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Venantius Fortunatus as an Aulic Poet (*Carm*. 6.1 and 6.5)

This paper examines Venantius Fortunatus's aulic stand in two of his carmens*: an epithalamium written for king Sigibert's wedding with the Visigoth princess Brunchild (*Carm. *6.1), and a consolation written for the death of Galswinth, Brunchild's sister, who married to Sigibert's brother, and died tragically under suspicious circumstances (*Carm. *6.5). Both poems were written for the Austrasian court with a political motivation behind; therefore the question arises, whether Fortunatus could preserve his integrity, and what kind of messages he conveyed through literary allusions and rhetorical tools.*

Keywords: Venantius Fortunatus, Merovingian Gaul, late antique literature, epithalamium, consolation, Brunchild

Venantius Fortunatus (~535–609) was born in Italy, obtained a classical education in Ravenna and moved to Gaul around 566. He arrived at the Austrasian court in Metz for the wedding of King Sigibert (561–575), presumably by the king's invitation. All of Fortunatus' first patrons had transalpine connections, which makes it likely that he left Italy for Gaul well prepared, maybe in the hope of finding more prosperous patronage among Merovingian elites. In his epic poem on St Martin, Fortunatus explains his journey with less worldly reasons. There he claims to have been seeking a cure for an eye illness by praying to St Martin in Ravenna, and the oil standing on the saint's altar healed him. In gratitude, he decided to set off for a pilgrimage to the saint's tomb in Tours.[1]

Living in Gaul, Fortunatus wrote mostly occasional poetry for his patrons: rulers, bishops and dukes of the Merovingian Gaul. Albeit he

[1] WILLIARD (2016: 4–7).

travelled widely, he lived for most of the time in Poitiers, where later in his life he became a bishop. Initially, he provided services here to Radegund, a Merovingian ex-queen who founded a monastery in the city. Fortunatus helped her to obtain a piece of the Holy Cross from Byzant for her abbey. He also dedicated many of his poems to her and her adopted spiritual daughter, Agnes. Gregory of Tours was another important patron in Fortunatus' life being the one commissioning his epic on St Martin.[2] Fortunatus never held an official post in any of the Merovingian courts, yet, due to his existential dependence on his patrons, his poetry was considered at least problematic, if not mere flattery.[3] The aesthetics of his poems were questioned on this basis by, inter alia, R. Koebner, who published a monography on Fortunatus in 1915 and considered his works schematic, self-serving with no literary value at all.[4] Lately, J. George and M. Roberts argued for his poems to be complex literary works.[5] Though George shed a new light on the position of the poet in the Merovingian courts in a social-political context,[6] H. Hess still states that there was no place for any criticism in his poems.[7]

Both the 6.1 epithalamium and the 6.5 consolation were written for the Austrasian court and had specific goals. Therefore, the question arises, to what extent did Fortunatus meet his patrons' expectations, whether he did convey any different messages. The paper begins with an outline of the most important characteristics of Merovingian politics in the second half of the 6th century, concentrating especially on marriage strategies. Then, an overview of the two poems is given examining their political goals to finally get to a comparison of some common elements in the poems.

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[2] WILLIARD (2016: 7–10).
[3] S. DILL (1926: 376–384).
[4] KOEBNER (1915: 28-29).
[5] GEORGE (1992); ROBERTS (2009).
[6] GEORGE (1989).
[7] HESS (2019: 135).

Merovingian politics in the second half of 6th century Gaul

Following the death of King Clothar (511–561), his four sons divided the kingdom among themselves.[8] Out of them, Sigibert (561–575) got the territories in Austrasia and Aquitania while Chilperich (561–584) received lands in Neustria. In this shared rule over Gaul, all brothers tried to gain more power against the others, which resulted in a bitter rivalry mostly between Sigibert and Chilperch. This competition was the context of their marriages as well.[9]

First, Sigibert married Brunchild, the daughter of the Visigoth king, Athanagild (551–567/8), in 566. Next, Chilperich asked the hand of Brunchild's sister, Galswinth. Athanagild gave huge dowries with both of his daughters, who then got a remarkably rich *Morgengabe* from their husbands. Since both princesses grew up as Arians, they later had to convert to Catholicism.[10] Brunchild was married to Sigibert for about ten years until Sigibert got murdered in 575 (supposedly on Chilperich's behest).[11] Galswinth's marriage must have been shorter and ended tragically.[12] Based on Gregory of Tours' account on the marriage, included in

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[8] In 567 the eldest brother, Charibert died, and his territory got divided again between his surviving brothers: Gonrthran, Sigibert and Chilperich. See the maps about the exact territories of each ruler by WOODS (1994: 368–369).

[9] CRISP (2003: 146–152).

[10] DLH 4, 27–28.

[11] DLH 4, 51. Here, Fredegund, Chilperich's wife, is named as the one who sent assassins to Sigibert. One should, however, keep in mind that the context is a warning to Sigibert, that he should spare his brother's life for 'Whoso diggeth a pit (for his brother) shall fall therein.' (*Proverbs* 26: 27.) Death falls onto Sigibert as heavenly judgement. The story had a different taste if Chilperich would have his brother killed then in turn.

