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*VENERATION OF MARTIN OF TOURS AND MARTIN OF
BRAGA IN NORTHERN PORTUGAL**

In early medieval hagiography the implantation and veneration of St. Martin of Tours and Martin of Braga in Northwestern Iberia in the former province of Roman *Gallaecia* is a fascinating development filled with enigma. As the medieval centuries unfolded after the sixth century devotion to Martin of Tours proliferated dramatically while that to Martin of Braga receded and almost disappeared. This essay explores two fundamental areas. First, a brief overview of how both saints came to be venerated in *Gallaecia*, in view that both of them fared from the eastern Roman Empire province of Pannonia. Secondly, to set forth where they are now venerated in Northern Portugal and how they are depicted in the artistic representation preserved in the churches. Due to the voluminous number of churches dedicated to Martin of Tours I have restricted myself to address only those in which he is shown parting his cape with the beggar. Churches representing Martin of Braga are in their entirety discussed here due to their scarcity.

Of the two saints, the reasons as to why Martin of Braga, who was born in Pannonia, traveled West and settled in Bracara Augusta (Braga) where he carried out his pastoral ministry has elicited much commentary.¹ Scholars have proposed a

* This research was carried out through the generous financial support of the *Fundação Luso-Americana* (Lisbon) and a supplementary Faculty Research Grant from *Seattle Pacific University*. I also thank professors Erwin Koller (Universidade do Alto Miño), José Mattoso (Mértola), Ana María Jorge and Carlos Azevedo (Universidade Católica Portuguesa-Lisbon) for their enthusiastic intervention and support of this project. Also, to my research assistant and guide Tiago (Vigo). Lastly, to the many parish priests whose hospitality made it possible for me to visit and photograph their churches.

1. For a current synthesis see María João Violante Branco, "St. Martin of Braga, the Sueves and Gallaecia," in *The Visigoths: Studies in Culture and Society*. (ed.) A. Ferreiro. The Medieval Mediterranean, 20. Brill, 1999, pp. 63-98. For full bibliography see Alberto Ferreiro, "Sueves and Martin of Braga: Historiography and Future Research Projects," in *Suevos-Schwaben. Das Königreich der Sueben Auf der Iberischen Halbinsel (411-485)*. (ed.) E. Koller and H. Laitenberger. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998, pp. 37-62.

wide variety of explanations, all of which may be valid, but for lack of more precise documentation we will never know for certain. Some have emphasized divine calling somewhat similar to the *peregrinatio in exilio* of the Irish monks.² Others see him as part of an officially organized missionary effort from Rome directed by the pope or perhaps even the emperor Justinian in Constantinople.³ We are on more certain ground with Martin of Tours, also from Pannonia, about whom we have more abundant documentation.⁴ If we consider the wider context of frequent travel by Christians East to West, lay or cleric, the arrival of both saints is hardly anomalous.⁵

The intimate connection between Martin of Tours and Martin of Braga, whose lives are separated by some two centuries, is not the imaginative invention of modern scholars. Rather it is based upon the reflection of sixth century authors mainly from Gaul and two short poetic works attributed to Martin of Braga.

Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus are the two principal sources linking the two saints. The complexities of conflicting testimony between them and Isidore of Seville and John of Biclar have been treated in detail in a separate study so I need not cover the same territory once again.⁶

Gregory's *De virtutibus sancti Martini* (1.11) narrates for us the only 'historical' account as how it came about that both Martins came together in the sixth century. Before proceeding with our analysis, it is useful to paraphrase Gregory's *De virtutibus sancti Martini* (1.11). Chararic's unnamed son was afflicted with an illness, presumably leprosy, as was the entire region of *Gallaecia*. As he sought a cure for his son, Chararic encountered a major obstacle: his adherence to Arian Christianity prevented intervention from God. It was well known, especially to Gregory, that Arians could not appropriate the miraculous intervention of God. Chararic heard about Martin of Tours and the extraordinary miracles reported in

2. A. Ferreiro, "Early Medieval Missionary Tactics: The Example of Martin and Caesarius," *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua* 6 (1998) 225-238 at 227-228.

