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The cult of St. Foy at Conques

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THE CULT OF ST. FOY AT CONQUES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Art and Design

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Rosemary Van Lare

August 1997

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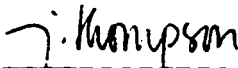
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ABSTRACT

THE CULT OF ST. FOY AT CONQUES

by Rosemary Van Lare

This thesis explores reasons why the cult of St. Foy flourished during the Romanesque period. The combination of the age and sex of Foy sets her apart from other saints of this period. She was perhaps the only saint widely venerated during the eleventh and twelfth centuries who was a female child, at a time when the majority of popular saints were adult men with monastic or episcopal ties.

The cult benefited from visual parallels created between Foy and the Virgin Mary in representations at Conques. The most important of these was the reliquary statue, which bears striking similarities to the Black Virgin statues of the surrounding Auvergne region. The cult practices associated with St. Foy also mirror those practiced in Black Virgin cults. This association of St. Foy with the Virgin Mary was most responsible for the renown of the cult of St. Foy at Conques.

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INTRODUCTION

The cult of St. Foy at Conques is intriguing because so many of its elements seem anomalous during the Romanesque period in which it flourished. First, the combination of the age and sex of St. Foy sets her apart from all other popular saints of this period. She was perhaps the only saint widely venerated during the eleventh and twelfth centuries who was a female child, at a time when the majority of popular saints were adult men with monastic or episcopal ties. The miracles attributed to St. Foy are equally unusual. Whereas many saints were credited with performing similar miracles, for example curing paralysis, several types of miracle seem to have been achieved only by St. Foy. Bernard of Angers noted in his eleventh century chronicle of the life and miracles of St. Foy, the *Liber Miraculorum sancte Fides*, three types of miracles associated with St. Foy which seem to be unique to her cult: the replacement of eyes which had been gouged out; the resurrection of a dead animal; and miracles in which the saint seemed to be playing a joke on her devoted followers. Modern scholars have commented on the strange nature of her miracles of vengeance, such as striking dead anyone who threatened the property of the monastery or mocked her reliquary.

The reliquary of St. Foy, a statue of the saint enthroned, is perhaps the most unusual element of the cult. It is one of the earliest reliquary statues, as most reliquaries of this period were in the form of the body part they enshrined. The statue, made of gold and encrusted with jewels, does not represent a young martyred girl, but rather a woman whose features have been described as pagan, strange, and Oriental. Both the strange rituals

associated with the reliquary and the degree to which the cult revolved around it are beyond the boundaries of Roman Catholic dogma.

In this paper I will examine the development of the cult of St. Foy at Conques and the origins of the reliquary of St. Foy. I hope to offer possible explanations for some of the strange cult practices associated with the statue, reasons why the non-typical, seemingly pagan elements of this cult were not suppressed by the Catholic Church, and to suggest how the cult of a young female martyr could flourish in a period devoted to male monastic and episcopal saints.

I. THE ROMANESQUE CULT OF ST. FOY

The cult of St. Foy is customarily associated with Conques, and more specifically with the town's well preserved Romanesque church. Generally, discussion of the church is framed within the larger context of the Romanesque pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. The Roman road from Lyon through the southwest of France, the Via Podense, was diverted in the eleventh century to take pilgrims through Conques.¹ From this point on, Conques was not only the focus of Foy's cult but also a stop on the road to the great church of St. James in Compostela. Reports of incredible miracles realized at Conques made it one of the major attractions along the pilgrimage roads which pilgrims followed through France into Spain (Figure 1). Indeed, the fifth book of the *Liber sancti Jacobi*, an eleventh century guide for pilgrims, recommends stopping at Conques for prayer and rest during the course of the long pilgrimage to Santiago.

Although St. Foy is associated with the Romanesque period, the cult associated with her predates that era. Indeed, the existing basilica in Conques is a Romanesque structure created in the eleventh century in response to the need to accommodate growing numbers of pilgrims, and replacing two earlier churches. This building project was begun between 1030 and 1065 under the direction of Abbot Odolric.² One of the latest portions, the west tympanum, was not completed until the twelfth century, *circa* 1125-1135.³ This period of approximately one hundred years of building (1030-1135) corresponds to the height of the popularity of the cult of St. Foy, and the resulting structure is a testament to the powerful cult of Foy rather than a point of departure marking its beginnings.

Between the ninth and eleventh centuries the cult evidently flourished locally, and word of the miracles performed by St. Foy for the faithful at Conques traveled north to Bernard of Angers at Chartres by 1010. Our knowledge of Bernard is limited to the information he provided in his account of the miracles of Foy, the *Liber miraculorum sancte Fides*. Brother of Robert, the abbot of Cormery, Bernard also chose a religious vocation and studied at Chartres under Fulbert, to whom he dedicated the *Liber miraculorum*. He was then chosen to be the head of the Angers episcopal college at the cathedral of St. Maurice.

Bernard made the first of three pilgrimages to Conques in 1013. He was prompted to make this journey both by rumors of the strange miracles performed there and by tales of what he considered to be pagan worship of the reliquary statue of Foy. It has been suggested that his skepticism may have stemmed partly from the fact that these were all oral accounts, spread largely by the illiterate, rather than validated accounts recorded by a historiographer.⁴ However, the skepticism Bernard exhibited in his writings may have been a rhetorical device calculated to enhance the drama of his story. Despite his professed distaste for the practices surrounding the saint, Bernard began his journey with a devotion to Foy. He states in the *Liber miraculorum* that he habitually prayed and read in the chapel dedicated to Foy just outside the walls of Chartres. At the school of Chartres, he listened to sermons on the martyrdom of the saint. The tension between his devotion to the saint and his skepticism about the legitimacy of rituals connected to her at Conques are evident in the *Liber miraculorum*. But as a result of his first pilgrimage, Bernard was won over to the cult of Foy and subsequently defended the practices and miracles which were reported to have occurred

there. He made two more journeys to Conques and wrote three books which constituted the *Liber miraculorum sancte Fides*.⁵

In addition to the secondary cult practices celebrated at Chartres, mentioned in the writings of Bernard of Angers, the cult of St. Foy had spread to other distant sites by the beginning of the eleventh century. Perhaps the greatest testament to her fame is the celebration of the cult of St. Foy at Santiago. Although there were many other churches which benefitted from strategic positions on the roads to Compostela, the tie between the cults of St. Foy and St. James seems to have been particularly close. Indeed, there was an altar dedicated to Foy in 1105 in the ambulatory of St. James.⁶ No other saint venerated on the pilgrimage roads was honored in this way at Compostela. In addition, there were three capitals at Compostela which depicted the martyrdom of St. Foy.⁷

The international renown of St. Foy achieved during the eleventh and twelfth centuries was the result of the spread of a much older, powerful cult of a saint honored and revered throughout much of Gaul. Devotees of the saint had outgrown two churches by the time the Romanesque building project was implemented. Although Bernard of Anger is credited with facilitating the dissemination of the cult of St. Foy throughout Europe through observations recorded in the *Liber miraculorum sancte Fides*, it is important to remember that St. Foy was famous enough before the publication of the *Liber miraculorum* for word of her miracles to reach Bernard in the North. And although the relationship between Compostela and Conques surely helped the cult of Foy to gain an international following, the connection between the two churches must be regarded as mutually beneficial. St. Foy must have already been well known if an altar dedicated to the saint was included in the

Romanesque church dedicated to St. James, and the Spanish Christian community surely owed a debt of gratitude to the saint for her assistance with the battles of the Crusades.

Notes

¹ Jonathon Sumption, Pilgrimage: an Image of Medieval Religion (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) 176. When the pilgrimage to Conques greatly declined in the fourteenth century, travelers returned again to the old Roman road.

² Marcel Aubert, L'Église de Conques, Petites Monographies des Grands Édifices de la France, ed. Henri Laurens, 2nd ed. (Paris: n.p., 1954) 10-11. These are the dates of Odolric's abbotship. Aubert suggests the starting date can be further narrowed to 1041-1052, the estimated range of dates for the laying of the first stone (based on a bill of indulgences).

³ Claude Delmas and Jean-Claude Fau, Conques (Millau: Éditions du Beffrot, 1989) 12. Delmas and Fau state that the tympanum was sculpted between 1107 and 1125 by an artist who had most likely already worked on Compostela. See also Aubert 53. Aubert dates its completion to *circa* 1130-1135.

⁴ A.G. Remensnyder, "Un problème de cultures ou de culture? La statue-reliquaire et les joca de St. Foy de Conques dans le *Liber miraculorum* de Bernard d'Angers," Cahiers de civilisation médiévale 33.4 (1990): 356.

⁵ Remensnyder 376n16. The anonymous monk who added the last two books of the *Liber* in the second half of the eleventh century regrouped the first three books of Bernard into two. These four books constitute the version of the *Liber* that Bouillet edited. Bernard's first book corresponds to the first book of the modern edition. Bernard's second book corresponds to the first six chapters of the second book, and the third to the last eight chapters of the second book.

⁶ Jean and Marie-Clothilde Hubert, "Piété Chrétienne ou paganisme? Les statues-reliquaires de l'Europe Carolingienne," Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France (1943-1944): 339.

⁷ Jean and Marie-Clothilde Hubert 344-345. Two are located at the entrance to the chapel dedicated to St. Foy and a third is located in the crossing. Based primarily on their style, these capitals have been attributed to a Conques artist who made a pilgrimage to Compostela and created them as offerings.

II. REPRESENTATIONS OF ST. FOY AT CONQUES

What were the characteristics of the powerful pre-Romanesque cult of St. Foy celebrated at Conques? Although the existing basilica resulted from building campaigns of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it is reasonable to assume that images incorporated into the new church would reflect earlier ideas and practices related to the cult of St. Foy. What is therefore unusual about this extant church is the insignificant amount of architectural sculpture relating to the life, martyrdom and miracles of St. Foy. Surprisingly, there are only three representations of the patroness of the abbey, and these identifications are not unchallenged. What becomes evident from the scarcity of representations of St. Foy, as well as from examination of the few existing images, is that the earlier cult of St. Foy was strongly associated with the reliquary statue of Foy.

Of the more than two hundred and fifty interior capitals, only one nave capital may depict a scene from the life of St. Foy, that of her martyrdom (Figure 2). To the left, a king hands a great sword to a man in front of him. To the right, a servant holds a resisting woman by the wrist. Aubert suggests this may be the martyrdom of Foy, but it may otherwise be the crime of David.¹ Delmas and Fau believe it is unquestioningly the condemnation of Foy, as do Jean and Marie-Clothilde Hubert.²

On the exterior of the church is a plaque believed to honor Abbot Begon, which presumably dates to around 1107, the year of his death (Figure 3). Begon is regarded by many as the greatest abbot of Conques. During the twenty years he served as abbot (1087-1107), he continued the building of the church, added a cloister to the complex, commissioned many reliquaries and

sponsored illuminated manuscripts.³ On the plaque Christ is depicted between an abbot and a crowned woman, traditionally interpreted as the Virgin, but possibly Foy. One angel crowns the woman and another seems to be the guardian angel of Begon. The crown placed on the woman's head is the Crown of Paradise, richly decorated like the one on the gold reliquary of Foy. Aubert points out that it is unlikely that the Virgin would not have been haloed while Christ and the angels are, and thus perhaps the crown, with its similarity to the reliquary crown, was meant to distinguish this figure as St. Foy.⁴

The tympanum of the west portal, which was not completed until *circa* 1125-1135 and thus is one of the latest portions of the church, depicts a well-preserved Last Judgment scene (Figures 4-6). A haloed, prostrated woman, acting as intercessor for the souls of the faithful, is represented at the right hand of God. This figure has been identified as St. Foy (Figure 5).⁵ The main support for this identification seems to be that her surroundings mimic those of the interior of the church as it would have then looked. There is an altar with a chalice on it, a throne, and manacles hanging above her head from a series of round Romanesque arches. The altar and chalice are an indication that this is the interior of a church. The throne is most likely a reference to the throne on which the reliquary statue of Foy sits in majesty. And the manacles are a reference to the chains offered to St. Foy by prisoners in thanksgiving for their release from captivity.

One can also arrive at the conclusion that this is St. Foy through the process of elimination. The only figure for whom she could be mistaken, with her blue garments and in her position as intercessor, is the Virgin Mary. But since the Virgin is elsewhere on the tympanum, it is unlikely that she would

have been represented twice and the patroness of the abbey not represented at all. The Virgin is shown next to Christ, on His right (Figure 6), while Foy is rendered in the register directly beneath the procession of the Blessed led by Mary. Upon first observation, the status of Foy seems to be significantly less than that of the Virgin due to the fact she appears in the register below the Virgin and also because, unlike the Virgin, Foy is not placed next to the enthroned Christ. However, the throne near her both serves as a reminder of her reliquary statue inside the church and mimics on a smaller, less grand scale the Majesty of Christ. More importantly, the hand of God the Father is extended toward St. Foy:

Le rôle d'intercesseur direct sera tenu dans les Jugements derniers gothiques français par la Vierge et saint Jean l'évangéliste et sans doute seront-ils alors situés au même registre que le Christ, mais sans être personnellement gratifiés de la main divine.⁶

The similarities between the two figures of the Virgin and St. Foy are striking. It is interesting that the sculptor did not choose to depict St. Foy as a young adolescent, the stage at which she was martyred and the form in which she appears in visions reported in the *Liber miraculorum*. Instead, he represented her with the same corpulent body given to the Virgin and imparted a maternal protectiveness to both figures. In addition to similar body types and facial features, both are veiled and wear coats over long sleeved garments. Both clasp their hands in prayer, indicating their special status as intermediaries for the faithful. These similarities are not unintentional:

Mais elle (*la Vierge*) joue encore à Conques un autre rôle essentiel: elle sert <<d'autorité>> ou de fondement typologique et figuratif pour le rôle confié à sainte Foy. Celle-ci est (comme) une autre Vierge élué par Dieu pour obtenir le salut de tous les

dévots de l'abbaye. La sainte est en effet, par rapport à la droite divine et à la série d'arcades qui figure son église derrière elle, dans la même position que la Vierge par rapport au Christ et à l'Église qui lui fait cortège.⁷

Through the similarities in the depiction of Foy and the Virgin on the tympanum, the patroness of the abbey symbolically assumes many of the protective, maternal aspects of the Virgin. The resulting message is that St. Foy is for her devoted the privileged mediator that the Virgin is, on a different level, for the universal Church.⁸

In order to achieve this image of St. Foy as the dutiful servant of God and loving intercessor for the faithful, the sculptor had to come to terms with the fact that the St. Foy known to pilgrims through the miracles reported in the *Liber miraculorum* and through the image of her reliquary is anything but gentle and loving. The empty throne may have been a device employed by the sculptor to reconcile these two very different ideas of the nature of St. Foy:

Là, au-devant de l'autel sur la table duquel repose le calice du sacrifice rédempteur, elle est représentée en "Majesté", siégeant dans un trône de reine, telle que, fascinante, elle apparaissait, figée dans sa statue d'or, aux yeux éblouis des pèlerins...en cette redoutable conjecture, elle s'est dressée hors de son siège et, en un geste d'ardente et indicible supplication, elle se prosterne profondément devant la main justicière de Dieu, afin que celle-ci ne s'appesantisse pas trop lourdement sur les coupables.⁹

While the above description is perhaps exaggerated, the idea of St. Foy symbolically leaving the throne of her reliquary to assume a different role as intercessor is valid. As examination of cult practices will reveal, devotion to Foy was truly centered around the tenth century reliquary and the persona which was associated with it. It seems that later images of Foy need to include some reference to the reliquary in order to identify her, almost as if her

reliquary were her only attribute. But at the same time these later depictions depart from the vengeful, powerful St. Foy associated with the reliquary and attempt to create parallels with the Virgin Mary, emphasizing a gentle, maternal nature. For example, the portable altar table of Begon, made for Conques in the early twelfth century, demonstrates the similar status accorded to Foy and the Virgin, as they are placed directly opposite one another and depicted in the same manner (Figures 7-9). This departure may reflect a desire on the part of the monastic community to move away from the popular, unorthodox cult associated with the reliquary. In order to trace the development of this cult, the history of the Conques monastery must be examined.

Notes

¹ Aubert 33. He suggests that this might also depict King David handing a sword to Bathsheba's husband and sending him off into battle, knowing he would die so David could claim her. If this were so, Bathsheba would be the woman the servant holds by the wrist.

² Jean and Marie-Claude Hubert 344.

³ Bousquet 45.

⁴ Aubert 45-46.

⁵ Aubert 49.

⁶ Jean-Claude Bonne, L'art roman de face et de profil: le tympan de Conques (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1984) 245.

⁷ Bonne 231-232.

⁸ Bonne 248.

⁹ Louis Bousquet, Le jugement dernier au tympan de l'église de Saint-Foy de Conques (Rodez: n.p., 1948) 77-78.

III. THE FOUNDATION OF THE MONASTERY AND THE TRANSLATION OF RELICS

Origins of the Conques Monastic Community

The monastery considerably predates the cult of Foy at Conques. The origins of the monastic community at Conques are fairly obscure. The hermit Dadon settled in Conques in the late eighth or early ninth century.¹ The isolation of the site combined with the plentiful springs flowing from the Lot and Dourdou rivers must have held great appeal for him (Figure 10). Some time later Medraldus joined Dadon. Word of their contemplative lifestyle spread, and others traveled to Conques and formed a community.² Dadon eventually departed to reclaim his solitude and founded the Grandfabre hermitage in the Dourdou valley, a few miles downstream from Conques. Before departing, Dadon put his first disciple, Medraldus, in charge of the monastery.

Even less is known about the architecture of the early monastic community. The earliest buildings of the community were destroyed by a Saracen raid. A church dedicated to Christ the Holy Savior was erected at an unknown date, subsequently destroyed, and later reconstructed through the generosity of Pepin the Short and Charlemagne.³ Indeed, it was the support of Carolingian sovereigns that made the existence of the monastery possible. Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne and King of Aquitaine, visited the monastery several times. In a charter of 819, Louis the Pious placed the monastery under his protection and instituted Benedictine Rule.⁴ In that same year he also made ten donations of land to the monastery.

Pepin II, King of Aquitaine, donated land in Figeac for the foundation of an affiliated monastery, the “new Conques”, in 838. He reasoned that because of its remote, mountainous location the Conques monastery could not support a growing population of monks.⁵ Figeac, situated in the rich valley of Cele, was attractive because of its fertile soil and mild climate. Many of the monks moved from Conques to this more desirable site, a move which created great problems for the Conques community. It was the beginning of a troubled relationship with the Figeac monastery that would last through the eleventh century.⁶ By the mid-ninth century, the Conques community was on the verge of economic ruin and desperately sought a solution.

Translation of the Relics of St. Foy

The abbey church that existed in the ninth century was dedicated to Christ, the Virgin Mary, and St. Peter. There were many other churches dedicated to these saints, and some of them had relics. The Conques abbey did not possess any relics, which meant that it had little with which to entice pilgrims.⁷ Consequently, few braved the long, treacherous journey to the monastery. Therefore, it is not surprising that attempts were made to secure relics for the monastery.⁸ The factors involved in the choice of relics are not so easily discerned.

