

POWER AND PATRONAGE IN HROTSVIT OF GANDERSHEIM'S PRIMORDIA
COENEBII GANDESHEMENSIS

by

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DEDICATION

To my father, who has always supported me in my aspirations, and to Hays, who reminded me of the joy of *veritas gratia veritatis* just in time.

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ABSTRACT

POWER AND PATRONAGE IN HROTSVIT OF GANDERSHEIM'S PRIMORDIA
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George Mason University, 2017

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Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, a Saxon canoness of Gandersheim Abbey, lived and wrote in the tenth century, and composed a number of *vitae*, plays, and poems, as well as two histories. The *Primordia Coenebii Gandeshemensis* was the second of her histories, written c. 970. This text has meaningful political and economic contexts, and it was directed at an elite, cultured audience, external to the monastery. This has been largely ignored or denied by the prevailing historiography. This intervention explores the nature and importance of Hrotsvit's ambitions as both a political actor and a stylist.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim is a figure of unique importance in the history of women, Western literature, Europe, and the Middle Ages as a whole. She can hold her own alongside the other great historians of the tenth century, like Flodoard of Reims, Liudprand of Cremona, Richer of Reims, and Widukind of Corvey, not only on the basis of her subject matter, but by her flair in marrying classical models with biblical inspiration to tell stories of great men, and, importantly, women.¹ Yet, the tenth century has bequeathed to the present no information specifically about her.² What can be known of Hrotsvit comes from what she reveals in her writing and from educated guesses.

¹ Timothy Reuter, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96.

² Such an admission is indispensable in a discussion of Hrotsvit; see Stephen L. Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics in the Works of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 17; and Phyllis R. Brown and Stephen L. Wailes, ed., *A Companion to Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Contextual and Interpretive Approaches* (Boston: Brill, 2013), 3.

She was most likely born around the 930s and died sometime between the mid-970s and the millennium. She must have been a member of the Saxon aristocracy to have rated admission to the elite Abbey of Gandersheim as a canoness. The abbey itself was founded by the duke of Saxony, Liudolf, and his wife, Oda, in 852, and the original buildings were completed in 856. By the time Hrotsvit entered the abbey in the mid-tenth century, the abbess of Gandersheim was Gerberga II, a Liudolfing, as the descendants of Oda and Liudolf are called. This same family took over Germany after the Carolingians died out in East Francia, becoming first kings and then, by the reign of Otto I, Holy Roman emperors. It is for this reason that the dynastic name for the Liudolfings as kings and emperors of Germany is the Ottonians.

It was in this context that Hrotsvit wrote. Her known works include eight legends about Christ, the Virgin Mary, and several saints, mostly virgin martyrs; six dramas; and two histories. The legends and the histories are written in verse and the dramas are written in rhymed prose. All bear the marks of Classical inspiration. The most recognized of these inspirations is Terence, to whom Hrotsvit refers as

both a stylistic model and an artistic rival.³ She also drew heavily from Byzantine hagiography and Gnostic gospels. She was thus, it can be guessed, a well-educated and cultured woman, with a large library, by the standards of the time, at her disposal. It can also be inferred that she had the support of her religious superior, Abbess Gerberga II, who was in a position to both allow and forbid this type of artistic production.

All of these works, except the *Primordia Coenebii Gandeshemensis*, one of her verse histories, have come down to the present in a single volume, called the Munich Manuscript, or simply "M." Hrotsvit's claims to fame include resurrecting the Western dramatic tradition from its earlier neglect by medieval Christendom, and developing for the first time a number of narratives and characters that would become leitmotifs in the Western literary tradition for centuries to come.

³ "Preface to the Dramas", *Hrotsvit: Opera Omnia*, 132, lines 1-13: "Plures inveniuntur catholici cuius nos penitus expurgare nequimus facti, qui pro cultioris facundia sermonis, gentilium vanitatem librorum utilitati praeferunt sacrarum scripturarum. Sunt etiam alii sacris inherentes paginis qui licet alia gentilium spernant Terentii tamen fingmenta frequentius lectitant et dum dulcedine sermonis delectantur nefandarum notitia rerum maculantur. Unde ego Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis non recusavi illum imitari dictando dum alii colunt legendo quo eodem dictationis genere quo turpia lascivarum incesta feminarum recitabantur laudabilis sacrarum castimonia virginum iuxta mei facultatem ingenioli celebraretur."

This state of affairs places scholars in the unfortunate position of being compelled to mention her, but, more often than not, having very little to say about her. The tenth century itself is the red-haired stepchild of the medievalist profession; it falls between the glory days of the Carolingians and the so-called "renaissance of the twelfth century," and, as such, is all too easily written off as a dark age, lacking in both sources and interest.⁴ This is not without some justification; the long tenth century was an era of first Viking, and then Slavic and Magyar raids; decline in monasticism throughout most of the Christian West; and, to a certain extent, paralyzing fear that the world was about to end, with concomitant social and cultural chaos.⁵ Rather than wade into this morass, many scholars have been content to ignore it, compare it unfavorably to other centuries, or even, bizarrely, argue that much or all of the period never happened and is instead either a counting error to which

⁴ See Reuter, ed., *New Medieval History* vol. III, 1-2. The admirably self-aware editor bills the tenth century as both an "age of historians" yet a "*dunkles Jahrhundert*."

⁵ Reuter, ed. *New Medieval History* vol. III, 27, 95.

events have been attributed or an outright political conspiracy.⁶

It is this context in which Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, an otherwise anonymous monastic woman, lived, wrote, and died. The quality of her writing, her precocity, and her femininity all make her impossible to ignore, and so scholars genuflect in her direction, but they often do so without explaining Hrotsvit as a historical subject. Indeed, whether it stems from a lack of interest in the period, or a disinclination to work with a "niche" figure who lived and worked within the confines of a women's cloister, or some other nameless motivation, historians have, by and large, bowed out of the discussion of Hrotsvit and her work since the mid-twentieth century, ceding the discussion to fields such as cultural studies, gender studies, and literary criticism. These scholars have produced a dizzying array of Hrotsvit material over the past four or so decades, often uninformed or underinformed by historical concerns and investigative frameworks.

⁶ See Anatoly Fomenko, *History: Fiction or Science? Chronology 1*, 2 ed., trans. Michael Jagger (Bellvue, WA: Delamere Resources, 2007). and Heribert Illig, *Das erfundene Mittelalter. Die größte Zeitfälschung der Geschichte* (Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 2002), *passim*. These are not to be seen as serious scholarly suppositions, but instead as illustrations of extreme reactions to the challenge of the tenth century and its sources.

While practitioners of these approaches have made a number of worthy contributions to the current understanding of Hrotsvit and her works, the lack of a formally historical perspective in these works makes its absence felt. For instance, the question of whether Hrotsvit was personally involved in the writing of the surviving manuscript of her work, *M*, while perhaps less than vital for the task of discussing her views on sexuality or the role of women, is a matter of legitimate debate and some explanatory importance, yet recent scholars have been content to somewhat arbitrarily assign dates and responsibility for the Munich manuscript with only the most passing of justifications.

The historiography of Hrotsvit and her works begins in the early modern period, with early humanists like Henricus Bodo and Conrad Celtis, who found her works in monastic archives and wrote about them.⁷ Later humanists continued to remark upon Hrotsvit and her works, most prominently Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who included her

⁷ Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, *Opera Hrosvite Illustris Virginis*, Conrad Celtis, ed. (Nürnberg 1501)
Heinrich Bodo, "Syntagma de Ecclesia Gandesiana" in *Scriptorum Brunsvicensia illustrantium* vol. 3, ed. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (Hannover: Nicolai Foersteri, 1711).

work in his three-volume collection of medieval Saxon writings, the *Scriptorum Brunsvicensia Illustrantium*.⁸

The Romantics, in their turn, found "Roswitha," as they called her, a similarly compelling figure, an embodiment of the Germanic poetic genius and forerunner of Goethe⁹. Her virginal heroines and stirring tales of martyrdom struck a chord with many people in an era of high emotion. The themes that much of Hrotsvit's hagiographical and dramatic work explore, such as the conflict between individuals with countercultural convictions and the broader society, resonated with many Romantics who used the same ones in their works and indeed saw them as driving forces in their own lives. Nineteenth-century German nationalists saw the immense exemplary potential of Hrotsvit in their arguments about the German creative capacity and the idea of the nascent German nation's *Sonderweg*.

Yet it was at this same time that Hrotsvit's very existence was called into question from other corners. The

⁸ *Scriptorum Brunsvicensia illustrantium*, ed. Leibniz, vol. 2, 319-330 and vol. 3, 1710-11.

