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Get A Head In Life: The Creation of Denis as a Cephalophoric Saint

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History

by

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Abstract

Martyrdoms by beheading are not uncommon in hagiographic narratives. In fact, it is one of the most common forms of martyrdom. In 8th century Francia, the beheading of Saint Denis became rose to national prestige. Saint Denis, the patron saint of Paris, engaged in a unique and original act. After Denis' martyrdom, he was raised from the dead and carried his head in his hands two miles to the location where his basilica would be constructed. Thus Denis became the most famous cephalophoric - or head-bearing - saint. This study asserts the murder of Saint Boniface in 754 is directly linked to the creation of Denis as a cephalophoric saint in the later 8th century. The Franks of the 8th and early 9th centuries used the hagiographic trope of cephalophory in a politically motivated decision during the formative years before the emergence of the Frankish empire. This study also explores the framing of the perception of the medieval body as a political machine and a theological exercise. Thus, this study will primarily use two hagiographical texts which are ostensibly about the same event but contrast in language and purpose to discuss the political motivations behind the creation of Denis as a cephalophoric saint.

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Abbreviations

AB	*Analecta Bollandia*
'Gloriosae'	*Passio S. Dionysii* [BHL 2171]
'anonymous passio'	*Passio S. Dionysii* [BHL 2178]
BHLms	*Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina Mansuscriptia,* ed. Bollandist, online at bhlms.fltr.ucl.ac.be
Hildiun's Passio	*Passio S. Dionysii* [BHL 2175]

Introduction

Don't Lose Your Head

Cephalophoric saints constitute an important group within hagiography, and pose significant challenges for the modern study of the medieval cult of saints, relic claims, and early medieval cultural history. Texts pertaining to the bodies of saints are common in the Middle Ages, and flourish in the period between the 6th and 10th centuries. By legitimizing early Christian martyrs as saints who had faced pagan persecution, their biographies propose that the power of the saints extended over the social and religious world of the western Mediterranean through their relics and cult. Denis, the first bishop of Paris and martyr was beheaded in the first century according to legend. The history of the 'head-bearing' saints such as Denis is unique in that it concentrates focus on two parts of the saint – body and head. Time, space, and the body are represented in the hagiography of cephalophoric saints.

There is a clear political and cultural importance of Denis in the hagiographical shift to make Denis into a cephalophoric saint by the 8th century. The mentalities of the Early Medieval period assisted in the creation of the cephalophoric saint which was rooted in the cultural views of the medieval body intellectually by placing the body within a theological frame. The time and place in which the shift in the content of the vita took place, which starkly contrast in language and purpose, was inspired by the

martyrdom, and decapitation, of Boniface in 754. By the mid-13th century, the time of Jacobus de Voragine, the legendary status of Denis' cephalophory became sealed in time, never again to be altered. The reinvention of Denis as a cephalophoric saint demonstrates the development of Carolingian interest in the early Christian past which was manifest in their own political actors they sought to transform into martyrs such as Boniface.

Cephalophoric saints may seem fantastical outside of medieval contexts, but are useful in illuminating the early medieval world as part of the larger corpus of evidence from hagiographies. There are over 100 cephalophoric saints, and the topic of cephalophores has been the focus of a niche scholarship.[1] Bollandist scholars, among others, have given some attention to these saints over the course of the 20th century, but interest in these specific saints has waned. This scholarship that has more or less been neglected for some time. Thus, the questions which are raised from this are concerned with the early medieval social, political, and theological world that, when combined, created these hagiographies that have been useful for a multitude of reasons. What did it mean to be cephalophoric saint? Why was this the time cephalophoric saints were created? What was the significance of the shift between the first *vita* of Denis and the second? In moving beyond the cephalophoric saint itself questions also arise in regards

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[1] LES SAINTS CÉPHALOPHORES: Etude de folklore hagiographique, Saintyves P., Association de la Revue de l'histoire des religions, 1929, 158

to the political impact of rewriting Merovingian hagiography. Was Denis a part of a larger trend of reinterpretation? How complex were the Carolingians' relationship to their predecessors? Did the hagiographers of Denis reinterpret Denis in congruence with the effort to erase the historical memory of the Merovingians and make Denis their own? To what degree of influence did the murder of Boniface have on the cephalophory of Denis?

The changes which took place between the versions of the *vita* outline the consequences of Boniface as the first national Frankish martyr. Whereas historians have focused on the version of Denis authored by Hilduin and the appearance of Denis in the Golden Legend, a return to the two documents which inspired Hilduin also reveal contemporary political and institutional influences which stem from the founding of a Frankish empire at the turn of the 9th century and the high prolife political assassination of Boniface. I am the first to look at the differences between the '*Gloriosae*' and the '*anonymous passio*' in a critical way.

A number of historiographies and methodological approaches including place, time, and body, apply to the medieval world of cephalophoric saints. The topic of cephalophoric saints insists that all of these dimensions be analyzed at an intersection. Some important intersections are the body and time, time and place, and finally place and body. These various interpretations of the medieval world demonstrate an intersection manifest in hagiography. That intersection in manifest in the hagiographic

trope of cephalophoric saints. At its core, the study of cephalophoric saints explores the intersection between the abstract and the material.

Hippolyte Delehaye, a Jesuit scholar whose work on the topic of hagiography and saints are still standard within medieval scholarship (including *The Legend of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*), only made a brief remark on the mentalities of the ancient and medieval authors of *vita* for cephalophoric saints. When speaking on the various mentalities that the hagiographical authors may have had, or had been exposed to, Delehaye, makes a brief remark about the invention of cephalophoric saints. He claimed, "It was obviously the common people who created the naïve legend of the saints who carry their own heads…".[2] This initial dismissal concerning the origins of cephalophoric vitae is not surprising given the intellectual processes of his time, but nowadays where historians are more than ever attempting to discover the lives of everyday people of the past, this is quite the accusation. He turns to cephalophores again explicitly in his section concerning false sources and oral histories. He claimed, "If it was the people who created the legend of the 'cephalophorous' or head-bearing saints, it was propagated by the hagiographers who bestowed upon it that special authority which uneducated always accord with the written word".[3]

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[2] Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legend of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography.* Trans. By Crawford. Longmans, Green and Co. London 1907. 46
[3] Delehaye *Legends of the Saints* 81

Hippolyte Delehaye's dismissal of cephalophoric saints as forgeries of folklore is inadequate for discussions on folklore and culture. Is it so simple for Delehaye to chalk these events up to simple common folk tales that hagiographers co-opted for their legitimacy? If it is to be believed the elites of society forced their culture into the lay populations, then, believing Delehaye to be correct in his assumptions, we find the opposite trajectory. Peasant culture in the belief and creation of the Cephalophoric saint must have, however inadvertently, influenced the nature of a church which would come to be associated with the royal dynasties of France. My intervention seeks to place the creation of cephalophoric saints into context with the martyrdom of Boniface in 754 while continuing to explore possible folkloric influences and cultural justifications for such a creation.

Perhaps the most famous of these head-bearing saints is Denis, the patron saint of Paris (and headaches). He is the most popular and prolific of all the cephalophoric saints. I investigated the primary texts for Denis, keeping in mind the assertions by Delehaye above, and made an interesting discovery that there are three separate versions of his *vita*. Only the second and third *vita* claim his cephalophory, yet the first, and quite possibly the original *vita* did not. The most prolific version of Denis was written in the 9th century by Hilduin of Denis, an abbey of the same name. Hilduin, one of the most educated men in the early medieval period, knew of the existence of these incarnations of Denis's *vita*. In keeping with this scholastic tradition, and with the

blessing of Louis the Pious, Emperor of the Franks, Hilduin compiled the *vita* into its third incarnation with elements of the two existing hagiographies. His hagiography notably included the tale of cephalophory. It is *Hildiun's Passio* which became the most well-known *vita* of Denis in perpetuity.

Seeking the exact, or even the possible, origins of cephalophory within western European hagiography is not the purpose. A medieval society informed hagiographical text. It is quite convenient for me that Hilduin himself did not invent this category. The anonymous nature of the second vita of Denis allows me to investigate more deeply into the possible social life of early hagiography in Western Europe. The area that is known to us today as France will be the main region of my focus.

The origins of cephalophores have been discussed in length by French scholars such as Phillipe Gabet, Marie-Céline Isaïa, Saintyves P., G. Oury, and Maurice Coens. These articles span 20th century scholarship as they discuss at length the origins and list, in legion, the biographies and historicity of named cephalophoric saints. Saintyves P. attempts to discuss at length the possible origins of the saints. He likewise gives us a survey of possible cephalophores and what they knew about them at the time of his publication in 1929. The Bollandist scholar Coens makes a more modern attempt in the 60's to discuss the origins of the unique group of saints. Gabet provides the most recent survey of cephalophores from 1980. He provides context to over a dozen known

cephalophores. G. Oury goes in depth into the origins of S. Quienten and his cephalophoric past. Likewise, Marie-Céline Isaïa goes into depth about S. Nicasius.

The modern study of saints, their relics, and hagiography in general was founded over a century ago by the Bollandist scholar Hippolyte Delehaye in his foundational text *The Legend of the Saints*. The scholarship from 1905 maintains the basic scholarly appeals to hagiography that students and scholars have been utilizing over the course of the century. In particular Delehaye speaks at length about the historian's role as an interpreter and the duty the historian has to understand the context of who, how, and when primary sources were written. These roles and duties are important to the study of hagiographies because of their religious implications and their legendary nature. Religion, legitimacy, and mythmaking are intertwined in several interesting ways as they pertain to cephalophoric saints. They also impact the construction of religious intellectuals of the early medieval period. Historians have had the tools and resources to investigate these sources thanks to Delehaye.

To further discuss the impact of the cult of saints and their relics one need not look further than the foundational work of Peter Brown's *The Cult of Saints*. Brown argues that a shift in religious sensibility allowed the formation of devotional practices which in part distinguish the classical from the medieval world. In the world of late antiquity, the former horror of death and the grave gave way among Christians to the belief that the graves of holy men and women were especially linked to heaven. His

scholarship is particularly foundational when studying relics in the context of the saint's *praesentia* (presence) and *potentia* (power). These two concepts are integral to the study of the cult of saints. Presence represented divine mercy such that those around the relics would feel the physical presence of the holy object. Presence related to the aforementioned *translatio* of relics: the movement of the relics to the people.[4] Power refers to the literal divine powers that the relics hold and how that power is projected onto the people.

The study of historical context and historical uses of hagiography by James T. Palmer provides a succinct overview of early medieval hagiography. Hagiographies were used in a historical and biographical nature to discuss saints and the world in which they lived. Palmer posits that if one wanted to understand the varied experiences of the Middle Ages, hagiography is an unrivaled source type.[5] His short work provides a kind of "spyhole" in which his reader can ascertain the importance of the illumination that hagiographies can have. Working with hagiographies can lead to a wide variety of interpretations such as how hagiographers created saints through memory, the popularity and circulation of texts, understanding personal politics and how studying hagiography can illuminate our understanding between the years 500-900.[6] Saints were crucial building blocks in Christian universality.[7]

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[4] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981. 88
[5] James T. Palmer *Early Medieval Hagiography,* Arc Humanities Press, Leed. 2018. 3
[6] Palmer, *Early Medieval Hagiography*, 11
[7] Palmer, *Early Medieval Hagiography*, 96

Palmer likewise builds off of such foundational works by Peter Brown. Brown's *The Rise of Western Christendom* asserts that early Christian Europe was composed of many "micro-Christendoms." This idea comes to us from the notion that communities sought to define the universal nature of Christian belief for local audiences.[8] Hagiography therefore might help to build and maintain such "micro" audiences and communities. From the clash of paganism and Christianity, the establishment of churches and local traditions, to the writing of local histories, hagiographies, and therefore saint's lives, made significant local and national impacts. The distinction between what is 'elite' and what is 'local' is important because these 'head-bearing' saints must then be intimately involved on the local level, particularly as ownership was applied to their relics. Localities might also explain the creation of such a trope.

