

A Merovingian Commentary on the Four Gospels (PSEUDO-THEOPHILUS, CPL 1001)

The Bible was a vital force in early medieval Francia. It offered Merovingian authors a veiled way of talking about the current order of things, and it provided them with an ideal image, against which the present could be judged.¹ Moreover, the Bible, as already noted by Pierre Riché, 'was a work rich and varied enough to replace the liberal arts',² and it gradually became the bedrock of secular as well as ecclesiastical education in Merovingian Gaul.³ No wonder

1. See, for example, P. Riché, 'La Bible et la vie politique dans le haut Moyen Âge', in *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible*, ed. P. Riché and G. Lobrichon, Bible de tous les temps 4 (Paris, 1984), pp. 385-400; F. Thürlemann, *Der historische Diskurs bei Gregor von Tours: Topoi und Wirklichkeit*, Geist und Werk der Zeiten 49 (Bern and Frankfurt, 1974), pp. 86-94; M. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours. History and Society in the Sixth Century*, trans. C. Carroll (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 36-93 [originally published as *Gregor von Tours (538-594) 'Zehn Bücher Geschichte': Historiographie und Gesellschaftskonzept in 6. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt, 1994), pp. 32-83]; M. Van Uytenghe, *Stylisation biblique et condition humaine dans l'hagiographie mérovingienne* (Brussels, 1987); idem, 'La Bible dans les vies de saints mérovingiennes. Quelques pistes et recherche', *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 168 (1976), pp. 103-11 [reprinted in *La christianisation des pays entre Loire et Rhin (IV^e-VII^e siècle)*, ed. P. Riché (Paris, 1993), pp. 103-11]. See also Y. Hen, 'The uses of the Bible and the perception of kingship in Merovingian Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998), pp. 277-89; I.N. Wood, 'Incest, law and the Bible in sixth-century Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998), pp. 291-304.

2. P. Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West from the Sixth through the Eighth Century*, trans. J.J. Contreni (Columbia, SC, 1976), p. 8 [originally published as *Éducation et culture dans l'Occident barbare, VI^e-VIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1962), p. 13].

3. P. Riché, 'L'instruction des laïcs en Gaule mérovingienne au VII^e siècle', *Caratteri del secolo VII in occidente*, Settimane di studi del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo 5 (Spoleto, 1958), pp. 873-88; idem, 'Le livre Psautier, livre de lecture élémentaire d'après les vies des saints mérovingiennes', in *Études mérovingiennes. Actes de journée de Poitiers, 1-3 Mai 1952* (Paris, 1953), pp. 253-6; idem, 'L'enseignement et la culture des laïcs dans

that Merovingian authors from the sixth century onwards bristle with allusions to the Bible. Abraham and Jacob, Moses and David, are all there in force, a fertile supply of *similes*. Yet, notwithstanding the biblical preoccupation of Merovingian authors, only three exegetical treatises are known to have been composed in Merovingian Gaul. The first and the more famous one is Gregory of Tours' commentary on the Psalms (CPL 1026), of which only the headings, the preface, and two short fragments copied by Mabillon survive.⁴ The second is the commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (CPL 1122a) which, according to Frede, was composed in southern Gaul (probably Provence) in the seventh century.⁵ The third is a commentary on the four Gospels (CPL 1001),⁶ wrongly attributed in the past to Theophilus of Antioch (d. *ante* 190), and it is on this commentary that I wish to concentrate in this paper.

I. – THE COMMENTARY ATTRIBUTED TO THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH

In 1575, Marguerin de la Bigne published a commentary on the four Gospels under the name of Theophilus of Antioch.⁷ The edition was based on a certain manuscript, which has never been traced ever since De la Bigne had copied it.

l'occident pré-carolingien', *La scuola nell'occidente latino dell'alto Medioevo*, Settimane di studi del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo 19 (1972), pp. 231-53; idem, *Education and Culture*, passim; Hen, 'The uses of the Bible', pp. 279-80.

4. Gregory of Tours, *In Psalterii tractatum commentarius*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM I.2 (Hannover, 1885), pp. 423-7.

5. See H.J. Frede, *Kirchenschriftsteller: Verzeichnis und Sigel*, 4th ed. (Freiburg, 1995), p. 146, listed as 'AN Hbr'; *Vetus Latina* 25/2, ed. H.J. Frede (Freiburg, 1983), pp. 1022-6; M. Gorman, 'The myth of Hiberno-Latin exegesis', *Revue bénédictine* 110 (2000), pp. 42-85, at pp. 74-5 (§ 34A). The text was published by H. Zimmer, *Pelagius in Irland* (Berlin, 1901), pp. 420-48, and reprinted in PLS 4 (Paris, 1967), cols. 1627-53. However, according to Bernhard Bischoff, it is of an Irish origin; see B. Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte in der Geschichte der lateinischen Exegese im Frühmittelalter', *Sacris Erudiri* 6 (1954), pp. 189-279 (§ 34A) [revised in idem, *Mittelalterliche Studien*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 205-73]. See also C. Stancliffe, 'Early «Irish» Biblical Exegesis', *Studia patristica* 12 (1975), pp. 361-70, at pp. 362-3; M. McNamara, 'How Irish is the Commentary on the Hebrews in MS St Gallen 73?', *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 12 (1988), pp. 90-94. It is far beyond the scope of this paper to survey the debate on Irish exegesis. For some comments, see Gorman, 'The myth of Hiberno-Latin Exegesis'; D. Ó Cróinín, 'Bischoff's Wendepunkte fifty years on', *Revue bénédictine* 110 (2000), pp. 204-37.

6. Listed by Frede as 'PS-THI Ev'; see Frede, *Kirchenschriftsteller: Verzeichnis und Sigel*, p. 772.

7. See *Sacra bibliotheca sanctorum patrum supra ducentos, qua continentur, illorum de rebus diuinis opera omnia et fragmenta*, ed. M. de la Bigne, vol. 5 (Paris, 1575), cols. 169-92. This edition was later reprinted eight times between 1589 and 1677.

The heading of Book I, as transcribed by De la Bigne, attributes the work to Theophilus, the patriarch of Antioch.⁸ However, the headings of the three following books attribute the commentary to Theophilus, archbishop of Alexandria (d. 412).⁹ Since nothing is known about the manuscript used by De la Bigne for his edition, it is not at all clear whether originally the entire work was attributed to Theophilus of Alexandria, and only at a later stage someone, who was familiar with Jerome's work, altered the heading of the first book.¹⁰ When and where this commentary was first attributed to Theophilus is impossible to gauge. Nevertheless, De la Bigne adopted the heading of the first book at face value, and it took more than two centuries for scholars to question this attribution.

In 1861, the German scholar Johann Otto, reprinted De la Bigne's edition and offered the first critical comments on the text.¹¹ Otto was in no doubt that this commentary on the four Gospels cannot be an authentic work written by Theophilus of Antioch. He rightly argued that this treatise was originally written in Latin, and therefore could not be a Latin translation of a Greek text. Moreover, on the basis of the authorities cited by the commentator, Otto dated this commentary to 'shortly after the middle of the fifth century' (*paulo post medium saeculum quintum*).¹² These observations, however, did not remain unchallenged.

