

Eastern Relics and Reliquaries in the Merovingian Realms and their Ways of Dissemination

The cult of saints during the Merovingian and Carolingian period has long been a topic of research¹. This practice cannot be separated from the general emergence of relics and saints' cults during Late Antiquity², but must be understood as a particular feature of the developing Frankish Christianity³. Based on the works of Gregory of Tours, M. Weidemann was able to list at least 120 different cults of local saints that were venerated in sixth century Gaul⁴; including additional sources, B. Beaujard counted more than 120 names of saints from Gaul that appeared for the first time in the written record during the sixth century⁵. At the end of the sixth and during the seventh century more cults emerged, and regional analyses show the high number of further saints, many of them anonymous⁶. Altogether these insights give a compelling impression of the great number of saints and their widely spread worship.

Several aspects concerning the development of veneration have been and still are a matter of discussion, some of which this article avoids discussing, for example the questions about saints as successors of antique heroes and as intermediaries for prayer⁷. Instead, keeping the general topics of religious exchange and identity in mind, this article focuses on a group of relics and their reliquaries that came to Merovingian Gaul from the East, from the regions ruled by the Byzantine Empire and its successors around the Eastern Mediterranean⁸. Apart from those of saints and martyrs like St Polycarp or St Stephen, the focus is especially on Holy Cross- and St Mary-relics as well as Apostles-relics.

Evidence of the cult of eastern saints in Late Roman and Merovingian Gaul has been already collected by E. Ewig, who pointed to the close links between Francia and the East based

on numerous records. M. McCormick emphasised the general importance of this evidence for the history of communication and commerce between these regions during the long Late Antiquity⁹. Very recently, T. Rotman analysed the accounts of eastern saints in the works of Gregory of Tours, with the aim of gaining deeper understanding of his hagiographical corpus¹⁰. In this contribution, the focus will be on understanding under which circumstances relics were transferred to the West, which people were involved in the transfer, and – based on the previous two points – which different avenues for the relics' dissemination can be identified. The basis for this is a comprehensive survey of the relics of eastern saints in the Frankish realms that have been documented in writing and/or in physical form. Lastly, this article shall outline the relics' function within the framework of Byzantine diplomacy.

To achieve a more comprehensive insight, it is necessary to consider not only the written sources, but also the material records that survived in the form of relic collections or as archaeological finds such as pilgrim flasks. But first of all, it is important to recall the general framework within which the cult of saints and their relics emerged, to understand how the circumstances in Gaul and beyond were a condition for the veneration of saints from abroad. This contribution therefore starts with an overview of the beginnings of the veneration of saints and the subsequent development of the cult of relics in general, which in turn is closely linked to the pilgrimage that emerged from the fourth century onwards. It is followed by a brief introduction to the general veneration of saints and relics in Gaul, before it discusses the relics of eastern saints found in the Merovingian Empire in detail.

1 Beginning with Beissel, Verehrung der Heiligen 11-30 (Die Reliquienverehrung der Franken).

2 Angenendt, Heilige und Reliquien. Seminal study: Brown, The cult of the Saints. For following, partly critical studies see Van Dam, Saints and their miracles 4 note 3. The topicality of this subject is shown by the current project »The cult of saints« at the university of Oxford, funded by the European Research Council: <http://cultofsaints.history.ox.ac.uk/> (15.06.2022) and by the international conference »Custodire il Sacro. Reliquari del primo millennio (IV-X secolo). Forme, funzioni, usi e contesti«, January 11th-12th 2021, published in *Temporis signa* 16, 2021, cf. Destefanis, Custodire il sacro.

3 Van Dam, Saints and their miracles 3-4; Weidemann, Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit 161. Perhaps triggered by the special circumstances in Gaul in a time of transition. Kitchen, Gregory of Tours 387-388.

4 Weidemann, Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit 172-181.

5 Beaujard, Culte des saints 247-248. 518-521 tables 2-5.

6 e. g. for Auvergne and Burgundy: Wood, Constructing cults.

7 cf. Angenendt, Heilige und Reliquien 21-22; Baumeister, Entstehung der Heiligenverehrung 10; Helvetius, Hagiographie und Heiligenverehrung 401; Klausner, Märtyrerkult 27-30.

8 For the following centuries and with a focus on the Late Byzantine period and the relics and reliquaries that have been transferred to France, especially after the sack of Constantinople in 1204, see Durand, Le projet de corpus (ibid. 154 n. 10. 173 with a reference to the most prominent relic transfers of the Merovingian period). With a focus on the Carolingian and middle Byzantine period: Klein, Eastern objects.

9 Ewig, Verehrung esp. 397; McCormick, Origins 283-318. For a critical review concerning the quality of communication connected to the evidence of movements across the Mediterranean see now Meier/Patzold, Qualifying Mediterranean connectivity 385-387.

10 Rotman, Hagiography 21-23 with further references dedicated to the hagiographical work of Gregory of Tours.

The Emerging Cult of Saints

Though it is not possible to identify a specific moment in time that can be defined as the starting point of the Christian cult of saints, the question of when Christians began to venerate holy people has been of course asked again and again¹¹. During the early phase of Christendom, the concept of holiness followed significantly a New Testament perception and referred to the whole community of people with Christian beliefs (*communio sanctorum*). This community in which all were held to be holy covered both the earthly and heavenly spheres, which were parted in the following centuries. At the end of this process, the term holy (*sanctus*) was only used for elected persons with undoubtedly Christian virtues who had already ascended to heaven and distinguished themselves from others by asceticism and miracles done¹².

It is therefore not surprising that giving one's life in the testimony of the Word of God and in the service of charity became a determining feature of holiness, which led to martyrs enjoying more and more public veneration. Though the term *martyr* initially meant the word-witness, it was first used in the martyrdom of St Polycarp († 156/167) to describe a person who died for his Christian belief. The Christian public saw the martyrs as perfect heavenly intercessors because they already stood at God's side¹³. But the importance of the testimony to God's word was not neglected in the face of the changing perception of martyrs. It remained a primary feature of the Apostles who, due to their ascetic way of life and their later veneration as martyrs, fulfilled all elementary aspects of the holiness ideal. Hence the Apostles were held as saints par excellence¹⁴.

But multiple ways leading to holiness existed. Soon persons who had confessed their Christian belief under the threat of death without having been killed gained the same appreciation as martyrs and were understood as *martyr ex voto*. A martyr-like status could also be achieved by a living person through asceticism, which was considered as a form of self-sacrifice. These different possibilities also became necessary because after the fourth century – when the Christian religion became tolerated (313) and later imposed as a kind of state religion (380) – no more persecution of Christians took place and the »opportunity« to suffer martyrdom vanished. St Martin of Tours († 397) was thus one of the first holy men whose life was described like a martyrdom »without

blood«¹⁵. In his description of the life of St Martin, Sulpicius Severus († ca. 420) emphasised two further important aspects of holiness: he described Martin as »*vir dei*« who possessed God-given power, the »*virtus*«, that enabled him to do miracles. This *virtus* was only granted to Martin because of his general God-fearing lifestyle and holy acts like prayers; it was not a power of his own. The concept of *vir dei* is well known since Antiquity and was also used by Athanasius in his description of the life of the Egyptian hermit Antonius († 356) – the first ever written vita of a saint –, who was very close to God because of his life far away from civilisation, his asceticism and his immovable confidence in God. He also received the *virtus*, which enabled him to do miracles and resist all temptations by the devil and demons¹⁶.

The veneration of saints soon developed into the veneration of holy relics which began to play an important role for Christian believers. A significant reason for this development was the function of intermediaries between heaven and earth that was ascribed to the saints themselves, although the New Testament had pronounced Jesus Christ as the only »mediator« between God and the faithful. However, the early writers of hagiographic texts did not seem to take much care about this factor, and thus the saints' role as intercessor – made possible mainly because of their *virtus* – became an integral part of their functions, both during their lifetime as well as after their entry into the Kingdom of Heaven¹⁷. Another important condition for the veneration of saints' relics was the development of a Christian doctrine that equated the dead body and the body emerging for resurrection. During early Christendom, there had been much discussion concerning the shape in which the dead would revive but, after the doctrine mentioned above was accepted, it followed logically that the bodies of the deceased had to be handled with much care, especially those of venerated persons, as those very bodies had once participated in performing miracles and had built a »home« for the *virtus*¹⁸. Hence the cult of holy people first developed around their graves – presumably during the second century AD – and remained tied to that specific place in the beginning. The community often established a holy day, in general on the date of the saint's martyrdom, when the venerated person was said to possess an even greater virtue. To benefit from the saint's power, people had to go to the place of his presence on earth, where his body and his *virtus* was omnipresent, in other words, his grave. Here they

11 Early examples: Lucius, *Die Anfänge des Heiligenkultes*; Delehay, *Les origines. Summing up the early history of research*: Hartl, *Leichen* 39-41. For a recent setting up concerning the research in the cult of saints: Brown, *Concluding remarks*.

12 Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 33-35. Still in the fifth and 6th c. the term *sanctus* could – depending on the context – be understood as »likely holy« as several inscriptions for bishops in Italy prove. Wegener-Rieckesmann, *Bischof Gaudiosus* 65-66.

13 Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 35-36; Baumeister, *Entstehung der Heiligenverehrung* 12-14; cf. Hartl, *Leichen* 41-43.

14 Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 38-39; Baumeister, *Entstehung der Heiligenverehrung* 14-16.

15 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 9; Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 55-56; Baumeister, *Entstehung der Heiligenverehrung* 20-23; Hartl, *Leichen* 153. Perhaps this conception was developed mainly in 4th c. Gaul, because of the principal lack of downright martyrs there. Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 115.

16 Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 69-72. The female pendant to *vir dei* is *famula dei*, cf. *ibid.* 93-96.

17 Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 80-83. The saints' function as intermediaries not only became more and more common in texts, but also in cult practice. This can be judged from graffiti and inscriptions with intercessions near the burial places of saints dating e. g. in Rome from the second half of the 3rd c. *ibid.* 106.

18 Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 108-111; cf. Hartl, *Leichen* 24-27 concerning the general care about dead members of the Christian community.

could pray for healing, for forgiveness or they could render thanks for miracles that had already happened. By at least touching the shrine or something else that had been in contact with the saint's body, it was possible to benefit from his virtues – this is the key aspect for the whole Christian concept of pilgrimage and the blossoming cult of relics during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages¹⁹.

The Cult of Relics and the Beginnings of Pilgrimage

The corpse of holy people often showed no sign of decomposition when the grave was opened, which of course was another clear sign of their holiness, as the same had been the case with Jesus Christ after his three-day deathlike silence. In the sources, the integrity of the body is especially pronounced for ascetics and martyrs – except for those who were put to death by decapitation. But in most other cases, the corpses had reportedly been found intact and, at the start of the booming cult of relics, efforts were apparently made to keep the bodies intact²⁰. However, there is a controversy concerning how intense the partition of the bodies of saints was actually practiced in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. For example, A. Angenendt argues that, at least in the sources, no clear notices of this practice can be found, whereas M. Hartl lists several examples of relic transfers that – according to the particular expressions used – are likely to have included body part relics. Already several decades ago, B. Kötting assumed that the partition of relics was well established around the middle of the fourth century²¹. A variation of this argument is related to an apparent general difference between East and West as far as the handling and partition of body relics in Late Antiquity is concerned. One point in favour of this perspective seems to come from a letter by Pope Gregory I, who had been asked by Empress Constantina in 594 to send him the head of St Paul for a newly built church she founded in Constantinople. In his answer, Gregory pretended that it was not allowed to disturb the holy graves. Moreover, he declared that the widespread practice of relic production in the East by dissecting holy bodies was not common in the West, where the use of contact relics was more established.

However, F. Carlà-Uhink recently stressed that this argument was a construct by Gregory who tried to keep the treasure of holy relics in Rome intact and at the same time to avoid any diplomatic conflicts. Actually, the exchange and production of body relics was a common practice in the church of the East and the West²².

Only Rome itself could have been an exception, because *dismembrationes* were avoided during Late Antiquity and only very few people were considered important enough to receive body relics originating from there²³. Constantinople, on the other hand, was dependent on relics from abroad due to a lack of its own suitable martyrs or other holy people. Therefore, different emperors took care to »import« an adequate amount, developing the capital into one of the leading repositories of relics²⁴. Moreover, the case of protomartyr St Stephen provides a vivid example of the partition of a holy corpse right after its discovery in 415²⁵.

Regardless of the question concerning when this practice of dismemberment began and was later accepted by the church, the veneration of relics began to rise more and more. One of the first theological texts dedicated to the phenomena of relics, written by bishop Victricius of Rouen († ca. 407), provides insights into why, while also laying way for the practice of relic partitions: Victricius supposed that a saint is virtually present in every part of his dead body and, furthermore, that the above mentioned *virtus* is still active also in the earthen remnants, which is proven by numerous examples of miracles and healings that happened near relics and were obviously caused by them²⁶. Finally, the power described was not restricted to the saint's body, but extended also to all objects that had been in contact with it during the saint's lifetime or after his death. As a result, the cult of relics witnessed an enormous boom from Late Antiquity onwards. Pilgrims took best efforts to reach the resting places where holy people had been buried and many Christians were eager to get »body relics« or at least »contact« and/or »secondary relics« that promised healing as well as protection from temptation, diseases or demons for the Christian community or family who possessed the holy artefact²⁷. J. Wortley recently argued that the Christian Gospels always emphasise bodily contact when a healing ministry is being exercised; this point could be one of the reasons why Christians were so focused

19 Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 132-135; Kötting, *Reliquienkult* 8-9.

20 Of course there are – few – exceptions, e. g. concerning body parts growing again like nails, hair or teeth. Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 150-154.

21 Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 150-154; Hartl, *Leichen* 72-74; Kötting, *Reliquienkult* 23.

22 Carlà-Uhink, *Differenz als Argument* 11-14 with full citation and translation of Gregory's letter.

23 The importance of the relics for the status of Rome concerning church policy interests seems to have played the crucial role. Carlà-Uhink, *Differenz als Argument* 16-17; Hartl, *Leichen* 119-121; Schmitz-Esser, *Der Leichnam* 126; Weiss-Krejci, *Märtyrer, Heilige und Körperreliquien* 144.

24 Carlà-Uhink, *Differenz als Argument* 11; Hartl, *Leichen* 161-170; Mergiali-Sahas, *Byzantine emperors* 42-43; Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques* 391-394.

25 Carlà-Uhink, *Differenz als Argument* 16; Hartl, *Leichen* 180-183.

26 Victricius, *De laude sanctorum* esp. 8-9; Hartl, *Leichen* 95-97. Kötting, *Reliquienkult* 23 emphasises that the theologians thereby sanctified the partition of relics; Schmitz-Esser, *Der Leichnam* 125-126. Carlà-Uhink, *Differenz als Argument* 15 points to further contemporaneous authors who also used this argument more or less clearly: Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-ca. 395), Chromatius of Aquileia († ca. 406/407), Theodoret of Cyrhus (393-ca. 458/466) and Paulinus of Nola (ca. 352-431). See also the sources quoted by Kötting, *Reliquienkult* 24 n. 80.

27 Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien* 154-159; Hartl, *Leichen* 79-83. For early relics owned by private persons see Hartl, *Leichen* 77-79. Carlà-Uhink, *Differenz als Argument* 16 n. 39 distinguishes between »first class« relics (parts of the saints' bodies), »second class« relics (objects that have been in direct contact with holy people during their lifetime) and »third class« relics (objects that have been in contact with the body of the saints after their death). Cf. Carlà, *Exchange and the saints* 411.

on access to physical body parts²⁸. The remains of the holy people then were a substantial and comprehensible connection between the Christians and the saints in heaven. The cult that developed around the relics was an important element for the distribution of the Christian thought among people for whom theological details were difficult to understand²⁹. Therefore, a relic's authenticity was of high importance, and the church was always anxious to prevent forgeries or even the possession of relics by persons of ill repute³⁰. Even so, once clerical authorities had decided about the authenticity of a relic – or the piece itself proved it by working miracles around it³¹ – the question of authenticity or falseness was not asked any more by the believers³².

