Article

Medieval Arles through the Lives of Its Founding Bishop

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Abstract: Texts recounting the careers of saints were foundational to Christian worship and historical construction in medieval Europe. They were also fluid, living works that evolved over time as individual saints’ stories were revised, adapted, and retold. These texts changed in response to changing contexts in which they were used and understood. This article undertakes a case study to see how the evolution of one urban saint’s legend reflects the history of that saint’s city. Specifically, it analyzes the numerous Latin and vernacular texts produced between the mid-fifth and late twelfth centuries that recount the deeds of Saint Trophimus, first bishop of Arles. It argues that shifts in the saint’s story reflect broad changes in the political, religious, and social life of Arles. It also demonstrates that the number of parties recounting the legend multiplied over time, and that dissonances within the story arose as these groups adapted the tale to their own interests.

Keywords: saints; cities; urban history; hagiography; medieval Europe; Gaul; France; Arles; bishops

1. Introduction

In a lengthy verse text, written perhaps toward the end of the twelfth century, a Provençal poet celebrated the early history of Arles, in what is now southern France. This work, known as the Roman d’Arles, proclaimed the city to be a “second Rome” and envisaged for it a past worthy of that title. Among other highlights, the Roman recounted the foundation of Arles’ church, which it credited to the city’s first bishop, Saint Trophimus. The text situated the saint’s career during the twenty years that, it alleged, the Emperor Tiberius (14–37) had spent in Arles. Moreover, the poet imagined the emperor and the saint coming face to face in a remarkably harmonious encounter. Specifically, the Roman reported that Tiberius summoned Trophimus and asked about his intentions. In the stories of many early Christian evangelizing saints, this interview would lead to conflict and possibly even martyrdom. In the Roman d’Arles, however, the scene ended with the emperor supporting the saint’s mission. Upon learning that Trophimus was a disciple of “the holy prophet” and intended “to preach and convert the people”, Tiberius granted the saint the power to preach and baptize, unmolested, throughout his lands, as well as possession of the imperial palace located in Arles. There, Trophimus established the city’s first church. The Roman d’Arles thus gave the Christian origins of Arles a distinctly imperial flavor.

The vernacular poet adapted this episode from a different version of Trophimus’ story, a Latin vita perhaps written only a couple of decades earlier, in which Tiberius did not feature. This vita likewise depicted Trophimus as a disciple of Christ who evangelized Arles in the first century and founded its church in what had previously been a palace. However, it reported that Trophimus received the palace not from Tiberius, but from a local senator named Theodosius. According to this anonymous hagiographer, Theodosius, a “most pious” man although a pagan, first allowed Trophimus to use his stable for Christian worship. When the saint’s flock outgrew that space, he sought to purchase the senator’s palace and raised funds for that purpose. Yet Theodosius accepted only three of the three hundred gold pieces offered to him in exchange. Trophimus then consecrated the palace for use as a church. In addition, he installed there a holy relic he had brought with him to Arles: blood of the protomartyr Stephen, who was honored as the first of Jesus’ followers to die for their faith when he was stoned to death shortly after the Crucifixion.
own day, this relic still belonged to Arles cathedral, where it was celebrated prominently, in part because the church was dedicated to Stephen. This Latin author did not link the city’s Christian origins to the Roman emperors, but instead emphasized the continuity of its cathedral from Trophimus’ time to the twelfth-century present. The Provençal poet then reframed this tale by transforming Senator Theodosius into Emperor Tiberius and omitting any reference to Stephen’s blood.

As the contrast between these texts illustrates, Trophimus’ story was recounted multiple times, and could change from one telling to the next. Details about his career first appeared in papal correspondence in the fifth century. His first Latin vita, likely written in the sixth century, then drew on those sources to spin a much more elaborate tale. Over the following six or seven centuries, this account evolved as various Latin and Provençal authors reworked it both in new versions of the saint’s vita and texts—like the Roman d’Arles—that did not focus primarily on Trophimus. Throughout these successive retellings, Trophimus figured consistently as the first bishop of Arles, who labored to convert the city and establish its church. This information formed the core of his legend, that is, the story of his life and career. Yet that legend remained fluid, for details of his background and deeds varied from text to text. Just as Theodosius the senator could turn into Tiberius the emperor, so the saint’s other associates, too, were subject to change. The precise nature and outcome of his efforts also differed from text to text: some authors credited Trophimus with immediate success, others with initial setback, and one claimed that his evangelization ultimately failed. The changeable nature of Trophimus’ story reveals that the religious history of Arles was not entirely stable in the Middle Ages.

This article explores that mutability by considering the different tales told about Trophimus from the mid-fifth century to around 1200. It is possible to trace the story’s evolution thanks to the work of scholars who dated and edited the various texts that feature or mention Trophimus. Chief among these scholars is Anke Krüger, who examined the production of all his vitae and edited three of those written in Latin. Krüger also identified the period and milieu in which each version of Trophimus’ legend most likely took shape, although she did not analyze the significance of the text’s evolution—in part because Trophimus was just one of many saints whose dossiers she examined. Nevertheless, her work remains the most thorough and reliable study of his legend. The vernacular works that feature Trophimus, the Roman d’Arles and the Roman de Saint Trophime, were edited in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their editors provided brief overviews of the texts’ manuscript history but did not explore the contexts in which they were produced or used. These topics were, however, of great interest to Eugène Duprat, who, in the first decades of the twentieth century, published a series of articles devoted to Provençal legends, including those of Arles. Despite some factual inaccuracies and what Florian Mazel called “a certain anticlerical and hypercritical zeal”, Duprat’s work remains useful for thinking about what may have inspired these compositions and how they reflected the contexts that produced them. Together, these scholars clarified how Trophimus’ legend evolved chronologically and showed that, over time, his story was retold in different institutional settings. In this article, I build on their work to investigate how various parties within Arles adapted Trophimus’ tale to their own ends. The shifts in the saint’s story, I argue, reflect both the sweeping changes that took place in his city over several centuries and different—sometimes contradictory—ways of understanding the city’s place in a changing world.