In 1883 Theodore Zahn reprinted, yet again, De la Bigne's edition and appended to it a most learned study on the commentary's language, use of sources, and dissemination.¹³ Unlike Otto's sober observations, Zahn argued for

8. P. S. *NOSTRI THEOPHILI PATRIARCHAE ANTIOCHENI COMMENTARIORVM SIVE ALLEGORIARVM IN SACRA QVATVOR EVANGELIA LIBER PRIMVS.*

9. P. S. *NOSTRI THEOPHILI ARCHIEPISCOPI ALEXANDRINI ALLEGORIARVM IN EVANGELIVM LIBER SECVNDVS/TERTIVS/QVARTVS.*

10. Jerome mentions Theophilus of Antioch's commentary on the Gospels three times; see Jerome, *De uiris illustribus*, ed. E.C. Richardson, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 14 (Leipzig, 1896), c. 25, p. 22: '... Legi sub nomine eius in euangelium et Prouerbia Salomonis commentarios ...'; idem, *Epistolae* 121 (*Ad Algasiam liber quaestionum undecim*), ed. I. Hilberg, CSEL 56 (Vienna and Leipzig, 1918), c. 6, p. 24: 'Theophilus ... qui quatuor euangelistarum in unum opus dicta conpingens ingenii sui nobis monumenta dimisit ...'; idem, *Commentarium in Matheum libri IV*, ed. É. Bonnard, *Saint Jérôme: Commentaire sur Saint Matthieu*, 2 vols., *Sources chrétiennes* 242 and 259 (Paris, 1977-9), praefatio, I, p. 68: 'Legisse me fateor ante annos plurimos in Matheum ... Theophili Antiochenae urbis episcopi commentarios ...'.

11. *Theophili episcopi Antiocheni ad Autolycum*, ed. J.C.T. Otto, *Corpus apologetarum christianorum saeculi secundi* 8 (Jena, 1861), pp. vii-viii and 278-324.

12. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

13. T. Zahn, 'Der Evangelienkommentar des Theophilus von Antiochien', in idem, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altchristlichen Literatur*, vol. 2 (Erlangen, 1883), pp. 1-233.

the authenticity of this work. With a thorough and extremely learned examination of minute details, he tried to prove that the Latin version is indeed a translation of the Greek original text, which was composed by Theophilus of Antioch and was later cited, without acknowledgement, by Ambrose, Jerome and Arnobius.

Less than a year after the publication of Zahn's massive study, his theory was brutally, but not unjustly, slaughtered by Adolf Harnack. In his study, Harnack exposed the many anachronisms in Zahn's linguistic argument and, subsequently, managed to demonstrate how, contrary to what Zahn had argued, the author of this commentary had borrowed extensively from the works of Jerome, Eucherius of Lyons and Arnobius.¹⁴ Harnack comments were ready for publication when, to his great joy, he received a letter from the director of the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels, reporting on an early manuscript that contains the commentary in question.¹⁵ This finding was proved to be extremely crucial. Not only the version transmitted by the Brussels manuscript (to which I shall return later) ignores Theophilus altogether, it also has a prologue, not found in De la Bigne's edition, which clearly supports Harnack's hypothesis. In this prologue, the commentator himself admits that he picked and mixed whatever he deemed appropriate from other commentaries.¹⁶

Putting all the evidence together, Harnack suggested a new date for the composition of the commentary, arguing that it could not have been written before c. 450 (that is, the date of the latest source used by the commentator), or after c. 650.¹⁷ But then he narrowed this period to between c. 470 and 529 on a triple ground.¹⁸ First, Harnack notes, there are no traces of the semi-Pelagian controversy in the commentary.¹⁹ Second, the Brussels manuscript, which is the earliest copy of the work known to us, coupled the commentary with the sermons of Caesarius of Arles (d. 542) and the Pseudo-Gelasian *Decretum de*

14. A. Harnack, *Der angebliche Evangelienkommentar des Theophilus von Antiochien*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur I.4 (Leipzig, 1883), pp. 97-175.

15. On the letter and its importance for Harnack argument, see Harnack, *Der angebliche Evangelienkommentar*, pp. 159-75.

16. See Pseudo-Theophilus, *Commentary on the Four Gospels*, ed. M. Gorman (in press), prologus, lines 1-11; PLS 3, col. 1283.

17. Harnack, *Der angebliche Evangelienkommentar*, p. 170.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 170-3. This conclusion was accepted by M. Schanz, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur bis zum Gesetzgebungswerk des Kaisers Justinian* (Munich, 1920), p. 567.

19. The semi-Pelagian theology on the grace and the free will was discussed by the Merovingian church councils of Orange II (529) and Vaison II (529); see *Concilium Arausicanum* and *Concilium Vasense*, eds. J. Gaudemet and B. Basdevant, *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens (VI-VII^e siècles)*, Sources chrétiennes 353 (Paris, 1989), pp. 154-77 and 188-93. See also *Epistola Bonifatii II papae ad Caesarium*, *ibid.*, pp. 176-85.

libris recipiendis et non recipiendis, both written at the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century, and, moreover, by the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century the commentary in question was already cited by Isidore of Seville.²⁰ Last, the language and style of the commentary, according to Harnack, are too good to be Merovingian. Thus, he concludes, it must have been composed before the colossal decline in education and culture which took place in Gaul from the middle of the sixth century onwards.²¹

Harnack's devastating criticism of Zahn's theory was not the end of the story. Zahn did not give up that easily, and in a series of papers the two German scholars continued arguing, each sticking tenaciously to his own point of view.²² Yet, as already noted by William Sandy in 1885, it seems quite clear that Zahn was fighting a losing cause.²³ Furthermore, by that time other scholars joined the discussion, new manuscripts were found,²⁴ and new theories were formed. In 1884 Jean-Baptiste-François Pitra collated De la Bigne's edition with the Brussels manuscript, and published a list of corrections to the text.²⁵ At the same year, Albert Hauck argued that although Theophilus of Antioch was, most probably, not the compiler of this treatise, it was nonetheless composed around the year 200.²⁶ Wilhelm Bornemann, on the other hand, following Harnack's

20. Harnack refers to Isidore of Seville's *Allegoriae quaedam sanctae Scripturae uel de nominibus legis et euangelii* (PL 83, cols. 97-130); see Harnack, *Der angebliche Evangelienkommentar*, pp. 170-1.

