

Sainted Women of the Dark Ages

Edited and translated by

Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg,

with E. Gordon Whatley



*To Adele and
John of our
favorite saints
John Halborg*

Duke University Press Durham and London 1992

of the almighty God, oh handmaids of Christ, for as the divine oracle says, it is not the one who begins but she who perseveres even to the end who will be saved."⁶⁶

29. Meanwhile, as affairs involving wealth usually generate discord among our nearest kin, her brother Bodo had, by illicit usurpation, retained the farms which she had bestowed on the convent through a series of charters.⁶⁷ But hearing of his sister's illness and that she had anxiously appealed to the Lord in the matter, he hastened to her side. Soon, with God's mediation, they mutually confirmed those charters and they remain legal to this day.⁶⁸ When she felt herself leaving her body, she said farewell to her sisters and called Italus the priest so that, as is customary, he might perform the funeral offices for her. And with these entreaties, she sent her holy spirit to be gathered into the assembly of the saints. By His gift, she received double measure of eternal glory from Him to Whom be honor and glory and power and ruling from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.

30. The said handmaid of God died on the tenth calends of October on which day we celebrate the passion of St. Maurice of Agaune Captain of the Theban legion.⁶⁹ And her relics were conducted to that place at which tomb the fame of her virtues was revealed after her death.

Here ends the death of the Holy Abbess Sadalberga.

66. Baudonivia, *Radegund*, 21. It is impossible to tell whether it was the author or Sadalberga herself who was inspired by the earlier saint's example.

67. Presumably this is her second brother, Fulculf-Bodo, and not Odila's husband, Leudin-Bodo, bishop of Toul. Possibly the difficulty involves the newly decreed hereditary rights of women.

68. McNamara has examined the uses of hagiography in strengthening the economy of conventual communities in "A Legacy of Miracles."

69. September 22.

I I

Rictrude, Abbess of Marchiennes

(ca. 614–688)



Rictrude was born about 614 in Gascony, a land that had never been thoroughly brought under Frankish control. It had a strong Gallo-Roman population mixed with Gascons and a troubled history of Visigothic authority in the sixth century. In addition, it was constantly plagued with Basque raiding parties, a fact that would still be vividly known to the early tenth-century author of the present life. Rictrude's meeting and marriage with the Frankish noble Adalbald, therefore, occurred in the context of this Frankish settlement and internal turbulence.¹

When she was a child, the country was relatively peaceful. Clothar II had delegated its government to his son Charibert, who continued to hold it from his half-brother Dagobert I, who succeeded to their father's kingdom in 628. Dagobert soon repudiated his first wife Gomatrude (the sister of Charibert's mother) in favor of a new queen, Nanthild.² However, he left Charibert in control of Aquitaine despite his uncle's rebellion in the north, which resulted in his execution.³ The saintly missionary bishop, Amand, was also caught up

This account is taken from *Hucbald, monk of Saint-Amand, Vita sanctae Rictrudis*, AS, May 12, 78–98. Hucbald was a popular Carolingian hagiographer and wrote this work about 907 from earlier sources, some of which have since vanished as he explains in his prologue. Van der Essen, *Etude critique*, 260–65, establishes that Hucbald used the *Vita Arnulfi* (MGH, SRM 2:426–46), *Vita S. Amandi* (MGH, SRM 5:395–449), Pseudo-Fredegair, and Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*. Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence*, 132, n. 23, adds Alcuin's *Vita Richarii* (MGH, SRM 4:381–401) from which the story of saving the child of a holy woman named Rictrude derives.

1. The family's continuing ties to the south are traced by Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence*, 145, in references to an eighth-century revolt, some years later, against the growing power of the Carolingians led by a man named Maurontus, who is likely to have been the descendant of Rictrude's son of the same name.

2. For an outline of this queen's career, see Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 67.

3. Charibert was the son of Clothar's second wife, Sichild, whose sister, Gomatrude, had been repudiated by Dagobert.

in this storm.⁴ The king exiled the holy man, and he went on an evangelizing mission to Aquitaine.

In 631, the half-brothers were reconciled, and the saint returned north for the baptism of Dagobert's son by Regentrude, his Austrasian wife. The meeting and marriage of Rictrude and Adalbald occurred somewhere in that period of conflict. After Charibert's death, Basque raiding again intensified, and in 636 Dagobert sent a substantial army into the country to pacify the people there. Adalbald's return to the south and subsequent death may have been connected to that strife. He was one of Neustria's leading nobles, brother of Erchinoald, who served Dagobert's son (Clovis II) as mayor of the palace.⁵ Rictrude's resistance to Dagobert's demand for her remarriage must be placed in this highly political context. Her son Maurontus grew up to be a court official, and his own retreat into the monastic life may have been connected to the political crises following Erchinoald's death and the rise of Ebroin, although the dates and even the names of the kings casually embedded in Hucbald's rendition of her biography are not recoverable.

Rictrude may have encountered Amand during his earlier trip to Gascony. If not, she certainly established a friendship with him after her marriage brought her north to Dagobert's court. There she formed ties to aristocratic families who patronized the Columbanian movement and used the religious life to enhance their worldly prestige. This involved transferring property commanded by women to monasteries. Noble women, sometimes in family teams, embraced the religious life and endowed lasting establishments in the north and east of the kingdom. Rictrude's mother-in-law, Gertrude of Hamay, had retired to a convent in the half-pagan north country and was destined for sainthood. Her husband enjoyed a cult after his untimely death at the hands of her relatives, as would her son Maurontus and three daughters. Rictrude herself is still actively honored at Marchiennes in modern Belgium, where she built a monastery on Adalbald's allodial property between Douai and Saint-Amand.⁶

This policy was complemented by aristocratic appointments to bishoprics that enabled aristocrats like Arnulf of Metz who wanted to resist royal centralization to concentrate land and power out of the reach of secular politics. Dagobert and his successors countered this by securing episcopal appoint-

4. Amand (584-679) will appear in chapter 13 in association with some of the saints of the north where much of his career was spent.

5. See introduction to chapter 14.

6. In part, this may represent a systematic family strategy of diverting wealth and women away from the predatory king and his ambitious courtiers. It also reflects a practice of deploying women in religious service involving both administrative and, above all, charitable activities. See McNamara, "The Need to Give."

ments for their own court officials. In addition to Amand, Philibert, Eligius, and Ouen started life at court as secular officials, moving later to a clerical vocation, bishoprics in the northern missionary centers, and finally sainthood.

The alliance between these ambitious aristocratic families and the Columbanian monastic leaders fits into a larger pattern of evangelization spreading in the north in the latter part of the seventh century. In 663/4, a synod at Whitby, an English convent with ties to the Frankish convent at Chelles, guaranteed the inclusion of the Anglo-Saxons and ultimately the Irish into a unified ecclesiastical administration. The event strengthened the connection of the Franks and the islanders in the work of converting the north. In 678, Wilfred of York came through Frisia on his way to Rome. Irmina, abbess of Ören near Trier, supported Willibrod, the great evangelist of the north.⁷ Other representatives of insular culture appear in the life of Gertrude of Nivelles and in the life of Balthild, the English queen of Neustria.

