The ‘other’ Boniface: *Vita altera Bonifatii* in its Frisian and wider Carolingian contexts

**Introduction**

The text known to modern historians as *Vita altera Bonifatii* – the ‘second’ or ‘other’ Life of Boniface – is a very different text than the far better known *Vita Bonifatii* composed by Willibald in the decade after Boniface’s death. For a start, its author and date of composition are unknown, although one manuscript attributes it to Bishop Radbod of Utrecht (899-917); as we shall see shortly some conclusions on this matter can be reached. In addition to this, whereas Willibald’s *Vita* provides a reasonably straightforward narrative of Boniface’s career – at least when taken at face value – *VaB* presents its audience with an account in which narrative clarity is eschewed for the sake of theological significance and in which political events give way to metaphorical and metaphysical encounters with mythical beings and Biblical enemies. Likewise, it shows us a very different saint and a very different understanding of his importance than had been demonstrated by Willibald. At the same time, while we can see through some of Willibald’s apparent simplicity to the deeper political meanings and context which lay behind his work,¹ so too *VaB* is a reflection of the context in which it was written. But without knowing the author and when he wrote, how much can we really say about this text and its context? As a way of answering this question, let us first consider the current consensus on the issue of authorship and date of composition.

The first thing to note here is that the attribution to Bishop Radbod appears to be a false lead. Instead, the text was almost certainly composed by a priest at the church of St Martin in Utrecht, probably in the first half of the ninth century.² The first conclusion is reasonably easy to establish, as the author refers to St Martin at various points and mentions

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the special relationship between Martin and Utrecht. The date is on less firm ground, but there are several indications as to when the text was composed. The first is that in his *Vita Liudgeri* Altfrid mentions that Boniface was martyred at Dokkum and notes that this location is verified by a certain text. Given that *VaB* is the earliest text to provide this information, it seems the obvious candidate. *Vita Liudgeri*’s composition in the 840s, when Altfrid was bishop of Münster therefore gives us a reasonable *terminus ante quem* for *VaB*’s composition. This theory is consolidated by the way in which the author of *VaB* mentions the Northmen. When discussing Boniface’s origin on the island of Britannia he says that the Angles living there had recently suffered an invasion by northern *pyrata* whom they had easily defeated and pushed back out of their land. Given that both Altfrid and Bishop Radbod lived through periods of intense and violent contact between the Northmen and Frisia and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and given that both wrote about the Vikings far more harshly than this author, it seems likely that he was writing significantly before them, and probably before 830, when the first wave of Viking raids gave way to more dedicated attempts at invasion and settlement. So what about Bishop Radbod? Rather than being the text’s original author, it appears that he revised it in some way in order to send a copy to Fulda. While it is likely that the text as we have it now represents the revised version, the extent of Radbod’s revision is difficult to determine, although as demonstrated by Levison, stylistically *VaB* bears little resemblance to Radbod’s known hagiographical works, and so we should assume that he left the majority of the work and its narrative untouched.

With those issues addressed, then, we can move on to the topic of the paper itself: the ‘other’ Boniface and the Frisian and Carolingian contexts of *VaB*. In this paper we shall see that, despite its stylistic peculiarities and the differences between this text and Willibald’s

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3 *Vita altera*, 3, 22.
4 Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, 5.
5 *Vita altera*, 6.
6 For example Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, 27.
7 Kehl, *Kult und Nachleben*, p. 140.
Vita – indeed, because of these – VaB is a crucial tool for understanding the ways in which Boniface was remembered, and cannot be easily dismissed. For this reason, then, we shall attempt to analyse this somewhat neglected text on its own terms in order to highlight not just what it might have meant for its author and his immediate audience in Utrecht, but also for the wider Frisian audience, and even an audience outside the region, and also to highlight the wider milieu in which the author worked and contemporary ideas by which he might have been influenced. In order to assess the significance of this unusual text we shall focus on four key themes: Boniface’s Frisian context, both in terms of his career and his commemoration as a saint; the narrative of VaB, what it tells us and how it compares to other texts; the audience of and influences behind VaB; and perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the text, the author’s presentation of Boniface as a latter-day David.