Lisa Bitel in *Landscape of Two Saints*, provided an excellent background into the world of pagan Gaul and the building of Christianity, of which S. Denis is a main provocateur. Her scholarship gave the reader an insight to both the folk and the elite culture. Genovefa was responsible for the initial chapel of S. Denis during a time which Bitel described as the building of Christianity in late antique Gaul. Her analysis focused on the use of place and time surrounding the area of Paris which became increasingly Christianized. Through this study of Genovefa we can ascertain not only her contributions to the cult of Denis, but also her methodological approaches. We can also

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[8] Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom,* Wiley and Blackwell, Oxford, 2013. 15

see how Denis was perceived contemporarily in 6th century Gaul and how these localities also contributed to the creation of cephalophoric saints.

Michael Lapidge not only provides the basis for the primary literature but also context into the life of the hagiographer, Hilduin. In addition to making these materials available in scholarly editions with facing translations, Lapidge offers a monograph-length introduction that reassesses the abbot's career and writings. He then speaks to the background of Hilduin himself, which has been talked about above. Lapidge turns at last to the *passio* itself, first offering an overview of its sources, language, and versification, then helpfully reviewing and extending his earlier arguments for Hilduin's authorship. In 1987, those arguments had engaged three categories of evidence such as the close correspondence generally between the poem and Hilduin's prose, the affinities of the poem with other Carolingian saints' lives, and the testimonies of later authorities. Lapide's contributions to historiography include a narrative prose and a poetic English translation of Denis' hagiography.

Historian Ian Wood explicates the origins of the Early Medieval Ages in a dense survey of material. He offers a broad panorama of approaches to and understandings of the late Roman Empire and Germanic migrations by Western European scholars between the eighteenth century and the present. He categorizes the contributions of individual scholars and identifies the sources of their inspiration, he dedicates substantial ink to the impact of contemporary political and personal circumstances

upon their research choices and publications. Wood successfully demonstrates the extent to which the work of early medieval historians has reflected the issues of the day regardless of the degree of their success in rising above the fray of contemporary political, religious, and social concerns.

Hagiographies are one of the most valuable sources for the interpretation of social, political, and religious life from the medieval period. The definition and use of hagiography has been debated heavily elsewhere; however, these points are important to note as a majority of the primary sources will come from hagiographies as well as religious icons. Scholars such as James T. Palmer and Scott Montgomery speak on the uses of hagiography. Hagiography continues to be crucial in the literary nature of these sources as well as the value it holds within theological and historical contexts. Hagiography has been described as "swindle-literature" for its uses of church dogmas. This assumption does not credit the audience of the consumers of hagiographies with sufficient agency. The audiences of hagiographies and the communities that consumed these stories, both lay and elite, were active participants in their societies with all of their inspirations, ideas and biases for writing and believing.

Hagiographies as sources have been historically controversial because of their legendary nature. This is especially true when working with the cephalophoric saints. Truth, fact, and fiction are all intertwined into a contemporary cultural understanding which the hagiographers understood well. It is then the job of a historian to bring to

light to what those cultural clues looked like in order for these narratives to make sense to the modern audience. Studying history through these types of sources therefore presents an interesting problem. It is a problem of truth as our modern perceptions understand the truth. Truth over the previous centuries has been fluid and means different things to different people. Historical writings must then be taken in context of the beliefs and culture of the time of authorship. Mathew Gabrielle said of medieval historical truth: "In the Middle Ages, what mattered was the text's truth *claim*, rather than the actual *value*. Not whether it corresponds to fact… but how it asks to be taken by the reader. Historical truth in the Middle Ages should simply be defined as that which was willingly believed."[9]

The main source for thinking about the cultural contexts of the medieval body, not only as it relates to women, but the historical era as a whole comes from Caroline Walker Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption*. The ideas most present in her mind when compiling this volume are brought together in the last essay, a discussion of ideas about the resurrection of the body in medieval theology and practice. This is known as material continuity. Here the most ancient of riddles, the secret of the relation between mind and body, is retold from medieval texts and through modern sensibilities, to highlight the dramatic tensions between fragmentation and redemption, transience and

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[9] Matthew Gabrielle *An Empire of Memory: The Legend of Charlemagne, the Franks, and Jerusalem before the First Crusade.* (Oxford: University Press, 2011) 8

eternity, frailty and wholeness: the story of the human condition.   Saints' lives and their bodies were used as examples of how people within a community must act themselves. The nature of the saints' life in its use of a narrative is closely linked with the lessons the hagiographers wanted to impart upon the people and mirrored the values of that community. This community as a whole was acutely aware how to treat the medieval body.

The body thus acts as *the* symbol of the Christian community. Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption* along with Akbari and Ross in *The Ends of the Body* posit a clear connection between the two viewpoints. The cephalophoric saints narratives exist in a highly public space both in their life, martyrdoms, and miracles. The body of those saints must not be fragmented due to the medieval understanding of the resurrection. If the body is broken, or fragmented, what will the consequence be during the resurrection? Will the earthly human matter be recreated? What of God's omnipotence? Cephalophores are invented with these medieval conditions applying to their hagiography, which perhaps can begin to explain why their legends have them carry their heads. Medieval conceptions of the body must also be understood as they exist in space, the 'ends' of the body demarcate the boundary line of the group, the line that divides those who are included from those who are excluded; yet in the discourse of the body as community as understood in temporal terms, the 'end' of the body marks the

moment of dissolution, when the spatial boundary ceases to be.[10] Death is that line.

Cephalophoric saints defy the boundary of death. As well, understood in terms of the

eternal linkage of soul and body, however, the 'ends' of the body lie in the beatific state

of the resurrected body at the end of time. Time and space are thus intimately linked in

medieval discourses of the body.[11] The resurrection of the fragmented body of the

cephalophoric saint is the key to understanding the breakage of space and time.

Scott Montgomery proposed cephalophoric saints as a whole demonstrated the

hagiography of a given saint was propaganda for possession. Thus, the hagiographic

trope of cephalophory, and the related miracle of cephalology, do more than provide a

dramatic tale of martyrdom. The concentrate attention on the cult of the saint's relics by

revealing the power of the relics, the location at which they may be found, and the

manner of their veneration.[12] He used the example of Just to argue cephalophory related

to the claims for the possession and effectiveness of relics. Basically, since it is claimed

the cephalophoric saint brought their own body to the locus of where their chapel /

shrine was built the saint thereby is imaged as initiating the cult of his own relics.[13] This

argument could work with the hagiography as Denis in the '*anonymous passio*'

participates in a post-mortem walk and travels to the location where his basilica just so

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[10] Akbari, Ross, *The Ends of the Body*, 5
[11] Ibid
[12] Scott B. Montgomery, "Securing the Sacred Head: Cephalophory and Relic Claims" in Disembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture, ed. Catrien Santing,, Traninger Anita, and Barbara Baert. (Brill 2013) 80
[13] Montgomery, "Securing the Sacred Head: Cephalophory and Relic Claims" 81

also happens to stand. Montgomery postulated the cephalophoric theme emerged from the central Middle Ages which coincided with the first major wave of international translations of holy relics.[14] Perhaps *furta sacra* had more widespread impact than originally thought, but this point is only tangential. Cephalophory as propaganda for possession is not an adequate analysis to provide for the full social life of the hagiography.

      The shift in the two earlier versions of Denis' *vita* are manifested by the inclusion of Denis' cephalophory. The first version is referred to as the '*Gloriosae*' and the second '*anonymous passio*'. Michael Lapidge recently published an expansive source on Hilduin and the inclusion of all three versions of Denis *vitae* and includes both English and Latin translations of the *vitae*.

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[14] Montgomery, "Securing the Sacred Head: Cephalophory and Relic Claims" 84

Chapter 1

Denis

Ambrose of Milan, in grisly detail, described the execution of John the Baptist in

grisly detail of a decapitated head continuing to praise the Lord God after death,

namely the grotesque feature of the still-moving tongue. A prominent feature of *vita*

and of hagiographies in general were their biblical counterparts and justifications for

holiness. The post-mortem activity after decapitation became that exact biblical

justification for the group of saints who were created as 'head-bearing' saints. These

cephalophoric saints vary in location, age, and purpose.[15] Yet the mantle of the most

famous of these cephalophoric saints can be claimed by the Parisian Denis.

Denis holds significant cultural importance to Paris and the medieval Church

and Crown. His story began in the first century as one of the first converts to

Christianity, a disciple of Paul the Apostle, sent to Gaul from Athens by Pope Clemens.

During his mission to proselytize to the pagan west, Denis, along with his companions

Rusticus and Eleutherius, were beheaded. The saint became rooted in the Merovingian

dynasty's national power as the tomb of Denis was made a popular pilgrimage site by

Genofeva; she is famous for the legend to which she discovered the bones of Denis and

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[15] Maurice Coens, *Recueil d'etudes bollandiennes* Subsudia Hagiographia 37 (Brussels, 1963) 9-31

negotiations with Attila the Hun in the 6th century.[16] This legendary saint's life was

reworked by the 8th century to include the miracle act of cephalophory in response to

Carolingian interest in the early Christian church and their mission to solidify Christian

against the "pagan" world.

The cult of Denis was known to the people of Paris as early as the 6th century as

Denis is mentioned by Gregory of Tours. Later, Denis' original veneration, creation of

his first shrine, and discovery of his bones are credited to Genovefa who probably died

in the early 6th century. Although Denis is noted in Gregory of Tours, the dating of the

actual *Vita of S. Genofeva* is debatable and believed to be an 8th century creation.[17]

Regardless of the creation of the legends, which were no doubt Carolingian Age

creations to draw on an early Christian past for legitimacy, the roots of the political and

religious power of Denis can be traced to Merovingian King Dagobert who completed

the construction of the basilica of Denis in the 7th century.

The "people of Paris" is a vague and contentious description. We have virtually

no records on how medieval Parisians would describe themselves. The majority of

those who were literate were the ecclesiastical elite. Thus "people" must refer to those

targeted by the Merovingians and Carolingians to create institutional Christianity. The

term "literacy" in this case refers to the definition given by James Thompson: Literacy

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[16] Jordan, William Chester. *A Tale of Two Monasteries: Westminster and Saint-Denis in the Thirteenth Century* (2009) 27
[17] Lapidge 612

during the Middle Ages may be measured almost wholly by the extent of the

knowledge and use of the Latin language."[18] Yet other languages were undoubtedly in

use by the local population, or 'the people.' It is precisely because a multiplicity of local

languages were in use besides Latin that populations were fixated with the cult of

saints. Common people were not educated in Latin and as concepts of literacy and

education are processed in terms of ability to read Latin, it is important to note different

abilities of literacy. The oral tradition of Denis existed for nearly two centuries before

the *vita* was forged. Gregory of Tours noted the people desired more authoritative cults

by the presence of their tombs and bones.[19] A more detailed discussion on early

medieval folklore will take place in chapter 4.

