'Great is the power (virtus) at the tombs of the [Theban] martyrs' wrote Gregory of Tours about the site of the saints buried at the monastery of Saint-Maurice d'Agaune. What sort of power did they have? The answer is hardly simple. Nor is it the same for all time. Since the power at the tombs was believed to be the power of God, it demanded recognition, deference, and monumentalization. These acts in turn intensified and complicated the ways in which the site's power was understood. And, in yet another turn, those who tapped into and associated themselves with the place hoped to — and apparently did — enhance their own power and prestige. This paper is an exploration of the changing ways in which beliefs about the power at Agaune led people — rulers, bishops, monks, and occasionally ordinary people — to reorganize and make use of the site and to model other institutions upon some of the key features of the monastery built there.

Agaune's very emplacement made it powerful for worldly reasons. High upon a rocky cliff close to the Rhône river, about 40 km from the Great Saint Bernard pass, it was a strategic point between Italy and the north. This meant different things at different times: in the Roman period, Agaune was a toll-collection center; in the Burgundian

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1 I am grateful to the members of the Bellagio workshop, and in particular to Albrecht Diem, Janet L. Nelson, Julia M.H. Smith, Ian Wood and, above all, Mayke de Jong for their important suggestions. I thank Alessandra Antonini, Charles Bonnet, and François Wible for their generous help in introducing me to the archaeology of Agaune. Christian Sapin supplied much-needed general orientation. Loyola University Chicago Research Services awarded me a Summer and Research Grant in 1998, which made it possible for me to visit the site and write up my findings. Loyola University Center for Instructional Design (LUCID) ably drew the figure.


3 M. Zufferey, Die Abtei Saint-Maurice d'Agaune im Hochmittelalter (830—1250),
and Merovingian periods, it was a demarcation point, separating the Italian south from Europe's northern kingdoms; in Charlemagne's empire, it was a symbolic hinge, connecting the conquered peninsula of Italy to the kingdom of the Franks. Its geo-political position was always the backdrop to Agaune's numinous powers.

Unexpected springs of water spout from crags on the site. Pagan Romans, who incorporated aquae into their topographies of power, dedicated Agaune to the nymphs. The Christians followed suit in their own way. The Passio Acaunensium martyrums by Eucherius, bishop of Lyon (d. 450/4), gives us the fifth-century version of the Christianization of Agaune: Roman imperial troops from Thebes, called up by emperor Maximian at the end of the third century, and led by their commander Maurice, were decimated near Agaune for refusing to kill Christians in the vicinity. Their bodies were discovered about a century later, Eucherius tells us, by Theodore, bishop of Martigny (then known as Octodorum). Theodore, disciple of Ambrose, and not to be outdone by the latter's appropriation of Saints Gervasius and Protasius, constructed a basilica at Agaune in honor of Maurice and his associates 'now nestled against the looming rock, leaning against it on just one side'. As we shall soon see, this description in the Passio inspired a compelling—but wrong—modern interpretation of the archaeological evidence.

A whole monastic complex, probably dual sex, grew up around the tombs of the martyrs and served the pilgrims who came there. We know about this community, however, only from Eucherius’s Passio, the anonymous Life and Rule of the Jura abbots, and the equally anonymous Vita of Saint Severinus. Subsequent written sources made a conscious effort to suppress—or in any event keep mute about—this early monastery.


4 An altar dedicated to the nymphs dating from the third century was found on the spot. It remains today in the vestibule of the abbey.

5 Eucherius, Passio Acaunensium martyrums, c. 2, B. Krusch ed., MGH SRM 3 (Hannover, 1896), p. 33. Eucherius was almost certainly substituting Maximian for Constantius Chlorus, father of Constantine, thus writing the latter out of the story of Christian persecution.


7 Eucherius, Passio Acaunensium martyrums, c. 16, p. 38: ‘basilica, quae vastae nunc adiuncta rupi, uno tantum latere adclinis iacet’.

8 Vita Severini abbatis Acaunensis, B. Krusch ed., MGH SRM 3 (Hannover, 1896),
In 515 Sigismund, a Burgundian prince fairly newly converted from Arianism to Catholic Christianity, rebuilt and reorganized the site with the help of his episcopal advisors. To Agaune's fame as the place of martyr-soldiers, new sources of power were now added. They included the new monastery's extraordinary day-and-night liturgy, which the monks carried out in relay; its symbolic embodiment of an episcopal-royal alliance; and, soon, its stewardship of the first royal saint in the West. For, about ten years after Sigismund and his wife and sons were killed by the Franks in 523, the abbot of Saint-Maurice retrieved their bodies and buried them in a church near his monastery. By 590, according to Gregory of Tours, the king was consortng with saints and Masses said in his honor were working miracles.

