

Rereading Absence

Silent Narratives in the 'Life of Eligius of Noyon'


Abstract The 'Life of Eligius of Noyon' contains a unique digression on the monothelete controversy engulfing the Roman Empire in the seventh century. While it is often read as evidence of the author and the saint's support for Pope Martin's anti-monothelete initiatives, an examination of the excursus also reveals clues that this particular narrative was artfully crafted to argue for this 'orthodox' position, not necessarily that it reflected the reality of Frankish attitudes around the year 650. By re-examining narrative omissions within this digression and viewing the absence of information not as indications of ignorance, but as the result of deliberate authorial intent, this contribution suggests that the hagiographer explicitly wove together the actions of Eligius and Martin, at least partially, in order to excuse Frankish inaction during this doctrinal dispute.

Zusammenfassung Das ‚Leben des Eligius von Noyon‘ enthält einen in vielerlei Hinsicht einzigartigen Exkurs über die Monotheletismus-Kontroverse, die das Römische Reich im 7. Jahrhundert erschütterte. Während der Exkurs oft als Beleg dafür gelesen wird, dass sowohl der Autor wie auch der in der Vita beschriebene Heilige Eligius die anti-monotheletistischen Initiativen Papst Martins unterstützten, liefert eine genauere Untersuchung Anhaltspunkte dafür, dass der Exkurs mit Bedacht konzipiert wurde, um für die ‚orthodoxe‘ Position zu werben, und er daher nicht unbedingt die fränkische Haltung um 650 widerspiegelt. Indem der vorliegende Aufsatz die erzählerischen Auslassungen innerhalb dieses Exkurses neu bewertet und das Fehlen von Informationen nicht als Unwissenheit, sondern als Absicht des Autors interpretiert, legt dieser Aufsatz die

Contact

Dr. Sihong Lin,

Department of History, The University of Sheffield, Jessop West, 1 Upper Hanover Street, Sheffield S3 7RA, sihong.lin@sheffield.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1125-2775>

Vermutung nahe, dass der Hagiograph die Handlungen von Eligius und Martin – zumindest stellenweise – absichtlich miteinander verwoben hat, um die fränkische Passivität während des Lehrstreits zu überspielen.

Historians of the Merovingian kingdoms are no strangers to dissecting narratives past and present. Between Carolingian tales of dynastic decline and more modern interpretations of a fragmenting Mediterranean world, the Frankish kingdoms have been viewed through many lenses, not many of them kind to the achievements of kings and bishops in this transformative period. Recent scholarship has greatly rehabilitated the seventh century, but much more can be done when we revisit the sources.¹ The lives of saints in particular remain a potent avenue for further exploration, for each text argues for the veneration of its protagonist and advances its own vision for society, often with its saintly hero at the forefront.² Much scholarly work has understandably been done on how each hagiographical work reshaped elements of Merovingian life to make its argument, but we can also turn to what each text neglected to tell the audience.

By examining the literary mechanics employed by authors to elide over parts of the story, such as through the use of prolepsis (a flashforward) and a switch in focalisation (the narrative point of view), more can be gleaned of the motivations behind these compositions.³ After reading a reference to the future through a prolepsis, for instance, the audience may be prompted to anticipate forthcoming developments and connect together the themes of the preceding and following narratives. A change in focalisation meanwhile allows the writer to emphasise or obscure different aspects of the story, for the reader is naturally drawn to an omniscient or first-person narrator.⁴ Medieval authors were no exception in seeking to reshape the audience's expectations

-
- 1 Andreas FISCHER and Ian WOOD (eds.), *Mediterranean Perspectives on the Mediterranean. Cultural Transfer in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 400–800 AD*, London 2014; Stefan ESDERS et al. (eds.), *East and West in the Middle Ages. The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective*, Cambridge 2019; Stefan ESDERS et al. (eds.), *The Merovingian Kingdoms and the Mediterranean World. Revisiting the Sources*, London 2019.
 - 2 Paul FOURACRE, *Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography*, in: *Past & Present* 127 (1990), pp. 3–38; Jamie KREINER, *The Social Life of Hagiography in the Merovingian Kingdom*, Cambridge 2014.
 - 3 On these two terms: Teresa BRIDGEMAN, *Time and Space*, in: David HERMAN (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 52–65, here pp. 57–58; Manfred JAHN, *Focalization*, in: HERMAN (ed.) *Companion to Narrative*, pp. 94–108, here pp. 96–102; Irene J.F. DE JONG, *Narratology and Classics. A Practical Guide*, Oxford 2014, pp. 48–69, 78–87.
 - 4 Particular inspiration for this study is drawn from Klazina STAAT, *Disclosing Secret Chaste Marriages in Jerome's 'Life of Malchus' and Stephen the African's 'Life of Amator'*, in: Christa GRAY and James CORKE-WEBSTER (eds.), *The Hagiographical Experiment. Developing Discourses of Sainthood*, Leiden 2020, pp. 275–299, here pp. 286–292; Anne ALWIS, *The Hagiographer's Craft. Narrators and Focalisation in Byzantine Hagiography*, in: GRAY and CORKE-WEBSTER (eds.), *Hagiographical Experiment*, pp. 300–332, here pp. 320–325.

and it would be profitable for historians today to probe the extent to which medieval texts adopted similar stratagems, as well as to investigate the reasons behind these narratorial decisions.