In the monasticizing of the north, Rictrude and her daughter Eusebia were members of a large company of women that included Oda, wife of Arnulf of Metz; Ida, the wife of Pippin of Herstal; and her daughters Begga and Gertrude of Nivelles.⁸ Together, they pursued a *Klosterpolitik* that tied the Carolingian family closely to the church and contributed to their ultimate replacement of the Merovingian dynasty in the mid-eighth century. Rictrude's own influence was long-enduring. Her vita was extended by various authors far into the twelfth century with accounts of her ongoing wonder-working. Here, it ends after her convent was destroyed by Vikings in 879. The subsequent account of its gradual decay into poverty and the usurpation of its land and titles by a company of monks, who accused the sisters of dissolute and irreligious lives, is omitted.

The Life of Rictrude, Abbess of Marchiennes

To the Lord Prelate Stephen, garlanded as his name suggests,⁹ who grows more honorable as he is more highly placed in the framework of Christ's body, now crowned by men with the insignia of apostolic reverence, but at last to be crowned with insignia by God because of his merits with those whom he follows in his turn, Hucbald, most insignificant of priests and

7. Probably the same monastery that earlier housed Glodesind's aunt, Rotlinda.

8. The life of Eusebia may be found in *AS*, March 14, 445-56. We have omitted it from this collection because it contains little material not to be found in Rictrude's life.

9. The name Stephen means "garlanded" in Greek.

Douai 849
68v

monks, wishes the joy of a crown of the same incorruptible and verdant flowers of virtue.¹⁰

1. I have been asked by the clerks and nuns of the congregation of God's beloved servant, Blessed Rictrude, to take up my pen anew to write of her acts and her children.¹¹ Long and hard have I resisted, knowing my paltry knowledge to be inadequate to the subject. Moreover, much time has passed and I had neither seen nor heard that there was any trustworthy narrative in writing. Thus I feared to assert doubtful things as sure and falsehood as truth. But, then they showed certain samples of her history to my reluctant self confirming what certain, not inconsiderable persons swore to me had once been set down in old writings which had vanished in the wake of the Norman depopulation. Invoking the name of Divine Majesty, trembling I acquiesced. So let me begin, if not as well as I should, then as best I can, not aspiring to verbal ornamentation but to comfort and edify my reader or listener.

2. In truth, when this little work was handed over spread out for Your Excellency's recitation or, rather, examination, it seemed to Your Prudence and those from whom it is customary to require an authorized corroboration of each book by Scholastics, to lack something: an attribution with time and place. Now it seemed enough and more than enough, that the many names of famous persons, deeds and places mentioned in the text should blot out the writer's name and provenance lest, like a black cloud, it seem to obscure stars of such splendor. Still, because it pleases Your Holiness, the shining lamp of your own famous name and even our own, though vile, shall cast light upon the shadows. So, where the preface of this book praises the famous Prelate Stephen of Liège, it mentions our own insignificant person. But as to my place: as you know, it is no longer in this famous city as once it was. Rather I might be preening myself on being the lowest of the monastic congregation of the most Blessed Amand, Confessor of Christ and your one-time predecessor, except that, for my pressing sins, I had been forced to flee more than once for fear of invading barbarians.¹² How can I speak of that time? For we might say that worse things have been seen and thus proclaim like the Psalmist to God: "Make us glad for the days wherein thou hast

10. The addressee is Stephen, Bishop of Liège, 901–20.

11. Marchiennes, like other religious foundations in northern Frankland, was burned and devastated by the Vikings in the late ninth century. It was reconstituted as a convent with some auxiliary contingent of priests, but never recovered its former prosperity. It is likely that their appeal to Hucbald arose out of the need to revive the cult of their saints in order to improve their revenues. In the early eleventh century, the nuns were accused of incompetence in dissipating the property and displaced in favor of monks.

12. The Viking attack occurred about 879, less than thirty years before Hucbald was writing.

afflicted us and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants."¹³ Then we must hear the warning of the Apostle: "Redeem the time, because the days are evil."¹⁴ But lest I seem to ignore the authority of your orders, I note, omitting the names of native kings, that 907 years have run their course from the time of the birth of our highest King, Christ, to the tenth indiction of the year of this writing. For the help of the Catholic Church, I pray that you will prosper happily in the prayers of our community.

3. May your wise prudence, which sheds a sweet smell of fame everywhere, smile on our enterprise, that a worshiper of truth may strip away the clouds of falsehood. May you deign to look upon this our work with complacent countenance and mend its faults, if evil error has inserted any therein, by balancing the scales with just weights. For if no unbalanced part tilts the turning scale, then no fraud mars it. Renowned Father, you know that the just are glad when a pious work has been accomplished. For we know that in this life we are moved to give due thanks to God, while we hope rather for the joy of true life which Lord Jesus gives us likewise to assume by the prayers of the saints whose acts we record.¹⁵

I. Saint Rictrude, born of the Gascon nobility, married to Saint Adalbald, has four sainted children and mourns for her husband's death.

4. When the Frankish nation had, in its primordial past, migrated from lesser Phrygia and propagated its nobility from the royal stock of Troy, Divine Grace wished it to come to knowledge of the truth, after it had, for a long time, been deluded by the fanatic madness of idolatry. For before the beginning even to the end of time, It had predestined that when the diligent King Clovis held sway over this nation, he would condescend to gratify the devout importunity of the blessed Prelate Remigius. This most holy bishop, by the holy probity of his behavior and the powerful virtue of miraculous signs, taught the Catholic faith to that king and even the greater part of his army and, gaining chrism from on high,¹⁶ as they say, he imbued about three thousand with the charism of Christ's baptism in a single day. And from that day, more and more, holy religion has increased among the Franks even as their domination has grown over kingdoms beyond their borders in certain distant places. This success was not obtained by their savage customs (though there are those who think that they are called Franks because they have a naturally ferocious temperament and very disorderly habits).¹⁷ Rather, it rested on

13. Psalms 90:15–16.

14. Ephesians 5:16.

15. The whole of c. 3 was written in a poetic form that we have not attempted to reproduce here.

16. By ninth-century legend, from a dove descending from heaven.

17. As we shall see below in c. 5 and again in c. 8, Hucbald was given to rather fanciful etymologies. We have no idea how he derived this one.

mighty twin columns which are seen to support the whole state of the *laure* church: clearly, the authority of holy bishops, who each in turn served outstandingly in that honor, and the strength of prepotent kings administering public affairs with wisdom in all things. Thus by divine grace, prevenient and subsequent, they were led to ever greater heights.

L III 5. And since, wherever sin abounds there also does God's grace superabound, so, as Heaven is decorated with the varied beauties of the stars from the Father of Light from whom all good and perfect gifts descend, does the land of the Franks shine with the brightness of its multiplicity of perfect saints both native and immigrant from other regions, of both sexes and all degrees. From which sacrosanct college, like a star of splendid beauty, shines Rictrude, devout bondwoman of Christ, most acceptable to God, lovable to all good people, laudable for justice and deserving of sanctity. LIV She began with fame enough from her family origins, the noble Ernold being her father and Lichia her mother, from the agile and warlike Gascon people. Of old, these people were first called the Vaccaeii from a certain walled town of the same name near the Pyrenees. But afterwards they were named Wascones, as the C in Vaccones changed to an S and that the same region before called Vacceia was now called Wasconia. And, though its natives were at that time given over to the worship of demons, Rictrude was predestined by God to spring from that same impious and godless people as a rose habitually flowers among the thorns.¹⁸ From that cradle, she came to maturity confirmed and lofty in honest customs.

