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Images of Sanctity: Contrasting Descriptions of Radegund by Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours

Bonnie Effros

The type of imagery utilized by Gregory of Tours (c.540 - 594) and Venantius Fortunatus (c.530 - c.610) makes evident their contrasting attitudes towards sanctity, stemming from their education and consequently their goals in writing. Both late Roman authors were intimately acquainted with Saint Radegund of Poitiers (518-587); their description of her provides a common ground on which to compare the two writers' use of holy imagery.¹ The small but growing gap between what one might consider late antique and early medieval attitudes is reinforced by drawing attention to the specific differences in these two men's definitions and descriptions of sanctity, or in other words, their ability to accomplish what Peter Brown terms: "the emotional feat of turning the *summum malum* of physical death into that into which all that is beautiful and refined in the life of their age can be condensed."² Fortunatus portrays Radegund more traditionally as holy primarily as a result of a God-given gift of a very personal brand of self-humbling piety, linked to the efficacy of her private ascetic devotions as well as her activities as a worker of miracles.³ In contrast, Gregory consistently identifies the source and affirmation of Radegund's piety as her acquisition of the Holy Cross for her convent, pointing to his confidence in the growing centrality of relics in the public lives of devout Christians.⁴

Indeed Gregory's and Fortunatus's depiction of Radegund has been in part shaped by their choice of literary

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genre. Fortunatus's references to Radegund occur in her *vita*, as well as in the poems he dedicates to Radegund and the abbess Agnes. As a result of the detailed and expressive nature of these literary forms, one senses immediately the intimate relationship between poet and subject. Fortunatus devotes prolonged attention to even the most private aspects of her life. In assessing the veracity of his treatment, however, one must recognize that a *vita* requires the repetition of certain *topoi* appropriate to the life of a leading abbess and geared to the needs of an audience, as it might be read publicly on the saint's day.⁵ Thus rather than pointing to inaccuracies in Fortunatus's work, which stem from his depiction of her solely as an ascetic and miracle-worker, Sabine Gaebe instead suggests that one should focus on the details themselves which Fortunatus employs to instruct the faithful.⁶ Jacques Fontaine indeed proposes that Fortunatus models his account of Radegund closely on Sulpicius Severus's *Life of Saint Martin*, a logical choice as the text wielded much influence and served as a prototype for the Merovingian concept of sanctity.⁷ Moreover, Fortunatus draws no link in Radegund's *Vita* between the saint and the Holy Cross. Thus, while Fortunatus has relative flexibility in terms of degree of historical accuracy and the number of exemplars from which he may formulate Radegund's *Vita*, the imagery itself is part of a longstanding hagiographical tradition. Similarly, the second genre selected by Fortunatus, his numerous poems which recite the praises of his benefactress Radegund, give him the opportunity, for instance, to employ late antique imagery of virginity in her portrayal. Free from the constraints of the *vita*, in which he chose to portray her solely as an ascetic and a worker of miracles, here he may describe his benefactress and her association with powerful symbols of sanctity.⁸

In contrast, Gregory's references to Radegund occur primarily in brief notices in the ten books of his *History of the Franks*, as well as in his hagiographical works the *Glory of the Confessors* and the *Glory of the Martyrs*. With the exception of Gregory's account of the uprising at Poitiers (589) and two miraculous visions, the passages referring to Radegund's lifetime in his *History* are largely terse and confined to a minimum number of details. Gregory appears to indicate that other more mundane aspects of the life of the former queen and monastic foundress have little interest for him. Walter Goffart attributes Gregory's lopsided approach to an, "inverted rationalism [which] appears to have been his

derivation of meaning from random unpredictable events, perceived by his own and audience's senses."⁹ To be certain, the scope of Gregory's historical text does not permit him the freedom to elaborate extensively on any one subject. Gregory nevertheless devotes a disproportionate amount of space to the uprising of the convent of the Holy Cross at Poitiers two years following Radegund's death; it represents more time than he concedes to all other aspects of her life. Clearly, his *History*, which typically focuses on the scandalous and the miraculous is not devoid of bias in its choice of imagery in describing Radegund.

In contrast to his historical work, the rich detail of the funeral of Radegund in Gregory's *Glory of the Confessors* and descriptions of the power of Radegund's fragment of the Holy Cross in *Glory of the Martyrs*, convey a more intimate and lasting image of the elements of Radegund's sanctity. In these hagiographical and miraculous accounts, Gregory exercises greater latitude in choosing how he wishes to portray Radegund's holiness. Free from the constraints of narrating contemporary events with some sense of chronology, historical accuracy and purpose, as required in his *History*, Gregory proves himself willing to create in Radegund a powerful point of reference to the holy by portraying her impact particularly on religious women.¹⁰ By emphasizing the power of Radegund's holiness, as justified by her acquisition of a portion of the Cross, Gregory points to the growing status of relics as intercessors in Merovingian Gaul. By linking Radegund closely with the the Holy Cross rather than an ascetic lifestyle, Gregory demonstrates that the saint herself is worthy of veneration by his Christian audience after her death.

Thus, while comparing these two descriptions of Radegund's sanctity, inherent stylistic differences determine to some extent the content of each man's account of Radegund. Yet a study of the nature of the imagery of the holy also thrives on the conscious selection by authors of modes of communication. The various degrees of freedom accorded to both Fortunatus and Gregory in their choice of style of composition directly reflect their educational background and the basis for sanctity which they are accustomed to conveying. Fortunatus, the product of a classical education at Ravenna, shows himself devoted to a late antique portrayal of the personal achievements of Radegund, as opposed to Gregory's loyalty to his more limited and local religious training, as well as to the Merovingian obsession with relics

and their ability to provide access to the heavenly sphere. Rather than the corresponding accuracy of each author's depiction of Radegund, what remain important are the inherent differences between the two authors' portrayal of the holy woman and how that may enhance our understanding of sanctity in the sixth century. Despite the many disparities between the two authors and their texts, the works of Gregory and Fortunatus both recognize the sanctity of their subject and the importance of glorifying her example.