Boniface in Frisia: Career and commemoration

Although Boniface’s time in Frisia made up at most only five of his nearly forty years on the continent, they were actually some of the most important in his continental career, consisting of its (premature) beginning in 716, his time spent working with Willibrord from 719-22, and finally his return in 753, which resulted in his martyrdom the following year. Yet his disagreement with the archbishop of Cologne concerning the jurisdiction over Utrecht after Willibrord’s death shows that Boniface did not forget the region in his thirty-year absence. Indeed, the saint’s impact on and violent death in the region ensured that he would be remembered as a key figure in the conversion of Frisia to Christianity.

The commemoration of Boniface after his death was somewhat fragmented, as different centres associated with the saint prioritised different aspects of his multi-faceted

8 Willibald, Vita Bonifatii, 4-5, 8.
9 Boniface, Epistolae, 107.
career and produced *Lives* of the saint or his disciples which embody these priorities. And so, while Boniface was remembered in Mainz primarily as a bishop, teacher and reformer and in Fulda as a monastic founder, the Frisian tradition remembered the saint as a missionary who had worked to convert pagans to Christianity and as a martyr whose death had led to the conversion of the Frisians themselves. Boniface’s first Frisian hagiographer – Liudger – however, emphasised Boniface’s missionary work more than his martyrdom, focussing on his work in Hesse and Thuringia, and providing no narrative of the martyrdom: the saint’s commemoration as a martyr may have suffered somewhat from the loss of his relics to Fulda. VaB, however, emphasises the martyrdom so strongly that the event is foreshadowed throughout the text and Boniface is even said to have travelled to the continent specifically to achieve martyrdom. But the author of *VaB* did not neglect Boniface the missionary, even if he presented this aspect of Boniface’s work in an incredibly peculiar way: not so much as the work of a preacher – although he did refer to this role – but rather as a metaphorical struggle between Boniface the farmer and ‘Davidic warrior’ and a paganism represented in both Classical and Biblical language. So we can already see that while there was a Frisian way of commemorating Boniface, there was an on-going debate even here about exactly what his career meant. Let us now look, then, at what this priest from Utrecht had to tell his audience about Boniface’s life and its significance.

*Vita altera Bonifatii*’s narrative

The author begins his work with an introduction in which he discusses the importance of spiritual doctors for the healing of men’s inner maladies before highlighting the most important apostles and saints who preceded Boniface – of whom Martin receives particular

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12 Wood, *Missionary Life*.
13 *Vita altera*, 7.
attention – and finally outlining some of the general themes of Boniface’s life and work.\textsuperscript{14} The \textit{Life} proper begins with a statement about Boniface’s birth in Britannia, where the Angles live and whence Fursey and Willibrord came.\textsuperscript{15} He then has the saint travel to Frisia briefly before returning to Britannia in the face of ‘impudent opposition’, and then making his first journey to Rome.\textsuperscript{16} The saint then returns to Frisia via Germania and works with Willibrord.\textsuperscript{17} After leaving Frisia again Boniface travels once more to Rome, where he is made a bishop by Pope Gregory (II), who also advises him to return to Germania and convert the pagans there.\textsuperscript{18} While working in Germania Boniface makes a third visit to Rome, after which he turns his attention to the Franks, who give him the bishopric of Mainz.\textsuperscript{19} Finally, Boniface returns to Frisia, where he is killed.\textsuperscript{20} The narrative ends with a four-line verse commemorating the saint,\textsuperscript{21} although there follows a sort of \textit{apologia} in which the author defends the work against his critics, to which we shall have reason to return when we consider the text’s audience.\textsuperscript{22}

For anyone familiar with Boniface’s life as constructed from the combination of information found in Willibald’s \textit{Vita} and Boniface’s own letters, this summary does not sound too unfamiliar. Indeed, when reduced to its bare skeleton, \textit{VaB}’s narrative is essentially the same as that of Willibald’s \textit{Vita}. Both texts contain as their main narrative elements the saint’s first, failed, mission to Frisia, his three trips to Rome – and being made bishop during the second of these – his time spent with Willibrord, his work east of the Rhine and in the Frankish kingdoms, and his final journey to Frisia which resulted in his martyrdom, and these

\textsuperscript{14} Vita altera, 1-5.
\textsuperscript{15} Vita altera, 6.
\textsuperscript{16} Vita altera, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{17} Vita altera, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{18} Vita altera, 10.
\textsuperscript{19} Vita altera, 11.
\textsuperscript{20} Vita altera, 12-14.
\textsuperscript{21} Vita altera, 15.
\textsuperscript{22} Vita altera, 16-23.
occur in the same order in both. However, the threads and emphases connecting these events in the two texts are very different, and the chronology in VaB is much vaguer and more confused. As already suggested, though, it is these discrepancies which make the text so intriguing and worthy of study, and so we shall now elaborate on some of the more notable differences.

