

Friendship in the Works of Venantius Fortunatus

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of History

September 2016

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

The help and friendship of many people has shaped the research and writing of this thesis and it is a great pleasure to acknowledge these debts here. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Ian Wood and Dr William Flynn, for their intellectual generosity and encouragement. Their advice and suggestions have been not only extraordinarily helpful but also most enjoyable to pursue; I have learned more than I can possibly say from them. Individually, I would like to thank Ian for organising weekly early medieval history seminars which were one of the highlights of my time at Leeds and for fostering a community of early medieval historians. I would like to thank Bill for coming on board as a supervisor during the last year of my thesis, for four years of help with Latin translations, and for giving me the opportunity to teach Medieval Latin in my final semester.

Various parts of this thesis have been presented at conferences in the UK and overseas, and I would like to thank Dr Conrad Leyser, for the invitation to speak about patronage and friendship in Oxford in 2014; Dr Bruno Dumézil, for inviting me to attend and give a paper at the colloquium on Austrasia in St-Dizier/Rheims in 2015, and Dr Charles Mériaux, for the invitation to attend and speak at a colloquium on the hagiography of Venantius Fortunatus in Rome in 2016. I am also very grateful to the wonderful participants, session chairs, respondents, and attendees at the conference panels, ‘New Approaches to Venantius Fortunatus’, at Kalamazoo and Leeds in 2015. Among them I would like to single out Professor Joseph Pucci, who first introduced me to Fortunatus’ poetry as an undergraduate, and whose friendship I am glad to have.

I would like to thank the University of Leeds for the International Research Scholarship which funded my doctorate, and the German History Society, for a fourth-year bursary which supported me during my writing up year. Colleagues and friends in the School of History and Institute for Medieval Studies have proven a source of scholarly inspiration and fellowship; in particular, my deepest thanks to everyone who attended Ian’s seminars.

Lastly, I would like to thank Kristin Bergman, Catherine Cooper, Hazel Freestone, Malka Key, Daniel Milstein, Bogdan Smarandache, Nathaniel Stetson and Anna Waymack, for years of friendship and marvellous letters. Above all, my love and gratitude to Graham Barrett, for more than I can say. My gratefulness for the love, encouragement, and support of my parents is immeasurable—they have been a large part of why I love and study history. I would like to thank my twin sister, Anne, the best of friends and walking companions, for her presence in even in absence. It is to her that I dedicate this work.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the reception and transformation of Roman ideas of friendship in the Merovingian kingdoms of sixth-century Gaul. The barbarian invasions of Late Antiquity were once seen as the cause of a cataclysmic rupture in Roman culture but I argue that Merovingian elites drew widely from Classical traditions of friendship in their culture and social organisation. Using the poems, letters, and saints' lives of Venantius Fortunatus (*c.* 530/540-609?), an Italian-born aristocrat who made his career writing for and about members of Gaul's elite, I show that the Classical relationship of patronage was subsumed into friendship. Fortunatus has more often been relegated to scholarly footnotes than studied in his own right, but when his works are taken seriously as sources for the mentality of his age our picture of Merovingian society and its debt to Classical culture comes into sharper focus. Fortunatus expressed the relationship between himself and his addressees in terms of parity and equality, as well as dependence and deference, which changes how we understand the structure of the early medieval elite: alongside the patronal language of vertical hierarchy, these linguistic friendships facilitated the creation of horizontal networks through ties of mutual benefit, obligation, and affection. I argue that elite men and women used the hyper-literate conventions of epistolary culture to organise themselves into networks. Such networks were made and maintained to help their members navigate a post-imperial world which remained culturally Roman. The major contribution of my thesis is thus to provide a model for using letters and poems, literary sources medieval historians rarely exploit in full, to chart the social and cultural transition between the later Roman world and the early Middle Ages.

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List of Abbreviations

All poems are cited as Carm (dot) Book Number (dot) Number of Poem (dot) Lines quoted. All Latin text of Fortunatus' *carmina* is from the three-volume edition of Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat Poèmes* (Paris, 2002-2004); references to specific volumes are abbreviated below.

Primary Sources

- DLH Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, *MGH SRM*, 1.1 (Hannover, 1951)
- EA Elena Malaspina, ed. and trans., *Il Liber Epistolarum della cancelleria Austrasica (Sec. V-VI)*, (Rome, 2001)
- Fredegar *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholastici libri IV cum continuationibus*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 2 (Hannover, 1888)
- GC Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria confessorum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 1.2 (Hannover, 1885)
- LHF *Liber historiae Francorum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 2 (Hannover, 1888)
- VG Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Germani*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH AA* 4.2 (Berlin, 1885), pp. 11-27
- VP Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 1.2 (Hannover, 1885)
- VSM Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Sancti Martini* ed. by Friedrich Leo, *MGH AA* 4:1 (Berlin: 1881), pp. 293-370

Secondary Sources

- Brennan, 'Career' Brian Brennan, 'The Career of Venantius Fortunatus', *Traditio*, 41 (1985), 49-78

- Brennan, 'Kings' Brennan, 'The Image of the Frankish Kings in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 10 (1984), 1-11
- Epp, *Amicitia* Verena Epp, *Amicitia: zur Geschichte personaler, sozialer, politischer und geistlicher Beziehungen im frühen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1999)
- Fiske, *Friendship* A.M. Fiske, 'The Survival and Development of the Ancient Concept of Friendship in the Early Middle Ages' (PhD Thesis, Fordham University, 1955)
- George, *Venantius Fortunatus* Judith W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford, 1992)
- George, *Personal and Political* Judith W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus Personal and Political Poems*, Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool, 1995)
- Pucci, *Friends* Joseph Michael Pucci, *Poems to Friends* (Indianapolis, 2010)
- Reydellet I Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat Poèmes* Vol. 1 (Paris, 2002)
- Reydellet II Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat Poèmes*. Vol. 2 (Paris, 2003)
- Reydellet III Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat Poèmes* Vol. 3 (Paris, 2004)
- Reydellet, *La royauté* Marc Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature Latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville*, (Rome, 1981)
- Roberts, *Sparrow* Michael Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow: The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus* (Ann Arbor, 2009)
- Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms* Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751* (London, 1994)

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Introduction

Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus has long occupied a liminal place in the history of the early Middle Ages. He has been described as a final link to the world of antiquity, but has also been framed as the last Classical and the first medieval poet, a writer whose life and work overlapped the boundary between antiquity and the Middle Ages.¹ He is cited, although less frequently, as an innovative writer, blending adherence to the rules of Classical metre with a Christian subject matter and worldview.² His work provides a window onto the social and cultural changes brought about by the end of imperial rule in the West.³ As one great scholar of his works put it, ‘only a half century separates Fortunatus and Sidonius, but they are an entire world apart’.⁴ This thesis argues that friendship played a critical role in the new world of Merovingian Gaul and demonstrates the echoes of the old Roman world within it.

Sometimes dismissed as an opportunist who wrote flattery for undeserving kings and aristocrats, Fortunatus has been seen as a writer uniquely suited to his times, a professional poet who addressed the needs and wishes of his contemporaries.⁵ Historians have seized on the poems as a source for Merovingian history, particularly since they complement the account of Gregory of Tours (538/539-594?). But scholars have also been stymied and frustrated by the perceived narrowness of Fortunatus’ vision, the partiality of his writings, and the seeming

¹ Michael Roberts, *The Jewelled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 148. Seppo Heikkinen, ‘The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus: The Twilight of Roman Metre’, in *The Eastern Mediterranean in the Late Antique and Early Byzantine Periods*, ed. by Maria Gourdouba, Leena Pietilä-Castrén, and Esko Tikkala (Helsinki: Suomen Ateenan-instituutin säätiö, 2004), pp. 17-31 (p. 17). Fiske, *Friendship*, p. 182. For an assessment of the poet’s innovativeness as a writer, see Roberts, *Sparrow*, 320-1; and as a hagiographer, Walter Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1986), p. 177.

² Fiske, *Friendship*, p. 215 and Peter Godman, *Poets and Emperors: Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp. 9-10.

³ ‘In him appear a remarkable fusion of the refined decadence of Italy with the barbarian North’. He writes about all classes but ‘above all the old Gallo-Roman aristocracy and the new Frankish nobles form his world. It is in some ways a deeply civilised world, but with a civilization remote in its ways of thinking and living from both Rome and Carolingian Gaul.’ Fiske, *Friendship*, p. 183

⁴ D. Tardi, *Fortunatus: étude sur un dernier représentant de la poésie latine dans la Gaule mérovingienne* (Paris: Boivin, 1927), p. 14.

⁵ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), p. 83.

insincerity of his praise. He lived through the same turbulent decades as his friend and patron in Tours, but his works are not easily used to clarify the events of his age.⁶ Instead, Fortunatus' poems clarify our view of the society in which these events took place, allowing us to see how the connections between people and community which created the framework of social life were made and maintained.⁷

This thesis argues that the central themes of Fortunatus' works are the social relationships of patronage and friendship. Fortunatus' status as an interesting footnote in the history of medieval *amicitia* has been noted repeatedly. In the introduction to his lengthy collection on medieval and early modern friendship, Albrecht Classen states, 'It would be fascinating also to explore in greater detail how the famous Merovingian poet Venantius Fortunatus (ca. 535-ca. 600) perceived friendship, a theme which he pursued at great length in many of his poems. But at this point it must suffice to refer to him only as another intriguing source for the theme of friendship during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages so that we can proceed more rapidly towards the next centuries.'⁸ Classen's account of the history and themes of medieval and early modern friendship moves straight on from Augustine to the twelfth century. When Fortunatus has been approached from a Classicist's perspective, a similar sort of truncation has occurred. In his book on Christian friendship, David Konstan posited that Christian texts displaced *amicitia* with *caritas*, leading authors to use the Classical vocabulary of *amor* in new amicable contexts.⁹ One of these contexts was the relationship between human beings and the divine, explored in the conclusion of this thesis as an extension of the relationship between human beings.

All human beings were in a patronage relationship with God, but the saints had the special quality that they could serve as intermediaries between individuals and the patronage of the Almighty. The development of the saintly patron responded to the contemporary need for a protector who was also a fellow person, 'relations

⁶ Reydellet I, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

⁷ As one scholar put it, '...the emotional community represented by Fortunatus and his patrons reinforced the goals of the ruling elite while itself helping to determine those goals'. Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 128.

⁸ Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge, eds., *Friendship in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), p. 18.

⁹ David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 106 n. 50.

with whom could be conceived of in terms open to the nuances of known human relations between patron and client'.¹⁰ Not only was there the reassurance of a relationship which could be understood and acted upon in familiar terms, but the integration of the language of patronage into the cult of the martyrs elided the differences between terrestrial and celestial by giving each Christian membership in a society that encompassed both heaven and earth.¹¹

Fortunatus' works focus on the relationship between himself, his addressees, and the networks of people they knew in common. For late antique and early medieval friends, the relationship of friendship itself, not merely the language used to express it, mattered, allowing friends to make and maintain relationships across distances, and exchange reciprocal services, favours, and gifts for their mutual benefit.¹² Additionally, Fortunatus' poetry shows the less tangible, but no less reciprocal, aspects of friendship: the bonds of patronage and friendship that stretched between human and divine. The influence of Classical and Christian thinking can be seen in Fortunatus' use of imagery of absence and presence in his letters to aristocratic friends, and his poems, and surviving letter collections such as the *Epistolae Austrasicae*, show in turn the importance of friendship in the making and maintenance of aristocratic networks, a theme I discuss in Chapter 5. Fortunatus' career provides a vantage point from which to examine the survival of Classical vocabulary and concepts of friendship and patronage, and the ongoing development of these relationships in the post-imperial culture of Merovingian Gaul.

Life and Career

Fortunatus was born between 530 and 540, in Valdobbiadene, near Treviso. Although formal Roman nomenclature was by this point becoming rare, this may give clues to his family background since there were many important fifth- and

¹⁰ Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (London: SCM, 1981), p. 61.

¹¹ Michael Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The "Liber Peristephanon" of Prudentius* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 25.

¹² Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship & Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250* (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1988), pp. 100-2. On the exchange of favours between friends, see Peter White, 'Poets in the new milieu: realigning', in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustan Rome*, ed. Karl Galinsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 321-39 (p. 331).

sixth-century upper-class Italians who bore the name Venantius. The name Fortunatus may pay homage to the martyr saint of Aquileia. However, his name ultimately leads us no further than what Fortunatus himself chooses to say about his family. He mentions his father, brother, a sister named Titania, and nephews but provides no further information. It seems that in the 570s, or at least between 573 and 576, his family still lived in Treviso.¹³

Fortunatus completed his education in Ravenna, which seems to be the only city in which he studied. There he learned grammar, metre, rhetoric, and law; and acquired a good knowledge of the major Latin and Christian poets such as Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Statius, Martial, Claudian, Arator, Paulinus of Nola, Paulinus of Périgueux, and Prudentius.¹⁴ Michael Roberts has proposed that Fortunatus' knowledge of and reliance on Christian poets is more extensive than has been thought previously. By his calculations, which adjust for the comparative size of the poets' output, Fortunatus actually uses more language from Sedulius than from Virgil. In particular, Fortunatus' writing of the *Life of Saint Martin* was deeply shaped by Sedulius' *Carmen paschale*, a fifth-century versification of the Gospels.¹⁵ Fortunatus was a Latin poet but he also deserves recognition as a Christian one.

Little is known about Fortunatus' early career but it is perhaps significant that his known activities were confined to areas under Byzantine control.¹⁶ He produced two early poems about the churches of an Italian bishop, Vitalis (?-c.565), who may have been the bishop of Altinum (modern-day Altino), in northern Italy.¹⁷ Altino was one of the few cities of northern Italy to move site during the early

¹³ For these biographical details see Reydellet I, pp. vii-viii; and Brennan, 'Career', pp. 50-1.

¹⁴ The best accounts of the poet's early life and education can be found in, George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 18-34; and Brennan, 'Career', pp. 51-4.

¹⁵ Roberts, *Sparrow*, p. 321.

¹⁶ On Byzantine Ravenna, see Deborah Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 201-276. Although definite links between the Franks and areas in which Fortunatus is known to have been present or had contacts (Valdobbiadene, Ravenna, and Altino), cannot be established, one should note the presence of the Franks in northern Italy from the 530s through the 550s. See Ian Wood, 'The Frontiers of Western Europe: Developments East of the Rhine in the Sixth Century', in *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, ed. by Richard Hodges and William Bowden (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 231-53.

¹⁷ Brennan, 'Career', pp. 50-3. Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 120-4, proposed that Vitalis was the bishop of Altinum; a later attempt to call this into question does not convince. Giuseppe Cuscito, *Cristianesimo antico ad Aquileia e in Istria* (Trieste: Deputazione di storia patria per la Venezia Giulia, 1977). The poems for Vitalis (identified in the manuscripts as the bishop of Ravenna) are Carm.1.1 and Carm.1.2; Brennan suggests that Carm.1.3 and Carm.1.4 might also be considered to date from the Italian period of his career but since their dedicatees can be identified among the Merovingian episcopate, I find it more likely that they were written after Fortunatus left Italy.

Middle Ages, which suggests an unusually precarious situation.¹⁸ Analysis of the level of urbanisation and urban survival in northern Italy indicates that the mid-sixth century was a low point in the patronage of buildings.¹⁹ Fortunatus may therefore have recognised that the possibilities of attracting sustained patronage in northern Italy were limited at best.

Our evidence does not allow us to say for certain why Fortunatus left Italy. The poet himself provides two different reasons for his initial journey to Gaul. In the *Life of St Martin*, he states that he made the journey for the purpose of pilgrimage to Martin's tomb, seeking a cure for an eye ailment.²⁰ In the preface to the first collection (Books one through seven) of his poetry, he depicts himself as a wandering bard journeying to a barbarian foreign land.²¹ Scholars have noted that the route he lays out in the *Life of St Martin* was extremely circuitous for one making a pilgrimage to Tours, which in any case does not feature prominently in his narrative.²²

The political situation of northern Italy at the time provides other possible explanations for Fortunatus' departure. Koebner suggested that Fortunatus was either sent by the Byzantines or seeking Frankish protection in order to avoid some sort of trouble with Byzantine authorities.²³ A Byzantine explanation has proved enduring—Jaroslav Šašel argued that Fortunatus travelled to Gaul to further the Byzantine goal of maintaining good relations with the Frankish rulers.²⁴ However, I find Brian Brennan's dismissal of this argument more convincing. He points out

¹⁸ Chris Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society, 400-1000* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 81.

¹⁹ There is a large body of work on urban survivals and disappearances in early medieval Italy. See now Bryan Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 37; *ibid.*, 'The towns of northern Italy: rebirth or renewal?', in *The Rebirth of Towns in Western Europe, AD 700-1050*, ed. by Richard Hodges and Brian Hopley (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1988), pp. 16-27; and Ross Balzaretto, 'Cities, Emporia, and Monasteries: Local Economies in the Po Valley, c. AD 700-850', in *Towns in Transition: urban evolution in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages*, ed. by Neil Christie and S. T. Loseby (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), pp. 213-34 (pp. 213-4).

²⁰ The symbolism and imagery of this story is analysed in Giselle De Nie, 'Word, Image and Experience in the Early Medieval Miracle Story', in *Word, Image and Experience: Dynamic of Miracle and Self-Perception in Sixth-Century Gaul*, ed. by Giselle De Nie (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 97-122 (pp. 109-14).

²¹ Brennan, 'Career', p. 54.

²² *Reydellet I*, pp. xiv-xv.

²³ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 14-5.

²⁴ Jaroslav Šašel, 'Il viaggio di Venanzio Fortunato e la sua attività in ordine alla politica Bizantina', *Antichità Altoadriatiche*, 19 (1981), 359-75.

that Fortunatus' closest substantiated contact with Byzantium was through his efforts to obtain a relic of the Holy Cross for Radegund (d. 587). Furthermore, he notes that Fortunatus' early ability to secure support among the Merovingian elite makes it unlikely he was in need of Byzantine patrons. Nor can Byzantine interests in Merovingian events at the time Fortunatus arrived—most notably the marriage of the Austrasian king Sigibert (r. 561-575) and Visigothic princess Brunhild (r. 566-613), which the poet celebrated in verse—be established with any certainty.²⁵

Nor is it clear what effects, if any, the Lombard invasion had on Fortunatus' decision to leave. Reydellet argued that one explanation for Fortunatus' circuitous route into Gaul may be that he was initially sent as a diplomatic envoy seeking allies against the Lombards.²⁶ This is possible but unprovable; what is certain is that he was not fleeing as a refugee. The upheaval the Lombards brought was not total: they were not strangers to the Roman world when they invaded in 568. They had settled in the province of Pannonia since the early sixth century and had made marriage alliances and other connections across the former Roman West.²⁷ Their presence caused change but not catastrophe, and there is evidence for villages all across Italy during the Lombard period.²⁸

I argue that Fortunatus' journey was motivated by opportunism: he came to Gaul to write laudatory poems to Merovingian royalty and aristocracy in exchange for their largesse and friendship.²⁹ Perhaps in the autumn, or at the end of the year 565, he journeyed to Gaul. In the spring of 566, the eastern Frankish king Sigibert married the Visigothic princess Brunhild, and Fortunatus celebrated their marriage with an epithalamium and panegyric.³⁰ This is frequently assumed to be the act of literary patronage which started Fortunatus' career in Gaul—that is to say, that the Frankish king, wishing to lend Roman dignity to his distinguished marriage,

²⁵ Brian Brennan, 'Venantius Fortunatus: Byzantine Agent?', *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines*, 65 (1995), 9-12.

²⁶ Reydellet I, pp. xvi-xvii.

²⁷ Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy*, pp. 29-31.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-9.

²⁹ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, pp. 100-1. As Peter White notes, the poets of imperial Rome had access to the patronage and friendship of members of the aristocracy because they were aristocrats themselves. The same was very likely true for Fortunatus. See White, 'Poets in the new milieu: realigning', pp. 327-30.

³⁰ Brennan, 'Career', p. 54.

commissioned a Latin poet to produce a work of literature in honour of the occasion. (I discuss this poem, and others to royalty, in Chapter 4).

Two pieces of internal evidence from Fortunatus' work supports the argument that his journey was planned, and that he may have been officially invited to come to Gaul. Firstly, Fortunatus notes that he was met by the royal envoy Sigould, a man who later became one of his friends and correspondents. Secondly, the fact that some of his earliest patrons in Gaul, Sidonius of Mainz (r. 549-?), Nicetius of Trier (r. 525-566), and Vilicus of Metz (r. 542-568), were bishops with transalpine connections provides further evidence of a planned journey.³¹ Gregory of Tours writes that the chief men of Sigibert's kingdom attended the marriage feast, and Fortunatus may have met many of his future friends and patrons there.

Fortunatus travelled frequently during his first decade in Gaul, visiting the court of Charibert (r. 561-567) and the cities of Tours and Poitiers, Bordeaux, and Toulouse. However, he seems to have settled in Poitiers by 569 and attached himself to the monastery of the Holy Cross, founded by the nun and former queen Radegund. As a result he established an important relationship which will be discussed in Chapter 3. Fortunatus arrived in Poitiers at the same time that Radegund was trying to obtain a relic of the cross for her foundation, a process which seems to have begun in late 567/568. Fortunatus wrote poems to the Byzantine imperial family in support of her cause, composed hymns to celebrate the relic's arrival in 569, and became close friends with Radegund and her adopted daughter Agnes (d. 587/589), the convent's abbess.³²

Poitiers' position on the Merovingian political and ecclesiastical map is worth noting. The diocese of Poitiers was frequently separated from the other dioceses in the ecclesiastical province of Bordeaux by the shifting borders of the Merovingian kingdoms.³³ The city itself was seized by various Merovingian kings

³¹ Reydellet I, pp. xvi-xvii. His first surviving poems were written for an Italian bishop, Vitalis of Altinum, who had connections to the Franks; among the first bishops he visited in Gaul was Nicetius of Trier, whose letters demonstrate his transalpine connections. Reydellet argued that the poet may well have been a guest of Bishop Sidonius of Mainz before proceeding, with a royal official as his escort, to Metz for the wedding, after which he went to Cologne, Trier, Verdun, Rheims, and perhaps Soissons. Reydellet I, pp. vii-ix.

³² Brennan, 'Career', pp. 60-3. On Radegund's contacts with Byzantium see also Averil Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II', in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1976), pp. 51-67.

³³ Brian Brennan, 'The Image of the Merovingian Bishop in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 18 (1992), 123.

throughout the sixth century. Only for very brief periods, 558-561 and 584-585, was the province united.³⁴ The lack of unity within its ecclesiastical province may have given the city a special dependence on the connections made by individuals, rather than through strictly institutional lines. Fortunatus made connections of friendship and patronage within the ecclesiastical province of Bordeaux, most notably to the metropolitan bishop, Leontius, but also sought friendship and patronage outside it. The connections and greetings he sent on behalf of Radegund are a good example of the necessity of making connections throughout the Merovingian kingdoms.

The poet's introduction to Radegund may have come through King Sigibert or through Bishop Germanus of Paris (c. 496-576), who had consecrated her as a nun.³⁵ Since Fortunatus was on pilgrimage in Tours before his arrival in Poitiers, it is perhaps more likely that it was Bishop Eufronius of Tours who sent him on to Radegund. Although he was permanently based in Poitiers from 568, Fortunatus continued to travel and seek patronage in Gaul throughout the 570s. When his poem on the death of Queen Galswinth, written for her sister Brunhild in 569/570, did not win him any special notice, he started travelling again: to Bordeaux to visit Bishop Leontius (r. c. 549-573?) and his wife Placidina (d. post-573) and also to their villas on the lower Garonne and the Haute Garonne. By around 573, he had met and was writing regularly for Gregory of Tours; these poems will be discussed in Chapter 1. Even after settling in Poitiers and establishing a steady connection to Gregory, Fortunatus' poems that suggest that his travels continued with a visit to Paris sometime before 576; journeys to a villa, the monastery at Tincillac, and Angers sometime in the 570s; a visit to Nantes before 573; Nevers in the early 570s; Brittany before 576/577, and two other unspecified trips.³⁶

At some point during his career, Fortunatus was ordained as a priest. Our only piece of autobiographic evidence on his clerical career occurs in the *Vita Martini*, when Fortunatus mentions that he had been urged to follow a religious life by an Italian episcopal friend.³⁷ Our evidence is otherwise slight for the date of and

³⁴ Excepting Périgueux, the cities of the province were united in support of Gundovald. See Nancy Gauthier and Jean-Charles Picard, *Topographie chrétienne des cités de la Gaule, des origines au milieu du VIII^e siècle*, t.10 (Paris: De Boccard, 1986-), pp. 12-5.

³⁵ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 39-40.

³⁶ The above is an abbreviated summary of Fortunatus' travels—for full details see Brennan, 'Career', pp. 60-6.

³⁷ Brennan, 'Career', p. 67.

motivation behind his ordination, and scholars have debated whether it was early or late in his career.³⁸ Brennan suggests that Fortunatus had been ordained by 576 because Gregory of Tours refers to the author of the *Vita Martini* as a priest. An early entrance into priestly orders would have facilitated Fortunatus' residence near the Convent of the Holy Cross and close association with the nuns there.³⁹ In contrast, Judith George argues that Fortunatus was not ordained until the late 580s or early 590s, after which he became bishop of Poitiers. She argues that Gregory's reference to Fortunatus as a priest applied to 593, the year in which Gregory wrote, not 576, the year Fortunatus finished the *Vita Martini*. George argues that Fortunatus may have been ordained in the late 580s or early 590s. Due to the hostility which existed between the bishop of Poitiers, Maroveus, and Radegund, the bishops of Tours were actively involved in the convent's affairs, so it is possible that Gregory himself ordained Fortunatus. He may also have been ordained by Maroveus' successor, Plato, who was Gregory's protégée.⁴⁰

Fortunatus' access to the convent of the Holy Cross is not an insurmountable obstacle to a later date of priestly ordination, since it likely he was in clerical orders for some time before becoming a priest. Robert Godding's work on Merovingian priests shows that Fortunatus' path to the priesthood and episcopate may have followed a standard pattern. Most priests followed a standard *cursus clericorum*, progressing through the ranks of the minor clergy before their ordination to the priesthood. A man could not be ordained a priest before age thirty, and he was required to be literate, a faithful Catholic, and of good moral character. Except for those who came from clerical families, a priest required approval from the king or his *iudex* to confirm his appointment.⁴¹ In contrast to the standard pattern, we should not that sixth-century progress through the grades of ordination could sometimes be quite rapid.⁴² However, the level and consistency of Fortunatus' access to the nuns

³⁸ It is worth nothing that in addition being silent about his own career as a priest, Fortunatus was largely silent about the careers of priests in general. As Robert Godding notes, Fortunatus very rarely mentioned priests—in his work, *sacerdos* almost always refers to a bishop. Robert Godding, *Prêtres en Gaule mérovingienne* (Bruxelles: Société de Bollandistes, 2001), pp. 182-3 and 432-3.

³⁹ Brennan, 'Career', p. 67.

⁴⁰ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 212-4. Fortunatus wrote a poem in honour of Plato's consecration, *Carm.*10.14.

⁴¹ Godding, *Prêtres en Gaule mérovingienne*, pp. 75-110.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 38-49.

of the Holy Cross suggests that he was in clerical orders relatively soon after arriving in Gaul, even if his ordination as a priest offered later.

Fortunatus continued to write for members of the Merovingian royal families, and episcopal and aristocratic friends well into the 580s. His activities during the 590s are more obscure, but he wrote to Gregory on behalf of the nuns of the Holy Cross during the unrest in their community. His last datable poem was written for the consecration of Gregory's archdeacon Plato as bishop of Poitiers in 592, an office Fortunatus himself later assumed. He is thought to have died in the first decade of the seventh century and was venerated as a saint in the Middle Ages.⁴³

The Works of Venantius Fortunatus

Upon his move to Merovingian Gaul, Fortunatus entered a world where the elite was educated or aspired to be so. The sixth century was a period of change in the organization of society and the administration of the formerly imperial West, where churchmen and soldiers increased in importance against civil officials, and where 'secular education and learning [were eclipsed] at the expense of literacy and to the profit of a more clerically orientated and a more scriptural culture'.⁴⁴ However, in the Merovingian kingdoms through which Fortunatus' networks of friendship and patronage extended, literary culture still mattered. He addressed his episcopal and secular correspondents assuming that they were learned and took pride in being so. The people to whom he wrote would likely have been taught to read and write at home, using books from family libraries, continuing their training in a monastery or under the supervision of ecclesiastical relatives (if destined for a religious career), or at court (if destined for a secular career).⁴⁵ It was a world in which literary culture mattered and those who participated in it 'were conscious of

⁴³ Brennan, 'Career', pp. 73-8; see also the timeline of Fortunatus' career given in Reydellet I, pp. xix-xxviii.

⁴⁴ R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 15.

⁴⁵ Pierre Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West: Sixth through Eighth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), pp. 113-24, 239-43.

their role as the last defenders of the classical culture that distinguished them from barbarians'.⁴⁶

In his preface to Books one through seven, Fortunatus addresses this idea. He describes himself as exhausted by his journey, not only because it was physically difficult but also because of a lack of response to his work.

...neither fear of a critic urged me on, nor did the laws of skill give approval, nor did the goodwill of a companion encourage me, nor did a knowledgeable reader correct me, when for me a hoarse groaning was just as adequate as singing among those who do not distinguish the hissing of a goose from the song of a swan; often, there was only a buzzing harp striking barbarian songs so that among them I was not a musical poet but a mouse-like one; with the flower of poetry nibbled away I was not singing a poem but talking nonsense; the listeners sitting among their maple-wood cups revelled wildly, toasting good wishes which Bacchus would judge mad.⁴⁷

Fortunatus' presentation of himself as a 'mouse-like' poet dulled by his unreceptive surroundings is a rhetorical strategy designed to separate him and his audience from ignorant inebriates. It contrasts interestingly with the poems found in Books one and two, discussed in Chapter 2, which centre on bishops as participants in Roman culture, exchanging literary greetings and constructing elaborate buildings to show their status and impress their friends.⁴⁸

Fortunatus enjoyed a prolific career as a poet and hagiographer, composing two hundred forty-nine poems, a four-book verse epic about the life of Saint Martin (d. 397) and prose lives of Hilary of Poitiers (r. 350/2-367/8), Germanus of Paris, Albinus of Angers (r. 529-550), Paternus of Avranches (d. 564), Radegund of Poitiers, and the legendary Marcellus of Paris.⁴⁹ The poems are organised into

⁴⁶ Riché, *Education and Culture*, p. 207.

⁴⁷ *Carm. Praefatio*, ...*ubi me non urgebat vel metus ex iudice vel probabat usus ex lege nec invitabat favor ex comite nec emendabat lector arte, ubi mihi tantundem valebat raucum genere quod cantare apud quos nihil disparat aut stridor anseris aut canor oloris, sola saepe bombicans barbaros leudos arpa relidens ut inter illos egomet non musicus poeta muricus deroso flore carminis poema non canerem sed garrirem, quo residentes auditores inter acernea pocula salute bibentes insana Baccho iudice debaccharent.*

⁴⁸ I discuss these poems in Chapter 2.

⁴⁹ On Fortunatus' hagiography, see Bruno Krusch, *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati Opera Pedestria* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1885), pp. v-xxxiii; Walter Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im Lateinischen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1986), pp. 277-87; and Richard Collins, 'Observations on the Form, Language and Public of the Prose Biographies of Venantius Fortunatus in the Hagiography of Merovingian Gaul', in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. by H.B. Clarke and Mary Brennan (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1981), pp. 105-31. The Lives of Remigius, Medard, Leobinus, Marilius, and the Passio of Dionysius, Rusticus, Eleuthrius were ascribed to Fortunatus in early medieval manuscripts; medieval attributions to Fortunatus also included two theological tracts, the *Symbolum Athanasium* and *Expositio fidei Catholicae*. Krusch

eleven books and the editions of Leo and Reydellet include an Appendix of poems preserved outside of the eleven-book collection. The Appendix poems have typically been thought to have been transmitted only in one manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 13048, but as I show in Chapter 3, at least one additional copy of the first three Appendix poems survived the Middle Ages.

The poet's role in arranging and publishing his works has been debated. Wilhelm Meyer argued that Fortunatus published Books 1-8 in 576 at Gregory's request, Book 9 after 584, and Books 10 and 11 posthumously; *Carm.*7.25, which postdates 585, was reinserted after it fell out of its original place. In his assessment, Books 10 and 11 were assembled by friends after the poet's death, and the poems of the appendix, preserved in a single manuscript, are ones which have fallen out of their proper places in the other books. Meyer concluded that the last few poems of Book 7 were obviously out of place, since a poem to a cleric appeared after a set of poems to secular officials; *Carm.*7.24, a set of decorative mottos, was 'trifling and inappropriate'; and the final poem of the book, *Carm.*VII.25, postdates 584, and thus the eight-book collection.⁵⁰ Tardi argued that the disorder at the end of Book 7 could be explained by collection of poems for Gregory which ended there, and that Book 8 opens with a new dedication to various bishops (*Carm.*VIII.1).⁵¹ Tardi's argument offers a better explanation for the state of the end of Book 7 than does Meyer's. In this thesis I follow Judith George's argument that the collection and publication of Fortunatus' poems occurred in three stages: Books 1-7, dedicated to Gregory of Tours, in 576; Books 8 and 9, at some point before 587, and Books 9 and 10 during the 590s. Book 11 is thought to have been published posthumously by friends, but George makes a convincing case that the poet himself may have assembled and published the poems found in Books 10 and 11.⁵²

doubted that these works were by Fortunatus, and subsequent scholarship has accepted his judgement of the Lives' authenticity, though cases have been made that the *Vita Medardi* and the *vita Seuerini Burdegalensis episcopi* should be accepted as genuine works by Fortunatus. See Berschin, p. 278-9 and 282. A new case for the authenticity of the *Vita Medardi* was recently made by Monique Goulet, 'Le poème de sancto Medardo et la Vie en prose de Saint Médard: analyse textométrique comparée', paper delivered at, 'Écriture italienne, écriture gauloise: Regards croisés sur l'œuvre hagiographique en prose de Venance Fortunat' (Rome, 2016). On the authorship of the Life of Remigius, see Alba Maria Orselli, *L'idea e il culto del santo patrono cittadino nella letteratura latina* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1945), pp. 65, n.6.

⁵⁰ Wilhelm Meyer, *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus* (Berlin: Weidmannscheibuchhandlung, 1901), pp. 24-30.

⁵¹ Tardi, *Fortunatus*, pp. 92-6.

⁵² George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 208-11. Judith George, 'Venantius Fortunatus the End Game', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 96 (1998).

Within the books themselves, the poems are arranged according to the principles of ordering for late antique letter collections. As Roy Gibson has argued for ancient and late antique letter collections, chronological disorder within each book was balanced by ‘progressive chronology’ for the whole collection (later books contain letters written later); and writers clearly tried to group letters by theme, or to created books with an artistic or thematic point. One way to do so this was careful selections of the letters at the beginning and end of a collection.⁵³ Wilhelm Meyer noted that Fortunatus’ book of epitaphs was arranged by the relative social status of the dead, with bishops, clerics, and laymen coming before the women at the very end of the book, and Judith George argues that the position of the addressee in the Merovingian social hierarchy shapes the ordering of each book.⁵⁴

Previous studies of Venantius Fortunatus

Fortunatus has attracted attention from a variety of perspectives. Historians have mined his poems for information about the social and cultural life in the Merovingian kingdoms, and Classicists have used his poems to investigate the evolution of late antique thought and the Latin language. In what follows I will sketch previous work on the poet in order to make plain the debts and points of departure for this study.

Interest in Fortunatus’ poetry long outlasted the Merovingian kingdoms. In the medieval world, Fortunatus’ works were classics until the end of the eleventh century and he had a significant impact on medieval thought.⁵⁵ Most manuscripts of his works date from the ninth and tenth centuries, when he seems to have enjoyed particular popularity. As a Christian poet and hagiographer, he was known and admired by other early medieval writers, including Paul the Deacon, who wrote an epitaph of him; Aldhelm, who knew his works well; and Alcuin of York, who included him in a list of Christian poets.⁵⁶ Peter Godman argued that Fortunatus

⁵³ Roy K. Gibson, ‘On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections’, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 102 (2012), 14.

⁵⁴ Meyer, *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 25. George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. xxi-xii.

⁵⁵ Fiske, *Friendship*, p. 182.

⁵⁶ Roberts, *Sparrow*, pp. 325-8.

served as an important model for Carolingian poets.⁵⁷ The current scholarly consensus is that interest in his poetry faded in the central and high Middle Ages but the fact that he was consistently listed in medieval catalogues of Christian authors suggests that his works continued to be known and read.⁵⁸ As I suggest in Chapter 3, there is further work to be done on interest in Fortunatus' works during the fifteenth century.

Modern interest in the poet's works can be said to have begun in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the appearance of the first editions of the *Carmina*.⁵⁹ The poet's works were edited again under the auspices of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* in 1881, when Frederich Leo produced a critical edition with useful indices by Max Manitius.⁶⁰ Leo's edition was the first to include, in what he named the Appendix, the additional poems discovered by Guerard in 1831. Leo's edition remains an important contribution to work on the poet and in its wake there followed the first series of scholarly monographs on the poet. The first of these was Wilhelm Meyer's *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus*, which offers detailed commentary on each of the poems and their collection and publication.⁶¹

The first interpretive studies of the poet's works built on these foundations. In his study of Fortunatus' authorial personality, Richard Koebner was the first scholar to recognise the importance of friendship for understanding the poet's career, works, and Merovingian context. He also stood at the beginning of a long line of scholars who have identified our poet as the last representative of the literary tradition of antiquity, 'still educated in the antique school of Latin rhetoric as a secular poet'.⁶² The subtitle of the next major monograph on Fortunatus, 'un dernier représentant de la poésie latin dans la Gaule mérovingienne', makes clear the extent

⁵⁷ Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, p. 184.

⁵⁸ For a list of medieval and early modern comments on Fortunatus, see Christophorus Browerus, *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati* (Moguntiae, 1617), p. 24-8, and see also D. Tardi, *Fortunatus*, pp. 277-81.

⁵⁹ The first edition of Fortunatus' *carmina* appeared in 1578, produced in Venice by Giacomo Salvati Solanio Murgitano, but it was not until 1603 that a complete critical edition of Fortunatus' works appeared in Mainz under the editorship of the Dutch Jesuit Christopher Brower, whose edition was reedited twice, in 1617 and 1630. Michel Ange Luchi produced another edition in Rome, in 1786-7, which was reprinted by Migne in the *Patrologia Latina*.

⁶⁰ Reydelle I, p. lxxxvi-lxxxvii.

⁶¹ See Meyer, *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus*.

⁶² Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 1; on friendship see in particular pp. 31-9 and 66-73.

to which scholars found this paradigm useful. Tardi was a firm and eloquent expositor of the idea of sixth-century literary *décadence*, but the value of his study is that it emphasises the extent to which Fortunatus successfully adapted to, and in turn attempted to shape, the Merovingian world in which he lived and wrote.⁶³ Alongside this historical approach to Fortunatus ran a second strand of scholarship, which attempted to pick up Manilius' threads and weave Fortunatus into the tapestry of Classical and medieval Latin. Antonio Meneghetti studied the vocabulary and morphology of the poet's Latin.⁶⁴ A lengthy series of articles by Sven Blomgren expanded the list of authors cited by Fortunatus and offered emendations to Leo's edition.⁶⁵

The first extended treatment of friendship in Fortunatus' works appeared in the mammoth doctoral thesis of Adele Fiske, *The Survival and Development of the Concept of Friendship in the Early Middle Ages*. Fiske wrote in 1955, a decade before the emerging field of late antiquity encouraged pursuing the story of late Roman cultural developments into the Middle Ages, but her study considers the use and adaptation of Classical and patristic ideas of *amicitia* from Augustine to Aelred of Rievaulx. Her reading of friendship in Fortunatus was largely literary and theological, focusing on the poet's use and adaptation of concepts of *caritas* and *dulcedo* found in the writings of earlier authors.⁶⁶

Attention to Fortunatus continued sporadically into the 1960s and 1970s: Pierre Riché drew on Fortunatus' works in his study of education and culture in barbarian Gaul, while he was cited in the works of early medieval history by J.M.

⁶³ D. Tardi, *Fortunatus: étude sur un dernier représentant de la poésie latine dans la Gaule mérovingienne* (Paris: Boivin, 1927).

⁶⁴ Antonio Meneghetti, *La Latinità Di Venanzio Fortunato* (Turin: Libreria Editrice Internazionale, 1916-17).

⁶⁵ Some of these are collected in Sven Blomgren, *Studia Fortunatiana* (Upsala: Lundequist, 1933-34). See also idem, 'De duobus epitaphiis episcoporum, utrum Venantio Fortunato attribuenda sint necne', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 39 (1941); 'In Venanti Fortunati carmina adnotationes', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 42 (1944); 'De Venantio Fortunato Vergilii aliorumque poetarum priorum imitatore', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 42 (1944); 'De P. Papinii Statii apud Venantium Fortunatum vestigiis', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana* (1950); 'De Venantio Fortunato Lucani Claudianique Imitatore', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 48 (1950); 'In Venanti Fortunati carmina adnotationes novae', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 69 (1971); 'Fortunatus cum elogiis collatus: de Cognatione quae est inter carmina Venanti Fortunati et poesin epigraphicam Christianam', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 71 (1973); 'Ad Aratorem et Fortunatum adnotationes', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 72 (1974); 'De Locis Ovidii a Venantio Fortunato expressis', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 79 (1981).

⁶⁶ Fiske, *Friendship*, pp. 181-217.

Wallace-Hadrill, and in Peter Brown's studies of late antiquity.⁶⁷ A number of important studies by Averil Cameron appeared on Merovingian contact with Byzantium, including several addressing Fortunatus' poems for Byzantine audiences.⁶⁸ Beginning in the early 1980s, Brian Brennan published a series of historical articles which established the details of Fortunatus' life and career, and elucidated his Merovingian context, particularly with regard to the kings, bishops, and senatorial aristocrats who were his patrons and friends.⁶⁹ Around the same time, Judith George published a series of articles on Fortunatus' relationships with Merovingian kings and bishops, as well as his poems of consolation. Her monograph on Fortunatus, which was both the first substantial monograph on Fortunatus since 1927 and also the first English-language monograph on Fortunatus, appeared in 1992.⁷⁰ George's study analysed Fortunatus' works for the evidence they provide of

⁶⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, pp. 82-7. Another important piece of this period worth mentioning is Gregson Davis, 'Ad Sidera Notus: Strategies of Lament and Consolation in Fortunatus' De Gelesuintha', *Agon*, 1 (1967). Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 84-5, treats Fortunatus and Gregory as the end of an era. In *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 156-7, 231, 237, and 247, he briefly discusses Fortunatus' career and two of his correspondents (Radegund and Gogo). In 'Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours', in idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), pp. 222-50 (p. 226), Brown touches on the false contrast scholars have drawn between Fortunatus and Gregory, but does not incorporate the poet into his main argument. Fortunatus appears only in a handful of perceptive footnotes as further evidence of conclusions drawn from Gregory's works.

⁶⁸ Averil Cameron, 'Agathias on the Early Merovingians', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Lettere, Storia e Filosofia*, 37 (1968); Averil Cameron, 'The Artistic Patronage of Justin II', *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines*, 50 (1980); Averil Cameron, 'Corippus' Poem on Justin II: A Terminus of Antique Art?', *Annali della Scuola normale superiore di Pisa Classe di lettere e filosofia*, 5 (1975); Averil Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II', in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1976), pp. 51-67; Averil Cameron, 'The Empress Sophia', *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines*, 45 (1975).

⁶⁹ Brennan, 'Career', remains an essential starting point for details of Fortunatus' biography. His other important articles include 'The Image of the Frankish Kings in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 10 (1984); 'St Radegund and the Early Development of Her Cult at Poitiers', *Journal of Religious History*, 13 (1985); 'Senators and Social Mobility in Sixth-Century Gaul', *Journal of Medieval History*, 11 (1985); 'The Conversion of the Jews of Clermont in AD 576', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 36 (1985); 'The Image of the Merovingian Bishop in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 18 (1992); 'Venantius Fortunatus: Byzantine Agent?', *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines*, 65 (1995), 7-16; 'The Disputed Authorship of Fortunatus' Byzantine Poems', *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines*, 66 (1996); 'Text and Image: "Reading" the Walls of the Sixth-Century Cathedral of Tours', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 6 (1996); 'Deathless Marriage and Spiritual Fecundity in Venantius Fortunatus' "De Virginitate"', *Traditio*, 51 (1996).

⁷⁰ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*. Judith George, 'Portraits of Two Merovingian Bishops in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 13 (1987); Judith George, 'Variations on Themes of Consolation in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 86 (1988); Judith George, 'Poet as Politician: Venantius Fortunatus' Panegyric to King Chilperic', *Journal of Medieval History*, 15 (1989); George; Judith George, 'Venantius Fortunatus Panegyric in Merovingian Gaul.', in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late*

the poet's use and adaptation of the Classical tradition, and also read the poems for historical information about the poet's addressees and the society in which they lived. Her partial translation of Fortunatus' poems made them more readily available to a new generation of early medieval historians.⁷¹ George's and Brennan's work is useful for understanding Fortunatus' context and his connections to Merovingian kings, bishops, and aristocrats, but in neither study was friendship a major focus.

A new edition and French translation of Fortunatus' poetry by Marc Reydellet began to appear in 1994; the third volume was published in 2004, although an additional volume of the *Vita Martini* had already appeared in 2002. Although Leo's edition continues to be cited, Reydellet's edition re-collates the manuscripts of Fortunatus' poems, and corrects Leo's text; the introduction is a useful overview of the poet and the *Carmina*.⁷² In a series of articles, Michael Roberts focused on the late antique literary context of Fortunatus' poems and the poet's use of specific literary techniques.⁷³ Roberts' monograph, *The Humblest Sparrow*, is a sustained examination of the literary qualities and strategies of Fortunatus' poems, situates the poet firmly in the Classical and late antique tradition,

Antiquity, ed. by Mary Whitby (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 225-46; 'Venantius Fortunatus the End Game', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 96 (1998), 32-43.

⁷¹ This translation is referred to throughout as George, *Personal and Political*. An earlier translation of Fortunatus' poetry was never published. Barbara J. Rogers, 'The Poems of Venantius Fortunatus: A Translation and Commentary' (Rutgers University, 1979). Complete translations of Fortunatus' poetry are available in French (Charles Nisard, Marc Reydellet), German (Wolfgang Fels), and Italian (Stefano di Brazzano), but his poetry and prose have never been fully translated into English (partial translations by Barbara Rogers, Judith George, and Joseph Pucci). Michael Roberts is currently working on a complete translation of the *Carmina*. The VSM is only translated into French (Solange Quesnel), Italian (Stanislao Tamburii and Giovanni Palermo), and German (Wolfgang Fels). Fortunatus' hagiography is very patchily translated indeed: Giovanni Palermo also translated the Lives of Radegund and Hilary and there is a German translation of the former by Gerlinde Huber-Rebenich. Only the *Miracula* of Saint Hilary (translated by Raymond Van Dam in *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*) and the Life of Radegund (translated Jo Ann McNamara in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*) are available in English.

⁷² Reydellet I, pp. vii-lxxxix.

⁷³ Michael Roberts, 'St. Martin and the Leper: Narrative Variation in the Martin Poems of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 4 (1994); 'The Description of Landscape in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus the Moselle Poems', *Traditio*, 49 (1994); 'Venantius' Fortunatus Elegy on the Death of Galswintha', in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 298-312; 'The Last Epic of Antiquity: Generic Continuity and Innovation in the Vita Sancti Martini of Venantius Fortunatus', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 131 (2001); 'Venantius Fortunatus and the Uses of Travel in Late Latin Poetry', in *Lateinische Poesie der Spätantike*, ed. by Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer and Petra Schierl (Basel: Schwabe Verlag Basel, 2009), pp. 293-306; 'Light, Color, and Visual Illusion in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 65/66 (2011-212), 113-20; and 'Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours: Patronage and Poetry', in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Alexander Callander Murray (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 35-59. Roberts' works on the VSM have been particularly significant.

and includes a chapter on friendship in absence.⁷⁴ The number of publications on Fortunatus has slowly increased, including investigations of the issue of genre in his works, his use of erotic and emotional vocabulary, and three conference volumes devoted to the poet and his context.⁷⁵ However, there is still a tendency among historians of the Merovingians to relegate the poet's works to a few carefully chosen footnotes rather than to fully integrate his picture of Merovingian society into narratives about the cultural history of the Frankish kingdoms. This is one of the gaps I attempt to fill.

The Blending of Patronage and Friendship in Fortunatus' Works

In his writings, Fortunatus participated in elite circles of friendship and patronage. This thesis discusses the language used to describe, express, and develop these relationships, which were uniquely important for Fortunatus, and investigates the ideas behind this vocabulary. Unlike other important figures in Gaul, Fortunatus had no local family connections, and throughout his career made use of his connections with friends instead. In turn, the identities and wishes of his friends influenced where he went and what he wrote about.⁷⁶

The words 'friend' and 'friendship' had different meanings for Fortunatus and his contemporaries than they do nowadays. When the poet used the language of friendship (which he does frequently),⁷⁷ he drew on centuries-old ideas about social

⁷⁴ Roberts, *Sparrow*, pp. 244-319. In the same year, a shorter and less comprehensive book on Fortunatus as a literary figure was published in French. Evrard Delbey, *Venance Fortunat ou l'enchantement du monde* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009).

⁷⁵ Gillian R. Knight, 'Friendship and Erotics in the Late Antique Verse-Epistle: Ausonius to Paulinus Revisited', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, n.s. 148 (2005); and eadem, 'The Parameters of Epistolarity: Mapping the Verse Epistle in Venantius Fortunatus', *Res publica litterarum*, 9 (2006). Robert Levine, 'Patronage and Erotic Rhetoric in the Sixth Century: The Case of Venantius Fortunatus', in *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), pp. 75-93. On the issue of genre in Fortunatus' works, with detailed attention to individual poems, see now Oliver Ehlen, *Venantius-Interpretationen: rhetorische und generische Transgressionen beim "neuen Orpheus"* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2011). The conference volumes are: *Venanzio Fortunato tra Italia e Francia*, ed. by Tiziana Ragusa and Bruno Termite (Treviso: Provincia di Treviso, 1993); *Venanzio Fortunato e il suo tempo*, ed. by Fondazione Casamarca (Treviso: Europrint, 2003); *Présence et visages de Venance Fortunat*, ed. by Sylvie Labarre, *Camena* 11 (2012).

⁷⁶ Simon Coates, 'Venantius Fortunatus and the Image of Episcopal Authority in Late Antique and Early Medieval Gaul', *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), 1114.

⁷⁷ Reydellet I, pp. lvi-lvii. He also notes that Fortunatus deserves mention in the history of friendship because of the frequency with which he uses the language of friendship.

relationships.⁷⁸ Greek and Roman ideas about friendship, such as the ‘spiritual unity and harmony of interest, reciprocity and sharing’ found between friends, were adapted by Christian thinkers of the fourth century, such as Augustine and Paulinus of Nola.⁷⁹ Latin Christian authors of the fifth and early sixth centuries saw friendship as a ‘meeting of souls’ and as a way in which orthodox (or heretical) ideas could pass between people.⁸⁰ On a less metaphysical level, friendship letters enabled correspondents separated by distance to continue their communication and connection.⁸¹ These connections were made not just with words, but also with gifts, a practice in which Fortunatus also participated.⁸²

Fortunatus’ friendships influenced his life before his journey to Gaul, as can be seen from the fact that he mentions an Italian clerical friend who wanted him to pursue a religious life (a wish Fortunatus did not heed at the time). His friendships in Italy continued to be a part of his life after his journey to Gaul—his *Vita Martini* and some other of his poems refer to friends across the Alps.⁸³ Fortunatus’ panegyrics to bishops and kings and his poems about churches are the result of the connections he established with elites from his arrival in Gaul. During his stay at the Austrasian court after the wedding of Sigibert and Brunhild, Fortunatus developed his skills at writing friendship poems, many of which appear in Books 6 and 7. Koebner found it unnecessary to answer the question of whether the culture of friendship at the Austrasian court came before or after Fortunatus; it is enough to know that the poet and his correspondents shared a common language of friendship, mutually understood through a shared Christian faith and education in Latin.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ James McEvoy, ‘Philia and Amicitia: The Philosophy of Friendship from Plato to Aquinas’, *Sewanee Mediaeval Colloquium Occasional Papers*, 2 (1985), 1-21.

⁷⁹ Caroline White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 4. On friendship in the works of Paulinus of Nola, Pierre Fabre, *Saint Paulin de Nole et l’amitié Chrétienne* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1949), remains fundamental.

⁸⁰ Ian Wood, ‘Letters and Letter-Collections from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: The Prose Works of Avitus of Vienne’, in *The Culture of Christendom: Essays in Medieval History in Memory of Dennis L.T. Bethel*, ed. by Marc Anthony Meyer (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993), pp. 29-43 (pp. 35-6).

⁸¹ Letters served the same purpose for people of Augustine’s generation, who met as students in the great imperial cities and maintained these friendships; White, pp. 5-8. White, *Christian Friendship*, pp. 5-8; Wood, ‘Letters and letter collections’, pp. 38-9.

⁸² In Carm. 1.17, Fortunatus offers an unidentified object to Placidina, wife of Leontius, bishop of Bordeaux. For a consideration of gift-giving as a Christian act in Fortunatus’ poetry, see Stephen D’Evelyn, ‘Gift and the Personal Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus’, *Literature and Theology*, 21 (2007), 3.

⁸³ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 10-12. The poems are to bishop Vitalis, Carm. 1.1 and 1.2.

⁸⁴ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 30-5.

Fortunatus composed both prose and verse letters to friends throughout his time in Gaul. Making connections and maintaining friendship networks were major reasons to write letters, as they enabled these links to be created and preserved even across distances.⁸⁵ The poetry and letters exchanged by Fortunatus and his friends they provide a window onto sixth-century elite culture and how this was built and maintained through letters. Literacy was an important marker of status for late Roman aristocrats, such as Fortunatus and his correspondents, and letter-writing was one of the ways to demonstrate attainment of this skill.⁸⁶

Ideas about friendship shared by Fortunatus and his contemporaries drew heavily on classical thinking about these relationships, a field which has been well-explored. Some of the most significant work on classical friendship has been done by P.A. Brunt, Richard Saller, Peter White, and David Konstan. Brunt, in 1965, was one of the first Classicists to argue against the then-prevailing view that Roman friendships were primarily indicative of political allegiances. About a decade later, Peter White, in an article on poets in early imperial Rome, noted that usually no distinction is made between the patron and his dependents—they are *amici*, the relationship between them is *amicitia*. Distinctions in rank amongst *amici* could be made by judicious use of adjectives, but the word *cliens* tended to be avoided: it was too bald and *cultor* was preferred.⁸⁷ *Cultor* and the associated verb *colere*, like *susceptus*, is another word worth chasing—Fortunatus uses *cultor* nine times in his poetry, describing his addressees in phrases like *cultor templorum*, or *cultor dei*. This seems to be a traditional use of the word, though now in a Christian religious context, and I discuss it further in Chapter 2.

White's work, though still widely read and cited, has met criticism. In his book on early imperial personal patronage, Richard Saller critiques White's discussion of Roman friends' social rank, arguing that we should not assume

⁸⁵ Wood, 'Letters and Letter Collections', pp. 38-9.

⁸⁶ Alan K. Bowman, 'Literacy and Power in the Ancient World', in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. by Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1-16 pp. 14-5). It has been argued that Roman cultural identity and Roman political identity were closely intertwined; with the political disappearance of the Roman Empire, the aristocrats such as Sidonius' emphasis on Latin learning was 'a retreat into an older identity.' See John F. Drinkwater, 'Un-Becoming Roman. The End of Provincial Civilisation in Gaul', in *Gallien in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter*, ed. by Gernot Michael Müller and Steffen Diefenbach (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 59-77 pp. 72-5).

⁸⁷ Peter White, 'Amicitia and the Profession of Poetry in Early Imperial Rome', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 68 (1978), 80-1.

patronage existed only where the words *patronus* and *cliens* are used. Furthermore, he cautions that in Roman usage these were not the words most frequently used to describe patronage relationships—both of them implied inferiority and degradation, and were thus avoided out of politeness. Yet Saller draws a distinction between the ways the words are used in literature and epigraphy, which he ascribes to the social differences between who wrote surviving literature and who set up surviving inscriptions.⁸⁸ Saller also suggests that since patronage was an unequal relationship based on exchange, the words one has look out for are actually ones which denote exchange, thus: *officium*, *beneficium*, and *meritum* all have the meaning, roughly, of ‘favour’, and *gratia*, ‘goodwill’.⁸⁹

Ideas of reciprocity and exchange are crucial to recognising the importance of relationships of friendship and patronage in Fortunatus’ works, and indeed the larger world in which he wrote. In contrast to White and Saller, I have found the analysis of more direct words such as *patronus*, *cliens*, and *amicus* to be helpful in the context of Merovingian Gaul. Fortunatus uses these words rarely, and in specific contexts, which allows us to understand the ideas behind their use. Fortunatus’ poetry is useful for the historian of Merovingian society because it reflects the many different guises of friendship and patronage during the sixth century.

Patronage in Fortunatus’ day was very different from that of the ancient Roman world. In understanding Classical patronage, the work of Barbara Gold, Peter Garnsey, and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill is fundamental. Garnsey’s work extends into the late Roman period, while Gold is the only one of the three to have offered a sustained discussion of literary patronage. These discussions of Classical patronage often consider it from the top down. According to Garnsey and Wallace-Hadrill, the emperor was the apex of patronage; below him was his surrounding circle of aristocrats, responsible for promoting their successors.⁹⁰ Richard Saller defines the connection of patronage which existed between these aristocrats and their successors as a: ‘a social relationship which is essentially: (i) reciprocal,

⁸⁸ Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 7-11.

⁸⁹ Saller, *Personal Patronage*, pp. 17-22.

⁹⁰ Peter Garnsey, ‘Roman Patronage’, in *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians Later Roman History and Culture, 284-450 Ce*, ed. by Scott McGill, Cristiana Sogno, and Edward Jay Watts (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 33-54 (p. 45). See also Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 81 and 84.

involving exchanges of services over time between two parties, (ii) personal as opposed to commercial, and (iii) asymmetrical, i.e. between parties of different status.⁹¹

Jens-Uwe Krause brought together and analysed later Roman developments such as the expansion of late Roman bureaucracy, which created a corresponding increase in networks of patronage. A further development was that the fifth-century emergence of barbarian courts created regional centres of power and patronage.⁹² Krause's central concern is dependence and independence between large landowners and their tenant farmers, and its consequences for the social and political system of the late empire. In his work, Krause accepts Saller's definition but finds that it runs into problems when compared with the language late antique sources use to describe patronage, and its principal actors, patrons and clients. Late antique sources do not always make the asymmetry of social relationships clear: patrons are sometimes difficult to distinguish from friends.⁹³ Krause writes that it would be useful to extend the study to the early Middle Ages but does not do so. Except for making occasional use of Gregory the Great and Cassiodorus, he avoids discussing the sixth century.⁹⁴ There is therefore a gap in the study of early medieval patronage, which this thesis attempts to fill.

For scholarship on the sixth century, one has to turn again to friendship studies.⁹⁵ Verena Epp's work examines the fifth through seventh centuries, and she argues that there are four major forms of friendship in the early Middle Ages: personal relationships, clientele or relationships of allegiance, international alliances, and relationships with the holy. This thesis focuses particularly on personal relationships and relationships with the holy, aspects of early medieval friendship on which an analysis of Fortunatus' works helps to shed new light. My thesis follows Epp in arguing that these two relationships were connected. In

⁹¹ Saller's definition is summarised in Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society*, p. 3.

⁹² Jens-Uwe Krause, *Spätantike Patronatsformen im westen des römischen Reiches* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1987).

⁹³ Krause, *Spätantike Patronatsformen*, 4-5.

⁹⁴ In contrast to work on *amicitia*, there is no modern study of which focuses specifically on patronage in the early Middle Ages. Volume five of Fustel du Coulanges' history of the political institutions of France, which argues that the transformation of benefices and patronage during the Merovingian age led to feudalism, is still the only study which addresses patronage in Fortunatus' day.

⁹⁵ Verena Epp, *Amicitia: zur Geschichte personaler, sozialer, politischer und geistlicher Beziehungen im frühen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1999).

Chapters 1 and 2, I argue that in Fortunatus' works personal friendships and relationships with the holy are connected in two ways: through bishops, who have access to patronage on earth and in heaven, and through the sponsorship of ecclesiastical building projects.

Fortunatus' works provide few glimpses of relationships between lords and their followers (Epp's *clienteles* and allegiances).⁹⁶ International alliances and diplomatic *amicitia*, two other forms of early medieval friendship Epp discusses, are not a feature of Fortunatus' writing and thus consideration of them is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, Fortunatus' 'Byzantine poems', written for the nun and former queen, Radegund, allow us to examine the intersection of literary patronage and diplomatic efforts. Chapter 3 also begins a discussion of the intersection between patronage, friendship and gender. Chapter 4 continues this discussion by uncovering the important role royal women played in Fortunatus' work and analysing the presence of late antique ideas of friendship within marriage in Fortunatus' writing for Merovingian royal couples.

Gendered aspects of friendship are not discussed in Epp's work. This thesis also differs with Epp on the subject of ethnicity. Epp concludes that a blend of Roman traditions of clientage and Germanic traditions of a leader and his followers with a Christian outlook led to a new concept of friendship.⁹⁷ I argue instead that the combination of Roman and Christian thought is undoubtedly what makes Merovingian friendship distinctive; this synthesis is analysed and discussed in Chapter 5 through the lens of Fortunatus' writings for Merovingian aristocrats.

Fortunatus' writings provide evidence that Roman ideas of friendship, patronage, and clientage gradually blended together during the early Middle Ages

⁹⁶ The literature on lordship in the Middle Ages is vast. Recent studies of the intersection of friendship and lordship include Gerd Althoff, *Family, friends and followers: political bonds in early medieval Europe*, trans. Christopher Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Sean Wilentz, *The Favour of Friends: Intercession and Aristocratic Politics in Carolingian and Ottonian Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). By contrast, study of the intersection between friendship and diplomacy has been limited. See Anna Maria Drabek, 'Der Merowingervertrag von Andelot aus dem Jahr 587', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für oesterreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 78 (1979), pp. 34-41 and Margaret Mullett, 'The Language of Diplomacy', in Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (eds), *Byzantine Diplomacy* (Aldershot, 1992), pp. 203-216. Friendship is not discussed in the major studies of diplomats or envoys in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, including Andrew Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 411-533* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Bruno Dumézil, 'Les ambassadeurs occidentaux au VI^e siècle: recrutement, usages et modes de distinction d'une élite de représentation à l'étranger', in *Théorie et pratiques des élites au haut moyen âge*, ed. by F. Bougard (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 243-60.

⁹⁷ Epp, *Amicitia*, pp. 2-6.

under an all-inclusive category of *amicitia*.⁹⁸ In this thesis, I proceed from the assumption that dependency and friendship, although they could be seen as separate categories, frequently overlapped and thus Fortunatus presented his patronage relationships within the framework of friendship. His writing about relationships of patronage and friendship reflected a choice of register. He might choose to stress dependence, deference, and reciprocity (a patronage relationship) or might focus more on shared values, reciprocity, mutual respect (a relationship of *amicitia*). Peter Brown, whose work has frequently touched on *amicitia*, offers an elegant statement of the relationship between the two:

Friendship—*amicitia*—had always been the gentler face of patronage. Patronage implied a measure of asymmetry between patron and client, but this asymmetry could be cancelled. The patron might promote a client to a more intimate relationship. *Familiaritas* might replace dependence, if by any chance the fortunate hanger-on was promoted from the position of a client to that of a friend.⁹⁹

Epp argues that clientage in the early Middle Ages became a strand of the idea of friendship during this period. My analysis of Fortunatus' work shows that ideas of clientage were rarely present in the literature of Merovingian Gaul. When they do appear, they are blended into the broader culture of early medieval friendship.

Scholarship on Classical ideas of patronage, friendship, clientage, and the intersections between them suggests that the fluidity of these concepts had ancient roots. In his book and several articles on Classical friendship, David Konstan has asked whether 'friend' could be a synonym for 'patron' or 'client'. He concludes that patronage and friendship were compatible: someone could be both patron and friend, or client and friend; but *amicitia* and clientage remained 'implicitly distinct'.¹⁰⁰ Konstan defined a relationship of patronage as one in which 'a powerful benefactor (*patronus*) lent protection and support to his dependant or cliens, who was supposed to have owed him the more humble services of obeisance and allegiance in return'.¹⁰¹

The vocabulary of the sources provides a way in to this question of connections. There was no one word for patron; the classical meaning of *patronus*

⁹⁸ On the convergence of clientage and friendship during the early Middle Ages, see Epp, *Amicitia*, p. 303.

⁹⁹ Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, pp. 155-6.

¹⁰⁰ Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*, p. 21 and idem, 'Patrons and Friends', *Classical Philology*, 90 (1995).

¹⁰¹ Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*, p. 136.

was ‘an advocate, or the former master of a freedman’.¹⁰² Classical and medieval sources themselves are limited, as Fustel du Coulanges observed. They do not directly tell us how connections of patronage were made and they do not define the nature of the relationship established between the two parties involved. Classical and early medieval people ‘did not define what the whole world knew’.¹⁰³ This observation extends to friendship as well—Classical and early medieval writers did not define how one created a relationship of *amicitia* or spell out what such a connection could mean for the parties involved.

A search for the word *patronus* in Fortunatus is a useful place to begin when considering the vocabulary of patronage. In particular, Fortunatus’ use of the word *patronus* shows the influence of the idea of saintly patronage which had been cultivated by Christians across the late antique Mediterranean for over two hundred years.¹⁰⁴ Late antique ideas of the patronage of the saints have been well studied by scholars, particularly Peter Brown, who has made a compelling case for the influence of the language of late Roman social relationships on ‘relations with the unseen’.¹⁰⁵ By the later fourth century, the word *patrocinium* came to be applied to the protection offered to the Christian faithful by the martyrs and saints, and the word *suffragium* takes on the sense of ‘intercession’. It was critical to have a patron to approach God on one’s behalf.¹⁰⁶ A late antique saint took on the features of a good Roman *patronus*: he interceded successfully, his wealth was available to all, he exercised non-violent *potentia*, and loyalty to him demanded no constraints.¹⁰⁷ As I discuss in Chapter 1, Fortunatus saw his episcopal patrons and friends as means through which he could access the patronage of heaven. In chapter 2, I discuss how members of Merovingian society could directly access heavenly patronage

¹⁰² Barbara K. Gold, *Literary Patronage in Greece and Rome* (Chapel Hill ; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 5-6.

¹⁰³ Fustel, *Les origines du système féodal* pp. 215, 216, and 221.

¹⁰⁴ G. Gagov, ‘Il culto delle reliquie nell’antichità riflesso nei due termini ‘patrocinia’ e ‘pignora’’, *Miscellanea Franciscana* 58 (1958), 489-92.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁶ G. E. M. De Ste Croix, ‘Suffragium: From Vote to Patronage’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 5 (1954), 46. Gagov, ‘Il culto delle reliquie nell’antichità’, p. 493, argues that the word *patrocinia* was used for the relics of saints one invokes for protection/the relics of protective saints. However, Fortunatus seems to use *patrocinium* to refer to relationships, not symbolic objects. Already in the sixth century *patrocinia* were the relics of saints from which benefits flowed. In the life of Remigius, attributed to Fortunatus but which Krusch thought was by Gregory of Tours, *patrocinia* is twice used for relics. See Orselli, *L’idea e il culto del santo patrono cittadino*, p. 65, n. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 41. Although Brown writes elsewhere about women exercising patronage within saints’ cults, he presents patron saints as exclusively male.

themselves through pious building projects, memorialised and presented to the public by their friend Fortunatus.

As Peter Godman noted, Fortunatus showed ‘a lively apprehension of contemporary sources of patronage’.¹⁰⁸ Patronage was and remained central to the Roman cultural experience but was neither systematic nor unchanging.¹⁰⁹ Many Roman writers were from wealthy backgrounds and did not need financial support, but they relied upon patrons to circulate their works and protect against slurs on their reputations.¹¹⁰

The counterpart of the patron is usually assumed to be the client. But it is important to note that *cliens*, though it could be courteously used between friends,¹¹¹ could also be a rude put-down in another context.¹¹² Furthermore, *cliens* was already becoming an extremely rare word in the fourth century; *susceptus* grew in popularity and *amicus* continued to be used.¹¹³ Fustel argued that Merovingian texts no longer use the word *cliens*, preferring *susceptus*.¹¹⁴ It is wrong to say that Merovingian texts *never* use the word *cliens* but it is very rarely used. The relationship between Roman patrons and clients was semi-formal and not always easy to define,¹¹⁵ but Roman writers tended to prefer words that did not so baldly demarcate a division in status.¹¹⁶ In late antiquity the language of friendship was a way to smooth the hard edges of such differences.¹¹⁷ As Fustel noted, Roman clientage had ‘many varieties and thousands of nuances’ and clients had many names: *cliens*, *amicus*, *familiaris*, *necessarius*, and *conviva/convictor*.¹¹⁸ But *cliens* was part of the vocabulary of men

¹⁰⁸ Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society*, p. 65. However, according to Krause, patronage remained much the same from the early imperial period. Krause, *Spätantike Patronatsformen*, pp. 332-3.

¹¹⁰ White, ‘Amicitia’, pp. 85-6; Gold, *Literary Patronage*, pp. 175-6. Writing could not produce an income sufficient to live on and earning an income was disdained by the upper-class circles from which most poets came. Barbara K. Gold, *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 50-8. On the difference between literary patronage and other types, see Gold, pp. xi, 40-1. See also White, pp. 75-8. On the significance of patronal gifts to Roman poets, Saller *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, disagrees with most of White’s arguments.

¹¹¹ Krause, *Spätantike Patronatsformen*, p. 5.

¹¹² P.A. Brunt, ‘Amicitia in the Late Roman Republic’, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* (1965), 8.

¹¹³ Fustel, *Les origines du système féodal* p. 245.

¹¹⁴ Fustel, *Les origines du système féodal* p. 239.

¹¹⁵ Konstan, ‘Patrons and Friends’, p. 328.

¹¹⁶ White, ‘Amicitia’, p. 82.

¹¹⁷ Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, pp. 393-4.

¹¹⁸ Fustel, *Les origines du système féodal* p. 213.

to whom friendship was important—*cliens* and *clientela* are part of Augustine's thinking; Ausonius wrote a poem about the rarity of gratitude from his clients. Sidonius Apollinaris uses the word *client* fifteen times in his letters, to describe the dependents of his correspondents.

Venantius Fortunatus rarely uses the word in his works—it appears six times, three times in the *Vita Sancti Martini*, and three times in his poetry to selected friends, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.¹¹⁹ It is a rarer word than *patronus*; which appears twenty times in his work.¹²⁰ In no case does Fortunatus ever describe someone else as a client, something that writers of the previous generation had felt entirely free to do.¹²¹ Close attention to Fortunatus' vocabulary of patronage allows us to chart his debt to, and distance from, Classical thinking on patronage, friendship, and clientage.

I argue that Fortunatus' use and manipulation of this language of social relationships was a response to needs and wishes of the times in which he lived and the friends and patrons for whom he wrote. Friendship and patronage are at the centre of Fortunatus' works and an overview of his career demonstrates why this was so: making and maintaining these relationships allowed the poet to exchange goods, favours, services, and affectionate letters with the men and women of the Merovingian elite. This thesis singles out as particularly important his connections to Gregory of Tours, Radegund, and the Austrasian royal family. Previous studies of Fortunatus have examined the Latinity of the poet's works and placed him in his literary and historical context, but this is the first study to use themes of patronage and friendship as a guide for understanding what he wrote and why he wrote it. Relationships of friendship and patronage were central to the poet's life and work and studying them enables us to better understand Fortunatus' addressees and audience and thus the world in which he wrote.

¹¹⁹ VSM II, line 449; VSM III, line 524; VSM IV line 441; and then in Carm 6.10 line 47 (Dynamius); and Carm. 7.12 (Jovinus); Carm. 10.16 line 9 (to Sigoald)

¹²⁰ 9 times it refers to St Martin, 7 times to God or the saints, and four times for human beings—all bishops, as it happens: Martin of Braga, Avitus of Clermont, Gregory of Tours, and Eufronius of Tours.

¹²¹ Ausonius: 7 Symmachus: 9—we have to note here that he's using the word *clientela* seven times Claudian: 12 Sidonius: 15 Dracontius: 9—including both *De Laudibus Dei* and poems like *Medea*. Avitus: 2 Fortunatus: 6—and half of these are in VSM Gregory: 2. Ruricius uses the word only once, in a verse epistle, to refer to himself. Mommsen makes a point of noting that Cassiodorus, while not referring to clients or clientage, uses the word *susceptus*, which also seems to be the preference of Ennodius.

In his first decade in Gaul, Fortunatus sought and cultivated literary connections throughout the Merovingian world: with priests, bishops, kings, queens, abbesses, nuns, aristocrats, royal officials—anyone who might offer him support, protection, and replies. Modern scholars call many of these relations by the name of friendship, and Fortunatus drew on the language and imagery of Classical and Christian friendship in his work. He made particular use of the language and images of absent friendship, using it to suggest an intimacy which transcended the boundaries of space, time, and personal acquaintance. But he also couched this rhetoric in the rich and long-standing language of patronage, to give distinction to his addressees and humility to himself. Looking at the poems of Venantius Fortunatus through the lens of patronage and friendship enables us to take a fresh look at the ordering and self-presentation of Merovingian society, shedding new light on the degree to which it was influenced by Roman culture.

Chapter 1, The Friendly Patron and His Client

Introduction

In the fragmented world of Merovingian Gaul, no one could survive on the support of one patron alone.¹ Throughout his career, Fortunatus sought to make and maintain connections with kings, queens, nuns, bishops and aristocratic men and women. Were these men his patrons or his friends? This chapter answers this question by examining the language Fortunatus used to address his episcopal and aristocratic patrons. Though Fortunatus never addresses Radegund and Agnes, the abbess and founder of the community of the Holy Cross, as his patrons, he came to settle not far from their monastery. Fortunatus benefited from Radegund's favour² and he developed a deep friendship with her and Agnes. This connection to the nunnery did not exclude his pursuit of other connections, and Fortunatus continued to travel and seek out the well-established network of Gallic bishops.

Merovingian friends operated within the parameters and precedents set by earlier Gallic writers, who often addressed each other as a patron in the salutations of their letters, and expressed admiration of each other's literary skills. In a letter to Sidonius' Apollinaris' son, the early sixth-century bishop Avitus of Vienne mentions how he looked up to Sidonius as a master; Ruricius of Limoges expresses similar feelings of polite deference.³ However, neither Avitus nor Sidonius address their aristocratic correspondents as patron.⁴ Ruricius was a senatorial aristocrat like Avitus and Sidonius, but he used the word *patronus* with extraordinary frequency—fourteen times, exclusively in addressing fellow bishops.⁵ This should not be taken

¹ The necessity of a 'plurality of patrons' was not unique to Merovingian Gaul; it was also a feature of the experience of poets during the age of Augustus. See Jasper Griffith, 'Augustan poetry and Augustanism', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, ed. by Karl Galinsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 306-320 (p. 307).

² As he wrote to Felix of Nantes, 'Tamen in uerbis uestris illud relegere merui quod in eius gratia iam percepi.' 'Nevertheless I deserved to reread in your words what I already felt in her kindness (*gratia*).' *Carm.* III.4.12.

³ Avitus, Ep. 51. For Ruricius' use of the word *patronus*, see n.4 and 5, below.

⁴ There is, however, a strange bit of Avitus Ep. 45, where the bishop writes about Sigismund offering a patron (*fautor*).

⁵ I.1 and I.2 to Bishop of Faustus of Riez; I.7 to Bishop Bassulus (likely of Cahors), I.8 and I.9 to Sidonius, I.15, II.8, and II.16 to Aenois of Arles; II.6 to Chronopius of Périgueux, II.18, the poem at II.19, II.34, II.35, to Sedatus of Nimes, II.40 to Victorinus of Fréjus (who also called Ruricius a patron in his letter; which seems to predate Ruricius writing to him). The aristocrat Taurentius also address Ruricius as patronus (he is the only secular person whose letter to Ruricius survives. Mathisen, 168-9). Sedatus also called Ruricius a patron, Ep. 10 and 13.

as a sign that Ruricius felt only bishops could be *patroni*, nor does it necessarily indicate distant deference, as is made clear in a playful exchange between Ruricius and Bishop Sedatus of Nîmes about a horse. These letters show that the language of patronage could be used in the context of friendship.

Venantius Fortunatus, like Ruricius, often wrote to bishops and called them *patroni*. This chapter discusses Eufronius of Tours (r. 557-573), Martin of Braga (r. 556-579), and Felix of Nantes (r. 549-582).⁶ Fortunatus' writings for Eufronius of Tours, two letters and a poem, allow us to examine the chain of patronage relationships that stretched between heaven and earth. Fortunatus' single prose letter to Martin of Braga provides further evidence of the way Fortunatus conceived of bishops as patrons with special access to the powerful patrons of heaven. This letter also enables us to consider the route letters travelled between correspondents, and the people who carried them. As Fortunatus' patrons, the bishops to whom he wrote could appeal on his behalf to the even more august patrons of heaven. Analysis of the poems to Felix of Nantes demonstrates that patronage in Merovingian Gaul applied not only to people, but also to ecclesiastical building projects.

After these shorter case studies, which established the ways Fortunatus used the conventions of friendship-writing in the context of a patronage relations, I turn to an analysis of patronage and friendship in Fortunatus' writings to Gregory of Tours. Fortunatus and Gregory are often paired: Fortunatus dedicated his first published collection of poetry to Gregory and executed a number of important commissions for him, including the four-book life of Saint Martin. The bishop was one of his most frequent addressees and the recipient of over thirty poems.⁷ Yet it is a curious fact that Gregory hardly ever mentions Fortunatus, even though they often wrote about the same people or events. Fortunatus courted Gregory's patronage and friendship by sending regular notes of greeting and replies to invitations, and by visiting the bishop where possible. Gregory provided his client and friend with a series of gifts, ranging from a book of psalms to land and a villa by the river Vienne, for which the poet sent appropriate notes of thanks. Gregory's gifts were of practical

⁶ Further examples of the polite use of the word *patron* in an epistolary context are found in the letters of a later Merovingian author, the bishop Desiderius of Cahors.

⁷ Specifically, there are twenty-six verse epistles written to Gregory and eight poems which he requested or which otherwise serve his interests. Michael Roberts, 'Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours: Patronage and Poetry', in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Alexander Callander Murray (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 35-59 (p. 36).

benefit to the poet and he used these gifts on behalf of those who came to him for help. In turn, Fortunatus advocated for Gregory's interests at the courts of Merovingian kings, one of the traditional favours that patrons and clients performed for each other.

In addition to keeping up a friendly correspondence with Gregory and requesting the bishop's help, Fortunatus also wrote a number of commissioned works for him. I examine first his writings for members of Gregory's family, in order to show. I then turn to the verse and prose hagiography Fortunatus wrote for Gregory and other patrons, which also allows an examination of how the process of commissioning a text worked. Finally, I turn to Fortunatus' poem about Avitus of Clermont's conversion of the Jewish community of his see. Fortunatus' poem includes a prefatory letter to Gregory which describes the commission of the text at short notice. This examination of the wide range of Fortunatus' literary projects for his serves to demonstrate the range of benefits a poet could offer his patron, celebrating and bringing attention to the people and issues which mattered to him.

Eufronius of Tours

Fortunatus likely met Eufronius of Tours soon after his arrival in Gaul, and seems to have visited Eufronius by around 567. Fortunatus gives two different versions of why he left Italy, but it is likely that as a Christian writer establishing himself in Gaul, he would have wanted to make the trip to St Martin's city to pay his respects to the saint and his representative. His letters to Eufronius allow us to consider Fortunatus' patronage relationships and the language he uses to describe them.

His communication with Eufronius, who had been in office since 556, takes the form of two letters and one poem, all found together at the beginning of the third book of poetry. These works, like many of the others in Book Three, seem to be datable to Fortunatus' first trip to Tours or a little after his move to Poitiers⁸, i.e. between 567 and 573.⁹ Since Fortunatus does not mention the relic of the Holy Cross, which Eufronius installed in Poitiers for Radegund sometime between 569

⁸ Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat Poèmes* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 2003), p. xxxi.

⁹ Brian Brennan, 'The Image of the Merovingian Bishop in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 18 (1992), 128.

and 573, nor does he mention Radegund and Agnes, these pieces most likely belong to the first few years of his career in Gaul.

The first letter indicates that the two men had previously corresponded. Fortunatus begins the letter by stating that the person carrying it had previously brought him one of Eufronius' letters. In late antiquity a connection like this would have been made through a letter of recommendation, in which one of Eufronius' colleagues would have recommended the poet to his care and attention. We do not have such letters for Fortunatus but as we will see, we do have some indication that they were written on his behalf.

This letter seems to have responded to a message of a letter of Eufronius, which Fortunatus claims took a few days to reach him. He perceived it as a 'gift of heaven' (*caelesti munere*) which 'continually proved your lavish, faithful feelings towards my lowliness, and I acknowledge that my devoted prayers were filled with many kindnesses. Although I reside in another city, God knows that I am only absent from you in place, not in mind, and wherever I am, I will hold you locked inside me'¹⁰ This language strongly recalls the relationship of beneficence and deference found between a late Roman magnate and his dependent.

Furthermore, Fortunatus sees the bishop as his intermediary to an even more august patron. The last paragraph of the letter acknowledges Eufronius' special connection to Martin of Tours—Fortunatus feels, he writes, 'the love of my Lord Martin in the heart of Lord Eufronius.'¹¹ Fortunatus asks Eufronius to teach Martin to remember him, since the bishop, through his merits, is able to protect him.¹² Martin is the most prominent patron in Fortunatus' works¹³; most of his uses of the word *patronus* are in relation to this powerful protector. Only four times does Fortunatus use the word to refer to a living, non-saintly patron: for Martin of Braga,

¹⁰ *Carm.* III.1.1 Quod ea auidate, teste rerum Creatore, complexus sum, qua et vestrum piissimum animum circa meam humilitatem iugiter adprobaui profusum et me supplicem multis repletum beneficiis agnosco deuotum. Qui quamuis in altera commorer ciuitate, nouit Deus quia uobis absens sum tantummodo loco, non animo, et quocumque fuero, intra me uos clausos habebo.

¹¹ *Carm.* III.1.3 Ego uero gratulor in corde domni Eufronii dilectionem domni mei sensisse Martini.

¹² *Carm.* III.1.3...rogo per ipsum domnum Martinum, cuius frueris participato consortio, ut apud eum memorari praecipias me famulum et deuotum, quaetenus quid apud eum meritis praeualetis in meae humilitatis protectione iugiter ostendatis.

¹³ *Carm.* III.7.53, which is honour of the relics of Peter and Paul at Nantes, describes the saints as the patrons of Gaul; *Carm.* IV.5.13, an epitaph for Ruricius of Limoges, describes the bishop doing things for his patron; *Carm.* V.11.7, Fortunatus refers to Martin as his personal patron; and *Carm.* X.7.31, 37, 43, and 67 for Childebert and Brunhild on the feast of Martin of Tours, refer Martin or God as their patron.

