

AMANDUS OF MAASTRICHT'S SLAVIC AND WASCONIAN MISSIONS, CA. AD 628–638

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The seventh-century Merovingian bishop, Amandus of Maastricht (d. ca. 675), is generally recognized as a central figure in the development of Christian “universal mission.” For Wolfgang Fritze, it was Amandus who intertwined the Columbanian concept of *peregrinatio pro Christo* (self-exile for Christ) with the new missionary framework of Pope Gregory I and his successors.² For Peter Brown, the *Vita Amandi* captured a transitional moment when Merovingian religious policy and missionary activity were still dedicated primarily to shoring up frontier zones but moving towards a more expansive, less border-restricted vision.³ For Ian Wood, Amandus’ hagiography marked a turning point after which missionary endeavors began to supersede miracles and other works as the defining features of a saint’s career and reputation.⁴ Wood has characterized Amandus as “by far the most impressive” evangelist of the early- to mid-seventh century, with “some claim

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² See Wolfgang Fritze, “*Universalis gentium confessio*: Formeln, Träger und Wege universal-missionarischen Denkens im 7. Jahrhundert,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 3 (1969): 84–98. Fritze’s article set the terms for subsequent scholarship on Amandus and the role of the papacy in the emergence of “universal mission.” Both Stefan Esders and Ian Wood open their discussions of Amandus with a summary of Fritze’s core arguments. See Stefan Esders, “*Nationes quam plures conqueri*: Amandus of Maastricht, Compulsory Baptism, and ‘Christian Universal Mission’ in Seventh-Century Gaul,” in *Motions of Late Antiquity: Essays on Religion, Politics, and Society in Honour of Peter Brown*, ed. Jamie Kreiner and Helmut Reimitz (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 269–272, as well as Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400–1050* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 39.

³ Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200–1000* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 259: “In Merovingian times, the old Roman *limes* had remained a firm, notional barrier in the back of the minds of kings and bishops.... There was to be no room in Gaul for lawless zones... Saint Amandus (d. ca. 684) was allowed to preach to the Basques of the Pyrenees... But across the *limes*, in central Europe, where law and order were not at stake, Dagobert had been happy to be a hegemonial overlord in the more relaxed, old style.”

⁴ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, 42.

to being the most important of all the Merovingian saints.”⁵ And yet, despite the wide awareness of Amandus’ significance, no attempt has been made to thoroughly contextualize two vital passages in Amandus’ hagiography – one in which Amandus crosses the old Roman *limes* of the Danube river to preach to the Slavs, and the other in which Amandus evangelizes the Wascones of the Pyrenees.⁶ These are the two instances in Amandus’ *Vita* in which the missionary passes beyond the Frankish borders to the sorts of far-removed areas that later hagiographies (such as Alcuin of York’s late eighth-century *Vita Willibrordi*) would associate with the “real,” more intimidating pagans.⁷ Nevertheless, the Slavic and Wasconian chapters have been addressed in near-complete isolation. In what follows, I will consider these two passages in tandem, as parts of the same overarching phenomenon. I will try to demonstrate that Amandus’ travels to the Slavic and Wasconian territories coincided exactly with the Frankish King Dagobert I’s invasions of these two regions circa 630–33 and 637–38, respectively. Amandus’ entrenchment in Merovingian court life (highlighted by his baptism of Dagobert’s son, Sigebert III, in 630–31) makes it probable that both of Amandus’ beyond-the-borders expeditions were conceived as part of Dagobert’s project of expansion and control – and perhaps even initiated on instructions from the king.

If any of this is accurate, Amandus’ proselytization of the Slavs and Wascones affords a striking new glimpse at the interplay of conversion and control during the Merovingian period. Amandus’ missions would allow us to rethink the degree to which royal policy acted as a catalyst for the emergence of early medieval Christian universalism. Furthermore, the case of Amandus would clarify the ways in which Merovingian rulers deployed churchmen in support of political (even expansionist) aims.

To put Amandus’ Slavic and Wasconian missions in their proper contexts, we must arrive at a reliable chronology for the events recorded in the *Vita*. Recovering accurate dates is a notoriously difficult task when dealing with

⁵ Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (London: Longman, 1994), 178 and. 245, respectively. Similarly at 191: “The greatest evangelist of the period... was Amandus.”