[12] It is impossible to point out the exact dates. Fortunatus writes in his consolation that he saw Galswinth travelling through Poitiers as she was heading to her wedding. Fortunatus arrived at Poitiers sometime between 567–569. [WILLIARD (2016: 7).] The wedding should have taken place afterwards. Gregory tells her father gave Galswinth a large dowry, but Athanagild died around 567–568, which suggests that Galswinth married Chilperich while her father was still alive. DLH 4, 28; Izidor 47; 48; CRISP (2003: 163–164).] Galswinth's death is also impossible to date. Fortunatus provides some help as he mentions some of the relatives of Goiswinth in his consolation (*Carm.* 6. 5, 368), which suggests that she was already remarried and Sigibert still alive, which puts the composition of the poem and Galswinth's death before 575. [REYDELLET

his work about Frankish history, Chilperich had Galswinth killed as she was demanding more respect. Namely, Chilperich's previous wife also stayed in court, which Galsuinth did not want to take.[13] Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that Gregory's information should be handled with caution, especially regarding the stories about Chilperich who is mostly depicted in his works as a villain.[14]

Keeping concubines while being married remained a usual phenomenon among Merovingian rulers even after Christianization since their most important goal was to have a male heir. In addition, the kings handled their relations arbitrarily: they got married and divorced according to their actual needs. It was sufficient to marry a woman only after she proved to be fertile, while a wife could be put aside if another union promised more benefits. To this end, Merovingian kings often married women of lower social status without a strong family background to support them. Consequently, it was easier to divorce in case the king's preference shifted towards someone else for certain reasons. In contrast, a wife of another royal dynasty could demand exclusivity or stability and could more likely count on her social network. Giving up the flexibility of their relationships, it seems kings decided to marry someone from another dynasty for the sake of prestige and if their own status had to be strengthened. Therefore, both marriages were motivated more by internal affairs rather than by a desire for foreign allies.[15] In the case of Sigibert, a military defeat to the Avars led to the marriage to a Visigoth princess. Chilperich probably decided to marry Galswinth seeing Sigibert's success to demonstrate power through the wedding festivities. Gregory tells that Chilperich was mostly motivated by Galswinth's large dowry while not being able to send away Fredegund, his previous wife, whom he remarried after the death of Galswinth. Another problem lies in the passing of Galswinth's father just around the

(1994b: 179, n. 75).] Williard estimates Galswinth's death to happen in 569 [WILLIARD (2016: 199).] For the different possible chronologies see FELS (2006: 9–10).

[13] DLH 4, 28.

[14] Chilperich is the Nero of his era. Cf. DLH 6, 46.; HALSALL (2002: 337–350).

[15] DAILEY (2015: 101–115); CRISP (2003: 146–166).

time of the wedding,[16] which could have devalued Galswinth's status in Chilperich's court right upon arrival.[17]

Venantius Fortunatus' epithalamium for Sigibert's and Brunchild's wedding might have been performed on the spot, and on one hand, it served as his poetic introduction in Gaul, on the other, to boost Sigibert's image as a ruler. Fortunatus' presence surely contributed to Sigibert's royal portrayal, as it connected him to Roman traditions, which were highly valued in the Merovingian Gaul.[18] Several members of the elite represented themselves as 'Romans'; this is conspicuous in Fortunatus' poetry too, as he often associates someone with the ancient empire through origins, education or connections to the institutions of the imperium.[19] The motives behind and the circumstances of writing the consolation for the death of Galswinth are much more obscure since neither the addressee(s) nor the commissioner is known with certainty. Moreover, the time of writing remains also questionable, as it is not clear whether the poem was sent right after the bereavement or it is just a later commemoration.

The epithalamium: De domno Sigiberchto et Brunichilde regina (*Carm.* 6.1)

The 143 lines poem consists of two parts divided by the chosen metre. A 24-line long *praefatio* comes before the actual epithalamium in elegiac distiches following the traditions of Claudian and Sidonius Apollinaris. The epithalamium is versed then in hexameters, thus adding a heroic, epic tone.[20]

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[16] See citation 12.

[17] CRISP (2003: 162–165). Princess Rigunth's fate can serve as an analogy. She was the daughter of Chilperich, betrothed to Reccared, the son of the Visigoth king, but on the way to the wedding she was stopped in Toulouse when news of her father's death arrived, and she found herself shortly deserted by her escort, deprived of her treasure and forced into sanctuary at St Mary's church (DLH 7, 9–10).

[18] WILLIARD (2016: 6).

[19] BUCHBERGER (2017: 133–146); HESS (2019: 131–175).

[20] ROBERTS (2009: 8).

In the *praefatio*, Fortunatus opens with a description of spring, utilizing the Vergilian model (1–14):[21] first, the pictures of the changing nature are visualized; trees regaining their green crowns, fresh vine sprouts and bees reproducing without any touch forecast the hope for offspring out of chaste marriage. The word *posteritas* in line 11 is then echoed by the word *prosperitas* in line 15 where Fortunatus directs his audience from nature to the tumultuous royal court (15–24). The epithalamium begins in the line 25. From here onwards, Fortunatus concentrates on the bride and groom. In the first part, Sigibert is pictured as someone now ready to be united by a lovely tie in order to have offspring from a legal marriage. In the next section (37–59), Cupid shoots his arrow on Sigibert who, as a result, burns in love immediately, which Cupid reports joyfully to Venus (48–59). In the third section (60–98) Venus and Brunchild can be seen preparing for the wedding, then comes Cupid's panegyric of Sigibert followed by Venus' speech that takes the rest of the poem. Venus opens with the laudation of Brunchild (100–112) and goes on with a short itinerary describing the princess' journey from Toledo to Gaul (113–117). Venus connects the summary of Brunchild's noble ancestry (117–127) to the itinerary. In the last lines of the poem, Venus talks about the happy union of the bride and groom and by discussing the hope for progeny, she returns to the opening motive of fecundity.[22]

