Many Lives, One Story:
The *Gesta sanctorum Rotensium* and the Making of Redon

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This article takes a fresh look at the composition of the *Gesta sanctorum Rotonensium* (*Deeds of the Saints of Redon*), a late 9th-century monastic narrative which tells of the foundation of Redon, in the south-east of present-day Brittany. This story is exceptional because not just the abbot but the entire first generation of monks is lauded for their sanctity and their contribution towards building a community. I will argue that the author, rather than presenting these lives as examples for subsequent generation of monks to follow, intended for these vignettes to serve as a confirmation of the sanctity of the community as a whole. The series of biographies that form the first part of the *GSR* show that Redon, in the eyes of the author of the *GSR*, was a place where an individual's holiness could come to full fruition – not because that was a given, but because of the fact that members of the community always helped their brethren become the best version of themselves, both during their lifetime and especially in the close examination of their lives after death.

A good life should only be properly evaluated after somebody dies. This observation underpinned the famous story by the Greek historian Herodotus about the meeting between the Athenian statesman Solon and Croesus, king of Lydia, but it remained a staple of many hagiographical texts in the early medieval West.[1] Especially when it came to the determination of holiness, this was a matter of life and death: a life well lived, a good death and, most importantly, a story that preserved someone's memory for subsequent generations were *conditiones sine qua non* for the establishment of somebody's status as a saint – regardless of whether these people had actually been part of the narrated events, or indeed had existed at all.[2] The death and subsequent remembrance of such exemplary figures opened up the possibility of his or her life being written about, an act which effectively placed the protagonist in an ever-present stasis that allowed their story to start living a life of its own.[3] In so doing,

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1 Emilsson, On Happiness and Time, 223-225; generally, see also Armstrong, Ethics as the Study of Ideals.

2 See Mulder-Bakker, The Invention of Saintliness.

3 Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 79-91.

the story of the saint – as well as their physical relics, if available – may become a central point to which a burgeoning community gravitates and around which its religious practices were shaped.[4] However, due to the revered status of saints in the Christian West, their appeal went well beyond the boundaries of individual communities: they exemplified the best that humanity had to offer and, as such, their stories were meant to appeal to humanity in general.

In this contribution, the interplay between life, death, (exemplary) holiness and community will be explored in examining a collection of saints' lives known as the *Gesta sanctorum Rotonensium* (*Deeds of the Saints of Redon*, henceforth *GSR*), a late 9th-century text from the monastery of Redon, which lies in the present-day *département* of Ille-et-Vilaine in Brittany.[5] In the course of this text, through a series of vignettes about the first generation of monks within the community, the author explores the way each of these »saints« has contributed to the establishment of his community. In doing so, he also sets out to explore the meaning of life itself and invites his audience to imagine with him what that meaning could be.[6]

It was a theme that had been on the mind of the foremost thinkers of Western Christendom for centuries. The 5th-century bishop Augustine of Hippo (354-430), for instance, in his sermon *De Disciplina Christiana*, reassures his listeners that: »He cannot die badly who has lived well«.[7] Living well, according to this influential Church Father, meant striving for »discipline«, which in turn is quite literally a matter of learning (*discere*).[8] »What is learned is how to live a good life; how to live a good life is learned to enable you to live forever; the ones who learn this are Christians; the one who teaches it is Christ«, Augustine preached, explaining that living a disciplined life was not just to follow the will of God in a way similar to that of the martyrs of old, dying a good death and being rewarded with eternal life long afterwards. It also meant passing on those teachings along the way, making sure that the seeds sown by Christ were heard by everybody.[9] Then, it would be up to them to act accordingly. Augustine's words invoke the idea that the Church, the community of believers, should be seen as a garden or a field sown by farmers. Using agricultural metaphors was fairly common in Christian hagiographical literature, and Augustine here used this idea to impress upon his audience the importance of learning and of teaching at the same time, even if the odds seem against them:

> We too, in speaking, are casting the seed, scattering the seed. There are people who ignore us, people who find fault with us, people who mock us. If we are afraid of them, we are reduced to sowing nothing, we are reduced to going hungry at harvest time. So let the seed reach the good soil. I know that those who hear, and hear well, both fall away and make progress; they fall away from iniquity, make progress in the truth; they fall away from the world, and make progress in God.[10]

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4   Choy, *Intercessory Prayer*, 170-171; generally, see Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints*, 1-57.

5   *Gesta sanctorum Rotonensium*, ed. and trans. Brett, 106-219 (henceforth *GSR*).

6   Cunningham, Hagiography and Imagination.

7   Augustine, *De Disciplina Christiana*, c. 12, ed. Vander Plaetse, 220.

8   See Pollmann, Augustine's Hermeneutics.

9   Compare Augustine, *De Disciplina Christiana*, c. 1, ed. Vander Plaetse, 207: »Qui discunt?« to his conclusion in c. 13, ed. Vander Plaetse, 221: »Qui discunt, Christiani sunt«, where he goes on to liken the role of good Christians to that of sowers – a recurring theme throughout this *sermo*.

10 Augustine, *De Disciplina Christiana*, c. 14, ed. Vander Plaetse, 222.

Augustine's words still resonated five centuries later with intellectuals in the Carolingian realm, which came into being around the 750s and persisted until the early 10th century.[11] This was not simply due to the impact Augustine made in the early medieval West or to the enduring influence of his thoughts on models for ascetic and monastic living.[12] Throughout the 8th and 9th centuries, the elites at the court of Charlemagne (r. 768-814), his heir Louis the Pious (r. 814-840) and his many grandsons had an increased sense of responsibility impressed upon them, underpinned by the idea that those in a position of authority within the *imperium Christianum* would be accountable for the salvation of every Christian under them.[13] It was a mentality that led to an almost programmatic movement aimed at harnessing local religious changes in order to create a common sense of responsibility and a shared liturgy to serve as the glue holding the disparate regions within the empire together.[14] It thereby aimed at sharing the burden of salvation among as many people as possible, giving everyone a stake in the Church by handing them the tools for reform at a local level.[15] From the vantage point of the Carolingian court, local priests, episcopal centres and monastic communities became the main proponents of these reforms and often provided the impetus for further developments parallel to the court's attempts to impose its own vision.[16] The subsequent debate about reforms bolstered the self-confidence of the empire.[17] The court benefited from taking a position as arbiter and propagator, even if they were not wholly justified in taking credit for all the changes wrought; in turn, local actors and communities saw their prestige increase if they participated in the general efforts to improve the state of the Church.[18] In doing so, everybody involved would also see themselves as working on the »good soil«, cultivating those who would heed their teachings, and resist the mockery and criticism of those who chose to ignore them. And, after many long days of working the (metaphorical) land, they could look back on a life well lived and hope that their memory would inspire the next generation to continue to care for the fields with the same zeal as they had.