2. Origins

Trophimus first appeared in a letter written by Pope Zosimus I (417–18), which attested to Arles’ importance in the Roman Empire. The city had long been a major trading port and provincial capital. Its administrative and military importance rose further in the fourth and fifth centuries, when it was one of the bases from which Roman authorities tried to respond to growing challenges. This rise, in turn, led the city’s bishops to demand greater status within the structure of the early church. In 417, the pope granted the city’s
church authority over the neighboring dioceses of Vienne and Narbonne. Zosimus did not explain his decision in terms of changing political conditions or the city’s historical importance to the Roman economy or administrative apparatus, however. Instead, he justified it largely by reference to the history of the church in Arles. Specifically, the pope claimed that Trophimus had been sent to Arles directly from Rome, and from him “all Gaul had accepted rivulets of faith”. This history, Zosimus argued, gave Trophimus—and his successors—spiritual authority, or primacy, over other Gallic churches.

While Zosimus did not associate Trophimus directly with the apostle Peter, others soon did. In 450, when various political tensions had cost Arles its primacy, the city’s bishop and his supporters sent a letter to Pope Leo I asking him to restore it. Their argument echoed the one Zosimus put forward, but it also asserted a direct connection between Trophimus and Peter, first bishop of Rome and prince of the apostles. Indeed, their reasoning hinged upon this link:

For it is known to all the regions of Gaul, and is not unknown to the sacrosanct Roman church, that first among the Gauls the city of Arles deserved to have its priest, Saint Trophimus, sent by the most blessed apostle Peter, and that from there, little by little, the goodness of faith and religion was spread to the other regions of Gaul . . . And just as the sacrosanct Roman church is head of all the churches of the world through the most blessed chief apostle Peter, so too the church of Arles, which deserved to have its priest Saint Trophimus sent by the apostles, may claim the right of ordaining bishops among the Gauls.

This argument helped Arles to win back much of its former ecclesiastical superiority. Its bishop, known as a metropolitan (or archbishop), once more held authority over other sees. Moreover, the text’s identification of Trophimus as a direct disciple of Saint Peter became the bedrock of the city’s sacred history.

3. The Archiepiscopal Vision of History

The archbishops of Arles retained control over Trophimus’ cult in the succeeding centuries and they therefore played a key role in shaping his story. Under their aegis, a series of Latin vitae appeared, as well as one vernacular work, over the course of which the saint’s legend gradually evolved. The authors of these texts are all unknown, but they were likely either members of the cathedral clergy or people working for the cathedral community. In either case, their work was almost certainly subject to episcopal approval. Perhaps not surprisingly, these texts repeatedly asserted the archbishops’ spiritual authority and constructed an ever more elaborate imagined history to justify it. The result was a historical vision that highlighted the city’s apostolic roots and downplayed its ties to the Roman state.

The first Vita Trophiimi emphasized, and indeed augmented, the apostolic status and spiritual authority already attributed to Trophimus in the fifth century. Like the letter sent to Pope Leo I, the Vita prima reported that Trophimus had preached throughout Gaul. The hagiographer went further than the earlier document, however, to assert that, since “knowledge of God” had spread throughout Gaul thanks to the “preaching and industry” of Trophimus, “it was decreed that the bishop of Arles should be set above all the leaders of the churches of Gaul”.

Moreover, the vita proclaimed the saint to be Peter’s vicarius or deputy. Krüger, who dated this vita to the sixth century, linked it to the archbishops’ acquisition of the title of papal vicar. This honorary title was first given to Bishop Caesarius in 514 and then retained by his successors throughout the sixth century. It granted them authority over neighboring sees and charged them with convening ecclesiastical councils to promote and safeguard papal interests in Gaul, as well as keeping the pope informed about the Gallic church. Indeed, according to William Klingshirn, vicars of Gaul supervised not merely their own metropolitan province (which included several dioceses), “but the whole of Gaul”. The first Vita Trophiimi, therefore, attributed to the first bishop of Arles an authority—and a title—that mirrored those enjoyed by his sixth-century successors. The parallel made it appear that the archbishops’ pre-eminence derived from
their city’s sacred history, rather than from recent papal favor. This illusion strengthened the claim of the sixth-century archbishops to authority over other churches.

A second Vita Trophimi, which appeared in the tenth century, further enhanced the saint’s apostolic profile. This version made Trophimus first cousin to both the apostle Paul and the protomartyr Stephen (whose blood he reportedly brought to Arles), for it portrayed the three men as the sons of three sisters. These kinship ties fleshed out aspects of the earlier Vita prima. For instance, the Vita secunda explained that Trophimus came to Arles because his cousin Paul, with whom he traveled to Gaul, specifically sent him to evangelize the city. The purported link to Stephen similarly gave Trophimus an additional reason to collect the protomartyr’s blood and carry it to Arles. It also lent emotional weight to the fact that, by the time the new vita was composed, Trophimus and Stephen had become dual patron saints of the cathedral. Moreover, these new details all enhanced Trophimus’ apostolic character. By placing the saint amidst the events and characters of the New Testament, the Vita secunda set him at the very heart of the Christian story. It thus seemed only natural that Peter and Paul would jointly appoint Trophimus as their vicar, as the new vita claimed. Similarly, the saint’s proximity to Jesus implicitly justified the primacy the hagiographer claimed for Arles as “the head of all Gaul” and “the example to Gallic cities near and far”, as well as for its prelate in particular, whom it described as “placed before all the churches of Gaul”.

