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***TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME***

Essays in honour of Kaj Öhrnberg

EDITED BY

SYLVIA AKAR, JAAKKO HÄMEEN-ANTTILA  
& INKA NOKSO-KOIVISTO



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**Edited by Sylvia Akar, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila & Inka Nokso-Koivisto**  
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# BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: THE MANY USES OF THE LIFE OF ST SYMEON OF TRIER

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## INTRODUCTION

In the minds of many, the history of eleventh-century Europe is characterized by a marked antagonism between East and West. The schism between the Eastern and Western churches, the semi-official division of the previously nominally unified church in 1054, and the crusader movement at the end of the century were events and phenomena that seem to testify to evident differences and even confrontation. This, however, is not the whole picture, and the understandable emphasis of historical studies on larger events, such as the schism or controversies between Christians during the Crusades, may prevent us from seeing the natural continuation of self-evident interaction between Eastern and Western Christendom.

In many respects, Eastern Christianity was considered even by Westerners to guard and maintain many of the secrets of the original faith. After all, the East was the home of, for example, the Bible, Christ and his disciples, the early church, the first councils, innumerable relics, eremitic and ascetic ideals, and monasticism. In short, Christianity was born in the East and, consequently, the Eastern tradition was considered to be the keeper of ancient wisdom and original practices, in spite of the obvious shortcomings of the contemporary representatives of the Eastern Church in the eyes of eleventh-century Westerners.

Hence, the East had authority that could be borrowed by the West to propagate ideas and ideals that were of importance for, say, an ecclesiastical institution, cult, town or realm. This article aims to elucidate this phenomenon by examining the versatile uses of the life of St Symeon of Trier (d. 1035), whose life was written and disseminated on the eve of and during the schism between the Eastern and Western churches in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

## A VERSATILE SAINT

St Symeon of Trier can without a doubt be counted among the most interesting monastic saints of the high Middle Ages. Whereas the activities of many of his

saintly colleagues were centred mostly within the walls of a monastery or a limited geographic area, Symeon was extremely well-travelled and had a very colourful life, a fact that would later contribute to the popularity of his hagiography. It is because of this hagiographic *vita*, written by his friend, the abbot Eberwinus, that we have a relatively detailed picture of the life of the saint.<sup>1</sup>

According to the *vita*, Symeon was born in Syracuse, Sicily, probably in the 960s.<sup>2</sup> His family was Christian in spite of Syracuse being under Muslim rule already since 878. The father of the future saint was Greek, and Symeon was taken to school in Constantinople as a seven-year-old boy. Seeing the Western pilgrims pass Constantinople on their way to the Holy Land, even Symeon became interested in visiting the most holy pilgrimage places in the East. Later on, he would spend a lengthy period of time in the Holy Land, find a Christian calling, and be gradually drawn more and more to religious life. During the following years, he worked as a guide for pilgrims, served a hermit on the bank of the Jordan, joined the monastery of St Mary in Bethlehem, was consecrated as a deacon, moved to the monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai, and lived as a hermit on the shores of the Red Sea and on Mt Sinai. Hence, as the *vita* made sure that every reader understood, he was thoroughly familiar with most of the holy places of the Old and New Testaments.<sup>3</sup>

After some time, the abbot of the monastery of St Catherine commissioned Symeon to travel to Rouen to collect a charitable donation promised to the monastery by Richard, the duke of Normandy. Symeon's voyage turned out to be full of adventures: he was attacked by pirates on the river Nile, and after a narrow escape he spent some time in the village of a local tribe. Later, in Antioch, he encountered a group of pilgrims from the church province of Trier and Lorraine who were on their way to Jerusalem, made friends with some of the leaders of the pilgrimage, and joined the group on its return journey. In Belgrade he became entangled in international high politics, as he was apprehended on suspicion of being a Byzantine spy. Soon released, but deprived of the company of the Western pilgrims, Symeon finally arrived in Rouen – only to learn that the

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1 See *Vita s. Symeonis*. The quality of the previous editions is inadequate, and the present author is preparing a new edition of the *vita* and *miracula* of Symeon in the request of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.