These considerations notwithstanding, the pilgrimage phenomenon emerging during the fourth century must not be separated from another triggering event that is said to have taken place around 326/327: Empress Helena's journey to Palestine, which included the discovery of the True Cross and relics of the three biblical Magi. Indeed, Christian travelers visited Palestine already during the second and third centuries, but only for the reason of bible exegesis. Downright Christian pilgrimage can only be proven to have happened for the time after Helena's visit and the beginning of the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre shortly before it (consecrated in 335)³³. The actual reasons for Helena's journey shall not be discussed here³⁴. For the history of pilgrimage, it is of greater interest to ask when other pilgrims began to walk in her footsteps through the holy land and when the veneration of the True Cross and/or parts of it as a relic started. Concerning the latter point, the catechesis of bishop Cyrill of Jerusalem (ca. 315-387), written around 348/350, is essential, because he is the first to mention relics of the True Cross. The text even points out that, already at the time of

its composition, nearly the whole world was filled with them, but it does not connect the discovery of the True Cross with St Helena³⁵. Consequently, H. A. Klein has assumed that the finding of the True Cross took place between 330 and 350 and was only subsequently related to Helena³⁶. And indeed, the first written reports about Helena's discovery can only be dated to the end of the fourth century, though it seems probable that by then they had already been circulating as »oral history« for a while. The connection between the True Cross and the emperor's family was crucial for imperial religious policy and a key to the distribution of Christian belief in the Roman Empire³⁷. At least from the end of the fourth century, the veneration of the True Cross can be demonstrated by relying on other sources like the pilgrimage report of Egeria, who describes correspondent relics in the church of the Holy Sepulchre³⁸. Even small pieces of the wood were seen as containing the power of the whole cross, or so reports Paulinus of Nola³⁹ – a striking parallel to the contemporaneously evolving opinion that even small relics of saints carry as much *virtus* as the whole body (see above).

The general pilgrimage to the Holy Land started shortly after Helena's journey. The first to be unquestionably a pilgrim was a person from Bordeaux around 333⁴⁰. Obviously, the first pilgrimages headed for the biblical places in Palestine, but soon the burial sites of martyrs all around the Mediterranean became part of the itinerary, too⁴¹. This new level of appreciation for the saints' bodies had consequences for the arrangement of their graves and their handling. In fact, the graves of martyrs had been focal points of veneration already from the second century onwards and soon were provided with corresponding structures⁴²; however, only from the time of Constantine I churches were built upon the burial places of martyrs and saints⁴³. Several graves of Apostles

28 Wortley, *Origins of Christian veneration* 10-11. He also suggests that the fundamental change concerning the Christian attitude towards the dead body compared with e.g. the former Jewish or Roman tradition was inspired by the Egyptian practice of mummifying and showing the bodies especially of venerated deceased persons. *Ibid.* esp. 25-28.

29 Helvetius, *Hagiographie und Heiligenverehrung* 405.

30 McCormick, *Origins* 287-288.

31 Miracles that cause cure from diseases are a main theme e.g. in the writings of Gregory of Tours. Kitchen, *Gregory of Tours* 376-377. 393-402.

32 Legner, *Reliquien* 49-54; Schreiner, *Zum Wahrheitsverständnis*. It is therefore not crucial for this contribution to analyse if e.g. all recorded fragments of the True Cross actually came from the wooden remains in Jerusalem, Apamea or Constantinople (or whether these really were the residuals of the cross Jesus Christ was crucified with). People perceived the relics as real holy remains with all their effects evoked by their still active *virtus*. Or as E. Weiss-Krejci put it: »Auch sind Zweifel an der Authentizität so mancher Reliquie angebracht [...]. Allerdings tut dies der Verehrung der Reliquie durch die Gläubigen keinen Abbruch, [...]«. Weiss-Krejci, *Märtyrer, Heilige und Körperreliquien* 137. – In a recent study relics from medieval relic shrines in Belgium were analysed with anthropological observations, radiocarbon dating and stable-isotope analysis leading to the remarkable result that the age of many body relics more or less matched the presumable life dates of the saints. Insofar a large-scale production of forged relics could not be proven. Van Strydonck, *Anthropology and ¹⁴C analysis*. Also following this approach: Van Strydonck, *Relics @ the lab*. – In this context, it is essential to refer to the scientific investigations of the head relic of St Paulinus of Trier that have been undertaken since 2021. Amongst others, a radiocarbon dating could prove a date between 254 and 412 what fits well to the supposed year of the saint's death 358. Further results confirmed a Late Antique funeral context and even a reference to Asia Minor, where Paulinus

spent his exile before his demise. Teegen, *Anthropologisch-pathologische Untersuchungen* 52; Reifarth/Schu, *Untersuchungen*.

33 Ritter, *Zwischen Glaube und Geld* 49.

34 Of course, Eusebius of Caesarea stylizes her to the first pilgrim in Palestine (Eusebius, *De vita Constantini* III, 120-123), but it is assumed that the true reasons for her journey are to be found in the political and social needs of the time without neglecting the support for the distribution of the Christian belief, cf. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta* 55; Heussler, *De Cruce Christi* 26 with corresponding references.

35 Haeuser, *Des Heiligen Cyrillus Bischofs von Jerusalem Katechesen* 67; Wortley, *Wood of the True Cross* 3. 6-7.

36 Klein, *Byzanz* 22-23; see also Wortley, *Wood of the True Cross* 5 limiting the possible timespan of the True Cross' »discovery« to 335 until 347 (following Leclercq).

37 Helena's discovery is mentioned e.g. by Ambrosius of Milan in his funeral eulogy on Theodosius I (379-395) and by Gelasius of Caesarea in his ecclesiastical history. Heussler, *De Cruce Christi* 27-28; Wortley, *Wood of the True Cross* 5-6.

38 *Itinerarium Egeriae* XXXVII, 2. cf. Wortley, *Wood of the True Cross* 8-9.

39 Paulinus, *Epistulae* 32.

40 *Itinerarium burdigalense*; Eichner, *Pilgerwege* 42-43 fig. 1.

41 Ritter, *Zwischen Glaube und Geld* 27.

42 The architectural arrangement in the so-called Red Wall in the Roman cemetery beneath St Peter in Rome obviously served as a *memoria* for the tomb of St Peter (known as *tropaion* from the written record). It belongs to the second half of the 2nd century AD and is the oldest known sanctuary for a martyr at all. Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen* 93-94. In Cimitile/Nola (IT) a small mausoleum was erected between 303 and 305 above the tomb of the confessor Felix. Following D. Korol it is the earliest known closed building with this purpose so far. Korol, *Wandmalerei* 20-21; Lehmann, *Paulinus Nolanus* 35-36.

43 Hartl, *Leichen* 51-52.

were also presented to the believers in similar fashion⁴⁴. Certainly, the growing crowd of pilgrims visiting the burial sites and churches forced the local clergy to modify the buildings again and again. At the same time, more and more Christians tried to receive burial places for themselves next to the graves of martyrs and saints (*ad sanctos*)⁴⁵.

From the middle of the fourth century onwards, another development crucial for the exchange of saints' relics in the following centuries and therefore a precondition for the transfer of relics from the East to the West took place. If R. W. Burgess arguments are correct, the first recorded *translatio* of the remains of holy men – in this case Andrew the Apostle and Luke the Evangelist – took place already in 336 and was organized by emperor Constantine I (306-337) for his newly built church in Constantinople, which was dedicated to the holy Apostles and was intended to soon become his mausoleum⁴⁶. However, we tread on safer ground only when considering the martyr and bishop Babylas from Antioch († ca. 253), whose mortal remains were removed from the grave and transferred to a newly built church in Daphne, a suburb of Antioch, around 350, on behalf of Caesar Constantius Gallus (ca. 325/326-354)⁴⁷. A multitude of *translationes* were due to follow⁴⁸. A very early and prominent one was organised by bishop Ambrosius of Milan (339-397). He transferred the bodies of St Gervasius and St Protasius to the altar of his new built *basilica Martyrum* and/or *Ambrosiana* in 386⁴⁹; in 395, he did the same with the body of St Nazarius, which was transferred to the *basilica Apostolorum*⁵⁰. This mobility was a new form of handling saints' bodies and showed that holy body relics could be transported from one place to another. It was also an expression of a fundamental change

concerning the traditional Roman opinion about the impurity of death that was now almost turned into the opposite by the Christians. Still in the 380s, the Roman Empire tried to stop the establishing practice of burial grounds within the cities, as well as the *elevatio*, transfer, and at least partition of saints' bodies through two edicts. It was too late, obviously⁵¹. During the next centuries the *elevatio* and *translatio* of saints developed into normal acts and already the Codex Iustinianus contains an adjustment of the former law that admits the transfer of relics on behalf of the emperor⁵². The relics were first deposited in the altar or beneath it; later they were often placed in shrines behind the altar⁵³. The opinion that every altar and/or every church should be equipped with relics became more and more common, to the point that it was considered noteworthy in sixth century Gaul if an altar did not have appropriate ones⁵⁴.

The Veneration of Saints in Late Antique and Frankish Gaul

As argued by B. Beaujard in her large-scale study on the cult of saints in Gaul, the veneration of martyrs and/or saints developed later there than in Italy, North Africa or the Roman East. Of course, Eusebius of Caesarea (260/264-339/340), in his *Historia ecclesiastica* describes the martyrdom of Christian people in Lyon already in 177, on the basis of a letter sent to Asia Minor by the local Christian community of Lyon⁵⁵; however, no contemporaneous written source informs about these incidents, and additional Christian saints or martyrs from Gaul are not mentioned by Eusebius⁵⁶. Empress Helena's

44 Ewig, Verehrung 388-389.

45 Hartl, Leichen 69-70; Kötting, Reliquienkult 24-28; Schmitz-Esser, Der Leichnam 65-70 with a differentiated assessment of conditions in urban centres and rural areas, where the burial on the cemetery around the parish church and *ad sanctos* was obviously slower to catch on; Weiss-Krejci, Märtyrer, Heilige und Körperreliquien 142 points to the earliest proven burial *ad sanctos* that shall have taken place in today Algeria between 309 and 338.

46 Burgess, The Passio S. Artemii; Effenberger, Prokopius 260-262 with further references. The most common date for the *translatio* of these two saints and St Timothy is 356 and 357 under emperor Constantius II (337-362), cf. Kötting, Reliquienkult 18; Woods, Date of the translation; Wortley, The earliest relic-importations 214-220; Cronnier, Les inventions de reliques 117. For a recent discussion concerning the relation of the holy Apostles church and the mausoleum of Constantine I: Asutay-Effenberger/Effenberger, Porphyrsarkophage 99 passim. – Asklepiä, a distinguished Christ from Salona, already transferred the corpse of St Anastasius the fuller (304) right after his death to her property and erected later above his tomb a mausoleum for her family, whereby she ensured a burial *ad sanctos*. Presumably this was no translation *sensu stricto*. Kötting, Reliquienkult 14; Baumeister, Entstehung der Heiligenverehrung 19-20. – This also applies to two other early translations: Pope Fabian transferred his predecessor Pontianus who died in his exile on Sardinia in 235, back to Rome where he was buried in the catacombs of Calixtus next to the other Roman bishops. At the end of the 3rd c., the matron Pompeiana acquired the corpse of St Maximilianus to have him around in her house as a protector, what reminds of the purpose of antique *lares*. Schmitz-Esser, Der Leichnam 123. – For Murighiol, the antique Halmyris (RO), the long-term excavator M. Zahariade assumed an early basilica with a burial vault underneath the sanctuary, where the martyrs Epictet and Astion, who had been executed on site in 290 or 303, had been transferred to before the middle of the 4th c. If the early date really can be proven this would be the earliest evidence of a saint's *translatio* on the basis of an archaeological record. Zahariade, The Halmyris episcopal basilica esp. 149-157; Weiss-Krejci, Märtyrer, Heilige und Körperreliquien 143.

47 Hartl, Leichen 71. 142-145; Kötting, Reliquienkult 17; Wortley, The earliest relic-importations 211-214 assuming the transfer having been between 351 and 354.

48 Hartl, Leichen 163-165 n. 856; Schmitz-Esser, Der Leichnam 125. – Generally on the steps from *revelatio* to *inventio* and the deposition of the relics at a new place: Cronnier, Les inventions de reliques 189-266.

49 Angenendt, Heilige und Reliquien 167; Kötting, Reliquienkult 19-20; Hartl, Leichen 54 passim with a description of *inventio*, *translatio* and *depositio* of the saints' relics and the attempt of Ambrosius to use this event against the Arians of Milan.

50 Hartl, Leichen 49-51. These procedures are interpreted as deliberate acts by Ambrosius to promote a local Christian identity in Milan. Moreover, it helped the Christians to build a connection with the early Christendom of the pre-Constantine era that had to suffer severe prosecution and therefore had been in a completely different situation compared with the church after 380.

51 Carlà-Uhink, Differenz als Argument 15; Hartl, Leichen 85-91; Kötting, Reliquienkult 21; Schmitz-Esser, Der Leichnam 124; Weiss-Krejci, Märtyrer, Heilige und Körperreliquien 143; Wortley, The earliest relic-importations 210-211 pointing also to an edict of Constantius from 357.

52 Codex Iustinianus 3.44.14. Carlà-Uhink, Differenz als Argument 15.

53 Angenendt, Heilige und Reliquien 172-177; Hartl, Leichen 64-65; Schmitz-Esser, Der Leichnam 125 emphasizes the importance of bishop Ambrosius of Milan concerning the connection of altar and the martyr's tomb or relic that became obligatory after the translations conducted by him; Yasin, Sacred installations.

54 Angenendt, Heilige und Reliquien 168-169.

55 Eusebius, Historia 5, 1.

56 Beaujard, Culte des saints 23. Eusebius describes that the martyrs of Lyon have been cremated and that their ashes have been scattered in the River Rhône in the end to avoid the emergence of their veneration – if this is no addition by Eusebius writing from his perspective a long time after the incidents in Lyon it could be a hint that the veneration of martyrs was not completely unknown in Gaul at the end of the 2nd c., cf. Hartl, Leichen 44; Wood, The cult of saints 258; Rotman, Hagiography 16.

already described journey to the Holy Land with the discovery of the True Cross evoked a boom of pilgrimage that also affected the West: journeys were undertaken to the holy places to the sites of relics around the Eastern Mediterranean, as can be inferred from the pilgrim from Bordeaux in 333 and later fourth century travels like the journey of Egeria⁵⁷. However, it is not possible to make a clear statement about the amount of relics the pilgrims brought back from the East. Hence, B. Beaujard chooses to define the time before 406 only as the »prehistory« of the cult of martyrs in Gaul⁵⁸.

Hilarius of Poitiers (ca. 315-367) was thus the first Christian author from Gaul who was occupied with martyrs, and Martin of Tour (316/317-397) together with Victricius of Rouen – later themselves venerated as saints – can be understood as the first bishops who established a downright cult of saints in their cities⁵⁹. Until the middle of the fifth century, this new form of Christian cult practice grew more and more in importance despite – or perhaps because of – the difficult political circumstances of Roman Gaul in this time⁶⁰.

During the second half of the fifth century, when the institutions of the public administration vanished and the bishops in the cities of Gaul (fig. 1) more and more took over the role of community leaders, the relics of saints and especially of Gallic martyrs grew even more in importance, not least as defenders of the particular *civitates*. B. Beaujard lists several examples like Lyon, Arles and Autun – not to mention the beginning of pilgrimage to Tours –, and emphasises the fact that the relationship between the Gallic dioceses and the papal see in Rome grew stronger during this period, too⁶¹. The last decades of the fifth century, after the end of the Western Roman Empire and the concurrent end of the prefecture of Gallia, was a time of uncertainties with different players in Gaul – Romans, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Franks and Burgundians – who also held different Christian and also non-Christian beliefs. Until the middle of the sixth century, the royal family of the Merovingians was able to expand the realm of the Franks and to establish themselves as rulers in almost the entire Gaul. Crucial for the religious life was the baptism of the Merovingian king Clovis in Reims by St Remigius, which took place between 497 and 508 and ensured a strong Christian tradition in his realm. The bishops saw in Clovis the hope for a Christian future for Gaul, and Clovis and his supporters saw the advantages of an alliance

with the Christian God for the fate of their kingdom⁶². But disregarding Clovis' political strategy, the cult of saints was supported also by the royal families of the other *gentes* in their territories, and this trend continued after the Merovingians dominated nearly all regions in Gaul, so that after half a century the cults had become an integral part of political life⁶³. This was also a result of the bishops' activities, as elevating the importance of saints was central to their political action during the whole sixth century⁶⁴.