F 9 6. This was at the time of King Clothar the Great, fourth of the Frankish kings after Clovis who, as we said, was first to convert to Christ,¹⁹ and of his famous son, Dagobert, nurtured by the blessed Arnulf, Bishop of Metz, to share the realm and then succeed his father, of whom it is written, he was worthy and diligent with his power.²⁰ When Clothar died and Dagobert took up ruling with the royal scepter, he was pleased to concede the lands and cities south of the Loire as far as the Gascon frontiers even to the Pyrenees to the government of Charibert, his brother by a different mother. This practice sprang from wise counsel, for thereby a firm pact was made that his brother would never struggle against him for more of the patrimony. Holding his seat in Toulouse, Charibert ruled part of the province of Aquitaine and in time subjected the whole of Gascony to his power. But, while he maintained the highest royal rights in many things, King Dagobert was excessively given over

¹⁸ The Basques were still largely pagan in Hucbald's time.

¹⁹ Clothar II, son of Fredegund and Chilperic (585–628). Hucbald has subtracted the line of Sigebert and Brunhild from this genealogy.

²⁰ Arnulf may have had a connection to the family of Glodesind. He was one of the family of Pippin of Herstal, father of Gertrude of Nivelles and ancestor of Charlemagne, and assisted in the overthrow of Brunhild and her grandsons in favor of Clothar II in Austrasia in 614.

to the love of women. Having found that the woman who had fallen to his lot in marriage appeared to be sterile, he repudiated her and took another whom he wished to make his queen.²¹ For this crime, he was denounced by the bishops, particularly the most holy man and wonder-working prelate Amand. Moved with indignation and pride, the King expelled that same venerable pontiff from his whole realm, not without injustice. Amand bore that persecution imposed on him patiently for the sake of truth, which is Christ. Indeed, he most freely chose to pour out his own blood to sow the seed of the divine word in various places. Thus, among other regions, he came at last to Gascony, Rictrude's original fatherland, for he yearned that by the light infused in him by Heaven, he might irradiate this beautiful star and many more; and there he hoped to obtain the palm of martyrdom from this savage people.

7. Meanwhile, the said Prince and King Dagobert, when he had no son in whom he could rejoice as a successor, was overcome with sorrow and admitted yet a third wife to his bed.²² The prayers of many men turned pleading to the Lord, and, by God's generosity, he had a son from her that same year, acquired by many prayers and largesse of alms. And most solicitously he moved toward his powerful cleansing in the holy font and his introduction to divine law. As he himself had had the Blessed Arnulf for his pedagogue, so he wanted his son educated in the practice of the Christian religion by one of God's greatest servants. Remembering and repenting all that he had done before when he had imposed so much shame on a man of sanctity, he sent servants out in every direction to find the Pontiff Amand and recall him most respectfully. What more? That true preacher and doer of the Gospel, the venerable Bishop Amand, was returned from exile like a new John the Evangelist coming back from Patmos. The King and his nobles alike made great rejoicing together and all the people danced in solemn celebration of his return.²³

21. Dagobert was the son of Beretrude and Charibert, the son of Clothar's second wife Sichild who had secured the marriage of the young Dagobert to her sister Gomatrude. Around 630, some conspiracy caused Dagobert to execute his wife's uncle, Brodolf, and repudiate her in favor of Nanthild. Hucbald's claim that it was because of Gomatrude's infertility is unconfirmed by any earlier source. It probably grows out of a greater sensitivity to the church's demand for monogamy which characterized Carolingian Christianity. See McNamara and Wemple, "Marriage and Divorce in the Frankish Kingdom."

22. This is presumably Regentrude, who in 631 gave birth to Sigebert III, king of Austrasia (634–56). However, Hucbald is white-washing Dagobert. Nanthild continued to be his queen until his death. She also had a son, the future Clovis II, in 631, who was to marry Saint Balthild. When Dagobert died in 639 he left her regent for Clovis II under the protection of Ega.

23. Tripudium, a religious dance, is the term used and may accurately describe the event, as Amand's successors in the north celebrate the dance of Saint Willibrod on his feast day. See Duckett, *The Wandering Saints*, 192.

202 *Sancti Fructus of the Bern Page*

8. Therefore, the king asked pardon, prostrate at Amand's feet, obtained it most readily. But when he poured out prayers for his son, his petition was refused. For our own Paul answered three times in the voice of the Blessed Paul that it was not suitable for a soldier of God to mix in the affairs of the world. Saying this, he turned from the king's face but the royal will lost none of its fervor. He finally succeeded in accomplishing what he had been unable to do for himself by the persuasions of good men. For the king sent Ouen and Eligius, proven executors of his will, after him. These men, foremost in sanctity and prudence, were very dear and familiar to Amand, who loved their virtues.²⁴ The holy man consented to the petition of these saints, for he could refuse them nothing, and obeyed the king's pleasure. Therefore the royal infant, who had been alive only about forty days from his birth, was brought to receive holy grace by the priest's blessing. But now the etymology of Amand's name must naturally be given. For, when he was being made a catechumen, no one in all the multitude answered 'Amen' at the end of the prayer. But it is said that the Lord, who opened the mouth of the mute and made the tongues of infants eloquent, opened his mouth. Everyone heard him, not like an infant but a boy, respond in a clear voice, 'Amen.' It was stupendous enough for the people there to be silent against all habit but it was even more marvelous that, contrary to nature, this one had spoken. Let us delay no more. The holy pontiff regenerated the child with life-giving baptism and announced his name to be Sigebert. King Charibert, the king's brother, took him from the sacred cleansing. And the Lord who did wonders in His saint, magnified him in the sight of kings. And all the troops following both kings were filled with great joy and wonder by this sign. The next year, King Charibert died. Nor did his infant son linger but died soon after him and King Dagobert recovered the whole land, with Gascony, into his power. I have inserted all this preceding material for the sake of what follows so that my readers or hearers will know how Blessed Rictrude came to be in Francia.

9. So at this time, when Gascony was being repeatedly infiltrated with Franks, the good-natured girl Rictrude had become nubile. A certain Frank—born Adalbald, child of a just and noble stock, saw her, loved her and chose her for his own. His mother, Gerberta, was the daughter of Saint Gertrude who rests in the monastery which she built which is now called Hamay. She

24. Ouen, or Dado, was one of the sons of Autharius, consecrated by Columbanus as a child. He was Dagobert's keeper of the seals until his retirement as bishop of Rouen and ultimate withdrawal to monasticism. From his retreat in Normandy, he continued to influence Neustrian affairs through the period dominated by the mayor of the palace, Ebroin. Eligius, or Eloi, was master of the mint before becoming bishop of Noyon and Tournai. They head the Neustrian branch of Dagobertian saints, as Arnulf of Metz heads the Austrasian group.

had imposed the highest standard of discipline on the boy who grew strong, rich with copious lands, and was greatly loved and honored at the king's court. He was a full worthy man who would take the worthy Rictrude in marriage. Thus, despite the opposition of some of her relatives, she was espoused to him according to custom, dowered and brought into matronhood. He took a wife, not for incontinence, but for love of progeny. In both of them, those things which people customarily expect in choosing husband or wife were combined. The man had strength, good birth, good looks and wisdom which made him most worthy of love and affection. And the wife had good looks, good birth, wealth and decorum which should be sought above all else. So let us remember the words of the Apostle on honorable marriage and an unsullied bed, for the apostolic word did not fall on deaf ears: "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify and carry God in your body."²⁵ "Let the man pay his debt to the wife and likewise the wife to the husband."²⁶ And again, "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to prayer."²⁷ And further: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; not in the lust of concupiscence."²⁸ Therefore, let married people keep their faith with the Apostle before their eyes: "Let everyone of you love his wife as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."²⁹ And again, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them."³⁰ Therefore may they join together in faith and charity that they may be two in one flesh and no more two because the flesh is one. Together in one voice, acting in concord, they honored God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and served the Lord all their days in sanctity and justice in His presence who have lived together in one house.

