

Shoes and a fish dinner: the troubled thoughts of Bruno of Querfurt

“Give me my shoes and let’s go out.” “*Da mihi*”, inquit, “*calceos, et abeamus hinc*.”¹ This vivid and somewhat unexpected sentence comes towards the beginning of a conversation at the heart of Bruno of Querfurt’s *Passio sanctorum Benedicti et Iohannis ac sociorum eorumdem*, otherwise known as the *Vita quinque fratrum*. It is one of a number of moments in Bruno’s writings where the author ignores hagiographic convention, giving us a remarkably down-to-earth picture of events (sometimes more so than he could find in his own sources), and even giving apparent access to his own feelings.² On occasion in his hagiography, as for example in the conversation in the *Vita quinque fratrum*, and in his Letter to Henry II,³ Bruno gives us autobiography pure and simple.⁴ But, like other hagiographers of mission who themselves worked in the missionary field, he also seems to use hagiography as ‘displaced autobiography’ – by which I mean that he used his accounts of others to explore his own hopes, fears and concerns.⁵

Bruno was born into the Saxon aristocracy in either 974 or 978.⁶ Like his relative Thietmar of Merseburg, he was sent to the cathedral school at Magdeburg, and then went on to join the Hofkapelle of Otto III in 996/7. In 997 he accompanied the emperor to Italy, but left him to join the community of St Alessio in Rome, where the recently martyred Adalbert of Prague (d. 23rd April 997) had once been resident – commemorating Adalbert would be a major consideration for both Bruno and for the emperor. In Magdeburg Bruno had been influenced by the monastic traditions of Gorze: in Rome the chief monastic influences on him were Cluny and the traditions of Basil, as followed by the disciples of Nilus. In 1001 Bruno left St Alessio for the eremitical community established by Romuald of Benevento at Pereum, near Ravenna, where Otto’s court was then based. But the eremitical life did not suit him, and he yearned for a more active christian life. It was this dissatisfaction that lay behind his conversation with Benedict, as a result of which, with Otto’s approval, the latter set out with another monk, John, to establish a mission to the Prussian neighbours of the Poles.⁷ Bruno agreed to secure papal approval for the mission, but he was interrupted by the death of Otto in 1002. By the end of the year, however, he had gained the pope’s blessing for the project: indeed Pope Silvester authorised the elevation of Bruno to the office of missionary bishop, but he was not consecrated until 1004, and then at the hands of archbishop Tagino of Magdeburg.⁸ Meanwhile, relations between Henry II and the Polish ruler Boleslaw Chobry

¹ Bruno, *Vita vel passio sanctorum Benedicti et Iohannis sociorumque suorum* (henceforth *Vita quinque fratrum*) 3 (ed. Reinhard Kade, MGH SS 15, 2, Hannover 1888) 709–738, at 720. I have not been able to consult the more recent edition by Jadwiga Karwasinska, *Monumenta Poloniae historica, series nova* 4, 3 (Warszawa 1973) 8–84. The fact that Karwasinska’s editions are almost unavailable outside Central Europe is a recurrent difficulty for anyone working on this material: see below, n. 11.

² Friedrich Lotter, *Christliche Völkergemeinschaft und Heidenmission. Das Weltbild Bruns von Querfurt*, in: *Early Christianity in Central and East Europe*, ed. Przemysław Urbańczyk (Warszawa 1997) 163–174, at 165–168, though he perhaps underestimates the extent to which other missionaries also put their own personalities into their writings.

³ Bruno, *Epistola* (ed. Wilhelm von Giesebrecht, *Geschichte der deutschen Kaiserzeit* 2, Leipzig 1875) 689–692. There is a more recent edition by Jadwiga Karwasinska: (ed. Jadwiga Karwasinska, *Monumenta Poloniae historica, series nova* 4, 3, Warszawa 1973) 85–106.

⁴ Ian Nicholas Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe* (London 2001) 236.

⁵ On the concept of displaced autobiography, Wood, *The Missionary Life* 112.

⁶ For the biographical details that follow, Lotter, *Völkergemeinschaft* 163–165. The fullest biographical account remains Heinrich G. Voigt, *Brun von Querfurt: Mönch, Eremit, Erzbischof der Heiden und Märtyrer. Lebenslauf, Anschauungen und Schriften eines deutschen Missionars und Märtyrers um die Wende des zehnten und elften Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart 1907). Also vital is Reinhard Wenskus, *Studien zur historisch-politischen Gedankenwelt Bruns von Querfurt* (*Mitteldeutsche Forschungen* 5, Münster 1956). There are also accounts in Wood, *The Missionary Life* 231–233; Stefan Weinfurter, *Heinrich II. (Regensburg 2002)* 206.

⁷ In addition to the works cited above, see Johannes Fried, *Otto III. und Boleslaw Chrobry. Das Widmungsbild des Aachener Evangelisars, der ‘Akt von Gnesen’ und das frühe polnische und ungarische Königtum* (*Frankfurter historische Abhandlungen* 30, Stuttgart 2001) 80.

