

Magic and Papyri in the Latin Voyage of Charlemagne to the East*

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SEVERAL MEDIEVAL texts of a tradition developed especially in the French-speaking lands tell the story of an imaginary voyage of Charlemagne to Jerusalem and Constantinople. Two of them particularly stand out: the Latin *Descriptio qualiter Karolus magnus clavum et coronam Domini a Constantinopoli Aquisgrani detulerit qualiterque Karolus Calvus hec ad Sanctum Dionysium retulerit* and an Anglo-Norman parody with a controversial title (either *Pilgrimage* or *Voyage of Charlemagne to Jerusalem and Constantinople*). The present research started with the purpose of studying the relationship between these two texts and the manner in which both of them reflect a shared made-up image of Byzantium through the lens of late ancient heritage, but ended up too large to be presented in a single study. I have therefore opted for two separate articles, focusing respectively on the Latin and on the French text. The present one deals with the “Greek whispers” in the Latin text. The other article, dedicated to the echoes of Byzantium and Antiquity in the Anglo-Norman parody of the 12th century, was submitted to the *Bulletin of the Christian Archaeological Society* (*Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρίας*) in Athens.

Since this research focuses on the Latin text, one should be informed that the manuscript tradition of the *Descriptio* poses a series of problems. Its first manuscript (P) is in the National Library in Paris (BnF, f. lat. 12710). It was made of every scrap of parchment available, including the irregular margins normally cropped during the quire assemblage. Our text begins on the second column of f. 1v and ends at f. 5r, where a *Narratio clericorum Remensium super depositionem Ebbonis* begins.¹ This late 12th century copy was edited by Gerhard Rauschen in 1890, but he made emendations from the *Vita Karoli Magni* version and from the Vienna manuscript, not to mention the editor’s own corrections of the Latin errors in the text.² A second manuscript is preserved in Rouen, Municipal Library, Y. 11 (12th-13th century); it features a similar text, with several passages removed.³ The third manuscript is preserved in the Library of the Medical Faculty in Montpellier. It dates back to the 13th century, presents a derived

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version, and was edited by Ferdinand Castets in 1892.⁴ The fourth one is the manuscript of Vienna, Austrian National Library, Codex Vindobonensis Palatinus 3398. This damaged 16th century quire contains 8 folios of the first part of the Montpellier text, even though the two may not be directly related.⁵ This last detail and the late redaction of the manuscript makes it less suitable for analysis.⁶ Last but not least, the *Vita Karoli Magni*, written in 1165, contains the first part of our text (without the appendix) in most of its many manuscripts. And the manuscript of Paris, National Library of France, f. lat. 2447 (14th century) contains the appendix with the translation of the relics by Charles the Bald.⁷

Even though the *Vita Karoli Magni* seems to be at the origin of the translation included in many vernacular renderings of Charlemagne's voyage to the East, I chose to use the Paris manuscript, as edited by Rauschen, and present only once, when the need arises, a different edition prepared by myself. The Paris manuscript is older and contains features that Castets judged to be *étrangetés*, particularly *une lettre en un langage qui prétend être de l'hébreu et qui rappelle plutôt l'idiome que Covielle soufflé au fils du Grand-Turc* (i.e. *sabir*, in reference to *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* by Molière).⁸ It is precisely because of these pseudo-Hebrew quotations and another Greek one (to be dealt with later in the present article) that I consider the Paris manuscript's bad Latin preferable to the polished language of the codices in Montpellier, Rouen, and *Vita Karoli Magni*. I believe that the Montpellier and Vienna versions are distorting an original more or less preserved by the Paris manuscript. I do not share Castets' opinion that the Paris text is a *brouillon*, and I have doubts concerning Nothomb's hypothesis that the emendations in the Paris manuscript were taken from the *Vita Karoli Magni*. For the time being, none of these problems is of immediate consequence, so it is preferable that they be dealt with later on in my analysis. It is much more useful to present a short summary of the story and to look at some of its particular features.

Charlemagne's Crusade, the Talking Birds, and Other Miracles

ONE DAY, the famous Charlemagne receives the visit of four envoys with two letters sent by Constantine, emperor of Constantinople, his son Leo, and the patriarch of Jerusalem. The latter had taken refuge in Constantinople together with many Christians from the Holy Land, because they had been chased away from their homeland by Saracens. Archbishop Turpin translates the letters in the vernacular tongue, and as soon as the message is understood (a cry for help and an angelophanic vision of Charlemagne in the dreams of the Byzantine emperor – a Byzantine emperor who bears the same name as Constantine the Great, as a sort of *nomen est omen*), Charlemagne gathers his army and leads it toward the East.

They get lost in a dark forest populated by wild or fabulous beasts, but Charlemagne has the excellent idea of singing the proper psalm verses for the occasion (Ps 99:35, Ps 118:36), therefore a bird appears. Charlemagne adds an antiphon following Ps 141:8,

and engages in a dialogue with the bird. The bird then leads Charlemagne and his army on the right track and the *Descriptio* tells us that even at the time of the redaction pilgrims passing through that land hear birds uttering the same words. The story is worth reading in full:

*Nam in via Iherusalem quidam lucus est, qui vix a peregrinis duorum dierum spacio valet transiri, in quo sunt etiam griphones ursi leones lince tigris et multe alie fere bestie, que sanguinis effusione gaudentes victimant homines. Quem locum Karolus magnus putans uno die posse se transire cum exercitu ingressus est summo mane; sed inclinata iam die et advesperascente, qui etiam densitate arborum fit obscurus, ingruente vero noctis obscuritate effectus est obscurior. Unde deviato iam exercitu et passim in arduis erranti imbrequae desuper inundante ac ita viris et iumentis lassatis nocte subobscura ipsemet castrametiri precepit. Transacto vero noctis silentio rex in pulvillo suo accubitatus inchoavit psalmos cantare. Sciebat enim litteras. Ast ubi hoc profeticum: ‘deduc me in semita mandatorum tuorum quia ipsam volui’, et ‘inclina cor meum in testimonia tua et non in avaritiam’ et reliqua psalmi coepit psallere, ex improviso ad aures eius evidenti-
tius vox cuiusdam alitis prope lectum clamantis ita incussit, ut quidam qui aderant ammiratione magna expectati a somno stuperent, dicentes hoc esse futurum rei prodigium, quoniam ales uti humana ratione videbatur eis. Sed imperator noster, ut paulo superius dictum est, orationem continuans hoc adiecit: ‘educ de carcere animam meam domine, ut confiteatur nomini tuo’. Verum et ad hoc ales intelligibilius clamare sic cepit: ‘France quid dicis, quid dicis? Quod accole ipsius patrie numquam antea quamlibet volucrum intelligibili tam ratione cantare se testificati sunt audire. Greci autem quasdam volucres sua tamen lingua regum salutationibus posse fungi asserunt ita: ‘(basileu amachos’, quod sic latine exponitur: ‘Salve Caesar invictissime’. Unde quia modo aperta latinitate usus convenienter regis orationi respondit, dubitandum non est, quin hic missus a Deo esset nuncius prosperitatis future, quo ipsum suumque exercitum ad meliora revocaret; quem prosecutus est parvula semita, donec recognito illo calle, quem die preterrito amiserant, vocem minime audierunt. Peregrini tamen, qui illa via ad Iherusalem gradiuntur, dicunt se alites usos huiusmodi voce audisse atque agricolas eiusdem patrie ab illo die, quo Karolus magnus a recto excidit itinere, semper huiusmodi voce audire cantum ab his avibus illatum referunt solitos sibi enarrasse.’⁹*

Even though hagiographical accounts routinely make use of folkloric motifs or themes, this particular story has more elements of romance than others. There is no need to dig too deep for enchanted forests. There was the Old Norse *Myrkviður* (the basis for Tolkien’s *Mirkwood*), there was also the Old French (and Arthurian) forest of *Brocéliande*, and there were many others in the literatures of the European continent. Since the forest was the home of monsters, witches, and fairies (or griffins, lions, bears, lynx, and tigers herein), it simply provided the setting for a magical encounter. Even Julius Caesar believed that unicorns lived in the Hercynian forest.¹⁰

The speaking bird is also a folkloric motif. The bird that we encounter in the *Descriptio* may be referenced according to two types in Stith Thompson’s motif-index of folk-literature: B211.9 (speaking bird) and B450 (helpful bird), but there is also the subcate-

gory B256.5.1 (birds protecting saints). Birds speak and sing hymns in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani abbatis*.¹¹ But there are also birds in the *Alexander* romance, in the description of the palace of Cyrus, dating back to the time of Antiquity, etc.¹² Talking birds are everywhere, including the chivalric romances.¹³ There's no need to look for a source of our bird, especially when one already knows that Old French Charlemagne romances generally emphasize the exotic wonders and treasures of the East.

It is therefore natural that many other wonders are summoned in our narrative and they present themselves up in arms. Another interesting thing, for instance, is the use of Greek words. The anonymous author tells his audience that previously some birds (different ones, in other places—see for this the use of *quasdam*) used to greet the Byzantine emperors with the formula *chere basileu amachos* (χαῖρε βασιλεῦ ἄμαχος), meaning *salve Caesar invictissime*. To my mind, this is a variation on the ancient story of the poor man in Rome who taught one of his two ravens to salute Mark Anthony and the other Octavian Augustus, depending on who the winner of the Civil War would be.¹⁴ This time the source of our narrative is evident, but it is hard to say if the author of the *Descriptio* had read Macrobius. He was simply delighted that his bird didn't speak Greek. It spoke plain Latin (*aperta latinitas*), which was a sign from God, and those birds continued to do so even after Charlemagne's passage.¹⁵ The pilgrims and local peasants are said to be able to testify of such wonders.

Messing things up when it comes to the Greek language was not a big thing in Western narratives. Suffice it to mention the Greek mumble-jumbled words included in the 12th century Old French romance of *Floire and Blancheflor*. But this also means that the author had mixed feelings concerning the Greek language. Someone must have translated the Latin salutation from Macrobius for him, but didn't do a perfect job. The translator chose the proper Vocative form of the noun (*βασιλεῦ*) but forgot the Vocative of the adjective (*ἄμαχος*). A Greek speaker would have provided our author with *χαῖρε βασιλεῦ ἄμαχε*; or maybe his source did that, but our writer messed things up. It should also be pointed that this formula is copied as *anichos basileu khere* in the Montpellier manuscript, further proof that this other text is a second-rate copy.¹⁶ A similar reading is found in the *Vita Karoli Magni* (*anichos basiley chere*).¹⁷ Nevertheless, the transcription of *βασιλεῦ* as *basiley* in the latter makes one wonder if the text was not transcribed in Greek capital letters in the original text, hence the use of the letter *Υ*.

But let's get back to the story. Charlemagne enters Constantinople, proceeds further on, vanquishes the pagans, saves Jerusalem, and reinstates the patriarch. Back in Constantinople, the French army wishes to go home, but the Greek emperor pleads with them to stay, or at least to receive some gifts. He assembles a list of precious things that resembles lavishly the catalogues of Oriental wonders also offered to the protagonists of chivalric novels or chansons de geste: *animalia multi generis tam bestiarum quam volucrum cariora varique coloris pallia et meliora gemmarum et preciosissimorum lapidum quoque insignia*.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the French refuse all the gifts. In this imaginary and ideal proto-crusade, the Westerners will not touch a single thing. But the Byzantine emperor insists, Charlemagne concedes, and the French choose to be rewarded only with relics.

As the story goes, Saint Helen had discovered many relics together with the wood of the Holy Cross, but she hid them and nobody knew where. After three days of fast-

ing and praying the cache of relics was found. The Crown of Thorns was the first one to be taken out and it had a wonderful smell. Daniel, bishop of Naples (*quidam Grecus Neapolis antistes nomine Danihel*), took the *thecam in qua spinea corona erat*, Charlemagne recited a long prayer asking for a miracle, *miracula tue passionis resurrectionisve*, and the miracle was produced.¹⁹ A heavenly dew descended upon the relic and its thorns began to bloom:

*...etenim ros celitus veniens statim lignum inebriavit et spinas ipsi insertas flores emit-
tere fecit ac inde suavitatis odor exiit ita magnus, ut hi qui aderant in templo preca-
rentur Dominum, nec se mutare nec tam suavem odorem amplius deficere.*²⁰

In the celestial light, Charlemagne sang Ps 27:7-9, started Ps 16:1, and when he got to the verse Ps 16:6, all the priests sang with him and ended together with Ps 17:6. Charlemagne, afraid that the flowers *ad terram caderent*, picked them in his *curiotheca dex-
tera, quae vulgari sermone dicitur quantus*. He next handed the glove to archbishop Ebrouin. But alas, the archbishop, blinded by tears, did not see Charlemagne and could not pick it up. The glove remained suspended in the air, to everybody's amazement (*fere per
unius hore spacium stetit uauantus in aere*).²¹ Charlemagne took the glove back and the flow-
ers transformed into manna, which is also preserved at the abbey of Saint-Denis at the
time of our author's writing.

