

Hans-Erich Keller

### **Saint Sylvester in *La Chanson de Roland***

The Rolandian matter never ceases to surprise scholars—not even the Oxford version, which has now been scrutinized for nearly one hundred fifty years. In this text, it is the second part in particular that yields increasingly more information about the period of the composition of the poem as we read it today, as well as its purpose. Such is the case with line 3746, which introduces the trial of Ganelon: "Halz est li jurz, mult par est grande la feste, / Dient alquanz *del baron seint Silvestre*," translated by Gerard J. Brault as "It is a holy day, the feast is very solemn, / Some say it is noble Saint Sylvester's Day."<sup>1</sup> No other version of the *Roland* contains this line that suggests a relationship between Saint Sylvester and the trial of Ganelon.

The only scholar who has ever commented on this line is Brault himself. In volume I of his edition he suggests (p. 334) that "Saint Sylvester's day (v. 3746) may have been determined by Bramimonde's baptism rather than by Ganelon's trial, which immediately precedes it," since in the Middle Ages Charlemagne was frequently associated with Constantine, and Saint Sylvester with the baptism of the latter.<sup>2</sup> While it is true that Charlemagne was often considered a second Constantine, a point to which we shall return later, it is first paramount to attempt to determine if Pope Sylvester I or his legend was ever linked to a legal matter that might

<sup>1</sup> *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*, vol. 2: *Oxford Text and English Translation* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978) 229.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., for instance, Constantine's dream in the Charlemagne Window at Chartres (executed between 1210 and 1220), in which a hand reveals to him Charlemagne, champion of Christianity; see François Garnier, *Le vitrail du XIIIe siècle: l'histoire de Charlemagne*, Coll. "Langages de l'art" (Paris: Sémévé, 1969) 19. For the relationship of Constantine and Saint Sylvestre, cf. l'Abbé Louis Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis*, vol. 1 (Paris: E. Boccard, 1955) 170-87, especially pp. 170 and 174. See also below.

have had wider implications. Sylvester, who was bishop of Rome from 314 to 335, can be considered the first pope: it was during his tenure that the emperor transferred his capital to Byzantium, leaving Rome under the direct influence of its bishop, now an imperial administrator. Although the historical Constantine was in fact baptized by the Arian bishop Eusebius near Nicomedia shortly before his death, legend very soon moved his baptism to Rome under quite different circumstances, at the hands of Pope Sylvester. This is the legend that remained predominant during the Middle Ages, thanks to the *Liber Pontificalis*, the first part of which—as we will see—was edited in the first half of the sixth century. However, with respect to the Sylvester legend, this work used the *Actus Sylvestri*, already edited in the second half of the fifth century.<sup>3</sup>

According to the *Actus*, "the fourth day after his baptism, Constantine conferred this privilege on the pontiff of the Roman church, that in the whole Roman world priests should regard him as their head, as judges do the king."<sup>4</sup> This passage from the *Actus* was also incorporated in another text, one of the most famous falsifications of all times: the Donation of Constantine. This work was probably composed between 754 and 767 by a cleric of St. John Lateran, who intended it to be the legendary description of the Lateran Basilica's foundation as the Emperor Constantine himself has described it. It is cast in the form of a decree, not for political purposes but for instructing the pilgrims with respect to the

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Levison, "Konstantinische Schenkung und Silvester-Legende," in *Miscellanea Francesco Ehrle: Scritti di Storia e Paleografia*, vol. 2: *Per la storia di Roma*, Studi e Testi 38 (Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1924) 181.

