

Inventing Paganism in Eighth-Century Bavaria

***Abstract:** This article examines the hagiographies of Saints Emmeram and Corbinian and the synod of Neuching from eighth-century Bavaria. It argues that the references to pagan survivals in these texts are misleading, in the absence of other evidence of paganism in the region. Rather, since these texts were composed in a narrow window of time from 769-774, this anxiety reflects concerns aroused by pagan uprisings in neighbouring Carantania, which were only suppressed in 772. Thus, the texts' authors "invented" paganism in their own culture as their perceptions of the dividing lines between Christianity and paganism grew sharper.*

I. The Ghost of Paganism

Our vision of the Christianization of medieval Europe has changed drastically over the last generation. It was once possible to see early medieval Germany as a land of virgin paganism, into which missionaries like Amandus, Willibrord, and Boniface boldly brought an alien Christian gospel.¹ This vision was framed in terms derived from the missionary movements of western Christendom in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Recent scholarship has made this image untenable. The work of Lutz von Padberg, for instance, has stressed the cultural similarities between Christian and non-Christian peoples of Europe, which made the latter's incorporation into Christendom

¹ Among the more influential works of the pre-war generation are K.S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity, Volume II: The Thousand Years of Uncertainty, A.D. 500-1500* (New York and London, 1938), J.T. Addison, *The Medieval Missionary: A Study of the Conversion of Europe, A.D. 500-1300* (Concord, NH, 1936). More recently, this tendency is also found in J.C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach* (Oxford, 1994). Russell's approach, however, has not gained much traction among contemporary scholars.

feasible.² Ian Wood's study of the hagiographies of missionary figures, our main sources of information on Christianization, has shown the extent to which these accounts are literary constructions, used among Christians to discuss missionary agendas, rather than direct reflections of actual activities.³ Archeology and careful analysis of the written sources have shown evidence of the presence of Christianity in many "mission fields" long predating the arrival of missionaries themselves. Personalities like Columbanus or Boniface, once presented as exemplary early medieval missionaries, now appear more like "reformers" and "consolidators" of existing Christian communities.

Early medieval Bavaria is a striking example of the shift from narratives of mission and conversion to those of reform and organization. Scholarly opinion up to the mid-twentieth century generally thought that Christianity virtually disappeared from the former Roman provinces of Rhaetia and Noricum in the sixth and seventh centuries. Postwar historians, however, particularly following the lead of Friedrich Prinz, moved toward seeing a strong continuity of Christianity in the area.⁴ Thus, Bavaria's re-entry into European Christendom in the eighth century now seems like a process of reorganization and reform rather than of mission and conversion.⁵

² L. von Padberg, *Mission und Christianisierung: Formen und Folgen bei Angelsachsen und Franken im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1995).

³ I. Wood, *The Missionary Life* (Harlow, 2001). Wood does, however, hold that the concerns aired in hagiographic literature did often reflect actual missionary experiences.

⁴ Efforts to find Bavarian paganism in mid-century scholarship include E. Klebel, "Zur Geschichte des Christentums in Bayern vor Bonifatius," in idem, *Probleme der bayerischen Verfassungsgeschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Munich, 1957), pp. 100-122; I. Zibermayr, *Noricum, Bayern und Österreich: Lorch als Hauptstadt und die Einführung des Christentums* (Munich and Berlin, 1944), and R. Bauerreiss, *Kirchengeschichte Bayerns*, Vol. 1 (St. Ottilien, 1958). Friedrich Prinz's arguments for continuity appear in numerous publications, particularly *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich: Kultur und Gesellschaft in Gallien, den Rheinlanden und Bayern am Beispiel der monastischen Entwicklung (4. bis 8. Jahrhundert)*, 2nd edn (Munich, 1988).

⁵ The strongest recent representative of the continuity paradigm is S. Freund, *Von den Agilulfingern zu den Karolingern: Bayerns Bischöfe zwischen Kirchenorganisation, Reichsintegration und Karolingischer*

The continuity paradigm has carried the field, but it leaves a lingering question: what to make of those sources which older scholarship took as evidence of paganism? If there was no great mission converting the Bavarians to Christianity, why did Bavarian authors sometimes write as though there had been? These sources betray an anxiety on the part of the Bavarian Christian leadership of the eighth century that their people had been entangled in actual paganism in the recent past, and that some current practices might still be tainted by demonic influences. These texts do not reflect memories of actual militant paganism in the region. Significantly, all of them were written within a narrow time frame, between 768 and 772. This article will argue that they indicate a shift in the mentalities of the Bavarian clergy, particularly expressed by Bishop Ardeo of Freising, as they developed a missionary agenda of their own and encountered setbacks in the pursuit of that agenda. These setbacks caused Ardeo and the other clergy to re-imagine their own past and thus to invent a pagan past for their own people.

Two of the texts in question are saints' lives. In the year 768, Ardeo arranged for the relics of St. Corbinian to be translated from his tomb high in the Alps at Mais down to Freising, where Corbinian had served as bishop some forty years earlier.⁶ Not long thereafter, Ardeo composed a hagiography of his patron saint. Among other things, this *Life* claimed that Corbinian had visited Rome twice, apparently between 710 and 720,

Reform (700-847), (Munich, 2004). Freund minimizes Boniface's work of 739, arguing that he only tinkered with a cohesive episcopal organization dating back to 716.