Saint-Maurice thereafter became a model monastery for Burgundian kings. When King Guntram founded Saint-Marcel de Chalon, he had Saint-Maurice in mind; and when Dagobert reformed his favorite monastery, Saint-Denis, he too had the exemplar of Agaune in view. The Carolingian period brought changed status to the monastery when, in the ninth century, Saint-Maurice became a house of canons. Nevertheless, it still maintained a reputation for holy power, and in 888 Rudolf chose the spot for his coronation as king of Burgundy.

What was so compelling about the place? Certainly Frederick Paxton is not wrong to stress the cult of Sigismund, healer of fevers and the first patron saint of an illness. Nor is Friedrich Prinz wrong

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9 Nevertheless, the title of Avitus's Homily 24, Dicta in basilica sanctorum Acaunensium, in innovatione monasteri, shows that the church was being 'revived', not founded; see Avitus of Vienne, Homilia 24, in: U. Chevalier ed., Oeuvres complètes de saint Avit évêque de Vienne (nouv. ed., Lyon, 1890), p. 337.


12 For Guntram, see below, at note 36; for Dagobert, see note 39.

to highlight the monastery’s extraordinary liturgy and its popular martyr-saint, Maurice himself. All of this is true; but it is not the whole truth. Agaune was powerful because it meant more than one thing, and sometimes different things in different contexts. The remainder of this paper will elaborate on this point, highlighting those few moments when the sources — both material and written — seem to cluster closely enough to allow us to say something reasonable about them. These moments are: the time of Sigismund’s foundation; the reign of King Guntram; the mid-seventh century; and the early Carolingian period.

Sigismund’s foundation

The foundation of Saint-Maurice marked the start of an orthodox (i.e. catholic) royal-episcopal alliance. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that the monastery was in many ways a creation of the episcopacy. In that same study, I argue that Agaune’s liturgy, dubbed the laus perennis by modern commentators, has been wrongly attributed to the model of the staunchly orthodox Akoimetoi monks at Constantinople. The only man associated with Agaune who might have been in a position to know about those monks was Avitus, bishop of Vienne and advisor to Sigismund and his father, King Gundobad. But Avitus’s letters show him to be thoroughly confused as to what was and was not orthodox at Constantinople, especially regarding liturgical practices. On the other hand, Avitus and the other bishops involved with Sigismund in Agaune’s foundation need have looked no further than the practices of bishops and monks in the Rhône Valley to find extraordinary liturgical innovation. There was precedent right at home for a liturgy of day-and-night psalmody.

When Sigismund founded Agaune, he had good political reasons for favoring the Theban martyrs. His cousin Sedeleuba and his aunt Thendelinda had already founded churches near the city of Geneva.

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dedicated to Ursus and Victor, martyrs associated with Maurice. Sigismund thus may have been, in the words of Ian Wood, ‘intent on eclipsing the works of his relatives’. In this he resembled the bishops of Geneva, who also took keen interest in the cult. Bishop Domitianus was known for having transferred Victor’s bones to Geneva as well as for his discovery and invention of the relics of Innocentius, another Theban martyr. And Bishop Maximus, according to the *Vita abbatum Acaunensium*, was the advisor who ‘incited’ Sigismund to oust the ‘vulgar’ crowd at Agaune and reorganize the site in a way suitable for the martyrs, even though Agaune was not in Maximus’s diocese. This suggests that the bishop of Geneva may have been interested in redrawing jurisdictional as well as spiritual boundaries.

Bishops and prince together, then, reconfigured the topography of the holy, setting up a monastery that suppressed an older community of worshippers at the martyrs’ tombs while drawing upon a large local repertory of cults and cultic practices for the new monastic *ordo* there. The new monks still tended the relics of the Theban martyrs, but they did so in a different way, and in entirely new buildings.

