

AUSTRIA'S CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY

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ABSTRACT. It is not until the 11th century AD that we can speak of Austria being a thoroughly Christian country (Romanowski 1994: 57). This is all the more astonishing when one considers that even before the turn of the first century most of what is today Austria was part of the Roman Empire and how quickly Christianity spread to other parts of the Roman Empire. But how did the Christianization of Austria come about in the first place? Who were the bearers of mission? What strategies were used? Is the term 'missionary work' appropriate at all or was it not rather a superficial, politically motivated Christianization? These questions are to be investigated and answered in the following article.

KEYWORDS: Austria, conversion, Christianization, mission, history

Introduction and Research Overview

Geographically, the article focusses on the territory of the present-day Republic of Austria. Thus, it comprised parts of three Roman provinces that had come under the rule of Rome by 11 BC at the latest as a result of various military campaigns: Raetia in the west, Noricum in the middle and Pannonia in the east. The northern border of the provinces was, by and large, the Danube (Barton 1975: 27). The territory of Raetia included Lake Constance and the eastern part of present-day Switzerland, reached the main ridge of the Alps in the south, the Inn—Zillertal line in the east, and had the Rhaetian Limes as its border in the north (Barton 1975: 29). Thus, it included large parts of today's Tyrol, Vorarlberg, Bavaria, southern Württemberg and eastern Switzerland. In the west, Noricum joined Raetia with the Danube as its northern border and the Carnic Alps as its southern border. Thus, large parts of Salzburg, Upper Austria and parts of Lower Austria as well as Carinthia and Styria belonged to Noricum. The Vienna Woods formed the eastern border (Barton 1975: 27). Pannonia bordered Noricum in the west and again had the Danube as its northern and northeastern border. It extended south

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to Belgrade and Trieste and included the present-day Austrian lands of Burgenland and parts of Styria (Barton 1992a: 31ff).

Not insignificant for the spread of Christianity in these provinces was the excellent Roman road network. The main connections run from Milan via Bregenz to Augsburg, from Brixen via Aguntum (located 4 km east of today's Lienz in East Tyrol) to Aquileja (a city on the river Natissa in today's Friuli, about ten kilometers from the lagoon of Grado on the Gulf of Trieste) and

from there via Carinthia to Wels or via Styria to Carnuntum and on to Constantinople, today's Istanbul (Romanowski 1994: 5f; Barton 1975: 30). As a result of this well-developed infrastructural framework, *Romanization* occurred, especially in the urban areas. Rudolf Noll defined this term aptly:

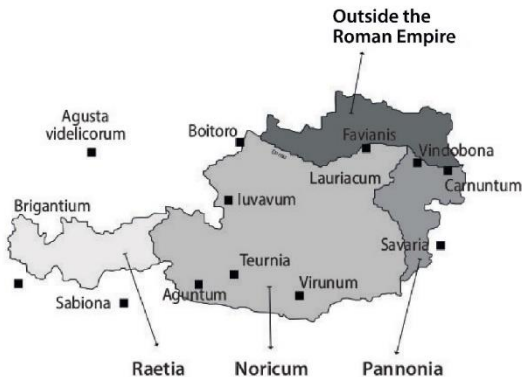


Figure 1: Roman provincial division of today's Austria

It is understood as the adoption of Roman ways of life by a province incorporated into the Roman world empire, whereby its original own life undergoes characteristic changes on the basis of an overall imperial Roman culture (Noll 1954: 6; cf. Barton 1992a: 51f).

In the context of the Christianization of and mission work in Austria, this has to be counted as important.

This article does not want to be understood as a new, scholarly contribution to the history of Christianization of and mission work in Austria. Rather, it offers an overview of the first 1000 years of Austrian church and mission history.

The Beginnings of Christianity until the Third Century

Karl-Jürgen Romanowski describes the initial religious situation at the appearance of Christianity in the territory of today's Austria well:

Now, what was the faith of the Celtic tribes in the Alpine region that were confronted with the message of Jesus Christ? Their original faith knew many local deities, such as Teurnia, Augusta, Abiona, Epona, Belinus. The worship of these gods remained, especially among the Alpine tribes, until the fifth century (Romanowski 1994: 11; cf Barton 1992a: 54-109).

In addition, with the rule of the Romans, the diverse Roman religiosity including various mystery cults came to Austria, whereby the cult of Mithras found special appreciation among the Roman soldiers, as can be proven by archaeological finds (Romanowski 1994: 11).