First, unlike Willibald, who provides a reasonably detailed account of Boniface’s life as a monk in Wessex, the author of VaB gives almost no information about Boniface’s life before his first journey to Frisia, beyond the fact that he was born in Britannia and was a respected teacher. By comparison, Liudger also did not give his audience any information about Boniface’s pre-continental life in Vita Gregorii, and even claimed that the saint had spent thirteen years in Frisia: we should see this as a sign of the authors attempting to focus on issues which were particularly relevant to them and their audience. Conversely, we actually receive more information about what Boniface did on his journey from Rome to Frisia in VaB, although it is not material to please a historian aiming to reconstruct the events of Boniface’s life. Where Willibald’s text has a brief section in which Boniface preaches to the peoples and rulers of Thuringia, the author of VaB presents us with a Germania that is utterly alien. Here we find a bizarre vision of people who had worshipped ‘demons and ghosts’ along with ‘fauns and satyrs called woodland gods’ and ‘dryads and dell-nymphs and other magical gods and portents.’ Most curiously of all, these are physical beings which Boniface is able to root out with his scythe before convincing the Christians to hang them. The strange depiction of paganism continues with Boniface’s second visit to Rome, where Pope Gregory charges him with a mission to return to Germania as a ‘Davidic warrior’ armed with ‘stones of divine law,’ to do battle with the ‘unremitting adversary’, the ‘false Cyclops’

23 Compare Willibald, Vita Bonifatii, 4-8, Vita altera, 7-15.
24 Willibald, Vita Bonifatii, 1-4.
25 Liudger, Vita Gregorii, 1.
26 Willibald, Vita Bonifatii, 5.
27 Vita altera, 8.
and ‘giant, who wished to tear down the whole of Israel.’\textsuperscript{28} Here, then, we have the eighth-century mission reimagined as the Biblical battle between David and Goliath. We are also told that Boniface would save ‘many thousands of souls from the throat of Leviathan’ before achieving martyrdom, furthering the Biblical metaphor.\textsuperscript{29}

Even where they seem to agree, however, there are differences between the two \textit{Lives}. Both describe Boniface’s three-year collaboration with Willibrord, although they do so in different ways. Whereas Willibald focusses on Willibrord’s attempt to convince Boniface to stay in Utrecht and become his successor,\textsuperscript{30} \textit{VaB} emphasises their unity and joint pastoral work, presenting them almost as equals.\textsuperscript{31} Likewise, while in Willibald’s \textit{Vita Boniface’s} work in Francia in the 740s is a focal point that dominates the end of the narrative, the author of \textit{VaB} describes not the famous reform councils organised in conjunction with Carloman and Pippin, but rather an almost military attack in which Boniface denounces the Franks and their sins.\textsuperscript{32} Finally, the chronology of Boniface’s final return to Frisia is incredibly confused in \textit{VaB}; the return was apparently inspired by a vision of Willibrord’s death, but this occurred in 739, while Boniface travelled to Frisia in 753.\textsuperscript{33} Likewise, the martyrdom itself is not presented as an event, but rather as another Biblical metaphor, this time comparing Boniface to St Paul, although the author later adds a clearer account. Let us now turn, then, to the meaning of these textual peculiarities by considering the author’s audience and message.

The audience and message of \textit{Vita altera Bonifatii}

At first sight it is difficult to determine who the author may have intended the audience of \textit{VaB} would be. After all, he clearly presents Boniface as a missionary in the Frisian tradition,
but his metaphors bear little if any resemblance to the realities of either Germanic paganism or missionary work. Yet even if this depiction was a literary construction by the author that implies he had no interest in the reality of the situation in Germania, it was nevertheless a key part of how his meant his work to be understood by its audience. But clearly the target audience was not the missionaries themselves, who would have immediately recognised the flaws in the author’s presentation, nor was it those who intended to become missionaries, since it contains little that would have been useful to them.