This paper focuses on one lengthy Merovingian hagiography, the ‘Life of Eligius of Noyon’, and its well-known digression on Rome and ‘heresy’.⁵ These three chapters, however, do not tell the whole story and the omissions provide clues to how the hagiographer had artfully crafted his case. By examining the absence of certain details, the motivations and audiences for the ‘silent narrative’ embedded within the text are also made clearer, in this instance revealing doctrinal tensions within the Frankish kingdoms. The digression focuses on a seventh-century doctrinal controversy within the (Eastern) Roman Empire: the dispute over the monothelete ‘heresy’, the view that Jesus Christ possessed ‘one will’, as opposed to ‘two wills’.⁶ The precise Christological details need not concern us here, but it suffices to note that this was an odd choice to include in a Merovingian ‘Life’, especially as Eligius does not feature for much of it, nor does the excursus offer a straightforward narrative of the controversy itself. These inconsistencies in the tale do, nonetheless, reveal some of the authorial strategies behind this particular depiction of Eligius’ early career.

The study of this narrative has previously been problematised by the difficult textual history of the ‘Life of Eligius’, a conundrum that has long exercised scholars, for if the ‘Life’ was heavily interpolated later, this incoherent tale may have been Carolingian in origin and as such may be an uncertain guide to seventh-century history.⁷ An emerging consensus on the composition of the ‘Life’, of the first recension being placed sometime in the 660s or 670s and then progressively added to in the seventh century, however, allows us to rethink this digression’s purpose.⁸ As it is

5 Audoin of Rouen, *Life of Eligius of Noyon I*, 33–35, ed. Bruno KRUSCH (MGH *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* 4), Hannover 1902, pp. 634–742, here pp. 689–692. This digression has recently been studied in Laury SARTI, *The Digression on Pope Martin I in the ‘Life of Eligius of Noyon’*, in: Stefan ESDERS et al. (eds.), *East and West in the Middle Ages. The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective*, Cambridge 2019, pp. 149–164; Catherine CUBITT, *The Impact of the Lateran Council of 649 in Francia. The Martyrdom of Pope Martin and the Life of St Eligius*, in: Scott DEGREEGARIO and Paul KERSHAW (eds.), *Cities, Saints, and Communities in Early Medieval Europe. Essays in Honour of Alan Thacker*, Turnhout 2020, pp. 71–103.

6 On the monothelete controversy: Friedhelm WINKELMANN, *Der monenergetisch-monotheletische Streit*, Frankfurt a. M. 2001; Marek JANKOWIAK, *Essai d’histoire politique du monothélisme, à partir de la correspondance entre les empereurs byzantins, les patriarches de Constantinople et les papes de Rome*, PhD thesis École pratique des hautes études Paris/Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2009; Phil BOOTH, *Crisis of Empire. Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 2013.

7 KRUSCH (note 5), p. 648; Yitzhak HEN, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul. A. D. 481–751*, Leiden 1995, p. 196 n. 245; Isabelle WESTEEL, *Quelques remarques sur la ‘Vita Eligii’*, *Vie de saint Éloi*, in: *Mélanges de science religieuse* 56,2 (1999), pp. 33–47, here p. 40.

8 Clemens BAYER, *Vita Eligii*, in: *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, Bd. 35 (2007), pp. 461–524, here pp. 468–469, 475, 478; Walter BERSCHIN, *Der heilige Goldschmied. Die Eligiusvita – ein merowingisches Original?*, in: *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische*

positioned near the end of book one, which focuses on Eligius' career before he became a bishop, the excursus studied here is part of the earliest layer of the 'Life' composed by St Audoin of Rouen, who was Eligius' close friend and another prominent figure in the Merovingian church.⁹ The narrative omissions in a near-contemporary source then become more significant, for they provide a glimpse of how Audoin sought to present and reinterpret events of the preceding decades.

The digression begins with chapter thirty-three, which sets the scene by narrating the death of King Dagobert I in 639, before describing the rise of a new 'heresy' in the Eastern Roman Empire. This development became a concern to Pope Martin, who sent a letter to the Franks in 649 to gather support. Our protagonist, St Eligius, wanted to go to Rome as a result, but was mysteriously prevented from doing so. The following chapter details Martin's resistance against the 'heretical' doctrine, his arrest by imperial forces and then his exile, all for the purposes of valorising the pope and praising him as a martyr for 'orthodoxy'. Perhaps surprisingly, the concluding chapter of this excursus returns to Gaul, around 640, and narrates the arrival of an anonymous 'heretic' from across the sea and his predictable defeat by Eligius. The sequential flashforward and flashback are of particular interest, for they are clear signals of the digression's constructed nature, and together with an analysis of the occasional shifts in perspective, we can determine how Audoin had skilfully constructed this narrative and glimpse the doctrinal context that warranted such an arrangement.

