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The dating of the first (anonymous) Anglo-Norman poem dedicated to the passion of Saint Catherine: c. 1115-1120

At the end of the 12th century, Clemence, a nun from the monastery of Barking, wrote in her pious introduction of an Old French metrical adaptation of the *Life of Saint Catherine* that there used to be an earlier ‘translation’ into Romance dealing with the same subject, but that the old text had suffered greatly, since it was fashioned after the standards of those early times. If we were to take her word for it, the trouble was that the soon-to-come turn of the 13th century was shaping an entirely different literary aesthetic. What was once suited for the effortlessly pleased people of old did not match the crafty tastes of the ‘envious’ (probably ‘judgemental’) public of Clemence’s time. The nun from Barking was afraid that her text might suffer the same fate when times and tastes would continue to change long after her poem would be written. She wrote it plainly: the nature of men followed the changes in the nature of the times. Because the old poem dedicated to the passion of Saint Catherine was scorned on account of its somewhat flawed metrical qualities, Clemence decided to amend it (in fact she translated the story anew) and make it suit the aesthetic of the late 12th century. But she must have felt guilty about doing that, so she insisted that her decision was not born out of her own arrogance, for she did not look for praises. God was the only one who deserved those praises, for He was the one responsible for giving her the poor talents that she had:

Pur sa pieté m'en deit aidier
a cel ovre que vuil traitier
d'une sue veraie amie,
de qui voil translater la vie,
de latin respundre en rumanz
pur ço que plus plaise as oianz.
Ele fud jadis translaté
sulunc le tens bien ordené;
mais ne furent dunc si veisdus
les humes, ne si envius
cum il sunt al tens ki est ore
e après nus serrunt uncore.
Pur ço que li tens est mué
e des humes la qualité
est la rime vil tenue
car ele est asquans corrupue.
Pur ço si l'estuet amender
e le tens selunc la gent user.
Ne l'aiment pas pur mun orgoil,
kar preisie estre n'en voil;
il sul en deit loenge aveir
de qui sai mun povre saveir.¹

The passage has been quoted every now and then in connection with the evolution of literary tastes in the first century of the Old French literature. What interests me here is that the old poem is in all likelihood the fragmentary Passion of Saint Catherine in 194 irregular verses, acephalous, nowadays preserved only in the mid-13th century manuscript of

¹ *The Life of St. Catherine by Clemence of Barking*, ed. William MACBAIN, Oxford, Backwell / Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1964, pp. 1-2 (v. 29-50).

Manchester, John Rylands University Library, fr. 6, f. 9r-10r. The fragment was edited by E. C. Fawtier-Jones in 1930 and did not attract much attention, except for its occasional use as a term of comparison in the analysis of other texts from the early days of Old French literature. The editor dated it to the first wave of Anglo-Norman texts (late 11th or early 12th century).² Other researchers felt more confident and dared to date it even earlier. It is perhaps best to quote extensively one of these hypotheses, for it boils down the original arguments of the 1930 study and reduces them to their essence. It was proposed by S. M. Cingolani and it argues that the poem could be attributed to a certain mid-11th century author Thibaut of Vernon (*Tretaldus Vernonensis*), known for having made vernacular adaptations of Latin hagiographical texts:

Gaston Paris ventilava l'ipotesi che questo Thibaut de Vernon potesse essere autore proprio della 'Vie de Saint Alexis' che lui, su basi linguistiche, datava alla metà dell' XI secolo. Tale attribuzione, mai esplicitamente accettata e mai apertamente rifiutata dalla critica posteriore, non è, come esporrò fra breve, condivisibile. Ritengo anzi, di poter attribuire un altro testo, fra quelli conservati, alla penna di Thibaut. Non vuole essere più che una ipotesi, per forza di cose, indimostrabile ma leggermente più plausibile, credo, di quella di Paris. Nel 1923 è stata scoperta in un manoscritto di Manchester o una frammentaria 'Vie de Sainte Catherine', sempre in versi francesi. L'editrice, forse per il pudore di ammettere un nuovo testo nel canone delle Origini, ha cercato di dimostrare che la vita è della fine XI - inizi XII secolo e che è la traduzione d'una perduta vita latina della santa composta da Ainard, monaco della Santa Trinità di Rouen e poi abate di Saint-Pierre-sur-Dives a metà dell'XI secolo. Ma non credo che si debba scendere tanto in basso, pur ammettendo l'ipotesi della traduzione del resto inverificabile. La ragione fondamentale è che l'autore cita come vivente l'abate Isembart: 'Danz Yseberz li abes [les] ad en sa baillie' (v. 182), il quale ('vir optimus et in omne liberalium disciplinarum experientia probatissimus'; *Historia* cit. p. 354) morì nel 1055. Non credo che un particolare così preciso e legato alla vita rouennese, se anche già presente nel modello latino, sarebbe rimasto invariato in un testo che, secondo l'editrice, è stato composto un mezzo secolo più tardi in una fondazione inglese dipendente dalla Santa Trinità di Rouen. Una seconda ragione, meno probante, è che l'autore, o traduttore, non mostra di conoscere i 'Sanctae Catherinae virginis et martyris translatio et miracula Rothomagensis saec. XI' composti fra il 1054 e il 1090 e di grande diffusione nell'ambiente. Non ritengo, dunque, ci sia bisogno di sdoppiare pensando ad un testo latino ante 1055 e una sua traduzione composta in Inghilterra circa cinquant'anni dopo. Il testo è stato composto a Rouen, 'l'einzné de Normandie' (v. 180), da un religioso non appartenente all'abbazia della Santa Trinità: 'a Sainte Trinité au Mont en l'abeïe (...) sil recoillent li moin' (vv. 183-185). E Thibaut giusto alla metà del secolo traduceva in volgare e non apparteneva alla Santa Trinità. Ripeto è un' ipotesi. Ciò che soprattutto conta è, comunque, il testo in se stesso in quanto molto antico (e non sarebbe il solo scritto a Rouen in quegli anni) e caratterizzato da alcuni elementi totalmente estranei ai poemetti limosini contemporanei. Forse non sono caratteri intrinseci al testo stesso ma valutabili solo con uno sguardo all'evoluzione successiva della storia letteraria. Ma tant'è e passo ad elencarli. [...] La 'Vie de Sainte Catherine', invece, ha goduto d'una notorietà e diffusione ben più prolungate nel tempo (circa due secoli fra la data di composizione e quella dell' unico manoscritto che la trasmette) ed ampie (conta due parziali rifacimenti) ma soprattutto, testimonia, fattivamente, una certa circolazione di testi e una meditazione sugli stessi poiché è citata nella 'Vie de Saint Alexis'. E con questo ponte intertestuale veniamo ad uno dei più notevoli ed importanti componimenti della letteratura religiosa, e non solo religiosa, della Francia medievale: proprio la 'Vie de Saint Alexis'. La quale si trova necessariamente al centro di questo intervento non solo per la sua