This view of the Carolingian apparatus of reform and personal correction, of course, presents an ideal scenario.[19] As with any such ideals, the vicissitudes of life and reality in a broader sense would continuously lurk in the shadows, ready to throw even the most well-intentioned monk or bishop off their path.[20] As the *GSR* explains to its readers, the goal of its author had been to »commit to humble parchment« the »struggles of the holy men who battled unceasingly night and day against the invisible enemy« in a way similar to the way »old emperors« wrote about their worldly victories: »so that they would not be consigned to oblivion«.[21] It is interesting to note that the author explicitly points out that he was putting quill to parchment, as it draws attention to the act of inscribing and reading as much as to the

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11   Generally on the Carolingians, see Costambeys *et al.*, *The Carolingian World*.

12   On the persisting legacy of Augustine, see Contreni, Carolingian Era, Early and Kelly, Carolingian Era, Late.

13   On this term, see Alberi, Evolution; Van Espelo, A Testimony of Carolingian Rule?; Nelson, Kingship and Empire.

14   De Jong, *Sacrum palatium et ecclesia.*

15   Guillot, Exhortation; Davis, A Pattern of Power.

16   Van Rhijn, Priests and the Carolingian Reforms.

17   De Jong, The State of the Church.

18   Walsham, Migrations of the Holy.

19   Barrow, Ideas and Applications of Reform.

20   Nelson, On the Limits of the Carolingian Renaissance.

21   *GSR* 2, prologue, ed. and trans. Brett, 144-147.

text itself: as these words are read, a monk is holding the book as an object. It is this action which »evokes the memory of the saints, provides edification of the mind for the faithful, and shows honour to the monks«. A book needed to be written, the author states, so that he could »figuratively« emulate the work of a farmer and eventually reap what he has sown. In other words: it is acknowledged that the act of writing has a function that is essentially separate from the deeds of the saints themselves, or even from the stories told about them – but is no less important for it.[22] To emulate the saints in their battle against the darkness is to ensure one's own salvation, the author states, but to write it down and inspire future generations is to take these seeds and cultivate them so that the virtues of these monks will work their way into the hearts and minds of the audience. Preserving the deeds of saints thus became as much a part of the cultivation of good Christianity as the virtues described. The physicality of the book is what anchors this to the community. The act of reading, out loud or quietly, is to adhere to the ideals exemplified by the saints who had lived so well in the past.[23]

The *GSR*, which so eloquently describes this purpose, is a narrative which describes how the monastery of Redon was established in the face of opposition from without and within.[24] It is essentially a foundation legend, in which the origins of the monastery and the exploits of the first generation of monks are retold in the course of three books, interspersed with a plethora of moral exhortations to the audience. It tells the story not by focusing solely on the development of the community or on the deeds of its succession of abbots, as it often the case, but also by presenting a series of short stories about the lives of the first generation of monks in the second book: once the monastery has been founded and obtained imperial sponsorship, but before it became a suitable vessel for receiving the relics which would establish the community as a viable ›holy place‹ in the region, it would be up to these first monks to meet the expectations of the world around them – to live a life worth retelling and imitating.

This collection of short ›embedded hagiographies‹ within the overall composition of the *GSR* will be the focus of the remainder of this article. Following a short description of the work as a whole and the »social logic of the text« at its »moment of inscription«, I will show how the biographical vignettes in the second book function both individually and as an over-arching series of life stories.[25] In doing so, and in drawing attention to the author's emphasis on the finite nature of life and the finality of these stories, I will explain how the text was intended to strengthen the resolve of individual monks – with the ultimate aim of strengthening the community.

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22 The relation between the written word and the truth it conveyed was on the mind of 9th-century intellectuals: Dutton, Why did Eriugena Write?; see now also Kramer and Novokhatko, Dead Authors and Living Saints.

23 Cf. the comments on the reception of Merovingian hagiography by Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*.

24   Generally, see Brett, Redon, abbaye carolingienne.

25 On these two theoretical concepts, see Gabriele Spiegel, History, Historicism and the Social Logic of the Text.

Context and Contents

The *GSR* was composed by an anonymous author belonging to the second generation of monks at Redon.[26] Considering that the monastery was founded in the 830s and that the author claims to have known the founding abbot personally, this would place its composition in the later 9th century. Internal evidence as well as the subsequent history of the community itself allows us to pinpoint the date to the 880s, but given that both the preface to the first book and the ending of the third are missing due to damage to the manuscripts over time, we remain in the dark about the identity of the author, the exact time of writing, what intentions he might have stated and whether or not there was an over-arching arc to the narrative.[27]

The *GSR* is extant in five manuscripts, two of which are from before 1500, as well as three early modern printed versions that allude to further manuscripts which are no longer extant. While all manuscripts postdate the moment of inscription by several centuries, the work itself is rooted in the late 9th century. This was a time when political turmoil characterised the relations between the Frankish empire and the semi-independent polity of Brittany in the north-western corner of present-day France, and Viking invaders made life difficult for everybody.[28] This colours the narrative, from the trouble the abbot had to go through to prove to the Carolingian emperor Louis the Pious that his community would subscribe to the Frankish political theology, to Redon's vulnerability to Viking attacks due to the fact that it existed between these spheres of influence.[29] Thus, while there is no indication as to whether the *GSR* was written at the behest of a patron or at the initiative of the author, it is clear that the author was aware of (and perhaps even lived through) the political turmoil in the area in the 830s, when the monastery was first founded – and that he was able to use this awareness as the basis for a ›coming-of-age story‹ for the community as a whole. The *GSR* tells of the origins of the community and the struggles it went through during its development from a small *cella* into a full-fledged ›imperial‹ monastery in the course of a process that is explicitly compared to the travels of the Chosen People in the Desert.[30] In doing so, the author combined hagiographical tropes and *topoi*, biblical imagery and saintly stereotypes with a keen awareness of the turbulent political situation both at the time of writing and during the period described – meeting the expectations of his many intended audiences (monks of the community; local aristocracy; members of the imperial court) in the process.[31] The political boundary between Brittany and the Carolingian empire is visible, but it does appear to be more of a hindrance to the monks than something to enforce: the universal *ecclesia* seems paramount here, rather than Breton identity.[32]

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26 For an overview of the dating, sources and manuscript transmission of the *GSR*, see the introduction to the edition by Brett, 20-62. Moreover, for an overview of the influences on early medieval Breton hagiographical texts, see Kerlouégan, Les citations d'auteurs latins profanes; *idem*, Les citations d'auteurs chrétiens; Wright, Knowledge of Christian Latin poets and historians in early medieval Brittany.

