New developments and re-assessments in late antique and early medieval studies have demonstrated that the growth and spread of Christianity was a gradual and complex process. However, reconsideration of how we interpret Christianisation is needed. Specifically, the implication that Christianisation followed a general process suggests that the religion’s effect on the towns and people was the same and thus underplays the complexity of the overall transition. In light of this observation, the recent archaeological and historical work in the cantons of Geneva and Basel in Switzerland, on settlements and sacred sites spanning AD 300-800, presents an opportunity to re-examine this process of religious transformation. It is in these regions that we see settlement by the Burgundians in Geneva and by the Alamanni in Basel in the sixth century. Their presence thus has much importance for understanding how Christianisation was impacted by local ethnicities and how they in turn were affected by the new religion. What role did these groups of people have on the spread and growth of Christianity? This paper will focus on two interrelated aspects using a multidisciplinary methodology: the histories of the study areas and their settlement history as well as the related church archaeology. If Christianisation did indeed follow a standard process then these two regions should present similar rates and patterns of diffusion of the religion. Instead, it is argued that the dissemination of Christianity in these two regions differed on various levels, meaning that Christianisation cannot be generalised as a process but more as a cultural event which presents itself uniquely in any given area.

Keywords: Alamanni, bishops, Burgundians, early medieval, late antique, religious transformation, Romans, settlement history, Switzerland

Introduction: Defining ‘Christianisation’

The late antique establishment of Christianity remains a topic of debate and contrasting perspectives. Scholarship remains polarised whether we should regard the period as one of decay and decline or one of gradual and complex transformation. Advocates for ‘decline’, notably Ward-Perkins (2005) and Liebeschuetz (2003), comment on the pressures the classical city faced during the fourth and fifth centuries, with circuit walls enclosing urban spaces largely defined by church foundations. In contrast, the works of Brown (1971; 2002) and Cameron (1993; 2006) argue the period experienced growth, innovation, and transformation, emphasising the rise of Christianity as a powerful factor driving social change.

Indeed, studies of Christianisation are central to a number of contributions to our understanding of the changes experienced during the late antique and early medieval period. Initially defined as the process by which the people converted to the new religion, research has stressed the role of the bishop as key movers of Christianity. Brown (1995: 16), for example, regarded bishops as an articulate and influential group of Christians’ who assumed ‘a chain of command’, contributing to the acceptance of the religion in AD 314. Rapp (2005: 16) more recently perceived the authority of the bishop as a ‘multifaceted and ever-mutating construct that continued to change as individuals adapted’. On the other hand, Bowes (2007: 150) questioned whether the emphasis on the role of the bishop within Christianisation processes underplayed the role of landed aristocrats, particularly when considering the progression of Christianity in the countryside.

Archaeology has expanded the study of Christianisation to include discussions of the evangelisation of landscapes and burial customs. Cantino Wataghin’s (1995) survey of urban churches identified three specific phases: a pre-Constantinian Christian presence with domus ecclesiae acting as congregation points; a visible church with intramural and extramural foundations following the acceptance of Christianity in the fourth century; and a final stage marked by intramural burials and further urban church foundations. Similar strategies have been employed recently by Caseau (2001), whose survey on changing sacred landscapes offered
another step-by-step model: a period of ‘desacralisation’ and the occurrence of religious violence; a change in attitude towards the preservation of some elements from the past (‘nostalgia’); and finally an effort to transform the cityscape into a Christian one. Research in Switzerland has explored similar themes. For example, excavations at Geneva led by Charles Bonnet (1986; 1996; 2002) have illustrated the gradual progression of Christianity in urban spaces. Terrier (2002; 2007) correspondingly explored the spread of Christianity into the rural landscape. Likewise, Marti (2000; 2006a; 2006b; 2009) has brought to light a number of early church foundations around Kaiseraugst and Basel, exploring the Christianisation of both urban and rural spaces.

However, reconsideration is needed in how we interpret Christianisation processes. The implication that the progression of Christianity followed a general process suggests that the religion’s effect on the towns and people was the same and thus underplays the complexity of the overall transition. This paper thus offers a comparative assessment, using both archaeological and historical resources from the dioceses of Geneva and Basel in Switzerland, to explore whether Christianisation in these areas followed similar trajectories. As parts of the Roman Empire and episcopal sees, these two particular areas present good research prospects, since they have seen extensive excavation, and a considerable amount of research has been conducted on aspects of their late antique and early medieval settlement and the development of their churches. Moreover, both regions had comparable historical settings in the fourth century: the diocese of Basel lay on the Rhine frontier and initially had only one major settlement, Augusta Raurica, which was later abandoned for the more secure location of Kaiseraugst, a fourth-century castrum; the diocese of Geneva saw its principal settlement (Geneva) used as a way-point for travel between Gaul and Italy. Additionally, the cities of both regions have evidence for mid fourth-century episcopal complexes, which suggests that they commenced the process of Christianisation at the same point. If Christianisation was indeed a uniform process, we would expect to see similar rates of diffusion and patterns in church development and archaeology.