2 The date of birth is not known, and scholars disagree on it. According to Haverkamp (2010: 10–11), Symeon was born in the early 960s, whereas Cassegrain (1992–1993: 56) considers the late 970s and Heyen (1995: 1911; 1984: 197) c.990 as the right date of birth. It has to be said that all details of Symeon's life, e.g. the curriculum of his studies (see Cassegrain 1992–1993: 56–59; cf. Haverkamp 2010: 12–13), that go beyond the story of his *vita* are purely speculative.

3 *Vita s. Symeonis*: 89C–92C. See Haverkamp 2010.

local duke had died and his descendants had no interest in hearing about a gift to the monastery of St Catherine.<sup>4</sup>

Disheartened, Symeon decided to visit the Western friends with whom he had become acquainted in Antioch. First he went to Verdun, where he stayed for a while with Richard, the abbot of Saint-Vannes. Soon thereafter he continued on to visit Eberwinus, his future hagiographer and a monastic magnate who seems to have been the abbot of three important monasteries at the time: one in Tholey, St Paul in Verdun, and St Martin in Trier.<sup>5</sup> Having spent some time in the West, Symeon joined a group of pilgrims under the direction of Poppo, the archbishop of Trier, and travelled back to the Holy Land.

Somewhat surprisingly, Symeon did not stay in the East. He returned to Trier, where he decided to settle down as a recluse in the tower of an ancient Roman town gate, Porta Nigra. According to his *vita*, Symeon lived out the rest of his life at Porta Nigra and soon became a well-known figure in the cathedral city. When he died on 1 June 1035, it was clear to the local clergy that he should be venerated as a saint, and swift action was taken to write his *vita* and *miracula* and to persuade Pope Benedict IX to canonize him. These endeavours were supported by the many miracles that Symeon had accomplished already during his life and right after his death. The first version of the *vita* and a small *miracula* were ready just a couple of months after Symeon's death, and they were subsequently sent to Rome for his canonization. The Pope was impressed, and Symeon became the second saint of all time to receive a papal canonization.<sup>6</sup>

For a modern scholar, the *vita* of St Symeon is an exceedingly interesting eyewitness testimony of the Near East around the turn of the millennium. For a mediaeval audience, the text was an exotic yet true tale that emphasized the self-evident but distant ties between the Christian East and West, as well as the continuum from the original Christianity of the Holy Land via the Greek tradition to the contemporary Western interpretation of the faith. In the eyes of the Western readers of his *vita*, Symeon tried all the classical forms of both anchoritic and coenobitic monastic life, and thus set an authoritative example on religious matters – an example equally valuable for readers within the walls of the monasteries as well as outside of them. In all, the Greek saint with strong ties to both the East and the West, as well as the hagiographic text written about him, provided ecclesiastical thinkers and authors of the eleventh century with

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4 *Vita s. Symeonis*: 91E.

5 Heikkilä 2002: 123; Hirschmann 1995: 319–321.

6 Jaffé & Loewenfeld 1956: 4112; Papsturkunden 599; see Heikkilä 2002: 138–146.



welcome material that could be used in a versatile and innovative way to back up their own ideas of the past. Let us now elucidate this with some examples.

### CASE 1: THE CULT OF ST SYMEON

Both the swift dissemination of the texts on Symeon by Eberwinus and other evidence make the eager efforts of the Trier clergy to establish a strong cult of the newly canonized saint quite evident. Porta Nigra, where the saint had lived and was buried, was turned into a church, and a community of clerics was established to cherish the memory of Symeon and to propagate his cult. When Archbishop Poppo of Trier died in 1047, he was, according to his own wishes, buried by the grave of St Symeon in Porta Nigra.<sup>7</sup>

Although the cult was established and developed for the needs and on the terms of the local Western clergy and people, Symeon's Greek roots were omnipresent. The *vita* and *miracula* made a point of his Eastern qualities, and even the more practically oriented side of the cult relied heavily on Eastern exoticism. A functioning cult of a new saint needed concrete evidence (i.e. relics) of his or her historicity and constant benevolent presence to fuel the veneration of the people. In Symeon's case, the most important relics were very exotic indeed, and they served to emphasize his ties to the Eastern Christianity. In addition to the miraculously incorrupt body of the saint, special importance was accorded to his cap, which according to tradition was made of camel hair and very effective against headaches. Another important relic with direct ties to the East was a Greek lectionary that the saint was supposed to have brought with him when he came to Trier.<sup>8</sup> Both relics can still be seen in the Domschatz of Trier cathedral, testifying to the longevity of the admiration of the Eastern tradition in the West since the eleventh century. It warrants mention that whereas the majority of Symeon's relics remained in the vicinity of his grave in Porta Nigra, we have an interesting (albeit somewhat questionable) bit of information linking one of his relics with the First Crusade to the Holy Land (1096–1099). It is probable that one of the leaders of the Western crusaders, Godfrey of Bouillon, carried a relic of St Symeon of Trier with him into the battle of Antioch.<sup>9</sup>