Throughout the poem, Fortunatus mostly follows the antique traditions of epithalamia. The genre itself stems from archaic layers of literature as songs were organic parts of wedding rituals in ancient Greece where they sang while the bride was led from her parents' house to her future husband's home. Sappho is considered to be the first one to turn these folkloristic songs into literature.[23] Mythology played an integral part in epithalamia since the beginning.[24] Venus, Cupid and the Graces often appeared preparing the couple for the wedding, escorting them to

[21] Cf. Verg. *Georg*. 1, 43.
[22] ADAMIK (2014: 303–308).
[23] CONTIADES-TSITSONI (1990: 21–46).
[24] CONTIADES-TSITSONI (1990: 105).

the marital chamber.[25] The genre had its rhetorical rules as well. Menander writes in his rhetorical handbook in the 3rd century that the epithalamium needs to give a description of the wedding chamber, praise the bride and the groom, their families and, first and foremost, the God of marriage.[26] It was also important to prove the social equality between the two parties.[27] Although Fortunatus writes in line with such requirements, the mythological apparat is rather humble compared to other late antique authors like Claudian or Dracontius, who involve more deities than only Venus and Cupid. Nonetheless, this modification has a function. The Christian Fortunatus usually did not attribute such important and active roles to pagan deities, unlike in the poem in focus. It is also possible that in this case Venus and Cupid substitute a more Christian setting only to avoid any reference to the different religious convictions of the Arian Visigoths and Catholic Franks.[28] The poet further added an itinerary, which could be hardly described as a traditional part of the ancient epithalamia.

Sigibert's laudation in the poem takes the regular form of a *panegyric* following the rules of the *basilikos logos,* starting with his origins, and then continuing with his virtues. Sigibert's ancestry is always discussed from the aspect of the future: as he has a royal ancestry, he will beget great kings alike, thus the glory of his antecedents will be increased by him. In addition, the lines concerning his lineage contain an allusion to the famous prophecy from Book 6 of the *Aeneid*:[29] '*…tibi quem promisimus hic est, / Sigibercthus, amor populi, lux nata parentum, / qui genus a proavis longo tenet ordine reges / et reges geniturus erit, spes gentis opimae*.'[30] Hereby, Sigibert is depicted as a founder of a dynasty. Talking about his offspring, however, the most important for Fortunatus is to emphasize the Catholic doctrines about procreation. It was prepared by the picture of the bees in the *preafatio*, where he used the words *casto* and *cubili*. These

[25] ROBERTS (1989: 322).
[26] Menandros *Peri epideiktikon*. 2, 6.
[27] WILSON (1948: 37–38).
[28] KOEBNER (1915: 26).
[29] PAGLIARO (2017: 125–126).
[30] *Carm*. 6.1, 67 – 70, cf. Verg. *A*. 6, 791–794.

words return at the beginning of the epithalamium: '*…sed quod natura requirit / lege maritali amplexu est contentus in uno. / quo non peccat amor, sed casta cubilia servans / instruat de prole lares, ubi luserit heres*.'[31] The ethical aspects of a marriage are also important to have trueborn children. (Though non-marital origin did not exclude a son from the inheritance per se by the Merovingians.)[32]

Sigibert appears to his folk as a righteous ruler, a true caring father: '*pater et rex sit, nullum gravet, erigat omnes*.'[33] He is wise and forgiving, an inspiring example for the people: '*corrigit ipse prius*.'[34] His youth is depicted by the *puer senex* topos[35]: '*iam gravitate senes tenerosque supervenit annos: / legem naturae meruit praecedere factis*.'[36] Sigibert has the *gravitas* and *pietas* necessary for a good ruler, he brings just laws (*bene lege coercet*), he is affectionate towards his subjects and so he wins the favour of his people: '*solus amat cunctos et amatur ab omnibus unus*.'[37] His prowess in battle is shown in connection with his victorious father, Clothar, and his much older cousin, Theudebert (533–548), who ruled Austrasia, the same territory as Sigibert, and was an extremely popular ruler.[38] Compared to them, Sigibert looks like a warrior king. This has special meaning as Sigibert presumably wished to hide the consequences of a military loss by his representative marriage. Altogether, the qualities and words appearing in Sigibert's praise will be used by Fortunatus in the other panegyrics written for Merovingian rulers.[39]

At the end of the poem, Fortunatus completes the praises: Sigibert and his bride stand out of their environment: '*quantum virgo micans turbas superare videris / femineas, tantum tu, Sigiberchte, maritos*.'[40] This motive

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[31] *Carm*. 6.1, 33–36.

[32] NELSON (1986: 4). It was just less likely to happen as a queen had more instruments in her hand to secure the throne for her own children. DAILEY (2015: 110–113).

[33] *Carm.* 6.1, 86.

[34] *Carm*. 6.1, 95.

[35] EHLEN (2011: 243).

[36] *Carm*. 6.1, 80–81.

[37] *Carm*. 6.1, 98.

[38] FRIEDRICH (2020: 18–19).

[39] WILLIARD (2016: 181).

[40] *Carm*. 6.1, 130–131.

of the bride and groom emerging out of the crowd is based on an ancient topos already present in Sappho's poetry.[41] In addition, the couple is described as having shining faces, the sun-rays surround Sigibert's head like a halo while Brunchild is compared to various jewels. On one hand, all the splendor expresses heavenly lustre,[42] on the other, it refers to the earthly wealth of the king. Brunchild just travelled through Gaul bringing a huge dowry, this royal glamour showed the people Sigibert's might. By presenting a catalogue of jewels, Fortunatus stressed further this quite spectacle message of power.