Fortunately, however, we know at least a little about VaB’s audience from the text itself, since the author appended to the text an apologia in which he responded to the complaints the brothers of the community had made after he read the Life to them. We thus know that the immediate audience for the text was the author’s own community, and it is worth exploring exactly what they complained about. Surprisingly from a modern perspective they did not take issue with the otherworldly narrative and imagery of the text, but rather with the lack of miracles, and they accused the author both of having misrepresented Boniface and of having deprived them of the usual material contained in a saint’s Life. The author responded that, in fact, he had represented Boniface perfectly, since the saint was not a worker of outward, physical miracles, but rather worked to cure men of their inner maladies, and he did this by teaching them the correct form of Christianity. At the same time, he admits that Boniface had performed miracles, and that the four places most closely associated with the saint – namely Mainz, Fulda, Utrecht and Dokkum – had all shown signs of Boniface’s favour since his death. He builds on this by arguing that miracles are in fact performed through faith rather than human agency. In fact, the author of VaB was not alone in being wary of miracles: Liudger’s Vita Gregorii contains little in the way of the miraculous, and Alfrid’s Vita Liudgeri is clearly divided into narrative and miraculous

34 Wood, Missionary Life, p. 105.
35 Vita altera, 18-23.
sections. While other ‘Bonifatian’ materials such as Willibald’s *Vita* and Eigil of Fulda’s *Vita Sturmi* also display a lack of concern for the miraculous, the trend seems to have found particular resonance in ninth-century Frisia. Nevertheless, the very fact that the author of VaB still had to defend his literary decision to work within this trend shows that there were some who expected wondrous miracles in their saints’ *Lives*, and it is unlikely this feeling was restricted to the clergy of St Martin’s Utrecht.

There are other aspects of VaB which show how its author was clearly engaged with the Frisian commemoration of Boniface, the most obvious being the way in which he portrayed Boniface as both a missionary and a martyr, and the emphasis he placed on the relationship between Boniface and Willibrord. These three aspects of the saint’s life were of course particularly relevant in Frisia, but in order to demonstrate how their use in VaB makes the text an exemplar of Frisian trends it is worth considering briefly the influence on Frisian hagiography of Willibrord’s hagiographer, Alcuin. The main thing to note is that Alcuin seems to have seen the writing of *Vita Willibrordi* as much as an opportunity to expound his own missionary ideology and theology as an opportunity to write a saint’s *Life*. Like VaB, *Vita Willibrordi* displays a wariness about miracles, and in fact provided the template for *Vita Liudgeri*’s division into narrative and miraculous sections. Unlike the author of VaB, though, Alcuin was also wary about the importance of martyrdom: this may be the reason why Boniface does not feature in the work, despite Alcuin’s commemoration of the saint elsewhere.

Alcuin’s influence on Frisian hagiography came from the fact that, along with Gregory of Utrecht, he was one of the teachers of Liudger, the man who inherited the joint missionary traditions of Boniface and Willibrord not only in the continuation of the mission.

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38 Wood, *Missionary Life*, p. 82.
into Saxony, but also in the way he composed his *Vita Gregorii*, which shows Alcuin’s misgivings about miracles and martyrdom – referring to Boniface as a martyr but providing no narrative of his death – yet also takes a more conciliatory approach to Willibrord and Boniface by mentioning both and claiming that the latter succeeded to the former’s episcopal seat of Utrecht when he returned to Frisia at the end of his life. Such an approach was also taken by Liudger’s own disciple Altfrid in his *Vita Liudgeri*, which mirrors *Vita Willibrordi* in many ways, but acknowledges Boniface’s missionary efforts.

To return to *VaB*, then, we should probably see its author as making a more extreme reaction to Alcuin’s influence than either Liudger or Altfrid. While he accepted the mistrust of miracles, and indeed was perhaps this sentiment’s most vocal advocate, he was also determined to make sure Frisia acknowledged the importance of Boniface’s martyrdom. He thus refers to Boniface as ‘holy martyr’ throughout the text, makes the martyrdom rather than missionary zeal Boniface’s primary reason for travelling to the continent, and foreshadows the event throughout. In keeping with the overall otherworldly feel of the text, though, we receive no martyrdom narrative in the *Life* proper. Instead what we find when Boniface returns to Frisia is a metaphorical comparison with St Paul’s journey to Miletus, even though such a comparison makes little sense, as we can see from what the author himself writes.40 What is most important for the author, though, is not the actual comparison of the events, but rather the spiritual comparison between the two saints, each of whom preached the word of God, and each of whom was killed for his efforts. However, the author does add the story about Boniface defending himself with a gospel book, which he explains he had learned from an old woman who had been present at the saint’s death.41