* * *

Fortunatus and Gregory know Radegund personally only after her entrance into the cloister, and both are well acquainted with her convent of the Holy Cross. Indeed Fortunatus, following his classical education in the schools of Ravenna, arrives eventually at Poitiers after a stay of approximately two years at the Austrasian court circa 566 and then Tours.¹¹ Fortunatus states in a poem that he remains at Poitiers at Radegund's insistence; they develop a close relationship in which Radegund and the abbess Agnes provide the poet with their gifts and prayers in exchange for his assistance as a sort of secretary and representative in temporal matters.¹² Some have called into question the nature of this interchange as inappropriate for women of a religious house under Caesaria's *Rule*, and find the lavish feasts provided by the nuns for Fortunatus as inconsistent with especially Radegund's apparent asceticism.¹³ Sabine Gaebe instead interprets her role here as a royal patroness; despite Fortunatus's penchant for writing flattering poetry about his benefactors, Radegund must fulfill her obligations as a former queen.¹⁴ Fortunatus clearly gains satisfaction from his close to twenty years of friendship with the religious women Radegund and Agnes; his consistent and prolific composition of poems in their praise indicates the depth of their mutual admiration. Yet perhaps their close association may also be understood as not only an element of the early Merovingian aristocratic cloister, but also a result of Fortunatus's desire to establish himself as a humble pupil or disciple of a woman whom he deems to be so holy. Not only does the poet address Radegund as his spiritual mother, but he indicates that her intercession and the prayers of the nuns earn him celestial favor.¹⁵

Soon after the saint's death, Fortunatus writes his account of her life, devoting the bulk of his narrative to the

ascetic nature of her personality. Portraying her sanctity as a direct consequence of the personal zeal and innate humility of the former Merovingian queen, he purposely relies on few other aspects of her personality or activities, unlike the descriptions of her in his poetry or in Baudonivia's version of Radegund's *Life*. Surprisingly enough, in his *Life* of Radegund, Fortunatus fails to mention even once her acquisition of a fragment of the Holy Cross from Constantinople in circa 569, a central event in the development of the reputation of her convent. His poems praising the Holy Cross as well as its benefactors Justin II and Sophia, however, indicate his pleasure with the powerful gift.¹⁶ One may only surmise that this omission stems from the poet's desire to heighten the effect of Radegund's sanctity, as well as to divorce her name from the political aspects of the diplomacy necessary to gain the relic.¹⁷ By eliminating in his prose account direct competition between her achievements and the Holy Cross, or any association of her with worldly matters, he centers all attention on the power of the saint's persistent devotions.

Besides Fortunatus's apparent desire to omit mention of the ceremony at which the Holy Cross enters the convent, his text also lacks a description of Radegund's funeral in 587. Gregory, who describes both of these occasions in detail, makes no mention of Fortunatus's presence at either of these events. An explanation might lie partly in the absence of Fortunatus's name from Gregory's works in general, apart from references to his compositions, and thus does not constitute reason enough to doubt Fortunatus's presence from what would have been two wonderful opportunities for his public recitation of verse. It does not seem likely that Fortunatus is ignorant of these events but rather that he specifically chooses not to include them in Radegund's *Life*. Fortunatus's image of Radegund's seclusion, especially after her entrance into the cloister, would have been jarred by the contrasting public nature of the two events. In addition, Fortunatus's failure to mention any miracles performed at Radegund's tomb, might be accounted for by his composition of this tribute to the holiness of his close friend and spiritual guide very soon after her death, perhaps in an effort to dispel ill effects of the bishop of Poitiers Maroveus's refusal to conduct her funeral. Moreover, while in mourning, Fortunatus must have found it difficult to portray the glory of his close friend's death. He instead stresses the personal and active nature of her sanctity as a woman of good works,

as opposed to Gregory, who instead sees Radegund's sanctity established with greater certainty by her death.

Gregory of Tours describes in his historical and hagiographical works primarily the more public events associated with Radegund's life, as well as a few miscellaneous details which coincide with his narration of other subjects. As would be expected of any member of a powerful Merovingian family, he has at least basic familiarity with the details of the life of the foundress of abbey of the Holy Cross. Radegund had many years before established her role as benefactress and pilgrim at the tomb of Saint Martin; soon after the time of her consecration as deaconess, Fortunatus explains that she had taken ship from Noyon to Tours to pay her respects to the holy sites associated with the saint.¹⁸ Moreover, Gregory recognizes the protective relationship taken by his diocese for Radegund's convent, as his predecessor Euphronius had assisted Radegund on a few occasions. In addition to signing the petition granting recognition of her foundation and its adherence to Caesaria's *Rule*, Euphronius had partaken in the installation of the relic of the Holy Cross, when Maroveus had also declined to participate.¹⁹ Gregory's personal association with Radegund and her convent, however, dates from no earlier than the time of his accession to his see at Tours in 573. Although Poitiers lies outside of the jurisdiction of the diocese of Tours, Gregory like his predecessor feels the need to act as bishop on behalf of Radegund as a result of the unwillingness of Maroveus to play any role whatsoever in the lives of the nuns. Thus, besides his involvement in a number of the more mundane affairs of the convent implied by Fortunatus, Gregory travels to Poitiers at the time of Radegund's death, for Maroveus does not even wish to aid in consecrating and burying her body at the funeral.²⁰

