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Martin of Tours' Monasticism and Aristocracies in Fourth-Century Gaul

O monasticismo de Martinho de Tours e as aristocracias na Gália do século IV

Matheus Coutinho Figuinha*

RESUMO

Sulpício Severo afirma, na sua *Vida de Martinho* (10.8), que muitos nobres residiam em Marmoutier, o monastério fundado pelo protagonista a pouco mais de 3 quilômetros de Tours. Desde o aparecimento dos comentários de Jacques Fontaine à *Vida*, na década de 1960, os estudiosos têm se apoiado na afirmação de Sulpício para interpretar questões fundamentais do Martinian monasticism. Eles supõem que a prática do trabalho manual em Marmoutier fosse determinada por valores aristocráticos e que a manutenção material do monastério dependesse dos recursos dos seus membros mais ricos. O objetivo deste artigo é examinar a confiabilidade da afirmação de Sulpício. Argumento que não há indícios claros que a corroboram e que ela, portanto, deve ser considerada com muita cautela.

Palavras-chave: Martinho de Tours; Monasticismo; Aristocracias.

ABSTRACT

In his *Vita Martini* (10.8), Sulpicius Severus asserts that many nobles resided in Marmoutier, the monastery founded by the saint a few kilometers outside Tours. Since the publication of Jacques Fontaine's comments on the *Vita* in the 1960's, scholars have relied on Sulpicius' assertion in order to interpret fundamental questions related to Martinian monasticism. They suppose that the practice of manual labor in Marmoutier was determined by aristocratic values and that the material maintenance of the monastery depended on the resources of its richer members. The purpose of this paper is to examine the reliability of Sulpicius' assertion. I argue that there is no clear evidence corroborating it and that it must be considered, therefore, with great caution.

Keywords: Martin of Tours; Monasticism; Aristocracies.

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Sulpicius Severus dedicated the tenth chapter of the *Vita Martini* to the monastery which his hero founded a little more than three kilometers from Tours, later known as Marmoutier. Sulpicius describes the surrounding geography, the architecture of the monastery, the rules enforced within it, and the monks who were part of it. In relation to the latter, he states: “many among them were considered nobles” (Sulpicius Severo, *Vita Martini* 10.8).

Sulpicius’ statement, long accepted by scholars (cf. Besse, 1906, p. 17), was questioned for the first time by Ernest-Charles Babut. In articles published between 1910 and 1912 and collected in the 1912 book *Saint Martin de Tours*, de 1912, he accused Sulpicius of insincerity and argues that his works about St. Marin have no historic value. Babut notes that among the disciples of the bishop, only Clarus appears in Sulpicius’ writings as *clarissimus*.² In addition, he suggests that it was not common at that time for the son of a senator to become a monk. In his favor, he mentions a tract from the *Vita* (25.4), in which Martin exhorts Sulpicius to abandon the world, offering him the “almost unique” example of Paulinus, future bishop of Nola (Babut, 1912, pp. 240-241).

Despite the strong criticism that Babut’s thesis received in 1966 (cf., for example, Delehay, 1920), Friedrich Prinz portrayed Martinian monasticism through many of the French historian’s arguments. In his important monography, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich*, Prinz considers Martinian monasticism as institutionally disorganized, since it had derived from the example of St. Martin, a charismatic thaumaturge who destroyed pagan temples in the countryside. The monasteries founded under his inspiration, did not possess continuity, structure, or organization (*Tageseinteilung*), had fundamentally been hermit colonies, in other words, groups of enthusiastic hermits and gypsy monks centered around a holy man. Moreover, Prinz states that the Bishop of Tours was celebrated in the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth only by Paulinus and Sulpicius, two outsiders (*Außenseiter*) to his monasticism. St Martin, a former soldier who did not leave any writings, did not have the same education as them, since he had come from a modest family, and his father had been a soldier and a tribune (Prinz, 1988, pp. 19-46 and 452-485). It is thus clear that Prinz did not accept the presence of nobles in Marmoutier. But he did not discuss Sulpicius’ assertion in section 10.8 of the *Vita*.

Only two years after the appearance of Prinz’s book, Jacques Fontaine, in his brilliant commentaries to the *Vita* (1967-1969), prepared a definitive reply to Babut’s hypercritical argument, thereby rehabilitating Sulpicius’ credibility.

Fontaine, however, did not question the assertion that Marmoutier had been settled by nobles. To the contrary, he assumed that the Martinian monks did not practice manual labor because of the prejudices of the aristocracies and that the monastery was materially provided for by the revenues from the properties of its richest members (Fontaine, 1967-1969, p. 677, 685, 958, and 991). In a more recent study, Fontaine refers to the example of Marmoutier, amongst others, to argue in favor of a strong influx of monasticism on Western aristocracies in the 370s (Fontaine, 1979, pp. 40-43). In his works, the Martinian monks are identified as “les nobles”, “l’élite de la société gallo-romaine”, “jeunes nobles”, “la clientèle aristocratique, et donc lettrée, de Marmoutier”, “membres de l’aristocratie gallo-romaine”, “la noblesse des Gaules”, “l’aristocratie provinciale”, “les fils des latifondiaires gallo-romains”, terms that are somewhat vague and not necessarily equivalent (Fontaine, 1967-1969, pp. 673-674, 678, 683-684, 958, 1059 and 1338-1341; Fontaine, 1973, p. 96 and 100; Fontaine, 1974, p. 270; Fontaine, 1979, p. 41, 48 and 50).