21. I shall address this misrepresentation more fully later in the paper.

22. See T. Zahn, 'Nachträge zu Theophilus', in idem, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, vol. 3 (Erlangen, 1884), pp. 198-277; idem, 'Cardinal Pitra's neueste Beiträge vornicänischen Kirchenliteratur', *Zeitschrift für kirchliche Wissenschaft und kirchlichen Leben* 5 (1884), pp. 617-30, at pp. 626-8; idem, 'Cardinal Pitra's neueste Beiträge vornicänischen Kirchenliteratur', *Zeitschrift für kirchliche Wissenschaft und kirchlichen Leben* 6 (1885), pp. 23-39, at pp. 37-9; A. Harnack, 'Der falsche Theophilus und Claudianus Mamertus', *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 17 (1886), cols. 404-5; idem, *Geschichte der altchristliche Literatur bis Eusebius*, vol. I.2 (Leipzig, 1893), pp. 496-502 and vol. II.1 (Leipzig, 1904), pp. 319-20.

23. See W. Sandy, 'A commentary on the Gospels attributed to Theophilus of Antioch', *Studia biblica. Essay in Biblical Archaeology and Criticism and Kindred Subjects* (Oxford, 1885), pp. 89-101, at p. 90. Sandy's paper gives a nice overview of the issues in question.

24. See, for example, S. Berger, *Histoire de la Vulgate* (Paris, 1893), pp. 17 and 83-4; G. Morin, 'Homélie inédites attribuées à Jean de Jérusalem dans la seconde partie de ms. 427 de Reims', *Revue bénédictine* 22 (1905), pp. 12-14; R. Helssig, 'Zur Theophilus-Frage', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 33 (1912), pp. 529-36.

25. J.-B.-F. Pitra, *Analecta sacra Spicilegio Solesmensi parata*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1884), pp. 626-34. De la Bigne's edition with Pitra's corrections were reprinted by A. Hamman, PLS 3 (Paris, 1963), cols. 1282-329.

26. A. Hauck, 'Zur Theophilusfrage', *Zeitschrift für kirchliche Wissenschaft und kirchlichen Leben* 5 (1884), pp. 561-8. Later Hauck changed his mind, and suggested a later

argument, re-dated the work to between c. 470 and c. 650,²⁷ and in 1907 Henri Quentin suggested to attribute the work to John of Jerusalem (d. 417).²⁸

For almost a century scholars were obsessed with justifying or refuting De la Bigne's attribution of the commentary on the four Gospels to Theophilus of Antioch. Various philological and grammatical arguments were used by both sides in order to prove their point, yet none of the scholars who discussed this commentary had ever considered seriously the possibility that it is probably a Merovingian composition. Only André Wilmart, in a short paper on the diffusion of Arnobius' commentary, expressed his belief that the so-called Pseudo-Theophilus' commentary was not written before the seventh century.²⁹ Unfortunately, though, Wilmart does not explain on what basis his observation was made. Nevertheless, some small pieces of evidence, which point to Merovingian Gaul, may give his hypothesis some support.

II. – THE EVIDENCE OF BRUSSELS, BR 9850-9852

The most important evidence concerning the commentary with which we are concerned, is Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 9850-9852 (Van den Gheyn's catalogue 1221; CLA X.1547a).³⁰ This magnificent Uncial manuscript is the earliest to transmit Pseudo-Theophilus' commentary on the four Gospels, and

(i.e. early medieval) date; see A. Hauck, 'Theophilus von Antiochia', *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 19 (Leipzig, 1907), pp. 668-9.

27. W. Bornemann, 'Zur Theophilusfrage', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 10 (1889), pp. 169-252. Bornemann's conclusions were adopted by Otto Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, vol. 1 (Freiburg, 1913), pp. 313-14.

28. H. Quentin, 'Jean de Jérusalem et le commentaire sur les évangiles attribué à Théophile d'Antioche', *Revue bénédictine* 24 (1907), pp. 107-9. This suggestion was based on a colophon in Reims 427, which reads: 'EXPLICIT EXPOSITIO EVANGELII SECVNDVM LVCAM. IOHANNES EPISCOPVS FIERI IVSSIT'. This statement, however, cannot be taken to imply that John, whoever he might have been, was the compiler of this commentary.

29. A. Wilmart, 'La diffusion des notes exégétiques d'Arnobé le Jeune', in *Miscellanea Amelli. Scritti varii di letteratura ecclesiastica dedicati al Rev.mo Abate Ambrogio Amelli O.S.B. Cassinese in occasione del cinquantésimo anniversario della sua ordinazione sacerdotale* (Montecassino, 1920), pp. 53-7, at p. 54.

30. For a detailed description of the manuscript and its content, see L. Delisle, 'Notice sur un manuscrit mérovingien de la Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, no. 9850-9852', *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale et autres bibliothèques* 31 (1884), pp. 33-47.

thus provides the only firm *terminus ante quem* for its composition. The title page of the original codex reads:³¹

HIC LIBER VITAS PATRVM SEV VEL HVMIAS SANCTI CAESARII EPISCOPI, QVOD
VENERABILIS VIR NOMEDIVS ABBA SCRIBERE ROGAVIT, ET IPSVM BASILICAE SANCTI
MEDARDI CONTVLIT, DEVOTA MENTE SI QVIS ILLVM EX EADEM AVFERRE
TENTAVERIT IVDICIVM CVM DEO ET SANCTO MEDARDO SIBI HABERE [NON
DVBITET].³²

Thus, we are told, the manuscript was commissioned by Abbot Nomedius, and subsequently presented by him to the monastery of Saint-Médard of Soissons. Very little is known about Nomedius (or Numidius), apart from the fact that he was the abbot of Saint-Médard of Soissons under the Merovingian king Childebert III (694/5-711).³³ Accordingly, the Brussels manuscript can safely be dated to c. 700,³⁴ and it is reasonable to assume that it was produced at Soissons, in either Saint-Médard itself, or in the nunnery of Notre Dame.³⁵

Yet, the importance of Brussels, BR 9850-9852 goes far beyond the fact that it provides us with a firm *terminus ante quem*. The content of this lavishly produced manuscript is also revealing, for it contains four different, but closely

31. Fols. 1-3, 140-43 and 177 are not part of the original codex. Fols. 1 and 177 are a bifolium from a ninth-century Psalter; fol. 2 is a fragment from a late ninth-century sacramentary, possibly from Saint-Amand (CLA X.1546); fol. 3 is covered with various scribbles (*saec.* IX-XII); and fols. 140-43 is a quire of two bifolia written in the so-called Corbie *abscript* (CLA X.1547b). On the latter, see D. Ganz, *Corbie in the Carolingian Renaissance*, Beihefte der Francia 20 (Sigmaringen, 1991), pp. 51 and 53.

32. A large section of the title page is nowadays completely invisible without the help of UV light. It was transcribed by Delisle, 'Notice sur un manuscrit mérovingien', p. 34 with a fac-simile (Plate 1).

33. See Delisle, 'Notice sur un manuscrit mérovingien', pp. 34-6. On the Merovingian kingdom under Childebert III, see I.N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London and New York, 1994), pp. 255-72.

