Dagobert also economically invigorated Saint-Denis by establishing the 'Foire de la Saint-Denis' (Crosby 10) in 635 or 636. This fair was very important as it drew foreign merchants to the area and was a precursor for later events like the Saint-Mathias and Lendit fairs. Thus, not only was pilgrimage to Saint-Denis owed to the miraculous legend of its namesake martyr but it was an important commercial center as well.
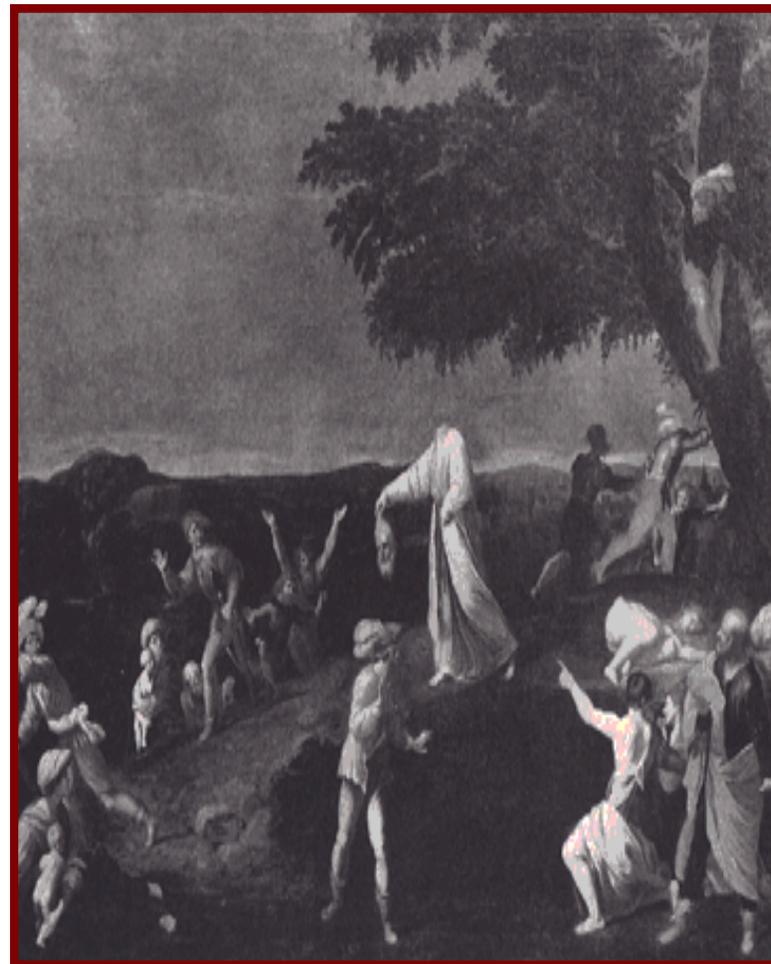
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THE BEHEADING OF SAINT DENIS AND COMPANIONS

Saint Denis and Companions
Martyrs

Feast day: Oct 9

**Saint Denis after his execution,
carrying his severed head and reciting psalms
as he made a two-mile journey to his resting place.**

SAINT DENIS AND COMPANIONS

Bishop of Paris, and martyr. Born in Italy, nothing is definitely known of the time or place, or of his early life. His feast is kept on the 9th of October. He is usually represented with his head in his hands because, according to the legend, after his execution the corpse rose again and carried the head for some distance. That, however, while still very young he was distinguished for his virtuous life, knowledge of sacred things, and firm faith, is proved by the fact that Pope Fabian (236-250) sent him with some other missionary bishops to Gaul on a difficult mission. The Church of Gaul had suffered terribly under the persecution of the Emperor Decius and the new messengers of Faith were to endeavor to restore it to its former flourishing condition. Denis with his inseparable companions, the priest Rusticus and the deacon Eleutherius, arrived in the neighborhood of the present city of Paris and settled on the island in the Seine. The earliest document giving an account of his labors and of his martyrdom (Passio SS. Dionsyii, Rustici et Eleutherii), dating from the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century and wrongly attributed to the poet Venantius Fortunatus, is interwoven with much legend, from which, however, the following facts can be gleaned.

