

La vie quotidienne des moines en Orient et en Occident (IV^e-X^e siècle)

Volume II

Questions transversales

Édité par

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John-Henry Clay

In heremo vastissimæ solitudinis

The Monastic Frontier in Conversion-Period Germany

INTRODUCTION

Few early medieval saints have left a reputation as complex and contested as the Anglo-Saxon missionary Saint Boniface. As national patron saint of Germany and the Netherlands, he is popularly remembered as the evangelist who brought Christianity beyond the bounds of the former Roman empire. Historians are often sceptical of the degree to which this reputation is justified. He inherited and did not greatly extend a long-standing mission in Frisia. His desire to convert the Saxons of northern Germany never came to fruition, and the regions in central Germany where he spent most of his time, Hesse and Thuringia, had already been Christianised to some extent before his arrival. The remainder of his work, in Bavaria and the Frankish territories, was concerned with church reform, and this is where his greatest legacy lies, alongside his great monastic foundation of Fulda.¹ Boniface was unambiguous when he wrote to the pope describing this foundation:²

“There is a wooded place in the midst of a vast wilderness and at the center of the peoples to whom we are preaching. There we have placed a group of monks living under the rule of St Benedict, who are building a monastery. They are men of strict abstinence, who abstain from meat and wine and spirits, keeping no servants, but content with the labor of their own hands.”

Technically this was hardly a new foundation, since this letter is dated 751, seven years after the site of Fulda was first established. Whether it lay in a true “wilderness” is also debatable, and is a point we shall return to shortly. The community was, at any rate, sufficiently secluded from centres of Frankish power to establish itself within a few years as the dominant economic and religious force in the region, and within a century it had become one of the greatest monastic schools and places of pilgrimage in the Carolingian empire.

1. See REUTER 1980, pp. 79–81; WOOD 2002; WALLACE-HADRILL 1983, pp. 153–161; FLETCHER 1997, pp. 212–213; VON PADBERG 2004, p. 61.

2. Boniface, *Ep.* 86, trans. EMERTON, pp. 136–137.

Its success was built almost literally upon the legacy of the martyr Boniface himself, whose tomb can still be seen in the crypt beneath the modern cathedral, and it is forever bound with his name. Yet it represents the culmination of his career, the place where he hoped to spend his final years in contemplative retirement. In this sense, although it would produce the next generation of missionaries for the conversion of the north, Fulda was a consequence of Boniface's many years of evangelising central Germany rather than an essential part of it. Similarly, church reform was a thorny hedge that Boniface entered relatively late in his mission. Perhaps reform did occasionally become a distraction from where Boniface wanted to be—that is, on the frontier, preaching the Word with his brother missionaries—but it too was a logical consequence of his evangelical strategy.

To understand this strategy, we must look to his other, less famous foundations on what was the Christian frontier at this time, and see how Boniface developed the mission field between 721 and his death in 754. He was a visionary driven by a divine mandate, but he was also a pragmatic, clear-minded administrator and leader. If he understood that the poetic ideal of *peregrinatio pro amore Christi* lays at the heart of his endeavour, he also appreciated that Christian converts, if they were to heed the lessons of baptism, needed good priests, and good priests required expansive networks to supply food, clothing, books and other liturgical materials, as well as basic security from pagan Saxon incursions. Any successful missionary strategy had to be adaptable and sustainable, each part strengthening the whole. In what follows, we shall cast a roving eye over the different manifestations of this strategy in the region of Hessa: the mission hub of Büraburg-Fritzlar; the surrounding pastoral network of churches; the isolated churches on the frontier; less substantial hermitages and chapels dotted throughout the landscape; Fulda itself; and, finally, how these foundations were eventually integrated—not entirely successfully—into an episcopal structure.

