

Missions on the Northern and Eastern Frontiers, c. 700–1100

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Indeed they were mostly monks (*monachi*) who came to preach.¹

To Bede (d. 735), penning his account of the conversion of the peoples inhabiting the British Isles, the involvement of monks and *monasteria* in mission and in pastoral activity was nothing unusual. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede described how Irish monks arrived on Britain's northern shores to proclaim the word of God, while monks from Rome preached in the south. Churches were built and kings granted land to religious men and women to establish monasteries. From the perspective of the established forms of monastic life of the later Middle Ages, the involvement of ascetics in the mission may seem paradoxical. Baptism, confirmation, and other sacraments pertaining to the cure of souls are after all officially the domain of secular priests; monks and nuns should serve God through prayer and the divine office, preferably in the tranquility of solitude, their movements limited by the obligation of stability. In practice, however, the ascetic training of fasting, continence, and obedience turned out to be a good grounding for the tasks of a preacher in foreign lands. To some, moreover, the possibility of shedding one's blood for God, the so-called "red martyrdom," was a desirable alternative to the spiritual rewards of monastic life and its white martyrdom, which was gained through asceticism and a renunciation of everything one loved.²

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¹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* III.3, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 221.

² Clare Stancliffe, "Red, White and Blue Martyrdom," in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick, and David N. Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), 21–46.

Monks, nuns, and their communities played a key role in the spread of Christianity in northern and eastern Europe—an enormous, culturally and geographically diverse area, stretching from the Frisian coast up to Denmark and the fjords of Scandinavia, and down the Danubian plain. These regions bordered on kingdoms and empires that had long been Christian: the Frankish realm (later the German kingdom) and Byzantium—successors to the old Roman Empire where Christianity had become the predominant religion in the fourth and fifth centuries. The focus of this chapter is on Frisia and Saxony in the eighth and ninth centuries, while the mission to the Scandinavians and Hungarians in the tenth and eleventh centuries is used as material for comparison. In the region between the North Sea and the Weser, aristocratic and royal families initiated and supported the foundation of monasteries and their involvement in the establishment of Christianity, because religious, political, and social interests intersected here. In Scandinavia, however, monasteries appeared late, although there is evidence of individual monks preaching and of an interest in the Scandinavian mission among English, Irish, French, and German monasteries. In Hungary, Christianization seems initially to have been a royal affair, with the king investing profoundly in monastic foundations from the start, soon followed by aristocratic families who imitated his example.³ There was never one model of missionary monasticism but many, depending on the religious men and women involved and especially the sociopolitical context.

The slow advance of Christianity as the religious norm for large parts of Europe included the initial conversion of “pagans,” as well as the process of continuously instructing and correcting communities that were already Christian. Currently, historians tend to distinguish between these two processes, defining the first as mission and the second as Christianization or evangelization. It is important to remember, however, that early medieval authors did not make this sharp division and that missionary activity and the reform of erroneous behavior of Christians were in fact closely linked.⁴ Monks and nuns, moreover, played a role in all phases.

The diffusion of Christianity did not rest solely on the efforts of missionaries and their foundations and the support of kings and nobility. Trade played a very important role, and so did cultural proximity. Long before missionaries set foot in Denmark and Sweden, the people of Scandinavia had become

³ See also the article by Jamroziak in volume II.

⁴ Ian N. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe 400–1050* (Harlow, 2001), 3.

acquainted with their religion through contacts with Christian merchants in emporia abroad and at home. In his description of the conversion of the Angles, the Saxons, and the Picts, Bede singled out the contribution of Rome and the Irish, whom he admired greatly. He ignored the influence of the nearby communities of Christian Britons, whose Christianity went back to the days of the Roman Empire, and the presence of a Frankish princess and her bishop at the court of Kent, just preceding the arrival of Roman monks in the kingdom of her husband.⁵ It was these often longstanding contacts with Christians and an awareness of their beliefs and habits, however, that paved the way for the missionaries, whether they were monks or clerics.

Willibrord and Boniface's Foundations

Regarding the involvement of monasteries in the spread of Christianity in Frisia and Saxony, we are best informed about the foundations of two Anglo-Saxon monks, Willibrord (d. 739) and Boniface (d. 754). While hagiographical sources promoted these two monks as "apostles" of the Frisians and the Germans respectively, pioneers of the mission, Willibrord and Boniface had in fact been preceded by other missionaries from the British Isles and Francia.⁶ In addition, they did not work on their own but collaborated with Austrasian aristocratic families who wished to convert and integrate the northern territories in the Frankish realm, and therefore willingly acted as patrons and protectors of this monastic "movement." Among them, the family of the Pippinids, better known as the Carolingians, was most prominent, even before they claimed the title of king of the Franks. Together, these Christian noble families and monastic leaders founded several religious communities.⁷

Boniface, who only worked for a few years in Frisia, would actually spend most of his career in Hesse, Thuringia, and Bavaria, regions in which Christianity had long been present, even if in forms and variations that would not always meet the monk's approval. The foundations of Willibrord and Boniface, however, provide a good starting point for discussing the role of monasteries in the progress of Christianity, as they are relatively well attested

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11; Ian N. Wood, "Some Historical Re-Identifications and the Christianization of Kent," in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, ed. Guyda Armstrong and Ian N. Wood (Turnhout, 2000), 31–4.

