The Remains of the Saints:

The Evidence of Early Medieval Relic Collections

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Abstract

This article explores the materiality of early medieval devotion to the saints. It argues that, even though most of the material objects themselves no longer survive, there is nevertheless much to be gleaned from surviving caches of relic labels about what churches believed they possessed. It exploits the same evidence to explore how types of relic-objects changed over time, track evidence for the importance of oral tradition in their formation, and identify pathways of circulation. In demonstrating how churches curated the relics in their care, it pinpoints the active participation of scribes and relic custodians in interpreting and re-interpreting them.

Scholars of all disciplines typically rely on legislative and hagiographical sources for their understanding of "relics" in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, shoehorning them into a framework derived from later canon law and nineteenth-century classificatory systems.[1] By exploiting neglected early medieval sources, this article offers a different approach. In seeking to make sense of what remains of early medieval relics themselves, its primary goal is to propose that the emergence of specific objects as relics in the early Middle Ages was a culturally creative response to the challenge of giving concrete form to the saints of distant

[1] J.M.H. Smith, 'Relics: an evolving tradition in Latin Christianity', in C. Hahn and H. Klein (eds.), *Saints and Sacred Matter: the Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, Dumbarton Oaks Symposia and Colloquia (Washington, DC, 2015), pp. 41-60.

centuries and places in a way that transcended the intervening space and time. To this end, it pursues two linked questions: what sorts of objects were deemed to circulate as saints' relics in the period prior to c. 900 in the Latin West, and how were they described and identified? En route, it introduces an unfamiliar corpus of evidence from whose details an outline of two ancillary themes will emerge: the material practicalities of wrapping, transporting, storing and curating relics in the centuries under discussion, and some of the complexities of relics' patterns of dissemination which have hitherto eluded notice.

By working with the surviving contents of church treasuries, I throw a spotlight onto discrepancies between what normative texts suggest was distributed and what churches believed they had in their possession. This disjuncture is both spatial and temporal, for the material under discussion here accumulated over time at places far away from saints' primary cult sites. Pursuing this approach allows me to argue, first, that some relics reflect a world of oral tradition about saints and their activities and, second, that others suggest a lively interest in filling out sketchy textual life stories with plausible mundane details of a saint's earthly career. This process is well known to late medievalists, familiar with the literal-minded creativity which fleshed out the life of the Holy Family in art, hagiography and even in relics: I demonstrate the early medieval antecedents of that tradition.[2]

[2] J. Durand, 'Byzantium and beyond: relics of the infancy of Christ', in C. Hahn and H.A. Klein (eds.), *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond* (Washington, DC, 2015), pp. 253-288; P. Sheingorn, 'Appropriating the holy kinship: gender and family history', in C. Neel (ed.), *Medieval Families: Perspectives on Marriage, Household, and Children*, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching (Toronto, 2004), vol. 40, pp. 273-301; P. Payan, *Joseph. Une image de la paternité dans l'Occident médiéval*, Collection historique (Paris, 2006); T. Brandenberg, 'Saint Anne: a holy grandmother and her children', in A.B. Mulder-Bakker (ed.), *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (New York, 1995), pp. 31-65. Due to

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Some introductory comments on the deficiencies of the material remains provide my rationale for developing a new approach. While relics were mopst commonly deposited in, under and near altars or, alternatively, in portable altars and reliquaries, this enquiry cannot exclusively rely on finds from these contexts. The former are only accessible archaeologically: yet undisturbed deposits are few and far between. Even more unusual are relic deposits which have been rigorously excavated and their contents identified via scientific analysis. The contents of reliquaries pose different problems. During the Middle Ages and for long afterwards, sacristans and relic-keepers commonly moved relics from one container to another whenever new reliquaries were commissioned, new altars dedicated and additional relics acquired: even when sealed, portable altars and reliquaries could be opened for inspection upon request and then resealed. For these reasons then, even in instances where they do retain their contents, there is every likelihood that they have been tampered with over the centuries. Only non-destructive imaging techniques would permit the contents of a sealed reliquary to be inspected.[3]

Academic—or antiquarian—investigation of relics began in the late nineteenth century. The most notable case (although not the first) was the unlocking of the altar in the Sancta Sanctorum chapel in the Lateran palace in 1903. Last inspected by Leo X (1513-21), the altar was opened with the permission of Leo XIII (1878-1903) and resulted in fierce academic

limitations of space here, I shall address the circulation of bone fragments as relics elsewhere.

[3] The only intact, unopened early medieval reliquary known to me was found during excavations at Winchester: D.A. Hinton, S. Keene and K.E. Qualmann, 'The Winchester reliquary', *Medieval Archaeology,* 25 (1981), pp. 45-77.

rivalry, competing publications and the dispersal of its contents.[4] It contained dozens of small relic packages dating from c. 600 to c. 900, plus a few later ones, all of which were unwrapped and inventoried in detail in 1906. The documentation reports numerous tiny pieces of stone of various colours, fragments of silk and linen textile, morsels of sponge, splinters of wood, lumps of wax, and the occasional fragment of bone. While some of the 1906 descriptions bear a close (and perhaps suspicious) resemblance to the wording on eleventh- and twelfth-century inventories or on the labels themselves, others seem uninfluenced by any textual source. They cannot be cross-checked, but certainly represent an early twentieth-century attempt to characterise a huge relic set that was made in good faith.[5]

Another early medieval relic set to have been carefully disassembled was published in comprehensive detail as recently as 2015. It was found in 1961 inside the twelfth-century reliquary-head of St Candidus at Saint-Maurice d'Agaune. Made in about 1150 or shortly thereafter, the subsequent history of this work of art is one of limited interference: a thorough dismantling and reassembling in 1659 and a brief but brutal effort to rip it apart at the very end of the eighteenth century.[6] It is likely, although impossible to (dis)prove, that

[4] Allegations that the Sancta Sanctorum was pillaged when Charles V sacked Rome in 1527 cannot be verified. For the circumstances and rivalries surrounding its 1903 opening, and then complete emptying in 1905, see K. Noreen, 'Opening the Holy of Holies: early twentieth-century explorations of the Sancta Sanctorum (Rome)', *Church History,* 80 (2011), pp. 520-46. For the textiles (placed in the Vatican Museum), see W.F. Volbach, *I tessuti del Museo sacro Vaticano* (Vatican City, 1942). For the papyrus and parchment labels, (deposited in the Vatican Library), see *Les authentiques de reliques du Sancta Sanctorum*, ed. B. Galland, Studi e Testi, 421 (Vatican City, 2004).

[5] Entries in Galland, *Les authentiques* collate these disparate sources of information.

[6] E. Antoine-König, P.A. Mariaux and M.-C. Bardoz, *Le Trésor de l'abbaye de Saint-Maurice d'Agaune* (Paris, 2014), pp. pp. 86-88; R. Schnyder, 'Das Kopfreliquiar des heiligen Candidus in Saint-Maurice', *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte,* 24 (1965-

the cluster of early medieval relics which underlay the cranial relic around which the head had been formed was placed there when the reliquary was first crafted; the only other occasion they could conceivably have been added was in 1659. Either way they must have been transferred from an older container in the abbey's possession, quite probably one that had been melted down to reuse its gems and precious metal for reuse. Although most of the relic bundles found in 1961 had deteriorated to the point where they had become untied and their labels detached or reduced to fragments, two were sufficiently intact that the remains of these particular saints are identifiable.[7]

The first is a relic of Justus, bishop of Lyon (d. c. 390). He abandoned his see and retired to the ascetic life in Egypt, but after his death his body was repatriated to Lyon and his feast day already attracted huge crowds when Sidonius Apollinaris attended it in or around 469.[8] His relic is a piece of late antique patterned beige silk, scarcely 4 cm x 4cm, with a rare design: it might have been an offcut from his shroud or an altar cloth, or even from a silk brought back with the saint from Egypt that was laid over his new tomb in Lyon. This was

6), pp. 65-127. Following their rediscovery, its contents were published in 2015. For the relic labels see J.M.H. Smith, 'Catalogue des étiquettes', in P.A. Mariaux (ed.), *Abbaye de Saint-Maurice d'Agaune, 515-2015, II: Le trésor* (Gollion, 2015a), pp. 152-177, nos 31-86. For the textiles, see R. Schorta, 'Catalogue des tissus et enveloppes de reliques textiles', *Abbaye de Saint-Maurice d'Agaune, 515-2-15, II: Le trésor* (Gollion, 2015a), pp. 272-309, nos 77-128. These descriptions supersede all previous accounts, including my own ('Portable Christianity: relics in the medieval West (c. 700-1200)', *Proceedings of the British Academy,* 181 (2012), pp. 143-67 at 162-7.