3. Consult for the alleged Roman connection: Luis Ribeiro Soares, *A Linhagem Cultural de São Martinho de Dume. I, Fundamentos*. Lisboa, 1963.

Jaroslav ̆apel, "Divinas nutibus actus, Due postille per San Martino di Bracara," *Historia*, 27, (1978), pp. 249-254.

4. For Martin of Tours see, J. Fontaine, *Sulpice Sévère. Vie de Saint Martin*. 3 vols. SC, 133-35. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1967-69. C. Stancliffe, *St. Martin and His Hagiographer. History and miracle in Sulpicius Severus*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, and R. Van Dam, *Saints and their miracles in Late Antique Gaul*. Princeton Press, 1993.

5 My remarks are in, "Early Medieval Missionary Tactics," p. 228 with further bibliography in note 16.

6 A. Ferreiro, "Braga and Tours: Some observations on Gregory's *De virtutibus sancti Martini* (1.11). *Journal of Early Christian Studies*. 3, 2, (1995), 195-210.

his shrine at Tours. When he found out about Martin's confession of the Catholic faith, Chararic resolved to believe likewise, but only if Martin would heal his son. To this end, Chararic sent envoys to Tours bearing gold and silver equal to the weight of his son, and upon their return to *Gallaecia* the son was still sick. Chararic, then, openly confessed the Catholic faith, promised to build a shrine in Martin's honor, and sent envoys once again to Tours. While the envoys were in Tours numerous miracles were unleashed and upon their return, bearing a relic of Martin for the new shrine, Chararic's son was already healed and leprosy had disappeared completely in *Gallaecia*. Gregory added that Chararic, his household, and all of the people of *Gallaecia* converted to the Catholic faith. He also related another extraordinary touch of Providence: when the relics of Martin of Tours arrived by ship in *Gallaecia*, another vessel docked at the same time carrying Martin of Braga, the future missionary and Metropolitan Bishop of Braga.⁷ Gregory embellished the story by noting that Martin of Braga began his journey to *Gallaecia* from a far away land on the very same day that Chararic's legates left Tours and headed for *Gallaecia*.

Gregory's *De virtutibus sancti Martini* (1.11) is not the sole witness within that work which attests to the conversion of the Sueves. We find a cross-reference to the shrine built in honor of Martin of Tours in *Gallaecia* (VM 4.7).⁸ A group of legates traveled, presumably to Braga, to seek out King Miro. Gregory specifically recalled the church built in honor of Martin of Tours by Gregory's predecessor [Chararic]; the same church by Gregory's own admission that he had mentioned earlier (VM 1.11).⁹ Gregory associated Martin of Tours with Miro to emphasize the long-standing status of the patronage of Martin in *Gallaecia* that had begun under Chararic when the saint was declared *beatus patronus*.

A third reference to Martin's shrine in *Gallaecia* is found in Gregory's *Liber historiarius* (5.37), a chapter that offers a brief biographical sketch of Martin of Braga.¹⁰ After extolling the fruitful career of the bishop of Braga, Gregory praised him for writing verses in honor of Martin of Tours which were posted at the southern portal of the church: *Versiculos, qui super ostium sunt a parte meridiana in basilica*

7 Gregorii Turonensis, *Miracula et Opera Minora*, MGH, SRM 1, pars II. eds, W. Arndt and Br. Krusch. Hanover, 1885, VM 1.11. See, R. Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 97 note 66.

8 Van Dam reminds us about the limited diffusion of the cult of Martin of Tours, *Saints*, pp. 117-119 and 140-141.

9 "Tempore quodam causa legationis Galliciam adiit, atque ad Mironis regis praesentiam accedens, negotia patefecit iniuncta. Erat enim eo tempore Miro rex in civitate illa, qua decessor eius basilicam sancti Martini aedificaverat, sicut in libro primo huius operis exposuimus" (VM 4.7) A fascinating and insightful discussion on pilgrimages to Tours is in Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 116-149.