<sup>4</sup> "Constantinus imperator quarto die sui baptismatis privilegium Romane ecclesie pontifici contulit, ut in toto Romano orbe sacerdotes ita hunc caput habeant, sicut iudices regem," *MGH, Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters*, ed. Wolfram Setz, vol. 10 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1976); 101-2. The English translation is that of Christopher B. Coleman, *The Treatise of Lorenzo Valla on the Donation of Constantine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922) 83.

importance of the first church in Christianity.<sup>5</sup> In this so-called *Constitutum Constantini*, the pseudo-Constantine not only declares that Peter's see, like his own divinely instituted power, is to be exalted above all other churches and patriarchates, but also grants the Lateran Palace ("greatest in the world") to Peter's successors and builds there a church dedicated to the Savior. He likewise concedes to them and all Roman clergy the use of numerous imperial insignia and privileges, including the senatorial dignity for the latter. Finally—and most importantly—after moving his own residence to the East, the pope shall be the judge in all that concerns the service of God and the Christian faith; to this effect, the emperor endows Pope Sylvester with the Lateran Palace, the city of Rome, the province of Italy, and all western regions. The object of this work was probably the rival church across town, St. Peter's in the Vatican, increasingly the major center of pilgrim traffic, which had come to detract from the Church of the Savior (St. John Lateran), part of the residence of Peter's successors and legendary site of Constantine's conversion.<sup>6</sup>

At an early date, Frankish emissaries to Rome brought a copy of the *Constitutum Constantini* back to France, where the oldest existing text is preserved in the *Formulæ Sancti Dionysii*, a collection of twenty-five originally independent letters and charters,

<sup>5</sup> Nicolas Huyghebaert, "Une légende de fondation: le *Constitutum Constantini*," *Le Moyen Age* 95 (1979): 208. The whole complex of problems has been discussed in detail by Horst Fuhrmann, "Constitutum Constantini und pseudoisidorische Dekretalen. Der Weg der Konstantinischen Schenkung zu ihrer Wirksamkeit," in his *Einfluß und Verbreitung der pseudoisidorischen Fälschungen*, *Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae historica* 24/2 (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1973) 354-407.

<sup>6</sup> John Van Engen, in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer, vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984) 258.

established prior to 806 and preserved at the abbey of St. Denis.<sup>7</sup> The text soon became interwoven in the most intricate ways with the *Actus Silvestri* and survived in countless manuscripts as well as the *Legenda Aurea* (chapters 12 and 52)<sup>8</sup> and the *Speculum Historiale* (book 13, chapters 46 to 56). It is a type of historical novel, such as were quite widespread in the Middle Ages, in which an element of historical truth is absorbed by a plenitude of free inventions often suggested by similar legends.<sup>9</sup>

The *Liber Pontificalis*, this treasure of legends, also contains quite a romanticized *Life of Saint Sylvester* that is combined with Constantine's conversion and his Donation. In his introduction to the definitive edition of the *Liber Pontificalis* (pp. cx-cxii), Louis Duchesne provides an excellent summary of it, according to MS Bibl. Nat., lat. 5301, of St. Martial of Limoges (end of the tenth / beginning of the eleventh century). Unfortunately, it is too long to quote here in its entirety; we must therefore confine ourselves to the part that has the most relevance for our demonstration:

A l'instigation de sa femme, Maximiana, fille de Dioclétien, Constantin ordonne une persécution violente contre les chrétiens. Pour y échapper, Silvestre se réfugie dans une caverne du mont Syraptim. Cependant le prince persécuteur est atteint de la lèpre. Les médecins, devins et mages cherchent à le guérir, mais inutilement. Enfin les prêtres du Capitole lui

<sup>7</sup> Text no. 11 in the MS Paris, Bibl. Nat., lat. 2777, contains the *Constitution*, cf. Wilhelm Levison, "Das Formularbuch von Saint-Denis," *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 41 (1917): 283-304. It has recently been republished by Horst Fuhrmann, *Das Constitutum Constantini (Konstantinische Schenkung): Text*, MGH, Fontes Iuris Germanici antiqui in usum scholarum 10 (Hanover: Hahn, 1968).