[7] I omit here details of the third reconstructable bundle because it contained site-relics from Jerusalem.

[8] M.-C. Isaïa, 'Histoire et hagiographie de Saint Just, évêque de Lyon', *Hagiographica,* 19 (2012), pp. 1-30. For a collation of the early evidence for his cult, see entry S02411 in The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity (CSLA) Database, http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=S02411 [accessed 14 May 2019].

wrapped inside a larger piece of silk, with a stunning peacock's-eye design in green, cream and golden brown. Two of its edges are seamed, an indication that it was an offcut from some older elaborate textile, such as the decorative panel on a late antique court robe. Attached to this little bundle was a parchment label in a seventh-century uncial hand, which simply reads *S(AN)C(T)I IVSTI*.[9] The bundle cannot be more closely dated than that, but the re-use of pieces of centuries-old cloth as both relic and wrapper is entirely typical of early medieval relic-making.

The other identifiable relic belonged to Euphemia, martyr of Chalcedon. A marker of orthodoxy, her cult reached Milan during the episcopate of Ambrose in the late fourth century and spread in the West from there.[10] It is a minute scrap of rose-pink silk taffeta only 7 x 4 mm in size, found wrapped in a piece of undyed (and undated) plain linen, together with a large papyrus label, written in a vigorous Merovingian cursive hand at the end of the seventh century.[11]

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Of the hundreds—doubtless thousands—of tiny particles of saintly stuff which circulated in the early Middle Ages, these are the only two whose material remains can be identified with

[9] For all relevant details see Schnyder, 'Das Kopfreliquiar', p. 122, A I(i), containing 7, 7a, 7b, 7c; Smith, 'Catalogue des étiquettes', p. 240, label 35; Schorta, 'Catalogue des tissus', p. 296, textiles 80, 81.

[10] Cult details available at CSLA record S00017, http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=S00017 [accessed 14 May 2019].

[11] Schnyder, 'Das Kopfreliquiar', p. 123, B II, containing 33, 34 and 35 (the second textile relic in this bundle noted by Schnyder (35b) has not survived); Smith, 'Catalogue des étiquettes', p. 242 label 44; R. Schorta, 'Catalogue des tissus et enveloppes de reliques textiles', *Abbaye de Saint-Maurice d'Agaune, 515-2-15, II: Le trésor* (Gollion, 2015b), vol. 2, pp. 272-309 p. 301, textiles 100, 101.

confidence. To say anything more requires exploiting the written record. Only one author was sufficiently curious about the active life of the material world within God's creation that he described relic-objects in some detail: Gregory of Tours. He took it for granted that, in addition to their corpses or ashes, a huge range of substances were remains of the saints. Some were substantial in size, but many were small and easily portable, and his voluminous hagiographical writings abound with miracle-working wax, lamp oil, dust, straw, rope, plant matter, water and much else besides.[12] Particularly notable in this context is his reference to threads pulled from an altar cloth—which might, perhaps, be how this Euphemia relic originated.[13]

Commonly, although not invariably, Gregory associated miraculous matter with named saints.[14] One generation later, Braulio of Saragossa admitted that his cathedral's stock of relics had slipped into anonymity because his predecessors had deliberately removed their identification tags.[15] Easily detachable, and, especially when made of papyrus, prone to degrade, tiny labels provided the essential link between saint and substance, as the two examples discussed above indicate. These scraps of papyrus or parchment gave identity and

[12] M. Weidemann, 'Reliquie und Eulogie. Zur Begriffsbestimmung geweihter Gegenstände in der fränkischen Kirchenlehre des 6. Jahrhunderts', in J. Werner (ed.), *Die Ausgrabungen in St. Ulrich und Afra in Augsburg 1961-1968*, 2 vols (Munich, 1977), vol. I, pp. 353-373.

[13] *Liber vitae patrum*, VIII, c. 6, ed. Bruno Krusch *MGH SRM* I/ii p. 246. See also *ibid*, c. 8, p. 248.

[14] Gregory had himself inherited some anonymous relics: *Liber in gloria martyrum*, c. 83, ed Bruno Krusch *MGH SRM* I/ii, pp. 94–5.

[15] Ep. 1: 'Praecessorum et dominorum meorum sententia fuit ut…cunctorum notitiae, ne ullius pateret indicium tituli, tollerentur et sub uno conclavi mitterentur.' *Bravlionis Caesaravgvstani Epistvlae, et Isidori Hispalensis Epistvlae ad Bravlionem*, ed. Ruth Miguel Franco, CCSL 114B, pp. 33-34. I owe this reference to the kindness of Robert Wiśniewski.

specificity to what were otherwise amorphous fragments.[16] Hundreds of them survive from the early Middle Ages, and, even when detached from their relic-object, they are valuable proxy evidence for them. The compensatory advantage of reliance on the labels is that it facilitates using their palaeographical features to comment, at least in outline, on patterns of circulation. It also enables the discussion to extend to a consideration of how relics were curated by the churches which accumulated them. This evidence is at the heart of this analysis, conducted via case studies of two saints whose popularity goes hand in hand with abundant documentation: St Martin of Tours and St Peter the Apostle.[17] By working across the various repositories in which they have left traces of their presence, I build up as complete an account as possible of their remains in the early Middle Ages.

St Martin of Tours

Neither the career nor the posthumous reputation of the wandering holy man who ended his life as bishop of Tours need extended introduction. However faltering its earliest phase at Tours itself may perhaps have been, suffice it to say that literary evidence confirms that his cult had spread beyond the Pyrenees, the Alps and the English Channel by the end of the sixth century.[18] As for material traces of Martin's great holiness, the impulse to touch, hold

[16] Cf. Smith, 'Portable Christianity'.

[17] For a survey of the unremarkable and unremarked documentary traditions associated with relics, see P. Cordez, 'Gestion et médiation des collections de reliques au moyen âge. Le témoignage des authentiques et des inventaires', in J.-L. Deuffic (ed.), *Reliques et sainteté dans l'espace médiéval*, Pecia: resources en médiévistique 8-11 (Saint-Denis, 2006), pp. 33-63.

[18] For general discussions see E. Ewig, 'Le culte de Saint Martin à l'époque franque', in H. Atsma (ed.), *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien: Gesammelte Schriften*, 2 vols (Munich,

and retain material evidence of his presence commenced even within his lifetime. The saint had stayed overnight in the sacristy of a church at Clion used by a group of "holy virgins" who, after his departure, ventured into it, pressing their lips to every spot where he had sat or stood, and taking away handfuls of the straw on which he had slept. The bedding retained his thaumaturgical power, for physical contact with it expelled a demon some days later.[19] For Sulpicius, that was the point of the story; for us, it focusses attention on the power of things intimately linked to the saint.

The most famous of those was the cloak which Martin had shared with a naked beggar one harsh winter in Amiens, a beggar who turned out to be Christ himself.[20] It reappeared three hundred years later: appropriated by the Merovingians no later than 679, it remained a royal palladium into the Carolingian era.[21] No other Martin relic would have an equivalently high profile again until John XXII gave papal permission to King Charles IV to

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1976a), vol. II, pp. 355-370; R. Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 13-28; A.S. McKinley, 'The first two centuries of Saint Martin of Tours', *EME,* 14 (2006), pp. 173-200; L. Pietri, *La ville de Tours du IVe au VIe siècle: naissance d'une cité chrétienne*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, 69 (Rome, 1983). For Martin's cult in Italy, see D.M. Deliyannis, 'Ravenna, Saint Martin, and the battle of Vouillé', in R.W. Mathisen and D.R. Shanzer (eds.), *The Battle of Vouillé, 507 CE: Where France Began*, Millennium-Studien, 37 (Berlin, 2012), pp. 167-180 and E. Ewig, 'Der Martinuskult im Frühmittelalter', in *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien*, vol. II, pp. 371-392 at pp. 375-6. Epigraphic evidence nuances the picture: M.A. Handley, *Death, Society and Culture: Inscriptions and Epitaphs in Gaul and Spain, AD 300-750*, BAR International Series, 1135 (Oxford, 2003), pp. 139-142. CSLA record S00050 itemises evidence for Martin's cult to c. 700: http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=S00050 [accessed 20 May 2019].