This was not recognized in the 1940s and 1950s, when the archaeologist Louis Blondel confidently asserted that he had found the pre-Sigismund edifices: a chapel, later enlarged into a basilica built over the martyr’s tombs against the rock; an attached baptistery; and a hospice for pilgrims. He also found structures that he took to be Sigismund’s basilica, and he interpreted a ramp that led around the southern and western walls of that new basilica as a pathway by

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which pilgrims gained access to the old basilica, under which was the primitive mausoleum (fig. 1).\(^{20}\)

We have to thank several trees and their destructive roots for causing an emergency that sent new archaeologists led by Hans-Jörg Lehner to the site in 1995/96.\(^{21}\) It should be said from the outset that their reassessment is extremely preliminary, mostly unpublished, and, above all, incomplete. They were able to revisit only the site that Blondel had chosen to excavate, and that is probably too restricted. The present church and buildings of the complex take up a good deal of space below and to the southeast of Blondel’s excavation area. But when the present community at Saint-Maurice decided to expand their church in the 1940s, Blondel observed very


clearly (before it was covered over by modern structures once again) the remains of an ancient (perhaps sixth-century) baptistery and an eighth-century tomb. It is thus very likely that the early architectural group at Agaune was considerably larger and more complex than the one now on view, extending into the area now covered by modern edifices. Saint-Maurice was, after all, meant to showcase the piety of a king and his bishops at a time when the nearby bishop of Martigny had a huge ecclesiastical complex boasting two large churches side-by-side, and when the bishop at Geneva presided over a still more impressive compound, with two differently organized basilicas marking out its northern and southern flanks; a baptistery; and a grand episcopal reception hall fitted out with a magnificent mosaic tile floor. It is unlikely that a royal scion and his episcopal advisors envisaged less for their common enterprise.

So what we see is hardly what was there. And yet what we see is enormously suggestive. It suggests, in the first place, that nearly everything that had been built before 515 was obliterated, whether by chance or design. What Blondel took as the evidence for the pre-515 basilica — an apse wall — turns out, upon modern inspection, to be a Romanesque or, more likely, Gothic building. The baptistery that Blondel had identified off the south wall of the basilica turns out to have been a sacristy attached to the later Carolingian church built on the site; while the ‘mausoleum’ that Blondel had thought contained the tombs of the martyrs, over which the first chapel had

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25 This may be especially true given the association of Theodore with Ambrose; Ambrose’s Milan had a double cathedral, as did many late antique Lombard episcopal sees; see P. Piva, Le cattedrali lombarde. Ricerche sulla ‘cattedrali doppie’ da Sant’Ambrogio all’età romanica (Quistello, 1990), esp. chap. 2.
been erected, in fact contains only three tombs: one dates from before 515 while the others are later (though pre-Carolingian). Some few walls that Blondel considered to be the pre-515 hospice for pilgrims are (according to the observations of Lehner and his group) properly to be dated to that period; but their function is uncertain. The only buildings that Blondel plausibly got right are the church of Sigismund (with its subsequent expansions) and the Carolingian church with its eastern and western apses.

Nothing, therefore, suggests the pre-515 community or any of its structures, and it is tempting to think that the site was in fact reorganized as completely as possible in the time of Sigismund. Certainly the texts about the new foundation hid and obfuscated the existence of the earlier monks who lived on the site. But need the architecture mirror the texts? Let us put the matter in its simplest form: on the basis of our present knowledge of the site, there is no trace of an early basilica 'against the rock'. It is possible that we have been looking in the wrong place; in that case, we might say simply that Sigismund and his advisors erected a prestigious new church without reference to the old. Alternatively, it is possible that the first basilica was where Blondel sought it, but was obliterated deliberately by Sigismund's architecture. Finally, it is just possible that the early basilica never in fact existed.

Whatever the case, the absence of the oldest structures does not obviate the fact that, as Charles Bonnet pointed out to me, there is evidence of long-term continuity at the site. In particular, two 'hot' zones may be discerned. One ran north-south along a line marked by the eastern apses of a sequence of churches built on the site up to and including the Carolingian period. (It was signaled, as well, by the Gothic apse next to the rock). The other ran parallel to, but to the west of, the first. For the earliest period, this western axis is clearly represented by only the smallest bit of wall. But we can see it as a focal point in the Carolingian period, when an entire western apse was built, into which was placed the tomb of Saint-Maurice within an arcosolium, a rectangular space topped by an archway. This western axis may not have been neglected by Sigismund's church either, as we shall see.