Avitus of Clermont, Gregory of Tours, and Eufronius of Tours.¹⁴ Fortunatus asks the bishop, as his patron, to recommend him to the saint.

Fortunatus explicitly addresses Eufronius as ‘my own patron before God’ in his second letter.¹⁵ Again, the letter opens with Fortunatus thanking Eufronius for his kind consideration, the source of which is ‘eloquent and very abundant sweetness’.¹⁶ *Dulcedo* is one of the most significant words in Fortunatus’ lexicon¹⁷ and it is a word he used in the previous letter to describe Eufronius’ personality. Furthermore, he writes that Eufronius’ sweetness creates an unbreakable bond between them:

It binds me to him with so great a chain of admirable charity that it does not seem to me that I am separated from him by the space of a single hour, and even if I do not see him in person, nevertheless I hold him safe and enclosed in the dwelling-place of my heart.¹⁸

This echoes what the poet wrote in his previous letter and reinforces the importance of the imagery of absent friendship for establishing a connection regardless of the relative status of the two parties. But had Fortunatus and Eufronius met by this point? Late antique Christian writers had developed the idea that friends could meet in spirit before they ever met in body.¹⁹ As we will see in our discussion of Fortunatus’ poems to Dynamius, he claims to have been drawn to Dynamius before he ever saw him face-to-face. It is possible that Fortunatus and Eufronius had met: Fortunatus’ letters reflect well-established claims to Eufronius’ support and affection, and the cities of Tours and Poitiers. However, it is not impossible that a meeting had not yet occurred. As we will see, Fortunatus uses concepts of absent friendship as a strategy to promote himself from distant hanger-on to close friend.

But Eufronius does not offer his kindness (*beneficia*) to Fortunatus alone—indeed, it is one of the points in his praise that no one, whether reluctant or trying to hide, can escape Eufronius’ attention. Once again, Fortunatus’ praises Eufronius’

¹⁴ *Carm.* III.21.5; *Carm.* III.2 salutation; *Carm.* V.1.20 ; and *Carm.* VIII.15.11.

¹⁵ *Carm.* III.2 Domino sancto mihi in Deo peculiari patrono Eufronio papae Fortunato

¹⁶ *Carm.* III.2.1 copiosam et superabundantem dulcedinem

¹⁷ A.M. Fiske, ‘The Survival and Development of the Ancient Concept of Friendship in the Early Middle Ages’ (Fordham University, 1955), pp. 201-3. See also J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), p. 83.

¹⁸ *Carm.* III.2.1 Quae tanto me sibi uinculo admirandae caritatis adstrinxit ut ne unius horae spatio ab illo mihi uidear separari conspectu quem et si praesentem non uideo, attamen intra pectoris habitaculum retineo conditum et reclusum.

¹⁹ Fiske, p. 192.

example—it is gladdening to see such a good example even for those, like himself, who cannot imitate the bishop. This flatters Eufronius but also establishes Fortunatus as subordinate to him. As demonstrated below, Fortunatus consistently adopts the view that Eufronius can do things he himself cannot.

Eufronius, in addition to being an example and a father, is the means through which Fortunatus feels that he is able to approach the otherwise inaccessible Martin. In even more explicit language, Fortunatus asks Eufronius to be his intercessor with St Martin for the remission of his sins; but unlike the previous letter, Fortunatus also asks that Martin himself may intercede for Eufronius' salvation. He describes himself as Eufronius' humble son and servant.²⁰ Describing himself as *seruus* (and *famulans*) is one of the ways Fortunatus subordinates himself to the powerful bishop he addresses.

Fortunatus still adopts the position that he himself is not worthy to approach Martin directly—he needs an intermediary. In this way, one can see connections to earlier ideas. In his book on Prudentius, Michael Robert argues that the patronage of the martyrs draws on the idea of imperial patronage, with its ideas about the splendour of the source of patronage, God or the emperor, and the existence of an intermediary (the saints or the emperor's close friends).²¹ Fortunatus inherits and expands on these ideas.

The first of Fortunatus' letters to Eufronius ends simply 'Ora pro me'. The second letter concludes by asking Eufronius to greet others' in Fortunatus' name: 'Reverently I greet your men who are all lords and my sweet men (*dulces meos*). In many different ways I humbly beseech my lord to greet your son Aventius, sweetest in everything, for me. I earnestly ask you to commend me with a kind heart (*benigno animo*) to my lord Bishop Felix, if he should come to you. Pray for me.'²² Aventius may have been a member of Eufronius' clergy at Tours; he does not feature in Fortunatus' poetry again. Felix is most likely the bishop of Nantes, whose relationship with Fortunatus will be discussed later in this chapter.

²⁰ *Carm.* III.2.5 humili filio et seruo uestro

²¹ Michael Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The "Liber Peristephanon" of Prudentius* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 24-5.

²² *Carm.* III.2.6 Eos uero qui uestri sunt omnes domnos et dulces meos reuerenter saluto. Domnum meum per omnia dulcissimum, filium uestrum Auentium pro me multipliciter supplico salutari. Domno meo Felici episcopo, si per uos uenit, me benigno animo commendari deposco. Ora pro me.

Other than a poem, which praises Eufronius as a bishop and emphasises his connection to Martin, no other sources attest to Fortunatus' relationship with Eufronius, who remained in office until his death in 573. Eufronius' letters to Fortunatus do not survive but it does not seem likely that Eufronius would have called the poet *patronus* as Ruricius did his social equals a century earlier.

Martin of Braga

Like Martin of Tours, Martin of Braga was a native of Pannonia. Both Visigothic and Frankish sources give details of his life but these are somewhat contradictory.²³ According to one reconstruction, Martin came to Spain in around 550, became abbot of Dumium, a monastery he had founded, in 556, and was bishop of Braga between 561 and 572, and died in 579.²⁴ By contrast Gregory's account in *Histories* claims that Martin travelled widely before being consecrated bishop at the moment Martin of Tours' relics were unloaded in Galicia, and that he died in 580 after thirty years in office. Gregory stated that he had written verses which were displayed over the southern portal of Saint Martin's church in Tours and mentions the establishment of the Martinian cult in Galicia in several of his works.²⁵ Martin's Gallic connections are further indicated by his poetry, which shows knowledge of Sidonius Apollinaris' poetry, and his epistolary friendship with Venantius.²⁶

²³ In Gregory of Tours, see DVSM I.11 and DLH V.37. On the Visigothic sources for Martin's life, see E.A. Thompson, 'The Conversion of the Spanish Suevi to Catholicism', in *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches*, ed. by Edward James (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 77-92 (p. 85). and Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400-1000* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 82. On the relationship between the two see *ibid.* p. 44. Martin of Braga composed his own epitaph, in which he refers to Martin of Tours as his patron, but Visigothic and Frankish sources, like Martin of Braga's own writings, are silent on how he developed an interest in the other Martin's cult. See Alberto Ferreiro, 'Braga and Tours: Some Observations on Gregory's *De virtutibus sancti Martini* (1.11)', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3:2 (1995), pp. 195-210 (pp. 208-9).

²⁴ Claude W. Barlow, *Martini Episcopi Bracaraensis Opera Omnia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), pp. 3-6.

²⁵ Ferreiro, 'Braga and Tours,' pp. 208-9. For the establishment of Saint Martin's cult in Galicia according to Gregory of Tours see VM 1.11 and 4.7. In the former chapter, he links the arrival of Martin of Tours and Martin of Braga in Galicia, a sign of his respect for the latter. This chapter also mentions the establishment of a church in Saint Martin's honour, under the patronage of Suevic royalty, referred to as the site of a miracle in the latter chapter. Gregory learned about the miracle from Florentianus, who was also a friend of Fortunatus (see Carm.10.12d, discussed below). In GC 12, Gregory recounts the miraculous protection of a monastery of Saint Martin and its abbot during the conflict between Leuvigild and Hermangild. The monastery was located between Sagunto and Catagena.

²⁶ Maria João Violante Branco, 'St. Martin of Braga, the Sueves and Gallaecia', in *The Visigoths: Studies in Culture and Society*, ed. by Alberto Ferreiro (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 1999), pp. 63-97 (p. 83). On Martin's poetry and other writings, see Serafin Bodelón, 'Martin of Braga and John of

Fortunatus' works provide evidence of communication between western Gaul and northern Spain in the sixth century, as he wrote for both Martin and another sixth-century Spanish churchman, Victorianus, whose foundation of Asán was probably somewhere in the Pyrenees. The poem tells us that this abbot existed (the other evidence is a fourteenth-century *vita*) and had some significance in contemporary eyes.²⁷

Fortunatus exchanged letters with Martin relatively early on during his stay in Gaul. Marc Reydellet notes that we cannot exclude the possibility Fortunatus visited Martin during his three years of traveling around Gaul.²⁸ Two pieces to Martin survive: a poem and a long, highly elaborate letter. Judith George argues that the poem is a *gratiarum actio*, written to thank the bishop on Radegund's behalf.²⁹ Here I will be concerned primarily with the letter. Both texts clearly demonstrate that Martin must have sent letters which no longer exist. About forty years after Martin's death, Isidore referred to reading a collection of his letters which no longer survives.³⁰ Once again, we have only Fortunatus' side of their connection. Fortunatus' letter opens with one of his most striking salutations: to the holy and apostolic lord and in the army of Christ the king first centurion after the commander, Paul, Bishop Martin'.³¹ Martin's words came on the breeze, one of Fortunatus' standard images for the travel of news between friends, accompanied by sweet scents. Fortunatus elaborately praises Martin's virtuousness. He then moves on to discussing the experience of reading Martin's letter, for which he longed. A chain of images then follow—a parched Fortunatus, who compares himself to a little sheep, is refreshed by the rain of Martin's eloquence, a storm which happily does not destroy the page. The letter is then compared to the finest of intoxicating wines; the poet, frightened like a rustic guest with a liver unworthy to the task, nonetheless

Biclaro in Recent Scholarship', *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch*, 31 (1996), 201. Martin's works, particularly *De Correctione Rusticorum*, were read in Merovingian and Carolingian Gaul. See Yitzhak Hen, 'Martin of Braga's *De Correctione Rusticorum* and Its Uses in Frankish Gaul', in *Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power, and Gifts in Context*, ed. by Esther Cohen and Mayke De Jong (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 35-49.

²⁷ Collins, p. 81.

²⁸ Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat Poèmes* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 2002), pp. xiii-xiv.

²⁹ Judith George, 'Venantius Fortunatus: Panegyric in Merovingian Gaul', in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Mary Whitby (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 225-46 pp. 239-40).

³⁰ Barlow, p. 284.

³¹ *Carm.* V.1 Domino sancto atque apostolico et in Christi regis exercitu post ducem Paulum primipilo Martino episcopo Fortunatus

submits to Martin's draught. This wonderful wine came overseas to Fortunatus, warming and satisfying his spirit, but not sating them completely. Rather, Martin's eloquence provokes a desire for more, 'the grape of this vine prolongs our thirst when it gives (us) drink.'³²

Compared to the other goods carried by ships, Martin's letter is entirely different: alum has a price, but the letter was unbought; other goods stain, but the letter leaves one white. Fortunatus and other Latin writers do compare eloquence to priceless wine, but rarely is it seen as in the company of a ship's cargo, as it is here. The letter's emphasis on the sea journey which brought it to Gaul is also unusual. In his account of Saint Martin's miracles, Gregory of Tours describes how Catholicism and Martinian relics reached Galicia. His account demonstrates that a sea journey formed part of the route between Tours and Galicia, and indeed between Galicia and places farther afield, such as Pannonia. Gregory claims that Martin of Braga and a relic of Martin of Tours miraculously arrived in the same port in Galicia on the same day.³³

Whatever goods the ship carried, to Fortunatus it brought the light of Martin's conversation. Fortunatus then praises Martin's rhetorical skill, specifically his ability to use complex figures of speech—'sentences, epicheiremas, enthymemes, and intricate syllogisms' and write in the style of both Virgil and Cicero. Furthermore, Martin displayed his knowledge of theology and philosophy in assumption that Fortunatus was on an equal level. The poet denies his facility with all the authors Martin cites: Plato, Aristotle, Chrysippus, Pittacus, and Hilary, Gregory, Ambrose, and Augustine. Martin's knowledge places him in the clientage (*clientela*) of the Cleanthes of the heavens. Fortunatus' only other reference to the followers of Cleanthes is part of an extended meditation on the futility of earthly life and achievements, but Martin's classical learning and knowledge is made worthwhile by its sacred bent.³⁴ His learning also impressed Gregory of Tours, who

³² *Carm.* V.1.4 Vnde, ut uere prosequare, huius una palmitis nobis sitim prorogat dum propinat.

³³ VM 1.11. See Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 211-3. The bulk of the journey between Poitiers and Braga was sailing along the coast—assuming favourable conditions and top speeds, the it could take only around 20 days to cover the 1220 km. See Walter Scheidel and Elijah Meeks, *ORBIS: the Stanford geospatial network model of the Roman world* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Libraries, 2012), <<http://orbis.stanford.edu/#introducing>> [accessed 19 September 2016].

³⁴ *Carm.* VII.12.25-6

noted in his account of Martin's death that 'he read so widely that he was held second to none among his contemporaries'.³⁵

Towards the beginning of the letter, Fortunatus refers to the bearer of Martin's letter, Domitius, one of Fortunatus' few references to named messengers. Domitius, described as *filium vestrum venerandum mihi*, was probably a member of Martin's clergy. He seems not to have waited to return with a reply, for at the end of his letter Fortunatus commends a different bearer, *vestrum famulum vere mihi bonum Bonosus*. *Famulus* is a frequently-used word in Fortunatus' vocabulary, and it is not clear whether Bonosus was in Fortunatus' employ or returning home to Braga. He was commended to the bishop, which would suggest that he was the poet's messenger. He was also entrusted with supplementary messages and tasks: to fulfil Fortunatus' own promises in his absence. The poet concludes the letter wishing that whoever visited him first might return with a letter and a couplet asking Martin to pray for him.

The letter is considerably more deferential than the one of Eufronius of Tours. Fortunatus subordinates himself to Martin; making himself the bishop's footstool, he commends himself to Martin and begs for his prayers. Inspired by the friendly tone of Martin's letter, Fortunatus commends Radegund and Agnes to him, and asks that Martin appeal to St Martin on their behalf. Indeed, Martin becomes their patron through this act of intercession. 'Indeed it is a logical plan that the hope of patronage should return to us through you from there, because hence the role of patron extends to you'.³⁶ Bishop Martin is part of a hierarchical structure of patronage that stretches from heaven to earth.

Felix of Nantes

Fortunatus wrote eight pieces for Felix of Nantes, presumably aided in this connection by Eufronius' recommendation, and likely travelled to his city. Latin letters to friends and patrons frequently ask the recipient to convey the writer's respects to others of his acquaintance. Commendation, *commendatio*, was the way one entered a patronage relationship; it was a means of subjection and a way to

³⁵ ...in tantum se litteris inbuilt, ut nulli secundus suis temporibus haberetur. DLH V.37. Translated by Thorpe, *History of the Franks*, p. 301.

³⁶ *Carm.* V.1.10 Est enim ratio consequens ut per uos illinc nobis redeat spes patronicii, quia ad uos hinc prodiit pars patroni.

place oneself in the hands of one's patron.³⁷ Commending oneself, or asking to be commended, was a way to indicate that one wished to establish a particular kind of relationship. The letters of Sidonius and Ruricius frequently include commendations for their friends and dependents. In terms of clerical careers, *commendatio* was required to access any level of education above primary; young boys were commended to a bishop, an abbot, or king, who assumed responsibility for their secondary education and formation as clerics.³⁸ In the seventh century, Desiderius of Cahors continued to commend the carriers of his letter and members of his clergy to the *patrocinium* of his addressees.³⁹ As I discuss below, bishops could and did restrict their clerics' ability to leave the diocese. Desiderius' letter-carriers and clergy thus had his official permission for their travels and could be received without any issue by the recipient of the letter.

Like Gregory, Felix was a senatorial aristocrat and a patron to whom it was worth commending oneself.⁴⁰ Felix was born in 512, and succeeded Eumerius, for whom Fortunatus wrote an epitaph, to the see of Nantes in 549. He died in 583.⁴¹ He may have been married before his ordination, though Fortunatus' poetry figures him as happily married to the Church.⁴² Nantes was about a hundred miles from Tours, and about one hundred ten miles from Poitiers, at the mouth of the Loire. It also neighbored Breton territory, which was sometimes under Merovingian control and sometimes not—both Fortunatus and Gregory mention Felix's administrative skill with respect to this situation.⁴³ Felix's capabilities are further demonstrated by his ability to organize and execute two major engineering projects, shifting the

³⁷ Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *Les origines du système féodal: le bénéfice et le patronat pendant l'époque mérovingienne*, 6 edn (Paris: Hachette, 1926), pp. 217, 246, and 283.

³⁸ Godding, *Prêtres en Gaule mérovingienne*, pp. 54-5. Godding presents *commendatio* as a model which effectively accounts for the range of experiences young clerics experienced during their formation but does not cite specific examples.

³⁹ Desiderius, Ep. I.9 and II.19.

⁴⁰ William C. McDermott, 'Felix of Nantes: A Merovingian Bishop', *Traditio*, 31 (1975), 3-4.

⁴¹ Gregory takes note of Felix's death and tenure in episcopal office in DLH.6.15. Eumerius' epitaph is Carm.IV.1; the final line names Eumerius as Felix's father; this was most likely a spiritual connection as our evidence does not allow us to say whether they were biologically related.

⁴² On Felix's possible marriage, see GC 77; on his spiritual marriage, Carm.3.8.29-38. McDermott 'Felix of Nantes', pp. 10-12, cites the former as evidence that Felix and Gregory reconciled after their dispute and suggests that Felix gave Gregory information about the doings of holy men in his region.

⁴³ DLH 4.4 and 5.31; Carm.3.5.7-8 and 3.8.41-2. The bishops present at the dedication of Felix's cathedral were also present with him at the Council of Tours in 567. See McDermott, 'Felix of Nantes', pp. 5-6; 9.

course of the Loire and a completing the cathedral of Nantes, achievements duly celebrated by his client and friend, Fortunatus.⁴⁴

Fortunatus' portrait of Felix was a positive one, but Gregory emphatically declares his and Felix's mutual dislike in the *Histories*, though it is possible they were sometimes on good terms.⁴⁵ However, Fortunatus' series of verses to Felix follow the opening three letters of the third book, to Gregory's predecessor Eufronius, and there is no disguising their importance to the structure of the book as a whole, or their glowing praise of Felix as bishop, builder, and leader of his community. One wonders why they were included, unless Gregory had the magnanimity to enjoy their literary qualities while ignoring their attention to someone he despised. Perhaps, as McDermott suggests, the place of the poems might indicate a rapprochement between Gregory and Felix.⁴⁶ The presence of the poems to Felix suggests that Gregory's influence on the first collection of Fortunatus' poetry should not be exaggerated. The poet wrote and published for audiences and patrons outside of Tours.

The poet's first letter to Felix is over three times as long as his first letter to Eufronius; and twice as long as the second. Clearly, he was making a special effort. The first letter again strives to create an impression of an ongoing conversation. It begins with image of Felix's words washing Fortunatus like a refreshing wave, an image which is found in other Merovingian letters. The imagery extends to that of thunder and lightning, and an eloquence so dazzling it can invert the natural order. The letter continues in praise of Felix's learning, and speaks to the relationship Fortunatus established between them.

⁴⁴ The poems about the cathedral Carm.3.6 and 3.7, are discussed in Chapter 2; Carm.3.10 praises Felix's Loire project.

⁴⁵ However, it is not entirely clear how long Gregory's dislike lasted. Sollertius seems to have been the first to suggest that Felix and Gregory made up, although he did say when or how. In his rereading of the *Histories*, supplemented by reference to Fortunatus, Gregory's other writings, and Merovingian church councils, McDermott suggests that their enmity was neither as severe nor as long lasting as has sometimes been thought. It arose in 576 over the revenues of a *uilla ecclesiae* (see DLH 5.5). Riculf's flight to Nantes after Gregory's successful self-defense at Berny (DLH 5.49) has also been seen as a sign of the enmity between the two men. Against these McDermott sets a conversation between Gregory and Felix (GC 77) and Felix's involvement in the death of a holy man in his diocese (VP 10 and DLH 4.37), arguing speculatively that there were periods of cooperation and even friendship between the two men. McDermott also cites the placement of the poems to Gregory and Felix so close together in Fortunatus' works as evidence of reconciliation. See McDermott, 'Felix of Nantes'. In contrast, George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 115 argues that Gregory never visited Nantes during Felix's lifetime, and he blocked the bishop's nephew from succeeding him (DLH 5.5).

⁴⁶ McDermott, 'Felix of Nantes', p. 19.

... I began to be amazed that I had grown by your subtle conversation, I who did not deserve favour by my own adornment; having rejoiced continuously, I undertake to be raised by the affection of a patron (*fautor*), I who recognised myself to be overcome by a quality of nature.⁴⁷

Fautor is not a common word for patron⁴⁸—but fits well with the elevated style of the rest of the letter, in which the poet clearly wishes to flatter Felix’s learning and delight him with elegant language. His protests that he does not deserve Felix’s support allow Fortunatus to stake a claim to it. And this support matters to Fortunatus, as we can see in the flowery passage:

Truly with what greed do you believe that I have read that – what pure charity has ordered you to weave – what you have said: ‘And if the Volsci had not come in relief, they would have been able to drag me from you’? Believe how great my soul considers it: Rome herself could scarcely give auxiliaries as great to me as much as you have supplied in words. Nor for me is there anything more to render by deeds than to offer prayers of goodwill. For with the sweetness of your encouragement flowing back, nothing more is needed.⁴⁹

Throughout the letter Fortunatus has used deliberately *recherché* classical language and imagery, at this high point of the letter he asserts that exchanging writings with Felix is a greater help than the armies of Rome itself. However, he mentions no tangible support—no money, land, a place to live, or any of the other gifts often associated with the support of dependents in late antiquity. The currency of support in this instance is spiritual—‘prayers of goodwill’ carried in words across distance. It is entirely possible that the messenger who delivered Fortunatus’ letter had an additional oral message for Felix but the length and complexity of this letter suggests that its primary purpose was the furtherance of friendship. Some shorter letters in the collection may have served simply to establish a messenger’s *bona fides* but that was not only purpose of this letter.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Carm.* III.4.4 ...*coepi me mirari uestro subito creuisse conloquio qui fauorem proprio non mererer ornatu, gausus usque adeo affectu fautoris erigi qui me recognoscerem ingenii qualitate substerni.*

⁴⁸ Although, see above, n.3—Avitus uses it in a letter to Sigismund. Note that in *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* entry, *fautor* seemed mostly to refer to supporters of wickedness; but it’s more likely Avitus and Fortunatus were being deliberately ornate than making subtle comments. *ThLL*, V6, p.390.

⁴⁹ *Carm.* III.4.10 *Qua uero auiditate illud me creditis perlegisse quod uos intexere mera caritas imperauit quod dixistis: nec si Vulsci uenissent in solacio, me uobis abripere ualuissent? Credite, quantum meus animus inspicit, ipsa uix Roma tantum mihi dare ad auxilia poterat quantum praestitistis in uerba. Nec apud me plus aliquid est factis impendere quam uota uoluntatis offerre. Nam alloquii refluyente dulcedine nihil opus est plus egere.*

⁵⁰ For example see *Carm.* VIII.12a, discussed below.

The letter ends with Fortunatus commending himself to his patron as one who can help him obtain the spiritual protection he seeks:

Wherefore commending myself to your power and holiness with humble supplication I pray through the Lord, Redeemer of our souls, who will make you, predestined, a sharer with in his light that you deign to remember me in your holy prayers in regard of piety. For it will be a great help to my hope to obtain from you what I ask.⁵¹

After this letter, Fortunatus wrote additional poems for Felix: an acrostic poem about the meaning of his name and a poem in honour of a church which the bishop had constructed in Nantes. This mentions that Eufronius of Tours was in attendance for the dedication of the building, further evidence of the links between the two men. The other poem, which we will discuss in detail, is Fortunatus' poem for Felix on the relics of St Peter and Paul, which Felix had installed in the cathedral of Nantes.

Up to this point, I have discussed patronage as though it were just of people; which was far from true. Patronage in late antiquity was also of cities, and especially of building projects within cities, for the benefit of the entire urban community.⁵² This impulse also applied to the support of Christian religious buildings; and in Merovingian Gaul one of a bishop's acts of patronage on behalf of his community was to obtain relics and construct a suitably splendid place to house them.⁵³ Fortunatus also lavishes attention on the architecture and decoration of the church

⁵¹ Carm. III.4.13. Quapropter dominationi et sanctitati uestrae me humili supplicatione commendans deprecor per Dominum redemptorem animarum nostrarum qui uos praedestinos sua facturus est in luce consortes ut me in sanctis orationibus pietatis intuit dignemini memorare. Magnum enim erit spei meae auxilium a uobis obtinere quod posco.

⁵² See Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2002), pp. 10-1. Much of Brown's work touches on the patronage of Christian buildings; see also Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (Princeton, NJ; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 88. Late antique euergetism in the city of Rome is particularly well-studied. See the works of Charles Pietri, *Roma Christiana: recherches sur l'église de Rome, son organisation, sa politique, son idéologie de Miltiade à Sixte III (311-440)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1976) and 'Évergétisme et richesses ecclésiastiques dans l'Italie du IV^e à la fin du Ve S.: l'exemple romain', *Ktema*, 3 (1978); and also Jill Harries, 'Treasure in Heaven: Property and Inheritance among Senators of Late Rome', in *Marriage and Property*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Craik (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), pp. 54-70.

⁵³ An example of the fluid transition between civic and ecclesiastical patronage in late antiquity can be seen in one of Sidonius' letters (Ep.III.1). His correspondent, having given a generous donation to the local church, was asked to become patron of the city and exercise influence over local Goths and Romans. Evidence from inscriptions is particularly illuminating for the varieties of late antique euergetism. See for example H.S. Sivan, 'Town, Country and Province in Late Roman Gaul: The Example of Cil Xiii 128', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 79 (1989).

Felix has sponsored. But the real glory of the church is not its appearance, but its contents:

The right side of the temple shines brightly by the merits of Hilary,
With his coequal Martin sharing his position.
Thus since Gaul has scattered its own patrons everywhere,
Whom the earth has covered here, the world has lights.
Another part is of Ferreolus, who by the wound of a sword (55)
shines by the gift of martyrdom, a proud gem.
Felix has offered these things, so that he should be all the more a priest,
Christ, your temple, who has given temples to you.⁵⁴

The relics of the saints in the church offer patronage and protection to the surrounding area, and in turn place Felix, himself a temple of Christ, under holy protection.

Indeed, Fortunatus can be seen within in a long tradition of late antique poets and hagiographers whose writings focused not on the protection which could be afforded by men, but on the protection of the saints. Though Fortunatus calls a select number of episcopal correspondents *patronus*, he tends to reserve the term for Martin and his fellow saints.

Gregory of Tours

The relationship between Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours has been studied several times, most notably by Marc Reydellet, Judith George, and Michael Roberts.⁵⁵ In this section, I build on these interpretations to offer a new reading grounded in an understanding of Merovingian friendship and patronage. More than any other relationships discussed in this chapter that between Gregory and Fortunatus stands between friend and patron. Scholars refer to Gregory interchangeably as Fortunatus' patron, friend, or both. I argue that Gregory was

⁵⁴ *Carm.* III.7.51-8. *Dextera pars templi meritis praeifulget Hilari,/ compare Martino consociante gradum./ Gallia sic proprios dum fudit ubique patronos/ quos hic terra tegit, lumina mundus habet./ Altera Ferreoli pars est qui uulnere ferri/ munere martyrii gemma superba nitet./ Obtulit haec Felix, ut sit magis ipse sacerdos,/ Christe, tuum templum qui tibi temple dedit.*

⁵⁵ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 124-31, and 'Portraits of Two Merovingian Bishops', pp. 194-204. Marc Reydellet, 'Tours et Poitiers: les relations entre Grégoire et Fortunat', in *Grégoire de Tours et l'espace Gaulois*, ed. by Nancy Gauthier and Henri Galinié (Tours: Revue archéologique du Centre de la France, 1994), pp. 159-67. The most recent work on the relationship between the two men is Roberts.

more patron than friend to Fortunatus. The poet needed the bishop of Tours far more than Gregory needed him.

Fortunatus' writing for Gregory is woven throughout his collection and Fortunatus' name is linked with Gregory's more than with any other patron.⁵⁶ There are more than thirty poems in Fortunatus' corpus written to Gregory, about him, or at his behest. They include an *adventus* poem for his entrance into Tours when he was consecrated bishop in September 573, a four-book metrical life of Saint Martin, and a poem about the conversion of the Jewish community of Clermont, which will be discussed further on in this chapter. Fortunatus also wrote poems and epitaphs for important members of Gregory's family: Armentaria, Gregory of Langres, Tetricus of Langres, and Gallus of Clermont.⁵⁷ Fortunatus' panegyric for King Chilperic (r. 561-584), delivered to a group of bishops at Berny-Rivière, has been interpreted as an act in defence of Gregory, who was on trial for slander.⁵⁸ Finally, Fortunatus wrote about Gregory's building projects and contributed *tituli* for the murals depicting the life of St Martin which adorned Gregory's cathedral. These survive only in Book Ten of Fortunatus' poetry—the cathedral is long gone and Gregory's description of his efforts to rebuild does not refer to the *tituli*.⁵⁹

Gregory may have been Fortunatus' foremost patron and friend, but he was not his first. Gregory did not become bishop until 573, when Fortunatus had already been in Gaul for six or seven years. Fortunatus' connection to Tours was first established with Gregory's predecessor and relative Eufronius during his first few years in the Merovingian kingdoms. There is no evidence to indicate where or when Gregory and Fortunatus first met, but it could have been as early as 566, for the wedding of Sigibert to Brunhild, or during Fortunatus' travels through Gaul at some

⁵⁶ Michael Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow: The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), p. 6.

⁵⁷ Brennan, pp. 136-7.

⁵⁸ Judith George, 'Poet as Politician: Venantius Fortunatus' Panegyric to King Chilperic', *Journal of Medieval History*, 15 (1989).

⁵⁹ See Judith George, 'Portraits of Two Merovingian Bishops in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 13 (1987). She sums up what Fortunatus wrote for Gregory: Fortunatus' other poems to Gregory, there is his commission in honour of Avitus of Clermont-Ferrand (*Carm.* V.5); works which emphasize his role as pastor of his flock (lines in *Carm.* V.4, V.8a, V.8b, V.10, V.11, V.12, etc.) praise of his building projects or to be inscribed on them (*Carm.* X.6, II.3, I.5), recommendations and petitions (*Carm.* V.8a, V.10, V.14, V.15), and pieces which reflect personal affection and friendship (*Carm.* V.4, V.8, V.9, V.12, V.13, V.16, V.17, VIII.9, VIII.11-13, VIII.14, VIII.16-21, IX.6-7) Fortunatus' poems for Gregory's building projects, *Carm.* I.V about the cell where Martin clothed a beggar, at Gregory's request; *Carm.* X.6, the *tituli* for the cathedral of Tours, are discussed in Chapter 2.

point before Gregory's consecration in 573. Of course, it is also plausible that Fortunatus was present at that event, and he wrote a poem which celebrated Gregory's installation as bishop and later honoured the anniversary of this date.⁶⁰

In the epistolary preface to Books 1-8, Fortunatus acknowledges Gregory's encouragement to collect and publish his poetry and he dedicates the work to Gregory.⁶¹ The preface is one Fortunatus' most elaborate pieces of rhetoric and it ends with a statement of purpose that is worth quoting in full:

But eagerly conspiring more steadfastly to overcome my resisting humility, subject to the testimony of divine mystery and the splendour of the miracles of the most blessed Martin, you persistently urge that contrary to my modesty I should be drawn into public, even as I acknowledge to the judge of my frivolities, the ignorance of my rough work, and what I delayed to bring to light when others asked, I grant to a strength which must be obeyed. At least with regard to my obedience, to compensate for this great change, you should either read them again making them known only to yourself or, you should entrust them to the ears of your close friends for (I beg) friendly discussion, since these things delight more by goodwill than by judgement.⁶²

The poet claims Gregory's insistence and encouragement were what successfully encouraged him to gather his poems and send them out into public. The line about Fortunatus refusing other requests to publish his work, but being persuaded by Gregory, is interesting. On the one hand, it caters to Gregory's sense of his own exceptionalism, but it may also hint at the poet's other patrons. In return for granting Gregory's request, Fortunatus demands that he re-read all the poems, either keeping them to himself, or circulating them, as he might see fit. Gregory may have read and shared the work among his friends as he was requested to do, but no evidence of this survives.

Reydellet suggests that Gregory may have seen the poems as a worthy accompaniment to the story of the *Histories*.⁶³ Indeed, Fortunatus' elegant and

⁶⁰ V.3, Gregory's installation as bishop; V.4 a celebration of Gregory's *natalicium*, performed, according to the title, at a banquet in the bishop's honour when Gregory requested him to say an antiphon. In its six lines, the poem crams praise of Gregory as a holy and good example, who offers his people the light of the apostles and illuminates the gift of heaven.

⁶¹ Reydellet, p. lxix.

⁶² Preface.6 Sed quoniam humilem impulsus alacriter, acius renitentem, sub testificatione diuini mysterii et splendore uirtutum beatissimi Martini coniurans hortaris sedulo ut contra pudorem meum deducar in publicum, me meis friuulis arbitre scabrosi operis ignorantiam confitente, quod aliis poscentibus patefacere distuli, oboediendo cedo uirtuti. Haec saltim obtemperanti uicissitudinem repensurus ut quia haec fauore magis delectantur quam iudice, aut tibi tantummodo innotescentia relegas aut intimorum auribus tecum amicaliter quaeso conlatura committas.

⁶³ Reydellet, pp. lxxviii-lxix.

sometimes un-datable poetry has often been used as little more than a footnote to Gregory's beguiling narrative. At the end of the *Histories* Gregory begs his reader to keep his works intact but encourages the possibility that they might be versified.⁶⁴ It is impossible to say whether he had Fortunatus in mind for this task, though the poet had undertaken lengthy verse account of the miracles of Saint Martin at the bishop's request.⁶⁵ Gregory mentions Fortunatus but once in the *Histories*, when encouraging his readers to learn more about the miracles of Germanus of Paris from the *vita* of the saint by 'the priest Fortunatus'.⁶⁶ Gregory refers to Fortunatus as a priest again in Book One of *Virtutibus Sancti Martini*.⁶⁷ The *VSM* contain two further references to Fortunatus (who in turn appears as a character in the account of Martin's miracles he wrote for Gregory) and Fortunatus also appears in Gregory's *Gloria Martyrum* and twice in his *Gloria Confessorum*. These are the only direct references to Fortunatus in all of Gregory's works.⁶⁸ Gregory's description of Radegund's death seems to share imagery with Fortunatus' poetry⁶⁹ and his description of a miracle of St Laurence quotes extensively from Carm.9.14. He also seems to have read or, at least known about, Fortunatus' lives of Germanus of Paris, Albinus of Angers, and a now-lost life of Severinus. Recent scholarship has shown that Gregory's silences can be significant and it is interesting that Fortunatus does not appear as a character in any of Gregory's narratives.

These silences about Fortunatus and his work may be connected to Fortunatus' and Gregory's complicated relationship to the see of Poitiers. It is

⁶⁴ DLH X.31

⁶⁵ For excellent analysis of the literary qualities of major work and its place in the late antique literary tradition, see Michael Roberts, 'The Last Epic of Antiquity: Generic Continuity and Innovation in the *Vita Sancti Martini* of Venantius Fortunatus', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 131 (2001); Michael Roberts, 'St. Martin and the Leper: Narrative Variation in the Martin Poems of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 4 (1994). For an analysis of Fortunatus' epic within the context of the tradition of writing about Saint Martin, see Sylvie Labarre, *Le manteau partagé: deux métamorphoses poétiques de la Vie de saint Martin chez Palin de Périgueux (Ve siècle) et Venantius Fortunatus (VIe siècle)* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1998). I discuss the *VSM* below in the context of commissions between a poet and his patron.

⁶⁶ DLH V.8

⁶⁷ Brian Brennan, 'The Career of Venantius Fortunatus', *Traditio*, 41 (1985), 67. The reference to Fortunatus as a priest is DVSM, 1.2.

⁶⁸ Marc Reydellet, 'Tours et Poitiers: les relations entre Grégoire et Fortunat', in *Grégoire de Tours et l'espace Gaulois*, ed. by Nancy Gauthier and Henri Galinié (Tours: Revue archéologique du Centre de la France, 1994), pp. 159-67 (p. 159).

⁶⁹ Brian Brennan, 'Deathless Marriage and Spiritual Fecundity in Venantius Fortunatus' "De Virginitate", *Traditio*, 51 (1996), 94-5.

surely significant that Gregory avoids any mention of origins of the bishop of Poitiers, Maroveus (d. 591), whose very Merovingian-sounding name may indicate a royal connection. On the whole, Gregory's portrait of Maroveus is a negative one. His intransigence resulted in devastation of the area around Poitiers and in reported speech Gregory blames his neglect for revolt of the nuns at the convent of the Holy Cross.⁷⁰ Even before the revolt, Maroveus' relationship with Radegund's convent was a difficult one—he refused to install the relics of the Holy Cross or preside over Radegund's funeral. The convent's closest episcopal supporters were the bishops of Tours: Gregory's predecessor Eufronius signed a letter in support of the foundation of the convent, and Gregory continued to be closely involved.

Like Gregory, Fortunatus seems to have had a fraught relationship with the city of Poitiers. He was strongly tied to Radegund and Agnes, both personally and professionally, which would have placed him in a difficult position with Maroveus, whose position was challenged by the presence of a former queen and the outstanding relic she had acquired. From his poems to the two women, it seems Fortunatus lived close enough to the convent to be a regular visitor, although the exact location of his residence is not entirely clear. Wherever he was, the bishop of Poitiers was sometimes able to restrict his movements although this does not seem to have prevented him from making and attempting to maintain connections across Gaul.

Brennan argues that after the murder of Sigibert in 575, Fortunatus' chances for patronage at the royal courts was reduced and his world narrowed to a greater focus on Tours and Poitiers. He continued to write to old friends, but much of his work was in Gregory's interest, such as the panegyric for Chilperic thought to have been delivered on the occasion of Gregory's trial for slander.⁷¹ However, as I show in Chapter 4, Fortunatus continued to write for royalty throughout his career, which cannot be neatly divided into phases of wider or narrower activity. Fortunatus continued to write for Gregory into the 590s. Two poems (8.12 and 8.12a) seem to

⁷⁰ DLH VII.24, Maroveus refuses to admit Guntram's envoys to Poitiers, resulting in an army sacking the area around Poitiers and Tours. The bishop was accused of disloyalty and bought off the envoys by melting down church plate. In IX.30, Maroveus requests revised taxes for Poitiers. IX.39-43, Gregory mentions Maroveus' involvements with the events at the convent of the Holy Cross. Maroveus' threats to the nuns over the imprisonment of their abbess, and his involvement in the commission to settle the revolt are mentioned in X.15. The nuns' disregard and maltreatment of their bishop is catalogued in the bishops' judgment on their case, X.16.

⁷¹Brennan, pp. 73-5.

request the bishop's help in dealing with the revolt at the convent of the Holy Cross in Poitiers. Fortunatus also wrote a poem in honour of the consecration of Gregory's archdeacon Plato as bishop of Poitiers in 591.⁷² This seems to be the latest piece of evidence we have for the relationship between the two men. Gregory died in around 594 and Fortunatus succeeded Plato as bishop of Poitiers. Only a few sermons may date from Fortunatus' time as bishop and we have no further evidence of his connections to Tours.

The Duty of Regular Greeting: Commendations and Replies to Invitations

The majority of the poems Fortunatus wrote for Gregory are strikingly brief and fall under the category of poems of greeting. One of the obligations of a relationship of *amicitia* was to send regular greetings and this Fortunatus did assiduously. Most of these poems are found in books Five and Eight.⁷³ The language Fortunatus uses to address Gregory reveals how he maintained and obeyed the dictates of friendship. Conventional in nature, these poems do not offer definite dates or much information about the evolution of Fortunatus' and Gregory's relationship. But they do provide evidence of the practicalities of maintaining relationships across distances, such as Fortunatus' occasional use of his own messengers to deliver his letters to Tours.

Fortunatus repeatedly commended himself to Gregory, which would indicate that he hoped to establish a patronal connection to the bishop, and that these wishes were put forward in appropriately emotional and formal language. He included these self-commendations in shorter notes of greeting and occasional poems. After Gregory took an unspecified journey, Fortunatus wrote to him, calling him the height of honour, kind glory, abundant light, shepherd of the apostolic seat, and sacred stronghold—in the first three lines.⁷⁴ Mixed in with the epithets of praise

⁷² Ibid. p. 78.

⁷³ Greetings: V.8, a poem to Gregory after a journey (commends the messenger); V.8a, short greeting; V.9, Fortunatus sends a letter to Gregory after Maroveus told him to go home; V.11 after Gregory's journey; V.12—letter to Gregory (a repeat of IX.9, note that the poem does not name Gregory, though it does refer to friendship); V.16 short poem, mostly praise—greeting; V.17 greeting VIII.11, Gregory's letter arrived while Fortunatus was ill; VIII.14, receipt of a letter, short greeting VIII.15; VIII.16 greeting; VIII.17 messenger is present to deliver a greeting; for greetings as well VIII.18, in which Fortunatus praises Gregory and calls him a patron

⁷⁴V.8.1-3 *Culmen honoratum, decus alium, lumen opimum/ pastor apostolicae sedis amore placens,/ amplectende mihi semper, sacer arce Gregori.* Fortunatus repeats the same or similar terms

reflecting Gregory's episcopal status is Fortunatus' claims to a personal connection with the bishop, written in the language of friendship.⁷⁵ Gregory is 'a man always to be clasped to me' and 'never separated from my soul'.⁷⁶ The poem concludes with Fortunatus commending his servant to Gregory and himself, and praying for Gregory's long service to his flock. This finds echo in the words of the next poem in the collection: 'Commending myself, a humble servant, I pay greeting / always with pious love, man blessed by God.'⁷⁷

In *Carm.* V.15, Fortunatus commends an unnamed stranger to Gregory. Pucci suggests that Fortunatus, referring to himself in the third person, was writing to Gregory to commend himself. Confirmation that *Carm.* V.15 is indeed about Fortunatus would seem to be provided by *Carm.* V.18, in which Fortunatus describes himself as *praesens Italus, peregrinus et hospes*. Open acknowledgment of his foreignness, and imagery of the search for a homeland, are shared with *Carm.* V.15. Another interpretation is that Fortunatus was instead commending the man who delivered the message to Gregory. It is certainly possible that Fortunatus wrote this note to commend someone other than himself—he did so on other occasions and the poem immediately follows his commendation of a young girl. It is followed by a short poem of greeting in which Fortunatus asks Gregory for *opem Olympi*; this is more likely to be a request for the bishop's prayers than a temporal favour. Gregory was not only a powerful figure worthy of appeal in his own right, but an intercessor to divine help. Fortunatus also asked Gregory to commend him to the Thunderer (God). This is not merely for the poet's selfish benefit: it will establish Gregory as a *consocius* of heaven.⁷⁸ In *Carm.* VIII.15, he praises Gregory's prominence within his region; Gregory is both a light and a lighthouse in this poem,

throughout his poems to bishops. Indeed, *Carm.* V.12 is an exact copy of a poem found elsewhere in the collection. Nowhere else does Fortunatus repeat a whole poem, though he does once repeat an entire line, in III.9.94 and V.5.136. Roberts, p. 157.

⁷⁵ This language does not necessarily include calling Gregory an *amicus*; Roberts finds that it is used only once for all Fortunatus' clerical correspondents, to Ragnemod. He argues that it may have been overly worldly or familiar. Ibid. p. 317. In any case, Fortunatus had other strategies which could be used to invoke Christian friendship.

⁷⁶ V.8.3-4 *amplectende mihi semper, sacer arce Gregori./ nec diuulse animo, uir uenerande, meo.*

⁷⁷ V.8a.5-6 *Commendans humilem famulum me soluo salutem / semper amore pio, uir benedicta Deo.* Reydellet's translation, 'Me recommandant à vous comme votre humble serviteur, je vous adresse mon salut avec mon amitié dévouée, homme béni de Dieu', fails to capture the sense that Fortunatus owes Gregory his greeting. Fortunatus does sometimes use the word *amicitia* to refer to his friendships; *amor* as amitié here obscures this distinction.

⁷⁸ *Carm.* VIII.17.7-8. *Sed memor ipse mei commenda, quaeso, Tonanti: sic te consocium reddat honore throno.*

and his protection extends far and wide.⁷⁹ Fortunatus concludes the poem by commending himself to Gregory and praying that God may give him long life.⁸⁰

In addition to sending notes of greeting and commending himself to the bishop by letter, Fortunatus attempted to fulfil the duties of friendship by visiting Gregory in person. Gregory invited the poet to Tours on several occasions but Fortunatus was not always able to visit. As can be seen in Fortunatus' reply to one of Gregory's invitations, the bishop of Poitiers, Maroveus, once attempted to control Fortunatus' movements. In a reply to one of Gregory's invitations, Fortunatus expresses gratitude for it, emphasising Gregory's connection to Martin and his episcopal role. But Maroveus, whom Fortunatus does not name, only calling him *vester frater*, would not allow him to complete his journey, despite his pleas and promises.⁸¹

The ambiguity of Fortunatus' position within Merovingian society at this point provides a potential explanation for why Maroveus forbade his travels. If Fortunatus was in clerical orders by this point of his career, he may have had to seek the permission of his local bishop before leaving his diocese.⁸² Regulations surrounding clerical movement were tightened in the Carolingian period: clerics were expected to be ordained in the diocese where they had been born and baptised unless their local bishop gave permission for another bishop to perform the ordination. Bishops wrote letters, known as *epistolae formatae*, to their episcopal colleagues to request the transfer of their clergy to the diocese of another.⁸³ This insistence on written permission for clerical mobility can be seen in seventh-century church councils. Carolingian legislation further restricted clerics moving to another diocese without local episcopal permission and bishops were not allowed to ordain

⁷⁹ It is worth noting that the word *pharus* is quite rare in late antique and early medieval Latin; Gregory of Tours himself is one of its most frequent users, although in both cases (DLH II.37 and VII.11) he refers to a pillar of fire, not a lighthouse.

⁸⁰ Carm. VIII.15.11-12. me Fortunatum humilem commendo patrono; sic tua uita diu hoc sit in orbe Deo The next poem, VIII.16, again concludes with Fortunatus commending himself to Gregory (and again referring to himself as *humilem*), and asking for the bishop's prayers.

⁸¹ Carm.5.9.

⁸² A particularly striking example of Merovingian legislation on clerical movement occurred in 614, when the Council of Paris (c. 5) forbade clerics of any rank from disregarding their bishops and going to the king or other powerful men to seek patronage. The conciliar legislation was echoed and augmented in Chlothar II's Edict of Paris of the same year. For an interpretation of the edict, see Gregory Halfond, *Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils, AD 511-768* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), p. 144.

⁸³ Julia Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 34-5.

or attempt to attract clergy from a diocese which was not their own.⁸⁴ Mobility was easier for clerics who were not in priestly orders since priests were bound to serve at a particular altar.⁸⁵

The extent of Fortunatus' travels during the first decade of his career suggests that episcopal restrictions on his mobility were limited or ineffectual. Since Maroveus made no further attempt to restrict Fortunatus' movements it is likely that his restriction was related to specific circumstances.⁸⁶ It is also possible that tensions between the bishops of Tours and Poitiers were at the root of the restriction. Maroveus may have worried that Fortunatus would defect to Tours, leaving his city without the connections and goodwill the poet's work might be able to amass. Fortunatus' connection to the bishop of Poitiers was extremely limited. He never commends himself to Maroveus and never names him. Nor did he do any surviving writing for him, despite writing a Life of Saint Hilary for Maroveus' predecessor, Pascentius. Perhaps his loyalties to Gregory and Radegund's community made it difficult for him to befriend Maroveus.

Fortunatus took care to fulfil the correct conventions of apology and greetings in order to prevent the incident from causing damage to his relationship with Gregory. In the final four lines of the poem, Fortunatus begs Gregory to pardon him for the sake of their friendship (described as a *foederis studium*). Fortunatus concludes the poem by saying that Radegund and Agnes also greet Gregory, and asks Gregory to accept his self-commendation. His success can be seen in the fact that he continued to develop his friendship with Gregory and his connections to friends and patrons throughout the Merovingian kingdoms unabated.

He also continued to reply to Gregory's invitations. In VIII.11, Fortunatus excuses himself from another invitation—Gregory's invitation to celebrate St Martin's feast, delivered by a priest named Leo, arrived when Fortunatus had been laid low by a fever. Having returned to health, Fortunatus greeted Gregory and asked him to be 'a help to an exile.' Providing help in exile was, in classical times, one of the good offices a friend might perform. Fortunatus was not literally in exile in Merovingian Gaul but he does refer to episcopal help for exiles and hospitality

⁸⁴ Carine van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 96.

⁸⁵ Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World*, pp. 346-7.

⁸⁶ *Carm.* V.11

throughout his work.⁸⁷ He was certainly in need of the *auxilium* and support Gregory might provide.

Although none of Gregory's letters to him survive, Fortunatus' poems suggest that there was regular correspondence between them, and his greetings did not go unanswered. In *Carm.*V.17 the poet was delighted to find Gregory in good health and concludes with an implicit plea for more letters, reminding Gregory that they are an aid to his salvation. In VIII.14, Fortunatus also acknowledges the receipt of Gregory's letter and the happiness it afforded him to know that the bishop was well. Commending himself, he concludes that it is his duty to honour Gregory. *Officium* was one of the key ideas of *amicitia* and patronage, as was the idea of reciprocity found in the letter exchange between the poet and the bishop.

Fortunatus only once calls the relationship between himself and Gregory *amicitia*. The poem appears twice in his collection, the second time addressed to Bishop Baudoald of Meaux.⁸⁸ Fortunatus uses similarly epithets for many of his episcopal correspondents but this is the only time an entire poem is recycled. Fortunatus greets Baudoald/Gregory as 'highest of the bishops, abundant supply of goodness/ a height in your honour, a light in my love' as well as venerable in their holy offices and nourishing in piety. They are described as *pignore amicitiae corde tenende meae*.⁸⁹ The promise of friendship included the expectation of stability—Fortunatus calls on the earth, sea, and stars to witness that his addressee may want to remember that he is always theirs. However rarely he used the word *amicitia*, the poems of greeting serve to show that Fortunatus envisaged his relationship with Gregory through the norms of friendship—the idea of reciprocal duty between friends, including reply to letters and invitations, praise and acknowledgement of a friend's merits, and apology for extenuating circumstances which interrupted their correspondence. Yet in his repeated self-designation as *famulus* and the times he commended himself to Gregory, Fortunatus reflects the social distance between

⁸⁷ This may well be a reflection on his own experience as a foreigner in Gaul. See Roberts, *Sparrow*, pp. 23-4. In *Carm.*V.15, also written to Gregory, Fortunatus refers to himself as a foreigner warmly welcomed and given a new home by Gregory.

⁸⁸ *Carm.*5.12 (to Gregory) and *Carm.*9.8 (to Baudoald).

⁸⁹ *Carm.*5.12.1-4. *Summe sacerdotum, bonitatis opima facultas,/ culmen honore tuo, lumen amore meo, / officii uenerande sacris, pietatis alumne,/ pignore amicitiae corde tenende meae*. The translation of the first two lines from Pucci, *Poems to Friends*, p. 33.

himself and Gregory.⁹⁰ Gregory, and his own patron, St Martin, were protectors to be cultivated as well as friends to be cherished.

Offering Thanks for Gifts

In addition to offering each other regular greetings, and invitations, friends gave each other gifts, and sent thanks for presents received. On several occasions, Fortunatus had reason to thank Gregory for various presents and correspondence.⁹¹ The gifts for which Fortunatus thanked Gregory can be seen as one aspect of his patronal attempts to provide for the poet. Like the early imperial poets with whom he can profitably be compared, Fortunatus likely came from a wealthy background. It is surely significant that although he refers to himself as an Italian, foreigner, and exile, he never calls himself poor or makes reference to needing money. Fortunatus' word choices make it clear that the poems of thanks were written to Gregory the bishop. As is often the case, we have only Fortunatus' perspective on these presents and their meaning. Gregory's letters have not survived and the exchange of small presents between friends rarely fell within the remit of the *Histories*. Interestingly, Fortunatus seems to have grouped these with the rest of his poems to Gregory, in Books Five and Eight; though as we have seen, poems of greeting are scattered throughout the collection. In this set of poems, Fortunatus thanks Gregory for gifts including a book of sacred verses, grafting slips, shoe leathers and a villa on the Vienne. Gregory's own letters, some of which accompanied his more material presents, are also figured as gifts which require the counter-gift of a letter of written thanks.

In *Carm.* V.8b, Fortunatus thanks Gregory for the gift of a book. Michael Roberts saw the book of the title and the *carmina diua* of the first six lines as two

⁹⁰ It is worth noting that Fortunatus uses the word *famulus* twenty-one times in his poetry, at least half of the time referring to himself in relation to the person he is addressing. The word is often used to refer to the saints (as servants of God or Christ) in the sermons of Caesarius of Arles and the Eusebius Gallicanus collection; and it is also frequently used by Bede.

⁹¹ Brennan, pp. 137-8. Gift-giving was an important part of late antique social life and has produced a voluminous scholarly literature. For gift-giving in an epistolary context see, Amanda Wilcox, *The Gift of Correspondence in Classical Rome: Friendship in Cicero's Ad Familiares and Seneca's Moral Epistles* (Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press, 2012). With respect to Fortunatus and Merovingian Gaul, see Stephen D'Evelyn, 'Gift and the Personal Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Literature and Theology*, 21 (2007); Florin Curta, 'Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving', *Speculum*, 81 (2006).

separate gifts; other commentators have been inclined to see them as one gift. Pucci interprets the gift to be a book collecting Gregory's favourite psalms. Certainly, it is likely that *carmina diua* were psalms; especially since Fortunatus emphasises Gregory's divine reward for distributing *sacras opes*.⁹²

It is also likely, as Reydellet points out, that Fortunatus would have mentioned if Gregory had composed the poems himself.⁹³ The poem concludes with Fortunatus commending the *famulus* Prodomer to Gregory: 'the present servant Prodomer, highest bishop/ I, suppliant, commend, father sweet in love/ To whom granting his own things by the government of a just balance/ may the future palm grow in honour of God for you.'⁹⁴ Fortunatus does not seem to be implying that Gregory reward Prodomer for the delivery of the message; rather, he seems to be wishing they enjoy the same future blessing. Prodomer, like many of the people Fortunatus names as his messengers, does not seem to have appeared again in Fortunatus' works. As Gregory's other gifts to Fortunatus suggest, he certainly would have had servants or tenants, but he does not seem to have had access to a consistent group of people who might deliver his messages. It is even possible that he used the messengers of the people who had addressed him to return his replies.

Fortunatus' and Gregory's exchange of literary gifts closely resembles the tradition of this sort of exchange in Classical *amicitia*. In Carm.9.6, Fortunatus thanks Gregory for a letter requesting a poem in Sapphic meters. Fortunatus praises Gregory's interest in the esoteric meter, saying it likens him to Gregory of Nazianzus, and denigrates his own efforts, claiming that Gregory wanted the poem quickly, but the pressures of the harvest required him to write slowly. Whether this was a harvest of poetry, or a literal harvest from the property Gregory gave him, is not entirely clear. The in any case serves as a covering letter for the requested verses, which follow (Carm.9.7). The poem itself thanks Gregory for sending him a book on metre containing various examples.⁹⁵ Fortunatus claims he had not yet mastered the book's contents, but sent in return his own little book to give his

⁹² See *Carm.* V.8b.1-6. Roberts, *Sparrow*, pp. 279-80 and Pucci, *Friends*, p. 30.

⁹³ Pucci, *Friends*, pp. 29-31.

⁹⁴ *Carm.* V.8b.9-12. Praesentem famulum Prodomerem, summe sacerdos,/ commendo supplex, dulcis amore pater./ Cui sua concedens iustae moderamine librae/ crescat honore Dei palma futura tibi.

⁹⁵ Meyer suggested that the book was Terentianus Maurus, *De Metris* and argued that Fortunatus consulted it before making his poetic effort. Meyer, *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 127.

greetings, a common motif in classical and late antique literature.⁹⁶ Fortunatus concluded the poem by sending greetings from Radegund, Agnes, and Gregory's niece Justina, and requesting the bishop's prayers. The poem underscores the level of reciprocity in Gregory and Fortunatus' friendship: they exchanged letters about poetic projects and Gregory sent gifts to help Fortunatus with his work. Fortunatus gave, as he always did, the counter-gift of poetry.

Since poems of thanks provide no contextual clues for dating, it is impossible to say anything about how often Gregory sent Fortunatus gifts or letters. Nevertheless there seems to have been a steady stream of presents from Tours to Poitiers. In *Carm* V.13, Fortunatus thanks Gregory for sending him fruit still attached to branches for grafting. Like the book of sacred verses, there is a sense of practicality in this gift. It was a token of friendship but also something the poet could use to feed himself. In *The Economy of Friends*, Verboven argues that patronage (which he regards as a subset of *amicitia*) provided a means to organise economic activity and distribute scarce resources. Focusing on the gifts exchanged between aristocratic patrons and clients, he argues that a variety of substantial gifts might be given; and therefore gift-giving within *amicitia* was not the mere exchange of tokens but an economically significant activity. Certain segments of the late Republican Roman aristocracy and middle class needed these gifts to sustain their standard of living.⁹⁷

Fortunatus did not sustain himself and his servants on the basis of a one-off gift of fruit from a powerful nearby bishop. But the fact that the bishop sent fruit grafts as well as suggests that the gift was meant to be of practical, long-term use, rather than a token of *amicitia*, though Gregory sent gifts in this vein as well. In *Carm* V.17 Fortunatus records his thanks to Gregory for a letter, in which he was pleased by news of Gregory's good health and the salvific power of Gregory's letters.⁹⁸ Late antique and Merovingian letter-writers sometimes described a friend's letter as a gift, a figure of speech Fortunatus uses elsewhere. Further practical gifts

⁹⁶ See George, *Personal and Political*, p. 94, n. 118.

⁹⁷ Koenraad Verboven, *The Economy of Friends: Economic Aspects of Amicitia and Patronage in the Late Republic* (Brussels: Latomus, 2002), pp. 104-7. As Peter White observes about poets in imperial Rome, patrons could give large gifts but not reliable or steady ones. White, 'Poets in the new milieu: realigning', p. 327.

⁹⁸ In *Carm*. V.18 Fortunatus thanks unspecified 'holy and apostolic lords...pontiffs, fathers of the church' for an unspecified *munus*; as the poem focuses on his state as a foreign wanderer and exile, this would seem to be thanks for patronage but Gregory is not mentioned here.

from bishop to poet can be seen in *Carm.* VIII.21 thanks Gregory for sending him shoe leather and an eloquent letter or poem (*pagina*). Most of the poem is praise; framed by Gregory's two gifts, the letter at the beginning and the leather at the end.

In another letter to Gregory, *Carm.* VIII.18, the poet finds himself incapable of adequately praising Gregory, who is described as a *munificum patrem*. The poem concludes with Fortunatus commending himself as Gregory's *famulum subactum*. Michael Roberts counted twenty-six epistolary poems to Gregory, in which he sees Fortunatus possessing 'unusual reticence' in showing affection for Gregory.⁹⁹ In positioning himself as Gregory's subordinate, Fortunatus balances between the roles of friend and client. He could praise Gregory's generosity but was not able to return it on the same scale.

The largest gift Gregory gave Fortunatus was a villa on the river Vienne, attested in *Carm.* 8.19 and 8.20.¹⁰⁰ Fortunatus thanks Gregory for the poem which communicated the gift, as well as the fruit of his piety (the farm itself), and the many gifts Gregory had given him. Judith George notes this poem represents the gift 'in terms of the generosity of an Augustan patron to a poet' while also echoing ascetic use of 'erotic terminology' to express friendly love.¹⁰¹ In *Carm.* 8.19, the gift is called a *praestitum*. *Praesto* was a common word for the verb to loan, and is frequently used with this meaning in the Theodosian code. Salic Law contains a specific provision *de re prestita*, which makes it clear that the word *praestitum* refers to the loan of property. If the property was not returned, the owner was required to formally notify the person to whom it had been lent, go to court, set a return date for the property, and give the person to whom it had been lent three chances to comply, with increasingly steep penalties for each reminder, and a fine of six hundred denarii plus the debt owed if the property was ultimately not returned.¹⁰² Gregory's grant of the *villa* to Fortunatus was therefore temporary and subject to recall whenever the bishop wanted it back. Gregory may well have granted

⁹⁹ Roberts, p. 271.

¹⁰⁰ Brennan, pp. 72-3.

¹⁰¹ Judith W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 130. Levine also takes note of the erotic rhetoric of this poem, which he argues is one of Fortunatus' strategies for suggesting intense love for his patrons. Robert Levine, 'Patronage and Erotic Rhetoric in the Sixth Century: The Case of Venantius Fortunatus', in *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), pp. 75-93 pp. 76-7).

¹⁰² See Katherine Drew, *The Laws of the Salian Franks* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1991), pp. 115-6.

Fortunatus the property as a friendly gift to support the poet but the legal conditions of *praestitum* suggest that a relationship of clientage was formed as well.

The next poem, *Carm.* 8.20, thanks Gregory for a gift of a field, an act Fortunatus compares to Martin's famous division of his cloak. The property is called *praecatoria* in the title of the poem. Fustel identified this as Roman form of land tenure, which continued in the West after the fall of the Western Empire. The property was granted temporarily at the recipient's request, and the recipient was established in the clientage of the grantor.¹⁰³ Fustel saw clear evidence of the terms of this sort of grant in Fortunatus' poem.¹⁰⁴ Both poems are clearly addressed to Gregory as bishop therefore the property must have been gifted sometime after 573. As I argued above, Fortunatus arranged his collection in rough chronological order in the manner of earlier letter-writers. Because the poems themselves are often difficult to date, it is impossible to ascribe Gregory's gift to a fixed point in Fortunatus' career.

However, a relationship of patronage or friendship did not typically begin with a large gift, and so one can assume that Gregory and Fortunatus had known each other for several years and exchanged smaller poems and presents before Gregory gave the poet real estate. Gifts were typically given with the expectation of a return gift of equivalent value. Although he does not (and perhaps could not) offer a counter-gift to the produce or raw materials Gregory offered him, he gave small gifts—flowers or chestnuts—to Radegund and Agnes. When the condition of the roads and the availability of messengers allowed, perhaps such small friendly gifts went to Gregory too. Both poems conclude by assuring Gregory that the property is still his and will be returned at his asking. This may be no more than a deferential acknowledgement of Gregory's generosity, or it may indicate that Gregory had given him a place to live and the profits of its land, without transferring the property to his ownership. Whatever the precise legal nature of the gift, it goes some way towards explaining how the poet was able to support himself on the profits of occasional poetry and occasional gifts.

¹⁰³ Fustel de Coulanges, *Les origines du système féodal*, p. 83, 109, 127.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4.

Advocating on Behalf of Others: Fortunatus' Appeals to his Patrons

Offering regular greetings and poems of gratitude are the most frequent manifestations of Fortunatus' relationship with Gregory but the poet made other, specific requests for Gregory's help. In these instances, we can see Fortunatus acting as a patron to someone less well-connected than himself. In one of these cases, the bishop of Tours (addressed here as the 'highest father of the fatherland, model of abundant piety/sweet head of Tours, crown of religion'¹⁰⁵), is sent a short, eight-line poem about the return of a girl whom Gregory had recommended. He is asked to care for her in the manner of a father. Pucci interprets this to mean that Fortunatus' role at the convent in Poitiers may have included handling the sisters' contact with the outside world, including 'handling new recruits, or in this case, sending them back if they or the sisters had a change of heart'.¹⁰⁶ This interpretation is possible but ultimately unprovable—Fortunatus only says that the girl was commended by Gregory, not to whom he sent her. The repeated references to paternal care suggest that she was under the bishop's protection in some way, perhaps as a widow, orphan, or refugee.

In this poem Gregory is the *recursus cunctorum* and his life is food for Fortunatus and 'all the rest'.¹⁰⁷ The poet portrays Gregory as someone who is able to aid those in need, including himself, but also positions himself as someone able to grant access to the bishop's aid. This is seen even more clearly in Fortunatus' poem requesting Gregory's help in the case of a wrongly enslaved girl, one of the longest and most elaborate of his correspondence with Gregory.¹⁰⁸ In the narrative of the poem, Fortunatus encountered a weeping couple praying for their daughter, wrongly accused of theft, at the location of one of Martin's miracles. Fortunatus compares Martin's care for his flock with Gregory's role as a good shepherd, asking him to restore the girl to his flock. Fortunatus does not call himself the family's patron and he emphasizes his own powerlessness to help, other than to appeal to his own

¹⁰⁵ *Carm.* V.10.1-2 Summe pater patriae, specimen pietatis opimae,/ dulce caput Turonis, religionis apex.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Michael Pucci, *Poems to Friends* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), p. 32.

¹⁰⁷ *Carm.* V.10.7-8 Sis quoque longaeuus cunctorum, care, recursus,/ et mihi uel reliquis sit tua uita seges.

¹⁰⁸ *Carm.* V.14 requests Gregory's help for a wrongly enslaved girl

protector. ‘Also protect me, by duty a servant subjected to you, dear, in your holy refuge, rich shepherd.’¹⁰⁹ As a man with many friends and patrons, including members of Merovingian royal families, Fortunatus was not likely to be placed in a similar situation to the family he encountered at Martin’s tree, but his appeal to Gregory suggests he was aware he might someday need Gregory’s help on his own behalf.

In *Carm.* X.12, Fortunatus appeals to a series of persons for help—Gregory, Romulf, Gallienus, and Florentius (Romulf was Childebert’s count of the palace and Florentius Brunhild’s major-domo; Gregory describes Gallienus as ‘amicus noster’ but he seems otherwise unknown).¹¹⁰ The situation seems to be one of a similar sort—a girl, falsely imprisoned by the judges, is the subject of an appeal for help returning her to her father. The bishop’s concern for the integrity of his sheepfold is again emphasised.

The appeal to Fortunatus’ three secular friends is couched in far different terms. That to Romulf opens with an appeal to their friendship—if he could see Romulf always with greedy eyes, Fortunatus says, his love would hardly be satisfied; greetings are willingly given even if he cannot see Romulf’s face. Then he commends to Romulf a servant in distress. Unlike Gregory, whose role is described in terms of a shepherd and his sheep, Romulf is described as a potential *medicina* for the sufferer. For his kind act God would in turn be solicitous.

In contrast to this, Fortunatus’ appeal to Gallienus hinges on praise of the qualities the count brings to carrying out his duties. He is commended in relatively impersonal terms, compared to the directness of the appeals to Gregory and Romulf. As count, Gallienus can remedy the man’s situation; Gallienus is instructed to find the *unus salus* in the both cases. Usually in interpretations of Fortunatus’ poetry, a more distant tone is taken to mean that the poet was not as familiar with his addressee, which may well be the case here, since the poet does not commend himself. He does offer his greetings, ‘according to my usual custom, sweet, I pay my debts to you / Obligated I honour (you), I repay the work of greeting’, but this is so conventional as to be meaningless for establishing the relationship between the two

¹⁰⁹ *Carm.* V.14.23-4 Me simul officio famulum tibi, care, subactum/ protege perfugio, pastor opime, pio.

¹¹⁰ Reydellet, pp. 90, n. 177.

men.¹¹¹ Certainly verbs of repayment would imply that Gallienus had sent Fortunatus letters, or simply that he would be flattered by the thought that the poet owed him greetings.

Last in this parade of appeals is Florentius. His letter, carried by someone going the right way, runs, and eloquence shows the love he owes. Florentius is ‘*care mihi, bone semper, amice fidelis*’; as with Romulf, he is addressed in the language of secular friendship.¹¹² It is only in this poem that it becomes clear that the father, lacking legal protection, has been tortured, and even worse than the wounds of his body is the agony of losing his young daughter. Interestingly, rather than asking Florentius to do anything for the man, Fortunatus asks him simply to ‘hear this voice’, a merciful action which ‘hence will give great things to yourself.’¹¹³ Whoever this man was, any trace of his fate or the response of the four patrons appealed to on his behalf, have long since vanished. Nor is it clear how often Fortunatus himself attempted to use his connections to intervene on behalf of the less fortunate—five poems, dealing with two similar situations, scarcely indicate that this was a regular occurrence, although it is worth keeping in mind that the eleven books of poetry and the Appendix do not represent everything Fortunatus ever wrote. The letters of appeal that survive show Fortunatus himself acting as a patron, and leveraging his own networks of friendship and patronage on behalf of less fortunate clients.

Strictly speaking, Fortunatus’ role at the monastery of the Holy Cross was neither patron nor client but he did occasionally reach out to his own patrons on behalf of the community. He had close and loving friendships with Radegund and the abbess Agnes, and contact with its prioress, Gregory’s niece Justina. There is no concrete evidence at all for Fortunatus’ position at the convent—speculation around the date of his ordination has tended to assume that he was a priest and spiritual advisor attached to the convent of the Holy Cross. A role as a land manager for the convent has also been proposed due to Fortunatus describing himself as *agens* in a poem to Radegund, but this is otherwise unsupported. Whatever he was to the

¹¹¹ *Carm.* X.12c.3-4 *more mihi solito, dulcis, tibi debita soluo;/ qui colo deuinctus, reddo salutis opus.*

¹¹² *Carm.* X.12d.1. The opening four lines of the two poems are similar in tone and vocabulary.

¹¹³ *Carm.* X.12d.9-10 *Audiat hanc uocem pietas miserando benigne;/ quae sibi cum tribuis, hinc tibi magna dabis.*

convent, Fortunatus seems to have kept his connection to it, even after Radegund's death in 587 and the death of abbess Agnes shortly afterwards.

A revolt at the convent, described in carefully selected detail by Gregory, began in 589 and continued until a combination of religious and secular authority put it down in 590.¹¹⁴ On behalf of the convent, Fortunatus composed a poem and a letter to Gregory, asking for his help.¹¹⁵ Fortunatus refers to the events of the revolt only in indistinct detail—the painfulness of what has happened prevents him from describing it, as does its wickedness. Gregory, as Martin's representative in the world, is called upon to help. Reydellet argues that the last four verses, muddled as they are in syntax, may represent the poet's haste and trouble as he wrote. This is totally unprovable, and in case the lines are not noticeably more convoluted than other poems.

Indeed, the next poem, a letter composed for the same reason, would seem to belie the idea that the poet wrote in haste and confusion; although only a sentence long, it is perhaps the poet's most complicated epistle.¹¹⁶ It opens with Fortunatus commending himself to Gregory's 'most eloquent sweetness and most gentle domination', before mentioning that his fellow-servant, a priest, has run to Gregory to ask his help.¹¹⁷ The poet states that the messenger brings supplementary message which he will explain further in Gregory's presence. It is uncommon for Fortunatus to mention this but the practice of extending the message of a letter with oral information was common in late antiquity.¹¹⁸ Fortunatus asks Gregory to remember Radegund and her requests for the foundation. This plea finds an answer in Gregory's account of the revolt in his *Histories*, where he incorporates Radegund's letters about the foundation of her convent and her wishes for it into the narrative. Fortunatus and his role as advocate on behalf of the convent find no mention in this

¹¹⁴ See Erin Thomas Dailey, 'Misremembering Radegund's Foundation of Sainte-Croix', in *Erfahren, Erzählen, Erinnern* ed. by Hartwin Brandt, et al. (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2012), pp. 117-40.

¹¹⁵ The title of the first of these, *Carm.* VIII.12, is *pro causa abbatissae*—the abbess at the time of the revolt was named Leuovera, and she is not mentioned within the poem itself.

¹¹⁶ Reydellet again notes that the ending is confused and difficult to follow—Reydellet, pp. 190-1, n.93.

¹¹⁷ *Carm.* VIII.12a *Commendans humilitatem meam copiosissimae uestrae dulcedini et mitissimae dominationi...* The bearer of the letter is 'conseruus meus presbyter, praesentium portitor'.

¹¹⁸

story, although by his own account Gregory played a significant part in bringing the crisis to a close.¹¹⁹

Doing Favours for his Patron? Fortunatus and Gregory at Court

Fortunatus relied on Gregory as a temporal and spiritual patron; he also appealed to Gregory on behalf of others as well as himself. George and others have concluded that Fortunatus repaid some of these favours in writing for on the bishop's behalf. *Carm.* IX.1, one of Fortunatus' great royal panegyrics, was delivered to king Chilperic on Gregory's behalf at the synod of Berny-Rivière in 580, can be seen as a particular example of this. Gregory was called before a council of bishops assembled at the royal villa, to answer the charge that he had slandered Chilperic's queen, Fredegund (d. 596/7). As Judith George argues, 'Fortunatus himself declaimed a formal panegyric before the synod, to mediate between the king and the bishops and persuade Chilperic to accept Gregory's innocence.'¹²⁰ The argument is based on a close reading of the poem and its oblique references to recent events in Merovingian history, as well as its subtle advice and praise for the king's character and actions. The opening lines and the title itself make it clear that the poem was indeed directed at a group of bishops.

Gregory's own writings support the contention that Berny-Rivière was a suitable place for a slander trial, as well as an administrative centre of some importance. When Chilperic took over rule from his father, he took possession of his father's treasure at Berny; similarly, Andacharius went to Berny to fraudulently obtain royal charters. The overzealous Duke Dragolen wrongly dragged Dracolen to the royal villa, where the latter was murdered. The royal villa was a setting of the plague of 580, in which two of Chilperic's sons died. The last time Berny is mentioned, and the only occasion where it is associated with ecclesiastical events of any kind is Gregory's own trial, ten chapters later, an event which actually occurred

¹¹⁹ Gregory discusses the revolt in a series of chapters in Books Nine and Ten—IX.39-42 chronicles the start of the revolt and attempts to put it down. He includes the history of the convent's foundation, and a series of relating to the foundation of the content and the scandal it was undergoing. X.14-16 chronicle the events at the end of the revolt. A final chapter X.20, deals with the reception of some of the rebellious nuns back into communion, and makes the story of the revolt the longest narrative in the *Histories*.

¹²⁰ George, pp. 33; 48-57.

about a month before the deaths of the princes.¹²¹ Gregory rounds out this tale with the vision of the destruction of Chilperic's family seen by his friend, the saintly bishop Salvius of Albi.¹²² Gregory is at pains to present Berny as a centre of the miscarriage of justice, the crowning example of which seems to be his own trial. Perhaps significantly, the villa only appears in the *Histories*. The saintly men and women who people Gregory's hagiography do not go there and miracles (other than Salvius' vision) are not performed there.

The personal danger to Gregory may have been less than has previously been supposed. Chilperic was at first unwilling to believe the accusation against Gregory and the trial was over relatively quickly. The real danger was the destabilisation of Gregory's authority in Tours, not exile or execution. Furthermore, both Gregory and Salvius may have been at court to dispute theology with Chilperic in 580; and even after he returned to Tours, Gregory was willing to write scathing comments on Chilperic's literary and theological abilities.¹²³ Gregory's trial finds a parallel in that of Bishop Charterius of Périgueux, who was accused of slandering Chilperic in a letter. Gregory commends the king's restrained handling of the situation, and his decision to leave judgement up to God. Unlike Gregory, Charterius was not brought before a synod, though those involved, including the messengers who carried the letters, were all brought before the king.¹²⁴ This may be related to slight differences in the way the accusations were raised—although both men were accused by a count who was supported by an archdeacon, Nonnichius was in good standing as count of Périgueux, whereas Leudast had been recently dismissed as count of Tours. Charterius' slander was against the king himself, while Gregory's was a more serious slur on Fredegund's fidelity.

¹²¹ Guy Halsall, 'Nero and Herod? The Death of Chilperic and Gregory of Tours' Writing of History', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Ian Wood and Kathleen Mitchell (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 337-50 pp. 341-2). See also Ian Wood, 'The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 71 (1993).

¹²² DLH IV.22 (Chilperic takes possession of his father's treasure); IV.46 (Andacharius goes to Berny to fraudulently obtain royal licenses; Thorpe claims this is before Sigibert); V.25 (Dragolen wrongly drags Dracolen to Berny, where the latter is murdered); V.34 Chilperic and Fredegund's son dies there and is carried to Paris; V.39 Clovis is sent to Berny in hopes that he'll die of plague; V.49 (synod and Gregory's trial. The accusation is voiced two chapters earlier. Note the comments on the distribution of church property and Felix of Nantes' role in the trial!); V.50 Salvius' vision of the sword over the roof of the villa at Berny

¹²³ Halsall.

¹²⁴ DLH, VI.22

At the time of the trial, Poitiers was under Childebert II's (r. 575-596) control, but Tours was under Chilperic's. As Gregory and Fortunatus both knew, it was not inevitable that things would stay this way.¹²⁵ After the death of Charibert in 576, Tours and Poitiers had fallen to Sigibert's share. Chilperic, via his son Clovis, tried to take them over by force, but Sigibert and Guntram (r. 561-592) jointly appointed a general, Mummolus, to take the cities back. The resistance of the citizens of Poitiers was overcome, and they were forced to swear fealty.¹²⁶ Assuming Fortunatus delivered the panegyric in person, the trip to the royal villa would have taken some planning and forethought. According to a third-century geospatial model of the Roman world, it would have taken at least a month to travel there from Poitiers.¹²⁷

Thus, if Fortunatus delivered the panegyric in person, and most late antique panegyricists did perform before their addressee or his representatives, there must have been some sort of commission and advance planning. Of course, the same is true for the assembly of the synod to whom the poem was delivered. Halsall suggests that the purpose of Fortunatus' panegyric may not have been to defend Gregory or persuade Chilperic to be clement. Rather the intended audience of the panegyric is the court, and particularly the assembled bishops. Presented with the king's virtues (including merciful judgement) and the difficulty of his position, the bishops would be persuaded not to excommunicate him.¹²⁸ The importance of the assembled bishops in the audience of the poem does deserve greater acknowledgement than it has previously received but the argument that the panegyric was intended to prevent the king's excommunication is unconvincing. The purpose of the synod, at least in Gregory's account, was his own trial, not Chilperic's excommunication.¹²⁹ Reydellet argues that the poem was recited to close

¹²⁵ Marc Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1981), p. 302, suggests that Fortunatus did not break off relations with Chilperic's court in 580 because it was entirely possible that Tours and Poitiers would come back under his control.

¹²⁶ *Histories*, IV.45

¹²⁷ See <http://orbis.stanford.edu/> A search for the travel time between Poitiers and Rheims (the nearest city on the map) reveals the fastest journey would be 23 days. Taking into account the distance between Berny-Rivière and Rheims, a month seems the shortest possible estimate for the time it might have taken Fortunatus to get from Poitiers to Berny-Rivière.

¹²⁸ Halsall, pp. 242, n.23.

¹²⁹ Another Merovingian, Charibert, for whom Fortunatus wrote a panegyric, was threatened with excommunication for his uncanonical marriages. IV.26

the synod of 580.¹³⁰ Although coming to his patron's defence would certainly be expected of a dutiful Roman friend and client, it may be telling that Gregory leaves Fortunatus' panegyric out of his version of the story. His narrative relies on his own innocence and a portrait of popular (including Chilperic's own daughter) and divine support. Fortunatus' panegyric was part of the proceedings, as the opening lines of the poem suggest, and he may have been using the opportunity to advance his own position in Chilperic's favour.¹³¹ Gregory's account of his trial at Berny-Rivière and Fortunatus' panegyric delivered at the same location but the connection between the two remains speculative.

Nine years later, Fortunatus may have advocated before royal officials on Gregory's behalf again, although as with the story of Gregory's trial, the *Histories* do not mention poetic intervention. In 589, when Austrasian envoys visiting Tours sought to adjust its tax burden, one of Fortunatus' poems, performed at the table before Childebert and Brunhild's tax assessors, may have been part of Gregory's efforts to wine and dine the officials into leaving his city alone.¹³² The poem refers Gregory's good stewardship of the city and his position as Martin's successor though Fortunatus makes note of Gregory's absence at the feast. The poem makes no direct reference to Tours' financial exemption, instead reminding the envoys of the festal occasion (Easter). They were reminded that they were in Martin's house, eating at Martin's table; and that their job was to 'govern the faithful people/and relieve the poor, if anyone should appear in want.'¹³³

Gregory narrates this incident in the *Histories*, although he does not refer to any poetic attempts at persuading the officials to respect Tours' immunity.¹³⁴ The tax inspectors first went to Poitiers (which did not enjoy the same immunities as Tours, though Gregory records that Romulf and Florentianus readjusted the tax burden so it sat fairly on everyone). When the inspectors arrived in Tours, armed with old tax-lists, Gregory argued that from the time of Chlothar, Tours had been exempted. Official attempts to revive the tax had been met with royal resistance and pious respect for St Martin. After the son of the man who produced the tax lists fell

¹³⁰ Reydellet, pp. xxv-xxvi.

¹³¹ I return to this point in Chapter 4.

¹³² Brennan, p. 77. *Carm.*X.11.

¹³³ *Carm.* X.11.27-8 uos quos miserunt populum moderare fidelem/ et releuare inopes, si quis et extat egens.

¹³⁴ DLH.IX.30.

ill and died, Gregory sent representatives to Childebert to clarify what the king wanted done. The rapid reply instructed the inspectors to leave Tours alone, which they did.¹³⁵ Gregory's own account attributes his successful defence of Tours' immunity to his own efforts and the miraculous power of Martin. He may well have commissioned Fortunatus to deliver a poem to the inspectors but he did not want to give his readers the impression he needed any help.

Writing for a Patron: Gregory's Familial Commissions

In addition to sending regular notes of greeting and thanks, and advocating on behalf of Gregory's interests, Fortunatus cultivated his connection with Gregory through writing about and on behalf of members of his family. Gregory took great pride in his episcopal relatives, the bishops Gregory of Langres, Tetricus of Langres, and Gallus of Clermont; the latter helped raise and educate him. Gregory proudly composed short *vitae* of his holy relations but he also may have commissioned Fortunatus to write their epitaphs.¹³⁶ It is possible that Gregory's predecessor Eufronius, who was also related to these men, requested the epitaphs, but Gregory's demonstrated interest in promoting their lives and careers makes him the more likely candidate.

The three epitaphs appear as a group in book four, following the epitaph of Eumerius of Nantes. Felix, the current bishop of Nantes, appears prominently in book three (although the book opens with letters to Bishop Eufronius) and so it is possible that Fortunatus simply wanted to follow the Nantes theme through, particularly since the poem about Eumerius names Felix his successor and spiritual or biological son. Given that Felix of Nantes and Gregory of Tours were always not on amicable terms, the prominence of Nantes is a reminder that Fortunatus relied on the support of multiple patrons.

¹³⁵ DLH IX.30.

¹³⁶ *Carm.* IV.2 Gregory of Langres; *Carm.* IV.3 Tetricus of Langres; *Carm.* IV.4 Gallus of Clermont. On the imagery of Fortunatus' epitaphs, see Evrard Delbey, 'La poétique de la copia chez Venance Fortunat: le livre IV des épitaphes dans les Carmina', *Revue des Etudes Latines*, 80 (2002), Sylvie Labarre, 'Vie terrestre et vie céleste dans les épitaphes mérovingiennes de Venance Fortunat', in *Les pierres de l'offrande*, ed. by Annie Sartre-Fauriat (Kilchberg: Akanthus, 2003), pp. 101-7, and Roberts, *Sparrow*, pp. 5-37. Much has been written on Gregory's family and his pride in it, see for a start Ralph W. Mathisen, 'The Family of Georgius Gregorius Florentius and the Bishops of Tours', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 12 (1984); and Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 7-35.