1. THE MISSION HUB

At the centre of Hessa, comprising the northernmost part of modern Hesse, lies the fertile basin of the rivers Eder and Schwalm. This district was a focus of settlement from the Neolithic period onwards, and by the first century AD it was occupied by a tribe known to the Romans as the *Chatti*. A punitive Roman campaign in AD 15 led to the sacking of the main political and religious settlement of the *Chatti* at *Mattium*, probably to be identified with the village of Maden.³ Little else is heard of the *Chatti* until the beginning of Boniface's mission in 721, when the tribe re-emerges from historical obscurity as the *Hessi*. By this time they were thoroughly in the orbit of the Frankish kingdom, forming a buffer region against the Saxons to the north.

In contrast to the neighbouring province of Thuringia, where the remnants of a previous Anglo-Saxon mission are unambiguously described by Boniface's biographer Willibald,⁴ Hessa does appear to have been relatively un-Christianised at this time. Two pre-existing

3. Tacitus I, 4; BECKER 2000.

4. Willibald, *Vita Sancti Bonifatii*, ed. LEVISON, pp. 32–33.

churches are known through archaeological excavation, both in Frankish hillforts (Büraburg and Christenberg),⁵ and a possible third lies on the main communication route between them (Bergheim). These churches were likely founded to cater to the Frankish political and military officials who had been in direct control of this region since the 690s. The church and small monastic complex at Büraburg, judging from its dedication to St Brigid, may have been founded by Hiberno-Frankish monks associated with St Kilian at Würzburg.⁶ An original adult-sized immersion font which still survives next to the eastern wall of the church suggests that the pre-Bonifatian religious community at Büraburg was active to some degree in baptising locals; on the other hand, the continued existence until 723 of a major pagan shrine near Geismar, just 1.5 km to the north, makes it unlikely that any systematic evangelism had taken place.

Boniface arrived at Büraburg bearing letters of sponsorship from both the pope and Charles Martel, the *de facto* ruler of Francia.⁷ Neither his biographer nor his surviving letters tell us anything about the religious community he encountered at Büraburg, such as whether it came under his jurisdiction. It is clear, however, that he wasted no time establishing his own base of operations at Fritzlar, 2.5 km to the north-east, which quickly became the centre of the mission.⁸ The primary purpose of this foundation, initially built in wood and rebuilt some years later in stone, was to support the missionaries who were sent into the surrounding valleys. It also included a school for the training of child oblates (including the Bavarian Sturm, who would later found Fulda on Boniface's behalf), and no doubt other necessary elements of a fledgling monastic community. We can imagine that goods from the estates granted to Boniface by local landowners—foodstuffs, along with manufactured items such as tools and clothing—were brought to Fritzlar, both to sustain its community and to be transported further to the outlying missionary churches.

The fortuitous survival of a letter of 746/7 from Boniface to the brothers at Fritzlar gives us a unique snapshot of the community. He names its abbot, Tatwin; the priest Wigbert, who along with the deacon Megingoz was responsible for the day-to-day regulation of the community; the prior Hiedde, who was in charge of the servants; and the monks Sturm, in charge of the kitchens, and Bernhard, responsible for maintaining the buildings of the monastery.⁹ Tatwin, Wigbert and Hiedde were all Anglo-Saxons; the previous abbot had also been an Anglo-Saxon. Later traditions suggest that at some point the monastery at Büraburg came under Boniface's control, with his Anglo-Saxon disciple Humbert remembered as its first abbot (no mention being made of the pre-Bonifatian community).¹⁰

In 741 Boniface chose Büraburg as the seat of one of his first bishoprics, headed by Witte, another of his Anglo-Saxon disciples. We will discuss the fate of this short-lived bishopric in

5. SCHLESINGER 1976.

6. CLAY 2011, pp. 179–183.

7. Boniface, *Ep.* 17: for Pope Gregory II's letter of commendation; *Ep.* 22: for Charles Martel's.

8. Boniface's biographer, Willibald (*Vita Sancti Bonifatii*, ed. LEVISON, p. 35), implies that Fritzlar was only founded in 732, after Boniface was made archbishop, but he is probably referring to the rebuilding of an earlier church in stone. See CLAY 2011, pp. 200–202, for discussion.

