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978-1-107-06459-1 - Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul: Columbanian Monasticism and the Frankish Elites

Yaniv Fox

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

Sometime around 591 a boat landed on the shores of Brittany, carrying a small group of monks. The thirteen men had just completed a voyage from their home in Ireland, and began making their way inland. Their objective was the royal court of the Merovingian kingdom of Burgundy, situated in the city of Chalon-sur-Saône. Heading the small group was a man called ‘Columba the Younger’, later to be known as Columbanus. Upon their arrival, Columbanus sought an audience with King Childebert II, and soon secured it.¹ Columbanus stated his case, and received the king’s permission to establish a monastic foundation for his followers in the east of the kingdom.²

The group then departed from the royal palace and began the arduous journey to the Vosges forest, a mountainous region scantily populated and devoid of settled comforts. The monks then started to build a home for themselves, and the new foundation began to attract small bands of followers from the neighbouring villages, drawn in by the promise of food and work, and perhaps by the group’s growing reputation for ascetic perfection. As the community, now called Annegray, increased in number, food ran short and starvation soon threatened it.³ Columbanus realised that in the solitude of Annegray he could not support his growing congregation adequately, and so decided to move to a neighbouring uninhabited *castrum*, where he and his followers could better shelter themselves.⁴ This time the choice of location proved auspicious, and within a short while the monks erected a small monastic house named Luxeuil.

¹ See *VC*, 1.6, pp. 162–3; *Vita Agili abbatis Resbacensis*, AASS Aug. vi (Antwerp, 1743), pp. 574–87, at 1.3, p. 575.

² I. N. Wood, ‘Jonas, the Merovingians, and Pope Honorius: *Diplomata* and the *Vita Columbani*’, in *After Rome’s Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History*, ed. A. C. Murray (Toronto, 1998), pp. 96–120, at p. 110.

³ See *VC*, 1.7, pp. 164–5; *VC* 1.10, p. 169.

⁴ Wood, ‘Jonas, the Merovingians, and Pope Honorius’, p. 106.

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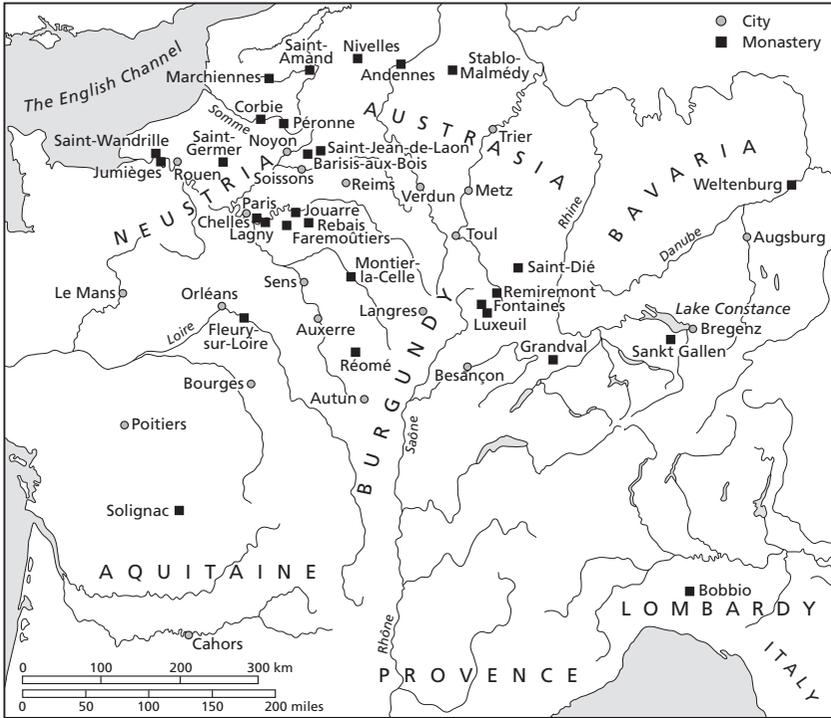
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I Columbanian monasteries in Francia, c. 680