27 On the hagiographical dossier of Redon and its first abbot, Conwoion, see especially Poulin, *L'Hagiographie bretonne*, 85-98.

28 Bley, Viking defilement.

29 Cassard, Avant les Normands; McNair, Vikings and Bretons?.

30 Kramer, Pharaoh in Carolingian Monastic Narratives, 148-154.

31 See the methodological remarks by Pohl, History in Fragments, 343-354.

32 Already noted by Riché, Les Hagiographes Bretons et la Renaissance Carolingienne.

This was an interesting authorial strategy, which if nothing else shows the sensitivity of the author towards the many different audiences his work might encounter.[33] Perched as it was on the border between Breton and Frankish interests, the region around Redon had lived through a long history of violence, scheming and conflict.[34] According to Frankish historiography, the Bretons had been subservient to the Franks since the early Merovingian era at least; the 6th-century bishop Gregory of Tours (538-594) already claimed as much, which set a precedent for treating the ongoing warfare in the region as a rebellion and the Bretons as inherently untrustworthy, in a way not dissimilar to the treatment of the Saxons – or any of their more resilient enemies for that matter – in Carolingian narratives.[35] The dynamics differ from case to case, however, and it should be noted that, while there is no clear narrative counterpoint coming from within Brittany, the region could boast long political, religious and literary traditions that were consciously different from Frankish conventions. The distinct ›Celtic‹ character of the Breton language and identity gave the culture in the region a resilience that may have been bewildering to onlookers from the other side of the frontier.[36]

During the 9th century, the cultural differences between the Bretons and the Franks were made more prominent, as the Carolingian expansion and the ambitions they harboured for their burgeoning empire caused them to formulate ever more sophisticated strategies of distinction and inclusion.[37] Under Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, the combination of the plunder economy and an increased emphasis on border protection meant that the existence of a peripheral principality that refused to acknowledge their overlordship became a problem indeed.[38] This would be exacerbated by the fact that Breton rulers also occasionally formed alliances with Viking invaders, despite being themselves often harried by them, opening the empire up to this threat.[39] Thus, a straightforward solution seemed to be the conquest of the peninsula and the subjugation of its people – something which was repeatedly attempted, but never seemed to stick, as local leaders seized upon the internal turmoil in the empire to go their own way time after time. The most successful among these was the count of Vannes, Nominoë (r. 819-851), one of Brittany's ›founding fathers‹ and one of the main sponsors of Redon during its first years.[40]

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33 Riché, En relisant l'*Histoire des Saints de Redon.*

34 Most clearly analysed in the still unsurpassed study by Smith, *Province and Empire.*

35 Smith, Confronting Identities; on early medieval views of the Saxons, see most recently Flierman, *Saxon Identities.*

36 On this and, more generally, the role of the region in the intellectual and trade network that linked the Western Mediterranean to the North Atlantic, see Le Duc, La Bretagne.

37 Garault, L'abbaye de Saint-Sauveur de Redon. Generally on the use of »strategies of distinction« for early medieval scholarship, see Pohl, Introduction: Strategies of Distinction, with reference to the Bourdieusian origins of the idea on pp. 5-6. See also, *idem*, Introduction – Strategies of Identification.

38 Noble, Louis the Pious and the Frontiers.

39 Smith, *Province and Empire*, 105-107; 197-205.

40 Guillotel *et al.*, *La Bretagne*, 229-246.

As the 9th century progressed, Carolingian expansionism and idealism combined with the internal struggles of the Breton polity (called a »kingdom« in local sources, but a »principality« or »duchy« by the Franks) to create a state of permanent instability in the region.[41] Nominoë's successors, Erispoe (r. 851-857) and Salomon (r. 857-874), managed to impart a degree of stability to their realm and could even afford to be cautiously ambitious.[42] For instance, when Salomon attempted to convince Pope Nicholas I (r. 858-867) to create a new archbishopric in Dol in the 860s, he did so to free the region from the influence of Tours, one of the most significant religious centres within the Frankish empire.[43] When Salomon was murdered in 874, however, the region fell into disarray again as aristocrats from various factions vied for rulership over the entire region.[44] Interestingly, even during this period, which roughly lasted until Alan II (r. 938-952) brought the region more or less under control in the 930s, Brittany was neither completely subjugated by Viking invaders nor fully absorbed into the Frankish political sphere of influence.[45] It would take until the early 16th century for Brittany and France to be formally unified, with the region steering its own course between England and France in the intervening centuries.[46]

The foundation of Redon in the 830s was thus something of a gamble, perhaps even part of a concerted effort to create a new beacon of stability – as represented by the Carolingian empire – in an otherwise contested region.[47] It was by no means the only monastic foundation on the peninsula, of course, and neither was it the only one to start compiling a hagiographical dossier in the later 9th century. Compared to the other Breton churches, however, Redon claimed the least chronological distance between foundation and composition, and the *GSR* appears to be the only Breton hagiographical narrative that openly courted a Carolingian connection, whereas the rest of the religious communities in the region remained oriented towards Britain and Ireland and the rule of Saint Columbanus.[48] The community of Saint-Gildas-de-Rhuys, for instance, situated about 70 kilometres west of Redon, could already boast three centuries worth of history by the 9th century. Unfortunately, we know only precious few details about this monastery due to the fact that the monks, like those of Redon, were forced to relocate under pressure of Viking attacks; what little we can glean from the archaeological record and manuscript transmission, however, points to a rich intellectual life.[49] On the north coast of the peninsula, both Dol and Saint-Pol-de-Léon similarly traced their origins back to the 6th century with the claim – stemming from hagiographical

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41   Smith, *Province and Empire*, 117-118.

42   Guillotel *et al.*, *Bretagne*, 201-352.

43   De Fougerolles, Tours, Dol et les droits du métropolitain.

44   Davies, *Small Worlds*, 13-22.

45   Price, Viking Brittany; see also, *idem*, *Vikings in Brittany*.

46   Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron*, 349-350.

47   On monastic institutions as carriers of royal authority, as exemplified in the liturgy (*cultus divinus*), see Garipzanov, *Symbolic Language of Authority*, 44-100.

48   Generally, see Brett, *Brittany and the Atlantic Archipelago*, 100-179. On the Carolingian »shift« from Columbanian to Benedictine monasticism, see Diem, The Carolingians and the *Regula Benedicti*.