‘The presence of Christians in the Danubian provinces can probably be reckoned with as early as the 1st century’ (Barton 1992a: 11). These Christians were mainly to be found among the Roman soldiers. For example, the second Italian cohort, in which the centurion Cornelius (cf. Acts 10:1ff) served, was moved to Carnuntum, at least temporarily, in 69 AD (Barton 1992a: 14). However, only for the period after 170 AD we have reliable information about a Christian presence in Austria. Although there are numerous legends claiming that Christianity found its way into Austria as early as the first century, these are more likely to be ‘purpose driven legends’—Barton’s apt terminology—which were intended to justify the apostolic founding of important episcopal sees and thus grant them legitimacy and primacy (cf. Barton 1975: 11; Barton 1992a: 20ff). To work out the historical core of truth of these legends remains, at least for the time being, a difficult or impossible undertaking due to lack of sources.

As an example of such legends, Petersen points to the inscription on the city gate of Enns, the successor city of Lauriacum (Lorch), the first city to later turn to Luther’s Reformation in Austria during the Reformation period. In the city tower, built between 1564 and 1568, there is the following Latin inscription:

Aspicias exiguam nec magni nominis urbem
quam tamen aeternus curat amatque Jesu.
Haec de Lauriaco reliqua est, hic Marcus in oris
cum Luca Christi dogma professus erat (Quoted after Petersen 1994: 11; see also Noll 1954: 17).

You are looking at the small and little-known town,
about whom the eternal Jesus nevertheless cares and whom he nevertheless loves.
This is left over from Lauriacum, here Mark had
together with Luke, spread the teachings of Jesus.

A first turning point in the mission history of Austria forms the so-called ‘rain miracle’. In 172-174/5 Marcus Aurelius fought from Carnuntum mainly against the Marcomanni, but also against Quades, Hermunduri, Chatti and Jazygians. One of the decisive battles was won by a sudden thunderstorm (Barton 1992a: 12).

The first church historian Eusebius wrote about this event:

Then the soldiers of the so-called Melite Legion, which, as a result of their faith, has existed from that time to the present day, when they had already taken their

stand against the enemy, knelt on the ground, as is the custom at and during prayer, and supplicated to God (Eusebius 1981: 247).

Barton comments:

It is more than understandable that prayers were also offered before this decisive battle—and that the so-called rain miracle was understood as an answer to prayer. Abrupt downpours saved the half-scared Roman troops. The lightning of the storm frightened the Germanic tribes. With the outbreak of the forces of nature the battle was decided. This episode is indeed historical—but it cannot be dated and localized exactly. As a place of battle the Marchfeld in northern Lower Austria is the most likely to be thought of. [...]. Today, moreover, research considers a dating to 172 almost certain (Barton 1992a: 12f).

Barton goes on to cite several Christian apologists who referred to the rain miracle and assumed as a matter of course that Christians served as soldiers in the Roman army (Barton 1992a: 14f). These are also mentioned later as martyrs in the Diocletian persecutions. However, not only Christians claimed the victory due to the intervention of their God. Hannsjörg Ubl therefore notes:

Written sources and picture leave no doubt. The rain miracle was a historical event and was understood as a miracle by those concerned, by the emperor as well as by the last horse-servant. It is only natural that everyone involved attributed his salvation from this danger to the work of the deity he worshipped. There must have been Christians in the army, because no non-Christian would have attributed the miraculous event to the Christian God.

It seems, and the surviving accounts justify this consideration, that a contest soon arose as to whether salvation was due to Jupiter, Hermes, Thoth, or Christ (Ubl 1997: 19).

At the latest in the second century, Christianity became known in Lower Austria through soldiers. These soldiers were the first Christian witnesses in the Alpine and Danube regions (Barton 1992a: 14; Noll 1954: 22).

It is not until more than a hundred years later that the next news about Christians from the Danubian provinces is found, namely with the advent of the general persecutions of Christians under Diocletian. From the middle of the third century at the latest, there must have been an establishment of a Christian infrastructure in many cities, which is noted in the third general persecution of Christians (cf Barton 1992a: 106ff; Scheibelreiter 2005: 13f; Ladstätter 1994: 357). The persecutions under Diocletian also affected the Austrian territories. The most outstanding victim of these persecutions is certainly the chancery leader Florian from St. Pölten, who was sentenced to

death by the governor in Lauriacum (Enns) in 304 and drowned in the river Enns.