⁶ The *Lives* of both Emmeram and Corbinian are edited in *Arbeonis Episcopi Frisingensis: Vitae Sanctorum Haimhrammi et Corbiniani*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRG in usum scholarum 13 (Hannover, 1920). For introductions and interpretation of these texts as a whole, see Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 150-160, and J. Couser, „A Usable Past: Early Bavarian Hagiography in Context,“ *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* n.s. 4 (2007), pp. 1-55. Lothar Vogel's highly critical deconstruction of the *Vita Corbiniani*, *Vom Werden eines Heiligen: Eine Untersuchung der Vita Corbiniani des Bischofs Ardeo von Freising*, (Berlin and New York, 2000) has drawn sharp criticism from numerous quarters: for a recent defense of Ardeo's factuality, see C. Hammer, „Ardeo of Freising's 'Life and Passion' of St. Emmeram: The Martyr and His Critics,“ *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 101 (2006), pp. 5-36.

and received a *pallium* and preaching commission from the papacy which authorized him to preach Christianity throughout the world. He had chosen to settle in Bavaria to execute this commission, since “our people [the Bavarians] were only halfway into the Christian religion, as it were still unformed in the novitiate of its conversion.”⁷ Within a few years, by 772, Arbeo followed Corbinian’s *Life* with another on St. Emmeram, a former bishop at the ducal residence of Regensburg who had been martyred within Arbeo’s own diocese. Emmeram, according to Arbeo, desired to evangelize the Avars of the Pannonian plains, but was persuaded to work in Bavaria instead when he saw that its inhabitants still “drank the chalice of Christ together with that of the demons, as their fathers did.”⁸ Emmeram’s dates are uncertain, but his association with Duke Theodo would put his ministry between the 680s at the earliest and 715 at the latest.⁹ To judge by Arbeo’s accounts, the Bavarians counted as a newly Christian people during this era; their ancestors must only have been converted a generation before that.

Arbeo was not the only one to think that Bavarians had lingering pagan habits to worry about. In 771, when he must have been at work on Emmeram’s *Vita*, he and other Bavarian nobles and senior clergy met at the Synod of Neuching.¹⁰ Duke Tassilo presided over this council, and most of its legislation (some twenty-eight canons in all) concerned secular matters; rules on slavery and manumission, theft, and defying the

⁷ *Vita Corbiniani*, c. 15, p. 203.

⁸ *Vita Haimhrammi*, c. 7, p. 36.

⁹ The dating of Emmeram’s life and martyrdom has been a subject of controversy that need not concern us here; opinions vary between a date in the mid-to-late seventh century and one around 715. Hammer defends the earlier dating (see n. 6), but in fact the evidence is too slim to be decisive either way.

¹⁰ *Concilium Neuchingense*, ed. A. Werminghoff, MGH Concilia II (Hannover and Leipzig, 1906), pp. 98-105.

commands of the duke. In the midst of these laws, however, were three items forbidding non-Christian practices. All of them have to do with processes of dispute resolution, especially oath-taking and trial by combat:

iiii. Concerning a fight between two men, called the “wehadinc”: that there is to be no lot-casting beforehand, when they have been prepared, nor any songs at all nor are devilish devices or magic arts to be slipped in.

v. He who, at the aforementioned fight, which we call a “chamfwich,” may presume to set himself up against those making the accusation for a similar judgment, should swear the oath called “ahteid” in a church with three designated oathhelpers.

vi. Concerning that which the Bavarians call the “stapsaken,” in the words of which we perceive the idolatry of pagans from old custom, that it should not be made henceforward otherwise than that he who seeks the compensation should say, “You have stolen these things from me unjustly, which you ought to return and make composition with so many solidi.” Let the other say against him, “I have not stolen them nor do I owe composition.” Let him say to the one seeking the compensation with raised voice, “Let us extend our right hands to the just judgment of God.” And then let them both extend their right hands to heaven.¹¹

Of the three, canon six states most clearly that the old custom seemed to perpetuate pagan idolatry. Thus, an explicitly Christian oath, made in church, had to replace the traditional one. Canon four does not refer to paganism *per se*, but its condemnation of “devilish devices” draws on long-standing Christian discourse for condemning traditional religious beliefs. By its placement between these two, we can safely infer that the requirement in canon five that the new “ahteid” be sworn inside a church was another innovation to replace a customary, but suspect, practice. The canons indicate that traditional conflict-resolution procedures, left alone until now, seemed to be

¹¹ *Concilium Neuchingense*, IIII. “De pugna duorum, quod wehadinc vocatur, ut prius non sortiantur, quam parati sunt, ne forte carminibus vel machinis diabolicis vel magicis artibus insidiantur. V. Qui supra predictae pugnae, quod chamfwich diximus, peracto iudicio se simile vindictae erigere contra querentem presumpserit, sacramentum, quod ahteid dicunt, iuret in ecclesia cum tribus nominatis sacramentalibus. VI. De eo, quod Bawarii stapsaken dicunt, in quibus verbis ex vetusta consuetudine paganorum idolatri reprimus, ut deinceps non aliter nisi, ut dicat qui querit debitum: ‘Hec mihi iniusto abstulisti, quae reddere debes et cum tot solidis componere.’ Reus vero contra dicat: ‘Nec hoc abstuli nec componere debeo.’ Iterata voce requisito debito dicat: ‘Extendamus dexteram nostram ad iustum iudicium Dei.’ Et tunc manus dexteram utrique ad caelum extendant.”

tainted with “pagan survivals” and needed to be replaced with explicitly Christian alternatives.