Since its publication, Fontaine’s position has been unreservedly accepted by scholars (cf. Pricoco, 1978, p. 12 and 65-66; Ghizzoni, 1983, p. 70 and 73; Pietri, 1983, p. 52, 603, and 639-640; Stancliffe, 1983, pp. 25-26; Oudart, 1993, p. 127; de Vogüé, 1997, pp. 50-51; Dunn, 2003, p. 63; Brown, 2012, p. 51, 216, and 415). Some historians have developed them, but do not discuss section 10.8 of the *Vita*. This is the case of Richard J. Goodrich, who suggests that the social divisions of the time remained unaltered in Marmoutier: monks of an aristocratic origin dedicated themselves to the *otium*, while servants and slaves did the necessary tasks and the Church was responsible for the subsistence of the monastery (Goodrich, 2007, pp. 192-196). Roberto Alciati, in turn, divides St. Martin’s disciples into just two groups: the teachers of rhetoric, who had knowledge that had come from grammar and rhetoric schools; and the *learned amateurs*, who were interested in *litteratura*, but who had not been teachers (Alciati, 2009, pp. 53-54 and 58).

My objective in this article is to analyze up to which point we can trust in Sulpicius’ assertion in section 10.8 of the *Vita*. The question is important because it does not concern only the Marmoutier case. Some scholars tend to generalize their understanding of Martinian monasticism to all the monastic experiences of fourth century Gaul and, consequently to homogenize them.³ Examining the reliability of section 10.8 of the *Vita* is therefore the first and most important step to reevaluating our understanding of Martinian monasticism, in particular, and Gallic monasticism in general. In the following pages,

I will argue that there does not exist clear evidence that corroborates Sulpicius' assumption, and that he must be considered with great caution.

This article is inserted in the context of the appearance of the so-called 'saintly men' of the third and fourth centuries. Peter Brown (1978) argues that in the cities of the times of the Antonines, a 'model of parity' restricted tensions among aristocrats. In other words, the competition for power, honor, and wealth was dissimulated in acts of generosity which favoured all citizens.⁴ At the moment which this 'model of parity' disappeared, around 260, some people began to stand out among their peers. From here there emerged the 'saintly men,' who obtained superior positions in the (urban or ecclesiastic) community because they supposedly maintained an intimate relationship with the divine. According to Brown, Egyptian monks represented the peak of this process: because of their rigorous asceticism, they, and only they, enjoyed a spiritual power which was shown in a palpable and continuous manner.

St. Martin was one of these 'saintly men.' Since he had acted as a 'saintly man' – Sulpicius stated that he could control elements of nature, cure diseases, and raise the dead – he enjoyed the admiration of aristocrats (cf. *infra*) and obtained success in his campaigns for the Christianization of the countryside.⁵ However, at the same time, St Martin encountered strong opposition. Sulpicius' work should be read exactly as the defense of the Bishop of Tours against those who condemned his military past, did not believe in his miracles, and associated his monastic regime with Priscillianism. Sulpicius wanted to show, amongst other things, that the miracles of his hero were authentic because he enjoyed an intimate relationship with the divine and that this relationship was possible because he had an impeccable monastic regime (Fontaine, 1967-1969, pp. 72-84; Stancliffe, 1983, pp. 149-159).

THE DISCIPLES OF ST. MARTIN OF TOURS

Above all, it is necessary to clarify the meanings of the terms nobility (*nobilitas*) and noble (*nobilis*) in the fourth century. Timothy D. Barnes stated that "the *nobilitas* still formed a special group within the senatorial order": at the time, the nobles were strictly the senators who had reached the ordinary consulate, the mayor of the city, or the mayor of the *praetorium*, as well as their descendants (Barnes, 1974, pp. 445-446). There can be no doubt that Barnes was correct, but, as some scholars have indicated, the terms nobility and noble

can be used in a broader sense. Ausonius, in his works, claimed an ancient nobility for his family, which was actually curial (cf. Barnish, 1988, p. 122), while Prudentius, in his poem *Crowns of Martyrdom*, and Paulinus, in his *Poema* 21, equaled the adjective 'noble' to *illustris*, a position which could be achieved through a series of public positions (cf. Salzman, 2001, p. 360).

The meaning with which Sulpicius used the term 'noble' in section 10.8 of the *Vita* is not clear. It is logical to consider that he used it in the restricted sense, since in this case, the portrait that he traces of Martinian monasticism in the tenth chapter of the *Vita* become much more attractive and moving to the aristocrats to whom he is writing (cf. *infra* for Sulpicius' audience). But he could well have referred to senators or even the curia. In the attempt to identify who were the disciples of St. Martin, in other words those who professed monasticism under his direction, and what was the social origin of each of them, I will leave open all possibilities.

For the period after the foundation of Marmoutier, between 373 and 374, we have a single and vague report. Sulpicius retorts that a "certain catechumen" (*quidam catechumenus*) put himself under the direction of St. Martin in his monastery a few kilometers from Poitiers (which later became known as Ligugé), but shortly afterwards, without any transition, alludes to the 'brothers' who lamented the death of this catechumen (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 7). Fontaine suggests that St. Martin's originally hermetic project was soon transformed into a coenobitic one. Sulpicius does not narrate the origins and the development of the monastery because he was only interested in the miracle worked by St. Martin at that time, thus the abrupt mention of 'brothers' (Fontaine, 1967-1969, pp. 613-616). At the same time, Sulpicius did not give any indication about the social origin of the catechumen and the 'brothers,' but if these had been nobles it would have been strange if he had not done this. Sulpicius sought to guarantee the authenticity of the miracles of his hero, indicating, whenever possible, the distinct social condition of his witnesses. We will return to this question later.

