# The Roman Middle Ages:
# Aspects of Late Antique – Medieval Cultural Continuity in Old French Hagiography

Peter Leonid Chekin
Springfield, Virginia

M.A. in French, University of Virginia, 2013
B.A. in French, James Madison University, 2011

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# Contents

*To my father.*

## Abstract

Using three Old French hagiographical texts recorded between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries, this dissertation demonstrates a continuity of identity between Roman late antiquity and the francophone high middle ages. Calling upon a range of historical evidence and modern linguistic, poetic, and cultural theories, I argue that medieval francophone culture, as a direct outgrowth of the common Latinate culture of the Roman world, retained traits of that world's common identity. This Romanity is reflected in medieval francophone texts' self-identification with the Roman past, as well as in a conscious continuity of spoken language between Late Latin and Old French that they reveal. Moreover, I provide reasons why hagiography as a genre, unlike aristocratic literature such as *chansons de geste*, would have been the vehicle best suited to convey such a Roman identity.

The first chapter proposes a historical re-contextualization of the *Vie de saint Alexis* using a thirteenth-century manuscript version (Paris, BnF fr. 19525), transcribed and translated into English in the Appendix. In the light of oral-poetic theory, I argue first that the available evidence should not lead us to consider the *Vie* to be a translation of a Latin prose text as previously assumed. Second, I show that its narrative details accurately describe the poem's late Roman setting in a number of ways anachronistic to the high medieval context in which it was composed. The two paths of inquiry then join, linking the *Vie de saint Alexis*' orality and its subject matter under the umbrella of 'cultural memory,' wherein the poem's audience identifies with the past that it portrays.

The second chapter demonstrates that the *Vie de saint Laurent* reflects a continuity of language between medieval Francophones and the Roman world. Inspired by diachronic linguistic research that suggests that Latin and the vernacular first began to be distinguished only after Carolingian educational reforms brought Latin out of line with spoken practice, I situate the *Vie de saint Laurent* within this emergence of new linguistic paradigms, whose developed forms are theorized in Dante Alighieri's *De vulgari eloquentia*. I argue that the *Vie de saint Laurent* uses the vernacular and Latin as complementary and related modes of expression in a way that identifies Old French with the common spoken language of the Roman world.

The third chapter synthesizes the approaches of the first two with the aid of one of the earliest extant Old French texts, the *Vie de saint Léger*, which is preserved in a single late tenth-century manuscript. Here, I examine the ways in which a Roman-based identity would have negotiated the period of Frankish rule (496-843), when Romanity contended with a new and inferior sociopolitical role. Seeing in the *Vie de saint Léger* the descendant of a mostly unwritten popular oral-poetic tradition, I claim that it uses the memory of St Leudegar's martyrdom (c. 679) to discuss sociopolitical questions in a situation where a legally subordinate 'Roman' population could most readily find recourse with the episcopate. The poem reflects an undercurrent of Roman identity throughout the Frankish period and beyond, an identity maintained and expressed in vernacular hagiographic poetry.

Keywords: cultural memory, diachronic Romance linguistics, hagiography, medieval identity, Old French poetry, oral poetry, Roman identity, *Vie de saint Alexis*, *Vie de saint Laurent*, *Vie de saint Léger*.

## Introduction

### 1. Background

This is a study meant to explore Old French hagiographic poetry in the context of enduring cultural continuity with the world of the Roman Empire. Continuity between late antiquity and the middle ages is invoked directly by every textbook of medieval history or chrestomathy of medieval Latin that takes the time of Diocletian and Constantine as its starting point,[1] and indirectly by the editors of the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* who drew their cutoff line for the classical language at 200 CE.[2] The concrete expression of this continuity, however – beyond the new and fundamental importance of Christianity – is difficult to pin down, especially in the later middle ages before the Renaissance revalorization of classical Roman and Greek culture, but also during the high medieval period (c. 1100-1300), when the Old French language first became an important medium of written literary expression. When I sought to understand what this continuity would have meant on a lived level to inhabitants of the high medieval francophone world, it quickly became apparent that their relationship with the Roman past would largely have been a question of identity. In the pages that follow, I will attempt both to demonstrate the presence, in select texts composed in dialects of Old French between the late tenth and thirteenth centuries, of signs of this late antique-medieval continuity of identity and to convey the importance of this 'Romanity' for our understanding of medieval culture. Central to this study is the question of how such an identity would likely have found cultural expression, as well as the question of the methodological tools

[1] For some recent examples of such textbooks, see Wim Blockmans and Peter Hoppenbrouwers, *Introduction to Medieval Europe, 300-1500*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014); Helen Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare: Theory and Practice of War in Europe, 300-1500* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2004); John M. Riddle, *A History of the Middle Ages, 300-1500*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); David Rollason, *Early Medieval Europe 300-1050: The Birth of Western Society* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[2] F.R.D. Goodyear, 'The *Oxford Latin Dictionary*,' in *Papers on Latin Literature*, ed. K.M. Coleman et al. (London: Duckworth, 1992), 281.

needed in order to discern past identities from our present vantage point, peering as we do through a relative paucity of available sources.

This study has arisen out of a persistent sense that our understanding of premodern European history and culture, despite the wealth of detail revealed in the light of the past two centuries' scholarship, still lacks a complete grasp of the big picture that would allow all of its individual elements to come into place together in a coherent narrative – i.e. as they seem to have done for the narrower field of classical antiquity. One major and inspiring exception immediately comes to mind in the form of the scholarship of Peter Brown, whose remarkable studies of late antique culture consistently deploy a range of evidence from a wide variety of domains, from the archaeological to the literary to the theological, resulting in seemingly seamless synthesis. Brown's sweeping narratives highlighting late antiquity's broad themes would be incomplete without his loving attention to detail and his celebrated empathy for every personality that he encounters: from Augustine to Edward Gibbon, the characters that come to life in Peter Brown's works seem not so much the objects of cold and dispassionate dissection as they do friends of the scholar (regardless of what they might, or indeed did, think of one another). Brown's ability to combine warmth with rigor, sweep with detail, breadth with focus, is unrivalled and may well remain so.

In my study of the hagiographic literature of the francophone middle ages, I shall attempt to follow Brown's example in a limited and modest way. I will not be overly constrained by field boundaries as I attempt to describe a major, indeed fundamental aspect of Western medieval culture that has in many ways escaped study: the persistent influence of the idea and of the reality of the Roman Empire, which had imposed upon Western Europe a cultural and political unity that it has never seen again since. By Rome, I mean not so much the *urbs* and its particular mythology, from Aeneas to Caesar, which elicited a fascination all of its own during the middle ages and ever

after, but rather the *orbis*, the Empire as a sociopolitical reality that for centuries united the Mediterranean world, and remained strongly felt even after its institutional reach shrank to what we now know as the Byzantine realm.

Despite the progress that modern scholarship has made in modulating simplistic narratives about ancient and medieval history, a progress whereof Peter Brown's work is but one outstanding example, it can still be difficult not to imagine a swift and definitive fading of the classical ancient world, historically speaking, wherein one epoch ended and another began. Part of the reason for this lies in our teleological view of history, in which we look back upon the middle ages from a modern perspective that takes the political parceling of Europe into nation-states for granted. We live in the wake of an era, after all, of conscious efforts to project national histories as far back in time as possible, where the textbook 'history of Hungary' includes the Huns, where every 'nation' has its own 'nos ancêtres les Gaulois.'[3] Derided as they might be in a modern academic context, they are very much present in our apprehension of the past, which habitually sees in the stuff of history the teleological germs of modernity. Of course, most of the territory once inhabited by peoples known to Roman authors as the Gauls does now comprise modern France, and certain historic processes guided the transformations of the area and its people between then and now. This does not, however, render the various Gauls of history reducible to their role in the becoming of its Frances, nor should this role represent the totality of their interest to us, for, in the words of Sharon Kinoshita, 'the nationalist paradigms that have traditionally shaped our understanding of the Middle Ages are frequently ill-suited to the objects that they purport to explain.' Instead, we

[3] Evoked by Nicolas Sarkozy during his recent presidential bid: 'Pour Nicolas Sarkozy, nos ancêtres étaient les Gaulois mais aussi « les tirailleurs musulmans »,' *Le Monde*, September 24, 2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2016/09/24/pour-nicolas-sarkozy-nos-ancetres-etaient-les-gaulois-mais-aussi-les-tirailleurs-musulmans_5002989_4854003.html. A pair of historians publically criticized the ex-president's words: Violaine Morin, 'Deux profs d'histoire détricotent les propos de Nicolas Sarkozy sur les « Gaulois »,' *Big Browser* (*Le Monde*), September 20, 2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/big-browser/article/2016/09/20/les-profs-d-histoire-qui-detricotent-les-raccourcis-politiques-en-ligne_5000891_4832693.html.

ought to study the people of the past in significant part for the ways in which their world was fundamentally different from ours, ways which would present us with alternative views that can at once contextualize our present moment and point to its ultimate contingency. For this reason, my study will echo Kinoshita's work in seeking to '*de*link our readings of twelfth- and thirteenth-century French texts from the teleology of the modern nation, making visible alternate histories not defined by the borders of the modern Hexagon.'[4] For Kinoshita, this means appreciating the cross-Mediterranean and cross-Channel context of medieval French-language literature, a context established by contemporary movements such as the Crusades and the Norman conquest of England; for me, the focus will be on the persistent influence of the cultural unity that had defined the old Roman Empire.

This is not to say that the competing view of a radical and catastrophic break between the Roman and medieval worlds is unreasonable in all of its aspects, and there are scholars who defend it today on solid, if limited (and generally military-historical) ground.[5] Yet a civilization is not necessarily defined by the particular character of its institutions, its territory, its religious and ethnic composition – elements of Roman civilization that all underwent certain important transformations during late antiquity. All such factors are always subject to change and redefinition within the context of civilizational continuity, and if a civilizational shift is accompanied by a sea change in one of these elements, the correlation will likely have deeper historical causes.[6] What

[4] Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Differences in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 3.

[5] Bryan Ward-Perkins and Peter Heather have both written extensively on this matter. See, e.g., Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[6] For example, if the Islamic civilization that emerged in the wake of the Arab conquests in the seventh century represented such a shift, it was not merely because a new religion and a new language had been introduced to Syria, Egypt, and North Africa. The conquerors were actively developing a new form of political identity, while the local Christian communities were bitterly divided by long-running disputes. While initially the Bedouin Arabs held themselves aloof from the peoples that they ruled, eventually, the invitation to participate in the new project would be extended to local Christians and Jews – on the condition that they adopted the Arabic language and (for full participation) converted to Islam. See Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an*

defines a civilization, rather, is the common identity of its participants, and by this standard, Rome's continuity would have extended as far out in time as the inhabitants of the former *orbis Romanus* considered themselves to be Roman. They did not cease doing so in 476 CE, nor had they ceased to do so centuries later when Carolingian chronicles and law still referred to categories of Frankia's inhabitants as 'Romans,' and, arguably, the denizens of Gaul and Latin Europe more broadly can be seen to still claim a form of Roman identity for as long as they referred to their spoken language primarily as Romance (*romanus sermo* or *romanz*).

This Roman identity would naturally have had competitors. The middle ages are conventionally defined as having begun when the Roman Empire fell in the West, when sovereignty over Africa, Spain, Gaul, and Italy successively slipped from the hands of the Roman state into those of Germanic (i.e. Vandal, Gothic, Frankish) kings, and as representing the ensuing fusion of Latin and barbarian[7] culture. Ever since Peter Brown and others introduced significant nuance into the heretofore standard catastrophist narrative of Rome's fall, debate on the degree to which continuity or change characterized the post-imperial world more has continued unabated for decades. Yet the very fact of this debate and the uncertainty that surrounds it hint at some broader past reality that, ultimately, depended little on the legal status of 'Franks' and 'Romans' under Salic law or on the quality of imported pottery in Gaul after the fifth century.[8] It would take more than political fragmentation, more than a marked decline in material culture, than de-urbanization,

*Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 97 (divisions among Christians); 157-61 (mingling and conversion); 213-9 (language and identity).

[7] Modern scholarship tends to employ the term in a non-pejorative sense. See Ralph Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul: Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 1-2, and Yitzhak Hen, *Roman Barbarians: The Royal Court and Culture in the Early Medieval West* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2007), 3 (note).

[8] A summary and analysis of past and current trends in scholarship on late antiquity and the early middle ages, with some emphasis on the debate between the followers of Henri Pirenne and Peter Brown, who emphasize continuity, and scholars who defend a more 'Gibbonian' and catastrophist view of the fall of the Western Roman Empire, can be found in Hen, 3-21. The founder himself of the field of late antique studies reflects on its past fifty years in a more recent volume: Peter Brown, 'The Field of Late Antiquity,' in *New Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, ed. David Hernández de la Fuente (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 6–19.

than the appearance of new elites, than the gradual divergence of regional vernaculars from one another, for the cultural connections that bound the Latin-speaking peoples of Western Europe together under the Roman Empire to fray and give way to some new arrangement. By studying the available sources, we can see that by the time that this process was actually completed and the peoples of Europe defined themselves primarily on the basis of new concepts of nationality, what we know as the middle ages had passed and early modernity was on the doorstep.

My interest here is thus in a broad re-contextualization of high medieval culture with particular reference to its past and historical origin. In his novel *Baudolino*, Umberto Eco paints the picture of a northern Italy in the twelfth century where the inhabitants of one village, due to linguistic and customary boundaries, hardly understand their neighbors in the next village over. Part of the story involves the squabbling Italian communes learning to work together against Frederick Barbarossa, frustrating his attempts at achieving real political dominance over the region before ineluctably returning to their internecine fights. To a large extent, the novel is based on the historical record as it has come down to us, amply seasoned with a rich variety of medieval anecdotes, myths, and legends that come to life through the eyes of the novel's namesake protagonist. But insofar as it is a retrospective on national character, *Baudolino*'s evocations of precocious Italianicity – reflected in the tragicomic mutual antagonisms of varying cities and regions – are probably anachronistic.[9] While a widespread modern vision of the European middle ages as local, isolated, and circumscribed is based on certain facts, most notably the realities of medieval political organization, it misses the forest for the trees. Whatever the degree to which the first sprouts of the medieval and early modern languages and 'national' cultures of France, Italy, and Iberia become discernible, they do so against a backdrop of the fading, larger unity that they

[9] It is entirely improbable that this was lost on Eco himself.

replaced. Because this unity, in which Latin Europe remained bonded by common language, culture, and institutions long after the Roman Empire ceased to be a political reality in the West, was essentially a continuation of the common culture of the western Roman Empire, I will call it 'Romanity.' The term is an Anglicization of the Latin *romanitas*, a 'historian's word' that is rare in surviving texts, but is used by modern historians to speak of 'Roman-ness' or Roman identity as a construct of the imperial era;[10] its modern Italian cousin *romanità* has an unsavory history as a marker of the Fascist movement's claims to Roman heritage.[11] Both latter usages denote active projects of identity-building, the one perceived by modern historians studying the past, the other constructed by a totalitarian political movement exploiting modern notions of the past. Here, in its English form, I will re-appropriate the term to denote not an active project of identity, but a more passive phenomenon that can be described as the sum of what it meant to be Roman. As the early modern nation-states of Europe eventually emerged, they built their new national identities by progressively shedding a broader inherited identity; one might even say that France became French in proportion to its ceasing to be Roman.

I was once asked why modern French studies should include the middle ages at all, if, according to this framework, medieval France was not truly French in any modern sense. This is a serious question: after all, in many cases, and in the United States especially, medieval studies maintain their position in the modern university curriculum by demonstrating their usefulness and relevance to other more established fields, like modern language and literature, history, art history; medieval Latin has found a place in Classics departments. To insist too heavily on the alterity of the middle ages could thus serve to cut the ground out from under medieval scholarship. At the

[10] Paul Fouracre, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 1, 7 vols. (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 40.
[11] Jan Nelis, 'Constructing Fascist Identity: Benito Mussolini and the Myth of "Romanità,"' *The Classical World* 100, no. 4 (Summer 2007): 391–415. The word *romanità* can also be used in a more neutral sense.

same time, it also remains true that the origins of the modern states of Latin Europe do lie in the medieval polities that once occupied its territory, in a very different way from that in which they ultimately descend from a Roman reality. To argue against a teleological view of the middle ages is not to deny their eventual *telos*. Instead, to point out medieval continuity with the Roman world serves to emphasize the former connections that bound Latin European cultures together, without necessarily detracting from the fact and continued relevance of their eventual divergence at a later medieval stage.

Of course, while the term 'continuity' has often been used to describe the sociopolitical dynamics of late antiquity and the early middle ages in less negative terms than 'decline and fall,' the concrete meaning of the expression can be difficult to pin down, especially in the context of the *longue durée*. The problem that faces me is in ascertaining the degree to which an identity derived from that of the Roman Empire – Romanity – would have survived in early medieval Gaul as well as in the francophone regions of the high medieval period. The Romanity I speak of here is distinct from medieval concepts of *translatio imperii* or *translatio studii*, the notions of passing the baton of political or scholarly authority that often appear in high medieval scholarly or literary treatments of the past, like Otto of Freising's political treatises or Crétien de Troyes' Arthurian romance *Cligès*. These theories of *translatio* represent active uses of history for present political projects, and, cleaving antiquity from the medieval present, betray a fundamental 'us-them' distinction in the very notion that political or scientific authority is transferred from one civilization to another. Chrétien de Troyes tell us as much in the proem to *Cligès*:

> Ce nos ont nostre livre apris
> Que Grece ot de chevalerie
> Le premier los et de clergie,
> Puis vint chevalerie a Rome
> Et de la clergie la somme,

Qui or est en France venue.[12]

Chrétien, in describing *translatio*, has in mind not a continuity of identity but a passing-on of values and authority, explicitly defined and claimed. The Romanity that I will describe is an identity of a different sort, and does not represent such a medieval cultural claim on the past. I speak rather of a phenomenon that, like gravity, is perceptible only thanks to its effects on objects in its historical vicinity. The 'Roman' identity in question is Roman insofar as it reflects aspects of medieval culture that can be seen, from our vantage point, to have grown out of and subsisted in realities that defined the world of the later Roman Empire. One cannot claim that medieval Latin- and Romance-speakers would have defined themselves as Romans in the way that their Byzantine contemporaries did, even if legal texts continued to differentiate between 'Romans' and 'Germans' even into the Carolingian era. Instead, I hope to show that their identity can be adequately described as representing a form of Romanity *de facto*.

This is admittedly a fraught task. Past identities make themselves known to us most readily through written texts, but in the case of post-imperial Western Europe, the texts that survive reflect an ambiguous rapport with the old Roman order. Both the new Germanic ruling classes – the Goths, Vandals, Franks, and Lombards – and the Catholic Church had their own priorities and agenda, and were willing to engage with and coopt the legacy of Rome only insofar as it suited them. Given that textual production in the ancient and medieval worlds was generally an elite activity, most of our surviving texts reflect these particular spheres of interest. It would be hasty, therefore, to assume either that the identities of the wider populace simply shifted with those of its rulers or that they were irrelevant to the history of the period. Indeed, with the proper methodology,

[12] 'Our books have taught us as follows: that Greece had the first glory of martial prowess and of clerical knowledge, and then chivalry went over to Rome, as did the summit of learning, which has now come to France.' Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ed. Charles Méla and Olivier Collet, Lettres gothiques (Paris: Livre de poche, 1994), verses 30-35.

we can hope for what John Richardson in *Language of Empire* describes as 'a greater chance of identifying general attitudes... which are not specifically argued about in our sources precisely because they are taken for granted by those who wrote or spoke at the time.'[13] The fact that the broader undercurrents of identity rarely won acknowledgement or explicit mention in our sources should lead us not to discount their presence, but to develop the methodological tools that would allow us to discern them. In so doing, the hypothesis underlying this study is that the broader undercurrent of identity in Gaul and then in the expanded francophone domain contained a strong strain of Romanity throughout the medieval period, including the era of the first bloom of vernacular French literature. This Romanity would have expressed itself along two axes: a vertical (temporal) axis, connecting the medieval present to the common Roman past, and a horizontal (spatial) axis, linking the Latin- and later Romance-speaking regions of Europe in a common Latin-based culture.[14] To wit, while Latin in its written form remained relatively unchanged as the dominant idiom of cultural, ecclesiastical, and administrative record into the late middle ages, the Romance languages were the site of continuity in oral culture both collectively and individually, a fact recognized by linguists medieval and modern.

The importance of medieval Romanity also goes beyond simple contextualization, beyond a story of origins, for it points to a historical picture that can provide an alternative to narratives that encourage the centrifugal tendencies seen in today's Europe. Just as many in France today reject the notion, promoted by populist politicians, that France cannot remain French while staying in the European Union,[15] so ought we be able to recognize the achievements of medieval

[13] John Richardson, *The Language of Empire* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6-7.
[14] While Latin language and literature also played an important role in the Germanic-speaking world, I will argue that Romance remained identified with Latin even after the stage at which they were recognized as distinct idioms.
[15] Articulated, e.g., by Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Guillaume Klossa, 'Menacer de sortir de l'Union européenne comme le fait Le Pen, c'est jouer contre la France,' *Les blogs* (*Huffpost*), March 5, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/daniel-cohnbendit/union-europeenne-le-pen_a_22066731/.

francophone culture while keeping in mind its place in the broader Latin- and Romance-language cultural complex of the time. This notion of unity is not necessarily new: Ernst Robert Curtius' concept of *Romania* and the 'Latin middle ages' springs to mind almost immediately. Curtius built his case for a culturally unified Europe by meticulously tracing and cataloguing literary tendencies, debts, and influences from the Roman era to the early modern. Since his time, however, new theoretical and methodological tools have emerged that now allow us to speak of cultural unity and continuity in other terms and give us the opportunity to explore dimensions of culture and identity beyond the realm of elite literary production. These are, in the order in which I shall evoke them, Milman Parry's and Albert Lord's theory of oral poetry and Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory (*kulturelles Gedächtnis*) in the first chapter, and Roger Wright's theory concerning the emergence of the written Romance languages (henceforth the Wright thesis) in the second. In the third and final chapter, I will attempt to synthesize my view of antique-high medieval continuity by examining the importance of the intervening Merovingian period.

1. Oral-formulaic poetry, cultural memory, and the *Vie de saint Alexis*

We begin from afar. My first chapter, an essay on a classic work of medieval French literature, the *Vie de saint Alexis*, was initially inspired by a century's scholarship on the civilization of the Greek-speaking world, from Mycenae to Byzantium; the questions of cultural continuity that this scholarship has engaged seemed applicable also to the Latin West. Hellenophiles will recall that, toward the close of the nineteenth century and before the first bloom of Mycenaean archeology, the content of the Homeric poems was widely seen as purely mythical. Yet a few decades' archaeological work soon went a long way toward dispelling much of this notion, while at the same time serving to explain certain apparent oddities within the Homeric works themselves as cultural memories of a bygone age, referential of Mycenaean Greek culture

to a significant degree despite the inevitable distortions worked by time.[16] Crucially, it was very likely oral literature, meaning poetry passed on by 'singers of tales' using oral-poetic techniques similar to those studied and described by Milman Parry and Albert Lord,[17] that made possible the very survival of these memories across the centuries of the Greek 'dark ages' that separated Achilles from Homer. And it was these memories, as preserved in the epics of Homer, that were so acutely relevant to their later Greek and Roman audiences as to be a cornerstone of their cultural, religious, social, and political world. The maintenance of such a cultural continuity over centuries depended on three interlocking factors: the cultivation of a cultural memory identifying the present with the past, an active narrative tradition capable of preserving stories and ideas over the centuries, and a common language whereof the stability and identity persisted despite its inevitable evolution. Between Mycenae, Homer, and classical Athens these factors were all in play, enabling a broad sense of Greek cultural continuity despite a long intervening period of what historians used to call the 'Greek dark ages.'[18]

I begin from this distance in order to remind the reader of the other 'dark ages' of European historiography, as they were once known, for the cultural memories whose survival I shall attempt to trace in the present study made their way through the centuries after the Roman Empire had ceased to represent a palpable political force in Western Europe generally and in Gaul (France) in particular. The textual example that will serve me in this purpose is the *Vie de saint Alexis*, and I will focus on the version surviving in Paris, BnF fr. 19525. As will become apparent, this Old French hagiographical poem contains a large number of details about its setting – the Roman Empire at the turn of the fifth century CE – that appear anachronistic given the eleventh-century

[16] Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung, und politische Indentität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999), 274-5.
[17] Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1960).
[18] Assmann, 49.

date of composition assumed by most scholars. This is where the analogy with Homer comes in, for the Homeric poems describe a world where political power centered on royal palatial complexes, where iron was a rare and precious metal, and where the tools of war were chariots and bronze weapons, none of which were characteristic of the later periods of these works' emergence, writing, and codification. Even written sources might not have been able to preserve this picture of antiquity in its fullness, since the Mycenaean civilization used a different alphabet and its surviving written records are bureaucratic and commercial; thus, it was presumably the continuous oral-poetic tradition associated with the name of Homer that did the job instead. So it is that in the context of the French middle ages, the *Vie de saint Alexis*, too, apparently conveys echoes of late antique society and culture, which we are able to judge thanks to the several reminiscences of late antiquity which seem to shine through a poem composed many centuries after the (semi-legendary) fact. And while, until a certain point, appeals to 'oral tradition' may have constituted something of a philological hand-wave, critics' efforts to answer the 'Homeric question' have since produced answers that are applicable to analogous situations in other contexts, like that of Old French literature.

The 'Homeric question,' the debate surrounding the authorship and composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, may well have been answered through a fruitful theory developed by the American scholar Milman Parry and his student Albert Lord. In the decade prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, Parry (1903-1935) and Lord (1912-1991) undertook a series of trips to Yugoslavia in order to study the living oral tradition of epic poetry practiced by local bards. Hoping to find clues, by analogy, as to the nature of the epic tradition of Ancient Greece, they recorded the performances of many 'singers of tales' and attempted to describe, analyze, and theorize the collected body of oral literature. Through extensive interviews and cross-interviews, they also

gained insight into the background, education, and perspectives of the singers themselves, and thus came to an understanding of both the poetic technique that they employed and of the manner of its inculcation. Parry's untimely death left Lord to synthesize and publish their work, resulting in what became known as the oral-formulaic hypothesis. According to this, the epic poet must be illiterate, for illiteracy provides for a particular way of understanding language that is essential to the technique in question; he must also have spent years developing his skill in imitation of older bards whom he has heard sing. When he performs, the bard actually composes his poem on the spot, within the given restrictions of his art's traditional meter and of the story that he wishes to tell, with the aid of 'formulas' – grammatically and metrically defined but lexically flexible syntactic units appropriate to certain narrative situations. Upon elaborating the theory, Lord used it to explain the repetitions and parallelisms that mark the entire Homeric corpus, and was able to show the similarities between the use of formulas in the decasyllabic Serbo-Croatian epics of his bards and in the more metrically complex hexameter of Homeric Greek.[19] Presumably, then, the striking reminiscences of Mycenaean civilization that Homer preserves were passed down orally through such poetic methods. (None of this ignores the fact that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as of at least the sixth century BCE, have been transmitted to us as primarily written works compiled, curated, and edited by many generations of ancient and medieval scholars.)

In an appendix to *The Singer of Tales*, in which he first laid out his complete theory, Lord further extended these same principles to an analysis of medieval epics such as the *Song of Roland* and the Byzantine *Digenes Akritas*, showing that they, too, appear to have originated as oral-formulaic compositions.[20] Alison Goddard Elliott was the first to apply principles derived from Lord's work to the *Vie de saint Alexis* and to Old French hagiography generally, and it is from her

[19] Lord, 20-29 (illiteracy and training); 30-67 (formulas); 141 ff. (Homer).
[20] Lord, 202-7 (*Roland*); 207-20 (*Digenes*).

work that I was inspired to see that poem's apparent reflection of the late antique society of its setting – the Roman world in the late fourth and early fifth centuries CE – as more than simple coincidence. The oral-formulaic hypothesis of Albert Lord provides the essential mechanism by which facts about late antiquity could be preserved in poetry. Moreover, by reading the *Vie de saint Alexis* as an oral work in a vein usually reserved by scholarship for heroic epic, I am able both to account for its apparent reminiscences of late antiquity and to create a space for hagiography in the domain of 'popular' literature, arguing that the existence of such a poem reflects an identity that sought to preserve the memory of a Roman past in part through literary means.

For my ensuing discussion of cultural memory, my guide will be Jan Assmann, whose work on the subject, using a number of ancient Mediterranean case studies – Egypt, Israel, Mesopotamia, the Hittite Empire, and Greece – describes the ways in which individuals are able to identify their community, real or imagined, with people and events of the past. Part of the value of his project lies in his attempt to render definite the admittedly nebulous concept of collective memory: eschewing abstraction whenever possible, Assmann builds his theoretic framework around specific examples drawn from textual, archeological, and anthropological evidence. By expressing himself as much as possible in concrete and material terms, he develops the concept of 'cultural memory' as an institution through which groups in the present can identify with a time that none of their members has personally experienced. Artistic and architectural canons, religious ritual, law, history, and literature are all successively invoked as foundations upon which such a relationship with the past can be constructed. Here, I am especially interested in Assmann's discussion of Homer, which connects his reception in the Classical period (the fifth and fourth centuries BCE) to a desire to ground a Hellenic identity in the apparent image of Greek unity found in the Homeric corpus. This example allows me to draw a parallel with the *Vie de saint Alexis*,

insofar as it presents a more or less clear case of identity finding expression in oral-poetic reminiscences of an idealized past. Where Albert Lord points toward the mechanism for the retention of poetic 'memories' in the form of concrete facts about late antiquity, Jan Assmann provides an imaginative schema in which to contextualize those memories in terms of processes of shaping and transmitting identity.

2. Linguistic identity, Latin-Romance continuity, and the *Vie de saint Laurent*

Of course, the *Vie de saint Alexis* is but one (rare) example of Old French hagiography that happens to display traits of oral-formulaic poetry; many more extant representatives of the genre have named authors or else bear signs of composition in a written, as opposed to an oral and illiterate, context. In the case of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, the question of orality was important because it allowed me to link that poem's identity-construction (its inclusive narrative 'we') with its late antique reminiscences under the umbrella of cultural memory. Yet nothing essential to the post-imperial Romanity that I posit necessitates the restriction of its influence to oral and 'popular' contexts, for a broad undercurrent of identity could make itself felt in many subtle ways. In the second chapter, I will take a step back and examine the connection between Romanity and language, language being closely linked to many kinds of cultural and ethnic identity.[21] On this point, I will turn to the scholarship of Roger Wright and the historical linguists who have built on his work, whose collective efforts allow for a fresh look at the medieval divergence between Latin and Romance that the appearance of writing in Old French in the ninth century seems to witness. According to them, on a fundamental level, it was not Romance that diverged from Latin and became acknowledged as an independent entity; rather, it was Latin that, through educational

[21] See Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin, 2000), 45; 130; 200.

reforms that gradually spread out from the heart of the Carolingian realm, changed from a common language into an exclusively learned register. In this view, on an everyday, lived level, the Latin of the later Empire and the early middle ages exhibits a much stronger continuity with Romance than it does with the learned 'medieval Latin' that was accessible only to those who had been trained in it. At the same time, on a textual, written level, all stages of Latin are manifestly the same language, and this fact would have been apparent to anyone working with texts in the middle ages. I am interested in analyzing the relationship between Latin and Romance (i.e. Old French) during this time of conceptual differentiation, i.e. the period when the oldest surviving vernacular texts appear in writing; in my view, this long historical moment must fall somewhere in between c. 843, when Nithard recorded the Strasbourg Oaths as part of his chronicle,[22] and the eleventh century, to which the composition of the first texts of classical Old French literature – the the *Vie de saint Alexis* and the *Song of Roland* – is conventionally dated. To understand how inhabitants of the various Romance-speaking countries, including France and, after the year 1066, Norman England, would have perceived their spoken language in relation to Latin and in relation to other Romance dialects is key to understanding their sense of group belonging both within the context of their medieval present and with respect to the past.

Although the once-common idea that spoken Latin had died with the Western Empire, dismissed already by Pierre Riché in 1962,[23] no longer holds wide currency, the opposition between Latin and vernacular still risks being conceived in absolute terms that have more to do with modern notions of language and nationhood than they do with any properly medieval

[22] Nithard, *Nithardi Historiarum libri III*, ed. Ernst Müller, MGH SS Rer. Germ. 44 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1907), 36.

[23] Pierre Riché, *Éducation et culture dans l'Occident barbare, VI^e^-VIII^e^ siècle*, 4th ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 163-4. Riché criticizes the notion of an early death of spoken Latin as proposed by Ferdinand Lot, who had also posited a fundamental divergence between Latin and vernacular as early as the fourth century. Cf. Ferdinand Lot, 'À quelle époque a-t-on cessé de parler latin ?,' *Archivum latinitatis medii aevi* 6 (1931), 98–9.

phenomena. That is to say that the emergence of written French is described as the start of a teleological process that begins with the first recorded mentions of the vernacular and comes to full fruition with Proust (the culminating point of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*). If we wish to understand medieval language on its own terms, we ought to recognize that this view is flawed on two counts. First, while recognizing the (literary) history of the French language as a process of development or evolution, it is incorrect to analyze any one of its stages with reference to the distant future: there can be no reciprocal link between the two, and seeing the past only in terms of its apparent consquences in our own time does not aid us at all in understanding historical processes and phenomena in their own context. Second, the teleological view of linguistic development can tempt us into seeing the earlier stages of a given language as somehow deficient. To take one well-known example: in discussing Gregory of Tours (c. 538-594) in the fourth chapter of *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach assumes the existence, parallel to Gregory's written Latin, of a Gallic vernacular that 'is not yet a usable literary vehicle'; in a later chapter on Chrétien de Troyes, meanwhile, he perceives a flatness of register in the language of Old French courtly romance, 'which does not know an "elevated style."'[24] Though today as ever we ignore Auerbach at our peril, read in the wrong light, these passages could give a reader the unfortunate impression that the French language had clawed its way from blind inchoateness in Gregory's time and skipped through a naïve adolescence in Chrétien's before arriving at a state of sublime maturity *chez* Marcel Proust. Yet this cannot be so, for, the talents and penchants of individual writers aside, at each and every one of these historical stages the language spoken in France was a fully functioning tool capable of all the forms of expression required of it in the context of its own time and setting.

[24] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. W.R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 87-94 (Gregory's Latin); 132-3 (Chrétien's style).

An additional key point to understand here is that Gregory of Tours' native spoken language was not an imaginary proto-French, but Latin pure and simple.

While Michel Banniard in France would introduce significant nuance into a prevailing impression that the vernacular and Latin were already different languages in the Merovingian era, the true breakthrough in this regard had come with the appearance of Roger Wright's provocative study *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France*.[25] Though some of Wright's claims elicited reasonable criticism, overall his argument turned out to be deeply intuitive, for he proposed that the appearance of written texts in Old French in the ninth century signals not the belated codification of a vernacular long distinct from Latin, but rather the very first sign of a conceptual separation of the one from the other. Seen in this light, the lack of any mention of the vernacular in written sources prior to the ninth century makes immediate sense, as does the interchangeability with which some writers used the adjectives *romanus* and *latinus* in a linguistic context even after that stage. Moreover, scholars following in Wright's footsteps further cast doubt on the significance of dates that even he had accepted as representing a divergence between Latin and Romance, namely 813 (when the canons of a church council at Tours recommended that a priest should 'strive to render his homilies in the rustic Roman language or in the German') and 843 (the date of Nithard's chronicle recording the Strasbourg Oaths).

The intuitive nature of these arguments lies in the smoothing-out of contradictions created by scholars of our own era. While, as just noted, early medieval authors never mention any vernacular distinct from Latin, modern scholarship, presuming that there had to have been one, took manuscripts with faulty grammar or spelling and grammarians' descriptions of bad Latin as proof of such a vernacular's existence. Walahfrid Strabo, who lived from 808 to 849, speaks simply

[25] Roger Wright, *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1982).

of contemporary 'peoples who speak Latin' ('gentes quae latinum habent sermonum') in his discussion of a territory (Raetia) that straddled the old imperial frontier,[26] while for every later example that appears to distinguish 'Romance' and 'rustic' speech from Latin, there is another source that treats them as synonymous or overlapping concepts. Meanwhile, for the eventual vernacular that we refer to as Old French, its autonym – *romanz* – simply meant 'Roman,' at least in etymological terms. Thus the much later, ninth-century point of Romance-Latin divergence proposed by Wright and the scholars whose work he inspired, with the opportunity that it affords us to reappraise the written historical records, allows us to take a fresh look at Old French. Given the continued preeminence of Latin as a mode of both written and oral communication throughout the middle ages, it seems likely that the vernacular and Latin may have been perceived by speakers as two parts of the same language system even into the twelfth century, which would necessarily affect both medieval Francophones' linguistic identity and their perception of ancient Rome, the namesake of their vernacular and the cradle of the classical language.

Our witness in this case is the *Vie de saint Laurent*, a hagiographic poem composed by an Anglo-Norman poet in the 1170s. This *Vie* freely mixes Latin words and names, invariably inflected following the rules of Latin grammar even in vernacular contexts throughout its Old French text. A close reading of the text reveals that this is far from a case of pedantry; rather, in dealing with the martyrdom of St Lawrence, which took place in the mid-third century CE at Rome, the poet employs Latin to convey both quaint late antique concepts and Roman personal and geographic names. More importantly, she[27] also uses Latin to raise the register of discourse by having the Christian protagonists invoke liturgical language, or when narrating a solemn moment.

[26] Walahfrid Strabo, 'Vita Galli auctore Walahfrido,' in *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici (II)*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 4 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1902), 282.
[27] See p. 115 regarding the likelihood that the author of the *Vie de saint Laurent* was female.

This mixing, which not only has parallels in other Old French works but also evokes the kinds of learned discourse that can be found in straightforwardly vernacular texts, indicates that while twelfth-century Francophones were, of course, well aware of a by then essential distinction between the two languages, complete conceptual separation between them had not yet been achieved, and they could still be used as part of the same language system.

Some thirteen decades after the *Vie de saint Laurent*, c. 1305, Dante Alighieri would be the first medieval author to extensively theorize the relationship between Latin and the Romance vernacular as well as the rapport between the various Romance dialects themselves. (Roger Bacon had a few decades earlier discussed the vernacular in his grammatical treatises, but his treatment was not systematic.) Dante's findings hardly correspond to the views of language that would emerge from early modernity, for he treats the Romance dialects (grouped under the three categories of Italian, Occitan/Catalan, and French) as essentially one, a *tripharium ydioma*, and describes Latin as a language that had never been a living spoken tongue. Situated, relative to the *Vie de saint Laurent*, at the opposite end of a timeline that starts with the ninth-century emergence of written Romance vernacular, Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* still reflects a deep sense of Romance-Latin unity in a striking, if different, way. Where until 813, according to Wright, what we might call Latin and Romance had simply been the written and spoken expressions of the same phenomenon, for Dante in 1305 there is only one language that had ever been spoken in southwestern Europe, namely Romance. Thus the language of the Romans, for the author of the *Divine Comedy*, still bore their name one thousand years after Diocletian's abdication marked a beginning of the middle ages for our historiography.

The situation of the *Vie de saint Laurent* between these two points in linguistic history, and the manner in which it uses Old French and Latin in combination while narrating a story about late

antique Rome, will allow me to draw conclusions about the poet's linguistic identity with reference to her two languages and the subject matter of her work. While one might be tempted to conclude that the rising profile of vernacular writing and literature after the ninth century reflected a new *discontinuity* with the world of late antiquity and the early middle ages, with Old French having begun to create a space of freedom of expression in a written domain heretofore dominated by a dead language, the vantage points of Wright and Dante emphasize a long-term historical continuity in the spoken language. According to Wright's argument, when the ninth-century linguistic conceptual shift began, it was not Romance that split from Latin but the other way around, and so it was the spoken language whose continuity would remain perceptually unbroken until the day when Dante would be able to imply that Romance had been the language of the Romans, and Latin an artificial literary register (*grammatica*). Connecting this idea to the question of cultural memory as presented in the first chapter, I will conclude by meditating on what it may have meant for medieval Romance-speakers to share in a dialectal continuum that, despite readily recognizable and classifiable regional differentiations, retained the name of 'Roman' in nearly all of its variants, from Galician-Portuguese in the west to Anglo-French in the north.

3. Frankish rule, hagiography, and the *Vie de saint Léger*

My final chapter deals with an early vernacular poem that, while clearly composed in a form of Old French, still retains strong conceptual links to Latin. Rather than take a new theoretical approach, I will attempt to synthesize my previous applications of Albert Lord's, Jan Assmann's, and Roger Wright's schools of thought in order to explore the role that the Frankish (Merovingian and Carolingian) period would have played in the formation and development of medieval Gallic Romanity. I will do so with the help of the *Vie de saint Léger*, a hagiographic text that, as a function of its tenth-century date of composition and Merovingian subject matter, is closer to the events

that it relates, at least when compared to the vantage points from which the *Vie de saint Alexis* and the *Vie de saint Laurent* treat their subject matter. In the process, my goal will be to understand why hagiography in particular might have turned out to be the most appropriate vehicle for preserving and conveying cultural Romanity.

The *Vie de saint Léger*, which describes the life of Leudegar, bishop of Autun up until his kidnapping and murder at the instigation of a Frankish noble c. 679, provides an example of how hagiography could channel a broader set of concerns than *chansons de geste*. With reference to the *Vie de saint Alexis*, I have already touched on 'popular' literature and the corresponding question of which genres get to be defined as such. Following the conclusions that I will have drawn in the first chapter, my reading of the *Vie de saint Léger* will look for signs that this genre is hagiography and not epic, for the concerns of *chansons de geste* are entirely aristocratic. Of course, this fact alone does not mean that Old French epic would have had no audience aside from the nobility, and Auerbach can be cited as one example of an eminent philologist who recognized that genre's peculiar classism while still seeing in it a form of entertainment that appealed to the largest possible public of the time.[28] Certainly the *Song of Roland*, or at least its holy-warrior heroes, enjoyed a popularity that left behind tangible traces. Yet as Pio Rajna reasoned convincingly, 'the common classes, the burghers and the peasants, surely could not boast about the way they are referred to at many points' in the texts of *chansons de geste* generally.[29] More recent scholars have followed the same line of thought in proposing that *chansons de geste* were geared specifically toward a military, and foremost a military-aristocratic, audience, though they would also have been performed both for audiences of commoners and in monastic settings (as a result of which, one

[28] Auerbach, 121-2 (on epic); cf. 132-40 (on courtly romance).
[29] '...le classi populari, borghesi e villani, non hanno certo a lodarsi del modo come si para di loro in molti luoghi.' Pio Rajna, *Le origini dell'epopea francese* (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1884), 362.

might venture, many of our extant examples of the genre wound up on parchment).[30] Thus, without denying that epic poetry could have broad appeal as entertainment, I will argue that, given the strictly delimited and exclusive nature of the medieval French nobility, epic was not the genre of literature that could adequately express the interests or channel the identity of the population at large.

This dichotomy, moreover, can be further traced to the Merovingian era, and thence to the conditions surrounding the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. The French nobility, after all, ultimately derived its origins, traditions, and worldview from the military aristocracy of the Franks who had usurped the Roman state's monopoly on violence in northern Gaul at the end of the fifth century CE (without necessarily seeking to disturb the standing institutions of law and administration). Though the Franks were more conciliatory in their cultural and religious stance with respect to the Roman population than the Ostrogoths in Italy, the Visigoths in southern Gaul and Iberia, or the Vandals in Africa, a broad kind of delimitation between 'Frank' and 'Roman' is still a readily perceptible factor in the life of the Merovingian kingdom. The meanings of these terms varied and shifted according to epoch and context, but in general the former referred to a more exclusive and privileged category, whence it acquired its surviving associations of honesty (frankness) and freedom (franchise). Almost by definition, this group could not include the majority of the population, which remained Roman, especially in subaltern regions like Aquitaine. This stratum of the populace did not remain entirely unrepresented politically, however, for as Jamie Kreiner demonstrates in her recent study of the Merovingian episcopacy and the hagiography that it produced and inspired, it was the bishops of Gaul who took up the role of

[30] Paula Leverage, *Reception and Memory: A Cognitive Approach to the* Chansons de geste (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 23-31.

'protectors' of the poor at a time when the ruling class had other concerns and did not necessarily see itself as bound by any responsibility to all of the country's inhabitants as such.[31]

It is true that the Carolingians' remaking of the Frankish realm introduced changes into the aristocracy's self-perception. As far as we can tell, no noble line was able to trace its ancestry further back than to Charlemagne or his court in subsequent centuries, meaning that his reign was revolutionary in that it came to form a historical nexus for the nobility's own identity;[32] this is tangentially supported by the fact that no *chansons de geste* look back further than Charlemagne's time (even though the historical memories encoded in Germanic epics from the *Waltharius* to the *Niebelungenlied* could reach back as far as the era of Attila, Theodoric I, and Theodoric the Great). However, the exclusionist principles governing noble marriage meant that, on the whole, the boundaries between noble and non-noble, and thus by some extension between Frank and Roman, would have been actively policed. Of course, the families of Roman notables surely retained their status to some extent after the detachment of Gaul from the Empire, and not all those who called themselves Franks were considered noble, but in the end the correlation between these sets of concepts would have been strong enough to attach the present meanings of 'honesty,' 'boldness,' and 'freedom' to words derived from the Frankish name.[33] The terms 'Frank' and 'Roman' thus necessarily developed connotations of class, to the advantage of the former.

We speak here of general tendencies and attitudes, for admittedly, the distinctions in play were probably far from definite; Helmut Reimitz has referred to Merovingian identity as developing in *Spielräume* or 'spaces of play,' where there was room for improvisation and

[31] Jamie Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography in the Merovingian Kingdom*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 152.
[32] Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Those of My Blood: Constructing Noble Families in Medieval Francia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 3; 17; 36.
[33] By a similar process, the modern English words 'generous,' 'gentle,' and 'honest' ultimately derive, through Anglo-French, from the Latin *genus, gens*, and *honor*, words primarily linked to family and social status.

variation.[34] Yet however porous and flexible the boundary, and however many caveats we apply to our understanding of early medieval terms of ethnic distinction, 'Frankish' and 'Roman' were still demonstrably different categories, and the sort of military aristocrat to whom *chansons de geste* would eventually speak belonged emphatically to the former and not to the latter. The upshot for my purposes is that signs of enduring forms of Roman identity should be sought not in the sort of literature that appealed to the tastes and priorities of the military aristocracy, whose identity was necessarily wrapped up in an exclusivity associated with the Frankish name and the aristocratic worldview.

The *Vie de saint Léger*, which has come down to us in a single tenth-century manuscript, is the earliest lengthy narrative work of French poetry that remains extant, though its language reveals that it predates a complete conceptual separation of vernacular and Latin, while the fact that the codex containing it is over a century older than any subsequent manuscript witnesses to Old French literature, which began to be widely diffused in the mid-twelfth century, leaves it largely disassociated from the timeline of French literary history. The poem, describing events that predate its manuscript by about three centuries, depicts the martyrdom of Leudegar of Autun at the hands of the Neustrian palace mayor Ebroin in much the same light as can be seen in passion narratives from late antiquity, such as the poet Prudentius' verse hymns to various martyrs: the protagonist, supported only by his flock of fellow faithful, finds himself face-to-face with the intransigent fury of state power, to whose violence he eventually succumbs after undergoing prolonged torments and inspiring conversions among his enemies. The key difference, naturally, is that the state portrayed in the *Vie de saint Léger* is nominally Christian and Catholic. And while Léger himself plays the role of a sort of Merovingian Thomas Becket, as attested by his numerous

[34] Helmut Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity, and the Framing of Western Ethnicity* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 20-1 and *passim*.

mentions in literature and in ecclesiastical topography, the conflict between the bishop and the Frankish state's prime minister which emerges from the poem appears much deeper. The former, representing the people under his leadership, spares them a siege and accepts martyrdom as the price of a moral victory over his foe. The latter, however, is motivated not by a moment's fury at a 'turbulent priest' but rather by abiding personal hatred, as he methodically pursues his vendetta over the course of years with the arms of secular power at his disposal.

I will analyze this conflict in the light of the poem's style, which will allow me to tie in the oral-formulaic hypothesis of Albert Lord, the poem's subject matter, to which Jan Assmann's framework of cultural memory is pertinent, and its language, which appears to exemplify many of Roger Wright's arguments. In combination, these scholars' theories will allow me to attempt a reading of the *Vie de saint Léger* as an expression of a Gallic culture, derived directly from that of Roman Gaul, reacting to the Frankish regime in its own Roman language and celebrating the memory of a public figure perceived to have been a popular champion. I could not do so without the help of the work of Jamie Kreiner, whose readings of Merovingian hagiography reveal a genre whose goal was to support the claims of the Gallic episcopacy – originally largely derived from Gallo-Roman aristocrats – to just such a role. The realities of the Frankish kingdom's class system, combined with such ecclesiastical pretentions to representing the common people would, I will argue, have produced a situation in which popular culture, insofar as it derived from Roman culture and reflected an enduring Romanity, could most easily find its voice precisely in the literary mode of hagiography. Insofar as the *Vie de saint Léger* can be seen as a surviving example of a work of popular, oral poetry, its portrayal of the conflict between Leudegar and Ebroin would seem to also be a meditation on what it means to be 'Roman' under 'Frankish' rule, even if the poet himself would never have put the matter in such terms.