10. And children were given to them, according to the first blessing that God gave to man, "Be fruitful and multiply."³¹ Their first-born was named Maurontus and, afterwards, he became a holy priest and abbot. And their three daughters were holy virgins: Clotsendis, who ruled this monastery after

25. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

26. 1 Corinthians 7:3.

27. 1 Corinthians 7:5.

28. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4.

29. Ephesians 5:33.

30. Colossians 3:18-20.

31. Genesis 1:28.

the death of her mother; Eusebia, a great worshipper of God according to her name's meaning;³² and finally Adalsendis. As their parents were righteous, they were educated to serve God by them and their familiars, growing trained from infancy in fear of the Lord and in celestial blessings. The worthy and venerable priest Richarius was Maurontus' spiritual father and regenerated him in God through holy baptism. The famous Bishop Amand rendered Clotsendis worthy before God in every way and with his own holy and worthy hands took her from the font to be saved. Dagobert's wife, Queen Nanthild, took Eusebia from the sacred cleansing.³³ Oh progeny truly blessed and pleasing to God! Of such it is rightly said: "Oh how beautiful is the chaste generation with brightness!"³⁴ Verily, the just are even as amply enriched with spiritual gifts as with temporal goods, as the Psalmographer says: "Blessed is everyone that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. The wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thy house: thy children like olive plants about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord."³⁵ Though these words should be understood spiritually, yet sometimes prosperity is gained fairly and temporally.

11. After this, the devout handmaid of Christ Rictrude's husband, Adalbald of good and praiseworthy memory, sadly took the road from Artois, where he was rich with many possessions, to Gascony. The noble matron Rictrude went part of the way with him but then, as he ordered her, she soon returned home in sorrow. For even while she was still in ignorance, her mind had a presage of the dolorous future which hung over her. Thus she was already mourning what she had not yet suffered. What more? The just man was set upon from ambush by certain wicked people, obviously [her relatives] who had been displeased by their holy matrimony, and he was wounded, and perished.³⁶ As was fitting, he was given a most honorific burial service. Dead to the world, he lives in God. He lives, I say, for his happy soul lives close to Him who is the true life and signs from his dead bones have frequently declared his merits. There was small delay before God's servant Rictrude

32. Eusebia is piety in Greek.

33. This seems to provide a base date between 632 (the earliest date at which people married after 628 could have had three children) and 639 (the death of Dagobert, after which Nanthild would probably be designated as queen or Clovis II's mother rather than Dagobert's wife).

34. Wisdom 4:1.

35. Psalms 128:1-4.

36. The Basque uprisings of 636 that caused Dagobert to send an army south seem to provide a handy setting for this story. Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence*, 131, says that Adalbald was the brother of Clovis II's major-domo, Erchinoald. If so, his death may have had some relation to the power struggles of the Arnulfings.

heard what had happened. She was so shaken by the news that her mind was afflicted with deepest sorrow, a sorrow that slowly grew by the sorrow of her sorrowing children. And her tears were multiplied with tearful tears among the domestics.

12. Still as the worst time of weeping passed, she began to take healing counsel from familiars who shared her love for Christ, especially Amand, God's most holy bishop.³⁷ At last, he offered the words of Paul the Apostle, a true consoler of the spirit: "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will, only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment."³⁸ And she gave her ear to those words and also she gave her mind. For from him she heard and gave heed to that sweet and swelling evangelical voice of Christ's servant: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me."³⁹ And, "whosoever that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."⁴⁰ And again, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven, and come and follow me."⁴¹ And again, "Everyone that hath forsaken houses or brethren or sisters, or fathers or mothers, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold and shall inherit everlasting life."⁴²

II. Of Saint Rictrude, holy widow, in the monastic life with her daughters and the priestly Maurontus.

13. Rictrude, widowed by Adalbald but loving God and beloved by God, fixed these holy and life-giving words as an anchor in her mind. Putting aside all wavering deliberation and turning from all that would delay her, she promised herself to find refuge in these salubrious admonitions. But lo! the envy of the devil strove by stealth to thwart the healthful advice of the Prelate and the pious vows of the holy matron. Nor did he move the weak or middling by his evil disturbances but the highest princes of the world: for he tried to sway the king's mind with the idea of joining her with a certain optimate in a second marriage. And when she spurned that utterly, he vainly poured out many blandishments and flatteries. And when this wholly failed to move her from her fixed stand in God, he tried the terror of royal threats, but to no avail. For she was equally contemptuous of his raging and his

37. Wallace-Hadrill, *Frankish Church*, 72-73, sees Amand as an initiator of the alliance between missionary work and political assimilation developed by the Carolingians.

38. 1 Corinthians 7:39.

39. Matthew 16:24.

40. Luke 14:33.

41. Matthew 19:21.

42. Matthew 19:29.

blandishment. From the three parts of philosophy, she had learned the greatest, which is to act in conformity with a just cause, which Greeks call Ethics and Latins Morals, mistress of the good life. And this is divided into four principal virtues: prudence and justice, fortitude with temperance. And each of these guided her. Through justice she was disposed to obey God before man; fortitude kept her from bending to enticement or breaking in adversity; through prudence she acted cautiously to save herself from royal anger and temperance enabled her to keep the rule of humility as a way of life in all her words and deeds. Following the counsel of the initiate in the mysteries, the Godbearer, Amand, she dissimulated for a time, while she remained constant in her proposed vows to serve God. Meanwhile, he pledged to use his influence to obtain the king's agreement to what he judged was most useful for her.⁴³

14. Why linger longer? She encouraged the king to imagine that she was ready to yield to his will and arranged a convivial gathering of splendid magnificence worthy of a king at her estate in the villa called Baireius.⁴⁴ She invited the king and his optimates and, with the salty seasoning of the banquet, they all enjoyed the sweetness of her talk. "Afterward, when hunger was repelled and love increased by eating, and they were convivial with Bacchus' bright exhilaration," she rose.⁴⁵ Not haltingly but steadily, not coolly but warmly, not sluggishly but sharply, not womanlike but manlike, she perfectly carried out the plan she had made. First, she entreated the king to allow her to do what she liked in her own house and to use that power freely in his presence. And he agreed promptly, her raised cup suggesting that she would command him to drink, as is the custom with many. He supposed that she sought to please him and his company. Following the salubrious advice of her renowned counsellor, the Prelate Amand, she invoked help from the terrible name of God and, to the stupefaction of the king and all the others, she covered her head with a veil blessed by that holy bishop which she drew from her bosom. The king was stirred to wrath and left the banquet, abandoning the unwelcome food. And she, pinning her thoughts truly on the Lord, committed herself and hers totally to His will that they might be nourished by Him and always comforted in the solace of His mercy.⁴⁶

43. Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence*, 147, fits Rictrude's family into a pattern of southern men brought up at the royal court in the seventh century and then restored to the south as bishops and other officials. The court cooperated with Luxeuil in bringing the two aristocracies together according to Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, 121–51.

44. The Bollandists place this as Bray in Artois, halfway between Douai and Arras.

45. We have used quotation marks at this point to indicate that Hucbald here broke into verse.

46. The king is not named, but the best candidate is Dagobert (d. 639) when Rictrude was in her early twenties. Otherwise, a long wait for Clovis II to grow up would have to ensue, which would be utterly incompatible with the chronology of Eusebia's life.