To sum up, Fortunatus gave the expected ideal image of a king. Sigibert appears as a worthy descendant of his ancestors, who can stand in line with his forefathers: the triumphant Clothar and Theudebert. Despite his youth, he is a wise and just ruler, anybody living under his command can be sure of good leadership and lawful treatment. Moreover, through a Vergilian allusion Sigibert is depicted as the founder of a dynasty. Still, Fortunatus puts a meaningful emphasis on Christian ethics, and by celebrating Sigibert's decision for a legal marriage, he warns the king to live according to those values. This was hardly the king's desire, which proves Fortunatus to be more than a simple flatterer.

The consolation: *De Gelesuintha* (*Carm.* 6.5)

The possible messages and the circumstances of composing the 6.5 consolation for the death of Galswinth are less clear than in the case of the 6.1 epithalamium. Here, many theories have been created about the questions who commissioned the poem, to whom it was addressed with what kind of aim, and why Fortunatus did not mention any of the inconvenient details.[43] There is no word about the murder which Gregory of Tours was not shy to describe.[44] Chilperich's name – though being the husband and the accused murderer – is not coming up in Fortunatus' work. Though Goiswinth, the mother is addressed in the poem, research

[41] Cf. Sappho, fr. 105.; 106.; 110.

[42] ROBERTS (2011: 113–120).

[43] See the summarizing table at STEINMANN (1975: 189).

[44] DLH 4, 28. Fortunatus might have left these unmentioned out of esthetical reasons: the *decorum* forbade to visualize and describe the violence.

mostly sees Brunchild, her other daughter in the Austrasian court as a recipient besides (or excluding) her mother.[45]

The 370-line long poem is written in elegiac distiches. It is one of Fortunatus' longest works. The genre had its rhetorical requirements. According to Menander, consolatory speeches have three compulsory parts: the lamentation which needs to give a philosophical frame to the bereavement, a laudation recalling the character of the deceased and the consolation offering comfort to the mourners.[46] Fortunatus' poem starts with the lamentation (1–12), which points out the uncertain nature of human life. It is like ice: slippery, fragile. The winter imagery here stands in contrast with the spring pictures in the opening of the epithalamium. This is followed by a brief summary of the events (13–22): Galswinth left her homeland to marry, but now she is buried in a foreign land. From the 23rd line onwards, the narration starts. Fortunatus shows in a linear order everything that happened to Galswinth from the marriage proposal until her heavenly entrance. This relation is broken by the querelae of the different characters: herself, her mother – Goiswinth –, her sister – Brunchild – and her nurse. There is also a short laudation (237–246) of the princess inserted and an itinerary (209–236), again an uncustomary element for the genre. The poem is closed by the consolation. The grieving mother should find comfort in the circle of her still-living family members. The final words express the Chrisitan hope for salvation, there is no need to weep for those already in Paradise. As the traditional elements of a consolation take a relatively small portion of the poem, it might be considered rather as an elegy. The narration and the querelae associate the poem with the late antique epics as well.[47]

The querelae widen the grief throughout the poem. The first three of them thematize the parting of mother and daughter. Goiswinth addresses first the envoys from Gaul who hasten the departure. The exclamation is full of the worries of the mother unwilling to let her child

[45] KOEBNER (1915: 52); REYDELLET (1994a: xxiii); ROBERTS (2017: 301, n. 11); H. D. Williard suggests that the poem was commissioned by Brunchild and intended for the Austrasian and Visigoth courts; WILLIARD (2016: 196, 202).

[46] LATTIMORE (1962: 215–216).

[47] ROBERTS (2017: 301).

go, she claims the *lex naturae* to be extinguished, she can no longer be the mother of her daughter (49–82). Then Galswinth turns back on the bridge towards the city and cries out to the gates for being cruel to let her go, though until then the walls enclosed her to safety. Her fears echo those of her mother: who will take care of her among strangers (97–122)? Next, Goiswinth speaks again, this time to the whole of Spain. She, just separated from her daughter, cannot find her place anymore in the kingdom (139–168). Then the querela grieving Galswinth moves on with growing intensity on an emotional spectre replacing the geographical one. First the nurse – like previously the mother – calls to account the natural order of the world: she, the nurse should have died before Galswinth, who was yet too young (259–270). Brunchild goes further by wishing to die together with her sister (283–298). Last, the mother cast her curses on nature for allot her only pain (321–346).[48]

Altogether, the querelae reflect deep grief and pain even though consolations were mostly written to comfort and explain why the weeping is unnecessary. Women might be condemned for excessive crying over the bereavement, Plutarch in his *Consolatio ad uxorem* for instance set his wife as an example for not abandoning her duties after the death of their little daughter and not being lost in grief loading her environment like other, weaker women might do. Seneca also warns his female addressees in his consolations to restrain their emotions.[49] Fortunatus himself adopted these thoughts when he wrote for Chilperich after losing his two little sons. He advised the king not to remain sorrowful, bear the burden with dignity, and help his wife to find comfort. He reminds the ruler that he should be a good example for his people too.[50] Although in the consolation for the death of Galswinth he addresses two

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[48] DAVIS (1967: 122–125).

[49] Sen. *Ad Helviam*, *Ad Marciam*; Plut. *Consolatio ad uxorem* 608C–610C.

[50] *Carm*. 9.2, 83–86.: *Rex precor ergo potens, age quod tibi maxime prosit, / quod prodest animae cum deitatis ope: / Esto virile decus, patienter vince dolores; / quod non vitatur, vel toleretur onus. Carm*. 9.2, 89–94.: *Consuleas dominae reginae et amantis amatae, / quae bona cuncta capit te sociante sibi; / materno affectu placare iubeto dolentem / nec simul ipse fleas nec lacrimare sinas. / Te regnante viro tristem illam non decet esse, / sed magis ex vestro gaudeat alta toro. Carm.* 9.2, 97–98.: *Tallis erit populus qualem te viderit omnis, / deque tua facie plebs sua vota metet.*

queens, no such arguments are used. The one line at the end of the poem warning not to weep for someone in Paradise cannot outweigh the tragic tone of the querelae.