⁸ Lotter, *Christliche Völkergemeinschaft* 164; Fried, *Otto III.* 99.

had turned to open conflict, which further prevented Bruno from joining Benedict. This seems to have led him to turn aside to evangelise the Black Hungarians, traditionally located in Siebenbürgen, although on no solid grounds.⁹ As a result, on November 12th 1003, Benedict, John and their three companions, who together made up the ‘five brothers’, were murdered before the papal licence for their mission reached them. The exact course of Bruno’s actions in the following three years is unclear, though it was at this time that he was consecrated bishop. 1004 would also seem to have been the moment that he wrote the first version of his *Life of Adalbert of Prague*, which he perhaps intended for Henry II.¹⁰ The work is itself a revision of a text, the original version of which may have been composed in Rome at the community of St Alessio, although it has recently been argued that the earliest *Life of Adalbert* was composed in the region of Aachen or Liège.¹¹ In 1007, Bruno visited Kiev, and went on to preach, with limited success, among the Pechenegs. Thereafter, despite the war between Henry II and Boleslaw, which he criticised savagely in a letter to the German emperor,¹² he moved to Poland. The letter to Henry II is the most firmly dated of his writings. During his time in Poland it appears that he also wrote the *Vita quinque fratrum*, and that he revised his *Life of Adalbert of Prague*, possibly for Boleslaw.¹³ Mission, rather than hagiography, was, however, still foremost in Bruno’s mind, and while in Poland, he sent missionaries to Sweden.¹⁴ In early 1009 he set off to evangelise the Prussians, but was martyred on 9th March of that year.

The request for shoes which opens the conversation in the *Vita quinque fratrum* is spoken by Benedict, the man who will end up as the senior of the five martyrs, and is addressed to the hagiographer. Bruno indeed plays a crucial role in the narrative. In the ensuing discussion, which takes place during their walk, he goes on to persuade Benedict to become a missionary to the Slavs. Because it was he who prompted Benedict to undertake the mission, and also because he failed to convey the papal licence to them, as we shall see, Bruno blamed himself for the deaths of the ‘five brothers’.¹⁵ He was particularly upset that they were killed by thieves and did not achieve martyrdom at the hands of pagans, while active in the mission field – although he is adamant that they did die as martyrs.

Leaving aside the account of the miracles which subsequently occurred at the tomb of the five martyrs and the epilogue with which the work concludes, both of which are an appendage to the main body of the narrative (although they constitute both an important set of proofs of the sanctity of the martyrs, and also an interesting insight in a small christian community in a newly christianised region), the *Passio* can be broken up into three sections. The first is an account of the early monastic career of Benedict, followed by his agreement to work as a missionary. The second consists largely of a description of the time that he, John and their Slav companions, Ysaac, Matheus and Christinus, spent waiting for the papal licence to preach. This is interspersed with comments on Bruno’s own failure to bring the licence. The *Passio* proper ends with a long chapter recounting the martyrdom itself. The middle section is concerned almost as much with Bruno and his failure first to secure and then to deliver the licence, at it is with Benedict and John. Unusually then, the hagiographer is one of the leading players in his own work.

Despite the autobiographical elements in Bruno’s *Life of the Five Brothers* and, as we shall see, his two other works, his writings have not attracted as much attention from scholars concerned with the portrayal of

⁹ Lotter, *Christliche Völkergemeinschaft* 164: it has to be said that the chronology of this stage of Bruno’s career is impossible to establish with certainty.

¹⁰ Lotter, *Völkergemeinschaft* 165; David A. Warner, *Saints, pagans, war and rulership in Ottonian Germany*, in: *Plenitude of Power: The Doctrines and Exercise of Authority in the Middle Ages. Essays in Memory of Robert Louis Benson*, ed. Robert C. Figueira (Aldershot 2006) 11–35, at 14. For the date, Fried, *Otto III*, 81, with n. 68.

¹¹ See now *Vita Adalberti. Früheste Textüberlieferungen der Lebensgeschichte Adalberts von Prag* (ed. Jürgen Hoffmann, *Vita Adalberti. Früheste Textüberlieferungen der Lebensgeschichte Adalberts von Prag, Europäische Schriften der Adalbert-Stiftung-Krefeld* 2, Essen 2005). There are older editions of various recensions of the *Vita Adalberti*: *Vita S. Adalberti episcopi* (ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, *MGH SS* 4, Hannover 1841) 574–612; and (ed. Jadwiga Karwasinska, *Monumenta Poloniae historica, series nova* 4, 1, Warszawa 1962). Karwasinska sees the Roman recension of the text as being the earliest.

¹² Weinfurter, *Heinrich II*, 206–208; Warner, *Saints*.

¹³ For the most recent arguments over the dates of the two versions, and the variants in the text, Lotter, *Völkergemeinschaft* 165; Fried, *Otto III*, 81, with n. 68. It is clear, however, that this is not the last word. See also Warner, *Saints* 14.

¹⁴ Władysław Duczko, *Real and imaginary contributions of Poland and Rus to the conversion of Sweden*, in: *Early Christianity in Central and East Europe*, ed. Przemysław Urbańczyk (Warszawa 1997) 129–135, at 131f.

¹⁵ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 9, ed. Kade 725.

the individual as might have been expected.¹⁶ Indeed, despite acknowledgement of the importance of his critiques of Otto II (973–983) and Otto III (983–1002),¹⁷ Bruno has been surprisingly little studied by modern scholars.¹⁸ The one substantial biography is still that of Voigt from 1907,¹⁹ while the major analysis of Bruno's political ideas remains Wenskus' Dissertation of 1953/4.²⁰ To some extent this relative silence is easily understood. There is no surviving Vita of Bruno (despite his claim to sanctity), although one is recorded in medieval sources.²¹ The nearest that we have is the short eye-witness account of his martyrdom in 1009, the *Hystoriae de predicatione episcopi Brunonis cum suis capellanis in Prussia et martyrio eorum*, set down shortly after the event by Wibert.²² There is, however, a chapter inserted by Bruno's relative Thietmar of Merseburg (d. 1018) into his chronicle,²³ and another excursus in Peter Damian's *Life of Romuald of Benevento*, written in 1042.²⁴ But Damian seems to have known little about Bruno, outside his early life at court, his journey to Rome in 1002 (about which he had an eyewitness report from *quidem senex monachus*²⁵), and his death – and even here his version of events differs from that given by Wibert. Unfortunately his ordering of events at the relevant point in the *Vita Romualdi* is not chronological.²⁶ He did, however, have access to Bruno's *Vita quinque fratrum*.²⁷ We, therefore, lack a coherent medieval account of Bruno's career, the detail of which is not easily reconstructed. Our main source for his life is to be found in those autobiographical passages which are contained in his two hagiographical works and his Letter to Henry II of 1008. Curiously there is, so far as I know, no collected edition of his writings.²⁸

