St Pientia and the Château de la Roche-Guyon: Relic Translations and Sacred History in Seventeenth-Century France

*This article seeks to explore the connections between the translation of an early Christian relic to the Château de la Roche-Guyon in the mid-seventeenth century and the writing of local sacred histories by the priest and prior Nicolas Davanne. It finds that the translation of a finger bone of St Pientia was the culmination of efforts by a local scholar to revive the sacred history of the Vexin and to celebrate the regional liturgical traditions associated with its early Christian martyrs. In doing so, it finds support for the recent historiography on local, sacred histories which emerged during the Counter-Reformation in response to liturgical standardization. The article also discusses the unstable nature of relics as material objects and explores the ways in which relics were continually reinvested with meaning. It is shown that Pientia’s relic was not only part of a defence of a local spiritual heritage in response to Trent, but also part of a claim to an early Christian spiritual heritage for a deviant and heretical movement within the Church.*

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Introduction: Reinventing Relics

On 29 October 1656, the archbishop of Rouen carried out an episcopal visitation at the Château de La Roche-Guyon, property of the duc and duchesse de Liancourt. The purpose of the visitation of Archbishop François Harlay de Champvallon (1625–95) was to verify the authenticity of the saintly relics preserved in a silver reliquary in the Chapelle de Notre-Dame-des-Neiges.[[1]](#footnote-1) Among the holy objects in the château was a relic recently translated from the monastery of Saint-Nicaise at Meulan. The relic was a finger of the third-century noble virgin martyr St Pientia (or Pience). Pientia was converted to Christianity at La Roche-Guyon through the evangelizing of the missionary St Nicasius and his companions Scubiculus and Quirinus during their journeys along the Seine.[[2]](#footnote-2)

La Roche-Guyon was situated on a commercial route between Paris and Rouen, on the right bank of the Seine in the Vexin, on the border of Normandy.[[3]](#footnote-3) The seventeenth-century proprietors of La Roche-Guyon, Roger du Plessis and Jeanne de Schomberg, were distinguished patrons of the Cistercian convent of Port-Royal, a relationship strengthened by their loyalty during the theological controversies of the seventeenth century. In the mid-seventeenth century, Port-Royal was persecuted for being one of the sites at which the ‘heretical’ ideas of the Dutch theologian Cornelius Jansen (1585 – 1638) on grace, free will and salvation held sway.[[4]](#footnote-4) It was largely due to the patronage and protection of families such as the Liancourt during this period that the convent eluded destruction until 29 October 1709, when it was demolished by Louis XIV’s troops. The duc and duchesse were also practitioners of the neo-Augustinian, penitential strand of post-Tridentine Catholicism associated with Port-Royal and the Jansenists, now often referred to as ‘rigorist’.[[5]](#footnote-5) The Liancourts were among the *noblesse d*’*épée* (sword nobility) who had purchased positions at the royal court.[[6]](#footnote-6) After both experiencing conversions in the mid-seventeenth century, they became known for their staunch piety. Both also seem to have internalized the reforming agenda of the Counter-Reformation; the duc de Liancourt was among the noble membership of the elite *dévot* organization, the *Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement* (Company of the Holy Sacrament) and the duchesse was one of Vincent de Paul’s most formidable *Dames de la charité* (Ladies of Charity).

The duc and duchesse procured the finger of St Pientia from a larger collection of relics at the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Nicaise in Meulan, around thirty kilometres from the château. The other agent in the commissioning of the relic was Nicolas Davanne (d. 11 June 1660), superior of the institution. As well as leading a complete reform of religious life at Meulan in the early seventeenth century, Davanne also wrote prolifically. Some twenty-six years prior to the translation of Pientia’s finger, he had published the first edition of his ‘Life’ of Nicasius and his companions, with a second edition in 1643.[[7]](#footnote-7) Davanne’s *vita* was alluded to in the visitation documentation of October 1656 as the ‘history’ serving as evidence that Pientia was ‘former lady of La Roche-Guyon’ and companion of Nicasius, ‘the first bishop of Rouen’. Davanne was also the author of a published collection (*Recueil*) of ‘acts and contracts’ pertaining to the priory of Saint-Nicaise, in which he recorded the movements of the relics of Pientia and her male companions Nicasius Scubiculus and Quirinus.[[8]](#footnote-8)

This article explores the connections between the translation of an early Christian relic to the Château de la Roche-Guyon in the mid-seventeenth century and the writing of these sacred histories. The first part reconstructs the broader circumstances surrounding the translation of Pientia’s finger by situating it within Davanne’s more recent history of movement of the early Christian relics. The second part turns its attention towards Davanne’s *vitae* and the longer history of Pientia’s bones that he presented, before considering the particular set of circumstances which may have motivated him to write. It finds that the translation of Pientia’s finger was the culmination of efforts by a local scholar to revive the sacred history of the Vexin and celebrate the regional liturgical traditions associated with its early Christian martyrs. In doing so, it finds support for the recent historiography on local, sacred histories which emerged during the Counter-Reformation in response to liturgical standardization.