⁹ Hrotsvit is commonly called the foundress of the Western Faustian tradition, in that her legend *Basilii* includes the first known literary scenario in which a man sells his soul to the devil for earthly profit and is rescued only through the intervention of a saint.

very things that make Hrotsvit such a compelling historical subject were marshalled as evidence for the impossibility of the works' authenticity: the plots were too intricate and well-composed to have been the work of a woman, the Latin was too good to have been composed in the bad old days of the tenth century, and the material was too great and varied to have been written by a monastic. These objections, first posed by Josef Aschbach in the 1860s, often attributed Hrotsvit's work to Conrad Celtis and his circle of humanist friends.¹⁰ These arguments owed more to male, Protestant, and modernist chauvinisms than they did to scholarly concerns, and were roundly disproved by a succession of other scholars.¹¹

In the early twentieth century, there was a renewed interest in Hrotsvit, due to both a resurgence in interest in the Middle Ages and the growth of German nationalism. The perverse turn that Hrotsvit studies took in the 1930s time mirrors the perverse trajectory of German nationalism. The 1934 piece by Liselotte Haase-Hahlow in the Nazi

¹⁰ "Roswitha und Konrad Celtis," *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-Historische Classe* 56, 1 (Vienna, 1867).

¹¹ Most prominently Rudolf Köpke, *Hrotsvit von Gandersheim* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1869) and Georg Waitz "Über das Verältnis von Hrotuits Gesta Oddonis zu Widukind" *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte* 9 (1869): 335-42.

Party's official newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, epitomizes the broader contours of this historiographical dead end; Hrotsvit is an idealized figure, whose blond hair and blue eyes are deemed more important details to mention than her intellectual and artistic achievements.¹² This picture, predictably, bore very little resemblance to the reality of who Hrotsvit was and what she accomplished. As others have pointed out, Hrotsvit's celibacy and intellectualism were not qualities the Nazis valued in women, and so she had to be heavily fictionalized in order to be shoehorned into a propaganda mold.¹³

A more overlooked aspect of Hrotsvit's unfitness as a National Socialist mascot is her pervasive anti-pagan polemic; her tales of heroic Christian martyrdom at the hands of bloodthirsty and often moronic pagans did not play well in an era in which men in uniforms bedecked with Norse runes and bastardized symbols of Eastern esoterica were dragging people off to death camps largely on the basis of religious identity. A further problem was her contention,

¹² Liselotte Haase-Hahlow, "Roswitha von Gandersheim. Die Geschichte der ältesten Chronistin," *Unterhaltungs-Beilage, Völkischer Beobachter*, 4-5 March 1934.

¹³ See Katrinette Bodarwe, "Hrotsvit and Her Avatars" in *Companion to Hrotsvit*, Brown and Wailes, ed., 349-352.

set forth in the *Gesta Ottonis*, that power was transferred from the Franks to the Saxons by God as a reward for their abandonment of paganism and subsequent faithfulness to the Church, and that their hegemony in Europe was inherently tied to their conduct as good Christian rulers and subjects.¹⁴ ¹⁵ It is no surprise, then, that the Nazi attempt to co-opt Hrotsvit's legacy was short lived; these articles seem to have petered out after the 1930s.

After the Second World War, the German nationalist tradition of Hrotsvit discussions was not revived. Interest in her works was instead resurrected by a generation of feminist scholars who saw her as a forerunner of their own movement. After all, Hrotsvit was a woman who appropriated the poetic and dramatic forms used by male writers like Terence to objectify and demean women, and then used these same forms to convey a message of female spiritual and intellectual empowerment.¹⁶ This dovetailed quite tidily

¹⁴ *Gesta Ottonis* Lines 1-8: "Postquam Rex regum, qui solus regnat in aevum Per se cunctorum transmutans tempora regum Iussit Francorum transferri nobile regum Ad claram gentem Saxonum nomen habentem A saxo per duriciam mentis bene firmam, Filius Oddonis magni ducis et venerandi, Scilicet Henricus, suscepit regi primus Iusto pro populo moderamine scepra gerenda."

¹⁵ See Phyllis R. Brown, Linda A. McMillin, and Katharina M. Wilson, ed., *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Contexts, Identities, Affinities, and Performances* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004) 16-17.

¹⁶ Helene Scheck, *Reform and Resistance: Formations of Female Subjectivity in Early Medieval Ecclesiastical Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 168-170.

with the aspirations and values of second-wave feminism, but this moment marked the beginning of a trend that was to outlast second-wave feminism itself and indeed to continue to characterize the state of Hrotsvit scholarship to the present day: women's, gender, literary, and area studies have taken ownership of the canoness and her canon.¹⁷

This state of affairs has advanced the understanding of Hrotsvit and her works in some ways, but has allowed it to decline in others. On the one hand, these more recent scholars have found many revealing textual links between Hrotsvit and the Classical and Antique authors that inspired her, and analyzed these links in an illuminating way, opening up Hrotsvit's hagiography and drama in a way that brings the authoress herself to life. However, these purely textual approaches place Hrotsvit and her work in a vacuum, and so they often lend themselves better to interpretations of her plays and legends than to her histories.

Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman ed. *Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 130-131.

¹⁷ The highest-profile works on Hrotsvit in English of the past fifteen years have been Brown, McMillin, and Wilson, ed., *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim* (2004); Brown and Wailes, ed., *Companion to Hrotsvit* (2013); and Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics in Hrotsvit* (2006).

Hrotsvit wrote two verse histories. The first, the *Gesta Ottonis*, was composed at the behest of Hrotsvit's abbess, Gerberga II, during the reign of Otto I. This work had a number of political motivations at the time of its writing and had a number of political ramifications once it was written. These have been explored in great detail by many other scholars, especially those in the field of German Studies. The current consensus is twofold. First, Gerberga commissioned Hrotsvit to apply her by then well-known literary talents to the task of rehabilitating the image of Gerberga, her family, and, by extension, the monastic foundation of Gandersheim in the wake of Gerberga's father Duke Henry of Bavaria's rebellions against Otto, his brother.¹⁸ Second, Hrotsvit's own intention as an artist and thinker was to write a meditation on the virtues of Christian kingship.¹⁹

Scholars have pored over this text for centuries, analyzing the language and collating the events Hrotsvit recounts with outside material, and have reached compelling conclusions about the origins and reception of this text. Hrotsvit presenting the *Gesta* to Otto I or to Gerberga II

¹⁸ Brown, McMillin, and Wilson, *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, 19-24.

¹⁹ Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics in Hrotsvit*, 206.

is a surprisingly popular subject of portraiture and iconography.²⁰

While the *Gesta Ottonis* has received a great deal of attention from German Studies scholars recently and from historians throughout the modern period, the *Primordia Coenebii Gandeshemensis*, Hrotsvit's other historical work, has been comparatively ignored.²¹ Overwhelmingly, scholars have been content to gloss over this work, or treat it as a simple monastic origin story intended for internal circulation and edification. Given the care and detail with which scholars have examined Hrotsvit's other works, this neglect is on its face puzzling. Her fables and plays present more raw material for gender and literary studies, and the *Gesta Ottonis* presents more for German and literary studies. The epic sweep and great-man subject matter of the *Gesta* have also made it quite appealing to previous generations of historians. The *Primordia*, meanwhile, has languished, included as an afterthought and footnote in many secondary publications on Hrotsvit's life and work.

²⁰ Most famously the woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer for Conrad Celtis's publication of the Munich manuscript.

²¹ Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics in Hrotsvit*, 21.

Ironically, it is the *Primordia* that stands to explain the most about precisely these topics.

As the final extant work of Hrotsvit, and the probable last work she ever composed, the *Primordia* ought to be seen as integral to her literary achievements and intellectual vision.²² In it, Hrotsvit writes about the things she knows and cares most about: her abbey, its history, and its purpose. For historians, the study of this epic ought to receive the same priority as the *Gesta*; it provides novel historical insights into the still-mysterious world of tenth-century religious women, the life and times of the Saxon nobility, and, importantly, the same early imperial political history that has driven so much of the interest in the *Gesta*. It is this final category of information that is most overlooked in scholarly readings of the *Primordia*. In point of fact, the moment of Hrotsvit's writing, occurring as it did within Gerberga II's abbacy, and the late tenth century itself, was a moment of growth and crisis for Gandersheim Abbey, to which Hrotsvit was directly responding in the composition of the *Primordia*.

²² The conventional date of its composition is 970.

The time is ripe for a historiographical intervention on these grounds. Historians of today have something important to offer the current field of Hrotsvit studies, in that they lack the natural incentives that have led previous scholars to disregard the *Primordia* and they have the information and skills to accurately contextualize the work within its original social, political, cultural, and economic environment. There are three especially crucial factors that have been missing from discussions of the *Primordia* to this point: its relation to the system of religious patronage in tenth-century Germany, its specific audience within that system, and the manner in which Hrotsvit engages this audience. The following chapters concern each of these three points.

CHAPTER TWO: CANONESSES, NUNS, AND PATRONS IN HROTSVIT'S GANDERSHEIM

The Abbey of Gandersheim was founded by Liudolf, duke of Saxony, and his wife Oda in 852. This foundation was an *Eigenkloster*, or a family monastery, built on the site, Hrotsvit explains, of a previous Liudolfing *Eigenkirche*, or family church, on the banks of the Ganda River. Liudolf and Oda constructed the original abbey building in 856 and the community, under the leadership of their daughter Hathumoda, moved on site from Brunshausen, where they had been staying during the building process. Hathumoda was succeeded as abbess by her sister Gerberga, who was succeeded by their youngest sister, Christina.²³ After the death of Christina in 919, the abbacy of Gandersheim fell out of Liudolfing hands for thirty years, until the accession of Gerberga II, great-granddaughter of Liudolf and Oda and abbess at the time of Hrotsvit.