In certain respects it may seem easier to reconstruct Bruno's personality and ideas than to reconstruct his career. Yet, at least with regard to his personality, there are, of course, difficulties. At first sight, his most obviously autobiographical work is the letter to Henry II.²⁹ This is in part a critique of the emperor's hostility towards the Polish ruler Boleslaw Chrobry, with whom Henry was often at war – and indeed against whom he was inciting pagan tribes, although Bruno thought that the two should be cooperating to evangelise those same tribes.³⁰ The *Epistola* provides a brief but nevertheless extremely informative narrative of Bruno's missionary career, first (and most cursorily) among the Hungarians, and then among the Pechenegs, whom he tried with some slight success to evangelise, despite opposition from the Russian ruler Vladimir, who attempted to dissuade him from the enterprise:

“[Vladimir] jumped from his horse: I went ahead with my companions, and he followed with his great men, and we went through the gate. He stood on one hill, and we stood on another: I myself clasped the cross in my hands, singing the noble song: ‘Peter, you love me, feed my sheep.’ After we had finished the responsorium, the chief [Vladimir] sent a great man of his to us with the following words: ‘I have brought you to the place where my lands end, and where those of my enemies begin. I know that tomorrow, before the third hour, you ought to taste a bitter death, without any

¹⁶ But see Lotter, *Völkergemeinschaft*; Wood, *The Missionary Life* 226–244.

¹⁷ See, for example, Knut Görich, *Otto III., Romanus, Saxonicus et Italicus: Kaiserliche Rompolitik und sächsische Historiographie* (*Historische Forschungen* 18, Sigmaringen 1993); Gerd Althoff, *Otto III.* (Darmstadt 1996) 120, 184–18; Lotter, *Völkergemeinschaft* 167, 170f.; Weinfurter, *Heinrich II.* 81.

¹⁸ Warner, *Saints* 13f., with notes 11 and 13. Marina Midalinov, *Margins of Solitude. Eremitism in Central Europe between East and West* (Zagreb 2008) 67–84, discusses Bruno, and especially the *Vita quinque fratrum*, in the context of the history of eremitism.

¹⁹ Voigt, *Brun von Querfurt*.

²⁰ Wenskus, *Studien*.

²¹ *Vita Adalberti*, ed. Pertz 580.

²² *Vita Adalberti*, ed. Pertz 579f.

²³ Thietmar, *Chronicon* 6, 94 (ed. Werner Trillmich, *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters, Freiherr vom Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe* 9, Darmstadt 1957) 342.

²⁴ Petrus Damiani, *Vita beati Romualdi* 26f. (ed. Giovanni Tabacco, *Fonti per la Storia d'Italia* 94, Roma 1957) 54–61.

²⁵ Petrus Damiani, *Vita Romualdi* 27, ed. Tabacco 57.

²⁶ Thus he places his account of Bruno and his martyrdom before that of the Five Brothers, and he puts both before Romuald's conflict with Otto III: Petrus Damiani, *Vita Romualdi* 26f., 28, 30, ed. Tabacco 54–61, 61–64, 65–67.

²⁷ Damian, *Vita Romualdi* 28, ed. Tabacco 61–64.

²⁸ It would not be difficult to reprint Karwasinska's editions of all three works, in: *Monumenta Poloniae historica, series nova* 4, 2–3 (Warszawa 1969–1973), although ideally an edition of the shorter version of Bruno's *Vita Adalberti* should also be provided, as should the dedication poem discussed by Johannes Fried, *Brunos Dedikationsgedicht*, in: *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 43 (1987) 574–583: the text is supplied on 574.

²⁹ Bruno, *Epistola*, ed. von Giesebrecht 689–692; Weinfurter, *Heinrich II.* 206–208, 213–215; Warner, *Saints* 11f., 24f.

³⁰ On other critics of Henry's policies, Weinfurter, *Heinrich II.* 206–208, 213–215; Warner, *Saints* 11f., 24f.

gain, and without any cause.' I replied, 'May God open Paradise for you, just as you opened the way to the pagans to us.' What more? For two days we travelled with no one harming us. On the third day, that is on the Friday, we were all led to the slaughter, with bent neck, on three occasions, in the morning, at noon and at nones, and just as often we departed unharmed from the enemy who came against us – thus God and our leader, Peter, spoke with a miracle. On Sunday we came to a centre of population [*maiorem populum*], and were given space to live, until everyone, summoned by messengers, came together to a meeting. And thus at nones, on another Sunday, we were called to the council, and we and our horses were whipped. An innumerable crowd came together, with cruel eyes, and they raised a horrible noise: a thousand threatened to cut us to pieces with axes and with drawn swords held over our necks. We were tormented until nightfall, and dragged this way and that, until the leading men of the region, who seized us by force from their hands [i.e. those of our tormentors], having heard our ideas, since they were judicious, knew that we had entered their land to do good. Thus as wonderful God and most precious Peter ordered, we stayed among that people for about five months, going round three-quarters of it, but not touching the other quarter, from which messengers were sent to us by their great men. Having converted around thirty souls to Christianity, we made peace by the hand of God [lit. in the finger of God], which, as they said, no one other than us could."³¹