To start this comparison, a discussion on the quality of the data will clarify problematic areas and the state of archaeological research in Switzerland. The study will then provide an overview of bishops and their cities, examining the progress of Christianity in the centre of the episcopal see. This will be followed by a consideration of the Christianisation of each rural zone, looking at rates and patterns of church foundation. The final section will discuss themes and relevant conclusions to draw from the case studies.

Geneva and Basel: Problems in Data and Dating

Within this paper, the data used derive predominantly from archaeological reports and the available historical resources. As such, questions of quality, reliability, and evidence need to be addressed. First, we might observe a loss of data through the inadequate methodology of early Swiss archaeologists. Of note are the excavations at Saint Peter in Geneva, where in the late nineteenth century, improper handling of an early medieval tomb resulted in the disintegration of rare textiles (Bonnet 1986: 4). Since the 1960s, however, archaeological methods improved dramatically, and the increased effort to coordinate between cantonal archaeological services and regional governments resulted in better handling of reconstruction efforts as well as the preservation of architectural remains underneath present-day churches. For example, excavations at Geneva’s church of Saint Peter are now lauded for their high level of stratigraphic analysis, which has illuminated various construction phases between the fourth and eleventh centuries AD (Knight 1999: 85; Cantino Wataghin 2003: 225). Currently, the primary problem facing Swiss archaeology is the lack of publication of findings. Marti (2000: 146) makes reference to the unpublished excavation reports on the cathedral of Basel as well as the unpublished thesis of Simon Burnell (1998) on burial practices in north-western Switzerland. Both would be useful resources for early Christian research in the Basel region.

Throughout all this excavation work, another problem presents itself: chronologies. Dating churches in their earliest phases and evolutions is problematic – thanks to damaged stratigraphy and plans due to continued use and development, limited associated material culture (coins, ceramics), lack of associated textual finds (epitaphs, epigraphs) - and thus regularly relies on casual finds and typological comparisons. For example, the church found at Meinier has been dated roughly to the sixth and seventh century based only on the
typologies of grave structures and a rough idea of the church plan (Terrier 2007: 87). Radiocarbon dating is used on the rare occasion where organic remains are recovered and only when they are preserved well and found in an undisturbed context. Consequently, the dates used throughout this study are presented as broad ranges.

A lack of historical sources in this region affects our understanding of the Christianisation process and the archaeological record. Central Europe, the region including Switzerland, regularly assumed a peripheral role in the politics and social movements of Late Antiquity and the early medieval period. With no major metropolitan centres, it is not surprising to find that the historical events in this region consist only of the movements of Roman troops in the fourth century to the frontier, the occasional hermit establishing a monastery, the settlements of non-Romans, and the administrative control of important routes and passes. During the sixth century, the elevation of Geneva to a royal city of the Burgundian Kingdom helps to clarify the historical sequence, but in canton Basel the period between the fifth and eighth centuries is much more difficult to interpret. In many cases, there simply are no historical documents to cross-reference with the archaeological evidence (Marti 2006a: 32-34). In these cases, hagiographical resources can help to fill these voids. Hagiographies, however, were written not to record historical detail but to edify a specific person or group of people. For example, the life of Saint Germanus can substantiate that the monastery of Moutier-Grandval was built in the seventh century but the exact date and the political and religious reasoning behind its creation still remain debatable (Vita Germani Abbatis Grandivalensis, MGH SRM: v.ix.36). Other sources, such as acts of Church councils, may also provide guidance, but their Christian agenda needs to be taken into account.

One final note concerns the churches discussed in this paper, which are those excavated within Switzerland, with one example from France. In total, twenty-six churches were examined and recorded by tabulating apse types, lengths, construction materials, naves and other architectural features (see Table 1). The emphasis, however, is on those closest to the episcopal centres of Late Antiquity, meaning churches found elsewhere in the dioceses are omitted. For example, the diocese of Geneva took up parts of modern day south-eastern France but little in that particular region has had substantial research and review. In Basel, churches north of the Rhine are also not included due to a lack of studies on those edifices. Thus, while this paper discusses Christianisation in the episcopal centres and their rural regions of the Genevan and Basel dioceses, there is a notable gap in our understanding of the whole region of each diocese. Hopefully, the discussion will nonetheless show the key trends.