In relation to St. Martin's disciples after his ordination in the Tours cathedral, between 371 and 372, there exist more precise reports:

Anatolius, a "certain young man" (*iuuenis quidam*), put himself under the direction of Clarus in the hermitage that had been established near Marmoutier (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 23.2). Fontaine suggests, based on his name, that he was of Asiatic origin, probably a pilgrim or a missionary from a pneumatic sect. In addition, he indicated that his name was the same as many

Asiatic slaves (Fontaine, 1967-1969, pp. 994-995). I think that Fontaine was right about the social origin of Anatolius. However, it is enough to flick through the first two volumes of the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (Jones; Mardindale; Morris, 1971, pp. 59-62; Martindale, 1980, pp. 83-86) to perceive that Anatolius was also the name of important people in the fourth and fifth centuries.

The priest Arpagius, probably from Tours (Pietri; Heijmans, 2013, p. 213), is cited by Galo as a witness of one of St. Martin's miracles (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.3.1). Sulpicius gives no information about his social origin.

Belgicus is mentioned by Gallus in Sulpicius' *Dialogues* due to his reaction to reading *Letter 22* by Jerome (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 1.8.5). The attribution of the possessive adjective *noster* to his name suggests that he was a disciple of St. Martin (Fontaine, 2006, p. 133; Pietri; Heijmans, 2013, p. 335). There is no information about his social origin.

Brice, a native of Tours (Gregório, *Historiarum libri decem* 10.31), was ordained deacon and priest by St. Martin (Gregório, *Historiarum libri decem* 2.1). When the latter died on 11 November 397, Brice was anointed his successor (Gregório, *Historiarum libri decem* 2.1 and 10.31). According to Sulpicius, he, who "had never possessed previously anything of the clergy (he was actually raised in the monastery by St. Martin), raising horses and buying slaves. At that time, he was reprehended by many for having bought not only young barbarians, but also girls of beautiful appearance" (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.15.2). The fact that he had not possessed anything before being ordained a cleric clearly indicates that he was not of an aristocratic origin. He could raise horses and buy slaves thanks to the wage he came to receive after his ordination.

The deacon Cato, "who was responsible for the administration of the monastery," was a skilled (*doctus*) fisherman (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.10.2). This skill, certainly acquired before starting his ecclesiastic career, indicated that he had exercised a manual activity and was thus not an aristocrat.

Clarus, identified by Sulpicius as a "young noble" (*adulescens nobilissimus*), was ordained a priest while still young. Sulpicius admired him a lot and built a great friendship with him, to the point of burying him under the altar of the basilica he had constructed in Primuliaco.⁶ Clarus, at an unspecified moment, constructed a hermitage (*tabernaculum, monasterium*) close to Marmoutier, and some monks joined him (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*

23.1-2; Paulinus, *Epp.* 23.3 and 32.6). Clarus died a little before St. Martin, probably the same year (Sulpicius Severus, *Ep.* 2.5). Scholars attribute to Clarus a more distinct social origin (Babut, 1912, p. 241; Stroheker, 1948, p. 161; Fontaine, 1967-1969, pp. 989-992; Heinzelmann, 1982, p. 584; Ghizzoni, 1983, p. 73; Stancliffe, 1983, p. 31; Pietri; Heijmans, 2013, p. 479). Fontaine specifically suggests that *nobilissimus* has in this case a social and moral meaning. I agree with the moral meaning of the term, which appears evident in the phrase: "in a short time he became distinguished for the most exalted faith, and for all sorts of excellence" (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 23.1). However, as I have mentioned, the curia could also appropriate the term noble in the fourth century. Moreover, Sulpicius says that Clarus had abandoned 'everything' (*omnia*) to follow St. Martin, but there is a great difference between abandoning 'everything' and abandoning 'great wealth' (*summae opes*), as if St. Martin was referring to the case of Paulinus. It is therefore much more probably that Clarus was from a curial family from Tours.

Eusebius is the recipient of one of Sulpicius' letters which compose the appendix of the *Vita* (*Ep.* 1). In Letter 397, Eusebius appears as a priest, but in the *Dialogues* (1.9.5), from 404, he appears as a bishop. The fact is that he was a member of Martinian circle in Primuliaco and Sulpicius' decision to address an apologetic letter to him about the *uirtus* of St. Martin led Fontaine to suppose that he was a disciple of St. Martin, and more specifically "un de ces ascètes distingués de Marmoutier, issus d'illustres familles et que 'nous avons vu ensuite évêques', comme le dit Sulpice à propos du recrutement du monastère" (Fontaine, 1967-1969, p. 1122; cf. Pietri; Heijmans, 2013, p. 699). I agree that Eusebius could have been a disciple of Martinho, but Sulpicius does not give any indication that he was an aristocrat, to the contrary of the case of Clarus. Considering the fact that a large part of the bishops of fourth century came from local aristocracies (cf. Brown, 2012, pp. 31-52), we can suppose that Eusebius was also of a curial origin. Nevertheless, the fact that Eusebius had been ordained a bishop does not automatically that he was curial. He could have reached the episcopate thanks to a period of education in Marmoutier. Brice, also ordained a bishop, was of a humble origin.

Gallus was also very close to Sulpicius. Playing with his name, Gallus was opposed to the Aquitanians (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 1.27.2), and was consequently from the civil diocese of Galias. He was the nephew, on the part of his mother, of Evancius, possibly a bureaucrat or a palace employee, and therefore belonging to a rich family or one in social ascension.⁷ Gallus declared that he

had abandoned school to follow St. Martin (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 2.1.1), but it is not known if he was a student or teacher. Due to the high quality of his speeches, Fontaine (2006, pp. 42-44) and Alciati (2009, pp. 51-53) were in favor of the second option. In fact, Gallus is called *scholasticus* (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 1.9.3 and 1.27.5), a term which can be used in a pejorative manner, but which qualifies teachers of rhetoric or those trained in rhetoric schools (Alciati, 2009, p. 20). The *Dialogues*, however, did not transcribe Gallus' exact words. Sulpicius certainly corrected and adapted the discourse of all those who took part in sessions in defense of St. Martin who are part of the work.