Two elements rapidly become evident in describing Gregory's depiction of the holy as embodied by Radegund. Gregory consistently substantiates Radegund's piety by relying solely on other individuals' testimony, as opposed to Fortunatus's personal approach in describing Radegund's devout behavior. While to some extent, one might explain this portrayal in terms of Gregory's less personal and more official relationship with Radegund, a certain reluctance to jeopardize his own status by defending the holy nature of a somewhat controversial figure becomes clear. Gregory, who devotes a disproportionate amount of time to describing the uprising at Radegund's convent two years after her death,

does not wish to mire himself too deeply in defending the saint's reputation. As an example, Gregory's first reference to Radegund in his *History* simply states that she was, "famous for her prayers, vigils and her charities, and she became so well known that the common people looked upon her as saint."²¹ Rather than give specific proof to substantiate Radegund's holiness, Gregory relies on a simple formulation of her activities and cites her popularity among the uneducated. Furthermore, at the time of the saint's funeral, Gregory notes the weeping of the nuns and phrases the account of her great sanctity primarily through their voices. On this occasion demoniacs also acknowledge her holiness by screaming that she is torturing them.²² Empowered by the devil, the possessed in Gregory's works have a second sight by which to confirm the presence of the holy. Similarly, in his account of the demoniac who earlier came to be cured at the convent by the relic of the Holy Cross, he alone shouts and announces to the nuns that the holy Disciola has died and gone to heaven.²³ Although his inclusion of these events in themselves represent an impersonal recognition of Radegund's holiness, separating her distinctly from the subsequent events which mar the reputation of the convent and all associated, the power of these images is somewhat lessened by the nature of their telling.

The second aspect of Gregory's depiction of Radegund becomes clear in his closing line on the saint in *The Glory of the Confessors*. When describing the display of grief by the nuns at Radegund's funeral, Gregory states: "Such grief overwhelmed my breast that I would not have stopped weeping if I did not realize that the blessed Radegund had departed from her convent in body but not in power, and that she had been taken from the world and placed in heaven."²⁴ Gregory thus finally acknowledges Radegund's sanctity, yet phrases this recognition in terms of the benefits for the convent and in fact all of Gaul through her holiness. Certainly this imagery is not uncommon for Gregory, who thus concludes his work on the martyrs:

So also you, if you manfully and firmly place the sign of salvation on your forehead or your chest, then by resisting vices you will be considered a martyr. For the martyrs themselves achieved their victories not by their own strength but with the assistance of God through the most glorious sign of the cross.

As I have often said, the Lord himself struggles and triumphs in the martyrs. Therefore it is necessary for us to seek the patronage of the martyrs, so that we might be worthy to be helped by their assistance.²⁵

Gregory envisions a cosmos in which the holy provide access points by which the ordinary may themselves achieve heaven. He tells of Radegund's sanctity in order that others may acknowledge her achievement; he sanctions their use of her powerful heavenly status, for she too during her lifetime recognized the divine force of the Holy Cross in her convent. Rendering more potent his depiction of Radegund as the Helena of Gaul in both faith and merit, her acquisition and appropriate treatment of the fragment of this most important relic constitute a great act of piety and heighten her status in the eyes of Gregory. While he recognizes the shortfalls of his own education and thus inability to properly describe these events, he finds the holiness of his subject so powerful that it overrides these fears.²⁶ Gregory's description of the miracles conducted by the Holy Cross at Radegund's convent implies his acceptance of the relic's satisfactory placement at the meritorious sanctuary where it receives its due honor.²⁷ One might hold this divinely sanctioned defense of Radegund's sanctity in some ways to be even more powerful and universal than Fortunatus's description of Radegund's personal devotion as an ascetic.

Fortunatus creates an image of a strong-willed woman dedicated to her faith, trying the patience of her violent captor and husband by distributing parts of their meal and objects of her own clothing to the poor. Chlotar complains that Radegund has acted in their marriage not as a wife but a nun; she meekly tolerates his arguments yet does not submit to the changes he demands. Moreover, with her escape to Saint Medard of Soissons, Radegund provokes the bishop with strong words to consecrate her as deaconess, despite his hesitation to anger Clothar by this affront.²⁸ The subject of Fortunatus's account is not a woman who does anything halfheartedly, and his honest portrayal of Radegund's stubborn fortitude lends a sense of heightened realism to his narrative. More than simply providing a description of the personality of Radegund, however, Fortunatus emphasizes the necessary persistence of the queen in renouncing her worldly status in order to attain a heavenly one. Fortunatus states that the glory of God manifests itself even in the weak ves-

sel of the female sex through merit and faith.²⁹ Thus, the strength and zeal with which Radegund overcomes these numerous physical obstacles to achieve a life of chastity and sanctity become symbolic of the divine sanction of her mission. Fortunatus provides no instances of Radegund's personal indecision or inner struggle, but instead demonstrates that not only does Radegund seek holiness, but also that God's will alone has brought about her ability and desire to do so.