The three epitaphs of Gregory's relatives immediately follow the poem about Eumerius. Gregory of Langres is praised for his noble descent, a statement corroborated by Gregory's *vita*. Both texts also note Gregory of Langres' rigorous pursuit of justice during his secular career, and his subsequent piety as a bishop. Fortunatus concludes by noting Gregory of Langres' miracles, which included restoring *amica salus* to the weak. Gregory never completed his biography of his great-grandfather's son and successor, Tetricus, although chapter-headings indicate he intended to write one. Gregory's brother Peter was one of Tetricus' deacons in Langres, and his involvement in the clerical politics of Langres led to his murder. Gregory defended his brother's innocence but may have been hesitant to write about Tetricus because of these events, which took place following Tetricus' death.¹³⁷ Fortunatus praises Tetricus for his qualities as shepherd of his flock and protector of the weak, widowed, and orphaned. The final epitaph for a member of Gregory's family, that of Gallus of Clermont, is the longest and most elaborate. It opens with an address to the devil, informing him that God's *famuli* escape safely to heaven. The epitaph gives biographical details of Gallus' life—his early departure from his biological family to embrace a monastic one and his close connection to Theudebert (r. 534-547). The last seven lines sketch of Gallus' long episcopal career, concluding with the assurance that Gallus rests not in a funerary urn but in the arms of God. The epitaph is unusually biographical, probably reflecting Gregory's first-hand knowledge of his uncle's life.

Fortunatus also wrote in honour of a living member of Gregory's family: his mother Armentaria. The short poem mostly praises her for being the mother of such an illustrious son, through an extended comparison to the mother of the Maccabees, but it concludes with Fortunatus commending himself to her and asking for her prayers on behalf of his salvation.¹³⁸ The self-commendation to Armentaria is interesting—it is one of the few times Fortunatus commends himself to a woman.

¹³⁷ DLH V.5

¹³⁸ Fortunatus was not the only Gallic bishop to mention this cult in poetry; Avitus of Vienne did as well (see Carm.VI.1.105). On interest in the cult of the Maccabees in the Rhone valley, see Ian Wood, 'The Cult of the Saints in the Southeast of Gaul in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries', in *L'empreinte Chrétienne en Gaule du IVe au IXe siècle* ed. by Michèle Gaillard (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 257-69 (p. 269). On the cult of the Maccabees in the medieval Christian world (though it does not mention Merovingian Gaul), see Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, *Christian Memories of the Maccabean Martyrs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Armentaria's life has to be pieced together from scattered references. Gregory never wrote a biography of her, although he greatly admired his mother's religious devotion, and he seems to have begun to write at her encouragement. Possibly she was one of Gregory's sources for information about happenings in the Auvergne, where she lived out her long widowhood in religious retirement. Gregory focused exclusively on her exemplary piety but as Erin Dailey suggests, her widowhood likely included temporal matters, such as managing the family estates and supporting her sons' ecclesiastical careers.¹³⁹ Fortunatus' poem to her would suggest that her retirement was not particularly isolated, and that she was still a person of importance and influence. It is not clear that they ever met in person; Armentaria lived on an estate in Chalon-sur-Saône and does not seem to have travelled.¹⁴⁰ Her last appearance in Gregory's works can be dated to December 587, and it is possible that she survived her son's death in 594.¹⁴¹

Fortunatus was close to other women in Gregory's family as well, particularly his niece, Justina, the prioress of Radegund's convent. Book Eight contains a series of poems supplicating Gregory's help in dealing with the revolt of the nuns of the Holy Cross but *Carm.* VIII.13 cannot be clearly connected to this situation. The poem praises Gregory's pastoral qualities and illustrious background, before asking him to remember his *famula*, Justina, and commending himself to Gregory's care and protection. Fortunatus writes that it brings him joy to see the resemblance between Armentaria and her granddaughter (a resemblance probably just as much spiritual as physical). He concludes by asking Gregory to be a *mediator* between grandmother and granddaughter. Nisard supposed there had been a quarrel between the two for which Fortunatus sought resolution. Reydellet's more sensible argument is that Fortunatus simply means Gregory should take his place in 'the order of relationship and affection'.¹⁴² Reydellet's suggestion that Gregory may have persuaded Armentaria to visit Poitiers, for which Justina thanked him, is possible but unprovable.

¹³⁹ Erin Thomas Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours and the Women in His Works: Studies in Sixth-Century Gaul' (PhD, University of Leeds 2011), pp. 19-29.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 24.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 20.

¹⁴² Reydellet, pp. 156, n. 96.

Fortunatus included greetings from Justina in one further poem, the Sapphic verses Gregory requested, which will be discussed in further detail with the rest of the works Gregory specifically commissioned from the poet. After verses conveying Fortunatus' own greetings, and greetings from Radegund and Agnes, Justina's respects are also included. Surprisingly, she does not appear again in Fortunatus' works; although she outlived both Radegund and Agnes, no evidence of a friendship between her and the poet survives.

Before moving on to other aspects of Gregory's patronage, it is worth noting that Fortunatus also wrote for a member of Gregory's episcopal family: his archdeacon, Plato, who became bishop of Poitiers in 591. The poem refers to Plato's respect for Hilary and figures him as Martin's gift, before noting his qualities as a bishop. The appointment was evidently Childebert's, for Fortunatus includes good wishes for the king and his entire family, before noting Gregory's presence. The bishop may have performed the service for Plato's consecration to the episcopate; the final two lines of the poem certainly show that he celebrated it. Plato's episcopal career was brief and he was soon succeeded by the man who had honoured his consecration.

Writing for a Patron: the Commissioning of Prose and Verse Hagiography

Venantius' writings about Gregory's family, particularly the epitaphs, may have been commissioned works, although no evidence of this process survives. A contemporary letter exchange illustrates what the commissioning process might have looked like. In the late sixth or early seventh century, Bishop Aunacharius of Auxerre wrote to a priest named Stephanus and asked him to compose a prose life of Amator of Auxerre and a metrical version of the *vita Germani*. Stephanus' reply agreeing to undertake the work also survives. Gundlach dated the letters to between 573 and 603; Wolfert van Egmond points out that the Life contains a similar story about St Martin to Fortunatus' near-contemporary Life of Hilary.¹⁴³ Nothing is

¹⁴³ Wolfert S. van Egmond, *Conversing with the Saints: Communication in Pre-Carolingian Hagiography from Auxerre* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), p. 77. That is, Martin freeing the island of Gallinaria of demons or snakes; the texts share 'no literal correspondences'. However, Jean-Charles Picard argued that Stephanus did borrow from Fortunatus.

known about Stephanus, though other sources from Auxerre call him Stephanus Africanus.¹⁴⁴

The letters between Aunacharius and Stephanus do not have an overt tone of being written between superior and inferior. In many ways, they resemble the discussions of copying texts found in the letters of Ruricius of Limoges and Sidonius Apollinaris a century earlier.¹⁴⁵ Aunacharius explains why he wants a verse Life of Germanus and a prose Life of Amator; tastes between men differ, amongst noblemen as much as common people, with a text in verse and a text in prose, no one's literary tastes need be disappointed.¹⁴⁶ Stephanus, though he protests his own inadequacies, promises to produce the texts. This looks less like classical literary patronage than late antique literary exchange between friends at different levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

A similar point regarding language of inadequacy as a sign of friendship is supported by Fortunatus' dedicatory preface of the life of Paternus of Avranches. The preface directly addresses the commissioner of the text, Martianus, abbot of Scicy (modern-day Saint-Pair-sur-Mer).¹⁴⁷ No evidence of commission exists outside of the preface, which states that abbot was involved in the process of composition and had texts transcribed to help Fortunatus with his work. The poet records that Martianus and his community gave only *dilectio* and *caritas* in exchange for the work and Fortunatus claims that love in turn makes his own insufficient efforts satisfactory. The limitlessness of Martianus' love enables the poet's will to transcend his ability and Fortunatus declares himself a debtor, unable to ever return the interest on the affection he has been given. The imagery of literary inadequacy was an ancient one, much-used in late antique friendship writing. The imagery of unpayable debt fits within the discourse of friendly patronage as well, indicating Fortunatus' desire that the connection between him and Martianus should continue as he worked to give back what he could.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 75.

¹⁴⁵ Ruricius Ep. 1.7, Sidonius replies Ep. 8.10; Ruricius 1.8, Sidonius replies Ep. 4.16.

¹⁴⁶ Egmond, p. 78. The letters are found in MGH *Epistolae* III, 446-7.

¹⁴⁷ Paternus had died in 565—See Martin Heinzelmänn, 'L'hagiographie Mérovingienne: panorama des documents potentiels', in *L'hagiographie Mérovingienne à travers ses réécritures*, ed. by Martin Heinzelmänn, Monique Goulet, and Christiane Veyrard-Cosme (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2010), pp. 27-82 (p. 63).

¹⁴⁸ Wilcox, 'The Epistolary Habit', pp. 75-6, is useful the idea of reciprocity and unpayable debt within Classical friendship. For a theoretically informed understanding of reciprocity in the early

A significant number of hagiographic works attributed to Fortunatus were dedicated to members of the Merovingian clergy: Bishop Pascentius of Poitiers received the *Life and Miracles of St Hilary*, the life of Marcellus was written for Bishop Germanus of Paris, and the *Life of Albinus* was written for Bishop Domitian of Angers.¹⁴⁹ In none of these works is the process of commissioning recorded. It is tempting to imagine that the men for whom Fortunatus wrote, having been satisfied with his work, passed his name on amongst themselves, much as Alice Rio argues that legal scribes may have worked for a particular patron, while also agreeing to write for others or possibly being ‘hired out by that patron’.¹⁵⁰ The image of a scribe being hired out, or hiring himself out, is not a bad one, but our evidence for literary patronage of this sort is rather limited. Fortunatus’ career and writings certainly suggest that it was possible. Responding to commissions and actively seeking literary patronage were after all to the poet’s advantage—abbots like Martianus, and bishops like Pascentius of Poitiers and Gregory of Tours, could champion the poet’s work on a scale that he himself could not.¹⁵¹

Gregory’s largest commissions were a four-book verse account of the life and miracles of Saint Martin and the collection of the first seven or eight books of Fortunatus’ poetry, both of which the poet produced during the 570s. Fortunatus’ *Vita Martini* contains with a verse prologue to Radegund and Agnes.¹⁵² It is preceded by an epistle to Gregory of Tours, which makes it clear that Gregory had

Middle Ages, see Marios Costambeys, *Power and Patronage in Early Medieval Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 48-51.

¹⁴⁹ The only modern edition of Fortunatus’ hagiography is Bruno Krusch, *Venantii Honorii Clementiani Fortunati Opera Pedestria* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1885). On the issue of Krusch’s editing of Merovingian hagiography, see Monique Goullet, ‘Introduction’, in *L’hagiographie mérovingienne à travers ses réécritures*, ed. by Monique Goullet, Martin Heinzelmann, and Christiane Veyrard-Cosme (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2010), pp. 11-26 (pp. 13-8). In my research on *Life of Saint Hilary* for a paper, ‘Remembering St Hilary’, delivered at the International Society for Late Antique Literary Studies in Oxford in 2015, I found that Krusch neglects a number of early manuscripts. He also omitted part of the dossier of texts that typically accompany this *Life* on the grounds that they are forgeries. On Fortunatus as a hagiographer, see Richard Collins, ‘Observations on the Form, Language and Public of the Prose Biographies of Venantius Fortunatus in the Hagiography of Merovingian Gaul’, in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. by H.B. Clarke and Mary Brennan (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1981), pp. 105-31; John Kitchen, *Saints’ Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 25-57.

¹⁵⁰ Alice Rio, *Legal Practice and the Written Word in the Early Middle Ages: Frankish Formulae, C. 500-1000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 137.

¹⁵¹ For useful comments on the value of patrons to poets see Peter White, ‘Poets in the new milieu: realigning’, pp. 325-6.

¹⁵² Epp, *Amicitia*, 74-6. This uses an image also used by Cassiodorus.

commissioned the transfiguration of his own Martinian writings into verse.

Fortunatus' poem to Agnes and Radegund, after a lengthy comparison between his own difficulties in writing and the fate of a sailor on a storm-tossed sea, makes it clear their request also influenced his persistence in writing:

Thus I, least, from short distances, venerable Agnes
 With holy Radegund, I honour them according to (my) pious fate,
To extend a promise because I am compelled to go to high places,
 By such great commands I, unequal to their strength, am driven...
Bring, I will pray, help and from my word demand words:
 If that foundation irrigates, the rivulet goes along. (40)
Give yourself what your protégée returns to you with profit
 So that I may add small talents to his own treasures.¹⁵³

Interestingly, the verse prologue and the letter do not refer to each other—the letter does not contain the women's greetings and commendation to Gregory, as other letters do, nor does the poem mention him to them. Quesnel's suggestion that Radegund and Agnes may have commissioned the work to promote goodwill between Tours and Poitiers is possible, but does not explain why Fortunatus would be versifying the bishop's works about Martin at his order. It is more likely that Gregory commissioned the versification, and Radegund and Agnes spiritually supported the project and requested a copy for the Holy Cross library. Gregory wrote this own collection of Martin's miracles, in which he refers to Fortunatus' work, and hoped that a future author might versify his writings; perhaps he had Fortunatus in mind for this task.

This hypothesis, although it cannot be definitely proven, is strengthened when one examines the place of Saint Martin in Fortunatus' works. He was clearly a special patron from the beginning of Fortunatus' career: one of the poet's stated reasons for coming to Gaul was to give thanks to Martin for a miraculous cure, a reason dismissed as a cover for a poet seeking to ingratiate himself with Gregory of Tours, rather than a plausible reason in its own right.¹⁵⁴ Fortunatus' consistent solicitation of the saint's patronage in his works provides an opportunity to flesh out the underlying ideas of

¹⁵³ Praefatio ad Agnen et Radegundem, lines 25-40. Sic ego de modicis minimus, venerabilis Agnes/
cum Radegunde sacra, quas colo sorte pia,/ tendere pollicitum quia cogor ad ardua gressum./ imperiis
tantis viribus impar agor./ fluctuat ingenium cui non natat unda Camenae./ sensus harenosus non rigat
ore lacus./ nam celsum meritis Martinum ad sidera notum,/ cum sint vota, mihi non valet arca loqui./
poscendum est vobis, ne naufraga prora labore./ flatibus ille suis ut mea vela iuuet./ credere tunc
potero ad portum mea carbasa ferri./ adspirante fide si sua flabra favent./ ferte precanter opem et de
verbo poscite verba:/ si fons ille rigat, rivulus iste meat./ vos date quod vobis cum fenore reddat
alumnus./ addam ut thesauris parva talenta suis.

¹⁵⁴ On skepticism to the pilgrimage, see Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 14. Reydellet, pp. xiv-xv.

saintly patronage. Indeed, when Fortunatus uses the word *patronus* in the VSM to refer to Martin, he quite deliberately evokes the official institutions of the Roman state: Martin is a senator who sits next to God amid the patricians and consuls of heaven.¹⁵⁵ Although Fortunatus sometimes approached the patronage of the saints through bishops, he also appealed directly to Martin to intercede with him before God: ‘Likewise you who live in heaven, Martin, pray, / Bring pious words to God for Fortunatus’.¹⁵⁶

Although Martin predominates in Fortunatus’ work, he was not the only saintly patron to whom Fortunatus appealed for intercessions. His hagiographic poetry typically concludes by commending himself to the care of his subject, as can be seen in a short poem in praise of the saints of Agaune, which may have been a commissioned work for Gregory’s translation of relics of the Theban legion to his cathedral in Tours before it was restored in 589.¹⁵⁷ The poet appealed to Maurice and his legion to save him from hell: ‘As for Fortunatus, by the shining gifts of the Thunderer,/ I ask that you bring help lest I be tormented by darkness.’¹⁵⁸ Brown linked concern over the consequences of sin and judgement with the possibility that the patronage and friendship of the saints could ameliorate them.¹⁵⁹

Fortunatus’ literary activity for Gregory was also a way for him to gain the patronage and friendship of the saints. In his prefatory letter to Gregory at the beginning of the VSM, Fortunatus frames the writing of the poem as an attempt to gain Martin’s intercession:

And if I obtain passage myself, I will take care to have what you have sent in quaternions transcribed immediately, offering to my lord and pious master Martin himself through you, certainly asking this: that with his goodness having been renewed by you, he does not cease to intercede on behalf of our humility and his own particular (people).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Orselli, *L’idea e il culto del santo patrono cittadino*, p. 63 n. 4 VSM: Bk3 lines 519-522 And Fortunatus uses the word *senator* to refer to Martin again in the life of Radegund Ch xiv line 33, 64 n.1

¹⁵⁶ Carm.I.5.21-2. Tu quoque qui caelis habitas, Martine precor,/ pro Fortunato fer pia uerba Dei.

¹⁵⁷ Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat*, I, 190-1, n.95

¹⁵⁸ Carm.II.14.29-30 Fortunatus enim per fulgida dona Tonantis,/ ne tenebris crucier, quaeso feratis opem.

¹⁵⁹ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, p. 65

¹⁶⁰ VSM, Epistula ad Gregorium, 4. [Quos] domino meo et pio domno Martino, si ipse com meatum obtineo, in quaternionibus quos direxistis, ipsi per vos oblaturus, confestim transcribendos curabo, illud certe postulans, ut eius a vobis pietas reparata pro nobis humilibus et suis peculiaribus intercedere non desistat.

Martin's own particular clients included the bishops of Tours and the members of their clergy, as well as Fortunatus, who copied his poem in hopes of the saint's support. Martin was protector of his territory and his reach as a patron extended to everyone in the area of Tours.¹⁶¹ From this favoured position, the bishop of Tours was seen as having an especially effective voice in appealing to Saint Martin. When Fortunatus wrote to Eufronius of Tours, he named the bishop as his patron and asked him to pray for Martin's intercession.¹⁶² In the VSM Fortunatus describes the relationship between God and Martin as one of clientage¹⁶³; and the saint himself as a client and advisor of God.¹⁶⁴

Sometimes Martin's intercession took an active form, as when the combined forces of Gregory of Tours, divine authority, and Martin compel Fortunatus to publish his first collection of poetry.¹⁶⁵ Fortunatus' idea of special relationship between the saint of Tours and the clerics who served him seems to have continued throughout his career: in one of his last dateable poems, Fortunatus celebrates the appointment of Gregory's archdeacon, Plato, to the see of Tours, with the image of Martin giving his protégée, Plato, to Hilary of Poitiers.¹⁶⁶ The new bishop passed from the patronage of one saint to the patronage of another.

Fortunatus' friends and patrons outside the Touraine also had a special connection to Martin. Sigoald, the Austrasian official who escorted him into Sigibert and Brunhild's court seems to have had a special attachment to the saint. In a poem about the poor relief Sigoald undertook in Childebert's name, discussed in Chapter 5, Fortunatus describes the official's devotion to saint Martin, *Hinc ad Martini uenerandi limina pergens,/ auxilium domini dum rogat ipse sui*.¹⁶⁷ As noted in Chapter 4, the rulers Sigoald served, Brunhild and Childebert, were also particularly

¹⁶¹ VSM Bk4 lines 630-32; Orselli, 122 n.1; Gregory of Tours *Virt. S. Mart I*, 14 Orselli, *L'idea e il culto del santo patrono cittadino*, p. 122, contrasts this with the reach of a classical patron, which extended only to his clients.

¹⁶² Carm.III.2.5

¹⁶³ Epp, *Amicitia*, p. 173.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 283.

¹⁶⁵ Preface, 6: But eagerly conspiring more steadfastly to overcome my resisting humility, subject to the testimony of divine mystery and the splendour of the miracles of the most blessed Martin, you persistently urge that contrary to my modesty I should be drawn into public, even as I acknowledge to the judge of my frivolities, the ignorance of my rough work, and what I delayed to bring to light when others asked, I grant to a strength which must be obeyed

¹⁶⁶ Carm.X.14

¹⁶⁷ Carm.X.17.27-8:

attached to the patronage of Martin.¹⁶⁸ A connection back to Gregory of Tours is present here as well, since Fortunatus' poetry suggests that the bishop of Tours owed his position to the appointment of Brunhild and her family. Fortunatus' *Vita Sancti Martini* was the largest work Fortunatus dedicated to anyone and it demonstrates both the importance of the saint and the importance of Gregory in the poet's career. Within the context of his dedication of the seven books of poetry, and other projects for Gregory, it shows his commitment to carrying out literary projects for his patron.

Writing for a Patron: Contemporary Events

As this chapter has demonstrated, Fortunatus carried a number of significant literary commissions on Gregory's behalf, writing in honour of Gregory's family and producing large scale hagiographic works for Gregory and other patrons. But Gregory's commissions were not just commemorations of the past; he also requested pieces in honour of events which had recently happened. In 576, Bishop Avitus of Clermont forcefully persuaded the Jewish community of his city to either leave or accept Christian baptism.¹⁶⁹ The Jewish community of Clermont was a significant force in the ecclesiastical and secular life of the city; Judith George argues that their conversion 'was a major ecclesiastical coup'.¹⁷⁰ Gregory had a personal connection to the bishop, having been brought up by Avitus, who was archdeacon in Clermont during the episcopate of Gregory's uncle Gallus (525-551)¹⁷¹ Avitus was consecrated bishop of Clermont in 571, following a contentious and uncanonical process in which the Jewish community of the city funded the campaign of Eufrasius, but the clergy backed Avitus. The local count attempted to intervene

¹⁶⁸ Carm.X.7

¹⁶⁹ There have been a number of studies of Gregory and Fortunatus' accounts of this incident. Brian Brennan, 'The Conversion of the Jews of Clermont in AD 576', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 36 (1985); Walter A. Goffart, 'The Conversions of Avitus of Clermont and Similar Passages in Gregory of Tours', in *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, and "Others" in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Jacob Neusner and Ernest R. Frerichs (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 473-97; Marc Reydellet, 'La Conversion des Juifs de Clermont en 576', in *De Tertullien aux Mozarabes*, ed. by Louis Holtz and Jean-Claude Fredouille (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1992), pp. 371-9' and E.M. Rose, 'Gregory of Tours and the Conversion of the Jews of Clermont', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden ; Boston, MA: Brill, 2002), pp. 307-20.

¹⁷⁰ George, p. 127.

¹⁷¹ Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 28.

against Avitus, who went over his head to the court of Sigibert and was consecrated in Metz.¹⁷²

Fortunatus' poem about Avitus' triumph is accompanied by a covering letter to Gregory. The letter is the only prose epistle between the two preserved, although they must have exchanged letters about other projects. Fortunatus presents the image of Gregory's messenger standing over him while he wrote, waiting for the commission to be finished as quickly as possible. In addition to urging haste, the messenger provided information about the events which the poem describes. Gregory himself may have been the ultimate source of information about what had happened, though Goffart notes that Fortunatus' account includes details which Gregory omits, such as the besiegement of Clermont's Jewish community by an armed mob.¹⁷³ Fortunatus attributes any defects in the finished product to this haste and his compliance with the request to his own duty and devotion to Gregory. George proposed that the poem was declaimed at some celebration on Avitus' behalf, arguing that the poem's final fourteen lines, which address Gregory, must have been omitted at its public recitation.¹⁷⁴ There is no evidence for the public performance of any of Fortunatus' poetry, but Brennan is surely right to suggest it must have been aimed at an audience in Clermont, since it would have been of little interest to the clergy or people of Tours.¹⁷⁵

These lines instruct Gregory to meditate on the events he has just heard described, and claim that he gave the poet barely two days to produce the poem. Gregory's love for Avitus and desire that he be praised is seen as fitting exchange for Avitus' upbringing. Brennan notes that through the baptism of the Jews, Avitus offered them protection and became their *patronus* 'in a social as well as a spiritual sense'.¹⁷⁶ Only at the end of the poem does Fortunatus address Avitus directly,

¹⁷² Ibid. p. 81. See also Brian Brennan, 'The Conversion of the Jews of Clermont in AD 576', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 36 (1985), 322-4.

¹⁷³ Goffart, 'The Conversions of Avitus of Clermont,' p. 488.

¹⁷⁴ George, p. 128.

¹⁷⁵ Brennan, p. 327. One of the few early attested performances of early medieval poetry occurred when Arator performed his *Historia Apostolica* in the Basilica of San Pietro in Vincoli. The story of the performance is relayed in the 'Preface of Surgentius' attached to the work. See Claire Sotinel, 'Arator, un poète au service politique du pape Vigile?', *Mélanges de l'École française du Rome Antiquité* 101: 2 (1989), pp. 805-820, reprinted in *Church and Society in Late Antique Italy* ed. by Claire Sotinel (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 805-820. We have no such evidence from Gaul.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 333.

asking that both he and Gregory remember and pray for him. He never wrote to or about Avitus again, and Gregory of Tours does not refer to the poem when he recorded Avitus' conversions in the *Histories*. The poem had served its purpose, allowing Gregory to honour his mentor and Fortunatus to offer the calling card of poetry to another Merovingian bishop.

Conclusion

Were Fortunatus and his correspondents friends or were they patrons and client? Analysis of Fortunatus' relationship with his episcopal correspondents demonstrates that friendship was possible within the context of a patronage relationship. In sections devoted to the letters Fortunatus sent to three important sixth century churchmen, Eufronius of Tours, Martin of Braga, and Felix of Nantes, we have seen that Fortunatus regularly paid the duty of greeting owed by a friend and patron, and responded to and requested letters. His corpus of letters to each of these patrons also demonstrates that Fortunatus could play the game of friendship and literary patronage according to its rules, while also cultivating a relationship with his friends and patrons as individuals. For Eufronius of Tours, he wrote letters and poems saluting the bishop's proximity to Saint Martin and value as a spiritual patron. His writings for Martin of Braga, by contrast, take a more formal and deferential tone, praising the bishop's great learning and eloquence, and placing him within the chain of patronage which stretched between earth and heaven. Fortunatus' eight poems and letters for Felix of Nantes provide a portrait of an active administrator, pastor, and builder, whom the poet attempted to please and befriend with elegant language and praise of his achievements.

Fortunatus exercised the polite convention of *commendatio* in his letters to Eufronius, Felix, Martin, and Gregory of Tours. He also occasionally commended his messengers to the recipient of his letter. The clerical or secular status of Fortunatus' messengers is usually left unstated, but it is possible that the poet's commendation was necessary in enabling these men to leave their diocese and deliver his letters. As discussed above, bishops tightened their control of clerical mobility during the Carolingian period, though Fortunatus' own travels show that his mobility was largely unrestricted.

After these three shorter case studies, we turned to examples from Fortunatus' extensive writings for Gregory of Tours, where over thirty poems provide a detailed view of the poet's attempts to make and maintain a connection of friendship and patronage. It must be emphasised that our information about this connection comes primarily from Fortunatus' own writings—even when he commissioned a work from Fortunatus about an event he described in his own *Histories*, Gregory did not mention the poet in his narrative. Gregory supported the poet, providing him with the patronal gifts of a villa and friendly gifts including shoe leather and fruit, but he did not grant Fortunatus a role as a political actor on the Merovingian stage. This place he reserved for himself.

Fortunatus' poems for Gregory show that his place in the bishop's world was as a late antique friend and client. He sent Gregory regular greetings and replied to Gregory's letters, as well as responding to the bishop's invitations and attempting to visit him. He thanked Gregory for small and large gifts, as well as letters, which were themselves regarded as gifts. He also appealed to Gregory's patronage on behalf of others. In effect, Fortunatus acted as a patron himself for two young women in need of assistance. One of them was faced with enslavement, and for her Fortunatus appealed to three other Merovingian officials besides Gregory, perhaps figuring that their combined protection would help his client most. His poetry also furthered Gregory's interests in the Merovingian courts of Chilperic and Childebert, speaking at the bishop's trial for slander and protecting his see against increased taxation.

The final sections of this chapter have dealt with the issue of literary patronage. Gregory of Tours makes a particularly apt case study since Fortunatus wrote a variety of small and large scale pieces for him. Fortunatus wrote epitaphs for distinguished members of Gregory's family, wrote a poem in honour of his mother, and passed along greetings to his niece. Fortunatus' hagiography, which includes piece for other Merovingian bishops besides Gregory, provides some of our clearest evidence of how the process of commissioning worked. Gregory requested the four-book epic in honour of Gregory's own patron, Martin, but its verse prologue for Radegund and Agnes suggests that Fortunatus did not write for him alone. We return to the question of audience in Fortunatus' poem in honour of Avitus of Clermont. The poet responds to Gregory's commission but was also writing for an audience outside of Tours.

What Gregory did for Fortunatus in return is less easy to see from our sources, although the alacrity with which the poet responded to Gregory's commissions, and amount he wrote for Gregory, suggests he found the bishop's friendship and patronage personally and professionally rewarding. It is in the correspondence with Gregory that we find the fullest evidence of communication sustained over a long period of time. In the late antique imagination of social relationships, one might progress from dependence to familiarity. In Fortunatus' work, familiarity and dependence exist in perpetual balance.

Chapter 2, Episcopal and Lay Building Projects

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with an important aspect of friendship-writing in this period: the praise of patronage, construction and refurbishment of buildings. Most of Fortunatus' poems on this subject are found in Books One and Two of his poems. This chapter considers three groups of church-builders: episcopal builders, particularly Bishop Leontius of Bordeaux and his wife Placidina, Merovingian royalty, and aristocratic couples. Among their many other activities, Merovingian bishops, royalty, and aristocrats repaired, restored, or had constructed from scratch the sacred spaces in which local Christians should gather. Fortunatus' poetry provides a useful vantage point from which to consider these activities how these activities fit into Merovingian conceptions of patronage and friendship. Out of his corpus of two hundred and eighteen poems, there are twenty-five about the construction or repairing of churches¹ and four about episcopal villas or castles.² In addition to these, ten episcopal epitaphs or praise-poems make mention of construction projects.³

¹ Carm.1.1 Vitalis; 1.2 Vitalis, church of St Andrew; 1.3 Palladius of Saintes, basilica of St Stephen; 1.4 Faustus of Auch, basilica of St Martin; 1.5 Gregory of Tours, cell of St Martin; 1.6 Leontius of Bordeaux/Palatina, basilica of St Martin; 1.7 Basil and Baudegund, basilica of St Martin; 1.8 Leontius of Bordeaux, basilica of St Vincent; 1.9 Leontius of Bordeaux, basilica of St Vincent; 1.10 Leontius of Bordeaux, church of St Nazarius; 1.11 Leontius of Bordeaux, basilica of Saint Denis; 1.12 Leontius of Bordeaux, basilica of Saint Vivien; 1.13 Leontius of Bordeaux, basilica of Saint Eutropius; 2.3 Gregory of Tours, oratory of the bishop's palace; 2.8 Launebod, church of Saint Saturnin; 2.10 Childebert I, church of Paris; 2.11 Berthoara, daughter of Theudebert, baptistery at Mainz; 2.12 Sidonius of Mainz, basilica of St George; 2.13 Traseric, oratory; 3.6 Felix of Nantes, dedication of his church; 3.7 the relics of the church of Nantes; 9.14 About the beam of the church of St Lawrence ('the people' are said to be rebuilding Lawrence's church); 9.15 a wooden house; 10.5 verses on the oratory of Artanne; 10.10 verses on the oratory of Artanne. There is also a missing poem, *De oratorio Apiliacense*; the title is given in manuscript *capitula* but the text of the poem does not mention an oratory. Reydellet suggests that whoever put the book together had a list of the poems Fortunatus wanted to be put in the book but was not able to find the poem.

² Carm.1.18 Villa of Leontius at Besson; 1.19 Villa of Leontius at Veregine; 1.20 Villa of Leontius at Preignac; 3.7 Castellum of Nicetius of Trier.

³ Carm. 1.15 About Bishop Leontius; 2.16 About Saint Medard; 3.11 About Nicetius of Trier; 3.13 About Vilicus of Metz; 3.14 About Carentius of Cologne; 4.8 Epitaph for Chronopius of Périgueux; 3.23 About Ageric of Verdun; 9.9 About Bishop Sidonius; 10.6 verses for the church of Tours renovated by bishop Gregory. In Carm.8.19, Fortunatus records that Gregory gave him use of a villa. Though Carm.6.7 is described as *De Cantoblado villa* in the *capitula*; the title of the poem in the book is slightly different (*Ad Cantumbladum villa. De pomis dictum*) and it is about the fruit Fortunatus enjoyed while he was there.

Though the majority of the builders are bishops, Fortunatus' poems mention a range of donors, from a local church community to barbarian aristocratic families. Their activities demonstrate the convergence of several aspects of patronage and friendship. As I discuss in relation to the construction activities of Felix of Nantes, ecclesiastical buildings and festivals had been intertwined with ideals of friendship, and thus aristocratic culture, since the fifth century. An occasional poet such as Fortunatus had an essential role to play in advertising charitable activities: the dedication of a religious building was a social occasion and his poems presented the donor's actions to an assembled community of friends, family, clients, and associates. The occasion provided friends with the opportunity to meet and exchange greetings.

I argue that both secular and ecclesiastic donors were engaging in social and pious display by using their wealth in a manner designed to bring them heavenly reward and the favourable attention of their friends, neighbours, and clients. The display of friendship surrounding a new building could be more than just friendly words and seeing and being seen, as aristocrats gave each other columns and other *spolia* to adorn their edifices.⁴ The material of a building and its design provided evidence of the founder's wealth and taste, as Fortunatus makes clear in relation to the churches of Leontius of Bordeaux and Felix of Nantes. The building could be inscribed with verses advertising the donor's generosity, and several of Fortunatus' verses in honour of such building projects may have served such a purpose. In the absence of an internal or external inscription, the donor's role could also be seen in the gift of vessels to the church, which might themselves bear his or her name.

In his poems about churches, Fortunatus notes when a building has been rebuilt and when it has been founded *de novo*. However, in contrast to earlier writers, he does not present foundation as superior to restoration.⁵ The patronage of

⁴ Ian Wood, 'The Audience of Architecture in Post-Roman Gaul', in *The Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. by L.A.S. Butler and R.K. Morris (1986), pp. 74-79 (pp. 75-7).

⁵ Cristina La Rocca, "'Mores tuos fabricate loquuntur'". Building Activity and the Rhetoric of Power in Ostrogothic Italy', *The Haskins Society Journal*, 26 (2014), pp. 1-31 (pp. 20-21). The equal status of renovation and foundation seems to have it been well-established by the sixth century: the former was a prestigious activity in Ostrogothic Italy. Jonathan J. Arnold, *Theoderic and the Roman Imperial Restoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 201-229 (especially pp. 220-8) and Valérie Fauvinet-Ranson, *Les cités d'Italie dans le premier tiers du VIe siècle: patrimoine monumental romain et spectacles d'après les Variarum de Cassiodore* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2006), pp. 282-6. Renovation played an important role in early medieval church-building activities: Bryan Ward-Perkins suggests that the primary focus of early medieval patronage of church buildings was on maintenance and restoration. Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, pp. 61-3.

the saints comes into play here, as Fortunatus' church poems focus on the saint to whom a construction project was dedicated, and the relationship established between saint and donor. Thus, the physical building itself, and whether the building it was built or rebuilt is of secondary importance. The benefits of the good deed of construction were sought by the founder, restorer, or donor, who gained merit from his or her donation and the establishment of a relationship with the saints.

As this chapter demonstrates, the donor's own social status and importance could also influence the amount and tone of the attention he or she receives in a given poem. In highlighting the wide range of patrons of buildings in Merovingian Gaul, I suggest that church-building activities were influenced by social status as well as religious obligations. Fortunatus' poems emphasise the appropriate use and display of wealth, which indicates that churches were not just visible signs of piety, but also that they were exhibitions of social display and competition.

Above all, Fortunatus' church-building poems show that he was concerned with reciprocity, an important element of friendship and patronage, intersected with the appropriate use of wealth. The poet connects church-building activity to the founders' attainment of a reward in heaven, which suggests he saw the patronage relationship between human and divine as one of exchange. The patron of an ecclesiastical building project thus claimed both the patronage of God and the patronage of the saints he honoured through his restoration project. Fortunatus' provided a prestigious public announcement of these claims.

Episcopal Building Projects in Merovingian Gaul

Church-building or restoration is mentioned or directly described in nearly twenty percent of Fortunatus' poems. Many of the church poems share a similar structure: they praise the building's brilliance, celebrate the saints with whom it is linked by relics or dedication, and conclude by recognizing the founder, often praying for his long life or heavenly reward. Fortunatus' poems emphasize the idea that building projects allowed the founder to lay up treasure in heaven. This structure has its origins in verse epigraphy; though some scholars have suggested that these verses need not have been inscribed.⁶

⁶ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, p. 61.

However, looking at them in the context of similar late antique and early medieval writings suggests that their potential for display as inscriptions should not be dismissed. As Graham Jones notes in a study of English church dedications, an important part of the legacy of the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon poet Aldhelm was his *Carmina Ecclesiastica*, a collection of poems modelled on *tituli*, publicly displayed poetic inscriptions which celebrated the consecration of churches and their patronal dedications. These poems put him in the tradition of Pope Damasus, Paulinus of Nola, Venantius Fortunatus, and Bede.⁷ Since Fortunatus was an occasional poet, we should also consider the possibility his poems were performed during events celebrating the completion of a building project as well as being displayed in or on the building itself.

What seem to be Fortunatus' two earliest surviving poems, likely composed before he came to Gaul, are about the building projects of Bishop Vitalis of Altinum.⁸ Both poems emphasise the bishop's sponsorship of church construction. The first of these poems is a praise-piece in honour of the bishop, which centres on Vitalis' sponsorship of churches which provide places for his flock to worship. The bishop's good fortune attracts more members to his congregation. The poem says little about the bishop's personal piety or his pastoral care, nor is there any indication that the bishop's church-building is funded by congregational donations. His activities are presented as the result of his individual relationship with God and the saints, a relationship which is figured as an exchange of favours: 'He gave dignities to you, you honourably repaid in turn.'⁹ A bishop's building projects were one of the ways in which he made good use of his time on earth, as the language of gift which concludes the poem seems to imply: 'May you celebrate many ceremonies by divine gift / And may you, flourishing, adorn the temples of God through your giving'.¹⁰ It is quite explicitly spelled out that pious building will earn public approval and heavenly reward. Church-building is the currency through

⁷ Graham Jones, 'Church Dedications 'West of Selwood'', in *Aldhelm and Sherborne: Essays to Celebrate the Founding of the Bishopric*, ed. by Katherine Barker and Nicholas Brooks (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), pp. 195-232 (p. 195).

⁸ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 120-5 This is accepted as the most plausible identification by Brian Brennan, 'Career', p. 53.

⁹ qui tibi digna dedit reddis honore vicem. Carm.1.1.10.

¹⁰ Plurima diuino celebres sollemnia dono / atque Dei florens templa locando colas. Carm.1.1.27-8.

which this exchange takes place. The second poem for Vitalis opens by addressing the viewer directly:

Whoever you are, run to the threshold of the holy temple,
If you come as a suppliant, here you take up help through prayer.
A citadel which the holy high priest Vitalis built,
Was led for a brief time by his high eminence:
He founded, built, endowed, then dedicated (5)
And he deserved to fulfil the prayers of his temple.¹¹

Vitalis built the church not long before his death and Fortunatus had no doubt that the bishop secured eternal life through his foundation. Most of the poem is dedicated to describing the building's relic collection, which Vitalis evidently acquired with the help and encouragement of a *bonus antistes* named John. The church had relics of Peter, Paul, and Andrew— who seems to have been the patron of the building— Laurence, Martin, Vigilius, Martyrius, Sisinnius Alexander, and Cecilia. The building belonged to the saints whose relics it contained; in the case of Andrew, Fortunatus wrote that he 'claimed this particular fortress for himself / And with his pious brother he rules the things imparted'; the building's roofs are described as Laurence's, which he fills with the light of piety.¹² By collecting and housing the relics of the saints, Vitalis successfully earned their patronage in heaven.

This dual focus on the saint who is honoured within the building and the benefits sought by the earthly donor or restorer can be seen in other poems, particularly *Carm.* 1.3, a short poem about a church of St Stephen built by Bishop Palladius of Saintes. Most of the poem focuses on the life of Stephen, who was martyred in Jerusalem by stoning. Fortunatus denigrates the group of Jews who earned perdition through this act, contrasting them with Stephen. Only briefly is the founder of the church even mentioned. The first two lines, 'High glory surrounds the pious friends (*pios amicos*) of the Lord / whose honour lives in the wide world'¹³, seem to apply equally to Stephen, who was called a friend of the Lord because of his martyrdom, and to Palladius, who achieves honour and glory through his actions as bishop. Palladius is named only at the end of the poem, when Fortunatus indicates

¹¹ Quisquis ad haec sancti concurris limina templi, / si uenias supplex, hic prece sumis opem. / Quam sacer antistes Vitalis condidit arcem, / culmine quae celso est tempore ducta breui. / Fundauit, struxit, dotauit, deinde dicauit, / et meruit temple soluere uota sui. *Carm.* 1.2.1-4.

¹² Hanc sacer Andreas propriam sibi uindicat arcem / et cum fratre pio participata regit. / Haec sua tecta replet Laurentius igne sereno, / cui pia flamma dedit luce perenne diem. *Carm.* 1.2.11-4.

¹³ Gloria celsa pios Domini circumdat amicos / quorum diffuso uiuit in orbe decus. *Carm.* 1.3.1-2.

that it was he who built the churches of Stephen and indicates that Palladius will benefit from his actions: ‘Whence let it be that his house will not perish’.¹⁴ Fortunatus could simply be referring to the fact that the church will last, but it seems likely that he is suggesting that the bishop will merit eternal life too.¹⁵ As with Vitalis, Palladius has clearly earned the patronage of the saints (the Lord’s friends) through his building activities.

In many of Fortunatus’ poems about churches, the physical building and its characteristics are not mentioned. Instead, he stresses the building as a symbol of a relationship established between the founder and the divine. He also makes it clear that this relationship extends to the wider community in which the building is located, as can be seen in *Carm.* 1.4, a short poem about a basilica of St Martin. The word ‘basilica’ comes from the title of the poem, which is likely to reflect Fortunatus’ original title.¹⁶ Within the poem, the building is called ‘aula decens’, a noble hall, ‘sanctified to God in the name of Martin.’¹⁷ Through Martin’s merits the people of the area receive answers to their prayers. In the last two lines, the donor of the building appears, the *sacerdos* Faustus, probably to be identified with Bishop Faustus of Auch, who merits a single sentence in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours.¹⁸ Faustus ‘carried out’ the task of constructing the church ‘with a devout heart / And he returned opulent gifts to his Lord’.¹⁹ As Reydellet notes, Fortunatus is reflecting the idea that human beings are only able to partially repay divine gifts.²⁰ Funding the building, repair, or decoration of churches was one way in which such repayment could be made.

¹⁴ unde sibi fiat non peritura domus. Fortunatus, *Carm.* 1.3.12.

¹⁵ For a brief discussion of Fortunatus’ poems about churches and how the churches of Gaul compared to ones in Italy see Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (Princeton, NJ; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 500-02.

¹⁶ The titling of the Appendix poems, which were not collected and arranged by Fortunatus, is distinctly different. Reydellet I, p. lxxviii.

¹⁷ Emicat aula decens uenerando in culmine ducta, / nomine Martini sanctificata Deo. *Carm.* 1.3.1-2.

¹⁸ This tells us that he was succeeded by someone called Saius. This was not an area of Gaul which Gregory knew a lot about—see Edward James, *The Merovingian Archaeology of South-West Gaul* (Oxford: BAR, 1977), p. 11.

¹⁹ Extulit hanc, Faustus, devote corde sacerdos, / reddidit et Domino prospera dona suo. *Carm.* 1.4.5-6.

²⁰ Reydellet I, p. 24, n. 20.

A Church Dedication as a Social Occasion: the Cathedral of Nantes

A relationship of patronage with the divine could be established on the basis of a single donation, but for many of the bishops Fortunatus writes about, their donations were not one-off repayments. Bishops such as Felix of Nantes had the resources to fund both the construction and interior decoration of a church, and to sponsor more than one building project. Fortunatus' two poems about the cathedral of Nantes provide a useful case in point, as well as rare evidence of a church dedication as a social and religious occasion.²¹

The first of these two poems is a piece in honour of the dedication. As with Childebert's church, discussed later in this chapter, Felix's cathedral is compared to the temple of Solomon, but rather than alluding to the temple's appearance, Fortunatus describes the festivals which surrounded it. A crowd of noblemen, Levites, and men of all ages assembled to celebrate and make sacrifices. Fortunatus portrays the Christian present as superior to the Jewish past. Both Solomon and Felix provided festivals for their people, but Felix surpasses old deeds with new ones. Fortunatus notes the gathering of 'distinguished fathers'; fellow-bishops who came celebrate the 'sacred ceremonies' of dedication. Fortunatus praises each of the guests in turn: Eufronius of Tours, as the senior bishop and metropolitan gets the lion's share of the praise.

Other bishops from the province were also present: Domitianus of Angers, Victorius of Rennes, and Domnolus of Le Mans. Romacharius of Coutances came from the neighbouring province of Rouen, possibly representing his metropolitan. These bishops shared the connection that they or their superiors had signed a letter in support of Radegund's community of the Holy Cross in Poitiers.²² The suggestion that Fortunatus wrote on Radegund's behalf is strengthened by the fact that her

²¹ The ritual for the consecration and dedication of a church was codified in the seventh and eighth centuries, and became an elaborate ceremony in the central middle ages. The Romano-Germanic pontifical (dated to the mid-eleventh century) contains a unique, complete *ordo* for the dedication of a church. See Catherine Gauthier, 'L'odeur et la lumière des dédicaces. L'encens et le luminaire dans le rituel de la dédicace d'église au haut Moyen Âge', in *Mises en scène et mémoires de la consécration de l'église dans l'Occident médiéval* ed. by Didier Méhu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 75-90. For evidence that dedication ceremonies were already occasions in the late fourth century, see Claire Sotinel, 'Locus orationis ou domus Dei? Le témoignage de Zénon de Vérone sur l'évolution des églises (tractatus II, 6)', *Studia patristica* 29 (1997), pp. 143-7, reprinted in eadem, *Church and Society in Late Antique Italy* (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

²² George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 118.

supporters are the only guests named. Further connections between the poet and this group are suggested by their association with the destinations Fortunatus mentions in a journey poem for Radegund and Agnes.²³ In addition to his ecclesiastical colleagues Felix was surrounded by his clergy and the people of Nantes, singing. The end of the poem links back its beginning by wishing that Felix may ‘glitter, a lasting sacrifice to God’.²⁴

The poem shows that the dedication of the church was a social event, at which Felix’s clergy, fellow bishops, and congregation were present. It was also an opportunity for the bonds between a network of bishops to be recognised and strengthened, as well as Felix’s bonds with his diocese. Although Fortunatus does not mention them explicitly, Felix’s clients, family, and friends, as well as other members of the aristocracy, would probably have been present. A further glimpse of what such festivities entailed can be seen in Gregory of Tours’ description of the arrest of bishop Theodore of Marseilles: the bishop was leading a procession for the dedication of an extramural oratory when he was apprehended.²⁵

Dedication ceremonies thus provided opportunities to see and be seen. This is further illustrated by a letter of apology Avitus of Vienne sent to the senator Arigius, sometime between 490 and 518, excusing his absence from the dedication of Arigius’s church. In the letter, Avitus imagines the response of the clergymen gathered at the ceremony to the church’s appearance: admiration of the whole building and the substantial amount of money Arigius had spent on it, praise of the church’s elegant design; including notice of the building’s proportional dimensions and measurements, its height, and its stable foundations. The admiring crowd would also notice the beauty of the marbles with which the church was furnished. Avitus envisages the interior of the church: ‘Daylight, somehow gathered and industriously closed in, is enlivened by the glow of splendid metals, and, appropriately, to all of these glories are added relics of which the world is unworthy.’²⁶ This was not a new topos—the idea of a building enclosing or retaining daylight was originally used for

²³ See Carm.11.25 and Carm.5.7.

²⁴ *Adde medullata in templis holocausta sacerdos / quo diuturna mices hostia pura Deo.* Carm.3.6.53-4.

²⁵ DLH VI.11.

²⁶ Wood, ‘The Audience of Architecture in Post-Roman Gaul’, 74. Gregory of Tours describes a church built by Namatius of Clermont during the fifth century, decorated with mosaics in many varieties of marble, which had been immeasurably enriched by the bishop’s procuring of relics. DLH.II.14

bath complexes, and was then applied to Christian basilicas.²⁷ Childebert's church in Paris is also said to retain the light of day.

The light-catching quality of churches is undoubtedly imagery which demonstrates their status as holy places and functions as a strategy of praising the building and its sponsor, but in some cases it may also reflect actual architecture. In poems about Bishop Germanus' cathedral in Paris and the church of Agericus of Verdun, Fortunatus emphasises that the brightness within these buildings is partially the result of skilful design. Large windows and an interior full of the reflective surfaces of marble, gilding, metal, or mosaic, would have furthered the impression of captured light.²⁸ The churches themselves would have been full of lamps and candles, as is suggested by anecdote told by Gregory of Tours about a bird which accidentally flew into a church in Clermont and put out all the lamps during early morning services.²⁹

None of Fortunatus' church poems refer to audience reaction to the building at the dedication, but he does give a detailed description of the appearance of Felix's church and its relics in another poem. Half of this poem is devoted to praise of Peter, Paul, Hilary, Martin, and Ferreolus, whose relics were honoured in Felix's church; the other half describes the internal and external appearance of the building. After describing the building's design, height, and tower, Fortunatus describes mosaic decoration which seemed to live and move due to the effects of light, a reflective metal roof and a large window from which the light inside the church shone. A traveller passing the basilica at night would think that the stars had come down to earth. This is a strategy Fortunatus employs elsewhere; when praising one of the many churches of Leontius of Bordeaux, Fortunatus notes how its situation in the landscape draws the eye and its light encourages weary travellers to approach.³⁰

The interior decoration of the church was perhaps even more extensive than Fortunatus' poem suggests. A part of the chronicle of Nantes written before Felix's church was replaced by a Romanesque building recorded that Felix raised a marble altar of which one could not find the like in Rome, and adorned the building with

²⁷ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, 65.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Many windows were a sign of a magnificent church. When Gregory of Tours describes two fifth century churches, one in Clermont and one in Tours, his description focuses particularly on the number of windows each church had. See DLH II.14 and DLH II.16.

²⁹ DLH IV.31

³⁰ Carm.1.6.19-20; Reydellet I, p. 26.

many columns with capitals sculpted in various marbles, as well as decorating two walls with well-executed mosaics, and archways with stucco flowers of various colours. Felix's church also contained a gold and silver altar crown, decorated gold and silver liturgical vessels, a gem-studded cross hung high on a silver chain, and a floor with ornamental marble tiling.³¹ The chronicler also reports a *carbunculus* brought from Alexandria, which sat atop a marble pillar and illuminated the church at night.³² Whether or not this eleventh-century list is in any way accurate, it certainly demonstrates that Felix was remembered as a generous benefactor.

In addition to displaying the donors' wealth, piety, and generosity, the interior furnishings of a church also occasionally provide evidence of the exchange of gifts and services within aristocratic friendships. In the late fifth or early sixth century, bishop Clarus of Eauze sent columns, likely *spolia* from an earlier building to Ruricius of Limoges. The columns were intended for use in a church.³³ Sometime in the mid-sixth century, we see bishops engaging in similar behaviour: in a letter to Nicetius of Trier, his fellow bishop Rufus of Martigny sent a group of Italian artisans accompanied a priest of his diocese to Trier. In a poem about Nicetius Fortunatus praises his restoration of ancient churches; the artists may well have been sent to help with that effort.³⁴ Fortunatus' poems usually focus on a single person or family as the sponsor of the restoration or construction of churches, but it is clear that these actions were seen, approved and perhaps actively supported by a wider community of peers and friends.

The Churches of Bishop Leontius of Bordeaux

Leontius of Bordeaux is the predominant focus of book one of Fortunatus' poetry: thirteen out of a total of twenty-one poems are dedicated to him and his projects. The bishop succeeded his father, also called Leontius, to the episcopate,

³¹ Luce Pietri, 'Nantes', in *Topographie Chrétienne des cités de la Gaule: des origines au milieu du VIIIe siècle, Province Ecclésiastique de Tours (Lugdunensis Tertia)*, ed. by Luce Pietri and Jacques Biarne (Paris: De Boccard, 1987), pp. 83-94 (p. 90).

³² *La Chronique de Nantes*, ed. by René Merlet (Paris: Alphonse Picard et fils, 1896), p. 2. The stone was probably a garnet. Bishops were interested in providing their churches with suitably splendid interiors: during his episcopate, Gregory of Tours redecorated the cathedral of Tours after a fire, focusing particularly on the restoration of the wall paintings. DLH X.31.

³³ Wood, 'The Audience of Architecture in Post-Roman Gaul', 76.

³⁴ See Carm.3.11.21-22, Reydellet I, p. 106-7.

and a third bishop of Bordeaux, Amelius may have also been a relative. The Leontii were from a distinguished family which prosopographers have connected to Pontius Leontius, a contemporary of Sidonius, and through him more tenuously to the major families of the Ruricii and the Anicii.³⁵ The aristocratic connections of Leontius' wife Placidina are more securely established, on the basis of what Fortunatus writes about her ancestry. She was related to Sidonius Apollinaris and Emperor Avitus.³⁶

Leontius II became bishop by 549 and he held the office until his death.³⁷ Earlier in his career, he accompanied King Childebert I (r. 511-558) on a military campaign against the Visigoths in 531 and he seems to have been a significant figure at court.³⁸ Leontius is mentioned only once in Gregory's work, in the context of a dispute with King Charibert over the uncanonical consecration of Emerius of Saintes. Leontius, summoned a council in Saintes, deposed Emerius and installed a priest from Bordeaux named Heraclius as bishop. When he tried to present this to Charibert as a *fait accompli*, the king had Heraclius exiled (driven in a cart filled with thorns), and imposed fines on all the bishops present at the council. Leontius had to pay a thousand pieces of gold.³⁹

Bordeaux was important to Fortunatus not only because it was the seat of one of his wealthiest, most powerful, and most ambitious patrons but also because bishop of Bordeaux was the metropolitan of the see of Poitiers, and the two cities

³⁵ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 70, n. 29-30. Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, p. 14., n. 34, argues that Leontius I and Leontius II were relatives but their precise relationship cannot be determined. Not all scholars are so cautious about the relationships implied by prosopographical methods. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, p. 218, suggests that Leontius may have been a descendent of Paulinus of Nola and his villa at Preignac, discussed below, was the same one owned by Paulinus' brother 150 years previously.

³⁶ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 70, n. 31. See also Karl Friedrich Stroheker, *Der Senatorische Adel Im Spätantiken Gallien* (Darmstadt Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1948), p. 188 and 205.

³⁷ Leontius I, also referred to by scholars as Leontius the elder, is commemorated in an epitaph by Fortunatus, Carm.4.9. Leontius II/Leontius the younger is the subject of the next epitaph, Carm.4.10. On Leontius II see also Brian Brennan, 'The Image of the Merovingian Bishop in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 18 (1992), 115-39 (pp. 121-27); and also George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 108-13. Scholars do not agree on the date of Leontius II's death. Brian Brennan, 'Senators and Social Mobility in Sixth-Century Gaul', *Journal of Medieval History*, 11 (1985), 145-61 (p. 151) writes that he died in the late 560s; but in 'The Image of the Merovingian Bishop' he places Fortunatus' visit to Leontius in the late 560s (p. 121) or in '568 or thereabouts' (p. 125). Paul-Albert Février writes that Leontius died between 567 and 574, but does not cite evidence to support this range of dates. See Louis Maurin et al, *Province ecclésiastique de Bordeaux (Aquitania Secunda)*, Topographie Chrétienne des cités de la Gaule des origines au milieu du VIII^e siècle, ed. by Nancy Gauthier (Paris: De Boccard, 1998), p. 30.

³⁸ Reydellet I, p. xxx; George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 70.

³⁹ Gregory of Tours, DLH, IV.26.

were only about 246km apart, a journey of approximately eight days.⁴⁰ By 568, Fortunatus had settled in Poitiers and though he continued to travel and seek patronage from those outside that region, he seems to have addressed much of his writing to people in Poitou. This can be seen quite clearly in his poems about the churches Leontius had built and restored throughout his metropolitan see. It seems that his suffragans were also active as church builders—as previously discussed, *Carm.* 1.3 is thought to be about a building sponsored by Bishop Palladius of Saintes, Emerius' successor.

Leontius first appears in *Carm.* 1.6, about a basilica of St Martin to which he donated land. Rather than ending with a statement of how this act will benefit the giver, the poem begins with it.

He who wants to share in the eternal abode of the blessed,
Causes this sharing through his pious prayers,
And he does not permit it to delay what must be done for a long time,
Since he gave these goods which he thinks are his wealth.⁴¹

The poet goes on to state that by donating a portion of his lands to the shrine, Leontius 'may enter the heavens himself'.⁴² The significance of Leontius' gift is further magnified by the merits of Martin, although the saint is only mentioned in four lines in the middle of the poem, which highlight his ability to cure leprosy and create peace. Fortunatus focuses on the relationship Leontius' sponsorship of the church established between himself and Martin. In exchanging the false wealth ('these goods he thinks are his wealth') of the world for the true treasure of heaven, Leontius gains the saint's sponsorship in the hereafter.

The rest of the poem does not mention the saint at all, focusing instead on the landscape setting. The poem's focus on pious donation and the building's prominent location serves to underscore that Leontius and his wife had given generously to it from their own property. The church was on a hill, standing out from the surrounding fields, perhaps lands Leontius also owned or donated, and was visible from far away. Neighbours of the building could see it and be impressed by the

⁴⁰ Distance and length of journey calculated using Water Scheidel and Elijah Meeks (2012-) *Orbis: the Stanford Geospatial Model of the Roman World* <<http://orbis.stanford.edu/>> [accessed 8 August 2016].

⁴¹ Qui cupit aeterna sociari in sede beatis / hos sibi participes per pia uota facit / nec patitur differre diu quod oportet agendo, / cum bona quae dederit haec sua lucra putet. Fortunatus, *Carm.* 1.6.1-4.

⁴² talibus officiis intret ut ipse polos. *Carm.* 1.6.6.

‘delightful things’ that they saw.⁴³ The church and its location were apparently so striking as to drag a tired traveller towards the light.⁴⁴ The poem concludes by mentioning Placidina’s contribution of ‘sacred coverings’ to the building and the fact that she and Leontius both strove to contribute to it.⁴⁵ The project of endowing and decorating the church was a joint financial and pious effort, for which both gained Martin’s patronage.

Other poems about Leontius’ building projects also focus on the patron saint, as in Fortunatus’ poem about the shrine of St Vincent located in a church on the Garonne, possibly at Le Mas d’Agenais (*Pompeiacum*).⁴⁶ Here, the focus of the poem is again on the saint. The poem begins by explaining the reason for the martyr’s eternal life: ‘A mind dedicated to Christ endures without end after the end, / Forsaking the crowd of men it remains joined to God.’⁴⁷ Vincent was beheaded but it was his executioner who truly died—the martyr and his ‘new offspring fly from earth to the stars.’⁴⁸ Leontius donated a *stagnum* (an alloy of silver and lead) roof to the shrine. Made venerable by the merits of the saint dwelling within, the glittering ‘holy heights’ were Leontius’ service to the martyr.⁴⁹

The bishop was evidently fond of the cult of St Vincent because he also restored the properties of Vincent’s church, located at a place ‘the ancients wanted to call by the name of Vernemet’.⁵⁰ The poet writes that the fame of St Vincent had spread worldwide and therefore it is only right to build churches dedicated to the saint. It seems that Leontius had picked the site of an older religious building for the church because Fortunatus calls Vernemet a Gallic name. But the power of God and the saints showed that the place had been claimed as a Christian site.

Here even the saints, supported by love of the Lord,
Gave terrible awe-inspiring signs of highest virtue.
For when a bishop consecrates churches of God according to custom,

⁴³ et quacumque petit, deliciosa uidet. *Carm.* 1.6.16.

⁴⁴ Fevrier dismisses the idea that this is the same church as the church of St Martin in Bordeaux mentioned by Gregory of Tours, and classes it on the basis of Fortunatus’ poem as an extramural church. Maurin et al, *Province ecclésiastique de Bordeaux*, pp. 31-2

⁴⁵ Quo fessus rapitur uisu inuitante uiator. *Carm.* 1.6.19.

⁴⁶ Reydellet I, pp. 170-72, n. 35. It is unclear whether the church was dedicated to St Vincent of Saragossa or St Vincent d’Agen.

⁴⁷ Post finem sine fine manet mens dedita Christo: / linquens turbam hominum stat sociata Deo. *Carm.* 1.8.3-4.

⁴⁸ et nova de terris proles ad astra uolat. *Carm.* 1.8.8, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ culmina sancta *Carm.* 1.8.18, Reydellet I, p. 28.

⁵⁰ Nomine Vernemetis uoluit uocitare uetustas *Carm.* 1.9.9, *ibid.*

The wrath of a demon flees from the coming of a martyr.⁵¹

The saints showed their power and residence in the locality in a holy place which Leontius provided, through miracles given to the worthy members of the local population—a local man who recognized the place of the saint as a good place to seek a healing cure was rewarded with one. The church attracted people to it, some seeking healing, others simply drawn to it by the holiness of the place. Fortunatus attributes this galvanizing of the flock to the person responsible for having the building built, and assures Leontius that ‘With such great services he will reap just rewards.’⁵² Leontius would benefit from both Vincent’s patronage and friendship, and God’s, enjoying eternal life in exchange for the churches he had sponsored.

Leontius also honoured St Nazarius with the construction of a church dedicated to him, which may have been situated near the modern-day village of Saint-Nazaire. The existence of this village in Fortunatus’ day is attested by Gregory of Tours, who noted that there was an eponymous village with Nazarius’ relics. Fortunatus alludes to the fact that the church contained relics of the saint but the saint himself dwells in Paradise.⁵³ Nazarius demonstrated his qualifications as a holy man through desiring no things of the flesh or the world, but only Christ, and was martyred for his faith. Leontius may have been building on the remains of an earlier structure—it has been suggested that the first oratory on the site was built by Bishop Delphin, who died in 405.⁵⁴ But Fortunatus gives all the credit to Leontius, and does not mention the previous builder or the state, size, or decoration of the previous building which presumably already bore the relics and dedication to Nazarius. Leontius wished certain motivations for his building project to be recognised, and Fortunatus addresses Nazarius directly to make the point. ‘Holy Leontius offers these churches dedicated to you /And henceforth he wishes that his house will be greater’.⁵⁵ Given his ancestry and the resources that are obvious from the number of buildings in which he was able to sponsor decoration, building, or rebuilding,

⁵¹ Hic etiam sanctus, Domini suffultus amore, / uirtutis summae signa tremenda dedit. / Nam cum templa Dei praesul de more dicauit, / martyris aduentu daemonis ira fugit. *Carm.* 1.9.13-16.

⁵² Qui plebem accendit uenerande conditor arcis, / talibus officiis praemia iusta metet. *Carm.* 1.9.24-5.

⁵³ cuius membra solum, spiritus astra tenet *Carm.* 1.10.2.

⁵⁴ Reydellet I, p. 29, n. 44.

⁵⁵ Haec tibi templa sacer deuota Leontius offert / maioremque suam hinc cupit esse domum. *Carm.* 1.10.7-8.

Leontius clearly came from a great house. His resources must have dwarfed those of aristocrats such as Basil and Baudegund, discussed later on in this chapter, who engaged in pious donations on a more limited scale.⁵⁶ In his building Leontius sought not only material and eternal good fortune but also the recognition that came from status and a good reputation. And one's good repute, among those on earth as in heaven, could be gained by spending wealth in an approved manner.

Fortunatus did not consistently fail to note the contributions of previous builders to a site—he writes about several churches began by another bishop and finished by Leontius, in which the actions and motives of both donors are given recognition. Fortunatus invites the reader to learn more about the subject in the first few lines of the poem. 'You who want to learn about the builder of an excellent church, /do not allow so many pious prayers to lie hidden from you.'⁵⁷ This opening, reminiscent of an inscription, suggests that the poem was on display, and thus accessible to a wider audience than just the bishop who commissioned the poem. The priest Amelius, a previous bishop of Bordeaux, who may have been Leontius' relative, began to build a church in the location for the benefit of the local people, since there were no nearby shrines, 'and the common people were often afraid on account of the long journey.'⁵⁸ Amelius did not live to complete the project, so Bishop Leontius completed it. Fortunatus' praise of Leontius' ancestry does not name any of his forebears, but Amelius' status as the bishop's predecessor and relative makes the mention of a donor who is not his subject unproblematic, and reinforces Leontius' outstanding merits within his family.⁵⁹

The church was dedicated to St Denis.⁶⁰ After he has explained the history of the building and its construction, Fortunatus goes on to give respect to the saint to whom it was dedicated. He briefly retells the story of the saint's martyrdom,

⁵⁶ Carm.1.7 details the church this couple had constructed. For another aristocratic couple who sponsored the foundation of a church, see Carm. 2.8. If the woman of this pair, Berthetrude is the same woman mentioned by Gregory in *DLH* IX.35, she apparently had the resources for multiple pious donations and bequests.

⁵⁷ Qui cupis egregii structorem noscere templi, / tam pia non patiar uota latere tibi. *Carm.*1.11.1-2.

⁵⁸ et plebs ob spatium saepe timeret iter *Carm.*1.11.4.

⁵⁹ Carm.IV.10.7-10 and Carm.I.15.15-28

⁶⁰ The location of this church has been debated but most scholars seem prefer a location somewhere outside the walls of Bordeaux. See Reydellet I, pp. 173-74, n. 48, for details of the various arguments. See also Maurin et al, *Province ecclésiastique de Bordeaux*, p. 29.

focusing on Denis' disdain for the world and love of heaven.⁶¹ Through his actions, Denis became someone to whom the Christian faithful could look for salvation. The poem gives no indication as to whether or not the foundation possessed relics of the saint, and since Fortunatus praises the relic collections of other churches he writes about, this may have been a small church without a relic. Like many of the churches Fortunatus wrote about, we are not entirely sure where this one was. It has been thought that it was built in Paris, but because it was one of Leontius' churches it is more likely that it was somewhere within the region of Bordeaux.⁶²

Wherever the church was, it seems likely that Fortunatus wrote on the occasion of its dedication. Fortunatus alludes to the fact that the building is unfinished unless the proper ceremonies have been carried out:

A priest did not suppress the first small sanctuaries
Unless he finished with elegance these which are now pleasing.
Constantly carrying out the sacred rites in the ancient temple,
Until he had built the following work well.⁶³

As already noted, such a ceremony would have been a social as well as a religious occasion. Members of Leontius' clergy, as well as some of his suffragans, his wife, his friends, and his clients may well have been there. In an event that mingled pious giving with social display, a poem in honour of the saint and the site may well have been declaimed. Fortunatus wrote for occasions, and the dedication of a church may have been cause for a public performance.⁶⁴

The church of St Denis was not the only church started by a fellow bishop which Leontius refurbished or completed. He also was responsible for finishing construction of the church of St Vivien (Bibianus), which still stands, with eleventh- and seventeenth-century alterations, in a suburb north of Saintes.⁶⁵ Vivien was the mid-fifth century bishop of Saintes, and was known to Gregory of Tours, who wrote a short biography of him in the *Glory of the Confessors*. Gregory's biography of him

⁶¹ Perhaps he had narrated the saint's life elsewhere. One of the saints' lives Krusch attributed less securely to Fortunatus is the *Passio St Dionysii, Rusticii, et Eleutherii*.

⁶² Reydellet I, pp. 173-74, n. 48.

⁶³ *Nec angusta prius subtraxit fana sacerdos, / haec nisi perficeret quae modo culta placent, / adsidue in prisco peragens cerimonia templo, / donec rite sequens consolidasset opus. Carm. 1.11. 21-4, Reydellet I, pp. 30-1.*

⁶⁴ Reydellet I, p. xxix.

⁶⁵ May Vieillard-Troiekouff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule d'après les œuvres de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris: H. Champion, 1976), pp. 284-85. See also Maurin et al, *Province ecclésiastique de Bordeaux*, pp. 61-2.

notes that there was an existing account of the saint's life and miracles, which may still survive. Gregory also notes that a holy bishop of Saintes from the early sixth century, Trojanus, was buried next to Vivien's tomb.⁶⁶

Two previous bishops had built on this site before Leontius took it over. The first of these, a man named Eusebius, died before he could complete the project. Fortunatus carefully phrases how Leontius contributed to the efforts of his successor, Emerius. 'But so that he might build the beginning, he refused to bear the burden/With prayers he entrusted the work to you, o Bishop Leontius'.⁶⁷ As bishop of Bordeaux, Leontius was Emerius' metropolitan. Evidence from Gregory of Tours shows that the two did not get along: Leontius had gathered the bishops of the province of Bordeaux in Saintes and had Emerius expelled, claiming that Emerius' appointment had been uncanonical, as it had occurred while his metropolitan bishop was away. However, as Gregory noted with relish, Emerius had in fact secured a charter from King Chlothar which allowed him to be consecrated in the metropolitan's absence. When Leontius sent his replacement candidate, Heraclius, to Charibert to present this as a *fait accompli*, Charibert rejected Leontius' attempts to remove Emerius as an insult to his father's memory and his own royal authority. He fined Leontius 1000 gold pieces (the other bishops of the province were fined as much as they could afford) and had Heraclius driven into exile in a cart filled with thorns.⁶⁸ In this context, Leontius' building projects in Saintes seem to be an attempt to gain as much influence as he could in a place where he had not been successful in gaining complete control.

In his poem, Fortunatus gracefully skated over what must have been a costly and embarrassing incident for Leontius. Other than referring to the church as having been begun by Emerius, he says nothing about him in the rest of the poem. The church is presented as Leontius' project and his will be the reward. Indeed, it is his personal qualities that allow completion of the building works to take place.

'Besides such great glory preserves it so that it be done for you,/ But not unless you were the kind of person who should give to holy places'.⁶⁹ The donation was a joint

⁶⁶ Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, Chapters 57-58, MGH SRM I.2, ed. by Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn 1885), pp. 330-32.

⁶⁷ Cui mox Emerius successit in arce sacerdos / sed coeptum strueret, ferre recusat onus. / Qui precibus opus tibi, papa Leonti *Carm.* 1.12.6-7.

⁶⁸ Gregory of Tours, *DLH* IV.26.

⁶⁹ Vltro tale decus tibi se seruauit agendum / nec nisi tu fueras qui loca sacra dares. *Carm.* 1.12.9-10.

one—Placidina gave to the church in accord with Leontius, and the poet goes on to describe the work they had done: the shrine of St Vivien was rebuilt with new levels, a silver roof, and shining gold decoration. It was also adorned with extremely lifelike wild beasts.⁷⁰ Fortunatus again proposes that Leontius' donation would plead that he merited eternal life: 'But you gave such great treasures to his soul, / Let this urge that everlasting salvation should remain for you'.⁷¹

Leontius and his wife built a third church in Saintes. According to Gregory of Tours, St Eutropius was one of the seven Roman missionaries sent to evangelise Gaul by Pope Clement. Because it was a time of persecution, Eutropius was not buried properly and was not given the veneration typically given to martyrs. Many years later, Bishop Palladius of Saintes had a church constructed in Eutropius' honour, gathered his clergy, and ordered the saint's body to be moved. Two abbots, opening the tomb, discovered that the body within bore a scar on its head. The saint revealed to them in a dream that this was how he had been killed, and so people knew that he was a martyr, though no one had written an account of his death.⁷²

Van Dam, following Vielliard-Troiekouff, suggests that Palladius was responsible for 'fabricating' the cult of St Eutropius, particularly his connection to Clement and the wound on the body's head.⁷³ It seems likely that Leontius' reconstruction of the church predated Palladius, and the church itself may have predated his predecessor Emerius. As mentioned above, Gregory supplies details of the saint's life, yet knew of no written source for it.⁷⁴ Fortunatus states that Eutropius was 'the first priest of the city of Saintes'.⁷⁵ As Lifshitz has shown, this sort of statement cannot necessarily be attributed to local tradition.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Ingenio perfecta nouo tabulata coruscant / artificemque putas hic animasse feras. Fortunatus, *Carm.* 1.12.18.

⁷¹ Sed cui uos animo donaria tanta dedistis, / hic agat utu obis stet diuturna salus. *Carm.* 1.12.19-20.

⁷² Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, Chapter 55, MGH SRM I.2, ed. by Bruno Krusch (Hanover 1885), p. 76.

⁷³ Raymond Van Dam, *Glory of the Martyrs* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), pp. 54-5, n. 67.

⁷⁴ Lifshitz's work demonstrates that Gregory may have had his own reasons for promoting the story of Clement and the seven apostles. Felice Lifshitz, 'Apostolicity Theses in Gaul: The Histories of Gregory and the 'Hagiography' of Bayeux', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Ian Wood and Kathleen Mitchell (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 2002), pp. 211-28 (pp. 213-8).

⁷⁵ Vrbs Santonicae primus fuit iste sacerdos *Carm.* 1.13.19, Reydellet I, p. 33.

⁷⁶ Lifshitz, 'Apostolicity Theses in Gaul: The Histories of Gregory and the 'Hagiography' of Bayeux'.

Scholars have noticed that Saintes possessed two major churches and in his poem, Fortunatus speaks of Eutropius' funerary basilica. The saint's tomb was present in this church during the time of Bishop Emerius; Palladius, who is mentioned in Gregory's account of Eutropius' Life, was his successor and had the saint's body translated into the cathedral. In 1843, in the crypt of the basilica of St Eutropius, which was reconstructed by the Cluniacs in 1096, a small stone tomb engraved with the name EVTROPIS was discovered. It seems that the inscription is not later than the sixth century.⁷⁷

For Leontius, revitalizing the saint's cult was an opportunity to put his own stamp on the religious architecture of Saintes and to reassert his metropolitan authority over the city's bishop. The poem begins by emphasising Leontius' role as a great church builder. Prompted by divine love he sponsors ecclesiastical building, and is in turn rewarded for it. 'How great the love of God should remain for you, Bishop Leontius, / Whom already saints remind to renew their churches!'⁷⁸ The church of St Eutropius which had stood on the site was an old building—abandoned, neglected, and weather-beaten. The roof was damaged, the plaster of one of the walls had fallen off, and this exposed the bare timbers of the building, which was being destroyed by water damage. In a dream, the saint asked Leontius to undertake the restoration project. Through this warning, God shows concern for his saint—and his bishop. Leontius 'restores antiquity' and improves the building. Previously, the building had had only a painted roof—after Leontius' carpenters had finished, there was a splendid carved one in place, as well as figurative painting on the walls, outdoing the previous building and builders.⁷⁹ Giving the saint a comfortable home was of benefit to Leontius: 'When the saint holds his churches and dwells there peacefully, / He gives back remuneration with love to the restorer.'⁸⁰

Leontius' actions were of temporal as well as spiritual benefit. Through his construction and renovation projects he placed himself and his wife under the patronage of his province's major saints. He also asserted his authority as

⁷⁷ Vieillard-Troiekouff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule*, pp. 281-3. See also Maurin et al, *Province ecclésiastique de Bordeaux*, p. 61.

⁷⁸ *Quantus amor dei Domini maneat tibi, papa Leonti, / quem sibi iam sancti templa nouare monent! Carm.1.13.1-2.*

⁷⁹ Maurin et al, *Province ecclésiastique de Bordeaux*, p. 61.

⁸⁰ *Cum sua templa tenet sanctus habitando quiete, / instauratori reddit amore uicem. Carm.1.13.21-22.*

metropolitan by building throughout the region, particularly in the city of Saintes, where his attempt to install his own episcopal candidate had been unsuccessful. Fortunatus' poems for Leontius draw a portrait of a pious and powerful leader, who had the favour and support of his region's important saints. Leontius—powerful, wealth, pious, and ambitious, would have found cultivation of Fortunatus, the friend and client who could present this portrait to a wider audience, well worth his while.⁸¹

In the poems about his churches, Leontius stands usually alone or beside his distinguished wife, and is only occasionally accompanied by distant shadows of his predecessors in building work. Usually there are only two figures in Fortunatus' poems about Leontius' churches: the bishop himself, and the saint in whose honour he had the building constructed or repaired. The poems are not about Leontius as a manager of wealth for the poor or about Leontius as a pastoral figure, subjects which are frequently discussed in the large body of literature about early medieval bishops. They are about Leontius as a man who is a friend to the saints and consequently is favoured by God. Indeed, it was an aspect of Leontius' attempts to use his power as a pastor that he wanted to be sure that everyone knew of him as divinely favoured because of his building projects.

Many of the poems discussed in this chapter were perhaps painted or carved onto walls of the churches they describe.⁸² Their direct address to travellers, viewers, and patron saints; their relatively simple style, and their brevity all bear witness to this. Placidina and Leontius may have also had inscriptions put on their other donations, as can be seen in one of Fortunatus' shorter poems. The poem is entitled 'About Bishop Leontius' Chalice' and expresses the idea that Placidina and Leontius have given jointly for the decoration of the altars.⁸³ Again, the poet expresses the idea that the couple will benefit from their actions. 'Happy are they whose work is fitting

⁸¹ Brennan, 'The Image of the Merovingian Bishop in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', p. 127.

⁸² Fortunatus certainly composed verses to accompany paintings of the life of St Martin on the walls of the cathedral of Tours. On the combination of poetry and paintings in the cathedral of Tours, see Brian Brennan, 'Text and Image: "Reading" the Walls of the Sixth-Century Cathedral of Tours', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 6 (1996), 65-83; Herbert L. Kessler, 'Pictorial Narrative and Church Mission in Sixth-Century Gaul', in *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Herbert L. Kessler and Marianna Shreve Simpson (Washington; Hanover: National Gallery of Art, 1985), pp. 75-91.

⁸³The chalice was probably given to a church in Bordeaux, and the language of the poem, with its use of phrases sometimes used to describe marriage, indicates Placidina's role in the donation. Reydellet I, p. 33, n. 62-3.

for the altars, / Which do not report that they will pass away in a short time.⁸⁴ Leontius and Placidina had the wealth to give previous objects to their churches, and the wish that their deed be commemorated with appropriate recognition.

Episcopal Panegyric and the Secular Building Projects of Leontius of Bordeaux

Fortunatus' panegyric to Leontius, *Carm.*1.15, is arguably one of the most written-about poems in his corpus. It is also the poem in which Fortunatus first mentions Leontius' secular building projects, and thus provides a useful place for us to begin. For Brennan, this poem was Fortunatus' earliest 'episcopal panegyric', a subgenre of poetry invented to praise the bishops of his day, among whom he found most of his patrons. These poems 'presented the idealised relationship that should exist between the "perfect pastor" and his clergy and people...episcopal panegyric underlined the legitimacy of a bishop's rule.'⁸⁵ Although this poem describes Leontius' actions as bishop it does not pay much attention his role as a pastor. The bishop is the defender of churches not of defenceless people. The poet begins by describing the start of Leontius' illustrious career. The future bishop stood out because of the nobility of his background and when he was a young man participated in royal military campaigns against the Visigoths. Rather than remain in the service of the state, Leontius entered the Church, although Fortunatus takes the time to praise the bishop's ancestry before explicitly alluding to his current position.

This is the context in which he first discusses Leontius' secular building projects. As a proud descendant of his family, Leontius shows his pride by keeping the family home in good repair. 'The seasons scatter and yet the hall of your parents stands/And by your repairing the house does not fall.'⁸⁶ Indeed, because of his good character and many achievements, Leontius actually stands above his ancestors through his merits. He is also superior because of his career in the church. Of the bishops of Bordeaux, Fortunatus assures his patron that he will be counted the best. Leontius' building of churches has much to do with why the poet considers him to be superior. The churches were falling down, and Leontius restored them in such a way

⁸⁴ Felices quorum labor est altaribus actus, / tempore qui paruo non peritura ferunt. *Carm.*1.14.3-4.

⁸⁵ Brennan, 'The Image of the Merovingian Bishop in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', p. 120.

⁸⁶ Tempora diffugiunt et stat tamen aula parentum / nec patitur lapsum te reparante domus. *Carm.*1.15.19-20.

that they were more beautiful than ever before. A fire which destroyed a church roof was not a catastrophe, but an opportunity, since it allowed Leontius to restore the building better than it was before. Fortunatus even goes so far as to say that the building itself wished for this to happen,

I believe that they themselves wanted to be burned,
So that your work might make them better
After the ashes were extinguished and their sparks were weak
Thus the Phoenix was wont to renew its old age.⁸⁷

Leontius also restored the baptistery and built a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary.⁸⁸ Reydellet believes that this church was in Bordeaux, not in Saintes or Soulac.⁸⁹

Leontius' churches are also his gift to his flock. By giving these places 'where they continuously praise Christ' to his people, Leontius ensure their salvation and his own.⁹⁰ Leontius has provided places for the locals to worship, seemingly for the reason that having these places will make the people more devout. 'You did it so that it may please all the citizens to run here / and one house calls everyone who lives in the city.'⁹¹ Fortunatus' final mention of Leontius' role within a community is to praise him as the glory of Bordeaux and the bringer of gifts to his fatherland. Before he concludes the poem by praising Leontius' wife Placidina, Fortunatus praises the bishop for the number of Eucharistic vessels he has provided for church altars. These gifts will return their own rewards. 'Temples and sacred vessels will give you these things, o priest, / And I cannot count the rest of it.'⁹²

At no point does Fortunatus mention the builders and other craftsmen Leontius would have hired to make and decorate his churches. In an examination of silversmiths in late antique Byzantium, Cutler has shown that these objects would have been made in stages by highly skilled metalworkers.⁹³ Craftsmen received

⁸⁷ Credo quod ex sese uoluissent ipsa cremari / ut labor ille tuus haec meliora daret. / Post cineres consumpta suos tenuesque fauillas / sic solet et Phoenix se renouare senes. Carm.1.15.49-52.

⁸⁸ Louis Maurin et al, *Province ecclésiastique de Bordeaux (Aquitania Secunda)*, p. 30.

⁸⁹ Reydellet I, p. 36, n. 74.

⁹⁰ Qui loca das populis ubi Christum iugiter orent Carm.1.15.61, Reydellet I, p. 36.

⁹¹ Fecisti ut libeat cunctos huc currere ciues / et domus una uocet quicquid in urbe manet. Carm.1.15.65-66.

⁹² Haec tibi templa dabunt et uasa sacrata, sacerdos, / et quicquid reliquum nec numerare queo. Carm. 1.15.89-90.

⁹³ Anthony Cutler, 'The Right Hand's Cunning: Craftsmanship and the Demand for Art in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 72 (1997), 971-994 (pp. 982-88).

their materials from the person who had commissioned the object, and wealthy patrons frequently had old objects melted down and remade, to pay debts or create new things. Presumably, Leontius would likewise have been donating family treasures to be remodelled and placed within his churches. There must have been messages sent between the bishop and the artisans to specify the details of the buildings and their furnishings.