<sup>8</sup> In chapter 68, the legend of Saint Sylvester is mentioned once more; see Johann Georg Theodor Grässe, ed., Jacobus de Varagine, *Legenda Aurea*, 3rd ed. (Bratislava: Kœbner, 1890) 305-7.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques* (Brussels: Bollandistes, 1905) 129.

conseillent de se baigner dans le sang d'enfants nouveau-nés. Au moment d'accomplir leur prescription, l'empereur se laisse toucher par les cris des mères et des enfants; il renonce à la guérison que lui procurerait un remède aussi cruel. En récompense, il voit apparaître, la nuit suivante, les apôtres Pierre et Paul, qu'il prend pour des dieux; ils lui disent de faire venir Silvestre, qui le guérira par les eaux de baptême. Silvestre, mandé, se présente, apprend à l'empereur que ceux qui lui ont apparu ne sont pas des dieux, mais des serviteurs du Christ; il lui montre leurs images et le prépare au baptême. La cérémonie, précédée d'un jeûne solennel, a lieu dans les bains du palais de Lateran. Au moment où Constantin entre dans l'eau sainte, une vive lumière apparaît à ses yeux et aux yeux des assistants; il est guéri en même temps que régénéré.

Les jours suivants, le premier empereur chrétien rend diverses ordonnances en faveur de la religion qu'il vient d'embrasser [it is here that the different falsifications discussed later in this paper will be inserted]; le Christ doit être adoré par tout l'empire; ceux qui blasphémeront son nom ou feront injure à ses fidèles seront punis de peines très graves; les églises jouiront du droit d'asile; pour en construire de nouvelles, les fonctionnaires publics lèveront la dîme sur les possessions impériales; aucune église ne sera construite à l'intérieur des villes sans le consentement de l'évêque approuvé par le pontife du siège apostolique; les évêques de l'empire romain tout entier seront soumis au pape comme les magistrats le sont à l'empereur.<sup>10</sup>

This extract from Duchesne's summary of the *Life of Saint Sylvester* clearly demonstrates the extent to which this legend and the *Constitutum Constantini* are now interwoven; whoever thought

<sup>10</sup> The last sentence is Duchesne's rendering of the famous "Ut in orbe Romano sacerdotes ita hunc [sc. pontificem Romanum] caput habeant, sicut iudices regem" quoted above in n. 4.

of Saint Sylvester thought of Constantine and his conversion at Rome, and vice versa.<sup>11</sup>

But there is more. Sylvester was also the object of several smaller falsifications that stress the authority of the Roman bishop. The best known of these is the so-called *Constitutum Silvestri*, which purports to be the minutes of a nonhistorical council in Rome, in the thermæ of Trajan, in the presence of the recently converted and cured Emperor Constantine. In this text, despite strong opposition, Sylvester first condemns a series of heretics; he manages to win over the opposition thanks to his conviction and gifts of rhetoric. He then proclaims a number of canonical rules that are primarily concerned with the rights and duties of the clerics. This is probably the oldest (ca. 501 A.D.) of the false disciplinary religious constitutions composed under the name of a pope.<sup>12</sup>

These falsifications were also incorporated in the *Life of Saint Sylvester* as it is told in the huge *summa* known today under the name *Liber Pontificalis*, the body of which, we recall, was composed in the first half of the sixth century, thus more than two hundred years before the Donation of Constantine. Furthermore, contemporaries of the later popes added to this corpus their own more or less legendary biographies. Among the latter, the one which obviously holds our interest is that of Pope Adrian I (772-95), to

<sup>11</sup> However, it is interesting to note that the Old French hagiographical poem *La vie de Saint Silvestre*, written at the end of the twelfth century in the west of France, does not mention the Donation of Constantine, the reason being that it was composed in Eleanor of Aquitaine's estates, where the idea of the supremacy of the pope was held in very little esteem (see, for a bibliographical reference, n. 22). Cf., for this poem, Paul Meyer, "La vie de saint Sylvestre en vers français," *Romania* 28 (1899): 280-86, and Adrien Planchenault, ed., *Cartulaire du chapitre de Saint-Laud d'Angers (Actes du XIe et XIIe siècle), suivi de la Vie de saint Silvestre et l'Invention de la Sainte Croix, poème français du XIIe siècle*, Documents historiques sur l'Anjou 4 (Angers: Germain et Grassin, 1903).