Heros is identified by Prosper of Aquitaine as a "saintly man and disciple of the blessed Martin" (*Epitoma de Chronicon* anno 412, 1247). He was ordained bishop of Arles in 408, at the moment when Constantine III established himself in the city. Being the protégé of a usurper, he lost his position after the city was taken by the *magister militum* Constante, in 411. In a letter (*Ep.* 2.4), Zosimus, bishop of Rome, states that the ordinations of Heros in Arles, and of Lazarus in Aix had been irregular and had been opposed by the plebeians and the clergy. In the same letter, Zosimus describes them as "unknown, foreigners." Zosimus' accusations were obviously partial, since they reflect the version of the enemies of Heros and Lazarus. But the communities of Arles and Aix would not have been opposed to their ordinations and Zosimus not have referred to them as "unknown, foreigners" if they had come from a senatorial family. It is possible that since they were ordained bishops, they came from curial families. However, both only reached the episcopacy through the intermediation of Constantine III. Most probably, therefore, they were of a modest origin.

Lazarus was ordained bishop of Aix in similar circumstances to Heros (Zósimo, *Ep.* 3.3). He is considered a disciple of Martin because of his proximity to Heros and for having raised "in many councils," particularly in the council of Turin in 398, the accusations against Brice (Zosimus, *Epp.* 3.3 and 4.2). Similar to Heros, he is described as unknown and a foreigner by Zosimus, in such a way that he was probably of modest origin.

Presbyter Refrigerius, who reached Primuliaco at the end of the first journey in the *Dialogues*, had followed Martin "since his early youth." He was presented by Gallus as a witness of various stories told on the second journey (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 2.14.5, 3.1.3, 3.5.1, 3.7.5, 3.9.1-3). However, nothing is said about his social origin. Since he had been a priest it may be considered that he came from a curial family. However, as in the case of Eusebius, there are strong doubts.

Sabbatius is named a disciple of Clarus (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 23.7), but Sulpicius does not give any other information about him. According to Luce Pietri and Marc Heijmans (2013, p. 1670), he is the same Sabbatius who reached Primuliaco at the beginning of the second journey in the *Dialogues*.

Saturninus, present in the second journey in the *Dialogues*, was mentioned in a story told by Gallus as a witness of Martin's *uirtus* (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.3.6). He was probably a disciple of the bishop, since he accompanied Gallus and other Martinian monks on a pastoral visit (Fontaine, 2006, p. 300).

Victor, possibly originally from Bordeaux (Paulinus *Ep.* 25*.1), was also a disciple of Martin and Clarus. After 399, he was responsible for carrying letters, books, and presents from Sulpicius to Paulinus and vice-versa (Paulinus, *Epp.* 23.2-10; 25.1; 25*.1; 26.1; 28.1-4; 29.6; 31.1; 32.5, 9-10 and 17; 33.1; 43.1-3). Victor had been a soldier before following Martin (Paulino, *Ep.* 25*.1) and was thus not an aristocrat.

Based on the close relations between Vitricius, Bishop of Rouen, and Martin, and the affinity of their natures, Camille Jullian raises the hypothesis that the former had been the disciple of the latter in Marmoutier (Jullian, 1923, pp. 50-51).⁸ In fact, the similarities between their biographies are surprising: both were converted soldiers, bishops of large provincial cities in western Gaul, thaumaturges, evangelists in the countryside, and founders of churches and monasteries (cf. Fontaine, 1982, pp. 13-24). It is very probable that Martin had influenced Vitricius to some extent, but it is impossible to know if he had actually lived in Marmoutier before his ordination. In my opinion, if not Sulpicius, at least Paulinus would have given some indication of this.⁹ Anyway, Vitricius was not an aristocrat, since he had served as a soldier before being ordained.

At the beginning of the second journey in the *Dialogues* (3.1.4-5), Sulpicius mentioned the arrival of a "mob of monks," consisting of Presbyter Evagrius, who was accompanied by Aper,¹⁰ Sabbatius, and Agricola, Presbyter Aetherius, who was accompanied by Deacon Calupio and by Sub-Deacon Amator, and finally by Presbyter Aurelius. Sulpicius insisted on stating the ecclesiastic title of those who had one, but did not reveal anything about their social origins. Gallus' reference to Martin's wooden seat with the words "which was known to everyone" is an indication that they passed by Marmoutier (de Vogüé, 1997, p. 138). Another indication resides in the fact that they had joined monastic discipline and clerical life, as Martin had also done. According

to Sulpicius, they all came “from very different regions.” But their arrival on the morning of the day after Gallus had begun to narrate the *uirtutes* of Martin, and in two groups, each led by a presbyter (Aurelius was the only one to arrive alone), shows that actually they could not have come long or “from very different regions.” It is assumed that they installed themselves in Primuliaco after Martin’s death due to Brice’s persecution of the Martinians (Pietri; Heijmans, 2013, p. 370). Some of them are mentioned at other moments. Evagrius is cited by Gallus as a witness of one of Martin’s miracles (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.2.8). Aper dispersed the “many mundane persons” who were at the door, expecting to be accepted in the auditorium, because he thought that they were only stimulated by curiosity, not religious zeal (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.1.6 and 3.5.7). Sulpicius resorted to the Ciceronian formula *dulcissimus meus* to show this great affection for Presbyter Aurelius. When the latter was still a deacon, Sulpicius had dedicated a second letter to him in the appendix of the *Vita*, in which it appears that he frequented Primuliaco (*Ep.* 2.1, 7 and 18). It may be thought that Aurelius was of aristocratic origin due to his closeness to Sulpicius and his priesthood. Evagrius and Aetherius are identified as priests (presbyters). However, as in the cases of Eusebius and Refrigerius, there are strong doubts about this. It is strange to consider that Sulpicius, who sought to highlight their ecclesiastic titles, had not wanted to indicate their aristocratic origins, as he did in the case of Clarus.