The other aspect of Frisian hagiography of which the author of *VaB* was a more vocal advocate than his contemporaries was in the matter of the relationship between Willibrord

40 *Vita altera*, 14.
41 *Vita altera*, 16.
and Boniface. While Alcuin had passed over this in silence, Willibald and Liudger had used it to discuss Boniface’s link to the bishopric of Utrecht and Altfrid had merely mentioned that both worked in the region, the author of *VaB* makes the relationship central to Boniface’s martyrdom. The link between Willibrord and Boniface is established in the period when the two work together in Frisia.\(^{42}\) What really drives home the importance of their relationship, though, is that while acting as bishop of Mainz Boniface receives a vision of Willibrord’s death, and it is this which allows him to know that the time for his return to Frisia and his martyrdom has come.\(^{43}\) It is worth stressing again that Willibrord died in 739 and Boniface returned to Frisia in 753. Nevertheless, when Boniface arrives in Utrecht we are treated to the most emotionally charged scene in *VaB*; an incredibly vivid depiction of Boniface mourning his fallen companion in the company of an angelic choir for several days. There can be no doubt, then, how this author felt about the relationship between these two missionary saints.

Yet there is another point to bear in mind when considering whether *VaB* was aimed at a wider Frisian audience, and this is that the author does not appear to have been particularly well inclined towards the region or its inhabitants. Boniface’s visits to Frisia in *VaB* contain some quite illuminating descriptions. We should not make too much of the ‘impudent opposition’ to Boniface’s first mission, since this was clearly a period when the conversion of Frisia was still underway and could not reflect on the author’s own time.\(^{44}\) On Boniface’s return, though, the matter is quite different, and the description worth quoting at length: Boniface ‘was carried back by ship to the Frisians, to whom he had already preached previously, they are wild and like fish live in lakes, by which they are surrounded on all sides, they have rarely entered foreign regions, unless they are conveyed by ships. The divine word-sower approached those who are remote from other nations and therefore brutish and

\(^{42}\) *Vita altera*, 9.

\(^{43}\) *Vita altera*, 13.

\(^{44}\) *Vita altera*, 7.
barbarous.' Note the persistent use of the present tense to show that the author believes the Frisian are still like this in his own day. Perhaps this was the point, though, and *VaB* was aimed at this barbarous people who had still not accepted the true significance of Boniface’s life and his sacrifice for the Frisians. This attitude is worth bearing in mind as we now turn to consider perhaps the most intriguing but also most complex aspect of *VaB*; the author’s portrayal of Boniface as a ‘Davidic warrior’.

**Boniface as David**

Of all the Biblical references in *VaB* the most striking is that comparing Boniface to David. The author makes this comparison three times, twice in the text itself, when he describes Boniface as a ‘Davidic warrior’ battling against Goliath, and once in his *apologia*, when he compares Boniface’s healing of men’s spiritual ills to David’s healing of Saul, although he refers here to medicinal knowledge, rather than the lyre-playing which actually healed Saul in the Biblical account. But what should we make of this insistence on Boniface being like David? My current theory is that we should see it as part of the author’s commentary on and disapproval of the wider world outside his community in Utrecht.

In the first *Vita Bonifatii* Willibald had consistently emphasised the relationship between Boniface and the Carolingian rulers. Such a relationship was also recognised by Alcuin and Bede, each of whom stressed that Willibrord began his missionary work with the support of Pippin II, as well as by Liudger and Altfrid in their own writings about the Frisian missionaries. No such relationship is found in *VaB*, however. In fact, with the exception of Pope Gregory II, none of Boniface’s contemporaries – either supporters or enemies – are named in the text. Instead of establishing himself with the support of the

45 *Vita altera*, 9.
46 *Vita altera*, 21. Cf. 1 Samuel, 16, 23.
49 Liudger, *Vita Gregorii*, 3-4, 10; Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, 22-4.
Carolingian dynasty and being opposed by its enemies, then, what we see in *VaB* is a Boniface who needs no secular support and battles with otherworldly enemies, fighting against paganism and heresy as concepts rather than individual pagans or heretics. Indeed, the imagery of Boniface’s work in Francia is equally militaristic as that of his work in Germania, with the saint setting up a camp on the Rhine before advancing ‘against the Franks and their innumerable indiscriminate sexual acts.’ Such military imagery fits well with the metaphor of Boniface as the warrior David battling against Goliath. Not only did he do battle with David’s enemy, he did so armed with David’s weapons of choice, the satchel and stones.

