



# Trades and circulation in the Loire Valley at the Carolingian period: the case study of the monastery of Cormery

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Silvana R. Vieira de Sousa (dir.)

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# Trade and circulation in the Loire Valley during the Carolingian period: the case study of the monastery of Cormery

Thomas Pouyet

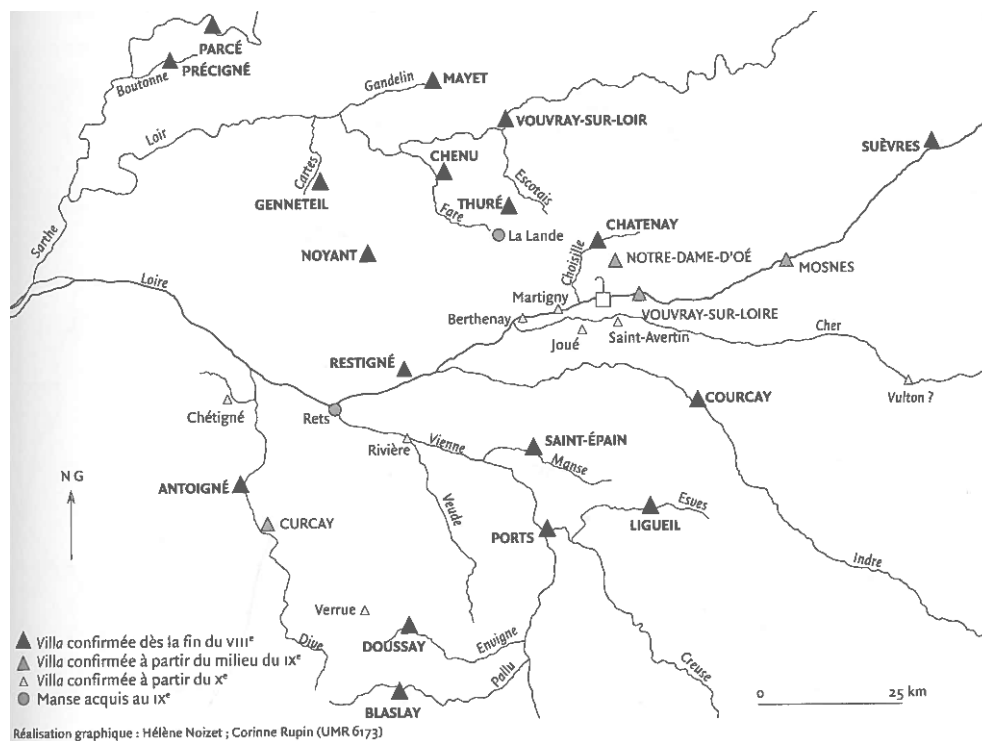
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- 1 Today, Cormery is a quiet village of the Loire valley in Touraine but during medieval times, it was the seat of an important monastery, which progressively declined until the end of the 18th century. The monastic settlement was created at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century by Ithier, an abbot at the head of the powerful community of St Martin of Tours and a grand chancellor of Charlemagne. The monastery was located near the Indre river, a tributary of the Loire river, at approximately 20 km from the famous funerary complex in Tours which housed the remains of the bishop Martin. The remains of the monastic settlement of Cormery are still numerous in the heart of the village. They have been studied within the framework of a PhD thesis in medieval archaeology defended in December 2019 (POUYET, 2019). In this work, we also covered the organization of trade and circulation during the Carolingian period and the question of the Indre river as a navigable waterway, which is still discussed today<sup>1</sup>. These questions are difficult to answer, especially while studying the early part of the medieval period because the written sources related to the topic as well as the materials sources, are scarce. Fortunately for Cormery, many charters of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, copied during the modern period, still contain numerous information linked to our interrogations, which is mainly restrained to the limits of the former diocese of Tours, roughly the area of the actual French department of Touraine<sup>2</sup>.