At the time of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian (= co-emperor for Italia and Africa) a persecution broke out against the Christians. At that time the governor Aquilinus administered Ufernoricum, who went to the camp Lauriacum and had the Christians eagerly investigated; 40 of them were seized and imprisoned after many tortures. When Florian, the former head of the governor's office, who at that time lived in the town of Cetium (St. Pölten), heard about this, he hurried to Lorch and confessed to be a Christian. Thereupon the governor asked him to sacrifice to the gods. But Florian refused and remained steadfast even after he had him beaten with clubs and his shoulder blades broken with sharpened iron. Finally Aquilinus passed his sentence and ordered Florian to be thrown from the bridge into the Enns River with a stone around his neck (Zinnhobler 1994:24). [On the discussion of the historicity and legend-making surrounding Florian, see the detailed discussion by Barton 1992a: 125-131, and Noll 1954: 22-36.]

The ancient report mentions 40 other Christians—a strong indication of the existence of a Christian community in Enns (Lauriacum). The fact that Florian wanted to rush from St. Pölten (Cetium) to help, indicates the spread of the Christian faith beyond the provincial capital. However, the fact that there is no report of the execution of a bishop as in other places, although Enns/Lauriacum had been the seat of the governor of Ufernoricum, rather suggests that there were no ecclesiastical structures at the time (cf Hofrichter: 1997: 60).

In summary, we hold that Christianity reached Austria at an early stage through Roman soldiers. However, it was not until the third century that the first congregations seemed to have been founded and the first Christian infrastructure established in parts of Austria (Glaser 1997:17f). How these came about remains obscure.

The Spread of Christianity to the Fifth Century

The development of Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries in Austria was strongly determined by the initial political situation. With the Edict of Milan (313) by the emperors Constantine and Licinius, not only did the persecution of Christians end, but Christianity was tolerated for the first time. Later it was also elevated to the status of state religion in 380. The contrary tendencies under Julian Apostata formed only a short intermezzo (337-361). For Christians in Austria, too, this meant that they no longer had to hide (Noll 1954: 37-40).

At the same time, however, an era of insecurity began, caused by increasing incursions of pagan tribes into the empire, and this was especially true for the border regions, which included Austria (cf Barton 1992b: 7-106). The

church father Jerome dramatically describes the situation in the Austrian region:

The provinces of Pannonia are swarming with Goths, Sarmatians, Quades, Alans, Huns, Vandals, Marcomanni, who are devastating these lands, plundering them and dragging away with them everything they can grab. How many venerable ladies, how many virgins sanctified to God, how many free women even from the first circles had to serve the animal desires of these barbarians for play! The bishops were carried away! The priests and the other consecrated servants of the altars were killed. The churches were destroyed and turned into horse stables. The relics of the martyrs were thrown out of their tombs. Everywhere mourning, groaning, horror and death in a thousand forms. The Roman Empire is collapsing—and yet our defiant sense does not bow! (Quoted from Barton 1992b: 14f).

Barton is to be agreed that one must certainly not understand this report too literally (Barton 1992b: 15); nevertheless, it offers a vivid insight into the difficult conditions of that time. Yet one also has to take into consideration that there were Christian communities outside the borders of the Roman Empire, such as the Germanic Rugians in northern Lower Austria with Krems as their capital—directly opposite the Roman Favianis (Mautern) on the northern side of the Danube. However, these Christians were Arian (Glaser 1997b: 70–87).

The situation was somewhat different in the interior, in Binnennoricum. Here, for example, *Teurnia*, a town in Upper Carinthia not far from today's district capital Spittal, had replaced Virunum, a town in the area of today's Zollfeld near Maria Saal in Carinthia, as the capital. Virunum itself is attested as a bishop's seat as early as 343. For Teurnia and other places in Binnennoricum, it seems very likely that an Arian church organization was able to establish itself alongside the Roman church. This is indicated by at least two representative church buildings in the same localities (Hofrichter 1997: 64). However, the Arian church was extinguished together with the end of the Gothic rule in Noricum around 536 AD.