As a first-hand description of missionary activity, this is a remarkable passage – though it is by no means unique, even for the Ottonian period: the account of Adalbert of Weissenburg's mission to the Rus, to be found among the additions to Regino's Chronicle, may well be autobiographical.³² The most detailed section of Bruno's narrative in the letter to Henry relates, interestingly enough, to the confrontation between the author and Vladimir, or his spokesman, but that may be because in certain respects it provided a parallel to Bruno's own conflict with Henry, who also had views as to where the bishop should and should not work. Even so the depiction of the two protagonists passing through a gate to stare at the pagan horizon is extraordinary. The accuracy of the passage has been called into question,³³ but we know from archaeology that the frontier of the kingdom of the Rus was marked by what are called the Snake Ramparts.³⁴ As for the account of the months spent among the Pechenegs, this is both dramatic and also, in its assessment of thirty converts, surprisingly plausible. Yet, this, like the account of the hymn singing at the Snake Ramparts, is also a description that inevitably bears that hallmark of Bruno's clerical outlook: time is measured in months, but also liturgically: for some reason Bruno tells us that the first threat to him and his party occurred on a Friday (*VI. feria*), that they were initially challenged on a Sunday, in the morning, afternoon and nones, and it was similarly on the Lord's Day, again at nones, that they were summoned to a council.

A cleric would, of course, be highly sensitive to the days of the week and the liturgical hours of the day, as has been noted, for instance in the case of Regino of Prüm.³⁵ Indeed the liturgical hours would provide basic points of measurement. Bruno, moreover, was remembered by Peter Damian as being particularly committed to the church offices.³⁶ But should we see the liturgical time in Bruno's narrative as a deliberate recasting of events? Writing of descriptions of one of Bruno's contemporaries, Sarah Hamilton remarked: "The young emperor Otto III (983–1002) has a reputation of great piety, recorded in various accounts written soon after his death. Recent scholarship has shown how much these descriptions of the devout young king owe to literary convention and clerical expectation."³⁷ Even in an autobiographical passage like that to be found in Bruno's Letter to Henry, it is worth remembering that we may be faced with a deliberately constructed image.

We may get further in understanding Bruno if we look not just at what he says about himself, but also about what he has to say about others. And when we turn to his Passion of Adalbert we also have one of his

³¹ Bruno, *Epistola*, ed. von Giesebrecht 689–692.

³² Regino of Prüm, *Chronicon* a. 961 (ed. Reinhold Rau, *Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte 3. Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters, Freiherr vom Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe 7*, Darmstadt 1960). See the comments of Stuart Airlie, "Sad stories of the death of kings": Narrative patterns and structures of authority in Regino of Prüm's Chronicle, in: *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Elizabeth Tyler/Ross Balzaretta (Turnhout 2006) 105–131, at 110f. Airlie also comments, *ibid.* 115, 119, on the extent to which Regino himself was an actor in his own chronicle.

³³ Paolo Squatriti, *Digging ditches in early Medieval Europe*, in: *Past and Present* 176 (2002) 11–65, at 32, n. 47, treats the description as fantastic.

³⁴ Simon Franklin/Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750–1200* (London 1996) 170–173.

³⁵ Airlie, *Sad stories* 116f., 120f., comments on the interplay of liturgical and historical culture in Regino.

³⁶ Damian, *Vita Romualdi* 27, ed. Tabacco 57.

³⁷ Sarah Hamilton, "Most illustrious king of kings". Evidence for Ottonian kingship in the Otto III prayerbook (München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 30111), in: *Journal of Medieval History* 27 (2001) 257–288, at 257. Compare Warner, *Saints* 15.

sources, the marginally earlier *Life of the martyr* once ascribed to John Canaparius.³⁸ In his *Passio of Adalbert of Prague*, even more than in his *Vita quinque fratrum*, Bruno explores his attitudes towards mission and to missionary strategy, and in addition provides an example of what may be seen as ‘displaced autobiography’.³⁹ Indeed his *Passio of Adalbert* – despite its dependence on an earlier text⁴⁰ – includes an exploration of his hopes and fears for the missionary life.

The chapters leading up to Adalbert’s martyrdom contain an extensive analysis of missionary practice, and the need to go native.⁴¹ A blueprint of an ideal way of evangelising is placed in Adalbert’s mouth.⁴²

“Our clothing and a horror of what we are wearing harms the minds of the pagans not a little, as it seems to me. So, if you agree, let us change our clerical garb, let us allow our hair to grow and hang down, and let us allow the stubble of our beards to grow. Then perhaps unrecognised we have a better chance of saving them. Having become similar to them, we may live like them, speak like them and live among them.”⁴³

There is no comparable passage in the version of the *Vita Adalberti* ascribed to John Canaparius,⁴⁴ or in that supposed to have originated in the Aachen-Liège region,⁴⁵ but the ideas are echoed in the *Vita quinque fratrum*.