34. Some scholars dated the manuscript to 695-697, but it is not at all clear on the basis of what evidence. See, for example, C.M. Batlle, *Die 'Adhortationes sanctorum patrum' ('verba seniorum') im lateinischen Mittelalter*, Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens 31 (Münster, 1971), p. 17. Ludwig Traube, on the other hand, confused by the c. 1200 *ex libris* of Saint-Vaast, dated the manuscript to later than 711 and attributed it to Saint-Vaast of Arras; see L. Traube, *O Roma Nobilis. Philologische Untersuchungen aus dem Mittelalter*, Abhandlungen der philosophisch-philologischen Classe der Königl. Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 19 (Munich, 1891), p. 331.

35. By c. 1200 the manuscript was at the library of Saint-Vaast of Arras, as indicated by the *ex libris* on fol. 4r. Later it found its way to the collection of the Bollandists, where it received the shelf-mark *O MS. 10*. At the end of the eighteenth century the manuscript was given, with many other manuscripts, to the royal library in Brussels, from where it was taken to Paris during the French Revolution. Eventually, it was returned to Brussels in 1815.

related, sections: Pelagius' *Verba seniorum* I-XV.39 (fols. 5r-107r),³⁶ which had quite a circulation in early medieval Gaul;³⁷ a collection of ten sermons addressed to monks by Caesarius of Arles and the so-called Eusebius Gallicanus (fols. 107v-139v);³⁸ the *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis* (fol. 139v),³⁹ that is, a list of orthodox and approved authors and their works;⁴⁰ and finally our commentary on the four Gospels (fols. 144r-176v). The Brussels manuscript, then, is emphatically not a random gathering of unrelated texts bound together. It is a rather coherent collection of carefully chosen texts, suitable for the education of monks. Nomedius, it seems, had the monastic community of Saint-Médard of Soissons in mind when commissioning this volume.

As a book whose main purpose was to enlighten monks on matters of discipline and doctrine, the production of the Brussels codex fits extremely well with the broader context of Church reforms, initiated by Queen Balthild at the middle of the seventh century.⁴¹ As her Merovingian biographer clearly indicated:

36. See Batlle, *Die 'Adhortationes sanctorum patrum'*, especially pp. 10-15 and 17; A. Wilmart, 'Le recueil latin des Apophtegmes', *Revue bénédictine* 34 (1922), pp. 185-99, especially p. 191; A. Diem, 'Keusch und Rein. Eine Untersuchung zu den Ursprüngen des frühmittelalterlichen Klosterwesens und seinen Quellen' (PhD thesis, University of Utrecht, 2000), pp. 63-5 and 349. For an edition of Pelagius' *Verba seniorum*, see PL 73, cols. 851-992.

37. See Batlle, *Die 'Adhortationes sanctorum patrum'*, especially pp. 208-17.

38. These sermons are (in order of appearance): Caesarius, *Sermo* 4; Eusebius Gallicanus, *Homilia* 39; idem, *Sermo extravagans* 6; idem, *Homiliae* 40, 41 and 44; Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones* 233, 235, 236 and 234. On this collection of sermons (the so-called *M* collection), see J. Courreau and A. de Vogüé, *Césaire d'Arles: Œuvres monastiques*, vol. 2 - *Œuvres pour les moines*, Sources chrétiennes 398 (Paris, 1994), pp. 19-20. For an edition of these sermons, see Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones*, ed. G. Morin, 2 vols. (Maredsous, 1937) [reprinted in CCSL 103-104 (Turnhout, 1953)]; Eusebius Gallicanus, *Collectio homiliarum et sermones extravagantes*, ed. F. Glorie, CCSL 101-101B (Turnhout, 1971).

39. Only the title of this treatise survives at the bottom of fol. 139v. It seems that at a later stage (*saec.* VIII^{ca}) at least one folio (which originally made a bi-folium with fol. 146) and possibly another bi-folium, which contained the entire treatise, were cut out and replaced with fols. 140-43. On the *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis*, see R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 202-5. See also E. von Dobschütz, *Das Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis in kritischem Text*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristliche Literatur III.8.4 (Leipzig, 1912).

40. The so-called *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis* had nothing to do with Pope Gelasius, and may well be a product of Merovingian Gaul. See McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, p. 202.

41. On these reforms, see E. Ewig, 'Das Privileg des Bischofs Berthefred von Amiens für Corbie von 664 und die Klosterpolitik der Königin Balthild', *Francia* 1 (1973), pp. 61-114 [reprinted in idem, *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien. Gesammelte Schriften (1952-1973)*,

We certainly must not pass over [the fact] that throughout the senior basilicas of Lord Denis, Lord Germanus, Lord Medard, St Peter, Lord Anian, and Saint Martin or wherever her precept reached, she ordered the bishops and abbots, by persuading them for the zeal of Christ, and sent them letters of this effect, that the monks dwelling in these places ought to live under a holy regular order. And in order that they would freely acquiesce in this, she ordered a privilege to be confirmed for them and she also conceded them immunities so that she might better entice them to exhort the clemency of Christ, the highest king, for the king and for peace.⁴²

Consequently, monastic conduct as well as the education of monks and nuns must have preoccupied both abbots and bishops in the second half of the seventh century, and against this background the production of Brussels 9850-9852 should be understood. Whether this Merovingian reform movement also provided the impetus for the initial composition of Pseudo-Theophilus' commentary on the four Gospels, is impossible to ascertain.

III. — THE BOBBIO MISSAL AND OTHER LITURGICAL PARALLELS

At approximately the same time in which the Brussels manuscript was produced, someone in Merovingian Gaul copied some excerpts from the commentary on the four Gospels, mainly from the commentary on Matthew. These excerpts, with some other short texts, were appended to the so-called Bobbio Missal,⁴³ which is a unique combination of a lectionary and a

ed. H. Atsma, 2 vols., *Beihefte der Francia* 3 (1979), II, pp. 538-83]; J.L. Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: the careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian history', in *Medieval Women*, ed. D. Baker, *Studies in Church History*, subsidia 1 (Oxford, 1978), pp. 31-77 [reprinted in eadem, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986), pp. 1-48]; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 197-202; Y. Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 481-751*, *Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions: Medieval and Early Modern Peoples* 1 (Leiden, New York and Cologne, 1995), pp. 54-7.

42. *Vita sanctae Balthildis*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM II (Hannover, 1888), c. 9, pp. 493-4: 'Preterire enim non debemus, quod per seniores basilicas sanctorum domni Dionisii et domni Germani uel domni Medardi et sancti Petri uel domni Aniani seu et sancti Martini, uel ubicumque eius perstrinxit notitia, ad pontifices seu abbates suadendo pro zelo Dei praecepit et epistolas pro hoc eis direxit, ut sub sancto regulari ordine fratres infra ipsa loca consistentes uiuere deberent. Et ut hoc libenter acquiescerent, priuilegium eis firmare iussit, uel etiam emunitates concessit, ut melius eis delectaret pro rege et pace summi regis Christi clementiam exorare'. I cite the English translation by P. Fouracre and R. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640-720* (Manchester, 1996), p. 125.