As much as Symeon's Eastern background was appreciated, during his lifetime it also cast him as an outsider of the Trier community. This had negative implications, as Eberwinus describes in the saint's *vita*: when Trier was hit by heavy

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7 Heikkilä 2002: 132–146.

8 Engberg 2005: 132–146; Kammer 1935.

9 Riley-Smith 1986: 93; Meyer 1884: 467–509 (edition of the source). On the discussion whether the relic was related to St Symeon of Trier or his namesake, the famous Antiochean stylite, see Heikkilä 2002: 248.

floods of the Moselle river in the early 1030s, the local people concluded that the strange-looking hermit of Porta Nigra was to blame and wanted to stone him to death.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Symeon's hagiographer Eberwinus makes no effort to downplay the story, but rather shares it as testimony of his hero's true exoticism.<sup>11</sup> For instance, he makes a point of stressing that Symeon was buried *more suae patriae*, according to the Eastern rites.<sup>12</sup>

Symeon's Greek roots and experiences in the East were strongly emphasized in the mediaeval illustrations of the saint. Coins minted in Trier during Archbishop Poppo's reign in the late 1030s and 1040s were an influential means of propagating the new saint, and they represented St Symeon as a hermit with a long beard, very different than the way in which Western saints of the era were depicted.<sup>13</sup> The few illuminations of the manuscripts of his hagiographic texts provide us with a similar picture: the saint was tonsured and bearded in a fashion that would likely remind readers of Eastern Christendom.<sup>14</sup> This seems to have been the normal, quasi-official way of depicting him, since the earliest known seal of the congregation of St Symeon in Porta Nigra makes use of precisely the same iconography.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the efforts of Archbishop Poppo and the Trier clergy, the cult of St Symeon took root only in the vicinity around Trier, not much elsewhere. In spite of the extant relics and pictorial representations of the saint, the vast textual tradition of his *vita* and *miracula* is the most important monument of the mediaeval cult of and interest in St Symeon. After the earliest version of the text – comprised of the *vita* and a small collection of miracles – was finished in summer 1035, more and more miracles were added to the original *miracula* over the next half century. Consequently, the *vita* and *miracula* of St Symeon make up a very complex text. In fact, we can identify no less than five different layers of writing (i.e. five different sequential writers) in the *miracula*.<sup>16</sup>

The *Vita et miracula s. Symeonis* enjoyed vast dissemination during the Middle Ages. There are nearly 60 mediaeval manuscripts still preserved, most of which date from the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>17</sup> This is an astonishingly high number, taking into consideration that the actual cult of the saint never found

10 *Vita s. Symeonis*: 90C.

11 Cf. a similar story of another Greek saint, St Macarios of Ghent: *Vita altera s. Macarii*: 877F–878A.

12 *Vita s. Symeonis*: 90D.

13 See Heikkilä 2002: 250; Clemens 1996: 198–199; Weiller 1988: 123–125, 313–326.

14 Cod. Bodmer 127, fol. 216v (12th century); Ms. 1384 / 54 80, fol. 1v (early 13th century). Cod. bibl. 20 57, fol. 247r (c.1120–1125) is an exception, as it depicts a very youthful Symeon wrestling with demons.