The landscape of 5th-6th century medieval Paris was considered peripheral in

post-Roman Gaul. Although Paris was a center of trade[20] situated on the Seine and

ancient Roman roads ran through her, the main administrative realm of the Roman

Empire was centered in the Mediterranean. Lisa Bitel investigated Paris at the

crossroads of the Late Antique and Early Middle ages as "a hinterland town of

middling importance."[21] Paris would undergo a reinvention by the 7th century, not as

an interior landscape, but a sacral landscape inducted by the Merovingian Franks and

inherited by the Carolingians. Yet by the 6th century a shift was already taking place.

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[18] F. H. Bäuml, Speculum 55: Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy, 238
[19] Bitel 2009, 55
[20] Ibid
[21] Bitel 2009, 5

Medieval Paris was being refitted for a Christian purpose. Roads were redirected,

shrines were erected, shops, houses and graveyards were repurposed for the new

Christian social and political order.[22]

It is under this context of a polycultural and religious landscape of medieval

Paris which Denis the abbey finds itself located. Dagobert, the Merovingian king of the

early 7th century, required a saint of political authority to seal his right to rule in Paris.

He chose Denis to carry this cross.[23] It was reported that by as early (or as late

depending on who you ask) as 620 Denis's church was filled with riches of great value

and already had the established feast day of October 9th. Thus, the basilica and

surrounding monastic community was constructed specifically to secure the political

power of the Merovingian king. Even as early as the 7th century, St. Denis' control over

land would have massive political and economic importance for Paris. Dagobert

repeatedly renewed charters for St. Denis, assuring its tax income and control over land.

As we shall see, the political power of the saint and Abbey of St. Denis would continue

into the Late Middle Ages.

The best primary source for cephalophory comes to us from the Abbot of St.

Denis, who also authored the third version of the *vita* for the saint of the same name.

Hilduin of St. Denis was named head of the Abbey of St. Denis in the year 815 CE by the

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[22] Ibid
[23] Lisa Bitel *Landscape with Two Saints* 2009 93

Carolingian Emperor Louis the Pious. St. Denis was the richest, most well-known

Abbey in the Frankish political and religious sphere becoming a de facto royal church

and the burial site for the Frankish kings. Hilduin's appointment to the abbey came as

no surprise in the Carolingian world. Hilduin was a man of letters, educated alongside

the best and brightest in the Carolingian kingdom. He also, as it turned out, was Louis

the Pious' cousin, who had been a regular at the royal court for some time before his

appointment.[24]

Hilduin was notably the most prominent scholar of Denis in the Carolingian Age

whose rendering of Denis in *Hilduin's Passio* became the most venerable *vita*. *Hilduin's*

Passio would later be incorporated into The Golden Legend by Voragine. The addition

of the cephalophory of Denis, however, began with the second reinterpretation of the

vita of Denis with the '*anonymous passio*'. Michael Lapidge recently published an

impressive tome incorporating the Latin, English translation, and context behind the

forging of the lives of Denis. Lapidge provided the approximate dating for all three

versions, but it is the dating of the first two - the '*Gloriosae*'[25] and the '*anonymous passio*'[26]

– are the most pertinent to the discussion to the cephalophory of Denis. The dating of

the three different versions is imperative to demonstrate how the political power of

Denis manifested itself within the Carolingian synthesis.

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[24] Lapidge, Michael. *Hilduin of Saint-Denis: The Passio S. Dionysii in Prose and Verse. Mittellateinische Studien und Texte*. Leiden : Brill, 2017
[25] BHL 2171
[26] BHL 2178

(I) Lapidge dated the 'Gloriosae' approximately between 725 - 775. His investigation into the paleography of the *vita* of Denis and contemporary *vita* and charters suggests the 'Gloriosae' was first transcribed in Aquitaine, near Toulouse and only brought north to the abbey of Denis upon the ascension of Louis the Pious to the throne.[27] Lapidge thus placed the approximate transcription closer to the mid-8th century (c. 750).[28] For my argument, I need only to place the approximate creation of the 'Gloriosae' before the year 754. This puts my dating of the creation of the 'Gloriosae' between 725 - 754. While narrowing the timeline, this timeline is aligned with the dates provided by both Lapidge and Krusch.[29]

(II) Lapidge dated the 'anonymous passio' more broadly between the years 778 - 814. Within the 'anonymous passio' the focus of our investigation is to be found. The addition was Denis' post-mortem walk, holding his own head, to the location upon his basilica. The basilica was eventually built in the 7th century. Lapidge asserted this event was an "important and original contribution of the author of the 'anonymous passio S. Dionysii.'[30] The authentication of the author of the 'anonymous passio' is a moot point considering, however, Lapidge also hypothesized the dating of the authorship of the 'anonymous passio' to Hilduin's predecessor, Abbot Waldo, whose own tenure at the abbey of St.

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[27] Lapidge 2017 626
[28] Ibid
[29] Ibid
[30] Lapidge 2017 660

Denis took place from 806-819.[31] However, the tenure of Abbot Fardulf, 792-806, seems

more of an appropriate hypothesis.

The 8th century was a crucial point when attempting to define the Carolingians'

complex relationship with their predecessors. Paul Fouracre spoke authoritatively on

the regulation which took place under the Carolingian 'mayors of the palace' and

kings.[32] Fouracre focused on the recently dead and sometimes still living saints and on

the relationship between power and sanctity of the fluid political landscape in 7th-8th

century Francia.[33] Sanctity was important to the Franks.[34] As was the Carolingians'

necessity for centralization. Yet here we see Fouracre judge the political power of

sanctity directly from the hagiographies, extrapolating on various 'social lives' of the

saints from the 7th century. Denis was not a saint who was involved or sanctified for

reasons of royal intrigue, but of the greater project of the Christianization of Gaul as a

whole.[35] Denis' legend reveals an understanding of the legitimate sanctity of saints in

this formative period, but the expedient political uses as well. The expedient political

regulation of the cult of saints under the Carolingians impacted the cult of Denis as well

as his reinvention. Denis, whose cult and veneration undoubtedly began in the 7th

century (quite possibly earlier) and was popularized by Dagobert's construction of his

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[31] Lapidge 2017 668

[32] Fouracre, Paul "The Origins of the Carolingian attempt to regulate the cult of saints" in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (1999): pp. 143 -165.

[33] Fouracre 1999 146

[34] Fouracre 1999155

[35] Bitel 2009, 11

basilica, was the cause which led to the creation of his episode of cephalophory and its immense popularity under Hilduin. Thus, control over cults was achieved largely by leading patronage away from saints associated with their opponents and back to the martyrs of old.[36]

The Carolingian synthesis impacted the preference for old saints over new and the Carolingians' wish to control the spread of saints.[37] This phenomena of reinvention was directly inherited from the Merovingians' explicit tendencies to reinforce themselves via the political power of the divine. The Merovingians engaged with hagiographies social lives to build up the patronage of St. Denis by focusing on politically important saints such as Audoin and Leudegar in the 7th century.[38] The late creation of the *vita* was probably in response to the lack of St. Denis' formal creation of his *vita*. The creation took place in the 8th century but also from a desire to influence his cult. As the Carolingians assumed control over rivals diocese beginning in the late 7th century, yet some important elite centers of power, notably St. Denis, remained under rival control until Charles Martel imposed his control on the area by military force.[39] Thus it can be gleaned that it was no coincidence the first, second, and final inventions of Denis' *vitae* were forged in the 8th-9th centuries following the Carolingians final rise to power. The inheritance of sanctification by Carolingians became a 'complex cultural

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[36] Fouracre 1999 150
[37] Fouracre 1999 156
[38] Ibid
[39] Fouracre 1999 161

phenomena, as Fourcare has shown.[40] Carolingian hagiographers continued the

tradition of political influence for divine invention. The Carolingian Synthesis impacted

the *vita* of Denis in a unique way. The addition of Denis' cephalophory was influenced

by the murder of Boniface in 754 and the anti-pagan attitudes were drawn on due to the

Saxon Wars of the late 8th century.

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[40] Fouracre 1999 165

Chapter 2

To Behead or Not to Behead

Christianity at the turn of the millennia was still in its infancy. Here at the end of the 1st century CE, the original Disciples, now all martyred, entrusted the proliferation of the Church to the various urban centers in western Asia and the Levant. Saint Peter, the rock of the Church as decreed by Christ, has been crucified upside down in a demonstration of his unworthiness to emulate Christ's death. Pope Clement had "ascended" to the top of the early Christian hierarchy. The next generation of Christians, such as Paul the Apostle, whose tendency for proselytization was nothing to discount, decided the western portion of the Roman Empire must hear the good word of Jesus. These borderlines of Christianity were to be found in Roman Gaul. The Greek Dionysius - later becoming the French Denis - was charged by the 1st century Pope Clement to begin the conversion of Gaul.

When Denis arrived he set out to fulfil his divinely appointed mission. He found the Germans set in their pagan ways, yet Denis was undeterred. Denis, with righteous zeal and love for the people of God, convinced the pagan Germans to do away with their idols, and was bolstered by his faith and personal holiness. The Devil was slowly but surely being driven from Paris. Crowds of Parisians emerged pledging their faith to God and their obedience to Christian law. Denis allegedly performed miracles for the

populace of Paris and the Germans felt they had no other choice but to convert. An old

man from Greece had come to Paris to bring light and Christian civilization. The light

from the East had begun to shine into the West.

Yet the pagans were not without their own zeal, and their reaction to Denis was

as swift as his own. Anger burned in their hearts against the holy men who had been

sent west. This time, rather than a crowd of the newly converted, a crowd of pagans

had come. The pagans had then seized Denis and subjected him to unnamed tortures.

Under immense duress, Denis continued to hold fast with his holy dedication and in

typical martyr style did not renounce his faith. The Pagans, seeing they could not deter

him, despite the tortures and fear they allegedly imposed, decided to end his words

once and for all. Denis was summarily executed by the sword; his head severed from

his body. Fearing Christian retribution, the pagans ditched the body (and head) in the

river Seine so the Christians might not be afforded the opportunity to revere the martyr.

However, a pagan but nevertheless a Christian sympathizer, possibly by the

name of Catulla, retrieved the body of St. Denis and buried him more or less properly

into the field of a local farmer. In this field, north of the Ile-de-la-cite, his shrine and the

basilica of St. Denis were constructed. The Christianization of Gaul was now

encapsulated by the bones of Denis. Paris was now sealed by the site of his veneration

and cult which would later become a suburb of the city bearing his own name, rather

than his head.

And yet, this is not the full extent of the impact of Denis. This climatic episode of this hagiography lacks the significant feature of cephalophory. The cephalophoric, or 'head-bearing', event of Denis is the most famous feature the patron saint of Paris is known for. However, the inclusion of Denis' cephalophory, was only introduced in the '*anonymous passio*'.

This description is from the '*Gloriosae*' written by an anonymous author between the years of 725 - 754. The '*Gloriosae*' features a grotesque scene of the decapitated martyr who continues to move his tongue with praises of the Lord post-mortem. Decapitation in itself is not unique to legendary martyr status in early Christian hagiographic culture. In fact, many martyrs are decapitated for their loyalty to the faith, according to hagiographers. But the biblical connection in reference to John the Baptist, the first Christian martyr who also met his death by decapitation, was a well-known trope to the early medieval hagiographers. The '*Gloriosae*' also made this grotesque reference to the head, which was uniquely expanded upon by the author of the second version of Denis' *vita*.