The new vita clearly built on longstanding traditions, yet the world in which the tenth-century hagiographer wrote had changed dramatically. First, Arles had been swept into the Carolingian Empire, and therefore was affected by the emperors’ efforts to reorganize the ecclesiastical hierarchy of their realm. This process had set off widespread competition among bishops for status and authority. The empire’s division, in 843, had then ushered in a different political reality. Competition for ecclesiastical primacy consequently altered too. Metropolitan bishops now strove for supremacy within the new territories that had emerged after the split. In West Francia, the archbishops of Reims and Sens vied for primacy, as did the bishops of Mainz, Cologne, and Trier in East Francia. Provence belonged to neither of these realms, however. Instead, it briefly became an independent kingdom, then formed part of the Kingdom of Burgundy. By the 930s, it was ruled by a count who was also King of Italy. Consequently, Provençal nobles, including the archbishops of Arles, spent a great deal of time south of the Alps. At the same time, the Ottonian rulers of East Francia, who secured the imperial title in 962, were gradually expanding their influence in both Burgundy and Italy. This fluid situation created a period of intensely competitive lordship in Arles and Provence.

The archbishops engaged actively in this competition, and they did so very successfully. According to Krüger, the second Vita Trophimi was probably composed between 960 and 972, for either Archbishop Manasses (920–61) or Archbishop Itier (963–85). These prelates were powerful lords, in both spiritual and secular terms. Indeed, Florian Mazel has shown that, beginning in the mid-tenth century, the archbishops consolidated their power into a “veritable hegemony” over both the Provençal church and the local aristocracy. Manasses had an especially impressive reign. A relative of Hugh, count of Provence and King of Italy (d. 947), Manasses spent roughly a dozen years of his reign in Lombardy, where he accumulated numerous episcopal sees. After his return to Arles, around 945, he became the dominant figure in Provence. Not only was Manasses the region’s sole metropolitan, but bishops beyond his province—and even another archbishop—submitted to his authority. He held nearly the whole of the comital fisc (that is, the properties and rights associated with the count’s office), including several of its principal castles. He installed members of his own entourage as bishops, who swore fidelity to him and sometimes continued to hold important positions in his cathedral chapter—both highly unusual actions. His successor, Itier, likewise maintained an entourage of loyal clerics and minted his own coins. Yet Itier’s position was probably weaker than his predecessor’s. For one thing, he appears to have been an outsider, perhaps a native of Lyon, rather than a member of the comital family. For another, it seems likely that the archbishops’ lordly behavior had
gradually taken a toll on their patrimony. Both Manasses and Itier granted ecclesiastical possessions to their followers. In addition, they engaged in complex exchanges of land and payments to the noble kin of their clerical entourages. While these practices cemented their position within the region, by the end of Itier’s reign they may also have eroded some of the archbishop’s patrimony. Even so, the archbishop remained one of the most powerful figures in tenth-century Provence.

If the *Vita secunda Trophimi* was indeed produced for one of these mighty prelates, then it seems that they particularly valued their see’s apostolic heritage, alongside its other assets, and wanted to showcase it. The translation of Trophimus’ relics from a cemetery outside the city into Arles cathedral sometime before 972 affirms this point. This move brought renewed attention to the city’s founding bishop and, in the wake of the event, the cathedral canons began to celebrate Trophimus as the second patron saint of their church. As with the *Vita secunda*, it is unclear just which archbishop was responsible for the translation. Yet the two undertakings clearly stressed the same theme: the worldly archbishops of the mid-tenth century were heirs to an apostolic forerunner, whose proximity to the founders of Christianity both enhanced and in some measure justified the standing of his distant successors. Once more, the archbishops envisioned the apostolic mission of their saintly predecessor as the foundational episode of their city’s history. And once more, that historical vision made sense of the archbishops’ continued pre-eminence.

Although the archbishops were not responsible for the third *Vita Trophimi* (which will be discussed below), the fourth *vita* once more issued from their entourage and advanced their interests. This version, which added the episode involving Senator Theodosius, has proven especially tricky to date. However, it may have been produced in conjunction with the rebuilding of Arles cathedral. This ambitious undertaking came to fruition in 1152, when the relics of the cathedral’s two patron saints—Trophimus’ body and Stephen’s blood—were moved to the new church. Since the *Vita quarta* implicitly presented this new structure as successor to the church founded by Trophimus centuries before in the senator’s palace, Krüger proposed that the translation inspired an author working in or for the cathedral to compose a text that emphasized its continuity.

The *Vita quarta* also underlined, again, the exalted spiritual heritage of the cathedral’s founder and, by extension, his episcopal heirs; it explicitly declared Trophimus to have been “one of the seventy-two disciples of Jesus.” It thus brought the saint still closer to Jesus than had the earlier *vitae*. The artistic program of the new church asserted the same point visually. The west portal, added toward the end of the twelfth century, depicted Trophimus in his episcopal garb. The saint faced directly outward with a hand lifted to bless those approaching his church. The pallium around his neck bore a Latin inscription announcing that he was a disciple of Christ—and thus echoed the claim of the *Vita quarta*. The same declaration featured again on the archbishop’s seal at the end of the twelfth century. The seal, which not only symbolized the archbishops’ authority but also served as the mechanism by which it was conveyed, shows how central Trophimus—and his proximity to Jesus in particular—remained to their conception of their office. The new *vita* thus portrayed Trophimus as the archbishops wished to envisage him—and, by extension, themselves—in the mid- to later twelfth century.