In chronological terms, the digression begins as one would expect, with Audoin first noting the death of Dagobert and the accession of his son King Clovis II to the throne of Neustria-Burgundy in 639. It then describes the accession of Constantine, better known today as Constans II, who became the Roman emperor in 641.¹⁰ A similar narrative arrangement, as noted recently by Andreas FISCHER, also features in the Frankish 'Chronicle' attributed to Fredegar, which was written in the same kingdom around 660. The chronicler had taken the obvious concordance of a young king and young emperor further by including notices on the consequences of their minorities on their respective polities. This had an important purpose for a contemporary Frankish audience, as royal minorities were very much a lived reality for the chronicler and their audience, for the Merovingian kings of the late 650s and 660s were once again

Geschichtsforschung 118 (2010), pp. 1–7; Martin HEINZELMANN, *Eligius monetarius. Norm oder Sonderfall?*, in: Jörg JARNUT and Jürgen STROTHMANN (eds.), *Die Merowingischen Monetaarmünzen als Quelle zum Verständnis des 7. Jahrhunderts in Gallien*, Paderborn 2013, pp. 243–291, here pp. 249–256; SARTI (note 5), pp. 151–152.

9 On Audoin: Elphège VACANDARD, *Vie de saint Ouen, Évêque de Rouen (641–684). Étude d'histoire mérovingienne*, Paris 1902; Paul FOURACRE, *The Work of Audoenus of Rouen and Eligius of Noyon in Extending Episcopal Influence from the Town to the Country in Seventh-Century Neustria*, in: *Studies in Church History* 16 (1979), pp. 77–91.

10 Audoin of Rouen, *Life of Eligius I*, 33, p. 689. On Constans II: cf. L. Konstans II, in: Ralph-Johannes LLIE et al. (eds.), *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1515/pmbz> (29 October 2021).

children.¹¹ The anonymous chronicler had then evoked and reshaped the recent past as lessons for the political factions of their present day, drawing together examples from the Mediterranean to better cement the argument.¹² The ‘Life of Eligius’ is a text from a different genre and written with a different purpose, but its highlighting of Clovis and Constans could have likewise served the author’s agenda beyond that of a simple chronological framework, if further clues to it being a carefully shaped account can be identified.

We can certainly detect more of the author’s voice in the following section, which narrates the rise of monotheletism through a prolepsis to 649, which we can presume was a deliberate authorial choice by Audoin to prepare the audience for the overriding theme of the following chapters. We learn that Pope Martin was a fervent opponent of the ‘heresy’ emanating from the East, to the extent that he gathered together a council, published a statement of faith, and then sent a letter to the Merovingian kingdoms to request their support. Although Eligius had wanted to take part in this endeavour, he was prevented from doing so by an unspecified reason (*quaedam causa*), a puzzling statement that has attracted much discussion in recent years, for this call for action should have led to some pro-Roman mobilisation within the Merovingian kingdoms.¹³ Whereas previously historians have emphasised the anti-monothelete leanings of Frankish bishops, in a recent article I offered the alternative explanation that Audoin’s curious excuse was but one symptom of Frankish apathy during the monothelete controversy, and that overall there was little enthusiasm among bishops in Gaul to aid the beleaguered Martin. I argued that whereas the two men were probably entirely genuine in their desire to support Rome, their fellow bishops (and perhaps even the king or the mayor of the palace) were less keen for one reason or another, thus preventing Eligius from backing Rome as he had wished.¹⁴

Though perhaps unexpected, my proposal aligns with recent reinterpretations of the monothelete controversy, which together paint a much more complex picture of this dispute. No longer can this theological debate be seen as one between the Greek East and the Latin West, nor the doctrine itself as an artificial compromise imposed from above by Constantinople. Instead, proponents of monotheletism can be found in North Africa and imperial Italy, and the anti-monotheletes’ campaign

11 Andreas FISCHER, *Rewriting History. Fredegar’s Perspectives on the Mediterranean*, in: Andreas FISCHER and Ian WOOD (eds.), *Mediterranean Perspectives on the Mediterranean. Cultural Transfer in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 400–800 AD*, London 2014, pp. 55–75, here pp. 61–69, 73–75.

12 Another concordance of Mediterranean history in Fredegar is discussed in Gregory HALFOND, *The Endorsement of Royal-Episcopal Collaboration in the Fredegar Chronica*, in: *Traditio* 70 (2015), pp. 1–28, here p. 18.