All in all, it is not surprising that only a few new missionary advances took place during this difficult time. E.g., Vigilius, bishop of Trent (383–405), took missionary initiative and sent three clerics to the Alpine Celts in the side valleys of Tyrol, who were still completely unreached by the Gospel. But the 'still collectively thinking Anauni slew these three clerics in 397, burned their bodies and destroyed the church' (Barton 1992b: 21; cf. Ladstätter 1994: 358). Such a missionary initiative into new territory, however, was rather the exception. Rather, for this period at the turn of the third and fourth centuries, one can speak of an inward expansion of Christianity in the Alpine region. These were and remained difficult times for Christians. [Cf. the detailed argumentation of Peter Barton who gives evidence for the inward expansion of

the church—e.g., in the form of church buildings—as well as for the difficult conditions for Christians, e.g., in Raetia (Barton 1992b: 22ff).

Peter Barton made an interesting observation in relation to church buildings and the missionary activity to be inferred from them:

The Roman-early medieval so-called church families (which must not be compared with the church families of the High Middle Ages)—combining a catechumen church with a church for the baptized (...) and often a baptistery—on the mountains served as a spiritual refuge for the Romanesque population of the endangered settlements, but—what is often overlooked—additionally promoted mission among the Alpine Celts: This missionary side effect cannot be overestimated (Barton 1992b: 38).

In 433, the Huns finally conquered Pannonia (cf Barton 1992b: 75f). However, after the death of Attila (453), the Hun Empire fell into decay, and the tribes they had previously subjugated strayed apart. In this politically ominous and dangerous period Severin appears, one of the outstanding figures of early Austrian church history. Through the *Vita Sancti Severin*, written by Severin's disciple Eugippius, we obtain not only invaluable information about Severin, but also about Christianity in Noricum in the second half of the fifth century. [On the historical value of the *Vita Sancta Severini*, see the discussion in Noll 1954: 53f and Barton 1992b: 107-109.]

We know little about Severin's life before his arrival in Austria (cf Barton 1992b: 107-140; Noll 1954: 53-68; Land Oberösterreich 1982), which probably took place in the sixties of the fifth century in the Noric-Panonian border area. He himself never spoke about his background, but he seemed to have been a highly educated man who came to Austria at least with the consent of the Roman Empire—here, of course, we should rather think of Constantinople (Barton 1992b: 111f). Probably he lived before as a hermit in the desert of Africa or in the Orient. Severin possessed not only theological knowledge, but he was also versed in legal matters and had great organizational skills (Barton 1992b: 111).

As a 'charismatic seer' (Barton 1992b: 112) Severin entered the Noric-Panonian area and appeared in Asturis. Whether Asturis (Asturae) is today's Klosterneuburg (Noll 1954: 54) or Zwentendorf (Barton 1992b: 112) must remain open. Despite all the hardships of war, a well-organized Christian community had persisted in Asturis, and Severin began to preach to both the clergy and the common people, calling them to repentance. He combined his sermons of repentance with a prophetic warning of an attack. But since people were not ready to receive his message, Severin moved on to Comagenis (Tulln). Romanowski aptly summarizes the following developments:

Here [Tulln, author's note] the only survivor reported the capture of Asturis. When one of Severin's predictions—this time that the threat to the city from the Germanic tribes would soon be over—also came true in Comagenis, Severin became known throughout Noricum (Romanowski 1994: 26).

Favianis (Mautern) developed into the main base for Severin's work, where the first monastery on Austrian soil with a basilica was built. But besides his religious activity, he also had a strong political influence. Thus, he was considered 'the gray eminence at the royal court of Rugia' (Barton 1992b: 125) and used his influence, for example, for the benefit of the Roman city of Lauriacum (Enns).

However, Severin also set important missionary accents. He preached against the pagan festivals in which 'Christians' still participated and called for conversion, good works, fasting and almsgiving (Barton 1992b: 134f).

Severin died on January 8, 482. He was considered 'the last bulwark of the Roman Empire and the Roman Church in the storms of the migration period' (Romanowski 1994: 29) on the northern border of the Empire.

The following decades brought little progress from a missionary perspective. The Romanesque influence steadily declined due to the turmoil of the migration period, and there are no sources available that provide information about new missionary initiatives—if there were any at all. Romanowski summarizes:

The end of organized Romanesque ecclesiasticism came with the destruction of Aguntum by the Slavs in 610. The faith did not possess sufficient strength for Christian witness to the occupying Bavarians, Alemanni, and Slavs; only in Pannonia could a small Christian minority hold on (Romanowski 1994: 33).

It took several decades before there were renewed missionary efforts, this time from Iroquois monasticism.