<sup>12</sup> One version of it has been published by Charles Poisnel, "Un concile apocryphe du pape Saint Silvestre," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 6 (1896): 3-13.

whom Charlemagne not only confirmed the Donation of his father Pepin the Short in 774, but even increased the territory turned over by Pepin to the pope in Central Italy.<sup>13</sup> Because Charles was slow in executing his promise, the pope wrote to him in May 778—the year of Charles' Spanish expedition—that he should imitate the example of Emperor Constantine, thanks to whose donation the Roman Church had been elevated, exalted, and become worthy of distributing the power in these western regions; in short, Charles should become a new Constantine.<sup>14</sup> This is the very first time that a pope refers to the Donation of Constantine as if it were a historical fact, without, moreover, great results as regards the execution of his promise. In any case, the equation Charlemagne = Constantine was born and would be exploited throughout the Middle Ages, as the Charlemagne Window in Chartres plainly demonstrates.

However, the reformed papacy of the later eleventh century, determined to win autonomy from the German emperor and sovereignty over the papal states, made surprisingly little use of the falsification: the popes quite rightly sensed that this text could be interpreted negatively to mean that popes had received much of their sovereignty and privileges from emperors. "Only after one of the

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Louis Duchesne, 1: 498. About the reason for the Donation of Pepin, see Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger, *Die Papst-Fabeln im Mittelalter. Ein Beitrag zur Kirchengeschichte*, 2nd ed. by J. Friedrich (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1890) 124-25.

<sup>14</sup> Philipp Jaffé, ed., *Bibliotheca rerum Germanicarum 4: Monumenta Carolina* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1867) 199-200: "Et sicut temporis beati Silvestri Romani pontificis a sanctae recordationis piissimo Constantino magno imperatore per eius largitatem sancta Dei catholica et apostolica Romana ecclesia elevata atque exaltata est, et potestatem in his Hesperiae partibus largiri dignatus; ita et in his vestris felicissimis temporibus atque nostris sancta Dei ecclesia, id est beati Petri apostoli, germinet atque exultet et amplius quam amplius exaltata permaneat; ut omnes gentes, quae hec audierint, edicere valeant: Domine, salvum fac regem, et exaudi nos in die, in qua invocaverimus te; quia ecce novus christianissimus Dei Constantinus imperator his temporibus surrexit, per quem omnia Deus sanctae suae ecclesiae beati apostolorum principis Petri largiri dignatus est."

greatest lawyer-popes, Innocent IV [1243-54], had reinterpreted Constantine's 'donation' to be a 'restitution' of sovereignty originally invested by God in the vicar of Christ, did popes and lawyers also make extensive reference to it, particularly on behalf of the papacy's temporal sovereignty."<sup>15</sup>

If the popes themselves were careful not to give too much weight to the Donation of Constantine, clerics in the different ecclesiastical provinces were not as prudent. Especially at St. Denis, where all the above-mentioned documents were preserved, the monks tried to use them for their own ends. It is therefore not surprising to learn that Abbot Suger—as historically-minded as he was—took an active role in putting these documents to work. This was especially true between 1147 and 1149, when the kingdom was confronted with a dangerous rebellion of the nobles during Louis VII's absence on crusade, while Suger was left behind as principal regent. It is true, as Gabrielle M. Spiegel has pointed out, that Suger's historical work embraces a triple purpose: "to narrate, explain, and legitimize the deeds of French kings; to preserve them for instruction and moral edification of future generations; and to provide an authoritative interpretation of the role of the Capetian monarchy in the destinies of France."<sup>16</sup> The abbey under Suger, however, was also looking out for its own interests, which could very well be fostered in a period when the monarch was absent on crusade; thus, two particularly striking falsifications were composed at St. Denis in this period.

In the first, with the concurrence of Pope Saint Leo III, Charlemagne restores certain alienated land, *ho minibus iniuste*

<sup>15</sup> John Van Engen, in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* 4: 259.