In the course of this discussion, this article is also attentive to relics as objects with unstable meanings. Translation, as Robyn Malo has recently observed, was not just about the physical relocation of a holy object, but also a ‘rhetorical translation’, as texts and their ‘relic discourse’ helped generate new significance for relics.[[9]](#footnote-9) Similarly, Katarzyna Rutkowski’s notion of the ‘textual reliquary’ has helpfully illuminated how narratives help to endow relics with power.[[10]](#footnote-10) Pientia’s relics, it is argued here, were reinvested with meaning via different modes of commemoration. In Davanne’s sacred histories, Pientia became an integral part of an articulation and defence of a local spiritual heritage in response to Trent. By her subsequent relocation to the rigorist château at La Roche-Guyon, she was also part of a claim to an early Christian spiritual heritage by the rigorist reaction within the French Church.

‘Restless’ Relics:[[11]](#footnote-11) Pientia and Nicasius in the Vexin

The chapel, as described within an inventory taken in 1672, housed a substantial corpus of relics among which Pientia’s finger was placed in December 1654. According to the inventory, the relics were contained within a silver reliquary and placed upon a small table.[[12]](#footnote-12) In the château today, the life of St Pientia is depicted in reliefs on the walls of the chapel, but its relic collection has disappeared.[[13]](#footnote-13)

A document dated 30 December 1654 states that Pientia’s finger was translated to La Roche-Guyon from the monastery at Meulan.[[14]](#footnote-14) The translation document was annotated with a sketch of the phalanx bone relic which the ‘translators’ claimed to have ‘drawn’ to document the relic. It is confirmed in the document that the finger came from a larger collection of bones of the virgin martyr which remained at the monastery. It is unclear exactly how the Liancourts were able to obtain this fragment from Meulan. The record describes the relic as ‘granted’ (*octroye*) by the monastery, taken (*tiré*) from a reliquary (*chasse*) and placed in the seigneurial chapel. The document emphasizes Pientia’s status as ‘former Lady of this place’ (*jadis Dame dudit lieu*) and suggests that the translation was imagined as restoring Pientia to her own lands and the site of her eventual martyrdom. If at least some of the initiative for the translation lay with Davanne, it may also have been regarded as a practical move for the newly reformed monastery to reach out to potential wealthy, local patrons with such a gift. The illegibility of a portion of the document obscures some of the details, but it does also seem clear that the duc and duchesse de Liancourt had actively sought out the relic with the intention of enhancing devotions and honouring God at this holy site. The seigneurial chapel was already a significant space for the veneration of saintly relics – including those of Elizabeth of Hungary; the apostles Thomas and Matthias; the martyrs Lawrence, Barbara and Catherine of Alexandria; and Marie Salomé. According to this document, the translation was a way of renewing and augmenting their devotions to these holy remains. For the Liancourts, the procurement of the relic was also related in more complex ways to their own evolving spiritual identities as rigorists.

Historically, relic translations had been subject to much regulation after initially being prohibited and condemned as ‘tomb violation’.[[15]](#footnote-15) Newly translated relics had to prove themselves, as Patrick Geary noted in his influential essay on sacred commodities.[[16]](#footnote-16) At La Roche-Guyon, issues of veracity may have been the motivation for the episcopal visitation of the chapel in 1656. The finger of Pientia had originally belonged to another collection of truly ‘restless relics’. [[17]](#footnote-17) The body parts of the four martyrs had been fragmented and the spoils had been circulating around local religious institutions for some time before they wound up at Davanne’s priory in Meulan. It was during the eleventh century that a cult surrounding the relics of Nicasius and his companions developed in the Vexin after their translation to the monastery of Saint-Ouen at Rouen in 1032.[[18]](#footnote-18) This provided occasion for the composition of the *Passio Nicasii*, the first ‘life’ of Nicasius and the other martyrs.[[19]](#footnote-19)