## 4. Preliminary remarks

The theoretical approaches and three case studies outlined above, which I will now proceed to work through and examine in greater detail, should allow the proposed phenomenon of medieval Romanity to come to the fore in its various expressions, cultural and linguistic. It should be made clear that, when I speak of an enduring Roman identity and of the flow of late antique-medieval cultural continuity, I am not speaking of a conscious project: the *Vie de saint Léger*, for example, juxtaposes the parties to its conflict only on the basis of social order, and contains none of the calls for political resistance that one might expected from a narrative of 'Frankish' oppression. Of course, in part this was because of the interest of the Church, which could lay first claim to Leudegar, in social cohesion and cooperation with the Frankish ruling class. I for my part am able to assign the values of 'Frankish' and 'Roman' to the poem's various forces only in retrospect, based on an understanding of the history and dynamics of late Roman, Merovingian, and Carolingian society. In highlighting the distinctions between these forces and their derivations from late antiquity, I will take care to emphasize also their ambiguity and malleability. Though legal texts at a fairly advanced stage would still refer to 'Romans' as a category apart, and though the autonyms for the Romance vernaculars represented their pronunciation of the Latin word *romanus*, the sort of active association with idea of the Roman Empire that characterized Byzantine identity did not persist in the West. Yet it is no less important to recognize the endurance of a broad undercurrent of Romanity, the ability, that is, to look upon the Roman world and its inheritance and to say 'we' on the basis of common language and continuity of culture, even as late as the thirteenth century. It is the extent and significance of this phenomenon that I hope to demonstrate here.

## I. Oral Poetry and Cultural Memory: the *Vie de saint Alexis*

### 1. Introduction

The *Vie de saint Alexis* is an Old French hagiographic poem surviving in a number of versions, all written down over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that is often cited as one of the first major works of French literature. The *Vie* relates the legend of the son of an important family in Rome who, compelled by his devotion to God to flee from his family's home on his wedding night, lives for a number of years as a beggar on the other side of the empire, on the streets of Edessa in Roman Syria. Then, brought home by divine will, he spends a number of years as an anonymous beggar under the stairs in the house of his still-grieving parents and abandoned bride. Only upon his death, attended by the supernaturally forewarned pope and emperors, is his identity revealed.[35]

The appearance in the middle of the poem of the pope and of both emperors together highlights a key point, which is further enhanced by a later scene in which they attempt to pass through a pressing throng of the city's residents in order to convey the saint's body to its final resting place. Believing that the people might be dispersed with a gift of alms, they scatter gold coins to the crowd: 'de lor tresor prenent l'or e l'argent / si funt geter devant la povre gent / par ceo quident aveir desconbrement' [from their chests they take gold and silver / and have it cast before the poor folk: / they think to be allowed to pass this way].[36] This may seem an insignificant detail, but when it is examined more closely, it reveals incongruities with the contemporary medieval French world. Presumably, *l'or et l'argent* refer to coins, yet gold coinage had ceased to

[35] For a transcription and translation of this poem, see the appendix at the end of this study; references marked 'Paris *VSA*' indicate the verses quoted.
[36] Paris *VSA*, 521-3.

be produced in France from around the eighth century,[37] while in late antiquity, where the gold *solidus* was a standard unit of account, 'the scattering of gold coins was a privilege usually reserved for emperors alone.'[38] This exercise of imperial prerogative is precisely what the *Vie de saint Alexis* sets up in a passage that, though at first glance unremarkable, is both anachronistic to medieval France and descriptive of the realities of the late Roman era. The example is illustrative of one of this work's remarkable features: the degree to which it manages to evoke late antique institutions and practices, set as it is, at least nominally, around the turn of the fifth century CE.[39] This, taken into account together with the text's resemblances to oral poetry (in the sense of the Parry-Lord thesis, first applied to the *Vie de saint Alexis* by Alison Goddard Elliott [40]), could well indicate a form of cultural continuity with the late Roman period in that the setting of the poem reflects practices and institutions that had rather faded from the sociopolitical scene by the second millennium, but which would have been encoded and transmitted through an evolving sung poem before it was finally fixed in writing in its twelfth-century forms.

To describe such cultural continuity, which the poem's preserved details of late antique life point to, is to speak of a phenomenon that is not at all passive. The active identification, from the very first verses of the poem, of both the narrative voice and the audience with a common past speaks to a shared identity that in effect can be traced to a time when the inhabitants of Gaul considered themselves to be Roman. The echoes of this Romanity, and the extent to which it

[37] Henri Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, trans. I.E. Clegg (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 5.
[38] Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 123; Brown's witness here is Ambrose in his letter *Contra Auxentium*.
[39] Without demanding historical precision of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, I am free, for my purposes, to assign a date to the action of the poem based on the historical figures involved. Specifically, Alexis' death must occur sometime between the years 401, when Innocent I became bishop of Rome, and 408, when the Eastern emperor Arcadius died. This date may be significant, as we will see.
[40] Alison Goddard Elliott, *The Vie de Saint Alexis in the 12th and 13th Centuries: An Edition and Commentary* (North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

survived into the twelfth century when the *Vie de saint Alexis* was committed to parchment, has much to tell us about the people who sang and listened to the poem, their identity, and their perspective on their past and on their world.

While the poem appears in part to pass on notions about life in late antiquity that correspond to the conclusions of modern historians such as Peter Brown to a surprising degree but are anachronistic to its own time period, other aspects of the poem are more generally characteristic of medieval hagiography. Some of the latter – the *ubi sunt* topos, Alexis' asceticism, his contempt for his family's social status – are played upon extensively for the benefit of concerns linked to issues of the poem's own day. The contemporary sociocultural significance of the *Vie* has been explored elsewhere, most recently by Emma Campbell, who has studied its portrayal of asceticism on the basis of queer theory and gift theory.[41] But though a considerable amount of scholarship has been done on the late antique origins of the Alexius legend itself,[42] the depth and contemporary significance of the Old French poem's relationship to its historical setting needs further discussion. This I shall eventually take up, turning to the scholarship and particular vision of Peter Brown, one of the foremost authorities on the world of late antiquity, both in order to establish the extent of the phenomenon in question and to obtain a comprehensive view of late antique life with which I might compare the narrative details of the *Vie de saint Alexis*.

## 2. Defining the text

The present study deals to a great extent with periodization, the unavoidable companion of any approach to history. In order that time and space appear ordered and intelligible, we look for

[41] Emma Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives: The Gift, Kinship and Community in Old French Hagiography* (Cambridge, Eng.: D.S. Brewer, 2008). Campbell's central argument regarding Alexis is that the saint's ascetic yearnings and flight from marriage reflect queer, i.e. non-normative desires.

[42] For a recent work on the late antique Alexius legend, see Maurizio Perugi, *Saint Alexis, genèse de sa légende et de la Vie française* (Genève: Droz, 2014). Cf. the studies (cited *passim*) by C. Odenkirchen, C. Stebbins, L. Herrmann, M. Rösler, G. Paris, and A. Amiaud.

common threads, traits, and trends, sort by area and century, analyze manageable units separately, and in the process create concepts that take on lives of their own. Some, like the 'Middle Ages' of popular imagination, have emerged as grotesque caricatures; others, like the limestone-columned dignity of 'Antiquity' or the humanistic exuberance of the 'Renaissance,' leave more benign impressions. To point out that these fictions are at the same time inevitably and deceptively insidious, even to scholars, is a banality. It may serve as a reminder, however, of a real issue that faces the literary aspect of this study from the outset in speaking of the *Vie de saint Alexis* as such, as any modern edition of a medieval text is a fiction of a very similar sort. While we may often speak for convenience's sake of this or that 'text,' the basis for our modern editions lies nearly always in a variety of manuscripts whose disparities can range from semantic tweaks to the apparent presence or absence of large swathes of text. These are then analyzed together as representing a single phenomenon, though they had existed independently insofar as the people who composed, performed, heard, wrote, copied, and read them were concerned.

This is especially true of the *Vie de saint Alexis*. While it is customary to speak of this early piece of verse hagiography as a single work of literature, what has come down to us is in fact a group of closely related versions of the poem as attested in various manuscripts, no two of which are exactly alike. Among editors, the most popular redaction has been that of the Hildesheim manuscript – also known as the St Albans Psalter – notable for its archaic linguistic features and its decorative execution. Overall, the attention lavished on the *Vie de saint Alexis* since the time of its first modern edition by the renowned philologist Gaston Paris (1839-1903) is unparalleled for a saint's Life, and its appeal rests in large part on its reputation as the oldest vernacular French text from which a continuous literary tradition may be traced. Though various editorial tendencies and approaches have predominated in Romance philology at various times in the past two centuries,

the field has most generally demonstrated a marked preference for the oldest traceable redaction of a work insofar as it normally represents the nearest approximation of an 'original,' a standard from which subsequent redactions deviate at the risk of losing the philologist's affections;[43] the positivist approach to Latin hagiographic legends embraced by the Bollandists of the twentieth century also reflects a similar set of concerns. The *Vie de saint Alexis* in particular has occasioned this sort of search for the 'Ur-text' practically since the dawn of Romance philology.[44] And yet, as Alison Goddard Elliott points out, 'if a poem indebted to the oral tradition is a living, changing creation... "earliest" need not equal "best," nor is the search for the "original version" necessarily a fruitful one.'[45] Elliott herself led the way in considering other approaches – namely that of oral-poetic theory – to the *Vie de saint Alexis* and related texts in her 1983 study of the tradition, and it is my purpose to build upon her findings.

As I have just suggested, referring to the *Alexis* or indeed to most medieval literary works as individual 'texts' already serves to conjure some of the same problems that speaking of the 'middle ages' in the abstract does: it raises the specter of entities existing independently of their physical, spatial, and temporal referents, not unlike scholarly Platonic Forms. In the case of the *Alexis*, this entity is conceived as some sort of average of the surviving versions of the poem that all share a large proportion of their verses, spelling variants aside. Various redactions may be proposed as best conforming to this 'ideal' *Alexis*; nevertheless, one should remain conscious of the fact that, in dealing with any one of them for efficiency's sake, one is ignoring a number of

[43] Alfred Foulet and Mary Blakely Speer, *On Editing Old French Texts* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979, 8-10. The all-consuming hunt for the 'Ur-text' was criticized by D'Arco Silvio Avalle, 'Un'idea di filologia romanza,' in *La doppia verità* (Edizioni del Galuzzo: Florence, 2002), 714-6.
[44] 'The Old French manuscripts, their possible filiations, and the most "accurate" reconstruction of the lost eleventh-century *Urtext* have, for over a century, occupied the attention of scholars whom one might call the school of Gaston Paris.' Karl Uitti, 'The Old French *Vie de Saint Alexis*: Paradigm, Legend, Meaning,' *Romance Philology* 20 (Feb. 1967), 263. This article, though dated, provides a thorough overview of the critical first century of Alexius studies.
[45] Elliott, 77.

equally representative versions of the poem, perhaps most of all those that have not survived to the present day. However, while not aspiring to determine which of the documented redactions best represents an abstracted ideal, one cannot simply insist that what we have are in fact four or five different poems. At the same time, neither a simple ascending stemma of textual reception nor a 'golden middle' blend of the various redactions will provide us with the 'real' *Vie de saint Alexis*. The latter approach, attempted in fact by Gerhard Rohlfs in his 1968 edition of the poem and the accompanying Latin *vita*, may constitute an interesting philological experiment, but complicates matters by presenting us with a text that is, strictly speaking, a modern fabrication.[46]

The tension between ideal and concrete may be resolved by following Alison Goddard Elliott in regarding the *Alexis* as something like an oral-formulaic poem, as a work that comes into existence whenever it is recomposed or performed from memory by the bard who knows its story, the general sequence of its verses, and certain formulas that facilitate the process of spontaneous composition. Granted, the overall consistency and similarity between the extant redactions of the *Vie de saint Alexis* indicate that it was not, by the twelfth century, an oral-formulaic phenomenon of precisely the same sort as that observed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord during their field work in Yugoslavia and systematically described by Lord in his seminal work *The Singer of Tales*. There, the differences even between renditions of the same song as sung by the same singer but on different occasions could be far greater than the distinctions between any two of the extant redactions of the *Vie de saint Alexis*,[47] whose various manuscript versions still share a great number of verses on a word-for-word basis. Nevertheless, as we shall see, outside evidence as well the formulaic quality of the poem's language indicate that it could, with all probability, still have been

[46] Gerhard Rohlfs, *Sankt Alexius: Altfranzösische Legendendichtung des 11. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1968).
[47] Lord, 28 and 69-70.

strongly attached to a tradition of oral performance, in which memorization may have played a certain role (incongruous with the practice of illiterate Yugoslav bards in the early twentieth century). The different manuscript versions of the *Vie de saint Alexis* still represent the poem as it was fixed in writing at one point or another, likely after a professional singer's performance: thus the heart of the poem would indeed have existed as a collective entity shared by all the *jongleurs* who took it into their repertoire, becoming manifest when summoned into time and space on individual occasions and in varying ways by those who performed it from memory or, perhaps at an earlier stage, used oral-composition techniques like those described in *The Singer of Tales*. We may therefore regard all surviving versions as more or less equally valid representations of the same thing, insofar as they represent such an oral-poetic phenomenon.

Allison Goddard Elliott made the case for the applicability of Lord's system to the *Vie de saint Alexis* after calculating that twenty-one percent of the poem as recorded in its oldest manuscript – the Hildesheim manuscript – consisted of formulaic expressions (we may assume that the figure for the closely related Ashburnham and Paris manuscripts is quite similar).[48] This may not seem like a large proportion, especially given that the Parry-Lord school of thought requires a substantial majority of a poem to consist of formulas for it to count as 'oral.'[49] Elliott's methodology, however, was based on that developed for Old French by Joseph Duggan,[50] who used a computer to search for metrically, lexically, and syntactically similar units across a large corpus of *chanson de geste*.[51] Elliott, meanwhile, had only the *Vie de saint Alexis* and its later variants to go by, thus ending up with the more limited figure of twenty-one percent, which, within the tradition of a single legend, is indicative enough of its 'orality' in the sense defined by Lord.

[48] Elliott, 51.
[49] Lord, 141-5.
[50] Elliott, 52.
[51] Joseph Duggan, 'Formulas in the *Couronnement de Louis*,' *Romania* 87, no. 347 (1966): 315–44.

The differences between the poem's various redactions do not seem to extend to their use of formulas, and in discussing the *Vie de saint Alexis* as a bearer of oral tradition, I would in principle be justified in working with any of the manuscript variants.

The choice, then, of an edition or redaction to study the phenomenon of oral tradition and cultural memory in the *Vie de saint Alexis* would ideally be based on a number of other factors, without necessarily attributing an objective superiority to the chosen version. In the present case, the best text would show the greatest affinity with the world and literature of late antiquity, for the existence of any one version with the requisite features – reminiscences of late antiquity as well as traits of oral-formulaic composition according to the Parry-Lord thesis – would support this study's argument. It seems logical that each written redaction of the *Vie de saint Alexis* should simply represent an organic rendition of the abstract 'text' that we imagine when looking at the ensemble of its recorded versions, without any one necessarily being the 'best.' In this way, I would also be faithful to those whose mediation preserved these texts for us in the first place: doubtless, the *jongleur* and the scribe who would have collaborated in the production of these written records purported to faithfully fix the song itself, as it were, and not just one of its versions. In the same way, the Bosnian 'singers of tales' that Parry and Lord interviewed claimed to replicate their epics exactly every time they performed them, even though their interviewers' transcripts consistently revealed significant variations in the actual performances, which fed into the two scholars' model of spontaneous oral verse composition based on formulas.[52] Therefore, in the context of my present study, I will regard the original *Vie de saint Alexis* in its extant variants as essentially one poem with four surviving realizations, none of which is necessarily the more valid, but to one of which I must adhere in order to conform to the poem's actual literary record.

[52] Lord, 28.

3. The manuscript tradition

I will now review the extant redactions of the *Vie de saint Alexis* before proceeding further with an inquiry into the question of the text as an oral poem. There are four or five manuscripts containing versions of the *Vie de saint Alexis* in its early form whose texts, orthographic differences aside,[53] share a high degree of resemblance. In fact, some of the most significant differences lie in the variant treatments of the ending of the poem; some variants contain an apostrophic prayer as a conclusion, while others end with the story's end. In the preface to his 1968 edition, Gerhard Rohlfs outlined in putative chronological order the various redactions of the poem (their dating will be discussed in more detail below). Of these, the first four – MSS L ('Hildesheim,' Dombibliothek, St Godehard I [St Albans Psalter]), A ('Ashburnham,' BnF n.a.f. 4503), P ('Paris,' BnF fr. 19525), and V ('Vatican,' BAV Cod. Vat. lat. 5334), represent *Vie de saint Alexis* as it must have been sung in its relative youth, or at least around the time that it was first fixed in writing; these twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts give us a poem of five to six hundred verses. In a number of greatly augmented later redactions from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the number of verses more than doubles to around twelve hundred.[54]

In all, the material evidence for the earlier, shorter *Vie de saint Alexis* consists of five manuscripts, two of which – the Vatican manuscript and MS $P^2$ – are fragmentary (the latter, very similar to the Paris version, is held in Manchester [John Rylands University Library, French, 6, f.

[53] Notable linguistic peculiarities of the Hildesheim manuscript include the retention of post- and intervocalic dental consonants (e.g. *nethe*, v. 41; cf. Lat. *nāta* > OF *nee*, and *emperethur*, v. 35; cf. Lat. *imperātor* > OF *empereor*), , as well as first- and even third-declension feminine words ending in 'a' rather than 'e' (e.g. *ta dolenta medra*, v. 396; cf. Lat. *tuam dolentem matrem* > OF *ta dolente mere*, including what were originally adjectives agreeing with *mente* used adverbially, e.g. *belament*, v. 48; cf. Lat. *bellā mente* > OF *belement*).

[54] Rohlfs, xiv-xv. One of these later, longer variants of about twelve hundred lines found in BnF fr. 2162 and Oxford Bodl. Canonici misc. 74 was edited by Charles E. Stebbins and published in 1974. In this edition, Stebbins refers to the *Vie de saint Alexis* as found in BnF fr. 2162, his base text, as *P*; it is not to be confused with our manuscript P (BnF fr. 19525). See Charles Stebbins, *A Critical Edition of the Thirteenth Century Old French Poem Version of the* Vie de saint Alexis (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1974).

10]). The best known, longest, and perhaps earliest redaction of the group is found in the lavishly illuminated Hildesheim manuscript or St Albans Psalter, which as a codex 'constitutes a landmark both in English art and in French literature'[55] and is generally thought to have been made for the celebrated English anchoress Christina of Markyate.[56] Its text of the *Vie de saint Alexis* is in the Anglo-French orthography, and the manuscript presumably originated at St Albans in England before moving to the Benedictine monastery of Lamspringe in Hildesheim, known to have hosted a community of English monks;[57] it is variously believed to have been produced between 1120 and 1150.[58] It should be noted that the *Vie de saint Alexis* is often referred to as an 'eleventh-century' poem precisely because of the apparently archaic orthography of the redaction found in MS L and following Gaston Paris, in whose estimate its ultimate original manuscript would have dated to around the middle of the eleventh century.[59] Indeed, despite the date of the Hildesheim manuscript itself, its language renders it distinct from of the majority of surviving twelfth-century vernacular literary output, where first-declension nouns ending in 'a' and the retention of so many inter- and post-vocalic dental consonants are not characteristic features. The *Alexis* text of MS L has been reedited many times in our own day since it was first published by Gaston Paris: notable editions in monograph form include those of Christopher Storey (Droz, 1968), Carl Odenkirchen (Classical Folia Editions, 1978), and Maurizio Perugi (Droz, 2000 & 2014), among others, which are distinct from one another by virtue of the degree to which the editors allow themselves to intervene in the manuscript readings. In addition to these, a photographic reproduction of the

[55] Rachel Bullington, *The* Alexis *in the Saint Albans Psalter: A Look into the Heart of the Matter*, Garland Studies in Medieval Literature 4 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 47.
[56] Kristine Haney, 'The St Albans Psalter: A Reconsideration,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 58 (1995), 23-8.
[57] Rohlfs, xiv.
[58] Gaston Paris and Léopold Pannier, *La Vie de saint Alexis : Textes des XI^e^, XII^e^, XIII^e^, et XIV^e^ Siècles* (Paris: Librairie A. Franck, 1872), 2-3.
[59] G. Paris, *La vie de saint Alexis*, 1872, 45.

manuscript's *Alexis* text was produced in 1890 by Franz Heinrich Bödecker,[60] while the University of Aberdeen has made a digitized reproduction and commentary of the entire manuscript available on its St Albans Psalter Project website.[61]

Roughly contemporaneous with the St Albans Psalter is the Vatican manuscript (Cod. Vat. lat. 5334 fo. 125), dated to the first half of the twelfth century, whose fragmentary text of the *Vie* contains only stanzas 86-125 minus four (according to the numbering system used by Gerhard Rohlfs, based on MS L, which contains the greatest number of stanzas of any of the surviving early versions and is thus often deemed more complete).[62] Rohlfs has also detected Franco-Provençal or Burgundian traits in the language of this manuscript's text, while Alison Goddard Elliott simply attributes the manuscript to a continental scribe.

The Ashburnham manuscript (BnF n.a.f. 4503) is the second of the full extant redactions of the poem after the Hildesheim manuscript, and was produced around the turn of the thirteenth century.[63] Two further scribes subsequently worked on the text after the initial hand, the first of these merely adding corrections and alternate readings in the spaces between the lines. The second, however, took a less subtle approach, 'correcting' words that he may not have understood and brutally attempting to impose a rhyme scheme upon the poem, apparently objecting to (and perhaps confused by) the fact that the form of the *Vie de saint Alexis* is characterized not by rhyme but by assonance, more generally associated with the *chansons de geste*.[64] This curious detail may well be a mark of the era, for most vernacular hagiography written by the thirteenth century was

[60] Franz Heinrich Bödecker, *La cançun de saint Alexis: reproduction photographique du manuscrit de Hildesheim* (Paris: H. Welter, 1890).
[61] University of Aberdeen, *The Saint Albans Psalter Project*, https://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter.
[62] Rohlfs, xiv-xv.
[63] Elliott, 1983, 14 (note).
[64] T.D. Hemming, *La Vie de saint Alexis: Texte du manuscrit A* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), viii-ix.

rhymed, and the scribe in question could well have been seeking to 'fix,' however clumsily, a perceived poetic flaw in the text.

Finally, there is the Paris manuscript (BnF fr. 19525), whose folios 26v-30v harbor a redaction of the *Vie de saint Alexis* that contains 113 stanzas, is closer to *L* than to *A* linguistically and structurally, and was dated by Patricia Stirnemann to the second quarter of the thirteenth century; Elliott has determined that this manuscript was produced by a Continental scribe, and Stirnemann, while noting that 'l'écriture... des ff. 1-66 ont un certain aspect français,' follows Paul Meyer in locating its origins in England.[65] This codex contains an additional number of other saints' Lives including the *Vie de saint Laurent*, which I will examine in the following chapter. There is also another, fragmentary manuscript of this type in Manchester known as $P^2$ (John Rylands University Library, French, 6, f. 10), which reproduces only the first 35 stanzas of the *Vie de saint Alexis*.[66] The Paris manuscript's text of the poem has never been separately edited as such, though it has been consulted for many editions based principally on the *Alexis* text of the St Albans Psalter, including that Rohlfs.

While one should avoid the trap of regarding the earlier types of *Alexis* texts as a priori superior, it is apparent that a globally shorter vernacular Life of saint Alexis was widespread in the twelfth century, and it is to its shorter forms – those found in MSS L, V, A, and P – that I should first turn in my search for cultural continuities between late antiquity and the first spring of written vernacular French literature. The more obvious choices for analysis are the Hildesheim (*L*) and the Ashburnham (*A*) manuscripts, both published to date in critical editions. In this regard, the former has been the more popular by far, having been reedited numerous times, most recently by

[65] Patricia Stirnemann and François Avril, eds., *Manuscrits enluminés de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1987), 67.
[66] Rohlfs, xv. Cf. Elliott, 14.

Maurizio Perugi in 2014.[67] Numerous arguments have been put forth as to the superiority of MS L over the competition, many of these based on its length and presumed (linguistic) proximity to an Ur-text. The Ashburnham manuscript, by contrast, enjoys only one well-received 1994 edition by T.D. Hemming. Though the latter manuscript's text was damaged beyond repair by the editorial zeal of the third scribe to work on it, reviewers of Hemming's edition showed some appreciation for the contrasts that his introduction was able to highlight between MS A and MS L, such as the former's more balanced treatment of the saints' mother and wife, in which their role is cast in an allegorical light.[68] MS A also features a rather shorter concluding prayer, which is more in keeping with late antique hagiographic styles, which leads Hemming to argue that the Ashburnham manuscript may in fact be a truer representative of the 'Ur-*Alexis'* than the others, and that the longer prayer is a later addition.[69] By contrast, in many high medieval saints' Lives these prayers have a distinct tendency to run on for several stanzas, imparting in retrospect a rather different flavor upon the rest of the poem. The manifest flaws of the manuscript's presentation of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, however, relegate Hemming's edition to a supplementary role here.

Between the three textually complete recensions of the *Vie de saint Alexis* – Hildesheim, Ashburnham, and Paris – the main differences are to be found in the poem's final stanzas. The narrative of MS A ends after the emperors' ploy of scattering gold coins before the crowd thronging Alexis' funeral procession fails to distract those hoping to gain access to 'their' saint; the poem thus seems to end on a bit of a cliffhanger, proceeding immediately to a brief final prayer, though it does also mention that Alexis is buried in Rome. MSS L and P, meanwhile, go on to describe Alexis' interment in the Church of St Boniface, anchoring the protagonist in a present

[67] Perugi, 617-39.
[68] Janet K. Ritch, 'La Vie de saint Alexis: Texte du manuscrit A (Book Review)' in *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 91, No. 3 (July 1996), 718-719.
[69] Hemming, xviii-xix.

spatial reality (since there is such a church in Rome) and providing closure to the narrative. MS L alone of the three features a lengthier prayerful lament in which the narrator briefly seems to further identify the audience with the poem's Roman *plebs* – 'cum esmes avoglez!' [how we were blind!][70] By contrast, like that of MS A, the closing prayer of MS P is brief, though the two are dissimilar otherwise. The Ashburnham text (re)emphasizes both the central tenets of Nicene Christianity (the world to come, the Trinity) and the saint's ability to provide for the remission of the sins of those who would keep him in mind, while the Paris text invokes his help in a more general sense, and here he appears almost as a kind of 'invisible friend,' to appropriate Peter Brown's translation of Greek and Latin terms for the personal spiritual function of the saint (angel, *daemon*) in late antiquity:[71]

| **(MS A)** | **(MS P)** |
|---|---|
| Ki ad pechied il s'en deit recorder | aiun seignors cest saint homme en memoire |
| Par penitence mult bien se puet saner | si lui priun que de tot mal nos toille |
| Briefs est li siecles plus durable atendez | e en ces siecle nos donst pais e concorde |
| Ço depreums la seinte Trinitez | e en l'altre parmanable gloire |
| Od Deu el ciel ensemble puissum regner. | que là poisun venir nos donst Deus ajutoire |
| AMEN AMEN[72] | e encontre deable e ses engins vitoire[73] |

Of course, it would be difficult to argue from these characteristics that one variant is more representative of certain spiritual trends than the other, since both still reflect beliefs that were broadly characteristic of orthodox Christianity from the very inception of the cult of the saints. In this case, Hemming's argument that redactions that feature a shorter concluding prayer are more representative of the poem's earlier stages clearly applies just as well to MS P as it does to MS A.

[70] Storey, 124 (verse 616).
[71] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 50-1.
[72] 'He who has sinned should keep it in mind; / by penitence he can cure himself of it well. / The world is short-lived, look forward to a more permanent one: / let us beseech the holy Trinity, / that with God in heaven we might together reign.' Hemming, 27 (verses 507-11).
[73] 'My lords, let us keep this holy man in our memory, / and let us pray to him that he deliver us from all evil, / and that he give to us peace and harmony in this world / and lasting glory in the other. / God give us aid so that we might attain it, / and against the devil and his schemes, victory.' Paris *VSA*, 571-6.

Ultimately, I have settled on using the Paris redaction of the *Vie de saint Alexis* as (found in BnF fr. 19525) as the basis for my study, only in part because its text shows slightly more affinity (per Hemming's reasoning) with late antique hagiographic practices than the Hildesheim version, without having been marred by later corruptions like the text of the Ashburnham manuscript. There is, however, another, more important reason to enlist the Paris manuscript in my study, based on the fact that it has heretofore remained unpublished as a separate redaction of our poem. By including a transcription and translation of the text of MS P in an appendix to this study, I will additionally have provided future students of the *Vie de saint Alexis* with the opportunity easily to refer to yet another version of this important Old French poem. At the same time, by focusing on the Paris text, my study of the *Vie de saint Alexis* will benefit from a fresh perspective on the poem, as scholars have until now concentrated mostly on the Hildesheim version (as well as on the Ashburnham version to a lesser extent). Preparing and studying the text of such an edition also affords me the opportunity to apply in practice one of the theoretical principles that undergird my arguments, namely that of treating each redaction as an independent manifestation of an oral poem that deserves individual care and attention. Given the importance accorded to the *Vie de saint Alexis* in French literary history, given the extensive attention that editors have granted to other redactions of the poem, and given the implications of oral-poetic theory for appraisal of the poem's manuscript tradition, an accessible and consultable edition of the poem as found in MS P would in itself be a useful undertaking. That said, though the main object of this study will be the *Vie de saint Alexis* as presented in my own transcription and translation of the Paris manuscript's text, I will at times consult other variants as well as other, later adaptations of the poem, while always striving to respect the chronology of the texts and manuscripts insofar as it is apprehensible to us today. I intend once again to consider the four redactions of the original *Vie de saint Alexis* as

essentially representing one poetic phenomenon, no single expression of which is necessarily truer. At the same time, my study is obliged to focus on a single redacted version of the poem – in this case, that of MS P – in order to duly reflect the empirical record that has been handed down to us. In this schema, references to the poem's other manifestations and later *remaniements* are still permissible, but only when clearly marked wherever they are made.

## 4. Orality and the *Vie de saint Alexis*

In order to discuss the *Vie de saint Alexis* as a product of 'cultural memory,' it will be helpful to establish it as a work of oral poetry, i.e. the product of a popular oral tradition. These two concepts – 'oral' and 'popular' – do not necessarily have to be identified with one another, but I refer to them in the sense that they have acquired in the wake of Parry and Lord's research in Yugoslavia. At this point, the notion that the earliest examples of Old French poetry originated as oral poems is not new; I have already touched on Elliott's and Duggan's thoughts on the topic, and might mention that Lord's own *The Singer of Tales* includes a brief analysis of the *Song of Roland* among its examples of texts that seem to share fundamental traits with the formulaic epics of prewar Yugoslavia.[74] These scholars' application of the Parry-Lord thesis to *chanson de geste* and even (in Elliott's case) hagiography builds on the older 'traditionalist' school of thought that attributed the creation of such works to 'oral tradition,' without necessarily being able to specify what such a tradition might have looked like in actual practice, lacking, as it did, the theoretic framework that Albert Lord's publications would provide. This is not to say that the emergence of that theory has universally convinced medievalists of its applicability to Old French texts, with Paul Zumthor, for one, resisting its use as an absolute standard for oral poetry while still admitting

[74] Lord, 202-6.

its usefulness as an 'hypothèse de départ.'[75] Indeed, despite the strikingly 'formulaic' language of *chanson de geste* and other Old French poems, the fact that most of their manuscript versions' texts match each other most of the time means that there had to have existed an intermediary form of oral performance between spontaneous formulaic composition and simple reading aloud. Or, as Evelyn Vitz expressed it, 'à mesure que les chansons de geste furent de plus en plus souvent couchées sur le parchemin, elles se "dénaturèrent," en quelque sorte.'[76] Nevertheless, Parry-Lord, used as an 'hypothèse de départ' without speculating overmuch about the largely unknowable mechanics of oral literary technique at the time of the *Vie de saint Alexis*' genesis, aligns broadly with and provides a solid basis for the 'traditionalist' viewpoint, while the alternative – the notion of written composition by individual authors – meshes very poorly with the evidently formulaic qualities of many of these texts.

Zlata Volkova, in *Istoki frantsuzskogo literaturnogo iazyka* (Origins of the French Literary Language), synthesizes for us these various 'traditionalist' theories regarding how some – particularly epic – poems in the Old French language developed before they were written down.[77] She notes in particular that 'the relationship of written epic texts to the oral epic tradition continues to remain not entirely defined even in the works of leading philologists.'[78] One of the more common hypotheses is thus that the oldest examples of Old French epic were the products of a lengthy period of development in oral form, this perhaps even ascending to the Carolingian era, before they were finally fixed in writing around the twelfth century; such is, briefly put, the

[75] Paul Zumthor, *La poésie et la voix dans la civilisation médiévale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), 77.
[76] Evelyn Birge Vitz, 'Vie, légende, littérature: Traditions orales et écrites dans les histoires des saints' in *Poétique*, Vol. 26 (1987), 387.
[77] Zlata Volkova, *Istoki frantsuzskogo literaturnogo iazyka* (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola, 1983), 77-104.
[78] '...отношение письменных текстов к устной эпической традиции продолжает оставаться не вполне определенным даже в трудах ведущих филологов.' Volkova, 93.

'traditionalist' viewpoint exemplified by the work of R. Menendéz Pidal.[79] Hagiography was generally not included in this schema, but unless one is to insist that, in contrast to *chanson de geste*, absolutely all vernacular hagiography had to have been translated from Latin by clerics (though much of it undoubtedly was!), there is no reason why a form of the 'traditionalist' view cannot be applied to such a variable anonymous work as the *Vie de saint Alexis*. Indeed, if in this case we are dealing with an oral poem, as Alison Goddard Elliott has argued and demonstrated, one cannot assume its immediate descent from extant written sources and automatically suppose that the *Vie de saint Alexis* was composed by someone directly under the impression of a Latin prose text.

In a slightly different sense, the notion of the essential orality of hagiographic texts has found expression in the scholarship of Evelyn Vitz, who draws a distinction between *chanson de geste*, hagiography, and courtly romance based in part on their relationship to oral and written transmission. Hagiography here occupies a middle ground between the two other genres in that it relies both on oral and written sources. For Vitz, 'hagiography is a fusion of oral and written traditions, oral and written mentalities,' and she lists the three ways in which she defines hagiography as 'oral': in its rhetorical character as a discourse of praise and persuasion, in its reliance on anecdotal information and word-of-mouth transmission, and in its associations with prayer.[80] At the same time, the earliest Christian hagiography defended the veracity of its accounts of persecution and martyrdom by appealing to the authority of the official written word and by imitating the style of Roman court records, harnessing the sense of conclusive fact that attaches

[79] Volkova, 85-6.
[80] Evelyn Vitz, 'From the Oral to the Written in Medieval and Renaissance Saints' Lives,' in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Klara Szell (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 97.

itself to judicial decisions.[81] The earliest martyrs' Lives, such as the *Life of St Polycarp*, were (or at least present themselves as) written after judicial transcripts, crafting for their narratives a double legitimacy from the notarized authority of the Roman state and from the attested willingness of Christians to submit to torture and death.[82] From these beginnings, Vitz maintains, the success and legitimacy of a hagiographical story would come to rest on the double expedient of the oral, through word-of-mouth retelling of saints' Lives through prayer, preaching, and sung or declaimed poetry, and the written, through the official records of the Church and the written fixing of saints within the liturgical calendar and in their *vitae*.[83] Although the 'orality' that Vitz discusses is a much broader category than the 'oral literature' of Parry and Lord (this being epic poetry spontaneously composed by illiterate bards using a flexible kind of formulaic language), conceptually the former can readily encompass the latter.

Now, before further exploring the matter of oral poetics, it would be prudent to review what is known about the origins and transmission of the Alexius legend, which is not of western European origin and seems to have reached the area at a comparatively late stage. It will also be helpful to review the manuscript evidence for what has widely been taken to be the vernacular poem's source: the Latin prose Lives, especially since Volkova, for one, denies the *Vie* 'oral' and 'popular' status precisely because it is held to be a translation from the *vitae*. Yet this line of thinking is well worth questioning, for the oldest manuscripts of most of the *vitae*'s redactions are roughly contemporaneous with MS L, the first of the extant manuscripts containing the vernacular text.[84] In fact, it appears that both the provenance and the age of the Latin *vitae* have been taken

[81] Vitz, 'Vie, légende, littérature,' 388-9.
[82] Vitz, 'Vie, légende, littérature,' 391-2.
[83] These forms could fuse, with the calendar providing an organizing principle for the Lives, e.g. as in the Byzantine *Menologion* or in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*.
[84] Rohlfs, xiv-xiv; xxv.

for granted for some time, despite problems with this view. As Vitz points out, the very success of any hagiographical narrative relied on both written and oral modes of transmission, with the Life always existing somewhere between the two: it is not always necessary or useful to assume that a saint's Life had to be first fixed in written form under official ecclesiastical tutelage as a prerequisite for its popularization.

In its earliest forms, the legend of Alexius appeared in the eastern Mediterranean toward the close of the fifth century and was first written down either in Greek or in Syriac.[85] Two versions of the Syriac legend were published in French translation in 1889 by Arthur Amiaud, who dated its three oldest manuscripts to as early as the sixth century.[86] The first version of the legend differs significantly from that found in the *Vie de saint Alexis*, to the point that the saint dies in Edessa, where the bishop Rabbula (d. 435 CE[87]) attends his death. This text also portrays the saint as a *puer senex* whose mother tempts him in vain with pretty servant girls, who studies diligently but indifferently, and who 'quitta avec joie sa famille et son pays' in a premeditated fashion,[88] none of which matches the inner conflict and ambiguity that characterize the Alexis of the Old French poem. The second Syriac legend, meanwhile, is presented almost as an addendum to the first version, and recounts the same sequence of events as do the Greek, Latin, and Western vernacular traditions, wherein Alexis comes back to Rome, and contains the familiar stories of the saint living in his parents' house and dying attended upon by the emperors and the bishop of Rome. One ought

[85] Carl Odenkirchen, *The Life of St. Alexius*, Medieval Classics, Texts and Studies (Brookline, Mass.: Classical Folia Editions, 1978).
[86] Arthur Amiaud, *La légende syriaque de saint Alexis l'homme de Dieu* (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1889), i (dating); 1-9 (first version); 10-7 (second version).
[87] G.W. Bowersock, 'The Syriac Life of Rabbula and Syrian Hellenism,' in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. Tomas Hägg, Philip Rousseau, and Christian Høgel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 255.
[88] Amiaud, 2-4.

to note here that the signified of 'Rome' in Syriac and even in Greek can be unclear, and there is disagreement among scholars over whether it refers to Rome or Constantinople.[89]

The Latin *Vita sancti Alexii* (BHL 286-92) ascends, according to the estimate of Bollandist scholars, to a ninth- or tenth-century original manuscript.[90] This, however, may be based on little more than the assumption that the legend of Alexius arrived in the West in the late tenth century with Bishop Sergius of Damascus,[91] who, when he came to Rome as a refugee from Syria, was reportedly surprised to discover that his hosts did not know of the saint.[92] According to Rohlfs, the oldest attested Latin versions of this text are found in MS B (Brussels, Albertina ms. lat. II, 992), dated to the eleventh century, and MSS P & O (Paris, BnF lat. 11104 and Oxford, Bodl. Can. Misc. 224), both dated to the twelfth century. The oldest witnesses to the Greek texts that could have inspired them, BnF gr. 1604 and BnF gr. 897 are from this same period, as well,[93] which manuscripts in turn may actually contain the text that some have attributed to Symeon Metaphrastes (a contemporary of Sergius).[94] There also exists an older, ninth-century panegyric to Alexius most likely composed by Joseph the Hymnographer,[95] which seems to be the same as the hymn found in the Menaion entry for March 17, the saint's feast day in the East.[96]

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[89] Charles Stebbins, 'Les origines de la légende de saint Alexis,' *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 51, no. 3 (1973), 505-6.

[90] Jean Pien (Joannes Pinius), 'De Sancto Alexio confessore,' in *Acta Sanctorum Julii*, by Société des Bollandistes, vol. IV (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1868), 250-1.

[91] 'L'archevêque de Damas, Serge, réfugié à Rome à cette époque, fut surpris de ne trouver dans cette ville aucune connaissance d'un saint que la Syrie, trompée par l'emploi du mot Ῥωμή pour Constantinople dans la légende grecque, considérait comme romain.' Gaston Paris, 'La vie de saint Alexi' in *Romania*, Vol. 8 (1879), 164. These appear to be Gaston Paris' own deductions based on discussions with Louis Duchesne and Arthur Amiaud.

[92] Stebbins, 'Les origines de la légende de saint Alexis,' 505.

[93] Rohlfs, xxv.

[94] Amiaud wrote that it is 'certain que Siméon, surnommé Métaphraste, a composé une vie de notre saint,' and attempted to attribute one of the extant Greek *vitae* to Symeon. Amiaud, lxv-lxvi. J.-P. Migne apparently did not consider the Alexius *vita* attributed to Symeon Metaphrastes to be authentic, for it is not to be found in the volumes of the *Patrologia Graeca* containing Symeon's works.

[95] Margarete Rösler, *Die Fassungen der Alexius-Legende mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der mittelenglischen Versionen* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1905), 2-9.

[96] Amiaud, 23; for the Menaion's entry for March 17 as published online by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, see 'Tēi 17 tou autou mēnos martiou: Mnēmē tou Hagiou Alexiou tou anthrōpou tou Theou,' *Hellēnika*

Overall, there is clearly much confusion with regard to the Greek sources, with attributions and dating generally being the subjects of sustained dispute.[97] Amid this, the likelihood that the Syriac legend was based on a lost Greek original is sometimes brought up. This state of general uncertainty greatly problematizes any attempt to describe a neat east-to-west transmission and translation of the Alexius legend. Nonetheless, the chronology that has most often been traced for the development of the Alexius legend is approximately as follows: a sixth-century Syriac text inspired numerous adaptations in Greek, the earliest of which can be traced to the ninth century, and some of which were translated into Latin, which in turn inspired the poet of the Old French *Vie de saint Alexis*. This traditional view of the matter should now be subject to revision based on more recent developments in theory and fresh appraisals of the available evidence.

To briefly recapitulate the information that we currently have, recall that Greek hagiographic texts on Alexius are known since the ninth century, the first Latin prose *vitae* being argued by the Bollandists to have appeared at the same time,[98] while, according to Gaston Paris and those who accept his dating, the French vernacular *Vie de saint Alexis* in more or less its current form dates from about two centuries later. The Old French poem, as I have stated, strongly features traits associated with oral poetry, for its various versions (what I here refer to as the *Vie de saint Alexis* as well as later expansions and adaptations) are all characterized by highly paratactic versification based on a heavy proportion of formulaic constructions.[99] The variety of extant vernacular versions, both between the earliest redactions of the *Vie de saint Alexis* and among its later *remaniements* like versions M and S,[100] also point to an originally primarily oral

*leitourgika keimena tēs Orthodoxēs Ekklēsias*, n.d., http://glt.goarch.org/texts/Mar/Mar17.html. The parts of the Alexius hymn that Amiaud quotes and attributes to Joseph exactly match the text presented by the Archdiocese.

[97] Stebbins, 'Les origines de la légende de saint Alexis,' 504-5.

[98] Rohlfs, xxv.

[99] Elliott, 50-1.

[100] Described and edited by Alison Goddard Elliott.

context, in which poetry is naturally marked by greater instability. (The same is true of many early examples of *chanson de geste*, which show significant discrepancies among the manuscript redactions and whose style is conducive to formulaic analysis of the sort developed by Albert Lord.)

Thus, the Bollandists' estimated ninth- or tenth-century date for the Latin *vita*'s composition may be no more than an absolute *terminus post quem*, for there is no extant Greek text older than Joseph's (late ninth century) and none similar in its narrative to the *vitae* that is older than Symeon's (tenth century), while a medieval European Syriac-to-Latin translation would appear unprecedented, Sergius' visit notwithstanding. And while one might imagine that a Latin *vita* could have been composed based on a retelling by Sergius, the group of prose texts, Latin and Greek (the latter possibly ultimately written by Symeon Metaphrastes), contained in the manuscripts that Rohlfs lists seem to differ very little amongst themselves, so much that the Latin versions appear as appreciably close translations of the Greek ones (which is a slightly unusual fact given their time of writing – around 1100 – when Greek was not widely known in the West).

Moreover, when it comes to the physical manuscript record, it must once more be emphasized that the earliest extant Greek and Latin manuscripts whose Lives of Alexius follow the same plot as the *Vie* are roughly contemporaneous with the earliest French manuscripts, and since one cannot definitively say that one text appeared before the others, the traditional east-west plot of the legend's transmission is really valid only if the notion of a direct Greek-to-Latin-to-vernacular path of translation is to be maintained at all costs.[101] This model fundamentally rests upon the assumption that all medieval vernacular poetry was composed in writing after Latin-language sources, an assumption that was broadly applied, before the development of a real oral-

[101] For the dating of the manuscripts, see Rohlfs, xxv.

poetic theory, because of the fact that many vernacular works do indeed themselves claim to be the results of such a process of poetic translation. In this context, given the tools then at his disposal, Gaston Paris was strictly correct in dismissing appeals to oral tradition for certain texts as a form of hand-waving.[102] Yet Parry and Lord have since provided a concrete system of examples of how 'oral tradition' might actually work, and the term has lost much of its vagueness. Now, as Carl Odenkirchen points out, one must be wary of assuming a direct transmission in all cases, for its 'lines do not merely move forward in a straight direction, they move in many directions, so that ultimately... they crisscross the map of East and West.'[103] It may be reasonably supposed that an oral vernacular poem, given initial 'Latin' inspiration, quickly assumed a life of its own; on the other hand, it may well have occurred the other way around, and we should be open to the possibility when a work such as the *Vie de saint Alexis* gives us reasons to do so. By itself, the material evidence gives us little cause to assume that the Latin *vitae* are any older than the Old French *Vie de saint Alexis* itself, in whatever oral-poetic form it may have first coherently emerged as such. Moreover, its hypothetical prototypes could easily be a good deal older.

Either of the suppositions above – that the Old French Life evolved as a work of oral poetry once its initial form had been inspired by a Latin *vita*, or that its origins were independent – can be supported by the form of some of the proper nouns in the poem, which are at times distinct from those found in the Latin texts. While the names of the saint, his father Eufemien, and Pope Innocent are always recognizable in their Old French forms, those of the two emperors and of the towns that Alexis visits during his seventeen years in the East are not. In manuscript P the reigning *augusti* (Honorius and Arcadius, the sons of Theodosius the Great) are known as *Honorie* and *Akaries*, in

[102] Gaston Paris, 'La vie de saint Léger, texte revu sur le ms. de Clermont-Ferrand,' *Romania* 1, no. 3 (1872), 297.
[103] Odenkirchen, 12.

manuscript A – as *Oneries* and *Achaires*, while in manuscript L Honorius is dubbed *Aneries*.[104] Likewise, among the Eastern toponyms in the poem, that of Tarsus (*Tersun* in MS A) is readily recognizable, as the home of St Paul might well expect to be, while that of Edessa is not (*Axis* in MS P, *Arsis* in MS A, *Alsis* in MS L).

Maurizio Perugi, in undertaking to examine the question of Edessa's name in his extensive recent study of the Alexius legend, maintains its importance for the history of the *Vie de saint Alexis* while stating that 'on n'a pas toujours réussi à trouver une explication satisfaisante pour ce toponyme.' His own idea is that it refers to Sis, the capital of Cilician Armenia – a very plausible explanation, especially in the context of the era of the Crusades when the surviving manuscripts of the *Vie* were produced. Of course – as Perugi points out – this substitution is odd in itself given that Edessa would have been well enough known, to Western listeners, as the capital of one of the four Crusader states established after the First Crusade.[105] One might also note that the twelfth-century *Chanson d'Antioche*, which narrates events of that crusade, refers to Edessa as *Rohais*,[106] as does the Old French translation of William of Tyre's *Historia*,[107] but what matters most for the purposes of this study is that these variations between Alexius texts in different languages strongly suggest that, as the French oral poem evolved, unfamiliar geographic and personal names tended to shift phonetically or referentially, while more familiar ones did not. The various copies of the Latin *vita* presumed to have served as the inspiration for the *Vie de saint Alexis*, given that they share the bulk of their plot details with the vernacular poem, give standard forms for all of the aforementioned names when they give them at all.[108] This indicates that, while the *Vie de Saint*

[104] Hemming, 20 (verse 344) and Rohlfs, 16 (verse 307).
[105] Perugi, 419-24.
[106] Suzanne Duparc-Quioc (ed.), *La chanson d'Antioche: édition du texte d'après la version ancienne* (Paris: Libraire orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1976), 550; 566.
[107] See Philip Handyside, *The Old French William of Tyre* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 3-4 and *passim*.
[108] Rohlfs, xxx.

*Alexis* (as we will see) preserved curious details concerning late antique life in the course of its development as an oral work, its evolution was also autonomous enough to have warped unfamiliar names in such a way, and perhaps even to have adapted to new toponymic information coming from the region in question (Cilicia, in this case).

Previously I have cited Alison Goddard Elliott's estimates of the 'formulaic' content of the various versions of the Alexis poem. The historical record further discredits the 'purist' perspective on oral tradition when it comes to the question of the *Vie de saint Alexis*' composition, i.e. the view that, as Evelyn Vitz critically puts it, 'the oral tradition is almost synonymous with the formulaic epic: if it isn't formulaic and an epic, it isn't oral.'[109] Now, while Elliott's estimates of the quantity of formulaic expressions in this or that version of the *Vie* do likely point to an originally oral-formulaic composition of the poem, they do not necessarily explain the relatively limited discrepancies between the redactions of the poem, which are less significant than those that characterize the epics sung by the Yugoslav bards of Parry and Lord. Moreover, it is in any case unlikely that vernacular poetic performance techniques in twelfth- and thirteenth-century France were wholly analogous to those of early twentieth-century Bosnia, as the methods described by Lord require the bard to be illiterate in order to function,[110] and one can hardly presume that all *jongleurs* c. 1100 were illiterate. The *Vie de saint Alexis* is probably short enough to have been memorized, and the differences between its manuscript versions could be due to smaller changes and improvisations effected by their performers. The exact mechanics of oral transmission of poetry at various stages in the middle ages are at any rate mostly impossible for us to know, and are only likely to have corresponded to the techniques observed by Parry and Lord in Yugoslavia at a fairly early stage, given the illiteracy requirement.