⁶ For linguistic evidence of Frankish involvement in establishing Christianity east of the Rhine, see Dennis H. Green, *Language and History in the Early Germanic World* (Cambridge, 1998). See also Wood, *Missionary Life*, 11–12.

⁷ Kay van Vliet, *In Kringen van Kanunniken. Munsters en Kapittels in het Bisdom Utrecht 695–1227* (Zutphen, 2002), 39–42, 72–3, and 90.

in the historical sources. With the diverse situations of their foundations—some were located near regions where pagans lived, while other communities were farther removed from the mission area—they also highlight the various facets of this religious transformation and the ways in which monasteries could contribute to it.

Charters, letters, foundation histories, and biographies allow us a glimpse of what life in these monastic cells may have looked like in the early days. Members led a regular life, observing what was probably a mixture of prescriptions from the *Rule of St. Benedict (RB)*, the teachings of the Irish monk Columbanus, and the examples set by the Apostles and the first Christian communities as they were recorded in the books of the New Testament.⁸ Archaeologically little is known of their foundations, with no standing buildings that can be dated to the period in which the missionaries were active. Extant material remains do, however, reveal the importance of food production, proper water supply, and a kind of demarcation. At Susteren, one of Willibrord's foundations, archaeologists discovered a well, remnants of a rectangular stone building, a small round building, something that seems to have been a baptismal font, and fragments of an earth wall or ditch that enclosed the settlement. The stone buildings date to the ninth century, but underneath there is evidence of a timber-framed construction.⁹ In Elst, another of Willibrord's foundations, the monks used an abandoned Gallo-Roman temple as a quarry to build the foundation of their first church, a simple hall church with rectangular choir.¹⁰ Fulda, one of Boniface's foundations in Hesse, was built near water and trade routes. The monks probably initially used the ruins of a Frankish villa, while clearing the site and erecting a church in stone.¹¹ These were no temporary accommodations; the residents of these cells intended to stay.¹²

Willibrord's male communities were populated by clerics and "wandering monks" (*monachi peregrini* or *fratres peregrini*), who often came from abroad

⁸ Josef Semmler, "Instituta sancti Bonifatii: Fulda im Widerstreit der Observanzen," in *Kloster Fulda in der Welt der Karolinger und Ottonen. Kultur—Politik—Wirtschaft*, ed. Gangolf Schrimpf (Fulda, 1996), 79–103.

⁹ Henk Stoepker, "Middeleeuws klooster op het Salvatorplein, Susteren," *Publications de la Société historique et archéologique dans le Limbourg* 129 (1993): 317–21; Henk Stoepker, "Susteren and Brunssum: Recent Excavations of a Medieval Monastery and a Church in Limburg (The Netherlands)," in *Religion and Belief in Medieval Europe*, ed. Guy de Boe and Frans Verhaeghe (Zellik, 1997), 89–92.

¹⁰ Julianus E. A. T. Bogaers, *De Gallo-Romeinse tempels te Elst in de Over-Betuwe* (The Hague, 1956), 40–60 and 195–202.

¹¹ Janneke Raaijmakers, *The Making of the Monastery of Fulda, c.744–c.900* (Cambridge, 2012), 28–9, 43; and also the article by Devroey in this volume.

¹² Regarding the archaeological remains of the early monasteries elsewhere in Europe, see the articles by Brooks Hedstrom and Dey, and Bully and Destefanis in this volume.

and combined an ascetic way of life with an active role in society as preachers of Christianity. Boniface also initially recruited helpers from abroad, mostly from his native region, Wessex. These foreigners were later joined by recruits from the neighboring areas.¹³ Local Christian families followed the example of the Frankish elite and offered their children as oblates. They desired religious training for some of their children and possibly wished also to safeguard their position or to move up in a changing order, in which Christianity became the predominant religion and one with the Frankish king at its head.¹⁴ The recruitment of locals, however, was a time-consuming process that demanded good contacts and the willingness among the population to invest in this Christian movement. A monk of Werden later noted the difficulties that Liudger (d. 809), continuing the work of Boniface and Willibrord, encountered in his attempts to recruit new members for his recent foundation in Westphalia: “The faith of the Saxons and Frisians was undeveloped and he could not persuade anyone to abandon the secular way of life and lead the life of a monk.”¹⁵