² Ethel C. FAWTIER-JONES, *Les vies de sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie en ancien français, I* [Le texte de Manchester], «Romania», LVI, 221, 1930, pp. 80-104 (p. 104).

importanza culturale ma anche perché la sua origine e la sua diffusione sono legate ai luoghi, normanni e inglesi, di Lanfranco e Anselmo.³

The arguments justifying this mid-11th century hypothesis are two in number, and both of them are rather spurious. The mention of abbot Isembart in the present tense (dead in 1055) could be due to a number of reasons (including the absentminded replication of a Latin text). As for the supposed lack of knowledge of the Latin *Miracula*, the text dating back to ostensibly 1054-1090, this is equally questionable. The development of the cult of Saint Catherine in the West was directly linked with the actions of the Norman elite and especially with the translation of some relics of the saint from Sinai to the monastery in the vicinity of Rouen. The English cult is also determined by the links with Normandy (not only after, but also before the 1066 Conquest), therefore the creation of an Old French poem dedicated to the saint (and mentioning the presence of her relics in Normandy) should date back to a more recent time period than the mid-11th century.⁴ And there is also the question of language, as well as the misinterpretation of the expression *l'einzné de Normandi*, which I plan to address in the following pages.

To me, this very early dating of the Old French poem is unreasonable and unsustainable.

There are a number of issues which need to be addressed. But first of all, one needs to take a look at the text copied in the manuscript, and not to the edition, which is the product of the editor's interventions. The actual text of the epilogue in the manuscript contains some very different readings. Here are the v. 180-201 in my revised adaptation after the confrontation of E. C. Fawtier-Jones's 1930 edition with the microfilm facsimile of the manuscript (my changes are marked in Italics – I will use Italics with the same purpose for the rest of the quotations):

De tut ne parest povre *l'einznez* de Normendi:
Treis os i ad acertes de sainte Katerine,
Danz *Yseberz* li abés l'ad en sa *abeie*,
A Sainte Trinité a *Munt* en la *abeie*.
Dez sainz⁵ i salt l'oiles qui chers est e beals,
Sil recoillent li moine *einz* el verins vessels.
Deus en fet tels miracles qui mult sunt aperz,
Qu'enferm en resanent, tele est la force *Dex*.
Si *enferm* est tuché desur s'enfermeté,
S'il ad bone creance, si li estot duter
Que tost aparmannes ne li seit plus suef,
E s'il vivre en deit, *ben* en tost *avera* santé.
Faimes l(u)i sa *memoire* chacun jur leement,
Qu'ele nous achat ci pais e sustenement,
E en ce altre secle glorie e saciement.
En iceste parole Amen.

Ceste vie ici finist,
Beneit seit qui l'escrit !
De ses meffez amendement

³ Stefano Maria CINGOLANI, *Normandia, Le Bec e gli esordi della letteratura francese*, in *Lanfranco di Pavia e l'Europa del secolo XI nel IX centenario della morte (1089-1989)*, dir. Onofrio Giulio, Rome, Herder, 1993, pp. 281-293 (pp. 284-286).

⁴ For an overview of the role of the Normans in the development of the Western culture of saint Catherine, see Walsh 2003, *passim*.

⁵ The manuscript does not have the second mention of *os* from the edition of E. C. Fawtier-Jones.

Lui doit Deus omnipotent !
A sainte Marie vus comant.
Ne dirrai plus de ci en avant.⁶

It is evident that the present tense mentioning abbot Isembart's actions does not appear in the text of the manuscript proper. It is an editorial reconstruction. E. C. Fawtier-Jones made an emendation (*Danz Yzeberz li abes l[es] ad en sa baillie*) in the second hemistich of a clearly corrupted verse which reads *Danz Yseberz li abes l'ad en sa abeie*. The last words are corrupted, this is certain. The next verse redundantly ends with the exact same word (*A Sainte Trinité a Munt en la abeie*), but this does not prove that *en sa abeie* needs to be replaced with *ad en sa baillie*. *Baillie* is just the first replacement choice that came to the mind of the editor; there are many other options available. *Ad* may just as well be the auxiliary verb *avoir* used in a *passé composé*. Hence Isembart could be responsible for bringing the relics to the abbey earlier, at an unknown date, previous to the writing of the Old French poem. This is exactly what "all the sources say", namely "that the relics arrived during the abbacy of the first abbot, Isembert [...] in the period 1030/33-1050/54".⁷ I therefore consider that the mention of abbot Isembart was probably taken from a Latin source and that the *Danz Yseberz* verse most likely ended with a past participle ending in *-i*.

As for the anonymous author's alleged unawareness of the 11th century text of the Rouen *Miracula*, this is equally unsustainable. E. C. Fawtier-Jones, editor of the text argued that the anonymous author, *parlant des reliques et visiblement en rapports avec la Trinité, il ignore les 'Miracula'*. Nevertheless, she did not justify this assertion and stated in the same paragraph that *parmi les traducteurs nombreux des vies de sainte Catherine il [the anonymous Anglo-Norman author] est le seul à parler de Rouen, d'Isembart, des reliques*.⁸ Since these two statements are the basis on which she relied for the dating of the text, I checked whether there are any traces of the *Miracula* in first Old French life of Saint Catherine. If one ignores the story of Isembart, which could have originated in many sources, there are other details on which three lines of the epilogue (v. 181, 184-185) agree with that particular Latin text:

Treis os i ad acertes de sainte Katerine
[...]
Dez sainz os i salt l'oiles qui [mult] chers est e beals,
Sil recoillent li moine e(i)nz el verin(s) vessel(s).