This particular attitude towards the cult of saints especially from the sixth century onwards certainly distinguished Frankish Christianity from other Christian regions. B. Beaujard counts more than 120 names of saints from Gaul that appear for the first time in the written record during the sixth century⁶⁵. This development was not only driven by the religious needs of the faithful, the strategies of the bishops concerning politics and the Christianisation of the countryside, and the royal Merovingian family, but also by the nobility. Indeed, a couple of saints had been members of noble families and their worship simultaneously implied a reverence for the families concerned. As a result, several aristocratic families and saintly cults competed on the social and political scene in the bigger *civitates* of Frankish Gaul. According to I. Wood, cults with a comparable structure and importance to that in Tours (St Martin) were, for example, situated in Brioude (St Julian) and Dijon (St Benignus), both supported by the same aristocratic family Gregory of Tours also belonged to⁶⁶. But except for these cities, which were simple centres dominated by a single cult and a single noble family, one can recognize a different model in more complex cities like in Clermont or Vienne. Even our warrantor Gregory of Tours does not give much information about the unquestionable important cults of St Genoveva and St Denis in Paris and St Marcellus in Chalon-sur-Saône, which were supported by the Merovingian family and therefore could present a threat to the cult of Gregory's beloved Martin⁶⁷. However, even those cities blessed with a higher number of saints like Arles, Autun, Auxerre, Clermont, Lyon or Paris had not more than five holy places in total⁶⁸.

Of course, most of the indigenous saints were only important at a local level (as for example in Clermont⁶⁹). In the second half of the sixth and during the seventh century, further cults appeared or better were created⁷⁰, for example

57 Itinerarium burdigalense; Egeria, Itinerarium; Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 47-48. 51.

58 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 54.

59 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 56-72. Concerning the nebulous record of the early veneration of the Theban Legion in Agaunum/Saint-Maurice (CH) with the discovery of the relics by a bishop Theodore and a possible first basilica housing the martyrs' relics and built at the end of the fourth c. see *ibid.* 72-73.

60 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 101.

61 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 126 and *passim*; see also Beaujard, *Cités, évêques et martyrs*.

62 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 147-148. For the discussion of this event see *ibid.* 148 n. 2; Quast, *Chlodwig* 250-251 with n. 79-80 for references about chronology and importance of the baptism.

63 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 152 *passim*, esp. 175. – See now Stüber, *Der heilige Medard, on the cult of Medardus*, strongly supported by the Merovingian king Chlothar I in Soissons. *Ibid.* 234-235 on further examples (Clovis I supporting the cult of St Genevieve and Childebert I supporting the cult of St Vincent in Paris, Guntram I supporting the cult of Marcellus in Chalon-sur-Saône).

64 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 151 »Le culte des saints est donc au VI^e siècle au centre de leur action«.

65 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 247-248. 518-521 tables 2-5.

66 Wood, *Topographies of holy power* 139-142.

67 Wood, *Topographies of holy power* 148-149. On the rivalry of *civitates*, but also within a single city (Lyon) see also Wood, *The cult of saints* 260. 268-269.

68 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 259.

69 Wood, *Constructing cults* esp. 168.

70 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 185-190. 197-199.



Fig. 1 Episcopal seats in Frankish Gaul. – (Map J. Drauschke; redrawn after Picard, *Les évêques bâtisseurs* 46).

the cult of St Servatius in Maastricht⁷¹; however, at least at the end of the sixth century the cult of saints was still concentrated more or less in the *civitates* due to the corresponding activities of the bishops, and had thus not affected all regions of Gaul⁷².

Relics and Reliquaries from the East

Given the numerous local Gaulish saints and the distribution of their cults, it seems inevitable that foreign saints are seldom found⁷³. Here we focus on saints from the East who

71 Theuvs, *Archaeology and history* esp. 36-40.
72 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 259.

73 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 251.

lived, died and have been buried and venerated in the regions around the Eastern Mediterranean⁷⁴. The following overview (fig. 2) lists the eastern saints whose relics are proven to have appeared also in Frankish Gaul. It is based mainly on the written record of the fifth until the end of seventh/beginning of eighth century. Where available, material remains and the archaeological record concerning the context of the specific relics are described. Earlier evidence of relics from eastern saints definitely exists, but remains sparse. Victricius of Rouen for example lists in his *De laude sanctorum*, presumably written around 396, the relics of saints already present in Rouen, among them John the Baptist, the Apostles Andrew and Thomas, St Euphemia of Chalcedon, and Luke the Evangelist⁷⁵.

Still, evidence for relics of eastern saints remains rare, even though many churches with eastern patrons can be found as early as the fourth and fifth century. In most cases it is not clear whether those churches also possessed corresponding relics. As mentioned above, the existence of relics was obviously expected by the public by the sixth century at the latest⁷⁶. Was this also the case in earlier centuries? Scholars occupied with this topic have answered the question differently, but tend to be doubtful about the existence of relics as a precondition for the dedication of a church⁷⁷. The written sources do not provide a clear picture until a general order to equip all churches with corresponding relics was issued by the second ecumenical council of Nicaea in 787⁷⁸. The question cannot be answered here, though the record of the relevant patrons will be considered, because the worship of oriental saints and its dissemination in Merovingian Gaul is an important framing for the perception and impact of specific relics. Invaluable infor-

mation about the early patrons and dedications of cathedrals, baptisteries, further basilicas, and monasteries⁷⁹ in Late Antiquity and Frankish Gaul was already collected and evaluated by E. Ewig, and published in several articles⁸⁰.

The survey of relics and reliquaries of eastern saints shall begin with the records of martyrs. Already the first example clarifies the divergence between the spread of a saint's patronage and the recorded presence of his relics. Following E. Ewig, it should be expected that every episcopal church complex possessed a baptistery, which was usually dedicated to **St John the Baptist**, whose grave was said to have been in Sebaste/Samaria and whose head-relic was transferred to Constantinople in 391⁸¹. Moreover, cemetery basilicas were also dedicated to St John from early on⁸². Considering the numerous episcopal seats already in place by the end of the fourth century – as conveyed by the *Notitia Galliarum*⁸³ – it must be assumed that St John the Baptist was well known to the early Christian believers in Gaul. Additionally, E. Ewig lists eight (cemetery) basilicas with John the Baptist as patron, including those in Fourvière/Lyon, Reims, Chalon or Dijon. Further evidence exists for seven monasteries, e.g. in Angers, Arles and Autun, and another seven examples with John as a co-patron like in Limeux or Meaux. Also numerous rural churches outside the *civitates* must be taken into account⁸⁴, and cathedrals must be considered, too. E. Ewig mentions Bazas, Belley, Lyon, Maurienne, Valence and possibly Aire. In Tours and Aosta (IT) the Saint is proven as co-patron⁸⁵. Unfortunately, the written evidence is not clear enough in some cases to distinguish between St John the Baptist and the Apostle. Therefore, the exact dedication of some further churches is unclear and still debated⁸⁶.

74 Ewig describes the situation of the Apostles graves during the 4th c. when they were shown in Jerusalem (Jacob), Ephesus (John), Hierapolis (Philip), Alexandria (Marcus), Patras (Andrew), and Theben (Lucas). The grave of John the Baptist was located in Sebaste (Samaria) before its destruction. His head was translated to Constantinople in 391 by Theodosius I, where Constantius II had already placed the mortal remains of Andrew and Lucas in 357. Thomas was translated to Edessa in 394 and Justinian I built a church for Bartholomev in Dara. Ewig, Verehrung 388-389. Of course, there exist border cases like St Clement who – following later legends and not the oldest sources on his life – is said to have suffered his martyrdom on the Crimea after having been bishop of Rome. Clement was rather known as a saint in Merovingian Gaul, but contemporaneous relics cannot be proven except for possible *brandea* in the monastery of Aredius in Attane/Saint-Yrieix-la-Perche. Beaujard, Culte des saints 254. Concerning the worship of St Clement in Gaul and the fate of his relics, see now Albrecht, Svatopluk's Stäbe 219-223.

75 Victricius, *De laude sanctorum* 6.

76 Kötting, Reliquienkult 24; Weidemann, Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit 181.

77 Analysing the record of relics and churches dedicated to the holy Apostles, St Peter and Paul or only Peter, Beaujard concludes that »La presence de reliques ne se manifeste pas obligatoirement par un patronage et vice versa.« and Ewig assumed that a transfer of relics was originally not combined with these dedications. Beaujard, Culte des saints 258; Ewig, Verehrung 389; Ewig, Kathedralpatrozinien 4; c.f. Wortley, The earliest relic-importations 213: »This is a most difficult question to answer. [...] can it be assumed that whenever an oratory was dedicated to a particular saint, the building necessarily sheltered relics of that saint?« – In contrast Ewig once emphasized, that the dedication to the Holy Cross certainly was tight to the possession of a corresponding relic. Ewig, Kathedralpatrozinien 6.

78 Jastrzębowska/Heydasch-Lehmann, Reliquiar 1146; Kötting, Reliquienkult 24. – The synod of Carthage in 324 obviously pronounced the connection between altar and saints' bodies for the first time. Weiss-Krejci, Märtyrer, Heilige und Körperreliquien 144.

79 One must be aware that in early Medieval sources of the West a clear differentiation between different types and functions of sacral buildings cannot be found, normally the terms *ecclesia* and *basilica* are used. Ristow, Grab und Kirche 214. The terms used in this article can therefore not claim to represent a distinguished function of the mentioned building.

80 Ewig, Kathedralpatrozinien; Ewig, Petrus- und Apostelkult; Ewig, Verehrung.

81 Cronnier, Les inventions de reliques 68-69. 85-86; Michl, Johannes der Täufer.

82 Ewig, Kathedralpatrozinien 16; Ewig, Verehrung 388. – In contrast Beaujard notices only a minor importance of St John in Gaul. Beaujard, Culte des saints 256.

83 *Notitia Galliarum*. At least 123 cities are mentioned for Gaul, cf. the map of episcopal seats in Merovingian Gaul based on the *Notitia Galliarum* in Picard, Les évêques bâtisseurs 46. – On the early church organisation in Gaul and its development in the 6th c.: Hen, The church 238-244.

84 Ewig, Kathedralpatrozinien 16; Ewig, Petrus- und Apostelkult 219. 222. 236. – For Arles see now the testament of Caesarius of Arles: B. Savill, Cult of Saints, E06932 – <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06932> (07.07.2020).

85 Ewig, Kathedralpatrozinien 16.

86 e.g. for the Marmoutier monastery in Tours, built by the local bishop Volusianus (491-498), and for a church in Dijon. Marmoutier monastery: Greg. Tur. Hist. X, 31. For the different interpretations see Beaujard, Culte des saints 255, and URL: K. Wojtalik, Cult of Saints, E02393 – <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02393> (06.07.2020). – Concerning the church in Dijon: Greg. Tur. Liber vitae patrum 7,4-5; URL: M. Tycner, Cult of Saints, E00055 – <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00055> (07.07.2020); M. Tycner / B. Ward-Perkins, Cult of Saints, E00053 – <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00053> (07.07.2020). – Two authentic Merovingian royal diplomas record the foundation of monasteries in Cugnion-sur-Semois (Arr. Neufchâteau/BE) as well as in Stavelot and Malmedy (Arr. Verviers/BE) by Sigebert III in 643/648. They were – amongst others – dedicated to St John the Baptist or the Apostle. MGH DD Mer. 80; MGH DD Mer. 81. Cf. URL: B. Savill, Cult of Saints, E06225 – <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06225> (07.07.2020); B. Savill, Cult of Saints, E06226 – <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06226> (07.07.2020). – Stavelot and Malmedy were also equipped with corresponding relics.

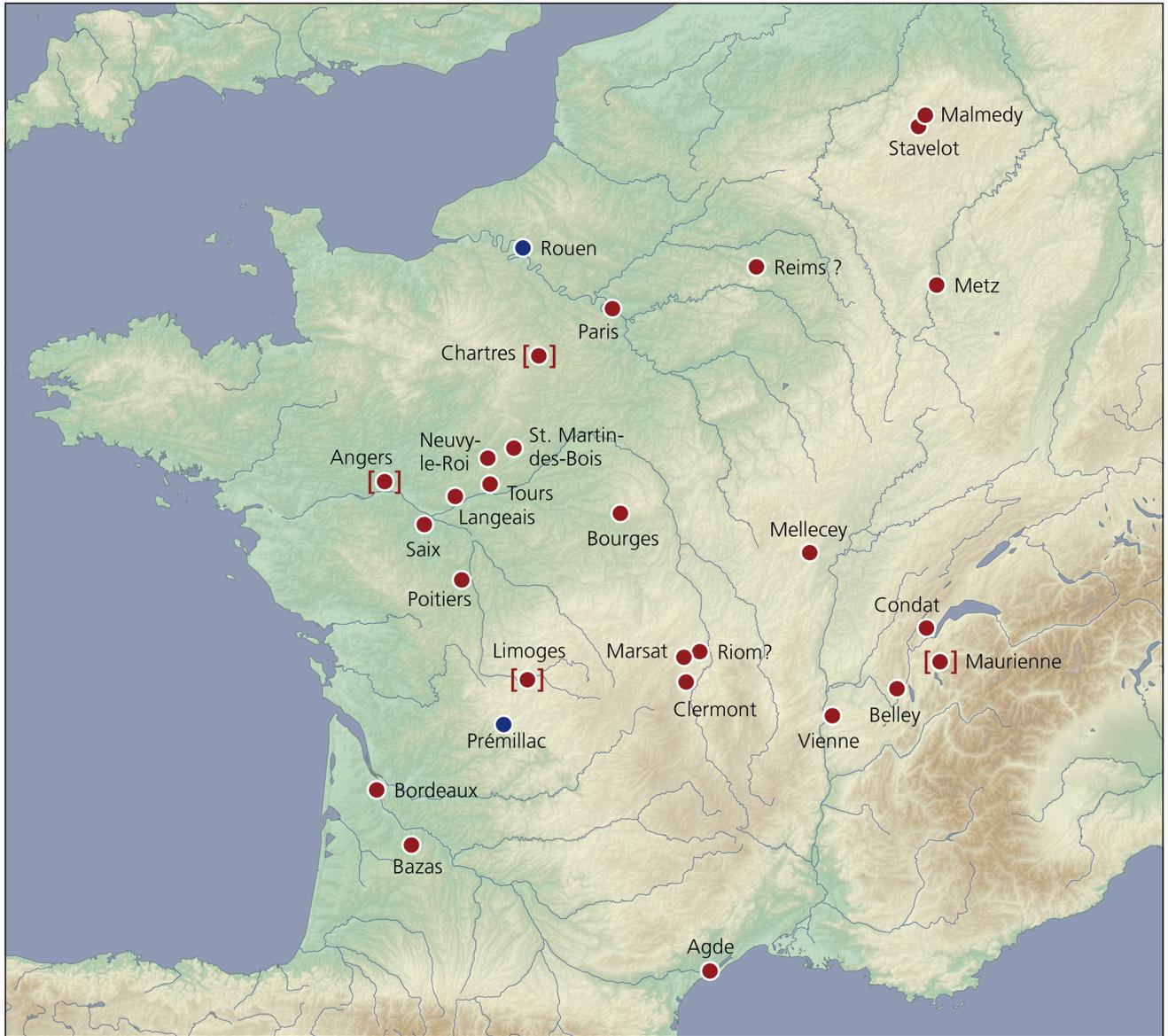


Fig. 2 Sites in Gaul mentioned in the text with relics of Saints from the East according to the written sources. – ● record earlier than second half of 5th c. – ●? record uncertain. – [●] record for the region or diocese. – (Map M. Ober, LEIZA).

Despite the diffusion of his patronage, only a small number of all the listed places are recorded as possessors of relics of John the Baptist, remarkably mainly for the cathedrals. According to Gregory of Tours relics existed in Bazas, Belley, Langeais, Tours, and in the Maurienne region (départ. Savoie/FR), though the character of the relics kept in Langeais and Tours is not described⁸⁷. The blood relic from the church in Bazas was said to come from the beheading of the saint: A pious woman from Gaul attended the saint's execution and

was able to collect some blood in a silver vessel that she later stored in the altar of the church⁸⁸. The origin of the body relic kept in the Maurienne was connected with a local woman named Tigris returning from pilgrimage: After several years of praying, fasting and waiting she received a thumb (*pollex*) directly from the shrine of the saint's tomb. Tigris kept the relic in a golden reliquary (*capsula aurea*) and brought it back to her hometown. Gregory describes how further relics originated from it: After prayers three blood drops dripped out of

87 With corresponding references to Gregory: Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 256 n. 7; Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit* 183.