10 There are important similarities between Gregory's and Isidore's biographical portraits of Martin of Braga. For Gregory *LH* 5.370 and for Isidore *De viris illustribus*, 22, pp. 145-146.

sancti Martini ipse, composuit (5.37.15-16).¹¹ Some commentators have erroneously maintained that Gregory was speaking of the church of Tours and not the one located in the environs of Braga.¹²

A solution to this confusion is found in Martin of Braga's poem, *in basilica*, a work of twenty dactylic hexameters.¹³ Most of the poem focuses on proclaiming the near universal spread of and devotion to Martin of Tours. The closing section declares that now the Sueves, too, were able to honor and worship at this new shrine of Christ where miracles abound.¹⁴ At the end of the poem Martin of Braga proudly states that both Gaul and *Gallaecia* could claim Martin of Tours as their patron. *In basilica* was written for the shrine at Braga built by Chararic and these are the same verses Gregory of Tours identified in *Liber historiarum* (5.37). *In basilica* was probably written between 556, the approximate date Martin arrived in *Gallaecia*, and the end of Chararic's reign in 558.

As further evidence of Martin of Tours's cult in *Gallaecia* it is advisable to consider briefly Martin of Braga's *Epitaphium eiusdem*, a six-line poem in dactylic hexameters.¹⁵ The opening verses identify Martin's birthplace in Pannonia [incidentally identical to that of Martin of Tours], his lengthy travels [westward] and his final settlement in *Gallaecia*: *Pannonis genitus, transcendens aequora vasta, Galliciae in gremium divinus nutibus actus* (1-2). The final ten lines point once again to the patronage of Martin of Tours and Martin of Braga's devotion: *Teque, patrone, sequens famulus Martinus eodem Nomine, non merito, hic in Christi pace quiesco* (5-6). The epitaph by Martin of Braga bears witness to the patronage of Martin of Tours in *Gallaecia*, and the bishop of Braga's hand in its propagation under Chararic's leadership.

11 The Martinian material in Gregory's narrative is wholly absent in Isidore's, especially where Gregory associates Martin of Braga with Martin of Tours, "Exinde Gallitiam venit, ubi, cum beati Martini reliquiae portarentur" (*LH* 5.37), an echo of *VM* 1.11. I am using the Barlow edition of Martin of Braga's works. *Martini episcopi Bracaraensis opera omnia*. Yale, 1950.

12 J.W. George observes, "he was the author of the verses over the south portal of St. Martin's Church in Tours," in *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 68. C.W. Barlow clarified this misunderstanding by earlier scholars in *Martini episcopi*, p. 276. Barlow suggests that the verses may have been placed in the monastery founded by Martin of Braga at Dumium in 558 near Braga, *Ibid.*, p. 280 note 5.

13 Reproduced with discussion in Barlow, *Martini episcopi*, pp. 276-281 and the poem at 282. Also in Vives, *Inscripciones Cristianas de la España Romana y Visigoda*. Barcelona-Madrid, 1942, pp. 119-120 no. 349.

14 "Tua signa Suevus/Admirans didicit fidei quo tramite pergat./Devotusque tuis meritis haec atria claro/Culmine sustollens, Christi venerabile templum/Constituit, quo clara vigen, Martine, tuorum/Gratia signorum votes te ades fatetur/Electum, propriumque tenet te Gallia gaudens/Pastorem, teneat Gallicia tota patronem" Barlow, *Martini episcopi*, p. 282.

15 *Ibid.*, 283. Also in Vives *Inscripciones*, 82-83 no. 275.