Sed, ut narrationis nostrae ordinem prosequamur, inter eosdem fratres quorum supra meminimus, erat quidam summae sanctitatis ac prudentiae, nomine symeon, qui divino spiritu plenus tamquam pater ab omnibus colebatur. Hic denique cum suae septimanae ordine supradicto fungeretur officio, divina favente gratia, tali insignitus est dono. Nam cum illo salutaris olei liquore tria admodum minuta de sarcophago distillantia meruit ossa excipere ;

⁶ For comparison, I transcribe here the edited version of Ethel C. FAWTIER-JONES, *Les vies*, cit., p. 94: *De[l] tut ne pas est povre l'einzne de Normandi[e]: | Treis os i ad acertes de sainte Katerine, | Danz Yzeberz li abes l[es] ad en sa baillie, | A Sainte Trinité a[u] Mont en l'abeie. | Dez sainz os i salt l'oiles qui [mult] chers est e beals, | Sil recoillent li moine e(i)nz el verin(s) vessel(s). | Deus en fet tels miracles qui mult [or] sunt aperz, | Qu[e] enferm en resanent, tel(e) est la force Deu. | Si enfers est tuché desur s'enfermeté, | S'il ad bone creance, si li estot duter | Que tost aparmannes [ço] ne li seit plus suef, | E s'il [re]vivre en deit, b[i]en en tost avra santé. | Falmes l(u)i sa memorie chacun jur leement, | Qu'ele nous achat ci pais e sustenement, | E en ce altre s(i)ecle glorie e saciement. | En iceste parole Amen. ||Ceste vie ici finist, | Beneit seit qui l'escrit! | De ses meffez amendement | Lui doit Deus omnipotent ! | A sainte Marie vus comant. | Ne dirrai plus de ci en avant.*

⁷ Walsh 2003, p. 22.

⁸ Ethel C. FAWTIER-JONES, *Les vies*, cit., p. 100.

quae diligenter collecta et in concha vitrea cum ipso oleo recondita secum conservavit multis postmodum profutura.⁹

The oil also appears in the *Mombritius* Latin version, one of the possible sources of the Old French poem, but the *tria ossa* are explicitly mentioned only in the Rouen *Miracula*,¹⁰ so it is highly probable that the Anglo-Norman anonymous author was well aware of the existence of that particular text. Furthermore, the whole reference to the *tria ossa* and the miraculous oil has nothing to do with the Rouen relics themselves. It actually refers to the oil flowing from the Sinai relics of Saint Catherine and it found its way into the Latin *Miracula* as a consequence of a circulation of texts well documented in a recent analysis concerning the genesis of the *Vulgate* Latin version of the Life of Saint Catherine.¹¹ This means that the author of the Anglo-Norman text could have simply taken these ideas from a Latin source, without actually knowing what had happened in Rouen. But this also means that the conjecture about the lost text of Ainard as the source of the Old French poem needs to be dismissed.

The only thing that we know about the lost text of Ainard is that it was a poem intended to be sung. Orderic Vitalis tells us only that *Ainard fuit natione Teutonicus, geminaque scientia pleniter imbutus, versificandi et modulandi cantusque suaves edendi peritissimus. Hoc evidenter probari potest in historiis Kiliani Guirciburgensis episcopi et Katerinae virginis, aliisque plurimis cantibus quos eleganter idem edidit in laudem Creatoris.*¹² E. C. Fawtier-Jones's only argument that Ainard should be the source of the Old French poem is that his text would have allegedly mentioned the translation of the relics of Saint Catherine – since none of the other texts mention it –, but the whole story of those relics is problematic and research actually agrees that there may have never been a translation of relics, only an invention.¹³

Leaving this aside, when one takes a look at the Old French poem proper, there are also a series of traductological or stylistic arguments which argue in favour of an early 12th

⁹ Alb. PONCELET, *Sanctae Catharinae virginis et martyris Translatio et Miracula Rotomagensia saec. XI*, «Analecta Bollandiana», XXII, 1903, pp. 423-438 (p. 427).

¹⁰ Cfr. *Bononinus Mombritius: Sanctuarium seu vitae sanctorum*, novam editio, ed. Monachi Solesmenses, vol. 1, Paris, Albert Pontemoing, 1910, p. 287: *De quo in omni solempnitate beatae Catherinae emanat oleum et lac usque in hodiernum diem: et quicumque habent ex eis: curantur a quaecumque aegritudine. Videntes autem populi corpus sanctissimae Catherinae ab angelis deportari. glorificaverunt deum: et crediderunt in eum. Decolata est beata Catherina septimo calendis decembris in civitate alexandrinorum regnante domino nostro Iesu christo: cui est honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum Amen.* Other *ossa* appear in connection with the miraculous oil in the so-called *Vulgate* life of the saint, but their number is not three and the context is a little bit different: *...quo in loco innumera ad laudem domini fiunt miracula, inter quae et hoc unum insigne constat miraculum quod de sepulchro ipsius rivus olei indeficienter manare videtur, nam et de minutis ossibus que de sarcophago cum oleo effluunt ubicunque asportantur salutaris olei liquor stillare non desinit ex quo peruncta debilium corpora celeris medicine opem reportant.*

¹¹ Tina CHRONOPOULOS, *The date and place of composition of the Passion of St Katherine of Alexandria*, «Analecta Bollandiana», CXXX, 2012, pp. 40-88 (pp. 74-75, 82-83).

¹² *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vol. 2, *Books III and IV*, ed., transl. Marjorie CHIBNALL, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 352-354.

¹³ See Ethel C. FAWTIER-JONES, *Les vies*, cit., p. 100: *Nous ne connaissons malheureusement pas un travail antérieur aux 'Miracula', la vie de sainte Catherine composée, selon Orderic Vital, par le moine Ainard, disciple d'Isembart et qui fut moine a la Trinité avant de devenir abbé de Saint-Pierre-sur-Dives. Composée à la Trinité au moment même de l'arrivée des reliques, cette vie n'a pas dû manquer de mentionner celles-ci, si cela n'a pas été son principal but. Elle a dû également parler de l'abbé Isembart et elle a pu ignorer la légende dont on a, peu de temps après, entouré l'acquisition même des reliques. Nous croyons donc possible, probable même, que notre poète traduise l'œuvre disparue d'Ainard.* Cfr. Ethel C. FAWTIER-JONES, *Les vies*, cit., p. 104: *Son poème est basé sur la vie latine de sainte Catherine composée au monastère de la Trinité par le moine Ainard vers le milieu du XI^e siècle.* These are the only two passages where E. C. Fawtier-Jones discusses the source of the Old French poem. For the invention / translation of the relics, see e. g. Walsh 2003, pp. 73-74.

century dating. Furthermore, a large number of lines from the vernacular poem follow the phrases of the Latin text of the *Mombritius* life of the saint (not to be confused with the BHL 1658, considered to be the *Mombritius* version by E. C. Fawtier-Jones).¹⁴ There are, of course, a number of digressions expected for a very early 12th century text, according to an aesthetic of translation-adaptation similar to what one may find in the poems of Philip of Thaon or Benedeit. And there is no point in making a comprehensive comparison, for one would roughly reach the same average result. A short look at the beginning of the poem suffices to prove this hypothesis. For starters, here is a concordance of the verses 1-14 with the Latin text of the *Mombritius* version:

<p>‘[...] Assez ai desiré que volsiste estre’ Dist Sainte Katerine : ‘Ore ne t’esmaiez!’ Dex te prumet corone par sun angle del cel, de ci qu’al quart jur la te mettra sur le chef. Ore receif baptesme, & seinte crestienté, Puis ne te estovera crendre, D(eu) ert od tei!’ Ço dit l’Empereiz: ‘mult cren les plaies qu’avrei!’ L’Empereur conuis, de talent si fer Qu’il me fra ocire a hunte & a turment’. Dist sainte Katerine: ‘Ço ne durra lungtens!’ Si tu sofres turment pur la Deu feelté, Poez saver bien sert guerdoné; Tu avras la glorie qui ert perpetuel; Ce si est grande que quer ne set penser!’¹⁵</p>	<p>– Dicit ei beata Catherina: beata es O Imperatrix quoniam video coronam delatam ab angelis ut eam super caput tuum imponant. Et post triduum – Christus enim stabit tibi in omni tua invocatione Et dicit ei Imperatrix: timeo valde poenas et Imperatorem pavesco: quoniam plenus est furore et tormenta ad quam beata Catherina: Noli inquit timere sed habe signaculum christi et non continget te poena: sed parum patieris et regnabis in saecula saeculorum –¹⁶</p>
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¹⁴ E. C. Fawtier-Jones quotes two possible sources for the anonymous Anglo-Norman poem: the *Vulgate* life of saint Catherine – actually the source of the second Anglo-Norman translation, the one made by the nun Clemence of Barking –, and the BHL 1658 – that she identified as the *Mombritius* version. However, BHL 1658 is a different text altogether; it is the acaudate version from the *Florilegium Casinense* and the text does not correspond to the structure of the first Anglo-Norman poem (this fragmentary *passio* ends with the philosopher’s debate; the Old French fragment starts after this scene). For the *Mombritius* version, see *Passio beatae Catherinae Virginis*, in *Bononinus Mombritius*, cit., pp. 283-287. Cfr. *Passio Sancte Caterine Virginis* from the *Florilegium Casinense*, published in *Bibliotheca Casinensis seu Codicum Manuscriptorum qui in tabulario Casinensi asservantur*, cura et studio monachi Ordinis S. Benedicti, vol. 3, Abbatia Montis Casini, 1877, pp. 74-76.

¹⁵ Cfr. the edition of Ethel C. FAWTIER-JONES, *Les vies*, cit., p. 88: ‘[...] Assez ai desiré que volsist estre’. | *Dist Sainte Katerine*: ‘Or(e) ne t’esmaies!’ | *Deu[s] te prumet corone par sun angle del c[i]el*, | *De ci qu[e] al quart jur (la) te mettra sur le ch[i]ef*. | *Ore receif baptesme, (e) sainte crestienté*, | *Puis ne t(e) estov(e)ra crendre, Deus od tei ert!* || *Ço dit l’Empereiz*: ‘(mult) crem les plaies qu’avrai!’ | *L’Empereur conuis, de talent [est] si fer* | *Qu’il me f[e]ra occire a hunte e a turment*. | *Dist sainte Katerine*: ‘Ço ne durra lungtens!’ || *Si tu sofres turment pur la Deu feelté*, | *Poez save[i]r bien te sera guerdoné*; | *(Tu) avras la glorie qui ert perpetuel*; | *or si est grand(e) que quer ne set penser!*. Notes: [v. 4: qu’al] ql + tilde, similar tilde for the following word (qrt); [v. 5: receif] the last letter is fading (maybe a t or an s); [v. 7: cren] cre + tilde (?); [v. 7: avrei] the end of the word is unclear in the microfilm; [v. 12: ben] bn + tilde.

¹⁶ Cfr. the corresponding Latin texts. In the BHL 1657 (*Bononinus Mombritius*, cit., p. 286), probable source of the Old French poem: *Dicit ei beata Catherina: beata es O Imperatrix: quoniam video coronam delatam ab angelis: ut eam super caput tuum. imponant Et post triduum deferes eam. Perges ad dominum: ubi sunt caetera bona et infinitum imperium domini nostri Iesu christi. Sed nil cura Imperatrix: Christus enim stabit tibi in omni tua invocatione: Et dicit ei Imperatrix: timeo valde poenas: et tormenta: et Imperatorem pavesco: quoniam plenus est furore: et maligno spiritu: ad quam beata Catherina: Noli inquit timere O regina: sed habe signaculum christi: et non continget te poena: sed parum patie[r]is: et regnabis in saecula saeculorum*. See also the *Vulgate*, which presents a very different text. Cfr. the BHL 1663 (*Vulgate = Passio sancte Katerine virginis*; Hermann KNUST, *Geschichte der Legenden der h. Katharina von Alexandrien und der h. Maria Aegyptiaca*, Halle, Niemeyer, 1890, pp. 281-282): *Ad hec illi inquit: O pretiosa virgo, Christi margarita, super his preces tuas ille suscepit pro cuius amore flagella et carceris horrorem non timuisti, sed et eterno federe ab ipso collatum tibi esse constat ut, pro quibuscunque ipsius maiestatem interpellaveris, inpetratum reportabis. Hos interim qui visitationis gratia tibi assistunt scito inter primicias laborum tuorum iam ascriptos quos triumphali passione ante te celica regna excipient coronatos. Mox milicie agone peracto te ille immortalis sponsus intra*

Some translation choices retain neologisms from the Latin text, others interpret phrases or various words in a manner very similar to the other early 12th century adaptations of Latin texts, so the first Anglo-Norman text dedicated to Saint Catherine follows in all likelihood the *Mombritius* version or a text derived from it. This is ever more evident in the next verses (v. 15-28), which I also briefly compare to the Latin text:

Dunc parla Porfire a la pucele: 'Dame, que duns averunt cels qui Deu servent e le crement e aiment e apellent ? nel di pur el mais que sons <i>voldrei</i> estre'. Dist la pucele: 'Garde es livres de crestiene lei. La troveras les duns <i>qu'</i> avrunt li Deu feel e les fins permanables u ja fin nen ert, ne oil ne pot veer, ne quer ne pot penser'. Mult se fist Porfire <i>i</i> dunques <i>leez</i> . Il e trestuit li altre se gettent a ses piez, e sainte Katerine les ad toz <i>baptizez</i> . Vait s'en l'Empereiz, od lui sa compaignie. En la chartre <i>remist</i> la bele Katerine, li <i>saint Espirit</i> od lui dunt ele est replenie. ¹⁷	Dixit Porphyrius ad Catherinam quae sint: quae donat Christus credentibus in se volo et ego illi militare Catherina: non audisti [...] scripturas christianorum — de aeternis bonis — Tunc gaudio repletus Porphyrius credidit Domino Christo cum ducentis militibus — — Erat autem beata Catherina in carcere apparuit illi dominus ¹⁸
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vite eterne ianuam suscipiet, ubi tibi modulis dulcesonoris celica organa resonabunt, ubi clarissima virginum turba inter lilia, roseis floribus vernantia, sequuntur agnum quocumque ierit. His dictis beata virgo reginam consolari cepit dicens: Iam regina forti animo esto quia post hoc triduum itura es ad Deum. Ne ergo momentanea penarum genera formides, quia non sunt condigne passiones huius temporis ad interminabilem gloriam que talibus pro Christo penis emereatur. Ne erge verearis regis temporalis aut mortalis sponsi qui hodie in sua superbit potentia et cras putredo et vermis futurus est, ne verearis, inquam, eius consortium aspernari pro rege eterno et immortalis sponso domino Ihesu Christo qui pro caducis honoribus donat eterna premia, pro transiuris largitur sine fine mansura.

