restore the contemporary views of female monasticism that have been marginalized in current historiography. By evaluating the primary source material on women in monasticism, I intend to recapture the complex links between female religious communities and the wider social, cultural and political world of the Frankish kingdoms. I consider this question in three sections, relating to the different aspects of female monasticism in this period. In the first chapter, I examine the pragmatic ways in which women responded to the specialized needs of their female communities, and how this resulted in the rise of the double monastery. I outline the internal structure of these houses as well as the ways in which these women mediated their relationships with the external world, illustrated by case studies of the monasteries of Chelles and Jouarre. My second chapter expands on the external relationships of female monasteries to explore the roles these houses played in the political environment of early medieval Francia. The political nature of these communities is unquestionable, given the presence of powerful and prominent elite and royal women in a number of convents, and in this section I trace the contextual networks of political patronage that surrounded female houses. In my final chapter I turn to the different monastic rules that early medieval convents followed. These texts, comprising four extant rules for nuns and the influential rules of Benedict and Columbanus, provide us with a vast amount of information on both attitudes towards monastic women and the way these women lived their lives. I address the lack of scholarly attention to the rules composed specifically for women by providing an in-depth analysis of these texts, demonstrating the striking individuality and variety present within female monastic practice. As a result, the numerous communities of monastic women in early medieval Francia re-emerge as powerful, prominent and complex institutions that sat at the centre of Frankish history throughout the Merovingian and Carolingian dynasties.

Although the source material for this period of history is often fragmented or limited in comparison with later eras, there are a number of different genres of texts and sources which can be viewed together to reconstruct the changes in the life of monastic women. Most importantly, we have a number of rules (*regulae*) for female monasteries that were specifically composed for convents in this period. *Regulae* were prescriptive texts, often composed by a bishop or male clergyman, which laid out the various duties and responsibilities of the nuns in a particular house, the different administrative and leadership roles that needed to be fulfilled, and how the community should provide for the day-to-day

needs of each nun. These documents, including the rules of Caesarius, Aurelian, Donatus and the anonymous *Regula Cuiusdam Patris ad Virgines*, provide us with a crucial insight into how these communities functioned, and contain a wealth of information on the daily life of early medieval nuns. The rules are supplemented by a large number of *vitae*, or lives, of monastic female saints, such as the *Vita Sadalbergae*, which reveal the actions of individual women within the various monasteries of Francia. The *vitae*, of course, focus primarily on the holy deeds of the saint in question, but often reveal a narrative of events surrounding the foundation of their convent and the relationships between the community of religious women and the secular world.

We can also gain a broader view of the political and social context of these female monasteries by examining the secular histories of the Merovingian and Carolingian kingdoms. The most important eyewitness source for the Merovingian kingdoms in the sixth century is the *History* of Bishop Gregory of Tours.³ For the period following his death in 594 AD, our sources are patchier. The next major historical texts are the *Chronicle of Fredegar* composed in the mid-seventh century and the *Liber Historia Francorum* from the early eighth-century.⁴ For the period after this, and the transition of the Frankish throne from the Merovingian dynasty to the Carolingians, we rely on the pro-Carolingian *Annales Mettenses Priores*.⁵ These histories of the political developments in Francia reveal the factional background behind the rise of female monasticism and often provide information on the secular careers of prominent female saints before they entered their monastery. While only a few of the histories of early medieval Francia survive, we can fortunately supplement them with the records of numerous secular and church councils in this period. Archaeology also helps to present a fuller picture of the environment in which these women lived. Although most convents from this period have been lost or heavily rebuilt as time passed, we do have some archaeological remains from sites such as the crypt at Jouarre.⁶

³ Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon*, Princeton, 1989.

⁴ For more on the context and problems of these sources, see the excellent analyses given in Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640-720*, Manchester, 1996.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Carol Heitz, 'Architecture et Monuments de Neustrie' in Hartmut Atsma, ed., *La Neustrie: Les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850*, Tome II, Sigmaringen, 1989, p. 189.

As with any form of historical material, we must address the problems these sources present when we use them as evidence for the history of women in monasticism. Firstly, the sources which are directly focused on female monasticism, the *regulae* and the *vitae*, are prescriptive texts. The composers of monastic *regulae* were more interested in outlining the ideal form of life for holy women than in reflecting the actual practice of nuns. We have no way of knowing for certain which elements of each rule were strictly enforced, which were held up as ideals to be strived for, and which were simply ignored or broken. Moreover, the *vitae* of monastic saints were also focused towards providing an example of true female piety and holy behaviour. Any evidence from these texts must be viewed through the lens of hagiography and it is often difficult to separate the historical actions and motivations of these women from their saintly roles as *exempla*. Nevertheless, despite the issues surrounding these sources, the *regulae* and *vitae* still provide us with our clearest view into female monasteries in this period. If we approach them with a critical view, and acknowledge their focus on ideal forms of monastic life, they can still provide a wealth of information on contemporary perceptions of the role of monastic women, how these communities functioned in a broader social context, and what issues they faced both internally and externally. With a careful reading of these texts, and the use of other literary and archaeological sources as supplements, we can begin to piece together some of the reality of these women's lives from beneath the layers of ecclesiastical ideals.

Additionally, we are unable, due to the fragmented nature of our evidence, to make generalisations about the monastic experience of women across all of Francia from the sources available to us. For example, in regards to monastic *regulae* for women, only four survive from all of Francia between the early sixth century and mid-seventh century. It is tempting to try to establish what the "typical" form of monastic rule was for Frankish convents, and to propose that these rules were likely followed in other houses, but in reality we have no evidence for the kind of rule each house followed, whether it was a written document or simply a set of customary practices. Furthermore, the geographical diversity of the different Frankish kingdoms means that we cannot apply conclusions drawn from a single source across the whole of Francia. The experiences of nuns in a small urban nunnery in the south of Burgundy, such as Arles, would have been dramatically different from those of their contemporaries in a large, rural double monastery founded by Austrasian nobility, like Nivelles. Each of our sources, be they *regulae*, *vitae* or *historiae*, were composed in a

specific context for a specific purpose and we must take care to avoid both chronological and geographical over-generalisations.

While a large number of studies on early medieval monasticism divide the history of the Frankish kingdoms under the Merovingian and Carolingian dynasties into two distinct periods, I have chosen to extend the scope of this thesis across the two. This allows the lines of continuity in female monasticism, and in Frankish history in general, to become evident, rather than imposing an arbitrary end date of 751, with the accession of the first Carolingian king. The surge in female monasticism that began in the sixth century did not come to an abrupt halt when Pippin III was crowned, but rather continued on across this chronological boundary. Indeed, I will demonstrate that both Pippin III and Charlemagne actively drew on the precedents set by the Merovingian kings in their relationship towards female monasteries. Consequently, I will focus on three centuries of developments within female monasticism, tracing the antecedents of double houses in the sixth-century rules of Caesarius and Aurelian, the rise of this distinctively new form of monastic community in the early seventh century, the important political roles of these houses across the seventh and eighth centuries and the continued interest of Pippin and Charlemagne in double monasteries in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. The *terminus ante quem* for this study is the implementation of the reforms of Louis the Pious and Benedict of Aniane from 816, when a new set of attitudes towards convents took hold. By focusing on this broader period, spanning several centuries, I am able to trace the shifting attitudes towards the religious life of women and illustrate how female monasticism evolved into a new form that forever changed the relationship between the secular political hierarchy and communities of religious women.

Surprisingly, despite the crucial role of double houses and the nuns within them in the social and political history of early medieval Francia, the historical attention on this subject remains slim. Instead of a body of scholarship that directly focuses on a close examination of female monasticism and follows its developments from its origins down through the medieval period, there is a split between those historians who focus on the role of women, those who examine the cultural history of Francia, and those who study developments within monastic thought and practice. Few have attempted to combine all three areas. Wemple, McNamara and Nelson address the experience of women in the Frankish kingdoms, and emphasize the

restrictions and controls placed over women by both the religious and secular male hierarchies.⁷ They downplay both the rise in power and prominence of several major female monasteries and the continued ability of Frankish women to follow a variety of expressions of monastic life. However, the number of high-profile royal and noble women who entered into monasticism has attracted the attention of both Nelson and Stafford, who are primarily known for their work on early medieval queenship.⁸ These historians draw on the individual royal women seen in hagiographical sources to demonstrate the political agency of royal women and their close association with patronage roles. While this body of work has shed light on the activities of royal women within a monastic context, it does so without considering the importance of their convents as centres of power and influence in and of themselves, which retained continued political clout well after the deaths of these individual women.

Alternatively, McKitterick and Hen examine the role of convents in the growth and spread of cultural products in the Frankish kingdoms, contesting the idea of a Carolingian 'renaissance' and emphasizing the continued cultural activity of the Merovingian period.⁹ Their scholarship is a positive move away from viewing the Merovingian and Carolingian

⁷ Suzanne Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500 to 900*, Philadelphia, 1984; Suzanne F. Wemple, 'Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Early Medieval Women' in Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, Susan Stuard, eds, *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, 2nd ed., Boston, 1987, pp. 131-151; Jo Ann McNamara, 'Living Sermons: Consecrated Women and the Conversion of Gaul' in Lillian Thomas Shank and John A. Nichols, eds, *Medieval Religious Women, Volume Two, Peaceweavers*, Kalamazoo, 1987, pp. 19-37; Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia*, Cambridge MA, 1996; Janet L. Nelson, 'Gendering courts in the early medieval west' in Leslie Brubaker, Julia M. H. Smith, eds, *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West 300-900*, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 185-197.

⁸ Janet L. Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: The Careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History' in Derek Baker, ed., *Medieval Women*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 31-77; Janet L. Nelson, 'Women at the Court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regiment' in John Carmi Parsons, ed., *Medieval Queenship*, New York, 1993, pp. 43-61; Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages*, Athens GA, 1983.

⁹ Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms Under the Carolingians, 751-987*, London, 1983; Rosamond McKitterick, 'The Diffusion of Insular Culture in Neustria Between 650 and 850: The Implications of the Manuscript Evidence' in Hartmut Atsma, ed., *La Neustrie: Les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850*, Tome II, Sigmaringen, 1989, pp. 395-432; Rosamond McKitterick, 'Nuns' Scriptoria in England and Francia in the Eighth Century' in *Francia*, 19, 1, 1989, pp. 1-35; Rosamond McKitterick, 'Royal Patronage of Culture in the Frankish Kingdoms Under the Carolingians: Motives and Consequences' in *Committenti e produzione artistico-letteraria nell'alto medioevo occidentale, Cettimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo 39*, Spoleto, 1992, pp. 93-129; Rosamond McKitterick, 'Script and book production' in Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *Carolingian Culture: emulation and innovation*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 221-247; Rosamond McKitterick, 'Women and Literacy in the Early Middle Ages' in ed., *Books, Scribes and Learning in the Frankish Kingdoms, 6th-9th centuries*, Aldershot, 1994, pp. 1-45; Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul AD 481-751*, Leiden, 1995; Yitzhak Hen, 'Gender and the patronage of culture in Merovingian Gaul' in Leslie Brubaker, Julia M. H. Smith, eds, *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West 300-900*, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 217-233.

periods as distinct, separate eras, and undoubtedly improves our knowledge of the cultural activity of female monastic centres. Nonetheless, it does not address why aristocrats in this period saw female monasteries as such attractive options for cultural patronage, and why royal, noble and episcopal patrons became so interested in linking themselves with the cultural production of these rapidly growing female foundations. Finally, there is a vast body of literature dedicated to examining the development of the Christian church in the early medieval period. Prinz, Wallace-Hadrill and Brown, amongst numerous others, trace the complex shifting relationships between monasteries, the episcopacy and secular rulers, and how this shaped Frankish history.¹⁰ Although these scholars have made a major contribution to our understanding of the development of Christianity in Francia, the majority of research on the history of the Church, and on monasticism in particular, is devoted to the male experience, with female monasticism relegated to a brief comparison or regarded as less important. Yet this era saw the most rapid growth of female monastic foundations in medieval history, and was a product of the same conditions as contemporary male houses. Any examination of Christianity in this period must necessarily deal with how this new boom of convents influenced the views of both the secular and church hierarchies towards monasticism.

The surge over the seventh century has led several scholars to describe this period as a 'golden age' for female monasticism. Patricia Ranft, in particular, uses this term to signify the relative freedom and opportunity for women in the seventh century to found new religious communities, to experiment with female leadership, and to enjoy the respect of their secular and ecclesiastical contemporaries.¹¹ The Merovingian period becomes, in this approach, the time when women had the greatest ability to determine their own religious life in the whole of the Middle Ages. Even so, golden ages are always determined in relation to bad periods that took place beforehand or afterwards. In this case, Ranft characterizes the subsequent Carolingian era as filled with increased restriction, control and misogynistic reform of female

¹⁰ Friederich Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich: Kultur und Gesellschaft in Gallien, den Rheinlanden und Bayern am Beispiel der monastischen Entwicklung (4. bis 8. Jahrhundert)*, Munich, 1965; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, Oxford, 1983; Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity A.D. 200-1000*, 2nd ed., Malden MA, 2003.

¹¹ Patricia Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe*, New York, 1996; Patricia Ranft, *Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition*, New York, 1998; For more examples of this view, see Schulenburg, 'Women's Monastic Communities', p. 270; Joan Nicholson, 'Feminae Gloriosae: Women in the Age of Bede' in Derek Baker, ed., *Medieval Women*, Oxford, 1978, p. 15; and Janet L. Nelson, *The Frankish World, 750-900*, London, 1996, p. 207.

monasticism which repressed the freedom that religious women had experienced under the Merovingians. This grand narrative of decline from a period of almost proto-gender equality is an incredibly constraining approach to this subject. My research demonstrates the deep levels of continuity that characterized female monasticism in Francia from the sixth century down to the ninth century. Monastic women continued to have incredibly varied experiences, experimenting and adjusting their own version of the religious life, often with the firm support of male bishops and nobles. Moreover, when historians label the seventh-century boom as a golden age, they preclude a more rigorous analysis of this period and instead focus attention on the lapse from the ideal that occurred under the Carolingians. By taking this approach, they also reinforce the idea that the Merovingian and Carolingian periods were dramatically different in their approaches to female monasticism, a view that is not supported by the primary evidence. When Pippin III ascended to the throne in 751, the lives of monastic women did not come to a sudden halt. Rather, the relationship between the Carolingian kings and female monasticism was heavily shaped by the developments that occurred under their Merovingian predecessors. The respect and concern shown by kings, noblemen and bishops towards supporting and protecting female monasteries in both the Merovingian and Carolingian periods means that the view of the golden age followed by a descent into misogyny is simply not tenable.

At the heart of the issues around the historiography on this subject is that very few of these historians have a primary focus on an examination of female monasticism for its own sake. All of these historians use nuns and convents as interesting illustrations of other themes and ideas, but there is little interest in development and changes within female monasticism itself. Those historians who do attempt to trace these developments, such as Bateson, McNamara and Ranft, approach the subject from the grand narrative of the ‘Golden Age’ and the decline into misogyny.¹² This restrictive view is clearly not reflective of the experiences of early medieval monastic women. The combination of disinterest in female monasticism by scholars of church history and the criticism of convents as repressive institutions by scholars of women’s history means that, on the whole, this area of history has not received its rightful attention. In this thesis, I make clear that the history of women in Frankish convents is not simply a narrative of unwanted women being disposed of in monastic retirement homes

¹² Mary Bateson, ‘Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries’ in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13, 1899, pp. 137-198; See above for McNamara and Ranft.

which were pale imitations of their male counterparts. The women in our sources were determined, often headstrong, political figures who participated actively in shaping their own communities. The agency of monastic women was evident in their confrontations with kings, nobles and bishops, and in the networks of cultural and political patronage that emanated outwards from convents. The impact of both female monasteries and the women within them on Frankish society was a major factor in the historical development of early medieval Francia. Indeed the reaction of the secular nobility to the advent of these powerful female communities laid the foundation for the relationship between convents and the political hierarchy for the remainder of the medieval period. Female monasteries deserve an equal level of scholarly attention to their male counterparts and are essential to any attempt to understand how monasticism, Frankish politics and Frankish society in general developed in this period. This thesis is my attempt to set the monasteries of early medieval women back into the positions of social power and political influence that their contemporaries clearly recognized they held.

Chapter One

Powerful, popular and pious: The nature of the double monastery

Among the range of choices of religious dedication open to early medieval women, one particular variety came to dominate female religious life in the seventh and eighth centuries. In terms of its social, political and religious influence on Frankish culture, the double monastery held a much more prominent and important role in our sources than its single-sex predecessors. The double house, which joined together both monks and nuns in one institution under the rule of an abbess, was first seen in the early seventh century, but quickly spread throughout Northern Francia and on into Britain. The majority of the powerful and influential female monasteries that appeared in contemporary sources, including Faremoutiers, Jouarre, Chelles and Nivelles, practised this new form of monasticism. In this chapter, I highlight the structural base of the double monastery by outlining not only the roles and relationships inside the community, but also the external links these monasteries cultivated with wider society. Double monasticism allowed women from various levels of the social hierarchy to come together in a single community and devote their life to worshipping God. Their foundations were flexible enough to suit both ex-slaves and ex-queens and entailed a pragmatic response to the pressures of the early medieval Frankish world.

Currently, the small body of scholarship on Frankish double monasticism is divided into two groups. On one side, following Bateson's argument that double monasteries were the logical response to an outbreak of enthusiasm for Christianity, Patricia Ranft suggests that this form was responsible for the increased power and prestige of seventh and eighth-century religious women.¹ She argues that double monasteries demonstrated the spiritual equality of early medieval women in the superior position of the abbess, and their increased ability to

¹ Bateson, 'Origin', p. 150; Ranft, *Women and Spiritual Equality*, p. 24.

control their own lives.² Aside from proposing this positive view, Ranft offers little real analysis of how and why double monasteries came to benefit religious women so greatly and instead prefers to hold up the seventh-century double monastery as the standard against which Carolingian monasticism declined. On the other side, McNamara sees double monasticism as ‘fundamentally a scholarly invention and one that is fast losing its usefulness’.³ She does not view the double monastery as a coherent system of female monasticism, but rather a haphazard arrangement in response to regional needs without any overarching unity of form.⁴ Indeed, McNamara even questions the suitability of studying this category of monasticism at all, and sees it instead as a modern construction applied by scholars to a form of religious life that did not strike contemporaries as being a dramatic new development.⁵

Part of the problem here is the ambiguous nature of the Latin terms around monasticism. The term ‘double monastery’ or ‘double house’ is not seen in the sources from this period. Instead we have brief allusions to monks and nuns living in the same monastery, rather than overt statements that a particular monastery is a double house.⁶ To further complicate matters, the Latin terminology around male and female monasteries is ambiguous at best. The terms *monasterium* and *propositum*, which are usually translated as monastery, can apply to a male monastery, a female monastery, or a double house. It is rare that our sources specify which of these forms they are referring to. The Latin terms for the inhabitants of monasteries are even vaguer. The women living in a religious foundation could be called *sanctae virginiae* (holy virgins); *ancillae dei* (handmaids of God); *sorores* (sisters); *matres* (mothers); *sacratae feminae* (consecrated women); *sanctimoniales* (nuns); or simply *mulieres sanctae* (holy women), with little explanation as to the differences between these roles and

² Ibid., p. 113; Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, p. 24.

³ McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 145.

⁴ Ibid., p. 145.

⁵ See *ibid.*

⁶ For examples of these allusions, we have ‘agmina monachorum et sacrarum puellarum’ (crowds of monks and holy maidens) in *Vita Sadalberga*, 8, p. 54; ‘Sepulta autem est in eodem loco honorifice a Dei Sacerdotibus, aliisque in Ecclesiasticae dignitatis ordinem ipsi militantibus’ (priests of God and others doing service in the order of ecclesiastical dignities’) in Hucbald of Saint-Amand, *Vita sanctae Rictrudis*, 32, in Godefrido Henschenio and Daniele Papebrochio, eds, *AS*, Paris, 1766, May 12, p. 88; ‘Bonis ac fidelibus dispensatoribus foris de fratribus, infra vero septa monasterii spiritalibus sororibus curam familiarem commendavit’ (she committed the stewards outside the monastery to the care of good and faithful brothers, and the care of the household within the enclosure of the monastery to the sisters’) in *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis*, Vita A, 3, in Bruno Krusch, ed., *MGH SRM*, II, Hanover, 1888, p. 457; and a ‘utriusque sexus ministrorum caterva’ (throng of servants of both sexes) and ‘filios vel filias’ (sons and daughters) of the abbess in *Vita Bertilae abbatissae Calensis*, 5, in W. Levison, ed., *MGH SRM*, VI, Hanover, 1913, p. 105.

whether they were considered to be engaging in the monastic life. Consequently it can be difficult to determine if a particular foundation was indeed a formal monastery, double or not, or instead a looser community of religious women and men. As Sarah Foot points out, we are further hampered in being able to determine if a monastery was double by the lack of a gender-specific phrase for a single-sex monastery.⁷ Adding to the confusion around double monasticism is that many of our sources, especially the hagiographical lives of the saints, were composed much later than the period that they describe, bringing their validity as historical sources into question.

Nonetheless, if we dismiss this new (and rapidly spreading) form of monasticism as an invention by modern historians, due to the issues surrounding our sources, then we overlook a crucial development in Frankish religious life. Apart from the more obscure references, we do have a number of sources that provide evidence for men and women living together in the same foundation, which I will discuss later in this chapter (see below, pp. 21-22). Furthermore, the number of these houses grew swiftly over the seventh and eighth centuries, with numerous secular and episcopal patrons in Francia and Britain deciding to focus their patronage efforts into founding double monasteries. Presenting saints' lives as inaccurate due to their later composition is also misguided. These lives often drew on oral and literary traditions surrounding monasteries and saints, and provide us with a valuable insight into the effect that female monasteries and monastic women had in Frankish society. In addition, we are able to assess their accuracy by comparing the information they contain to more contemporary sources, such as the councils of the church, political histories and monastic rules. Consequently, double monasticism deserves more scholarly attention than it has thus far attracted. Just what aspects of the double house made it so successful and appealing to the women and men of seventh and eighth-century Francia?

Part of the reason behind why double monasticism spread so quickly through Francia and into Britain was that it was an extremely practical response to the contemporary pressures of this period. Double monasteries, with the addition of male priest-monks to the female

⁷ Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women I: The Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England*, Aldershot, 2000, pp. 49-50.

community, allowed religious women to be far more self-reliant and independent than their sixth-century predecessors.⁸ Accordingly, double monasteries were particularly suited to the rural areas of Northern Francia, the areas to which political power shifted under the Austrasian and Neustrian nobles. These nobles were particular champions of double monasteries, founding numerous new houses for their female relatives and benefitting from the close connections to the sanctity of the convents that this provided. The flexibility and pragmatism of double monasticism were key factors in the success of this model, and its export to the new female monasteries of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. With this in mind, we must examine the various options for religious women in early medieval Francia, before turning to a closer analysis of the internal structure and external relationships of the double monastery. The monasteries of Jouarre and Chelles provide us with two useful case studies of the rise and spread of double monasticism in Francia. Their relationships with wider Frankish society, as well as their internal hierarchy, clearly illustrate to us just how popular this new form of female monasticism was, and what motivated women to enter these communities.

Before I examine the double monastery in detail, I will first outline the broad range of options of the religious life that a woman could choose from in early medieval Francia in order to establish the context in which double monasticism originated. The double house was a popular and prominent form of female religious life, but it was by no means the only option. Single-sex nunneries continued throughout this period, and if women did not wish to live according to a defined rule (or *regula*), they could become hermits, anchorites, deaconesses, vowed widows or virgins, or simply *mulieres sanctae*. Even within monasticism itself, nuns could have vastly different roles from their fellow sisters, depending on their position in the secular social hierarchy. Moreover, the Latin terminology in our sources is often so ambiguous that we have no idea what kind of religious consecration particular women undertook. The resulting range of experiences of monastic women forces us, as historians, to acknowledge the flexibility present in the life of Frankish religious women. It also reveals the extent to which external political class structures infiltrated the very monastic environments that were encouraged to abandon the secular world.

⁸ For more on this, see below, p. 21.

The dominance of large monastic foundations in literary sources and secondary studies can serve to eclipse the less prestigious, but no less common alternatives to the monastic life for women. Indeed, a number of different ways were available for women to engage in a religious life. Small domestic monasteries based in family homes continued to exist throughout the early medieval period.⁹ They provided opportunities for individual women to devote themselves to a religious life, along with their daughters, sisters or female servants, without leaving their home and family. Contemporary sources also reveal young virgins and widows simply living as ‘holy women’ based on an individual vow.¹⁰ Female hermits remained popular throughout the period, and it was as a hermit that Waltrude, the foundress of the monastery of Mauberge, first began her religious life.¹¹ These female hermits, or anchorites, resided in small enclosed cells (sometimes attached to churches or monasteries) and could attract a large following of pilgrims.¹² Although rarely mentioned in our texts until the Council of Worms in 868, women continued to assume the position of deaconess.¹³ Suzanne Wemple proposes that this title, which recurred periodically throughout the early centuries of Christianity, may have been assumed by royal or noble women who were part of a monastery but who were not an abbess.¹⁴ The *Institutio Sanctimonialium*, instituted by Louis the Pious and Benedict of Aniane in 816/817 also gave women the option of becoming canonesses, by following the *regula* without a full conversion to the monastic life.¹⁵ Even within monasticism itself, there were a number of ways for women to enter the religious life. Young girls could be gifted to the monastery by their family as child oblates, or they could make a vow after receiving a monastic education in the convent.¹⁶ Some nuns used monasteries to escape unwanted marriages, or to provide security in their old age as widows.¹⁷ Finally, some women turned to monasteries from religious devotion and the desire to lead a monastic life in an enclosed female community. Clearly, the all-encompassing references to *religiosae* or *mulieres sanctae* seen in our Latin sources obscure the ability of

⁹ Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, London, 2003, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Vita Bertilae abbatissae Calensis*, 1, p. 102; *Vita Anstrudis abbatissae Laudunensis*, 2, in W. Levison, ed., *MGH SRM*, VI, Hanover, 1913, p. 67.

¹¹ *Vita Waldetrudis*, 7-8, in Godefrido Henscenio and Daniele Papebrochio, eds, *AS*, Paris, 1765, April 9, pp. 830-1; Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, p. 41.

¹² *Vita Waldetrudis*, 10, p. 831; Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, p. xiv. Monasteries could also spring up around a hermit's cell.

¹³ Aimé Georges Martimort, *Deaconesses: an historical study*, San Francisco, 1986, p. 208.

¹⁴ Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 146.

¹⁵ Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, p. xiv.

¹⁶ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, pp. 32, 223.

¹⁷ Foot, *Veiled Women*, pp. 39-41.

these early medieval women to tailor their chosen form of consecration to their own particular needs.

Indeed it was entirely possible for women to enter the monastic life without ever taking vows or becoming a nun. Merovingian female monasticism was closely intertwined with the patronage of powerful noble or royal women. These women used their own wealth to establish and support various convents, and often chose to enter them following their retirement from secular political life.¹⁸ A prime example of this option was Queen Balthild, who refounded the convent of Chelles as a double monastery and was also a patron of the convents of Jouarre, Faremoutiers and Soissons.¹⁹ Despite her entry into Chelles around 664, and her subsequent sanctification, Balthild did not become its abbess, nor did she take vows as a nun until shortly before her death.²⁰ Pauline Stafford and Mayke de Jong argue that this failure to take vows implies that queens only entered the religious life following their fall from political power, and ‘kept themselves ready and able to emerge if necessary’ into the secular world.²¹ Though it is clear that these queens retained a keen involvement in Frankish politics, it is also evident that royal women had a consistent interest in female monasticism. The patronage of numerous foundations by royal women exceeded simple concern for their future retirement, but instead indicates a deeper religious policy, specifically centred on female monastic communities. These convents provided an opportunity for royal women to take part in a religious life and still maintain their ties to the political world.

Within enclosed monasteries themselves, the role of the abbess provided the opportunity for early medieval women to hold a position of authority and respect in both the religious and secular community.²² The responsibilities and qualities of the abbess were dealt with repeatedly in the monastic rules of the seventh century. As the ‘mother’ of the monastery, the abbess was not only in charge of the spiritual and temporal needs of her community, but also functioned as their exemplar and a figure of absolute authority. This

¹⁸ Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, p. 178.

¹⁹ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, 7-9, in Bruno Krusch, ed., *MGH SRM*, II, Hanover, 1888, pp. 489-94.

²⁰ Mayke de Jong, ‘Monastic Prisoners of Opting Out? Political Coercion and Honour in the Frankish Kingdoms’ in Mayke de Jong, Frans Theuws with Carine van Rhijn, eds, *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, Leiden, 2001, p. 317; Nelson, ‘Queens as Jezebels’, p. 51.

²¹ Quote from Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, p. 180; de Jong, ‘Monastic Prisoners’, p. 317.

²² For further analysis of the role of the abbess in early medieval Francia, see my dissertation *Sainted Rule: female religious authority and the role of the abbess in sixth-century Gaul*.

maternal role was reflected in the ideal qualities outlined by Donatus of Besançon in his *Regula ad Virgines*. He felt the abbess should be ‘chaste, sober, merciful’, that she should ‘have a hatred of vice and love her sister’, and ‘study more to be loved than to be feared’.²³ The abbess was responsible for any communication between her nuns and the external world, as well as any decision that was to be made inside the convent itself.²⁴ This role was reaffirmed in the *Regula Cuiusdam Patris ad Virgines* (hereafter the *RCP*). Here the abbess was instructed to ‘join together holy words with holy deeds’ and to be careful ‘lest through excessive kindness she nourishes vice in the hearts of her subjects, or through excessive austerity of discipline those who may be healed through gentle chiding are torn apart by rigid correction.’²⁵ As the spiritual leader of the monastery, she was responsible for taking the confessions of the sisters and giving them the appropriate spiritual guidance and penance.²⁶ Every other nun was considered to have ‘placed herself wholly in the power of the abbess, according to Christ’.²⁷ Thus, for those few women who became an abbess, they had the opportunity to exercise a remarkable amount of power and control, something which was often not available to them in the secular world.

The other responsibilities incorporated into the position of the abbess reinforced her authoritative role over the community. In addition to her pastoral role over the nuns’ spiritual welfare, the abbess was in charge of the financial needs of the monastery, acting in a managerial role over its various, and sometimes extensive, estates.²⁸ These responsibilities entrusted to the abbess allowed her to exercise forms of authority that were, in the secular world, reserved solely for men.²⁹ For example, the introduction of confession to the abbess, plus her role as leader of the convent’s liturgical celebrations, allowed the early medieval abbess to hold ‘a public and liturgical office in her own right’.³⁰ The large amount of power

²³ ‘Castam, sobriam, misericordiam’; ‘Odio habeat vitia diligit sorores.’; ‘Studeat plus amari quam timeri.’ Donatus of Besançon, *Regula ad Virgines*, 1, in J. P. Migne, ed., *PL*, LXXXVII, Paris, 1851, col. 274-275.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4, 56, 57, col. 277, 291.

²⁵ ‘Debet enim sacris eloquiis opera nectere sacra’ and ‘ne aut nimia bonitate in subjectarum cordibus vitia nutriat, aut nimia disciplinae austeritate ea quae leni increpatione sananda fuerant, rigida correptione diripiantur.’ *RCP*, 1, in J. P. Migne, ed., *PL*, Vol. LXXXVIII, Paris, 1850 cols. 1053-4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7, col. 1060.

²⁷ ‘quae suas in omnibus voluntates propter Christum in abbatissae tradidit potestatem.’ *Ibid.*, 17, col. 1066.

²⁸ Donatus, *Regula*, 8, 9, 12, 62, cols. 278-280, 293; *RCP*, 1, 12, cols. 1053-4, 1063-4; Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 181.

²⁹ Nelson, ‘Queens as Jezebels’, pp. 33-4; Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 146.

³⁰ Donatus, *Regula*, 23, 51, cols. 282, 288-9; *RCP*, 6-7, cols. 1059-1060; quote from Gisela Muschiol, ‘Men, women and liturgical practice in the early medieval West’ in Leslie Brubaker, Julia M. H. Smith, eds, *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West 300-900*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 211; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 141.

exercised by these women explains why they were so frequently drawn from the nobility, despite injunctions against electing the abbess ‘for her birth, her talents or her relationships’.³¹ Not only did the abbess rule over her own nuns, who themselves were often from powerful noble families, but she also had frequent interactions with local lords and bishops. Abbesses of major convents were ‘able, indeed required’ to travel to the imperial court at the request of the king.³² A non-aristocratic abbess would struggle to fulfil these duties and risk external attacks or internal rebellions against her rule.³³

Despite the emphasis placed on the roles of royal founders and noble abbesses in female monasticism, the extant rules of late Merovingian convents allow us to see the variety of different positions within these monasteries. In addition to the abbess, nuns were able to exercise authority by assuming the roles of prioress, portress and cellaress.³⁴ Indeed in the *RCP*, most likely written by Waldebert of Luxeuil for Sadalberga’s convent at Laon, the instructions for choosing a suitable prioress, portress and cellaress all exceed in length the section on the abbess. The prioress acted as the deputy of the abbess, in charge of smaller day-to-day issues in the running of the convent. In particular, she was responsible for ‘the needs of all as much for body as for the soul’ and for the care and distribution of the monastery’s possessions to the nuns.³⁵ If any nun had an issue she wished to raise with the abbess, she would ‘strive to make any need whatever known to the abbess through the prioress’.³⁶ This role, which entailed managing all of the temporal needs within the monastery, would have required a great deal of tact and authority. Consequently, we see the ideal attributes and characteristics of the prioress centring on her gravity, responsibility and obedience to the abbess. Donatus felt that she should be ‘more holy, wise, fearful of God and humble than all the rest and be in love devoutly with religion and be knowledgeable in observance of the rule’.³⁷ The *RCP* added a lengthy list of the ideal features of the prioress including ‘grave manner, clever speech, strong character, watchful consideration, unwearied

³¹ ‘nulla ex vobis carnali affectu, aut pro natalibus, aut pro facultatibus, aut pro parentela aliquam minus efficacem fieri velit’, Donatus, *Regula*, 77, col. 297; McNamara, ‘Living Sermons’, p. 31.