49   Valéry, La bibliothèque de la première abbaye; *idem*, Autour de l'antiquité du monastère.

dossiers that, like that of Redon, came to fruition in the course of the 9th century – that they were founded by a saint, Samson and Paulus Arelianus respectively, who had crossed the Channel from Wales.[50] In the latter case, the resulting *vita*, written by Uurmonoc of Landévennec, also betrays the influence that the author's monastery on the far west coast of Brittany had on religious life in the peninsula at the time. This influence, in turn, might account for the fact that, in 818, Louis the Pious seemed particularly keen on reforming Landévennec and ensuring it turned away »from the Irish« to join the *universalis aecclesia* – and then using Landévennec's acquiescence as an example for the other communities and bishops on the peninsula.[51]

Between its foundation in the 830s and the composition of the *GSR* about five decades later, Redon was thus exceptional more for its embrace of the Carolingian connections to the region than for its existence *per se*.[52] Nevertheless, the foundation did leave a marked imprint on its surroundings and might have upset the existing order to a greater degree than the existing sources allow us to see. The *GSR*, in that case, also reflects the memory of these uncertainties and would have given the monks a boost of self-confidence that came with the presentation of the monastery as a community of saints.[53] Given the political context of the late 9th century, when the *GSR* was written, its emphasis on the authority of the Carolingians might even be construed as nostalgia for a time when there still was such a thing as a singular ecclesiastical ideal, as the world at the moment of inscription appeared to be crumbling around the community.[54] This supposedly pro-Carolingian (though not necessarily pro-Frankish) stance should not be taken for granted, however: the Frankish and Breton polities had already been at loggerheads well before the establishment of the Carolingian empire in the course of the 8th century, and it is rather curious that the author positions Redon between the Carolingian ideology propagated by the imperial court and the local interests of his community's immediate neighbours.[55] Given the fact that the empire was under noticeable pressure by the end of the 9th century, the decision to subscribe to the all-inclusive Carolingian political and religious vision for their community reflects a conscious choice on the part of both the founding abbot, Conwoion, and the author describing his deeds.[56] From a local perspective, it may even be seen as a call to action for local authorities to fill the sizeable shoes left by the Carolingians.

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50 On Paulus Aurelianus, see Kerlouégan, La *Vita Pauli Aureliani,* as well as the other contributions to that same volume. On Samson of Dol and his *vitae*, see the contributions in Olson, *St Samson of Dol*, especially the chapters by Brett, The Hare and the Tortoise?, and Wooding, The Representation of Early British Monasticism.

51 Flechner, *Libelli commentarii aliorum*, citing Borderie, *Le Cartulaire de Landévennec*, 75-76.

52 In many ways, it makes more sense to group the *GSR* in with Carolingian *Gesta abbatum* composed around the same time, with the *Gesta abbatum Fontanellensium* from the community of Saint-Wandrille being perhaps the most obvious example among many: Becher, Die Chronologie der Äbte von Saint-Wandrille; Pradié, L'historiographie à Fontenelle. The place of the *GSR* among (near-)contemporary hagiographical collections from the Frankish realm, however, is another story for another time, as this article is focused on its internal logic.

53 Astill *et al.*, *A Breton Landscape*, 107-110.

54 Generally, see MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, esp. 1-11, in which the author explains how the idea that the Carolingian empire was in a state of collapse was more a result of modern historiographical interpretation than a reflection on the contemporary source material.

55 Dumville, Writers, Scribes and Readers, 49-65.

56 Cf. Nelson, Kingship and Royal Government, 416.

For the monks of Redon, the political entropy in the world around them culminated in the 920s. After having already been forced, under pressure from Viking attacks, to leave Redon for the *villa* of Plélan in the 870s, even this refuge was proving too unsafe by the early 10th century, and the monks moved on to stay as guests in other, safer communities – first in Auxerre and later Poitou – before returning to Redon in the late 10th century.[57] Given that the community persisted in exile for well over a century in total, it is not surprising to see how their reappearance in Redon was marked by a reinvention of their history and identity.[58] The compilation of the Redon Cartulary, an 11th-century collection of charters reaching back all the way to the foundation of the community and one of the most important parallel sources to the *GSR*, took place around the same time, probably starting under the auspices of Abbot Almod (1062-1084), but with additions being made well into the 12th century.[59] Additionally, in the early 11th century, parts of the *GSR* were used as the basis for a shorter, more conventional saint's Life known as the *Vita Conwoionis*, a version of their foundation legend focusing almost exclusively on the first abbot, Conwoion. Both these texts should be seen in the context of their return and their attempts to rebuild or reform, but definitely re-establish their community in its original spot, as if continuity was a given despite their long absence.[60] Considering that the abbey flourished in the first centuries after its re-establishment, it seems safe to assume that the monks succeeded in their ploy.

Life Stories

The three books of the *GSR* each contain their own narrative arc. The first book details the foundation of Redon by the abbot Conwoion, the community's interaction with the local nobility and how it came to acquire imperial sponsorship. The second book tells of the exploits of the first generation of monks and explains how the monastery acquired the relics of several local saints as well as those of the martyred pope Marcellinus (r. 296-304). Finally, the third book is a collection of miracles performed through these relics, demonstrating the rise to prominence of the community as a pilgrimage destination and holy place. The final extant chapter details a Viking attack, which was thwarted by the saints, and then the narrative breaks off, leaving us in the dark about how this story was meant to end.

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57   Smith, Making of a Holy Place, 370-371. Another rather underappreciated source for this period is a fragmentary set of annals »apparently composed by a member of the Redon community in the first half of the tenth century«; *ibid.*, n. 39. These *Annales Rotonenses*, which unfortunately fall outside the scope of the current article, have been edited by Bischoff, *Annales Rotonenses*.

58   Garault, L'abbaye de Redon.

59   Guillotel, Les cartulaires de l'abbaye de Redon; Davies, Composition of the Redon Cartulary; apart from representing a reassertion of the community's identity, this project also fits in with the general trend towards composing cartularies discernible in the high medieval West: Declerq, Originals and Cartularies.

60   See Cross, Why Emphasize Viking Disruption?, for a number of helpful comparative observations on this way of implying continuity and change, albeit focused on Britain and Normandy in the later 10th and early 11th centuries.

The importance of Redon's saints and relic collection shows how the author tried to cement the monastery's status as a religious powerhouse in the region.[61] Through these relics, the power of Redon allegedly rivalled that of Rome, Carthage or even Jerusalem.[62] To the author, Redon as a community was meant to be a shining light to its surroundings. This adds depth to his narrative: the guidance provided by the »saints« and the relics was supposed to keep the monks on the straight and narrow, and that in turn ensured that the community continued to be accepted as a cultural, economic and religious powerhouse in the region.