¹⁷ Cfr. the edition of Ethel C. FAWTIER-JONES, *Les vies*, cit., pp. 88-89: *Dunc parla Porfire a la pucele*: | 'Dame, que duns av(e)runt cels qui Deu servent | e le crement e aiment e apellent ? | Nel di pur el mais que sons voldrei estre'. || *Dist la pucele*: 'Garde es livres de crestiene lei. | la troveras les duns qu(e)'avrunt li Deu feel | e les fins permanables u ja [mais] fin[s] nen ert, | ne oil[z] ne pot vee[i]r, ne quer ne pot penser'. || *Mult se fist [or] Porfire idunques liez*. | *Il e trestuit li altre se gettent a ses piez*, | e sainte Katerine les ad toz baptis[i]ez. || *Vait s'en l'Empereiz, od lui sa compaignie*. | *En la chartre remest la bele Katerine*, | li sainz Espirs od lui dunt ele est replenie. Notes: [v. 17 : crement] possibly creinent in the manuscript (unclear in the microfilm copy); [v. 19 : livres] abridged, fading ink; [v. 20 : qu] q + tilde.

¹⁸ Cfr. the corresponding Latin texts. In the BHL 1657 (*Bononinus Mombritius*, cit., p. 286): *Haec ea dicente: Dixit Porphyrius ad Catherinam profer quaeso nobis: quae sint: quae donat Christus credentibus in se: volo et ego illi militare Catherina: non audisti aliquando scripturas christianorum de aeternis bonis. Dicit ei Porphyrius: Non aliquando cognovi et beata Catherina: Quali lingua aut quibus verbis aliquid de aeternis bonis dici queat? nullis certe: qui autem perseveraverit usque in finem pro Christo: hic salvus erit hereditabitque bona illa: quae angeli possident. Tunc gaudio repletus Porphyrius credidit domino christo cum ducentis militibus et osculantes eam exierunt de carcere media nocte: praecipientes custodibus: ut nulli haec indicarent. Erat autem beata Catherina in carcere duodecim diebus et nutriebatur a splendida columba dei: quibus expletis apparuit illi dominus cum multitudine angelorum et dixit ei: beata es inter mulieres: quoniam multi per te credent in nomine meo, veruntamen ne timeas: ego enim sum semper tecum. Haec cum dixisset: cum angelis suis ascendit in caelum. Cfr. the BHL 1663 (*Vulgate*; Hermann KNUST, *Geschichte*, cit., pp. 282-286): *Ad hec verba beate virginis Porphyrius, quia prime cohortis prefecturam agebat et magnis rerum possessionibus pollebat, cepit rogando insistere quenam illa essent premia que suis Christus militibus pro dampnis temporalibus recompensabit. Cui virgo, 'Audi', inquit 'Porphiri, et animadvertite quia hominem mortalem, quamlibet sit potens, quamlibet dives, quamlibet incolumis, nulla unquam tanta vigilantia, tanta circumspectio eum prevenire valet ut, quacunque sit conditione, a statu suo haudquaquam immutetur. Intuere diligentius quam brevis est vita hominis. Ipse verum divicie, quamlibet longo tempore et magno labore quesite, quam celeri lapsu affluunt. Quid enim forenses verimonia aliud clamant, nisi verum patrimonia sublata? Animadvertite an ipse urbes eiusdem dignitatis statum adhuc retinent quo primo tempore fundate constiterant. Quod si ita est, immo quia ita est nunc in adversum mentis defige intuitum. Et quia interrogando sciscitaris que sunt et quanta illa premia que suis**

This only serves to show that the adaptation technique resembles well that of the authors of the early 12th century and there is no need to imagine that the author lived in Normandy just because some Latin texts connected with the 11th century cult in Rouen could have been known to him. This Rouen-author hypothesis, never doubted by previous research, relies on a shallow demonstration. The 1930 editor made a very risky conjecture:

Hasardons enfin une dernière hypothèse. La ville de Rouen est désignée par notre poète comme ‘l’aîné de Normandie’ (v. 180). C’est un normannisme qui a un sens très précis. En voici la définition: ‘Cette expression dans notre province ne désigne pas le droit que l’aîné a dans les successions de fiefs... elle indique au contraire, le chef-lieu d’un héritage roturier qui a été divisé anciennement entre frères et dont le possesseur est tenu de répondre au seigneur pour la totalité’ [quoting here Houard, *Dictionnaire analytique... de la Coutume de Normandie*, Rouen, 1780, in-4, t. I, p. 56]. Cette institution doit remonter à l’époque féodale et nous nous demandons s’il ne faudrait pas voir dans l’emploi de cette expression par notre auteur une allusion au partage fait par Guillaume de Normandie de ses terres entre ses fils, partage par lequel l’aîné Robert Courteheuse reçut la Normandie, le cadet William Rufus l’Angleterre. Ce serait encore un renvoi à la fin du XI^e ou au début du XII^e siècle.¹⁹

The supposition is illogical, to say the least. Not only an 18th century meaning of a word cannot serve as basis for the interpretation of a late 11th-early 12th century one, but the two words are not one and the same. In her quotation of David Houard’s 17th century juridical work, the editor omitted to quote the word itself (*ainesse*, in the feminine form – in the text of D. Houard), which does not correspond to the masculine from the Old French text. Hence the conjecture does not actually make sense. The only thing with which I agree is that the phrase *l’einz nez de Normendi* is corrupted and needs to be reconstructed as *einznez* (‘aîné’). On the other hand, this word has nothing to do with the city of Rouen. It simply speaks of an elder brother or son, a word which could not come from the Latin source of the text (even though the text of the Rouen *Miracula* does mention the prince of Normandy, but this refers to early

