

Hagiography and authority in ninth-century Francia

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Abstract

From the 820s onwards, the cult of relics came to be the subject of intense discussion in the Carolingian Empire. In the wake of the renewal of the image controversy in the West, the legitimacy and pastoral utility of relic cults was put into question, defended and hotly debated by Carolingian theologians. Yet, the reign of Louis the Pious was also a period of particularly strong efforts to use relics as resources for establishing and confirming spiritual, social and political positions. These often highly political projects were conducted within a field of competition between various actors and cult centres. Against this background, this paper discusses three hagiographical texts from the first half of the ninth century: Jonas' of Orléans *Vita et translatio Huberti*, Paschasius Radbertus' *Passio Rufini et Valerii*, Einhard's *Translatio Marcellini et Petri*. It thereby seeks to elucidate some aspects of the complicated relationship between relics and texts and the textual strategies developed to establish and maintain the authority of texts on relics. Comparison of the three texts reveals a diversity of such strategies, as well as different ways to conceptualise this relation between relics and texts. Although the three texts connect to different specific discussions and concerns, they also form part of a common discourse on the place of relics within Carolingian society, the righteous use of relics and its constraints.

key-words: cult of relics, Jonas of Orléans, *Vita et Translatio Huberti*, Einhard, *Translatio Marcellini et Petri*, Paschasius Radbertus

Relics and Texts: Hagiography and Authority in Ninth-Century Francia

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Unde timendum ne fiat in nobis, quod in multis iam gentibus actum legimus. Nequaquam igitur dixerim sine causa miracula sanctorum longe diu in Christo quiescentium nuper coruscasse, quanta et qualia numquam sunt audita a seculo facta uno in tempore ad reliquias sanctorum, quia omnino, quasi in gallicinio, sancti hoc in regno huc illucque delati, se invicem excitarunt quasi ad concentum cantus, ut daretur intelligi, quod nostra infidelitas iuxta Apostolum id exigeret, quia signa non fidelibus, sed infidelibus, ipso teste, verissime dantur [...].¹

When Paschasius Radbertus commented retrospectively on the political crisis of the Carolingian empire during the reign of Louis the Pious, he did so with a sharp eye for the discursive and social function of relics in Carolingian politics. In the passage from the second book of his *Epitaphium Arsenii* cited above, the miracles performed at relic shrines are understood as belonging to a mode of communication. The divine signa are meant to alert to their moral shortcomings those who would otherwise refuse to listen.

This perception of miracles as an indicator of the state of public affairs, and as a means of mediation between the spheres of the divine and the human, is something of a commonplace in Carolingian politics. For example, the *Annales regni Francorum* for the year 826 record the famous translation of the relics of the Roman martyr, Sebastian, organised by the arch-chaplain Hilduin of St. Denis.² Given the *Annals'* entries for the 820s, which record famines, crop failures, and military defeats in a way Paul Dutton has described as "ordering of disorder", the arrival of such famous relics could have conveyed a sense of hope and uninterrupted divine favour.³ Although Radbertus' somewhat more pessimistic interpretation

I would like to thank Dana Polanichka for kindly helping me with the English translation of this paper.

¹ Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, ed. E. Dümmler, "Radbert's Epitaphium Arsenii", *Abhandlungen der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 2 (1900) 1-98, at 61-62. (= *Charlemagne's Cousins: Contemporary lives of Adalhard and Wala*, trans. A. Cabaniss (Syracuse, N.Y., 1967) 150: "We should therefore fear lest what has happened to many nations also befall us. But not without reason, I would say, have the miracles of saints long since asleep in Christ recently been gleaming. Never before in history have such great deeds been accomplished at one time by the relics of the saints. Everywhere the saints brought into this realm from hither and yon have aroused each other in symphony of song as at cockcrow, so that it may be understood that this was necessitated by our faithlessness ; for signs are, according to the Apostle, most truly vouchsafed not to believers, but to unbelievers." (Transl. slightly altered by me).

² *Annales regni Francorum* a. 826, ed. F. Kurze, *MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol* [6] (Hannover, 1895) 171-172.

³ P. Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln-London, 1994) 87.

of such events differed from that of the Annals, and was of course written from hindsight, his comments point to a shared understanding of miracles and relics, and of their functions within a text.

Certainly, the saints' role as mediators between divine and human had a long history from late antiquity onwards, as did the political use of saints' cults.⁴ The reign of Louis the Pious (814-840) arguably witnessed, however, a remarkable intensification of interest and efforts concerning relic cults among members of the intellectual and political elite. This interest was accompanied by an increase in the production of written accounts of relic translations, and by a high amount of publicity and ostentatiousness.⁵

In 827, Einhard brought the relics of the Roman martyrs Marcellinus and Peter to Francia. His use of the martyrs as vehicles for critical commentary on the political situation of the realm is the most spectacular example of employing prestigious relics as trump cards in political discourse.⁶ In the Translatio Marcellini et Petri, Einhard described how the archangel Gabriel appeared to a blind man called Alberich at the shrine of the saints in the winter of 828, revealing instructions addressed to Louis the Pious for the reform of the troubled empire; shortly thereafter, the confessions of the demon Wiggo defined what had gone wrong in previous years. Einhard edited two libelli containing these divine messages, which were discussed at the court meetings that winter.⁷

⁴ See above all P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981); cf. the comments in P.A. Hayward, "Demystifying the Role of Sanctity in Western Christendom", in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Age: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P.A. Hayward, (Oxford, 1999) 115-142; N. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley, 1994) 209-237; for Merovingian contexts, see P. Fouracre, "The Origins of the Carolingian Attempt to Regulate the Cult of Saints", in *The Cult of Saints*, ed. Howard-Johnston and Hayward, 143-165; C. Leyser, "The Temptations of Cult: Roman Martyr Piety in the Age of Gregory the Great," *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000) 289-307.