²³ This Gerberga, or Gerberga I, is not to be confused with Hrotsvit's abbess, Gerberga II, who was Gerberga I's great-great niece.

In its early years, as the personal foundation and final resting place of the leading family of Saxony, Gandersheim and its fortunes were on the ascendant. In 877, Louis the Younger extended imperial protection to the abbey, which was both a guarantee of the abbey's territorial integrity and a mark of prestige. More significantly, in 919, King Henry the Fowler, the grandson of Liudolf and Oda, granted the abbey *Reichsfreiheit*, or imperial immediacy. This meant that the abbess only answered to the king, or, later, the emperor. She held a seat in the Imperial Diet and had the right to hold markets, mint coins, and preside over her own law courts. While she was not the only abbess or abbot to hold powers like these, she was in the minority of religious superiors of the day. As a woman, the abbess was not able to directly exercise all of these powers; she sent representatives to carry out most of her public functions, but she hand-picked these men and gave them their marching orders. In short, the abbess of Gandersheim in the tenth century was an incredibly powerful woman, with sweeping seigneurial privileges and well-placed contacts in the imperial elite.

As the *Eigenkloster* first of the Saxon ducal family, and then of the imperial family when the Liudolfing dukes

became the Ottonian kings and emperors, Gandersheim was the recipient of a number of different kinds of patronage. In the first place, the Liudolfings gave Gandersheim property upon which to build a monastery, and then built the monastery itself. Liudolf and Oda also secured the blessing of both the emperor and the pope for the new foundation. In doing so, they were able to bring additional sorts of patronage to the institution. The emperor gave his protection and recognition to the foundation: initially, the Carolingian Louis the Younger, and subsequently the Ottonians Henry the Fowler and Otto I. These gestures, which were far from perfunctory, elevated Gandersheim above many other *Eigenklöstern* of its time.

As Hrotsvit records, it was initially Oda's desire to build the abbey, which Liudolf then supported. Oda's mother, Aeda, also plays a prominent role in the foundation. While it is tempting to view the centrality of Aeda and Oda as a manifestation of a sort of proto-feminism on Hrotsvit's part, it is more likely that this was a reflection of mainstream cultural values of the day; it was Germanic noblewomen who traditionally exercised *Hausherrschaft*, the power to endow religious houses with their families' riches. Women, it could be said, were the

traditional nexus of financial religious patronage in Germanic culture.

Papal patronage, while different in kind from the sorts of patronage secular rulers could bestow, was nonetheless of great value politically, economically, and spiritually to Gandersheim. In the first place, Liudolf and Oda's initial trip to Rome to seek the pope's blessing on their planned foundation secured the approval and active support of the papacy for Gandersheim from its very inception. Still more importantly, on this trip, the pope bestowed relics of two of his papal predecessors, Saints Anastasius and Innocent, on the monastery. This was significant in a number of ways. First of all, Rome was then, as it still is, the default final resting place of the popes. To release the bones of any pope, much less two, and still less two recognized saints, from Rome's embrace was no idle gesture; it was, rather, a dramatic display of approval and largesse on the part of the pope. Secondly, the overall urbanizing trends of the tenth century were characterized by a self-conscious imitation of Rome.²⁴ Nothing could be more Roman than having a pope or two of

²⁴ Reuter, *New Medieval History*, 94.

one's own. All told, the gesture was almost certainly intended to convey that the papacy held Gandersheim in particular esteem and had a direct authority over it, unmediated by the rule of a diocesan bishop.²⁵ It appears to have been interpreted by the ladies of Gandersheim to convey this, at any rate.

This sense of answering solely to the pope and the Holy Roman Emperor in matters spiritual and temporal placed Gandersheim, and especially its abbesses, in direct conflict with the bishops of Hildesheim, the diocese in which the abbey was built. The bishop of Hildesheim, as was customary, would have seen himself as the rightful superior to the abbess of Gandersheim. The abbess, for her part, would have had a sense of her own power and prestige as a Saxon aristocrat and what would later be called a princess-electress of the Empire, and felt that it was unseemly to have to answer to a bishop of his rank. This conflict came to a head with the abbacy of Sophia, daughter of Otto II and successor of Gerberga II, who refused to be installed

²⁵ Amy G. Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 78: relics given to communities by the pope symbolized "special status and enjoyment of papal protection." How much more would relics of popes given by the pope convey this message.

as abbess by the bishop of Hildesheim in a broader conflict over the rights and freedom of the abbey. Scholars have pointed out Hrotsvit's glossing-over of the bishops of Hildesheim in her histories, and have suggested that this was reflective of a wider culture of enmity between the abbey and the bishopric.²⁶

Additionally, and significantly, the complete relics of two pope-saints, and Roman martyrs at that, were enormously valuable in the context of medieval Germany. Gandersheim may have initially been the only place with papal relics in Germany. To be the caretaker of this treasure was to be a high-profile pilgrimage destination, with all the power, prestige, and economic benefits that came with it. Pilgrims gave donations, sometimes in great amounts in the hopes of being buried near the saints; they required food and lodging, which they paid to locals whom the abbey could then tax; and so on and so forth. The prestige that came from such peregrinal popularity served to attract wealthier and higher-profile donors and benefactors, in turn raising the profile and fortunes of the abbey still further.

²⁶ Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics in Hrotsvit*, 220.

Gandersheim was not only founded as an important pilgrimage hub; it was an important stop for the itinerant Ottonian court in its Saxon circuit.²⁷ While this was in a large part a marriage of convenience, the conscious decision on the part of the emperors to stay at Gandersheim conveyed to the empire the centrality of the abbey to the imperial ethos and program. At the same time, the level of resources needed to sustain royal visitors and their retinues was no small thing. Gandersheim's ability to feed and house so many people for such a time gives a good sense of the productive lands and revenues at its disposal.²⁸

There is another, more often overlooked, aspect of Liudolfing patronage of Gandersheim. Though the Liudolfings gave the abbey their time, prestige, money, and lands, they also gave it their daughters. Often, scholars view the placing of young daughters in monasteries as a way of preventing them from marrying down the social ladder or

²⁷ Brown and Wailes ed., *Companion to Hrotsvit*, 19, 39.

²⁸ The initial donation of lands by Liudolf, according to the surviving documents, included everything "in Gandesheimia Marcu, et in Riuderia Marcu, et in Aluunga Marcu habui, in terriis, silvis, capis, partis, pascuis, aquis aquarumque decursibus, propriis vel commuibus, domibus, aedificiis vel prius habitis vel postea constructis; mancipiis quoque diversi generis vel conditionis; mobilibus et immobilibus, et in quibuscunque rebus cum omni integritate earum."
"Concessio & Transsumptum Ludolfi fundatoris". *Diplomata Gandersheimensia. Scriptorum Brunsvicensia illustrantium* vol. 2, Leibniz ed., 371.

splitting the family's property in inheritance. This is not untrue, but it presents an incomplete picture. In sending their daughters to Gandersheim, the Liudolfings were not merely closeting them away from away from upstart suitors, they were forging dynastic marriages with God and with the abbey itself. The gift of one's own children to the abbey was a pledge of enduring support and personal investment therein. Indeed, when Liudolf lists the terms of his gift to the new foundation at Gandersheim, he lists not only the lands, buildings, bondsmen, and rivers, but also "*filiam meam Hathumodam nomine*" as one of his contributions, and points out that he does so in order to solidify and protect the rest of the gifts.

In short, from a tenth-century perspective, Gandersheim lived and died on the basis of the Liudolfings' money and attention, the leadership of Liudolfing women, and the support and blessing of both the pope in Roman and the popes buried in the abbey whose clout assisted them on earth and in Heaven.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS

Hrotsvit's *Primordia* was no mere "sacred fiction," nor was it a simple foundation legend for intramural consumption and religious edification.²⁹ Rather, it was a deeply political document, with clear objectives and a specific intended audience. Hrotsvit, the "*Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis*," as she styles herself elsewhere in her work, had a clear notion of herself as the spokeswoman for her community, a voice crying out in the desert, much in the style of Saint John the Baptist, patron of Gandersheim Abbey and pivotal figure in the *Primordia* itself.^{30 31 32} This dynamic originated in the *Gesta*, but finds its full flower in the *Primordia*.

Unlike the *Gesta*, before which she includes a preface discussing how the work was explicitly written on the orders of Abbess Gerberga II, Hrotsvit gives no indication

²⁹ Lynda Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, passim.

³⁰ "Preface to the Dramas", *Opera Omnia*, 132, line 8.

³¹ *Primordia Coenebii Gandeshemensis*, Lines 34-66.

³² For Hrotsvit as a type of John the Baptist see Brown and Wailes ed., *Companion to Hrotsvit*, 3.

that the *Primordia* was commissioned.³³ Whether this is strictly true is debatable, as this could well be the result of a lacuna or a way to exempt Gerberga or whoever else might have requested it from fallout if the work was poorly received. Nonetheless, there is good reason to see the *Primordia* as a truer articulation of Hrotsvit's own feelings, ideas, and intentions than the *Gesta*.