During Davanne’s tenure at the priory at Meulan, the relics continued in their restlessness, as recorded in his account describing their continuing movements. The translations that he recorded in the *Recueil*, along with their accompanying rituals, can be used to shed light on his aims as author. The first translation Davanne described was the movement of the relics of Pientia, Scubiculus and Quirinus to new reliquaries on 1 June 1639, the feast of the Ascension, when the relics of the martyrs were central to the local celebration of the feast.[[20]](#footnote-20) Davanne explained how the relics were venerated both on the vigil and the day of their feast, as well as on the vigil and the feast day of the Ascension. Four reliquaries containing the relics of the four martyrs respectively were displayed, according to this account, and Davanne stressed how people assembled to kiss and touch them with their rosaries, a common ritual practice surrounding relics. William Christian found similar practices in Fuencaliente, Spain, for instance, when on feast days the head of one of the legendary Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne was exposed to local people who were permitted to touch it ‘with their heads, eyes, mouths, bowls, and other objects out of devotion’.[[21]](#footnote-21) The second translation Davanne related was the relocation of Nicasius’s relics on 13 May 1643, the vigil of the Feast of the Ascension, to a new reliquary, at the cost of 2,400 livres.[[22]](#footnote-22) This particular translation was, he noted, marked by a sermon delivered by the bishop of Chartres, and the singing of the *Te Deum* and *Veni Creator Spiritus* by the clergy and local people. (The latter is more typically used in consecrations, ordinations and coronations.) According to Davanne, this heavily ritualized translation culminated in the removal of the bones piece by piece, witnessed by the whole congregation, before being placed in the new reliquary.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In the preface, Davanne stated that his motivation for recording these and other instances of translation was the edification of the Benedictines at Meulan and the female religious at the monastery of Notre Dame de Bonnes Nouvelles in Rouen, where he was also a superior – as well as for posterity.[[24]](#footnote-24) Interestingly, Davanne did not record the ceremony accompanying the conferring of Pience’s finger on the chapel at La Roche-Guyon – perhaps a reflection of the more private nature of this particular translation. It seems significant that Davanne devoted more attention to carefully recording the public, liturgical ceremonies that accompanied other movements of the relics, indicating that he was probably also writing to strengthen an existing cult. This is also reflected in his commentary on the devotional traditions surrounding the relics. For instance, Davanne described how beneath the main altar in the church at Saint-Nicaise, Meulan, there was an armoire in which were kept a number of reliquaries. Among them was an ivory horn (*cor d’yvoire*) which had been formerly used both as a reliquary and to call people to mass. It was known as the ‘horn of Saint Nicaise’ (*cornet Saint-Nicaise*). When applied to the ears, Davanne observed, it could heal deafness.[[25]](#footnote-25) This object also appears in Davanne’s account of the translation ceremonies, where he again refers to its curative powers.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The translation of Nicasius’s bones into the costly new reliquary coincided with the publication of the second edition of Davanne’s *vita*, in which he had already made a strong case for the liturgical traditions surrounding the early Christian history of La Roche-Guyon. An explanation of how the translation of Pientia’s finger fitted into these claims about the spiritual heritage of the Vexin is provided in Davanne’s text.