³² Nelson, ‘Gendering courts’, p. 196.

³³ The most famous example of this situation is the rebellion of the nuns at Poitiers against their abbess, recounted in Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 10.15, translated by Lewis Thorpe, London, 1974, pp. 567-571; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 57.

³⁴ Donatus, *Regula*, 5, 60-1, col. 292; *RCP*, 2-4, cols. 1054-7.

³⁵ ‘Debet namque esse omnium necessitatum tam corporis quam animae provida’, *RCP*, 2, cols. 1054-5.

³⁶ ‘omnes per praepositam quidquid necessitatum fuerit abbatissae studeant intimare.’ *Ibid.*, 22, col. 1069.

³⁷ ‘sancta, sapiens, timens Deum, humilitatemque super omnia habens, et in religionis amore devote, et regulae observatione sit cognita.’ Donatus, *Regula*, 5, col. 277.

striving for the goal and pious correction'.³⁸ In order to prevent conflict between the two most powerful women in the community, both rules emphasised the importance of the prioress adhering completely to the commands of the abbess as well as to the rule of the monastery. This position of prioress offered women who may not have had the necessary familial connections to be an abbess of a monastery the opportunity to assume a leadership role within their community.

Nuns could also assume the role of portress, the gatekeeper of the monastery, who was in charge of mediating contact between the convent and the world outside its walls. The ideal qualities of the portress reveal the serious nature of her role. As the means by which items or individuals could enter or exit the enclosed monastery, the portress was meant to be an elder 'whose maturity does not permit her to wander' and who would be accompanied at all times by two or three other sisters in her cell near the gate.³⁹ Most importantly, the portress 'shall not presume, without the consent of the abbess, to give anything away from the monastery, nor to perform any service, nor to accept anything from outside.'⁴⁰ The *RCP* in particular outlined at length the responsibilities of the portress. Not only was she in charge of the gate, but also she also 'had the care of all the paupers, pilgrims and guests' of the convent, as well as ensuring that the cellaress and cooks had enough supplies to last them through the night.⁴¹ At the times when guests were forbidden to enter the convent (from Vespers up to the second *impletam*), any conversation or business had to go through the portress.⁴² While this role did not have the same leadership aspect as those of the abbess or prioress, it still offered women a significant position which allowed contact with members of the world outside of the convent.

The monastic rules covered the role of the cellaress in particular at length. She was in charge of the distribution of food, drink and other daily necessities to the nuns, and as such, if

³⁸ 'Constituenda ergo est praeposita moribus gravis, sermone solers, ingenio fortis, consideratione vigil, cursu impigra, correptione pia' *RCP*, 2, col. 1055. 'Unwearied striving for the goal' here indicates the metaphor of monastic life being a *cursus*.

³⁹ 'cuius maturitas eam non sinat vagari.' Donatus, *Regula*, 60, col. 292.

⁴⁰ 'Foras aliquid dare, vel cuilibet ministrare, vel a foris aliquid accipere, nullatenus sine comiteu abbatissae facere praesumant.' *RCP*, 3, col. 1056.

⁴¹ 'Pauperum, peregrinorum, et hospitem curam inter omnia habentes', *ibid.*, 3, col. 1056.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3, col. 1056.

the wrong woman was chosen the opportunity for discord within the convent was high. Donatus described the ideal cellaress as wise and mature, ‘sober, not exceedingly greedy, not haughty, not hurtful, not slow or prodigal, but fearful of God: she should be like a mother to all the congregation’.⁴³ The *RCP* echoed this maternal ideal, with the cellaress ministering to unwell sisters ‘with diligent care and most prompt affection’.⁴⁴ To support her in her role, sisters were also assigned to care for the infirm and to teach the children raised in the monastery, and the duties of the kitchen, brewing, baking and serving were shared by the rest of the nuns in turn.⁴⁵ Most importantly, both rules emphasised that the cellaress must not show favouritism to any of the nuns, nor should she offend anyone in distributing food or drink. The *RCP* exhorted her to ensure that ‘that which has been given to her, should be distributed without delay; lest an occasion of scandal or cause of offence arise from her tardiness’, and that she should avoid harsh and sharp words.⁴⁶ Donatus agreed, saying that she should ‘above all have humility’ and that ‘at the proper hours what should be given is given and what should be asked for is asked for so that none is disturbed or discomforted in the house of God’.⁴⁷ This role clearly required a woman who could provide for the needs of nuns without exceeding the supplies of the convent, and who could assume a maternal, caring role towards the other sisters. We do not see in her position the same kind of authority given to the abbess, prioress or portress. Nonetheless, the women who occupied this position had a critical role in the smooth functioning of their community.

The remainder of the nuns were organised into a set order within the convent, from juniors to seniors. When a woman first came to a convent, she was not immediately accepted into the community as a nun. Instead the new recruit ‘shall be in a cell where she shall eat and sleep and shall be considered’ for a year, under the supervision of an elder nun.⁴⁸ If she displayed the necessary obedience and devotion in that time, then she would be accepted as a

⁴³ ‘sober non multum edax, non elata, non injuriosa, non tarda, non prodiga, sed timens Deum: quae omni congregationi sit ut mater’, Donatus, *Regula*, 61, col. 292.

⁴⁴ ‘diligenti cura et promptissimo affectu’, *RCP*, 4, col. 1057.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12, 15, 24, cols. 1063-4, 1065-6, 1070; Donatus, *Regula*, 12, 67, cols. 279-280, 294. Wemple notes in *Women in Frankish Society*, pp. 178-187 that double monasteries served as co-ed schools until the middle of the eighth century.

⁴⁶ ‘Ea vero quae danda sunt, sine mora tribuantur; ne scandali occasio, aut offensionis casus ex ipsa tarditate generetur’, *RCP*, 4, col. 1058.

⁴⁷ ‘Humilitatem ante omnia habeat’; ‘Horas competentibus et dentur quae danda sunt, et petantur quae petenda sunt, ut nemo conturbetur neque contristetur in domo Dei.’ Donatus, *Regula*, 61, col. 292.

⁴⁸ ‘et sit in cella ubi meditetur, et manducet, et dormiat.’ *Ibid.*, 6, col. 277.

junior nun.⁴⁹ The hierarchy within the community was then based upon the length of time each woman had been in the monastery, unless the abbess chose to elevate or demote a particular nun.⁵⁰ This hierarchy was absolutely essential to the organisation of the convent and the relationship of the nuns to each other. As Donatus stated, even the way sisters addressed each other was governed by this order, as ‘the first will name their sisters junior and the juniors will address those before them as nuns by which their maternal reverence is known.’⁵¹ This hierarchy was also utilised in the order of seating for the celebrations of the psalms, readings, and the Mass.⁵² While this likely served as the ideal organisation of the monastery, the ability of the abbess to promote particular women at her discretion meant that, in reality, women of a higher social standing likely occupied senior roles more quickly than those from a more humble background.

Having examined the ideals set out for each of the monastic roles in female monasteries, it is important to emphasize that not all roles were open to all women. The secular backgrounds of nuns were influential in their ability to occupy certain positions.⁵³ As mentioned above, the role of abbess was, in general, limited to women of noble birth, due to the particular responsibilities it entailed. Indeed, the majority of abbesses that we see in monastic *vitae* were women from royal or noble families.⁵⁴ This likely applied to the positions of prioress and cellaress as well, as they were respectively responsible for the discipline and welfare of their fellow nuns. These roles would have been more suitable for higher-class women, as tension and disobedience would likely occur if a noble nun was punished or denied supplies by a lower-class woman. Regardless of the influence of social hierarchy, it is clear that there were varied and different monastic experiences open to different women, even within the same community. The experiences of two nuns in a single community may have been significantly different depending on the roles they assumed.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 6, cols. 277-278.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 66, cols. 293-294.

⁵¹ ‘In ipsa appellatione nominatim nulli liceat aliam puro nomine appellare, sed prioeres juniores suas sorores nominent, juniores prioeres suas nonnas vocent, quod intelligitur materna reverentia.’ Ibid., *Regula*, 66, col. 294.

⁵² *RCP*, 22, cols. 1068-70.

⁵³ Muschiol, ‘Men, women and liturgical practice’, p. 200.

⁵⁴ Nelson, *The Frankish World*, p. 208.

When we examine female monasticism, it is critical that we acknowledge the diverse nature of early medieval religious life. There was a wide range of ways for women to devote themselves to a Christian life, both inside and outside of the double monastery, which were often closely linked to their places in the Frankish class structure. Nonetheless, monasteries were places where women of all classes, from ex-slaves to queens, co-habited in the same way of life, under the same *regula*. The ability of both bond and free to devote themselves to the worship of Christ in a community of fellow nuns is a theme repeated throughout monastic *regulae* and the *vitae* of female saints. The variety of roles within a single monastic foundation points to a multiplicity of experiences in female religious life that is often overlooked by historians. There was no standard or typical experience of female monasticism in this period, as the roles of nuns, abbesses and royal foundresses were shifting and adapting to their individual circumstances. Because of this multiplicity, female monastic foundations spread throughout Francia rapidly, attracting the enthusiastic attention of noble and royal patrons.

It was in this context of flexibility and variation within female religious life that the double monastery was created in response to the new needs of monastic women in the seventh century. In its most basic definition, a double monastery is a religious foundation that includes both men and women, albeit in separate living quarters. Mary Bateson, in her pioneering study of double monasticism, proposes that the essential aspect of a double monastery is the coexistence of two sexes who had ‘contiguity to a common church’.⁵⁵ However, as she rightly notes, there are a wide range of regional variations on this type of monastery.⁵⁶ In seventh and eighth-century Francia, the majority of double monasteries were led by an abbess rather than an abbot, although there were some early communities which were founded with an abbot before later switching to the rule of an abbess.⁵⁷ In these communities, the male monastery was composed of priests who attended to those religious needs of the female monastery that women could not perform themselves, such as the consecration of the host and the performance of the Mass.⁵⁸ The pragmatic combination of religious men and women in a single institution meant that double monasteries did not need to rely on the services of local bishops and priests as seen in the urban nunneries of the sixth

⁵⁵ Bateson, ‘Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries’, p. 138.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ For example, Remiremont and Metz (refounded by Glodesinda); Bateson, ‘Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries’, pp. 149, 152, 182; Wemple, ‘Sanctity and Power’, p. 136.

⁵⁸ Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, p. 24.

century.⁵⁹ Thus, despite the large cost of founding such a community, double monasteries were better suited to a more secluded, rural environment than their single-sex predecessors. From the seventh-century onwards, a number of large, high-profile double monasteries were established in rural northern Francia, especially in Austrasia and Neustria.⁶⁰ In a range of textual sources, including monastic *regulae* and the *vitae* of monastic saints, we can determine the coexistence of both monks and nuns in a number of houses.⁶¹

When we look at our primary sources, double monasteries are incredibly important. From the establishment of the first double house at Faremoutiers in 617, all the most powerful female convents were double communities. In Neustria, Faremoutiers was quickly joined by Remiremont in 620, Jussa-Besançon in 624, Jouarre in 634 and Laon in 640.⁶² The convent of Chelles, originally founded by Queen Clotild in the sixth century as a single convent, was re-established as a double house in 658.⁶³ Double monasticism then spread to Austrasia in the mid-sixth century with the foundations of Marchiennes, Hamay, Nivelles, Mauberge, Chasteaulieu and Andennes.⁶⁴ These convents represent only a handful of the documented examples of double monasteries in early medieval Francia. It is important to note though, that they were all prestigious and often large communities, with noble founders or abbesses. Some of these communities, most notably Chelles, Nivelles, Remiremont and Faremoutiers, were also powerful political forces, a topic that I will explore in more detail in my next chapter. Consequently, the texts of this period, both secular and religious, have recorded them and made particular mention of their double nature. Clearly, if we have such a number of important and documented double houses, the number of smaller, undocumented double houses that were not important enough to merit inclusion in our sources is likely to be significant. Furthermore, this trend of double monasticism was not simply a Frankish phenomenon but also stretched across the Channel into Britain.

⁵⁹ Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 162.

⁶⁰ Bateson, 'Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries', pp. 151-165.

⁶¹ For examples, see the *Vita Sadalbergae*, 22, pp. 62-3 ; *Vita Sanctae Geretrudae*, 7, pp. 461-4; Hucbald of St Amand, *Vita Aldegundis*, 25, in J. P. Migne, ed., *PL*, CXXXII, Paris, 1853, cols. 871-2; *Vita Waldetrudis*, 12, p. 829; *Vitae Balthildae*, 10, 15, pp. 495-6, 501-2; *Vita Bertilae abbatissae Calensis*, 5-6, in W. Levison, ed., *MGH SRM*, VI, Hanover, 1913, pp. 105-7; *De S. Austreberta virgine in Belgio et Normannia*, 11, 19, in Johannes Bollandus and Godefrido Hensceno, eds, *AS*, Paris, 1764, pp. 421-2, 423; *Miracula S. Austrebertae*, 4, in Johannes Bollandus and Godefrido Hensceno, eds, *AS*, Paris, 1764, pp. 424-5.

⁶² Bateson, 'Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries', pp. 152-154.

⁶³ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, 7, 18, pp. 489, 506; Bateson, 'Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries', p. 156.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-159.

When the Anglo-Saxon royal families began to found their first female monasteries in the mid-seventh century, the version they turned to was the popular variety sweeping across Francia, the double house. Indeed the *vita* of the abbess of Chelles, Bertilla, mentions that the Saxon kings ‘asked her through faithful envoys to send some of her disciples for learning and holy instruction, which they heard were marvellous in her, so that they might build convents of men and nuns in their region.’⁶⁵ Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, mentions a number of convents as specifically including both men and women, and he notes the influence of the Frankish convents on their establishments.⁶⁶ From 640, the houses of Lyminge in Kent, and Coldingham and Hartlepool in Northumbria were in place as double houses, led by royal and noble women.⁶⁷ They were followed in 657 by the famous female monastery of Whitby, led by the abbess Hilda, who herself had close ties to Neustria.⁶⁸ The convent of Barking was established in Essex in 666, and the daughters of King Anna of East Anglia founded Ely in 673.⁶⁹ In addition to these five monasteries recorded by Bede, a number of other houses were founded in England throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, but we can only tentatively establish their double nature.⁷⁰ The rise of these houses in England confirms the importance of the double monastery in the early medieval period. Not only did female monasticism surge in popularity in Britain during this period, but the founders of convents consciously imitated the Frankish double house as their model. Numerous historians, both contemporary and modern, have noted the Frankish origins of double houses.⁷¹ Thus, it is clear that to men and women in early medieval monasticism the double monastery was a particularly attractive and prestigious form of institution. Yet for such an important form of female monasticism there has been little examination of the reasons for its wide appeal and success in this period.

⁶⁵ ‘ab ea per missos fideles postularent, ut illis de suis discipulis ad eruditionem vel sanctam instructionem, quam audierant esse in ea mirabilem, dirigeret, seu etiam qui virorum et sanctimonialium coenobia in illa regione construerent.’ *Vita Bertillae*, 6, p. 286.

⁶⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of England*, 3.8, translated by J. A. Giles, in *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, London, 1894, p. 121.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.24, 4.19, pp. 151-2, 204-5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.24, pp. 151-2; Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 25; Nicholson, ‘*Feminae Gloriosae*’, p. 17.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.6, 4.19, pp. 184, 204-5.

⁷⁰ Such as Lyminge, Folkestone and Minster-in-Thamet, amongst numerous others. See Bateson, ‘Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries’ for a more comprehensive list.

⁷¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.8, p. 121; Bateson, ‘Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries’, p. 182; Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 25; Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 376; Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The archaeology of religious women*, London, 1994, p. 25; Barbara Mitchell, ‘Anglo-Saxon double monasteries’ in *History Today*, 45, 10, 1995, p. 33; Nancy Bauer, ‘Abbess Hilda of Whitby: All Britain Was Lit by Her Splendor’ in Miriam Schmitt, Linda Kulzer, eds, *Medieval Women Monastics: Wisdom’s Wellsprings*, Collegeville, 1996, p. 21.

As with any religious community, the double monastery's function was to allow its members to focus on the worship of God. The cycle of daily life in double monasteries seems to have been particularly appealing for early medieval women who wished to engage in the monastic life. In terms of reconstructing the internal functions of early medieval double houses, we are highly reliant on the surviving monastic *regulae* and *vitae* of the period. Although I will examine the *regulae* in much greater detail in a later chapter, we can perceive from these rules the emphasis placed on the recitation of the divine office as the central religious purpose of the double house. Double monasteries were intended to provide the ideal environment for nuns to sing the liturgy, psalms and hymns, along with scriptural readings and prayers, at set hours throughout the day and night. Indeed some monasteries, such as Remiremont, even instituted an unceasing order of psalms and prayers, the *laus perennis*, to ensure that the convent was continuously celebrating the liturgy.⁷² Nuns were exhorted by the authors of the monastic rules to 'let nothing be preferred to the work of God' and it is likely that a number of double monasteries followed Columbanus's system of monastic hours with psalms recited every three hours through the day and night.⁷³ We can also see this focus on the recitation of the liturgy as the defining purpose of female monasticism in the *vitae* of female monastic saints. McNamara has rightly pointed out that liturgical prayer and the chanting of psalms served as the response of the monastery's female community to any crisis or threat that they faced.⁷⁴ Consequently, a number of critical and triumphant moments in the lives of monastic saints are marked in their *vitae* by liturgical activity in particular. For example, when Sadalburga, accompanied by over 100 nuns, triumphantly entered the city of Laon in order to found her convent there, she processed through the streets 'while a singing chorus rejoiced with psalms and hymns of praise'.⁷⁵ Her daughter Anstrude also utilised the liturgy at a key point in her life, but in a more defensive manner. When Ebroin, the Mayor of the Palace of Neustria, threatened to exile her from her convent, the response of her nuns was to sing psalms and pray loudly for her deliverance from her enemy. According to her *vita* this tactic was successful, as 'when Ebroin's attendants and companions heard the voices of the

⁷² McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 140.

⁷³ 'ut nihil operi Dei praeponatur', *RCP*, 8, col. 1060; Columbanus, *Regula Monachorum*, 7, trans. in G. S. M. Walker, ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, Vol. II, Dublin, 1957, pp. 128-133.

⁷⁴ McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 119.

⁷⁵ 'ovans sanctas famulas Christi cum choro psallentium, cum psalmodia et hymnidicis summisque laudibus deducit in urbem.' *Vita Sadalbergae*, 14, p. 58.

chanting nuns, they were struck with fear beyond measure'.⁷⁶ Ebroin repented and promised his patronage to the convent of Laon. Although we cannot take this hagiographical explanation of the the reconciliation of Anstrude and Ebroin as the sole reason behind their treaty, the power accorded to the liturgical activity of the nuns in this text is striking. As the central activity of female communities, the recitation of psalms and hymns in the divine office stands out as the main marker of female sanctity for both individuals and the monastic community as a whole.

Interestingly, we do not see much mention of the celebration of the Mass in either the rules or the *vitae*, and it certainly does not garner as much attention as the divine office. While Masses were compulsory only on Christmas, Easter and the Pentecost, and were also performed on saints' days, they do not have a central role in the literary evidence.⁷⁷ The celebration of the Eucharist is often only alluded to in the monastic *vitae*, while the office is prominently featured. In the rules, the divine office again is the dominant liturgical activity of the community, with the Mass only briefly referred to.⁷⁸ McNamara uses the lack of attention on the Mass in these sources to argue that in double monasteries, 'priestly duties almost dwindled to the consecration of hosts, apparently kept in reserve, to be administered, if need be, by the abbess'.⁷⁹ Her argument mistakenly takes this lack of emphasis on the Mass to indicate that the male community of the double monastery as a whole was unimportant. It is instead more probable that the focus of the monastic *vitae* and *regulae* on the recitation of psalms and hymns instead of the Mass reflected the relationship of monasticism to the Frankish community. By reciting psalms and constantly praying, monasteries were performing an important communal function as spiritual intercessors on behalf of Frankish society.⁸⁰ As Columbanus noted, this liturgical prayer was intended by the monastery to intercede 'first for our own sins, then for all Christian people, then for priests and the other

⁷⁶ 'Cumque voces psallentium sanctimonialium audirent satellites et comites Ebroini, qui cum illo erant, nimio timore exterriti', *Vita Anstrudis* 13, p. 72.

⁷⁷ Hen, *Culture and Religion*, pp. 72, 86.

⁷⁸ The office is mentioned in Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad Virgines*, 8, 10, in J. P. Migne, ed., *PL*, vol. LXVII, Paris, 1848, col. 1109 while the mass is only referred to briefly in 33, 'qui aliquoties missas facere debeant', col. 1114; Aurelian of Arles mentions the office in 18, 24, 38 and 41 of his *Regula ad Virgines*, in J. P. Migne, ed., *PL*, LXVIII, Paris, 1847, cols. 402-6, while he only mentions the mass in 42, 'Missae vero quando sanctae abbatissaevism fuerit tunc fiet', col. 406; Donatus discusses the office in *Regula ad Virgines*, 13-18, 65 and 75, cols. 280-1, 293, 296, while he only refers to the mass in 55, 'qui aliquoties missas facere debeant', col. 290; and the *RCP* refers to the office in 8, cols. 1060-1 and makes no mention of the mass.

⁷⁹ McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 143. A view supported by Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 141.

⁸⁰ Mayke de Jong, 'Religion' in Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *The Early Middle Ages: Europe 400-1000*, Oxford, 2001, p. 150.

orders of the holy flock that are consecrated to God, finally for those that do alms, next for the concord of kings, lastly for our enemies'.⁸¹ It was this communal activity that marked out monasteries as holy, and thus it was this activity that the authors of monastic texts emphasised as the central aspect of double monasticism. The celebration of the Eucharist, while important for the spiritual life of each nun individually, was shared by all Christians and did not have the same reputation of sanctity as the divine office in the wider Frankish community. As a result, while the male community was invaluable in allowing the monastery to perform the celebration of the Mass, the liturgical activity highlighted in our texts was that which reaffirmed the purpose of female monasticism – the recitation of the office.

The appeal of double monasteries did not solely lie in its focus on the celebration of the divine office. These monastic communities were also ideally constructed to provide a safe and secure place for women in the turbulent society of the Frankish world. This is not to say that double houses were completely shut off from outside society. Rather, these communities had a number of ties to various groups, both secular and religious, in Frankish society. What set the double monastery apart was its particular ability to mediate these relationships while retaining the independence and security of their community from external interference or attack. Surprisingly however, historians of double monasticism have not yet examined the ways in which double houses conducted their relationships with the world outside their walls. The different links that double houses had to external communities were valuable diplomatic tools that are central to explaining the vast growth and rapid adoption of this new variety of monasticism. By privileging particular groups and limiting access to the most holy parts of the monastery, leaders of double houses were able to increase their community's sanctity and power on both a local and national scale. This in turn allowed the nuns of a convent to act in a pastoral role to their local lay community, further reinforcing their position in Frankish society. As our sources show, the double monastery was able to provide a pragmatic answer to some of the issues presented to religious women in the early medieval period, and so spread quickly throughout Francia and Britain.

⁸¹ 'pro peccatis primum nostris, deinde pro omni populo christiano, deinde pro sacerdotibus et reliquis deo consecratis sacrae plebis gradibus, postremo pro elemosinas facientibus, postea pro pace regum, novissime pro inimicis' Columbanus, *Regula Monachorum*, 7, trans. by Walker, pp. 130-1.

As I examine the system of privileges, immunities and exemptions that spread throughout seventh and eighth century female monasticism, I must acknowledge the importance of Barbara Rosenwein's scholarship.⁸² Her proposal that powerful men cemented their alliances and networks of patronage through the granting of monastic privileges has strongly influenced my own argument. Even so, I believe that there is room to expand on the ideas of privilege and access in female monasticism in particular. Convents were not simply passively awarded exemptions and immunities from their patrons, but actively sought them out in order to reinforce their own positions. Moreover, they used these ideas of enclosure and access *within* their own monastery in order to heighten the aura of sanctity and purity that was so crucial to their social purpose. Thus, while Rosenwein's theories lie at the heart of my own argument, I will go further to uncover how female communities capitalised on the new ideas of privileged access that arose in early medieval Francia.

The relationships constructed by female communities with the secular world were complex negotiations centred on the ideas of enclosure and privileged access. Sitting at the centre of the monastery, and occupying the position of greatest sanctity and prestige, were both the relics of the founding saint and the enclosed community of female nuns led by the abbess. These formed the *secreta septa* of the monastery, the secret spiritual centre marked out from the rest of the lay and religious community by strict enclosure.⁸³ Surrounding this central point of the foundation, we can see a series of concentric circles of access, with more privileged groups gaining closer positions to the *secreta septa*, while less privileged or openly antagonistic individuals were kept further away. While we can see similar patterns emerge in how the majority of houses conducted their relationships with these different secular groups, it is also apparent that the abbesses and founders of certain monasteries manipulated their policies of access for specific purposes. Thus, enclosure and access became a political and religious tool for the leaders of double monasteries, where favoured individuals may be granted more access to the inner sanctum, while enemies or antagonists were denied this privilege. While this use of restricted access was not unique to double monasteries, but also utilised by other male and female houses, it appears that the structure of the double house was especially well-suited to applying these kinds of policies, and a number of double

⁸² See Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint, and Privileges of Community in Early Medieval Europe*, Manchester, 1999.

⁸³ Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space*, p. 69.

monasteries became very adept at employing this political tool. As we shall see, this was an extremely effective way of reinforcing the power not only of the monastery, but also of the abbess, her family and her factional supporters.

The closest relationship that the female community of a double monastery had with the outside world was with its associated community of monk-priests. These men, who bridged the gap between the inner sanctum and external society, constituted the closest circle of privileged access. The monks were actually part of the monastery, under the rule of the abbess, but still delineated from the community of nuns, living in separate quarters. As I noted earlier, these monks were generally priests, and so served a pragmatic function of providing the female community with ready access to consecrated hosts and the performance of the Eucharist. In return for this service, the monks were granted the ability to worship in a contiguous church and have ready access to the relics of the monastery's saint. Alongside this pastoral role, the monks of the double monastery were also able to mediate between the community of nuns and the external world. This is specifically referred to in the *Vita Geretrudis*, when, as Gertrude retired from her temporal duties, 'she committed the stewards outside the monastery to the care of good and faithful brothers, and the care of the household within the enclosure of the monastery to the sisters'.⁸⁴ The idea of a circle of monks occupying the space between the outside world and the inner *secreta septa* of the nuns was clearly present at Nivelles in the seventh century, and is alluded to in a number of other double houses. The establishment of a community of monks, able to provide for the material and spiritual needs of the nuns was a significant reason for the increased independence of double monasteries. Rather than relying on their bishop to provide for and protect them, as occurred in single-sex nunneries, the double foundation was much more self-reliant. Accordingly, the leaders of double houses began to adjust their relationship with their local bishop in order to assert their new-found autonomy.

In the model of access to the female monastery, the next circle of privilege belonged to the local bishop of the monastery. However, the relationship between the episcopacy and double monasteries began to shift in the seventh century from the pattern that had previously

⁸⁴ 'Bonis ac fidelibus dispensatoribus foris de fratribus, infra vero septa monasterii spiritalibus sororibus curam familiarem commendavit' *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis*, 3, p. 457.

existed with single-sex nunneries. As was evident from the sixth century onwards, following the struggles of Radegund with Maroveus, the Bishop of Poitiers, a disinterested or openly hostile bishop could seriously disadvantage a convent.⁸⁵ The rise of episcopal exemptions in the seventh century went some way to mitigating this problem. Founders of monasteries, often bishops themselves, formulated decrees that would prevent other bishops from removing or usurping the property of that specific monastery, as well as prohibiting entry to the inner space of the foundation. The spread of these decrees throughout Francia was tied into a general shift among the patrons of monasteries towards viewing the powers of local bishops 'as impediments to, rather than guarantors of monastic policy'.⁸⁶ Thus we see a growing trend of founders of double houses solidifying in legal form their new ability to limit the right of their diocesan bishop to enter the most sacred part of their community. Instead, the abbesses of monasteries would reward their own favoured patron bishops with the right of entry into their foundation.⁸⁷ Accordingly, we see certain bishops recognize the power of supporting female monasteries and closely link themselves to a number of double monasteries.⁸⁸ In doing so, these bishops could provide much needed support to a monastery against the ill will of the nuns' diocesan bishop. In return, the patron bishop gained closer ties and access to the sacred relics and prestige of the holy community.

Moving further out into the secular world, the next circle surrounding the double monastery consisted of its lay patrons, both noble and royal. This group, while not part of the ecclesiastical structure, was still able to retain close ties to specific female communities through subtle use of ideas of holy space.⁸⁹ In particular, around the time that double monasteries begin to surge in popularity, we see the growing importance of the ideas of immunity and exemptions. These two decrees entailed, respectively, the prohibition of royal agents from taxing or entering into certain monasteries, and the prohibition of bishops from appropriating monastic property. The principle behind these exemptions is clearly illustrated in an episode from the *vita* of St. Columbanus. Following a disagreement between the saint and King Theuderic of Burgundy, the king demanded entry into the monastery of Luxeuil.

⁸⁵ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, 9.40, pp. 530-31.

⁸⁶ Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space*, pp. 36, 69. Quote from p. 36.

⁸⁷ Dick Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe*, Lund, 1998, p. 323.

⁸⁸ For example Amand of Maastricht was involved in the foundation of Marchiennes and Nivelles, and Audoin of Rouen was the patron of Jouarre, Fécamp; Soissons, Pavilly. McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, pp. 103-4.

⁸⁹ Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space*, p. 73.

Columbanus refused to allow him over the threshold, saying ‘that it was not his practice that men of the world and strangers to religion should throw open for entry the dwellings of the servant of God’.⁹⁰ This conflict over the right of access into a monastery highlights not only the desire of royal patrons to enter the inner sanctum of a monastery, but also the recognition by the heads of these monasteries that enclosure and access were powerful tools to secure their independence. Consequently, throughout the seventh century, we see both male and female monastic communities convincing their royal patrons and noble bishops to grant these ‘special privileges’ in order to secure their monastery’s autonomy and reinforce the idea of limited access.⁹¹ By confirming the ability of a monastic community to prevent external interference, these secular patrons were actually reaffirming their own access to the monastery. Monastic communities would reward their lay supporters by allowing them entrance into the innermost areas of the foundation.⁹² Granting exemptions was also attractive to royal and noble patrons as it prevented their political rivals from trying to gain control of their own particular foundations. Queen Balthild was notably associated with granting immunities and confirming privileges for the monasteries that she supported, sending letters to bishops and abbots warning them ‘that the brothers inside in those places ought to live following their holy rule and order’.⁹³ This idea was solidified under the Carolingians, with the introduction of royal *tuitio*, or protection over a monastery.⁹⁴ Instead of a policy of non-intervention, Carolingian *tuitio* ‘celebrated and imposed jurisdiction’ over the community.⁹⁵ This shift in relationship, where the Carolingians alone were allowed access to the holy space within the double monastery, was in keeping with their desire to prevent other noble factions from patronising female convents.

Finally, occupying the most distant sphere of access to the double monastery was the local lay community. Double houses, despite the profession of enclosure, retained a pastoral

⁹⁰ ‘se consuetudinem non habere, ut saecularium hominum et relegioni alienis famulorum Dei habitationes pandant introitum’, Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani Abbatis Discipulorumque Eius*, 1.19, in Bruno Krusch, ed., *MGH SRM*, IV, Hanover, 1902, p. 88.

⁹¹ Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space*, p. 51.

⁹² An example of this is the relationship of Grimoald with Nivelles, seen in the *Additamentum Nivialense de Fuilano*, *MGH SRM*, IV, Hanover, 1902, pp. 449-451.

⁹³ ‘ad pontifices seu abates suadendo pro zelo Dei praecepit et epistolas pro hoc eis direxit, ut sub sancto regulari ordine fratres infra ipsa loca consistentes vivere deberent.’ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, A Vita, 9, p. 493.

⁹⁴ This was first seen under Pippin III in 760. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space*, p. 111.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

relationship with their surrounding society.⁹⁶ The presence of a community of monks, able to engage in manual work in order to support the community, made the double house much more economically viable than a single nunnery. Nearby Christians would benefit from the surplus food and clothing produced by the monks, which was distributed to the needy by the monastery, and laypeople were also able to worship in the public church of the foundation.⁹⁷ In particular, the local Christian community would come to the monastery on the feast days of saints and take part in the meals provided by the nuns, known as charities.⁹⁸ This feast day is seen in the *vita* of Gertrude, when the saint killed, then resuscitated, the son of a matron who refused to celebrate her feast.⁹⁹ The pastoral role of double monasteries to their lay supporters reinforced the idea that the convents provided a 'surplus grace', able to be spread outwards into Frankish society.¹⁰⁰ Although double monasteries restricted their access to the inner sanctum of the foundation the local community was still able to engage in a mutually beneficial relationship with the monastery. The concentric circles of privilege that surrounded the double monastery ensured that the foundation could protect its own authority and autonomy while still engaging in relationships with those outside its walls. Perhaps this is a factor behind the predominantly rural northern settings of seventh and eighth-century double monasteries.¹⁰¹ Its ability to provide for both the spiritual needs of the monastery itself and of the surrounding lay community, in addition to its economically self-supporting nature with both nuns and monks, made the double house ideal for the missionary activity that spread throughout rural north Francia and into Britain from in the seventh century. The nature of the double monastery meant that the abbess was easily able to manage varying levels of privileged access amongst her foundation's supporters. Not surprisingly, the pragmatic appeal of this form of female monasticism led to its surge in popularity in the seventh and eighth centuries, helping to explain the boom in double houses in this period.