Fortunatus symbolically delineates Radegund's roles as queen, disperser of charity, and, finally as a religious woman who has taken her vows, through his description of her interaction with clothing. As a young girl, Radegund cleans the floor of the oratory of Chlotar's villa with her dress, soiling her royal clothing with dust from the threshold of the Lord.³⁰ Radegund thus gravitates early to the holy and attempts to incorporate a physical sign of this commitment onto her being. Moreover, as a young queen, Radegund receives instruction from a religious woman Pia to wear goatskin under her royal clothing as part of her penance during Lent.³¹ Fortunatus suggests that while she still appears a worldly figure to her husband and those around her, Radegund has already begun to cleanse her inner soul in preparation for her holy profession. Fortunatus employs especially powerful imagery to illustrate Radegund's radical transition from queen to deaconess. As Saint Medard remains reluctant to consecrate her, she appears in the church already dressed in her new religious costume.³² Radegund herself has taken the active role in exchanging her queenly clothing for vestments of white;³³ the bishop may only sanctify what has already occurred. Culminating with her donation of all her clothing and jewels to the altar and the poor on that day, Radegund's bodily transformation is complete.

Fortunatus frequently portrays Radegund giving over her lavish royal clothing as if they represent vestments for the altar. Indeed he states that whenever Radegund receives praise for a new linen shawl encrusted with precious stones, indicating her great wealth, she removes and bears the clothing to the nearest holy place.³⁴ There she gives the clothing as an offering, thus recognizing the appropriate place for such finery to be the altar and not herself. Moreover, Fortunatus emphasizes the new role that Radegund will play now that she has renounced her role as worldly queen and enters into the kingdom of Christ who reigns forever. For in the heavenly sphere: "There is a palace there of topaz, with

gates of emerald, in which the lintels are decorated with precious stones."³⁵ On the head of every virgin who enters these gates, Christ places: "a radiant crown set with beryls intermixed with white emeralds; a hair-band the color of amethyst tied around her brilliant hair, which falls loosely upon her collar decorated with pearls."³⁶ Clearly Radegund gives up worldly riches for the much more powerful and everlasting riches of heaven. This sacrifice is made not only by herself, but later, once she has founded her convent, by the wealthy and powerful young girls who enter this sacred place.

While Gregory does not employ royal imagery in relation to Radegund's holy profession, he illustrates her divinely bestowed grace at the time of her funeral by stating that her face shines more brightly than lilies and roses. He describes how the abbess Agnes wraps Radegund's body in so many spices that a larger casket is necessary, one formed of two tombs joined together by removing the one side of each.³⁷ While her burial in this manner is probably necessary as a result of the length of time which passes between her death and the arrival of Gregory from Tours to perform the service, Gregory omits mention of this difficulty.³⁸ Instead, the saintly aroma of Radegund's body becomes not merely spiritually but also physically overpowering to all present. Gregory narrates that the nuns of the convent cry out on this occasion that, "when we saw your glorious face [that of Radegund] we found there gold and silver; there we saw blossoming vineyards, waving cornfields and meadows blooming with a variety of different flowers. From you we picked violets; for us, you were a glowing red rose and a brilliant lily."³⁹ While Gregory's description is not as eloquent as Fortunatus's, in the nuns' eyes as well as Gregory's, Radegund represents the means by which these nuns receive their encouragement and example. Choosing flowers and fertile fields to describe the holiness of the saint, they emphasize by these images not only the red of martyrdom, the purple of heavenly royalty and the fragrant bouquet of sanctity and purity, but also the rich fruit that this woman has borne.

Fortunatus, whose poems about Radegund do not allude frequently to the blessed aroma and colors of roses, lilies and violets, explains more specifically, however, the nature of her fertility. Likening the flowers received by the nuns now to the ones they will receive in heaven, Fortunatus describes Radegund as a most blessed gardener. Because she has renounced the ability to bear children of her own blood, and

has dedicated herself to devout chastity, she plants seeds in the persons of the young girls, the very nuns who blossom before Gregory's eyes at her funeral.⁴⁰ Blossoms and fertility similarly constitute powerful themes for Fortunatus in relation to the Holy Cross, which he describes as a tree which bears new fruit and protects with its shade.⁴¹ Both Fortunatus and particularly Gregory recognize that by constructing the walls of her sheltering convent and acquiring a piece of this holy wood for her nuns, Radegund seeks to ensure through powerful means both the sanctity and fertility of her creation.

In returning again to the importance of Radegund's status as queen and then royal foundress, one must recognize the power, flexibility and relative freedom that this position affords to her. Radegund's role as a woman of wealth devoted to the poor through charity and the freeing of prisoners justifies her access to worldly power in the eyes of Fortunatus and Gregory. For the two men being recipients of her generosity recognize the necessity of patronage; wealth and influence used appropriately do not constitute a source of criticism. Even so, Fortunatus plays down the role of Radegund's status and defends her just use of wealth frequently in her *Vita*, most likely in order to refute future criticisms of the former queen. At her consecration, as well as at numerous other times, she makes donations to local churches and monasteries, including Saint Martin's at Tours.⁴² Furthermore, Radegund on a number of occasions before entering the convent succors the poor with various forms of wealth. For instance, on the occasion of her consecration as deaconess discussed above, the saint has her weighty gold girdle crushed and distributed to the poor.⁴³ In fact, she often gives clothing to the poor, because she recognizes, "that the limbs underneath poor clothing are protected by Christ: believing that what she did not give to the poor was lost."⁴⁴ Radegund acts as a patroness of captives as well, her intercession on their behalf taking both a practical and religious form: Fortunatus states that before entering the cloister she uses her influence to appeal directly to the king for the condemned. In another instance, the chains of the imprisoned break in response to her recitation of the psalms.⁴⁵ As Michael Wallace-Hadrill makes clear, Radegund does not condone the crimes that these men have committed, but rather exercises appropriate charity when the opportunity arises.⁴⁶