Other disciples of Martin lived around Tours as hermits. One report tells of a former soldier who wanted to remove his wife from a monastery of women, where she had been put by Martin, so that he could live with him in his cell (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 2.1.11).

Martin, therefore, also encouraged female monasticism. It is known that he, probably in Tours, consecrated the daughter of Arborius, nephew of no-one less than Ausonius, to perpetual virginity (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 19.1-2). René Metz estimates that, “Après la cérémonie, Arborius a, sans aucun doute, ramené sa fille à la maison; elle vécut son idéal de vierge consacrée dans le milieu familial, selon la pratique courante à l’époque” (Metz, 1961, p. 124). Fontaine, to the contrary, raised the hypothesis that she had remained in the women’s monastery. He argues that her personal oblation to Martin goes back to an Egyptian custom of offering oblates to celebrated hermits or cenobites for them to receive a spiritual education (Fontaine, 1967-1969, p. 882). Sulpicius, however, does not give any indication that Arborius’ daughter had remained in Tours. Moreover, female monastic practices in Gaul in the second

half of the fourth century and the religious customs of Egypt were part of different worlds, so that Fontaine's assertion is not sustained. In fact, due to the elevated social condition of the daughter of Arborius and, as indicated by Metz, the custom of the time, it is much more probable that she had returned to her parents' house to live out her ideal of virginity in the company of her family.

Some monks and virgins from the Tours community are mentioned anonymously (Sulpicius Severus, *Epp.* 2.6 and 3.18-19; *Dialogi* 2.2.2, 2.5.4, 3.14.6 and 8). Gallus also testifies that virgins from "distant regions" frequently came to Tours to visit Martin (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 2.12.11), but does not indicate who they were or if they were under the direction of the bishop.

In Martin's diocese, a virgin retired to a small property (*agellum, uillula*), hiding herself from the view of all men (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 2.12.1-2). She certainly owned the property on which she lived, but she was not in any way related to Martinian monasticism. When he went to visit her for pastoral motives, she refused to see him.

In relation to a conversation in an unnamed village (*uicus*), Sulpicius writes: "The name of Christ, thanks to his miracles and his example, gained such force that there was nowhere that was not full of well attended churches and monasteries. Since where he destroyed temples, he immediately built churches or monasteries" (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 13.9).¹¹ Due to the supposed enthusiasm of peasants to convert and the foundation of monasteries in the location, it is logical to think that these monasteries were peopled by locals. Martin founded other monasteries in his campaigns to convert the countryside, perhaps in the same manner, in other words, on top of destroyed pagan temples. The monks are only mentioned anonymously. The presence in Tours of monks from an unknown diocese is only alluded to (Sulpicius Severus, *Ep.* 1.13). In Clion-sur-Indre a "multitude of consecrated virgins and saints" was encountered (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 2.8.5-9). Amboise was inhabited by the presbyter Marcellus and his "brothers," criticized by Sulpicius for his incapacity to destroy a pagan sanctuary (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.8.4-6).

Other supposed disciples of Martin appeared in the works of Gregory of Tours. In his *Liber in gloria confessorum* (22), Gregory, basing himself on a *Vita* composed in verses which did not come down to us, identified Maximus as a "disciple of our Martin." Maximus, seeking isolation, established himself initially in a monastery on Barbara island in Lyon. However, after becoming known, he decided to return to his place of origin, Chinon, a *castrum* in the

territory of Tours, and founded a monastery there. In the same *Book* (45), Gregory stated that Presbyter Romano, according to a *Vita* which was also lost, was buried close to Blaye by Martin. For this reason, Prinz considered him a disciple of the bishop (Prinz, 1988, p. 24). Gregory also speaks of Martin, who was abbot of a monastery in Saintes, but demonstrated some caution in identifying him as a disciple of the Bishop of Tours: “Martin ... as they say, a disciple of our Martin” (Gregory, *Liber in gloria confessorum* 56). In his *Ten Books of History* (7.10), Gregory mentions another Martin, who was buried in Brives-la-Gaillarde. Gregory also demonstrates a certain caution in regard to him: “Martin, as they say, a disciple of our Martin.” These reports transmitted by Gregory are not supported by any contemporary source, so they are not very reliable. Even in the cases of Maximus and Romano, we are unable to judge the reliability of the *Vitae* which Gregory consulted to write about them. These *Vitae* could have been written many years after the death of their protagonists and have been based on not very trustworthy traditions.

According to a *Vita* written around 620 by Bishop Magnobodo, which is based on a previous *Vita* (Magnobodo, *Vita Maurilii, Praefatio*), now lost, Maurilius, originally from Milan, abandoned his mother and his goods to follow Martin. Maurilius, who could read, was ordained sub-deacon, deacon, and a priest by Martin (Magnobodo, *Vita Maurilii* 1). However, desiring to isolate himself, Maurilius retired to Angers, where he built a church over a destroyed pagan sanctuary (Magnobodo, *Vita Maurilii* 1-2) and a monastery on a hill close to the same church (Magnobodo, *Vita Maurilii* 6). In 423, he was ordained bishop of Angers. Also according to Magnobodo, Maurilius was of noble origin (Magnobodo, *Vita Maurilii* 1: *de genere nobile ueniens; natalibus claris fuerat oriundus*). This *Vita*, however, is not very reliable: some plausible chronological arguments are mixed with unlikely elements and numerous legendary episodes (Pietri; Heijmans, 2013, p. 1286; cf. Prinz, 1988, p. 23). Moreover, the attribution of noble origin to a saint was in the seventh century a hagiographical *topos*. No matter how much his association with Martin was chronologically possible – Maurilius died on 13 September 453 and according to Magnobodo, was in his nineties (*Vita Maurilii* 28) –, we cannot accept his noble origin without another corroborating source.