15. First, she prudently ordained the distribution of the powers and possessions left to her and wholly extirpated the thorny cares of the world from the soil of her heart. What she had borne three-fold in the conjugal life was then doubled, for in widowhood her seed yielded fruit six-fold. At first, satisfied to serve Christ in His members, she was Martha. But then, sitting at His feet listening and storing up His words, she became Mary. And thus, by Christ's own testimony, she chose the higher part which would not be taken from her, and for that same better part she deserved to receive in recompense the reward of the elect and beloved. Indeed, to appear outwardly as she was inwardly, she changed the habit of her mind as she put a new habit on her body. She threw off the elaborate clothes which adorned her in marriage when she thought of worldly things, how she might please her husband. But one who has stripped away all the burdens of the world, though she appears as a widow divided from a husband, is not divided in mind but is always solicitous for the things of the Lord only, how she might please God.⁴⁷ She put on garments of widowhood which expressed her contempt of this world through her appearance. For just as white garments are fitting for exultation and solemn joy, so do black belong to humiliation and lugubrious sorrow. Whence the head, the principal part of the body, is veiled in vile draperies that the principal member of the spirit, the mind, should be shown as veiled with sorrow and penitent mourning. Thus, to be brief, her consolation would soon be wrought, I would say instantaneously, as it says in the Lord's Gospel: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."⁴⁸ And again: "Amen, Amen, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."⁴⁹

16. In order to subdue her body which had been accustomed in the past to pleasures and was now troubled by demonic suggestions, she imposed repeated fasts upon herself with strenuous vigils and continual prayers. She clothed herself in a haircloth shirt whose insistent prickling smothered the pricks of desire for, as the Poet says, "Venus freezes without Ceres and Liber."⁵⁰ Truly she might sing with the Psalmist: "When they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth. I humbled my soul with fasting and my prayer returned unto mine own bosom."⁵¹ Then she chose a fitting place, a monastery called Marchiennes which the same pontiff had built on the river Scheldt, where she might carry out her spiritual exercises, with the prelate's advice

47. 1 Corinthians 7.

48. Matthew 5:4.

49. John 16:20.

50. Terence, *Eunuchus* 732.

51. Psalms 54:13.

and help in private counsel. The prelate had assigned his venerable disciple Jonatus, whose holy body is still resting in that monastery, as abbot for its completion and ordering. For Blessed Amand had intended to install an order of monks there: but the abbot gathered nuns instead as had been shown to him.⁵² So God's servant Rictrude hurried to this opportunely remote place. With the consent of blessed Amand who mediated a reconciliation between her and the king, she received privileges from royal authority. There, though she occupied a fragile body, she strongly subdued its physical desires and not only them. Struggling towards Heaven against the powers of the air, against the worldly rulers of this darkness,⁵³ against spiritual wickedness, while conquering the world as well, she awaited her triumphant victory when she would receive fitting rewards from the supernal Spectator.

17. For the happy accomplishment of her aims, that she might be a public example to all, she began her conversion with the perfection advised by the Gospel: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in Heaven."⁵⁴ Casting from her the burdens of estates and the baggage of wealth, making profession of widowed continence to God and assuming the holy habit of a nun, she showed herself holy as a living sacrifice. Nor was she content to please God in herself alone. For she offered the first fruits of earth, that is her womb, holy and excellent, to the undivided Trinity: that is, her three daughters, white as doves, as most gracious offerings that with immaculate body and soul, preserving perpetual virginity they might follow the Lamb, Son of a virgin mother, where he led with sincerity of heart and flesh, blooming with unfading flowers of virginity in body and glittering with inviolate purity of truth in heart; that they might be always without stain before the throne of God singing to Him a new song, that is, rejoicing perpetually with Him about the uncorrupted flesh. For though they can hear the song, none of the saints can sing it but the white-robed throngs of the uncontaminated.

18. Oh, hear these most truthful things, I pray! Let your ears receive them all—you who have ears to hear, to whom it has been given to rise to chastity, the privilege of angels, and thus to acquire the society of the most famous companions to sound out the sweet melody of the new song. Hurry! Hasten!

52. At the time Hucbald was writing, the nuns who had hung on after the Vikings burned the monastery were already in the straits that would eventually lead to their eviction in favor of monks in the eleventh century. Hucbald was a monk of Saint Amand, whose institution would later benefit from the claim that the nuns had wasted the property and that Saint Amand had originally wanted to put monks in the place and only changed his mind to accommodate the pressing need of Rictrude for a retreat. *Miracula S. Rictrudis*, 1, 3. *AS*, May 12, 92.

53. Ephesians 6:12.

54. Mark 5:16.

Run! Remember Lot's wife and never seek to look back.⁵⁵ Flee lust with disgust and trample down carnal concupiscence. "All flesh is grass and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field."⁵⁶ May these exhortations sink into your inmost heart, for they do not come from me but from the words of the famous Father Augustine. They are drawn from the Doctor's words exhorting virgins: "Hasten," he says, "holy boys and girls of God, men and women, celibate and unmarried; continue persevering unto the end. The more sweetly you praise the Lord the more constantly you will think of him. Hope more happily in Him and you will serve Him more swiftly. Love Him more ardently and you will be more attentive to please Him. With girded loins and burning lamps, await the Lord when he is coming to the wedding. You will present a new song at the wedding of the Lamb, and play it on your cithars as no one can but you." And a little after, this follows: "You will follow the Lamb for the flesh of the Lamb is also virgin. You will follow Him with your virgin heart and virgin flesh wherever He goes. For what is it to follow except to imitate? Because Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example that you might follow in His footsteps."⁵⁷

19. Therefore, the faithful woman of God who had devoted herself to Him in holy continence, Rictrude espoused her three daughters at one time, while they were still young, to Christ as husband.⁵⁸ So they might always follow in the footsteps of the Lamb and that song which she could never make her own could be made to sound for her on her daughters' cithars. With all things thus wisely disposed and stripped of every worldly care as in the customary nudity of the palaestra, she entered the monastic gymnasium where she would run, competing in the arena of this present life, struggling in contention against the Devil.⁵⁹ She was anointed with the oil of celestial grace lest the wicked adversary get a hold to restrain her. And besides contending in the contest, as the Apostle said, she abstained from all things and taught her

55. Lot's wife was turned to a pillar of salt when she looked back with regret to Sodom. Genesis 19:26.

56. Isaiah 40:6.

57. Augustine, *De sancta virginitatis*, 16.

58. Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence*, 132–35, suggests that the entrance of the whole family into the cloister may have been connected to the rise of Ebroin as mayor of the palace, a bitter rival to their own family and thinks he might have been involved in the death of Adalbald. However, Ebroin's rise was not until 658. The Eusebia incident has to be between 647 and 653 if the girl taken from the font by Nanthild (d. 642) was not yet twelve. That would be in the era of Erchinoald's (Adalbald's brother) power and subsequently Balthild's ascendancy. Assuming Maurontus was born by 632 (to allow for his three sisters to be born by 636), he was twenty-six when Ebroin rose and could well have been married and even possibly had a child despite Hucbald's disclaimer. Thus it would be quite possible that Ebroin drove him (but not the rest of the family) into the cloister.

59. 1 Corinthians 9:24.

daughters to live by her example. Meanwhile her first born, Maurontus, still did service to the king in lay habit and fought his wars with his body rather than his spirit. We will spare a few words for him at a subsequent opportunity.