Fortunatus, unlike Gregory, devotes much time to a description of Radegund's penitent behavior. Before becoming a

nun, Radegund does not seek to impose her ascetic lifestyle on those around her; frequently she gives to the hungry the very food from which she has abstained, and on other occasions she provides lepers with banquets while she herself retreats to pray in another room.⁴⁷ According to Fortunatus, her generosity and sanctity make her very popular among the people of Poitiers; great crowds gather in the streets and on the rooftops of the buildings of the city in order to be present on the day she enters the convent.⁴⁸ Gregory confirms her holy reputation and generosity by stating that among the nuns, clerics and even possessed, none present on the day of her funeral are able to desist from weeping profusely.⁴⁹ Fortunatus's description of the ritualized asceticism of Radegund becomes especially prolific after her entrance into the cloister. He regards her austerity as a manifestation of her personal responsibility for the well-being of her soul, and in a sense these descriptions fill the vacuum left by her inability to fulfill her former active role in relation to the poor and ailing, now that she is cloistered. Disturbing in their harshness, her acts of humility include harsh fasts, tortures with metal wires and self-inflicted burns.⁵⁰ Fortunatus in his *Life* stresses her holiness and activities within the convent, conflicting with his poems describing the feasts provided for him by Radegund and Agnes, as well as Baudonivia's more practical account of Radegund's activities as the Helena of Gaul in her acquisition of the Cross.⁵¹ As discussed earlier, this discrepancy must be interpreted as Fortunatus's desire to separate Radegund from the mundane and the worldly in his more directed and somewhat formulaic *vita* of this ascetic. Moreover, he seeks to depict her, especially after her profession as a nun, as powerful as a result of her pristine sanctity alone, and not due to her association with either royalty or relic.

Both Fortunatus's and Gregory's accounts of Radegund bear repeated reference to acts of purification rendered by the saint. More than simple emphasis on the nature of the Radegund's pristine nature, which signifies her inner sanctity, the precise details of her devotion to the cleanliness of sacred objects around her indicate the authors' desire to show both her recognition of and respect for the holy, as well as a certain sense of responsibility appropriate to a royal foundress. Fortunatus describes in great detail the constant attention of the saint even as a young girl to the purity of the oratory of Chlotar's royal villa: she polishes the floor of the sanctuary with her own clothing and gathers the dust

from the altar, collecting these grains with great reverence.⁵² Indeed, this image might indicate to the reader simply a young girl's desire to "play house" and indeed imitate her elders, yet Fortunatus purposefully demonstrates this act to be a result of Radegund's own initiative in recognizing her religious responsibilities. Radegund's actions echo the liturgical practice of a cleric cleaning the altar with the maniple of his vestments.⁵³ Moreover, because she is able to collect some amount of dust, Fortunatus indicates the failure of a cleric to fulfill this duty. Despite her companion, the young cleric Samuel, who assists her in the religious processions she leads through the villa, her activities in the oratory appear to be completely independent. Not only does Fortunatus seek to portray Radegund's poignant dedication to the holy, but he also prefigures the nature of the future abbess in her innocence by portraying a young girl, indeed a blessed vessel, with clothing worthy of comparison to sacred vestments.

Fortunatus links Radegund's desire to purify most frequently with her care for the poor and her cures of the ill early in her life. Far from being miraculous, the saint's activities in washing the hair and bodies of the impoverished and the ailing as well as applying salve to their wounds, indicate the depths of her humility and dedication to the apostolic ideal. Her physical contact with the ill brings the holy into direct association with suffering.⁵⁴ She ministers to even lepers, whom she feeds and clothes in addition to tending their ulcers. By likening her treatment of the lesions of her impoverished charges to anointing with evangelical oil, Fortunatus clearly wishes to establish the holiness and purity of Radegund in the midst of inconceivable need.⁵⁵ Moreover, her loving treatment of her charges by washing and applying salve transforms the lowliest of tasks into a symbolic ritual of baptizing and sanctifying.

Worthy of note too is the change which occurs with Radegund's monastic profession. As Radegund's confinement within the walls of her foundation and obedience to Caesaria's *Rule* represent official recognition of her holy intentions and orthodoxy, Fortunatus now feels justified in utilizing powerful imagery in relation to her healing powers.⁵⁶ Caesaria's *Rule* enjoins that the sick be bathed when necessary,⁵⁷ thus Fortunatus feels confident in portraying many of her cures through the cleansing or bathing of the ill as miraculous. The nun Animia, in one instance, who suffers from dropsy, a condition involving an excess of humours,

dreams of Radegund lowering her into an empty bath; upon awakening she finds herself completely cured of her illness. Similarly, Radegund revives from the dead a young infant by cleansing her in warm water.⁵⁸ Fortunatus indicates thus, that Radegund is able to transmit the healing power of inner purity through both the physical and symbolic cleansing of her charges. Furthermore, Fortunatus's account illustrates Radegund's dedication to cleanliness manifesting itself in other ways as well within the convent. For Radegund engages in the most ordinary as well as the most vile of tasks with no hesitation, cleansing vegetables for the convent's simple meals, washing and tending to the courtyards of the convent, cleaning and oiling the shoes of her fellow nuns while they sleep, and even carrying out the foul-smelling dung which must have been an ever present concern within the walls of the cloister.⁵⁹ In all of these duties which Radegund takes upon herself, she abhors an audience, seeking instead to perform these activities in humility and silence. In addition to providing a fascinating window into the more practical and seldom visible aspects of conventual life, Fortunatus engages his audience with easily identifiable tasks which they themselves would probably confront daily. His imagery succeeds in both emphasizing the humility of a woman who might have remained queen as well as elevating the status of the performance of mundane and abhorrent tasks in the monastery. Fortunatus has again transformed these humble acts into an affirmation of piety; the acts themselves have gained some sort of liturgical significance in the daily ritual of Radegund's life. The reader must conceal disappointment that after Radegund's funeral, when the nuns of the convent display to Gregory her prayer mat, book, and spindle, all of which remind the nuns of her holy profession, they do not also show him her broom or cleaning rags.⁶⁰

