

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim

A FLORILEGIUM OF HER WORKS



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**Hrotsvit of Gandersheim:
A Florilegium of her Works**

Translated with Introduction, Interpretative Essay and Notes

Katharina M. Wilson
University of Georgia

D. S. BREWER

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First published 1998
D. S. Brewer, Cambridge
Reprinted 2000

ISBN 0 85991 489 5

D. S. Brewer is an imprint of Boydell and Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell and Brewer Inc.
PO Box 41026, Rochester, NY 14604-4126, USA

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hrotsvitha, ca. 935–ca. 975.

[Selections. English]

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim : a florilegium of her works / translated
with introduction, interpretative essay and notes, Katharina Wilson.

p. cm. – (Library of medieval women, ISSN 1369-9652)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-85991-489-5 (paperback : alk. paper)

1. Hrotsvitha, ca. 935–ca. 975 – Translations into English.
2. Christian literature, Latin (Medieval and modern) – Translations
into English. 3. Christian drama, Latin (Medieval and modern) –
Translations into English. 4. Epic poetry, Latin (Medieval and
modern) – Translations into English. 5. Women and literature –
Germany – Saxony – History. 6. Christian saints – Legends.

I. Wilson, Katharina M. II. Title. III. Series.

PA8340.A28 1998

872'.03–dc21

97-51129

This publication is printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Great Britain by
Athenæum Press Ltd, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear

Library of Medieval Women

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Series Editor: Jane Chance

Already published

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Introduction

Long considered the “*rara avis*” of early Germanic authors, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim has now been firmly placed in the medieval monastic traditions of Benedictine spirituality, and even though her hagiographic plays are without precedent in tenth century European literature, her efforts at the didactic utilization of hagiography are not. In fact, Hrotsvit’s dramatization of legendary materials bears testimony to the prominent role that hagiographic *lectiones* played in the Benedictine office and to the gradual rise of the use of hagiographic *exempla* in homiletic texts. While illustrative *exempla* were copied and circulated throughout the Middle Ages, the actual logical organization of homiletic narratives – whereby individual *exempla* became linked with dogmatic or scriptural topics – did not occur until the rise of the preaching orders. As early as the twelfth century, several *exempla* collections, alphabetically arranged and painstakingly cross-referenced, were available for preachers – the best known, perhaps, being Etienne de Bourbon’s *Liber de septem donis*. Hrotsvit’s thematic linkage of her plays to the liturgy and her utilization of hagiographic sources in a plethora of non-hagiographic genres are, thus, while early and imaginative, yet by no means totally alien to the early medieval literary scene famous for its predilection for genre mixing. To argue against the authenticity of her works on these grounds does not, therefore, seem to be tenable.

Manuscripts

The most complete text of Hrotsvit’s works is preserved in the Emmeram-Munich Codex (clm 14485 1–150). This is also the oldest extant copy of her works dating to the early eleventh century. The manuscript, believed to have been produced at Gandersheim, was discovered by the leading German humanist Conrad Celtis in 1494 and was printed under the auspices of the Sodalitas Rhenana by Hieronymus Holtzel in Nuremberg in 1501. The first edition contains six woodcuts illustrating the dramas: two by Albrecht Dürer and four believed to be by Wolfgang Traut. Celtis made emendations to the text but Johannes Trithem commissioned a complete copy of the manuscript prior to Celtis’ editing. This original version is preserved in the Schlossbibliothek of Pommersfelden (cod. 308 (2883)). Additionally, several fragmentary texts of Hrotsvit’s works have been discovered in the twentieth century. Goswin Frenken found a copy

of the first four dramas (perhaps the copy Hrotsvit claims to have sent to certain *sapientes* for evaluation). They are preserved in a manuscript of miscellaneous texts in the Cologne Stadtarchiv (cod. w 101, 1–16) and were copied toward the end of the twelfth century, probably from a prototype other than the Emmeram-Munich codex. Another late twelfth century copy of *Gallicanus* was incorporated into the *Alderspach Passionale* (clm 2552, now in Munich) and, as some scholars have argued, in the late twelfth century and early thirteenth century from here into the *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum* without attribution of authorship (Heiligenkreuz Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 12, vol. 278–81; Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, cod. lat. 336, vol. 362–66; Melk Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 675, vol. 234–38).¹