**Historical Context**

By AD 300 both Geneva and Basel were under Roman control and administration. Geneva, the older of the two settlements, was an important port and economic hub for the northern alpine region, yet evidence for Roman ‘paganism’ has only been noted through the remains of a large temple in the Saint Gervais quarter, north of the Rhône (Bonnet and Privati 2000: 383). Sometime during the fourth century, the city was listed as a civitas and thus was by then a centre of fair demographic size (covering 5.6 hectares) and provincially important (Liebeschuetz 2000: 21). The small villas and rural farmsteads found around the city saw continued use well into the fifth and sixth centuries, suggesting the locality was both secure and prosperous. In contrast, Kaiseraugst (castrum Rauracense) was a Roman military fort built around 290 next to the Rhine, about 12 kilometres from present-day Basel. Originally dependent on the Roman colony Augusta Raurica, the raids by the Alamanni in the late third century resulted in the inhabitants taking refuge in the better defended fort. Kaiseraugst continued to act as a fort throughout the fourth century, notably during another incursion by the Alamanni in 351, until the removal of the Roman troops in 401. The settlement continued to be inhabited and its defences were enhanced in the mid-fifth century, as evident by an increase in watch towers and gates (Marti 2003: 207; Marti 2006a: 30). Moreover, fifth-century glass wares and other Roman ceramic wares suggest the fort was occupied in later periods (Schwarz 2002: 154). Little evidence exists for Roman polytheistic worship in the fort; rather, it appears that Augusta Raurica was the centre for the imperial cult with a variety of small square temples and two large Mediterranean styled cult-houses (Schwarz 2002: 153). Presumably, these temples saw less frequentation and were left to ruin after the abandonment of Augusta Raurica. While the hinterland of Roman Kaiseraugst was occupied by villas and rural farms, a recent survey on the settlement history of the region notes that
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date range (AD)</th>
<th>Apse type</th>
<th>Apse orientation</th>
<th>Max. length (m)</th>
<th>Construction materials</th>
<th>Nave</th>
<th>Architectural features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Cathedral</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>300-400</td>
<td>semi-circular</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>brick</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>multiple annexes, choir, baptistery, atrium, atrium, chapel, choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Cathedral</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>400-500</td>
<td>semi-circular</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>~30</td>
<td>brick</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>multiple annexes, choir, baptistery, atrium, chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cathedral</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>500-600</td>
<td>semi-circular</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>stone/brick</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>multiple annexes, choir, baptistery, atrium, colonnade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Madeleine</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>450-500</td>
<td>semi-circular</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>portico, choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Gervais</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>450-500</td>
<td>semi-circular</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>~25</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>portico, choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Jean-les-Grottes</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>500-600</td>
<td>square</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>three</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Germain</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>400-500</td>
<td>semi-circular</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>~15</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>multiple annexes, colonnade, choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Jacques</td>
<td>Vaudouevres, Geneva</td>
<td>400-450</td>
<td>square</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>baptistery, choir, crypt, oratory (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Hippolytus</td>
<td>Grand-Saconnex, Geneva</td>
<td>400-500</td>
<td>square</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>portico, choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Peter</td>
<td>Meinier, Geneva</td>
<td>500-600</td>
<td>polygonal</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>choir (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Martin</td>
<td>Celigny, Geneva</td>
<td>400-500</td>
<td>square</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>portico (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Julien-en-Genevois</td>
<td>St Julien-en-Genevois, Geneva</td>
<td>400-500</td>
<td>semi-circular</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>choir, two northern annexes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episcopal church, St Gall</td>
<td>Kaiseraugst, Basel</td>
<td>300-400</td>
<td>semi-circular</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>brick/stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>multiple annexes, bath, baptistery (?), baptistery, altar, choir, atrium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cemetery church</td>
<td>Kaiseraugst, Basel</td>
<td>600-700</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>memoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Nikolaus</td>
<td>Lausen, Basel</td>
<td>500-600</td>
<td>semi-circular</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Michael</td>
<td>Buus, Basel</td>
<td>600-700</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>memoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Jakob</td>
<td>Sissach, Basel</td>
<td>600-700</td>
<td>square</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Peter and Paul</td>
<td>Oberwil, Basel</td>
<td>600-700</td>
<td>square</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>choir, altar, baptistery (?), oratory (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Aesch, Basel</td>
<td>600-700</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>memoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Peter and Paul</td>
<td>Diegenten, Basel</td>
<td>700-800</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>memoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Wintersingen, Basel</td>
<td>700-800</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>~12</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>memoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Arbogast</td>
<td>Muttenz, Basel</td>
<td>700-800</td>
<td>Square</td>
<td>east</td>
<td>~14</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>choir, altar, baptistery (?), oratory (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Michael</td>
<td>Oberdorf, Basel</td>
<td>700-800</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>memoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Bennwil, Basel</td>
<td>700-800</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>~10</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>memoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Peter and Paul</td>
<td>Ettingen, Basel</td>
<td>700-800</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>stone</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>memoria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Qualitative data for churches in the Dioceses of Geneva and Basel, ‘~’ denotes approximate measurements.
many farmsteads were abandoned in the fourth century although some villas saw use into the fifth, sixth and even seventh centuries (Marti 2009: 293).

