Sacred time, sacred space. history and identity in the monastery of Fulda (744-856)
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Conclusion

Fulda sustained the hardships of monastic conflicts and political strife. Contrary to what one might expect of a monastery when reading through a monastic rule, monasteries were not only not homogeneous and uniform, but they also did not aspire to this goal. In order to survive, it was important that mutual differences among monks were recognised and that the heterogeneity of the community was respected. This was where it went wrong with Ratgar. This abbot and his associates had lacked discretion, for he tolerated no weakness and expected of all the monks to meet the same obligations. Anyone who could not cope with the abbot's directives was either refused entrance or sent away from the mother convent to one of the monastery's cellae. To this abbot unitas seems to have meant 'uniformity', i.e. Ratgar demanded of all the monks to be similar. But Ratgar's way of governing the monastery caused discord and threatened the existence of the monastic community. Hucbald of St Amand had been right. Writing in the late ninth century on musical theory, he claimed that concord could not come from a soloist or from two singers with identical voices, but that it came from two or more entirely different voices. Distinction was essential to concord. This parable, made famous by Karl Morrison, also applies to monastic communities, I believe. An enduring existence made differences necessary, even conflict perhaps. Ratgar's policy of increasing austerity, and his demand that all his monks should meet the same stringent obligations, had threatened communal life in Fulda. His lack of discretion was leading to disaster and the abbot was deprived of his abbacy.

This dissertation has studied the monastery of Fulda from the time of Boniface and Sturmi until the middle of the ninth century, a period in which Fulda, first a small and poor religious community of men living from the work of their own hands and under the supervision of Boniface, would be become an important Carolingian royal abbey, a flourishing intellectual centre and a prosperous undertaking, owning estates from Frisia to Italy. Additionally, the monastery had come to be at the centre of social and political life, having, as vassal, lord and neighbour, contacts with both the royal court and the localities. Analysing how the monks of Fulda dealt with these changes that transformed life in the monastery has been the main concern of this study. It has shown the several ways in which the monks tried to safeguard the existence of their rapidly growing, heterogeneous community and attempted to strengthen its cohesion, using

1 Morrison, "'To know thyself'", pp. 380-1.
texts, architecture, relics, liturgy and memoria and appealing to an authoritative past, be it the past of Fulda’s founders Boniface and Sturmi or that of the early Christian Church.

The death of Boniface in 754 probably led to the first internal discussion about Fulda’s identity, most of all its juridical status. Here king Pippin stepped in and settled the conflict between Mainz and Fulda to the advantage of the monks, making Fulda a royal abbey. The approaching death of Sturmi, in combination with a rapid growth since Boniface’s burial in the abbey church, presented the relatively young community with another challenge. The annales necrologici appear to have been the monks’ answer to the need to strengthen the monastery’s unity. Including the names of only monks of Fulda and chronologically listing their names from Sturmi the annales necrologici incorporated, defined and represented the entire community of monks. Additionally, the fact that the lists were structured according to years Anno Domini connected the present to the past, and, as part of salvation history, to the eschatological future of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

In the years following Sturmi’s death Fulda established itself as an important political, social and religious centre. To demonstrate Fulda’s excellence as mediator between God and the faithful and the royal status of a major royal abbey the monks started the construction of a new abbey church. The architecture of this edifice, consisting of an isled basilica in the east in imitation of the old church of Sturmi and a large, stretched out transept in the west following St Peter’s in Rome, reflected the current position of the monastery in Carolingian society, its hopes for the future and the focal points of Fulda’s identity: the strong connections with the Carolingians, the growing importance of Boniface as patron saint of the community and Fulda’s special relationship with the Apostolic See.

Yet the construction of the abbey church, which took the monks some thirty years to build, catalysed discord between the abbot and the monks. A severe conflict broke out, which finally led to the intervention of the Carolingian emperor and the deprivation of Ratgar. The group of monks, who had appealed to the Frankish ruler first in 812, then in 816 or 817, claimed that Ratgar had betrayed the old monastic principles of Boniface, which they held to be at the root of monastic life in Fulda. They turned to the past to validate their vision of Fulda’s identity, transforming the monastery’s early history into a golden age, in which the monks lived in peace and harmony with their abbot, even though we know from for example the Vita Sturmi that this had not been always the case.