9. Boniface, *Ep.* 40.

10. WAND 1999.

more detail shortly, but it may be significant that Büraburg was selected for elevation rather than Fritzlar. It could indicate a desire on Boniface's part to keep some distance between bishop and monastic community. Whenever he visited the royal court to petition for political and material assistance, Boniface was acutely aware of the moral dangers involved, and resented having to deal with Frankish churchmen whom he regarded as morally corrupt.¹¹ It made sense, therefore, to distinguish episcopal and monastic affairs at the centre of his own territory, with the bishop's seat in the midst of a bustling Frankish hillfort, and the main religious community in its own elevated compound across the river Eder.

2. PASTORAL NETWORKS

With Fritzlar and Büraburg as a secure hub, the spokes of the mission radiated in every direction across central Hessa. For Boniface, evangelising and baptising went hand-in-hand with *ministerium*, typically used in the letters to refer to the general business of pastoral care.¹² It was not enough merely to baptise people, when time and lack of understanding could soon erode any semblance of proper Christian behaviour and leave converts to lapse into former habits. New Christians required regular instruction and correction by well-trained priests, which is why Fritzlar was so central to the mission, and why Boniface himself kept a firm hand on the process through the sacrament of confirmation. This Roman episcopal function, already common in Anglo-Saxon England, was largely unknown in Frankish territories at this time, and spread in large part through Boniface's agency.¹³

Contemporary historical sources fail to mention by name any of Boniface's other church foundations in the region, but there can be no doubt of their existence. We know, at least, that a Saxon incursion into northern Hessa led to the violent destruction of "more than thirty" of Boniface's chapels and churches in 752, which gives us an impression of how expansive his mission had become by this date.¹⁴ Studies of later charter evidence have also revealed strong indications of a network of early Hessian "mother churches" whose origins can likely be traced back to Boniface's mission.¹⁵ These include Bergheim, Gensungen, Mardorf-Berge, and Urff. Each lies on a main communication route between 10 and 12 km from Fritzlar, and they form a concentric ring around it. The regularity of the arrangement is unusual and striking; it looks like a network that was established at one point with a coherent objective in mind, and the charter evidence strongly points towards a Bonifatian date. The church of St Martin at Bergheim, as mentioned above, may have been an earlier Frankish foundation which was incorporated by Boniface into this pastoral network. None of these mother churches has been excavated, but the church of Kirchberg, which lies between Bergheim and Gensungen and seems to fill a northern "gap" in

11. See Boniface, *Ep.* 63–64.

12. CLAY 2011, pp. 241–242.

13. ANGENENDT 1987, pp. 309–313; ANGENENDT 1997, pp. 471–473.

14. Boniface, *Ep.* 108.

15. CLASSEN 1929; DEMANDT 1953; METZ 1955.

the network, was excavated in 1979 and found to have eighth-century origins.¹⁶ Kirchberg may therefore have been part of the original network, its mother church status subsumed in a later period by the church of Fritzlar itself, which attained the status of archdiaconate and controlled the archpriests based at Bergheim, Gensungen, Mardorf-Berge and Urff until the Reformation.

In their distribution these mother churches closely resemble the “minster churches” of Boniface’s West Saxon homeland, which implies that he was imposing the model of pastoral care within which he himself had been trained.¹⁷ Together they encompassed the self-contained, densely-settled district of central Hessa, and ensured that every settlement was within easy reach of a priest. These were strong foundations indeed for the process of Christianisation.