Even at Fulda, a community so important to the establishment of an ecclesiastical infrastructure in Saxony in the 770s, the monks had difficulty tying Saxon families to their community. Apart from an occasional conversion (the Saxon Count Hessi spent his last days in Fulda and died there), the involvement of Fulda in mission did not immediately result in a structural increase in Saxon recruits and titles to Saxon lands. This was related to the lack of success of missionaries in attracting new converts, but also to the political situation. As long as the area remained subject to Frankish military intervention, Fulda was not able to gain a firm foothold in Saxony and to establish long-lasting relations with the local nobility.¹⁶

An effective method for increasing the number of missionaries from the local population was to buy captives. We know that the missionary Anskar (d. 865), working in Denmark, bought Danish and Slav boys and purchased their freedom “so that he might train them for God’s service.”¹⁷ The advantage of these children was that they knew the language and customs of the regions

¹³ Stefan Schipperges, *Bonifatius ac socii eius. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung des Winfrid-Bonifatius und seines Umfeldes* (Mainz, 1996), 190–2.

¹⁴ Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel’s Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden, New York and Cologne, 1996), esp. chapters 6 and 8.

¹⁵ *Fundatio monasterii Werthinensis*, in *Die Münsterischen Chroniken des Mittelalters*, ed. Julius Ficker, (Münster, 1851), 353.

¹⁶ Eckhard Freise, “Studien zum Einzugsbereich der Klostersgemeinschaft von Fulda,” in *Die Klostersgemeinschaft von Fulda im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. Karl Schmid *et al.*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1978), 2:1164–77.

¹⁷ Rimbart, *Vita Anskari* 15, MGH SRG 55, 36–7.

that Anskar hoped to convert. Some of them stayed with him in Hamburg, while he sent others to his monastery in Flanders.¹⁸ Bishop Amandus, who in the seventh century preached on the Scheldt, bought captives and sent them to monasteries, presumably for religious training, among whom were many future bishops and abbots, as the *Life of Amandus* proudly recounted.¹⁹ It is not clear, however, whether Willibrord and Boniface employed the same tactic.

The children entrusted to Willibrord and Boniface were trained with the view to preparing them to carry on the work of their teachers. As places of constant mutual correction and enforcement of discipline, monasteries were believed to train future preachers well for their job, especially when they had entered the monastery at a young age. They learned how to read and write Latin, the language of the Church, by singing psalms and studying Christian literature, above all Scripture. Senior monks constantly corrected their behavior in accordance with the Christian values and customs that they hoped these young recruits would pass on to their future audiences. For their formation, they had easy access to texts about holy men and women, as well as the living example of their teachers.²⁰

In addition to training future preachers and model Christians, these monastic foundations produced and kept the manuscripts that were essential to missionary work. But not all religious communities were immediately equipped for such an undertaking. Many of the books used by Willibrord and Boniface came from their homelands. Famously Boniface asked an Anglo-Saxon abbess for a copy of the Epistles of Peter in letters of gold “to impress honor and reverence for the Sacred Scriptures visibly upon the carnally minded to whom I preach.”²¹ For such a showpiece, Boniface turned to the well-established scriptoria of southern England. Apparently his own communities were not (yet) capable of supplying such luxury manuscripts; when he wrote to Abbess Eadburga in 735, Amöneburg, Ohrdurf, and Fritzlar were still small communities that were mostly aimed at training preachers and instructing the local population in proper Christian behavior.²²

Not all of the manuscripts that these preachers used, however, were imported. Some of their monastic foundations produced their own

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 8 and 15, 30 and 36–7.

¹⁹ *Vita S. Amandi* 9 and 13, MGH SS RM 5, 435 and 438.

²⁰ Catherine Cubitt, “Monastic Memory and Identity in Early Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrell (London and New York, 2000), 253–76.

²¹ Boniface, *The Letters of Saint Boniface* 35, trans. Ephraim Emerton and with a new introduction and bibliography by Thomas F. X. Noble (New York, 2000), 43.

²² Semmler, “*Instituta sancti Bonifatii*,” 79–103.

manuscripts. Utrecht and Fulda had scriptoria in their early days, as did Liudger's foundations in Werden and Münster. Many of the manuscripts written in these monasteries were books for everyday use, produced particularly to aid instruction in the Christian faith, rather than showpieces in golden letters. Examples are the baptismal vow and the *Short List of Superstitious and Pagan Practices*, which records religious practices of dubious character. These eighth-century texts, written in both Latin and the vernacular (Old Dutch or Old Saxon), were transmitted as part of a missionary manual. They were composed to aid local mission, providing the user with the formula for the ritual of baptism and a checklist of religious practices that were not considered proper Christian behavior.²³

The manuscripts produced in Liudger's monasteries contain marginal notations in various languages; both the notations and the hands in which they were written betray a mixture of descent. Among the manuscripts is a glossary with translations of Latin words into Old English or an Old High German dialect, which was probably used by monks who wished to deepen their knowledge of Latin to be able to study Scripture.²⁴ The codices thus also show the mixture of geographical origins of Liudger's collaborators.