EARLY GALLIC MONASTICISM AND MONASTIC PATRONAGE

With this tale of monastic beginnings this book opens. Yet the monks of Luxeuil were but a link in a long chain of activists that filled the annals of Gallic monasticism. Columbanus and his contemporaries could look back on more than two centuries of effort in the cities and rural expanses of Gaul. Leafing through the pages of the *Vita Columbani*, one can easily gain the impression that Columbanus and his disciples were monastic pioneers in a world dominated by stubborn urban bishops or the wild beasts that roamed the countryside.⁵ Jonas of Bobbio, Columbanus' hagiographer, described the monks as blazing an untrodden trail in a landscape that was

⁵ *VC*, 1.9, pp. 167–9. Possibly as a reference to Martin; see W. Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 49. See also the 'tenacious swamp of Elmonne' in Jonas' prefatory letter; *VC*, ep., p. 145; S. Lebecqz, 'The Role of the Monasteries in the Systems of Production and Exchange of the Frankish World between the Seventh and the

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all but untouched by pious, defiant men like Columbanus, who had left behind diocesan politics and the demands of court life. Jonas was right, for Columbanus was an innovator. Yet recent archaeological excavations and landscape history challenge the notion of Columbanus establishing himself in uninhabited and inhospitable locations. It seems, in fact, that Luxeuil was a lively Gallo-Roman hamlet – not quite the wooded wilderness Jonas made it out to be.⁶ Columbanus' interactions with the Merovingian royal family and its aristocracy also show how willing Frankish society was to accommodate him and his seemingly unorthodox ideas.⁷ This had less to do with Columbanus' *fama*, which Jonas mentions repeatedly,⁸ and more with the fact that patronage of monasteries was an established practice with a well-defined set of expectations.

A common assumption regarding fifth- and sixth-century Gallic monasticism is that it was primarily an urban phenomenon, closely supervised and regulated by bishops. Such an image accounts for Gregory of Tours' descriptions in the *Histories*, where monasteries are accorded less importance. There is no denying that the rural monastic community envisaged by the Columbanians was not a common feature of Gregory's religious landscape, but that does not mean that Gallic monasticism was solely urban. Although the *Histories* are not the best source for studying the rich and diverse monastic tapestry of Gaul, there are fortunately other sources, which provide us with a closer look.

A good place to start any discussion of Gallic monasticism is the island of Lérins, four kilometres from the shores of the modern city of Cannes.⁹

Beginning of the Ninth Centuries', in *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, ed. I. L. Hansen and C. Wickham (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 2000), pp. 121–48, at pp. 126–7.

⁶ S. Bully *et al.*, 'L'église Saint-Martin de Luxeuil-les-Bains (Haute-Saône): première campagne', *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre* 13 (2009), pp. 33–8; also, for initial notes on the on-going excavations at Annegray, see S. Bully *et al.*, 'Le site du monastère d'Annegray (Haute-Saône): les prospections géophysiques', *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre* 15 (2011), pp. 9–15.

⁷ See R. Meens, 'Reforming the Clergy: A Context for the Use of the Bobbio Penitential', in *The Bobbio Missal: Liturgy and Religious Culture in Merovingian Gaul*, ed. Y. Hen and R. Meens (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 154–67, at pp. 160–5; R. Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe, 600–1200* (Cambridge, 2014), ch. 4. I am very grateful to Rob Meens for sending me an early copy of his forthcoming book.

⁸ *VC*, 1.6, p. 162; A. Diem, 'Monks, Kings, and the Transformation of Sanctity: Jonas of Bobbio and the End of the Holy Man', *Speculum* 82 (2007), pp. 521–59, at pp. 529–30.