3. THE BORDERLANDS

Only 30 km north of Fritzlar as the crow flies, a long day’s walk, one entered the Hessian-Saxon borderlands. The frontier, such as it was, lay along the Diemel valley, but it is unlikely that anything so formal as a recognised frontier existed in the eighth century. One should think instead of fluctuating zones of control, with certain districts contested between the Franks, who controlled Hessa, and the Saxons. Central Hessa was relatively secure beneath the massive ramparts of Büraburg, which resisted a Saxon invasion in 774 and may have done so on other occasions.¹⁸ Between Büraburg and the Diemel was a smaller Frankish fortification at Weidelsburg, and possible another at Dörnberg.¹⁹ Opposing Saxon fortifications are known to have existed at Gaulskopf, a hill which lies 2 km south of the Diemel near Warburg, and Eresburg (modern Marsberg), an imposing promontory fort overlooking the Diemel itself.²⁰

The Frankish annals record sporadic campaigns against the Saxons during the early years of Boniface’s mission which may have given the missionaries a degree of security.²¹ Nonetheless, one letter, written by the missionary monk Wihberht to his home community in Wessex, captures the perils of evangelising this politically unstable region.²²

“The blessed God, ‘who desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth’, has been pleased to guide our way in safety into these lands, that is, into the borders of the pagan Hessians and Saxons, across the sea and amid the perils of this world [...]. And believe me that our labor is not in vain in the Lord, but shall bring a reward to you. For Almighty God in his mercy and through your merits has given success to our labors, arduous and perilous though they may be in almost every way, hunger and thirst and cold and attacks by the heathen.”

16. SIPPEL 1989; GÖLDNER, SIPPEL 1981.

17. On the parochial organisation of Wessex, see HASE 1988.

18. Lupus of Ferrières, *Vita Wigberti*, ed. HOLDER-EGGER, pp. 41–42.

19. On Weidelsburg, see KNAPPE 2000, pp. 35–36; on Dörnberg, see KAPPEL 1993.

20. BEST, LÖWEN 1997.

21. For details see CLAY 2011, pp. 166–167. Frankish campaigns into Saxony are recorded for 719, 720, possibly 722, 724, and 728 or 729.

22. Boniface, *Ep.* 101, trans. EMERTON, p. 152.

Evidence for early church foundations in this district is less clear than in central Hesse, as the borderlands represent the limit of Boniface's successful mission. One of his foundations, however, probably survives at Schützeberg. This was also a medieval mother church under the jurisdiction of the archdeacon of Fritzlar, and its dedication to Saint Peter, Boniface's personal patron, is suggestive of an early date.²³ After the Reformation Schützeberg lost its privileged status and then its surrounding village, and today the church stands alone on a rather isolated hillock. Despite this, one can sense why the site may have been attractive as a borderland mission station. It lies not directly on the main north-south road between Fritzlar and Saxony, but a kilometre to the east, and its name, roughly meaning "the forward military base on the hill", makes the reason for this clear enough. It is small, but defensible; close to a major thoroughfare, but not too exposed. The site is ideally suited, in other words, to serve as a borderland missionary post.²⁴

A second early church was revealed during excavations of the Saxon hillfort of Gaulskopf in the 1990s. The evidence comprised a series of post-holes from a wooden building approximately 11 metres long and 5 metres wide, aligned west-east, with an internal "porch" at the west end. Aside from the alignment and plan, the presence of three west-east burials immediately adjacent to the north wall makes the identification of the building as a church all but certain. It is the only example of a wooden church yet known in this part of Germany, as such buildings are archaeologically ephemeral, their traces typically destroyed by later rebuilding.²⁵ What makes this church especially interesting is, first, its location in a non-Frankish fortification; second, the short period it remained in use (judging from the presence of only three burials); and third, the fact that it was destroyed by fire and never rebuilt, even though the plot continued to be inhabited.

As I have argued elsewhere, the most logical interpretation of the Gaulskopf evidence is that it was a short-lived Bonifatian foundation.²⁶ If so, it must have been built when Gaulskopf came under Frankish control, or at least during a phase of Saxon submission which allowed for such a mission station to be established. We also know, as mentioned above, that there was a violent Saxon invasion of northern Hesse in 752 which involved the deliberate targeting of missionary churches, and it is very possible that some of those churches had to be abandoned permanently. The Diemel was to remain in Saxon hands until 772, when Charlemagne destroyed a prominent pagan shrine near Eresburg. This historical framework, circumstantial as it is, neatly explains every aspect of the Gaulskopf evidence. The site is a vivid illustration of the dangers which made Wiehberht so nervous.