13 Audoin of Rouen, *Life of Eligius I*, 33, pp. 689–690. For interpretations of the *causa*: André BORIAS, *Saint Wandrille et la crise monothélite*, in: *Revue Bénédictine* 97, 1–2 (1987), pp. 42–67, here pp. 59–61; SARTI (note 5), p. 158; Stefan ESDERS, *Chindasvinth, the ‘Gothic Disease’, and the Monothelite Crisis*, in: *Millennium* 16, 1 (2019), pp. 175–212, here p. 200.

14 Sihong LIN, *The Merovingian Kingdoms and the Monothelete Controversy*, in: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 71, 2 (2020), pp. 235–252, here pp. 238–244.

was frequently hindered by the lack of support for them.¹⁵ Indeed, Martin himself presided over a seemingly unconvinced papal bureaucracy, as no Roman clergy can be identified as an attendee of the Lateran Synod in 649 and his own legates to Thessalonica were persuaded by the local archbishop's pro-Constantinopolitan stance.¹⁶ In such circumstances, we should not assume that Latin authors writing outside of the Roman Empire were automatically opposed to eastern initiatives.

The Council of Chalon-sur-Saône, which took place at some point between 647 and 653 and gathered together bishops from across Neustria-Burgundy (including both Eligius and Audoin), has long been interpreted as a public proclamation of the Frankish Church's opposition to monotheletism.¹⁷ Against this view, I instead suggested that the crucial first canon from the council would have been accepted by Constantinople and refuted by Rome, as its ambiguous condemnation of earlier, uncontroversial Christological 'heresies' mirrored the contemporary imperial position, as outlined in the document known as the '*Typos*', which barred all discussion of the monothelete doctrine.¹⁸ Yet at the same time in Rome, this attempt to obfuscate the current controversy was precisely what Martin condemned in 649, making the canon issued by the Frankish bishops not only a tepid reference to the ongoing dispute, but also a sorely misjudged one, since if it was ever sent to Rome it would have surely been criticised by the papacy for its indirect language, instead of the explicit condemnation Martin had requested. This particular canon thus raises the possibility that the gathered bishops, for now-unrecoverable reasons, chose to present their views as being in step with Constantinopolitan diktats instead of papal theology. Even if this canon was meant to condemn imperial doctrinal policy, however ineffectually, we can presume that it would have been viewed as something of an embarrassment in retrospect for its weak language, as monotheletism would be decisively condemned by both the imperial and post-Roman churches in the 680s.¹⁹ In either case, Audoin

15 JANKOWIAK (note 6), pp. 224–227, 253–258, 275–276. See also Tim GREENWOOD, 'New Light from the East'. *Chronography and Ecclesiastical History through a Late Seventh-Century Armenian Source*, in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, 2 (2008), pp. 197–254; Jack TANNOS, *In Search of Monotheletism*, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 68 (2014), pp. 29–67.

16 JANKOWIAK (note 6), pp. 257–258, 292–293.

17 *Canons of the Council of Chalon-sur-Saône*, ed. by Charles DE CLERCQ (*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 148A), Turnhout 1963, p. 303; BORIAS (note 13), pp. 59–61; Ian WOOD, *The Franks and Papal Theology, 550–660*, in: Celia CHAZELLE and Catherine CUBITT (eds.), *The Crisis of the Oikoumene. The Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity in the Sixth-Century Mediterranean*, Turnhout 2007, pp. 223–241, here pp. 239–240.

18 JANKOWIAK (note 6), pp. 238–239; BOOTH (note 6), pp. 291–293; LIN (note 14), pp. 240–241. Independently, Charles MÉRIAUX, *A One-Way Ticket to Francia. Constantinople, Rome and Northern Gaul in the Mid Seventh Century*, in: Stefan ESDERS et al. (eds.), *East and West in the Middle Ages. The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective*, Cambridge 2019, pp. 138–148, here p. 146, also notes the generic nature of the canon.

19 See now Stefan ESDERS, 'Great Security Prevailed in Both East and West'. *The Merovingian Kingdoms and the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680/1)*, in: Stefan ESDERS et al. (eds.), *East and West in the Middle Ages. The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective*, Cambridge 2019, pp. 247–264, on the western background to the condemnation.

would have had excellent reasons to write carefully about Eligius' actions around 650 and to reframe his career in a much more anti-monothelete light.