[19] Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* II.8, ed. C. Halm, CSEL 1, p. 190.

[20] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, c. 3. *Sulpice Sévère. Vie de Saint Martin*, ed. J. Fontaine, 3 vols. (Paris, 1967), vol. I, pp. 256-9.

[21] J. Fleckenstein, *Die Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige*, MGH Schriften, 16, 2 vols (Stuttgart, 1959), pp. I, pp. 11-14.

arrange for the saint's head to be detached from his body and placed in its own reliquary, to which it was formally translated in 1323.[22]

Quite apart from his cloak and, much later, his head, Martin's relics nevertheless abounded in the early Middle Ages. None of the literary evidence takes us at all close to the modest materialisations of the saint which circulated in abundance: only the labels can do that. They give us glimpses of how his cult functioned beyond the parameters of his shrine at Tours, offer a rare glimpse beyond the copious hagiographical traditions about Martin into a world of oral stories about him, and suggest something of the ways in which relics were treated by the churches which accumulated them. In short, they take us 'below the radar' of hagiographical, liturgical, epigraphic and archaeological evidence.

<< TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE >>

Scattered across eight different repositories, there survive fourteen early medieval labels on which Martin is the only named saint: they are enumerated and detailed in Table 1.[23] They present a palaeographical challenge for two reasons. These small slips of parchment range in size from a mere 26 x 10 mm (**M11**) to 85 x 13 mm (**M1**) and none has more than twelve words on it. In short, they display a limited selection of letters of the alphabet and lack any codicological information. Some are written on neatly prepared parchment rectangles, while others make use of the irregular, crinkled trimmings left when a sheet of parchment was cut to shape. They vary greatly in their degree of scribal expertise, and are written in a

[22] S.A. Farmer, *Communities of Saint Martin: Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (Ithaca, NY, 1991), p. 299.

[23] I exclude labels which combine Martin and his successor Brice, Martin in combination with several other saints, and all labels post c. 900.

wide variety of minuscule scripts, ranging from cursive through to fully developed caroline. Only the most approximate of chronological sequencing is possible, stretching from the first half of the seventh century to the first half of the ninth century. Guesstimates of their date, however, provide little help to the historian of saints' relics. This analysis first exploits selected palaeographical details to comment on circulation and curation, and then moves on to consider what they can tell us about Martin's remains, and how they were conceptualised by those who looked after them.

<<PLATE 1 ABOUT HERE>>

We may begin at Tours itself for, while the abbey of St Martin was never the only place associated with the saint's lifetime, it was where his body was laid to rest and it housed one of the most prolific and best-studied scriptoria of the early Middle Ages.[24] With due palaeographical caution, up to four labels may tentatively be assigned to Merovingian Tours. Two (**M1, M8**) are written in dark ink with a thick nib in a semi-cursive minuscule that shows considerable similarities to the numerous hands (mostly in a pale brown ink) in that script featuring in the late seventh-century Tours manuscript of Eugippius's compilation of extracts from Augustine (BnF NAL 1575).[25] Like BnF NAL 1575, the height and spacing of

[24] Martin died at Candes: the ensuing tussle between the citizens of Poitiers and Tours for possession of his body is recounted by Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum* I.48, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, *MGH SRM* I/i, pp. 32-3.

[25] https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105154174/f1.image [accessed 22 May 2019]. E.A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores: a palaeographical guide to Latin manuscripts prior to the ninth century*, 12 vols (Oxford, 1934-1971), vol. 5, no. 682, pp. 46-7, where the scripts are described as "mostly uncalligraphic and careless, and manifestly the product of a transition period". E. K. Rand proposed a date "probably near the beginning of the seventh century" for the Tours Eugippius (*A Survey of the Manuscripts of Tours*, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 1, p. 85) but Bernhard Bischoff preferred an early eighth-century date: 'Ein wiedergefundener Papyrus und die ältesten Handschriften der Schule von Tours',

letters of letters on **M1** and **M8** are uneven, and both are—or were originally—readily legible, only making use of common ligatures (**rt**, **tr**). Both waver between the genitive and ablative, suggestive of an origin somewhere where written Latin remained close to its spoken form, as it did in Tours. A third label (**M10**) shares some but not all of these features: it is in correct Latin and includes ligatured **ep**, **et**, but is in a more spacious, flowing semi-cursive than **M1** and **M8**.

<<PLATE 2 ABOUT HERE>>

The fourth label which may perhaps be assigned to Tours (**M11**) is quite different. Its text is neatly centred in the parchment rectangle, has regularly spaced letters in fully developed caroline minuscule, including a well-proportioned rustic capital **M**. These features immediately suggest that it derived from a centre where experienced scribes were available and are reminiscent of the "Perfected Style" of script which E.K. Rand identified as characteristic of manuscripts produced during the abbacy of Fridugisus (before 808-833).[26] Although there is inadequate detail on any of these labels to enable firm conclusions to be drawn, there are nevertheless grounds for suspecting that Tours energetically distributed Martin's relics. Despite the fact that none of the extant manuscripts of the Martinian collection of texts known as the *Martinellus* predates the ninth century, its core had been compiled prior to the episcopate of Gregory of Tours. It may even date back to his

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Mittelalterliche Studien, 3 vols (Stuttgart, 1966-1981), vol. I, pp. 6-16. A seventh-century date has recently resurrected by Kirsten Wallenwein for the group of Tours manuscripts to which it is related ('*Subscriptione*s in karolingischen Codices', in J. Becker, T. Licht and S. Weinfurter (eds.), *Karolingische Klöster: Wissenstransfer und kulturelle Innovation* (Berlin, 2015), pp. 23-38 at pp. 33-34.)

[26] Rand, *Survey*, I, p. 53. Fridugisus is first attested as abbot in 808 but he may have been installed as abbot after Alcuin's death in 804.

predecessor Perpetuus (461-491), and had certainly been circulating in the seventh and eighth centuries.[27] In view of the effort devoted to producing and distributing these compendia of hagiographical, epigraphical and metrical memorials to their patron, it would not be in the least surprising if the clergy of St Martin's basilica expended equivalent energy in distributing relic bundles.

In contrast to the specimens which may have retained their original Tours labels, three other relics cannot have done so: they offer tantalising clues to the realities of Martin's cult and its capacity to produce relics from sites remote from the saint's grave. The oldest of all the labels under discussion here comes from the head of the Adriatic. It was found in 1871 inside a richly embossed cylindrical container, one of two ornate silver reliquaries inside the relic cavity under the floor of Grado's late sixth-century cathedral. On its outside, seven saints are named below the lip; inside were eleven small gold foil *lamellae* which must have accompanied (or been attached to) the relics it contained. Each metal strip carries the neatly incised name of a single saint in majuscule letters, four more than the seven named externally: Martin features in the exterior inscription and on a *lamella* (**M7**).[28] As Cynthia Hahn has remarked, this is a carefully assembled set of relics denoting major eccclesiastical centres, including Rome, Ravenna, and Arles in addition to Tours, all gathered together

[27] E. Babut, *Saint Martin de Tours* (Paris, 1912), pp. pp. 299-304; M. Hellmann, 'Die Auszeichnung der Textstruktur in einer biographischen Sammeledition der Karolingerzeit am Beispiel des "Weissenburger Martinellus"', in D. Walz (ed.), *Scripturus Vitam. Lateinische Biographie von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart. Festgabe für Walter Berschin zum 65. Geburtstag* (Heidelberg, 2002), pp. 243-262.