Four surviving letters from late antique Gaul give some suggestion as to what these messages may have contained. We do not have any surviving letters in which craftsmen and commissioner communicate directly; all evidence of this process of finding skilled workers commissioning a desired output is embedded in the transactions of aristocratic friendship. In one of his letters, Sidonius Apollinaris provides an ekphrasis of a silver basin intended as a gift for Queen Ragnahild, and Avitus of Vienne's letter to his brother describing a swivel ring he wanted made may be as close as we can come to an actual commission. The same letter also contains a request for a master potter and technical questions about preparation of the kiln and clay-pit. This exchange of craftsmen can be seen in other episcopal letters: Ruricius dispatched a glassworker to his friend Celsus at his request and sent a painter and his apprentice to the noblewoman Ceraunia. As previously mentioned, among Fortunatus' own contemporaries, Rufus of Martigny sent Nicetius of Trier a group of Italian artisans under the care of a member of his clergy.⁹⁴

Fortunatus did not describe this stage of the combination of patronage and friendship which led to the decoration of Merovingian buildings. He wished only to glorify the person who provided the commission and the resources for artistic production, though he does at times take note of the appearance of church decorations. This is particularly seen in his poem about the church of St Vivien, discussed above, where Fortunatus describes glittering of the silver and gold used to redecorate the saint's shrine. Furthermore, he gives a brief description of what this looks like: 'you think that the craftsman here has given the wild beasts life.'⁹⁵ One would certainly like to know which wild beasts are being used to decorate the shrine, and what meaning this had for the people who saw it, but this detail did not

⁹⁴ The letters in question are Sidonius, Ep.4.8.4-5; Avitus, Ep. 87; Ruricius, Ep.1.12 and Ep.2.15, and EA 21.

⁹⁵ See above.

matter for Fortunatus; the shrine's existence as the commission of a wealthy and powerful Roman bishop was more important.

The last part of Fortunatus' first book of poetry deals with three of Leontius' villas. According to archaeological evidence, Fortunatus' descriptions of buildings match up relatively well with what once existed. As one scholar has put it, 'Even at this late date in the history of the Roman villa, when archaeological evidence for continuing prosperity is rare indeed, Fortunatus can represent Leontius' estates as forces of order in the Merovingian world, firmly anchored in a benign relationship with nature.'⁹⁶ The archaeological remains of fourth- and fifth-century villas tend to match rather well to literary descriptions of these sites, and '...the conscious imitation of literary ideals might well have been part of a much more extensive package of status-display. This can be shown from architecture, mosaic, and other art, and inscriptions to have emphasized Roman imperial culture and literacy. Perhaps following the descriptions of literary models in one's own home and estate were part of the same pattern of behaviour.'⁹⁷ In the following century, even without a central Roman state, a clear idea of what it meant to be Roman existed, and was expressed in Fortunatus' poems about Leontius' villas.⁹⁸

The first of Leontius' villas which Fortunatus praises was located at *Bisonnum*, which de Maillé situates in a modern-day village called Besson, which is in the south of Bordeaux, beyond Pessac, in the municipality of Cestas.⁹⁹ Fortunatus refers to it as an island and situates it within a verdant and beautiful landscape.

There is a place, however warm it may be in the summer-time,
Where renewed fields are continually green with flowers,
The painted lands breathe with golden colours,
Pleasant herbs smell strongly with fragrant leaves.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, p. 75.

⁹⁷ Ken Dark, 'The Archaeological Implications of Fourth- and Fifth-Century Descriptions of Villas in the Northwest Provinces of the Roman Empire', *Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte*, 54 (2005), 331-42 (p. 338).

⁹⁸ On Roman identity in Fortunatus' poetry, see now Erica Buchberger, 'Romans, Barbarians, and Franks in the Writings of Venantius Fortunatus', *Early Medieval Europe*, 24 (2016), 293-307. Buchberger discusses ideas of Romanness in Leontius' epitaph at pp. 298-9, but her analysis does not include the poems about churches and villas examined here.

⁹⁹ Reydellet I, p. 43, n. 84.

¹⁰⁰ Est locus, aestifero quamuis sit tempore feruor, / quo uiret assiduo flore reffectus ager. / Respirant croceris depicta coloribus arua, / flagrat odoriferis blandior herba comis. *Carm.* 1.18.1-4, Reydellet I, p. 43.

He then goes on to describe the building itself, situated seven miles from Bordeaux. When it was first built, there was a front gate and a colonnade, which Leontius had restored. Because of his work, the dilapidation due to old age has been reversed. There may have been a church on the site of the villa as well, as Fortunatus indicates that Leontius has repaired a buried, or possibly collapsed, building: ‘Now it is also as if the buried hall rose again more successful/ And it favours the supporter who made it live.’¹⁰¹ ‘Aula’ is an ambiguous word in Fortunatus’ lexicon. Very often he uses it to refer to a church, but here it is equally likely that he is referring to the hall of the villa. If this is true, it is interesting that a secular building, as with many of the churches we have seen, also rewards its restorer.

Fortunatus concludes the poem by praising the fact that the villa’s baths have been restored. As Dark notes, baths were an essential part of fifth-century Gallic writers’ conceptions of the characteristics which defined a villa.¹⁰² Here they are presented as reviving and refreshing the owner and his guests. Fortunatus concludes by stating that a place once inhabited by animals has been reclaimed by men. This is probably poetic hyperbole, since it is doubtful that a family like the Leontii, which had kept the see of Bordeaux in their family for a few generations, would let one of their properties decay, especially one within an easy distance of the family see. Describing Leontius as bringing beauty and civilization to what had been ruins shows him preserving and maintaining Roman order. Renovation of ancient buildings, especially family properties, was a way to indicate one’s high aristocratic standing in post-imperial world.¹⁰³

The second of Leontius’ villas which the poet praises is found at *Vereginis*, a place which was presumably also close to Bordeaux—Baurech has been suggested, but the definite location is unknown.¹⁰⁴ This villa was also situated in a pleasing landscape: it was on the banks of the Garonne, surrounded by fertile fields, and situated on the middle of three hills, standing out from the fields but also providing the traveller with a gentle upward stroll. Fortunatus describes little of the building

¹⁰¹ Nunc quoque prosperius uelut aula sepulta resurgit / et fauet auctori uiuificata suo.
Carm. 1.18.13-14, Reydellet I, p. 44.

¹⁰² Dark, p. 373.

¹⁰³ For parallels with Ostrogothic Italy, see Arnold, *Theoderic and the Roman Imperial Restoration*, pp. 224-8.

¹⁰⁴ Reydellet I, p. 44, n. 85.

itself, other than noting that it was supported by a threefold arch, but he dwells for most of the rest of the poem on the villa's glorious fountain and fishpond.

A hidden wave produced from living metal springs forth,
Sweet and everlasting from a refreshing fountain of water;
A reclining shepherd celebrates banquets above it
And drinks from the enclosed pond where fish swim.¹⁰⁵

The 'reclining shepherd' is of course Leontius himself, who can look down from his dining room at his beautiful fountain and fishpond. One again Fortunatus concludes by emphasizing that this building and its beauties are Leontius' reward.

The last of Leontius' villas which Fortunatus discusses was also located close to his episcopal seat. This was the villa at *Praemiacum*, modern-day Preignac, which according to de Maillé is in the district of Bordeaux, the canton of Podensac, on the left bank of the Garonne, about 5km downstream from Langon.¹⁰⁶ Fortunatus begins the poem with a topos unusual in his writings to Leontius. He creates a picture of himself, dragging along on a difficult journey, nevertheless compelled to say something about the villa. Punning on the similarity of the name of the place with the Latin word for 'prize', he notes that it is situated in a beautiful verdant landscape. The villa itself is located on a hill overlooking the river, and is surrounded by fields. One of these is a meadow full of flowers, another contains grain, and in a third there are vines. In addition to the fruitful agricultural landscape, Leontius also has available the bounty of fish which comes from the river. All of this abundance is depicted as Leontius' due reward.

But such great duties demanded you, o Leontius,
You who might give plentiful good thing, you alone are absent. (20)
For the pleasing baths begin shine like the beautiful house,
They celebrate you, their fortifier.
So that those things which are yet to be built may acquire ornament
May you rule these gifts of yours for a long time.¹⁰⁷

Very little of Leontius' role as Gallo-Roman bishop is present in these poems, but his place as a Roman aristocrat is very much evident. His villas may not

¹⁰⁵ Exilit unda latens uiuo generate metallo / dulcis et inriguo fonte perennis aquae. / Quo super accumbens celebrat conuiuia pastor / inclusoque lacu, pisce natante, bibit. Fortunatus, *Carm.* 1.19, lines 11-14.

¹⁰⁶ Reydellet I, p. 45., n. 88.

¹⁰⁷ Sed te quaerebant haec munera tanta, Leonti: / solus defueras qui bona plena dares. / Nam quod pulchra domus, quod grata lauacra nitescunt, / consolidatorem te cecinere suum. / Vt tamen adquirant adhuc fabricanda decorum, / temporibus longis haec tua dona regas. *Carm.* 1.20.19-24.

have been the splendid displays of wealth found in the Bordeaux villas of an earlier generation, but not all villas even then were of extreme size and splendour. Villas, mirroring the resources of their owners, came in different sizes and levels of decoration; Fortunatus poems suggest that Leontius' secular and ecclesiastical building projects displayed considerable wealth. In this poem, Fortunatus can clearly be seen to be picking up on the ideas about wealth expressed in the works of earlier authors such as Ausonius. Throughout this poem Fortunatus writes about the abundance of nature and presents it as Leontius' due. Similarly, in earlier centuries, the wealth of rich Romans was thought to have come freely from the abundance of nature.¹⁰⁸

At least in these poems, Leontius' wealth is not presented as the deserved result of his holiness. His status as a well-off landowner is not because he is a bishop but because he is a Roman. His activities as a restorer of villas and founder of churches are never presented in the same poem, though *Carm.* 1.20 seems to suggest that Preignac had a baptistery. Yet the buildings seem to have had a similarly beneficial result for Leontius. Churches, as offerings given to God and exemplary holy people, argued for the bishop's reward in heaven. Villas were seen as a sign of his present, and an assurance of his future, success on earth.

Royal Building Projects

Sponsorship of church-building was not restricted to bishops, although we can say rather less about the laity from the evidence of Fortunatus' works: he wrote only five poems concerning the building projects of non-episcopal patrons. In this handful of poems about the construction projects of Merovingian royalty and nobility, we can see them doing much the same thing as their bishops. Greater and lesser members of the aristocracy patronised Fortunatus, commissioning poems in honour of their building and restoration projects. He wrote for luminaries like Leontius of Bordeaux and his wife Placidina, as well as more obscure figures, like Launebod and his wife Berthetrude. Merovingian aristocrats were far from the only

¹⁰⁸ Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, pp. 197-99.

powerful people investing in pious building: members of the royal family were the founders of a number of religious buildings and promoters of a number of cults.¹⁰⁹

However, Fortunatus wrote only three poems, all found in Book Two, which present sixth-century Merovingian royalty as the patrons of building projects. Fortunatus' image of Merovingian kingship simply did not focus on kings and queens as builders.¹¹⁰ Secular rulers' patronage of religious buildings suggested 'patronage and the potential for a certain degree of intervention in matters of religion' and as such had to be handled carefully.¹¹¹ Fortunatus sidestepped this difficulty. His writings for Merovingian royalty occurred at carefully selected political moments; as we will see in Chapter 4, this is particularly apparent in his panegyrics for Charibert, Sigibert, and Chilperic, and in his poems for Merovingian royal couples. Building projects were not part of these moments and thus went unmentioned.

Fortunatus wrote about a baptistery sponsored by Berthoara, the daughter of King Theudebert; and a praise-poem about the miracles of St Medard, which includes an intercession for Sigibert who had a church built in the saint's honour. In the poem for Ultrogotha (d. post-567?) about Childebert's garden, he hints but does not directly state that Childebert built the church near which he established his garden. For this information, we have to go to Gregory of Tours and the *Vita Droctovei Abbatis*.¹¹² The poem about the church of Paris—scholars have disagreed about whether this refers to the church of St Vincent or to the cathedral—is in many ways the most similar to Fortunatus' church poems for aristocratic patrons, and so I start with it.

¹⁰⁹ Vieillard-Troiekourov, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule*, pp. 374-83.

¹¹⁰ This was a trait he shared with Gregory of Tours. Gregory's curt dismissal of King Chilperic's amphitheatres in DLH V.17 is one of the few royal building projects mentioned in the entire *Histories*. It is worth noting that Theoderic the Great provided an example of a ruler for whom good rulership involved building and restoration projects, and Theoderic's own panegyrist, Ennodius, mentioned them. See La Rocca, 'Mores tuos fabricate loquuntur', pp. 2-7; Shane Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition Between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 234-53; and Fauvinet-Ranson, *Les cités d'Italie dans le premier tiers du VIe siècle*, pp. 49-298. It is worth emphasising that these were secular building projects; Theoderic's orthodox Roman subjects and civil servants were silent about his patronage of churches, possibly because of Theoderic's Arianism. See Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, pp. 69-70; Bjornlie pp. 248-51; and Sean D. W. Lafferty, *Law and Society in the Age of Theoderic the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 239-40.

¹¹¹ Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition Between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople*, p. 250.

¹¹² Gregory of Tours, DLH, IV.20. This church is likely the subject of *Carm.*2.10.

1. Childebert I

King Childebert I restored a church in Paris, which Fortunatus compared to the temple of Solomon, made more beautiful because it was a place of Christian worship.¹¹³ As part of his rebuilding of the church, Childebert added marble columns, perhaps reused from an earlier building. As with other churches, particularly those of Leontius of Bordeaux, Fortunatus highlights light-catching qualities of the building, singling out the glass windows which allowed Childebert's church to trap light. The fact that the church is able to retain the day within itself is on account of the skill of the craftsman who built it. But the building also resounds to Childebert's praise by allowing him to participate in networks of giving: the king's building project is a deathless gift (*dona non moritura*) to his people, and is also described as an increase to the perpetual wealth of the church. The king is further praised as 'our Melchisedek'; performing the functions of both ruler and priest, a layman who completed the work of religion. Furthermore he is described as 'the singular glory of the bishops', perhaps a nod to the king's advisors who supported his building project.¹¹⁴

In the Life of Germanus of Paris, Fortunatus also praises the king's generosity, recounting an occasion where bishop and ruler strove to outdo each other in generosity to the poor.¹¹⁵ Childebert's donations secure him a twofold eternal life: the immortality on earth granted by the memory of his deed and a perpetual place in heaven. The typecasting of Childebert in the mode of an Old Testament ruler, and the praise of his generosity and justice make this different from Fortunatus' other church poems, but the basic structure and elements are the same—praise of the new over the old, the importance of light, the eternal reward and elevated reputation of the founder.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Identified as either the cathedral of Paris or the church of St Vincent. Reydellet II, p. 188, n. 78.

¹¹⁴ *Publica iura regens ac celsa palatia seruans: / unica pontificum gloria norma fuit.* Carm.II.10.23-4.

¹¹⁵ Fortunatus, VG, Chapter 13.

¹¹⁶ On Fortunatus' image of Childebert, see Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 22-7.

2. Berthoara

The collaboration between bishops and members of the royal family is even more explicit in the poem Fortunatus placed immediately following this; a poem about the baptistery in Mainz, which was built by Bishop Sidonius of Mainz to fulfil a vow made by Theudebert I's daughter Berthoara, whom Fortunatus praised as one who would not die wealthy thanks to her generous charity. After describing the purpose and effects of baptism, Fortunatus praises their joint efforts:

So Bishop Sidonius raised this stronghold
He favours the worship of the Lord by renovating temples.
The priest has built, since Berthoara's offering perfects,
She, splendour of the church, is pleasing by the love of her heart.¹¹⁷

This church may still stand—recent excavations at the Johanneskirche in Mainz have shown that the building has late Roman foundations and walls dating from the Merovingian period. The church was almost certainly Boniface's cathedral and the dedication to John the Baptist itself goes back to the time of the ninth century archbishop, Hatto.¹¹⁸ The poem's words of praise continue on for the princess alone: she is 'glittering in piety/ a supporter of temples, prodigal to the poor'.¹¹⁹ As with the Merovingian princess Theudechild, the same descriptor, distinctive within Fortunatus' vocabulary of patronage, is used: *templorum cultrix*. Like the other devout and wealthy women about whom Fortunatus wrote, Berthoara is described as laying up her reward in heaven by giving away her possessions on earth, a woman who does not plan to die with wealth. Fortunatus concludes by describing Berthoara as a daughter worthy of her father, and moves on to praise Theudebert directly. He is not, however, talking to the living king since Theudebert died in 548, but praises his reign in the present perfect, referring to his paternal rule and possibly his military adventures in Italy ('you recovered triumphs from the enemy by the accompaniment of faith' is somewhat opaque). Like his daughter, Theudebert is described as a

¹¹⁷ Hanc tamen antistes Sidonius extulit arcem, / qui Domini cultum temple nouando fouet. / Struxit Berthoarae uoto complente sacerdos, / quae decus ecclesiae cordis amore placet. Carm.2.11.7-10.

¹¹⁸ Ian Wood, Conversation with Hope Williard and William Flynn (22 June 2016).

¹¹⁹ Catholicae fidei splendor, pietate coruscans, / templorum cultrix, prodiga pauperis Carm.2.11.11-12.

patron of the church and the poor: *ecclesiae fultor, laus regum, pastor egentum/ cura sacerdotum, promptus ad omne bonum*.¹²⁰

Fortunatus' praise of Merovingian women who lived up to their heavenly reward may have reflected his views of how well they fulfilled the responsibilities of their gender and stage of life, for he does not refer to any Merovingian royal men—except Chilperic and Fredegund's young sons—as enjoying the eternal life of heaven, as he did in his epitaphs and encomia of Merovingian women. Theudebert's afterlife is one of human memory alone: 'You live still, o king, by your merits, in love'. Reydellet's translation underscores this point by using *tuis* twice—once as a personal adjective modifying *meritis*, and once as 'yours', the people in whose love the king lives.¹²¹ The poem does not return to Berthoara—who, outside this poem, is totally unknown. The links Fortunatus' makes between her donation to the baptistery and Theudebert's memory suggest that the project was in commemoration of her father, funded through family wealth to keep his name alive.

Bishop Sidonius, who started and probably supervised the project, is a friend Fortunatus addresses elsewhere in his works. Indeed, he became bishop in 549 and seems to have been one of the first people in Gaul for whom Fortunatus wrote, alongside Vilicus of Metz and Nicetius of Trier. Fortunatus wrote to him three times—*Carm.*9.9, *Carm.*2.11, and *Carm.*2.12; the last is a short poem in praise of his construction of a basilica of Saint George. In his praise of Sidonius in *Carm.*9.9, the poet presents him as a model bishop, who fasts, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, redeems captives, and eloquently teaches the people. He increases the devoutness of his people and his own reputation by means of pious building and restoration projects. Given Sidonius' track-record as a builder in Fortunatus' eyes and Berthoara's obscurity, it may be tempting to see the baptistery as his project rather than hers. However, Fortunatus' poem emphasizes that royal money paid for the project, overshadowing Sidonius' level of involvement or contribution. The project was collaborative between bishop and princess but the credit and prestige of it belonged to her and her family.

¹²⁰ *Carm.*2.11.19-20.

¹²¹ Vous êtes toujours vivant, o roi, par vos mérites, dans l'amour des vôtres. Trans. In Reydellet I, p. 68. *Carm.*2.11.22 *uiuis adhuc meritis rex in amore tuis*.

3. Ultrogotha

Judith George classifies many of Fortunatus' poems for royalty as formal court poems. One of these is a consolation for the widowed queen, Ultrogotha, which praises a garden planted by her husband, Childebert I.¹²² Childebert died in 558, a decade before Fortunatus arrived in Gaul. Childebert's brother Chlothar (r. 511-561) took over his kingdom and treasury and sent Ultrogotha and her two daughters, Chrososwinth and Chrodoberga, into exile.¹²³ Gregory of Tours provides no motive for this act but Chlothar was likely consolidating his position by removing the remnants of Childebert's family from Paris, a centre of their authority. Ultrogotha had a saintly posthumous reputation, according to the author of the *Vita Balthildis*; she and Childebert had also founded churches in Paris, including Saint Germain-des-Prés, where the king and other Merovingians were buried.¹²⁴ Fortunatus' panegyric for Chlothar's son Charibert states that he was a protector (*tutor*) to Ultrogotha and acted as a brother and father to her daughters. It is possible that he was responsible for recalling them and the women may well have been in the audience when Charibert's panegyric was delivered.¹²⁵

The title of the poem describes the garden as Ultrogotha's but its text claims that the garden was planted by Childebert. The poet praises the deceased king by claiming his merits cause the apples to smell and taste better. All of the plants (grapes, roses, and apples are mentioned) grow better because of the founder's virtue. It is a Roman garden in contents, layout, and purpose, combining fruit and flowers, providing a pleasant refuge in the summer. For the Romans a good gardener was a good man and so the quality of Childebert's garden is a point in his praise.¹²⁶ The garden stands as a memorial to his quality as a ruler. George locates it behind the church of Saint Vincent; the poet describes Childebert as passing through the

¹²² George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. xxiii; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers, Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: the King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London: University of Leicester Press, 1998), p. 175.

¹²³ DLH IV.20. Gregory's only other mention of her is that Ursinus, who later became bishop of Cahors, was her referendary.

¹²⁴ Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 198.

¹²⁵ Carm.6.2.21-6. George, *Personal and Political Poems*, 35 n. 54. Evidence for Ultrogotha's dates is almost non-existent, but if, as Fortunatus' poem suggests, she was in the audience when Charibert's panegyric was delivered, this would perhaps place her death sometime in or after 567.

¹²⁶ John Henderson, *The Roman Book of Gardening* (Routledge: London and New York, 2004).

garden on his way to church¹²⁷ Childebert's previous temporary visits to the church are contrasted with his permanent residence through being buried in the church and dwelling in heaven.

Ultrogotha only appears in the final two lines: *possideas felix haec, Ultrogotho, per aevum,/ cum geminis natis tertia mater ovans*.¹²⁸ Given the context of what he has just said about Childebert, this is a straightforward wish that she and her daughters may enjoy eternal life. Perhaps it is also a wish that the women continue to enjoy the garden and what it represents whilst on earth. As George points out, the poem contains two gardens, heavenly and earthly.¹²⁹ Ultrogotha and her daughters may have commissioned the poem in Childebert's honour, though there is no direct evidence of this. One would like to imagine the poem on display in the garden, to inform passer-by and honour Childebert's memory, but there is no evidence of this either. The poet may also have been soliciting the patronage of Ultrogotha and her daughters with a poem he surmised might please them. However, the poet does not make any other unsolicited approaches to Merovingian royalty, which makes a commission more likely.

We do not know when Ultrogotha and her daughters died but other than their brief appearance in his panegyric for Charibert, Fortunatus does not mention them again.¹³⁰ Other than Charibert, they were they only Merovingians for whom Fortunatus wrote only once. However, the pious generosity of Ultrogotha and her husband can be seen in other Merovingian sources, most notably the canons of the council of Orleans in 549, which confirmed the foundation of a *xenodochium* by the king and queen. The canons protected the royal gifts to the institution from being absorbed into the wealth of the church of Lyon, and anathematized anyone who interfered with its resources or stability.¹³¹

Although other contemporary sources allow us to call Ultrogotha, Theudechild, Chrodoswinth and Chrodoberga queens or princesses, Fortunatus does not call them by their royal titles in his poems. In Theudechild's case this is not a noticeable absence because of the consistent praise of her ancestry but it is a striking

¹²⁷ George, *Personal and Political Poems*, 51 n.108.

¹²⁸ Carm.6.6.23-4

¹²⁹ Judith W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 101-5.

¹³⁰ The panegyric for Charibert is discussed in Chapter 4.

¹³¹ See Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 105. Council of Orleans (549), 15.

omission for Ultrogotha and her daughters. For widowed or single Merovingian women, their royal status and access to power depended on their continued connections to royal men. Nevertheless they retained the ability to offer charity and cultural patronage in their own right.

4. Sigibert I

Fortunatus' other poems on the subject of royal building projects support the argument that these were not independent acts of sponsorship but instead involved ecclesiastical and family collaboration, with the commission of a poem to mark the occasion suggesting an intended audience of God and subjects. In *Carm.*2.16, Fortunatus recounts the miracles of St Medard. Although longer than his usual occasional verse—excluding his writings about Martin, it is his longest narrative hagiographic poem, it was written for an occasion, most likely the consecration of a church dedicated to Medard.¹³² It was also written fairly early in Fortunatus' career in Gaul: Medard of Noyon died c.557/560, and the poem probably predates the composition of the *VSM*, which was written between 573 and 576. Recent work by Monique Goulet and others has made a convincing case for Fortunatus' authorship of the prose life of Medard.¹³³

Throughout the poem, Medard is addressed in the second person, which lends the poem a hymnic quality. Fortunatus did not make such extended use of the second person again, and the poem may be something of experiment.¹³⁴ It is not until the end of that the foundation and founder are mentioned at all:

In your temple Sigibert worships with a very great love,
Pursuing the work and eager with love for you.
Watch over the heights which lead the temple on high,
Protect by your merits he who gave roofs to you.
Bearing these few works, o pious one, I Fortunatus with love (165)
Ask your help, grant my prayers, I beg.¹³⁵

¹³² Reydellet I, p. 192, n. 108.

¹³³ Monique Goulet, 'Le poème *De sancto Medardo* et *La Vie en prose de saint Médard*: analyse textométrique comparée', at *Écriture italienne, écriture gauloise: Regards croisés sur l'œuvre hagiographique en prose de Venance Fortunat* (Rome, 2016).

¹³⁴ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, p. 181.

¹³⁵ *Carm.*2.16.161-6. In tua templa colit nimio Sigibercthus amore, / insistens operi promptus amore tui. / Culmina custodi qui templum in culmine duxit, / protege pro meritis qui tibi tecta dedit. / Haec, pie, pauca ferens ego Fortunatus amore / auxilium posco, da mihi uota, precor.

As Roberts notes, and as we can see from comparison with the church-building poems discussed earlier, this is far less prominence than is given to most builder-honourees.¹³⁶ The poem is also similar to Fortunatus' only other piece in elegiac couplets on the subject of miracles: *Carm.*10.6, a set of *tituli* for the cathedral of Tours. In both Reydellet's and Leo's editions, these have titles; most are four lines long, but two of the seven are ten lines long. Leo prints *Carm.*2.16, without divisions; Reydellet gives each miracle a title in parentheses, and spaces them out.

Although three of these are short poems in themselves there is no reason they might not have been *tituli* themselves, painted, engraved, or displayed in mosaic in the church. A *titulus* eighteen lines long might seem unlikely, but the *Martinellus* contains a twenty-six line *titulus* and one that is sixteen lines long. Many of the epigrams in this collection of material related to the cult of Saint Martin are eight to ten lines in length.¹³⁷ The rest of Fortunatus' miracle descriptions are ten lines long, which the poem for Gregory would suggest is an acceptable length for *tituli*. Given that both poems are comprised of short, vivid descriptions of different miracles, I suggest that *Carm.*2.16 may reflect a programme of illustration within in the church in a similar way to *Carm.*10.6, even if the status of its components as *tituli* is not as clear as in the later poem.

Fortunatus' church poems should set alongside the wealth of surviving inscriptions from late antique Gaul, particularly those of Rusticus of Narbonne, who put up a number of inscriptions dating and claiming responsibility for building projects during his episcopate. In the largest of these, his reconstruction of the cathedral of Narbonne, a single line on the cornice records the date, followed by four columns on the lintel on which Rusticus advertises his genealogy, *cursus honorum*, and details of the project.¹³⁸ Some idea of the appropriate length of church poems can also be gleaned from the *Martinellus*, a miscellaneous collection of Martinian works that circulated with some early medieval manuscripts of Sulpicius Severus.

¹³⁶ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, p. 181.

¹³⁷ See Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*, pp. 310-7.

¹³⁸ *Carm.*2.16.105-123, about a crippled woman restored to soundness; *Carm.*2.16.139-156, about a blind man who regained his sight. *Carm.*2.16.77-92, about a man miraculously freed from chains, is also on the lengthy side. Amid a large bibliography on Rusticus of Narbonne see Denis Trout, 'Inscribing Identity: The Latin Epigraphic Habit in Late Antiquity', in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. by Philip Rousseau (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 170-86 (pp. 181-2) and Henri-Irénée Marrou, 'Le dossier épigraphique de l'évêque Rusticus de Narbonne,' *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* (1970), 331-49.

This material includes a description of Martin's church and exhortations to attend the saint's festivals in the church, a creed attributed to Martin, excerpts from Paulinus of Périgueux and Gregory of Tours, and later medieval accounts of the saint's miracles. Van Dam suggests that description and exhortation were actual inscriptions in the cathedral of Tours, which Gregory drew on in his writings. The collection also includes a set of poems and epigrams about Martin's cult, which were found in Martin's church in Tours and his monastery at Marmoutier. Some of these were commissioned by Perpetuus of Tours. One of the poems specifically refers to the fact that it was engraved and a fragment of another have been found, which suggests that the poems were probably engraved, rather than set in mosaic or painted.¹³⁹

Fortunatus attributes the construction of the church to Sigibert, who as founder may have also had input into its decoration. Only reading Fortunatus' poem, it would appear that Sigibert was the sole Merovingian to contribute to the church. In fact, Gregory of Tours attributed the start of the construction of a church for Medard in Soissons to Chlothar I, who also gave the saint a lavish funeral. Sigibert, Gregory claimed, was responsible for completing and embellishing the church.¹⁴⁰ Koebner suggested that the poem may have been commissioned for recitation on the occasion of the church's dedication.¹⁴¹ Unlike Fortunatus' other church poems, this poem pays relatively little attention to the founder; it seems more designed to promote Medard's cult and miracles, a boost which may have been necessary given that he was a relatively recent saint. Ultimately, Fortunatus offered his 'few words' (*pauca*) not to the king who may have commissioned them, but to Medard, a gift through which he sought the saint's prayers and help.

Fortunatus' few poems about the royal building projects have not been subject to the same level of study as have his larger-scale panegyric poems. They are in many ways similar to his poems in honour of aristocratic patrons, particular with

¹³⁹ A selection of the Martinellus has been translated into English with an excellent introduction by Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, pp. 308-17, and it is also discussed briefly in Trout, 'Inscribing Identity', p. 183. Meinolf Vielberg expands the term Martinellus from its usual meaning (a collection of Martinian poetry and prose which circulated with Sulpicius Severus' writings) to the entire corpus of material written about Martin during the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries and discusses the literary interrelationship between the various texts. Meinolf Vielberg, *Der Mönchsbischof von Tours im 'Martinellus'* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006).

¹⁴⁰ DLH IV.19

¹⁴¹ Koebner, pp. 20-1.

regard to pious giving and donations by women. Queens and princesses could be generous on their own account, but when it came to building churches, women worked in tandem with bishops or their husbands. This is not because the poet did not believe women could not be independent donors, as Fortunatus' depiction of the generosity of royal women shows, but because, as is clearly shown by his poems about Leontius of Bordeaux, individual acts of generosity reflected on the wealth and resources of particular families.

Aristocratic Building Projects

As in royal building projects, collaboration was also a feature of aristocratic euergetism: the two poems Fortunatus wrote about aristocratic donors feature couples and families. The joint efforts of Basil and Baudegund provide further insight into collaborative construction projects and language of repayment. In this poem Fortunatus mentions nothing about them other than their names, and the unanimity of their decision to renew and restore 'the ancient work',¹⁴² although he also wrote an epitaph of Basil which notes his generosity to churches.¹⁴³

Their poem is one of the shorter poems in honour of a building project at only twelve lines long; it is included in a sequence of poems about churches dedicated to St Martin. Meyer thought that the couple was from Poitiers and suggests that this church was near there.¹⁴⁴ In this poem Fortunatus mentions nothing about them other than their names, and the unanimity of their decision to renovate and restore 'the ancient work'.¹⁴⁵ Most of the poem is devoted to describing the topography of the site. Although there is a hill in the way, flowing water shows where the building should be. The poem indicated that this is a man-made rather than natural waterway: 'So that the roving water might serve the heavenly house / A new art supplies the ancient waters with their courses'.¹⁴⁶ Evidently, the local aqueduct had broken, but the church of St Martin withstood the

¹⁴² hoc renovans priscum reddit et auget opus. Carm.1.7.8

¹⁴³ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, pp. 26-7 and 167. The epitaph is Carm.4.18.

¹⁴⁴ Meyer proposed that the church in question is St Martin-la-Rivière, near Morthemmer. Wilhelm Meyer, *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus* (Berlin: Weidmannscheibuchhandlung, 1901), p. 74.

¹⁴⁵ See above.

¹⁴⁶ Vt famularetur domui uaga lympha supernae / cursibus antiquas ars noua subdit aquas. Carm.1.7.5-6.

flood, causing a local family to rebuild church and water-work. The opening lines of the poem mention a flood, so one possible interpretation is that the local aqueduct had broken, causing a local family to rebuild church and water-work. The juxtaposition of church and aqueduct makes sense when one considers the evidence of a homily for the dedication of a church preached by Avitus of Vienne, who noted that water for baptisteries was brought to the building via an aqueduct supported by columns.¹⁴⁷

Basil and Baudegund's sponsorship enhances the glory of St Martin, whom Fortunatus asks to respond favourably. 'Placated with such services, O highest priest, / You see their prayers, o kind one, give back in return.'¹⁴⁸ In this context the word 'officium' has a double meaning, as Fortunatus could be referring both to the services which Basil and Baudegund have rendered to the saint in rebuilding the church, and to the ecclesiastical offices taking place there. Once again Fortunatus introduced the idea of exchange and repayment between donors and saint as the means of establishing a relationship between them. The phrase 'give back repayment', occurs in related forms throughout his work, usually in the context of the bonds between friends, patrons, or people and saints.¹⁴⁹ In his epitaph for Basil, commissioned by Baudegund, Fortunatus makes it even clearer what Basil would receive in exchange for patronage of buildings and pious charity: 'Enriching churches, decently honouring holy places / presenting wealth to the poor he ascends to the stars.'¹⁵⁰

Although Fortunatus' epitaph also notes that Basil had plenty of money and did not steal, on his own behalf or anyone else's, it is impossible to say anything concrete about the amount of money he and his wife devoted to pious giving.¹⁵¹ We do not know, and have no way to know what sort of craftsmen they needed to hire or

¹⁴⁷ Wood, 'The Audience of Architecture in Post-Roman Gaul', p. 75. Though Christian patronage of aqueducts is sparsely evidenced, there are parallels in Ostrogothic Italy and Carolingian Francia. For these see Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, pp. 144-6 and La Rocca, *Mores tuos fabricate loquuntur*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁸ Talibus officiis pacatus, opime sacerdos / quorum uota uides, redde benigne uicem. Carm. 1.7.11-12.

¹⁴⁹ With friends/patrons, see Carm.5.5.146, 7.25.18, 9.7.71; 9.12.9; 9.13.10.

¹⁵⁰ Ecclesias ditans, loca sancta decenter honorans, / pauperibus tribuens diues ad astra subit. Carm.4.18.19-20.

¹⁵¹ Fortunatus' comment about Basil's honesty is curious, and not paralleled by other comments in his epitaphs. He may have referred to an episode from Basil's official career, the details of which are obscure to us. Another possibility is that Basil's family objected to his expenditure of family resources on church building and regarded his donations as theft.

how much they were paid; nor can we make any sort of guess as to the total cost of their basilica for St Martin. We can speak in relative terms: members of the Merovingian royal families, and aristocratic bishops of important sees such as Tours, Nantes, or Bordeaux, would have had a larger pool of resources from which to draw for donations and construction projects.

A poem Fortunatus wrote for Launebod, *dux* of Toulouse, and his wife Berthetrude, who built a church in honour of Saint Saturnin, demonstrates the poet's emphasis on the resources for pious projects coming from the decisions and wealth of families. The poem opens with an introduction to Fortunatus' concerns in writing about Saturnin: he worries that it takes a capable man to describe the actions of the great, but to be silent is to support sin; he also hopes those who read about great deeds will be inspired and desire to do better themselves. He then briefly describes Saturnin's martyrdom, a topic which is treated at greater length in his hagiographical poem, Carm.2.7. Both the poems were quite likely commissioned as a pair for the occasion of the church's dedication.

There had been no church on the site of Saturnin's martyrdom until Launebod and his wife Berthetrude built one. In his hagiographical poem, Fortunatus states that Saturnin was involved in the Christianisation of the area around Toulouse, and was martyred by pagan locals incensed by his preaching. If Saturnin was martyred under Decius, as his *Passio* claims, this would imply a gap of a few centuries before the first church was built on the site of his martyrdom. However, our earliest evidence of Saturnin's cult is from the fifth and sixth centuries. The *Passio*, recently reedited, has been dated to the second decade of the fifth century, or to the sixth century. This text describes the foundation of a basilica of Saturnin under the fourth century bishop of Toulouse, Hilarius, and the fifth century bishops Silvius and Exuperius (405-411).¹⁵² Excavations at the Place Esquirol located the probable site of the *capitolium* of late Roman Toulouse, where antique sources unanimously situated Saturnin's ordeal. Excavations in 1992

¹⁵² *Topographie Chrétienne des cités de la Gaule: des origines au milieu du VIIIe siècle quarante ans d'enquête, 1972-2012*, ed. by Françoise Prévot, Michèle Gaillard, and Nancy Gauthier, Topographie Chrétienne XVI.1 (Paris: De Boccard, 2014), p. 275; and *Topographie chrétienne des cités de la Gaule: des origines au milieu du VIIIe siècle, Christianisation et espace urbain: atlas, tableaux, index*, ed. by Françoise Prévot, Michèle Gaillard, and Nancy Gauthier, Topographie Chrétienne XVI.2 (Paris: De Boccard, 2014), p. 667. On this basilica see also Jean Rocacher, 'Toulouse: Martyrium de saint Saturnin a Saint-Sernin', in Noël Duval, 'Les Premiers Monuments Chrétiens de la France', vol. 2 (Paris: Picard, 1995-1998), pp. 197-9. On both the basilica and the martyrium see Vieillard-Troiekouff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule*, pp. 298-300.

unearthed a marble pavement aligned with the temple steps. At the foot of the steps, to the east of this movement, was a fifth-century grave containing a human cranium. The excavators suggested it was a possible lieu de memoire of Saturnin's sufferings antedating Launebod and Berthetrude, and point to medieval depictions of the saint's skull sitting on the temple steps.¹⁵³ Additional excavation in 2004-2005 discovered the levelled podium of a temple, where rebuilding work radiocarbon dated to the end of the sixth century had taken place, very possibly the work commissioned by Launebod and his wife. A further clue to the location and is existence of their church is provided by evidence of a medieval church dating from at least the twelfth century, now demolished, which stood on the site of the *capitolium* and had an early dedication to Peter and Saturnin.¹⁵⁴

The poem has typically been discussed in the context of its reference to Launebod's barbarian ancestry. 'Because no-one coming from the Roman people built (it),/This man of barbarian descent completed the work'.¹⁵⁵ Buchberger detects a tone of 'definite chastisement', arguing that the poet 'used the opportunity to praise Launebod and his wife for their nobility and generosity to the church, but also to rebuke the local Romans for not completing the task themselves.'¹⁵⁶ It is right to see praise of Roman euergetism carried out by a barbarian as a component of Fortunatus' encomiastic strategy in this poem, but I argue that the poet instead focuses on praising Launebod and Berthetrude as model of Christian nobility which could be pursued by upper-class barbarians and Romans alike.

Fortunatus uses Berthetrude as his first example of this, describing her as *clara decore / pectore quae blando clarior ipsa nitet*. As we will see in chapter 3, light imagery is one of his favourite strategies for praising aristocratic women. Conventionally, upper-class women were praised for their beauty but for Christian women such praise made it clear that external appearance was a sign of their even greater spiritual beauty. Praise of ancestry was also an option for a noblewoman; Berthetrude was from a *genus egregium fulget de stirpe potentium*.¹⁵⁷ Fortunatus

¹⁵³ *Topographie Chrétienne* XVI.1, p. 277. See Jean-Luc Bourdardchouk, 'Le Capitolium de Toulouse, L'église Saint-Pierre et Saint Géraud, et le martyr de l'évêque Saturnin: Nouvelles Données', *Mémoires de la société archéologique du Midi de la France*, 65 (2005), pp. 15-50.

¹⁵⁴ Prévot, Gaillard, and Gauthier, eds., *Topographie Chrétienne* XVI.1, pp. 276-7.

¹⁵⁵ Quod nullus ueniens romana gente fabriuit, / hoc uir barbarica prole peregit opus Carm.2.8.23-4, *Reydellet I*, p. 62.

¹⁵⁶ Buchberger, 'Romans, Barbarians, and Franks', 300-1.

¹⁵⁷ Carm.2.8.27, *Reydellet I*, p. 62.

also uses the word *stirps* to describe the Roman roots of his friend Lupus of Champagne; Launebod is clearly described as barbarian, but Berthetrude's ethnicity is left unspecified.¹⁵⁸ Her noble character and ancestry are enhanced by her husband's devotion to God—the couple's identity as Christians clearly transcends both barbarian background and Roman public activity.

Berthetrude undertakes a wide range of charitable activities herself: she feeds the poor with her hands, seeking spiritual food through this work. Her search for opportunities to carry out pious work is indefatigable, and she clothes the naked, refreshes the thirsty, by which she in turn sates herself at the eternal fountain. Her anxious prayers ensure that her activity is of benefit to her husband as well, and Fortunatus leaves his audience in no doubt of his subject's nobility, among his own people and within Merovingian society more widely *Dux meritis in gente sua qui pollet opimis, / celsus ubique micans nobilitatis ope*.¹⁵⁹ Launebod's noble heritage led to his high position, but because of his religion he outshone his ancestors, a sentiment found in other late antique poetry praising the nobility of barbarians.¹⁶⁰

Emphasis on the church as a joint pious project comes in the last two lines, in which Fortunatus emphasises their status as couple, 'May they remain joined in the world by an equal vow, / and may a stronger love glitter for them both.'¹⁶¹ The poet also wished joy and longevity in marriage for other couples and expressed the idea that their virtue in marriage would lead to the same heavenly reward for both partners in other poems.¹⁶² Sponsorship of a new church, particularly one at an important cult site where one had had not stood before, was one way for an aristocratic couple built for a future in heaven and earn praise and good repute on earth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued that aristocratic, royal, and episcopal church-building has to be seen within a context of social display, as well as piety and

¹⁵⁸ Carm.7.7.45-6, Reydellet II, p. 95.

¹⁵⁹ Carm.2.8.37-8.

¹⁶⁰ EA 23

¹⁶¹ Ergo pari uoto maneat in saecula iuncti / et micet ambobus consolidatus amor. Carm.II.8.41-2.

¹⁶² This thesis discusses in particular, Carm.VII.6 and Carm.VI.1a.

concerns over the appropriate use of wealth. The construction and dedication of churches were both religious and social occasions, at which the clergy and clients, friends and family, would gather. As Fortunatus' poems demonstrate, to display the use of one's wealth in a pious and socially approved manner was to store up treasure in heaven and praise on earth.

This chapter has focused primarily on Leontius of Bordeaux because of the predominant position he holds in book one: eleven out of its twenty-one poems about are about his building projects, and two of the twenty-one poems are large-scale praise poems in which his edifices are celebrated. Leontius clearly wished to be remembered a patron of architecture and Fortunatus celebrated him as such. The poet also presents Leontius, and the other builder he writes about, as successfully establishing relationships with the saints for whom they built their churches. In exchange for pious building, founders obtained the protection and affection of the great men of heaven.

In building churches, bishops, royalty, and aristocrats also successfully exercised their patronal responsibilities towards their communities. For a Merovingian bishop, providing local communities with churches was one of the ways in which he fulfilled his role as a good pastor to his flock. Except on a handful of occasions, Fortunatus does not show episcopal building as a service to the bishop's flock, but depicts the relationship between the bishop and God as the foundation of episcopal authority. Builders, episcopal and lay, retained their *Romanitas* through maintaining old traditions of construction in their localities, but their euergetism was a new purpose, and Fortunatus' work reflects in its ideas of exchange and repayment. In the case of the royal and aristocratic patrons we have discussed, church-building and restoration was one of the ways in which laypeople could show their piety before God, attract the love and patronage of His saints, and demonstrate their wealth and righteousness to their neighbours.

Chapter 3, Patronage, Friendship, and Gender

Introduction

This chapter examines Merovingian women's relationships of patronage and friendship. It focuses particularly on the poet's writings to Radegund, former queen and founder of the convent of the Holy Cross, and Agnes, her adopted daughter and the first abbess of the community. The poet calls neither of these women patrons, nor does he ever call them friends, yet the poems evoke an intimacy and closeness which has fascinated scholars for hundreds of years. The poet wrote fifty-five surviving poems to Radegund and Agnes; the women form a second centre of gravity in the collection, aside from Gregory of Tours for whom he wrote over thirty poems.¹ Twenty-one of the poems for Radegund and Agnes are found in the so-called Appendix, which had a limited survival compared to the rest of the poet's works. However, the women are present in the eleven books of poetry—they are mentioned as sending or receiving greetings alongside the poet in thirteen additional poems and letters.²

This chapter first traces Fortunatus' inheritance of classical and late antique thought about friendship with women. His poems for aristocratic women, Placidina, the wife of bishop Leontius of Bordeaux, and Palatina, show that Fortunatus kept within this tradition. The next sections of the chapter focus on the ways in which Fortunatus developed the Christian tradition of friendship. An analysis of the Rule of Caesarius, under which Radegund and Agnes lived, demonstrates that their liberal interpretation of the rule allowed them to seize chances for patronage and friendship. One of these chances came through Radegund's passion for relic collecting, which required the commissioning of three major poems, *Carm.App.1.*, 2, and 3, in an effort to obtain a piece of the True Cross. Although the poems have been attributed to Radegund, analysis of their manuscript transmission demonstrates that they are in

¹ *Carm.8.2-10*, *Carm.11.2-25* (*Carm.11.26* is most likely addressed to Radegund—it describes a winter-time journey the poet took, which does not seem to match the title of the poem given in the capitula, which is *de oratorio Piliacensi*). *Carm.App.10-31*. Radegund appears in poems where she is not the addressee, notably *Carm.8.1*, and Fortunatus' letters sometimes pass on her greetings.

² The numbers are from Michael Roberts, 'Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours: Poetry and Patronage', in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Alexander C. Murray (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 35-59 (p. 35).

fact by Fortunatus and I argue that they are evidence of Radegund's standing as a literary patron. In the final section, I examine the shorter poems of friendship Fortunatus sent Radegund and Agnes in order to prove that the ascetic way of the life the women practiced still permitted them to enjoy the exchange of letters and gifts which were a hallmark of late antique friendship.

Fortunatus' friendships with women can be placed into a wider context of early medieval friendships. In her study of friendship, Adele Fiske suggested that Fortunatus' relationship with Radegund and Agnes can be compared to Jerome's relationships with women.³ Another fruitful comparison is Alcuin and Boniface's friendships with religious women. Eangyth's letter to Boniface, written between 719 and 722, provides a rare example of a woman making sustained use of the word *amicus*, as well as one of our only early medieval definitions of friendship. Eangyth and Bugga describe Boniface as their *amicum fidelem*, in whom the women can confide their troubles and seek support.⁴ Their understanding of friendship has a distinctly late antique cast, particularly the question: 'what is sweeter, than to have a person, with whom you can speak of all things, as (we do) with you?'⁵ The idea that a friend is one in whom one can confide as in oneself was a staple of classical *amicitia*, as was the praise of a friend's eloquence: 'in order to seek a friend, faithful and of such a kind, in whom we can trust better than in our own selves; who might regard our sorrows as his own sufferings and needs, who might both have compassion on us and console us, support us with his eloquence and lift us up with salutary speech'.⁶ The uplifting effects of salutary conversation and Boniface's care for their pain, misery, and poverty fit with ancient concepts of friendship as well, while also having a distinctly Christian cast. The letter ends with the proverb:

³ Fiske, *Friendship*, pp. 185-6.

⁴The women describe the burden of their worldly cares and distractions, compounded by the loss of friends (*amicorum*), tribesmen/people from the same region (*contribulium*), relatives *propinquorum*, and kinsmen *consanguineorum*. MGH Ep.3, 262. The terminology of kinship and friendship in the letter is varied and would repay further investigation. Eangyth and Bugga *necessariis nostris et cognatis sive alienis* who have gone on pilgrimage to Rome, and commend to Boniface the bearer of the letter, *necessarium amicum nostrum*. See Lisa M.C. Weston, 'Where Textual Bodies Meet: Anglo-Saxon Women's Epistolary Friendships', in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. by Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2011), pp. 231-46.

⁵ MGH Ep.3, 262 *quid dulcis est, quam habeas illum, cum quo omnia possis loqui ut tecum?*

⁶ MGH Ep.3, 262. *ut quaeremus amicum fidelem et talem, in quem confidamus melius quam in nosmet ipsos; qui dolores nostros et miserias et paupertates suas deputaret et conpatiens nobis fuisset et consolaret nos et sustentaret eloquiis suis et saluberrimis sermonibus sublevaret.*

Amicus diu quaeritur, vix inventitur, difficile servatur, which is found in one of Jerome's letters, and quoted often by Alcuin.⁷

Contrary to Jerome's proverbial pessimism, in Fortunatus, Radegund did not have long to seek to find a long-lasting, loyal friend. Perhaps, as Epp suggests, his patrons Brunhild and Sigibert recommended him to Radegund as an advisor and secretary.⁸ However, Fortunatus' poetry and hagiography reveal nothing about his official role at the convent and it is important not to forget that our view of their relationship is only ever from his perspective as an educated, upper-class, Christian poet and priest. From Agnes we have no surviving writings of any kind and from Radegund only a single letter survives. Recent scholarship has challenged Fortunatus' authorship of several poems long thought to be written on Radegund's behalf. These arguments, and the former queen's role as a literary patron, will be discussed in further detail later on in this chapter. I argue that the patronage and friendship of women was central to Fortunatus' career and that even from behind convent walls, powerful women had the opportunity to make and maintain these relationships.

Could Women Have Friends?

At the outset, it is important to note the linguistic problems inherent in discussing patronage and friendship between men and women. Fortunatus never calls Radegund, Agnes, or his other female addressees *amica*, since this would have connoted a sexual relationship, but in many ways the relationship between them looks like a friendship. Yet here more than ever, it is important to pay attention to language and the contexts in which it was used. Ancient philosophers had denied the possibility of friendships between men and women. Christian authors thought mixed-sex friendship should be kept strictly within families: a Christian man could be friends with a woman who was his mother, daughter, or sister.⁹ Fortunatus, who had no family in Gaul, used language of spiritual kinship with Radegund and Agnes. This strategy was unique to them: in other cases, he addressed female friends and

⁷ MGH Ep. 3, 264. The letter is Jerome Ep. 3. 'A friend is long to seek, hard to find, difficult to keep'

⁸ Epp, *Amicitia*, p. 75.

⁹ Epp, *Amicitia*, p. 114.

patrons jointly with their husbands using imagery of light found also in late antique praise of women.

Classical friendship had personal elements but was both a public and private relationship.¹⁰ In the essay, 'Patronage: relation and system' Johnson and Dandeker argue that patronage operated at a relational and systemic level. This thought can be extended in terms of gender, patronage, and the Merovingian kingdoms: women's patronage on the relational level could not be discussed in the same language as men's, and on the systemic level, only the patronal actions of the highest-born and most powerful women left traces in our sources. As Kate Cooper notes, Roman noblewomen 'had the wherewithal to act as powerful literary patrons' due to their wealth and book ownership.¹¹ They served as patrons of culture as well—in Yitzhak Hen's definition, this is not just commissioning or requesting works, but applies more generally to fostering an environment in which literary or artistic creativity could occur. Offering patronage was 'an investment and people patronise because they expect a return, either spiritual or temporal.'¹² For Radegund and other aristocratic women, engagement with the Latin Christian literary tradition was a way to publicise their power, status, and learning.

In his study on monastic friendship, Brian McGuire argued that in the early Middle Ages '*amicitia* remained, in spite of social reality [the importance of spiritual friendships between men and women], a matter for men alone. In this area as in so many others, classical Roman attitudes passed into a medieval framework.'¹³ This perception of social norms has allowed female friendships to exist in something of a blind spot. In their introduction to *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge note that female friendship in the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds still remains largely uncharted territory—for the Middle Ages, no theoretical treatises focus women's friendships, and it seems there is no Latin or vernacular literature on the topic. The

¹⁰ Benjamin Fiore, 'The Theory and Practice of Friendship in Cicero', in *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship*, ed. by John T. Fitzgerald (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Publishing, 1997), pp. 59-76 (p. 59).

¹¹ Kate Cooper, 'Poverty, Obligation, and Inheritance: Roman Heiresses and the Varieties of Senatorial Christianity in Fifth-Century Rome', in *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-900*, ed. by Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 165-89 (p. 188).

¹² Yitzhak Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald (877)* (London; Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press, 2001), p. 17.

¹³ Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship & Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250* (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1988), p. 90.

writings of female mystics and monastic communities may provide a place to start.¹⁴ As David Konstan suggests, one consequence of the Christianisation of the language of friendship—‘the displacement of *amicitia* by *caritas* in Christian texts was a willingness to exploit the terminology of love or *amor* in amicable contexts quite foreign to classical usage.’¹⁵ Fortunatus’ poems to Radegund and Agnes are an early example of this. The writings to these aristocratic, monastic women suggest the future directions of friendship.¹⁶

Evidence of female friendships and connections, though largely limited to women in religious life, can be found in late antique and early medieval letters. Although women are not the predominant focus of surviving letters and letter collections, they do matter and are mentioned in various ways.¹⁷ Several letters by women survive, including a variously dated late antique letter between two anonymous women, preserved in Codex Sangallensis 190. The letter contains a rich array of scriptural allusions and a discussion of virginity and hints at the existence of female literary circles now lost to us.¹⁸ Fortunatus’ poems hint towards the existence of a literary community between Radegund, Agnes, and Fortunatus.

Is this evidence unique? Fortunatus’ relationships of friendship and patronage with women have often been seen as completely separate from his connections to men. ‘As a matter of course he distinguished his devotion to these two extraordinary women from what he felt for his male friends.’¹⁹ McGuire attributes Fortunatus’ friendship with Radegund and Agnes to emotional needs: with male aristocratic friends and church officials, Fortunatus could ‘play the literary man...but for [him] the commerce of friendship for pleasure and literary recognition was not enough.’²⁰ Thus he became friends with Radegund and Agnes and his poetry altered: ‘What had earlier been dainty products for appropriate occasions

¹⁴ Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge, *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), p. 47 and 81.

¹⁵ David Konstan, ‘Problems in the History of Christian Friendship’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 4 (1996), 106 n.50.

¹⁶ McGuire, *Friendship & Community*, p. 102.

¹⁷ Ian Wood, ‘Family and Friendship in the West’, in *Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, AD 425-600*, ed. by Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 416-36 (pp. 423-4).

¹⁸ On the various arguments for the dating of this letter, see Ralph W. Mathisen, *People, Personal Expression, and Social Relations in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 130. The letter is edited in MGH Epi 3: 316-18 and preserved in Codex Sangallensis 190.

¹⁹ McGuire, *Friendship & Community*, p. 99

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 98.

became memorable expressions of sharing in a world of flowers, gifts, sympathy, understanding, and affection.²¹ Though the poems Fortunatus wrote for male and female addressees are demonstrably different, there are better reasons for this than emotional fulfilment and artistic integrity. Even as some avenues of thought and language were in classical times closed to female friends and patrons because of their gender, the power and status of aristocratic made them worth approaching in their own right.

Women outside the Cloister: Context and Comparison

By sheer weight of numbers, the poet's friendships and patronal relationships, with the extraordinary exceptions of Radegund and Agnes, comprised a world of men. When women were mentioned, it was almost always in relation to their husbands or families. Within these boundaries, Fortunatus' task when he wrote to a female addressee was much the same as writing to a man: 'the celebration of the subject of the work.'²² Fortunatus addressed poems to three aristocratic women: Palatina, the wife of the *dux* Bodegiselus and Placidina, wife of Leontius, bishop of Bordeaux.²³ His poem for Palatina contextualises her in relation to her husband and father, while making use of light imagery to praise her beauty and character. He employs similarly imagery to describe the ancestry of the *episcopa* Placidina, who acted as a patron of Christian building projects jointly with her husband Leontius and commissioned his epitaph. Several other women also commissioned relatives' epitaphs from the poet: Frigia, who secured her husband's burial in Francia after he died in Italy, Nicasia, who commissioned an epitaph for her husband Orientius, and Evantia, who commissioned an epitaph for her son-in-law, Hilary.²⁴ Fortunatus also wrote four epitaphs about women, all found at the end of his book of epitaphs.²⁵

²¹ Ibid.

²² Roberts, *Sparrow*, p. 9.

²³ He also addressed the noblewoman Baudegund, jointly with her husband, Basilius; this poem is discussed in Chapter 2.

²⁴ Roberts, *Sparrow*, p. 15. *Carm.*4.20, 4.24, and 4.12. Placidia commissioned an epitaph for Leontius (*Carm.*4.10).

²⁵ *Carm.*4.25, The epitaph of Queen Theudechild; *Carm.*4.26, an unusually long epitaph/*consolatio* about Vilithuta, a young Frankish noblewoman; *Carm.*4.27, about Eufrasia, the widow of a priest of Vienne; *Carm.*4.28, about a virgin named Eusebia.

The praise of women required a particular set of strategies. In particular, Fortunatus used light imagery as a strategy of praising female addressees. Late antique Christian writers with a rhetorical education had an embarrassment of riches from which to draw imagery of light: from philosophical theories of intellectual cognition, to imperial panegyric, to Christian scripture, theology, and hagiography. Praising the luminous quality of a woman's ancestry, appearance, or behaviour created an acceptable space for public praise and formed part of Fortunatus' strategies of panegyric praise.

Previous scholarship on imagery of light in Fortunatus' work has largely focused on his poems in praise of important churchmen and their building projects, or his panegyrics in honour of royalty. Both Judith George and Geneviève Bührer-Thierry divide Fortunatus' use of light imagery into two registers: a celestial light which comes from Christ and is disseminated through the apostles, and a terrestrial light characteristic of kings and emperors.²⁶ Michael Roberts analyses Fortunatus' use of light imagery in his descriptions of churches, paying special attention to the building's ability trap light, its construction or decoration, and its founder.²⁷ Imagery of light is also ubiquitous in descriptions of heaven and references to individual saints. Holy and distinguished men (and women) shone in the world by means of their merits.²⁸

Praise of merit was one of Fortunatus' most frequent subjects. As ancient authors from ranging from Lucian to Augustine expressed 'unease about the ethics of praise,'²⁹ so too have more recent authorities distrusted Fortunatus' tendency towards panegyric. There is no positive sense to the idea of a 'courtly flatterer', let alone a venal one, and Koebner among many others accused Fortunatus of being excessive in his flattery.³⁰ Fortunatus is still sometimes described as writing to

²⁶ Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, 'Lumière et pouvoir dans en haut Moyen Âge occidental: célébration du pouvoir et métaphores lumineuses', in *La Sicile à l'époque Islamique: questions de méthode et renouvellement récent des problématiques*, ed. by Alessandra Molinari and Annliese Nef (Rome École française de Rome, 2004), pp. 521-56 (p. 542).

²⁷ Roberts, *Sparrow*, p. 65-9.

²⁸ A line that occurs more than once. See for example, 3.15.10, to Egidius of Rheims.

²⁹ Roger Rees, 'Panegyric', in *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, ed. by William Dominik and Jon Hall (Malde, MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 136-48 (p. 136).

³⁰ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 4; see also Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1926), pp. 378-80.

flatter his addressees, though now largely without a sense of denunciation.³¹ Indeed, the importance of praise-poetry in his work is now widely acknowledged, as is his importance as a model for Carolingian and other medieval writers: writing in about 1140, Peter the Venerable included Fortunatus in a list of poets who were ‘masters of the panegyric style’.³² George argues that Fortunatus ably used panegyric to communicate and negotiate his way through the shoals of Merovingian political life.³³ Fortunatus was excluded from Claudia Schindler’s recent study of verse panegyric on the grounds that he wrote for a post-imperial audience; like the Carolingian poet Ermoldus Nigellus he harked back to the late antique tradition of verse panegyric but pursued ‘another literary style’.³⁴ But Fortunatus’ creative use of the late antique panegyric tradition deserves greater emphasis than Schindler gives it. Judith George includes even quite short poems in a generous definition of panegyric.³⁵ As Michael Roberts argues one of the poet’s greatest contributions to praise poetry is adapting the ‘traditions of panegyric description’ to epigrammatic poems, often written for a particular occasion, to a much smaller scale.³⁶

Fortunatus knew something of the verse of Claudian, Ausonius, and Sidonius, whose works served as models for his own praise-writing.³⁷ There is no indication he knew the writings of the fourth-century emperor Julian, author of one of the few late antique panegyrics for a woman, a *gratiarum actio* was written for the empress Eusebia in about 356 to thank her for a gift of books.³⁸ Nearly two centuries later, Fortunatus was not troubled by Julian’s problems with praising women, namely accusations of flattery and the appropriateness of a female

³¹ Alicia McKenzie, ‘Model Rulers and Royal Misers: Public Morality among the Merovingian Aristocracy’, in *Poverty and Prosperity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Cynthia Kosso and Anne Scott (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 3-24 (p. 4).

³² Paul Prill, ‘Rhetoric and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages’, *Rhetorica*, 5 (1987), 134.

³³ Judith George, ‘Venantius Fortunatus Panegyric in Merovingian Gaul.’, in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Mary Whitby (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 225-46.

³⁴ Claudia Schindler, *Per carmina laudes: Untersuchungen zur spätantiken Verspanegyrik von Claudian bis Coripp* (Berlin de Gruyter, 2009), p. 4. For a similar view see Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 305-6. Reydellet argues that strictly speaking, Fortunatus did not write panegyric, but a new poetic form, the elegiac poem of praise.

³⁵ George, ‘Venantius Fortunatus Panegyric in Merovingian Gaul.’

³⁶ Roberts, *Sparrow*, p. 60.

³⁷ Roberts, *Sparrow*, pp. 320-1.

³⁸ Shaun Fitzroy Tougher, ‘In Praise of an Empress: Julian’s Speech of Thanks to Eusebia’, in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Mary Whitby (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 105-23 pp. 111-3).

benefactor. Indeed, as this chapter demonstrates, Latin Christian authors like Fortunatus had developed strategies to render patronage and friendship with women unproblematic, even though, as with Fortunatus' poems about his relationship with Agnes show, ambiguities could remain.

From the time he settled in Gaul, Fortunatus worked hard to make and maintain connections with the important people of his day. One such person was Palatina, the wife of the *dux* Bodegiselus and daughter of Bishop Gallomagnus of Troyes. Gregory of Tours knew her father, who he mentions had sought to obtain relics of Nicetius of Lyon.³⁹ Bodegiselus, her husband, is also described in favourable terms; when he died at an advanced age, his estate was handed now intact to his sons.⁴⁰ Gregory does not mention Palatina herself, and Fortunatus' poem is the sole text that mentions her. It is probable that Fortunatus knew her through her husband. Bodegiselus, who held office under Sigibert and was governor (*ductor*) in Marseilles and later in Germania, also received a poem from Fortunatus.⁴¹ The Provençal connection is worth pausing over. Fortunatus sought to make and maintain connections with several of the men who rotated in and out of the governorship of Marseilles—among them Jovinus, Albinus, and Dynamius, whom he probably met at wedding of Sigibert and Brunhild in 566. It is probable that this is where he met Bodegiselus and perhaps Palatina as well.

The density of light imagery in the poem for Palatina is significant: in the opening four lines of the poem her face is compared to the morning star, which rules the other stars. Palatina's own face is a source of light, so beautiful that lesser women make way as does the moon for the sun. This is not the only time Fortunatus uses this comparison—in a poem for Bishop Egidius of Rheims, he says that Egidius shines brighter than the morning star on account of his serene speech and piety. With such a comparison it is probable that Fortunatus is making more of a point about Palatina's good character than her good looks. In his comments on the poem, Evrard Delbey notes that this poem demonstrates how Christian elegiac writers

³⁹ VP.VIII.8.

⁴⁰ DLH VIII.22.

⁴¹ Wilhelm Meyer, *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus* (Berlin: Weidmannscheibuchhandlung, 1901), p. 43. On the relationship between these two poems, Meyer argues that the Palatina poem is a completely independent poem, presented on a different day but for the same occasion. By Germania, Fortunatus seems to mean the easternmost part of Austrasia.

inherited and transformed the motifs of classical erotic elegy.⁴² Palatina has the appearance of an elegiac heroine, but the roses and lilies of her complexion are also flowers associated with female sanctity.⁴³ The reference to spring flowers brings to mind the several times Fortunatus sent a bouquet and a poem to Radegund, as well as the returning fruitfulness of the landscape at Easter, and when Radegund returned from aesthetic retreat.⁴⁴

Perhaps significantly, there is no explicit praise of Palatina as a faithful Christian, though the praise for her ‘modest chaste sense’ and radiant wisdom would certainly suggest that this is implicit. The poem contains some panegyric elements, including a focus on the subject’s virtue and praise of her ancestry. The poet’s statement that ‘Rightly, the daughter of Gallus the Great is great herself / But the father increases in honour by his daughter’s merit.’⁴⁵ may also suggest a sense of spiritual excellence. As the daughter of a great bishop, Palatina inherits her father’s status; by possessing merit in her own right, she is a credit to her parent. However, Fortunatus spends fully half the poem praising the appearance of Palatina, a bishop’s daughter, in terms that hint at her virtuous merit, before emphasising that this is not what she should be known for. ‘It is pleasing to put forward, revered for your modest chaste sense / The splendour of your character is as great as that of your face.’⁴⁶

Returning to a more elegiac description Fortunatus notes that Palatina has charming manners, a pleasant way with words, and a musical speaking voice. Both Placidina and Palatina are described as an honour to their sex. In Palatina’s case, her radiance increases the lustre of her husband’s house and their home flourishes by her excellent management. Though the title of the poem—which may or may not be the one Fortunatus gave it—makes it clear that Palatina is married, one has to wait until the twenty-first line for her husband to appear. Despite the predominance of light imagery in the poem for Palatina, this appears in only two lines in the poem for her

⁴² Evrard Delbey, *Venance Fortunat ou l’enchantement du monde* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009).

⁴³ Roberts, *Sparrow*, p. 287. Michael Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow: The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), p. 287.

⁴⁴ *Carm.*8.6-8

⁴⁵ Iure quidem magna est quae est Galli filia Magni/ sed merito natae creuit honore pater. *Carm.*7.6.23-4.

⁴⁶ Grator incessu, sensu reuerenda pudico,/ talis in ingenio qualis in ore nitor. *Carm.*7.6.15-16.

husband, 'You have lights of heart by the shining lamp of your soul / And your crown glitters with eternal light.'⁴⁷

The poem for Bodegiselus focuses on his legal acumen, virtuous administration of justice, and care for his followers, for which he will earn his place in heaven. Fortunatus' poem for his wife plays on Bodegesilus' role as judge, suggesting that it is yet another sign of his good judgement that he chose so excellent a wife. Palatina is not mentioned in the poem for her husband but the final two lines seem to suggest that the entire poem has been written in honour of their marriage, for which the poet wishes joy and longevity.

Imagery of light is absent from the description of Palatina's ancestry, but Fortunatus uses it elsewhere to refer to the luminous lineage of Placidina, the wife of Leontius of Bordeaux, who was a descendant of the emperor Avitus. Fortunatus hastens to add that Placidina surpasses her noble birth through virtue and good habits, which cause her to glitter by day.⁴⁸ In his praise of Placidina, Fortunatus does not emphasise her physical appearance, possibly because this would not be appropriate for an imperial *episcopa* who lived in a chaste marriage. She is mentioned in the context of a poem to her husband, Leontius, the bishop of Bordeaux. She appears elsewhere in her husband's company, jointly restoring and furnishing churches.⁴⁹ Only once does Fortunatus address a poem to her in her own right: *Carm.*I.17, in which he asks her to accept *munera parva nimis*, noting that she herself is a *decens munus* who shines in the world. The gift is not specifically named but since Fortunatus refers to an island, and the action of wind and waves, the gift is often assumed to have been seashells, and the island Cordouan, near to one of the couple's villas.⁵⁰ Placidina's own abundant good fortune was itself the source of the little gifts attacked by the waters and found on land. Seashells were one of the suggestive gifts Roman poets gave their *puellae*⁵¹ and the echoes of this sit oddly with Fortunatus' portrait of a dignified, generous, blue-blooded bishop's wife. It is much more probable that the gift was of fish or shellfish, which fits the precedent of

⁴⁷ *Lumina cordis habes, animi radiante lucerna/ et tuus aeterna coruscat apex. (Carm.*VII.5.29-30)

⁴⁸ *Carm.*I.15.93-110.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 3.

⁵⁰ Pucci, *Friends*, pp. 3-4.

⁵¹ A. R. Sharrock, 'Womanaufacture', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 81 (1991), 44.

amicable late antique gift-giving and the pattern of Fortunatus' gifts to Radegund and Agnes.⁵²

Placidina was one of four women who commissioned the poet to write epitaphs of members of their families. Relatively few of Fortunatus' epitaphs name the commissioner of the text in their conclusion; women are named more often than men.⁵³ Scholars have argued that Fortunatus' poems were written for commemoration of the deceased, not inscription on his or her tombstone; the evidence for this point seems to be their length and literary sophistication, which makes them unlike surviving sepulchral inscriptions. These arguments do note the poet's use of epigraphic language.⁵⁴ Since these do not explain how a funerary epigram on papyrus or parchment would be useful to commemorate the memory and reputation of the dead, I argue that Fortunatus' epitaphs were painted or inscribed.

As with all of Fortunatus' epitaphs, we have no contextualising evidence of the compositions, although his patrons must have requested the works conveyed information about the deceased by letter, messenger, or in person. Placidina's presence in Leontius' epitaph is confined to the final two lines, 'The duty of burial, the solace of great love/ Sweet Placidina still gives to your ashes,'⁵⁵ but the poet notes that he is summoned (*uocor*) to write a funerary lament rather than a happier poem of greeting, which Roberts suggests can be stretched to refer to a commission. He argues that the length of the poem and its use of the first person both place it outside what was typical for inscriptions.⁵⁶ But twenty six lines is not excessively long and the recent discovery of fragments of the funerary epigram of Sidonius Apollinaris, previously thought to be preserved only in a medieval manuscript,

⁵² On the instances of piscatorial gifts in late antique letters, see Ian Wood, 'The Exchange of Gifts Amongst the Late Antique Aristocracy', in *El Disco De Teodosio*, ed. by Martín Almagro Gorbea (Madrid Real Academia de la Historia, 2002), pp. 301-14 (p. 302). See also Danuta Shanzer, 'Bishops, Letters, Fast, Food, and Feast in Later Roman Gaul', in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 217-36.

⁵³ *Carm.*4.23 was commissioned by the Johannes, the son of the merchant Julianus. Vilithuta's husband and father are named as grieving in her epitaph, but are not specifically mentioned as its commissioners.

⁵⁴ Roberts, *Sparrow*, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁵ *Funeris officium, magni solamen amoris,/ dulcis adhuc cineri dat Placidina tibi. Carm.*IV.25-6

⁵⁶ Roberts, *Sparrow*, pp. 16-7.

suggests we should not discount the possibility that Fortunatus' epitaphs were inscribed.⁵⁷

Fortunatus' other commissioned epitaphs were shorter than Leontius' and do not reveal any prior connections to the deceased. Hilary, a nobleman who became a priest after the death of his equally nobly-born wife, was commemorated by his mother-in-law, Evantia: 'Weeping about the dear duty of burial/ Evantia contributed sad tombs for her son-in-law'.⁵⁸ Though the poem's title refers to Hilary as a priest, only one line seems to refer directly to his status as a priest ('the love of God standing firm, there was not another love');⁵⁹ the next four lines emphasise Hilary's knowledge of law and his dispensal of even-handed justice, presumably the part of his career Evantia chose to highlight.

Frigia, the wife of a civil servant named Brumachius, plays an even more prominent role in the epitaph she commissioned. Her husband died whilst returning to Francia from Italy, where he had been a legate. Four out of its ten lines describe her arrangement of his burial out of love and her continued status as loving, faithful wife after his death.⁶⁰ Rather than simply putting up a marker, Fortunatus implies that she arranged for the return of his body and the construction of a tomb, which suggests she was not without resources and connections. Frigia's prominence within the text is unique. The one other wife of a palatine office, Nicasia, who commissioned an epitaph for her husband Orientius, also arranged her husband's burial.⁶¹ Unlike Frigia, she seems to have committed herself to religious life his death: 'Her chaste love honours her husband's tomb/ Not giving pleasure to man she gave herself to be God's'.⁶²

Although the presence of women in poetry of praise was contentious in late antiquity, by the sixth century public praise of a woman could be negotiated through the use of imagery of light. Such imagery was a way to honour a woman like Palatina, who stood out from Fortunatus' usual writing to Radegund and Agnes by

⁵⁷ Patrice Montzimir, 'Nouvel essai de reconstitution matérielle de l'épithaphe de Sidoine Apollinaire (RICG, VIII, 21)', *Antiquité Tardive*, 11 (2004).

⁵⁸ *Carm.*4.12.17-18. *funeris officio lacrimans Evantia caro/ contulit haec genero maesta sepulchra suo*

⁵⁹ *Carm.*4.12.12 *stans amor dei, non fuit alter amor*

⁶⁰ *Carm.*4.20

⁶¹ I take the relevant line to mean that she was alive and responsible for his burial not that she was buried with him. *Carm.*4.24.12: *coniuge Nicasia, qua tumulante cubat.*

⁶² *Carm.*4.24.13-14

being neither a nun nor a queen. His writings for Palatina also suggest that the poet befriended and was patronised by women at the highest levels of Merovingian society, whose families he honoured in verse and to whom he gave friendly gifts. However, the epitaphs hint towards the presence of women of more modest aristocratic status, commissioning epitaphs for members of their family, and in turn the subject of epitaphs commissioned by their families, as the poet's patrons.

Sources for the Life and Career of Saint Radegund

As this chapter will focus predominantly but not exclusively on the possibilities and depictions of friendship and patronage in the life and career of Radegund of Poitiers (and, as far as can be known, her adopted daughter and abbess, Agnes), it is worth some attention to the sources. Radegund, in the words of Jo Ann McNamara, was 'one of the best documented individuals of her time'.⁶³ She was born in around 520, the daughter of King Berthar of Thuringia, who was killed in battle by his brother Hermanfrid when she was a child.⁶⁴ After Hermanfrid had been killed by the armies of Chlothar and Theuderic (r. 511-534), his niece was taken by the former as a prize of war in 531.⁶⁵ Chlothar had her brought up at his villa in Athies and as befitted her royal status, she was well-educated.⁶⁶ Fortunatus' *vita* describes a childhood and young adulthood much occupied with devotional practices. Her marriage to Chlothar, which she seems to have made efforts to delay, occurred in around 540.⁶⁷

After the murder of her brother, Radegund separated from her husband in around 550. Fortunatus recounts that she went to Medard of Noyon, and sought consecration as a *monacha* but was ordained a deaconess at the pressure of noble

⁶³ Jo Ann McNamara, John E. Halborg, and E. Gordon Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

⁶⁴ DLH III.4

⁶⁵ DLH III.7.

⁶⁶ Fortunatus makes it clear that education was an expected part of her upbringing: *Quae puella, inter alia opera, quae sexui eius congruebant, litteris est erudita.* MGH SRM 2, p.365.

⁶⁷ For these dates, see McNamara, Halborg, and Whately, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, p. 60. On Radegund's age at the time of these events, see Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500 to 900* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 39.

bystanders who refused to see her marriage dissolved so easily.⁶⁸ Perhaps significantly, Fortunatus glides over the establishment of her monastery and dating its establishment has proved somewhat difficult. Eventually, Radegund obtained approval and material support of her former spouse and his family, as well as the support of the civil and ecclesiastical hierarchy of Poitiers, and founded her monastery sometime between 552 and 557.⁶⁹

The monastery complex may have included individual cells for its nuns and there seems to have been an oratory named after St Mary. It is possible that after the arrival of the relic of the Holy Cross in c. 569, a new church was constructed in its honour. Radegund's patronage of buildings extended inside and outside of the city walls; the funerary basilica for the nuns of the Holy Cross was situated outside the walls below the monastery. Radegund was buried there, as well as the seventh-century bishop Leodegar of Autun.

Radegund's religious retirement thus created a visible and lasting effect on the ecclesiastical topography of the city of Poitiers. Joann McNamara argues that Radegund never fully sublimated her status as queen to her career as a religious: 'like Clothild, she never became a nun, and though she demanded the diaconate, she did not allow her ordination to prejudice her control of power and property.'⁷⁰ McNamara's view contradicts both of Radegund's hagiographers and our evidence of the effects of ordination on property ownership, but she is surely right to emphasise that the former queen retained the ability to arrange her religious life according to her wishes.

I argue that Radegund used her identity as a former queen within her chosen life as a nun, and that both identities opened up possibilities of power, patronage, and friendship. Robert Levine argues that scholars have not adequately considered

⁶⁸ The meaning of this has been debated but Aigrain's argument, that it was a blessing for virgins and widows, and also a term occasionally used for monastic consecration, best acknowledges that the evidence does not allow for precision. See Rene Aigrain, *Sainte Radegonde, Vers 520-587* (Poitiers: Edition des Cordeliers, 1952), pp. 60-1. The best overview of deaconesses in Gaul is found in Gisela Muschiol, *Famula Dei. Zur Liturgie in merowingischen Frauenklöstern* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1994), pp. 295-300. About Radegund's status as a deaconess, see also Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours and the Women in his Works', pp. 52-3, and Muschiol, pp. 283-4.; for further bibliography see Muschiol, pp. 8-9, n. 27 and p. 241.

⁶⁹ Yvonne Labande-Mailfert, 'Les débuts de Sainte-Croix', in *Histoire de l'abbaye Sainte-Croix de Poitiers: quatorze siècles de vie monastique*, ed. by Yvonne Labande-Mailfert and et al (Poitiers: Société des antiquaires de l'Ouest, 1986), pp. 25-116 (pp. 30-5).

⁷⁰ Jo Ann McNamara, 'Imitatio Helenae: Sainthood as an Attribute of Queenship in the Early Middle Ages', in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography* ed. by Sandro Sticca (Binghamton, New York Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), pp. 51-80 (p. 64).

‘the complexity as well as the ambiguity generated by a priest establishing *amicitia* with patronesses who were nuns, one of whom was also, not incidentally, a former queen’.⁷¹ Radegund’s status gave her a place in the secular and ecclesiastical worlds.⁷²

Radegund’s life was recorded by contemporaries who knew her personally and a few of her own writings also survive. Gregory of Tours recorded incidents from Radegund’s life and funeral in his *Histories* and books of miracles.⁷³ Sometime between Radegund’s death on 13 August 587 and c.609, Fortunatus composed a *vita* of Radegund. Brennan suggests that this account was likely composed relatively soon after the saint’s death since it does not describe a *cultus* at Radegund’s tomb.⁷⁴ It was quickly followed by another *vita* written by one of Radegund’s own nuns, Baudonivia, at the request of Abbess Dedima. Baudonivia stated that this account was to complement Fortunatus’ life, describing incidents which he passed over for reasons of length.⁷⁵ It is worth emphasising that Baudonivia intended the two lives to be read together: a point worth emphasising, given that the two lives were edited and printed separately in the MGH.⁷⁶ These sources make it clear that the extensive

⁷¹ Robert Levine, ‘Patronage and Erotic Rhetoric in the Sixth Century: The Case of Venantius Fortunatus’, in *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), pp. 75-93 (p. 80).

⁷² George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 162.

⁷³ In the *Histories*, the living Radegund appears III.4, III.7 (a brief biography), VI.29 (where Gregory says she ruled over the nunnery and tells of the holy visions experience by a few of the nuns); VI.34 (refusing to let a royal nun out to get married); VII.36 (cited as a witness for Gundovald); IX.2 (a brief notice of her death, which Gregory says he has described in detail elsewhere); IX.39 (a letter sent to Radegund in support of her convent); IX.40 (Gregory gives backstory for the revolt, including the story of the Cross relic); IX.41 (letter of bishops dealing with the revolt describes the nunnery as ‘the nunnery of Radegund, of blessed memory’ *monastirio* [sic] *beatae memoriae Radegundis*); IX.42, the letter of foundation; X.15 Radegund called in a doctor to operate on a sick boy and various practices during her lifetime. GC 104 contains an account of Radegund’s funeral. GM5 contains an account of miracles before the Cross when Gregory visited Radegund;

⁷⁴ Brian Brennan, ‘St Radegund and the Early Development of Her Cult at Poitiers’, *Journal of Religious History*, 13 (1985), 347.

⁷⁵ On the contrasting approaching taken by the two Lives, see Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp. 9-11.

⁷⁶ McNamara, Halborg, and Whately, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, pp. 60-105. Scholars have frequently compared the two lives and attempted to explain the differences between them. See Louis Coudanne, ‘Baudonivie, moniale de Sainte-Croix et biographe de Sainte Radegonde’, in *Études Mérovingiennes: Actes des journées de Poitiers, 1er-3 Mai*, 1952 (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1953), pp. 45-51; Simon Coates, ‘Regendering Radegund? Fortunatus, Baudonivia and the Problem of Female Sanctity in Merovingian Gaul’, *Studies in Church History*, 34 (1998); John Kitchen, *Saints’ Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 134-53; and Ruth Wehlau, ‘Literal and Symbolic: The Language of Asceticism in Two Lives of St Radegund’, *Florilegium*, 19 (2002)

array of sources on the saint is far from complete: in particular, Radegund's letters and poetry do not survive.

We have fragments of what must have been an extensive amount of personal and political correspondence, including a letter Radegund wrote to the bishops of her time, asking them to watch over her community during her lifetime and after her death. Gregory of Tours preserves this letter in his account of the disturbances that occurred after Radegund's death, noting that the current abbess, Leuovera, had it recopied and circulated to all neighbouring bishops.⁷⁷ This document has wrongly been described as a letter of foundation but it clearly refers to a community already in existence at the time of writing. Jane Jeffrey argues this letter can also be seen as the queen's will and testament.⁷⁸ The letter does not have the standard form of a will but already in Merovingian usage *testamentum* was a flexible term.⁷⁹ It is noteworthy for its legal language and pursuit of legal protection for her community even after her death. A further hint that this was not simply a 'begging letter' but a document with legal force comes towards the end of the epistle, when Radegund asked that the supplication which [she] wrote with her own hand' be preserved 'in the archives of the universal church.'⁸⁰

Outside of Gregory's narrative, this 'supplique testamentaire' was also copied onto a now-lost parchment roll containing documents from Sainte-Croix.⁸¹ The roll itself, variously dated to the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, survived until the end of the eighteenth century and there is a seventeenth-century copy of it still extant.⁸² Another copy of the letter is found in Poitiers Ms 250 (136), an eleventh-century

⁷⁷ DLH IX.42.

⁷⁸ Jane E. Jeffrey, 'Radegund and the Letter of Foundation', in *Medieval Women Writing Latin*, ed. by Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown, and Jane E. Jeffrey (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 11-23 (p. 14).

⁷⁹ Karl Heinz Debus, 'Studien zu Merowingischen Urkunden und Briefen. Untersuchungen und Texte', *Archiv für Diplomatik* (1968), 55. 'Testament zu nennen, deren der Brief entspricht keineswegs dem Formular eines Testaments, und unter dem Begriff *testamentum* versteht man bereits in fränkischer Zeit fast jede Art von Beurkundung.'