Nevertheless, certain circumstances could make a bereavement especially painful in antiquity, like if someone died far away from home and family, was buried in a foreign land, by others than his or her relatives, or if the death occurred untimely and violently.[51] These were all true in Galswinth's case, so the exclamations can be justified. It is also possible that Fortunatus tried to give a safe passage to the emotions: absolving them in the form of exaggerated grief rather than in thoughts of revenge. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the Wheel of Fortune is pictured in the first line of the poem: '*Casibus incertis rerum fortuna rotatur*.'[52] In the classical era, Fortuna was not to blame, it counted as a neutral authority contrary to Fatum who is sometimes depicted as a hostile force.[53]

The real tragedy seems to be more the parting of mother and daughter rather than the actual death of Galswinth. The bereavement is foreshadowed. All the worries in the querelae suggest that she went on a dangerous journey. As she sets off, the nature is echoing with pain bringing in Vergilian tunes: '*deducit dulcem per amara viatica natam, / inplentur valles fletibus, alta termunt, / frangitur et densus vacuis ululatibus aer*.'[54] The verb *ululo* is used by Vergil in Aeneas' and Dido's cave scene, where the nymphs squawk, and the word *malum* in the next line predicts the tragic end of the love story.[55] Even Goiswinth's words in her last querela suggest that the tragedy was not entirely unexpected: '*hoc ergo illud erat, quod mens praesaga timebat*.'[56] Here lies another episode from Vergil in the background as in the 10th song of the Aeneid Lausus,

[51] LATTIMORE (1962: 178–199).
[52] *Carm*. 6.5, 1.
[53] LATTIMORE (1962: 317).
[54] *Carm*. 6.5, 127–129.
[55] Verg. *A*. 4, 168–170: *conubiis summoque ululârunt vertice Nymphae. / ille dies primus leti primusque malorum / causa fuit*.
[56] *Carm*. 6.5, 333.

a warrior fighting against Aeneas, reacts with the same words when his son's death is reported to him.[57]

Galswinth's departure evokes a violent aspect of wedding songs too: young virgins often looked ahead of their new lives fearing the separation from their mothers and then the marriage. Therefore, archaic epithalamia sometimes contained a lament of the bride.[58] Galswinth's own querelae fit well into this tradition. The consolation is connected to the epithalamia on the level of language as well, Fortunatus names Cupid in one line talking about Galswinth's unwillingness to marry: '*fixa Cupidinicis cuperet huc frigora flammis*.'[59] The themes of marriage and death can be intertwined. A topos existed in epitaphs of classical antiquity, which claimed that young girls and boys were taken by gods for their beauty and kindness. This promise of immortality, life on the Olymp or in the Elysium offered a very similar consolation as the Christian salvation.[60] These children were often named *raptus/rapta*, words Fortunatus himself uses for Galswinth.[61] Another classical topos concerning the rite du passage motif common in getting married and dying is the story of the girl who died on the day of her wedding. The contrast of life and death was exploited in epigrams in the Hellenistic era, but later it found its way into other genres too.[62] As Fortunatus mentions Galswinth's wedding only in one line and makes no further references to the marriage, the poem can be connected to this Hellenistic topos as well. Furthermore, this way the transitions from Toledo to Gaul and from earth to heaven are not distinguished, and Galswinth appears as a virgin heading to her unification with her heavenly bridegroom.[63] The

[57] DAVIS (1967: 124); Verg. *A.* 10, 843.

[58] FEENEY (2013: 76–78).

[59] *Carm*. 6.5, 25.

[60] WYPUSTEK (2013: 125–126).

[61] WYPUSTEK (2013: 162–165).

[62] SZEPESSY (1972: 341–357).

[63] In the Middle Ages, there were serious concerns about the question of whether women can become saints. To be honoured as such, women first had to overcome the failures of their sex. Most often it was achieved by preserving virginity. Therefore, it can have significance by Fortunatus, that Galswinth appears as a virgin and her mas-

final consolation should be found in Galswinth's beatification. Though the poem is full of tragic tones, by the end, Galswinth is admitted to heaven by Virgin Mary, the martyr St Stephan and the Apostles. The ending is anticipated also by a miracle that happened at her grave: a lamp falls to the ground but does not break, nor does the light diminish, which symbolizes Galswinth's sound faith.[64]

The poem contains many references to Claudian's late antique epic, *De raptu Proserpinae*, the parallel is apparent: the grieving mother or the girl forced into a marriage are recurring actors in both works. While the mother is devastated, the girl in the epic receives a warm welcome in her new home, just like in the consolation. The laudation of Galswinth makes it clear that she became an exemplary queen of her new homeland. Moreover, the transition through marriage leads in both cases to some form of death. Galswinth crosses five rivers on her journey mirroring the five rivers of the Underworld. There is a direct reference to Claudian's work in the 367th line of the poem too, as Fortunatus uses the word *tonans*, which is to be read by Claudian in the very same line. In the epic it means Iuppiter, in the consolation it might refer to God's anger from the Old Testament and his heavenly judgement awaiting people.[65]

According to Gregory, following Galswith's death Sigibert and Gonthran joined for a campaign against Chilperich avenging the murder,[66] hence vengeance (at least a war on Chilperich) was possibly a very actual matter after Galswinth's death. M. Reydellet, K. Steinmann and Roberts suggest that the poem was written shortly after the bereavement,[67] and both Reydellet and George see it as an attempt on Radegund's behalf to restore peace.[68] Radegund and Fortunatus seem to

culine role accepting the oath of the soldiers can further strengthen the idea of her worthy nature. DAILEY (2015: 48–53).