The prestige held by double monasteries in Frankish society is best demonstrated by reference to specific examples. Two double monasteries, namely Chelles and Jouarre, provide

⁹⁶ Hen, *Culture and Religion*, p. 96.

⁹⁷ McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, pp. 137-8.

⁹⁸ Hen, *Culture and Religion*, p. 96. These occurred regularly with 48 feast days listed for Chelles in the mid-seventh century.

⁹⁹ *De Virtutibus Sanctae Geretrudis*, 11, in Bruno Krusch, ed., *MGH SRM*, II, Hanover, 1888, pp. 469-70.

¹⁰⁰ Quote from McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 143; Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 254.

¹⁰¹ For evidence of the growth of seventh and eighth-century double houses, see Schulenburg, 'Women's Monastic Communities', p. 267.

useful illustrations of how seventh-century double monasteries were created and were run, and the links they had to the world outside their walls. While these houses are only two examples of this form of monasticism that spread throughout Francia and Britain in the early medieval world, numerous other convents, such as Nivelles, Faremoutiers, Laon, Soissons, Marchiennes and Andennes could equally serve as illustrations of the nature and role of the double monastery in Francia. My reason for selecting Jouarre and Chelles is that they encapsulate the issues discussed above. Jouarre provides us with an excellent example of the way in which a policy of privileged access was used by an abbess, and demonstrates the political relationships that convents were able to enter into. On the other hand, Chelles, as the house of Queen Balthild, shows us the interest of royals in allying themselves to an already powerful convent. The sources for these particular two case studies also highlight the limitations surrounding our knowledge of double monasticism, especially evident in the ambiguity of the Latin language in which they are written. Nonetheless, the image that emerges of these two foundations is one of lively communities with close ties to the outside world. The external relationships of both these monasteries with their episcopal and royal patrons provide excellent examples of the ability of women in double monasteries to control access into their communities closely. Chelles and Jouarre illuminate for us some of the reasons behind the appeal of the double monastery to religious women in the social and political context of the early medieval period.

Jouarre provides us with an interesting case study of a seventh-century double monastery, despite the lack of literary sources directly relating to it. In contrast to most of the other prominent double houses of this period, we do not have a *vita* of the founding abbess, Theodechild. Alternatively, we do have the advantage of the archaeological evidence from the surviving crypt of St. Paul at Jouarre, which contains the sarcophagus not only of Theodechild, but also her brother, the Bishop of Paris Agilbert.¹⁰² The inclusion of the bishop within one of the most holy inner places of the monastery provides an excellent example of a patron of the community being rewarded for his support. Agilbert, as a member of the familial dynasty that was established at Jouarre when it became a double monastery, was granted entry to a sphere closer to the community than he was strictly entitled to by his

¹⁰² Carol Heitz, 'Architecture et Monuments de Neustrie', p. 189.

position as bishop.¹⁰³ The archaeology of the crypt reveals these close links between the hierarchy of the double monastery and its supporters in the outside world, and is a concrete example of the rewards that patrons of these foundations could expect.

Despite the lack of literary sources focused on the monastery of Jouarre itself, the prominence of its noble founders, the brothers Ado and Dado (later known as Audoin), led to a number of references to Jouarre in other sources. The *vita* of Columbanus by Jonas of Bobbio notes an episode where the saint, when welcomed by Ado and Audoin's parents, consecrated the brothers to a religious life. As a result, when they reached maturity, Ado founded the monastery at Jouarre and Audoin founded Rebais.¹⁰⁴ While Jonas was more interested in displaying the spread of Columbanian monasticism than outlining the foundation of Jouarre, this text remains the earliest source on Jouarre and its noble family of founders.¹⁰⁵ The other key source on the founders of Jouarre is the *vita* of Audoin. This hagiographical text does not mention Jouarre directly, but provides us with a great deal of context on the links that Audoin and Ado, and consequently Jouarre, had with other key monasteries in Francia.¹⁰⁶ In the *vita*, we discover that these two men had strong ties to a number of monasteries, notably the double monasteries of Faremoutiers (founded under Burgundofara), Soissons, Pavilly and Fécamp, and the male monasteries at Brie and Rebais.¹⁰⁷ Again, the author of Audoin's life is not primarily interested in the origins of Jouarre, but his focus on the sanctity and political activity of Audoin and his family helps reveal to us the factional context in which Jouarre was set. The interest of a powerful noble bishop in establishing a network of double monasteries in Francia confirms the appeal of this new form of female monasticism not only to the women involved, but also to their secular and religious patrons.

¹⁰³ Alain Dierkens, 'Prolégomènes à une histoire des relations culturelles entre les îles Britanniques et le Continent pendant le Haut Moyen Age' in Hartmut Atsma, ed., *La Neustrie: Les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850*, II, Sigmaringen, 1989, p. 377. This dynasty included Dado's grandmother Mode, her niece Theodechild, and her other niece Agilberte. Mode's two sons also joined the community at Jouarre.

¹⁰⁴ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, 1.26, p. 100.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, 'Commentary on *Vita Audoini Episcopi Rotomagensis*' in eds, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640-720*, Manchester, 1996, pp. 137-8.

¹⁰⁶ The *vita* does mention that Ado 'flourished indeed in the monastic order, and, seeking the religious life, he scorned the malice of the world.' *Vita Audoini*, 1, translated by Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding, in *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640-720*, Manchester, 1996, p. 154.

¹⁰⁷ McKitterick, 'Nun's Scriptoria', p. 6.

Interestingly, some historians, such as Wemple, argue that Jouarre was not originally a female monastery at all, but began as a male foundation in 630.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the *Vita Columbani* makes no reference to nuns at Jouarre, but instead lays emphasis on Ado's withdrawal into the monastery away from the secular world.¹⁰⁹ Wemple proposes that Jouarre only became a true double house when Bishop Faro of Meaux, an ally of Ado and Audoin, and the brother of Burgundofara, introduced a female community.¹¹⁰ The first nuns introduced into Jouarre were drawn from Faremoutiers, including the first abbess Theodechild, reinforcing the close ties between the two communities.¹¹¹ Jouarre exemplifies the response of patrons such as Dado and Faro to the potential of this new form of female monasticism. The patrons of the community at Faremoutiers, one of the earliest double monasteries, used their monastery as a model for the new community at Jouarre, which in turn provided the nuns and the new abbess for the refounded monastery at Chelles.¹¹² This relationship between Faremoutiers, Jouarre and Chelles was explicitly mentioned in the *vita* of Balthild, who acted as a patron to all three convents.¹¹³ The close links between these various communities demonstrates the network of external relationships that double monasteries cultivated throughout the seventh and eighth centuries.

In contrast to Jouarre, the double monastery of Chelles is well-documented in our historical sources. Situated in the Seine basin, eighteen kilometres from Paris, the village of Chelles was focused on the Gallo-Roman villa favoured by the Merovingian royal family for accommodation on their travels in the region.¹¹⁴ In the sixth century, Queen Clotild founded a female monastery there, close to the royal villa, sometime between the death of her husband King Clovis I in 511 and her own death in 545.¹¹⁵ At its foundation, Chelles was most likely a small community of nuns, living in a collection of cells surrounding the church of St.

¹⁰⁸ Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁹ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, 1.26, p. 100.

¹¹⁰ Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 161.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹¹² Faremoutiers was founded c. 617. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹¹³ 'Quid ad Iotro monasterio, unde illas sacras virgines cum prefata domna Berthilane abbatissa ad Kala suo monasterio accersivit? Quanta ibi munera et de agris et pecunia multa contulit? Similiter et ad monasterium Sanctae Farae sepe larga munera direxit.' (And what about the monastery of Jouarre, whence she gathered holy virgins with the aforesaid lady Bertilla as abbess for her monastery of Chelles? How many gifts of lands and great amounts of wealth did she confer to that place? And similarly she directed copious gifts to the holy Fara's monastery.) *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, A Vita, 8, pp. 492-3.

¹¹⁴ Bateson, 'Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries', p. 156; Nadine Berthelmer-Ajot, 'Chelles à l'Époque Mérovingienne' in *Revue du Nord*, 68, 1986, p. 348.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

George.¹¹⁶ By the middle of the seventh century, Chelles had grown enough to attract religious women from Anglo-Saxon England to travel to Francia in order to join the convent. Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, mentions Chelles along with Faremoutiers and Andelys, as being particularly popular amongst the royal and noble women of the English kingdoms.¹¹⁷ Indeed, one of the most famous abbesses in early medieval England, Hilda of Whitby, had originally intended to join the monastery at Chelles in 647.¹¹⁸ Although she was prevented from doing so, her sister Hereswith, the mother of Aldwulf, King of East Anglia, was already present at Chelles, ‘living in the same monastery, under regular discipline’.¹¹⁹ While it was, most likely, still a single-sex nunnery at this stage, Chelles had grown into a community famous enough to attract women from outside Francia.

In all probability, it was the combination of Chelles’ royal origins, and its links with England, that drew it to the attention of Queen Balthild in the mid-seventh century. Balthild, a former English slave and wife of King Clovis II of Neustria, greatly enlarged Chelles as her own ‘special house of God’ around 658, within her wider policy of monastic patronage.¹²⁰ She took Jouarre as the model for this new structure, and drew both nuns and the new abbess Bertilla from there as the core of the new convent.¹²¹ Despite these changes, Balthild maintained the close links between Chelles and England, with the author of her *vita* noting that from among the captives she released ‘she admitted some of them in monasteries, especially as many men and maidens of her own people as possible’.¹²² As noted above, Bertilla’s *vita* also mentions that Saxon kings wanted to found double houses with the aid of Balthild and Bertilla.¹²³ Indeed, following her fall from power after 664, Balthild entered Chelles herself.¹²⁴ Notably, Balthild did not become the abbess of the monastery and the *vita* does not actually mention her assumption of the veil, the traditional symbol of becoming a

¹¹⁶ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, 18, p. 506; Bateson, ‘Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries’, p. 156.

¹¹⁷ ‘For at that time but few monasteries being built in the country of the Angles, many were wont, for the sake of monastic conversation, to repair to the monasteries of the Franks or Gauls; and they also sent their daughters there to be instructed, and delivered to their heavenly bridegroom, especially in the monasteries of Brie [Faremoutiers], of Chelles, and Andelys’. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.8, p. 121.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ ‘peculiares Dei casas, id est Kala in Parisiaco’, *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, A Vita, 7, p. 489.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8, pp. 489-493.

¹²² ‘Sed magis et ipsa, dato pretio, captivos plurimos redimere precepit et liberos relaxavit et alios ex ipsis in monasteria intromisit et precipue de gente sua viros et puellas quam plures denutritas suas.’ *Ibid.*, A Vita, 9, p. 494.

¹²³ *Vita Bertillae*, 6, p. 106. See n. 65.

¹²⁴ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, 7, 10, pp. 489-491, 495-6.

nun. The ability of a royal foundress to live at Chelles, possibly without formally becoming a nun until the end of her life indicates the flexibility around the roles of women in early medieval convents that I have described above.

In contrast to Jouarre, we have a number of literary sources associated with Chelles. Chief among these are the two *vitae* of Balthild and the *vita* of the abbess Bertilla. By examining the language of these texts, some historians have called into question the double nature of the monastery at Chelles. Wemple argues that the language of the first version of Balthild's *vita* (the *A vita*) does not show Chelles as a double monastery, but rather a female convent, in Balthild's lifetime.¹²⁵ It is only in Bertilla's *vita*, dating from the mid-eighth century, that we see male and female members living at Chelles.¹²⁶ As such, Wemple concurs with McNamara that the idea of double monasticism has been overemphasised by historians, and that the male community at Chelles was, in its early stages, small and unimportant.¹²⁷ While Wemple is correct in noting the lack of specific reference to monk-priests living at Chelles, we must not confuse absence of evidence with evidence of absence. We have seen that Balthild drew heavily on the double monastery of Jouarre to refound Chelles. It is more probable that Chelles began as a heavily female-oriented monastery, but still had a few priests closely associated with the female foundation. Indeed, in Balthild's *vita* we see her conferring with priests in order to persuade the nuns to accept her into their community. Although it is not specifically stated that they were monks of Chelles, the phrasing of the text implies that they were present at the monastery within Balthild's lifetime.¹²⁸ This number of monk-priests steadily grew over Bertilla's tenure as abbess, culminating in 'the surrounding throng of servants of both sexes' over which she ruled.¹²⁹ The lack of reference to male monks in the *vita* of Balthild highlights the issues around the vague nature of Latin terminology that I have referred to above. We cannot simply assume that if there is no overt mention of monks at Chelles in our sources, then they did not exist there at all. Balthild

¹²⁵ Suzanne Fonay Wemple, 'Female Spirituality and Mysticism in Frankish Monasteries: Radegund, Balthild and Aldegund' in Lillian Thomas Shank, John A. Nichols, eds, *Medieval Religious Women, Vol. II, Peaceweavers*, Kalamazoo, 1987, p. 42.

¹²⁶ The life of Bertilla makes several references to the double nature of Chelles, including 'non vallata utriusque sexus ministrotum caterva', 'quasi ergo mater proprios filios vel filias' and 'plurimi viri ac feminae festinabant'. *Vita Bertillae*, 5, pp. 105-6; Wemple, 'Female Spirituality', p. 43.

¹²⁷ Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 162.

¹²⁸ 'Sed et hoc conferens cum sacerdotibus citius, eis clementer cuncta indulsit.' *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, 10, p. 496.

¹²⁹ 'utriusque sexus ministrorum caterva.' *Vita Bertillae*, 5, p.105.

specifically chose a double monastery as the template for her new community. This, alongside the strong evidence for the male community in the later *vita* of Bertilla, indicates that Chelles was, from its refoundation, a double monastery.

Thanks to this range of sources, we also have a clear view of Chelles' relationship with the external world. For example, prior to Balthild's entry into the monastery, we see an episode where the nuns of Chelles tried to limit her access into the community. The *vita* suggests that the nuns 'may have suspected her of falseness, or rather attempted to repay evil for good'.¹³⁰ Considering the volatile political situation that acted as the catalyst for Balthild's entry into Chelles, it is more likely that the nuns were trying to protect their community from being attacked as an ally of the weakened queen by limiting her access to the monastery. Even so, in this particular case, Balthild's history of generous endowments to the convent, and close relationship of patronage with the abbess Bertilla ensured her eventual acceptance into Chelles.¹³¹ The policy of royal patronage and favour continued on through Balthild's stay in the monastery, as she recommended that Bertilla should continually visit the king, queen and other nobles with gifts in order to ensure that Chelles 'by custom, so that the good fame of the same house of God, with which it began, shall not be diminished. Rather it would always abide in great loving affection with all its friends and continue stronger in the name of God.'¹³² Balthild's advice proved fruitful, as we see Chelles' fame and prestige increase over the subsequent centuries.

Following the death of Balthild around 680, Chelles maintained its position as one of the most important female monasteries in Francia. Bertilla continued as abbess for another 46 years, during which she enlarged the relic collection of the convent and maintained ties with England by sending books along with 'chosen women and devout men' to found double monasteries.¹³³ Notably, Balthild's son King Clothar III of Neustria was buried at Chelles

¹³⁰ 'pro qua re falso ipsi eam habuissent suspectam, vel etiam pro bonis mala ei repensarent.' *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, 10, p. 496.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 7, 10, pp. 489-491, 495-6

¹³² 'ut et regem et reginam et procures cum digno honore cum eulogias semper visitarent, ut erat consuetudo, ut ipsa domus Dei bonam fama, quam coeperat, non amitteret, sed amplius semper in affectu caritatis cum omnibus amicis atque validius in Dei nomine permaneret in dilectione', *Ibid.*, 12, p. 498.

¹³³ 'electas personas et devotissimos homines', *Vita Bertillae*, 6, p. 107; Hen, *Culture and Religion*, p. 93

following his death in 673.¹³⁴ The increasing prominence of Chelles led the nobility of Austrasia, and the Pippinid family especially, to take an interest in it. The penultimate Merovingian king, Theuderic IV, was raised at Chelles in the early eighth century during the period when Charles Martel's widow, Swanhild, was abbess.¹³⁵ When the Pippinid family assumed royal power in the mid-eighth century, becoming the Carolingian dynasty, its close relationship with Chelles continued. A number of female members of the royal family entered Chelles, beginning with Pippin III and Carloman's stepmother Sunihild in 741.¹³⁶ Charlemagne in particular had strong ties to the convent, with his sister and close adviser Gisela becoming its abbess.¹³⁷ He placed both his daughters Rotrude and Gisela, as well as his imperial collection of relics at Chelles, and it was during this period that the cult of Balthild was revived and enthusiastically promoted by the Carolingian family.¹³⁸ Gisela and her successor as abbess Heilwig (mother-in-law of Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious) constructed a new basilica at Chelles and, in the presence of Louis' wife and son, translated Balthild's relics there with great honour in 833.¹³⁹ The close ties of the monastery of Chelles to Frankish royalty, both Merovingian and Carolingian, demonstrate the ability of its abbesses to manipulate relationships with patrons in order to secure their community's position of fame and prominence. Chelles also illustrates for us not only how appealing this form of double monasticism was to secular patrons, but also its pragmatic appeal to the women within the monastic community.

These two case studies provide a brief introduction into the complex relationships that double monasteries had with groups and individuals outside the monastery's walls. While our sources are not always precise in their description of the structure of double monasteries, when we contextualise the information they provide it is evident that both Chelles and Jouarre were part of this new form of female monasticism. They exemplify the features that

¹³⁴ Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, 'Commentary on *Vita Domnae Balthildis*', in *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640-720*, Manchester, 1996, p. 114.

¹³⁵ Bateson, 'Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries', p. 16; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, p. 179.

¹³⁶ McKitterick, 'Royal Patronage of Culture', p. 100.

¹³⁷ Gisela was often seen accompanying Charlemagne on important or prestigious occasions, such as his imperial coronation at Rome. Nelson, 'Women at the Court', p. 54; Valerie L. Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World*, Ithaca, 2009, p. 22.

¹³⁸ Nelson, 'Women at the Court', p. 54; Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture*, p. 22.

¹³⁹ *Ex Translatione S. Baltechildis*, Lectio 1-7, in O. Holder-Egger, ed., *MGH SS*, XV, I, Hanover, 1887, pp. 284-5; Jean Heudin, 'Les Abbés des Monastères Neustriens 650-850' in Hartmut Atsma, ed., *La Neustrie: Les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850*, I, Sigmaringen, 1989, p. 332; Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840*, Cambridge, 2009, p. 32.

led the double monastery to spread from Francia into Britain as a pragmatic solution to the issues religious women faced in the early medieval period. Chelles and Jouarre were able to manipulate their concentric spheres of access to protect their community as best they could from the pressures of the secular world, and to reward their supporters.

The combination of the double monastery's internal organization and the manipulation of its relationships were the key factors behind the rapid rise in popularity of this new form of female monasticism. With the addition of monk-priests to the monastic community, the women within double houses were able to devote themselves to celebrating the liturgy and so carve out for themselves a distinct reputation of sanctity. This sanctity served to secure the monastery's place both within the Frankish religious community and the wider secular community. In addition to this, the leaders of double houses were able to manage carefully their external relationships with those outside of the monastery in order to reinforce themselves further. By manipulating the concentric spheres of access around the *septa sancta* of the female community, abbesses were able to reward their allies, punish their opponents and assert their own position of authority. The pragmatic advantages of the double monastery, in terms of its increased independence and autonomy made it the ideal form for the rural, aristocratic founders of northern Francia. As part of the power shift in the seventh century from the more Gallo-Roman south of Francia to the northern Merovingian kingdoms of Neustria and Austrasia, we can see an accompanying surge in powerful and highly visible double monasteries. Indeed this form was so successful in early medieval Francia that it was consciously exported to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England. Accordingly, we can see that the double monastery was a definitive characteristic of seventh and eighth-century female religious activity in particular, and monasticism in general.

Evidently, double monasticism is a central aspect within the wider study of early medieval female monasticism. Those historians who have undertaken a study of the religious activity of Frankish women without including an analysis of this prominent innovation have overlooked an important factor in the development of Frankish monasticism. The double houses of Francia, while admittedly far fewer than single male monasteries, were extremely prominent cultural and political forces in the Frankish world. By combining male and female members in the single community, these monasteries were able to respond to the pressures of

their turbulent early medieval Frankish context. While my analysis has attempted to address the lack of secondary literature around the double monastery, there remains room for much more historical investigation. Double houses were influential not only in Frankish religious society, but were also significant secular political forces, and deserve a more prominent position in the history of monasticism than they have thus far been accorded.

Chapter Two

Holy queens and noble saints: The politics of patronage

Certain places repeatedly grab our attention throughout Frankish history - places where queens lived, where powerful nobles plotted, where princes were raised, and where kings visited. The names of Nivelles, Chelles, Faremoutiers, Jouarre and Andennes, among others, appear in our historical sources as the background for the turbulent political struggles of the seventh and eighth centuries. Any attempt to understand the political or social developments of early medieval Francia is therefore incomplete if it fails to recognize the active role these prestigious convents played in secular society. Conversely, an analysis of Frankish female monasticism would be remiss if it did not examine how the violent and unpredictable nature of Merovingian and Carolingian politics shaped women's experiences of the monastic life. Nonetheless, the historiography around female monasticism in Francia has generally passed over the political role of convents. Instead, female monasteries appear as passive tools in the hands of politicians, filled with unwanted women who were removed from secular society and relegated to a convent.¹ Yet, when we examine our sources, we see that the monastic women at the heart of this thesis were powerful forces in Frankish society, and maintained high levels of interaction in Frankish politics. Nunneries housing queens and princesses were inherently political institutions, especially in the context of early medieval Francia. When factional conflict ensured repeated rebellions and constant struggles for power, convents, and the women within them, were crucial actors on the political stage.

In a period characterized by instability and frequent crises of power, factional politics dominated Frankish rule. As various factions competed for influence over the royal courts, they sought to externalize their power by acting as patrons of both male and female monasteries. Due to the close links female monasteries retained with secular families, the

¹ For examples of this view, see Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp. 143-148; Wemple, 'Sanctity and Power', pp. 138-139, 146-7; Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, pp. 31-33; McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, pp. 149, 158-169.

seventh and eighth centuries saw an increasing number of political factions turning to convents to provide security and stability for their power base. These female houses, as centres of high cultural activity and literary authority, were able to promote their patrons' interests across Francia and Britain. In return, convents gained political and economic support in a period where attacks on female monasteries were far from rare. Rather than the grim picture of misogynistic control and repression of female religious women that is proposed by McNamara, Ranft and Wemple, the relationship between convents and their secular patrons was symbiotic, based on a mutually beneficial agreement of political and cultural support. Consequently, the appeal of this type of patronage helps to explain the surge of new female monasteries founded in this period in both Francia and Britain.

McNamara's argument, which proposes a Merovingian golden age for religious women followed by a swift crackdown on their freedom by the misogynistic Carolingians, does not sufficiently explain the development of policies of monastic patronage around female monasteries. In particular, she overlooks the lines of continuity between the Merovingians and Carolingians in their attitudes towards monastic women. The early Carolingians enacted the same kinds of monastic policies for the same reasons as their Merovingian predecessors. Even Louis the Pious, who put in place reforms which changed the expression of female monasticism significantly in the early ninth century, drew on the lessons learned from the seventh and eighth-century monastic policies and adapted them to his own needs. My argument recognizes the nuances of the complex bonds between convents and their secular patrons as well as the influence of a changing secular context, rather than externalising the blame for their later decline. If we are to gain any kind of understanding of how female monasticism developed in early medieval Francia we cannot continue to regard the interactions between secular patrons and female monasteries as the imposition of aggressive control from above, designed to repress and prevent women from having a political role. This approach misreads the entire basis of the relationship between the two parties. Female monasteries were not passive victims of their Carolingian patrons, but were instead their active partners in a mutually beneficial relationship, which recognized, and indeed reinforced the political nature of female houses.

Before we examine the relationships that linked together female monasteries and their patrons, we must first establish the complex political environment of the early medieval Frankish kingdoms.² I do not intend to rehash here the comprehensive account of Frankish political history given by Gerbeding and Fouracre, among others. Instead, I will outline the central political developments which were closely intertwined with the story of Frankish female monasticism. In particular, I shall highlight the importance of noble factions as the energising force within Frankish politics, and then address how these factions utilised monastic policies to reinforce their hold on power. The stability of the kingdoms rested on maintaining a balance between the different factions who competed for influence at the royal courts and for the crucial position of Mayor of the Palace. When this network became skewed in favour of one particular faction, crisis erupted. It is in this context of aristocratic rivalry that the three Frankish kingdoms were consolidated into one through a series of civil wars and the Pippinid family emerged from amongst the other factions to a position of dominance, transforming itself into the Carolingian dynasty. Not surprisingly, in this period of turbulent and often violent political conflicts, factions sought to reaffirm and secure their hold on both cultural and political power. Double monasteries featured prominently in their policies of patronage, helping to solidify a regional power base and provide support for these factions throughout both their accession to and fall from political power.

At the dawn of the seventh century, Francia was divided into three kingdoms, ruled by members of the same Merovingian family. Neustria lay in the Northwest against the Channel, Austrasia was in the East along the Meuse and Moselle Rivers and Burgundy ran along the Rhône River in the South. Two brothers, Theudebert II and Theuderic II, ruled Austrasia and Burgundy under the control of their grandmother Queen Brunhild. At Brunhild's instigation, Theuderic attacked and killed his brother in order to join the two kingdoms against Brunhild's enemy, King Clothar II of Neustria. However, Brunhild's plans were foiled when the Mayor of the Burgundian Palace, Warnachar, extended an appeal to Clothar to invade and rid the kingdoms of Theudebert's tyrannical rule. Warnachar represented two important factions: a group of Burgundian nobility led by himself and a faction of Austrasian nobility led by Arnulf and Pippin I. Shortly after Theuderic's death from dysentery in 613, Clothar killed his successor, Theuderic's infant son King Sigebert III. With the support of the

² See the works of Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerbeding especially.

Burgundian nobility, he executed Brunhild, the grandmother of Theuderic and the great-grandmother of Sigebert, by tying her hair to the tails of wild horses and whipping them through the streets. With the support of the influential Austrasian and Burgundian factions, Clothar II ruled over all three kingdoms until 622/623, when he placed his son Dagobert I onto the Austrasian throne. Burgundy, following the death of Warnachar in 626, no longer had its own king or mayor. Fouracre and Gerbeding argue that this implies the Burgundian nobles were at this stage already integrated into the factions of the Neustrian court.³ The events of 613 as a whole show the central role these factions of nobility played in the Frankish political arena, and the inter-dependence amongst these groups and Merovingian royals. Political stability relied on this factional balance of power being maintained. When this balance failed, as seen in the events of 650, the political environment of Francia collapsed into violent conflict.

A period of relative stability followed Clothar II's victory in 613. Neustrian kings continued to send their sons to Austrasia as junior kings, who in turn succeeded to the Neustrian throne on their father's death. The Pippinid faction remained in control at the Austrasian court, holding the position of the Mayor of the Palace. Thus, when Dagobert I of Austrasia and Neustria died in 638, his son Sigebert III was already king of Austrasia. His other son, Clovis II, succeeded to the Neustrian throne with his wife, the former slave Balthild. Yet when Sigebert III died in 651, something changed. The Austrasian Mayor of the Palace, Grimoald (the son of Pippin I) attempted a coup. He abducted Sigebert's son and heir Dagobert, forcefully tonsured him, and then sent him to Ireland on a pilgrimage with a fellow member of the Pippinid faction, Bishop Dido of Poitiers.⁴ Grimoald then placed his own son, Childebert, on the Austrasian throne.⁵ The *Liber Historiae Francorum* records that this assumption of royal power by the Pippinid faction led the Neustrian nobles to be 'enraged', and prompted them to ambush Grimoald and bring him to Clovis II to be tortured and killed.⁶ Childebert was also killed and replaced by Clovis's son Childeric in 651. Following the dramatic fall of the Pippinids from power, a rival Austrasian family rose to

³ Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerbeding, 'Introduction' in eds, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640-720*, Manchester, 1996, p. 14.

⁴ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 43, in Bruno Krusch, ed., *MGH SRM*, II, Hanover, 1888, p. 316.

⁵ It is telling that Grimoald had previously had Sigebert III take Childebert as an adoptive son, implying an attempt to legitimise his son's future role.

⁶ 'indignantes', *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 43, p. 316.

prominence, led by the new Austrasian Mayor Wulfoald.⁷ This violent story of usurpation is a striking example of the complexity of Merovingian rule. While aristocratic factions were an integral part of seventh-century Frankish politics, power was still firmly considered the provenance of royalty. The attempt by a group of Austrasian nobles to infringe on royal power and disrupt the balance of factional influence was quickly and firmly halted by other members of the Frankish aristocracy.

The death of Clovis II in 657, and the accession of his young son Clothar II to the Neustrian throne placed Clovis's widow, Queen Balthild, in a powerful position as regent. As we have seen above, Balthild's other son Childeric was already ruling over Austrasia, giving Balthild influence in both kingdoms. Nonetheless, despite her central role, Balthild still relied on noble factions to secure her position. The Neustrian Mayor under Clovis had been Erchinoald, Balthild's own, who continued to hold power throughout the early years of Balthild's regency. The presence of a strong Mayor of the Palace with close links to the regent queen could help to explain the lack of challenges to Balthild's rule. However, on Erchinoald's death, a new Neustrian faction rose to power under the Mayor Ebroin.⁸ This group, which included the prominent bishops Audoin of Rouen, Eligius of Noyen, and Chrodobert of Paris, was so influential in the Neustrian kingdom that when Balthild installed people outside of this faction, namely Leudegar and Sigobrand, as the bishops of Autun and Paris respectively, she was forcefully retired from her active political role.⁹ The influence of both Erchinoald and Ebroin's factions on Balthild's monastic policy was considerable as I will discuss below. As we have seen repeatedly in the history of the Frankish kingdoms, concentration of power in the hands of one faction led to increasing political instability, and eventual violent rebellion. For Ebroin's faction, this occurred on the death of Clothar III in 673. Although Clothar's brother Theuderic III succeeded as Neustrian king with the support of Ebroin, an uprising of Neustrian nobles, including Bishop Leudegar, deposed Theuderic and tonsured Ebroin, placing him in exile in the monastery of Luxeuil.¹⁰ The *Passio Leudegarii* explicitly links Ebroin's fall with his concentration of power and excessive

⁷ I will discuss the impact of the Pippinid's fall from power on their monastic policy below.

⁸ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 45, p. 317.

⁹ Leudegar was the nephew of Dido, Bishop of Poitiers who had links to Grimoald. Balthild entered the convent at Chelles around 664/665. *Passio Leudegarii*, 1-2, in Bruno Krusch, ed., *MGH SRM*, V, Hanover, 1910, pp. 283-285; *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, 10, pp. 495-6.

¹⁰ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 45, pp. 317-9; *Passio Leudegarii*, 5, pp. 287-8.

influence over the king.¹¹ The Neustrian nobles then invited the Austrasian king Childeric II, Theuderic and Clothar's brother, to rule over them. Unfortunately, Childeric's reign was to be short-lived. Following Ebroin's exile, the Austrasian Mayor, Wulfoald, took on the equal position at the Neustrian court. The power of this Austrasian noble and his faction over the Neustrian nobles sparked a second violent rebellion in 675, led by the Neustrian Bodilo, which killed Childeric and his pregnant wife Bilichild and forced Wulfoald to flee back to Austrasia. Theuderic III returned from exile as the king of Neustria and Leudesius the son of Erchinoald became the new Neustrian Mayor of the Palace.

Despite the return of the deposed king who had ignited the initial crisis in 673, the situation in the Frankish kingdoms remained volatile. Having escaped imprisonment at Luxeuil, Ebroin gathered support in Austrasia and attacked the Neustrian king and Leudesius.¹² Ebroin was eventually successful in his attempt to regain power, capturing Theuderic and killing Leudesius and his supporter Leudegar. As the *Passio Leudegarii* notes, Ebroin then 'took up a faction of certain people and he was very shortly made Mayor of the Palace again.'¹³ At the same time, following the death of Wulfoald in Austrasia, the Pippinid faction once again rose to power, with Pippin II becoming the Austrasian Mayor under Dagobert II, the king whom Pippin's father Grimoald had exiled to Ireland. The growing concentration of power in Ebroin's hands was a continued concern for the Pippinids, who reacted against the assassination of Dagobert and the dissolution of the Austrasian court in 679 by raising an armed force against Ebroin and Theuderic.¹⁴ Although this attack was unsuccessful, forcing Pippin and his ally Martin to flee back to Austrasia, Ebroin was eventually killed by a member of the Neustrian nobility, Ermenfred, who fled to Pippin for protection. Factional conflict continued between the Neustrians and the Austrasians, led by Pippin, until the Battle of Tertry. The *Liber Historiae Francorum* characterised this battle as a conflict between the divided Neustrians and the strong united force led by Pippin, leading to the inevitable victory of the Austrasians.¹⁵ Pippin's faction was then powerful enough to secure for him the position of Neustrian Mayor, a position he passed on to his son in 694.

¹¹ Ibid., 5, pp. 287-8.

¹² Ibid., 18, pp. 299-300; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 45, pp. 317-9.

¹³ 'Quorundam vero factionem suscoeperunt et iterum subito palatii maior domus efficitur.' *Passio Leudegarii*, 28, p. 309.

¹⁴ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 46, p. 320.

¹⁵ Ibid., 48, pp. 322-3.

This security is exemplified by the establishment of Andenne, the first Pippinid convent founded since Grimoald's fall from grace in 656.