88 Greg. Tur. *Liber in Gloria martyrum* 11. – Ewig concludes that the translation of the body relic was the reason for building the church in Bazas, that was later elevated to a cathedral. Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 19.

the relic and were collected with a piece of cloth. The cloth was subsequently divided into three parts and given to the bishops of Belley, Aosta (IT) and Turin⁸⁹.

Protomartyr **St Stephen** suffered his martyrdom in Jerusalem, was buried in a place nearby and then transferred to Jerusalem around 415⁹⁰. Afterwards, his relics came to Constantinople and finally to Rome in 560. In Gaul, church dedications to St Stephen began after his *inventio* during the fifth century and continued into the sixth century, whereas his popularity seems to have decreased during the seventh century. But before that time, he was chosen as patron for many monuments: At least 26 cathedrals were dedicated to St Stephen, some together with the holy Virgin and the Apostles. Additionally, E. Ewig counts five chapels, 21 cemetery churches and suburban basilicas, but only five monasteries⁹¹. In contrast to the high number of dedications, the record of early relics of St Stephen remains rather small. Gregory of Tours only mentions oratories and churches in Bordeaux, Bourges, Metz, and near Tours⁹². He describes the relic in Bourges as being a blood relic possessed by the local episcopal church and the relic in Bordeaux as belonging to bishop Berthramn († ca. 585). It was a piece of cloth (*brandeum*) once soaked with water that ran out of the garment worn by St Stephen when the martyr appeared in a vision to an old woman who visited the crypt in the church of St Peter/the Holy Apostles to light the lamps. The relic in the oratory in the near of Tours was transferred there on behalf of Gregory himself and taken from a reliquary (*capsa*) kept in the oratory of his own episcopal residence⁹³.

For the history of early Christianity **St Polycarp** is a very important figure who is counted among the Apostolic Fathers. He was bishop in Smyrna/Izmir (TR), where he also suffered his martyrdom around the middle of the second century. Despite his importance, the presence of relics can only be assumed for a church in Riom where the *passio* of St Polycarp was celebrated⁹⁴. Churches dedicated to him in Gaul remain unknown. **St George** became one of the most venerated saints in Christianity, especially in the time of the crusades, but his life and martyrdom is little known and more or less legendary. He is thought to have been a Roman officer of Christian belief who was martyred presumably during the persecution of Christians under Diocletian. His burial place in

Diospolis/Lydda (Lod/IL) soon became a place of veneration⁹⁵. These tales left little traces in Frankish Gaul: Venantius Fortunatus describes a *basilica Sancti Georgi* in Mainz in one of his poems⁹⁶, and further churches were dedicated to the saint in Amay, Chelles, Metz, Saint-Bohaire, and perhaps Lyon⁹⁷. The relic of St George that was kept in the oratory of a *villa* in the diocese of Limoges (départ. Haute-Vienne/FR) was – following Gregory – brought there by travelers who carried with them a reliquary with relics of different saints (*capsula*). The travelers stayed the night near the church and the next morning were forced by a miracle to leave a part of the relics there: They were unable to lift the reliquary unless they cut off some pieces of the relics. Another relic of St George was mentioned by Gregory in the church of a *vicus* (presumably St Martin-des-Bois, départ. Loir-et-Cher/FR) near Le Mans⁹⁸. Moreover, E. Ewig lists additional relics in the dioceses of Paris and Chartres⁹⁹.

According to the legend of the martyrs **St Cosmas and Damianus**, these twins lived and worked as physicians in the seaport of Aegeae/Yumurtalik (TR), then in the Roman province of Syria where they suffered martyrdom during the persecution of Emperor Diocletian¹⁰⁰. During the fifth century, their cult stretched over to Constantinople and afterwards to Rome. Already in this phase bishop Germanus founded a monastery dedicated to the saints in Auxerre; additional, later churches with this patronage are known from Reims and Luzarches¹⁰¹. In his register of the bishops of Tours, Gregory also mentions his own merits of discovering several relics and reliquaries, amongst others stored in a silver casket (*»inveni in eum capsulam argentam«*). He placed relics of St Cosmas and Damian in St Martin's cell adjoining the cathedral¹⁰². Relics of the same saints have been venerated in an oratory in Artannes-sur-Indre (départ. Indre-et-Loire/FR), according to Venantius Fortunatus¹⁰³.

In their historically unreliable passion from the mid-fifth century, the saints Sergius and Bacchus are described as officers in the army of emperor Maximian or Maximin Daia (305-315). Sergius suffered his martyrdom in Resafa after their hidden Christian belief had been disclosed¹⁰⁴. Their veneration can only be proven from the early fifth century onwards and resulted in the renaming of the city to Sergiopolis¹⁰⁵. Soon the place developed into a major pilgrimage site in Syria and beyond. Especially Sergius left some traces

89 Greg. Tur. Liber in Gloria martyrum 13; Beaujard, Culte des saints 248; Weidemann, Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit 183. – The place is sometimes identified directly with Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne, cf. M. Tycner, Cult of Saints, E00387 – <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00387> (07.07.2020). – Like in Bazas the translation of the relic shall have been the reason for building a church dedicated to the saint and later elevated to a cathedral by king Guntram around 580. Ewig, Kathedralpatrozinien 18.

90 Cronnier, Les inventions de reliques 86-101.

91 Ewig, Kathedralpatrozinien 41-47.

92 With corresponding references: Weidemann, Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit 183; Beaujard, Culte des saints 256 correctly mentions relics for the church in Metz, cf. Greg. Tur. Hist. II, 6.

93 Greg. Tur. Liber in Gloria martyrum 33.

94 Greg. Tur. Liber in Gloria martyrum 85; Beaujard, Culte des saints 254 n. 9; Ewig, Verehrung 394; Rotman, Hagiography 53-56. – Weidemann, Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit 183 refers in this context to a possible relic of

St Ciricius in Clermont, because the oriental Abraham founded a monastery there in the near of a Ciricius basilica, but the evidence seems very problematic.

95 Walter, Warrior Saints 111-113; Cronnier, Les inventions de reliques 158-161.

96 Ven. Fort. Carm. II, 12.

97 Ewig, Verehrung 396. Maybe the churches with George as patron in Arles, Bordeaux, Paris und Soissons are of an early age, too.

98 Greg. Tur. Liber in Gloria martyrum 100; Rotman, Hagiography 79; Weidemann, Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit 183.

99 Ewig, Verehrung 396.

100 Schreiber, Kosmas und Damianos.

101 Ewig, Verehrung 395.

102 Greg. Tur. Hist. X, 31.

103 Ven. Fort. Carm. X, 10 (*»versus de oratorio Artannensi«*).

104 Walter, Warrior Saints 146-149.

105 cf. Schuhmann, Entwicklung der Sakraltopographie 60-66 on the early and difficult development of Resafa's early sacred topography.

in Gaul, too. From the time around 700, we know of a monastery dedicated to St Sergius in Angers, thanks to an authentic Merovingian royal diploma concerning the immunities guaranteed by Childebert III (678/679-711)¹⁰⁶. Other churches are known from Orléans and presumably Paris and Tours¹⁰⁷. There is a well-known story concerning the relics of these saints. After Gregory of Tours, they belonged to a Syrian merchant called Eufron who arranged a small church within his residential building in Bordeaux. In 585, bishop Berthramn of Bordeaux, the usurper Gundovald and the Patricius Mummolus Eunius put pressure on Eufron, because they wanted to see and at least get a piece from the relic – a finger bone (*«os de sancti digito»*) that was stored in a *capsa*. However, following Gregory, the saint was not amused about the Franks' approach. In the end only Mummolus received a part of the bone, after he had cut it with his knife, but the martyr's grace did not come along with him as could be judged from his later fortune¹⁰⁸. Gregory himself possessed a relic of St Sergius, too, that was given by him to a newly built baptistery in Tours. Its origin is unknown¹⁰⁹; perhaps Gregory received it from the heirs of Berthramn¹¹⁰.

St Mamas of Caesarea is a martyr from the third century, who was martyred at Caesarea because of his Christian faith after his parents had been executed several years before him. Very early the cult of this saint is proven in the West: In the fourth century bishop Ursicinus of Sens and in the fifth century bishop Paulinus of Langres brought relics of him to Gaul, and the cathedral of Langres was dedicated to him in the eighth century under bishop Wandreri¹¹¹. In Merovingian times, his name is especially connected to Rade Gund the former Merovingian queen (ruled 540-550, † 587) who is well known as a »relic collector«¹¹². Before she managed to receive a fragment of the True Cross from the Emperor in Constantinople (see below), she had sent envoys to the Holy Land for such a piece and for relics from further saints, but the Patriarch of Jerusalem refused her request for a fragment¹¹³. At least, Rade Gund's envoys obtained a finger bone of the martyr St Mamas for her monastery in Poitiers. Even though the circumstances of this relic transfer are uncertain, we must assume the presence of such a relic there¹¹⁴.

Of course, it cannot be ruled out that relics of further confessors not explicitly mentioned in the written record reached Merovingian Gaul, too. For example, S. Esders argued recently for the existence of relics of **St Polyeuctos** in Metz because of the specific political and diplomatic circumstances of the time around 570 and the important role ascribed to the saint by king Guntram (561-592) in the context of a treaty between him and his royal brothers¹¹⁵. Even so, we will focus here on the evidence of relics clearly described in the written sources or attested by material remains¹¹⁶.

Another important group of eastern saints comprises the **Holy Apostles and Evangelists**. During the first centuries AD, the Apostles mainly appear as a group and only Peter and Paul were perceived as individuals. This changed after the invention of specific Apostle graves during the fourth century. E. Ewig has shown that many cathedrals and cemetery churches in Gaul were dedicated to the Apostles already in the fourth century, and also Gregory of Tours points to this, but it must be emphasized that the denomination of the churches occasionally changes between St Apostles and St Peter and Paul in the written sources¹¹⁷. The survey of early monastic foundations yields a similar result¹¹⁸. It is very likely that especially in the early phase no relic transfers were connected to the patronage of the Apostles¹¹⁹, but later transfers can be proven: Gregory mentions Apostle relics that reached Tours around 590, and also the diocese of Angers presumably before 581, but without providing detailed information about specific saints¹²⁰. Gregory himself carried Apostle relics in a golden, cross shaped reliquary (*«in cruce aurea»*) around his neck¹²¹.

We will focus here on Apostles who died and have been buried in the East like **St Andrew**, who is said to have been crucified in Patras (GR), and whose mortal remains were transferred to the Holy Apostles church in Constantinople in 356¹²². At first, St Andrew was mainly connected to the cult of his brother Peter and also to that of Peter and Paul, though he soon gained more importance. E. Ewig can count three cathedrals dedicated to him (Bordeaux, Avranches and Sées/Exmes), and during the seventh century he appeared as co-patron in four monasteries¹²³. Earlier monastic foundations can be found in Lyon and Vienne¹²⁴ and further (ceme-

106 MGH DD Mer. 145; B. Savill, *Cult of Saints*, E06146 – <http://clsia.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06146> (07.07.2020), dating the diploma to 694-711.

107 Ewig, *Verehrung* 394-395. In Paris St Bacchus is also mentioned as co-patron.

108 Greg. Tur. Hist. VII, 31; Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 248. 254 n. 6; Rotman, *Hagiography* esp. 67-68; Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit* 183; Wynn, *Cultural transmission*.

109 Greg. Tur. Hist. X, 31; Rotman, *Hagiography* 68-69.

110 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 254 n. 6; Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit* 183.

111 Ewig, *Verehrung* 396; Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 35.

112 Greg. Tur. Hist. IX, 40; cf. Moreira, *Provisatrix optima*.

113 Ewig, *Verehrung* 396; Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 35; Jones, *Perceptions of Byzantium* 111.

114 Luckhardt, *Gender and connectivity* 36 emphasises that the envoys could not receive a finger bone of St Mamas, because the relics of this martyr simply were not in Jerusalem. Moreira, *Provisatrix optima* 291-298 discusses this first relic expedition in detail.

115 Esders, »Avenger of all perjury« esp. 27-37. It remained a single appearance in the West for the saint, cf. Rotman, *Hagiography* 84-85.

116 This is why the uncertain reference of a head relic of Julian of Antioch that shall have come to the monastery of Montigny (near Étampes) with the help of queen Brunhilda of Austrasia is not considered here. Ewig, *Verehrung* 393.

117 Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 19-29; Ewig, *Verehrung* 388-389; Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit* 182; see also Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 138. 257 with table.

118 Ewig, *Petrus- und Apostelkult* esp. 237-238.

119 Ewig, *Verehrung* 389.

120 Greg. Tur. Liber in *Gloria martyrum* 82, described as relics of those whose feet had been washed by Jesus. Greg. Tur. Hist. VI, 6, about a journey to Rome with the aim to receive relics of the Apostles or other saints. Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit* 182.

121 Greg. Tur. Liber in *Gloria martyrum* 10.

122 Or even earlier, see above n. 46.

123 Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 30; Ewig, *Petrus- und Apostelkult* 226-227.

124 Ewig, *Petrus- und Apostelkult* 231-232; Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 255.

tery) basilicas have been dedicated to St Andrew in Auxerre, Châlons, Clermont, Périgueux and Verdun¹²⁵.

Radegund made sure that her monastery in Poitiers received St Andrew relics¹²⁶. Gregory mentions relics in Agde¹²⁷ and in a church in Burgundy which were transferred to Neuvy-le-Roi (dép. Indre-et-Loire/FR) after its destruction¹²⁸. Additional references from the sixth century point to relics in the *villa* Saix (dép. Vienne/FR), in Mellecey (dép. Saône-et-Loire/FR), and in the monastery of Condat, today Saint-Claude (dép. Jura/FR)¹²⁹. At the end of the seventh century, bishop Bonitus obtained relics for a church in Clermont¹³⁰, and at the time of Flodoard of Reims (893/894-966), the »Niedermünster« in Reims possessed a St Andreas relic that presumably was older¹³¹. These relics are unfortunately not described in more detail except for those that were saved from the destroyed church in Burgundy: According to Gregory, they were hung around the neck of a young girl in a reliquary (*capsula*)¹³².

The distribution of the cult of **St John the Apostle**, who is believed to have died and been buried in Ephesus without martyrdom, is comparable with that of St Andrew. He appears in connection with his brother St Jacob, for example as special patrons for the Apostles church in Metz (eighth century), but also together with St John Baptist in Lyon, in a baptistry in Valence and in the monastery of Saint Jean de Réomé (Langres)¹³³. A few monasteries have been dedicated to St John alone (e.g. Weißenburg, Agaunum/Agaune), the cemetery basilica in Trier and the cathedral in Langres, a church in Arles, whereas the cathedral of Valence held his patronage only temporarily and again together with St John Baptist¹³⁴.

The difficulties concerning the differentiation between the cult of St John the Apostle and St John the Baptist has been mentioned above¹³⁵. This difficulty also effects the presumably existing relics, as it cannot be decided about their exact attribution. Following Gregory of Tours, relics from St John the Apostle should have been distributed all over the world¹³⁶, but there is no definitive proof for the presence of

such relics in Gaul. In general, the Apostles have been an extremely important group of saints right from the beginning, with a clear predominance of St Peter and/or Paul but also with a clear minor dissemination of the cults of all the other individual apostles, which is why correspondent relics remain small in number.

Things are quite different when we look at the cult of **St Mary**. Dedications to the Mother of God were widespread among the cathedrals of Gaul with core areas in the South, North and East. Already E. Ewig could count over 50 churches with St Mary as patron as well as several churches where she served as co-patron. Of course, most of these dedications are proven only from the ninth century onwards, but the examples of older recordings (e.g., in Konstanz, Metz or Chartres) show the long tradition of taking St Mary as patron¹³⁷. Evidence for this practice derives also from many early cemetery basilicas and some few monastery churches, whereas St Mary became the patron par excellence for nunneries in the seventh century¹³⁸. This is obviously embedded in the general and continuing trend of monastery foundations, especially in northeast Gaul¹³⁹. Additionally, many further St Mary churches from the fifth and sixth centuries can be counted¹⁴⁰. Sometimes the institutions are also under the patronage of other saints, but compared with the already mentioned oriental saints the dedications to St Mary are by far the most frequent.