⁵ M. Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 33 (Tournhout, 1979) 94-99.; J. M.H. Smith, "Old Saints, New Cults: Roman Martyrs in Carolingian Francia," in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald Bollough*, ed. eadem (Leiden, 2000) 317-334; P. Geary, *Furta Sacra. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton 1990) 35-41; idem, "The Ninth-Century Relic Trade – A Response to Popular Piety?" in idem, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1994) 177-193.

⁶ Einhard, *Translatio et miracula sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, ed. Georg Waitz, *MGH SS 15, 1* (Hannover, 1887) 238-264; English = P. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier: The Complete Einhard*, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 2 (Peterborough, 1998) 69-130. For a new interpretation of the reign of Louis the Pious and an elaborate analysis of the modes of political discourse in the 820s and 830s, see now M. de Jong, *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Cambridge, 2009). I would like to express my thanks to the author for supplying me with a manuscript of the work prior to publication. For the political context, see furthermore P. Godman/R. Collins (eds.), *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814-840)* (Oxford, 1990) ; E. Boshof, *Ludwig der Fromme* (Darmstadt, 1996).

⁷ Einhard, *Translatio* III, 13-14 (Waitz, 252-254).

In subsequent years, Einhard's text became the model for a number of translation narratives.⁸ Renewed interest was not limited to Roman martyrs, however, but also bestowed upon Gallo-Roman and Frankish saints. In the wake of the crisis of 833, Hilduin of St Denis and Louis worked together to connect the identity of St. Denis to that of Dionysius Areopagita, thus making him the first and foremost missionary into Gaul. This joint venture had clear political implications far beyond the obvious advantages that the possession of such prestigious relics presented for Hilduin. The dedication of the revised version of the Passio Dionysii to Louis could serve to underline the recently re-established good relations between Hilduin and the emperor, and it may have been part of an attempt to provide a particular patron for the future king Charles the Bald.⁹ Both Roman and Frankish saints were transferred to different political contexts. Accounts of relic translations into Saxony formed part of the discussions about the integration and in-depth Christianisation of the Saxons.¹⁰

These are but a few examples of the various efforts to use relic cults as resources for power and authority at the time of Louis the Pious. It is important to bear in mind, however, that these efforts were conducted within a field of debate and contention, and in a context of competition between various actors and cult centres. Einhard's transfer of his saints was a reaction to Hilduin's translation of Sebastian, and the two courtiers thereafter fought about the possession of the bodies of Marcellinus and Peter. Einhard also needed to negotiate the place of the Roman relics within a network of already established cults, for example at St. Bavo in Ghent, where he was lay abbot.¹¹ Hilduin, in turn, had to employ all his rhetorical skills to refute doubts about the identity of the relics of St Denis with the Areopagite in the Passio Dionysii and the dedicatory letters accompanying it.¹² Relics, therefore, were not simply trump cards in public discourse, but increasingly becoming the object of discussion themselves. This was also due to the theological debates evolving around the cult of relics.

⁸ Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 118-124.

⁹ Hilduin, *Passio Dionysii*, *PL* 106, cols. 23-50; G. Brown, *Politics and Patronage at the Abbey of Saint-Denis: The Rise of a Royal Patron Saint* (unpubl. PhD, Oxford 1989) ; R. Loenertz, "La légende parisienne de S. Denys l'Aréopagite: sa genèse et son premier témoin," *Annalecta Bollandiana* 69 (1951) 217-237.

¹⁰ H. Beumann, "Die Hagiographie bewältigt Unterwerfung und Christianisierung der Sachsen durch Karl den Großen," in idem, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Sigmaringen, 1987) 289-323 ; H. Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen im 9. Jahrhundert: Über Kommunikation, Mobilität und Öffentlichkeit im Frühmittelalter*, Beihefte der Francia 48 (Stuttgart, 2002).

¹¹ Einhard, *Translatio* iv, 8-14 (Waitz, 258-262).

¹² Hilduin, *Epistola* nr. 19 to Louis the Pious, ed. E. Dümmler, *MGH EE* 5 (Berlin, 1899) 328-335.

Relics played an important role in the revival of the image controversy in the West during the 820s. In the treatises written by Jonas of Orléans and Dungal of Pavia to counter the iconoclastic policy of bishop Claudius of Turin, they reacted harshly against Claudius's criticism of pilgrimage, the veneration of the cross, and relic cults.¹³ Claudius's views had presented a serious challenge to established practice, and provoked reflection on its theological foundations and pastoral utility. Attempts to reaffirm the legitimacy of relic cults were complemented by an effort to tighten episcopal and royal control over cults. Increased anxiety and doubts are reflected not only in theological treatises, but also in many hagiographical texts. Even the author of the 826 entry of the *Annals* on the translation of Sebastian included a vehement argument against contemporary reluctance to believe in the great miracles performed at Sebastian's shrine.¹⁴ Many texts of the period reveal a profound sense of anxiety concerning the risks involved for one's salvation when dealing with relics, and concern for the ways to distinguish true relics from false. What was at stake was legitimate control over cults, as well as the power to define, and the right way to speak about, relics.¹⁵

There is nothing self-evident in the successful use of relics as resources for establishing discursive authority. Rather, relics themselves necessitate discourse.¹⁶ It is this combination of the political and social importance of relic cults on the one hand, and their intrinsic ambiguity on the other, that should make us think about the relationship between relics and