Our final piece of evidence comes from the pen of that illustrious poet, Venantius Fortunatus (530-610), bishop of Poitiers, who devoted a poem to Martin of Braga, *Ad Martinum episcopum Galliciensem* (5.2).¹⁶ Venantius opens the poem with praise to Martin of Tours' evangelism in Gaul; then he proceeds to proclaim Martin of Braga a "successor" of the apostles and an "apostle" of *Gallaecia*. As Martin of Tours had been the apostle of *Gallia*, Martin of Braga is the "new apostle" of *Gallaecia*. Venantius extolls both of them for their defense of the Catholic faith and persistent labors in combating heresy and paganism. Once again the close relationship between both Martins is confirmed. Devotion to Martin of Tours in *Gallaecia* enjoyed a long fruitful experience, but that story has been told in another essay.¹⁷

In this limited consideration of Martinian churches in northern Portugal there emerged a sharp contrast with those that I researched in Galicia in the Diocese of Mondoñedo—Ferrol.¹⁸ In Galicia, the parting of the cape by Martin of Tours is rarely depicted there unlike in Portugal. The only exceptions I found in my previous study were San Martín de Cobas and San Martín de Lanzós.¹⁹ Galician churches conserve overwhelmingly the image of Martin of Tours as bishop like his namesake Martin of Braga. I suspect, with no solid historical documentation, that some of these churches in the earlier Middle Ages pertained to Martin of Braga and were later transferred to devotion to Martin of Tours as Galicia and northern Portugal parted ways, coupled with the strong French influence along the Road to Compostela in the tenth and eleventh centuries.²⁰

In this section I wish to highlight those churches within our inventory which possess striking distinctives. Of all the Martinian churches the mosaic at San Martín de Brufe (fig. 1) alone has Martin of Tours on his feet parting the cape whereas all others have him on horseback. One thing I found rather interesting, not related to our theme directly, is the bell tower which bears remarkable resemblance to a Muslim minaret (fig. 2). San Martín Silvares (fig 3) renders the encounter with the beggar by showing Martin of Tours leading a group of mounted Roman soldiers. The scene gives dramatic emphasis to his public profession of Christian faith and charity and his conversion from soldier of worldly armies to soldier of Christ.

16 George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 67-69 with useful commentary.

17 A. Ferreiro, "The Cult of Saints and Divine Patronage in *Gallaecia* before Santiago," in *The Pilgrimage to Compostella in the Middle Ages: A Casebook of Studies*, ed. Maryjane Dunn and Linda Davidson, Garland Press, 1996, pp. 3-22.

18 A. Ferreiro, "Martino de Braga: De apostolo dos Suevos a sua memoria de epoca medieval na diocese de Mondoñedo—Ferrol," *Galicia fai dous mil anos O feito diferencial Galego*, Museo do Pobo Galego, 1996, pp. 323-256, 10 figs, 19 maps.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330.

20 Alberto Ferreiro, "The Cult of Saints and Divine Patronage," pp. 3-22.

The norm is always to show Martin of Tours and the beggar alone. San Martín Mateus (fig. 4) include an attendant holding the reins of Martin's horse. An extra touch of divine approbation are the angels hovering above Martin's head in the background, who are witnesses to his charity. The beggar in the artistic pieces is either seated with a crutch at his side or when on his feet supported by a cane or crutch. At San Martín Vila Jusã (fig. 5) he has no cane. San Martín Mateus (fig. 4) similar to Brufe (fig. 1) shows the beggar on his knees, a rare occurrence in the iconography.

As I initiated my visit to these churches it did not take very long for me to notice how frequently Purgatory is recalled in iconography in sharp contrast to its absence in the churches I visited in Galicia. San Martin Galegos (fig 6) possesses an external altar at a sidewalk near the church which contains a mosaic showing Martin of Tours praying souls out of Purgatory. The recently lit votive candles attest to ongoing devotion to Martin of Tours and belief in his intercessory role in aiding departed souls in their final stage towards the beatific Vision. The souls in Purgatory in these churches are not suffering rather their faces radiate a sense of release as they begin their final ascent to heaven, with angels also assisting.