⁹ For initial literature on the origins of Lérins, see M. Labrousse *et al.*, *Histoire de l'abbaye de Lérins*, Association pour le Rayonnement de la Culture Cistercienne (Bégrolle-en-Mauges, 2005), pp. 23–124; M. Labrousse, ed. and trans., *Saint Honorat: fondateur de Lérins et évêque d'Arles* (Bégrolle-en-Mauges, 1995); S. Pricoco, *L'isola dei santi: il cenobio di Lerino e le origini del monachesimo gallico* (Rome, 1978); R. Nouailhat, *Saints et patrons: les premiers moines de Lérins*, Centre de Recherches d'Histoire Ancienne 84 (Paris, 1988); M. Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford and Malden, MA, 2000), pp. 82–4; Y. Codou and M. Lauwers, eds., *Lérins, une île sainte: de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge* (Turnhout, 2009); R. W. Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism and Religious Controversy in Fifth-Century Gaul* (Washington, DC, 1989), pp. 69–140.

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When Honoratus, son of an esteemed Gallo-Roman family, assembled a group of companions and began constructing a small monastery in the early years of the fifth century, he was not the first to make such an attempt.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the achievement of Honoratus is remarkable not only because he was able, within less than three decades, to transform a previously deserted islet into a thriving monastic community, but also for the far-reaching influence Lerinian monasticism was to have on the religious landscape of Gaul. Word of Honoratus' activities spread swiftly and widely, attracting young aristocrats from Gaul's wealthiest and most illustrious Christian families. Among the residents of Lérins were Eucherius of Lyon, Faustus of Riez, Salvian of Marseille, and Hilary of Arles, who succeeded Honoratus as bishop.¹¹ Those, and many more, went on to become bishops in Gaul, and were able to export Lérins' model of monasticism through their episcopal activities and their tireless literary promotion of the virtues of asceticism.

The scope of Lérins' impact on the monastic scene in Gaul becomes evident when one surveys the monasteries that were founded by its members and their effect on communities further north. After a period of training at Lérins, many of its alumni became bishops and monastic founders. As bishop of Arles, Hilary constructed a monastery outside the city named the Hilarianum.¹² Likewise, Maximus established a monastery once he became bishop of Riez,¹³ and Eucherius may have been the founder of Île-Barbe in Lyon.¹⁴ His commitment to monasticism is certainly apparent in the compositions he produced as bishop, such as the *Passio Acaunensium martyrum*.¹⁵ Salonius of Geneva, Eucherius' son,

¹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. J.J. O'Donnell, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1992), I, viii.15, pp. 94–5; Sulpicius Severus, *Vita sancti Martini*, ed. J. Fontaine, 3 vols., Sources chrétiennes 133–5 (Paris, 1967–9), I, ep. 3.18, p. 343; D. C. Alexander, *Augustine's Early Theology of the Church: Emergence and Implications, 386–391*, Patristic Studies 9 (New York, 2008), pp. 227–44; Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, pp. 62–4; G. Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: Praising the Saints', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.3 (1999), pp. 365–99, at p. 374; J. Fontaine, 'Victrice de Rouen et les origines du monachisme dans l'ouest de la Gaule (iv^e–vi^e S.)', in *Aspects du monachisme en Normandie (iv^e–xviii^e S.)*, ed. L. Musset (Paris, 1982), pp. 9–29.

¹¹ Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, p. 83. Faustus, notably, had been a Briton.

¹² Honoratus of Marseille, *Vita sancti Hilarii episcopi Arelatensis*, in *Vitae sanctorum Honorati et Hilarii episcoporum Arelatensium*, ed. S. Cavallin, Publications of the New Society of Letters at Lund 40 (Lund, 1952), c. 11, pp. 90–1; F. Benoit, 'L'Hilarianum d'Arles et les missions en Bretagne (v^e–vi^e siècle)', in *St. Germain d'Auxerre et son temps*, ed. G. le Bras (Auxerre, 1950), pp. 181–9.