The *GSR* appears to have been composed by a single author, seemingly without significant interruption. The individual narratives/biographies throughout the text would therefore have been placed there deliberately, as part of the composition. It is noteworthy that the author presents himself as having witnessed some of these events,[63] or having known the protagonists,[64] or basing his stories on the testimony of reliable witnesses,[65] thus lending an air of credibility to the narrative. Here, the *GSR* serves a twofold function. As a whole, the narrative presents the story of the rise of a community in a politically contentious area. The image presented to the audience would be one of a community that is here to stay, with divine and imperial support, regardless of who would rise against it. In fact, the mere existence of Redon already improved the region's moral makeup: as told in the *GSR*, local aristocrats opposing the foundation meet their grisly demise,[66] and those supporting it are portrayed as having near-saintly qualities.[67] The fact that Conwoion put a lot of effort into securing Carolingian/imperial sponsorship (as is clear from the description of his many travels and travails in Book 1, cc. 8-11) suggests that the author wanted to show to any potential ›Carolingian‹ readers that Redon actively pursued the interests of the Carolingian state and its ecclesiastical framework, rather than dwelling on the more localised Breton identity.[68] The trans-regional perspective flaunted by the author is interesting when compared to the image that emerges from the Cartulary of Redon.[69] The extant older charters show how the community actually was and remained deeply embedded into its surroundings.[70] The veneer of reliability created by the narrator should therefore be treated with caution: the *GSR* is a text with an agenda that was affected by recent history and the position of Redon at the time of writing – and which had set out to improve both.

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61   Smith, Making of a Holy Place.

62   *GSR* 3 c. 8, ed. and trans. Brett, 206-213.

63   *GSR* 2, c. 1, ed. and trans. Brett, 150-151.

64   *GSR* 3, preface, ed. and trans. Brett, 184-185.

65   *GSR* 2, preface, ed. and trans. Brett, 144-145.

66   *GSR* 1, cc. 6-7, ed. and trans. Brett, 124-131; for context, see Davies, On the Distribution of Political Power; Davies, People and Places.

67   *GSR* 1, c. 3, ed. and trans. Brett, 114-119.

68   *GSR* 1, cc. 8-11, ed. and trans. Brett, 132-143; see Gravel, *Distances, rencontres, communications*, 7-24.

69   Generally, see Guillotel, Cartulaires bretons médiévaux.

70   Davies, *Small Worlds*, 1-2; *Cartularium Rotonensis*, ed. De Courson.

Although the monks are omnipresent in the *GSR* and we read about their exploits throughout all three books, the second book is the closest to a ›biographical collection‹. Here we find the stories about the monks who were the first to follow Conwoion. Taken separately, these individual narratives seem to be aimed ›inwards‹, at the members of the community itself.[71] They are exemplary stories about exemplary men, whose virtue makes them conduits for God's grace on earth. Central to these biographies are not the lives of the monks themselves, but rather the miracles that God performs through them and the way these »could be harnessed as a means of social control«.[72] The stories themselves are quite conventional, although it is noteworthy that they are prefaced with several explicit quotations from the Bible that may have helped a monastic audience make sense of the different episodes.[73] This has been cleverly done: the citations at the start and end of these biographies served to guide the audience's expectations and would help them give a moral context to the narrative; additionally, some of these quotations are actually ›coded‹ patristic quotations, adding an extra layer of depth to their use. The miracles themselves are, with a few exceptions, also ›biblical‹ (curing the blind, walking on water, raising the dead), which lends an evangelical agenda to the *GSR*.[74] Quite possibly, the individual chapters under scrutiny here were intended to serve as an aid for composing sermons or, indeed, for reading during mealtimes.[75] This interpretation is bolstered by the fact that in some cases the death dates of the monks are also given, probably for commemorative purposes and thus for reading on that given date, similar to hagiographical collections such as the *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum*, mentioned in Ó Riain's contribution to this volume.

If the texts were indeed meant as *lectiones* during mealtimes, their normative power over the immediate intended audience will have been considerable. However, rather than setting behavioural norms, the agenda seems to have been more contemplative – showcasing instances of the perfect Christian life which the monks could aspire to, but also commenting on the ideals represented by the saints through the biblical quotations that accompanied them.[76] These quotations, in turn, establish the depth of the *GSR*: occasionally, the author apparently renders a verse incorrectly, but in misquoting the Bible actually invokes a patristic or exegetical source that gives direction to the biblical passage.[77] In that sense, the text draws an implicit boundary between the ›community of learning‹ of those able to understand the allusions made and those for whom the moral or political narrative is the more important one. To those in the latter category, the *GSR* presents Redon as a community distinguished by a very clear (almost literal) boundary that is protected by God and emperor, which one could cross at one's own peril.[78] To those readers with a more advanced level of understanding, the narrative would open up the possibility of reflecting on the meaning their community held for them, the various ways in which they could pursue the road to salvation or how to overcome the many difficulties that would be thrown in their way.

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71 Generally, Prinz, Aspekte frühmittelalterlicher Hagiographie. For comparable cases of the interplay between hagiography and community, see Licciardello, La fonction normative dans l'hagiographie monastique.

72 Smith, Oral and Written, 340.

73 See Cochelin, When the Monks were the Book.

74 For these examples, see *GSR* 2, cc. 1, 2 and 8 respectively (ed. and trans. Brett, 146-153 and 166-171).

75 Smith, Making of a Holy Place, 379, n. 72.

76 Cf. the remarks on the multivalent nature of the genre itself in Prinz, Hagiographie und Welthaltigkeit.

77 Already noted by Ohly, Vom geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter; Kaczynski, Edition, Translation and Exegesis; specifically on the *GSR*, see Kramer, In divinis scripturis legitur.

78 *GSR* 1, c. 11, ed. and trans. Brett, 140-143.

The stories of the saints of Redon can be read separately, but the sequence in which they are presented within the *GSR* also lends a serial aspect to the second book. Each chapter is an episode in a longer story, and as such the individual chapters have a meaning and message of their own while also, through repetition, reinforcing the overall purpose of the work. Moreover, the serial nature of the *GSR* also allowed the audience to become familiar with the storytelling mode and the protagonists, while at the same appreciating the variety of purposes given to each story.[79] By and large, within the variation found between the chapters, the overall goal appears to have been mostly to emphasise the communal identity of Redon and give the new generations of monks food for thought. Eschewing a strictly chronological order, the author shows how the community of Redon was founded by a group of saints, whose power and authority do not just derive from their collective appearance but are equally dependent on their individual sanctity. In that sense, there is a meta-narrative of mutual support visible, not only between the »saints« themselves, but also from the narrative of the *GSR* – which would be supposed to teach the brethren – to the monks who keep the memory of their founding fathers alive. This adds to the serial nature of the readings: if these were indeed tied to liturgical functions or specific dates in the calendar, the *GSR* would be a reminder of what made the community great, not just for individual readers of the entire text but also for the communal audience at specific points during the year, for example on the day of death of the individual saints.