None of these sources present an elaborate image of a pagan world, complete with gods, monsters, myths and rituals. Arbeo’s contemporaries in Anglo-Saxon and Frankish circles did imagine paganism in such terms, preparing themselves to debate whether beings who begat descendants could really be gods, cutting down sacred trees or defiling holy springs, and casting the gods and heroes of their religious opponents variously as Woden and Ingeld or Jupiter and Saturn. As James Palmer has recently shown in the pages of EME, simply to define “paganism” was always a tendentious affair for early medieval writers, overshadowed by the classical past and hampered by a lack of interest or means to comprehend cultures neither “civilized” nor Christian.¹²

Instead of such elaborate characterizations, what we find in Arbeo and at Neuching is a ghost of paganism, conjured up only to be exorcized. This ghost haunted the late eighth century not because it had walked the earth fifty or sixty years before, but because it embodied current concerns of the Bavarian church. The phantom is formed mainly of allusions and hints. The words, not quoted, of Neuching’s *ahteid* convey the “old idolatry of pagan custom,” and the “recently converted” Bavarians – Arbeo never says when they actually were converted, or how – have still not fully uprooted their idolatry, still drinking the “chalice of demons” along with that of Christ. These texts speak to an anxiety over the purity of one’s Christianity. Such an anxiety is common enough in Christian history. But it is worth inquiring why this anxiety is expressed in terms of a pagan taint, rather than as moral vices, heresy, or general worldliness.

¹² J. Palmer, „Defining Paganism in the Carolingian World,“ EME 15 (2007), pp. 402-425.

It would be another generation before anyone attempted to pin down the supposed original conversion of the Bavarians. A summary of the property holdings of the bishops of Salzburg from around 800, the *Breves Notitiae*, began by describing the arrival of St. Rupert from Worms in 696.¹³ At this time, Rupert is said to have baptized Duke Theodo – the same who had invited Emmeram and Corbinian to stay in the duchy – thus claiming Rupert as the original “apostle of the Bavarians.” This story was repeated in the *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum* of 870/1 and passed into high medieval hagiography. However, it is absent from the report of Rupert’s career in the *Notitia Arnonis*, another property summary compiled around 790, and from the *Life of St. Rupert* written in the 790s on the basis of a lost model of the 770s.¹⁴ As Ian Wood has shown, the image of Rupert tangibly evolves through these texts, beginning as a saintly bishop in the earlier versions but becoming a missionary figure by the ninth century.¹⁵ The apostolic claim appears to have developed in support of the elevation of Salzburg to archiepiscopal status in 798. The reluctance of other bishops to accept suffragan status required that Salzburg make bold claims, which were expressed through Rupert’s missionary work.

This review of the sources shows that the idea of a Bavarian conversion from paganism was first raised in texts from 768 to 772, before Salzburg capitalized on it after

¹³ *Notitia Arnonis und Breves Notitiae: Die Salzburger Güterverzeichnisse aus der Zeit um 800: Sprachliche-historische Einleitung, Text und Übersetzung*, ed. and trans. F. Losek (1990).

¹⁴ *Vita Hrodberti episcopi Salisburgensis*, MGH SSRM VI, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, (Hannover and Leipzig, 1913), pp. 140-162, and *Die Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum und der Brief des Erzbischofs Theotmar von Salzburg*, ed. F. Losek (Hannover, 1997). Its dependence on a lost original from around 774 was established by H. Beumann, “Zur Textgeschichte der Vita Ruperti,” in *Festschrift für Hermann Hempel zum 70. Geburtstag*, vol. 3, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 36/III, (1972), pp. 166-196. Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 146-150, demonstrates the evolution of Rupert’s image through the eighth and ninth century from a simple saintly bishop to Apostle of the Bavarians.

¹⁵ Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 145-150.

798. Just how new this claim was will be established by consideration of the evidence – or rather lack of evidence – in older texts dealing with Bavaria, and then with the portrait of the duchy’s religion that emerges from texts composed in Bonifatian circles. Finally, we will return to the immediate context of these texts, and ask what was new in the 760s that might have prompted their portrait of a semi-pagan background.

II. Absence of Evidence: Bavaria between Late Antiquity and the Eighth Century

The evidence for the continuity of Christianity on what became Bavarian territory is strong, if not absolutely conclusive. Christianity had come to the area in late antiquity, before the Bavarians coalesced as an ethnic group. The land that would become the Bavarian duchy was then divided between the imperial provinces of Rhaetia Secunda and Noricum Ripense.¹⁶ The *Life of St. Severinus*, our main source for late antique Noricum, never describes its hero having to deal with pagans at all. This need not mean that there weren’t any; its author, Eugippius, wrote for an audience in Ostrogothic Italy, where Severinus’ struggles with Arian barbarians doubtless resonated more than confrontations with pagans would have. But his failure to mention Norican paganism is striking.¹⁷

¹⁶ See H-J. Kellner, “Die Zeit der römischen Herrschaft,” in M. Spindler (ed.), *Handbuch der bayerischen Geschichte*, 1. Band: Das Alte Bayern das Stammesherzogtum bis zum Ausgang des 12. Jahrhunderts, 2nd edn (Munich, 1981), pp. 65-100.

¹⁷ Eugippius, *Vita sancti Severini*, ed. H. Sauppe, MGH SSAA I.2, (1877: repr. Munich, 1985). Eugippius was best noted as a proponent of cenobitic monasticism in Italy, where he was abbot of Lucullanum and compiled a *Rule* for his monks from older works. It is unclear whether he had personal experience of Noricum. On the one hand, he states in his prologue that he is reporting accounts of Severinus given by the elders of his community (at Lucullanum). On the other hand, in the account of Severinus’ death, he uses “we” at one point, suggesting that he had joined the saint’s monastery at Favianis by 482. The deacon Paschasius, responding to Eugippius’ work, appeals to the superiority of eye-witnesses to second-hand writers to beg off correcting it. Older monks in Eugippius’ community certainly had come from Noricum and could have informed him of the circumstances there. Nevertheless, Eugippius’ current concerns with leading monks in a sixth-century Italian environment may mean that the *Vita* privileges stories relevant there, where paganism was not very prominent. The key work on the *Vita Severini* is F. Lotter, *Severinus von Noricum: Legende und Historische Wirklichkeit*. Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 12 (Stuttgart, 1976), though Lotter’s “maximal Severinus” has been rejected; see also the studies in *Eugippius und Severin: der Autor, der Text und der Heilige*, ed. W. Pohl and M. Diesenberger (Vienna, 2001).