First the monks attempted to steal the relics of St. Vincent of Saragossa, but were not successful.⁹ They then turned their attention to those of St. Vincent of Agen, which they acquired around 863.¹⁰ During the course of their investigation of St. Vincent, they learned of St. Foy, who was also enshrined in Agen.¹¹ There are no surviving contemporary accounts of the theft. The earliest document describing the translation was written in the

eleventh century.¹² According to this account, a monk of Conques, Aronide, was accepted into the Agen monastic community. He won their trust and was chosen to guard the treasure of the monastery, which made it easy for him to steal the relics of Foy. He arrived in Conques with the relics on January 14, 866. While this date is suspect, we do know that the translation occurred before 883 because, in a document of that year, the monastery is described as the sanctuary for the bodies of St. Foy and St. Vincent. Thus it can be assumed that the translation occurred sometime between 863, when the relics of Vincent were secured, and 883.¹³

Although the precise reasons the monks were interested in Vincent of Saragossa, Vincent of Agen, and subsequently Foy are not possible to ascertain, there are two considerations which may have influenced them. First, the acquisition of relics of a relatively unknown saint meant little or no initial competition from other sites with established cults of the same saint. Second, all three of these are Gallic saints, associated during their lifetimes with either Roman or Merovingian Gaul. Gallic saints appealed to popular tastes in Southern Gaul as early as the ninth century.¹⁴ Monasteries benefited from the possession of relics of these local saints because they established ties with the history of the region, and thus instilled a certain sense of patriotism in the surrounding community. This patriotism inspired devotion and generosity in the local population.¹⁵

St. Foy satisfied both of these conditions. Although popular in Agen, Foy was almost unknown outside of the local area. Unlike many more widely known saints, Foy's relics had not been dispersed among several sites.¹⁶ The sum of her remains rested entirely in Agen. According to the eleventh

century account, all of her relics were removed from the church in the 866 theft, making Conques the sole repository.¹⁷

Foy lived and died in Agen during the time of the Roman Empire.¹⁸ Born to noble parents around 282, she converted to Christianity because of the influence of her Christian nurse and was baptised Fides by St. Caprasius. In 303, Emperor Diocletian issued an edict against Christians. Dacien, governor of northern Spain and a portion of central Gaul, was sent to Agen to carry out Diocletian's orders. Dacien published a decree promising favor to those who renounced Jesus and threatening death to those who refused. Most Christians fled, including St. Caprasius, but Foy refused to hide. On October 6, 303 she was ordered by Dacien to renounce Christ and pray to Diana. When Foy refused, she was chained to a grill and burned, then beheaded. The age of Foy at the time of her martyrdom is not known, but she may have been as young as ten and was not likely more than twelve.¹⁹

While the geographic origins of Foy make her a typical local patron saint of the ninth and tenth centuries, the combination of her age and her sex certainly set her apart from all others. She is perhaps the only saint of this period who is a female child. The rare young saints for which we have accounts of miracles were adolescents rather than children. Lay people were also rare as patrons, as the majority of saints were monastic or episcopal.²⁰ The few female patron saints were generally abbesses. It is therefore strange that while the relics of Vincent of Agen and Foy were acquired at the same time, the abbey rapidly identified with Foy. After April of 900, references to St. Vincent in charters become rare and eventually disappear. What can account for the development of the cult of Foy, an atypical saint, rather than an increasing reverence for Vincent of Agen, a much more likely patron?

Notes

¹ Delmas and Fau 6. Dadon is most likely a nickname for Datus, which is an abbreviation of the Latin Deodatus. Meaning "God given", Deodatus probably refers to the religious vocation of the hermit.

² Delmas and Fau 7. An 819 charter states that "a man full of piety known as Medraldus has withdrawn to the same place and lives with Dadon."

³ Aubert 5-6.

⁴ Jean Taralon, "La majesté d'or de Sainte-Foy du trésor de Conques," *Revue de l'art* 40-41 (1987): 10. In this same charter Louis the Pious mentions that the monastery was founded by Charlemagne.

⁵ One of the difficulties possibly foreseen by Pepin II was the lack of room for architectural expansion. This was a factor in the execution of the Romanesque structure that exists today. See Aubert 14-15: "Construite à flanc de coteau, sur un espace reserré, Sainte-Foy de Conques n'a pas le magnifique développement de Saint-Sernin de Toulouse qui s'étale largement sur le sol." Another concern may have been a lack of pilgrims due to the inaccessibility of the site.

⁶ O.K. Werckmeister, "Cluny III and the Pilgrimage to Santiago," *Gesta* 27.1-2 (1988): 108. The Figeac monastery broke away from Conques in 1035. Count Begon regained it by force. The Figeac community then submitted to Cluniac rule to regain independence from Conques. Subsequently, Etienne II of Conques appealed to Pope Gregory II, who reaffirmed the supremacy of Conques in a papal bull of 1084. However, both abbots were to remain in office, and after the death of one, the survivor would govern both monasteries. But after the death of Etienne II, the Conques monks refused to recognize Abbot Ayrard of Figeac. They instead elected Begon II. The Figeac community appealed to the Council of Clermont in 1095, and Abbot Hugh of Cluny intervened on their behalf. Pope Urban II deposed Begon II, but the Conques community disregarded the order. Urban II acknowledged the permanent separation of Conques and Figeac at the Council of Nimes in 1096. See also Taralon 21n7. According to Taralon, Figeac even fabricated a false charter in order to liberate itself from Conques. They pretended the monastery was founded by Pepin the Short and therefore predated the foundation of the mother abbey.

⁷ Remensnyder 375n6.

⁸ The theft of relics was not unheard of in the Middle Ages and did not seem to violate the faith of the monks. They believed if a translation was successful then it must be the will of the saint whose relics were involved, and thus no sin was committed. See Sumption 32. As Sumption points out, many of the great pilgrimage churches of Europe had stolen relics at the heart of their

cults, such as St. Benedict at Fleury, St. Nicholas of Bari, and St. Mark in Venice. For more on the theft of relics during this period, see Patrick Geary, Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

⁹ Jacques Bousquet 44. One of the monks secured the relics of Vincent of Saragossa near Valence, but when he returned to Conques no one believed him. He took them to the abbey of Saint-Benoit-de-Castres where they were accepted.

¹⁰ Taralon 10.

¹¹ L. Servières, Histoire de Sainte Foy, rev. ed. (Conques: Éditions Dadon, 1983) 26, 36-37. According to tradition, the church which housed the relics of St. Foy in Agen was built on the site of her martyrdom. It was a fifth century structure erected *circa* 405 by St. Dulcide, Bishop of Agen. It was later replaced by a thirteenth century basilica which is no longer extant. Her remains were housed in a magnificent marble tomb.

¹² Geary 138. The accuracy of this account has been debated. Ferdinand Lot and Leon Levillain saw the *Translatio* as a fairly accurate historical text, while J. Angely (a local hagiographer of Agen, whose likely motive was to prove that the relics of Vincent and Foy were still in Agen) considered the whole thing a fabrication.

¹³ Servières 48. According to Servières, the translation must have occurred before 874 and thus occurred during the reign of Charles the Bald.

¹⁴ Geary 75-76.

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that the monastic community of Figeac stole the relics of St. Bibanus, a Merovingian Gallic bishop of Saintes, to compete with those of Foy. See Geary 150. According to Geary, the monks of Figeac carried the body from Saintes to Figeac during the Norman invasion of Saintes in the ninth century.

¹⁶ Servières 58. Although initially all of Foy's relics may have been transported from Agen to Conques, later divisions of these relics occurred. In 1365 Pope Urban V gave some of Foy's relics to the monastery of St. Cueufat in Catalonia. One of the hands of Foy is claimed by the monastery of St. Foy de Longueville in Normandy, and an arm of Foy is venerated at Glastonbury, England.

¹⁷ While it is believed the head of Foy is enshrined in the reliquary statue of St. Foy (discussed in chapter five), the whereabouts of the body of Foy are controversial. See Servières 63-64. According to Servières, after the arrival of the Prémontrés monastic order in Conques in 1873, they demolished a sixteenth century wall that had been added to the interior of the church. This wall is believed to have been built *circa* 1590 to support the columns of

the apse after they were weakened in a fire set by Protestants in 1561. The newly arrived monks discovered a coffin, containing what are thought to be the relics of Foy, hidden in the wall.

¹⁸ This account of Foy's life and martyrdom is based on Servières 19-33.

¹⁹ Remensnyder 376n12. The *Passio* does not give the age of Foy. Bernard describes a vision in which she appears in the form of a girl about ten. *La Chanson* states she is twelve. This discrepancy may be the result of a transcription error of recording ten (dex) instead of twelve (doz).

²⁰ Joseph-Claude Poulin, L'idéal de la sainteté dans l'Aquitaine carolingienne, d'après les sources hagiographiques, 750-950 (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1975) 34-35. Monastic saints were the most common type until 950.

IV. THE CULT OF ST. FOY: ORIGINS AND DISSEMINATION

The Relationship Between Conques and Compostela

The mutually beneficial relationship between the cult of St. James at Compostela and that of St. Foy at Conques is partly responsible for the spread of the cult of St. Foy throughout Europe. This strong relationship between the two cults was without doubt connected to the cultural and economic relationship between certain regions of Spain, particularly Catalonia, and the Auvergne region of France. For example, there are formal texts which record merchants of Catalonia traveling to Rodez to purchase mules. These relations date to the Carolingian era.¹ The high esteem in which Conques was held throughout Spain was also evident in the fact that a Conques monk, Pierre d'Andouque, was given an episcopal seat in Navarre from 1077 until 1114.² However, the two sites have more in common than favorable economic exchanges.

St. James, apostle of Christ, traveled to Spain after His death to preach and came to consider it his adopted country. According to legend, after his execution in Jerusalem, James' followers transported his body to Spain and buried him there. It would seem that an apostle of Christ and a martyred girl could have little in common, but upon closer examination some similarities become evident. Just as Foy's followers perceived her as a saint with close ties to the region due to her resistance to Roman pagan religion in Gaul, devotees of James considered him a patron of Spain. Indeed, despite the fact that he was an apostle, the cult of St. James was rather obscure until the mid-ninth century. His growing popularity resulted from his miraculous appearance during the Battle of Clavijo in 859, one of the early battles fought by Christian

Europeans to reclaim Spanish territories under Islamic control. According to legend, St. James appeared on a white horse in the sky above ranks of Christian soldiers and led them to victory over seventy thousand Moors. By the end of the tenth century, reports of this brave military feat performed in the service of his adopted country attracted a great number of pilgrims from all over Europe to the shrine of St. James in Compostela.

The cult of Foy shares with that of James a strong connection to the Crusades. By some accounts, the foundation of the abbey itself was the indirect result of the clash between Saracens and Christians.³ Two capitals of the Conques monastery, one in the cloister and one in the nave of the church, depict Crusaders (Figures 11-12). While there are no reports of St. Foy herself appearing to soldiers fighting in Spain, crusaders combatted the Moors under the protection of her banner and some of the spoils of victory were brought to Conques in her honor.⁴ More commonly, however, manacles which bound Christian soldiers in Muslim captivity were offered to Foy, and she seems to have been the first saint to “specialize” in the release of prisoners.⁵ Although St. James, as well as St. Gilles and St. Leonard, was credited with the miraculous escape of crusaders in Spain, by the beginning of the eleventh century Foy was more famous than any of them for this type of miracle. So great were the offerings of chains to Foy that a grill forged from them was installed around the main altar at Conques (Figure 13). Donations made to St. Foy by kings and nobles of Spain were often accompanied by allusions to the Crusade against the Moors. Perhaps the most famous gift of this type is the foundation of a monastery at Barbastro dedicated to St. Foy by King Peter I of Aragon in thanksgiving for his victory over the Moors in 1101.⁶ Even the

inscription of a portable altar commissioned by Abbot Begon refers to the important contributions of Conques in the reconquest of Spain.⁷

Bernard of Angers and the *Liber Miraculorum sancte Fides*

It is difficult to trace the growth of the cult of Foy before the eleventh century due to the lack of primary documents. There are no surviving accounts of the miracles of Foy recorded at Agen. There are three surviving literary accounts of the cult of St. Foy, two of which are more the products of the cult rather than contributors to it.⁸ The *Passion of St. Foy* fuses several accounts of the fourth century martyrdom into one narrative and was written no earlier than the eleventh century. The *Song of St. Foy* is a dramatic account of the passion and martyrdom of St. Foy written in verse. It appealed to popular devotees and was probably intended to be sung. The earliest account of her miracles, written in the eleventh century by Bernard of Angers, was instrumental in promoting the international acclaim the saint would receive in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. But more importantly, it serves as a valuable record of earlier practices and miracles which were intrinsic to the pre-Romanesque cult of St. Foy.

The elements of the cult of Foy which make it unusual were recorded by Bernard in the *Liber miraculorum*. While many of the miracles described by Bernard are not unique to Foy, there are three types of miracles which he classified as *novitas*: the replacement of eyes which had been scratched out; the resurrection of a dead animal; and the miracles referred to as *joca*, meaning games or jokes.⁹ In addition to these miracles which Bernard found shocking, modern scholars have focused on the miracles of vengeance and protection described in the *Liber miraculorum*, as they, too, seem unusual.

The first miracle of Foy described by Bernard is the replacement of the eyes of Guibert, which took place around 980.¹⁰ According to Bernard, it was this miracle that made Foy famous. Guibert had made a pilgrimage to Conques and was returning to Espeyrac on the feast day of St. Foy when he encountered his master. Guibert's master became enraged, and ordered three of his servants to seize him. Guibert asked what offense he had committed, and his master refused to answer him. He called on St. Foy to protect him, but his master ordered the servants to take Guibert's eyes out. The servants refused, so the master did so himself. A dove descended, took the detached eyes into its beak, and flew toward Conques. The master immediately repented, but his belated apologies were of no help to Guibert, who spent the next year earning a living by amusing crowds.

The night before her feast day the following year Foy appeared to Guibert in a dream. She appeared as a pre-adolescent young girl in noble dress. She instructed him to go to Conques and purchase two candles. He was then to offer one of the candles at the altar of the Saviour and the other to Foy at the shrine of her relics. She promised that if this were done, Guibert would regain his sight. Foy told Guibert that she had asked for his healing with so much insistence that God finally granted her request. Guibert did exactly as Foy instructed, then spent the night in prayer in front of her reliquary. He awoke to the chant of Matins before dawn and discovered that he could see. When he emerged from the church, everyone was shocked and chaos broke out among the crowd. Guibert grew fearful that his master would again take his eyes and sought refuge in a castle some distance from Conques.

The monks took great pains to convince Guibert to return to Conques, and eventually he complied. Word of this miracle spread throughout Europe

and pilgrims journeyed to Conques in great numbers, perhaps motivated more by the desire to see Guibert than by genuine devotion to the saint. With the pilgrims came good fortune, and the monastery became wealthy. Bernard met Guibert on his second journey to Conques, and his motivation for making his third and last pilgrimage to Conques seems to have been primarily to see Guibert one last time, but the old man died before Bernard reached his destination.

The miracle of Guibert's renewed sight was indeed incredible and unprecedented. According to Pierre-André Sigal's exhaustive study of eleventh and twelfth century miracles, marvelous and fantastic miracles were not characteristic of this period. Of the five thousand miracles that he inventoried, Sigal found only three other cases of organ replacement. But as rare and fantastic as this miracle was, the resurrection of a dead mule recounted by Bernard was even stranger and more unusual. While Sigal notes that a certain number of saints were known for animal healing, he does not record any cases of resurrections associated with these saints.¹¹

Bernard recorded that a knight named Bonfils was close to Conques when his mule became ill and died.¹² He left the mule with two peasants and asked them to skin the animal for him. When he reached Conques, he prayed to Foy and complained about having lost his animal in the course of making a pilgrimage to her. At that moment, the peasants were beginning to cut the skin off the animal. The animal suddenly "awakened" and made its way to Conques. Upon reaching its destination, it galloped in the public square in front of the church. The peasants then arrived and told the story of the resurrection. Even the most cynical were convinced of the miracle because there were two knife marks visible on the thigh of the animal.

Bernard recounted three miracles which he classified as *joca*. These joking or trick-like miracles are perhaps the most unique hallmark of St. Foy. Sigal found no other *joca* like those of Foy in his inventory of miracles.¹³ In her *joca* Foy expresses her power and gently humiliates individuals.¹⁴ In one case, Foy extinguished a candle, then appeared to a man sleeping near it and requested that he light it. But Foy herself reignited the candle before the man could get to it. This occurred many times. Finally, the man accused Foy of making fun of him.¹⁵ Bernard interpreted this miracle as a sign of the virtue of the recipient in that he was worthy of interacting with the saint on this informal level. In another case, Foy appeared to a countess and demanded her jewels, but the countess refused. The jewels became lodged in a tree as the countess rode away from Conques and were discovered by a poor woman, who offered them to Foy. When the countess made another pilgrimage to Conques, she recognized her jewels adorning the reliquary statue of Foy and realized that the saint had tricked her.¹⁶

The *joca* have been described as instances in which Foy exhibits behavior typical of a medieval child.¹⁷ But the *joca* are really outside of the realm of Foy's role as patroness and protector of the monastery. In this role, she assumed quite a different personality, that of a vengeful and powerful woman. Examples of this type of miracle are numerous.¹⁸ In one case, men who had robbed the monastery were punished when a roof collapsed on them, resulting in death. In another, a cleric named Odalric insulted the reliquary image of the saint and prevented the crowd from making offerings. The next night, Foy appeared to him as a "lady of imposing severity" and demanded "How dare you insult my image?" She then flogged the man with a staff she

carried in her right hand. Odalric survived only long enough to recount the vision in the morning.¹⁹

Apparently these unusual miracles of Foy defined a unique personality which attracted pilgrims. One might wonder if miracles of this type were associated with other saints and simply not recorded, as Bernard is not a typical hagiographer. Most hagiographers of this period were monks writing about the patron saints of their respective monasteries. Since the type of miracles Bernard describes as *novitas* were shocking and untraditional, it is not likely a monk would have wanted to include this type of information in an account of miracles associated with his monastery. Thus it is indeed possible that comparable miracles existed elsewhere and simply were not recorded. On the other hand, it was the news of these strange miracles attributed to Foy that prompted Bernard to make a pilgrimage to see for himself if there were any truth to the stories. This indicates miracles such as these were not common, or surely Bernard would have been used to hearing accounts such as these and would not have bothered to journey to Conques.

The reliability of Bernard's account and his possible motivations for writing it should be considered. We can assume that Bernard had no vested interest in promoting the image of Foy, as he had no ties to the monastery of Conques. Indeed, Bernard even recounted one miracle which did not portray the monks in a flattering way. Pilgrims and clergy alike spent the evenings in the church of Foy, but while the monks and other literate people sang psalms and liturgical offices of the vigil, the illiterate held candles lit as offerings to Foy and sang popular songs to fight fatigue and stay awake.²⁰ Usually these were troubadour songs which celebrated the martyr and her miracles, but they could include tributes to other saints or verses more secular

in nature. The superiors of the monastery viewed this practice as a profanation of holy vigils and made many failed attempts to forbid it. Sometime before 980 they voted to lock the doors of the church at night so pilgrims could not gain admittance. A few evenings later, a large crowd of pilgrims pounded on the locked doors to the church and demanded to be admitted. Suddenly, the doors swung open by themselves. In addition, the iron gates surrounding the inner shrine where the relics were secured, to which only a very select few were admitted, also opened. When the monks went to chant Matins at midnight they found the church full of pilgrims. Finding all keys accounted for among themselves and noting that the doors had not been damaged or broken down, they concluded that this was a miracle. Bernard thus conveyed an incident in which the will of the saint was contrary to that of the monks, something a monastic hagiographer most likely would have omitted.

Assuming, then, that Bernard had no hidden agenda, the real question becomes the reliability of those whom Bernard interviewed for the *Liber miraculorum*. Certainly one must take into account the fact that many of these people were talking about events which they believed to have taken place many years before and knew only through the reports of others. Thus the likelihood of exaggeration and inaccuracy in the accounts offered to Bernard is great. However, regardless of the degree of accuracy with which the events were described, we can assume that those describing them were for the most part telling the story as they believed it. The exceptions might be, of course, exaggerations on the part of those with institutional ties to the monastery and thus a personal interest in the spread of the cult. But the majority of those at Conques were the pilgrims who so believed in the powers and acts of Foy that

they had journeyed to her shrine. Thus, having examined the likely motives of Bernard and those with whom he came into contact, it can be concluded that there already existed a loyal base of pilgrims at the time word of the Conques miracles reached Bernard and that Foy already had achieved great renown in Gaul.

The cult of St. Foy was multi-faceted, and the legend of the small, helpless martyred girl was transformed into the cult of a powerful woman, able to perform such incredible miracles as the replacement of eyes and the resurrection of a dead animal. Few vestiges of the child saint are evident in the cult which developed. One such vestige is that with few exceptions she appeared in visions as a beautiful young girl.²¹ St. Foy was fond of performing the miracles described by Bernard as *joca*, and in some ways these playful games call to mind the original legend of the child saint. But even the *joca* often reflect the tastes and desires of a powerful woman, not a child, as is evident in the examples of the tricks she played to secure jewelry. While Foy's love of expensive jewels is perhaps inappropriate for a Christian saint, her vengeful nature seems a violation of fundamental Christian principles. Stories of the saint killing those who threatened the monastery, mocked her image, or failed to follow her instructions reveal a side of the personality of St. Foy which inspired fear. Yet many turned to this powerful figure for assistance and protection, and she remained one of the most popular saints along the pilgrimage roads for many centuries.

Notes

¹ Jacques Bousquet, "La sculpture de Conques dans ses rapports avec l'art méridional," Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa 4 (1971): 44.

² Jean and Marie-Clothilde Hubert 338-339. While Pierre d'Andouque served as bishop Conques received many donations in Navarre, notably Roncevaux. He exercised great influence over the kings of Navarre and Aragon. He was present when the chevet of the cathedral of St. James was dedicated in 1105, which included the chapel of St. Foy.