The prestige that this illustrious apostolic heritage conveyed aligned well with the archbishops’ real stature in this era. Although troubles, linked in large part to the Investiture Contest, had weakened their position in the later eleventh century, by the mid-twelfth they had recovered and, once more, possessed enormous power within Arles. The prelates’ pre-eminence resulted in part from the fact that the counts of Provence (who from c. 1110 were also counts of Barcelona) spent the bulk of their time elsewhere and therefore presented no serious competition. The archbishops held direct authority over the oldest part of the city, the walled quarter known as the Cité, where the cathedral stood. Elsewhere, the situation was more complicated. Like other cities in this era, Arles was experiencing dramatic growth. As its population swelled and its economy expanded, new urban centers, known as *bourgs*, arose. These came to form a ring around the Cité before spreading beyond the
city’s ancient wall and across the Rhône. Noble families competed for power in these bourgs. Yet their influence there was limited by the fact that they generally held these areas in fief, often from the archbishop who, moreover, could turn their rivalries to his advantage.48 The more eminent of the non-noble townspeople likewise sought a share of power. To this end, they established a consulate in 113149. This body allowed them a foothold in the city’s power structure and, in particular, the authority to judge and punish violent crimes. Yet, the consulate remained subject to the archbishop’s authority and, indeed, more or less under his control. It was the archbishop, for instance, who around 1150 granted the consulate the charter according to which it operated. In addition, the consuls met in the archbishop’s palace and swore an oath to him, while he retained the power to interpret urban statutes and to mediate disputes within the city. Thus, even as numerous groups vied for influence within this growing city, the archbishops kept the upper hand.

The *Vita quarta*, therefore, provided a historical basis for the power enjoyed by the archbishops of the mid-twelfth century, much as earlier versions of Trophimus’ legend had done for their predecessors. The repeated emphasis on the saint as one of the seventy-two disciples of Christ—conveyed in Latin text, sculpture, and seal alike—reveals that these prelates, effectively princes of their city, continued to trace their pre-eminence to the apostolic status and successful mission of their distant predecessor. In this sense, the saint’s apostolic image at once expressed, reinforced, and justified the archbishops’ very real power.

An author likely from the archbishop’s circle soon followed up this fourth Latin *vita* with a vernacular version of Trophimus’ story, the *Roman de Saint Trophime*50. The two texts overlap quite a bit. For instance, the *Roman* again presented Trophimus as one of the seventy-two disciples of Christ. It similarly reported that Peter and Paul had sent him to evangelize Gaul and granted him primacy there. Like the *Vita quarta*, the *Roman de Saint Trophime* also told of the cathedral’s origins. Its account of the church’s founding clearly echoed the Latin text, yet also differed in certain details. Once again, Trophimus established the city’s first church in a palace, granted to him for a token sum by a well-intentioned pagan. However, the donor this time was not Senator Theodosius, but a nameless “king” whom the saint petitioned in Lyon. Despite the discrepancy, this consistent attention to the cathedral’s origins, as well as the Provençal text’s emphasis on the ecclesiastical primacy of Arles, suggest that this author, like the earlier ones, sought to celebrate the cathedral and to affirm the archbishop’s authority.51

The poet’s use of the vernacular suggests that the *Roman de Saint Trophime* was aimed at a different audience than other cathedral works, however. By recounting the saint’s story in Provençal verse, the *Roman* made it resemble the epic *chansons de geste* that celebrated Charlemagne and other legendary heroes. Moreover, the *Roman de Saint Trophime* drew on those tales to weave a story that featured both saints and heroes, as well as local holy sites increasingly popular with pilgrims. In particular, the poem dwelt at length on the vast cemetery located just outside medieval Arles, known as Les Alyscamps. This ancient necropolis, founded when Arles was a Roman colony, had subsequently become a prestigious burial place for the city’s Christian community. By the twelfth century, its renown had spread well beyond Arles. The southernmost route to Compostela began here, and the *Liber sancti Jacobi*, advice for travelers to Santiago compiled in the 1130s, urged its readers to visit the cemetery and pray there.52 Another work associated with the pilgrimage, the *Historia Karoli* (also known as the *Historia Turpini*), asserted that many of Charlemagne’s rearguard massacred at Roncesvalles (as recounted in the *Chanson de Roland*) were buried in Les Alyscamps.53 It also reported that the cemetery had been consecrated by seven apostolic bishops, whom it identified by name, Trophimus among them.54 The *Roman de Saint Trophime* retold this foundation story at much greater length and gave it a miraculous dimension. In this version, as the seven bishops gathered to consecrate the burial ground, Jesus appeared to them and blessed their work.55 As the fame of Les Alyscamps grew, apostolic saints and chivalric heroes alike were thus linked to it.56 The author of the
de Saint Trophime likely played up these associations in the hope that they would entice laypeople to visit Arles—as indeed the poem explicitly urged its audience to do.\textsuperscript{57}

This addition to the story of Trophimus may have been an effort to lay claim to the cemetery for Arles cathedral and to boost the canons’ income in the process. The fame of Les Alyscamps was such that bodies were reportedly shipped down the Rhône in casks, along with funds to secure their interment in the celebrated necropolis.\textsuperscript{58} Initially, however, the cathedral canons enjoyed little of this income. By the mid-twelfth century, many of the seven churches located in Les Alyscamps—to which donations pertaining to burials there accrued—belonged to the abbeys of Saint-Césaire, Arles and Saint-Victor, Marseille. In the 1160s, however, the cathedral canons sought (and obtained) two of these churches and a healthy portion of the revenue generated by burials.\textsuperscript{59} This background may explain why the poem celebrates the cemetery at length and urges the faithful to visit it, while also castigating “our clergy” (nostres clerges) for having lost the revenue (renda) associated with it.\textsuperscript{60}

The Roman de Saint Trophime thus served the cathedral in multiple ways. Details of its story—such as the saint’s birth in Judea, kinship with Paul and Stephen, and membership among the direct disciples of Christ—justified the pre-eminence that the archbishops of Arles claimed both within their own city and over other churches, as the same details had done in the Latin texts on which the poet drew. This vernacular version, however, had the potential to reach a wider audience than the Latin works could do without learned mediation. Even if most Provençal speakers were illiterate, this epic poem could be read directly to them, and it may have circulated orally too. By tying Trophimus and Arles to legendary heroes such as Roland and Charlemagne, the Roman de Saint Trophime also gave the saint a more worldly allure, which likely enhanced the glory of his city, at least with certain groups. In addition, the Roman advertised a new source of revenue for the cathedral. Its tale of the miraculous consecration of Les Alyscamps both strengthened the cathedral canons’ claims to a portion of the revenues from burial there and added to the cemetery’s renown. By tying Les Alyscamps closely to the cathedral’s founder, the poem also asserted that this celebrated area beyond the city’s walls should, by rights, belong to its cathedral.