The Quick and the Dead

With this in mind, the stories told in the second book of the *GSR* make sense both as individual anecdotes and as the constituent parts of a larger story. Most of the chapters situate a monk within the community and narrate one or several miracle stories involving him. The notable exceptions are a story which tells how the dormitory collapsed without injuring any of the brethren and the final two chapters about the theft of relics, first from the neighbouring city of Angers and eventually from Rome.[80] The remaining chapters all fit into the scheme set out in the preface: they contain lessons that are taught as a function of the life of the monk in question, and in reading these lessons, the community is strengthened. This shows how the author built a degree of flexibility into the *GSR*, as the value of each individual lesson did not decrease in isolation, whereas they did show a monastery in action when taken together.

The first chapter is about the abbot Conwoion and symbolically opens the eyes of the audience by showing how he emulated Christ by curing a blind man. The exemplary function of the story is emphasised by the biblical quotations that bookend the passage – they all deal with the power of light and the importance of witnessing miracles for the illumination of one's soul, whereas the final quotation is Christ's promise to »his disciples and also all the faithful: ›All the works which I do, they will do them also, and greater than these‹«.[81] This is confirmed in chapter 2, which shows the monk Riouuen unwittingly crossing the River

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79 On these aspects of seriality, see the observations by Eco, Innovation and Repetition; see also the introductory remarks by Spencer-Hall, *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens*, 11-63.

80 *GSR* 2, cc. 7 and 9-10, ed. and trans. Brett, 166-167 and 170-183; although no mention is made of Redon, Geary, *Furta Sacra* still offers the best introduction to the phenomenon of relic theft and provides a context for this narrative.

81 *GSR* 2, c. 1, ed. and trans. Brett, 146-151, at 151.

Vilaine in order to perform Mass in the monastery church. It is a charming story, emulating not only the pericope repeated in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and John, but also a very similar story from Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, in which one of Saint Benedict of Nursia's pupils performs the same feat.[82] In each case, the supernatural element of the story is supposed to show God's mastery over the elements. Both Gregory and the *GSR* emphasise the humility of the monks following their miracle, while the *GSR* makes the point even more explicit by reminding the reader, with John 15:5, that »You can do nothing without me [i.e. Christ]«.[83]

With the eyes of the audience now open, the *GSR* continues with the gardener Condeluc, whose virtuous conduct enables him to expel an infestation of very hungry caterpillars from his carefully cultivated garden.[84] Belonging to a long tradition of garden miracles, Condeluc's story not only shows that Redon – symbolised by the garden – enjoys divine protection against incursions from outside, but also reminds readers that this protection had to be earned through faith and good works.[85] While nobody can do anything without Christ, the biblical quotations imply that requests made in good faith, in the name of God, will be granted. This includes wishing for the well-being of the community: divine protection should in no way imply that the individual monks can forget that they are part of a bigger whole.

»This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you«; the author paraphrases another passage from the Gospel of John in the next chapter, before telling the stories of the two brothers Conhoiarn and Fidweten. Conhoiarn, in the liturgical act of washing the feet of the poor, cures a paralytic – and then, interestingly, forbids him to tell anyone about this.[86] This vignette again hearkens back to the work of Gregory the Great, who explains this as being part of the unspoken covenant between God and the faithful: good deeds should be performed out of love for one's fellow man, in total and unquestioning humility.[87]

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82 *GSR* 2, c. 2, ed. and trans. Brett, 150-153. See Madden, *Jesus' Walking on the Sea*, and for a reading of its reception, Adalbert de Vogüé's commentary to Gregory the Great, *De vita et miraculis sancti Benedicti*, trans. Costello and de Bhaldraithe, 49-51; Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cults*, 38-47. On the lingering influence of Gregory the Great among the Carolingians, see Meens, Ritual Purity.

83 *GSR* 2, c. 2, ed. and trans. Brett, 151.

84 *GSR* 2, c. 3, ed. and trans. Brett, 152-155.

85 Müller, Diabolical Power of Lettuce.

86 *GSR* 2, c. 4, ed. and trans. Brett, 156-161, at 157.

87 Gregory the Great's views on the matter, which he explains in his *Dialogi* 1.9, ed. de Vogüé, II, 80-83, trans. Gardner, 33, deserve to be quoted in full: »All that which our blessed Saviour wrought in his mortal body, he did it for our example and instruction, to the end that, following his steps, according to our poor ability, we might without offence pass over this present life: and therefore, when he did that miracle, he both commanded them to conceal it, and yet it could not be kept in, and all this to teach his elect servants to follow his doctrine; to wit, that when they do any notable thing whereof glory may arise to themselves, that they should have a desire not to be spoken of, and yet for the good of others, contrary to their own mind, they should be laid open and known: so that it proceed of their great humility to desire that their works may be buried with silence, and yet, for the profit of others, it should fall so out, that they cannot be concealed. Wherefore our Lord would not have anything done which he could not effect: but what his servants ought to desire, and what also, contrary to their minds, was convenient to be done, like a good master he taught us by his own example.« Generally, see Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism*, 131-188.

This includes not being boastful about miracles, as it will in the end be in God's interest to ensure that these acts are made public anyway. This is then confirmed in a second miracle performed post-mortem by Conhoiarn. Healing a young man from an unspecified disease, he does this on the condition that he »must go and proclaim the power of our Lord Jesus Christ everywhere, and be a faithful friend to this holy place« all the days of his life.[88] Rather than forcing people into silence, as he did while alive, Conhoiarn has taken his place in Heaven and becomes a more proactive force for good – and for the community. After all, the author confirms, quoting the Gospel of Matthew, »He is not the God of the Dead, but of the Living«. The saints of Redon still have a mission.

A similar reversal of the narrative befalls Fidweten in the next chapter.[89] According to the lost part of the first book, alluded to here, he had already established himself as a holy man in his own right. Now, his story continues, he »desired in his heart to despise his homeland« and become a *peregrinus*, a voluntary exile usually seen as part of a specifically Irish ascetic tradition.[90] He is thwarted by Nominoë, however, who pleads with him not to leave »their homeland« but to enter the monastery of Redon instead. Fidweten agrees, and his mere presence seems to elevate his brethren, who »began to imitate his life with all their heart«.[91] When he wants to leave again, it is the community that stops him, together with the abbot, as they convince him that they need his example to encourage them to keep doing better. His importance for the community becomes clear when he has a vision of a demon sitting at the feet of one of the brethren, Osbert – who does end up fleeing the monastery, »loving the world, as an untamed horse without a rider«.[92] Although Osbert eventually ends up in a monastery in Pavia, the message to the readers in Redon is clear: life in a monastery might not be easy, but it is preferable to the dangers of the world, where lack of (self-)control could easily lead sinners astray.[93] This is also the *Leitmotif* of the chapter that follows about the scribe Doethen, who, at the instigation of the Devil, leaves the monastery but is then paralysed after the abbot prays for his salvation. »Do not delay in rendering to God what has gone out from your lips, for it would be better not to make vows than not to fulfil them after making them«, the author admonishes his audience, explicitly reminding them of the monastic vows they made when entering the monastery and implicitly calling to mind the importance of those vows for the integrity of their community.[94]

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88 *GSR* 2, c. 4, ed. and trans. Brett, 159.