The period up until Pippin II's death in 714 was one of comparative political stability. While there were still attacks on Pippinid rule, especially by external forces like the Suevi and the Frisians, the intense factional struggles among the Franks themselves that characterise the rest of the seventh century do not seem to occur.¹⁶ Part of the reason for this period of relative peace lies in Pippin's utilisation of marriage ties to balance the power of competing factions. We see in the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and the *Annales Metteses Priores* that Pippin, after defeating Radbod, leader of the Frisians, joined the two families together by marrying his son and successor as Mayor, Grimoald, to Radbod's daughter Theudesinda.¹⁷ We also see that Pippin married his other son Drogo to Anstrud, the daughter of Waratto and widow of Berchar, two prior Neustrian Mayors from a rival faction.¹⁸ However, Pippin's talent for negotiating amongst the factions and establishing stability did not survive past his death in 714. Instead, we see the Pippinid faction explode into civil war, with Pippin's widow Plectrude championing her grandson Theudoald as Pippin's successor against her step-son Charles Martel. The alliance of Plectrude with the new Mayor Raganfred and Radbod turned a succession struggle into a war between the old Frankish kingdoms, with Charles based in the Pippinid stronghold of Austrasia against his stepmother's Neustrian allies. The eventual victory of Charles, and the accession of his son Pippin III to the throne in 751, was the final victory for the Pippinids over the rival factions that they had struggled against since the beginnings of the seventh century.

The complex, volatile and violent history of the Frankish kingdoms reads as a series of crises of power. The repeated rise and fall of different factions and the struggle to gain control of the important position of Mayor caused repeated bloody rebellions. As we have seen, these were sparked by any one faction gaining too much influence over the king and the court, threatening the delicate power balance which Merovingian rule was based on. Despite

¹⁶ Ibid., 49, pp. 323-4; *Annales Metteses Priores*, trans. by Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, in eds, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640-720*, Manchester, 1996, p. 360.

¹⁷ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 50, pp. 324-5; *Annales Metteses Priores*, trans. by Fouracre and Gerberding, p. 364.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 362.

the eventual ascendance of the Pippinids to power over the Merovingians, it would be a mistake to share the Carolingian view of the Merovingians as weak and powerless kings.¹⁹ Instead the history of the seventh century shows the centrality of the Merovingian royal line as the seat of political power. Factions competed not for the throne, but rather for influence over the king. The failed coup attempt by Grimoald illustrates the chaos that ensued when royal power was usurped by a faction. Indeed, the Pippinid faction seemed to have taken this lesson to heart, as through the first half of the eighth century they still sought to reinforce their power with the legitimacy of the Merovingian kings. It was only when they were completely secured in their power that the Pippinids successfully attempted to place a member of their own family onto the Frankish throne. Unsurprisingly, this complex political environment of factionalism had a significant impact on the development of female monasticism in Francia. The volatility of this period contrasts with the stability of monasteries, and factions utilised this stability to bolster their own political influence.

It is in this context of constant and often violent political instability that female monasticism underwent a startling episode of growth. As we have seen, the seventh and eighth centuries witnessed the foundation of a number of influential double houses, many of which remained as powerful social and political centres well into the Carolingian period. Yet these major convents were also part of a wider trend of growth for female monasticism. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, in her pioneering statistical analysis of early medieval monasticism, identifies the seventh century as the most active period for founding female monasteries in both Francia and Britain.²⁰ 77 new female monasteries were founded in this century in Francia, compared to 27 in the sixth century, 19 in the eighth century and 20 in the ninth century. In Britain, the figures are even more dramatic. From no female monasteries in the sixth century, the seventh century saw 47 new houses founded, dropping to 8 in the eighth century and 6 in the ninth century. The proportion of new female foundations compared to new male foundations also shifted in Francia, leaping from the sixth century's 9.8% to 28.6% in the seventh century, then falling back to 12.4% in the eighth century. In Britain, it rose from 0% in the sixth century to a staggering 38.2% in the seventh century, before dropping to 19% in the eighth century.²¹ From this, we can see that female monasteries experienced a

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

²⁰ Schulenburg, 'Women's Monastic Communities', p. 266.

²¹ Schulenburg, 'Expansion and Decline', p. 266.

boom in numbers during the seventh century which tapered away in the following centuries. While we cannot be completely certain that the increased number of female foundations reflects a corresponding rise in the absolute numbers of women in the monastic life, it does demonstrate the increased appeal of female convents to their patrons. The boom of convents indicates that patrons and donors to monasteries saw female houses, rather than male houses, as an increasingly attractive option for their patronage. Despite the significant growth of female monasticism in this period, there has thus far been little attention in the secondary literature on what exactly lay behind the appeal of convents to their patrons. Why did *female* houses in particular become so central in the monastic policies of the seventh-century factions?

While scholars agree that monasteries in general were ideally suited to solidify noble or royal control in the early medieval period, as they echoed the 'land-based familial structure' of the nobility, this does not explain why the feminine form of monasticism achieved such prominence in this period.²² Gisela Muschiol proposes that the association of sanctity and feminine virginity in early medieval theology led to the prayer of monastic women being 'deemed purer and thus more effective than men's' in the minds of seventh-century patrons.²³ While the prayer of female nuns was indeed considered more powerful than that of a member of lay-society, there is little reference in the monastic texts to the comparative sanctity of monks and nuns, and its impact on the effectiveness of their prayer. Instead, Peter Brown suggests that female piety may have been attractive as it was able to act as a connection between the lay world and the religious world, and so was more suitable for familial monastic policies than male monasticism.²⁴ While this provides part of the explanation behind the appeal of female monasticism, it does not address the reason for the *increased* appeal of convents in this period. This, somewhat paradoxically, lies in their rarity. Despite the growth of convents in the seventh century, female monasteries never came close to equalling the numbers of male monasteries in either Francia or Britain. Consequently, female monasticism was a more visible form of sanctity than its male counterpart. For those seventh century factions seeking to make their monastic patronage as conspicuous as possible, founding a female monastery rather than a male one was an adroit move.

²² McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 29.

²³ Muschiol, 'Men, women and liturgical practice', p. 209. Muschiol also notes on p. 210 that the establishment of male prayer confraternities and an increased emphasis on the Mass from the eighth century corresponds with falling female foundation rates.

²⁴ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, pp. 226-28.

A number of noble families, seeking to demonstrate their patronage of monasteries, did indeed take this option. Early medieval female houses were solidly linked into the familial networks of monastic patronage. The *vitae* of female monastic saints make repeated references to gifts of land for their new convents from their families. The lives of Glodesind in Metz, Burgundofara in Faremoutiers, Sadalburga in Laon and Gertrude at Nivelles, amongst countless others, show noble and royal families setting up their female relatives in monasteries on sections of their traditional family lands.²⁵ McNamara argues that these examples are evidence of the larger hagiographical trope in which female saints resisted the pressure from their families to marry, before miraculously converting them into becoming patrons of their new monasteries.²⁶ Nevertheless, these *vitae* still reflect that noble families invested larger levels of patronage into convents in this period. While this form of patronage may seem detrimental to factions wishing to secure their power base, as they estranged both their lands and their female relatives, the reverse was in fact true. Convents functioned as external *loci* of familial power, where traditional family lands could be held in perpetuity, unable to be divided in future family disputes.²⁷ In a society that favoured partible inheritance, this was understandably appealing. Moreover, through dedicating this land to the church, factional kin-groups could minimize the risk of rival factions attempting to encroach on their boundaries.²⁸

The close relationship between female monasteries and their factional patrons is evident in the common practice of dynasties of abbesses, all drawn from the same family, presiding over key convents. For example, Sadalburga of Laon was succeeded as abbess by her daughter Anstrude; Gertrude of Hamay by her great-granddaughter Eusebia; Gertrude of

²⁵ For examples of this, see the life of Glodesind in *Vita Antiquior*, 12, in Johannes Bapt. Sollerio, Johannes Pinio, Guilielmo Boschio, eds, *AS*, Paris, 1768, July 25, p. 204; Burgundofara in Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, 2.7, pp. 120-21; Sadalburga in *Vita Sadalbergae*, 12, pp. 56-7; Gertrude in *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis*, 2, pp. 455-7. Other examples include Aurea, in *De S. Austreberta*, 11, pp. 421-2; Begga in *De Virtutibus Sanctae Geretrudis*, 10, p. 469; Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, 'Commentary on *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis* and the *Additamentum Nivalense de Fulano*' in eds, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640-720*, Manchester, 1996, p. 312; Schulenburg, 'Expansion and Decline', p. 271.

²⁶ McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 132.

²⁷ Régine Le Jan, 'Convents, Violence, and Competition for Power in Seventh-Century Francia' in Mayke de Jong, Frans Theuws with Carine van Rhijn, eds, *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, Leiden, 2001, p. 245; McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 133.

²⁸ However, this did not stop factions from trying to usurp control of the convents of rival factions, as will be seen below.

Nivelles by her niece Wulftrude; and Aldegund of Mauberge by her niece Aldetrude.²⁹ In addition to this, the seventh century saw the rise of child oblation to monasteries by the upper class, despite the disapproval evident in monastic rules, reinforcing familial dynasties present within convents.³⁰ The intimate association of female convents with a familial power structure ensured that patrons could remain closely linked with the foundations they favoured. In effect, by setting up dynasties of female relatives as leaders of convents, noble kin-groups constructed ‘anchorage-points’ of power in their regions of influence.³¹ In times of conflict, these convents could be called upon for support against the attacks of rival dynasties. Indeed, when Grimoald was executed following his attempted coup in Austrasia, it was the convent at Nivelles, under the leadership of his daughter Wulftrude, that sustained the family as a political force. Once the rival faction of Wulfoald fell, Pippin II, Wulftrude’s cousin, was able to move back into a political role, assuming the role of the Mayor of the Palace in Austrasia. Throughout the years that the Pippinids were eclipsed by Wulfoald, Nivelles continued as the focal point of their family, set in the heart of their traditional lands, and provided them with a much-needed sense of security and stability.

Female convents evidently provided a better opportunity than their male rivals for patrons to address their need to construct a solid, external power base from which they could draw support. Even the royal families of the Merovingians and Carolingians were keenly aware of the benefits of supporting female monasteries. Royals applied their patronage to convents for similar reasons as nobles, that is, to secure their influence in their traditional lands; to establish seats of power and support external to their own courts; and to hold familial lands in perpetuity under the leadership of female relatives. Clearly the appeal of female monasticism to Frankish dynasties was not simply because it ‘provided the female element of the ruling caste with something to rule’.³² The benefits that convents offered noble factions were especially crucial to Frankish royalty. Perhaps even more so than noble families, royal families in early medieval Francia were not stable dynasties, but were rather loose networks of competing members. The establishment of a female monastery, led by a mother, sister or daughter, could provide royal men with both political and religious support

²⁹ *Vita Anstrudis*, 4, p. 68; Hucbald, *Vita sanctae Rictrudis*, 25, p. 86; *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis*, 6, pp. 459-60; Hucbald, *Vita Aldegundis*, 27, col. 872.

³⁰ Le Jan, ‘Convents’, p. 245; McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 133.

³¹ Le Jan, ‘Convents’, pp. 248, 257.

³² Nicholson, ‘*Feminae Gloriosae*’, p. 18.

for their claims to power. In this context, female houses were more valuable than male monasteries. Very few male royals entered the monastic life, and those who did so were generally forced into monasteries as political prisoners.³³ As Jonas records in the *vita* of Columbanus, when the saint proposed that Theudebert should renounce the throne and enter a monastery, ‘the king and all those standing around him laughed, saying that they had never heard a Merovingian, having been elevated into royal power, become a willing monk.’³⁴ Female royals, on the other hand, had close ties to monasticism, and a number of queens and princesses were abbesses or nuns.³⁵ By supporting female relatives who were outside the line of succession in founding convents, kings could not only reinforce their political power, but also add the extra protection of increased sanctity to their rule.

Religious power remained an important adjunct to political power, and female monasteries provided an excellent opportunity for factions to gain a reputation of sanctity. As we have seen above, the liturgical role of convents, and especially their recitation of the divine office, was emphatically emphasized in monastic texts as the defining purpose of female monasticism. Consequently, female monasteries were believed to imbue their region with their extra sanctity, or, as the *vita* of Sadalburga describes it, ‘to illuminate the town just like the rays of the sun’.³⁶ Brown notes that the foundation of Faremoutiers was considered so remarkable that ‘the holiness of the convent irradiated an entire agricultural region’.³⁷ This holiness was not simply applied to the physical location of convents, but also to its patrons. These monasteries, filled with religious women praying on behalf of their patrons and their families, were able to imbue their noble and royal supporters with an increased sanctity. The Pippinid/Carolingian family in particular were well aware of this benefit, and, as we shall see below, made excellent use of it to support their rise to royal power.

³³ With the notable exception of Chlodovald who voluntarily became a monk. See Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, 3.18, p. 182.

³⁴ ‘Quod et regi et omnibus circumadstantibus ridiculum excitat, aientes, se numquam audisse, Mervengum, in regno, sublimatum, voluntarium clericum fuisse.’ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, 28, p. 105.

³⁵ These women included Balthild; Charles Martel’s widow Swanhild; Charlemagne’s sister Gisela; Charlemagne’s daughters Gisela, Theodrada and Ruothild; and Charles the Bald’s wife Ermentrude.

³⁶ ‘ad illuminandam urbem veluti solis radius veneranda femina cum suis sequacibus sanctis appropinquasset’, *Vita Sadalbergae*, 14, p. 58.

³⁷ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 254.

Convents provided factions with the opportunity to capitalize on a number of benefits. By founding and supporting convents, the noble and royal families of Francia were able to demonstrate their wealth, political power and piety, benefits which were also offered by the patronage of male monasteries. However, female monasteries acted as a much more visible display of these traits. The close ties binding female foundations to a family-based power structure only strengthened this appeal, as factions could maintain close control over these monasteries, and the relatives and land held within them. The violent factionalism of the seventh and eighth centuries sparked an increased need among Frankish factions to support and reaffirm their hold on political power. Female monasteries clearly fulfilled that need, leading to the boom in seventh-century female foundations.

Indeed, there is a good deal of evidence available, not only in the hagiography of female monastic saints, but also in our secular historical texts, that demonstrates Frankish factions actively constructing policies of monastic patronage which showcased their female houses. From the origins of double monasticism in the early seventh century, right down to the rule of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, political factions, both royal and noble, utilised female monasteries to reinforce their often fragile hold on political power. The importance of these convents as factional bases was recognized by contemporaries, illustrated by the sometimes bloody conflicts over their patronage. As places firmly focused on and characterized by familial power structures, female monasteries were firmly set at the heart of the political machinations of this period. Nonetheless, it is important to note that while the statistical data demonstrates a surge of convents in the seventh century in Francia, followed by a decline in new foundations in the eighth and ninth centuries, policies of female monastic patronage did not end with the accession of Pippin III in 751. The Pippinid/Carolingian dynasty was, in fact, keenly aware of the power of female convents, and relied heavily on them to support their rise to royal power. The fall in new foundations from the eighth century onwards does not illustrate the misogyny of this family in comparison to the Merovingian dynasty. Once the Pippinids returned to power in the late seventh century, they set about converting convents that had traditionally been seats of Merovingian power to their own network of patronage, in an effort to legitimise their rule and emphasize their continuity with their royal predecessors. The seventh-century boom is reflective of the presence of numerous different factions enacting policies of patronage over female houses. The eighth-century

decline reflects the Carolingians' dominance over other political forces, and their desire to prevent their rivals from accessing such a valuable resource.

To illustrate this rising awareness, I shall begin by examining the political connections of the first prominent double house in Francia, Faremoutiers. From its origins, Faremoutiers was set at the core of the political faction based around the monastery at Luxeuil. Jonas of Bobbio records the life of the first abbess of Faremoutiers, Burgundofara, within his *vita* of St. Columbanus.³⁸ Throughout this work, Jonas emphasizes the close ties binding both Burgundofara, and her monastery, to Luxeuil. Blessed by Columbanus as a child, along with her brothers Faro, Chagnoald and Waldebert, (all of whom were key members of the Luxeuilian faction) Burgundofara founded Faremoutiers under the supervision of Columbanus's successor as abbot of Luxeuil, Eustasius.³⁹ Her brother, Waldebert, in turn succeeded Eustasius as abbot, and it is believed that he wrote the *RCP* for his sister at Faremoutiers.⁴⁰ As I noted earlier, another central member of the Luxeuilian faction, St. Audoin, founded the convent of Jouarre using nuns from Faremoutiers as the base for the new community.⁴¹ The network of ties holding Faremoutiers to Luxeuil, and to the patronage of its political supporters, illustrates that from the beginnings of this new form of female monasticism, the double house was closely bound into political policies of monastic patronage.

The Luxeuilian faction, in conjunction with the faction of Neustrian nobility led by the Mayor of the Palace, expanded their patronage of female monasteries over the seventh century. Richard Gerbeding and Paul Fouracre outline the considerable number of influential members in this faction, including Audoin, the bishop of Rouen; Eligius, the bishop of Noyon; Desiderius the bishop of Cahors; Chrodobert, a counsellor of Balthild and the bishop of Paris; Burgundofaro, the bishop of Meaux and brother of Burgundofara; Ebroin and his successor as Neustrian Mayor of the Palace, Waratto.⁴² Audoin in particular was a prolific

³⁸ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita S. Columbani abbatis discipulorumque eius*, Liber II, in Bruno Krusch, ed., *MGH SRM*, IV, Hanover, 1902, pp. 130-43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-8.

⁴⁰ G. S. M. Walker 'Introduction' in ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, Vol II, Dublin, 1957, p. xlvi; Jo Ann McNamara, 'Introduction to *The Rule of a Certain Father to the Virgins*', in McNamara, John Halborg, eds, *The Ordeal of Community*, Toronto, 1993, p. 75.

⁴¹ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, 8, pp. 492-3.

⁴² Fouracre and Gerbeding, 'Commentary on *Vita Audoini*', pp. 149-50.

founder of convents. He was behind the establishment of Jouarre, Fécamp and Pavilly, and was heavily involved in the foundation of Soissons around 660, alongside Ebroin and his wife.⁴³ The overlapping policies of patronage at Soissons reveal the close political relationship between these two factions at this point in Neustrian history. Audoin, representing the Luxeuilian group, was affirming the political prominence of Columbanian monasticism as the form favoured by the Mayor of the Palace. Ebroin, in turn, was attempting to strengthen his political position through the added sanctity of female monasticism. Notably, the Luxeuilian faction utilised this ability to overlap their patronage with other groups to link themselves to the power and prestige of their Merovingian ruler. Three of the convents of Queen Balthild were in fact Luxeuilian houses (namely Faremoutiers, Jouarre and Soissons). For her fourth, and most favoured house of Chelles, Balthild selected for abbess a nun from Jouarre, Bertilla. The shared patronage of these convents by both the Luxeuilian faction and the queen provided a means by which Audoin and his allies could assert their influence in Neustrian politics, and also provided Balthild with additional security in her precarious role as queen regent. Notably, when Balthild attempted to moderate her support for Ebroin's monastic policy, she lost her political authority and was forced into retirement at Chelles as a result.

Balthild serves as a particularly interesting example of a secular political figure enacting a comprehensive monastic policy with a heavy focus on female convents. The *vita* of Balthild explicitly notes that the queen was a keen patron of monastic communities in all three kingdoms, including Luxeuil, Jumièges and St. Denis. As noted above, Balthild promoted, alongside these male monasteries, her chosen convents of Jouarre, Faremoutiers, Soissons, and Chelles. These monasteries acted as spiritual reinforcement to Balthild's power, showing her piety in form particularly appropriate for a royal woman.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding the role that piety played in her patronage of convents, the particular houses Balthild chose to support reveal the political implications of her patronage. While her male monasteries were spread across the Frankish kingdoms, Balthild's four convents were all centred in a small area at the heart of the Neustrian kingdom, around Paris. The close ties between female monasteries and familial power structures explain this. As we have seen,

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 147-8.

⁴⁴ Valerie L. Garver notes that commemoration of the dead through liturgical practice was a form of religious worship inherently tied to female members of families in *Women and Aristocratic Culture*, p. 75.

convents were often led by dynasties of women from the same family on their traditional family lands. They thus acted as stable, external places of power for families and factions. By Balthild donating ‘entire estates and large forests’ of Clovis’s land to these four convents, including the convent of Chelles founded by Clovis’s ancestor Queen Clotild, Balthild was effectively solidifying her influence in her new family’s territory in a way that was both religious and political.⁴⁵

One of the most arresting examples of the close bond between factional politics and female monasticism lies in the careers of the Irish pilgrim monks Fursey, Foillan and Ultan. These three missionary brothers had travelled from England to Francia, following the destruction of their monastery in the war between East Anglia and Mercia. Fursey, the first of the brothers to arrive in Neustria in 644, was warmly welcomed by Erchinoald, the Neustrian Mayor of the Palace, and was given land to establish the male monastery of Lagny.⁴⁶ Unfortunately when Foillan and Ultan travelled to Neustria after Fursey’s death they experienced firsthand the volatility of Frankish politics. Erchinoald at first welcomed the brothers on their arrival, but suddenly changed his mind. The *Additamentum Nivialense de Fuilano* records that ‘they were expelled by the *patricius*, who looked down upon the pilgrims’.⁴⁷ Fursey and Foillan then fled to the patronage of the Pippinid family at Nivelles. Itta, Gertrude and Grimoald built for these Irish monks the monastery of Fosses, close by Nivelles, on Itta’s own familial lands.⁴⁸ The two houses of Nivelles and Fosses were very closely linked, with Foillan helping to celebrate mass at Nivelles, and relics from his body were taken for the convent after his murder.⁴⁹ This episode provides a compelling illustration of two rival versions of Irish monasticism, both intimately tied to female houses, being championed by two rival factions. Erchinoald was, at the time of the monks’ expulsion around 651, the Neustrian Mayor of the Palace, and the former owner of Queen Balthild. While the choice to expel Foillan and Ultan is presented in the hagiographical records as an arbitrary decision, Erchinoald’s political position reveals his motivations. As I have noted above, the faction of Luxeuil, led by Audoin and Eligius, was involved in a shared policy of patronage with Balthild and Erchinoald. The exile of these rival Irish monks can therefore be

⁴⁵ ‘largiendo integra praedia et silvas magnas’. *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, 7, p. 489.

⁴⁶ *Transitus Beati Fursei*, 23, translated by Oliver Rackham in *Transitus Beati Fursei: A translation of the 8th century manuscript Life of Saint Fursey*, Norwich, 2007, p. 57.

⁴⁷ ‘Quo non multo post a patricio viros peregrinos despiciente expulsi sunt’, *Additamentum Nivialense*, p. 450.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 450; J. J. Hoebanx, *L’Abbaye de Nivelles des Origines au XIV^e siècle*, Brussels, 1952, p. 54.

⁴⁹ *Additamentum Nivialense*, p. 328; Hoebanx, *Nivelles*, p. 55.

seen as Erchinoald's response to pressure from his political allies, who wished to remove a rival, non-Columbanian group of monks from his patronage. The decision by Balthild to refound Chelles shortly after this into a Columbanian double monastery, led by a nun from Jouarre, reinforces the tightening of the bonds between Luxeuil and the Neustrian royal house, through the medium of female monastic patronage.

The convent of Nivelles, in particular, highlights how important female monasteries could be for political families. Established in the Meuse-Moselle region of Austrasia in 640, Nivelles was a stronghold for the family of the Austrasian Mayor of the Palace Grimoald. Situated centrally in the traditional Pippinid family lands, Nivelles was founded by Grimoald's mother Itta and led by his sister Gertrude and then by his daughter Wulftrude.⁵⁰ This concentration of Pippinid power in one institution did not just act as a bolster to the family's spiritual prestige, but also served to make the convent a safe place to decide on the future political manoeuvres of the faction. The *Additamentum Nivialense de Fuilano* reveals this aspect of Nivelles, as it explicitly states that Grimoald and his ally Bishop Dido of Poitiers met at the convent in the beginning of 651, just prior to Grimoald's attempted coup against Dagobert.⁵¹ Considering the subsequent actions of Grimoald and Dido, it is extremely likely that the two men discussed their plans with Grimoald's daughter, the Abbess Wulftrude.⁵² This is confirmed by the actions taken by the Merovingian royals against the Pippinids and their convent following the coup. Gertrude's *vita* notes the opposition of Queen Balthild, her sons Clothar III and Childeric II, and Queen Chimnechild (the widow of Sigebert III and mother of Dagobert) to Wulftrude when 'seized by hatred of her father, the kings and queens, through ample ill-will, wished to take her from her place first by persuasion and then by force'.⁵³ The Merovingians were not only concerned at the power of the Pippinids, but they also felt that their female monasteries could provide a power base from which the family could regain their influence.

⁵⁰ Bateson, 'Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries', p. 158; Fouracre and Gerberding, 'Commentary on *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis* and the *Additamentum Nivialense de Fuilano*', p. 312; McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 29.

⁵¹ *Additamentum Nivialense*, p. 329; Fouracre, Gerberding, 'Commentary on the *Vita Domnae Balthildis*', p. 101; Hoebanx, *Nivelles*, p. 23.

⁵² Ian Wood, 'Genealogy' in Leslie Brubaker, Julia M. H. Smith, eds, *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 240.

⁵³ 'Contigit autem ex odio paterno, ut reges, reginae, etiam satis per invidiam illam de loco suo per suasionem primo, postmodum per vim vellent abstrahere et res, quibus eadem puella preerat, iniquo modo possidere.' *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis*, B Vita, 6, p. 460; Le Jan, 'Convents', p. 256.

Consequently, the leadership of Frankish convents was an issue of importance in Frankish politics. Factions sought to limit the ability of their political rivals to enact policies of patronage over female monasteries, often by violent means. For example, Ebroin, during his tumultuous career, was involved in a number of attempts to either moderate or to remove the control of female convents from his rivals' hands. As J. M. Wallace-Hadrill notes, Ebroin, alongside Audoin, was a key figure in the Neustrian fight against the growth of Pippinid power in the West.⁵⁴ Therefore, their joint establishment of the convent at Soissons around 660 should be viewed in light of his success over Grimoald's failed coup. The foundation of this new convent, close to the Austrasian border, was an attempt by Ebroin to reinforce Neustrian power in a contested area. This is further confirmed by Ebroin's later attacks on Anstrude, the abbess of the nearby convent of Laon, as she was related (albeit somewhat distantly) to the Pippinid family.⁵⁵ Sometime between 677 and 681, Ebroin attacked Anstrude, removing 'the power of the consecrated abbess of ruling souls', and ordered her into exile.⁵⁶ The *Passio Leudegarii* also makes a brief mention of Ebroin's attacks on other, unnamed, famous convents, 'driving their religious leaders into exile', indicating that his opposition to Laon was not an isolated incident.⁵⁷ This push by Ebroin against the Pippinid network of female monasteries clearly shows how seriously factions regarded female monasteries as centres of both spiritual and political power.

Following the return of the Pippinid family to power under Pippin II in the late seventh century, their policy of monastic patronage helped them further consolidate their position of dominance. Both Pippin III and Charlemagne were active patrons of monasteries, building networks of 'royal monasteries' through grants of immunities.⁵⁸ Charlemagne in particular rewarded his family and allies for their support by appointing them as leaders of monasteries.⁵⁹ Notably, he installed female members of his family, including his sister Gisela and his daughters Rotrude, Theodrada, Gisela and Ruothild as abbesses in the prominent

⁵⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 68.

⁵⁵ The Gundoinis were linked to Wulfoald, the contemporary Austrasian mayor. Hoebanx, *Nivelles*, p. 259.

⁵⁶ 'quatinus sacrae abbatissae potestatem regendi animas auferret', *Vita Anstrudis*, 11, p. 71.

⁵⁷ 'sane feminarum nobelium monasteria destruens eorumque religione primarias in exilium dirigens.' *Passio Leudegarii*, 28, p. 309.

⁵⁸ McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, pp. 37-43; Hen, *Culture and Religion*, p. 57.

⁵⁹ McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 60.

convents of Chelles, Argenteuil, Soissons and Faremoutiers respectively.⁶⁰ These women remained firmly set in the Carolingian family structure, staying in close contact with Charlemagne's court. Janet Nelson convincingly argues that royal convents served as satellite courts, which 'maintained the court's outliers and partial replicas at key regnal cult-sites'.⁶¹ Indeed, when even the convents that Charlemagne's daughters entered were the same foundations patronized by the Merovingian queen Balthild. By placing women from his family as leaders of these sites, Charlemagne was able to tie sites of Merovingian piety closely to his Carolingian dynasty in an effort to legitimize and justify their royal power. This is particularly evident in his relationship with Chelles, where his sister Gisela was abbess. Gisela is recorded in our sources as an especially close confidant and adviser to Charlemagne, accompanying him to his imperial coronation in Rome in 800 and acting as a physical representation of the king's power and sanctity.⁶² Under her leadership, Chelles not only housed the imperial relic collection, but also became an important political site, hosting various political figures and functioning as a channel of information that could be relayed back to the court in Aachen.⁶³ Thus, the traditional view, that the Carolingians defined themselves in opposition to the Merovingians as much as possible is too simplistic. The significant policy of patronage by Charlemagne over traditional Merovingian convents points to his conscious efforts to emphasize the continuity between his dynasty and his Merovingian predecessors.

The early ninth-century reforms of Louis and his favoured bishop Benedict of Aniane, have drawn the condemnation of a number of historians of female monasticism. Following the Councils of Châlon and Aix in 813 and 816, and the Synod at Aachen in 817, Benedict, with the support of Louis, instituted a wide platform of monastic reform.⁶⁴ As part of this, he championed a new form of religious profession for women, that of the canoness.⁶⁵ For those women who remained within traditional monasteries, Benedict enacted a series of stricter regulations, including a blanket adoption of the Benedictine Rule; the consolidation of small groups of nuns and privately vowed women into larger communities; and a push to make all

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Nelson, 'Gendering courts', p. 196.

⁶² Nelson, 'Women at the court', pp. 54, 57; Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture*, p. 22.

⁶³ Nelson, *The Frankish World*, pp. 191-2.

⁶⁴ McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 108; Ranft, *Women and Spiritual Equality*, p. 122.

⁶⁵ McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 112.

monasteries into royal abbeys under Carolingian control.⁶⁶ Historians have subsequently portrayed these actions in an extremely negative light, viewing them as an expression of Carolingian misogyny and a crackdown on any attempt by women to assume authority or power.⁶⁷ Patricia Ranft even questions whether the Viking invasions in the ninth century were a positive development for religious women, as ‘it gave them the opportunity to start over again’.⁶⁸ Condemning Louis and Benedict as misogynistic oppressors of religious women is a far too simplistic view. In reality, they were attempting to enact a much more complex set of objectives which drew heavily on the antecedents of the seventh and eighth centuries. Louis’s actions represent a logical progression from the monastic policies outlined above, and demonstrate his clear understanding of the political power that convents could wield. His reforms were, in fact, an attempt to place all convents under Carolingian patronage, and to prevent other noble factions from founding or patronizing rival, non-royal, female monasteries. His reforms were not motivated by simple misogyny, but sought to minimize the ability of non-royal groups to co-opt convents as power bases, reinforcing their political importance. This is clearly seen in how Louis the Pious dealt with the convent at Brescia, which was founded by the Lombard dynasty. Instead of dissolving this rival convent after the Frankish invasion of Italy, both Charlemagne and Louis donated considerable amounts of land to it, and appointed a *rectrix*, or secular head of the monastery, from the royal family.⁶⁹ Even though the manner in which Louis dealt with female monasteries differed from his predecessors, his attitude towards them was still heavily influenced by the policies of patronage enacted over the past two centuries. His reforms were based firmly on the recognition of the critical importance of female convents to the political history of Francia, and a desire not to stamp them out, but rather to ensure that this valuable tool remained in the hands of the Carolingian dynasty alone.

The apparently passive role of convents in these policies of factional patronage has provided historians such as Ranft, McNamara and Wemple with ammunition for their portrayal of the Carolingians as misogynistic opponents of female monasteries. Indeed, the way that the patronage of particular convents appears to be co-opted by political figures for

⁶⁶ Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, p. 33.

⁶⁷ See McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 169; Wemple, ‘Sanctity and Power’, pp. 146-7.

⁶⁸ Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, p. 32.

⁶⁹ These lay abbesses were Judith, Ermengard and Gisela. Suzanne F. Wemple, ‘S. Salvatore/S. Giulia: A Case Study in the Endowment and Patronage of a Major Female Monastery in Northern Italy’ in Julius Kirshner, Suzanne F. Wemple, eds, *Women of the Medieval World*, Oxford, 1985, p. 90.

their own ends has led Ranft to argue that ‘women’s communities became subject to the whims of secular and ecclesiastical leaders’, unable to protest or act against changes to their monasteries.⁷⁰ This approach ignores the fundamental basis to the relationship between faction and female monastery. The policies of patronage that spread throughout Francia in the seventh and eighth centuries were successful because of the active desire of both parties to engage in this kind of relationship. Monasteries were not passive subjects to their patrons, forced into accepting their secular supporters, but instead had a ‘strong sense of their own institutional rights and responsibilities’.⁷¹ Moreover, a crucial part of the appeal of convents to factions was the monastery’s own position as a powerful agent of cultural patronage in its own right. Throughout this period, female monasteries promoted the cults of their particular saints, commissioned hagiography, created highly productive *scriptoria* and became renowned centres of education. The combined effects of this cultural output earned convents the reputation of being prestigious centres of knowledge, learning and sanctity, which was reinforced by their construction of networks of cultural patronage stretching across Europe and into Britain. The active role of female monasteries as cultural patrons was incredibly attractive to early medieval factions. As hubs of cultural authority, convents provided powerful support to their patrons, spreading their faction’s influence through their hagiography, relics and texts that disseminated outwards from their foundation.