[64] GEORGE (1992: 99); DAVIS (1967: 132–133).; REYDELLET (1994b: 178, n. 69).

[65] GIOANNI (2012: 938–943).

[66] DLH 4, 28.

[67] STEINMANN (1975: 189–199); REYDELLET (1994a: xliii); ROBERTS (2017: 298).

[68] REYDELLET (1975: xxiii–xxiv); GEORGE (1992: 96; 101).

share a desire for peace along with Gregory of Tours.[69] A king, however, could hardly afford peace as he was expected to provide booty for his warriors.[70] Nonetheless, Fortunatus created an illusion according to which the death of Galswinth was not a tragedy at all, and it must be perceived as a rebirth of life in heaven. At the same time, he discouraged his readers to take earthly revenge by reminding his audience of God's judgement.

Common elements and motives

The 6.1 and 6.5 carmens have some common elements, partly due to the rhetorical requirements and Fortunatus' own preferences. While laudations were a compulsory part of both the epithalamia and the consolations, itineraries are often added by Fortunatus over the genre-specific formulae. In the following, these will be examined side by side. First, the two itineraries, which describe the same journey from Toledo to Gaul, but the same phrases get very different connotations. Both princesses travel through snowy, high mountains, cold winter pictures appear. '*Per hiemes validasque nives Alpenque Pyrenen / perque truces populos vecta est duce rege sereno / externis regina toris. super ardua montis / planum carpis iter.*'[71] – stands in the itinerary of the epithalamia. Invoking the *militia amoris* topos well known from Ovid,[72] the seemingly least pleasant road means an obstacle between the couple, which they successfully overcome: '*nil obstat amantibus umquam*.'[73]

Much longer is the itinerary in the consolation, and surprisingly, the winter imagery here gets a positive connotation. The snow is white and glittering, the high mountains reach the skies, the words reveal Paradise. This description becomes the turning point in the poem, these lines bring light among the dark tunes for the first time. Galswinth's journey

[69] Gregory of Tours condemned the many liaisons of the Merovingian Kings not only because it was against the Christian idols, but because he saw it as the source of instability in Gaul. In his opinion, the disputes of the too many children stemming from the too many relations of the kings lead to the wars. DAILEY (2015: 101).

[70] CRISP (2003: 5–7).

[71] *Carm*. 6.1, 113–116.

[72] EHLEN (2011: 250).

[73] *Carm*. 6.1, 116.

is more detailed than Brunchild's. Here, Fortunatus includes passages about Tours and Poitiers as the princess progresses through partly to mention the venerated saints of the two cities, St Martin and St Hilary, who was famous for his eloquence. The saints direct attention towards the transcendent as well. St Hilary's words enlighten the minds just as the rays of the sun illume the mountains: '*sol radio, hic verbi generalia lumina fundunt, montibus ille diem, mentibus iste fidem.*[74] St Martin is connected to the skies: *Toronicas terras Martini ad sidera noti.*'[75] The last words stem from the 5th eclogue of Vergil, from a lamentation told for Daphnis, the deceased shepherd, who will then become a guardian of all the shepherds. St Martin, as a Christian bishop, fulfils the same pastoral task of being a caretaker of his fold.[76] The two saints were deeply honored by Fortunatus; therefore it is no accident that he mentioned them in the consolation. The scene in Poitiers is further extended, Fortunatus grabs the occasion to portray Radegund as a sympathizing mother-figure for Galswinth, offering the newcomer warm welcome and support.[77] Fortunatus mentions himself too when seeing the procession going through the city. He positions himself as another foreign soul in Gaul and creates a sense of fellowship between him, Radegund and Galswinth.[78] Consequently, the itineraries are functional, as they serve their individual aims both in the consolation and the epithalamium.

The laudations of the two princesses have specific purposes as well. Fortunatus could have very little personal knowledge of either Brunchild or Galswinth at the time of composing the poems, hence, both princesses get an idealized, nevertheless, very different depiction. Brunchild is described by her physical features while Galswinth is characterized by her acts.

The first words about Brunchild evoke Vergil: '*…maturalis nubilis annis / virginitas in flore tumens, conplexa marito / primitiis placitura suis,*

[74] *Carm*. 6.5, 221–222.
[75] *Carm*. 6.5, 229.
[76] DAVIS (1967: 130–131).
[77] SMITH (2009: 310–311).
[78] ROBERTS (2017: 308–310).