[109] Evelyn Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Cambridge, Eng.: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 69-70.
[110] Lord, 25.

Rather than speculate on this topic, I propose to focus on the fact that Elliott's investigation into the Alexis tradition from the perspective of oral-poetic theory raises the issue of hagiography as oral poetry in the first place, given that the latter concept has tended, in the context of Old French literature, to be primarily associated with epic or *chanson de geste*; Elliott's calculations serve as a convincing indicator of orality (in a sense that approaches that of Parry-Lord) for a genre that has too often been attributed only to the 'cloistered' medieval clerical class.[111] Evelyn Vitz traces some reasons why it has been assumed that non-epic narrative poets were always clerics: first, it was 'inconceivable' that they would be anything but; second, that is what many of them indeed were.[112] In short, when it comes to medieval French literature, oral literature and epic have been exclusively associated with each other for no truly good reason, while the other narrative genres were perhaps too hastily attributed to an ecclesiastical, written, clerical origin. This is not to deny the great part that clerics did play in literary production, for theirs were the first scriptoria, and theirs were initially the time and the means to produce, write, and copy manuscripts. Much medieval literature was the product of clerical and, indeed, of monastic efforts. But this by no means leads to the conclusion that *all* religious poetry was of clerical origin, as if narratives about saints could only subsist as part of the institutional Church's efforts at self-promotion; we should be especially wary of this assumption when speaking of the *Vie de saint Alexis*.

In *Orality and Performance,* Vitz attempts to rescue medieval courtly romance from the purist trap, in part by analyzing poems' references to themselves; as a result, she draws a distinction between clerics and *jongleurs* (or minstrels), the performers of oral poetry, who were not

[111] An obvious example of such association is found in Volkova, 59-60, where 'clerical literature' is explicitly defined over against 'popular literature' by virtue of its similarity, given the religious content, to that of contemporary works in Latin: thus, 'clerical literature' is reduced to translation. She notes but ultimately dismisses the traits, noted by other scholars, that the *Vie de saint Alexis* specifically shares with *chanson de geste*.
[112] Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, 54.

necessarily literate. (It must be remembered that for Vitz, 'orality' is a multifaceted and flexible term, while in this study I tend to use it more narrowly to refer to the sort of oral poetry that can be adequately described within the limits of the Parry-Lord thesis.) On the question of saints' Lives, which not infrequently present themselves explicitly as written compositions or translations from Latin into vernacular verse, Vitz's position throughout her work is nuanced. When discussing the orality of courtly romance in *Orality and Performance*, she points out that some Lives 'explicitly invite being read aloud,' but suggests that public performance either at court or at feasts 'surely seems rather unlikely.' At the same time, she notes that the more 'romance-style' variants of the *Vie de saint Alexis* may have indeed been meant for such performances.[113] Here Vitz is interested specifically in aristocratic settings, however, and as far as much surviving Old French hagiographic poetry is concerned, performance in such contexts was perhaps unlikely indeed. Yet the *Vie de saint Alexis* represents a unique case in that we have a nearly direct medieval testimony of it as a publically and orally performed poem (in addition to the deductions of Alison Goddard Elliott and others who have seen in it stylistic and formal similarities to *chanson de geste*[114]). In its entry for the year 1173, the anonymous *Chronicon universale* of Laon, preserved for us in two thirteenth-century manuscripts,[115] reads:

> There was in Lyon in Gaul a certain citizen, Waldo by name, who had amassed a lot of money for himself through the evil of usury. One day, as he had gone out of his way toward a crowd that he had seen gathered around a *jongleur*, he was goaded by that man's words and, leading him to his own house, took care to listen to him intently. For it was the part of his story where the blessed Alexis reposed in his father's home in happy death.[116]

[113] Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, 177 and 177 (note). Vitz also mentions the Waldo anecdote elsewhere in *Orality and Performance* (101).
[114] Volkova, 59.
[115] Georg Waitz, ed., 'Ex Chronico universali anonymi Laudunensis,' in *Ex rerum Francogallicarum scriptoribus*, MGH SS 26 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1882), 442.
[116] '...fuit apud Lugdunum Gallie ciuis quidam Valdesius nomine, qui per iniquitatem fenoris multas sibi pecunias coaceruauerat. Is quadam die Dominica cum declinasset ad turbam, quam ante ioculatorem uiderat congregatam, ex uerbis ipsius conpungtus fuit, et eum ad domum suam deducens, intente eum audire curauit. Fuit enim locus narracionis eius, qualiter beatus Alexis in domo patris sui beato fine quieuit.' Waitz, 'Ex Chronico universali,' 447.

Given the date and circumstances of this vignette, it is reasonable to assume that the *narracio* that Waldo heard on that day in Lyon was a sung performance of some twelfth-century version of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, perhaps even one close to *L* or *M*. It does not matter whether this little anecdote, which implies that Waldo's subsequent slide into heresy was inspired by a jarring encounter with the story of Alexis' extreme asceticism, recalls an actual event or not. Its vivid street scene centered on an itinerant musician (for the designation *ioculator* serves as an emphatic indication that we are not dealing with a preacher) singing, of all things, the Life of Alexis, is as good a confirmation of what this poem was as is any formulaic analysis. The fact that this account describes events taking place only about fifty years, at most, after the redaction of the Hildesheim manuscript (c. 1120-50, per Gaston Paris), makes it especially valuable.

Though there is no way to ascertain which variant of the Alexis story the chronicler is referring to, if we are to believe Alison Goddard Elliott and Evelyn Vitz that the 'romance-type' version S was composed by a *jongleur*, Waldo may even have been listening to some similar poem rather than the oldest version that I am primarily interested in here. The Waldo anecdote is almost chrestomathic in French literary history, and Elliott, Vitz, and Volkova all make mention of it (Elliott also cites a number of other testimonies concerning hagiographic poetry performed by medieval *jongleurs*[117]). Ultimately, all of the available evidence points to the *Vie de saint Alexis* as an oral poem of some sort. First, its formulaic language indicates an original composition through methods similar to those described in the Parry-Lord thesis, while its length and the overall similarity between redactions suggests a more recent practice of improvised memorization by *jongleurs* no longer operating in the illiterate context required for the strong form of Lord's theory of oral composition and performance to work. Second, the *Vie*'s treatment of unfamiliar or foreign

[117] Elliott, 69-70.

proper names points to its independent, unwritten development apart from any Latin written sources. Finally, the Laon chronicle's account of Peter Waldo's turn to heresy attests that the *Vie de saint Alexis* was performed publicly on secular occasions by *jongleurs*.[118] These three factors are consistent with the notion that the *Vie de saint Alexis* was a work of oral poetry, whose origins could have easily gone back many generations before it took any written form that has survived to this day. It should therefore be kept in mind that this story would have originally passed down from bard to bard as I proceed to catalogue and analyze the poem's reminiscences of late antiquity, before connecting these to its orality under the umbrella of cultural memory.

5. Late antiquity in the *Vie de saint Alexis*

The *Vie de saint Alexis* is, from the start, a text distinctly aware of history and of the temporal distance separating it from its subject matter. The poem, declaring from its first verse that 'bons fu li siecles al tens ancienor' [good was the world in ancient times], immediately establishes a nostalgic contrast between the medieval present and the distant past in an evocation of the *ubi sunt* trope.[119] The audience is assured that the world has been in a state of decline since the time of Noah, Abraham, and David, though not without bright spots: 'puis icel tens que Deus nos vint salver, / nostre ancesor ourent crestienté' [after that time when God came to save us, / our ancestors received Christianity].[120] This verse introduces the late antique setting of the poem while solidifying its awareness of the past: 'nostre ancesor' plainly identifies the audience with the inhabitants of 'Rome la cité' (verse 13) in a way that it does not with the figures of the Old

[118] Ulrich Mölk has shown that, insofar as the Laon chronicler's anecdote regarding Peter Waldo and the *jongleur* can be trusted, the incident therein described could not have taken place on any feast day linked to St Alexius. See Ulrich Mölk, 'La Chanson de saint Alexis et le culte du saint en France aux XI[e] et XII[e] siècles,' *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 21, no. 84 (October 1978), 340.
[119] Deborah B. Schwartz, 'Those Were the Days: The 'Ubi Sunt Topos' in *La Vie de Saint Alexis*, *Yvain*, and *Le bel inconnu*' in *Rocky Mountain Review of Literature*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, 1995), 27-51.
[120] Paris *VSA*, 11-2.

Testament.[121] While, from the perspective of the prologue of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, the world of late antique Rome may have disappeared temporally, in a way it persists even in its identification with the text's audience, as Karl Uitti has argued.[122]

Scholars have disagreed over whether the past evoked through the first stanza's *ubi sunt* theme should be taken to include the late Roman world of the poem's narrative. Deborah Schwartz and Howard Robertson have argued that the first lines of the poem ('bons fu li siecles...') refer to the Old Testament only, and that their function is to place Alexis and his contemporaries nearer to the listener on the slope of historic decline in a further identification of setting and audience. For Schwartz,[123] this interpretation is solidified by Alexis' parting speech to his bride, in which he denounces 'cest siecles' [this world] where 'n'en a parfite amor' [there is no perfect love],[124] in a contrast with the poem's first two lines: 'bons fu li siecles al tens ancienor / car feiz ert e justise e amor / si ert creance dunt or n'i a nul pro' [good was the world in the olden days / for there were faith and justice and love / and there was belief, of which there is no more].[125] These would then refer only to the Old Testament patriarchs. Yet Alexis' speech claims only that his world is in decline and that it is subject to death; the same would have been true of the world of Abraham and David, even if their times were 'better.' The fact that Alexis' world, by the protagonist's own admission, occupies a lower rung on the trajectory of decline relative to the world of the Hebrew Bible does not mean that his own era is not included in the 'tens ancienor' from the poem's perspective and that it was not still *bons* relative to the audience's medieval present. If 'nostre ancesor' in line 12 has to refer to the Romans of late antiquity, by the same token these same

[121] See pp. 91-93 below for further discussion. This identification may seem less problematic if one recalls that, until the fourteenth century at least, the various Romance vernaculars were known to their speakers as just that – *romanz*.
[122] Karl Uitti, 'Alexis, Roland, and French "*Poésie Nationale*,"' *Comparative Literature Studies* 32, no. 2 (1995), 134; 144.
[123] Schwartz, 32.
[124] Paris *VSA*, 67.
[125] Paris *VSA*, 1-3.

Christians are the *anchesors* in line 5, whose world, apparently marked by *feiz*, *justise*, and *amor*, is also irretrievably lost.

The interval of time dividing this audience from the world of the poem's setting was once held to represent a radical civilizational break (as it still is in areas of popular culture). Thanks in large part to the efforts of Peter Brown and his colleagues and students since the 1970s, however, the post-Roman 'dark ages' have come to appear much 'brighter' than before, and we are now both better equipped methodologically and more prepared conceptually to trace continuities across these centuries that, before, might have been ignored or dismissed. This is not to say that there was not, in fact, a cultural break at the turn of the fifth century, for the breakdown of the political system that had heretofore united the continent together with the transfer of power to new 'Germanic' elites who did not see themselves as 'Roman' certainly constituted a long moment of cultural rupture. Scholarship on late antiquity has sought to emphasize precisely the gradual and ambiguous nature of many of these changes, and to question some of the binary oppositions that had characterized our understanding of the era (such as 'Roman versus barbarian'). I speak here of a deeper continuity than that of the ruling class, however. If those who had always seen themselves as Romans continued to do so, we should ask how long this identity persisted, how it would have told its own story, where its echoes are to be found, and what its cultural import would have been. For this, popular culture, and in particular oral poetry, seems a likely repository of precious information. Not that the legend of St Alexius itself is representative of such a cultural persistence, for by all accounts it was not present in western Europe until after Charlemagne's time. The Old French *Vie de saint Alexis* does, however, preserve a large number of details that are accurately descriptive of late antique Roman life, and which may have survived in cultural memory (discussed below) and oral poetry generally before merging with a nascent song about the Alexius legend.

As I have already mentioned the poem's evocation of the pope and emperors as an example of its portrayal of institutions of the late Roman world, it should be noted that their role is in general limited, for the terseness of this hagiography, with its intense personal focus on the character of the saint, leaves little room for elaboration on this subject. It is in this 'institutional' domain, in fact, that the one major 'historical inaccuracy' of the *Vie de saint Alexis* crops up: lines 408-11 are imbued with a truly medieval flavor, as Alexis' father imagines his son's thwarted political career as that of playing Roland to Honorius' Charlemagne: 'tei convenist halberc, broigne à porter, / espee ceindre cunme ti altre per; / ... le gunfanun al enpereor porter, / cum fist tis peres e li altre per!' [you should have had a hauberk, a byrnie to wear, / a sword to carry like your other peers. /... borne the emperor's standard, / as did your father and your other peers!][126] This distinctly feudal conception of a young aristocrat's duties, judging from its vocabulary perhaps a result of influence from *chanson de geste*, is an invention of the vernacular poem, as it does not appear in any of the Latin prose texts associated with the Alexius tradition.

With that caveat, I will proceed to meditate on as many such details of late antique life as I could find in the poem, some of which might individually seem minor in the context of the already parsimonious *Vie de saint Alexis*, but which in their sum make simple coincidence an unlikely reason for their appearance. Of course, medieval poetry and art generally are not often thought of as 'accurately' reflecting their own past. In fact, it is fairly easy, from our present-day perspective, to read a sort of guilelessness into medieval depictions of the past, literary and artistic; the medieval imagery of antique and biblical heroes riding into battle in the guise of medieval knights is quite familiar. Likewise, much medieval literature, which as often as not deals with topoi and characters rather far removed from western Europe in space and time, does not appear to put heavy emphasis

[126] Paris *VSA*, 408-11.

on *couleur locale*. Hippolyte Delehaye, in the pages of *Les légendes hagiographiques*, his systematic introduction to the study of hagiography, came to deplore this as a product of a cultural lowest common denominator: '[l]a nature simpliste du genie populaire,' he states flatly, 'se manifeste avec évidence dans les légendes qu'il crée.' As for the creative spirit of *hoi polloi*, in producing hagiographic legends, according to Delehaye, '[l]a géographie ne le préoccupe pas davantage, et les distances n'existent point pour lui.' Then, to emphasize his point, he cites a saint's Life involving a caravan of camels dispatched into a desert that, as far as its presumed audience is concerned 'ne lui paraît pas moins intéressante parce que ce désert est situé sur les bords de la Dordogne.'[127] Thus the great scholar of hagiography condemns the apparent artlessness and credulity of popular religious expression with 'a pessimism similar to that of Hume.'[128]

Many medieval literary works may indeed rather easily be seen to feature such descriptive flatness, apparently anachronistically applying medieval terms to non-medieval phenomena and grafting medieval concepts onto non-medieval situations. Often this is explicable simply by the fact that scientific archeology did not exist in the middle ages. At the same time, the apparent failure to descriptively highlight a change in setting, especially when we expect the new setting to have been construed as 'exotic,' may strike us as a sign of poor imagination. In the case of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, however, it is rather appropriate: the educated[129] scion of a wealthy Roman family would face few cultural or linguistic boundaries if he were to find himself on the opposite end of the sea, for at that point the Mediterranean coastline still presented a coherent whole in its economy, politics, and culture.[130] In language, too, the urban centers that ringed the sea were more

[127] Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques* (Subsidia hagiographica 18. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1927), 17 ('nature simpliste'), 20 ('desert on the Dordogne').
[128] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 17.
[129] The poem emphasizes this fact: 'e li bons peres à ecole le mist / tant aprist letres que bien en fu garniz' [and the good father sent him to school. / he learned letters so well that he was well adorned with them]. Paris *VSA*, 32-3.
[130] See Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (The Carl Newell Jackson Lectures. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), and Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*. The still-controversial

united than not, for while, as is often noted, Greek dominated in the East and Latin in the West, a decent education (though admittedly inaccessible for the majority of the empire's denizens) would imply a widespread easy bilingualism for some time yet.[131]

It should be remarked that this notion is more explicitly elaborated in a different treatment of the Alexis story, known as *M*, preserved in a pair of thirteenth-century manuscripts, one of which ($M^2$) was published for the first time by Elliott as part of her 1983 study.[132] Here we read of Alexis' thoughts regarding his return to Rome after his Eastern sojourn: 'Or se commenche par lui a pourpenser / K'a Romme ira son pére arasonner, / Que par griois le vaura apeler, / K'en son rommant ne le puist raviser' [Now he begins to plan it in his head / that he will go to Rome to persuade his father, / that it will be best to address him in Greek, / so that he might not recognize him by his Latin].[133] This is interesting on two accounts. First and most obviously, there is the recognition that both Alexis and his father should know Greek, as might indeed be expected of people of their station, situating these events squarely in the world of late antiquity (learned knowledge of Greek is generally held to have disappeared from Gaul after the sixth century[134]). Second, their home language, which might betray Alexis' voice, were he to speak it, is referred to as *rommant*, the term by which Old French distinguished itself from literary Latin. Simultaneously, these two verses thrust the poem's world away from the medieval listener and draw it close again.

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'Pirenne Thesis' finds an echo in the works of Brown, who has frequently pointed to the essential homogeneity of the Mediterranean world. It is rather the *terminus post quam* of this Mediterranean world that is up for debate.

[131] For a (somewhat conservative) account of the survival of Latin-Greek bilingualism among the elite specifically of Gaul through the end of the fifth century, see Pascal Boulhol, *Grec langaige n'est pas doulz au françois: étude et enseignement du grec dans la France ancienne* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2014), 13-19. In the intellectual world of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, meanwhile, St Augustine's ignorance of Greek seems to have made him an exception among his peers, and embarrassingly so. See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000), 24. Brown provides the notable counterexamples of Ambrose (74) and Pelagius (384), among others.

[132] Elliott (1983), 14-9.

[133] Elliott (1983), 166 (verses 477-81).

[134] Regular contacts with Constantinople and the presence of Eastern trading communities in many cities notwithstanding. See Anthea Harris, *Byzantium, Britain & the West: The Archaeology of Cultural Identity, AD 400-650* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2003).

As befits educated Romans in the late fourth century, Alexis and Eufemien can speak Greek, but their home language – the so-called Vulgar Latin – is explicitly identified with the vernacular of the poem's audience.[135] Although *M* as a text differs rather strongly from the early versions of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, one ought to recognize that these notions, which identified contemporary France with late antique Rome while at the same time presenting the latter as another world existing on its own terms, were part of the Alexis tradition as late as the thirteenth century. The fact that the details of this presentation were frequently accurate, despite a divide of six to nine hundred years, is likewise worthy of attention.

Returning to the text of the Paris manuscript, it might yet be hasty to suggest that the descriptive silence of the *Vie* regarding human and physical geography is at all intentional, any more than was the Homeric poet's treatment of various details of Mycenaean culture. Generally speaking, the same cities featured in the Syriac and Greek texts (with the exception of the ambiguous 'Rome') as in the *Vie de saint Alexis*,[136] and so took part in the Alexis legend's series of westward translations (however fitful and indirect) that gradually accrued further plot details. Instead, one may cautiously call the poem's failure to highlight any difference between Rome and Edessa (understood differences in grandeur aside) a referential touch that reflects a reality of the fourth- and fifth-century Empire; this coincidence, in turn, allows the more remarkable late antique features of the Old French text to come to the fore.[137] Thus, in the manner of a late antique novel such as *Apollonius, Prince of Tyre*, the poem's silent treatment of human and physical geography serves to present the audience with a homogenous landscape that happens to correspond much

[135] See ch. 2 for an extended discussion of medieval perceptions of the vernacular's historical role.
[136] Odenkirchen, 13-29.
[137] 'The inhabitants of the Mediterranean towns possessed a finely articulated and embracing *koiné* of religious and social experience.' Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, 7.

more closely to the world of late antiquity than to that of the middle ages, when the Mediterranean world was divided rather than united by diversity of linguistic and religious practice.

Perhaps the most striking everyday geographic difference between late antique and medieval society in western Europe lay in the relative level of urbanization, for the former was highly urbanized, while the latter was overwhelmingly rural. As Peter Brown points out in *Through the Eye of a Needle*, his 2013 economic and religious history of Western late antiquity, the actual proportion of city to country dwellers in the Roman world was still greatly skewed in favor of the latter, but public life took place entirely in the cities, and most of all in 'Rome la cité.'[138] This is where Alexis spends his youth and is educated, and this is likewise where he is groomed for his future career and provided with a bride, the only daughter of a Roman 'count.'[139]

Accordingly, in the *Vie de Saint Alexis*, the settings are invariably urban; brief sojourns at sea aside, it is in cities such as Laodicea and Edessa that Alexis takes up his ascetic practice, and even upon fleeing unwanted acclaim in Edessa, he seeks not the desert but Tarsus, another urban center. At this point, he is diverted by *force majeure*: 'et dreit à [Tersun] espeirent ariver, / mais aillors lor estuet torner, / tot dreit a Rume les porte li orez' [straight to Tarsus, they thought to land there, / but they were bound to turn elsewhere, / the wind bears them straight to Rome].[140] Clearly, mention of the intended destination is made only to highlight the fact that it is the will of God that carries Alexis back to his ancestral home in Rome, for a storm that could drag a ship from Cilicia to the Tyrrhenian Sea would be impressive indeed. Alexis' world is pointedly urban throughout the poem, and in escaping one city, even at a time of flowering desert monasticism (certainly not

[138] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 103.
[139] Paris *VSA*, 32-41.
[140] Paris *VSA*, 191-3.

ignored in medieval French hagiography![141]), the young Roman aristocrat can hardly place himself outside the context of the *urbs*, even though deep in ascetic withdrawal.

The role of the ascetic in the *Vie de Saint Alexis*, insofar as its protagonist joins outwardly the ranks of the urban poor, is thus closely linked to urban poverty, itself at the heart of the rise of Christianity in late antiquity as explored by Peter Brown in his recent monograph on the role that wealth played in this process. It was around the turn of the fifth century, according to Brown, that the social dialectic of the Roman world changed definitively, for the once-coveted Italic right and Roman citizenship had by then spread so widely – with the aim of increasing the Empire's tax base – that this devalued franchise came to represent a burden rather than a privilege. Where once the main perceived social contrast had been between citizens and non-citizens, now, under the influence of Christian preaching on wealth, it turned into a distinction between rich and poor. Yet rich Romans were still expected to be generous with their wealth: under the old scheme, the targets of their liberality had been their city and their fellow-citizens; now, they were expected to make the poor the object of their generosity. These men were frequently fabulously wealthy, as Brown notes, although their status depended on the combined factors of privileged birth, official status, and education.[142]

Eufemien, Alexis' father, appears in the *Vie de Saint Alexis* as precisely such a *nobilis*. In his lament on discovering the identity of the beggar in his home, he expounds at length upon his life station: 'eh filz qui ierent mes granz heritez, / mes larges terres dunt jeo aveie asez, / mes granz paleis en Rome la citez?' [son, to whom will go my vast inheritance, / my great estates of which I have so many, / my grand palaces in the city of Rome?][143] Eufemien thus presents himself as a

[141] Cf. *La vie de sainte Marie l'Égyptienne*, etc.
[142] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 8-30 (on the shift in social distinctions), 68-71 (on the poor vs. the *plebs* as the target of largesse), 94 (on conditions for nobility).
[143] Paris *VSA*, 398-400.

typical late Roman grandee in the vein of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus (345-402, a pagan), or of Petronius Probus (358-390, a Christian), with vast estates – perhaps likewise strewn all over the Roman world – and multiple residences in Rome and its environs. Whatever served as the ultimate inspiration for these verses, they are not simply hyperbolic descriptions of a semi-mythical past: instead, they manage to portray, whether coincidentally or not, the actual situation of a noble senator of the later Empire. His willingness to accommodate a beggar in his home fits in well with an age where, according to Brown, the rich notable's civic obligations toward his clients were gradually redirected, through Christian preaching, toward the poor. At the same time, Alexis' seeking refuge among the urban destitute reflects nothing if not the early Church's 'sense of heroic *démesure*... which could inspire its adherents to do such extraordinary things as abandon sex and love the poor.' It also mirrors the rhetoric, if not necessarily the actions, of Roman *divites* such as Paulinus of Nola (c. 353-431) or Melania the Younger (383-439) and her husband Pinianus, who all claimed to have renounced their vast fortunes while continuing to manage them as part of a new conspicuously ascetic lifestyle.[144]

The lives of late antique martyrs and confessors carry in them other inherent referents to a bygone age, for the forms of religious devotion epitomized by both types of saints were no longer current in the West by the time of the *Vie de saint Alexis*. The martyrs, of course, belonged to an age of persecution, and as such their feats could be replicated only in the forests of eastern Europe; and even so, martyrdom among remote pagans was still very different from the public witness of the sort that St Catherine could give in the great city of Alexandria among her fellow Romans. But confessors of the late antique kind exemplified by Alexis – exponents, that is, of radical forms of ascesis – had also become rarer in the West since the Merovingian age. Indeed, as early as the

[144] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 94-9 (on the 'super-rich'), 76 ('heroic *démesure*'), 208-223 (on Paulinus), 291-307 (on Melania and Pinianus).

sixth century, it had been made clear in parts of Gaul that public, institutionally unaffiliated ascetic practice was no longer necessary nor welcome; Peter Brown describes 'the obvious feature of a marked shortage of living holy men' in the time of Gregory of Tours, referring to the holy fools, stylites, and desert hermits that continued to appear in Byzantium.[145] Ascesis in the West, in effect, was soon institutionalized in the monasteries, many of which were founded in France between the sixth and eighth centuries – though other forms of asceticism would also eventually arise, especially in the thirteenth century (e.g. with the appearance of the mendicant orders). Although Guillaume de Berneville's *Vie de saint Gilles*, dated to around 1170, shows that Old French literature was also capable of projecting similar forms of eremitic practice onto the Merovingian era (whatever its actual realities), throughout most of the medieval period up to the time that the *Vie de saint Alexis* was fixed in writing, Western asceticism was mostly attached to the institutional Church by formal bonds. The practices of anchorites tended to provide for them to live either in cells in monasteries or in dwellings attached to churches, under the guidance of an ecclesiastical spiritual advisor:[146] in his eleventh-century treatise on eremitic life for women (a text long often attributed to Augustine himself), the English abbot Aelred of Rievaulx seems to assume that anchoresses, whom he describes as 'shut-ins' (*inclusae*), would be able to participate to some extent in church life.[147] Of course, this institutionalization of ascetic practice does not mean that Alexis could not have served as an effective eremitic role model in the francophone world of the

[145] Peter Brown, 'Eastern and Western Christendom: A Parting of the Ways,' in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, 185.

[146] Robert Mills, 'Gender, Sodomy, Friendship, and the Medieval Anchorhold,' Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures 36, no. 1 (2010), 3-4. It seems that even twelfth-century English hermits and holy men such as Godric of Finchale and Wulfric of Haselbury, though aspects of their practice recalled those of late antiquity, still sought patronage and approval from the local bishop for their activities. See Henry Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse,' *History* 60, no. 200 (1975), 337–9. Many parallels can be drawn between these two figures, Christina of Markyate, and Alexis, but we should not lose sight of the radical nature of the latter's *démesure*.

[147] Aelred de Rievaulx, 'De vita eremitica: ad sororem liber,' in *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi opera omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 32 (Paris, 1841), 1451–74.

high middle ages: one famous *inclusa* in Anglo-Norman England was Christina of Markyate, and the likelihood that the Hildesheim manuscript belonged to her may well indicate that Alexis' example was, in general, readily associated with ascetic practice in high medieval Europe. At the same time, Alexis' asceticism can still be seen as 'late antique' and 'Eastern' precisely because it is non-institutional: an attempt to attach the saint and his blessings to a church in Edessa is what precipitates his fateful flight from fame and return to Rome.[148]

Opinions have differed in recent scholarship as to what sort of imitation, if any, hagiography about ascetic confessors was meant to inspire. Duncan Robertson criticized[149] Brigitte Cazelle's thesis that the protagonists of vernacular Lives like the *Vie de saint Alexis* were not intended as literal models for audiences to emulate, and pointed out the surge in twelfth-century western Europe of various kinds of religious fervor, both orthodox and heterodox. According to him, this would have created a spiritual setting where at least some listeners, such as the anchoress Christina of Markyate but also the future heresiarch Peter Waldo, were certainly open to acts of 'heroic *démesure*.' Regarding the realism, as perceived by hagiography's medieval audiences, of the possibility of achieving sainthood, Robertson traces a finer line to tread, where 'in *imperfect imitiation* of this model, the believer acknowledges that perfection is possible... and so takes responsibility for his own shortfall.'[150] On the other hand, with regard specifically to Alexis, Evelyn Vitz remarks that this particular saint 'n'est jamais présenté, dans la chanson du XI$^{e}$ siècle qui lui est consacrée, comme un modèle à suivre ! L'auditeur est plutôt invité à prier cet homme qui fut tellement (peut-être excessivement) saint...'[151]

[148] Paris *VSA*, 156-88.
[149] Duncan Robertson, 'The Inimitable Saints,' *Romance Philology* 42, no. 4 (May 1989), 435–46.
[150] D. Robertson, 'The Inimitable Saints,' 445.
[151] Vitz, 'Vie, légende, littérature,' 389.

That the *Vie de saint Alexis* itself was to inspire pious conduct and prayerful reflection rather than perfect emulation may be read into its introductory and concluding verses. The former imply that the days of men such as Alexis have passed: 'tot est muez perdue a sa color / ja mais n'iert tel cum fu as anchesors' [all has changed and has lost its color / no more shall it be as it was for our ancestors].[152] The world that had made Alexis possible has receded into time; one might identify strongly with its figures, but both the splendor of Eufemien and the extreme asceticism of Alexis, which is made meaningful, in part, by his rejection of his father's wealth, are irretrievably in the past, and different from the sorts of challenges and temptations that might face any of his would-be emulators in the twelfth century. Indeed, as we shall see, the era in which the poem is set is at the very end of what Peter Brown describes in brutally economic terms as an 'age of gold,' referring to the wealth of the fourth century's super-rich[153] – the peers, one might think, of Eufemien. Borrowing Brown's terminology, the *ubi sunt* sentiment thus refers, in these opening verses of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, to a past *aurea aetas*, a 'golden age' in a very literal and not entirely positive sense. Brown evokes and inverts here the classic notion of the ages of mankind which decline from a pristine golden age to a corrupted age of iron, a theme conceptually linked to the *ubi sunt* topos as expressed in the beginning of our poem. As it happens, Brown's notion of double-edged 'golden age' fits rather well the point at which the *Vie de saint Alexis* locates its setting on a trajectory of historical decline: decadent compared to the Old Testament patriarchs, but an object of nostalgia for the present-day medieval descendants of the late Romans. As the

[152] Paris *VSA*, 4-5.

[153] '...the *Aurea aetas* (golden age) of which the ancients had dreamed, as a moneyless utopia at the dawn of time, had become a new and frightening 'age of gold,' characterized by violence and a degree of social stratification that was unprecedented even by Roman standards.' Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 15. This description, of course, runs counter to the *justise* of line 2 of our poem; yet the *Vie de saint Alexis* commemorates Eufemien and his family as pious late antique Christians, not as beneficiaries of overbearing state power and economic inequality.

opening stanza explicitly states, both the glories and the worthy mores of these past ages are irretrievably lost.

Later on, the poem's prayerful concluding stanza reinforces the point: 'aiun, seignors, cest saint homme en memoire, / si lui priun que de tot mal nos toille, / e en ces siecle nos donst pais e concorde / e en l'altre parmanable gloire' [my lords, let us keep this holy man in mind, / and beseech him that he deliver us from all evil, / and grant us peace and harmony in this world / and lasting glory in the next].[154] No call for emulation of any sort is made, for the appeal is merely to memory, and even Alexis' role as an intercessor is purely spiritual: no miracles of any sort are recorded here.[155] Instead, we find implicit admiration for the mores of the past, initially triggered by the *incipit* with its *ubi sunt* theme. Not that this ethos of the past is at all monolithic; it is expressed differently in the characters of Alexis, his family, the servants and citizens with whom he interacts, and in the secular and religious authorities, which appropriately reflects the differences normally found within any single community between its leaders, its ordinary members, and its heroes or visionaries. The audience is invited to reflect on how well each of these sets of characters represents the Christian ideal that the saint exemplifies, as well as to see its own reflection in one or more of their reactions to Alexis' journey. Late antiquity, however different it may have been from his or her medieval present, is thus connected to the listener by means of the explicit injunction to remember and the implicit invitation to compare oneself with the poem's characters with an eye toward spiritual growth. The past thus functions here on an intimate, personal level.

[154] Paris *VSA*, 571-4.
[155] The latter fact, incidentally, brings the *Vie de saint Alexis* closer to the priorities of Merovingian hagiography, which was not necessarily interested in post-mortem miracles. See Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 103-4. The third chapter of this study will discuss the question of Merovingian hagiography in greater detail.

It would be appropriate to remind ourselves here that the *Vie de saint Alexis*, like the Homeric works, is not simply a repository for curious tidbits about the past. Rather, it responds to contemporary concerns and demands, and, indeed, as *vernacular* hagiography it might be intended for the broadest possible contemporary audience, in a 'textual community' expressing the spiritual ideas of the liturgy 'in their own language,' as Duncan Robertson puts in in describing other twelfth-century hagiography poems.[156] Its reception is not a passive one, for the audience is confronted both with a 'golden' past, only somewhat idealized, which serves as a reminder it of the fact that a Christian can always go a little bit further in his or her religious commitments. In a sense, Alexis' example is even more perturbing than that of the martyrs, for while martyrdom was not a likely eventuality for a Christian in high medieval Europe (missions and crusades aside), the sort of asceticism practiced by Alexis was theoretically within anyone's capabilities. Rather than a call to action, his example might well be seen as a warning against complacency: when it comes to Christian practice, there could be no such thing as 'good enough.' The appeal is still personal, regardless of its substance.

Thanks to their cultivation of the details of late Roman life, as well the way in which they solicit the audience's spiritual engagement with its narrative, the Old French *Vie de saint Alexis* and its variants represent legend that is truly late antique in its inspiration, setting, and motifs. Together with the related Latin prose *vitae*, with which they form a unit of sorts insofar as they tell the same story, these oral works are full of details about the late antique world that is their subject, to the extent that a surprisingly appropriate picture of the late Roman world emerges from a careful reading of these poems. They thus stand in contrast to some contemporary works such as the vernacular Lives of St Margaret of Antioch, in which the setting features in a fashion that is much

[156] Duncan Robertson, 'Writing in the Textual Community: Clemence of Barking's Life of St Catherine,' *French Forum* 21, no. 1 (January 1996), 24-5.

more abstract.[157] The *Vie de saint Alexis* is not alone in this regard, however. Concerning the *Song of Roland*, Sharon Kinoshita has shown that a fairly common scholarly approach, which tends to focus on the *Song* as a precocious expression of French nationalism, ignores or dismisses elements of the setting and of the plot that are in fact highly evocative of medieval Iberian politics. In addition, Kinoshita argues that crusading ideology is something that the *Song of Roland* actively works to construct and shape, whereas previously the poem had widely been thought to *reflect* an preexisting ideology.[158] Where the setting of this particular *chanson de geste* can be seen to refer to contemporary realities, the *Vie de saint Alexis* manages to portray those of a fairly distant past.

In assuming a process of translation from Latin to Old French, the traditional view of the *Vie de saint Alexis* implies that the poem's portrayal of the past has its origins in the Latin *vitae*. Though the Latin *vitae* indeed differ little from the Old French poem in their narrative details, there are some moments that call for our attention. To begin with, the city of Rome in the *Vie de saint Alexis* is not an abstract setting, despite the economy of the text. In the versions of MSS L and P (but not A), the saint's body is eventually carried to the Church of Saint Boniface (of Tarsus); the implication is obvious, for in Rome there is a Basilica dei Santi Bonifaci ed Alessio, originally a late antique building but associated with Alexius' name from the tenth or the eleventh century on.[159] While they also mention the church, regarding the saint's return home after his Syrian sojourn, two of the Latin manuscripts (B and O) have his ship arriving, apparently according to divine will, directly in the city of Rome.[160] Though the Old French MS A does say that 'tot dreit à Rume les porte li orez' [the storm bears them straight to Rome], this is immediately followed by a pair of clarifying verses: 'à un des pors qui plus est pres de Rume, / iloc arive la nef à cel saint

[157] Cf. Delehaye's comments cited above.
[158] Kinoshita, 15-45.
[159] Stebbins, 'Les origins de la légende de saint Alexis,' 498.
[160] Rohlfs, xxix (note).

hume' [at one of the ports that is closest to Rome, there lands that holy man's boat].[161] The other manuscripts of the *Vie de saint Alexis* contain similar verses.[162] In this case, two of the Latin versions could leave their readers with the impression that seagoing vessels would dock at Rome, which is located inland up the Tiber, rather than at Ostia. The detail may seem minor, but here the Latin texts of MSS B and O – two of the presumed bases for the French Alexis materials – are guilty of omitting a key and basic fact of Roman geography by neglecting the distinction (to an effect similar to, albeit more subtle than, the 'desert on the banks of the Dordogne' that exasperated Hippolyte Delehaye). And as a further detail, when they appear in the narrative, MS B fails to mention the emperors by name at all.[163]

In addition to the historical details present in the *Vie de saint Alexis* and absent from the Latin prose texts, there are moments where the Old French narrative is more coherent and plausible than its supposed models. For instance, in chapter 6 of Rohlfs' edition of the Latin *vita*, the father, having met the beggar asking for his protection and 'having been reminded of his son,' promises to reward whomever of his servants will take care of him, 'quia liberum eum faciam et de domo mea accipiet hereditatem' [for I will set him free and he will get an inheritance from my household].[164] This show of largesse, even conservatively translated as here, is tempered in the Old French poem: 'tot le feroie franc' [I would set him completely free].[165] This latter version also fits slightly better with subsequent events in which Eufemien's servants mistreat Alexis, whilst his guardian is at best absent until the saint is at death's door seventeen years later; here, the grandee's more limited enthusiasm is more consistent with the seventeen years of complete lack of interest

[161] Paris *VSA*, 193-5.
[162] Hemming, 12 (verses 191-3); Rohlfs, 11 (verses 195-7).
[163] Rohlfs, xxx (note).
[164] Rohlfs, xxix.
[165] Paris *VSA*, 225.

in his client that follow. This relatively small difference does not discount the likelihood of a genetic relationship between the French poem and the Latin *vitae*, and could be argued rather to reflect a reworking (or a corruption, depending on the direction of the translation) of the original. When added to the omissions mentioned above, however, the *Vie de saint Alexis* appears to have by far the stronger links to the original story, both in terms of narrative detail and of narrative coherence.

What we have on the Latin side, in effect, is a group of manuscripts, all nearly identical to one another but for a few apparent omissions in some of them; these lacunae, however, appear more significant when one considers these works in terms of their referential relationship to the past that they are portraying. At the same time, such omissions are found in none of the existing Old French poems, which still follow nearly the same plot line as the Latin texts; these renditions are, in fact, all the more remarkable for the accuracy of their portrayal of late Roman life. The *M*-family, as noted previously, even includes a surprisingly realistic detail wholly absent from any of the Latin *vitae* – that of Alexis, fresh from the East, addressing his father in Greek rather than in 'Romance,' i.e. the everyday Latin of the Roman world (*rommant*). It has also been demonstrated by others, notably Alison Goddard Elliott (through formulaic analysis) and Evelyn Vitz (through discussions of poetic creation and performance), that these are to some greater or lesser degree oral poems, works that could have been composed and transmitted independently of the economy of scribal production, and thus even less likely to leave a 'paper trail' to their point of origin than other representatives of medieval literature. This notion is elevated nearly to the status of fact by the wholly Gallic phonetic mutations of unfamiliar proper nouns (e.g. *Arcadius-Akaries*), as well as by the Laon chronicler's explicit reference to a *jongleur* performing the Life of Alexis in Lyon.

Given the discrepancies between the *vita* and the *Vie*, might we not be dealing, then, with a Latin text that is based at least in part on an oral legend, some of whose twelfth- and thirteenth-century manifestations we see in the surviving *Vies de saint Alexis*? If this is so, how might one peer into the fog of the preliterate stage of the poem's existence, and how far? For, if the *Vie de saint Alexis* is a work of oral poetry, which it indeed appears to be, and if its roots go back to the arrival of the Alexius legend in the West (in the manner in which epic poetry is believed to take form), then there is every reason to suppose that such an oral-formulaic poem would be the legend's first literary manifestation when it reached the Frankish kingdom. This would also explain the differences between the Western texts, on the one hand, and the early Greco-Syriac tradition on the other, for what we would then have would be a fusion of a new hagiographic legend with cultural memories from late antiquity, the latter providing the details of the legend's setting.

Through its portrayal of the late Roman world, the *Vie de saint Alexis* represents a sort of 'cultural palimpsest' in the manner of the Homeric epics: composed with the present in mind, it can nonetheless be seen to encode and preserve an authentic record of a world divided from its own by many centuries, whose portrayal it then repurposes in contemporary interests. How this came to pass, and how the Latin *vitae* and the Old French *Vies* came to contain such a relative wealth of detail about their remote setting, remains to be explored: having discussed the notion of oral poetry, I will now examine it in concert with the *Vie de saint Alexis*' late antique reminiscences by calling to our aid Jan Assmann's theory of 'cultural memory.'

## 6. Cultural memory in the French middle ages

The largest question here, of course, involves the transmission of these various reminiscences of late antiquity through the centuries leading up to the written fixing of the vernacular *Vie de saint Alexis*, for it is precisely their anachronism that makes them stand out: in

the eleventh and twelfth centuries, life in the agrarian, communitarian society of the *langue d'oïl* linguistic zone of the *Vie*'s transmission little resembled life in the urbanized late antique Mediterranean. Though a contrast between urban life in antiquity and subsequent periods has often been intuited by past cultural commentators (take Joaquim Du Bellay's and Edward Gibbon's[166] meditations on the ruins of Rome as chrestomathic examples), the rise of academic archeology in the twentieth century allowed historians to express the difference in concrete terms.[167] Henri Pirenne was among the first to systematically incorporate archeological data into his discussions of the decline of the late antique city and the subsequent rise of the medieval town with its own very different scale, functions, and institutions, and though some of his more sweeping conclusions (notably the 'Pirenne Thesis') have since elicited major criticism, Pirenne's description of urban evolution remains valid and his archeological-historical synthesis continues to inspire emulation.[168] In effect, the setting of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, defined by free movement within a unified, urbanized Mediterranean world, would have presented a contrast even to those familiar with Syria, Cilicia, and Rome as a result of pilgrimage or crusade.

Rome in particular was something of a different story both in late antiquity and in the middle ages, however, and its faded grandeur would have presented its own form of cultural alterity. Medieval audiences broadly were likely to be aware of its many monuments and attractions, given the presence of guide books from at least the ninth century, but of course the fame and unique image of the 'eternal city' was also a much older phenomenon. By Alexis' time at the turn of the fifth century, whatever the contemporary economic, demographic, social, and

[166] Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life*, ed. George Bonnard (London: Nelson, 1966), 134-6.
[167] For a recent discussion of Pirenne's legacy, see Bonnie Effros, 'The Enduring Attraction of the Pirenne Thesis,' *Speculum* 92, no. 1 (January 2017): 184–208. For a broad example of Pirenne's economic-historical thought that focuses less on his more controversial claims, see Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*.
[168] E.g. Anthea Harris' study cited above.

political decline of the Western Empire, Rome was by all accounts a magnificent city to the nobles who lived there.[169] Even after the Visigoths in 410 and the Vandals in 455 had thoroughly, if relatively peacefully, relieved the city of the greater part of its wealth, and despite a marked decline in public works, Rome still maintained its allure as a 'splendid stage set for its resident nobility.'[170] The *Vie de saint Alexis* indicates that its events transpire before the city's fortunes finally ebbed, if only just.

The convergence of the historical figures of Honorius (393-423), Arcadius (395-408), and Innocent (401-417) means that, insofar as an actual date can be assigned to the events of a hagiographic legend that took shape centuries later, the scene of Alexis' death must be set between 401 and 408 for all three men to have been present at his funeral. For context, one should recall that Germanic bands breached the unguarded Rhine frontier and began to plunder Gaul in the winter of 406-7, while the Visigothic leader Alaric rebelled and invaded Italy in early 408, going on to sack Rome in 410 (a traumatic event for Roman identity, as Peter Brown has shown[171]). Thus, the ending of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, if it might be expressed in historical terms, is set just before or at the onset of the events that would, in retrospect, mean the beginning of the end for the Western Empire, and thus of Rome as the capital of anything.[172] And while the emperors' joint appearance in Rome is itself ahistorical, it is consistent with the images that appeared in the contemporary panegyric poetry of Claudian, then the lyric propagandist of the Western court, who

[169] The poet Rutilius Namatianus, writing less than a decade after the Gothic sack and fully cognizant of its effects, is a contemporary witness of the city's enduring majesty: 'Exaudi regina tui pulcherrima mundi / inter sidereos, Roma, recepta polos / exaudi genetrix hominum genetrixque deorum / non procul a caelo per tua templa sumus' (47-50). Léon Herrmann, incidentally, saw a link between Rutilius and Alexius, as 'contemporaries' compelled by duty to leave Rome behind. See Léon Herrmann, 'Qui est Saint Alexis ?,' *L'antiquité classique* 11, no. 2 (1942): 235–41.
[170] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 461.
[171] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 307; 372-4.
[172] Peter Brown states that, even though the Western imperial court may have moved to Milan or Ravenna, the emperor would still make frequent use of his palaces in Rome throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, and that the city remained a 'capital' in the public mind's eye. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 456-8.

strove to portray the two *augusti* as united in all things even as their courts were locked in bitter political disputes.[173] Even if Honorius and Arcadius were effectively severed from each other's company during their reigns, the image of their majestic deference to the saint, their concern for imperial decorum eventually giving way to a humbler sort of piety, is very much in the spirit of the turn of the fifth century. Moreover, the activities of Claudian may well have played a part in transmitting just such an image of the imperial pair to posterity, the actual political facts of the matter notwithstanding.

The problems with discussing hagiography in such terms have already been considered above; specifically concerning hagiographic name-dropping, Evelyn Vitz notes in her 1987 essay on hagiography that '[s]i le narrateur ne savait pas sous quel empereur son saint était mort, il pouvait toujours y mettre "Dioclétien," ou un autre nom d'empereur qu'il connaissait, ou simplement inventer un nom qui sonnait "romain..."'[174] Were such a narrator fortuitously to ascribe one of Diocletian's deeds to the man himself, one would hardly be justified in reading this an expression of some special historical conscience. Yet such is not at all the case with the *Vie de saint Alexis*. Even if one were to blame on coincidence the accuracy and appropriateness of the poem's late Roman setting as traced above, we would still be dealing with a coincidence anchored by the inclusion of actual historical figures whose periods of activity overlapped precisely at the time when the star of ancient Rome shone brightly in the West for the last time. But how did this vignette of late imperial Rome make it all the way to twelfth-century France through a genre (hagiography) known in our time for its inaccuracies and distortions? I have proposed that the vernacular *Vie de saint Alexis* developed for some time in the form of an oral poem independently of any written material, as the consistently mutated names of Arcadius and Edessa put at least

[173] Alan Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 51.
[174] Vitz, 'Vie, légende, littérature,' 393.

some distance between the Old French poem and any of the Latin *vitae*, in the sense that any notion of a direct one-way translation should be ruled out. Moreover, according to the arguments that Evelyn Vitz puts forth in *Orality and Performance*, one should not automatically assume some sort of written (Latin) Ur-text as the inspiration for non-epic oral poetry. I have also followed Vitz in her view regarding the indebtedness of hagiography as such to both oral and written modes of articulation and transmission. Indeed, in the case of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, the problems with deriving the *Vie* from the written *vitae* can be perceived in the texts themselves, as has been discussed above.

Recall that, though I defend here the plausibility of anonymous hagiographic poems such as the *Vie de saint Alexis* as bearers of cultural memories by attempting to show that the chains of transmission and translation as outlined by philologists are based on unproven assumptions, such a cultural role has long been granted to epic poetry. The Homeric epics and the varied literature dealing with the Germanic heroic age – from the Old English *Beowulf* to the Latin *Waltharius* to the Middle High German *Niebelungenlied* – are not obviously translations or versifications of learned written sources, yet they contain reminiscences of people, events, institutions, and material culture that antedate their composition by many centuries. The same has been argued with success by the 'traditionalists' and their fellow-travelers for the earlier expressions of *chanson de geste*, such as the *Song of Roland* and the *Charroi de Nîmes*. If hagiography as such has been deemed an unlikely vehicle for the transmission of such reminiscences, it has largely been because of the contemporary presence of a large body of Latin prose on the subject, as well as the fact that many vernacular hagiographic poems are, by their own admission, translations of a sort. This does not prove the same for all representatives of the genre, however, and is hardly relevant in the case of

the *Vie de saint Alexis*, with its formulaic elements, textual variety, and authorial anonymity, and with the Laon chronicle's testimony to its public performances in 'secular' settings.