When the “Bavarians” first appear in written sources in the mid-sixth century, no one mentioned their religion.¹⁸ The first duke to be attested, Garibald, was connected to the Franks and so was presumably Catholic to some degree. His daughter, Theodelinde, came to represent the Catholic party at the Lombard court, but that role probably had as much to do with Italian church politics than with her upbringing.¹⁹ The bishoprics of late antique Rhaetia and Noricum lay on either Slavic or Alemannic territory, and several of them disappeared entirely.²⁰ There is archaeological evidence that a limited number of Roman churches continued to be used through the sixth and seventh centuries, and a few new churches founded, but how they were staffed in the absence of an episcopal superstructure to ordain priests, we cannot say.

Although there was no canonical church structure in Bavaria, none of their neighbours ever said that the Bavarians were pagans or worshiped pagan gods. Early in the seventh century Eustasius, abbot of Luxeuil and a disciple of St. Columbanus, undertook a mission to Bavaria. The brief mention of his mission in the second part of the *Life of St. Columbanus and his Disciples* does not claim that Eustasius converted pagans or idol-worshippers to Christianity; rather, it seems to associate the Bavarians with another group, the Warasci, who supposedly held the Bonosiac heresy, denying the

¹⁸ In the absence of either a native origin-legend or appearance in Roman sources, the Bavarians have been labeled the “foundlings of the barbarian migrations.” See H. Wolfram, *Die Geburt Mitteleuropas: Geschichte Österreichs vor seiner Entstehung* (Vienna, 1987), pp. 319-325, and K. Reindel, “Grundlegung: Das Zeitalter der Agilolfinger (bis 788),” in Spindler, *Handbuch*, pp. 101-113.

¹⁹ W. Pohl, “Deliberate Ambiguity: The Lombards and Christianity,” in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, ed. Guyda Armstrong and Ian Wood, International Medieval Research 7, (Turnhout, Belgium, 2000), pp. 47-58.

²⁰ H. Wolff, “Die Kontinuität der Kirchenorganisation in Raetien und Noricum bis an die Schwelle des 7. Jahrhunderts,” in E. Boshof and H. Wolff (eds.), *Das Christentum im Bairischen Raum: Von den Anfängen bis ins 11. Jahrhundert*, (Weimar and Vienna, 1994), pp. 1-28.

virginity of Mary.²¹ It seems improbable that either group were Bonosiacs in any formal sense, but rather that Jonas of Bobbio was trying to categorize people whose religious life was inadequate by Columbanian standards. The key thing to note, however, is that Jonas reached for a classification of Christian heresy, not paganism, to describe the targets of Eustasius' missions.

The case of St. Amandus, with whom Jonas co-operated on mission projects in northern Francia, also illustrates the Bavarians' ambiguous religious life. Amandus was the first churchman in medieval Europe to practice the biblical commission to preach the gospel to "all nations."²² Besides his principal mission field around Ghent, Amandus also tried to evangelize the Basques and the Danubian Slavs.²³ His journey to the latter group must have taken him through Bavarian territory. Yet his *Vita* gives no indication that Amandus paused to preach in Bavaria or saw the area as requiring his attention in any way. This does not indicate that the Bavarians had a fully functioning church organization, but it does imply that for a dedicated missionary like Amandus, they were not the kind of pagans which would attract his attention. The Bavarians' kind of local, irregular Christianity, which warranted a mission in the eyes of Eustasius, was nothing to trigger the evangelistic agenda of Amandus.

In the late seventh and early eighth century, Duke Theodo began a policy of inviting outside bishops to come to Bavaria and organize Christian religious life there.

²¹ Ionae, *Vitae sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRG in usum scholarum v. 37 (Hannover and Leipzig, 1905), II.8, p. 244.

²² *Testamentum Amandi ep.*, ed. B. Krusch. MGH SRM V (Hannover, 1910), p. 483. The emergence of a concept of universal mission in the Iro-Frankish circle around Amandus was traced by W. Fritze, "Universalis Gentium Confessio: Formeln, Träger und Wege universalmissionarischen Denkens im 7. Jahrhundert," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 3 (1969), pp. 78-130.

²³ *Vita Amandi ep.* I, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM V (Hannover, 1910), c. 16.

The aforementioned hagiographies of Rupert, Emmeram, and Corbinian recalled this policy, while we know only the bare names of other participants, such as Erhard at Regensburg and Anzogolus and Flobrigis, Rupert's successors at Salzburg.²⁴ Theodo visited Rome in 715/16 to obtain papal cooperation in the organization of a Bavarian church province. This plan failed in the short term, but was revived by Duke Odilo and the Anglo-Saxon missionary Boniface in 738/9. The creation of an archbishopric, envisioned in 715/16, had to wait until 798.²⁵ At no point do we hear of pagan resistance to the new churches or of a need to convert pagan Bavarians to Christianity.