23. CLASSEN 1929, p. 228.

24. CLAY 2011, p. 335.

25. BEST, LÖWEN 1997.

26. CLAY 2011, pp. 214–216.

The only historically attested example of a hermitage associated with Boniface's mission is Hersfeld, where Sturm, after some years of preaching in Hessia, settled for a time. According to his biographer, Sturm had been sent by Boniface into the thickly forested river valleys between Hessia and Thuringia in order to find a suitable site for a monastery. Sturm first proposed Hersfeld, but Boniface advised him to continue farther south:²⁷

"You have indeed found a place to live in, but I am afraid to leave you there on account of the savage people who are close by, for, as you are aware, there are Saxons not far from that place and they are a ferocious race. Look for a spot farther away, deeper in the woods, where you can serve God without danger to yourselves."

Here, again, we see the potential hazards of the missionary life. It is worth noting that Hersfeld is at least sixty kilometres from Saxony proper, and so, assuming the hagiographical tradition to be reliable, this may be a case of a group of Saxons who had followed the river Fulda upstream and settled along its length.²⁸

If relatively substantial wooden churches like the example at Gaulskopf are so unlikely to survive, we are even less likely to come across the physical remains of oratories or other structures associated with hermitages. Willibald refers to the construction of a oratory dedicated to Saint Peter from the wood of the Oak of Jupiter, the shrine near Geismar destroyed by Boniface, but its precise location is unknown.²⁹ There may have been a similar chapel at Simonskopf, a small hill on the road from Fritzlar to Eresburg which directly faces another small hill named Teufelskopf, or "Devil's head". This possibility rests on topographical and toponymical evidence, and depends upon the theory that a pagan wayside shrine at Teufelskopf was deliberately confronted and supplanted by a Christian oratory at Simonskopf. Some time after the pagan shrine fell out of use, the oratory was presumably abandoned, leaving only the name of the saint to whom it was dedicated.³⁰ With such insubstantial evidence, however, we can do little more than speculate.

27. Eigil of Fulda, *Vita Sancti Sturmi*, ed. PERTZ, p. 367; trans. TALBOT 1954, p. 183.

28. I have proposed (CLAY 2011, pp. 327–329), that this enclave was located in the upper Geis valley, north-west of Hersfeld.

29. Tradition identifies this oratory with the first church built at Fritzlar on the strength of a common dedication to Saint Peter, but there is little reason to accept this as definite. There are several other nearby churches of Saint Peter that can be associated with Boniface, including those at Gensungen, Mardorf-Berge, Maden and Schützeberg.

30. The monastery founded at Hersfeld in 769 by Lul, another of Boniface's Anglo-Saxon *protégés*, was dedicated to Saint Simon (the Zealot), along with Saint Thaddeus. This unusual dedication may have been inherited from the oratory of Sturm's earlier hermitage; if so, it would be less surprising to see another oratory dedicated to the same saint at Simonskopf.