The '*anonymous passio*' entered the imagination of Carolingian Francia sometime between 754 - 814. With it came the unique phenomena of Denis' several mile walk to the site where his tomb and basilica would later be built by King Dagobert in the early 7th century. This event would again be reinvented by the Abbot Hilduin during the reign of Louis the Pious when its fame would continue to grow exponentially before

finally being sealed in time by Jacobus de Voragine in 1250. The inclusion of

cephalophory is not the only stark contrast between these two *vitae*, however. There are

stark differences between the '*anonymous passio'* and the '*Gloriosae*'. What follows is an

exploration into the social life and original composition into these versions of the *vitae*.

Michael Lapidge has done excellent work investigating the composition of Hilduin's

passio, which is a combination of the '*anonymous passio'* and the '*Gloriosae*' plus

Hilduin's own originality. However, a focus on the differences in social life's between

the first two *vitae* has not been contributed. First, literary analysis will be used to

suggest the inherent differences in the *vitae*. Thus a focus on the tone of the *vitae* and

using both the Latin and English translations, the political purposes of the hagiography

will be revealed. A shift in tone and content comes from those political purposes. A

comparison of the *vitae* side-by-side, suggests the rhetoric and tone of the *vitae* are

different even though they are about the same event.

The differences in composition are evident on a literary level. The '*Gloriosae*'

begins with a short preface as our first hagiography attempts to pull off the fog of

legend to a more distinct and solid foundation for Denis. The author refers to the

legendary status of Denis in the preface. He notes the divinity of Denis has "been

obscured by the long silence of time."[41] The legend has Denis coming into Roman Gaul

in the 1st century. The '*Gloriosae*' is now being transcribed well into the 8th century.

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[41] *Quae longo temporis fuerant obumbrata silentio*

The hagiographer continued to claim originality from the old legend. The tone of the '*Gloriosae*' is filled with references to Jesus Christ, Paul the Apostle, and Saint Saturninus.[42] The ending of the first chapter of the '*Gloriosae*' first referred to Denis as "a particular patron-saint."[43] At the end of the first chapter the author asserted his respectful efforts toward revealing the case of Denis and charges the faithful to "believe more than the human record can reveal."[44] The hagiographer is simultaneously recording an early medieval memory of the legendary Denis and connecting the religious and political institution of the Abbey back to an early Christian past. The author connects to this when he stated "those who were worthy to undergo martyrdom for confessing the Lord our God, were even able to tolerate greater torments than the account handed down by peoples over succeeding ages seem to recollect."[45] Memory was an integral part of the legendary status of Denis before the forging of his *vitae*.

The author of the '*Gloriosae*' characterized Denis according to his piety and courage. Denis went forth to Paris "fearlessly, and, inflamed by the heat of his faith."[46] As Denis approached, the hagiographer opened the scene to an ancient, thriving, and

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[42] The hagiographer made a reference to St. Saturninus, which was in turn referenced by Gregory of Tours. *Historia Francorum*. St. Saturninus was a martyred saint from Toulouse which is understandable considering the probable location of composition was southern Aquitatine. See Lapidge.

[43] *Dum ergo ad peculiaris patroni*

[44] *In talibus enim causis magis conuenit fideles credere quam possit relatio humana monstrare*

[45] *Totis uiribus confitendum eos qui pro confessione Domini ac Dei nostri digni fuerunt subire marrtyrium, etiam ampliora tolerare ualuisse, quam uidetur seccedentibus aetatibus relatio per populos transmissa recolere*

[46] *Illuc intrepidus et calore fidei flammatus accessit*

healthy Paris who's only pain was that of the lack of Christianity.[47] The author

suggested there was a "savagery of an unbelieving people."[48] The '*Gloriosae*'

continuously referred to Denis as a fearless man with faith, someone who was a servant,

and a man who even performed miracles for the populace of the invented Paris.[49]

The tone and language of the '*Gloriosae*' continued to be gentle in describing the

pagans even when the martyrdom of Denis approached. The pagans are described as

"weeping for the destruction of their gods" who were acting under fear for Denis and

the conversion in general.[50] Denis' arrest comes and with it his torture and decapitation.

The grotesque tongue trembling appears in direct connection to John the Baptist. Even

when decapitated "it was thought that their trembling tongues were still confessing the

Lord."[51] The event of Denis' death and the comparison between the inclusion of the

cephalophory between the *vitae* warrants a separate analysis.

The tone and language of the '*anonymous passio*' stands in stark contrast to the

'*Gloriosae*'. Whereas the '*Gloriosae*' promoted a missionary and pious character of Denis

and a gentle tone of "ancient" Paris as a whole, the '*anonymous passio*' began as more

combative and hostile. The '*anonymous passio*', unlike the '*Gloriosae*' begins with the first

chapter rather than a preface. Here our author begins with a reference to the

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[47] This language was undoubtedly taken from a previous charter which more accurately depicted a late 7th to early 8th century Paris. See Lapidge, 647

[48] *Non ueritus incredulae gentis experete feritatem*

[49] *Miraculis, famulus*

[50] *Deorum suorum flentes exitium*

[51] *Ut amputatis capitibus adhuc putaretur lingua palpitans Dominum confiteri*

resurrection of Jesus, citing a victory over "jewish wickedness."[52] This notably anti-

semetic language does not continue to appear, but showcases how charged the

language manifests from the text. The author's reference to the resurrection could also

be seen as a foreshadowing to Denis' own "resurrection" and the rhetorical relation to

the *imitatio Christi*.

The author of the '*anonymous passio*' went into significantly more detail on the

origins of Denis than their predecessor. In comparison with the '*Gloriosae*' the author

alludes to the mission sent by Pope Clement, but related Denis as being directly

converted by Paul the Apostle. The relationship between Denis and Clement suggests

something subtly political based on the language of the text. This legalistic language

simply did not exist in the '*Gloriosae*'. The author of the '*anonymous passio*' referred to

the "apostolic authority" of Clement and described the way Denis was appointed to the

position of bishop.[53] Denis' authority over the pagan peoples of Paris in the '*Gloriosae*'

appears to come directly from the power of God rather than ecclesiastical law vis-a-vis

his miracle working.

The '*anonymous passio*' went into much greater detail on the nature of the

description of the persecution against Denis much like his early history with Pope

Clement. The '*anonymous passio*' specifically claimed the persecution of Denis was

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[52] *Iudaica impietate*

[53] *Beatum Clementem apostolic inueniens praeditum potestate. Tum beatus Clemens sanctum Dionysium episcopum ordinauit et potestatem quam sanctus Clemens a beato Petro acceperat ei tradidit*

ordered directly by Domitian. The '*Gloriosae*' simply stated a proclamation had been

published against the Christian. The author of the '*anonymous passio*' tied in the success

of Denis' mission to the persecution. The information was spread in such a way that

Denis' actions can be considered public and notorious. The author claimed "At the very

same time these events were transpiring, the reputation of the holy man spread far and

wide to such an extent that through popular report it reached the court of Domitian."[54]

 In both sources we see the authors claiming forces from outside of Paris had

come west to carry out the persecution. This assertion was more than likely due to

relieving any blame of persecution onto the contemporary populace of Paris

themselves. Denis was again subjected to pain and tortures by the pagan company.

Here in the '*anonymous passio*' the author directly tied the persecution back to an

imperial (read: secular) authority. The persecution was handed out by an "imperial

company undertaken the commands of the Emperor."[55] The legalistic language is

contrasted with the ecclesiastical justifications of earlier chapters in the '*anonymous

passio*'.

 The author's description of paganism is substantially more hostile. Pagans are

continuously referred to as "errors of faithlessness" and "ignorant gentiles."[56] The

contempt for paganism throughout the '*anonymous passio*' is immense. In the '*Gloriosae*',

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[54] *Per idem uero tempus quo talia gerebantur, sancti uiri preaconium longe se lateque diffudit in tantum, ur Domitaini*
[55] *Itaque cum decreta principis apparitio suscepisset*
[56] *Errore infidelitatis, ignotis gentibus*

pagans are indeed referred to as the "ancient Enemy" but not as greatly hostile to this rhetorical extent as is present in the '*anonymous passio*'. In contrast, Denis in the '*anonymous passio*' is described as a "mighty and true combatant" who worked to convert the "savage peoples" against the "error of paganism."[57] In the 6th chapter of the '*anonymous passio*' the author presented us with a similar depiction of ancient Paris which was undoubtedly inspired by the earlier version if not directly taken verbatim.[58] Yet while the language taken from the charter is similar it is overshadowed by the antagonistic presence of pagans. The '*Gloriosae*' painted an ancient Paris ripe for the conversion to Christianity, the '*anonymous passio*' described the landscape as soiled by "pagan scum"[59] which necessitated conversion. The "untutored populace"[60] naturally had to be instructed by authority.

Depictions of martyrdom also varied. As martyrdom approached in the '*anonymous passio*' so did "a rejoicing crowd of the wicked."[61] The Latin in this depiction is particularly striking because the author described the crowd with *turba* rather than *genibus* or *populus*. The Latin connotes a violent and messy mob of pagans dedicated to Denis' persecution rather than simply a grouping of people. The explicit characterization of the ancient pagans is directly related to the contemporary pagan

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[57] *Fortis se te uerus proeliator, trucibus populis*
[58] Lapidge 2017 687
[59] *Paganorum faecibus*
[60] *Rudis populus*
[61] *Impiorum gaudens turba progreditur et contra Dei famulos pugnatura conspirat*

world of the late 8th century. The author of the '*anonymous passio*' continued in the

hostile description of the pagans. Denis is described as "avoiding the howls of the

wicked" and "not being terrified by fear of the reprobates."[62]

The author of the '*anonymous passio*' made a clear political attack against pagan

Germans at the end of the 10th chapter. In his depiction of the steadfast Denis, the

author claimed "even the ferocious barbarism of the German nation rejoiced that its

neck was now submitted to the yoke of Christ, having experienced heartfelt

contrition."[63] This political attack stemmed directly from the ongoing war with the

Saxons in the late 8th century when the consciousness against German pagans was at an

all time high within the written tradition of the Carolingian Empire.[64]

The events preceding the martyrdom are divergent in the content of the

supposed interrogations. The '*Gloriosae*' only stated Denis was under interrogation and

tortue by the persecutors where he refused to recant Christ in typical martyr fashion.

However, in the '*anonymous passio*' the author gave words to his interrogator, removing

the pagan's agency from the text for his political purposes. The agents were "enflamed

by an atrocious fury of cruelty."[65] They said directly to Denis:

> Are you that most unspeakable old man, who are rejecting the worship of our gods and
> are scorning the decrees of the unconquerable emperor? Say, therefore, of whose

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[62] *Impiorum latratibus, nullo metu territi reproborum*

[63] *Ipsa etiam Germaniae ferox immanitas, subacta cordis conpunctione, colla sua iam Christi iugo domita gaudebat*

[64] Nelson, McKitternick

[65] *Furore atrocissimo ministri crudelitatis accensi*

(divinity) you profess yourself to be a worshiper, or what confession (of faith) you assign to your authority?[66]

In his response, Denis compares his suffering to the fires of furnace suffered by Daniel. The author describes Denis as following the "Christian law" as opposed to Roman law.[67] The Christian law vs. Roman law dichotomy is a common trope in early hagiographic language.[68] Now we will turn to the introduction of cephalophory.