The basis for the cultural authority of these female communities lay not only in the sanctity associated with their liturgical celebrations, but also in the establishment of saints’ cults, primarily those of their founders and abbesses. Consequently, we can see the majority of female monasteries making a systematic effort to emphasize their roles as cult centres. Almost all of the female *vitae* of the period made explicit mention of the central position of these cults within female foundations, enhancing the sanctity of the foundation and its position of cultural importance.⁷² As Rictrude’s biographer reminds his audience, her miraculous interventions were centred on the relics that remained within her monastery, ‘for

⁷⁰ Patricia Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, p. 33.

⁷¹ Hans J. Hummer, *Politics and Power in Early Medieval Europe: Alsace and the Frankish Realm, 600-1000*, Cambridge, 2005, p. 76.

⁷² See *Vita antiquior*, 18 onwards, pp. 205-224; *Vita Sadalbergae*, 30, p. 66; Hucbald, *Vita sanctae Rictrudis*, 25, 33, pp. 86, 88; *De Virtutibus Sanctae Geretrudis*, pp. 464-474; *Vita Waldetrudis*, 15, p. 832; *Vita Anstrudis*, 18 onwards, pp. 74-78. Interestingly we do not see this in Jonas of Bobbio’s account of Burgundofara, in his *Vita S. Columbani*, Liber II or in the *Vita Sanctae Balthildis* or the *Vita Bertilae*. The Luxeuilian faction appears to have focused more attention on the lives and nature of sanctity of these women, rather than on the miracles worked by their relics.

here the blind see, the deaf hear, the mute gain the use of words, the lame walk and those labouring with fever and various illnesses often received relief and still receive relief when praying with faith.’⁷³ Schulenburg argues that the majority of these saints’ cults were localized, especially those of women, who tended to possess only ‘limited posthumous cults’.⁷⁴ Alternatively, I propose that the expansion in number of localized female saints results from the increasing number of convents staking their claim to sanctity and trying to establish themselves as cult centres.⁷⁵ This was accomplished through promoting the ability of the founder or initial abbess of the convent, who was often a family member of the current abbess, to work miracles through her relics housed in the convent. As a result, the monastery would gain increased prestige, patronage and a flow of pilgrims bringing economic support. The promotion of these cults was achieved through two activities, namely the establishment of relic collections at the convent itself, and the creation of a literary tradition around the saint through the use of hagiography. Women in female monasteries actively engaged in both these activities to reaffirm the cultural importance of their community.

As tangible manifestations of the sanctity of not only the founding saint, but of the monastic community as a whole, relics were incredibly important to female monasteries. By setting up collections of relics from the founding abbess and establishing their role as her cult centre, convents were able to legitimise the holy nature of their way of life, and reaffirm their worth to Frankish society. The physical presence of a saint’s body or belongings, through which miracles of healing could occur, was a powerful boost to the aura of holiness surrounding the *secreta sancta* of a convent. Thus, a number of double monasteries made a concerted effort to both promote their foundress as a saint and to add the relics of other saints to their collection. Chelles for example, held a massive relic collection gifted by Charlemagne to Gisela; a body of 139 relic labels remains from Chelles, of which 123 date from the seventh to ninth centuries alone.⁷⁶ In constructing these collections, convents could use relics to mediate their factional relationships. Patrons of the community were allowed closer access to the holy items, in keeping with the circles of access and enclosure outlined above. New monasteries in the same network of patronage could be given relics of these

⁷³ Hucbald, *Vita sanctae Rictrudis*, 33, p. 219.

⁷⁴ Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, ‘Saints’ Lives as a Source for the History of Women, 500-1100’ in Joel T. Rosenthal, ed., *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History*, Athens GA, 1990, p. 287.

⁷⁵ See Fouracre and Gerberding, ‘Introduction’, p. 43.

⁷⁶ Nelson, *The Frankish World*, p. 191; Hen, *Culture and Religion*, p. 93.

founding saints to reaffirm the bonds between the communities. The Pippinid abbesses of Nivelles were particularly adept at this form of gift exchange. When St. Foillan was murdered, he was carried back to Nivelles, where the abbess Gertrude made sure to take relics from his body before he was returned to Fosses.⁷⁷ Wulftrude also gifted relics from Gertrude, including a piece of her bed, to the new convent of Andennes, led by Begga (Wulftrude's mother, and Gertrude's sister).⁷⁸ Aside from their usefulness as gifts, relics also provided additional spiritual protection to convents against violent persecution by rival factions, evidenced by the hagiographical trope of saints as patrons and defenders of their foundation.⁷⁹ For example, when Nivelles was threatened by a potentially devastating fire, the nuns saw Gertrude standing on top of the roof, fanning away the flames that threatened her monastery with her veil.⁸⁰ The cults of these founding saints, centred firmly in the female monasteries where their relics resided, were powerful aids to the spiritual and cultural reputation of convents. These cults, and the role of convents as their cult centres, were further enhanced and publicized by the judicious use of hagiography.

Some excellent work has been done on the literary aspects of early medieval hagiography, and how we may relate the tropes contained within them to their religious context.⁸¹ Instead my focus here is more on the historical background and motivations behind the production of these female *vitae*, and how convents utilised them as an outlet for cultural patronage. As we have seen, the collections of relics based around the founding saints of a convent were central to the cultural prestige of the community. Thus, in order to advertise these relics, to attract pilgrims and to affirm the convent's role as a cult centre, the leaders of female monasteries needed to publicize the lives of these saints. Many of the *vitae* of female monastic saints in the early medieval period were commissioned by abbesses, such as the *Vita Sadalberga abbatissae Laudunensis*, the *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis* and the *De S.*

⁷⁷ *Additamentum Nivialense*, p. 451.

⁷⁸ *De Virtutibus Sanctae Geretrudis*, 10, p. 469.

⁷⁹ *Vita antiquior*, 41-2, p. 209; *De Virtutibus Sanctae Geretrudis*, 11, pp. 470-1; *Vita Anstrudis*, 15, pp. 72-3; *De S. Austreberta*, 16, p. 423.

⁸⁰ *De Virtutibus Sanctae Geretrudis*, 3, p. 466.

⁸¹ See Schulenburg, 'Saints' Lives'; John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography*, New York, 1998; Anne-Marie Helvétius, 'Virgo et Virago: Réflexions sur le pouvoir du voile consacré d'après les sources hagiographiques de la Gaule du Nord' in Stéphane Lebecq, Alain Dierkens, Régine Le Jan, Jean-Marie Sansterre, eds, *Femmes et Pouvoirs des Femmes à Byzance et en Occident (VIe-XIe siècles)*, Lille, 1999.

*Austreberta virgine in Belgio et Normania.*⁸² Some *vitae* may have even been written by nuns within the convents themselves, with Wemple proposing that a nun of Chelles was the author of the earliest *vita* of Saint Balthild.⁸³ Female monasteries were actively involved in creating and disseminating hagiography in the seventh and eighth centuries, especially the *vitae* of their own saints. The lives of these monastic women were filled with expressions of female sanctity within a cloistered setting, which both gave authority to female monasticism as a valid form of the religious life, and promoted convents as cult sites for pilgrims.⁸⁴

Moreover, hagiography could provide support for convents when their external supporters fell from power. The *vita* of Gertrude was composed around 663 to 670, shortly after her brother Grimoald's failed coup attempt.⁸⁵ An episode within this life demonstrates an open warning to those who doubted the sainthood of Gertrude. Following Gertrude's death, Adula, 'a certain religious woman' came to the monastery who 'doubted whether or not the Lord truly condescended to display through the merits of the blessed Gertrude so many signs and virtues.'⁸⁶ On the occasion of the feast day of Gertrude, when a charity was given, Adula refused to eat anything beyond the usual Lenten allowance. As a consequence, her young son, who accompanied her in the monastery, fell into the well and drowned, at Gertrude's command. It was only when Adula, at the behest of a nun, entreated Gertrude to restore her son to her that the boy was resuscitated. As a result, she immediately 'feasted from the charity which she had refused before'.⁸⁷ In this attempt to promote Gertrude as a saint and Nivelles as her cult centre we can see an attempt by her successors to use her *vita* as a tool to keep the prestige of the convent (and of Gertrude's cult) alive during their fall from political power. Although Schulenburg argues that these *vitae* were awarded to monastic founders by bishops in recognition of their support of the church, we should not overlook the active role of monastic women in the production of this hagiography.⁸⁸ The *vitae* of female saints were commissioned and promoted by female monasteries to support their own

⁸² *Vita Sadalbergae*, Prologue, pp. 49-50; *Vita sanctae Geretrudis*, Prologue, pp. 453-4; *De S. Austreberta*, 1, p. 419; Hen, 'Gender and the patronage of culture', p. 225.

⁸³ Wemple, 'Female Spirituality', p. 42. Wemple also proposes a female author for the later ninth-century B *vita*, p. 43.

⁸⁴ Schulenburg, 'Saints' Lives', pp. 286-8.

⁸⁵ Ian Wood, 'Genealogy', pp. 240-1.

⁸⁶ 'quedam relegiosa femina'; 'Sed tamen dubitationem habebat, utrum Dominus tanta signa adque virtutes per meritum beatae Geretrude dignatus esset ostendere, an non.' *De Virtutibus Sanctae Geretrudis*, 11, pp. 470-1.

⁸⁷ 'Eadem vero hora convocans universam familiam suam, implevit postea, quod ante negavit de caritate', *ibid.*, 11, p. 471.

⁸⁸ Schulenburg, 'Saints' Lives', pp. 307-8.

community's claim to religious authority as a cult centre. While churchmen did use female *vitae* as *exemplae* of sanctity, these lives were created at the behest of women in female monasteries to serve their own cultural purposes.

Literary activity, especially the production of books, has a strong association with female monasticism. From the earliest *regula* written for monastic women in Francia, the sixth-century *Regula ad Virgines* by Caesarius of Arles, nuns were commanded to learn to read.⁸⁹ In the seventh century, certain convents gained a reputation for their particularly productive *scriptoria*, where nuns copied liturgies and patristic texts. The key literary centres were focused in the convents along the Seine River, that is, Jouarre, Chelles, Faremoutiers, Soissons and Rebais.⁹⁰ The production of religious texts provided an acceptable form of economic activity for the nuns, as well as enabling convents to spread their cultural patronage over a wide area.⁹¹ Through exchanging religious texts and letters, monastic women were able to participate 'as active partners in the networks of friendship and power' of early medieval literary culture.⁹² The *vitae* show religious women like Gertrude at Nivelles and Bertilla at Chelles sending and receiving religious texts from places as remote as Britain and Rome.⁹³ Indeed convents often provided their patron bishops with books for their diocese's use, such as Chelles for the bishop of Cologne.⁹⁴ In addition, Janet Nelson proposes that the literary activity of these *scriptoria* may not have been limited to simple reproduction. She argues that the *Vita antiquior* of Mathilda, the *Annales Mettenses priores* and the *Liber historiae Francorum* could all be of female, specifically monastic, origins.⁹⁵ She draws on Patrick Gerbeding's proposal that the author for the *Liber historiae Francorum* was from Soissons, but criticizes his dismissal of its author being a nun from the double monastery of

⁸⁹ 'Et si fieri potest, aut difficile, aut ulla unquam in monasterio infantula parvula, nisi ab annis sex aut septem, quae jam et litteras discere et obedientiae possit obtemperare, suscipiatur' and 'Omnes litteras discant'. Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 5, 17, cols. 1108-1109.

⁹⁰ McKitterick, 'Script and book production', p. 50. Notably, all these convents had close ties to Luxeuil.

⁹¹ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. by Catharine Misrahi, New York, 1961, p. 154; McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 115.

⁹² Nelson, 'Women at the Court', p. 45.

⁹³ 'cum magna diligentia et patrocinio sanctorum seu et voluminibus multis librorum electas personas et devotissimos homines illuc direxit' (AS reads *patrocinio* as relics) *Vita Bertillae*, 6, p. 108; 'per suos nuntios, boni testimonii viros sanctorum patrocinia vel sancta volumina de urbe Roma et de transmarinas regionibus gignaros homines ad docendum divini legis carmina' *Vita sanctae Geretrudis*, 2, p. 457; Hen, 'Gender and the patronage of culture', p. 223.

⁹⁴ McKitterick, 'The Diffusion of Insular Culture', p. 412.

⁹⁵ Nelson, *The Frankish World*, p. 195.

Notre Dame.⁹⁶ Other historians have proposed female authorship of a number of historical texts. Hartmut Hoffman and Irene Haselbach suggest that the *Annales Mettenses Priores* was composed at Chelles, possibly by Gisela herself.⁹⁷ Rosamond McKitterick expands on this and raises the possibility that the *vitae* of Monegund, Austreberta, Sadalberga, Anstrude and Bertilla were all written by women.⁹⁸ The attribution of these crucial historical sources to nuns may be controversial, but the prodigious output of monastic *scriptoria* and their reputation for literary authority certainly provides the intriguing possibility that monastic women had a much more active role in the recording of their history than has thus far been attributed to them.

As female monasteries increasingly portrayed themselves as centres of culture and learning, their role as educators of future nuns and lay children grew accordingly. Convents operated as schools in the seventh and eighth centuries, accepting both boys and girls to teach them to read and to give them a basic religious education.⁹⁹ At the more prestigious convents, pupils could include children of the royal family, evidenced by two Merovingian princes and Charlemagne's daughters Gisela and Rotrud raised at Chelles.¹⁰⁰ However, under the reforms of Louis the Pious in the ninth century, the educational role of convents was restricted to young girls only, and segregation of sexes was enforced in monastic schools.¹⁰¹ This is a further illustration of how powerful and useful the education of young lay-people was to convents, as they were able to reinforce the factional ties with their secular patrons by raising and educating their children. In accordance with Louis's attempts to restrict other noble groups from gaining control over female monasteries, he removed the male secular element from their cultural patronage. The emphasis placed on education and reading in monastic *regulae* also allowed nuns to further their knowledge of 'ancient law, history, allegory, chorography, grammar, orthography, punctuation', and the writings of the Church fathers.¹⁰² Female monasteries were not simply repositories for unwanted women, but were vibrant and attractive cultural centres, where Frankish women had the opportunity to be educated and

⁹⁶ Ibid.; McKitterick, 'Women and Literacy', pp. 24-5.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁹⁹ Wemple, 'Sanctity and Power', p. 138.

¹⁰⁰ Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 176; Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture*, p. 162.

¹⁰¹ Wemple, 'Sanctity and Power', p. 138; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 187.

¹⁰² Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, p. 27.

could subsequently communicate their knowledge to others.¹⁰³ Monastic women repeatedly engaged in cultural activities which enhanced their own power and prestige, and extended a network of literary and educational ties throughout Europe.

Frankish female monasteries were actively involved in the creation and promotion of cultural activities in the seventh and eighth centuries. In this way, they sought to secure their own economic position and safety in a turbulent political context through establishing themselves as cult centres and places of cultural authority. The hagiographic texts and saints' relics that secured their positions as cultural centres also allowed convents to engage in a network of patronage, symbolised by exchanges of gifts. This was further solidified by female monasteries educating the children of their lay-supporters, both male and female. These activities of cultural patronage provided an acceptable outlet for religious women to exert themselves as active patrons of others. Through these means, convents became renowned as places of exceptional spiritual and cultural authority. Accordingly, secular patrons saw the benefit of securing these powerful foundations to support their own political cause. The relationships of patronage that surrounded early medieval convents were therefore more symbiotic than restrictive. Female monasteries were recognized by their patrons as influential forces that could help stabilize the power of a political faction. In return, convents gained economic and political support in a period where the future of any nunnery was uncertain at best. To portray convents as passive subjects of their misogynistic secular patrons is to misconstrue the dynamic that characterised this relationship.

The seventh century saw a significant rise in new female monastic foundations under the rule of the later Merovingians. Convents were highly sought after by nobles and royals as they were able to add a measure of stability and security to factional power. By founding and patronising female monasteries, secular groups were able to reaffirm their influence in their geographic base, oppose the growth of rival families and harness the cultural and spiritual prestige convents possessed. As the Merovingian hold on power faded in the eighth century, the Carolingian faction rose to their position of dominance through careful use of monastic policies centred on convents. Recognising the political power these female foundations embodied, the Carolingians enacted monastic policies designed to concentrate this power in

¹⁰³ Helvétius, '*Virgo et Virago*', p. 199.

their hands alone, in an attempt to eliminate the threat of other noble groups. Despite the restrictions imposed on patronage of female monasteries in the late eighth and ninth centuries, the Carolingians did not try to remove convents from their position of prestige. Indeed, throughout the reigns of all the Carolingian kings, royal women continued to enter and lead convents, and kings continued to offer large gifts and patronage to female foundations. The misogyny so often attributed to Carolingian reforms was in fact their recognition of how powerful female monasticism could be in the political world, and reflected a desire to concentrate that power into royal hands.

In contrast to much of the historiography on early medieval monasticism, I have highlighted the various aspects of continuity that linked Merovingian and Carolingian attitudes to the patronage of convents. Throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, policies of patronage were enacted that benefitted both the secular patrons and the female foundations. The context of turbulent and violent Frankish politics saw these two groups turn to each other for mutual support and protection, a symbiotic relationship which continued up to the reforms of Louis the Pious in 816-817. Even then, Louis drew upon the lessons learned from his predecessors to make the logical progression of restricting female monasticism to forms which were completely under royal control. Historians like McNamara, Wemple and Ranft view this development as inherently negative, as a repression of religious women and a contrast to the relative freedom of the previous era. I disagree. The reforms of 816-817 were firmly rooted in the developments of the seventh and eighth centuries, and the recognition of religious women as powerful political allies. The Carolingians did not see female monasteries as their enemies, or a threat to their power. Rather, they wished to keep the power and prestige embodied in convents away from their political enemies. To view Carolingian attitudes as more repressive and misogynistic than Merovingian attitudes ignores the nuanced political relationship presented in our sources. The names of convents were repeated throughout Frankish history for a good reason – they were active allies to political players in an unstable and uncertain political context, and were recognised as such by their contemporaries.

Chapter Three

Precepts of the Fathers, Rule of the Mothers: Female Monastic Rules

Early medieval female monasticism was a heterogeneous movement. No two convents were exactly the same. Each was closely bound into its own networks of patronage and local society, and had its own particular requirements. Consequently, the monastic rules used by these communities were themselves selective and specific texts. The *regulae* of the various female monasteries in Francia from the sixth century onwards provide us with a clear view of the variety that characterized female religious life in these communities. Unlike male monasticism, no single comprehensive rule existed that could be applied for all female houses in Francia. Rather, female *regulae* were constantly shifting and changing in this period, reflecting the experimentation and adaptation that took place within these convents.

These texts are incredibly rich sources for historians of monasticism. They reveal to us the organisation and day-to-day functioning of communities of monastic women in a level of detail that cannot be matched by other documents. Even more than this, *regulae* provide us with a fascinating insight into the contemporary ideals that surrounded female monasticism. These rules were not written by nuns, but instead by male patrons of particular convents (often with the firm direction of the abbesses of these communities as to what should be included). While this may seem to constrain the amount of useful information we may gain from these sources, as they are firmly in the genre of prescriptive texts, in actuality the rules allow us to see into the changing ideas around female monasticism in this era. The changing roles of concepts such as enclosure, chastity, poverty and leadership in these texts reflect the changing conceptions of both male bishops and female abbesses on what the ideal monastic life for women looked like. Admittedly, it would be naïve to take these rules as completely accurate depictions of female monastic life. Certain disparities between

the tenets of monastic rules and the actual behaviour of real nuns are present throughout our sources.¹ As with any prescriptive text, the gap between the ideal presented and the reality of everyday practice is undetermined, and may be considerable. Consequently, these rules must be treated with great caution as a source for the actual experiences of the nuns who lived by them. Nonetheless, the more practical tenets do give us a tantalising glimpse into how the life of a nun in this period may have been structured. The creation of several different female rules in a short period of time points to a period of variety, experimentation and mutability in the life of monastic women. The ideals around female monasticism were by no means fixed. Instead, the women of these religious communities were engaged in shaping and redefining what it meant to be a nun, and enlisting the aid of the male clergy to validate their new expressions of the religious life.

The female rules of the early medieval period were not written in a vacuum. As with so many other religious texts in this era, female *regulae* were heavily influenced by the body of Christian works that had already been composed on the subject of the monastic life for women. The extant female rules of the mid-sixth to eighth centuries drew on three texts in particular as their guide for the monastic life for women: the *regulae* of Caesarius of Arles, of Benedict of Nursia and of Columbanus. The authors of the new female rules selected a variety of precepts from these other influential texts to form the backbone of their own *regula*, tailoring their choices to the needs of their patron abbess. Consequently, before I can fully examine how these authors constructed their own *regulae* and changed the ideals of female monasticism, I must first examine the texts that they used as their foundation. Interestingly, the secondary literature on female monasticism has thus far focused primarily on the importance of the two new thinkers in seventh-century male monasticism, St. Benedict and St. Columbanus. These men undoubtedly had a significant impact on both male and female monasticism. Nonetheless, one of the most central texts in female monasticism, the sixth-century *Regula ad Virgines* of Caesarius of Arles, is only rarely acknowledged as influencing the ideas on female

¹ The most famous example of this is the sixth-century nuns' revolt at Poitiers, but numerous *vitae* present examples of nuns transgressing rules and consequently being divinely punished.

monasticism in the seventh and eighth centuries.² Part of the reason for this seems to be the trend within the earlier literature on early medieval monasticism to view male monasticism as the original and more developed form of the monastic life, and female monasticism as a derivative. It is true that the ideas of Benedict and Columbanus had a serious influence on the female monastic life. Yet when we examine the extant female *regulae*, the greatest number of precepts are taken from Caesarius's *regula*, with a smaller number of tenets added in from the rules of Benedict and Columbanus. The Benedictine and Columbanian rules were undoubtedly important in the development of female monasticism, or they would not have merited inclusion in these new rules. Even so, the way in which they were used was more complex than a simple blanket adoption, which overshadowed the earlier rule of Caesarius. Caesarius's influence remained at the heart of the developments in ideas of female monasticism in this period.

Caesarius, bishop of Arles from 502 to 542, composed his *Regula ad Virgines* for the female monastery of St. Jean he built in Arles around 512. Led by his sister Caesaria the Elder, and then his niece Caesaria the Younger, the convent at Arles was the focus of Caesarius's monastic patronage, designed to enhance his spiritual prestige as bishop of Arles.³ The rule he composed for St. Jean was the first specifically created for a female community in Francia. Caesarius explained why he composed his rule at the beginning of the work, pointing to the tensions between women using earlier texts on the monastic life that had been directed to a male audience.

‘Between the monasteries of women and those of monks there are many differences in customs. Because of this we have made the choice of certain prescriptions, taken from many others, so that you may all lead together, young and old, a regular life and so that you may apply yourselves to the

² Schulenberg argues that the influence of Caesarius's rule after the seventh century is only seen indirectly in church legislation. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, ‘Strict Active Enclosure and its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience (ca 500-1100)’ in John A. Nichols, Lillian Thomas Shank, eds, *Medieval Religious Women, Volume One: Distant Echoes*, Kalamazoo, 1984, p. 56.

³ *Vita Caesarii*, 1.28, 1.35, trans. William E. Klingshirn in *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters*, Liverpool, 1994, pp. 91, 98; William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 105-117.

practice of spiritual observances which are specially adapted to your sex, which you are able to note.’⁴

These spiritual observances, tailored for a female community, emphasize the importance of removing self-determination and individual property from the nuns, and the centrality of the nuns’ role in celebrating the divine office. By removing secular distinctions of wealth and property, Caesarius tried to minimize the opportunities for conflict between the sisters. As he stated, those who had something in the secular world should not be proud or disdain those who had nothing, but ‘all shall live together in unanimity and peace, and honour God in each other’.⁵ Along with this, Caesarius emphasized moderate asceticism, with restrictions on clothing, decorations, ornaments and even hairstyles.⁶ A system of fasting was included, along with a calendar of the celebration of the office. Unsurprisingly, Caesarius’s set of pragmatic guidelines for female communities became extremely influential in other convents from the sixth century onwards.

Most famously, the *Regula ad Virgines* was the first rule to include the idea of strict active enclosure applied to a female community. The idea of enclosure for female religious women was nothing new in Christianity, with Jerome in particular championing seclusion of religious women from men.⁷ However, Caesarius was the first to set out a system of *active* enclosure, in which not only were secular and religious men and women forbidden from entering the monastery, but also that any woman who entered the community as a nun was forbidden to leave ‘until her death’.⁸ This idea, which is highlighted by Caesarius throughout the *regula*, reflects the volatile context in which he founded his convent. St. Jean was the second female monastery founded in Arles by Caesarius. The first, a smaller community under

⁴ ‘Quia multa in monasteriis puellarum aut monachorum instituta distare videntur, elegimus pauca de pluribus, quibus seniores cum junioribus regulariter vivant, et spiritualiter implere contendant quod specialiter suo sexui aptum esse perspexerint; haec sanctis animabus vestris prima conveniunt.’ Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 1, col.1107.

⁵ ‘Omnes ergo unanimiter et concorditer vivite, et honorate in vobis invicem Deum, cuius templa esse meruistis.’ Ibid., 19, col. 1110.

⁶ Ibid., 40-42, cols. 1115-6; Caesarius of Arles, *Recapitulo*, 7, 11, in J. P. Migne, ed., *PL*, LXVII, Paris, 1848, col. 1118.

⁷ Jerome, *Epistola*, 22, trans. in Philip Schaff, ed., *Jerome: The Principle Works of St. Jerome*, New York, 1892, pp. 85-120.

⁸ ‘usque ad mortem’, Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 1, col. 1107.

Caesaria the Elder, was located outside the city walls, and was destroyed in 507 or 508 during the siege of Arles by the Burgundians.⁹ This earlier convent was governed by a short letter of Caesarius to Caesaria, known as *Vereor*.¹⁰ Notably, it is only in Caesarius's *Regula* for his second convent that the concept of strict active enclosure is outlined. This suggests that Caesarius introduced this precept of stable and total enclosure of nuns to try to protect female monasteries from external attacks. This is further supported by Caesarius's concern that the abbess of the convent should retain her independence and authority as the leader of the monastery, and should not 'establish herself in the dependence or the household of the bishop of this city'.¹¹ The promotion of the female monastery as a secure, enclosed community, ruled by the abbess without external interference, was perfectly suited to the double monasteries of the seventh and eighth centuries. The combination of its female origins, its established presence in Frankish monasticism, and its appeal to abbesses led Caesarius's *Regula* to be the most commonly utilised source for the new female rules in the seventh century, rather than the Benedictine and Columbanian rules (which are better known and more widely studied today).¹² While Benedict and Columbanus were still important influences on these new *regulae*, their innovative aspects were laid on a base of well-established Caesarian female monastic practice.

The question remains as to why the rule of Benedict, a text written for male monasteries, was able to become such a widespread guide for female monasteries when a suitable and popular rule for nuns was already in use. The rule of Caesarius was already widely followed and was created especially for female communities. In contrast Benedict's *Regula* is written in exclusively male language. The abbot is exhorted to be the 'formidable teacher, the pious father' to the sons offered to the monastery.¹³ Nowhere are women, either abbesses or nuns mentioned, nor is there

⁹ Klingshirn, *Caesarius*, pp. 104-5.

¹⁰ Caesarius of Arles, *Vereor*, trans. in William E. Klingshirn, ed., *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters*, Liverpool, 1994, pp. 129-139.

¹¹ 'subjectionem vel familiaritatem pontificis huius civitatis habere voluerit', Caesarius, *Recapitulo*, 14, col. 1119.

¹² See Appendices 1-3, pp. 106-113. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg even goes so far as to say that Caesarius's *regula* 'seemed to exercise little direct influence on the female monastic experience after the seventh century'. Schulenburg, 'Strict Active Enclosure', p. 56.

¹³ 'dirum magistri, pium patris' Benedict of Nursia, *Regula*, 2, 59, in J. P. Migne, ed., *PL*, LXVI, 1847, trans. in Justin McCann, ed., *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, London, 1952, pp. 20, 135.

any indication that this rule was intended for use in female communities. For example, the *Regula* of Benedict does not outline any form of strict enclosure, which was generally thought appropriate for female monasteries in this period.¹⁴ Indeed, the rule provides for members of the monastery to be sent on journeys outside the community at the discretion of the abbot, as long as they did not ‘tell another what he has seen or heard outside the monastery’.¹⁵ Clearly, this rule in its original form did not completely meet the needs of Frankish monastic women. Nonetheless, even with the tension inherent between the male origins of the Benedictine text and its application in female houses, the pragmatic appeal and flexible nature of this rule led to its extensive popularity in Frankish convents. Despite the widely acknowledged importance of this *Regula* in the development of medieval monasticism, and the strong body of scholarship on the literary and theological significance of this text, the reasons for its adoption in female monasticism have not been addressed in full.¹⁶ Benedict’s Rule was not simply adapted wholesale by communities of nuns, but rather adapted and adjusted to their own needs, and often combined with other rules to give a more cohesive system of monastic practice. Consequently, this *regula* had an important role in female monasticism, but the reasons for this importance are more nuanced than current scholarship has thus far suggested.

Benedict of Nursia composed his *Regula* at his monastery in Southern Italy in the mid-sixth century for the purpose of giving stability and order to his community of monks at Monte Cassino.¹⁷ He was first brought to the attention of a wider audience by Pope Gregory the Great, who paid reverence to him as a monastic leader in his *Dialogues*.¹⁸ Interestingly, the *Regula* of Benedict itself does not appear in our texts until the seventh century. Even then its first appearance was as selected excerpts

¹⁴Schulenberg, ‘Strict Active Enclosure’, p. 56.

¹⁵Benedict, *Regula*, 67, trans by McCann, p. 155. Notably, these sections are omitted in the extant female rules.

¹⁶For examples of some of the scholarship on the Benedictine Rule, see Adalbert de Vogüé, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: A Doctrinal and Spiritual Commentary*, translated by John Baptist Hasbrouck, Kalamazoo, 1983; Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*; David Knowles, *Christian Monasticism*, London, 1969; Cuthbert Butler, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule*, Cambridge, 1924; Lowrie J. Daly, *Benedictine Monasticism: Its formation and development through the twelfth century*, New York, 1965; Aelred Sillem, ‘St. Benedict’ in D. H. Farmer, ed., *Benedict’s Disciples*, Leominster, 1980.

¹⁷Justin McCann, ‘Preface’ in ed., *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, London, 1952, p. viii.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. vii.

included in Donatus of Besançon's *Regula* for the nuns of Jussa-Moutier.¹⁹ The first 'authentic text', as historians of Benedict term it, appeared around 620 to 630 at the monastery of Altaripa in Albi.²⁰ Following this introduction into the monastic world of Francia, Benedict's *Regula* quickly spread through both male and female monasteries, and was particularly championed by the Luxeuilian faction.²¹ Many of the *regulae* we have from this period drew on the tenets of Benedict, and we can see monastic patrons like Balthild instituting aspects of the Benedictine rule in their foundations (including, according to McNamara, at the convent at Chelles).²² The Synod of Verneuil, held in the middle of the eighth century, was the culmination of the spread of Benedict's Rule throughout Frankish monasticism. Both monks and nuns were ordered by the Synod to adopt a rule for their monastery, preferably Benedict's *Regula* or the *Regula canonicorum* of Chrodegang of Metz.²³ From its introduction in the early seventh century, the rule of Benedict became widely regarded as an ideal basic rule for both monks and nuns in Francia and further afield.

The reason for the popularity of the Benedictine *Regula* in convents was the combination of its practical appeal and the ability of female communities to adapt this rule to their own specific needs. Many of the precepts of Benedict's Rule, such as total obedience to superiors, humility, and the holding of all things in common, helped to ensure the smooth running of a community that could include women from a variety of different backgrounds and social classes, forced to live together.²⁴ Moreover, the rule was explicitly intended as a 'little Rule for beginners' that would not be too 'harsh or burdensome' for those following it.²⁵ This allowed Benedict's *Regula* to be suitable for even the most junior monk or nun in the monastery, while those who had been in the monastery for a longer period of time, and who were further advanced in monastic life, could add other scriptural, hagiographic and

¹⁹ I will analyse the rule of Donatus, and his use of Benedict in greater detail later in this chapter. McCann, 'Preface', p. xv; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59; Andre Vauchez, 'Benedict of Nursia, Benedictine Rule', in Andre Vauchez and Richard Barrie Dobson, eds, *The Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages, Volume Two*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 166.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²² McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 124.

²³ McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 58.

²⁴ Benedict, *Regula*, 5, 7, 33, trans. by McCann, pp. 33, 39, 85.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Prologue, 73, trans. by McCann, pp. 13, 165; Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 225.

patristic texts, as well as precepts from other rules to extend their devotions.²⁶ As Janet Burton has noted, Benedict's *Regula* was popular as it was a 'workable model' of both prayer and work, underneath a clearly defined hierarchy of obedience, led by the abbot and the abbess.²⁷ Not surprisingly, the authority allowed to the abbess, along with the flexibility they possessed in choosing which of Benedict's precepts to enact in their community, appealed to the founders and abbesses of convents in early medieval Francia.²⁸ In comparison with other monastic systems which could be more vague, involve a number of different rules, or were designed for those well advanced in monastic study and theological philosophy, the Benedictine Rule was easily applied and adapted to communities in a range of different contexts.

As time progressed, this tension between male theory and female practice of the Benedictine Rule became a source of increasing worry for the leaders of the Frankish church. At the Council of Aix, held in 816 and 817, Louis the Pious, alongside his favoured bishop, Benedict of Aniane, sought to reform both male and female monasticism by enforcing the strict observance of a monastic rule.²⁹ The favoured rule, in most cases, was Benedict's.³⁰ However, when it came to the subject of female monasteries, this policy of instituting Benedict's *Regula* was altered. Instead of simply requiring nuns to abide by the Benedictine rule alone, we see the Council enacting legislation that enforced strict claustration for all female monastics.³¹ Nuns were offered the choice of adhering to Benedictine rule with the addition of claustration, or adopting the new *Institutio sanctimonialium* and becoming a chapter of canonesses.³² Following this, we see a split occur amongst the female monasteries in Francia. Some, such as Chelles, likely rejected Benedict's *Regula* in

²⁶ Benedict, *Regula*, 73, trans. by McCann, p. 161.