Christus pro transitoriis rependit sic accipe. Porro si hec que sub celo sunt tam fluxa atque fugitiva aliquo modo forent expetenda, cur non multo magis que super celos sunt firma et stabilia mentes humanas [obtectarent] presertim cum illa nec ad votum possunt retineri, ista semel accepta ultra non possunt amitti? Mundus iste velut carcer est tenebrosus in quo nullus ita nascitur ut non moriatur. Illa superna patria pro qua fit mundi contemptus velut civitas est, sole numquam indigens, ubi nulla turbat adversitas, nulla necessitas angustiat, nulla molestia inquietat, sed perennis letitia, iocunditas eterna, felicitas regnat sempiterna. Si queris quid ibi sit ubi tanta et talis beatitudo consistit, aliter dici non potest nisi quicquid boni est ibi est, et quicquid mali est nusquam est. Quod, inquis, bonum est. Illud est, dico, quod oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, que preparuit Deus diligentibus. Ad hanc felicilatam divitiis constipatus anhelabat dicens: Usque quo me Deus in hoc mundo squalentis pulvere retines? Usque quo adeo sitientem ad te spiritum intra carnis ergastulum reprimis? Usque quo prolongatur incolatus meus? Hec est illa desiderabilis patria ubi non est luctus neque clamor neque dolor, sed absterget Deus omnem lacrimam ab oculis sanctorum, de qua dicit unus ex suis: satiabor dum manifestabitur gloria tua. Parva quidem sunt que dico ad ea que visu et rerum veritate experieris si fidelis usque in finem perseveraveris. Iam leti de civium supernorum presenti visione et beate virginis consolatione regina simul et Porphirius procedunt de carcere, parati ad omnia que tortor insanus poterit inferre pro Christi nomine sustinenda. Fit questio a militibus quo in loco Porphirius cum regina pernoctasset. Quibus ipse ait: ‘Quo ego pernoctassem vos ne quesieritis. Etenim summum vobis et utile bonum erit si in consiliis meis adquiescitis, quod contigit michi non terrenis, sed divinis excubiis invigilasse quibus michi via vite revelata est et vere deitatis cognitio reservata. Quocirca si mei estis et gaudere mecum optatis idola vana que huc usque coluimus relinquite et [verum] Deum qui omnia et nos inter omnia creavit, filiumque eius Ihesum Christum credendo adorete quia ipse est Deus et dominator omnium seculorum, in cuius potestate constat universalis machina mundi, qui credentibus eterna beatitudine remunerat, incredulos autem supplicio dampnat eterno. Hic errores nostros diu ferens per beatam Katerinam nobis nunc primum innotuit quam Maxentius, imperator, in carcere clausam vesano tenet iudicio’. Erant ducenti et eo amplius milites quibus a Porphirio talia [referebantur], qui mox idola vana respuentes ad Christum conversi sunt.

¹⁹ Ethel C. FAWTIER-JONES, *Les vies*, cit., p. 103.

11th century times).²⁰ It must be connected with the *realia* from the anonymous author's times.

Since its language and versification places the text in the first wave of Old French poems from the early years of the 12th century, it is safe to assume that the *elder of Normandy* is none other than William Ætheling, son of king Henry I and queen Mathilda (the name taken by princess Edith of Scotland upon her marriage to the third Norman king of England). Their son's nickname *Adelingus* (*Audelin*, *Atheling* or *Aetheling*) was inspired by the Old English *æþeling*, meaning 'son of the king'.²¹ William was born in 1103 and died on November 25, 1120, in the sinking of the White Ship, being proclaimed duke of Normandy as early as 1115, when his father Henry I forced the Norman barons to swear homage and loyalty to him. The Manchester fragment of the Passion of Saint Catherine would date from c. 1115-1120. Therefore, it would impeccably correspond (stylistically, metrically, linguistically, and traductologically) to the first wave of Old French adaptations, those of the time of Philip of Thaon and Benedeit. It would also be predictable that the anonymous author lived in England, thus basically explaining him being unaware of several Rouen *realia*, as he probably worked mainly from written sources and not from first-hand evidence. But this does not mean that William Ætheling had anything to do with the patronage of the Old French poem. He is only mentioned as a secular reference. I am dissuading my readers from jumping on the high horse of socio-political interpretations.²²

It is perhaps best to return to the prudent conclusions of E. Walberg, who did not dare say much about the Manchester Library Catherine fragment (except that it could date back to roughly around the same period as the works of Philippe de Thaon and the early Anglo-Norman writers – carefully questioning the late 11th century dating of E. C. Fawtier-Jones) and noting that the most important feature of the text is its hesitant metrical structure of verses made up of eight, ten, or twelve syllables.²³ This hesitant rhythm makes one think of the

²⁰ Alb. PONCELET, *Sanctae Catharinae*, cit., p. 427: *In occiduis partibus tunc temporis divae memoriae Ricardus Normanniae princeps erat egregius.*

²¹ For a discussion about the meanings of the Old English word *æþeling* and its use in Latin texts of the early Norman period, see David N. DUMVILLE, *The atheling*, «Anglo-Saxon England», VIII, 1979, pp. 1-33. For the different spellings of the word in the Latin texts, see e. g. Orderic Vital and Henri de Huntington: Orderic Vital, VIII, 22: *Henricus [...] desponsavit, ex qua Guillelmum Adelinum [...] genuit*; XII, 18: *Guillelmus Adelingus*; Henri de Huntington, VI, 24: *Eadwardus filius Edmundi Irenside [...] fuit pater Edgari Atheling*. Cfr. R. E. LATHAM, David R. HOWLETT, et al., *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, vol. 1, A-L, London, Oxford University Press, British Academy, 1975, p. 27a (entry *adelingus*). Cfr. other interesting uses of the same word in the Laws of Edward the Confessor: *Et ipse Ædwardus accepit ibi uxorem ex nobili genere, de qua ortus est ei Eadgarus aþeling et Margareta regina Scotie et Cristina soror eius*; from the *Leges Edwardi Confessoris* [1130-1135], edited by *Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, vol. 1, *Text und Übersetzung*, ed. Felix LIEBERMANN, Aalen, Scientia, 1960 (Halle, 1903), p. 664. Or: *Propter quem misit rex Eadwardus, avunculus eius, et fecit eum ad se venire. Ipse autem et uxor eius non longo tempore vixerunt post adventum eorum. Eadgarum vero, filium eius, rex Eadwardus secum retinuit et nutrit pro filio. Et quia heredem putabat eum facere, nominavit aþeling, quod nos dicimus domicellum; sed nos de pluribus, quia filios baronum vocamus domicellos, Angli autem nullum praeter filios regum [...] in quadam parte Saxoniae ling ymago dicebatur, aþel Anglice nobilis, quod coniunctum aþeling, id est nobilis imago, dicitur*; from the same text, edited in the *Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, cit., p. 665.