The Spiritual Heritage of a Sacred Landscape

Davanne’s life of the early Christian martyrs of the Vexin was not the first such account. The earliest reference to Nicasius was in Usuard’s martyrology of 865, which simply recorded his name, status and date of martyrdom.[[27]](#footnote-27) Herrick’s study of the eleventh-century *Passio* has highlighted the discrepancies between Usuard’s account of Nicasius as a simple priest and later hagiographies (including Davanne’s) which referred to him as a bishop.[[28]](#footnote-28) It seems that the abbey at Saint-Ouen had sought to elevate the cult of Nicasius as the first archbishop of Rouen in the same way that the cathedral of Rouen had done for the seventh-century bishop of Rouen, St Romanus (d. 640).[[29]](#footnote-29) The identity of Pientia was similarly fluid in these early hagiographies, as she oscillated between virgin and matron.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The origins of Nicasius’s presence in the Vexin given in the first part of Davanne’s *vita* also correspond roughly to the version popularized by the eleventh-century *Passio*. Nicaisius was commissioned to undertake a mission to Gaul and ordained a bishop before leaving Rome. On reaching Paris, Nicasius, accompanied by a priest Quirinus and a deacon Scubiculus, headed towards the river and chose Rouen as his bishopric.[[31]](#footnote-31) Davanne pinpointed their arrival at La Roche-Guyon and identified the conversion of a local noblewoman named Pience as instrumental to their mission since it gave Nicasius the freedom to preach (*plaine liberté de prescher*) and to sow the words of the faith (*d’y semer les paroles de la Foy*). Pientia is also credited with having established oratories where converted Christians assembled to pray and celebrate the divine mysteries.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The martyrdom of Pientia and her converters was, of course, central to Davanne’s text. While on their knees praying to God after preaching to a congregation just outside of La Roche-Guyon, Nicasius and his priestly companions were decapitated by soldiers sent by a governor named Sifinius, following an edict of the Emperor Domitian against Christians in Gaul.[[33]](#footnote-33) That night, their remains were miraculously transported to safety by angels to a site known to Davanne as the Ford of Saint Nicaise.[[34]](#footnote-34) It was then that Davanne stressed the role of the ‘good’ Pientia, who decided to ‘bury them in that same place, whose heritage belonged to [her]’. According to Davanne, the ‘holy woman’ then had built an oratory or chapel for their graves which later became renowned as a site of miracles.[[35]](#footnote-35) Pientia’s own martyrdom came shortly after, when her own father learned of her conversion to Christianity and sent troops to investigate. She declared her faith to them before they decapitated her.[[36]](#footnote-36) Davanne explained that the bodies of all four martyrs withstood centuries of persecution against Christians and their tombs.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The second part of Davanne’s *vita* then goes on to describe the early translations of their bones and the miracles occurring surrounding these relics. These stories were, he asserts, gleaned from an inventory of ‘ancient manuscripts’.[[38]](#footnote-38) Davanne traced the early history of Pientia’s remains to the bishop of Lisieux. He, too, was a descendant of La Roche-Guyon and he who translated her head, bones and some contact relics (including a belt) to the church of Saint-Cande in Rouen. In the early years of their veneration, the belt of Pientia was known to protect pregnant women and safely deliver their babies.[[39]](#footnote-39) A considerable proportion of Davanne’s *vita* is made up of short accounts of later miracles occurring after the relics turned up in Meulan. Some were due specifically to the intercession of Nicasius, but many others to all four martyrs; these were gleaned by Davanne from the ‘ancient manuscripts’ at his disposal. One example describes how a priest from Saint-Jacques in Meulan came to venerate the relics with a gangrenous hand, which was quickly healed after a reliquary was opened and he gazed upon the head of Pientia.[[40]](#footnote-40) Similar miracles are recounted by Davanne as occurring well into the seventeenth century.[[41]](#footnote-41) He also took care to identify sites which were significant for the occurrence of miracles. These included the fountain of Saint-Nicaise at Vaux-sur-Seine, where Nicasius had baptized new converts, the water from which could cure a fever.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Davanne’s attentiveness to the topography of the Vexin was comparable to countless other ‘sacred geographies’ which emerged in Europe during the early modern period. Elizabeth Tingle has, for example, identified the role of the landscape in seventeenth-century Brittany, where the *vitae* of early saints helped to reinforce a religious identity for Bretons ‘strongly rooted in place’.[[43]](#footnote-43) Alexandra Walsham’s studies of the sacred landscape in Reformation-era Britain and Ireland have similarly revealed how topographical ‘landmarks’ such as springs, trees and stones played a part in the collective memory as ‘signposts’ of the Christian past.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Davanne’s writing was also part of a broader inclination to reclaim the Christian past which many historians have detected in Counter-Reformation Europe. The most recent scholarship on the writing of this sacred history has shown that the study of the early Church was not just a confessional tool used in competing Catholic and Protestant histories, but also important to intra-confessional discussions.[[45]](#footnote-45) Historians such as Simon Ditchfield, Katie Harris and Howard Louthan have shown how such histories helped to strengthen the ‘autonomy’ of local religious practices in response to official attempts to regularize devotions with the revised Roman Breviary in 1568 and the creation of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1588.[[46]](#footnote-46) Ditchfield’s study of Pietro Maria Campi shows expertly how local counterparts to Cesare Baronio’s *Annales Ecclesiastici* sought to ‘vindicate’ local devotional traditions.[[47]](#footnote-47)