¹³ P. Boulhol, *Claude de Turin: un évêque iconoclaste dans l'occident carolingien. Étude suivie de l'édition du Commentaire sur Josué*, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Serie Moyen Âge et Temps Modernes 38 (Paris, 2002) 115-149; A. Boureau, "Les théologiens carolingiens devant les images religieuses: la conjoncture de 825," in *Nicée II, 787-1987: Douze siècles d'images religieuses. Actes du colloque international Nicée II, tenu au Collège de France, Paris, 2-4 octobre 1986*, ed. F. Boespflug and N. Lossky (Paris, 1987) 247-262; D. Appleby, "Holy Relic and Holy Image: Saints' Relics in the Western Controversy over Images in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," *Word and Image* 8 (1992) 333-343; idem, "Sight and church reform in the thought of Jonas of Orléans," *Viator* 27 (1996) 11-33; M. van Uytvanghe, "Le culte des saints et la prétendue 'Aufklärung' carolingienne," in *Le culte des saints aux IX^e-XIII^e siècles. Actes du colloque tenu à Poitiers, 15-17 septembre 1993*, ed. R. Favreau, Civilisation médiévale 1 (Poitiers 1995) 151-166; J.-M. Sansterre, "Les justifications des reliques dans le haut Moyen Âge," in *Les reliques: objets, cultes, symboles. Actes du colloque international de l'Université du Littoral-Côte d'Opale (Boulogne-sur-Mer) 4-6 septembre 1997*, ed. E. Bozóky and A.-M. Helvétius, Hagiologia 1 (Brepols, 1999) 81-93; P. Riché, "Les Carolingiens en quête de sainteté," in *Les fonctions des saints dans le monde occidentale (III^e-XIII^e siècles)*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 149 (Rome 1991) 217-224.

¹⁴ *Annales regni Francorum* a. 826 (Kurze, 171-172).

¹⁵ See, for example, two letters written by Agobard of Lyon and his successor, Amolo, to fellow bishops concerning relics of doubtful authenticity. Both authors strongly emphasise the importance of ecclesiastical control over cults and allocate the power of definition in such matters to experts, that is, bishops. See Agobard of Lyon, *Epistola* 12, ed. E. Dümmler, *MGH EE Karolini aevi* 3 (Berlin 1899) 206-210; Amolo of Lyon, *Epistola* 1, ed. E. Dümmler, *ibidem* 363-368. Cf. Geary, *Furta sacra* 28-32. For the repercussion of such discussions in Northern Italy, see the contribution of Giorgia Vocino in this volume.

¹⁶ P. Brown, "Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours," in idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982) 222-250.

texts in the Frankish empire of Louis the Pious, a relationship that is of crucial importance with regard to questions of authority. In what follows, I would therefore like to discuss three hagiographical texts that allow us to explore the diverse aspects of this relationship formulated as part of the attempt to ‘textualize’ the symbolic capital of relics and to overcome the difficulties and risks that came with writing texts on relics.

My first example is the Vita et Translatio Huberti, written by Jonas of Orléans between 825 and 831 at the request of bishop Walcaud of Liège, who translated Hubert’s relics from Liège to the monastery of Andagne in 825.¹⁷ This transfer is closely connected with Walcaud’s reform projects within his diocese.¹⁸ Jonas’ Vita is the reworked version of an older Life of the saint, dated to the middle of the eighth century, to which he appended his own account of the translation of 825.

As one of the most eminent advisors to Louis the Pious, Jonas is renowned for his various contributions to the reform endeavours of the 820s.¹⁹ He was central to the re-conceptualisation of the function of bishops and their relationship with the other ordines of the empire, and was deeply involved in the controversies over ecclesiastical property. Moreover, at the time of writing the Vita et Translatio, he was working on his treatise De cultu imaginum against Claudius of Turin.²⁰ It is therefore no surprise that Jonas took the opportunity of rewriting the Vita Huberti to position himself with regard to the debates of his time. His text is an argument in favour of the pastoral utility of relic cults under episcopal control, a point of view that David Appleby has established as Jonas’ major contribution to the debate on images and relics.²¹ In the Vita, Jonas also formulated a model of the episcopal office and its ideal fulfilment that was intended as a contribution to contemporary debates, as conducted, for example, at the synod of Paris in 829.²² Building on the narrative of Hubert’s

¹⁷ Jonas of Orléans, *Vita secunda et Translatio S. Huberti*, AASS Nov. 1, 806-818.

¹⁸ A. Dierkens, “La christianisation des campagnes de l’empire de Louis le Pieux. L’exemple du diocèse de Liège sous l’épiscopat de Walcaud (c. 809 – c. 831),” in *Charlemagne’s Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious*, ed. R. Collins and P. Godmann (Oxford, 1990) 309–329.

¹⁹ R. Savigni, *Giona di Orleans: una ecclesiologia carolingia* (Bologna, 1989).

²⁰ *PL* 106, cols. 305–388.

²¹ Appleby, “Sight and Church Reform”, esp. 18 – 21 and 27–33; idem, “Holy relic” 338-339; Boulhol, *Claude de Turin*, 156-163.