⁸⁰ *supplicatio, quam manu propria subscripsi*. Note that Thorpe, who translates Omont and Collon, has 'the archives of our cathedral church'; the Latin of Krusch's edition reads: *in universalis ecclesiae archevo servetur*; MGH SRM 1:1, p. 474. Omont has *in universals ecclesie harchevo servetur*; Thorpe has evidently introduced the cathedral.

⁸¹ Labande-Mailfert, 'Les Débuts de Sainte-Croix', p. 28.

⁸² Jean Vezin, 'Étude paléographique et codicologique du manuscrit de la Vita Radegundis', in *La Vie de Sainte Radegonde par Fortunat: Poitiers, Bibliothèque Municipale, Manuscrit 250 (136)*, ed. by Robert Favreau (Paris: Seuil, 1995), pp. 115-26 (p. 126 n.16).

copy of Fortunatus' life of Radegund.⁸³ Unlike Gregory's copy, the manuscript and the parchment preserve Radegund's subscription and the subscriptions of other people, principally bishops; Vezin dismisses these as the additions of a forger.⁸⁴

In the face of Chlothar's attempt to take her back as his queen Radegund wrote to Germanus of Paris in order to forestall the king; and she wrote letters to the Merovingian kings whenever there was the prospect of discord between them.⁸⁵ Both Gregory and Baudonivia record that Radegund sent letters to Sigibert for the purpose of obtaining and installing a relic of the Holy Cross in her monastery. Fortunatus' poetry, Gregory's *Histories*, and Baudonivia's Life all provide evidence of her extensive relic collecting activities, which will be discussed below.⁸⁶ Two of the letters she received (outside of many poems by Fortunatus) still survive: Caesaria the Younger of Arles sent her a letter about monastic life, which is preserved in a unique tenth-century manuscript⁸⁷ and Gregory preserves a letter of support from seven bishops, dating from the start of her monastic project.⁸⁸

⁸³ Labande-Mailfert, 'Les Débuts de Sainte-Croix', p. 28.

⁸⁴ The copy of the letter is found on ff.73v-75. See Vezin, 'Étude paléographique et codicologique du manuscrit de la Vita Radegundis', p. 117. The copyists left space for three additional documents relating to the monastery and added sheets when the space allotted proved insufficient. The first document is a forged charter from 560-561 of Chlothar I relating to the foundation of the basilica of St Mary. The second is another forged charter of 561-567 in which Chlothar's four sons confirm his donation. The third is 878 charter of Louis the Stammerer, renewing the commands of Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald regarding the immunity of the monastery and the colligate church of St Radegund. The abbesses are accorded free elections and their lands are confirmed. Jean Vezin, 'Étude paléographique et codicologique du manuscrit de la Vita Radegundis', in *La Vie de Sainte Radegonde par Fortunat: Poitiers, Bibliothèque Municipale, Manuscrit 250 (136)*, ed. by Robert Favreau (Paris: Seuil, 1995), pp. 115-26 (pp. 124-5). Note that this last charter is also found in the parchment roll.

⁸⁵ *Sacramentales fecit litteras sub contestatione divina* 'She made a letter of oath under divine witness'. Baudonivia, *Vita Radegundis*, Ch 6. MGH SRM II, p. 382.

⁸⁶ On Radegund as a collector of relics, see Isabel Moreira, 'Provisatrix Optima': St Radegund of Poitiers' Relic Petitions to the East', *Journal of Medieval History*, 19 (1993); and Brennan, 'St Radegund and the early development of her cult', pp. 349-50.

⁸⁷ There has been some debate about the authenticity of this letter but most scholars accept it as genuine. Caesaria II died in 561 which provides a date for the chronology of Radegund's life in religion. McNamara, Halborg, and Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, p. 112. The manuscript is Cod. Trecensis 1248. The manuscript also contains Fortunatus' and Baudonivia's Lives of Radegund. On the subject of forgery and surviving documents about Radegund, see Karl Heinz Debus, 'Studien zu Merowingischen Urkunden', pp. 51, 60-1, and 66-7. Debus divides the surviving material attributed to Radegund into genuine and false correspondence, as well as forged diplomas of her monastery. There are three groups within the category of false letters: letters to bishops, a faked correspondence with Chlothar and his sons, and the correspondence with Caesaria. The argument for the falseness of the second and third categories appears to be based on their divergence from Fortunatus and Gregory. He suggests that the Caesaria letter was fabricated to match interpolations to Gregory's text. I believe the letter to be genuine.

⁸⁸ Yvonne Labande-Mailfert, 'Les Debuts De Sainte-Croix', pp. 43ff. Radegund's supporters were: Eufronius of Tours, Praetextatus of Rouen, Germanus of Paris, Felix of Nantes, Domitianus of Angers, Victorius of Rennes, and Domnolus of Le Mans. DLH IX.39. Domitianus, Felix, and

Fortunatus praised Radegund's poetry and there have been some attempts to argue that certain of his poems should be attributed to her, which I will discuss further on.⁸⁹ Radegund was not the community's only poet: Fortunatus recorded how an anonymous nun overheard local people celebrating outside the walls of the monastery by singing songs she had composed.⁹⁰

Possibilities of Patronage and Friendship in Convent Life

The organisation of Radegund's monastery has been the subject of some debate. The key question is at what point the community adopted the Rule for Nuns of Caesarius of Arles, and how strictly this was followed. Erin Dailey, among others, argues that the nuns adopted Caesarius' rule from the very beginning, but Gregory of Tours deliberately obscured this point in order to argue that the convent lacked appropriate support from bishop Maroveus.⁹¹ Other arguments date the acquisition of the rule of Caesarius to after the monastery's foundation—Labande-Mailfert argues that it was adopted around 570.⁹² In chapter 24 of the *Life*, Fortunatus refers to Radegund's devoted service to inmates in the monastery infirmary before she adopted the Rule of Arles. Though this suggests that the foundation came first and the Rule afterwards, it does not establish the chronological relationship between the two events. Since Fortunatus first came into contact with the community during the late 560s it is probable that he knew the community as Caesarian nunnery.

Eufronius also attended the Council of Paris, traditionally dated to 557, together; this group of bishops plus Domnolus and Victorius were all present together at the Council of Tours in 567. See William C. McDermott, 'Felix of Nantes: A Merovingian Bishop', *Traditio*, 31 (1975), 8-9. On the connections between several of these men and Radegund's former husband, Chlothar, see *See Histories* VI.9 and IV. 15. Members of this group of bishops performed significant services for Radegund and her community. Germanus of Paris consecrated Radegund's adopted daughter Agnes as Abbess of her convent, possibly because Bishop Pientius of Poitiers had died and the see was vacant. McNamara, Halborg, and Whatley, p. 89 n. 91. In Baudonivia's account Germanus also intervened to prevent Chlothar from reclaiming his queen. Eufronius of Tours, Gregory's predecessor, led the service for the installation of the relic of the Holy Cross in Radegund's nunnery.

⁸⁹ See *Carm.* VIII.1 and *Carm.App.*31

⁹⁰ Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis*, Ch.36.

⁹¹ Erin Thomas Dailey, 'Misremembering Radegund's Foundation of Sainte-Croix', in *Erfahren, Erzählen, Erinnern* ed. by Hartwin Brandt, et al. (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2012), pp. 117-40.

⁹² Yvonne Labande-Mailfert, 'Les Débuts De Sainte-Croix', p. 37.

In turn, the degree of adherence to the Rule would have affected the ways in which the community experienced friendship, patronage, and literary culture. The Rule of Caesarius forbade girls to enter the monastery to be taken in to be raised or educated, regardless of who their parents were, and entrants had to be a minimum of six or seven years old.⁹³ To join the community, one had to be of age to obey and read (or learn to read) but the convent was a spiritual centre, not an educational one. Yet daily life in the community would have inculcated a high level of scriptural literacy, through reading and hearing sacred texts.⁹⁴

Reading was an important part of the lives of Caesarian nuns: Chapter 18, which specifies that the community was to listen to sacred readings during meals, concludes ‘All should learn letters.’⁹⁵ The next chapter emphasises that no matter what the season of the year, nuns were to spend their time reading from the beginning of the morning to the second hour; at Terce, one of the sisters was to read while the others worked, and at all other times they were to keep praying and repeating the *uerba Dei*.⁹⁶ Baudonivia emphasizes that Radegund was insistent that the nuns have food for their souls at the same time they provided their bodies with food. Prayer, reading, almsgiving, and incessant daily preaching were guards against slovenliness divine service; ignorance was not an excuse for what McNamara translates as ‘slacking off’.⁹⁷ According to her biographer Baudonivia, Radegund preached and discussed Scripture with her nuns, and listened to the reading of the psalms without sleeping when illness compelled her to take a little rest. Even when she seemed to sleep, she was seen to be praying and repeating the psalms and always had someone reading to her.⁹⁸ Baudonivia recounts these narratives of Radegund’s ceaseless prayer, reading and listening to show her holiness and religious devotion but they also serve to show her exceptional place in the convent and pursuit of individual spiritual goals.

⁹³ Adalbert de Vogüé, *Œuvres Monastiques* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1988), p. 187.

⁹⁴ Baudonivia’s life emphasizes the convent’s daily routine—see Lisa Weston, ‘Elegiac Desire and Female Community in Baudonivia’s Life of Saint Radegund’, in *Same-Sex Love and Desire among Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Francesca Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 85-99 (p. 92).

⁹⁵ Vogüé, p. 193. omnes litteras discant.

⁹⁶ Ibid. pp. 193-5.

⁹⁷ Baudonivia, *Vita Radegundis*, Ch.17. This does not exactly reflect the Latin, which implies rather that Radegund’s regimen of incessant prayer and readings was to prevent sloth from developing through ignorance (of what was required).

⁹⁸ Chapter 19. For psalmody during sleep and preaching, Chapter 9.

If Fortunatus' poems to Radegund and Agnes reflect real-life exchanges of gifts and messages, and there is no reason to think otherwise, then the nuns had certainly adapted the Rule for their own purposes. Caesarius repeatedly returned to the subject of letters and gifts, a sign of the role these practices would have played in noblewomen's lives before and after their religious conversion. If a nun received a letter or gift in secret and confessed, she was to be forgiven, but hiding such exchanges or attempting to clandestinely give gifts or send messages was to be severely punished. A nun who wanted to give her family something might, with the abbess's permission, gift Eucharistic bread.⁹⁹ Without the presence of the porteress or the prioress, she could not give or receive anything. Caesarius reiterated these rules for objects—if a nun received clothes or any other object, she could not hide it. Part of the porteress's job was to prevent gifts from leaving and entering the monastery without the abbess's oversight. Even when the abbess was busy with visitors, she was to be shown the gifts when she was free.¹⁰⁰ The restriction on private letters returns yet again in Chapter 54—nuns could neither send nor receive letters without the permission of the abbess.¹⁰¹

Women in Caesarian nunneries were not forbidden to have connections of friendship or patronage but they were required to exchange gifts and letters openly and subject to the approval of their superior. Fortunatus' correspondence with Radegund and her peace-weaving letters to Merovingian kings fit within the framework of her religious life. Labande-Mailfert describes Fortunatus as Radegund's messenger and secretary; Epp suggests that he was recommended for the role by Sigibert and Brunhild.¹⁰² On this point, it is useful to recall that the Rule forbade any nun, even the abbess, from having a slave for her personal service—instead she was to rely on the younger nuns for help.¹⁰³ This suggests that Radegund, who like most late antique and early medieval letter writers probably dictated most of her letters¹⁰⁴, was expected to find an amanuensis within the

⁹⁹ Vogüé, p. 203.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 227.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 241.

¹⁰² Labande-Mailfert, 'Les Débuts De Sainte-Croix', p. 51. Epp, *Amicitia*, p. 75.

¹⁰³ Vogüé, p. 187.

¹⁰⁴ As Joan Ferrante argues, this was standard for all medieval letter-writers, men and women; secretaries could and did affect the letter's final contents. Joan Ferrante, 'What Really Matters in Medieval Women's Correspondence', in *Medieval Letters between Fiction and Document*, ed. by Christian Høgel and Elisabetta Bartoli (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 179-99 pp. 180-1).

convent walls. Fortunatus was, however, of higher status than a mere personal secretary. He wrote poems on behalf of Radegund's efforts to acquire and properly honour relics of the Holy Cross, actions which resemble the writings of Classical poets on behalf of their patrons and friends. In another parallel with the traditions of *amicitia*, Fortunatus sent greetings on behalf of Radegund and Agnes in his own poems for friends, and carried on a friendly correspondence with both women that occupies a substantial portion of his surviving output. Provided it was not kept secret, Fortunatus' activities on behalf of the convent contravened none of its rules.

Access to and control of personal space are less in keeping with strict observance. Caesarius forbid the nuns from having individual rooms or furnishings—they were to sleep in a common dormitory, and even the old and the sick were not to be given individual cells.¹⁰⁵ Nor were they allowed private spaces (individual cells) or one-to-one conversations, however brief: no one was permitted to have 'close friendship or any affinity whatever' (*familiaritatem aut quamlibet societatem*) with anyone, whether lay, religious, male, or female.¹⁰⁶ Fortunatus' poems to Radegund and his account of her Life make it clear that she had access to a private cell for prayer, physical asceticism, and retreat.¹⁰⁷ When he went to Poitiers to perform her funeral, Gregory of Tours was shown her cell, and Baudonivia's account of a nun reading to Radegund throughout the night also indicates a personal space for sleep, work, and devotion. The community had at least two anchorites—Radegund was not the only woman in the convent with a room of her own—but her use of an individual space was unusual, and her biographers took pains to present it in a way that enhanced her sanctity.

The Rule's attempt to control social interactions extended from the exchange of gifts, letters, and speech, to control of ingress and egress from the monastery and treatment of guests. If strictly adhering to the Rule, the nuns were to admit only bishops, priests, administrators, deacons, subdeacons, and one or two readers into the oratory and *in secreta parte monasterio*.¹⁰⁸ Artisans and male servants were to

¹⁰⁵ Vogüé, pp. 187-9.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 237-9.

¹⁰⁷ And gardening—in Chapter 33 of the Life, she has a laurel tree transplanted to her cell for her enjoyment.

¹⁰⁸ Caesarius is not specific about what is meant by 'the private part of the monastery', but the phrase seems to refer to the entire area within the monastic enclosure. Shari Horner, *The discourse of enclosure: representing women in Old English Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 8-9.

enter the monastery only with the permission of the abbess and required the supervision of the *provisor*. The *provisor* himself was not to go anywhere in the monastery unaccompanied by the abbess.¹⁰⁹

As was discussed in the introduction, Fortunatus was likely in clerical orders at the time he met Radegund. Despite its persistent appearance in scholarly literature, it does not seem likely that he was Radegund's agent—this is based on the one time use of *agens* in one of his poems to her. In any case, he mentions a married man, Andered, in this office.¹¹⁰ Fortunatus is always identified in manuscripts of his work as either priest or bishop, but according to the Rule of Caesarius even men in clerical office were supervised and restricted in their access to the monastery. Though Baudonivia, Fortunatus, and Gregory emphasise the adherence of Radegund and her nuns to strict claustration, religious visitors to the convent seem to have been frequent. Baudonivia claimed that Radegund made a point of seeking out and learning from whatever servants of God were passing through Poitiers.¹¹¹

Furthermore, the nuns were enjoined against preparing special meals for visitors.¹¹² Fortunatus' accounts of Radegund and Agnes preparing food for him would seem to suggest that this aspect of hospitality was part of his interaction with the convent. Banqueting and feasting were part of the aristocratic culture of exchange that included letters and gifts. The Rule of Caesarius attempted to channel these practices into a form which sublimated connections outside the convent to the goals of communal life. In conclusion, the Rule left a defined and tightly regulated space for patronage and friendship, which Radegund and her nuns interpreted as liberally as possible.

The Transmission of the Appendix Poems and the Question of Radegund as an Author

Our evidence for Radegund as a poet comes from Fortunatus' praise of her writings:

On short tablets to you gave me great poems
Which you are able to render honeys from empty wax.

¹⁰⁹ Vogüé, pp. 219-20.

¹¹⁰ Vita Radegundis, Ch 34.

¹¹¹ Chapter 9.

¹¹² Vogüé, pp. 221-3.

You furnish numerous courses for holiday joys,
But more to me, a greedy man, your words are food
You send rebuilt little verses with gentle speech
in whose words you bind our hearts.
All things are sufficient for the others whom sweet things draw
But to me your tongue gives pure honeycomb.¹¹³

The poem describes Radegund writing both long and short poems, which the gourmandizing poet claimed he appreciated more than food since they served to deepen their friendship. These comments may well be somewhat tongue in cheek. Brennan points out that wax tablets were used for love-notes and school exercises; it is possible that *carmina magna* and *versiculos* describe the same set of poems.¹¹⁴ The ‘little verses’ are ignored, but ‘*carmina magna*’ has sometimes been taken as evidence that Radegund wrote *De Exicidio Thuringiae*, *Ad Iustinam iunioem imperatorem et Sophiam Augustos*, and *Ad Artachin*. These three poems are not found in the standard eleven-book collection of Fortunatus’ works and have long been thought to be preserved in only one manuscript, Paris Lat. 13048, along with twenty-eight other unique poems. In this section I draw on late medieval and early modern reading of the poems in order to demonstrate that more than one copy of the Appendix poems survived the Middle Ages.¹¹⁵ I also demonstrated that these poems were written by Venantius Fortunatus, not by Radegund.

To begin, it is important to point out that the Appendix as it is presented in modern editions is an editorial creation. To make it, Leo and Reydellet prune away all of the poems found elsewhere in Fortunatus’ corpus and present the rest of the poems in the order of the Paris manuscript (see table 1). Leo and Reydellet arranged these poems into a collection called the Appendix at the end of Book Eleven. Scholars have debated whether or not the appendix belong outside of the eleven-book collection, or have lost their places within in it. Reydellet argued that they were collected posthumously by an admirer of Fortunatus’ and do not need to be reintegrated into the collection as Meyer thought.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *Carm.App.31.1-8*. In breuibus tabulis mihi carmina magna dedisti/ Quae uacuis ceris reddere mella potes./ Multiplices epulas per gaudia festa ministras,/ Sed mihi plus auido sunt tua uerba cibus:/ Uersiculos mittis placido sermone reffectos (5)/ In quorum dictis pectora nostra ligas./ Omnia sufficient aliis quae dulcia tractant/ At mihi sinceros det tua lingua fauos

¹¹⁴ Brian Brennan, ‘The Disputed Authorship of Fortunatus’ Byzantine Poems’, *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines*, 66 (1996), 341.

¹¹⁵ Reydellet I, p. lxxi, does not mention the possibility of other Appendix survivals; Leo does.

¹¹⁶ Reydellet I, p. lxxix.

Most recent scholarship, particularly that focusing on Radegund, claims that Paris Lat. 13048 contains the only copy of the Appendix poems.¹¹⁷ The work of the prolific Benedictine abbot Johannes Trithemius, the first person to offer a detailed list of Fortunatus' works, suggests otherwise. In his *Liber de scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, published in 1494, he offered a short biography of Fortunatus and then catalogues his works, listing thirteen titles, the first nine of which are provided with incipits, and concluding his description of Fortunatus' works with a summaries of the books of poetry he had encountered (see table 2).¹¹⁸ Comparison of the two lists demonstrates that he was not reading Paris Lat. 13048 since there is little overlap between their contents (see table 3). Therefore, Trithemius must have been reading another manuscript containing the first appendix poems and other of Fortunatus' works. It is likely he was reading something from his own library: Trithemius was a noted bibliophile and one of his proudest achievements as abbot of Sponheim was his library which contained Latin, Greek, and Hebrew books.¹¹⁹ He acquired books while performing visitations of other Benedictine monasteries. When he came across a text not found in his own library, he offered to buy or copy it.¹²⁰ Unfortunately, only a list of Greek volumes survives from the library catalogue, and the library itself was broken up by Trithemius' successor after his forced resignation in 1506.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ In 'Radegund and Epistolary Tradition', in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1993), pp. 20-45 pp. 42, n.8) Karen Cherewatuk interestingly though erroneously claims that the manuscript was put together at the Holy Cross.

¹¹⁸ Christophorus Browerus, *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati Carminum* (Moguntia: Balth. Lippius, 1603), p. 29 (57 pdf). This reprints the description given in Johannes Trithemius, *Liber de scriptoribus ecclesiasticis* (Basle: Johann Amerbach, 1494), p. f. 26 (89 of pdf).

¹¹⁹ In the *Nepiachus*, an autobiographical work, he claimed to have had 'about two thousand volumes, both handwritten and printed, on every subject and science which is held of utility among Christians...I have never seen in all of Germany, nor have I heard to exist anywhere, such a rare and marvellous library'. Quoted and translated in Noel L. Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius (1462-1516): The Renaissance of Monastic Humanism* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), p. 12.

¹²⁰ He was a zealous book hunter: 'Lying about in various monasteries and Orders were many copies of volumes in astronomy, in music, in mathematics, in philosophy, in poetry, in rhetoric, in history, in medicine, and in the fine arts. But the good fathers who possessed these either did not understand them, or else, fearing that their presence might violate their holy observance, requested me to remove of these to my own abbey and replace them with certain other printed works which they might find more desirable.' Brann, *The Abbot Trithemius*, p. 13.

¹²¹ Brann, p. 21. One notes the parallels between the careers of Trithemius and Hrabanus Maurus, about whom he wrote a biography. In addition to collecting books, Trithemius wrote and researched on Frankish history. When Markward Freher edited Trithemius' historical works in the early seventeenth century, he traced some of the books to Kreuznach and some to the elector's library in Heidelberg. E.G. Vogel, 'Die Bibliothek der Benedictinerabtei Sponheim', *Serapeum*, 3 (1842), 325-8.

A brief examination of early modern citations of Trithemius' *Liber de scriptoribus ecclesiasticis* allows us to determine that he may have found his copy of Fortunatus' works in Trier. Trithemius' list of Fortunatus' works was cited in 1578 *editio princeps*. The editor, Iacobus Salvator Solanius, printed only eight books of poetry and the life of Saint Martin, indicating at the end of Book Eight that he knew his edition was incomplete and making a note of the missing material.¹²² Trithemius' summary of Fortunatus' output was next cited by the Dutch Jesuit Christoph Brower, whose edition of Fortunatus' works was reprinted three times.¹²³ Unlike Solanius, Brower used multiple manuscripts and had access to the same three appendix poems as Trithemius himself did.¹²⁴ Brower had evidently seen Solanius' edition, for he used the Vatican index of Fortunatus' poems, and recorded what he had been able to add to it.¹²⁵ As he noted, for a long time the Appendix poems were only known from Trithemius' catalogue and sight and use of them was reserved to private libraries. 'Hereafter,' he wrote, 'the edition is generally due to the one [codex] of the Trier library'.¹²⁶ Leo used Brower's edition as a witness of the lost Trier codex after being unable to locate it in Trier in the 1880s.¹²⁷

Brower's edition suggests that there may have been more than one manuscript including the Appendix poems in Trier. This is suggested by the table of contents in the first edition, which includes the appendix poems under the heading,

¹²² Iacob Salvator Solanius, *Carminum Lib. Octo* (Venetiis: Iacobus Simbenius, 1578), p. 213

¹²³ 1603, 1617, and 1630. Brower died in 1617; unless otherwise noted I will refer to the second edition.

¹²⁴ In the first edition, Brower records the use of two manuscripts from Trier (one fragmentary), a fragmentary manuscript from Bernkastel-Kues, a manuscript from St Gall (*probae notae*), and a manuscript from Siegburg Abbey. Sangallensis 196 (G in Reydellet's schema). Brower also consulted books 'editi sed mutile' from Caligari, Venice, Paris ('in Bibliotheca PP'), and 'ex poetis sacris GF'. By the gift of one Bernardus Walterus, Brower was able to add additional manuscripts owned by his humanist contemporaries, to his list of *libri subsidiari*. A manuscript of Fredericus Tiliobroga (the pseudonym of Frederich Lindenbrog), a manuscript of Theodorus Pulmannus Craneburgius (Theodor Poelmann of Craneburg), two books owned by Iohannus Metellus Sequanus, a book described as 'G Cornelli Gualteri Gandavensis qui Coloniae vixit, Georgi Cassandri Maecenas, de quo Melchior Hittorpius praefatione a Scriptoribus diuinorum officiorum', and a fragment owned by Bonaventura Vulcanius.

¹²⁵ In the 1603 edition, this is at the beginning of the volume (20-6 of pdf); in the 1617 edition it has been shifted to the end of the volume (371-5).

¹²⁶ Christophorus Browerus, *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati Presbyteri Italici Episcopi Pictauensis Carminum Epistolarum Expositionum Libri Xi Poematis Et Libris Singularibus Aucti Nouaq[ue] Rursum Editione Illustrati* (Moguntiae, 1617), p. 257 (656 of pdf). Porro uni Trevirorum bibliothecae debetur universe editio...

¹²⁷ Friedrich Leo, *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati Presbyteri Italici Opera Poetica* (Berlin, 1881), p. xiv.

‘Supplementa ex variis mm. ss.’¹²⁸ In the second edition, this is changed to ‘libelli singulares’; the titles were kept the same, but each poem was now a ‘liber’. Brower does not explain this change but it seems likely that Brower and Trithemius were reading the same Trier manuscripts. Given that it has now been convincingly demonstrated that the letters of *Epistolae Austrasicae* were preserved in the archives of Trier, it is interesting to find another set of Merovingian writings squirreled away in its archives.¹²⁹ Brower himself was trained in Trier, taught at its university, and extensively researched the city’s ecclesiastical history.¹³⁰

Having established that Fortunatus’ Appendix poems circulated more widely than has previously been thought, I turn to what these poems can tell us about Radegund’s education and authorship. Our investigation into Paris Lat 13048, Trithemius’ bibliographic interests, and Brower’s edition, has demonstrated that that medieval and early modern scribes and scholars unhesitatingly ascribed Carm.App.1, Carm.App.2, and Carm.App.3 to Fortunatus. Trithemius and Brower both thought that the poems were by Fortunatus, but were clearly struck by the use of Radegund’s voice. This can be seen in Brower’s criticism of Trithemius’ choice for the title of Carm.App.1; he noted that Trithemius added *ex personae Radegundis* to the manuscript title and added that he preferred the manuscript reading.¹³¹

It was nineteenth-century scholars who first argued that Radegund’s persona meant Radegund’s authorship. Nisard, the first French translator of Fortunatus, argued on the basis of ‘painfully depicted female emotion’ that Radegund wrote them.¹³² This was followed by studies rebutting the thesis on philological and stylistic grounds. In particular, the theology of Carm.App.2 parallels the Fortunatus’ prose sermons. Although this particular poem does not contain exact verbal parallels

¹²⁸ 1603. Brower (1603), p. 26.

¹²⁹ Graham Barrett and George Woudhuysen, ‘Assembling the Austrasian Letters at Trier and Lorsch’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 24 (2016), 24-7 and 31-9.

¹³⁰ Brower’s two volume history of the archbishops of Trier was edited and completed by Jakob Masen, and published in two volumes as *Antiquitatem et annalium Treverensium libri XXV* in 1670 (a partial version, censored by the city’s electors, was published in 1629). His two-volume work on Trier’s churches and monasteries, *Metropolis ecclesiae Trevericae Quae metropolitanae ecclesiae originem, iura, decus, officia*, edited and completed by Masen and Christian von Stramberg, was not published until 1855-6.

¹³¹ Brower, p. 257 (656 of pdf). However, in the 1603 edition Brower used a descriptive title: ‘De excidio Thoringae ex persona Radegundis’.

¹³² Nisard’s argument was not accepted by members of the next generation of French scholars; Aigrain noted that this ‘does great violence to the manuscript tradition.’ Aigrain, *Sainte Radgonde*, p. 126, n. 36.

with Fortunatus' other poems, certain features of style including lists of rivers and peoples, light imagery, frequent alliteration, polyptoton, and paronomasia, are found elsewhere in his works. Furthermore, Fortunatus uses a female voice and persona to great effect elsewhere, most notably in the poem on the death of Galswinth and in *De Virginitate*. *De Excidio Thoringiae* was written by someone who had an extensive acquaintance with Latin poetry: it contains echoes of Virgil, Claudian, and Ovid, authors whom Fortunatus cited elsewhere. It also contains a verbal reminiscence of Fortunatus' *De Virginitate*.¹³³ Tardi, following Rey, pointed out usages characteristic to Fortunatus, such as the adjective *undifragus*, *dare* used with the meaning of *reddere*, and *reparare* used as a synonym for *repraesentare*.¹³⁴ We do not have the evidence to prove that Radegund was able to mimic Fortunatus' style so precisely, and therefore his authorship seems logical. The length and complexity of the poems makes it clear that these pieces were of a higher order than Fortunatus' usual occasional poetry, their imagery of presence and absence, one of the features they strikingly share with Fortunatus' *Gelegenheitsdichtungen*, strengthens the case for his authorship.

The three Appendix poems demonstrate that Fortunatus wrote at Radegund's request, using her voice to further her interests. The works functioned as a diplomatic tool in their own right, demonstrating Radegund's piety, learning, background and connections before the imperial court. McNamara suggested that this channel of communication also provided the inspiration for some of Radegund's religious practices.¹³⁵ Although surviving letters, messages, and poems only ever convey part of an exchange, there is no evidence about what additional information may have travelled between Poitiers and Constantinople. There was no such thing as a private letter in Merovingian Gaul; Fortunatus' occasional and epistolary poetry with the assumption that it would be seen and shared by people other than the addressee.¹³⁶ The destruction, slaughter, and grief with which *De excidio Thuringiae* opens was both a public and private performance, of mourning for the dead and longing for news

¹³³ The lines are *Carm.*VIII.3.227: *strara solo recubo lacrimans neque cerno quod opto* and *Carm.*App.1.16: *strata solo recubat lacticolor amita*. Brennan, 'The disputed authorship of Fortunatus' Byzantine poems', p. 344

¹³⁴ Brennan, 'The disputed authorship of Fortunatus' Byzantine poems', pp. 341-4.

¹³⁵ McNamara, 'Imitatio Helenae', p. 63.

¹³⁶ See the triangular model of reading and audience proposed by Amanda Ruth Wilcox, 'The Epistolary Habit: Representation, Participation, and Exchange among the Roman Elite' (University of Pennsylvania, 2002), pp. 18-27.

of the living. The poem concludes by beseeching Christ that the poem would find her *amantes* and occasion a reply. The third appendix poem suggests that it did, written to Radegund's relative Artachis suggests that there was a reply to *De excidio Thuringiae*, in which Radegund was informed of her cousin Amalfred's death and given silk to spin.¹³⁷ Having established communication with her relatives, Radegund is determined to keep it open:

and with messengers, I ask, often seek me at the monastery
and for your remedy let that place stand with God
so that to you with your pious mother this everlasting care
may be able to restore worthy ones to the starry throne.'¹³⁸

Though Radegund may have had, or demanded, oversight of the works she commissioned, there is no direct evidence for the extent of her involvement. Karen Cherewatuk argues that the distinctive Germanic elements of *De excidio Thuringiae* and *Ad Artachin* support at the very least Radegund's partial authorship.¹³⁹ As she puts it, 'the distinctly Germanic tone of Radegund's epistle suggests an ancient oral tradition of female lamentation'.¹⁴⁰ She illustrates a number of parallels between the content, tone, and voice of the two poems and Old English and Icelandic literature.¹⁴¹ But the Latin tradition contains the lamenting female voice as well (Cherewatuk's articles make it predominately Germanic), and as she notes elsewhere, there are points where Radegund's language of longing for her cousin echoes Ovid's *Heroides*. *De excidio Thuringiae* opens with a comparison between the women of Troy and the greater sufferings of the women of Thuringia.¹⁴²

Brennan convincingly rebuts Cherewatuk's arguments, while emphasising the limits of our knowledge of Radegund's literacy and education.¹⁴³ I have argued that the evidence is less slight than Brennan makes it appear but it does not support the feminist theory of Radegund's authorship, which continues to be repeated

¹³⁷ Meyer suggested that he was the son of Radegund's brother, whose murder was a catalyst for her retreat to religious life. Meyer's Artachis lived with his mother and was a support for the community of Poitiers. This is based on his interpretation of lines *Carm.App.2.37-9*.

¹³⁸ *Carm. App.3.37-40. meque monasterio missis, rogo, saepe requires/ ac uestro auxilio stet locus iste Deo./ ut cum matre pia uobis haec cura perennis/ possit in astrigero reddere digna throno.*

¹³⁹ Cherewatuk, 'Radegund and Epistolary Tradition', p. 41, n.3.

¹⁴⁰ Cherewatuk, 'Radegund and Epistolary Tradition', p. 38.

¹⁴¹ Karen Cherewatuk, 'Germanic Echoes in Latin Verse: The Voice of the Lamenting Woman in Radegund's Poetry', *Allegorica*, 14 (1993).

¹⁴² Cherewatuk, 'Radegund and the Epistolary Tradition', 27, 30-1.

¹⁴³ Brennan, 'The disputed authorship of Fortunatus' Byzantine poems', pp. 338-9, n. 15.

without support. In a 2015 study of medieval women's correspondence, Joan Ferrante states, 'Fortunatus exchanged poems with Radegund, telling her "In short tablets you gave great songs to me"', and yet her three historic poems, which identify her, have been attributed to him.'¹⁴⁴ This fails to acknowledge that there is good reason to continue to attribute the poems to Fortunatus: medieval scribes interpreted them to be his writings and modern scholars have established similarities between these poems and his other surviving writings. There is no reason to suppose that the *carmina magna* must refer to the 'Byzantine poems', rather than other works of Radegund's which have simply not come down to us.

The 'Byzantine Poems' and the Relic of the Holy Cross: Radegund as a Literary Patron

Our evidence of Radegund's education and literary tastes, her surviving letters, and her lost letters and poems demonstrate that our picture of Radegund the author is incomplete. This section examines our evidence of Radegund as a literary patron. As with many medieval patrons of literature, we lack direct evidence of Radegund herself commissioning texts, other than perhaps the VSM. It is difficult to find commissions from late antique and early medieval women. Over a third of Jerome's letters were written to women and some of the answers and explanations they request from him might well be counted as commissions from their sheer length and volume. However, one commission which still survives was Alcuin's commentary on John, written at the request of Charlemagne's sister Gisla and her niece Rotrude. This is a rare example of a medieval literary commission surviving with the work itself: their letter of request included with the work as a prologue.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Ferrante, 'What Really Matters in Medieval Women's Correspondence', p. 182. Carm.IX.23. At no point in the article does Ferrante mention Radegund's letter to the bishops (she does refer to Radegund's letter to Caesaria); though both letters appear in the *Epistolae* database. For another attribution of the poems to Radegund without argument or evidence, see Patricia Ranft, *Women in Western Intellectual Culture, 600-1500* (Houndmills; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Ferrante, 'What Really Matters in Medieval Women's Correspondence', pp. 184-5. On the issue of women as patrons of literature and other cultural productions, see the essays collected in June Hall McCash, ed., *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), and for a comparative perspectives on late antiquity see, Leslie Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Female Patronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries', in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 52-73; Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Patrons, Not Priests: Gender and Power in Late Ancient Christianity', *Gender & History*, 2 (1990).

Although they do not contain a letter of commission or dedication, two sets of poems are associated with Radegund's efforts to communicate with her family and obtain relics of the Holy Cross: the three poems of the Appendix *Carm.App.1 De Excidio Thuringiae*, *Carm.App.2 Ad Iustinum iunioem imperatorem et Sophiam augustos*, and *Carm.App.3 Ad Artachin*, and the first six poems of Book Two. George argues that these poem, together with *Carm.8.1*, worked to present Radegund's 'credentials as a devout and learned nun' to the Byzantine court.¹⁴⁶ 'Fortunatus was concerned to establish Radegund as the last survivor of a royal family, devout and civilised, and to demonstrate that such a relic would not be going to some heretical and barbarian backwater.'¹⁴⁷ This is certainly possible, but there is nothing in the poems to support the idea that both *De excidio Thuringiae* and *Ad Artachin* were sent before the *gratiarum actio* to Justin II (r. 565-578) and Sophia (r. 565-578).¹⁴⁸

Koebner argued that *Carm.8.1*, in which Radegund asks for copies of the Christian poets, should be included with the Byzantine poems, a view Brennan and George accepted, but Reydellet rejected as lacking support.¹⁴⁹ The poem is certainly an elaborate presentation of Radegund's royal ancestry, Christian learning, and monastic devotion, in a way that is not found in the Appendix poems, which mostly emphasise her family ties. However, its place in the collection supports the thesis that it was intended for an audience in Gaul. The poem is placed at beginning of book eight, among a series of poems for Radegund and the women of the Holy Cross, some of which are as virtuosic as the 'Byzantine poems'. *Carm.8.7*, with its reference to the circus factions of the Blues and Greens, evokes the Byzantine East and may have connections to Radegund's search for relics as well.¹⁵⁰

However, other than a series of poems which seem to have been connected to the project, Fortunatus is silent about it. His Life of Radegund makes no mention of her relic collection, which is curious. His poems about churches celebrate their relic

¹⁴⁶ George, *Personal and Political*, p. 111, n.1. For an analysis of Fortunatus' portrait of the Byzantine rulers, see in particular Averil Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II', in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1976), pp. 51-67; and eadem, 'The Empress Sophia', *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines*, 45 (1975).

¹⁴⁷ George, *Personal and Political*, p. 116, n. 21.

¹⁴⁸ In practice, Justin II ruled for only a decade. After his madness rendered him incapable of rule, Sophia remained the predominant figure in Byzantine government until his death. She herself may have died in the early seventh century. See George, *Personal and Political*, p. 128.

¹⁴⁹ Reydellet II, p. 124, n. 1.

¹⁵⁰ George, *Personal and Political*, p. 71 n. 7.

collections, and his other hagiography refers to the existence of relics, hallowed by their contact with his saintly male subjects. As Sylvie Labarre points out, common themes and vocabulary can be read across Fortunatus' hagiographic poetry and prose.¹⁵¹ This is not possible for the story of Radegund's quest for the Holy Cross: the poems stand and speak alone, since neither Gregory nor Baudonivia include Fortunatus in their stories. Radegund's actions and initiative have to be pieced together from Gregory and Baudonivia, who have their own agendas on the subject.

Fortunatus' poems are probably the earliest written works to survive from the whole affair, composed at some point between 568 and 573, followed by Gregory's summary history of Radegund's convent, written at some point during the 590s, and Baudonivia's account, written in the early seventh century. Fortunatus composed hymns to the cross: *Pange lingua gloriosi*, and *Vexilla regis prodeunt*, which entered the repertoire of Latin hymnody and have an entirely separate tradition of transmission and use from the rest of his work.¹⁵² Jo Ann McNamara argued that commissioning and performance of hymns and poems in honour of the cross reflected Radegund's authority and independence: 'the public processions and ceremonies that accompanied the relic's progress towards Poitiers served to enhance Radegund's independence of episcopal authority—her queenly space between the temporal and episcopal powers.'¹⁵³

Radegund's relic collecting activities took place within a wider context of contact between Francia and Byzantium, including the diplomatic activity of Sigibert and Brunhild as well as Radegund's efforts to maintain contact with her scattered Thuringian family. We know that Radegund sought Sigibert's permission and help to obtain a relic of the Holy Cross. Indeed, Marc Widdowson has argued that the will

¹⁵¹ Sylvie Labarre, 'Hagiographie en prose et hagiographie poétique chez Fortunat', paper given at *Écriture italienne, écriture gauloise Regards croisés sur l'œuvre hagiographie en prose de Venance Fortunat*, Rome 2016.

¹⁵² *Carm.* 2.2 *pange lingua*, has the title 'in honore sanctae crucis'; *Carm.* 2.6 *Vexilla Regis*, has the title 'Hymnus in honore sanctae crucis'. It is worth noting that Fortunatus was hardly only writer of hymns in Merovingian Gaul; he stands in the company of Caesarius of Arles, Flavius of Chalon-sur-Saone, Chilperic, and anonymous hymnists. Yitzhak Hen, 'The Church in Sixth-Century Gaul', in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Alexander C. Murray (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 232-55 (p. 251). Augustus Engelbrecht, who produced the first critical edition of the works of the fifth-century theologian Claudianus Mamertus, noted that *Carm.* 2.2 was misattributed to Mamertus. August Engelbrecht, *Claudiani Mamerti Opera* (Vindobonae: apud C. Geroldi Filium, 1885), pp. xlviii-xlviii.

¹⁵³ McNamara, 'Imitatio Helenae', p. 65.

driving this mission may have been more Sigibert and Brunhild than Radegund.¹⁵⁴ However, the Austrasian royal couple are mentioned nowhere in *Carm.App.2*, a surprising omission if their patronage had been dominant. Brennan stated that Fortunatus' closest contact with Byzantium came through the composition of these poems but denies Fortunatus' connection to Sigibert I's Byzantine diplomacy.¹⁵⁵ The desire to contact Byzantium may have come either from Sigibert and Brunhild or from Radegund, but in reaching out to the eastern empire political and religious aims were clearly aligned, and the poems can be placed in a wider context, despite the silences of our sources, particularly Gregory of Tours.¹⁵⁶

The effort to obtain the cross relic must have begun after 567¹⁵⁷, because King Sigibert's authority over Poitiers began with the death of Charibert. 567 is also the year in which Fortunatus reached Poitiers. The 'Byzantine' poems combined with the timing of his arrival, provide strong circumstantial evidence that he was recruited to help with efforts to obtain the relic. His poems may have also had a role to play in Merovingian diplomacy at the time. It seems likely that the request and dispatch of the relic occurred in the context of the conclusion of a peace treaty between Sigibert and Justin I in 568.¹⁵⁸ Fortunatus' involvement in the diplomatic side of things cannot be proved with any certainty, but it seems possible that his poems were used to establish the Merovingians' cultural bona fides and Radegund's

¹⁵⁴ Marc Widdowson, 'Merovingian Partitions: A 'Genealogical Charter'?', *Early Medieval Europe*, 17 (2009). See also Stefan Esders, 'Avenger of All Perjury' in Constantinople, Ravenna and Metz: Saint Polyeuctus, Sigibert I, and the Division of Charibert's Kingdom in 568', in *Western Perspectives on the Mediterranean*, ed. by Andreas Fischer and Ian Wood (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), pp. 23-76 pp. 22-3). However Esders also notes Radegund's strong family connections to the East, p. 21.

¹⁵⁵ Brian Brennan, 'Venantius Fortunatus: Byzantine Agent?', *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines*, 65 (1995), 11-2 and 14-5.

¹⁵⁶ On related lines, Zarini has cautioned that one should not prize the diplomatic value of the poem over its genuine religious sentiment, but as I attempt to show, both matter for our understanding of the poem's significance. Vincent Zarini, 'L'éloge de 'empereur Justin II et de l'impératrice Sophie chez Corippe et chez Venance Fortunat (Poèmes, Appendice 2)', in *Présence et visages de Venance Fortunat*, ed. by Sylvie Labarre (Abbaye Saint-Martin de Ligugé: Camenae, 2012), p. 11.

¹⁵⁷ Esders argues that Charibert cannot have died until after the mid-November church council held at Tours in 567 because he was still listed as ruler. Thus he plausibly puts the division of the kingdom and its enactment into the year 568. Esders, p. 19. On the dating of Charibert's death and the ecclesiastical councils held during his reign see also Gregory I. Halfond, 'Charibert I and the Episcopal Leadership of the Kingdom of Paris (561-567)', *Viator*, 43 (2012).

¹⁵⁸ Esders, pp. 19-20, 23. It is possible that the Frankish ambassadors involved in this treaty provided Agathias with material for his discussion of the Merovingians. Averil Cameron, 'Agathias on the Early Merovingians', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Lettere, Storia e Filosofia*, 37 (1968), 133-4.

status as royal, holy, and eminently deserving of the custody of a most precious relic.

The Byzantine embassy—bearing bejewelled Gospel books, unnamed relics, and the reliquary of the Holy Cross—arrived in the fall of 569.¹⁵⁹ Fortunatus' *gratiarum actio* is then from 569, after the relic had been formally received, and must be from before 573, because this was when Eufronius of Tours, who formally installed the relic in the convent, was replaced by Gregory.¹⁶⁰ Within two years, the relic of the Cross had been requested and received; and formal thanks sent.¹⁶¹ People, goods, and relics could speedily move if persons of influence were interested in their movement.

Fortunatus' poem of thanks begins with ten lines on the Trinity, in which Fortunatus shows that he is well aware of the Chalcedonian understanding of the Trinity: a unity composed of three parts, each equal in power and status.¹⁶² These first ten lines also are echoed in Fortunatus' commentaries on the *Pater* and *Credo*, which were perhaps composed after he became bishop, nearly thirty years later.¹⁶³ In places the language used is biblical and it recalls the doxology.¹⁶⁴ It may also show Fortunatus' awareness of Justin's decree about the creed.¹⁶⁵ The poem often uses phrases from other Christian poets: Arator, Sedulius, Paulinus, and Sidonius.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ Isabel Moreira, 'Provisatrix Optima': St Radegund of Poitiers' Relic Petitions to the East', *Journal of Medieval History*, 19 (1993), 290-1.

¹⁶⁰ Averil Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II', in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1976), pp. 51-67 (p. 59). Baudonivia and Gregory himself specifically name Eufronius as the bishop who installed the relics but Fortunatus gives no details.

¹⁶¹ Esders, p. 25. estimated that it took about this length of time (566-568) for the relics of St Polyeuctos to come from Constantinople to Metz.

¹⁶² Some of interpretations Fortunatus' poem for Justin II and Sophia find commentary on their actions with respect to the Three Chapters Controversy. See Rajko Bratož, 'Venanzio Fortunato e lo scisma dei Tre Capitoli', in *Venanzio Fortunato e il suo tempo* (Fondazione Cassamarca: Treviso 2003), pp. 363-401. I prefer the argument that the Merovingians had confused and fragmentary information on eastern theological controversies and Fortunatus' own position with respect to the controversies is ambiguous. Ian Wood, 'The Franks and Papal Theology', in *The Crisis of the Oikumene: The Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity in the Sixth-Century Mediterranean*, ed. by Celia Martin Chazelle and Catherine Cubitt (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 223-42 (pp. 235-6); and the other essays in this volume provide a clear overview of the debates at the centre of the controversy and their effects around the Mediterranean world. See also Claire Sotinel, 'Emperors and Popes in the Sixth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. by Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 267-90.

¹⁶³ Zarini, 'L'éløge de l'empereur Justin II', p. 5. These are Carm. 10.1 and 11.1, which are prose pieces.

¹⁶⁴ Ope luce throno, see Reydellet III, p. 190, n. 27-8.

¹⁶⁵ Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II', p. 58.

¹⁶⁶ On specific parallels, Zarini, 'L'éløge de l'empereur Justin II', pp. 9-10, is excellently detailed.

There is also the possibility that Fortunatus read Corippus' poems for Justin II, which survives in a single western manuscript. These works, composed in 566-7 or 568, seems to have been a commissioned for a court audience and designed to bolster the regime's shaky beginning. Like Fortunatus' poem, it features a notable emphasis on religious issues and on the role of Empress Sophia.¹⁶⁷ Although there are no direct verbal parallels, Fortunatus defines orthodoxy theology in a similar manner to Corippus.¹⁶⁸

The poem divides into three main parts: one praising Justin, the next praising the widespread fame of his name; and the last praising Empress Sophia for her role in sending the Cross to Francia. A repeated two-line refrain divides the poem into sections; the second line alters depending on whether Justin or Sophia is praised, but it always begins with the same line, which gives the poem a hymnic effect. It is interesting to note that Sophia actually gets ten lines more of attention than Justin does—a perceptible amount in a poem which is a total of a hundred lines long.¹⁶⁹ The last part praises Sophia's great and famous piety, which made her instrumental in sending a relic of the Cross to Francia. Sophia, as Cameron has shown, was a shrewd and powerful woman who ruled in partnership with her husband Justin.¹⁷⁰ This is the first time that the relic is mentioned and the gift is provided by the empress, not the emperor. Women had an important spiritual link to the cross because of Helena; Sophia and Justin are compared to Constantine and his mother.¹⁷¹ Fortunatus assured the imperial couple that their gift increases the faith of people in the West, including the barbarians, which by his list includes Germans, Batavians, Basques, and Britons. Radegund's and her nuns' prayers for the success of the kingdom and salvation of its rulers conclude the poem.

A close reading of Fortunatus' poem suggests that Sophia was predominantly responsible for the granting of the relic. Scholars usually ascribe the dominant role

¹⁶⁷ Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II' and Zarini, 'L'éloge de l'empereur Justin II'.

¹⁶⁸ Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II' p. 58.

¹⁶⁹ Zarini, 'L'éloge de l'empereur Justin II', p. 5. She gets 50 lines, Justin gets 40.

¹⁷⁰ Averil Cameron, 'The Empress Sophia', *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines*, 45 (1975).

¹⁷¹ Zarini, 'L'éloge de l'empereur Justin II', p. 7. The comparison of Sophia to Helena is also found in the works of the Byzantine panegyrist Corippus, whom there is a possibility Fortunatus had read. See Averil Cameron, 'Corippus' Poem on Justin II: A Terminus of Antique Art? ', *Annali della Scuola normale superiore di Pisa Classe di lettere e filosofia*, 5 (1975).

in exchange to Justin: though Cameron did much to establish Sophia's significance, she attributes the granting of the relic to Justin's religious policy. Indeed, Fortunatus' praise of the emperor is focused through the lens of religious concerns. However, when it comes to the cross, Justin becomes much less significant. The concluding prayers which express thanks and reflect on the importance of the cross are directly addressed to Sophia, not to Justin. Sophia's sponsorship of the gift, Fortunatus claims, leads to an increase in religious devotion caused by the presence of the cross. The language and structure of the poem suggest that the royal and imperial women, Radegund and Sophia, were predominantly responsible for the request and grant of the relic.

Gregory and Baudonivia make it clear that Radegund lavished considerable attention and resources on relic collecting. Fortunatus does not: his life of Radegund does not mention relics or her interest in them, though he does mention her gifts to Saint Martin when she visited Tours.¹⁷² In Baudonivia's *Life*, Radegund's desire for relics of all the saints began during her time at Saix, and her collection started when a priest named Magnus brought her relics of Andrew and other saints, and after entering the convent, she continued to be an assiduous relic collector. Baudonivia describes in detail her pursuit of the relics of Mammas the Martyr and the Holy Cross, for which she sought permission from Sigibert.¹⁷³ Baudonivia explicitly mentions that Radegund sent no gifts, only prayers and saintly support. In return, she received bejewelled gospel books, the cross relic, and the relics of additional, unspecified saints. In the nun's account, the messenger was a doctor, Reoval; in Gregory Radegund's messengers were churchmen who searched the eastern lands for pieces of the Cross, and relics of the Apostles and other martyrs. Like Baudonivia, Gregory mentions that she had Sigibert's assent for this, but he does not mention Radegund's previous relic-collecting efforts, nor that the cross relic was sought direct from the imperial couple.

¹⁷² When the word *reliquae* is used in Chapter 38 of Fortunatus' *Life of Radegund*, it refers to the foundation and pavement of a basilica, suitable to be reused as an oratory for saint Martin, revealed to the tribune of the fisc, Domnolenus, in a dream. On Radegund's gifts to the shrine of Saint Martin see chapters 13 and 14; see also Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 30.

¹⁷³ Baudonivia, *Vita Radegundis*, Chapters 13, 14, and 16. In investigating her use of these words, I found that Baudonivia uses *pignus* or *pignora* to describe individual relics and *reliquiae* to describe a group of them. On the term *pignora* within saints' cults, see G. Gagov, 'Il culto delle reliquie nell'antichità riflesso nei due termini 'patrocinia' e 'pignora'', *Miscellanea Franciscana* 58 (1958).

Both Gregory and Baudonivia allude to the difficulties Radegund faced in settling the relics in Poitiers. Baudonivia's account is the more detailed of the two: since the bishop and people of Poitiers refused to receive the relic, Radegund had to appeal to Sigibert a second time. Eventually Sigibert responded to her plea, sending one of his counts, Justin, to Eufronius of Tours, ordering him to perform the installation. The episode ended with Radegund commending her monastery to Sigibert and Brunhild, and to 'the sacrosanct churches and their bishops'.¹⁷⁴ Gregory does not mention the resistance of the people of Poitiers, only Maroveus' rebuff, Radegund's appeal to Sigibert, Sigibert's deputation of Eufronius, and Maroveus' deliberate absence from the installation service.

The ecclesiastical networks of the bishops of Poitiers during Radegund's lifetime provide clues to why Maroveus may have reacted as he did. The bishop of Poitiers was the suffragan of the bishop of Bordeaux, but for most of the sixth century, these cities were part of different Frankish kingdoms. As can be seen in the letters of Avitus of Vienne and the experiences of Caesarius of Arles, royal interference in communication across the borders of their kingdoms was a real possibility.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, royal jurisdiction as well as provincial organisation impacted the ecclesiastical networks of the bishops of Poitiers. When Gregory of Tours mentions the city of Poitiers, it is usually in the context of conflict between Merovingian kings, but he does not usually mention the bishop of Poitiers' involvement.¹⁷⁶ Maroveus was the exception to this rule: he received King Guntram's envoys in 585, after the king accused the citizens of Poitiers of breaking their oath of allegiance to him and sent an army to punish them. However, the bishop gave the envoys a hostile reception.

¹⁷⁴ Baudonivia, *Vita Radegundis*, Chapter 16.

¹⁷⁵ Wood, 'The Franks and Papal Theology, 550-660', pp. 234-5. See for example Avitus, Ep. 94.

¹⁷⁶ II. 37 Clovis marches on Poitiers to battle the Visigoths (Arians); on the way his soldiers encounter a saintly abbot Maxentius on the outskirts of the city; IV.16 Chramn leaves Clermont and goes to Poitiers to plot against his father Chlothar; IV.45 Chilperic invaded Tours and Poitiers when they fell to Sigibert; Mummolus and army restored them to Sigibert; IV.47 Chilperic sends son Theudebert to invade Tours, Poitiers, etc. Duke Gundovald's army loses, the area is devastated; V.2 Chilperic sends son Merovech to Poitiers with an army—Merovech went to Tours and married Brunhild.; V.4 After threatening Tours on the orders of Chilperic, a very ill Duke Roccolen sets out for Poitiers but dies before his ordinances for the people of that city can go into effect; VI.31 men of Poitiers, Tours, Angers, and Nantes fight as part of Duke Berulf's on behalf of Chilperic, against Guntram; VI.45 Members of Rigunth's embassy turn back at Poitiers; VII.12 Tours and Poitiers want to transfer to Childebert II but Guntram threatened them with an army raised from Bourges and they desist; VII.26 Gundovald plans to march on Poitiers but instead demands oaths of allegiance from various cities (not all to himself); IX.20 Under the treaty of Andelot, Tours and Poitiers came under Childebert's control; VII.28 Army stops occupying Poitiers, sets out after Gundovald. Note that George pp. 9-10 provides many of the dates of the military campaigns.

Guntram's soldiers then laid waste to the region until the Poitevins had submitted to royal authority. Maroveus saved himself from accusations of disloyalty, and his people from further attacks, by melting down a chalice 'to ransom himself and his people'.¹⁷⁷ Maroveus clearly served as the voice of his city on this occasion, and did so on other occasions as well, successfully requesting that king Childebert readjust the tax burden of the people of Poitiers.¹⁷⁸ Gregory is silent about who appointed Maroveus, his family, or where he came from, information he presumably would have had access to.

After the relic had been successfully received, Baudonivia records that Radegund sent Reoval (again) and other messengers to Justin with a simple garment as a token of thanks. The former queen's gratitude does not feature in Gregory's account and indeed he seems to diminish the status of the embassy by excluding its imperial interactions. In his second account of Radegund's acquisition of the Cross relic, Chapter 5 of his *Gloria Martyrum*, Gregory continued to be studiously silent about from whom Radegund requested the relics.¹⁷⁹ If Gregory was sympathetic to the quandary Radegund's presence created for Maroveus, as Erin Dailey argues, then he may have deliberately shaped his portrait of the former queen to focus on her spiritual rather than political authority. But in his *Histories* Gregory also took a dim view of Empress Sophia and hence wished to minimise Radegund's association with an objectionable figure.¹⁸⁰ Like Baudonivia, he makes it clear that Radegund's collection was the result of multiple Eastern missions.¹⁸¹ Although pious relic

¹⁷⁷ VII.24

¹⁷⁸ IX.30

¹⁷⁹ 'The cross of the Lord that was found by the empress Helena at Jerusalem is venerated on Wednesday and Friday. Queen Radegund, who is comparable to Helena in both merit and faith, requested relics of this cross and piously placed them in a convent at Poitiers that she founded out of her own zeal. She repeatedly sent servants to Jerusalem and throughout the entire region of the East. These servants visited the tombs of holy martyrs and confessors and brought back relics of them all. After placing them in the silver reliquary with the Holy Cross itself, she thereafter deserved to see many miracles.' Both Gregory and Fredegar (Book II, Ch.42) describe Helena's finding of the Cross. Interestingly, Gregory and Fredegar have quite different stories about the fate of the tunic Christ wore at the crucifixion: see GM7 and Book 4, Chapter 11. Fredegar's brief chapter on the subjugation of the Thuringian kingdom by the Franks (Book III, Chapter 32) does not mention Radegund.

¹⁸⁰ DLH V.19 and 29, VI.30

¹⁸¹ It's worth noting that relics could be gathered by trade and happenstance as well as deliberate seeking: Gregory himself had a collection of relics of Italian and Eastern saints, including Cosmas and Damian, John the Baptist, Sergius, Paul, Laurence, Pancras, Chrysanthys, Daria, and Victor, which he had housed in oratories in his diocese. Simon Loseby, 'Gregory of Tours, Italy, and the Empire', in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Alexander C. Murray (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 462-97 (p. 463).

hunters were presumably less expensive to fund than the diplomatic embassies suggested by the letters of the *Epistolae Austrasicae*, the repeated Eastern missions and the reported extent of their travels suggests Radegund had money and authority at her disposal.

Fortunatus' writings were another resource Radegund seemed to have at her disposal, and she turned to Fortunatus again for material to praise and celebrate the Cross. Book two begins with a short poem about the cross which focuses on the salvific role of the crucifixion and the fruitfulness of the living tree of the Cross. There are also three acrostics, *Carm.*2.4, 2.5 (unfinished), and 2.5a.¹⁸² The group of cross-themed poems includes one dedicated to Gregory, who had installed a piece silk in which the cross had been wrapped in an oratory in Tours.¹⁸³ *Carm.*2.4 briefly recounts the story of salvation history from Adam to the cross, and is decorated with cross-shaped verses about it. *Carm.*2.5, although unfinished, also has cross-shaped verses about the cross and begins to describe its significance. Of the three, *Carm.*2.5a is the most striking as a visual decoration—it features the two-line poem: 'The cross is my certain salvation, the cross which I adore always/ the Lord's cross is with me, the cross is my refuge', radiating out from the centre to form a cross shape; unlike other acrostics Fortunatus wrote, it is not rectilinear.¹⁸⁴ The verses themselves take a few minutes to pick out.

Only one of these poems mentions the women who commissioned them. A prayer for Radegund, Agnes, and Fortunatus himself runs down the sides of the cross in *Carm.*2.4: 'Venerable Cross, defend the devoted women, Agnes with Radegund. Protect, Holy Cross, frail Fortunatus'.¹⁸⁵ Graver suggested that Radegund used the poems as part of her effort to secure the Cross relic, since both incorporate prayers to the Cross. This is possible, but I think it more likely that Radegund commissioned these works to celebrate the arrival of the cross in Poitiers. The acrostics may have

¹⁸² Leo rejected *Carm.* 2.5a as spurious, but Reydellet accepts it and notes that Brower provides the solution for how to read it.

¹⁸³ *Carm.* 2.3. In GM6, Gregory refers to his acquisition of a silk robe in which the cross had been wrapped, from an unnamed man who had gotten it and other relics from Abbot Futes (Photius), a favorite of the empress Sophia. Fortunatus does not explicitly connect this to Radegund's cross relic but the theme of the cross provides a unifying thread in this section of his works.

¹⁸⁴ Margaret Graver, 'Quaelibet Audendi: Fortunatus and the Acrostic', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 123 (1993), 219: 'Crux mihi certa salus, crux est quam semper adoro/ Crux Domini mecum, crux mihi refugium.'

¹⁸⁵ *Carm.*2.4 *Crux pia, devotas Agnen tege cum Radegunde. / tu Fortunatum fragilem, crux sancta, tuere.* Reydellet I, p. 183.

been used to decorate books or wall within the cloister. The hymns likely became part of regular worship within the convent and they spread widely outside of it.¹⁸⁶

In Fortunatus' poem for Justin and Sophia, Radegund has a prominent position as a suppliant in the poem and all of our sources for acquisition of the relic present her as driving force for the relic's acquisition. She and Agnes are named in one of the poems Fortunatus composed for veneration and worship of the cross, and the preservation of these poems as a group indicates their common theme and suggests a common purpose. However, the full extent of Radegund's role and authority in the acquisition of relic remains opaque. The three contemporary accounts of the event told the story in different forms and for different reasons. What comes across is not necessarily Radegund's role as a patron, as much as her position within the networks and connections she pursued and developed in pursuit of her religious goals.

Asceticism and Friendship

In addition to writing on behalf of Radegund's big projects, Fortunatus wrote many small notes of friendship to Radegund and Agnes. The poems chronicle the gifts, meals, flowers, and festivals the three friends shared. They suggest that the poet sometimes had access to the convent, and in some poems he imagines himself participating in cooking and gardening.¹⁸⁷ In *Carmen Appendix 28*, Fortunatus gives a description of the work Radegund performs and its tiring effect,

Just now you, willing, exhaust your limbs in fugitive time,
With Christ perpetual rest will be given.
When, truly perspiring, you prepare meals for the sisters,
Hence may your face be washed with waves, and thence may it be warmed with
flames.
With constant prayers I am enveloped in your arms,
And your burden wears out my soul.

¹⁸⁶ On their use in medieval England, see John J. Thompson, 'Agency and Appetite for Religious Song: Vexilla Regis and Its First Thousand Years', *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature*, 93 (2012). On reception in Anglo-Saxon England, see Inge B. Milfull, 'Hymns to the Cross: Contexts for the Reception of Vexilla Regis Prodeunt', in *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Catherine E. Karkov, Sarah Larratt Keefer, and Karen Louise Jolly (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), pp. 43-57. See also Sarah Larratt Keefer, 'The Performance of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Cross and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Karen Louise Jolly, Catherine E. Karkov, and Sarah Larratt Keefer (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2007), pp. 203-41. and Joseph Szövérfy, *Hymns of the Holy Cross* (Brookline Classical Folia Editions, 1976). As Milfull points out, the two hymns only seem to have entered found a regular place in the office during the ninth century, pp.46-7.

¹⁸⁷ *Carm.App.22.9-14*.

Now you return to making the hearth, cooking the meals
And, lazy, I am not able, as you see, to help my mother.¹⁸⁸

Carmen Appendix 22 also suggests he had access to observe (or imagine) the nuns' chores and devotional work. This is one of the poems of absence—the poet imagines the tasks he would undertake, at Radegund's command, if he were present. It is not clear whether he actually would have fetched water, scoured pots, and performed other chores. As Peter Dronke points out that the 'playfulness' of these lines comes from the fact that these are impossible things.¹⁸⁹

Few of the poems to Radegund and Agnes can be dated to any specific period after Fortunatus came to the convent of the Holy Cross—it is thought that Book Eight of the collection was published in 590-591 as a memorial to Radegund and the ideals of her foundation after her death in 587.¹⁹⁰ The haphazard nature of Book Eleven and the set of poems known as the Appendix, which contain in part the more personal poems to Radegund and Agnes, have led scholars to think that these were collected after the death of Fortunatus. The poems make it clear that theirs was a friendship often conducted through separation, caused by the poet's travels and the women's asceticism. As Barbara Rosenwein notes, friendship studies have largely focused on two areas: friendship in monastic contexts, and the use of Cicero in the Middle Ages.¹⁹¹ As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, women's friendships, even those in a monastic context, remain largely unexplored territory. In the following, I examine pitfalls and possibilities of friendship within an ascetic monastic context.

To start with the potential problems: in *Carm.* 11.6, Fortunatus describes his love for Agnes:

My mother in honour, but my sweet sister in love,
Whom I cherish with piety, faith, soul, heart
With heavenly affection, not with any guilt of body
Not the flesh, but this which the spirit desires, I love,

¹⁸⁸ quae modo membra libens fugitivo tempore lassas/ cum Christo dabitur perpetuanda quies./ <os> ubi nempe paras sudanda sororibus escas/ undis et flamis hinc riget, inde calet:/ assiduis uotis inter tua bracchia uoluo/ atque meos animos sarcina uestra terit./ nunc faciendo focus epulasque coquendo recurris/ nec ualeo matrem quippe iuuare piger' *Carm.* App. 28, lines 3-9, Pucci, *Friends* p. 120. Leo gives line five as [dextra], ubi nempe paras sororibus sudando escas

¹⁸⁹ Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 205.

¹⁹⁰ Reydellet I, pp. xxxii and lxx-lxxi

¹⁹¹ Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'The Sorrows of Friendship', in *Splendor Reginae: Passions, Genre et Famille*, ed. by Laurent Jégou, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 313-19 (pp. 313-4).

Christ is present as witness, with Peter and Paul as attendants,
And with the pious companions holy Mary sees
You were not to me different, in my eyes and soul,
Than you were Titania, my sister from the womb...¹⁹²

‘Noxia uerba’ (line 16) were one of the perils of the relationship between religious men and women. As Christian writers turned to the Latin amatory and erotic vocabulary to express the intensity of their spiritual feelings and affections, the classical meanings of these words lingered and created ambiguity. Two other poems in Fortunatus’ corpus attest that the closeness of his relationship with the women had given rise to gossip; in *Carm.App.24*, the poet expresses the anxiety and distress such rumours have caused him: ‘Anxious, vexed, I am bowed by a burden of worries/ from my upset heart I am not able to produce words;/ I am mangled with a whisper about doubt and do not extend poems,/ I am unable to speak certainly with my mind empty.’¹⁹³ Separated from Radegund and Agnes, the poet asks the clouds to carry his words to them and protests that if he was able he would build wings and fly to them, like Daedalus. Despite their current separation, the poet wants to return and seek pardon. ‘Excuse, if perchance you are able, by the stars, witness/ I do not want you to speak of delay in my mother’s hearing./ Pray for a servant: I will quickly prepare to return/ and when I am present, subdue (me) with voice and lash.’¹⁹⁴ If George and Meyer are right, and *beata* in *Carm.11.6* refers posthumously to Radegund, then this poem, in which she is clearly still living, predates it. The closeness of Fortunatus’ relationship with the women, in particular with Agnes, caused talk and temporary separation but did not permanently damage their friendship. *Carm.App.10* confirms that the poet was welcomed back to their *benigna mensa*; he asked them to send a letter to confirm this.¹⁹⁵

Gifts of food and flowers were an important part of the relationship between the poets and the nuns. Radegund, as McCash notes, was one of the first medieval

¹⁹² *Carm.11.6.1-6*. Reydellet and George suggest that use of the word *beata* to describe Radegund means that this poem was written after her death in 587. Mater honore mihi, soror autem dulcis amore,/ quam pietate, fide, pectore, corde colo,/ caelesti affectu, non crimine corporis ullo,/ non caro, sed hoc quod spiritus optat amo./ Testis/ adest Christus, Petro Pauloque ministris,/ cumque piis sociis sancta Maria uidet,/ te mihi non aliis oculis animoque fuisse,/ quam soror ex utero tu Titania fores...

¹⁹³ *Carm.App.24.1-4*: Anxius, afflictus curarum pondere curuor,/ pectore confuso nec dare uerba queo;/ murmure sub dubio laceror neque carmina laxo,/ nescio certo loqui mente uacante mihi.

¹⁹⁴ *Carm.App.24.13-16*. Excusa, si forte potes, per sidera testator,/ me neque uelle moras matris in aure feras./ Oret pro famulo: citius remeare parabo,/ et cum praesentor, uerbere, uoce domet.

¹⁹⁵ *Carm.App.10*

women to make a name for herself as a patron, and unlike later medieval queens, the support the poet received from her was food, friendship, and gifts, rather than money.¹⁹⁶ The importance of gift-giving in early medieval social and political relationships has been well-studied, but as Tyrrell observes, the evidence of gift-giving in Merovingian letters is very sparse; on the rare occasions letter-writers did give gifts, these were usually small, easily portable objects. As she points out, the letter was a gift in itself, and senders and recipients expected no more.¹⁹⁷ All of Fortunatus' poems were in and of themselves gifts, and the gifts he mentions sending and receiving are all small, in size and value, and reflect his feelings for his friends.¹⁹⁸ Interestingly, he receives gifts from men and women, but gives them in poems written to or for women.¹⁹⁹ Florin Curta's otherwise excellent article on gift-giving, though it mentions gifts given by queens, does not discuss the role of gender in gift-giving. Hospitality and generosity were part of the role of a good queen, aspects of the royal role Radegund herself was criticised for neglecting. Gifts were important to cementing relationships within and outside of the court but in the letters and letter collections of late antiquity, friendship was a world of men only.²⁰⁰ How was it possible for women to participate?

As Verena Epp notes, Fortunatus circumvents the issue of gender and friendship by addressing Radegund and Agnes in the language of spiritual kinship. They are *mater* and *soror*, but he also addresses them with the loving language that Christian authors had repurposed from the classical lexicon of love and friendship. Radegund is *mea lux* (Carm.11.2 and Carm.11.21), Agnes is *dulce* (Carm.11.5) and once *delicias animae* (Carm.11.16), but they are most often addressed as mother and sister. Fortunatus, like other Christian authors, uses *amor*, *dilectio*, and *caritas* as

¹⁹⁶ June Hall McCash, *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 11-2.

¹⁹⁷ Alice Tyrrell, 'Merovingian Letters and Letter Writers' (University of Toronto, 2012), p. 235. As she notes on p210, only 16% of Merovingian letters mention gifts. Small gifts had an obvious advantage over larger ones in that they could be transported by the same person who carried the letter; larger presents required the trouble and expense of arranging for their delivery.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 212-3.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 215. Note that in Theudechild's epitaph, Carm.4.25, Fortunatus praises the queen's gift-giving.

²⁰⁰ For comments on late antique epistolary friendships as a world of men, see Wood, 'The Exchange of Gifts Among the Late Antique Aristocracy'. Florin Curta, 'Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving', *Speculum*, 81 (2006), briefly refers to Fortunatus' gifts to Placidina and Radegund (pp. 280-1) and discusses the gifts given by queens in political contexts (pp. 285-6) but does not discuss women's friendships. On the hospitality and gift-giving of queens, see Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 101.

synonyms for *amicitia*, particularly for the women. Christian authors had thought friendship was only possible between a man and a woman if she was his mother, daughter, or sister. To this Fortunatus, Radegund, and Agnes were exceptions.²⁰¹ But the poet still created a family for them in verses—with Radegund as the mother and himself and Agnes as the two children, which created an acceptable space for friendship and gift-giving.

Of the fifty-five poems for Radegund and Agnes, at least fifteen refer to gifts of food or meals. It is not clear that the poet and his friends ever dined together—this would have contravened their Rule—but they seemingly delighted in feeding him.²⁰² Nor was this nourishment purely physical—in *Carm.* 11.8, Fortunatus acknowledges his gratitude for the way the sisters' food has fed his soul: Feasts feed my limbs, love nourishes my soul: / which, to one whose need is more, you come, a sweeter meal.²⁰³ In two delightful poems, Fortunatus celebrates the bounties of Radegund's table, describing the menu, the serving dishes, and his own repletion at the feast's end.²⁰⁴ The poems were gifts in exchange for the feasts, which in turn strengthened their friendship, as the last couplet of *Carm.* 11.10 suggests: Being a servant to this lady mother, these gifts, / I shall mention to the daughter, bound a third by pious love.²⁰⁵ *Carm.* 11.11 opens by addressing the 'felix conuiuia' before Agnes has spread a beautifully flower-decked table. (Fortunatus also wrote in praise of the flower arrangements Agnes and Radegund made for Easter.²⁰⁶) The poet particularly thanked them for the wine they provided with one feast, which he had sufficiently enjoyed as to find the task of thanking them for difficult.²⁰⁷ Some

²⁰¹ Epp, *Amicitia*, p. 114.

²⁰² Laure Chappuis Sandoz, 'Les épigrammes gourmandes de Venance Fortunat', in *La Renaissance de l'épigramme dans la latinité tardive*, ed. by Marie-France Guipponi-Gineste and Céline Urlacher-Becht (Paris: De Boccard, 2013), pp. 345-60 (p. 350) argues that the gifts of food bear witness to Radegund's authority, independence, and resistance to the overly severe strictures of the Caesarian Rule. I would argue that the gifts are given with love rather than defiance.

²⁰³ *Carm.* 11.8.7-8. Pascunt membra dapes, animam dilectio nutrit:/ quae, cui plus opus es, dulcior esca uenis.

²⁰⁴ *Carm.* 11.9-10. *Carm.* 11.12, which does not describe the meal the poet was offered, is also thanks for food. For analysis of these poems and their debt to classical epigram, see Sandoz, 'Les épigrammes gourmandes de Venance Fortunat', pp. 350-4.

²⁰⁵ *Carm.* 11.10.13-4. Haec dominae matri famulans, haec munera natae/ uinctus amore pio tertius ipse loquar

²⁰⁶ *Carm.* 8.7

²⁰⁷ *Carm.* 11.23

manuscripts join a further two lines to this poem: ‘A charming mistress restored her own man with words and meals/ and sates with various enticing jokes.’²⁰⁸

In addition to feasts, the women also provided the poet with meals when he was ill, though this occasioned a frantic apology when the poet learned that his doctor’s miscommunication had kept him from the meal.²⁰⁹ This was not the only time Fortunatus’ doctor interfered with his dining plans, though on this occasion Agnes sent milk, as prescribed.²¹⁰ He does not seem to have brooked restrictions on his eating: ‘I heard, I admit, that long fasts are prepared: / if they should come to me, they are a burden not to be borne.’²¹¹ Fortunatus might praise his friends for their fasting and discipline but he did not wish to join them.

As argued above, Radegund and Agnes followed a liberal interpretation of the Rule of Caesarius which enabled them to socialise with Fortunatus within the demands of the monastic life. Fortunatus’ poems indicated that they were particularly relaxed about the rules surrounding hospitality. The nuns were enjoined against preparing special meals for visitors, but the poet seems to have dined in their presence, if his request for mealtime conversation is taken seriously:

By the work of piety, by him who rules the stars,
By what the mother loves, the brother also desires,
That, while we seize meals, you may say something:
If you should do that, I will be twice sated.²¹²

In addition to meals, the poet was also given edible presents which were not full meals, including *lactea munera*, which prompted him to speak directly to friendship when seeing the marks of Agnes’ fingers on her gift: ‘O venerable friendship, by acquiring plunder/ your likeness comes to me when sight is taken away!’²¹³ The women gave him milk on other occasions.²¹⁴ The poet also gave the women gifts of food—in *Carm.*11.13, he records the gift of chestnuts in a basket he had fashioned himself. He also sent them plums and encouraged Radegund to eat

²⁰⁸ *Carm.*11.23a. Blanda magistra suum uerba recreauit escis/ et satiat uario deliciante ioco.

²⁰⁹ *Carm.*11.16.

²¹⁰ *Carm.*11.19.

²¹¹ *Carm.*App.30. Audiui, fateor, ieiunia longa parari:/ ad me si ueniant, non toleranda grauant.

²¹² *Carm.*11.22 Per pietatis opus, per qui pius imperat astris, / Per quod mater amat, frater et ipse cupit,/ Ut, dum nose scam capimus, quodcumque loquaris:/ Quod sit tu facias, bis satiabor ego.

²¹³ *Carm.*11.14.4-5 O uenerandus amor cuius faciente rapina/ subtracta specie uenit imago mihi!

²¹⁴ *Carm.*11.15; and *Carm.*11.22a, where the poet is delighted by a draught of buttermilk.

them: 'I am not a cruel man, who would offer unsuitable things to his mother: / don't hesitate to accept the food with your jaws.'²¹⁵ In turn, the women sent him eggs and prunes, on which he binged, turning the moment around as a sign of his respect for their spiritual authority: 'And would that I deserve to obey every day/ thus with my soul just as today my appetite gave orders.'²¹⁶

As well as responding to the women's gifts of food, Fortunatus offered Radegund flowers: fragrant purple violets, since neither roses nor lilies are in season, though friendship he suggests that friendship can turn them into roses: he who offers violets also brings roses because of love.²¹⁷ On another occasion, Fortunatus, calling himself *amans*, offered Radegund (*regina potens*) a bouquet of crocuses and violets. The gold and purple of the flowers suggest the worldly wealth Radegund has rejected and the rewards she will earn in heaven. Her ascetic practices are a means to the end of salvation 'as you mortify your flesh, be revived in a light you will come to know.'²¹⁸ But the poem does not end there, but on earth. When Radegund returns her appearance will cause the flowers to flourish: 'Although the favour of the flowers of paradise awaits you,/ these want to see you again out of doors./ And although they seem to please with an exceptional odour,/ they adorn their foliage more when you return.'²¹⁹

Some of the gifts just mentioned—flowers, fruit, and nuts—have precedents in erotic elegy, where inexpensive, carefully presented gifts were part of the sport of seduction. But whereas 'in elegiac contexts [gifts were] constantly problematized by

215 *Carm.*11.18.7-8. Non ego crudelis, qui matri incongrua praestem:/ ne dubites puros sumere fauce cibos.

216 *Carm.*11.20.7-8. Atque utinam merear cunctis parere diebus/ sic animo, ceu nunc hoc gula iussa facit.

217 *Carm.*8.6.6 profert qui uiolas, fert et amore rosas.

218 'quae modo te crucias, recreanda in luce futura' *Carm.*8.8. 9, Pucci *Friends*, p. 83.

219 There is a possible ambiguity here with the word *comas*. Pucci suggests a translation 'The beauty of the flowers of paradise awaits you (not doubt)/ but the flowers I've sent wish to see you again/ in the world—and though their singular smell may seem pleasant enough/ you've returned—they belong more properly in your hair.' Joseph Michael Pucci, *Poems to Friends* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), p. 83. But no woman in Latin elegy is ever platonically told to put flowers in her hair (c.f. Propertius III.10). Roberts translation of that last line 'their blossoms will be all the finer at your return,' seems more in keeping the addressee and occasion. Roberts, p. 289. A translation on Epistolae database unsuccessfully strikes out for the middle road between the two: 'they adorn their own hair more with you returning.' Joan Ferrante, 'A Letter from Fortunatus (after 567)' (no date). <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/921.html> [accessed 16/2/2016] *Carm.*8.8.15-18. Quamuis te expectet paradisi gratia florum,/ isti uos cupiunt iam reuidere foris./ Et licet egregio uideantur odore placere,/ plus ornant proprias te redeunte comas.

the subversive hint of mercenary transaction,²²⁰ Fortunatus' description of Radegund as his social and spiritual superior muffles the charge of his giving. Fortunatus' gift-giving is not one-sided, but reciprocated with gifts of food from the nuns, which brings it closer to the tradition of friendly gift-giving. The fact that Fortunatus' relationship with Agnes in particular causes gossip suggests that not everyone in Merovingian Gaul read his gifts as he wanted them to be read.²²¹

Fortunatus is among the many early medieval writers who refers to his own literary works as gifts—even if he occasionally downplayed this (Carm. 9.1 was a *munusculum*), poems and letters were valuable in their own right.²²² It is worth emphasising that Fortunatus only gave physical objects as gifts to women, but refers to his writings as gifts when addressing both men and women. In Carm.11.17, the poet describes the poem he addresses to Radegund and Agnes as a gift in and of itself: 'I build this gift of love (*munus amoris*) with my own hands, but I ask that it be sweet to you or my lady/ although small things seem petty to prepare/ let the small things which I bear grow presently with affection./ if you consider it well, among all friends (*amantes*) always/ greater favour (*gratia*) belongs to little gifts.'²²³ As D'Evelyn notes, 'the text as gift resonates with complexities of meaning—social, personal, artistic and religious.'²²⁴ Early medieval givers often denigrate the quality and importance of their gifts and a performance of humility was part of a well-written Christian letter. Fortunatus' poetic gift emphasises its own insignificance while suggesting it is in fact the opposite—a gift which will grow to size to fit the favour and affections of its recipients.

Fortunatus' exchange of messages and gifts with Radegund and Agnes implies a close friendship but also one with frequent periods of separation, patterned

²²⁰ Sharrock, 'Womanaufacture', pp. 43-5.

²²¹ Chris Wickham, 'Conclusion', in *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Paul Fouracre and Wendy Davies (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 238-61 (p. 240). 'But the problem was that gifts could be read in different ways, and one had to be careful both about misreadings and, if one could, control the seminological context: how the gift was read and/or was reported to have been read.'

²²² Ibid. p. 251. The word *munusculum* was associated with vocabulary of civic benefactions. See Claire Sotinel, 'The Bishops of Late Antique Society: A New Elite?', in *Church and Society in Late Antique Italy and Beyond* ed. by Claire Sotinel (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), p. 7, n. 24.

²²³ Carm.11.17 *Composui propriis minibus hoc munus amoris,/ sed tibi uel dominae sit rogo dulce meae,/ quamuis exiguo uideantur inepta paratu:/ crescent affect quae modo parua fero./ Si bene perpendas, apud omnes semper amantes/ muneribus paruis gratia maior inest.*

²²⁴ Stephen D'Evelyn, 'Gift and the Personal Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Literature and Theology*, 21 (2007), 2.

in part according to the demands of the liturgical calendar and the women's ascetic practices. *Carmen* 8.5, although not describes as a gift, is certainly presented as one: it is an acrostic in which Radegund's name appears on both axes. The poet mentions that she is on retreat, which will be of spiritual benefit.

While you lie hidden in a cell, hence you see above the stars.
You crush the harmful joys of the earthly kingdom
So that by favouring heaven you, happy woman, may please its king.
Now you are close-confined in order to enter heaven:
Shedding tears you will reap true joys.
And you torture your body, hungers feed your soul ²²⁵

Voluntary self-seclusion had long been a part of the ascetic tradition, as had weeping, and it seems that Radegund engages in some sort of discipline or mortification. Fortunatus honours her devotion and its purpose.

A theme that runs through the poems is Radegund's absence on retreats and Fortunatus' wish and anticipation of seeing her again. *Carmen* 8.9 begins with a statement of this,

Mind fruitful with God, Radegund, life of the sisters,
You burn your flesh to stoke your soul:
Honouring your annual vow today you hasten back to be enclosed
My feelings will wander, demanding you back. ²²⁶

Cremas membras could be a figurative statement of Radegund's subjugation of flesh to spirit, but Fortunatus elsewhere describes Radegund burning her limbs with a brand and basin of glowing coals. Though he presents Radegund's reasons for retreat and for self-mortification with sympathy and understanding, a note of ambiguity is introduced. Radegund's absence makes him anxious for her presence and her praiseworthy actions are occurring at a personal cost.

In another poem, Agnes and Fortunatus' expressed concern about Radegund's overwork or possibly illness and begged Radegund, as her servants, to drink a little wine to soothe her exhaustion,

...Fortunatus the pleader and Agnes pray with verses
That you drink kindly wine when exceedingly tired...
...let the cause, not the appetite get you to accept wine,

²²⁵ 'et dum clausa lates, hinc super astra vides. / gaudia terreni conculas noxia regni, / ut placeas regi laeta favente polo. / nunc augusta tenes, quo caelos largior intres: / diffundens lacrimas gaudia vera metes/ et corpus crucias, animam ieiunia pascunt... *Carm.*8.5.4-10.