<sup>16</sup> *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis: A Survey* (Brookline, Mass. and Leyden: Classical Folia Editions, 1978) 45.



*sublata*, to the abbey of St. Denis;<sup>17</sup> in the second, the emperor decrees that the abbey of St. Denis shall be the head of all churches of the Frankish empire, that its abbot shall be considered the primate of all the prelates in it, and that all Frankish kings shall be crowned in the abbey; he promises, for himself and his successors, to pay four Byzantine coins (*bisancios*) on an annual basis to the abbey and guarantees that the nobles will pay four golden coins annually, while bondsmen who pay this same amount will obtain their freedom.<sup>18</sup>

The second falsification, signed not only by Charlemagne but also by Archbishop Turpin of Reims (!), proves without a doubt that the monks of St. Denis had used a version of the Donation of Constantine as a model. Indeed, the sentence "ut caput omnium ecclesiarum regni" 'that it [sc. St. Denis] (be) the head of all the churches of the kingdom' in the St. Denis falsification is nothing other than a variant on the passage of the *Constitutum Constantini*: "ut principatum teneat ... super omnes ... ecclesias ... Iustum

<sup>17</sup> Engelbert Mühlbacher, *Die Urkunden der Karolinger* 1, no. 282 (Hanover: Hahn, 1906) 421: "Igitur consilio et voluntate filii mei Ludovici Pii [anachronism!] iam in regem destinati optimumque meorum cupiens augmentare et amplificare possessiones beatissimi Dionysii, memor etiam illius veracissimi verbi Dagoberti excellentissimi regis dicentis, sicut in gestis Francorum habetur, se tantum de redditibus suis daturum et concessurum speciali patrono suo Dionysio et monachis ibidem deo servientibus, quod, quamvis successores sui multa auferrent, monachi tamen semper ibi necessaria sufficienter haberent."

<sup>18</sup> Mühlbacher, *Urkunden* 1, no. 286, p. 429: "Igitur ob id ad honorem dei et tantorum dominorum nostrorum reverentiam tale fieri decrevimus praeceptum, quod volumus imperpetuum esse mansurum, videlicet quod omnes Franciae reges, omnes archiepiscopi et episcopi tam praesentes quam et futuri ob amorem domini dei et nostri salvatoris Iesu Christi honorem ac reverentiam deferant venerandae matri ecclesiae domini Dionysii peculiaris protectoris nostri ac venerabili abbati eiusdem sancti et sacri loci eamque ut caput omnium ecclesiarum regni nostri ab omnibus eiusdem regni nostri christicolis venerari et eundem abbatem super omnes praelatos primatem haberi et teneri volumus ac desideramus..."

quippe est ut ibi lex sancta caput teneat principals"<sup>19</sup> 'that it [sc. the see of the papacy in Rome] shall hold the primacy over all the churches. It is only right that the holy law shall govern there.'<sup>20</sup> It is thus evident that Suger, the regent for Louis VII during the latter's absence in the Holy Land, tried to combine his efforts in defending the King's rights with his own interests—or, rather, those of his beloved abbey of St. Denis as the exponent of royal Gallicanism with those of ecclesiastical Gallicanism as it was defended by Bernard of Clairvaux.

Line 3746 of the Oxford version of the *Song of Roland* fully substantiates this observation. It calls to the attention of its audience that the trial of Ganelon is to commence on a day when even the ecclesiastical power of St. Denis / Rome will be on Charlemagne's side. The mention of Saint Sylvester in the *Song of Roland* cannot be taken lightly; it clearly hints at the gravity of Ganelon's trial for the future of France, a gravity that will be underscored a few lines later by the judicial duel, which by definition requires the intervention of God. In other words: the upcoming trial is crucial to the king's efforts to control the feudal barons and therefore calls for the help of even the most ecclesiastically-oriented politicians, i.e., of