²² On these discussions, see De Jong, *The Penitential State* 170-184; eadem, “Sacrum palatium et ecclesia: l’autorité religieuse royale sous les Carolingiens (790-840),” *Annales* 58 (2003) 1243–1269; eadem, “Ecclesia and the Early Medieval Polity,” in *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. S. Airlie, W. Pohl and H. Reimitz, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 11 (Vienna, 2006) 113-132; S. Patzold, “Redéfinir l’office épiscopal: les évêques francs face à la crise des années 820/30,” in *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge. Crises et renouvellements*, ed. F. Bougard, L. Feller and R. Le Jan (Turnhout, 2006) 337-359; A. Dubreucq, “Le pouvoir de l’évêque au IX^e siècle: étude sur le vocabulaire du pouvoir,” in *Hommes de pouvoir: ressources et lieux de*

exemplary career as a bishop, Jonas formulated a powerful image of the bishops' role within the order of the Christian empire in his account of the translation of 825.²³ By establishing a close link between the relic translation and the politics of reform in his text, he was negotiating both the meaning of the translated relics and his own position as a bishop. The *Vita Huberti prima* was a very suitable resource for such an endeavour.²⁴ Important concerns in this text are the virtues of a bishop, the relationship between the bishop and his community, and the rightful use of ecclesiastical property. Adapting the *Vita prima* to the interpretative frame of the 820s in order to provide a model for contemporary bishops nevertheless required considerable caution and effort. It is impossible within the limits of this article to discuss in detail all of the strategies through which Jonas appropriated and adapted the *Vita prima*.²⁵ In the present context, it is sufficient to note that while Jonas updated the vocabulary and added a substantial amount of theoretical reflection to the account, he nevertheless tried to invest his suggestions with the authority of an older text. In the dedicatory letter to Walcaud, he claimed to have merely rephrased and corrected the text of the *Vita prima*, without altering its contents, and he refused to accept the position of author of the *Vita et Translatio*.²⁶ In his retreat behind the authority of the ancient text, Jonas went so far as to comply with the sudden change in point of view that occurs in c.8 of the *Vita prima*. During a miracle account, the narrative voice suddenly switches to the first person, and the narrator relates his own experiences as an eyewitness to the event. Jonas followed this change and even enhanced its effect: [Here is] what happened to me, **who has written this [account]**, during the same shipwreck.²⁷

Jonas also drew on the *Vita prima*'s authority for negotiating the status of Hubert's relics. This is above all visible in the accounts of the two elevation rituals, shortly after Hubert's death in 743, and in the context of the translation to Andagne in 825. Compared to the description of the 743 elevation in the *Vita prima*, Jonas subtly shifted the emphasis of the narrative, turning the story into a powerful demonstration of the pastoral efficiency of a relic

pouvoir, V^e-XIII^e siècles, ed. E. Magrou-Nortier, *Aux sources de la gestion publique 3* (Lille, 1997) 97–110; H.-H. Anton, "Zum politischen Konzept karolingischer Synoden und zur karolingischen Brüdergemeinschaft," in *Historisches Jahrbuch* 99 (1979) 55–132.

²³ See Jonas, *VH* c. 29, 817.

²⁴ *Vita Huberti episcopi Traiectensis*, ed. W. Levison, *MGH SS rer. Merov.* 6 (Hannover, 1913) 471–496.

²⁵ I have discussed these strategies more fully in G. Heydemann, "Text und Translation: Strategien zur Mobilisierung spiritueller Ressourcen im Frankenreich Ludwigs des Frommen," in *Zwischen Niederschrift und Wiederschrift*, ed. M. Diesenberger *et. al.* (forthcoming) with fuller bibliography on both *Vitae Huberti*.

²⁶ Jonas, *VH*, Epistola dedicatoria, 806: *Sed neque compilatoris vel nomen vel officium mihi debeat imputari, quasi qui alienum opus verbaque pervaserim.*

²⁷ Jonas, *VH* c. 10, 811: *Mihi quoque, qui haec scripsi, in eodem naufragio tale quid accidit* (my emphasis). Cf. *Vita prima* c. 8 (Levison, 487–488).

cult, which he argued exerted a particularly strong impact upon its audience wherever the saint enjoyed close links with the community's past.²⁸ Jonas placed even more emphasis than the Vita prima on the miracle of corporeal integrity, albeit for different reasons. He added comments stressing the difference between Hubert's holy body and that of "ordinary" mortals, and securing the understanding of this miracle as an anticipated fulfilment of the promise of resurrection and as a sign for the power of intercession.²⁹ Jonas thus reacted to fundamental issues in the controversy about relic cults and to doubts expressed by some contemporaries not only as to the spiritual usefulness of relic cults but also concerning the shrine as the privileged place of the presence of a saint.

In the account of the translation of 825, Jonas went out of his way to demonstrate that the ritual of 825 had been the model of a correct relic translation. He described in great detail the official channels through which the request for translating the relics went, as a process perfectly in line with the decrees of the Council of Mainz (813).³⁰ Even so, he once again had to discuss the status of Hubert's relics. Drawing on Bishop Walcaud's testimony, Jonas stressed the lack of any sign of corruption in Hubert's body, again discussing the theological foundations and the likelihood of such a miracle even in recent times. To disperse his readers' doubts about Hubert's incorrupt body, Jonas referred to the description of the elevation of 743 in the preceding text.³¹

In order to employ the parallels between the two elevation rituals as a means of establishing the authenticity of the miracle, the subtly reworked text of the Vita had to be accepted as a reliable account of the events of the eighth century by Jonas' readers. This is emblematic of the difficulty Jonas faced in rewriting the Vita Huberti. His appropriation of the Vita Huberti prima rested on both his claim to have written a text that was not of his own making, and on the careful adaptation of the text to its new contexts, which was brought about not least through interjections and additional comments to the older text. To use Hubert's relics and the hagiographical traditions of Liège in order to affirm his position in discussions about the

²⁸ Cf. Jonas, *VH* 25 with *Vita prima* 19. Jonas strongly emphasises that contrition and penitential attitude are the effects of witnessing the miracle, and that the function of such a miracle is to underline the exemplary role of the saint for his community. Cf. Appleby, "Sight and Church Reform," 18.

²⁹ Jonas, *VH* 25, 816: *ita ut quamquam de resurrectionis redintegratione veracissime a Salvatore dictum et fideliter a fidelibus constat susceptum: capillus de capite vestro non peribit, tamen et hoc tempore in hujus sancti viri corpore videretur impletum*. See A. Angenendt, "Corpus incorruptum: Eine Leitidee der mittelalterlichen Reliquienverehrung," *Saeculum* 42 (1991) 320-348.