²²⁶ Mens fecunda deo, Radegundis, vita sororum / quae ut foveas animam membra domando cremas / annua vota colens hodie claudenda recurris:/ errabunt animi te repetendo mei. *Carm.* 8.9.1-4, The translation of line 2 is from Pucci, *Friends*, p. 84.

Indeed such a draught aids tired hearts²²⁷

The poem implies that Radegund undertakes an extreme amount of work as an ascetic practice and also that she deprives herself of drink, practices found in more detail in the Life. Once again, the poet emphasises the worthwhile nature of Radegund's activities, but gently suggests that if she over-extends her body she will not be able to achieve her goals. Both of the nuns pushed themselves to extremes; retreats and fasting could interrupt the flow of friendly communication. In *Carm.* 11.6 Fortunatus and Radegund expressed concern about Agnes, who had not communicated with either of them due to her fasting and retreat.

Indeed, I have learned that you had abstained from food
And it is as if through you hunger occurred in me.
I listen, does helpless sleep oppress your radiant eyes;
Can it be that you wish to anticipate excessive night? (10)
To whom are these long times of quiet not sufficient
Since night holds near what day duplicated?²²⁸

In the phrase 'radiant eyes' (*radiantes...ocellos*) in line nine, Pucci sees an 'obvious parallel' to Catallus' 63. 39-40, 'with radiant eyes' (*radiantibus oculis*)—which occurs in the incident when Attis, the protagonist of the poem, realizes that he has made himself a eunuch in a night of 'frenzied devotion.' Pucci's suggestion is that Fortunatus is worried that Agnes' practices are leading her to similar harmful extremes.²²⁹ Her days and nights have blended together and her vigils are so intense she may be hastening her body's death. These moments of concern are rare: Radegund and Agnes went on solo retreats numerous times during the period of their relationship chronicled in Fortunatus' poetry, but usually he simply lamented absence and separation, as in *Carmen* 11.7, where he expressed the wish to see his friends again soon and to not repeat the experience of absence.²³⁰

When the poems to Radegund and Agnes and the Life of Radegund are considered together, they are usually thought to provide very different pictures.

²²⁷ Fortunatus agens, Agnes quoque versibus orant/ ut lassata nimis vina benigna bibas.../non gula vos, sed causa trahat modo sumere vina/talis enim potus viscera lassa iuvat.' *Carm.* 11.4, lines 3-4 and 9-10. Pucci translated 'agens' as 'agent'. I prefer pleader; I do not think this poem demonstrates that the poet had an official role at the convent. Pucci, *Friends*, p. 89.

²²⁸ abstinuisse cibis etiam uos ipse probaui/ et quasi pro uobis est mihi facta fames. / audio, somnus iners radiantes pressit ocellos/ an nimias noctes anticipare uolis?/ cui non sufficient haec tempora longa quietis/ cum prope nox teneat quod duplicata dies? *Carm.* 11.6.7-12, p. 91.

²²⁹ Pucci, *Friends*, pp. 89-90.

²³⁰ *Carm.* 11.7. Pucci, *Friends*, p. 94.

Radegund in Fortunatus' hagiography is a rigorous and withdrawn ascetic, and in the poetry a beloved friend and spiritual mother. As Jo Ann McNamara put it '[In the Life] Fortunatus was apparently determined to make good his claim for Radegund that she had earned a place among the martyrs. His occasional poetry reflects a far different picture of the nuns at Poitiers, however. There he celebrates the pleasant feasts they shared and displays a long, affectionate intimacy based on mutual love of learning and poetry.'²³¹ This is an understandable picture: Fortunatus give detailed praise of the feasts the nuns lavished on him and these is some suggestion that he enjoyed their company while he ate; Radegund in the hagiography does severely and secretly mortify her flesh. But close attention to Fortunatus' references to ascetic practices in his poetry brings these two pictures closer together.

The gentler face of ascetic life can be seen in appreciation of poetry Fortunatus, Radegund, and Agnes shared; Book Eleven and the Appendix make it clear that he regularly wrote and sent them his work. But as we have seen from the brief mentions in his poetry, these exchanges occurred in a community where fasting, weeping, prayer, self-mortification, and self-imposed isolation, were a frequent part of everyday life. Mentions of the women's ascetic practices and their treatment of their bodies are woven throughout the poetry. For Fortunatus, an ascetic's manipulation of her body was a means to her end of salvation but he also expressed concern for the physical effects of his friends' stringency.

After the death of Abbess Agnes, shortly after the death of Radegund, the community experienced an uprising which must have badly damaged its reputation. In this way, Fortunatus' and Baudonivia's Lives can be seen as attempts to emphasize the holiness and stability of a community which for a time had been anything but holy or peaceful. Fortunatus' account takes care to establish Radegund's standing as an ascetic. The twenty-first and twenty-second chapters of Fortunatus' Life discuss Radegund's practice of going on solitary retreats, emphasizing how little she ate and drank during these times. The next two chapters provide corroboration of Fortunatus' poetic portrait of Radegund busying herself and burning her hands going about the cooking and cleaning. Chapters 26 and 27 are perhaps the most notorious in the Life, for at this point Fortunatus describes the

²³¹ McNamara, Halborg, and Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, p. 63.

additional practices of mortification Radegund undertook. In chapter twenty-six, he mentions how during one Lent she so tightly bound herself with chains that her skin swelled over them and removing them caused severe cutting and bleeding.²³² In chapter twenty-seven, he describes an occasion where she had a brass plate with ‘the sign of Christ’ made, took it back to her cell, heated it, and then branded herself with it. During another Lent, she took a basin of burning coals back to her cell and held it to herself until she was severely burned. It is not difficult to see Fortunatus’ complaints about Radegund’s absences during her retreats as a genuine fear for her survival. But it is worth emphasizing that these practices, were out of the ordinary for Radegund, as they are the unrepeated events of three separate occasions. Significantly, after Fortunatus awed his audience with Radegund’s feats and justified her claim to the suffering of a martyr, he can turn to his attention to a long list of her miracles.

Despite the difference of genre, audience, and circumstances of composition, Fortunatus’ gave a consistent portrait of his friends’ asceticism as a regular and worthwhile part of their religious practice. Radegund and Agnes’ practices of sleep deprivation, self-isolation, fasting, and even burning occur in brief mention throughout his poems and in the *Life of Radegund* they feature in more explicit detail. But his poetry and his prose are subtly different. In the *Life*, he expresses the admirable stringency of Radegund’s practices and their intended purposes. In poems, which were explicitly and implicitly amicable gifts, he seems to say that his friends’ treatment of their bodies could sometimes go too far.

Conclusion

It is Fortunatus’ poems for female friends and patrons where we can truly see the widening distance between classical and Merovingian friendship. This was reflected in the changed relationship between friendship and patronage: where they had been distinct, though sometimes overlapping, relationships in the late Roman period, in Fortunatus’ writings patronage is subsumed into friendship. His poems to Palatina, Placidina, Radegund, and Agnes reflect this change.

²³² Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 109, sees in this a deliberate parody of royal jewellery.

As Emily Hemelrijk's recent study of women's roles in Roman civic life makes clear, patronage had always been a space open to women of means or high rank. Roman society was an 'overwhelmingly male world', but women of a variety of social backgrounds participated in public life as civic benefactresses, the patronesses and mothers of cities and *collegia*, and as civic priestesses; and they were publicly honoured with statutes and funerals.²³³ Hemelrijk draws her evidence primarily from the epigraphic record and her study stops at the end of the third century, but her work provides a foundation for historians of women in late antiquity to build. Late antique women continued and further developed the tradition of female civic involvement. The growth and development of Christianity provided new opportunities for patronage and benefaction, even as more ancient opportunities were neglected or eliminated. Even as the will of late antique female patrons remains difficult to discern—none of the letters of Jerome's female correspondents survive—women had an important role in the commissioning of Christian texts.²³⁴

Female friendships, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, had their own possibilities and problems. Whatever may have existed in practice, mixed-sex friendships were strictly limited in theory: if a precondition of friendship was that friends be equals, and women were intellectually inferior to men, then a true friendship was not possible. There was also a language problem: the amatory and erotic shades of meaning inherent in the feminine equivalents of friendly language (*amica*, *cara*, *delicia*, and so on), complicated the task of addressing and writing about female friends.²³⁵ Fortunatus avoided these linguistic pitfalls by employing techniques also used in late antiquity to address women: praise of their ancestry, character, and physical beauty. Fortunatus primarily wrote to aristocratic women within the context of their families—Placidina, the wife of Bishop Leontius of Bordeaux, received a small amicable gift in her own right; and the poet makes it clear that the couple's benefactions and building projects were a joint effort. Their efforts, as we saw in Chapter 3, can be compared to the smaller-scale benefactions of other aristocratic couples. The poem in praise of Palatina, a bishop's daughter and

²³³ Emily Ann Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae: Women and Civic Life in the Roman West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 339.

²³⁴ Anne Kurdock, 'Demetrias Ancilla Dei: Anicia Demetrias and the Problem of the Missing Patron', in *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome* ed. by Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 190-224.

²³⁵ Epp, *Amicitia*, pp. 74-6.

the wife of Frankish official, stands out among his works, particularly since it seems to form a diptych with a similar poem to her husband. Fortunatus sought a connection with Placidina, Palatina, and their husbands, but other Merovingian women sought out the poet for his ability to honour their deceased relatives. Relatively few of Fortunatus epitaphs identify the person responsible for commissioning the text; but of those that do, most of the commissioners were women. The women, all whom are otherwise unattested, show that the poet was patronised by women of more modest aristocratic status, as well as great noblewomen like Palatina and Placidina.

In discussing the patronage and friendship of aristocratic women, we established that Fortunatus' writings for women were in the late antique tradition. In examining the issues raised by his writings for two prominent religious women, Radegund and Agnes, we can see how he innovated within this tradition, as well as continuing to use traditional motifs such as the use of a female voice and persona. As I have shown in considering the manuscript evidence, the first three Appendix poems had a wider circulation than has previously been thought and medieval and that early modern audience clearly considered these poems to be written by Fortunatus. An analysis of these three poems does not support the feminist argument that some of Fortunatus' poems ought to be attributed to Radegund, but strengthens the case that the poet wrote at her request and on her behalf. The former queen was one of Fortunatus' foremost literary patrons. She commissioned three major poems to accompany her efforts to contact her family and obtain a relic of the Holy Cross from Byzantium and an additional series of hymns to celebrate the relic's reception in her convent in Poitiers.

Alongside his formal commissions, Fortunatus also wrote many informal poems for Radegund and Agnes. As this analysis demonstrated, Fortunatus inherited a tradition of Christian thought which took on many aspects of classical thought about women, including wariness of friendships between unrelated men and women and they limited friendships to families. In this, they left a loophole, for the Christian language and concept of family was not limited to blood relatives. Furthermore, Ambrose, Jerome, and Paulinus of Nola took on and Christianised the ideas and terminology of Latin friendship, including terminology of love and ideas

of presence and absence.²³⁶ In writing to Radegund and Agnes, Fortunatus used language of spiritual kinship—referring to the women as his mother and sister in addition to continuing to employ the epithets of Classical affection. For friends in late antiquity, gift-giving was a substantial part of friendly interaction, and the trio exchanged food, meals, poems, and letters. Within the poems themselves, there is wide variety—there are poems mourning absence and celebrating the poet’s or the nuns’ return from journeys or retreats; gifts are shared and gratitude expressed.

I conclude that patronage and friendship were possible, and indeed, thrived, within the context of ascetic female monasticism. Fortunatus’ friendship with Radegund and Agnes led him to portray their way of life in manner that was both respectful and concerned about their wellbeing. As Rosenwein notes, ‘...we can never know if friends loved one another passionately. But we can be sure that they esteemed such bonds. They patronised Fortunatus because he expressed and celebrated such feelings in a pleasing style.’²³⁷ In the emotional community of poet and nuns, we may be as close as we can come to understanding how and why friends were cherished.

²³⁶ Fiske, *Friendship*, pp. 92-132.

²³⁷ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 121.

Chapter 4, Writing for Royalty

Introduction

In *Poets and Emperors*, Peter Godman argued that without the model of Fortunatus' writing for kings, the works of Carolingian poets cannot be properly understood.¹ He left a definitive legacy of some thirty poems for or about royalty—future generations had a wealth of models from which to choose.² This chapter seeks to situate these poems within the context of the themes of patronage and friendship that run through the poet's work. The first section discusses the panegyrics Fortunatus wrote for Merovingian kings, which were carefully crafted public responses to the situations in which they were written. Many of the poems for Merovingian queens lack a clear context and cannot be discussed as occasional poems in the same way as the panegyrics, but the second section on poems for royal women offers a clear portrait of the importance of family, patronage, and generosity in their lives. The third and final section considers poems Fortunatus wrote to ruling pairs, finding that Merovingian marriages were presented within the late antique tradition of friendship between spouses, and developing the point about the importance of family from the second section.

Fortunatus began his career in Merovingian Gaul with the patronage of royalty, writing for the wedding of Sigibert and Brunhild, and performing at royal functions, while also composing poetry for bishops and members of the nobility.³ In this, he is comparable to other late antique Latin poets, such as Ennodius, whose aristocratic status and connections gained them the honour of writing panegyrics for barbarian kings.⁴ How these aristocrats, kings, and queens knew of Fortunatus in the first place is a question our evidence does not know allow us to answer but he offered them 'a living link with the cultural heritage to which they aspired'.⁵ Fortunatus' poetry shows us the public images that Merovingian nobility and royalty

¹ Peter Godman, *Poets and Emperors: Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p. x.

² Marc Reydellet, *La royauté*, p. 299.

³ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 24.

⁴ Marc Reydellet, *La royauté*, p. xvii.

⁵ Brian Brennan, 'The Image of the Frankish Kings in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 10 (1984), 1-3.

wished to present, including the ideal of Christian service to the poor and destitute.⁶ Like his other letters of friendship, Fortunatus' writings to royalty tell only one side of the story: I argue that his works reflected his patrons as they wished to be seen, but we have no surviving evidence of the process of commission or response to his work. Gregory of Tours writes about his own tense or friendly relationships with kings and queens, and gives some idea how they treated their bishops and officials, but not their court poets. Whereas we can compare his poems of friendship to other Merovingian collections such as the *Epistolae Austrasicae*, Fortunatus' royal panegyrics have no parallel among Merovingian writings.

Fortunatus never became permanently established at any Merovingian court. Brennan argues that he moved from kingdom to kingdom seeing patronage, and chances of permanent royal patronage ended for good with the death of Sigibert in 575.⁷ Koebner took an even more extreme view: after the death of Sigibert, Fortunatus' time at a highly cultured court was over, and he left the secular world completely.⁸ The argument that Fortunatus' world narrowed to exclude involvement with Merovingian royalty after 576 is false: his panegyric for Chilperic, his consolations of the deaths of Chilperic and Fredegund's sons, and his poems for Childebert II and Brunhild, were all products of the 580s. Brennan and Koebner are correct to identify the poems as the products of a specific window of time, but this window of time was 567-587, a substantial portion of his career in Gaul. Within these conventional pieces, it is possible to read across his work and see how he developed as a poet in 'technique, in ideas, and in his relationship to his patrons.'⁹

One constant of his relationship with Merovingian royalty was the continuing importance of his relationships with royal women, discussed below. As Reydellet argues, he was profoundly influenced by Radegund, who is unreasonably neglected in his work on royalty.¹⁰ Radegund's patronage and friendship should be set in the context of his connections to the other queens who patronised his work. The poet deserves some notice and much credit for being one of the few aristocrats of Merovingian Gaul to be on good terms with both Brunhild and Fredegund.¹¹ Yet

⁶ Ibid. p. 9.

⁷ Brennan, 'Career', p. 73.

⁸ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 38-9

⁹ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 35.

¹⁰ Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 341-2.

¹¹ On their rivalry, see Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp. 12-5.

it is important to note that he wrote for a selection of Merovingian royalty. There are some noticeable absences, particularly Guntram. The absence of Theudebert, Theudebald (r. 547-555), and Chlothar I is explained by the fact that they had died before the poet arrived in Francia. I emphasise the importance of Merovingian royal women, something scholarship on Fortunatus has not stressed enough, but here too Fortunatus was selective in his addressees: writing to living queens (Radegund, Brunhild, Fredegund, Ultrogotha) and commemorating those who had died (Theudechild and Galswinth).

It is unclear to what extent these panegyrics and other poems were commissions, and to what extent they were attempts to keep his networks alive through persistent ingratiation. Epp sees the effort as being mostly on Fortunatus' side. She argues that he was protected and patronised by kings, and secular and ecclesiastical aristocrats, but had to work to keep his relationships alive, reminding his royal patrons of the commitment between them.¹² This connection came with a limited viewpoint. The poet did not comprehensively cover the patronage and friendship relationships of kings: in particular, he paid no attention to royal patronage of monasteries or the cults of saints. Nor does he provide much insight into the king's role within his own city: the count of Poitiers was royally appointed, though the city's frequent shift between kingdoms must have made him a comparatively powerless figure beside the bishop.¹³

Royalty were special patrons and special friends. There was a clear legal distinction between royal patronage and other kinds.¹⁴ Direct appeals for royal patronage and protection are not much reflected in Fortunatus' work, but as Epp argues for higher levels of society patronage could take the form of *affinitas* or *proximitas*,¹⁵ Fortunatus' attempts to remain relevant to Merovingian royalty can thus be seen as an ongoing attempt to retain their support. Furthermore, the Merovingian royal families, though at the top of the patronage pyramid, were sometimes indirectly rather than directly engaged with it. They served as brokers,

¹² Epp, *Amicitia*, p. 170.

¹³ Marcel Garaud, 'Les classes sociales dans la cité de Poitiers à l'époque Mérovingienne', in *Études Mérovingiennes: Actes des Journées de Poitiers* (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1953), pp. 137-46 (pp. 137-8). Gregory of Tours discusses only one of these individuals in detail.

¹⁴ Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *Les origines du système féodal: le bénéfice et le patronat pendant l'époque Mérovingienne*, 6 edn (Paris: Hachette, 1926), pp. 283-4, 300-1, 313.

¹⁵ Epp, *Amicitia*, p. 304.

enabling different resources, including services, capital, information, and more, between parties separated by social status or geographic distance.¹⁶ Fortunatus' various friends and patrons undoubtedly performed acts of brokerage for him amongst themselves: either Sigibert or Germanus of Paris may have recommended the poet to Radegund, and the wide range of poetry he composed bears witness to how his reputation spread through Merovingian networks of family, patrons, and friends.¹⁷

1. Kings

Kingship is a well-studied aspect of Fortunatus' writings, and this section argues that ideas of patronage and friendship informed Fortunatus' works for Merovingian kings. As with the royal women and ruling couples examined in the next two sections, Fortunatus wrote steadily for kings throughout his career. Save Chlodomer (r. 511-534) and Chlothar II (r. 584-629/630), all the Merovingian kings with whom he was contemporary appear at least once in Fortunatus' poetry: he knew and wrote about Sigibert, Charibert, Chilperic, and Childebert II.¹⁸ However, of the kings who controlled Poitiers during his lifetime, he wrote only for Charibert, Chilperic, and Childebert II. Guntram is named only once, in a poem for an obscure *comes* Galactorius.¹⁹ Reydellet, surprised by this absence, argues that this must be explained by the assumption that Fortunatus never met Guntram, who came to prominence in his world in 584, when the king assumed guardianship of Chlothar II and Childebert II. The poet celebrated the king's visit to Metz in 588.²⁰ The rulers in Carm.X.9, discussed, below, are not named, though I take them to be Brunhild and Childebert.

¹⁶ Ola Teige, 'Friends, Brokers, and the King: A Norwegian Merchant's Informal Political Network in Copenhagen in the Early Eighteenth Century', in *Friendship and Social Networks in Scandinavia, 1000-1800*, ed. by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Thomas Småberg (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 255-74 (p. 261).

¹⁷ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 42.

¹⁸ Reydellet I, pp. xxxiv-xl. Fortunatus also makes four references to Clovis, whom Reydellet argues is Reydellet argues that Clovis is a 'glorious model'. Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 314-7.

¹⁹ *cui rite excellens rex Gunthechramnus honores/ maius adhuc debet, qui tibi magna dedit*. Carm.7.25. 11-2 Fortunatus wrote another poem for Galactorius, Carm.10.19. Pucci, *Friends*, p. 64, argues it predates Carm.7.25. The king Galactorius worked for in Carm.10.19 is not named.

²⁰ Reydellet I, p. xl.

Gregory, a senatorial aristocrat and powerful bishop, commented on the Merovingians as rulers, and scholarship has done much to uncover the nuances of these portraits.²¹ For Gregory, Christian governance was the duty of all who held positions of power: ‘what kings were expected to do, their officials and subordinates were expected to echo.’²² Within the constraints of his own political situation, he freely drew judgement on where rulers and officials achieved this and where they fell short. Fortunatus, particularly in the late 560s, when many of his panegyrics were written, had not established this sort of security. As was discussed in the Introduction, he was very likely of high aristocratic status himself, but he was a foreigner, a theme George and Pucci have pointed out that he revisited throughout his career. Fortunatus didn’t know Clovis’ sons or have Gregory’s reasons for disliking them. When he arrived he knew whatever Merovingian history was known in northern Italy. Reydellet argues that this may have been very little. However, a record of Frankish military involvement in the region during the 550s and exchange between Byzantium and the Merovingian kingdoms during the same period, suggest that he did not arrive completely ignorant.²³ Reydellet suggests that Fortunatus’ earlier information on the Merovingians came from the nobles of Sigibert’s court and then from his stay in Paris (where, based on the *Vita Germani*, he may have had

²¹ Among a very large body of work see, Felix Thürlemann, *Der historische Diskurs bei Gregor von Tours: Topoi und Wirklichkeit* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1974); Ian Wood, ‘Gregory of Tours and Clovis’, *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* 63 (1985); idem, ‘The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours’, *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* 71 (1993); Walter A. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); Guy Halsall, ‘Nero and Herod? The Death of Chilperic and Gregory of Tours’ Writing of History’, in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Ian Wood and Kathleen Mitchell (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 337-50; and E. T. Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines: Gregory of Tours and Women of the Merovingian Elite* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

²² Alicia McKenzie, ‘Model Rulers and Royal Misers: Public Morality among the Merovingian Aristocracy’, in *Poverty and Prosperity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Cynthia Kosso and Anne Scott (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 3-24 (p. 12).

²³ Walter Goffart, ‘Byzantine Policy in the West under Tiberius II and Maurice: the Pretenders Hermenegild and Gundovald (579-585)’, *Traditio*, 13 (1957); and Ian Wood, ‘The Frontiers of Western Europe: Developments East of the Rhine in the Sixth Century’, in *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, ed. by Richard Hodges and William Bowden (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 231-53. Over half of the forty-eight letters of the *Epistolae Austrasicae* bear witness to Merovingian diplomacy; see Andrew Gillett, ‘Ethnography and Imperium in the Sixth Century: Frankish and Byzantine Rhetoric in the Epistolae Austrasicae’, in *Basileia: Essays on Imperium and Culture in Honour of E.M. And M.J. Jeffreys*, ed. by Geoffrey Nathan and Lynda Garland (Brisbane: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2011), pp. 67-82; and idem, ‘Advise the Emperor Beneficially: Lateral Communication in Diplomatic Embassies between the Post-Imperial West and Byzantium’, in *Ambassadeurs et ambassades au cœur des relations diplomatiques*, ed. by Audrey Becker and Nicolas Drocourt (Metz: Centre de recherché universitaire Lorrain d’histoire, 2012), pp. 257-85.

an ecclesiastical source). After these first years his sources become harder to trace.²⁴ Radegund, who maintained ties to the Merovingians, was likely a fruitful source of information, as were Fortunatus' many friends in Merovingian officialdom.²⁵

Fortunatus did not draw a sharp distinction between the kings he writes about; indeed, Reydellet claims that Fortunatus' high opinion of Sigibert, Charibert, and Chilperic renders it useless to look for differences between them.²⁶ Each of these kings was praised with similar language. His title was *rex* and *princeps*—the first much more often than the last—qualified by a variety of stereotypical adjectives. A good king has qualities of *pietas*, *bonitas*, and *grauitas*.²⁷ The king is both *dominus* and *pater*, with associated ideas of protection, though only bishops are ever *pater patriae*. As was previously noted about, his praise poetry, Fortunatus uses lots of words for light and its movement in his descriptions of kings.²⁸ We have no way of knowing how Fortunatus' words reflect popular views or opinions of Merovingian kings.²⁹ These poems are among the most public of Fortunatus' works. We may not be able to say what bishops, aristocrats, and common folk thought about the king but discussion of what his panegyrist wanted them to think proves fruitful.

1.1. Charibert

When Fortunatus arrived in Gaul in 565/566, Charibert had ruled a kingdom centred on Paris, inherited from his uncle Childebert I since 561. His death after only six or seven years of rule caused the ill-fated division of his kingdom between

²⁴ Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 313-4.

²⁵ Radegund's political position is suggested by a line from *Carm.App.1.165-6: Ut me commendes Francorum regibus oro, / qui materna sic pia colunt*; her hagiographer Baudonivia attested to the queen's active interest in the political stability of the Merovingian kingdoms. Jo Ann McNamara, John E. Halborg, and E. Gordon Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 62.

²⁶ Reydellet, *La royauté*, p. 320.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 332. On the characteristics of early medieval kingship, P. H. Sawyer and Ian Wood, *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1977) remains illuminating. See also J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Gregory of Tours and Bede: Their Views on the Personal Qualities of Kings', in *Early Medieval History*, ed. by J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), pp. 96-114. For attention to the subject of kings specific to Fortunatus, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 35-61, and Brennan, 'The Image of the Merovingian Kings', pp. 7-8.

²⁸ Reydellet, *La royauté*, p. 340.

²⁹ See George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 60-1 and Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 333-7.

his surviving brothers. Gregory of Tours' account of the king focuses on his irregular marriages and his failure to listen to ecclesiastical reproof, as well a dispute with Leontius of Bordeaux about the bishopric of Saintes. Gregory also recorded Charibert's attempt to take back a royal villa which had been donated to the church of St Martin; the king's refusal to return the property led to this death.³⁰ Halfond argues that Gregory did not have first-hand knowledge of Charibert, and got most of his information from his predecessor Eufronius of Tours; furthermore Gregory's portrait of the king contradicts the conciliar evidence, which shows the king working cooperatively with his bishops up until the dispute about his marriage in the final months of his life. He dismisses Fortunatus' portrait of a saintly king as probably inaccurate but argues that Charibert was more politically effective than Gregory makes him out to be.³¹

As George discusses in her analysis of Fortunatus' panegyrics for kings, a panegyrist was a public role. Fortunatus' panegyrics bring the Roman past alive in the Merovingian present, portraying kings as defenders of orthodox Christians and the heirs of Roman antiquity.³² As a genre, panegyric has the purpose of communication and mediation, and the panegyrist takes on both of these roles as the speaker of the poem.³³ Historical analysis such as Halfond's which dismisses panegyric for its doubtful veracity misses out on a key point of this sort of poetry: that it was written to be performed, not read. Michael Roberts' discussion of the panegyric for Chilperic emphasises that it 'had to be delivered aloud in order for its qualities to be fully appreciated. In performance the reiterative patterns of language so characteristic of Fortunatus will have a quasi-liturgical hymn-like effect.'³⁴

The panegyric for Charibert follows a traditional structure: it opens with a call for universal acclamation of the king, praise of his lineage, early years, and virtues as a leader, particularly singling out his abilities as a peacemaker sense of duty and justice. Various biblical and classical rulers are brought in for favourable

³⁰ DLH IV.26 and V.36; VSM Ch.20

³¹ Gregory I. Halfond, 'Charibert I and the Episcopal Leadership of the Kingdom of Paris (561-567)', *Viator*, 43 (2012), 1-28.

³² Brennan, 'Kings', pp. 2-3.

³³ Judith George, 'Poet as Politician: Venantius Fortunatus' Panegyric to King Chilperic', *Journal of Medieval History*, 15 (1989), 225-6.

³⁴ Michael Roberts, 'Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours: Patronage and Poetry', in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Alexander Callander Murray (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 35-59 (p. 57).

comparison—the king has the mercy of David, the wisdom of Solomon, Trajan’s sense of duty, and the dignity of Fabius.³⁵ As a statesman, he also is praised for being able to understand Latin and Frankish.³⁶ Fortunatus flattered other Merovingians with the assurance that they had better than native Latin; for Charibert, this is not just a matter of linguistic ability but also of mastery of the virtues of a good Roman ruler.

Charibert’s people benefit from these abilities. Reydellet highlights the unique concentration of references to law and the poet returns several times to the king’s provision of justice.³⁷ Even in complicated disputes, the king is able to straighten out the tangle of arguments and discern the right course; a point related to one made earlier in the panegyric, that Charibert’s nobles and people seek his counsel in matters of *publica cura*.³⁸ The king’s people can rely on the success of royal diplomacy because of their king’s eloquence. With reference to the Gospel image of house with strong foundations, the poet assures his audience that the king, on account of his faith, keeps his promises.

Charibert is called the protector (*tutor*) of both the city of Paris and his uncle Childebert’s widow and daughters.³⁹ Under royal patronage, both his capital city and his vulnerable female relatives are safe. The dichotomy of the king as both patron and avenger is explored as well: Childebert is said to have trampled down his enemies, elevated his friends, fostered the cast down and terrorised the uncivilised.⁴⁰ Fortunatus calls the people to witness the king’s patronal and friendly generosity: ‘your graciousness fills all with the abundance of your gifts; the people here are a witness for me, that you can prove my words.’⁴¹

Alongside the reliability of royal justice, another repeated theme of the poem is Charibert’s right to rule the kingdom of Paris—the poet repeatedly stresses the good qualities the king has inherited from his uncle. Of these, piety is first and foremost. In Fortunatus’ hagiography, Childebert I is the most frequently mentioned

³⁵ On comparisons of barbarian rulers to Trajan, see Arnold, *Theoderic and the Roman Imperial Restoration*, p. 208.

³⁶ George, ‘Poet as Politician’, pp. 231-2.

³⁷ Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 328-30.

³⁸ Carm.VI.2.71-4 and 85-90.

³⁹ Carm.6.2.10 and 22.

⁴⁰ *calcauit hostes tumidos, erexit amicos, / fouit subiectos, conteruitque feros*. Carm.6.2.33-4.

⁴¹ *Muneribus largis replet tua gratia cunctos / ut mea dicta probes, ples mihi testis adest*. Carm.6.2.105-6. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 38.

ruler.⁴² He engages in competitive generosity with Bishop Germanus of Paris and corrected his errors upon reproof.⁴³ Charibert fits into this lineage of a good Christian ruler—faith is a mirror for the king’s life, and he excels even the great rulers to which he is compared later in the poem through his merits. This also gives him the disciplined control over his emotions which keeps him always on the right path. This is a significant contrast to Gregory’s Charibert, who took and set aside wives and concubines as his passions dictated. The last of his wives, Marcovefa, had been consecrated to the religious life, which led Gregory to condemn their marriage and blame it for their prompt deaths.

Fortunatus makes no direct allusion to this situation but it may explain his silence about Charibert’s wife. Praising a Merovingian queen of non-noble ancestry was not inherently problematic: in the next section we will see how Fortunatus negotiated praise of a woman whose social status was far below her husband’s. Unlike his writings for Brunhild, Fortunatus could not praise Chilperic’s queen, Fredegund, for the standard virtues of a noblewoman, but he lauded her as intelligent, shrewd, and ennobled by her spouse and royal children. In contrast, the panegyric for Charibert does not even include the wish that the king’s line may be continued by his children, or even that his rule may last for a long time. Rather, the poem finishes with a wish for concord between the king and his people: ‘May the citizens wish you well, may you give joy to the citizens;/ may the people please in their service, may the king rule in virtue.’⁴⁴

Fortunatus’ panegyric clearly and subtly responds to the needs of the occasion on which it was delivered. The poet repeatedly stresses Charibert’s faith and its positive impacts on his rule, including his control of his emotions, provision of justice, and ability to keep his promises to his people. The king is presented as the worthy and rightful successor of his uncle Childebert. As patron and protector of Childebert’s widow and daughters, and the people of Paris, assures the audience of his reliability. Epp suggests a ‘missionary accent’ in Fortunatus’ address to this king.⁴⁵ By highlight his qualities as a good ruler the king is reminded of ‘the

⁴² Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 322-7.

⁴³ VG Ch 12 and 13; for correction see Ch22, and the VP, Ch15

⁴⁴ *Ciues te cupiant, tu gaudia ciuibus addas, / plebs placeat famulans, rex pietate regat.* Carm.6.2.113-4. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 38.

⁴⁵ Epp, *Amicitia*, p. 203.

commitment to duty and to unity' he must have to retain the backing of his people, lay and clerical alike.⁴⁶ In this sense, Fortunatus takes on the role of active mediator between Charibert and his people, simultaneously urging his audience to accept his view of Charibert as a virtuous ruler, and encouraging the king to live up to it.⁴⁷

1.2. Chilperic

Fortunatus' panegyric for Chilperic was written approximately twelve years after that for Charibert and in it we can see how he further developed his ideas about the characteristics of an ideal king and the patronal relationship between him and his people.⁴⁸ Fortunatus had at one point in his career been one of the king's subjects. When he arrived in Gaul, Poitiers was under the control of Charibert. After Charibert's death in late 567/early 568, his kingdom was divided, and Poitiers allotted to Sigibert. Chilperic made repeated efforts to capture the city, finally succeeding in the third year of Childebert's reign (578).⁴⁹ After Chilperic's assassination in 584, the city was somewhat reluctantly under Guntram's rule until it was restored to Childebert II under the Treaty of Andelot in 587.⁵⁰ Reydellet rightly notes that we cannot rank Fortunatus' Merovingians by which one he considered best or most virtuous, but as with the Charibert panegyric, comparison between what Fortunatus includes and omits is instructive. Simon Coates argued that Fortunatus' panegyric to Chilperic was a means of exhortation for the king to be better at his job and to resolve his disagreements with his bishops.⁵¹ This message of the panegyric is subtly delivered: Fortunatus presents Chilperic's good qualities in wishes or prayers, rather than statements of fact.⁵²

⁴⁶ Judith George, 'Venantius Fortunatus Panegyric in Merovingian Gaul,' in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Mary Whitby (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 225-46 (p. 232).

⁴⁷ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 47-8, argues that Fortunatus draws on an ancient tradition of panegyric as a 'mirror for princes', particularly in the selection of virtues he praises and implicitly recommends to the king.

⁴⁸ George, 'Poet at Politician', pp. 240-2.

⁴⁹ DLH V.23; earlier attacks are described in IV.45, and IV.47

⁵⁰ On the resistance of the citizens of Poitiers to Guntram's rule, see DLH VI.31, VII.27. For the provisions of the Treaty of Andelot, specifying that Poitiers belonged to Childebert II, see DLH IX.20.

⁵¹ Simon Coates, 'Venantius Fortunatus and the Image of Episcopal Authority in Late Antique and Early Medieval Gaul', *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), 1136.

⁵² Roberts, *Sparrow*, p. 60.

Unlike his other panegyrics, this one opens with a direct address to his audience, the bishops of the synod of Berny-Rivière, held in 580.⁵³ ‘O company of priests Christ’s revered champions, you whom bountiful faith has made our fathers in our religion, I humbly beg to speak forth the praises of our noble king. May your love compensate for my lowly verses.’⁵⁴ Fortunatus does not directly refer to the bishops again but their presence likely framed his poem’s emphasis on Christian kingship and the necessity that the king find favour with God. Fortunatus attributes Chilperic’s survival of dangerous situations early in his reign to divine intervention. It reminds the king that he owed his position to the gift of God and would retain it through acting rightly.⁵⁵

No documentary evidence of the synod survives, so we have little idea of the individuals who made up the *ordo sacerdotum*. The synod tried Gregory of Tours for the charge of slandering Fredegund; he had been accused by Bertram of Bordeaux, who seems to have served as president of the synod. Salvius of Albi was probably among the bishops also since Gregory bade him farewell after the trial.⁵⁶ Danuta Shanzer points out that in comparison to classical and late antique panegyrics, the agenda of Fortunatus’ piece is far more indirect and questions George’s case that Fortunatus delivered the panegyric in Gregory’s defence. I would argue that Fortunatus’ comments on Chilperic’s lineage and place among his brothers and the themes of protection and judgement seem relevant to a situation involving questions of both legitimacy and justice.⁵⁷

Fortunatus’ audience was not solely episcopal—Chilperic and Fredegund were likely in attendance at the synod. No named secular people made up the audience but Chilperic had witnesses ready to be called if the bishops deemed it appropriate. These perhaps included princess Rigunth, who fasted on Gregory’s behalf throughout the trial, his archdeacon Plato and his friend Gallienus, who were

⁵³ On this council, see Odette Pontal, *Histoire des conciles Mérovingiens* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1989), p. 175; Halfond, *Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils, AD 511-768* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 11-2, 47-8, and 231.

⁵⁴ *Ordo sacerdotum uenerandaque culmina Christi, / quos dedit alma fides religione patres, / paruolus opto loqui regis praeconia celsi:/ subleuet exigui carmina uester amor.* Carm.9.1.1-4 Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 72-3.

⁵⁵ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 53-4; see in particular lines 133-140.

⁵⁶ DLH V.50

⁵⁷ Danuta Shanzer, ‘Capturing Merovingian Courts: A Literary Perspective’, in *Le corti nell’alto Medioevo* (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo, 2015), pp. 667-700 (pp. 679-81).

being held under guard at court as witnesses to Gregory's slander. Riculf, Gregory's subdeacon, was also present at court, having been interrogated about the charges he had made. Gregory records Leudast, the count of Tours, fleeing the scene after the trial was over, and it is likely that a fellow conspirator, the priest Riculf, may have also been on hand. In Gregory's dramatic scene-setting of the trial, there was a great clamor among the people outside the building after Bertram made his charges.⁵⁸ As previously noted, Gregory omits Fortunatus and his panegyric from the narrative; unless the panegyric was delivered as the bishops' blessing at the start of the synod, we have no idea where it fit into the proceedings. That said, 'networking' the two accounts gives us a glimpse of Fortunatus' royal, episcopal, and lay audience.⁵⁹

Fortunatus' panegyric delivers an idealised summary of the king's reign, starting from an auspicious childhood at his father's favourite son to the 'point of destruction' (*funere uitae*) he faced before Sigibert's assassination in 575. The king is urged to rejoice that he has been tested by difficult times which have given way to better things. As in the panegyric to Charibert, the poet praises the benefits of peace under the king's rule but this is far overshadowed by tribute to Chilperic as a military victor, protecting his people from internal and external dangers. George argued that the poem's next gambit, praise of the fairness of the king's justice, may be an argument on Gregory's behalf, a reminder to the thing to judge fairly.⁶⁰ After justice, the poet moves on to praise Chilperic's learning: he has no need for interpreters. After a puzzling interlude on Chilperic's generosity, the poet returns to his theme that the king's balance of military and intellectual ability renders him praiseworthy and unique. If, as Shanzer suggests, Fortunatus uses *oratio figurata* to criticise Chilperic's theological views, his comments on the king's erudition may have a sting in their tail.⁶¹

The poem closes with a series of wishes for Chilperic's kingdom: 'Humble though I am, yet I wish that my favourable prayers prosper, and these blessed gifts

⁵⁸ DLH.V.49

⁵⁹ The term 'networking' for reading the two accounts together is borrowed from Shanzer, 'Capturing Merovingian Courts'.

⁶⁰ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 47-58.

⁶¹ Shanzer, 'Capturing Merovingian Courts', pp. 681-3. The lines she singles out are *Regibus aequalis de carmine maior habetis./ dogmate uel quails non fuit ante parens./ Te arma ferunt generi simile, sed littera praefert:/ sic ueterum regum par simul atque prior.* Carm.IX.1.105-8.

come from heaven to earth'.⁶² The good things of Chilperic's rule are not solely his but heavenly gifts to benefit him and his people. This final prayer contains a summary of the royal duties discussed in the poem. The king is responsible for achieving military victories, lovingly protecting the faithful, being suitably devout and is in a position of honour and able to give out honours. Fortunatus likely hoped that 'the highest honour of the king, through which honours are given' would enhance his own career and standing.⁶³

As we saw in Fortunatus' writings for Radegund, Fortunatus indicates when he wrote on another's behalf. Fortunatus' lack of mention of Gregory and Gregory's lack of reference to him may be grounds for another look at the association between poem and trial. Chapter 1 argued for a maximalist interpretation of the importance of Gregory's patronage for Fortunatus and the bishop was the sort of patron worth cultivating, but it is extremely unlikely that Gregory's conviction for slander would have endangered Fortunatus. The poem is presented as a gift which the king should accept in place of the gold and gems others can offer. Fortunatus' desire to offer the king gifts can be explained by the political situation at the time he delivered the panegyric. The late 570s were not a stable time for Poitiers: Chilperic had controlled the city before and there was a chance he would again.⁶⁴ Fortunatus' attempt to curry favour with Chilperic has been seen as sycophantic or as a betrayal of Gregory. Offering the king a panegyric as an attempt to claim his patronage and protection was neither of these things but rather a shrewd attempt to integrate himself into the kingdom of his new ruler.

1.3. Childebert II

Fortunatus' last poem for a Merovingian king was a short piece for the son of Brunhild and Sigibert, Childebert II. This likely forms a diptych with the poem for Brunhild which was delivered by the same messenger Audulf, whom the poet commended to both royals. Reydellet dates these poems to 584-5 on account of

⁶² *paruolus opto tamen, sic prospera uota secudent, / ut ueniant terris haec pia dona polis.* Carm.IX.1.139-140

⁶³ *summus honor regis, per quem donantur honores.* Carm.IX.2.145

⁶⁴ Reydellet, *La royauté*, p. 302.

Ingund's marriage; Meyer put them at 588 on the assumption that Fortunatus travelled with Gregory to Metz.⁶⁵

The poem has largely been noticed for its extravagant use of alliteration, such as the line *florum flos florens, florea flore fluens*.⁶⁶ Dronke calls this a 'graceful rhetorical superlative' in the king's praise.⁶⁷ The poem abounds with these sorts of these sorts of flourishes: the king is called the *rex regionis apex et supra regna regimen / qui caput es capitum, uir capitale bonum*.⁶⁸ As Meyer suggests and George echoes, the intensity of the alliteration may reflect a youthful liking for such things or a general Frankish taste for it.⁶⁹ Even in its short and informal state, the poem reflects many of the standard elements of Fortunatus' writing for royalty: it praises the king's goodness, honour, and lineage. As with his uncle Charibert, Childebert is also praised for his becoming behaviour and judgement, 'o worthy one, not being unworthy, worth considering the worthy to be worthy.'⁷⁰ As with the panegyric for Chilperic, Fortunatus himself appears as figure in the poem, offering it humbly to Childebert, commending himself to the king, and wishing for his continued rule. The poem can be taken as a rare bit of evidence that the poet's contact with Merovingian royalty had its less formal side, as well as being carefully crafted to reflect them as they wished to be seen.

2. Royal Women

Fortunatus wrote more poems for royal women than he did for royal men.⁷¹ The study of his relationship with Radegund in the previous chapter made it clear that the friendship and patronage of women played an important role in his work. Merovingian women were heavily involved in fostering the creation of court circles. A seventh-century queen, Balthild, 'was involved in the schooling of young aristocrat at court, a policy geared towards the creation of networks of *amicitia*,

⁶⁵ Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 301-2.

⁶⁶ Carm.App.5.10.

⁶⁷ Dronke, *Medieval Latin I*, p. 184.

⁶⁸ 'high king of the country and ruler over the kingdom / you are head of heads, a capital good man'. Carm.App.5.1-2

⁶⁹ George, *Personal and Political*, pp. 118, n. 31.

⁷⁰ *digne nec indignans, dignos dignatio dignans*. Carm.App.5.9

⁷¹ Reydellet, *La royauté*, p. 297.

which could later be counted upon to implement royal programmes on a regional level.⁷² Gregory of Tours' stories about Brunhild and Fredegund demonstrate that queens had their own networks of servants and clients. Fortunatus was one of the few members of both but he also wrote for more obscure Merovingian royal women, such as Theudechild and Berthichild. The poems for these women show how Merovingian royal women controlled great wealth and deployed it in charitable giving, including the support of foreigners. Family and lineage were important for Merovingian women, a theme which is also seen in Fortunatus' panegyrics for royal men. Fortunatus' poems on the death of Galswinth and for her sister Brunhild suggest that Merovingian women acquired power through their families and marriages, but were the source of patronage in their own right.

2.1. Theudechild and Berthichild

Outside of the formidable trio of Radegund, Brunhild, and Fredegund, and Charibert, Chilperic, and Childebert, Fortunatus also wrote for Merovingians less well-realised in our sources.⁷³ One of these was a woman named Theudechild, who was probably a daughter of Theuderic I and Suavegotha, the granddaughter of Clovis, and the sister of Theudebert I. Fortunatus wrote two poems, an epitaph and an encomium, for her, but neither of these can be securely dated. Fortunatus' poem of praise for Theudechild is immediately followed by a poem about Berthichild. The position of the poem in Book Six, between poems about Theudechild and Galswinth, suggests that Berthichild was royal but unlike Theudechild, there are no other sources of information about her. The lack of information about the two women suggests that they were minor members of the Merovingian royal family but Fortunatus; portraits of Theudechild and Berthichild giving generously to the poor, destitute—and perhaps crucial to Fortunatus—foreign members of their communities suggests that they were patrons worth cultivating.

⁷² Yaniv Fox, *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 39. For a comparison of the political activities of Radegund and Balthild, see Susanne Wittem, 'Frauen zwischen asketischem Ideal und weltlichem Leben. Zur Darstellung des christlichen Handelns der merowingischen Königinnen Radegunde und Bathild in den hagiographischen Lebensbeschreibungen des 6. und 7. Jahrhunderts', in *Frauen der Geschichte VII*, ed. by Werner Affeldt and Annette Kuhn (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1986), pp. 272-94.

⁷³ Reydellet, *La royauté*, p. xl-xlvi.

In Fortunatus' encomium and epitaph Theudechild is depicted as a wealthy and generous royal woman, and the similarities between the two poems support the argument that the dedicatee of the two poems is the same. However, the writings of Gregory of Tours feature two women named Theudechild, one of whom was the Merovingian I discuss below. A second woman named Theudechild was one of the concubines of Charibert I, the daughter of a shepherd and the mother of a son who did not survive infancy. Left with plenty of treasure after the death of Charibert, she was outmanoeuvred by King Guntram, who stripped her of this wealth and interred her in a monastery for the rest of her life.⁷⁴ Fortunatus' epitaph and encomium describe a woman of royal ancestry who possessed the virtues of a noblewoman and was a prolific and pious charitable giver. This does not match what is known about the life and ancestry of the Theudechild who was Charibert's concubine, and for this reason my discussion focuses on the Theudechild who was Theuderic's daughter.

Theudechild was born sometime between 510 and 523, and died when she was seventy-five, sometime between 585 and 598.⁷⁵ She has a cameo appearance in Gregory of Tours' *Life of Germanus of Auxerre*, in which she is seen receiving taxes from a tribune of Clermont.⁷⁶ Outside of Fortunatus' poems, the fullest evidence of Theudechild's life is found in Procopius' *History of the Wars*, which has the unnamed sister of Theudebert I marrying Hermegisl and then her stepson Radigis. The latter had already been betrothed to a British princess, who arrived at the head of an army to persuade him to put aside his Frankish wife and honour his previous engagement. He did.⁷⁷ Theudechild must have returned to her father's kingdom, although Procopius does not say so, and no other source mentions her marriage. As the fate of Theudechild's contemporary Rigunth demonstrates, failed marriages were usually difficult for Merovingian women.

However, Theudechild seems to have retained her position, property, and place within her family. Flodoard of Rheims records Suavegotha's and Theudechild's grants of land and its rights to the church of Rheims.⁷⁸ Fortunatus'

⁷⁴ DLH IV.26 and 27

⁷⁵ P. Wareman, 'Theudechildis Regina', *Classica et Mediaevalia* 37 (1986), 201.

⁷⁶ GC 40. Based on an argument of Eugen Ewig, Van Dam identifies this woman as Theuderic's daughter, not Charibert's wife. Raymond Van Dam, *Glory of the Confessors* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), p. 32 n.46.

⁷⁷ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VIII.20.11-41. See Wood, 'The Frontiers of Western Europe', p. 248 for other marriage alliances between the Merovingians and other barbarian kingdoms.

⁷⁸ Flodoard, *Historia* II.1

eulogy for her, Carm.6.3, follows his two poems for Sigibert, Brunhild, and Charibert, which suggests that it was written along with these poems at the beginning of his career in Gaul. The poem opens by praising her royal ancestry, which like the other aristocratic women Fortunatus praises is described in language of light and shining. Her fame is placed within the context of her family, ‘the new glory of your family hastens, flying around the world / and at once your brother is bruited aloud on this side, on the other your father’.⁷⁹ The father and brother here are most likely Theuderic and Theudebert. As usual the glory of ancestry is less important than possessing a good character: ‘your disposition is worthy of veneration, seemly, intelligent, devout, loving and affectionate; since you are powerful through your race, all the greater grace is with you’.⁸⁰ Her good nature makes her powerful, as well as loved rather than feared: ‘Avoiding what causes hatred, your abundant power is resplendent; you come all the more in love, the less you come in terror.’⁸¹

Fortunatus praises Theudechild, like Palatina, for her pleasant voice and sweet speech; but like Placidina, the poet says nothing about her physical appearance. Placidina was a blue-blooded bishop’s wife for whom elegiac praise of beauty might be inappropriate. The poet’s lack of praise for Theudechild’s appearance may suggest the way she wished to be seen. The first fourteen lines of the poem praise Theudechild’s ancestry; the last thirty-one praise her outstanding works of charity. ‘By as much as you surpass the female sex in honour, so too you outdo other women in the wealth of your piety’.⁸² Theudechild surpasses other women because of her character and her family but even more so because of her religious devotion.

She actively expressed her piety through her hospitality to strangers, to the point where she welcomed strangers as if they were already her clients and friends.

⁷⁹ *Currit in orbe uolans generis noua gloria uestri, / et simul hinc frater personat, inde pater.* Carm.6.3.3-4 Translation adapted from George, *Personal and Political*, p. 38.

⁸⁰ *mens veneranda decens sollers pia cara benigna / cum sis prole potens, gratia maior adest.* Carm.6.3.9-10. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 38-9. George translates *prole* as offspring. Since Theudechild is not known to have had children, I prefer to translate *prole* as race, one of several references to her status as a Merovingian.

⁸¹ *evitans odii causas micat ampla potestas: / quae terrore minus, plus in amore venis.* Carm.6.3.11-12. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 39.

⁸² *femineum sexum quantum praecedis honore, / tantum alias superas et pietatis ope.* Carm.6.3.15-16. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 39, last line slightly adapted.

‘If a stranger arrives, you welcome him with friendly spirit, as if he had already found favour with your forefathers through his services.’⁸³ Fortunatus himself was one of the new men who benefited from the queen’s welcome of those who had not previously held patronage relationships with her family. The bulk of her praiseworthy activities went towards largesse to the poor and destitute. In his poems for the building and rebuilding of churches by members of the nobility, Fortunatus makes it clear that these acts are an exchange of wealth for heavenly rewards.

Theudechild’s provisions for the poor and destitute go straight to Christ:

‘Whatsoever you bestow upon the destitute comes to Christ; though none see, it remains without end’.⁸⁴ In addition to being a patron of the poor and destitute, the queen also restored churches, an activity for which the exchange metaphor is even more explicit:

Through your stewardship, holy churches are made new; you establish Christ’s house and he does yours. You give him dwelling places on earth, he will give you them in the world above; you exchange for the better, thus (you are) going to inhabit the heavens.⁸⁵

In his writing to Radegund, Fortunatus emphasized the opposition between royal status on earth and eternal life: the former queen’s purported rejection of her rank contributes to her sanctity. The poet does describe Theudechild as living for Christ, but she did so in a far different way from Radegund. She did not lay aside her royal status on earth or in heaven but retained it in both. Fortunatus explicitly names Radegund as a queen, but Theudechild is only called a queen in the title of the poem, though the poet repeatedly returns to the fact that she is of royal family. Theudechild seems to have wanted to be presented as a Christian of wealth, power, and status, who used her resources and position to carry out pious projects. This was a typical role for a queen, particularly one who was widowed. Whether Theudechild was called a queen or considered herself to be one, she wished to be presented as royal, generous, and powerful.

⁸³ *si novus adveniat, recipis sic mente benigna / ac si servitiis iam placuisset avis.* Carm.6.3.17-18. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 39.

⁸⁴ *pervenit ad Christum quidquid largiris egeno: / etsi nemo videt, non peritura manent.* Carm.6.3.23-4.

⁸⁵ *ecclesiae sacrae te dispensante novantur: / ipsa domum Christi condis, et ille tuam. / tu fabricas illi terris, dabit ille supernis: / conmutas melius sic habitura polos.* Carm.6.3.27-30. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 39, with modification of the last line.

Fortunatus' epitaph for Theudechild has similar content to the encomium. Again, though the title of the poem refers to her as a queen, she is not called such in the body of the poem. Once again, the poet highlights her royal ancestry. 'Her brother, father, husband, grandfather and forebears were a royal line, of successive eminence.'⁸⁶ Theudechild's place in an ancient and venerable family was plain, but most of the epitaph focuses on her charitable activities. She was a mother, food, and clothing to the orphan, exile, poor, widow, and naked. She is also described as giving promptly, before she was even asked to help, and in secret, lest her family object to what she was doing.⁸⁷ Fortunatus describes her as the patron of churches (*templorum domini cultrix*), making her the rare feminine equivalent of the *cultor ecclesiae* he describes in other epitaphs. An inscription in her honour suggests that she founded the monastery of St-Pierre-le-Vif.⁸⁸

The epitaph contains no evidence of its commissioner. If it was from her family the reference to their objections to her charitable giving does not reflect well on them. But giving discreetly, without ostentatious display, was a virtue in a pious donor, and so the comment may simply indicate that Theudechild did the appropriate thing in the appropriate way. In his epitaph for Avolus, the poet notes that the bishop gained greater rewards for performing his acts of charity in secret.⁸⁹ In other epitaphs, Fortunatus praises bishops for their charity and hospitality to foreigners, the resources for which came from their own private fortunes as well as their official budgets.⁹⁰ Both Fortunatus' praises for Theudechild and his use of intertexts, including Virgil and Ovid, are paralleled in other poems.⁹¹

Like Theudechild, little is known about Berthichild; unlike Theudechild, she cannot be identified in any source other than Fortunatus' poem to her. Her royal status is suggested by the fact that the poem to her is placed fourth in book six, bookended by poems to Theudechild and Galswinth; though it is worth noting that the book ends haphazardly—Carm.6.7 is a short poem in praise of a villa, Carm.6.8

⁸⁶ *cui frater, genitor, coniunx, avus atque priores / culmine succiduo regius ordo fuit.* Carm.4.25.9-10.

⁸⁷ The New Testament ideal of gift-giving was that it should be done in secret. See Bronwen Neil, 'Models of Gift Giving in the Preaching of Leo the Great', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 18 (2010), 230. On Christian gift-giving, see also Brown, *Needle*, pp. 72-90.

⁸⁸ Roberts, *Sparrow*, p. 27.

⁸⁹ Carm.4.21.6.

⁹⁰ Roberts, *Sparrow*, p. 24-5.

⁹¹ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 8, n. 16; Roberts, *Sparrow*, pp. 27-31.

a comic poem in which the poet's friends help him after a royal cook stole his boat; the final two poems are poems of friendship to Dynamius of Marseilles. His book of epitaphs is arranged by the status of the addressee, a choice which also sees all the epitaphs of women placed at the end of the book. But the royal poems have no such clear organisation—why, for instance, are the poems to Charibert, Theudechild, and Berthichild placed between the poems about Brunhild and the lament for her sister? For that matter, the poems to Childebert I and Ultrogotha have clear connections given that Fortunatus includes Childebert's support and projection of Ultrogotha and her daughters as a point in his praise in the poem. An argument from context supports Berthichild's royal status and Fortunatus' description of her can profitably be compared to his poems to aristocratic women, particularly Palatina.

The poem praises Berthichild as having a 'mens devota deo', a phrase which echoes his praise of Radegund, 'mens intenta deo'. Berthichild's status as a nun is confirmed by the poet's praise of her as someone who has turned her back on the world, 'instead reaching for the stars'. She is an immaculate woman, free from the filth of the world, a 'virgin dedicated to God' who will be 'hurried to heaven'. Like the virgin in *De Virginitate*, Berthichild awaits her heavenly bridegroom, Christ, having traded her jewellery, fine clothes, and family position for divine rewards.

It is not clear that Berthichild was a member of a monastic community, although Fortunatus' praise of her display close parallels with his writings about Radegund, and Agnes, and the members of their communities. Fortunatus' praise for these cloistered nuns focused on their spiritual stature and religious devotion, not on their acts of charity or dispersal of their wealth. Berthichild's use of her fortune parallels Theudechild's: the poet praises her provision of food for the hungry, her feeding of guests, her provision of clothing for the naked, and her pious ransoming of captives. These activities suggest a fortune, and a degree of control over it, which would be unusual for a cloistered nun. Fortunatus claims she refused nothing that was asked of her, and turned her money into public property: 'You distribute wealth denying no one his request/ And you make your riches exist for all./ You collect in heaven whatever you scatter on earth./ Now scattering seeds, afterwards you will reap better things.'⁹²

⁹² Distribuis censum nulli sua uota negando / diuitasque tuas omnibus esse facis. / Colligis in caelis quicquid dispergis in aruis. / Semina nuncc fundens, post meliora metes. Carm.6.4.23-6.

The poem ends with the conventional wishes for long time and eternal reward with which Fortunatus often concluded messages to his patrons. Like Theudechild, whoever Berthichild was, the poet presented her as generous, pious and wealthy. Unlike Theudechild, and the other royal women Fortunatus addresses, her royal family and status are not directly addressed—although ‘the honour of your family’—could refer to Merovingian lineage, it is distinctly understated compared to Theudechild and even Radegund herself. Ultimately, these three poems suggests that in searching for friendship and patronage, the poet extended his acquaintance in every direction he could, including honouring the patronal activities of obscure members of the royal family such as Berthichild and Theudechild.

2.2 Galswinth and her family

The poems for Theudechild and Berthichild suggest that queens, as women who controlled of wealth, could be powerful patrons. Even in widowhood a queen retained control of wealth, and she might continue to have an important role as regent for underage male relatives. As Fortunatus’ writings for Queen Brunhild make clear, Merovingian women were also the patrons of major literary works. In this section, I argue that Brunhild was the commissioner of Fortunatus’ long poem *De Gelesuintha*, a commemoration of Brunhild’s sister Galswinth, who was murdered at the instigation of her husband Chilperic. The poem directly addresses Brunhild and Galswinth’s mother, Goiswinth, and I argue that she and the Visigothic court were also part of the poem’s intended audience. As with Fortunatus’ ‘Byzantine’ poems for Radegund, the poet’s work served as an ambassador from the Merovingians to an external audience. An analysis of the poem’s account of Galswinth’s activities during her brief tenure as queen reveals the importance of friendship for a foreign queen and how she might exercise patronage.

The poet presumably met Brunhild at the celebrations for her wedding to Sigibert of Austrasia in 566 and knew her through the political changes and challenges of the late sixth century. After Sigibert’s assassination in 575, Brunhild ruled through the minorities of her son Childebert II and his sons. She was killed during the unsuccessful reign of her great-grandson Sigibert II, having outlived Fortunatus by at least five years. He composed an epithalamium and a panegyric for Brunhild and Sigibert, and he addressed another poem to the queen and her son,

Childebert II, in honour of the feast of St Martin. She is addressed individually in Carm.App.6, which seems form a pair with the preceding poem for Childebert II. Gregory of Tours, who viewed Brunhild with wary respect, carefully crafted his portrait of her as patron to show her in the best possible light.⁹³

De Gelesuintha contains several echoes of Virgil and Ovid, as well as one intertext from Lucan, a high level of classical allusion which Fortunatus employed in his most formal court poetry.⁹⁴ This was likely to Brunhild's taste.⁹⁵ After bewailing the uncertainty of fate, the poem describes Brunhild and her sister as the twin towers Toledo sent to Gaul, only one of which still stands. The poet alludes to Galswinth's living family as 'foundations left behind in Spain', which suggests also that the poem may have been intended as a consolation for Galswinth's and Brunhild's mother Goiswinth, as well as a formal announcement of Galswinth's death. The poem directly addresses Goiswinth and describes her role in persuading and preparing her daughter for marriage to Chilperic (who is not named) and then grieving her departure. In Fortunatus' poem, Goiswinth is meant to be a sympathetic figure, grieving her daughter's death. In Gregory of Tours, she is an infamous persecutor of Catholics in Spain. Like her daughter Brunhild, Goiswinth retained her political position through decades of change.⁹⁶

Our sources for Goiswinth are contradictory. Gregory's portrait depicts her as the persecutor of Catholics in Spain, including her daughter in law, Ingund. Gregory's narrative makes the conflict between Hermangild, Leuvigild's son and Ingund's husband, primarily about his conversion to Catholicism.⁹⁷ In comparison with other contemporary sources, Gregory's account is inaccurate with regard to the date and reasons for Hermangild's conversion, either deliberately or simply because he was misinformed.⁹⁸ Hermangild's *amicitia* with the Byzantines is not attested in the other major sources for the revolt, though Gregory mentions it in two of the four

⁹³ E. T. Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines: Gregory of Tours and Women of the Merovingian Elite* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 130.

⁹⁴ Barbara J. Rogers, 'The Poems of Venantius Fortunatus: A Translation and Commentary' (Rutgers University, 1979), p. 98.

⁹⁵ Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 126.

⁹⁶ Erin Thomas Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours and the Women in His Works: Studies in Sixth-Century Gaul' (PhD, University of Leeds 2011), pp. 32-3. DLH V.38.

⁹⁷ DLH V.38.

⁹⁸ Ian Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire* 63 (1985), 260.

times he discusses the revolt and its consequences.⁹⁹ With regard to the marriage of Hermangild and Ingund, John of Biclarum alludes to a *factione* of Queen Goiswinth, an aside which has admitted several interpretations and may serve to indicate the queen's political importance at court.¹⁰⁰ Goiswinth's politicking continued even into her second widowhood; Gregory records that she came to terms with Reccared after Leuvigild's death, having a position in the kingdom as his adoptive mother.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Gregory's claims about the queen's fervent Arianism should be set against John of Biclarum's claim that before her death in 589, Goiswinth pretended to convert to Catholicism when it was expedient to do so.¹⁰²

In short, the evidence about Goiswinth's attitude towards Catholicism is complicated, and two lines about Galswinth's conversion to Catholicism are insufficient to exclude Goiswinth from consideration as one of the poem's addressees. I argue, following Reydellet, that the poem addressed Brunhild, her mother, and the Visigothic and Austrasian courts, offering consolation for Galswinth's death. Frankish Catholics were supposed to be fervent proselytizers, at least according to their bishops, Gregory of Tours himself filled this role in meetings with Arian envoys. He does not seem to have caused diplomatic incident when he attempted to argue out the legates out of their faith. Conversion may have been an expected step for foreign brides: Brunhild herself had converted to Catholicism when marrying Sigibert.

Fortunatus does not directly allude to the circumstances of Galswinth's death but Gregory provides a detailed narrative. Chilperic married Galswinth after he saw Sigibert reject his brothers' relationship patterns and marry Brunhild, Galswinth's younger sister. Like her sister, Galswinth brought a large dowry (for which, the bishop claims, her husband loved her) and converted to Catholicism. The relationship between the royal couple was not harmonious because Chilperic had not fully put aside Fredegund. Galswinth complained about the insults she had to endure and pleaded to return to Spain, even if she had to leave all her dowry behind. Chilperic did his best to pacify and deceive her but eventually had her strangled by

⁹⁹ The revolt and its consequences are discussed in DLH VI.18, VI.40, VI.43, and VIII.28.

¹⁰⁰ Roger Collins, 'Gregory of Tours and Spain', in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Alexander Callander Murray (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 498-515 (p. 507).

¹⁰¹ DLH IX.1

¹⁰² Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1990), p. 77.

one of his servants. He wept for her death and then took back Fredegund in marriage.¹⁰³ Gregory recounts a miracle that occurred at Galswinth's tomb, a concluding point in his argument that her fate was not her fault. The other Merovingians suspected that Chilperic was ultimately to blame, and attempted to drive him out of his kingdom.¹⁰⁴

Even if Chilperic had kept Galswinth's dowry, the financial gain would not have compensated for the potential loss of an alliance with the Visigoths. Such an alliance was valuable, and Chilperic used it to counterbalance against his brothers in the civil wars which followed. According to Gregory, the Visigothic king Leuvigild was afraid that Childebert II would retaliate for the insult done to his sister Ingund, who had allegedly been mistreated by her in-laws during her marriage to his son Hermangild. Chilperic may have had a similar fear of Visigothic revenge for an insult to a member of the royal family.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Chilperic had married Galswinth in competition with his brother Sigibert, a competition he would have lost if the marriage failed.¹⁰⁶ Politically, Galswinth's murder was almost as risky as granting her request to leave would have been, since it imperilled Chilperic's relationship with her family and his standing amongst his brothers.

However, the Visigothic political situation at the time of Galswinth's murder made retribution unlikely. As Michel Rouche points out, Brunhild and Galswinth's father, Athanagild, died in the middle of 567 and the Visigothic throne remained vacant for five months before Leuvigild succeeded him and married his widow. Galswinth married Chilperic in Rouen in the middle of 568 and perhaps was murdered at the beginning of 569.¹⁰⁷ Her murder occurred at a point when Visigothic kingdom was focused on internal concerns. Gregory's account shows that rumours circulated in Gaul, but whatever stories reached Toledo, Chilperic managed

¹⁰³ Thorpe's vivid translation (*The History of the Franks*, p. 223) is misleading; Gregory's Latin clearly indicates that Chilperic formally remarried Fredegund. See DLH IV.28, MGH SRM III, p. 161.

¹⁰⁴ DLH IV.28

¹⁰⁵ On the risks of setting aside one's wife, see Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire*, p. 277.

¹⁰⁶ Further instance of competition can be seen in Chilperic's morgengabe of five cities. DLH IX.20. Chilperic may also have been assuring Galswinth's father Athanagild of his commitment to the marriage. Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 122.

¹⁰⁷ Michel Rouche, 'Autocensure et diplomatie chez Fortunat: à propos de l'élégie sur Galeswinthe', in *Venantio Fortunato tra Italia e Francia* ed. by Tiziana Ragusa and Bruno Termite (Treviso: Provincia di Treviso, 1993), pp. 149-59 (pp. 154-5).

to keep up diplomatic ties: at the point of his death his daughter Rigunth was on her way to Spain to marry Reccared.

As Michael Roberts points out, ‘there is no irreconcilable difference between Fortunatus’ poem and Gregory’s more circumstantial account.’¹⁰⁸ The two accounts are not directly contradictory but they do choose to emphasize and omit different parts of the story. Part of this can be explained by genre. Fortunatus’ poem has the structure of a *consolatio*: it opens with a statement on the fragility of human life and ends with Galswinth’s reception into heaven. At 370 lines, it is unusually long—out of all of Fortunatus’ poetry, only *de Virginitate* and *Vita Sancti Martini* are longer. The poem divides into two parts—a description of her journey and reactions to her death, divided by praise of her virtues. Most of the poem consists of unusually long speeches of lamentation by Galswinth, her mother, and Brunhild.¹⁰⁹ A *consolatio* is supposed to console a specific person or people, and Fortunatus’ words of consolation are addressed to Brunhild and Goiswinth in the first person plural but it is only the latter to which he speaks directly. However, Meyer, Steinmann, and Roberts agree that the address to Goiswinth is fictionalized and Brunhild is the real intended audience of the poem. Reydellet suggested that it was written for both Brunhild and Goiswinth but Roberts cites Fortunatus’ references to Galswinth’s conversion as indicating that the poem was intended for Brunhild alone. The address to Goiswinth thus highlights ‘a tension between the formal and poetic functions of the poem.’¹¹⁰

In addition to debating the addressee of the poem, scholars have also differed about when it was written. Reydellet dates it to perhaps after 570 and suggests that he wrote it at Radegund’s suggestion.¹¹¹ Roberts suggest it was written around 570 and composed before Gregory’s account.¹¹² The poem contains no specific contextual clues and Rouche uses events Fortunatus does not mention to suggest that the poem must have been written before 579, namely the absence of criticism of Goiswinth’s treatment of Ingund. The poem makes no reference to Sigibert, alive or

¹⁰⁸ Michael Roberts, ‘Venantius’ Fortunatus Elegy on the Death of Galswintha’, in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 298-312 (p. 299).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 299-300.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 301.

¹¹¹ Reydellet, *La royauté*, p. 300. For the argument that Radegund was involved, see Reydellet I, pp. xxii-xxiii.

¹¹² Roberts, ‘Venantius’ Fortunatus Elegy on the Death of Galswintha’, p. 298.

dead, but Rouche argues that the poem was written between 576 and 579, for the purpose of reviving the alliance between Metz, Toledo, and Constantinople.¹¹³ As I discussed in the introduction, the case for Fortunatus as a Byzantine agent is unproven and unprovable, but Rouche is surely right to set the poem within the context of Frankish-Visigothic diplomacy.¹¹⁴

The poem demonstrates Fortunatus' familiarity with the conventions of late antique literature. It is structured around a series of laments (*querulae*), given alternately by Goiswinth and Galswinth, on their separation and her departure from Spain. Galswinth's laments are laced with fatalism; the speeches the poet gives her seem to make her death the inevitable consequence of leaving Spain and going to Gaul. Her last farewell to her mother is particularly striking: 'If God in His lofty majesty wished me now to grant me further days of life, He would not have granted them on this path. But since irrevocable fate presses upon me, if none bar me, I will follow where passion leads. But I will speak these last words, to be remembered in sorrow; hence what is yours is not yours. Goiswinth, farewell.'¹¹⁵

Fortunatus recounts the route Galswinth took to reach Rouen and recollects that he saw her entourage pass through Poitiers. The princess paid her respects to Radegund—whether the two women actually met or merely exchanged letters depends on one's interpretation of the Latin. Whatever the form their contact took, Radegund mourned Galswinth's death and her presence as a mourner serves to emphasise the Visigothic princess's virtue. As this is the only time she appears in the poem, Radegund's involvement in the composition of the poem cannot be proven. The poet does not make use of her voice and offers no words of consolation on her behalf.

Her connection to Radegund is one of the ways Fortunatus emphasises the importance of friendship for a foreign queen. In one of her laments at leaving home,

¹¹³ Rouche, 'Autocensure et diplomatie chez Fortunat', p. 156.

¹¹⁴ A point made by Roberts, who suggests that 'it is likely that by emphasising the pathos of Galswinth's death Fortunatus serves the purposes of the eastern Frankish kingdom. Common grief unites the Visigothic court in Toledo and the court at Metz. The tragic death of Galswinth points up by comparison the happy marriage of Galswinth's sister. Implicitly, the Austrasian court is the natural ally of, and shares common interests with, Spain.' Roberts, 'Venantius' Fortunatus Elegy on the Death of Galswintha', p. 311.

¹¹⁵ *Maiestas si celsa Dei mihi tempora uellet / nunc dare plus uitae, no daret ista uiae. / Vltima sed quoniam sors inreuocabilis instat, / si iam nemo uetat, qua trahit ira sequar. / Haec extrema tamen loquar et memoranda dolori: / hinc tua non tua sunt. Goiswintha, uale.* Carm.6.5.173-8. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 43.

Galswinth cries, ‘Who will be my friend when I am far from home,/ Where none come from my land or family?/ Can any foreign nurse, though kind, please me?/ Whose hand will wash my face or dress my hair?/ No maiden or foster-sister shall play (with me) in a round dance.’¹¹⁶ As Gregory notes, Galswinth was older than Brunhild. There is no evidence for when either woman was born but they probably married in their late teens or twenties. The poet emphasises the tragedy of her death by suggesting she was young, isolated, and afraid. In lamenting the lack of friends, family, and trusted servants, Galswinth reflects the fact that queens needed networks to rule effectively and be secure in their position.

Most commentators have skipped over Fortunatus’ praise of Galswinth as conventional platitudes between dramatic speeches of lamentation and mourning. Whether these statements reflect what she actually did or what Fortunatus and his audience wanted her to be remembered as doing, they show Galswinth trying to establish her position as a good ruler.

The maiden is then joined in wedlock to the most lofty king,
and earned the great love and respect of the people.
Charming some by gifts, others by her words,
she thus makes even strangers her own. (240)
The armed ranks swear an oath on their weapons in their own right,
that they would be loyal to her, and bind themselves by law.
Getting her life in order on a peaceful track, she reigned;
the stranger, by her generosity to the poor, was a mother to them.
That she might all the more live on in the eternal kingdom, (245)
she gained acceptance by being won over to the Catholic faith.¹¹⁷

Fortunatus’ audience is assured and consoled that Galswinth did everything she could to be a successful queen, including making friends with gifts and words. She accepted the oaths and loyalty of the *gens armata*. In his description of the Treaty of Andelot Gregory of Tours records that one of the bones of contention had been the five cities that comprised Galswinth’s *morgengabe*—possibly these lines also refer

¹¹⁶ *Quem, precor, inueniam peregrinis aduena terris / quo mihi nemo uenis ciuis, amice, parens? / Dic, si blanda potest nutrix aliena placere, quae lauet ora manu uel caput ornet acu? Nulla puella choro neque collactanea ludat.* Carm.6.5.113-7. Translation follows Rogers, ‘The Poems of Venantius Fortunatus,’ p. 101, with slight adaptation. In contrast to this, Stafford claims that Galswinth brought with her a retinue of women but neither Gregory nor Fortunatus support this. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 58.

¹¹⁷ *Iungiter ergo toro regali culmine uirgo / et magno meruit plebis amore coli. / Hos quoque muneribus permulcens, uocibus illos, / et licet ignotos sic facit esse suos. / Vitque fidelis ei sit gens armata, per arma / iurat iure suo, se quoque lege ligat. / Regnabat placido componens tramite uitam, / pauperibus tribuens adyena mater erat. / Quaque magis possit regno superesse perenni, / Catholicae Fidei conciliata placet.* Carm.6.5.237-246

to her taking up her responsibilities towards them. As George notes, the reference to oaths of loyalty sworn to a queen is unusual.¹¹⁸ The most conventional bit of the *laudatio* records her patronage of the poor, an act for which Theudechild and other Merovingian women were praised. Her conversion to Catholicism was not only a religious act which ensured her salvation but a political one which demonstrated her commitment to her new home.

Fortunatus says nothing about how she died or how her death was discovered. His account about how the news of her death spread provides clues towards the audience of the poem. The first mourner is Galswinth's nurse. This woman was evidently not the *nutrix aliena* the princess worried about in her lamentations; this nurse recalls her promise to Goiswinth to keep her daughter safe, 'What shall I tell your mother, if I am allowed to return?'¹¹⁹ It is not clear whether the permission she needs is Goiswinth's to come back to the Visigothic court, or Chilperic's, to leave his.

The nurse's laments were picked up by others and the court grieved; *obsequialis amor* performed Galswinth's funeral rites. Gregory mentions that Chilperic wept for her death but Fortunatus does not include the king among the mourners. While this might be a deliberate avoidance because of rumours implicating the king in her death, this also fits with the gendered nature of the poem's laments—all of the speakers invoke female roles—daughter, mother, nurse, and sister—in their speeches. There are no grieving men, though elsewhere Fortunatus consoled husbands and fathers. The poem concludes with laments by Brunhild and Goiswinth in turn as they learn of Galswinth's death. Fortunatus imagines the words and actions of the grieving mother and sister; Brunhild laments that the first word she had from her sister in Gaul was the news of her death and calls out to the natural world asking for her sister; Goiswinth that her daughter ever left and the loss of her dreams of grandchildren; and both women weep. The transition between the two laments is the journey of a messenger from Gaul to Spain—the hope that Goiswinth would be last to hear the dreadful news after it had spread widely was in vain; the queen's love and fear made her especially attentive: 'But the person who loves more, hears sooner what rumour brings, and believes

¹¹⁸ George, *Personal and Political*, p. 47, n. 93.

¹¹⁹ Sed quod fama refert qui plus amat et prius audit / ac dubium credit, dante timorem fidem. Carm.6.5.313-4. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 49.

what is not certain, fear lending credence.’¹²⁰ Goiswinth was part of the poem’s intended audience rather than a fictionalised figure within the narrative, which reinforces the poem’s consolatory purpose by suggesting that the queen’s experience was similar to that of others who anxiously await news. In the final section of the poem, Fortunatus speaks directly to the weeping survivors, Goiswinth and Brunhild, emphasising that Galswinth lives in heaven with the saints, and underscoring the miracle of the lamp at her funeral as a sign of her eternal life. The lamp brings to mind the parable of the wise and foolish virgins; the fact that both Gregory and Fortunatus recount a similar story suggests a shared assessment of Galswinth’s character and salvation.

Furthermore, Fortunatus reminds Goiswinth that she has the consolation of her surviving family, including grandchildren. If the poem were written solely for Brunhild, to whom this point also applied, it would have made sense to have addressed it to *soror* rather than *mater*. Structurally, the poem is organised by the bonds of family—Galswinth’s opening scene in the poem has her running to her mother for a comforting embrace, Goiswinth’s final lament has her mourning the loss of the chance to see and touch her daughter and grandchildren; Fortunatus’ final consolation suggests that she can take comfort in her living family. The final two lines of the poem return to the general statements made at the beginning of the poem about the uncertainty of life and fate. For Christians, Fortunatus reminds his audience, there is the certainty faith affords: Galswinth lives in heaven because she believed on Earth—because Paradise holds her they ought not to weep. The fragility of earthly life has been replaced by the security of heaven.

In my analysis of this poem, I show that its length, complexity, and relevance to contemporary events suggest that it was a formal commission. I have argued that Brunhild was most likely responsible for this, but that the poem was also intended to retrace Galswinth’s route back to her mother, and to be read by a Visigothic court audience. The poem’s use of speeches renders it unique in Fortunatus’ corpus, but it is well within the tradition of late antique epic and consolation. As Davis aptly notes, poetic consolation was not made to fit a standard mould, but is rather a genre determined by the circumstances under which it is written—to be consoled, there must be something to mourn, and the scope of that mourning determines the range

¹²⁰ George, *Personal and Political*, p. 49.

of the poem.¹²¹ The balance of Fortunatus poem is more towards lament, reflecting the piling-up of causes of grief: Galswinth was murdered, she was young, she had recently been married, she was far from home, none of her relatives could attend her funeral, and she died before her mother. Her sister survived. As Fortunatus' other poems to Brunhild and her family suggest she did so in part by balancing the bonds of family, friendship, and patronage.

2.3. Brunhild

This section focuses on the only poem Fortunatus addressed to Brunhild alone: *Carm.App.6*, which is preceded by a poem to Childebert. The concluding lines of each poem commend a man named Audulf as a servant to Childebert and Brunhild and Fortunatus with him, which supports the conclusion that the poems were written and sent at the same time. George suggests that the poems to Brunhild and Childebert should be associated with *Carm.10.8*, which may have been written shortly after the Treaty of Andelot in 584.¹²² Unusually for Fortunatus' poems to royalty, they are short—the poem to Childebert is a mere fourteen lines long, that to Brunhild only sixteen lines in length. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the Appendix in which these poems circulated has a different transmission history to the rest of his poetry—its survival was more limited and its circulation much smaller. An analysis of the poems to Radegund and Agnes showed that the Appendix collection is characterised by a mix of formal commissions and occasional poetry. The poems to Childebert and Brunhild suggest that queens and princes were also recipients of friendly verse.

Only in writing to and for Brunhild and Fredegund does Fortunatus suggest that they were powerful through their families. Fortunatus did not normally write to his female friends and patrons about their children—if Palatina or Placidina had children, we do not hear of it. He addressed Radegund as a spiritual mother and appealed to her surviving family, and he refers to Agnes as sister and mother, but in neither case are they praised through their family connections. Fortunatus' mentions Ultrogotha's daughters but does not single out her role as a mother for praise or

¹²¹ Gregson Davis, 'Ad Sidera Notus: Strategies of Lament and Consolation in Fortunatus' *De Gelesuintha*, *Agon*, 1 (1967), 119.

¹²² George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 57-8.

comment; and Theudechild's children, if she had any, are not mentioned. But Brunhild's success in uniting Spain and Gaul came through her own bloodline and maternal achievements. Fortunatus' poem to Brunhild begins by praising her as being from royal stock, 'a mother of rank and honour', who gives offspring to rule two countries, a son to protect Gaul and a daughter to govern Spain; that this was hoped to engender political closeness is suggested by Fortunatus' reference to their subjects as 'twin peoples'. The future grandchildren the poem wishes for Brunhild are described as a *blanda corona nepotum*; she is a doubly fruitful grandmother through her son and daughter. At the close of the poet returns to the theme that the ruling position of Brunhild's family in Gaul and Spain is cause for rejoicing, for her together with the people and *patria*.

The poet praises Brunhild for the most traditional part of her role as a royal woman—uniting communities and bearing children. The poem makes no direct reference to her political role within the Merovingian state, or her regency for Childebert II. It does refer to her daughter ruling in Spain (*dirigat illa Getas*), without mention of her husband, suggesting that the poem's lack of reference to Brunhild's own position is not due to denial of the fact that women could and did rule. I am not sure it is necessary to cluster all of Fortunatus' writings for Brunhild and Childebert around this one particular moment—the Appendix poems could predate *Carm.* 10.8. Indeed, given that Fortunatus refers to only one of Brunhild's daughters and to the hope of grandchildren rather than their existence, I find an earlier date more plausible.

Brunhild had two daughters, Ingund and Chlodosind, both of whom were affianced to the Visigothic royal family. Given that before the treaty Ingund and her son had ended up in Byzantine captivity as a result of Hermangild's rebellion, George argues against Reydellet's view that the poem refers to Ingund, suggesting instead that he may be referring to the prospect of Chlodosind's marriage to Reccared. According to Gregory of Tours, Visigothic envoys petitioned Childebert and Brunhild for a marriage between Reccared and Chlodosind to secure the Visigothic-Austrasian alliance. They jointly replied that they were in favour of the match but could do nothing without Guntram's approval. During the negotiations for the Treaty of Andelot, Guntram granted his approval if Childebert upheld the conditions of the treaty. Brunhild had a gem-studded gold salver and gilded dishes

made and sent to Reccared, who 'was to marry' (*sponsare debuerat*) Chlodosind. For unclear reasons the marriage did not take place.¹²³

Brunhild's power came from her family in Spain and Gaul and was often exercised on behalf of her children or relatives. The valuable diplomatic gifts she commissioned for Reccared indicates her position as a noteworthy patron, which can also be seen in her steady patronage of Fortunatus. This *consolatio* she commissioned in memory of her sister Galswinth addressed both Brunhild and her mother directly and its length and elaborateness also suggests court audiences in the Visigothic kingdom and Francia. The poem presents Brunhild and her family in a positive light: Galswinth carried out her queenly duties well during her tragically short reign; and Brunhild and her mother are depicted as grieving appropriately. Despite her first-hand knowledge of the hazards of political marriages, Brunhild strongly supported and sought to facilitate good marriage for her daughters, both of Brunhild's daughters married or came very close to marrying into the Visigothic royal family. Indeed, her success as a mother is at the centre of Fortunatus' short poem in her honour, a poem which expects and celebrates her continued influence on future generations of her family. The close of this poem commends its bearer to Brunhild, indicating her position as a powerful patron in her own right.