The distribution of St Mary relics in Gaul from Late Antiquity onwards is very likely, but again we cannot be sure that all churches associated with St Mary possessed corresponding relics¹⁴¹, especially when taking into account that the Mother of God was told to have been taken up bodily into heaven. However, this fact was unproblematic for secondary or contact relics like garments, shoes or the belt of St Mary that was kept in Constantinople in the church of St Mary of Blachernae and later in the church of St Mary of Chalkoprateia¹⁴². Gregory of Tours explicitly mentions relics of St Mary only for an oratory in *Mariacensis*/Marsat (dép. Puy-de-Dôme/FR) without describing their character¹⁴³. Apart from this detail,

125 Clermont: Greg. Tur. Hist. IV, 31. Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 30-31; Ewig, *Petrus- und Apostelkult* 242-243.

126 Baudonivia, *Vita Sanctae Radegundis* II, 13.

127 Greg. Tur. Liber in *Gloria martyrum* 78.

128 Greg. Tur. Liber in *Gloria martyrum* 30. Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 255 n. 2 only mentions the basilica in Burgundy whereupon Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit* 93. 182 points only to the church in Neuvy-le-Roi. Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 31 mentions Tours as recipient of the relics in 524.

129 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 255. The Jura monastery is said to have received the relics together with relics of St Peter and Paul from Rome, not from the East. Cf. Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 27.

130 Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 31.

131 Flod. Hist. Rem. IV, 46. Ewig, *Petrus und Apostelkult* 236.

132 Greg. Tur. Liber in *Gloria martyrum* 30. Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 255.

133 Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 32. – Concerning the discussion about the dedication of the church in Lyon: Greg. Tur. Liber in *Gloria martyrum* 49; M. Tycner, *Cult of Saints*, E00570 – <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00570> (07.07.2020).

134 Beaujard, *Culte des saints* 255-256; Ewig, *Petrus- und Apostelkult* 227. 237. 243; Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 33-34. The cathedral in Besançon was dedicated to him only in the 9th c.

135 Especially discussed for the churches in Tours, Dijon, Cugnon-sur-Semois, Stavelot, and Malmedy. See above n. 86.

136 Greg. Tur. Liber in *Gloria martyrum* 29.

137 Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 8-12; Ewig, *Petrus und Apostelkult* 247.

138 Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 12-14. The popularity among the cemetery basilicas might have to do with the idea that the deceased are welcomed by the Blessed Mother in paradise; Ewig, *Petrus- und Apostelkult* 217-218. 227. 237.

139 Drauschke, *The search for central places* 37 fig. 9. It is striking that the so-called Formulary of Marculf includes a template for a charter with which to found a monastery or oratory dedicated to Mary or another saint. Marc. Form. II, 1. URL: B. Savill, *Cult of Saints*, E06232 – <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06232> (08.07.2020).

140 Ewig, *Kathedralpatrozinien* 14-15.

141 Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit* 182.

142 Speyer, *Gürtel* 1255-1256. It shall be identical with the belt now kept in the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos. Generally on the Virgin relics: Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques* 129-143.

143 Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit* 182.

Gregory also describes a man called John who travelled to the Holy Land to be cured from leper probably in the sixth century. After the successful therapy bathing in the Jordan River at the place Jesus had been baptised, he visited Jerusalem where he received Mary relics that he brought back to Gaul wrapped in linen cloth in a reliquary (*capsa*)¹⁴⁴. Further instances are not given, and it can only be assumed that Gregory received his own Mary relics, which he kept in his golden pectoral cross together with the above-mentioned apostle relics and with St Martin relics¹⁴⁵, from this John.

Relics associated with the life and passion of **Jesus Christ** comprise some body relics – which exist despite his corporal ascension in the form of hair or milk teeth – and objects including some related to his childhood¹⁴⁶ and his passion. The latter group includes the crown of thorns, nails, and the lance used by the Roman soldier Longinus to pierce Jesus' side¹⁴⁷. Moreover, relics exist deriving from his clothing, for example the famous sandals kept today in the basilica St Salvator of the Prüm Abbey¹⁴⁸. Fragments of the True Cross were considered among the most appreciated relics of all, though their presence in the West can be proven only very seldom before the eighth century. The earliest record for the transfer of True Cross' relics to Gaul is attested for 402/403, when Paulinus of Nola sent a fragment of it in a golden *tubellum* to his friend Sulpicius Severus for a newly built church in Primuliacum (perhaps Prémillac near Saint-Sulpice-d'Excideuil, dép. Dordogne/FR)¹⁴⁹. Bishop Avitus of Vienne asked bishop Elias I of Jerusalem for a fragment of the True Cross and received a piece with support of pope Symmachus before 513/514¹⁵⁰. The record for a True Cross relic in Orléans is rather late and difficult to assess¹⁵¹. More reliable is the information given by Gregory of Tours for the relics of this kind in sixth century Gaul. He himself received a silk cloth as a gift from a returning pilgrim that once served as a wrap for a True Cross fragment. Gregory, disbelieving the authenticity of the piece, was told then that the cloth was obtained in Jerusalem from an abbot called »Furtes«¹⁵². He proved the relic's authenticity by dipping it into water that he subsequently gave to invalid persons to drink. As all sick persons recovered from their illness, the relic's authenticity was evident for Gregory and he began to dispense parts of the silk to his clerics. Therefore, one must



Fig. 3 Relic and enameled reliquary of the True Cross, Monastery Sainte-Croix, Poitiers. Original size 6.0 cm x 5.5 cm. Collections des Musées de la Ville de Poitiers. – (Photo © Musées de Poitiers, Christian Vignaud).

assume that not only his Episcopal church St Martin in Tours, but also other churches in his diocese possessed this kind of contact relic¹⁵³.

The most prominent case of a True Cross relic in Frankish Gaul is the well-known fragment that was obtained by Rade Gund for her monastery in Poitiers together with a reliquary decorated with gold and gemstones (fig. 3). It may not be a chance that this – compared with other oriental relics – most appreciated and valuable piece has received a likewise dense account in the written sources of the time¹⁵⁴. Rade Gund received it as a gift by the Byzantine emperor Justin II (565-578) and Empress Sophia in response to an official petition carried by Frankish ambassadors who had been to the Byzantine court after Rade Gund arranged so with king Sigibert I (ca. 535-575). The whole event took place around 567 and before 569, shortly after Sigibert took power in Poitiers¹⁵⁵. In

144 Greg. Tur. Liber in Gloria martyrum 18.

145 Greg. Tur. Liber in Gloria martyrum 10: *Huius beatae virginis reliquias cum sanctorum apostolorum vel beati Martini quadam vice super me in cruce aurea positas exhibebam.*

146 Durand, Byzantium and beyond; Cronnier, Les inventions de reliques 125-127.

147 Hahn, The making of the crown of thorns; Heussler, De Cruce Christi 30; Kirchweyer, Die heilige Lanze; Schulze-Dörrlamm, Die Heilige Lanze; Schulze-Dörrlamm, Heilige Nägel und heilige Lanzen.

148 Neu, Die Eifelabtei Prüm 48. The sandals were granted by the first Carolingian king Pepin III (the short) and his wife Bertrada the younger, who had received the pieces from the pope shortly before. As a result, the monastery church of Prüm was dedicated to St Salvator. – Generally on the *inventio* of the costume of Jesus Christ: Cronnier, Les inventions de reliques 127-129.

149 Frolow, Relique 169-170 No 14; Schulze-Dörrlamm, Heilige Nägel und heilige Lanzen 156 No 61.

150 Frolow, Relique 177 No 28; Schulze-Dörrlamm, Heilige Nägel und heilige Lanzen 156 No 70; Wood, The cult of saints 269.

151 Frolow, Relique 187 No 46; Schulze-Dörrlamm, Heilige Nägel und heilige Lanzen 156 No 58.

152 Jones, Perceptions of Byzantium 115.

153 Greg. Tur. Liber in Gloria martyrum 5. Frolow, Relique 178 No 31-32; Weidemann, Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit 182; Schulze-Dörrlamm, Heilige Nägel und heilige Lanzen 156 No. 69.

154 Greg. Tur. Hist. IX, 40; Greg. Tur. Liber in Gloria martyrum 5; Baudonivia, Vita Sanctae Rade Gundis II, 16. Venantius Fortunatus composed the hymns *Vexilla Regis* and *Pange Lingua* on the occasion of the relic translation: Ven. Fort. Carm. VI. In addition he later also wrote a biography of Rade Gunde: Ven. Fort. Vita Sanctae Rade Gundis.

155 Drauschke, Diplomatie und Wahrnehmung 252; Jones, Perceptions of Byzantium 111-113; Luckhardt, Gender and connectivity 36; Moreira, Provisatrix optima 298-304; Van Dam, Saints and their miracles 31-32. – Perhaps Rade Gund had heard shortly before about the translation of a True Cross relic from Apamea to Constantinople in 566, cf. Brandes, Thüringer/Thüringerinnen 302-305.

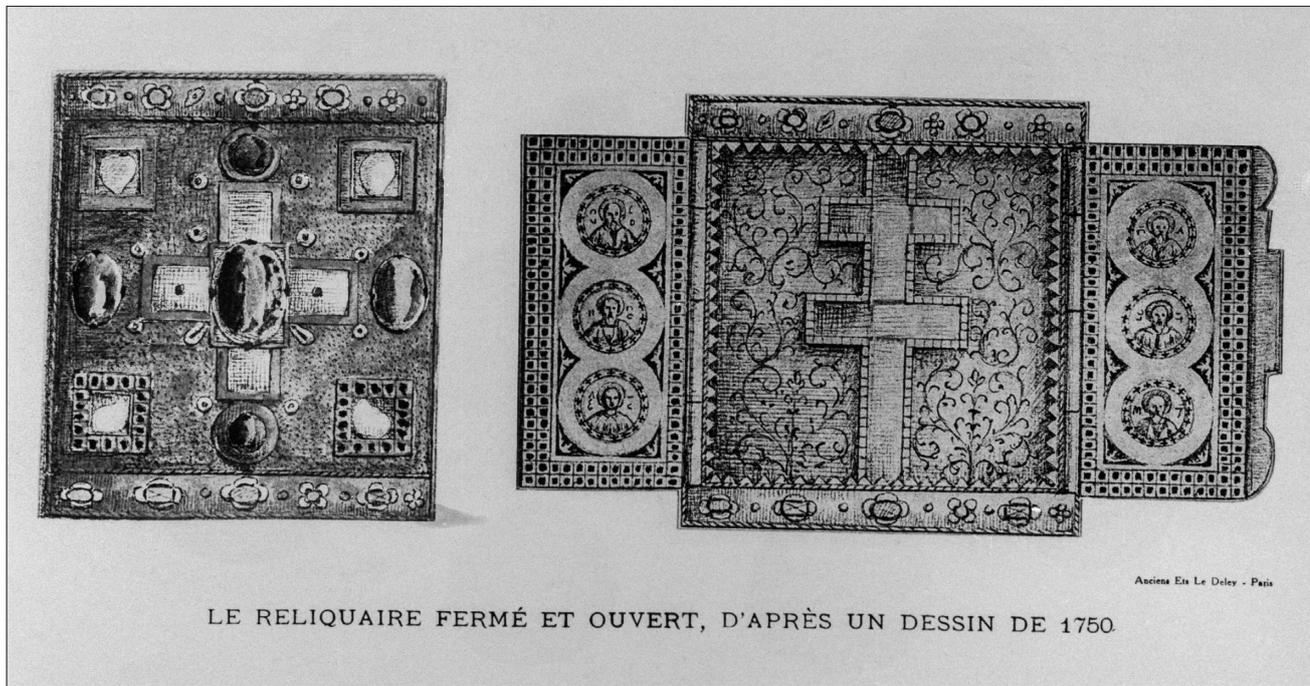


Fig. 4 Former appearance of the True Cross reliquary in Poitiers after a drawing from ca. 1750. – (Image © Bildarchiv Foto Marburg).

return for the holy wood and the wonderful reliquary, Justin II and Empress Sophia received a poem written by Venantius Fortunatus. The Byzantine rulers were glorified, and it was confirmed that the imperial hegemony was accepted in the occident¹⁵⁶.

The reliquary survived in Poitiers until today with its enamel-frame. This was once believed to be the original from the sixth century, but more recent research resulted in a much later dating to the second half of the eleventh century¹⁵⁷. An idea of the former frame may be recorded by an eighteenth-century drawing, showing the now lost wings of the reliquary in the form of a triptych (fig. 4). On the inner side of the wings, six saints were displayed whose identity cannot be determined any more¹⁵⁸. From Radegund's biography, composed between 609 and 614 by the nun Baudonivia, we learn at least that the relic was enshrined in gold and gems. Deviating from this account, Gregory of Tours describes the container of the relic in a different context as a silver chest (*arca*)¹⁵⁹.

The importance of this relic cannot be overstated, because it is one of the earliest recorded translations of the True Cross to the West. Moreover, it was accompanied by relics from eastern saints, though Radegund's biographer Baudonivia

does not bother to identify them as they of course paled beside the True Cross relic. It was as a testament to Christ's presence in the monastery that immediately after the relic's arrival was rededicated to the holy Cross¹⁶⁰. In addition, building activities started soon afterwards: A special chapel was built for the relic, which was venerated every Wednesday and Friday. During excavations in the early 1960ies, residuals of this chapel could be found with a small exterior room added to the apse where the relic is supposed to have been kept (fig. 5-6). The walls most likely are Merovingian, whereas mosaic fragments with the inscription »O CRVX A[VE]«, the beginning of a verse of the hymn *Vexilla Regis*, must be dated later, perhaps to the eighth century, and are important for the identification of the whole monument (fig. 7)¹⁶¹. Recently, G. Noga-Banai emphasised that this architecture is unique in Merovingian Gaul. She suggested that the architects in Poitiers – perhaps Radegund herself – wanted to shape a visual familiarity with the architecture of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, where the relic of the True Cross was also kept in an exterior room behind the apse, positioned there by a member of the Constantinian family, perhaps Constantine I himself. The parallels with Santa Croce are more striking than those with the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem, where the po-

156 Ven. Fort. App. II.

157 Haseloff, Email 20 fig. 19; Skubiszewski, La staurothèque de Poitiers. – Jones, Perceptions of Byzantium 123-124 distinguishes between »two separate sets of Byzantine relics of the True Cross associated with Radegund«: the original (and presumably now lost) one from the 6th c. and a second True Cross relic enclosed in the 11th c. with a Byzantine triptych reliquary.