³⁰ Jonas, *Vita et Translatio* 30-32, 817; cf. *Concilium Moguntinense* a. 813 c. 51, ed. A. Werminghoff, *MGH LL Concilia* 2 (Hannover-Leipzig, 1906) 272.

³¹ Jonas, *VH* 33, 818.

social function of relic cults or the ministerium of bishops meant that Jonas needed to balance the reinterpretation of narrated events in light of contemporary concerns and the need to leave the authority of the older text untouched.

Like the Vita Huberti, Radbertus' Passio Rufini et Valerii, probably written in the 840s, around the middle of the ninth century, is the ré-écriture of an older version of the life of the saints, usually dated to the eighth century.³² But as we shall see, Radbertus differed from Jonas not only in his definition of the relation between the earlier passio and his own text, but also in his envisaging of a very different relation between relics and texts.

The two saints suffered near Soissons, at the hands of the Roman prefect of the province Rictiovarus, under Diocletian (284–305). The Passio opens with a somewhat ideosyncratic synopsis of the Roman-Christian past as a historical background to the story of the martyrs. Radbertus praised the gradual spread of Christianity throughout the Roman world, the growing numbers of Christians in high political and military ranks, and the prosperity of a consolidating ecclesia guided by faithful and honourable churchmen in the period before Diocletian. But there soon followed decline, which Radbertus described in words borrowed from Eusebius-Rufinus' Ecclesiastical history.³³ Depraved morals and corrupted discipline led to envy, lying and strife among both principes and the populus. These moral failures and the worldly and dishonest behaviour among the clergy provoked God's anger against this second Israel. Divine anger manifested itself, according to Radbertus, to such an extent that the prophecy on the fate of the terrestrial Israel (Lam 2; Ps 88. 40) could be seen to apply to the Christian Church.

These passages on the “Golden Age” and the analysis of the subsequent crisis of the ecclesia feature many of the keywords of ninth-century political discussions.³⁴ That this was a deliberate choice rather than mere coincidence seems very likely given Radbertus' familiarity with a typological mode of interpretation of the past. In his Epitaphium Arsenii, written to

³² Paschasius Radbertus, *Passio Rufini et Valerii*, PL 120, cols. 1489–1508. The earlier version is edited as *Passio Rufini et Valerii*, AASS Iun 2, 796-797; W. Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter 3: Karolingische Biographie, 750–920 n. Chr.*, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 10 (Stuttgart, 1991) 304–308.

³³ Cf. Radbertus, *Passio*, cols. 1492C-1493B and 1493D with Eusebius-Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica* VIII, 1, 6-9 and VIII, 2 respectively, ed. T. Mommsen, *Eusebius Werke* 2 (Leipzig, 1908) 739-743 = *Life and Works of Rufinus with Jerome's Apology against Rufinus*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 3, trans. W.H. Freemantle (Oxford and New York, 1890).

³⁴ This is observed by Berschin, *Epochenstil* 307, who does not, however, comment on the use of Eusebius-Rufinus. On the reception of the latter Carolingian period, see R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004) 218-244.

commemorate his former abbot Wala, the characters of the recent past are referred to by aliases mostly derived from a biblical or late antique past. This technique, which was informed by the practice of biblical exegesis, served to create an additional layer of meaning by providing loose historical parallels.³⁵ A similar sense of overlap between past and present, I would suggest, underlies much of the text of the Passio Rufini et Valerii. In his preface, Radbertus stressed that the hagiographer's task was to produce a historia sanctorum.³⁶ It is important to note the moral implications of this definition of hagiographical writing. While remaining firmly situated within the context of the reign of Diocletian and third-century Roman Gaul, the story of Rufinus and Valerius was meant to offer lessons on faith, doctrine, and virtue to Radbertus' ninth-century audience.

Another remarkable feature of the Passio is the subtle way in which Radbertus exploited the convention of the genre of martyr acts. This is visible, for example, in his approach to the traditional dispute about the pagan gods that took place during the saints' trial before the Roman official. Radbertus most likely drew inspiration for his account from the Passio Sebastiani, where considerable space is devoted to this subject.³⁷ But compared to the Passio Sebastiani, let alone the old Passio Rufini et Valerii, Radbertus took the discussion considerably further. Drawing on Lactantius' Divine Institutions, which he also at times quoted verbatim, Radbertus did not restrict himself to refuting the pagan cults as a vain superstition. He also put a strong emphasis on the moral depravity of the gods, listing violent struggles for power among family members, and adultery and sexual debauchery among their deeds, and he passionately deplored the repercussions such 'divine' role models had on the maintenance of social order in the human world.³⁸ Close attention was given to the gods as simulacra or statues, which Radbertus described as man-made and created from stone, wood or metal, lacking reason, sense and life, and therefore incapable of intervening in human affairs.³⁹ Another concern, also present in the Passio Sebastiani, which Radbertus repeatedly emphasised throughout the text was that worship of these simulacra does not help the cause of the empire, or promote the well-being of its rulers and citizens.⁴⁰ Quoting Seneca (with Lactantius as an intermediary), he denounced the rites and gestures performed in front of the

³⁵ On this text, see D. Ganz, "The 'Epitaphium Arsenii' and the opposition to Louis the Pious," in *Charlemagne's Heir*, Godman and Collins, 537-550; De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 102-111.

³⁶ Radbertus, *Passio*, col. 1490A.

³⁷ *Passio Sebastiani* 13, *PL* 17, 1021-1058, 1040-1041.