This brings me to the notion of 'cultural memory.' The term is vague almost by necessity, with the air of the hand-wave that 'oral tradition' represented before Parry and Lord; and as in that case, discussions of the concept have tended to shy from concrete definitions.[175] Yet the subject is unavoidable, because of the disappearance of so much of the testimony that might have allowed us to comprehensively evaluate medieval relationships to the past. Perhaps the greatest challenge that faces medievalists in general is the overwhelming lack of written evidence for the period, with the earlier middle ages being, as a rule, the more opaque to our view. This lack must not be confused with a contemporary absence, for we have, of course, written records and works of named writers in a variety of genres for nearly every period and (macro-) region of the post-imperial West. But what remains is always but the tip of a vast iceberg. A minefield of accidental factors ensured that relatively few written texts were lucky enough to survive to the present day, and there is now no way of perceiving the full scope of this invisible medieval literary scene, let alone its content; some might indeed conclude, perhaps even with relief, that the bulk of those lost texts was correctly deemed unworthy of preservation by contemporaries. Medievalists are, not without good reason, often hesitant to speculate about unknowns of this sort. Yet the silent presence of this vanished corpus must be recognized: it is improbable, for example, that Venantius Fortunatus, Gregory of Tours, and a handful of others of whose work we have direct testimony were the only writers of sixth-century Gaul.[176] Sometimes, philological work has been able to reveal older texts in newer guise: although only two hagiographic texts from the entire Merovingian era (496-751) have been

[175] See Assmann, 19, for a discussion of the difficulty of defining cultural memory. A different example than those outlined by Assmann would be the great medievalist Jacques Le Goff's *Histoire et mémoire*, an essay that muses at length on the meaning of its title without developing much of a theoretical framework for the topic.
[176] For a detailed discussion of literary culture in sub-Roman Gaul, see Mathisen, 111-6.

preserved in contemporary codices, the surviving body of what is now considered to be Merovingian hagiography, gleaned and reconstructed from later manuscripts, is much greater.[177] Indeed, the situation is broadly analogous to that of classical Roman literature, the greater part of which has also been lost, and whose major works have survived, for the most part, in later manuscripts. One significant difference is that much of the writing of the Merovingian period was subject to *réécriture* in later centuries,[178] a treatment that older, Roman-era works were spared presumably by virtue of their *auctoritas*.

The term 'cultural memory,' just like 'oral poetry,' must then be coherently defined and illustrated with concrete examples in order to be useful. In his 1992 study *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (*Cultural Memory*) the Egyptologist Jan Assmann draws up just such a theoretical framework, which he meant to be applicable well beyond his field: he describes his work, which treats a number of civilizational 'case studies' of cultural memory, as 'the beginning of an open row than might be continued through any number of further studies.'[179] Part of his work's value stems from his awareness of the difficulty of adequately demonstrating that 'cultural memory' can even exist as a empirically definable phenomenon, and among the first tasks that he tackles is an elucidation of the meaning, legitimacy, and sensibility of the concept, wherein he offers concrete examples of the ways in which 'memory,' which can only exist within the context of individual consciousness, can be transmitted through time.[180]

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[177] Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640-720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 64.
[178] Fouracre and Gerberding, 27; Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 6. *Réécriture* can be defined as 'la rédaction d'une nouvelle version (*hypertexte*) d'un texte préexistant (*hypotexte*), obtenue par des modifications formelles qui affectent le signfiant... ou des modifications sémantiques, qui affectent le signifié,' according to Monique Goullet and Martin Heinzelmann, *La réécriture hagiographique dans l'Occident médiéval: transformations formelles et idéologiques*, Beihefte zu Francia (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2003), 13.
[179] 'Es handelt sich vielmehr um den Anfang einer offenen Reihe, die sich durch beliebig viele andere Studien fortsetzen ließe.' Assmann, 25.
[180] Assmann, 19.

Naturally, in applying Assmann's ideas to medieval France, one must remain aware of the differences between it and the areas that he deals with – the early ancient literary cultures of the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. That said, I have already noted above the parallels between concepts derived from Assmann's field of study, broadly conceived, and medieval French cultural memory by invoking the Homeric literary reminiscences of Mycenaean Greece (cultural memories, that is, of life circa 1200 BCE that were transmitted through oral poetry, which was in turn fixed in writing five to six hundred years later). Assmann himself is in part interested in this very phenomenon when discussing Greece, and states regarding Homer 'that we are not dealing with myths or miracle tales, but rather with the codification of memory.'[181] This codification can take many forms. In the introduction to his book, Assmann defines cultural memory within a matrix of three themes: 'remembering' (*Erinnerung* or *Vergangenheitsbezug*), 'identity' (*Identität* or *politische Imagination*), and 'cultural continuity' (*kulturelle Kontinuierung* or *Traditionsbildung*).[182] The two terms that he gives for each concept help focus their understanding, giving each one an active and a passive sense at the same time, such that his 'remembering' is at the same time a passive 'recollection' and an active 'reference to the past.'

The sorts of examples that Assmann begins with are illustrative of his meaning. He is especially interested in how more mundane types of memory recombine and fuse to become cultural memory, ceasing to be individual in scope.[183] (It bears mention that he is explicitly not concerned with the techniques of memory training and memorization developed by ancient rhetoricians.[184]) In this fashion, mimetic patterns, imbued with a given meaning, cease to reflect

[181] '...daß es sich hier ja nicht um Mythen oder Wundererzählungen handelt, sondern um die „Kodifikation von Erinnerung".' Assmann, 274.
[182] Assmann, 12 (on applicability beyond Egyptology), 16 (on the three constituent themes).
[183] Assmann, 20-1.
[184] Assmann, 29.

quotidian praxis and instead become ritual, a component of cultural memory that passes ideas down across generations. Ultimately, these processes allow individuals to speak in the first-person plural when referring both to their actual social group and to past figures with whom they identify. Similar and complementary effects can be achieved through language and writing: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* opens with an evocation of how Jewish ritual, as laid out in the Pentateuch, preserved such a 'cultural memory' of the Hebrews' Egyptian captivity. He goes on to develop an explanation for how and why this continuous effort of remembrance became necessary and important to Jewish identity: where group identity can only exist in opposition to an outside other, in the context of the Babylonian deportation, strictures regarding collective memory were developed and extended into the past as a way of defending group identity against outside cultural pressure. In the same way, the canonizing activities of the 'new temple' of Egypt, which meticulously cultivated ancient styles of art to the point where the dating of a given work of art or architecture can vary by 1500 years,[185] and which promoted the accompanying notions of an unchanging and eternal Egypt, seem to have originated in reaction to Persian rule in the sixth century BCE.[186] The Egypt we read of in Herodotus, and that which has become part of our own historical consciousness, is thus in part the product of a comparatively late archaizing cultural-memory project.

Assmann's framework of cultural memory is built around a tension between repetition and innovation in cultural practices, which he describes in many of its aspects. One might add that any kind of definable cultural continuity must lie somewhere in between, for, as Assmann puts it, the past can only be perceived as past if manifest changes distinguish it from the present, but it can only be perceived in the first place if the repetition or preservation of certain forms of cultural

[185] 'Ganze Grabwände wurden kopiert, uralte Bauformen aufgegriffen und Statuen geschaffen, deren Datierung noch immer um 1500 Jahre schwankt.' Assmann, 172.
[186] Assmann, 208.

expression can bear witness to it.[187] Overall, cultural memory must offer an alternative to the present (*kontrapräsentisch sein*). This dichotomy between cultural change and permanence, which implicitly evokes Nietzsche's notion of the tension played out in Greek tragedy between principles he defined as Dionysian and Apollonian, is linked to Lévi-Strauss's theory of 'hot' cultures that dynamically evolve and can relate to the past versus 'cold' cultures that have no conception of the past as different from the present. Assmann points out how 'hot' and 'cold' elements can combine in one and the same culture, whose awareness of history can tend 'hot' while its religious practice tends 'cold' (through cyclical repetitions of ritual). An even subtler aspect of this dichotomy is that of repetition (*Wiederholung*) versus recalling (*Vergegenwärtigung*), where the former systematically reinforces an eternal conceptual present while the latter establishes a relationship between the present and the past. Naturally, these two are far from mutually exclusive categories[188] – think, for instance, of a liturgical calendar that both enshrines a cyclical notion of time and commemorates specific past events – and it is their interaction that makes the phenomenon of cultural memory possible.

From the start, Assmann describes the various elements that come together like parts in a machine to produce and reinforce cultural memory: in the given example from the Pentateuch, these are a dialogue in question-and-answer format laden with subtle implications, the interplay of 'we/us' with 'you' (pl.), prescriptions for ritual meant to commemorate mythological-historical events, etc. The key lies is in establishing a notion of 'we' that can be applied beyond the present moment: briefly put, cultural memory is what allows one to say 'we' when referring to people in the past, as well as to those who, in the present, are perceived to have a similar relationship to history as the speaker. This pronoun is, indeed, central to Assmann's vision of the matter: 'what

[187] Assmann, 31-2.
[188] 'Die beiden Funktionen müssen sich also keineswegs ausschließen.' Assmann, 79.

binds single individuals to such a We is the *connective structure* of a shared knowledge and self-image, which is based on the one hand on shared rules and values and on the other on the memory of a shared lived past.'[189]

Of course, the portrayal of the later Roman world in the *Vie de saint Alexis* does not entirely correspond to the sort of cultural memory that the Jewish traditions invoked by Assmann shape: no two expressions of the phenomenon are entirely analogous. The key to the application of his conceptual framework to this study is, rather, the 'we' that connects author and reader, *jongleur* and listener to each other and to the story that they are experiencing. Sophie Marnette has conducted a study showing that the narrating first-person plural occurs more than twice as often as the first-person singular in the various versions of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, and that 'les 1$^{ères}$ pers. pl. de ce groupe de textes réfèrent à *je+vous*, c'est-à-dire au narrateur (locuteur) et aux auditeurs/lecteurs (allocutaires).'[190] The beginning of our poem, in which we hear 'puis icel tens que Deus nos vint salver, / nostre ancesor ourent crestienté,' sets a similar process into motion to that of the remembrance injunctions of the Pentateuch that serve as Assmann's first example of 'cultural memory.' The *nos* in line 11 encompasses a whole range of persons starting with *icel tens* and extending to the present audience, still the beneficiaries of that salvation; the next line then establishes a connection between 'nostre ancesor,' who received Christianity at some point after 'icel tens,' with the present *nos*. Immediately afterward, the poem introduces Eufemien, leading to

[189] 'Was einzelne Individuen zu einem solchen Wir zusammenbindet, ist die *konnektive Struktur* eines gemeinsamen Wissens und Selbstbilds, das sich zum einen auf die Bindung an gemeinsame Regeln und Werte, zum anderen auf die Erinnerung an eine gemeinsam bewohnte Vergangenheit stützt.' Assmann, 16-7.
[190] Sophie Marnette, *Narrateur et points de vue dans la littérature française médiévale: une approche linguistique* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), 51.

the logical conclusion that he is one of those converted *ancesors*, and is thus part of the community of salvation evoked in line 11.[191]

At first glance, the first ten lines of the poem, in which the *ubi sunt* topos is played upon, may also seem to refer to Noah, Abraham, and David as *anchesors*. Yet we ought not to be thrown off by the inclusion of Old Testament figures in this list, even though to our mind one could hardly speak of cultural continuity between ancient Israel and late fourth-century Rome, let alone ancient Israel and medieval France; let us also not forget that Christian rulers often looked to David and Solomon as role models. (This was fairly standard practice in some circles: Christian chroniclers, for instance, often took the book of Genesis as a point of departure, even if in the end their focus would wind up as narrow as that of Cassiodorus' Italy under the Ostrogoths.) Analyzing the syntax of the first strophes of the poem, Howard Robertson concludes that 'nostre ancesor' does not, in fact, refer to the Old Testament patriarchs.[192] Moreover, upon looking more closely at the poem's first ten lines, it seems likely that both instances of *anc(h)esors* refer, as Karl Uitti has said, rather to the late Roman protagonists of the story.[193] It is Eufemien and his contemporaries who represent 'ancestors' for the *Vie*'s audience:

> Bons fu li siecles al tens ancienor
> car feiz ert e justise e amor
> si ert creance dunt or n'i a nul pro
> tot est muez perdue a sa color
> ja mais n'iert tel cum fu as anchesors
> al tens Noë e al tens Abraam
> e al Davi que Deus ama tant
> bons fu li siecles jamais n'iert si vaillant
> viex est e frailes tot s'en vait declinant

[191] Howard Robertson reads this as a pessimistic account of a world that, in its workings, did not change for the better after the Incarnation, but instead continued to decline. Howard Robertson, '*La Vie de Saint Alexis*: Meaning and Manuscript *A*,' *Studies in Philology* 67, no. 4 (Oct. 1970), 421.
[192] H. Robertson, 420-2.
[193] Karl Uitti, 'Paradigm, Legend, Meaning,' 290. Cf. Uitti, '*Poésie Nationale*,' where the author claims, in perhaps stronger terms than I do here, that the audience comprises 'the physical and spiritual descendants of the Romans among whom Alexis lived' who are 'translated into latter-day "Romans"' by this reference to ancestors (134), but goes on to link this identity to notions of *translatio imperii* (139-44) and to define the poem's language against the *rustica Romana lingua* of the earliest Old French texts (131-5), neither of which is my intention here.

si est enperiez tut bien i vait morant[194]

The first five lines ought probably to be read as setting the stage for the poem, and thus as referring to the ensemble of the 'bons... siecles al tens ancienur,' with the next five lines serving simply to emphasize the decline further by pushing its starting point all the way back to the Flood. In this reading, *anchesors* in line 5 refers also to the characters of the poem, and then briefly cedes the stage to a tangential reference to the Old Testament illustrating the permanence of decay in human affairs (recall my discussion above of the common ancient and medieval trope of societal decline featured here).

In this manner, a 'we' is established between the audience and the ancestors, a shared identity as Latin Christians. If the *Vie de saint Alexis*, in a pre-literate form, preserved impressions of late Roman life, it did not necessarily have to do so unaided. The unfortunate impression that the bulk of Latin literature – as literature in general represents an artificial form of memory, and is an important component of cultural memory according to Assmann's model – lay undisturbed in monasteries, but for the occasional 'renaissance,' until its rediscovery by later humanists unnecessarily clouds our view of how the composer of the *Vie de saint Alexis* may have seen his subject. In other words, there is no reason to assume that an understanding of common history could not be supplemented by notions ultimately derived from the perspective of late antique writers such as Claudian. Speaking from a very different vantage point from that of Eufemien, the fabulously wealthy Roman notable, the poet is able to say 'tot est muez, perdue a sa color.' Rather than the idle invocation of a literary trope, this reflects a *kontrapräsentisch* awareness of the

[194] 'Good was the world in the olden days, / for there were faith and justice and love / and there was belief, of which there is no more: / all has changed and has lost its color, / no more shall it be as it was for our ancestors. / in the time of Noah and in the time of Abraham, / and of David, whom God loved so greatly, / the world was good; no more will it be so virtuous. / it is old and fragile, everything proceeds to its decline; / it has worsened so that all good goes dying.' Paris *VSA*, 1-10.

centuries of changes that make his own world, on the outside at least, so different from that of Eufemien. As mentioned above, an irony of sorts at the heart of Assmann's theory is that, in order for cultural memory and thus cultural continuity to exist, there has to exist a perceptible cultural *Bruch* or break[195] at some point that distinguishes the present from the past with which it seeks identification; the *Vie de saint Alexis* refers to this break quite clearly even as it lays claim to its Roman 'ancestors,' by situating them in the 'tens ancienor.' This distinction, coupled with the poem's closing injunction to remember, makes it fit neatly into Assmann's framework.

Recall that, according to our material records, the *Vie de saint Alexis* is fixed in written form around the same time as the *Chanson de Roland* and other early *chansons de geste*, that is to say in the first half of the twelfth century. As Vitz and other exponents of the oral-literature approach have pointed out, the latter genre is likely to have emerged from a lengthy pre-literate or para-literate stage, where it encoded embellished popular memories of the deeds of heroes in song; here, I have argued that the Alexis poems emerged under analogous circumstances. In this respect, it is possible to see how Assmann's 'remembering,' 'identity,' and 'cultural continuity,' each in its active and passive role, have their place in the formation of the oral Alexis material. Remembering, in cultural-memory terms, involves the conscious recollection of 'ancestral' people, places, and deeds, and the establishment of a meaningful relationship with them. Identity and remembering are mutually dependent: the former is the location of the individual within a current community and the association thereof with people and places ritually remembered. Finally, cultural continuity and the shaping of tradition involve the fusion of the above elements into a coherent and intuitively apprehensible narrative that allows an individual to situate him- or

[195] Assmann, 32.

herself both within a present community and within the overarching story of that community, all the way from its perceived beginnings.

One must, of course, avoid simplifying the rapport between medieval France and ancient Rome, as there exist also early Old French texts that clearly portray Italy as a foreign country. The *Couronnement de Louis*, for example, which features a pilgrimage to Rome undertaken by its protagonist Guillaume au Court Nez, displays just such an attitude. Although this particular text's focus on military-aristocratic concerns might make its worldview less relevant for audiences of other genres like hagiography, the fact is that at least some twelfth-century Francophones viewed Italy as an alien entity even as it continued to occupy an important place in their spiritual geography as the homeland of the pope and, consequently, an object of pilgrimage. One might well consider that Rome could have meant something different for a Frankish aristocrat, a Gallic churchman, an Anglo-Norman anchoress, or one of their lay countrymen, and that the Rome of the *Vie de saint Alexis* is relevant to the poem's listeners not so much through its spatial reality as in its capacity as the home of their Roman 'ancestors.'

Each of the elements at the heart of Assmann's theory – 'remembering,' 'identity,' and 'cultural continuity,' are thus present in and about the *Vie de saint Alexis,* through the association of the narrator, audience, and characters, as well as by the portrait of the Roman Empire at the turn of the fifth century that emerges from it. How the world of the *Vie de saint Alexis* would have emerged the way it did in the poem's earliest stages is unclear, but perhaps there lingered for a while an awareness of the Theodosian empire's last years of stability before the chain of events that lead to the establishment of the barbarian kingdoms, including France, in the West. Through songs such as the *Vie de saint Alexis*, memory of that era, fed by information from written records such as histories and even religious tracts, as a sort of 'golden age' (or age of gold, in Peter Brown's

words), may have persisted in sub-Roman Gaul over the centuries, across the break, more evident in hindsight, in institutional continuity between the Empire and its successor states. This awareness can be qualified as an evolved form of 'Roman' identity among the denizens of what would become France, whose language and cultural affinities stayed largely the same even as the ruling class placed above them changed.

## 7. Conclusion

Jan Assmann's discussion of *kulturelle Kontinuierung* brings me back to the initial purpose of this excursus, which was to link the historical details found in the *Vie de saint Alexis* with the likelihood that it originated as an oral-formulaic poem in order to see what sort of continuities might be traced between the poem's audience and its subject matter. As a work of oral or even oral-formulaic literature, the poem seems to encode, in the more 'organic' circumstances of its formation, a set of cultural memories regarding the late antique world that it portrays. These memories, whether influenced in some way by written records or representative of a popular recollection of a vivid world that had long since slipped into the past, may have fused with a newly imported hagiographic legend in order to create, after a few centuries' evolution, the *Vie de saint Alexis* as we know it.

In this reading, the *Vie de saint Alexis* represents a sort of cultural continuity between late antiquity and the high medieval francophone world in that it identifies the poem's audience with 'its' Roman past, all in the process of carrying cultural memories from that past into the present. In terms of what we know from modern historiography, the result, contrary to much hagiography of the 'desert on the Dordogne' sort, is a portrayal of setting that is faithful to at least some aspects of the late antique world, a world that mattered so much to and exerted such a profound influence on medieval literary culture in general. At the same time, the poem's identification on several

levels with the Roman 'ancestors' of its audience points to an awareness of the Roman past of Gaul and to the origins of the language and culture of the majority of the population. This 'organic' sort of cultural continuity, however, insofar as it was maintained through oral poetry such as the *Vie de saint Alexis* and committed to parchment in the twelfth century, would not last in this form. As I move forward to examine the hagiography of an unambiguously written vernacular culture, I will describe how medieval francophone cultural and linguistic links with late antiquity played out in a more self-consciously literary domain.

## II. Latinity and Cultural Identity: the *Vie de saint Laurent*

1. Introduction

In my search for signs of cultural continuity between late antiquity and the high middle ages of *langue d'oïl* literature, I will move from the matter of cultural memory (as seen in the *Vie de saint Alexis*) to that of cultural identity, to the question, that is, of the extent to which continuity with the distant Roman past was present and recognized in medieval France and the broader *langue d'oïl* sphere of cultural and linguistic influence (which included Norman England). In order to suggest a positive answer, I must first determine the kinds of evidence that may be relevant to an examination of the question: 'cultural identity,' like mentality, is a precarious construct in the first place, and all the more fraught when imposed upon an era in the distant past that has, on the whole, left us with but a few textual, artistic, architectural, and archeological scraps to judge it by, if one takes into account all of the sources that have been lost. It is also the sort of phenomenon that is not always explicitly declared in its own time, existing rather on the level of common understandings before finally fading away without leaving many clear traces behind; historian John Richardson has spoken of such 'attitudes... which are not specifically argued about in our sources precisely because they are taken for granted by those who wrote or spoke at the time.'[196] Yet if the body of evidence for cultural identity is largely circumstantial, this does not mean that the question of its nature is inadmissible, for if it can be demonstrated that a form of continuity with the Roman world – a culturally, linguistically, and politically united Europe of the past – was perceived and broadly accepted by medieval Francophones, this would bear significantly on our understanding of the period.

[196] Richardson, 6-7.

By ‘medieval Francophones,’ I use a form of shorthand to describe speakers of a number of dialects, from Burgundian to Francian to Picard to Norman to Anglo-French, who shared a common literary domain but also espoused a multiplicity of local identities. While it is convenient to speak of the *langue d’oïl* zone in the middle ages as a kind of cultural and linguistic whole, one should not lose sight either of its internal diversity or of its place in a larger Romance dialect continuum. And by ‘Roman identity’ I do not mean that speakers of Old French would explicitly consider themselves Romans in the way that their Byzantine contemporaries did, for the polity on which such an identification could depend no longer existed in the West; nor am I necessarily speaking of the extent to which medieval Francophones could identify with pagan Rome, especially in the context of hagiography. Instead, I speak of a more subtle sense of cultural commonality across the Romance-speaking sphere, with an implicit identification with the people who had lived in and defined those geographical areas before them, people who at least until a certain point in time necessarily saw themselves as Latin-speaking Romans.

The question is legitimate because these people did not, of course, disappear with the weakening of the Roman Empire’s political control of the areas in which they lived, and so any change in identity must have taken place gradually and under the influence of many external and internal factors. The scholarship of Peter Brown and others has traced strong continuities of this sort for centuries to either side of 476 CE, and indeed those who study Byzantium are perfectly able to see nothing but continuity in their domain, as we will have occasion to see when I examine the work of Antony Kaldellis. In the West, however, matters were more complicated, and I am in any case far more interested in the long-term strength and significance of the underlying cultural unity known to philologists from Gaston Paris to Ernst Robert Curtius as *Romania*, but which I shall refer to as ‘Romanity’ to avoid conceptual confusion. The survival of Romanity, the basic

understanding of the identity of Romans and, more narrowly, Latin-speaking Romans from the time of the late Empire into the period of Old French literature could provide interesting new angles for the understanding and study of the latter.

Such a broadly shared Latin European identity would have derived from and survived in a social fabric that had been created in the Roman Empire through the Latinization of Western Europe: though an explicit sense of political Romanity may have disappeared in the West with the disintegration of imperial political control over the region, an overall sense of unity seems to have persisted, maintained through a common language and culture. Only gradually did this fabric fray, its constituent pieces slowly separating to become, more and more consciously by the time of the Hundred Years' War, the modern nation-states of today's Europe. But we ought not to regard the process as inevitable, nor are the identities of twelfth-century Francophones, in all of its multifaceted complexity, reducible to a simple germ of the future nation. By studying its reflections in the available texts, we may not only gain a better understanding of this stage in European cultural history, but also cultivate for ourselves a sense of critical perspective with regard to the very notion of the European nation-state – as well as its potential alternatives. Of course, such an inquiry demands caution: as Rosamond McKitterick puts it, '[i]t is obvious that memory and the markers of identity in the past are embodied in texts and objects, but such texts and objects are far from passive.'[197] This means that we should be watchful for the ways in which our texts' own relationship with the past can distort the image of the past that their compilers inherited from their own cultural milieu. With this in mind, I propose to look into the nature of this early-to-high medieval identity and, knowing more or less the forms that would eventually replace it, attempt to

[197] Rosamond McKitterick, 'Transformations of the Roman Past and Roman Identity in the Early Middle Ages, in *The Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 226.

discern the extent to which it had remained Roman – common, in other words, to all of Latin Europe.

In speaking of a Europe in transition, when it comes to geographical and ethnic nomenclature, the distinctions between modern and ancient terminology ought to be pointed out, for in modern historiography the various terms Gaul, Frankia, and France usually refer to overlapping geographical areas at different periods in history. 'Gaul' tends to indicate the territory of modern France from the time of the earliest Greek colonies (i.e. when written records of the region first enter our field of view) up to and including the Merovingian era (496-751 CE); 'Frankia' (or 'Francia') refers to the polity of the Merovingian and Carolingian periods (496-843) which included large parts of modern Germany but not always all of modern France; finally, the use of 'France' is found in scholarship with greater frequency beginning with the Carolingian dynasty (751-941). Whether a territory outside of the *langue d'oïl* zone – Aquitaine, say, or Brittany – can be referred to as 'France' usually depends on its political subordination at any given time. All of these are products of modern convention, for in Latin and Old French the terms remained consistent: in Latin, *Gallia* was the geographic region bounded by the Rhine in the east, the Alps in the southeast, and the Pyrenees in the southwest, and *Francia* was the polity of the Franks, while in Old French literature, *France* appears to be the only term in use for both concepts. Its meaning depended on context: in the *Roman de Jules César*, Caesar is described as invading *France*;[198] in the *Song of Roland*, many references to *France* invoke the royal capital *Ais* (Aachen), a city definitively within the Germanic-speaking part of Charlemagne's empire; in some uses, such as arguably that of Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, its meaning might have been limited to the region of Île-de-France. In the period before Old French literature, meanwhile, the precise

[198] E.g. verses 136, 141, etc. in Olivier Collet, ed., *Le roman de Jules César* (Geneva: Droz, 1993), 8.

meanings of ethnonyms apparently denoting 'Frank' and 'Roman' become increasingly confused as the centuries wear on, it often being difficult to tell if the terms denote primarily ethnic or legal categories, or indeed both in equal measure.[199] Laury Sarti cites an eighth-century example from a chronicle recording that Charlemagne's father and uncle put down a revolt by 'the Romans' in Aquitaine;[200] yet some sixty years later the pope would crown Charlemagne 'emperor of the Romans,' with the convenient 'legal' justification that the title was available because a woman, Irene, occupied the throne in Constantinople at the time. Were the meanings of the term 'Roman' the same in all of these contexts, or even similar? It is difficult to tell.

If the meaning of 'Roman' is unclear, so too is that of 'Frank,' whose shifting significations have recently been discussed by Helmut Reimitz and Jamie Kreiner.[201] The term seems to have had two primary senses from early on, both of which it retains in modern French: that of the ethnonym and that of an adjective synonymous with 'free' shading into 'honest' (in keeping, one might well assume, with a sort of aristocratic prejudice). To ask which came first – whether the Franks were originally labeled as 'free people' or whether the social status of Germanic warriors in post-Roman Gaul attached connotations of freedom and franchise (another derivative of 'Frank') to their name is to pose something of a chicken-or-egg question, and the solution would never be so simple in any case. Helmut Reimitz goes so far as to speak of early medieval ethnic identity in terms of *Spielräume*, spaces of play, where significations shifted according to context and program. Matters did not simplify with the establishment of the Frankish realm: in the ninth century, the geographer Walahfrid Strabo attempted to define his own homeland of Alemannia with recourse to geography, etymology, ancient authority, experience, and common sense, but the

[199] Laury Sarti, 'Frankish Romanness and Charlemagne's Empire,' *Speculum* 91, no. 4 (October 2016), 1040–58.
[200] Sarti, 1043.
[201] Helmut Reimitz's *History, Frankish Identity, and the Framing of Western Ethnicity*, cited above, is dedicated to the topic; cf. Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 88-97.

only firm boundary he could draw was linguistic, between 'Latin speakers' ('gentes quae latinum habent sermonem') and 'barbarians.'[202]

With the question of ethnonyms so fraught, I may now take my cue from Walahfrid and appeal to the one marker of cultural identity for which we have relatively abundant fixed evidence remaining: language. The issue of how Old French was used and regarded at various stages – by itself, in relation to Latin, or in relation to other Romance dialects – can offer clues about the broader sociocultural context of the time. To this end, I will turn to a twelfth-century hagiographic poem, the *Vie de saint Laurent*, for reason of the relatively heavy presence of Latin words and phrases in the poem: by investigating how the text makes use of both Latin and Old French, I shall hope to gain a glimpse into the way the contemporary medieval audience may have perceived the relationship between the two languages in terms of cultural continuity with the Roman world. Naturally, this relationship and the cultural perception of this relationship would have developed diachronically, from the automatic identification of the two as one and the same in late antiquity to their complete conceptual separation during the fifteenth century. Our poem is situated closer to the latter end of the timeline, but it is my hope to show that the links between the two modes of expression had still not been entirely severed at that time, and that this had a role to play in defining the identity of medieval Romance speakers respective to ancient Rome. It is thus convenient that the poem that will serve here as a case study is in fact set in third-century Rome, the stage of St Lawrence's martyrdom.

The historicity of this figure, so strongly associated with the city as to be considered its patron, is far more concrete to us than that of Alexis, and Lawrence's cult was already well

[202] Patrick Gautier Dalché, 'Représentations géographiques savantes, constructions et pratiques de l'espace,' in *Constructions de l'espace au Moyen Âge: pratiques et représentations*, ed. Thomas Lienhard (Paris: Mulhouse, 2006), 19.

established by the late fourth century: an epitaph by Pope Damasus,[203] hymns by Ambrose of Milan,[204] a longer 'hymn' by the Spanish poet Prudentius,[205] and a few of Augustine's sermons[206] all testify to the high status of St Lawrence in the contemporary pantheon of the martyrs. As for the medieval French poem, it represents an exercise in conscious repetition, or even one of *réécriture*, rather than an outgrowth of an oral tradition, and appears moreover to be based directly upon late antique textual models. By examining the *Vie de saint Laurent* with particular attention to the ways in which it handles both language and its late antique subject matter, one can elucidate a sub-Roman identity discernible in medieval French texts that is different from the organic cultural-historical memory on display in the *Vie de saint Alexis*; in particular, I have in mind a continuity that is reflected in the persistence of living sociolinguistic identities oriented toward the medieval present, where the *Vie de saint Alexis* displays a continuity of identity in relation to the late Roman past. In my endeavor, I will be guided and inspired by some of the latest advances in the field of Byzantine studies, which will provide some principles to keep in mind while approaching the question of the identity of medieval Francophones.

In his scholarship on the politics of the Byzantine Empire, historian Anthony Kaldellis has pioneered a revisionist approach that vigorously confronts many of the assumptions that have accompanied Byzantine studies practically since the outset. At the heart of his method lies an imperative to read the evidence left by past societies on their own terms, while attempting to recognize and account as much as possible for the distorting effect wrought by much early modern

[203] Damasus, 'Epigr. 32,' in *Damasi Epigrammata*, ed. Max Ihm, Anthologiae Latinae Supplementa 1 (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1895), 37.
[204] Ambrose, 'Hymn XIV,' *Early Latin Hymns*, ed. Arthur Sumner Walpole (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 97-104.
[205] Aurelius Prudentius Clemens, 'Hymnus in honorem passionis Laurentii beatissimi martyris,' in *Prudentius*, trans. H.J. Thomson, vol. 2, Loeb Cassical Library 398 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), 108-43.
[206] Augustine, 'Sermones 302-4,' in *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi opera omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 39 (Paris, 1841), 1385–97.

and modern historiography. In the case of Byzantine studies, this effect has been especially insidious, to the point that even many scholars who are, on the whole, sympathetic to their subject have had a difficult time rejecting such influences[207] (although Kaldellis points out that many others appear to harbor an active dislike of Byzantium[208]). Regardless of intent, however, the role of centuries of Western hostility to the Eastern Empire has been extremely corrosive to our current ability to accept and analyze the Byzantines on terms relatively free from such biases.[209]

The term 'Byzantine' itself is the example par excellence of this problem, for the people of that empire never called nor considered themselves anything of the kind, and the etyma of the word itself in Greek texts tend to refer specifically to Constantinople and to its inhabitants; this itself, moreover, was likely an archaizing touch typical of a literary culture that exclusively privileged the vocabulary of the classical age. Nor does the term 'medieval Greek' do justice to their identity, for while Latin Europe certainly knew them as Greeks (*Graeci*),[210] the Byzantines themselves – and many in the Greek-speaking world ever since[211] – called themselves simply *Rhômaioi*, or Romans.[212] The attitude toward this phenomenon prevalent in Western historiography – an attitude energetically denounced by Kaldellis as symptomatic of unexamined and unscholarly bias – has

[207] Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), xiv-xv.
[208] 'One of the paradoxes of Byzantine studies is that first-rate historians and philologists spend their lives studying a body of literature they detest.' Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 38; also 29, where Kaldellis speaks of 'the bizarre contempt [Byzantine scholars] feel for Byzantine literature.'
[209] Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, x-xi.
[210] Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 63.
[211] Peter Mackridge, *Language and National Identity in Greece 1766-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 47-51.
[212] Kaldellis elsewhere relates an anecdote from Prof. Peter Charanis, who described events from his childhood on an Aegean island: 'When the island was occupied by the Greek navy [in 1912], Greek soldiers were sent to the villages and stationed themselves in the public squares. Some of us children ran to see what these Greek soldiers, these Hellenes, looked like. "What are you looking at?" one of them asked. "At Hellenes," we replied. ''Are you not Hellenes yourselves?" he retorted. "No, we are Romans."' Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 42; see also Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, ix-xii.

been akin to a condescending 'morality play,' the common understanding being that, despite unbroken institutional and cultural continuity, the eastern half of the Roman Empire quickly ceased to be 'truly Roman' by abandoning Latin, adopting an excessively oriental veneer, replacing Roman political traditions with theocratic absolutism, etc.[213] Needless to say, each of these propositions is deeply problematic, and if we add their effect to a strong tradition since at least the time of Gibbon and Voltaire of disparagingly condemning Byzantine politics and society, the picture of modern anti-Byzantine bias is complete.[214]

As a solution, Kaldellis proposes to read the Byzantines as much as possible on their own terms, by which he means an effort to rigorously establish the historical and cultural context in which the examined Byzantine texts and artefacts were produced. In *The Byzantine Republic*, he advances the radical-sounding thesis that the members of the body politic we know as 'Byzantium,' like those of the Roman Dominate and Principate before it, saw their state precisely as a *res publica* in the ancient sense, that is as a political entity whose ultimate purpose is the common good of its citizens – a commonwealth, regardless of the formal structure and composition of executive and legislative bodies and the manner in which they were invested with power.[215] The author shows that reading Byzantine legal and political texts on these terms (i.e. taking seriously their claims to Romanity and republicanism) allows for the construction of a much more logical and consistent historical perspective of the Byzantine state. It was in part a modern-era assumed

[213] Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 27.
[214] On the Enlightenment and Byzantium, see Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 8 and 26. The situation may not have been helped by the prominent role in Byzantine studies of scholars whose Slavic perspective, unique and often useful in that it was informed by attitudes shaped by centuries of Byzantine-Slavic interactions, also produced inevitable distortions that were too readily received by Western scholars, to wit the tendency to grant some sort of *translatio imperii* between Byzantium and Russia, as well as references to the Orthodox Slavic world as an 'heir' to Byzantium or in fact culturally Byzantine, a 'Byzantine Commonwealth' in Dimitri Obolensky's formulation. Kaldellis implicitly rejects this paradigm, dismissing Obolensky's thesis as 'fictional': see Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, x, and Kaldellis, *Hellenism*, 109.
[215] Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 14-26.

meaning of the word 'republic' – i.e. a state where strictly defined procedures and institutions facilitate the distribution of power between the citizens and an oligarchic class, as was the case in pre-Augustan Rome – that, combined with superficial judgments based on the character of Byzantine ceremonial, led to the consequent association of Byzantium with a stereotyped 'Eastern' despotism, though it really represented nothing of the sort.[216]

So goes Kaldellis' argument. If his task of upending Byzantine studies is titanic, it is also a fairly straightforward one, for many of his claims should have been patently self-evident if not for the field's deeply ingrained biases. But part of the broader value of his work lies in its reemphasis of the historical, political, and cultural continuity between the Roman world, as it is now generally understood, and the Byzantine. The same general principles, those of evaluating historical sources in their own context, taking their claims seriously while attempting to avoid as much as possible the ideological prerogatives of later historiography, can be fruitfully applied elsewhere, the study of medieval France being no exception. This I shall now attempt. My argument here, demonstrated in practice with respect to the notion of 'cultural memory' in the previous chapter, is that a similar continuity of identity existed in the West, as well. This identity stood on fewer supports than did the Byzantine Roman identity, which managed to survive, in a way, the final fall of the Empire in 1453,[217] but was nonetheless strong enough to persist for centuries following the disintegration of imperial power in the West, and maintained itself even as it gradually ceased to see the Eastern Empire as a repository of Romanity. The Western sub-Roman

[216] Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 22-3.

[217] I refer here to the tendency of denizens of Magna Graecia to refer to themselves as *Rhômaioi* or to their language as *Rhômaïkê* well into the twentieth century, and in some places to this day – most notably in southeastern Ukraine and in Trabzon in Turkey. See Ioanna Sitaridou, 'Greek-Speaking Enclaves in Pontus Today: The Documentation and Revitalization of Romeyka,' in *Keeping Languages Alive: Documentation, Pedagogy, and Revitalization*, ed. Mari C. Jones and Sarah Ogilvie (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 88–112. Cf. Hakan Özkan, 'The Pontic Greek Spoken by Muslims in the Villages of Beşköy in the Province of Present-Day Trabzon,' *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 37, no. 1 (January 2013), 130–50.

identity proposed here is difficult to elucidate, as are many such elements of the fabric of society, which (to echo John Richardson), being understood almost unconsciously in their own time, do not lend themselves readily to discussion until they have already ceased to exist.

Enter St Lawrence, whose verse Life is written in the dialect of Old French used in England after its conquest by the Normans. The *Vie de saint Laurent* provides evidence for a continuity of Roman identity among medieval Francophones of a more subtle sort, but one which has left us with the most accessible body of evidence: that of language (though the late antique substance of the Life of this saint from Rome, whose relative importance in France in particular is attested by the abundance of toponyms there bearing his name,[218] is also relevant to the issue). Surviving Gallic poetic celebrations of Lawrence consist of a sixth-century commemorative hymn by Venantius Fortunatus,[219] composed for the miraculous renovation of a shrine to the saint, and the twelfth-century *Vie*, witnessed by two manuscripts; the latter blends Old French and Latin in a way that indicates a relationship between the two idioms, vernacular and classical, that is more complex and nuanced than has generally been thought. The linguistic interchange here may reflect a situation not far removed from that in the contemporary Byzantine world, where a similar state of diglossia[220] between classical and vernacular Greek played a role in the maintenance and emphasis of historical and cultural continuity with its Roman and Ancient Greek past.

Delbert Russell's 1976 edition of the *Vie de saint Laurent*, based upon a synthesis of its two closely related extant redactions, is the most recent and complete modern edition of the poem. Unlike in the case of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, one would be justified in describing both manuscript

[218] See pp. 112-3 below for more details on this matter. For a list of known Romanesque churches, see Pauline de La Malène, *Atlas de la France romane* (Saint-Léger-Vauban: Zodiaque, 1995).
[219] Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus, 'De basilicae sancti Laurenti trabe,' in *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati presbyteri Italici Opera poetica*, ed. Friedrich Leo, MGH SS Auct. ant. 4.1 (Munich, 1881), 218.
[220] The Oxford English Dictionary defines diglossia, a neologism taken from French, by citing a definition by the linguist C.A. Ferguson (1959): 'In many speech communities two or more varieties of the same language are used by some speakers under different conditions.'

versions, which Russell refers to as *A* and *B*, as representing a definitive single work, for their texts, the inevitable orthographic differences aside, are nearly identical, where in the previous case the number and order of verses was different in each redaction. The editor and his predecessors conclude that both manuscripts of the *Vie de saint Laurent* are based upon a common source, since they share some of the same irregularities.[221] *A* is the first item within BnF fr. 19525, which also happens to be manuscript P of the *Vie de saint Alexis* corpus, dated, as mentioned in the previous chapter, to the first half of the thirteenth century. *B* is the last text of the British Library's (formerly British Museum's) Egerton 2710, a manuscript whose writing, in Paul Meyer's estimation, 'est du XIII$^{e}$ siècle, plutôt de la seconde moitié que de la première.'[222] Russell's editorial conclusion, based on a thorough linguistic (phonetic) study and comparisons with other Anglo-French texts whose dates are more certain, is that the original *Vie de saint Laurent* was likely composed in the 1170s.[223]

I will here accept and proceed from Russell's elucidation of his editorial approach,[224] description and analysis of the text's linguistic features, and conclusions regarding its authorship, while accepting Patricia Stirnemann's earlier date for its composition;[225] the exact date of this poem or its manuscripts is not here a matter of principle, for the *Vie de saint Laurent* is not a work of oral poetry, at least not in the same sense as the *Vie de saint Alexis*. (In the case of the latter, the oral-formulaic vantage point allowed me to project the poem's origins back past the date of its manuscripts, making sense of its portrait of the late antique world in the light of Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory.) Instead, it appears that the *Vie de saint Laurent* was likely indeed

[221] D.W. Russell, ed., *La Vie de saint Laurent: An Anglo-Norman Poem of the Twelfth Century* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1976), ix (editorial history), 4-5 (on the common source and shared irregularities).
[222] Paul Meyer, 'Notice du ms. Egerton 2710 du Musée Britannique,' *Bulletin de la Société des anciens textes français* 15 (1889), 72.
[223] Russell, 1-4 (on the manuscripts and their contents), 22-3 (on the date).
[224] Russell, 28-9.
[225] Stirnemann and Avril, 67.

composed by some particular Anglo-Norman author in the last third of the twelfth century. I shall therefore seek to explore the ways in which this poem, as a more purely and literally 'literary' text in the modern sense, still shows signs of a sub-Roman identity both through its linguistic features and through its *reprise* of late antique culture, as well as how this may reflect a development in the popular medieval reception of late antique notions and ideas. It is only by cursory signs, through how the poem speaks rather than simply through what its words denote, that we may discern such an identity.

It is also convenient to the general trajectory of my study of the *Vie de saint Laurent* that, between the poem's two manuscripts, Russell's edition uses *A* as its base manuscript,[226] since it (BnF fr. 19525) also contains our redaction of the *Vie de saint Alexis*. In this way the two poems, the latter 'oral,' the former not, will appear to this study as contemporaries in their fixing through writing, and thus provide better ground for comparative investigation.

## 2. The cult of St Lawrence

Unlike the Alexis legend, the story of St Lawrence does not have its origins shrouded in obscurity; moreover, the sources for it are early and specific enough – as many prominent Christian Latin authors of the late fourth century have something to say about him – to allow for the conclusion that he was a historical figure. As such, he would have been put to death during the wave of persecutions that began under the emperor Decius (249-51) and continued under Valerian (253-60),[227] while his cult was first monumentalized for posterity by figures of the stature of Pope

[226] Russell, 6.

[227] Historians hold this to have been the only general, empire-wide persecution of Christians, though it ebbed before swelling again under Diocletian in the early fourth century. See Geoffrey Earnest Maurice de Ste. Croix, 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?,' *Past & Present* 26 (November 1963), 6–7. While Christians had often been prosecuted and punished before that time, there has been some debate regarding the reasons for this. See also Adrian Nicholas Sherwin-White, 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? An Amendment,' *Past & Present* 27 (April 1964), 23–27.

Damasus, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, and the poet Prudentius. It was also in some degree from them that this saint's Life was necessarily passed down to posterity, and to them that any subsequent adaptation had perforce to answer and respond, even if it were more immediately based on later sources like the Latin prose text that D.W. Russell calls 'the *Passio Polychronii* version,' in which he discerns the inspiration for the Old French poem.[228] Although he may be correct in this, the poetic antecedents to the *Vie de saint Laurent* ought also to be considered, and especially that of Prudentius (the second poem of the *Peristephanon*, his cycle of fourteen hymns dedicated to Spanish and Roman martyrs,[229] is a 584-verse narration of St Lawrence's final days).

The fourth- to fifth-century sources agree on the essential details of the Lawrence legend. As deacon to Pope Sixtus II (who was indeed a contemporary of Decius and Valerian; thus once more the name of a late antique Roman leader given in an Old French Life appears to us with an air of historical accuracy, this time thanks to its written sources), Lawrence oversaw finances and almsgiving on behalf of the Christian Church in the city of Rome. The various renditions of his Life all recount his martyrdom as follows.

When Sixtus is put to death by order of the Roman authorities, he prophesies that Lawrence will follow him within three days. (The notion that the bishop was crucified, present in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* II, is based on this tradition of a prophecy, of which Ambrose's fourteenth hymn also makes mention: it is logical enough that crucifixion would seem a method of execution most appropriate for final speeches to mourning followers.) Soon after, the persecutor summons Lawrence before him and demands that he hand over all of the wealth that, he is convinced, is hidden away in the Christian churches. Lawrence duly promises to present him with the 'riches of

[228] Russell, 24.
[229] The collection's name means 'on the crowns [of the martyrs]'; Prudentius or his earliest editors gave his works Latinized Greek titles.

the Church,' and spends the three allotted days gathering all of the Church's poor and invalid dependents, bringing them before the official gaze on the third day; the outraged magistrate then orders the deacon to be roasted alive on a grill. After a torture sequence, before giving up his spirit, Lawrence announces that he is cooked through on one side, and proposes that he either be turned over or eaten, depending on the version. This last, signature stroke of dark humor is present in one form or another in almost all of the late antique sources on the saint (except for the poem of Venantius Fortunatus, where the incident has no relevance to the theme of his hymn).

Lawrence's cult in Gaul is known from at least the second half of the sixth century, when Fortunatus, the Merovingian court poet, celebrated in verse the saint's miraculous intercession in the renovation of a church dedicated to his name. Lawrence's popularity would only grow from then on, and would later spread to Norman England at the same time as it became integrated into the Gallic (i.e. French and Occitan) cultural sphere, and as French replaced English as the prestige language of vernacular culture.[230] Thus, in twelfth-century England, as Glyn Burgess and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne assert in the introduction to their translation of the *Vie de saint Laurent*, Lawrence was among the four or so most venerated saints.[231] In France, meanwhile, the saint's cult is indirectly attested in a large number of derived toponyms: a dictionary of place-name etymology records over eighty extant communes that bear his name, twenty-five of which are first attested in sources older than or roughly contemporaneous to the *Vie de saint Laurent*.[232] This need not necessarily mean that the other places in France named St-Laurent are all younger than c. 1250,

[230] Though the extent of the Norman conquest's impact on the veneration of St Lawrence in England is beyond the scope of this chapter, which treats texts written in medieval French as pertaining to a Gallic cultural sphere, it is worth noting (if unsurprising) that his cult had long been present, to some extent, in Anglo-Saxon England. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn Burgess, trans., *Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths: Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo-Norman Women*, The Everyman Library (London: J M Dent, 1996), xxxvii.
[231] Wogan-Browne and Burgess, xix.
[232] Albert Dauzat, *Dictionnaire etymologique des noms de lieux en France*, ed. Charles Rostaing, 2nd ed. (Paris: Guénégaud, 1989), 610.

either: documents confirming the prior existence of at least some such toponyms may have not survived until the present day.

The toponymic evidence for Lawrence's popularity is in turn corroborated by the archeological record of churches in France: the *Atlas de la France romane* records fifteen extant monuments of Romanesque architecture associated with the name of St Lawrence.[233] Setting aside the names of figures from the New Testament,[234] there are just five saints' names whose medieval architectural footprint is greater, four of which belong to representatives of the Gallic church. These are St Martin, with a full forty-two Romanesque monuments to his name, St Germanus (Germain) with nineteen, St Julian with eighteen, and SS Hilary and George with seventeen each. Moreover, the churches associated with Saint-Germain, Saint-Hilaire, and Saint-Julien ought variously to be divided between two saints each: Germanus of Auxerre and Germanus of Paris, Hilary of Poitiers and Hilary of Arles, and Julian the Hospitaller and Julian of Le Mans. And further, of all the saints to give their name to ten or more surviving Romanesque structures in France, only SS George and Lawrence are neither Biblical nor Gallic. Lawrence is the only Roman saint so honored.[235]

### 3. Sources for the *Vie de saint Laurent*

As stated, D.W. Russell concludes that the plot of the *Vie de saint Laurent* is drawn predominantly from the Latin text found in the '*Passio Polychronii* version' (BHL 4754) dated in the Bollandist analysis to around the fifth century.[236] This is a Latin *vita* of St Lawrence that often

[233] La Malène, 274.
[234] While some places named Saint-Étienne, Saint-Jean etc. may honor other saints, it is fairly safe to assume that the vast majority refer precisely to the New Testament figures.
[235] In England, Burgess and Wogan-Browne count 220 'pre-Reformation' churches dedicated to Lawrence. See Wogan-Browne and Burgess, xxxvii.
[236] For the version used by Russell, see Hippolyte Delehaye, 'Recherches sur le légendier romain,' *Analecta Bollandiana* LI (1933), 34-72.

appears in manuscripts together with *vitae* of Polychronius, Sixtus, and Hippolytus, figures described in this version of events as having been successively killed under Decius and whose Passions frequently presented a continuous narrative, though they are also broken up in many of the manuscripts. At the same time (and this is a point that Russell concedes[237]), the sequence of events and their emphasis is very different from that of the *Vie de saint Laurent*; most significantly, the latter lacks an entire episode of the '*Passio Polychronii* version' that describes Lawrence travelling between groups of Christians on the eve of Sixtus' execution, doling out alms and dispensing blessings. The characters of the presbyter Justin and the widow Cyriaca, introduced at some length early in the Latin prose text, only appear at the very end of the French *Vie*. (We should take their omission from the beginning of the poem to be evidence both for a single authorship of the poem, as well as for an ultimate diversity – so as not to say confusion – in its source material.)