The author of *VaB* was, of course, not the first Christian writer to put the story of David in a Christian context. Augustine had also compared the patriarch’s encounter with Goliath to Christianity’s struggle against the Devil in his sermon on Psalm 144. However, while for Augustine and others David prefigured Christ, in *VaB* it was Boniface who was a second David. But perhaps the importance of the portrayal of Boniface as a second David was not just to show him as a spiritual warrior or healer, perhaps it was to contrast him with other leaders of the Christian community who had been compared to Biblical kings. Even during his own lifetime, Charlemagne was nicknamed ‘David’ by members of his court circle, and after his death chroniclers and poets were keen to continue this comparison. The comparison between the great warrior-kings was obvious enough, especially in contexts where the Frankish Empire could be seen as a ‘new Israel’, or the Franks as a new ‘Chosen People’, but the imagery of David and his son Solomon, to whom Charlemagne and Louis were also compared, contained a sacral aspect related to preaching, teaching and the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. This aspect could also be applied to the Carolingian rulers, since Charlemagne had spread Christianity through his conquests and Louis had strengthened the

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50 *Vita altera*, 11.
faith of the Franks themselves through his policy of *correctio*. Yet for the author of *VaB* this imagery was just as applicable to his version of Boniface, the man who had fought paganism not with an army at his back, but alone and armed only with stones, just as David had fought Goliath. This second David had also preceded the Carolingian attempts to reform the faith of the Franks, although the author presents a condensed and exaggerated version of this part of the saint’s career. In addition, unlike the Carolingians, who were kings with an interest in religion, Boniface was a priest, and his multi-faceted role as priest, bishop and spiritual warrior, may be what lies behind the author’s comparison of him to Melchizedek, a Biblical character referred to in Genesis and Psalms as both a priest and a king, and interpreted in the Letter to the Hebrews as the anticipation of the priesthood of Christ and justification of the abandonment of the Levitical priesthood and law. Thus, for this author it was Boniface, not Charlemagne or any other member of his family, who was the true leader of the faithful, the true defender of Christianity, and the strongest warrior in the battle against paganism and the Devil.

Yet while this may be a denunciation of the political-ecclesiastical world of the early-ninth century, it is ultimately part of that world’s discourse. After all, if we are right to imagine this author attempting to illustrate Boniface’s importance to a world which had not fully acknowledged it despite the saint’s efforts in life then we are not far removed from the discourse of *admonitio, correctio* and *parrhesia* that emerged in the first half of the ninth century. In *VaB* Boniface stands (almost) alone against paganism and the sins of the world: he is the good architect who builds faith with hope and an understanding of scripture and is the good farmer who nurtures the Catholic faith in place of faithlessness and encourages

virginity in place of passion and charity in place of avarice, in contrast with the builders and farmers of the authors own time who rely on gold and silver and are lax and sleep while others engage the plough. In such ways the author exhorts his audience to accept Boniface as their spiritual healer and rely on his guidance to show them the way to true faith.

Conclusions
The portrayal of Boniface in VaB is a complex one, and relies heavily on the author’s own view of the world. It combines a number of interconnected threads, particularly the Frisian mistrust of miracles and emphasis on Boniface the missionary and martyr with a somewhat distorted vision of the saint’s work outside Frisia. Given the survival of the saint’s own correspondence, as well as the much more historical Vita by Willibald, it is difficult to ascertain how widely accepted this ‘other’ Boniface would have been. Certainly, its dissemination appears to have been limited almost exclusively to the area around the lower Rhine, although a copy of the text was sent to Fulda by Bishop Radbod. Without doubt it is a fantastical work, especially in the vivid descriptions of Germanic paganism. Yet even if the author intended the text to stand as a metaphor for the significance of missionary activity and Boniface’s role on the continent, the extensive epilogue defending the work and explaining the meaning of its message suggest that he meant for the message to be taken seriously. Thus we have the mission against the pagans not written in terms of conversion, but in terms of a spiritual battle, with Boniface healing men of their sins and exhorting them to lead better lives and perhaps – as David – he also stands as the leader of God’s chosen people.