“And since the other holy man, that is the blessed John, bowing his neck humbly to divine judgments, suffered everything patiently with a wisdom of character, and could easily control his mind tamed by the gift of God, so that he wanted what could be done, because what he desired was impossible. As a result Benedict alone was restless and, impatient of the time; he fought with himself, struggling and living badly, worried that he would be defrauded of his holy desire, and concerned that he should not lose his golden objective in purple hope [i.e. martyrdom],⁴⁶ on account of which he had left his homeland, where he could have helped many, and had entered a land with an unknown language, among mountains, rivers and valleys, being an exile with great labour: and now he was ready to understand the Slav language and to speak it reasonably well. And he ordered the whole of his head to be shaven, in which council they [he and John] were both of one mind, and he put on masculine costume, such as secular men wear, so that he might please the eyes of the pagans with his looks, in case, being horrified at the novelty of their clothes on a first encounter, they should not provide a place for others to come to him; and because it could be so, not being distinctive in bodily appearance or clothing, he might more easily find a place for preaching, and thus, he could direct them when occasion presented and, what is always necessary, with discretion in the way of salvation.”⁴⁷

Despite the differences in hairstyle chosen by Adalbert and by Benedict in these two passages, it is clear the ideas expressed reflect a single missionary strategy.⁴⁸ And since that strategy is not spelt out in the earliest *Life of Adalbert*, its presence in Bruno’s version is likely to reflect his own views. That he was sensitive to the way in which costume impressed a pagan audience would seem to be borne out by Peter Damian’s account of Bruno’s meeting with the king of the Prussians, where he first turned up barefoot and in squalid clothes. On this occasion, however, the king reacted in a way that Bruno had not expected, and took him for a beggar, whereupon he went back to put on his vestments: this too failed to impress.⁴⁹ Damian’s account differs from

³⁸ Despite *Vita Adalberti*, ed. Hoffmann 119–121, it is likely that Bruno’s source was the Roman life, even if that from the Liège-Aachen region ultimately proves to be the earliest.

³⁹ See Wood, *The Missionary Life* 112.

⁴⁰ Lotter, *Völkergemeinschaft* 165f., provides a clear discussion of the difference between the anonymous text and Bruno’s version.

⁴¹ See the discussion of this section in Ian N. Wood, *Pagans and holy men 600–800*, in: *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin/Michael Richter (Stuttgart 1987) 347–361, at 358f.; Wood, *The Missionary Life* 219f.

⁴² Bruno, *Passio Adalberti* 26 (ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, MGH SS 4, Hannover 1841) 596–612, at 609.

⁴³ Bruno, *Passio Adalberti* 26, ed. Pertz 609; see Wood, *The Missionary Life* 220.

⁴⁴ *Vita Adalberti* 27–30, ed. Pertz 593–595.

⁴⁵ *Vita Adalberti* 27–30, ed. Hoffmann 155–159.

⁴⁶ One wonders whether the reader is meant to draw a comparison with the accoutrements of empire,

⁴⁷ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 10, ed. Kade 727.

⁴⁸ Robert Bartlett, *Symbolic meanings of hair in the Middle Ages*, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, new series 4 (1994) 43–60, esp. 48f. on Polish traditions, and 60, on hair in a later missionary context. For discussions of the meanings of hair in the Frankish world, Maximilian Diesenberger, *Hair, sacrality and symbolic capital in the Frankish kingdoms*, in: *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources, Artefacts*, ed. Richard Corradini/Max Diesenberger/Helmut Reimitz (*The Transformation of the Roman World* 12, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2003) 173–212; also Paul E. Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (London 2004) 3–42.

⁴⁹ Damian, *Vita Romualdi* 27, ed. Tabacco 58f.; Wood, *The Missionary Life* 239f.; see also *ibid.* 220, 235, 252, 258f.

that of Wibert, though the two are in agreement that Bruno deliberately wore vestments in the course of his meeting with the Prussian king.⁵⁰

Bruno seems to have incorporated into his version of the Passion of Adalbert and his account of the Five Brothers consideration of his own missionary anxieties as well as his intended strategies. While the *Vita quinque fratrum* includes directly autobiographical passages, the *Passio Adalberti*, with its investigation of the fears and failings of a missionary,⁵¹ can at times be seen as displaced autobiography.⁵² Bruno's detailed depiction of Adalbert's terror prior to his martyrdom,⁵³ which also goes a good deal further than the description in the Roman⁵⁴ or Liège life,⁵⁵ can be seen as reflecting the author's own concern over resolution in the face of danger. Fear and a lack of resolve were, after all, among the factors behind Bruno's failure to travel to Rome to obtain the papal licence, and, once he had it, to go directly to Poland.⁵⁶ Of course, this does not necessarily mean that Adalbert himself did not hold the ideas that Bruno ascribed to him. There is good reason to think that fear really was an issue for Adalbert as well.⁵⁷ The difficulties and dangers of the missionary field must have been well known to all those who undertook the evangelisation of pagan peoples.

Comparison between the Bruno's *Passio Adalberti* and *Vita quinque fratrum* on the one hand, and the anonymous *Vita Adalberti* on the other, take us some way towards understanding Bruno's political and missionary ideals, and perhaps towards an awareness of his hopes and fears – the latter being a good deal more in evidence in the *Passio Adalberti* than in the Letter to Henry II. But we can, I think, get a good deal closer to Bruno himself, particularly if we return to the *Vita quinque fratrum*. As we have seen, Bruno presents Benedict as chafing at the bit: impatient to get down to the work of evangelising. His companion John, by contrast, is presented as being much more resigned to his lot, and as being content to do what he could. In this story, Bruno, rather than the other three martyrs (Ysaac, Matheus and Christinus), comes across as the third protagonist – and he is desperate to stress the closeness of his association with Benedict. He is the one who proposes the mission, and who agrees to secure a papal licence, but he is then dilatory, first in securing the licence, and second in delivering it, even once he has been spurred into obtaining it. Here, it must be admitted, the picture he presents of himself is extremely complex. He delayed his trip to Rome because of the political situation following Otto III's death.