89 *GSR* 2, c. 5, ed. and trans. Brett, 160-165.

90 Johnston, Exiles from the Edge?; Charles-Edwards, The social background to Irish *Peregrinatio*. It was a phenomenon that would have appealed to a high medieval audience as well: Ó Riain, *Schottenklöster*. On the question of the ›Irishness‹ of the tradition, see Hayes-Healy, Irish pilgrimage.

91 *GSR* 2, c. 5, ed. and trans. Brett, 161-163.

92 *GSR* 2, c. 5, ed. and trans. Brett, 163: »... et sicut equus indomitus sine gubernatore totus fertur infraeceps saeculum diligens.« The phrase »equus indomitus« appears to be an invocation of Sirach 30:8: »equus indomitus evadit durus et filius remissus evadit praeceps«.

93 He ends up in the monastery of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, in Pavia. According to the very final entry in Bede's *Chronica Maiora*, chapter 66 (ll. 2061-2066) of his *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. Jones, 466; trans. Wallis, 237, this was the final resting place of the relics of Saint Augustine, and, according to the late 8th-century historian Paul the Deacon, it was one of many churches restored by the erstwhile Carolingian ally King Luitprand (r. 712-744): Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum*, 4, c. 58, ed. and trans. Schwarz, 340. See Stone, *St. Augustine's Bones* It is also noteworthy that »Osbert« is one of the few monks who had a non-Breton name, possibly denoting his provenance from one of the kingdoms across the Channel: Smith, Confronting Identities. 181.

94 *GSR* 2, c. 6, ed. and trans. Brett, 164-167: »In diuinis scripturis legitur: ›Quod egressum est de labiis tuis, ne moram facias Deo reddere: melius est enim non uouere, quam post uotum non reddere‹.« See De Jong, *Imitatio morum*; Choy, Deposit of Monastic Faith.

With the exception of the abbot Conwoion (and the errant Osbert), all the life stories end with the deaths of their protagonists. Sometimes they suffer a debilitating illness – a trope that may denote them being prepared for Heaven – and sometimes it is merely noted that they have died.[95] In each case, however, it was important to show that their exemplary life led to their salvation, that the performance of a miracle doubled as a divine ›mark of approval‹ for each individual monk and that being part of the community would enable the monks in the audience to achieve the same. While their regular lifestyle would not protect them from the vicissitudes of life in the early Middle Ages, the author wanted to show that they were all in this together, under the watchful eye of God and his vicar, the abbot. It is for this reason that we hardly learn any personal information about the saints: these were not deeds in the sense that they could actively be imitated. What mattered was the place of these stories within the collection and, *mutatis mutandis*, the place of the individuals within the collective. This is made clear in the chapter that immediately follows the moral programme exemplified by the monks. As they are together building their dormitory, the structure collapses – but, miraculously, nobody is injured. It is a stark reminder that death lurks everywhere, while at the same time standing as a monument to their collective efforts at building a better life for themselves. Building and continuously improving a monastery is an essential aspect of life in any monastic community.[96] Moreover, it is likely that monastic readers would have had the oft-used metaphor of the »living stones« on their mind as they read this short chapter: just as their brethren were building an actual building, they themselves were being used to construct the Church at large.[97] And as long as they were doing this, they could not really die; their saintly behaviour would ensure them a place in the light, allowing them to continue the battle against the darkness alluded to at the beginning of the book, and the author of the *GSR* has, in composing this work, preserved their memory so that their example would live on.

The Curious Case of Condeluc's Cultivated Community

One of the monks helping with the construction of the dormitory may have been Condeluc, mentioned above as the gardener of the monastery. His case is interesting in that he is among the few monks in the *GSR* who is mentioned in both the first and the second book. While there is an internal coherence to each of the books, taking a closer look at his particular story shows how the work as a whole functions and how the first two books work to establish Redon as a holy place worthy of relics with an ›international‹ appeal.[98]

Condeluc first appears in the *GSR* as part of a delegation sent from the monastery to appeal for imperial protection for Redon.[99] As Louis the Pious resided in Tours at this point, Conwoion and his monks travel there and make their case. They meet with failure. The emperor refuses their petition, and Conwoion is »immediately thrown out« for his trouble. Seemingly unfazed by this setback – he encouragingly quotes John 16:33, that the monks

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95   On the importance of illness in the establishment of saintliness, see Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh*, 109-137 and 167-171.

96   A sentiment that would have been valid in the early 12th century as much as in the 9th: Cushing, *Reform and the Papacy*, 91-93.

97   Meyer, *Soziales Handeln*, 221-223; see also Czock, *Gottes Haus*, 244-264.

98   Condeluc is treated in greater detail in Kramer, *In divinis scripturis legitur*.

99   *GSR* 1, c. 9, ed. and trans. Brett, 134-137.

»will have oppression in the world« but should persist in their faith – the abbot orders Condeluc, a »venerable man«, to sell the gift of candle wax they had brought for the emperor, so that it could benefit the community in another way.[100] On his way to the market, Condeluc is confronted by a prostitute, who is, incidentally, the only woman in the entire *GSR*.[101] She tries to coerce him to come home with her – perhaps with impure intentions, but also because, as she claims, »they were brought up in the same home and in the same family« and »he was her slave and she his mistress«. The poor monk is eventually rescued from this »snare of the Devil« by »two priests from the monastery of Saint Martin«, who »berated that harlot with great indignation, so that she would never dare to do such a thing to the Saints of God again«. After this adventure, Conwoion and Condeluc return home »sorrowfully«. The emperor had refused them. However, as the author to whom we owe this story reminds us, quoting Sirach and Paul's Second Letter to Timothy in quick succession, »the fire tests the potter's vessel and trials and temptations tempt righteous men«, and »only he who competes fairly will be crowned«. There may be hope for Redon yet.

Several chapters later, we encounter Condeluc again.[102] Redon has since obtained Carolingian sponsorship and, despite his unfortunate run-in with the prostitute in Tours, Condeluc has been put in charge of the monastery garden. Given that he was a »simple, upright man«, who »flourished in virtues«, his vegetable patch thrives along with the community, until one day it was »reduced to almost nothing« by a certain type of worm. Not despairing, Condeluc addresses the worms in the name of the Trinity and asks them to leave – which they promptly do. Thanking God for this miracle, the gardener sees this as a reminder of Christ's mercy and benevolence towards his servants. The story finishes by explaining how Condeluc »persevered in the highest sanctity« until he received a vision of his upcoming death, which occurred as foretold on a Sunday, »the week before the ides of November (i.e. the 6th of November)«. The gardener, so the chapter concludes, now »exults with the angels, rejoices with the archangels, and happily awaits the day of resurrection. Amen«.