More hymns inspired by psalms were sung, and the odour of the Crown of Thorns
cured *trecenti et unus homines infirmitatum diversarum*, who thanked the Lord in other
psalmis, ymnis et canticis spiritualibus. The French also found the Holy Cross's nails, the
shroud of the Lord, the shirt worn by the Virgin during childbirth, etc. Charlemagne
returns home with these treasures in a *sacrum de bubalino tergo factum*:

*...in quo spineam coronam et clavum frustrumque crucis et sudarium Domini cum aliis
sanctissimis reliquiis – nam sanctissime Matris Domini semper virginis Marie camisia
inerat, et cinctorium, unde puerum Iesum in cunabulis cinxerat, et brachium sancti
senis Symeonis – insuerat, et quiete deportans ad collum suspensum Ligmendon venit.*²²

On the way back, the relics cure countless sufferers (*ceci innumerabiles illuminati sunt,
demoniosi duodecim, leprosi octo, paralytici quindecim, claudi quatuordecim, manci triginta,
gibbosi quinquaginta et duo, febricitantes vero absque numero, caduci sexaginta quinque, gut-
turnosi plures*).²³ Finally arrived in Aachen, Charlemagne displays the relics. We are
given a more precise inventory: only eight thorns of the Holy Crown with a piece of
the wood from the same Crown, one of the nails of the Cross, wood of the Cross, the
Shroud, the shirt worn by the Virgin Mary during childbirth, and the diapers of baby
Jesus, as well as an arm of Simeon, the one who carried Jesus, and *alia quoque multa*.
Charlemagne established an annual feast in Aachen for the veneration of these relics.
He chooses the second week of June (Ember Days). A long list of prelates headed by
Pope Leo and Archbishop Turpin validates his arrangements.

The epilogue fast-forwards through two more reigns and arrives at Charles the
Bald, who founds the abbey of Saint-Corneille in Compiègne and is also kind to the abbey

of Saint-Denis.²⁴ He gives to these two churches part of the Aachen relics: Saint-Corneille receives the Holy Shroud (*sudarium Domini Compenii dimisit*), while Saint-Denis has the nail of the Cross, the Crown of Thorns, the wood of the Cross and other relics (*spineam Domini coronam et unum de clavis, qui in carne Eius fuerunt, et de linga crucis et alia quaedam ad ecclesiam ter beati Dionisii martiris devote attulit*). Charles the Bald transfers the Aachen feast to Saint-Denis, and maintains the date in memory of the feast established by his grandfather. This is the story of Ember Days celebration in Saint-Denis. But there's also an interesting detail about Charles the Bald and Compiègne. The *castrum* of this place was made *ad instar Constantinopolis urbis [...] ac ita parato opera suo nomine titularat sic apellans Karmopolis, ut Constantinus suo Constantinopolis*.²⁵ This provides us with an explanation for our anonymous author's insistence on Constantinople.

The List of Relics and the Multiple Origins of the Legend

I BELIEVE IT is interesting to take a short look at the catalogue of relics in later and earlier sources. In the French text of the *Bible du ms. BnF, f. fr: 763*, for instance, the anonymous author tells us that when Saint Helena found the Holy Cross she started looking for the nails. She discovered them and put them on the bridle of her son's horse. Everywhere Constantine went, fire and flames came out of that bridle, and thus he made many converts to Christianity. This mid-13th century French biblical poem tells us that Constantine took the nails off the bridle only when his death approached and placed them near the Cross.²⁶ The author was convinced of the validity of this account, because he had kissed the relics himself, and heard the Saint-Denis clergy tell the story, as well as the countless miracles operated by the relics:

*Maint miracle ont puis veüz
 Plusor gent pour lor grant vertuz.
 En Costantinoble et en France
 En a fait Deus mainte monstrance.
 I. clou en a a Saint Denis,
 O la corone ou tresor mis.
 Je l'i ai veü et baisié
 Ou tesmoinnaige dou clergié.
 De mainte grant enfermeté
 I ont li malade santé
 Qui le vont a Saint Denis requerre
 Por lor besoing, de mainte terre.*²⁷

This implies that our story permutated in later times, even before the translation of the Constantinopolitan Crown of Thorns in Paris in 1238. There were other versions of the story in circulation during the 12th and 13th centuries, since the French verse Bible doesn't mention anything about Charlemagne, its attention shifting towards Saints Helena and Constantine.

This is further confirmed by a passage in Suger (*videlicet clavo et corona Domini, et brachio sancti Symeonis*)²⁸ and another one in Rigord, referring to Charles the Bald (*Hic attulit ad ecclesiam ter beati Dionysii clavum et spineam coronam, et brachium sancti senis Simeonis, et cristam auream cum gemmis pretiosissimis et preciablem, et crucem auream cum lapidibus pretiosis*).²⁹ These other texts speak about the same relics without mentioning Charlemagne at all. And there was also the lost epitaph of Charles the Bald's tomb, composed in the 13th century. It talked about the relics, but without any mention of his illustrious grandfather.³⁰ I do not dare call to mind the entangled early stages of these relics' veneration for fear of straying too far from the present argument.³¹ I am not trying to evaluate the relics themselves, but to investigate the multiple sources used in the *Descriptio*, therefore I find it much more interesting to take a look at the possible literary origins of our catalogue of relics.

Research agrees that the tradition of Charlemagne's journey to the East is a little bit older. The *Translatio Sanguinis Domini* from the Benedictine abbey of Reichenau, written in c. 925, is a very short text compared to the *Descriptio*, but it speaks of Charlemagne acquiring relics of the Passion, including drops from the blood of Christ.³² The prefect of Jerusalem, Azan, is said to have wished a *foedus amicitie* with him. There comes again the foreign embassy motif, but Azan first approaches Pope Leo, promising him treasure from Jerusalem. The pope agrees, Charlemagne does not, but the Frankish ruler finally concedes and Azan brings his relics to the West. When Azan arrives in Corsica, Charlemagne sends two emissaries to see what the whole thing was about. One of the envoys was Hunfridus, ruler of Istria, the other was Waldo, abbot of Reichenau and confessor of Charlemagne. They saw the relics listed below:

*Haec sunt ergo illa dona honorabilia cunctoque orbi optatissima, et haec est illa gaza sacrosancta supraque omnes preciositates dignissima, quae de Corsica insula gloriosissimo imperatori Karolo delata est; Ampula una ex lapide onichino, de Salvatoris sanguine plena. Crucicula una ex auro et gemmulis fabrefacta, continens cruorem Christi per quatuor partes inclusum, et in medio portiunculam ligni Domini. Hanc eandem cruciculam, o bone Iesu, tuis modo Augiensibus ad tutelam et solatium nostri mittere dignatus es. Sit tibi, Christe, gloria lausque! Spinea corona, quae caput amabile Redemptoris nostri complexa est. Unus de clavis, qui delectabiles Christi articulos configebant. De ligno quoque Domini, in quo preciosa Christi membra pendebant. De sepulchro Domini, quod salutifero Christi corpusculo consecratum est. Praeter diversa etiam unguenta sive pigmenta, cum ceteris quoque muneribus variis, quibus augustus [i.e. Charlemagne] festive donatus est.*³³

The two emissaries took the relics to Sicily, where Waldo remained to guard them while Hunfridus proceeded to Ravenna. Charlemagne marched barefoot *quinquaginta miliaria* from Ravenna to Sicily, accompanied by his men. He then took the relics and kept some of them for the chapel where he would be buried, disseminating the rest in various sacred places. The anonymous writer takes pity on his readers and does not wish to bother them with tedious details in his small book (*modo taediosum est explicare, ne ob morosum opusculum ultra modum protelatum fastidians lector nauisare compel-*

latur), that is, he is afraid that the mystification would be discovered. He makes his point quickly: the *saluberrimus Christi sanguis, inclusus in the crucicula supradicta*, already praised during the description, is preserved in his monastery at Reichenau. The text goes on to tell us more about the privileges gained by Waldo for his Reichenau abbey and how Charlemagne made him abbot of Saint-Denis (*quod post aliquantum temporis rector monasterii sancti martyris Christi Dionysii ab imperatore preelectus est*). Next, the anonymous writer tells the story of Humfridus' longing for the *crucicula* and how he founded another monastery for it, as well as many events that do not concern us here. What should be noted in this narrative is that the monks of Saint-Denis could have gotten their idea from this text too, since they had been under the rule of the same Waldo.³⁴

This text's sources are also interesting. Latowsky noted that a real embassy from a certain Azan visited Charlemagne in 799, but this Azan was prefect of Huesca (Spain). The passage was recorded in the Royal Frankish Annals immediately after the visit from a monk bringing relics from the Holy Sepulchre. The passage is worth quoting in its two versions:³⁵

799. *Eodem anno monachus quidam de Hierosolimis veniens benedictionem et reliquias de sepulchro Domini, quos patriarcha Hierosolimitanus domno regi miserat, detulit. Azan praefectus civitatis, quae dicitur Osca, claves urbis per legatum suum cum muneribus transmisit. 800. Rex absolutum Hierosolimitanum monachum reverti fecit, mitens cum Zachariam presbiterum de palatio suo, qui donaria eius per illa sancta loca deferret.*

799. *Et Azan Sarracenus, praefectus Oscae, claves Urbis cum aliis donis regi misit, promittens eam se dediturum, si opportunitas eveniret. Sed et monachus quidam de Hierosolima veniens benedictionem et reliquias de loco resurrectionis Dominicae, quae patriarcha regi miserat, detulit Et rex natalem Domini in eodem palatio residens celebravit ac monachum reverti volentem absolvens Zachariam quandam presbyterum de palatio suo cum eodem ire iussit, cui et donaria sua ad illa veneranda loca deferenda commisit.*³⁶

This means that the anonymous author of Reichenau needed some facts in order to back up his mystification. I add to this that the monk Zachariah returned from his voyage the next year, accompanied by two Eastern monks. This again makes one think about other features from our *Descriptio*, such as the *vexillum*, of which the *Descriptio* makes use during Charlemagne's visit to the Holy Land:

800. *Eadem die Zacharias cum duobus monachis, uno de monte Oliveti, altero de sancto Saba de Oriente reversus Romam venit; quos patriarcha Hierosolimitanus cum Zacharia ad regem misit, quid benedictionis causa claves sepulchri Dominici ac loci calvariae, claves etiam civitatis et montis cum vexillo detulerunt. Quos rex benigne suscipiens aliquot dies secum detenuit et Aprilis mense remuneratos absolvit.*

800. *Eadem die Zacharias presbyter, quem rex Hierosolimam miserat, cum duobus monachis, quos patriarcha cum eo ad regem misit, Romam venit; qui benedictionis gra-*

*tia claves sepulchri Dominici ac loci calvariae cum vexillo detulerunt. Quos rex benigne benigne susceptos per aliquot dies secum detinuit et redire volens remuneratos absolvit.*³⁷

It is therefore probable that the monks of Saint-Denis also dug into some chronicles to pick up various features suiting their mystification. But these chronicles and the *Translatio Sanguinis* are not the only texts linked with the Saint-Denis account. A 967 (968?) Italian monk wrote that Charlemagne travelled to Jerusalem to meet Aaron, the king of Persia (Hārūn al-Rashīd), and three Greek contenders for the Eastern throne. In this pig-Latin account by the monk Benedict from the monastery Saint Andrew on Mount Soracte, north of Rome, Charlemagne leaves the pope's city with the latter's blessing, goes to Jerusalem to meet Aaron the Persian, is accompanied by the Persian to Alexandria, then the Frankish king proceeds to Constantinople alone. Aaron offers Charlemagne a lot of gifts in the church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the emperors of Constantinople also give him something: a relic of Saint Andrew. There is no talk of Saint Simeon the God-receiver's arm, but it is interesting to note that the Saint Andrew relic is, of course, preserved in the Italian monk's abbey of Soracte, because on his voyage back Charlemagne stops in Rome, meets the pope, grants him lands in Italy, and they both travel to Mount Soracte.³⁸