The miraculous event of Denis carrying his own head was readily adopted by the Abbot Hilduin with the forging '*Hilduin's Passio*' under the reign of Louis in the 9th century and acceded to national popularity with the publication of the Golden Legend. Earlier historiography attests cephalophores were a production of cultural folklore.[69] The shift in the creation of Denis into one of these cephalophoric saints is the main concern in the literary analysis and cultural and political contexts of the '*Gloriosae*' and the '*anonymous passio*'. It is worth noting, as we will see, the '*anonymous passio*' itself claimed the act of cephalophory to be "a new and previously unheard of miracle!" We have also seen Lapidge claim the inclusion of cephalophory to such a prominent and politically active saint to be nothing short of original. It is true that such an act was made famous by Denis, yet the appearance of cephalophoric acts does in fact predate

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[66] *Tune es ille infandissimus senex, qui deroum nostrorum culturam euacuas, et inuitissimi principis statuta contempnis? Dic ergo, cuius te asseris cultorem, aut quam confessionem tuae dicioni adscribis?*

[67] *Christianae legi*

[68] Perpetua

[69] Saintyves P., *LES SAINTS CÉPHALOPHORES: Etude de folklore hagiographique, Association de la Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 1929, Maruice Coens *La Cephalophorie* (1963)

Denis. Some Merovingian hagiographies include acts of cephalophory. The *Passio S. Iusti*[70], which Historian Scott Montgomery heavily draws upon, was mostly likely a work of the 7th century.[71] The *Passio S. Fusciani, Victorici er Gentiani* [72] of which all three men walked with their severed heads, also predate the '*anonymous passio*' by about a century. Either of these texts might have prompted the author of the '*anonymous passio*' to add the episode of cephalophory to the account of Denis.[73]

Here I will compare the most important shift in the two *vitae* side by side and suggest both literary differences and contextualize the historical differences.

'*Gloriosae*'

> Then the ancient Enemy, seeing that what was clearly benefiting the Lord through the relentless conversion of peoples was being lost to him, turned the entire contravice of his ingenuity towards attacking the things which had been built up; and he armed the agents of his party, (who were) weeping for the destruction of their gods, for the wickedness of a sudden persecution, so that they would hasten to repay with a variety of tortures those who had introduced this one and true God Who was to be worshipped and feared, so that none would survive who would be able to acquire what was lost. When the proclamation of persecution had been published, a crowd of the ungodly advances and plots to fight against the Lord's people, not hesitating to attack with the sword those whom the Lord had revealed as His by means of a sign. Accordingly, when they reached the western part of the empire in their search for Christians, they found St Dionysius struggling against unbelievers at Paris; the fury of persecution discovered Rusticus the priest and Eleutherius the archdeacon in his company. These saintly men never allowed themselves to be separated from the presence of St Dionysius. The executioner's inquisition found them together, but was unable to discover one whom it could segregate from the company of martyrdom. Under interrogation, they confess the one and true God in trinity; and, with terror added and afflicted by many injuries - or rather butchered by tortures - they affirm that they are Christians; and, on seeing the stroke of the executioner's

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[70] BHL 4590

[71] Scott B. Montgomery, "Securing the Sacred Head: Cephalophory and Relic Claims" in Disembodied Heads in Medieval and Early Modern Culture, ed. Catrien Santing,, Traninger Anita, and Barbara Baert. (Brill 2013)

[72] BHL 3326

[73] Lapidge 2017 697

(sword), they announce in a voice of loud confession that they are servants of our Lord and God. Preserving, therefore, in this obstinacy of faith, yielding their bodies to the earth, they bore their blessed souls to heaven. They were found worthy to journey to the Lord with a profession of this sort, that, even when decapitated, it was thought that their trembling tongues were still confessing the Lord: among them the first could not be the second or third but, in confessing the trinity, they could not but embellish the holy place with their threefold martyrdom!

'anonymous passio'

'We confess the Father and Son and Holy Ghost, the unborn Father, the Son born from the one Father, the Holy Ghost issuing from them both.' To this the wicked prosecutor questions the blessed saints: 'Therefore the commands of our emperors are scorned by you, and your confession does not answer the laws of the unconquerable gods?' As before, the saints unanimously said in reply: 'As we said, we both believe and confess, and do not cease praising aloud, Christ the Son of God born of the Virgin Mary, whom we announce to all peoples with obvious daring.' With the holy men preserving in this constancy of faith, with the savage executioners hesitating for no lengthy space of time, the sword of the executioner cut through the blessed necks submitted for the faith of Christ. Yielding their bodies to the earth, they brought their blessed souls to heaven. And in order to demonstrate the victory bestowed on the martyrs by divine mercy, when the heads were seen to be cut from the bodies, their tongues were confessing the Lord as best they could. O what a truly blessed fellowship most welcome to our God! O the holy and truly praiseworthy brotherhood, among whom the first could not be the second nor the third but, confessing (together) the glory of the Holy Trinity, they were found worthy to be consecrated in triple martyrdom on the small hill just more than a mile from the city!

The precious decapitated bodies lay at length on the summit of the hill, and in the martyrs of Christ was fulfilled that which the prophet had foretold was to happen in the future, that 'the precious deaths of the just will remain in the sight of the Lord.' For in revealing the glorious achievements of the martyrs and the first bishop of Paris, so that the glory and triumph of him through whom the health-bringing fruit had first begun to spring up would be even more evident, the holy lifeless corpse of the blessed bishop Dionysius raised itself up, and with its blessed hand began to cradle in its arms the head hanging from the body, cut off by the sword of the executioner, and carried it nearly two miles from the summit of the hill by way of a new and previously unheard of miracle - a lifeless body hastening along in the manner of a living person, and a dead man proceeding with firm footsteps!

The soon to be martyred saints, Dionysius, Rusticus, and Eleutherius had been hard at work shining the light of the East to the West. And they had been doing it well.[74] Too well. Reaction had come for them and it came at the end of a sword. The persecutors found them continuing their work in the urban sprawl of ancient Paris where all three were bound and tortured. The ancient inquisition demanded they recant and disavow God. The trio were summarily executed, not unlike the three at Calvary, their bodies descended to the earth while their spirits ascended to heaven. Like the Christ who had risen before, Denis stood tall again, head in hand, and proceeded to the location where his relics would be venerated.

The narrative of these two *vitae*, which are ostensibly about the same legend, illicit similar reactions yet manifest differing cultural receptions. The change to the invention of Denis as a cephalophoric saint was inspired by the murder of Boniface which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. Likewise, the medieval perception of the body and why such an event was "believable", as well as the movement of the body from the perception of the 8th century Frankish culture will be discussed in chapter 4. The language of the decapitation is similar yet the cephalophoric invention pushed the cultural milieu of the sanctity of Denis further.

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[74] Rusitcus and Eleutherius have been discussed elsewhere. See M. Lapidge, S. Montgomery, A. Taylor, and M. Deleporte. They have discussed how all three figures have functionally been merged into the single character of Saint Denis by virtue of later hagiography and religious practice. For my purposes discussion on Rusitcus and Eleutherius have been omitted.

The language of zeal, while not uncommon for a hagiography, in comparison to that of the '*Gloriosae*' presents a significant shift in purpose. Saint's *vitae*, associated with liturgy, was made to be read out loud during Feast Days for public purpose.[75] Thus, the language as we compare the two, while ostensibly about the same event drawn from the legend of early Christian Gaul, suggests a change of cultural importance. Not only is cephalophory unique; it is exciting. Our anonymous hagiographer of the '*anonymous passio*' went as far as to suggest this was "a new and previously unheard of miracle!"[76]

The allusions to John the Baptist and the grotesque imagery of the "trembling tongues"[77] are prevalent in both *vitae*. In a direct comparison to the language we see the '*Gloriosae*' described the martyrs with "trembling tongues were still confessing the Lord."[78] The '*anonymous passio*' described them as "their tongues were confessing the Lord as best they could."[79] The latter is undoubtedly inherited from the former as discussed by Lapidge.[80] These two are analogous of a post-mortem miracle, exemplifying how strong their faith to God was even after being decapitated. Our trembling tongues then shift into an even more explicit addition to the *imitatio christi*.

The chapter of the '*anonymous passio*' containing the cephalophoric event claimed the event was foreshadowed in accordance with an *imitatio christi*. Indeed the

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[75] Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* 12
[76] *Doubus fere milibus firmis gressibus apportauit nouo et prius inaudito miraculo*
[77] *Lingua palpitans Dominum confiteri*
[78] ibid
[79] *Eorum ut poterant linguae Dominum fatebantur*
[80] Lapidge 2017 668

hagiographer claimed "and in the martyrs of Christ was fulfilled that which the prophet had foretold was to happen in the future."[81] An *imitatio christi* is a biblical justification akin to John the Baptist. Likewise, the hagiographer foreshadowed the impact the cephalophorus *imitatio christi* would have on this *vita*. "The blessed and glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which the divine power restored over three days the true Temple..."[82] Thus, like the fruits of Christianity spread amongst the pagan populace of ancient Paris, the Greek Dionysius rose; "the holy lifeless corpse of the blessed bishop Dionysius raised itself up, and with its blessed hand began to cradle in its arms the head hanging from the body."[83] The language of the '*anonymous passio*' is centered on its legalistic tone. Rather than focusing primarily on the martyrdom of the trio, as the '*Gloriosae*' does, the '*anonymous passio*' asserted it was the single character of Denis to become a cephalophore. Rusticus and Eleutherius remained slain.

The '*anonymous passio*' identified the individual movement of Denis through space in contrast to '*Gloriosae*'. Denis, with his head in arms, "carried it nearly two miles from the summit of the hill"[84] is a uniquely individual act of piety. The justification of the entombment of Denis and the other two follow in both *vitae* in the important

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[81] *Implebaturque in martyribus Christi quod olim propheta praedixerat adfuturum*

[82] *Post beatam et gloriosam resurrectionem Domini nostri Iesu Christi, qua uerum Dei templum Iudaica impietate resolutum diuina potentia*

[83] *Beatissimi se Dionysii et pontificis uenerandi sanctum examine cadauer erexit beataque manu caput a corpore lictoris ense truncatum, pendulum coepit brachiis uectiare atque ab illo montis cacumine duobus fere milibus firmis gressibus apportauit nuou et prius inaudito miraculo*

[84] ibid

addition of Catulla. Yet this movement was portrayed in the '*Gloriosae*' as happening near, if not exactly, on the stop where the basilica would be built. The '*anonymous passio*' named Denis as the sole contributor to the location of the basilica. Hilduin would create a more uniform claim for where the martyrs were beheaded and a more specific location of the founding of the abbey of St. Denis later in the ninth century.

The events which transpired between the two *vitae* continue to contrast in language and purpose. An unsuccessful plan was hatched by the ancient pagans to subvert the fact they had created martyrs to the cause of Christianity. They attempted to rob the Christian populace of the saintly bodies by disposing them into the river Seine. Yet the Christians would not be so easily defeated. A noble woman with sympathies for the Christians, Catulla, devised a plan with her compatriots to retrieve the bodies. It should be noted that Catulla is only first named in the '*anonymous passio*'. After distracting the executioners, the sympathizers moved in silence and secrecy to retrieve the bodies of Dionysius, Rusticus, and Eleutherius from the river. Thus the saints were buried in a farmer's field nearby. It is at this time, the differences in the *vitae* become obvious, as earlier in the '*anonymous passio*' Denis moved himself to the field.

Here at the field of the farmer begins a very obvious metaphor in claiming the Christianization of Gaul. Both *vitae* state after the bones of the martyrs had been buried there, a great bounty of food grew in the field. The '*Gloriosae*' claimed after burying the saints in a local field "the crop did not withhold its obedience: having been fertilized by

such abundance, its bounty poured out such wealth that the farmer would reap

hundredfold fruits and the homeland would obtain its salvation."[85] Similarly, the

author of the '*anonymous passio*' echoed the metaphor: "the sacred field yielded the crop

of its planting, it was so enriched by the fertility of the blessed martyrs that the farmer

gained a hundredfold harvest and ensured the prosperity of the homeland and

consecrated this great treasure to posterity."[86] Like the fruit of the field, the fruits of

Christianity spread among the people of Paris because of the actions of the martyrs and

the enterprise of a woman.