Willibrord and Boniface made sure that they could rely on a number of religious communities, some of which were right in the middle of the region where they worked, offering direct access to accommodation and schools, while others were further removed from the "frontline." A case in point is Willibrord's network of communities, which was spread over the dioceses of Trier, Tongeren/Maastricht, and Cologne. As long as the political situation north of the Rhine was stable, Willibrord worked in Utrecht. When the situation grew more tense—for example in 714 when the Frisian leader Radbod and his troops expelled the Franks from Utrecht—Willibrord and his companions moved either to Susteren (granted by Pippin II and his wife to offer the refugees shelter) or to Willibrord's monastery in Echternach, which was even further south.²⁵

²³ Marco Mostert, "Communicating the Faith: The Circle of Boniface, Germanic Vernaculars, and Frisian and Saxon Converts," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 70 (2013): 87–130; Michael Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg. Zur politischen Dimension eines Rechtsbegriffs* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 435–599.

²⁴ Christoph Stiegemann and Matthias Wemhoff, eds., 799. *Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit. Karl der Große und Papst Leo III.* In Paderborn. *Beiträge zum Katalog der Ausstellung*, 2 vols. (Mainz, 1999), 2:483–5 and 490–1.

²⁵ Camille Wampach, ed., *Geschichte der Grundherrschaft Echternach im Frühmittelalter. Untersuchungen über die Person des Gründers, über die Kloster- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte auf Grund des Liber aureus Epternacensis (698–1222)* (Luxemburg, 1930), 1.2, no. 24, 57–60.

The creation of these kinds of networks, which as a whole supported mission but whose individual *cellae* could have different tasks, is also visible elsewhere. When Anskar was appointed bishop of the new diocese of Hamburg in 831, the Frankish emperor granted him the monastery of Turholt in Flanders “as a possible place of retreat.”²⁶ Turholt, identified by historians as either Turnhout or Torhout, was a considerable distance from Saxony and Denmark where Anskar preached, but it was close to important ports on the Flemish coast (this holds true for both Turnhout and Torhout) and therefore relatively easily reached by boat. Besides being a place of retreat, Turholt provided Anskar and his collaborators with food and other necessities. So when Anskar lost Turholt as a result of the re-division of the empire after the death of Louis the Pious (r. 814–40), he was no longer able to support the group of monks who had come to help him in his mission. Many of them returned to their home monastery.²⁷

Women did not work on the frontline of mission, but they did play an important role in the spread of Christianity.²⁸ The female houses founded by Boniface as part of his network all lay in the Main area, near Mainz and Würzburg, which had been subject to Frankish overlordship since the sixth century. Boniface entrusted the supervision of these communities to religious women from his homeland, who had followed him to the Continent. The women’s convents under Willibrord’s care were led by the daughters of powerful local aristocratic families, who had often also initiated the foundation of these monasteries.²⁹ Although women could not be priests, they could provide the local population with a living example of exemplary Christian behavior and inspire them to conversion by winning their admiration. In addition, women’s monasteries offered a safe haven for widows and a place to educate the daughters of local aristocrats. An eleventh-century *Life of Boniface* claims that Boniface called in women to nurture (*nurtrire*) and educate (*imbuere*) the clerics and sons of noble families.³⁰ It is unclear whether the nuns indeed taught boys and men. It does seem that the nuns of Willibrord’s

²⁶ Rimbart, *Vita Anskari* 12, 34; Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* I.18, MGH SRG 2, 24–6.

²⁷ Rimbart, *Vita Anskari* 21, 46–7.

²⁸ Yitzhak Hen, “*Milites Christi utriusque sexus*: Gender and the Politics of Conversion in the Circle of Boniface,” *Revue bénédictine* 109 (1999): 17–31; Gisela Muschiol, “Königshof, Kloster und Mission: die Welt der Lioba und ihre geistlichen Schwestern,” in *Bonifatius. Apostel der Deutschen. Mission und Christianisierung vom 8. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Franz Felten (Stuttgart, 2004), 99–114; Barbara Yorke, “The Bonifacian Mission and the Female Religious in Wessex,” *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998): 145–72.

²⁹ Van Vliet, *In Kringen van Kanunniken*, 41–2, 76–7, and 89–94.