Biography

All we know of Hrotsvit's biography has to be gleaned from her dedicatory letters and prefaces. She was probably born in the fourth decade of the tenth century, and is likely to have been of noble Saxon descent. She lived as a canoness in the Imperial Abbey of Gandersheim under Gerberga II's rule, and she probably died at the turn of the millennium after having completed her last extant work, the *Primordia*, in 973.²

Living in the tenth century Benedictine monastic environment, Hrotsvit's predilection for choosing hagiographic sources that celebrate the hermetical and monastic ideal of *solī-deo vivere* comes as no surprise. It is evident from her work that she considers hermetic life (total solitude in worship) and martyrdom as the two most privileged manifestations of Christian devotion. In eremitic life, as H. Fichtenau observes, "... separation [from the world] was stressed almost to the point of pathos."³ In an age where temporary solitude (in taking one's meals, spending one's day) was a most serious monastic punishment, eremitism and martyrdom do, indeed, appear to be metaphorical equivalents of self-denial. Two of her plays, *Paphnutius* and *Abraham* particularly, reflect a specifically German brand of monastic hermetism, the custom of "Klausner" and "Klausner-

¹ The most complete editions of Hrotsvit's works are still those of Paul von Winterfeld, *Hrotsvithae Opera* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1965) and Helena Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera* (Munich: Schöningh, 1970). For a full discussion of the manuscript tradition see Sibylle Jefferies, "Hrotsvit and the *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum*," in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, "Rara avis in Saxonia"*, ed. K. Wilson, Medieval and Renaissance Monograph Series, vol. VII (Ann Arbor, 1987), pp. 239–52.

² She says in the *Primordia* (525) that she was born "longo tempore" after the death of Otto of Saxony (died November 30, 912) and that she was older than her Abbess Gerberga (born c. 940).

³ Heinrich Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century*, trans. P. Geary (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 246.

innen" (*inclusi* and *inclusae*), a practice whereby religious people did not live in a monastery but, rather, next to a convent or church in individual claustration, walled up in a cell without doors. Martyrdom, conversely, is celebrated in two of her dramas (*Dulcitius* and *Sapientia*) and three of her legends (*Pelagius*, *Dionysius*, and *Agnes*); in all but one of the five treatments of martyrdom the saint dies not only as an eloquent witness to the faith but in preserving her/his virginity from persuasive assaults by male antagonists. Both (hermetism and martyrdom) are extreme, even extremist forms of asceticism depicted by Hrotsvit not simply as idealized abstractions of Christological emulation but as manifestations of the eternal human struggle for moral excellence.

In composing all her texts Hrotsvit is entirely within the mainstream of the didactic hagiographic *exemplum*'s tradition which invariably presented action in the texts as particular and anecdotal. By extension, her treatment of sin and virtue is never abstract but exemplified by specific instances of good and evil behavior and always anchored in a recognizable historic, geographic, and social context, inevitably constructed rhetorically with an eye to its closure conveying its moral.

Hrotsvit's epics exhibit the same concerns for particular detail and moral intention. Her conception of history in general, and of Otto's *imperium* in specific, was more complex and sophisticated than those of Benedict of Saint Andrea and Thietmar of Merseburg, in that she recognized that Otto's imperial title and dignity absorbed his royalty. She knew, as Carl Erdmann has argued, "... that Otto's empire had universal preeminence ... [and she] ... conferred upon Otto the Caesarian and Augustan *imperium* and placed him in the same line of succession with the ancient emperors."⁴ As such, she is able to anchor his deeds not only in hagiography (by depicting him as the true imperial *christomimētēs*) but also in the lore of ancient Roman grandeur.