⁶ *Vita sancti ac beatissimi Amandi episcopi et confessoris* [*Vita Amandi prima*]. In *Monumenta Germaniae historica* SS. rer. Merov.: *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* [MGH SS. rer. Merov. 5], ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover 1910), 395–449. I use the English translation in J. N. Hillgarth, ed., *Christianity and Paganism, 350–750: The Conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 137–48.

⁷ Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 178, 191, repeatedly mentions the Slavic and Wasconian missions as evidence of Amandus’ importance and impressive vision. For Willibrord, see the discussion in Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 10th ed. rev. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 415–418.

Merovingian hagiographies, and the *Vita Amandi* is no exception. However, we have at our disposal a resource that previous scholars who worked on Amandus' hagiography (particularly Bruno Krusch and Édouard de Moreau) did not.⁸ In 1976 Josef Riedmann unearthed fragments of an earlier *Vita Amandi* designated the *Vita Amandi antiqua* – in an eighth-century manuscript in Innsbruck.⁹ The *Vita antiqua* is clearly the account from which the author of the *Vita prima* worked. Building on Riedmann's discovery, Adriaan Verhulst and Georges Declercq demonstrated that the *Vita antiqua* had been paraphrased closely in the fourteenth century Toulouse inquisitor Bernard Gui's *Speculum sanctorale*.¹⁰ By looking at the *Vita antiqua* (via Bernard Gui), we will be able to get closer to the actual details of Amandus' life – and to reconstruct the process of composition and revision that shaped the *Vita prima*.¹¹

The Slavic and Wasconian Chapters: Their Place in the *Vita Amandi prima*

To start, it is important to stress the abnormality of the Slavic and Wasconian chapters.¹² They are distinguished not only by their cross-border settings (Amandus' other activities occurred *within* the Frankish kingdom), but by their startling emphasis on the saint's lack of success, or on the near-complete unreceptiveness of beyond-the-border pagans to the Christian message. It does

⁸ Édouard de Moreau, *Saint Amand, apôtre de la Belgique et du nord de la France* (Louvain: Museum Lessianum, 1927) remains the most complete biography of Amandus – and one of the few attempts to place the events of the *Vita Amandi* on a proper timeline.

⁹ Josef Riedmann, "Unbekannte frühkarolingische Handschriftenfragmente in der Bibliothek des Tiroler Landesmuseums Ferdinandeum," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 84 (1976): 262–289. See also Riedmann, "Die ältesten Handschriftenfragmente in der Bibliothek des Museum Ferdinandeum," *Veröffentlichungen des Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum* 56 (1976): 129–140.

¹⁰ Adriaan Verhulst and Georges Declercq, "L'action et le souvenir de saint Amand en Europe centrale. À propos de la découverte d'une *Vita Amandi antiqua*," in *Aevum inter utrumque: Mélanges offerts à Gabriel Sanders, professeur émérite à l'Université de Gand*, ed. Marc Van Uytfanghe and Roland Demeulenaere, *Instrumenta patristica* 23 (Steenbrugis: In abbatia S. Petri, 1991), 504–515 in particular.

¹¹ Throughout this paper I use the version of Bernard Gui's text on pp. 1267–72 of *Patrologia Latina* [PL] 87 (1863) (under the heading *Sancti Amandi episcopi vita*). There is no standard, edited version of Gui's work. The principal manuscript of the *Speculi sanctoralis quarta pars* (used by Riedmann and Verhulst/Declercq) is Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Latin 5406, which was apparently used as a presentation copy by Gui himself.

¹² The Slavic and Wasconian episodes appear in chapters 16 and 20–21 of the *Vita Amandi prima*, respectively.

not take Amandus long to realize he has no hope of success among the Slavs, and when he moves on to the Wascones a *mimilogus* (or jester) laughs in his face at the prospect of conversion. These reactions appear surprisingly neutral when set against Amandus' experiences *within* the Frankish realm, which are shot through with actual and potential violence. One might expect that the pagans beyond the frontier would react *more* savagely, *more* violently to Christianity than communities inside Francia, but just the opposite is true. The possibility of martyrdom looms over Amandus' activities inside the Frankish kingdom, whereas it is explicitly ruled out in the territories of the Slavs and the Wascones.¹³ What is more, the Slavic and Wasconian chapters provide little insight into why, at the height of his missionary career and his ties to the court, Amandus would suddenly move from within the kingdom, where much evangelical work remained to be done, to areas past the frontier. This rather simplistic picture of Amandus' movements jars with the normal pattern of Merovingian rulers' pressuring missionaries to remain *inside* the Frankish realm. In the early-seventh-century *Vita Columbani*, for instance, almost every king Columbanus encounters urges the holy man not to settle beyond the frontiers.¹⁴ Taken together, all these observations should make us question, on its face, the *Vita Amandi*'s account of its protagonist's cross-border movements. But is it possible to build up a more concrete case that the hagiography does not tell the whole story?