The *Gesta Ottonis*, Hrotsvit's other historical epic, has long been recognized by scholars as a document intentionally crafted with very specific political and spiritual objectives. Consensus on the *Gesta* is that it was written to articulate Hrotsvit's political philosophy on Christian kingship, to chastise Otto I for falling short of that moral standard, and to help rehabilitate the image of Gerberga's father, Duke Henry of Bavaria, who had a history of fomenting rebellion against Otto.³⁴

³³ Cf. "Praefatio to the *Gesta Ottonis*," in *Opera Omnia*, lines 1-8: "Gerbergae, illustri abbatissae, cui pro sui eminentia probitatis haut minor obesquela venerationis quam pro in signi regalis stemmate generositatis, Hrotsvit Gandeshemensis, ultima ultimum sub huiusmodi personae dominio militantium quod famula herae. O mea domna, quae rutilanti spiritalis varietate sapientiae praelucetis, non picescat vestry almitiem perlustrare, quod vestra confectum si ignoratis ex iussione..."

³⁴ On this last point, see Brown, McMillin, and Wilson, ed., *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, 21.

Scholars have done the *Primordia* an injustice by not extending it the same consideration.³⁵ This may be in a large part because the subject of this work is much more local and intimate at first blush than that of the *Gesta*, but also because literary scholars and historians are trained to look at monastic foundation legends in a certain way, as iterations of a broader pattern: typically expressions of a desire to link a house to noble and saintly founders on the one hand, and lay claims to land and other property, in much the same way that forgeries of donations and other similar documents of this period were, on the other.³⁶ That is to say, these "sacred fictions" were attempts to justify and protect rights that these houses believed they were really justified in holding, but lacked the hard evidence to fully secure. These works also served an important didactic and identity-forming function within the communities themselves.³⁷

While Hrotsvit was certainly informed by this tradition, she was not writing strictly within it. For instance, it certainly does not seem that this is a work

³⁵ Among the exceptions to this are Stephen L. Wailes, Helene Homeyer, and Walter Berschin.

³⁶ See Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings*, passim.

³⁷ Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings*, p. 44.

primarily about inventing, documenting, or justifying Gandersheim's claims to land and other property or its noble origin; there is good independent documentation for the donation of lands and succession of early abbesses that she relates.³⁸ The initial donation of lands in three marches, with all of the resources and bondsmen that came with them, is recorded in the "Concessio et Transsumptum Ludolfi fundatoris."³⁹ A diploma of Otto I dated 956 adds a fourth march in its account of this initial donation. It then goes on to enumerate gifts of more land from a number of other aristocrats and royals, including Liudolfings and kings of East Francia.⁴⁰ Further donations by Otto II follow in the 970s.⁴¹ The names of the early abbesses and their relationships to one another are also enumerated in the "Concessio," as well as in a number of letters and diplomata of King Louis III the Younger, Otto I, and Pope Agapetus II, found in the same collection.⁴² There is good reason to think that even if these texts are forgeries

³⁸ These can all be found in Leibniz ed., *Scriptorum Brunsvicensia illustrantium*, vol. II, 371-380. Although this was published in the eighteenth century, no scholarly editions have been published more recently. This would make a good project for future scholars.

³⁹ Ibid., 371.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 373-374.

⁴¹ Ibid., 375-376.

⁴² Ibid., 372-375.

themselves, or copies or summaries of pre-existent forgeries, they were available in Hrotsvit's time, and thus there would have been no reason for her to reinvent the wheel with her composition.

Another common purpose of foundation narratives, according to Remensnyder, is to link a monastery to a heroic saintly founder. In the case of Gandersheim, the saintly foundress would be Hathumoda. While Hrotsvit recounts a miracle story concerning Hathumoda in the *Primordia*, establishing Hathumoda's sanctity is not Hrotsvit's ultimate purpose.⁴³ This had already been accomplished in the ninth century by a monk called Agius of Corvey, who composed two hagiographical works on Hathumoda, the *Vita Hathumodae* and the *Dialogue on the Death of Hathumoda*.⁴⁴ These works also examined the circumstances of Gandersheim's foundation, and, importantly, recounted miracles wrought by Hathumoda herself, depicting her more as a mystic than a pragmatic leader, as she is portrayed in the *Primordia*.⁴⁵ Hrotsvit, then, writing nearly a century

⁴³ *Prim.*, lines 238-279.

⁴⁴ The only full English translations of which can be found in *Anchoress and Abbess in Ninth Century Saxony: The Lives of Liutbirg of Wendhausen and Hathumoda of Gandersheim*, ed. Frederick S. Paxton (2009) CUA Press.

⁴⁵ Helene Scheck makes much the same point in *Reform and Resistance*, 140, although for different reasons.

later, was not trying to create from scratch a *cultus* of an otherwise obscure holy foundress or creatively fabricate the circumstances of a monastery's founding.

There is also no evidence that Hrotsvit's histories were performed or circulated within the abbey for didactic purposes. Others of her works arguably were, but these were plays and legends about the lives and martyrdoms of the saints, of a different much different tenor from her historical epics.⁴⁶ While Hrotsvit plays with tropes found in many other monastic histories of the period, she is repurposing the genre for her own, largely disparate, purposes.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ This is the view of the most prominent Hrotsvit scholar of the twentieth century, Helene Homeyer.

⁴⁷ For instance, as Amy Remensnyder points out in her work on West Frankish monastic foundation legends, *Remembering Kings Past*, a common motif is the discovery of the site of the new monastery by animals or other supernatural phenomena. Hrotsvit certainly employs this trope. Another motif that Remensnyder notes is of particular importance in these narratives is the linking of the foundation of the house to important royal figures. By playing up the links between Gandersheim and the papacy, Gandersheim and the Carolingians, and Gandersheim and the Liudolfings, Hrotsvit certainly fulfills this line item. In both of these examples, however Hrotsvit is doing more than just creating convenient yet pious fictions that serve the purposes of justifying Gandersheim's property or creating a sense of identity for the abbey's members, which is what the narratives Remensnyder examines are designed to do. Rather, Hrotsvit's designs are at once more ambitious and more understated than that. Primarily, this is a work about the relationship between the abbey and its patrons, and addressed pointedly to those patrons. It is concerned with impressing upon its audience the link between the monastery as founded and the destiny of the Liudolfings.

The *Primordia* itself came into being at a moment of crisis; in the latter half of the tenth century, the Abbey of Gandersheim was at a crossroads. The abbess at this time was Gerberga II, the fourth Liudolfing abbess of the house, and the first after a hiatus of two or three abbesses.⁴⁸ Saxony had become the leading duchy of Germany two generations before, and Germany itself had just become an empire. At the same time, the Liudolfings had gone from a ducal family to a royal family to an imperial family. Gandersheim accordingly received new privileges and legal standing from the emperor, and sought matching ones in the spiritual domain from the pope, namely, freedom from the oversight of the bishops of Hildesheim.⁴⁹ The abbey was also met with new potential rivals, chiefly in the form of the new imperial abbey at Quedlinburg, which attracted royal patronage and daughters. Importantly, Gandersheim's aspirations grew in this period, including the construction

⁴⁸ Sources disagree as to the succession of abbesses between Christina and Gerberga II.

⁴⁹ Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings*, p. 39: "Between the seventh and the late tenth centuries, privileges granted by the pope could place the abbey in question under papal protection, free it from the temporal, though not the spiritual jurisdiction of the bishop ordinary, and give it secular immunity. Only in the last decade of the tenth century were abbeys granted the right to be free from the spiritual jurisdiction of the ordinary... the greatest possible liberty an abbey might possess."

of a Benedictine daughter-house.⁵⁰ It was this milieu that shaped the content and purpose of Hrotsvit's *Primordia*.

Freedom from episcopal oversight was the *ne plus ultra* of monastic freedom, dignity and importance from the tenth through twelfth centuries. In Gandersheim's case, the abbey is thought to have chafed at its subjection to the bishop of Hildesheim.⁵¹ This crisis was to reach a breaking point under Abbess Sophia, Gerberga II's successor, student, and cousin. Sophia, a daughter of Otto II and Theophanu, refused to be consecrated abbess by the bishop of Hildesheim, as was tradition. This conflict would continue into the thirteenth century, until Pope Innocent III granted the abbey sovereignty in 1206.⁵²

A number of scholars have attempted to situate the *Primordia* solely within the framework of this conflict, citing the fact that Hrotsvit mentions the bishops of Hildesheim but once in her *Primordia* and her emphasis on Gandersheim's ties to Rome as evidence.⁵³ They characterize these artistic decisions respectively as a deliberate snub

⁵⁰ Katharina M. Wilson, ed., *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Rara Avis in Saxonia?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Marc Publishing Co., 1987), 40.

⁵¹ Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics*, 220.

⁵² Grants of papal sovereignty were relatively widespread in the long twelfth century.

⁵³ *Prim.*, lines 392-393: "...Wicberhtus praesul domini benedictus dedicat hoc templum..."

and a demonstration of Gandersheim's historical independence from all but Rome.⁵⁴ A much more ontologically parsimonious, and more likely, explanation is that the *Primordia* simply is not about the bishops of Hildesheim or their relationship to the monastery. In point of fact, there are very few characters mentioned by name in the *Primordia*: Liudolf, Oda, Aeda, John the Baptist, Louis the Younger, Pope Sergius, Hathumoda, Gerberga, and Christina. When a story is clearly about a duke, his family, and their dealings with the king and the pope, it stands to reason that a mere suffragan bishop would not factor into a narrative at this level.⁵⁵

Another piece of "evidence" sometimes marshalled to argue that the *Primordia* is primarily about Gandersheim's ties to Rome is a cryptic reference in the work of a sixteenth-century antiquarian called Henry Bodo. He claimed to have found a pair of hagiographies of Popes Anastasius and Innocent, the saints whose relics were kept at

⁵⁴ Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics*, 220.