A marker was placed upon the location on which the tombs were to be

constructed after the conspirators succeeded in moving the bodies. Both *vitae* refer to

the basilica which was built on that same location but this is clearly an allusion to the

basilica of St. Denis which was constructed by the Merovingian king Dagobert in the

early seventh century. Miracles occurred at the site of the tomb in justification of the

power of the relics which were housed there. The '*Gloriosae*' ends here with a nod to

power and agency of the saints. A command is given to the people that "...They are

compelled by the command of the saints themselves to indicate by their given names

which of the martyrs is buried in which place."[87] Amen.

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[85] *Quae tali fecundata pinguedine, sic in ea beneficium ubertas effudit ut centuplicatos fructus et cultor adquireret et patria mereretur salutem*

[86] *Satinonis suae segetem sacratus produceret ager, ita beatorum martyrum est ubertate ditatus, ut et centuplicatum fructum cultor acquireret et patriae mereretur salutem et magnum thesaurum posteris consecraret*

[87] *Sanctorum ipsorum conguntur imperio, quo quisque sit martyrum positus loco assignatis nominbus indicare*

The '*anonymous passio*' continues for two more chapters highlighting the miracles and dedication of the tomb, as well as rhetoric referencing the unworthiness of the contemporary Christians. The author prefaces the unworthiness of the hagiographers to appropriately tell the record the events of Denis and only able to do so by the intercession of the martyrs themselves by stating "We too believe that we are to be helped, though unworthy, by their holy prayers." The author continues, arguing, "we who, being dull and unworthy, presumed to make known to you the narrative of their martyrdom, not through the capacity of our talent or the activity of our own intelligence, but because it was clear to us from the accounts of the men of old…"[88] The hagiographer argues that this story is so meaningful and powerful, it is their duty to tell this story to the best of their ability within their power to do so.

All things considered, it has become apparent the *vitae* were not only written at different times, but for a distinctly different purpose and audience. We can see the forging of the '*Gloriosae*' is in all purpose, ordinary. The *vita* gives credence and legitimacy to the possession of relics housed within the abbey of St. Denis. It allowed the audience, the people of Paris, to remember what an oral tradition was certainly for centuries in an official account. It connects Paris to an early Christian past and set the foundation for the process of Christianization supported by the Carolingian faction at

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[88] *Nos ipsos, quamuis immeritos, eorum credimus sacris precibus, qui ut hebetes et indigni eorum uobis seriem passionis praesumpsimus, intimare, non ex nostri ingenii capacitate aut proprii sensus industria, sed quod euterum fidelium nobis relatione patuit*

the beginning of the 8th century. At the end of the 8th century, the purpose of the saint

has an abrupt change in character. The rhetoric of the '*anonymous passio*' is consistently

on the attack against the "ancient enemy." Likewise, it reveals more about social

attitudes towards life and death, miracles, and contemporary problems facing the

author. It goes without saying that the inclusion of Denis as a cephalophore showcased

the dedication to originality and piety. The author's purpose for the *vitae* coincided with

their needs at the time. The author of the '*anonymous passio*' needed a powerful figure

who, even after death, could not be defeated by pagan murderers. When the two are

compared face to face, the '*anonymous passio*' was not only longer, but revealed more

about contemporary issues of the 8th century. The author of the '*anonymous passio*' ends

with an implication that records had been lost and the author, or even multiple authors,

of the '*anonymous passio*' came together in a network to reinvent Denis.

Oral culture is also alluded to in the '*anonymous passio*'. Here the author claimed

there was another long silence which had blurred the *vita* over time. The hagiographer

alludes to the ecclesiastical network which was a part of the construction of the

'*anonymous passio*'. "For, we as recognized from the conversation of learned men fearing

God and burning with the pursuit of holy love, they [the men of old] sought to commit

to holy writings, or the recollection of posterity many things concerning the outstanding

struggle of the holy men…". This was a direct demonstration of the value of both oral

traditions and the written word. The author makes an oral tradition to recount the

earlier *vita* of Denis, the '*Gloriosae*'. Here we see the authorial motivation of that same

earlier passio. Similarly, the hagiographer continued, stating "the clever capacity of

human minds is able to compensate, from the few things which we said, for the greater

things which remain in silence." The author perhaps added things; events, descriptions,

people, names, information, - cephalophory - through verbal, oral tradition. The author

of the '*anonymous passio*', unlike that of the '*Gloriosae*', included a reason as to why

previous writings were not used. The author claimed a "blaze of fire" took the texts.

Texts, which through "destructive negligence" were lost forever.

    In the words of Jacques LeGoff "to understand how a society functions and as a

historian by definition must do how it changes and is transformed, one needs to keep

an eye on the imaginary."[89] LeGoff related the idea of the medieval imagination in

terms of bishops fighting dragons. LeGoff's medieval imagination can also be applied to

saints carrying their own heads. It was the hagiographer's authority which gave a the

saint his legitimacy. Still between antiquity whose silences leave perhaps too much

conjecture, and the modern times, overwhelmed by a mountain of documents, the

Middle Ages may have been the time when the balance was proper to permit a fruitful

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[89] Le Goff, Jacques, 1924-2014. *Time, Work & Culture in the Middle Ages.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

interplay between a judicious use of documentation and a well grounded

imagination. [90]

    In the 7th century paradigms such as religious cult and political power were

understood as inseparable, whether at the level of Dagobert or at the local level of

Frankish aristocrats who sought to introduce uniformity in cult in their areas of

power.[91] This uniformity came in the form of conveying the importance of Denis to the

people of Paris. Saints lives after all tell us how people were supposed to behave,

emphasizing emotional ideals.[92] The grant of the Fair of Saint Denis by Dagobert in 635,

the first royal concession of its kind, testifies to the growth of the cult in Merovingian

France and the increasing homage paid to the saint.[93]

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[90] LeGoff 1980
[91] Geary *Furta Sacra* 1979, 177
[92] Rosenwein, Barbara H. *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2006. 28
[93] Spiegel, Gabrielle M., "The cult of Saint Denis and Capetian kingship." Journal of Medieval History 1:1 1975. 51

Chapter 3

Boniface Goes to Holland then to Heaven

The Anglo-Saxon archbishop of Mainz, Wynfreth, was renamed Boniface by

Pope Gregory II in Rome.[94] He had been a quintessential Church organizer under

Pippin III and proselytize to the then pagans of eastern Germany earning himself the

accolade "Archbishop of the East". Later Carolingians also claimed Boniface had been

the Archbishop to anoint the first king of the Carolingian dynasty.[95] Thus, not only was

Boniface present in the highly political culture which came with reorganizing the

Church in the subsequent years following the Carolingian succession to the kingdom,

his cult would become highly politicized following his murder in 754. Likewise, he

would become the inspiration for the reinterpretation of Denis. Boniface's decapitation

would instill the political and cultural imagination of the Carolingian hagiographers to

connect the Carolingian dynasty back to the not so distant early Christian past.

Boniface's political importance during his life is not to be understated. Geary

noted in the transition from the Merovingian organization of the Church to the

Carolingian centralization that "the extent of the spread of the Benedictine monasticism

at the expense of the older forms marked the growing range of Carolingian control in

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[94] James T. Palmer, Revue bénédictine.: The Frankish Cult of Martyrs and the Case of the Two Saints
Boniface (2004) 326
[95] Palmer 327

the Frankish world."[96] Intercession from Papal seat in Rome was a hallmark reform of the Carolingian Church. The cult of saints divine power is manifested through holy men, and in both the location of this action is north of the Alps (Rome). However, by the end of the Merovingian period, this power was mediated through Rome.[97] Boniface's reform is explained by these facts of the coronation of Pippin and Romanization of his own name.

Boniface the Reformer was no doubt a great asset to the Carolingian reorganization of the Church. Yet, contemporary political strife drove a wedge between the Anglo-Saxon and the Franks. In their campaign to move the Church away from the Merovingian dynasty towards one centralized by the Carolingian Crown and Rome, actors such as Charles Martel seized a number of ecclesiastical properties. The temporal differences between the Church and the Crown were still explicit at this time, and the seizure of Church property was undoubtedly seen as uncouth and unjust by churchmen such as Boniface. Boniface himself saw Charles as a leader who routinely and improperly seized church property. In a letter to King Aethelbald of Mercia, Boniface announced the death of Charles Martel, a "destroyer of many monasteries," who "transferred ecclesiastical goods to his own use."[98] If one examines what was criticized in these councils, one finds not corrupt or semi pagan monasteries (much less lax

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[96] P. Geary, Before France and Germany (Oxford, 1988) 217
[97] Geary (1988), 230
[98] Geary (1988), 130

Merovingian royal leadership) but rather bishops who were ineffective Christian rulers, allowing their flocks to go astray. The heresy and paganism that Boniface feared was a danger for the lay population, not for monks.[99]

If Boniface was far less of a strong political ally than is anticipated, why then would his sanctification inspire the reinterpretation of Denis? Saints had always been malleable, changing to meet the changing needs of the present.[100] Palmer noted the martyrdom of Boniface significantly impacted Carolingian society after 754.[101] Symbolically, Boniface's martyrdom was important for the fledgling Frisian Church, Boniface's colleagues in Germany and the Carolingian family.[102] Even though Boniface had retired in 753, a year prior to his murder, according to his hagiographer Willibald, Boniface was still an active participant in the destruction of "pagan idols" near the site of his martyrdom in Holland.[103] Thus, the cult of Boniface was popular in the east of the Frankish Kingdom and what would become the Low Countries.

Boniface has been showcased as a cult of a missionary life. Missionary hagiography, as put forward by Ian Wood, is not a connected stream of hagiographies with their own traditions, but rather a modern categorization.[104] His categorization is

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[99] Geary (1988), 133
[100] Geary (1988),125
[101] Palmer 331
[102] Ibid
[103] Palmer 331
[104] Wood, Ian "The missionary Life" in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (1999): pp. 167 - 183.

useful in determining the influence Boniface had after his murder. The reactions to

Boniface are dominated by his initial hagiographer, Willibald. Lapidge likewise

attributed Boniface's fame to him.[105] Willibald's life is likely the *vita* the later

Carolingian hagiographers would have used as political justification for the reinvention

of Denis. Willibald wrote his *Vita Bonifatii* between 754 and 768 according to Wood.[106]

Wood mentions an alternative life of Boniface which Lapidge does not, Liudger's *Life of*

Gregory of Utrecht, essentially a double-life featuring Gregory and Boniface centered in

Utrecht.[107] Utrecht was also the location of Boniface's initial cult until his relics were

moved to the interior.[108] The *vita* is dated between 786 - 804.[109] Lapidge's decision not to

utilize this text was more than likely because Liudger's double life was essentially a

fabrication designed to connect Utrecht back to an earlier Christian past as well as

personal political clout.[110]

The political power of Boniface and the reinterpretation of Denis after 754 is

largely a part of an analysis historian Jamie Kriener called the 'Carolingian Synthesis.'