³ Jacques Bousquet 44. According to Bousquet, Dadon sought solitude in the Dourdou valley and became a hermit because he had been a warrior and was helpless when the Saracens killed his mother before his eyes. See also Christian Lauranson-Rosaz, L'Auvergne et ses marges (Velay, Gevaudan) du VIII au XI siècle. La fin du monde antique?, diss., U. Paris, 1984 (Le-Puy-en-Velay: Les Cahiers de la Haute-Loire, 1987) 42-44.

⁴ Taralon 10. See also Servières 90-92.

⁵ Sumption 67.

⁶ Jean and Marie-Clothilde Hubert 339. Another example which demonstrates the artistic exchange between Conques and Spain is a donation of land in the region of Bazas made around 1076 on the condition that the monks of St. Foy travel to the site and build a church.

⁷ A. Darcel, Trésor de l'église de Conques (Paris: Librairie Archéologique de Victor Didron, 1861) 11-13. This altar was dedicated June 26, 1100. For the Latin inscription see page 12.

⁸ Benedicta Ward, Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event, 1000-1215, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987) 37.

⁹ J. Huizinga, Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play Element in Culture, rev. ed. (Boston: n.p., 1960) 35-36. *Joca* is the irregular plural of *jocus* in Latin. In Classical Latin, *ludus* and *jocus* are not perfectly synonymous but early on the derivatives of *jocus* replaced those of *ludus* in common language.

¹⁰ See Servières 96-104 for the miracle of Guibert.

¹¹ Pierre-André Sigal, L'homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale (11th-12th c) (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1985) 120-125. According to Servières' translation of Bernard's work, Foy is credited with five human resurrections as well.

¹² See Servières 104-106 for the miracle of the resurrected mule.

¹³ Remensnyder 374-375. There is only one other instance where the word *joca* is used to describe a miracle, and it is in a different context. In the ninth century account of the miracles of St. Philbert, a blind man is healed by the saint but then blinded again. The man accuses the saint of playing a joke on him, but the saint is insulted by these words and punishes the man with death. Laughter will also be associated with the later cult of St. Thomas of Becket, but it will again be in a different context. The laughter of others humiliates the targets of Thomas' jokes, while with Foy the joke seems to be between only the saint and an individual.

¹⁴ Remensnyder 373-375.

¹⁵ Remensnyder 374.

¹⁶ Remensnyder 374.

¹⁷ Remensnyder 372, 377-378.

¹⁸ Geary 350-353.

¹⁹ Geary 351.

²⁰ For this account see Servières 118-120. See also Servières 72-73 for an account of what the illiterate might have sung.

²¹ See Remensnyder 369 and Ward 37 for exceptions.

V. THE RELIQUARY OF ST. FOY

The importance of the role played by the reliquary in the cult of St. Foy cannot be overstated. The cult which began as a devotion to a humble, martyred little girl rapidly became associated with the reliquary statue and developed into the cult of a powerful woman. There are two aspects of the reliquary which must be examined. First, the physical components, which encompass date of origin and later additions and transformations of the statue, must be discussed. The second set of issues concerns historical considerations which contributed to the creation of the statue and an examination of some of the attitudes and circumstances which might explain the strong link which developed between the reliquary and the cult of the saint.

Origins and Transformations

It has already been established that the cult of St. Foy at Conques is not merely a Romanesque phenomenon, as its origins and development date to an earlier era. As stated in chapter three, the monastery owed its early development to the generosity of the Carolingians. A charter of Louis the Pious written in 819 attributes the very foundation of Conques to Charlemagne.¹ And many of the treasures of Conques are gifts of the Carolingian monarchy.² It is not surprising, then, that many scholars consider the reliquary of St. Foy to be the only surviving Carolingian majesty.³ However, there is disagreement over the original date of the statue. It is obvious from certain idiosyncrasies, such as the large head which rests at an odd angle on an undersized body, that modifications were made to the reliquary, but the dates of these modifications are also subject to debate.⁴

The statue, as it appears today, is eighty-five centimeters in height and made of gold (Figures 14-19). The saint sits rigidly on her throne and looks directly in front of her. The face lacks detail and Foy's expression seems serious, even daunting. Her crown and robe are encrusted with jewels, intaglios and cameos offered as gifts to the saint. At the core of the debate over the dating of the reliquary is whether or not this is the statue which Bernard of Angers saw and subsequently described in the *Liber miraculorum*. If this is the statue about which Bernard wrote, it had to have been made before 1013, the date of his first journey to Conques. Opinion is divided on whether this is the statue created as a receptacle for the head of Foy shortly after the translation, or whether it was created sometime after the miracle of Guibert. The central issue in this debate is how one interprets the words of Bernard, who wrote that before the miraculous cure of Guibert's blindness the statue was "*ab antiquo fabricata*," and after it was "*de integro reformata*." The question is whether *reformata* signifies remade or transformed.⁵

Prosper Mérimée believed that the statue was remade in the eleventh century.⁶ Darcel dated it to the Carolingian era, and therefore to the arrival of Foy at Conques.⁷ While conceding that the crown recalls certain imperial crowns of the tenth century, F. de Lasteyrie stated that the face does not belong to that century and places the origins of the statue at the end of the eleventh or early twelfth centuries, under the abbacy of Begon (1087-1107).⁸ Desjardins believed the statue was created during the rule of Étienne II, abbot of Conques from 942-984.⁹ Rupin, the first to notice the terms *ab antiquo fabricata* and *de integro reformata*, also attributed the statue to Étienne II. Curiously, although he interprets *de integro reformata* as remade, he believes there was only one statue.¹⁰ Molinier attributed the work to the abbacy of

Étienne II, but unlike Rupin he believed there were two statues and that this is the second, which was described by Bernard of Angers.¹¹ Brehier discovered a text relating an order given by the Bishop of Clermont to Alleaume for a Virgin in Majesty for the cathedral. A design for this statue was represented in an illumination in the same manuscript (Figure 20).¹² Brehier believed this was proof that the Majesty of Conques, who resembles the Virgin of the illumination, was executed under Étienne II, who was both Bishop of Clermont (937-984) and Abbot of Conques (942-984).¹³ Both Aubert and Deschamps accepted his theory. Aubert wondered if a second statue might have replaced a more primitive work made under Étienne. Deschamps, on the other hand, believed that there was only one statue.¹⁴ Gauthier also accepted Brehier's theory and dated the transformation of the statue to around 940.¹⁵ Forsyth believed the renovation took place after the healing of Guibert, *circa* 985, and that Étienne II could not have been the patron.¹⁶ Keller shared Forsyth's opinion. Hubert believed the first statue was made after the translation of the relics, and a second majesty was created under Étienne II.¹⁷ Ward attributed the statue to Étienne II and believed the original was created by him *circa* 946.¹⁸ Sumption also attributed the commission of the original reliquary to Étienne II.¹⁹

To summarize the above opinions, the original statue, regardless of whether it was transformed or replaced, was made in the tenth century at the time of Abbot Étienne II according to eight of these scholars. The conclusion of two was that it was created before the abbacy of Étienne II, and three concluded that it was made some time later. Further complexities in this matter stem from uncertainty about which parts of the statue were added or later transformed.²⁰ Although not all of these questions can be settled definitively,

some conclusions can be drawn based on the extensive restoration of the statue conducted in 1954-1955.²¹ The statue which exists today is the early statue, and thus there was not a second statue created after the miracle of Guibert, but rather a transformation of the original.²² This transformation included the reworking of the crown and further adornment of the throne. Additionally, intaglios and cameos were incorporated into gold filigree bands, which were then used to create bracelets for the arms and ornaments for the shoes.²³ The body of the gold-covered statue has a wooden core, however the head of the statue does not. This head predates the statue and was originally part of a bust which was cut at neck level to adapt to the statue (Figure 21). This accounts for the disproportionate size of the head in relation to the body as well as the odd angle at which it rests on the shoulders.²⁴ The origins of this head and the reasons for its inclusion in the reliquary are perhaps the most intriguing and perplexing questions surrounding the Majesty of St. Foy.

The restoration team dated this head to about the fourth century, or possibly the beginning of the fifth, basing their ideas partially on the refinement of the work and on the rendering of the hair typical of this era. The team had no doubts that this was the head of an emperor, a theory justified by the use of gold. They also confirmed that this was an emperor elevated to divine status due to the fact that originally the head was crowned with a laurel wreath.²⁵ Thus the head of an Imperial Roman emperor, possibly once the object of pagan worship, had been reused in a Christian statue. This partially explains why the Majesty of Foy has so often been described as having the appearance of a pagan idol.

The reuse of pagan art in Christian works is not without precedent. Indeed, other examples of this phenomenon are evident in the Conques

treasure. There are approximately twenty four Antique engraved stones, cameos, and intaglios at Conques. Pepin's shrine is adorned with an intaglio of Apollo, which is most likely a reflection of the assimilation of Apollo, the Greco-Roman sun god, with Christ.²⁶ An intaglio of Athena Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, has been incorporated into the reliquary known as the "A" of Charlemagne. This victory goddess has been combined with a cross and a figure seven to deliver the Christian apocalyptic message that the Last Judgment will take place when the seventh seal is opened.²⁷ Other examples can be found beyond Conques. For example, an Antique head of Venus was reused as the head of Christ on the cross of Heriman de Cologne, and there is a cameo of a laureled emperor on the cross of Lothaire at Aix-la-Chapelle.²⁸

Like the head, the crown was not originally made for this statue (Figures 22-23). Originally it was larger and it was made smaller to adapt to the head. It was therefore a gift which was incorporated into the work. It has been debated whether this was a votive crown or whether it was intended to be worn.²⁹ Originally, the crown had only one vertical band and two florets. The second band and two additional florets were added later and are the products of a less skilled artisan. The crown in its original form is of an imperial type of which there are no extant examples. However, crowns of this type are represented in Carolingian and Ottonian manuscripts.³⁰ It also bears a resemblance to the votive crown of the Virgin of Essen which was originally created for Otto III when he was three years old (Figure 24).

Other aspects of the reliquary also point to imperial sources. Taralon observed that the metalwork of the second gold covering shares similar qualities with the art of Ottonian palatial workshops.³¹ The throne seems to be a miniature of the only two surviving imperial thrones, those of

Charlemagne at Aix-la-Chapelle and Henry IV at Goslar. The cloth which was wrapped around the actual head relic of the saint was of Byzantine purple which would only have been available to royalty.³² And many jewels, cameos and intaglios have been incorporated into the metalwork that date to Carolingian and Ottonian times and seem to be the products of royal workshops (Figure 18).³³ Other jewels are of Antique origin and reflect the Carolingian fascination with the Greco-Roman world (Figure 19).³⁴ It has been asserted that the statue was reworked as a majesty in order to reflect the real or desired status of the abbey, and that these stylistic and iconographic reminders of the Carolingians and Ottonians were deliberately incorporated to create an imperial figure. In its refashioned state, the reliquary of St. Foy served as both an affirmation of the power of St. Foy and a representation of the power, either newly acquired or desired, of the monastery.³⁵

Carolingian Auvergne: the Political Climate and the Church

The importance of the Carolingians in the development of the cult of St. Foy cannot be overstated. The abbey was patronized by Carolingian royalty, beginning with Charlemagne, whose generosity toward the monastery surpassed that of all other members of his family and earned him a noteworthy place on the tympanum of St. Foy (Figure 6). Family members continued his tradition of generosity, such as Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne and King of Aquitaine, who in 819 placed the monastery under his protection, made ten donations of land, and instituted Benedictine Rule.³⁶

The reliquary was refashioned, most likely around the mid-tenth century, and many of the jewels and cameos incorporated into the metalwork had been the gifts of Carolingian lords. Indeed, the unusual form of the

reliquary has been attributed to the Carolingians, as the statue of St. Foy has been referred to as the only extant example of a Carolingian majesty.³⁷ This period of growth and expansion for the Conques monastery has been attributed to the political and religious movements of the Carolingians.³⁸ Therefore, the attitudes and views of the Carolingians as manifested in Auvergne must be examined to foster a better understanding of the development of the monastery, the transformation of the reliquary, and the subsequent flourishing of the cult.

Auvergne received so much attention from the Carolingians because it was an area which posed many problems for them (Figure 25). It was considered a rebellious region, resistant to outside influences. It symbolized a refuge for Celtic beliefs during the Romanization of Gaul, and later offered great resistance to Frankish and Visigothic invaders.³⁹ The hostility of this region toward Carolingian rule seated in northern Gaul therefore came as no surprise. Although all of Aquitaine struggled for independence from Carolingian rule, which ensued in the eighth century, Auvergne was considered by the Carolingians to be the heart of this hostile territory.⁴⁰ Chroniclers of northern Gaul wrote of Aquitainian treachery. It becomes clear in these records that they considered Aquitainians to be of another race and culture. This theme of treason was most likely exaggerated but was intensified by reports of relationships between Saracens and Aquitainians. Saracen raids were one of the biggest problems of the Carolingian centuries, and thus the matter of whether the Aquitainians were resisting the raids or encouraging them was an important issue and contributed to Carolingian suspicions about the region.⁴¹

How did Charlemagne and his successors attempt to control the Aquitanian regions? Initially, Charlemagne brought his military and administrative system to the area. By 778, he realized the only way to govern these provinces successfully was to recruit indigenous nobles to fill leadership positions. Thus, Charlemagne appointed counts, bishops and abbots who were for the most part natives of the region. In 781 Charlemagne took further steps to satisfy the inhabitants of central Gaul and, just as he had created a kingdom of Italy, he created a kingdom of Aquitaine and placed some degree of power in the hands of its inhabitants. However, Charlemagne made the mistake of allowing his son Louis the Pious to rule the kingdom of Aquitaine. This young king embezzled and misappropriated funds, as well as attempted to usurp the rights and property of the local aristocracy.⁴² Although Charlemagne attempted to make amends for the wrongs of his son, Aquitaine remained for the most part an explosive, hostile territory.⁴³

After Charles the Bald, grandson of Charlemagne, regained control of Aquitaine from the rebellious Pepin II in 864, he reformed the Carolingian system of government by introducing territorial principalities. Realizing that successful government depended on knowledge of a population and its local leaders, Charles the Bald deemed it necessary to place people who knew the region in positions of power. In order to be respected, any representative of Carolingian power had to have ties to the region he represented. The most likely candidates were men educated locally who were members of families with ties to the land.⁴⁴

The generous gifts of Charlemagne and his descendents to the Church were another channel through which the rulers attempted to appease and to govern successfully central Gaul. Generally, many types of structures in this

region had become dilapidated and the Carolingians chose to focus their attention primarily on the restitution of monasteries. This monastic reformation had the effect of taking advantages away from the non-monastic clergy and the aristocracy affiliated with these positions. The joint efforts of Louis the Pious and Benedict of Aniane to refurbish the abbeys of the region were met with hostility from the episcopacy as well as from the great abbeys of northern Gaul. However, Louis the Pious believed the disadvantages were outweighed by the advantages afforded to imperial power through the restoration of these structures. Louis was aware that royal control was weak and inefficient in these regions. It was a good political decision on his part to form devoted teams of ecclesiastical administrators through the device of monastic reformation in central Gaul. As the monastic population of Aquitaine consisted mainly of local nobility, Louis the Pious thereby won the support of the local aristocracy. Like Charlemagne, Louis governed this region by placing noteworthy locals in important positions. He chose to accomplish this by giving a voice to local forces through the Church.⁴⁵

These monastic improvements were not steady and consistent but rather came in waves, the most powerful of which were Benedictine reform at the beginning of the ninth century and the Cluniac movement of the first half of the tenth century⁴⁶. This is consistent with Carolingian politics, as each political crisis was immediately followed by positive action, and thus the greatest periods of reconstruction were also the times of greatest weakness for the Carolingian rulers.⁴⁷ The earliest wave of restorations was orchestrated by Benedict of Aniane under Emperor Louis the Pious in the early ninth century. The next series of restorations occurred in the second half of the ninth century, largely in response to the Norman invasions. The central part

of Gaul remained largely untouched during these years of Norman advancement and served as a refuge for terrorized populations. Auvergne was one of the regions least directly affected, as only in the invasion of 864 did the Normans advance as far as Clermont. Thus having served as a refuge for monks fleeing from the Normans, Auvergne and surrounding areas benefitted from an intense immigration. The exiles helped to revive the monasteries, and the king, viewing this as an opportunity to improve relations with the area, contributed land and money for the expansion of facilities to house these new arrivals. The creation of the Figeac affiliate of the Conques monastery by Pepin II in 838 was just one of these attempts to create new resources for the increased monastic population and win the support of the Auvergne population. Princes and local aristocracy followed the king's example and made generous contributions as well.⁴⁸ Thus, monastic institutions in Auvergne and the surrounding areas were strengthened by these ninth century waves of reform and entered the tenth century as powerful entities.

Although the reliquary of St. Foy is associated with a monastery, the non-monastic church of Auvergne also warrants examination, as the statue was modified in the tenth century during the abbacy of Étienne II, who was also the Bishop of Clermont. In exchange for their loyalty, Étienne II and other bishops of this period near the end of the Carolingian era were granted advantages which almost made them the equivalent of counts. Indeed, the Auvergne church seemed to become more powerful in the tenth century, and Étienne II of Clermont remains one of the most famous historical figures of Auvergne.⁴⁹ Étienne II was faithful to the Carolingian royalty and arbitrated internal conflicts of the region. With the power given to him in return for

this service, he reigned as master of the city of Clermont and was a powerful force in surrounding areas as well.⁵⁰

Although the churches of central Gaul were bound by Roman Catholic laws and practices, they exercised regional freedoms unique to this area. Many of these regional practices served to strengthen the influence of the church in central Gaul. The *chorépisopat*, an office unique to regions south of the Loire during the Carolingian era, is an example of a peculiarity which existed in the Auvergne church system which allowed bishops such as Étienne II to hold more control over their offices. The institution of the *chorépisopat* is ancient and has been traced to Egypt where a bishop was aided by someone of almost equal stature in the administration of rural areas. This office disappeared with the hierarchization of the clergy and the appearance of *archiprêtres* and *archidiaques*. Indeed, in central Gaul, particularly in Auvergne, the *archiprêtres* were charged with the administration of great rural parishes, such as Brioude or Artonne. It was during the Carolingian era that the office of *chorévêque* reappeared south of the Loire. In central Gaul, the *chorévêque* seems to have served as first counselor to the bishop, but also as *l'évêque en second*, an appointed successor to the bishop. In order to prevent conflicts between the ecclesiastical establishment and the noble families of the area, a compromise was reached in which the bishop was allowed to select his own replacement. However, there were still guidelines the bishop had to follow in selecting his assistant and successor and the king could become involved in the decision if he felt intervention was warranted.⁵¹

The power of the Auvergne church in the tenth century and the unique offices and practices which contributed to its strength can be better understood when the weakness of civil power during this period is

considered.⁵² In the confusion which resulted from the crisis of weak Carolingian government, inhabitants of central Gaul agreed that centralized power should be eliminated, but the aristocracy and clergy differed in their goals. Members of the noble class expressed a desire to profit from the anarchy by violently asserting their domination of central territories. The clergy did not share the aggressive desires of the aristocracy, but rather hoped to impose a new vision of society centered around the power of the Church. The Auvergne church united with other churches of central Gaul in that it took a strong administrative stance and therefore extended its influence and concerns beyond the spiritual into the temporal.

One of the ways in which the Auvergne church broadened its administrative capacities was to make possible the presence of two or sometimes three abbots in the same monastery. There were two different types of abbots. The first was the abbot *secundum regulam*, who directed the monks and guided the abbey spiritually. This abbot was normally elected by the monks of his community and ensured conformance with the rules of the order of the monastery. The second type of abbot was someone considered to be a great administrator, generally a great, titled noble, whose responsibilities concerned the material life of the abbey. These abbots, referred to by Lauranson-Rosaz as *des abbés seculiers*, were not elected by the monastic population, but were neither less respected nor taken less seriously than the abbot *secundum regulum*. This *abbé seculier* was never selected from the laity, but was rather a member of the clergy, sometimes even a canon.

Conques benefitted from the presence of multiple abbots in the tenth century. Beginning in 942, after the death of Abbot Jean and no doubt in

accordance with his wishes, Étienne headed the monastery. A member of the viscountal family of Auvergne, he was *abbé seculier*. In addition to his duties at Conques, he continued to serve as Bishop of Clermont, and thus he was soon surrounded by coadjutors. An act of 958 brought to the abbey “Stephanus episcopus et Bego et Hugo abbas.” In a charter of 961, Begon was cited as the *chorévêque* of Étienne. Hugues was the true abbot, *secundum regulam*. When Étienne II died, the *chorévêque* Begon succeeded him and Hugues remained abbot *secundum regulam*.⁵³ This strange practice of multiple abbots is therefore the key to understanding how Étienne II could function as both the Bishop of Clermont and the Abbot of Conques.