Finally, the supposed coincidences of Marmoutier with the description of the druidic traditions of Pomponius Mela – in relation to the living traditions, the recruitment, and the religious formation conferred by a master – led Fontaine (1967-1969, pp. 673-674) to question:

Pourquoi, dans l'ordre des mobiles les plus secrets, d'antiques traditions celtiques n'auraient-elles pas eu au moins autant de poids, dans de grandes familles encore partiellement christianisées, dont certains membres pouvaient encore assumer des sacerdoces gaulois (comme en témoigne Ausone à propos du Bajocasse Patera devenu rhéteur à Bordeaux), que les traditions de la 'matière d'Égypte' et le style de vie de l'ascétisme monastique?

Although Fontaine's hypothesis is suggestive, we have no evidence which relates the recruitment of the monks of Marmoutier with druidic traditions. All of Martin's disciples who we have identified above have names of Latin or Greek origin. It is a simple coincidence.

THE RELIABILITY OF *VITA MARTINI* 10.8

This attempt to identify the disciples of Martin and their social origins offers little information to reach definitive conclusions. We have reports (in some cases only the name) of 22 people who could have been trained in Marmoutier,¹² but Sulpicius testifies that almost eighty monks lived there (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 10.5).¹³ Nevertheless, there exists sufficient data to draw up some hypotheses. Only Clarus and Gallus appear as probable members of curial families and can be considered nobles. It could be argued that Bishop Eusebius and the presbyters Arpagius, Aurelius, Aetherius, Evagrius, and Refrigerius, due to their ecclesiastical positions, also came from curial families, but there exist serious objections. In first place, Sulpicius did not give the slightest indication of their social origins, to the contrary of the case of Clarus, even though he insisted on emphasizing their ecclesiastical titles. In second place, as in the case of Brice, they could have been ordained priests because of the education they received in Marmoutier. Seven disciples are certainly of modest origin: Anatolius, Brice, Catan, Heros Lázarus, Victor, and an anonymous hermit. We do not have information about the social origins of the others.

This list and Martin's impression about the example of Paulinus – that he “was almost the only one of his time to fulfill the evangelical precepts” (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 25.4) – are fully in agreement. In relation to this passage, Fontaine questions if Martin, by chance, did not want to save “les autres membres de l'aristocratie gallo-romaine” who lived in Marmoutier, referring to the example of Paulinus as almost unique. He proposes two

hypotheses to explain the words of the Bishops of Tours. The first is that the noble monks of Marmoutier may not have given up all their goods, since family conditions had to be different: other members of their families would have continued to live in the world and enjoy the family's assets. The second is that Paulinus, having established himself in Nola, had voluntarily abandoned his *patria*, something which the monks of Marmoutier had not done, even when coming from provinces to the south of Gaul (Fontaine, 1967-1969, p. 1059).

However, the sources do not corroborate Fontaine's hypotheses. For some of the priests of the desert, exile was one of the most important duties of monks (cf. *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Andreas). However, in the West, there were no echoes of this need to expatriate oneself. Moreover, Nola was not a strange place for Paulinus. He had deposited the first beard he had cut in the sanctuary of St. Felix and between 380 and 381 had been governor of Campania, a period in which a road was built which linked Nola to the same sanctuary (Trout, 1999, pp. 47-48). We can suppose, with greater probability, that Martin had cited the example of Paulinus because he knew of his friendship with Sulpicius. Calling attention to someone so close to his interlocutor, the bishop made his advice become much more illustrative and touching. However, the passage has certainly much more sense if we admit that in Marmoutier there were no aristocrats of the caliber of Paulinus. Martin, like Augustine (*Epp.* 27 and 31), and Ambrosius (*Ep.* 58.1), was very impressed, exactly because, as the list of his disciples confirms, there were never any reports of the conversion to monasticism of a rich senator.

A passage from the *Dialogues* (3.14.5-6) corroborates this conclusion:

[The former vicar Lycontius] offered a hundred pounds of silver, which the blessed man neither rejected nor accepted; but before the amount of money touched the threshold of the monastery, he had, without hesitation, destined it for the redemption of captives. And when it was suggested to him by the brethren, that some portion of it should be reserved for the expenses of the monastery, since it was difficult for all of them to obtain necessary food, while many of them were sorely in need of clothing, he replied, "Let the church both feed and clothe us, as long as we do not appear to have provided, in any way, for our own wants."

A phrase from the *Vita* (10.6), "all things were shared in common," suggests that the monks of Marmoutier had contributed with part of their goods to the common property of the monastery. Nevertheless, this passage from the

Dialogues, by leaving it clear that these goods were not sufficient to guarantee the maintenance of the monastery, indicates that there no monks were found with comparable fortunes to the rich senators. Otherwise, I do not understand how the monks could have reached such penury (they lacked fundamental products for subsistence), even during a period of economic restrictions. Nevertheless, some objections can be made. The first is that, like Clarus, the monks who possessed goods could have abandoned everything by converting, in such a way that they no longer had any revenue. The second is that many nobles mentioned in the *Vita* may not have resided in Marmoutier since the beginning, since Sulpicius' description in the tenth chapter of *Vida* reflects the situation of the monastery in the 390, around 20 years after its foundation.