*...quanta vestes, et aromata, et ceteras horientalium terrarum opes ingentia, et dona Karulo concessit [Aaron]! Vertente igitur prudentissimus rex, cum Aaron rex usque in Alexandria pervenit; sicque letificantes Francis et Aggarenis, quasi consanguineis esset, dimissoque est Aaron rex a Karulo Magno in pace; in propria sua est reversus. Rex piissimus atque fortis ad Constantinopolitano hurbem, Naciforus, Michabel et Leo formidantes quasi imperium ei eripere vellet, valde subsceptu; quo cognito rex formidine eorum, pactum et fedus firmissimum posuit inter se, ut nulla inter partes cuilibet scandali remaneret occasio, erat enim semper Romanis et Grecis Francorum suspecta potentia. unde et illum Grecum est ad proverbium: ΤΟΝ ΦΡΑΝΚΟΝ ΦΙΛΟΝ ΕΧΙΣ, ΙΤΟΝΑ ΟΥΚ ΕΧΙΣ. Quod Latini dicunt: 'Francos abeto amicos'. Qui mox imperator cum quanta donis et munera, et aliquantulum de corpore sancti Andree apostoli, ad imperatoribus Constantinopolim accepto, in Italia est reversus! Roma veniens, et dona amplissima beato Petro constituit, ordinataque Hurbe et omnia Pentapoli et Ravenne finibus seu Tuscie, omnia in apostolici potestatibe concessit. Gratias agens Deo et apostolorum principi, et benedictione apostolica accepta, et a cuncto populo Romano Augusto est appellatus simul cum ipso pontifice usque ad montes Syrapti, ad monasterium Sancti Silvestri devenit. Deinde ad monasteria Sancti Andree cum pontifice summo adest; qui rogatus imperator ad pontifice, ut aliquantulum reliquiarum de corpore sancti Andree apostoli in hunc monasterium consecrationis constitueret; cuius loco positus est in hunc monasterium venerabile ecclesie, aput nos incognitum est. Victor et coronator triumphator rex in Francia est reversus.*³⁹

It has been implied that this other story could have influenced the *Descriptio*, especially since it involves Constantinople in the transfer of relics.⁴⁰ However, I am not convinced, since this story seems too frugal and too peripheral to gain such traction. I

personally think that there could have been other similar stories, and that this one from Italy could have just been built on those we do not yet know. There is nonetheless a feature which should interest us in this Charlemagne and Hārūn al-Rashīd friendly saga. The Greek proverb quoted in the middle of the story, often translated as “the Frank is a good friend but a bad neighbour,” actually comes from Einhard’s *Life of Charlemagne*:

Imperatores etiam Constantinopolitani, Niciforus, Michabel et Leo, ulro amicitiam et societatem eius expetentes complures ad eum misere legatos. Cum quibus tamen propter susceptum a se imperatoris nomen et ob hoc eis, quasi qui imperium eis eripere vellet, valde suspectum foedus firmissimum statuit, ut nulla inter partes cuiuslibet scandali remaneret occasio. Erat enim semper Romanis et Grecis Francorum suspecta potentia. Unde et illud Grecum extat proverbium: ton Phragkon philon echis, gitona ouk echis.⁴¹

This also explains the story of the three contenders for the Greek throne. Einhard speaks of three emperors immediately after speaking of Hārūn al-Rashīd (the same Aaron, king of the Persians). I believe there are two interpretations. Either the pig-Latin story of our 10th century monk was nothing but a fantasy derived from a Latin source badly understood, or it was a conscious choice based on cherry-picked features from Einhard. Whichever of the two may be nearest to the truth, it will be admitted that all of these stories are books written from books, and the makers of them hagiographic burglars.

This further leads me to believe that the presence of Emperor Constantine and his son Leo in the *Descriptio* refers to Constantine V the Dung-named (741–775) and Leo IV the Khazar (775–780). They could be taken from a reference somewhere, from a compilation—who knows?—much in the way in which the author of the *Descriptio* borrowed and altered Macrobius’ raven. There are no mentions of Constantine and Leo together in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, nor in Einhard (except for Leo alone), but they appear in other texts, whence our writer could have picked their names, knowing that both the father and the son lived and ruled in the times of Charlemagne.⁴²

The Two Letters Received by Charlemagne

THE OBSESSION with Charlemagne is a commonplace in Saint-Denis. After Abbot Suger, the monks expanded on the Charlemagne legend creating fake documents, such as a donation of the legendary ruler, in order to reinforce the role of the abbey and its links with the kings of France. In this fake donation, the kings are supposed to give the abbey a regular gold and silver offering for thanking the Lord and the saints that they received the kingdom of France.⁴³ This goes to show that fabrications such as the one in the *Descriptio* were quite common during those times, but it is also interesting to see that the monks also took great care to back up their these fabrications with half-truths. Other passages of our *Descriptio* may provide better pieces of evidence regarding this technique.

I am extremely interested in the two letters that Charlemagne receives at the beginning of the narrative. The Latin text tells us that because of his fame, the Frankish king was visited by four envoys from the East. Two of them were Christians; the other two were Jewish. Here are the first two, priest John of Naples and archpriest David of Jerusalem. They represented the patriarch of Jerusalem, who had already taken refuge in Constantinople:

*...ad nostratem imperatorem Karolum magnum, cuius fama orientalium aures iam dudum diverberaverat, legati cum litteris missi sunt, qui hec que diximus edoceant, quorum nomina subnotantur in ordine. Namque hac in legatione quattuor dinoscuntur fuisse, duo christiani duoque hebrei. Qui utrique in sua lingua attulerunt sacras litteras, scilicet Iohannes Neapolis sacerdos et David Iherosolimitane ecclesie archipresbyter. Sed Iohannes Neapolitanus vir scilicet columbine simplicitatis, et David Iherosolimitanus, homo quoque iustus et timoratus ac timens deum in omnibus, epistolam manu patriarche Iohannis hominis dei perscriptam simulque imperatoris Constantini voluntate assignatam cum aliquantis muneribus pertulerunt ad regem, cuius exemplum infra scriptum est.*⁴⁴

Since we already saw that the Royal Frankish Annals mention a real exchange of envoys between Charlemagne and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Saint-Denis story was not entirely false. The monks certainly found something in their archives to back up the mystification. What is strange, however, is to find the emperor of Constantinople together with the patriarch as senders of this first letter; and once again the emperor as sender in the second one, together with his son Leo. Since there were two letters, one in Greek and the other one in Hebrew, one would assume that the reasonable intention would have been to present them as emanating from the patriarch and from the emperor, respectively. A consequent choice would have been to make the first one Hebrew and the next one Greek. However, this is not the case with our text, for the anonymous author presents a Christian letter from the patriarch and the emperor, doubled by a Jewish letter from the emperor and his son. In my opinion, this confused choice of senders may be the result of a series of indecisions in the writing of the *Descriptio*. The anonymous author probably wanted to make use of two half-truths that he had in his possession, but he knew them badly, and as a result mixed them up by mistake.⁴⁵

Here's the text of the first letter, the Christian one. It is in Latin, with no foreign words, and it is supposed to be a translation from the Greek:

Servus servorum dei Iohannes urbis Iherusalem domini misericordia episcopus, unaque orientalium imperator Constantinopoli Constantinus regi inclito occidentalium triumphantorique semper augusto Karoli magno regnum et imperium feliciter in domino. Favoralis apostolice doctrine gratia magno pacis rutilamine splendens ad nos usque pervenit splendorisque ac leticie tantul fidelibus infulsit, ut gaudentes deo uberrimas persolvere gracias deberent nosque uberiores fateremur semper debere; multomagis vero a deo iocundati sumus, quod perspicue omnibus tue inquisitis fraternitatis actuum lateribus

ita proculdubio facto pietate dei ac tua patientia esse cognovimus, ut in omnibus deum laudare conaremur. Sed ipsum successum ideo tuis laboribus prosperum evenisse videmus, quia tota animi virtute pacis amator existens eam repetitam inveneris et repertam summa caritate servaveris. Multa ergo in Iherosolimitanis partibus sancte ecclesie turpia et nunquam ab aliquo sufferenda et nobis karissime paganos intulisse cognoscas. Namque egomet de sede, quam prior sanctus Iacobus iubente domino possedit intrepidus, eiectus sum et plerisque christicolis captivatis atque quibusdam interfectis et, quod maius est, captivato domini sepulchro nimis que dedecorato. Ita his talibus commoti et quampluribus constricti a te, o invictissime Karole magne auguste, suffragium suspirantes maxime ex necessitate scriptamus. Hec quidem amminiculante deo possunt a te resecari facillime; proinde nos, ne quid tue meritis benivolentie videremur derogare, ad te potentissimum regem scripta direximus, que in omnium fratrum principum et coepiscoporum nostrorum noticiam ire facias, non solum eorum, qui in tua sunt provincia, sed etiam qui tue dilectionis vicinis adiunguntur provinciis. Sciat hoc quoque quisquis, quod si auxiliari nobis apostolica doctrina de pace catholice ecclesie postposita neglexerit, a deo esse se iudicandum districtius. Minime vero dubitet sibi ullam eius loci rationem constare, si ipsum domini sepulchrum, quo pro nobis humanatus triduo iacuit ac surrexit, a pravis hominibus inhoneste tractari paciatur; nec non hoc putet post auxilium prohibitum a domino non impune omitti. Etenim contumelie superbieque fit studio, si, quidquid dei ecclesie est contrarium, maneat a christianis intactum. Quid plura? Multa vero huiusmodi et plura potuissimus scribere, sed quia dolore ac lacrimis impediti sumus et simul fideli satis est dictum, et quod quisque conquerens sua dicta putat omnibus esse cognita, omittere pie Karole magne sub lacrima. Vive capax vite memorareque dicta benigne. Mente cave pecces et corpore corde rebelles. Ut vis et volumus, valeas sine fine beatus.⁴⁶

In truth, this letter does not tell us much. It simply states that the Holy Land had been under attack, that the patriarch left, and that he is asking for Charlemagne's help. It is more of an introduction to the matter. Furthermore, we do not understand why this letter was carried by a priest of Naples. It would have been sufficient to leave it to David, archpresbyter of Jerusalem, but the anonymous author probably wanted to achieve a literary effect: two envoys for each of the two letters presented to Charlemagne.

Duo quoque hebrei sacram Constantini imperatoris manu scriptam epistolam ad nostratem cum precipuis donis apportavere. Nomina autem hebreorum hec sunt: Ysaac et Samuel; Ysaac vero magne prudentie et simplicitatis vir in sua lege esse assertus est. Samuel etenim secundum ipsorum legem erat pontifex in eis, homo nimis religiosus et in utraque lingua valde eruditus ratus est et dicebatur a pluribus. Hi duo presertim imperialibus edictis ad legationem electi sunt. Sed sacre Constantini imperatoris et epistole patriarche una et eadem prope est sententia.⁴⁷

But then again, why did they use the two Jews and two Christians? There is no apparent logic in this, apart from the fact that the second text includes three gobbledygook passages sounding like Hebrew. Here is the second letter and its imaginary Latin translation. In this particular case, for reasons which will be evident in the analysis, I prefer

not to use the Rauschen edition. I transcribe a semi-diplomatic version of the manuscript text, including its corrections, the emendations, and I add to the comparison the *Vita Karoli* version edited by Rauschen. In my transcription of the Paris manuscript I note the P2 supralinear emendations and additions in superscript. The expunctuated letters are strikethrough. I preserved the *puncti*, but I used “;” to mark the *punctus elevatus*, and “?” for the *punctus interrogativus*.

BnF, f. fr. 12710 (P1 + P2 versions)⁴⁸

[f2^{ra}]... ~~Justus~~^{Justus} *Justinus* autem exemplar · hoc est

Ayas · anna · bonac · saa · calabri · milac · pholi · pholi · ansilau · bemunj · segen · lamichel · bercelnj · fade · abraxion · faauotium ·

hoc est constantinus imperator · et leo filius eius · ~~et~~^{et} que imperator et rex orientalium omnium minimus et uix imperator dici dignus karolo magno regi occidentalium famosissimo fideliter^{um} regnum et dominium · et coronam utriusque feliciter ·

jephet · a[.]as · calabri · çaa · milas · pholi · anna · bonac · beree[.]oenj · ancilau · docatabel · lamieth · iochet · fauothium · faodem · baruch · katha · maroth · adonay · he[.]oy · [f2^{rb}] eloeth · heley · abraxion · athedaj · baruch · israhel · aithamuns · tramiloizima · muchetha · dauid · dabiac · Geman · teruhel · bemunieegen · ihesum · bathexion · locaith · Romathedal · Rubohihel · helka · zadol · clabjnabel · dauifae · vidaiac · dimamuch · saac · milac · berse · joth · moysima · laymatol · auchima^raiah · kalabrifonath · Thiumaubaructhi adonay ·

Com has litteras bene perlegeris · o amicissime karole magne cognoscas me · non animi penuria uel hominum · ad te hanc legationem causas petendi auxilium direxisse · cum antea multotiens in paganos paucioribus militibus adeptus ~~sim~~^{sim} uictoriam ; Namque ab Iherusalem bis et ter quam ceperant · eos multis captis · et occisis fortiori · expulsi · et in campis sexies aminiculante deo uictor fugauj

The *Vita Karoli Magni* version⁴⁹

Exemplar epistole Constantinopolitani imperatoris

Aias anna bonac saacalabri milac pholi ausilau bemuni segen lamithel bercelni fade abraxion faauotium.