¹³ Faustus of Riez, *De gratia, De spiritu sancto, Epistulae, Sermones*, ed. A. Engelbrecht, CSEL 21 (Vienna, 1891), ep. 6.9, pp. 195–200, 211–15; Pricoco, *L'isola dei santi*, p. 56.

¹⁴ Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*, p. 90.

¹⁵ Eucherius of Lyon, *Passio Acaunensium martyrum*, MGH SRM 3, ed. B. Krusch (Hannover, 1896), pp. 20–41; B. H. Rosenwein, 'One Site, Many Meanings: Saint-Maurice d'Agaune as a Place of Power in the Early Middle Ages', in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. M. de Jong and F. Theuvs (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 2001), pp. 271–90, at p. 272.

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who came as a boy with his father to Lérins, was possibly responsible for the restoration of Ainay.¹⁶ John, another of Jonas of Bobbio's hagiographical heroes, founded the monastery of Réomé after he left Lérins, where he may have picked up the 'rule of Macarius'.¹⁷ Monasteries founded by Lérins' monks became catalysts for further monastic establishment. Members of Réomé, for example, were responsible for the foundation of new houses: Sequanus of Mémont set up Saint-Seine near Langres after a period of training at Saint-Jean-de-Réomé,¹⁸ and Saint-Benigne in Dijon can probably also be linked to the same community.¹⁹

Although not educated in Lérins, the achievement of Romanus, founder of Condat, was another important milestone. Unlike other founders, he was not of the highest aristocracy, but there is reason to believe that he originated from a family endowed with extensive estates.²⁰ Romanus decided to leave his parents' house in c. 435, around the time that Honoratus' first followers were being elevated to the episcopacy.²¹ Retiring to the forests that lay beyond his family's lands, Romanus braved the elements as a hermit, and soon was joined by his brother Lupicinus. The two siblings attracted a following, resulting in the creation of two communities – Condat and Lauconnum – in the Jura Mountains. A third house for women, named La Balme, was also established,²² and their sister was placed at its head.²³

Unlike Lérins, the Jura communities were relatively secluded and at least nominally resistant to episcopal intervention. Yet the forceful anti-clerical tone so characteristic of the *Vita patrum Jurensium* – which chronicled the lives of Abbots Romanus, Lupicinus, and Eugendus – was not entirely congruent with the reality. The Jura monasteries would eventually move away from the example of Lérins and the conspicuous political partisanship of its alumni, but during the first decades of their existence, association with episcopal and secular leaders was strong.²⁴ This is discernable in the story of Romanus' summons to Besançon to meet Bishop Hilary of Arles, as it

¹⁶ I. N. Wood, 'A Prelude to Columbanus: The Monastic Achievement in the Burgundian Territories', in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. H. B. Clarke and M. Brennan, BAR International Series 113 (Oxford, 1981), pp. 3–19, at p. 11.

¹⁷ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Iohannis abbatis Reomaensis*, MGH SRG 37, ed. B. Krusch (Hannover, 1905), pp. 321–44, at cc. 4–5, pp. 330–2; W. E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 25.

¹⁸ *Vita Sequani*, AASS Sept. vi, ed. J. Mabillon (Antwerp, 1757), pp. 37–8; Wood, 'A Prelude to Columbanus', p. 5.

¹⁹ Wood, 'A Prelude to Columbanus', p. 13. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

²¹ *VPJ*, p. 11. For an English translation, see *The Life of the Jura Fathers: The Life and the Rule of the Holy Fathers Romanus, Lupicinus, and Eugendus, Abbots of the Monasteries in the Jura Mountains*, ed. and trans. T. Vivian *et al.*, Cistercian Studies 178 (Kalamazoo, MI, 1999).

²² *VPJ*, cc. 25–6, pp. 264–8. ²³ *Ibid.*, c. 60, p. 304.

²⁴ R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 213–14.