Between them, these two anecdotes, linked by the name of the monk, are typical of the way the *Deeds of the Saints of Redon* has been composed, when looked at on a saint-by-saint basis. While the *GSR* is, at its core, the story of the community of Redon rather than that of its monks, it also presents us with an idiosyncratic collection of hagiographical vignettes about individual members of the community, especially in the second of its three books. Given that the *GSR* as a whole relies heavily on tropes common to early medieval Latin hagiography, the idiosyncrasies are striking.[103] In his description of the interaction between abbot and empire, the anonymous author shows himself a master at using intertextual references and quotations to add layers of meaning to his narrative. Moreover, the *GSR* tells its own story by

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100 On the importance of wax (for lighting and other purposes), see Fouracre, Eternal Light and Earthly Needs.

101 On the *topos* and function of prostitutes in medieval hagiography, see generally Karras, Holy Harlots; Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 71-94. Both these works centre on the redemptive arc usually associated with prostitutes; this episode in the *GSR*, in which a woman threatens the purity of a monastic community by appealing to both sexual and familial connections, warrants further investigation.

102 *GSR* 2, c. 3, ed. and trans. Brett, 152-155; this story falls under what Alice Rio, in a recent publication, called the ›nearly-not-a-miracle‹-category (known as #crapmiracles on social media), reflective of a »context which valued the ability to marvel at, to be enchanted by, and to see the work of God in all things, no matter how apparently mundane«: Rio, Nearly-Not Miracles of the Carolingian Era.

103 Generally, see Van Uytfanghe, *Stylisation Biblique et Condition Humaine*, both on the use of the Bible and on the narrative strategies employed in such texts. See also Poulin, *L'idéal de Sainteté*.

presenting the tale of Redon neither as a conventional foundation history nor in the equally popular genre of the *Gesta abbatum*, which focuses on the deeds of successive generations of abbots.[104] Instead, the author has elevated the entire first generation of monks to saintly status and gives each of them a place in the sun. As such, this biographical collection reminds its primary intended audience – the current crop of monks at Redon – of the exemplary role played by their founding fathers. It is a strategy that culminates in the third book, which focuses on the miracles performed through the monastery's relics rather than by its monks. Once the monks of Redon have established their community as a holy place, they are turned into the saints that, together with the relics they acquired, will anchor the monastery to the region itself. In constructing a memory of the first generation of monks, the *GSR* creates a framework that gives an extra layer of meaning to the reality for future generations.[105]

Condeluc's story, too, is one of surmounting challenges, of building the monastery in the face of aristocratic interventions and the Devil's best efforts. The first two books of the *GSR* essentially argue that the monastery became receptive to the relics (the protagonists of the final book) by overcoming enemies from outside the community and, once that had been accomplished, by defeating the enemy that lurked inside each individual monk. Conquering a fear of death was part of this battle – and the assurance that their teachings and examples would persist may have helped alleviate those fears.

The life story of Condeluc is thus also a story of the community of Redon. It shows how his exemplary life is part of a larger whole and how it has contributed to the construction of the community. While part of the function of his story – and those of the other named saints in the *GSR* – was to commemorate him personally, it is in the seriality of the biographical vignettes that the author shows his strength as a narrator. The memory of Condeluc as a historical person was made subservient to the confirmation of his exemplary life. It might not be possible to actually imitate the deeds of this saint of Redon, but in order for Redon to keep on existing as a community it was vital to heed the lessons taught through the venerable examples that form the backbone of the text.

Living Well is the Best Defence

As with many hagiographical texts from the early medieval West, it is difficult to ascribe a single function to the *GSR*. Consequently, its audience will have had different reading experiences, which may have been taken into account during the composition of the text. In that sense, the author made his points not only by latching onto existing genre conventions in his presentation of a series of hagiographical stories but also by placing the work in its entirety in a venerable tradition reaching back to the Old Testament. To read or listen to the *GSR* was to be immersed in two worlds: the world of the community of Redon, with all its pitfalls and possibilities, and the world outside the walls of the cloister, which was definitely the more dangerous one but also the world that had most to gain from the guidance of the monks.

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104 On this genre, see Sot, *Gesta Episcoporum.*
105 Smith, Making of a Holy Place; cf. *eadem*, Einhard and the Uses of Roman Martyrs.

Within a monastery, the goal of any individual was to achieve salvation – by taking personal responsibility and speaking out against the iniquity of others. In that sense, the fact that the *GSR* acts both as a series of individual life stories and as a single story of many parallel lives strengthens the idea that the saints of Redon formed a collective that would ideally also act as a community if the situation called for it. Taken as a whole, the text would thus have been meant to resonate with its audience on a personal as well as a communal level. Acting as a conduit between those two narrative levels, Condeluc's individual garden miracle could thus also be read as a metaphor for the development of the community. Throughout the first two books of the *GSR*, we have seen monks walking on water, curing the blind and even raising the dead. However, taking into account the many biblical and patristic intertextual references made by the author, Condeluc's faith and virtuous behaviour are part and parcel of the continuing existence of Redon. Through his virtues he has repelled a dangerous invasion, just as the community, through its collective virtues, should repel the very real invasions by the ever-so-hostile nobility – or any other threats to their continuing existence, for that matter. With this story, he has come full circle. Condeluc had been able to reach that level of sanctity thanks to the protection offered by the walls of his cloister, which in turn had been protected by the Carolingian empire and the Church it claimed to represent.

It is here that the juxtaposition of life, death and text emerges as one of the most salient features of the *GSR*. What little information may be gleaned from the text itself shows that the author was aware of the significance of his composition. He was effectively safeguarding the saints of Redon for posterity. The flexibility of his audience's experience notwithstanding, the author put the first generation of monks in a stasis, with only the setting and the names of the monks anchoring the stories to the past reality seen in the Cartulary. It would be this composition, rather than the actual lives of the actual saints, which gave Redon a history, thereby preparing its individual members for the future and their inevitable end. This is why the stories focus on the confirmation of holiness through the miracles, and on the lessons gleaned from those, rather than on the actual behaviour of the historical persons. If witnessing the deeds of the saints should motivate new generations of monks to do the best they could, learning about their deaths gave meaning to their own lives and the long history they were part of. The realisation that death would come for everyone, after all, was the ultimate community-builder; it would be up to the living community to demonstrate enough discipline to join the community of saints as well. They should aspire to lead a life worth writing about.

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Abbreviations

GSR: *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium*

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