Hoc est: Constantinus imperator et Leo filius eius eque imperator et rex orientalium omnium minimus et vix imperator dici dignus Karolo magno regi occidentalium famosissimo fidelium regnum et dominium et coronam utriusque vite feliciter ·

Iephet alas calabri caa milas pholi anna bonac bercheloeni aucilau docathael lamieth iochet fauothium faode baruch catha maroth adonay heloy heloeth helau abraxion atheday baruch israhel aithamuns thramiloizima mucheta david dabiac geman theruel bemunicegen iesu athexion iocaith romathedal ruboiel helka zadol olabibael davifae vidabiac dimamuch saac milac berseioth moysima laumathal auchimarath kalabrifovath thiumaubaruth adonay.

Cum has litteras bene perlegeris, o amicissime Karole magne, cognoscas me non animi penuria vel hominum ad te hanc legationem causa petendi auxilium direxisse, cum antea multotiens in paganos paucioribus militibus adeptus sim uictoriam. Namque ab Iherusalem bis et ter quam ceperant expuli eos fortior multis captis et occisis et in campis sexies aminiculante deo victor fugari. Quid plus? Opere

Quid plus · Opere precium est · ergo quatinus me nequaquam meo sed tuo merito diuinitus monitum esse · ut ad tantum negotium te invitarem credas confidenter ·

Quipe quadam nocte de inuasionem paganorum meditans quid agerem · et a deo succursum firmo corde postulans · et quasi in extasi effectus ; uidi ante lectum · meum quendam iuuenem stantem · qui me blanda uoce uocans nomine meo paucillum tetigit · et ait · Constantine rogauisti dominum auxilium et consilium huiusce rei · Ecce accipe adiutorem karolum magnum ~~imperatorem~~ · regem gallie in domino ac pacis ecclesie propugnatores · et ostendit mihi quendam militem ocreatum et loriatum · Scutum rubeum habentem ense precinctum · cuius manubrium erat purpureum · hasta albissima · cuius curpis septem ^{+sepe} Flammas emittebat · ac in manu cassidem tenebat auream · Et ipse senex proluxa ^{+e} barba ^{+e} vultu decorus · et statura procerus erat · cuiusque oculi fulgebant · tanquam sidera · caput uero ^{eius} canis albescebat · Vnde minime dubitandum est · quin hec dei voluntate sint facta ·

Presertim uero^[1] exhilarati ~~sum~~^{sumus} a ⁺ⁱⁿ domino quod omnibus perspicaciter tue fraternitatis actuum lateribus inquisitis ita sine dubio te magnifice factum humilitate simplicitateque tantum esse cognouimus · ut in omni ~~ut~~^{ut} dominum laudare niteremur · uerum enim uero ipsum euentum jccirco tuis laboribus cognosco accidisse prosperium ^{ac} secundum · quia toto cordis desiderio · pacis propugator factus eam quesitam inueneris · ac summa dilectione inuentam propagaueris · Magna ergo in iherusalem catholice ecclesie turpia et a nemine fideli diutius · patientia paganos karissime iniecisse licet cognoscas · Sed hec quidem deo cooperante possunt a te resecari leuissime ·

precium ergo est, quatinus me nequaquam meo sed tuo merito diuinitus monitum esse, ut ad tantum negocium te invitarem, confidenter credas.

Visio Constantini imperatoris.

Quadam quippe nocte de inuasionem paganorum meditans quid agerem et a deo succursum firmo corde postulans et quasi in extasi effectus uidi ante lectum meum quendam iuuenem stantem, qui me blanda uoce uocans nomine meo paucillum tetigit et ait:

Constantine rogasti dominum auxilium et consilium huiusce rei; ecce accipe adiutorem Karolum magnum regem gallie in domino ac pacis ecclesie propugnatores. Et ostendit michi quendam militem ocreatum et loriatum, scutum rubeum habentem, ense precinctum, cuius manubrium erat purpureum, hasta albissima, cuius cuspis sepe flammam emittebat, ac in manu cassidem tenebat auream et ipse senex proluxa barbe uultu decorus et statura procerus erat, cuiusque oculi fulgebant tanquam sidera; caput uero eius canis albescebat. Unde minime dubitandum est, quin hec dei voluntate facta sint.

Nunc exhilarati sumus in domino, quod omnibus perspicaciter tue fraternitatis lateribus inquisitis ita sine dubio te magnifice factum humilitate simplicitateque tantum esse cognouimus, ut in omnia dominum laudaremus. Verum enim uero ipsum euentum idcirco tuis laboribus cognosco accidisse secundum, quia toto cordis desiderio pacis propugator factus eam quesitam inueneris ac summa dilectione inuentam propagaueris. Magna ergo in Iherusalem catholice ecclesie turpia et a nemine fideli patientia paganos karissime iniecisse cognoscas. Sed hec quidem deo cooperatore possunt resecari a te leuissime.

[marginal note] □ *Hanc enim tuis meritis gloriam
diuinam certissime comperi reservare gratiam*

*Nequid itaque ~~tue~~ nos tue caritatis meritis
uideremur subtrahere · ad te regem a deo pre-
electum hec scripsimus magno opere ; quid
ultra ? habes enim valentes causas · quibus
favere debes ocissime · quis etenim quem deus
hortatur potest debortari ? age iam rex
auguste · que a deo manda^{ta} sunt tibi quam-
totius impleas · ne amplius percunctando
gravem culpam incurras · qui enim iusionibus
dei refugit obedire · minime culpam poterit
evadere ;*

*Emmanuel Geman ihesum
hoc est in domino gaudere eius fungere lau-
dem · Justicie zona lumbos · caput atque coro-
na perpete succingat te xpistus honoreque
stringat · Nil opus est ficto · domini quo vis-
sio dicto · Ergo dicto tene fundum domini pre-
cepta seculum*

*Hanc enim tuis meritis gloriam divinam cer-
tissime comperi reservare gratiam.*

*Nequid itaque nos tue caritatis meritis videre-
mur subtrahere, ad te regem a deo preelectum
hec scripsimus magnopere. Quid ultra? Habes
enim valentes causas, quibus favere debes ocis-
sime. Quis etenim quem deus hortatur potest
debortari? Age iam, rex auguste, que a deo
mandata sunt quantocius impleas, ne amplius
percunctando gravem culpam incurras. Qui
enim iusionibus dei refugit obedire, minime
poterit culpam evadere.*

*Emmanuel geman ihesu,
... hoc est: In domino gaude, memor eius fun-
gere laude. Iusticie zona lumbos, caput atque
corona perpete succingat te Christus honoreque
stringat. Nil opus est ficto domini quo iussio
dicto. Ergo dicto tene fundum domini precepta
secundum.*

Agreeing with Rauschen's analysis, Nothomb believed that the archetype of our text was P1 (the first version of the Paris manuscript, uncorrected, also called P) and that P2 (that is, the additions and emendations made to it) compose a tributary version when grafted on P1, also found in the Rouen manuscript (R) and in the *Vita Karoli Magni* (K). However, when comparing the two, it is obvious that the *Vita Karoli Magni* does not contain all of the emendations in our text. Nothomb noticed this aspect, but chose to consider that the additions and corrections *sont de si mince importance qu'il faut les attribuer au scribe de P2*.⁵⁰ Furthermore, when faced with the big differences between the two, Nothomb believed that the P2 scribe was lazy and did not make all of the needed corrections,⁵¹ which is a fairly inconsistent interpretation. I do not agree with his interpretation, because it does not provide any argument for these preferential choices. Nothomb's reasoning seems biased and subjective. He neglects another aspect as well: the pseudo-Hebraic gibberish. In fact, all other researches chose to disregard this gibberish as inconsequential, even though it is—as we shall see later on—of primary importance to our understanding of the *Descriptio*'s creation.⁵²

I cannot yet divulge the precise significance of the gobbledygook phrases, I need to deal with them later on in my analysis, but if the reader trusts me on this argument, it will be evident that the *Vita Karoli Magni* contains a preferable version, because many gibberish words look corrupted in the Paris manuscript, with or without the P2 corrections. There is also the problem of the Greek words spoken by birds, which are clearly better preserved in P1+P2 than in the *Vita Karoli Magni*. Therefore it is much easier to presume that P2 is a version corrected after the source of P1, and that P1 is

just the initial copy with the common transcription errors, in greater numbers, maybe because of this scribe's inexperience. Hence my choice to provide a semi-diplomatic version of P1 + P2, in order to have a term of comparison for the *Vita Karoli Magni* version, since I need to work with both of them in my analysis, because they look like second-hand copies of other copies of the autograph of the *Descriptio*.

Since we have briefly dealt with this pseudo-Hebraic gibberish, it is essential to note that the Rouen manuscript does not contain any traces of it.⁵³ Furthermore, the Montpellier manuscript (M) and its Vienna copy (V) also suppress it. They simply make use of the end formula *Emanuel. Geman. Ihesum.*, preserving the interpuncts between the words, while the Paris manuscript does not preserve them anymore, even though it transcribes them.⁵⁴ This serves to prove that the Montpellier version is a simplification, and that the Montpellier copyist did not know what to make of the gobbledygook. Since he was writing in the 13th century, and since his interests were completely different (transcribing a story and not proving its veracity), I believe that the use of the pseudo-Hebrew phrases in the Paris version and in the *Vita Karoli Magni* must have played an important role in the construction of the story, especially since there are also emendations made to them.⁵⁵ We should consequently look for two sources which could be used in backing up the letters mentioned in the *Descriptio*. It is exactly what I mean to prove in the next two segments of my study.

The Greek Document of Saint-Denis

LET US leave the pseudo-Hebraic gibberish aside for the moment and observe that Saint-Denis was the main depository of Greek culture in medieval France. As a result, it is not difficult to find many Greek things there. There were Greek letters in the abbey. It is this author's opinion that such proof is a fragment of a Greek imperial letter on papyrus, originally measuring about 3m x 0,5m. The papyrus is preserved nowadays in the National Archives of Paris and dates back to the first half of the 9th century. During the Middle Ages and most of the modern era, this Byzantine imperial letter was in the care of the Saint-Denis monastery, so the monks could really make use of the papyrus' contents, especially since this Greek letter speaks of an alliance between Byzantines and Franks against their common Muslim enemies:

...ὅτι ἐν τῷ ταξιδίῳ τούτῳ δεῖ ἐπίκουρα ὄλα τὰ ἐσπέρεια γενέσθαι ἡμῖν, ἵνα καινισθῇ τὸ μεγαλόδοξον αὐτοῦ τοῦ φιλανθρώπου θεοῦ καὶ θελήματι θεοῦ ἢ ἀγάπῃ τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐκ θεοῦ βασιλείας ἐφραπλωθῇ ὑμῖν καὶ ἔσῃται ἐστηριγμένη ἡ φιλία τῆς ἐκ θεοῦ βασιλείας ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ ἡγαπημένου ἡμῶν τέκνου του ῥιγός μονίμως καὶ ὁ θεὸς δοξάζεται παρὰ πάντων καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῶν χριστιανῶν ἢ δικαία ἀποκατάστασις φθάνη καὶ οἱ κοινοὶ ἀντίπαλοι ὄλονται καὶ οἱ φίλοι σώζονται. Ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ εὐφροσύνη ἔστω μεθ' ἡμῶν. Καὶ ἡ περὶ τοῦ σκοποῦ τούτου ἀρμόδιον σοὶ ἐστὶν καὶ ὑπομνηστικῶς ἐγκελεύειν τῷ προδηλωθέντι ἀγαπητῷ ἐν Χριστῷ ἡμῶν τέκνω τῷ ῥηγί, ἐπειδὴ δεσπότης αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθης καὶ ἐπίτροπος ἐπεδόθης αὐτῷ παρὰ τοῦ δημιουργήσαντος σὲ θεοῦ.⁵⁶

† *Legimus* †

The text speaks indeed of a just restoration (*ἡ δίκαια ἀποκατάστασις*) arriving (*φθάνη*) at the 'limits' of the Christians (*εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῶν χριστιανῶν*). The common enemies (*οἱ κοινοὶ ἀντίπαλοι*) need to be destroyed (*δλονται*) and the friends (*οἱ φίλοι*) need to be saved (*σώζονται*). Wishing that the grace of God, his peace and joy may be with the addressee of the letter (*χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ εὐφροσύνη ἔστω μεθ' ὑμῶν*), the sender also mentions the possibility of orders issued (*ἐγκελεύειν*) to the sender's abovementioned son (*τῷ προδηλωθέντι ἡμῶν τέκνῳ*) beloved in Christ (*ἀγαπητῷ ἐν Χριστῷ*) who was also a king (*τῷ ῥίγι*), because (*ἐπειδὴ*) the addressee was made (*ἐκτίσθης*) his lord (*δεσπότης*) and he was given (*ἐπεδόθης αὐτῷ*) by God the creator (*παρὰ τοῦ δημιουργήσαντος θεοῦ*) as his guardian (*ἐπίτροπος*).