²⁷ Janet Burton, *Medieval Monasticism, Monasticism in the medieval West: from its origins to the coming of the friars*, Oxford, 1996, p. 5. For further commentary on the importance of Benedict's Rule, see C. H. Lawrence, 'St. Benedict and his Rule' in *History*, 67, 220, 1982, pp. 185-194; de Vogüé, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*.

²⁸ Benedict, *Regula*, 2, 44, 68, trans. by McCann, pp. 21, 107, 155.

²⁹ de Jong, 'Religion', p. 151; Burton, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³¹ *Capitulare Aquisgranense Generale*, 25-26, in George Henry Pertz, ed., *MGH Legum*, I, Hanover, 1835, p. 209; Schulenburg, 'Strict Active Enclosure', p. 63.

³² I will discuss the new vision of female monastic life that the *Institutio Sanctimonialium* contains at more length in the epilogue. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 169.

favour of the new *Institutio sanctimonialium*.³³ Others, including Notre-Dame of Soissons and Holy Cross at Poitiers retained their observance of Benedict's regulations.³⁴ The version that was used by a convent was determined by a number of factors, including the political factions that patronised the monastery, the connections of the abbess and the particular needs of the community. Regardless, the situation from the ninth century onwards shows Louis and Benedict of Aniane recognizing the issues surrounding the widespread use of a male rule for female monasteries, and attempting to moderate these with the creation of a new overarching, and explicitly female, monastic rule.

Benedict's rule was never completely applied over all female monasteries. The problems inherent in the use of a male rule for a female community meant that it was more suitable for nunneries to take selected Benedictine precepts and add them into a rule that was already written for women. The ideas that Benedict promoted were appealing to women, but the form in which they were expressed needed to be modified for a female audience. An understanding of the Benedictine rule is essential if we wish to trace the developments within female monasticism, but it is by no means the most important rule. We must view this text within the context that monastic women and the authors of monastic rules viewed it – as a single (albeit popular) rule amongst the many different authoritative texts that could be included in a *regula*.

We must also be careful to not let the later significance of Benedict's *Regula* affect our view of its role in early medieval female monasticism. It is true that the abbesses of numerous convents were attracted by the precepts Benedict outlined and they adopted them for their own use. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we should regard Benedict's *Regula* as the default *regula* for those monasteries whose rules are unknown. Scholars should not assume that when our primary texts, such as the *vitae* of Balthild and Bertilla refer to a 'holy rule', that this is automatically the Benedictine

³³ Wemple argues for this in *ibid.*, p. 170.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

version.³⁵ While Benedict's precepts undoubtedly influenced the rules of many convents, they were by no means the only option from which abbesses could choose. As I have noted, the Benedictine Rule was part of a collection of rules, which also included the *regulae* of Columbanus, Caesarius, Cassian and Basil.³⁶ It is more likely that these 'anonymous' *regulae* were composed of precepts from a number of different monastic authors, in addition to Benedict, in accordance with the needs of the specific community.

At the same time that Benedict's *Regula* was spreading through the monasteries of Francia from Italy, another force was influencing Frankish monasticism from the West. The Irish monk Columbanus, who was an active monastic reformer in Francia from the late sixth century onwards, wrote two *regulae* which were widely adopted by both monks and nuns. The precepts contained within the *Regula monachorum* and the *Regula coenobialis* were championed by the network of monasteries centred on the community of Luxeuil, and were often adopted alongside other monastic rules, especially the rule of Benedict. This particular combination is referred to by scholars as a Benedicto-Columbanian mixed rule, and was particularly associated with Irish monasticism and with the monastery of Luxeuil. Mixed rules were favoured by a number of early medieval monasteries for a variety of reasons, including the political pressure applied by the faction surrounding the monastery of Luxeuil. However, as I will discuss below, despite the central position of Columbanus and his *regulae*, there were also other rival Irish monastic factions spread through Francia in this period. The Columbanian rule is a key influence on female monasticism in Francia, but it is by no means the only form of Irish monastic practice that convents could utilise.

Columbanus arrived in Francia roughly around 590, and quickly set about spreading his own insular version of monastic practice. Through a career marked by

³⁵ 'sub sancto regulari', *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, 9, A Vita, p. 493; 'sub sancta norma', *Vita Bertilae*, p. 105; McNamara does this in *Sisters in Arms*, p. 124, as does Hoebanx in *Nivelles*, p. 83.

³⁶ Benedict, *Regula*, 73, trans. by McCann, p. 161; Adalbert de Vogüé, 'Sub Regula vel Abbate: A Study of the Theological Significance of the Ancient Monastic Rules' in M. Basil Pennington, ed., *Rule and Life: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, Shannon, 1971, p. 43.

highly public conflicts and confrontations with Frankish authority figures, including a famous feud with King Theoderic and Queen Brunhild of Burgundy over royal polygamy, Columbanus initiated an influential network of monasteries.³⁷ While Columbanus only founded three monasteries himself, namely the male foundations of Annegray, Luxeuil and Fontaines, the monks educated in these monasteries became central figures of patronage in the surge of female monasticism from the seventh century onwards, as noted in the previous chapter.³⁸ Over one hundred monasteries were founded by Columbanian monks, or influenced by Columbanian monastic practice between 590 and 730 in the Frankish kingdoms, including the convents of Faremoutiers and Jouarre.³⁹ As part of this insular influence, a distinctive type of monastic *regula* also spread, which combined the practical tenets of Benedict's *Regula* with the austere customs of Columbanus.

The *regulae* of Columbanus, which were widely followed in the early medieval period, were composed of two texts.⁴⁰ The first part, the *Regula monachorum*, or Monk's Rule, dealt with the theological background of the monastic community. Similarly to Benedict's *Regula*, there was a focus on obedience and poverty.⁴¹ At the same time, Columbanus introduced a new emphasis on ascetic practice and self-denial. Food and drink were carefully rationed, an intense regime of psalms and prayer was prescribed, and the self-determination of the individual monk was removed.⁴² As Columbanus states, in order for a monk to obtain perfection, 'Let him not do as he wishes, let him eat what he is bidden, keep as much as he has received, complete the tale of his work, be subject to whom he does not like. Let him come weary to his bed and sleep walking, and let him be forced to rise while his sleep

³⁷ For the life of Columbanus, see Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, pp. 65-152; Jane Barbara Stevenson, 'The Monastic Rules of Columbanus' in Michael Lapidge, ed., *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, Wodbridge, 1997, p. 205; Pierre Riché, 'Columbanus, His Followers and the Merovingian Church' in H. B. Clarke, Mary Brennan, eds, *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, Oxford, 1981, p. 62.

³⁸ McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 109.

³⁹ Friedrich Prinz, 'Columbanus, the Frankish Nobility and the Territories East of the Rhine' in H. B. Clarke, Mary Brennan, eds, *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, Oxford, 1981, p. 77.

⁴⁰ Columbanus also composed a famous penitential, but as it was more directed to the lay community and episcopate, I have not included this text in my analysis of female monasticism.

⁴¹ Columbanus, *Regula Monachorum*, 1, 4, trans. by Walker, pp. 125-127.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3, 7, 9, trans. by Walker, pp. 127, 129-133, 141.

is not yet finished.’⁴³ The second half of Columbanus’s rule, the *Regula coenobialis*, or Communal Rule further reinforced this asceticism. Whereas the *Regula monachorum* was intended as a guide for each monk’s individual spiritual practice, the *Regula coenobialis* focused on legislating for the monastic community as a whole.⁴⁴ Rather than imitating Benedict’s general scheme for how a monastery should be organised, Columbanus instead provided the appropriate punishments for those monks who have failed to adhere to the principles of the *Regula Monachorum*. Thus, we see punishments for negligence and carelessness towards the community’s property, disagreeing with other monks, disobedience, and eating during a prescribed fast, among numerous others.⁴⁵ As James O’Carroll notes, the rapid spread of these rules into the male and female monasteries of Francia can be explained by the more inward focus of these *regulae*, and the attention they devote to attaining individual spiritual perfection.⁴⁶ In addition, the *regulae* of Columbanus and of Benedict were highly compatible when used together as a guide for monastic life. Indeed mixed rules featuring Benedictine and Columbanian precepts were widespread throughout male monasteries in the early medieval period.

However, the use of Columbanus in female monasteries was quite different. As I noted above, male monasteries tended to use a mixed rule that was almost entirely composed of tenets from Benedict and Columbanus. In contrast, Caesarius gives the basis of female monastic practice in the *regulae* for women, with Benedictine and Columbanian precepts layered over the top. Even Columbanus’s successor as abbot of Luxeuil, Waldebert, wrote a rule for nuns that was heavily influenced by the rule of Caesarius, with inclusions from Benedict and Columbanus’s rules.⁴⁷ Female monasteries in particular were partial to using this variety of mixed rule, with a range of tenets drawn from Caesarius, Columbanus and Benedict. The

⁴³ ‘Non faciat quod vult, comedat quod iubetur, habeat quantum acceperit, operis sui pensum persolvat, subiciatur cui non vult. Lassus ad stratum veniat ambulansque dormitet, necdum expleto somno surgere compellatur.’ Ibid., 10, trans. by Walker, p. 140.

⁴⁴ Stevenson, ‘Monastic Rules’, pp. 206-7.

⁴⁵ Columbanus, *Regula Coenobialis*, 3, 5, 10, 13, trans. in G. S. M. Walker, ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, Vol II, Dublin, 1957, pp. 147, 151, 159, 161.

⁴⁶ James O’Carroll, ‘Sainte Fare et les Origines’ in Gabriel Le Bras, ed., *Sainte Fare et Faremoutiers: Trieze Siècles de Vie Monastique*, Abbaye de Faremoutiers, Seine-et-Marne, 1956, p. 11.

⁴⁷ McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 109. Waldebert was abbot from 629-670. I will examine this rule in more detail below.

author of the *vita* of Columbanus, Jonas of Bobbio, mentions Faremoutiers and Jouarre specifically as using Columbanus's *regulae*.⁴⁸ In addition to this, we can add the convents of Jussa-Besançon, Soissons and Chamalières, who all used a mixed rule.⁴⁹ While we cannot be completely sure of the *regulae* of the following monasteries, the houses of Remiremont, St. Jean of Laon, Chelles, Fécamp, Pellemontier and Pavilly were strongly influenced by the circle of patrons emanating from Luxeuil. The founders of these monasteries were either aristocrats who had strong ties to Columbanus himself (such as Ado, Audoin and Burgundofara), or were former monks of Luxeuil (such as Waldebert, Donatus and Eustasius).⁵⁰ It is likely that they spread elements of Columbanian practice throughout the new monasteries that they founded, and we even see older, well-established monasteries being reformed and adopting the new mixed rule.⁵¹ Evidently the combination of Caesarian tradition, Benedictine stability and pragmatism, and the spiritual patronage of the Luxeuil circle made this version of monastic rule extremely successful in the female monasteries of Francia.

It is important to note that Columbanian monasticism was not the only form of Irish monastic practice in early medieval Francia. While Columbanus was the most famous Irish monk active in Francia, he was by no means the only one, nor even the first. There are scattered mentions of anonymous Welsh, Irish and Cornish monks present in Western Brittany and the Channel Islands in the sixth century. However, they were generally passed over in the textual sources of this period, overshadowed by the brilliance of Columbanus's monastic career.⁵² This has led some historians to assume that any mention of Irish monastic practice in Francia must be influenced by Columbanus. For example, Friederich Prinz and J. J. Hoebanx have viewed the monastery of Nivelles as adhering to a Columbanian form of monasticism, with speculation that the nuns followed a Benedicto-Columbanian form of mixed rule.⁵³ Yet, one of our sources reveals the number of different forms of Irish influence in

⁴⁸ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, 1.26, p. 100; O'Carroll, 'Sainte Fare', p. 11.

⁴⁹ Besançon and Chamalières used the *Regula ad Virgines* of Donatus. Bateson, 'Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries', p. 162; McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, pp. 123-4.

⁵⁰ McKitterick, 'The Diffusion of Insular Culture', pp. 374-7.

⁵¹ Prinz, 'Columbanus', p. 80.

⁵² Riché, 'Columbanus', pp. 61-2.

⁵³ Prinz, 'Columbanus' p. 80 and Hoebanx, *Nivelles*, pp. 45, 52-4.

Frankish monasticism. The *Additamentum Nivialense de Fuilano*, as we have seen above, demonstrates that Nivelles embraced and actively patronised a different group of Irish monks to Columbanus and the Luxeuil circle. Saints Fursey and Ultan, in particular, were closely linked to Nivelles and had an active role in the monastery, leading celebration of the mass.⁵⁴ The patronage of this group of Irish monks, unrelated to the Luxeuil faction, has a number of important implications for the nature of Irish monastic influence within Francia.

The existence of at least one rival version of Irish monastic practice present in Francia calls into question the dominance of Columbanian influence. We cannot be certain that when our sources refer to an unnamed Irish monk, that this is necessarily means that he was a follower of Columbanus. Nor can we assume, as Prinz and Hoebanx do for Nivelles, that the presence of Irish monks indicates a convent followed a Columbanian mixed rule. Indeed, for Nivelles, this is highly unlikely. The evident rivalry between the Pippinids and the Neustrian-based Luxeuil faction, and the open hostility of Erchinoald to Foillan and Ultan, makes it more probable that Foillan provided for Nivelles his own particular form of Irish monasticism for the nuns to incorporate into their *regula*. Indeed, even the *vita* of the Luxeuilian ally, Balthild, makes no mention of either Columbanus or of his rule.⁵⁵ While I do not intend to depict Columbanus as completely irrelevant in our understanding of these monasteries, it is evident that the picture of insular monastic practice in Francia contains more variation than has yet been recognised. Columbanus was only one amongst a diverse group of monastic authors who were influential in the later *regulae* of female monasteries in Francia, and his rules are by no means a definitive representation of Irish monastic practice.

The *regulae* of female monasteries are solidly based on the ideas that were promoted in the rules of Caesarius, Benedict and Columbanus. These texts, along with other earlier rules that formed the body of authoritative ‘rules of the fathers’ are

⁵⁴ *Additamentum Nivialense*, p. 450.

⁵⁵ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, pp. 482-508; *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis*, pp.453-464; *De Virtutibus Sanctae Geretrudis*, pp. 464-74.

crucial in understanding ideas around early medieval female monasticism. Nevertheless, the authors of the new female rules combined these older precepts into dramatically new and different forms to suit their own needs. The idea of a mixed rule, which took tenets from all three of the earlier rules, spread quickly throughout female monasteries in Francia. These rules were a means by which female communities could satisfy their own pragmatic and spiritual needs, while still retaining the authority of the patristic texts. Benedict and Columbanus are undeniably important in the development of female monasticism from the seventh century onwards. However, as both of these authors composed their rules for male communities, female communities could not simply take these rules as the single *regula* for their community. The extant female rules demonstrate female convents taking advantage of the new ideas coming through Frankish monasticism to construct their own particular *regula*, with the help of their male patron bishops.

For this reason it is unfortunate that scholarship on monastic rules in the seventh and eighth centuries relegates the handful of extant female *regulae* to a marginal position. At best, historians may examine them to determine if the influence of Benedict is more dominant than Columbanus, or vice versa. Indeed, Hoebanx and C.H. Lawrence prefer to generalize about the mixed nature of female *regulae*, without analysing them on their own merits.⁵⁶ As a result, these approaches overlook the large amount of information that we can glean from these *regulae*. While the analysis of monastic rules must always take into account the differences between these kinds of prescriptive texts, and the reality of life in early medieval convents, the *regulae* still provide us with a valuable source on how these individual communities of women functioned. The extant rules of Donatus, Aurelian and the *Regula Cuiusdam Patris* all demonstrate their own individual attitude towards the ideals of female monasticism which were heavily influenced by their context. These rules show monastic women picking and adapting precepts from existing *regulae* to suit their own needs and illustrate for us the contemporary concerns and interests of the nuns in these communities. Accordingly, they each deserve a detailed individual examination.

⁵⁶ Hoebanx, *Nivelles*, pp. 77, 83 ; C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism : Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed., Harlow, 2001, p. 50.

The first major rule specifically composed for women in Francia since Caesarius was written by his successor as bishop of Arles. Aurelian, who was bishop from around 546 to 551, founded both a male monastery and a female monastery in Arles, in emulation of Caesarius. He composed for each community a new monastic rule, drawing heavily on the monastic ideas that Caesarius originated. For all that Aurelian was heavily influenced by the rule of his predecessor, there were a number of adaptations and new ideas in his *regula*. Aurelian went further than Caesarius in his attempts to prevent discord amongst the nuns, overtly warning them against making oaths, insulting one another or lying, and he quoted passages of the scripture to reinforce his precepts.⁵⁷ He also introduced a new rule that ‘slaves shall not be received; however if a freedwoman comes as an adolescent and presents herself with a letter from her patron, the abbess will decide if she should be received.’⁵⁸ Caesarius did not mention the acceptance of slaves into the monastery, other than forbidding the nuns and the abbess from possessing slaves for their own personal service.⁵⁹ The inclusion of this new tenet by Aurelian could reflect his recognition of the issues arising from accepting refugee slaves into the monastery, and the possibility of conflict with their owners. Aurelian also includes two more additions, forbidding the nuns from eating extra food outside of mealtimes, and providing a shortened form of the office to be recited in the basilica when winter was especially harsh.⁶⁰ All of these new innovations by Aurelian reflect a half-century of experimentation with Caesarius’s *Regula*, and a recognition of the problems that had occurred in female communities. Most strikingly, Aurelian also adapts the strict active enclosure of Caesarius into a looser form. Aurelian includes a new precept, that ‘no sister shall have the authorisation to go out for an interview unless the abbess, or the prioress, or another elder delegated by the abbess directs her. And when they see or speak with their close relatives, they shall not speak in loud voices.’⁶¹ This suggests that rather than following Caesarius’s strict rule, preventing nuns from leaving the monastery at

⁵⁷ Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 7-9, col. 401.

⁵⁸ ‘Ancilla non excipiatur: liberta tamen si fuerit, adhuc adolescens aetate, et cum epistolis patroni sui venerit, in abbatissae sit arbitrio si excipi debeat.’ Ibid., 13, col. 401.

⁵⁹ Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 4, col. 1108.

⁶⁰ Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 36, 38, col. 403.

⁶¹ ‘Nulli liceat ad salutandum exire, nisi cum abbatissa aut praeposita, vel certe alia quacunq; seniore cui abbatissa praeceperit. Et sic propinquos suos videant, aut loquantur, ne altiori voce loquantur.’ Ibid., 12, col. 401.

all, or even entering the basilica, the nuns in Aurelian's convent were permitted to leave the community for short periods of time.⁶² Within fifty years of Caesarius's introduction of the ideal of strict active enclosure, Aurelian and his nuns recognised that this was not always practical. Nuns retained ties to the secular world, and especially to their families, which were not abandoned on their entrance into the convent.

Aurelian's *Regula ad Virgines* also serves as a particularly useful source for views on what was considered appropriate in female monasticism in this period, as it can be directly compared to his *Regula ad Monachos*, which was written at the same time. The bulk of the two rules are identical, illustrating the common base of monastic thought shared between male and female communities, such as obedience, lack of self-determination and asceticism. However, six precepts in the *Regula ad Monachos* were considered irrelevant in the *Regula ad Virgines*. These include a prohibition on accepting children under the age of ten; a prohibition against elaborate decoration and furnishings; a command to sleep in separate beds; a command to distribute resources to the poor; a requirement for young monks to offer their goods to the monastery on their entrance; and a prohibition against providing meals to people in the town (although the abbot is allowed to invite them to his table).⁶³ The omission of these precepts demonstrates Aurelian's different view of the economic role of male and female monasteries, as well as the different kinds of external relationships they constructed. While monks were enjoined to have a more ascetic existence, without luxurious decorations and having visitors share their meals, and were ordered to distribute their extra food and clothing to the poor, Aurelian allowed nuns to retain their prestige and display this to their favoured visitors. He also recognises that the economic position of female communities was less secure than males and that while male monasteries could produce excess food and clothing, female monasteries likely would not. Again Aurelian's *Regula* illustrates that even though Caesarius's rule remained the base for the overall idea of female monasticism, the requirements of Aurelian's convent led him to modify his rule to their own particular needs.

⁶² Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 1, col. 1107.

⁶³ Aurelian, *Regula ad Monachos*, 17; 27; 33, 35; 44, 45; 47; 48, in J. P. Migne, ed., *PL*, LXVIII, Paris, 1847, cols. 390-2.

Following Aurelian, the next extant rule for nuns is the *Regula ad Virgines* composed by Donatus, bishop of Besançon, around 660. Donatus had strong connections with the Luxeuil faction and with Columbanus himself. In the *Vita Columbani*, Donatus's birth is depicted as a miracle of the saint. Donatus's parents, the duke Waldelen and the nobly-born Flavia, were childless. They travelled to St Columbanus to beg him to pray to God on their behalf for a son to whom they could leave their great fortune. Columbanus replied that he would do so if they promised to give him the child to be consecrated to the Lord. As a result, Donatus was born. The *vita* continues, saying that 'after being filled with wisdom in the same monastery, [Luxeuil], he became Bishop of Besançon, which he still is, ruling in the same see. From love of St. Columbanus he founded a monastery from his rule.'⁶⁴ The *vita* also notes that Waldelen and Flavia had other children following this, including two daughters, and that after the death of her husband 'Flavia founded a monastery of maidens [circa 624] in the above said city of Besançon, strengthening it with full enclosure and brought together an assembly of many nuns.'⁶⁵ The first abbess of the community however was not Flavia herself, but a woman named Gauthstruda.⁶⁶ On her death, she was succeeded by Flavia and one of Flavia's daughters as co-abbesses.⁶⁷ This nunnery, Jussa-Moutier, was firmly part of the Columbanian faction centred on Luxeuil, evidenced by the use of aspects of Benedict's Rule in the *Regula ad Virgines* that Donatus composed for these nuns. Historians agree that this text is the first recorded use of Benedict's precepts in any Frankish monastery, male or female.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ 'Qui post alitus in eodem monasterio, sapientia inbutus, Vesontionensis pontifex praefectus, nunc usque superest, eandem cathedram regens. Qui post in amore beati Columbani ex ipsius regula monasterium virorum construxit', Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, 1.14, p. 78.

⁶⁵ 'Post ista munera mater ipsorum Flavia post mariti obitum monasterium puellarum in supradicta urbe Vesontionis construxit, omni munimine roborans, multarum puellarum contionem adunavit.' Ibid, p. 79. Interestingly, the *vita* mentions Flavia establishing enclosure at Besançon, despite the overt rejection of it in the later rule of Donatus. It is possible that the enclosure referred to here is not active, but rather passive – the prevention of others entering the monastery.

⁶⁶ Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, Prologue, col. 273.

⁶⁷ Bateson, 'and Early History of Double Monasteries', p. 153. This may be a similar arrangement to the one seen at Nivelles, where Itta took charge of the pragmatic affairs of the monastery while Gertrude was the spiritual leader.

⁶⁸ Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 110; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 59.

Donatus's rule is the longest and most detailed extant female *regula* from the seventh century. Not only is it the first example of a Benedicto-Columbanian mixed rule for either men or women, but it was also the first text of Benedict's Rule to be seen in Francia at all.⁶⁹ Donatus also composed a lengthy (and very useful) prologue, outlining exactly what his motivations were for creating this rule. Addressing Flavia and Gauthstruda, Donatus noted that the monastery was already following 'the rule', but wanted 'to excel more'.⁷⁰ Thus the women urged Donatus to combine the rules of Caesarius, Benedict and Columbanus, promoting the tenets that were 'more specially appropriate for the female sex.'⁷¹ Notably, Donatus casts the abbess and foundress of Jussa-Moutier as the two active agents behind the creation of this rule. Not only were they aware of the different rules of Caesarius, Columbanus and the new rule of Benedict, but they commissioned Donatus to write a new *regula* drawing on them, as they felt that 'the rules of the above mentioned fathers are not completely appropriate...as they were put out more for men and not at all for women.'⁷² The agency of monastic women to shape their own expression of the monastic life is further demonstrated by their rejection of the idea of strict active enclosure. Donatus states that Flavia and Gauthstruda singled out this central tenet of Caesarius's rule as being 'not in the least suitable' for their needs and consequently he has not included it in his rule.⁷³ Despite their dismissal of strict active enclosure, which formed the heart of Caesarius's rule, these women still wished to follow a number of his other precepts. They justified their rejection of enclosure by pointing to the rural context of Jussa-Moutier and its structure as a double monastery, which meant that active enclosure was neither necessary nor useful for the convent, as it originally would have been in Arles. The protection that Caesarius envisaged enclosure providing was now brought by the additional male house, by the patronage of Donatus as bishop of Besançon, and by the support of the Luxeuil faction.

⁶⁹ See Appendix table 2.

⁷⁰ 'Quanquam vos juxta normam regulae, vasa Christi pretiosissima, egregie noverim quotidie vitam ducere, attamen qualiter magis excellere debeatis sagaci vultis semper intentione perquirere.' Donatus does not refer to what rule is meant here. I propose that this was either a set of customs in place at the convent already which had not been solidified into a written *regula*, rather than the rule of Benedict or Columbanus. Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, Prologue, col. 273.

⁷¹ 'quae specialius femineo sexui custodienda competenter promulgarem', *ibid.*, Prologue, col. 273.

⁷² 'dicentes quod regulae praedictorum Patrum vobis minime convenirent, cum easdem viris potius, et nequaquam feminis, edidissent.' *Ibid.*, Prologue, col. 273.

⁷³ 'tamen ob immutationem loci in nonnullis conditionibus minime conveniret.' *Ibid.*, Prologue col. 273.

Donatus's rule is long, containing 77 precepts compared to the 43 of Aurelian. The emphasis of the *regula* is on obedience, the removal of self-determination and the importance of the divine office, as with the rules of Caesarius and Aurelian. Even so, in contrast to the older rules, Donatus incorporates the new, more austere practices of Columbanus's rule, and his systems of punishment. Daily confession to the abbess is introduced, as well as corporal punishment – for the nun who 'if she eats or drinks without asking a blessing or answering Amen, six blows; and six for she who does not make the sign of the cross over the spoon she licks; and six for she who talks while eating to the other sisters without need; six for she who sticks her knife into the table, six; and if she says anything is hers, correct her with six blows.'⁷⁴ Nuns who gossip, try to avoid punishment, criticize others, blame others, complain, speak at meals, contradict the prioress or show affection to other nuns are all punished with blows.⁷⁵ This system of increased austerity and abstinence is centred around punishment for those who upset the balance of the community, and is paired with the inclusion of Benedict's precepts on humility and patient obedience.⁷⁶ Interestingly, there is a repeated stress laid on the importance of silence in this rule, which has not been seen in the prior female *regulae*. Eleven precepts deal with silence or moderation of speaking in some fashion.⁷⁷ Indeed, Donatus introduces a new instruction that 'in every place and work, they are particularly advised to maintain the rule of silence.'⁷⁸ This is an extension of the idea of silence as a virtuous practice, seen in Caesarius, Benedict and Columbanus, but expressed here in a much more unequivocal form. The implication within these precepts that silence is an antidote to gossip or slander suggests that it was promoted in this rule to prevent conflicts between nuns in the community.⁷⁹ Donatus also includes some unusual adaptations and additions in his rule. At the end of the precept of Caesarius against taking in children for education, Donatus adds 'except those who will continue in the monastery like the rest in the

⁷⁴ 'Si comederit vel biberit non petens benedictionem, et non respondens Amen, sex percussioibus; et quae non signaverit cochlear quo lambit, sex; et quae locuta fuerit comedens, non in necessitate alterius sororis, sex; vel pertuderit cultello mensam, sex; et si dixerit suum proprium aliquid, sex percussioibus emendet.' Ibid., 23, quote from 25, cols. 282-284.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 28-30, 32-33, cols. 283-4.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 2, 3, 5, 8, 12, 21, 37-48, cols. 276-81, 285-8.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 11, 16, 19-20, 25, 33-34, 45, 47, 49, 75, cols. 279-81, 283-5, 287-8, 296.

⁷⁸ 'In omni loco et opera silentii regula magnopere custodire censetur', ibid., 75, col. 296.

⁷⁹ For more on the development of silence as a monastic virtue, see Scott G. Bruce, *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism: The Cluniac Tradition c. 900-1200*, Cambridge, 2007.

habit of a religious.’⁸⁰ He also modifies Caesarius’s precept on access into the monastery, saying that everyone may visit the monastery for parental visits, prayer or by invitation, but only the abbess is to judge who is worthy of invitation into the interior of the convent.⁸¹ Donatus then follows this by saying that ‘when they have gone either to the reception room or to the gate, if the abbess sees fit, where one after the other they may accept presents or relics or eulogies, or they may decide what else to offer. But they should presume to accept nothing from those who attend on them apart from in the refectory where it is decreed.’⁸² In complete contrast to Caesarius, Donatus allows nuns to prepare food for their relatives or other people, and they ‘may send as much as she [the abbess] had decided through the portresses, prepared by these women themselves following the holy custom, as is expedient.’⁸³ Given their specificity, it is evident that these sections come from Flavia and Gauthstruda, and reflect their insistence against strict active enclosure. The nuns of the convent at Jussa-Moutier were, in this rule, permitted to have much closer ties to their secular relatives than Caesarius outlined, as is to be expected in a double monastery. This *regula* shows the active role of monastic women in selecting which precepts of Caesarius, Benedict and Columbanus were most suitable for their needs, and discarding those which were inappropriate.

Around the same time as Donatus, another female rule was being composed. The *RCP* is an anonymous rule that is clearly influenced by the Irish asceticism of Columbanus. A number of scholars, led by McNamara and G. S. M. Walker, propose that the Irish influence of this rule indicates that it is the rule mentioned as being composed by Waldebert, the abbot of Luxeuil, in the *Vita Sadalbergae*.⁸⁴ With this in mind, they suggest that Waldebert possibly composed this rule for the community of

⁸⁰ ‘nisi quae in monasterio sub habitu religionis, sicut et reliquae, perseverent.’ Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 54, col. 290.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 56, col. 290-1.

⁸² ‘Cumque partes quas ipsa voluerit circumferint, protinus aut in saluatorium, aut ad portam redeant; ubi deinceps, si abbatissae visum fuerit, illa, si voluerit, praesente vel reliquis, eulogias accipiant, aut reliquum quod offerre decreverint. Hae vero quae ministrante et omnes non alibi nisi in refectorio, ubi decretum est, aliquid accipere praesumant.’ *Ibid.*, 56, col. 291.

⁸³ ‘quantum decreverit per portarias in monasterium transmittat, et ipsae per se secundum sanctam consuetudinem sibi, ut expedit, praeparent.’ *Ibid.*, 58, col. 291.

⁸⁴ ‘ex eius norma’, *Vita Sadalbergae*, 12, p. 56; McNamara, ‘Introduction to the *RCP*’, p. 75.

nuns at Faremoutiers, in which he was residing.⁸⁵ This is supported by the mention in the life of Burgundofara to Waldebert and Chagnoald providing her with instruction in ‘the rule’.⁸⁶ Regardless of the possible attribution to Waldebert, and the application of this rule in the convent of Faremoutiers, the Columbanian links of this text are evident.⁸⁷ The *RCP* incorporates a number of precepts from the *Regula Coenobialis* and the *Regula Monachorum* of Columbanus, and shares his interest in the establishment of asceticism in monastic practice.

Waldebert was a much more flamboyant monastic author than his predecessors. Aurelian and Donatus tended to adopt the precepts of Caesarius, Benedict and Columbanus almost verbatim, with the additions of a handful of new ideas. In contrast, Waldebert used these tenets as more of a theoretical base, adding to, embellishing and altering them significantly. For example, when Waldebert draws on Caesarius’s instruction to the nuns that ‘sitting at the table they shall be silent and direct their mind to the reading’, Waldebert adapts this to say that ‘before table, if the abbess pleases, one or more chapters of the rule should always be read, so that as food restores the flesh, reading shall sate the soul.’⁸⁸ He also freely combines ideas from all three rules, plus his own additions, into single chapters. Waldebert’s section on the prioress uses sections 65, 31 (which was originally applied to the cellarer) and 22 from Benedict’s *Regula*, sections 25 and 30 from Caesarius’s *Regula ad Virgines*; and loosely draws on section 9.4 of Columbanus’s *Regula Coenobialis*.⁸⁹ In addition, Waldebert adds a number of characteristics he believes the prioress should possess, including ‘her grave manner, clever speech, strong character, watchful consideration, unwearied striving for the goal, pious correction, moderate discipline, chaste acts: sober in habits, just in her decisions, adorned with humility, patient, mild, not disorderly, not irritable, not proud or stained with the vice of arrogance, not wasteful,

⁸⁵ Walker ‘Introduction’, p. xlvi; Bateson, ‘Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries’, p. 151.

⁸⁶ ‘germanum puellae Chagnoaldum et Waldebertum, qui ei postea successit, ut regulam doceant, decernit.’ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, 2.7, p. 121.

⁸⁷ Perhaps similarly to the *Regula Cuiusdam Patris ad monachos*, written by Waldebert which almost exclusively drew on Columbanus. Walker, ‘Introduction’, p. xlvi.

⁸⁸ ‘Sedentes ad mensam taceant; et animum lectioni intendant.’ Caesarius, *Regula Ad Virgines*, 16, col. 1109; ‘Ante mensam vero semper capitulum regulae unum aut amplius, si abbatissae placuerit, legatur: ut cum cibus carnem reficit, lectio animam satiet.’ *RCP*, 9, col. 1061.