Gregory, who avoids most reference to the mundane activities of Radegund, appropriately provides a more symbolic account of Radegund's powers as a purifying force in the life of the convent. The bishop narrates the account of the death of the holy nun Disciola in Radegund's convent; a possessed man shouts that he sees her body being escorted to heaven by the archangel Michael. The holiness of the nun is reaffirmed by the fact that even Radegund cannot find a winding sheet as white as the chastity of the deceased nun.⁶¹ In this manner, Gregory demonstrates that the purity of heavenly holiness transcends even the purest of worldly objects, including those possessed by Radegund. Furthermore, Gregory also re-

lates that another nun of the same convent dreams that she has drunk from the well of living water and meets Radegund nearby this river. Radegund strips from the nun all her clothing and dresses her in a shining queenly robe.⁶² In this way, Gregory conveys a powerful image of the role Radegund plays among her nuns, not merely as an example of sanctity and humility, but also in the same manner that a relic would function, as the intermediary between her charges and salvation. Thus Gregory states that the nun upon waking asks to be enclosed permanently in her cell so that she might dedicate herself to reading and prayer. Symbolically cleansing her of her worldly attachments, Radegund provides the nun with the means of achieving even greater purity by her own merit.

This construction of a double set of walls--a sealed cell within the cloister--presents a disturbing image for the reader. For the anonymous nun seeks a piety even greater than she is able to find at the convent, yet hesitates to abandon the physical and spiritual protection afforded by its walls. According to *Caesaria's Rule*, no nun may leave the convent once professed;⁶³ consequently she must adapt in this manner to the environment in which she is committed to stay for the rest of her lifetime. Although the *Rule* states that no nun may have a private cell,⁶⁴ the Byzantine practice of a nun sealing herself within her cell represents an even higher level of sanctity, and is not to be considered a part of this prohibition. The action also parallels the activities of the desert saints, who in contrast to the cultural ideals of the fourth century, sought truth in isolation rather than in urban centers. Because a Merovingian holy woman had no access to the desert, she instead thus created a similarly sterile environment in which to achieve the ascetic ideal.⁶⁵

While the explicit praise of Radegund's sanctity remains clear in the dream narrated by Gregory, the nun's act brings into question the very nature of the conventual life practiced at Radegund's foundation. The needs of the anonymous nun have clearly not been satisfied. This criticism may indeed reflect the discomfort that Gregory and other bishops of his time felt with the poorly defined status of a convent in the hierarchy of the ecclesiastical landscape of Gaul.⁶⁶ Foreshadowing the later rebellion at the convent, Gregory suggests that the cloister has not provided a sufficiently stringent environment for the most ascetic. At the same time, one must be wary of interpreting Fortunatus's repeated descriptions of the extra tasks and self-humiliation practiced

by Radegund as expressing similar criticism. His extensive narration of her ascetic activities accomplish a slightly different purpose: as former queen and abbess, Radegund must take additional steps to achieve the most devout lifestyle, and thus quell the doubts of any who question the abbess' dedication to holiness in her own life. In contrast, for Gregory, the anonymous nun, with the permission of Radegund, has created personal solitude within the walls of a convent perhaps too worldly, recalling the isolated existence and individual sanctity achieved in the Syrian deserts a few centuries before.

Although Gregory interjects thus what appears to be skepticism of conventual life at the Holy Cross, at the same time he recognizes the necessity of the cloister.⁶⁷ Outside the walls lurk the dangers of incessant warfare as well as exposure to threatening heretical doctrine;⁶⁸ the nuns who enter the convent, desire through divine aid to, "escape the jaws of the spiritual wolves."⁶⁹ Gregory portrays the convent as an appropriate location to house religious women, their presence there sanctioned by the Holy Cross. Including Gregory himself, who personally witnesses the power of the relic to produce additional lamp oil, the admirers of the relic recognize its symbolic as well as physical ability to illuminate even the darkest hours of Good Friday.⁷⁰ The Holy Cross, with which he associates a large part of Radegund's sanctity, becomes a beacon which draws nuns and those who seek divine assistance into direct contact with the holy. While Gregory proclaims Radegund's attainment of the heavenly sphere, in his eyes her achievement rests as much upon her treatment of the relic as her personal sanctity. In contrast, Fortunatus portrays Radegund as a woman deserving of heavenly reward as a consequence of an innate personal holiness and dedication to asceticism. Radegund herself represents the focal point of holiness at her convent. Omitting virtually all connection of the saint with worldly concerns or her association with the Holy Cross, the poet strongly points towards a sanctity based on merit, rather than on the status which she has possessed since birth or on the powerful relic which she has acquired by diplomatic means. Fortunatus depicts Radegund with a personal power so great, that when Floreius, the man commissioned to fish for the convent by the saint, fears the great waves of the sea, he feels confident in calling upon the saint to quell the storm and assure his safety.⁷¹ While both Fortunatus and Gregory recognize the convent of the Holy Cross as a legitimate and

potent religious center, the imagery with which they each depict Radegund demonstrates the vast differences they feel in designating the primary source of her innate sanctity. Their understanding of the nature of holiness differs fundamentally, shaped for Fortunatus by a classical education and familiarity with early Christian exemplars, and for Gregory by rather limited schooling and a strong belief in the efficacy of relics.