While, on the one hand, only two disciples of Martin convincingly appear as aristocrats, Sulpicius, on the other hand, sought to highlight the contacts of his hero with important aristocrats and the imperial court. In relation to this, Sulpicius writes that Martin “gave orders not only to counts and prefects, but also to kings themselves” (*Dialogi* 1.24.4). On the list of important relations of the Bishop of Tours, we can find people from the administration: Arborius, “a former prefect” (*uir praefectorius*) (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 19.1-2; *Dialogi* 3.10.6),¹⁴ the most important person who Martin knew; Avitianus, a “count” (*comes*) (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.4.1, 3.5.1, 3.8.1-3), and his wife (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.3.1-4); Auspicius, “former prefect” (*praefectorius uir*), and his son, Romulus (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.7); Evancius (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 2.2.3-7), uncle of Gallus; Lycontius, “a former vicar” (*ex uicariis*) (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.14.3-5); Tetradius, “a former proconsul” (*uir proconsularis*) (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 17.1-4); and Vicente, a “prefect” (*praefectus*) (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 1.25.6). We can also add to the list the names of Meropius Pontius Paulinus (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 19.3 and 25.4; *Dialogi* 1.23.4 and 3.17.3; Paulinus, *Ep.* 18.9; cf. Pietri; Pietri, 2000, pp. 1630-1654) and Sulpicius Severus (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 25.1-3; *Ep.* 2.6; *Dialogi* 2.4.1, 2.12.1, 2.13.3-4, and 2.13.8). Among the emperors, Martin visited Maximus and his wife, who supposedly venerated him a lot (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 20; *Dialogi* 2.6, 3.11; *Chronica* 2.50.2), and Valentinian I (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 2.5). In court Martin met people with an elevated social position (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 20.4-7), even defending the cause of some of them (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.11.8).

Had Martin also established direct relations with his aristocratic admirers, devotees of asceticism, who we can find in the writings of Sulpicius? We know

the names of Bassula, mother-in-law of Sulpicius (Sulpicius Severus, *Ep.* 3.1-5); Dagridus, “a former tribune” (*ex tribunis*) (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* 3.5.1); Desiderius, to which Sulpicius dedicates the *Vita*; Euquerius, “a former vicar” (*ex uicariis*), and Celsus, “a former consul” (*consularis*), who arrived at Primuliaco in the second journey of the *Dialogues* to hear Gallus’ stories (*Dialogi* 3.1.7); and Postumianus, one of the interlocutors of the *Dialogues*, a friend of Sulpicius (*Dialogi* 1.1.1, 1.5.6, 1.9.6). Moreover, three *patres familias* are mentioned anonymously (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 16 and 17.5-7; *Dialogi* 3.2.3-8).

Fontaine supposes that Martin’s important contacts confirm Sulpicius’ assertion in section 10.8 of the *Vita* (Fontaine, 1993, p. 27). However, nothing corroborates his assumption. Most of those mentioned above maintained their secular careers. Even those who converted to monasticism – in this case Paulinus and Sulpicius – did not abandon their refined lifestyle to transfer to Marmoutier. Actually, rich aristocrats like him lived their monastic ideals in their *uillae* amongst relatives and friends. The only conclusion which Martin’s list of important contacts allows us make is that many aristocrats felt touched by him.

Sulpicius wrote his Martinian works for monks and sympathizers of monasticism, for lettered aristocrats, many of whom were not disposed to convert to Christianity in order not to abandon classical literature, and against the bishops of Gaul, hostile to Martin’s military past and monasticism, and skeptical about his miracles and his capacity to interpret the Scriptures (cf. Fontaine, 1967-1969, pp. 72-84; Stancliffe, 1983, pp. 72-80; Ghizzoni, 1983, p. 121). By highlighting the contacts of his hero with important aristocrats and emperors, Sulpicius’ objectives were to show that he was not only an apostle of the poor and the peasants and to guarantee the authenticity of his miracles. At the same time Sulpicius visited Marmoutier various times (cf. Delehaye, 1920, pp. 34-36; Fontaine, 1967-1969, p. 29 and 1050; Stancliffe, 1983, p. 71 and 318), in such a way that he had the opportunity to get to know all the monks living there. While we do not have information about the social origin of most of Martin’s disciples, it is because Sulpicius has nothing to say about this. Stating that many nobles lived in Marmoutier, surrounded by manuscripts (cf. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 10.6) and promoted to episcopal seats, but who had voluntarily abandoned wealth and comfort, choosing a life of humility and mortifications (cf. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 10.8-9), was a way of defending and at the same time promoting Martinian monasticism among his erudite readers.

Moreover, Sulpicius wanted, with the detailed description of Marmoutier in the tenth chapter of the *Vita*, to criticize the supposed mundane clergy of Gaul, as Fontaine aptly points out (1967-1969, p. 689):

Point par point, on y relève des griefs qui s'opposent à la vie parfaite menée à Marmoutier sous la direction de Martin: modestie de l'habitat, du vêtement, de la nourriture et de la boisson, dénuement, solitude, vie contemplative. Tout était là-bas l'envers de la richesse, de l'orgueil et de la mondanité. Ainsi, les exigences de l'apologétique ne sont pas moindres dans la stylisation de ce chapitre, qui pouvait d'abord apparaître comme une pure contemplation de l'idéal ascétique réalisé à Marmoutier selon le cœur de Sulpice.

In this criticism, the presence of many nobles was used to increase the amount of renunciation of the material world by Martinian disciples: they were aristocrats who, like Clarus, had abandoned everything, not poor people who had nothing to abandon. It is curious that Fontaine, who analyzed so well the literary strategies of Sulpicius in the *Vita*, accepted so literally the assertion that many aristocrats lived in Marmoutier.

