



## Wall Painting of Saint Christopher



Until 1950 huge wooden panelling which looked like marble covered the church walls and held up some altars. It was decided then to take them off in order to bare the beautifully cut stonework.

Through the lime coating which covered the right pillar some evidence of colour could be guessed and made way to a wall painting: 5m high and 3,20 large, the bottom of which was destroyed.

Dampness might carry on damaging it. In 2002 the painting was removed, restored and then hung on an inert frame separate from the wall.

This painting goes approximatively back to the "Golden Legend" from Dominican Brother Jacques de la Voragine (13th century) and adds to it what seems to be the memory of an incident and perhaps of a wish as well as coats of arms of donors. Saint Christopher whose real name was Reprobus (the outcast) came from the Land of Canaan where Giants (among them, Goliath) used to live. He was supposed to be 13 feet tall that is 4 metres. That's exactly his size on the painting. Intent as he was only to serve the most powerful master, he first went to a prince. The castle on the top right-hand corner could tell the story.



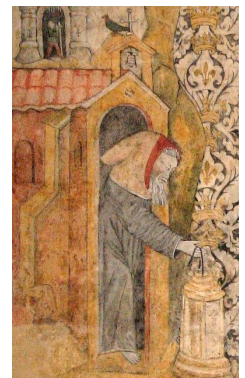
But this prince feared the Devil and Reprobus left him to serve the Devil himself. At the turn of a path, both happened upon a cross and seeing it, the Devil ran away. Under the castle a dragon (the Devil) can be seen moving away from a calvary while Reprobus dressed in medieval outfit (from Charles VII's reign) is about to leave him to look for that Christ able to frighten the Devil away.

Above, a unicorn, a symbol of purity, could represent Christ.



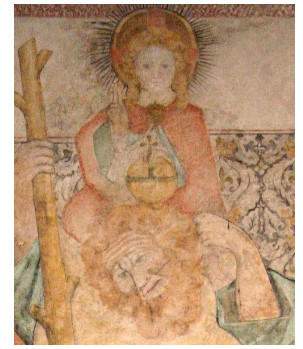
While immersed in his quest, Reprobus met a hermit named Babylas whom a crow daily bought bread to. On the left a hermit can be seen getting out of a tiny chapel with a bell and a black bird on the top. But Reprobus had served the Devil so Babylas gave him a punishment: he had to help pilgrims cross the river carrying them on his wide shoulders as there was no bridge.

One day as he was carrying a child, he nearly drowned because the child was quite heavy. That was Jesus bearing the weight of the world. Reprobus became Christophoros "who carries Christ".



The painting represents Christopher wearing a red-lined green coat on which there are two people, a layman and a clergyman. His feet are deep in the river and he braces himself with difficulty on a long and rough stick. He is carrying Christ on his shoulders, crowned by a halo.

Christ's right hand raised as for a blessing, his left foot in his carrier's hand.



After this adventure Christopher went and preached the Gospel.

He planted his stick in the ground and it got covered with palms and dates, arousing conversion of many spectators. But prefect Danus had him thrown in jail. At the top left an oriental-style palace can be seen. In the middle a window with bars opens while a prisoner can be seen through them.



As he had not renounced his faith, Christopher was sentenced to death, 400 archers were meant to stab him. Only one of them can be seen on the painting facing a naked man tied to a post. Behind him, a bearded man wearing a kind of tiara watches the scene. One can see an arrow which has just got stuck in his eye. Indeed, none of the arrows shot at Christopher reached him and one of them having turned back blinded one of the prefect's eyes. Seeing that, Christopher offered the executioner his head for his blood to be mixed with mud so that the victim could recover his eyesight. As a result of this miracle, the latter was converted and with him, his family and many people who were attending the scene.

At the bottom of the painting one can see a ship like those used in the 14th and 15th centuries, unrelated to the legend. A look-out keeps a watch on the horizon from the topmast, a passenger seems to be handing out something to a sea-monster and another passenger seems to be in poor shape. Big sea-monsters are infesting the water. From the mast hangs a shield with coat of arms similar to the Bony de Lavergne family's. This scene probably illustrates a tragic episode when sailors from this family asked for Saint Christopher's protection



At the bottom left a knight wearing his armour can be seen, his sword on his side, his hands joined in prayer and in front of him a large helmet topped with a feather like those used in the 15th century. Above this praying figure, a shield holds the following arms : "quarterly : 1 and 4, gules three annulets argent ; 2 and 3 gules, a fesse argent in chief three estoiles, lined up in fesse". The arms of quarters 1 and 4 are Bony's.

Abbot Martial Bony de La Vergne had the stalls carved and is probably one of the donors at the origin of the painting. He had one brother named Christopher. The other arms are likely those of a second donor but are still unknown to us.