15 Schmid 1998: 41. The seal dates from the 12th century.

16 Heikkilä 2010.

17 For the shelf marks and descriptions, see Heikkilä 2002: 148–168.

very much popularity outside of Trier. When comparing the dissemination of manuscripts on Symeon to that of other things (e.g. his relics, references to him in ecclesiastical calendars, and the evidence on his liturgy), it soon becomes clear that Symeon's cult was not disseminated hand in hand with his *vita* and *miracula*. The texts were naturally needed for the proper veneration of St Symeon, but their diffusion clearly exceeded the needs of his modest cult. And whereas the cult of Symeon seems to have been restricted mainly to the neighbouring areas of Trier, the texts on him found readers throughout Western Christendom, from Rome to Utrecht and from the shores of the English Channel to the east of Austria.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, the *Vita et miracula s. Symeonis* seems to have had other value for the readers and listeners than the usual theological and instructive worth of a hagiographical text. The texts described the exotic East, the Holy Land, and Biblical places that were very much in people's minds during the eleventh and early twelfth centuries (when the texts found their widest dissemination). The exotic contents of the *vita* and *miracula* clearly made them interesting for the broader public. Consequently, study of the texts may provide us with interesting insights not only into the fields of religious and cult history, but also textual history and literary taste, among other things.

## CASE 2: THE APOSTOLICITY OF ST MARTIALIS

The semi-official *Vita et miracula s. Symeonis* found popularity during the Middle Ages, but several other texts made use of his colourful life as well. Perhaps the most interesting of these was written already during the saint's lifetime by a well-known monastic historian, Ademar of Chabannes (989–1034). There is no doubt among scholars that Ademar really met Symeon and his travelling companion Cosmas in Angoulême in 1027, when the saint-to-be was on his way to Rouen to collect the gift of the duke of Normandy. In addition to showing the Eastern visitors around Angoulême, Ademar also took them to Limoges – a trip which was undoubtedly fascinating for Symeon and Cosmas and, some years later, would be of significance for the use of Symeon's reputation in Ademar's literary and historical production.<sup>19</sup> In all, Symeon seems to have stayed in Angoulême and Limoges from May to July or August; during this time, Symeon's companion Cosmas passed away.<sup>20</sup> Despite this regrettable event, it was also during those months that Ademar made sure to ask questions and glean whatever information

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<sup>18</sup> Heikkilä 2002: 197–261.

<sup>19</sup> On Ademar, see esp. Landes 1995. On him and Symeon, see Landes 1995: 163.

<sup>20</sup> *Vita s. Symeonis*: 89C.

his visitors had on matters of interest for a historian such as himself. Scholars are unanimous in thinking that a number of pieces of information about the Eastern Christian tradition and the history of Eastern Christendom in Ademar's later works can be traced back to his discussions with Symeon.<sup>21</sup>

In 1027, Ademar was already a seasoned writer of history, in the middle of composing his magnum opus, an extensive history of the Franks and Aquitaine, *Chronicon Aquitanicum et Francicum*. Still, as the *Vita et miracula s. Symeonis* makes no mention of the meeting with Ademar,<sup>22</sup> the encounter between the local historian and the widely-travelled Greek obviously made a more lasting impression on Ademar than it did on Symeon. In fact, Ademar saw in the meeting of Symeon an opportunity to bolster the trustworthiness of his historical works, and he composed an intricate construction around Symeon.

Although the idea was originally not of his own invention,<sup>23</sup> one of the most important aims of Ademar's later works was to prove that St Martial, the patron of Limoges and his home monastery of Saint-Martial, had in fact been one of the original disciples of Christ. Based on what we know of Martial today, the idea was totally false (since the real Martial lived in the mid-third century). For an early eleventh-century audience in Limoges, however, the thought of their patron being linked directly to one of the most influential characters of Christian history was, of course, very appealing.

Ademar's campaign to propagate the apostolicity of St Martial included a number of carefully constructed forgeries. A *Vita s. Martialis episcopi Lemovicensis* was composed as if it had been written by Martial's direct successor to the episcopal see of Limoges, Bishop Aurelianus.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Martial's liturgy was changed to better suit his "real" status as an apostle, rather than the confessor saint portrayed by his old liturgy. Ademar even rewrote some of his earlier historical texts to bring them into alignment with his new view on the apostle Martial.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately for Ademar, the ideas of Martial of Limoges as an apostle of Christ were not accepted universally outside Limoges. As the new apostolic liturgy was being sung in Limoges in August 1029, it was heard by a travelling prior from Lombardy, Benedict of Chiusa, who immediately raised loud objec-

21 Landes 1995: 161; Wolff 1978: 148–150, 181–189.

22 The whole visit to Angoulême is just referred to by mentioning that Symeon stayed at a local count William (i.e. of Angoulême) in Francia; *Vita s. Symeonis*: 89C: "A quodam igitur sibi noto comite wilhelmo benigne suscipitur & apud eum aliquamdiu moratur." Ademar is not mentioned. See Landes 1995: 370 Appendix G.