Returning to Fredegar, it is then interesting that in this 'Chronicle' Emperor Constans' religious policy was not mentioned at all, seemingly because Neustria-Burgundy at the time was on friendly terms with the empire.²⁰ This sentiment, though surprising, is again understandable in the doctrinal milieu of the 650s, as Constans' court had pursued a very different religious policy. Constantinople at this point no longer enforced monotheletism, the doctrine promulgated by Emperor Heraclius via the document known as the 'Ekthesis' and for which Heraclius was condemned in Fredegar's 'Chronicle'. Instead, Constans had issued the 'Typos' in 647/8, which suppressed discussions of monotheletism or dyotheletism altogether in an attempt to secure doctrinal peace.²¹ Although such a compromise was still seen as unacceptable by Pope Martin, it may nonetheless have created enough ambiguity to allow outside observers to not see Constans solely as a 'heretic'. In the 'Life of Eligius' composed a decade or two later, however, the emperor was explicitly associated with the monothelete 'heresy', which is likely representative of a later reaction against earlier, more tolerant views of eastern doctrinal developments.²²

We therefore have a plausible reason for why no additional information is provided in the 'Life of Eligius', as in the following decades it became increasingly unpalatable to say that the Franks had done little to condemn the monothelete doctrine, especially among this group of pro-papal bishops. Instead, in a simple sentence Audoin made clear Eligius' stance and left unsaid the ultimate cause for the saint's inaction. The hagiographer was perhaps even craftier and further elided his own role, since Eligius was supposed to go to Rome with an anonymous companion (*sodalis*), who can be identified as Audoin himself, for he is identified as a *sodalis* elsewhere in the 'Life'.²³ If it is indeed a reference to Audoin, then the change in focalisation provides another helpful tool for the author to further distance himself and his protagonist from the Frankish Church's actions (or lack thereof) around 650. No longer is the hagiographer an omniscient narrator or a first-person eyewitness to the saint's miracles, for he has now become a character whom the reader may not even associate with the saintly Audoin.

The same explanation, that Audoin had wanted to gloss over certain events, also adds to the already highlighted pairing of King Clovis and Emperor Constans, as it was Clovis, or his mayor of the palace, given the king's young age, who had done nothing to support the pope. Constans, on the other hand, was the emperor

20 Stefan ESDERS, When Contemporary History is Caught Up by the Immediate Present. Fredegar's Proleptic Depiction of Emperor Constans, in: ESDERS et al., Merovingian Kingdoms (note 1), pp. 141–149, here pp. 144, 146.

21 JANKOWIAK (note 6), pp. 327–335; BOOTH (note 6), pp. 320–322.

22 Audoin of Rouen, Life of Eligius I, 33, p. 689. Cf. SARTI (note 5), p. 159.

23 Audoin of Rouen, Life of Eligius I, 8, II, 2, pp. 675, 695; KRUSCH (note 5), pp. 646–647; BAYER (note 8), pp. 469–470.

who persecuted Pope Martin, which provides yet another parallel between the two rulers, in addition to those already identified by FISCHER. More subtly, it is also worth noting that according to the previous chapter, Dagobert, Clovis' father, had ordered Eligius to further embellish St Martin's sepulchre and granted privileges to the church of Tours.²⁴ While it might seem unlikely for Audoin to have linked together St Martin, a very well-known saint in Gaul, and Pope Martin, we must remember that this digression does not belong here in chronological terms, for the first book of the 'Life of Eligius' focuses on the saint's career before he became the bishop in 641. These chapters on Pope Martin, who became the bishop of Rome in 649, were thus a deliberate prolepsis that served a greater narrative purpose. By placing the pro-papal digression here instead of in the second, more chronologically appropriate book, Audoin implicitly draws the reader to consider how one king, Dagobert, had venerated St Martin, while Dagobert's son had done little to help Pope Martin, whom the next chapter makes clear was a martyr worthy of veneration. To a knowledgeable contemporary, such as a bishop, Audoin's narrative would have thus provided potent reminders of the recent past, much like how the Fredegar 'Chronicle' included lessons on how nobles ought to behave when serving kings who had yet to reach their majority.²⁵

The next chapter of the monothelete digression jumps even further forward away from c. 640, where the main narrative still remained, and it essentially has nothing to do with Eligius, the saint this text is supposed to be celebrating. It describes the arrest and exile of Pope Martin by imperial forces in 653–654, with a substantial defence of Martin's status as a martyr for Christianity. Martin was said to have had a more glorious martyrdom, because he suffered for the universal church, rather than being personally persecuted by pagans, which could have only driven home further the message of the pope's righteousness and the just nature of his call to arms against monotheletism.²⁶ As Catherine CUBITT observes, the Martin narrative as a whole occupies 58 lines in the Latin edition, but 18 of which focus on the pope's status as a martyr, which provides a telling indication of this argument's importance to Audoin.²⁷ Given the exceptional nature of this praise, however, we should keep open the possibility that the hagiographer was perhaps protesting too much. The text was written in the 660s or the 670s, when the tide was turning against monotheletism, possibly even in the lead-up to the 680–681 council that finally overturned this doctrine, so it is understandable that the 'Life of Eligius' would have included such positive

24 Audoin of Rouen, *Life of Eligius I*, 32, p. 688. KRUSCH (note 5), p. 647–648, suggested that this chapter is a later addition, but CUBITT (note 5), p. 80, rightfully argues that the noted powers assumed by a Merovingian bishop would not now be seen as anachronistic by scholars.