We can associate that latter church with the constructions that Lehner calls 'phase 2', which appear to date from the sixth century. Blondel confidently spoke of 'Sigismund's church', and in this instance he may not be wrong. We know that Sigismund's church was ded-
icated in 515, and we have a homily written by bishop Avitus for the occasion. There Avitus calls attention to the psalmody of the monks; he even makes up a word, *psalmisonum*, to emphasize the solemn tones of the day and night liturgy there. Unfortunately, he does not describe the church in which this liturgy took place; but Blondel was right to think that it was a simple basilica with one fairly elongated eastern apse. Blondel also thought that flanking it to the south and gradually rising along its west end was a ramp leading to the old basilica of the pre-515 monks. It now seems more likely that the ramp led right into Sigismund’s church. Why would pilgrims care to enter there? I have two complementary suggestions. First, they entered to marvel at the monks’ non-stop liturgy. It is striking that no barrier has been discovered between the area around the altar and the rest of the basilica, for such structures were common in churches of this period. Indeed, Gregory of Tours suggests that laypeople were welcome to come to Agaune and listen to the monks. His first illustration of the *virtus* of the tombs of the martyrs, quoted at the beginning of this paper, features Saint Maurice comforting a mourning mother on the spot by inviting her to rise for matins the next day to listen for the voice of her dead son ‘among the chorus of psalm-singing monks’. She could do this ‘every day of [her] life’ if she liked.

Second, pilgrims entered only after going round the west end of the church. This may have been to allow them to visit, in some way we cannot now determine, the relics (if such there were) along that western axis. Certainly it is striking that a bit later another corridor was built, wrapping itself right around the ramp, under which are tombs that appear to date from the eighth and ninth centuries. This was clearly a privileged burial place. But here we are getting ahead of our story.

To return to the foundation of 515, then, the sources, both textual and material, suggest two preoccupations. One was to forget...

27 Lehner, “Saint-Maurice”, modifies the sequence of apse construction, however.
the first community that had tended the relics of the martyrs. The
other was to create — through episcopal ingenuity and royal power —
a spectacularly long liturgy that would express the piety of the bish-
ops while according appropriate deference to the site and glory to
the king.

THE TIME OF KING GUNTRAM

The texts for King Guntram show that the alliance between bish-
ops and kings persisted when the Merovingians took over Burgundy
and that Agaune remained a potent symbol of close royal-episcopal
relations. Gregory of Tours could hardly mention Agaune without
invoking the piety of kings. In his Histories, he associated the site
with the remorse of King Sigismund, penitent murderer of his own
son. In the Liber in gloria martyrum, he linked it as well to King
Guntram, Frankish king of Burgundy (561–92). Indeed, in Gregory’s
second (and last) illustration of the virtus of the tombs of the Theban
martyrs, he dwelt on Guntram’s ‘spiritual activities’, his renunciation
of earthly pomp, and his gifts to the monks at Agaune.

For Gregory, Guntram was a bishop manqué. Indeed, he was another
Mamertus, the bishop of Vienne who (as Ian Wood describes in this
volume) created a new kind of rogation liturgy in the face of nat-
ural disasters:

as if a good bishop [Gregory writes] providing the remedies by which
the wounds of a common sinner might be healed, [Guntram] ordered
all the people to assemble in church and to celebrate Rogations with
the highest devotion. . . . For three days, his alms-giving flowing more
than usual, he was so anxious about all the people that he might well
have been thought not so much a king as a bishop of the Lord. 31

At the Council of Valence in 585, Guntram’s bishops met ‘on account
of the complaints of the poor’ to decide what would be best ‘for the
safety of the king, the salvation of his soul, and the state of reli-
gion’. 32 It is clear by the end of the document that the ‘poor’ were
the monks of royal monasteries; or, more precisely, they were the

30 Pace Paxton, “Power and the power to heal”, p. 107.
31 Gregory of Tours, Decem libri historiarum, IX, c. 21, p. 441.
32 “Concilium Valentinum”, in: C. de Clercq ed., Concilia Galliae, a.511–a.695,
monks of monasteries favored by King Guntram, Queen Austrechildis, and their two daughters, the latter three now deceased. The council confirmed the gifts to loci sancti by these royal personages and, calling its assent not simply worthy of bishops but a matter of divine inspiration, turned to consider how to protect the basilicas of Saint-Marcel and Saint-Symphorian and other places endowed by royal largesse. It declared that whatever the royal family had given or would give to these places — 'whether in the ministry of the altar or in gold and silver ornaments (speciebus) for the divine cult' — was not in future to be diminished or taken away either by the local bishop or by royal power (potestas regia), on pain of perpetual anathema. Here the alliance of king and bishops had become so intense as to lead them to proclaim a mutual and complementary self-restraint. In the mid-seventh century, under the impetus of a reform movement spearheaded by the disciples of Columbanus, this self-restraint would come to be interpreted as formal exemption. 33

### The mid-seventh century

In the mid-seventh century Agaune had two related meanings: liturgical and juridical. It was lauded for its liturgy and renowned for its monastic exemption, which betokened its excellent relations with kings.