Bernard of Angers provided evidence that the *abbé seculier* was unheard of in northern Gaul. In the *Liber miraculorum*, he described a meeting with Abbot Pierre while he was on pilgrimage. Bernard stated that Abbot Pierre did not strike him as a clergyman, and that he was surprised to see this seemingly wealthy person engaging in a conversation more typical of a noble than a monastic. When Bernard expressed this astonishment to the abbot, Pierre explained to him that he was not an abbot of monks but rather an abbot of abbeys, just as one would be lord of châteaux.

Although we think of the Carolingian rulers as reviving an interest in Greco-Roman Antiquity at a time when the classical world was a distant memory, it is likely that the presence of Rome remained strong and consistent in central Gaul. This might also account for some of the differences between the practices of churches in Auvergne and in northern Gaul. With the advent of Carolingian rule, the inhabitants of central Gaul clung to their Roman roots, just as they had previously embraced their Celtic roots at the beginning of Roman domination. As often as the Carolingians exploited the theme of

Aquitainian treachery, the population of central Gaul insisted on the wrongs inflicted upon them by the people of northern Gaul, whom they referred to as Franks and barbarians. The Franks belittled the Roman aristocracy. The saints embraced by central Gaul would as a result be not only of Roman origin but above all anti-Frank.⁵⁴

The practices of Auvergne churches were strongly grounded in the Roman era.⁵⁵ Since titles were so important to the Romans and, as a result, to the Auvergne nobles, it is not surprising to find an attachment to titles in the regional administrative apparatus which governed the churches of Auvergne, institutions modeled on the structures of the Early Roman Empire and from which they inherited many characteristics. Indeed, upon examination of the monastic map of tenth century Auvergne, it becomes evident that very little was founded (Figure 26).⁵⁶ At the beginning of the ninth century, there were very few abbeys or establishments of the Merovingian era, among them Clermont, Le Puy and Mende. Instead, efforts were concentrated on ancient bases, reclaiming abandoned or dilapidated establishments. These foundations were used to better restore the Antique Church and as such were an expression against the Carolingian rulers seated in northern Gaul.

In addition to a preference for Roman saints and the restoration of ancient religious structures, the fondness exhibited by central Gaul for their Roman predecessors was reflected in other ways.⁵⁷ The nobles of Auvergne traced their lineage to important Roman families and claimed illustrious ancestors. They established geneological links which connected them to the great senatorial families of the Early Empire as well as to great lineages of the sixth and seventh centuries. In some cases they even claimed emperors, such as Claudius and Heraclius, as ancestors. This elevation of the Romans by

Auvergne nobles may shed some light on the incorporation of Roman cameos into the reliquary of St. Foy, as well as their use in other pieces of the Conques treasure. Indeed, it is possible the Roman head which was transformed into the head of the reliquary of St. Foy was a gift originally intended to promote belief in a genealogical link between a noble donor and an emperor.

The nobility of central France attached special significance to the patronage of reliquaries.⁵⁸ This attitude stems from a desire similar to that of these same nobles to trace their heritage to Roman senatorial and imperial families, and some indeed claimed holy ancestors.⁵⁹ Reliquaries, like important family ties, seem to have been affirmations of power and prestige, as well as confirmation of the close rapport shared between the noble and the saint whose remains he chose to enshrine.⁶⁰ The power of saints manifested in a corporal sense is reinforced by the form of reliquaries created as majesties. The iconography of majesty has traditionally been associated with emperors and with Christ. It is not a coincidence that the flourishing of these statues corresponds to a time of relative political fragmentation, where bishops, monasteries and nobles represented spheres of power which were often concurrent. Reliquary statues seem to have been preferred, perhaps because they project the presence and authority of the saint, and through association that of the patron, more convincingly than non-figurative reliquaries. Taking this into consideration, it seems perfectly logical that Étienne II, a titled Bishop of Clermont and Abbot of Conques, would have commissioned two such reliquaries, representing his power in both the ecclesiastical and monastic spheres.

Notes

- ¹ Taralon 9.
- ² For example, the "A" of Charlemagne was a royal donation. See A. Darcel, Trésor de l'église de Conques (Paris: Librairie Archéologique de Victor Didron, 1861) 29-35.
- ³ Taralon 9-10. Taralon states that without the reliquary of St. Foy, we would only know of the existence of these majesties through surviving texts. See also Jean and Marie-Clothilde Hubert 235-236.
- ⁴ Probably the biggest debate over these modifications is regarding what was originally placed in the outstretched hands of St. Foy. See Ward 37 and Sumption 50-51. Ward proposes that she held a casket, while Sumption believes she held a model of the grill on which she had been martyred.
- ⁵ Taralon 11.
- ⁶ Prosper Mérimée, Notes d'un voyage en Auvergne 1838, ed. Pierre-Marie Auzas (Paris: A. Biro, 1989) 82-88.
- ⁷ Darcel 49.
- ⁸ F. de Lasteyrie, "Observations critiques sur le trésor de Conques et sur la description qu'en a donnée M. Darcel," Memoires de la Société des Antiquaires de France 28 (1863): 53.
- ⁹ Joseph Desjardins, Chronique de Conques (Chartres: Bibliothèque École des Chartes, 1872) 43-45.
- ¹⁰ Ernest Rupin, L'oeuvre de Limoges (Paris: A. Picard, 1890) 57.
- ¹¹ H. J. Molinier, Histoire des arts industriels, vol. 4 (Rodez: Carrère, 1902) 27-29.
- ¹² Ms. 145, a tenth century document housed in the Clermont library.
- ¹³ L. Brehier, "La cathédrale de Clermont au X siècle et sa statue d'or de la vierge," La Renaissance de l'art français (1924): 205-210.
- ¹⁴ Paul Deschamps, "Les sculptures de l'église Sainte-Foy de Conques," Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France (1941): 114.
- ¹⁵ Remensnyder 379n83.
- ¹⁶ The miracle of Guibert took place under the abbacy of Aimon, the abbot who succeeded Etienne II.

¹⁷ Jean Hubert, "La Majesté de Sainte-Foy de Conques," Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France (1943-44): 391-393.

¹⁸ Ward 37.

¹⁹ Sumption 51-52.

²⁰ Remensnyder 377n39. Later additions to the reliquary include four crystal balls added in the fourteenth or fifteenth century to replace the original gold doves, hands redone in the sixteenth century, and feet replaced in the nineteenth century.

²¹ See Taralon 21n46 for technical details of the restoration. Taralon was part of the restoration team.

²² Taralon 16-17. Taralon describes two series of arguments which support the position that the statue was transformed rather than remade after the miracle of Guibert. One has to do with the wooden core, and the other concerns the metalwork. When the statue was disassembled, it was discovered that an earlier throne had been made in the same wood as the statue. Aside from the Antique head and the later replacements, the metalwork seems to be of two different eras, one dating to the original manufacture of the statue and the other to the embellishments following the miracle. The first gold surface has a basic drapery design, the pleats of which continue beneath the filigree bands of the second surface. This original surface is very mutilated due to cuts made for additional ornamentation and there are few surviving fragments. The second surface, which consists of filigree bands into which intaglios and cameos were inserted, was added at the same time the statue was installed on the new throne and crowned.

²³ See Taralon 16-17 for more on these intaglios and cameos, almost all of which were Antique, with some exceptions of Byzantine and Carolingian origin.

²⁴ Taralon 15.

²⁵ Taralon 16. When the restorers removed the existing crown to examine the head, they discovered laterally pierced holes of the type likely to have secured a laurel crown.

²⁶ Delmas and Fau 67.

²⁷ Delmas and Fau 67-68.

²⁸ Taralon 22n63.

²⁹ Taralon 22n54. The crown has no hinge, which means it may have been a votive crown. However, there were crowns without hinges that were

intended to be worn, for example that of Empress Cunegonde. If it were worn, it could only have belonged to a child. The original diameter, before its size was reduced to fit the reliquary, was only fourteen centimeters, which is about the size of the head of a four year old child. It has been demonstrated that the crown of the Virgin of Essen once belonged to Otto III when he was three. The crown of Foy might have had a similar history. Louis the Pious was crowned King of Aquitaine in 781 when he was only three years old. Charles l'Enfant was crowned in 855 at the age of eight.

³⁰ Taralon 17. Taralon gives examples of the Carolingian First Bible of Charles the Bald and the Ottonian Bible of Henri II.

³¹ Taralon 17-18 for this and the following. Taralon gives examples of the Ottonian crosses of Aix, Essen and Vienna as having similar workmanship.

³² Delmas and Fau 67.

³³ Delmas and Fau 66. For example, the rock crystal intaglio of the Crucifixion on the back of the throne was created *circa* 870 (Figure 18), and the earrings are products of the tenth century. See also Taralon 18. For an inventory of intaglios, cameos and other ornaments of the reliquary see Darcel 65-72.

³⁴ Delmas and Fau 77. For example, on the hem of Foy's dress is an intaglio of Caracalla, Roman Emperor from 211-217.

³⁵ Remensnyder 364.

³⁶ Delmas and Fau 7.

³⁷ Delmas and Fau 62-63.

³⁸ Delmas and Fau 64.

³⁹ Lauranson-Rosaz 12.

⁴⁰ Lauranson-Rosaz 41-42. At times Auvergne won this struggle for independence. They enjoyed periods of freedom from 718-768 before succumbing once again to Carolingian rule seated in northern Gaul after the failure of the laborious campaign of Pepin the Short (760-768).

⁴¹ Lauranson-Rosaz 42-44. As witnessed by certain sources, central Gaul was definitely opposed to Arab pressures. The founder of the community at Conques, Dadon, was given as an example of the sentiment of the majority of the area. He resisted the Saracens to such an extreme that he allowed them to kill his mother rather than capture his horse. He then went to Conques seeking solitude and repentance. But as with any invasion, there were certainly sympathizers and collaborators, and some native Aquitainians must have had an interest in profiting from these Arab incursions.

⁴² Lauranson-Rosaz 44-45.

⁴³ Lauranson-Rosaz 47-50 for the events of 817-864 in Aquitaine.

⁴⁴ Lauranson-Rosaz 51-52.

⁴⁵ Lauranson-Rosaz 45-47.

⁴⁶ Lauranson-Rosaz 228.

⁴⁷ Lauranson-Rosaz 47.

⁴⁸ Lauranson-Rosaz 227-229.

⁴⁹ Lauranson-Rosaz 235-236.

⁵⁰ Lauranson-Rosaz 236-237.

⁵¹ Lauranson-Rosaz 238-240.

⁵² Lauranson-Rosaz 242-247 for discussion of *abbés seculiers*.

⁵³ Lauranson-Rosaz 243-244, 247. It seems that Begon did not spend a lot of time at the abbey but rather governed through nephews who resided in Conques. These nephews were known as the *tyrans de Calmont d'Olt*. One of them, Pierre, robbed the Conques treasury before dying at sea.

⁵⁴ Lauranson-Rosaz 219.

⁵⁵ Lauranson-Rosaz 211-218.

⁵⁶ Lauranson-Rosaz 228 for this and the following.

⁵⁷ Lauranson-Rosaz 222-223 for this paragraph.

⁵⁸ Remensnyder 364-366.

⁵⁹ Lauranson-Rosaz 272-273.

⁶⁰ Servières 58-60. Apparently this tradition of establishing ties with a saint, carried even to the extreme of tracing one's lineage to a saint, continued into modern times. Delabat de Savignac claimed to be a descendent of St. Foy. He obtained a relic of St. Foy in 1734. All members of his family used the *prénom* of Foy. When his young daughters visited Conques, they carried the reliquary of the saint in public ceremonies.

VI. THE CULT OF THE BLACK VIRGIN IN AUVERGNE

St. Foy seemed to assume the identity of the reliquary statue in almost every respect, and the cult of St. Foy became the cult of the reliquary of St. Foy.¹ As Jean Taralon states: "...le reliquaire s'est identifié à la relique, et par elle au saint, au point qu'il participe de son caractère sacré...profaner le reliquaire, c'eut été profaner la relique."² The cult of the saint owed a great deal of its popularity to the statue, which exercised enormous influence and was instrumental in dethroning the original patron saints of the monastery.³ This cult surrounding the reliquary of St. Foy is just as unique and mysterious as the reliquary itself.

One of the aspects of the cult which sets it apart from others was the performance of rituals which seemed to have no basis in Christian dogma. One of these practices was the parading of the statue through the valleys of Auvergne whenever the abbey's lands were threatened.⁴ Her statue was also brought to the local councils of the Church to assist in the proceedings, and in the event of a disaster it was carried through the affected area. Often a band of musicians accompanied the statue in these processions, or the monks clashed cymbals together and blew into ivory horns.⁵ The cult of St. Foy shared many practices with thriving cults dedicated to the Virgin in Auvergne and neighboring areas. An examination of Marian cults and their relationship to that of St. Foy will provide insights into the origins and development of the cult of St. Foy.

The earliest record of a reliquary statue may have been the Virgin created for Clermont Cathedral at the request of Bishop Étienne II around 946 (Figure 27).⁶ Although it may have been the first statue intended for relics, it

was certainly not the first statue of this type. Many sculptures of the Virgin were intended for veneration without relics, as articles of clothing and other material items from the life of Mary were scarce. These statues were most often black, and the Virgin of Clermont was strongly influenced by these black Virgin cults which flourished in Auvergne. Indeed, the Virgin of Clermont was also black, and thus was a part of this tradition.⁷ Étienne II, acting in his capacity as Abbot of Conques, later enshrined the relics of St. Foy in a reliquary statue. This reliquary statue of Foy not only resembles the statue of the Virgin commissioned for the Cathedral of Clermont, but also shares many traits in terms of both appearance and cult practices with the larger body of Black Virgins.

Black Virgin statues are relatively few in number, as many have been lost or destroyed. There are approximately four hundred and fifty images of the Virgin throughout the world, not counting those in Africa south of the Mediterranean littoral, which have been called black, dark, brown, or grey.⁸ Although the cult ranges geographically from the Black Virgin of Montserrat in Catalonia to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, Black Virgins were most concentrated in France in the central and southeastern regions (Figures 28-29).⁹ By 1550, only one hundred and ninety Black Virgin statues remained in France.¹⁰ That number dropped considerably after the French Revolution, as many of the Black Virgins were destroyed during revolutionary uprisings.

It is very difficult to estimate accurately the number of Black Virgin shrines in France at the height of the Romanesque period. The majority of original Black Virgins have been destroyed or partially damaged as a result of religious wars, the French Revolution, fire or local accident. Few of the survivors remain intact due to repainting and other restorations. A true Black

Virgin would have been painted black at the time it was created.¹¹ The immense prestige surrounding these statues in the Middle Ages inspired some communities to paint their local effigy black, hoping this simple act would bring all the attributes of Black Virgin cults to their community, notably a profusion of miracles and a corresponding increase in revenue.¹² Whereas during the Middle Ages the tendency was to transform Virgins into Black Virgins, this trend was reversed in later centuries and many were repainted a different color.¹³

Jacques Huynen has identified characteristics common to all Black Virgins.¹⁴ All were carved in wood primarily during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. All are Virgins in Majesty: an enthroned Mary holds the Christ Child in her lap and both look straight ahead. Since the face of the Virgin reflects neither tenderness nor compassion, often the expression of these Virgins has been referred to as Egyptian, Oriental, or Pharaoh-like. With few deviations, they all share the same dimensions of seventy centimeters high and thirty centimeters wide. The statue of Foy conforms to the majority of these elements. Although the statue was covered with gold and rich ornamentation, the core of the body is carved wood. Its creation parallels that of the earliest Black Virgins since the transformation of the St. Foy statue was an event of the tenth century. Foy is seated in the same rigid pose typical of Black Virgins and her face seems expressionless. While Black Virgins hold the Christ Child on their laps and Foy does not, the position of her outstretched arms has led to debate about whether or not she once held something before her transformation. Foy's statue is eighty-five centimeters tall, which is just slightly larger than the average seventy centimeters of Black Virgins. It has

even been pointed out that the crown of the Black Virgin of Le Puy seems to have shared similarities with that of Foy in its ornamentation.¹⁵

Even the use of the Foy statue as a reliquary relates to Black Virgins, as these were also sometimes reliquary statues. In addition to the Clermont Black Virgin reliquary, the most famous Black Virgins, those of Chartres and Le Puy, were linked to important relics of Mary.¹⁶ Notre Dame la Brune of St. Philbert in Tournus and the Black Virgin of Beaune are both reliquaries.¹⁷ The Rocamadour Virgin also was designed to contain relics.¹⁸ Notre Dame de Vauclair, a Black Virgin from the second half of the twelfth century, at one time held relics in her wooden body (Figures 30-31).¹⁹

In addition to physical traits, several cult elements were shared by all Black Virgins. They were worshipped in locations frequented since Antiquity and previously associated with pagan deities. Indeed, the Black Virgin seems to have been the Christian incarnation of the goddesses formerly worshipped in these locations. Often these sites are close to rivers, wells, trees or stones which had a known sacred significance to older religious communities. An Eastern element has been incorporated into the legend of almost every Black Virgin. Often, this element is a legend of its origin concerning someone bringing the statue back from the Crusades. Other times, it is comprised by stories of the miraculous salvation of imprisoned Crusaders. All Black Virgins attracted significant numbers of pilgrims, and the majority were situated along the major routes to the shrine of St. James in Compostela. Almost all are connected with Benedictine abbeys. Recipients of miracles associated with Black Virgins are always some combination of Crusaders, children, merchants and seafarers. The Black Virgin is known for curing infertility, as well as frequent resurrections of stillborn children, often for only a short period of

time so they could be baptised. Among the rituals associated with their cults, there is always at least one element which escapes any traditional Catholic explanation.

Many theories about the origins of these Black Virgins attempt to account for their strange color. Some members of the Roman Catholic Church claim that the images were blackened from the smoke of candles burned as offerings. Since parishioners became accustomed to the black image, it was repainted black when necessary to maintain it.²⁰ The most obvious hole in this argument is that while the hands and faces of Black Virgins are dark, the clothing has not suffered similar discoloration. Another question one might ask is why a similar “blackening” has not affected images of other venerated saints. For while other figures are sometimes represented as black, the instances are rare and not nearly as common.²¹ And finally, if an effort were to be made to repaint the statue, one might wonder why shades of pink and white would not be used to return it to its “original” color, rather than black in order to maintain its “altered” state.

Other less common arguments include the assertion that Mary would have been sunburned because she lived in a hot climate. Portraits of her attributed to St. Luke are offered as proof, and some of the Black Virgin statues themselves are even said to have been created by St. Luke. As more than one scholar has pointed out, however, this is circular reasoning. (“Why are the portraits brown? Because Mary was brown. How do we know? Because of the portraits.”)²² Another assertion is that Black Virgins were made by Eastern, dark-skinned people in an effort to make Mary in their own image. Begg refutes this with the following:

In fact there is no ancient tradition in Asia or Africa according to which Mary is represented as black. Even in Ethiopia she is generally shown as much lighter colored than the majority of the indigenous population. Furthermore, Black Virgins, though often reputed to have been brought back from the Crusades...are considered to be of local workmanship.²³

Another argument is that sculptors of Black Virgins believed Palestinians were dark-skinned and sculpted these images in black material, such as ebony, creating a prototype for future images. However, fairly constant contact between Western Europe and the Middle East since 600 BC guaranteed that twelfth century French and Spaniards would have been familiar with Jews and Saracens. And almost all Black Virgins are carved of wood, as ebony did not become popular in Western Europe until the thirteenth century.²⁴

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, several popular theories asserted that Black Virgins were a response to an esoteric or mystical interpretation of Scripture.²⁵ These scholars offered chemical explanations for the blackening of these effigies. Some claimed it was due to the oxidation of metals, particularly silver, which frequently covered Romanesque effigies.²⁶ However, there are several examples of silverplated Virgins in Majesty which have never blackened.²⁷ Others claimed lead salt used in the composition of certain coloring agents eventually turned to black due to contact with the atmosphere.²⁸ Related theories attempt to explain the blackening of these statues through cult rituals associated with them. For example, the Black Virgin of Le Puy was washed every year with a sponge soaked in wine. According to some, the repetition of this process resulted in the blackening of the statue. Documents concerning heresy proceedings held in Dijon in 1591 state that the Black Virgin of Dijon was periodically rubbed with oil. However, while these rituals might discolor the statues, they would

not blacken them.²⁹ It has also been suggested that Auvergne artisans left wood under water for several years in order to harden it and asserts that this blackened it. However, since almost all statues created in the Middle Ages were painted, the natural color of the wood was irrelevant. The blackening of the wood has also been attributed to sun exposure. This argument has the same flaw as many others: why would only the face and hands darken?³⁰

Since these arguments for natural occurrences as the source for the color of Black Virgins cannot be substantiated, the voluntary intervention of man becomes more credible. These figures were purposely and deliberately painted black, for no chemical reaction could create homogenous black faces and hands while preserving the color of the garments. Many consider Black Virgins to be the last descendants of an Antique cult. While theories have been advanced connecting Black Virgins to cults of ancient Egypt as well as Greco-Roman goddesses, the strongest links seem to be between the Celts and the Black Virgins.