<sup>19</sup> *Das Constitutum Constantini*, ed. Fuhrmann, pp. 81-83: "Et sicut nostra est terrena imperialis potentia, eius sacrosanctam Romanam ecclesiam decrevimus veneranter honorare et amplius, quam nostrum imperium et terrenum thronum sedem sacratissimam beati Petri gloriose exaltari, tribuentes ei potestatem et gloriae dignitatem atque vigorem et honorificentiam imperialem. Atque decernentes sancimus, ut principatum teneat tam super quattuor precipuas sedes Antiochenam, Alexandrinam, Constantinopolitanam et Hierosolimitanem, quamque etiam super omnes universo orbe terrarum dei ecclesias; et pontifex, qui pro tempore ipsius sacrosanctae Romanae ecclesiae extiterit, celsior et princeps cunctis sacerdotibus totius mundi existat et eius iudicio, quaeque ad cultum dei vel fidei Christianorum stabilitate procuranda fuerint, disponantur. Iustum quippe est, ut ibi lex sancta caput teneat principatus, ubi sanctarum legum institutor, salvator noster, beatum Petrum apostolatus obtinere praecepit cathedram..."

<sup>20</sup> About the comparison of the St. Denis falsification with the *Constitutum Constantini*, cf. Gerhard Laehr, *Die Konstantinische Schenkung in der abendländischen Literatur des Mittelalters bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Historische Studien 166 (Berlin: Emil Ebering, 1926) 57.

those who in the twelfth century vouch for the superiority of the Church over the secular power—read here Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Indeed, the latter's view of the pope's supremacy over all the churches of Christianity, including that in France, is well known because of his greatly publicized letter *De Consideratione*,<sup>21</sup> addressed to his former disciple, the newly elected Pope Eugene III, between 1149 and 1152. The same ideas are already expressed in earlier letters, at least since 1131,<sup>22</sup> and his interventions in the matters of the French church are increasingly crowned with success. Between 1138 and 1144 alone, the party of the king lost out three times in the question of appointment of a new bishop; each time Bernard's candidate was confirmed by the pope over the head of the king.<sup>23</sup> Suger, the king's vicar from 1147 to 1149, consequently had every interest in rallying Saint Bernard's support in a case where the foundations of the Capetian monarchy itself were threatened by the revolt of the feudal barons during Louis' absence, a revolt that is clearly reflected in the trial of Ganelon in the *Song of Roland*, where the same issue is also at stake, and which even recalls the same political situation by the way Charles's barons behave when it comes to the accusation of one of theirs before a royal court (cf. laisse 275).

In previous studies, I have argued that the old *Song of Roland* must have ended with Charlemagne's return to Roncevaux, driving the Saracens into the Ebro River and conquering Saragossa.<sup>24</sup> This poem was then reworked and continued in the

<sup>21</sup> PL 182: 727-808.

<sup>22</sup> Augustin Fliche, Raymonde Foreville and Jean Rousset, *Histoire de l'Eglise 9: Du premier Concile du Latran à l'avènement d'Innocent III (1125-1298)* (n. p.: Bloud and Gay, 1944) 124-25.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 73-74.

<sup>24</sup> Especially "La version dionysienne de la *Chanson de Roland*," in *Philologica Romanica, Erhard Lommatzsch gewidmet*, eds. Manfred Bambeck and Hans Helmut Christmann (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1975): 257-87; "The *Song of Roland* and its Audience," *Olifant* 6 (1979): 259-74.

mid-twelfth century under the inspiration—or even supervision—of Suger, probably at the abbey of Saint-Denis itself. Many indications in the part that narrates the events following the conquest of Saragossa point in that direction; only the most salient need be mentioned here. Paleographical evidence strongly suggests that, notwithstanding other scholars's efforts, MS Digby 23 of the Bodleian Library at Oxford cannot be older than the last quarter of the twelfth century; furthermore, this manuscript attests to an Anglo-Norman adaptation of a text composed in the Ile-de-France. Bramimonde's conversion and acceptance of the Christian name Juliana, in particular, indicates an insular modification of the end of the poem, since the cult of Saint Juliana enjoyed special favor in England and the conversion episode is exclusively found in the Oxford manuscript.