“But wound upon wound, on top of great sadness this yet greater sadness accumulated for me, that on account of the loss of peace and lack of a lull in the wars, no way of going to Rome lay open to me, to acquire the licence to evangelize the pagans. Therefore these oft-mentioned saints wondered why I didn't come, having obtained a licence. Negligence was suggested as a reason for my delay; that not being afraid to tell a lie, I firmly promised without shame what I neglected to fulfill. They often said this, that they would not have thought to go to that place, had I not been persuasive and caused the mind of the emperor to implement such things; there were many beautiful places of solitude in their own land [i.e. Italy], in which they could have led the solitary life; not for that reason, to delight to stop in the desert in an unknown land, had they undergone such labour. Truly, because it created great good, they had sought angelic comfort to evangelize the pagans and to enter the terrible-sounding paganismum.”⁵⁸

As already mentioned, Bruno's failure to deliver the licence once he had obtained it involved other complicating factors.

“But after a few days, stirred by by the salutary precepts of my abbot, with longing mind and slow foot I came to Rome, where I sought licence to evangelize from the mouth of the apostolic father [Silvester II]. And after much labour and a great journey by sea and land, I came to Regensburg, whose ancient name is Radix-bona [‘Good-root’, Ratisbonne]. There, because war was raging and the road was full of enemies, I turned the direction of my horse from the Slav lands, where the holy pair of brothers was awaiting my arrival in great hardship, and not even a shadow of memory of my lying promise or the sin of fraternal deception remained in my heart. And having put the Prussians to

⁵⁰ Wibert, *Hystoriae*, ed. Pertz 579f.

⁵¹ Lotter, *Völkergemeinschaft* 165, on Bruno's humanising of the image of Adalbert in the anonymous first Life.

⁵² Wood, *The Missionary Life* 264f.

⁵³ Bruno, *Passio Adalberti* 30, ed. Pertz 610.

⁵⁴ *Vita Adalberti* 30, ed. Pertz 594f.

⁵⁵ *Vita Adalberti* 30, ed. Hoffmann 158f.; Lotter, *Völkergemeinschaft* 165, notes the more schematic nature of the earlier text.

⁵⁶ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 9–10, ed. Kade 725f.

⁵⁷ Wood, *The Missionary Life* 212–215.

⁵⁸ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 9, ed. Kade 725.

one side, to whom a juster cause directed me, because of the recent death of saint Adalbert, I, left-handed and weak-shouldered, began to carry the gospel to the Black Hungarians, taking a ship towards the east, saying in my heart, 'I will allow no sleep to my eyes, no slumber to my eyelids, till I find a place for the Lord.'"⁵⁹

Bruno could have emphasised the fact that, far from opting out of missionary activity, he pursued it in a more accessible area. He could also have pointed out that Adalbert too seems to have worked among the Hungarians.⁶⁰ In other words he was far from being the *sarabaita* or *gyrovagus*, he accused himself of being.⁶¹ These two terms of opprobrium were, of course, taken from the Rule of Benedict, a work which infuses the language of the *Vita quinque fratrum*.⁶² Even more dismissive is another statement apparently derived from the Rule of Benedict,⁶³ that for him *est voluptas pro lege*,⁶⁴ a phrase that also appears in his *Passio Adalberti*, where it describes the attitudes of the people of Prague, whom the martyr failed to influence.⁶⁵ By contrast, right from his first appearance in the *vita*, John, Benedict's companion, *voluptatem pro hoste tenuit*.⁶⁶ Bruno, thus makes no attempt to excuse his behaviour, depicting it in the worst possible light, at least from the point of view of a Benedictine monk. And to make matters worse, in the *miracula* inserted into the text, after the martyrdom of the Five Brothers, Bruno implicitly compares his failure to reach Poland, with the story of how bishop Vungerus of Poznan did manage to return home. Even though he was being held in custody at Magdeburg by Henry II, because of the conflict between him and Boleslaw Chrobry, he went back to Poland, to deal with problems in Benedict's monastery.⁶⁷

One might set the self-criticism of Bruno alongside the penitential tone of Otto III's reign,⁶⁸ and regard it as being nothing special, merely as an aspect of the *Zeitgeist*. There are, however, reasons for thinking that that may not be an adequate response. It is important to remember the emotional involvement of Bruno in the lives of a number of those mentioned in the *Vita quinque fratrum*. It is tempting here to draw attention to the extraordinarily vivid account of the killing of the five. We are told in detail how and where each of them died, and how their bodies were found. The description is extremely precise, perhaps reflecting the extent to which Bruno himself was affected by what he had heard. At the same time, what is set down at this stage of the *Vita* is unquestionably hearsay. Bruno himself was not there. The description of the state of the bodies must have come directly or indirectly from those who found them:⁶⁹ the account of the martyrdoms can only have been reconstructed from information circulating about the discovery of the corpses.

Rather than search for Bruno's own responses to the martyrdom of Benedict and his companions in his overwrought statements of personal guilt and in his intensely dramatic account of the five killings, it may be that we would do better to turn to a number of more downbeat passages, which perhaps both exceed the more rhetorical writing in their emotional punch, and also tend to support the notion that the *Vita quinque fratrum* is a work which does express genuine emotion, and is not merely a carefully constructed exercise in tune with the penitential tone of the reign of Otto III. It is time to return to the passage with which we started.

Bruno and Benedict's conversational stroll takes place at Romuald of Benevento's monastery at Pereum,⁷⁰ where Otto had founded an oratory dedicated to the recently martyred Adalbert. This was consecrated in the presence of the emperor as he was on route to deal with rebellion in Rome. While he was there some Romuald decided for no clearly explained reason to abandon his new foundation and to set off for Istria.⁷¹ It was in the aftermath of this departure that Bruno and Benedict discussed whether to remain at the Pereum or to head elsewhere, above all to the lands of the Slavs.