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is in Lupicinus' journey to the court of Chilperic in Geneva to petition the king on behalf of certain *pauperes*.²⁵ In his version of the story, Gregory of Tours related that the meeting was concluded favourably and that Chilperic was persuaded to help.²⁶ What Gregory also describes are the gifts bestowed upon Lupicinus' monastery by the king, something the author of the *Vita patrum Jurensium* understandably neglected to mention. The allocation of an annual stipend – if we are to believe Gregory – suggests that the Jura monasteries were well integrated into the political landscape of Burgundy. Romanus' initial reason for approaching the king indicates that they were even offering patronage to nearby villagers.²⁷

Eugendus' tenure marked a departure from previous traditions. As abbot, Eugendus was said to have rejected the example of eastern desert fathers, and removed existing eremitic cells to make room for a proper *coenobium*, with a common dormitory and dining area.²⁸ Yet Eugendus continued to interact with the world outside the monastery during his time as abbot, in much the same way as previous abbots had done. His reputation as a holy man caused the neighbouring laity to seek his powers of intercession, their number at one point exceeding that of monks themselves.²⁹ Condat continued to function as an important regional centre, offering succour to surrounding populations with religious services and the distribution of food. Eugendus' helpers were called *presbyteri* – ordained priests – testimony to Condat's connections with the ecclesiastical authorities. Indeed, bishops repeatedly requested Eugendus himself to receive ordination.³⁰ While his refusal may be taken at face value as a decision to rely on his own charisma without the stamp of ecclesiastical office, it is certainly in keeping with hagiographical conventions of humility. Condat was clearly of political significance and could have made a valuable ally to bishops in the region and to metropolitan bishops further afield.

By this time Gallic monasticism was on the brink of its next big step. The newly converted prince, Sigismund of Burgundy, embraced monastic patronage and re-established a house at Agaune in honour of Saint

²⁵ *VPJ*, c. 92, pp. 336–8; R. W. Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul: Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition* (Austin, TX, 1993), pp. 122–3.

²⁶ Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, MGH SRM 1.2, ed. B. Krusch (Hannover, 1885), pp. 211–83, at c. 5, pp. 216–17.

²⁷ A. E. Jones, *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul: Strategies and Opportunities for the Non-Elite* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 141–2; compare to Bobolenus, *Vita Germani Grandivallensis*, MGH SRM 5, ed. B. Krusch (Hannover, 1910), pp. 25–40, at cc. 10–11, pp. 37–8.

²⁸ *VPJ*, c. 170, p. 423; G. Moyses, 'Les origines du monachisme dans le diocèse de Besançon (v^e–x^e siècles)', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 131 (1973), pp. 21–104, 369–485, at p. 61.

²⁹ *VPJ*, cc. 147–8, pp. 396–8. ³⁰ *Ibid.*, c. 151, p. 400.

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Maurice and the martyrs of the Theban legion.³¹ With this establishment, Sigismund ushered in a new era of Gallic monasticism, one defined by royal patronage. In a manner befitting its status, Saint-Maurice d'Agaune developed new rites and practices, and in so doing, redefined Gallic monasticism for decades to come.

The memory of the 6,600 martyred Roman Thebaei³² was recorded by Bishop Eucherius of Lyon in his *Passio Acaunensium martyrum*.³³ Agaune, where Emperor Maximian allegedly punished the rebellious legion by repeated decimations, became the site of local veneration after the late fourth-century Bishop Theodore of Octodorum (modern-day Martigny) discovered the remains of the slain soldiers.³⁴ Theodore ordered the construction of a basilica on the site to commemorate this act of mass martyrdom, and a cult quickly developed, sustained by a monastic community.³⁵

The re-establishment of Saint-Maurice d'Agaune enabled the Burgundian royal family to display its alliance with the Burgundian bishops following its adoption of Catholicism. Possibly a clandestine Catholic, Sigismund's father Gundobad was nonetheless enticed by the political advantages of Arianism.³⁶ While he no doubt maintained productive working relations with the bishops of his kingdom, most notably Avitus of Vienne,³⁷ the conversion of his son and heir held the promise of an even brighter future. Saint-Maurice was given a new purpose. New