[28] E. Marocco, *Il tesoro del duomo di Grado* (Trieste, 2001), pp. 12-15. For the reliquary, see G. Noga-Banai, *The Trophies of the Martyrs: An Art Historical Study of Early Christian Silver Reliquaries* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 127-128, 162.

around Mary.[29] Although the tradition reported by Paul the Deacon that in 568 the cathedral community of Aquileia had fled with their relics to Grado may not be fully adequate to explain the arrival of these relics at the island see, there is every reason to conclude that this gold tag had reached Grado by a circuitous route and was already old when Gregory of Tours wrote his Miracles of St Martin.[30]

By contrast, the oldest surviving parchment label comes from north of the Alps, and from the first half of the seventh century (**M9**). Preserved at Saint-Maurice d'Agaune, it had probably crossed the Alps from south to north. It is written in the same Italian cursive hand as a label for a relic of the Cross preserved in the same location, suggesting that both originated at the same time in the same high-status Italian church.[31] Indeed, Martin's cult was well established in Italy by the second half of the sixth century, and Pope Symmachus had even dedicated a church to him in Rome in c. 499.[32] Although there is no evidence as to what the relic-substance itself was, the balance of probability is that it originated in Rome, and was then carried north.

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[29] C. Hahn, 'The meaning of early medieval treasuries', in B. Reudenbach and G. Toussaint (eds.), *Reliquiare im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 2005), pp. 1-20 at p. 5.

[30] Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* II.10, *MGH SRL* ed. L. Bethmann and G. Waitz, p. 78; Gregory of Tours, *Libri de virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* I/ii, pp. 134-211.

[31] A. Bruckner and R. Marichal, *Chartae latinae antiquiores: Facsimile-edition of the Latin Charters Prior to the Ninth Century*, 49 vols (Olten, 1954), vol. I, no.19, pp. 32-33. For a digital image see http://www.digi-archives.org/fonds/aasm/index.php?session=public&lang=fr&action=show&ref=CH%20AASM%20CHN%20064%20001%20010 [accessed 23 May 2019].

[32] L. Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, 3 vols (Paris, 1886-1957), vol. I, p. 262; Deliyannis, 'Ravenna, Saint Martin, and the battle of Vouillé'.

It is impossible to guess where the last of this trio originated. According to the contemporary report of its discovery in 1889 inside the ninth- or tenth-century so-called Reliquary of Pippin at Conques, the relic itself comprised stones—presumably a few small chips or pebbles—that were wrapped in a piece of cloth.[33] Found torn, its label (**M6**) is not completely decipherable but is exceptionally important nevertheless. Its twelve words are awkwardly squeezed onto an approximately triangular parchment offcut, 80mm at its largest extent. Preceded by a cross, it opens with the declaratory formula more common in epigraphic contexts: "here there is…" and then announces that it contains a relic from the column (at a place whose name is illegible) *quam s(an)c(tu)s martinus firmauit*, in other words, which St Martin had signed or blessed.

The implication that Martin had made the sign of the cross over, or upon, a column opens up two intriguing possibilities. One is that this is a distant echo of a tale which Sulpicius's *Dialogues* ascribed to Gallus, in which the saint was attempting to topple a huge column that supported an idol. Lacking the means to do so, he restorted to prayer and another massive column hurtled down from heaven and smashed it.[34] To posit a correlation between Gallus's tale and the Conques label also requires a generous attitude to the disparity between a relic-producing site with an illegible name and the notable absence of topographical detail in Sulpicius's account. The first possibility is thus that the story had been appropriated by a specific church but its details misremembered and inaccurately transmitted by hearsay. The alternative is that this legend had developed entirely independently of the Martinian corpus of hagiography. Either way, this tiny scrap of

[33] P. Gasnault, 'Quelques documents originaux peu connus de l'époque mérovingienne', *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de la France,* (1969), pp. 254-264, cited p. 262 note 5.

[34] Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* III.9, ed. Halm, pp. 206-7.

parchment opens a big window into a world of oral story-telling about the saint's exploits. It illustrates how his cult had acquired a life of its own independent of Tours and its authorised traditions, including the establishment of a relic-generating shrine somewhere Martin was believed to have acted decisively in dealing with a column.

The next group of relics to consider are ones whose place of origin cannot be deduced because their original tags had been replaced at a later date. Throughout the Middle Ages, many churches curated their relics from time to time, relabelling them (and perhaps also rewrapping them) and sometimes moving them into different reliquaries. The tell-tale sign of this is sets of labels in the same hand for relics which originated in such scattered places that they cannot plausibly be attributed to a single individual's relic-collecting activity. Such evidence survives in several church treasuries and archives from c. 700 onwards: one of the best-known instances of this phenomenon occurred at the Carolingian royal nunnery of Chelles, just east of Paris, quite possibly under the abbacy of Charlemagne's sister Gisela. Here, at the end of the eighth century, the nuns used their characteristic "b-type" minuscule, first identified as their hallmark in several manuscripts by Bernhard Bischoff, to relabel over thirty items in their relic collection.[35]

Of the assemblage of 178 labelled relics discovered at Chelles in 1983, 139 date from before c. 800. Although the collection as a whole still awaits comprehensive analysis, three of its four Martin specimens, labels **M2**, **M3**, and **M4**, provide a typical snapshot of the early

[35] B. Bischoff, 'Die Kölner Nonnenhandschriften und das Skriptorium von Chelles', *Mittelalterliche Studien*, 3 vols (Stuttgart, 1966-81), vol. 1, pp. 16-34; J.-P. Laporte, *Le trésor des saints de Chelles* (Chelles, 1988). In the face of some scepticism, Julia Becker and Tino Licht reaffirm this hand as that of the Chelles nuns themselves: *Karolingische Schriftkultur: aus der Blütezeit des Lorscher Skriptoriums* (Regensburg, 2016), p. 5 and plate 9.

Carolingian phase of activity in b-minuscule. In common with all the new tags in this distinctive script, they are neatly cut parchment rectangles. In most cases, as **M2** and **M3** here, the text is exactly centred with modest margins on each side, implying very careful coordination between pen-work and knife-work. **M4** is unusual in having 18mm blank on the right-hand side, which may be a clue to the mechanics of production. We should probably envisage the copyist taking a fresh, trimmed sheet of parchment, writing out label texts one after another in neat rows, then cutting each line of text off the sheet and finally separating each label: if so, **M4** would have been the last one at the right-hand margin of the row.

Both the nuns' care and the limits of their expertise are evident in minor scribal details. Corrections indicate that labels were checked for accuracy, as in the case of **M3**, where a darker ink has neatly corrected **c** to **t**, yet whoever first penned it had mis-read the cursive **a** on the exemplar as **e**, a mistake left uncorrected. In an effort towards consistency, the nuns limited themselves to three formulae, of which the Martin subset evidences two. Named relic-objects are always introduced by *de* … as in **M4**, whereas non-specific objects are generally introduced by *reliquias* in abbreviation followed by the saint's name in the genitive (**M2**, **M3**).[36] They failed to achieve complete scribal consistency, however, for *reliquias* was abbreviated in one of several ways, and only sometimes given a capital **R**.

The quality of the nuns' work is emphasised by the sharp contrast with the remainder of the Chelles collection, almost none of which were produced to a comparable standard. Some relics were demonstrably left with their original tags on, while others may have been

[36] The third formula, used in only a handful of cases, is simply the saint's name in the genitive, with no prefatory word. Two labels blur the categories by using *de* + saint's name.

acquired after this burst of curatorial activity. Others again should probably be regarded as discards from the curating activities. **M5** is one such: an irregularly shaped offcut of poor-quality parchment, so rubbed that it is almost illegible, it was probably duplicated by either **M2** or **M3**. The contrast with the regularity of the new labels is a measure of the Carolingian transformation in writing practice achieved at the end of the eighth century, even though curatorial activity of this kind was not an innovation.

<<PLATE 3 ABOUT HERE>>

The rather basic lettering and use of a parchment trimming that characterise **M5** are common features of many early medieval relic labels. These are also the qualities of **M12**, preserved in the huge relic assemblage in the treasury of Sens cathedral. Its crude, widely spaced minuscule letters are the work of someone not in full control of his/her pen whose challenge was exacerbated by having to write on an uneven, heavily creased corner-piece discarded when a skin was trimmed into a rectangle. This is not the place to review the complex history of the formation of the Sens relic collection; suffice it to say that, whatever this label's provenance, its scribe was aware that there was more than one saint called Martin and wished to differentiate them: this relic explicitly referred to the saint from Tours.[37]

[37] Gregory of Tours mentions two homonyms, a martyr of Brive, near Limoges and an abbot of Saintes (*Decem libri historiarum*, VII.10, eds. Krusch and Levison, p. 332; *Liber in gloria confessorum*, c. 56, ed. Krusch, p. 330); another possibility is Pope Martin (d. 655), whose death in exile in Cherson led some in the West to style him a martyr. Relics of at least one of these other Martins circulated: a relic of *Martinus martyr* was in Sens by the early eighth century: Bruckner and Marichal, *Chartae Latinae antiquiores*, vol. XIX, no. 682.xxxviii, p. 48.