23 Landes 1995: 197–204.

24 See *Vita b. Martialis*.

25 Landes 1995: 214–227.

tions against Martialis's alleged apostolicity.<sup>26</sup> Ademar was forced to invent new evidence – even a papal letter! – for his cause, and, to make a long story short, it was at this point that he saw it necessary to invoke Symeon's Eastern authority. His account of a council held in Limoges in November 1031 includes Symeon and Cosmas witnessing strongly in favour of the apostolicity of Martialis. According to Ademar, he had asked his Eastern visitors during their stay in Angoulême and Limoges if they knew Martialis, and he had found them appalled to learn that anyone could even doubt the apostolicity of the patron of Limoges. For them and everyone in the East, reported Ademar, Martialis was self-evidently one of the 72 apostles sent around the world by Christ, according to *Luke* 1:1–24.<sup>27</sup>

Naturally there is no way of telling whether or not Ademar and Symeon really had a discussion about the apostolicity of St Martialis, or if the whole idea of his apostolicity was Ademar's own invention. However, it is almost certain that Ademar told Symeon about the local patron when they visited Limoges, and the plan to propagate St Martialis only began to be realized the year after Ademar met Symeon. Perhaps the encounter with the visitor from the East did indeed give food for the historian's thoughts about the possibilities of using mythical Eastern wisdom to back his ideas.

If Ademar was only using Symeon's name and fame, it was a hazardous game he was playing, since much of his argumentation in favour of the apostolicity of Martialis relied on the falsified testimony of a person who was still alive, already relatively well-known in the ecclesiastical circles of eastern France and Lothringen, and who could expose significant parts of Ademar's historical construction. The gamble paid off, however, and Symeon's and Cosmas's alleged testimony in the falsified council of Limoges in 1031 went on to prove Ademar's argumentation. It was only in the twentieth century that the alleged apostolicity of Martialis of Limoges was proved false.<sup>28</sup>

The case of Ademar, Martialis, and Symeon provides important insight into the topic of this article. For Ademar – and presumably for his audience, as well – Symeon's value as a convincing witness is directly related to the fact that he came from the East. In his story, Ademar describes Symeon's praiseworthy character and language proficiency, but especially his great knowledge of the Eastern Christian tradition. Much weight is given to the fact that Symeon was from the East: he is specifically mentioned as having arrived from the monastery of Mt Sinai, and, interestingly, Ademar even makes a point of declaring that “the Greek have always

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<sup>26</sup> Landes 1995: 232–246.

<sup>27</sup> Mansi 1767: 517. See Wolff 1978: 177.

<sup>28</sup> See Wolff 1978: 156–183; Saltet 1931: 149–162.

been wiser than the Latin".<sup>29</sup> Moreover, it is worth pointing out that Ademar was writing prior to Symeon's death and canonization. In other words, he was fascinated by the Greek monk's Eastern background, not by his sainthood.

### CASE 3: THE RELICS OF ST CATHERINE

Having left Angoulême and Limoges, Symeon headed for Rouen to receive Richard's promised gift to his monastery. As we already know, Richard died before the Greek traveller arrived in Rouen, and Symeon saw that the goal of his long journey would never be realized. In terms of a memorial, however, Symeon's brief and frustrating visit to the capital of Normandy proved out to be of some significance for Western church history.

When Symeon visited Rouen, a monastery was being built there in honour of the Holy Trinity, Sainte-Trinité du Mont. Relics were *sine qua non* for mediaeval churches and monasteries, and it was important for newly established institutions to acquire as precious remains of saints as possible. Interestingly, the local tradition of the monastery associates its most remarkable relics with St Symeon. The earliest record of the tradition, *S. Catharinae translatio*, was written by an anonymous author between 1054 and 1090. According to this text, Symeon had found three small relics of St Catherine, the patroness of the monastery, on Mt Sinai when guarding her grave at night during his stay there. He brought them with him to Rouen and donated the relics to the local monastery of Sainte-Trinité du Mont.<sup>30</sup> The local tradition, thus initiated, soon found other witnesses as well, all of whom told almost exactly the same story. In the early twelfth century, the well-known chronicler Hugh of Flavigny (c.1065–c.1144) included the story in his *Chronicon Viridunense seu Flaviniacense*.<sup>31</sup> Finally, it was retold in *Chronicon triplex*, a later compilation of three different sources on mediaeval Normandy.<sup>32</sup>