³⁰ *Quarta Vita Bonifatii*, MGH SRG 57, 95.

foundation in Pfalzel taught boys, at least occasionally. It was here that Boniface met Gregory, the grandson of the abess, whose training had probably been the responsibility of the nuns.³¹ And we do know that Boniface's female collaborators instructed local girls.³²

These female communities were thus not strictly cut off from local society, as later hagiographers, influenced by monastic regulations, sometimes wish us to believe. One of Boniface's associates was Leoba (d. 782), a relative and nun from Wessex, who had come to the Continent in the 730s. Her biographer, writing some hundred years later, was clearly struggling to fit this learned woman, who had traveled far and who, according to heavenly visions, had been destined to preach (*verba praedicationis*), within the confines of recent monastic reforms that tied monks and nuns strictly to the cloister. He described Leoba as a charismatic intermediary, to whom the local population could turn for help in times of distress, and one who was a welcome guest at the royal court, which she nevertheless "despised like poison."³³

Male and female communities played an equally important role as new, powerful focal points of family identity and commemoration for local aristocrats.³⁴ In this respect as well, they contributed to Christianity's firm rooting in regions at the Christian frontier, and also aided their further integration in the Frankish realm. The Saxon Count Hessi, mentioned above, was one of the first Saxon nobles who submitted himself to Charlemagne. He was also one of the first monks of Saxon origin in Fulda, the monastery where he retired after a violent career, and where he died in 804. His daughter did not enter an existing monastery, but founded the convents of Karsbach and Wendhausen on family land, in Franconia and Saxony, and made her own daughter abess of one of these female houses.³⁵ These next generations of Christian Saxons associated themselves with the imperial elite by following the example of the Frankish ruler, their new lord, and his magnates: they founded their own monasteries, making their own sons and daughters their abbots and abbesses and demanding their prayers for the salvation of their souls. Their bodies were buried in the abbey church or in the monastery's cemetery, protected by the holy power of the relics, which they had brought from Francia and Rome in order to insert themselves into a

³¹ Liudger, *Vita Gregorii Abbatis Traiectensis*, MGH SS 15, 63–79.

³² Boniface, *Epistolae* 96, MGH Ep. sel. 1, 216–17.

³³ Rudolf, *Vita Leobae*, MGH SS 15, 118–31.

³⁴ See also the article by Isabelle Rosé in this volume and the article by Jonathan R. Lyon in volume II.

³⁵ Frederick S. Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess in Ninth-Century Saxony: The Lives of Liutbirga of Wendhausen and Hathumoda of Gandersheim* (Washington, DC, 2009), 29–31.

powerful, supra-regional network of holy patronage and intercession.³⁶ The monasteries kept their memory alive and rewrote the histories of these Saxon families, now placed within a Christian framework.

The religious communities founded by Willibrord, Boniface, and their successors were the nodes in a network set up to strengthen and preserve their work. Their most important tasks were the training of local clergy, the offering of exemplary models of Christian life to inspire the remodeling of life according to Christian standards, and the production and provision of food and other necessities such as manuscripts. Monasteries also fulfilled these tasks in other regions along the Christian frontier. Most importantly, in the long run, they provided the starting point for an enduring ecclesiastical infrastructure. What were once small monastic cells developed into seats of dioceses, large royal abbeys, and communities of canons, with their own networks of churches and *cellae*. Some of these communities continued to support the spread of the Christian faith at the frontier of *Christianitas*. Echternach, for example, shifted its attention from Frisia to Saxony and supported Bishop Willehad in his missionary work in the region of the Weser estuary.³⁷

Monasteries like Fulda, where monks specialized in prayer and mass, increasingly monopolized intercession with the sacred and commemoration of the dead on behalf of local families east of the Rhine, absorbing many small family monasteries and proprietary churches into their web of prayer.³⁸ By gaining control over such abbeys—for example through the granting of special privileges and titles to land—the Carolingian king aimed to control the local elite and to prevent the monasteries from becoming focal points of regional power and independence.³⁹ Many of Boniface's foundations became royal abbeys in the 770s and early 780s; they were situated in the northeastern periphery that Charlemagne wanted to integrate further into his kingdom, and close to the Saxon frontier that was the target of his military expeditions.⁴⁰

³⁶ Hedwig Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen im 9. Jahrhundert. Über Kommunikation, Mobilität und Öffentlichkeit im Frühmittelalter* (Stuttgart, 2002).

³⁷ Anskar, *Vita Willehadi*, MGH SS 2, 382.

³⁸ See the article by Blennemann in this volume.

³⁹ Matthew Innes, "People, Places and Power in Carolingian Society," in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Mayke de Jong, Frans Theuvs, and Carine van Rhijn (Leiden, Boston, MA, and Cologne, 2001), 412–19.

⁴⁰ Josef Semmler, "Karl der Grosse und das fränkische Mönchtum," in *Karl der Grosse. Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, vol. 2: *Das geistige Leben*, ed. Bernard Bischoff (Düsseldorf, 1965), 271; Ulrich Hussong, "Studien zur Geschichte der Reichsabtei Fulda bis zur Jahrtausendwende," *Archiv für Diplomatik* 31 (1985): 104–8, with further references.

At the same time, local aristocrats tied themselves to these royal abbeys to gain access to spiritual as well as political patronage.