There are indications that Davanne was indeed working to raise the profile of the regional cults of Pientia and her companions. The timing of the two editions of Davanne’s text lends further support to this hypothesis, as both followed the issuing of the Rouen breviaries of 1627 and 1642, which caused a controversy between the archbishop and the cathedral chapter. [[48]](#footnote-48) François de Harlay, uncle of François de Harlay de Champvallon, was a keen reformer of the Rouen breviary and during his episcopate from 1615 to 1651, three editions were published in 1617, 1627 and 1642, as well as an edition of the missal in 1623.[[49]](#footnote-49) Reform of the breviary in France was subject to substantial regional variation but, despite some resistance, most dioceses had adopted the Roman missal and breviary of Pope Pius V by the mid-seventeenth century.[[50]](#footnote-50) This preceded a wave of reforms to the French liturgy in the direction of a ‘neo-Gallican’ liturgy which also centred on a culling of saints’ feasts, but also the addition of daily readings from the Old Testament.[[51]](#footnote-51) Harlay’s early reforming efforts in Rouen were undoubtedly inspired by the Tridentine spirit of standardization. In April 1627 he addressed the diocese and invited them to make the transition to the new, reformed breviary.[[52]](#footnote-52) The calendar of the 1627 edition confirms that the feast of Nicasius (and associated martyrs) on 11 October was actually retained, but perhaps it was the perceived threat to local liturgical tradition in these controversial reforms which may have motivated Davanne to write his first edition that year.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Socially elite families had long been sequestering desirable sacred relics at their estates as part what Peter Brown called the ‘privatisation of the holy’.[[54]](#footnote-54) There is less research specifically on the role played by seigneurial chapels in fostering devotions to local saints and their relics in the Counter-Reformation era, but scholars have begun to observe occasions when the European elite used relics to celebrate family lineages and spiritual heritage.[[55]](#footnote-55) It was, at least in part, the mid-century renaissance of the cult of Pientia which inspired the local seigneur and his pious wife to procure the saint’s finger in December 1654. We know, for example, that Davanne’s mission to extol the early martyrs of the Vexin began to be endorsed by his peers by the mid-seventeenth century. The work of Cécile Davy-Rigaux on the compositions of Baroque composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643–1704) has revealed his contribution towards three plainsong hymns which were dedicated to St Nicasius. These hymns were apparently composed by a Jesuit Jean Commire (1625–1702) after a visit to the Jesuit college in Rouen in 1662.[[56]](#footnote-56) As Pientia’s status as ‘Dame de La Roche Guyon’ was emphasized by Davanne, perhaps the Liancourts sought to associate their château with this new cult. It seems that Davanne’s efforts to raise the profile of the cults had begun to pay off.[[57]](#footnote-57)

The decision by the duc and duchesse de Liancourt to display the relic of Pientia in their family chapel has also to be interpreted as an expression of their status as rigorists and patrons of the Cistercian convent of Port-Royal, the hub of the ‘Jansenist’ movement. The Port-Royalists were known for the sense of identification they felt with the early Christians as ‘martyrs’ persecuted by their own society.[[58]](#footnote-58) Patristic works were celebrated by the Port-Royalists who held up the ‘apostolic purity’ of the early Christian Church.[[59]](#footnote-59) We know from the probate inventory taken in 1672 that in her apartment at the château de la Roche-Guyon the duchesse de Liancourt was in possession of a selection of devotional books which confirm her personal interest in patristics.[[60]](#footnote-60) Alongside the spiritual letters of the Port-Royalist abbot of Saint-Cyran, in her small study the duchesse also kept translations of works by Athanasius and Augustine’s *De libero arbitrio* (‘On Free Will’), among others. Whilst readership of the Church Fathers was not uncommon in the seventeenth century, these particular titles were more extraordinary and, as far as we can tell from broader studies of reading practices in France, less widely read.[[61]](#footnote-61) Liancourt’s ownership of Augustine’s *De libero arbitrio* was undoubtedly also a reflection of her engagement with the theological debates at the heart of the Jansenist controversy – the place of human free will in salvation.

These reading materials thus point to the significance of La Roche-Guyon as a site for the evocation of the Liancourts’ identity as patrons of Port-Royal and (by implication) their identification with the early heritage of the Church. Importantly, this was also reflected in the material culture of the devotional spaces they used at the château. At La Roche-Guyon, Pientia’s finger was ‘kept company’ by a substantial collections of early Christian bones which arguably had some very rigorist traits.[[62]](#footnote-62) As already noted, the repository in the chapel included the relics of martyrs Thomas the ‘doubting’ apostle, Matthias, Lawrence, Barbara and Catherine of Alexandria. Like Pientia, these early Christian martyrs were all persecuted for their faith, which must have had a clear resonance for their rigorist custodians. Once the finger of Pientia was translated to La Roche-Guyon in 1654, her relics not only became part of the local sacred history constructed by Davanne, they were also part of a claim to a rigorist spiritual identity during the persecution of the Jansenist convent.