43. Paris, BnF lat. 13246, fol. 1r-6r (CLA V.653). For a fac-simile, see J.W. Legg, *The Bobbio Missal: A Gallican Mass-Book*, Henry Bradshaw Society 53 (London, 1917). For an edition, see E.A. Lowe, *The Bobbio Missal: A Gallican Mass-Book*, Henry Bradshaw Society

sacramentary that was produced c. 700 in Burgundy, possibly in the region of Vienne, if not at Vienne itself.⁴⁴ It is not at all clear according to what criteria the choice of passages was made. Nevertheless, it seems that the overall purpose of this abridgement was didactic. The compiler clearly indicated each passage cited from the Gospels with the word *CAPITVLVM* and each interpretation cited from the commentary with the word *INTERPRETATIO*, thus pointing to the text's pedagogical aspirations.

Bearing in mind that the Bobbio Missal version of the commentary is only one component in a plethora of miscellaneous material that was appended to the original lectionary-sacramentary,⁴⁵ the didactic purpose of the compiler becomes even clearer. Among those texts, one can find the Pseudo-Augustinian sermon *De dies malus*,⁴⁶ the so-called *Ioca monachorum*,⁴⁷ instructions on how to celebrate a mass,⁴⁸ an Ordinal of Christ,⁴⁹ and some computistical material,⁵⁰ all of which were designed, in one way or another, to assist the clergy in executing its pastoral duties. Thus, it seems safe to conclude, that by the end of the seventh century or the beginning of the eight, our commentary on the four Gospels was already perceived in Merovingian Gaul as a standard textbook of

58 (London, 1920). On the Bobbio Missal, see E.A. Lowe and A. Wilmart, *The Bobbio Missal: Notes and Studies*, Henry Bradshaw Society 61 (London, 1924); and see the various papers collected in *The Bobbio Missal: Liturgy and Religious Culture in Merovingian Gaul*, ed. Y. Hen and R. Meens (Cambridge, in press).

44. See R. McKitterick, 'The scripts of the Bobbio Missal', in *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Hen and Meens (in press).

45. *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Lowe, pp. 1-7 and 177-82.

46. *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Lowe, pp. 4-5. On this sermon, see J. Machielsen ed., *Opera homiletica*, vol. 1, *Clavis Patristica Pseudoepigraphorum Medii Aevi 1A* (Turnhout, 1990), no. 3314; and see C. Wright and R. Wright, 'The *Ioca monachorum* and sermon *De dies malus*', in *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Hen and Meens (in press).

47. *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Lowe, pp. 5-7. On the *Ioca monachorum*, see J. Dubois, 'Comment les moines du Moyen Âge chantaient et goûtaient les Saintes Écritures', in *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible*, ed. Riché and Lobrichon, pp. 261-98, at pp. 264-70. See also Wright and Wright, 'The *Ioca monachorum* and sermon *De dies malus*', in *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Hen and Meens (in press). The various *Ioca monachorum* were edited by W. Suchier, *Das mittellateinische Gespräch Adrian und Epictitus nebst verwandten Texten (Ioca Monachorum)* (Tübingen, 1955), and reprinted in PLS 4, cols. 917-41. For a list of the manuscripts used, see idem, *Scriptorium* 11 (1957), p. 136, no. 245.

48. *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Lowe, c. 581, pp. 177-8.

49. *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Lowe, c. 582, p. 178. On this Ordinal of Christ, see R. Reynolds, *The Ordinals of Christ from their Origins to the Twelfth Century*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde des Mittelalters 7 (Berlin and New York, 1978), especially p. 58.

50. *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Lowe, c. 548, p. 179.

biblical knowledge, that any priest and bishop should master. It was duly added by someone, a priest or a bishop, to his liturgical-canonical *uade mecum*.⁵¹

There is, however, one further point which connects Pseudo-Theophilus commentary on the four Gospels with the Bobbio Missal and with other liturgical manuscripts from the Merovingian period. Immediately after the prologue, and before commenting on the Gospels themselves, the author inserted a short paragraph explaining the symbols of the four evangelists.⁵² This passage has some distinctive parallels in three sacramentaries from Merovingian Gaul, that is, the Bobbio Missal,⁵³ the *Missale Gallicanum Vetus*,⁵⁴ and the so-called Old Gelasian Sacramentary.⁵⁵ These parallels are not only thematic, but also linguistic and syntactic, as the following table clearly demonstrates:

<i>Pseudo-Theophilus</i>	<i>The Bobbio Missal</i>	<i>Missale Gallicanum Vetus</i>
Quattuor euangelia Iesum Christum quattuor animabus figurata demonstrant.	Fili karissimi exponamus uobis, ut quam figuram unusquisque in se conteneat;	Filii karissimi, non diutius ergo uos teneamus, exponamus uobis, quam rationem et quam figuram unusquisque in se conteneat;
Matthaeus enim saluatorem nostrum natum passumque homini comparauit.	et quare Mattheus in figuram hominis abeat: quia inicio suo nihil aliud agit, nisi natiuitatem saluatoris, plini ordinis generacionis enarrat.	et quare Mattheus in se figuram hominis habeat: quia initio suo nihil aliud agit, nisi natiuitatem saluatoris, pleni ordine generationis enarrat. Sic enim coepit: <i>Liber generationis Iesu Christi, filii Dauid, filii Abraham</i> . Videtis, quia non inmerito huic hominis

51. See R. Meens, 'Using the Bobbio Penitential', in *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Hen and Meens (in press); Y. Hen, 'The liturgy of the Bobbio Missal', in *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Hen and Meens (in press); idem, 'Priests and books in Merovingian Gaul', in *Early Medieval Priests*, ed. Y. Hen and R. Meens (forthcoming).

52. Pseudo-Theophilus, *Commentary on the Four Gospels*, ed. Gorman (in press), lines 12-22; PLS 3, col. 1283.

53. *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Lowe, cc. 176, 178, 180 and 182, pp. 55-6.

54. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 493 (?Chelles/Faremoutier/Rebais, saec. VIII¹); CLA I.92-3. For an edition, see *Missale Gallicanum Vetus*, ed. L.C. Mohlberg, *Rerum ecclesiasticarum documenta, series maior 3* (Rome, 1958), cc. 69, 71, 73 and 75, p. 22.

55. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 316 + Paris lat. 7193, fols. 41-56 (Chelles/Jouarre, saec. VIII^{med}); CLA I.105. For an edition, see *Liber sacramentorum Romanae ecclesiae ordinis anni circuli (Sacramentarium Gelasianum)*, ed. L.C. Mohlberg, L. Eizenhöfer and P. Siffrin, *Rerum ecclesiasticarum documenta, series maior 4* (Rome, 1960), cc. 303, 305, 307, 309, pp. 47-8.

Marcus leonis gerens figuram a solitudine incipit dicens, *Vox clamantis in deserto, parate uiam domini*, siue quia regnat inuictus.