It is difficult to establish whether Fulda—with all its *cellae* and churches, some of which had housed precious relics of Roman martyrs since the 830s—was involved in local pastoral care. While Abbot Ratgar (r. 802–17) had replaced the monks living in the dependencies with lay people, the churches and land of Fulda seem in general in the eighth and ninth centuries to have been administered and maintained by Fulda monks. There is evidence that at least certain hours of the divine office and masses celebrated in the *cellae*'s churches were open to the public, and that priest-monks heard the confessions of locals in spiritual need.⁴¹

Contrasting Models of Mission: Scandinavia and Hungary

The first known mission to Scandinavia was led by Archbishop Ebbo of Reims (d. 851) in 823. He was followed soon by Anskar, the missionary monk from Corbie, who then became bishop of Hamburg, as mentioned above. Because of a lack of sources, the achievements of both Ebbo and Anskar in Denmark and Sweden are difficult to determine, as is the degree of involvement of monasteries in their strategies to establish Christian life in these regions.⁴² The *Life of Anskar* (869–76), our primary source for the contribution of both men to the Scandinavian mission, describes Anskar and his collaborators working mainly from the monastery of Hamburg and, after its destruction in 845, from the monastery of Rameslo, founded by a devout lady to accommodate the refugees from Hamburg who had managed to escape the Viking attack. Further north, in Denmark and Sweden, kings allowed churches to be built and provided each ministering priest with a house, but did not initiate the foundation of monasteries.⁴³

Anskar's mission suffered great hardships: besides the Viking attacks on Hamburg and Birka, a civil war in 854 brought to power a new leader with his own entourage and an end to many of the contacts that Anskar had established at the royal court. What happened after the death of Anskar (d. 865) and his successor Rimbart (d. 888) is unclear. The first reported success

⁴¹ Rudolf of Fulda, *Miracula sanctorum in Fuldenses ecclesias translatorum*, MGH SS 15, 328–41; Raaijmakers, *Making of the Monastery of Fulda*, 187–8 and 223.

⁴² Eric Knibbs, *Anskar, Rimbart and the Forged Foundations of Hamburg-Bremen* (Farnham, 2011).

⁴³ Rimbart, *Vita Anskari* 16, 24, and 28, 37–8, 52–3, and 59; Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis* I.23, 29–30.

of Christianity is the conversion of the Danish ruler Harold Bluetooth (r. c. 958–986) around 960 by the priest Poppo, presumably an associate of the archbishop of Cologne.⁴⁴ Adam of Bremen (d. 1081/5) skipped this event in his *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, written in 1066–7 as a means of promoting his own church.⁴⁵ Instead he asserted that Unni, archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen (918–36), had done all the hard work, preparing Harald's conversion.⁴⁶

Historical evidence for the spread of Christianity in Scandinavia is extremely problematic and scanty.⁴⁷ Anskar's mission seems to have been the best recorded, but the least successful. Among the sources are sagas, transmitted orally for generations before they were written down from the thirteenth century onwards. These sagas focus on the heroic actions of the rulers, who used Christianity to consolidate their power. In these stories, mission was the prerogative of kings, who were assisted by an occasional bishop or priest, often brought in from abroad. According to Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241), the Norwegian ruler Hákon, for example, invited a bishop and priests from England to boost the spread of Christianity in his kingdom.⁴⁸ Clerics preaching Christ's message often found shelter in the royal household or in the homes of the members of the elite.⁴⁹

Folk tales only occasionally recall the involvement of monks, such as the story told about the Irish monks, the "holy men of Selja," who hid in a cave and were martyred.⁵⁰ Besides some Irish ascetics, we know that Anglo-Saxon monks had been active as missionaries in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden.⁵¹ There is, however, hardly any evidence, either written or archaeological, that

⁴⁴ Michael H. Gelting, "Poppo's Ordeal: Courtier Bishops and the Success of Christianization at the Turn of the First Millennium," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 6 (2010): 101–33.

⁴⁵ Sigebert of Gembloux, *Chronographia a. 966*, MGH SS 6, 351; Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis* II.25, 83–4.

⁴⁶ Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, I.59 and II. 3, 57–8 and 62–4.

⁴⁷ Haki Antonsson, "The Conversion and Christianization of Scandinavia: A Critical Review of Recent Scholarly Writings," in *Conversion and Identity in the Viking Age*, ed. Ildar Garipzanov (Turnhout, 2014), 49–73; Lesley J. Abrams, "The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia," *Anglo-Saxon England* 24 (1995): 213–49; Peter Sawyer, "The Process of Scandinavian Christianization in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," in *The Christianization of Scandinavia: Report of a Symposium Held at Kungälv, Sweden 4–9 August 1985*, ed. Birgit Sawyer, Peter Sawyer, and Ian N. Wood (Alingsås, 1987), 68–87.

⁴⁸ Abrams, "Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia," 217–18. See also Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis* II.37 and IV.34, 98 and 268.

⁴⁹ Lesley J. Abrams, "Eleventh-Century Missions and the Early Stages of Ecclesiastical Organisation in Scandinavia," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 17 (1994): 21–40.