The contents of this imperial letter are similar to the second letter included in our text, with the exception of the pseudo-Hebrew gobbledygook and the vision of the emperor.⁵⁷ Omont was the first to identify the acephalous papyrus with a letter brought by an embassy of the Byzantine emperor Theophilus to the Frankish king Louis the Pious in 839, an interpretation that has not yet been changed.⁵⁸ It has also been suggested that this may be a letter sent by emperor Theophilus after the Byzantine defeat at Amorium (Phrygia) in 838, when 42 officers and notables of that city were taken as hostages and martyred when they refused to convert to Islam. Byzantine historians mention the sending of such an envoy to the king of France with a proposal of military collaboration, but it is said that the death of the Greek emperor of dysentery prevented the creation of the military alliance.⁵⁹

Omont also believed that the context of the letter is described in the Annals of Prudentius, bishop of Troyes,⁶⁰ but I personally consider that there are many other contexts for this letter, and to make matters worse, the monks of Saint-Denis could have had other letters on imperial papyri from other Byzantine embassies, with more or less the same subjects. Maybe the name of Leo as son of the Byzantine emperor in the *Descriptio* was invented or maybe it points to real but different historical context.⁶¹ It is frankly impossible to choose between all the available options. We have no clue as to what is the degree of truth in the mystification, especially since the whole story of the patriarch of Constantinople seeking refuge with the Byzantine emperor looks a lot like the story of Pope Leo seeking refuge in Paderborn with Charlemagne. But none of these matters. If the Byzantine imperial papyrus was indeed the one we discussed, or another one of a similar nature, its existence would give credence to the relics' imaginary translation during the time of Charlemagne and that was all that the monks of Saint-Denis really needed.

This is why I believe that the larger mystification was composed of many partial bits of truth. At least an imperial letter speaking of a military alliance between Christians was involved. The French monks could not perpetrate an obnoxious lie as proof of their translation of relics. There must have been something true, a half-truth to support a half-lie. Why not a precious and interesting document that they had in their collections, such as the imperial papyrus? They used all sorts of other material to back up other passages from the *Descriptio*, so the use of this other document would be expected of them. And the story tells us also that the four envoys presented their letters in Saint-Denis.⁶²

I have already said that the monks of Saint-Denis used to be the sole depositaries of Greek writing and knowledge in early medieval France. In Merovingian times, Greek was forgotten, but the Carolingian renaissance saw a certain interest in Greek letters, especially in the 9th century, when many translations of pseudo-Dionysian texts were made in the abbey of Saint-Denis by translators whose knowledge of Greek was surprisingly good. Other places such as Laon and Auxerre had their Hellenophones too.⁶³ But the knowledge of Greek gradually died out in France during the 10th and 11th centuries, and this led to a childish fashion of using only the Greek calligraphy. One of the French monks' favourite pastimes of this period was to write short Latin texts in Greek letters. The Greek language was better known in German-speaking lands and it is believed that by the end of the 11th century the rare use of Greek (in odd and less well documented contexts) may be ascribed only to a handful of monks from the abbey of Saint-Denis.⁶⁴ At the beginning of the 12th century the situation stayed the same and the practice of translating from Greek into Latin didn't return to the French-speaking lands before the middle of that century.⁶⁵ Therefore, when the text of our *Descriptio* was written in Saint-Denis, Greek was completely unknown to the French and only some of the Saint-Denis monks could claim that they were able to read it, even though such claims may have been greatly exaggerated.

It is much safer to assume that the contents of the Greek imperial papyrus were known from previous times, when knowledge of Greek was real, and that the approximate transmission of its contents through the back-channels of an oral tradition led to the gradual development of our legendary account. Legendary traditions tend to change the original key characters and glue them to the persona of a more famous hero (Charlemagne). The same must have happened to the name of the Byzantine emperor, generically baptised Constantine in our story, and it is not surprising that the military alliance proposal became a military campaign. In those dark times, when the monks of Saint-Denis were among the rare readers of Greek letters, if somebody were asking for proof of their legendary account, they would produce the document and interpret key passages handed down to them by the local tradition, picking and choosing segments of the papyrus text to prove their point.

A Magical Text in the Abbey of Saint-Denis?

IN THIS context, it is hard to assume that the gobbledygook in the second letter did not mean anything. Pierre Courroux, who recently voiced the common opinion about it, thought that this mumble-jumble is a *langue cryptée, qui devait imiter le grec et l'hébreu, pour un effet de réel*.⁶⁶ However, there were others who did not agree with this interpretation. M. M. Schwab, who wrote at the end of the 19th century, believed that the text was translatable and he proposed the following interpretation, loosely completing the words and suggesting all sorts of imaginary reconstructions. I reinsert the original text of the Paris manuscript and the *Vita Karoli Magni* version (none of them used by Schwab), for the sake of comparing them to his interpretation:

Paris manuscript (P1 + P2)

Vita Karoli Magni (K)

Schwab's interpretation

Ayas · anna · bonac · saa · calabri · milac · pholi · ansilau · bemunj · segen · lamichel · bercelni · fade · abraxion · faauotium [...]

Aias anna bonac saacalabri milac pholi ausilau bemuni segen lamithel bercelni fade abraxion faauotium.[...]

jephet · a[.]as · calabri · çaa · milas · pholi · anna · bonac · beree[.]oenj · ancilau · docatahel · lamieith · iochet · fauothium · faodem · baruch · katha · maroth · adonay · he[.]oy · eloeth · heley · abraxion · athedaj · baruch · israhel · aithamuns · tramiloizima · muchetha · dauid · dabiach · Geman · teruhel · bemunieegen · ibesum · bathexion · locaith · Romathedal · Rubohibel · helka · zadol · clabjnahel · dauifae · vidaiac · dimamuch · saac · milac · berse · joth · moysima · laymatol · auchimaxaih · kalabrifonath · Thiumaubaructhi · adonay [...]

Iephet alas calabri caa milas pholi anna bonac bercheloeni aucilau docathael lamieith iochet favothium faode baruch catha maroth adonay heloy heloeth belau abraxion atheaday baruch israhel aithamuns thramiloizima mucheta david dabiach geman theruel bemunicegen iesu athexion iocaith romathedal ruboiel helka zadol olabibael davifae vidabiach dimamuch saac milac berseioth moysima laumathal auchimaxath kalabrifovath thiumaubaruth adonay. [...]

Ô Japhet, tous mes grands, à moi roi de Constantinople et à mon fils, sont abattus dans Jérusalem. Sauve-nous. Ô Dieu, tu es le seul, l'unique de mon peuple et de mes ancêtres. À jamais, sois béni dans les hauteurs, Seigneur, Éternel, Dieu très-haut, Tout-puissant. Ô béni d'Israël, tu as été avec nous, tu as secouru David par ta foi. Ô unique, tu élèves l'humble. Maître Dieu, ton partage est grand... Certes, en toi est le salut... de tous mes vassaux.

*Enmanuel Geman jbesum**Emmanuel geman Ihesu [...]**Sois loué, Éternel!*⁶⁷

Schwab thought that the author of the text had to resort to a Jew or to a cleric who knew Hebrew, transcribing from the latter's oral dictation, hence the crippled Hebraic expressions, disfigured successively by the Latin copyists of the text.⁶⁸ It is evident though from his so-called 'interpretation' that the gobbledygook has nothing to do with the Latin words supposed to translate it in the same manuscript. The only segment of Schwab which reminds of the Latin letter is the "me king of Constantinople and my son" cluster, the rest being a list of Hebrew far-fetched approximations. Moreover, I find it hard to believe that that the two-syllable word *pholi* stands for an abbreviated rendering of *Constantinopoli*, especially since it appears twice and Schwab interprets it once.⁶⁹ The same may be said about *bonac*, appearing twice in the text, but interpreted as *benô* ("son") only once. Neither do I believe that *beree[.]oenj* could be read as *Bersheloem* and interpreted as *bi-Ierushalaim*. Furthermore, the *Vita Karoli Magni* version (K) has *bercelni* in the

first segment, corresponding to the Paris version's *bercelnj* (P) and echoing the words *berce*[.]*joenj* (P) and *bercheloeni* (K) from the second segment of the gibberish text. The first segment is simply ignored by Schwab, who also ignores many other repeated words (*milas* / *milac*, for instance). Schwab's pseudo-scientific reading requires a huge leap of faith.

Despite his exaggerations, I nevertheless believe that there is something to be saved from Schwab's idea. It is true that certain compound words ending in *-el* may be of Hebrew origin or Hebraic imitations. Other words can be traced to Hebrew too, and at first I assumed that the frequent appearance *baruch* / *-baructhi* and *adonai* echoed a Jewish prayer heard by a French speaker who didn't understand a single thing.⁷⁰ Fortunately I asked for the help of Ștefan Colceriu and Nicolae Roddy, who kindly pointed to me that there are a few Hebraicised names but very few grammatical indicators, that the text has elements of Hebrew, Latin, or Greek,⁷¹ that the Hebrew words belong to the category of theonyms, and that their succession in the text resembles the one found in magical writings. Further proof could be found in the nine uses of the word *-hel*, suggesting a rhyming scheme. And it should also be noted that parts of the first sequence ([*Ayas*] + [*anna · bonac*] + [*saa · calabri · milac · pholi*]) are recomposed in the second one ([*a*[.]*as*] + [*calabri · çaa · milas · pholi*] + [*anna · bonac*]), some of the words further appearing for a third time (*saac · milac*). The whole shenanigan has the consistency of the *voces magicæ* of Late Antiquity.

Gideon Bohak notes that among the most frequent *voces magicæ* of Hebrew origin one finds the names of God, two of whom may be present in our text (*Adonai*, *Eloai*). Angel names are also frequent in the magical chains, but there are many inventions on this basis in Greek and Coptic magical texts. Names of biblical figures also characterise these texts (such as *david*), as well as liturgical formulae (such as *barouch aththa adonai*, "blessed art Thou, Lord" – already present in our text). Most of these odd contaminations of Hebrew, Aramaic, Coptic, and Greek compounds appear in the magical texts of Greco-Roman Egypt. And the best proof that our text is of this origin is the use of *abraxion*. This is a Graecised form of *Abraxas*, a word designating the μέγας ἄρχων and prince of the 365 skies in the *Gnostic Basilides*. Schwab correctly linked *abraxion* with *Abraxas*, but he didn't follow this clue to the end.⁷² Readers are certainly familiar with the *Abracadabra* formula, also coming from these chains. This is why I believe that the monks mistook this magical chain for a Hebrew text. Their error may be linked with the fact that words describing the rumour of voices in several European languages evolved from other confusions of Hebrew words.⁷³

It is therefore clear that the *voces magicæ* of our text were not created for the purpose of conveying a realistic effect. It was the other way round. The two Jewish envoys from our story were summoned in order to explain the use of a text that sounded like Hebrew. But this equally implies that the monks were in possession of such a text before the writing of the narrative. Likewise, it is of no surprise that this second letter, in gibberish Hebrew, was the one containing the Byzantine emperor's angelophanic vision wherein the Frankish king was presented as a Messianic hero. The incomprehensible nonsense (as it must have been considered during the medieval times) served to reinforce the letter's veracity. But this also means that the monks did not know what to make of the gobbledygook.

This hypothesis is the most preferable one. Our text could not come from the Western magical tradition. Korshi Dosoo, whom I wholeheartedly thank for checking this analysis, first suggested that I look into the Latin tradition, but the *Descriptio* quotations do not have any connection with the *Picatrix*. None of our *voces magicae* may be found in the *Picatrix* and the chains copied in this treatise are very short in comparison with ours. Besides, the Latin *Picatrix* is a translation from a 13th century Spanish text adapted from an Arabic source, and most of its manuscripts are late (15th–17th centuries), with rare 14th century fragments.⁷⁴ Similarly, I looked into the *Medicina Plinii* and Marcellus Empiricus' *De medicamentis*, but no viable comparisons could be made either. Nothing else is really known of the early medieval Western magical tradition and most of what we know dates back to the time of the first Latin translation from Arabic, which points to a mid-12th century dating. This makes our text too early to be linked with such a tradition and there are no traces of Arabic words or phonetics in its *voces magicae*.