Contextualizing Amandus' Slavic and Wasconian Missions

The case for the 630–633 dating of the Slavic mission is rather clear-cut; that for the 637–638 dating of the Wascones mission is less straightforward, but still convincing. To begin with, it is well-known that the chapter immediately preceding

¹³ Among the pagans of the Frankish peripheries, martyrdom is nearly always close at hand. The *Vita* (ch. 13) describes the pagan- and apostate-dominated *pagus* of Ghent (part of the kingdom) as a far more dangerous and more savage land than the Slavic territories or Wasconia. The Ghent *pagus* is a place where no one had “dared to proclaim the word of God.” Before Amandus goes there he has to cast aside “fear... for his life;” he ventures “intrepidly forth.” “Who could do justice,” the hagiographer proclaims, “to the tale of the injuries he [Amandus] suffered for the name of Christ, how often he was beaten by the inhabitants of the land, how he was repulsed, with insults, by the very women and rustics, often, even, thrown into the Scheldt [river]?” The *pagus* of Ghent was an internal pagan region, but it is presented in much more negative terms than either the Slavic or Wasconian lands.

¹⁴ See chapter I.6 of the *Vita Columbani*, in MGH *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum* [SS. rer. German.], *Ionae vitae sanctorum: Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover 1905), 148–224.

the Slavic episode in the *Vita* records events of 628–629: Dagobert is named as the king of territories which he did not inherit until 628, and, as Stefan Esders has shown, the chapter's mention of forcible baptism in the *pagus* of Ghent fits best with a 629 context.¹⁵ These details yield a *terminus post quem* for Amandus' Slavic mission. The chapter following the Slavic journey narrates Sigebert's baptism; as this definitely occurred circa 630–631, the most likely scenario is that Amandus began proselytizing the Slavs around 629–630.

With this in mind, we can ask whether there was a turn-of-the-630s context that could have accounted for Amandus' attempted evangelization of the Slavs. Sure enough, the *Chronicle* of Fredegar attests that Dagobert was occupied with conflict against the Slavs in the very same years when Amandus ventured across the Danube to spread the Gospel.¹⁶ Esders has determined that a 629 agreement between Dagobert and the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius, settled a joint policy of expansion and conversion for the Slavic territories between the borders of the Frankish kingdom and the Eastern Roman Empire – precisely the zones where Amandus preached.¹⁷ The 629 plan put Dagobert on a collision course with the Slavs, and it did not take long for war to break out. In 633 the Franks suffered a disastrous defeat at Wogastisburg, after which Dagobert adopted a purely defensive border policy.¹⁸

It is worth noting that the outcome of Dagobert's invasion – the Frankish withdrawal following Wogastisburg and the ruler's return to a defensive frontier policy – provides an explanation for the way Amandus' proselytization efforts

¹⁵ Stefan Esders, in "Amandus of Maastricht," makes a convincing case that Dagobert adapted the practice of forcible baptism from eastern Roman policy right around 629, when, according to the Fredegar Chronicle (ch. 62), the king concluded a *pax perpetua* with the Byzantine emperor Heraclius. A central impetus for this treaty was Christianization.

¹⁶ Throughout this essay I use the standard edition of the Fredegar Chronicle: *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholastici libri IV cum continuationibus*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SS. rer. Merov. 2, (Hanover 1888), 1–194. I also use the English translation in J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, trans., *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar, with Its Continuations* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960). Fredegar's discussion of Dagobert and the Slavs appears between chs. 58 and 77.

¹⁷ Esders, "Amandus of Maastricht," 286–87. See also Stefan Esders, "Herakleios, Dagobert und die beschnittenen Völker. Die Umwälzungen des Mittelmeerraums im 7. Jahrhundert in der fränkischen Chronik des sog. Fredegar," in *Jenseits der Grenzen. Studien zur spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. A. Goltz, Harmut Leppin, and Heinrich Schlange-Schöningen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 239–311, esp. 307–8.

