

## **Saint Cucufas (†303/304) - An Iberian Saint in the Carolingian Empire**

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At the beginning of the IVth century, two young wealthy men, Cucufas and Felix, arrive by ship in the port of Barcelona. Both are presumably sons of wealthy families from northern Africa, more precisely from the city of Scilicum near Carthage. The young men are Christians and are fleeing the Roman persecution of Christians under Emperor Diocletian. Following the Christian works of mercy, Cucufas and Felix, who have the financial means, take care of their fellow men and other refugees. Felix travelled further north to the city of Girona, while Cucufas stayed in Barcelona to preach. The young Christian's preaching attracted the attention of the governor Galerius, who had Cucufas brought before him and interrogated. Cucufas had to undergo several ordeals, all of which he survived unharmed - quite the opposite of the soldiers or his judges who tortured him; the latter were blinded or even died. Finally, Cucufas was beheaded under the governor Rufinus. The possible place of this execution is described as "locum hunc Obtiano, quod situm est a civitate octavo miliario". Unfortunately, it is not possible to give an exact name, but it is assumed that it could be the current location of the monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallès. The foundations of a possible martyr's chapel were found there during excavations in the 1990s.

How do we know about the saint with the unusual name? The early Christian poet Prudentius (†405) left us a collection of 14 martyr hymns in his *Liber Persitephanon* in the late IV and early V centuries. In the fourth hymn, Cucufas is mentioned for the first time in a liturgical source together with the aforementioned Felix.<sup>1</sup> He appears a second time in the *Passio Sanctae Leocadiae* together with other Iberian martyrs. Cucufas is also mentioned in an entry in the so-called *Orationale Visigothorum*, which is now in the *Bibliotheca Capitolare* in Verona and was probably written in Tarragona in the 7th century. In the meantime, a monastery was founded in Barcelona under the patronage of the saint. It is assumed that the *Passio* of the saint was also recorded at this time, because although they had the saint's relics, they also had to give them a special value through the saint's legend.<sup>2</sup> In 777, the relics of Saint Cucufas are mentioned in the will of Abbot Fulrad of Saint Denis and the question arises as to how these relics could have found their way to the Carolingian Empire - more precisely to Leberau in present-day Alsace.<sup>3</sup> The three most common theories focus on both Abbot Fulrad of Saint Denis (†784) and the court around Charlemagne (†814).

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<sup>1</sup> Prudence. *Cathemerinon Liber*, hg. v. Maurice LAVARENNE (1), Paris 21955

<sup>2</sup> FÁBREGA GRAU, Ángel, *Pasionario Hispánico (siglos VII-XI)* (*Monumenta Hispania Sacra. Serie Litúgica VI*) 1953 sowie *Passionarium Hispanicum*, hg. v. Valeriano YARZA URKIOLA (*Corpus Christianorum. Series latina 171-171 A*), Turnhout 2020.

<sup>3</sup> TANGL, Michael, *Das Testament Fulrads von Saint - Denis*, 1907, URL: [[https://www.digizeitschriften.de/id/345858530\\_0032|log15](https://www.digizeitschriften.de/id/345858530_0032|log15)].

- 1) The "Suleiman" theory: The proponents of this theory see the translatio of the relics to the Carolingian Empire as a diplomatic gift from the wali (governor) of Barcelona, who may have brought these relics with him to his audience in 759 with Charlemagne. Abbot Fulrad was chancellor at the king's court at this time. The theory of a diplomatic gift seems the most likely. The furnishing of newly founded monasteries and churches was not only a prerequisite for the consecration of the altar and the building of the church, but at the same time also a way of bringing pilgrims to the place of faith. The relics thus not only increased the treasure of the church, but also its reputation in the respective region.
- 2) "Rome" theory: It is assumed that the relics of Cucufa first reached Rome, possibly similar to the codex of the *Orationale Visigothorum*, in order to protect them from the Muslim invasion of the region. The Pope then presented the relics to Abbot Fulrad as a gift, but this theory cannot be substantiated and therefore seems unlikely.
- 3) "Ambassador" theory: Here it is assumed that Abbot Fulrad commissioned monks to travel to the Iberian Peninsula in order to acquire/receive relics. Just as about 100 years later the monk Usuard was commissioned to acquire relics of martyrs in Cordoba. This theory is the least likely, as the journey of the monk Usuard of Saint Germain-des-Près has left written documentation, but the postulated journey of the ambassadors on behalf of Fulrad is not documented at all.<sup>4</sup>

The Cucufa's journey does not end in Alsace, however, but takes us on to Saint Denis, the cathedral at the heart of the Carolingian Empire. Abbot Fulrad decreed in his will that his monasteries, goods, treasures and relics should be bequeathed to the abbey of Saint Denis. In the 830s, the relics were brought to Saint Denis by order of Abbot Hilduin of Saint Denis (†840/844). The martyrologies written in the 860s by Ado of Vienne,<sup>5</sup> Florus and Usuard<sup>6</sup> attest to the translatio of the relics from Leberau to Saint Denis, albeit with only one sentence at the end of each of the saint's passion narratives on his day of honour, 25 July or the VIII Kalends of August. In Saint Denis, the remains of Cucufa have been given their final resting place in a place of honour to the right of the main altar. A shrine containing the saint's supposed remains can still be seen in Saint Denis today. Cucufas was and still is venerated in other monasteries associated with Saint Denis, including Corbie and Saint Benoit sur Loire.

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<sup>4</sup> PAGÈS I PARETAS, Montserrat, *Sobre el trasllat de relíquies de Sant Cugat a Alsàcia i a Sant Denis, a prop de París, en època carolíngia*, in: *Miscellània litúrgica catalana* 17, 2009, URL: [<https://raco.cat/index.php/Miscellania/article/view/51014>].

<sup>5</sup> *Le martyrologe d'Adon. Ses deux familles, ses trois recensions ; Texte et commentaire*, hg. v. Jacques DUBOIS/Geneviève. RENAUD u.a. (*Sources d'histoire médiévale*), Paris 1984.

<sup>6</sup> GAIFFIER, Baudouin de, *Les notices hispaniques dans le martyrologe d'Usuard*, in: *Analecta Bollandiana*, 1937, S. 268–283.

In this short report on my research, I hope to show that saints and their relics, as well as their Passiones, occupied a firm place in early and high medieval liturgy, but also in secular life. On the one hand, history was written to create certain realities, which in turn led to an upgrading of the monasteries and churches that were allowed to call the relics their own. But the remains of the saints could also serve as diplomatic gifts. Similarly, the translatio of the relics to different places strengthened the network connections between the religious communities and institutions, as can be seen above all in the martyrologies and other liturgical manuscripts such as calendars and antiphonaries.

In researching the Iberian saints, I hope to identify more such interesting biographies and network connections that move the region around the Pyrenees further into the centre of the Carolingian Empire - away from the periphery.