Last but not least, if the source of our chain were a precocious and obscure Latin treatise explaining the use of the magical chain, the monks of Saint-Denis would not dare copy magic formulae in the story of their most venerated relics. It had to be an unconscious choice, little does it matter that they were mystifying documents in their story. Even mystifiers had to stop somewhere, and monks were unquestionably afraid of the devil. Likewise, were our anonymous author consciously using black magic to ensure the success of his tale, such a scenario would be too silly to imagine in a pious context. By the look of our *voces magicae* and by their use in the second letter, they must have been out of context, just the magical chain without explanation. The monks probably did not know what it was all about. This leaves us with two possible interpretations: either a lamella dating back to the times of Late Antiquity or a magical papyrus.

When taking a look at the Paris manuscript preserving the quoted text, one will note that the specific interpuncts between individual words do not appear elsewhere in the *Descriptio*. The presence of these *puncti* separating only *voces magicae* gives the impression that they were transcribed from a source that already had this punctuation, and some of the Greek magical papyri have exactly this type of punctuation between their magical words.⁷⁵ However, these magical papyri were not known until late modern times, when many of them were discovered in Egypt, then auctioned in Western Europe, ending up in various library collections. One auction catalogue actually described them as *fromage mystique* and it took even more time until these texts were properly understood at the dawn of the 20th century.⁷⁶ If by any chance one of these papyri found its way into medieval France as a consequence of pilgrimages (many early pilgrims visited Egypt),⁷⁷ or for any related reason, it is safe to assume that their magical chains would be incomprehensible, meaningless, and misattributed to say the least. The hypothesis is quite plausible, because some of the caches in the ruins of Ptolemaic or Roman Egypt—such as the ones who provided the magical papyri studied nowadays—were undoubtedly opened and robbed at a medieval date, too.⁷⁸ It is therefore reasonable to assume that some of their contents would have been sold. Our text could be a magical roll.

But there is also the second option. Such texts in Greek or Latin script were present on late-ancient amulets, lamellae, or gems which could be discovered in ancient sarcophagi during the Middle Ages, thus becoming presumably available to the French

monks of Saint-Denis. The problem is that most texts inscribed on such objects are short and they do not feature punctuation, because the interpuncts were used at an earlier date, in the 1st century AD Latin texts,⁷⁹ or during later periods. There are rare examples of longer texts on lamellae,⁸⁰ and there is also a singular lamella with *vores magicae* separated by interpuncts.⁸¹ Since the latter was discovered in a rudimentary stone sarcophagus dug up from a mound in the city of Vienna in 1662, this interpretation should not be discarded. Many ancient sarcophagi were reemployed in medieval Europe.

However, in the case of a large gold Roman lamella, it would be inconsistent to imagine that the monks copied the text from such a lamella yet present it as a letter. They would need to present the document as proof in case someone checked, just as they would easily produce the Byzantine imperial papyrus. So they would obviously describe the precious material on which the text was written, especially since gold and silver are often used in our text's descriptions of objects. To me, the transcription of a lamella text is highly unlikely to occur, simply because the *Descriptio* presents the magical chain as a *manu scripta epistola*. Moreover, the aspect of such a lamella would have black magic undertones even in medieval times and a monk wouldn't dare commit such sacrilege.

But why not imagine the existence of a Latin magical papyrus, since the text presented to us is transcribed in the Latin alphabet? It is a matter of common sense to assume its existence, because the ancient lamellae have *vores magicae* written in Greek, Latin, or mixed alphabets. The absence of Latin magical papyri may be explained by the simple fact that the texts studied nowadays come from papyri preserved in late ancient Egypt, which was a Greek-speaking region, but the Western part of the Roman Empire would experience a circulation of Latin papyri, nowadays lost.

So, was there a Greek magical papyrus in the abbey of Saint-Denis during the Middle Ages? It certainly looks like there was one, or maybe the Parisian monks had a Latin one if such a Latin tradition did indeed exist. Whatever the answer to this question may be, positive or negative, the monks certainly had another papyrus, not magical but imperial and Byzantine. If they had a second papyrus, of a magical nature, they would keep them together, because of the nature of the material, hence the use of two different papyri for two different letters. If not preserved in the right conditions (and if it were older than the Byzantine one), such a papyrus could have been destroyed with the passage of time, whereas the imperial letter fragment would survive because of its larger size.⁸² Likewise, these two papyri wouldn't be the only ones in the Parisian abbey. All sorts of papyri could have been preserved in Saint-Denis during the Middle Ages. Papyri were used by the Merovingian chancery until 692, so it was not an unknown material, and the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs didn't interrupt the papyrus trade, which stopped only in the 10th century, when the manufacturing of papyrus ceased in Egypt, Rome being one of the last bastions of papyrus use of that time.⁸³

Since the contents of the Byzantine imperial papyrus probably gave rise to a legendary tradition about Charlemagne's involvement in the military affairs of the East, it is also probable that a second papyrus, incomprehensible because of the bizarre language of its magical chains, would suffer a transfer of meaning from the first one. Hence the invention of a letter brought by two Jewish envoys. The characters of Ysaac and Samuel serve absolutely no other purpose in the economy of our story except to elucidate the

second letter's pseudo-Hebraic gibberish. This is why the *Descriptio* tells us that *utrique in sua lingua attulerunt sacras litteras* before the insertion of the two letters.

This does not mean that I exclude the hypothesis of a lamella. I have already said that there are traces of Greek spelling in our text's magical chains and they may point to a lamella written in mixed alphabet. When comparing the Paris manuscript (P) with the *Vita Karoli Magni* (K),⁸⁴ probable traces of Greek capital letters in the autograph manuscript of our text may be conjectured from the use of *milac* twice and *milas* once in both P and K. They may hide an alternate reading of a C-type sigma in capital letters. This is further substantiated by *saa* (or *saac*) and *caa* in both versions, as well as *ansilau* and *ancilau* (P) vs. *ausilau* and *aucilau* (K). All of these oscillations point to the existence of several C-type sigmas in the original text.⁸⁵ But this presents us with a puzzle, because the alternation between S and C transcribing a majuscule sigma may have been present in the sources of P and K, and therefore in the autograph version of the *Descriptio*.

The transcription of the aspirates is also thought-provoking. The pair *fauothium* and *faauotium*, copied identically in P and K, may indicate that this oscillation was present in the autograph.⁸⁶ On the other hand, the transcription of *katha* (P) and *catha* (K) indicates that an adaptation to the Latin alphabet was made not only in the autograph, but that such adaptations continued in the manuscript tradition. Next, the pairs *docatahel* (P) vs. *docathael* (K) and *Rubobihel* (P) vs. *ruboiel* (K), where P is much closer to the Hebrew phonetics, may account for a better copy in the Paris manuscript. Yet there are cases in which the situation is vice-versa: *vidaiac* (P) vs. *vidahiac* (K). Other readings look more coherent in the *Vita Karoli Magni* version than in the Paris manuscript too. We have already seen one of them: *bercelni* and *bercheloeni* (K) vs. *bercelnj* and *berce[.]oenj* (P). Nonetheless, the *ayas* and *a[.]as* of the P version may be preferred to the *aias* and *alas* of K. It is difficult to say which ones were present in the original text or in its first copy (the autograph of the *Descriptio*) and which ones were altered for imitative purposes by the copyists of P and K. Similarly, there are cases in which it is difficult to prefer one of two different readings, even though there is a clear copying error (*iocaith* in K and *locaith* in P; or *laumathal* in K and *laymatol* in P).

The only correct assumption is that the author of the *Descriptio* transcribed a text where these graphic oscillations were already present, either because of his choices (if he transliterated an original in Greek letters) or because these graphic confusions came from a source already written in a mixed Greek-Latin alphabet. When the copyist of the Paris manuscript and the many copyists of the *Vita Karoli Magni* were faced with such a text, they certainly added even more variations, either unconsciously, because of the dictation,⁸⁷ or consciously, to make it look more Hebrew than it already was. The only way out of this dead end debate is to identify a similar chain of *voces magicæ* in the magical papyri and work our way backwards to the P and K texts.

Therefore, all of these differences could be due to the transcription of a mixed Latin-Greek text or to the transliteration of a Greek one. Further proof of this transliteration may be identified in one of our monks' favourite pastimes, the writing of short Latin texts in Greek letters. There is no way to choose between the three possible interpretations and I simply find the hypothesis of a lamella the least probable among the three.

* * *

As regards the general interpretation of the *Descriptio*'s creation, at this stage it is difficult to assess if and to what extent the presence of papyri and magical texts in the Saint-Denis abbey played a key role or a minor role in the invention of our legend. Many projections are possible by giving them more or less importance, but such projections will always be subjective, prone to a personal interpretation of the researcher. It is safer to assume that they did play a part, too difficult to assess due to the lack of other pieces of information.

However, since papyri and magical texts must have been kept in the monastery's library, the probability that the *Descriptio* originated in the monastery of Saint-Denis is greater than the other hypothetical choice—the royal French court.⁸⁸ Also, since the Byzantine letter on papyrus contains many of the so-called crusading ideas of the *Descriptio*, generally interpreted in the context of the First Crusade, as a proto-crusading document or at least with crusader undertones,⁸⁹ it is also safe to assume that crusader rhetoric was fuelled by many other legends of Carolingian times, when contacts with the Byzantines were more common and when plans for military alliances were more frequent. One should not underestimate the fact that many stories about Charlemagne—including our *Descriptio*—were linked with the tradition of sibylline texts.⁹⁰ We therefore contemplate a multi-layered narrative with a hybrid structure (hagiography, chanson de geste etc.), into whose creation the Saint-Denis monks must have poured all that they could find at the abbey and in the abbey's library. Other facets of this hybrid structure will become obvious in the analysis of its 12th century parody, the so-called *Pilgrimage* or *Voyage of Charlemagne to Jerusalem and Constantinople*, the subject of a different research. □

Notes

1. Complete description of the manuscript in Jules Lair, *Mémoire sur deux chroniques latines composées au XII^e siècle à l'abbaye de Saint-Denis*, «Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes», 1874, 35, pp. 543-580 (pp. 544-550).
2. Gerhard Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende Karls des Grossen im 11. und 12. Jahrhundert*, Duncker & Humblot, Leipzig, 1890.
3. Jacques Nothomb, *Manuscrits et recensions de l'Iter Hierosolimitanum Caroli Magni*, «Romania», 1930, 56, 222, pp. 191-211 (pp. 198-199).
4. Ferdinand Castets, *Iter Hierosolymitanum ou Voyage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem et à Constantinople*, «Revue des langues romanes», 1892, 36, pp. 439-474.
5. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, p. 101.
6. Cf. Joseph Chmel, *Die Handschriften der k. k. Hofbibliothek in Wien, im Interesse der Geschichte, besonders der österreichischen*, Erster Band, Carl Gerold, Vienna, 1840, p. 205 (no CCCXXXV).
7. Nothomb, *Manuscrits et recensions...*, p. 195.
8. Castets, *Iter Hierosolymitanum...*, p. 427.
9. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, 108-109.
10. Caesar, *De bello Gallico*, VI, 26: *Est bos cervi figura, cuius a media fronte inter aures unum cornu existit excelsius magisque directum his, quae nobis nota sunt, cornibus: ab eius summo sicut palmae rami que late diffunduntur. Eadem est feminae marisque natura, eadem forma magnitudoque cornuum.*