It is widely accepted that Black Virgins are associated with fairly remote regions which were strongly Celtic during the pre-Roman era and in which pagan traditions were preserved due to resistance to Roman contributions. While the degree of resistance to Roman ideas has been disputed, the influence of the Celts on the Christianity of these areas cannot be denied.³¹ Examination of the role of the Celtic mother goddess shows the Celtic influence on the cult of the Black Virgin. The Black Virgin does not appear to be the descendent of any one mother goddess but rather an amalgamation of numerous Celtic deities. For example, Brigit is the Celtic goddess of fertility, and Belisama was honored by the Celts as both a goddess of healing and as the mistress of hot

springs.³² The traits associated with these goddesses are also associated with the majority of Black Virgins.

The link between ancient Celtic beliefs and practices and the medieval cult of the Black Virgin can be further explored by examining the vestiges of Celtic tradition at two popular Black Virgin sites, Chartres and Le Puy. As noted by Julius Caesar, Chartres was the chief seat of Druidic worship in Gaul. There is evidence to suggest that Celtic rituals included sacrifices made to the goddess Belisama on or near the site of the present cathedral.³³ Prior to the evangelization of Gaul and the construction of the cathedral, an altar dedicated to the *Virgo Paritura* existed at which offerings were made to the “virgin who would give birth” (Figure 32).³⁴ This altar was situated in a grotto and associated with a cult statue of wood and a miraculous well. The existence of a thriving cult of a virgin mother goddess made conversion of this cult into a Christian format relatively easy. The bodies of the first Christian martyrs of the region were thrown into the miraculous well, thereby adding Christian relics to the pagan waters. The grotto was incorporated into the first wooden church, and the altar was reconsecrated to the Virgin Mary. After a fire damaged the cathedral in 1020 and reconstruction was necessary, Bishop Fulbert decided the existing wooden structure should be replaced with a stone cathedral. The grotto was left intact as a martyrium, surrounded by a processional way and three side chapels, but a roof of stone was added and it became a crypt beneath the new cathedral.³⁵

At about the same time, a black wooden statue of Mary was placed in the crypt at the altar dedicated to her. This Black Virgin was destroyed in 1793 during the French Revolution, but the original figure survives in stained

glass and tapestry representations (Figure 33).³⁶ Pintard recorded the following observations about the statue in 1681:

The Virgin is seated on a chair, holding her son on her knees, who blesses with His right hand, and in His other holds an orb. His head is bare and His hair quite short. His robe is close-fitting and girdled with a belt; His face, hands, and feet, which are bare, are of a shining grey-ebony color. The Virgin is clad in an antique mantle, shaped like a chausuble. Her face is oval, of perfect design and of the same shining black color. Her crown is plain and only the top is adorned with flowers like small leaves. The chair is one foot in width with four posts, hollowed out at the back and carved. The statue is twenty-nine inches in height.³⁷

The history of the church was recorded at this time in a chronicle which developed the legend of the *Virgo Paritura* and associated it with this Black Virgin. According to the manuscript, a prince had commissioned, before the birth of Mary, a statue of the Virgin holding the Christ Child on her knees which was venerated in a secret place among pagan idols.³⁸ This story served to impart a Christian sensibility to the *Virgo Paritura*, and the Black Virgin of Chartres achieved renown quickly because of the presumed ancientness of the cult.

Like Chartres, Le Puy was also a site important to the Celts. It is believed that the Druids held their councils at Le Puy.³⁹ Mount Anis was an important Druid center and the site of an altar. Under Roman rule a temple to Jupiter was constructed on the site but the altar, an enormous monolith, was retained because of its healing powers. Christianity did not reach this region until the fourth century, and it was not until the end of the fifth century that a primitive church was built on the remains of the Roman temple.⁴⁰ This early church and the later structures which replaced it all retained the druidic monolith, known as the Stone of Fevers, as part of the shrine. It is also likely

that a cult dedicated to the *Virgo Paritura* existed in the pre-Christian era and was the basis for the cult of the Black Virgin which evolved at Le Puy.⁴¹

As at Chartres, legends were recorded which legitimized the Christian cults at this pagan site. In the case of Le Puy, legend has it that in approximately 250 A.D. the Virgin appeared to a woman who sought healing at the Stone of Fevers on Mount Anis and demanded that a sanctuary be dedicated to her on this site.⁴² This eventually led to the construction of the fifth century church and successive structures retained a dedication to the Virgin. The earliest reference to a Black Virgin at Le Puy (Figure 34) is found in a tenth century papal bull declaring the journey to Le Puy a Marian pilgrimage.⁴³ The cult of the Black Virgin was closely associated with that of the Stone of Fevers, and throughout the Middle Ages the stone was located in front of the altar of the Black Virgin in the heart of the sanctuary.⁴⁴

The origins of and practices associated with the cult of the Black Virgin in France are of interest because there are many striking similarities to the cult of St. Foy. First, there are common elements relating to the sites of both Black Virgins and the Conques reliquary. Water is an important element in the sites and legends of Black Virgins. They were frequently discovered near a lake, river, well or fountain.⁴⁵ Many legends include an element of travel, often comprising the discovery of a statue, its subsequent move to a majestic spot, then a miraculous return of the statue to the place of its discovery or an indication of another preferable site for a shrine.⁴⁶ Additionally, imposing mountain ranges are associated with many Black Virgin sites, such as Montserrat or Rocamadour.⁴⁷ In the case of St. Foy, the legend of translation ties into this theme of travel. The water related to her cult is the well just outside the west entrance to the church (Figure 35), and the mountain setting

is common to Black Virgin sites. But perhaps the most striking thing in terms of site is the fact that the reliquary of St. Foy is situated in the heart of Auvergne, the region most heavily populated with Black Virgins.

Black Virgins tended to “specialize” in certain types of miracles, and the recipients of those miracles were frequently Crusaders, children, merchants and seafarers.⁴⁸ Of these four groups, St. Foy was known for assisting both Crusaders and children. Both Black Virgins and St. Foy assisted Crusaders imprisoned by Muslims. Although the healing of children wasn’t something for which St. Foy was particularly known, curing infertility was a specialty she shared with Black Virgins. Most Black Virgins seemed to perform predominately one type of miracle. For example, the Black Virgin of Cantal is known as Notre Dame de Vauclair because she is most associated with healing blindness.⁴⁹ However, the three most widely known Black Virgins, those of Chartres, Rocamadour and Le Puy, are renowned for performing many types of miracles.⁵⁰ The miraculous capabilities of St. Foy also seem to have been wide in scope. In addition to her fame as a worker of miracles of fertility and escape from imprisonment, she was well known for several types of healing and other miracles. But even the strangest and seemingly inexplicable miracles of Foy can be linked to similar miracles performed by Black Virgins or can be better understood through examination of the history of the Black Virgin cult.

Without doubt, the strangest miracle of St. Foy was the resurrection of a mule. While such a miracle is completely beyond the realm of Catholic doctrine, it echoes older pagan cults. For example, Artemis of Ephesus, a Greek goddess often portrayed as black commonly believed to have influenced the cult of Black Virgins, was sovereign of wild animals before she became known

as goddess of the hunt.⁵¹ The Celtic goddess Epona, renowned as protectress of the dead and goddess of the moon, was also patroness of horses.⁵² Additionally, approximately eighty percent of legends concerning the origins of a Black Virgin statue concern a large domestic animal, often a bull or cow.⁵³ While beasts are not associated with the origins of the St. Foy reliquary, such legends may underlie the miracle of the resurrection of the mule.

Like Black Virgins, St. Foy was a symbol of fertility in the largest sense. In times of drought, rural communities prayed to St. Foy as well as Black Virgins, many of whom were associated with sacred wells or other water sources, for rain to promote fertility of crops. Sterile women offered prayers and ex votos to both Black Virgins and to St. Foy hoping to improve their chances of conceiving a child.⁵⁴ Often Black Virgins, and St. Foy as well, were noted for assistance with the delivery of babies. Notre Dame de la Daurade, a Black Virgin of Toulouse, possessed a belt which women borrowed during their labor to ensure a quick and relatively painless delivery.⁵⁵ St. Foy also possessed a belt which was used in rituals to ease the pain of childbirth and was also associated with fertility rituals. In her case, other belts were brought into contact with her holy belt and made sacred while a blessing was recited, so that a maximum number of women could benefit from the powers of the original belt.⁵⁶

The great number of legends which involve a bull discovering a Black Virgin enhanced the reputation of these figures for fertility. These legends and related practices are outside of the realm of Catholic dogma and stem from older mythologies of natural forces, particularly those originating in Mediterranean regions. These older religions typically involve stories of a

bull representing male power and an earth goddess representing female power. For example, bull sacrifices were offered at temples to Cybele and Mithra in the early Roman Empire. Many of these temples were later replaced with sanctuaries to the Virgin.⁵⁷ In Mize, a village in the Languedoc region of France, the feast of the bull is celebrated on August fifteenth, culminating in pilgrimages to shrines of the Virgin.⁵⁸ Also, the symbol of St. Luke is the bull and he is known as the portrait painter of the Virgin Mary.

Although many of the statues were said to have originated in the East and to have been transported by Crusaders, these legends were invented much later to explain the strange appearance of Black Virgins.⁵⁹ However, the association of Black Virgins and St. Foy with the deliverance of prisoners does connect them with the Crusades, as the majority of prisoners were captives of the Saracens. Commonly, prisoners who escaped from their captors with the aid of divine intervention made subsequent pilgrimages to the shrine of the Black Virgin who assisted them and left their manacles as offerings. For example, iron manacles hang near the shrine of the Black Virgin of Rocamadour. The same is true of St. Foy, and so many chains and manacles were left as offerings that grilles which surround the altar were constructed from them.

The cult of St. Foy greatly benefitted from the devotion of several Carolingian royals, including Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. There was also a special relationship between the nobility and Black Virgins. The fact that so many Black Virgins were destroyed during the Revolution attests to their connection to French royalty.⁶⁰ It is well known that the Dukes of Burgundy had a special affinity for the Black Virgin.⁶¹ Two of the men most associated with the Crusades, Charlemagne and St. Louis, were also attached to

the cult of the Black Virgin.⁶² The connection to royalty spread even as far as Spain, where Peter II, King of Aragon, ordered the image of the Black Virgin of Rocamadour painted on the standards his army carried with them to the Battle of las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, from which they emerged as victors over the Muslims.⁶³

Some sites have greater associations with French nobility than others. For example, Chartres enjoyed one of the most advantageous relationships with royalty. Charles the Bald offered the relic of the Virgin's veil to Chartres in 876. This holy veil had been preserved in Constantinople and was presented to Charlemagne by Empress Irene. Every king of France, with the exceptions of Louis XV and Louis XVI, has made a pilgrimage to Chartres.⁶⁴ Le Puy, also, has a special connection to French royalty, as eighteen kings of France in twenty five recorded pilgrimages have journeyed there.⁶⁵ In addition, Pope Urban II made an appeal for the first Crusade at Le Puy in 1095.⁶⁶ Charlemagne is believed to have visited the shrine of the Black Virgin at Rocamadour during his wars with the Saracens. Legend has it that Roland offered his sword, Durandal, to Our Lady of Rocamadour.⁶⁷

Clearly the reliquary statue of St. Foy and the cult associated with it are closely linked to the cult of the Black Virgin which flourished throughout the area surrounding Conques. Although it is debatable which was commissioned first, Étienne II commissioned both the creation of a Black Virgin for Clermont Cathedral and the transformation of the reliquary of St. Foy in the mid-tenth century. It is believed that there was an active workshop at Clermont which created many of the Auvergne Black Virgins, including those of Clermont, Orcival, Marsat and Le Puy.⁶⁸ It is therefore very likely that the reliquary

statue of St. Foy was also created at this workshop and this may partially account for the traits the reliquary shares with Black Virgins. However, the similarities between go beyond physical comparisons. The cult of St. Foy shares with that of Black Virgins a special capacity as patroness of Crusaders and the infertile and both cults are indebted to the older cults of pagan, particularly Celtic, goddesses once worshipped in Auvergne. Royal patrons were also common to both cults, as Charlemagne and other nobles were benefactors of Black Virgin shrines as well as the Conques monastery.

Notes

¹ Remensnyder 369. The only exception to the fact that St. Foy was associated with the reliquary is that she almost always assumes the form of a beautiful young girl in visions. Bernard of Angers only recorded one instance in which she appeared in the form of the menacing statue.

² Taralon 10.

³ Molinier as quoted in Taralon 11.

⁴ Sumption 63.

⁵ Ward 37 and Sumption 51-52.

⁶ Ward 37. See also Delcor 36. Delcor agrees that the Black Virgin of Clermont is the oldest reliquary Madonna but believes the relics were not placed in it until 959. See also Sophie Cassagne-Brouquet, Vierges Noires: regard et fascination, 2nd ed. (Rouergue: n.p., 1990) 81-82. Cassagne-Brouquet agrees it was commissioned around 946 and states that it is the oldest Virgin in Majesty known in the West.

⁷ The Virgin of Clermont was apparently a great influence on other Black Virgins as well. See Cassagne-Brouquet 20, 36, 81-82. The statue was created to house *une boucle de cheveux* of the Virgin. The statue disappeared during the French Revolution and was not discovered until 1972 in the mortuary chapel of a bishop at Clermont-Ferrand cathedral. Cassagne-Brouquet states that Notre Dame du Port de Clermont-Ferrand and the Black Virgin of Le Puy were the two most influential Black Virgins in terms of setting a stylistic standard for other statues of the same nature.

⁸ Ean Begg, The Cult of the Black Virgin (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) 3.

⁹ Cassagne-Brouquet 20. Regions with large numbers of Black Virgins include Auvergne, Velay, Limousin, Gevaudan, Rouergue and Quercy.

¹⁰ Cassagne-Brouquet 17.

¹¹ Huynen 27.

¹² Huynen 28.

¹³ Huynen 28.

¹⁴ Jacques Huynen, L'Énigme des Vierges Noires (Paris: Garnier, 1991) 30-35.

¹⁵ Cassagne-Brouquet 129. From the surviving drawings of the Black Virgin of Le Puy it is evident the crown was decorated with Antique cameos and precious stones.

¹⁶ Cassagne-Brouquet 83.

¹⁷ Cassagne-Brouquet 102, 104.

¹⁸ Cassagne-Brouquet 100.

¹⁹ Cassagne-Brouquet 2. During a 1954 restoration the black paint was removed.

²⁰ Begg 6.

²¹ Huynen 17. Only one statue of Christ, *Hormis le Christ de Saint-Flour*, has been repainted black. See also Begg 6-7. Begg notes other figures sometimes represented as black (but not nearly as often as the Virgin) include St. Anne, St. Mary the Egyptian, the Queen of Sheba, Sara the Egyptian, St. Catherine of Alexandria, the Libyan sibyl, one of the Magi, the executioner of John the Baptist, St. Maurice and his Theban legion.

²² Begg 7-8. Begg is referring here to an argument first refuted by Emile Sallens in his book *Nos Vierges Noires. Leurs Origines* (Paris, 1937).

²³ Begg 7-8.

²⁴ Begg 7-8.

²⁵ Cassagne-Brouquet 139, 169.

²⁶ Cassagne-Brouquet 169.

²⁷ Cassagne-Brouquet 170-172.

²⁸ Cassagne-Brouquet 169-170. This type of explanation was not limited to the blackening of statues. The darkening of frescoes at Montmorillon and Jouhe-sur-Gartempe has been explained by sulfuric acid in the air. However, in these cases as well the chemical explanations do not hold up. At Jouhe-sur-Gartempe, only nine of thirteen figures are black. The other four have light skin tones. These nine dark figures all originate from the Orient. Thus, there appears to have been a conscious manipulation of tones rather than an accidental chemical reaction.

²⁹ Cassagne-Brouquet 173.

³⁰ Cassagne-Brouquet 173-174.

³¹ Cassagne-Brouquet 24 and Lauranson-Rosaz 267. Cassagne-Brouquet claims that the archeological discoveries of a Temple of Mercury at the summit of Puy-de-Dome and of pottery workshops in Roman Gaul disprove claims that the Massif Central was a pole of Roman resistance. But regardless of the degree of Roman infiltration, the longevity of Celtic beliefs is undeniable. For example, as Lauranson-Rosaz points out, the dedication of the temple at Puy-de-Dome to Mercury was the Romanization of the older cult of Lug, a Celtic warrior god popular in this region.

³² Cassagne-Brouquet 141.

³³ Cassagne-Brouquet 145.

³⁴ H. M. Gillett, *Famous Shrines of Our Lady*, vol. 1 (Westminster [Maryland]: Newman Press, 1952) 59; Huynens 192; Cassagne-Brouquet 143-145.

³⁵ Gillett 59.

³⁶ Gillett 61. The figure was not replaced until 1857. The replacement was created by the Parisian sculptor Fontenelle.

³⁷ Pintard as translated by and quoted in Gillett 60-61.

³⁸ Cassagne-Brouquet 144.

³⁹ Huynen 55.

⁴⁰ Cassagne-Brouquet 146-147.

⁴¹ Huynen 69.

⁴² Cassagne-Brouquet 146. See also Gillett 83. This woman to whom the Virgin appeared appealed to the Bishop, St. George of Velay, to carry out her demands. He visited the site in the summer and was amazed to find snow outlining the perimeter of a church. He preserved this outline with a hedge that day, and returned the following day to find that the hedge had turned into flowers. Two centuries later Vosy, Bishop of Velay, was served another request for a chapel on this spot by a paralytic woman cured on the popular stone who had seen an apparition of the Virgin. Work began on the structure in 493. When it was completed, the Bishop journeyed to Rome in order to obtain relics and consecrate the church. While traveling he met two men who told him his journey was unnecessary, gave him a parcel, and told him to return. When he reached Mount Anis he found the chapel ablaze with lights and filled with music and incense, believed to be the result of heavenly consecration.

⁴³ Huynen 18-19, 69. The original Black Virgin statue probably dates to the eleventh or twelfth centuries. It was destroyed during the French Revolution and replaced with a copy in the nineteenth century.

⁴⁴ Huynen 166. The stone was later moved to a less central location. It is now in the narthex.

⁴⁵ Cassagne-Brouquet 43-44.

⁴⁶ Cassagne-Brouquet 55-56. See also Gillett 72 for an example of this type of legend (the Black Virgin of Montserrat).

⁴⁷ Montserrat is situated among a block of mountains four thousand feet high. Montserrat is similar to Conques in that there is also a water source close to the entrance of the abbey (in the square in front of it) which is known as the Fountain of the Gate as well as the Fountain of Miracles. See Gillett 70, 75-76.

⁴⁸ Huynen 30-35.

⁴⁹ Cassagne-Brouquet 210-211. Vauclair is derived from *voit clair*.

⁵⁰ Cassagne-Brouquet 209.

⁵¹ Cassagne-Brouquet 150.

⁵² Gerhard Herm, The Celts (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975) 159; Cassagne-Brouquet 141.

⁵³ Cassagne-Brouquet 52.

⁵⁴ Darcel 28. One recorded example of an offering made to St. Foy in hopes of conceiving a child is that of Angiarde, wife of Hugues de Balnes, who offered two villages to the monastery in order to procure St. Foy's assistance in obtaining an heir. This offering was made sometime before 954.

⁵⁵ Cassagne-Brouquet 155. This same belt is sometimes attributed to Isis. Hera possessed this same attribute and power as well.

⁵⁶ Servières 134-135. See also Darcel 27-28. The belt which exists today is likely a thirteenth century creation.

⁵⁷ Cassagne-Brouquet 53. See also Delcor 40-42.

⁵⁸ Cassagne-Brouquet 54.

⁵⁹ Cassagne-Brouquet 68. Legends stating these statues were created in Jerusalem and brought back by Crusaders were common, but at that time Jerusalem was under the rule of Islam and thus was subject to laws forbidding human representation. Also, examination of the statues has ruled out this theory. See Gillett 71-72, 86 for examples of this type of legend. Ancient chronicles claim that the Black Virgin of Montserrat came from Jerusalem to

Barcelona via Egypt, and then was transported to Montserrat in order to escape Saracen profanation. Also, there is a legend that St. Louis brought a Black Virgin, believed to have been sculpted by the prophet Jeremiah, from Egypt to Le Puy.