The only outside sources to attribute any pagan taint to the Bavarians come from the corpus of writings from St. Boniface and his circle. Such statements are absent from Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii*, which describes three visits to the area; passing through briefly in 719, then a visitation in 734 when he inspected local priests and prosecuted a "heretic" there named Eremwulf, and then the creation of the bishoprics in 738/9. The issues mentioned by Willibald for Bavaria are similar to those of the Frankish heartlands – basically, failure to live up to proper canonical order. Boniface's letters offer more detail. Conflict broke out between him and Virgil, subsequently Bishop of Salzburg, in 746, over a priest who mangled his Latin pronouncing the baptismal formula.²⁶ In a letter of 748, responding to Boniface, Zacharias discusses the case of baptisms performed by deceased

²⁴ Anzogolus and Flobrigis, with variant spellings of their names, appear in the *Conversio*, c. 2, p. 98, and in the *Liber Confraternitatum Vetustior*, in *Monumenta Necrologia Monasterii S. Petri Salisbergensis*, ed. S. Herzberg-Frankel, MGH Necrologia Germaniae II (Berlin, 1904), col. 18.

²⁵ *Le Liber Pontificalis: Texte, Introduction et Commentaire*, ed. l'Abbé L. Duchesne, vol. I. 2nd ed., (1955: repr. Paris, 1981). See Freund, *Agilolfingern zu den Karolingern*, pp. 24-42.

²⁶ *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl, MGH Epistolae Selectae vol. I (1916: repr. Munich, 1989), nos. 45, 68 and 80. V.I.J. Flint, "Monsters and the Antipodes in the Early Middle Ages and Enlightenment," *Viator* 15 (1984), pp. 65-80, and J. Carey, "Ireland and the Antipodes: The Heterodoxy of Virgil of Salzburg," in *Speculum* 64:1 (January 1989), pp. 1-11.

priests who had sacrificed to pagan gods. Later in the letter Zacharias takes up the dispute with Virgil, whom Boniface had accused of heresy. It is possible, then, that the sacrificing priests were also located in Bavaria. However, the same issues appear earlier in Boniface's correspondence, in 732 and 745, from other regions of Germany.²⁷ Thus, the 748 letter might describe Thuringia or Austrasia rather than Bavaria. One other source from Bonifacian circles that accuses the Bavarians of pagan practices is the *Vita Wynnebaldi*, written by the nun Hugeburc sometime after 786. Hugeburc claims that, at the time Odilo invited Boniface to Bavaria, he had to prohibit their fornication and depravity and pagan deceptions.²⁸ The language of the passage is vague and clearly draws on the stereotyped language of religious criticism from the Bonifacian tradition. It might strengthen a case that the claims of letter 80 were understood to refer to Bavaria. Still, given the conflicts between Boniface and the Bavarians, and the fact that by the time Hugeburc was writing Tassilo was already under pressure from Charlemagne (if indeed the *Life* was not written after Tassilo's fall), Hugeburc's evidence confirms little.

Even if the Anglo-Saxons thought that the Bavarians were pseudo-pagans, the issue for this article's argument is that the Bavarian leadership itself did not accept this judgment at the time. Virgil and his colleague Sidonius, later bishop of Passau, defended local priests from Boniface's criticism and Duke Odilo backed them. In 743 the duke even went so far as to obtain a new legate from the pope, no doubt due to his political break with Pippin and Carloman but perhaps also from dissatisfaction with Boniface's approach.²⁹

²⁷ *Briefe*, nos. 28 and 60.

²⁸ Hugeburc, *Vita Wynnebaldi Abbatis Heidenheimensis*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15.1 (Stuttgart, 1887), p. 110.

²⁹ Jahn, *Ducatus*, pp. 188-9.

Texts written in Bavaria before 768 do not remember a pagan past. In terms of legislative sources, the three canons promulgated at Neuching are the first to mention supposedly “pagan” practices at all. The Bavarian law of the 730s (the *Lex baiuvariorum*) devoted its opening title to church law, but not one article of its content even mentions or condemns any kind of pagan or superstitious practice.³⁰ The prologue associated with several manuscripts of the law claims that pagan elements had been purged by Frankish kings, but the claim is spurious and may have Frankish or Alemannic law in mind.³¹ By comparison to the frontal assaults launched on paganism and syncretism in Frankish legislation, the Neuching canons are modest. The *Concilium Germanicum* of 743 had given Austrasian bishops sweeping responsibility to root out any manifestation of paganism within their dioceses.³² The *Indiculus superstitionum*, compiled about the same time, likewise testifies to an effort to suppress a broad range of non-Christian practices on the north-east fringe of the Frankish world.³³ Not long after Neuching, Charlemagne issued his Saxon capitularies, listing pagan practices with draconian penalties for each.³⁴ Compared to these, the canons of Neuching restrict only a

³⁰ *Lex Baiuvariorum*, ed. E. von Schwind, MGH Leges nationum germanicarum 5.2, (Hannover, 1926). I have argued for dating the *Lex Baiuvariorum* to 735-738 in my dissertation, *The Chalice of Christ and the Chalice of Demons: The Making of Christendom in Agilulfing Bavaria, 500-788 A.D.* (Notre Dame, IN, 2006), pp. 195-212.

³¹ C. Schott, *Lex Alamannorum: Das Gesetz der Alamannen. Text-Uebersetzung-Kommentar zum Faksimile aus der Wandalgarius-Handschrift, Codex Sangallensis 731* (Augsburg, 1993), pp. 12-17.

³² *Concilium Germanicum*, ed. A. Werminghoff, MGH Concilia II, (Hannover and Leipzig, 1906), pp. 33-34.

³³ *Indiculus Superstitionum*, ed. A. Boretius, MGH Capitularia 1 (Hannover, 1883), pp. 222-223.

³⁴ *Capitulare Saxonicum*, ed. H. Pertz, MGH Leges in Folio vol. 5 (Hannover, 1889), pp. 85-93.

handful of superstitious behaviours rather than stamping out a pervasive system of beliefs and customs.