158 Esders, »Avenger of all Perjury« 37 fig. 2.6, assumes that one of the displayed saints could be St Polyeuctos.

159 Baudonivia, Vita Sanctae Radegundis II, 16; Greg. Tur. Hist. X, 15.

160 Noga-Banai, Relocation to the West 193.

161 Excavation report: Eygun, Sainte-Croix esp. fig. 48-49; Eygun, Les fouilles. Cf. Favreau, Radegunde 67-68.

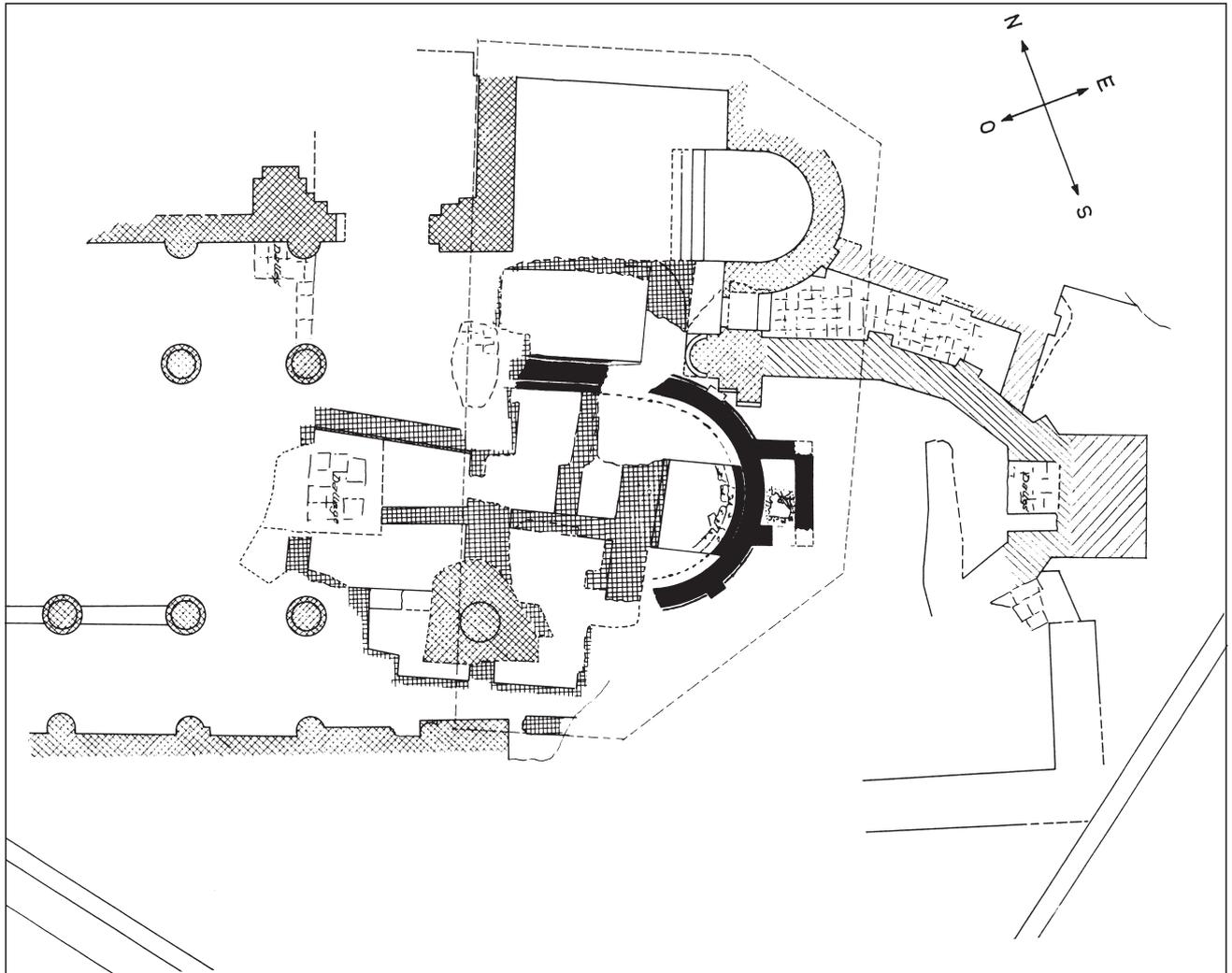


Fig. 5 Excavation plan of the chapel of the Holy Cross in Poitiers. Walls of the Merovingian period in black. – (After Eygun, Sainte-Croix fig. 48).



Fig. 6 Photo taken during the excavation of the Chapel of the Holy Cross in Poitiers showing the Merovingian-period apse and the rectangular oratory from the East. – (After Eygun, Sainte-Croix fig. 49).



Fig. 7 Mosaic fragment found during excavations of the Chapel of the Holy Cross in Poitiers with the inscription O CRVX A[VE]. Without scale. Collections des Musées de la Ville de Poitiers. – (Photo © Musées de Poitiers, Christian Vignaud).

sition of the Cross is different. In any case, while celebrating the finding of the Cross on May the 3rd, the same day as in Rome (while the date for Jerusalem is the thirteenth/fourteenth of September), and composing the architecture in the described way, Rade Gund could evoke an association with Santa Croce, its imperial patronage, and with St Helena who herself was connected not only to Rome but of course also to Jerusalem. With this complete »package« Rade Gund achieved an impact that soon gained supra-regional importance in Merovingian Gaul¹⁶².

Another very prominent relic transfer is connected to the exchange of Frankish and Byzantine embassies around 629/630 and 633/634¹⁶³. King Dagobert I (608/610-639) obviously intended to receive his recognition as the ruler of the Frankish Kingdom and to conclude a permanent peace with the Byzantine emperor, who on his part was interested in persuading Dagobert to baptize all Jewish people in the Frankish Realms¹⁶⁴. The monumental cloisonné cross, a work ascribed to the famous goldsmith and royal *magister monetarius* St Eligius that was produced in the following years with the obvious purpose of incorporating a True Cross relic (fig. 8), was several years ago the starting point for H. Vierck to consider whether Heraclius – soon after his victory over the Persians and the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem – could

have sent Dagobert also a fragment of the True Cross at the same time¹⁶⁵. Several scholars accepted this assumption¹⁶⁶, but one has to bear in mind that it cannot be proven and that no written source of the time or later mentions this kind of relic transfer – and in view of the True Cross fragment given to Rade Gund and its echo in the contemporaneous and later record it is more than amazing that this extraordinary important imperial gift should have left no traces.

The Relics and their Containers

The above listed record of relics in connection with the corresponding church dedications clearly shows that evidence of eastern saints is not on the fringes in Merovingian Gaul, although the cult not only of oriental, but of non-Gaulish saints in general remains, at least in the sixth century, a phenomenon mainly bound to the cities¹⁶⁷. Nevertheless, the cult evidence of all oriental saints and confessors already listed by E. Ewig is rather impressive¹⁶⁸, but must be put into perspective, considering how T. Rotman pointed out that the eastern saints incorporated by Gregory of Tours in his hagiographical work were hardly known or venerated in Frankish Gaul at the time¹⁶⁹.

162 Noga-Banai, Relocation to the West 194-199; cf. Jones, Perceptions of Byzantium 113-114. – For architectural adjustments in churches of Gaul concerning the installation of relics and relic cults see Crook, The architectural setting 48-64. – Although not in the focus of this contribution it shall not be neglected that Esders tried to put the transfer of the True Cross relic to Rade Gund's monastery in Poitiers in a much more complex frame of political and religious issues connected with embassies exchanged between the Austrasian king Sigebert I and Justin II that ended with a peace treaty. Connected with this event and the possible transfer of relics of St Polyeuctos are further possible grantings of True Cross fragments to Trier and Metz. Esders, »Avenger of all Perjury« 33-40. A precondition is to antedate the concluded peace to around 568 – before the transfer of the relic – that generally was dated to around 571/72, cf. Drauschke, Diplomatie und Wahrnehmung 253.

163 Dölger, Regesten 23 No 202; 24 No 207; Fred. Chron. IV, 62, 65; Drauschke, Diplomatie und Wahrnehmung 257-258.

164 Esders, Herakleios 244-245. 307-308 also to further possible implications of these negotiations, e. g. an agreement concerning a common policy in the Balkans. – For a recent discussion about the possibility of constantly renewed peace treaties between the Franks and Constantinople every thirty

years throughout the 7th c. see Sarti, Byzantine history 17-21; Meier/Patzold, Qualifying Mediterranean connectivity 398-400.

165 Vierck, Werke des Eligius 319-335, esp. 368-370 pointing to other possible gifts from the Byzantine emperor including the so-called Khosrow-bowl in the treasury of St Denis. – Recently on the cross: Cat. Cluny 2016-2017, 130 No 83 (M. Aimone).

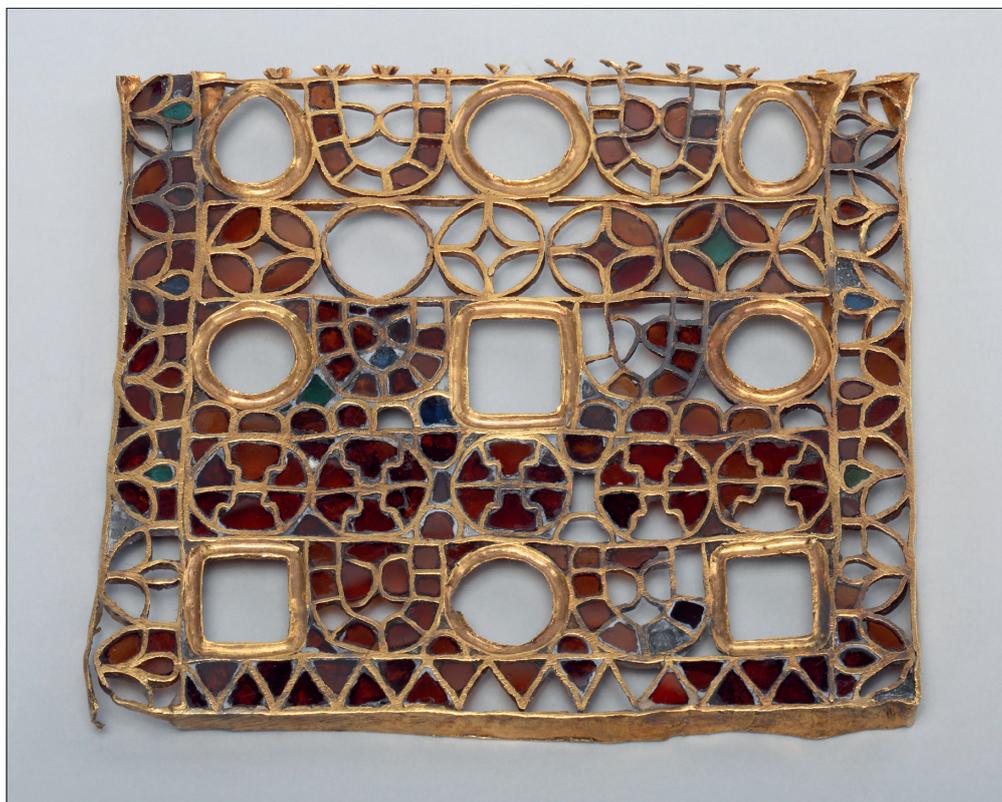
166 Ewig, Die Merowinger 141-142; Esders, Herakleios 246. 307-308; Scholz, Die Merowinger 212.

167 Beaujard, Culte des saints 258-259.

168 Ewig, Verehrung esp. 397.

169 Rotman, Hagiography esp. 86. Rotman concludes that Gregory's hagiographical works must be understood as parts of one ecclesiastical history (ibid. esp. 126-127) and that Gregory while compiling this tried to construct a Gallo-Christian identity (ibid. 129 passim). »The accounts of the eastern martyrs and saints, however, were Gregory's way of connecting the Christian present of Merovingian Gaul with its historical Christian past.« This was represented by the East. In the end »Gregory made a masterful attempt to integrate Gaul and its Christian communities into a grand narrative of Christian history.« Rotman, Hagiography 150. 153. 167-171.

Fig. 8 Fragment of the monumental cross of St Eligius. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, inv.-No 56.324. Original size 10 cm x 9.2 cm. – (Photo © Bibliothèque Nationale de France).



Unfortunately, information about the character of the relics is missing in the most cases, but sometimes we learn more details about contact or secondary relics occasionally called »brandea« like the textile that was soaked with a liquid from St Stephen in Bordeaux or a silk cloth that was once wrapped around a True Cross' fragment, as in the example from Gregory of Tours. On the other hand, first-class relics are also recorded, like the blood relic of St John Baptist in Bazas, the finger bones from St Sergius in Bordeaux and from St Mamas in Poitiers or the fragment of the True Cross also in Poitiers. The relics themselves were frequently called »reliquiae« or »pignora«¹⁷⁰.

The last decades have seen an increasing research interest, not least stimulated by the »material turn« in the humanities, not only in relics but also in their containers. Reliquaries are understood now as »objects that often take on the properties of the very things they contain and are thus both subject to and object of sacred contagion«¹⁷¹. Unfortunately, the containers of the eastern relics are hardly described so that no conclusion is possible about their form and appearance. The most frequent terms used for them are »capsa« or »capsula«, which we can assume the writers thought of as some kind of small box. Sometimes the material of the *capsulae* is mentioned and shows that only precious metal was chosen as dignified to contain the holy pieces: The blood relic of

St John Baptist was kept in a golden *capsula* and Gregory of Tours stored relics in a silver box whereas his pectoral cross was made from gold. An exception is the True Cross fragment from Poitiers, as it was transported in a silver chest (*arca*) and the reliquary itself made of gold and gemstones. Generally, many different containers and boxes could be used as reliquaries as long as they were large and precious enough¹⁷². Concerning the designations *capsa* or *capsella*, the reliquaries show no difference compared with the description of containers from other saints' relics. These terms are the most frequent ones known from the written sources since the fifth century; *arca* is used more seldomly and only slowly changes its meaning from *sarcophagus* in Late Antiquity to *reliquary*, at least in Carolingian times¹⁷³.

To picture how the mentioned containers could have looked, one must fall back on the late Antique and early Byzantine examples that survived until today. In the Mediterranean, the development of these containers started in the fourth century with sarcophagus-shaped reliquaries made of stone (mainly marble, but also limestone), which remained in use during the following centuries. Mainly in Syria and Palestine, examples with two holes are known – one in the lid and one on a side – which obviously served for the well-known production of contact relics by pouring oil or water into the top and collecting it at the bottom, so that the liquid

170 Dubreucq, *Les reliquaires et leurs usages* 28.

171 Klein, *Materiality and the sacred* 233.

172 Thümmel, *Ikonomie* 289.

173 Dubreucq, *Les reliquaires et leurs usages* 30-32.



Fig. 9 Originally interlocked reliquaries from Džanavar Tepe in the near of Varna (BG) from the first half of the 6th c. Length of the marble reliquary 22.4 cm. – (Photo © Varna Regional Museum of History).

could touch the holy remains inside the reliquary¹⁷⁴. Some of the stone chests clearly contained smaller boxes made of precious metals that protected the relics, as it can be determined from examples like the reliquaries from Džanavar Tepe near Varna (BG), which dates from the first half of the sixth century (fig. 9)¹⁷⁵.

In Gaul and north of the Alps, stone reliquaries of this kind are not recorded. This is also true for the most common types of smaller, mainly silver reliquaries known from the Mediterranean: as D. Quast could show (fig. 10), the distribution of flat, oval- or cube-shaped, higher pyxis-shaped and house-shaped reliquaries stretches from places in the Alps over to the Balkans and to the Eastern Mediterranean, with some findings in North Africa¹⁷⁶. The objects themselves have been published for the most part by H. Buschhausen, while their iconographic programme was analysed by G. Noga-Banai¹⁷⁷. The common types of reliquaries in the West can be separated

from the Mediterranean groups¹⁷⁸. We can only speculate about how the reliquaries with relics of the holy persons from the East that arrived in Gaul might have looked like. From the frequently used terms *capsa* and *capsula*, we might conclude that the containers were rather small in most cases, perhaps like the small oval- or pyxis-shaped silver reliquaries (fig. 11). But this conclusion seems not adequate for the containers that are described as hanging around the necks of persons, which obviously must have been much smaller in size, maybe in the form of *bullae*¹⁷⁹ or differently shaped pendants¹⁸⁰. Moreover, a figural or other type of ornamentation of the containers, which is common for the known silver examples, is never mentioned in the sources, thus a plausible identification remains difficult. Even so, I would venture that the *arca* used for the True Cross relic that arrived in Poitiers represents a larger and – following the description in the sources – ornamented chest.

174 Quast, *Ennabeuren* 52-55; Jastrzębowska/Heydasch-Lehmann, *Reliquiar* 1155-1157; Cat. Karlsruhe 2017, 196-200 No V.4 (U. Peschlow); Concerning the reliquaries of the Near East and Cyprus: Comte, *Les reliquaires du Proche-Orient* 41-46. Especially on the importance of the circulation of oil in the stone reliquaries: *ibid.* 46-51; Comte, *Les reliquaires* 61-66; Bianchi, *Archäologische Zeugnisse. Recent overview over examples from Italy*: Sannazaro, *Reliquiari* 108-113.

175 Minchev, *Reliquaries* 15-18.

176 Quast, *Ennabeuren* 57-58 fig. 49. For a short overview see Jastrzębowska/Heydasch-Lehmann, *Reliquiar* 1158-1161; on pieces from the Near East and Cy-

prus: Comte, *Les reliquaires du Proche-Orient* 53. 63-66; on Italy: Sannazaro, *Reliquiari* 101-107.

177 Buschhausen, *Metallscriinia catalogue B and C*; Noga-Banai, *Trophies of the martyrs. Especially on oval shaped caskets*: Noga-Banai/Safran, *A Late Antique silver reliquary*.

178 Quast, *Ennabeuren* 58-84; Caillet, *Reliquaires du monde franc* 183-189.

179 Baldini Lippolis, *Oreficeria* 126-127. 146-147 No 2.III.9.

180 cf. Pitarakis, *Reliquaires-bijoux* fig. 1-4.