## The monastic communication network in the Loire valley: St Martin and Cormery

2 H  l  ne Noizet has recently investigated the supply of St Martin's people (NOIZET, 2007). She enlightened the existence of a supply network based on the river system, which allowed the carriage of resources from Saint Martin agricultural domains in the countryside to the monastery in Tours. Almost all St Martin's domains identified in the charters from the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> were located near a river (Figure 1). These rivers as well as terrestrial roads were used to carry the goods towards some intermediate point of transshipment, like the port of Rest in Candes-Saint-Martin, which was dedicated to the domains located at the west of Tours or the place of La Lande for the north part of the supply network. H  l  ne Noizet showed the autarkic nature of St Martin exchange system compared to other Carolingian abbeys such as Saint-Denis or Saint-Germain-des-Pr  s which were engaged in the economic circuit of Northern Europe (NOIZET, 2001, 61-62). None of St Martin domains were located in the Indre valley if we exclude the case of Cour  ay, but this configuration could be easily explained by the creation of Cormery in 791. Moreover, during the same period, we can observe the transfer of the villae of Tauxiny and Aubigny - which are located in the same area, to the young monastic settlement. The foundation of the *cella* at this place was a thoughtful decision for St Martin of Tours, which also used the settlement to welcome pilgrims<sup>3</sup>. Until the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the monastery didn't have its own abbot and had to be considered as a territorial extension of the community of St Martin of Tours<sup>4</sup>. In this regard, it is very likely to include Cormery in the territorial supply network of St Martin.

**Figure 1 - The domains of St Martin of Tours in the Loire valley during the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries**

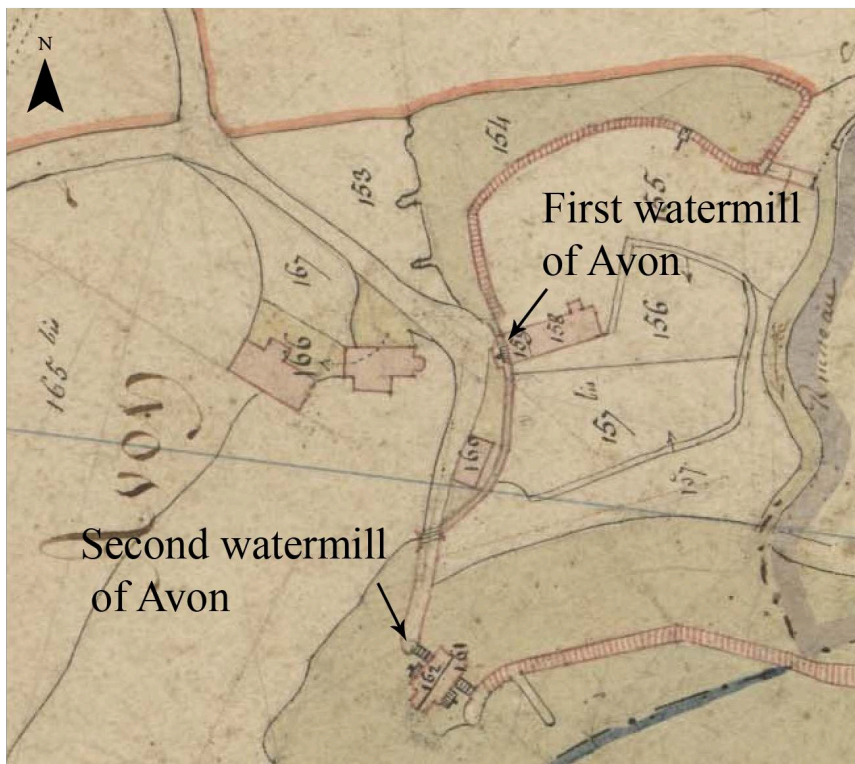


Hélène Noizet 2007, p. 49

- 3 During the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, many tax exemptions were granted to Cormery by the Carolingians rulers to promote the development of the monastery. These exemptions highlight the existence of a trading network structured on the Loire river involving the use of two boats in 800<sup>5</sup> and later on without transport limitation in 844<sup>6</sup>. However, the charters never mention the Indre river although others tributaries of the Loire river are listed like the Vienne, the Sarthe or the Mayenne for example. Regarding these elements, the state of the river Indre has been considered as non-navigable from the Carolingian times (ZADORA-RIO, 1992, 23). A state which should be linked to the presence along the rivers of numerous mills mentioned in the 9<sup>th</sup> century charters (NOIZET, 2007, 51).