¹⁸ For instance, when a Slavic contingent entered Thuringia in 633 Dagobert agreed to relieve the Saxons of their customary tribute if they would serve as a buffer against Wendish aggression (Fredegar, ch. 74).

panned out. Chapter 16 of the *Vita* makes it clear that Amandus had little chance of success among the Slavs and that he withdrew without persevering for too long. These somewhat awkward details, which might seem at odds with the spiritual arguments of the hagiography as a whole, become far more comprehensible if we match up Amandus' mission with the political and military events replayed in the Fredegar *Chronicle*. The *Vita's* implication that the Slavs were simply a lost cause could provide an *ex post* rationale for a failure really tied to the expulsion of the Franks in the early 630s.¹⁹

Amandus' Wasconian journey (chapter 20) poses greater problems than the Slavic episode. Some scholars have assigned the Wascones mission to a mid- to late-630s context, whereas others have pushed it as far forward as the 650s and 660s. The principal source of confusion is that chapter 18, which precedes the Wasconian section and records Amandus' investiture as bishop of Maastricht, almost definitely did *not* happen under Dagobert, but circa 647–649. If, as I am arguing in this paper, the Wascones mission really did occur in the late 630s (and not the 650s–660s), something must be out of sequence in the *Vita*.

There is abundant evidence, in both the *Vita* and additional sources, that the Maastricht section is misplaced – that is, while Amandus was appointed to his seat in Maastricht around 647–649, the hagiographer mistook the Maastricht investiture for an event from Dagobert's reign. To begin with, the wording of chapter 18 leans heavily towards Dagobert as the *rex* who elevated Amandus.²⁰

¹⁹ There is a precedent for the *Vita Amandi's* treatment of the Slavs in Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Columbani* (I.27). Columbanus considers preaching among the Wendish Slavs but is reminded by an angel of the Lord that it is not worth his effort, as the Slavs are beyond redemption.

²⁰ Bruno Krusch was entirely convinced that the phrasing of the *Vita prima* placed the Maastricht episode within Dagobert's rule, not the late 640s; this was the main reason why Krusch doubted the passage's historicity. Even Moreau, who believed that Amandus' installation in Maastricht occurred after Dagobert had died, conceded that the *Vita prima* passage reads as though the unnamed *rex* was, in fact, Dagobert. Moreau suggested that the hagiographer might well have made an error: "Mais il est très possible que le biographe, ou bien ne sache pas exactement quand Amand devint évêque de Tongres [Maastricht], ou bien croie erronément qu'il le devint sous Dagobert. La tradition orale lui a fourni sans doute bien peu de précisions chronologiques dont, vu son but, il se souciait d'ailleurs assez peu" (Moreau, *Saint Amand*, 41). Throughout the rest of the *Vita*, the hagiographer is diligent about naming the king whenever a new one succeeds to the throne. Whereas the hagiographer identifies *Dagobertus rex* in chapters 13 and 17 and takes care to specify that Childeric II had become ruler by chapter 23, in which Amandus obtains royal support for a new monastery at Nant (... *Amandus ad Hildericum adiit regem*...), he offers no indication that power had changed hands before Amandus was appointed bishop of Maastricht. If

Second (and most persuasively), Bernard Gui's *Speculum sanctorale* indicates that the *Vita Amandi antiqua*'s baptism scene, explicitly set in Dagobert's court, came *after* Amandus' appointment as bishop of Maastricht and *after* Amandus' trips to the Slavs and Wascones. In other words, the *Vita antiqua* hagiographer situated both the Maastricht episode and the Slavic-Wasconian missions during the period of Dagobert's rule. Finally, a chapter after the Wascones journey in the *Vita* (ch. 22, Amandus' foundation of Elnone abbey) gives a likely *terminus ante quem* for the Wascones mission: there is strong evidence that it was Dagobert who donated the lands for Elnone prior to his death in 639.²¹

If one accepts the misplacement of the Maastricht episode (an accident attributable to the influence of the *Vita antiqua*), the chronology of the *Vita prima* falls into place. The *Vita prima* notes a delay of four to five years between the end of Amandus' mission to the Slavs (633, the Battle of Wogastisburg) and the start of Amandus' mission to the Wascones, leaving a date of 637–38 for Amandus' Wasconian mission. This would work well if the Elnone section is assigned a date circa 639.