20. In those days, Adalsendis, the youngest of her daughters died. She who entered most lately through the gate of this present life was first to enter the gate of death. And wherefore do we say she was dead? She went with the annual cycle of the turning year, at the sacrosanct solemnity of the Lord's birth when He came as a remedy for the sins of this world putting Death and his prince to flight. So, will she not rather be exalted in perpetual light and life than in death? And what did good Rictrude, strong and long-suffering in adversity, do then? With her mind running in two contrary directions, did she rejoice or did she mourn? While the whole world listened to the angel intoning: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people,"⁶⁰ she had her dead daughter before her eyes. But did she give in to the natural sorrow of her condition? The strength of the manly mind within her overcame her womanly feelings. Sorrow for her daughter's death was not suffered to dominate her nor sadness allowed to enter where the birth of Life was celebrated. Let me absolve myself briefly of the worthy memory: the due office of burial was completed according to the custom of the faithful, but the custom of mourning her loved one was set aside. Then in sequence the solemnities of the first, second and third days were celebrated.⁶¹

21. Then, on the fourth succeeding day, when Holy Church recalls the massacre of the Innocents slaughtered by Herod for Christ and the misery of their bereft mothers, prudent Rictrude knew how she should spend the time. For there is a time for all things under heaven: a time for joy and yet a time for tears. She did not mourn during the explication of the mystery where honor is shown to the holy martyrs in praise of God; for then ceremonial devotions are tendered, not tears. But when she was going with the other nuns for bodily refreshment, she gathered them all and said: "Now, oh beloved sisters, let your company's charity proceed,⁶² and rejoice, giving thanks together for God's gifts. For myself, I will follow the example of those ladies, the mothers of the most holy innocent children—so like my own little innocent—for whom much mourning and wailing is heard today. For now, it is permissible to mourn this one snatched too soon to death." And she asked a friend for a private place to mourn so that her grief might be satisfied as is compatible with nature. Oh, praiseworthy woman, example of prudence, long-suffering

60. Luke 2:10.

61. That is, the three days of Christmas, the feast of Saint Stephen and the feast of Saint John the Evangelist.

62. A caritas is a festive meal in the monastery.

and patience, "let her works praise her in the gates."⁶³ Oh, strong woman with loins girded up in chastity who persevered in good, and strengthened the good works of her arms! Her light will not be extinguished in the darkness.

22. We mentioned the blessed man, Maurontus, earlier and it does not seem out of place to say a little about him here. As we said, in Baptism he was a spiritual son of the famous priest of Christ, Richarius. One day, that same venerable priest came on horseback to visit the blessed Rictrude, both for the sake of holiness and friendship. And after their holy colloquy, partaking of the food of heavenly life which was equally sweet to both of them, the man of God mounted his horse, intending to return home. From love, God's bondswoman slowly went with him a little ways from her house, bearing one of her natural generation in the crook of her arm—the little son who was also his by spiritual generation. She followed his steps, asking that the boy be fortified with his paternal blessing. The man of God, sitting on his horse, took up the child in his hands either to bless him or kiss him. An envious devil, one of the enemies of good, infected his horse with unaccustomed ferocity. He burst out insanely at the delay and, with gnashing teeth and thrashing hooves, impetuously hurled himself forward with excessive strength, striking both the priest and the mother with the same fear. The priest feared for himself and for the boy: the mother for the priest and her son. And what did the anxious one do? Almost lifeless, as the imminence of death hung before her eyes, she turned away her tear-blinded face so she should not see the pair's miserable fall. And the grief-stricken household, weeping and wailing, gathered in great lament at the spectacle. But God's servant poured out prayers to God lest he fall holding the child in his hand. As he finished, the child fell to the ground unhurt, as lightly as a bird's feather. Then the horse reverted to his usual manner, gentle as a sheep. And recovering her spirits, the mother took up her unharmed son and carried him laughing in her arms. Thus enormous sadness was turned to great joy for all who were there. No one ought to dispute the great merits of both. For such is Almighty God's mercy that, where a malign enemy makes more and more progress and opens his jaws to seize the just, he is so used by blessed men that the attack contributes to the perfection of virtue. For believing within himself that, while the lord God was proceeding to the redemption of human kind, He made an example of humility instead of a display of pride by not riding on an ornamented horse but being borne on an ass led by the Apostles, he was ever afterward borne in the same way whenever necessity required him to travel.

63. Proverbs 31:31.

23. Later, when he came to manhood, the same venerable Maurontus adhered unswervingly to the king's side as his nobility required and it is said that, in the service he had contracted, he was joined in the bonds of matrimony. But he had no sooner placed his feet in the voluptuous bondage of carnal love, than he dissolved the bond.⁶⁴ The prelate Amand, profitmaker of souls, suggested the sweetness of spiritual love to him and the suavity of eternal jocundity. But when he confided to his holy mother that he wished never to make use of his wife's companionship, she feared that by turning too abruptly from lasciviousness, he might, as young people do, be deciding to follow the broad road to hell. Accordingly, her mind stricken with these cares, she asked Amand, doctor of sick minds, to help her. And coming to Marchiennes, he soothed her with gentle words, bringing her relief. Thus with her original alacrity, she turned back to God. Then it happened that while the Pontiff was celebrating solemn mass with Maurontus standing in his presence, he saw a bee circle three times around the man's head. And the man of God fully understood what this prophetic sign portended. By that witness, he warned him speedily to complete the work he had begun in his heart, for he had understood what had been revealed by God's auspices. And he delayed in no way to do that.

24. Then the most holy Pontiff Amand, blessing him according to the ecclesiastical custom, cut the hair off his head in clerical tonsure and made the sign of the cross on his brow, showing that what was done on the outside was to serve as a sign of what was inscribed within. Clearly the denuded top of his head signified that all the secrets of his heart were bare and open to God and every secret act and thought revealed to all eyes. Verily, frequent shearing of hair signifies the frequent shearing of superfluous evil thoughts. And that adornment of the crown symbolizes both the tiara of high priesthood, and the diadem of royal dignity. Thus he knew that he belonged to the regal priesthood. And so, after completing the endurance of diverse temptations and proving his patience in this manner, he would be worthy of the crown of eternal life which God has promised to those who love Him. For the same holy man, Maurontus, committed many readings and admonitions to memory, not only from the salubrious legacy of the prelate but even from the reading of holy Scripture and devoutly strove always to fulfill his tasks assiduously. For being made a Levite, he took care that his life and deeds would be suitable to that title and office. And, as he sprang from the bright nobility, he

64. Hucbald seems uncertain about this marriage. If, as Geary suggests in *Aristocracy in Provence*, 128, Maurontus, a dux in Provence in 735, was a descendant of this line, the marriage must have borne fruit. Perhaps Hucbald did not want to associate his pro-Carolingian hero with an opponent of Charles Martel's rise to power.

shone even more brightly in the king's court, honored with royal bulls as one might expect, a prudent notary writing out edicts containing royal commands. To which, seizing and storing up emoluments of holy behavior, God added the holy association of the holy man, Bishop Amatus. That holy man, who was chosen and raised to the bishopric of the town of Sens,⁶⁵ was falsely accused of treason at the time when King Theuderic exercised his wicked tyranny and ordered him to submit to exile in the monastery of Péronne in Vermandois where the holy Abbot Ultanus presided.⁶⁶ After Blessed Abbot Ultanus' death, he was turned over to the aforesaid servant of God, Abbot Maurontus, for custody in that monastery called Breuil which he had built in the territory called the Lys.⁶⁷ Having accepted him, as he was experienced in religious usages, he [Maurontus] made every effort to act as his servant all the days of his life as though storing up treasures in heaven, for in him [Amatus], he had a most beautiful mirror of life and sanctity for himself and his brothers.⁶⁸

III. The Acts of her daughter, Saint Eusebia; Her death; the deaths of Amand and Maurontus and Saint Rictrude herself.

25. Meanwhile, God's servant, Gertrude, grandmother of Adalbold, Ric-

65. The Bollandists follow several sources in calling him archbishop of Sens, although modern scholars have assigned him to the see of Sion (Sitten) in Switzerland. Hucbald may have been the first source, but by the tenth century his name was inserted into the episcopal lists of the see.