³⁸ Radbertus, *Passio*, col. 1501B-D.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, col. 1498C, 1499D-1502B.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Passio Sebastiani* c. 23, 1056, where the emphasis lies, in contrast to Radbertus, on the efficacy of Christian prayers for rulers and empire.

simulacra as vain efforts to secure supernatural support from mortal beings incapable of administering aid to humans.⁴¹

This exceptionally sophisticated engagement with the pagan cults, with its focus on the correlation of public cult and the well-being of the res publica, could well have evoked thought on contemporary practice, and the presence of some shared concerns and vocabulary connects the description of pagan simulacra to the ninth-century debate on image worship. A critical stance towards the superficiality of outward gestures of veneration squares well with the views Radbertus expressed in his preface. While in the Vita Huberti, Jonas negotiated the authenticity and the meaning of Hubert's relics, the Passio Rufini et Valerij was not a text designed to lend meaning to the particular relics concerned. The preface was instead devoted to an elaborate discussion of the spiritual value of relics in general.⁴² Radbertus systematically contrasted relics and texts, carefully weighing their respective utility as a means to salvation. The Lives of the saints, he argues, render *materia salutis* to believers; studying them in the form of a written text prompts the spiritual advancement of the audience. Saints' Lives preserve the immortal memory of good deeds; they serve to strengthen faith and to provide instruction. They thus belong to the heavenly sphere of the spirit. By contrast, relics are mortal, corruptible, and material; they are associated with the body and with original sin, and pertain to the inferior sphere of the flesh. Radbertus therefore lamented the undue preoccupation with the material and outward aspects of the cult of relics. Although he was wary of denying the saints' power of intercession or the venerability of relics as vehicles of God's miraculous power, his attitude towards their salvific function remained somewhat reserved, and he clearly expressed the superiority of texts over relics.⁴³ He put a strong emphasis on the fact that it is through texts, rather than through relics, that the saints are rendered present to the believer. Reading or listening to texts is the prime road to spiritual progress and salvation.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Radbertus, *Passio*, col. 1502A; cf. Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* II,2, ed. S. Brandt, *CSEL* 19 (Vienna, 1890) 101 = *Divine Institutes*, Translated Texts for Historians 40, trans. A. Bowen and P. Garnsey (Liverpool 2003) 121–122.

⁴² Radbertus, *Passio*, preface, cols. 1498C–1491B. Berschin, *Epochenstil* 305–306.

⁴³ Radbertus, *Passio*, preface: *Quae [historiae sanctorum] quanto majora sint quam vestis aut pulvis corporum, quanquam sanctorum, facile comprehendit quicumque prudenter advertit*. For Radbertus' view of the human body's part in salvation, see D. Appleby, "Beautiful on the Cross, Beautiful in His Torments: the place of the body in the thought of Paschasius Radbertus," *Traditio* 60 (2005) 1–46.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of Augustine's views on the cult of the martyrs against the background of competing concepts of imitability and inimitability of the saints in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, see P. Brown, "Enjoying the saints in Late Antiquity", *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000) 1–24. Cf. below, note 56.

This view stands in sharp contrast with numerous translation narratives, all of which lack reference to the earthly life of the saints concerned. When he discussed the chronology of the saints' lives and the questions of precedence with regard to Hilduin's Dionysius, Radbertus moreover made it perfectly clear that he considered rivalry about prestigious relics foolish and ridiculous: "We should therefore not discern the merits [of the saints], since we do not confer the honours, nor should we fight about [the value of] martyrs' crowns awarded for struggles we are in no position to judge".⁴⁵ In more general terms, the Passio is a response to ninth-century debates about the 'tools of salvation', a debate centred around the role of images, relics, the cult of the cross and the eucharist for spiritual advancement and salvation.⁴⁶ Throughout the Passio, Radbertus emphasised the movement away from material tokens towards purely spiritual contemplation of the divine. It is in the context of this broader discussion that Radbertus' attitude towards relics as material tokens needs to be understood.⁴⁷

Like Jonas, Radbertus took the opportunity of writing hagiography to comment on contemporary events and debates. The incorporation of a large amount of theological material into his account placed the text of the Passio in a line with the homiletic and educational function of martyr acts such as the Passio Sebastiani.⁴⁸ Radbertus both exploited and expanded these narrative traditions, and he invested a great deal of learning and cultural competence in his creation of a historia sanctorum. In contrast to Jonas, he did not tie the authority of his own text to the replication of an older version of already established prestige. Tellingly, Radbertus stated in the preface that whoever preferred to read the older Passio should feel free to do so.⁴⁹ While Jonas' power to speak rested on his claim to an ancient textual tradition and was also the effect of his episcopal office, for Radbertus it was based on the very act of writing about saintly lives. This rather self-confident authorial posture, and his strategy in writing the Passio, correspond to his strong sense for the power of words, both as oral admonitio and as a written instruction.

⁴⁵ Radbertus, *Passio*, 1495A.

⁴⁶ D. Ganz, "Theology and the Organisation of Thought," in R. McKitterick (ed.), *New Cambridge Medieval History* 2 (Cambridge, 1995) 758–785 at 773. It is worth mentioning that after its completion in 840, Jonas rededicated his treatise against Claudius to Charles the Bald.

⁴⁷ For example, Radbertus formulated a well-balanced conclusion on the efficacy of miracles as a 'means to salvation', arguing that their impact on human minds cannot be measured independently of the individual's spiritual condition: See Radbertus, *Passio*, 1507B.

⁴⁸ K. Cooper, "Ventriloquism and the Miraculous: Conversion, Preaching, and the Martyr Exemplum in Late Antiquity," *Studies in Church History* 41 (2005) 22–45.