The *Vie* was in turn unlikely to have been composed without knowledge of Prudentius' *Peristephanon* II, though this is only conjecture (this point will be elaborated further on). Details of Lawrence's martyrdom might have circulated independently, but where Prudentius describes the persecutor only as an anonymous magistrate carrying out the imperial command (line 100, 'minister insani ducis'), the *Passio Polychronii* and the *Vie de saint Laurent* implicate both Decius and Valerian directly, the latter playing the role of the former's henchman. During his tenure as emperor, the historical Decius had indeed appointed Valerian to serve in various official capacities in the city of Rome; the most widespread view, and that maintained by the Roman Catholic Church in its pontifical lists, however, is that Sixtus and Lawrence were martyred when Valerian was already emperor in his own right, sending persecutory instructions to Rome from the front lines of his war against the Persians in the east.

[237] Russell, 25-6.

Glyn Burgess and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne point out that the *Vie de saint Laurent* was originally written for a woman who was a particular devotee of the saint, as indicated by verses 75-9;[238] this dedication should also be taken to indicate that the poem ought not to be seen as a continually-evolving oral poem in the vein of the *Vie de saint Alexis*. By associating it with the *Vie de sainte Catherine*, which was written by a nun of the abbey at Barking in Essex, they surmise that the text in question may well have been also written by an Anglo-Norman nun, while still remaining open to the possibility of its authorship by a male figure associated with the abbey.[239] (The former version of events seems more likely if Burgess and Wogan-Browne are correct in situating the poem's composition at Barking, and that is the assumption that I will proceed from in referring to the poet as 'she.'[240]) The amount of Latin featured in the *Vie de saint Laurent* might also be a reference to the Latinity of the addressee, but its having been copied into collections of vernacular poems in the two extant manuscripts nevertheless implies that this level of Latin could be appreciated by a broader audience. The first half of manuscript A, i.e. BnF fr. 19525, which is written in a different hand than the second half, mostly contains saints' Lives, and was likely intended for readers generally interested in religious literature.

## 4. Latinity in the *Vie de saint Laurent*

At first glance, the *Vie de saint Laurent* is marked by its conspicuous Latinity. On the face of it, this is a turn with numerous implications in terms both of the text itself and of its audience. Although the bulk of the poem is in Old French, it is liberally sprinkled with Latin words and

[238] Wogan-Browne and Burgess, xxxviii.
[239] 'Whether the writer was an inhabitant of a female community dedicated to St Lawrence, or perhaps the male spiritual director of such a community, remains unknown. There is no internal evidence to confirm or exclude authorship of either gender.' Wogan-Browne and Burgess, xxxviii.
[240] For more on the extensive literary agency of women in Anglo-Norman society, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Wreaths of Thyme: The Female Translator in Anglo-Norman Hagiography,' in *The Medieval Translator* 4, ed. Roger Ellis and Ruth Evans (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994), 46–65.

terms, declined according to their context; in the process, French and Latin forms are occasionally made to rhyme. Much of the Latin content refers to characters or places in the city of Rome, though other words are rendered in that language, as well. It ought to be noted from the outset that this approach to language is not unique to the *Vie de saint Laurent*: written around the turn of the thirteenth century, the abovementioned *Roman de Jules César* similarly features a number of Latin proper nouns that are, whenever appropriate, inflected according to the rules of that language.

It need not necessarily be assumed that this feature of the *Vie de saint Laurent* implies an audience literate in Latin, much less a purely clerical one. A lifelong acquaintance with the liturgy of the Church might well have prepared anyone to apprehend the meanings of the various endings of first- and second-declension nouns, the sort that are common in the *Vie de saint Laurent*.[241] The simplified Old French declension system, in turn, fostered a syntax broadly corresponding to the more basic uses of the various Latin cases, especially as regards the accusative and the genitive, both of whose grammatical functions passed to the oblique case of Old French. More curiously, there is also an instance of an absolute construction employing a French participle in combination with a Latin noun in the ablative case.[242] This is in verses 421-2, where 'et Valerien en est desvez / *veant Decio* est levez'[243]: Valerian is the subject of the main verb of both clauses, while Decius (in the Latin ablative case) is the subject of the verb expressed by the (French) participle *veant* in a kind of bilingual ablative absolute.

[241] Examples are *paralitici* and *ydropici* (305-6), *laminas* (631), *plunbatis* (666), and *catasta* (691, 724), in addition to a number of recurring proper nouns, foremost among these being *Decius*, variously declined, and [*palais*] *Tiberii*.
[242] According to Allen and Greenough's *New Latin Grammar*, §419, '[a] noun or pronoun, with a participle in agreement, may be put in the Ablative [case] to define the time or circumstances of an action. This construction is called the Ablative Absolute.' The noun of an absolute construction may not at the same time be the subject of the main clause of the sentence; in other words, it serves to link two separate actions in one phrase while at the same time pointing to their circumstantial or temporal relationship.
[243] 'And Valerian is enraged by this, / he has risen [from his seat] with Decius watching.'

The Latin of the *Vie de saint Laurent* may appear both marked (in its occasional unusual constructions and learned vocabulary) and readily accessible (in the relevance and simplicity of most of its usage) to contemporaries lacking Latinity. The interplay between French and Latin in this poem can therefore be contrasted with that on display in the tenth-century *Vie de saint Léger*, where the distinction between them is much blurrier.[244] This latter fact might be read in two complementary ways: the scribe of the *Léger* may not have perceived Latin and Romance as wholly distinct languages, while still feeling entirely comfortable adapting Latin words to a vernacular context in which they would have been readily understandable. Such was the linguistic situation in the immediate post-Carolingian era, but within two centuries, a much clearer line could be drawn between Latin and the vernacular, so that we may today read the *Vie de saint Laurent* and point to specific words as representing purely 'classical' Latin forms. These stand out further to modern readers of Delbert Russell's edition, where they are italicized.

In this way, the poem appears to play a double linguistic game: the placement of largely foreign Latin words in a vernacular context is potentially jarring, but the effect would be broadly illusory because all of the words would be readily comprehensible. This linguistic game may be seen as a creative way of dealing with the familiar-alien setting of late antique Rome, a world likely familiar from countless legends yet alien because temporally remote. The Latinity of the *Vie de saint Laurent* would thus be superficial, but it would serve to ground the poem in its setting while rendering it accessible to the medieval francophone audience.

[244] E.g., *La vie de saint Léger*, lines 33, 'perfectus fud in caritet' (he was perfect in charity), and l09, 'et Ewruïns fist fincta pais' (and Ebroin made a false peace). *Perfectus* and *fincta* are both explicitly Latin spellings corresponding to the tenth-century versions of the French words *parfait* and *feinte*, and it is unclear how they are supposed to be pronounced and interpreted in this context. There seems to be some tension between the scribe's intention to produce a phonemically written, explicitly vernacular text, and the lack of any complete conceptual distinction between Latin and vernacular at this stage, reinforced by the habits of a scribe probably used to Latin.

Such would be the case, at any rate, if we read these elements as representing straightforward, quasi-erudite insertions of Latinity into an otherwise vernacular text, as a foreign plant on Anglo-French soil, curious but superficial. Yet perhaps another explanation for this aspect of the poem ought to be sought and addressed precisely because of this seeming superficiality, for as a purely decorative element it is in fact jarring and out of place. And in fact, there is another possibility: that the wordplay of the *Vie de saint Laurent* represents not a pretentious display of Latinity, but a blending, in a sense, of multiple registers of the same language system, a reflection of the final stage of historical linguistic unity between Latin and French. After all, in the manuscript, unlike in Russell's edition, the Latin words in question are not marked in any way. If this suggestion seems radical, it is because we are very much accustomed to regarding Old French and Latin as distinct entities; yet this was certainly not always be the case, and need not have necessarily seemed so to medieval audiences even in the twelfth century. To shine light on the situation, I must first set the linguistic stage through a discussion of medieval diglossia, which will involve an excursus into the history of 'late Latin,' as it is known, and Romance.

## 5. Latin and Romance

In the previous chapter, I touched briefly on the question of the medieval relationship between Latin and the vernacular. This is an issue that, for all its importance to medieval cultural history, has received little interest among scholars of literature except when it comes to the question of translation, which has indeed been extensively explored and theorized. The advances made in the field of medieval Romance diachronic linguistics[245] by scholars such as Michel

[245] For a brief description of the goals and methodologies of diachronic linguistics, see Michel Banniard, 'Sur la notion de fluctuation langagière en diachronie longue (III$^{e}$-VIII$^{e}$ s.) à la lumière des enquêtes dialectologiques contemporaines,' *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, Langues et littératures modernes – Moderne taal en litterkunde, 80, no. 3 (2002): 779–88. For a survey of the state of the field, which remains divided with competing narratives regarding the passage from Latin to Romance, see Marc Van Uytfanghe, 'La diachronie latino-romane: le conflit des chronologies et la diglossie,' *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 128 (2012): 405–56.

Banniard and Roger Wright over the past four decades have not, however, been incorporated into either literary studies or literary history;[246] in a sense, the picture of the development of the French language respective to Latin that Erich Auerbach assumed in *Mimesis*[247] still holds true for many today. This is the idea that the written and spoken languages of what is now France were fundamentally different entities even at the time of the fall of the Roman Empire, but that the vernacular eventually came into its own and bloomed into what we today know as French, Catalan, and so on. While this may not be a wholly incorrect image of the state of things, it requires nuance if we are truly to attempt an understanding of medieval language and thus literature. Part of the problem lies in the fact that there has been a tendency to evaluate matters too much in hindsight: we see Latin at one end of a timeline and French at the other, and this leads us to a teleological view of linguistic evolution, to the assumption that the history of the French language is necessarily that of its gradual emancipation from Latin. Lost in the process is an understanding of the nature of Latin and vernacular as seen at any given point along the timeline of their combined history, and of what this combined linguistic phenomenon represented to contemporaries. Intriguing and, ultimately, fundamentally intuitive answers have been proposed by Banniard and Wright, [248] but this seems to have gone largely unnoticed among literary scholars; a glance at three recent histories of French literature reveals that they all tend more or less to hew to the old model, even when they

[246] A notable exception is Ardis Butterfield, who explores the role that language played in the development of French and English literary identities in the context of the Hundred Years' War, with particular reference to the work of Roger Wright and his colleagues in *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Middle Ages*. See Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. 36-53 but also *passim*.

[247] See p. 122 below.

[248] This is not to say that Wright and Banniard have always or even usually agreed with one another. For their respective magna opera, see Wright's *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France*, cited above, and Michel Banniard, *Viva voce: Communication écrite et communication orale du IV^e^ au IX^e^ siècle en Occident latin*, Collection des Études Augustiniennes (Paris: Brepols, 1992).

invoke the same historical circumstances, like the 813 council of Tours, as do scholars of diachronic linguistics.[249]

While the earliest surviving vernacular Romance texts date from the ninth century, direct high-medieval textual references to the vernacular are generally only found in the *incipit* and *explicit* of those poems whose authorial voice explicitly mentions the process of translation.[250] Despite a great profusion of medieval treatises on language as such, medieval linguistic theory tended for a long time to focus exclusively on Latin; in the words of Serge Lusignan, 'lorsque nous voulons saisir la conception médiévale du rapport entre le latin et les langues vernaculaires ou l'analyse des conditions de développement des langues dites maternelles, nous ne disposons que de très peu de sources.'[251] Roger Bacon (c. 1220-c. 1292) touched on the vernacular and its quotidian usefulness in some of his linguistic works, and even drew a grammatical example from it here and there,[252] but the first truly detailed surviving examination of the Latin-vernacular dichotomy seems to be in the first book of Dante Alighieri's (c. 1265-1321) *De vulgari eloquentia*, to which I will have recourse further on. This treatise is sometimes cited in cursory fashion when discussing the development of vernacular writing or as proof of medieval ignorance of the Romance languages' origin in Latin,[253] but Dante's actual position is more nuanced, as we shall see. Moreover, one ought not to forget that he wrote his treatise c. 1304-6, when the sociolinguistic

[249] E.g. Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, *A New History of Medieval French Literature*, trans. Sara Preisig (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 4-7; David Coward, *A History of French Literature: From* Chanson de geste *to Cinema* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 2; Sarah Kay et al., *A Short History of French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7, 15, 31-4.
[250] Marie de France's 'de latin en romanz traire' is a canonical example.
[251] Serge Lusignan, 'Le français et le latin au XII$^{e}$ et au XIII$^{e}$ siècles : pratique des langues et pensée linguistique,' *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 42, no. 4 (August 1987), 956.
[252] Lusignan, 'Le français et le latin,' 960-1. For a systematic examination of medieval scholastic ideas about the vernacular and its relationship to Latin, cf. Serge Lusignan, *Parler vulgairement* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1987).
[253] The various schools of interpretation of *De vulgari eloquentia* are discussed in Marcel Danesi, 'Latin vs Romance in the Middle Ages: Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* Revisited,' in *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Wright (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 248–57.

lay of the European land was already greatly changed from what it had looked like a century or two before.

The surviving evidence is in fact sufficient to allow us to add nuance to the paradigm of Latin-Romance relations heretofore dominant in literary studies (and especially in literary history), namely the notion of the vernacular emerging from under the shadow of an ossified Latin and gradually coming into its own as a medium for poetry first and for prose later. This paradigm developed for its own reasons, but its general adoption in modern scholarship may be due to the weight here of the aforementioned interpretations of Dante. It maintains a conceptual framework that both throws up a boundary between Latin and the vernacular and sustains the retrospective influence of modern national histories on medieval studies, effects convenient to modern views of language and nationhood and well suited to the way in which modern scholarship functions, but which do not necessarily reflect the reality of the manner in which language functioned or was perceived at any point during the middle ages.

Evidence pointing toward a different picture of medieval language relations includes the way in which the notion of Romance is handled in the poems that mention it, the way in which related medieval vernaculars interact with each other in medieval texts, the name *Romance* itself, and the general silence, before Dante, among Latin writers on the topic of the vernacular. Perhaps it should be no surprise that this last piece of negative evidence is the most telling, for the obvious rarely bears explicit mention.

It is thus generally taken for granted that the relationship between Latin and the vernacular, especially in Romance-speaking areas, represented a state of diglossia throughout the medieval period, with diglossia defined as a condition in which one language is the stuff of everyday speech and much of popular writing, while a different language is used in more formal settings. Erich

Auerbach, in examining the language of Gregory of Tours in the fourth chapter of *Mimesis*, offers the suggestion that Gregory's faltering Latin and chaotic vividness of expression both result from his attempts to translate his experiences, lived in the vernacular, into a by now foreign language, for '[t]he vernacular is not yet a usable literary vehicle; it obviously cannot yet satisfy the most modest requirements of literary expression.'[254] This is fully in line with the traditional view of the matter,[255] though Auerbach is of course very right, on an intuitive level, in connecting Gregory's style to that of vernacular medieval texts. At the same time, the posited 'vernacular' somehow radically different from the written Latin of the day – a mere hundred years or so after the Roman Empire's collapse in the West, and at a time when that same empire, ruled from Constantinople, once more controlled the city of Rome – seems less likely. It is certain, rather, that Gregory largely wrote in the very language he spoke, and that his apparent orthographic and grammatical irregularities – or rather those of subsequent Merovingian-era scribes, some of which were in fact inferred by modern editors[256] – were merely a reflection of the pronunciation of the day.

None of these ideas concerning language is new: they are at the heart of József Herman's *Vulgar Latin*, one of the definitive studies on the topic. Having analyzed a large corpus of late antique texts and inscriptions, Herman concluded that, while there was indeed a certain breakdown in grammatical boundaries that tended toward regularization[257] and the merger of cases[258] – witness the increasing frequency, throughout late antiquity and the early middle ages, of prepositions used with an improper noun case – this was often a reflection of contemporary pronunciation. This conclusion is supported by the deductions of comparative linguistics, where

[254] Auerbach, 94.
[255] Wright, *Late Latin*, 1-5.
[256] Giovanni Orlandi, 'Un dilemma editoriale: Ortografia e morfologia nelle "Historiae" di Gregorio di Tours,' in *Scritti di filologia mediolatina* (Florence: Edizioni del Galuzzo, 2008), 254-6.
[257] József Herman, *Vulgar Latin*, trans. Roger Wright (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 61-2.
[258] Herman, *Vulgar Latin*, 53-9.

in, for example, the Latin second declension, the final [u] (*caballus*, *monstrum*) is known to have been raised to [o], while word-final [s] and [m] tended to be dropped even in the classical period.[259] Thus, *caballus* would, at a certain stage – certainly well before 476 CE – have been pronounced identically in the nominative (*caballus*), accusative (*caballum*), ablative (*caballo*), and dative (*caballo*) cases; the genitive (*caballi*) would not have been far behind, or avoided through periphrastic structures (i.e. *de* plus the ablative, which begot the standard genitive and partitive constructions of modern French). Though today's scholars know it as 'proto-Romance,' Merovingian-era writers were unlikely to have regarded their native spoken language as anything other than Latin. No more, indeed, do speakers of modern French find contradiction in the fact that much of French morphology cannot be discerned in the spoken language, a fact which leads to frequent confusion between verb forms in the written language (where, absent liaison, *aimer*, *aimez*, and *aimé* are pronounced identically, and the imperfect forms *aimais, aimait, aimaient* also fall into the same category for many speakers).[260]

To be sure, popular Latin was very different from the written standard on the level of vocabulary and usage, with certain structures and words (especially adverbs) being, on the whole, characteristic of the written language only. This is also the case in many modern languages, if not to the same degree; yet at the beginning of the seventh century Isidore of Seville mentions no vernacular as being distinct from Latin, though he is aware that his idiom represents a stage of the language different from the Ciceronian: 'Some say there are four varieties of Latin,' including both 'Roman, which arose after the kings were driven out by the Roman people. In this variety the poets Naevius, Plautus, and Vergil, and the orators Gracchus and Cato and Cicero, and others produced

[259] Herman, *Vulgar Latin*, 31 ([u]>[o]); 39-40 ([-s] and [-m]).
[260] For Latin, some common orthographic errors are listed in the late antique *Appendix Probi*. See Herman, *Vulgar Latin*, 26.

their work,' and 'Mixed, which emerged in the Roman state after the wide expansion of the Empire, along with new customs and peoples, corrupted the integrity of speech with solecisms and barbarisms.'[261] Thus on the one hand we have a modern assumption about the diglossic state of the language in the late Roman Empire, as expressed by Auerbach and fitting into a narrative of linguistic 'decline and fall,'[262] while on the other hand contemporary testimony presents a situation quite similar to that of many modern languages. Michel Banniard asserts as much with regard to the late Merovingian period (i.e. before 751) in Gaul, where, '[e]n effet, les locuteurs lettrés considèrent toujours qu'il n'y a pas de différence essentielle entre la langue écrite et la langue parlée...'[263] What remains to be decided is how long this situation maintained itself before a true sense of diglossia developed.

In his 1982 study *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France*, Roger Wright advanced the thesis that a conceptual distinction between Latin and Romance first arose in France with the Carolingian educational reforms around the turn of the ninth century.[264] These reforms, put into motion by the English educator Alcuin, would have 'purified' the pronunciation of Latin as read aloud and spoken by assigning a particular sound to each grapheme, that is, according the system used in the British Isles then and in Latin pedagogy ever since. The reason for its implementation would have been a desire to increase the quality of written and oral expression overall in Charlemagne's realm, where Ciceronian Latin was the very model of what 'quality' meant. It succeeded insofar as the 'Carolingian Renaissance' produced a large body of

[261] Isidorus Hispalensis, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen Barney et al. (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 191.
[262] Cf. Ferdinand Lot's somewhat less charitable characterizations of the popular tongue in Gaul in the post-imperial era as 'degenerate.'
[263] Michel Banniard, *Du latin aux langues romanes* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 1997), 34.
[264] Wright, *Late Latin*, 104-7.

classically-modelled literature and left behind a large number of fresh manuscripts; the investment in copying these likely saved many classical and early medieval texts from oblivion.

At the same time, according to Wright, the new standard for Latin severed the connection between written 'Latin' and the everyday language of western Frankia by imposing on the former a phonetic principle of pronunciation long in use among speakers of Germanic languages who had always had to approach Latin as a foreign language. This standard was in part inspired by the pronunciation of the classical language prescribed in the fifth century CE by Martianus Capella[265] and now deduced by historical linguists through their various methods, yet very different from the naturally-evolved pronunciation of Merovingian times. For example, Wright argues that, before the reforms, the Latin *uirginem* would have been read aloud more or less as the Old French *vierge*:[266] the Latin-to-Romance phonetic changes traced by historical linguists would thus, in fact, reflect the then-customary pronunciation of Latin itself.[267] And to be sure, Alcuin's reform would have fallen on fertile ground in the Frankish realm, since Gallo-Romance had experienced more phonetic shift than the other major Romance dialects (whose vowel inventories broadly tend to correspond to that of classical Latin).

The beginning of a conceptual distinction between Latin and Romance, between 'grammar' and 'vernacular,' thus falls, for Wright and other linguists and philologists sympathetic to him, around the turn of the ninth century. This date allows Wright to explain the emergence in the mid- to late ninth century of the first written examples of vernacular Romance, the Strasbourg Oaths and the *Sequence of St Eulalia*, for the new phonographic approach to Latin orthography would

[265] Wright, *Late Latin*, 100-1.
[266] If this seems counterintuitive, how much more plausible is a modern North American pronunciation of 'time' as [tʰaɪːm] or 'light' as [laɪt]? In the former case, as with *uirginem/vièrge*, we can observe suppression of the second written vowel with accompanying diphthongization of the first; compare the Swedish *timme* and the German *Licht*, which are today pronounced rather phonetically as [ˈtɪmːə] and [lɪçt], Germanic analogues of the more conservative patterns seen in Italian and Iberian Romance.
[267] Wright, *Late Latin*, x-xi.

have allowed for analogous phonetic or semi-phonetic transcriptions of what was actually spoken day-to-day. This would be the beginning of Old French as a distinct written idiom. On the other hand, the decree of the 813 council of Tours – oft-cited as the first reference to the French language in history – that each priest 'omelias... transferre studeat in rusticam romanam linguam aut theotiscam,'[268] becomes a sign of the post-reform emergence of diglossia, where learned Latin came to be perceived by its own cultivators as something different from the language of the common people. And certainly the learned Carolingian fondness for classicism would have contributed to this state of affairs.[269]

Subsequent studies have questioned even the seemingly late date for the 'death' of Latin in France as proposed by Wright, and as apparently witnessed by the canons of the 813 council of Tours and by Nithard's text of the Strasbourg Oaths.[270] Marc Van Uytfanghe stresses the impossibility of delineating between the terms *latinus* and *romanus* in the linguistic vocabulary of the time, since they were used synonymously and interchangeably as often as not; he also questions whether *rusticus* necessarily refers to a conceptually distinct vernacular in the same contexts.[271] R. Anthony Lodge ventures that the fact that linguistic issues were only raised at Tours and Rheims indicates a problem of communication, at this stage, in the northern regions of the Frankish realm but not elsewhere.[272] Rosamund McKitterick, meanwhile, points out that the 813 council was

[268] Albert Werminghoff, ed., 'Concilium Turonense a. 813,' in *Concilia aevi Karolini (742-842)*, MGH Conc. 2.1 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1906), 288.
[269] With regard in particular to the Carolingian historian Einhard's success in resurrecting classical prose style, the philologist Eduard Norden writes, '...ja, man kann noch mehr sagen, Einhart hat den Sueton besser reproduziert, als irgend einer der Verfasser der nachsuetonischen Kaiserbiographien' ('...indeed, one can go still further and say that Einhard mimicked Suetonius better than some of the composers of post-Suetonian imperial biographies'). Eduard Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa: vom VI. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1918), 695.
[270] Wright, 'Introduction: Latin and Romance, a thousand years of incertitude,' in *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 4.
[271] Marc Van Uytfanghe, 'The Consciousness of a Linguistic Dichotomy (Latin-Romance) in Carolingian Gaul: The Contradictions of the Sources and Their Interpretation,' in *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 116–8.
[272] R. Anthony Lodge, *French: From Dialect to Standard* (London: Routledge, 1993), 93.

strictly local in scope, and may have been responding to a local issue in connection with a population of German-speakers (hence 'theotiscam'), since councils held during the same period in other places make no such injunction. She also highlights some of the inherent problems with taking the text of the Strasbourg Oaths at face value as a faithful recording of actual Romance speech in 843.[273]

The 813 canon need not, therefore, compel one to declare 'Latin' dead as of that date, effective immediately – dead, that is, as a linguistic unit, perceived by all as such, that covered the spectrum from highly formal writing to the most informal registers of everyday speech. While it may well be an indicator of a developing situation of diglossia, it is nevertheless but one document – and a learned document at that, from an era in which educational institutions explicitly cultivated classicizing Latin usage, per force at the expense of popular forms of expression – that does not necessarily reflect an immediate sea change in how the common tongue of Latin Europe was perceived by the majority of its speakers.

Much more significant is the autonym that they used to refer to their language, which is the same both in the document of the 813 council of Tours and in the Old French literature of the twelfth century: in all cases the term is derived from the adjective *romanus*, and even early uses of the term *franceis* to refer to a language seem to mean Francian, the particular prestige dialect of Île-de-France, rather than *langue d'oïl* as a whole.[274] Such is the notion expressed in the 1170s[275] by Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence who, referring to his language as *romanz* in the *explicit* to his *Vie de saint Thomas Becket* (line 6174), has declared that 'mis languages est bons, car en France

[273] Rosamund McKitterick, 'Latin and Romance: An Historian's Perspective,' in *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 137–9.
[274] Lodge, *French*, 96. In a slightly different register, Roger Bacon seems to refer to Francian when he speaks of 'puros Gallicos' (see Lodge, *French*, 100). Cf. Lodge, *A Sociolinguistic History of Parisian French* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 55 for *françois* as Francian, and 54-71 for a broader discussion of Francian. Cf. also Butterfield, 62-4 for Old French sources that limit *françois* to Île-de-France.
[275] I.e. at about the same time as the *Vie de saint Laurent* was composed.

fui nez (line 6165).'[276] Moreover, terms derived from *romanus* are the standard autonyms for vernacular speech throughout the Romance-speaking area until the thirteenth century.

Now, the question is not whether or not Romance and Latin were regarded as distinct categories, in some sense, either in 813 or in 1174, for in the latter case they undoubtedly were: in the same verse 6174 of his Life of Becket cited above, Guernes juxtaposes *romanz* with *latin*. The question is rather whether or not the two were seen as wholly separate languages at either date. The traditional view, as mentioned above, is that 813 sees the first mention and official acknowledgement of a nascent autonomous French language, while by 1174 it is well on its way toward escaping out from under the dead hand of Latin and becoming the language of Molière, Voltaire, and Baudelaire. One would, however, be committing a genetic fallacy in assuming that *latin* and *romanz* (and *France*, for that matter) meant the same thing to Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence as it does to us.

In order to see the effect, it may be worthwhile to meditate on the linguistic autonym *romanz* as it appears in Old French literary texts. While one might argue that to insist on the etymological meaning of the word it is precisely to commit the same genetic fallacy, just as today neither the English 'frank' nor the French 'franc(he)' call to the mind the supposed qualities of a Frankish aristocrat, two objections may be opposed to such reasonable skepticism. First, there is the powerful presence of Rome in medieval popular consciousness, when conceptions of the past, Christian and secular, were per force strongly intertwined with the idea of Rome as a historical locus of both ecclesiastical and imperial authority, the latter spiritually legitimized through its late antique Christianization. Second, there is the fact that, as signifiers, *romanz* (like its cognates in

[276] Ironically enough for Guernes, if he indeed referred to his Francian dialect when boasting of the quality of his language, the text presented in the standard Walberg edition is from an Anglo-French redaction. According to D.S. Avalle, Guernes' is the first extant reference to Francian. See D'Arco Silvio Avalle, *Monumenti prefranciani: il sermone di Valenciennes e il Sant Lethgier* (Torino: G. Giappichelli, 1967), 17-8.

Occitan, Portuguese, etc.) refers not just to Old French but to all of the dialects that would become the Romance languages, which, while probably mutually intelligible, were still distinct enough usually to prevent the sorts of inter-dialectal blends found within some Old French texts.

To repeat once more, the traditional view of the development of the French vernacular in relation to Latin is that of diglossia prior to the Carolingian age and of two distinct languages thereafter. Accepting in part the conclusions drawn by Roger Wright, we may reinterpret the Carolingian Renaissance as representing only the beginning of a diglossic development, with the corresponding development of phonetic writing in the vernacular, for only such writing can provide us with proof of two linguistic standards – one privileged, the other popular – that is typical of diglossia anywhere, from high medieval Byzantium to modern Switzerland. At the same time, the newly developing view of the *rustica Romana lingua* as a distinct dialectal phenomenon worthy of written expression would have taken hold gradually and at varying rates in various geographic areas, this last seen imperfectly in the staggered emergence of vernacular writing, in France first and in Italy last (presumably because of their vernaculars' varying proximity to Latin). In order to see if this is so, and in order to avoid vain quibbling over definitions, one ought to consider another, 'classic' historical case of diglossia for comparison: that of medieval Greek.

In the contemporary Byzantine world, the Atticizing[277] learned written standard had by the eleventh century diverged from the spoken demotic language to such an extent as to allow for the emergence of written literature in the latter (like the epic *Digenes Akritas*) and to require highly specialized instructors to teach the former. The differences between the two were obscured by the fact that written Demotic maintained (as it does to this day) an orthographic system very much based upon the ancient one, although pronunciation had by the medieval period shifted so much

[277] I.e. maximally based on the language of the classical Athenian writers of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

that the connection between written symbols and spoken sounds was based entirely on tradition (much as it has been in English since the Great Vowel Shift). Still, it would hardly have occurred to any Byzantine at the time that Demotic and Attic were different languages, while diglossia, by just about any modern definition of the word, would surely have accurately described the contemporary linguistic situation.[278]

Another pertinent example is that of the medieval East Slavic world, where there developed a diglossic situation between Church Slavonic on the one hand and the various vernacular Old East Slavic dialects on the other. The former, an artificial literary and liturgical standard heavily shaped by Greek in the logic of its vocabulary and grammar, developed in the late ninth century by Byzantine monks working in the Balkan borderlands between their empire and the kingdom of the Bulgars, was at first the primary standard that one learned to read and write, but with time texts emerge that show non-Church Slavonic features, such as the large corpus of birch-bark documents unearthed in Novgorod. As far as one can tell, there was no great policing of the boundary between the liturgical language and the vernacular in this case, perhaps because Church Slavonic in all of its aspects did not possess the ancient pedigree that medieval speakers of Greek and Romance saw in their analogous classical languages, and consequently there took place an easier blending of the two with the result that it is impossible (and likely unnecessary) to determine whether many texts of the Kievan Rus' belong more to the one or to the other register.[279]

What I am proposing, in effect, is that the distinction between Romance and Latin that developed in France from the Carolingian educational reforms to about the mid-thirteenth century

[278] In Greece, the diglossic distinction between the literary standard and everyday demotic speech was maintained until 1976, when the Atticizing *Katharevousa* was replaced by Modern (Demotic) Greek as the official linguistic standard of the country. See Mackridge, 318-20.

[279] On these various aspects of the dynamic between Church Slavonic and Old Russian see Marina Remnyova, 'Drevnerusskii i tserkovnoslavianskii [Old Russian and Old Church Slavonic],' *Moscow State University Bulletin, Philology*, no. 6 (2013), 7–15.

can be seen as roughly analogous to that maintained in Byzantium between Demotic and Attic. Roughly, because the analogy is far from perfect, and it is clear in many cases that with the full bloom of vernacular poetry in the twelfth century, heretofore non-existent categorical distinctions began to develop between Romance and Latin as between the various Romance dialects themselves. While the name for the vernacular, derived, as ever, from *romanus*, remained basically the same for all dialects, their geographical distinctions were nevertheless associated with certain local standards. Yet their differences still encompass an essential unity. In his *descort* poem 'Eras quan vey verdeyar,' the late-twelfth-century Provençal troubadour Raimbaut de Vaqueiras alternately composes each of five stanzas in a different Romance tongue (Provençal, Italian, French, Gascon, Portuguese), before finally blending the five in the sixth. He seems explicitly to take this approach in order to emphasize the theme of *descort*, or discord, in the work, but the apparent presumption that his reader will understand him likely serves to emphasize the mutual intelligibility of the dialects.[280] The languages Raimbaut employs are distinct in that they represent recognizably different norms whose simultaneous mastery by the poet is a reflection of his skill; at the same time, they are similar enough to be used in a coherent poem whose sense goes beyond simple experimentation. This coherence maintains itself in spite of the fact that nobody would ever actually speak such a blended language, though one might modulate one's dialect when travelling or speaking to travelers.[281] For his part, Michel Banniard sketches an outline of mutual comprehensibility between related dialects, proposing that a world in which community-to-community dialectal variation was the norm would foster the skills required to surmount it.[282]

[280] Other interpretations are, of course, possible.
[281] Even at the end of the fourteenth century, the fact that a Jean Froissart is impressed with the excellent French of his host the count of Foix betrays an implicit readiness to deal with speakers of other varieties of Romance, the broad contemporary cultural prestige of French notwithstanding. One is, in fact, hard-pressed to find accounts of total non-comprehension between Romance speakers from any point in the medieval period.
[282] Banniard, 'Fluctuation langagière,' 786-7. The author notes that, at the time of his writing, the phenomenon of inter-comprehensibility between Romance dialects modern or ancient had barely been studied.

Though he has in mind the period before the emergence of vernacular writing, evidence such as Raimbaut's poem suggests that his notion is readily applicable to later periods.

In actuality this should not be a controversial point. A full century later, Dante refers to the various Romance languages as essentially one language, 'triphario... nostro ydiomate,'[283] and emphasizes their mutual intelligibility and common vocabulary. His famous division of Romance into *oc*, *oïl*, and *si* ('nam alii *oc*, alii *oil*, alii *sì* affirmando loquuntur') is qualified by an affirmation of their close resemblance and evident genetic affiliation: '...to wit the Spanish, Franks, and Latins. And it is an immediate sign that the vernaculars of these three peoples come from one and the same language that they appear to call many things by the same words.'[284] The use of the term *ydioma* here to refer to a single language of origin, incidentally, confirms our understanding of his later use thereof to describe *oc*, *oïl*, and *si* as one whole. Incidentally, editorial consensus considers the use of *Yspani* here to refer to speakers of Occitan, as is borne out by the word order, the reason being that Catalan was generally assimilated into that language at the time, while the affirmative particle in Catalan until the fifteenth century was generally *oc*.[285] As Provençal is either assimilated into the language of the 'Spanish,' or else *oc* and *oïl* are both spoken among the *Franci*, any nascent national identity is here largely distinct from the linguistic.[286] (Speakers of Castilian and Portuguese, who would have to fall under the category of those who '*sì* affirmando loquuntur,' are

[283] Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, 1.10.1.

[284] '...ut puta Yspani, Franci et Latini. Signum autem quod ab uno eodemque ydiomate istarum trium gentium progrediantur vulgaria, in promptu est, quia multa per eadem vocabula nominare videntur.' Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, 1.8.5. The corresponding note in Vittorio Coletti's edition (Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. Vittorio Coletti [Milan: Garzanti, 1991], 111) tells us that *Yspani* 'è un modo, non inconsueto, per designare la zona pirenaica, estesa sino alle foci del Rodano.'

[285] '[J]usqu'au XV$^{e}$ siècle, on a dit *oc* en Catalogne pour l'adverbe d'affirmation ; c'est vers la fin du Quattrocento qu'il est remplacé par *sí*.' Germán Colón, 'La dénomination *langue d'oc* en deçà des Pyrenées,' *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature* 16, no. 1 (1978), 84–85.

[286] Irène Rosier-Calach hints that this use of *Yspani* for all speakers of *langue d'oc* may be metonymic. See Dante Alighieri, *De l'éloquence en vulgaire*, ed. Irène Rosier-Catach, trans. Anne Grondeux, Ruedi Imbach, and Irène Rosier-Catach (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2011), 299.

overlooked, presumably because Italian contact with them would have been limited at a time when the Mediterranean coastline of Iberia was dominated by the Catalan-speaking Crown of Aragon.)

Dante's words, written at the turn of the fourteenth century, in an era when Romance vernaculars had already come far enough into their own to become a widespread and versatile medium for literature of all kinds, from poetry to prose to diplomatic, can give us some indication of the corresponding situation in the twelfth century, when the vernaculars were less differentiated from one another and their literary positions fare less strongly asserted vis-à-vis classical Latin. Far from 'creating' an independent Italian language through his investigation of vernacular poetics, Dante provides us with proof that it is anachronistic to paste modern or even late medieval notions of language and language boundaries onto earlier centuries; he also expresses in no uncertain terms the essential unity that speakers of *romanz* would have perceived between their dialects, and this unity would presumably appear only stronger the further back in time one were to look. The principles of the evolution of languages that he intuits are also rather close, all things considered, to those associated with the modern comparative method.

As for Dante's treatment of Latin in relation to Romance, it would be somewhat inaccurate to claim that he is unaware of the evolution of the latter from the former. He speaks of all of the Romance tongues as essentially one language, and presumes that they share a common ancestor; Latin is not, however, treated in this scheme as an unrelated language. Instead, Dante regards it as an artificial idiom created to insulate literature against the vagaries of linguistic evolution, so that works written in any period might still be understood many centuries later: 'Whence the motivation of the inventors of the art of grammar: grammar is really nothing other than a certain inalterable identity of expression through various times and places.'[287] Latin is thus for Dante not a dead

[287] 'Hinc moti sunt inventores gramatice facultatis: que quidem gramatica nichil aliud est quam quedam inalterabilis locutionis ydemptitas diversis temporibus atque locis.' Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, 1.9.11.

language, but one that was never a natural spoken idiom in the first place, and in this he comes curiously close to the narrator of the M version of the *Vie de saint Alexis* who has Alexis call out to his father in Greek, 'k'en son rommant ne le puist raviser' ('lest he recognize him by his vernacular'). For both, the language of the ancient Romans is thus quite naturally Romance and not Latin. Dante also explicitly compares Latin's relationship with the vernacular to the contemporary diglossic situation of Greek when he writes that 'thence we have also another, secondary mode of expression, which the Romans called grammar. The Greeks and some others have it, but not all peoples do.'[288]

It surely follows, if even in the mind of a highly educated Italian c. 1305 the distinction between Romance languages was one of dialectal variation, while 'Latin' was merely a learned, scholarly, and administrative register (*grammatica*) complementing the largely spoken register of Romance, that the lines between the two forms of expression would have been less distinct one hundred to one hundred-fifty years earlier. Dante's purpose in this is not inimical to Latin, nor is it to defend vernacular Romance writing as such against Latin, for that had been developing actively for at least two hundred years. He is, instead, attempting to find the variant of Italian most suited to the sort of poetic production that was behind knightly epic and courtly lyric in France and Iberia, as well as the *dolce stil nuovo* in Italy. Yet even so the question is evidently one of aesthetics and not one of intelligibility, for in *De vulgari eloquentia* Dante quotes freely from Occitan and French, and famously comes to include a passage in Provençal (spoken by the shade of the troubadour Arnaut Daniel) in *Purgatorio* XVI. The overall situation as reflected in Dante's œuvre is still close to one of diglossia and free dialectal variation, as in the German-speaking cantons of

[288] 'Est et inde alia locutio secundaria nobis, quam Romani gramaticam vocaverunt. Hanc quidem secundariam Greci habent et alii, sed non omnes.' Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia,* 1.1.3.

modern Switzerland, where Alamannic ('Swiss German') is spoken day-to-day but standard High German is used for almost all formal written communication.

Meanwhile on the other end of the chronological spectrum we have, as Roger Wright works hard to demonstrate, the mere beginning of vernacular-Latin diglossia in the Carolingian period, where scribes first experiment with transcribing the Gallic pronunciation of Latin that now begins to be regarded as 'vernacular' because of the Carolingian educational and liturgical reforms. If one is to follow Wright, it is in a sense not Romance that has at this point diverged from Latin, but the other way around, where '[a]t a stroke, much of the vocabulary had become unintelligible to the uninitiated.'[289] This holds even if early Old French literature leaves evidence of a persistent 'Merovingian' pronunciation of at least some Latin expressions, as for example the *Song of Roland*'s mentions of *la geste francor* and *la tere major*, which look rather like phonographic renderings of how *gesta francorum* ('the deeds of the Franks') and *terra maiorum* ('the land of [our] ancestors'[290]) would have been pronounced natively in Gaul c. 800 CE.[291]

Yet the old understanding of what language was, and of what Latin was, would likely have persisted in some form, even within the Frankish realm and certainly beyond it. Half a millennium later, Dante could regard Latin as an artificial standard[292] that had never truly represented a natural language to begin with, assuming that Romance, or an ancestor thereof, had always been the native idiom of southwestern Europe. With that, my point of focus now falls back to the twelfth century, in between Charlemagne and the Trecento, and when the *Vie de saint Laurent* was written. This was a period where vernacular assertiveness was in full bloom, but where the general

[289] Wright, *Late Latin*, 107.
[290] Roger Walker, '"Tere Major" in the *Chanson de Roland*,' *Olifant* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1979), 123–30.
[291] E.g. in laisses 45 ('tere major') and 111 ('geste francor') of the Oxford version of the *Song of Roland*.
[292] I.e. precisely what it became as a result of the Carolingian reforms as described by Wright.

understanding of the relationship between Romance and Latin must still have had roots in the pre-Carolingian, sub-Roman paradigm.

Helmut Lüdtke has previously called attention to the similarity of the Latin-vernacular diglossia to analogous modern cases in Greece, the Arab world, and Switzerland;[293] he had in mind, however, the pre-Carolingian era. Yet the analogy is arguably more applicable – especially if one is to follow Wright – to the post-Carolingian situation, when Latin had become an artificial, learned standard rather than simply the written form of the common language. It is the appearance of explicitly vernacular French texts that allows us to speak of diglossia in the first place, just as the production of vernacular texts in Demotic Greek, local varieties of Arabic, and Alamannic allow us to speak with surety of diglossia in their respective language areas at the time of their appearance: they are proof of an awareness of a diglossic relationship between *Hochsprache* and *Mundart*.

6. The dual register of the *Vie de saint Laurent*

I will now return to the *Vie de saint Laurent* as my case study of twelfth-century perceptions of the relationship between Latin and vernacular. It must first be made clear once again that I am not attempting to downplay the very real distinction between the two that would have existed in the minds of a twelfth-century audience, for at this point access to Latin required explicit training in its grammar, which in turn was no longer associated with simple literacy: one could theoretically now be literate in Romance alone, unlikely as this may have been at this early stage. Moreover, different hagiographical poems may have had different linguistic expectations of their audiences at this time. The *Vie de sainte Geneviève*, likely composed within twenty years of the *Vie de saint Laurent*, begins with the explanation that it has been translated into the vernacular for the benefit

[293] Helmut Lüdtke, 'Die Entstehung romanischer Schriftsprachen,' *Vox Romanica* 23 (1964), 4-21.

of the unlettered: 'que cil qui ne sevent la letre / oient la vie et qu'il l'entendent.' In keeping with this stated purpose, when it does slip into Latin (in verses 2742-5 and again in verses 2768-71), the poem promptly provides a vernacular translation; neither is its Latin grammatically and syntactically spliced into the French text as in the case of the *Vie de saint Laurent* and the *Roman de Jules César*, though French verses are made to rhyme with Latin ones.[294] The latter practice is also found in the *Vie de saint Laurent*, with regard to which I must note, at the risk of banality, that its application of Latin falls clearly within the paradigm of phonetic (as opposed to logographic) pronunciation as described by Roger Wright. There is no way to claim that the 'Latin' words in the text are simply vernacular terms masquerading under a different spelling; on the contrary, at this point it was more likely for the spelling of archaic grammatical holdouts to reflect, according to phonographic principles, the once-ordinary pronunciation of a Latin word form (e.g. OF *francor* reflecting the former pronunciation of the Latin plural genitive *francorum*). The Latin of the *Vie de saint Laurent*, in short, in no way represents a survival of pre-Carolingian practice, and this can most clearly be seen in the example of following couplets, in which Latin and French words are made to rhyme:

> 'un altre torment or avras'
> dunc fait aporter laminas (lines 630-1)
>
> quant demanderent tei regehi
> esse Iesum Filium Dei (644-5)
>
> deslier lei de catasta
> quant osté fu se l'demanda (724-5)[295]

[294] Lennart Bohm, ed., *La vie de sainte Geneviève de Paris* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1955), 51-62 (date); 109 (incipit); 189-90 (Latin verses).

[295] '"Now you will have another torment" / then he has flat irons brought up'; '"when they asked, I confessed that you / are Jesus, the Son of God"'; 'to untie him from the scaffold / when he had been taken off, he then asked him...' Russell, 50-2.

In all three cases, the pronunciation of the final vowel of the Latin words *laminas*, *Dei*, and *catasta* necessarily reflects the phonographic standard of Alcuin's pronunciation reforms as posited by Roger Wright; moreover, *laminas* and *catasta* are markedly learned words designating tools of torture that would be difficult to express as succinctly in the vernacular; the former is also quite simply the etymon of the French noun *lame*, clearly inappropriate in this context. Rather, the poet's use of Latin here has an archaizing effect, and brings the audience closer to the third-century scene of the events described by borrowing terms directly from the sources, which regularly indulge in detailed descriptions of torture and its implements and means.[296] At the same time, when we eschew editorial intervention marking their presence, the effect of these Latin words may not even jar the reader; indeed, they merely allow the poet to diversify her rhyme scheme by juxtaposing the simple future and simple past tenses of French verbs with Latin first-declension nouns, where the former normally only rhyme with other verbs of the same sort; this allows for a greater diversity in syntax instead of forcing the poem to field specific verb forms at fixed intervals. Even the poem's broader inclusion of learned as well as more basic Latin content – sometimes it is a single word easily recognizable from the liturgy, such as *gratias* (line 872) or *pater* (line 899) – is in fact only especially noticeable when highlighted in modern editorial practice, as for instance in Russell's edition.[297] Although, as Dante will note some hundred-odd years later, the distinction between *romanz* (Old French) and *grammatica* (Latin) in the high medieval period is clear, in effect there exists here a distinction of register as well as one of kind, for there is no reason why

[296] This is evident in nearly all late antique Passions, and vividly so in the poems of the talented Prudentius.
[297] His practice is in fact very useful for anyone working with the *Vie de saint Laurent*, as it allows them to find the words in question simply by scanning the text. It ought simply not be forgotten that these words do not stand out in the same way in the original manuscripts, and their author, at least if my argument here holds, did not necessarily mean them to.

poetic discourse in the everyday language of Romance should not feature words from the higher, learned standard, especially where conducive to the work's prosody and style.

In some cases, the blending of high and low registers in the *Vie de saint Laurent* makes good sense as such, for registers can be manipulated for poetic effect. As I have pointed out, Latin terms as high-register vocabulary appear in instances of elevated (direct) discourse such as prayers. Such is the case in verses 645, 872, and 899 cited above: 'esse Iesum filium Dei,' 'gratias,' and 'pater'; also 'credo' (lines 364 and 367). All of these are words that would have occurred regularly during the liturgy[298] as well as in the standard set of prayers familiar to most Christians, most notably the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. As the presence of this vocabulary would not be likely to cause confusion, it only serves to elevate the tone of the text when so employed.

On this point, it is significant that nowhere in the poem do its antagonists ever speak Latin in direct discourse, for this fact could also indicate that, when it comes to the characters' speech, the poem's choice of language is essentially a choice of register, and that while its world speaks Romance, the Christian protagonists will activate a liturgically-tinged vocabulary at certain appropriate points in the narrative. Where the actions of the antagonists Decius and Valerian are throughout the poem determined by their greed and hatred, their spiritual limitations are reflected on the level of their exclusively vernacular parlance which, while not contemptible in itself, betrays no sign of education or learning. They are, in effect, incapable of the higher linguistic register that the Christians in the poem display. That the speeches of Lawrence and his companions employ learned turns of phrase offers a perceptible contrast with the style of their enemies, allowing the audience to evaluate them by their words as well as by their actions. And we have already seen that the Latin vocabulary of the poem often conveys obscure, learned concepts that are not readily

[298] For a standardized scholarly presentation of a medieval Mass, see Christine Mohrmann and Bernard Botte, eds., *L'ordinaire de la messe* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1953).

rendered in Romance; the link with learning is thus twofold, existing both through the concepts that the Latin expresses and through the characters for whom education and elevated style are positive markers. Within the world of this poem, as would later be implied in Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, and as implied also in the M version of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, Romance is the common language of late antique Rome, while Latin is its learned register.

To the objection that it could primarily be Lawrence's priestly vocation that would render his Latinity credible, it should be pointed out that, in the twelfth century, it was not as rare for secular aristocrats of the francophone world to display Latin learning as one might suppose. While the notion of rampant aristocratic illiteracy already sits ill with everything that is known about contemporary troubadour culture in particular, a recent study by Paul Anthony Hayward has further and convincingly shown that at least one or two of the Norman earls of Leicester between 1107 and 1204 were probably comfortable enough with Latin to be able to quote classical Latin poetry and engage with sophisticated texts.[299] Hayward fields possible objection to the effect that the scribes who praised the earls' learning were simply engaging in flattery,[300] but ultimately argues that the preponderance of available evidence suggests that they should be taken more or less at their word.[301] At any rate, extreme skepticism regarding the Latinity of secular Francophones seems warranted only if the notion of a clerical monopoly on medieval learning is to be maintained at all costs (a notion that I attempted to undermine, with respect to the vernacular and with the help of Evelyn Vitz's ideas, in the previous chapter.)