⁵⁹ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 10, ed. Kade 726. See also Miladinov, *Margins of Solitude*.

⁶⁰ For negotiations with the Hungarians, Bruno, *Passio Adalberti* 16, ed. Pertz 603; for his presence among the Hungarians, Hartwig, *Vita sancti Stephani* 3–4 (ed. Emma Bartoniek, in: Imre Szentpétery, *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum* 2, Budapest 1938).

⁶¹ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 10 (*sarabaita*), 21 (*gyrovagus*), ed. Kade 726, 735.

⁶² *Regula Benedicti* 1 (ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, SC 181, 182, Paris 1972) 438–440.

⁶³ *Regula Benedicti* 1, ed. de Vogüé 438, where *voluntas*, not *voluptas*, appears.

⁶⁴ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 10, ed. Kade 726.

⁶⁵ Bruno, *Passio Adalberti* 15, ed. Pertz 603.

⁶⁶ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 3, ed. Kade 721.

⁶⁷ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 21, ed. Kade 735.

⁶⁸ Hamilton, "Most illustrious king of kings" 257–259.

⁶⁹ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 13, ed. Kade 730–734.

⁷⁰ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 2, ed. Kade 720f.

⁷¹ For this also see Damian, *Vita Romualdi* 30, ed. Tabacco 65–67.

“I, the son of negligence, whom Benedict loved, such as I am, replied: ‘The emperor is particularly keen that you should set out for the regions of the Slavs ahead of him: there, as you know, his intentions already lie. Don’t doubt that I, whom the desire of the emperor holds in this sick land, until I see which way his affairs direct him, will follow as your companion.’ Having said this we went from the wood to the church, and found the emperor had got up from dinner and, in his accustomed humility, had gone in to the master, who had been offended by the separation of his disciples. And, as he hoped, he easily obtained agreement to send good John and, at least in the eyes of men, better Benedict to Slavonia.”⁷²

The simple request that Bruno hand Benedict his shoes thus falls in the middle of an emotionally loaded sequence of events, including the dedication of a chapel to Adalbert, whose memory Bruno revered, the departure of Romuald, and the decision to embark on a Slav mission. The simplicity of the request makes the account of the ensuing conversation all the more vivid.

Otto, of course, would never pursue his missionary ambitions, because of his conflict with the city of Rome.⁷³ As described by Bruno, his failure to embark on the religious life (albeit offset by his final penance) provides a point of comparison, alongside the vacillations of Bruno himself, with the determination of Benedict and his four companions – a comparison which may well be one of the organising principles of the work. Otto is a flawed saint, who made the mistake of not leaving God himself to take vengeance against Rome, but who nevertheless died in the odour of sanctity, and was a ruler whose like Bruno thinks he will not see again.⁷⁴ He is unquestionably better regarded than his father, Otto II, whose reign is the subject of an equivalent – though far more devastating – critique by Bruno in his *Vita Adalberti*.⁷⁵ But just as Otto would fail to join Benedict and John in the Slav lands, so too would Bruno himself.

The exchange which follows Benedict’s request for his shoes is not the first conversation between him and Bruno: the two had already discussed the possibility of missionary work among the Slavs.

“But I, whom he used to call ‘my brother’ out of the privilege of love, suggested to the blessed Benedict between services, that he might go to Slavonia to carry out missionary work, saying that I myself was prepared to undertake this work. ‘This is an unsafe place and a horrible swamp.’ I said. ‘From the least to the greatest, who has not fallen ill here? And thus, it is a special sign from God, so that no one should die in such a sickness.’”⁷⁶

Among those who had succumbed to malaria in Italy there was Otto II, whose death must have been remembered by those who disliked the lower Po valley. Otto III would also die of ‘languor’.⁷⁷ The sense of the region round Ravenna as swampy and disease ridden occurs on several occasions in the *Passio*. When he finally sets off to obtain the licence to preach from pope Silvester, Bruno himself cries out “Now submit to no more delays: get on the way. It is better to die preaching the Saviour in pagan territory, than here, fruitlessly, at some time, in this soggy swamp.”⁷⁸ The marshes of Ravenna contrast with the longed-for landscape of mission and martyrdom. Not that Poland would turn out to be any more desirable, in the eyes of Benedict and John, as they waited for the licence to evangelize.

Equally striking is a third conversation between Bruno and Benedict, which takes place when all the arrangements for the missionary expedition are in place.

“There, the emperor prepared the way of Benedict and John with great zeal and love of Christ, and with all necessary things correctly ordered, he sent the pair of holy brothers, to whom none similar remained, beyond the Alps to Slavonia. Then – as I cannot set down without crying – as night came, still in the twilight, because I loved him dearly, grieving with him more, I began to walk [and to talk about] heavenly things: I confess it was a sweet conversation for me, who was miserable.”⁷⁹

⁷² Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 3, ed. Kade 721.

⁷³ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 3, 7, ed. Kade 721–723. See the analysis in Althoff, *Otto III*. 184–186.

⁷⁴ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 7, ed. Kade 723f.; Lotter, *Völkergemeinschaft* 165, notes that Bruno even presents Adalbert as sinful.

⁷⁵ Bruno, *Passio Adalberti* 9, 10, 12, ed. Pertz 598f., 600f.

⁷⁶ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 2, ed. Kade 720.

⁷⁷ Damian, *Vita Romualdi* 30, ed. Tabacco 67.

⁷⁸ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 10, ed. Kade 726.