For a poet like Fortunatus, the patronage of royal women such as Brunhild, Berthichild, and Theudechild was worth pursuing since these women controlled their own wealth and spent it on a variety of charitable causes, including the support of foreigners. Fortunatus' poems for Merovingian women have been overshadowed by the longer panegyrics he wrote for Merovingian kings, and his use of the patronage of royal women has not been subject to the attention its role in his work warrants. Yet as his description of Galswinth's brief reign shows, patronage and friendship mattered to Merovingian women, and the use of gifts and words to win friends enabled them to rule successfully.

¹²³ Chlodosind may have married a nobleman named Chrodoaldus, see Jonas *Vita Columbani* I.22, who describes Chrodoald as the husband of an unnamed aunt of Childebert II. DLH IX.28

3. Royal Pairs

In addition to writing for individual rulers, Fortunatus also wrote for Merovingian ruling pairs: Brunhild and Sigibert, Fredegund and Chilperic, and Brunhild and Childebert II. The king and queen offered patronage and friendship to their subjects as individuals and as a unit. An analysis of these poems shows that Fortunatus also focused on the relationship between king and queen. Drawing on the legacy of Roman and late antique thought about marriage, he presented the relationship between royal spouses as one of friendship. In writing consolations to royalty, his authorial persona is that of a friend, urging them to manage their grief in a dignified and appropriate manner.

The political history of the 560s and 570s as told by Gregory of Tours seems to present the face off of Brunhild and Sigibert against Chilperic and Fredegund. Fortunatus wrote for both couples, although his ultimate partisanship may be deduced from the fact that he continued to write Brunhild and her family after Sigibert's death, but not Fredegund or her son Chlothar II. In terms of output, he wrote more poems for the Austrasian royal family, which may be explained by the fact that Poitiers was within their kingdom. Fortunatus wrote two panegyrics for Sigibert and Brunhild (*Carm.*6.1 and *Carm.*6.1a); and a poem each for Childebert and Brunhild (*Carm.*10.7 and *Carm.*10.8). He also commemorated in verse a river journey he took alongside Sigibert and Brunhild from Metz to Andernach (*Carm.*10.9). This is sometimes argued to have taken place alongside Gregory when the bishop went to see the royal couple, although it is not possible to prove a connection between the river journey and Gregory's visit.¹²⁴ For Chilperic and Fredegund, the poet composed two poems of consolation on the death of their sons, *Carm.*9.2 and *Carm.*9.3, as well as epitaphs for the two boys. Fredegund also is briefly praised in *Carm.*9.1, which is otherwise about the virtues of her husband's rule.

¹²⁴ Brennan, 'Career', pp. 75-6.

3.1. Sigibert and Brunhild

Two of Fortunatus' earliest datable poems are his pieces in celebration of Sigibert and Brunhild's wedding and Brunhild's conversion to Christianity. The exact place of the epithalamium in the wedding is not certain.¹²⁵ In any case, the poet was probably at court in the spring of 566 to celebrate the marriage, and seems to have stayed with the king until summer 567, traveling up and down the Rhine and to northern Francia, as his first poetic letter to Dynamius of Marseille suggests.¹²⁶ The epithalamium is among his most classical works, with an introduction of twenty-four elegiac couplets, after which begins the epithalamium proper, where Cupid and Venus praise the king and queen. The work is similar to epithalamiums by Claudian, Ruricus, and Sidonius. Allusions to mythology and the classical past became rarer and rarer in Fortunatus' works, found in 7.1, 7.7, 6.2, 3.10, and 7.12 (where the references to antiquity are particularly concentrated).¹²⁷

We speak of the wedding of Sigibert and Brunhild but what their marriage service may have been like and how exactly it was celebrated, is not entirely certain. Probably, following Christian precedent since the sixth century, the marriage received an episcopal blessing. The Verona sacramentary, a seventh-century manuscript which contains the earlier surviving copy of prayers for the Mass, includes a liturgy for marriage. This liturgy suggests that the marriage of early medieval couples such as Brunhild and Sigibert could include a formal service.¹²⁸ The king, according to the epithalamium, was being surrounded by his officials and leading men of the kingdom, who came to the palace to celebrate the king's marriage. Because of the equivalence between being queen and being a king's wife, a formal marriage ceremony doubled as the ritual which created a queen.¹²⁹ The poem ends with Venus offering a benediction to the couple, which draws on the legacy of late antique Christian and Roman thought about marriage, which intersects

¹²⁵ Pauline Stafford makes the interesting suggestion that the poem was part of Brunhild's reception into Sigibert's kingdom. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 57.

¹²⁶ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 17 and 22.

¹²⁷ Reydellet I, pp. liii-liv.

¹²⁸ Scholarly consensus is that the Verona sacramentary 'reflects sixth-century practices'. Kyle Harper, 'Marriage and Family', in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. by Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 667-714 (p. 684).

¹²⁹ Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, pp. 111-2; and Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp. 127-34.

with ideas of friendship in ways worth examining. In her speech, Venus emphasises the equality of the royal couple and the good that will hopefully come to their kingdom from their union:

Go, long to be joined in body and yoked in heart, both equal in spirit, in merits and virtues equal, each adorning their sex with their accomplishments beyond price. (135) May your necks be yoked in the one embrace, and may you pass all your days in peaceful diversions. May each wish whatsoever the other desires; may the same salvation be upon both, guarding the two lives, may one love grow, linked by living strength; (140) may the joy of all increase under your auspices, may the world love peace, may concord rule supreme. Thus again may you, as parents, fulfil vows with children, and may you embrace grandchildren, offspring of your children.¹³⁰

This passage has never cited in any discussion of early medieval marriage. Scholarship on marriage displays similar chronological blind spots to friendship studies: it thins out before the sixth century and picks up again with the later middle ages. Prior to the 1980s and 1990s, there was a single study of Roman ideas of marriage; after that decade, the field of ancient family studies grew and continues to grow rapidly. It is characterised by the use of a wide range of sources, particularly law, epigraphy, literature, and by its confident self-positioning as important area of study within Roman social history.¹³¹ Late antique studies of marriage share a similar approach, though they tend to divide into studies carried out from either patristic or social history viewpoints.¹³²

¹³⁰ *Ite, diu iuncti membris et corde iugati, / ambo pares genio, meritis et moribus ambo, / sexum quisque suum pretiosis actibus ornans, / cuius amplexu sint colla conexas sub uno / et totos placidis pergatis lusibus annos. / Hoc uelit alterutrum quicquid dilexerit alter. / Aequa salus ambobus eat, duo pectora seruans, / unus amor uiuo solidamine iunctus alescat. / Auspiciis uestris cunctorum gaudia surgunt, / pacem mundus amet, uictrix Concordia regnet. / Sic iterum natis celebretis uota parentes / et de natorum teneatis prole nepotes.* Carm.6.1.132-143. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 31.

¹³¹ One of the few, if not the only, monograph written on Roman marriage before Susan Treggiari's *Roman Marriage* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), was Percy Corbett's *The Roman Law of Marriage* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930). The 1980s and '90s saw a flood of publications on Roman families, usefully summarised in Jens-Uwe Krause, *Die Familie und weitere anthropologische Grundlagen* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992). Particularly relevant for the study of marriage were Suzanne Dixon *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) and *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. by Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991). *A companion to families in the Greek and Roman worlds* ed. by Beryl Rawson (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), provides a recent overview of scholarship on Roman families and marriage.

¹³² Good general overviews of the study of late antique marriage are found in Kyle Harper, 'Marriage and the Family', in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* ed. by Scott Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 667-714; and Judith Evans Grubbs, 'Marriage and Family Relationships in the Late Roman West', in *A Companion to Late Antiquity* ed. by Philip Rousseau (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), pp. 201-219. Among the most important monographs on late antique marriage are Judith Evans Grubbs, *Law and the Family in Late Antiquity: The Emperor*

For the early medieval ages the discussion largely starts with Carolingian theologians, leaving a gap of several centuries between. Hans Werner-Goetz's discussion of the development of a Christian theory of marriage during the early Middle Ages begins with Jonas of Orleans (780-843).¹³³ Unlike in Roman and late antique scholarship, most study of medieval marriage has occurred within the context of study of medieval women or has focused the way marriage strategies were used to consolidate or increase of the power, authority, and/or landholdings of kin-groups.¹³⁴ Scholarship on medieval marriages has also explored the tensions between the idea of marriages made for utilitarian dynastic or ecclesiastical reasons and the romantic motivations of courtly love.¹³⁵

Fortunatus' poems to Merovingian royal couples fall within the chronological and thematic gap left by previous studies of marriage in the Roman and post-Roman world. In particular, the place of ideas of friendship within ideas of antique and medieval marriage has yet to receive full attention. There is a rich range of material with which to work. In his *Advice to bride and groom*, Plutarch wrote that 'a marriage of a couple who love each other is like a mixture of liquids: they amalgamate their bodies, property, friends, and relations.'¹³⁶ Centuries later, Thomas

Constantine's Marriage Legislation (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) and Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage During the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). The effects of Christianization on Roman marriage has continued to be a subject of scholarly interest—see Geoffrey Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 74-132 and Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 143-198.

¹³³ Hans-Werner Goetz, *Frauen im frühen Mittelalter* (Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1995), pp. 165-96.

¹³⁴ On the role of marriage strategies, see Régine Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde franc (VIIe-Xe siècle): essai d'anthropologie sociale* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1995). Among the publications which focus on women's history, Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500 to 900* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, 'The Power of Women through the Family, 500-1100 in Medieval Europe' *Feminist Studies* 1 (1973), pp. 126-4; and Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, 'Marriage and Divorce in the Frankish Kingdom', in *Women in Medieval Society* ed. by Susan Mosher Stuart (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1976) are particularly fundamental for the early middle ages. See also Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997); *Il Matrimonio nella società altomedievale*, ed. by Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro, 1977); Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Christopher Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); David D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Karl Heidecker, *The Divorce of Lothar II: Christian Marriage and Political Power in the Carolingian World*, translated from the Dutch by Tanis M. Guest. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

¹³⁵ Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300*, pp. 5-9.

¹³⁶ Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 225.

Aquinas objected to consanguineous marriages on the grounds that they would ‘prevent people from widening their circle of friends. When a man takes a wife from another family he is joined in special friendship with her relations; they are to him as his own. And so Augustine writes, ‘The demands of charity are fulfilled by people coming together in bonds that the various ties of friendship require, so that they may live together in a profitable and becoming amity; nor should one man have many relationships to one another, but each should go to many singly’’.¹³⁷ Brunhild and Sigibert’s marriage was meant to increase and strengthen the friendship alliances of the Merovingian and Visigothic royal families. As we have seen, this effort continued with the next generation and it would continue throughout the Middle Ages.¹³⁸

Fortunatus’ poem echoes this idea of marriage as a social good and it is here that his thinking seems to draw strongly on the legacy of late antique thought. Augustine’s *On the Good of Marriage*, which he wrote as a pair with *On Holy Virginity* in around 401, was written in response to contemporary Christian debates over these issues.¹³⁹ For him, friendship and marriage were closely related: ‘Every human being is part of the human race, and human nature is a social entity, and has naturally the great benefit and power of friendship. For this reason God wished to produce all persons out of one, so they would be together in their social relations not only by similarity of race, but also by the bond of kindship. The first natural bond of human society, therefore, is that of husband and wife.’¹⁴⁰ Augustine argued that marriage holds the community of human society through the production of children, the only valid outcome of sex, ‘for even without such sexual association there could

¹³⁷ Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 57-8. Merovingian church councils legislated on consanguinity; during the Carolingian period concern over permitted and forbidden marriages intensified greatly, although it is important to note that definitions of degrees of consanguinity were still being debated during the this period. See Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 255-67 and Wilfrid Hartmann, *Kirche und Kirchenrecht um 900* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2008), pp. 125-7 and 192-214 (Merovingian legislation is discussed on pp. 192-7).

¹³⁸ Marriage alliances are fairly well-studied for the early Middle Ages; Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp. 34-7 provides a good brief assessment.

¹³⁹ Patrick Gerard Walsh, *Augustine: De Bono Coniugali, De Sancta Virginitate* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), p. ix.

¹⁴⁰ Ray Kearney and David Hunter, *Marriage and Virginity* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1999), p. 16. Elsewhere, Augustine connected friendship to kinship Augustine discussed the links between ways in which *amicitia* bound together different kinship relationships: Ep.130.2.5-6; *de fide rerum quae non uidentur*, 2.4, and passages from En. Ps.33.

exist a true union of friendship [*Amicalis coniunctio*] between the two sexes, with one governing and the other obeying.’¹⁴¹ Elsewhere in the treatise, he emphasized that though marriage is to produce children, the bond (*sociale uinculum*) between spouses is so strong that marriages are not broken because they fail to produce children.¹⁴² Antique concepts of friendship focused on it as a relationship between men, a relationship more elevated than that between man and wife. Augustine’s care to link marriage and friendship may reflect his wish to ‘endow Christian marriage with a dignity higher than the institution had enjoyed earlier.’¹⁴³

Augustine held friendship in high esteem, as a God-bestowed good thing worth seeking out for its own sake. Marriage and sex are for the good of friendship to exist ‘for the propagation of the human race depends on this last, and the association of friendship [*societas amicalis*] within it is a great good’.¹⁴⁴ The good of friendship comes even out of the sins of incontinence and illicit intercourse, for they produce children and the next generations, ‘from whom blessed friendship [*sanctae amicitiae*] can be sought out.’¹⁴⁵

There was a Scriptural basis for the importance of friendship relative to marriage (‘A friend and companion never meet amiss: but above both is a wife with her husband’¹⁴⁶) but the two relationships more often shared overlapping values and vocabularies than explicit links. ‘Marital concord was a core social value’ sometimes honoured in a wife’s epitaph.¹⁴⁷ Bruttia Aureliana, Melania the Elder’s first cousin, was praised in a commemorative inscription for her ‘*merita honestatis et concordiae coniugalis*.’¹⁴⁸ *Fides*, a concept so important in Roman life, thought, and friendship, also had an important place in the Roman idea of marriage. Reciprocity-based relationships like patronage demanded ‘good faith and moral

¹⁴¹ Walsh, *Augustine: de bono coniugali*, p. 2

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 17

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 2

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 21. As Anita Gurreau-Jalabert argues, the terminology of friendship came to be associated with relatives by marriage, and eventually blood relatives as well. ‘Amour et amitié dans la société médiéval: jalons pour une analyse lexicale et sémantique,’ in *Splendor Reginae. Passions, genre et famille. Mélanges en l’honneur de Régine Le Jan*, ed. by Sylvie Joye, Thomas Lienhard, Laurent Jégou, and Jens Schneider (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 281-290 (p. 283).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁶ Ecc 40:23

¹⁴⁷ Harper, ‘Marriage and Family’, p. 673.

¹⁴⁸ Judith Evans Grubbs, *Law and the Family in Late Antiquity: The Emperor Constantine’s Marriage Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 84.

obligation'.¹⁴⁹ Mutual faithfulness, Lactantius argued, made for inseparable *caritas* between a man and his wife.¹⁵⁰

The Greco-Roman ideal of marriage valued the idea of companionship as can be seen in the language of late Roman epitaphs, which often present an idea of the equality of wives and husbands. In an epitaph a husband might be described as the *patronus* of his wife; but this can be set against epitaphs which express the equality of wives with their husbands.¹⁵¹ A friend and a wife might share desirable qualities like *facilitas* and *comitas*. Furthermore, the word *officium*, when used for wives (as in the phrase *in officio mariti*) does not imply subordination since this word can be defined as the 'mutual serviceableness between status equals'.¹⁵²

In his sermons John Chrysostom promoted ideas of Christian marriage which argued that companionship would be achieved through the virtue of husband and wife, a single standard of sexual behaviour, and the prohibition of divorce and remarriage.¹⁵³ Gregory of Tours devoted an entire book of his *Histories* to Merovingian marital policy, holding up Brunhild and Sigibert as worthy of emulation. Gregory took seriously the importance of faithfulness in marriage, presenting Sigibert's fidelity as the reason for the success of his marriage.¹⁵⁴ Gregory surely would have agreed with the main point of Fortunatus' second poem for the royal couple: the importance of shared faith for strengthening the marriage bond. The poem was likely written in honour of Brunhild's conversion. Through Christ's gift (*munere Christi*) of the Catholic faith, a queen who was first joined in heart to her husband, is now even more pleasing by her faith. This twofold security for their marriage is something Sigibert is enjoined to celebrate; his wife now pleases both man and God. The indissolubility of this divinely sealed bond is strongly implied by the poem's last lines, 'May you, shining, lead for many years with your dear wife/ whom divine love has given you as a companion.'¹⁵⁵ The love which joined the royal couple in Fortunatus' panegyric has been deepened and

¹⁴⁹ Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, p. 237.

¹⁵⁰ Evans Grubbs, *Law and the Family*, p. 89.

¹⁵¹ Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, p. 245-6.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 241-2.

¹⁵³ Harper, 'Marriage and Family', p. 667.

¹⁵⁴ Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, pp. 95-6, and see more generally Chapter 5.

¹⁵⁵ *Saecula longa micans cara cum coniuge ducas / quam tibi diuinus consociauit amor*. Carm VI.1a.41-2. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 33.

divinely blessed through Brunhild's conversion. Brunhild is not presented as an active agent in her own conversion: the credit belongs to Christ and her husband. Her Catholicism is presented as a point in her husband's favour through which 'the house of the church grows strong through your doing.'¹⁵⁶ The poem, Koebner suggests, was commissioned by Sigibert to celebrate Brunhild's conversion, which would explain why so much of the poem praises the king and the benefits of his rule.¹⁵⁷ Fortunatus' panegyric for Sigibert is grounded on a background of late antique political theory but it has a number of specifically Merovingian concerns: dynastic permanence, the king's faithfulness in marriage, the king as master, and the importance of *pietas*.¹⁵⁸

Fortunatus' poem suggests that the royal marriage is supposed to be one of equality. The partners should possess equal virtue, meaning that both come to the marriage chaste and faithfully follow Christian standards of sexual morality. They should also possess equal merits: each partner, as Venus and Cupid describe in their speeches, possesses the ideal qualities of man or woman. And they are equal in spirit (*ambo pares genio*).¹⁵⁹ The relationship between them in which each wants whatever the other wants, each partner achieves the same salvation, and one love joins them together, blends the Christian traditions of marriage and friendship, as well as drawing on earlier Roman values of companionship in marriage.

Although Fortunatus does not explicitly underscore it, implicit in the benediction for Brunhild and Sigibert's marriage is that it will last all their lives. In his book on the Christianisation of marriage, Reynolds concludes that Christianity introduced an emphasis on the indissolubility of a marriage which deemphasized the relationship between spouses.¹⁶⁰ Merovingian kings took and dismissed wives for practical as well as human reasons: the exclusivity of a wife's role, together with political concerns such as diplomatic alliances and the need for a successor, meant

¹⁵⁶ *Ecclesiae creuit te faciente domus*. Carm.VI.1a.30. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 33.

¹⁵⁷ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 24-6.

¹⁵⁸ Reydellet, *La royauté*, pp. 321-2.

¹⁵⁹ Carm.VI.1.133

¹⁶⁰ Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage During the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 419. On the early medieval development of the idea that Christian marriage was indissoluble, see Heidecker, *The Divorce of Lothar II*. On the continued development of the idea of the indissolubility of marriage in the Middle Ages, see David D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 200.

that their marriages were sometimes dependent on the expediencies of the moment.¹⁶¹ In contrast to this, Fortunatus' benediction on the royal couple wishes them a long, loving, and harmonious relationship, but this is not for their personal happiness, it is part of their duty as a good ruling pair. A good royal marriage contains joy, peace, and concord, and spreads these to their subjects.

It is important to note that we do not know how the dynamics of Sigibert and Brunhild's marriage played out in real life. Against these expressions of love and equality should also be set the potential experiences of marriage among the aristocracy. As Suzanne Wemple notes, an aristocratic wife in Frankish Gaul 'was subject to the authority of her husband. She had to obey his command and act according to his pleasure rather than her own. Above all, she had to guard her chastity if she did not wish to be repudiated or killed. Her husband, on the other hand, did not owe her fidelity.'¹⁶² Brent Shaw's important article on the late antique family canvassed Augustine's sermons, letters, and autobiographical writings to come to the conclusion that domestic conflict pervaded the family home; and there was no genuine partnership between spouses, but rather a 'dyad of love and fear'.¹⁶³ Ultimately, whatever their marriage was like in reality, the king and queen were granted the poem's final wish: their marriage vows were fulfilled with children, and Brunhild lived to see their grandchildren.

3.2. Fredegund and Chilperic

In Fortunatus' works, Brunhild appears to be the moral equal of her contemporary queen.¹⁶⁴ Although Gregory was circumspect when dealing with the Merovingian rulers of Tours, particularly Brunhild, Fortunatus responded instead to the demands of particular occasions.¹⁶⁵ The first occasion he had to write for Chilperic and Fredegund was at the synod of Berny-Rivière, at which Gregory stood trial, accused of slandering the queen as an adulteress. The poet addressed the

¹⁶¹ Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, p. 101.

¹⁶² Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500 to 900* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 38.

¹⁶³ Brent D. Shaw, 'The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine', *Past and Present*, 115 (1987), 28-9.

¹⁶⁴ Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours and the Women in his Works', p. 101.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 140.

assembled bishops with praise of Chilperic. Previously this was seen as the ‘opportunistic abandonment’ of his friend, but current consensus is that Fortunatus skilfully deployed the panegyric to persuade Chilperic towards leniency and prevent future tensions.¹⁶⁶ Julia Smith argues that Gregory and Chilperic were in fact back on good terms by the time the trial came around, but a trial was still necessary to allow the king to save face, and punish the true culprits. In her view the poem demonstrates Fortunatus’ ability ‘to participate in a high-stakes game: his own reputation and career would have been forfeit had he failed to bring about an honourable resolution’. The poem cleared Fredegund’s reputation and allowed the king to ‘acquit Gregory without losing face’.¹⁶⁷ To my mind, this pushes the poem too far: Fredegund is not even mentioned until line 117, and she disappears from the poem at line 132. Comparing across Fortunatus’ works, we see that Sophia’s presence outweigh Justin’s in the *gratiarum actio* for the imperial couple. Brunhild is overshadowed by Sigibert in the panegyric for the two of them, but dominates as the powerful and successful matriarch of her dynasty in poems written for her and Childebert II.

Comparing his words for Fredegund, to the praise of Brunhild in Carm.6.1a, we see a distinctly different emphasis. Fredegund is Chilperic’s *coniuge propria*; and an active partner in his rule, who participates in the business of governing the kingdom and offers wise counsel. The poet focuses on her intelligence, generosity, and virtue. Smith argues that Fredegund was heavily pregnant at the time of the trial (quite literally ‘carrying the cares of the state’).¹⁶⁸ Fortunatus’ choice of the word *opima* may be a reference to this also. Like other worthy women he wrote about, he describes her countenance as shining with the light of day. Brunhild shines as well, with the light of her conversion. She is described as ‘beautiful, modest, decorous, intelligent, dutiful, beloved, generous, holding sway by her character, her aspect, and her nobility’.¹⁶⁹ Both women are *sollers* (clever) and both are praised for their

¹⁶⁶ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 48-57. Below I suggest reasons this consensus may need revisiting.

¹⁶⁷ Julia M.H. Smith, “‘Carrying the Cares of the State’: Gender Perspectives on Merovingian “Staatlichkeit””, in *Der Frühmittelalterliche Staat: Europäische Perspektiven*, ed. by Walter Pohl and Veronika Wieser (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), pp. 227-39 (p. 232).

¹⁶⁸ Smith, ‘Carrying the Cares of the State’, pp. 237-8.

¹⁶⁹ *pulchra, modesta, decens, sollers, grata benigna/ ingenio uultu nobilitate potens*. Carm.6.1a.37-8.

generosity as patrons, though Brunhild's *grata benigna* is less emphatic than Fredegund's *munere larga placens*.¹⁷⁰

The social background of the two women was dramatically different: Brunhild was a Visigothic princess and Fredegund had risen from servile origins to become a queen. Fortunatus handles his inability to discuss the topic of nobility in two ways. First, he focuses primarily on praise of Fredegund's intelligence, not the more traditional aspects of praiseworthy femininity: character, beauty, or social status. According to Gregory, people outside the royal villa during the trial shouted a series of what we might call protest chants in his defence. One of these was, 'surely a bishop cannot say such things, even about a slave?'¹⁷¹ Gregory may have chosen *episcopus* and *servus* simply as social opposites—a good bishop like himself would not stoop to abuse even one so far below him. Does it push the reading too far to suggest a subtle dig at the queen?¹⁷² Perhaps. Social status was part of Fortunatus' strategies of praising; in its absence, he took care to stress the status Fredegund had from being Chilperic's wife and queen.

Smith rightly highlights Fredegund's political importance and co-rulership as the main point of Fortunatus' praise.¹⁷³ The poet further develops his praise of the queen's cleverness and advice: 'she cherishes you with her goodness, she helps you by her service. With her guidance at your side, your palace grows, by her help your house gains greater honour.'¹⁷⁴ Rather than describing Fredegund as beneficial to Chilperic's realm, Fortunatus limits her influence to his *palatia* and *domus*; the object of *colens* and *iuuans* is *te*, the king himself. Fredegund is of service to the state first and foremost by being of service to her husband. This service includes seeking out prayers on Chilperic's behalf, including from Radegund. Reydellet is right to argue against an emendation of this to Rigunth, which would create a puzzling switch of subject from mother to daughter. Radegund, as Baudonivia and Fortunatus both indicate, prayed ceaselessly for peace between the Merovingian

¹⁷⁰ Carm.9.1.120

¹⁷¹ *Numquid potuit episcopus talia dicere vel de servo?* DLH.V.59 MGH SRM III, p. 261

¹⁷² See Shanzer, 'Capturing Merovingian Courts', for the subtleties of Fortunatus' and Gregory's criticism of Chilperic. She does not discuss their treatment of Fredegund.

¹⁷³ Smith, 'Carrying the Cares of the State', pp. 237-8.

¹⁷⁴ *te bonitate colens, utilitate iuuans, / qua partier tecum moderante palatia crescent, / cuius auxilio floret honore domus* IX.1.124-6

kings and actively intervened by letter when civil strife threatened.¹⁷⁵ Seeking the aid on her husband's behalf of a powerful and well-known holy woman is to Fredegund's credit. By bringing Radegund into the picture at this moment, Fortunatus reminds the royal couple that an audience outside their own palace watches their actions.

For a panegyric that was supposed to be vindicating the queen's character, Fortunatus' only two comments on it *quae regnum moribus ornat* and *omnibus excellens meritis* seem rather to damn with carefully nonspecific praise.¹⁷⁶ Fredegund's virtues are again described vaguely, with the addition of light imagery, later on in the poem. 'She shines resplendent through her own merits, a glory to a king, and, made queen, a crowning glory for her own husband'.¹⁷⁷ Fortunatus seems to build a case that an attack on Fredegund, who has been a dutiful wife and queen, is an attack on her husband. This is congruent with Chilperic's statement at the trial, *crimen uxoris meae meum habetur obprobrium*.¹⁷⁸ To a significant extent, an early medieval queen took her status from her position as the king's wife and the mother of his children, whatever her own origins. Queenly status, Fortunatus wrote to Fredegund on the death of her sons, was cause for rejoicing even in the midst of grief, but his recognition of how precarious this status was can be seen in his additional wish that the queen may continue to fulfil her duty of producing offspring, so that Chilperic may in due course become a grandfather.¹⁷⁹

The importance of children for a Merovingian royal family can be seen in Guntram's message to Childebert on the birth of his son, 'Through this child, God, by the lovingkindness of his divine majesty, will exalt the kingdom of the Franks, if only his father will live for him and he will live for his father.'¹⁸⁰ Children were necessary to continue the family line, and Guntram, and Gregory of Tours (who may well be using reported speech to voice his own opinion) would have been well acquainted with the political difficulties caused by lack of a stable succession or

¹⁷⁵ Reydellet I, p. 14, n. 26.

¹⁷⁶ Carm.9.1.117 and 121.

¹⁷⁷ *quae meritis propriis effulget, gloria regis, / et regina suo facta corona uiro*. Carm.9.1.129-130. A biblical intertext renders this stronger than it first appears, *mulier diligens corona viro suo et putredo in ossibus eius quae confusione res dignas gerit* Proverbs 12:4

¹⁷⁸ Gregory of Tours V.49 MGH SRM III, 261.

¹⁷⁹ Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp. 86-8.

¹⁸⁰ DLH.VIII.37

tensions between parents and children.¹⁸¹ In Gregory's *Histories*, Fredegund and Chilperic are the foremost examples of this sort of strife, and he thought little of Fredegund as a mother. This was not accepted by later historians of the Franks, who wrote when Fredegund and her descendants had decisively triumphed, and a more positive portrait than Gregory's is found in the LHF.¹⁸²

Fortunatus had occasion to write about Fredegund and Chilperic as parents when he composed consolations for the death of the couple's sons, Chlodobert and Dagobert, who died in a dysentery epidemic in 580, twenty days after Gregory's trial at Berny.¹⁸³ In antiquity, consolations were typically sent within a few months of a death, whereas commemorative events might be held years later.¹⁸⁴ Fortunatus' first consolation seems to have been sent within this immediate period of mourning, and the second, far shorter, sent about six months later, encouraging the king and queen to take joy in Eastertide.

Neither of the two poems contain label themselves as *consolationes*, nor were they given these titles by medieval scribes. We have already touched on consolatory writings as a genre, but these poems warrant a more in-depth consideration of genre. For metrical reasons, the word *consolatio* rarely appears in poetry.¹⁸⁵ The best definition is a flexible one: a consolation is a piece of writing for a practical purpose, which can have a theoretical underpinning, usually produced by a well-educated elite with the skills and position to voice 'common concerns and sorrow' at a moment of crisis.¹⁸⁶ The constructed nature of consolation should be stressed: antique consolers wanted to present themselves positively through their choice of words, arguments, and topics, and to demonstrate '[their] well-considered

¹⁸¹ Post haec Childebertho regi filius natus est, qui a Magnerico d Treverorum episcopo de sacro fonte susceptus, Theodoberthus est vocitatus. De quo tantum gaudium Gunthchramnus rex habuit, ut statim legatus dirigens, multa ei munera transmitteret, dicens: 'Per hunc enim Deus eregere Francorum regnum propria maiestates suae pietate dignabitur, si huic pater aut ipse viverit patri.' DLH VIII.37, p. 405

¹⁸² Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours and the Women in his Works', p. 128.

¹⁸³ DLH V.50

¹⁸⁴ Amanda Wilcox, 'Exemplary Grief: Gender and Virtue in Seneca's Consolations to Women', *Helios*, 33 (2006), 100, n. 97.

¹⁸⁵ J.H.D Scourfield, 'Towards a Definition of Consolation', in *Greek and Roman Consolations*, ed. by Hans Baltussen and Peter Adamson (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2013), pp. 1-36 pp. 2-3). Cicero is the first person to use and define the word *consolatio*, who uses it both to mean consolation, and more rarely, 'to denote a particular kind of abstract discourse'.

¹⁸⁶ Hans Baltussen and Peter Adamson, *Greek and Roman Consolations* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2013), p. xiv.

and properly justified view on the matter.¹⁸⁷ Consolation was not merely to provide the distressed with psychological comfort but also to allow him or her to adjust to changed circumstances and continue to live in a socially approved fashion—it was also a moral and hortatory genre.¹⁸⁸ For modern historians, consolatory writing also provide insight into ancient emotions and a glimpse of how grief was managed.¹⁸⁹ Christian consolatory writings were often found within sermons, letters, and eulogies and they continued to draw on classical ‘arguments and perspectives.’¹⁹⁰ Frances Young points out the difficult of tracing a straight line between Christian and classical consolatory writings since Christian literature of the fourth and fifth centuries was deeply influenced by classical literary forms but defies analysis in terms of classical genre. Christian authors wrote *encomia* and *consolationes*, but most of the works that straightforwardly copied classical genres do not survive.¹⁹¹ The late antique development of this tradition can be seen in authors Fortunatus knew from his education in the Christian classics, a tradition with which late antique writers such as Ambrose and Jerome were also familiar. In one consolatory letter, Jerome boasted of his reading in the ancient consolatory tradition.¹⁹² Augustine’s place in this tradition has been debated, but it has been convincingly argued that he used consolatory motifs, and that the broad and continuous transmission of his work renders his witness to the consolatory tradition important.¹⁹³ Gregson Davies situated Fortunatus’ *De Gelesuintha* within this tradition, emphasising the flexibility of consolatory writings when cast in the form of poetry, as well as the poet’s expert blending of classical and Christian motifs. He does not directly compare the poem to Fortunatus’ other consolatory works, as Judith George does in a survey of consolatory motifs in Fortunatus’ poems.¹⁹⁴ George concludes that the range of Fortunatus’ consolatory poetry demonstrates his ability to respond sensitively to the tastes, needs, and interests of his patrons.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. xx.

¹⁸⁸ Scourfield, ‘Towards a Definition of Consolation’, p. 7.

¹⁸⁹ Baltussen and Adamson, *Greek and Roman Consolations*, p. xiii.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, pp. xvi-xvii.

¹⁹¹ Frances Young, ‘Classical Genres in Christian Guise; Christian Genres in Classical Guise’, in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. by Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 247-58 (p. 254).

¹⁹² Scourfield, ‘Towards a Definition of Consolation’, pp. 12-3.

¹⁹³ Baltussen and Adamson, *Greek and Roman Consolations*, p. 168, n.24.

¹⁹⁴ The prose consolations, to which George alludes briefly, still await comprehensive analysis.

My analysis expands on these points by focusing on consolations within the context of friendship. Consolation was a flexible genre and should also be considered in terms of its extra-literary dimensions. Consolations were not solely a literary form but also belonged to oratory, since late antique funerary speeches contained a consolatory element.¹⁹⁵ Offering consolation was not just a matter of words but also of social practices and obligations. In the ancient world, it was customary to visit a bereaved person to offer sympathy and comfort. When this was not possible, and sometimes even when it was, a letter of consolation was sent to the affected individual or community.¹⁹⁶ Offering condolences was a social obligation, and it was an act of friendship to give sympathy and advice or exhortation to deal with the loss in a certain way.¹⁹⁷

This is not to say that Fortunatus and the rulers of Neustria were friends, but it does underscore that Fortunatus carved out an authoritative space from which to address them. In many ways, Fortunatus' poem for Fredegund and Chilperic can be seen as representative of the distance he had travelled in twenty years of residence in Gaul. Carm.6.8, written around the time of the poet's arrival at court, details the poet's travel woes after the royal cook stole his boat. Even with Sigibert's command that a boat be made available, it took the joint efforts of Gogo and Papulus (otherwise unknown) to arrange for Fortunatus' journey to continue. Two decades later, the poet was the counsellor of royalty in their grief.

Fortunatus' poems for Chilperic and Fredegund are unique for addressing a bereaved couple jointly, though the first consolation speaks to Chilperic, instructing him how to best to guide his grieving wife; the poet does not directly speak to Fredegund herself. Consolations which address women are rare in antiquity and were intended for a male readership.¹⁹⁸ Fortunatus and other late antique authors wrote for grieving men and women, though like their antique counterparts, consolatory works were not intended to be private. Accordingly, his advice focuses on the king and queen's public behaviour. The poem opens with twelve lines on man's fallen state and the inevitability of death. Fortunatus rarely displays his

¹⁹⁵ Scourfield, 'Towards a Definition of Consolation', p. 4.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 15-16.

¹⁹⁷ Baltussen and Adamson, *Greek and Roman Consolation*, p. xxii.

¹⁹⁸ Wilcox, 'Exemplary Grief,' p. 75. The much-debated *Consolatio ad Liviam* is a fascinating case in point.

biblical knowledge as comprehensively as he does here; the next twenty-seven lines of the poem (lines 13-40) focus on a parade of biblical men, predominantly from the Old Testament, whose remarkable and praiseworthy lives nevertheless did not allow them to escape death. 'Moses himself, the lawgiver, and Aaron the priest lie dead / and the friend worthy of God's words died'.¹⁹⁹ Christ rose from the dead but still underwent death as man. As George notes, an abrupt transition is signalled at line 43, when the poet poses his audience a series of rhetorical questions about the inevitability of death.²⁰⁰

The poet then ponders the futility of grief—the physicality of grief does not bring back the dead and man cannot set himself against the will of God. The king is urged to handle his grief in the proper way: 'be dignified and manful, bear your suffering patiently; let the burden be borne which cannot be avoided' and to be mindful of the queen, who depends on him for all good.²⁰¹ He is to urge her to quiet her feelings and not cry nor allow her to weep. Fortunatus' advice draws on the classical *topos* of the excessive grief of women, which had had a long history. Seneca's *Consolation to Marcia* characterises women as giving themselves over excessively to grief because of their lack of self-control; everyone should be restrained in their grief, but this advice applies particularly to women.²⁰² Extravagant grieving was seen as an upset to the social order.²⁰³ Moreover, Fredegund has the consolation that her husband is king and so ought to rejoice rather than mourn. The poet hopes she will have a long time, and reminds the couple to

¹⁹⁹ Carm.IX.2.26-7 *Legifer ipse iacet Moyses Aaronque sacerdos, / alloquisque Dei dignus amicus obit.*

²⁰⁰ Judith George, 'Variations on Themes of Consolation in the Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 86 (1988), 57.

²⁰¹ *esto uirile decus, patientur uince dolores:/ quod non uitatur, uel toleretur onus.* Carm.9.2.85-6. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 84. The poem circulated in medieval Spain and is transmitted in MS El Escorial b.III.14 (16th century), a copy of the lost Codex Ovetensis (12th century) discovered and described by Ambrosio de Morales. This is one of the manuscripts from which Gundlach gathered and edited the *Epistola Wisigothicae* for the MGH. It has the title *Fortunatus ad Hilpericum regem*. It is first noted in M. Risco (ed.), 'Noticias que escribió Ambrosio de Morales de lo contenido en el famoso Códice Ovetense de Don Pelayo, Obispo de esta Sede', in *España Sagrada*, vol. 38, app. 40 (Madrid, 1793), pp. 366-76 (p. 369). The manuscript is very briefly described in Gundlach, 'Epistolae Wisigothicae', in E. Dümmler (ed.), *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi I*. MGH Epistolae III (Berlin, 1892), pp. 658-90 (p. 659, n. 3.); and at greater length in Paul Erwald, 'Reise nach Spanien im Winter von 1878 and 1879', *Neues Archiv VI* (1881), pp. 233-4.

²⁰² Jacqueline Fabre-Serris, 'Women after War in Seneca's Troades: A Reflection on Emotions', in *Women and War in Antiquity*, ed. by Jacqueline Fabre-Serris and Alison Keith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), pp. 100-18 (pp. 101-3).

²⁰³ Wilcox, 'Exemplary Grief,' p. 74.

have thought for their daughter. He also reminds them that their grief is not private: their people are watching, and will take their cue from royal behaviour. As in earlier consolations, the text and its author create a community of readers and ‘a public evaluation of virtue’, which in turn delimits which acts are public, publicly valued, and exemplary.²⁰⁴

To reinforce the message of appropriate behaviour in the face of loss, the royal couple are reminded of biblical paragons—Job, David, and the mother of the Maccabees (the one exemplary female figure cited in the entire poem), who bore up under their grief with joy. Chilperic and Fredegund are urged to rejoice that their baptised sons have been taken back to God. The poet imagines Chilperic and Fredegund reuniting with their two boys, dressed in heavenly finery, on the day of judgement. The poet invokes the birth of children to Abraham, David, and Job in order to comfort the king and queen with the fact that by the grace of God there will be another child in their future.

As far as I know, most poetic consolations prior to Fortunatus were single occasional pieces. He is therefore unusual in writing to the king and queen again, at Easter 581. This consolation is far shorter and less specific. After ten lines about the end of winter and return of spring, the poet hopes that the king and queen are experiencing a similar improvement in their spirits. The death of their sons is only briefly alluded to as a *tristia damna*. The poem focuses on the connection between spring and the message of Easter, and the king and queen are once again reminded of their duty to set an example for their people with proper behaviour. ‘May joy find more welcome throughout the high palaces of the king and, thanks to you, may your servants observe a blessed festival. May the Almighty grant us your salvation on earth and may your Highnesses long reign over this land.’²⁰⁵ Unlike the previous poem, which addressed Chilperic alone, advising him to model the proper acceptance and coping with grief for both his wife and his people, this poem addresses the royal pair jointly. Chilperic and Fredegund share responsibility for dealing with the progress of time and grief, and looking after the palace and people.

The poet also composed epitaphs for the couple’s dead sons, Chlodobert and Dagobert. As I noted in relation to non-royal epitaphs, there might be a gap between

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 73.

²⁰⁵ *Gaudia plus faueant per celsa palatial regum/ et per uos famuli festa beata colant./ Omnipotens nobis uestram addat in orbe salutem/ atque diu patriam culmina uestra regant.* Carm.9.3.15-9.

a death, the commissioning of an epitaph, and its appearance on a monument, but observing the appropriate funerary rites could be both ‘comforting and virtuous’ for survivors.²⁰⁶ Gregory of Tours records that Chilperic and Fredegund had Dagobert buried at the church of Saint Denis, and that they brought Chlodobert to the church of Saint Medard in Soissons, making vows to the saint for his recovery. He died and was buried in the church of Saint Crispin and Crispinian. Gregory records that Chlodobert’s funeral occasioned an outpouring of grief from the people who followed the procession.²⁰⁷ Fortunatus’ epitaphs for the princes were likely commissioned for these tombs. Both epitaphs open with an evocation of popular grief of the loss of future leaders, trace the princes’ lineage back to Clovis, and emphasise their residence in heaven as sinless children. Danuta Shanzer underscores the epitaph’s emphasis on Dagobert’s Merovingian legitimacy, a feature I would argue it shares with the epitaph to Chlodobert.²⁰⁸

Judith George effectively uses these poems to argue that Fortunatus’ success as an occasional poet came from his ability to deploy traditional language and ideas in a way tailored for specific individuals and situations. Read carefully, his poems also provide a way to analyse expectations of how a king and queen should rule together. An analysis of Merovingian ruling couples furthers the point I began to make in the previous chapter, that royal women were an important source of patronage and commissions for the poet. His works also provide a view of the limitations, as well as the opportunities, of Merovingian queenship.

3.3. Brunhild and Childebert II

The limitations and opportunities of Merovingian queenship can also be clearly seen in the career of Fredegund’s contemporary, Brunhild. Brunhild and Sigibert had been married for around nine years when, on the verge of defeating his half-brother Chilperic, Sigibert was murdered. Gregory of Tours wrote that Sigibert’s death was preceded by the same portent of lightning which had foretold Chlothar’s death. Sigibert was also warned by Germanus of Paris that if he took action against his brother intending to kill him, he himself would die. Sigibert

²⁰⁶ Wilcox, ‘Exemplary Grief’, p. 85.

²⁰⁷ DLH V.34

²⁰⁸ Shanzer, ‘Capturing Merovingian Courts’, p. 680, n.84.

ignored this warning and was stabbed by two *pueri* with poisoned knives who had tricked their way into his presence. Gregory claimed that they had been bewitched by Fredegund.²⁰⁹ Gregory mentions that Brunhild and her children had rejoined Sigibert in Paris before he set out to besiege Tournai; they were in Paris when he was killed.²¹⁰ Chilperic, accompanied by Fredegund and her children, buried his brother.

Gregory does not mention Brunhild's role at this point at the end of the story of Sigibert's murder, just states that Childebert succeeded his father. Gregory expands on this in the next chapter: Childebert, barely five, was taken from his mother and proclaimed king on Christmas day. Chilperic came to Paris and broke up the family further, banishing Brunhild to Rouen and her young daughters to Meaux. Gregory makes no mention of the treasure she had with her, a detail the author of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* includes.²¹¹ While in Rouen, Brunhild married Chilperic's son Merovech—as Janet Nelson points out, she had the attractions of being both a Merovingian widow and a means to claim Sigibert's kingdom. Throughout this period, she retained the loyalty of some of the Austrasian magnates; an embassy was sent in Childebert's name to request her 'peaceful' return after Merovech was captured and tonsured by his father.²¹² It is possible Brunhild's will was behind the Austrasian refusal to receive Merovech in 577.²¹³ Out of all of the participants in Merovech's rebellion, she came out the best, which certainly suggests a more active role than Gregory gives her.²¹⁴

In the years until Childebert attained his majority in 585, his mother remained a commanding force. Brunhild may have appointed Gogo (d. 581), one of the envoys who escorted her from Spain to Gaul, as her son's *nutricius*.²¹⁵ This role

²⁰⁹ DLH.IV.51 'bewitched' is Dalton's translation; Thorpe's 'suborned' does not put across the full force of *maleficati*.

²¹⁰ DLH.V.1

²¹¹ LHF Ch 33. Bernard S. Bachrach, *Liber Historiae Francorum* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1973), p. 83.

²¹² LHF, Ch 33. Bachrach, *Liber Historiae Francorum*, p. 84.

²¹³ Janet L. Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: The Careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by Janet L. Nelson (London: Hambledon, 1985), pp. 1-48 pp. 10-12). DLH.V.14

²¹⁴ Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours and the Women in his Works', p. 158.

²¹⁵ Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels', p. 12. DLH V.46. On Gogo as an envoy, Fredegar III.59; Fortunatus and Fredegar give contradictory information about his career as a royal official, effectively summarised in Dumézil, 'Gogo et ses amis', p. 555, n. 17. I discuss Gogo's career in more detail in Chapter 5.

was an important political position since it included serving as Childebert's tutor during his minority and living in close proximity to him.²¹⁶ *Carm.*7.4, Fortunatus describes Gogo as a leader of a palace *scola* and Gregory of Tours tells a story of how an ambitious priest unsuccessfully sought to become a bishop by placing his son in Gogo's household.²¹⁷ The story serves to show that contemporaries perceived the *nutricius* to have influence on royal appointments to ecclesiastical positions.²¹⁸

Brunhild had the power and agency to intervene in the attack led by Ursio and Berthefried against her supporter, Lupus of Champagne. According to Gregory, Ursio taunted her, 'it should be enough for you that you held regal power when your husband was alive. Now your son is on the throne, and his kingdom is under our control, not yours.'²¹⁹ Brunhild's power had limits: her successful intervention prevented Lupus' death but not continued threats and the theft of his property. In the end, Lupus left his wife safe inside the walls of Laon and took refuge at Guntram's court.

Brunhild's power during her son's minority was a balancing act: in addition to the Austrasian aristocracy, she also had to work with Guntram, who had adopted Childebert as his heir after the death of his own sons.²²⁰ The alliance fluctuated: Childebert was also made heir of his uncle Chilperic when he had no living sons, but was restored as Guntram's heir in 585.²²¹ Being the sole secure male Merovingian of his generation was a good bargaining chip, as Childebert, his mother, and his advisers were well aware.

Brunhild's contemporaries knew of her influence. Guntram declared Childebert his heir for the second time during Gundovald's attempt to establish independent rule and warned the teenage king not to visit his mother nor give her

²¹⁶ On the relationship between Gogo and Childebert II's mother, Queen Brunhild, see Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, p. 113, 146, and 155.

²¹⁷ *Siue palatina residet modo laetus in aula / cui scola congregiendi plaudit amore sequax?* *Carm.*7.4.26-7. DLH V.46.

²¹⁸ For an excellent overview of fosterage and clerical careers, see Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World*, pp. 158-69. The Merovingian royal court began to play a role in deciding the futures of potential clerics in the sixth century. See Martin Heinzelmann, 'Studia Sanctorum: Éducation, milieux d'instruction et valeurs éducatives dans l'hagiographie en Gaule jusqu'à la fin de l'époque mérovingienne' in *Haut moyen-âge, culture, éducation et société: Études offertes à Pierre Riché*, ed. Michel Sot (La Garenne-Colombes: Éditions Européennes Erasme, 1990), pp. 105-38 (pp. 120-1).

²¹⁹ DLH.VI.3.

²²⁰ DLH.V.17. This alliance broke down in 581—see DLH.VI.1.

²²¹ DLH.VI.3 Childebert was again made Guntram's heir during Gundovald's attempt to establish himself in Gaul. LHF VII.33.

any means of communicating with Gundovald.²²² Later, Guntram used Brunhild's name on a false letter to Gundovald to trick him into betraying his plans.²²³ Guntram's suspicions of Brunhild's involvement continued even after the pretender's defeat. The queen had gifts made for Reccared, with whom she was negotiating the marriage alliance of her daughter. Guntram detained and threatened her messenger, accusing him of carrying gifts Gundovald's sons.²²⁴ Brunhild and Childebert asked the Visigothic envoys who sought Chlodoswinda in marriage together, saying they could do nothing without Guntram's approval.²²⁵ He later expanded this accusation, claiming that Brunhild had tried to marry one of Gundovald's sons and was offering her son bad advice. Brunhild cleared herself on oath and Guntram permitted free traffic between their kingdoms again.²²⁶

Brunhild was clearly a powerful figure in her own right and as her son's advisor but her enemies knew that her position would not be secure without her son's continued support.²²⁷ Two assassination plots against Childebert had the additional goal of Brunhild's downfall. Fredegund wanted Childebert dead so that Brunhild 'whose arrogant behaviour is encouraged by the support he gives her, may fall and so cease to be my rival.' If Childebert was too closely guarded, her assassins were to kill Brunhild instead.²²⁸ Gregory describes Ursio and Berthefried, who were part of an assassination plot against Childebert that aimed to kill him, and set up his sons as puppet rulers, as determined to humiliate Brunhild, as they had done in the period after Sigibert's death.²²⁹ Erin Dailey notes that Gregory normally condemned

²²² DLH VII.22.

²²³ DLH.VII.23.

²²⁴ DLH IX.28 Guntram's suspicions that Brunhild was plotting against him do not seem to have ever fully disappeared. During a conversation with Gregory and his clergy when he visited Tours, Guntram asked their prayers for Childebert and added that Brunhild had planned to have him murdered but God had delivered him from her as he had from his other enemies. DLH.VIII.3 I agree with Erin Dailey's argument that Gregory may well have used the incident to highlight Guntram's paranoia. Dailey, *Gregory of Tours and Women*, 121.

²²⁵ DLH.IX.16.

²²⁶ DLH.IX.32.

²²⁷ DLH IX.10. In DLH IX.11, Gregory records that Childebert brought Brunhild and his sister to the meeting in Trier which decided the fate of Guntram Boso. The queen was also one of the parties who subscribed to the treaty of Andelot. For commentary on the partnership between Brunhild and Childebert II, see Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp. 146-8.

²²⁸ DLH.VIII.29

²²⁹ DLH IX.9

the actions of widows who attempted to hold on to power, yet he did not condemn Brunhild.²³⁰

Fortunatus may have shared Gregory's wary respect for the queen though he attached himself to the orbit of a different queen, Radegund. Once he was established in Poitiers, Fortunatus engaged with Merovingian royal politics sporadically, and perhaps, deliberately so. No surviving royal poem dates from the worst period of the Merovingian civil wars, 573-575—and indeed, all of the royal poems seem to date to either the 580s or late 560s. Even in the 580s, Fortunatus' engagement with the Austrasian and Neustrian royal families was limited to particular moments. For the Neustrian royal family, this was the synod of Berny-Rivière with a panegyric for Chilperic in 580 and the deaths of two young princes with two poems of consolation for Fredegund and Chilperic and an epitaph for each of their sons. For the Austrasian royal family, Fortunatus wrote a pair of poems for Brunhild and Childebert, found in the appendix, as well as a poem in honour of the summer feast of Saint Martin, a poem in praise of the royal pair, and a poem about a journey he took in their company.²³¹

Saint Martin may have had special significance for Brunhild: she sought refuge in a church dedicated to him in Rouen, and one of Gregory the Great's letters mentions that she had a church dedicated to Martin built in Autun.²³² Fortunatus' praises Martin's holiness, the worldwide extent of his reputation, and his residence in heaven. The poem postdates the death of Radegund, since he lists her among the saints with whom Martin associates in heaven. Fortunatus repeatedly describes Martin as the *patronus* of the queen and kingdom: 'likewise you cherish this man Martin as a patron, o kingdoms,/ Remembering this man on earth, you remember him in heaven'.²³³ Martin's patronage includes advocacy for the royal couple before

²³⁰ Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours and Women in His Works,' p. 111.

²³¹ Carm.10.7, 10.8, and 10.9; The pair of poems are Carm.App.5 and 6. In the *Histories*, Gregory refers to his own journey to Metz in 588, and additional diplomatic travels on Guntram's behalf. Fortunatus does not mention travelling with Gregory, nor does Gregory mention travelling with Fortunatus. Yet it is assumed that Gregory took Fortunatus with him, and then left him at court. Late Roman clients were sometimes expected to accompany their patrons about town but there is little to suggest their presence was required on longer journeys. If Gregory and Fortunatus did travel together, it is likely each man had his own purpose for the journey. See George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 33. Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours and the Women in his Works', p. 142, n.11, takes this trip as certain and says it occurred in 588.

²³² Dailey, 'Gregory of Tours and Women in His Works', pp. 146-7.

²³³ *Hunc quoque Martinum colitis quem, regna, patronum, / uos hunc in terries, uos memor ille polis.* Carm.X.7.31-2.

the other saints of heaven, 'He reads your names to the patriarchs and prophets/
Today an ivory diptych for him proclaims your names in the temple/ Let it give back
the apostolic princes and the rest of the patrons/ Whom you gather here and give
pious festivals.'²³⁴ Martin is also Brunhild and Childebert's advocate before God
and Christ, praying for them as they pray to him and advocating for their salvation.
The poem repeats the wish for Martin's patronage, 'And may the Lord regard this
man as your patron/ So that the love of this man may who is honoured may honour
you.'²³⁵ God is the ultimate patron, who facilitates the favourable outcome of
Martin's patronage. Recounting in brief a few of Martin's most famous miracles,
Fortunatus wishes that the saint may protect and sustain the royal family in a similar
fashion. A further sign of Brunhild's special relationship with Martin is that the poet
addresses her directly, hoping that the saint will fulfil her prayers (*ipse tribuat
pignora*) for the success and longevity of Childebert, her daughter in law, and their
children.²³⁶ Martin's position as Brunhild's particular *patronus* is reinforced by the
poem's last four lines,

Therefore it is very agreeable to you, Brunhild, to have a patron,
because a pious lord guards your house in the world.
Thus may he teach you likewise, may he rule you and lead you on the course
So you may shine united to him by pious actions.²³⁷

Brunhild's association with Martin offers her and her family protection in this
world; and if she follows his guidance, eternal life in the next. This presented as her
sole responsibility: the poem does not give Childebert, Faileuba, or their children a
voice in seeking out and maintaining Martin's protection. Martin is, without a doubt,
the most prominent patron in Fortunatus' works; most of his uses of the word
patronus are in relation to this powerful protector.²³⁸ This poem stands out among

²³⁴ *Nomina uestra legat patriarchis atque prophetis / cui hodie in templo diptichus edit ebur. /
Reddat apostolicos proceres reliquosque patronos / quem uos hic colitis uel pia festa datis.*
Carm.X.7.35-8.

²³⁵ *Deputet et Dominus uestrum hunc esse patronum, / ut modo qui colitur uos colat huius amor.*
Carm.X.7.43-4.

²³⁶ *Qui uiduae matri reuocauit ad ubera natum, / ipse tibi haec tribuat pignora, mater, aua, / ut
Childebertus maneat cum prole nouella, / rex sua regna tenens et noua regna trahens, / de genita uti
ideas genetrix, ut dulcius optas, / deque nuru cara quod tua uota rogant.* Carm.X.7.59-64

²³⁷ *Quo tibi plus libeat, Brunichildis, habere patronum, / quando domum dominus seruat in orbe
pius. Sic quoque te erudiat, regat et sic tramite ducat, / actibus ipsa piis ut sibi iuncta mices.*
Carm.X.7.67-70.

²³⁸ Fortunatus uses the word *patronus* some twenty times in his works, and refers to Martin as a
patron in Carm 5.11.7, where Martin is his personal patron; and repeatedly in Carm.10.7 for
Childebert and Brunhild on the occasion of Martin's feast.

his works because of its unusual concentrated focus on the saint as a patron and because it connects the royal family to saintly patronage. The close connection to Saint Martin was also shared by Gregory of Tours and serves to illuminate the close link between the queen and the bishop.

Fortunatus' encomium for Childebert and Brunhild was likely delivered to them at around the same time as the poem for Martin's feast. Once again the poem opens by addressing king and queen, making use of light imagery to underscore the tone of praise. Childebert and Brunhild are described as a light, a mirror, and the object of their people's affections; their family, country, and protection shine. The poet's emphasis on the peacefulness of their kingdom is perhaps appropriate in a post-587 context. The poem uses the second person plural for the first eighteen lines, but there is a shift to address Brunhild alone in line 19:

may you devoutly nurture these riches, so that you, o mother resplendent with glory, may see a rich harvest flourishing from your son and offspring; thus may further noble offspring be granted to a grandmother, from your son and from your splendid grandsons. From Childebert - sweetness, flower, salvation - may you, his mother, reap the fruits, and the people see their prayers answered. From your daughter and daughter-in-law may the Creator heap gifts upon you, and with your devout merit, may you remain pleasing in God's sight.²³⁹

Brunhild's capacity to give good advice or wield political influence are not worthy, in this context, of encomiastic praise, but her success as a mother makes her *honoremicans*. Her glory is her family and the divine rewards returned to her the result of her own piety and motherhood. The language of gift in this exchange of virtue and reward underscores Brunhild's status. The poet turns the focus on himself at the end of the poem asking that he may be worthy to greet the royal family and rejoice with them. The celebratory purpose of the poem is suggested by the repeated emphasis on rejoicing in these last four lines. Fortunatus' portrait of Brunhild, as queen and widow, does not directly focus on her political role, concentrating instead on the conventional characteristics of a bride, queen, and later, a royal mother. But in Brunhild's role as intercessor with Saint Martin of Tours on behalf of her house, we see the dominant figure portrayed by Gregory.

²³⁹ *Ac pie participes has foueatis opes, / ut tibi quae floret de nato et germine, messem / maturam uideas, mater honoremicans; / sic ut et ex genito genitisque nepotibus amplis / altera progenies inclita detur auae. De Childeberto dulcedine flore salute / fructum habeas genetrix, plebs sua uota uidens. / De nata atque nuru cumulet tibi dona Creator / cumque pio merito stes placitura Deo.* Carm.X.8.18-26 Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 98.

In Fortunatus' continued literary efforts on her and her family's behalf throughout his career, we see their enduring importance among his patrons. This is evidenced by what seems to be the last poem he wrote for Brunhild and Childebert, excepting the two Appendix poems of uncertain date. It commemorates a journey that Fortunatus took in their company, sailing along the Moselle from Metz to Andernach. This trip is often assumed to have been taken alongside Gregory of Tours but the poem does not mention him. Given the bishop's close connections to Brunhild and support for Childebert's rule, this is a surprising omission if Gregory were present. It is the only poem he wrote for royalty where their names are never mentioned—Brunhild and Childebert are referred to as *regibus, dominis, reges*; Childebert alone is singled out as *rex* in a moment of inspecting the catch of the day for the banquet table.

The poet's praise for their stewardship and patronage focuses on the prosperity of the land under their rule. From Metz, where the poet is compelled to accompany them, to Trier, to Contrua (Koborn-Gondorf), to the journey's end at Andernach, the poet continually notes the fecundity of the landscape: sizeable and well-tended fields, smoke rising from riverside villas, verdant vineyards, and good fishing. In between Trier and Contrua, Fortunatus notes that he was 'following the royal boats' (*nauita regna sequens*), which suggests that the poet was part of the royal train. His role and importance within this train becomes clear when the poet introduces the Muses, whose songs he imagines echoing from the passing hills, rocks, and river reeds. He has an active role in producing this song, at request, 'the king's grace demands this to refresh the people; he always discovers the means by which his care gives pleasure.'²⁴⁰ The end of the poem celebrates the banquet held at the end of the trip, in which strangers were welcomed as citizens, and locals also enjoyed a feast. The final two lines indicate that Fortunatus was declaiming the poem at the banquet, 'May the Lord long grant the lords such a sight/ and may you grant that the people have such pleasant days;/ with your peaceful countenance may you give joy to all,/ and may your eminences be made joyful by your people.'²⁴¹ The recurring themes of peace and joy support the traditional association of these poems

²⁴⁰ *Quo recreet populum, hoc exquirat gratia regum, / inuenit et semper quo sua cura iuuat.* Carm.10.9.61-2. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 101.

²⁴¹ *Ista diu Dominus dominis spectacular praestet, / et populis dulcis detis habere dies: / uultibus ex placidis tribuatis gaudia cunctis, / uester et ex uestris laetificetur apex.* Carm.10.9.79-82. Translated by George, *Personal and Political*, p. 102.

with the Treaty of Andelot. As Judith George suggests, the central role Fortunatus gives himself in the poem also stakes a claim for his own importance as someone who can properly celebrate the achievements of Childebert and his mother.²⁴²

Conclusion

When he addressed the friendships and patronage of royalty, Fortunatus had a specific set of concerns. The rulers of the Merovingian kingdoms understood their *patria* to be a whole, an idea supported by ‘the tool and metaphors of family bonding’.²⁴³ This continues the discussion of spiritual kinship begun in the previous chapter. Royal relationships of friendship and support also ran into unique problems, namely equality. The normal standard for friendship was that friends were ‘all equal in rank or status.’²⁴⁴ The nature of our sources for this period does not allow us to say much about the personal friendships or feelings of the royal families in this period but writers like Fortunatus could portray their obligations to their people, relationships with their spouses, and fealty to God and the saints, in a desired and flattering light.

Fortunatus’ panegyrics for kings were occasional poetry intended for a public audience and written to address specific circumstances. Fortunatus’ panegyric for Charibert is put into context by reading Gregory of Tours’ account of the king’s misdeeds, and demonstrates how some of the situations in which he composed his poetry have to be reconstructed from other sources. However, the panegyric also shows Fortunatus constructing the Merovingians as they wished to be seen, in his presentation of Charibert as the possessor of Roman virtues who was consequently able to serve and protect his people and his family. The panegyric for Chilperic also shows a contrast between situation and poetic presentation. Fortunatus’ panegyric for Chilperic does contain an opening address to the bishops gathered at the synod of Berny-Rivière, but says nothing overt about the situation of Gregory’s trial, or about his audience. Whether or not the poem served to defend Gregory, it certainly served

²⁴² George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 184.

²⁴³ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 129.

²⁴⁴ Hans Werner-Goetz, ‘‘Beatus Homo Qui Invenit Amicum.’’ the Concept of Friendship in the Early Medieval Letters of the Anglo-Saxon Tradition on the Continent (Boniface, Alcuin)’, in *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Julian Haseldine (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 124-36 (p. 125).

its purpose of ingratiating the poet into Childebert's court and kingdom, a purpose also served by his short poem for Childebert II.

A thread that runs throughout his poems for kings is the importance of lineage and family, a theme that emerges even more strongly in his writings for queens. Even obscure Merovingian princesses such as Theudechild and Berthichild emerge from his poetry as patrons worth cultivating, who controlled considerable wealth and spent it lavishly in charitable pursuits, including the support of foreigners. Queens such as Galswinth attempted to establish a position as a good ruler by offering patronage and friendship. Fortunatus wrote the poem for Galswinth possibly at the commission of her sister, Brunhild, and for an audience at both courts which included their mother Goiswinth. The consolation continued a connection of writing for the queen which began with her wedding to Sigibert and continued on to celebrate Brunhild's success as a mother: the power she gained from her family and exercised on their behalf.

Friendship and patronage had an important place in Fortunatus' construction of the good Christian queen, although it played a lesser role in his depiction of the good Christian king. When he wrote about the relationship between king and queen, ideas of friendship had a significant impact. There is a close overlap between the language of friendship and the language the poet uses to describe a good Christian royal marriage. This drew on late antique precedents of the ideal of friendship between spouses, as well as Christian ideas about the importance of fidelity and shared faith. A comparison of the poet's praise of Brunhild and Fredegund within the context of poems about royal couples highlights the way Fortunatus responded to the backgrounds and circumstances of his royal patrons.

Fortunatus' consolations and epitaphs for Fredegund and Chilperic on the death of their two sons makes clear the importance of children for a Merovingian family. The poet positions himself as a friend to the king and queen through offering them consolation, a genre with a long antique legacy and close associations with friendship. The importance of children and family can also be seen in Fortunatus' poems for Brunhild and her son, where the poet celebrates her achievements as a mother. Gregory of Tours makes it clear that the queen was powerful in her own right but also needed her son's support in order to remain secure. The value of Brunhild and Childebert's poetry for Fortunatus is shown by the success of their rule as seen in the fertility of their lands.

The range of his poetry for members of the Merovingian royal family shows quite clearly that he sought and obtained the patronage of kings, queens, and princesses. These poems demonstrate how this patronage mattered. Members of the royal family could fiscal and political support, and, as Fortunatus' poetry shows, donations to saints' cults and churches.²⁴⁵ By putting himself into the public role of panegyrist, Fortunatus sought this patronage for himself. He seems to have picked the occasions for which he wrote deliberately, and the slightly haphazard arrangement of book six contains a mix of poems which were most likely commissions and poems which may have been written at his own initiative. Yet his poems also demonstrate his awareness that kings and queens were not the highest level of patronage available in Merovingian society. That status belonged to God and his saints, especially Martin.

²⁴⁵ Halfond, 'Charibert I and the Episcopal Leadership,' p. 10.

Chapter 5, Long-distance Friendship

Introduction

Fortunatus' connections radiated outwards across Merovingian Gaul and into Visigothic Spain. He also had active connections to royal courts for much of his career and was closely involved in the ecclesiastical politics of the city of Poitiers through his connection with Radegund and the basilica of Saint Hilary. The fact that so many of his friendships were conducted over significant distances influenced his use of imagery of absence and presence. In fifth- and sixth-century Gaul, messages travelled between friends via the networks of old Roman roads, and along the major rivers. Although this communication came with hassles and frustrations, the importance of networks of friendship and patronage made them worthwhile. Fortunatus' poetry provides important evidence for the role of literary skill in the ability of the Merovingian elite to make and maintain networks amongst themselves. This chapter will discuss the networks of Fortunatus and his correspondents, particularly Gogo, a royal official who ended his career as tutor (*nutricius*) to the young Childebert II; Dynamius and Jovinus, two of the closely interconnected circle of men who rotated in and out of the position of rector of Marseilles; and Sigoald, a royal official who escorted Fortunatus from the borders of Italy into Merovingian Gaul. Unlike Fortunatus, these correspondents did not write for a living but the pursuit of letters in order to create a wider web of connections was an essential part of their lives.

Fortunatus' aristocratic and episcopal contemporaries formed networks for protection of their mutual interests. These networks needed to be kept alive through contact and exchange, either in person at banquets, hunting or fishing trips, or visits to each other's estates. If separated by distance, aristocrats wrote letters and could also maintain their connections by exchanging gifts. Furthermore, friendship networks were seldom disturbed through bad feelings, and even more seldom were they broken.¹ Literary networks were important not just for mutual solidarity and support but also for aristocratic identity. In the rapidly changing world of the fifth century, when ideas of literary decline first appear amongst Gallic writers, the ability

¹ Bruno Dumézil, 'Gogo et ses amis: écriture, échanges et ambitions dans un réseau aristocratique de la fin du Vie siècle', *Revue Historique*, 643 (2007), 569-74.

to participate in shared intellectual culture was a sign and a reaffirmation of status, no matter what had happened to one's wealth or lands.² Sidonius Apollinaris maintained that literary culture would become the only sure sign of nobility.³ In its own way the sixth century was as turbulent as the fifth and the ability to write and understand poetry and letters of friendship continued to signify elite identity.⁴

Indeed, it is possible to speak of a 'cult of friendship' amongst Merovingian aristocrats, made possible by education and a shared mental world.⁵ Our evidence of friendship networks comes from the surviving texts exchanged among members. These exchanges rarely if ever survive completely intact, and their fragmentary and one-sided nature makes it difficult to gauge their frequency. Were they commonplace, taking on undue significance due to the accident of their survival? Gregory of Tours seems to regard the exchange of messages and messengers as routine, and did not write about a letter or its carrier unless it was part of a chain of events he wished to highlight.

Early medieval letters are often ill-suited to providing their own context: few of those which survive were written to provide a straightforward narrative of something which had happened. Letters did not transmit news; they transmitted and strengthened social bonds. The writer affirmed or reaffirmed his or her desire to maintain connections with the recipient or people in the recipient's circle. In this way, letter-writing was an important skill, which broadened a writer's reach beyond those who were near at hand, to people he had met once, would never meet again, and who resided far away. The group of Merovingian letter-writers discussed in this chapter likely met at the court of Sigibert and Brunhild during the 560s. Men like

² For considerations of changes within the physical fabric of the cities in which many elites would have lived, see Jean Guyon, 'Les chefs-lieux de cités de Gaule méridionale aux Ve et VIe siècles: un espace urbain en mutation', in *Gallien in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter*, ed. by Gernot Michael Müller and Steffen Diefenbach (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 201-22. For another view of the transformation of the late antique city in Gaul, see Christian Witschel, 'Die spätantiken Städte Galliens: Transformationen von Stadtbildern als Ausdruck einer gewandelten Identität', in *Gallien in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter*, ed. by Gernot Michael Müller and Steffen Diefenbach (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 153-200.

³ Ralph W. Mathisen, 'The Theme of Literary Decline in Late Roman Gaul', *Classical Philology*, 83 (1988), 50.

⁴ For a recent consideration of the changes reflected in fifth-century friendship writing (especially Ruricius and Sidonius), see Gernot Michael Müller, 'Freundschaften wider den Verfall. Gemeinschaftsbildung und kulturelle Selbstverortung', in *Gallien in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter*, ed. by Gernot Michael Müller and Steffen Diefenbach (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 421-54.

⁵ Richard Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus: seine Persönlichkeit und seine Stellung in der geistigen Kultur des Merowinger-Reiches* (Leipzig B. G. Teubner, 1915), pp. 34-5

Gogo and Dynamius maintained their connections with the court as royal officials. Fortunatus, as we have seen, courted the literary patronage of Merovingian royal families, and maintained a web of aristocratic and episcopal connections. In these circles, to write in a style sufficiently sophisticated to prove the writer's membership among the elite was to be capable of making and maintain good connections.

Making connections and maintaining friendship networks were major reasons to write letters, as they enabled these links to be created and preserved even across distances.⁶ Merovingian writers drew on classical and Christian concepts of friendship, which had begun to be harmonised in the fourth century. These concepts of friendship included a well-developed ideology of long-distance friendship, on which Fortunatus drew heavily. Augustine and Paulinus of Nola's ideas of friendship included thinking about the effect of distance on their relationships. Augustine had written that friendships conducted across distances were more stable than those conducted face-to-face.⁷ In one of Sidonius Apollinaris' letters this argument about the effect of distance on friendship is also connected to theological understanding of the soul. Because one loves the rational souls of one's friends, which are not fixed in any one place, their physical absence is irrelevant.⁸ The tradition of epistolary friendship continued through Fortunatus' own day into the seventh century; indeed, Mathisen has recently argued that epistolography was the most important literary genre of the 600s.⁹ This can be seen in the letters of Desiderius of Cahors, who kept in touch with the far-flung friends he had made at court through letters.¹⁰

Though these ideas of absence and presence seems as if they may have been as commonplace as any of the other statements about friendship inherited from

⁶ Ian Wood, 'Letters and Letter-Collections from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: The Prose Works of Avitus of Vienne', in *The Culture of Christendom: Essays in Medieval History in Memory of Denis L.T. Bethel*, ed. by Marc Anthony Meyer (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993), pp. 29-43 (pp. 38-9).

⁷ Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 209-10.

⁸ Charles Brittain, 'No Place for a Platonist Soul in Fifth-Century Gaul? The Case of Mamertus Claudianus', in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot, Hants ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 239-62 (p. 244).

⁹ Ralph W. Mathisen, 'Desiderius of Cahors, Last of the Romans', in *Gallien in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter*, ed. by Gernot Michael Müller and Steffen Diefenbach (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 455-69 (pp. 461-2).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

classical thought, in the case of ideas about the soul they had a specific, fifth-century source. Claudianus Mamertus, priest of Vienne and brother of Vienne's bishop, was part of Sidonius' network of correspondents, and it was to Sidonius that Claudianus dedicated *De Statu Anima*, his three-book defence of the incorporeality of the soul. Sidonius quotes directly from passages in this work.¹¹ For Claudianus, friends physically absent from each other were united in God.¹² It does not seem possible to deduce a direct link between Fortunatus and Claudianus; but his friend and patron Gregory of Tours used the letters of Sidonius as a source for his *Histories*.¹³

The maintenance of friendships of long distances had a practical as well as a theological component. Letter-writing enabled people to continue to communicate despite political borders, physical separation, and times of unrest. With few or no opportunities to meet in person, poems or letters allowed friends to continue to interact and to deepen their connection with each other, and men like Fortunatus relied on letters to maintain their connections.¹⁴ Poems and letters were useful for maintaining and improving a writer's connections to 'widely scattered and influential' friends and patrons.¹⁵ Friends might rarely if ever meet, but their separation was valorised. For letter-writers, it was expected that correspondents would seize any opportunity to write, as sending regular greetings was one of the recognised duties of friends and clients.¹⁶ The complaints when this failed to happen were bitter.¹⁷

¹¹ Brittain, pp. 241, 44.

¹² Ibid. pp. 253, n. 74.

¹³ Fortunatus' awareness of Paulinus of Nola can be seen in VM.II.88; see also Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, p. 337. Gregory cites Sidonius in DLH II.34.

¹⁴ Ralph W. Mathisen, 'The Letters of Ruricius of Limoges and the Passage from Roman to Frankish Gaul', in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 101-15 (p. 106). White, pp. 6-9.

¹⁵ Jill Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome, AD 407-485* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), p. 4.

¹⁶ Régine Le Jan, 'Le lien social entre Antiquité et haut Moyen Âge: L'amitié dans les collections de lettres gauloises', in *Akkulturation: Probleme einer Germanisch-Romanischen Kultursynthese in Spätantike und frühem Mittelalter*, ed. by Dieter Hägermann, et al. (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 528-46 (pp. 540-1).

¹⁷ Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer, *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources* (Aldershot, Hants ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 106-7.

Dynamius

Replying to a friend's letter was one of the duties of friendship. In this section, I first analyse Dynamius' own background and two surviving letters in order to prove that he was familiar with this expectation. Then I analyse Fortunatus' two poems to Dynamius and demonstrate that Fortunatus held him to a high standard of replying to letters and expected replies from his friends.¹⁸ Dynamius was born around 545 and embarked on a public career after receiving legal training; by 581 he was rector of Marseilles.¹⁹ Fortunatus probably met him at Sigibert and Brunhild's court, since many of the great men of the Austrasian kingdom were invited to be present at the royal wedding.²⁰ Scholars have dated both Dynamius' letters and Fortunatus' two poems to him to the late 560s.²¹

Rector of Marseilles was an important position due to its oversight of the principal port and point of contact with the east.²² Geographically speaking, Marseilles, founded as a Greek colony, looks to the sea: in the sixth century it served long-distance trade and was not well-connected to the rest of Provence. For both Gregory the Great and Gregory of Tours, the normal way to reach northern Europe from the Mediterranean was to take a ship to Marseilles and then a boat up the Rhone River. Marseilles continued to serve as a hub of long-distance trade under the Merovingians and seventh-century evidence indicates that tolls and revenues from the city were lucrative.²³ Because of the city's economic significance, patrician of Provence was a significant role and it is well-documented in our sources—the list of patrician governors runs from 566 almost until end of Merovingian rule in the

¹⁸ Carm.6.9 and 6.10. As is usual for Fortunatus, correspondence to the same individual or members of his or her family is kept together.

¹⁹ Dumézil, 'Gogo et ses amis', pp. 560-2. See also idem, 'Le patrice Dynamius et son réseau'.

²⁰ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 17.

²¹ A discussion of the dating of the works to and from Dynamius is found in Dumézil, 'Le patrice Dynamius et son réseau', pp. 171-5.

²² On Marseilles in late antiquity, see S. T. Loseby, 'Le rôle économique de Marseille pendant l'antiquité tardive', in *Marseille et ses alentours*, ed. by Marie-Pierre Rothé and Henri Tréziny (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2005); S.T. Loseby, 'Marseille and the Pirenne Thesis, II: 'ville morte'', in *The Long Eighth Century*, ed. by Inge Lyse Hansen and Chris Wickham (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 167-93; S.T. Loseby, 'Marseille and the Pirenne Thesis, I: Gregory of Tours, the Merovingian Kings and "un grand port"', in *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution, and Demand*, ed. by Richard Hodges and William Bowden (Leiden ; New York: Brill, 1998), pp. 203-29; S. T. Loseby, 'Marseille: a late antique success story?', *Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992).

²³ See Loseby, 'Marseilles and the Pirenne Thesis I'.

region.²⁴ Buchner emphasised the ill-defined meaning and relative rarity of the title patrician, outside of hagiography, inscriptions, and letters.²⁵ The king of Neustria or Burgundy appointed the governor but there was only ever one at a given time. Dynamius was appointed by Childebert II of Austrasia but according to Gregory of Tours also displayed loyalty to Guntram of Burgundy.²⁶ Based on his analysis of a set of late-sixth century Provençal coinage, Uhalde suggests that the patrician may have been responsible for the financial administration of Provence; Loseby argues that this official was especially concerned with keeping the port running smoothly.²⁷ Whatever the specifics of his role, the patrician of Provence operated in a region where traditional curial responsibilities had gone to him, rather than the *comes civitatis*.²⁸ Outside of Gregory of Tours' account of Dynamius' feud with the Bishop of Marseilles, Theodore, Fortunatus' poems and Dynamius' own letters provide the totality of our evidence of his official career.²⁹

Alongside his status as a prominent official, Dynamius wrote several texts which still survive and may have written others which do not.³⁰ He has been identified as the author of the *Vita* of St Maximus of Riez and possibly the *Vita* of St

²⁴ Kevin Uhalde, 'The Quasi-Imperial Coinage of Merovingian Provence', in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 134-65 pp. 141-2). Two letters from Gregory the Great, Regest. 3.33 and 6.6, address Dynamius' administration of papal estates in Provence.

²⁵ Rudolph Buchner, *Die Provence in merowingischer Zeit* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933), pp. 16-7. However, Uhalde argues that the patrician gathered revenue from the papal estates (which were administered by the Pope's *conductores*) and forwarded it, or the merchandise into which it had been converted, on to Rome—see above.

²⁶ Uhalde, p. 142.

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 142-3. See S. T. Loseby, 'Marseille: A Late Antique Success-Story?', *Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992), 174-5. For recent evaluations of Merovingian coinage in Provence, see Jürgen Strothmann and Jörg Jarnut, *Die merowingischen Monetarmünzen als Quelle zum Verständnis des 7. Jahrhunderts in Gallien* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2013).

²⁸ See Simon T. Loseby, 'Lost Cities. The End of the Civitas-System in Frankish Gaul', in *Gallien in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter*, ed. by Gernot Michael Müller and Steffen Diefenbach (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 223-52 (p. 233 n. 42); Rudolph Buchner, *Die Provence in merowingischer Zeit* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933), pp. 19-25. Loseby suggests that Austrasian Provence, because its official was varying titled *patricius*, *praefectus*, or rector, was an exception to trends in the development of the count's role taking place in other Merovingian *civitates*.

²⁹ On the feud between Dynamius and Theodore, see DLH VI.11. Dynamius is briefly mentioned in DLH IX.11.

³⁰ This network has been the subject of several studies. See Bruno Dumézil, 'Le patrice Dynamius et son réseau: culture aristocratique et transformation des pouvoirs autour de Lérins dans la seconde moitié du Vie siècle', in *Lérins, une île sainte de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge*, ed. by Yana Coudou and Michel Lauwers (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 167-95. For a brief earlier survey of Dynamius' and Gogo's networks, see Pierre Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West: Sixth through Eighth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), pp. 186-7, 221-3. On Dynamius' level of education, see *ibid.* pp. 202-3.

Marius. In a Carolingian collection lists Dynamius as the author of a praise-poem in honour of Lérins, although some scholars think that this was written by his grandson.³¹ One verse of Dynamius' poetry survives and he may have also written a grammar which now exists only in fragments.³² Two of his letters survive in the *Epistolae Austrasicae* and the papal side of his correspondence with Gregory the Great is preserved in the pope's *Registrum*, where the two corresponded about church properties. One of these letters refers to a codex from the Lateran library which the pope sent to Dynamius and his first wife, Aurelia.³³ There is an epitaph for Dynamius and his second wife Eucheria. One of her poems survives and was known to Aldhelm.³⁴ When Fortunatus met him, and the other Provençal officials with whom he corresponded, they were all up and coming young men, with the literary skills which assured them of a promising future.

Dynamius' own literary skills and his awareness of the conventions of friendship are displayed in his two surviving letters to friends. Letter 12 of the *Epistolae Austrasicae*, which Dynamius wrote to an unnamed friend, is one of the shortest in the collection. It is also one of the most difficult to understand because it is written in extremely flowery language. Dynamius writes to thank the friend for his letter, to praise his literary efforts and express the joy that reading them has brought, and to encourage the anonymous correspondent to go on writing. Dynamius writes that he longs to see his friend again but in letters 'by means of our indivisible affection' they are 'are never separated'.³⁵ Dynamius notes that he and his friend are inseparable despite the meagreness of his own rhetorical gift. The topos that one wanted the ability to address a particular subject or pay adequate

³¹ On the literary productions of Dynamius and his grandson, who was also called Dynamius, see Karl Friedrich Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel im Spätantiken Gallien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1948), pp. 164-5; Dumézil, 'Gogo et ses amis', p. 572, n. 119; Dumézil, 'Le patrice Dynamius et son réseau', pp. 177-9; Rudolph Buchner, *Die Provence in merowingischer Zeit* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933), pp. 94-5, n. 45

³² George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 142.

³³ Bruno Dumézil, 'Le patrice Dynamius et son réseau', pp. 167-85. And Dag Norberg, 'Dynamie patrice de Marseilles', *the Journal of Medieval Latin*, 1 (1991), 46.

³⁴ The epitaph for Dynamius and his wife Eucheria is found in Rudolf Peiper, *Alcimi Ecdicii Aviti Viennensis Episcopi Opera Quae Supersunt* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1883), p. 194. See A.M. Juster, *Saint Aldhelm's Riddles*, pp. 119-21.

³⁵ ...mutuis inter nos laetatur aspectibus, qui numquam indivisis affectionibus sequestramur. Malaspina, *Il liber epistolarum della cancelleria austrasica (Sec. V-VI)* (Rome: Herder, 2001) pp. 116, line 14.

respect to a particular person is not a unique one, and occurs frequently in the context of the high-style writing appropriate between friends.

Letter 17, between Dynamius and Bishop Vilicus of Metz, is a friendship letter in which Dynamius, the *rector* of Marseille, praises his friend and apologizes that it has taken him so long to fulfil the duty of writing back. Dynamius may have been prevented from replying by illness rather than lack of time: ‘How much the more, I myself, being a servant of words, am glad to send ahead the oaths in my turn, until having recovered my powers, I deserve to respond to these things!’³⁶ He asks that the bishop intercede on his behalf with the king, claiming that he has fallen into disgrace. Dumézil interprets this as a reference to Dynamius’ appointment to office in Provence, a literary conceit indicating his distance from royal authority.³⁷ This is a plausible interpretation. Dynamius’ letter to his anonymous friend, discussed above, is undatable; the fact that the two writers were separated does not indicate where either actually was. Dynamius concludes the letter thanking his friend for the gifts he has sent, praising him, and adding that he is ending the letter because he is running out of space on the page. A letter could be the means to a variety of different ends, as seen here, with the exchange of greetings, thanks, apology, and literary reference to current circumstances.