⁸⁹ *RCP*, 2, cols. 1054-5; Benedict, *Regula*, 62, 31, 22, cols. 489-490, 533-6, 863-4; Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 25, 30, cols. 1111-3; Columbanus, *Regula Coenobialis*, 9, pp. 156-7.

not talkative, but adorned with religion in all acts.’⁹⁰ The *regula* of Waldebert emphasizes mutual charity, confession of sins, asceticism, obedience and humility. The interest in silence introduced by Donatus is again present, but in an even more strict form. Waldebert institutes that ‘at all hours of the day, apart from at the table, from the hour of Prime until compline, speaking is through the permission of the abbess, for whatever use that the holy rule demands.’⁹¹ Waldebert also provides the most explicit account of the types of manual work done by the nuns in all of these rules. In addition to reading and the office, Waldebert mentions mending and washing clothes, picking fruit, making fires, preparing baths, grinding and baking flour, brewing beer and cooking.⁹² The interest in the nuns’ manual labour not only provides us with an interesting insight into the activities of these women, but demonstrates Waldebert’s concern for the nuns to be continually busy, and for the community to produce enough ‘so that either they have enough to use for their own needs or to give suffrage to the poor.’⁹³ He also demonstrates a significant concern for the responsibilities of the prioress, portress and cellaress, in addition to the abbess, and devotes large sections to outlining the necessary characteristics of these women, who were so crucial to the functioning and order of the community.

Waldebert’s rule is perhaps the most individualistic and innovative female *regula* of this period, reflecting the growing influence of Irish asceticism as well as the adaptation of the traditional form of Frankish female monasticism represented by Caesarius. In addition to the use of these other rules, Waldebert also appears to take into account customs that may have already been in place at Faremoutiers, with his inclusion of monastic practices unseen in other rules. For example, whereas Columbanus’s *Regula Coenobialis* says that confession should be made before the meal or before sleep, or whenever is opportune, Waldebert lays out a detailed

⁹⁰ ‘Constituenda ergo est praeposita moribus gravis, sermone solers, ingenio fortis, consideratione vigil, cursu impigra, correptione pia, disciplina moderata, actu casta: moribus sobria, dispensatione aequa, humilitate ornata, patiens, mitis, non turbulenta, non iracunda, non superbiae vel arrogantiae vitio maculata, non prodiga, non garrula, sed omni actu religionis ornata’, *RCP*, 2, col. 1055.

⁹¹ ‘Omnibus ergo horis diurnis, praeterquam ad mensam, ab hora secunda usque ad completam quidquid utilitas sacrae regulae poposcerit, per abbatissae commeatum loquendum est.’ *Ibid.*, 9, col. 1061.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 12, cols. 1063-4.

⁹³ ‘Operandum namque est omni tempore, praeter dies festos; ut habeatur vel propriae necessitatis usus, vel egenis unde detur suffragium.’ *Ibid.*, 12, col. 1063.

timetable of confession.⁹⁴ He also introduces a new form of benediction at table, which is not seen in any other rule.⁹⁵ The new need for permission for speech and schedule for daily manual labour, mentioned above, are also unique to this rule. The increased asceticism and individuality of Waldebert's *regula* likely reflects its composition for the convent of Faremoutiers. As one of the earliest double monasteries, and as a key member of the Luxeuil group, Faremoutiers sat at the center of a faction which strongly promoted the Irish asceticism of Columbanus. The rule of Waldebert drew on this asceticism, but was not strictly bound by Columbanus's precepts. Even at Faremoutiers, the needs and practices of the community of nuns provided the strongest influence on the tone of their *regula*.

It is true that the female *regulae* composed in this period have a number of similarities. All of these rules were intended to serve the same purpose, to provide the theoretical guidelines by which a community of religious women could function smoothly. Unsurprisingly, they demonstrate very similar preoccupations. This is compounded by the preference of nuns and of the authors for the rules of Caesarius, Benedict and Columbanus as models for female rules. However, we must not mistake similarity for uniformity. When Ranft argues that the various female rules present a 'more monolithic than diverse' picture, or de Vogüé proposes that 'the particular elements which distinguish them are less striking than the strong homogeneity of their doctrines', they underestimate the variety of different needs and concerns that each rule reflects.⁹⁶ From the early fifth century onwards, we see the spread of individual rules for both male and female monasteries, with founders composing a specific *regula* for their own community.⁹⁷ These founders chose from a wide background of texts, not simply Benedict and Columbanus, to suit their particular needs.⁹⁸ Thus, composers of mixed rules were not simply compiling old rules, but were instead

⁹⁴ Columbanus, *Regula Coenobialis*, 1, trans. by Walker, pp. 144-7; *RCP*, 6, col. 1059-60.

⁹⁵ 'Quando in mensam cibus administratur, nulla prius cibum comedat, quam signum ad benedicendum insonet. Abbatissa vero vigilet, ut confestim cum cibus ministratus fuerit, signum tangere procuret; et omnes cum signum audierint, una voce benedictionem rogent, quarum vocem abbatissa subsequatur dicens: *Dominus dignetur benedicere*. Hoc ad omnia fercula, vel pomorum ac potus administrationem observandum est.' *Ibid.*, 10, cols. 1062-3.

⁹⁶ Ranft, *Women and Spiritual Equality*, p. 115; de Vogüé, 'Sub Regula', p. 35.

⁹⁷ V. Desprez, 'Introduction Generale' in Adalbert de Vogüé, ed., *Règles Monastiques D'Occident: IVe-VIe siècle, d'Augustin à Ferreol*, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1980, pp. 19, 30; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, p. 70.

⁹⁸ Desprez, 'Introduction', p. 20.

determining which elements were most useful for their convent, and adapting these precepts into one unified, and indeed unique, *regula*.

The most striking aspect of the three fully extant female *regulae* is not, as de Vogüé believes, their homogeneity, but rather their individuality. Despite all three rules by Aurelian, Donatus and Waldebert drawing heavily on these sources, only two sections from Caesarius and three ideas reflected in Benedict are common to all. No single tenet of Columbanus is shared by all three female rules. The implications of this for the historiography on female monasticism are immense. If there are only seven common precepts amongst the three extant *regulae*, and if none of these *regulae* is identical, then the references in the scholarship on female monasticism to a typical mixed rule of Benedict and Columbanus are far too simplistic. When Hoebanx argues that a Benedicto-Columbanian mixed rule was followed in a monastery without an extant *regula*, this may well be true. Nonetheless, that rule would have been highly individualistic and tailored to that particular convent. There is no contender in this period for an overarching ‘standard’ female *regula*. Even the rule of Caesarius, specifically designed for female communities and clearly an important document in female monasteries throughout Francia, was adapted and changed to suit the wishes of particular abbesses. Moreover during the reign of Louis the Pious, whom Ranft characterizes as restricting female monasticism, a standardised single rule did not emerge.⁹⁹ Instead, Benedict of Aniane provided abbesses with the ability to choose between the new *Institutio Sanctimonialium* or the Benedictine Rule as their *regula*. The common elements of Frankish are more reflective of the common needs of female communities, that is, precepts which ensured the smooth running of a convent. They do not provide evidence of a standard kind of monasticism applied over numerous disparate convents. We cannot truly understand the flexibility and variety present within Frankish female monasticism if we continue to make broad generalisations about the rules these women followed.

⁹⁹ Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, p. 33; Ranft, *Women and Spiritual Equality*, pp. 121-2.

The two sections of Caesarius's rule that are common to all the other extant rules relate mainly to keeping order in the convent and to ensuring the nuns remain focused on their spiritual roles. The first precept, that 'At the table, they shall sit in silence and pay attention to the reading', not only reinforces that the nuns should focus on learning and abiding by the divine scripture at all times, but also helps to maintain control and order in the community.¹⁰⁰ As noted above, in the *RCP*, this is modified to specify that the reading will be from the *regula* itself, further enhancing the pragmatic overtones of this precept. In order to ensure that all the nuns know the rules of their convent, they will hear it repeated to them every day. The second, and perhaps most interesting tenet of Caesarius is his section forbidding the abbess to leave the community for meals.¹⁰¹ The three authors of these rules felt this section was important enough to be included, yet we do not see a similar consensus on including other sections establishing firm monastic enclosure. It is likely that as time progressed the ideal of enclosure became increasingly loose in its application to the abbesses of convents. Aurelian, for example, modified this section to forbidding the abbess from sleeping outside the community, rather than eating outside it.¹⁰² Waldebert interpreted it even more loosely, saying that 'we advise only those who are vowed to God in holy religion and are bound in unity of obedience under one rule to eat and drink within.'¹⁰³ While the ideal of enclosure remains as almost self-evident when applied to the rest of the body of nuns, the important external roles of the abbess were increasingly recognized in monastic *regula*.

The common elements from Benedict's rule are similarly centred on basic guidelines for day-to-day life in a monastic community. All of the female rules include the admonition to hurry to the divine office when the signal is given, leaving

¹⁰⁰ For a comparison of the Latin of each of these texts, please see Appendix 4, pp. 114-8. Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 16, col. 1109; Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 32, col. 403; Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 33, col. 284; *RCP*, 9, col. 1061.

¹⁰¹ For a comparison of the Latin of each of these texts, please see Appendix 4, pp. 114-8. Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 38, col. 1114 ; Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 27, col. 402, although this is changed to sleeping rather than meals; Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 59, cols. 291-2; *RCP*, 3, col. 1057, although this is loose and directed to all of the sisters.

¹⁰² Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 27, col. 402. See Appendix 4, pp. 114-8. for Latin text.

¹⁰³ *RCP*, 3, col. 1057. See Appendix 4, pp. 114-8 for Latin text. Interestingly, the inclusion of 'tantummodo' appears to signify the idea that this restriction is being directed towards a prevention of other laypeople from trying to enter the monastery for meals, rather than emphasizing the need of the abbess to eat within the monastery.

all other work behind.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the other rules share the instruction for the recitation of compline before bed, although Aurelian omits his instruction for complete silence after these are said.¹⁰⁵ The remaining common idea reflected in Benedict focuses on punishment for those who break the monastic rule. Those who remain obstinate after discipline will receive stronger punishments from the abbess, or, at worse, be completely cut off from the rest of the community.¹⁰⁶ These precepts are all clearly pragmatic in nature, and illustrate the common needs of monastic communities to establish order and prevent conflict amongst the monastery's inhabitants.

Along with the common inclusions of precepts in all the female *regulae*, the common exclusions also provide us with valuable information. The gaps in our rules give us an insight into what was considered to be unsuitable or irrelevant for female monasteries in the seventh century. Compared to the small number of shared tenets, the number of unused sections is far greater. Parts of 22 chapters from Benedict, 5 from Columbanus's *Regula Monachorum*, 10 from his *Regula Coenobialis* and 42 from Caesarius are not seen in any of the other female rules. The majority of these omissions relate to areas that each rule constructed for their own convent, such as the particular order of the psalms to be celebrated in the office, the times the office was to be performed, the amount of food given to each nun and so on. However, there are some surprising and telling gaps. Firstly, the sections on chastity in Columbanus's *Regula Monachorum* are not included at all in any of the female rules.¹⁰⁷ Even the sections on chastity in Aurelian's *Regula Monachorum*, (where the monks are prohibited from sleeping together in the same bed or being excessively affectionate, especially at night) have been removed in his *Regula ad Virgines*. Precepts against excessive affection between the sisters do remain in Donatus, where they are not to

¹⁰⁴ For a comparison of the Latin of each of these texts, please see Appendix 4, pp. 114-8. Benedict, *Regula*, 43, col. 675; Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 24, col. 402; Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 13, col. 280; *RCP*, 8, col. 1060.

¹⁰⁵ For a comparison of the Latin of each of these texts, please see Appendix 4, pp. 114-8. Benedict, *Regula*, 42, cols. 669-672; Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 41, col. 406; Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 19, col. 281; *RCP*, 9, col. 1061.

¹⁰⁶ For a comparison of the Latin of each of these texts, please see Appendix 4, pp. 114-8. Benedict, *Regula*, 28, cols. 519-520; Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 28, col. 402; Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 7, col. 295; *RCP*, 20, cols. 1067-8.

¹⁰⁷ Columbanus, *Regula Monachorum*, 6, trans. by Walker, p. 129.

hold hands or call each other ‘little girl’.¹⁰⁸ Even so, the fears around chastity in these rules are directed more at the threat of men in the secular world, rather than the threat the nuns posed to each other’s chastity. The inclusion of Caesarius’s precepts against coveting the regards of men in Donatus rule supports this.¹⁰⁹ While Columbanus, quoting Matt. 5.28, condemns the monk ‘who looks on a woman to lust after her’, Caesarius warns nuns against coveting the gaze of men, casting them in a passive role.¹¹⁰ Chastity, in these rules, is something to be protected from the lustful attacks of men, and in a community solely composed of women, it was considered to be self-evident.

Additionally, ideas around enclosure in these rules do not show a definite system applied to all female convents. Enclosure remains a central part of the female monastic experience laid out in each *regula*. For example, the sections of Benedict and Columbanus on the behaviour of monks while they are outside the community, and how they should receive secular and religious guests, are excluded, which agrees with a policy of enclosure.¹¹¹ Even so, all the female rules lack the sections from Caesarius which clearly outline this type of enclosure.¹¹² As we saw in Donatus’s Prologue, the nuns of Jussa-Moutier explicitly argued that enclosure was not at all suitable for their convent.¹¹³ Thus, while the idea of defensive enclosure remained in these rules, limiting the kinds of people who had access into the monastery, active enclosure was recognized over time by nuns as an ideal, rather than a strict rule. Accordingly, it was not set into the legislative base of these *regulae*, allowing these convents more flexibility around enclosure when circumstances required it. The repercussions of this on our understanding of female monasticism are considerable. The flexibility that these rules demonstrate, and the active voice of monastic women rejecting strict enclosure in Donatus’s *regula* stand in stark contrast to those historians who characterise early medieval monasticism as an increasingly restrictive and

¹⁰⁸ ‘Juvenculae’, Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 32, col. 284.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 50, col. 288.

¹¹⁰ ‘Qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendum’, quote from Columbanus, *Regula Monachorum*, 6, trans. by Walker, pp. 128-9; Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 21, col. 1110.

¹¹¹ Columbanus *Regula Coenobialis*, 3, 8, trans. by Walker, pp. 144-9, 152-5; Benedict, *Regula*, 50, 51, 56, 61, cols. 743-746, 795, 853-4.

¹¹² Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 1, col. 1107; Caesarius, *Recapitulo*, 9, col. 1118.

¹¹³ Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, Prologue, cols. 273-4.

repressive force on women.¹¹⁴ Caesarian enclosure was not harshly imposed on women, and indeed was never intended as a means of repression, but instead as a way to defend these communities from external attacks. The sophisticated use of enclosure and access that numerous double houses engaged in, and the ability of monastic women to choose whether it was suitable for their convent to follow this precept demonstrates that nuns were fully aware of Caesarius's original intention.

In analysing these three “mixed-rules” for women, we can see that they are each selecting and choosing different items from the existing rules of Benedict, Columbanus, Caesarius and others. None of these rules is identical to one another, and all of them demonstrate separate focuses and particular concerns. This individuality raises a number of questions about the relationship between female communities and their *regulae*. De Vogüé argues that a *regula* in the context of Gregory the Great implied ‘nothing else than the authority of the superior. To live *sub regula* means to live under an abbot, he being the living rule of the monastery.’¹¹⁵ I argue in turn that the variety present in the female *regulae*, while clearly influenced by the rise of Columbanus and Benedict, were solidifications of the particular customs and practises of individual convents, firmly rooted in their temporal and geographic location. Further, we should not make broad generalisations about the rule followed in those communities for which there is no rule extant (such as Nivelles). It is possible that some of these convents, especially those on a smaller scale, adhered to their own mix of customs without solidifying them into a definite rule. As Alain Dierkens notes, the evidence around seventh and eighth-century female monasticism indicates that ‘la vie merovingienne n’était ni unifiée, ni cohérente dans l’ensemble du royaume et pendant la totalité de la période.’¹¹⁶ The historians who rely on the simple categorisation of “mixed-rule” overlook the wealth of information about female monasticism present in these rules. The *regulae* do not reflect an imposition of external authority onto female monasteries, but show monastic women actively choosing the kind of community in which they wanted to live.

¹¹⁴ For examples of this view see Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life*, and *Women and Spiritual Equality*; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society* and ‘Sanctity and Power’, pp. 131-151; and McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*.

¹¹⁵ de Vogüé, ‘*Sub Regula vel Abbate*’, p. 26.

¹¹⁶ Alain Dierkens, ‘Prolégomènes’, p. 388.

The diversity of early medieval female *regulae* also goes some way to explaining the absence of one single, over-arching rule that was followed by the majority of convents. Each *regula* was firmly tied to its convent of origin, rather than being a standardized set of precepts. Hence, what was convenient for Aurelian's convent at Arles was 'not in the least suitable' for the nuns of Jussa-Moutier and Faremoutiers.¹¹⁷ Though some of these rules do combine the *regulae* of Benedict and Columbanus, it would be an overgeneralisation to label female rules as strict Benedicto-Columbanian mixed rules without further analysis. By selecting what sections of Benedict and Columbanus to include, and what sections to omit, the composers of female *regulae* exercised a great deal of creative agency. Moreover, the female rules were not simply compilations of pre-existing male precepts. These *regulae* for women's communities include a number of new and innovative ideas unseen in male rules. Unfortunately, historians have too often overlooked the existence of innovations in these texts. By examining the extant *regulae*, the diversity, variety and flexibility of early medieval female monasticism becomes clear, as does the agency of monastic women in shaping the nature of their communities.

¹¹⁷ 'immutatorem loci in nonnullis conditionibus minime conveniret.' Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, Prologue, col. 273.

Conclusion

Piety and power: The role of female monasticism in Frankish history

The developments that took place within female monasticism in the seventh and eighth centuries were a driving force in early medieval Frankish history. This thesis has shown that female monasteries, far from being insignificant communities of unwanted women, were in fact both important cultural foci and powerful political forces. Monastic saints like Balthild, Itta, Gertrude and Sadalberga, among numerous others, turned their convents into prestigious centres of power and actively engaged in the political factionalism of this period. Monastic women were not marginal figures, or pale imitations of the male monks that have been so well studied by historians. Instead, the women who chose to engage in this form of the religious life played a key role in determining how their communities would run internally, and how they would negotiate the tumultuous political relationships they had with the world outside their walls. It is no surprise that the developments in female monasticism in this period, such as the double monastery and the influence of Benedicto-Columbanian monastic practice, reflect the pragmatic nature of these women. The founders, abbesses and nuns of early medieval convents responded to the pressures they faced in the violent and unstable Frankish world by carving out for themselves a form of religious community that would best suit their needs.

The power of women to shape their own experiences is a common thread running through my argument. The determination and stubbornness of the women in the monastic *vitae* contradict those who have characterised early medieval nuns as passive women shut away by misogynistic men. The cultural patronage exercised by founders and abbesses of convents in fact accorded them positions of considerable power, and it is evident that these women were key political figures despite their monastic profession. While I do not claim that

all Frankish nuns were powerful and prominent figures, they were nonetheless respected for their religious life and lived in communities of women that could become very powerful indeed. The influence of female monasticism as a collective group of holy women extends beyond the traditional attention paid to the power of their royal and noble founders. Furthermore, the narrative of a female convent squarely under the thumb of a tyrannical bishop also falls apart when we examine the freedom of convents to choose their own monastic rules. When bishops like Donatus and Waldebert composed their *regulae* for female monasteries, the women of those communities had an active say in how their convent would be run. Female monasteries were even given a choice between the rule of Benedict and the *Institutio Sancitmonialium* under the later reforms of Louis the Pious. Monastic women had a central role in the evolution of female monasticism in this period, and deserve recognition for it.

My research into the nature of Frankish female monasticism has highlighted the problems around generalisation in this subject. As I mentioned earlier, there is a historiographical motif in this topic of a golden age of Merovingian female monasticism, heralded by the rise of the double house. The implications of the view of the Merovingian age as the high point of female independence and self-determination in the religious life, followed by the repressive imposition of Carolingian control, is simply not tenable when we look at the sources for female monasticism. It is true that the seventh and eighth centuries were indeed a period of great growth for convents in Francia, and there was a subsequent fall in numbers of new female monasteries founded in the Carolingian period. However, the reasons for this were far more complex than the idea of a golden age can convey. These generalisations have proved incredibly restrictive for our understanding of both what made women want to engage in the monastic life, and also what drew secular and ecclesiastic patrons to found and support these communities. Moreover, to see every monastery as following the same pattern of development is an oversimplification. Female monasticism in this time was characterised by its flexibility and levels of variation, not its homogeneity. As I have noted, the experience of a nun in a small urban monastery in southern Francia would have been dramatically different from that of a nun in a large rural convent in Northern Francia. Even within convents themselves, there were levels of differing experience dependant on class and family connections. A nun coming from a poor family admitted into a convent would have a different view of that community compared to its noble foundress or abbess. It is clear that no

single overarching monastic model exists for female communities in this period. Each convent was firmly tied to its own context and responded to its own needs. The historical surveys of female monasticism that skip quickly over the golden age ignore the individuality of these convents and the valuable historical insights that a more detailed investigation can uncover.

One reason why female monasticism is such an important part of Frankish history is the level of inter-connection between convents and the world outside their walls. As we have seen, convents played a major role in the social structure of their surrounding area, acting as religious and cultural patrons as well as distributing alms and attracting pilgrims. On a larger scale, the women in convents, especially their noble or royal leaders, remained actively involved in national politics, acting as key allies for factions in the unstable royal courts. It is not surprising, then, to note the frequent mention of female monasteries in our secular primary sources, such as the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and the *Annales Mettenses Priores*. The secular politicians of the seventh and eighth centuries recognised the importance of female monasteries in their own time, something which has been strangely overlooked by modern historians. Even in Frankish monasticism itself, female monasteries were a vital part of the religious structure. Abbesses of convents actively promoted the cults of their founding saints and produced numerous religious texts. The *regulae* for convents also demonstrate the ability of convents to draw on the new ideas in monasticism that were spreading through Francia. Notably, the first textual evidence we have of Benedict's *Rule* comes from the inclusion of some of its tenets in Donatus's *Regula ad Virgines*. Female monasticism went well beyond its enclosed communities of women in terms of its impact on Frankish history. Without reference to how convents of women interacted with the external world of Francia, early medieval history as a whole is left poorer.

The seventh and eighth centuries witnessed a remarkable change in the nature of female sanctity and the monastic life. Women were able to carve out for themselves a distinct form of the religious life that not only served their pragmatic needs, but also enabled their communities to become prestigious spiritual centres. Without an understanding of this period in female monasticism, the careers of women like Saint Balthild cannot be fully comprehended. For example, when we see Judith, the wife of Louis the Pious, and their son,

the future Emperor Charles the Bald, coming to venerate the translation of Balthild's relics at Chelles in 833, over 150 years after her death, political history alone cannot provide a suitable explanation. Why would the family of Louis the Pious show so much favour to the cult of a saint who was not of their family? Why did they not venerate the cult of the saints of the Pippinids, Gertrude or Itta, in the same way? However, when we apply the key themes of this thesis to this event, their motivations become clearer. Even under Louis the Pious, we can see the nunnery of Chelles retaining its political importance as a cult centre, headed by a close female relative (his mother-in-law Heilwig). Naturally Louis would be eager to associate his family closely with the sanctity of this site, which figured significantly in the religious and political history of the past two centuries. The reverence of the Carolingians for this Merovingian queen who was such a central figure in the evolution of female monasticism illustrates the links of continuity between these two dynasties. Balthild's foundation of the powerful convent of Chelles was a potent enough marker of sanctity to ensure her a national cult almost 200 years later. The actions of women like Balthild in the early medieval period created the form of female monasticism that served as the basic guideline for the Carolingian period and on into the later Medieval era. While their contemporaries venerated them for this, not all historians have accorded them the same central position in medieval history. Hopefully, this thesis has gone some way to correcting this oversight, and restoring female monasticism to its proper position in the early medieval historical record.

Epilogue

Something old, something new: The *Institutio Sanctimonialium*

In 817, Louis the Pious, along with his favoured bishop Benedict of Aniane, held a church council at his palace in Aachen composed of both clergy and secular nobles. Following this council, Louis sent out letters to a number of bishops in his empire who had been unable to attend this synod. These letters, three of which are extant, focus on the promotion of the new monastic rules for canons and nuns, the *Institutio canonicorum* and the *Institutio Sanctimonialium*. Louis was at pains in his letters to stress his fervent desire for these new rules, ‘which the holy and venerable council carefully chose from the wise words of the fathers’, to be consistently applied to the *canonicae* in the dioceses of his kingdom.¹ There was to be no ‘distorting or truncation’ of these *regulae*, but instead they were to be carefully copied out in full and implemented to the letter.² To ensure this, Louis stated that he had made a true copy, which was to be stored in a chest in his palace, against which all other versions would be checked.³ He was so concerned with enforcing these rules that he also determined to send envoys in one year’s time, to check that both the prelates and subjects of the bishop ‘have been informed of the *institutio* and are discovered to be brisk operators of the same.’⁴ Any who had failed to do so ‘will undoubtedly be in terror, if they dare to admit to such.’⁵ In promulgating a compulsory, standardized rule, both for male and for female monasteries, Louis was clearly breaking with the traditions of flexibility and variety that were common in the previous centuries. Accordingly, the *Institutio Sanctimonialium* marks the beginning of a new phase in female monasticism.

¹ ‘sacrum et venerabile concilium ex sanctorum patrum sententiis diligenter excerpsit.’ *Hludowici Imperatoris Epistolae ad Archiepiscopos Missae*, in Albert Werminghoff, ed., *MGH Conc.*, II.I, Hanover, 1908, pp. 458, 461. Quote from 461.

² ‘depravatione et detruncatione’, *ibid.*, p. 459.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 459.

⁴ ‘institutione informati atque instructi eiusdemque operadores inveniuntur strenui’, *ibid.*, p. 460.

⁵ ‘sine dubio terrori erit, ne tale admittere praesumant.’ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

Indeed, the *Institutio* itself demonstrates the rise of some strikingly new ideas for female monastic life. Most notable is a re-evaluation of the ability of nuns to maintain ownership of property. Whereas the majority of earlier rules prohibited nuns from retaining lands or other goods, the *Institutio* provided a range of options. Although the ideal of nuns distributing all their goods and living off the stipend provided by the monastery remained in place, the rule allowed women who objected to this to either entrust their property to the church and retain usufruct, or to entrust it to ‘servants or certain others’ to manage it for them and send them the profits.⁶ Similarly, while earlier rules forbade slaves in convents, the *Institutio* noted that ‘it is permitted for those living canonically consecrated to God to have little slaves with them for the benefit of serving in the monastery.’⁷ For the first time, we see the mention of numerous ‘dwellings’ or *habitationes* within the walls of the monastery, with the ‘nuns living canonically usually having their own little buildings.’⁸ Hospitals for paupers were to be created at the gate of the convent, funded by a tithe both from the monastery and from the church housing the priests of the convent, and run by one of the priests of the same church.⁹ The recurring theme throughout all of these new sections is the increased concern about the ideas of the equity of the individual nuns, and the proper recognition of their rights.¹⁰ Abbesses were strictly warned against engaging in the kinds of behaviours forbidden to the other nuns (such as leaving the convent, donning extravagant clothes etc.) as a ‘judgement of equity.’¹¹ In particular, the measures of food and drink allowed to each nun were carefully detailed, and abbesses were forbidden from going below these minimum limits, ‘lest through their neglect or arrogance they shall permit poverty of anything in the monastery.’¹² The general emphasis of this rule was less on enforcing a strict system of ascetic practice, and more on ensuring that every nun was adequately provided for so as to prevent conflicts or uprisings against the leaders of the convents, or the nuns turning to secular nobles for additional support.

⁶ ‘aut servis aut certe aliis’, *Institutio Sanctimonialium Aquisgranensis*, 9, in Albert Werminghoff, ed., *MGH Conc.*, II.I, Hanover, 1908, p. 444.

⁷ ‘licitum est Deo dicatis canonicae viventibus vernulas secum famulandi gratia in monasteriis habere’, *ibid.*, 21, p. 452.

⁸ ‘intra claustra monasterii sanctimoniales canonice viventes proprias solite sint habere mansiunculas’, *ibid.*, 11, 23, pp. 446, 454. Quote from p. 454.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 28, p. 455.

¹⁰ However, the equality of the nuns, a key idea in the earlier *regulae*, may well have been undermined if some women had slaves and external access to money.

¹¹ ‘censura aequitatis’, *ibid.*, 7, p. 442.

¹² ‘ne propter earum incuriam et insolentiam aliquam in monasteriis patiantur inopiam’, *ibid.*, 13, p. 447.

All of its new ideas notwithstanding, the *Institutio Sanctimonialium* was phrased in language that was very familiar. Obedience was to be prized above all else; nuns were to be constantly working, praying or meditating; they were all to eat and sleep together; and humbly serve the seniors in the convent.¹³ Strict active enclosure was enforced ‘as it is not fitting for certain men to enter these enclosed places, nor for nuns to have the ability to wander outside.’¹⁴ The celebration of the hours was central to the daily life of the convent, and nuns were enjoined to constantly direct both their heart and mind to prayer during the offices.¹⁵ There were sections on the proper behaviour and morals of the abbess, prioress, cellaress and portress that all evoked the same ideals as the earlier rules.¹⁶ Even the manner of disciplining disobedient nuns was drawn from the earlier practices of Caesarius and Benedict.¹⁷ The *Institutio* was overt in a number of places in its use of earlier authors, quoting and citing passages from Jerome, Cyprian, Caesarius, and Athanasius.¹⁸ Thus, while the *Institutio* represents a different picture of religious life for women, one with much more emphasis on equity and honour, it was still heavily grounded in the same base of female monastic practice established in the sixth and seventh centuries. This rule, while different in many respects to its predecessors, was clearly influenced by the same ideals and practices that were set in place between the sixth to ninth centuries.

In 816 and 817, Louis the Pious was evidently trying to institute an over-arching, unified system of female monastic practice in his empire. This had never before been attempted. The type of monasticism promoted in the *Institutio* was a different form from that promoted in the *regulae* of the sixth to eighth centuries, full of new ideas and practices, and without the variation seen in the earlier rules. Nonetheless, without the experimentations and innovations of those earlier centuries, the *Institutio* could not have existed. The efforts of Louis and Benedict in the Council of Aachen to reform female monasticism (as part of their wider reform efforts) were heavily influenced by the policies of female monastic patronage I have outlined in this thesis. It is no coincidence that Louis decided to hold this council and promote this *Institutio* so soon after he was crowned emperor. He demonstrated the same

¹³ Ibid., 10, pp. 445-6.

¹⁴ ‘quatenus nec viri quiddam, quod non decet, in earum claustris agendi nec sanctimoniales foras evagandi habeant facultatem.’ Ibid., 11, p. 446.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15, 16, pp. 448-9.

¹⁶ Ibid., 14, 24, 26, 27, pp. 448, 454-5.

¹⁷ Ibid., 15, 16, pp. 449-451.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1-7, 22, pp. 423-444, 452-454.

concerns around the leadership of convents and the access of other noble patrons to these monasteries as his father Charlemagne before him. By being so closely tied to the institution of this new rule, Louis was effectively trying to place himself as the main patron over all of the female monasteries in his empire. Moreover, the aim of implementing a single overarching *regula* was clearly the result of the continued tension around male rules being used for female communities seen from the sixth century onwards.¹⁹ Admittedly, the result of Louis's reforms was the construction of a new and different era in the monastic life of women, shaped by the new and different political and social concerns of the ninth century. Even so, this new era did not see an abrupt break with past ideas of female monasticism. Rather, this was an evolution. From its origins in the sixth century, female monasticism in Francia was moulded and shaped by numerous men and women to fit their own needs and requirements. The *Institutio Sanctimonialium* is just one more example in the long history of interconnection between the history of monastic women and history of the wider Frankish world.

¹⁹ This also ties in to the contemporary interest in *correctio* and *emendatio* that characterized the Carolingian Renaissance. For more on this, see Rosamond McKitterick, *History and memory in the Carolingian World*, Cambridge, 2004; McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms Under the Carolingians*, especially chapters 6 and 8, pp. 140-168, 200-277; McKitterick, 'Royal Patronage of Culture', especially pp. 112-126; Giles Brown, 'Introduction: the Carolingian Renaissance' in McKitterick, ed., *Carolingian Culture: emulation and innovation*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 1-51; John J. Contreni, 'The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe' in R. E. Sullivan, ed., *The Gentle Voices of Teachers': Aspects of Learning in the Carolingian Age*, Columbus OH, 1995, pp. 106-141.

Appendix 1

Monastic sources used in Aurelian, *Regula Ad Virgines*

Aurelian	Caesarius	Benedict	Columbanus <i>RM</i>	Columbanus <i>RC</i>
Prologue (Foundation of convent)	Prologue, 43			
1 (Strict active enclosure)	R8, 1, R1			
2 (Must sell all possessions)	4, R4			
3 (Receive nothing secretly)	23, 40			
4 (Receiving letters)	R6			
5 (All food and drink shared in common)	28, 30			
6 (No personal cells/chests)	7			
7 (Swearing)				
8 (Insulting)				
9 (Lying)				
10 (Fighting amongst sisters)	31			
11 (Striking each other)	24			
12 (Interviews without the abbes)				
13 (Receiving slaves)				
14 (Secular men and women)	34			
15 (Entrance of provisor and workmen)	33			
16 (Becoming a godmother)	9			
17 (Receiving keys)	30			
18 (Duties shared in turns)	12 (Aurelian doesn't mention prioress)			
19 (Choosing own work)	6			
20 (Meditating on text while working)	16, 18			
21 (No goods of one's own)	15, 18			
22 (Clothing colours)	40			
23 (Sleepiness during vigils)	13 (Aurelian doesn't mention working)			
24 (Hurrying to office)	10 (New imagery of bees)	43*		
25 (Behaviour during psalms)	8			
26 (Learning to read)	17			
27 (Abbess sleeping outside convent)	38*			
28 (Receiving punishment)	11	28*		

Aurelian	Caesarius	Benedict	Columbanus <i>RM</i>	Columbanus <i>RC</i>
29 (Quarrels)	31			
30 (The proud, disobedient, angry)		25*		
31 (Selling goods)	R14			
32 (Behaviour at table)	16			
33 (Abbess eating outside convent)	38*			
34 (Eating meat)	R17			
35 (Poultry and fish)	R17			
36 (Eating outside of mealtimes)				
37 (Care of old and unwell)	7, 30			
38.1-4 (Reciting office in winter)				
38.5-7 (Vigils for deceased sisters)	†			
39 (Keep rule in full)	43, 39, R10, R14			
40 (Rereading of rule)	43, R8*			
41 (Order of psalms/divine office)	†	42*		
42 (Order of psalms from Christmas to the Epiphany, martyr feasts)	†			
43 (Order of meals)	† (Aurelian allows abbess to provide as many meals as she likes), R15	39*		

† This section is not included in the *Patrologia Latina* edition of Caesarius as it is derived from the rule of Lerins, but is included in the *Codex Regularum Monachorum*.