The liturgy is easy to deal with: Fredegar, for example, writing in the mid-seventh century, 34 speaks of the psalmody of Saint-Denis ad instar — on the model — of Agaune. 35 The long day and night liturgy at Agaune continued to exert its magnetic attraction.

Exemption is more complicated and involves a new kind of royal model, though one not entirely divorced from that of Sigismund. The new model, however, went beyond linking king to episcopacy: the king himself became pliant and bishop-like. When Fredegar tells us that in 584 King Guntram founded Saint-Marcel de Chalon on the model of Saint-Maurice, what he means (as he goes on to say)

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33 On these disciples, see B.H. Rosenwein, Negotiating space: Power, restraint, and privileges of immunity in early medieval Europe (Ithaca, N.Y., 1999), chap. 3.
35 Fredegar, Chronica, IV, c. 79, p. 161.
is that Guntram, thinking like a bishop, called a council of bishops to carry forward the task. Fredegar had in mind the Council of Valence. But by Fredegar's day, some of the words of this council had been incorporated into the first charter of exemption, that for Rebais. And Saint-Marcel itself was understood to be a precedent for the Rebais exemption. The privilege for Rebais, drawn up c. 640, presents Burgundofaro, bishop of Meaux, as initiating a series of provisions directed against his own diocesan powers of jurisdiction over the monastery of Rebais. In the first of these provisions, as Albrecht Diem pointed out to me, the ideas and even the vocabulary of the Council of Valence appear: whatever is given to the monastery, whatever, that is, that pertains to the divine cult or functions as offerings for the altar, is not to be usurped or diminished by bishops or kings (regalis sublimitas). Diem concludes that 'Rebais is a sort of mega-extension of Valence'.

Rebais's is the first extant privilege containing an episcopal exemption. Indeed, it is probably the first ever drawn up. Yet it places itself within a venerable monastic tradition that begins with Saint-Maurice. Its provisions of 'exemption' (libertas), it declares, arise not from mere 'impulse' (instinctu) but rather from the norms of the 'holy places' of Agaune, Lérins, Luxeuil, and Saint-Marcel of Chalon.

How can this be? There are no charters of exemption for any of these monasteries prior to the one given to Rebais. I suggest that the new mid-seventh century understanding of the right relations between a special, royal monastery and the king and his bishops was read back to the time of Agaune's foundation. Fredegar thought that Guntram followed the model of bishops when he was with bishops: 'sacerdus ad instar'. He noted that Guntram called a synod of forty bishops 'ad instar institucionis monasterii sanctorum Agauninsum', that is, following the example of the foundation of Agaune, which (this was Fredegar's point), in the time of Sigismund was confirmed by Avitus and other bishops upon the orders of the prince. For Fredegar, then, Saint-Marcel followed the model of Agaune because it involved a king who acted according to the model of bishops and who ratified his foundation through them. Agaune became a 'type' of exempt

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37 Quoted from a private E-mail communication. For the Council of Valence see note 32 above.
38 See Goffart, "Fredegar problem", p. 343.
monastery through a chain of associations that led from Rebais back to Saint-Marcel and the Council of Valence, and from thence back to Agaune.

In 654, just a few years before Fredegar was writing, Clovis II issued a diploma for Saint-Denis that neatly tied together the new-style royal patronage with both exemption and the non-stop liturgy at Agaune. 39 Itself a confirmation of an episcopal exemption that must have been very close to Burgundofaro’s for Rebais, the Saint-Denis privilege linked the king’s interests with those of the bishops, and it ended with a reminder that King Dagobert, Clovis’s father, had instituted at Saint-Denis ‘psalmody per turnas, just as it is practiced at the monastery of Saint-Maurice d’Agaune’. These various ideas came together because of the mid-seventh century conviction that episcopal exemption freed the monastery to carry out its liturgical round ‘for the stability of the kingdom’. The emphasis in the mid-seventh century was on the king as an associate of episcopal sponsors who guaranteed the monastic liturgical enterprise by staying clear of the monastery.