The Penetration of Austria with Christianity by the Iro-Scotts and Frankish Mission

New impulses from the far West had first to awaken the readiness of the still completely or partially pagan peoples of the Danube region to accept Christianity and to integrate into the existing ecclesiasticism. Even before the organized Romanesque ecclesiasticism had completely disappeared in Binnennoricum, there were already forces at work in the west of the Austrian area that helped prepare a new future and brought Christianity to the Alemanni, Bavarians and Slavs with new persuasive power. This new dynamic of the Iro-Scottish monastic mission and the continental missionary wave that blossomed in its wake was further accumulated and 'built up' by the politico-

religious expansionist policy of the Frankish Empire, which was pressing for the Christianization of the Danube region (Barton 1992b: 293).

The most important member of this missionary movement, which has its origins in the missionary work of Patrick in Ireland, is Columban the Younger, who died in 615. Together with twelve other companions, he arrived in Burgundy at the end of the sixth century via Brittany and founded a monastery. However, due to (religious) political entanglements and enmities, Columban was forced to move on. Finally, he was persuaded by the Frankish kings Chlotar II and Theudebert to begin a mission among the still predominantly pagan Alemanni. Already at this point it becomes very obvious that an important impulse for the mission and Christianization of the Alemannic-Bavarian region came from the Frankish eastern policy (Barton 1992b: 295; Breatnach 1985: 84-91). Columban began his missionary activity in the north of the Alemannic area and passed through Swiss territories until he founded the first Iroquoian monastery on German-speaking soil in Bregenz in 610. He himself had to leave Bregenz a few years later for political reasons (612/13) and moved on to Italy, but several of his disciples continued the missionary work, especially in Bavaria.

The work of the Iro-Scottish monks was characterized above all by the penitential sermons of their missionaries, which were often delivered in the local language—here the missiological relevance of the Iro-Scottish mission becomes apparent. However, this also meant that the missionaries in Bregenz first addressed the baptized Christians in their preaching, since they behaved like pagans; they first had to be converted. It is not surprising that the missionaries encountered resistance with their plans. For example, the Romansh Christian remnant population turned to the Alemanni duke ‘with the request for protection from the terrible disturbing and hunting-damaging bell ringing of the missionaries’ (Barton 1992b: 298). In addition, the missionaries followed a strict asceticism. All this did not necessarily make the missionary work popular with the formal Christian population. However, since their missionary activity was accompanied by a lack of interest in church organization, unfortunately, Christianity did not have a comprehensive broad and deep impact in these regions. It is remarkable, however, that we encounter a universal missionary concern in Columban and that he was also interested in mission work among the Slavic (Leeb 1995: 99-101).

Barton aptly summarizes this phase of mission in Austria:

Despite the superficial failure, a new upswing of Christianity in south-central Europe, still primarily supported by Romans and Germanic peoples, began with the Iro-Scottish mission. Whereas in the early days’ impulses leading to an upsurge of Christianity in south-central Europe had come from the East, they now came from the West. The new upsurge of missionary activity was very slow to set in—but it

did set in. (...) The proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was offered new opportunities in the long run (Barton 1992b: 301).

However, again, a phase followed in church history, which Barton titles 'dark decades' (Barton 1995: 11). These decades remain predominantly unknown for us and in the dark, since only few sources are preserved.

Only at the end of the seventh century can new missionary activities in the Danubian lands be traced again. The second missionary wave in and beyond Bavaria was triggered by Duke Theodo of Bavaria, who initiated the missionary work of the three so-called 'Bavarian apostles' (cf Romanowski 1994: 39f). After his old capital Lorch was destroyed by the Avars in 700, Theodo moved his seat of government to Regensburg. Under Theodo's rule, the confluence of the Iroquoian and Frankish missions occurred. Even though all three 'Bavarian Apostles' came from the realm of the Franks, they were either direct or indirect heirs of the Iro-Scottish missionary priests. 'Hruodpert = Rupert, Haimhramm = Emmeram and Korbinian, became founders or initiators of the bishoprics of Salzburg, Regensburg and Freising, which became important for the further Austrian church history.

The first and most important representative of the three is Rupert (cf Barton 1995: 82-94; Wolfram 1983: 81-92; Dopsch 1997: 88-139). Probably coming from a noble family, Rupert left his episcopal see in Worms in 693 at the invitation of Duke Theodo and began his preaching activities initially in Regensburg. Yet there he remained only about three years (Dopsch 1997: 92) and soon chose a new place of activity: Noricum or more specifically Iuvavum (Salzburg). As a motive for his move to the Salzburg region, his missionary concern is often mentioned. In fact, he had Duke Theodo grant him a license that authorized him to proselytize wherever he pleased in Bavaria. In Salzburg Land he developed a lively preaching activity; for example, at Mondsee or in Seekirchen am Wallersee, before he finally moved his seat to Salzburg. There he received as a gift from Duke Theodo the town and castle with further lands and built there the oldest continuously existing Benedictine monastery in the world (cf Barton 1995: 89) and founded other monasteries during his lifetime.