Ioannes habet similitudinem aquilae, quod nimis alta petiuerit. Ait enim, *In principio erat uerbum, et uerbum erat apud deum, et deus erat uerbum. Hoc erat in principio apud deum*, uel quia Christus resurgens uolauit ad caelos.

Lucas uituli speciem gestat, ad cuius instar saluator noster est immolatus, uel quod sacerdotii figuratur officium.

Marcus aeuangelista leonis gerens figuram a solitudine incipit dicere, *Vox clamantes in deserto parate uiam domini*, siue quia regnat inuictus, huius leonis, multifariae inuenimus exempla, ut non uacet dictum illud *Iuda filius meus catulus leonis, de germine mihi*; recubans dormisti, ut leo et sicut catulus leonis quis excitabit eum?

Iohannes abit tudinem aquile, quod nemis alta petierit; ait enim Dauid ex persona Christi: *Renouabitur sicut aquile iuuentus tua*, id est Iesu Christi domini nostri, qui resurgens a mortuis, ascendit in celis, unde iam uobis conceptis rignans gloriatur aeclesia noua tendere christiani legis exordia.

Lucas aeuangelista speciem uituli gestat, ad cuius instar saluator noster est immolatus, et ideo Lucas uitolo comparatur, quia dua cornua duo testamenta, et quattuor pedum unguis quattuor aeuangelia contenebat.

adsignata persona est, quando ab hominis natiuitatem initium conpraehendit; nec inmerito (ut diximus) huic misterio adsignata est Matthei persona.

Marcus euangelista leonis gerens figuram a solitudine incipit dicere, *Vox clamantes in deserto parate uiam domini*, siue quia regnat inuictus, huius leonis, multifaria inuenimus exempla, ut non uacet dictum illud: *Iuda filius meus catulus leonis, de germine mihi ascendisti*; recubans dormisti, ut leo et sicut catulus leonis, quis excitabit eum?

Iohannis habet similitudinem aquilae, quod nimis alta petierit; ait enim: *In principio erat uerbum, et uerbum erat apud deum, et deus erat uerbum. Hoc erat in principio apud deum*. Et Dauid ex persona Christi dicit: *Renouabitur sicut aquilae iuuentus tua*, id est Iesu Christi domini nostri, qui resurgens a mortuis ascendit in caelos.

Lucas euangelista speciem uituli gestat, ad cuius instar saluator noster est immolatus. Hic enim Christi euangelium locuturus sic coepit de Zacharia et Helisabeth, de quibus Iohannis Baptista in summa natus est senectute; et ideo Lucas uitulo comparatur, quia dua cornua duo testamenta, et quattuor pedum unguis et quattuor euangelia quasi tenera firmitate nascentia in se plenissime contenebat.

These apparent parallels must not be taken to imply that one has borrowed from the other. Given the fact that these texts are not identical, it seems more appropriate to assume that their authors used common material, already available and accessible where the earlier text was compiled. Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt the Merovingian origin of the tradition represented by the various versions of this text. No such a text is to be found in any of the liturgical compositions known to represent the Roman rite, such as the *Sacramentarium Veronense* or the various versions of the so-called Gregorian Sacramentary. This short explanation of the *symbola euangelistae* appears only in liturgical compositions from the Merovingian period, and later it was incorporated into several of the so-called eighth-century Gelasian sacramentaries,⁵⁶ which were copied during the second half of the eighth century in Gaul, and for the use of the Frankish Church.⁵⁷ Similar *expositiones euangeliorum* were, of course, incorporated into the works of several late-antique and early medieval commentators, such as Jerome or Eucherius of Lyon.⁵⁸ Yet, Pseudo-Theophilus' choice of words and phrases is unique, and has no parallel in early medieval sources, apart from the Gallican sacramentaries mentioned above.⁵⁹ It appears, therefore, that our commentator worked within the Gallican tradition, or at least was well familiar with it.

56. See, for example, *Liber sacramentorum Gellonensis*, ed. A. Dumas and J. Deshusses, CCSL 159 (Turnhout, 1981), cc. 537, 539, 541, 543, pp. 66-7; *Liber sacramentorum Engolismensis*, ed. P. Saint-Roch, CCSL 159B (Turnhout, 1987), cc. 704, 706, 708, 710, pp. 100-2.

57. On the eighth-century Gelasian sacramentaries, see Y. Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald (877)*, Henry Bradshaw Society, subsidia 3 (London, 2001), pp. 50-61, and see the bibliography cited there. See also B. Moreton, *The Eighth-Century Gelasian Sacramentary. A Study in Tradition* (Oxford, 1976).

58. See, for example, Jerome, *Commentarium in Mattheum*, ed. Bonnard, praefatio, I, pp. 64-6; Eucherius of Lyons, *Instructionum libri duo*, ed. C. Wotke, CSEL 31 (Prague, Vienna and Leipzig, 1894), I, De quaestionibus difficilioribus novi testamenti, c. 1, pp. 105-6.

59. It is worth noting that the order of the evangelists – Matthew, Mark, John and Luke – appears only in two other places, that is, in the so-called Mommsen Catalogue and in the Curetonian manuscript of the Old Syriac Gospels. See P.-M. Bogaert, 'Les Quatre Vivants, l'Évangile et les évangiles', *Revue théologique de Louvain* 32 (2001), pp. 457-78, at pp. 459-60. On the early list of biblical books discovered in 1885 by Theodor Mommsen in the Phillips MS 12266 at Cheltenham (now Rome, Biblioteca Nazionale, Fondo Vittorio Emanuele 1235), see W. Sanday, 'The Cheltenham list of canonical books of the Old Testament and New Testament and the writings of Cyprian', *Studia biblica et ecclesiastica* 3 (1891), pp. 217-325. Although the manuscript is from the tenth century, the list itself is dated to 359, and thought to be of western origins. On the Old Syriac version of the Gospels, published by William Cureton in 1858, see B.M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 36-48.

IV. – CONTENT, STYLE, AND LANGUAGE

After the prologue and the short note on the *symbola euangelistae*, the author turns to explain and enlighten passages from the four Gospels. The commentary is divided into four books, each dedicated to a different Gospel, and the first book (dedicated to Gospel of Matthew) is, by far, the longer and most elaborate of them all⁶⁰. Rather than being detailed and exhaustive, the commentary offered by Pseudo-Theophilus is a collection of short comments on selected passages. Each comment opens with a citation from the Gospels, after which a short and succinct explanation is added. Let us take two examples. On Mat. XIX.24 the author writes:

*Facilius est camelum per foramen acus transire, quam diuitem intrare in regna caelorum. Per diuitem populum significat Iudaeorum, qui cum diuitiis egressus est de Aegypto, de quo legitur, Diuites egerunt et esurierunt [Ps xxxiii.11]. Per camelum autem gentilem populum dicit, nihil habentem rectum gerentemque sarcinam peccatorum. Ac per foramen acus intrantem, hoc est, per artam uiam incedentem, quae ducit ad regna caelorum. Nam Iudas de praetio proditoris diues fuit, sed uitam aeternam habere non meruit.*⁶¹