This perspective is echoed as well in the papal exemption for Agaune, issued in the mid-seventh century by Pope Eugenius I (654–657). In this text, as reconstructed by Anton, the pope writes at the behest of Clovis II (‘postulavit a nobis Chlodoveus’), presenting his words as confirmation of the statutes and privileges of King Sigismund and the kings who came after him. 40 The right of the brethren to choose their own abbot is affirmed, and the pope prohibits the diocesan bishop from extending his ditio or potestas over the monastery; nor may the diocesan even enter it unless invited by the abbot to celebrate Mass; nor may he take away any of the alms given to it by the faithful; nor, finally, may he carry off the tithes which, says the privilege, were given to the monastery by the founder, now styled ‘Saint Sigismund’.

By the late seventh or early eighth century, the idea that Agaune was ‘hands off’ to its diocesan bishop was enshrined in the formularty of Marculf, where Agaune again paraded with Lérins and Luxeuil

as precedents for episcopal exemption. Indeed, the association became general and routine. In Charlemagne's first diploma for Farfa, for example, the monastery received a privilege said to be on the model of those for Lérins, Agaune, and Luxeuil, namely (in the words of the charter):

that no bishop should receive a gift for the election of the abbot; nor have power to carry away from the monastery the crosses, chalices, patens, books or anything else pertaining to the ministry of the church; nor have the least power to subject the monastery to princely taxation; nor, finally, be able to exact tribute or a census from that monastery of theirs.

Thus, in the mid-seventh century Agaune was a place of power not so much at its site on the Rhône as at the Frankish royal court, where its neat dual symbolism — as exemplar of effective liturgy and as model of episcopal and royal synergy — gave it particular panache when kings and bishops were creating the first charters of exemption and immunity.

This view of royal/episcopal/monastic relations did not last; the privilege for Farfa marks the last gasp of the Merovingian tradition of according episcopal exemptions to monasteries. Already by the mid-eighth century bishops had virtually stopped giving out episcopal exemptions. In the Carolingian period, kings gave out both exemptions and immunities, but they changed their character. By the addition of tuitio (protection), they asserted not — as in the Merovingian period — a hands-off policy but rather their very active hands-on control over the monasteries of the empire.

Meanwhile a different aspect of Agaune was gaining new emphasis: the organization of the monks into turmae (companies) to carry out

43 See Rosenwein, Negotiating space, Part 2.
their day-and-night liturgy in a church which itself had become all the holier by organizing in focused fashion the translated relics of the martyrs. The sources here are both material and textual. They include the new Carolingian structures at Agaune itself and the so-called foundation charter of King Sigismund, which Theurillat has shown was a forgery of the late eighth/early ninth centuries. The *Passio sancti Sigismundi* and the *Vita Sadalbergae* I also take to be Carolingian. Though based on sixth-century materials, they may help us to assess the meaning of Agaune in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

In the early Carolingian period, Sigismund’s church, which had meanwhile undergone several changes and expansions at its east end, was knocked down and subsumed into a far larger basilica with two apses, the western one of which had a crypt below.44 The focus of this western end was the tomb of Saint Maurice, which was placed in an *arcosolium* within its western wall. Though Lehner’s findings suggest that the old access ramp was destroyed at this time, it seems that the passage-way that limned it, while no longer opening onto the new church, was nevertheless fitted out with windows or apertures. These might have provided pilgrims with contact of some sort with the relics along the western axis. Entry and egress was provided for the western crypt by a set of stairs. This church was more clearly focalized and organized than its predecessor.

Efficient organization was also the theme of the Carolingian texts concerning Agaune. Consider the so-called foundation charter of Sigismund. Theurillat has argued plausibly that this source was forged whole cloth in the late eighth or early ninth century.45 It is of rather little value for the sixth century, but no one has yet bothered to put it into its Carolingian context. It is worthwhile to make the attempt here.