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At first glance, the translation of Pientia’s finger to the chapel at the Château de la Roche-Guyon in December 1654 might seem simply have been a way for the newly reformed monastery at Meulan to build links with pious, aristocratic patrons.[[63]](#footnote-63) Read alongside the scholarship of local priest and prior Nicolas Davanne, however, a denser picture emerges. This analysis of relic translation has shown through this case study of Pientia’s finger how the movement of relics was intimately connected to the writing of a local, sacred history in the face of Tridentine standardization. Davanne may have been responding directly to challenges to local devotional culture posed by the reform to the Rouen breviary; almost certainly he was also writing to celebrate the liturgical traditions associated with the monastery he had successfully reformed. Viewed in this way, the martyr in the subterranean crypts and chapel at La Roche-Guyon became an extension of the Roman catacombs.

The case of Pientia upholds much of the recent scholarship on saints, relics and sacred history in Counter-Reformation Europe discussed in this article. Yet what also makes the case quite unique is the way the movement of these relics was intimately connected to their continual reinvention since the composition of the eleventh-century *Passio*. Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Jahner recently noted how the relocation of relics into their ‘proper homes’ could often be an ideological endeavour.[[64]](#footnote-64) This observation seems particular apt here. The return of even a small fragment of Pientia’s bones to La Roche-Guyon – the site of her conversion and martyrdom – in many ways acclaimed Davanne’s scholarship and lent further support to the spiritual heritage of the Vexin, as well as being an important marker of the spiritual identity of its new aristocratic hosts.