³¹ See J. M. Theurillat, *L'abbaye de Saint-Maurice d'Agaune: des origines à la réforme canoniale, 515–830 environ*, *Valesia* 9 (1954), pp. 30–84; Rosenwein, 'One Site, Many Meanings', pp. 271–80; B. H. Rosenwein, 'Perennial Prayer at Agaune', in *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society. Essays in Honor of Lester K. Little*, ed. S. Farmer and B. H. Rosenwein (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2000), pp. 37–56; F. Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich: Kultur und Gesellschaft im Gallien, den Rheinlanden und Bayern am Beispiel der monastischen Entwicklung* (Vienna, 1965), pp. 102–12; F. Masai, 'La Vita patrum iurensum et les débuts du monachisme à Saint-Maurice d'Agaune', in *Festschrift Bernhard Bischoff zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. J. Autenrieth and F. Brunhölzl (Stuttgart, 1971), pp. 43–69; F. S. Paxton, 'Power and the Power to Heal', *Early Medieval Europe* 2 (1993), pp. 95–110; A. Diem, 'Who is Allowed to Pray for the King? Saint-Maurice d'Agaune and the Creation of a Burgundian Identity', in *Post-Roman Transitions: Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West*, ed. G. Heydemann and W. Pohl, *Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* 14 (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 47–88. I am very grateful to Albrecht Diem for sending me a copy of this and other essays.

³² See D. Woods, 'The Origin of the Legend of Maurice and the Theban Legion', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 45.3 (1994), pp. 385–95.

³³ Eucherius of Lyon, *Passio Acaunensium martyrum*, pp. 20–41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40; for Theodore, see D. Van Berchem, *Le martyre de la Légion Thébaine: essai sur la formation d'une légende* (Basel, 1956), pp. 35–44; Woods, 'The Origin of the Legend of Maurice', p. 387.

³⁵ Rosenwein, 'One Site, Many Meanings', p. 272.

³⁶ See the chapter on Burgundy in Y. Hen, *Western Arianism: Politics and Religious Culture in the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

³⁷ I. N. Wood, 'Continuity or Calamity: The Constraints of Literary Models', in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, ed. J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 9–18, at p. 17.

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buildings replaced old ones,³⁸ clerics replaced laypersons that had previously dwelt there,³⁹ and a new and extravagant liturgy, the *laus perennis* – eternal chant – was established.⁴⁰

Yet repeated Merovingian aggression led, over the decades following the establishment of Saint-Maurice, to the gradual weakening and final conquest of the Burgundian kingdom by the Franks.⁴¹ In 524, Sigismund was captured and put to death with his wife and two sons by Chlodomer of Orléans, the son of King Clovis I. Some years later, the bodies of the royal family were exhumed and translated to Agaune.⁴² A cult soon developed around the tomb of Sigismund, and Saint-Maurice became home to the first royal martyr in Western Europe.⁴³ Saint-Maurice's association with royalty served as an inspiration to later Merovingian kings, who built edifices to their own piety. Gregory of Tours' monastic landscape was shaped by the royal patronage of great urban cult centres. He referred to Saint-Maurice several times in his writings, as he did to other *basilicae* such as Saint-Medard in Soissons, Saint-Symphorian in Autun, or Saint-Remigius in Reims.⁴⁴ Gregory was fully aware of the political associations that came attached to such patron saints.⁴⁵

The year 591, when Gregory's narrative ends, is also the year of Columbanus' arrival, and the start of the next great impulse in Gallic monasticism. Columbanus entered the world described by Gregory.

³⁸ Rosenwein, 'One Site, Many Meanings', p. 277.

³⁹ Diem, 'Who is Allowed to Pray for the King?'