⁴⁹ Radbertus, *Passio*, 1491B, borrowing Jerome's words in the prologue to his edition of the book of Joshua; cf. Berschin, *Epochenstil* 305 note 477.

Saints as a vehicle of admonitio for rulers and members of their entourage leads me to my final example, Einhard's Translatio Marcellini et Petri, which has received more attention from modern historians than any other translation narrative of the period.⁵⁰ This is above all due to the spectacular way in which Einhard used the prestige of his Roman saints to air commentary on the political situation of the late 820s. In contrast to Jonas or Paschasius, Einhard could not count on the authority of an ecclesiastical office, or locate his comments within a venerable textual tradition. Instead, the admonitio Einhard addressed to Louis the Pious and his court was firmly bound to the authority of the relics of Marcellinus and Peter, at whose shrine the archangel Gabriel appeared, and whose power compelled the demon Wiggo to speak out.

Modern scholars have often stressed the exceptional character of Einhard's text, which results, among other things, from the marked presence of Einhard's authorial *ego* within his own text, which was unique among similar texts in the early Middle Ages. This authorial presence, I shall argue, is above all due to Einhard's problems with defining and defending the position from which he wrote. These problems become apparent already in the curiously negative definition of the addressees of his text, but also in the preface.⁵¹ It can be read not only as a subtle attack on Einhard's rival Hilduin, but also as a bid for acceptance of both author and text by asserting almost defensively the continuity of his work with a series of valuable texts whose authors were driven by laudable motives.

This defensive tone is characteristic for the greater part of the Translatio. This was due to the need not only to legitimize the theft of the relics, but also to strengthen his own position as a participant in the discussions on the state of the realm in 828/29 and thereafter.⁵² The story of the blind man Alberich and his vision of the archangel Gabriel disguised as St Marcellinus may serve as an example. This vision resulted in the production of a libellus containing instructions for the reform of the empire that was subsequently submitted to Louis the Pious

⁵⁰ M. Heinzlmann, "Einhard's *Translatio Marcellini et Petri*: Eine hagiographische Reformschrift von 830," in *Einhard: Studien zu Leben und Werk*, ed. H. Schefers (Darmstadt, 1997) 269–298; J.M.H. Smith, "'Emending evil ways and praising God's omnipotence': Einhard and the Uses of Roman Martyrs," in *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing*, ed. K. Mills and A. Grafton (Rochester–New York, 2003) 189–223; eadem, "Einhard: The Sinner and the Saints," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (2003) 55–77; De Jong, *Penitential State*, 67–72 and 157–164; H-R. Seeliger, "Einhard's römische Reliquien: Zur Übertragung der Heiligen Marcellinus und Petrus ins Frankenreich," *Römische Quartalschrift* 83 (1988) 58–75.

⁵¹ Einhard, *Translatio*, Preface (Waitz, 239): *Veris veri Dei cultoribus et Ihesu Christi domini nostri sanctorumque eius non fictis amatoribus Einhardus peccator*. On the preface, see Heinzlmann, "Reformschrift," 293–296.

⁵² For the context of the political discourse at Louis the Pious's court in the 820s, see De Jong, *The Penitential State*, esp. 112–184; cf., with different emphasis, Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming*, 53–122.

in the winter of 828/29. The Translatio's account is characterised above all by keeping the contents of the heavenly guidelines a secret, and by the constant reiteration of two points: the libellus contains divine commandments, and it was written and delivered to the king by God's order.⁵³ Einhard's constant re-use of words reflecting the divine command to speak (iubere, praecipere, divina voluntas, auctoritas) wove for him a fabric of authority. Reporting the words of angels and intermediaries who told Einhard the story, enabled him to repeatedly summarize the events. At the same time, this technique served to preserve Einhard as a narrator at the centre of the audience's attention, since the point of view remained that of the author throughout the account. This 'rhetoric of divine order' corresponds to the way in which Einhard presented his messages as divinely inspired time and again in the Translatio. From this resulted the notion that his writing was an obligation. At the end of the preface to book III, which opens the sequence of miracles worked by the saints in Francia, Einhard discusses the principles governing the organisation of his material in the following miracle accounts, an organisation that aimed at leaving not a single miracle unmentioned.⁵⁴ There are a number of passages in the text that define the content of the narrative as something that needs to be written down and the act of narration as an imperative, even if the events defy human language.⁵⁵ This is reminiscent of Augustine's demand to keep the records at the saints' shrines as complete as possible. The underlying notion is an understanding of the spiritual benefit believers obtain from being told these stories, and, more importantly, an understanding of miracles pertaining to God's salutary actions on earth.⁵⁶ It is this definition of his text as an account of sacred events that gave Einhard the range to write as he did. Significantly, the reason he gave for including the story of Gabriel in the Translatio was that it was followed by a miraculous lighting of candles that was interpreted as a miracle worked by the saints and thus demanded written commemoration.⁵⁷

Yet, it was necessary to ensure the status of the written text as an authentic narrative about God's intervention in this world through his saints. For example, the Gabriel-story had to be

⁵³ Einhard, *Translatio* iii, 13 (Waitz, 252–253)

⁵⁴ Einhard, *Translatio*, Praeface to book iii (Waitz, 248): *neque mihi silendum est, nec tamen ita ut fuit plene dici atque enuntiari potest. Dicendum tamen est, ne res ad Dei laudem maxime pertinens quasi per desidiam silentio suppressa videatur.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* ii, 8 (Waitz 247); cf. also iv, 15 (Waitz, 262); iii, 20 (Waitz, 258).