Since the concept of truth differed in high mediaeval hagiographic and other religious texts from that of our own time, modern historians often tend to be suspicious of the veracity of stories found in the mediaeval sources. For the sake of covering all possible angles, it is necessary to ask if Symeon really did give the relics of St Catherine to a monastery in Rouen. In this case, the sources propagating the authenticity of the relics seem entirely fictitious.<sup>33</sup> The monastery of Sainte-Trinité du Mont was only being built when Symeon visited Rouen in 1027,

<sup>29</sup> Mansi 1767: 517.

<sup>30</sup> Edition of the source: Poncelet 1903: 431–438. See Fawtier 1923: 358–360.

<sup>31</sup> *Chronicon Hugonis*: 398–399.

<sup>32</sup> *Normanniae Nova Chronica*: 4.

<sup>33</sup> See Fawtier 1923.

which raises obvious practical difficulties.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the patrons of the monastery during its construction would obviously have been interested in any important relics they could lay their hands on, even prior to completing the actual building phase. Still, it is very curious that Symeon's own *vita* by Eberwinus mentions neither St Catherine nor her relics at all, considering that playing a role as a disseminator of relics and an old cult would have been a favourable thing to include in a hagiographic text. In fact, the *vita* tells *expressis verbis* that Symeon lost all his belongings in the raid of the pirates on the Nile,<sup>35</sup> and could thus not have brought anything from Sinai to Rouen. In addition, the Rouen tradition has peculiarities that cannot be reconciled with facts proven by other sources.<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, the Rouen tradition of St Catherine is yet another historical construction supported by the Eastern authority of St Symeon. In this context, the significance of the fact that Symeon arrived from the centre of the Eastern cult of St Catherine on Mt Sinai is obvious. In clear contrast to Ademar, the Rouen monks and other writers propagating the relics of St Catherine instigated the story only after Symeon's death. The origin of the Rouen tradition can be dated back to 1046–1047,<sup>37</sup> suggesting that it only came to light after Symeon's *vita* had already been disseminated widely both in France and Germany and Symeon himself had gained a reputation as a saint canonized by the Pope.<sup>38</sup>

The obvious goal of the invented Rouen tradition was to authenticate the relics of St Catherine in the monastery of Sainte-Trinité du Mont. It is of interest that the cult of the virgin martyr St Catherine was unknown in Western Europe prior to the invention of her relics in Rouen.<sup>39</sup> It was probably only Symeon's visit to the town and his background as a monk of the famous Sinai monastery dedicated to Catherine that gave the Rouen clerics the idea to claim ownership of her relics. Later on, Sainte-Trinité du Mont even changed its name to reflect its most important treasures, adopting the new name Sainte-Catherine du Mont.

On a side note, the Trier clergy also wanted to profit from the Rouen tradition of Symeon bringing the relics of St Catherine from Mt Sinai to the West, albeit this took place several centuries later. A fifteenth-century list of relics includes "oil of St Catherine" (*de oleo S. Katharine*) among the treasures of the congre-

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34 The monastery was established in 1030 by Josquelin d'Arques, the viscount of Normandy, and his wife Emmeline. The new monastery could, however, with some effort trace its roots back to 1024. See Fawtier 1923: 361–363.

35 *Vita s. Symeonis*: 91C.

36 Heikkilä 2002: 121–122.

37 Schill 2005: 40.

38 Heikkilä 2002: 198–217.

39 Walsh 2007.

gation of St Symeon in Trier.<sup>40</sup> As there is no mention of such a relic during previous centuries of the cult and congregation, this was probably an attempt to imitate the earlier success in Rouen.