Jamie Kriener's scholarship as a whole also proved invaluable as a source into the early

medieval world. The Merovingian kingdom transformed its standards for justice and

order, and its criteria for political legitimacy, in response to Christian ideas about social

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[105] Lapidge 2017 83
[106] Wood 169
[107] Wood 170
[108] Lapidge 2017 639
[109] Wood 170
[110] Wood 172

responsibility and discipline. Therefore, "hagiography played a pivotal role in these transformations by deploying specific rhetorical and cognitive strategies to effect the social order for which it so strenuously argued."[111] At the heart of her book is the message that hagiography remembered episodes in which these ideals were achieved, or were not, and in doing so, inspired others to acknowledge them as fitting goals. More importantly, she reveals an impressively interdisciplinary range of models for her analysis. She relied on the "double-scope narrative" from cognitive science, that is, the conceptual blending of two stories into one to create at least the illusion of causality, to make important points about hagiographical stories.

Hagiography played a pivotal role in the transformations of the early Middle Ages by deploying specific rhetorical and cognitive strategies to effect the social order for which it so strenuously argued.[112] This happened at a time when changes to the structure of royal politics after an extended period of civil war saw the rise of a ruling class that was at once competitive and cohesive. According to Kreiner, the ruling class was hagiography's core audience.[113] Through the process of the Carolingian synthesis, Merovingian hagiography was rewritten for the Carolingian mentality and politics of the 8th-9th centuries. Denis' legend and legitimacy, and whose *vitae* were produced under Carolingian sympathizers, was also indicative of that change. The Carolingians

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[111] Kreiner, *Social Life of Hagiography*, 7
[112] Kreiner, 8
[113] Ibid

found a great deal to preserve in Merovingian hagiography, and their hagiographical

compendia and rewritten *vitae* are some of the best sources we have for how the

Carolingians adapted older norms and practices for their own purposes.[114] The

Carolingian synthesis can be seen as cooptation and reinvention of Denis into a

uniquely and legendary Carolingian saint after 754. From this framework adopted from

Kreiner, the reconsideration of the differing version of the *vitae* of Denis can reveal the

history of Christianity vis-a-vis a history of politics and culture.

Their program of *renovatio* and *correctio,* the very notion of renaissance and

reform that fueled nearly every aspect of their administration was an inherently

evaluative judgement.[115] They seemed to systematically reject their predecessors'

religious culture. They prohibited the creation of new saints and instead filled their

churches and calendars with ancient martyrs, usually roman martyrs, or martyrs from

elsewhere who were already popular in Italy.[116] Or, as in this case, the Areopagite from

Greece sent by Pope Clemens in the 1st century. It is also relevant for such a framework

of analysis to note Charlemagne issued a decree at the Synod of Frankfurt in 794

Charlemagne decreed that 'no new saints are to be venerated'.[117] The wheel does not

need to be reinvented to argue that the Carolingians revived old martyrs and

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[114] Kreiner, 10
[115] Kreiner, 231
[116] Ibid
[117] Fouracre 1999 150

synthesized the past for new purposes. The case here being one of the oldest legendary saints in Gallic history, allegedly.

The *correctio* and *renovatio* prevalent in the Carolingian Synthesis and the reinvention of hagiography is also related to the redefinition of Frankish identity as suggested by Helmut Reimitz. As we have seen, Boniface was a primary political influence for the invention of the '*anonymous passio*' to include cephalophory post 754. Even earlier however, Reimitz described how the *Royal Frankish Annals* was a watershed moment for Frankish identity beginning in 741 with the accession of Pippin to *regnum Francorum*.[118] The victorious mentality went hand in hand with the Carolingians rewriting themselves as the victors of the new Frankish kingdom and Christian order in Francia. Geary also pointed out the extent of reform Charles Martel and Pippin undertook to centralize power with a Carolingians stamp. The new bishop was primarily a secular magnate in the Carolingian hierarchy where power was mediated through Rome.[119] The process of the *Royal Frankish Annals* became an important component of a grand narrative in which the Carolingian success story stood at the start of a new age.[120]

The Carolingian age was frustrated by Saxon insurgency in the eyes of the later Carolingians particularly after 754 and Charlemagne's Saxon wars at the end of the 8th

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[118] Reimitz 336
[119] Geary (1988), 211
[120] Reimitz 337

century. The murder of Boniface, the Archbishop of the East, in this context, was an affront to the victorious Carolingian dynasty, and therefore, in the eyes of our anonymous hagiographer, an assault on their very identity. Geary likewise asserted on politics in the 8th century that with the exception of Boniface and his companions, who were more the victims of political assassination than true martyrs, the expansion and consolidation of the Carolingian Empire and its religion had taken place with little persecution of Christians or loss of missionary life.[121] The murder of Boniface had slipped through their grasp of hegemony in the eyes of the hagiographer working in the abbey of Denis in the late 8th century.

The influential political attitude of another Anglo-Saxon bishop might also have worked itself into the mentality of the author of the '*anonymous passio*'. Alcuin himself, of course, though not a politician, did not confine his attention to purely religious matters without political significance, for in those times religion and politics were not clearly distinct.[122] To Alcuin, the criteria that distinguished friend from foe was the formal act of baptism, therefore, the total sum of Christendom were all those baptized.[123] The pagans constituted opposition to the Christians. Charlemagne, in the years before his coronation of 800, was focusing on this hybrid of religious and political ideas.[124]

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[121] Geary (1988),35
[122] Fichtenau, Heinrich, *The Carolingian Empire* (1957) 64
[123] Fichtenau 65
[124] Ibid

The abbey of St. Denis bares political significance. Rosamond McKitterick succinctly described the incredible political entity St. Denis was in relation to the royal household. The *Annales regni francorum* again comes into play. The *Annales regni francorum* were written within St. Denis, and through McKitterick we have come to understand St. Denis was the location where Pippin III had been educated and where he and his family were anointed as the new dynasty for Francia by Pope Stephen II in 754. Pippin died there and chose to be buried there as a completion of his career in association with St Denis.[125] It was also on the bones of St Denis that Tassilo was made to swear his oath in 757.[126] St Denis was a royal abbey and retained a close relationship with the Carolingian royal family throughout the later eighth and the ninth centuries.

The international political importance of St. Denis can be exemplified by a donation charter written to St. Denis by the Anlgo-Saxon king of Mercia, Offa. In London in 790, two brothers (presumably monks) donated their wealth and belongings to the abbey of St. Denis. The charter stated:

> Wherefore I, Offa, in God's name king of the Mercians, at the suggestion of Abbot Maginarius through his envoy Nadelharius, concerning that land which is called London, where two years ago two brothers Angonwala and Sigrin gave of their own free will all their belongings to the holy blissful martyr Dionysius, who is in France, and his associates; I also grant from this day, and wish this grant to stay forever, all the dues which I should lawfully receive and have hitherto retained for my own purposes, whether

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[125] McKitterick, Rosamond *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 45

[126] McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity.* 46

in gold, or in silver, or in other returns, all this I grant from love of God Almighty and reverence for the holy martyrs Dionysius, Rusticus, and Eleutherius… [127]

The act of donating land and possessions to the saints is typical of medieval donations. In doing so, no external force, secular or ecclesiastical, may undo such a contract. What is indeed notable here is an absence of description. Surely a saint whose *vita* may have claimed cephalophory at the time warrants an acknowledgement. Yet the descriptor of 'head-bearing' is silent from the entire charter.

The political importance of the cephalophory of Denis can be seen within the context of the Saxon wars of Charlemagne. As we have already explored in the *vita*, the rhetoric within the '*anonymous passio*' was identifiable as hostile. Power was an intrinsic theme within the *vita*; power over the people of "ancient" Paris, power over Christianization, and even power over life and death which the author asserted was conquered by the saint in his act of cephalophory. Hagiography quite commonly has a missionary and conversion minded production, yet the '*anonymous passio*' felt it was more at war with the ancient pagans than it was in the previous iteration. The Saxon war was real to the author of the '*anonymous passio*'. Not only was the war contextually relevant to Denis but it was a fact of life. We learn from the *Miracula of S. Dionysii*[128] that

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[127] Barker, Eric Ernest. *Sussex Anglo-Saxon Charters* in Sussex Archaeological Collections. 1947 122-5
[128] BHL 2202

during Charlemagne's campaigns against the Saxons, "Abbot Fardulf, took the relics of SS. Dionysius, Rusticus, and Eleutherius on the campaign."[129]

Which specific campaign against the Saxons, is unknown. We do know the tenure for the Lombard Abbot Fardulf was approximately 792-806. Thus this timeline coincides with Charlemagne's late 8th century Saxon wars between 792-799. However even within this timeline it's impossible to know which excursion the relics would have been a part of, whether they were there for only one summer campaign or the entirety of the wars is lost.

The *Royal Frankish Annals* is the primary source for the contextualization of the Saxon wars between 792-799. Janet Nelson summarized several of Charlemagne's campaigns of the late 8th century. In the summer of 792, the strife began as Saxons, Slavs, and part of the Frisians rebelled and unrest began.[130] To think of these groups as homogenous would be misleading. Nelson asserted that those Saxons and Franks did not look or act very differently from each other.[131] Frisians is also an interesting descriptor as it was allegedly the pagan Frisians who murdered Boniface decades earlier. The relation between rebellious Frisians, Boniface, and the possession of the relics of Denis on the battlefield suggests an interesting connection; the creation of the '*anonymous passio*'.

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[129] Lapidge 2017 97
[130] Nelson, Janet L. *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne*. University of California Press: Oakland. 2019. 319
[131] Nelson 321

Another contemporary political and religious event other than the beginning of the Saxon Wars took place in 794. The Synod of Frankfurt in 794 ordered "that no new saints might be venerated or invoked . . . but only those who were chosen by the authority of their passion or by the merit of their life are to be venerated in church."[132] Historians such Geary, Fouracre, Fichtenau, and Reimitz cite this popular example as proof of the centralizing effort Charlemagne put into motion against the wayward aspects of the church in an attempt to sanctify the political enemies of Charlemagne. An unintended consequence from the synod might be related to the reinvention of Denis. The hagiographer of the '*anonymous passio*' could have been on campaign during the Saxon wars. The decree of the synod of Frankfurt would have thus been unable to canonize a new saint influenced by the wars. Denis' relationship with the abbey, and the abbey's relationship with the royal court, and the people of Paris, made the reinvention of the saint attractive.

When the synod came to a close in August of 794, Charlemagne returned to the war. Several campaigns were planned between 794-799.[133] Biographical information taken from both the *Lorsch Annals* and the *Royal Frankish Annals* by Nelson indicate a war of immense repression. The affairs of Saxony were harsh. Land was devastated, hostages taken, and populations resettled. *The Lorsch* writer alleged in 797 "he and his

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[132] Geary, *Furta Sacra* 35
[133] Nelson 321

army wasted and burned...and he carried off hostages or as much as he wanted from them, and then did the same with the Frisians."[134] Between the years 795 - 796 it was reported that Charles simply entered and laid waste to Saxony.[135] Earlier in the war, a kinsman of Charles was killed by a Saxon ambush in 793. The war had then, if perhaps tangentially, became personal.[136]

There are strong connections between the murder of Boniface on 754 as a crucial event when considering the impact of the Carolingian Synthesis on the reinvention of Denis as a cephalophoric saint. There is an immense religious and political importance of Boniface as it pertained to the Carolingian court and the impact of Christianization as a whole. Boniface perhaps served as the most obvious influence for recasting the legendary martyr as a figure undefeated by the "ancient enemy." The rhetoric of the '*anonymous passio*' was clearly influenced and in some parts taken directly from the '*Gloriosae*'. However, in the '*anonymous passio*', the tone and hostility of the document demonstrates a significant shift for the purpose and social life of the *vita*. As the relics of the saint were brought out on campaign during the Saxon wars of the late 8th century theoretically aligns with Lapdige's dating of the '*anonymous passio*', one can come to the conclusion that there is a connection between the war and the hagiography.