If label **M12** hints at a hinterland of rapidly accumulating relics and the risks of mistaken saintly identities, **M14** indicates how complex the early medieval travels of a single tiny relic could be. It is one of a group of labels which appear to be the work of a single scribe active around c. 700 who wrote a large, loopy cursive hand using a fairly evenly cut nib and made regular use of ligatures.[38] The saints themselves were of diverse origin, yet each label opens with *Hic sunt...*, suggesting that the scribe imposed a standardised formula on them. We should thus regard the activity of making new labels as one of redaction rather than merely copying. Within this set, however, only Martin's label is prefaced by a chrismon. If this was copied across from its exemplar, the relic and tag are unlikely to have originated at Tours, for none of the putatively Tours labels discussed above has any opening sign. If, on the other hand, it was added by the redactor, it indicates the freedom with which scribes altered and remodelled the text in front of them, while also suggesting a special affection for Martin.

Three of the other tags penned by this scribe denote relics originating in Rome, while the remaining ones came from Le Mans, Saintes, and Soissons respectively.[39] Behind this small relic assemblage lies a complex history.[40] Their provenance, but not their origin, was the Burgundian abbey of Saint-Vivant de Vergy. It had been founded c. 900 on a highly defensible site, and its first inhabitants were small groups of monks and clergy from multiple

[38] Following the suggestion made by D. Ganz and W. Goffart, 'Charters earlier than 800 from French collections [review article]', *Speculum,* 65 (1990), pp. 906-932 at p. 931.

[39] See L. Deslisle, 'Authentiques de reliques de l'époque mérovingienne', *Bulletin d'histoire et d'archéologie religieuse du diocèse de Dijon* 2 (1884), 129-34.

[40] A. Rauwel, 'Reliques et légendes: les pérégrinations de saint Vivant', in idem (ed.), *Saint-Vivant de Vergy: un prieuré clunisien au coeur de la Bourgogne* (Vosne-Romanée, 2010), pp. 10-19. The post-800 labels remain unpublished.

places in Aquitaine and Neustria, including Gravion (original home of the patronal St Viventius), Clermont, Bayeux, Rouen, and perhaps Maine, who shared a common plight in having all fled eastwards with their relics in the face of the Scandinavian attacks on the Frankish Atlantic seaboard. For some of them, Vergy was at least their second attempt to find a place of security and stability, and while we cannot deduce where the cluster of relics with their matching cursive labels originated, we may be sure that it was the sacred heritage of an early Merovingian foundation. Sufficiently ancient to feel the need to curate its relics in c. 700, but shattered by the Scandinavian onslaught in the ninth century, all that remains of this monastery is this clutch of seven relic labels at Vergy. Here, Martin's link to Tours was of no special significance; rather, this was just one of a group of old relics brought by weary refugees that became the foundational relic deposit of a new church far removed from any of the relics' point of origin.

<<PLATE 4 ABOUT HERE>>

The final label, **M13**, was originally a neatly cut strip, but is now torn, stained and abraded. It is preserved at Sens, where, like many of the easily legible labels, it survives alongside the copy made in 1192 when the cathedral undertook a major overhaul and curation of its relic collection.[41] There are no clues to where it was written, although its caroline script is so unlike **M11** that it points us away from Tours, and its reliance on the *hic…habentur* formula inclines me to suspect that it may be a Carolingian redaction of an older label. Its significance is in announcing the presence of Martin's chasuble as well as other indeterminate relics. At least part of the bundle's contents was, then a scrap of textile,

[41] Musées de Sens, Trésor de la cathédrale, J 626; unpublished.

although we cannot say whether its predecessor (if indeed there was one) was similarly explicit.

We may go one step further and speculate whether later redactors may have done more than merely alter the formula, add paraphs or other notable signs, and sometimes tidy up the Latin. Of the labels which, on palaeographical grounds, might have originated at Tours, only one contains any sort of object-specific information: his bier. One of the Chelles labels, **M4**, mentions Martin's stole, while here as at Sens they believed they had a piece of his chasuble: in Carolingian perspective, Bishop Martin of Tours must surely have possessed a set of liturgical garments.[42] When early medieval churches elevated their patron saints into a new tomb, they sometimes removed the original funerary vestments and kept them as relics, but there is no report of this happening when Bishop Perpetuus of Tours enlarged Martin's basilica and moved his sarcophagus in c. 470.[43] Nor, indeed , is there any evidence that either the church itself or Martin's tomb was altered in any way until the end of the tenth century.[44] In the absence of any Tourangelle tradition that the saint's vestments were removed from his tomb in the early Middle Ages, it is quite possible that these labels'

[42] On changing trends in ecclesiastical attire in the early Middle Ages, see M.C. Miller, *Clothing the Clergy: Virtue and Power in Medieval Europe, c. 800-1200* (Ithaca, NY, 2014), pp. 96-140.

[43] Cuthbert's shoes were retrieved when his body was elevated in 698 and soon performed miracles: *Vita Cuthberti auctore anonymo*, IV.14, 17; *vita Cuthberti auctore Beda*, cc. 42, 45, both in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 130-133, 136-139, 290-295, 299-301; Gregory the Great's cloak, belt and pectoral reliquary were removed for veneration when he was translated by Gregory IV (828-844): John the Deacon, *Vita Gregorii magni*, IV.15, *AASS Mar*. II, col. 205. For Martin's elevation see Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum* II.14, ed. Krusch and Levison pp. 63-4 and *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*, I.6, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* I/ii, pp. 141-142.

[44] Pietri, *La ville de Tours*, p. 380.

redactors had made their own best guess what they were handling when they rewrapped Martinian textile relics.

Like the stone-relic that came from a column (**M6**), Martin's stole (**M4**) and chasuble are thus objects which exist beyond the purview of literary sources. So too is his bier (**M1**), for Gregory of Tours' account of how Martin's body was smuggled back to Tours features only a boat.[45] All three are the appropriate paraphernalia of a sainted bishop, but it is impossible to determine whether these objects actually existed at Tours or, rather, did so in the minds of later relic custodians struggling to make sense of the objects they were curating. Clearly, then, we cannot solely rely on our hagiographical and other literary sources to ascertain what relics of any given saint were in circulation. Nor should we assume that all relics of a saint originated from his main shrine. In Martin's case, even though Tours certainly was his primary cult centre, it was not the only one, for both his hermitage at Marmoutier and his place of death at Candes were lesser cult sites, at least in the sixth century.[46] Most importantly, the careful relabelling of a relic far away from its point of origin, decades or centuries after it was first produced, was itself an act of cultural creativity, an effort to give specific, plausible identity to a tiny fragment of tangible matter.

St Peter the Apostle

[45] See note 24 above.

[46] Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, pp. 128-129.

That creativity is even more evident in the second case study, the only saint whose relics circulated even more widely and numerously than Martin: St Peter. Twenty-six early medieval labels either mention Peter on his own, or, in five instances, pair him with Rome's other apostle, Paul: see Table 2 for details.[47] In view of the ubiquity of his cult, the survival of so many labels is no surprise: in addition to complementing the conclusions of the first case study, they shed light on how this exceptional cult fostered changes to the urban topography of early medieval Rome.

<< TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE >>

The lack of a reference collection of papyri or manuscripts of certain Roman origin need not prevent us beginning in the city, for the provenance and circumstances of survival of two of the corpus point strongly in the direction of a Roman origin.[48] **P8** may well date from c. 600: although not as old as **M7**, the conditions of its survival take us as close as it is possible to get to the late antique practicalities of distributing labelled relics. The only one of the twelve papyri surviving at Monza to name a single saint, rather than a group, it was originally attached round the neck of a glass phial of oil, as were all the others. Filled from the lamps at Roman martyrs' shrines, the accompanying inventory declares that "in the times of the pope, lord Gregory, John, unworthy and a sinner, brought [them] to the ruler, Theodelinda, queen, from Rome".[49] In a neat, spacious cursive hand, the text of **P8** is

[47] I exclude the numerous other composite labels on which one or both apostles feature.