Of the eighteen churches in this survey only three maintain any memory of Martin of Braga. The See of Braga naturally is the most important in the order of things. It is not only the Episcopal seat of Martin of Braga it also is the depository of his relics that were placed there in a special chapel in the nineteen fifties (fig. 7).²¹ In the suburbs nearby at Dume we find a modern church built on the very site where Martin of Braga founded a monastery and church. The literary sources all testify to this foundation and recent archaeological excavation of the site have illuminated greatly our knowledge of this important sixth century church and monastery.²² An exterior garden across the street displays a dignified statue of the bishop of Braga (fig. 8). San Martín de Bornes (fig. 9) emerged as the most distinctive of all the churches I have visited thus far in northern Portugal or Galicia. In the interior of the church one will find a statue of Martin of Tours as bishop. On the grounds there is a separate chapel which houses a statue of Geraldo of Braga, and paintings of Fructuosus of Braga, [who is rarely depicted in art], and Martin of Braga (fig. 10, 11, 12).

21 See the acts of the Congress celebrating this event in *Trabalhos do I Congresso. Internacional dos Estudos Martinianos*. Bracara Augusta, 8, Braga, 1957 and *Actas do Coloquio Bracarense de Estudos Suevo—Bizantinos*. Bracara Augusta, 9-10, 11-12. Braga, 1958-61.

22 Consult, Luis Fontes, "Salvamento Arqueológico de Dume—1987. Primeros Resultados," *Cadernos de Arqueologia* II, 4 (1987) 111-114 and the entire volume of *Cadernos de Arqueologia* II, 6-7 (1989-90).

San Martín de Bornes is the only location that I have found in which Martin of Tours and Martin of Braga are venerated together and as a bonus Geraldo and Fructuosus too. Nearby is also a flowing creek which the resident priest told me many of the faithful went to in previous eras believing the water to have possessed miraculous properties. In San Martín de Magazos in Galicia, also known as San Martín do Castelo, there is a holy fountain in the mountain which the faithful today still go to for the healing of ailments of the ear.²³ The church and the fountain are dedicated to Martin of Braga. The statue of Martin of Braga at Magazos is now found in the church of San Xulián de Landrove. I would like to signal that in Póvoa de Lahoso (Braga) there is a church dedicated to Martin of Tours bearing the name of San Martín de Aguas Santas. San Martín de Bornes, however, is the only site where both Martins are associated together with healing waters from the mountain creek.

The current overwhelming commemoration and veneration of Martin of Tours in Galicia and northern Portugal need not be interpreted that Martin of Braga never enjoyed wider veneration in the Middle Ages. It is very likely that many churches now dedicated to Martin of Tours had Martin of Braga as their original patron.²⁴ It is hard to imagine that between the two major Sees of Martin of Braga—Mondoñedo in northern Galicia and Braga in northern Portugal—that no churches in between commemorated the bishop of Braga. The literary testimony from Gaul and Iberia speak of Martin of Braga founding numerous churches and monasteries. The road to Santiago de Compostela caused not only greater devotion to Martin of Tours along the route, it also resulted in restricting veneration to Martin of Braga in Portugal—save the few exceptions I have noted in Galicia. In the end, however, both Martins were rapidly eclipsed by Santiago de Compostela a development they undoubtedly would have humbly welcomed.²⁵

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23 Ferreiro, "Martino de Braga," pp. 328-329.

24 My interviews of elderly parishioners sometimes revealed that veneration of a Martinian Church had been in March (feast of Martin of Braga) only to be changed in their lifetime to November (Martin of Tours), *Ibid.*, p. 327.