⁵⁵ See Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1989), 78: "The ties of land, kinship, and gratitude anchored the monastery within the community." The bishop simply is not a main character in this sort of narrative.

Gandersheim, and attributes them to Hrotsvit.⁵⁶ Some scholars have implied that the *Primordia* was the central panel in a sort of triptych about Gandersheim's special relationship with the papacy. This, too, seems absurd. First of all, Hrotsvit was, if one goes strictly by the numbers, a hagiographer. It would hardly betoken some kind of deviant political intrigue if she were to apply her talents to the pair of canonized saints in the shadow of whose graves she lived, worked and prayed. Second, an offhand allusion to a work like this from a man separated by more than half a millennium from its purported author is far from proof of the works' existence, much less their authenticity as genuine writings of Hrotsvit. Attributing motive to her composition of the *Primordia* on this basis is unreasonable, untenable, and, from the standpoint of academic history, irresponsible.

⁵⁶ See Henry Bodo, "Syntagma de Ecclesia Gandesiana" in *Scriptorum Brunsvicensia* vol. 3, 712: "Sub illustrissima Domina Garburgi ista secunda vitam egit ac floruit illustris virgo sanctimonialis Hrosuita in Saxonia nata, miro ingenio ac doctrina clarens, et in utroque scribendi genere admirabilis, cujus opera sunt... Verum de fundatione coenobii Gandesiani versu hexamentro scriptum opus, cui etiam beatissimorum Pontificum Anastasii et Inocentii vitas, eodem genere metrorum contextas praemisit, pulveribus longissimis temporibus abditum, nostro aevo vix lucem vidit, aliquibus etiam foliis privatum. Taceo, quod et vetustate nonnullis in locis non litterae tantum, verum et totae sententiae absumentae sunt..."

To try to understand Hrotsvit's programme, it is necessary to take the actual productions that have survived to the present day and those facts about her world that are well established and thus can be known, and draw conclusions from these. Such a description of this essay's methodology may sound rather obvious, perhaps even tautological, but only because it is the necessary stuff of elementary historical inquiry, which is what has been largely absent from Hrotsvit studies for half a century. It must be done before any further, more interesting and exciting conclusions can be drawn.

Fundamentally, this is a story about the Liudolfings. John the Baptist, King Louis and Pope Sergius serve more as guarantors of the holiness, nobility, and piety of the Liudolfings than as active participants in the plot. It is for this reason that Hrotsvit focused on the relationship between Gandersheim and the papacy: not because the bishop's involvement is not suitable, but rather because the papacy better underscored the nobility and prestige of Gandersheim itself and the Liudolfings that patronized it. This decision also made it clear that it was Liudolf and his descendants who were primarily responsible for the care and keeping of the abbey.

For their part, the Liudolfings had continued to care for and keep the abbey. As many scholars have pointed out, the time of Gerberga II's abbacy at Gandersheim was a "golden age" for the institution: its wealth, nobility, freedom, and influence all blossomed under renewed Liudolfing leadership and interest.⁵⁷ What is often ignored, however, is that this flourishing was hard-won and far from a foregone conclusion at the time. During the early reign of Liudolf's great-grandson, Otto I, the cultural and religious dominance of Gandersheim had receded; Otto's mother, Saint Matilda of Ringelheim, had founded her own house for women at Quedlinburg, sent her daughter there, and made provisions to retire there herself. She richly endowed Quedlinburg with relics and, with her patronage, the abbey was given the same privileges of *Reichsfreiheit* that the more ancient Gandersheim had received only a few years earlier. Of perhaps greater significance was Matilda's decision to bury her husband, King Henry the Fowler, at Quedlinburg rather than at Gandersheim alongside his Liudolfing ancestors. Taken together, these gestures have been interpreted by some scholars to imply that while

⁵⁷ Brown, McMillin, Wilson, ed., *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, 3.

Gandersheim was the ducal *Eigenkloster* of the Liudolfings, Quedlinburg was to be the imperial abbey of the Ottonians, and that in the early tenth century, then, the power and prestige of the Liudolfings waxed, while that of the family's monastery waned.⁵⁸

This is an overly simplistic reading of the situation. Gandersheim was never the apex of a unipolar monastic system in Saxony, much less all of Germany. It had shared the designation of imperial abbey with a number of other monastic houses for women, most notably Essen and Herford, even before Quedlinburg was founded. By the time Hrotsvit was composing the *Primordia*, Gandersheim's well-established abbess was a Liudolfing, a niece of the Holy Roman Emperor, and the sister of the duke of Bavaria. The high profile of Gandersheim is further validated by the decision of Otto II in 979 to send his daughter, Sophia, to be educated at the abbey. This imperial princess would succeed Gerberga II as abbess upon her death in 1001. Clearly, then, there is no reason to think that the *Primordia* was a reaction to a perceived decline in the abbey's fortunes. The tenth century, in fact, was a time of expanded privileges and

⁵⁸ Brown and Wailes, ed., *Companion to Hrotsvit*, 20-21.

increased prestige for Gandersheim. There was no particularly compelling reason at the time to expect that this trajectory would change, and, as time would show, Gandersheim's ascendance would not flag for centuries afterwards.

If wresting power from the bishop was not Hrotsvit's target, nor was keeping up with Quedlinburg, what, then, was Hrotsvit's intent in composing an epic poem about her monastery and directing it at the emperor and his family? Collating the timeline of Hrotsvit's composition with events in and around the abbey provides some answers. The common dating for the composition of the *Primordia* is 968. In 973, the Abbey of Gandersheim was able to open a daughter house for Benedictine nuns in Gandersheim, Saint Mary's.⁵⁹ If Hrotsvit's intention was to write an artistic appeal to the emperor and his family for aid in the approval, construction, and endowment of this new foundation, she could have done little better than the *Primordia*. Her decision to talk about only the very earliest days of the monastery and glorify these roots is a decision to glorify the Benedictine roots of Gandersheim

⁵⁹ Wilson, ed., *Rara Avis*, 40.

itself. Although it was a house for canonesses in Hrotsvit's day, the abbey was initially founded as a Benedictine monastery. Hathumoda, the daughter of Liudolf and Oda and Gandersheim's first abbess, was first sent to the Benedictines to be trained up as a nun, and then helmed her own community of Benedictines at Gandersheim once it was built.⁶⁰

At some point, the abbey made the switch from Benedictine nuns to canonesses. Scholars are not entirely certain as to when this shift occurred, but it is most likely to have happened before the time of Hrotsvit and after the time of the first three Liudolfing abbesses, Hathumoda, Gerberga I, and Christina.⁶¹ This change allowed the women of Gandersheim a greater autonomy, especially in terms of owning property and movement. Unlike Benedictine nuns, canonesses were able to hold property as individuals, not just collectively. Canonesses were also free to leave

⁶⁰ *Primordia* Lines 111-113: Hrotsvit specifies that Hathumoda was sent to learn under an "abbatissa cuidam venerandae, Quae, praelatarum, vice succedendo priorum, Tunc Herifordensem sortita fuit sibi sedem." Herford Abbey was the oldest Saxon house for religious women, and the abbess in question was Addila.

⁶¹ Suzanne Fonay Wemple, "Monastic Live of Women from the Merovingians to the Ottonians" in *Rara Avis*, 40.

the abbey virtually at will, as they were not in vows in the way that nuns were.⁶²

The project of building the Benedictine priory of Saint Mary could be considered as a way for Gandersheim to relive the heroic days of its saintly founders without the abbey proper and its canonesses having to surrender their property and prerogatives. Recalling this holy and heroic past, the role the Liudolfings played in it, and the role it played in bringing the Liudolfings to power all would have been effective ways of engaging the Ottonians in the work of building and endowing this house; the project of reviving the Benedictine monastic tradition in Gandersheim itself could be seen as a chance for Otto I and his family to live up to the legacy of their forbearers by their cooperation. To the imagination of a pious woman of the tenth century like Hrotsvit, it is probable that the alignment of these familial and monastic timelines was too tidy, perhaps even too providential, to go unremarked upon.

⁶² Ibid., 37-39.

CHAPTER FOUR: NARRATIVE AND OBJECTIVE

There are two important factors to bear in mind in an examination of Hrotsvit's verse histories: Hrotsvit has both ambitions as an artist and vested interests as a member of the Abbey of Gandersheim.⁶³ One cannot really speak of a tension between these two ends; the ambition to write is made acceptable by the desire to help the community, and the desire to help the community is in fact feasible because of the profundity of Hrotsvit's literary talent. Nonetheless, there is enough daylight between these two quantities to justify treating of them separately.