Even Hrotsvit's name has been the source of some discussion.⁵ She records the nominative form of her name as Hrotsvit (in the "Epistle" [3] and in the prologue [1] to the third book) and the inflected forms as being Hrotsvithae ("Maria" [18], "Ascensio" [148], "Gongolf" [3]) and Hrotsvitham ("Pelagius" [3]). After many fanciful interpretations of her name, ranging from Gottsched's "Weisse Rose" to "Rauschewind" and "rascher Witz,"⁶ it was not until 1838 that Jacob Grimm in *Lateini-*

⁴ Karl Erdmann, "Das ottonische Reich als Imperium Romanum," in *Deutsches Archiv für Geschichte des Mittelalters* VI (1943): 422.

⁵ The following page is a summary of my note "Clamor Validus Gandershemensis," *Germanic Notes* 14, no. 2 (1983): 17-18.

⁶ Edwin Zeydel, "Ego Clamor Validus - Hrotsvitha," *Modern Language Notes* 64 (1946): 282.

sche Gedichte des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts recognized that Hrotsvit herself gave us the Latin etymology of her name.⁷ She says in the prose introduction to the dramas (3): “Unde ego, Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis non recusavi illum imitari dictando dum alii colunt legendo.” Grimm pointed out that her old Saxon name derived from the two words *hruot* = clamor = voice and *suid* = validus = strong. As she wrote “Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis” in apposition to “ego”, he observed she must have intended it either as a mere Latinization of her name or as a pun. No one before Grimm, not even the German Humanists who so enthusiastically furthered her literary fortunes, has the “faintest inkling of the true derivation” of Hrotsvit’s name.⁸ In the seventeenth century, Martin F. Seidel even went so far as to consider “Hrotsvit” to be an anagram for Helena von Rossow and claimed, accordingly, that Hrotsvit was a member of the Brandenburg von Rossow family.⁹

“Clamor Validus,” however, is both an interpretation of, and a pun on, Hrotsvit’s name – one that she chose to represent her poetic program as well as her poetic purpose.¹⁰ It is not merely a Latinization of “Hrotsvit” but, more important, an interpretation of it and an explanation of her self and of her earthly mission as suggested by her name. Seen as allegorization of her name, “Clamor Validus” could be best rendered as “Forceful Testimony” (that is, for God), or “Vigorous (valid) Attestation” (that is of Christian truth).¹¹

Nothing is known of Hrotsvit’s childhood and ancestry except that she was of noble Saxon parentage. With pride in her descent from the famous

⁷ Jacob Grimm, *Lateinische Gedichte des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Dieterische Buchhandlung, 1898) p. 9.

⁸ Zeydel, “Ego Clamor Validus,” p. 282.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Grimm’s contribution to Hrotsvit scholarship rests with his recognition of the connection between her name and the reference to herself as “Clamor Validus.” His conclusion, on the other hand, has subsequently been modified. Sebastian Euringer, for example, asserts: “Denn ihr Name bedeutet eigentlich nicht ‘mächtiger Ruf,’ sondern ‘am Ruhm Mächtig,’ ” and he adds: “Ich wenigstens finde für *hruot* nur *fama*, *gloria*, nirgends aber *clamor* angegeben, was althochdeutsch *hruop* heissen würde” (“Drei Beiträge zur Roswotha Forschung,” *Historisches Jahrbuch der Goerres-Gesellschaft zur Pflege des Wissenschaft im katholischen Deutschland* 54 (1934): 75–83). Thus, when Hrotsvit identifies herself as “ego Clamor Validus” rather than as “Fama (Gloria) Valida,” she must have had in mind reasons other than the mere Latinization of her name.