25 While we cannot determine the audience of the 'Life', the text was read by at least one bishop, Chrodebert of Tours: KRUSCH (note 5), p. 741; BAYER (note 8), p. 516.

26 Audoin of Rouen, *Life of Eligius I*, 34, pp. 690–691.

27 CUBITT (note 5), p. 80.

descriptions of Martin, the arch anti-monothelete.²⁸ A laudatory account of Martin's sufferings, in turn, would also help to mitigate the earlier revelation that Eligius had not in fact done what the pope had asked for in 649, for the saintly Martin now has pride of place in the celebration of Eligius' sanctity.

It is likewise worth noting that the prolepsis in this chapter goes even beyond Martin's death, for the author added two further interventions. First, there is a validating statement immediately prior to the papal narrative, which noted that the following account was related to the hagiographer by someone who had followed the pope to Constantinople and his exile.²⁹ Not only does the digression stretch to 655, the year of Martin's death, it now extends into the following decades, when apparently an eyewitness to eastern events arrived in Gaul and provided Audoin with the necessary material. Moreover, Audoin is now speaking in the first person (*novismus, narro*) to reassert the validity of his source. This is a common strategy by hagiographers to bolster their claims, but the shift in perspective also makes the narrative much more immediate to the audience, even though the story has moved well beyond Martin's exile and the career of Eligius. As recently suggested by Anne ALWIS for the seventh-century Greek 'Life of Mary of Egypt', the unprompted appearance of the first-person perspective may have been a strategy to anticipate future critiques concerning the tale's veracity, for the hagiographer needed to change the focalisation and allow a more trustworthy narratorial voice to intervene.³⁰

The emphasis on the martyrdom of the pope is then all the more interesting, for Audoin acknowledges that the pope's holiness was so great that this story deserved to be inserted in the 'Life of Eligius'.³¹ This is an oddly open statement about the artificial, crafted nature of the narrative, and presents an explicit hint of the purpose of this account, to tie together Eligius with Pope Martin. This prolepsis can therefore be seen as serving a very strange purpose in the digression, to reinforce contemporary expectations of pro-papal solidarity among the Frankish audience and re-emphasise both the author and the protagonist's alignment with the papacy, yet also to distract the reader from Eligius' earlier inaction. While this chapter might seem at first glance to be evidence that the memory of Pope Martin was revered among some Frankish bishops, such an account of papal sanctity could also have been a convenient literary topos, more akin to a rhetorical tool to make up for the deficiencies in the story, all the while priming the reader for what comes next.

The final part of the digression, chapter thirty-five, completes the story and is the culmination of the Eligius–Martin narrative. The narrative now uses an analepsis

28 On the various mooted datings, all in the 660s and 670s: BAYER (note 8), p. 475; BERSCHIN (note 8), p. 3; SARTI (note 5), pp. 152, 155.

29 Audoin of Rouen, *Life of Eligius I*, 34, pp. 690: *Novimus quendam fratrem a partibus Orientis venientem, qui ea quae narro se coram posito gesta esse testabatur* ("We know a certain brother coming from the eastern parts, who witnessed the deeds that I narrate in his presence").

30 ALWIS (note 4), pp. 321–322.

31 Audoin of Rouen, *Life of Eligius I*, 34, pp. 690.

(flashback) to jump back to around 640, so two or three decades before the authorial intervention noted previously, since Eligius was still described as a layman.³² A ‘heretic’ from across the sea arrived in Gaul, who by implication was someone spreading the monothelete ‘heresy’ given the preceding chapters, but he was naturally defeated by a church council, with Eligius and Audoin playing a key role.³³ Interestingly, there is again no royal involvement in the process. Instead, it was Eligius and Audoin, both still laymen, who took the lead, which ties in well with the suggestion above of Clovis’ complicity with ‘heresy’ and the narrative need to bolster Eligius’ (otherwise lacking) anti-‘heretical’ credentials. This chapter thus continues to hammer home the message found throughout the digression.³⁴ In the first chapter, Eligius was described as loyal to the pope, then the pope’s sanctity is established via a prolepsis, and now in the conclusion of the digression Eligius’ own actions and implicit parallels to Martin himself are highlighted. The narrative jumps forwards and back, but through these different episodes, the reader is given a timeless image of an ‘orthodox’ saint aligned with the papacy that stretched across the decades, with Eligius’ actions in 640 even mirroring Pope Martin’s struggle against monotheletism, as though the saint’s personal position had never changed. Audoin the hagiographer himself also reappears in the narrative, for he joined Eligius in the campaign to stamp out the ‘heresy’ in Gaul.³⁵ Now that he is talking about a much safer topic, the ‘orthodoxy’ of Pope Martin and his friend Eligius, Audoin can return to the narrative and take on a more proactive role, rather than relegate himself to an anonymous companion as he did in chapter thirty-three.