In the mid-fifth century, the regions of Geneva and Kaiseraugst both experienced the effects of Germanic settlement. However, the political circumstances behind these waves of colonisation were very different; the Burgundian settlement in Sapaudia, organised by late Roman authorities, saw the inter-mingling of Gallo-Romans and Burgundians, whereas the Alamannic seizure of the Kaiseraugst/Basel region was not desired by local or imperial authority. In AD 443, the first Burgundian kingdom was defeated by the Roman ‘generalissimo’ Aetius, who allocated the surviving people to the region of Sapaudia (south-eastern France and south-western Switzerland) where they established Geneva and Lyon as their capital cities (Bonnet and Reynaud 2000: 243). The close relations between Romans and Burgundians, who were recognised as federates and allies, resulted in continued ties with the Eastern emperors. The effort of both King Gundobad (473-516) and King Sigismund (516-523) to acquire honorific titles, such as magister militum, highlights this characteristic. The fate of the region of Kaiseraugst was clearly different: the Alamanni, a Germanic confederacy, which had troubled Roman frontiers since the third century, eventually settled in southern Germany but oddly did not cross south of the Rhine in the fifth and sixth centuries (Marti 2003: 207). Presumably, the river provided a natural boundary or there was an agreement between the Gallo-Romans and the Alamanni (Marti 2003: 207). It is only in the seventh century and after the subjugation of the region by the Franks that archaeologists and historians can comment on the settlement of the Swiss plateau by the Alamanni. A survey by Marti in this region charts an increase in settlements suggesting a growing population; he proceeds to suggest a probable ‘Alamanisation’ of the region (Marti 2009; 2003), supported by the distribution of place-names. After extensive funerary and philological studies on the region, this theory continues to be the most readily accepted (Marti 2009; Schwarz 2002; Steuer 1994).

Back in Geneva, after the defeat of the Burgundians by the Franks in the late sixth century, the region surrendered to Merovingian hegemony. The installation of Cariatto as bishop by King Guntram in the late sixth century suggests that Merovingian political activities were at play, but whether this takeover constituted a new wave of colonisation by the Merovingian Franks in the region remains questionable (Fredegar, Chronicles: 3.89). In this paper, it is assumed that the Burgundians remained in the region and that high-ranking Franks took up residence to occupy important political posts, such as the episcopacy. Geneva remained part of the kingdom of Burgundy throughout the Frankish period, but was never used again as an administrative centre for the kingdom and fell into relative insignificance during the middle Merovingian and early Carolingian period.

Throughout this period of settlement and political upheaval, the Church remained a common feature and bishop lists exist for both areas, although broken. While it remains questionable how established Christianity was prior to the fourth century, the first bishop in Kaiseraugst suggests that it was, by this time, sufficiently recognised to warrant a public figure. Bishop Iustinianus was listed as episcopus Rauracorum in the acts of the Council of Serdica in 343, the first known ‘Swiss’ bishop (Marti 2006a: 30). Meanwhile, a mid-fifth-century letter composed by Bishop Eucherius of Lyon to a friend mentions a Bishop Isaac of Geneva, who held office c. AD 400 (Epistula, MGH SRM: iii.40).

However, despite the presence of an early bishop attributed to both centres, it is not long before a divergence emerges in the mid-fifth century. While the episcopal seat at Geneva saw continued use throughout the late antique and early medieval period (if with a few gaps in the seventh century), at Kaiseraugst the next mention of a bishop occurs only at the Councils of Paris (614) and Clichy (626/627) - a Ragnachar of Augustanae and Basiliae, interpreted as being bishop of both Augst and Basel (Schwarz 2002: 154; Marti 2006a: 30, 38). The mention of two locations for a bishop has been suggested by scholars as the first sign of the eventual transition of the Episcopal seat to Basel in the early ninth century. Episcopal moves were occasional occurrences during this period, such as from Martigny to Sion in the late sixth century or the longer transition from Windisch to Lausanne spanning the fifth to late sixth century, and are usually signs that the original location was waning in population and political prominence (Schwarz 2002: 154; Marti 2006a: 30, 38).
Episcopal Churches