⁶⁰ For example, the Black Virgins of Le Puy and Chartres were both destroyed during the French Revolution. See Cassagne-Brouquet 83.

⁶¹ Cassagne-Brouquet 35.

⁶² Cassagne-Brouquet 62.

⁶³ Cassagne-Brouquet 229.

⁶⁴ Gillett 60. Others who journeyed to Chartres include Pope Pascal II, Pope Innocent II, Pope Alexander III, St. Anselm, St. Thomas of Canterbury, St. Bernard, St. Francis de Sales and St. Vincent de Paul.

⁶⁵ Gillett 85. Outside of Italy there isn't a shrine visited by more Popes either. See also Huynen 20. Huynen claims fourteen kings of France, not eighteen, have visited this shrine.

⁶⁶ Huynen 76.

⁶⁷ Gillett 93-94. An ancient sword, most likely not Roland's, was destroyed during the French Revolution. A model of the original now rests in a rock at the door of the chapel of the Black Virgin.

⁶⁸ Remensnyder 89. The attribution of the Black Virgins of Orcival, Marsat and Le Puy to this workshop are based on comparisons to the Virgin on the tympanum of the Clermont-Ferrand cathedral.

CONCLUSION

The popularity of the cult of St. Foy during the Romanesque centuries, while anomalous during a time of great devotion to male, particularly monastic, saints, can be partly attributed to many elements which supported its growth. The international fame of St. Foy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries resulted from the spread of a much older cult, facilitated by a strategic position on one of four major pilgrimage roads, a close relationship with the cult of St. James at Compostela, and the dissemination of the miracles of St. Foy through the *Liber Miraculorum sancte Fides* by Bernard of Angers. The cult of Foy was established at Conques with the translation of relics sometime between 863 and 883, and the motives for the selection of her relics are uncertain, but may partly be attributed to the fact that she was a relatively unknown Gallic saint. Since the entirety of her relics had been enshrined at Agen, the Conques community could expect little competition from other sites claiming relics of the same saint.

The early development of the cult of St. Foy at Conques was heavily indebted to the patronage of the Carolingians, as the very existence of the monastery can be attributed to their generosity toward the monastic institutions of Auvergne, which was most likely an attempt to gain the support of local religious leaders in their attempt to control this rebellious region. The transformation of the reliquary statue in the mid-tenth century is attributed to a commission by Étienne II, Abbot of Conques and Bishop of Clermont. The cult became centered around this statue, which was literally built upon a pagan base, as the head was originally that of a Roman deified emperor created in the fourth or early fifth century. This reuse of pagan work in a Christian

icon corresponds to the Christianization of folk rituals, the descendants of pagan goddess practices, through their incorporation into rituals associated with the reliquary.

Noble patronage was critical to both the transformation of the reliquary and the development of the cult. The generosity of privileged donors is evident in the imperial crown of the reliquary, the throne which resembles that of Charlemagne at Aix-la-Chapelle, the cloth of Byzantine purple which is wrapped around the head relic, and the Carolingian and Ottonian jewels and cameos which adorn the statue.

The most important of all the factors which contributed to the phenomenal growth of the cult was the identification of St. Foy with attributes of the Virgin Mary, the most revered female saint in Christianity. The ninth century abbey church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, as well as Christ and St. Peter, but it possessed no relics. Although the relics secured for the abbey were those of a child martyr, representations of Foy evoked the Virgin Mary in many ways. The reliquary was transformed in the mid-tenth century into a statue stylistically based on the Black Virgins popular in Auvergne. Later images created for the church continued this conscious emulation of the Virgin. The most dramatic example of this is the tympanum, in which the Virgin and St. Foy are represented in a very similar manner. St. Foy assumes the role of intercessor, a role traditionally associated with the Virgin. Only the empty throne of her reliquary and the hanging manacles indicate that this is Foy rather than the Virgin.

These visual parallels between St. Foy and the Virgin Mary were complemented by the mirroring of cult practices associated with Black Virgins. St. Foy shared with the Black Virgin a propensity for aiding

Crusaders and a reputation as patroness of the infertile. Like Black Virgin cults, that of Foy was centered around a site which had been formerly associated with Celtic goddess cults. Perhaps, then, the reason the Conques monastery rapidly identified with St. Foy rather than St. Vincent of Agen, a more likely patron, was because of the existence of an older goddess cult associated with the site which had survived in folk practices and which readily grew and flourished when channeled into an appropriate Christian saint.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Plate 2. The martyrdom of St. Foy. Nave capital.



Plate 3. Funerary plaque of Abbot Begon.

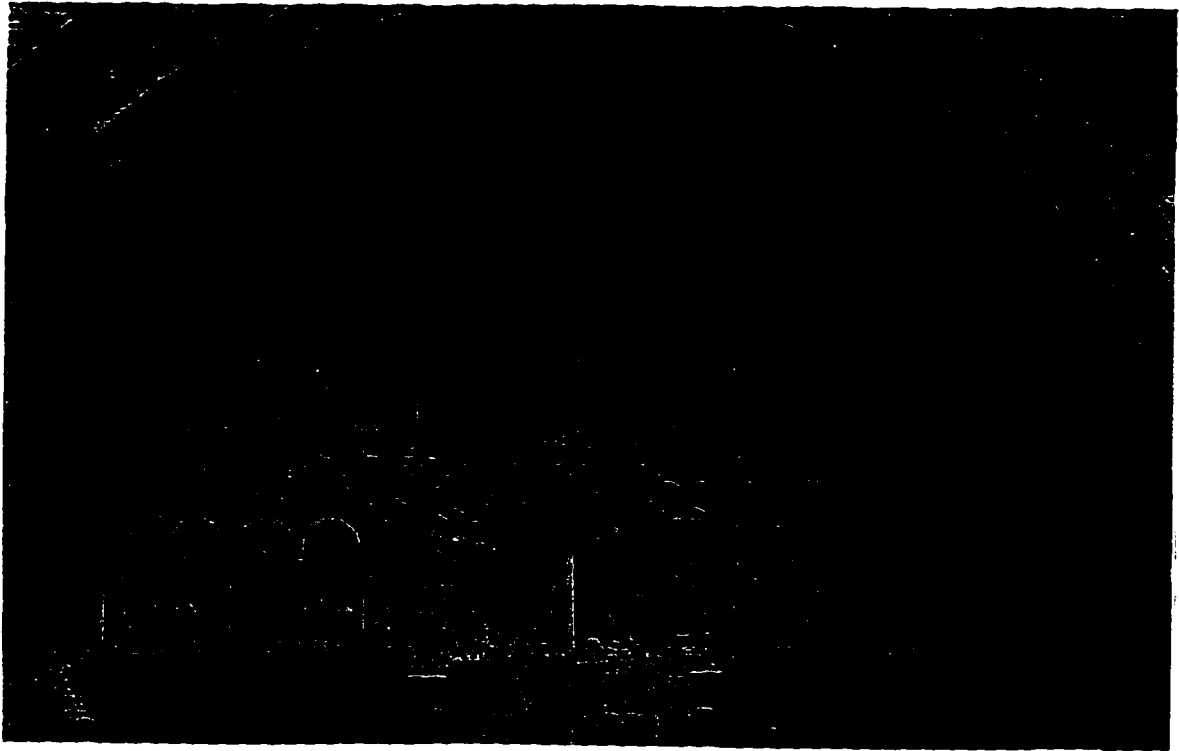


Plate 4. Last Judgment.

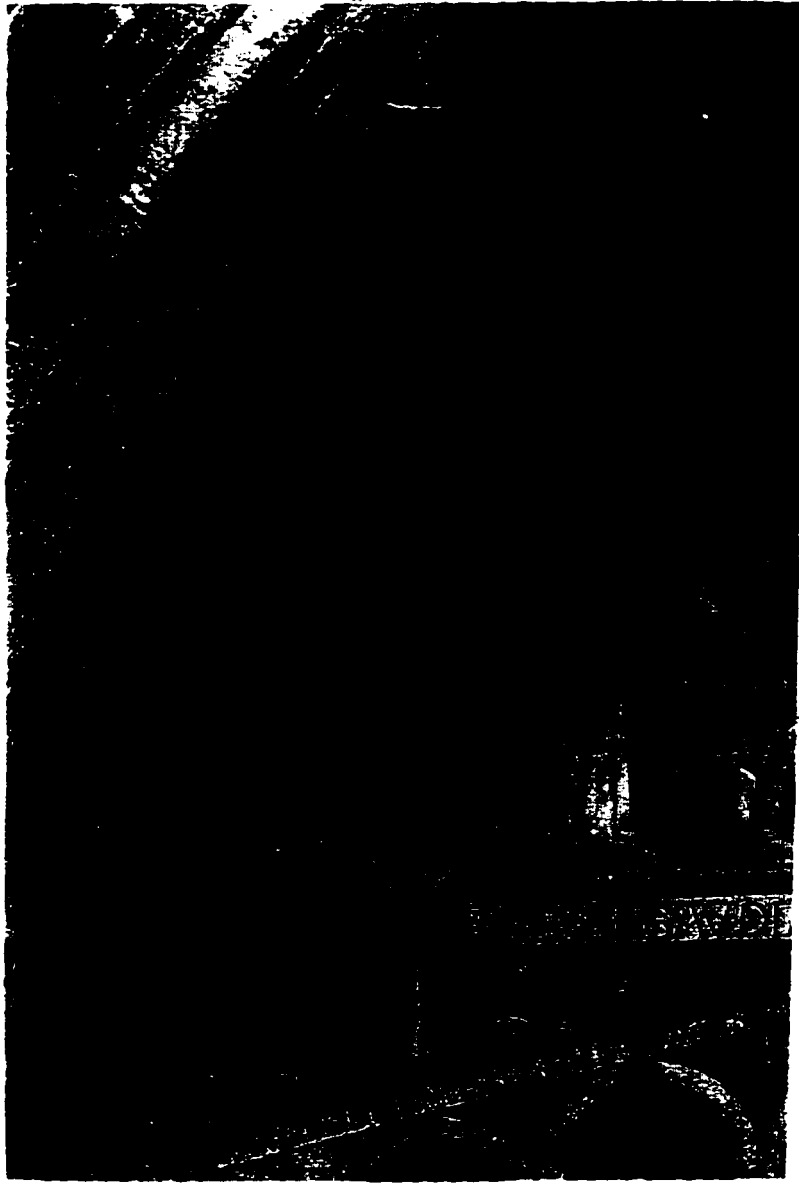


Plate 5. Last Judgment. Detail of St. Foy kneeling before the hand of God.

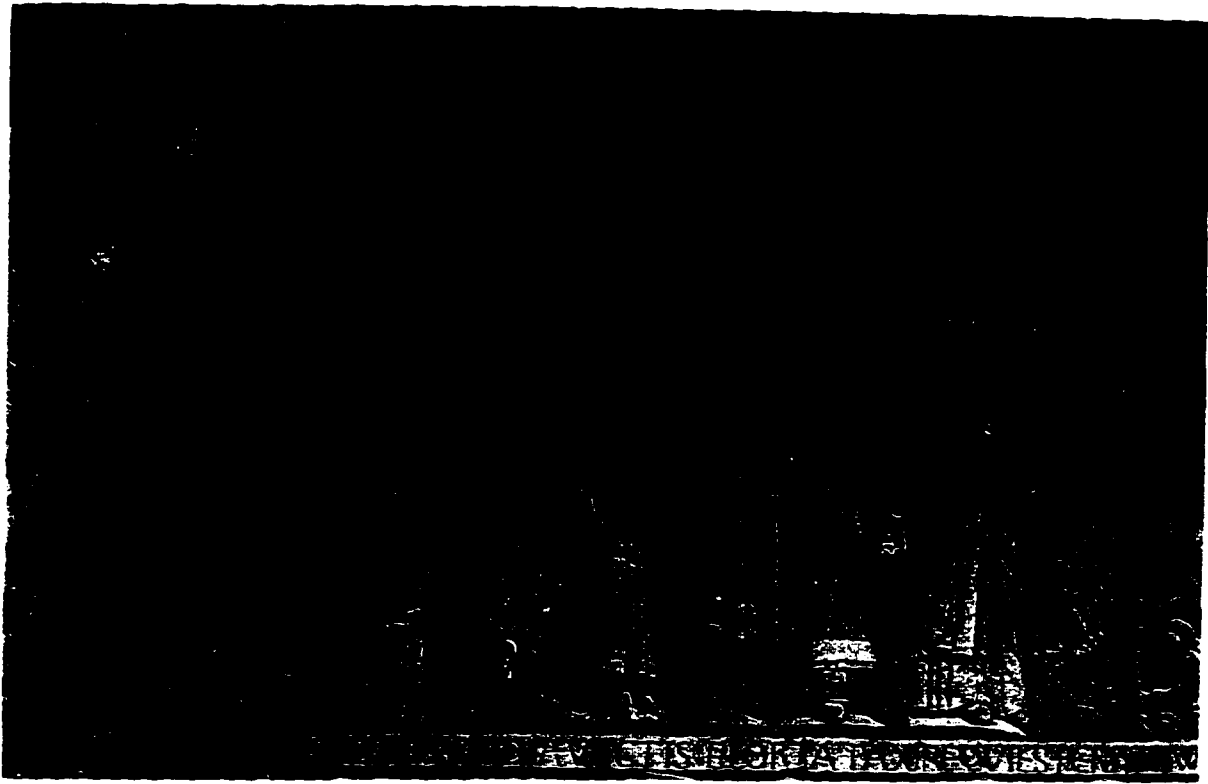


Plate 6. Last Judgment. Detail of the Procession of the Blessed.

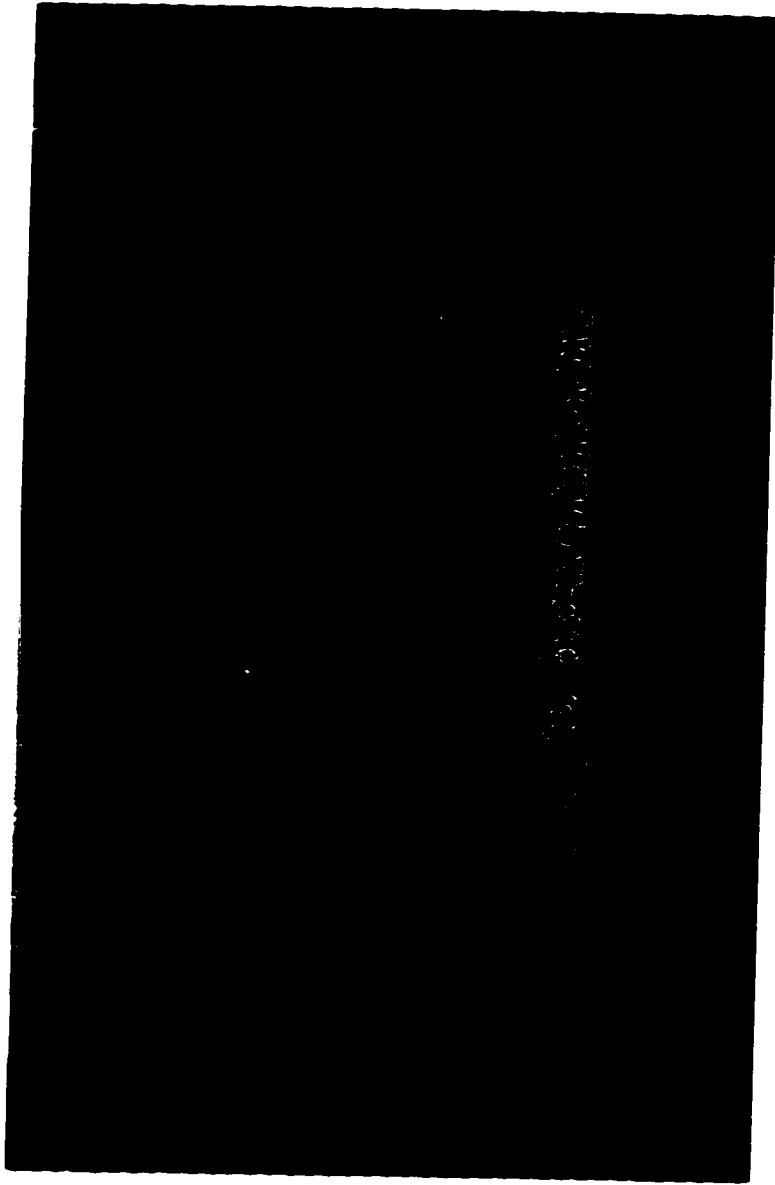


Plate 7. Portable altar table commissioned by Abbot Begon.

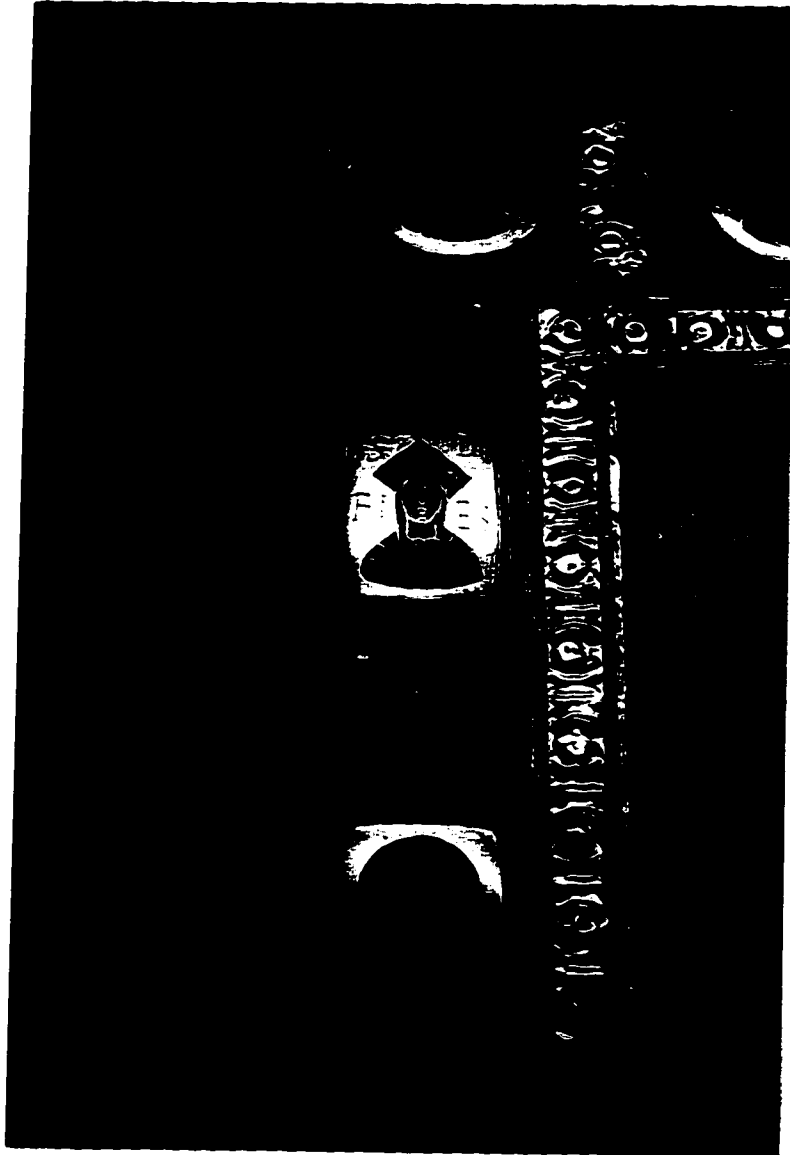


Plate 8. Portable altar table commissioned by Abbot Begon. Detail of St. Foy.