²² There are already enough speculations about the scope of the Norman cult of Saint Catherine. Catherine B. C. THOMAS, *The Miracle Play at Dunstable*, «Modern Language Notes», xxxii, 6, 1917, pp. 337-344, argued that this cult was encouraged by the first Norman kings of England, and especially by William the Conqueror and his son Henry I. Other even spoke of a military order dedicated to Saint Catherine (Jennifer R. BRAY, *The Medieval Military Order of St. Katherine*, «Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research», LVI, 133, 1983, pp. 1-6). Nevertheless, the only actual arguments discussed by these researches are the dedications of churches, and they do not tell us much. In her study, Walsh 2007 rejected most of these conjectures and does not see any clear trace of a Norman ducal programme in the evolution of the cult of Saint Catherine.

²³ Cfr. Emanuel WALBERG, *Quelques aspects de la littérature anglo-normande: Leçons faites à l'École des chartes*, Geneva, E. Droz, 1936, p. 40: [...] *ce fragment de poème, écrit dans un rythme très varié, — on y trouve*

earliest characteristics of vernacular drama, and it is no wonder that the editor herself had asked herself a similar question in her study:

Au lieu de l'irrégularité inconsciente des rythmes anglo-normands, n'aurions-nous pas ici une irrégularité recherchée, inspirée par un certain sens dramatique et n'aurions-nous pas dans notre poème une œuvre qui, partie du genre 'cantilène de sainte Eulalie' évoluerait déjà vers le miracle ou le mystère? Il nous semble que notre 'vie de sainte Catherine' a dû être récitée par un clerc, peut-être deux, mimant les personnages. Son rythme heurté, au lieu de choquer, aurait ainsi servi à marquer le caractère dramatique.²⁴

Even though she did not propose this interpretation – probably because she favoured a late 11th century dating for the vernacular fragment –, E. C. Fawtier-Jones had linked the Anglo-Norman poem to an early 12th century play performed at Dunstable and dealing with the same story of Saint Catherine. This other play is mentioned in the story of a certain abbot Geoffrey of Gorham's (1119-1146) arrival in England, such as it is narrated in the *Gesta abbatum Sancti Albani*. And it was often quoted in connection with the early development of medieval religious drama. As the story goes, before becoming abbot and before becoming even prior, this Geoffrey "came from Maine, where he was born, being summoned by abbot Richard while he was still a secular, to keep the school at St Albans. And when he arrived, the school had been granted to another master, as he had not come when he was expected. He taught therefore at Dunstable, while waiting for St Alban's school which was again promised him, where he made a play of St Katharine — what we commonly call a Miracle Play. To set it off he asked and obtained from the Sacrist of St Albans the loan of some choir copes. And that play was of Saint Katharine. The following night Master Geoffrey's house was accidentally set on fire; and was burnt, with his books and the copes. So not knowing how to repair the loss to God and St Albans, he offered up himself as a burnt offering to God, taking the religious habit in St Alban's house. And this was the reason why, after he was promoted to be abbot [in 1119], he was so diligent in making precious choir copes in it".²⁵

The interesting thing is that we have absolutely no idea whether the play was written in Latin or vernacular. The second option cannot be discarded²⁶ and it could well be that the

des vers de huit, de dix et de douze syllabes, approximativement, — de plus conservé par un seul manuscrit, très incorrect, d'après ce qui ressort d'autres textes qu'il renferme, ce fragment d'environ deux cents vers se présente dans un état qui en rend la datation très incertaine.

²⁴ Ethel C. FAWTIER-JONES, *Les vies*, cit., p. 86.

²⁵ Arthur F. LEACH, *Educational Charters and Documents, 598-1909*, Cambridge, At the University Press, 1911 (for the quoted translation), p. 77, 79. For the original text, see *Chronica monasterii S. Albani. Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani a Thoma Walsingham regnante Ricardo secundo, eiusdem ecclesiae praecentore, compilata*, vol. 1. AD 793-1290, ed. Henry Thomas RILEY, London, Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867, p. 73: *Iste de Cenomania, unde oriundus erat, venit, vocatus ab Abbate Ricardo, dum adhuc saecularis esset, ut scholam apud Sanctum Albanum regeret. Et cum venisset, concessa fuit schola alii magistro, quia non venit tempestive. Legit igitur apud Dunestapliam, expectans scholam Sancti Albani, sibi repromissam; ubi quemdam ludum de Sancta Katerina, — quem 'Miracula' vulgariter appellamus, — fecit. Ad quae decoranda, petiit a sacrista Sancti Albani, ut sibi capae chorales accommodarentur, et obtinuit. Et fuit ludus ille de Sancta Katerina. Casu igitur, nocte sequenti, accensa est domus Magistri Gaufridi; et combusta est domus, cum libris suis et capis memoratis. Nesciens igitur quomodo hoc damnum Deo et Sancto Albano restauraret, seipsum reddidit in holocaustum Deo, assumens habitum religionis in Domo Sancti Albani. Et haec fuit causa, quare tantum habuit diligentiae, ut capas chorales in eadem, postea in Abbatem promotus, faceret pretiosas.* The story is also analysed by Catherine B. C. THOMAS, *The Miracle Play*, cit.

²⁶ Mary Dominica LEGGE, *La précocité de la littérature anglo-normande*, «Cahiers de civilisation médiévale», VIII, 31-32, 1965, pp. 327-349 (p. 340), who did not exclude the possibility that the language of the play could have been vernacular (*Malheureusement, la langue de la pièce, latine ou française, est inconnue*). Cfr. Ethel C. FAWTIER-JONES, *Les vies*, cit., pp. 86-87: *on est d'accord pour regarder ce 'ludus de Sancta Katerina' de Geoffroi, qui a malheureusement disparu, comme une œuvre latine, mais le fait que nous le connaissons uniquement par une chronique en latin ne le prouve pas. Et si les conquérants de l'Angleterre ont imposé*

dramatic features of *Catherine* fragment from the Manchester codex could be related in one way or another to Geoffrey of Gorham's play. There is also the possibility that the Catherine fragment of Manchester was Geoffrey's play, but there is no way of proving or disproving it, since this is as far as secondary evidence may take us. The only sure thing is that, by the time the Dunstable play was performed, Geoffrey had not yet become prior, so the events narrated in the *Gesta abbatum Sancti Albani* must have taken place sometime at the beginning of the 12th century, well before 1119 – and not in 1119, as recent studies say –;²⁷ maybe in c. 1110, as recently suggested by H. Blurton.²⁸ This fits the c. 1115-1120 dating of the Catherine fragment from Manchester Library, but fails to provide any further proof in order to substantiate this particular hypothesis.