25 Ferreiro, "The Cult of Saints and Divine Patronage," pp. 3-22.

| | Inventory of Churches | |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| | Provincia | Consejo |
| 1. S.M. Vila Jusã | Vila Real | Mesão Frio |
| 2. S.M. Sande | Braga | Guimaraes |
| 3. S.M. Brufe | Braga | Famalicão |
| 4. S.M. Gandra | Viana do Castelo | Ponte de Lima |
| 5. S.M. Freixieiro de Soutelo | Viana do Castelo | Caminha |
| 6. S.M. Coura/ (S.Ma. Dolores) | Viana do Castelo | Parades de Coura |
| 7. S.M. Campo | Braga | Póvoa de Lanhoso |
| 8. S.M. Mour | Braga | Vila Verde |
| 9. S.M. Galegos | Braga | Barcelos |
| 10. S.M. Padraso | Vila Real | Montalegre |
| 1. S.M. Mateus | Vila Real | Vila Real |
| 12. S.M. Tibães | Braga | Braga |
| 13. S.M. Fradelos | Braga | Braga |
| 14. S.M. Armil | Braga | Fafe |
| 15. S.M. Silvares | Braga | Fafe |
| | | |
| | | |
| | Churches Venerating Martin of Braga | |
| 1. S.M. Dume | Braga | Braga |
| 2. Sé de Braga | Braga | Braga |
| 3. S.M. Bornes | Vila Real | Vila Pouca de Aguiar |



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

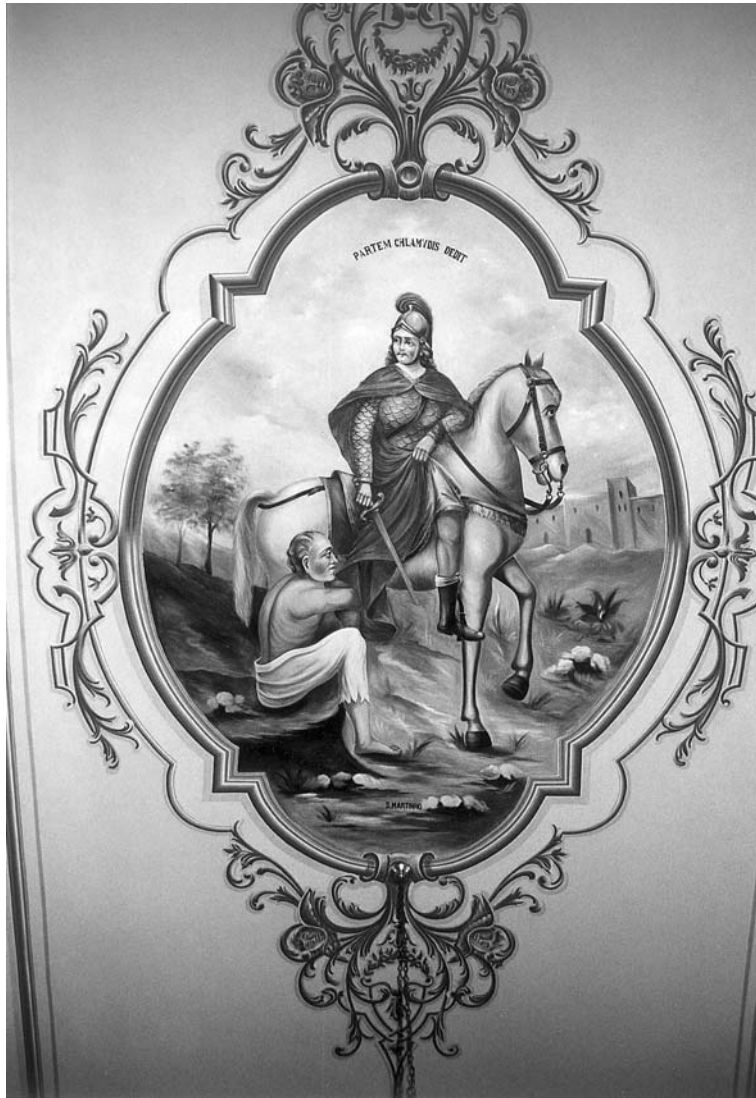


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12