Knowledge of mid-fourth-century churches in both Geneva and Kaiseraugst seems to support the record of the first bishops. At Kaiseraugst (Figure 1), excavations between 1960 and 1966 under and next to the current church of Saint Gall unearthed remains of a late antique intramural church. With a rectangular nave and a semi-circular apse, the dimensions of this early church were quite modest (17 by 11.5 metres). The walls were constructed from rubble and brick. Liturgical features included a choir with a slightly elevated floor divided from the nave by a chancel (Schwarz 2002: 159; Marti 2006a: 36). Side rooms, including a bath room, were located to the north and extended to the fort’s wall. A large room has been interpreted as a courtyard, while the smaller rooms are considered to be storage spaces or residences. The date for this edifice derives from the discovery of a coin hoard located in the western wall of the atrium with a terminus post quem of AD 351/352 (Schwarz 2002: 159). Geneva’s first church (called the north cathedral) is dated to around the same period (based primarily on stratigraphy and ceramic finds) and was also an intramural church but was grander in scale and construction. Using opus africanum brickwork, the 32-metre long rectangular nave terminated in a semi-circular apse; a small baptistery was located in a southern annex room (Bonnet 2002: 145). Multiple rooms were attached to the north of the nave. Inside the early cathedral there is evidence for two barriers: one, likely a choir screen or chancel, was built near the apse creating a sacred area for the altar; the second barrier spanned the nave. In both cases, there is evidence of an earlier Roman official building, suggesting the spaces were donated to the Church by a wealthy householder (Schwarz 2002: 159; Bonnet 2002: 101, 145).

Both churches were modified in the fifth century. In Kaiseraugst, annexes were placed on either side of the apse and the bath to the north was expanded (Schwarz 2002: 160; Marti 2006a: 36-37). Archaeologists (Schwarz 2002: 160) suggest the large basin (H) was used for baptismal immersions but many remain sceptical (e.g. Marti 2006: 34) as it was not in a central location, like those known at Geneva and other cities (Figure 1). Geneva saw greater expansion, primarily through the creation of a second cathedral south of the original. Similar in length and construction, the entire complex was accessible via an atrium between the baptistery and the north and south cathedrals. The south cathedral also had small annexes attached to its nave, including one with a geometric mosaic floor. The knowledge that this was a heated and lavishly decorated room led to its interpretation as the bishop’s reception room (Bonnet 1996: 102). A sub-phase of the fifth-century construction at Geneva saw the elaboration of liturgical arrangements, primarily the creation of a pathway in the choir leading to an ambo or pulpit. It is at this time that there is evidence for Christianity in the suburbs of Geneva, where the church of Saint Gervais was established and the memoria of La Madeleine emerged as a burial ground for Christians. Both churches were built outside the walls in a probable observance of the traditional Roman rule forbidding the interment of the dead within city spaces (Bonnet 2002: 147-148). Meanwhile, the small church of Saint Germain, an intramural church at Geneva, was built during this time.

In the sixth and seventh centuries, the episcopal centre at Geneva continued to see growth and building within the walls and extramurally. Around AD 500, after a fire, the northern cathedral was rebuilt, expanding the nave and restructuring the apse. The major development was the creation of a third cathedral which had a three-nave plan with a dominant centre apse flanked by two smaller apses (Figure 2). Internally, a liturgical space was sectioned off by barriers and the presence
of a tomb next to this space could have been designed for a privileged person, and possibly a point of veneration (Bonnet 1996: 103). Outside the city walls, the memoria of La Madeleine was redesigned as a church and saw successive phases in the seventh and eighth centuries, and the number of internal and external graves leaves little doubt as to its funerary function. A new extramural church, Saint-Jean-les-Grottes, was built circa AD 600 and was Geneva’s first wooden church, located about 1.7 kilometres from the cathedral.

In contrast, the Kaiseraugst church remained static. The episcopal cathedral experienced no further building nor is there any indication of another intramural church or prominent extramural churches. The extramural cemetery, located southeast of the castrum, and the construction of a small square building - perhaps a memoria for a privileged person - are the only signs of continued Christian activity (Marti 2006a: 37). Thus, by the eighth century, Kaiseraugst had begun to fade, whereas Geneva, despite losing its status as a capital of the Burgundian kingdom, remained a flourishing episcopal centre with nearby extramural Christian places of worship.