The first of Fortunatus’ two poems for Dynamius is a letter of greeting and complaint. It begins informally, directly addresses him ‘as an equal’ and complains about the lack of correspondence.³⁸ Fortunatus’ first poem to Dynamius draws heavily on the imagery of absent friendship—Fortunatus’ affection (*cura*) for Dynamius ‘sees’ him even though he is absent:

I wait for you, my love, revered Dynamius,
whom my care sees even though [you are] absent.
I ask the wafting breezes what places they keep you,
If you flee my sight, you do not thereby flee my heart.
The realm of Marseilles pleases you, Germania pleases us:
Torn from sight, you are present, joined by feeling.
Why has a part of you, forgotten still, stayed behind without you,
And why do you not call back the abandoned heart with your mind?
...As the months of the starry year have passed
A second orbit of the sun wearies the panting horses
While you, departing, have taken my eyes with you

³⁶ Quam magis ego in vicem mei famulatus verborum gaudeo iura praemittere, donec, et recuperatis viribus, rebus mereor respondere! Malaspina, *Il liber epistolarum*, p. 130.

³⁷ Dumézil, ‘Le patrice Dynamius et son réseau’, p. 175.

³⁸ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 146.

And now without you I see nothing on a clear day.³⁹

Despite their separation and the difficulties of communication, Fortunatus' affection for Dynamius is still present to him, an idea to which he returns several times in the first half of Carm.6.9: echoing Horace's words to Maecenas, Fortunatus asks Dynamius why he has left a part of himself behind.⁴⁰ Absent friendship was a common subset of literary friendship-writing; Augustine and Paulinus had argued that friendships between those who could not meet were stronger. Fortunatus used and expanded the late antique repertoire of images of the absent friend. He uses the metaphor of the wind as messenger thirteen times in his poems to friends, and it is distinctive to his poetry; classical authors described the winds losing messages, not delivering them.⁴¹ In Fortunatus' poetry, absence or separation is often presented as deprivation—leading in his letter to Dynamius to the metaphorical loss of sight. A similar image is seen in a poem to his friend Hilary, a priest and nobleman. Although they are separated, Fortunatus' affection makes Hilary present for him, as his affection for Dynamius made the Provençal nobleman present despite their separation. Absence from Hilary—'whose worthy love has so filled my heart / that without you I never speak, for my mind goes blank'—came at a cost.⁴² Fortunatus does not reproach Hilary for separation and silence as he does Dynamius, and in other poems to friends he apologizes for the absence he has inflicted on them. In a letter to the *referendarius* Faramond, Fortunatus asks that his poem give greetings if he does not visit and fulfil the *obsequium* he is not able to give in person. He assumes that a reply will be forthcoming: 'may your page seek me out with boundless love; / but as this returns to you, kindly one, pay (me) back in turn.'⁴³

³⁹ Expecto te, noster amor, uenerande Dinami, / quamuis absentem quem mea cura uidet. / Quae loca te teneant uenientia flabra requiro. / Si fugias oculos, non fugias hinc animos. / Massiliae tibi regna placent, Germania nobis:/ uulsus ab aspectu, pectore iunctus ades. / Quo sine te tua pars hucusque oblita remansit / nec reuocas animo membra relicta tuo. / ...Altera signiferi reuolutis mensibus anni, / solis anhelantes orbita lassat equos, / cum mea discedens rapuisti lumina tecum / et modo nil sine te cerno patente die. Carm. 6.9 lines 1-8 and 13-16. Trans. adapted from George, *Personal and Political*, p. 55 and Pucci, *Poems to Friends*, p. 48.

⁴⁰ George, *Personal and Political Poems*, pp. 55-6.

⁴¹ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, 254-6.

⁴² cuius honestus amor tantum mea corda repleuit, / ut sine te numquam mente uacante loquar Carm.3.16.3-4. Trans. adapted from Pucci, *Poems to Friends*, 11.

⁴³ Inpenso affectu me pagina uestra requirat, / hoc remeante tamen, redde, benigne, uicem. Carm.9.12.7-8. Translation adapted from Pucci, *Poems to Friends*, p. 71.

In the second half of the poem, Fortunatus writes that he has not heard from Dynamius for almost two years, which leaves him feeling as if light has gone out of his life and he is blind. ‘I pray that you would pour words forth for me from that eloquent source, so that the page you send would make me talk with you. But all the same I entreat you with even more affection to come here after all this time, and bring back the light to my eyes, my friend.’⁴⁴ For Fortunatus, Dynamius’ words are the source of his eloquence and it is their shared skill with words on which their friendship is founded. The shared delight of literature continues to make their friendship possible, but in order for the friendship to continue the sharing must also.⁴⁵ Whether the emotions expressed are genuine or not Fortunatus underscores the value of literature and friendship.⁴⁶

In his next poem to Dynamius, Fortunatus apologizes that being bled has delayed the reply he promised. The first half of the poem sets up the adverse circumstances under which Fortunatus is writing—time itself is jealous of the bond which exists between himself and Dynamius; his muse has fled in the physical toll the bloodletting has taken. Bloodletting was a normal medical procedure in the Middle Ages, but sometimes, as Fortunatus may have found, the cure was worse than the disease.⁴⁷ The rest of this part of the poem sets up an antithesis between Fortunatus’ affection for Dynamius and the lazy leisure (*lenta otium*) his condition requires. This is resolved in favour of doing things for his friend, even at inconvenience to himself: ‘I think less of my own health, when I wish to bring health to you, / But I look out for my own, when I honour your prayers’.⁴⁸ By being of service to his friend, Fortunatus enriches himself. It is unlikely that he literally

⁴⁴ Vel mihi verba dares de fonte refusa loquaci, / ut faceret tecum pagina missa loqui. Carm.6.9.17-8. Translated in George, *Personal and Political Poems*, pp. 55-6.

⁴⁵ In a later poem (Carm.6.10), Fortunatus sent greetings, via Dynamius, to other Provençal noblemen, but our evidence is too slight to allow us to speak of a literary network. In a letter to Dynamius (6.6) Gregory the Great, mentions sending him a codex, but this is our only evidence of Dynamius’ participation in the transmission of texts into or out of Gaul.

⁴⁶ Some scholars argue that the affectionate emotions displayed in Fortunatus’ epistolary poetry are completely artificial. See Robert Levine, ‘Patronage and Erotic Rhetoric in the Sixth Century: The Case of Venantius Fortunatus’, in *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), pp. 75-93.

⁴⁷ On bloodletting in the early Middle Ages, see Jan Jansen-Schmerikon and Odo Lang, ‘Der Aderlaß—Eine monastische Tradition’, *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktiner-Ordens und seiner Zweige* 110 (1999), pp. 57-71.

⁴⁸ *Duco parum propriam, tibi dum uolo ferre salutem/ sed mea prospicio, cum tua uota colo.* Carm.6.10.31-2

benefited financially, since Roman writers stigmatized receiving money for poetry, though it is difficult to say whether this held true in the early Middle Ages, since Gallic poets mention receiving gifts but not getting paid to write.⁴⁹ As discussed in Chapter 1, Fortunatus was the recipient of gifts throughout his career, particularly from Gregory of Tours. Like Dynamius in his letter to Vilicus of Metz, the poet sent letters of thanks to those who gave him gifts.⁵⁰

It is interesting that Fortunatus uses the word *otium* to describe his period of enforced leisure. The word is not common in the early Middle Ages, but had classical and late antique lineage. *Otium* described aristocratic retreat to a country estate for engagement in intellectual pursuits. It was not simply rest and relaxation and was expected to produce results.⁵¹ Such a beginning for such a poem means that Fortunatus positions himself and his audience in the world of classical elite friendship, where taking the time to cultivate one's mind and write elegantly affected poetry were signs of status.

The second half of the poem praises Dynamius himself, and explicitly sets up Fortunatus' relationship with him. By describing Dynamius as part of him (*pars mea*) and half of his soul (*animae pars mediata meae*), Fortunatus echoes terms with which Horace addresses his patrons and friends.⁵² Fortunatus describes himself as hearing Dynamius' reputation as he travelled, and claims that the fate of seeing Dynamius was one of the things that drew him northwards.

Fortunatus refers to his friend by a strange epithet, 'powerful in the two scales'⁵³, referring to Dynamius' position as an important royal official, which made him a patron worth cultivating. From the time of his arrival in Gaul, Fortunatus writes, he had heard praise of Dynamius' character and appearance. Having seen Dynamius, Fortunatus compares himself to a group of foreigners returning to their homeland, or Telamon running to his father's embrace in longing to see him again. But amongst these classicising images, Fortunatus also borrows from a different part of the classical lexicon:

⁴⁹ Peter White, 'Amicitia and the Profession of Poetry in Early Imperial Rome', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 68 (1978).

⁵⁰ Examples of these include Carm.3.26 and 3.27.

⁵¹ Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, p. 164.

⁵² Ex illo, celebrande, cliens stat pars mea tecum / et uenis huc animae pars mediate meae. Carm.6.10.47-8. George, *Personal and Political Poems*, pp. 144-5.

⁵³ Nunc cape parua, cate et pollens duilance Dinami. Carm.6.10.33.

All the same the eager man ploughs in a wavy line,
 The farmer ploughs the soil with skill, the sailor the sea with his rudder.
 From that, o honourable man, my role with you remains as a client
 And you come here, a halved part of my soul.⁵⁴

This is one of only six times that Fortunatus ever uses the word *client*. From his position as a fellow-aristocrat enjoying customary literary leisure and writing to a valued friend he also borrows from the lexicon of patronage. Fortunatus' position in Gaul was such that he was a client as well as a friend to more powerful and securely established men and women. *Clients* did not necessarily imply a person of lower status but instead referred to someone on the outer reaches of a patron's entourage. Persons closer to the inner circle were *amici* or *sodales* but were not always of greater social status than a client or of equal rank to their patron.⁵⁵ Fortunatus seems to be deliberately adopting a position of deference as a way to demonstrate his affection for Dynamius, as well as describing the close connection between them.

Having called himself a client, Fortunatus again takes up the mantle of a friend. He writes of Dynamius as the other half of his soul—a common image of friendship—and says that he had taken him into his heart as soon as he saw him, before he even knew who Dynamius was. Because of his affection, the distance between them becomes nothing. Rivers, the Saone and the Rhone, are in the way, but geographical barriers and distances between them are no barrier to them—'That which forbids a pace does not forbid the mind to go.'⁵⁶ The poet also cites the time of year in which he was writing: 'Behold the thirsting dog-star stands out from the vaporous sky/ And heat exhales through fields split open.'⁵⁷

Mention of the season and the geographic features between Fortunatus and his correspondent gives a hint of the route travelled by his letter-carrier. Fortunatus may never have seen any of his Provençal friends face to face after the late 560s, so regular correspondence with them was necessary to maintain a relationship. The journey between Marseilles and Poitiers during the third century might be partially

⁵⁴ Vix quoque tam cupidus uario sinuamine sulcat / rusticus arte solum, nauita aplustre fretum. / Ex illo, celebrande, cliens stat pars mea tecum / et uenis huc animae pars mediata meae. *Carm.*6.10.45-8.

⁵⁵ White, 'Amicitia and the profession of poetry', p. 76, n.5.

⁵⁶ Nec uetat ire animum qui uetat ire gradum. *Carm.*6.10.56

⁵⁷ Note that 'hiulcatos...agros' is also found in Catullus 68, 62. Ecce uaporiferum sitiens canis exerit astrum / et per hiulcatos feruor anhelat agros. *Carm.*6.10.5-6.

completed by boat and took at least twenty-eight days according to the top speeds of antique travel.⁵⁸ So at the bare minimum in the sixth century, we might assume a month to send the letter and a month for a reply to return to the recipient.

Fortunatus' poetry provides evidence that travel in the sixth century could be difficult to others among his correspondents provide additional looks at what could go wrong during travel. In one poem, the poet recounts his troubles travelling from Metz: the royal cook stole the poet's boat and crew, leaving him stranded until the bishop of Metz offered his assistance and lent a rickety boat which leaked and could barely support its few passengers. When the poet arrived at Nauriacum (modern location unknown) he told the king his woes, and royal officials were charged with finding him a boat, only his baggage did not fit in the first one they found.⁵⁹ The poem is comic and the poet's tribulations exaggerated, but there is no reason not to take the basic difficulties it describes seriously. Indeed, it is easy to imagine that if the traveller were not a poet patronised by the king and his courtiers, his wait for transportation might have been still longer and less pleasant. Furthermore, early medieval kings could be suspicious of communication across borders.⁶⁰ Fortunatus' own travels were interrupted when he attempted to cross diocesan borders, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter. Fortunatus sent the poem chronicling his troubles as his greeting—one wonders how and where the messenger got through to Tours, but the poem gives no answer.⁶¹ But even with mishaps of this sort, Dynamius' two-year silence to Fortunatus seems unreasonably long. The poet's elegant expressions of the ultimate ineffectiveness of distance were made in the face of pressing challenges to travel and the transmission of messages. An ideology of friendship which made distance irrelevant must be read against the significant time and trouble it took for the words which bore a friend's presence to physically arrive.

⁵⁸ Distance and length of journey calculated using Water Scheidel and Elijah Meeks (2012-) *Orbis: the Stanford Geospatial Model of the Roman World* <<http://orbis.stanford.edu/>> [accessed 18 May 2014]

⁵⁹ See Carm.6.8, in George, *Personal and Political Poems*, pp. 53-4.

⁶⁰ Avitus of Vienne avoided communication with his friend and kinsman Apollinaris while the latter was under suspicion of treason. Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), pp. 342-8. Caesarius of Arles was also suspected of treasonable activities for communication across a border. See Ian Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 63 (1985), 257.

⁶¹ See Carm.5.1 and 5.9. Fortunatus occasionally names his letter-carriers, their delivery routes are often unclear.

The final part of the poem introduces what Judith George calls ‘an interesting vignette of the tensions in literary friendship and patronage.’⁶² She argues that Fortunatus had read verses which Dynamius had circulated under a pseudonym but were recognisably written by him. I would argue instead that Fortunatus’ focus is on Dynamius’ writings as a guarantee of his presence. Dynamius’ position as a Merovingian official meant that he would often be ‘banished’ as his duties dictated. His skills as a speaker and writer were appropriate to his position, and ensured his continuing success and fame.

From Muses’ fountain you are scattered to the four corners of the world,
You are led to a place which you do not know by the waters of your speech.
Hence however often banished you do not withdraw from us
Where you are fixed, you will be known by your writings.⁶³

Dynamius’ writings do not just bring back his presence; they fix it with Fortunatus and keep him with his friend.⁶⁴ Why Dynamius would need to send them ‘under a foreign name’ is unclear.⁶⁵ They travel where Dynamius himself cannot—perhaps even without his control or knowledge; and because of the distinctive characteristics of his writing, they will always be recognised wherever they go. Furthermore, Dynamius’ writings serve as a guarantee of his permanent presence for Fortunatus.

The poem concludes with good wishes for Dynamius—Fortunatus sends Dynamius his hope that his literary abilities will continue to bring him prosperity and success. Literature was not just a keepsake and talisman against separation but also a means of professional advancement. Fortunatus touches on this when he refers to Dynamius’ qualities at the beginning of the poem’s second half, he returns to it when it refers to himself as Dynamius’ *cliens*, and finally he recognizes that literary ability benefits Dynamius himself. ‘Watching the power of your speech and wishing the betterment of your star / May it hasten so that your address remains your

⁶² George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 146.

⁶³ Fonte camenali quadrato spargeris orbi / ad loca quae nescis duceris oris aquis. / Hinc quoque non aliquo nobis abolende recedis, / quo fixus scriptis nosceris esse tuis. *Carm.* 6.10.59-62

⁶⁴ Fortunatus’ delight at seeing Dynamius in *Carm.* 6.10.39-40 finds a parallel in his a section of his poem about the Visigothic princess, Galswintha (6.5.25-6). Michael Roberts, ‘Venantius’ Fortunatus Elegy on the Death of Galswintha’, in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, ed. by Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 298-312 (pp. 310-1, n. 40).

⁶⁵ Legi etiam missos alieno nomine uersus. *Carm.* 6.10.57. Judith George has suggested that in this passage Fortunatus takes offense that Dynamius did not consult him before circulating his works. I prefer to emphasise Fortunatus’ claim that the written word anchors the presence of an absent friend. George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 146

boundless prosperity'.⁶⁶ In a world without our boundaries of public and private, secular and religious; literary skill was not just a way to make, keep, and impress friends. It was also a means of advancement which Dynamius evidently used.

Dynamius was a member of the Austrasian network of bishops and aristocrats to whom Fortunatus extends greetings at the end of poem. These men were the bishops Theodore of Marseilles and Saupaudus of Arles, and the aristocrats Felix, Albinus, Helias, and Jovinus. Greeting others in his name is, as we have seen, something that Fortunatus only asks of correspondent with whom he is reasonably well-acquainted. Fortunatus also wrote for two poems for Jovinus and a short poem to someone named Felix which may have been part of a longer work. Most manuscripts of Fortunatus' poetry identify him as Jovinus' father-in-law, although Reydellet suggests that he was Fortunatus' school friend.⁶⁷ Gregory of Tours refers to Sapaudus, Albinus, and Theodore. Only Helias is completely unknown.⁶⁸ It is interesting that Fortunatus asks Dynamius to pass on greetings to Theodore because the bishop and the *rector* were not always on friendly terms.⁶⁹ Tensions appeared between Dynamius and Theodore after the death of Sigibert, so the reference to a two-year silence mentioned above, together with this greeting, supports a possible date for this poem in the late 560s.⁷⁰

The final couplet recalls the bond of poetry both share: 'Our lyre plays these things for you as a simple song / But in those verses may the lute thunder with the genius of the original.'⁷¹ Fortunatus flatters his patron by depicting him as the greater lyric poet.⁷² As mentioned above, George argues that Fortunatus was offended that Dynamius did not consult him before circulating his poetry; and valued himself enough as a fellow litterateur to risk offending Dynamius—in other

⁶⁶ *Spectans oris opem melioraque sideris optans, / currat ut afflatus, stet tibi longa salus.* Carm.6.10.65-6. Reydellet II, p. 83, seems to interpret this as 'notre commerce' (despite the fact that the Latin is 'tibi') I interpret it as Fortunatus wishing that his friend's literary and rhetorical abilities continue to bring him success.

⁶⁷ Reydellet II, p. 109, n.82.

⁶⁸ Reydellet II, p. 84, n. 120.

⁶⁹ Gregory of Tours, *Histories* VI.10. Translated in O. M. Dalton, *The History of the Franks* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), pp. 245-7.

⁷⁰ Dumézil, 'Le patrice Dynamius et son réseau', p. 173.

⁷¹ *Haec tibi nostra chelys modulatur simplice cantu, / sed tonat archetypo barbitus inde sopho.* Carm.6.10.71-2 Last line modified slightly from George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 145. Reydellet interprets the line as Fortunatus promising Dynamius poetry in a metre of his choice—see II, p. 84 n. 121.

⁷² George, *Personal and Political Poems*, p. 145.

words, the poem balances intimacy and injury.⁷³ This may be the case; but I would argue that other axes are equally significant—presence and absence, as well as patronage and friendship.

A letter or poem could bridge the distance between separated correspondents and unite them in the shared delight of eloquent language. Fortunatus wrote to all of his friends and patrons with the expectation that they would be able to understand and respond to his words. He and the letter-writers of the *Epistolae Austrasicae*, like Dynamius, position themselves in the context of a shared and flourishing literary culture, in which elegantly written poems and letters were a sign of status.

Status and Literary Skill: Gogo

Gogo, a royal councillor in the eastern Frankish kingdom of Austrasia, was one such aristocrat whose literary abilities served him well.⁷⁴ He seems to have been from a Frankish rather than a Roman background and to have achieved his position by meritorious service. Gogo seems to have been a nickname which he used in letters instead of his full name; it may have been derived from Gondegyselus or Godinus, both of whom are attested in the *Histories* as Austrasian royal officials.⁷⁵ In a letter addressed to Traseric, probably the bishop of Toul, he describes himself as having learnt a barbarous Latin from a certain Dodoreus without the benefit of rhetorical teaching from Parthenius.⁷⁶ The former is not well known as a literary figure, though he was the recipient of one of Fortunatus' poems, but the latter was the grandson of Ruricius of Limoges, educated in Ravenna and later in service to Theudebert I. Parthenius' rhetorical ability was praised by figures such as Arator and remembered in Gaul nearly twenty years after his death.⁷⁷

When Sigibert died in 575, Gogo was named *nutricius* to the king's young son, Childebert II. Further evidence of Gogo's role as an official can be found in the last letter of the *Epistolae Austrasicae*, described in the surviving manuscript as 'a

⁷³ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 146.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-7.

⁷⁵ Dumézil, 'Gogo et ses amis', pp. 554-5.

⁷⁶ EA16. Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, pp. 127-8.

⁷⁷ Norberg, 'Dynamie patrice de Marseilles', p. 50 and Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel*, p. 199. Parthenius was murdered during a tax revolt in 548. The poem is Carm.2.13

beginning written by Gogo to Grasulf in the name of the king.⁷⁸ The letter discusses the movement of Frankish and Byzantine embassies and ambassadors in their effort to coordinate an attack against the Lombards.⁷⁹ The wide range of Gogo's writings and activities demonstrates the variety of networks and activities in which Fortunatus' friends were engaged.

Gogo's own surviving letters demonstrate how literary skill affected the social and political position of Merovingian aristocrats, and their standing in one another's eyes. Gogo's correspondent, Traseric, does not appear in Gregory's *Histories*, but seems to be the same Traseric whose oratory Fortunatus praised in Carm.11.13. He might be the 'Trisoricus' present on a list of bishops of Toul whose dates are uncertain.⁸⁰ Toul would have been an important point of contact for Gogo because it lay on a road, possibly pre-Roman, which ran from Lyon to Langres and Metz, before branching off to Bar-le-Duc, Rheims, and the headwaters of the Moselle.⁸¹ Like Trier and Metz, Toul was reachable from the river. It was also an important place for the transfer of information between these two cities.⁸²

The manuscript heading simply reads, 'a letter of Gogo to Traseric', which may argue that the letter dated from before Traseric became bishop of Toul, since Gogo and the copyist of the Austrasian letters are normally careful with ecclesiastical titles, as can be seen in Letter 22, discussed below. Gogo praises his correspondent's 'fruitfulness of words' and 'knowledge of wholesomeness (*salubritatis*)'; using an expression also used by Avitus of Vienne, he adds that these

⁷⁸ Incipit dicta Gogone ad Grasulfo de nomen regis. Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, p. 218.

⁷⁹ Historians have debated the date of EA 48. For summaries of previous arguments and important contributions, see Paul Goubert, *Byzance avant l'Islam* (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1955), p. 197; Walter Goffart, 'Byzantine Policy in the West under Tiberius II and Maurice: The Pretenders Hermenegild and Gundovald (579-585)', *Traditio*, 13 (1957), 77-80; and Bernard S. Bachrach, *The Anatomy of a Little War: a Diplomatic and Military History of the Gundovald Affair (568-586)* (Boulder, CO; Oxford: Westview, 1994), pp. 155-9.

⁸⁰ Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, pp. 259 n. 415. The short and uninformative entry on Trisoricus is found in Georg Waitz, 'Gesta Episcoporum Tullensium', in *Chronica et gesta aevi Salici*, ed. by Georg Pertz (Hanover: Hahn, 1848), pp. 631-48 (p. 634). The bishop from Toul present at the fifth council of Orleans in 549 was called Alodius; this appearance at the council seems to be the only firm date in his career. Odette Pontal, *Die Synoden im Merowingerreich* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1986), pp. 96, n. 80.

⁸¹ Gerold Bönnen, *Die Bischofsstadt Toul und ihr Umland während des hohen und späten Mittelalters* (Trier: Verlag Trierer Historische Forschungen, 1996), p. 22.

⁸² Odette Pontal, *Die Synoden im Merowingerreich* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1986), pp. 105-6. Further evidence of Toul as a centre of some significance is that King Theudebald called a synod in the city of Toul on the first of June 550, as is attested by EA 11, from Mapinus of Rheims to Nicetius of Trier.

qualities are long-standing ones.⁸³ Furthermore, Traseric has helped Gogo understand contemporary events: ‘you likewise opened our hearts with logical speech: and indeed you do both things to gain praise for yourself, you prepare the field with ploughmen and a reading for us in letters.’⁸⁴ These references to literary activity and farming are similar to Fortunatus’ own depictions of the Merovingian aristocratic lifestyle in poems to Gogo and others.

However the letter primarily refers to literary, not agricultural, fields. Fortunatus uses a similar image when referring to Dynamius of Marseilles’ ability to participate in shared literary culture, *Interiora mei penetrans possessor agelli*.⁸⁵ Participation in the field of literature was contested. Although he does not name names, Gogo spends the rest of the letter expressing praise for native, as opposed to foreign, poetic talent. ‘Our region’, he assures Traseric, ‘deserved to have you alone as a teacher from our residents’.⁸⁶ The instruction of his forebears (*instituto priscorum*) and individual genius (*singularis natura*) qualify him to be the region’s teacher. Gogo says that he has called on powers stronger than himself to sort out the situation but cannot yet do anything.⁸⁷ In any case, Gogo deplored his own education as insufficient to address the problem: as noted above, he had been taught by Dodoreus rather than Parthenius.⁸⁸ It seems that the two men were discussing Fortunatus’ arrival and impact, and the letter can be used to show that the poet was making a name for himself. Gogo acknowledges Fortunatus’ skill but his words also

⁸³ ...nec mirum ducimus, ut inde ubertas verborum procedat, in quo salubritatis scientia exabundat. Nam difficile valet quicumque vacuare conditum, quem ad ministrandum diffusio reddidit cotidiana repletum, et noscit aescere tellorem circi[n]us, ubi fluminis gignitur ortus. Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, p. 126. Alexander Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 50. Avitus uses the word ‘circunus’ in the same unusual way, to refer to the course of the year.

⁸⁴ *Et quamlibet circa saurina nemorum succisa purgetis, nostra quoque pectora sermone dialectio aperuistis: utrasque enim res vobis ad laudem facitis pertinere, cum agricolis culturam et nobis praeparatis in epistulis lectionem praecipua.* Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, p. 126.

⁸⁵ Carm.6.10.63.

⁸⁶ Elena Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum Della Cancelleria Austrasica (Sec. V-Vi)* (Rome: Herder, 2001), p. 126. ...cum te incola regio nostra unicum meruit habere doctorem.

⁸⁷ Gogo uses the image of rushing water, which echoes the vocabulary of one of Fortunatus’ poems to Dynamius, Carm.6.10.7-20. Ex studio studiis retrahor: silet unda Camenae. / Carne fluit sanies, ne riget ore latex. / Musicus ignis abest, algent in fonte sorores. / Nam sanguis latices hinc gelat unde rigat.

⁸⁸ Provocavi laticem quem necdum in responsis sustinere valeo decurrentem. Sed haec unda inrigua et inperitum ebromat sensum et componit barbarum dictatorem, qui potius apud Dodoreum didicit gentium linguas disceperere, quam cum bone memoriae Parthenio obtinuisse rethorica dictione. Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, p. 128.

suggest jealousy of the patronage that that skill was attracting. Fortunatus later became friends and correspondents with both men and shared literary culture created common ground between them.⁸⁹

Gogo's letter to Chaming (on whom no other information survives) is written as a message of friendship. It includes the topos that letters allow people separated by physical distance to see and speak with one another, which brings them joy. The distance between the two men is irrelevant to the strength of their affection, as is the amount of time they have spent apart.⁹⁰ The letter seems to indicate that a meeting is expected or sought, since Gogo refers to 'the desolation of the road' and 'finally, set face-to-face, he who is discerned to be indivisible from me might stand near'.⁹¹ Fortunatus' writings contain similar ideas about the strength of affection through absence, time, and distance; the un-dissolvable bond between friends; and the wish for the joy of reunion.

Gogo assures the man he describes as *patrone dulcissime* that King Childebert II, still a minor at the time, regards and will continue to regard him highly.⁹² The word *patronus* rarely appears in friendship literature and Fortunatus reserved it for his most distinguished friends and patrons, including Martin of Braga, Eufronius of Tours, and for the saints, especially Martin.⁹³ As we saw in Chapter 1, the fifth-century bishop Ruricius of Limoges frequently addressed fellow bishops as *patronus* in the context of friendly exchanges. Lack of context—Chaming is unknown except for this letter—makes Gogo's reason unclear, but it seems as though he uses *patronus* in a similar way and for similar reasons as Ruricius. The conclusion of the letter, in which Gogo claimed that even the eloquence of Virgil would be unequal to the task of Chaming's praises, supports this picture of friendly discourse, which is strengthened by Gogo's remark that he has included some verses in his friend's honour, unfortunately now lost. This illustrates the principle that

⁸⁹ Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 22-4. The poem to Traseric is Carm.2.13; the poems to Gogo are Carm.7.1-4.

⁹⁰ Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, pp. 116-8.

⁹¹ Non tamen me in aliquo vastitas tenebat itineris...dum ille tandem adstaret coram positus, qui a me dinoscitur esse indivisus. Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, pp. 118.

⁹² Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, pp. 118.

⁹³ See White, 'Amicitia and the profession of poetry', pp. 79-80. White flatly states that 'patronus' is not used for classical literary friendships. In his poetry, Fortunatus only uses the word 'patronus' four times to refer to a human patron; all of these men are bishops (the other sixteen times this word is used, it refers to God or the saints, especially Martin).

letters could be extended through gifts of words, presents, and supplementary messages, and it provides a useful comparative to Fortunatus' repeated framing of the letters he sent and received as gifts.⁹⁴ References such as this indicate the level and frequency of exchange which once existed, but survives only in part.⁹⁵

Another of Gogo's letters bears witness to the importance of these exchanges. In the late 560s, Gogo came into the ownership of property within the diocese of Metz, and wrote to Bishop Peter to announce this. He desired a good relationship with the bishop: 'that I might be a neighbour to you, to whom I was rightly connected by charity, and I ought to visit with mutual exchange, (you) whom I seem to retain in my heart with indivisible love'.⁹⁶ Peter is addressed as a friend, with words of affection and promises of mutual defence. After this attempt to cement his friendship with his neighbour Gogo then asks Peter to greet ecclesiastical dignitaries, including deacons, abbots, monks; Avolus, 'brilliant in his knowledge as a secretary', and Theodemundus, the count of the city.⁹⁷ His final and most elaborate greeting is reserved for an unnamed bishop, who through Gogo's description of his activities as a visitor and builder of churches as well as a teacher to the royal palace, seems to be Nicetius of Trier.

Since the copyist preserved the names and epithets of the people Gogo greeted, one can get a sense of the size of one of Gogo's networks. The letter contains greetings for ten people as well as an unnamed group of monks. Given that most of his greetings are for ecclesiastical figures, Gogo's new property was probably near the cathedral and a monastery, but he does not ignore colleagues in the civil administration either. Fortunatus' own networks, as can be seen in his greetings to Dynamius and friends, were of similar size, and mixed secular and ecclesiastical makeup—he greets six named individuals, two of whom were bishops.

⁹⁴ Catherine Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster: Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), p. 28; Mary Garrison, "'Send More Socks': On Mentality and the Preservation Context of Medieval Letters", in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. by Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 69-100 (p. 99).

⁹⁵ Sandrine Linger, 'L'écrit à l'époque Mérovingienne d'après la correspondance de Didier, évêque de Cahors (630-655)', *Studi Medievali*, 33 (1992), 799-823. Linger uses internal evidence from the letters to estimate texts which definitely or probably once existed.

⁹⁶ Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, p. 142. Quod etiam divine fuit dispensatio Maiestatis, ut essem vobis oportunitate vicinus, quibus caritatis iure coniunctus, et alternis vicibus visitare deberem, quos vider in corde amore individuo retinere; eademque possessio, dum vestra residet defensio, iam unita in vestris praesidiis nos prumptus esse sollicitat.

⁹⁷ Notarii eruditione fulgentem. Malaspina, p. 142.

Fortunatus' four poems to Gogo show him enacting the virtues of friendship to build and maintain networks and relationships. The first of these poems is a praise piece in which Gogo's eloquence and wisdom are celebrated.

Enchanted by your stirring sweetness, Gogo, the foreign traveller draws near the distant realm. Your eloquence, like Orpheus with his lyre, summons all to hasten here with greater speed from all quarters. When the weary exile himself has arrived before, he sheds through your healing whatever ailed him before. You banish lamentation from the afflicted and instil joy; lest they should be parched, you nurture them with the dew from your lips. You build combs with your speech, supplying new honey; and with the nectar of your sweet eloquence you surpass the bees.⁹⁸

The reference to a foreign traveller seems to be Fortunatus himself, far from his birthplace of Duplavis and his education and early career in Ravenna. It is not impossible that this poem was written soon after Fortunatus' arrival in Gaul, with its references to travel, rest, and hospitality. Fortunatus portrays himself as one of many 'afflicted' who seek out the courtier's abilities. Gogo draws people to him because he is so eloquent and his words have the power to lift downcast spirits. Fortunatus flatters his addressee by comparing him to Orpheus and he develops an extended analogy between his friend and a busy and virtuous hive of bees.⁹⁹ His praise of Gogo's character and appearance makes extensive use of light imagery, and he praises the height of Gogo's standing in Sigibert's favour, highlighting in particular Gogo's accomplishment of escorting Brunhild from Spain to Austrasia. The poem ends with Fortunatus excusing himself for offering Gogo insufficient praise, 'if I am silent about these blessings, my silence applauds you; you who dwell in my heart, do not expect my voice. I sing the truth by my silence, and deceit does not condemn me.'¹⁰⁰ By trusting to his affection for Gogo, and not words alone, Fortunatus is able to properly honour his friend.

Fortunatus next two poems to Gogo are shorter and less encomiastic. As can be seen in his poems of thanks to Radegund and Agnes, the poet was an appreciative

⁹⁸ Sic stimulantē tua captus dulcedine, Gogo, /longa peregrinus regna viator adit. /Vndique festini ueniant ut promptius imnes, / sic tua lingua trahit sicut et ille lyra. / Ipse fatigatus huc postquam uenerit exul / antea quo doluit te medicante caret. / Eruis afflictis gemitus et gaudia plantas; /ne tamen arescant, oris ab imbre foues. / Aedificas sermone fauos noua mella ministrans / dulcis et eloquii nectare vincis apes. Carm.7.1.11-20. Translated by George, *Personal and Political Poems*, pp. 57-8.

⁹⁹ On the classical and Christian heritage of this image, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 138.

¹⁰⁰ Haec bona si taceam, te nostra silentia laudant / nec uoces spectes qui mea corda tenes. Carm.7.1.45-6. Translated in George, *Personal and Political Poems*, p. 58.

recipient of edible gifts; in *Carm.*7.2, he thanks Gogo for gifts of nectar, wine, food, clothing, learning, and ability, mixing tangible gifts with the intangible benefits of Gogo's friendship. After comparing Orpheus' way with animals to his friend's ability to draw people to him, Fortunatus compares his eloquence to Cicero and calls Gogo the new Apicius, before excusing himself from trying the chicken and goose, as he has been sent to sleepy satiation by the beef. Reydellet suggests that the poem was improvised and declaimed at table.¹⁰¹ Improvisation is impossible to prove, but Fortunatus certainly seems to have performed at banquets for other friends, including Gregory of Tours.¹⁰²

In addition to feasting together, Fortunatus and Gogo also exchanged letters. Unlike with Dynamius, there seems to have been no lapse in correspondence, but that did not mean that their relationship was free from conflict. Fortunatus' poem responds to a letter of complaint (*Quas mihi porrexit modo pagina missa querellas*) from Gogo, claiming that he was blameless and Gogo's trip to Rheims was at fault. Whatever misunderstanding had arisen, Fortunatus was clear that it had not damaged their friendship: 'Yet still sweetness is not destroyed by reason of such a pretext: / the fruit of friendship abides in a heart which cultivates it.'¹⁰³

All of which is written with the assumption that its audience is a man of culture and learning, who participates in and understands the duties of friendship. In *Carm.*7.4 Fortunatus paints a picture of an educated and powerful man's life through the conceit of imagining what Gogo might be doing with his days. The poem opens with the image, which Fortunatus employs in other poems, of the poet asking the travelling clouds to bring him news of his friend.¹⁰⁴ He then pictures Gogo enjoying himself on the banks of various rivers in Austrasia: he could be fishing alongside the Rhine, walking by the Moselle, listening to waterfowl honking near the Meuse, or passing time in the fruitful farmland near the Aisne. Fortunatus lists eight other rivers where his friend could potentially be. Having plumbed the possibilities of aquatic recreation, Fortunatus takes to the woods, asking whether Gogo hunts in the Ardennes or the Vosges, and what kind of animals he kills. Only two lines are devoted to the final possibility for outdoor activity—borrowing a phrase from

¹⁰¹ Reydellet II, p. 87, n. 6.

¹⁰² See for example *Carm.*5.3 and *Carm.*10.11.

¹⁰³ Non tamen ex tali titulo dulcedo peribit: / fructus amicitiae corde colente manet. *Carm.*7.3.5-6.

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, pp. 254-6.

Virgil's *Georgics*, Fortunatus inquires whether Gogo uses a young bull to plough his fields¹⁰⁵

The final part of the poem deals with Gogo's responsibilities at court. Fortunatus imagines his friend at work in the palace hall, with 'the school following him'¹⁰⁶ expressing praise, sitting with other royal counsellors making laws and 'creating mild honey with equal accord'.¹⁰⁷ The idea of Gogo as master of a Merovingian palace school seems to rest on this one line about him being following by a *scola*. The word *scola* could mean school, but throughout the late Roman period it also referred to a college or corporation of the army.¹⁰⁸ Gregory of Tours uses the phrase *Chrodieldis scola* to refer to the armed band the royal nun Clothild gathered around her in her dispute with the abbess of the Holy Cross, Leubovera, and mentions fighting between their rival *scolas*.¹⁰⁹ It is thus possible that Gogo's role was as a teacher of arms instead of, or in addition to, letters.

However, there is no doubt that the Merovingian court was a magnet for talent, to which the arrival of Fortunatus himself surely bears witness. Since schools of rhetoric in Gaul ceased to exist in the early sixth century, some of the earliest writers featured in the *Epistolae Austrasicae* could have had access to a traditional Roman education but Gogo, Dynamius, and Nicetius of Trier, among others, did not, and were educated in local, ecclesiastical schools.¹¹⁰ Our evidence that young, educated men gathered at court and were sent out into suitable secular or ecclesiastical careers continues uninterrupted until the 670s, after which our evidence for this activity at court disappears for at least fifty years. Whether they ended up in church or state, a literary education was useful.¹¹¹ Only Fortunatus' reference to a *scola* places Gogo at the head of such an endeavour; his official position according to Gregory was Childebert II's *nutricius*, the man responsible for the young king's upbringing.

¹⁰⁵ One of Gogo's letters testifies to his possession of an estate near Metz. The letter is EA22. See Malaspina, pp. 142-5. See Malaspina, *Il Liber Epistolarum*, pp. 142-5 and Reydellet, II, n. 18, p. 90.

¹⁰⁶ *Siue palatina residet modo laetus in aula / cui scola congregiendiens plaudit amore sequax?* Carm.7.4.26-7.

¹⁰⁷ *Consilioque pari mitia mella creant.* Carm.7.4.28.

¹⁰⁸ On the *scola* in the Roman Empire, see Richard Ira Frank, *Scholae palatinae: the palace guards of the later Roman Empire* (Rome: American Academy at Rome, 1969).

¹⁰⁹ See DLH X.15. Gregory uses the word *scola* only once more, to refer to the household of bishop Ragnemod of Paris, in DLH X.26.

¹¹⁰ Wood, 'Administration and Culture', p. 366.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 366-9.

According to the poem Gogo's responsibilities also included law-making, in cooperation with royal officials—Fortunatus specifically mentions duke Lupus as one of the people who would have participated in the council.¹¹² Although many different types of legislation were surely discussed, Fortunatus mentions only measures to feed the poor, comfort widows, protect the small, and empower the weak. This description creates a very different picture from Gregory's polemical portraits of rapacious Merovingian officials. Fortunatus writes that such legislation furthers the salvation of those who make it and allows them 'to benefit from the love of Christ the King'.¹¹³ The poem ends by again evoking the image of the winds as messengers, carrying Fortunatus' messages to Gogo. The metaphor of the winds as messengers, as well as the scenes imagining Gogo's activities, suggest that Fortunatus was not entirely sure where his correspondent was, a circumstance which likely complicated the task of the messenger who delivered the letters.

Gogo's letters and Fortunatus' poetic description of his activities provide a clear image of Gogo's *Romanitas*. As Judith George has written, '[Fortunatus]' point is that Gogo leads the life of a Roman gentleman, with the wide-ranging interests and commitments of such a man of power. Every detail underlies his distinction; the very structure of the poem itself associates him with the Roman way of life, with allusions and images which again echo and flatter his learning in classical literature.'¹¹⁴ One part of Gogo's subscription to Roman values was his awareness of and participation in friendships, as is seen in his own letters and those addressed to him by Fortunatus.

Language of Clientage as a Strategy of Friendship: Jovinus and Sigold

Late antique writers rarely describe themselves as clients but this section aims to illustrate how Fortunatus used the language of clientage as a strategy for indicating the closeness of his friendships. *Cliens* was part of the vocabulary of late antique friendship—Ausonius wrote a poem about the rarity of gratitude from his clients and Sidonius Apollinaris uses the word client fifteen times in his letters, to describe the dependents of his correspondents. From the many times the word is

¹¹² Fortunatus wrote to Lupus and his brother Magnulf, Carm.7.9, and 7.10, discussed by George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 132-6.

¹¹³ Et valeant Christi regis amore frui. Fortunatus, Carm.7.4.32.

¹¹⁴ George, *Personal and Political Poems*, p. 140.

used in Augustine's sermons¹¹⁵, *cliens* is used only once in the fifth-century Eusebius Gallicanus sermon collection:

Should we happen to pay obeisance to some powerful man—which it certainly had been the habit for superior persons to expect from their clients—would that man not, if he should see that we present the duty owed to him with a reluctant and twisted spirit, even with a certain distaste; would he not judge that injury is done to him instead, and declare that he has been dishonoured rather than respected, and believe that resentment rather than favour should be repaid for negligence and disrespect of this sort?¹¹⁶

This text describes a ritual that had been part of the Roman conception of patronage for centuries—however much they might resent it, clients were expected to behave in certain ways towards their superiors. Favours—*gratia* and greetings were an expected part of polite social interactions. Interestingly, this sermon was directed towards a monastic community, likely Lérins, for which imagery of the world the monks had left behind could be deployed to remind them of how they ought to willingly present the duty they owed to God. This vision of Christian clientage is not fully developed in Fortunatus' works. Instead, he situated his use of the language of clientage in the context of late antique ideas of Christian patronage and absent friendship. In this way his poems to secular magnates had similar goals and strategies, despite their differences from poems, letters, and verse epistles to Gregory and other bishops.

As with Dynamius and Gogo, Fortunatus probably met Jovinus, a Provençal aristocrat, at Sigibert's wedding, and he addressed two elegant friendship poems to him; perhaps significantly he is one of the few people to whom Fortunatus describes himself using the word *cliens*. George argues that we do not have the evidence to tell whether this was a relationship of friendship or 'just patronage'; all we can tell is that Jovinus 'was sufficiently important for the poet for him to address a long and elaborately evocative poem to Provence. Given the distinctive and poignant impression made by the poem, it is all the more tantalizing that we cannot move

¹¹⁵ *Cliens* is used in Serm. 20A, 61, 130, 302, 311, among others. Augustine seems often to mention clients in *Contra Academicos* and his commentary on the Psalms (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*.)

¹¹⁶ *Faciamus alicui potenti uiro obsequium soluere—quod utique superiores personae a clientibus suis exspectare consueuerat—none, si nos uiderit homo ille, debitum sibi officium inuito atque extorto animo, etiam cum quodam fastidio, exhibere: nonne magis sibi factam iniuriam iudicaret, et exhonorari se potius quam excoli pronuntiaret, et huiusmodi neglegenti atque indeuoto offensam potius crederet referendam esse quam gratiam?* CCSL 101A, pp. 488-9

beyond that point.¹¹⁷ Fortunatus likely wrote *Carm* 7.11 before 573, since the title of the poem addresses him as the *rector* of Provence, a position he was removed from in 573.¹¹⁸

Like the poems to Dynamius, Gogo, and his episcopal friends and patrons discussed earlier, these two poems are the only evidence for Fortunatus' relationship with the addressee. With both Dynamius and Jovinus, the poet chooses to begin without preamble and state directly the issue standing between them: lack of replies to correspondence. An opening such as *prosaico quotiens direxi scripta relatu* is not usual for Fortunatus' work.¹¹⁹ The emphasis that the works were in prose, although it may be a figure of speech of the sake of the metre, is similarly unique. The complaint about that Fortunatus had sent Jovinus many letters without response resembles Fortunatus' complaints to Dynamius about the interruption of their correspondence.

The poem makes an extended comparison between eloquence and flowing water, imagery which is found elsewhere in late antique letters of friendship and indicates Fortunatus', and perhaps Jovinus', awareness of and participation in this tradition.¹²⁰ The image of Castalian springs developed in the first four lines may also represent shared literary interests. Without letters, the poet is denied the refreshment that they bring. Fortunatus' desire to embrace Jovinus, and his grief at being unable to do so, draws further on conventions of epistolography—letter-writers, in their efforts to transcend separation, would imagine themselves kissing, embracing, or talking with an absent friend.¹²¹ For Fortunatus, these imagined activities in absence included seeing as well—letters allow him to visualise absent friends. This was always an incomplete view, as the poem's penultimate question makes clear: 'He who transfers to himself my feelings from his safe feeling/ why, I ask, do my eyes not equally hold his light?'¹²² In the last two lines, Fortunatus renews his plea for letters (*pagina*) from his *amice care*.

¹¹⁷ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 150.

¹¹⁸ DLH, IV.43

¹¹⁹ *Carm*.7.11.1. Reydellet II, p. 102.

¹²⁰ See for example EA16.

¹²¹ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, p. 167.

¹²² *Qui sibi transfudit mea pectora pectore tuto, / cur, rogo, non pariter lumina lumen habent?* *Carm*.7.11.9-10. On this passage, see Reydellet II, n. 60.

His next poem for Jovinus has been analysed in detail by Judith George and Michael Roberts. It is one of the poet's most elaborate works, discussing death and the passing of time in first half and in the second half reminding Jovinus that the impermanence of life should urge him to fulfil the duties of friendship. The poem's evocation of presence and absence is highly detailed and coloured by allusion to the Bible and classical authors.¹²³ Like the previous poem, it plays heavily with imagery of presence and absence:

If a light breeze flies, he thinks a greeting arrives thence;
This noise returns to the ear which a man bears in his mind.
Therefore, dear man who must be honoured, I myself, your client, am
seeking
Him whom places make an absent man, not a soul,
You, a memory, are always held in our mouth:
We write, and while we write these things, we do not speak without you.
With affection, with zeal, with prayer I encircle your arms
And by an embrace I tie your breast and neck.¹²⁴

As was discussed with the poems to Dynamius, Fortunatus does not usually call himself a client, and deploys the word as a strategy to indicate the closeness of his friendship. Fortunatus describes various means by which he attempts to overcome the difficulties of absent friendship: imagining greetings arriving on the breezes, remembering that Jovinus is only absent in body, not in spirit; and keeping his presence alive through writing and remembering. Memory without regular correspondence was an unreliable guarantor of his friend's presence even bolstered by affection. Fortunatus returns to the theme of lost and wasted time explored in the first half of the poem, reminding Jovinus that the time spent in silence is irreplaceable:

O how often we send short poems on timid papers
And your silent pages never speak to give me new life.
Who, I ask, will give us back these hours lost in silence?
No light will recall time, weightless and fleeting.
Tell me, my esteemed friend: what are you doing? To what, o friend, do you
have recourse?

¹²³ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, pp. 265-9, finds citation and allusion to Horace, Virgil, Wisdom, and Ecclesiastes.

¹²⁴ Si uolat aura leuis, putat inde uenire salutes; / hoc fragor aure refert quod homo mente gerit. / Hinc tuus ergo cliens ego, care colende, requiro / absentem faciunt quem loca, non animus, / qui semper nostro memoralis haberis in ore: / scribimus et haec dum, non sine te loquimur. / Affectu, studio, uota tua brachia cingo / atque per amplexum pectora, colla ligo. *Carm.* 7.12.83-90.

If you are tending your farms, why do you deny my prayers?¹²⁵

Evidently, whatever he was doing, Jovinus' activities were no excuse for silence; even if he was tending his estates, he was expected to fulfil the duties of friendship and communicate regularly.

Even when friends were separated for a number of years, Fortunatus' poems to Sigoald demonstrate how the obligations of friendship could remain in force. Sigoald (also spelt Sigivald) may have been one of the first Merovingian officials Fortunatus met on his arrival in Gaul in 566.¹²⁶ Sigibert sent him to escort Fortunatus into Austrasia before his wedding to Brunhild. Fortunatus remembered Sigoald's companionship approximately twenty-five years later in a poem about their friendship.¹²⁷ In two other poems, Fortunatus praised Sigoald's official career as a count in Childebert's service, and hoped for his further advancement.¹²⁸ The three poems themselves are not easily dateable, nor are they much help in establishing a chronology of the relationship between Sigoald and Fortunatus. The context of book ten means that they were probably composed during the late 580s or early 590s, when a number of poems in the book can be securely dated.¹²⁹ Meyer argued that the book was put together after the poet's death, but I find George's argument that Fortunatus himself assembled books ten and eleven during the 590s more convincing.¹³⁰

Judith George dates *Carm.* 10.16 to 592, placing it in the context of Guntram's death rather than the immediate context of the Treaty of Andelot. She argues that the line *rex Childeberthus crescens te crescere cogat* suggests the political context of Childebert having inherited Guntram's kingdom.¹³¹ The 'te' here is Sigoald, whose career, Fortunatus wishes, will advance in step with his royal patron's. Throughout the poem Fortunatus plays with the dual meaning of *comes*—a

¹²⁵ Misimus o quotiens timidis epigrammata chartis / et tua, ne recreer, pagina muta silet. / Quis, rogo, reddat eas taciti quas perdimus horas? / tempora non reuocat lux leuis atque fugax. / Dic, homo note meus: quid agis? Quid, amice, recurris? / si tua rura colis, cur mea uota neges? *Carm.* 7.12.105-10 Translation adapted from Fiske, *Friendship*, p. 127.

¹²⁶ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 4.

¹²⁷ The poem is *Carm.* 10.16. Reydelle I, pp. ix-x.

¹²⁸ *Carm.* 10.17 and 10.18.

¹²⁹ Reydelle I, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

¹³⁰ An argument alluded to in George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, p. 210, and fully developed in Judith George, 'Venantius Fortunatus the End Game', *Eranos: Acta Philologica Suecana*, 96 (1998).

¹³¹ George, 'End game', pp. 40-1.

count (Sigoald's current position) and a companion (what he was for Fortunatus when they first met).¹³² The poem opens recalling Fortunatus' journey from Italy to Gaul and Sigoald's assistance to him at Sigibert's request. This poem is our only evidence that Fortunatus was escorted into Gaul, which suggests an official invitation. Sigoald was Fortunatus' guide, providing him with food, a horse, and directions.

There is no indication that the two men kept regularly in touch after Fortunatus' arrival in Gaul and choice to settle around Poitiers. With his duty done, Sigoald is recalled to his friend—one striking feature of this poem is that Sigoald is twice called *amicus*, an unusual emphasis. The next few lines of the poem suggest that Sigoald had actually come to visit in person:

Tell me, my sweet, whence you came after so long a time,
Great in your honour, greater in my love
Manifest in the affection, kind Sigoald of your clients,
And to Fortunatus, o friend, a pious name?¹³³

What brought Sigoald back to Fortunatus after such a long time is not clear—George suggests that he was a new man chosen by Childebert and sent to Tours and Poitiers as an administrator. He does not seem to match any Sigoald/Sigivald recorded by Gregory of Tours,¹³⁴ but this explanation makes sense in light of the next poem to Sigoald, in which he is praised for feeding the poor at Martin's church.

Fortunatus addresses Sigoald in terms of friendship; Sigoald, in addition to his official role as *custos* is *mea cura*, *meus dulcis*, *maior amore meo*, and *benigne*. Fortunatus calls himself Sigoald's friend and he names Sigoald as his friend. The use of *amicus* to refer both to the poet and his addressee suggests that Fortunatus was not flattering his addressee by pretending to a close relationship but reflecting a state of equality between the two of them. This is made clear by one of the points in Sigoald's praise—his love (*affectus*) for his clients. Ambrose regarded *affectus* as one of the duties of friendship and had an important place in Fortunatus' lexicon.¹³⁵ But Fortunatus does not seem to identify himself among Sigoald's clients but sets himself apart by identifying Sigoald as a pious name and friend.

¹³² Reydellet III, pp. 95 and 190.

¹³³ Dic, meus, unde uenis post tempora plurima dulcis, / Magnus honore tuo, maior amore meo, / Promptus in affectu, Sigoalde benigne, clientum / Et Fortunato nomen, amice, pium? *Carm.* 10.16.7-10.

¹³⁴ George, 'End Game', p. 41.

¹³⁵ Fiske, *Friendship*, pp. 107-8; 195.

The forty-four lines of Fortunatus' next poem to Sigoald, *Carm.* 10.17, praise a single incident; a time when the count handed out alms at Martin's threshold on Childebert's behalf. The poem opens with a direct address to Christ, reminiscent of the book of John discussing the futility of human action without divine approval. Most of the poem is in fact a meditation on the nature of Christian wealth—by giving to the poor the rich store up talents in heaven. Only in the twenty-first line do Childebert and Sigoald appear. Sigoald, the king's own *famulus*, 'Grants to poor men, so that the crown of the king may stand forth.'¹³⁶ This act is a benefit both to Childebert and Sigoald. The exchange element—feeding the poor for a heavenly reward—is quite clear in their patronage of the poor and crippled. The poet's own appearance in the poem is a brief greeting and a wish that his work for Childebert may provide Sigoald with better (presumably heavenly) things.

Fortunatus' final surviving poem to Sigoald discusses the count's sponsorship of an Easter banquet. Reydellet and Pucci both interpret the *defensor* of the poem's second line to be an official in charge of the protection of the church and the person in charge of the feast.¹³⁷ I argue that this is a reference to Sigoald, rather than an unnamed royal official. Given his close association with ecclesiastical charity in the previous poem, his sponsorship of an Easter feast makes sense. Royal involvement is less strongly suggested here, though Fortunatus does wish that Childebert's dominion may continue to advance his friend's career, and the poem concludes with a wish that the kingdom may be happy in the love of Christ the king. The poet flatters his friend's distinguished service and may also nod to royal patronage of the feast. The last line, which prays that 'the fidelity of a good count/companion may grow in honour', also supports a double meaning, since Sigoald was the *fides* of both Christ and Childebert through his faithful service.¹³⁸

Meyer and Di Brazzano both suggest that the poem was written during an actual meal.¹³⁹ Fortunatus composed other short poems of thanks for meals and composition and delivery were likely close in time to the original occasion. Furthermore, there are indications elsewhere in his work, particularly in poems for

¹³⁶ ergo suus famulus Sigoaldus amore fidelis / pauperibus tribuit, regis ut extet apex. *Carm.* 10.17.25-6.

¹³⁷ Paschale hic hodie donum memorabile floret; / defensor pascit, quo comes ipse fauet. *Carm.* 10.18.1-2.

¹³⁸ Sit regio felix felicis regis amore / atque boni comitis crescat honore fides. *Carm.* 10.18.7-8.

¹³⁹ Pucci, *Friends*, p. 61.

Gregory of Tours, that he sometimes performed poetry during banquets at request. Gatherings such as feasts, church dedications, and religious festivals—to name but a few—could provide opportunities for friends and patrons to meet, make, and maintain relationships. Poets like Fortunatus captured these occasions in verse, providing and preserving a memory of groups of friends and their activities.

Conclusion

Many of Fortunatus' friendships with members of the Merovingian elite were conducted over distance, and with an imperfect knowledge of his correspondents' activities and whereabouts. Letters enabled the maintenance of relationships of friendship and patronage across distances, and Fortunatus' use of imagery of presence and absence helped to diminish the effects of separation. By recalling the gestures of affection with which friends greeted one another, and reminding his friends of their duties of regular correspondence, Fortunatus' poetry provides a clear view of the values and expectations of Merovingian friendship.

In the case of Fortunatus' friends Dynamius, Gogo, and Jovinus, the duties of friendship are further illustrated by the account of Gregory's *Histories* and their own surviving writings. The body of evidence surrounding Dynamius in particular indicates that Fortunatus exchanged letters with men for whom active participation in literary culture was an important part of their identity. Dynamius' surviving letters show that he himself expected regular exchange of letters with friends and understood that replying to letters was a social obligation. Such relationships were strengthened through expressions of affection and inseparability between friends. They were also supported by the exchange of goods and services—Fortunatus' poems for Dynamius allude to the importance of favours between friends.

The mutual benefits and obligations of friendship were exchanged across a range of travel and communication hazards, which intensified friends' reliance on imagery of presence and absence as a way to overcome infrequent and interrupted correspondence. Using an epistolary poem to send greetings to the recipient's wider circle of friends and family was thus a way to maximise the efficiency of communication, and it was a strategy that appears frequently in Merovingian letters, including those of Fortunatus and Gogo. Replies to friendly messages were still

essential, as a friend's writing was his avatar, and served as a guarantee of his presence and continued affection.

Fortunatus and his friends used a variety of strategies to demonstrate their affection for one another. Gogo's letter to Traseric shows the effectiveness of an appeal to a shared background and education. Fortunatus' four poems for Gogo praise the effects of his eloquence and reveal the expectations for a nobleman's behaviour in leisure, at court, and in the banquet hall. In addition to flattering description of his friends' activities, Fortunatus also used the language of clientage to demonstrate the strength of his affection. Early medieval writers rarely describe themselves as clients, but clientage was an important part of the late antique thought about social relationships. In Fortunatus' poetry it appears within the context of the elaborate evocation of presence and absence found in friendly letters.

Fortunatus' poems for Sigoald demonstrate how friendships could be picked up again even after a period of separation. In his praise of Sigoald's high standing in the affections of his clients and his charitable activities on behalf of Childebert II, the poems demonstrate how friendships occurred in a space which was political and personal. Occasions such as an Easter banquet sponsored by the king may well have been a social occasion graced by the public performance of poetry as well as an opportunity for friends to meet in person. Even if they were not able to see each other face to face, imagery of presence and absence strengthened the relationships between Fortunatus and his friends and enabled them to express their affection for one another. Letters provided the concrete contact which made presence in absence possible.¹⁴⁰ Acknowledging the inseparability of the united souls of friends was a means to overcome the very real forces of geography, political unrest, and unreliable communication which threatened to divide them.

¹⁴⁰ Fiske, *Friendship*, p. 206.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the transmission and adaptation of Roman ideas of friendship and patronage in Merovingian Gaul through the lens of the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus. I argue that Fortunatus' poems and letters to bishops, kings, queens, nuns, and aristocrats provide a sense of Merovingian self-fashioning. The works of Fortunatus have often been cited as a footnote to the *Histories* of his friend and patron Bishop Gregory of Tours, but when Fortunatus is taken seriously as a historical source for the mentality of his age our picture of Merovingian society and its debt to Classical culture comes into sharper focus.

Gregory and Fortunatus were closely connected by bonds of patronage and friendship. From a historian's perspective, they share a number of commonalities. Both men carried out complex literary projects unique in their locations and century, and both men refer to letters, poems, and histories which no longer survive. In addition to the losses of sixth-century literature, it is worth noting the gap that comes after Fortunatus: not until Aldhelm and Eugenius of Toledo in the seventh century did another western Latin writer produce a substantial poetic corpus. The immense productivity of the two men might be taken as a sign of how much we have lost.

In their surviving works, Fortunatus and Gregory provide an informative picture of Merovingian social and political history, although they do so with different emphases.¹ As I demonstrated in chapter one, Fortunatus wrote regularly for Gregory as a patron and a friend, sending him greetings and thanks; asking for his services as a patron, including seeking the bishop's help for others besides himself; executing literary commissions for him; and writing on his behalf and in his interests.

Gregory did not include Fortunatus as a character in his narrative, and made reference to him only as a hagiographer. Gregory and his fellow bishops provided the poet with their own patronage and access to divine patronage. In Gregory's works, the dead saint was the ideal patron, who competed with 'other less worthy patrons and less ideal forms of patronage'.² Dependence on a saint was a preferable alternative to the 'ambiguities' of the terrestrial patronage system in which people,

¹ Reydellet, *La royauté*, p. 297.

² John H. Corbett, 'The Saint as Patron in the Work of Gregory of Tours', *Journal of Medieval History*, 7 (1981), 5.

particularly rural labourers and women, found themselves caught.³ Peter Brown argued that a saint could possess a form of ‘clean power’ in the struggle between competing patronage systems.⁴ But Gregory’s world of competition between patrons and systems of patronage is largely absent from the works of Fortunatus. The poet either treats human and saintly patrons as individuals or presents them in terms of networks of family, friends, and petitioners. Divine, saintly, and human patronages are not in competition but instead form an interlocking system.⁵

Chapter 1 focused on one part of this system, the relationship between the poet and the individuals he names as his *patroni*. In seeking out the patronage and friendship of men at the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Fortunatus was also connected to the saints these bishops acknowledged as their patrons.⁶ In a letter to Martin of Braga, Fortunatus suggested that the bishop was under the protection of the patronage of heaven.⁷ Furthermore, as a patron himself, Martin of Braga could pass on the patronage of Martin of Tours.⁸ The portions of Fortunatus’ writings which touch on the relationships between bishops and saints support Brown’s argument that, by the time of Gregory of Tours, the bishop was established in his role ‘as the visible *patronus* beneath the invisible *patronus*’. Brown attributed this to increasing numbers of bishops from what Kate Cooper aptly named ‘the patronage class’.⁹ Rather than celebrating the social status of bishops, Fortunatus’ poems for bishops, particularly his episcopal epitaphs, praised bishops who ennobled themselves properly by redirecting their resources and prestige towards their ecclesiastical communities. ‘Happy are those who have, from fleeting nobility / traded their senatorial dignities for the dignities they hold in heaven.’¹⁰ Focusing their patronage on intercession, charitable giving, ecclesiastical euergetism, and spiritual protection, elite bishops behaved as members of their class.

³ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 123

⁴ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 103

⁵ These views had late antique roots. See Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, p. 1, 20-5.

⁶ Richard Collins, ‘Observations on the Form, Language and Public of the Prose Biographies of Venantius Fortunatus in the Hagiography of Merovingian Gaul’, in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. by H.B. Clarke and Mary Brennan (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1981), pp. 105-31 (p. 118). Corbett, ‘The Saint as Patron in the Work of Gregory of Tours’, 3.

⁷ Carm.V.1.7 ‘Whence, far from doubt, you are brought into the clientship/patronage of the Cleanthes of the heavens.’ Vnde procul dubio caelestium clientela factus es Cleantarum.

⁸ Carm.V.1.10

⁹ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 39.

¹⁰ Carm.IV.5.21-2 Felices qui de nobilitate fugaci/ mercati in caelis iura senatus habent.

Fortunatus' poems and letters for Merovingian bishops demonstrate how poet and friends subscribed to a shared understanding of social relationships and the way they should work. Fortunatus' poems for episcopal friends and patrons demonstrate that a relationship of friendship could exist within a connection that included the support, protection, and appeals associated with patronage. Obedience to the duties of *amicitia* is seen in Fortunatus' writings to Eufronius of Tours, Felix of Nantes, Martin of Braga, and Gregory of Tours, the case studies on whom the first chapter focused. Friendship involved mutuality and reciprocity, and Fortunatus' letters display this by responding to the letters and invitations of his friends, apologising for any interruptions to their correspondence, and in turn expecting the same treatment. He also commended himself and his letter-carriers to these men and used them to pass on greetings and establish relationships with others, on earth and in heaven. Eufronius was Fortunatus' intermediary to Saint Martin, and he uses the bishop to pass on greetings to other (human) friends in his network. Fortunatus' self-commendations to bishops show a blending of these two purposes: the spiritual currency of episcopal support allowed him to access the patronage of heaven as well as terrestrial benefits such as the gifts for which he thanked Gregory of Tours. Fortunatus' variety of commissions for Gregory blended the roles of client and friend. His poems in honour of members of Gregory's family fell within the friendly praise of merit traditional in Late Antiquity, whereas his more substantial commissions, such as his poem in honour of the conversions of Avitus of Clermont, show the poet writing for hire.

Ecclesiastical building projects were another point at which different types of patronage intersected. The patrons Fortunatus honours in his church poems, discussed in Chapter 2, funded and supervised the restoration or construction of churches. His poetry presents seeking the patronage of the saints as one of the major reasons for building activity. In almost every single one of his church poems, Fortunatus portrays the building, restoration, or donation as a gift from the founder to God or to the saint in whose honour the building was created. While the poems create a close connection between the donor and the saint, it is clear that these activities affected the communities in which they took place. Leontius of Bordeaux's churches were for the benefit of communities which had not previously had a place of worship, and they could be seen from afar to welcome travellers. Furthermore, ecclesiastical buildings increased the standing and reputation of their builders.

Fortunatus' poems were one way in which this might be advertised and communicated.

The architecture, design, and decoration also provided evidence of the founder's wealth, taste, and desire to earn heavenly rewards. Fortunatus' verses may have been painted or inscribed on buildings and the donor's generosity could additionally be displayed on church vessels and images within the church. In San Vitale, Ravenna, there is a picture of the patronal saint being approached by the donor of the building, which may also have been found at Tours.¹¹ New construction and renovation projects were equally prestigious; the fabric of the building belonged to the saint(s) whom it honoured but the benefits were sought by the human founder(s). Pious building earned a bishop public approval and heavenly reward; they were one of the ways human beings could begin an attempt to repay the gifts of God. Good repute on heaven and earth could be gained by spending wealth in an approved manner.

A small subset of Fortunatus' church poems focuses on royal building projects. The poems display many of the same motifs, even as they use language and imagery specific to rulers, such as celebrations of kingly justice and favourable comparisons to Old Testament rulers. The poet presents Leontius of Bordeaux's churches as being of benefit to the community, and Childebert I's church in Paris in *Carm.II.10* is figured as the king's gift to his people. Ecclesiastical building projects also placed royal families under the protection of heaven: saints were called on to protect those who gave roofs to them, and so Sigibert hoped for St Medard's protection after building him a church.¹² Later Merovingian kings would do the same: the chronicle of Fredegar describes Dagobert's donations to beautify St Denis as a result of his wish for seeking 'his [the saint's] patronage expensively' (*precioso ipsius patrocinium*). Kreiner describes this as 'the exchange of one extravagance for another', in which public participation and witness were important.¹³

Fortunatus' poetry makes it clear that the public forms of generosity and piety he celebrated in his episcopal and lay friends were open to women as well as

¹¹ Brian Brennan, 'Text and Image: "Reading" the Walls of the Sixth-Century Cathedral of Tours', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 6 (1996), 80. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Martinellus and the dossier of inscriptions from the churches built by Rusticus of Narbonne, provide comparative material for Fortunatus' church poems.

¹² *Carm.II.16*

¹³ Kreiner, *The Social Life of Merovingian Hagiography*, p. 225.

men. The building projects of royal women were part of the generosity that was a valued aspect of their role, and they were able to command considerable resources in support of these aims. As Peter Brown noted in *The Cult of the Saints*, the political aspects of gift-giving were restricted to males, but Christian women were encouraged by their *patroni*, Christian clergy and bishops, to have a patronal role themselves in charity and church-building.¹⁴ Merovingian women were among the most active commissioners of Fortunatus' work, particularly of epitaphs.

As we saw in our discussion of building projects, and poems for royalty, Fortunatus' world of patronage and friendship was largely a world of men, but he found the friendship and patronage of aristocratic and royal women well worth courting. As Michael Roberts observed, one of Fortunatus' greatest contributions to the tradition of praise poetry is scaling down the size of panegyric to epigrammatic and occasional poems, and this innovation is on particular display in his poems for women. Fortunatus' writings for women also provide a clear example of the linguistic difference between friendship in the Merovingian age and Classical ideas of friendship and patronage. Women acted as literary and artistic patrons in the ancient, late antique and early medieval worlds; Fortunatus' poetry shows that these activities continued in the Merovingian world even as the language used to describe them changed.

Alongside Gregory of Tours, Radegund and Agnes form a second centre of the collection. Both Radegund's identity as a former queen and her chosen life as a nun opened up possibilities of power, patronage, and friendship. The *Rule of Caesarius* repeatedly returns to the issue of letters and gifts, a sign of the important role these had in the lives of noble nuns. Under the rule, gifts, letters, and visitors were tightly controlled, yet Radegund repeatedly sought out opportunities to learn from holy men; the nuns were enjoined against dining with visitors, yet Radegund and Agnes prepared special food for Fortunatus. The nuns' flexible interpretations of their rule increased the possibilities of friendship and patronage within their monastic lifestyle and made their relationship with Fortunatus possible. As my analysis of the transmission of the Appendix poems has shown, the first three circulated more widely than has previously been thought. These poems in particular demonstrated Radegund's significance as a literary patron. Fortunatus used her

¹⁴ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, p. 46-7.

voice to write on her behalf and in her interests. The nuns were also the recipients of friendship poetry. Fortunatus figures his letters and poems, sent and received, as gifts; only to his female correspondents did he offer actual gift objects. Fortunatus' creation of a spiritual family, with Radegund as mother and himself and Agnes as the children, created an acceptable space for gift-giving which foreshadows medieval language of spiritual kinship.

The language of Fortunatus' poems for Radegund and Agnes foreshadows the language of medieval friendship, while his poems for royalty were admired and imitated by Carolingian writers. Although Fortunatus' poems for Merovingian kings and queens are among the best-studied in his corpus, examining them through the lens of patronage and friendship allows us to consider Fortunatus' use and adaption of late antique thought, particularly with regard to friendship within marriage and the friendship and patronage of women. Indeed, royal women are more important in his works than has previously been recognised, and through donating their wealth to pious building projects they gained heavenly rewards and earthly repute. Widowed or single Merovingian women retained the ability to offer charity and cultural patronage in their own right even as they depended on connections to royal men for status and access to power.

Fortunatus' involvement with royal courts continued throughout his career, and his continued writing to royalty indicates the importance and prestige of their support and protection. This support and protection came from kings and queens as individuals as well as royal pairs. Fortunatus wrote for the two great royal couples of his day, Chilperic and Fredegund; and Brunhild and Sigibert, as well as their son. His work does not noticeably favour one couple over another (despite their rivalry), but he continued writing for Brunhild rather than Fredegund after their husbands' deaths. His depiction of royal marriage in the epithalamium for Sigibert and Brunhild draws on late antique ideas about the institution, including the equality of the married pair, the presence and nature of friendship within marriage, and marriage as a social good. A good relationship between the members of royal couples was part of their duty as rulers, because it would spread joy, peace, and concord to their subjects.

Fortunatus made himself essential to Merovingian royalty as someone who could properly celebrate their achievements and console them in their grief. The range of Fortunatus' consolatory writings shows his ability to adapt to his patron's

tastes, needs, and interests. Condolences were a social obligation, and it was an act of friendship to provide the bereaved with support and advice. His panegyric poems responded to needs of the occasions on which they were delivered: as the panegyric for Chilperic delivered at Berny-Rivière demonstrates, a single poem could be written to meet multiple needs. In this case themes of justice and legitimacy were pertinent to the trial of Gregory of Tours, but the panegyric also allowed the poet to get on the king's good side for his own sake. Fortunatus' writings for royalty clearly demonstrate that Fortunatus sought all royal patronage available, but they were not at the top of the hierarchy of patronage and friendship. This place was reserved for the saints.

Obedience to the divine ordering of society was a way to become a friend of God—Verena Epp argues that *Herrschaft* was frequently expressed in terms of *amicitia*. This relationship of lordship proceeded according to divine instructions and could thus put all men in a circle of friendship with God.¹⁵ As is suggested by Fortunatus' prayer for his friends Dynamius and Lupus, Christ's love had to be earned. 'And may they be able to benefit from the love of Christ the king'.¹⁶ In her discussions of Christian epistolary culture, Jennifer Ebbeler has stressed the new ideological grounds which underlay the development of Christian literary enterprise in the fourth century. Christian letter-writing was 'an innovative reformulation of traditional epistolary practice, designed to reflect the revolutionary implications of Christian theology: that friendship was part of an individual's love for God—God as the absent presence, both here and not here—and a means of overcoming the dislocation of communities'.¹⁷ This early Christian idea that friendships were founded in the love of God had a Scriptural basis: Christ himself entered into the holy relationship of friendship with his followers. This divine foundation made Christian friendship different from purely human friendship, yet it manifested itself in the same ways, through affection and 'acts of kindness to body and soul'.¹⁸ According to Paulinus of Nola, the divine foundations of friendship removed a need

¹⁵ Epp, *Amicitia*, pp. 2-5. The connection between lordship and *amicitia* is particularly apparent in early medieval charters, especially those from Anglo-Saxon England. See Julia Barrow, 'Friends and Friendship in Anglo-Saxon Charters', in *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Julian Haseldine (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 106-21.

¹⁶ Carm.VII.4.32

¹⁷ Jennifer Ebbeler, 'Tradition, Innovation, and Epistolary Mores', in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. by Philip Rousseau (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 270-84 (p. 283).

¹⁸ Fiske, *Friendship*, p. 71.

for the relationship to develop naturally, for because of their divine source friendships were perfect from first contact and stayed fixed thanks to the charity of God.¹⁹

Fortunatus' own adaption of the language of absent friendship, discussed in Chapter 5, served to establish a connection regardless of the relative status of the two parties or their level of in-person familiarity with each other. Fortunatus' surviving correspondence, such as with Dynamius, often seems to begin after a few letters, no longer surviving, have already been exchanged. Letter-writing was a key component of making friendship networks, since they carried and preserved connections across distances. The imagined landscape of Fortunatus' poems sometimes gives a hint of the actual route traversed by the person who carried his letters. Epistolary and literary culture united their participants despite the reality that the transmission of letters could be slow, intermittent or interrupted. The message of letters could be extended through words, gifts, and supplementary messages; references to these help to demonstrate how surviving evidence represents only part of the exchange.

Fortunatus shifts through registers of patronage, friendship, and clientage, which enabled him to address his correspondents as fellow aristocrats and refer to himself as his friend's client. This shifting of registers encapsulates Fortunatus' view of Merovingian society, which he portrayed as held together by interlocking bonds of vertical patronage and friendship, between God and the saints, the saints and humanity, bishops and their flocks, kings and their subjects, and humanity and God. Each of these bonds of patronage allowed the client in the relationship to access another level of patronage by appealing to an intermediary to facilitate the connection and desired outcome. In this, Fortunatus' model of the effects of patronage in society looks very Roman. Obtaining a patron in Classical society 'involved a special and highly developed social ritual and technical language', which continued in the Latin West for a very long time, as Fortunatus' poetry clearly demonstrates.²⁰ Fortunatus is thus an important witness to the survival of Roman ideas of social relationships after the fall of Rome and their continuing application in a post-imperial context. He is also a neglected source for the early medieval

¹⁹ Pierre Fabre, *Saint Paulin De Nole Et L'amitié Chrétienne* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1949), pp. 139-40.

²⁰ Corbett, 'The Saint as Patron in the Work of Gregory of Tours', p. 5.

understanding of the meaning and power of the saints. These ideas would see their full development in the early Middle Ages, when the question of the nature of the support one might get from a saint was answered more fully in the Carolingian period.²¹

²¹ Gagov, 'Il culto delle reliquie nell'antichità riflesso nei due termini 'patrocinia' e 'pignora'', pp. 497-8

Table 1: Contents of Paris Lat 13048

Title in manuscript	Poem in modern edition	Divisions between poems
(none)	Carm.8.3.93-178	
(none)	Proba's <i>Cento</i>	
(none)	Carm.App.1	
<i>Ad iuuiuium inlustrem ac patricio et rectorem provinciae</i>	Carm.7.11	
<i>Ad felicem socium</i>	Carm.7.13	
<i>Incipit uersus ad uirginem</i>	Carm.8.4	
<i>Uersus generaliter omnibus</i>	Carm.8.1	
<i>Item incipiunt uersus</i>	Carm.App.2	
<i>Item uersus ad artachin</i>	Carm.App.3	Explicit uersus
<i>Item incipiunt uersus</i>	Carm.2.12	Explicit
<i>Item aliud ad lupum ducem</i>	Carm.7.9	Explicit
<i>Uersus ad flauum</i>	Carm.7.18	Explicit uersus
<i>Uersus ad sigimundo</i>	Carm.App.4	Explicit
<i>Item uersus ad sigimundo</i>	Carm.7.20	Explicit
<i>Epitaphium orienti</i>	Carm.4.24.1-2	
(no title)	Described in a later hand as the Lactantius' <i>Phoenix</i>	
<i>De childeberto rege</i>	Carm.App.5	
<i>De brunchilde regina</i>	Carm.App.6	
<i>Item aliud ad agiulfum</i>	Carm.App.7	
<i>Item aliud de Radegunde</i>	Carm.8.5	
<i>Item aliud ad radegundem de missis floribus</i>	Carm.8.8	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.8.9	
<i>Incipiunt uersus epitaphium domni uictoriani primi abbatis de monasterio asan in spania</i>	Carm.4.11	
<i>Item uersus in ecclesia noua parisus</i>	Carm.2.10	
<i>Item epitaphium super sepulcra episcoporum donorum ruricorum lemovecas</i>	Carm.4.5	Explicit item aliud
(no title)	Carm.4.6 (minus line 20)	Explicit uersus
<i>Item uersus epitaphium nectarii</i>	Carm.App.8	Explicit uersus
<i>Item aliud incipiunt uersus pro pomis directis</i>	Carm.App.9	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.3.30.1-20 jointed to Carm.11.20.6-8	

<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.11.21	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.11.22	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.11.22a	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.11.23 joined to Carm.11.23a	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.11.24	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.11.25	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.1.7	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.11.26	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.10	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.11	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.12	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.13	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.14	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.15	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.16	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.17	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.18	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.19	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.20	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.21	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.22	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.23	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.24	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.25	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.26	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.27	
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.28	Explicit
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.29	Explicit
<i>Item aliud</i>	Carm.App.30	Explicit

Codicological Note: Paris Lat. 13048 combines two partial collections of Fortunatus' poetry, made perhaps a century apart. The manuscript was discovered and published by Guérard in 1831 and its contents first edited by Leo.¹ The first section of the manuscript dates from the ninth century, and contains *De Virginitate*, lines 93-178, followed by three notes, the first of which indicates that the collection contained XI books and was made for Gregory of Tours. The next section of the manuscript, written at Corbie during the eighth or ninth century, opens with a copy of Proba's *Cento*. Underneath the heading INCIPT OPUS FORTUNATI PRESBITERI is the first line of the poem Reydellet and Leo call *De excidio Thuringiae*, although it is without a title in this manuscript. Only *Carm.App.3*,

¹ Reydellet I, p. lxxxvi.

which is the seventh poem in the manuscript matches the editorial title ('item versus ad Artachin'). The collection also includes an untitled poem not by Fortunatus, which a later hand has identified as the Phoenix of Lactantius.

Table 2: Trithemius' list of the works of Venantius Fortunatus

(starred works have incipits)

Trithemius' Title	Poem or <i>Vita</i> in modern edition
<i>Excidium belli Thuringorum</i> *	Carm.App.1
<i>Ad Iouinum de Radegonde</i> *	Carm.VII.1
<i>Ad Iustinum iuniorem</i> *	Carm.App.2
<i>Ad Sophiam Augustam</i> * ²	Carm.App.2.51
<i>In persona Radegundis</i> *	Carm.App.3
<i>In laudem Martini episcopus</i> *	Carm.5.2
<i>De Leontio venerabile episcopo</i> *	Carm.1.15
<i>De eiusdem laudibus</i> *	Carm.1.16
<i>Hymnorum Septuagint septum</i> *	? (gives the same incipit as above)
<i>De miraculis Sancti Martini</i>	VSM
<i>vitam sancti hilari pictavensis</i>	<i>Vita Hiliari</i>
<i>ad oporicum vitae suae</i> ³	Carm.10.9
<i>vitam sancti maurilii episcopi</i>	<i>Vita Beati Maurilii</i>
<i>Epistolar ad diuersos</i>	Book 5?
<i>Carminum ad amicos</i>	Book 7?
<i>Rex reigionis apex &c. aliquoque; multa composuit quae cum breuia sunt sub librorum nomine nolui consignare</i>	Book 6 and other poems?
<i>Plura enim Epitaphia & uersus breuis scripsit</i>	Book 4 and other poems?

² Brower (1603), 20 (48 pdf) Brower noted that the poem to Empress Sophia mentioned by Trithemius does not exist in the ancient books of poetry which he had examined.

³ Nisard identified this as a corruption of the title *Hodoporicon*, first used by Sigibert of Gemblours in *De script. Eccl.*, Ch. 45.

Table 3: A Comparison of the Contents of Paris Lat 13048 and Trithemius' List of Fortunatus' Works

(poems in common are in bold)

Contents of Paris Lat 1380	Trithemius' list of Fortunatus' Works
Carm.8.3.93-178	Carm.App.1
Proba's <i>Cento</i>	Carm.7.1
Carm.App.1	Carm.App.2
Carm.7.11	Carm.App.2.51-100
Carm.7.13	Carm.App.3
Carm.8.4	Carm.5.2
Carm.8.1	Carm.1.15
Carm.App.2	Carm.1.16
Carm.App.3	? (gives the same incipit as above)
Carm.2.12	VSM
Carm.7.9	<i>Vita Hiliari</i>
Carm.7.18	Carm.10.9
Carm.App.4	<i>Vita Beati Maurilii</i>
Carm.7.20	Book 5?
Carm.4.24.1-2	Book 7?
Described in a later hand as the Lactantius' <i>Phoenix</i>	Book 6 and other poems?
Carm.App.5	Book 4 and other poems?
Carm.App.6	
Carm.App.7	
Carm.8.5	
Carm.8.8	
Carm.8.9	
Carm.4.11	
Carm.2.10	
Carm.4.5	
Carm.4.6 (minus line 20)	
Carm.App.8	
Carm.App.9	
Carm.3.30.1-20 jointed to Carm.11.20.6-8	
Carm.11.21	
Carm.11.22	
Carm.11.22a	
Carm.11.23 jointed to Carm.11.23a	
Carm.11.24	
Carm.11.25	
Carm.1.7	
Carm.11.26	
Carm.App.10	
Carm.App.11	

Carm.App.12	
Carm.App.13	
Carm.App.14	
Carm.App.15	
Carm.App.16	
Carm.App.17	
Carm.App.18	
Carm.App.19	
Carm.App.20	
Carm.App.21	
Carm.App.22	
Carm.App.23	
Carm.App.24	
Carm.App.25	
Carm.App.26	
Carm.App.27	
Carm.App.28	
Carm.App.29	
Carm.App.30	

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