Artistically speaking, Hrotsvit's general project is that of a biblical allegory. That is to say, she deliberately structures her narrative about the birth of Gandersheim Abbey to mirror the narrative of the birth of Christ in the New Testament. Many of her characters are

⁶³ Alcuin Blamires, "Women and Creative Intelligence in Medieval Thought" in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 213. "Before Christine de Pizan, medieval women did not write much about their own creative intelligence. However, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim in the tenth century is a major, early, and self-conscious exception."

written not as historical figures but as readily recognizable biblical types. If, as has been proposed, Hrotsvit wishes to be perceived by her readers as a figure of Saint John the Baptist, the *dramatis personae* of the *Primordia* align quite neatly with those of the Nativity narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.⁶⁴ More importantly, the events and dialogue of the narrative align closely with biblical precedent, giving Hrotsvit's story a deeper resonance and greater persuasive power. This is particularly evident in her exposition of two important events: John the Baptist's apparition to Aeda, the pious mother of Oda, and the miracle of the discovery of the site for the monastery.

In the *Primordia*, John the Baptist appears to Aeda and delivers news that her family will found a monastery in his honor and that it will assist them by the prayers of the nuns therein, and thus bring strength and glory to her house.⁶⁵ If we are to take John the Baptist as an Angel

⁶⁴ For Hrotsvit's self-presentation as John the Baptist, see Brown and Wailes, ed., *Companion to Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, 3.

⁶⁵ Lines 57-64: "'Quia nos crebro coluisti,/ Nuntio virginibus sacris tua clara propago Instituet claustrum, pacem regnique triumphum,/ Dum sua religio studio steterit bene firmo./ Hinc tua progenies saeculis quandoque futuris culmine pollentis tanto clarescet, honoris,/ Ut terrenorum nullus tunc tempore regum/ Iure potentatus illi valeat similari.'" Cf. Luke 10:30-35, 37: "Et ait angelus ei ne timeas Maria invenisti enim gratiam apud Deum. Ecce concipies in utero et paries

Gabriel figure and Aeda as a Mary figure, this scene is very much a reworking of the Annunciation.⁶⁶ By the same token, the actual work of founding the monastery is the project of Liudolf and his wife Oda, Aeda's daughter. Liudolf is an understanding man who gives his permission and protection to Oda's founding and nurturing of the monastery. He dies while the abbey is still quite young, and is mourned like a father, much like Saint Joseph in all these respects. Oda, as the holy mother of the monastery, exemplar of virtue and mediatrix of earthly gifts, is a type of the Virgin Mary.

This leaves the abbey itself in the place of the Christ Child, a gift from God to save and uplift His "chosen" Saxon people, led by the Liudolfings. Hrotsvit makes this parallel quite explicit; animal herders are the

filium et vocabis nomen eius Iesum. Hic erit magnus et Filius Altissimi vocabitur et dabit illi Dominus Deus sedem David patris eius et regnabit in domo Iacob in aeternum et regni eius non erit finis. Dixit autem Maria ad angelum quomodo fiet istud quoniam virum non cognosco? Et respondens angelus dixit ei Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi ideoque et quod nascetur sanctum vocabitur Filius Dei... quia non erit impossibile apud Deum omne verbum." (Vulgate)

⁶⁶ This parallel appears not to have been lost on Sister Mary Bernardine Bergmann, whose magisterial translation of the *Primordia* uses what can only be described as self-consciously biblical language to render her translation of "Ac commota parum volvebat pectore multum": "Greatly perturbed she pondered much in heart as to who he could be..." (Lines 39-40) cf. Luke 1:29: "Who having heard was troubled at his saying and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be." (Douay-Reims)

first to receive the news of its "birth," and miraculous lights show the way to find it.⁶⁷

The clear implication of the Gandersheim-Christ Child parallel Hrotsvit creates is that to neglect the importance of the abbey or to cause it harm was to become like King Herod, privileging one's own earthly power above that of God and ignoring religion's pride of place.⁶⁸ Not coincidentally, it is Herod (this time, Herod I's son, Herod Antipater) whom John the Baptist admonishes for his moral failings later in the Gospel.⁶⁹ This ties in rather neatly with Hrotsvit's self-appointed role as Gandersheim's advocate and Otto I's conscience, the "*Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis*" that so many scholars have compared to the *vox clamantis in deserto* of John the Baptist.⁷⁰

While Hrotsvit does not appear to directly quote or paraphrase biblical sources, this should not be seen as counter-evidence. Because she writes in verse, it would be difficult to shoehorn bits of the Gospels, or the liturgy,

⁶⁷ Lines 190-199, cf. Luke 2:8-12, Matthew 2:1-2, 9-10.

⁶⁸ Matthew 2:3-8, 12, 16.

⁶⁹ Luke 3:19.

⁷⁰ See Stephen J. Wailes, "Introduction" in *Companion to Hrotsvit*, ed. Brown and Wailes, 3; and Phyllis R. Brown, "Hrotsvit's Apostolic Mission: Prefaces, Dedications, and Other Addresses to Readers in *Companion to Hrotsvit*, ed. Brown and Wailes, 235.

for that matter, into her meter.⁷¹ At any rate, for Hrotsvit's purposes, it was more important that biblical allegory adhere more closely to contours of biblical narrative and characters, rather than to the original wording itself.

In terms of her pragmatically political goals, Hrotsvit is speaking in a different register. She groups events in her narrative into nine distinct "moments" of Gandersheim's history, each building upon the previous, while at the same time containing individual internal coherence and purpose. She signals the divisions between these moments with transition words and other turns of phrase.⁷² These moments are, briefly, the origin of the idea of the abbey, the approval and endowment of the abbey, the building of the abbey, the deaths of several key figures and subsequent new leadership for the endeavor, the completion and dedication of the abbey, the early days of life in the abbey, the death of a major benefactor, the birth of Otto the Great, and the death of the last first-

⁷¹ For a detailed side-by-side comparison and demonstration of Hrotsvit's tendency to modify sacred texts to fit her meter, see Jonathan Black, "The Use of Liturgical Texts in Hrotsvit's Works" in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Rara Avis in Saxonia?* Katharina M. Wilson, ed., *passim*.

⁷² These are quite straightforward: e.g. "nunc," "ut," "sed," "licet," and, more exotically, "his bene perfectis."

generation Liudolfing abbes. These nine units bear analysis both individually and all together.

The first moment stretches from the beginning of the *Primordia* to line 117, and could be termed the *primordia* of the *Primordia*. Hrotsvit first introduces Liudolf, the "comitatus" of the Saxons, as she calls him, in reverent terms, as an excellent specimen of humanity, nobility, and Christianity.⁷³ She then turns to his mother-in-law, Aeda, who experiences a vision of John the Baptist, foretelling the foundation of a great new monastery of women that would help her descendants rise to power by their prayers.⁷⁴ Hrotsvit then introduces Oda, Aeda's daughter and Liudolf's wife, who implores Liudolf to build just such a monastery, as it is her fondest desire.⁷⁵

This is one of the most important moments of the *Primordia*, and it sets the stage for the rest of the work. In it, Hrotsvit shapes her audience's perceptions of the two pivotal figures of her narrative and recounts the mystical origin and destiny of both the monastery and the Ottonians. This epic, sweeping scope is echoed in her

⁷³ Prim., lines 9-20.

⁷⁴ Prim., lines 37-64.

⁷⁵ Prim., lines 85-102

choice of meter.⁷⁶ This unity of purpose and ontological link between the nuns of Gandersheim and the rulers of Saxony and Germany is the central theme of this history, and Hrotsvit pursues it assiduously throughout.

The second moment begins with line 118 and extends to line 184. In this moment, Hrotsvit recounts Liudolf and Oda's journey to Rome, after having received permission from King Louis, to secure the blessing of Pope Sergius. The pope gives his blessing to the venture, along with explicit declarations of Gandersheim's future liberty.⁷⁷ He then bestows the relics of Pope Saint Anastasius and Pope Saint Innocent, after extracting from Liudolf and Oda a promise that there would be a constantly burning lamp at their graves and people to pray there and tend to the site in perpetuity.⁷⁸ This highlights both the importance of the relics and their guardians at Gandersheim, but also the fact that Oda and Liudolf came to the pope as petitioners and were in a position to take orders from the pope, not to give them. This second fact is important in that it takes

⁷⁶ Leonine hexameter is a heroic meter. Katharina M. Wilson, "The Saxon Canoness: Hrotsvit of Gandersheim" in *Medieval Women Writers*, Katharina M. Wilson, ed., 41.

⁷⁷ *Prim.*, lines 152-156.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, lines 173-177.

the possibility of contravening the pope's stipulations off the table entirely for both Liudolf and his descendants. In agreeing to literally keep the fires burning in perpetuity at the site of these relics, Oda and Liudolf bind both themselves and their descendants to patronage of the abbey.

From lines 185 to 279, Hrotsvit turns to the physical foundation of the monastery, with not one but two miracle stories. The first is that of the miraculous discovery of the site to build the monastery. Swineherds, looking after their pigs in the forest see strange lights. They report the strange sight to their master, Liudolf, who camps out overnight in the forest to see for himself.⁷⁹ After experiencing the dazzling lights illuminating the forest, he concludes that this is the spot God has willed for the monastery to be constructed.⁸⁰

The project hits an obstacle shortly afterwards: there is no stone to be found nearby to build the walls.⁸¹ It is in response to this that the second miracle occurs. Hathumoda, the daughter of Oda and Liudolf, and Gandersheim's new abbess, prays for help and guidance, and

⁷⁹ Ibid., lines 214-217.