The only fact that can confirm Sulpicius' assertions is that many monks wore camel skin (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 10.8), one of the most precious reminders which a devote pilgrim of monasticism could bring from Egypt (Fontaine, 1967-1969, p. 681). If the Martinian monks had travelled on pilgrimage to Egypt, we can conclude that they were from an elevated social condition. However, it appears that camels were raised in Gaul in Late Antiquity and their skins provided low cost clothes (de Vogüé, 1988, p. 87; de Vogüé, 1997, p. 50). Sulpicius sent a skin to Paulinus around 400 (Paulinus, *Ep.* 29.1). Nevertheless, camel skins were perfectly suited to Sulpicius' criticism of the supposed mundane clergy of Gaul. Thus, the indication that the Martinian monks wore them could ultimately be fallacious.

Finally, I have the impression that Sulpicius himself was not particularly convinced of the presence of 'many nobles' in Marmoutier. His words, "many among them were *considered* [*habebantur*] nobles" (emphasis added), may indicate a certain reservation on his part, but the information was too useful to the portrait he wanted to trace of Marmoutier and Martinian monasticism to be discarded. He could have heard this information from the monks of Marmoutier themselves,¹⁵ but he found no confirmation.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no clear indications that can corroborate Sulpicius' claim that "many nobles" lived in Marmoutier (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 10.8). Of all the disciples of Martin that we could identify, only two, Clarus and Gallus, appeared as aristocrats and could be considered noble. However, both were, most probably, of a curial origin and their possession could not be compared to those of the important senators. Since the lack of sources prevents us from drawing definitive conclusions, I suggest that the presence of nobles in Marmoutier should be considered with great caution.

Conclusions such as Fontaine's – that the Martinian monks did not practice manual labor because of the prejudices of the aristocracy and that Marmoutier was materially maintained with the revenues from the properties of its richest members –, based almost exclusively on section 10.8 in *Vita*, are not sustainable. Equally problematic is the generalization of these conclusions to all monastic experiences in fourth century Gaul. Sulpicius had very clear motives to state that Marmoutier was full of nobles. On the one hand, he wanted to defend and promote Martinian monasticism among his erudite readers and, on the other, to increase the level of the renunciation of the material world among Martinian monks to criticize the supposed mundane clergy of Gaul.

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NOTES

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² Babut supposes that all the members of the senatorial order belonged to the *nobilitas*.

³ For a recent example, cf. Brown (2012, p. 415).

⁴ In relation to civic Euergetism, cf. Veyne (1976).

⁵ For a recent study of the Christianization of the Roman Empire, cf. Veyne (2011).

⁶ When he converted to monasticism, in 394, Sulpicius abandoned his career and properties. He kept possession of a single *uilla*, Primuliaco, located to the west of Toulouse (STANCLIFFE, 1983, pp. 30-31). In this *uilla*, he founded a monastery and began to live in the company of his mother-in-law, his former slaves, who had also converted, friends, and monks from Tours.

⁷ It is not known exactly to which social level Evancius belonged. Gallus refers to him as “Euanthius auunculus meus, uir, licet saeculi negotiis occupatus, admodum Christianus” (SULPÍCIO SEVERO, *Dialogi* 2.2.3) and states that Martin cured one of his domestic slaves (*puerum e familia*) in Trier. The secular occupations, the possession of domestic slaves, and the house in Trier suggest an official in the imperial or palace bureaucracy. Gallus could have attended schools with the purpose of ascending socially along the path laid down by his uncle in other words, the bureaucracy or the palatine service. Cf. Sivan (1993, pp. 85-91), for examples of this type. Fontaine (2006, p. 223) assumes that Evancius and the noble *Euentius*, whose epitaph was discovered in Rome and published in *L'année épigraphique*, 1953, n° 200, were the same person. However, Heinzelmann (1982, p. 605) had already correctly differentiated the two people.

⁸ Prinz (1988, p. 23 and 25) also argues that Vitricius was a disciple of Martin. However, Prinz has a broader concept of disciple than me, also taking into account those who, even without knowing Martin, were influenced by his example.

⁹ Paulinus, who met Vitricius and Martin in Vienne (*Ep.* 18.9), would certainly have indicated if the former had been the disciple of the latter, since this letter speaks of the missionary work of Vitricius, the foundation of monasteries in Rouen, and his conversion.

¹⁰ Heinzelmann (1982, p. 555) records that the Aper of the *Dialogues* can be identified with the Aper the receiver of *Epp.* 38, 39 and 44 from Paulinus de Nola. This second Aper, a friend of Paulinus was rich and had been a lawyer and judge before becoming a monk. However, nothing indicates that they were both the same person. Fabre (1948, p. 75) had already demonstrated caution about identifying the two persons. Furthermore, Aper the friend of Paulinus was not a disciple of Martin. *Ep.* 38, probably from 399/400 (FABRE, 1948, pp. 75-83), defines the conversion of Aper as recent, and *Ep.* 44 shows that after his conversion he continued to live on his property, whose administration was the responsibility of his wife, Amanda.

¹¹ Gregory of Tours, in *Historiarum libri decem* 10.31, identifies six *uici* where Martin founded churches after destroying pagan temples: Langeais, Sonnay, Amboise, Ciran-la-Latte, Tournon, and Candes.

¹² I do not consider in the count Maximus, Romano, and the two Martins, identified by Gregory, and Maurilius.

¹³ As Fontaine indicates (1967-1969, pp. 674-675), however, this number is probably artificial.

¹⁴ For the prosopographical news about all those cited in this paragraph, I especially draw on the most recent book by Pietri and Heijmans (2013).

¹⁵ In relation to Sulpicius' informants, cf. Fontaine (1967-1969, pp. 183-205) and Stancliffe (1983, pp. 160-173).