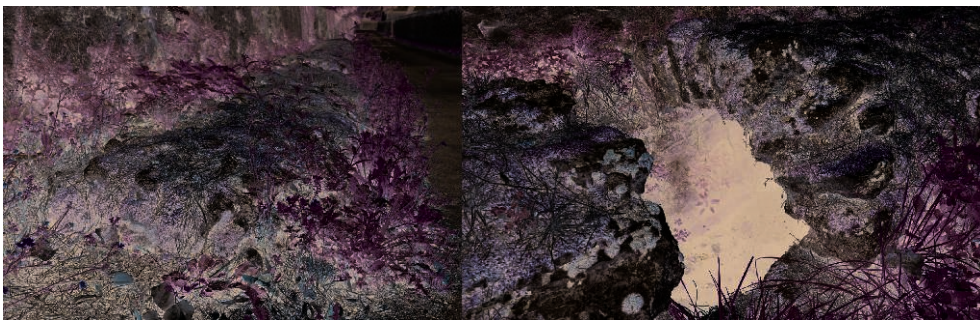
## The non-navigability of the river Indre: a complex case

- 4 The list of rivers named in these tax exemptions has been interpreted as the map of the rivers navigated by the monastery's boats, but it does not prove that the unnamed rivers like the Indre were non-navigable. If we look at the mentions in details, we can notice that as a matter of fact, the text includes all the rivers of the kingdom in 807 (« *per omnia flumina in regno nostro* »), in 831 (« *per diversa flumina in regno* ») or in 844 (« *per caetera diversa flumina regni nostri* »). The issue could probably be rephrased to "why are some rivers named in these documents and others not?". One line of research concerns the significance of the waterways: the cruised rivers could more likely be taxed by the officers of the Carolingian power, and the Indre didn't belong to this category. Aside this argumentation, the passage of boats on the stream is still supposed to be blocked by the presence of water mills along its route.
- 5 In Touraine, no Carolingian mills have been identified in archaeological excavations, making the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> charters the only historical sources documenting this matter. In the cartulary of Cormery, the first mills located with a toponym are mentioned in an act of 844 referring to an exchange between the monastery and the bishop of Tours<sup>7</sup>. The three names involve places located around Cormery: "Evena" matches the municipality of Esvres-sur-Indre, "Avon" is a locality set in the same area and "Troicis" refers to the village of Truyes. Theoretically, these mills were supposedly located on the banks of the Indre river (LORANS 1996, 48; GUICHANE, 1998, 74). By observing in details the text referring to the mills in the cartulary of Cormery, we observed that there were no explicit mentions of the watermills on the river until the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when they were sometimes described on river banks. At a European level, the watermills described in the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> texts are generally located in the headwaters of the rivers or on small tributaries (LOHRMANN, 1989, 371; ROUILLARD, 2013, 4). It is therefore questionable to presume that the Carolingian mills of Cormery mentioned in 844 were stationed on the Indre river. On the cadastre of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we identified three watermill spots with the same pattern, in the area of Truyes, Avon and Esvres. These watermills were not established on rivers but on springs, which are numerous on the hillsides of the valley. For example, the first mill of Avon was built on a spring, which allowed the creation of a water reserve for the mills. Later in the medieval period, they built a second mill directly on the stream of the Indre river (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - The watermills of Avon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century cadastre

- 6 In Truyes, there were even two mills: the first was located directly on the spring in the heart of the village and the second situated below the hill<sup>8</sup>. The water of the spring was partially channeled by an aqueduct which probably goes back to antiquity and allowed to fill a pool with water for the mill (Figure 3).

Figure 3 - Photography of the aqueduct of Truyes



- 7 Regarding this analysis, the arguments of the non-navigability of the Indre river during the Carolingian times doesn't seem to be confirmed<sup>9</sup>. The lack of archaeological evidence forces us to be cautious, but the Indre river can probably be embedded in the navigable network of St Martin and Cormery during the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