¹¹ Euringer “Drei Beiträge,” p. 76, suggests that “Clamor Validus” is a reference to John the Baptist (“ego vox clamantis in deserto: Dirigete viam Domini!” (John 1:24)), with whose mission and zeal Hrotsvit identified herself and who appeared to Oda, the foundress of Gandersheim, in a vision. Interpreting the meaning of her name in this way, Hrotsvit stands in the mainstream of early medieval thought, which insisted that *sine nomine persona non est* and that every word, every name, like everything, had a transcendental meaning and reflected the divine plan of the Creator.

tribe of the warlike Saxons, Hrotsvit gives us the etymology of the name of her tribe (*gens Saxonum*) in the *Gesta* (4–5):

Ad claram gentem Saxonum nomen habentem

A Saxon per duritiam mentis bene firmam.

That she was of noble descent is almost certain, since only daughters of the aristocracy were admitted to Gandersheim, a foundation of the Liudolf dynasty in lower Saxony on the slopes of the Harz mountains, on the border between the dioceses of Hildesheim and Mainz.¹² In 852, thirty years after the first Saxon foundation at Herford, Gandersheim Abbey was established by Liudolf and his wife, Oda, ancestors of the Ottos. Initially the canonesses dwelt at Brunschausen and were moved only four years later to Gandersheim. Five of Liudolf's daughters took the veil, and three of them become the first abbesses of Gandersheim. Hathumonda (852–74), educated at Herford, Gerberta I (874–96), and Christina (896–918) ruled for twenty-two years, and they succeeded not only in enforcing religious discipline but also in making the abbey into a new center of learning. The Liudolfs maintained close ties with their foundations: Liudolf himself was lay abbot of Brunschausen, his son Otto was lay abbot of Hersfeld,¹³ and Oda retired to Gandersheim Abbey after her husband's death. Agius of Corvey, brother of the three Liudolf abbesses, gives testimony to the spirit of learning and culture in the abbey in the erudite dialogue of solace which he composed for the canonesses after Hathumonda's death.

The Liudolf dynasty showed a predilection for establishing religious houses, especially for daughters of the aristocracy. That some of these convents and abbeys became centers of learning and culture is hardly surprising, given the illustrious history of female monasticism. "Monasteries for women," as Suzanne Wemple observes, "were centers of civilization and culture in the early Middle Ages."¹⁴ Some scriptoria of Frankish and Merovingian convents were the workplaces of nuns, Cologne and Chelles being the most famous. Bernhard Bischoff, for example, has connected with these scriptoria seventeen codices that contain the names of several female scribes.¹⁵ Indeed, "some of the best examples of calligraphy," Florence E. de Roover remarks, "came from the hands

¹² See, for example, Wilhelm Gundlach, *Heldenlieder der deutschen Kaiserzeit* (Aalen: Scientia, 1970), pp. 225ff; Duckett, *Death and Life*, pp. 182ff.

¹³ Mariane Schütze-Plugk, *Herrscher und Märtyrerauffassung bei Hrotsvit von Gandersheim* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1972), p. 5.

¹⁴ Suzanne F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 175.

¹⁵ Bernhard Bischoff, "Die Kölner Nonnenhandschriften und das Skriptorium von Chelles," in *Mittelalterliche Studien*, ed. Bischoff (Stuttgart: Hierseemann, 1966), pp. 16–33.

of nuns." Some of these scribes, she points out, were also very prolific: Dietmundis (c.1060–1130) of Wessobrunn, Bavaria, for instance, left a catalogue of forty-five volumes that she herself had copied,¹⁶ and religious women made lasting contributions in the fields of hagiography and hymnography as well.¹⁷

By the tenth century Gandersheim, like Reichenau, Tegernsee, Saint Gall, Fulda, Corvey, Herford, and Saint Emmeram (with the last four Gandersheim Abbey entertained close connections), was an oasis of intellectual and spiritual activity. Like the other great medieval monasteries, it functioned as a school, hospital, library, political center, house of refuge, center of pilgrimage. As such, it harbored different kinds of people, one of whom might have been the Spaniard who claimed to have been an eyewitness to Pelagius's martyrdom and told Hrotsvit the story of the martyrdom of the new saint in Cordoba.¹⁸ Incidentally, the Emmeram-Munich codex of Hrotsvit's works also contains on the back of the last page eight lines in the old Glagolitic alphabet. They are almost certainly not by Hrotsvit, but they help to date the codex and give testimony to the cosmopolitan atmosphere that prevailed in Gandersheim during the Ottonian Renaissance. The old Glagolitic alphabet was used in Bulgaria and Croatia in the tenth century; perhaps Hrotsvit's abbey or Saint Emmeram harbored someone from the Balkans,¹⁹ or the codex may even have traveled to the Balkans.