As with the Slavic mission, the chronology of Amandus' journey to the Pyrenees aligns exactly with events in the Fredegar *Chronicle*. Fredegar (ch. 78) relates that the Wasconian territory had been lost by Charibert and that Dagobert initiated a reconquest operation in 637–638. The *Chronicle* leaves no doubt as to the massive scale of Dagobert's invasion: "ten dukes and their forces" came along, and Dagobert had relatively little trouble bringing Wasconia under firm

ever there were a place to acknowledge a royal succession, this would be it: the Maastricht passage follows right after the baptism scene, which celebrates the Amandus - Dagobert relationship.

²¹ The evidence is laid out nicely in Henri Platelle, *Le temporel de l'abbaye de Saint-Amand des origines à 1340* (Paris: Librairie d'Argences, 1962), 35–37. In a famous 642 letter to abbots Waldebert and Bobolenus (the dedicatory preface to the *Vita Columbani*), Jonas of Bobbio remembers having collaborated with Amandus at the confluence of the Scarpe, Scheldt, and Elnone rivers (the location of Elnone abbey) already by the end of the 630s: *Vita Columbani*, 61. Later sources seem to confirm that Elnone was founded under Dagobert, although one must keep in mind the proliferation of forgeries and false claims regarding Dagobert's rule. The ninth-century Elnone monk Milo, who edited Amandus' *Vita*, was under the impression that it was Dagobert who had handed down the abbey's privileges; Milo expressly names Dagobert in a sermon devoted to the monastery's patron (MGH SS. rer. Merov. 5, 471). Likewise, Charles the Simple declared in a *diploma* of 899 that Dagobert had provided for the defense and immunity of Elnone's brethren. The text is reproduced in Platelle, *Le temporel*, 37. An additional twelfth-century source indicates that the Elnone community celebrated Dagobert's birthday every year.

control. "The whole of Gascony was overrun... [and] in the end the Gascons were overcome and subjugated."²²

Fredegar's account of the fighting confirms the magnitude of Dagobert's operation. The Wascones were mountain-based bandits who launched raiding sorties down from their secure positions in the Pyrenees to the neighboring plains. Since the Roman period, the convention had been merely to cordon off such dangerous mountain territories as internal frontier zones – not to venture too far in. It was common knowledge that invasions of highland areas could result in catastrophe. And yet, Dagobert's forces "followed them [the Wascones]" to their hiding places "among inaccessible rocks." As with the Slavs, Dagobert was not interested in simply securing the status quo; he meant to achieve absolute control. Roger Collins rightly refers to this as "the most systematic attempt to impose order on the Basques since the beginning of the Roman period..."²³

It is no stretch to imagine that such a total effort at control and integration had a religious dimension. Dagobert sought to bring Wasconia under Frankish rule for good, so it would have made sense for him to mobilize missionaries (particularly those closely connected to his court, like Amandus) to try and *convert* the Wascones as a way of reinforcing their submission. That Dagobert continued with this policy regardless of its failure against the Slavs in 630–633 suggests that the king was strongly committed to linking control and conquest with conversion. There was a natural place for missionaries in such initiatives.

In the baptism scene of the *Vita prima*, Dado and Eligius are said to have advised Amandus that "thanks to his familiarity with the king he might more easily obtain permission to preach *in his kingdom or wherever he chose [in regno ipsius, vel ubicumque eligeret]*, and that, through royal favor, he might conquer many nations for Christ" (emphasis added).²⁴ In fact, Amandus' trips to the Slavs and Wascones probably involved much more than just permission from the king; Amandus' two cross-border missions were closely associated with royal policy in the wars of 630–633 and 637–638. Nonetheless, the exact relationship between Amandus' missions and Dagobert's operations remains an open question; the evidence is

²² The Frankish army was so formidable that as soon as Dagobert threatened to redirect his forces against the Bretons, the Breton king (Judicael) personally hurried "at once to Clichy with a quantity of gifts to ask pardon of King Dagobert," Wallace-Hadrill, *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 65–66.

²³ Roger Collins, *The Basques* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 96.