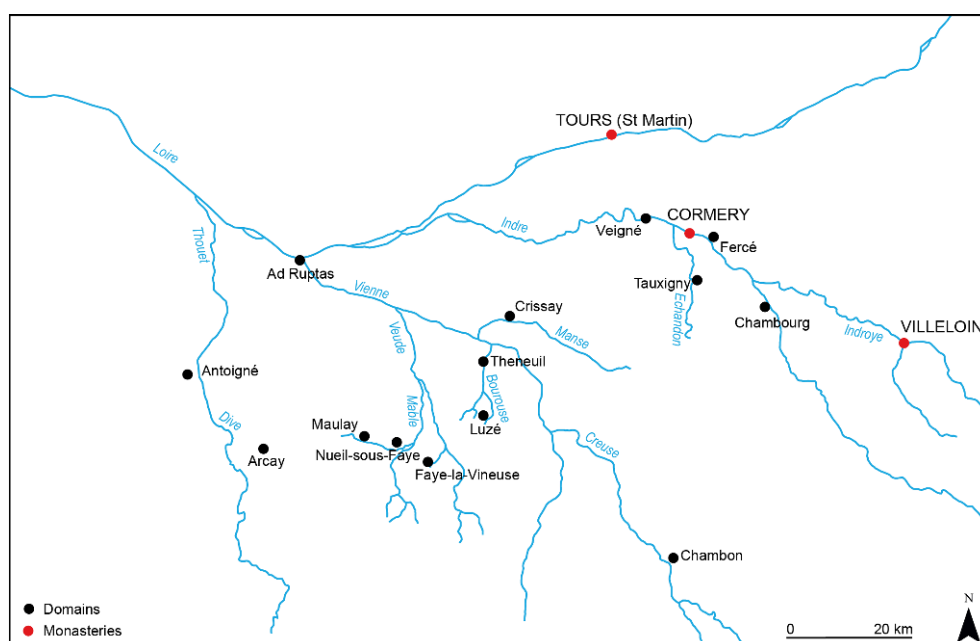
## The network of Cormery in the Loire valley

- 8 Cormery developed its own network of *villae* in the Loire valley during the 9<sup>th</sup> century and almost all these domains were located in the Indre valley or near a tributary of the Loire or the Vienne rivers: the Veude, the Dive, the Manse, the Creuse, the Bourouse...



(Figure 4). Most likely, the monks of Cormery used the hydrographic system to carry resources from their domains to the monastery in the Indre valley. Around the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the monastery was powerful enough to create itself a new monastic settlement called Villeloin with the financial help of local landlords<sup>10</sup>. Villeloin was established on the Indrois river, a tributary of the Indre river, upstream of Cormery. One charter of the 9<sup>th</sup> century tells us that the monastery of Cormery owned some warehouses in the port of Rest for trading and shipping purposes<sup>11</sup>. As St Martin of Tours, Cormery probably used the port of Rest as a point of transshipment to redeploy the resources from its domains in the west. Cormery also had fishing activities in the port of Rest according to the charter which describes a drawn net.

Figure 4 - The domains of Cormery during the 9<sup>th</sup> century



Original map from NOIZET, 1997, p. 200; modification POUYET 2020

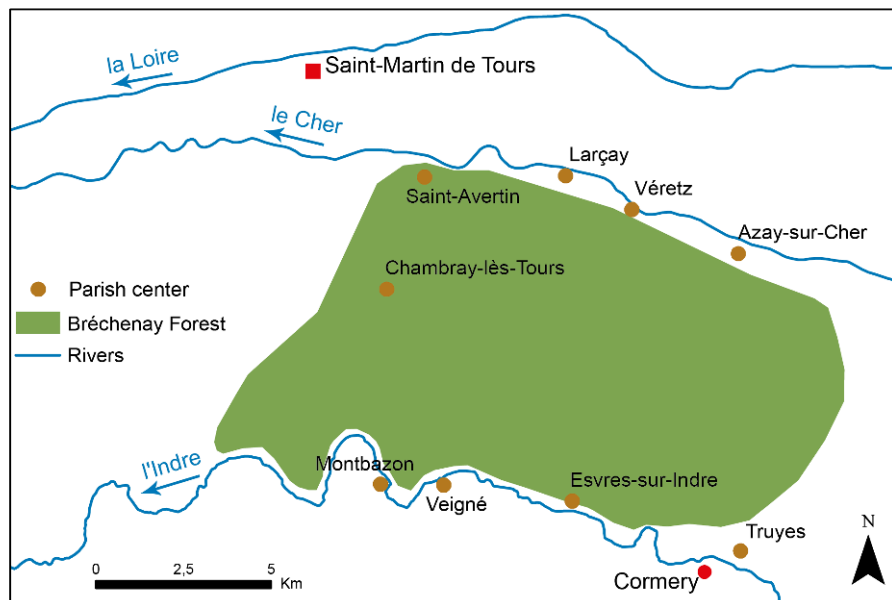
- 9 By boat the transport time between Cormery and the port of Rest, approximately 75 km, could be made in one day sailing down the Indre and then the Loire river. The other way round was probably much longer if we refer to the estimation of 15 km a day upstream, even with draught animal power (LEBECQ, 2011, 191). To reach Cormery from Rest by the river, the boats needed at least 4 or 5 days. It is still far better than the use of carriages harnessed by animal power – oxen or mules – that we can estimate between 10 and 20 km a day. However, the short distance between Saint Martin of Tours and Cormery, less than 20 kilometers, does not exclude the use of ground transportation for direct exchanges between the two monasteries.
- 10 The nature of the transported goods is almost never directly mentioned in the written sources. The question must be examined with another perspective: what kind of resources could have been produced or brought in the Indre valley? The 9<sup>th</sup> century charters sometimes describe the composition of the domains close to Cormery including the forest, fields, meadows, vineyards, pastures, arable and unusable lands which are mentioned in these same sources.