Gandersheim was a free abbey directly responsible to the king rather than to the Church. Indeed, in 947 Otto I freed the abbey from royal rule and gave the abbess the authority to have her own court of law, keep her own army, coin her own money, and hold a seat in the Imperial Diet. In 918 the reign of the three Liudolf abbesses was followed by the interregnum of two women not affiliated with the crown but chosen by the sisters from among themselves. The first of these abbesses was Hrotsvit I, whose name Hrotsvit might have been chosen or to whom she may have been related. In 965 the rule of a royal abbess was reinstated with the conse-

¹⁶ Florence E. de Roover, "The Scriptorium," in *The Medieval Library*, ed. James W. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 609, 610.

¹⁷ Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 181. Wemple observes, "While Merovingian legal texts were the products of episcopal and royal courts, saints' lives, hymns, and prayers were closely connected with the monasteries. Nuns left an imprint on this type of literature by introducing feminine ideals into hagiography and leaving a record of their own mystical experiences." Baudovinia's "Life of Saint Radegund," Aldegund's *vita* recording her visions, Hugeburc's "Life of Saint Wynnebalde," and the older version from Chelles, of Saint Balthild's *vita* bear eloquent testimony to this observation.

¹⁸ Nagel, *Hrotsvit von Gandersheim*, Stuttgart, Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965, p. 47; Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, p. 124.

¹⁹ Edwin Zeydel, "On the Two Minor Poems in the Hrotsvitha Codex," *Modern Language Notes* 60 (1945): 376.

cration of Gerberga II (940–1001), daughter of Henry of Bavaria and niece of Otto I, by Bishop Otwin of Hildesheim. During the reign of Abbess Gerberga II, Gandersheim was renowned for its scholastic, cultural, and religious activities.²⁰

The date of Hrotsvit's entrance into Gandersheim is uncertain, but given the traditions of the time, it is likely that she was quite young.²¹ She lived, studied, and wrote during the abbey's golden age under Gerberga II's rule, a period of peace, tranquillity, and genuine devotion to learning and service. Hrotsvit's virtuosity in adorning her works with diverse rhetorical ornaments (she uses, as I have argued elsewhere, almost all of the figures and tropes discussed by Donatus, Isidore, and the Venerable Bede), as well as the *etymologia*, *arithmetica*, and *musica* lessons incorporated into her plays, bear eloquent testimony to her training in, and respect for, the *artes*. According to her own statement in the preface to the legends, her teachers were Rikkardis and Gerberga II. It seems that Rikkardis, whom Hrotsvit describes as being "sapientissima atque benignissima magistra," taught her the curriculum of the quadrivium, while Gerberga perfected her in the fields of the trivium. Gerberga herself was educated in Saint Emmeram, the cultural center of Bavaria. It was she who introduced Hrotsvit to the Roman authors as well as to the patristic writers. Like her sister, Hadwig of Swabia, who was known for her connections with Ekkehard II of Saint Gall, Gerberga seems also to have received tuition in Greek;²² indeed, her knowledge of Greek, as Bert Nagel

²⁰ This is reflected by one of the letters of Otto II to Gerberga in which, sending his five-year-old daughter Sophia to be educated in the abbey, the emperor praised the cultural state of the abbey:

Nos dilectae conjugis nostrae Theophanae
Imperatricis Augustae votum et interventionem
Sequentes filiam nostram carissimam nomine Sopiam
Deo sanctaeque Genitrici illius Mariae virgini
Sanctisque confessoribus Anastasio et Innocentio,
Quorum Ecclesia in loco Gandesheim nominato
Honorifice constructa videtur, cui etiam Gerbig
Neptis nostra sub praesenti tempore venerabilis
Abbatissa praesse dignoscitur devoto animo obtulimus
Atque sacrae scripturae litteras ut ibi ediscat
vitamque et conversationem dignam Sanctimonialium Deo
Ibi servientium imitetur.