Fig. 10 Distribution of the most frequent types of silver altar reliquaries between the Eastern Mediterranean and the West: ● flat shape, ■ high shape, ▲ house-shaped. Data is up to date as of 2012 from Quast, Ennabeuren fig. 49 list 9. – (Map V. Kassühlke, LEIZA).



Fig. 11 Oval shaped silver reliquary. Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, inv.-No 986.181.62.1. Original size 4.3 cm × 13.3 cm × 6.9 cm. – (Photo courtesy of ROM [Royal Ontario Museum], Toronto/CA, ©ROM).

The Relics, their Transfer and their Dissemination

The circumstances of relic transfers from the East to the Frankish realms described in the written sources have a rather different character¹⁸¹. Many transfers are said to depend on the agency of individual persons. The famous body relic of Sergius belonged to the Syrian merchant Eufron, who arranged a small oratory within his residential building in Bordeaux¹⁸². A man called John travelled to the Holy Land to be cured from leprosy, visited Jerusalem and received relics of St Mary that he brought back to Gaul. Obviously, he combined his therapy journey with a pilgrimage: other pilgrims are mentioned too, including the pious woman who was able to collect some blood from St John the Baptist or the pilgrim Tigris who received a saint's body relic. The relic of St Stephen in Bordeaux could be obtained when the martyr appeared in a vision to an old pious woman. Here we reach the border of miracle stories told to explain the origin of specific relics: Gregory of Tours describes how the relic of St George in the diocese of Limoges was left there by travellers who were forced by a miracle to leave the piece there. This narrative is beyond any reliability, but certainly had no effect on the perceived authenticity of the relic.

Besides lone individuals or pilgrims, it was the agency of higher-ranking persons like clerics and bishops that was responsible for the import of relics. When we look for example at the True Cross fragments that reached the West, we can recognise specific clerical networks: Paulinus of Nola sent a fragment to his friend Sulpicius Severus, bishop Avitus of Vienne asked bishop Elias I of Jerusalem for a piece, and Gregory of Tours received as a gift a silk cloth that was once wrapped around a True Cross fragment. The close contacts existing between the church in Gaul and the (Eastern) Mediterranean become immediately and clearly visible. Beside the connections of clerics, the contacts within the highest secular elite played a major role especially for corresponding high-ranking relics. Rade Gund's efforts to receive a True Cross fragment (and other relics from saints and martyrs) is the example par excellence for this kind of relic transfer¹⁸³.

However, it is interesting to note that in many cases body-relics as well as secondary or contact relics found their way from their oriental origin to the West not by official ways,

but instead with the help of private persons – merchants, travellers, pilgrims – who then distributed them in the Frankish realms. One must assume that the dissemination of relics from the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as the knowledge about this region and the Byzantine Empire, had a larger impact than can be judged from the written sources. Two examples shall illustrate this point.

The number of relics from Byzantium and the Eastern Mediterranean can be increased by including those known from church treasuries and medieval relic collections in Gaul¹⁸⁴. They must have existed in larger quantities, but only few have (partly) survived until today, for example in Sens, Chelles, Baume-les-Messieurs, Chartres and St Maurice d'Augeaune. These mainly small relics were generally accompanied by small parchment strips – so called authentics – which were inscribed with information about the saint and/or the origin of the holy piece (fig. 12)¹⁸⁵. With a careful analysis of their scripts, it is possible to date the authentics and obtain information about the chronology of the relics. M. McCormick studied in detail the two great relic hoards of Chelles and Sens and could distinguish several chronological horizons based on the still existing authentics. In Sens, relics from Gaul itself and Italy are the most common ones with 67 % (n = 60) among the Merovingian group (seventh/eighth century), whereas relics from the Eastern Mediterranean (Constantinople, Asia Minor, Holy Land, Egypt) comprised at least 28 % (n = 25)¹⁸⁶. The saints associated with some of these relics could be identified: Virgin Mary, Sts Andrew and Luke from Constantinople; Basil of Caesarea (Cappadocia), Isidore of Chios, John Evangelist, Theodore of Euchaita, Polycarp of Smyrna; Sts Jerome, Procopius of Caesarea, and the prophet Elias among others form the Holy Land, including a relic of Jesus Christ in the form of a fragment from the Lord's cradle; from Egypt Sts Catherine and Mark the Evangelist¹⁸⁷. Not only is the high number of relics of different oriental saints surprising, but also the number of saints whose relics are not recorded in the written record like Sts Luke, Basil, Isidore, Theodore, Jerome, Elias and previously unmentioned saints from Egypt¹⁸⁸. This trend, with a smaller range of different saints, continues into the eighth century: The Eastern Mediterranean now is the origin of 30 % (n = 16) of all relics, Gaul and Italy of 70 % (n = 38). Even during the ninth century, still 29 % (n = 19) can be ascribed to the East¹⁸⁹. In Chelles only very few relics and authentics can be

181 Concerning the methods of relic acquisition during the Middle Ages in the West see Schmitz-Esser, *Der Leichnam* 129-137.

182 The relic of Sergius is able to show us also another reason for the desire for relics: Mummolus who in the end hacked off a piece from the body relic was the general of Gundovald. He in turn tried to make use of any help for his rebellion and had heard before of a king in the East that always carried a St Sergius relic with him in all military conflicts. This kind of heavenly support for battles and war just had developed in the Byzantine Empire and soon was taken over in the West. Wynn, *Cultural transmission*; cf. Mergiali-Sahas, *Byzantine emperors 49-50 concerning the role of relics in the military sphere of Byzantium*.

183 Cf. Carlà, *Exchange and the saints 417-421* describing the gift-giving between clerical and profane elite groups as one possibility of acquiring relics; Hartl,

Leichen 75-77 on the network of Ambrosius of Milan that he used for the dissemination of relics.

184 For the authentics from the relic collection of the Sancta Sanctorum in Rome see Galland, *Les authentiques*.

185 Quast, *Ennabeuren* 19-20.

186 McCormick, *Origins* 296 tab. 10.3. – In the Sancta Sanctorum collection 33 authentics (of altogether 113 pieces that could be dated) belong to the 7th and 8th c. Galland, *Potenzial und Grenzen* 82.

187 McCormick, *Origins* 297-300 and tab. 10.5. First edition by Prou/Chartraire, *Authentiques de reliques*; additions in Bruckner, *Chartae* 19. 40.

188 At least Gregory of Tours included Isidore of Chios in his *Glory of the Martyrs*. Rotman, *Hagiography* 81-82.

189 McCormick, *Origins* 300-306 tab. 10.7-10.9.

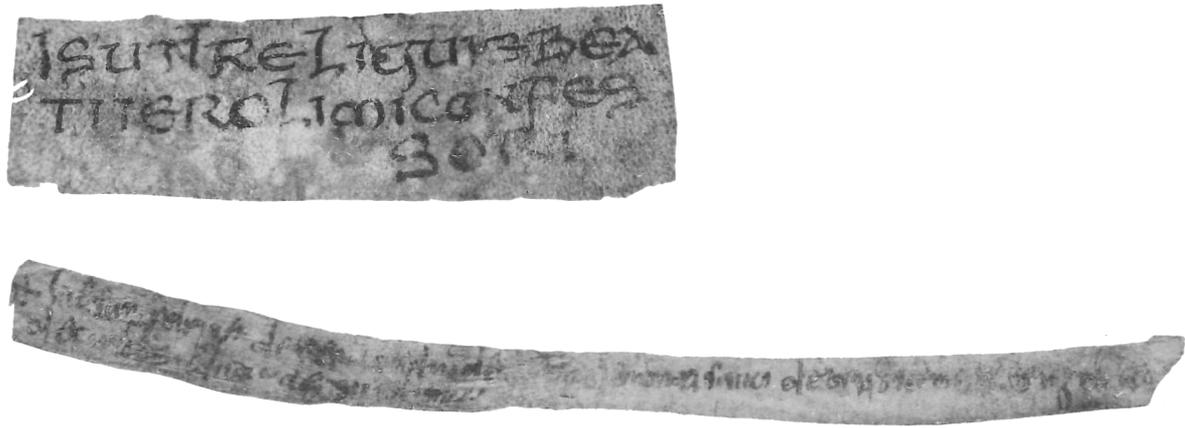


Fig. 12 Authentics from the relic hoard of Sens mentioning relics from St Jerome (above) and from the Holy Sepulchre, the Mount Sinai and Mark the Evangelist (below). – (After Prou/Chartraire, *Authentiques de reliques* pl. 8, 20. 61). – Scale ca. 1:1.

dated to the seventh century, but from the eighth century 58 pieces could be analysed. Gaul and Italy supplied 81 % (n = 47) of the relics, Byzantium, the Holy Land, and Egypt 19 % (n = 11). Among the second group are again saints whose relic transfers are not mentioned by other sources like Paul the Hermit from Egypt, Mary Madgalene (Ephesos) or pope Martin I (Cherson)¹⁹⁰. In addition, the collection in St Maurice d’Agaune comprises relics from the Holy Land associated with Christ and Virgin Mary¹⁹¹. In Baume-les-Messieurs, 28 authentics of the relic hoard have survived, with among them only one piece of a late Merovingian age¹⁹².

Certainly, relic collections were much more frequent in the Middle Ages and only few of them have survived, though some smaller assemblages with the corresponding authentics are known from several other localities¹⁹³. Although the material evidence is not large, it is able to contribute substantially to the whole picture of eastern relics in Frankish Gaul, not least for the possible ways of their dissemination. It is obvious that inner-church connections may have played a major role for relic transfer, but different personal contacts must be considered, too. In the case of Chelles, a substantial increase of the hoard can be estimated between ca. 770 and 810 under the abbess Gisela, the sister of Charlemagne, a fact that might have greatly simplified the access to relics¹⁹⁴.

A second example leads away from the church sphere and more into an area of private religiousness: pilgrim sou-

venirs or *eulogia* – derived from contemporaneous terms in the written record and on the souvenirs themselves – which mainly comprise blessed oil, water, wax or dust and earth from the holy places and pilgrimage sites in Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. Different solutions were established to carry these portable items that were considered contact relics because they had been in direct contact with the remains of the saints and martyrs, for example, the earth was pressed into medallions («tokens»)¹⁹⁵. The liquids were transported in flasks or *ampullae*, thanks to which the types coming from Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt can be easily distinguished¹⁹⁶. Some of them have been found in Western Europe and are often taken as direct traces of pilgrims and pilgrimage. Without a doubt, pilgrimage became a grand enterprise from the fourth century onwards¹⁹⁷, and M. McCormick has shown that this kind of journeys continued throughout the early Middle Ages despite the upheavals in the Mediterranean during the seventh century¹⁹⁸.

The record of pilgrim flasks in the West may be a material reflection of this activity, but by no means in every case. Several years ago, C. Lambert and P. Pedemonte Demeglio published a catalogue of all known examples of *ampullae* from Egypt, the Holy Land and Asia Minor. Among these items, Menas flasks were by far the most frequent, especially in the West of Europe. The distribution of the flasks was compared with the pilgrimage routes known from the written record¹⁹⁹.

190 McCormick, *Origins* 308-312 tab. 10.12-10.13. Primary edition in Bruckner, *Chartae* 18, No 669; see also Laporte, *Trésor des Saints* 116-132.

191 Bryan Ward-Perkins, *Cult of Saints*, E08079; <http://cls.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E08079>

192 For a relic of St Nazarius. Wallenwein, *Reliquienauthentiken* 266.

193 cf. Wallenwein/Licht, *Reliquienauthentiken*.

194 Laporte, *Trésor des Saints* 118.

195 »Third class relics« following Carlà, *Exchange and the saints* 411; Carlà-Uhink, *Differenz als Argument* 16 n. 39. For the definition of *eulogia* as devotional objects see: Stuiber, *Eulogia* 925-927.

196 Witt, *Menasampullen* 13-15.

197 Eichner, *Pilgerwege*. Recent publications to the main areas of pilgrimage in the eastern Mediterranean: Effenberger, *Konstantinopel als Pilgerziel*; Külzer, *Pilgerzentren im westlichen Kleinasien*; Külzer, *Pilgrims on the way*.

198 McCormick, *Origins* 129-137. Cf. the list of Mediterranean travelers 700-900, *ibid.* 799-810 Appendix 1.

199 Lambert/Pedemonte Demeglio, *Ampolle devozionali* 211 figs 4-5. 218-219.

But this step proved inconclusive, at least for the *ampullae* from Gaul: in the catalogue and its corresponding maps, flasks with certain and with unknown find spots are mixed. To be precise, the authors list around 106 pilgrim flasks from the area between southern Germany and the Pyrenees but indicate a find spot only for 16 of them²⁰⁰. The predominant number of *ampullae* belongs to museums and private collections without information about the date or place of find²⁰¹. But even the details about the few find spots must be handled with care. P. Linscheid argued in her study on the Menas flasks with allegedly proven origin that no piece with a secure find spot can be identified in the region north of the Alps²⁰². However, this conclusion did not remain undisputed²⁰³.

As seen, the interpretation of the distribution remains difficult. Hence, W. Anderson argued against the prevalent interpretation of pilgrim flasks as direct traces of pilgrimage. Instead, he emphasised the correlation of *ampullae* clusters and trade routes as well as the record of commodities with a Mediterranean origin, concluding that the flasks could be collected by pilgrims but also imported by merchants or exchanged as diplomatic gifts²⁰⁴. This conclusion might be true for individual cases but does not seem to be plausible for all *ampullae* in the West. Firstly, trade and pilgrimage routes certainly followed the same routes and connections, especially in the Mediterranean – therefore congruencies between the distribution of traded commodities and pilgrim souvenirs are neither surprising nor very meaningful. Secondly, Anderson neglects the already mentioned problem of the unreliability of the clusters of Menas flasks in Gaul, although it must be admitted that many of the supposed locations are near classic coastal or fluvial traffic routes. In this regard, it is interesting to consider the situation of Menas flasks from Britain, whose find circumstances are also poorly documented. However, in that case there are some reliable finds. S. Bangert, considering a selection of nine *ampullae* with more or less certain find spots, has presented further conclusions. She doubts whether the artifacts represent pilgrimage of Christians from Britain to the holy places in the Eastern Mediterranean and suggests instead that Christians from the continent were responsible for the import, maybe in connection with the mission of Augustine²⁰⁵. Meanwhile, a few more *ampullae* with certain find contexts could be identified. These are a flask fragment found in a dump pit with material from the sixth to the ninth

century that was excavated in the East of the great hall of the *thermae* in Cluny and two *ampullae* from the Merovingian cemetery around Saint Julien in Paris with a sixth/seventh century context (fig. 13)²⁰⁶. Given these new insights and the considerations concerning the flasks from Britain, one must expect that contact relics found their way to Gaul also in form of blessed *eulogia* with *ampullae* as containers, and that they unfolded their impact there.

Eastern Relics and the Strategies of Byzantine Diplomacy

As shown, the ways in which eastern relics were disseminated in the West from the fifth to the eighth century were various. It was mainly the agency of individuals like merchants or travellers, and to a certain but difficult to estimate degree also of pilgrims²⁰⁷. In an early phase, the church opposed this private possession of relics, or at least of first-class body relics, but this opposition seems not to have been very successful. For the Christian Fathers of the second half of the fourth century and later, relics in private ownership posed no problem²⁰⁸. However, another development resulting from these possessions was perceived as more dangerous: the demands for holy items lead to a kind of commerce of relics where especially merchants and travellers were involved. Scholars believe that this mechanism of relic import to the West (and elsewhere) acquired greater importance from the eighth/ninth century onwards, though it must not be neglected for earlier periods²⁰⁹.

A major role for the transfer of relics was played by the networks of high-ranking persons like the nobility and bishops or popes and patriarchs²¹⁰, of course not only for transfer between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Merovingians but also between Italy/Rome and Gaul²¹¹. These partly church-internal connections must also be understood as mediators of knowledge about the Eastern Mediterranean and the Byzantine Empire. The relics were generally given as gifts and the act of gift giving implies its own social meanings²¹², which played a major role when the highest secular elites were involved. With the fragment of the True Cross that was granted to Radegund by Justin II we reach the same level of international contacts within a secular framework. Relics

200 106 is the quorum as sometimes the number of *ampullae* in a collection is unknown. Besides I did not incorporate in this calculation the flasks from the Liebieghaus Museum in Frankfurt, because they derive from the collection of C. M. Kaufmann and have been excavated by him in Abu Mena (EG).