**Rural Christianisation**

The diffusion of Christianity with regard to church foundations into the hinterlands is largely unrecorded in the historical literature and archaeological research thus becomes critical to understanding this phase of Christianisation. Current studies continue to examine memoriae, Roman-styled mausoleums or small square structures, as sites which would often later become funerary churches (Doig 2008: 39). This transformation is most readily found and studied in Italy, the most famous belonging to Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome. In Gaul, the fourth and fifth centuries did see strong support for the cult of saints and their shrines, most notably known from the writings of Gregory of Tours on Saint Martin, and the historical accounts of Saint Maurice in Agena. Thus it is not unexpected to find in the countryside of Basel and Geneva, numerous memoriae. However, unlike the shrine of Saint Martin or Saint Maurice, the names of these saints and the extent to which we know these sites were visited and venerated is, at times, impossible to determine. In light of this observation, for the purpose of this paper, the term memoriae refers to structures built to house specific graves which later saw a transformation into a church; but the term does not necessarily signify that all these sites were the graves of saints or martyrs.

Both regions feature churches which began as memoriae. In Geneva, four churches have connections with late fourth- and early fifth-century memoriae and all have associated later graves inside and outside the churches (Figure 3). Of these, the memoriae at Vandoeuvres and Celigny are of particular interest: both
were established on the sites of late Roman villas. The main excavator here, Jean Terrier, suggests that this could be evidence for the owners of the villas creating their own sacred space for their burials (Terrier 2002: 199). In Basel, an impressive nine memoriae have been unearthed (Figure 4). Interestingly, all the memoriae in the Geneva diocese were rebuilt as churches in the fifth or sixth centuries whereas only one of the nine memoriae in the northern diocese saw a transformation into a church in the early medieval period. This small square memoria (6 by 6 metres) at Oberwil eventually saw a second phase of construction in the eighth century when a square apse was added (Marti 2000: 167-168). The remaining mausolea saw later transformations, primarily in the late ninth century, evident in the creation of choirs and apses to the original buildings. For the most part these churches in both Basel and Geneva were relatively small, made of stone, and incorporated the earlier burial space into the later construction. An exception to these observed tendencies is the church found at Celigny, where a large three-nave wooden church (22.5 by 12.5 metres) was built with the middle nave immediately adjacent to a memoria.


Only the late antique church underneath Meinier’s Saint Peter was built outside the context of a memoria in the Geneva region (Terrier 2002: 198). This sixth-century church (8.5 by 6 metres), terminating in an internal semi-circular apse (externally rectangular), was intriguing to the excavators, who found evidence for an early church cemetery (Terrier 2002: 198). In Basel, three churches had no previous association with a memoria (Lausen, Sissach, and Muttenz). Burials were found in association with these churches, either situated within the buildings or located outside. In the case of Lausen, a solitary tomb in the nave suggests the church was built for funerary purposes. A later building phase in the mid-seventh century shows an annex for burials and many more tombs outside the structure (Marti 2000: 156-159).

**Parishes?**

An important question regarding early churches is what they meant to communities and the organisation of rural spaces, and specifically their presumed transition into parish churches. ‘Parish churches’ are defined here as churches with evidence for altars, baptisteries and divided naves. The presence of an altar implies liturgy for the Eucharistic rite, making the presence of a priest necessary. Baptisteries, distinguished by the remnants of built fonts, similarly required a priest or a bishop to perform the holy ceremony of baptism. Divided naves are widely regarded as a way to separate space designed for clergy with the laity; in these cases, the choir is defined as the separated space closest to the altar with the remaining space holding the congregation (Bonnet 1996: 101-103). While the lack of these features does not necessarily mean such functions were not carried out, the presence of liturgical spaces and baptismal fonts are viewed here as signs indicative of early parish churches.

In Geneva, all five previously mentioned churches fit these characteristics, and continue to be used through the medieval period. The only slight exception is the church at Saint-Jean-en-Genevois, which was abandoned in the eighth or ninth century, likely related to the lack of a nearby settlement to maintain it (Terrier 2002: 197). At Vandoeuvres, excavation revealed both a baptistery and a square choir. In this case, the church likely became a parish because the late antique villa site subsequently attracted further settlement and growth. Regular building phases and new constructions of the church resulted in larger structures throughout the medieval period and it is officially mentioned for the first time in the thirteenth century as Saint Jacques of Vandoeuvres (Terrier 2002: 196). Churches at Meinier and Grand-Saconnex both have fragmentary signs for nave divisions and choirs. In both cases church plans were developed out of the layout of tombs. While the very small interiors make it difficult to
suggest their use for congregational gatherings, later evidence shows they eventually developed into parishes - the first historical account of St Peter at Meinier has Pope Eugene III in 1153 stating the parish belonged to the monastery of St-Jean-les-Grottes in Geneva. Saint Hippolytus at Grand Saconnex is first mentioned by Abbot Pierre in the twelfth century (Terrier 2002: 198-199). Celigny is perhaps best seen as a parish church due to its large space, perfect for large gatherings, and a central nave leading to a square choir; historically, however, it is first noted as a parish in 1246 when the wooden building was destroyed and replaced by a stone church (Terrier 2002: 199).