"Saint Denis" On the island in the Seine Denis built a church and provided for a regular solemnization of the Divine service. His fearless and indefatigable preaching of the Gospel led to countless conversions. This aroused the envy, anger and hatred of the heathen priests. They incited the populace against the strangers and importuned the governor Fescenninus Sisinnius to put a stop by force to the new teaching. Denis with his two companions were seized and as they persevered in their faith were beheaded (about 275) after many tortures. Later accounts give a detailed description of the confessors' sufferings. They were scourged, imprisoned, racked, thrown to wild beasts, burnt at the stake, and finally beheaded. Gregory of Tours simply states: "Beatus Dionysius Parisiorum episcopus diversis pro Christi nomine adfectus poenis praesentem vitam gladio immente finivit" (Hist. Franc. I, 30). Their bodies were rescued from the River Seine, the bodies of the three holy martyrs received an honorable burial through the efforts of a pious matron named Catulla and a small shrine was erected over their graves. Later a chapel built over their tomb later became the Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Denis. This was later on replaced by a beautiful basilica (egregium templum) which Venantius celebrated in verse (Carm. I, ii).

St. Denis was one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers (feast 8-8). During the Middle Ages, especially in France and Germany these saints were credited with particularly efficacious intercessory power. All had/have also individual feast days. Their special powers of intercession are connected with incidents in their stories. For example, St. **Denis is shown with his head in his hands; therefore, he is invoked against diabolic possession, headache, rabies, frenzy, and strife.**

The legend of Saint-Denis, first bishop of Lutetia (Roman Paris), is a complex and controversial tale of a decapitated martyr. A man so imbued with Christian faith and devotion that immediately after his execution he was able to carry his severed head and recite psalms as he made a two-mile journey from Montmartre to his now famous resting place. The primary myth describes him as Denis or Dionysius the Areopagite who converted to Christianity in Athens under the Apostle Paul. Following Paul's death, Pope Clement I sent from Rome a contingent of bishops, including Dionysius and two companions Rusticus and Eleutherius, on a mission to Gaul to convert the pagans. Once in France, the Emperor Domitian persecuted all Christians and Dionysius and his friends were the first to be arrested, tortured and then decapitated on the slopes of Montmartre. Soldiers were ordered to throw the bodies of Rusticus and Eleutherius into the Seine but a noble woman named Catulla easily inebriated the Roman soldiers, stole the bodies and reunited all three men for a proper burial where she erected a small monument in their honor. The monks of Montmartre, in the 7th century, believed their residence to be the true site of his execution but evidence from early texts say it took place in Catulliacum or present day Saint-Denis. There is archeological evidence of a large Roman building and pagan and Christian cemeteries. The strategic location of Saint-Denis on the north road close to Paris and close to the Seine, would have presumably been a good location for a Roman *castrum* (Crosby7) or guardpost and camp. 'Normally, an execution such as Denis' decapitation would in Roman times take place outside of a city in an armed camp' (Crosby 7).

Saint-Genevieve, the patron saint of Paris, is named as the one who inspired the building of the church in her devotion to the first Parisian martyr. But, it is Dagobert I who is considered the founder of the Saint-Denis Basilica. He is also responsible for seeding its reputation as the royal abbey. His patronage and generosity to the church in the 7th century allowed for its first major enlargement. Its incarnation as the first Gothic cathedral would come in the 12th century with the influence of Abbot Suger. Before Dagobert's interest, the Merovingian dynasty favored Saint-Germain-des-Pres. A few royal burials took place before his alterations, but after his death the basilica became known as the burial place of kings. 'By the end of the tenth century there were more royal tombs at Saint-Denis than in any other locality' (Crosby 9).