Conversely, the underlying text must have originated in the Ile-de-France, for several barons of the poem's second part can be historically identified as vassals of Louis VII who were crucial during the period around 1150. Among them are Thierry of Argonne, whose name camouflages that of Count Thierry of Flanders, one of Louis's pillars during the critical years of his crusade (1147-1149) and Count Geoffrey IV Plantagenet of Anjou, Charlemagne's standard-bearer in the poem, equally loyal to the king during the same crisis, as was Count Thibaut of Champagne ("Tedbald de Reins"). Even Suger's co-regent is represented in the new version of the *Song of Roland* as it must have been composed at Saint-Denis: he is Raoul, Count of Vermandois ("Rodulfus comes Viromandenses"), a cousin of the king and one of the most powerful barons of the period. In view of his importance, he even figures twice in the poem, first as Rabel (a dialect form of Raoul), then as Guineman (a scribal error for \*Guireman, a vernacular form of Viromandis, today Saint-Quentin, capital of the Vermandois). Likewise, the name of the Saracen overlord Baligant has been identified as Yahya ben Ghâniya, a leader of the Spanish Moors who in 1134 inflicted a crushing defeat on the Christians and their

French allies at Fraga in Aragon under Alfonso I the Battler.<sup>25</sup> The latter was mortally wounded in the clash, an event that thus forms a definite terminus a quo for all the versions of the *Song of Roland* known today, including those of the *Pseudo-Turpin*. Even more present in the mind of the audience must have been the crushing defeat of the middle division of Louis VII's army, separated from vanguard and rear guard in a mountain pass of Anatolia in fall 1147, strongly reminiscent of Charlemagne's catastrophe at Roncevaux. A poem that would indirectly explain Louis's disaster as being caused by treason, and thus somewhat attenuate it, could not be more welcome than immediately following the king's return to France just after 1149, when he had to account for the loss of so many men.

Ganelon's trial can also be invoked: whether Ganelon's betrayal of the Christians represented personal revenge or high treason was a question hotly debated in France during the forties of the twelfth century. It was also at this time that the courtly civilization of the South, propagated by Eleanor of Aquitaine, came under increased criticism at the royal court. Therefore, at Ganelon's trial the *courtoisie* of the Auvergnats, the southernmost of Louis's subjects, was linked with opposition to the cause of the king. Ganelon's champion Pinabel, too, can be related to the same period, since a baron of such an unforgettable name is historically attested in the *Catalogus Baronum* composed for King Roger II of Naples and Sicily,<sup>26</sup> whom Louis and Eleanor met while returning from the crusade in the early summer of 1149. It should also be recalled that in the poem Pinabel is the castellan of *Sorence*, a spelling error for \**Sorrente*, Sorrento, a recent (1133) conquest of King Roger and certainly vividly remembered in southern Italy for its long and fierce resistance against the Normans. These references and many more

<sup>25</sup> Jean Poncet, "La *Chanson de Roland* à la lumière de l'histoire: vérité de Baligant," *Actes du deuxième Congrès International d'Etudes Nord-Africaines, Aix-en-Provence* 1968 (=Revue de l'Occident et de la Méditerranée, 1970, special issue), especially pp. 132-33,

<sup>26</sup> Emily Jamison, "Notes on S. Maria della Strada at Matrice, its History and Sculpture," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 14 (1938): 71.

are found in the second half of the *Song of Roland* as it was probably composed at the abbey of Saint-Denis. But these allusions to contemporary persons and events are all presented in a camouflaged, distorted way, in order not to provoke antagonism and jeopardize the political message of the poem: propagation of the cause of Capetian kingship.