⁷⁹ Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum* 4, ed. Kade 721. It is clear from what follows that ‘ambulare’ is not just being used figuratively, ‘to mull over’. Bruno really is envisaging a discussion which takes place during a walk.

The time of day, or rather the fading light, *in crepusculo lucis*, is precisely specified. And here for once time is not liturgical. In the course of their parting Benedict effectively prophesies that Bruno will become a bishop, instructs him to learn Slavonic and to secure a papal licence to evangelise. The prophecy made by the subject of the vita, concerns the work's author. Bruno did indeed become a bishop, though he makes nothing of the fact in his writings. The instruction to learn Slavonic, Bruno seems to have taken to heart. The need to speak the language is mentioned elsewhere in the Vita,⁸⁰ and Bruno implies that he responded to that need when he later translates the name of Boleslaw as *maior gloriae*.⁸¹

It is difficult to think of more emotionally charged encounters in a work of early medieval hagiography than those between Bruno and Benedict. The personal attachment between the two men was unquestionably intense – and I would suggest that the extraordinarily sharp ways in which Bruno presents their conversations result precisely from this emotion. Bruno remembered his final and fateful encounters with Benedict in absolute detail: hence the shoes on one occasion and the fading light on another. Their parting was meant to be temporary, but Bruno's failure to secure a papal licence with any speed meant that it was permanent. Bruno blamed himself for the resulting death of Benedict and his companions, and as a result his recollections of his beloved friend – at least as he set them down on parchment – were all the more vivid.

There is, however, one moment in the Vita quinque fratrum, which does not involve Benedict, which is equally vivid in its presentation of a conversation between two friends – and which implies that Bruno was a man who entered into a number of intense friendships. This conversation occurs during Bruno's account of the period following Otto's death, when he thought it too dangerous to go to Rome.

“Meanwhile it happened one day that someone walked past looking for advice, and intending to visit brothers. Guided by the spirit, he came to my cell, and among those things which he came to ask, he related an unworthy crime, complaining miserably. ‘Recently,’ he said, ‘in Rimini the whole population rose up against one noble man whom you know, the monk Rothulf, because as a wise man in secular terms he was helping bishop Leo of the palace, who was working for loyalty to the king, and had acquired much money in his company through his administration. He did not take the opportunity to flee, but went into the Holy of Holies: they, blind with rage, and demonically possessed, dragged him outside, not only as he confessed, but even from the altar of saint Gaudentius, where he was hiding, and not content just to kill him, first cut off his hands and arms, then his feet and legs and tore his whole body to pieces bit by bit, as dogs do.’ At this I was more terrified than could be believed. ‘Alas,’ I said, ‘the other day weren't we having a meal together, eating bread and a fish, and thinking of nothing less than death? He was very dear to me, although he acted against the law in his secular dealings, and because he loved me equally, I thought that when the time came he would be rewarded by God ...’⁸²

It is this crisis which makes Bruno resolve to travel to Rome to secure the licence to preach.

Once again, a crucial moment is triggered in the narrative by a conversation, this time between Bruno and an unnamed visitor. The conversation is described in detail, as if etched into Bruno's memory, and indeed it calls to mind an earlier conversation, the one he had with Rothulf, which is likewise recounted with striking detail: the two of them were having a fish dinner. Bruno was much attached to Rothulf, as he was to Benedict – though unlike Benedict, he did not have many virtues to admire. His death triggers an extreme response in Bruno, though this was a murder for which he could in no way blame himself.

A significant proportion of the Vita quinque fratrum, the Life of Benedict and his four companions, is an expression of Bruno's guilt. This is signalled from the start, with the prologue, which like much of what follows, subtly exploits the norms of hagiography. The work has no dedicatee, but is addressed directly to God – it is almost confessional. Like many a hagiographer, Bruno claims inadequacy, but his inadequacy is the *monstrum dissidentium morum* – what this means will only become apparent in the course of work.

It is unclear how long Bruno felt responsible for the murders of the Five Brothers. The intensity of feeling that appears at certain crucial moments in the Vita quinque fratrum was not a constant – Bruno himself could decide to work among the Hungarians rather than find his way to Poland. Some time after he returned to Rome the emotional charge seems largely to have passed – though it would seem to have returned at the time he wrote the Life of the Five Brothers in 1008. His devotion to the memory of Adalbert of Prague also suggests that feel-

⁸⁰ Bruno, Vita quinque fratrum 10, ed. Kade 727.

⁸¹ Bruno, Vita quinque fratrum 6, ed. Kade 722.

⁸² Bruno, Vita quinque fratrum 10, ed. Kade 725f.

ings did return to haunt him. There is nothing in the letter to Henry II to suggest that he was lacking in nerve as he had been in the months before Rothulf's murder – though, of course, the lack of nerve expressed in the *Vita quinque fratrum* and the courage presented in the *Epistola* may both be literary constructs.

Recent scholarship has seen the penitential tone of Otto's reign as a clerical construction.⁸³ This does not mean that Bruno's autobiographical passages amount to no more than literary artifice. Certainly there is artifice: there are Leitmotives running through Bruno's works, and despite the difficulty of much of the Latin, the narrative itself has been structured extremely carefully. At the same time, such small details as a pair of shoes, the fading light, and a fish dinner, suggests that some at least of the recollections and emotions may be genuine, and that at least in the months after the deaths of Benedict, John and their companions, Bruno was a deeply troubled individual, and indeed that composing the *Vita quinque fratrum* five years after the martyrdom of Benedict and his companions may even have been a confessional act which was a psychological as well as a religious exercise.

⁸³ Hamilton, "Most illustrious king of kings" 258f., with extensive documentation in the notes.