At Basel, the churches of Lausen, Sissach, Muttenz and Oberwil could potentially be considered early medieval parishes. Despite the small size (4 by 6 metres), excavators at Lausen found an altar and a north-south wall dividing the nave into two zones. This church saw successive reconstructions, evident via the remains of a Romanesque church (Marti 2000: 147, 157). In the Middle Ages, Sissach’s parish church tied various communities and valleys together; in this stage, the church was dedicated to Saint James but the continual worship of Saint Imier in a side altar suggests that the original dedication was to Saint Imier, a hermit who possibly lived in this region during the seventh century. The excavations here revealed a side altar and a choir space (Marti 2000: 147, 162-163). At Oberwil, the early religious structure featured a baptismal font in the western nave and an altar in the eastern choir area both dating to the early Carolingian period (Marti 2000: 148; 167-168). The sacred site at Muttenz lay at the centre of the village but not under the current church - like the majority of the churches mentioned in this paper (Marti 2000: 170). In all these cases, we can recognise continuity and the development of churches as centres for nearby rural settlements (Marti 2006b: 61) (Figure 5).

![Figure 5 A study by Marti (2000) suggests that the location of early churches became vital for the development of early medieval communities (image from Marti 2000:198; reproduced with permission of publisher).](image)

**Discussion**

A total of thirteen churches in the region of Geneva including the titular city and thirteen in the diocese of Basel, formerly Kaiseraugst, were examined and compared to explore the process of Christianisation and whether we see similar trajectories. This has been done by studying the regional and local church histories, episcopal centres, and rural zones with an emphasis on church archaeology. Below the discussion centres on two aspects: the rate at which Christianity was diffused in town and country, and points of architectural commonalities and differences.

**Rate and Reception**

From the available data, it appears that Christianity disseminated in the diocese of Geneva faster than in the diocese of Basel. Table 2 demonstrates that church constructions in the Geneva diocese began between the fourth and sixth centuries
contrasting the comparatively late start in the diocese of Basel. This might suggest that Geneva as a region was far more receptive to Christianity than the northern diocese of Basel. The reasons for the delayed spread of Christianity in the region of Basel likely have to do with location, historical circumstance and the settlement of the region by the Alamanni. Geneva had a resident monarch, continued ties with major metropolitan centres such as Lyon and Vienne, and had easy access to the Italian province through the Great Saint Bernard Pass in the Valais Alps. The stability gained from the presence of the Burgundians (sanctioned by Rome) saw stable settlement patterns in both cities and in the countryside. In contrast, Kaiseraugst’s location on the frontier, the instability of the region, especially in the fifth century, and isolation from major centres likely contributed to the eventual demise of the episcopal centre and town in the late eighth century, after which Basel eventually (under Carolingian directive) became the episcopal seat. Moreover, the

Burgundians were a Christian, albeit Arian Germanic, people whereas the Alamanni were reportedly ‘pagan’ well into the seventh century (e.g. Todd 1992; Drinkwater 2007). If this observation holds true, then the Alamannic elite may have been less likely to support the construction of churches.

Comparison of form and design

A comparison of architectural features ranging from apse, number of naves, type of construction and size, offers useful results (see Table 1). First, the most apparent observation is that the majority of these structures were made of stone. Brick, used notably in the north cathedral of Geneva and in the Kaiseraugst church, was detected in sacred buildings of the fourth and early fifth century and was perhaps an indication of continued Roman building practices. This material, however, did not have a substantial impact in the rural region. Wooden churches were fairly rare; however, this could be a situation where these buildings have simply been overlooked or even lost in the archaeological record (Bonnet 1986: 40-41; Marti 2000: 146). In Geneva, if we compare Saint Jean-sur-les-Grottes with Saint Martin of Celigny, wooden churches are rather large with three naves and a central square apse. This form continued to be used in this region in the ninth and tenth centuries, with examples at Satigny and Vuillonex, but, by the eleventh century most of these were converted into stone (Terrier 2007: 89).
Single-nave churches with choirs appear as common architectural designs between the two dioceses. In Basel, many of the later constructions on the memoriae see a transformation into this small type of church. For example, the memoria at Ettingen saw a later construction phase in the late ninth century when a dividing wall was added alongside an altar, thus creating a single-nave church (Marti 2000: 174). Yet there is more variety in Geneva, evident in the large three-nave churches found at the eastern cathedral of the episcopal centre in Geneva, at Celigny, and Saint Jean-sur-les-Grottes. Size also appears to be a factor of difference: more churches in the diocese of Geneva reached lengths above twenty metres contrasting the largest church in the Basel diocese at seventeen metres. Moreover, the portico appears to be an attribute that is unique to the diocese of Geneva. Used in churches at La Madeleine, Saint Gervais, Saint Martin, and Saint Hippolytus, the portico area featured arcosolia (recessed chambers) suggesting to Bonnet (1986: 45-46) that the suburban church was used for the clergy or nobility of the city. This variety in architectural style and size is observed in Terrier’s analysis of Geneva rural churches, although he does detect that by the Carolingian period in the ninth and tenth centuries the church plans appear more uniform (Terrier 2003: 203-204).

