

VENERATION OF MARTYRS IN LATE ANTIQUE GAUL

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Martyrs played an important role in the success of early Christianity: As people who were willing to accept death rather than renounce the Christian God, they exerted an immense fascination and acted as effective ‘advertising vehicle’ for their faith. For the individual Christian communities, martyrs were also a source of identity, as their members were able to identify with pride in the blood witness from their own ranks.

SPACE. In my thesis, I am focussing on the veneration of Christian martyrs in late antique Gaul. In particular, I want to investigate how martyr cults were staged in late antique communities and how atmospheres were created: To what extent did cults affect urban spaces, urban topography? Which spaces were newly occupied or conquered by the cult? How did the cityscape change when martyrs were brought into the city?

RITUALS. What rituals were used to honour and venerate the saints? Among other things, ad sanctos burials, veneration of relics, processions, church services, vigils, etc. are considered here. What role did the cults and their rituals and actions play for the bishops, who authenticated the martyrs, their tombs and passiones and who established and orchestrated cultic veneration?

IMPRESSIONS. What effects did atmospheres that were staged in the course of martyr veneration have on people? What feelings were evoked, what memories awakened? Were people thrown into ecstasy, fear, awe? Here, written reports from believers, but also non-Christians, who experienced the atmosphere and reported on their impressions, will be analysed. Reports about the actual impressions can also provide information about the success or failure of the staging.

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