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[134] Nelson 325
[135] Nelson 324
[136] Nelson 334

Chapter 4

<div align="center">

Medieval Cultural Body

Vita Bonifatii

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> Sons, cease fighting. Lay down your arms, for we told in scripture not to render to evil
> for good but to overcome evil by good. The hour to which we have long looked forward
> is near and the day of our release is at hand. Take comfort in the Lord and endure with
> gladness the suffering He has mercifully ordained…. Be strong of spirit and be not scared
> of those who kill the body, for they are not able to kill the soul, which remains without
> end'.[137]

This excerpt from the *vita* of Boniface highlights the intellectual regime dedicated

to the medieval perceptions of the material body. Medieval intellectuals such as

Gregory of Tours, St. Augustine, and Hilary of Poitiers, while not contemporary

colleagues, belonged to an intellectual tradition and network which were interested in

theological problems using the bible as benchmark for their writings. Theological

concerns for the resurrected body and intellectual perceptions about the medieval body

were reserved for elites. This phenomena was revealed in the hagiographies forged in

the monasteries of the medieval world. Such a process is undoubtedly true for

monasteries with royal exemption status, such as the abbey of Saint Denis.

The Carolingians not only sought to reinterpret histories 'constituting in an ever

growing body of histories to reshape the past for the present'[138], they also sought to

reinterpret physical bodies. The social life of the *vitae* of Denis showcases the medieval

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[137] BHL 1400

[138] Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity 550-850* 22

cultural body relevant within the political context of the 8th century. Cultures contain people, things, ideas, places, memories, monuments, rituals, and institutions but those are all in motion and often moving at different speeds.[139] The *vitae* of Denis, like Boniface, is not an exception, and in fact, demonstrates the medieval cultural body in a wholly unique way.

The depictions of the body of Denis between the two *vitae* connote different needs at different times. The main difference, of course, being cephalophory. Cephalophory, as we have seen, is not present within the '*Gloriosae*'. Even though the depiction of the body within the '*Gloriosae*' did not include the exciting episode of cephalophory, it does include inferences on the medieval perception of the body discussed by theologians such as Hilary of Poitiers. "Preserving therefore, in this obstinacy of faith, yielding their bodies to the earth, they bore their blessed souls to heaven."[140] The body and the soul separated. The remains of the martyr also remained together even after being beheaded. The bones of the martyrs were then preserved in the same place. The entirety of the '*Gloriosae*' demonstrates the need to provide documentation for the relics of Denis in the first place. The Carolingian hagiographers were primarily interested in providing foundation narratives. Such texts described the

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[139] Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache and other Culture Clusters of a Dark Age* 1
[140] *In hac ergo fidei pertinacia permanentes, reddentes terrae corpora, beatas caelo animas intulerunt*

circumstances surrounding the birth of their communities and the acquisition of their

patrons' relics.[141]

The '*anonymous passio*' likewise echoes the severance of the soul and the body.

"Yielding their bodies to earth, they brought their blessed souls to heaven."[142] The Latin

in verbatim. But the originality of cephalophory is striking when considering the

perception of the body. The hagiographer described the body of Denis as "lifeless." The

saint, in the '*anonymous passio*', was "a dead man proceeding with firm footsteps."[143]

When the saint undertook his post-mortem walk, his soul was not present with his

body demarcating the second body which takes its place after death. Through the

intervention of the power of God, Denis underwent the phenomenon of the *imitatio*

christi, breaking the boundary between life and death.

Elite theological actions were imparted into hagiographies and the *vitae* of Denis.

Resurrection and the body, as described in 4th century Gaul by Hilary of Poitiers,

promoted a view of material continuity similar to that investigated by Bynum. "The

bodies of all who will rise will not be formed from extraneous material, nor will natural

qualities of strange origin and extrinsic sources be used; it will emerge the same,fit now

for eternal beauty, and what is new in it will come about by change, not by creation."[144]

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[141] Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints* 33
[142] *reddentes terrae corpora, beatas caelo animas intulerunt*
[143] *Exanime corpus uiuentis currere more et homo iam mortuus firmis incedere plantis*
[144] Daley E., Brian *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* Cambridge University Press 2003 , 95

Hilary related that God will raise up the bodies and that identity will be preserved.
Denis not only engaged with the concept of cephalophory, which we have seen existed
for some time prior to the 8th century, but also related to the intellectual ideas of
resurrection. The Godhead that is his by right will be communicated to the whole
body.[145]

Augustine asserted the saints, in resurrection, will possess the identical bodies in
which they labored here on earth.[146] Augustine claimed the flesh will rise again.
Augustine was wholly committed to the idea of the Christian body and the resurrection
in terms of God's omnipotence and general eschatology but the obsession with the
resurrection also comes from denial of the supposed Manichean heresy which holds
great contempt for the body and only focuses on the spirit. The elite theologians would
have had this patristic education and be literate enough in theological debates of the
early medieval period to be able to communicate to a wider audience using the tools
they had.

Gregory of Tours also alluded to the idea of material continuity in The History of
the Franks. In the 6th century, Gregory transcribed a Socratic conversation with a priest
over a dispute about the resurrection of the body. The moment of interest in the
allegorical conversation begins over a disagreement concerning the restoration of the

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[145]Daley 2003 96
[146]Daley 2003 143

body at the end of time. The "priest" and Gregory discuss how God might restore the physical attributes in their entirety citing the disciple John that the body will be restored just as they were before.[147]

These are but a few examples of early medieval thought pertaining to the medieval cultural body. These theological conversations would come to impact hagiography into the future as it is shown in the *vitae* of Denis. Intellectuals, such as the monks of St. Denis, would have probably come from the elite of the early medieval period. St. Denis was intimately connected with the royal dynasties of the Franks, as we have seen, with safeguarding the Royal Frankish Annals as well as with the royal burials of Pippin, Charles Martel, and public funerals of two of King Chiperic's sons.[148] Although elite connections bound St. Denis, it was not always the case. Whereas a layman Lombard, Fardulf, was abbot of the highly politically connected, yet immensely rich abbey, from 792-806. Upon the death of Fardulf, the Lombard who had been granted the abbey of St. Denis as a reward for his betrayal of the conspiracy of the hunchback Pepin, Waldo of Reichenau had to march armed men into the chapter house and force the rebellious monks to fulfil their spiritual duties.[149].

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[147] Greforius, Saint, Bishop of Tours, 538-594. The History of the Franks. New York;Harmondsworth;: Penguin, 1974. 562
[148] Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity 550-850* 249
[149] Fichtenau 168

Conclusion

By the beginning of Louis the Pious's reign in Francia, a new abbot of St. Denis, Hildiun would go on to forge a master craft *vita* of Denis including a narrative and poetic version. It would be *Hildiun's Passio* which would jettison Denis to exponential fame and solidify a combination of the '*Gloriosae*' and the '*anonymous passio*' as well as his own inventions, into *Hilduin's Passio*. Hilduin opted to continue the theme of cephalophory for Denis, a clear editorial hagiographical decision which would increase Denis' popularity in perpetuity. Thus *Hildiun's Passio* would stay the most popular and widely known portrayal of a cephalophoric saint. The Golden Legend would serve as a seal for which the Christian world would imagine Denis from the 13th century to today. Hilduin's own social and political purposes have been discussed at length yet it goes to show how important Denis was for Franks and the political continuity his sanctity was for the kingdom of France, and especially Paris, in the future. Hilduin, as the most popular author of Denis' *vita*, has shaped not only our understanding of the saint's dominance and apostolicity as a theologian and martyr, but also our understanding of Paris and its rulers' pre-eminence and sovereignty.[150]

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[150] Deleporte, Marianne M. "Saint Denis, Hildiun's Headless Holy Man." PhD Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2004, 192

A 13th century Icelandic Saga told the story of Denis appearing to Charlemagne in a dream, underlying the international political clout Denis held.[151] As the saga goes Charlemagne, upon returning from Spain decided to intercede with Denis on behalf of those who had perished on campaign. After he stopped in Paris he went into the church of Denis and kept watch there during the night, praying for help from God.[152] As he slept, Denis appeared to Charlemagne in a dream. "Karolus," said he, "your prayer has been heard, for because of the intercession of your patron James, God has granted to me that all of those you have called to mind who fell in these times in Hispania, and those who shall so fall in the future, shall win forgiveness of all their misdoings, both greater and lesser."[153] After his vision, he erected a church in honor of St. James, a patron saint of the Carolingians. This intimate moment in the saga demonstrated the lasting prominence of Denis. This short story all the way from Iceland underscores the political continuity Denis still held going into the future particularly in relation to Charlemagne.

As an institution itself, the abbey of St. Denis was the largest land holding entity in the early 8th century and continued to be one of the richest and most powerful landholders through the mid 13th century.[154] The regional political power of Denis of

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[151] Hieatt, Constance B. Karlamagnús Saga: *The Saga of Charlemagne and His Heroes.* Vol. 13, 17. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1975.
[152] Hieatt 1975 77
[153] Hieatt 1975 78
[154] Geary noted the abbey of Saint Denis was the most significant land holder in Paris, owning up to 12,000 acres of land. *Before France and Germany* 200 Bouchard's analysis of litigation and rent records from the 12th-13th centuries in Paris suggests this phenomena continued. See *Tale of Two Monasteries*

the 8th century evolved into increasingly national importance. The abbey would lay

claim to the traditions of coronation as well as the location of the royal necropolis

dating back to the Merovingians.

The saint and the abbey would become a central figure for Capetian kingship

during the central Middle Ages. The life of the saint is inserted into the history of

France and throughout the underlying intention of the work is to set forth the history of

the protection extended by Denis to the kings of France from the time of Dagobert to the

13th century.[155] Denis of *Hilduin's Passio* became a creation of royal character. His figure

from the 9th century onwards underlined royal involvement in all aspects of his cult.[156]

Denis became sealed in time as the most famous cephalophoric saint by Jacobus de

Voragine due to the publication of The Golden Legend in the 13th century.

Simultaneously, Denis was used to impose a national and patriotic character.[157]

The main influence for the shift in the *vitae* to reinvent Denis as a cephalophore

was due to the murder of Boniface in Holland at the hands of, who we are lead to

believe, were pagans, in 754. The difference of language between the '*Gloriosae*' and the

'*anonymous passio*' continued to contrast in language and purpose. The '*anonymous*

passio' sounded as if it had come from a warzone. Coincidentally, the relics of

Dionysius, Rusticus, and Eleutherius were taken on campaign by the abbot Fardulf (or

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[155] Spiegel, The cult of Saint Denis and Capetian kingship. 1975 54
[156] Ibid
[157] Spiegel 1975 56

someone under his command). Which campaign is unknown, however, it is enough to make a serious connection.

The body of Denis was intricately and intimately connected to the body and political assassination of Boniface. The body in a medieval context is difficult to define. Thus, a more holistic approach would be to state how the body in the medieval world was framed rather than defined. The framing of Denis must be seen in the political machinations of the time by how he was related to Boniface and the inclusion of cephalophory in the '*anonymous passio*'. The framing must also include the theological education of the hagiographers and their religious and political role in the creation of the *vitae* in the first place. Just as Boniface's body became politicized as the first Carolingian martyr in the formation of a new empire, Denis's body was similarly politicized in a direct comparison. The body was a privileged site, vehicle, and metaphor of political struggle.[158] Denis's body quite literally became that vehicle due to the reinvention of his cephalophory.

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[158] Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, editors. *Framing Medieval Bodies*. New York: Manchester University Press. 1994. 11

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