Taken together, we can discern a coherent narrative logic to the structure of this digression, one that centres Eligius’ similarities to Pope Martin and elides the question of his inaction, with the previous sections all building up to this climax and together framing Eligius’ efforts c. 640 within a larger history of Christianity. Whereas Eligius’ ‘orthodoxy’ might be questioned by the reader earlier, now his stance is beyond reproach, once we read the whole story and draw the natural conclusion that just like Pope Martin, Eligius had organised a council to suppress a foreign ‘heresy’. Eligius’ inability to support Martin in Rome after 649 was an unfortunate exception, but Audoin’s narrative then makes clear the two men’s similarities, while the effusive praise for the pope ensures that readers will conclude that Eligius no doubt felt the same way for the holy pontiff. Audoin therefore had ample justification to include this excursus in the first book of the ‘Life of Eligius’, for it at once strengthened his friend’s

32 Ibid., I, 35, pp. 691–692.

33 Odette PONTAL, *Histoire des conciles mérovingiens*, Paris 1989, p. 216; Ian WOOD, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751*, Harlow 1994, p. 246; Andreas FISCHER, *Orthodoxy and Authority. Jonas, Eustasius, and the Agrestius Affair*, in: Alexander O’HARA (ed.), *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, Oxford 2018, pp. 143–164, here p. 155. Cf. KRUSCH (note 5), pp. 648–649, 691 n. 3.

34 BAYER (note 8), p. 478, highlights also the thematic relevance of chapter thirty-six.

35 Audoin of Rouen, *Life of Eligius I*, 35, p. 692.

image, even comparing favourably an incident from Eligius' secular career with the sufferings of a saintly pope, and partially absolved these bishops' actions c. 650.

We should then be wary of using this digression to analyse Frankish admiration of the papacy, as the narrative is a construct, drawing together different events to promote one saint and to fulfil Audoin's authorial agenda. While there were genuine connections with Rome, the narratorial strategies employed in this digression also make events here part of an artificial story world, not one that mirrored the historical reality. There remains much historical value, however, within the digression, but more in what the digression neglected to say. As Paul FOURACRE argued in 1990, Merovingian hagiographers were nonetheless limited by the lived lives of their protagonists and had to deal with the many awkward details besmirching their heroes' careers.³⁶ Audoin's project here has obscured much of what Eligius had done or thought c. 650, but his omissions nonetheless provide clues to what the hagiographer was concerned with decades later and what an 'orthodox' audience would have expected from a friend of Rome.

Audoin was not alone in writing about the 650s while omitting certain facts, for other Latin authors had similarly obfuscated doctrinal history in this period. The Fredegar 'Chronicle', for example, said nothing of Constans II's 'heresy', even though Heraclius' equally questionable doctrinal measures were explicitly criticised.³⁷ Amandus of Maastricht, an acquaintance of Eligius and Audoin and yet another Frankish bishop with close links to Rome, had likewise received a letter from Pope Martin calling for a Frankish council to be convened and envoys sent to the Eternal City. Amandus, moreover, was exhorted not to resign from his position.³⁸ It is telling then that the next thing we know of Amandus is that he did resign his bishopric shortly after c. 650, and that there is no evidence of a council held in the Frankish kingdom of Austrasia, with Stefan ESDERS recently even suggesting that King Sigibert III had actively ordered his bishops not to be involved in this doctrinal furore.³⁹

36 FOURACRE (note 2), pp. 11, 37.

37 ESDERS (note 20), pp. 144, 146; Stefan ESDERS, Herakleios, Dagobert und die ‚beschnittenen Völker‘. Die Umwälzungen des Mittelmeerraums im 7. Jahrhundert in der fränkischen Chronik des sog. Fredegar, in: Andreas GOLTZ, Hartmut LEPPIN and Heinrich SCHLANGE-SCHÖNINGEN (eds.), *Jenseits der Grenzen. Beiträge zur spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, Berlin 2009, pp. 240–309, here pp. 293–294.

38 Pope Martin, Letter to Amandus, ed. Rudolf RIEDINGER (*Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* 2.1), Berlin 1984, pp. 422–424.

39 WOOD (note 17), pp. 239–241; MÉRIAUX (note 18), pp. 147–148; ESDERS (note 13), pp. 198–200; Stefan ESDERS, Die gallische Kirche des 7. Jahrhunderts zwischen *imperium* und *regna*. Der Brief des merowingischen Königs Sigibert III. an Bischof Desiderius von Cahors (650) und die fränkische Rezeption des Monotheletismus-Streites, in: Matthias BECHER and Hendrik HESS (eds.), *Kontingenzerfahrungen und ihre Bewältigung zwischen imperium und regna. Beispiele aus Gallien und angrenzenden Gebieten vom 5. bis zum 8. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2021, pp. 339–374.