The monastery of Fulda was founded by Sturm in 744 beside the river of the same name. Boniface's description of the site as lying "in a wilderness of vast solitude" requires some qualification, since it was in fact close to an important ford over the river Fulda, on a major trade and transit route between Frankfurt and Thuringia. This is actually self-evident in the account given by Sturm's biographer Eigil, who wrote what amounted to a foundation myth for the community of Fulda in AD 794–800. The "wilderness" traversed by Sturm is surprisingly busy; the saint encounters first a group of Slavs bathing at a crossing point of the river, then a lone traveller taking his lord's horse from Wetterau.³¹ Furthermore, due to the strategic importance of the ford, the Franks had already established a settlement of some sort at Fulda in the previous century. Excavations at Fulda uncovered substantial stone buildings beneath what is now the plaza of the baroque cathedral church, evidence of a high-status fortified site which perhaps functioned as both stronghold and royal hunting lodge for the Merovingian kings. It appears to have been destroyed by fire and abandoned around 700, and left vacant until granted to Boniface by Charles Martel for the site of the monastery.³² Despite the hagiographical topoi of wandering monk and predestined site, therefore, it is apparent that Boniface was typically pragmatic in his arrangement of the foundation. This may also explain why he waited seven years before informing the pope; he had already judiciously rejected the site of Hersfeld, and probably he wanted to make sure that Fulda would prove to have sufficiently sturdy foundations before requesting a papal exemption.

Whereas it is unclear whether Fritzlar was explicitly organised according to the *Benedictine Rule*, there is no doubt that Fulda was. This is clear from both the contemporary letters and the hagiographical tradition. The *Benedictine Rule*, of course, makes no provision for evangelism. Yet Boniface had more than twenty-five years of missionary experience in 744, and no doubt he understood where Fulda would fit within his overall strategy. As he informed the pope, he intended to retire to Fulda and spend his remaining years preaching to the surrounding peoples, who must have been thoroughly Christianised by this stage. Fulda was therefore a place of personal retreat and strategic consolidation. Unlike Fritzlar, it was not in the busy heartland of a tribal province, but on the interface between several peoples; it was also deliberately situated a safe distance from the borderlands, far from the regions still dominated by paganism. And whereas Fritzlar was captured and almost burned by invading Saxons in 774—being saved only by a miracle³³—Fulda never came under serious threat. It is true that its monks fled upriver with the remains of Boniface during the Saxon invasion of 778, but this was a precautionary measure; the Saxons never came closer than the Wetschaft district, 80 km to the north-west.³⁴ That Sturm and Boniface had chosen the site well was proven when Fulda became a major support base for the renewed Saxon mission under Charlemagne.

31. Eigil of Fulda, *Vita Sancti Sturmi*, ed. PERTZ, p. 369.

32. See HAHN 1984, p. 304.

33. Lupus of Ferrières, *Vita Wigberti* ed. HOLDER-EGGER, pp. 41–42.

34. Eigil of Fulda, *Vita Sancti Sturmi*, ed. PERTZ, p. 376. On the correct identification of *Wedereiba* with Wetschaft, rather than Wetterau as is commonly assumed, see DEMANDT 1953, p. 46.

As mentioned above, Boniface raised the church of Büraburg to episcopal status in 741, appointing Witta as its first bishop. This should be seen in terms of his mission strategy during the 740s, and is closely related to his attempts to reform the Austrasian church. First of all, Boniface had not previously gone out of his way to make enemies among the Frankish episcopacy. Upon his first arrival in Hesse he annoyed an unnamed Frankish bishop who apparently claimed the territory for himself, but there seems to have been little basis for this claim; at any rate, nothing came of it.³⁵ The situation changed in the 740s, and was probably related to Boniface's attempt to evangelise Saxony in the wake of a Frankish military campaign of 738.

A central feature of Boniface's approach to conversion was the establishment of stable, sustainable parochial networks under strong episcopal governance. His problem at the start of the 740s was that he was himself still an archbishop with no fixed see and no subordinate bishops in central Germany. This was manageable when his central territory comprised the relatively limited territories of Hesse, Thuringia and Franconia, but any mission into stubbornly pagan Saxony would need to be projected from a more secure foundation. We can see his attempts to create this foundation over the following years. It was vital, first of all, to consolidate his existing mission field, which meant the simultaneous establishment of bishoprics at Büraburg in Hesse, Erfurt in Thuringia, and Würzburg in Franconia. Boniface could also count on the support of the church in Frisia, on the north-west flank of Saxony, which had been led by Anglo-Saxon missionaries for more than fifty years.