Between the sixth and late twelfth centuries, therefore, the archbishops of Arles repeatedly used the story of their city’s first bishop, the founder of their church, to advance their own interests and those of their cathedral. The legend of Saint Trophimus consistently linked the Christian origins of Arles to the faith’s most prominent early leaders, including Peter, Paul, and Jesus himself. These ties grew more numerous and ever closer over time. In each iteration, these links burnished the prestige of Arles cathedral and justified the authority that its archbishops claimed in the present. The nature and scope of that authority, however, altered as circumstances changed. The ecclesiastical and political boundaries within which the archbishops sought pre-eminence shifted as kingdoms and empires rose and fell, and as ecclesiastical provinces and hierarchies were reorganized. The overlap between the archbishops’ spiritual and worldly power likewise changed, in keeping with broad historical shifts. Thus, the tenth-century archbishops exercised a sort of lordship that their fifth-century predecessors could not have envisaged. Their counterparts in the twelfth century ruled a city considerably larger and more prosperous than it had been since Roman times, and within which an increasing variety of groups vied for influence. The urge to narrate their saintly founder’s career repeatedly and, in so doing, to enhance his apostolic standing shows that, through all these momentous changes, the story of Trophimus remained a potent means of justifying the archbishops’ position.

It also created a particular sense of the city’s history and identity. These stories all made Trophimus’ mission the defining moment of the city’s past. Arles’ status as a vibrant Roman colony faded into hazy backdrop while the saint’s arrival, these texts implied, marked the true beginning of the city’s history. By centering the career of Arles’ founding bishop in this way, his successors constructed a history that rendered their own pre-eminence in Arles, as in the Gallic church more generally, inevitable.
4. Other Historical Visions

Arles’ cathedral had no monopoly on this story, however. Alongside the successive versions of Trophimus’ legend produced by authors working for the archbishop or the cathedral more broadly, new ones began to take shape elsewhere in and near Arles. Predictably, the saint’s tale was altered somewhat in these retellings, as writers not tied to the cathedral added new episodes and emphases. These changes highlight the fact that Trophimus’ story could be tailored to different sets of interests and that conflicting ideas about the city’s past and present coexisted.

Not long after the composition of the second Vita Trophimi, likely in the mid-tenth century, a third Latin vita appeared. The Vita tertia relied heavily on the Vita secunda and, indeed, echoed many of its claims. For instance, it once more presented Trophimus as the first apostle of Gaul, the companion and cousin of Paul, and envoy of Peter. This hagiographer likewise repeated the claim that Peter had made Trophimus “vicar of the holy and apostolic see for all Gaul”.61 Despite this overlap, however, the new hagiographer took little real interest in the archbishops’ privileges and, in fact, omitted any further mention of ecclesiastical primacy or prerogative. Instead, the new vita linked Trophimus to the abbey of Montmajour, located roughly six kilometers outside Arles.

To achieve this end, the hagiographer added new details, which shifted the story’s focus. For starters, the Vita tertia reported that when Trophimus arrived, Arles was so devoutly pagan that, at first, the saint “could not freely stay in the city”62. He therefore withdrew each evening to a nearby mountain, called Monsmajor, where he spent his nights in prayer and vigil. This inauspicious beginning represented a sharp departure from the saint’s earlier vitae, in which his mission faced no obstacles. The Vita secunda, for instance, reported that divine grace assured that even the saint’s first sermons were “never without fruit”.63 Despite this initial setback, however, the new hagiographer reported that Trophimus gradually succeeded. First, he converted the local “king”. This victory then enabled him to preach openly in the city, and his mission consequently gained momentum. Over time, Trophimus founded several churches; consecrated a cemetery; and performed “innumerable”, though unspecified, miracles. Most importantly, for the Vita tertia, toward the end of his life Trophimus built a church on Monsmajor, which he dedicated to Peter. There, he established a community of priests, on whom he imposed the Benedictine rule.64 The hagiographer presented the foundation of this monastic community, on the site of the future abbey of Montmajour, as a highlight of Trophimus’ career. While the Vita tertia Trophimi thus mainly respected (and reiterated) the traditions long nurtured by the archbishops, it nevertheless took them in a distinctly new direction.

This swerve enabled the hagiographer to insert a newly founded religious house into the city’s sacred traditions. This narrative strategy may reflect genuine ties between the cathedral and Montmajour, which had been established in the mid-tenth century (shortly before the Vita tertia was composed) by the noble nun Teucinda and her brother Gonthard, the cathedral provost, with the cooperation of Archbishops Manasses and Itier.65 The rocky island on which the new abbey stood, as well as the marshes surrounding it, had previously belonged to the archbishop: Manasses had granted the land to Teucinda in exchange for property elsewhere.66 Archbishop Itier, for his part, had endorsed Teucinda’s wish to turn the small group of hermits living on the island into a Benedictine community.67 Good relations likely persisted between the monks and the cathedral—indeed, it is possible that the first monks were former canons of Arles cathedral.68 By attributing the abbey’s original foundation to Trophimus, the hagiographer projected these ties between the cathedral and the new abbey onto the distant past. While this move may have obliquely reflected the monks’ roots in the cathedral community and honored the tenth-century archbishops for their support, it also created the illusion that the abbey’s recent establishment was in fact the revival of an institution created by Trophimus. The hagiographer thus gave this new monastic community a prestigious place in the city’s established religious history.