## The resources usually transported by waterway: cereals, wood and wine

- 11 From all the potential resources produced in the Indre valley, three of them were particularly suitable to be transported by boat due to their weight: cereals, wood and wine (CHAPELOT and RIETH, 1995, 126).
- 12 During the Antiquity, the Indre valley was already an important place of production of cereals to supply the Roman city of *Caesarodunum* at the position of the actual city of Tours (POIRIER 2014). In addition to that, Elisabeth Lorans pointed out that according to the Middle Ages charters, there was a meaningful number of references of soil exploitation in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> written sources, showing probably the importance of the production of cereals in the valley (LORANS, 1996, 158). An interesting aspect of this question concerns St Martin of Tours and its grinding process. Helene Noizet noticed that the canons didn't have any mills near their location, and that they probably had their cereals ground on floating mills on the Loire or in their domains not far away<sup>12</sup>. In light of the study of the Indre valley mills outlined earlier, it is highly possible that St Martin used these facilities to produce the flour and brought it back to Tours by waterways.
- 13 In the medieval society, wood was an omnipresent resource used for many purposes and especially as softwood lumber. For the abbeys, it wasn't necessarily easy to obtain in the appropriate shape. For example, in 859, Loup of Ferrières, asked another abbot called Berthold to give him twenty trees from his forest for the purpose of building a boat<sup>13</sup>. After this event, Ferrières received from Odon some forest that belonged before to the abbey of Corbie<sup>14</sup>. For St Martin of Tours or Cormery, the information linked to this resource in the Carolingian charters are very sparse and have not been yet fully exploited. However, the existence of an important forest called Bréchenay, located between the Indre and the Cher rivers, is attested for the first time by a charter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century a reporting a conflict concerning the use of the wood involving the monastery of Cormery<sup>15</sup>. This forest almost disappeared around the 16<sup>th</sup> century to be replaced by agro-pastoral activities (**Figure 5**). The data recorded in archaeological sites located in this area show us that the forest cover was very sparse during the Antiquity (YVARD, 1995, 554-555; JOLY, 2014). Most likely this forest has been established between the early Middle Ages and the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries when it reached its maximum surface (JACQUET, 2003, 133-134). Is there a possible connection between this expansion and the monastic activities of the settlement of Cormery? The answer is probably yes if we compare to the use of the forest by the abbey of Cormery at another period, between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century; but many actors were probably involved in the management of this resource like the abbey of St Julien of Tours or the archbishop of Tours (POUYET, 2019, 135-136). Around the 9<sup>th</sup> century, we can assume that Cormery and St Martin fully exploited the wood of the forest of Bréchenay for the building purposes.