The absence of earlier legislation to suppress superstitions was not due to a lack of synodal activity. At Duke Tassilo III's coming of age in the mid-750s, the Bavarian abbots and bishops had gathered at Ascheim to pass a string of canons asserting their own dominance in the duchy's religious affairs.³⁵ The canons of this synod show that the assembled leaders of the Bavarian churches were thinking along lines similar to those of mid-eighth-century Frankish reform synods. It is not clear that the influence was direct; there are no verbal quotations from the Frankish councils, nor are identical solutions advanced for the same problems. The synod of Ver in 755 has been suggested as a model for Ascheim, but in fact only a few canons echo Ver's concerns.³⁶ Ascheim sought to assert the authority of the bishops over church personnel and property, to require canonical conduct of the clergy, and to protect the poor, widows and orphans from exploitation by the powerful. Remarkably, the synod called for ecclesiastical oversight of ducal officers in the execution of their duties. But not one of these canons refers to any non-Christian behaviour or belief which might call for the bishops' intervention. It would appear that anxiety over pagan survivals had not driven the agenda of the Bavarian dukes or church for the thirty-plus years since Boniface had established the duchy's

³⁵ *Concilium Ascheimense*, ed. A. Werminghoff, MGH Concilia II (Hannover and Leipzig, 1906), pp. 56-58.

³⁶ The dating of Ascheim to 756/7 is based on its reference to Tassilo as a youth, apparently on the brink of coming of age. If Matthias Becher is right in arguing that Tassilo already came of age in Bavaria in 754, any dependence of Ascheim on Ver would be impossible. See M. Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft: Untersuchungen zum Herrscherethos Karls des Grossen*, (Sigmaringen, 1993), pp. 25-35.

bishoprics. These few canons of 771 are the first trace of worry in legislation that current Bavarian customs were tainted with the demonic.³⁷

Scattered as these sources are in time, they form a consistent message. External missionaries and reformers found much that was lacking and much that needed improvement among the Bavarians; they were irregular in their organization, prone to odd teachings, and performed the sacraments incorrectly. But these sources never claimed that the Bavarians were or had recently been a pagan people. Of course, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. It is possible that the sudden appearance of concern over paganism around 770 is simply an accident of the far-from-comprehensive sources for the Agilulfing period. Perhaps the Bavarian churches had been struggling to prevail over popular paganism for some time without producing textual evidence of the effort. Nevertheless, it is striking that when one looks for evidence of Bavarian paganism, the only traces one finds are in a group of sources composed within a few years of each other starting at the end of the 760s. Can their appearance be explained by contemporary events, rather than as a trick of fragmentary documentation?

The answer may lie in a growing missionary agenda in Bavaria. Ardeo's *Lives* of Emmeram and Corbinian have missionary motifs as important framing or structural elements, even though they do not provide specific examples of missionary activity by their subjects. Ardeo clearly saw both of his holy men as participants in a larger Christian world which was expanding across the face of Europe. He opened Emmeram's *Vita* with a bird's-eye panorama of this growing Christian world, describing how the

³⁷ On the Bavarian synods generally, see Hartmann, *Die Synoden der Karolingerzeit*, pp. 88-96, and Hartmann and Dopsch, "Bistümer, Synoden und Metropolitenvfassung," pp. 318-327.

Gospel had reached the English, Irish, Britons, Gauls, Alemanni, and “part of Germany.” Besides this, it was also known in Gothia, Septimania, Spain, and finally Aquitaine, Emmeram’s homeland.³⁸ Emmeram, while a recluse, heard of the Avars’ paganism and decided to evangelize them, thus bringing him to Bavaria. Corbinian’s *Vita* claims that his only aspiration was to withdraw into ascetic confinement, but when he sought the pope’s support to shield him from the attention of the worldly, he received instead an episcopal consecration, a *pallium*, and a preaching commission in unquestionably missionary terms: “He was enabled to exercise the office of preaching everywhere throughout the entire world.”³⁹ The entire episode was probably a fiction of Arbeo’s; but it is significant that the *carte blanche* commission he imagined far exceeded that of St. Boniface, whose authority only extended to Gaul and Germany.⁴⁰ Its universality recalls that of St. Amandus. Arbeo probably meant these claims to rival those of the famous Anglo-Saxon martyr. Indeed, the accounts of these saints from Theodo’s time, well before the generation of Odilo and Boniface, may have been intended to repudiate the criticisms of the Bonifacian circle.⁴¹

These passages function only to frame the main action of these hagiographies rather than to drive it; very little of either saint’s recorded activity suggests that they

³⁸ *Vita Haimhrammi*, c. 1, pp. 26-27. “(Christi) in partibus mundi fama percreverat, ita ut Europae non modica pars in seigniter sacris christianitatis indagine florere dinosceretur, ita ut occidentales tot angulorum, Britanniae, Hiberniae, Galliae, Alamanniae, Germaniae pars, paulatim mirifico modo in Dei laude constanter fulsissent. Inter quas provincias Gotia, Septemania, Spania, Aquitania cum habitatoribus suis deponentes idolatria unicum Dei filium colere coeperunt. In cuius Aquitaniae praedictae partibus Pictavis urbs antiqua sita dinoscitur, ex qua ortus est puer vocabulo Haimhrammus.”

³⁹ “Ubique praedicationis officium exercere per universum orbem potuisset.” *Vita Corbiniani* c. 9, p. 197.

⁴⁰ I discuss the reliability of Corbinian’s pilgrimage accounts in “Virtual Pilgrimages: the Roman Journeys of St. Corbinian of Freising,” in *Travel and Movement in Medieval Italy*, ed. E. Coleman and W. Day (forthcoming).