²¹ The first abbesses of Gandersheim entered their monasteries at a young age. Hathumonda, for example, entered Herford at the age of six, and Sophia, Otto II's and Theophano's daughter, was sent to Gandersheim for education at the age of five. However, the suggestion, first voiced by Magnin in his edition of Hrotsvit's works, that Hrotsvit shows such deep understanding of erotic passion that she must have taken the veil rather late in life, enjoyed for a while at least some popularity with German Hrotsvit scholars.

²² Wilhelm Gundlach in *Heldenlieder der deutschen Kaiserzeit* (Aalen: Scientia, 1970), vol. I, pp. 26ff, tells that Hadwig spoke and translated Greek. She learned the language while she

suggests, might have been an additional reason why Otto II's Byzantine wife, Theophano, spent much time in Gandersheim.²³ In addition, as Peter Dronke suggests, Hrotsvit may have received some instruction at court:

It is possible that she spent some of her youth at the Ottonian court rather than in a convent. One detail here seems to me particularly suggestive. In 952 Otto I had invited Rather, the most widely-read scholar and most brilliant prose-writer of the age, to his court. . . . Ostensibly he came to give Bruno some advanced literary teaching; but the fact that Rather cultivated a distinctive style of rhymed prose, which has notable parallels in Hrotsvitha, makes it tempting to suppose that, in Rather's years with Otto, Hrotsvitha too received instruction from him, and then tried to model some of her mannerisms on his. Especially her longest and most complicated sentences . . . have to me a markedly Ratherian ring.²⁴

It was through Theophano that the great culture of Byzantium came directly to Saxony. In addition to transmitting Greek arts and customs, Theophano also introduced many refinements from the court of Constantinople, such as wearing silks and taking baths.²⁵ She may have been, as Franz Dölger argues, an important factor in the new conception of Imperial majesty at the Saxon court.²⁶ Significantly, perhaps, for Hrotsvit's dramatic ventures, the Greek princess was related to Constantine VII, author of the *Liber de ceremoniis*. Constantine mentions, among other ceremonial concerns, the substitution of religious pageants for pagan spectacles. Liudprand of Cremona, too, observes that an embryonic church drama existed in tenth century Byzantium. Sent by Otto I as his ambassador to the Emperor Nicephorus Phocas in order to arrange the marriage of Otto II and a Greek princess, Liudprand complained in his work *Mission to Constantinople* that Hagia Sophia was turned into a theater, and he recorded a scenic depiction of the ascension of the prophet Elias.²⁷

was engaged to the Greek King Constantino. As a widow, she read Virgil together with Ekkehard II of Saint Gall. In addition, as Nagel (*Hrotsvit von Gandersheim*, p. 43) remarks, the document of Pope John XIII for the abbey records Gerberga's name in Greek letters.

²³ Bodo of Clus records that Theophano frequently visited Gandersheim Abbey on holy days. See also Nagel, *Hrotsvit von Gandersheim*, p. 43.

²⁴ Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua († 203) to Marguerite Porete († 1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 5, 6.

²⁵ Anne Lyon Haight, *Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim: Her Life, Times, and Works and a Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York: Hrotsvitha Club, 1965), p. 9.

²⁶ Franz Dölger, "Die Ottonenkaiser und Byzanz," in *Karolingische und Ottonische Kunst*, ed. H. Subin et al. (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1957).

²⁷ Cf. Rudolf Vey, *Christliches Theater im Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Aschaffenburg: P. Pattlock, 1960), p. 12.