H. Blurton also speculated on the “linked themes of copes and cloaks across the *Life of Christina of Markyate* and the *St Albans Psalter*”²⁹ – which is, of course, a matter of debate – but there may be something behind this Saint Albans connection and it may help us understand better the early beginnings of Old French literature. Something of note clearly happened at that abbey in the first half of the 12th century, as testified by the links between the *Saint Albans Psalter*'s Latin text and the Old French text of the *Oxford Psalter*. Maybe this happened under the patronage of Geoffrey of Gorham, as suggested by recent research.³⁰ Nevertheless, I am not tempted to succumb to a basic form of pareidolia, giving credit to unclear evidence for the sake of constructing an enchanting socio-political conjecture, so I will not replace Thibaut of Vernon with Geoffrey of Gorham, and I will certainly not speculate on the connections between the Anglo-Norman abbots, monks, and nuns. I will simply stop here, for I believe that the only certain things about the Catherine fragment are its dating (c. 1115-1120) and its possible links with the early beginnings of Old French drama. Therefore I will use the conclusion of my short article to reopen an old debate.

In the end, everything could come down to the *Jeu d'Adam*, one of the earliest and most debated theatrical works of the 12th century. Some speak of its Anglo-Norman origin (and if the Catherine fragment of Manchester presents similar features, this origin may be again valid for discussion); others speak about the Poitou, with occasional traces of the Midi, but the truth of the matter is that the text is a sort of dialectal stew. In spite of the recent

l'usage du français, à côté du latin, comme langue usuelle dans les écoles, il est vraisemblable que des représentations du genre de celle de Geoffroi se soient données en français. Sans croire que notre poème soit l'œuvre de Geoffroi, car rien ne le prouve, nous croyons qu'il a été inspiré par le même sentiment et qu'il faut y voir un essai dans le domaine dramatique.

²⁷ *Le Jeu d'Adam. Édition critique et traduction*, ed. Geneviève HASENOHR (and introduction by Geneviève Hasenohr, Jean-Pierre Bordier), Geneva, Droz, 2017, p. CIX-CX, mentioned Geoffrey's story in what was intended to be a sweeping and monumental study for the *Jeu d'Adam* in the history of medieval theatre, but was unaware of the possible links to the Catherine fragment from Manchester, probably because the *Jeu d'Adam* edition drew on mainstream research, which ignored the dramatic features of the Manchester fragment, though well discussed by E. C. Fawtier-Jones. My assumption is based on the fact that G. Hasenohr (and J.-P. Bordier – co-author of the introduction to her edition) did not read the entire text (she quoted only excerpts of Latin phrases from an excerpt published in the *Appendix W* of Edmund KERCHER, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 2 vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1903, vol. 2, p. 366). On account of this truncated perspective, she also considered that *les faits* [Geoffrey's play about saint Catherine] *sont censés se dérouler en 1119* [the year he became abbot].

²⁸ Cfr. Heather BLURTON, *Redressing the Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani: Geoffrey of Gorham's copes, the Life of Christina of Markyate and the St Albans Psalter*, synopsis of a yet unpublished presentation at the conference *Inside Out: Dress and Identity in the Middle Ages*, Fordham University, March 17-18, 2018 (mvstconference.ace.fordham.edu; retrieved August 13, 2020).

²⁹ *Vide supra*.

³⁰ See e. g. Ian SHORT, Maria CARERI, Christine RUBY, *Les Psautiers d'Oxford et de Saint Albans: liens de parenté*, «Romania», CXXVIII, 509-510, 2010, pp. 29-45 (p. 40): *on se doit d'envisager la possibilité qu'Ox* [the Oxford Psalter] *ait été traduit à St Albans sur l'initiative de l'abbé Geoffrey de Gorham (1119-46) à l'intention de l'anachorète Christina de Markyate.*

penchant of considering that it could be of a continental origin, there is no way to convincingly argue in favour of an interpretation or another. In fact, every researcher who took an interest into the linguistic mess of the *Jeu d'Adam* felt the urge to come up with a different 'recipe' for the manner of this text's 'cooking', and this in itself deserves a certain degree of prudence. I, for one, do not feel that philology should be mistaken for palaeontology or archaeology, reconstructing the overlapping linguistic strata according to a half-baked methodology, so my only assumption – agreeing with the fundamental aspects of all previous research – is that the *Jeu* circulated in the Anglo-Norman environment at one point or another during its odd stratigraphic development. This is more than enough to imagine that it may have a connection with the Catherine fragment of Manchester, even though it would be best that the nature of this connection remain – at the time of the writing of this article – still unclear.³¹ The two texts (and many others) still need to be compared in many aspects. Hopefully, future research will be finally able to clarify whether the Manchester fragment had anything to do with the beginnings of Old French drama, and maybe this may shed some light on other early texts, such as the *Jeu d'Adam*.

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³¹ The secondary nature of the *Jeu d'Adam* argument in the current discussion prohibits me from launching an extended presentation of all theories which have been proposed. I will name only two of them, chosen from among the last ones to be published. For instance, one could have hoped that the publication of G. Hasenohr's monumental edition of the *Jeu d'Adam*, planned to cover all codicological, palaeographical, philological, and linguistic aspects of this *unicum* text – the 18th edition to date – would have made superfluous the task of analysing its versification. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The G. Hasenohr edition contains no single word whatsoever concerning the metrical features of the text and argues in favour of a hypothetical reconstruction of the original text. Cfr. *Le Jeu d'Adam*, cit., p. LXXXVII: *A contrôler la métrique, on s'aperçoit que la totalité des vers contenant des forms ou des constructions spécifiquement anglo-normandes (étrangères aux écrits de l'Ouest) sont faux, mais redeviennent métriquement corrects une fois rétabli l'usage continental commun*. Her study is entirely based on the analysis of the rhymes, trying to reconstruct a perfect text where those rhymes actually functioned. However, other interpretations are correspondingly plausible. According to Catherine BOUGY, *The 'Jeu d'Adam': An Anglo-Norman Text?*, in *The 'Jeu d'Adam': MS Tours 927 and the Provenance of the Play*, dir. Christophe Chaguinian, Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 2017, pp. 41-64, the *Jeu d'Adam*'s "metrical irregularities" are due to the text's evolution during its performances in the Anglo-Norman milieu. And personally I cannot exclude the possibility that the vernacular writer was far from a perfect versifier. Like many poets of all times and places, the anonymous author could have simply contended himself with the use of imperfect rhymes and metres, repeating those choices for many times in the space of his poem.