[48] The earliest certain document in a papal curial hand is Bruckner and Marichal, *Chartae Latinae antiquiores*, vol. XVI, no. 630, pp. 67-71 [Paris AN K.7, no.9[2]], of 788.

[49] The quotation is taken from the inventory which accompanied the *ampullae* (Bruckner and Marichal, *Chartae Latinae antiquiores*, vol. XXIX, no. 863, pp. 5-11); I cite the translation of Dennis Trout, 'Theodelinda's Rome: *ampullae*, *pittacia* and the image of the city', *Memoirs of the American Academy, Rome,* 50 (2005), pp. 131-150 at p. 132. As Trout notes

prefaced by a prominent equal-armed cross whose arms terminate in crossbars, and punctuated at the end by a simpler, smaller one, affirming that the flask's contents were of immense sacred value. We see here how Peter's relics spread outwards from Rome at the start of the centuries under discussion.

The use of papyrus for seventh-century labels was not confined to Theodelinda's collection, but the only other extant one for Peter, **P1**, is uninformative.[50] This cannot be said of the other relic which can confidently be assigned a Roman origin (**P9**), for it survived in the very heart of the early medieval papal city. One of a hundred very early relics preserved inside the relic chest commissioned by Leo III (795-816) in the Sancta Sanctorum, it is written in an Italian cursive hand which its most recent editor assigned to the ninth century.[51] An approximately square piece of heavily worn parchment (108 x 104 mm at its maximum extent), it functioned as wrapper-cum-label, a practice fairly common in the Sancta Sanctorum relic assemblage but unusual elsewhere.[52] Its patterns of wear and tear suggest that it had first been folded flat around its relic-object, rather in the manner that letters

(*op. cit*., p. 131 note 1), the dating of the inventory and tags has been contested, but this does not affect my argument. Trout publishes photographs of the *ampullae* with the tags still attached.

[50] For other papyrus relic labels, see Bruckner and Marichal, *Chartae Latinae antiquiores*, vol. XXIX no. 862, pp. 2-3; Galland, *Authentiques*, nos 55, 98, pp. 113, 131, and note 10 above for one from Saint-Maurice.

[51] For analysis of the whole assemblage from the Sancta Sanctorum, see my 'Care of relics in early medieval Rome', in V. Garver and O. Phelan (eds.), *Rome and Religion in the Medieval World: Studies in Honor of Thomas F.X. Noble* (Aldershot, 2014), pp. 179-205; M. Luchterhandt, 'The Popes and the *loca sancta* of Jerusalem: relic diplomacy in the eastern Mediterranean after the Muslim conquest', in R. Bartal, N. Bodner and B. Kühnel (eds.), *Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translations of Place, 500-1500* (Abingdon, 2017), pp. 36-63.

[52] Smith, 'Care of relics', pp. 199-200.

were folded, but later scrunched around it to form a frilled sachet. This would explain why its main text repeats words that recur in tiny format in the middle of the parchment, at the centre of the grubby stripe between the fold-lines. In saint, script, provenance and manner of packaging, then, this most Roman of relics highlights the importance of local habits in the care of relics.

The remaining Peter labels all have the same strip-like format as the Martin labels, and are parchments of similar size.[53] From a palaeographical perspective, they are remarkably diverse, not least at both Chelles and Sens. At Chelles, curiously, none of the Peter relics was redacted in the nuns' b-minuscule. The collection contains six labels (**P2-7**) of which one is in uncial (**P6**) and the remainder in Frankish cursive or semi-cursive hands which lack any graphic, scribal or verbal uniformity. Most are on somewhat irregular rectangles of parchment; only **P5** (now badly stained and chewed by vermin) seems to have achieved a level of neatness of preparation and script equal to the work of the b-minuscule scribes. The eleven specimens from Sens, on the other hand (**P15-P25**), include several neatly prepared labels in caroline minuscule (**P15**, **P23, P24, P25**) as well as several Merovingian parchments of widely varying standards. The older ones show a degree of notarial professionalism but lack concern with visual discipline. This is most evident in **P17**: replete with exuberant ligatures and a graphic sign resembling "SSS", its vigorous Merovingian cursive is effectively accommodated to the irregular shape of the parchment. **P21** also

[53] The size range is somewhat greater, for the smallest (**P24**) is 18 x 7 mm, while the longest is 164 x 15 mm (**P10**).

terminates in a similarly prominent sign, in both examples the hallmark of a scribe grounded in a formalised documentary tradition.[54]

Despite their heterogeneity, these labels have much to say about other issues of circulation and curation. Two pairs of labels are helpful here. In the first instance, **P14** and **P19** testify to pilgrimage to Rome by people from the insular world. The former, in an insular minuscule of c. 700, survived at the early medieval alpine transit point of Saint-Maurice and had surely belonged to an Anglo-Saxon or Irish traveller en route home. The latter (**P19**) is in an eighth- or ninth-century insular-style script but comes from Sens rather than a continental house of strong insular connections, thus hinting at complex patterns of internal circulation within the Frankish empire.[55] Symptomatic of otherwise unrecorded journeys, **P14** and **P19** are a caution that, in seeking to identify where relics were labelled, we should be prepared to find the answer in neither the place of origin nor the final destination.

The second pair to consider together are **P5**, from Chelles and **P18**, from Sens. They are the exceptional case of labels from different repositories in scripts that resemble each other in striking ways. More than a decade before the discovery of the Chelles labels, Jean Vezin had noted the similarities of **P18** with the Corbie *a-b* script and placed this, together with the Chelles manuscript books, in a regional Gallic context.[56] Like **P18**, **P5** has a neat script at a

[54] B.-M. Tock, *Scribes, souscripteurs et témoins dans les actes privés en France (VIIe-début du XIIe siècle)* (Turnhout, 2005), pp. pp. 145-190 on graphic signs. There are three other labels which include terminal marks of authority of this kind, all from Sens: Bruckner and Marichal, *Chartae Latinae antiquiores*, vol. XIX no. 682.xlviii, liii, lviii pp. 50-52, the first two of which closely resemble the work of the **P17** scribe.

[55] Discussed in more detail in my *Relics and the Insular World c. 600-c. 800*, Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lectures (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 20-21.

[56] J. Vezin, 'Le B en ligature à droite dans les écritures du VIIe et du VIIIe siècles', *Journal des Savants,* (1971), pp. 261-286 esp. p. 267.

transitional point between cursive and caroline minuscule, characterised by a **d** whose vertical descends well below the loop, an **e** with a very generous upper bow, and a deltoid **o** with a vigorous upstroke on the right-hand bow. The similarities suggest either a shared regional writing style or conceivably a common nearby point of origin for relics and labels alike.

Textual information on some labels provides supplementary clues to the circulation of St Peter's relics. **P15**, in an early caroline hand, states that these relics came "from the palace", presumably Charlemagne's, whereas **P26** (like **M14**, relabelled as part of the set of Vergy labels somewhere in western Gaul) makes the objects' Roman origin explicit: these relics of Peter and Paul are "from the city of Rome".

Other labels can be mapped against the topography of Peter's cult as it had developed in Rome by c. 600. This is by no means straightforward because, as Alan Thacker has stressed, Rome's earliest Christian writers emphasised Peter's credentials as their own martyr, yet remained uninterested in his grave until a relatively late date.[57] Peter's Roman career was developed and elaborated in post-biblical texts from the end of the first century onwards; in view of the notorious fluidity of apocryphal texts and hagiographical legends, well-read transalpine pilgrims were liable to encounter multiple, conflicting accounts. Enthusiastic

[57] A. Thacker, 'The Cult of St Peter and the Development of Martyr Cult in Rome. The Origins of the Presentation of Peter and Paul as Martyrs', in R. Dijkstra (ed.), *The Anchor of the Fisherman. The Early Reception and Appropriation of the Apostle Peter* (forthcoming). I am very grateful to Alan Thacker for sharing this with me in advance of publication, and to him and Markus Bockmuehl for help and advice with the complexities of early Petrine traditions in Rome; cf. M.N.A. Bockmuehl, *The Remembered Peter: In Ancient Reception and Modern Debate*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 262 (Tübingen, 2010), pp. 114-132. The following paragraphs draw heavily on both.