²⁴ ... *per hanc familiaritatem liberius in regno ipsius, vel ubicumque eligeret, haberet licentiam praedicandi, seu et nationes quam plures per hanc gratiam se posse conqueri fatebantur*. MGH SS. rer. Merov. 5, 441.

nowhere near detailed enough to get at a ground-level view of how conversion and control were actually put together. Did Amandus literally accompany the Frankish army? Was he simply *inspired* by political and military circumstances to choose the Slavs and Wascones as targets for evangelization or was he instructed by the king to join in the initiatives of the Merovingian state?

At this point I will turn to a close reading of the *Vita*. Why did the hagiographer present the Slavic and Wasconian episodes as he did? What do the Slavic and Wasconian passages reveal about broader conceptions of politics and mission during the Merovingian era (the formative period for Christian universalism)?

Tension and Obfuscation in the Slavic and Wasconian Chapters

So long as Amandus is operating *within* the Frankish borders, the *Vita prima* goes into exceptional detail about the missionary's collaboration with and service to the king.²⁵ In most contemporary hagiographies scholars have detected a much greater reticence to acknowledge secular authorities' roles in saints' successes "in local life."²⁶ In between the Slavic and Wasconian chapters, the scene of Amandus' baptism of Dagobert's son (ch. 17) provides a highly structured, almost performative argument for the holy man's connections to the king

²⁵ The *Vita Amandi prima* records, for example, that Amandus received permission to forcibly baptize the pagans and apostates of the Ghent *pagus*. Amandus "obtain[ed] letters" from Dagobert through the intermediary Acharius of Noyon, and "provided with power from the king and blessing from the Church the man of God Amand went intrepidly forth" (ch. 13). "Royal munificence" is also mentioned in chapter 15, in which the revival of a hanged man motivates pagans around Ghent to demolish their old temples and seek "heavenly mandates" from Amandus. On top of this royal support for Amandus' evangelization around Ghent, the *Vita* highlights the role of the king in elevating Amandus to the rank of bishop (and installing him in Maastricht) (chs. 8 and 18), stresses Amandus' baptism of Sigebert III at King Dagobert's request (ch. 17), and specifies that "the king [Childeric II] gave him [Amandus] the place named Nant" (ch. 23) as a site for a monastery ("Amand went to King Childeric [II] and humbly asked him to give him a place in which to build a monastery"). All of these references, spread throughout the hagiography, add up to an exceptional portrait not only of the prestige Amandus acquired through his connections with the court, but of Amandus' reliance upon royal favor in many of the key achievements of his career.

²⁶ Esders, "Amandus of Maastricht," 278–79. Esders has called attention to the *Vita Amandi's* openness about the missionary-king association and has asked "why the author of a saint's life should mention the king's support in the process of Christianization, for this could diminish his hero's glory, who ideally should have achieved his aims solely with God's support by preaching and his ability to work miracles." Ibid., 274.

and engagement in “secular affairs.” Amandus is initially reluctant to baptize Dagobert’s son: “The man of God vehemently refused for he knew the Scripture says: ‘The soldier of God should not be involved in secular affairs’ (2 Timothy 2:4). Having decided (on scriptural authority) not to perform the royal baptism, Amandus leaves the presence of the king. Yet Dagobert remains determined that it should be Amandus who baptizes the royal heir and sends Dado (Audoin) and Eligius, “who were then living in the royal palace in secular dress but who later... became bishops,” to urge the saint to reconsider. Dado and Eligius not only repeat the king’s plea that Amandus carry out the baptism and educate the ruler’s son in divine law, but propose that “if the man of God did not refuse to do this, thanks to his familiarity with the king he might more easily obtain permission to preach in his kingdom or wherever he chose, and that, through royal favor, he might conquer many nations for Christ.” Amandus is eventually “worn out” by the prayers of Dado and Eligius, and he agrees to baptize the king’s son. That Amandus has done the right thing is confirmed by a miracle that celebrates the increase of proper spiritual conduct among members of the court (including the king himself): when none of the crowd attending the baptism answered “Amen” to Amandus’ prayer, “the Lord opened the [only forty-days-old] boy’s mouth and everyone heard him clearly answers “Amen.” All are overjoyed, and Amandus names the boy Sigebert (III).