The territory in between Hesse and Frisia, however, was most important. This stretch of the lower Rhine had a long and open border with Saxony, and was part of the bishopric of Cologne. It was this city which Boniface therefore coveted as his archiepiscopal seat, even managing to extract firm promises from the Franks. Unfortunately, for reasons which have not been preserved, the see was instead granted to a Carolingian nobleman called Hildegard, who not only failed to cooperate with Boniface, but also began to challenge his influence over Utrecht.³⁶ It so happened that the bishop of Mainz, another Frankish rival of Boniface, was expelled from his see in 745, and so Boniface reluctantly accepted Mainz in place of Cologne. The following year he demoted the bishoprics of Büraburg and Erfurt and incorporated their territories into his own see of Mainz, retaining personal control over the borderlands.³⁷ Renewed Saxon revolts in the early 750s led to the final abandonment of his embryonic attempt to convert the north.

Boniface's involvement in the Rhineland church was thus fundamentally related to his missionary strategy. He came from an insular ecclesiastical tradition that was sustained by profound ideals of monastic asceticism and doctrinal orthodoxy, and there was already much in the relative worldliness and laxity of the Frankish church which offended him. His experiences

35. Boniface, *Ep.* 24. Although most historians identify the unnamed bishop with Gerold of Mainz, CLASSEN 1929, pp. 3–4, is probably correct to identify him with Milo of Trier. Mainz itself was closer than Trier to Hesse, but the diocese of the latter was far larger, extending up the Lahn valley to reach the district of Amöneburg, where Boniface was active.

36. The surviving letters of Boniface illustrate the course of events: Boniface, *Ep.* 60, 80, 86, 87, 109.

37. CLAY 2011, pp. 230–232.

of trying to win material support for his mission at court, and his bitter defeat in the matter of Cologne, were hardly likely to improve relations. They did teach him, however, that any future mission in Saxony would depend on fundamental reforms of the east Frankish church, and so it is not surprising that this is where we see him expending much energy in his final years.

CONCLUSION

By casting a swift eye over the range of different foundations established by Boniface in his mission territory, we can better appreciate the coherence of his strategy. Soon after his arrival in Hesse in 721 he established a monastery at Fritzlar as a complement to the pre-existing church at Büraburg. From Fritzlar he was able to coordinate missionary parties who ranged across central Hesse, converting the people and winning the support of local landowners who offered him property and child oblates. At some point he established a network of mother churches around Fritzlar to help provide systematic pastoral care, in particular the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. The mission was then extended north into the borderlands, with a possible foundation at the secure location of Schützeberg. As well as these pastoral centres he may have founded a number of small oratories in order to challenge sites of particular pagan significance; we know of the oratory of Saint Peter which supplanted the Oak of Jupiter near Geismar, and there may well have been others.

By the 740s, Boniface was attempting to expand his mission from central Germany into the pagan north. Despite receiving the *pallium* in 732, he had waited nine years before founding his first bishoprics, a testament to the patience and resilience of his long-term vision. It was at this stage, however, that he faltered. He found himself obstructed by certain factions of the Frankish élite, who resented his desire to take over Cologne, the most important of the Rhineland bishoprics. Denied Cologne, Boniface settled on Mainz and demoted the bishoprics of Büraburg and Erfurt. A few years later he lost a great many churches to a Saxon invasion, and one of his final letters is a plea for the aid of King Pippin in supporting those of his borderland missionaries who remained.³⁸

In this sense, Boniface's mission failed at the final hurdle. He may have taken small consolation in realising that this was due to forces beyond his control. Where he had retained unchallenged influence, most of all in Hesse, Thuringia and Franconia, his mission was enormously successful. The parochial network he established in Hesse would survive for eight centuries; but the most enduring legacy of all would prove to be the monastery of Fulda, where he was, in accordance with his final wishes, eventually laid to rest.