In addition to visiting Gandersheim frequently, Theophano also sent her daughter Sophia there to be educated. Otto II, soon after his coronation in 973, bequeathed his Seesen property to the abbey, and in 975 he solemnly reaffirmed all previous gifts to Gandersheim.²⁸ Hrotsvit thus was directly exposed to contact with the Imperial family, which was profoundly Byzantine in its cultural outlook and personal tastes. Perhaps as a result, a large portion of her sources belong to the hagiography of the Byzantine Empire. Four of her legends (*Maria*, *Ascensio*, *Theophilus*, *Basilius*) and four of her dramas (*Calimachus*, *Abraham*, *Paphnutius*, *Sapientia*) have their roots in the hagiography of the Eastern Church. It may be conjectured that Hrotsvit's contact with the Imperial family and its orientation to Byzantine culture and tastes might have been a contributing factor in her interest in Eastern sources.

Works

Hrotsvit's works consist of eight legends, six plays, two epics, and a short poem. The works are organized chronologically and generically into three books and fall into three clearly marked creative periods, the breaks occurring after the fourth legend and the fourth play.²⁹

Book I, containing the legends (seven in leonine hexameters; one, *Gongolf*, in elegiac distichs), begins with a preface and a dedication to Hrotsvit's abbess, Gerberga II. The first legend, *Maria*, is a treatment of the Virgin's life based on an apocryphal source, the *Pseudo-Evangelium* of Mattheus. In the exordium to the poem, Hrotsvit introduces her major theme: the exaltation of the virtue of steadfast, obedient, and, therefore, triumphant and life-giving virginity. *Maria* narrates the miraculous conception and birth of Mary, her childhood, and her stay at the temple, her reluctance to marry, the selection by divine judgment of Joseph as her husband, and finally, her motherhood. Mary's glorification is entirely Christocentric – her laudable chastity and exemplary conduct are subordinated to her role as genetrix, and the poem closes with a prayer to Christ. Hrotsvit's second legend, *Ascensio*, the shortest of her works, is drawn from a Greek source describing the ascension of Christ. The third legend deals with the eighth century Frankish knight Gongolf, who lived under Pippin the Short. Gongolf is the meek, courteous, wise, and chaste knight. His magnanimity and virtue, however, became the source of envy for the devil, who uses his favorite weapon, human sexuality, to plot the saintly Gongolf's destruction. Gongolf's wife, crazed with lust for a cleric, not

²⁸ Nagel, *Hrotsvit von Gandersheim*, p. 46.

²⁹ The following description summarizes my description of her works in *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. K.M. Wilson (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1984), pp. 42–57.

only commits adultery but also instigates her husband's murder. Subsequently, she suffers for the deed (and her lack of contrition) by means of a scatological miracle when her blasphemy of Gongolf's miracles is punished by an involuntary fart whenever she opens her mouth. Hrotsvit's fourth legend is based not on a written source but on an eyewitness report. It describes the martyrdom of the chaste Pelagius, a tenth century Spanish saint who died persevering against the homoerotic advances of the Caliph of Cordoba, Abderrahman III. The fifth and sixth legends are the first literary treatments of the Faust theme in Germany and deal with the Greek saints Basilus and Theophilus; both concern men who made a pact with the devil and sold their immortal souls for mortal gain. The sinners are saved at the intercession of Bishop Basilus and the Virgin Mary respectively. In both poems Hrotsvit uses the themes of fall and conversion, sin and salvation; in both she apotheosizes the unlimited power of prayer and contrition that are rewarded by divine forgiveness. The seventh legend describes the martyrdom of Dionysius, the first bishop of Paris. The canoness's last legend glorifies Saint Agnes, martyr for virginity, who rejects the marriage proposal of Sempronius's son in favor of the heavenly bridegroom and resists, with Christ's help, the ignominious attempts of her adversaries to defile her chastity when she is placed in a brothel for punishment. At the conclusion of her earthly sufferings, Christ awaits his virginal bride in the celestial bridal chamber.