⁸⁰ Ibid., lines 224-226.

⁸¹ Ibid., lines 238-240.

God answers her prayer. She hears a voice that tells her to follow a dove, a symbol of both virginal purity and the Holy Spirit. Accompanied by stonecutters, Hathumoda follows the dove through the countryside to a hill, which the dove swoops down upon, indicating that they should dig.⁸² Beneath the earth, the stonecutters find sufficient stone to build the monastery and its church. Inspired by this miracle, the laborers work hard to complete the task at hand.

Hrotsvit condenses all talk of miracles in the poem to this single moment, which invites direct comparison between the two. The miracle of the lights is directed at men, the swineherds and Liudolf, and the miracle of the dove is directed at a woman, Hathumoda. Interestingly, the miracle of the lights, as an event, requires a relatively inactive role of its beholders. Hathumoda, on the other hand, has to storm heaven with her prayers and fastings, and only afterwards hears a voice deliver instructions in a very personal fashion, and then must follow a bird some distance through the countryside. Hrotsvit, by portraying Hathumoda as an agent in her miracle and Liudolf as a member of an audience in his, is reinforcing the notion that women in

⁸² Ibid., 257-259, 266-269.

the abbey are doing real, often strenuous, work in mediating between God and man and assisting the Liudolfings in achieving their ambitions.

This theme of female agency and male passivity intensifies in the next moment, lines 280 to 374.⁸³ Liudolf dies, making Oda and his sons the chief benefactors of Gandersheim. Hrotsvit speculates that perhaps God willed that Liudolf should die so young in order for Oda to be more effective in assisting the abbey.⁸⁴ Soon after, Oda's daughter, Liutgard, becomes queen of East Francia, and gets her husband, Louis the Younger, to dedicate still more aid to the monastery.⁸⁵ Hathumoda then dies, and is succeeded by her sister, Gerberga. Gerberga had been betrothed to a nobleman called Bernard, although she had already pledged her virginity to Christ. Bernard was not supportive of this vow, and swore that he would take her as his wife when he

⁸³ It must be wondered why literary and women's studies scholars have not capitalized on this; it would have made a helpful piece of evidence for Scheck's work, for instance.

⁸⁴ *Prim.*, lines 296-300: "Forsan adhoc illum mundo Deus abstulit isto,/ Dum vix aetatis febres tetigit mediocris,/ Illustris domnae post haec ut plenius Oda/ Mens, intent Deo, posset tractare superna/ Expers carnalis totius prorsus amoris."

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 310-314: "Quae, regina quidem nobis ad prosperitatem/ Facta, suae dignum sanctae matri famulatum/ Consensu regis praebens, proprii senioris,/ Maxima coenobio permisit commode nostro."

returned from battle.⁸⁶ Gerberga prays that God's will be done in this situation. Bernard falls in battle and Gerberga is thus free to enter the abbey.

Hrotsvit follows her account of these deaths with that of the martyrdom of Duke Bruno of Saxony, Liudolf's son and heir, at the hands of the Magyars. While Hrotsvit, ever the martyr enthusiast, has no overt criticisms of Duke Bruno's tenure as chief benefactor of Gandersheim, she does not list any real contributions that he made to its flourishing. His brother and successor, Duke Otto, on the other hand, has a list of concrete achievements and abstract compliments to his name. The first and most dramatic of these is his completion of the monastery's construction, which Hrotsvit is careful to specify was done at Oda's instruction.

Hrotsvit's implication in this moment, almost menacing in its matter-of-factness, is that men live and die on the basis of their usefulness to the abbey, and that the women of the abbey are intermediaries between men and the will of God. It is not enough for these men to take care of the

⁸⁶ Ibid., lines 348-350: "Dixerat et dextra, permotus mente, levata/
Iurat per gladium, per candidulum quoque collum, / Iuxta posse sui
factis praedicta repleti."

abbey; they must do so in a way that has the approval of both God and the nuns. Men who thwart the design of God, even unwittingly, are blotted off the face of the earth.

This is not to say that these heroines rejoice in or seek out these convenient and sometimes violent deaths. Quite the contrary; Hrotsvit paints Gerberga, for instance, as a gracious and pure vessel of Divine grace. In Hrotsvit's rendering, Gerberga uses distinctly Marian language to express her desires, most notably in her prayer to be delivered from Bernard.⁸⁷ This was a socially-acceptable way for Hrotsvit to give her female protagonists agency. It combines two traditional Germanic gender roles assigned to women: *Hausherrshaft* and the task of bridging the gulf between the physical and spiritual realms.⁸⁸

Hrotsvit next turns to the dedication of the abbey church, from lines 375 to 404. This takes place on the Feast of All Saints (November 1) in 881, a date that Hrotsvit specifies was selected by Oda.⁸⁹ This solemnity was one of the highest, most important feast days of the tenth-

⁸⁷ Ibid., lines 352-353: "Christo me totam committo meam quoque vitam, Utque fiat de me iuxta domini rogo velle" cf. Luke 1:38: "Ecce ancilla domini. Fiat mihi secundum verbum Tuum." (Vulgate)

⁸⁸ On the latter feminine role, see Scheck, *Reform and Resistance*, 10-12.

⁸⁹ *Prim.*, lines 375-381.

century liturgical year. The people of the surrounding countryside come to see the ceremony, the nuns chant and process about the grounds, and Wichbert, the bishop of Hildesheim, performs the dedication.⁹⁰ This is the briefest of the moments Hrotsvit relates, and is also the least pointed. In it, she relates more or less bare, straightforward facts: names, dates, and events. It is illustrative of Hrotsvit's abilities as a historian; she relates dates, gives a picture of what occurred and the relevant figures who were involved. In a text full of editorializing, rich characterizations, and cosmic significances around every corner, this moment is peculiar. A likely explanation is that the reference to All Saints Day is meant to hearken back to the miracle of the lights in the forest, and imbue this event with the same level of significance, or at least echoes of it.⁹¹ To dress it up any

⁹⁰ As has been discussed in a previous chapter, this is a nod, not a slight, to the bishops of Hildesheim.

⁹¹ Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings*, 44: "[Hrotsvit] rendered the continuum between the two moments tangible; she wrote that Gandersheim's church was consecrated on the anniversary of the site's miraculous revelation." This is not strictly true; Hrotsvit specifies that the lights in the forest first occurred two days before All Saints Day (lines 194-195: "cum sanctorum venerabile festum esset cunctorum mox post biduum celebrandum...") and Liudolf himself saw the lights the next day, the Eve of All Saints (line 214: "Ipseque sacrata festi mox nocte futuri..."). The larger point is that though there is not perfect consonance between the date of the miracle and the date of the dedication, Hrotsvit frames the entire narrative in terms of continuity between the events.

further might detract from this correspondence, and so she declines to elaborate.

The next episode Hrotsvit presents, from line 405 to 485, is the time Oda spends at Gandersheim before her death. Oda, like many other noble women who founded and endowed monasteries, retired to her foundation in her old age. Hrotsvit characterizes Oda's time at Gandersheim as a time of motherhood to the community, but also a time of service, in the literal sense, to the nuns.⁹² This establishes the members of the community at Gandersheim as fictive kin of the Liudolfings on the one hand, and the spiritual superiors of the Liudolfings on the other.

Hrotsvit's language reinforces this second point. Oda repeatedly calls the nuns "*domnas*," a diminutive form of *domina*, which means "lady" or "mistress." The diminutive forms of *dominus*, and, by extension, *domina*, often have a more specific function in Christian contexts. They are used

⁹² *Prim.*, lines 490-506: "Mater et illius, stabilem corrumpere cuius/
Mentem nullarum potuit mutatio rerum,/ Quominus obsequio domini fieret
studiosa,/ Provocat exemplis illam, monitis quoque crebris,/ Ut, sese
semper circumspiciens sapienter,/ Commidum caute sibimet servaret
ovile/ Necnon factorum iuxta meritum variorum/ Nunc pie subiectas
monitis mulceret amicis,/ Nunc etiam verbis iuste terreret acerbis,/ Ne
quem divini ritum cultus violari/ Torpens effectus cordis permetteret
eius./ Ipsaque domna sui studio laudabilis Oda,/ Quae, claris splendens
radiis mirae bonitatis,/ Sat dilecta Deo fuerat, celebris quoque
mundo."

to refer to religious and spiritual superiors, as the full terms *dominus* and *domina* are generally reserved for God and the Virgin Mary in liturgical settings. That is, Hrotsvit puts "*domnas*" in the mouth of Oda to make it clear that the nuns in question are not mere ladies, in the secular sense, but her spiritual superiors, and by the extension the spiritual betters of her family as well, to whom duties of care and, in a certain measure, obedience, were owed.

With her entrance into the monastery, Oda hands the mantle of chief benefactor over to her children, stating explicitly that the fortunes of the family are directly tied to their support of the abbey.⁹³ Her son-in-law, King Louis the Younger, donates more royal lands to the abbey. When he dies, his successor, King Arnulf, gives Gandersheim vineyards. Liutgard dies shortly after, as does Gerberga. Christina, the youngest sister of Hathumoda and Gerberga, succeeds her as abbess.