⁵⁰ Tore Nyberg, *Monasticism in North-Western Europe, 800–1200* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2000), 69; Barbara Crawford, "Holy Places in the British Isles: Some Parallels to Selja," in *Two Studies in the Middle Ages*, ed. Magnus Rindal (Oslo, 1996), 7–29.

⁵¹ Abrams, "Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia," 213–49.

they established religious communities like the foundations of Willibrord and Boniface. According to modern scholarship, it took roughly a hundred years from the conversion of the first Scandinavians to Christianity before the first monasteries appeared in Scandinavia.⁵² To set up an ecclesiastical structure, kings relied on bishops, not monasteries. Until the establishment of fixed sees in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries (at the earliest), bishops in Scandinavia apparently traveled around or were based at the royal court. The first bishoprics were founded in the area under the king's direct control, and it was the king himself who appointed the bishops.

When monasticism finally gained ground, some monasteries first recruited monks from abroad, particularly from England.⁵³ The monastic cathedral chapter that the Danish king Erik Eiegod founded in Odense around 1095 to promote the cult of his brother Cnut (murdered there in 1086) recruited monks from Evesham, an English community that had enjoyed strong ties to the Danish royal family since the early eleventh century.⁵⁴ The first Cistercian monasteries in Norway, founded in the 1140s, were daughter foundations of Fountains Abbey and Kirkstead Abbey, Yorkshire. Monks from Clairvaux founded Sweden first's Cistercian house around 1142, and many of Denmark's Cistercian monasteries were established with the help of French or English monks.⁵⁵ Most monasteries were small initially and often the identity of the founder is uncertain. Kings seem to have been involved, as well as bishops and lay magnates, such as Dag Eilivsson, who in the first half of the twelfth century founded the Gimsøy nunnery in eastern Norway and made his daughter its abbess.⁵⁶

How can we explain the rather late establishment of monastic life in Scandinavia? Josef Semmler has suggested that the monastic reforms of Louis the Pious and Benedict of Aniane (d. 821) in the 820s had repercussions for the involvement of monasteries in the mission. According to him, the reforms, which considered preaching and pastoral care the tasks of secular

⁵² Nora Berend, ed. *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900–1200* (Cambridge, 2007), 25–6; Michael H. Gelting, "The Kingdom of Denmark," in *ibid.*, 96; Abrams, "Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia," 226, n. 65, and 244–9.

⁵³ Nyberg, *Monasticism in North-Western Europe*, 76; Abrams, "Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia," 213–49.

⁵⁴ Peter King, "The Cathedral Priory of Odense in the Middle Ages," *Sagabook of the Viking Society* 16 (1962–5): 192–214; John Bergsagel, "Songs for St. Knud the King," *Musik & Forskning* 6 (1980): 152–66.

⁵⁵ James French, *The Cistercians in Scandinavia* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1992), 27–98.

⁵⁶ Sverre Bagge and Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide, "The Kingdom of Norway," in Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy*, 151–3.

priests, forced monasteries to reevaluate their objectives, sometimes resulting in severe crises. As a consequence, monasteries in the Frankish realm became reluctant to offer their assistance in the missions to pagan neighbors.⁵⁷ So when in 826 Louis the Pious called together his magnates to discuss the conversion of the Danes, he was met by a wall of silence; nobody wished to participate.⁵⁸ In the end, the abbot of Corbie pushed forward the monk Anskar to take on the imperial assignment.

The author of the *Life of Anskar*, which recounts the meeting, could well have brought out the silence of the participants to highlight Anskar's courage and the difficulty of his task. Although Louis's reforms did cause a reorientation of monastic life, the consequences should not be exaggerated. For all the attempts to tie monks and nuns closer to the cloister, monasteries continued to play a role in mission.⁵⁹ The reasons for the relatively late establishment of monastic life in Scandinavia, if the extant sources do not mislead us, must not be sought in Francia, but in Scandinavia itself. Missionary monks never operated in a vacuum; they depended on kings and local nobility for support and for monasticism to take root, and apparently the Scandinavian elite at first favored other forms of religious life and organization. Political crises caused by power struggles between local chieftains in the build-up to the formation of stable kingdoms may well have been a factor that slowed the establishment of monastic life.⁶⁰

That monastic reforms did not necessarily thwart the involvement of monasteries in the mission is confirmed by the example of Hungary, which, like Scandinavia, converted to Christianity in the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Since the end of the ninth century Hungarian-speaking peoples had settled in this region, once a sphere of activity for Frankish, Bavarian, and Byzantine missionaries. They brought with them new belief systems, and it is not clear to what extent local Christian communities that had been established with the aid of the bishops of Salzburg, Passau, and other sees survived the Hungarian conquest.⁶¹ Under the leadership of the Árpád dynasty, Hungary developed from a group of semi-nomadic tribes into a Christian kingdom in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, with Stephen as the first crowned

⁵⁷ Semmler, "Karl der Grosse," 284–7; James Palmer, "Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* and Scandinavian Mission in the Ninth Century," *JEH* 55 (2004): 245–6.

