Sainted Women of the Dark Ages

Edited and translated by
Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg,
with E. Gordon Whatley

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 ersde the. 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, Reléged, 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, Fulcol-Bodo. and not Oddo's husband, Leudin-Bodo, bishop of Toul. Possibly the difficulty involves the newly decreed hereditary rights of women.
68. McNemara has examined the uses of hagiography in strengthening the economy of conventual communities in "A Legacy of Miracles."
69. September 22.

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, Armand, was also caught up

This account is taken from Hucbald, monk of Saint-Amand, Vita sanctae Rictrudis (MGH, SRM 14:263-265). 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, "Hucbald et les Etymologies." 132, 23, adds Alcuin's Vita Arnulfi (MGH, SRM 4:391-401) 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 Clohtar's second wife, Sichild, whose sister, Gomatrude, had been repudiated by Dagobert.
in this storm. 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. 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. Noblewomen, 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 his 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-Arnand.

This policy was complemented by aristocratic appointments to bishoprics that enabled aristocrats like Arnulf of Metz; Ida, the wife of Pippin of Hersal; and her daughters Begga and Gertrude of Nivelles. 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.

To the Lord Prelate Stephen, garlanded as his name suggests, 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...
monks, wishes the joy of a crown of the same incorruptible and verdant flowers of virtue.  

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. 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 and I had neither seen nor heard that there was any trustworthy narrative in writing. 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 Liege, 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 time predecessor, except that, for my pressing sins, 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. 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 afflicted us and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants." Then we must hear the warning of the Apostle: "Redeem the time, because the days are evil." 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 worshipper 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.

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 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 destined that when the diligent King Clovis held sway over this nation, he would condescend to gratify the devout imprudence 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 Christ from on high, 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 our savage customs (though there are those who think that they are called Franks because they have a naturally ferocious temperament and very disorderly habits). Rather, it rested on

11. Marchisenames, like other religious foundations in northern Frankland, was burned and devastated by the Viking 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.
mighty twin columns which are seen to support the whole state of the 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, preventient and subsequent, they were led to ever greater heights.

5. And since, wherever sin abounds there also does God's grace super-abound, 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. She began with § 200

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, 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. 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. But afterwards they were named Wascones, as the C in Vasscones changed to an S and that the same region before called Vaceia 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. From that cradle, she came to maturity confirmed and lofty in honest customs.

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. 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.
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, Gerbertha, was the daughter of Saint Gertrude who rests in the monastery which she built which is now called Hamay. She 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 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 Tours. They head the Neustrian branch of Dagobertan saints, as Arnulf of Metz heads the Austrasian group.
the death of her mother; Eusebia, a great worshipper of God accorded to her name's meaning,\textsuperscript{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 venerable priest Richarius was Maurontus' spiritual father and regenerated him in God through holy baptism. The famous Bishop Amand rendered

deadly setting for this story. Geary, 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.

\textsuperscript{32} Eusebia is pity in Greek.
\textsuperscript{33} This seems to provide a base date between 652 (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).
\textsuperscript{34} Wisdom 8:1.
\textsuperscript{35} Psalms 128:1-4.
\textsuperscript{36} The Basque uprisings of 636 that caused Dagobert to send an army south seem to provide a handy setting for this story. Geary, 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.
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 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 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 Bairreus.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 cooly 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. The court cooperated with Luxeuil in bringing the two aristocracies together according to Prinz, Frühe Minchum, 121–51. 46. The Bollandists place this as Bray in Artois, halfway between Douai and Artois.

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 comforter, my servant; when my soul was in sore distress, then did I remember the Lord: morning after morning, I did not refuse to pray. Iang out to Him, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fear.”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

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 adored 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

43. Geary, Aristocracy in Provence, 147, fits Rictrude’s family into a pattern of southern men brought up 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, Frühe Minchum, 121–51.

44. 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.

47. 1 Corinthians 7.
50. Terence, Eunuchus 732.
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. 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, 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." 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 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. Mirrors 5. Round 1: 3. 46, May 17, 92. 53 Ephesians 6:12. 54 Mark 5:36.

55. Lot's wife was turned to a pillar of salt when she looked back with regret to Sodom. Genesis 19:26.
57. Augustine, De sancta virginitate, 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 Bahlfo's ascendancy. Assuming Maurontus was born by 642 (to allow for his three sisters to be born by 656), 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, till 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 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, Richardus. 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 bondwoman 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 saint'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.

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.
...adhered unswerving 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. 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 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.

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 denu 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 Anarchy in Provence, 158, 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.
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 serpent-like 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. Sorrowsing, 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 of her great-grandmother, Saint Gertrude, and other relics of saints kept of her 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 companion 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 own mother and fled her as an enemy; a son who, with his mother’s consent, 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 compelling 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 deceive 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 disdained 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 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 Huchald 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 Eisen, Eistoeripr, 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, that 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: "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 knowing that everything has its time and there is a time for every business. As

216 Sainted Women of the Dark Ages

Solomon, the most wise, said: "A child to himself bringeth his mother to shame."83 And she heard the Scripture say: "Hast thou daughters? Have a care of their bodies,"84 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."85 Still she confided in His grace Who anointed her with a rod. 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."86 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

72. Matthew 7:1.
75. Romans 14:4.
76. 1 Corinthians 4:5.
77. James 4:11.
78. Psalms 50:19.
80. Psalms 12:3.
82. Psalms 52:3.
83. Psalms 52:15.
84. Psalms 5:11.
86. Ecclesiastes 7:24.
87. Exodus 20:12.
89. Matthew 6:22.
90. 2 Corinthians 12:10.
hard labors to the heavenly fatherland on the ides of September.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{94} She showed herself in all things most perfect by imitating Him who said: "I did not come to do mine own will."\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{92} Van der Essen, \textit{Etude critique}, 341, places the date of Amand's death in 679. His life appears in the AS, September 13.
\textsuperscript{93} May 11, 701.
\textsuperscript{94} John 12:35.
\textsuperscript{95} John 6:38.
\textsuperscript{96} Matthew 20:28.
\textsuperscript{97} May 12, 688.
\textsuperscript{98} 1 Corinthians 15:42-43.