but ill-informed local guides doubtless also peddled much oral tradition and unreliable information, as they do in major tourist destinations today. Faced with much confusion, even Romans themselves struggled to develop a coherent master-narrative. The inconsistencies of local lore are evident in both the first recension of the *Liber Pontificalis*, made in the early sixth century, and the seventh- and eighth-century itineraries around Christian Rome.[58]

Acts 8: 19-24 had located Peter's confrontation with Simon Magus in Samaria, but the second-century *Acts of Peter* reprised the conflict in Rome's Forum on the V*ia sacra*, and later elaborations of the legend added Paul alongside Peter. Thus **P18** proclaims that it came from "the place where St Peter and St Paul prayed against Simon Magus". The imprints left by the apostolic knees in the rock on which they knelt to pray remained visible in the Forum throughout the early Middle Ages, and were incorporated into a church by Paul I (757-767), evidently the source of **P18**.[59] The *Acts of Peter* also narrated the legend of the apostle's imprisonment in the Mamertine prison on the Capitoline hill, where he baptised his guards in a spring which gushed from the rock in answer to his prayers: **P19,** "the rock on which St Peter prayed", may refer to the cult site which apparently developed there by the seventh century.[60]

[58] The late antique evidence for the earliest phases of Peter's cult is conveniently summarised by R. Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 14-17.

[59] Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, c. 27, ed. Krusch, p. 53; *Liber Pontificalis*, vol. I p. 465.

[60] For further details on this site and its legend, see Thacker, 'Cult of St Peter'. **P19** is the work of soneone who also visited the site *ad aquas salvias* where Paul's head reputedly bounced when he was martyred: *Relics and the Insular World*, p. 20.

First- and second-century traditions that Peter had been crucified upside down in the reign of Nero congealed in Jerome's *De viris illustribus*, but without any topographical precision about the location of his execution.[61] By the time of the first recension of the *Liber Pontificalis*, however, place had become important. By the early sixth century, common knowledge located his martyrdom "next to Nero's palace on the Vatican", yet confusion remained about where he had been buried, as also about when and where his body had been moved. The entry for Peter himself in the *Liber Pontificalis* stated that he had been buried in the temple of Apollo on the *via Aurelia*, while the entry for Pope Cornelius (251-3) reported that the pope had removed the bodies of both Peter and Paul from the cemetery *ad catacumbas* (on the *via Appia*), further stating that he relocated Paul to an estate on the *via Ostiense* belonging to *beata Lucina* (at whose request he had extracted the bodies), but placed Peter's body "close to the place where he was crucified, among the bodies of the holy bishops at the temple of Apollo on the Mons Aureus, on the Vatican at Nero's palace".[62]

<<PLATE 5 ABOUT HERE>>

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A further refinement came in the seventh century. The huge Constantinian *basilica apostolorum* covering the graves *ad catacumbas* was becoming known as the church of St Sebastian, and the *Notitia ecclesiarum Urbis Romae* added that, in addition to this martyr's

[61] Jerome, *Gli uomini illustri*, Biblioteca patristica, 12 (Florence, 1988), pp. 72-74.

[62] Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*, vol. I, pp. 51-53, 65-67. I quote the translation of R. Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715*, Translated Texts for Historians Latin Series, 5 (Liverpool, 1989), p. 9.

body in the lower church, “there are the graves of the apostles Peter and Paul, in which they rested for forty years.”[63] It is, then, a reasonable surmise that the contents of all five Peter and Paul relic packages (**P2**, **P11**, **P18**, **P22, P26**) had originated there while the apostles’ cult was still the predominant one. Apostles’ graves, therefore, did not need bodies, and these labels reflect the primary cult focus of the site in the Merovingian era.

Seventh- and eighth-century itineraries agreed in placing Peter’s body in his church on the *via Cornelia* (also styled the *via Vaticana*).[64] The insular scribe responsible for **P14** reconciled conflicting traditions by acknowledging the apostle had been transferred from one site to another: its owner had acquired “soil from the church in which Peter was first buried”, which could as easily refer to the church on the *via Appia* as to the *via Aurelia* or *via Cornelia*. The ambiguity did not matter: rather the label proclaimed that the relic was tangible evidence of the prince of the apostles’ death despite the existence of multiple topographical claims. In similar fashion, the eighth-century author of **P10** travelled home with a piece of the cross on which the apostle was crucified.[65] Although not readily translatable, the vernacular Latin of **P17** might refer to the same site commemorating the

[63] ‘*Via Appia*. Postea pervenies via appia ad sanctum Sebastianum cuius corpus iacet in inferiore loco. Et ibi sunt sepulchra apostolorum Petri et Pauli, in quibus xl annorum requiescebant’, *Codice topografico della città di Roma*, eds. R. Valentini and G. Zucchetti, 4 vols. Fonti per la storia d'Italia, 81, 88, 90, 91 (Rome, 1940-53), vol. 2, p. 85. R. Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum christianarum Romae. The Early Christian Basilicas of Rome (IV-IX cent.)*, 5 vols (Vatican City, 1937-77), vol. 4, pp. 99-147.

[64] *Codice topografico*, vol. 2, pp. 95, 106.

[65] Although there is no corroborating evidence, it is not impossible that relics of St Peter’s cross derived from Jerusalem. During his visit in late sixth century, an anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza saw “the small column in which was set the cross of St Peter, on which he had been crucified at Rome” among the many lithic relics in the church on Mount Sion: 'Ps-Antonini Placentini Itinerarium', c. 22, *Itineraria et alia geographica*, CCSL 175, p. 140.

apostle's crucifixion. Topographical precision did not trouble early medieval relic-gatherers: event mattered far more than place.

<<PLATE 7 ABOUT HERE>>

<<PLATE 8 ABOUT HERE>>

Nevertheless, the material expression of Peter's cult became steadily more important. It remains unclear to how much the proliferation of Peter-objects may have owed to local, Roman initiative, let alone whether the papacy promoted this trend. The notable exception here is the apostle's chains. Inside the city, the legend of his imprisonment prior to crucifixion had brought his chains into existence: by the fifth century, they were enshrined in a *titulus* church on the Oppian Hill, which soon became designated as the 'basilica of Peter's chains'.[66] Here, their cult was evidently under papal control, for on twelve occasions, Gregory the Great enclosed filings from them in little key-shaped pendant reliquaries for dispatch as diplomatic gifts to secular and ecclesiastical potentates.[67]

The objects attested by pre-caroline relic labels are less prestigious. Two have already been mentioned, the oil—a common late antique relic-substance—in Theodelinda's possession at Monza (**P8**) c.600, and, at Säckingen, an eighth-century relic from the cross on which Peter

[66] 'Basilica quae appellatur vincula Petri, ubi habetur catena qua Petrus ligatus est': *Codice topografico*, vol 2, p. 180. See also Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum*, vol 3, pp. 179-234; A. Thacker, 'Popes, emperors and clergy at Old Saint Peter's from the fourth to the eighth century', in R. McKitterick *et al.* (eds.), *Old Saint Peter's, Rome* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 137-156 at p. 148.

[67] Discussed by A.T. Hack, *Codex Carolinus. Päpstlishe Epistolographie im 8. Jahrhundert*, Päpste und Papsttum, 35 (Stuttgart, 2007), pp. 786-789.

was crucified (**P10**). At about the same time, the first references to objects pertaining to his life begin to feature. They fall into three groups: those relating to his body, his clothing, and his domestic life. Signalled by a label written, unusually, in uncial (**P6**), Chelles possessed a piece of his beard. A label in a transitional minuscule of around 800 reveals that, among other Petrine relics, Sens possessed his cloak and his bed (**P20**), while Chelles too had a relic of this piece of furniture at about the same date (**P7**). As noted above, the cursive label **P17**, "from the wood of St Peter, where he himself rests", might refer to a domestic bed, but more likely to the cross on which he was crucified.

<<PLATE 9 ABOUT HERE>>

Moving into the era of fully developed caroline minuscule, the range of relic-objects expands further. The reliquary-altar of the Sancta Sanctorum possessed a piece of his *manica* (**P9**), while Sens was home to pieces of his *cingulum* and his *tunica* (**P16**; **P25**). To interpret these objects and appreciate the full range of Petrine objects known to exist by the Carolingian era, we must turn to a sequence of relics itemised in caroline minuscule in Sens Treasury (Table 3 and Plate 10). It represents the characteristic second phase of relic documentation: a slip of parchment listing diverse objects grouped together into a single reliquary or altar that had been produced for deposition among them.