⁵⁸ Rimbert, *Vita Anskari* 7, 27.

⁵⁹ Constable, "Monasteries, Rural Churches and the *cura animarum*," 366–8.

⁶⁰ Abrams, "Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia," 220–1.

⁶¹ Walter Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk im Mitteleuropa, 567–822 n. Chr.* (Munich, 1988), 310–23; Nora Berend, Jozsef Laszlovsy, and Béla Zsolt Skakács, "The Kingdom of Hungary," in Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy*, 319–24.

Christian king of the Hungarians (1000/1). As in Scandinavia, the establishment of royal power and the spread of Christianity went hand in hand. Unlike in Scandinavia, however, monasteries appeared from the beginning.

Monks and ascetics played an important role in the spread of the Christian faith, which seems to have been imposed from above. They first came from abroad, from southern German areas, northern Italy, and possibly Poland, as well as from the Byzantine Empire. Like Willibrord and Boniface, these monks brought books with them. Hungary's monasteries possessed liturgical manuscripts from southern Germany, the Rhineland, Lotharingia, and northern Italy. These reveal the region of origin and the geographical scope of the network of the missionaries working in Hungary, although we need to take into account that quite a few of these manuscripts were imported by the Hungarian king and donated to churches in his realm.⁶² Monks from abroad populated the monasteries founded by the Hungarian rulers and later also by noble families. Aristocrats soon followed the example set by their king to support monastic foundations and use their abbey churches as burial places. The majority of these monasteries adopted the *RB*, but there were also some Greek monastic foundations, which were similarly supported by the king and his magnates.⁶³

As there was no fully developed parish structure in Hungary in the eleventh century, monks preached the Christian faith and undertook the cure of the souls. The Synod of Esztergom in 1033 was the first to prohibit the involvement of monks in preaching, baptism, and the giving of absolution. Subsequent synods repeated these decrees.⁶⁴ These gatherings increasingly sought to regulate the life of monks and canons, just as the councils organized under the auspices of Emperor Louis the Pious had done.

Conclusion

Missionaries needed books, writing cases, liturgical vessels, crosses, portable altars, and relics. They also needed tents for spending the nights while

⁶² Berend, Laszlovsy, and Zsolt Skakács, "Kingdom of Hungary," 334–6.

⁶³ See the article by Jamrozak in volume II.

⁶⁴ János M. Bak *et al.*, eds. and trans., *The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary 1000–1301* (Bakersfield, CA, 1989); Marie-Madeleine de Cevins, "Les paroisses hongroises au Moyen Âge," in *Les Hongrois et l'Europe. Conquête et intégration*, ed. Sándor Csernus and Klára Korompay (Paris, 1999), 341–57; Jerzy Kłoczowski, "Les paroisses en Bohême, en Hongrie et en Pologne (XI–XIII siècles)," in *Le istituzioni ecclesiastiche della "Societas Christiana" dei secoli XI–XII. Diocese, pievi e parrocchie. Atti della sesta settimana internazionale di studio Milano, 1–7 settembre 1974* (Milan, 1977), 187–98.

traveling, as well as more permanent places for shelter in dangerous times, and in which to educate new generations of teachers who could continue and consolidate the work they had started. Many missionaries, having been raised in monasteries themselves, founded monastic communities on the land that they received from royal families and local aristocrats to support their work. These monasteries were situated in areas where Christianity was already present, sometimes at the border of Christian realms, sometimes further inland. From there, missionaries fostered missionary activities to the outside. Their monasteries provided schools to train preachers, as well as libraries and scriptoria in which texts were composed and copied to support mission.

These monastic missionary activities led to the formation of a strong monastic culture within the newly Christianized territories only if the local nobility and kings chose to encourage this form of life, as the cases in Frisia, Saxony, and Hungary show. In Hungary the king took the initiative, while in Frisia and Saxony noble families supported the foundation of monasteries, alongside the Frankish king. From the late eighth century on, the Frankish king increasingly sought to control these monastic foundations, and in particular those in the regions bordering on Saxony, which was the focus of his military expeditions.⁶⁵ In Scandinavia, on the other hand, monasteries were founded relatively late. These differences illustrate that (missionary) monks never worked in a vacuum but always in close collaboration with the laity.

Monasteries formed a vital link in the complex process of Christianization once they attracted the aristocracy. These religious communities tied local families to their patron saint as well as to their secular benefactors. In the end, this was how monasteries contributed to the spread of Christianity: not so much through baptizing pagan peoples, which they certainly also did, but rather by making already Christianized local families part of their *familia*. Furthermore, monasteries acquired and built churches and *cellae*, which, in addition to their importance for the administration and cultivation of the monastery's estates, formed a sacred infrastructure. Clustered around the mother community, these churches were centers of religious activity in their own right, providing the local faithful with the opportunity to interact with the divine.

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⁶⁵ Semmler, "Karl der Grosse," 255–89.

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