⁵⁶ Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* XXII, 8 (Dombart/Kalb 823-824). See M. Heinzelmann, "Die Funktion des Wunders in der spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Hagiographie," in: idem et. al. (eds.), *Mirakel im Mittelalter. Konzeptionen, Erscheinungsformen, Deutungen* (Beiträge zur Hagiographie 3, Stuttgart 2002) 23–61. For the literary and political context, see C. Leyser, "Homo pauper, de pauperibus natum: Augustine, church property, and the cult of Stephen", *Augustinian Studies* 36 (2005) 229–237.

⁵⁷ Einhard, *Translatio* iii,13 (Waitz 253).

accompanied by a complex web of interrelated stories that supported its credibility.⁵⁸ But it is not only this highly political miracle that required efforts to establish its authenticity. At the centre of the strategies developed to this end was Einhard as a protagonist of the story, who was given much room for reflection on the symbolic meaning of certain miracles and, more importantly, who testified to the truth of the narrated miracles through his presence. Einhard's role as an eyewitness was complemented by his function as a narrator, which enabled him to limit the range of possible interpretations of the miracles as well as organise his material. In the first part of the prologue to book III, Einhard discussed the difficulties caused by relating miracles he had not seen with his own eyes, and he fervently affirmed his belief in events related to him by others.⁵⁹ The account of the healing of Alberich, the intermediary transmitting Gabriel's message, shows the weight that was given to Einhard as a personality within these strategies. While Einhard usually stuck to the point of view of a third-person narrator and used reported speech for relating episodes which he had not himself witnessed, he introduced this story with a break from his usual mode of representation. Although he had not been present when the miracle had happened, Einhard claimed that his trust in the truth of what he had heard was so strong that he narrated it as if he had seen it with his own eyes.⁶⁰ Thus, in his double function as an eye-witness and as narrator, Einhard was responsible for ensuring the status of his text as a truthful narrative of sacred events. The success of these efforts depended on the acceptance of this construction by his readers. This dependence on the readers' cooperation was exactly what made his position a very vulnerable one. In the final lines of his text, which take up themes of authority and motivation to write that were developed in the general preface, Einhard defended himself against 'uncooperative readers'.⁶¹ In a parallel movement, he rebuffed attacks on both the text and its author as blasphemous and motivated by envy, by calling such attacks a sure sign of the attacker's lack of love for God and men. Thereby, the person of the author was closely tied to the content of the narrative that was defined as true (aut a nobis aut fidelium veraci relatione comperta). Einhard's takeover of

⁵⁸ See Einhard, *Translatio* iii,6; iii, 12; iii, 17.

⁵⁹ Einhard, *Translatio*, Preface to book iii, ed. Waitz, p. 248: [...] *ex his quae scribere disposui maior pars ad notitiam meam aliorum relatione perlata est. Quibus tamen ut fidem haberem, ex his quae ipse vidi et coram positus agnovi tam firmiter mihi persuasum est, ut sine ullo dubitationis scrupulo vera esse crederem quae ab his dicebatur qui se illa vidisse testati sunt [...]*.

⁶⁰ Einhard, *Translatio* iii, 6, ed. Waitz 250: *verbis eorum quorum hac relatione mihi compertum est non minus quam propriis oculis credere possum; ideoque non ut auditum, sed potius ut a me ipso visum, incunctanter ac sine ulla dubitatione proferre decrevi.*

⁶¹ Einhard, *Translatio* iv, 18, ed. Waitz 264: *Haec sunt, quae de innumeris sanctorum virtutibus, aut a nobis visa aut fidelium veraci relatione comperta, litteris ac memoriae mandare decrevimus; quae Christi amatoribus ac martyrum eius veneratoribus ad legendum grata fore non ambigo; quoniam nihil eis videtur impossibile, quod ut fiat, Deo omnipotenti placuerit; incredulis autem ac sanctorum gloriae derogantibus, quia fastidiosa esse non dubito, ne omnino legere velint, censeo suadendum, ne forte vilitate nostri sermonis offenso, blasphemiam et invidentiam devitare non valeant, ac sic Deum et proximum, quos amare iubentur, se odisse declarent.*

the function of the author rested on his personal integrity and on the spiritualisation of this function – a clever response to Einhard’s many problems with his position as the author of the Translatio.

In many ways, the Translatio can be read as a discussion of the legitimate way of writing texts on relics. The attempts to define the relationship between the author and the narrative are also a part of the strategies to textualise the spiritual capital of the relics. This was especially painstaking at a time when the legitimate use of relics and legitimate control over cults were very much contested. That Einhard was counting on the mutual reinforcement between the text as an account of sacred events and the status of its author meant that his position was not without risks. If it took huge textual efforts to secure this fragile position, it was nevertheless one which corresponded to Einhard’s social standing and resources.⁶²

Approaching the three hagiographical texts discussed above with an eye toward the relationship between relics and texts can remind us that the authority of relics ought not be taken for granted, and that the meaning of particular relics needed to be negotiated through texts. Comparison of the ways of speaking about relics developed by the three authors reveals the caution and effort required for using relics as resources for authority in political and theological debates during the reign of Louis the Pious (or for refusing to use them in such a way). All three endeavours are subject to constraints due to the need to reflect on the legitimacy of relic cults. The risks that came with writing texts on relics also relate to differentiated strategies regarding the relationship between author and text discernable in the three texts. While, in the case of both Jonas and Einhard, the construction of the figure of the author is central to establishing the authority of the relics concerned, Radbertus developed his position from scepticism against the spiritual efficacy of relics, in contrast to which the writing of a historia sanctorum was all the more important. In this sense, although the three texts connect to specific discussions and concerns, all of them are part of a common discourse on a truly Christian social order, in which saints and their relics formed an element that was as important as it was hazardous.

⁶² Cf. D. Ganz, "Einhardus peccator", in *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. P. Wormald and J. Nelson (Cambridge, 2007) 37–50.