After the crisis Eigel took several measures to reinforce the cohesion of the community and to negotiate a new shared identity: he used the dedication of the new church to stress Fulda’s restoration to both the world outside and his community; he attempted to bring old monastic
traditions in Fulda in harmony with recent reforms in the *Vita Sturmi*, and made Sturmi’s anniversary a celebration of Fulda’s foundation, to strengthen the unity of the community; creating a tradition of successive abbots’ *vitae* that would be continued at least until the 840s, Eigil commissioned Candidus to write the *vita* of Fulda’s second abbot, Baugulf; and he built the church of St Michael on the monastery’s cemetery, perhaps as a memorial of the monastery’s abbots, expressing and buttressing an awareness of a continuous succession of office holders.

Hrabanus Maurus elaborated on Eigil’s attempts to rebuild the monastic community. We have concentrated on the events of the 830s, a time in which many relics of Roman martyrs were brought to Fulda. With these sacred treasures Hrabanus created a holy city echoing the Celestial Jerusalem and brought Fulda from the periphery of Christianity into the orbit of the old church of the Apostles and martyrs. The abbot appealed to the authoritative past of Rome, connecting it through the relics of home grown saints like Leoba with the monastery’s own history and identity, to show the holy power of Fulda, and his personal might. Furthermore, by distributing Roman relics he tied the dependencies of the monastery to the mother convent, strengthening the sacredness and power of the holy monastery in the countryside and meanwhile also instructing the faithful in the regions in the Christian faith.

The monks of Fulda selected from their history what fitted their needs best. Continuously returning persons and themes were the foundation of the monastery, Boniface and Sturmi, the pope and the Carolingians. These formed the material with which Fulda’s identity was built. The ways in which the monks used the past to create a group identity changed over time and sometimes we find old themes suppressed that were no longer relevant to the present-day community. Eigil’s portrayal of Fulda in the *Vita Sturmi* concentrated on Sturmi and Boniface as the founders of the monastery and their monastic traditions, on the relation of the monastery with the Carolingian kings, and on the Rule of Benedict being, together with the *instituta sancti Bonifatii*, the guide for the monks. In the *Vita Aegil Candidus* also emphasised the role of the Frankish rulers in monastic politics and the importance of the Rule of Benedict for the monks. Yet, the authority of the Rule of Benedict for the monks comes more to the fore in Candidus’ work than in the *Vita Sturmi*; with Candidus the *instituta sancti Bonifatii*, to which the *Vita Sturmi* referred, have disappeared to the background. The Rule of Benedict had gained new impetus in Fulda, presumably due to the attempts of the West-Frankish monks sent by Louis the Pious to restore peace in the monastery and to reinforce the Benedictine rule. Under the influence of these recent reforms the Rule of Benedict became the main focus of monastic life in Fulda, absorbing the
Conclusion

older monastic traditions of Boniface in a renewed identity, though it would seem that this process had not happened as smoothly as Candidus had pictured it in the *Vita Aegil*.

The *instituta sancti Bonifatii* were no longer an issue for Candidus, as they had been for Eigil shortly after the crisis. The author of the *Vita Aegil* had occupied himself with themes distinct from those which Eigil himself had been concerned with, such as the issue of lay-abbots and the alienation of gifts. This shift in interest resulted from new attitudes towards the role of monasteries in Carolingian society, both within these communities themselves and at the royal court. Even though monasteries still played a significant role in Carolingian politics, the implications of their responsibilities towards society were under discussion. The prominent position of Fulda in Carolingian society had brought the monastic community wealth, but had also attracted secular rulers who used the monastic possessions for other purposes than the religious ones. The phenomenon of lay-abbots had emerged in the context of the power politics of the Frankish rulers. When Eigil had written the *Vita Sturmi* the existence of lay abbots had been tacitly tolerated. But when Candidus started his *Vita Aegil*, lay-abbacies had begun to encounter severe criticism.

For obvious reasons the selectivity of the community’s memory has often been difficult to grasp, though from time to time the sources have allowed us a glimpse of how the past was filtered in terms of contemporary needs. As we have seen, Candidus’ *Vita Aegil* is a portrait of an ideal abbot, transforming the memory of both Ratgar and Eigil in favour of the latter. If Candidus’ work would be the only source we could rely on concerning Ratgar’s remembrance, our impression of this abbot would have been bleak and oversimplified. However, we also know that, after his deprivation of the abbacy, Ratgar lived for almost twenty years at only a fifteen minutes walking distance from the monastery, in a satellite community of Fulda. We know that he was buried there with the signs of dignity befitting an abbot. Furthermore, the early tenth-century *Gesta abbatum* does not mention the conflict between the abbot and the monks at all, but honours Ratgar as *sapiens architectus* for having built the abbey church. The author of the *Gesta abbatum* remembered Eigil for the construction of the funerary chapel. Thus Candidus’ failure, and success for no sources from the hand of Ratgar and his supporters have survived, show that the process of remembering and forgetting was a complex one.