By adapting the story of Arles’ Christian origins to serve the monks of Montmajour, the third Vita Trophimi also created a slight dissonance in his legend. Tales emanating from
the cathedral stressed the privileges Trophimus had passed on to the archbishops of Arles. The monks, by contrast, stressed the saint’s nights of quasi-monastic prayer and vigil upon the mountain where, they claimed, he later founded a Benedictine community. As each institution reframed the saint’s legend to serve their own ends, the tale itself became harder for any one party to control.

The Provençal Roman d’Arles (which featured the Emperor Tiberius) affirms this point. This poem, too, changed Trophimus’ story to suit the intentions of an author likely based somewhere other than the cathedral. In this case, the aim was to celebrate the long history of Arles and to entwine it with the Roman Empire (a goal reflected by the substitution of Tiberius for Theodosius) and with Charlemagne. This new historical vision displaced Trophimus from the center of the story. In this text, his career constituted just one of many episodes in the city’s glorious history. Consequently, the poet omitted the usual details that supported the archbishops’ claims to pre-eminence—such as the saint’s birth in Judea and proximity to Christ and the apostles—and made no mention of him founding a monastic community.

The poet’s identity remains unknown, but Eugène Duprat argued that he was a layman from Arles who viewed the city’s ancient history in light of recent events. In particular, Duprat suggested that the poet wrote shortly after 1178, when Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (1152–89) had himself crowned King of Arles by Archbishop Raymond de Bollène (1163–82) at the cathedral. This event followed earlier signs of imperial interest in the city. In 1154, Barbarossa entrusted the whole of Arles in perpetuity to Archbishop Raymond de Montredon (1142–60) and his successors. Although he gave the city to the count of Provence in 1162, the emperor again confirmed the archbishop’s rights in 1164, when he also declared Arles to be the capital of Provence. Indeed, Barbarossa then ensured that full jurisdiction in the Cité belonged to the archbishop, as did the power of creating consuls. He decreed, moreover, that no secular power—whether the count of Provence or the city’s consulate—could dispute the archbishop’s rights. Although Krüger noted that, in light of these affirmations, the coronation of 1178 represented a “triumphant climax” for both the city and the archbishop, if this event did inspire the Roman d’Arles (as Duprat believed), then it was the imperial dimension that made the greatest impression on the poet. In fact, the dating can only be conjectural: the text survives, somewhat deformed, in a single fourteenth-century manuscript, which obscures the date of its composition. In Duprat’s view, however, this version of the saint’s story refracted the legendary history of Arles through the lens of the imperial visit.

Indeed, the Roman d’Arles transformed the city’s religious history in ways that suggest an affinity for imperial authority. It did not describe Trophimus as a disciple of Jesus. It made no mention of Peter or Paul appointing Trophimus as their vicar and it omitted any reference to the biblical apostles as the source of his mission. Instead, the emperor’s goodwill—in granting Trophimus initial permission to preach—became key to the saint’s success. The poem effectively severed the apostolic links on which the archbishops’ pretensions to primacy had long rested. The unknown poet thus appears to have taken little interest in the archbishop’s ambitions and was, presumably, not connected to the cathedral. Instead, as noted earlier, the text lends the city’s religious origins an imperial character. This retelling, therefore, increased the dissonance that arose within Trophimus’ legend as different parties bent it to their own aims.

It also offers a historical vision quite different from that nurtured either at the cathedral or at Montmajour. While both those communities stressed the city’s Christian origins as the defining moment of its history, the Roman d’Arles implanted that episode within a much longer story. Moreover, its author celebrated the imperial ties (both ancient and Carolingian) that the clerical authors ignored. The disjunction between these historical visions suggests different—and, indeed, conflicting—ways of thinking about Arles itself. In particular, these authors appear to have disagreed about how much the city’s imperial history mattered in the medieval present. This question held important implications, such as whether the archbishops derived their power from their apostolic heritage or from imperial favor.
5. Trophimus Displaced

This problem was not merely academic in twelfth-century Arles, for the city had recently confronted it head-on. As hostility between the papacy and the German king intensified in the late 1070s, the pope sought to depose Archbishop Aicard (c. 1070–98/99 and 1107–13), a partisan of King Henry IV. To that end, Pope Gregory VII instructed the city’s clergy and laypeople to elect someone more suitable in 1179. When no such election occurred, a council led by the papal legate deposed Aicard the following year, ostensibly for simony. Although local rivalries had contributed to this conflict, Aicard had enough support among his own clergy, the region’s nobility (to whom he was often related), and the city’s inhabitants to remain archbishop for nearly two more decades. The pope’s candidate, refused entry to the city in 1080, obtained the see only in 1098 or 1099, when Aicard left for the Holy Land, and then lost it once more when he returned in 1105. These events took a toll on the archbishop’s power and reputation.

In response, the cathedral community crafted a very different vision of Trophimus’ career and, indeed, an alternate vision of Arles’ religious roots. Specifically, they recast the saint’s mission as a failure and fashioned a new founding bishop to replace him. This new vision was articulated in the Vita Reguli, which celebrated the deeds of a saint it presented as the second bishop of Arles.

Unlike Trophimus, Regulus was not a saint with a longstanding tradition. Instead, he first appeared as the second bishop of Arles in episcopal lists produced in the second half of the eleventh century, around the same time that, Krüger believed, his vita was written at Arles cathedral. That vita reported that Regulus had been sent to Gaul by Pope Clement I (88–97), in the company of Saint Dionysius, first bishop of Paris. After crossing the Alps, the saints stopped in Arles, which they found to be firmly pagan—even though it had already been evangelized by Trophimus. For although, the hagiographer reported, “the inhabitants of that city had once partly understood the faith of the gospels of Christ through the preaching of saint Trophimus”, the saint had not stayed long in Arles, and now “nearly the whole city” had fallen once more into its former disbelief. Dionysius and Regulus, accordingly, demolished its pagan temples and converted (or reconverted) the inhabitants. Dionysius built and consecrated a new basilica, sent disciples to preach elsewhere, and established Regulus as bishop of Arles before leaving for Paris.