66. Ultanus was brother of Saint Fursey, the founder. In 670 Theuderic III, third son of Saint Balthild and Clovis II, succeeded to his brother Clothar III with the help of the contentious Neustrian mayor of the palace, Ebroin. Hucbald's characterization of Theuderic as a tyrant indicates his Carolingian loyalties because his opponents were the Arnulfing family led by Pippin II, Austrasian mayor of the palace. Amatus, Bishop Chramnelenus of Embrun, and Philibert of Jumièges supported the effort to restore Dagobert II in 676, for which Amatus was accused of infidelity and imprisoned at Péronne, formerly under the control of Erchinoald until 680. This tangled tale of interwoven family loyalties is outlined in Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence*.

67. Ibid., 135. Nearness of property suggests relationships between the brothers Adalbold and Erchinoald and Ansfredis, Waratto's wife. Waratto, the majordomo after Ebroin, also had land in Normandy. Waratto and Maurontus cooperated in the affair of Amatus. In 680, Ultanus died, Ebroin was murdered, and Waratto succeeded. These related persons formed an alliance of aristocratic groups between Rouen and Douai like the alliance of the Arnulfings and Pippinids in Austrasia. Bishop Austrebertus in Vienne (726-730) was a native of Normandy with estates near those of Waratto and Ansfredis and was also an opponent of Charles Martel. Moreover, Prinz (275-78) argues a relationship between the Rhône and Neustria by the introduction of the Benedictine-Columbanian rule in three Provençal monasteries at the end of the seventh century: Lérins, Grosseau, and Douzère. The reformers can be shown to relate to Neustrian houses. Both areas supported nobles supporting the claims of Childeric II against the Arnulfing domination, and the appearance of the Dux Maurontus seems to provide a final tie.

68. Vita Amati, AS, September 4, says that Maurontus knelt at his feet to beg pardon for acting as his custodian.

trude's venerable husband, went the way of all flesh. In a long life, she had accumulated good works at the monastery she had built at Hamay. There she had brought up the holy virgin Eusebia, her great granddaughter. A girl of good quality, Eusebia succeeded her in the ruling of the place, but she was as yet hardly old enough, being but twelve years old. A true servant of Christ, her mother Rictrude, was guided by deeper counsel and prudence, well knowing that the malign enemy, by his cunning, seduces even more mature folk with much training in virtue. She feared for her daughter, lest having too much liberty while still immature, she be too strongly tempted by the serpentine fraudulence. Therefore, she wished her to come and live with her. Eusebia refused, wishing to remain at Hamay. Her mother was compelled to put a word in the king's ear by whose authority she could recover her daughter. He agreed and sent letters ordering her return. Sorrowing, the holy Eusebia went back to her mother's monastery at Marchiennes with the body of her great-grandmother, Saint Gertrude, and other relics of saints kept there. Her entire flock came with her. And having gained control of her daughter, the mother gave her many admonitions to train her to serve with her in God's militia. And most freely obeying these precepts, she settled to the yoke of divine service. But she could not turn her mind from her love of that other genial place.

26. Whence, almost every night when Vespers were over, in the dead of night, when she was supposed to be resting her body with the others, she would deceitfully leave her sandals by her bed and silently proceed to Hamay, with her prayer book and a harp which she considered the comrades of her secret. There, she celebrated the vigils and offices of the hours. Having finished this truthful deception, she would return to the monastery of Marchiennes in good spirits never being caught absent at the evening or matutinal hours. But it did not fail to reach her mother's ears. Calling her again, she was compelled to punish her; both soothing her with sweet blandishment and terrifying her with harsh words, she sought to recall her to her will, knowing surely that she could contain her body but not her mind. And when she saw that neither she nor her friends or familiars could succeed, she took counsel with her son Maurontus, urging that she should be punished with a whipping for her disobedience and a certain pertinacity of mind. Her brother agreed to carry it out when it suited her mother.⁶⁹ He ordered the servants to hold her tightly by the arms and she was subjected to the decreed correction.

69. This must have taken place before 650, because Eusebia was taken from the baptismal font by Nanthild in Dagobert's lifetime (d. 639). Presumably Maurontus was still a layman in royal service, probably at the court of Clovis II, husband of Balthild and perhaps working in association with his father's brother, Erchinoald.

One of the boys who held her was girdled with a sword and while the virgin twisted this way and that under the pain of the whips the hilt struck her tender ribs. This so wounded her that, through the rest of her life, pus and blood sometimes mixed with the saliva which she spat from her mouth.

27. Still she would not desist from carrying out her intention. They called bishops, abbots and other important men of the neighborhood who all met with the holy virgin to try to persuade her in diverse ways to give up her desire. However, with great constancy, she opposed their advice and exhortations. When they saw how inflexible her mind was, they counselled the mother to let her go back to her chosen place. Though unwillingly, she agreed, stiffening her religious habits with persuasive admonitions and commending her to God in her holy prayers. Thus she achieved what she had desired for so long. With all her little following, she took up the body of her grandmother and the venerable saints' relics and walked back to the monastery of Hamay full of joy. Living there the life of an angel on earth, she was carried off to the chamber of her heavenly spouse in the middle of her adolescence. For, as Scripture says: "Lest that wickedness should alter his understanding or deceit beguile his soul,"⁷⁰ she achieved much in a short time and ended her life quickly. For her soul was pleasing to God and he hurried to take her from the midst of the wicked.⁷¹

28. Now, despite a certain clumsy garrulity, we are pleased to sharpen our pen a little in order to confound those who would slander the righteous with forked tongues and misplaced pride. Such folk would lay their tongues to heaven itself and still not fear to malign people who are free of earthly burdens and, as we believe, reigning with God in heaven. So in their cunning they have observed: 'Look who they are calling saints: a mother who attacked her innocent daughter for wanting to serve God; a daughter who detested her own mother and fled her as an enemy; a son who, with his mother's consent, branded his sister like a fugitive taken away in secret, or like a condemned thief whipped her so viciously that she nearly died. And even though she did not perish on the spot, she wasted away in slow agony. Is this how they make saints pleasing to God? What sanctity is here? What peace? What charity?' Now, how can we answer the madness in men's heads? Oh, foolish arrogance

70. Wisdom 4.

71. A life of Eusebia was included in the AS, March 16, 445-56. Like this life of Rictrude, it was produced in the tenth century, and the style suggests that it was also by Hucbald or someone enamored with his overwrought style. It adds no substantial information to this account but does contribute a fanciful tale that the whips used on Eusebia later burst into blossom. According to that life, c. 12, she lived in virtue thirty minus seven years. Van der Essen, *Etude critique*, 261, like the Bollandists, reads this to mean twenty-three years after her return to Hamay and puts her death at forty-six, clearly at odds with this text.

of minds gone mad! Oh, rabid fools, yapping like dogs rather than men, what will be given—what assigned—to the accursed tongue? Only the sharp point of the arrow, that is, the lance of God Almighty's word from the quiver of the Holy Scripture! For [these weapons] can not only transfix the loquacious mouth but also the clouded heart.