[299] Paul Antony Hayward, 'The Earls of Leicester, Sygerius Lucanus, and the Death of Seneca: Some Neglected Evidence for the Cultural Agency of the Norman Aristocracy,' *Speculum* 91, no. 2 (April 2016), 328–55. The inscriptions upon which Hayward bases his argument refer to a Robert ('Rob. comes Lecestriae'), a name shared by all of the twelfth-century earls of Leicester.
[300] Hayward, 349.
[301] Hayward, 345-50.

Thus far I discern two modes in which the *Vie de saint Laurent* appears to employ Latin words: as a marker of elevated, liturgical language in direct discourse, and as a source of learned vocabulary in the narrative portion of the text, where it facilitates the introduction of alien or esoteric concepts that would not be as succinctly or precisely expressed in the vernacular. To this latter category may be added a number of references to places in Rome, such as a temple to Mars and the Domus Tiberiana; these locations are also found in the *Passio Polychronii* text, and are all mentioned in the *Mirabilia urbis Romae*, a popular twelfth-century travel guide.[302]

A rather interesting sequence in verses 757-65 describes the movement of Decius and Valerian through the city by listing some of the landmarks they pass by; while only the starting point (the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus) and destination (Sallust's palace) are readily identifiable based on archeological evidence, several fora that were indeed the sites of a number of baths and theatres are known to have lain between the two.[303] The itinerary seems indeed to be based on the *Mirabilia*, whence the names for the baths – unattested in antique sources – must have come. In any case, the choice to decline most of these in their Latin forms can be attributed to an unwillingness to translate them, and is yet another sign that Latin and Romance are in a sense regarded as complementary registers of the same idiom: the poet has simply left untranslatable terms in the form in which she found them. When such words are easily rendered in French, moreover, the poet does not hesitate to do so; this is the case with *Valeriens* (line 757), *Auguste* (764), *Saluste* (765). Still others are given in either form depending on metrical requirements, as the pairs *Sixtus*/*Sixte* and *Justinus*/*Justin* indicate. The name *Decius*, on the other hand, does not quite so easily lend itself to vernacular adaptation, and is thus left in Latin and declined regularly

[302] Russell, 77-8; Wogan-Browne and Burgess, xxxv.
[303] For a detailed study of the late antique topography of the city, see John R. Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital: Rome in the Fourth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

throughout the poem, in the genitive (387, 'de part *Decii*'; 888, 'la crualté *Decii*'), accusative (838, 'devant *Decium*'; 860, 'a *Decium*'), dative (258, '*Decio* le presenterent'; 403, '*Decio* dit'), and ablative (422, 'veant *Decio* est levez') cases as required by the (French!) grammatical context.

Both examples cited above of the accusative case used with the name *Decius* are, characteristically, triggered by French prepositions: it is 'devant Decium' in 838 and 'a Decium' in 860. This is typical of the third mode of Latin encountered in the *Vie de saint Laurent*, which involves just such mixed Latin-French expressions or even small Latin phrases set within an otherwise French context. The already-mentioned 'ablative absolute' in verse 422 ('veant Decio est levez') is an especially curious case, as Romance participles are not frequently used in this way in such syntactical contexts. For example, though in verse 2132 of the *Couronnement de Louis* a noun and a present participle are combined into an absolute construction ('veiant maint chevalier'), they still have the appearance of a separate clause, just as they do in verse 4.18 of the Occitan *Song of the Albigensian Crusade* ('vezent tota la jant').[304] As this seems to happen most often with verbs of witnessing and seeing, the construction may have entered Old French and Occitan under the influence of Latin formulas invoked in official language. In the *Vie de saint Laurent*, the verb is likewise one of seeing, but the syntactic context is unique in that this construction is placed between two finite verbs that have a different subject. Nonetheless, the meaning – that Valerian is the grammatical subject of the verb form *est levez* – is immediately clear, likely because of the Latin noun in the ablative (*Decio*) that accompanies the French present participle (*veant*), and perhaps also because of the more Latinate context of the poem as a whole. The fact of this usage demands explanation, and I am inclined once more toward the interpretation that the poet perceives

[304] These are editions referred to here: Ernest Langlois, ed., *Le couronnement de Louis: chanson de geste du XII^e siècle*, 2nd ed., CFMA (Paris: H. Champion, 1984), and Guillaume de Tudèle, *La chanson de la croisade albigeoise*, ed. Michel Zink, trans. Henri Gougaud, Lettres gothiques (Paris: Livre de poche, 1989).

Latin and Romance as two registers of the same idiom whose mixing, when not excessive, is in the main a marker of stylistic choice. Take for example the final scene of the poem, where the martyr's body is laid to rest:

> enportent le cors saint Lorenz
> *in Tiburtina* l'unt porté
> si l'unt tresque a la nuit gardé
> en une croute l'enterrerent
> que en *Tiburtina* troverent
> *in agro Verano* el pré
> qui ert *illius vidue*
> a qui saint Lorenz out rendu
> devant ceo santé et salu. (lines 923-31)[305]

The serenity of this scene, the theme of peaceful rest as a final reward for holiness, triggers an elevation in register that the numerous Latin expressions seem to provide, all while highlighting the locations involved and the widow Cyriaca (not mentioned previously in the narrative, although the use of the demonstrative pronoun *illius* implies, in a way, that she should have been: *that* widow[306]). Perhaps the technique of using Latin to raise the register of the text at certain points reflects something akin to Auerbach's admittedly dated view concerning the vernacular, expressed in the fifth chapter of *Mimesis* that treats Chrétien de Troyes, that 'a real separation of styles is not in question here, for the simple reason that courtly romance does not know an "elevated style," that is, a distinction between levels of expression.'[307] While twelfth-century French literature does, in fact, provide many examples of elevated register, Auerbach may yet have a point in that Latin can at this stage also supply an elevation in register when necessary, although this is seldom seen in practice. Still, the way in which Latin influences the *Vie de saint Laurent* is instructive for any

[305] 'They carry away the body of St Lawrence; they took it to the Tiburtine Gate, and they kept [watch over] it until nighttime. They buried it in a crypt that they found at the Tiburtine, in the Ager Veranus, in a field, which belonged to that widow to whom St Lawrence had restored, before this, her health and her salvation.' Russell, 58.
[306] Alternatively, the use of *illius* could conceivably be articular here, reducing slightly the tension created with the poem's prior silence on the subject of Cyriaca; if that were a goal, *cuiusdam* would make much more sense, but would perhaps appear rather out of place in a vernacular context. Syntactically and grammatically speaking, the Latin of the *Vie de saint Laurent* is admittedly not very elaborate.
[307] Auerbach, 132-3.

meditation on the nature of medieval language and its contemporary perception, and the strict distinctions between Romance and Latin as well as among the various Romance vernaculars that modernity has tended to project backwards upon the middle ages do not mesh very well with a number of our sources. Instead, the actual perceived difference would have been one as much of degree as of kind, as seen indirectly in the *Vie de saint Laurent*.

In this fashion, the poem can be seen to operate within a sociolinguistic paradigm where *romanz* does not just refer to a new mode of vernacular expression that asserts itself against the artificiality of the literary language of the day; if anything, the profusion of Latin poetry during the 'Renaissance of the twelfth century' went hand in hand with the contemporary bloom of vernacular production. Nor should we forget that, even after the vernaculars of Europe were formalized, made official, and more or less firmly defined over and against one another, 'neo-Latin' continued to be an active medium of literary production, albeit one that is not normally the object of modern interest or scholarship. What the vernacular of the twelfth century maintains is a sense of linguistic unity with Latin as part of the same language system, and thus a unity of identity with the Roman and sub-Roman past of western Europe. As long as the common language of Latin Europe was 'Roman,' the cultural identity of the continent would be very different from that which emerged from the nascent nationalisms of the following centuries.

## 7. Peristephanon II and the *Vie de saint Laurent*

The glimpses that it affords into the linguistic continuity of the middle ages with Rome aside, there are other ways in which the *Vie de saint Laurent* may convey a late antique influence. D.W. Russell has argued that the poem draws its inspiration and basic narrative from the so-called *Passio Polychronii* version of Lawrence's *vita*, with some shifts of emphasis and a few 'didactic'

elaborations,[308] but this does not quite tell the full story, for the Life proposed as the primary source for our French poem differs from it substantially in tone: where the former is somber, the latter is at points markedly humorous, celebrating the martyr's cleverness and portraying the antagonists not just as evil but also as foolish. To illustrate the contrast, I propose to examine the way in which both texts treat the iconic scene where Lawrence offers his last words. My reading of the *Passio Polychronii* version will be from a digitized copy of the Vatican Library manuscript[309] used by Hippolyte Delehaye in establishing his edition; this is an eleventh-century codex copied in a form of Carolingian miniscule with erasures and corrections made in a later, blackletter hand. Fol. 108v presents the scene, which begins with Lawrence being roasted on a grill at Decius' orders, as follows:

> The blessed Lawrence said, "get it through your head, wretch, that your coals offer refreshment to me, but eternal torture to you, because God himself knows that, when accused, I made no denial; that, when asked, I confessed Christ; that, having been roasted, I give him thanks." The prefect Valerian said, "where are the fires that you had promised the gods?" At that moment the blessed Lawrence began to say, "oh unhappy you in your madness, you do not understand that your coals give me not burning pain but refreshment." And all who were present were shocked at the way in which Decius had ordered him to be roasted alive. But he was saying with a serene expression, "I give thanks to thee, Lord Jesus Christ, who hast deigned to comfort me." And raising his eyes toward Decius the blessed Lawrence spoke thus: "look, wretch, you've roasted yourself one side; turn over the other one and have a bite." Then, giving thanks to God, in glory he said, "I give thanks to thee, Lord Jesus Christ, for I have gained entrance to thy doors." And right away he gave up his spirit.[310]

The tone of the scene is serious, despite the irony afforded to the perspective of the reader, who can see through the prefect's bluster and knows that the spectators' concern at the torture is

[308] Russell, 25-27.
[309] Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Arch. Cap. S. Pietro A.4, fols. 104v-109r.
[310] 'beatus Laurentius dixit, 'disce, miser, quia carbones tui mihi refrigerium praestant, tibi enim aeternum supplicium, quia ipse Dominus nouit quia accusatus non negaui, interrogatus Christum confessus sum, assatus gratias ago.' Valerianus praefectus dixit, 'ubi sunt ignes quos tu diis promiseras?' in ipsa hora dicebat beatus Laurentius, 'o insania uestra infelices, non cognoscites quia carbones uestri non ardorem sed refrigerium mihi praestant.' et coeperunt omnes qui aderant mirari quomodo praeceperat Decius uiuum eum assari. ille autem ulutu placido dicebat, 'gratias ago tibi domnie Iesu Christe, qui me confortare dignatus es.' et eleuans oculos suos contra Decium sic dixit beatus Laurentius, 'ecce miser assasti tibi partem unam; regira aliam et manduca.' tunc gratias agens Domino cum gloria dixit, 'gratias tibi ago domine Iesu Christe, quia merui ianuas tuas ingredi.' et statim emisit spiritum.' Vat. Arch. Cap. S. Pietro A.4, fol. 108v.

worthy but ultimately 'misguided,' from Lawrence's point of view, for it is precisely the torture that furnishes him his 'gloria.' Decius' silence here is even more telling, as he cannot even bring himself to produce anything like his henchman's pathetic rejoinder. Finally, the martyr's invitation to eat reads here as bitterly sarcastic, in keeping with the general tone of his remarks. All in all, if imagined properly, this is a very vivid scene, despite features of grammar that a purist might find questionable (the *enim* in the first sentence quoted is evidently misplaced by the standards of classical rhetoric, for one might rather expect a contrastive adverb like *uero* or *autem* here). Compare now the corresponding part of the *Vie de saint Laurent*, which, on the surface of it, follows the logic of the Latin text very closely in detailing this scene.

Valerien qui prevost fu
dit al saint, 'ou sunt li fu
que tu a nos deus prametoies
quant deïs que tu les ardroies ?'
et sain Lorenz dunc lui respunt
et dit as princes qui iloc sunt
'ohi chetif maleüré
de desverie forsené ;
et n'avés vos dunc entendu
que nule ardor n'ai d'icest fu ?
ne jeo ne l'sent n'en char, n'en os,
ains m'est frigerie et repos.'
tuit icil qui iloc esteient
hisdor et grant pitié aveient
de la cruauté Decii
qui vif le fait rostir issi.
dunc dist saint Lorenz en riant
o simple vult, o bel semblant,
'Deu, tei en puisse jeo loer
qui ci me deignas conforter.'
ovre les oils et dunc si dit
Decio que devant lui vit :
'chaitif, l'altre part car tornez ;
mangez deça, quit est assez.'
gloire et grace a Deu en rent
et dit, 'Pater omnipotent,
Jesu Crist, a tei graces rent
qui m'as doné ceste mémoire
que envers tei deservi ai
si qu'a tes portes entrerai.'
et li sains cum out ceo dit
a Deu tramet son esperit. (lines 868-907) [311]

In terms of the things that happen and are said, the two passages match each other very closely; the French text features a few elaborations, but nothing of substance is added, except that

[311] 'Valerian, who was prefect, says to the saint, "where are the fires that you promised to our gods when you said that you would burn them?" And St Lawrence then answers him and says to the nobles who are there, "oh unhappy wretches, enraged by madness! and so have you not understood that I am not burned at all by this fire? nor do I feel it in my flesh or in my bones: rather, it is refreshing and relaxing to me." All those who stood there felt horror and great pity because of the cruelty of Decius, who has him thus roasted alive. Then St Lawrence said, laughing, with clear face and bright aspect, "God, might I praise thee for the fact that thou hast deigned to comfort me here." He opens his eyes and then speaks thus to Decius, whom he saw before him: "wretch, go turn over the other side; eat from this here, it's cooked enough!" He renders glory and thanks to God for it, and says, "Father Almighty, Jesus Christ, I give thanks to thee, who hast given me this wisdom, that I have served thee so that I will enter thy gates." And the saint, when he had said this, gives up his soul to God.' Russell, 56-7.

the saint's insistence that he does not feel the fire seems translated into fact by virtue of the way in which it is presented. While 'carbones tui refrigerium mihi praestant' might be read figuratively, and the tone of the scene in the Latin *vita* thus remains serious, since the described torture may well be real, the physicality of the saint's denial of pain ('n'en char, n'en os') in the Old French version eliminates the ambiguity and lightens the tone. This in turn colors the culinary command 'chaitif, car l'altre part tornez,' adding a slightly comical effect.

Now, the only other author who treats the martyrdom of St Lawrence with humor is Prudentius, in whose hands the pagan magistrate is driven to palpable, yet ultimately helpless rage by the deacon's antics. Compare his handling of the martyr's rejoinder:

> 'conuerte partem corporis
> satis crematam iugiter
> et fac periclum, quid tuus
> Vulcanus ardens egerit.'
> praefectus inuerti iubet.
> tunc ille, 'coctum est, deuora,
> et experimentum cape,
> sit crudum an assum suauius.'
> haec ludibundus dixerat. (lines 401-9)[312]

Here the tone clearly has humorous hues, as the narrator immediately informs us: Prudentius' Lawrence is mocking (*ludibundus*) his would-be tormentors, and the 'culinary' aspect of these verses is as a consequence much elaborated. While the narrator does not inform us whether the martyr feels any pain during this procedure – elsewhere in the *Peristephanon* conditions of martyrdom vary, and sometimes the saint is explicitly said to be saved from pain by divine intervention – he does make clear that the effect on the spectators of the torture depended on their

[312] '"This part of my body has been burned long enough; turn it round and try what your hot god of fire has done." So the prefect orders him to be turned about, and then, "it is done," says Lawrence; "eat it up, try whether it is nicer raw or roasted." These words spoken in jest...' Prudentius, trans. Thomson, 132-3.

sympathies: the pagans' nostrils were assaulted by a bitter, acrid scent, while a sweet one reassured the Christians present.[313]

While it is of course entirely likely that our anonymous author elaborated the tone of her Old French poem on her own, one would be remiss to ignore the figure of Prudentius in any discussion of a medieval verse Life of St Lawrence. According to the classicist Michael von Albrecht, 'in the Middle Ages, Prudentius was the poet who was read and imitated the most';[314] though perhaps an exaggeration given the stature of Vergil and, later, Ovid, this statement is corroborated in part by the fact that over 320 medieval western European codices with Prudentius' works have survived until the present day, a very large number for any author.[315] (Many of these manuscripts contain only the allegorical *Psychomachia*.[316]) This transmission was not only copious but also geographically broad, if the varied present locations of these codices is any indication: for his 1926 edition of Prudentius' poems, Johan Bergman catalogued fully twelve manuscripts older than the millennium and containing all or nearly all of the poet's works, found in libraries in England, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.[317] In any event, while the scant evidence for the transmission of most Roman literature in the middle ages discourages one from stating flatly that the author of a given work read and was influenced by any specific ancient or late antique text – unless, that is, the likelihood is overwhelming, as with the author of the *Roman d'Enéas* who may be safely assumed to have read his Vergil, and that of the *Roman de Thèbes*, his Statius – Prudentius' medieval availability was such that we may reasonably suppose

[313] Prudentius, 130 (lines 385-92).
[314] 'Im Mittelalter ist Prudentius der am meisten gelesene und nachgeahmte Dichter.' Michael von Albrecht, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur: von Andronicus bis Boethius und ihr Fortwirken*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 1169.
[315] Albrecht, 1167.
[316] Johan Bergman, ed., *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis carmina*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 61 (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1926), xix-xx; xxv.
[317] Bergman, xxiii (list); xxiv (stemma); xxv-xlv (manuscript descriptions).

that there was a copy of the *Peristephanon* on hand in the vicinity of the author of the *Vie de saint Laurent*. It seems probable that a medieval hagiographer who clearly knew Latin and was working in a primarily written context would be familiar with the fundamental poetic source text concerning his saint.

If the humorous elements in *Vie de saint Laurent* constitute an intertextual reference to Prudentius, the Old French poem nevertheless goes its own way in terms of the sequence of events to follow and of the details to stress. This results in the discontinuity that arises at the conclusion, when the previously unmentioned character of Cyriaca – whose analogue figures at the beginning and and at the end of the *Passio Polychronii* version – makes a sudden appearance. Though the narrative of the *Vie de saint Laurent* is still largely based on that particular prose version of the Lawrence legend, this slight continuity error may well point to a multiplicity of sources, while the poem's moments of levity, as well as the contemporary medieval profusion of codices containing the hymns of Prudentius, nudges one toward the conclusion that this source pluralism includes *Peristephanon* II.

By explicitly referring to its written source material when it introduces its narrative with the words 'si cum lisum en l'estoire' in verse 84,[318] the *Vie de saint Laurent* shows itself to be conscious of the distance that separates its own time from that of Lawrence (or from that of Prudentius, for that matter). Yet whatever its approach to recounting the saint's story might owe to any late antique text, the manner in which the *Vie de saint Laurent* frames this hagiographical narrative – the introduction and the conclusion – belongs to it alone, and the poem is left free to use these bookends in order to identify the reader with its characters and setting. For, when the

[318] Russell, 35.

verses 38-42[319] invoke a *sic transit* (or *ubi sunt*[320]) topos by asking where the glory of Aristotle, Caesar, Samson, and Absalom has gone, all of those figures are much more ancient than the martyr whose Life is about to be told, and thus create no temporal barrier between the reader and the saint. Narrator, reader, and protagonist thus implicitly all find themselves on one end of a temporal divide, making mutual identification somewhat easier. In addition, the *Vie de saint Laurent* exploits its closing prayer in order to further blur the distance between reader and martyr. It bears mention that there is also a closing prayer in *Peristephanon* II, but this one is deeply personal, referring to the poet himself by name: 'audi benignus supplicem / Christi reum Prudentium' (lines 581-2).[321] The final prayer of the *Vie de saint Laurent*, by contrast, is not only grammatically collective (being in the first person plural: 'prium lui qu'il nos doinst,' etc.), but also is directly introduced from the narrative, where the martyr's surviving friends are praying. In fact, the preceding verse 939, 'Justinus la messe chanta,' could even be interpreted as introducing the final prayer in the form of Justin's own direct discourse, leaving it potentially unclear as to whether the reader is participating in the narrator's prayer or in Justin's. In so ambiguously invoking the collective nature of prayer and sacrament, the *Vie de saint Laurent* can be seen to render relevant and present the late antique past of the martyrs to its readers, by presenting all parties as forming one (textual) community. Combined with its way of playing with the linguistic pair represented by Old French and Latin, this has every appearance of a kind of identity of cultural continuity, albeit one that is in part artificially created and shaped by a text based on written sources.

[319] Russell, 34.
[320] Arthur Robert Harden, 'The "Ubi Sunt" Theme in Three Anglo-Norman Saints' Lives,' *Romance Notes* 1, no. 1 (November 1959), 64.
[321] 'Be thou gracious and hear the prayer of Prudentius who stands arraigned by Christ...' Prudentius, trans. Thomson, 142-3.

Though my interest in the *Vie de saint Laurent* has been mainly linguistic, the likely literary influence of Prudentius points to the new and different ways in which an evolving vernacular Old French literature could express a form of cultural continuity with the late antique world, and thus give voice to the identity of both narrator and audience as a kind of Romanity. While still able to exploit a sense of cultural unity felt by Francophones with respect to their Roman 'ancestors' (to borrow the term from the *Vie de saint Alexis*) by actively using the Latin language both for local color and to raise the register of narration and direct discourse, the *Vie de saint Laurent* also engages with late antiquity as literature on a purely written level. Its apparent intertextual connections to *Peristephanon* II mean that we are probably dealing with a text here that actively appeals to late Roman literature – including difficult quantitative poetry that, by the late eleventh century, would have been accessible only to the highly-educated. In a sense, then, the *Vie de saint Laurent* represents a flexible *réécriture* of the late antique Lawrence narratives with a francophone audience in mind, though it expects enough Latinity of the reader to be able to understand the lexical and grammatical aspects of its engagement with the classical language.

## 8. Conclusion

The apparent influence of Prudentius is relevant to my overarching theme of continuity with the late antique world in that our medieval author has here affected the lighter tone of her Roman predecessor – and perhaps explicitly so, since she would likely have had the means to hear or read the *Peristephanon* – all while drawing the bulk of Lawrence's story from a different, more somber source whose mood was more characteristic of post-imperial prose hagiography in general. In using both narratives, the author also creates a space for herself to define the poem's relationship to its setting in its introduction and conclusion. These elements fall into place within a linguistic context that, by apparently exploiting a twelfth-century Romance-Latin diglossia for poetic effect,

manages to modulate between a variety of registers within a single work. The blending of Romance and Latin in turn reflects a certain linguistic unity between the two that makes the most sense as a natural outgrowth of linguistic and cultural habits grounded in the late Empire, a situation very similar to the contemporary sociolinguistic conditions in the Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean. If, in the twelfth century, Latin and Romance were regarded as neither one and the same, as they would have been prior to c. 813, nor wholly separate, as they would be by the time of the Hundred Years' War, one ought to account for the effect that this would have on the identity of Francophones at the time. Given the fact that the conceptual distinction between various forms of Romance was hardly reflected in terminology, and given the apparently complementary nature of Latin and Romance, we may surmise that texts such as the *Vie de saint Laurent* reflect a fundamental unity of linguistic identity in southwestern (Latin) Europe that had persisted since the days of the Roman Empire in the West, even if it did gradually weaken. This unity was based on a complex nexus of Latin-to-Romance and Romance-to-Romance relationships that only later developed into the linguistic paradigms familiar to us today; thus, to fully account for medieval literary culture, we ought to acknowledge the profound bonds that Rome had managed to forge between the regions it incorporated, bonds that held on even when little more remained of the Roman Empire itself than a single beleaguered city on the edge of the continent. Now, in the final part of my study, I will turn to the question of the role that cultural memories of the intervening period between the collapse of Roman political power in Gaul and the rise of Old French literature would have played in the shaping of an enduring sociocultural Romanity in that country, and to the question of why it was the literary genre of hagiography that turned out to be the best medium for such an identity of cultural continuity to define and assert itself.

## III. Romanity under the Franks: the *Vie de saint Léger*

1. Introduction

Of the Franks, the prologue to one extant redaction of the Salic Law proclaims that they were 'the people who, when vigorous and healthy in their strength, had fought and struck from their necks the onerous yoke of the Romans.'[322] It concludes by praising the Franks for having, upon their conversion to Catholicism, honored the bodies of the Christian martyrs, 'which the Romans had burned with fire or cast out to be mauled by beasts,' with superposed gold and precious stones. The version cited comes from a ninth-century manuscript (BnF lat. 4404), penned in Carolingian miniscule, that contains a number of other texts of Roman and Germanic law, most notably the Visigothic Breviary of Alaric, as well as remarkable illuminated portraits of sundry Roman and Germanic ruler-lawgivers.

Here, the juxtaposition of ostensibly Roman and Germanic law, the fraught implied questions of dynastic legitimacy, the faulty grammar and anti-Roman rhetoric of a manuscript otherwise showing all of the traits of the 'Carolingian renaissance,' whose leaders styled themselves as the heirs of Rome, all amount to a tangle of contradictions that is ripe for analysis and raises intriguing questions about the authors and audience of this compilation. The manuscript's very subject matter, meanwhile, would seem to challenge the thesis of enduring Latin European 'Romanity' that has been thus far the focus of this study, for it puts on display an extremely public and visible aspect of the changes wrought, from the fifth century on, upon the culture of the Western Roman Empire by the area's new Germanic managers. In this discussion of

[322] 'Haec est enim gens quae fortis dum esset robore valida Romanorum iugum durissimum de suis cervicibus excusserunt pugnando, atque post agnationem baptismi sanctorum martyrum corpora, quae Romani igne cremaverunt vel ferro truncaverunt vel besteis lacerando proiecerunt, Franci super eos aurum et lapides perciosos superornaverunt.' BnF lat. 4404, f. 197r. For a modern edition of this prologue, see Karl August Eckhardt, ed., 'Lex Salica S,' in *Lex Salica*, MGH LL nat. Germ. 4.2 (Hannover, 1969), 198.

the cultural continuity between late antique Rome and medieval France, an account of this Germanic factor in the politics and culture of post-Roman Europe remains to be rendered, but here, too, hagiography can be of aid, as I turn to Lives not of Roman saints, but of the bishops of post-Roman Gaul.

Having begun from afar, it is now time for me to narrow the focus of this study, to take a look at Old French hagiography's relationship with the closer, definably Frankish (as opposed to Roman) past that contributed in its own way to the development of the francophone culture of the high middle ages. If my arguments for a persistent medieval French Romanity in terms of both cultural memory and linguistic identity are to hold, I must also account for this period of rule by dynasts and nobles who considered themselves first and foremost to be 'Franks,' and whose contradictory relationship with Romanity we have just seen so vibrantly manifest in the bombast of a prologue to their customary laws. In the previous two chapters I considered two factors contributing, in medieval France, to a sense of continuity with the late Roman world: cultural memory, in which descriptions of the late antique world seem to have survived in oral poetry, and the linguistic unities between Romance and Latin that made Latin Europe still stand out as a coherent cultural whole through most of the early and high medieval period. Yet one cannot but take into account the other major cultural forces, the Franks as well as the Catholic Church, whose roles played out in full in the intervening centuries between the fading-away of Roman imperial power in Gaul and the rise of Old French literature. Neither force was ever wholly independent of Romanity, nor can either be completely collapsed into it, and both at turns identified and contrasted themselves with Rome.

In addition to the role of the Merovingian era (496-751) in the development of local identities, an explanation must also be offered for the effect that the Carolingian period (751-843)

had on the cultural memory of later generations. Both of the aspects of the Romanity of medieval Latin Europe that I explored in the preceding chapters – historical memory and language – must have been directly impacted by the far-reaching ideological and linguistic projects of the Carolingians. The impact of both, in the long as well as in the short term, was palpable, and it has simply been my aim to point out the inconsistencies of narratives that overestimate their reach. However, the new Western imperial ideology that emerged from Charlemagne's reign as well as the linguistic projects of the scholars whom he sponsored, which in many ways set the conditions for the subsequent development of Latin, Germanic, and Romance language and literature, could not but shape new ways of understanding the Roman past and its legacy. The Frankish period in its two parts, therefore, is key to understanding the degree to which an enduring Romanity can be claimed for medieval Europe, why and how it endured in some forms, and why it gradually gave way to other forces. Thus, in order to make sense of medieval French literary perspectives on Rome, and of the identities that they represent, the sometimes-hostile, sometimes-symbiotic relationship between the Frankish and Roman aspects of French cultural memory ought to be engaged and explored.

The historiography of the Frankish period is to a large extent grounded in hagiography, for many of the accounts that have come down to us of the Merovingian era are in the form of biographies of bishops and other prominent Church figures. These took on more markedly hagiographic forms as the meaning of the word *sanctus* – originally an honorific broadly applied to clergy, perhaps not dissimilar to late antique honorific-titles like *clarissimus* – gradually shifted over the course of centuries. The *vitae* of Merovingian bishops were among the texts first and most notably subject to processes of *réécriture* (that is, judicious editing and rewriting with an eye

toward contemporary concerns) during the Carolingian era;[323] the subsequent translation of Latin hagiographical texts into Romance can also be seen as a form of *réécriture*, one that sought to reintroduce old saints to the audience in creative new ways.

As far as vernacular productions are concerned, the literary corpus of Old French has left us with a number of hagiographic poems treating saints of the Merovingian period. Some of these are comparatively lengthy works on saints associated with the period of transition from Roman to Frankish rule and the Christianization of the Germanic elite around the turn of the sixth century; these include most notably the *Vie de sainte Geneviève* (which speeds through her salvation of Paris from the Huns and focuses mostly on a lengthy enumeration of her more 'quotidian' miracles, though early Merovingian royalty make an appearance here and there) and the *Vie de saint Rémi* (which celebrates the baptism of Clovis). A number of other extant Old French Lives deal with figures of the seventh century, including one of the oldest texts in written Romance, the *Vie de saint Léger*, an anonymous poem preserved in a sole tenth-century manuscript currently held at the municipal library of Clermont-Ferrand.[324] From the classical period of Old French literature there is also the *Vie de saint Gilles*, a twelfth-century Anglo-French poem by Guillaume de Berneville, and a pair of verse Lives by the thirteenth-century cleric Pierre de Beauvais, the *Vie de saint Germer* and the *Vie de saint Josse*.[325]

The *Vie de saint Léger* is a verse adaptation of the Life of Leudegar, the bishop of Autun, who is the subject of a number of older biographic treatments that include prominent examples of *réécriture* in early medieval hagiography. The relative diversity of both near-contemporary and

[323] For the original meaning of *sanctus*, see Fouracre and Gerberding, 67. For a discussion of *réécriture* in the context of the Lives of Merovingian bishops, see Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 234-7.
[324] Clermont-Ferrand, Bibliothèque du Patrimoine, MS 240 (*Glossaire latin attribué à Ansileubus*), http://www.bibliotheques-clermontmetropole.eu/overnia/notice.php?q=id:71555.
[325] Nils-Olof Jönsson, *La vie de saint Germer et la vie de saint Josse de Pierre de Beauvais*, Études romanes de Lund 54 (Lund: Lund University Press, 1997).

later written sources for this figure will allow me to trace the literary development of his cult before attempting to situate the *Vie de saint Léger* in its proper context with respect to those earlier works. At the same time, I shall attempt to apply both principles of cultural continuity evoked earlier – that of cultural memory as well as that of sociolinguistic continuity – on a smaller chronological scale, to a work of hagiography dealing with a temporally and spatially closer past. This is made possible by the diversity of Latin sources regarding St Leudegar, as well as by the fact that his Old French *Vie* is among the earliest works recognizably written in that language, and thus temporally nearer to the events and texts that are supposed to have inspired it.

## 2. The cult of Leudegar of Autun

Through the various Latin hagiographic Lives of the bishops of Gaul, their subjects emerge as historically situated figures even from those texts which deal with the earlier periods of the Church in that country. The career of St Martin of Tours, for example, is described for us in detail (miracles and all) by friends and contemporaries, while the Lives of many of the bishops who served under Frankish rule were penned by their colleagues, who would in turn often earn hagiographies of their own.[326] Far from appearing as a pantheon of figures with sketchy documentation and varying degrees of historicity and plausibility, as might be said of many Roman saints such as Lawrence, to say nothing of St Alexius, the bishops of Gaul form a network of historically and socially contextualized actors on a shared cultural-political stage. The cult of the saints in Gaul was also, for a long time, highly local; with few apparent extant exceptions, the hagiography of Merovingian-era writers concentrated squarely on Gallic personalities. According to Jamie Kreiner, it was also broadly disinterested in post-mortem miracles,[327] which only

[326] Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 14-6.
[327] Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 103.

accentuates these Lives' appeal to modern historiographic sensibilities. In a sense, we use something of a misnomer when speaking of much Merovingian hagiography: in part, their assimilation into the genre as defined by the Bollandists may have taken place post factum, as a result of the wide presence of the title *sanctus*, and originally the texts in question, given the difficulty of separating the spiritual from the secular in the pre-modern era, seem to have constituted as much political biographies with a marked religious bent as they did 'typical' saints' Lives.

Bishop Leudegar of Autun is, in fact, a chrestomathic example of a Merovingian bishop who 'settled more comfortably into his saintly persona over the centuries.'[328] His martyrdom and canonization resulted from his conflict with Ebroin, the Neustrian mayor of the palace, prior to the elevation of Childeric II to the Neustrian throne in 673 and in the aftermath of that king's assassination in 675. In the following decades and centuries, several accounts of the bishop's turbulent career were penned, through which a picture emerges of the political conflicts that simmered and occasionally flared up between interest groups in the various constituent kingdoms of the Merovingian realm. Leudegar had a place on this chessboard, and his own missteps were among the factors that led to his demise. Read in this way, as in Jamie Kreiner's study, there is little in this web of intrigue that meshes well with orthodox Christian conceptions of sainthood through martyrdom, though the hagiographies certainly highlight Leudegar's Christian virtues and noble intentions in contrast to the weakness of Childeric and the cruelty of Ebroin. For example, Leudegar's role in Ebroin's exile to Luxeuil upon Childeric's election is presented in the Lives as a selfless act of mercy rather than as a (failed) political calculation.

[328] Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 263.

The development of Leudegar's story, from contemporary biographical accounts to later hagiographies, is in fact a good example of the way in which hagiographic narratives take shape, for the path from narratives reporting what we might see as fact to those tending toward 'fiction' is here comparatively clearly in evidence at every step of the way. Of course, this judgment is not entirely fair: the hagiographies all invoke divine agency, and by all of the surviving accounts, Leudegar only died after miraculously withstanding prolonged torments meant to kill him, which would testify in and of itself to his righteousness. All in all, attempting to distill a core of 'secular,' factual truth from the narratives woven by hagiographers is a somewhat futile task, for the authors and copyists themselves would have been unlikely to perceive the factual and the supernatural as separable realms.

Nor is any of the above meant to downplay the actual spiritual penchants of Merovingian hagiography: the era's *vitae* were still first and foremost religious texts, though they displayed traits that distinguish them from the styles of saints' Lives of other eras and regions. Rather, it is the fact of their very concrete grounding in the specific temporal and spatial settings of post-Roman Gaul, rather than in a semi-mythical past, that makes them unique. Jamie Kreiner's study shows that the sacred dimension of these texts was part and parcel of their political import and implications, and she agrees with Marc Van Uytfanghe that, to the hagiographer, 'every saint's life is a piece, a microcosm of the history of salvation, beginning and ending through God's initiative.'[329] The virtue that was to shine through these accounts would be a reflection of timeless realities, but the accounts themselves dealt with largely-historicized phenomena that reflected the very specific sociopolitical conditions of the contemporary world.

[329] Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 124

The historical Leudegar, as his *vitae* inform us, came from a prominent family in Burgundy, which, though one of the four constituent kingdoms of the Merovingian realm, was mostly caught in the middle of power struggles between factions in the principal powers of Neustria and Austrasia instead of projecting its own influence.[330] Leudegar's Germanic name may suggest Frankish origin, and the Latin *vitae* certainly emphasize his Frankish background; having become bishop of Autun, he participated in a Burgundian faction opposed to Ebroin, the politically ambitious mayor of the Neustrian palace. In 673, the death of Clothar III of Neustria created a power vacuum through which his crown passed to Childeric II of Austrasia, temporarily uniting the two kingdoms; Ebroin himself, who had supported the cause of Childeric's brother Theoderic, was confined to Luxeuil as a monk in the aftermath. According to the *vitae*, Leudegar took it upon himself to counsel the new king, and the texts tend to emphasize that Childeric's subsequent bad leadership was very much in spite of the bishop's best efforts. The two soon had a falling-out, and Leudegar, too, found himself exiled to Luxeuil alongside Ebroin, with whom he ostensibly achieved a rapprochement. When the king was assassinated in 675, both men escaped and their earlier conflict resumed; Theoderic claimed his turn to became king, while Ebroin, having previously supported his candidacy, regained his political influence, and, repudiating his reconciliation with Leudegar, exacted his revenge by besieging Autun, capturing the bishop, and having him confined and tortured to death. The maelstrom of political instability that served as the background to these grim events would in turn claim Ebroin's life two years later, a fact that the *vitae* seem to note with satisfaction among Leudegar's post-mortem miracles (which most of them devote long sections to, unlike most Merovingian hagiography).

[330] According to Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 78.

The subsequent elevation of Leudegar to sainthood, and the fact that he is one of the more celebrated saints from the later Merovingian era, has something to tell us about the significance of Leudegar's martyrdom for subsequent generations. The relatively rich corpus of hagiographic literature on Leudegar, which includes three different discernible Latin prose *vitae*,[331] a poetic *vita* in hexameters, and the *Vie de saint Léger* itself, testifies indirectly to his importance and popularity on a level beyond the regional, while in terms of extra-literary evidence, there are four Romanesque churches dedicated to him that remain standing (two in the southwest, one in the south, and one in Île-de-France),[332] while at least twenty-five French communes acquired their present names of Saint-Léger (or Saint-Lager) by the end of the thirteenth century at the very latest.[333] This makes him, in terms of toponyms, one of the most honored saints of the Merovingian period, not counting those figures associated with the conversion of the Franks (St Genevieve, St Remi).

Jamie Kreiner has traced the ways in which the regicide of 675 and the subsequent reworking of saints' Lives associated with this event were reflective of debates on the public and social responsibilities of kingship, treading carefully to avoid any form of *lèse-majesté* while firmly insisting on the Merovingian kings' duty to submit to divine prerogatives. In particular, while not excusing Childeric's assassination itself, the *vitae* do, according to Kreiner, imply that he had it coming to him.[334] This in itself is extraordinary given the supposedly sacred nature of Merovingian kingship, but it is not hard to understand in the context of the Church's history of negotiating for power with the secular authorities. Regardless of Leudegar's background and actual positions, his demise came about as a result of his conflict first with the king and then with the

[331] For a discussion of the textual history of the Leudegar *vitae*, see Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 243-7.
[332] La Malène, 274.
[333] Dauzat, 609.
[334] Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 78-84.

mayor of the palace. Though factional politics may have been the ultimate cause, the end result, as portrayed in the *vitae*, was not just one of admonishment of Childeric's and Ebroin's ungodly behavior: it also comprises the valorization of the bishop's political positions in retrospect, through the lens of his martyrdom. Whether or not matters of principle were at stake is, in the end, immaterial here, for through his *vitae*, St Leudegar emerges before us as a kind of Merovingian Thomas Becket. This may explain much of his apparent popularity, for, as Kreiner points out, it is known of other canonized bishops that their *fama* could endure in the area of their pastoral and political activity for a long while after their deaths.[335]

The trope of the sacral quality of Merovingian kingship is well-known, and the regicide of Childeric II was an exceptional event that demanded explanation. It is remarkable that, for all the ways in which Ebroin stands out as the villain of the sundry Latin *vitae* and the Old French verse Life alike, no criticism is offered of Theoderic, who, after all, was Ebroin's liege and presumably might have intervened at some point during the two years in which Leudegar was being tormented in Ebroin's dungeon. This may reflect an unwillingness to criticize royalty, or a tacit acknowledgement, later so often expressed in *chanson de geste*, of the weakness of Frankish kings with respect to their magnates; perhaps it is both at once. In the end, however, Leudegar, for all his prestige and status, is helpless before the violence of a powerful, angry enemy who sees the bishop's attempts at influencing policy as a direct threat to his ambitions. Just as Thomas Becket became the object of a significant martyr cult starting almost immediately after his murder in the cathedral at Canterbury, so too can we see through the diverse centuries-long literary tradition surrounding Leudegar hints of the degree of veneration that could be offered to a bishop who had stood up to the powers of the day and ultimately paid with his life.

[335] Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 53.

3. Manuscript, editions, and language

What we know as the *Vie de saint Léger* is preserved in one manuscript, MS 240 of the Bibliothèque du patrimoine in Clermont-Ferrand. Most of this large, folio-sized codex is taken up by a running Latin glossary whereof the beginning and end are missing; the hand and ink of the glossary's text change several times, and it is punctuated by a number of poems interspersed throughout the manuscript. In addition to the *Vie de saint Léger*, MS 240 contains another of the oldest extant written works in Old French, known as the *Passion* of Clermont-Ferrand. There are also several Latin poems within the codex, likewise inserted into breaks in the glossary.

An edition of the poem prepared by Gaston Paris appeared in the first volume of *Romania* in 1872, and a second, accompanied by an extensive linguistic study of the text, was published by Joseph Linskill in 1937. As best can be surmised, the latter was produced based on photographs of sections of the manuscript rather than the manuscript itself, for its description of the codex's contents is inaccurate. The most recent edition by D'Arco Silvio Avalle in 1967 includes an important discussion of language and dialect, where the author makes a number of salient cautionary points regarding the positivist tendency to determine the provenance of vernacular texts based on apparent dialectal features, and thus to assume a direct link between dialect, pronunciation, and orthography. On this point, Linskill's earlier edition is replete with footnotes pointing out various 'Provençalisms' and 'Latinisms,' but the extent to which such categories can be applied to a tenth-century manuscript from central France is unclear at best. In the end, Avalle's edition of the *Vie de saint Léger* is the most recent and its approach is less interventionist than that of past editions. For these reasons it will be used here (though I may draw a reading here and there from Avalle's critical apparatus; insofar as written Romance interests my within the framework of

the Wright thesis, the actual preserved manuscript readings are of greater relevance to this discussion than reconstructions based on later linguistic evidence).

Though the earliest extant examples of written Romance, including the *Vie de saint Léger*, clearly represent some sort of phonographic transcription of the spoken vernacular, they are hardly unmoored from Latin either in their grammatical logic or in their orthography. Unlike in the much later *Vie de saint Laurent*, where the difference between Latin and Romance, though they play and interact on the same field, is nonetheless clear, the scribe of the *Vie de saint Léger* appears at times to vacillate between two norms, the old and the nascent, when determining how to write down a particular form of a word. When, in verse 109, he records 'et Ewruins fist fincta pais' ('and Ebroin pretended to make peace') we should not doubt that *fincta*, in this context, was pronounced along the lines of the French *feinte*.[336] Unless his statement is taken to refer strictly to orthography, Linskill is surely wrong to dub this a 'pur latinisme';[337] rather, as Roger Wright puts it, we have a situation where a scribe of '[t]hose who have already been taught how to write in the "correct way"... is likely to find the traditional spelling of a word springing more easily to his ballpoint than the phonetic transcription of the same word.'[338]

This, however, leads to a different problem in which the older positivist philology clashes with the Wright thesis to no clear mutually satisfactory resolution. For the *Vie de saint Léger* contains Latin words that, though they have immediate cognate analogues in Old French, cannot metrically be understood as vernacular words in classical garb. These include *perfectus* (verse 33), *gratia* (46, 88), and *occidere* (220); each of the Old French words (as might be reasonably

[336] Inversely, when the manuscript spells its protagonist's name as *Lethgiers*, it is employing a phonetic rendering of something close to how *Leudegarius* would have been pronounced even in the bishop's own day.
[337] Joseph Linskill, *Saint-Léger : Étude de la langue du manuscrit de Clermont-Ferrand suivie d'une édition critique du texte avec commentaire et glossaire* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1937), 68.
[338] Wright, *Late Latin*, 50.

reconstructed for the period in question) that would correspond to them – *parfaiz*, *grace*, and *occire* – is one syllable shorter than the meter requires. Even if one takes into account Alfred Lord's discovery that illiterate performers of poetry do not perceive words or lines as independent units, which sometimes leads to what we might see as metrical error,[339] the connection between the spelling of the Latin words and the needs of the meter is here too systematic to be coincidental.

One may, instead, posit an advanced stage in the development of the written vernacular, corresponding to a growing acceptance of the ecclesiastical reformed pronunciation and the insertion of commonly-known or register-heightening words with that pronunciation assumed for them. After all, 'perfectus fud' (verse 33) and 'occidere lo commandat' (220) are more obvious candidates for a register-heightening shift in tone than 'fist fincta pais' (109), where it makes less sense and where *fincta* truly seems to be a logographic representation of [fɛ̃tə], the way *feinte* is pronounced in French. In verse 18, meanwhile, we read 'rovat que litteras apresist,' where *litteras* has to represent [lɛtʀəs] in order to be metrical. There are many other such instances in the poem, but what follows is a conservative list: *ille* (27), *irae* (79), *missae* (82), *exit* (146), *las poenas* (151), *lingua* (164, 169), *labia* (181), *causa* (208), *cadit* (231). Not included in this list are forms like *ira* (105), *mala* (114), *flamma* (133), since word-final Latin /a/ in first-declension words appears to be regularly written in just that way in the *Vie de saint Léger*; *exercite* (138), however, presumably comes from the neuter plural Latin *exercita*, meaning that there is already some uncertainty as to how the reduced vowel sound should be represented. In addition, the scribe, apparently used to using the graphemes 'ae' and 'e' more or less interchangeably in those situations where the former of the two had been called for in classical Latin orthography, also uses it or its medieval equivalent

[339] Lord, 38.

'ę' a few times to represent a similar sound ([ɛ] or [e]) in the vernacular here: *quae* (6, 8, 122, 124, 144, 164), *juvęnt* (31), *frędre* (59), *pensaez* (170), *cęl* (203).

What this means is that, under the Wright thesis, as discussed in the previous chapter, the 'death of Latin' should not be placed and dated at Tours in 813 or at Strasbourg thirty years later. The emerging new rules for pronouncing Latin and the corresponding appearance of written representations of vernacular speech would not have severed the association between the dominant spoken (which can now safely be called Old French) and written (Latin) forms quickly. The *Vie de saint Léger*, which comes to us from the tenth century, is a text that we are fortunate to possess because it represents a bridge between the two norms, and a middle point in the evolution of the conception of language identity in medieval France.

As I have already had occasion to point out above, traces of the transition can also be found in the oldest canonical Old French texts, the *Vie de saint Alexis* and the *Song of Roland*. Both poems appear to employ forms derived from the Latin plural genitive, to wit *ancïenor* (*VSA*), *tere major*, and *geste francor* (*Roland*).[340] These are essentially transcriptions, according to Alcuin's reformed phonographic spelling (the phenomenon posited by Roger Wright), of the way in which the Latin *antianorum*,[341] *terra maiorum*, and *gesta francorum* would have been pronounced natively in 'Merovingian' Latin, where final /-um/ was generally not pronounced (e.g. Lat. *aurum* > OF *or*) and where unstressed final /-a/ was likely already a schwa sound (e.g. Lat. *testa* > OF *teste*).[342] Whether such forms as the ones listed above are simply ossified remnants of pre-reform high-register speech repurposed as adjectives, or whether their connection to the Latin genitive was not entirely lost on those who composed, performed, and listened to this poetry, is largely

[340] Walker, 124.
[341] Walther von Warburg, *Etymologisches französisches Wörterbuch*, vol. XXIV (Basel: Zbinden Druck und Verlag AG, 1969), 640.
[342] Herman, *Vulgar Latin*, 51.

unverifiable. Their existence, however, serves to support the Wright thesis in one form or another; otherwise, if Wright were wrong and the Latin of the churches, chancelleries, and scriptoria were pronounced by and large 'correctly,' according to the modern reconstructed classical pronunciation, from the fifth century to the fifteenth, it would be difficult to explain neatly how such mutated forms as *geste francor* could have appeared; to all appearances, in fact, they fit the claims of the Wright thesis perfectly.