What did Rupert's work look like in concrete terms?

He took care of the worship and established the monastic life. In addition, however, in connection with his missionary work, he also fulfilled a political task of high rank. Duke Theodor had apparently commissioned Rupert to prepare the incorporation of the area south of Iuvavum into the Duchy of Bavaria. [...] The task of Rupert and his companions who supported him in the mission was to create the necessary organizational conditions and to establish contact with the down-to-earth population. In those times when, after the collapse of Roman rule, the written word was transmitted almost exclusively within ecclesiastical circles, it remained for the missionaries not only to convert the people to the Christian faith

through preaching and baptism, but also to instruct and teach them. These contacts, which at first served missionary and Christianization purposes, could soon be used for the manorial capture of the area in question (Dopsch 1997: 95).

An exemplary example of Rupert's strategic approach was the foundation of Maximilian's cell in the Pongau, today's Bischofshofen, which was at the same time a first bastion of the church (through the foundation of the monastery), but also of the 'Bavarian' Duke Theodo in the direction of the mountains for the purpose of settlement and Slavic missionary work. Rupert ended his activity in Salzburg at the end of the year 715. There is uncertainty about the year and place of Rupert's death. The only certainty is that he died on March 27, probably in 716 in Worms after his expulsion by pagan forces following the death of Duke Theodos (Barton 1995: 93).

The second central figure is Emmeram. He was initially a bishop in Poitiers (France) and arrived in Regensburg on a missionary journey. He stayed there at the invitation of Duke Theodo and devoted himself to strengthening Christianity in Regensburg and its environs, probably in the years 712-715. However, he died quite early when he became involved in a family conflict at the ducal court (Barton 1995: 79-82).

The Frankish choir bishop Korbinian came to Freising in 716. Due to his clear preaching and criticism of what he saw as the immoral behavior of Duke Grimoald—who had married his brother's widowed wife in his second marriage, which was forbidden by church law—he could no longer stay in Freising and moved to South Tyrol, where he ministered near Merano (Obermais) (Barton 1995: 95-99). When the political situation in Freising changed, Korbinian returned there and baptized Duke Hucbert before dying near Merano in 725. Korbinian became the founder of the bishopric of Freising. Again, it remains difficult to trace the exact missionary activity of these 'Bavarian apostles'. Their achievement and long-term impact lied mainly in the infrastructural decisions around the founding of the bishoprics of Salzburg and Freising.

Finally, the work of Boniface and Virgil should be mentioned. Boniface was commissioned by the pope to reform and reorganize the broken Frankish church. He then also received a letter of protection from Charles Martel (714-741), which was supposed to secure him support in the Frankish Empire. This was mainly to consolidate the eastern border regions. Boniface subsequently divided the entire Bavarian territory into four bishoprics: Passau, Salzburg, Freising and Regensburg (cf Padberg 1998: 83-84; Riché 1994: 658-660). 'The previous bishops (...) who still went back to the Iro-Scottish-early Frankish missionary work, were deposed by Boniface, or as Barton says: "cold-smilingly dumped" (...)' (Petersen 1994-41).

As Boniface's influence with the Bavarian Duke Odilo declined, the star of Virgil (cf. Dopsch/Juffinger 1985), a priest abbot from the southern Irish

monastery of Aghaboe, began to rise. In 745 Virgil was sent by the future King Pippin to the Bavarian Duke Odilo. Already in 746 Virgil and Boniface met, and as a result there were the first disputes, which intensified over the years, especially after Virgil was consecrated Bishop of Salzburg. [Cf. the detailed discussion in Barton 1995: 155-160; Ó Néill 1985: 76-83. Ó Néill raises the quite thought-provoking thesis that cultural differences may well have played a decisive role in the conflict. See also: Schmidinger 1985: 92-101.]