1. The word used in the document was *chasse*, an old French word for reliquary, deriving from *capsa*, Latin for ‘box’ or ‘coffer’: Robert Bartlett, *Why can the Dead do such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ, 2013), 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cergy-Pontoise, Archives départementales du Val d’Oise [hereafter: ADVO], fonds privées, 10 J, 747, ‘Reliques: certificats et visites’. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Vincent Gourdon and Marion Trévisi, ‘Âge et migrations dans la France rural traditionnelle. Une Etude à partir de l’an VII à la Roche-Guyon’, *Histoire, économie, et société* 19 (2000), 307–30, at 311. For a recent history of the château and its gardens from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Gabriel Wick, *Un Paysage des lumières. Le Jardin Anglais du Château de La Roche-Guyon* (Paris, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For a recent history of the convent and the Jansenist debate, see Daniella Kostroun, Feminism, Absolutism and Jansenism: Louis XIV and the Port-Royal Nuns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Robin Briggs, *Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tension in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 1989), 339; Jennifer Hillman, *Female Piety and the Catholic Reformation in France* (London, 2014), 2–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Robert. J. Kalas, ‘Marriage, Clientage, Office Holding, and the Advancement of the Early Modern French Nobility: The Noailles Family of Limousin’, *SCJ* 27 (1996), 365–83, at 379. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nicolas Davanne, *La vie et martyre de sainct Nigaise premier archevesque de Roüen, S. Quirin, prestre, & S. Scuviculle Diacre ses compagnons, & de sainte Pience, jadis dame de La Rocheguyon; ensemble le recueil de la Translation de leurs sainctes reliques, et fondation du prieuré Saint Nigaise au fort de Meulent ou ils reposent* (Rouen, 1627). I have also consulted the 1643 reprint, but throughout this paper, I cite the 1627 edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Nicolas Davanne, *Recueil d’actes et contracts, faicts par M Nicolas Davanne, prestre ancien prieur du prieuré S.Nigaise au fort de Meulant; et encores par autres personnes pour fondations & Decorations audit prieuré & ailleurs; avec un breve description dudit prieuré selon son estat, en l’année 1656* (Rouen, 1656). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Robyn Malo, *Relics and Writing in Late Medieval England* (Toronto, ON, 2013), 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Katarzyna Rutkowski, ‘Reformation of the Relic: Lydgate’s and Milton’s Saint Edmund’, in Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Jahner, eds, *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective: Translations of the Sacred* (Basingstoke, 2010), 135–53, at 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This is a reference to a point made excellently by Cynthia Hahn in her study of medieval reliquaries – that reliquaries, like relics, are ‘restless’: ‘What do Reliquaries do for Relics?’, *Numen* 57 (2010), 284–316, at 312. Reliquaries were, she argues, like relics, ‘restless’ as they were ‘lifted, gestured with, carried in processions, opened and closed.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. ADVO, fonds privées, 10 J, 31, ‘Inventaire après décès’, 1672. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The tourist website of the château describes the chapel: <http://www.chateaudelarocheguyon.fr/content/heading14575/content16393.html>, accessed 8 July 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ADVO, fonds privées, 10 J, 747. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1990), 110; Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, transl. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings and Jeanine Routier-Pucci (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2009), 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Patrick Geary, ‘Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics’, in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), 169–94, at 181; see also Sherry L. Reames, ‘Reconstructing and Interpreting a Thirteenth-Century Office for the Translation of Thomas Becket’, *Speculum* 80 (2005), 118–70. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The phrase ‘restless relics’ is borrowed from Hahn, ‘What do Reliquaries do for Relics?’, 312. Pientia’s teeth were among the relics at Avranches listed in an inventory: Samantha Kahn Herrick, *Imagining the Sacred Past: Hagiography and Power in Early Normandy* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Herrick, *Imagining*, 17 – 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Passio Nicasii*, in ‘Appendix ad catalogum codicium hagiographicorum civitatis et academiae Leodiensis’, *AnBoll* 1 (1886)[surely the date or volume number is incorrect?], 372–4; ‘Appendix ad catalogum codicium hagiographicorum civitatis Namurcensis’, *AnBoll* 1 (1882), 628–32, both cited in Herrick, *Imagining*, 154. See also Samantha Kahn Herrick, ‘Heirs to the Apostles: Saintly Power and Ducal Authority in Hagiography of Early Normandy’, in Adam J. Kosto, Alan Cooper and Robert Berkhoffer, eds, *The Experience of Power in Medieval Europe 950–1350* (Aldershot, 2005), 11–24; A. Legris, ‘Les Premiers martyrs du Vexin. Saints Nicaise, Quirin, Scuvicule, Pience (11 octobre)’, *Revue catholique de Normandie* (1912), 280–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Davanne, *Recueil*, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. William Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton, NJ, 1981), 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Davanne, *Recueil*, 44–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Jacques Dubois, ed., *Le Martyrologe d’Usuard. Texte et commentaire*, Subsidia Hagiographica 40 (Brussels, 1965), cited in Herrick, *Imagining*, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Herrick, *Imagining*, 45. The Bollandists gave a history of Nicasius and Pientia in the *ActaSS* but did not reproduce the *Passio Nicasii* *Acta Sanctorum*, Octobris V, 513, Dies XI Octobris, http://acta.chadwyck.co.uk [accessed June 26, 2015]Herrick notes that the text of the *Passio* is accessible in part in the Bollandists’ catalogues: ‘Le pouvoir du passé apostoloique’. in *Hagiographie, ideologie et politique au Moyen âge en Occident. Actes du colloque international du Centre d’Études supérieures de Civilisation médiévale de Poitiers, 11–14 septembre 2008*, ed. E. Bozóky (Turnhout, 2012), 129–38, at 129 n. 2. The *Livre Noir* at Saint-Ouen is also mentioned in Lucile Tran-Duc, ‘Enjeux de pouvoir dans le *Livre Noir* de l’abbaye Saint-Ouen de Rouen’, ibid. 199–210, at 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Louis Violette, ‘Nicaise, du martyr du Vexin au Saint Rouennais. Valorisation des reliques par l’hagiographie au XIe siècle’, in Olivier Dumoulin et Françoise Thelamon, eds, *Autour des morts: mémoire et identité* (Rouen, 2001), 377–86, at 377. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Herrick, *Imagining*, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Émile Réaux, *Histoire de Meulan* (Meulan, 1865), 40–1. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Davanne, *Vie*, 79–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. 87–92; 94–101; their death at 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid. 104–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid. 87–107. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid. 50–1. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid. 51–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid. 92–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid. 26; 79–80. Today, a nineteenth-century construction stands on the site of the earlier chapel destroyed in the Revolution, depicting Nicasius by the side of the crucified Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Elizabeth Tingle, ‘The Sacred Space of Julien Maunoir: The Re-Christianising of the Landscape in Seventeenth-Century Brittany’, in Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, eds, *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), 237–58, at 251. Devotion to sites such as this had been helping to create ‘holy places’ for centuries: R. A. Markus, ‘How on Earth could Places become Holy?’, *JECS* 2 (1994), 257–71, at 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Alexandra Walsham, ‘Sacred Topography and Social Memory: Religious Change and the Landscape in Early Modern Britain and Ireland’, *JRH* 36 (2012), 31–51, at 31; eadem, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2011), 223– 225, on sites of martyrdom. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Simon Ditchfield, ‘What was Sacred History? (Mostly Roman) Catholic Uses of the Christian Past After Trent’, in Katherine Van Liere, Simon Ditchfield and Howard Louthan, eds, *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World* (Oxford, 2012), 72–97, at 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi* *and the Preservation of the Particular* (Cambridge, 1995); Howard Louthan, *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation* (Cambridge, 2009); A. Katie Harris, *From Muslim to Christian Granada: Inventing a City’s Past in Early Modern Spain* (Baltimore, MD, 2007). Kirstin Noreen also presents a convincing case for the Jesuit use of early Christian martyrs: ‘Ecclesiae Militantis Triumphi: Jesuit Iconography and the Counter Reformation’, *SCJ* 29 (1998), 698–715. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History*, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid.233–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. A. Collette, *Histoire du Bréviaire de Rouen* (Rouen, 1902), 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*: *The Religion of the People and the Politics of Religion*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1998), 2: 45–50. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Martha Mel Stumberg Edmunds, *Piety and Politics: Imaging Divine Kingship in Louis XIV’s Chapel at Versailles* (Newark, NJ, 2002), 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Collette, *Histoire*, 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. This edition survives in Paris, Bibliothèque Saint Geneviève, 8BB 1194 INV 1369, 8BB 1195 INV 1370. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, 2nd edn (London, 2015), 34; Sean Lafferty, ‘Ad Sanctitatem Mortuorum: Tomb Raiders, Body Snatchers and Relic Hunters in Late Antiquity’, *EME* 22 (2014), 249–79, at 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Simon Ditchfield, ‘Thinking with Saints: Sanctity and Society in the Early Modern World’, *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009), 552–84, at 555–9; Keith P. Luria, *Territories of Grace: Cultural Change in the Seventeenth-Century Diocese of Grenoble* (Berkeley, CA, 1991), 115. Scholars have also noted how the elite constructed private crypts and chapels in parish churches to participate in local devotions in the Counter-Reformation era: Elizabeth C. Tingle, *Purgatory and Piety in Brittany* c.*1480–1720* (Aldershot, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Cécile Davy-Rigaux, ‘Charpentier Plain-Chantiste’, in C. Cessac, ed., *Les Manuscrits autographes de Marc-Antoine Charpentier* (Wavre, 2007), 239–50, at 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Davanne’s sketches and notes on the history of the monastery of Saint-Nicaise, now archived in Montigny-le-Bretonneux, Archives départementales des Yvelines, fonds 24H, were drawn upon by Victor Cotron – prior of the monastery between 1669 and 1672 – whose *Chronique de saint Nicaise* was a ‘preparatory work’ for the *Gallia Christiana*: Madeleine Arnold Tétard, *Histoire de la vie religieuse à Meulan* (Juziers, 2009), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. The interest of the Port-Royalists in the early Christians has been explored in Bruno Neveu, *Érudition et religion aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1994); Jean-Louis Quantin, *Le Rigorisme chrétien* (Paris, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Brian. E. Strayer, *Suffering Saints: Jansenists and Convulsionnaires in France 1640–1799* (Eastbourne, 2012), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. ADVO, fonds privées, 10 J, 31, ‘Inventaire après décès’, 1672. This collection of books complemented a fuller selection in her oratory in Paris. This is explored fully in Hillman, *Female Piety*, 111–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Henri-Jean Martin, *Livre, pouvoirs et société* *à Paris au XVIIe siècle 1598–1701*, 2 vols (Geneva, 1999), 1: 496, 2: 928–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. These relics are recorded in the visitation documentation and in the probate inventory of 1672. This hypothesis was first presented in Hillman, *Female Piety*, 92–3. The idea of the ‘company’ kept by relics shaping their meaning is from Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries 400–*c.*1204* (Philadelphia, PA, 2012), 12. Interestingly, the Liancourts’ interest in the ancient spiritual heritage of La Roche-Guyon was perpetuated by the eighteenth-century proprietors, who commissioned an ‘ancient’ portal to be designed on the Tour de Guy as an allusion to their family lineage; this is explored in Gabriel Wick, ‘Hubert Robert (1733–1808) and the Renovation of the Tour de Guy at the Château de La Roche-Guyon’, *Garden History* 41 (2013), 224–44, at 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Edina Bozóky and Steven Vanderputten have shown how relics were symbols of authority.See ‘Voyage de reliques et demonstration du pouvoir au temps féodaux,’ in *Voyages et voyageurs au Moyen Age* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), 267-80 and ‘Itinerant Lordship: Relic Translations and Social Change in Eleventh and Twelfth-Century Flanders’, *French History* 25 (2011), 143–63 respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Robertson and Jahner, ‘Introduction’, in *Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)