In the same manner, the allusion to this contemporary political situation is extremely discreet in the case of Saint Sylvester, for the author simply states "Dient alquanz..." 'Some say [it is noble Saint Sylvester's Day]'. 'Some' suggests that others could dissent, but of course no one will, since the suggestion does not allow for another answer. On the contrary, by hinting at the idea of only 'some' who might have suggested this precise day, the author makes us wonder why he brought it up in the first place. He has obviously mentioned it in order to call attention to it; but by referring to it in this "casual" fashion, he obfuscates it—as he does when referring to other contemporary situations—in some cryptic manner meant to be understood only by those few who could. These were basically the clergy, but also—to a great extent—the politicians (including Saint Bernard) directly involved in the troubles of the years 1147-49.

For the rest, the mention "...li jurz ... del baron seint Silvestre" absolutely corresponds to the customs of the period, since it fixes the day of the trial according to that set by Charlemagne: "Carles mandet humes de plusurs teres. / ... Halz est li jurs, ... Dient alquanz del baron seint Silvestre."<sup>27</sup> It is Charlemagne who chooses the day of Saint Sylvester deliberately, without the constraint of a preestablished date, although in the twelfth century the big assemblies would normally take place on the occasion of

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Yvonne Bongert, *Recherches sur les cours laïques du Xe au XIIIe siècle* (Paris; Picard, 1949) 187.

great feasts.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, by selecting the day of Saint Sylvester, the author of the version on which the Oxford manuscript is based definitely wanted to emphasize the importance of the union of the Church with the State in the enterprise of deciding, once and for all, that a vassal is guilty of high treason if he attacks another baron who at that moment is in the service of the king. In other words, by trying to enroll the papal wing of the Gallican church, the abbot of St. Denis, who sought the primacy of his monastery in the mid-twelfth century, threw his whole weight behind the King in combatting the concept of personal vendetta so characteristic of the chaotic times of the early Capetians. We are now at the threshold of modern France.

In conclusion, it is extremely significant that only the author of the version reflected by the Oxford manuscript links Saint Sylvester to the trial of Ganelon by deliberately toying with the implicit understanding of his audience. He suggests not only the authority of the overlord the king, but also calls for rational unity by invoking the concurrence of the forces of ecclesiastical Gallicanism represented by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. This is the most urgent message of the powerful abbot of St. Denis, the tenant of royal Gallicanism, in the period of his regency around 1150, which therefore must be the date of composition of the *Song of Roland* as we read it today.

Hans-Erich Keller  
Ohio State University

<sup>28</sup> Eric Boumazel, *Le gouvernement capétien au XIIe siècle (1108-1180). Structures sociales et mutations institutionnelles*. Publications de la Faculté de Droit et des Sciences Economiques de l'Université de Limoges (Limoges: P.U.F., 1975) 134-35.

Conference:  
The Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies

The eighteenth annual conference sponsored by The Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at The Ohio State University will be held in Columbus on Friday and Saturday, February 27-28, 1987. The title of the conference is "1453: The Fall of Constantinople and the Rise of Istanbul." The focus of the conference will be on the symbolic year 1453 that marked the end of a world characterized by a richly unified European-Islamic culture and the beginning of a series of developments that culminated in a complex, fragmented Christian and Muslim world. Speakers will be: A. A. M. Bryer (University of Birmingham); Walter Denny (University of Massachusetts, Amherst); Colin Heywood (University of London); Andrew Hess (Tufts University); George Majeska (University of Maryland). For further information, please contact: Ken Schurb, Conference Coordinator, CMRS, 322 Dulles Hall, 230 West 17th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210.

-o-oOo-o-

Répertoire des noms propres

In its October 1986 prospectus the Librairie Droz has announced the impending appearance of André Moisan's long-awaited reworking of Ernest Langlois's *Répertoire des noms propres de personnes et de lieux cités dans les chansons de geste françaises et les œuvres étrangères dérivées*. With the publication of many texts formerly unavailable, as well as many new and better editions of texts surveyed by Langlois, the former volume had come to be of limited usefulness. The "revision" is in effect an entirely new volume, having 3428 pages in five volumes compared to its predecessor's 674 pages in a single tome. Readers of *Olifant* will surely welcome this new version of a classic reference volume.