NOTES

1. A number of studies contrasting these two contemporaries have been done. Brian Brennan provides a detailed analysis of Gregory's and Fortunatus's description of the conversion of the Jews at Clermont as well as their attitudes towards the *populus Christianus*. Brian Brennan, "The Conversion of the Jews of Clermont in AD 576," *Journal of Theological Studies*, new series 36(1985): 320-337. Peter Brown warns against drawing too distinct a line between late antique and early medieval attitudes towards sanctity. Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, (London, Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1982), 226-227. Walter Goffart makes reference to the two men's literary capabilities. Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988), 146ff. Michael Wallace-Hadrill discusses some of the effects of the differences in education on the writing of Gregory and Fortunatus. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983), 78-88.

This discussion will not focus on Baudonivia's *Life of Saint Radegund*, as extensive comparisons between her work and Fortunatus's have previously been made. Baudonivia, *Vita Sanctae Radegundis*, II, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum Medii Aevi*, new edition, vol.2: *Fredegarii et Aliorum Chronica Vitae Sanctorum*, (Hannover, Impensis Bibliopolii Hahmani, 1956), 377-395. Brian Brennan, in relation to this subject, discusses at length the basis for the contrasting accounts of Radegund's *Life* by Baudonivia and Fortunatus. Brian Brennan, "Saint Radegund and the Early Development of her Cult at Poitiers," *Journal of Religious History* 13(1985): 340-54. Jacques Fontaine also briefly discusses this issue. Jacques Fontaine, "Hagiographie et politique, de Sulpice Sévér à Venance Fortunat," *Revue Historique Ecclesiastique en France* 62(1976): 114-115. Sabine Gaebe points to differences in the objectives of Fortunatus and Baudonivia as authors. Sabine Gaebe, "Radegundis: Sancta, Regina, Ancilla. Zum Heiligkeitsideal der Radegundisviten von Fortunat and Baudonivia," *Francia* 16(1989): 1-30. Similarly, Suzanne Wemple addresses the contrasts between the two versions of Radegund's *Life*, and provides explanation for their differences. Suzanne Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500-900*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 181-5.

2. Brown, *Society*, 226.

3. Wallace-Hadrill, 86.

4. Goffart, 140-141. Brown, *Society*, 223ff.

5. Although Collins deals primarily with Fortunatus's *Lives* of Merovingian "monk-bishops," many of his observations remain pertinent in a discussion of Radegund's life. He dedicates interesting research to the language of Fortunatus's

compositions which are addressed to *audientes* rather than *legentes*. Richard Collins, "Observations on the Form, Language and Public of the Prose Biographies of Venantius Fortunatus in the Hagiography of Merovingian Gaul," *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, edited by H.B. Clarke and Mary Brennan, BAR International Series 113, (Oxford, BAR, 1981), 106-107. Fortunatus similarly states in the prologue of Radegund's *Life* that: "ferre temp-tamus in publico, ut, cuius est vita cum Christo, memoria gloriae relicta celebretur in mundo." Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Sanctae Radegundis*, I, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum Medii Aevi*, new edition, vol.2: Fredegarii et Aliorum Chronica Vitae Sanctorum, (Hannover, Impensis Bibliopolii Hahmani, 1956): I, Prologue. I thank Sarolta Takacs for all of her work in our effort to translate this text.

6. Wallace-Hadrill, 86. Gaebe, 3-4. Peter Brown discusses the use of living exemplars rendering the past accessible to common Christians during late antiquity. Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations* 1(1983): 1-25.

7. Fontaine, 129-131. Alison Elliot discusses the problem of the *vita* and historical accuracy, describing hagiography as, "ethically rather than factually true." Alison Goddard Elliot, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover, University Press of New England, 1987), 3-7.

8. Gaebe states that in his poetry Fortunatus shows Radegund a *domina* and holy ascetic, while in the *vita* her virtues are solely linked to her deeds. Gaebe, 5-9.

9. Goffart, 202.

10. Bernard Guenée, "Histoires, annales, chroniques: Essai sur les genres historiques au Moyen Age, *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 28(1973): 998-1002.

11. Wallace-Hadrill, 83. Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Continuity in Late Antique Gaul*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985), 222-3.

12. Venance Fortunat, *Poesies Melées*, translated by Charles Nisard with Eugene Rittier, (Paris, Librairie de Firmin-Didot et C., 1887), VIII, 2 and 12; Appendix, 26 and 27.

13. Samuel Dill, *The Roman Society in the Merovingian Age*, (London, MacMillan and Co., 1926), 378.

14. Georg Scheibelreiter discusses at length the relationship between Fortunatus and Radegund and the abbess Agnes. Georg Scheibelreiter, "Koenigstoechter im Kloster: Radegund (d.587) und der Nonnenaufstand von Poitiers (589)," *Mitteilung des Instituts fuer Oesterreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 87(1979): 26-7. This subject is also discussed by Gaebe as listed in #8. Julia O'Faolain depicts Radegund's personality as headstrong and proposes the nature of her relationship with Fortunatus in her historical novel. Julia O'Faolain, *Women in the Wall*, (London, Virago Press, 1975).

15. Fortunatus, *Poesies*, VIII, 2. Peter Brown discusses the relationship between the desert saints and their disciples, a concept which seems to apply fairly well to this example as well. Brown, "Saint," 9-17. I will draw other parallels between Radegund and the desert saints below.