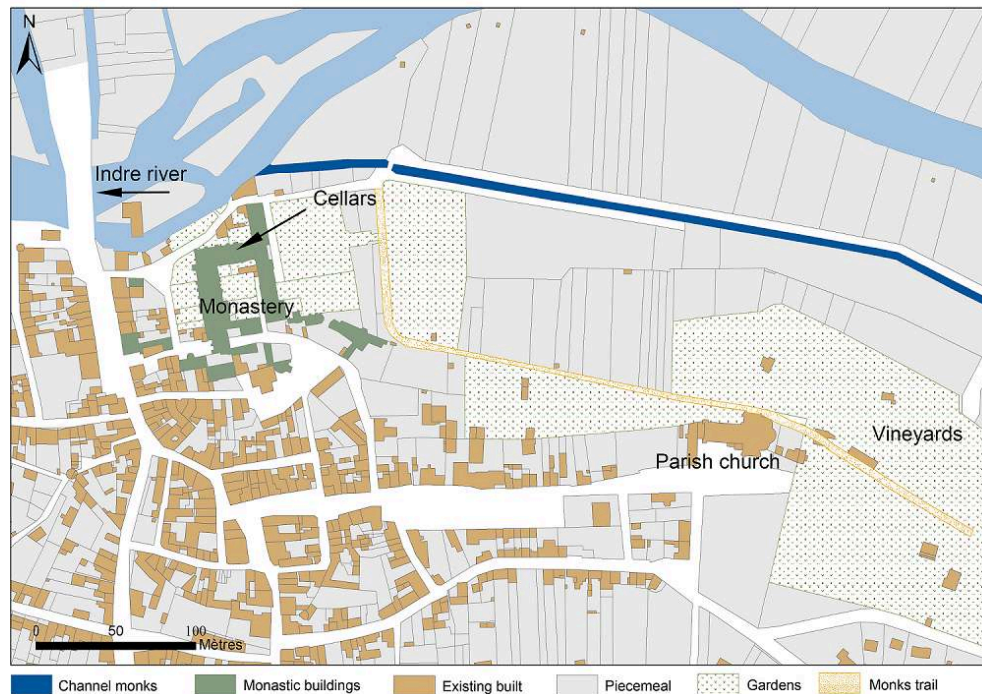
Figure 5 - Presumptive limits of the forest of Bréchenay



- 14 At the Carolingian times, the wine production of the abbey was relatively well-known. Beyond a simple product of consumption, it was also used as currency on markets and fairs (DEVROEY and LAPEYRE, 1984, 583). The French wine from the Paris area was shipped throughout the whole Frankish territory and even in Northern Europe (MCCORMICK, 2001, 651). The wine produced in the Loire valley was apparently better than the one produced in the Parisian abbeys according to the polyptych of Irminon, but this assessment did not refer explicitly to the Touraine area (TANGE, 1997, 951). The production of wine in this area was rather kept for local markets during the medieval times, it started to be shipped beyond around the 15<sup>th</sup> century (LETURCQ and LAMMOGLIA, 2018, 31-33).
- 15 Vineyards are mentioned in the charters of the 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Loire and the Vienne valleys, but also in the domains located near Cormery. A chapter of the *Vita Alcuini* describes the delivery of wine to the monks of Cormery by Alcuin which was abbot of St Martin at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century (VEYRAD-COSME, 2017, 287). Did the young monastery lack of a vineyard ready to produce, or should we consider it as an exceptional event, the gift of a better-quality wine? In any case, the community of St Martin of Tours had largely the means to provide the monks of Cormery according to estimates which assesses the production of several thousands of hectolitres per year (NOIZET, 2003, 208).
- 16 In Cormery, a topographical singularity of the monastic organization could be related to this issue. The cellars of the monastery, built around the 12<sup>th</sup> century, are located in the north part of the cloister (which is situated at the north of the church like the monastery of Villeloin and Saint-Julien de Tours) in front of the river (Figure 6). This position was usually the place of the refectory (at the opposite of the church), like in most of the Benedictine abbeys of Touraine. In Cormery, the refectory of the 13<sup>th</sup> century was located in the west part of the cloister close to the road. The cellar location could be linked to a former use related to the navigation of the river or to the exploitation of the vines. At the east of the monastery, an important vineyard which

surrounded the parish church was exploited by the monks and the villagers of Cormery at least since the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>16</sup>.