11. There is also the helping bird from the legend of Saint Oswald. Reginald of Durham wrote that Saint Oswald's right arm was taken by a bird to an ash tree, invigorating it. The bird then dropped the arm and a spring emerged from that place.
12. M. Huys, A. Wouters, *P.Hal. Inv. 31: Alexander and the Speaking Bird* (Cf. *Ps.-Call.*, III, 28), «Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik», 1993, 99, pp. 33-36.
13. See for instance the talking birds in *Blandin de Cornouaille*, in the *Chevalier du Papegau*, or in the *Merveilles de Rigomer*.
14. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, II, iv, 29: *Sublimis Actiaca victoria revertebatur. Occurrit ei inter gratulantes corvum tenens, quem instituerat haec dicere: Ave, Caesar victor imperator. Miratus Caesar officiosam avem viginti milibus nummum emit. Socius opificis, ad quem nihil ex illa liberalitate pervenerat, adfirmavit Caesari habere illum et alium corvum, quem ut adferre cogeret rogavit. Adlatus verba quae didicerat expressit: Ave, victor imperator Antoni. Nihil exasperatus satis duxit iubere illum dividere donativum cum contubernali.*
15. Cf. Anne A. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World: Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800-1229*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca / London, 2013, p. 85, who believes that the *Descriptio* speaks about the same birds. This leads to further confusions and exaggerations. For Latowsky, *Emperor of the World...*, p. 85, “The bird's uncanny ability to communicate in Latin is evidence of God's favour, but it also highlights the emptiness of the parroted *laudes* [in Greek]. The implicit critique of Byzantine practice is akin to Notker's depiction of Greek envoys prostrating themselves at the feet of Charlemagne's various servants and stable hands. Both belittle the Byzantine leadership, while promoting Charlemagne as the divinely chosen Christian emperor.”
16. Castets, *Iter Hierosolymitanum...*, p. 448.
17. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, p. 52.
18. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, p. 110.
19. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, p. 113.
20. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, p. 113.
21. For these quotations, see Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, p. 115-116.
22. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, p. 117-118.
23. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, p. 120.
24. I do not believe that the abrupt transition between the Charlemagne and Charles the Bald sections of the *Descriptio* may be taken as a clue that there was a lost original. See for this Marc du Pouget, *Recherches sur les chroniques latines de Saint-Denis : édition critique et commentaire de la Descriptio Clavi et Corone Domini et de deux séries de textes relatifs à la légende carolingienne*, «Position des thèses de l'École des chartes», 1978, pp. 41-46; followed by Latowsky, *Emperor of the World...*, p. 75 (who quotes Nothomb, *Manuscripts et recensions...*, p. 201, for the same opinion, but I couldn't find it in the latter's study).
25. For all these quotations, see Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, p. 124.
26. Julia C. Szirmai (ed.), *La Bible anonyme du Ms. Paris B.N. f. fr: 763*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1985, p. 244 : *Après a tant les clos cerchiés | Que Deus ot es mains et es piés, | Que les trova et que les prist | Et au frain Constantin les mist: | Ains ne furent veüz tant biaux, | Plus resplandissans que cristalz. | Quel part que li rois en aloit, | Li frains feu et flamme gitoit | Tant que plusor s'an convertirent | Vers Deu, qui cele flamme virent. | Quatre ans les porta Costantins | Et quant li apri-ma sa fins | Par reverance les osta | Dou frain, o la croix les posa.*
27. Szirmai (ed.), *La Bible anonyme...*, p. 244.
28. Françoise Gasparri (ed.), *Suger: Œuvres. t. 2: Lettres de Suger; Chartes de Suger; Vie de Suger par le moine Guillaume*, Les Belles-Lettres, Paris, 2001, p. 253.
29. Elisabeth Carpentier, Georges Pon, Yves Chauvin (ed.), *Rigord: Histoire de Philippe Auguste, édition, traduction et notes*, CNRS Éditions, Paris, 2006, p. 204.

30. *Imperio Carolus Calvus regnoque potitus | Gallorum, iacet hic sub brevitare situs. | Plurima cum villis, cum clavo, cumque corona | Ecclesiae vivus huic dedit ille bona. | Multis ablatis nobis fuit hic reparator; | Sequanii fluvii, Ruoliique dator.* Szirmai (ed.), *La Bible anonyme...*, pp. 20-21, prefers to date this epitaph in the 13th century and the relation with the other two texts, an important piece of evidence for the dating of the French Bible of the BnF, f. fr. 763 manuscript. Cf. Chiara Mercuri, *Corona di Cristo, corona di re. La monarchia francese e la corona di spine nel Medioevo*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome, 2004, p. 57, who believes it to be the original epitaph. However, since it is lost, he thinks it may be spurious.
31. See for this, e. g., the monograph of Mercuri, *Corona di Cristo...*
32. For this paragraph, cf. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World...*, pp. 60-62.
33. *Translatio Sanguinis Domini*, ed. Georg Heinrich Waitz, in MGH, vol. 6, SS vol. 4, Hannover, Hahniani, 1861, pp. 447-448 (p. 447 for the large quotation; pp. 447-448 for the smaller quotations transcribed in the next paragraph).
34. Of course, this does not mean that the story should be attributed to Waldo's times.
35. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World...*, p. 60, note 5.
36. *Annales regni Francorum*, in MGH SRG, vol. 6, Hannover, Hahniani, 1895, pp. 108, 109, 111.
37. *Annales regni Francorum*, in MGH SRG, vol. 6, Hannover, Hahniani, 1895, pp. 112, 113.
38. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World...*, pp. 60, 62-68.
39. Giuseppe Zucchetti (ed.), *Il Chronicon di Benedetto monaco di S. Andrea al Soratte e il Libellus de Imperatoria Potestate in Urbe Roma*, Tipografia del Senato, Rome, 1920, pp. 114-116.
40. Cf. Castets, *Iter Hierosolymitanum...*, pp. 428-429, who believed that there was a direct connection between the text of the *Descriptio* and the account of the Italian monk.
41. Louis Halphen (ed.), *Eginhard: Vie de Charlemagne. Édition et traduction*, Champion, Paris, 1967 (1923), p. 48.
42. For instance, William of Ockham knew of such sources when he refers to a passage *ubi agitur de Constantino et Leone filius eius imperatoribus*; Jeffrey Garrett Sikes (ed.), *Guillelmi de Ockham Opera Politica*, vol. 4, Oxford University Press / British Academy, Oxford, 1997, p. 436.
43. See for this the edition of Cyril Meredith-Jones (ed.), *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi ou Chronique du Pseudo Turpin. Textes revus et publiés d'après 49 manuscrits*, Slatkine, Geneva, 1972 (Paris, 1936), pp. 348-349.
44. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, p. 104.
45. Cf. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World...*, p. 79, who simply believes that the first letter is from the patriarch and that the second one is from the emperor.
46. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, pp. 104-105.
47. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, pp. 105-106.
48. Cf. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, pp. 106-107, for an interventionist edition of this text. Rauschen does not transcribe the marginal note and the emendations. He also borrows a lot of *lectiones* from the *Vita Karoli magni* version.
49. Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, pp. 48-50.
50. Nothomb, *Manuscrits et recensions...*, p. 203.
51. Nothomb, *Manuscrits et recensions...*, p. 203: *Nous avons plusieurs divergences entre K et le texte constitué par P+P2, mais presque toujours la cause en est que le scribe de P2, pour s'éviter une correction, a la leçon assez voisine qu'il trouvait dans le manuscrit qu'il surchargeait.*
52. Following an analysis of the differences between these manuscripts, Nothomb noticed that the Rouen manuscript cannot be directly linked with the *Vita Karoli magni* or to the Paris manuscript, that it stems from an independent source; Nothomb, *Manuscrits et recensions...*, p. 204. According to him, *tout serait expliqué, le plus simplement, en supposant que sur un manuscrit complet du texte le plus ancien (P1), auraient été reportées les additions de K (c'est-à-*

dire l'ensemble de P2), en laissant subsister des phrases supprimées par K; de ce manuscrit dériverait le texte de R (p. 204). Nothomb forgets here (or simply chooses to not mention) one of his observations on p. 203, that there are 'additions' to R which cannot be found in P1, P2 or K. Cf. p. 205: *le manuscrit assez récent V n'a pas été copié sur M, car il a des passages qu'on retrouve dans K P2 R et qui sont absents de M. Cette recension dépend évidemment de la famille K P2 R*. The main argument used by Nothomb in his evaluations is the *concordance des listes épiscopales* copied after the story of Charlemagne's return to France, when the feast is instituted (pp. 206-208). But this *concordance* does not prove that P2 represents an emendation of P starting from K, it simply proves that the two are related somehow. Cf. Nothomb, *Manuscrits et recensions...*, p. 208, where he explained that he therefore wished to make a critical edition starting from the Rouen manuscript, because it was *le seul manuscrit complet et indépendant de la recension P*, even though this is clearly not the best manuscript to take into account, especially since it has no pseudo-Hebraic gibberish.

53. Nothomb, *Manuscrits et recensions...*, p. 202.
54. Castets, *Iter Hierosolymitanum...*, p. 445 (and 444-445 for the entire second letter).
55. The superscript *r* in *auchima^raih* (P manuscript; cf. *auchimarath* in K), shows that this apparent gibberish was corrected.
56. For the restitutions of the quoted text, see Franz Dölger, *Der Pariser Papyrus von St. Denis als ältestes Kreuzzugsdokument*, in *Actes du premier congrès international d'études classiques à Paris (28 août-2 septembre 1950)*, Paris, 1951, pp. 93-102. Cf. H. Omont, *Lettre grecque sur papyrus émanée de la chancellerie impériale de Constantinople et conserve aux Archives Nationales*, «Revue Archéologique», 3^e série, 1892, 3^e, pp. 384-393 (it has a conservative reading of the document, with fewer restitutions (some of whom are nonetheless incorrect): ...ων ὅτι ἐν τῷ ταξιδίῳ τοῦτω δ... | ε.ε.ε..αγενέσθαι...ι...α καὶ [εἰς]... | [δό]ξ[α]ν αὐτοῦ τοῦ [φιλαν]θρώπο[v]... | .. [θ]εῖω ἡ ἀγάπη τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐκ [Θεοῦ] | ...ἐφαπλωθῆ ὑμῖν καὶ ἔσητα[ι].. | ...τῆς ἐκ Θε[οῦ] βα[σι]λειᾶς ἡμ[ῶν]... | [ἡ] ἀπημένον ἡμῶν τέκ[νον]... | [δ]πως καὶ ὁ Θεὸς δοξάζ[ηται]... | ...εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῶν Χριστιαν[ῶν] | [ἀποκ]ατάστασις φθάνη καὶ οἱ ἡ... | [ἀπ]όλονται καὶ οἱ φίλοι σώζονται. Ἡ χά- | [ρις] τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη αὐτοῦ κ[αὶ] ἡ | [ἀγάπη] ἔστω μεθ' ὑμῶν καὶ περὶ τ[ού]... |ἀρμόδιόν σοι ἔστιν καὶ ὑπομ... | [εἰρήν]εῖν τῷ προδηλωθέντ[ι] φιλο-][χρ]ῖστ[ω] ἡμῶν τέκν[ω] τῷ β[υ]τ[τ]... | ...σαντῶ ἐκτίσθης καὶ ἐπὶ τ[ῶ]... | ...εἰς αὐτῶ παρὰ τοῦ δημιουργήσα[ντος]. There is another edition by Werner Ohnsorge, *Das Kaiserbündnis von 842-844 gegen die Sarazenen. Datum, Inhalt und politische Bedeutung des 'Kaiserbriefes aus St. Denis'*, «Archiv für Diplomatik», 1955, 1, which I was unable to obtain.
57. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World...*, pp. 79-81, believes that the vision of the Byzantine emperor from the second letter was based on a 5th century *Letter of Lucianus to the Whole Church*, because there is a description of an old man there and an adjective describing his beard may have a connection with an adjective referring to the beard of Charlemagne in the *Descriptio* vision. I find it hard to follow this interpretation, even though its spirit (identifying a literary source for the vision) is probably correct. There are many other sources that could have been used and one needs to broaden the comparison in order to identify them.
58. For a further bibliography of the document see *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453*, bearbeitet von Franz Dölger. 1. Teil, 1. Halbband, *Regesten 565-867*. Zweite Auflage, unter Mitarbeit von J. Preislerkapeller und A. Riehle, besorgt von A. E. Müller, C. H. Beck, Munich, 2009, Regest 413.
59. For a recent synthesis about this, see Juan Signes Codoñer, *The Emperor Theophilos and the East, 829-842: Court and Frontier in Byzantium during the Last Phase of Iconoclasm*, Routledge, London / New York, 2016, p. 325.
60. Omont, *Lettre grecque...*, p. 388, quoting MGH SS, vol. 1, ed. G. H. Pertz, Hannover, Hahniani, 1826, p. 434: *Quorum legatio super confirmatione pacti et pacis atque perpetuae*

inter utrumque imperatorem eique subditos amicitiae et caritatis agebat, necnon de victoriis, quas ad versus exteras bellando gentes caelitus fuerat assecutus, gratificado et in Domino exultatio ferebatur; in quibus imperatorem sibi que subiectos amicabiliter Datori victoriarum omnium gratias referre poposcit.