During Virgil's tenure as Bishop of Salzburg, a number of important monasteries were founded, for example in Mondsee, Innichen and Kremsmünster. Virgil's main concern, however, was the mission of the Alpine Slavs and he promoted the so-called Carantanian mission (Barton 1995: 160ff; Wolfram 1995; Kahl 1985: 103-121; Kronsteiner 1985: 122-128). Carantania was formed around 700 by different, mostly Slavic tribes and

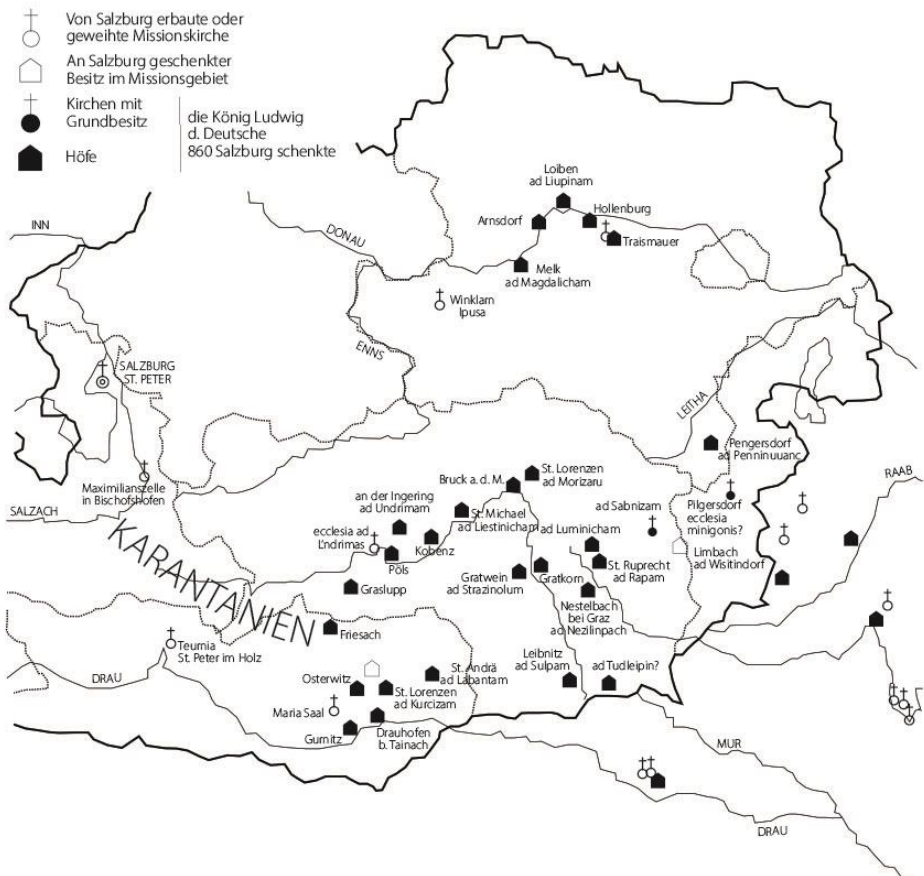
essentially comprised the valleys of the Drava, Mur, Münz and upper Enns [...]. On the other hand, the Enns valley and the Ischler Landl, now populated by Caratans, had belonged to the late Roman riparian oric. [...] The Upper Austrian, Lower Austrian limestone and foothills of the Alps also belonged to Carantania, and the same might be true for the western part of the Bucklige Welt up to the watershed between Pitten-Leitha and Zöbernach-Rabnitz. Not only in the year 863 the area north of the Semmering up to the Schwarza was Carantanian. [...] The eastern border of Carantania probably ran west of the old Noric-Pannonian Lafnitz border [...] (Wolfram 1995:75f).

As far as the Carantanian southern border is concerned, exact answers in regard to borders must remain open, probably the Karavanke formed the southern border.

In any case, the Christianization of Carantania was favored and encouraged by political developments. Boruth, prince of the Caratans, turned to Duke Odilo of Bavaria for help when he was threatened by the Avars. Odilo's victory over the Avars in 741/743 brought Carantania under the political influence of the Bavarians. Boruth's son Cacatius as well as his nephew Cheitmar and other representatives of the upper class were taken hostage and instructed in the Christian faith under Virgil's supervision. This took place on Herrenchiemsee (Barton 1995: 170). 'This instruction was probably primarily concerned with teaching individual passages of the Old and New Testaments, simple beliefs, and Christian principles for daily life' (Scheibelreiter 2005: 33). When Prince Boruth died in 749/750, his Christian-educated son Cacatius was sent to the Slavs and installed by them as prince (Dopsch 1997: 103). He later turned to the bishop of Salzburg with a request for clergymen to preach the Gospel to his people. *Figure 2: Salzburg Caravan Mission following Posch* (Dopsch/Juffinger 1985: 120-121).