With this dissertation I hope to have shown not only the ways in which Fulda had used the past to create internal cohesion and continuity, but also to have contributed to our understanding of life in this monastery. The inclusion of architecture and relics in this study hopefully has
enriched our picture of early medieval monastic life. Often these subjects are treated separately, but I hope that my approach of combining different disciplines has turned out to be a fruitful one. It has shown that the strategies of building an enduring existence were not limited to the use of the written word, but included architecture, relics, painting and saints' shrines. Furthermore, it has elucidated that safeguarding the continuity of the abbey was not restricted to the acquisition of a juridical status, but also involved the establishment of the monastery as a holy place, showing its superiority as mediator between God and the faithful. Relics and architecture were both areas in which religious communities competed over prestige and patronage. As we have seen in relation to Hrabanus Maurus' relic translations, enjoying a good reputation alone was not enough; a monastery constantly needed to re-establish itself as a sacred place. For this end, following Einhard and Hilduin, Hrabanus drew on relics of Roman martyrs, connecting Fulda to the holy power of Rome and the authority of the Apostolic See.

Moreover, the study of architecture has shown how difficult it is to capture the past in structures and trends. First of all we have been confronted with the problem of interpreting the architecture of Fulda's abbey church, which consisted of an aisled basilica and a continuous transept in the west. Instead of considering the church as the result of two different and opposite designs (one resulting from traditionalism, the other from the wish to break with old traditions) it has turned out more fruitful to look at the church from the perspective of the needs of the monastic community, i.e. to evoke continuity with the past, to emphasise Boniface's importance as patron saint of Fulda, to stress the monastery's royal status and to demonstrate its holiness. The analysis of the crypts has also shown how careful we need to be with interpreting architecture to represent certain brands of monasticism, a lesson, which can be pursued to include our interpretations of the written sources as well.

Furthermore, a monastery was not an immobile foundation identical with the place where it was once founded with its life solely to be lived within the confines of the cloister. Not wanting to detract from the cloister's importance for the identity of the monks and for the monks' perception of the world, it is important to stress that monastic life extended far into the landscape around the monastery. Rudolf's Miracula sanctorum has offered us an exceptional glance into the landscape in which Fulda was active. We have seen Fulda like a spider in a web connected to many places spread over a wide area. The monastery did not only consist of the mother convent but was also made up of all its dependencies.

Fulda is still there, though it no longer is a monastery, but, since the eighteenth century, a bishopric. The medieval abbey church has been
replaced by a baroque cathedral in the early eighteenth century, its once
famous library has been destroyed by the Thirty Years war.\(^1\) Much has
changed since its foundation in 744, but Boniface is still venerated there,
and so is Sturmi, whom Pope Innocentius II canonised in 1139.\(^2\) An
eighteenth-century altar, made out of silver and gold and positioned in
Fulda’s cathedral museum, lodges Boniface’s skull that still shows the
marks of the pagan axe that killed the missionary in Frisia in 754. On
either side of the martyr’s head lie relics of Sturmi, first abbot and founder
of Fulda. Sturmi is still remembered in close relationship with Boniface
and the foundation of Fulda. Each year, on 5 June, Boniface’s \textit{dies natalis},
the abbot’s head is carried in procession together with the relics of his
teacher.\(^3\) The little booklet about Sturmi’s life, available in several
languages at the bar of the museum, is based on Eigil’s \textit{Vita Sturmi},
memorising Sturmi’s and Boniface’s involvement in Fulda’s institution.\(^4\)

\(^1\) The monastery was closed in 1802.
\(^2\) \textit{Epistolae et privilegia Innocentius II pontifex Romanus}, PL 179, pp. 450-1; \textit{Regesta pontificum
Romanorum} 1, ed. Phillipus Jaffé-Löwenfeld (1885, repr. 1956) 8007.
\(^3\) Engelbert, \textit{Die Vita Sturmi}, p. 113.
\(^4\) Josef Leinweber, \textit{St. Sturmius. Leben und Wirken} (Fulda 1979).