Given the text’s portrayal of missionary-ruler collaboration *inside* the Frankish territories, it is notable that the *Vita* remains completely silent on the political dimensions of Amandus’ Slavic and Wasconian expeditions. As noted above, the hagiographer insists that Amandus’ trips to the Slavs and Wascones were triggered purely by the saint’s own personal spiritual ambitions. Moreover, while the pagans across the border are entirely unreceptive to Amandus’ preaching, they do not resist him with the same intensity or violence as many pagans *within* the Frankish kingdom. Since the Slavs and Wascones were conceptualized as enemies of the Franks, it is surprising that the hagiographer did not portray the two groups as *more* vicious, *more* adversarial to the representative of Christianity.

To try and understand why the Slav and Wasconian passages of the *Vita Amandi prima* appear as they do, we can go back to their antecedents in the late-seventh to very early-eighth century *Vita antiqua* (via Bernard Gui). Like the *Vita prima*, the *Vita antiqua* appears to have said nothing about the connection of the Slavic and Wasconian missions to the ruler. In fact, the *Vita prima* hagiographer seems to have left the *Vita antiqua*’s Slavic and Wasconian passages more or less untouched (aside from stylistic features) in his revision, possibly indicating that

he did not know enough about the two episodes to supply any further details.²⁷ It is in the *Vita antiqua*, therefore, that we should look to see how the Slavic and Wasconian chapters took shape.

A separate passage from the *Vita antiqua* (recorded by Gui) shows that the hagiographer envisioned a sharp opposition between the ideal of *peregrinatio* and service to the king (or involvement in “secular affairs” more broadly):

14) One day of the Lord [Sunday] while holy Amandus was preaching to the nobles of the court, he celebrated the sacred mass at the request of the bishops and King Dagobert. When the prayer had been concluded, he demanded a private conversation with the king, and he began to denounce the king for his pernicious sins. Out of pride the king was unwilling to hear the words of the man of God and angrily ordered him to depart from the borders [of the kingdom]. However, the servant of God Amandus, filled with joy, hastened from the range of vision [*conspectus*] of the king, desiring to come upon the harbor. He meant to cross the *mare Britannicum* to the Saxon people, in order that he might preach the Gospel among them; he was planning to persevere in *peregrinatio* for all the days of his life.

15) Afterwards, the king, seized by fevers and recognizing the error which he had committed against the man of God Amandus, hastily sent for him in order that he [Amandus] might return to him [the king]; he humbly implored that Amandus might indulge him and baptize his son Sigebert, who had [recently] been born...²⁸

²⁷ The Slavic chapter from Bernard Gui: “(9) *Deinde trans Danubium ad Asclaborum terras, ubi Christus non nominabatur, predicare perrexit ad martirii palmam animo preparatus. Ubi libera voce evangelium salutis predicans aliquos ad baptismi gratiam adduxit, sed adhuc peccatis exigentibus alii verbum Dei audire noluerint,*” PL 87, 1269. The Wascones chapter: “(11) *Post spatium vero temporis, visitatis fratribus quibus per diversas provincias monasteria et ecclesias regendas commendaverat, auditur esse quamdam gentem ferocissimam errore deceptam, quae nunc Vasconia appellatur. Quae gens per saltus Pyranaeos, per aspera et invia diffusa est loca: quae crebris eruptionibus, pugnandi agilitate, Fracorum fines longe lateque vastando contrivit. Illuc itaque causa praedicationis accessit, ut eos ab idolatria et rapinis et a fallacia hujus mundi eriperet. Cum quadam autem die praedicaret, surgens unus ex eis, verbis risui aptis, Evangelium Christi et servum Dei Amandum detrahendo irrisit, et populum post se illa vana laetitia attraxit. Eadem hora, divina ultione, angelus Satanae miserum invasit, statimque omnia membra ejus contraxit, et inter poenas confitens quod ideo patiebatur, quia servum Dei Amandum irriserat, miserabiliter exspiravit. 12) De finibus autem Vasconum egrediens, dum ad civitatem quamdam venisset...*” PL 87, 1270.