Hrotsvit uses this moment to model the attitude of a good benefactor in the person of Oda. She, the ideal

⁹³ Ibid., lines 435-440: "'Exhortans moneo vos, o mea pignora cara,/ Ut maturetis condignis primule vestris/ Muneribus nostras large ditescere domnas,/ Hic servire piis debent quae sedulo nostris Patronis, quorum meritis, precibus quoque sacris/ Successus nobis optate prosperitatis/ Necnon regalis decus accedebat honoris.'"

patron, approaches the nuns as members of her own family, in terms of her personal concern for their well-being, and yet she also sees them as her betters, to be respected, and perhaps even appeased, to ensure her own well-being and that of her family. This is a rather pointed instruction to her audience.

The next period, which Hrotsvit recounts from lines 486 to 560, is largely the story of Duke Otto the Illustrious of Saxony. This was the son of Liudolf and Oda, the successor of Liudolf as duke and the successor of Oda as the chief benefactor of Gandersheim. Hrotsvit delivers a paeon to his virtues as a man and as a Christian: it is well within his powers to be a "*terribilis senioris*," but he chooses instead "*bene mansueti genitoris ad instar amari*."⁹⁴ He dies, like many of his male relatives and other male figures in the *Primordia*, relatively young. Upon his death, the nuns are stricken with grief and keep vigil by his body for three days, sobbing and wishing to die themselves.⁹⁵ It takes the intervention of outside visitors

⁹⁴ Ibid., lines 519-520.

⁹⁵ Ibid, lines 542-550.

to convince them to cease weeping over the corpse and allow it to be buried.⁹⁶

The depth of loyalty and feeling the nuns of Gandersheim display at the death of Duke Otto and the sheer volume and subsequent efficacy of the prayers they offer for the repose of his soul stand as a promise of what a similarly beneficent future patron could expect. This was important: the nuns were not treating their obligation to intercede for the family in prayer as a transactional affair; there was a true depth to their feelings that would manifest itself in both the fervor of their prayers and their assiduousness in actually offering them. This would be incredibly attractive to a prospective patron in the tenth century.

In her penultimate moment, extending from line 561 to 580, Hrotsvit at once delivers her *coup de grace* and lays bare her motivations in writing the *Primordia*. As Duke Otto nears death, a new Otto is born, who would one day become Emperor Otto I. Oda also dies at this time. Otto the Great is thus the heir to the legacies of both Oda and Otto the Illustrious, and is expected to match, if not surpass,

⁹⁶ Ibid, lines 551-556.

their work on behalf of Gandersheim. After all, if God, with His special concern for the nuns of Gandersheim, had seen fit to take Otto the Illustrious and Oda from this world, He surely would not leave His handmaidens without some source of aid, but in His munificence, grant Gandersheim another, perhaps even better than the previous, champion, in the person of Otto the Great. His birth is presented as a "when God closes a door, He opens a window" scenario.

More fascinating than this situation of the birth of Otto I as a sort of replacement for his ancestors is Hrotsvit's description of Otto: "*Dum decus hoc tanti clarum generis fuit ortum, in quo laeta procul dubio promissa replete Christi baptistae creduntur primitus esse.*"⁹⁷ He is presented as the fulfillment of the prophecy of John the Baptist to Aeda. It is difficult to imagine a more flattering framing of Otto as a man and as a ruler. John the Baptist is, after all, the final and most important of the biblical prophets, whose mission was to foretell the coming of Christ. By situating Otto as the summit of Liudolfing ascendancy, Hrotsvit is also tying his success

⁹⁷ Ibid., lines 569-571.

and, indeed, his very existence, to the pledges of his ancestors to Gandersheim and the spiritual labors of the nuns and later canonesses of the abbey. In short, she is delivering a sweeping claim of importance and superiority on the part of herself and her sisters, but softens it with high praise of Otto.

Finally, in lines 581 to 594, Hrotsvit concludes her narrative by recounting the death of Abbess Christina, the last Liudolfing abbess of Gandersheim until Hrotsvit's day. Her death marks the end of the heroic past of the abbey, the temporary end to Liudolfing abbacy at Gandersheim. The last lines of the *Primordia* are a prayer for the repose of the souls of all the deceased Liudolfing benefactors of the abbey. Given the sweeping scope of the poem as a whole and its expansive descriptions of so many events, this conclusion seems rather abrupt. In point of fact, however, the death of Christina is the peaceful end of the original Liudolfings; Liudolf, Hathumoda, Bruno, Liutgard, Gerberga, Otto, and Oda have all passed away years before, and Christina's death completes the epic. It is for this reason, with the heroic early Liudolfings before the eyes of her reader, Hrotsvit concludes with prayer.

In this parting moment, Hrotsvit demonstrates the value of her vocation as a canoness of Gandersheim, providing a free sample of sorts for her elite audience of prospective donors, especially Otto I himself. This is not to say that this is all marketing and no piety; Hrotsvit writes prayers for various occasions throughout her work. This is thus a fitting conclusion to the *Primordia*, encompassing as it does her dual purpose as the *Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis* and a creative woman of faith.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim was a poetess, playwright, scholar, canoness, historian, political fundraiser, philosopher, and theologian: a true Ottonian renaissance woman. Her work merits examination on all of these points to chart out the complex web of motivations that prompted such a singular outpouring of artistic expression.

Although Hrotsvit has been celebrated for her contributions as a poet and dramatist, and scholars have made some moves in furthering her reputation as a political philosopher and theologian, there have been vanishingly few discussions of her as a historian, or at least, as a writer specifically of two histories. This essay has endeavored to fill in this gap with respect to the less-examined of the two, the *Primordia Coenebii Gandeshemensis*, by situating the work within its social, political, economic, religious, artistic, and historiographical contexts each in turn.

In so doing, it has become clear that the *Primordia* was both a way for Hrotsvit to exercise her rare literary talent and advocate for the interests of her home and her

sisters. These interests involved increasing patronage in the forms of land, other types of wealth such as relics and treasure, sponsorship of new building projects, and being entrusted with the daughters of the royal family and other elites, whether as girls to be educated or young women to serve as abbesses or other leaders of the chapter.

The primary audience she appears to have had in mind for this work was Emperor Otto I the Great, his close family members, and perhaps also his court. There were concrete circumstances prompting this intervention by Hrotsvit. The Abbey of Gandersheim had needs and aspirations that required an influx of goods and goodwill from powerful patrons to achieve. The most significant of these, and the one most related to the subject and scope of the *Primordia*, was the construction and endowment of a new daughter-house of Benedictine nuns in Gandersheim. The *Primordia* was written in 970 and the priory was completed in 973. This success was followed by more royal grants throughout the 970s, 980s, 990s, and beyond, and the abbey's receipt of an imperial princess, first as a student in 979, and later as an abbess in 1002. These coups all imply that Hrotsvit was not unsuccessful in her project. While this entire outcome cannot be attributed solely to

the Primordia, but rather to the larger pattern of success and ascendance for Gandersheim in the mid-tenth through eleventh centuries, Hrotsvit and her project were undeniably the strong voice of Gandersheim in this pivotal moment that she so firmly believed she was destined to be.

Hrotsvit was not merely a conduit for political messaging. She was also an artist, with a clear sense of her own abilities and a desire to display them in her writing. To showcase these abilities, she wrote the entire work in leonine hexameter, heavily inspired by Classical Latin. This was hardly a small undertaking, and there exist no other works by women of her time that approach this level of complexity and classical fluency.

She further employed her artistic abilities in her organization of the narrative into the form of an allegory for the Nativity story in Saint Luke's Gospel. This sort of endeavor can be seen just as much as an act of devotion as it was a bravura literary performance. Either way, it is a clear extension of Hrotsvit as an individual. She writes with a distinct first-person style, mentioning that this is the outpouring of her mind and her pen.

Hrotsvit's learning, clarity of objective, artistic skill, and consciousness of her own talent make reading her

work just as delightful as it is informative. Perhaps other women writers of the Middle Ages have been similarly unjustly ignored by the established historiographical tradition. Ascertaining which of these merit this same level of analysis is an important task for future scholars. There is likely also a good number of male authors of the period who produced works that are simultaneously understudied by historians for the simple fact that their political and social import are masked by apparently insular or hagiographical content. Future scholars should apply what exegetical schemata these authors would have understood and used themselves to decode the historical narratives that lie just below the strange yet wonderful surfaces of these texts.

All told, Hrotsvit has achieved what she set out to do as Gandersheim's voice. Her abbey and the town that sprung up around it, Bad Gandersheim, are famous in a large part because of her work. The abbey, thanks perhaps in part to her efforts, remained in the good graces of both popes and emperors long after the Ottonian dynasty died out. In fact, it was to last nearly a millennium, surviving wars, plagues, and even Lutheranism before its dissolution in the

midst of the political turmoil of nineteenth-century Germany.

To understand the life and times of this incredible woman and her connection to the broader developments of Ottonian Germany, the best place to look is her most personal and intimate work. The *Primordia* was the legacy she sought to leave behind. To take it seriously is to accord the genius of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim the respect it so richly deserves.

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