38. Boniface, *Ep.* 93.

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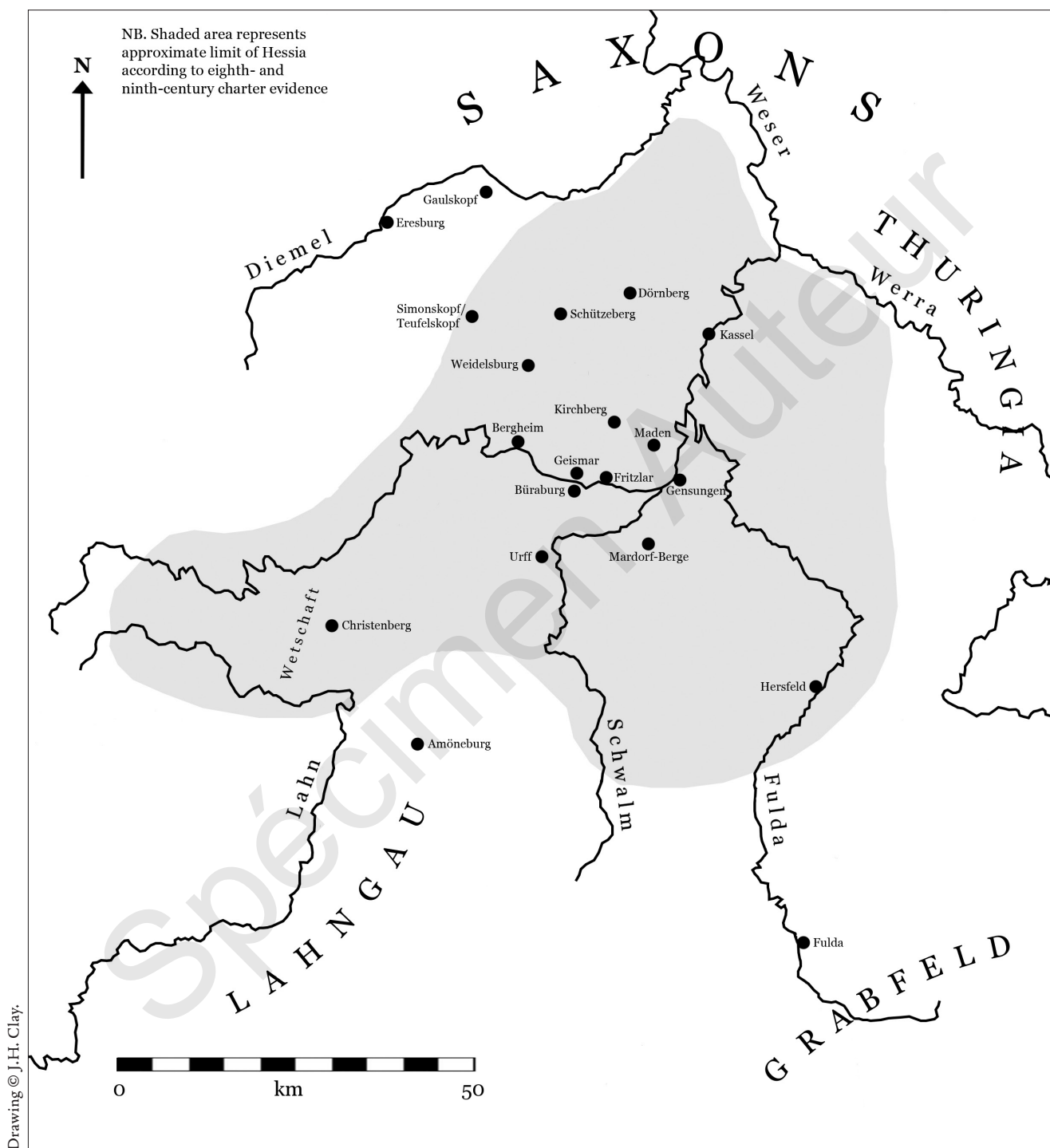


Fig. 1. The central Germany at the period of Saint Boniface mission.

Spécimen Auteur