²⁸ 14) *Quadam die Dominica dum sanctus Amandus Palatinis proceribus praedicasset, rogatus ab episcopis et a rege Dagoberto missarum solemnina celebravit: finita vero oratione, privatim colloquium*

The prerequisite for Columbanian *peregrinatio*, in the *Vita antiqua*'s account, is the total renunciation of political life. When the king recalls Amandus to court later in the passage and Amandus and Dagobert mend ties, the future plan of *peregrinatio* and of spreading the Gospel among the Saxons is no longer a possibility. The hagiographer's stark opposition of politics and *peregrinatio* might help explain why there is absolutely no mention of the political context of Amandus' Slavic and Wasconian expeditions. The Slavic and Wasconian journeys are the two episodes in which Amandus comes closest to Columbanian-style *peregrinatio*. Since the *Vita antiqua* hagiographer thought of court life and *peregrinatio* as incompatible, he might have imagined that acknowledging any connection to Dagobert would detract from the legendary, Columbanian character of Amandus' missions. We may well be dealing, in the Slavic and Wasconian chapters, with a case of deliberate obfuscation.²⁹

In fact, the alterations made by the *Vita prima* hagiographer to chapters 14 and 15 (the exile and baptism scenes) of the *Vita antiqua* indicate that he, too, struggled with the tension between *peregrinatio* and politics. This is further evidence that the political role of a missionary beyond the borders was a complex issue which could generate much distortion of facts. To begin with, the *Vita prima* hagiographer greatly condensed the story of Amandus' exile and Saxon proselytization hopes, merging it with the baptism chapter and essentially reducing it to a brief parenthetical note. This is the only passage from the *Vita antiqua* that he did not expand. The hagiographer removed all of the crucial details: the Saxons (Amandus' particular target, whom he must reach by crossing the *mare Britannicum*) are generalized into some unnamed "pagans" in "remote places."

a rege secretius expetiit, ipsumque regem de capitalibus criminibus arguere coepit. Rex vero typho superbiae clatus, verba viri Dei audire noluit, sed iratus de finibus ejus exire jussit. Cumque servus Dei Amandus gaudio repletus a conspectu regis... ad locum maritimum navem invenire volens perrexerit, et mare Britannicum transire voluit ad gentes Saxonum, ut eis Evangelium praedicaret, et in peregrinatione cunctis diebus vitae suae permanere volebat. 15) Post haec rex correptus febribus, culpam quam in virum Dei Amandum commiserat recognoscens, misit celeriter pro eodem ut ad se rediret: rogans humiliter, ut sibi indulgeret, et filium Sigebertum, qui ei natus erat, baptizaret. PL 87, 1270. The translation is mine.

²⁹ One can only guess whether the hagiographer knew the circumstances of Amandus' cross-border expeditions or whether he was working from oral reports that left the missions' political dimensions out. Nevertheless, both possibilities are intriguing. In the former case we would be looking at a deliberate decision to cut out the missionary's role in the conquest and control operations of the king. In the latter case the politics of Amandus' missions to the Slavs and Wascones would have completely faded from the collective memory over less than a century of handing down stories about the saint's career.

Whereas the *Vita antiqua* claims that Amandus never actually realized his plans, the *Vita prima* suggests that Amandus *did* spend some time among far-away pagans before returning for Sigebert's baptism. In other words, the king's summons did not entirely stymie Amandus' idealistic goals and Amandus got the best of both worlds. The *Vita prima* hagiographer seems to have been uncomfortable with the notion that the holy man had to choose one or the other, devout self-exile or obedience to the king. He removed any trace of *peregrinatio* from the exile episode. Additionally, in presenting the argument for the missionary's involvement in "secular affairs," the *Vita prima* author added a number of scriptural quotations, as if to lend additional, much-needed authority to his case.

Conclusion

A major question in Merovingian scholarship is when, over the stretch of the late-sixth and early-seventh centuries, conversion activity turned from the closing of internal frontier zones (peripheries just within the borders of the Frankish kingdom) to the pursuit of a new Christian universalism "independent of local frontiers."³⁰ The Slavic and Wasconian episodes have frequently been cited as evidence for the breadth of Amandus' missionary plan and for the emergence of Christian universal mission more generally. The fact that Amandus' missions to the Slavs and Wascones appear to have been motivated largely by the initiatives of the king begs the question: Is there a political history to the rise of Christian universalism? To what degree did royal policy (or the state) contribute to the development of new missionary ideas? Perhaps, by carefully cross-checking hagiographies (spiritual histories) with political histories – as this paper has done with the *Vita Amandi* and the *Chronicle* of Fredegar – scholars can move towards a more concrete, more ground-level view of the relationships between mission and politics, conversion and control during the Merovingian period.

³⁰ See Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 414–416.