The second book, Hrotsvit's most widely known creation, contains her plays, all in rhymed, rhythmic prose. The book is introduced by a dedication to Gerberga, followed by a prose letter to the learned patrons of the book (sometimes identified as Gerberga's former teachers at Saint Emmeram). *Gallicanus*, the first of Hrotsvit's dramas, disseminated in the Middle Ages in martyrologies under the feast days of Saints John and Paul, deals with the conversion and martyrdom of the pagan Roman general Gallicanus. He has been promised the hand of Constantia, Emperor Constantine's daughter, if he wages a successful war against the Scythians. Constantia, however, has taken the vow of chastity, and, therefore, cannot marry him. Through divine intervention and the assistance of Saints Paul and John, Gallicanus becomes a Christian and renounces marriage. Like Constantia, he devotes the rest of his life to religion and dies persevering in his faith. *Dulcitius*, the second play, takes place during the Diocletian persecutions of the Christians and dramatizes the martyrdom of three virgin sisters, Agape, Chionia, and Hirena, who refuse to forego their faith and their chastity (thereby avoiding idolatry and adultery against the heavenly bridegroom). *Dulcitius* contains elements of an almost mimelike character. Dulcitius is depicted as a philandering pagan. He imprisons the girls in a room adjacent to the pantry so

that he may visit them undisturbed at night. The girls, very much afraid, spend the hours in prayer. Dulcitus arrives at nightfall, but when he tries to seduce the virgins, a miracle happens; he is deluded and mistakes the pots and pans for the sisters. He embraces and kisses the kitchen utensils until he emerges so smeared and blackened with soot that his soldiers mistake him for the devil and the guards chase him from the palace doorsteps. This instance of typical medieval kitchen humor is an excellent example of the concretization and visualization of Hrotsvit's hagiographic themes; external appearance is a reflection of the internal state. Dulcitus, whose soul is possessed by the devil, appears as the *imago diaboli* in body.

The third play, *Calimachus*, depicts the sin and subsequent conversion of a pagan youth. Calimachus is passionately in love with Drusiana, Andronicus's wife, who has taken the vow of chastity. Upon learning of his violent passion, Drusiana prays for death in order to forego temptation, and she dies. Ablaze with lust, Calimachus bribes Fortunatus, the tomb guard, in a desperate attempt at necrophilia. Before he can profane Drusiana's body, however, he and Fortunatus both die. They are subsequently resurrected by Saint John, and Calimachus is converted to Christianity. As did Sempronius's son in *Agnes*, so Calimachus vividly exemplifies the Christian paradox that in order to live the Christian has to die to the world first.

In the fourth and fifth dramas, *Paphnutius* and *Abraham*, Hrotsvit again treats of the themes of fall and conversion. Two harlots, representing the most abominable vice of *luxuria carnis*, are converted by two saintly anchorites and consequently live ascetic lives. In *Paphnutius* the courtesan Thais is converted by a saintly hermit who aspires to this task as the result of a vision, while in *Abraham* the hermit is the courtesan's uncle and former guardian. The recognition scene between the aged Abraham, posing as a lover, and his niece Mary in the brothel has evoked especial praise for Hrotsvit's talent as a dramatist. Finally, *Sapientia*, the last of the dramas, deals with the martyrdom of the three allegorical virgins, Fides, Spes, and Caritas, who, like the heroines of *Dulcitus*, willingly face death on earth so that they may earn eternal life in heaven.

Paphnutius and *Sapientia* commence with a dialogue lesson in music and mathematics respectively. In *Paphnutius* the saintly hermit is expounding upon the mysteries of the celestial harmonies to his disciples, while in *Sapientia* the mother of the three virgins confounds the pagan emperor with her arithmetical learning or, rather, her Boethian exposition of numerical values. Book two concludes with a poem of thirty-four hexameters on Saint John's Apocalypse which is believed to have been intended for inscription under the twelve murals of Gandersheim.

Book three contains the two extant leonine hexameter epics, the