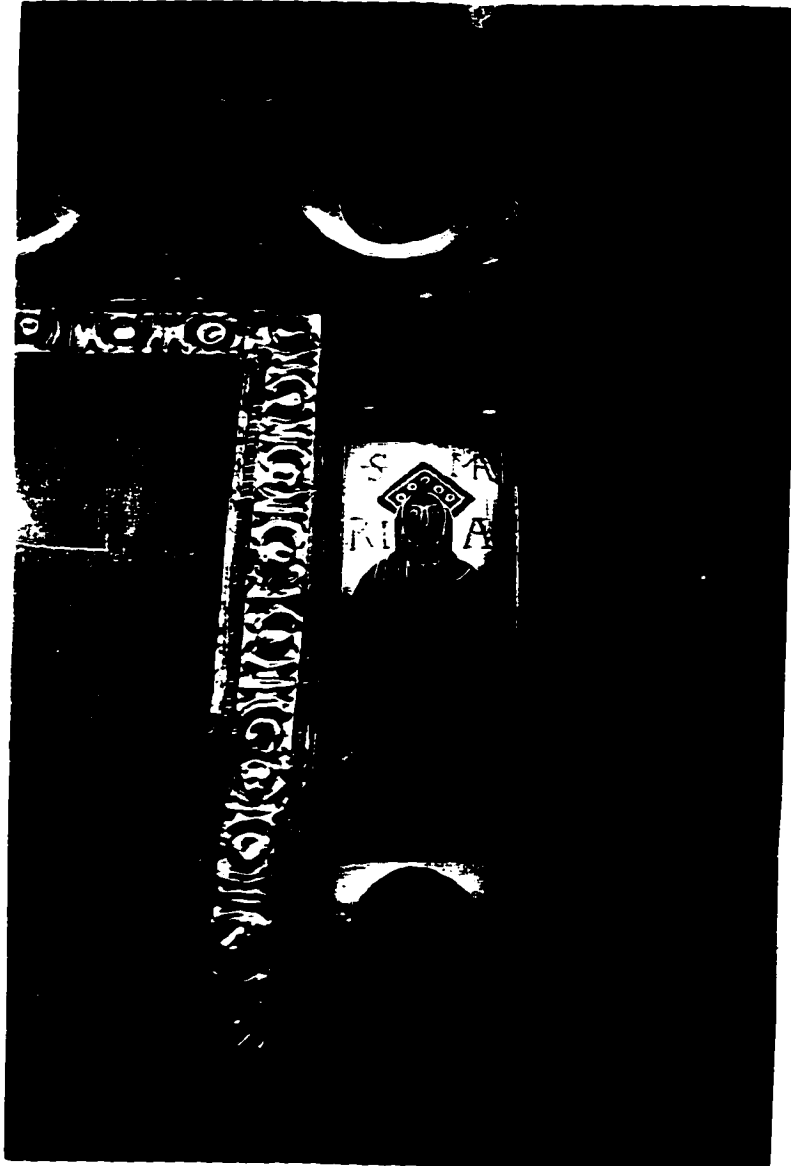


Plate 9. Portable altar table commissioned by Abbot Begon.
Detail of the Virgin Mary.



Plate 10. Conques.



Plate 11. Crusaders. Nave capital.

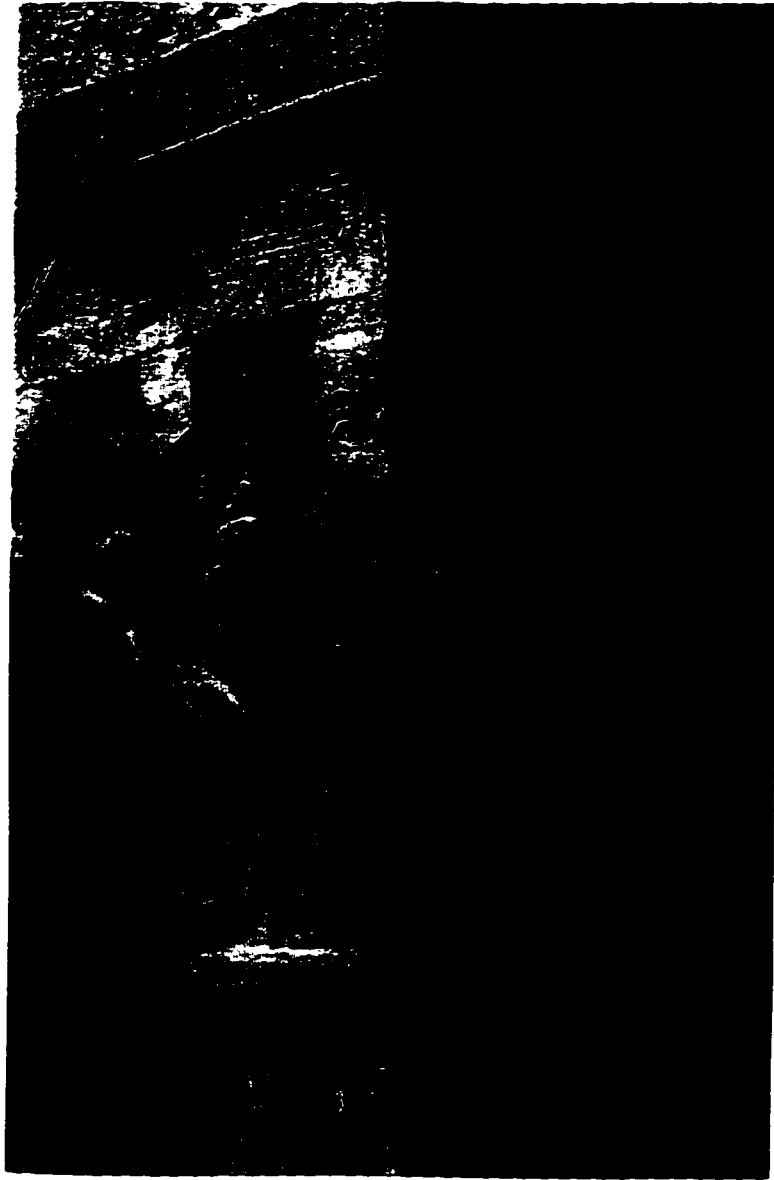


Plate 12. Crusaders. Cloister capital.

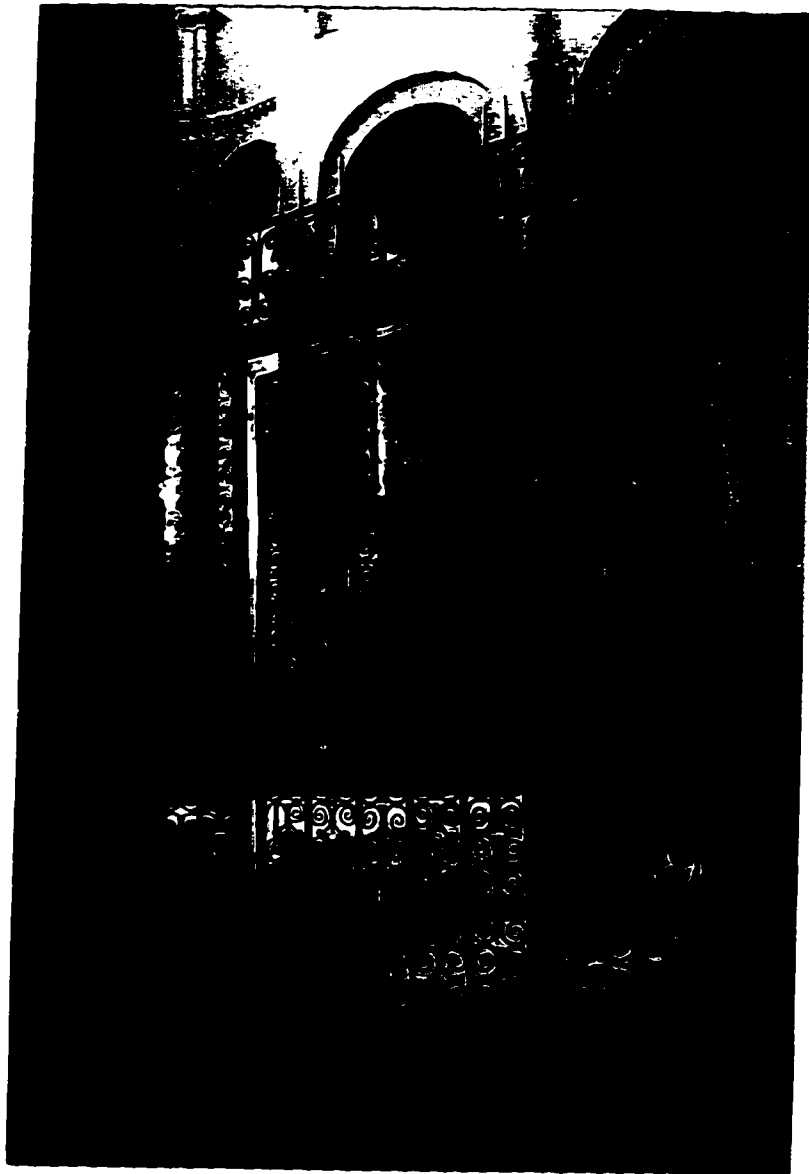


Plate 13. Grill forged from chains offered to St. Foy.



Plate 14. Reliquary statue of St. Foy. Detail of head and upper body.

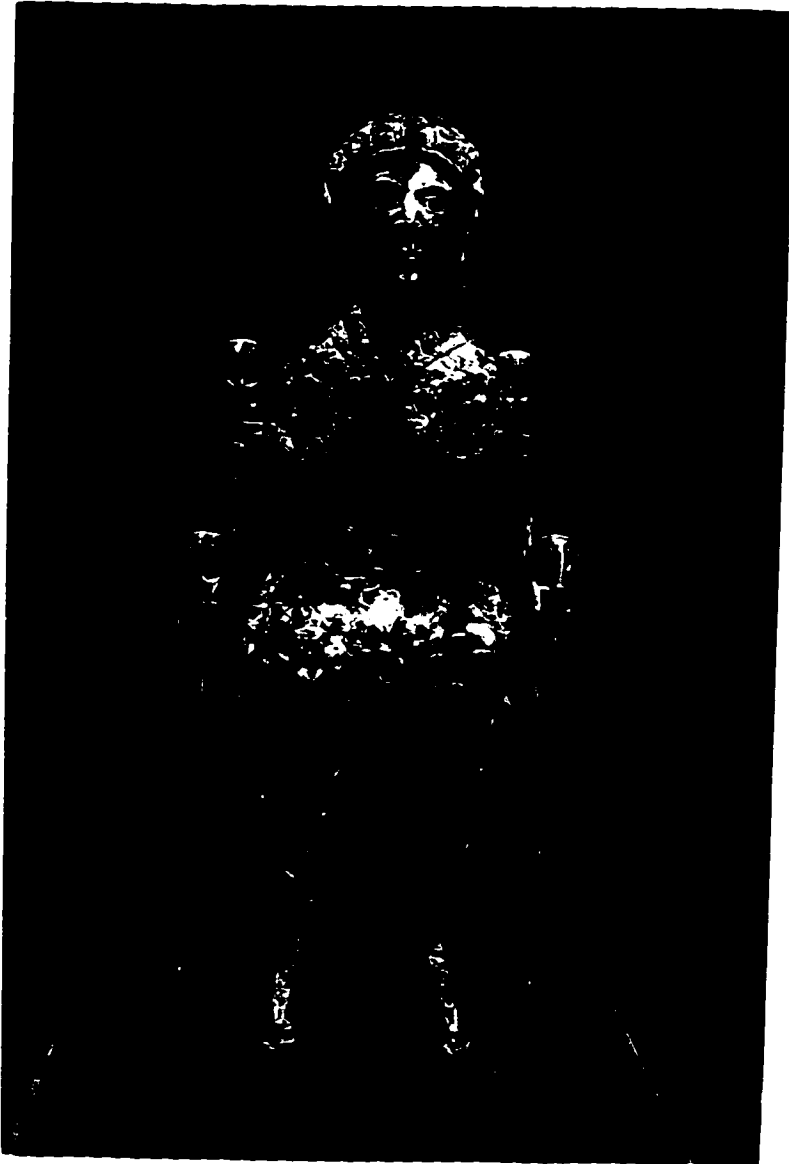


Plate 15. Reliquary statue of St. Foy. Frontal view.

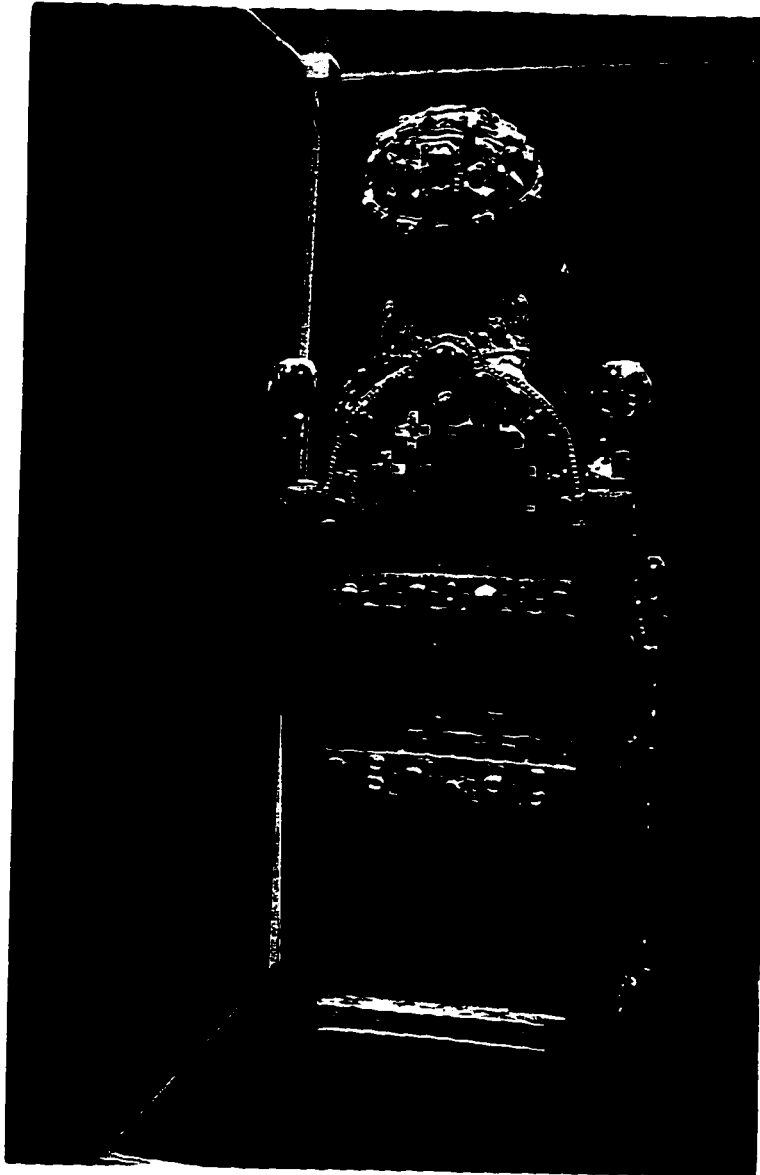


Plate 16. Reliquary statue of St. Foy. Rear view.

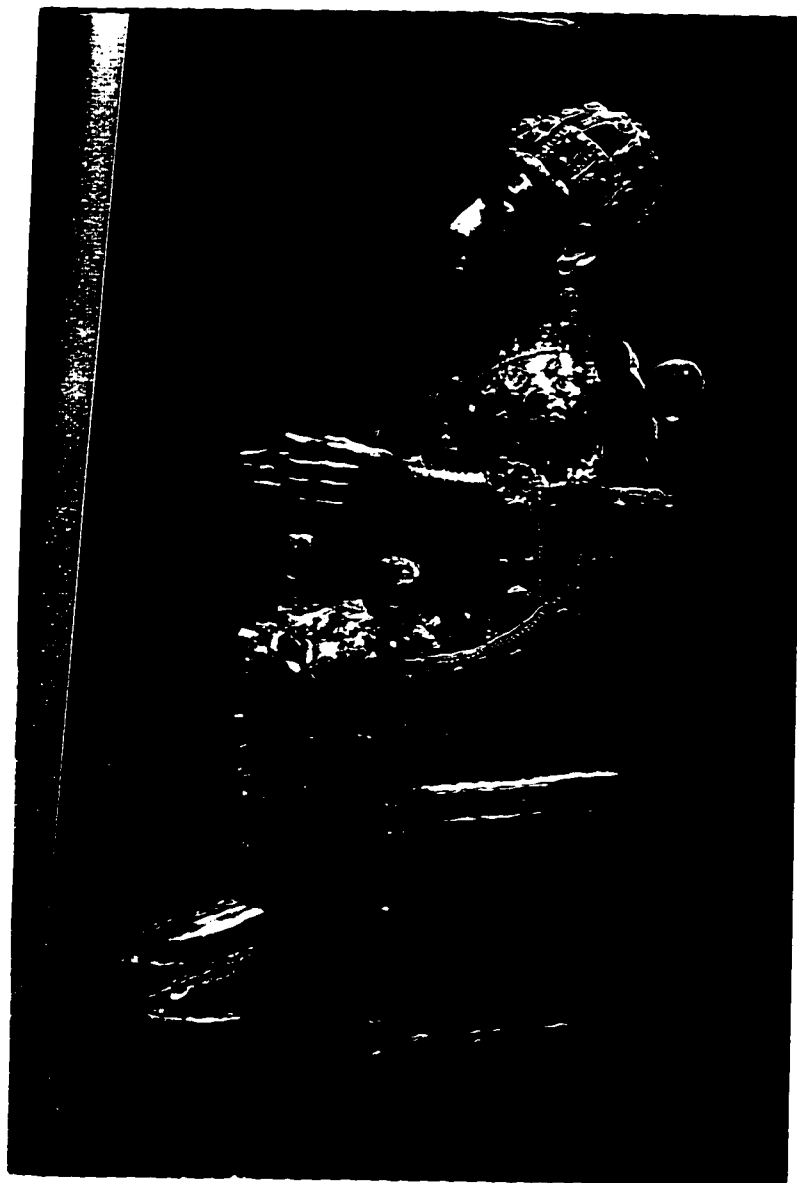


Plate 17. Reliquary statue of St. Foy. Side view.

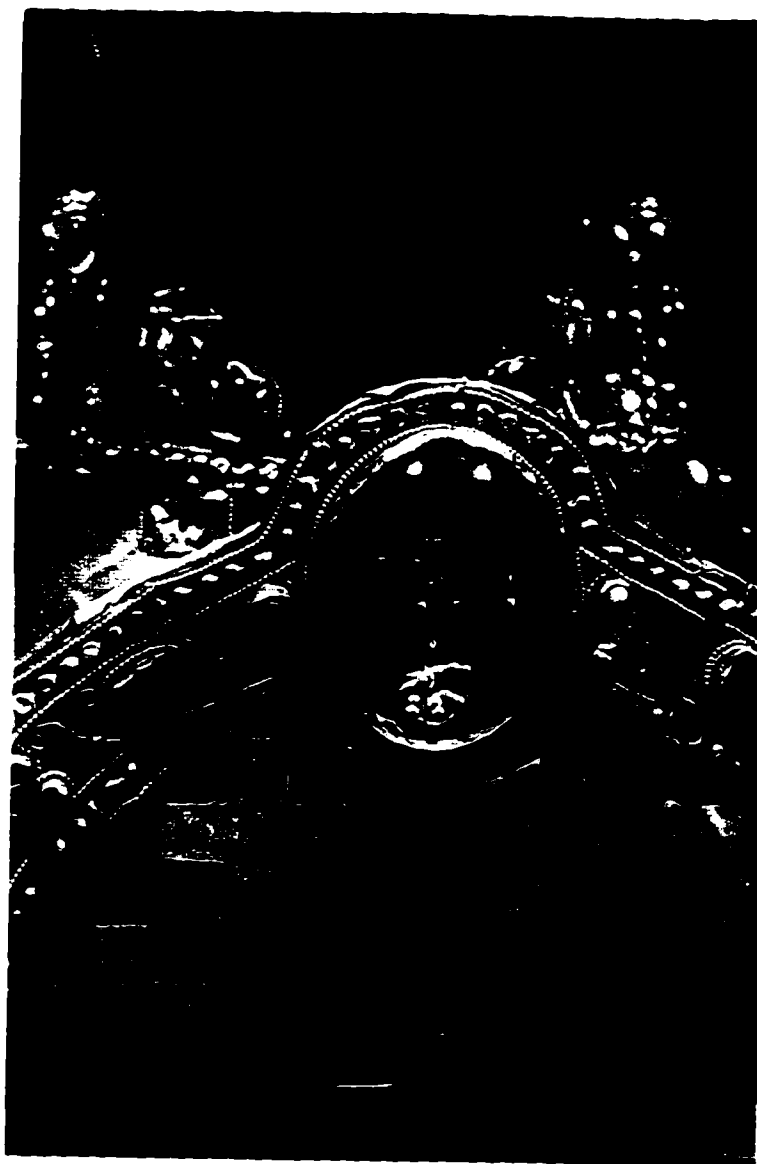


Plate 18. Reliquary statue of St. Foy. Detail of a ninth century rock crystal Crucifixion intaglio.