⁴⁰ Rosenwein, 'Perennial Prayer at Agaune', p. 39. Also see I. N. Wood, 'Liturgy in the Rhône Valley and the Bobbio Missal', in *The Bobbio Missal: Liturgy and Religious Culture in Merovingian Gaul*, ed. Y. Hen and R. Meens (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 206–18; A. M. Helvétius, 'L'organisation des monastères féminins à l'époque mérovingienne', in *Female Vita Religiosa between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages: Structures, Developments and Spatial Contexts*, ed. G. Melville and A. Müller (Münster, 2011), pp. 151–69.

⁴¹ See Gregory of Tours, *LH*, III.6, pp. 101–3 and III.11, pp. 107–8; Marius of Avenches, *Chronicum*, in *La Chronique de Marius d'Avenches (455–581)*, ed. and trans. J. Favrod, Cahiers Lausannois d'histoire médiévale 4 (Lausanne, 1991), p. 70, s.a. 524. Also, J. Favrod, *Histoire politique du royaume Burgonde (443–534)* (Lausanne, 1997), pp. 450–70. Also, see I. N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (London and New York, 1994), pp. 52–3; I. N. Wood, 'Royal Succession and Legitimation in the Roman West, 419–536', in *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. S. Airlie, W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (Vienna, 2006), pp. 53–72, at pp. 63, 70–1.

⁴² *Passio Sancti Sigismundi*, MGH SRM 2, ed. B. Krusch (Hannover, 1888), pp. 329–40, at c. 10, p. 338.

⁴³ G. Claniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 67–8.

⁴⁴ See Gregory of Tours, *LH*, II.15, VIII.30, IX.13, and X.19, pp. 64, 393–7, 427–8, and 510–13 respectively.

⁴⁵ Gregory of Tours, *De virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*, MGH SRM 1.2, ed. B. Krusch (Hannover, 1885), pp. 134–211; Gregory of Tours, *LH*, VIII.6 and VIII.18, pp. 374–5 and 384–5; C. Wickham, 'Topographies of Power: Introduction', in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. M. de Jong, F. Theuvs and C. van Rhijn (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 2001), pp. 1–8, at pp. 4–5; M. Heinzlmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 64.

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Critical as he may have been of what he found, Columbanus did not encounter a monastic desert in Gaul – far from it. From reclusive ascetics to grand royal establishments, monasticism was part of the religious fabric of Gallic society, an agent of change and development. Moreover, Columbanus owed his phenomenal success to the willingness of patrons – royal and aristocratic – to adopt his monastic model.

THE EVOLUTION OF A MOVEMENT

Despite its allegedly humble beginnings, Luxeuil was to carve out a central place for itself in the annals of Gallic monasticism. The new foundation drew patronage from the Merovingian court,⁴⁶ and soon from the surrounding great families, who were eager to participate in the project. A tireless advocate for his cause, Columbanus solicited support from as far afield as Soissons, but as a rule, concentrated on the vicinity.⁴⁷ When Luxeuil became overcrowded, Fontaines was created, named after the thermal waters from springs on that site.

Columbanus' uncompromising nature made his relationship with the world outside the monastery a volatile one. His independent spirit steered him on a collision course with his most generous patrons, King Theuderic II and his formidable grandmother, Brunhild.⁴⁸ For as long as he had enjoyed the protection of the king, Columbanus remained beyond the reach of neighbouring bishops, but the withdrawal of royal support exposed Columbanus to mounting episcopal pressure.⁴⁹ What began as a close and mutually beneficial cooperation soon deteriorated into open conflict between the royal house and the leadership of Luxeuil. Columbanus refused to receive Theuderic's gifts or to admit him into the monastery. Finally the king had had enough. He sent guards to arrest Columbanus and put him on a boat back to Ireland, while Brunhild ordered that the monastic community be closed off to the world.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Vita Sadalbergae abbatissae Laudunensis*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM 5 (Hannover, 1910), pp. 40–66, at c. 1, p. 51: 'ex munificentia Childeberti regis'.

⁴⁷ *VC*, 1.26, pp. 209–10. ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.19, pp. 187–93.