## 4. The *Vie de saint Léger*

The *Vie de saint Léger*, unlike the extant Latin texts on the bishop's life (the three prose *vitae* and the poem in hexameters), opens its narrative without offering any information about Léger's family. While it is true that the poem is rather concise on the whole, the omission is significant, for it is precisely at the beginning of their stories that the *vitae* take care to situate Leudegar in the context of Merovingian society. The Old French poem, by contrast, is simply vague on this point, presaging Léger's virtues and accomplishments, martyrdom included, in the first stanza, before telling the audience in the second that the future bishop's parents sent him off to the king's court to learn his letters. At the very least, it would seem that his family was well-connected, but this fact is hardly emphasized at all: 'quant infans fud, donc a ciels temps / al rei lo duistrent soi parent' (verses 13-4).[343] Meanwhile, the Latin texts emphasize his Frankish credentials: the hexameter *vita* tells us that 'renowned parents, born of the great people of the Franks, begot renowned progeny' (1.45-6);[344] Ursinus' prose *vita*, published by Bruno Krusch in the Monumenta Germaniae Historica as *Passio II*, informs us that Leudegar was 'sprung from

[343] 'When he was a child, so at that time / his parents gave him to the king.' D'Arco Silvio Avalle, 'Il *Saint Lethgier*,' in *La doppia verità* (Florence: Edizioni del Galuzzo, 2002), 374.
[344] 'Progeniem claram clari genuere parentes / Francorum procerum de magna gente creati.' Ludwig Traube, ed., 'Vita Beati Leudegarii martyris,' in *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini (III)*, MGH Poetae 3 (Berlin, 1896), 7.

glorious descendants of the Franks' (section 1),[345] while the third *vita* claims that 'the parents who begot him were namely quite renowned and their influence among the Frankish nobility was not insignificant' (section 2).[346]

Even if desire for brevity is granted as its motivation, and despite the status implied in their direct interaction with the noble court, the omission of any account of the future saint's parents is notable. It is not enough to float the supposition that the saint in question may have been well-known enough in the area where the poet was performing for the latter to skim over certain aspects of his protagonist's biography, for even so the audience would surely still expect the full story: after all, medieval narrative practice rarely relied on the element of suspense, the end often being announced in advance; *how* the story was told is what seems to have counted most. The gap is further highlighted by the redundancy of 'quant infans fud, donc a ciels temps,' where the second half of the verse placed after the caesura gives us no new information whatsoever, as if the poet were inserting a tautological formula to gain time in developing his exposition. It would seem that a theory of oral poetry, as defined by Milman Parry's field work in Yugoslavia, would explain *both* the poem's brevity and the formulaic – in the oral-poetic sense – nature of many of the poem's hemistiches, including the tautological example just given: Albert Lord discusses at one point in *The Singer of Tales* just such uses of tautology and 'how and why pleonasm is so common in oral style.'[347] In fact, the question of orality, to which I will return subsequently, may well be the key to understanding the *Vie de saint Léger* both in terms of its meaning and of the significance of its place in Latin and French literary history.

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[345] '[E]x progenia celsa Francorum ac nobilissima exortus.' Bruno Krusch, ed., 'Passiones Leudegarii episcopi et martyris Augustodunensis,' in *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici (III)*, MGH SS rer. Merov. 5 (Hannover, 1910), 324.
[346] '[I]llum etenim clarissimi et inter Francorum principes non mediocris potentiae parentes genuerunt.' Krusch, *Passiones*, 358.
[347] Lord, 34.

The matter of Léger's parentage, thus excluded, almost flaunts of the tendency of hagiography to prioritize and emphasize saints from noble and wealthy backgrounds as having a greater and more heroic distance to cover, i.e. more to lose in the world, in assuming the cross of asceticism or martyrdom. This is reinforced by the *Vie*'s silence on the fact that the bishop to whom the king entrusts Léger for his education (Didun/Dido/Desiderius) was, according to the Latin *vitae*, Leudegar's uncle. The protagonist thus emerges as if from nowhere, his historical model's privileged background and powerful connections effectively masked; one might well ask if the omission does not serve to set his subsequent conflicts with kings and mayors in starker relief by setting the bishop over and against those who could directly wield the secular power of state violence. Moreover, since the term 'Frank' was associated with political agency and power – i.e. franchise – both in Leudegar's day (judging from the way in which his near-contemporary biographers use the term) and in the period of Old French literature, if the poem was indeed a bard's oral work, it may be seen as reclaiming the bishop for 'the people.'

The poem enumerates some of Léger's virtues and sees him off to his abbacy at Saint-Maixent (*Sanct Maxenz*) in what is now the *département* of Deux-Sèvres (two of the four Romanesque churches bearing the saint's name are found in this general region) and then to his bishopric in Autun (*Hostedun*). All is well until the death of Clothar III, whom the poem does not distinguish from Clothar II, king of Neustria in the time of Leudegar's youth: 'quandieus visquet ciel reis Lothier / bien honorez fud sancz Lethgiers' (verses 49-50).[348] At this point, the poem's ambiguous relationship to kingship, already hinted at in its de-emphasis of the young Léger's connections at court, begins to emerge in full. Clothar is portrayed as a good king, insofar as he respects the Church (represented by the protagonist) and is not implicated in any wrongdoing. The

[348] 'As long as that king Clothar lived / Saint Léger was well honored.' Avalle, 'Il *Saint Lethgier*,' 375.

kings who follow are different. Once more, in a poem as verbally parsimonious as this one, some emphasis is placed on the notion that Childeric was elected by the lords of the realm for his personal qualities, with no hint at sacral kingship: 'cio controverent baron franc / por cio que fud de bona fiet / de Chielperig feïssent rei' (52-4).[349]

It is at this point that the villain Ebroin first appears in the narrative, where he is shown futilely attempting to persuade his peers to support Childeric's brother, Theoderic, instead. The failure of his wheedling leads him to choose to renounce the world in chagrin, while no mention is made of the protagonist's role in his exile: 'et Ewruïns en ott gran dol / por cio que ventre no·ls en poth / por ciel tiel duol rova·s clergier / si s'en intrat in un monstier' (verses 63-6).[350] For what it is, this passage is a fairly frank look at the Merovingian monarchy, perhaps more so than contemporary *vitae* could have allowed themselves, though these had also broadly hinted at a certain level of dysfunction (especially when, later on, Ebroin besieges Autun and goes on to imprison and torture its bishop for years, with no royal interference). The Frankish magnates pursuing their interests, the ambiguous motives for which they elevate their chosen candidate (what shades of meaning does *bona fides* project here – is the prince faithful or pliable?), and the opposition of certain factions are all exposed briefly but forthrightly, and though all seems well and the transition of power is resolved peacefully, the fact that the poem has already put a limit on Léger's standing with Clothar's death, despite the fact that he will go on to counsel Childeric, already adds a hint of foreboding to the narrative.

As the poem removed Léger's Frankish background from the equation and ignored his original conflict with Ebroin, so too does it deviate from the Latin *vitae* on the matter of its

[349] 'The Frankish barons came to this decision: / because he was a man of good faith / they made Childeric the king.' Avalle, 'Il *Saint Lethgier*,' 375.
[350] 'And Ebroin was greatly upset / because he could not convince them of it; / thus upset, he swore to become a priest / and so entered a monastery.' Avalle, 'Il *Saint Lethgier*,' 376.

protagonist's eventual row with Childeric. Where the Latin texts had, while denying any actual wrongdoing on Leudegar's part, made the king's suspicions of treason appear at least reasonable, here the *Vie de saint Léger* attributes the unpleasantness to a certain 'Deu inimix' who slanders the bishop before the king (the hexameter *vita* offers a similar version of events). Like Ebroin, Léger chooses to become a monk in protest, and winds up in the same monastery, Luxeuil (*Lusos*), as the once-and-future mayor. Ebroin hates him immediately, but out of pure spite and not for personal reasons: 'per enveja, non per el' (verse 102),[351] and dissimulates by making 'fincta pais' in response to the bishop's attempts to 'preach out' to him (104-8). Once again the poem disassociates Léger from the actual politics of the kingdom, which nevertheless seem always to catch up to him: at this point, one may claim justification in seeing this separation of church and state as systematic. Léger is not opposed to the state as such, but malign forces will oppose the state to him.

Following Childeric's death (whereof the violent manner is not mentioned), we see Léger and Ebroin emerge from their monastery to pay their respects before returning to their erstwhile posts, the former to his bishopric and the latter to his mayoralty; of course, Ebroin is here reneging on his religious vows, while Léger is not. At this point, Ebroin 'abandoned the Lord God and committed himself to the devil' (verses 127-8),[352] whereupon he proceeds to raise a war-band, ravage the countryside on his way to Autun, and seize and torture Léger when the latter emerges from the city to reason with the rabid mayor. From this point on, the narrative of the *Vie de saint Léger* merges with that of the *vitae*: the bishop is imprisoned and tortured for years by Ebroin, who acts with impunity; several miracles occur, most notably the restoration of Léger's sight and speech after his eyes and tongue are, at turns, taken from him; finally and most importantly, his witness

[351] 'Entirely out of envy, not because of him.' Avalle, 'Il *Saint Lethgier*,' 377.
[352] 'Dominedeu, il lo laissat / et a dïables commandat.' Avalle, 'Il *Saint Lethgier*,' 378.

leads to the conversion of torturers, jailers, and executioners, before he finally accepts his own death as a martyr.

If the *Vie de saint Léger* is perhaps at first difficult to conceive of as a heroic oral poem in the mold of Parry's Yugoslav bards, it does share some traits with the *Vie de saint Alexis* that, in the case of that poem, I perceived to be markers of oral transmission. First, the names of the characters have been altered. While Gaston Paris (and all subsequent editors) concluded that the poem is based on Ursinius' *vita* – he claims that it follows the seventh-century Latin prose text almost exactly – he also notes that there is some confusion when it comes to the historical personalities involved. Most significantly, the name of the dissolute, soon-to-be assassinated king is given in the *Vie de saint Léger* as *Chielperics*, or Chilperic – not Childeric. Second, Clothar II (*Lothiers*) who is king at the beginning of the poem, and to whom the young Leudegar is sent for his education, is dubbed *fils Baldequi*, which stems from a confusion with a slightly later king, Clothar III, mentioned with his mother Balthild further on in the Latin *vitae*. At least one other name is also changed, for the name of the man who takes care of the bishop in captivity is given as *Landeberz* for the Latin texts' *(Ch)rotbertus*.[353] These mistakes led Gaston Paris to describe the 'connaissances historiques' of the putative poet as 'nulles,' and he is correct at least in that we are probably not dealing with mere scribal errors in this situation. These errors appear rather consistent with the vagaries of oral traditions: the story, especially in a version as condensed as that presented in the *Vie de saint Léger*'s 240 octosyllabic verses, does not deviate from the general sequence of events described in the hagiographical texts, and though it offers considerably less detail and greatly simplifies some episodes, characters' names and relationships could still be subject to corruption.

[353] G. Paris, 'La vie de saint Léger,' 301.

I thus consider myself justified in returning to Friedrich Diez's opinion, criticized by Gaston Paris, that the *Vie de saint Léger* as we know it was sprung at least in part from an oral tradition.[354] Paris himself died a year after Milman Parry was born, and did not have the benefit of the American's field research that first demonstrated how exactly an 'oral tradition,' which before might have had the air of a hand-wave tinged with Romanticism, might operate in actuality. Paris, as he generally had the right of it in resisting as a rule certain Romanticizing tendencies in his field, was thus also quite justified in questioning Diez's appeal to orality; now, however, it may reasonably be reconsidered. Imagine for a moment Parry and Lord's 'singer of tales' in the context of medieval Frankia. He may have acquired a repertoire consisting of a number of poems, one of which involved a Chilperic and another Clothar III, the son of Balthild. The lack of a firm sense of history – Parry's singers are never literate[355] – could indeed lead to the confusion of similar names and namesakes, especially if the poet lacked in skill or experience. Yet the plot stays the same, since the singer still knows the story; the copyist's task, meanwhile, would have been to write down the poem as received from his source. It is unclear why a post-Carolingian, tenth-century scribe copying a poem in between the quire-sections of a large glossary (a parchment-saving task, one must assume, not charged with the utmost seriousness) should be expected to have immediately known Childeric from Chilperic, or Chlothar II from Clothar III.

The emphasis placed on such factors by positivist scholars benefiting from a lifetime of rigorous study of all the available sources, and who were themselves intimately acquainted with the various stages of Latin and Old French in all their lexical and grammatical variety, can sometimes obscure the true nature and value of such works as the *Vie de saint Léger*, 'this text as

[354] G. Paris, 'La vie de saint Léger,' 297.
[355] Lord, 20-1; 28.

venerable for its age as it is underappreciated by readers of poetry.'[356] Debates attempting to determine the poem's dialect – variously judged to be Walloon (Avalle) or simply the bad French of a Provençal scribe (Linskill) will also only take us so far, and their results, though interesting in and of themselves from a linguistic viewpoint, will have little to do with the poem's ultimate origins and purpose; after all, were one to assume that either proposition is correct, there would still remain nothing to stop a Walloon or Provençal monk from winding up working as a copyist at a monastery in the vicinity of Poitiers or Autun, where his speech habits would still presumably impact whatever vernacular text he set out to copy down. Gaston Paris seems to assume that the poem was systematically inspired by a Latin saint's Life read communally in the refectory or privately in the scriptorium, but the historical errors in the text – errors not found in the Latin *vitae* – would surely make this unlikely. And unless we are to take for granted that the author and scribe of the *Vie de saint Léger* were one and the same person, the question of dialect, which in any case is based on extrapolation and inference from much later linguistic evidence, leads nowhere here. As is, it presumes, perhaps, a middle ages whose horizons were much more circumscribed than modern scholarship would lead us to believe.

Moreover, one need not necessarily imagine a situation absolutely analogous to that of Milman Parry's Yugoslav bards for the question of oral tradition, and thus the comparison with Yugoslavia, to be relevant here. After all, the problem of the *Vie de saint Léger* prompts a choice: one may chalk the confusion of names up to the 'connaissances historiques ... nulles' of a Walloon (Provençal?) author-scribe, who felt compelled to compose or at least copy a poem about St Leudegar and insert it into a glossary containing a few other vernacular and Latin poems, or one can more plausibly invoke the slips that occur naturally as part of the way in which oral poems are

[356] 'Questo testo venerabile per l'età quanto misconosciuto dai lettori di poesia.' Avalle, 'Il *Saint Lethgier*,' 369.

learned and composed,[357] and conclude that it was written down by a scribe during or after its performance by an illiterate professional. This would also help to explain the manuscript's Latinisms: as the scribe would have been trained to write in correct Latin in a cultural environment where that language had not entirely been conceptually severed from the vernacular, it makes sense that he would on occasion, e.g., write down *fincta* instead of *feinte*. This may well be no Latinism but rather an expression of the language itself as understood by a contemporary speaker.

The poem itself survives in a format consistent with oral transmission. It consists of 120 octosyllabic couplets (alongside the decasyllabic *laisse* the earliest and most basic form found in Old French literature), of which some verses do not appear to be metrical. However, this may be taken as a sign of orality rather than as one of literary incompetence, for, as Albert Lord points out, the oral poet, who is illiterate, does not perceive his poem in terms of distinct units such as 'words' and 'verses': when Parry's Yugoslav bards answered probing questions based on such terminology, they were simply using the asker's words on their own terms, and their sense of the word 'word' (*slovo*) boiled down to 'utterance.'[358] Apparently non-metrical verses, inevitable under the conditions of oral composition, did not have to detract from their perception of a songs' quality, for the singer could simply compensate by holding the beat longer on one syllable, or by otherwise incorporating such moments into the overall rhythm of his poem. To avoid such situations, editors from Gaston Paris onward have intervened in the manuscript's readings with a heavy hand, proposing more 'metrical' resolutions for problematic moments, based always on an understanding that the scribe's language, and thus what he actually meant to write, could be derived from the Old French of the classical period[359] by the rigorous application of known laws

[357] Lord, 27; 76.
[358] Lord, 25.
[359] I.e. the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that saw the composition of the most famous and influential works of Old French literature, from Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian romances to the *Romance of the Rose*.

of phonetic change, and that it sufficed to find the proper midpoint between the archaic *Vie de saint Alexis* and the Latin of Merovingian charters in order to correct the tenth-century copyist's errors.[360] Of course, this presumes an answer to Ferdinand Lot's and Dag Norberg's question 'à quelle époque a-t-on cessé de parler latin'[361] that is both early and definitive, as well as a vast, invisible undercurrent of vernacular poetic activity.

The assumption that tenth-century Romance verse would necessarily follow the strictures of later periods is useful, however, in that it points toward the question of the origins of the forms of medieval Romance poetry. Certainly they have nothing in common with quantitative Latin poetry, be it that of the classical period, when distinctions of vowel length were still a readily perceptible aspect of Latin prosody, or the post-classical, which presumably required great erudition to compose, since it could no longer reflect the natural prosody of the language.[362] Nor are they apparently sprung from the alliterative verse of the earliest Germanic poetry that we possess. One might rather see in it, without being able to provide any definitive proof for lack of evidence, the form of early Romance oral literature that, with time, by force of tradition, would become a medium for non-oral composition, as well. Dag Norberg's manual on later Latin versification sees the origins of non-quantitative verse styles reflected in some fourth-and fifth-century hymns, and rhythmic Latin verse featuring assonance was being written in the sixth century,[363] but the gap between these forms (which are at any rate the work of known individual authors like Augustine, Ambrose, and Venantius Fortunatus) and the realm of oral poetry is significant. The Wright thesis, in turn, undermines the paradigm under which there would exist a

[360] E.g. Linskill, 2.
[361] Michael Richter and Monique Laroze, 'À quelle époque a-t-on cessé de parler latin en Gaule ? À propos d'une question mal posée,' *Annales. histoire, sciences sociales* 38, no. 2 (1983), 439.
[362] Herman, *Vulgar Latin*, 28-32; 36.
[363] Dag Norberg, *Introduction à l'étude de la versification latine médiévale* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1958), 38-42.

'correct' written Old French, neatly corresponding to the spoken language, at any stage anterior to the eleventh century.

As D'Arco Silvio Avalle points out, however, throughout our sources from the early middle ages are found scattered mentions of 'vulgar' religious poetry or song, mostly in a condemnatory tone. Based on the texts that discuss this matter, it seems that there was a tradition of *cantilenae* or *psalmi,* described with forms of the adjectives *idioticus*, *plebeius,* and *rusticus,*[364] which clerics had to struggle to keep out of the church and the rituals therein conducted; Avalle cites in particular the early eleventh-century example of Bernard of Angers, who throws up his hands in an attitude of exasperated acquiescence at the end of a narrative describing a mob of pious commoners fighting their way into his church singing their 'vulgar' songs.[365] Though the songs from this particular vignette appear to have little in common with the sort of poetry described by Parry and Lord, and seem unlikely to have represented narrative poetry at all, the episode is important for two reasons. First, it tells us that the saints did, in fact, inspire the composition of songs and poems among the laity, meaning that 'clerical' hagiography had a 'popular' counterpart. Second, it provides a notion of where vernacular Romance poetry, whose earliest examples are for the most part hagiographic, may have come from: a popular, unwritten tradition that did not find easy or immediate acceptance from the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

This report, which Avalle perceived to be linked to the *Vie de saint Léger*, together with my own analysis of that poem's structure, according to which it seems to exhibit characteristics of oral poetry based on formulas, allows me to conclude that the *Vie de saint Léger* may well have been an example of that sort of oral-formulaic literature. And while the record seems in general to indicate clerical hostility toward such *psalmi plebei*, Bernard's eventual acquiescence may at the

[364] Avalle, 'Il *Saint Lethgier*,' 428-9.
[365] Avalle, 'Il *Saint Lethgier*,' 430.

same time represent a broader tendency toward an acceptance, even if initially grudging, of popular poetry as part of legitimate religious practice. This supports me in the notion that the poem as written down in the Clermont-Ferrand manuscript is not the creative work of a clerical scribe but rather a written record of a poetic Life of St Leudegar as performed by a professional or semi-professional, and at this point likely professionally illiterate, bard.

Returning to the matter of the narrative presented in the *Vie de saint Léger*, one might well wonder what makes it stand out as worthy of preservation in a popular oral tradition. For a possible answer, I suggest looking to the discrepancies between it and the Latin *vitae*, which provide a number of details lacking in the Old French poem. The apparent simplifications and omissions, far from diluting the narrative, serve to hone the poem's focus. As far as is possible, Léger's character is distanced from the Franks and their politics; the loci of political power, be they in the monarchy or the nobility, are presented as morally ambiguous at best, and as vehicles for evil at worst. In this sense, Leudegar's invocation of St Lawrence in one of the Latin *vitae*[366] is telling: the martyr is thus portrayed as standing up to a wicked agent of the state who wields its violent power to the fullest extent. The fact that the state in question is supposed to be Christian seems to have no effect on the way that things play out in the *Vie de saint Léger*, and this may well explain why the poem refuses to associate its protagonist with such an entity. But one might also take this notion a step further and see in Léger a symbol of a broader social tension between ruler and ruled, which ultimately points to an older tension that lay at the very foundation of medieval France – that between 'Frank' and 'Roman.' And the figure of St Leudegar, thus reclaimed from the Franks, could endure in popular memory as expressed through song in the 'Roman' language.

[366] MGH, SS rer. Merov. 5:303.

## 5. Romans and Franks in cultural memory

In the first chapter of this study, I expressed doubts about the distinction that some scholars have drawn between popular and clerical culture, with its accompanying oppositional dichotomies of oral versus written, authentic versus learned, popular versus clerical, vernacular versus Latin, and so forth based on perceived degrees of the ecclesiastical hierarchy's engagement in the production and transmission of texts. Peter Brown and Leonard Boyle both criticized such notions of a qualitative distinction between 'official' (i.e. learned) and 'popular' (i.e. superstitious) piety, which Brown refers to as the 'two-tiered model';[367] as we have seen, even episodes such as that recounted by Bernard of Angers support the 'two-tiered model' only at first glance. In some other expressions of this framework of clerical-popular dichotomy, such as that proposed by Zlata Volkova, all religiously-themed literature, including vernacular hagiographic poems like the *Vie de saint Alexis*, was *a priori* clerical and necessarily sprung from in and around the institutional Church, thus placing it in opposition to the popular genres of epic (*chanson de geste*) and fable (*fabliaux*).[368] I, however, found no compelling reason to maintain such a distinction: while much religious medieval literature certainly was produced in clerical or monastic settings, as the texts themselves often admit – and as does the *Vie de saint Laurent*, which I treated in the previous chapter – this is no reason to assume the same for all representatives of the hagiographic genre. In the same way, that some *chansons de geste* (like the *Chanson d'Antioche* and the *Chanson de la croisade albigeoise*) claim to have been composed by eyewitnesses says nothing of other works

[367] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 17; Leonard Boyle, 'Popular Piety in the Middle Ages: What Is Popular?,' *Florilegium* 4 (1982): 184–93.

[368] Volkova, 59-60. Here I am much more in agreement with the views of Evelyn Vitz, who throughout her scholarship has insisted on hagiography as a fundamentally oral genre while deeming it unlikely that most hagiography was destined for oral performance in courtly, i.e. aristocratic, settings. See Evelyn Vitz, *Orality and Performance*, 177 and 177 (note), as well as my discussion of Vitz's broader work in the first chapter.

of Romance epic, for the unity of the genre lies to a great degree in our own perception and not necessarily in its inherent characteristics.

A different distinction, however, may be drawn between hagiography and *chanson de geste*, the two most precocious genres of vernacular literature in France, for the divide between the two can be reexamined in terms of culture and class rather than in terms of religion. *Chanson de geste* is, above all, a singularly aristocratic literary genre, focusing nearly exclusively on the penchants, values, and problems of the military aristocracy. While certainly a rich source of information about the contemporary nobility, *chanson de geste* has little to say about the other strata of society, which play supporting roles if any at all. (An 'exception' that comes to mind is in the *Song of Roland*, where the warrior-bishop Turpin wholly shares in the values of the warrior class!) That the genre had a wide audience beyond the aristocracy is very probable, given, for example, the common occurrence of brothers named Olivier and Roland in the Occitan area in the eleventh century.[369] Yet even as Pio Rajna remarked beginning in 1884,[370] to posit *chanson de geste* as a model of popular oral literature remains problematic, given what is known of the dynamics of medieval social class. Analogies – common in certain strains of literary history – with skaldic poetry, the product of a very different sort of society, can only take us so far.

In some ways, the social caste system that developed with the Germanic takeover of the western Roman world would have been without recent precedent in Europe. Though enormous inequality of wealth and status had always marked the social structure of the Roman Empire,[371] and its organization depended on the institution of slavery on a scale without subsequent parallel on the European continent, a degree of social mobility persisted even after the edicts of Diocletian

[369] Michel Zink, *Littérature française du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 91.
[370] Rajna, 362.
[371] Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 159; Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 16-7.

(284-305) by law compelled sons to assume the professions of their fathers: even male freedmen and slaves (eunuchs) could rise to rank and wealth under the imperial regime, and few of the great landowners of the fourth and fifth centuries, such as the Anicii and the Symmachi, could trace their ancestries to the far side of the Crisis of the Third Century. By contrast, the emphasis on lineage that would come to define European aristocracy until even the present day – where any eventual meritocratic inclusivity would be tempered by a distinction between *noblesse de robe* and *noblesse d'épée* to the benefit of the latter – may have had its origins in the attitude of a Germanic elite toward its Roman neighbors.

In the case of Gaul, it is not difficult to trace a connection between Germanic notions of kinship (though our understanding thereof may be unduly influenced by the idealizations of ancient historians[372]), the social distance maintained at first by all of the Germanic ruling classes of the old Western Roman Empire, and the eventual emergence of a strictly hereditary military aristocracy that ostensibly descended in the main from this very elite. Of course, there is not much with which to compare the Gallic situation. Other post-Roman polities of late antiquity – Gothic Spain and Italy, Vandal Africa – certainly attempted to rigidly define a distinction between German and Roman, but in all of these cases the distinction was at least initially reinforced by religious differences (the Goths and Vandals were generally followers of Arian Christianity). The fact that all of these states were overthrown by outside forces – the latter two less than a century after their establishment – further makes it difficult to compare them to what would become France, where a broad institutional and cultural continuity with Rome and orthodox Christianity was maintained. That said, the widespread imposition of legal and social segregation between Goth, Vandal, and Roman points toward the possibility of a similar instinct among the Franks, albeit mitigated in

[372] Constance Brittain Bouchard, 68-9.

practice by confessional unity with the Gallo-Roman population. The fact that so many of the episcopal seats in Gaul were taken up by members of the senatorial aristocracy, a fact repeatedly highlighted by historians describing the shift from imperial Roman forms of civic governance to a system in which the Church began to exercise greater secular authority, also hints that this may have been the only way, aside from land ownership, for the old Roman elites to retain a social position at least comparable to the one that they had enjoyed under the Empire.[373]

This distinction comes through in the relationship that emerges from the *vitae* between the secular powers, dominated by the Franks, and the clergy, whose hierarchy drew on Franks and Gallo-Romans alike. Keeping in mind that these texts were written by representatives of the Church in order to advance its interests, one can take their claims regarding their own political influence with a grain of salt and accept Jaimie Kreiner's opinion that the bishops of Gaul could have only limited access to royal ears.[374] Though the bishops' elite status was legally assured – the Lex Ripuaria, for one, set their wergild higher than that of the king's retainers[375] – a distinction of class is palpable in the sources. Kreiner describes in detail the development of the Gallic bishops' role as 'protectors of the poor' in a society where the nobility did not necessarily feel a responsibility to take into account the interests of their subjects. A more socially responsible attitude would gradually be cultivated and encouraged by the Church as part of its image of the ideal social order, as evidenced by the shifting meaning of the term *populus* in early medieval texts: where in some sources it seems to refer exclusively to Frankish nobles, one sees a progressive broadening of its meaning to encompass more categories of the realm's inhabitants,

[373] See Mathisen, 89-104, 136-9 (on the Church as a new locus of influence for Gaul's Roman aristocrats); 30-1, 144-5 (on land ownership and social status).
[374] Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 166.
[375] Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 177.

which Kreiner takes as an attempt to widen the circle of interests deemed politically legitimate.[376] The definition of 'Frank,' and notions of who could be considered a 'Frank,' also evolved and shifted, though the term's corresponding meanings of 'free' and 'honest' indicate that it could not encompass the entirety of the population.

While the initial arrangement whereby 'Franks' were legally set as a class apart from 'Romans' lost meaning and acuity with time, it persisted *de facto* through the aloof and exclusive nature of aristocratic marriage and the corresponding relative openness of the Church to social mobility. Even the harder forms of distinction did not fade as quickly as one might think – recall Pippin's expedition against the 'Roman' uprising in Aquitaine in the eighth century, and the fact that even Carolingian law still distinguished between the two apparently ethnic categories in some cases.[377] Though they adopted Roman and Christian values and, west of the Rhine, Latin as their everyday tongue, and while elements of their culture also spread to their subjects (thus producing the Roman-Germanic fusion familiar to us from modern historiography), class boundaries meant that those who called themselves 'Franks' would continue to see a distinction of kind between themselves and those living under their authority.

In speaking of a hereditary aristocracy with a quasi-ethnic flavor, I must, of course, be careful to make clear that we are not, in fact, necessarily dealing with a group that was actually as consistently exclusive and pedigreed as its own members might themselves have believed. In her study of medieval aristocratic views of kinship and ancestry, Constance Brittain Bouchard points out that, in the high middle ages, even the most exalted families, who tended to share a common ancestor in Charlemagne, could ultimately trace their genealogy only to that king[378] (who thus

[376] Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography*, 152.
[377] Sarti, 1043; cf. Reimitz, 231; 333-4.
[378] Bouchard, 3.

represented the crucial nexus of their pedigree), while for most noble families, identifiable records went back no farther than the tenth or eleventh centuries.[379] While we may today be missing some of the pieces of the puzzle, this nevertheless hints at a shake-up of structures of identity under the Carolingians, where the old Frankish elite of the Merovingian era, if it retained its power to a large degree, was nonetheless unable to forge a strong sense of independent personal familial history that could bridge the Carolingian revolution and its accompanying reevaluations of what it meant to be a Frank.[380] It is remarkable in this context that the one true institutional continuity of power apart from the monarchy that is discernible today may be found in the episcopacy, for the bishops' list of any given see, studded here and there with stars as visible as Leudegar's, is able to tell us something that aristocratic genealogies cannot.

'Romanity' and 'Frankishness' could also only ever be as exclusive as those who identified with those labels would allow. Under the later Roman Empire, men of barbarian background could achieve the highest of government ranks: at the turn of the fifth century, the half-Vandal general Stilicho had even maneuvered into a position where he expected to see his descendants on the imperial throne. Despite xenophobic suspicions[381] and elitist grumbling from entrenched centers of privilege – similar to that which had accompanied the rise of 'new men' to senatorial rank[382] – 'barbarians' in Roman service such as Arbogast (d. 394), Stilicho (d. 408), and Aetius (d. 454) were not only fully integrated into the Roman system but were also actively engaged in conflicts with the Germanic peoples on the frontiers. Frankish kings in post-imperial Gaul were also initially eager to don the trappings of Roman institutional legitimacy in the form of titles and honors

[379] Bouchard, 17.
[380] Perhaps it is for this reason that no Old French *chanson de geste* looks back further than the time of Charlemagne.
[381] For example, the rumors of treason that eventually led to Stilicho's assassination. See Cameron, 75.
[382] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 98.

bestowed upon them from Constantinople.[383] The divide between Roman and German thus emerges in large part as a matter of self-definition and social delineation, just as the word 'Frank' gradually shifted from designating Germanic groups in the upper Rhine region that were subordinate or hostile to Roman state interests toward indicating full membership and agency (franchise) in the political system of post-Roman Gaul.[384] But as, under the conditions of the time, such agency could never be extended to the majority of the population, the term would never enjoy the same broad application as Roman identity, and thus remained exclusive to those who were able, at various times and under various and sometimes mutually-exclusive paradigms, to consider themselves 'free.' Romanity, meanwhile, had by late antiquity simply meant being an inhabitant of the Roman Empire who identified with its culture to a significant extent. The majority, as well as their language, thus remained 'Roman,' especially in politically subordinate regions like Aquitaine.

What this means for my argument is that, insofar as I have sought to trace the cultural continuities between the Roman and the medieval French worlds, in many cases I can safely admit that such continuity was not to be found in the cultural penchants of the aristocracy, which originated at least in part from an exclusionist identity that established barriers between itself and the majority of the population; this aristocracy was often itself unable to present and transmit to future generations a coherent narrative of its own historical continuity. Instead, it should be sought precisely in genres of cultural production with wider appeal, such as hagiography. In this way, the notion that 'clerical' literature was an exclusive cultural element foreign to the majority will also have to be turned on its head.

[383] Harris, 32; 181.
[384] Sarti, 1042.

If one were to attempt to elucidate a different distinction with regard to audience in medieval literary culture than that proposed between the 'clerical' and the 'secular,' therefore, it could be more logical to see aristocratic genres like *chanson de geste* and, later, courtly lyric as representing a class apart and more narrowly reflecting the interests of elite social circles (the latter genre would express this most blatantly with the form of the *pastourelle* and its frequent overtones of coercion and violence by aristocrats against commoners[385]). Hagiography, on the other hand, both in the form of written texts meant for diffusion through the Church and of poetry to be performed by laymen, had the potential to be for everybody, and since it drew on and appealed to the broadest possible groups of interest, it is there that we can trace the survival of phenomena originally grounded in a Roman reality.

The case of Leudegar of Autun provides a rare surviving example of both a highly developed clerical literary tradition and of a reflection of popular hagiography expressed through oral poetry. Both of these traditions present the bishop as a figure who resisted the injustice of the state in the manner of ancient Roman martyrs such as St Lawrence, peacefully but firmly, by his example swaying even those who had been set against him. But whereas the old martyrs had redeemed Rome by making it Christian – 'iam Roma Christo dedita / Laurentio victrix duce,' in the words of Prudentius[386] – the temporal realm of the Franks, who are already Christian, is not transformed through Leudegar's sacrifice. His victory in death is not definitive, but rather an element of the long-term balancing act that would continue between ruler and ruled, elite and popular, temporal and spiritual, Frank and Roman. As far as we can tell, the *Vie de saint Léger* may well spring from a tradition of oral poetry whose origins, if largely unwritten, are nonetheless recognizably Latin. This hagiographic poetry would represent a bridge of cultural stability from

[385] Edmond Faral, 'La pastourelle,' *Romania* 49, no. 194 (1923), 211.
[386] 'Rome... now given up to Christ, Lawrence has led thee to victory.' *Prudentius*, trans. Thomson, 108-9.

late antiquity to the world of Old French, not by celebrating the outward trappings of a political Romanity (this was rather the preserve of early Merovingian kings), but by focusing on the interests and concerns of the people of Gaul whose language and self-identification remained fairly stable. It was the Church that, in effect, provided a refuge and preserved a degree of political influence for the old Gallo-Roman elite, and it was the Church's propaganda that, as Jamie Kreiner points out, attempted to convince the Frankish rulers to take an interest in the welfare of the mass of their subjects. In this light, it makes sense for the episcopacy to become associated with the sort of persistent undercurrent of medieval Romanity that I have been discussing throughout this project, and for hagiography to have become its primary mode of literary expression.

# Conclusion

Final remarks

The preceding dissertation represents an attempt to give concrete meaning to the term of 'cultural continuity' with respect to late antiquity and the medieval era of Old French literature. This term has often been invoked in recent years to describe the passage from the ancient to the medieval worlds, but rarely in specific terms – even though its general sense is present in every scholarly and popular work that stretches the 'middle ages' from 300 CE to 1500 and even beyond. Here, I have tried to free the concept of cultural continuity from some of this uncertainty, in part by seeking discernible links capable of connecting various stages of the high medieval (c. 1000-1300) francophone world to that of late antique Rome. It was apparent that cultural continuity could only be defined based on expressions of identity, of how medieval Francophones would have understood their own relationship with the past. In this fashion the main axes of this dissertation, which has sought to elucidate the ways in which such an identity might be traced, took shape. These themes, which frequently feed into and overlap with one another and play roles of varying magnitude in each of the cases that I have explored, include medieval cultural memory, vernacular oral tradition, the differentiation of Latin from the vernacular, and the notion of antique-medieval continuity itself. Each of these concepts may have once seemed too hazy to serve as a support for scholarship, but each was, in the twentieth century, theorized on the basis of enough concrete evidence and examples as to render them useful analytical tools. Thanks to the work of Jan Assmann, Albert Lord, Roger Wright, Peter Brown, and their colleagues, we may now draw conclusions and suggest answers with greater confidence and plausibility than before. Having attempted to do just this, I will now recapitulate my findings and attempt to draw from them some broader conclusions.

Notably, I have put forth some possible reasons as to why vernacular hagiography in particular can provide us with the best evidence for a shared Latin European identity traceable back to the time of the Roman Empire, when the Latin-speaking denizens of western Europe considered themselves to be Romans. This sense of identity would not have disappeared just because a new elite that called itself Frankish or Gothic or Burgundian had taken over the Roman state's monopoly on violence in Gaul; indeed, Franks and Goths and Burgundians had already been a presence, progressively less and less marginal, in Gallic politics for centuries. There was no real seismic shift in terms of language and culture, for the Latin language and its letters continued to dominate and command prestige in each of the new Western states, and the fact that our chronicles refer to the Frankish kingdom's 'Roman' subjects well into the Carolingian period can only indicate a bedrock of Romanity that was largely immune to the influence of a feuding 'Germanic' elite preoccupied with internal concerns. At the same time, insofar as such an identity could have maintained and propagated itself through the centuries after the Roman Empire lost its grip on Western Europe, it would need institutions and cultural mechanisms that could preserve and foster a notion of 'we' binding people together in the present and connecting the developing medieval present to the Roman past.

That the Catholic Church had taken up this role is not a new notion. The concept of the noble-bishop, the Gallo-Roman senatorial aristocrat who sought high ecclesiastical rank where his predecessors had joined the Roman civil service, reflects the fact the Church became a repository of institutional and cultural Roman identity. What has interested me, however, is the fate of the broader, more diffuse identity of the large majority of the population, those whom the chronicles and laws of the Frankish kingdoms persisted in referring to as 'Romans.' Jamie Kreiner has pointed out that bishops took upon themselves the role of protectors of the common people in the face of

the monarchy and the warrior aristocracy,[387] and it is therefore reasonable to suppose that the sociopolitical aspects of being Roman under Frankish rule would have attached themselves in part to the episcopacy and its cultural activities. While the lines between identity groups such as 'Frank' and 'Roman' were never very firm to begin with and would have further blurred with time, such written evidence as we have speaks overwhelmingly for the elites of society. For the majority, which was never fully enfranchised (literally, lifted to 'Frankish' status), the language remained 'Latin' and 'Roman,' while an important locus of political and cultural activity would have been the local church, whose clergy had stepped into the vacuum of political representation. For this reason, hagiography – whether officially approved or not, whether 'clerical' or 'popular' – is the best cultural site in which to look for the survival of Roman identity into the Old French period, better than any other genre. For later periods this is doubly true of vernacular hagiography, which would have a stronger continuity with the oral culture of the Roman populace than the formal written Latin that, according to Roger Wright, had begun to distinguish itself from the common spoken language(s) of France in the ninth century.

The difficulty here lies in the longstanding assumption that 'popular' literature, that is the literature reflecting or representing the concerns, interests, and identity of the broader populace of France, was to be found in epic or *chanson de geste*. Pio Rajna pointed out the problems with such an identification in 1884, but Romance philology, true to its positivist roots, tended to resist the association of markedly religious literature with the interests of the general public. Before the interventions of Alison Goddard Elliott, discussions of oral tradition in Old French literature, even without the benefit of the Parry-Lord thesis, focused mainly on *chanson de geste*. That genre is indeed well-suited to such analysis, and yet its extraordinary focus on the military aristocracy

[387] Jamie Kreiner, 'About the Bishop: The Episcopal Entourage and the Economy of Government in Post-Roman Gaul,' *Speculum* 86, no. 2 (April 2011), 321–2.

makes its relevance across all social strata doubtful. Without exaggerating the harshness and constancy of medieval class systems, it is fair to say that the warrior aristocracy of the Frankish realm policed its own boundaries with zeal, and that its concerns were thus to a significant degree fenced off from those of the majority. Its poetry reflects the exclusivity of these concerns; would this not restrict in some way the audience of such poetry? Though cursory signs, such as trends in personal names and accounts of public performances, point to the wide dissemination of the Roland legend in parts of western Europe, and though *chanson de geste* undoubtedly owes its origins to poetry of the oral-formulaic type, we would do well to join Pio Rajna is doubting that such oral literature was truly *popular*, reflective as it was of the interests and values of an exclusive caste.

The conceptual link between the popular and the epic has been to the detriment of hagiography, which, insofar as it is deemed the product of 'clerical' activity, can be seen as a mere element of the Church's efforts at self-promotion. Now, much hagiography did indeed represent just such propaganda from the earliest centuries of the medieval period: Jamie Kreiner has shown how hagiography claimed and staked out the Church's role in public affairs in part by portraying it as exerting more influence on secular politics than it really did. At the same time, however, one of the ways in which the Church was able to assert the right to such influence was by taking up the patronage of the poor and common people, effectively picking up the baton from the patron-client system that had been central to the functioning of Roman society. By claiming protection of the poor, the bishops of the Merovingian era could claim influence in court, but each of these two claims would depend on the other for legitimacy and persuasive power. In such conditions, hagiography and reality become interwoven to an extent that is difficult to untangle from a present vantage point, though Jamie Kreiner's studies lead the way in doing so.

Of course, to reduce even 'clerical' hagiography to public-relations maneuvers is deeply problematic, but this is not the principal phenomenon that I am considering here. As I have sought out the cultural expressions of a broad undercurrent of Roman identity and its subsequent persistence, which I have dubbed Romanity, through the period of Old French literature, I also looked for the kinds of literature that could be capable of conveying such notions. *Chanson de geste*, with its military-aristocratic penchants and the mysterious Carolingian event horizon of its memory,[388] in effect makes a poor vehicle for the identity of a population that remained Roman in large part insofar as it did not, or could not, become Frankish. One might do better instead by searching for such a vehicle in the literature conceptually associated with an institution that took up many of the administrative functions of the Roman state, that came to play a larger and larger role in providing classical education, that explicitly identified itself as the patron of the common people, and that provided a much broader and more inclusive avenue for upward mobility than did the courts or the war-bands of the nobles. I speak here of the Church as preserving and channeling Roman identity not in any religious or mystical sense, but rather in terms of the concrete institutional and ideological practices of the day, given the unique conditions of the day. It is thus through hagiography that we must seek the expressions of Romanity, and foremost in the hagiographic poetry that can be defined as 'popular.' The works that best exemplify such a poetry are both vernacular and show strong traits of an original orality, in the sense of the oral-formulaic hypothesis of Albert Lord; for such poems, such as the *Vie de saint Alexis* and arguably the *Vie de saint Léger*, we can readily imagine the poetic mechanisms that would facilitate their creation and propagation in an illiterate or para-literate context.

[388] For reasons hinted at by Constance Britain Bouchard in *Those of My Blood*, her study of the medieval French aristocracy, though she does not explicitly mention epic poetry.

These and more explicitly literary (i.e. written) vernacular poems such as the *Vie de saint Laurent* convey a contemporary vision of the dynamic between vernacular and Latin that both emphasizes a sense of continuity between the spoken language of southwestern Europe over the centuries and introduces significant nuance into our picture of the Latin-vernacular dichotomy in the middle ages. In effect, both worked for centuries as parts of a single language system, growing out of a context where they were perceived as a single language; moreover, it was the vernacular that emerged as the primary heir of the language of the Romans, for, from the *M*-version of the *Vie de saint Alexis* to Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, one gets the strong sense of a medieval assumption that the vernacular had always been the spoken language of Latin Europe. In terms of linguistic identity at least, our sources all imply a unity with the inhabitants of the Western Roman Empire, a unity that is emphasized in poems like the *Vie de saint Alexis* that refer to these Roman citizens as 'our ancestors,' with an emphasis on the inclusive 'we.' This language-based identity, combined with the signs of an enduring sub-Roman identity that emerge from arguably oral vernacular poetry, lies at the heart of my case for a popular medieval Romanity that persisted through the thirteenth century. That such an underlying unity would have expressed itself in a rich diversity of local identities, both in the medieval francophone sphere and beyond, points toward further questions about whether this Romanity represents an aspect of broader cultural phenomenon or something unique to post-imperial Europe, and invites further comparison with other eras and regions.

Further steps

From here, I am able to discern several avenues along which I might continue to trace the forms of cultural continuity in the middle ages. The first is indicated by my final chapter, which examined the Merovingian era's role in defining a continuity of culture and identity between late

antiquity and the high middle ages through the lens of the *Vie de saint Léger*. This poem from the very beginning of the history of Old French literature, dealing with a historical figure from the very end of what can reasonably be described as late antiquity, in effect allowed me to use two midpoints on the timeline of late antique-medieval continuity in order to see how the larger phenomena that I have argued for would play out on a more limited chronological scale.

This points toward the little-explored question of the reception and meaning of the Merovingian era in Old French literature. In the same chapter, I listed some of the saints' Lives written in the vernacular language to celebrate the Merovingian Church's heroes, yet these Lives have never been subject to analytical synthesis as a group. In fact, the way by which these hagiographies handle the history of their realm is highly relevant to our understanding of how Francophones at the time perceived their own past, and thus of how they constructed their identities. Given that *chanson de geste* could not see back beyond the time of Charlemagne, these poems are our sole vernacular source for high medieval perceptions of the Merovingian era, and merit dedicated study in that very light.

A second possible direction of inquiry would expand the horizontal scope of the Romanity that I have described here, by looking more at the interactions between the various Romance-language literatures of the high middle ages, from Portugal to England. Especially relevant to this matter is the theme of the Crusades, which usually represented highly international efforts, and thus brought speakers of different Romance dialects into direct sustained contact with one another. The literature of the Outremer, as well as the influence of the Crusades on literature in Europe, all provide a space for the discussion of Latin European self-perception, especially when Latins found themselves confronted with the Other in the form of Muslims and Byzantines. This would also afford me the opportunity to extend my discussion of Romanity to include the literature that took

up the theme of Western Europeans' interactions with the Byzantine world. Here, it would be interesting to follow up on Anthony Kaldellis' continuing study of Roman identity in Byzantium by exploring the way in which Western and Eastern claims, implicit and explicit, to the inheritance of Rome feature in the literature of Frankish-Byzantine contact, from *Le pèlerinage de Charlemagne* to the histories of Geoffroi de Villehardouin and Robert de Clari, to the *Chronicle of Morea*.

In the end, I can hope, through such discussions of cultural continuity, to be able to perceive the tapestry of history – social, literary, and linguistic – as a continuous whole.

## Appendix: The Paris *VSA*

A transcription and translation of the *Vie de saint Alexis* of the Paris manuscript

(BnF fr. 19525 fol. 26v-30v)

Introduction

In preparing this transcription and translation of the Paris manuscript's (MS P or BnF fr. 19525) version of of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, I refer principally to Alfred Foulet's and Mary Blakely Speer's *On Editing Old French Texts*, published in 1979, which remains a reliable guide and the only one of its kind available in English.[389] My other main reference is the manual published by the École nationale des chartes in Paris.[390] The following transcription of the *Vie de saint Alexis* supplies the text upon which I have based my study of the poem in the first chapter of this dissertation; it was initially made possible by a generous grant from the Rare Book School in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The eleventh or twelfth-century poem known as the *Vie de saint Alexis* (*Life of Saint A*lexis) describes the journey toward sainthood of a young man of noble senatorial stock, born in Rome toward the end of the fourth century. His path takes him from his parents' home to the province of Syria and then back again, and in its course he develops a form of asceticism that shocks some and inspires awe in others. This story, of Syrian origin, which made its way to western Europe in the ninth or in the tenth century,[391] does not appear to have any clear historical basis. The Old French poem based on this legend is often presented as one of the oldest surviving significant works of French literature, and is the subject of the first chapter of the present study, in which the poem, its themes, and the manuscripts that preserve it are described in greater detail.

[389] Foulet and Speer, *On Editing Old French Texts*, cited above.
[390] Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, *Conseils pour l'édition des texte médiévaux* (Paris: École nationale des chartes, 2005).
[391] Rösler, 3.

The Paris Manuscript, dated by Patricia Stirnemann to the second quarter of the thirteenth century,[392] has in the past has been considered for comparison in other scholarly editions of the *Vie de saint Alexis* but never before published as such. The broader codex's texts represent, for the most part, a collection of saints' Lives quite similar to that found in the British Museum's MS Egerton 2710, and its version of the *Vie de saint Alexis* is what has been transcribed and edited below. The *Vie de saint Alexis* is presented here as an independent work, without reference to its sister manuscripts except for the one case where the scribe accidentally wrote *Rõme* (verse 191) when another city clearly must be assumed; the name of Tarsus is supplied by the other manuscripts. The writing of the codex as a whole is executed in two Gothic hands, the former of which Stirnemann believes to be continental and the second, insular; the part containing the *Vie de saint Alexis* is written in the first hand. The language appears to be Anglo-French, or perhaps Francian with Anglo-French influences, based on the widespread use of *u* before nasals (i.e. *dunt*, *nun*, *tun*, etc.).

Principles of editing

In general, editions of early medieval vernacular literary works – and these are mainly poems, often anonymous or semi-anonymous, meaning that we know nothing of the supposed author beyond her or his name and an autobiographical scrap – will follow one of two models. One provides what is at heart a transcription of the testimony of a given manuscript, with educated guesses emending obvious or probable corruptions and lacunae. The other method seeks to establish an idealized text based on the ensemble of manuscript variants, weighed and vetted for quality, age, and completeness, variously judged. Under the latter model, the poem is essentially conceived of as an ideal existing independently of the manuscript evidence; the brainchild of a

[392] Stirnemann and Avril, 67.

concrete, if unknown author, it needs an editor to chip and brush away the errors of transmission to reveal the work of art of the author's intent. In this case, there is little distinction made between a work with a named author, even one such as Chrétien de Troyes or Marie de France, of whom next to nothing is known beyond what their texts themselves provide, and a truly anonymous work such as the *Vie de saint Alexis*. In both cases, the editor strives to accede to the author's original words, generally following the same principles of edition as are used for the literature of classical antiquity.