Figure 6 - Localization of the monastery, the parish church and the vineyards in Cormery



## The range of the exchange network of Cormery

- 17 From the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Cormery obtained from Charles the Bald the right to hold a weekly market near the monastery and also to organize an annual fair the day of the conversion of St Paul<sup>17</sup>. In Meuse, Georges Despy analyses the rural market as “a commercial relay between the rural areas and the towns” (DESPY, 1968, 163-168). By prolonging this thinking, we can interpret Cormery’s rights as the will to create an exchange node, a relay which allowed the Indre valley to join the Loire valley exchange network. Most likely, the role of the monastery was not limited to purchasing goods and collecting taxes but also to sell its own production, like St Denis monks in the 8<sup>th</sup> century (TANGE 1997: 943-955).
- 18 The right of holding an annual fair on January, 25<sup>th</sup> is even more significant. According to the work of Michael McCormick, Cormery and St Maixent are the two only references that we know of today for the western half of Francia, if we exclude Rouen and Paris (MCCORMICK, 2001, map. 22.1). The short length of these fairs - which only lasted for a day, stated probably the small size of these events at the beginning<sup>18</sup>. The significance of this fair is difficult to assess, it could have been established to attract merchants of rare products needed for the activities of the scriptorium, liturgy, medicine or even cooking. For example, the monks of Corbie abbey used to buy gold dust, incense, myrrh and pepper in Cambrai, probably during the fair of St Gély (DEVROEY, 2003, 133).



monastery of Cormery produced maybe itself some vegetable oil in its domains: in a charter of 844, some “oleae”<sup>22</sup> mentioned near Avon could refer to olive trees or some others oil-fruits<sup>23</sup>. In addition, we have known that this domain of Avon was equipped with a watermill in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, which could have been used to manufacture the oil.

## Conclusion

- 22 The establishment of the monastery of Cormery in the Indre valley was a strategic decision linked to the supply policy of the canons of St Martin of Tours. After studying the Carolingian acts, the topographic features of the 9<sup>th</sup> century watermills have been reviewed and the navigability of the Indre river appears very likely. The supposedly increase of the circulation and exchanges around the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century testifies the vitality of the exchange system based on the hydrological network of the Loire valley. The implementation of a weekly market and an annual fair in Cormery contributed to this process, which underlines the leading role of the monastery in the territory enhancement like other monastic settlements of the Frankish world during the same period (LEBECQ, 2000, 129-133).

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## NOTES

1. This specific problematic was the subject of a communication given at the "40<sup>e</sup> journées internationales de l'Association française d'Archéologie mérovingienne (AFAM)" in Nantes in October (3-5<sup>th</sup>) 2019 (POUYET, *in press*).
2. These charters were compiled by Joachim Perion at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they were then edited in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the abbot Bourassé in 1861. A very happy initiative because the original cartulary of Perion burned in the fire of the library of Tours during WWII.
3. The chart of foundation recalls this function « *quam et pro stipendio fratrum ibidem in Dei servitio habitantium, necnon consolatione peregrinorum* » (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 1).
4. The first abbot Jacob appears in the text in 831 (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 10) but it's definitively under the abbacy of Audacher from 837 that the independence of Cormery increased (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 11).
5. « *in monasterio quod est constructum in honore sancti Pauli Apostoli, in Loco qui dicitur Cormaricus licentiam haberent naves duas per Ligerim fluvium, et Meduanam, sive Sartam, et Ledum, vel Viennam, huc illucque pro necessitatibus dirigendi...* » (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 3).
6. « *ut immunes ab omni teloneo naves quotquot sint necessariae per alveum Ligeris, et per Carum, Vigenam, Meduanam, Sartam, Sequanam et Ledum, vel per caetera diversa flumina, ob necessitates ipsius monasterii fulciendas, discurrere, nostra regalis decerneret auctoritas sequens morem praecedentium regum...* » (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 16).
7. « *[...] in pago Turonico, in condita Eveninse, inter duos locos in Evena farinarium I [...]; in Avon autem mansions VIII, et prata aripennos XV, farinarium I [...] in villa Troicis farinarios III...* » (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 15).