And this is how he explains ‘The Parable of the Two Sons’ (Mat. XXI.28-30):

*Homo quidam habuit duos filios et accedens ad primum, dixit, Fili, uade, operare in uineam meam. At ille respondens dixit, Nolo. Per duos filios duos populos dicit, Iudaeum atque gentilem, quorum prior gentilis est intellegendus negans se paternis parere praeceptis et tamen fecit. Posterior autem promisit se facturum quod iusserat pater, utpote Iudaeus et minime promissa compleuit. Vinea uero lex est accipienda, ad cuius praecepta omnes homines inuitantur.*⁶²

The explanations are very basic, and aim at revealing the allegorical layer of the biblical text, with very little theological discussion, if at all. The overall impression is that the author of this commentary sought to produce a comprehensible and simple handbook, that will enable the reader to grasp the basic meaning of the biblical text and to understand the Christian dogma embedded in it. Thus, neither originality of thought, nor extensive theological discussions are

60. In the Brussels manuscript, Book I (Matthew) occupies a total of 13 folios (fols. 149r-161v); Book II (Mark) occupies 3 folios (fols. 161v-164v); Book III (John) occupies slightly more than 4 folios (fols. 164v-169r); and Book IV (Luke) occupies almost 8 folios (fols. 169v-176v).

61. Pseudo-Theophilus, *Commentary on the Four Gospels*, ed. Gorman (in press), lines 518-26; PLS 3, cols. 1299-1300.

62. Pseudo-Theophilus, *Commentary on the Four Gospels*, ed. Gorman (in press), lines 545-53; PLS 3, col. 1300.

to be found in this commentary, whose purpose seems to be didactic and unpretentious.

As the author clearly states in the prologue, he relied on several earlier commentaries available to him.⁶³ His main source was Arnobius' *Expositiunculae in euangelium Iohannis, Matthaei et Lucae*.⁶⁴ Yet, some traces of Jerome's *Commentarium in Mattheum* and his letter to Algasia,⁶⁵ as well as Cyprian's letter to Magnus,⁶⁶ Augustine's *Quaestiones euangeliorum* and *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus*,⁶⁷ and Eucherius of Lyons' *Instructiones*,⁶⁸ may suggest that our compiler had consulted these works as well.⁶⁹ Yet, when compared with the works of Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, or even Arnobius, the brevity and simplicity of Pseudo-Theophilus' commentary become even more apparent. Not only did he refrain from long discussions and highly sophisticated theological exegesis, he also wrote in a simple language, much simpler and basic than the language of his predecessors. His sentences are short and direct, his vocabulary is conventional, and his style is unadorned and straightforward. This is precisely the *sermo rusticus* that Caesarius of Arles was so anxious to attain in his sermons,⁷⁰ and it points once again to the didactic-pedagogical aims of this commentary.

63. The author refers to himself in the prologue as *famulus dei*, which means he was a man, most probably a monk.

64. For an edition, see *Expositiunculae Arnobii episcopi in euangelium Iohannis euangelistae, Matthaei et Lucae*, ed. K.-D. Daur, CCSL 25A (Turnhout, 1992), pp. 245-305.

65. Both are cited above, n. 10.

66. See Cyprianus of Carthage, *Epistulae* 69 (*Ad Magnum*), ed. G.F. Dierks, CCSL 3C (Turnhout, 1996), pp. 469-96.

67. See Augustinus of Hippo, *Quaestiones euangeliorum*, ed. A. Mutzenbecher, CCSL 44B (Turnhout, 1980); idem, *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus*, ed. R. Willems, CCSL 36 (Turnhout, 1990).

68. See Eucherius of Lyons, *Instructionum libri duo*, I, De quaestionibus difficilioribus novi testamenti, especially pp. 105-23.

69. Interestingly enough, none of the Greek fragments which survive from the original commentary of Theophilus of Antioch has any parallel in the Latin commentary with which we are concerned here. On the Greek fragments, see M. Richard, 'Les fragments exégétiques de Théophile d'Alexandrie et de Théophile d'Antioche', *Revue biblique* 47 (1938), pp. 387-97; B. de Gaiffier, 'Une citation de l'Harmonie évangélique de Théophile d'Antioche dans le *Liber sancti Iacobi*', in *Mélanges en l'honneur de Monseigneur Michel Andrieu* (Strasbourg, 1956), pp. 173-9.

70. On Caesarius' sermons, see W.E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 146-51. See also H.G.J. Beck, *The Pastoral Care of the Souls in South-East France during the Sixth Century*, *Analecta Gregoriana* 51 (Rome, 1950), pp. 259-61; Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, pp. 25-8.

Although the style of the commentary itself is simple, it is not completely lacking in rhetorical devices and literary pretension. The prologue to the commentary, like the prefaces of almost all the Latin texts from the sixth and the seventh century, is written in a far more elevated style than the rest of the commentary, and thus bears witness to the compiler's artistic conscious. It is worthwhile citing this prologue in full:

Apis fauos de omnigenis floribus operatur eosque melle lapso caelitus replet et in flagrantibus ceris foetus edit ore fecundo, haud aliter ego, famulus dei, hortantibus uobis, in euangelii interpretatione, tractatoribus defloratis, opusculum spiritale composui, quod ecclesiasticum gignat examen, inuidorum amara conloquia, uelut gryneas taxos, effugiens. Nectar quoque est in eo diuina adspiratione dulcissimum, hoc si quis audebit reprehendere, spicula sentiet, propriis operata uulneribus, quia obtrectans propositi sui potest affectum prodere, non tamen studium deuotionis auferre.⁷¹

The first sentence of the prologue is a carefully organised period, which never escapes the author's control. Its main clause – 'opusculum spiritale composui' – occurs more than two-thirds of the way through the whole, and it is preceded and followed by a carefully structured series of subordinate clauses. Although the author's choice of vocabulary is rather conventional, a poetic touch is evident in the alliteration at the beginning of the sentence in words beginning with *f* – *fauos*, *floribus*, *flagrantibus*, *foetus*, *fecundus*, and *famulus* – as well as in the simple type of homoeoteleuton (in the final syllables *us*) and the metaphor of the bees, which clearly has some Virgilian undertones.⁷² Moreover, the author, it seems, took great care over the rhythm of the prologue. Both sentences which comprise the prologue end with an accentual *cursus* rhythm – 'táxos effúgiens' (*cursus tardus*) and 'deuotiónis auférré' (*cursus planus*). Hence, the prologue reveals Pseudo-Theophilus as an author whose grasp of rhetoric remained strong. His basic vocabulary is indeed relatively unadorned; but nevertheless his prose seems to be carefully structured, with some rhetorical figures, and with considerable attention to effects of metric and prose rhythm. Similar features characterised the writing of Gregory of Tours,⁷³ and are also apparent in the *Liber historiae Francorum*,⁷⁴ which was composed in Soissons shortly after Brussels, BR 9850-9852 was copied.⁷⁵ Adolf Harnack believed that

71. Pseudo-Theophilus, *Commentary on the Four Gospels*, ed. Gorman (in press), prologus, lines 1-11; PLS 3, col. 1283.

72. The parallels with Virgil's work (especially *Georgica* IV) were fully explored by Harnack, *Der angebliche Evangelienkommentar*, pp. 166-9.