201 Lambert/Pedemonte Demeglio, Ampolle devozionali 219-224.

202 Linscheid, Untersuchungen; Witt, Menasampullen 72.

203 With a nearly opposite approach: Delahaye, Conditions de découverte; Delahaye, Diffusion des ampoules.

204 Anderson, Menas flasks esp. 238-240.

205 Bangert, Menas ampullae esp. 31-33.

206 Linscheid, Neues zur Verbreitung.

207 Hen, Gregory of Tours 57-58 refers to the record of relic collections and *ampullae* and estimates »frequent visits of the Holy Land by westerners«.

208 Carlà, Exchange and the saints 409-414 emphasises the different meaning of relics in private possession as signs of separation, social distinction and an individual supernatural protection in contrast to relics owned by groups which is amongst others important for the Christian identity of a community.

209 Carlà, Exchange and the saints 422-428. Following Carlà the commerce of body relics then was forbidden, but that of contact relics was allowed.

210 H. A. Klein concluded mainly for the following centuries that »gift-giving on a decidedly personal and rather high social level was by far the most common means of transfer of sacred relics between Byzantium and the Latin West.« Klein, Eastern objects 313.

211 Rotman, Hagiography 49-52.

212 Carlà, Exchange and the saints esp. 418 underlying the establishment of a bond between donor and receiver by accepting a gift.

of this high importance could – by official ways – only be received when the Byzantine emperor allowed it. This was a great honour and was perceived accordingly by the early medieval public. With the gift of his well-known cross, Justin II made a comparable offer to the Papal see in Rome about the same time²¹³. These gifts underline the high symbolic meaning and value that was ascribed to the saints' relics²¹⁴.

Of course, the Byzantine emperors did not grant relics and gifts of this importance very frequently. These acts must be understood within the context of Byzantine gift diplomacy, which had its roots as early as Late Antiquity²¹⁵ and was kept alive during the Byzantine epoch. Donations by the Byzantine emperors always had different meanings: ostensibly, they showed the emperor's appreciation and respect, but by accepting the Byzantine gifts the foreign rulers – especially of the Germanic Kingdoms in the West – simultaneously accepted the supremacy of the Byzantine emperor and were virtually integrated into the imperial hierarchy. The subordination and the cultural decline between Byzantium and the West were especially clear in consideration of the gifts the Byzantines received from the Western kings and emperors as it is recorded in later sources: mainly animals and weapons. Although the latter were quite appreciated in the East, these items could not equal the luxury goods transferred from Constantinople to the West. Among them, gifts of relics and reliquaries were the most outstanding because they put the connection between donor and receiver downright on a sacral level. The Byzantine emperors saw themselves as keepers and distributors of the most sacred relics of the True Cross and the relics connected with the passion of Christ, the Holy Virgin or the Apostles. These were certainly the most outstanding and desirable possible donations, and only few chosen foreign rulers were privileged to receive them. Thanks to a policy of very restricted grantings of True-Cross-fragments, those who received these gifts were held in an abeyance between desire and dependency, until with the reception of such a relic they accepted the Byzantine's exclusive ownership and supremacy²¹⁶. Already M. Mauss in his ground-breaking study on the exchange of gifts emphasised the intentions that were connected with gift giving, since through the exchange of gifts of different value hierarchies could be formed and dependencies created²¹⁷. A precondition for the successful operation of this system was that the value of the relics was commonly accepted within the Christianity of East and West, based on shared beliefs concerning the authenticity and efficacy of the sacred objects²¹⁸.



Fig. 13 Menas ampulla found during excavations in Paris, Rue Dante in 1901. Paris, Musée Carnavalet, inv.-No AC 1000/454. Original size 10 cm x 6.6 cm. – (Photo CCO 1.0 Paris Musées / Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris).

Conclusion

The traces of Byzantine gift diplomacy can be found also during the following Carolingian period. Several outstanding grants are mentioned in the written sources, such as the water run organs that were sent to king Pippin (752-768) in 757 by emperor Constantine V (741-775) and again to emperor Charlemagne (768-814) in 812 by emperor Michael I (811-813). Apart from reported manuscripts (827) and ivory doors (803) silk clothes and other textiles must have constituted a very large part of these gifts²¹⁹. High ranking relics were not missing. Louis II (the German) met a Byzantine embassy in Regensburg in 872 sent there by Basil I: besides letters and different gifts, the ambassadors handed over a large crystal

213 Belting-Ihm, *Das Justinuskreuz*; Cameron, *Artistic patronage* 67-68; Guido, *The Crux Vaticana*.

214 Carlà, *Exchange and the saints* 404-405.

215 Engemann, *Diplomatische »Geschenke«* esp. 39-42 concerning questions of definition; cf. on the general policy of donations by the Roman emperor within the empire of the 4th c.: Beyeler, *Geschenke des Kaisers*.

216 Bauer, *Byzantinische Geschenkdiplomatie* esp. 18-22; Mergiali-Sahas, *Byzantine emperors* 46-47; Klein, *Eastern objects* 288-300 (concerning the foreign rulers who received a True Cross fragment). 313; Schreiner, *Diplomatische*

Geschenke 264 on the asymmetry of the gifts between Byzantium and the West; Political issues even played a role when Byzantine rulers donated gifts to St Peter in Rome, cf. Bauer, *Herrschergaben* 73-79.

217 Mauss, *Die Gabe* esp. 170-171; Carlà, *Exchange and the saints* 418-421 with several examples; For a reappraisal of the gift giving concepts of Mauss see Weiner, *Inalienable possessions* esp. 60. 65.

218 Geary, *Sacred commodities*; Klein, *Eastern objects* 283.

219 Bauer, *Byzantinische Geschenkdiplomatie* 17 with corresponding references.

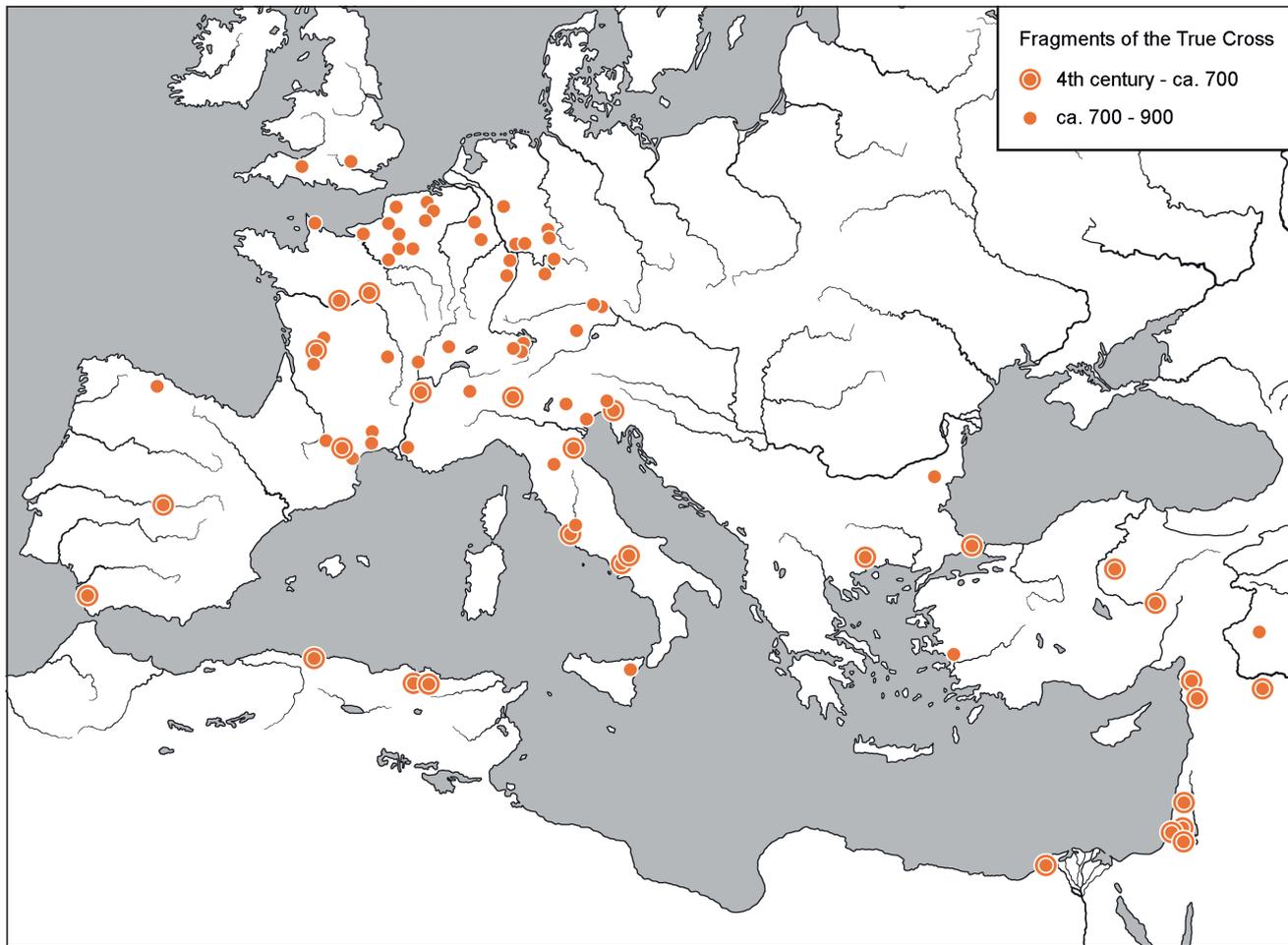


Fig. 14 Distribution of relics of the True Cross in the West, 400-900. – (Map M. Schulze-Dörrlamm / M. Weber, LEIZA).

ornamented with gold and gemstones and a fragment of the True Cross. Moreover, relics formed a significant part of Charlemagne's inheritance and among them numerous relics of Christ can be found²²⁰. According to the data collected by P. Schreiner, relics were even the second most common form of diplomatic gifts – after silk textiles – that was transferred from the Byzantine emperors to the whole West between ca. 800 and 1200²²¹.

But the demand for high-ranking relics still led to transfers beyond the official. For example, the tradition of pilgrimage from Western Europe to the holy places of the Eastern Mediterranean lived on despite the Arab conquests, as can be demonstrated by the recorded journeys from between the seventh and ninth centuries²²². Relics and *eulogia* certainly were transported to the West during these journeys; moreover, the commerce of relics increased – as can probably be recognised by the sharp rise in the number of True Cross

fragments especially in the Frankish Empire between ca. 700 and 900 (fig. 14)²²³.

The ways of dissemination remained, indeed, diverse, as it had been in the preceding Merovingian period. How the specific form of religious and at least material exchange examined in this contribution is able to change our perception of Christianity in Gaul could be the task of further research in this area.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Benjamin Fourlas very much for his careful proof-reading and his essential hints and additions. Also I would like to thank Michael Ober and Vera Kassühlke for their technical support and the peer reviewer for the important feedback.

220 Bauer, *Byzantinische Geschenkdiplomatie* 21-22 with further transfers of True Cross fragments, e.g. to the Doge of Venice in 817/19.

221 Schreiner, *Diplomatische Geschenke* 266; Tinnefeld, *Mira varietas*. Cf. Effenberger, *Via Italia* amongst others on the relics kept in the church treasures of Quedlinburg and Halberstadt that at least partly must have been donations from the Byzantine emperors.

222 e.g. the journeys of St Willibald († 786) in 721-724 or the Frankish monk Bernard in 867. McCormick, *Origins* 129-138.

223 Schulze-Dörrlamm, *Heilige Nägel und heilige Lanzen* 146-149 fig. 49.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung / Résumé

Eastern Relics and Reliquaries in the Merovingian Realms and their Ways of Dissemination

The cult of saints during the Merovingian and Carolingian period has long been a topic of research and must be understood as a particular feature of Frankish Christianity. This paper focuses on a group of relics and their reliquaries that came to Merovingian Gaul from the regions ruled by the Byzantine Empire and its successors around the Eastern Mediterranean. Apart from relics of saints and martyrs such as St Polycarp or St Stephen, the paper focuses particularly on Holy Cross- and St Mary-relics as well as apostle-relics.

I ask under which circumstances relics were transferred to the West, which people were involved in the transfer, and which different avenues for the relics' dissemination can be identified. The basis for this investigation is a comprehensive survey of the relics of Eastern saints in the Frankish realms that have been documented in writing and/or in physical form. Moreover, the paper outlines the function of the relics within the framework of Byzantine diplomacy. The ways in which eastern relics were disseminated in the West from the 5th to the 8th century were various. Merchants or travelers, and to a certain degree also pilgrims served as agents of the transfer. Later the demands for holy items even led to a kind of commerce of relics. The networks of high-ranking individuals such as bishops or popes and patriarchs played an important role, and with the fragment of the True Cross that was granted to Radegund by Justin II we can grasp the same level of high-ranking international contacts within a secular framework.

Östliche Reliquien und Reliquiare in den Merowingerreichen und ihre Verbreitungswege

Der Heiligenkult in der Merowinger- und Karolingerzeit ist seit langem Gegenstand der Forschung und besaß im Christentum des Frankenreiches eine besondere Bedeutung. Der Artikel konzentriert sich auf eine Gruppe von Reliquien und deren Reliquiare, die aus den vom Byzantinischen Reich und seinen Nachfolgern beherrschten Gebieten rund um das östliche Mittelmeer ins merowingische Gallien kamen. Neben den Reliquien von Heiligen und Märtyrern wie dem heiligen Polykarp oder Stephanus stehen vor allem Heiligkreuz- und Marienreliquien sowie Apostelreliquien im Mittelpunkt.

Es wird analysiert, unter welchen Umständen Reliquien in den Westen gelangten, welche Personen an der Überführung beteiligt waren und welche unterschiedlichen Verbreitungswege sich für die Reliquien feststellen lassen. Grundlage

hierfür ist eine umfassende Aufnahme der schriftlich und/oder physisch überlieferten Reliquien östlicher Heiliger im Fränkischen Reich. Darüber hinaus soll die Funktion der Reliquien im Rahmen der byzantinischen Diplomatie skizziert werden. Die Verbreitung östlicher Reliquien im Westen vom 5. bis zum 8. Jahrhundert ist demnach vor allem auf die Initiative einzelner Personen wie Kaufleute oder Reisende zurückzuführen, in gewissem, aber schwer abzuschätzendem Maße auch auf Pilger. Später führte die Nachfrage sogar zu einer Art Reliquienhandel. Eine wichtige Rolle für den Transfer spielten außerdem die Netzwerke hochrangiger Personen wie Adelige und Bischöfe oder Päpste und Patriarchen, und mit dem Fragment des Wahren Kreuzes, das Radegund von Justin II. geschenkt wurde, fassen wir schließlich die gleiche Ebene internationaler Kontakte in einem weltlichen Kontext.

Reliques et reliquaires orientaux dans les royaumes mérovingiens et leurs modes de diffusion

Le culte des saints à l'époque mérovingienne et carolingienne fait depuis longtemps l'objet de recherches et possédait une importance particulière dans la chrétienté du royaume franc. L'article se concentre sur un groupe de reliques et leurs reliquaires qui arrivaient en Gaule mérovingienne en provenance des régions dominées par l'Empire byzantin et ses successeurs autour de la Méditerranée orientale. Outre les reliques de saints et de martyrs comme saint Polycarpe ou saint Étienne, l'accent est mis sur les reliques de la Sainte-Croix et de la Vierge ainsi que sur les reliques des apôtres.

L'étude analyse les circonstances dans lesquelles les reliques sont arrivées en Occident, les personnes impliquées dans leur transfert et les différentes voies de diffusion des reliques. Cette étude se base sur un inventaire complet des reliques de saints orientaux transmises par écrit et/ou physiquement dans le royaume franc. En outre, la fonction des reliques dans le cadre de la diplomatie byzantine sera esquissée. La diffusion des reliques orientales en Occident du V^e au VIII^e siècle est donc principalement due à l'initiative de personnes individuelles telles que des marchands ou des voyageurs, et dans une certaine mesure, mais difficile à évaluer, à des pèlerins. Plus tard, la demande a même donné lieu à une sorte de commerce de reliques. Les réseaux de personnes de haut rang, comme les nobles et les évêques ou les papes et les patriarches, ont en outre joué un rôle important dans le transfert, et avec le fragment de la Vraie Croix offert à Radegund par Justin II, nous saisissons enfin le même niveau de contacts internationaux dans un contexte séculier.