⁴⁹ D. Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus', in *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, ed. M. Lapidge (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 1–28, at pp. 13–14; C. Stancliffe, 'Columbanus and the Gallic Bishops', in *Auctoritas: Mélanges offerts à Olivier Guillot*, ed. G. Constable and M. Rouche, Cultures et Civilisations Médiévales 33 (Paris, 2006), pp. 205–15, at pp. 210–13; K. Schäferdiek, 'Columbanus Wirken im Frankenreich (591–612)', in *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. H. Löwe, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1982), 1, pp. 171–201; C. Corning, *The Celtic and Roman Traditions: Conflict and Consensus in the Early Medieval Church* (New York and Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 19–44.

⁵⁰ *VC*, 1.19, p. 188; *Vita Agili*, c. 8, p. 577; O. Pontal, *Histoire des conciles mérovingiens* (Paris, 1989), p. 177.

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Excerpt

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Columbanus was now on the run, never to reclaim his abbacy at Luxeuil. While he was welcomed at the courts of Chlothar II of Neustria and Theudebert II of Austrasia, Columbanus was unable to establish any new monastic houses in the three Merovingian kingdoms. His next attempt was made on the Frankish periphery, in the area of Lake Constance. Theudebert offered Columbanus and his followers a stretch of land in Bregenz, and Columbanus obliged, with the hope of working among the neighbouring Alamanni. The monks' efforts were met with a hostile response, and as the initial zeal cooled, the project was abandoned in favour of the milder climates of the south. The monks headed for Italy, where they were received by the king of the Lombards, Agilulf and his wife, Theodelinda. There, Columbanus and his followers founded a fourth monastery, Bobbio.⁵¹ The Italian house grew in status and holdings, and soon matched Luxeuil for prestige. Bobbio was Columbanus' last project, and in 615 became his resting place.⁵²

Back in Francia, the political scene was rapidly changing. Theuderic and Theudebert met in battle soon after Columbanus left for Bregenz, with a crushing defeat for the Austrasians and the death of their king. The triumphant Theuderic moved next to eliminate Chlothar, the remaining Merovingian ruler. When Theuderic was overcome by dysentery, aristocratic support for Brunhild collapsed, and in 613 the unimaginable happened and Chlothar II seized control of all three kingdoms.⁵³ These events were to have far-reaching effects on the Burgundian foundations, which came under the auspices of a friendlier regime. Although Chlothar's munificence was felt throughout the united realm, Burgundy was left under the control of the same *potentes* who had supported his bid for power. These dramatic movements in Frankish politics set the stage for the foundation of several new monasteries by Luxeuil's disciples, ushering in the next phase in the history of the Columbanian *familia*.⁵⁴

While both Luxeuil and Bobbio were established with royal resources under the direct supervision of Columbanus, this new brand of monasteries that emerged in the countryside of Burgundy and Austrasia was an aristocratic enterprise. The first of these was spearheaded by a Luxovian monk named Amatus, and by his partner, Romaric.⁵⁵ In this partnership one first detects the marriage of those elements that enabled the

⁵¹ *VC*, 1.30, pp. 220–1. ⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 223–4. ⁵³ *Fredegar*, IV.42, pp. 34–5.

⁵⁴ Such as Faremoutiers; see *VC*, II.11, p. 257; and Remiremont; see *Vita Romarici abbatis Habendensis*, MGH SRM 4, ed. B. Krusch (Hannover, 1902), pp. 221–5, at cc. 4, 5, pp. 222–3; R. Folz, 'Remiremont dans le mouvement colombanien', in *Remiremont, l'abbaye et la ville: actes des Journées d'études vosgiennes, Remiremont, 17–20 avril 1980*, ed. M. Parisse (Nancy, 1980), pp. 15–27, at p. 16.

⁵⁵ *Vita Amati abbatis Habendensis*, MGH SRM 4, ed. B. Krusch (Hannover, 1902), pp. 215–21, at c. 7, pp. 217–18.