nec damna pudoris / sustinet, unde magis pollens regina vocatur.'[79] These lines echo Lavinia's introduction: '*iam matura viro, iam plenis nubilis annis*.'[80] Brunchild's beauty is shown by flowers and jewels: '*lactea cui facies incocta rubore coruscat, / lilia mixta rosis: aurum si intermicet ostro, / decertat tuis numquam se vultibus aequant. / sapphirus, alba, adamans, crystalla, zmaragdus, isapis / cedant cuncta: novam genuit Hispania gemmam*.'[81] The phrase *lilia mixta rosis* is a recurring element of Fortunatus' poetry, here, the white and red colors are already present in the preceding line. The flowers are partly borrowed from Vergil, who portrays Lavinia with lilies and roses,[82] which becomes commonplace in late antique epithalamia likewise.[83] Light and flowers have always been part of wedding songs,[84] but they gain special importance by Fortunatus. Light has a particular significance in his poetry. First of all, by the descriptions of churches, as shine makes them a place of God. A glittering effect is often achieved by using precious stones or sometimes even floral images. This method is especially transparent in one section of his epic *Vita Sancti Martini*. While gems and flowers garnish vestments of lay nobles on several occasions, representing earthly riches against the simplicity of the Saint, at one place the splendor of heaven's armies. This latter scene turns into the depiction of a wedding chamber where virgins and martyrs are followed by Christ himself appearing as the bridegroom.[85] In the case of Brunchild, the jewels do not only mean to indicate the princess's wealth and the roses do not only symbolize love, as lilies also not only her innocence: these are all metaphors for virginity and heaven.[86] Brunchild as a bride is shown as the perfect image of a Christian virgin.

Brunchild's laudation takes up thirteen lines, extra ten lines about her ancestry are added later, where Fortunatus names her father and the excellent rule he brought to Spain. Compared to this, Galswinth's lauda-

[79] *Carm*. 6.1, 52–55.
[80] Verg. *A*. 7, 53.
[81] *Carm*. 6.1, 107–111.
[82] Cf., Verg. *A*. 12, 68–69: *aut mixta rubent ubi lilia multa / alba rosa.*
[83] Cf. Dracontius. *Romul*. 6, 8; 7, 45.
[84] CONTIADES-TSITSONI (1990: 56–66).
[85] PATAKI (2017: 92–93); cf. *Vita Sancti Martini,* 3, 455–528.
[86] ROBERTS (2011: 114–119).

tion seems shorter, only ten lines in a more than twice as long poem as the epithalamium. The difference in length becomes especially apparent when compared to the consolation written for the death of Vilithuta (4.26), a noblewoman who died in childbirth, where the laudation of the deceased takes up about a fourth of the poem. Another peculiarity of Galswinth's laudation is the omission of her origins, though she was a daughter of a king. Royal lineage was highlighted in another consolation of Fortunatus written for a dead princess, Theudechild (4.25), where he enumerates the distinguished relatives.[87] Prominent ancestry was brought up writing about Vilithuta as well.[88] However, these all seem to be functional. In Vilithuta's case, the noble pedigree is a barbarian one which, apart from her Roman education and kind character, serves to prove that the word 'barbarian' do not necessarily have a pejorative meaning. It is an exemplary place for the mixed identities of Merovingian society.[89] In the poem for Theudechild, Fortunatus presumably wanted to stress Merovingian greatness, as the princess was the daughter of a late Merovingian king, sister to the already-mentioned popular ruler Theudebert. Lastly, while at Brunchild's wedding, Fortunatus had to make the courtesy to praise the Visigoth king for the envoys of Spain, the king had already been dead when Galswinth herself died. Mentioning her father in the consolation would have served no aim. There is no referring to Galswinth's beauty either, unlike in the works for Brunchild or Vilithuta. Despite these lapses, the laudation still contains conventional elements. Like all good Christian noblewomen, Galswinth was also a true mother to the needy: '*pauperibus tribuens advena mater erat*.'[90] Choosing the word *advena* can have a special meaning: patristic authors used it for rebirth, it can refer here to Galswinth's new life in heaven.[91] The princess is magnanimous and eloquent too: '*et magno meruit plebis amore coli, / hos quoque muneribus permulcens, vocibus illos*.'[92] Her foreign-

[87] *Carm*. 4.25, 7–10.
[88] *Carm*, 4.26, 13.
[89] See note 19.
[90] *Carm*. 6.5, 244.
[91] QUESNEL (1996: 126).
[92] *Carm*. 6.5, 238–239.

ness is highlighted again in these lines, she needs to win the graces of her new compatriots, and she does a wonderful job. She wins even the favor of the warriors: '*utque fidelis ei sit gens armata, per arma / iurat iure suo, se quoque lege ligat*.'[93] This is a very unusual motif, as the army was traditionally not supposed to swear an oath to Merovingian queens.[94] Bringing in the soldiers partly suggests dangers, partly shows Galswinth's skills to establish herself in her new homeland. Voices of war are contrasted in the next line, Galswinth creates peace: '*regnabat placido conponens tramite vitam*.'[95] Most importantly though, she converts to the Catholic faith to win the heavenly reward: '*quaque magis possit regno superesse perenni, / catholicae fidei conciliata placet*.'[96] These closing lines of the laudation serve as an affirmation: Galswinth was on the right religious conviction when she died, she must have been accepted to the eternal kingdom. In addition, it sets a reassuring example to the converted Brunchild as well. The laudation assures everyone that Galswinth met the requirements set for a good queen, she made everything in her power to make herself beloved in her new home.[97]

A pictured alliance between the Visigoth and Austrasian courts is a further common aspect of the epithalamium and the consolation. It is spoken directly in the epithalamium. Brunchild is presented as a princess, who came to unite the two nations: '*Hispanam tibimet dominam, Germania, nasci, / quae duo regna iugo pretiosa conexuit uno*.'[98] It is strengthened by the many Vergilian allusions described above, which connect Brunchild to Lavinia and Sigibert to Aeneas, who were the mythical founders of a new nation. Later, this picture returns in a panegyric written for Brunchild by Fortunatus in the 580s. Brunchild's daughter married to a Visigoth ruler, while his son ruled in Gaul: '*Gallia cuius habet genus et Hispania fetum / masculus hinc moderans, inde puella regens*.'[99]

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[93] *Carm*. 6.5 241–242.
[94] GEORGE (2011: 47).
[95] *Carm*. 6.5, 241–243.
[96] *Carm*. 6.5, 245–246.
[97] WILLIARD (2016: 202).
[98] *Carm*. 6.1, 118–119.
[99] *Carm*. App. 6, 3–4.