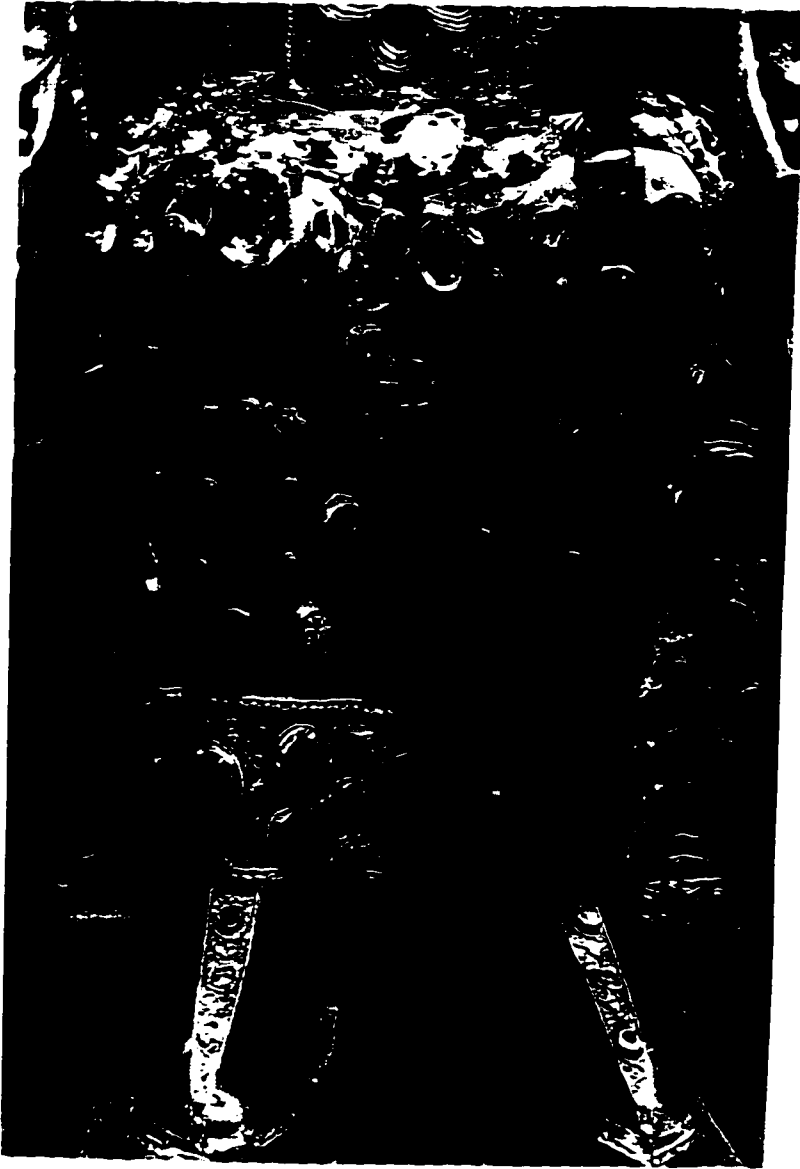


Plate 19. Reliquary statue of St. Foy. Detail of cameos and jewels.



Plate 20. Virgin in Majesty commissioned by Étienne II for Clermont cathedral.



Plate 21. Gold mask of an emperor of the Early Roman Empire incorporated as the face of the reliquary statue of St. Foy.

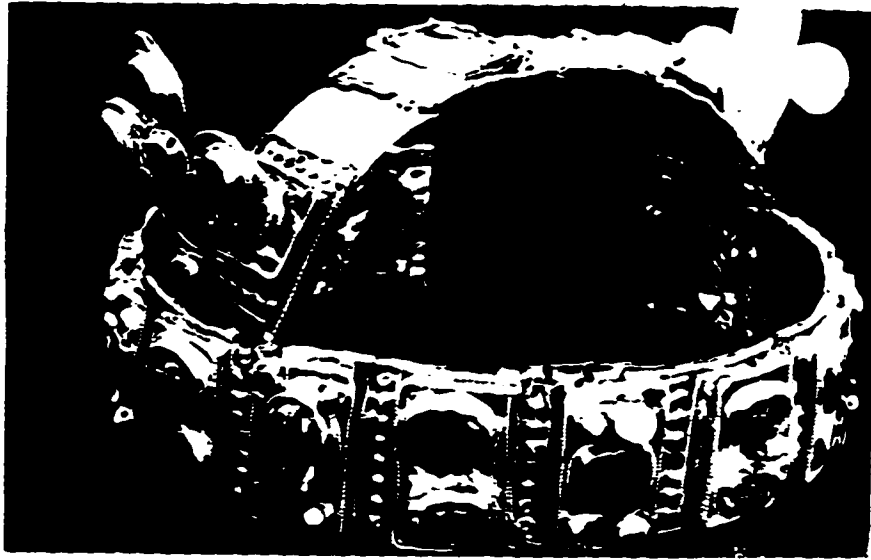


Plate 22. Crown of the reliquary statue of St. Foy. Reconstruction proposed by Jean Taralon.

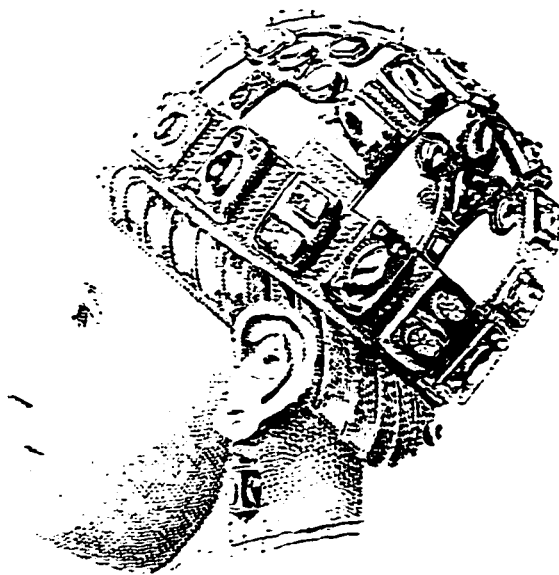


Plate 23. Crown of St. Foy. Nineteenth century drawing.

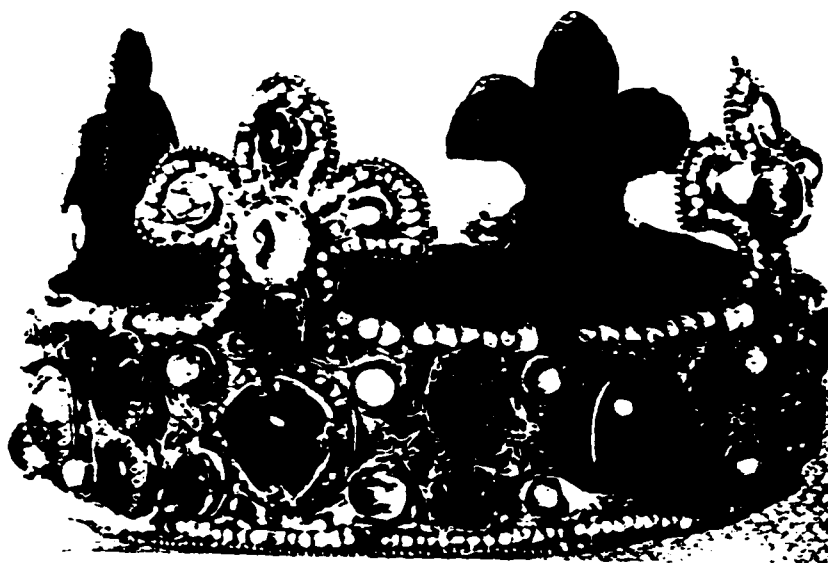
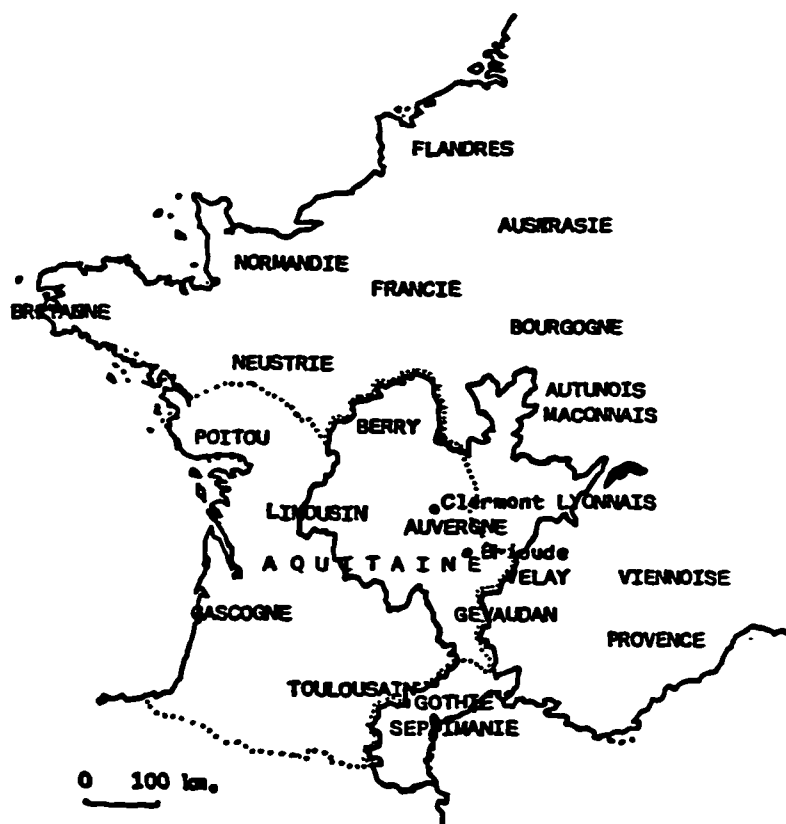


Plate 24. Crown of the Virgin of Essen, Germany.

LA PRINCIPAUTE AQUITAINE DE GUILLAUME LE PIEUX
(893-918)



..... Limites de l'Aquitaine traditionnelle du Ht. Moyen-Age

Plate 25. The principality of Aquitaine under William the Pious (893-918).



Plate 27. Notre-Dame de la Bonne-Mort.

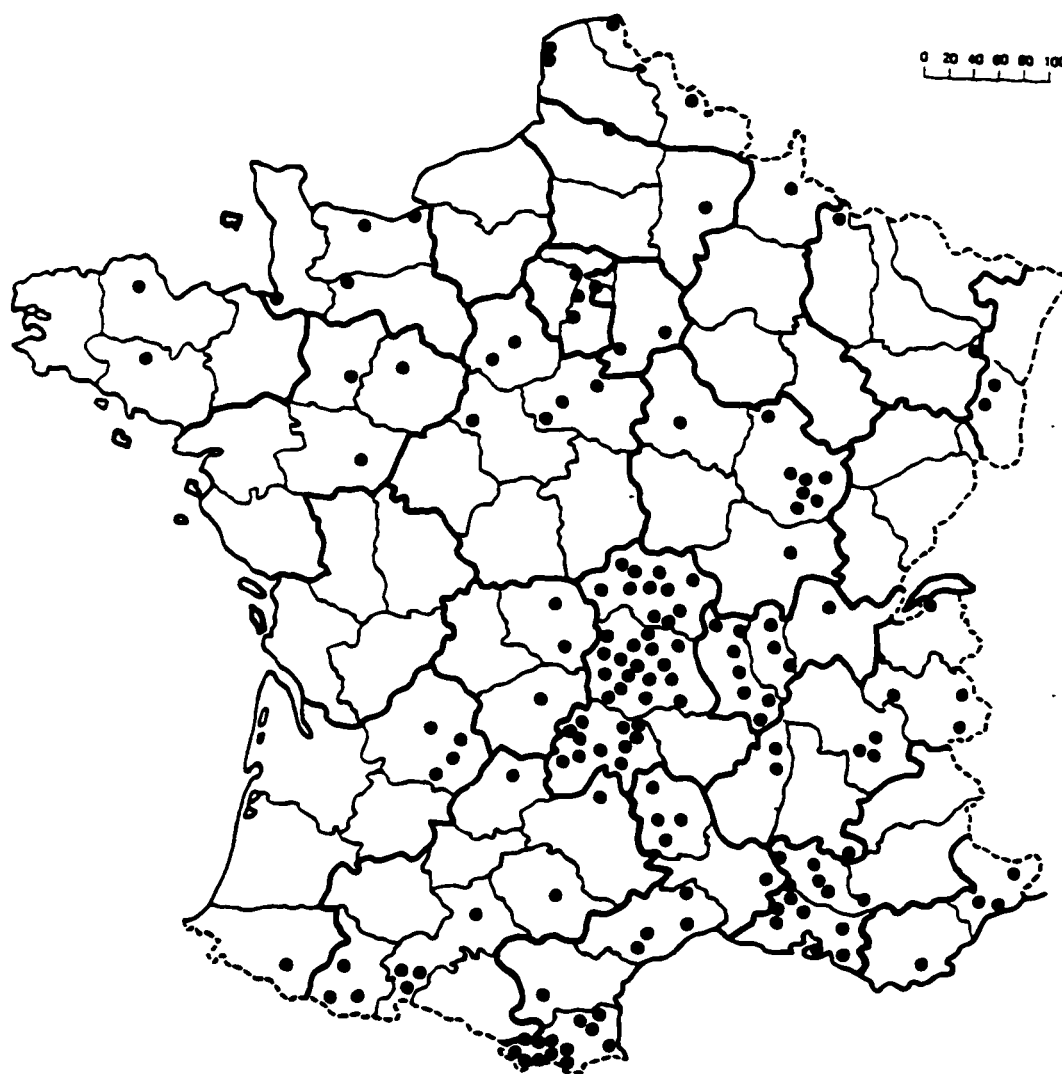


Plate 28. Distribution of Black Virgin statues in France *circa* 1550.

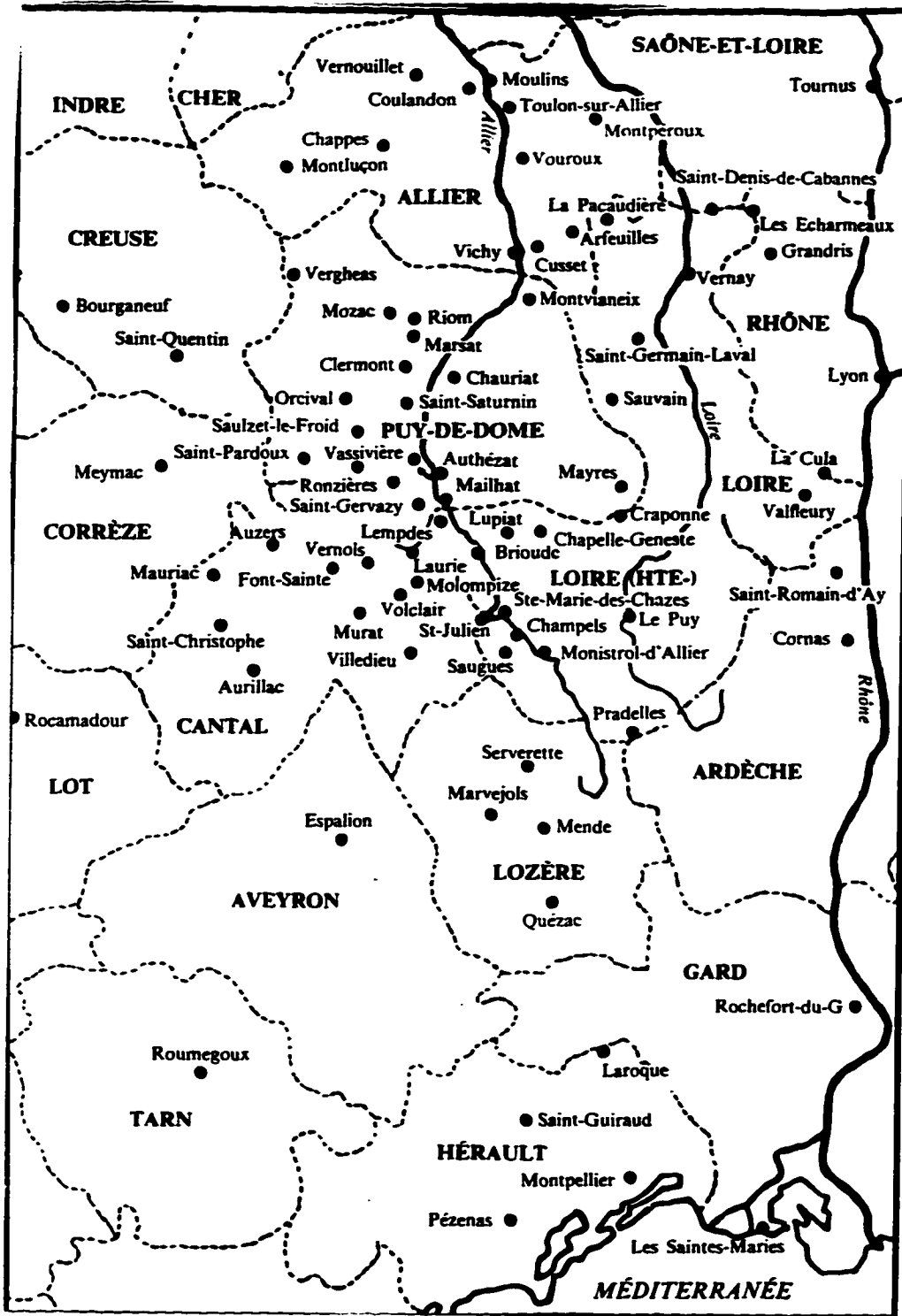


Plate 29. Locations of Black Virgins in central France.



Plate 30. Notre-Dame de Vauclair. Photo taken before 1954 restoration.



Plate 31. Notre-Dame de Vauclair. Photo taken after 1954 restoration.



Plate 32. The *Virgo paritura* honored by the Druids.



Plate 33. The Black Virgin of Chartres.



Plate 34. Notre Dame du Puy.

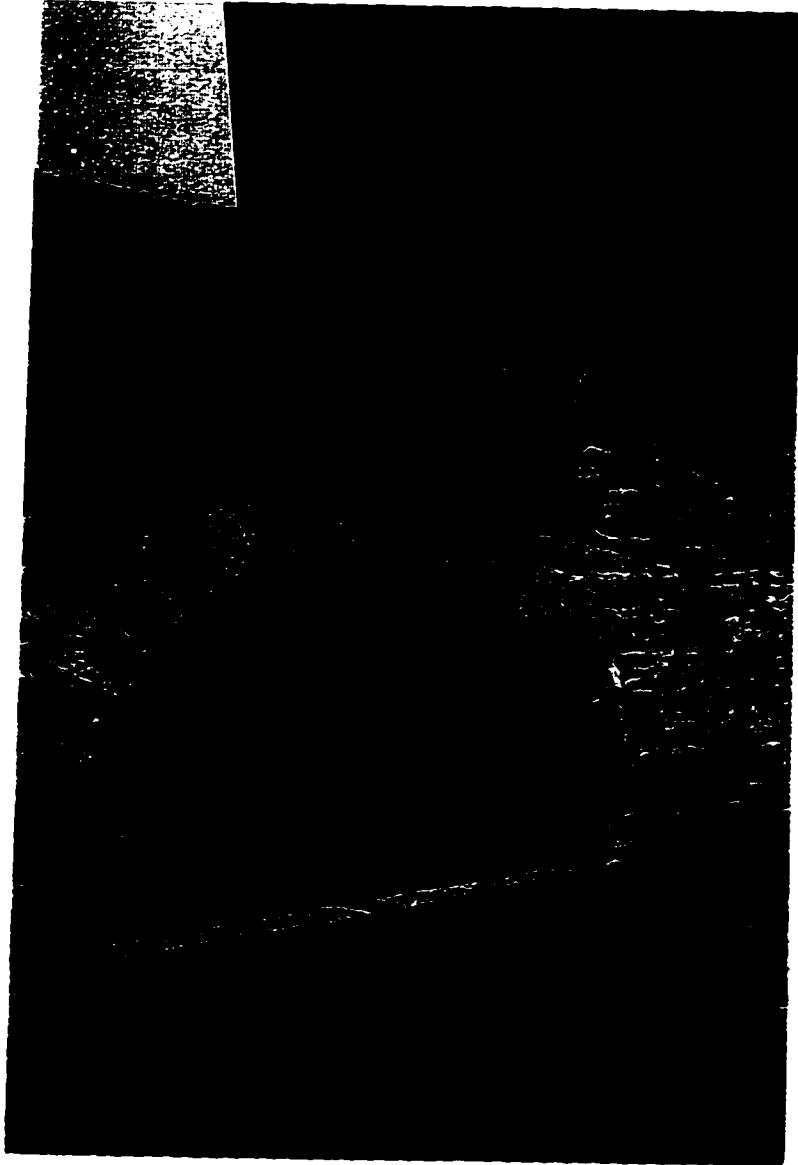


Plate 35. Well close to west entrance.

8/01/97

To Whom It May Concern:

I give my wife, Rosemary Van Lare, permission to reproduce my photographs taken in Conques in her Master's thesis, The Cult of St. Foy at Conques. UMI may supply copies upon request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen Van Lare". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Stephen Van Lare