8. This mill is probably the one described in a chart of the beginning of the 11th century: « [...] *ut concederemus ei cum duobus successoribus quoddam farinarium more censili, cum uno arpenno de terra, quod est subter Troillum villam, non longe juxta ripam Agneris* » (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 34).
9. The complete study is available on the chapter 3 of the PhD thesis (POUYET, 2019).
10. The foundation charter is edited in the cartulary of Cormery (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 17) and in the collection of acts of Charles le Chauve (TESSIER, 1943, n° 131).
11. « *mansiones quoque in Condate de villa Reste que dicuntur Ad Rupas, quas ad compendium navium solamenque piscium, unde et eis tractum sagene concessit in Ligere de memorata villa Reste...* » (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 18).
12. « les chanoines se soient fait livrer directement en farine et aient fait moudre leurs grains ailleurs qu'à Tours, soit directement dans leur *villae*, soit dans des moulins non loin de Tours [...] » (NOIZET, 2007 : 59).
13. « je comptais vous prier [...] de vouloir bien nous faire cadeau de vingt arbres, dans votre bois de Marnay... » (LEVILLAIN, 1964, n° 105).
14. « Envoyez-nous avant le début de septembre, selon nos conventions, si l'occasion ne se présente pas avant, les frères qui doivent nous assigner une partie de votre forêt » (LEVILLAIN, 1964, n° 106).
15. BOURASSE, 1861, n° 55.
16. Some vines are mentioned in the text of the establishment of the chapel St-Martin in the abbatial church in 1322 by the knight Pierre de la Charpraie: « [...] Item Thomas Deradon sept solz sex deniers et ung chappon et demy sur la vigne do cimitière que fust à la femme Gueignart. Regnau Babin bochier cinq solz et ung chappon de sa vigne, séant audict leu. Jehan Camuseau bouchier tres solz cinq deniers et maille sur sa vigne séant audict leu, une ruete entre deux. Macé Guibert le genre tres solz cinq derniers et maille de sa vigne séant audic leu. Phelippin de Rudebor dix solz, deux chappons, sur les vignes de celluy leu et dou Bruillaz, près des vignes au sacretain... » (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 117).
17. « *Insuper etiam petiit majestatem pietatis nostrae ut in omni hebdomada absolute mercatum juxta idem monasterium possit haberi, et aliud mercatum annuale in festivitate Conversionis beati Pauli, octavo kalendas februarii...* » (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 16).
18. The length of a fair in days reflected approximately "the distances which merchants travelled to attend that market" (MCCORMICK 2001: 648). By comparison, the fair of St-Denis lasted several days at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and up to four weeks at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.
19. In 1443, the monks had the right to organize two fairs the Sunday in September and November (not in January like in the 9<sup>th</sup> century) and they ask the king Charles VII to modify the date of these fairs: "les religieux, abbé et couvent de Saint Poul de Cormery [...] ont droict de toute ancienneté d'avoir deux foires en ladicte ville de Cormery, don't l'une d'icelles estoit tenue le premier dimenche de septembre et l'autre le dimanche devant la saint André, esquelles foires affluait grand nombre de merchandz et autres gens qui y venoyent de plusieurs parts, lieux et contrées [...]" (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 132).
20. « *ut monachi qui in Cormarico monasterio [...], licentiam haberent duas naves per Ligerim fluvium et Viennam et Carum et Tavagum [...]* » (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 8).
21. BOURASSE, 1861, n° 25.
22. « *in Avon autem mansiones VIII, et prata aripennos XV, farinarium I, et tres partes ex altero, et inter oleas et vineas et terram arabilem aripennos ccxx* » (BOURASSE, 1861, n° 15).
23. However, the cultivation of olive trees so far north would be surprising.

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## ABSTRACTS

The *cella* of Cormery was established in the Indre valley at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century by an abbot of St Martin of Tours. The small monastery was located approximately 20 km from the famous funerary complex, which housed the remains of the bishop Martin. The supply of St Martin's people was based on the river system of the Loire valley, which allowed the carriage of resources from the countryside to Tours. The settlement of Cormery is excluded from this network because the Indre River was not supposed to be navigable during the Carolingian period because of the presence of mills along its route. On the basis of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century charters of the monastery, let us propose to reconsider this hypothesis and include Cormery into the monastic exchange network of the Loire valley.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Loire, St Martin of Tours, Cormery, Indre, carolingian, Benedictine

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