The invention of the Rouen relics proved to be quite successful on a bigger scale, as well, and the veneration of the virgin martyr was swiftly disseminated throughout Western Europe during the remaining centuries of the Middle Ages.<sup>41</sup> Even today, St Catherine is a very popular saint in both the Roman and Greek Catholic worlds, even in spite of the fact that she was excluded from the official Roman calendar in the 1960s. In this respect, St Symeon was used to propagate the transfer of a cult from the East to the West, a cult that continues to have an influence on Western ecclesiastical and religious history. Within Eastern Christianity, Symeon – nicknamed Pentaglossos, the one who speaks five languages – is nowadays mostly venerated because of his alleged role in the diffusion of St Catherine’s cult in the West.<sup>42</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The actual life of St Symeon (d. 1035) and its posthumous use to propagate different ideas and ideals provide a good example of the versatile connections and interaction between the East and West in the high Middle Ages. The three cases dealt with above – Symeon’s cult, the apostolicity of St Martial, and the relics of St Catherine – reveal interesting aspects of and insights into the expectations and valuations associated with the East in the minds of the people of Western Europe. As we have seen, positive exoticism, ancient wisdom, and originality were attributes often attached to Eastern Christianity, even in a century which saw the schism between the churches of the East and West (in 1054). Much of the alleged antagonism between the East and West had to do with high politics and did not reflect the actual views of the Western people. As the East was generally valued positively and attracted the interest of the broader public, Eastern features and personalities could be used to diffuse new traditions, texts and their contents.

The far-ranging life of Symeon both in the East and the West made him not only a highly interesting personality in the eyes of his contemporaries, but also a natural mediator between the two frontiers of Christendom and an expert on all things Eastern in the eyes of his friends and admirers in Germany and France.

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<sup>40</sup> Hamanns & Flügel 1895: 7–8. The list was still found in the cathedral of Trier in the 19th century, but is nowadays lost.

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g. Schill 2005.

<sup>42</sup> See, e.g. Lafontaine-Dosogne 1996: 107. Lafontaine-Dosogne takes the Rouen tradition at face value and is even otherwise alarmingly ill-informed about St Symeon.



Interestingly, the fame of the newcomer from the East was also used to legitimize historical constructions independently from the text composed by Eberwinus and his later colleagues. Although in both the cases of Limoges and Rouen the authority of Symeon was – in modern terms – used to falsify the past, both examples show an eagerness to benefit from Eastern authority and to join the past of one's own community to the larger story of Christianity, some of the oldest roots of which were located in the history of the Holy Land and other sacred places in the East. The spicing up of historical constructions with exotic tales and witnesses really worked: the *Vita et miracula s. Symeonis* was disseminated, read, and copied eagerly, the apostolicity of St Martialis was considered as a fact for centuries, and the relics of St Catherine were considered genuine until the twentieth century. In addition, legitimizing ideas by Symeon, his actions, and his knowledge of the Eastern tradition had another clear advantage: it was as equally difficult to challenge the truthfulness of the ecclesiastical tradition that was allegedly reported by Symeon (in the Limoges case) as it was tricky to question the actions of a saint canonized by the Pope (in the Rouen case).

Of course, Symeon is but one example of a much wider phenomenon.<sup>43</sup> There were numerous Greek and other Eastern hermits and monks who migrated from the East to the West in the tenth and eleventh centuries and acquired a reputation as authorities in questions of faith; it suffices to mention such names as Simeon of Polirone (d. 1016) and Neilos of Rossano (d. 1005). In fact, the influx of Eastern influences had an impact on the Western monastic reforms of the high Middle Ages, which, in turn, were of importance for the whole of society. Another sign of the fascination with Eastern personalities is revealed by the fact that several of the few saints canonized by the Pope in the eleventh century were of Eastern origin.<sup>44</sup> During the high Middle Ages, the admiration of many things Eastern was naturally intertwined with the more practical and challenging ways of learning to know the East (namely via pilgrimages and, finally, the Crusades).

The veneration of St Symeon exemplifies beautifully the ties between the Eastern and Western boundaries of mediaeval Christendom. Symeon has been dead for nearly a millennium, but his cult is still very much alive both in the East and the West, with Mt Sinai and Trier as the most important cultic centres. It is of special bearing on the topic of this article that, whereas Easterners consider the biggest merit of Symeon Pentaglossos to be his activities in the West, in Western Europe he was originally venerated first and foremost as an Eastern authority.

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43 In general, see, e.g. Berschin 1980.

44 Symeon of Trier, Simeon of Polirone, and Nicolaus Peregrinus. See Jaffé & Loewenfeld 1956: 4055, 4112, 5762.

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