61. A Constantine VI (780-797) was emperor in Byzantium at the time of Charlemagne, and his father was Leo IV (775-780), who made Constantine co-regent at the age of five in 776. Constantine VI was betrothed to Gertrude, daughter of Charlemagne, even though the engagement was broken, and Charlemagne proposed to wed his mother Irene who blinded and imprisoned her son, becoming the first female ruler of the Byzantine Empire in 797. Why not this story and another? Why not link the events in our letter with the Battle of Krassos (804), when Nicephorus I (802-811) was crushed by the forces of Hārūn al-Rashīd? Why not Michael II the Amorian (820-829) at the end of whose reign Crete was lost to the Saracens and the Muslim conquest had already started? Why not Leo V the Armenian (813-820), without any battle at all? And why link this military alliance proposal with any famous battle at all? All these solutions are possible at the same time.
62. *Legati igitur longi gravisque onere itineris fatigati tendentes Parisius ad regem, quoniam ibi eis in itinere ferebatur agitavisse, appulerunt Remis. Ibi quoque primum ipsum deducere in Arveniam exercitum acceperunt; idcirco ibi biduo remorati sunt. Namque praedictus Neapolitanus parumper dolebat caput et pectus. Posteaquam illa evanuit passio, iter ceperunt cum gaudio sicque ad sancti Dionisii Arcepagite castrum pervenerunt, atque hic nunciatum est eis imperatorem castro quodam capto tunc redire de expeditione et ad presens esse Parisius. Illi itaque triduo recreati regi Parisius ingredienti sese obviam dederunt. Cui ut decuit salutato signatas epistolas tradiderunt; his vero ipse receptis et cum taciturnitate bene perscrutatis intelligens iam se a Deo ad hoc negotium pre-electum esse et iam usque ad orientales famam sue probitatis transvolasse, hinc gaudio gavisus est valde, sed oppido, quod Dominicum sepulchrum a paganis esset obsessum, condolens lacrimari cepit; denique aliis inter se sciscitantibus, quid canerent carte, quia tantam tristitiam incuterent regi, ipse Tilpinum Remensem archiepiscopum accersiri iubet. Cui mox astanti unius et alterius sacre scripta epistole palam omnibus materna lingua exponere precepit; etenim earum ut dixi una fere eademque erat sententia; Rauschen (ed.), *Die Legende...*, pp. 107-108.*
63. Pascal Boulhol, *La Connaissance de la langue grecque dans la France médiévale V^e-XV^e siècles*, Publications de l'Université de Provence, Aix-en-Provence, 2008, pp. 30-44.
64. Boulhol, *La Connaissance...*, pp. 49-60.
65. Boulhol, *La Connaissance...*, pp. 61-68.
66. Pierre Courroux, *L'usage des lettres dans les premières chroniques françaises (XII^e-XIII^e siècle)*, «Cahiers de civilisation médiévale», 2018, 61, 2, pp. 157-170 (pp. 170).
67. M. M. Schwab, *Sur une lettre d'un empereur byzantin*, «Journal asiatique», 9^e série, 1896, 8, pp. 498-509 (pp. 507-508).
68. Schwab, *Sur une lettre...*, p. 508: *Évidemment, le fabricant de cette pièce a dû recourir à un Juif, ou à un ecclésiastique sachant l'hébreu. En transcrivant oralement ce qu'il a entendu dire par l'hébraïsant, déjà le rédacteur de la lettre a sans doute estropié maintes expressions, encore défigurées davantage par les copistes successifs.*
69. The author's ultimate argument is: *Combien d'hommes instruits, combien d'officiers français ayant passé par l'École d'application du génie et d'artillerie prononcent 'bleau', pour dire 'Fontainebleau', trop long à énoncer*; Schwab, *Sur une lettre...*, p. 504.
70. The whole *baruch · katha · maroth · adonay · he[.]oy · eloeth · heley* sounded scrambled after *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, melekh ba`olam...* ("Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe..."), a formula found in many Jewish liturgical blessings, or maybe in its spin-offs. The only problem was the word *maroth*.

71. For the Hebrew and suspected Graecised, Latinised, or pseudo-Hebraic: *lamichel*, *iephet*, *baruch* (x2), *eloeth* (x2), *israhel*, *zadol*, *david*, *teruhel*, *maroth*, *adonay* (x2), *laymatol*. Other words look pseudo-Greek: *ayas*, *anna*, *abraxion*, *pholi*, *katha*, *helau*, *bathexion*, *milas*, *tramiloizima*.
72. Schwab, *Sur une lettre...*, p. 505.
73. See for this the French *brouhaha*, the Italian *badanai* and *barruccaba*, and many others of the same type. Cf. the synthesis of David L. Gold, *An Immediate or Non-Immediate Jewish Connection for Dutch 'poeha' and Variants (> Afrikaans 'bobaai' > South African English 'bobaai'), French 'brouhaha' (> English 'brouhaha'), French 'Brou, brou, ha, ha, Brou, ha, ba', High German 'buhai' and Variants, Low German 'bubé' and Variants, or Modern West Frisian 'babey' and Variants Has Not Been Proven (With Remarks on the Jewish Italian or Liturgical Hebrew Origin of Arezzo Dialectal 'barruccaba' and the Liturgical Hebrew Origin of Italian 'badanai')*, in David L. Gold, *Studies in Etymology and Etiology (with Emphasis on Germanic, Jewish, Romance, and Slavic Languages)*, eds. Félix Rodríguez González, Antonio Lillo Buades, Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante, San Vicente del Raspeig, 2009, pp. 377-407, even though some of its historical interpretations are overstated. I thank Maria Roşu for pointing to me this associated idea.
74. David Pingree (ed.), *Picatrix: The Latin Version of the "Ghayat Al-hakim*, Warburg Institute, London, 1986.
75. See e. g. *Papyri Graecae Magicae / Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, herausgegeben und übersetzt von Karl Preisendanz. Zweite, verbesserte Auflage, mit Ergänzungen von Karl Preisendanz, durchgesehen und herausgegeben von Albert Henrichs, 2 vols., Teubner, Stuttgart, 1973-1974, vol. 1, p. 66, for this type of punctuation in a text. It is the 4th century magical papyrus preserved in the National Library of Paris (nou. suppl. gr. 574), but only the chains are marked by such interpuncts. According to Korshi Dosoo, in magical papyri, ostraka and other objects carrying such *voces magicae*, punctuation is very inconsistent. The subject is not yet properly studied. In the texts from the 3rd century onwards, points may be used between magical names, sometimes they use a supralinear stroke over each name, sometimes there is no marking or division of names except for a space. In later texts, from the 6th century onwards, which are usually written in Coptic, they continue to use these practices, but also use a double slash (/). A short discussion of this may be found in Lincoln H. Blumell, Korshi Dosoo, *Horus, Isis, and the dark-eyed beauty. A series of magical Ostraca in the Brigham Young University collection*, «Archiv für papyrusforschung und verwandte gebiete», 2018, 64, 1, pp. 199-259 (pp. 206-207).
76. Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago / London, 1986, pp. xlii-xliii.
77. Dicuil, Charlemagne's Irish geographer, tells the story of the pilgrimage of a presumably Irish monk named Fidelis, who visited Egypt and saw the pyramids before 767. A century later, in 867, the *Itinerarium Bernardi monachi* also mentions travelling through Alexandria and Cairo. They were following in the footsteps of Arculf (c. 680, whose pilgrimage story was embellished by Adomnan), the anonymous pilgrim of Piacenza (c. 570 AD) or the anonymous author of the *Theodosii De Situ Terrae Sanctae* (518-530?). Sometimes these accounts copy each other, but other times they provide new pieces of information. Some of these pilgrims visited the tomb of Saint Minas in Abu Mena, before and after its destruction in the Arab invasion of the 7th century, or the church of Saint Minas in Cairo, destroyed during the same invasion, rebuilt afterwards and renovated again in 1164. Despite the numerous complaints about Muslims denying passage to pilgrims through their lands, many early medieval pilgrims passed through Egypt, as did later ones before and after the fall of Damietta (1219).

78. According to Korshi Dosoo, there are certainly Coptic texts from 9th century Egypt and later which use very similar *voces magicae*. On the other hand, in the Middle Ages, relics could be bought only from non-believers, otherwise they could be either received as gifts or exchanged. Francesca Tasca kindly pointed to me that in Willibald's 8th century pilgrimage account the monks of the Holy Lavra of Saint Sabas offered relics to the pilgrims, but it is highly unlikely that the text could have come from an Eastern monastery, because the Oriental monks were aware of the nature of the magical texts. Many Coptic hagiographic texts contain references to demons and magical names. Cf. František Lexa, *La magie dans l'Égypte antique de l'ancien empire jusqu'à l'époque copte*, 3 vols. Librairie orientaliste P. Geuthner, Paris, 1925, pp. 149-153.
79. For the 1st century AD Latin manuscripts separating words by interpuncts and for the extinction of the practice of writing with interpuncts by the end of the 1st century (and the return to the *scriptio continua*), see Malcolm Beckwith Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*, University of California Press, Berkeley / Los Angeles, 1993, pp. 10-12.
80. Some of these are in Greek alphabet, such as the Amulet for Litigants from Renania (2nd century AD; Roy Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets. The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze 'Lamellae'. Part I: Published Texts of Known Provenance*, Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen, 1994, pp. 25-30), the Amulet for Phaeinos against the demons, from Thrace (2nd-3rd century AD; Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets...*, pp. 206-210), or the Amulet from Emesa, Syria (1st century BC; Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets...*, pp. 248-256). Others are written in Latin characters, such as the Amulet for Justina from Poitiers (4th century AD; Kotansky, 1994, pp. 31-40). There are also mixed Greek and Latin ones, quite large, such as the Romulus Amulet from Hungary, even though it contains also phrases and not only magical names (4th century AD; Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets...*, pp. 81-88), etc.
81. A small gold *lamella* amulet from Vienna (3rd century AD, 3,6cm x 5cm), containing only *voces magicae* transcribed in Latin alphabet, has the same interpuncts as our text. See for it Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets...*, pp. 77-80.
82. The edited text of this papyrus contains the end of the imperial letter. One may dare attribute this to its preservation in the form of a roll, whose outer layers (the rest of the imperial letter) would be damaged first.
83. Gerald A. Hodgett, *A Social and Economic History of Medieval Europe*, Routledge, London / New York, 1972 (2006), pp. 44-46.
84. There is no need to take into account the Rouen manuscript, nor the Montpellier and Vienna ones, because none of them feature this essential chain of *voces magicae*.
85. Likewise, the presence of the Greek letter Υ (capital letters again?) may be encountered in the use of *basiley* for βασιλεῦ in the *Vita Karoli magni* version of the talking birds story.
86. Cf. *-fonath* from *kalabrifonath* (P) and *-fovath* from *kalabrifovath* (K), probably stemming from the same *faauotium* and *fauothium* (identical in P and K).
87. For two types of unconscious alterations, see *clabjnabel* (P) vs *olabibael* (K) or *berse · joth* (P) vs *berseioth* (K).
88. For Rolf Grosse, the monarchy and the abbey probably had a dispute concerning the fair linked with these relics in the late 11th and early 12th century, but he argues (Rolf Grosse, *Reliques du Christ et fêtes de Saint-Denis au XI^e siècle. À propos de la 'Descriptio Clavi et Corone Domini'*, «Revue d'Histoire de l'Église de France», 2001, 87, pp. 357-375 (p. 363)) that the dating of the text should be earlier, to the middle of the 11th century. Cf. Gabriele 2008, who does not believe that the *Descriptio* was written at Saint-Denis and looks towards the entourage of Philip I. Cf. Anne Lombard-Jourdan, *Montjoie et saint Denis!?. Le centre de la Gaule aux*

origines de Paris et de Saint-Denis, Presses du CNRS, Paris, 1989, p. 225, who believes for instance that the text of the *Descriptio* was written with the intention of authenticating the relics (and the local Saint-Denis fair); and Donatella Nebbiai-Dalla Guarda, *La bibliothèque de l'abbaye de Saint-Denis en France du IXe au XVIIIe s.*, Presses du CNRS, Paris, 1985, p. 39, for the idea that the fair was so successful that Louis VI organized a second one in 1124, honouring a request by Suger the abbot to grant the monastery its benefits.

89. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World...*, pp. 76, 86.

90. For a synthesis, see Latowsky, *Emperor of the World...*, pp. 69-74. For the Sibylline prophecies' relevance to our text, see p. 76.

Abstract

Magic and Papyri in the Latin Voyage of Charlemagne to the East

Several medieval texts tell the story of an imaginary voyage of Charlemagne to Jerusalem and Constantinople. Among them, the Latin *Descriptio qualiter...* (11th–12th century) contains several odd features, analyzed in the present paper: two curious letters, one of them containing a sequence of gobbledygook phrases. The present paper revisits the *Descriptio qualiter...*'s already known sources of inspiration, the *Translatio Sanguinis Domini* from the Benedictine abbey of Reichenau and an account by a certain monk Benedict from the monastery Saint Andrew on Mount Soracte (both of them dating back to the 10th century). The analysis then explores the transliteration of Greek texts in the various manuscript variants of the *Descriptio qualiter...*, the use of *voces magicæ* and rudiments of spoken Greek, as well as the possible misreading of a real 9th century Byzantine imperial letter on papyrus kept in the monastery of Saint-Denis.

Keywords

Medieval Latin texts, Voyage of Charlemagne to the East, Byzantine Greek texts