Another trend to compare is the use of the square-apse. Wider studies on apse shapes in Switzerland have observed that northern and eastern regions were characterised by square apses, contrasting the western semi-circular shapes (Eggenberger et al. 2002: 215-228). A study by Sennhauser (2002: 232-236) demonstrates that in the eastern cantons (Ticino, Graubünden, Glarus, Saint Gall, Appenzell and parts of Thurgau) there appear to be distinct regional differences. Primarily, in north-eastern Switzerland, churches with square-apses are more abundant, contrasting with the use of the semi-circular apse in south-eastern Switzerland. In this comparative study, the semi-circular apse does appear to be more dominant in the diocese of Geneva, but the lack of churches with proper apses in the Basel region makes this observation difficult to compare. However, a wider study comparing church typologies in this region between the fourth and tenth centuries suggests that there was a certain amount of regionalism. For example, the semi-circular churches of Kaiseraugst and Lausen appear to have more links with early churches dominant in Roman regions, notably based on ceramic finds and church typology, whereas transformations of memoriae into churches feature square apses - a transition which generally occurred during the late Merovingian or early Carolingian period (Marti 2000: 371).

While similarities in form and apse orientation suggest that the general layout of a church (rectangular/square building, usually with an eastern apse) was widely known, differences in size and architectural features might denote the importance of wealth, patronage and population to Christianisation processes. It is widely acknowledged that the early Church required patronage from wealthy elites to construct churches (Loseby 1992: 150-151; Bonnet 1996: 101; Knight 1999: 65-67; Rapp 2005: 150). Bowes’ (2007: 156) research emphasised that it was sponsorship from rural landowners which resulted in the first Christian buildings in the countryside. Thus, in considering the historical context for Geneva, it is assumed that the city and region acquired wealth and patronage because of stability created by the presence of the Burgundian monarchy. This is evident in the case of Vandoeuvres, where a small church was constructed on a Late Roman villa site that saw continued use in Late Antiquity. In contrast, the instability endured in the diocese of Basel brought about inconsistent population patterns and an environment that lacked the wealth needed to support grandiose displays of aesthetic adornment.

Conclusion

In summary, the evidence explored in this paper suggests that two similar and relatively proximate dioceses saw different rates of spread and different trends despite similar Christian beginnings. While it is possible to discuss common trends, such as memoriae transforming into churches or churches with burial contexts, to suggest that this is part of a larger and more general linear process would simplify a complex transition from non-Christian to Christian. The fact that the regions were settled by two different Germanic peoples, the Burgundians and Alamanni, was probably an important influencing factor on how Christianity spread in the two regions; it appears that the Burgundian monarchy had a positive influence whereas the Alamannic presence (one not supported by Rome) hindered church growth in the fifth and sixth centuries. Moreover, the probability that the Alamanni were not Christians at the time of their settlement north of the Rhine in the fifth
century could also be a causal factor as to why the Basel region saw continued use of temples and sanctuaries in the same period.

Further insight on the ways and extent that these people settled in both dioceses would likely be gained by analysing burial customs and the related grave goods. Burial ritual and relationships to (or away from) churches will guide us on social and gender issues of Christianisation, as well as add to research on cultural and religious identity and their role on individuals and society as a whole. Consideration of the liturgy and rituals involved in early Christianity as well as differing functions (i.e. funerary, baptismal, parish) might also provide more information on whether Christianity was practiced differently in various regions. In the end, Christianisation should be reinterpreted as (a series of) regional events amidst the growth of a central western Church, which were dependant on a variety of factors including settlement, history, economic strength, and, most importantly, people.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Eucherius of Lyon, Epistula. MGH SRM, iii, p. 40


Secondary Sources


Goodman, P.J., 2011. Temples in late antique Gaul. In: M. Mulryan and L. Lavan (eds), The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism' (Late Antique Archaeology Series 6.2). Leiden: Brill.