A few years later Virgil sent a priest called Modestus to Carantania who later became the apostle of Carinthia. When he died around the year 763, the first crisis in the Carantania mission occurred. Heinz Dopsch writes:

The Salzburg Slavic mission ran smoothly as long as the choir bishop Modestus, appointed by Virgil, was at its head as the undisputed authority. After his death in 763 there was for the first time an uprising (*carmula*) among the Slavs, which was apparently directed against the Salzburg mission (Dopsch 1997: 103).



In addition, one might also question the motives of some missionary priests. Peter Barton cites an impressive example that suggests that the missionaries' qualifications and motivation also frequently left much to be desired. A missionary named Blancidius laments his lot:

He must still work as an old man under a dense fir forest, in a land covered with dense beech and spruce forests and swamps, in the mountains of the Slavs.

Glowingly, he envied his colleagues in Italy. He could not feast on sweet figs but had to choke down buckwheat mush. He could quench his thirst—in view of Carinthian pollution—only at springs, since the water of the streams was polluted by animals and humans. He doesn't understand the language of the inhabitants, can't enjoy witty conversations and feels lonely (Barton 1997: 32).

Neither was this missionary priest apparently willing to learn the language of the Slavic tribes, nor did he seem to have been particularly motivated in his work.

Virgil was succeeded by Arno of Salzburg. He successfully consolidated the church organization of Salzburg diocese without being able to set decisive missionary impulses (Barton 1997: 219ff).

A final decisive missionary impulse took place in the ninth century under Charlemagne. After the victory in the Avar wars in 791/96 and 805, mission among the Avars and Slavs became one of Charlemagne's main concerns. The area between the rivers Raba, Danube, and Drava was assigned to the bishopric of Salzburg (Barton 1997: 33). The subjugation was accompanied by the obligation for the losers to adopt Christianity. Baptismal instruction was not to exceed 40 days, and only after baptism did instruction in Christian ethics follow. At the same time, however, mass and forced baptisms were also rejected. Nevertheless, instead of mission, it is much more accurate to speak of a politically motivated Christianization.

The Hungarian storms, which began around the year 900, once again posed a threat to Christianity in Austria without causing any dramatic setbacks. By the 11th century at the latest, the missionization or Christianization of Austria was complete, and the further expansion of Christianity could proceed.

Summary Conclusion

How did the mission and Christianization of Austria come about in the first place? Who were the sponsors of this mission? What strategies were used? Is the term missionary work appropriate at all or was it not rather a superficial, politically motivated Christianization?

We began our elaboration with these initial questions. Whoever researches the beginnings of Christianity in Austria will find that much remains in the dark. It can be assumed as certain that soldiers of the Roman Empire were the first Christians to set foot on Austrian soil. Through their lives and testimonies, people seem to have been made aware of the Gospel of Jesus Christ early on (first or second century). Since the border along the Danube was sometimes the most soldier-rich region of the empire and quite a few soldiers were Christians, this is not necessarily surprising.

Another observation is that the first Christian communities emerged mainly among the Roman colonists. This is neither a strategically planned mission nor one that initially started from the church.

One can speak of Christian communities in Austria from the third and fourth centuries at the latest. These are then also provable by archaeological findings. However, the Christian communities were mainly limited to the Roman border and trading towns. It would be premature to speak of a missionary breakthrough in rural areas as well. And even in the existing communities, it became evident that after Christianity was tolerated and later recognized as the leading religion in the Roman Empire, a formal nominal Christianity quickly spread, as is clear, for example, from Severin's calls for conversion and repentance.

A strategic missionary work in Austria by missionaries only began to take place when Iro-Scottish and later Frankish missionary monks arrived. To what extent they were successful outside the centers and apart from founding monasteries must again remain open. Once again we lack meaningful sources. Their missionary activity, however, was often motivated by spiritual concerns, and they endeavored, for example, to learn the respective language and to preach in it.

With the increasing power politics of the church, parallel to the rise of the Frankish dynasty, we witness a development away from real mission towards Christianization, while some boundaries remain fluid.

Whoever looks at the history of the mission and Christianization of Austria must be prepared to leave many questions unanswered. Too little could be researched, especially due to the scanty sources, to make sure statements in detail.

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