In the consolation the idea is less direct but still present. First of all, the grief unites the lamenting daughter and mother in the two courts. Brunchild refers to the shared tragedy in her querela crying for Galswinth: '*non te hic cara soror, non ibi mater habet*.'[100] After Goiswinth's last exclamation the grieving mother and daughter are connected: '*partitis lacrimis soror hinc, inde anxia mater, / vocibus haec Rhenum pulsat et illa Tagum. / condolet hinc Batavus, gemit illinc Baeticus axis, / perstrepit hoc Vachalus, illud Hiberus aquis*.'[101] The geographical names here cover Gaul and Spain, the two kingdoms seem joint in the grief. Though the distance separates mother and daughter, the common sadness overcomes the physical obstacles.

According to Roberts, the consolation brings sympathy towards the Austrasian and Visigoth courts through this common grief, it creates an extra bond between the two natural allies while forging hostile feelings towards Neustria.[102] Though Chilperich is not mentioned in the poem, the connection with the *De raptu Proserpinae* allows the audience to see him in the role of the lord of the Underworld.[103] Williard agrees that the poem should be understood in the context of Visigoth and Austrasian diplomacy and suggests that the work aimed the audience of these two courts.[104]

This blueprint of alliance seems however problematic. Historical research shows that Sigibert wanted to solve internal issues by his marriage to the Visigoth princess and not to gain external support. The message of the consolation is enigmatic. On one hand, the Claudian allusions may suggest a theory towards a hidden negative portrayal of Chilperich and Fortuntus' careful judgement on him between the lines.[105] On the other hand though, the many Vergilian loci echoed in the poem can put Chilperich into Aeneas' role, who was innocent of Dido's death, and so forming a neutral depiction of Chilperich.[106] Neither of the

[100] *Carm*. 6.5, 288.
[101] *Carm*. 6.5, 347–350.
[102] ROBERTS (2017: 310–311).
[103] GIOANNI (2012: 941–943).
[104] WILIARD (2016: 200–204).
[105] GIOANNI (2012: 941–943).
[106] GEORGE (1992: 99–101).

allusions should be understood as the exclusive narrative for the whole poem. Looking at the poetic oeuvre of Fortunatus, it seems unlikely that he would have served the political interests of the Austrasian court by writing propagandistic works against Neustria. In his panegyrics written for royalty, the ideal king is the one who can bring and maintain peace, which has a higher value than victorious wars.[107]

In the 6.1 epithalamium *Pax* seems to win over Mars: '*Mars habet ecce duces, pax habet ecce decus*.'[108] In a panegyric composed for the royal couple not much after the wedding, Sigibert is though praised for his successful wars, these secure peace and prosperity: '*prosperitate nova pacem tua bella dederunt / et peperit glaudius gaudia certa tuus. / plus tamen ut placeas, cum sit victoria iactans, / tu magis unde subis, mitior inde manes*.'[109] These lines can be read as an admonishment for the king: true virtue cannot be found on the battlefield. In another poem, addressed to Charibert (561–567), Sigibert's and Chilperich's older brother, the king and his uncle, the late king Childebert (511–558) are described to be peaceful rulers (*rex placidus*). The deceased Childebert is presented as a gentle, wise and just king who set an example for his successor.[110] The past wars are mentioned here again from the aspect of the present peace: '*Quos prius infestis lassarunt bella periclis, / hos modo securos pacis amore foves*.'[111] An echo of this can be found in Galswinth's laudation, which shows that she overcame the dangers by bringing peace. The pictured unity between the Visigoth and Austrasian people by Fortunatus can be understood as a plead for peace in an era when memories of enmities were still close. At the dawn of the 5th century, the Visigoths were forced to leave and move to Spain by the rising Merovingians. Wars went on until the beginning of the 6th century.[112] Possibly, the Franks still meant a threat in the middle of the century.[113]

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[107] BRENNAN (1984: 5).
[108] *Carm*. 6.1, 20.
[109] *Carm*. 6.1a, 15–19.
[110] *Carm*. 6.2, 13–15.
[111] *Carm*. 6.2, 39–40.
[112] MEZEI (2006: 8).
[113] COLLINS (1995: 40).

Analyzing the laudations and the itineraries proves that Fortunatus used the required elements with creativity, the compulsory parts were always shaped to the exact situations. The same things could appear very differently depending on the context. The content is, however, not fully formed by the desires of the addressed. Keeping the peace was hardly the most important thought of the Merovingian rulers, whose power, treasure and fame derived mostly from military campaigns, Fortunatus still tried to promote a pious way of life in line with his own values.

Conclusion

To conclude, Fortunatus seems to carefully balance between the expectations of his patrons and his conscience. He met the requirements of his commissioners both in the epithalamium and the consolation. He boosted Sigibert's image as a ruler, as a successful warrior as well as a wise judge of his people. If the consolation was written on behalf of Radegund to send a message of peace to Brunchild, which seems likely, he accomplished his task again speaking against earthly vengeance. Both poems have some didactic points. Sigibert is warned about the expected behavior of a good Christian husband, while for Brunchild, the conversion and beatitude of her sister can serve as an argument for her newly adopted Catholic religion. The content of the poems reveals a deeply religious person in those lines where he speaks beyond the notions of the rulers. Examining these literary artefacts in their historical context shows Fortunatus' skills to write beyond flattery and preserve his integrity even in delicate situations.

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