Later, Regulus handed the church of Arles over to one of his disciples and went north himself, eventually converting the city of Senlis and serving as its first bishop. The Vita Reguli thus tarnished Trophimus’ reputation, by claiming that his evangelization had, in fact, failed.

This starkly different account of Trophimus’ mission suggests a need to distance the archbishop from Peter’s successor. For the archbishops’ claims to primacy had long rested on the tradition that Peter had made Trophimus his vicar and granted him authority over the churches of Gaul. Since Gregory VII both occupied Peter’s episcopal throne and invoked his legacy, it became problematic for the archbishops of Arles to maintain that their primacy stemmed from this source while they were in conflict with Peter’s successor. Consequently, Krüger suggested, the clergy of Arles cathedral sought new grounds for the prerogatives of their church by fashioning a new apostolic tradition. Although Trophimus’ reputation would recover in the twelfth century, when both Latin and vernacular texts once more celebrated him for having successfully evangelized Arles, the Vita Reguli reflected the saint’s momentary eclipse—even in his own cathedral—during a troubled period in the city’s religious life.

It also reveals that, while the cathedral community could reframe the past to suit their current needs, the conversion of Arles remained central to their historical vision. The Vita Reguli merely transposed the apostolic foundation of Arles’ church from one early Christian generation to another. Although pushed back in time (and presented as more difficult to achieve), conversion remained the defining moment in Arles’ history. Indeed, despite the current archbishop’s clashes with the pope and his support for Henry IV, no emperor appeared in this tale. By replacing one apostolic saint with another, the hagiographer maintained the idea that the archbishops owed their dominant position to...
the saintly founder (or refounder) of their church, rather than to imperial favor. Even when recasting Trophimus as a failed apostolic saint, the archbishops essentially stayed true to their historical vision.

6. Conclusions

No one had a monopoly on the history of Arles or of its founding bishop. Although most versions of Trophimus’ story produced between the sixth and late twelfth centuries likely originated in the city’s cathedral and reflected the archbishops’ concerns, other versions also appeared elsewhere. In the course of these successive retellings, the tale altered. This instability is typical of medieval hagiography. Saints’ legends were living texts, as scholars have long recognized. These fluid narratives could be adapted or revised anywhere, at any time. No matter how important a particular saint’s story was to a given community, such as Arles cathedral, they could not fully control it.

As the versions of Trophimus’ story multiplied, a certain dissonance was thus introduced to the tale. One such point of discord concerned the outcome of Trophimus’ mission—whether he succeeded immediately or after overcoming resistance, or whether he even succeeded at all. This dissonance arose because those who recounted the saint’s story adapted it to suit their specific needs. For the cathedral, Trophimus’ success, like his proximity to Peter, Paul and (eventually) Jesus, justified the enormous authority wielded by his successors, the archbishops of Arles. For the monks of Montmajour, the saint’s initial struggle explained his attachment to their mountain and his ostensible foundation of their house. For the author of the *Roman d’Arles*, the saint’s success was down to the Emperor Tiberius, who thus became the instigator of the city’s conversion. For the author of the *Vita Reguli*, Trophimus’ failure made it possible to reframe the archbishop’s relation to Rome.

This discord also suggests that, by the late twelfth century, the growing population of medieval Arles did not all share the same historical vision. For the archbishops who ruled Arles, the city’s history began with Trophimus’ arrival. The saint was key to the city’s past, as the archbishops themselves were to its medieval present. The history constructed by these princely prelates promoted the idea that their apostolic authority, inherited from Trophimus, eclipsed all others. This logic was so powerful that even when the Investiture Contest cast Trophimus (temporarily) into the shade, another apostolic saint was found to replace him as the source of the archbishops’ power. Moreover, Trophimus was then rehabilitated to serve, once more, as the cornerstone of this historical narrative. The cathedral versions of the saint’s story thus obscured centuries of Roman rule, as well as all the kings, counts, and emperors who followed. These texts promoted a vision of Arles as, above all, a religious community ruled by its archbishop—even though the twelfth-century city was home to a bustling population of nobles, merchants, and others whose quest for a share of power suggests that they did not wholly share this view. This was the backdrop to Barbarossa’s coronation as King of Arles, an event that evoked a different take on the city’s history. If Arles belonged to the emperor, and he had the authority to affirm the archbishop’s rights, then perhaps he and his predecessors mattered more than the cathedral’s legends allowed. Such a view seems to have inspired the author of the *Roman d’Arles*, whose vision of history centered on emperors rather than bishops. According to this text, Trophimus succeeded because Tiberius granted him license to preach. This Provençal author thus set the city within the framework of imperial history, and rendered its founding saint’s career as merely one moment among many. This reworking of Trophimus’ story, if indeed articulated around the time of Barbarossa’s coronation as King of Arles, suggests that some of the city’s inhabitants held a view of the city’s past and present quite different from that nurtured in the cathedral.

Arles’ history mattered to the city’s inhabitants, as they tried to make sense of the changing world around them and their city’s place within it. Retelling the story of Trophimus, the founding bishop of Arles and apostle to Gaul, provided a powerful way to imagine different versions of the city itself, past and present alike.
For instance, Duprat erroneously believed that the cults of Martha of Bethany (based in nearby Tarascon) and Trophimus were...