16. Fortunatus, *Poesies*, II, 1-5. Brennan, "Saint Radegund," 345-346.

17. Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, translated with an introduction by Lewis Thorpe., (Penguin Books, New York, 1974), IX, 40.

18. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 14.

19. Gregory, *History*, IX, 39.

20. Fortunatus, *Poesies*, VIII, 12. Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Confessors*, translated and with an introduction by Raymond Van Dam, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1988), 104.
21. Gregory, *History*, III, 7.
22. Gregory, *Confessors*, 104.
23. Gregory, *History*, VI, 29.
24. Gregory, *Confessors*, 104. Goffart discusses Gregory's acknowledgement of posthumous miracles, thus through relics, as being more efficacious. Goffart, 140-1.
25. Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs*, translated and with an introduction by Raymond Van Dam, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1988), 106.
26. Brown, *Society*, 240. In the preface of the first book of "The Miracles of Blessed Martin the Bishop," Gregory states in response to his mother's question, why he does not describe the miracles he has seen at the tomb of Saint Martin: "'You know that I am not learned in literature and being simple and unskilled would not dare describe such awe-inspiring miracles. Would that Severus or Paulinus were alive, or indeed that Fortunatus were present to describe these deeds! Since I am incompetent, I would incur shame if I tried to do this.' And she [his mother] said to me: 'Do you not know that on account of the ignorance of our people the way you can speak is considered more intelligible? So do not hesitate and do not delay doing this since it will be a charge against you if you pass over these deeds in silence.' So I wish to do this but am afflicted by double dread, equally by grief and fear; grief because such great miracles done under our predecessors have not been described, fear of approaching so excellent a work, since I am a rustic. But led by the hope of divine favor I will approach what is advised. For He, Who produced water from a dry rock in the desert to quench the burning thirst of a people, is able, I believe, to display these things through me though I lack eloquence." *Gregory of Tours: Selections from the Minor Works*, translated by William McDermott, (Philadelphia, 1949), 17-18. Clearly Gregory sees himself as exploring a field which he understands to have been little touched before, that of the great power of relics.
27. Gregory, *Martyrs*, 5.
28. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 5; I, 12.
29. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, Prologue.
30. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 2.
31. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 6.
32. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 12.
33. Fortunatus, *Poesies*, VIII, 1.
34. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 9.
35. Fortunatus, *Poesies*, VIII, 4.
36. Fortunatus, *Poesies*, VIII, 3.
37. Gregory, *Confessors*, 104.
38. Scheibelreiter, 13.
39. Gregory, *Confessors*, 104.
40. Fortunatus, *Poesies*, VIII, 3. Gregory, *Confessors*, 104.
41. Fortunatus, *Poesies*, II, 1.
42. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 3.
43. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 13.
44. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 3.
45. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 10; I, 11. Collins describes the wide use of such a theme

among Merovingian hagiographers, due to its appeal to the public to whom such a work is directed. Collins, 116-117.

46. Wallace-Hadrill, 93.

47. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 4; I, 17.

48. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 21.

49. Gregory, *Confessors*, 104.

50. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 22, 25, and 26.

51. Wemple states that her possession of the Cross placed her in the position necessary to act as intercessor for Merovingian kings. Wemple, 184-185. Fortunatus in the *Vita*, however, chooses to omit reference to the Holy Cross in contrast to Baudonivia who states that Radegund: "ut sicut beata Helena sappientia inbuta, timore Dei plena, bonis operibus gloriosa lignum salutare, ubi precium mundi pro nostra salute appensum fuerat, ut nos de potestate diaboli eriperet" Baudonivia, *Vita*, II, 16.

52. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 2. The theme of Radegund's sanctity is remembered even today; at Jesus College, Cambridge, her feast day is still celebrated by the blessing of the bathrooms.

53. Fernand Cabrol and Henri LeClercq, *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, X, (Paris, Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1931), 1411-1416.

54. Brown, 228.

55. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 19; I, 17. Collins points out that miracles which occur through the medium of sacraments, "are destined to facilitate the incorporation of the *vita* into the symbolic structure of the divine service through the resumption of themes already long since emphasized by preaching in the cities of Roman Gaul." Collins, 112-113. The elements in Radegund's *Life* which point towards possible liturgical usage of the text for public ceremony seem numerous.

56. Van Dam, 263.

57. Maria Caritas McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of Caesarius of Arles: A Translation with a Critical Introduction*, Catholic University of America: Studies in Mediaeval History, new series, XVI, (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1960), #31.

58. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 37; I, 39.

59. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 23.

60. Gregory, *Confessors*, 104. Gregory, however, would not have found the same significance in brooms or rags as Fortunatus.

61. Although the text states "abbatissa" here, one might infer that Gregory means Radegund and not Agnes. Fortunatus as well addresses Radegund on occasion as "veneranda abbatissa beata Radegundis," a title of respect. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 35.

62. Gregory, *History*, VI, 29.

63. McCarthy, *Rule*, #2.

64. McCarthy, *Rule*, #51.

65. Alison Elliot discusses the role of the liminal hero and the steps taken by the desert saints in order to achieve true purity through their ascetic lifestyles. The desert, usually associated with lifelessness and death, becomes a setting for great sanctity in a period after the legalization of Christianity, when the opportunity for martyrdom no longer existed. Elliot, 169-179. Radegund's *Life* parallels in many cases the exemplars proposed by Elliot.

66. Scheibelreiter, 9ff.

67. Brennan, "Saint Radegund," 344.

68. Gregory, *History*, Prologue.
69. McCarthy, *Rule*, #2.
70. Gregory, *Martyrs*, 5.
71. Fortunatus, *Vita*, I, 31.