Slavery and the Systems of Unfreedom in the Church of Merovingian Francia (ca. 500 – 751)

Topic of research

The project studies the existence and functioning of patron-client relationships between the Church of (roughly) sixth- to eighth-century Gaul, and the people of unfree status under its control. The focus lies on the institutional strategies, employed by ecclesiastical actors towards their unfree dependents, and the Church's instrumental depiction of the very existence of unfreedom. These strategies remain largely unstudied in the specialised scholarship.
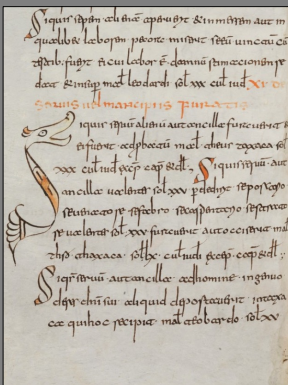
Sources

Narrative sources:
• Hagiographical texts (*Lives* of saints)
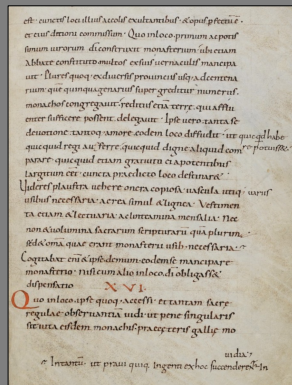• Historiographical texts (historical narration, chronicles)

Legal/Normative sources
• Royal/Secular collections of legal texts
• Collections of canon law
• Charters/Testaments

Other types of sources, e.g.
• Letters
• Inscriptions/Epitaphs

Left: Pactus legis salicae, (legal collection, 6th c.), section XV on the kidnapping of slaves (St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 731, p. 248)

Right: Chapter I.15 of the *Vita Eligii episcopi Noviomagensis* (hagiographical text, 7th c.), section containing a gift of unfree persons to the monastery of Solignac (St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 556, p. 93)

Depiction of religious unfreedom in the Utrecht Psalter (Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS Bibl. Rhenotraiectinae I Nr 32, 83r)

Research questions

1. How is the concept of unfreedom portrayed in ecclesiastical texts? What does it suggest?

2. What mechanisms were used to acquire and bind people of unfree status to the Church?

3. What control mechanisms were used by ecclesiastical actors on people of unfree status?

4. What was the role and position of people of unfree status in the economic and social existence of ecclesiastical institutions?

Methodological approach
• Interdisciplinary study: History, Theology, and Sociology in conversation
• Global approach towards the "Economies of the Temple/Church"
• Study of slavery/unfreedom between tradition (Early Christian, Roman/Ancient) and its contemporary context
• Importance of the internal logic of sources and of authorial intent. Literacy, participatory literacy, and illiteracy as fundamental concepts to understand the intended audience and message of texts.

Research methods
• Study of normative texts on unfreedom and related legal acts
• Study of social practices as described in sources
• Discourse-analytical approach to the language of unfreedom found in the extant sources

Eduard Visintini
GRK 2304, FB 01
Institut für Alte Kirchengeschichte und Patrologie
Betreuung: Prof. Dr. Heike Grieser, Prof Dr. Ludger Körntgen

GRK 2304 Byzanz und die euromediterranen Kriegskulturen