

2 SAINT REMI, BISHOP OF RHEIMS

Meeting with Clovis the First

In 486, after the battle of Soissons in which Clovis vanquished Roma Syagrius, the sacred agate stone vases were stolen by the Frankish army. The event is recounted by Grégoire de Tours: Remi sent an emissary to Clovis, hoping to get back the most beautiful of the stolen vases that he really cared about. The king and the emissary then went to the site where the booty was to be shared. Clovis asked the valiant warriors to give him the vase on top of his share of the booty so that he could fulfil his promise of restitution. The soldiers accepted and said that the booty was his. But, to the general surprise, an impulsive and passionate soldier hit the vase with his axe, broke it and exclaimed: "You will only have what has been allocated to you by fate."

Clovis endured the humiliation and, in spite of his rancour, brought the broken vase to Remi. Later, in the same year, in the middle of a military review, Clovis spotted the soldier and broke his head, with his battle axe, shouting: "This is what you did to the Soissons vase."



Picture 8 — Clovis I and the Soissons vase (14th century)

Friendship between the King and the Bishop

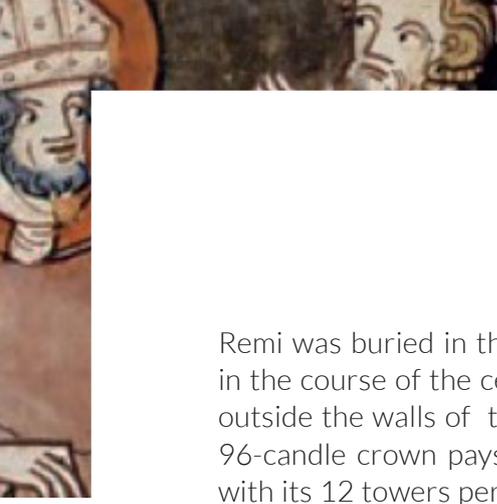
After this memorable episode, the bonds of friendship grew over time. Remi negotiated with the local aristocracy and obtained the submission of the city of Rheims. Soon, the Bishop became inextricably linked to the politics of Clovis, pacifying resistant rural areas, helping the poor and appeasing the Gallo-roman elite. To this powerful elite, Clovis appeared to be a resource person towards order and authority as he remained extraordinarily faithful to the Romans. In the next thirty years, the King and the Bishop forged a sincere relationship, based on mutual consideration and confidence.

The saint

Venerable Remi was praised in the whole of Christendom. He died, loved and glorified, at the canonical age of 96, on January the 13th, 533. In his will, Saint Remi bequeathed assets to the churches under the name of "pagi" (the Roman areas of Castrice, the Porcien, the Vongeois, Mouzon) because they were the first parishes, the first relays founded far from the city of Rheims to make sacramental life possible. Further in the will, it was mentioned that the Bishop bequeathed a silver vase of an 18-pound value to the church of Laon so that they could melt it to make patens and chalices. In the same document, Remi wrote "As to the other silver vase that was given to me at the baptismal font by dearly remembered King Clovis, [...] I order that it will be used to make a censer and a chalice engraved with decorations."



Picture 9 — Statue of Saint Remi (western facade of the Basilica) — photo TD



Remi was buried in the Saint-Christopher oratory which would later become the Basilica, in the course of the centuries. In tribute to Remi, the Basilica was erected as a sanctuary, outside the walls of the city (the "pomoerium"). In the nave of today's basilica, a luminous 96-candle crown pays tribute to the saint. This crown represents the golden walled city with its 12 towers personifying the apostles. Between these towers, a series of 8 candles – 8 being the number of the resurrection, of the new life. Celestial Jerusalem, described in the Apocalypse, is the term of contemplative monks' vocation, which they reached through the mediation of the Church.



Picture 10 – Remi and Clovis I by Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, 14th century © BNF