⁴¹ Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 157-158.

engaged in any significant missionary work in Bavaria, still less that they dealt with pagans. Emmeram's gruesome martyrdom had nothing to do with his preaching, but with his entanglement in a court intrigue involving the duke's pregnant unmarried daughter.⁴² Corbinian encounters non-Christian practices only once, when he leaps from his horse to thrash a peasant woman who tried to cure the duke's son with magic.⁴³ But the frames drawn by Ardeo's description of his protagonists' alleged motivations and his deprecating depiction of prior Bavarian religion give them the aura of missionary saints. Why were these missionary motifs so important to Ardeo, when he had so little material to flesh them out in his narratives?

A generation earlier, perhaps in the 740s, the Bavarians had displaced the Avars as overlords of the Slavic Carantanians who lived on their south-eastern frontier.⁴⁴ As part of this overlordship, the Carantanian Duke Boruth sent his son Cacatius and his nephew Cheitmar to Bavaria as hostages. Both were baptized, and on Boruth's death first his son and later his nephew returned to Carantania, bringing Bavarian priests with them as personal chaplains. In the 750s Cheitmar requested additional clergy from Bishop Virgil of Salzburg in order to evangelize his people. At first things seemed to go well, but beginning in 763 a series of revolts broke out, called *carmula* in our source, the *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*. The term *carmulum* itself is not common, but seems to have had local currency. It appears in the *Lex baiuvariorum*, referring to conspiracies to overthrow the duke.⁴⁵ Later, in the *Annals of St. Emmeram*, the revolt of

⁴² *Vita Haimhrammi*, c. 9, pp. 39-40.

⁴³ *Vita Corbiniani*, c. 29, pp. 221-2.

⁴⁴ *Conversio*, cc. 3-5, pp. 100-107.

⁴⁵ *Lex Baiuvariorum*, II.3.

the disinherited Bernard of Italy in 818 was also called a *carmulum*.⁴⁶ The motivation of the revolts, therefore, was probably secular rather than religious. Presumably the Carantanian leadership felt that they had only traded one overlord for another and sought to remove Cacatius and Cheitmar with their Bavarian connections.

Whatever the motivations from the Carantanians' perspective, the Bavarians took the uprisings as a religious event as well as a secular one. The Carantanian dukes' chaplains had been the thin end of a wedge introducing western missionaries to the region. There is little sign that these missionaries had gained many adherents among the local population, and they were forced to flee when the violence began.⁴⁷ In the ninth century, the author of the *Conversio* pointed to these conflicts as a crisis in the mission, when Christianity had withdrawn from the area altogether. A regular rotation of priests could only begin once Tassilo defeated the last and greatest revolt in 772. It appears that a line of annals associated with Salzburg also remembered the *carmula* of 763-772 as a religious event. One early annal paired Tassilo's victory of 772 with Charlemagne's destruction of the Irminsul, which took place in the same year. Later Austrian annals, from Garst and from Admont, connected it with the baptism of Tassilo's son, who bore the significant name Theodo, at the hands of the pope.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Annales sancti Emmerammi Ratisbonensis maiores*, ed. G.H. Pertz, MGH SS I (Hannover, 1826), p. 93: "818. Pernhardus rex carmalum levavit." Note that while the *Lex baiuvariorum* had identified the *carmulum* as a revolt against a duke, in this later notice it is used for a revolt by the disinherited King Bernard of Lombardy against Emperor Louis the Pious.

⁴⁷ B. Wavra, *Salzburg und Hamburg: Erzbistumsgründung und Missionspolitik in karolingischer Zeit* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 167-175

⁴⁸ E. Klebel, "Eine neuaufgefundene Salzburger Geschichtsquelle," in *Probleme der bayerischen Verfassungsgeschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Munich, 1957), 123-143.

The struggle against the *carmula* also brought Tassilo a letter from a *peregrinus* named Clement, one of the few texts to give us insight into the ideological discourse of the Agilulfing court. Most famously, Clement hailed the duke as a “new Constantine.”⁴⁹ Clement’s letter does not jump directly to the Constantine comparison, however; he begins by invoking a series of Old Testament figures, all of whom received divine aid to defeat their earthly enemies. He is sensitive to the fine points of ranking; when speaking of non-royal Israelite leaders like Abraham, Gideon, and Samson, he compares them directly to Tassilo personally. In fact, he calls the war leaders from the book of Judges “dukes,” a term which is not used for them in the Vulgate. When he mentions royal personalities like David, however, he discreetly compares God’s aid for them to God’s aid for the Bavarians collectively. Only Constantine himself breaks this pattern.

Mary Garrison has shown that Clement’s letter was not intended simply as a letter, even a public one.⁵⁰ Its structure and language are liturgical; it is a prayer for the Bavarian court. Through this liturgical discourse, Clement’s letter anticipates later Carolingian texts which would increasingly identify the Franks as a new Israel. The identification has not yet fully emerged in this letter; it is a simile, not yet a metaphor, and Tassilo’s fall in 788 would prevent its further development in his principality. The letter is often treated as a work of praise and congratulation for Tassilo’s victory, based on Dümmler’s dating of 772. However, the text is undated, and Clement’s invocations of Biblical *exempla* are consistently phrased in the future tense or in the subjunctive. That is, he does not declare that God has fought for Tassilo as he did for Gideon or Samson,

⁴⁹ *Epistolae variorum Carolo Magno regnante scriptae*, ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH Epp. 4, (1895: repr. Munich, 1978), no. 1, pp. 496-7.