The text falls into two parts: first is the account of a huge council purportedly taking place at Agaune in 515 consisting of 40 bishops, 40 counts, and a very pliant ‘King’ Sigismund; second is the king’s donation charter, which focuses on the royal properties given

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44 Blondel spoke of a crypt in the eastern apse as well, but Lehner, “Saint Maurice”, observed no evidence for this.

to the monastery. The council is presented as a dialogue between bishops and king. The counts are there only for show. Four bishops dominate: Maximus, Theodore, Victor, and Viventiolus. Historically, this is utterly impossible: Theodore was long dead by the time of Sigismund. Rhetorically, it is extremely effective. The tone of the proceedings is set from the start when the king abjures the Arian heresy and asks the bishops to instruct him in the true religion. The four do not hesitate to do so. After evoking some general principles (for example, to live justly), Theodore gets down to brass tacks. The immediate and pressing question is what to do about the bodies of the Theban martyrs. Who will build churches for them? Unmentioned, of course, is the church that we know had been built for those relics and tended by a group of monks. The king volunteers to do what is necessary. Theodore advises him on how to dispose of the relics: put the ones that can be associated with a specific name — Maurice himself, Exupery, Candidus, Victor — in an ambitus of the basilica (this is, surely, a reference to the wall of the Carolingian church in which is the arcosolium) and put the others in a well-fortified place so that they cannot be stolen. Then have the monks there carry on an office of perpetual psalmody day and night.

The latter is institutionalized through the prescriptions of Bishops Victor and Viventiolus. There are to be eight groups — here they are called normae (a common term for ‘monastic community’), in most of the other sources of the period, turmae — to succeed one another in relay for the various hourly offices. An abbot presides over all; ‘deacons’ preside over each norma. The monks are freed from manual labor; their clothing, drink, and food are prescribed. They are to sleep in one dormitory, eat in one refectory, warm themselves in the same warming room.

The king’s role, says the Viventiolus of this account, is to endow the monastery. If the abbot runs into any problems, he is to betake himself to the Holy See and seek help there. This is an extraordinary suggestion: such ‘right of appeal’ was a provision of only the rarest and most up-to-date privileges of the eighth century, such as the one Stephen II gave Fulrad of Saint-Denis in 757. It is so unusual that

it suggests that the creation of the ‘foundation charter’ of Sigismund might reasonably be placed at the time of Fulrad. Indeed, we know from the Liber Pontificalis that Agaune is where Stephen and Fulrad met in 753, on Stephen’s trans-alpine journey to ask for Pippin’s aid against the Lombards.17

However, there is another context for the text as well, one that is broader and may be more important: the monastic reform movement of the Carolingian period. Three decades ago François Masai already noticed that the foundation charter of Sigismund echoed two rules.18 One, the so-called ‘Rule of Four Fathers’, has Serapion, Paphnutius, and two fathers both named Macarius together in council, each taking turns in a sort of dialogue in which they dictate their rule. The other is the Rule of St Benedict. Both were collected in the Carolingian reformer Benedict of Aniane’s Codex Regularum.19 It is clear, however, that a monastic reformer need not necessarily have been at Aachen or Inden to have been preoccupied with cleaning up untidy monastic practices and making all orderly, regular, and uniform. Indeed, it is rather likely that Agaune was the place where the foundation charter of Sigismund was drawn up.

Although the turmae of the monks at Agaune were mentioned in Dagobert’s charter for Saint-Denis in 654, in the phrase ‘psallenciuss per turmas’, this use of the term remained an isolated instance until the Carolingian period.20 None of the sources that may be associated with the foundation of 515 — not the writings of Avitus of Vienne, not the Vita abbatum Acaunensium, not the additions made after the death of Sigismund to the text of the Passio Acaunensium martyrum, not the writings of Gregory of Tours nor even the later chronicle of Fredegar — say a word about turmae. These sources certainly stress the day and night psalmody carried out by the monks; but they are unconcerned about its practical organization. By contrast, the Carolingian sources can almost be so identified because of their use

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20 CIL 13, p. 37, no 558.
of the term. In the so-called ‘Chronicle of the Ninth Century’, the monks are organized in nine *turmae* to chant their psalms.\(^{51}\) In the *Vita Sadalbergae*, Sadalberga’s nuns are distributed ‘per turmas, ad instar Agaunensium’.\(^{52}\) In the Carolingian *Gesta Dagoberti I*, Dagobert’s reform of Saint-Denis, on the model of Agaune and (in this case) Tours as well, has the monks chanting the psalms *turmatis*.\(^{53}\) And in the *Vita Amati*, which, however, may possibly be a Merovingian text, the saint organizes his house at Remiremont ‘per septem turmas’, presumably inspired by Agaune, where he had once spent time as a monk.\(^{54}\)

When a donor named Ayroenus gave a donation to the monastery of Saint-Maurice in 765, he did so ‘to the sacred place or indeed to the turma Valdensis, where the monk Matulphus, the turmarius, is seen to preside’.\(^{55}\) Historians have interpreted this as a ‘vestige’ of the original organization at Agaune; but it might as easily mark a newly reformed organization there.