Each chapter from Aurelian's rule is numbered and summarised in the left hand column. If the chapter has drawn on another source, the original section number of that source has been given in the appropriate column in the order in which they appear in Aurelian's rule. A star next to the section number indicates that Aurelian has loosely interpreted this section. If no section number is given, Aurelian has created this chapter himself.

Key

- Aurelian** Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, in J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 68, Paris, 1847, 399-406
- Caesarius** Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad Virgines*, in J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 67, Paris, 1848, 1105-1120. (If an R is included before the section number, this indicates the *Recapitulo* of the rule).
- Benedict** Benedict of Nursia, *Regula*, in Justin McCann, ed., *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, London, 1952.

Columbanus RM Columbanus, *Regula Monachorum*, trans. in G. S. M Walker, ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, Vol II, Dublin, 1957.

Columbanus RC Columbanus, *Regula Coenobialis*, trans. in G. S. M Walker, ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, Vol II, Dublin, 1957

Appendix 2

Monastic sources used in Donatus, *Regula Ad Virgines*

Donatus	Caesarius	Benedict	Columbanus RM	Columbanus RC
Prologue (foundation)	Prologue			
1 (Abbess)		2, 64		
2 (Counsel of sisters)		3		
3 (Tools of good works)		4		
4 (Behaviour of abbess)	32			
5 (Prioress)		6		
6 (Receiving converts)	3 (D includes placing her in a separate cell), 5	58		
7 (Widows and married women)	4			
8 (Personal possessions)		33		
9 (Private work)	27, 19			
10 (Sisters will not despise each other)	19			
11 (Separate cells)	7*, 8			
12 (Old and infirm)	39, 30	36		
13 (Hurry to office)		43		
14 (Late to work/table)	10	43*		
15 (Signalling the hours)		47		
16 (The oratory)		52		
17 (Chanting psalms in oratory)	20	19		4
18 (Reverence in prayer)		20		
19 (Silence)		42* (D includes silence after compline)		
20 (Reading)	17, 18*, 20, 16	71*	1*	
21 (Receiving what is needed equally)		34		
22 (Behaviour while being punished)	10			
23 (Daily confession)				1
24 (Hiding things in beds)	27			
25 (Benediction at table)				1*
26 (Throwing things away in the kitchen)				2, 3, 4
27 (Leaving without prayer)				3, 8
28 (Gossip)				4

Donatus	Caesarius	Benedict	Columbanus RM	Columbanus RC
29 (Criticises others)				6, 7, 8
30 (Contends with prioress)				8
31 (Not asking pardon)				8
32 (Calling each other little girl puella?)				8*
33 (Silence at table)	16			
34 (Genuflection)				9 (D decreases number of psalms),
35 (Swearing)	2			
36 (Lent)		49		
37 (Humility)		5, 7		
38 (Second grade of humility)		7		
39 (Third grade of humility)		7		
40 (Fourth grade of humility)		7		
41 (Fifth grade of humility)		7		
42 (Sixth grade of humility)		7		
43 (Seventh grade of humility)		7		
44 (Eighth grade of humility)		7		
45 (Ninth grade of humility)		7		
46 (Tenth grade of humility)		7		
47 (Eleventh grade of humility)		7		
48 (Twelfth grade of humility)		7		
49 (Taciturnity)		6	2	5
50 (Guarding eyes)	21, 20			
51 (Concealing another's sins)	22 (D omits cautioning her privately)			
52 (Quarrels and insults)	24, 31			
53 (Taking things from family secretly)	R6, 40*			
54 (Godchildren)	9, 5			
55 (Men entering monastery)	33			
56 (Entry of secular women)	34*, 36* (D includes allowing sisters to accept gifts, relics or eulogies if the abbess agrees)			

Donatus	Caesarius	Benedict	Columbanus RM	Columbanus RC
57 (Reception of visitors)	35, 37* (D includes allowing visits by other nuns), 42*, 36, 37, 35			
58 (Banquets)	36 (D includes prohibition on abbess or nuns attending banquets with bishop or parents. Allows them to send food for close relatives or friends)			
59 (Abbess eating outside convent)	38			
60 (The portress)	40		66 (D includes having two or three sisters to accompany her)	
61 (The cellaress)			31	
62 (Property of convent)	30, 40		32	
63 (Ornaments or furnishings)	40 (D includes prohibition on purple, <i>bebrina</i> , feathered items, damask), 41 (D allows black dyes).			
64 (Measure of hair)	R7			
65 (Sleeping)			22 (D omits assigning beds by conversion date and wearing knives)	
66 (Order of congregation)			63 (D omits calling abbess <i>domina et abba</i>)	
67 (Weekly kitchen service)			35 (D omits prostration and washing)	
68 (If ordered to do the impossible)			68	
69 (Excommunication)			24	
70 (Graver faults)			25	
71 (Joining the excommunicate)			26	
72 (Care of excommunicate)			27	
73 (Those who do not improve)	R14* (D includes sequestering them in cells)	28		

Donatus	Caesarius	Benedict	Columbanus RM	Columbanus RC
74 (Defending each other)		69		
75 (Singing of psalms)				7* (D includes new section on silence and preventing gossip)
76 (Hours of meals)		41		
77 (Election of abbes)	R12, R14, 43			

Each chapter from Donatus is numbered and summarised in the left hand column. If Donatus has drawn on another source, the original section number of that source has been given in the appropriate column. A star next to the section number indicates that Donatus has loosely interpreted this section. If no section number is given, Donatus has created this chapter himself.

Key

Donatus	Donatus, <i>Regula ad Virgines</i> , in J. P. Migne, ed., <i>Patrologia Latina</i> , Vol. 87, Paris, 1851, cols. 273-298.
Caesarius	Caesarius of Arles, <i>Regula ad Virgines</i> , in J. P. Migne, ed., <i>Patrologia Latina</i> , Vol. 67, Paris, 1848, cols. 1105-1120. (If an R is included before the section number, this indicates the <i>Recapitulo</i> of the rule).
Benedict	Benedict of Nursia, <i>Regula</i> , in Justin McCann, ed., <i>The Rule of Saint Benedict</i> , London, 1952.
Columbanus RM	Columbanus, <i>Regula Monachorum</i> , trans. in G. S. M Walker, ed., <i>Sancti Columbani Opera</i> , Scriptorum Latini Hiberniae, Vol II, Dublin, 1957.
Columbanus RC	Columbanus, <i>Regula Coenobialis</i> , trans. in G. S. M Walker, ed., <i>Sancti Columbani Opera</i> , Scriptorum Latini Hiberniae, Vol II, Dublin, 1957.

Appendix 3

Monastic sources of the *Regula Cuiusdam Patris Ad Virgines*

<i>RCP</i>	Caesarius	Benedict	Columbanus <i>RM</i>	Columbanus <i>RC</i>
1 (Behaviour of abbes)		2 *, 64*		
2 (Prioress)	25*, 30*	65, 31 (adapted from ideal of cellarer), 22*		9*
3 (Portress)	40* (changes prioress to cellaress), 39*, 41*	66*, 53, 67, 53*		
4 (Cellaress)		31*		
5 (Mutual love and obedience)	30		1*	
6 (Making confession)		24*, 44*		1
7 (Not revealing confessions to others)		46*		
8 (Rising at signal for office)		43*		
9 (Silence)	17, 18* (Permission for speech is new), 16*(Reading chapters of rule at table is new)	42	2	
10 (Food and drink at table)	39, R16	39	3	
11 (Hours of dining)		41*		
12 (Daily manual labour)	20	48*, 35		
13 (Goods of monastery)		32*		
14 (Sleeping)	Departs from Caesarius	22		
15 (Care of sick)		36		
16 (Negligence or accidents)		46*		
17 (No personal belongings)		33 (Only gives two admonishments while <i>RCP</i> gives 3 corrections)	4	
18 (Excommunication)		23*		
19 (Manner of excommunication)		24, 25, 26		
20 (Those who do not improve)		28 (New segregation rather than expulsion), 30		
21 (Reception of sisters who leave convent)		29		
22 (Humility)		63, 4 *		
23 (Defending a relative)		69		
24 (Raising children)	17*	37*		

Each chapter from the *RCP* is numbered and summarised in the left hand column. If the chapter has drawn on another source, the original section number of that source has been given in the appropriate column. A star next to the section number indicates that the author has loosely interpreted this section. If no section number is given, the author has created this chapter himself.

Key

- RCP*** *Regula Cuiusdam Patris ad Virgines*, in J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 88, Paris, 1850, 1053-1070.
- Caesarius** Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad Virgines*, in J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 67, Paris, 1848, 1105-1120. (If an R is included before the section number, this indicates the *Recapitulo* of the rule).
- Benedict** Benedict of Nursia, *Regula*, in Justin McCann, ed., *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, London, 1952.
- Columbanus *RM*** Columbanus, *Regula Monachorum*, trans. in G. S. M Walker, ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, Vol II, Dublin, 1957.
- Columbanus *RC*** Columbanus, *Regula Coenobialis*, trans. in G. S. M Walker, ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, Vol II, Dublin, 1957.

Appendix 4

Common precepts in female *regulae*

‘Sedentes ad mensam taceant; et animum lectioni intendant.’

Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad Virgines*, 16, col. 1109.

‘Sedentes ad mensam taceant, et lectio quotidie omni tempore, dum cibus sumitur, legatur’

Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 32, col. 403.

‘Sedentes ad mensam taceant, et animo lectioni intendant.’

Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 33, col. 284.

‘Ad mensam vero nulla penitus praeter abbatissam, vel cui abbatissa praeceperit, pro communi necessitate sororum loqui praesumat: sed omnes intento animo gratias reddentes creatori in cordibus suis cibi ac potus solidae mensurae largitione fruantur.’

RCP, 9, col. 1061.

‘Abbatissa, nisi inaequalitate aliqua aut infirmitate, vel occupatione compellente, extra congregationem penitus non reficiatur.’

Caesarius, *Regula ad Virgines*, 38, col. 1114.

‘Sancta abbatissa extra congregationem non maneat.’

Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 27, col. 402, although this is changed to sleeping rather than meals.

‘Abbatissa, nisi inaequalitate aut infirmitate, vel occupatione compellente, extra congregationem suam penitus non reficiat.’

Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 59, col. 291-2.

‘Intus vero tantummodo quae sacram Deo voverunt religionem, et in unitate obedientiae sub una regula sunt ligatae, edere vel bibere censemus.’

RCP, 3, col. 1057, although this is loose and directed to all of the sisters.

‘Ad horam divini officii mox ut auditum fuerit signum, relictis omnibus quaelibet fuerint in manibus, summa cum festinatione curratur; cum gravitate tamen, ut non scurrilitas inveniatur fomitem. Ergo nihil operi Dei praeponatur.’

Benedict, *Regula*, 43, col. 675.

‘Signo tacto omne opus praetermittatur, et sicut apes prudentissimae ad alvearium, ita veloci festinatione properare contendite; si qua tardius venerit, districtioni subjacet.’

Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 24, col. 402.

‘Ad horam divini officii, mox ut auditum fuerit signum, relictis omnibus quaelibet fuerint in manibus, summa cum festinatione curratur; cum gravitate tamen, ut non scurrilitas inveniatur fomitem. Nihil tamen operi Dei praeponatur.’

Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 13, col. 280.

‘Quandocumque vel diurnis vel nocturnis horis ad opus divinum signum insonuerit, mox cum summa festinatione surgendum est, ac si praeco regis insonet, omni opere quod in manibus habebatur postposito’.

RCP, 8, col. 1060.

‘Omnes tempore silentio debent studere monachi, maxime tamen nocturnis horis... Omnes ergo in unum positi compleant: et exeuntes a completoriis nulla sit licentia denuo cuiquam loqui aliquid.’

Benedict, *Regula*, 42, cols. 669-672.

‘Quando repausaturae estis, in schola, in qua manetis, completa dicatur; imprimis directaneus, et psalmus nonagesimus dicatur, deinde capitella consuetudinaria’

Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 41, col. 406.

‘Omni tempore omnique loco silentio studere debent ancillae Christi, maxime tamen nocturnis horis.’

Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 19, col. 281.

‘Ab hora vero completionis, cum oratio ad somnum capiendum datur, nulla omnino loqui praesumat, nisi grandis necessitas monasterii poposcerit.’

RCP, 9, col. 1061.

‘Si quis frater frequenter correptus pro qualibet culpa, si etiam excommunicatus, non emendaverit, acrior ei accedat correptio, id est, ut verberum vindicta in eum procedat. Quod si nec ita correxerit, aut forte (quod absit) in superbiam elatus etiam defendere voluerit opera sua, tunc abbas faciat quod sapiens medicus. Si exhibuit fomenta, si unguenta adhortationum, si medicamina Scripturarum divinarum, si ad ultimum ustionem excommunicationis, vel plagas virgarum, etiam si viderit nihil suam praevalere industriam: adhibeat etiam (quod majus est) suam et omnium fratrum pro eo orationem: ut Dominus, qui omnia potest, operetur salutem circa infirmum fratrem. Quod si nec isto modo sanatus fuerit, tunc iam utatur abbas ferro abscissionis, ut ait Apostolus: *Auferte malum ex vobis (I Cor. V)*. Et iterum: *Infidelis si discedit, discedat: ne una ovis morbida omnem gregem contaminet (I Cor. VII)*’.

Benedict, *Regula*, 28, cols. 519-520.

‘Si qua pro qualibet culpa aut transgressione regulae increpatur, aut disciplinam accipiat, arguenti respondere non praesumat: quia peccatum quod hic dstringitur, in aeterna examinatione non punitur. Et sic debetis animae curam excipere, quomodo aeger curam medici: tenentes illud sanctae Scripturae: *Qui abjicit disciplinam infelix est (Prov. XV)*. Et illud: *Ego in flagella paratus sum (Psal. XXXVII)*.’

Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*, 28, col. 402.

‘Si qua soror pro qualibet culpa frequenter correpta, si etiam excommunicata non emendaverit, acrior ei accedat correctio, id est, ut verberum in eam vindicta procedat. Quae si nec ita correxerit, aut forte, quod absit, in superbiam elata etiam defendere voluerit opera sua, tunc mater faciens ut sapiens medicus, si exhibuit fomenta, si unguenta adhortationum, si medicamenta Scripturarum divinarum, si ad ultimum ultionem excommunicationis, vel

plagas virgarum, etiamsi viderit nihil suam praevalere industriam, adhibeat etiam quod majus est, suam et omnium sororum orationem pro ea, ut Dominus, qui omnia potens est, operetur salutem circa infirmam sororem. Quae si nec isto modo sanata fuerit, tunc jam utatur ferro abscissionis, ut ait Apostolus: *Auferte malum ex vobis ipsis (I Cor. V)*. Et iterum: *Infidelis si discedit, discedat (Ibid., VII)*, ut ne una oris morbida totum gregem contamineat.’

Donatus, *Regula ad Virgines*, 7, col. 295.

‘Soror si saepius correpta emendare noluerit, excommunicatione pro modo culpa corrigatur. Si nec sic aliquid proficiat increpantis correctio, tunc verberum vindictae subiacebit. Quod si sic emendare noluerit, sed magis in tumorem superbiae elata, opera vel actus, de quibus corrigatur, defenderit, tunc abbatissae scientiae regimine corrigatur: quia scriptum est: *Qui abjicit disciplinam, infelix est (Sap. III)*. Moderante ergo scientia saniei medendi cura adhibeatur. Si lethale vulnus per fomenta castigationum, et pietatis ac lenitatis unguenta sospitati non redditur, saltem incisionibus amputetur. Et si sic sanies desecta tumorem non amiserit, tum excommunicationis sententiam, vel disciplinae corporalis poenam incurrat. Et si nec excommunicationis metu, nec flagelli poena frangitur, augeatur adhuc pietatis fomes; ita ut ab omni congregatione pro ea communis Dominus orationum officio deprecetur: ut quae laqueo diaboli irretita tenetur, Domini misericordia ac pietate curetur.’

RCP, 20, cols. 1067-8.

Appendix 5

Translation of Aurelian, *Regula ad Virgines*

PROLOGUE

The bishop Aurelian, to the holy and venerable sisters in Christ, established in the monastery of Saint Mary, which, on the order of God, we founded inside the walls of the city of Arles.

Since by the inspiration of God, who warned us in his ineffable mercy, it is our vision that having repudiated the pleasures of the world and scorned and parted from temporal joys, you shall have chosen the splendour of the most holy life. In embracing the grace of virginity and chastity, in pursuing the love of God with all the avidity of your body and heart, you shall pierce your flesh with the fear of the divine, and holding to that saying “I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgements of thy justice” (Ps 118:106) and: “The world is crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). Also we have decided, by order of the Lord who works in us his will and his aims, that we shall build a monastery for you for the progress of your souls, as we have done. And that is why we institute for you a rule for discipline, which shall teach you to advance on the path of the commands of God, and to be able to happily attain the Kingdom of Heaven.

STATUTES OF THE HOLY RULE

1. By the order of God, we desired to hold inviolably in the first place that, if someone comes to convert, the rule shall be read to her in the parlour and if she promises to carry it out in full, thus she shall be received: until her death, she shall not be permitted to go out of the monastery, following the words of the Prophets: “One thing I have asked of the Lord, this I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” (Ps 27:4).

2. She shall not receive religious clothes, unless she has made charters of donation or sale to whomever she pleases for all of her goods, whether great or small, due to the commandment of the Lord, where he said: “If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast” (Matth. 19:21), and: “So likewise, every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth, cannot be my disciple” (Lc 14:33).

3. You shall accept nothing in secret; but if a close relation or a friend will have given or sent anything in clothes or in gold or anything else, it shall will be in the power of the abbess and

if it is needed by her to whom it was sent, it shall be given to her; if she has no need of it, it will be put into the common collection and given to her who has need of it.

4. We advise letters not to be given nor received without the knowledge or the permission of the abbess.

5. No-one shall presume to store anything to eat or drink around her bed; she shall store all things in the common cellar; and if an unwell sister requires it, by the order of a senior that which is necessary shall not be denied to her.

6. No-one shall be authorised to have a cell, chest or anything of this kind which can be shut for her own personal use.

7. Do not swear, as the Lord said: "Swear not at all" (Matth. 5:34) and another scripture: "Thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie" (Ps 5:7).

8. Do not speak ill, for it is written: "Revilers shall not possess the Kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:10).

9. It shall not at all be authorised to lie, as "the mouth that believeth, killeth the soul" (Wis 1:11); and again: "Thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie" (Ps 5:7).

10. No-one shall dare to drag out their anger until the next day. And if, as it happens in human fragility, harsh speech occurs between sisters, they should hasten to mutually seek one another's pardon and lighten their debts, because of the commandment of the Lord where he says: "If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath any thing against thee: Leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother: and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift" (Matt 5:23-24). And: "If you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences" (Matth 6:15). And again: "If he sin against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day be converted unto thee, saying, I repent, forgive him" (Lk 17:4). And: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but Until seventy times seven" (Matth. 18:22). And another Scripture: "For the anger of man worketh not the justice of God" (Jam 1:20) And the Apostle: "Let not the sun go down upon your anger" (Ephes 4:26). If, may God avert it, at the instigation of the devil, someone shall be filled up with fury to the point of scorning these commandments with an opinionated heart; and if one of those who are in discord comes in front of the other asking her pardon; if she who has been asked does not pardon her, she shall receive discipline so that

she may amend herself in charity. And if they both scorn each other, they will both equally be suspended from communion and meals, until they reconcile themselves.

11. If a sister dares to strike a sister, she shall be subject to discipline.

12. No sister shall have the authorisation to go out for an interview unless she is with the abbess or the prioress, or another elder who will have been chosen by the abbess. And when they thus see or speak with their relatives, they shall not speak in loud voices.

13. Slaves shall not be received; however, if she becomes enfranchised, and is of the age of an adolescent, and comes with a letter from her patron, the abbess will decide if she should be received.

14. Neither men nor secular women shall enter in the monastery, except in the basilica of St. Mary and in the parlour.

15. Even the provisors of the monastery, if they wear lay clothes, shall not be authorised to enter except for reasons which we indicate in the present rule: if a work or repair must be made, or for any other reason of the abbess, they shall enter with the masons or the carpenters. For the rest, they will have not authorisation or liberty to enter.

16. No-one shall take an infant in baptism.

17. Those to whom are entrusted the keys of the cellar, the loft, the store house, the back door and the oratory shall be proven persons; they will receive the keys on the altar or on the Gospel knowing that they will give an account to God of the ministry which was confided in them.

18. In all services, whether in the orders of psalmody or reading or working, the sisters will follow each other in turn of roles, except the holy abbess, the very elderly and the very small infants, as well as the unwell sisters absolutely incapable of getting up; they shall not be compelled to do that which they do not have the ability to do.

19. No sister shall choose from her own will the work to do; but they shall do that which the abbess has commanded.

20. During the manual work of all the day, they shall not cease meditation on the holy texts in their heart, because of that order of the Apostle: “in psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles, singing grace in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16).

21. No-one shall be permitted to call anything her own, or to claim anything for her own use; but, following the Acts of the Apostles, have all in common between you; have one single soul and one single heart in the Lord. (Act 4:32)

22. You will not wear clothing of any other colour if it is not natural or milky white.

23. At vigils, no-one shall sleep; but if it is a Sunday or a feast day, she to whom sleep will have come shall stand, the others staying seated, in order to be able to chase away the numbness of sleep lest she be found lukewarm or negligent during the office.

24. When the signal is given, all work shall be passed over and like most prudent bees to the beehive, you shall strain to hasten with rapid speed. If one comes more slowly, she shall be subject to a correction.

25. During the psalmody, let your holy souls strive not to wander in spirit, indeed they shall not presume to work or to speak, but “Sing ye wisely” (Ps 46:8) as the Prophet says: “will I sing; And I will understand” (Ps. 100:1-2). And again: “I will sing with the spirit, I will sing with the understanding” (I Cor. 14:15); fearing this: “Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully” (Jer. 48:10).

26. All shall learn to read.

27. The holy abbess shall not sleep apart from the community.

28. If someone is rebuked or receives discipline because of some fault or transgression of the rule, she shall not presume to respond by arguing, because the sin which is corrected here is not punished at the same time as the eternal judgement. And thus you ought to receive the cure for your soul as a sick person receives cure of a doctor; following these words of the Holy Gospel: “He that rejecteth instruction, despiseth his own soul” (Prov 15:32). And: “I am ready for scourges” (Ps 37:18).

29. Do not have quarrels, holding to the precept of the Apostle: “The servant of the Lord must not wrangle: but be mild towards all men” (II Tim 2:24).

30. As for the proud, the disobedient, and to those who drag out their anger, they must never be spared until they are corrected.

31. It is not permitted for the holy abbess to give or sell any of the goods of the monastery, nor to do anything against the dispositions of the rule. If she tries to do this, do not consent to

it, joined together in a holy assembly and in a unanimous sisterly accord from our permission; do not permit this to occur for any reason, as she will know that she will have to defend herself before God.

32. At the table, they shall be silent; reading shall be done each day the whole time that they take their meal. Each side of the man shall be restored, the external by food and the internal by the word of God, since it is written “Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God” (Deut 8:3; Matth 4:4).

33. Except for when illness requires it, the holy abbess should not take her meal outside of the community.

34. Meat should never be eaten.

35) Chicken or any other fowl shall not be served in the community; unless they are provided only for the ill or for sisters of delicate health. On certain feast days, or when the abbess wishes to give an indulgence, then fish shall be provided.

36) Outside of the common table, no other food or drink shall be enjoyed, except for the sick and those who are minors.

37. It is necessary to take into account the desires of the unwell; so that if the holy abbess judges it to be right, having examined it, they will even have their own small cellar and kitchen in common; they shall be treated with devotion until they are restored.

38. The community will recite the daily and nocturnal cursus of the office, that is, matins, vigils, nocturns, vespers and the office of the twelfth hour in the basilica of Saint Mary. If winter is harsh, they shall say only matins, vespers and the office of the twelfth hour in the above-mentioned basilica, but the second hour, terce, sext, and none in the interior oratory because of those who desire to pray or wish to meet with the abbess or pay a visit to their parents. When a sister dies, a few sisters shall keep vigil in the oratory until midnight, and shall make a series of readings from the Apostles. After midnight, those who kept vigil shall rest, and others keep vigil in their turn. You shall inform the holy bishop, so that he may give the order to transport her into the place of her interment.

39. And since by gracious God worthy and sufficient resources have been conferred to you, which are able to supply your monastery, I warn and admonish you, holy abbess, and you venerable prioress, whoever you may be, in the presence of God and his angels, that you shall

provide the holy congregation who, by the inspiration and order of God, live regularly following the institutes which we have made, with all that is needed for them in clothing and other necessities. If you neglect this and they unite to murmur or to need something, compelled by necessity, know that you will have to justify yourselves with me before the tribunal of Christ.

40. And you, holy community, I beseech you for your progress and by God all-powerful to keep in full and without lessening all that we have established in this rule for the remedy of our soul and the health of your souls. And, so it is never neglected by forgetting it, reread the rule once a month, that is, at the Calends, and thus twelve times a year.

We have judged that we should insert in this little book the following ordinance by which you should sing the psalms.

41. The first day of Easter, at Terce, you shall say three Kyrie Eleisons and 12 psalms: that is, four sisters will each say two psalms plus a third alleluia. After the psalms, Kyrie Eleison and six antiphons; three readings; one from the Acts of the Apostles, the other from the Apostle, the third from the Gospel; the hymn *Iam surgit hora tertia* and the verse; then Kyrie Eleison. Thus, at all offices of God, say three Kyrie Eleisons: before starting, after the psalms and after the verse. At Sext, the same number of psalms, an antiphon, and the hymn *Iam sexta sensim volvitur*, the reading from the Gospel, and the verse. At None, keep the same ordinance; with the hymn: *Ter hora trina volvitur*. At Lucernaire, the section of the psalm in the direct fashion, that is: “Sing to God, ye kingdoms of the earth” (Ps 67:33) and the following day: “Praise the Lord, ye children” (Ps. 112:1); three antiphons, the hymn *Hic est dies versus Dei*, and the verse. Recite this hymn during all of the Paschal week at matins and at Lucernaire. At the twelfth hour, first, the section of the psalm in the direct fashion: “The sun knoweth his going down” (Ps 103:19). Six sisters shall each recite two psalms with their alleluias, three antiphons, two readings, one from the Apostle, the other from the Gospel. At nocturns in the Easter week, say all the elements of the office followed by the number which we have indicated for the twelfth hour.

At matins, first, in the direct fashion: “I will extol thee, O God my king” (Ps. 144) Then: “Judge me, O God” (Ps 42) and “O God, my God, to thee do I watch at the break of day” (Ps 62) with alleluia. Then “Give praise to the Lord” (Ps 117) with alleluia, then “Let us sing to the Lord” (Ex 15) in the same manner. Following: “Praise the Lord, O my soul”; “Praise ye the Lord, because psalm is good”; “Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem” (Ps 145-147), all three with

alleluias; then the Benediction of the three infants is said (Dan 3:57-88). After the Benediction: “Praise ye the Lord from the Heavens”; “Sing ye to the Lord a new canticle”; “Praise ye the Lord in his holy places” (Ps 148-150) with antiphons or with alleluias; the hymn *Gloria in excelsis deo*, and the verse. And finish the matins following this ordinance during the whole of the Easter week. The same for all Sundays and for all the principal feasts where you do not have to work. On ordinary days, at nocturns, say first, in the direct fashion: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy” (Ps 50) then 18 psalms, three small antiphons, two readings from the Apostle or the prophets, and the verse.

Once the nocturns are finished, say matins. In summer, that is, after Easter and until the calends of October, keep this same disposition. On Friday, after the nocturns, say two series of readings in summer, three in winter. For Sunday, in all seasons, summer as in winter, you should have six series of readings after nocturns. If it occurs that you rise late for vigils, read only what the abbess will decide. When she gives the signal, the reader will rise without being late so that the number of canons in the series of readings will be assured. From the calends of October, we add other nocturns. At first, say: “Have mercy on men, O God, according to your great mercy” (Ps 50); at seconds, say “Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy” (Ps 56) in the direct fashion, then 18 psalms; two readings from the Prophets or from Solomon. Hymn for the first nocturns: *Rex aeterne domine*. For the second: *Magna et mirabilia*. The nocturns ended, as the nights get longer, each day you shall do four series of readings from the book. One sister will read three or four pages, according to the dimensions of the book. If it is written finely, or in a large format, three pages; if it is small, four; and perform an oration; She shall read as much again, making another oration; she shall read as much again a third time, and then you shall stand up say an antiphon, taking it from the Psalter, then a response, then an antiphon. Another sister will read in her turn; and one the three series of readings are accomplished, say the canonical psalms of matins, that is first the canticle antiphon, then, in the direct fashion, ‘Judge me, O God’ (Ps 42); “O God, my God, to thee do I watch at the break of day” (Ps. 62); “Praise the Lord, O my soul”; “Praise ye the Lord, because psalm is good”; “Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem” (Ps 145-147). Again “Praise ye the Lord from the Heavens”; “Sing ye to the Lord a new canticle” (Ps 148-149); “Praise ye the Lord in his holy places” (Ps. 150), antiphonally. With hymn *Splendor paternae gloriae*; the following day *Aeternae lucis conditor*; then the verse and the Kyrie Eleison twelve times. It is thus that the office is accomplished on ordinary days.

After the matins, at prime, say six psalms; the hymn *Fulgentis auctor aetheris*, two readings, one from the Old Testament and the other from the New Testament, and the verse. After this, all shall devote themselves to reading until the third hour; the rest of the day they shall do their work, according to what the Lord said: “My Father worketh until now; and I work” (Jn 5:17) And this word of the Apostle: “Working with our own hands” (I Cor 4:12), and “If any man wil not work, neither let him eat” (II Thess 3:10). For it is written: “The way of the slothful is as a hedge of thorns” (Prov: 15.19) and “And the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness” (Matth 25:30).

On ordinary days, at Terce, say six psalms, an antiphon, the hymn *Iam surgit hora tertia*, a reading and the verse *Fiat domine*. At Sext, perform the same number of psalms, an antiphon the hymn *Iam sexta sensim volvitur*, a reading and the verse. At none, follow the same ordinance, but with the hymn *Ter hora trina volvitur*. At Lucernaire, in all seasons, and on feast days, and ordinary days, first the psalm in the direct fashion, then two antiphons; the third will always be said with an alleluia; with the hymn one day *Deus qui certis legibus*, the other day *Deus creator omnium*; and the verse. At the twelfth hour, 18 psalms, an antiphon, the hymn, a reading and a verse. When you go to bed, in the schola, in the place where you rest, you shall say complines; first in the direct fashion, say psalm 90, then the customary verses.

42. From Christmas until the Epiphany, rise at the third hour of the night recite a nocturn and make six series of readings from the Prophet Isaiah; say again a second nocturn and read another six series of readings from the Gospel. At the Epiphany equally: first a nocturn, then do six series of readings from the Prophet Daniel, and the nocturns; and the same six series drawn from the Gospel. The matins follow the ordinance which we have described for Easter and Sundays. At feasts of the Martyrs, do three or four series of readings. Read the first series from the Gospel, the others from the passions of the martyrs. All Fridays, after the office of the twelfth hour, read six series of readings from the book, and three after nocturns. Each Saturday at matins “Let us to the Lord” (Ex 15) and *Te Deum Laudamus*. At Terce, three readings, one from the prophets, another from the Apostle, the third from the Gospel. Each Sunday, after nocturns, when you read the first series of lectures, that is from the Resurrection, no-one is permitted to sit, but all must stand. The following Sunday, another reading from the Resurrection, and so you shall read in order all of the four accounts of the Resurrection, Sunday after Sunday. After terce, say the Our Father, and all shall receive

communion while singing. Act the same on feast days; as for the Mass, it will take place when the holy abbess judges it to be opportune.

43. We have also inserted here in this rule the manner of meals. Each day there will be three dishes at a single meal (on the days of the fast), or two at lunch and two at supper. For drinks: at the sole meal in summer, in the months of July and August, three cups of hot drink, or three at lunch and two at supper in all seasons. At feasts and when the abbess wishes to grant an indulgence, she shall prescribe as many dishes as she wishes, and add sweetened iced wine. On ordinary days, they will always prepare dishes with legumes, cheese, and oil. As for the fast, the Calends of September to the Calends of November shall have fasts on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. From the Calends of November until Christmas, you shall fast each day, except Saturday and Sunday. From Epiphany until Easter, feast each day, except for grand feast days, Saturday and Sunday. After Easter, until Pentecost, fast only on Friday. After Pentecost, in the months of June, July and August, the Abbess will have the power to decide if they fast or if they have lunch; she shall enforce the rule of fasting following the ability of the sisters.

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