⁵⁰ Mary Garrison, “Letters to a King and Biblical Exempla: the Examples of Cathuulf and Clemens Peregrinus,” EME 7 (1998), pp. 305-328.

but rather predicts that God will do so, or prays that He would. As Garrison points out, some large gathering of the ducal court would be the logical milieu for the presentation of the letter, and the most likely event we know of would be the Synod of Neuching itself.⁵¹ Thus, the synod might have been Tassilo's effort to get his religious and secular house in order on the eve of marching away to war in the east. If the letter was written for public reading at the synod, it interpreted the coming struggle, not merely as a secular battle to control the rebellious Carantanians, but as a religious campaign to deliver God's people and smite His enemies.

As we have seen, Neuching was also the only Bavarian synod to betray anxiety about lingering paganism in Bavaria. Arbeo was certainly present there, and the church he headed was involved in the eastern mission. Although not directly on the eastern frontier like Salzburg or Passau, Freising still played a role there. In 769, returning from Italy, Tassilo gave property in the Alps at Innichen to Freising's daughter house of Scharnitz-Schlehdorf, which Arbeo had led prior to his elevation to the episcopacy and which was then under Atto, who succeeded Arbeo at Freising in 783. The explicit purpose of the grant was to found a monastery which could serve as a mission base for the Drau watershed to the east.⁵² We have little documentation of the Innichen mission's progress, but charters from the 820s suggest that it did indeed develop interests among the Carantanians.⁵³ The preservation of the grant among the episcopal charters indicates that Freising felt itself engaged in its daughter-house's work there.

⁵¹ Garrison, "Letters," p. 322.

⁵² *Die Traditionen des Hochstifts Freising*, ed. T. Bitterauf. 2 vols. Quellen und Eroerterungen zur bayerischen und deutschen Geschichte. Neue Folge Band 4. (1905: repr. Munich, 1967): TF 34.

⁵³ TF 472 and 550.

While obscured by Carolingian historiography, Tassilo's victory of 772 was a key moment in the Christianization of Carantania for the churches of his own principality. Salzburg annals recorded the event alongside Charlemagne's destruction of the pagan Irminsul shrine in Saxony, deliberately juxtaposing them as a two-pronged advance of Christianity against the pagan world. In many ways, religiously and ideologically as well as militarily, the victory of 772 marked the high point of Tassilo's power and independence. At the same time, it may be that the celebration of the end of the *carmula* reflects the degree of anxiety these uprisings had provoked in the Bavarian leadership, particularly the ecclesiastical authorities. The outbreak of the first *carmulum* in 763 coincided with Tassilo's controversial decision to abandon the Frankish army in Aquitaine; in fact, Tassilo may have left the Franks precisely to respond to it.⁵⁴ But then it would have been plain to all that this pagan uprising was responsible for dangerously upsetting Franco-Bavarian relations. In 768, as Arbeo began writing his hagiographies, the outcome of this struggle was still unclear. The Slavs, long in possession of the ruins of the ancient Norican bishoprics, had already proven themselves dangerous to the project of building the Bavarian church, having destroyed the cell of St. Maximilian sometime between 720 and 735, a highly-valued project between the Agilulfing dukes, the bishops of Salzburg, and influential families of local *Romani*. The persistence of Carantanian unrest after the suppression of the *carmula* of 763 and ca. 766 raised the spectre of a long struggle without decisive victory.

The *carmula* of 763-772, then, formed one of the decisive issues of Tassilo's reign, a challenge to his own authority as duke over a frontier territory, to his capacity to

⁵⁴ *Annales Mettenses Priores* for 763, ed. B. von Simson MGH SRG in usum scholarum 10, (1905: repr. Hannover, 2003), p. 52.

lead the Bavarians in war, and to the aspirations of the newly-organized Bavarian churches. Though they ended in triumph, while they were ongoing they represented a crisis both political and religious, which planted the dangers of a militant paganism firmly in the minds of the Bavarian leading classes. It was the anxiety provoked by this crisis that seems to have prompted Arbeo and the others at the council of Neuching to look again at their own culture and history and imagine paganism lurking where they had not perceived it before.

The early medieval Bavarians were certainly not unique in their mix of Christian authorities presiding over all manner of unauthorized “superstitions.” Reformers and preachers throughout Christian history have struggled with such heterodoxies right down through modern times. Still, though never fully pagan themselves, the Bavarians had undergone a long process of growth into full participation in western Christendom from the beginning of the eighth century. Bishoprics had been organized, synods held, the clergy recognized as a privileged estate under Bavarian law, dukes had made pilgrimages to Rome and Bavarians held prominent ecclesiastical offices abroad as abbots of Fulda and bishops of Langres. Numerous new monasteries sprang up in the 760s, reflecting a new piety and a new sense of identity among the aristocratic families that founded and supported them.⁵⁵ It was at the peak of this process of growth that the Bavarian Church encountered a pagan “other,” and found that this complex Christian identity was not alone in the world, but could be challenged by an alternative identity – a pagan one. It was precisely in the crisis of foreign mission during the final *carmulum* of 769-772 that Bavarian Christendom re-imagined its own past, redrew the boundaries of the Christian

⁵⁵ See L. Holzfurtnner, *Gründung und Gründungsüberlieferung. Quellenkritische Studien zur Gründungsgeschichte der bayerischen Klöster der Agilolfingerzeit und ihrer hochmittelalterlichen Überlieferung*, Münchner Hist. Studien. Bayer. Gesch. 11, (Kallmünz, 1984).

and the pagan, and learned to be discontented with its own religious achievements.

Bavaria had never had a moment of conversion itself, but found that, in the face of crisis in the conversion of others, such a moment of conversion would need to be invented. It was not only in Salzburg's struggle for pre-eminence after 798, but in the maturing of the Christianization process itself, that Bavaria imagined itself to have once needed an apostle for its salvation.