More than mere interest in organization may be involved. The word *turma* had primarily military associations.\(^{56}\) In Eucherius’s *Passio* of the Theban martyrs, the impious ‘squadrons’ who carried out emperor Maximian’s evil persecutions were organized in *turmae*.\(^{57}\) In

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\(^{51}\) For the text, see Theurillat, *L’Abbaye de St-Maurice d’Agaune*, p. 55.


\(^{56}\) The Vulgate provides a quick overview of *turna*’s semantic field. In Gen. 32:7–8, Jacob divides his people and herds into *duae turnae*. They are his ‘company’, to be sure, but one that is decidedly unarmed. In Exod. 6:26, God commands Moses and Aaron to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt ‘per turnas suas’. Here *turna* is used in place of *cognatio*. Nevertheless here we are not far from military meaning, for these same cohorts will (in Num 1:52) pitch their camp *per turnas et cuneos atque exercitum suum*. In 1 Chron. 27 the king’s army is organized in *turmae* in companies of 2400 men. Nevertheless, in 2 Chron. 35:10 the Levites stand *in turnis* to take part in the rites of Passover. Clearly the meaning of *turna* deserves special study; but from the evidence here adduced, we may say fairly certainly that it implies more than a simple ‘group’; it is an organized band, under a leader, and, while not necessarily armed, it can quickly become so.

\(^{57}\) Eucherius, *Passio Acaunensis Martyrum*, c. 1, p. 33.
Avitus of Vienne’s poem on the deeds of the Jews, the word is equivalent to an army cohort. In Prudentius’s *Psychomachia* the virtues are drawn up in *tornae*. In Gregory’s *Moralia in Job* the Chaldaean army forms three *tornae*.

Using the word *tornia* thus gave a particularly militant cast to the efficacy and singleness of purpose of monastic psalmody. In the Carolingian period it became a kind of shorthand for the monastic corporation as a whole: Lorsch was a *monachorum torna* in a charter of protection issued by Charlemagne c. 772/3, and Fulda’s abbot Sturm presided over *tornae monachorum* in a charter of 779. It is useful to note in this regard that visual representations of the soldier-martyr Saint-Maurice began to be produced only in the ninth century. In the *Passio Sigismundi regis*, the king sets up his choirs of psalm-singers at Agaune *ad instar caelestis militiae*. Monasteries had always been understood as a kind of religious army, but in the Carolingian period the liturgy itself was militarized. This may be connected with its renewed emphasis on prayer for the dead.

Via a rapprochement of material and written sources, we have seen that Agaune was a powerful holy place — in part meaning a model holy place — for a very long time. The king, his bishops, and the military martyrs they honored there were always paramount in the power that it exerted. What is more interesting is that those elements were paired with different ones, hence given different meanings, at different times. In 515 and shortly thereafter, they were tied

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61 MGH DD 1, p. 105, n° 72 (Lorsch); p. 177, n° 127 (Fulda).  
to an emphasis on episcopal liturgical innovation. In the mid-seventh century, they suggested a model of freedom from episcopal control. In the early ninth century they were harnessed to an ideal of organization and militant liturgy.

These were not contradictory representations: episcopal will and freedom from episcopal control went hand in hand in the mid-seventh century, and liturgy by *tunnae* was itself a reflection of episcopal creativity and royal and soldierly militancy. There is every reason to think that at some level all these facets coexisted at Agaune from the time of its reorganization in 515. Nevertheless, the reason that it is important to tease out various emphases and subtleties of meaning is to quell our impulse to generalize. If we read that a monastery was set up ‘on the model’ of Agaune, we should not jump to the conclusion that such a monastery carried out the ‘laus perennis’. (Indeed, it most certainly did not carry out ‘the’ *laus perennis*.) If we are speaking about a mid-seventh century monastery, it is very much more likely that the place had an episcopal exemption — or wanted one. If our source is from the late eighth century, the monastery in question was probably organized by *tunnae* and performed an aggressive non-stop liturgy — or at least hoped to do so.

All this leads to a final, general hypothesis. It is that for a place of power to be lasting, it must have the same sort of complexity as a great piece of music, so that in each era new *maestri* can tease out different timbres and themes. So it was with Agaune in the early middle ages.