22. “Arelas eiusque cives ... exemplum et capud totius gallie ... Exin decretum est, ut omnibus ecclesiis gallie Arelatensis antistes preponeretur ...,” Vita secunda Trophimi, ed. Krüger, p. 359.


27. See Aurell i Cardonna (1985).


29. Manasses held the sees of Mantua, Verona, Trent and perhaps Milan, as well as the patriarchate of Friuli and the Tridentine march (Poupardin 1901, p. 223; Poly 1976, pp. 29, 36; Bouchard 1999, p. 344; Sergi 1999, p. 353). For the kinship between Manasses and the Bosonids, see Bouchard (1988).


31. See Poly (1976, pp. 67–68, 86, 91; Mazel 2007, p. 120).

32. For instance, (Poly et al. 1992) no. 2, “Les récompenses d’une fidélité précaire (précaire épiscopale arlésienne, 16 juin 983).”

33. For example, see Bouchard (1999, p. 344); for an example, see Poupardin (1901, 18n4). This situation may be reflected in a false bull in Arles cathedral cartulary, which lamented that Archbishop Itier’s patrimony was being “eviscerated” by unnamed evildoers. While the document purported to have been granted by Pope John XIII around 966, Mazel attributed it instead to the later eleventh century. (Albanèse and Chevalier 1901, no. 272 and Mazel 2007, p. 126).

34. The Vita secunda stated that the saint’s body lay outside the city; Vita secunda Trophimi, ed. Krüger, p. 360. In 972, however, a donation to the cathedral described this church as containing his body; (Albanèse and Chevalier 1901, no. 255) (dated 972). For this reason, Krüger believed the vita slightly predated the translation.

35. See for instance, Albanèse and Chevalier (1901, nos. 297 (from 994), 299 (from 1003), 307 (from 1011)), which all refer to the cathedral canons as “canonicos aecclesie Sancti Trophimi, vel Sancti Stephani” (297).


37. Albanèse and Chevalier (1901, no. 569).


39. “Gloriosissimus ac unus de septuaginta duobus domini nostri ihesu christi discipulis Trophimus arelatensis urbis primus episcopus fuit.” The Vita quarta Trophimi has no BHL number and has not been edited. It survives in two manuscripts: Paris, BnF MS Lat. 1018, fols. 270v-291 (a breviary from Marseille, c. 1216); Paris, BnF MS Lat. 752, fols. 81v-90v (a breviary of Arles cathedral from the mid-fourteenth century). This quotation is from Paris, BnF MS Lat. 752, fol. 81v.


41. See Blancard (1860, pp. 122–123 and pl. 63).

42. For the Investiture Contest, see pp. 10–11 below.


46. See (Sammarthan 1575, no. 17; Krüger 2002, p. 76; Stouff 2000, p. 73).

47. See (Le Roman de Saint Trophime 1901, II. 297–345).


See Pseudo-Turpin (ed. 1937, cap. xxxiii). The *Historia* is the fourth book (of five) that make up the *Liber sancti Jacobi* (of which the most famous manuscript is the *Codex Calixtinus*); the fifth book is the *Pilgrim's Guide*.


See *Le Roman de Saint Trophime* (1901, ll. 175–241).

See *Benoît* (1935).

See *Le Roman de Saint Trophime* (1901, ll. 1085–87).


See Guérard (1837, no. 959). A new dispute, between the cathedral and the nuns of Saint-Césaire, broke out in the 1220s. See *Benoît* (1938); *Duprat* (1941, pp. 126–53).

See *Le Roman de Saint Trophime* (1901, ll. 9–16).


See *Poly* (1976, pp. 69–70).

See Albanès and Chevalier (1901, no. 255). Hermits had been living at Montmajour before Teucinda aquired the land for them by exchanging with Archbishop Manasses in 954. Also, *Stouff* (1984, p. 264).

See Albanès and Chevalier (1901, no. 277).

See *Poly* 1976, p. 60; *Aurell et al.* 2005, p. 40). For the theory that the monks had been cathedral canons, see (Magnani Soares-Christen 1999, pp. 101–106).

See *Duprat* (1941, pp. 88–93); coronation also mentioned in “Diploma Frederici regis pro ecclesia Arelatensi concessum Raimundo archiepiscopo [1178],” *Gallia christiana* 1, *Instrumenta* no. 19 (Sammarthan 1575).


See (Albanès and Chevalier 1901, no. 604; *Arnold* 2004; *Stouff* 1984, pp. 68–69).

See (Albanès and Chevalier 1901, no. 604).


See *Duprat* (1941, pp. 88–93).

See Gregory VII (1079); see also *Stouff* (2000, pp. 84–86).


*Vita tertia Reguli (BHL 7108)*, Paris, BnF MS Lat. 5295 (eleventh-century), fols. 10-25v. Krüger attributed this text to the cathedral and dated it to the later eleventh century; *Krüger* (2002, pp. 65–67).

See *Duchesne* (1907, pp. 250–51). He notes that Dionysius was later also inserted into the episcopal lists, apparently in the twelfth century.

“Si quidem olim ciues urbis illius ex parte fidem Christi evangeliorum perceiverant. a summis apostolorum culminibus misso a sano [sic, though corrected to sano] trophimo praedicante. Sed quia corporea infirmitate. qua frequenter urgentem defectum patiebatur detentus. paucis ibidem superfuerat annis; poene omnis corrupta heresium uanitate pristina ciuitas habebatur,” *Vita [tertia] Reguli*, Paris, BnF MS Lat. 5295, fols. 14v–15. Ironically, the notion that Trophimus suffered from “frequent bodily weakness” echoes earlier *vita*. For other hagiographers had first linked Trophimus to Paul by identifying him as the disciple of the Apostle who had fallen ill and been “left” at Miletus, as reported in 2 Timothy 4.20.

*Vita tertia Reguli*, Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 5295, fols. 14v–16.

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