<< PLATE 10 and TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE>>

Approximately rectangular, its bookmark shape is highly unusual. Of its sixteen items, all but four represent St Peter, twice in conjunction with St Paul but otherwise alone. Minor repetitions and syntactic differences between the entries betray its origin as a compilation that drew on the discrete labels attached to each object. Two correspond exactly to labels

already discussed, and might even have redacted them. Overall, however, this list brings into sudden visibility the proliferation of Petrine objects which took place in the Carolingian era. His bodily relics now include his hair as well as his beard, plus his blood mingled with that of St Paul. As for his domestic arrangmements, in addition to the "wood where St Peter himself rests" (cf. **P17**), it now extends to "the table where St Peter and Paul ate", as well as "St Peter the Apostle's house". Both suggest the importance of oral tradition in the formation of saintly objects and places; the latter might conceivably also connect Peter back to his Holy Land origins.[68]

Peter's attire, meanwhile, has expanded to include his *camisa* as well as his *cingulum* and *tunica*. His *manica* preserved in the Sancta Sanctorum in the Lateran patriarchate might conceivably have been a relic of the handcuffs with which the apostle was believed to have been shackled in jail, but the word was more likely used in its liturgical meaning of episcopal gloves. In this sense, *manicae* feature in several ecclesiastical treasure inventories from the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious.[69] With this single exception, Peter's other items of apparel all feature north of the Alps, where they are best interpreted in the light of the authoritative status enjoyed by Roman liturgical practice coupled with an emerging

[68] The *mensio* (= *mansio*) of line 9 of the relic list in Table 3 (Plate 10) might refer to one of two traditions: in Rome, one of the fourth-century mausolea abutting the *basilica apostolorum* has a graffito scratched into the plaster reading *domus Petri*; in the Holy Land, some late antique pilgrims report that at Capernaum in Galilee the *domus Petri* had been converted into a church. Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum*, vol 4, pp. 111, 138; 'Ps-Antonini Placentini Itinerarium', c. 7, p. 132. See also note 62.

[69] B. Bischoff, *Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse. Erster Teil: Von der Zeit Karls des Grossen bis zur Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1967), nos. 27, 56, 65, 85, 110, pp. 36-37, 63-64, 73, 90-91, 109. These references were not available to J. Braun, *Die liturgische Gewandung im Occident und Orient: nach Ursprung und Entwicklung, Verwendung und Symbolik* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1907), pp. 359-366, which remains the principal account.

Carolingian emphasis on correct priestly vestments.[70] In liturgical contexts, both *tunica* and *camisa* are synonyms for an alb (*alba*), a garment in universal liturgical use by the Carolingian era and attested under all three terms in church treasuries.[71] Finally, Carolingian guidance required a priest to belt his alb with a cincture (*cingulum*) whenever he said mass.[72] In tribute to the prestige in which the papacy was held, Peter had become the very model of a well-dressed pontiff. The Lateran's *manica* suggests that the papal clergy updated his image—and relics—to match.

Carolingian relics thus detached event from place, making Peter's life, martyrdom and pontifical status easily transportable. They are witness to a creative interaction between oral tradition, Rome's monumental heritage, and relic-objects themselves. All converged in supplying the saint with the everyday belongings which he must—in a literal-minded reasoning—have surely possessed in his lifetime. The apostle's paramenta snap into full textual focus in the fifteenth century, when their presence in Rome is noted by the records of the indulgences available for visiting specific churches and altars. Thus in claiming to be *mons Aureus*, the site of the apostle's martyrdom, the church of St Peter *in Montorio* on the Janiculum hill possessed his leggings, shirt and shoes, while over on the Aventine, Santa Prisca had his stole and belt.[73] Only Peter's table achieved equivalent notice in the early

[70] Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*.

[71] Braun, *Die liturgische Gewandung*, pp. 57-69. See also Bischoff, *Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse*, nos. 12, 15, 28, 49, 56, 65, 82, 85, 89, 110, pp. 23-24, 26, 38-39, 58-9, 63-64, 73, 87-88, 90-91, 94, 109.

[72] Braun, *Die liturgische Gewandung*, pp. 102-4. There are no eighth-/ninth-century cinctures in Bischoff, *Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse*.

[73] N.R. Miedema, *Die römischen Kirchen im Spätmittelalter nach den 'Indulgentiae ecclesiarum urbis Romae'*, Bibliothek des Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Rom, 97 (Tübingen, 2001), pp. 716-718, 756-758. Legends associating Peter with S. Prisca appear c.

Middle Ages: probably produced in the pontificate of Honorius (625-638), the compendium *De locis sanctis martyrum quae sunt foris civitatis Romae* notes the presence of "the table, now an altar, which Peter made with his own hands" among the sites along the *via Cornelia*.[74] Turned into an altar, the evidence for Peter's furniture-making subsequently disappeared from the record.

To demean these tangible expressions of Rome's martyrial past as ahistorical because undocumented in narrative, hagiographical or liturgical texts is to misunderstand both the meaning of relics to medieval Christians and the nature of relic-making traditions. Stories about what "surely must have been" abounded wherever visitors and locals interacted, in the seventh and eighth centuries as in the fifteenth. Relic-objects emerged out of the convergence of their interests, needs and beliefs, for they express the cultural creativity of an age keen to venerate the holy in concretised form. Although the impulsion to materialise the holy is much better documented in the late Middle Ages than in these earlier centuries, the remains of Peter and Martin discussed here show that, within the bounds of their own imagination, the men and women of the early Middle Ages sought similar concrete, sensory contact with Christian verities.[75] Beyond the purview of hagiographical and liturgical texts, oral tradition, apocryphal writings (in the case of Peter), and an instinct to clothe the distant past in the garb of the present all collaborated in supplying the detail and verisimilitude that helped make the saints imaginable as people who had once truly lived.

1100: Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum*, vol. 3, p. 262. For additional fifteenth-century Peter sites and relics, see Miedema's index, s.v. 'Petrus, Apostel', pp. 865-866.

[74] *Codice topografico*, vol 2, p. 106.

[75] Cf. C.W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011).

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There is no better proof that objects could slide unobserved between secular and sacred status than the fate of the apostle's chair, the *cathedra Petri* in the Vatican basilica. Despite scholarly uncertainty about its initial symbolic or ideological meaning (the phrase first appears in the earliest liturgical evidence for saints' cults in Rome, the so-called *Calendar of 354*), it is now clear that the current throne-like chair designated by that name was made in north-eastern France in the ninth century and was probably a gift from Charles the Bald in 875—but that it only became regarded as a relic during the twelfth century: it now survives as enshrined by Bernini in the mid-seventeenth century.[76] But of all the other relics discussed here, almost nothing remains. A small bundle wrapped in tawny linen and labelled as the apostle's beard (**P6**), a piece of blue/brown tabby-weave wool accompanying the non-specific **P4,** and a woody fragment found with **M2** survive among the Chelles labels in the Archives nationales—but that is all.[77] In conjuring objects out of written labels therefore, this paper has been an exercise in finding imaginative ways to make early medieval saints' relics become real. To that extent, it parallels the efforts of early medieval men and women themselves to make their saints more than just names, stories, or prayers by endowing them with the things they must surely have possessed in their lifetimes and anchoring their legends in the landscapes with which they were familiar.

[76] 22 February. The feast of Peter of the Chair (*Natale Petri de Cathedra*): *Chronographus anni CCCCLIIII*, ed. T. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. 1, *MGH AA* IX, p. 71; D.J. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 112-113.

[77] Images of these relics are included with the digitised images of the relevant Chelles relic labels at https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/IR/FRAN_IR_052903.

There are two consequences: as saints gradually acquired concrete, tangible form, they became steadily more portable, and as the material manifestations of cults proliferated, so patterns of dissemination became more circuitous and indirect. This paper has drawn attention to that increasing complexity by exploiting the miniature texts attached to relic-objects in search of the stuff of sainthood, its meaning, curation and circulation. In revealing how tiny pieces of holy matter were packaged, labelled and re-labelled—in effect, how the material culture of sainthood was interpreted and curated—it has endeavoured to throw a spotlight on the dynamics of early medieval relic-making.[78]

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