29. And first they are struck with the thunder of the Gospel: "Judge not, that ye be not judged,"⁷² He says, "Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned."⁷³ Then sounds the trumpet of the Apostle Paul: "Why dost thou judge thy brother?"⁷⁴ "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant."⁷⁵ To this is added: "Judge nothing before the time until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God."⁷⁶ And now hear James: "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law and judgeth the law."⁷⁷ But God himself speaks through the Psalmist: "Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and the tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother."⁷⁸ And a little while after: "I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."⁷⁹ And again: "The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaketh proud things."⁸⁰ And again the Scripture says: "Who calumniates the brethren shall be eradicated. Why do you not fear exceedingly this misery?"⁸¹ "How long will ye love vanity, and seek after falsehood? Thou shalt destroy all that speak falsehood."⁸² And, "Thou lovest lying rather than to speak righteousness. Thou lovest all devouring words."⁸³ That means the blasphemies of the deceitful tongue and so, "God shall likewise destroy you forever."⁸⁴

30. Listen if you can, and pay attention: the holy mother Rictrude did not persecute her innocent daughter. Rather, she considered her immature age, knowing that everything has its time and there is a time for every business. As

72. Matthew 7:1.

73. Luke 6:37.

74. Romans 14:10.

75. Romans 14:4.

76. 1 Corinthians 4:5.

77. James 4:11.

78. Psalms 50:19.

79. Psalms 50:21.

80. Psalms 12:3.

81. Psalms 4:2.

82. Psalms 5:6.

83. Psalms 52:3.

84. Psalms 52:15.

Solomon, the most wise, said: "A child to himself bringeth his mother to shame."⁸⁵ And she heard the Scripture say: "Hast thou daughters? Have a care of their bodies,"⁸⁶ and thought she would be better to remain with her, in order to achieve greater perfection by more powerful exhortations and examples. And her daughter Eusebia, though betrothed to the heavenly King, did not spurn or despise her blessed mother for she knew that her Spouse commanded: "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land."⁸⁷ Still she confided in His grace Who affianced her with a ring. She wished only to delight in Him and show no other love, not even affection for her mother, lest it should detract from her love's immoderate fervor. Nor did her brother, the minister of Christ Maurontus, whip his sister from hate or cruelty but rather from fraternal charity for her insolence and disobedience (as he was given to understand) to her parent. As her age required, he punished her infancy, knowing the Scripture: "He that spareth the rod, hateth his son."⁸⁸ Correction and the rod bestow wisdom. What wonder that a mother and her son might be mistaken in their human judgment? They corrected the holy virgin, not yet knowing of the divine grace that was in her. With the holy prophets, they made a human judgment as though from the Spirit of God. Cease therefore, cease your vain and foolish chatter! For no work that springs from the root of charity can be called a work of iniquity. Truly is it said: "Therefore if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."⁸⁹ And as to the blessed virgin's endurance of such infirmity as long as she lived, who would not see it as the crowning pinnacle of the accumulated grace built up in her? For while her body weakened, her spirit grew stronger, as the Apostle says: "When I am weak, then am I strong."⁹⁰ Therefore let us stop up our mouths against wicked gossip. As the divine voice intones in the prophet Isaiah: "I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people. All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed."⁹¹

31. In effect, God's good worshiper, Eusebia, died full of virtue on March 16, which is the seventeenth calends of April. After that, the Lord assumed the holy bishop and beloved monk, Amand from these troubled wanderings and

85. Proverbs 29:15.

86. Ecclesiastes 7:24.

87. Exodus 20:12.

88. Proverbs 13:24.

89. Matthew 6:22.

90. 2 Corinthians 12:10.

91. Isaiah 61:8-9.

hard labors to the heavenly fatherland on the ides of September.⁹² Having his holy body in possession, the priest Maurontus buried it honorably: he had given the whole of his inherited estates over to him through the instrument of charters. And this same venerable Abbot and worthy Levite of God, Maurontus, survived his mother in life afterwards completing his pious duty of administration. On the third nones of May, his debt discharged, he was borne to a heavenly palace to receive the reward worthy of his labors in eternal life rejoicing with Christ, joined with Him in glory.⁹³

32. But let us return to the explication we had begun. Rictrude, God's most devoted handmaid, gave her whole mind and her whole bodily strength to good works, pacing from strength to strength as she hastened with swelling heart indefatigably in the way of God's mandates over the field of faith and justice drinking into her open ears: "Walk while you have the light that you may be worthy to receive a heavenly prize."⁹⁴ She showed herself in all things most perfect by imitating Him who said: "I came not to do mine own will."⁹⁵ Subjecting herself to the rule of others she appeared most obedient to their orders serving others as a servant that it might be said: "I did not come to be ministered unto but to minister."⁹⁶ She kept this always before her eyes: never going anywhere outside her monastery walls, an example in herself of good works, she offered it to all in humility, obedience, patience, chastity, fasting, vigils and constant prayer, long-suffering, gentleness, modesty, and benignity. And what more? As a daughter of God she walked forever in daylight and all her fruit is goodness and justice and truth. Thus persevering in holy virtues, she completed seventy-four years. On the fourth ides of May her long desired joy was gained and, leaving her little body on earth, she returned her soul to heaven.⁹⁷ She was honorifically buried in the same holy place by priests of God and others doing service in the order of ecclesiastical dignities. Men of the Christian religion flowed from every direction to the services of such a mother, sorrowing for her temporal absence but rejoicing that her eternal glory blossomed in Christ. And now, with ineffable joy and hope, she awaits the great day of her greater glorification when what was sown in corruption shall rise incorruptible; and what was sown in ignominy shall arise in glory; and what was sown in infirmity shall arise in strength;⁹⁸

92. Van der Essen, *Etude critique*, 341, places the date of Amand's death in 679. His life appears in the AS, September 13.

93. May 5, 701.

94. John 12:35.

95. John 6:38.

96. Matthew 20:28.

97. May 12, 688.

98. 1 Corinthians 15:42-43.

and then, with that happy resurrection, she will be glorified with double glorification arising once more in blessed glory with all the saints on the right side happily crowned with the merits of their acts.

33. And, lest anyone doubt of the lasting efficacious life-giving merits of God's servant, our experiences yield many true signs of virtue demonstrated by the lifeless limbs of her corpse. For here the blind see, the deaf hear, the mute gain the use of words, the lame walk and those laboring with fever and various illnesses often received relief and still receive relief when praying with faith. And witnesses of these many things still live who have seen those who sought health healed. Seeing the wonders God does through His saints, they have rejoiced praising them and His benefits. Therefore, thou holy servant Rictrude, beloved of God, we pray with all the love in our hearts that by your merits and intervention with holy prayers, we shall be loosed from the bonds of various infirmities and, most of all, from the chains of our sins. By the grace of benign Jesus, rescue us on that terrible day of His judgment, when heaven and earth shall burn so we may be snatched from the flames of Gehenna and taken with you to enjoy eternal felicity with Him whose pity and mercy have no end, eternal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, whose kingdom and power, honor and glory are forever from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.