If, however, this methodology is valid for Classics, where even biographically elusive authors such as Lucretius can still be situated in a web of relationships with other historical figures, its universal applicability to medieval literature raises more questions. After all, nearly all premodern European literature has reached us by the exact same process of manuscript transmission, which carefully (though on rare occasion erroneously) attributed the works of Roman authors to specific *auctores* while at the same time ignoring the question of authorship for more contemporary works, with the often-fanciful troubadour *vidas* as the notable exception proving the rule. The very process of the transmission of classical literature points to the problems inherent in applying the methods and goals of textual criticism developed for Classics to medieval literature: while the words of antiquity, charged with *auctoritas*, were meant to be transmitted inviolate, anonymous and quasi-anonymous medieval writing invited contemporary and later *réécriture*, which distorted or garbled the author's voice. In other cases, we have but a name and an epithet for an author, based on which biographical conjectures may be made; and yet, for all intents and purposes, these works, too, are nearly anonymous. In the thirteenth century, it is true, vernacular prose works emerge whose attributions pose less of a problem, thanks in part to the autobiographical details therein contained: the crusaders Villehardouin and Joinville appear before

us in their eyewitness works with no less clarity than does, say, the fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus. But in this regard, they belong rather to the long tradition of historians and philosophers who wrote in Latin before them, with the sole distinction that, by 1204 (when Villehardouin participated in the sack of Constantinople), Romance vernacular had become an acceptable medium for secular prose. When it comes to poetry, with the appropriate exceptions made once again for troubadour (trouvère, Minnesänger, etc.) lyric, the desire to recapture the original, 'authorial' text may be misguided, since, in the case of oral poetry, there is often no real reason to assume that there was such an author (in any useful sense of the term) in the first place. Instead, it is best to proceed on a case-by-case basis, carefully weighing any claims of authorial privilege against the clues provided by the manuscript tradition and the text's influence on later works.

The alternative to the single-author, Ur-text approach to literature is, of course, that of the various theories of oral poetry that emerged from Milman Parry's groundbreaking fieldwork in Yugoslavia during the 1930s. This movement, too, originated in Classics, but had limited effect on the way in which modern scholars perceive figures such as Homer and Hesiod; a variety of opinions on the matter can still be encountered, though the development of the oral-formulaic hypothesis did have the merciful effect of stifling some of the less productive forms of debate about the identity of the poets of the Greek Archaic age (to wit, the persistent urge to attribute the Homeric poems to 'a different poet of the same name'). In addition, the quest for these Ur-texts had already been undertaken by the Hellenistic scholars of Alexandria, and today's classicists are largely content to work with and refer back to the poems as handed down by the Alexandrians and their Byzantine heirs. The guiding notion is now that, until fixed in writing at some point during the Classical period, the Homeric poems' text was rather free-form, being in a sense recomposed

by an oral performer using specific poetic and mnemonic techniques every time that it was sung (as it would have been; cf. Plato's and Aristotle's identification of poetry and music).

After Parry's premature death, his disciple Alfred Lord, in synthesizing his teacher's research, noticed that the oral-formulaic techniques of the Yugoslav bards could be applied beyond the Homeric question, and attempted to describe, among other works, the *Song of Roland* in the same terms. In the 1960s, Joseph Duggan developed a computer-based quantitative method of formulaic analysis that he applied to *chanson de geste*, and, in 1983, Alison Goddard Elliott used this approach on the *Vie de saint Alexis*.[393] Given the mass of evidence for the orality of the *VSA*, which includes multiple differences between the various manuscript texts as well as a chronicle's reference to the poem's performance by a jongleur in Lyon, it would seem that the oral-formulaic theory could indeed provide a far better reflection of the nature of the poem, as well as of other anonymous or semi-anonymous Old French poetry, than any attempt to establish an original, authorial, Platonically ideal text. And since there were no (nor should there have been) medieval French scholars to collate and edit various versions of the poem, we are ultimately left with four manuscripts that testify to different ways in which it must have been sung, then fixed at four different points. Here, the best text is not necessarily the oldest, since any of the four – regardless of the date at which they were fixed and of the orthography featured in the manuscript – could ultimately originate from an 'older' version than the others. In all likelihood, the very earliest versions of the poem little resembled the twelfth-century manifestations that came down to us, just as the latter in turn underwent a number of embellishments and adaptations in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It is certainly impossible, given the degree of variation between the four surviving redactions of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, to construct a stemmatic history of the manuscript

[393] See Lord, Duggan, and Elliott, all cited above.

tradition: the poems, as written down at various points, were simply four differing versions that the four scribes encountered individually.

From this standpoint, all four of the manuscripts are, in principle, equal partners in the transmission of the *Vie de saint Alexis*. It is time, therefore, that the version found in the Paris manuscript – no less complete, as a poem, than that of the Hildesheim manuscript, and a good deal less corrupt than that of the Ashburnham manuscript – received an edition of its own. But in addition to the value of regarding various incarnations of an oral poem in their own right, there are other reasons why the *VSA* of the Paris manuscript deserves to be considered on its own and not just as a source of variant readings for the poem. One of these is that, unlike other recensions, the Paris manuscript's *VSA* reports no miracles on St. Alexis' part other than the handing of his letter to the pope (verses 369-71). This represents a different take on sainthood, and changes the perceived reason for the crowd's enthusiasm for Alexis at the poem's end. Other differences that make the Paris manuscript stand out will be examined in the future on the basis of this edition, which must also, it ought to be admitted, be revised in consultation with the original manuscript in Paris.

Below is a transcription of the Paris manuscript version, as seen in the microfilm image available on the Bibliothèque nationale de France's *Gallica* website;[394] I offer as well my own line-by-line translation into English. At present, my approach to the transcription is extremely conservative: I have stayed faithful to the written word throughout except for the one or two cases where a lacuna or orthographic error were utterly obvious in context. Each verse is realized as a separate line of text throughout the transcription, matching the layout of the manuscript except for verses 269-76, which are written continuously, with each verse ending marked by a *punctus*.

[394] Bibliothèque nationale de France, 'Vies de saints, en français (BnF fr. 19525)' March 12, 2012, *Gallica*, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9062154g.

Following standard editions of the Vulgate, I have also refused to impose any punctuation upon the Old French text, and have only capitalized the first letter of the poem and all proper nouns. I have also expanded all abbreviations, the most common being those regularly used in Latin manuscript texts for *con-*, *qui*, *que*, and *et*, the latter simply expanded to 'e' here since it refers both to the conjunction (*et* in modern French) as well as to an interjection (something like *eh!*). All nasal bars above vowels have been expanded to *-n*. No adjustment has been made for the rules of medieval French poetry; the scribe has elided some vowels and not others, at it is often difficult to tell between implied elision, hiatus, scribal error, and verses that appeal non-metrical on paper but did not in performance. I have added a disambiguating trema above vowels only in cases of utter certainty, such as the past participle *geü* (from *gesir*, 'to lie down'). Textual interpretations, including punctuation, have been reserved for the translation.

*La vie de saint Alexis*

Bons fu li siecles al tens ancienor **(fol. 26v)**
car feiz ert e justise e amor
si ert creance dunt or n'i a nul pro
tot est muez perdue a sa color
ja mais n'iert tel cum fu as anchesors
al tens Noë e al tens Abraam
e al Davi que Deus ama tant
bons fu li siecles jamais n'iert si vaillant
viex est e frailes tot s'en vait declinant
si est enperiez tut bien i vait morant

puis icel tens que Deu nos vint salver
nostre ancesor ourent crestienté
si fu un sire de Rome la cité
riches huem fu e de grant nobilité
por ceo vos di d'un suen fiz voil parler
Eufemien si out à nun li peres
cuens fu de Rome del miex qui dunc ere
dunc prist moillier vaillant e honoree
des plus gentis de tote la contree
puis converserent ensemble longement
que enfant n'ourent poise lor ferment
Deu en apelent parfitement
e reis celestes par tun cunmandement
enfant nos done qui seit à ton talent
tant l'en preierent par bele humilité
que à la moillier dona fecundité

un fiz lor done si l'en sourent bon gré
de saint baptesme l'unt fait regenerer
bel nun lui mistrent selunc crestienté
baptizié fu si out Alix à nun
qui l'out porté volentiers lo norrit
e li bons peres à ecole le mist
tant aprist letres que bien en fu garniz
puis vait li emfes l'empereor servir

quant vit li peres que mais n'ara enfant
mais celui sol k'il ainme tant
dunc se porpense del siecle en avant
e veut k'il prenge moillier à son vivant
dunc li porchace fille a un noble franc
fu la pucele de mult halt parenté
fille à un cunte de Rome la cité

n’a plus d’enfans mult la vout honorer
ensemble en unt li dui pere parlé
lors deus enfanz welent faire asembler
nunment le terme de lor asemblement
quant vint al jor mult le funt gentement
dans Alexis l’esposa vairement
mes de cel plait ne vousist il nient
de tot en tot à Deu a sun talant

quant li jors pase e il fu anoitiez
fiz dist li peres car te va cochier
avoc t’espose al conmant Deu del ciel
ne vout li enfes sun pere corocier
vait à la chambre dreit à sa moillier
quant vit le lit esgarda la pucele
si lui menbre de sun seignor celeste
k’il plus a cier que tote honor terrestre
e Deus dist il si grant pecié m’apresse
se ore ne m’en fui mult criem que ne me perde
quant en la chambre furent tot sol remes
danz Alexiz la prist à apeler
la mortel vie li prist mult à blasmer
de la celestre lui mostra verité
tart li esteit que il s’en fust alé
os tu pucele celui tieng à espous **(fol. 27r)**
qui nos raënst de son sanc precious
en cest siecle n’en a parfite amor
la vie est fraile ni a durable honor
ceste leesce  revert à grant tristor
quant sa raisun lui a tote mostree
dunc lui cunmande la renge de sa espee
e un anel dunt l’out espousee

dunc s’en ist fors de la chambre sun pere
en cele nuit s’en fui de la cuntree
dunc vint erant dreitement à la mer
la nef est preste où il pora entrer
done sun pris e enz s’est aloëz
drecent lor sigle lessent core par mer
là prenent terre où Deu lor vout doner
dreit à Lalice ceo fu une cité mult bele
iloc arive sainement la vacele
dunc en issi fors dans Alexis à terre
mes jeo ne sei cumme lunges i converse
où que il seit de Deu servir ne cesse
puis s’en ala en Axis la cité

por un ymage dunt il oï parler
que angre firent par le conmandement Deu
el nun de la virge qui porta salveté
sainte Marie qui porta Dampnedeu

tot son aveir k'il out o sei porté
si depart que rien ne l'en remist
larges almones par Axis la cité
dona as povres où qu'il les pout trover
por nul aveir ne vout estre encombré
quant sun aveir out à toz departis
entre les povres s'asist danz Alexis
reçut l'aumosne quant Deu la li tramist
tant en reçut dunt sun cors pot garir
se lui remaint as plus povres le rent

ore vendrai al pere e à la mere
e à l'espose qui sole fu remese
quant il ceo sorent que fui s'en ere
ceo fu grant duel par tote la contree
ceo dist li peres bel fiz cum t'ai perdu
respunt la mere lasse que est devenu
ceo dist l'espose pechié le m'a tolu
amis bel sire si poi vos ai eu
ore sui si graime que ne puis estre plus
dunc prent le pere de ses meillors serjanz
par maint païs fait quere sun enfant
desque en Axis en vindrent dui erant
iloc toverent danz Alexis seant
mais ne conurent sun vis ne sun semblant
si out li enfes la tendre char mué
ne'l reconurent li dui serjant sun pere
a lui meisme unt l'almosne donée
il la reçut cumme li altre frere
ne'l reconurent se apres s'en retornerent
ne'l reconurent ne ne l'unt entecié
dans Alexis en loe Deu del ciel
d'ices suens serfs cui il est almosner
i fu lor sire ore est lor provender
ne vos sai dire cunme il se fist liez
cil s'en retornent à Rome la cité
noncent al pere que ne'l pueent trover

se il fu dolenz ne'l estuet demander
la bone mere se prist à dementer
e son chier fiz sovent à regreter

fiz Alexis por quei te porta ta mere **(fol. 27v)**
tu m'es fuiz dolente en fui remese
ne sei le lieu ne sei la cuntree
où te puisse quere tote sui esgaree
ja n'iere mes lie bel fiz non iert ti pere

vint en sa chanbre pleine de marement
si la despoille que n'i remist nient
n'i laissa paile ne nul aornement
à tristor torne sun talent
unc puis cel di ne vesqui liement
chambre dist ele ja mais ne serez paree
ne james leece n'ert en tei demenee
si l'a destruite cum s'el l'eust preee
sacs i fait tendre e cinces de ramees
sa grant onor à grant dolor est tornee
de duel s'asist la mere jus à terre
si fist l'espose danz Alexis acertes
e Deu dist ele mult par ai fait grant perte
des or vivrai en guise de tuertrele
ore n'ei ton fiz ensemble o tei voil estre
respunt la mere s'o mei te vels tenir
gardrai tei por l'amor Alexi
ja n'aras mal dunt te puisse garir
pleignun ensemble le duel de nostre ami
tu por tun seignor je'l ferai por mun fiz
ne puet altre estre metent al consirer
mais la dolor ne pueent oblier

danz Alexis en Axis la cité
sert sun seignor par grant humilité
ses enemis nel pueent enganer
dis e set anz ne fu nient à dire
pena son cors iloc el Deu servise
por amisté d'ami ne d'amie
ne por honor que nul lui ait pramise
ne veut torner tant cum il ait à vivre

quant tot son cuer ja si a torné
que mais son wel n'istra de la cité
Deu fist l'ymage por l'amor de lui parler
al servitor qui servi al alter
ceo li cunmande fai venir l'unme Dei
ceo dist l'ymage fai l'unme Deu venir
enz el mostier car il a deservi
il est dignes d'entrer en paradis

cil vait se'l quiert mes ne'l set choisir
icel saint home de qui l'ymage dist
revint tost à l'ymage el mostier
certes dist il ne sei qui entercier
l'ymage dist cest cil qui lez l'uz siet
pres est de Deu e del regne del ciel
por nul aveir ne se vout esloigner
cil vait si'l quiert fait lei al mostier venir
†ece vous† la novele par tot le païs
que cel ymage parla por alexis
trestuit l'onorent li grant e li petit
e tuit li prient k'il ait de els merci
quant il ceo vit que hum le vout honorer
certes dist il n'i ai mais à ester
de ceste honor ne me voil enconbrer
en une nuit s'en fuit de la cité
dret à Lalice rejoint li suens †orez†

saint Alexis entra en une nef
drescent lor sigle lessent core par mer
e dreit à †Ronme† espeirent ariver
mais aillors lor estuet torner
tot dreit à Rume les porte li orez **(fol. 28r)**
à un des pors qui plus est pres de Rume
iloc arive la nef à cel saint hume
quant <vit> sun regne forment se redote
de ses parenz que ne'l reconeussent
e del honor de'l siecle ne'l enconbrent
e Deus dist il bon reis qui tot governes
s'il te pleust je i ne vousisse estre
s'or me conoissent mi parent d'este terre
il me prendrunt par pri e par poeste
se je's crei tot me torrunt à perte
e neporquant mis peres me desire
si fait ma mere plus que hume qui vive
avoc ices l'espose que ai guerpie
or ne lai mi ne mete en lor baillie
ne me conoistrunt lunc tens a ne me virent

dunt issi de la nef si vait erant à Rume
vait par les rues dunt jadis fu bien cointes
ne un ne altre mes sun pere encuntre
ensemble o lui grant masse de ses homes
si'l apela par sun dreit nun le nunme
Eufemiens beau sires riches huem
herberge mei por Deu en ta maisun

sos ton degré me fai un grabatun
e por ton fiz dunt tu as tel dolor
tot sui enferm si me pais por soue amor
quant oi li peres la clamor de sun fil
plore des oilz ne s'en pout atenir
por Deu amor e por mon chier ami
tot te ferai bons huem quanque m'as quis
lit e hostel e pain e char e vin
e Deu dist il car eusse jeo ore un serjant
qui le me gardast tot le feroie franc
un en i out sempres vint avant
prest sui dist il que'l gart par tun conmant
por vostre amor en sofrirai l'ahan
cil le mena tot dreit sos le degré
fist lui sun lit où il pout reposer
tot li apreste quanque ois li fu asez
vers sun seignor ne veut mesaler
en nule guise ne l'en pout un blasmer

sovent le virent le pere e la mere
e la pucele k'il out espousee
en nule guise unques ne'l aviserent
ne il ne'l dist ne cist ne'l demanderent
q[u]iels hom esteit ne de quel regne il ere
soventes feiz lor vit grant duel demener
e de lors oilz mult tendrement plorer
trestot por li onques nient por el
il les esgarde si'l met el consirer
kar en Deu est tot le suen penser
sos le degré où gist suz une nate
iloc le paist l'um del relef de la table
à grant poverté deduit sun grant barnage
e si ne veut que sis pere le sache
plus ainme Deu que tot son lignage
de la viande que devant lui vint
tant en reçut que son cors en sostint
s'il en remaint si'l rent as asmosniers
ne fist estui por sun cors engresser
mais as plus povres le done à manger
en sainte iglise converse volentiers
chascune feste se fait acumenier
sainte escripture ceo est sun conseillier
de Deu servir le rove esforcier **(fol. 28v)**
danz Alexis ne se vout esloignier
sos le degré où il gist e converse
iloc deduit liement sa poverté

li sers son pere qui la maisnee servent
lors laveures li getent sus la teste
ne se coroce ne il ne's apele
tuit l'escharnissent si'l tienent por bricun
l'eue li getent si moillent sun liçun
ne se corosce icil saintisme huem
ainz prie Deu k'il lor pardunst
par sa merci k'il ne sevent k'il funt

iloc converse issi dis e set anz
ne'l conurent les suens apartenanz
n'est hom en terre qui sace les suens ahans
mais que le lit où il a geü tant
ne'l puet celer cil est aparissant
trente quatre anz a le suen cors pené
Deus sun servise li veut gueredoner
mult li agrege la soue enfermeté
ore set il bien que il s'en deit aler
cel suen serjant a à sei apelé
quier mei bel frere enque e parchemin
e une pane ceo pri toue merci
cil lui aporte e cil l'a coilli
de sei meisme tote la chartre escrist
cum s'en ala e cum s'enfui
triers sei la tint ne la vout demostrer
que ne'l conoissent desqu'il s'en seit alez
parfitement s'est à Deu cunmandez
sa fin aproce sis cors est agrevez
de tot en tot cesse de parler
en la semeine k'il s'en deit aler
vint une voiz treis feiz en la cité
fors del sacraire cum Deu l'a conmandé
ki ses feels a à sei enviez
preste est la gloire qu'il leur veut doner
al altre voiz lor fist une semunse
ke le home Deu quier gent qui gist en Rume
si lui deprient que la cité ne funde
ne ne perisse la gent qui ens fregunde
qui l'unt oï remaignent en grant dote
saint Innocent ert donc apostoile
à lui vienent e li riche e li povre
si lui requierent conseil de ceste chose
k'il unt oï qui mult les descunforte
ne gardent l'ore que terre les asorbe
li apostoiles e li empereour
li uns Akaries li altre Honorie out nun

trestot li pueples par comune oreisun
deprient Deu que conseil lor en donst
de cel saint home par qui il garunt
ceo li deprient par sa grant pieté
que lor enseint où le porunt trover
vint une voiz qui lor a endité
à la maisun Eufemien querez
car iloc est e là le troverez

tout s'en retornent sus danz Eufemien
alquant le prenent à blastengier
iceste chose nos deussies nuncier
à tot le poeple qui ert desconseilliez
tant l'as chelé mult en as grant pechiez
il s'escondit cum cil qui ne'l set
mais ne'l en creient al ostel sunt alez
il vait avant la maisun aprester **(fol. 29r)**
forment l'enquiert a toz ses menesterez
e il respunent que nul de els ne'l set
li apostoiles e li empereours
sieent es banz pensis e coroçous
il les esgardent tuit cil altre seignor
deprient Deu que consiel lor en doinst
de cele chose dunt si desiros sunt
e tant dementres cum il unt iloc sis
deseivre l'alme del cors saint Alexis
dreitement en vait en paradis
à son seignor k'il aveit servi
Deu rei celestes là nos fai parvenir
le bon serjant qui le serveit volontiers
il l'a nuncié à danz Eufemiens
soef l'apele si li a conseillié
sire dist il mort est tis provendiers
e ceo sei dire k'il fu bons crestiens
mult longement ai o lui conversé
de nule chose certes ne'l sai blasmer
e mei est vis k'il est home Deu
tot sol s'en est Eufemiens tornez
vient à sun fiz où gist sos les degréz
le drap soslieve dunt il esteit covert
vit del saint home le viz e cler e bel
tient en sun poing la chartre le Deu serf
où a scrit trestot le suen convers
Eufemien veut saveir que ceo espialt
il la vout prendre cil ne li vout guerpir

à l’apostoile revint tot esbahiz
ore ai trové ceo que tant avum quiz
sos mun degré gist uns mors pelerinz
tient une chartre mais ne li puis tolir
li apostoile e li enpereour
vindrent avant e firent oreisuns
mistrent lors cors en grans aflictiuns
merci funt il por Deu saintisme hom
ne te coneusmes n’encor ne conoissun
ci devant tei estent dui pecheor
par la Deu grace vouchié empereour
ceo est sa merci qu’il nos consent l’onour
de tot cest mund summes governeor
de ton conseil sunmes mult besoignos
cist apostoiles des almes a baillie
ceo est sis mestiers dunt il a à servir
done li la chartre par la toue merci
ceo nos dira k’il trovera escrit
e ceo nos doinst Deus que or li puissuns plaisir

li apostoiles tent sa main à la chartre
danz Alexis la soue li alasche
lui la consent qui de Rome ert pape
mais ne la list ne dedens n’esgarde
avant la tent à un clerc bon e sage
li chanceliers à qui li mestiers en ere
cil list la chartre li altre l’escoterent
de icele gemme que iloc unt trovee
lor dist le nun del pere e de la mere
e ceo lor dist de quieus parenz il ere
e ceo lor dist cum il s’enfui par mere
e cum en ala en Auxis la cité
e cum Deus fist l’ymage por lui parler
e por l’onor dunt ne se volt encombrer
s’en refui à Rome la cité

quant ot le pere ceo que dist en la chartre
a ses deus mains detrait sa blanche barbe **(fol. 29v)**
e fiz dist il cum doleros mesages
vif atendoie que à mei repairasses
par Deu merci que tu me confortasses
à halte voiz prist le pere à crier
fiz Alexis quel duel m’est presentez
malveise garde t’ei fait sos mes degrez
alas pechable tant par sui avoglez
tant t’ai veu si ne te pui aviser

fiz Alexis de ta dolente mere
mainte dolor a por tei enduree
e tantes lermes a por ton cors plorees
cist dels l'ara enqui par tuee
e fiz qui ierent mes granz heritez
mes larges terres dunt jeo aveie asez
mes granz paleis en Rome la citez
e por tei fiz m'en esteie penez
puis mun deces en fussiez honorez
blanc ai le chief e la barbe chanue
ma grant honor aveie retenue
por tei fiz mais n'en aveies cure
si grant dolor m'est ui aparue
fiz la toue alme seit al ciel asolue
tei convenist halberc broigne à porter
espee ceindre cunme ti altre per
ta grant maisnie deusses governer
le gunfanun al enpereor porter
cumme fist tis peres e li altre per
à tels dolors e à si granz povertés
estes deduit par alienes terres
ices granz biens qui tuens deussent estre
ne vousis prendre ainz amas poverté
s'il te pleust sire en deusses estre
de la dolor que demena le pere

grant fu la noise si l'entendi la mere
là vint corant cumme femme forsenee
batant ses palmes criant eschevelee
vit mort son fiz à terre chet pasmee
ki dunt lui veist sun grant duel demener
son piz debatre e son cors degeter
son vis derunpre ses chevels detirer
e son fiz mort acoler e baisier
n'i out si dur k'il n'esteust plorer
trait ses cheveus e debat sa poitrine
à doel demeine la soue char meisme
e fiz fait ele cunme m'avez haïe
e jeo pechable cunme par sui avogle
ne te conui plus que unc ne te veisse
plore des oilz e gete mult grans cris
apres le regrete mal te portei bel fiz
e de ta mere n'en aveies merci
por tei veez desir à morir
ja est merveille cum je'l puis sofrir
ohi lasse mere cum ai forte aventure

ci vei morte tote ma porteure
ma longe atante m'est à grant duel venue
que porai faire dolente creature
ceo est merveille que li mien cuer tant dure
fiz Alexis mult eus dur corage
quant adosas trestot ton lignage
se une feis uncore parlasses
ta lasse mere que la recunfortasses
que si est graime chier fiz bon i levasses
fiz Alexis de la toue char tendre
à tel dolor as dedui ta jovente[395] **(fol. 30r)**
por quei t'eusse jeo porté de mon ventre
e Deu le set or sui jeo mult dolente
jamais n'iere lie por home ne por femme
ains que te eusse fui mult desirose
ains que te veisse mult par fui angoissose
puis que fus nez si fui jeo mult joiouse
ceo peise mei que ma fin tant dure
seignors de Rome por amor Deu merci
aidiés mei à plaindre le duel de mun ami
granz est li dels qui sus mei est vertiz
ne puis tant faire que mis cuers seit saziz
il n'est merveille n'ai mes fille ne fiz

entre le duel del pere e de la mere
es vos la pucele k'il out esposee
sire dist ele cumme lunge demoree
t'ai atendu en la maisun tun pere
tu me lessas dolente e egaree
sire Alexis tanz jors t'ai desiree
e tantes lermes por ton cors ploré
e tant sovent por tei en loins esgardé
se revendreies t'espose conforter
e chiers amis de ta jovente bele
cum ore sui graime que ore porira en terre
e gentil home cunme dolente puis estre
jeo atendoie de tei bones noveles
mois or les vei mult dures e pesmes
ohi bele chose bel vis bele faiture
cunme vei mué vostre bele figure
plus vos aveie cier que nule creature
si grant dolor m'est ui aparue

[395] char tendre[ac]

miex me venist que morte fusse
se jeo vos seusse sos le degré
où as geü en grant enfermeté
n'est home qui vive qui m'eust trestorné
qu'ensemble o tei n'eusse conversé
s'il me l'eust si t'eusse gardé
ore par sui vaive sire ceo dist la pucele
jamais leece n'arei charnel en terre
ne charnel home n'arei car ne puet estre
Deu servirai le rei qui tot governe
ne me faldra s'il veit que je'l serve

le pere e la mere tant i plorerent
e la pucele que tot s'en alasserent
e tandementres le saint cors apresterent
tuit cil signor mult bel le conduierent
cunme felix sunt icil qui par fei l'onorerent
seignors que faites ceo dist l'apostoile
que nos valt cist dels ne ceste noise
à qui il est duel à nos est il gloire
car par cestui arun nos bon ajutoire
ceo proiun que por Deu nos asoille
trestuit le prenent qui i pourent avenir
chantant enportent le cors saint Alexis
e ceo lui prient k'il ait de els merci
n'estut somundre cels qui l'unt oï
tuit i acorent nis li enfant petit
si se conmurent tote la gent de Rome
plus tost i vunt qui plus i pout core
parmi les rues en menent si grans torbes
ne reis ne cuens ne pout faire rote
ne le saint cors ne pout passer outre
entre els prenent ci seignor à parler
grant est la presse ni porun mie paser **(fol. 30v)**
por cest saint cors que Deu nos a doné
liez est li pople qui tant l'a desiré
ceo dient tuit nos ne volun torner
cil en respundent qui l'empire baillirent
merci seignors nos en querun mecine
de nostre aveir ferun grant departie
la gent menue qui l'almosne desire
quant ceo verunt tost en serunt delivré
de lor tresor prenent l'or e l'argent
si funt geter devant la povre gent
par ceo quident aveir desconbrement
de quanqu'il getent cil ne'l volent nient

à cel saint cors ont torné lor talent
à une voiz crie la gent menue
de cest aveir n'avun nos cure
si grant leece nos est aparue
de cest saint cors où avun nostre aïue

saint Boniface que l'un martir apele
aveit à Rome une iglise mult bele
iloc aportent saint Alexis acertes
trestot souef le poserent à terre
felix est li lieus où le saint cors converse
la gent de Rome qui tant l'out desiré
set jors le tienent sus terre à poësté
plore li poples de Rome la cité
de totes pars l'unt si aviruné
que ains unques i pout l'um adeser
al setime jor fu faite la herbege
à cel saint cors a la gemme celeste
ensus se traient si alasche la presse
voillent ou nun se'l lessent metre en terre
ceo lor peise mais ne pout altre estre
d'or e d'argent fu cist sarcuz parez
por cel saint cors qui ens deit reposer
en terre le maitent n'iert mes trestorné
plore li poples de Rome la cité
tuit i acourent n'en veut nul retorner
à enchensiers e à orins chandelabres
clercs revestuz en albes e en chapes
metent le cors en son sarcu de marbre
auquans i chantent e auquans lermes i espandent
ja lor voil de lui ne desevrassent
sus terre ne pueent mais tenir
voillent ou nun se'l lessent enfoïr
pristrent congié al cors saint Alexi
e sire pere de nos aies merci
al tuen seignor nos soies plaidis
vait s'en li pueples e le pere e la mere
e la pucele k'il out espousee
ensemble furent tant que à Deu s'en alerent
lor compaignie fu bele e honoree
par cel saint homme sunt lors almes salvees

saint Alexis est el ciel sains dotance
ensemble o Deu en la compaignie as angres
mult servi Deu de bone volenté
por ceo est ore el ciel coroné

le cors gist en Rome la cité
e l’ame en est el saint paradis Dé
aiun seignors cest saint homme en memoire
si lui priun que de tot mal nos toille
e en ces siecle nos donst pais e concorde
e en l’altre parmanable gloire
que là poisun venir nos donst Deus ajutoire
e encontre deable e ses engins vitoire

*The Life of St Alexis*

Good was the world in the olden days,
for there were faith and justice and love
and there was belief, of which there is no more:
all has changed and has lost its color,
no more shall it be as it was for our ancestors.
In the time of Noah and in the time of Abraham,
and of David, whom God loved so greatly,
the world was good; no more will it be so virtuous.
It is old and fragile, everything proceeds to its decline;
it has so worsened that all good goes dying.

After that time when God came to save us
our ancestors received Christianity,
and there was a certain lord in the city of Rome:
he was a rich man and of great nobility
(I tell you this because I wish to speak of his son).
Euphemian, thus was the father named;
he was a count of Rome of the best that then were,
so he took a virtuous and honorable wife
from among the most well-born of the entire province.
Then they spent a long time together;
that they had no child weighed on them strongly.
They called upon God perfectly:
'oh heavenly king, by your commandment
give us a child according you your wishes.'
They prayed for it so much with goodly humility
that he granted fertility to the wife.

He gives them a son, and they found out with gratitude
they had him reborn through holy baptism,
they gave him a good name in the Christian custom:
He was baptized and got Alexis for a name.
the one who bore him nursed him willingly,
and the good father sent him to school.
He learned letters so well that he was well adorned with them;
then the child goes to serve the emperor.

When the father saw that he will have no more children
but the one that he loves so much,
he then puts his mind to the next generation,
and wants him to take a wife while he is still alive:
therefore he secures for him the daughter of an honest noble.
The girl was of high birth,
the daughter of a count of the city of Rome:

he has no other children and wishes to honor her greatly.
The two fathers spoke together:
they wish to join their two children,
they name the date of their union.
When the day arrived they did so with great dignity;
lord Alexis married her in truth,
but he would have liked to have nothing to do with it:
all in all his will is turned to God.

When the day passes and night arrived
'son,' said the father, 'now go to bed
with your wife by the command of the heavenly God'
the son does not want to upset his father,
he goes to the bedroom straight to his wife.
When he saw the bed, he looked at the girl,
and it reminds him of his heavenly lord
whom he holds dearer than any earthly honor.
'Oh God,' he said, 'such great sin presses on me:
if I do not flee now, I fear greatly that I will be lost.'
When they were left all alone in the bedroom,
lord Alexis began to address her,
he began to denounce mortal life very much,
he showed her the truth of life in heaven.
It was high time for him to depart.
'Hear me you, girl: hold him to be your husband
who redeemed us by his precious blood.
In this world there is no perfect love,
life is fragile, there is no lasting honor:
this joy reverts to great sadness.'
Now that he has made his thoughts clear to her,
he entrusts to her his sword-ring
and a ring with which he had married her.

Then he went out of his father's halls;
that night he fled the province,
and so he came wandering right to the sea.
The boat that he may board is ready,
he hands over his fare and has paid his way aboard.
They unfurl their sail and let it run across the sea;
they land where God will grant it to them,
right at Laodicea (this was a very fine city);
the vessel arrives safely there,
and lord Alexis then stepped out onto land.
Yet I know not how long he stayed there:
wherever he is, he does not cease serving God.
Then he left for the city of Edessa

for the sake of an icon of which he had heard talk
that angels made by God's command
in the name of the virgin who bore salvation,
holy Mary who bore the Lord God.

All of his belongings that he had brought with him
he hands out so that none of it remains:
generous alms throughout the city of Edessa
he gave to the poor wherever he could find them:
he did not want to be burdened with any wealth.
When he had handed away his wealth to all,
lord Alexis sat down among the poor.
He received alms when God granted them to him,
he accepted as much as could sustain his body,
if anything is left he gives it to poorer folk.

Now I will return to his father and his mother
and to his wife who was left all alone.
When they found out that he had fled,
this was of great sorrow to the whole region.
Their father said, 'dear son, how have I lost you?'
The mother adds, 'poor me, what has become of him?'
The wife says, 'sin has taken him from me;
my friend, my dear lord, I had you for so short a time;
now I am so sad that I could not be sadder.'
Then the father chooses some of his best servants,
has them search for his son through many lands,
until two of them came wandering to Edessa.

There they found lord Alexis seated,
but did not recognize his face nor his appearance,
so much had the boy changed his gentle aspect.
His father's two servants did not recognize him,
they even gave him alms.
He received them like the other brothers;
they did not recognize him, afterwards they departed.
They did not recognize him, nor did they notice him.
Lord Alexis thanks God in heaven for it,
for these servants of his whose alms he has received.
He was their master, now he is their dependent:
I cannot tell you how happy this makes him.
The two return to the city of Rome,
announce to the father that they are unable to find him.

It is pointless to ask if this grieved him;
the good mother took to lamenting

and mourning her dear son over and over:
‘Alexis, my son, why did your mother bear you?
You have fled from me, and I have been left distraught.
I do not know the place or the land
where I might seek you, I am completely abandoned;
never again will I be happy, nor will your father.

She came into his room, afflicted with grief,
and so wrecks it that nothing there was left:
she left not a straw nor any decoration.
She turns her will to melancholy,
never after that day did she live joyfully.
‘Room,’ she says, ‘nevermore will you be adorned
nor will joy ever reside in you.’
She has destroyed it as if it had taken him from her,
she has sackcloth and rags strung from the beams there;
her great pride has turned to heavy grief.
With sorrow the mother sits down upon the ground,
and just so did the wife of lord Alexis:
‘oh God,’ she said, ‘I have suffered loss in many ways:
from now I will live in the manner of a dove.
Now that I do not have your son, I wish to be together with you.’
The mother responds, ‘if you want to stay by my side,
I will keep you for love of Alexis:
you will suffer no evil that I might save you from.
Let us mourn together the loss of our friend,
you for your lord, I will do so for my son.’
It cannot be otherwise; they take to consoling each other,
but they cannot forget their grief.

Lord Alexis in the city of Edessa
serves his Lord in great humility,
his enemies cannot deceive him.
For seventeen years there was nothing to say:
he mortified his body there in God’s service.
For the friendship of man or woman,
nor for any honor that anyone might have promised him,
he will not desist for however long he has left to live.

When he has already thus set his whole heart
that no more, by his will, shall he leave the city,
God made the icon speak for love of him
to the servant who served at the altar.
He commands him this: make the man of God appear.
So said the icon, ‘bring the man of God
into the church, for he has earned his reward,

he is worthy of entrance to paradise.'
The man goes and looks for him but knows not how to pick him out,
this holy man of whom the icon spoke;
soon he comes back to the icon in the church.
'Truly,' he said, 'I do not know whom to mark.'
The icon said, 'him who sits by the door.
He is close to God and to the kingdom of heaven,
for no possession will he distance himself from it.'
The man goes and seeks him and brings him to the church.
Now, behold, the news spreads throughout the whole land
That this icon spoke because of Alexis.
Everyone honors him, the great and the small,
and all pray that he have mercy on them.
When he sees this, that they want to honor him,
'truly,' he said, 'I have no more reason to stay:
I do not want to burden myself with this honor.'
One night, he flees from the city,
right to Laodicea; he rejoins his wind.

Saint Alexis boarded a boat;
they unfurl their sail and let it run across the sea,
and they hope to arrive right at Tarsus,[396]
but they were fated to head elsewhere.
Straight to Rome the wind bears them,
to one of the ports that is closest to Rome;
there this holy man's boat makes land.
When he <saw> his homeland he becomes very fearful
of his parents, lest they recognize him
and burden him with the honor of this world.
'Oh God,' he says, 'good king who rules all,
if it pleased you, I would not want to be here:
if now my parents of this earth recognize me,
they will take me by plea and by force,
and if I trust them, they will lead me to my doom.
And nevertheless my father longs for me,
so does my mother, more than anyone alive,
with them the wife that I have abandoned.
Now do not abandon me nor put me in their power;
they'll not recognize me, it's been a long time since they saw me.'

Then he stepped off the boat and goes wandering to Rome,
goes by the streets with which he was once well acquainted.
He runs into none other than his father,
together with him a great crowd of his followers,
and he called to him, he names him by his true name.

[396] MS: *Ronme*, an obvious scribal error. Tarsus is drawn from the other manuscripts.

‘Euphemian, noble lord, wealthy man,
shelter me, for the sake of God, in your house:
under your stairs lay out a bed for me,
and for your son for whom you mourn so much.
I am all weak: feed me for love of him.’
When the father heard the cry of his son,
he cries from his eyes, he could not restrain himself.
‘For the love of God and for my dear friend,
for you, good man, I will do all that you asked of me:
a bed and a home and food and wine.
By God,’ said he, ‘would that I now had a servant
who would keep him for me: for this, I will make him free.’
There was one there who immediately came forward:
‘I am ready,’ he said, ‘to take care of him by your order.
For love of you I will suffer this burden.’
The man led him right under the stairs,
made his bed for him where he could rest,
makes all that is needed ready; there was enough for him.
He does not wish to transgress before his master;
in no way could one find fault with him for it.

Often his father and his mother saw him,
as did the girl that he had married.
In no way did they ever take notice of him,
nor did he tell them, nor did they ask him,
whose man he was nor from what land he came.
Many times he saw them mourning greatly,
and shedding tears tenderly from their eyes,
entirely from him, never anything for themselves;
he looks at them and withdraws into himself,
for all his thoughts are for God.
Under the stairs, where he lies on a mat,
there he is fed with scraps from the table,
he subjects his noble self to great poverty,
and so does not wish that his father should know:
he loves God more than all his family.
Of the food that came before him
he accepted as much as would sustain his body;
and if any was left, he would give it to the beggars.
He kept no hoard to fatten his body,
but gave to eat to the poorer folk.
Willingly he spends time in the holy church,
takes communion at every feast.
Holy scripture – this is his counselor;
he prays to God to strengthen him in his service.
Lord Alexis does not want to leave from

under the stairs where he lies and meditates;
there he happily lives in poverty.
His father's servants who serve the household
toss their dishwater upon his head;
he does not get upset nor does he berate them;
they all mock him and hold him for a fool,
they throw water on him and soak his bedding.
This most holy man does not get angry,
but he prays to God that he pardon them,
by his mercy, since they know not what they do.

There he stays in this way for seventeen years;
his household did not recognize him,
there is no one on earth who knows his trials,
but the bed where he lay for so long.
He cannot hide it, this is apparent:
for thirty-four years he has punished his body;
God wishes to reward his service.
His infirmity pains him greatly,
now he knows well that he must depart.
He has called that servant of his to him:
'good brother, bring me ink and parchment
and a pen; I ask you this favor.'
He brings them to him, and the latter takes them.
He wrote the whole account of himself,
how he left and how he fled;
he held it close and did not want to show it,
that they might not know until he had gone.
He has entrusted himself entirely to God;
his end draws near and his body labors,
he stops speaking entirely.
During the week in which he must depart
there sounded a voice three times in the city,
from the tabernacle, as God has commanded it,
that called his faithful to itself:
at hand is the glory that he wants to give them.
By the second voice he gave them an injunction,
that the people seek the man of God who lies in Rome,
and ask him that the city not fall,
nor perish the people who live inside;
those who had heard it are greatly worried.
Saint Innocent was pope at the time;
the rich and the poor come to him,
and seek his counsel about this matter:
what they have heard troubles them greatly
(they look not to the hour when the earth will claim them).

The pope and the emperors
(the one – Arcadius, the other named Honorius),
all of the people by a joint prayer,
pray to God that he give them guidance
concerning this holy man who is their guarantee.
They prayed this of him that by his great virtue
he instruct them where they will find him.
There came a voice that instructed them:
'seek him at Euphemian's house,
for he is there and there you will find him.'

All turned upon lord Euphemian,
some took to berating him:
'you should have made this matter known to us,
to all the people who were at a great loss;
you have hidden him for so long, this is a great sin on you.'
He excused himself as one who does not know,
but they do not believe him and have gone to his residence.
He goes ahead to ready his house,
he forcefully asks all of his servants about him,
and they respond that none of them know him.
The pope and the emperors
sit in their council-chamber thoughtful and worried.
They observe them, all of those other lords,
they pray God that he give them guidance
for this matter which presses them so greatly.
And meanwhile, while they sat there,
the soul took leave of the body of Saint Alexis,
from there it goes directly to paradise
to his lord, whom he had served
(God, heavenly king, bring us there, too!)
The good servant who served him willingly,
he has announced it to lord Euphemian,
gently he calls him, has advised him thus:
'lord,' he said, 'your client has died,
and I know enough to say that he was a good Christian.
For very long I have spent time with him,
and, truly, I can find fault with him for nothing at all:
it is clear to me that he is a man of God.'
Euphemian went away all alone,
comes to his son where he lies under the stairs,
raises the blanket with which he was covered,
saw the bright and lovely face of the holy man.
God's servant holds in his fist the document
in which he has written all of his thoughts.
Euphemian wants to know what it says:

he tried to take it, but the other would not give it up.

He comes back to the pope in amazement:
'now I have found that which we have so sought:
under my stairs lies a dead pilgrim,
he holds a document, but I could not take it from him.'
The pope and the emperor
came forward and said prayers,
they subjected their bodies to great discomfort:
'thanks be,' they say, 'for the most holy man of God.
We did not recognize you nor do we yet know you.
Here before you stand two sinners,
by the grace of God appointed emperors,
it is by his mercy that he granted us the honor.
Of this whole world we are the governors:
of your guidance we are in great need.
This bishop has power over souls,
that is his calling that he must carry out.
Give him the document by your mercy:
he will tell us what he finds written inside.
And may God grant that now we might please him.'

The pope reaches his hand out for the letter,
lord Alexis lifts his own hand in reply,
he grants it to him who was pope of Rome.
But he does not read it nor does he look inside:
he hands it over to a good and wise priest,
the secretary whose duty it was.
This one read the document and the others listened,
from this treasure that they found there.
He told them the name of the father and the mother
and he told them of what family he was,
and he told them how he fled by sea,
and how he came thence to the city of Edessa,
and how God made the icon speak for him,
and because of the honor with which he did not want to be burdened
he fled thence back again to the city of Rome.

When the father heard what was said in the letter
with both his hands he tears his white beard.
'Oh son,' he said, 'what grievous news!
I waited for you to return to me alive,
by God's mercy, that you might comfort me.'
The father began to cry out loud,
'my son Alexis, what sorrow has been granted me;
I took ill care of you beneath my stairs.

Alas, I am sinful, how I have been blind!
How often I saw you and could not notice you!
Alexis, son of your wretched mother;
she has endured much pain for your sake,
and she has cried so many tears for your life:
this grief will have killed her on the spot.
Oh my son, to whom will go my great inheritance,
my vast estates of which I had so many,
my great palaces in the city of Rome?
And for you, my son, I had labored,
after my death you would have been honored with them.
My hair is white and my beard is grey,
I had maintained my great status
for you, my son, but it did not concern you.
such great pain has come to me today!
My son, your soul will be redeemed in heaven.
You should have had a studded breastplate to wear,
a sword to carry like your other peers.
You should have governed your great household,
borne the emperor's standard,
as did your father and the other peers!
To such pain and to such misery
have you been reduced in foreign lands?
These great possessions that should have been yours
you did not want to take, but rather loved poverty.
If you had wanted, you should have been their lord.'

From the lamentation that the father carried on,
the noise was so great that the mother heard him.
She came there running like a madwoman
smacking her hands, crying, disheveled,
she saw her son dead on the ground, she falls, faint;
of those who then saw her mourn her great grief,
beat her chest and convulse her body,
scratch at her face and tear her hair,
and embrace and kiss her dead son,
there was none so hard as not be led to weep.
She tears her hair and beats at her chest,
and expresses her grief upon her very flesh.
'Oh son,' she says, 'how you have hated me,
and sinful me, how I have been blind!
I recognized you no more than if I had never seen you.'
She cries from her eyes and lets out great sobs,
then mourns him: 'in vain did I bear you, good son,
and for your mother you had no pity.
Because of you, you see, I wish to die:

it is a wonder how I am able to bear it.
Oh, poor mother, what a terrible fate!
Here I see my whole inheritance lie dead,
my long wait has come to great sorrow.
What can I do, wretched creature?
It is a wonder that my heart has lasted so long.
Alexis, my son, you have had such a hard heart,
when you turned your back on your whole family!
If just one more time you had spoken
to your poor mother, to comfort her
who is so sad, you would have done good.
My son Alexis, from your gentle body,
to such pain have you reduced your youth.
why would I have borne you from my womb?
And God knows, no I am greatly saddened,
never will I be glad for any man or woman.
Before I had you, I was so desirous;
before I saw you, I was so anxious;
after you were born, then I was so happy!
It weighs on me that my end lasts so long.
Lords of Rome, for the love of God's mercy,
help me to mourn the death of my friend.
Great is the sorrow that has been placed on me:
I cannot do enough for my heart to be satisfied.
It is no wonder: I have no more sons nor daughters.'

Amid the laments of the father and the mother,
here comes the girl whom he had married.
'Lord,' she said, 'through what a long delay
I have awaited you in your father's house!
You left me sad and abandoned.
Lord Alexis, for so many days I desired you,
and have shed so many tears for your body,
and have so often looked into the distance for you,
if you would come back to comfort your wife.
Oh my dear friend, for your lovely youth
how sad I am now, now that it will rot in the earth
oh noble husband, how mournful can I be?
I awaited good news from you,
but now I have cruel and terrible news.
Oh lovely thing, lovely face, lovely body!
How changed I see your lovely figure;
I held you dearer than any creature.
Such great pain has befallen me today!
Better for me that I had died
if I had known that you were under the stairs,

where you lay in great affliction.
There is no man alive who would have dissuaded me
from having stayed together with you;
if he had cared for me, so would I have cared for you.
Now I am widowed indeed,' thus said the girl,
'never will I experience bodily joy on this earth,
nor will I have a man in flesh, for it cannot be:
I will serve God, the king who governs all.
I will not want if he sees that I serve him.'

The father and the mother lamented so greatly there,
and the girl, that all left them to it,
and meanwhile prepared the holy body.
All of those lords did this very solemnly:
how happy are those who honored him in faith!
'Lords, what are you doing,' - this the pope said, -
'of what use to us is this grief and this wailing?
For some it is sorrow, for us it is glory,
for though this man we will have fine help.
Let us pray for this, that God should absolve us.'
All of those who could come take him up,
and, singing, bear away the body of Saint Alexis,
and pray of him that he have mercy on them.
It was not necessary to summon those who had heard:
all come running, even the little children,
and the whole Roman people became agitated.
Those arrived soonest who could run the most;
among the streets come such large crowds,
neither king nor count could force a path.
Nor could the holy body pass further;
among themselves these lords begin to talk.
'The crowd is huge, we will not be able to pass;
for this holy body that God has given to us
the people, who wanted it so much, are joyful:
they all say that they do not want to let us leave.'
To this those who rule the empire answer:
thank you, lords; we will seek a solution.
Of our wealth we will share generously;
the lower classes who desire alms,
when they see this, will soon forget their cares.'
From their chests they take gold and silver
and have it cast before the poor folk:
they think to be allowed to pass this way.
However much they throw, those people want none of it:
they have focused their attention on that holy body.
With one voice the lower classes cry,

‘we do not care about this wealth!
Such great joy has come to us
from this holy body by which we will get help.’

Saint Boniface, whom they call a martyr,
had a very lovely church at Rome.
They bring Saint Alexis directly there
very gently they place him on the ground.
Happy is the place where the holy body stays!
The people of Rome, who had desired it so much,
kept it for seven days above ground, in their power.
The people of the city of Rome weep,
from all sides they have surrounded it so
that hardly ever could one reach it.
On the seventh day the resting place was ready
for that holy body, for the heavenly gem.
They bear him aloft and the crowd gives way;
whether they like it or not, they let him be placed in the earth.
It grieves them, but it could not be otherwise.
That casket was prepared with gold and silver,
for that holy body that is meant to rest inside.
They put in the earth, it shall be put off no longer;
the people of the city of Rome cry,
all come running and no-one wants to turn away.
With censers and with golden candlesticks
priests dressed in white robes and hoods
place the body in its marble sarcophagus.
Some sing there, some shed tears,
never would they cut their affection from him.
They could no longer keep him above ground,
whether they like it or not, they let him be buried.
They took their leave of the body of Saint Alexis:
‘oh lord father, may you have mercy on us,
be our advocate before your Lord.’
The people depart, and the father and the mother,
and the girl whom he had married.
They stayed together until they went up to God,
their company was good and virtuous;
through this holy man their souls were saved.
Saint Alexis is in heaven without a doubt,
together with God in the company of the angels.

He served God greatly by his own good will:
for that he is now crowned in heaven.
The body lies in the city of Rome,
and his soul is in God’s holy paradise.

My lords, let us keep this holy man in our memory,
and let us pray to him that he deliver us from all evil,
and that he give to us peace and harmony in this world
and lasting glory in the other.
God give us aid so that we might attain it,
and against the devil and his schemes, victory.

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