From eighth-century England, we learn from the ‘Life of Wilfrid of York’, the hagiography of the pre-eminent Romanophile in Northumbria, that Wilfrid had encountered an anonymous pope during his pilgrimage to Rome in the early 650s.⁴⁰ The silence is a curious one, for this is the only pope out of the five pontiffs who feature in the ‘Life’ to have been left unnamed.⁴¹ As the possible candidates for a meeting with the young pilgrim can only have been Martin, Eugenius, and Vitalian, with the first and last being figures associated with the struggle against monotheletism, it is tempting to suggest that Wilfrid had in fact met Eugenius, the pope who had accepted Constantinopolitan diktats on monotheletism after Martin was deposed.⁴² Much like Eligius’ inaction c. 650, this encounter was a potentially awkward event to include in a celebration of Wilfrid’s sanctity, for the Northumbrian had championed Roman doctrines in England. Similarly to Audoin, the hagiographer Stephen understandably sidelined the problematic aspect of the narrative – the pope – and instead put greater emphasis on Boniface, an archdeacon who served as Wilfrid’s mentor, but who was surely an altogether less memorable character than the bishop of Rome himself.⁴³ As Boniface had unimpeachable anti-monothelete credentials at a time when Rome had favoured doctrinal accommodation with the emperor, his appearance in the ‘Life of Wilfrid’ therefore became a helpful narrative foil to the more problematic Eugenius.⁴⁴

The 650s were a time when the papacy had capitulated to Emperor Constans II’s religious policy, and the same was equally possible for the Merovingian kingdoms, as the imperial ‘heresy’, represented by the reconciliatory ‘Typos’, was likely much more acceptable to audiences within and outside of the empire than historians have often assumed. The silence in the ‘Life of Eligius’ can then be understood along the same lines, for in the following decades there emerged a need for the ‘Life’ to explain away a previously more positive relationship with Constantinople, to rewrite the story of Eligius to be more suitable in a world without compromises, when attitudes needed to be the same, whether in 640 or 670. This is all the more important in a hagiography written by Audoin to celebrate the sanctity of his friend, which naturally necessitated certain editorial omissions to gloss over aspects of Eligius’ career. By adding an extensive prolepsis featuring Pope Martin and then returning to an account of Eligius’ attitudes towards ‘heresy’ much, much earlier, Audoin had therefore created

40 Stephen, *Life of Wilfrid of York* 5, ed. by Bertram COLGRAVE, Cambridge 1927, p. 12.

41 Ibid. Pope Agatho: 29, 31–32, 43–47, 51–54, pp. 56–60, 64, 88–96, 104–118; John VI: 50–54, pp. 102–116; Benedict II and Sergius: 43, 46, 51–53, pp. 90, 94, 104–114.

42 BOOTH (note 6), p. 320; LIN (note 14), pp. 242–243.

43 Stephen, *Life of Wilfrid* 5, p. 12.

44 On Boniface’s career: Walter BERSCHIN, *Bonifatius Consiliarius* († nach 704). Ein römischer Übersetzer in der byzantinischen Epoche des Papsttums, in: Walter BERSCHIN, *Mittelateinische Studien*, Heidelberg 2005, pp. 65–78; Catherine CUBITT, *St. Wilfrid. A Man for His Times*, in: Nick HIGHAM (ed.), *Wilfrid. Abbot, Bishop, Saint. Papers from the 1300th Anniversary Conferences*, Donington 2013, pp. 311–330, here pp. 327–328; Richard POLLARD, *A Cooperative Correspondence. The Letters of Gregory the Great*, in: Bronwen NEIL and Matthew DAL SANTO (eds.), *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, Leiden 2013, pp. 291–312, here pp. 308–309.

the misleading impression that the same narrative holds true in between these episodes, that Eligius remained a stalwart friend of Rome even in 650.

But at least in this regard, the argument made in the 'Life of Eligius' was singularly successful, for its story of a 'heretical' emperor and an 'orthodox' Frankish Church fit very well into the grander narrative of a post-Roman West growing further and further apart from the eastern Roman Empire. The reality, however, appears to have been more complex, for the Latin West and the eastern Mediterranean may have been more aligned than we had thought. Because of the pervasiveness of this meta-narrative, it is all the more important to dig deeper into the sources, to understand why this particular digression, for example, was written and to question the methodology it used to reshape the narrative of the monothelete controversy.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mateusz Fafinski and Jakob Riemenschneider for organising the 2019 conference and their exemplary stewardship of the paper through the publication process. I am also very grateful to Andrew Buck for introducing me to narratology and the reviewers for their helpful suggestions. This article was completed during a Government of Ireland postdoctoral fellowship and I am likewise thankful to the Irish Research Council for its generous support.