73. See the illuminating analysis by N. Wright, 'Columbanus' *Epistulae*', in *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writing*, ed. M. Lapidge (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 29-92, at pp. 32-9.

74. See R. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 19-20.

75. On the date and place of composition of the *Liber historiae Francorum*, see Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, pp. 146-59.

the Latin of Pseudo-Theophilus' commentary is too good to be Merovingian, and therefore it had to be composed before the decline in culture and education which characterised Merovingian Gaul.⁷⁶ It is true that by the seventh century the traditional Roman education system in Gaul had largely disappeared, or survived only in a modified and curtailed form.⁷⁷ Merovingian authors, for example, did not have much familiarity with classical authors, apart from Virgil. But, should the knowledge of Cicero and Horace really be the yardstick according to which Merovingian Latin is to be measured?

Luckily research moved forward, and scholars are becoming more and more aware of the faults in such a comparison, which encompasses the bias and shortcomings of Renaissance and Humanistic thought. Modern scholarship, especially by Roger Wright, Michel Banniard and Marc Van Uytfanghe, is increasingly revealing how profoundly dynamic and multi-layered was the Latin of early medieval authors,⁷⁸ and subsequently a greater degree of continuity is acknowledged by historians, archaeologists, and literary critics.⁷⁹ Far from representing an age of obscurity and decline, Merovingian Latin is perceived nowadays as the most eloquent witness to the vitality and creativity of early medieval culture.⁸⁰ Latin texts continued to be studied and written in Gaul even after the Merovingian took power, and Pseudo-Theophilus' commentary on the four Gospels was one of them.

Although one can clearly find in the commentary some features characteristic to the later Merovingian 'jargon' (such as the use of *intellegendum est* in order to introduce the meaning of a sentence, the use of *ut non* to introduce a purpose clause, or the use of *dum* simply to mean 'because'), the Latin of the commentary is indeed more idiomatic and less 'corrupt' than the Latin of many

76. Harnack, *Der angebliche Evangelienkommentar*, p. 170.

77. Riché, *Education and Culture*; idem, *Écoles et enseignement dans le haut Moyen Âge de la fin du V^e siècle au milieu du XI^e siècle*, 2nd. ed. (Paris, 1989). See also, H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. G. Lamb (London, 1956), pp. 330-50.

78. See, for example, R. Wright, *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France* (Liverpool, 1982); M. Banniard, *Viva Voce. Communication écrite et communication orale du IV^e au IX^e siècle en Occident latin*, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Moyen Âge et Temps Modernes 25 (Paris, 1992); idem, 'Language and Communication in Carolingian Europe', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History, II - c. 700-c. 900*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 695-708; Van Uytfanghe, *Stylisation biblique*.

79. See, for example, the various studies published in *Latin and Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. R. Wright (London, 1991); *Latin vulgaire, latin tardif. Actes du quatrième colloque international sur le latin vulgaire et tardif, Caen 1995*, ed. L. Callebaut (Hildesheim, 1995).

80. See, for example, E. Rose, *Communitas in commemoratione. Liturgisch Latijn en liturgische gedachtenis in het Missale Gothicum (Vat. reg. lat. 317)* (PhD thesis, University of Utrecht, 2001); eadem, 'The Latin of the Bobbio Missal', in *The Bobbio Missal*, ed. Hen and Meens (in press).

Merovingian Hagiographers.⁸¹ In this respect, it is closer to the Latin of Gregory of Tours and Jonas of Bobbio. Pseudo-Theophilus still uses properly the *ablatiuus absolutus* (and not the *accusatiuus absolutus* which we find in many late seventh- and early eighth-century compositions from Merovingian Francia), and his use of the subjunctive often accords with classical rules. Thus, the language and the style of Pseudo-Theophilus' commentary represent a transitional stage, and therefore support Wilmart's assertion that it could not have been written before the seventh century.⁸²

V. – THE MEROVINGIAN CONTEXT

All the evidence adduced above points, in one way or another, to seventh-century Francia. This is hardly surprising. Contrary to the dim view of Merovingian culture which scholars adopted in the past, the Frankish kingdoms of the seventh century were a prolific centre of cultural and intellectual activity, where historical compositions, such as Fredegar's *Chronicon* or the *Liber historiae Francorum*, were composed,⁸³ hagiographic material was produced in abundance,⁸⁴ and liturgical books were compiled.⁸⁵ Merovingian Gaul was also a centre of interest in canon law. The *Vetus Gallica*, that is the first systematic Merovingian collection of canon law, was put together at Lyons in around 600, and distributed throughout Gaul in later redactions from Autun, and

81. On the Latin of Merovingian hagiographers, see Van Uytvanghe, *Stylisation biblique*; idem, 'L'hagiographie: un genre chrétien ou antique tardif?', *Analecta Bollandiana* 111 (1993), pp. 135-88; idem, 'Le latin des hagiographes mérovingiens et la protohistoire du français', *Romanica Gandensia* 16 (1976), pp. 5-89. See also Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, pp. 58-78.

82. The fact that the text of the Gospels cited by Pseudo-Theophilus is the *Vetus Latina* and not the Vulgate must not be taken as an argument for the antiquity of the commentary itself. First, the *Vetus Latina* was still available in Frankish Gaul even in the seventh century. Second, it is highly probable that the author simply repeated the Biblical quotations he had found in his sources. On the *Vetus Latina*, see now P. Burton, *The Old Latin Gospels. A Study of their Texts and Language* (Oxford, 2000).

83. On the composition of Fredegar's *Chronicon*, see R. Collins, *Fredegar, Authors of the Middle Ages* 13 (Aldershot, 1996). On the *Liber historiae Francorum*, see Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*.

84. See, for example, Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, pp. 26-58; I.N. Wood, 'The use and abuse of Latin hagiography in the early medieval West', in *East and West: Modes of Communication. Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Merida, The Transformation of the Roman World* 5 (Leiden, New York and Cologne, 1999), pp. 93-109.

85. See, for example, Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy*, pp. 28-41; idem, *Culture and Religion*, pp. 43-60.

subsequently from Corbie.⁸⁶ This coincided with the production and diffusion of the *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis*, whose first manuscript evidence, as we have just seen, is Brussels, BR 9850-9852, and whose first complete manuscript (Fulda, Hessische Landesbibliothek, *Bonifatianus 2*; CLA VIII.1197) was copied in Luxeuil, or in a centre where the script of Luxeuil was used.⁸⁷ A concern for close study of authoritative patristic texts is evident, for example, in the Merovingian library of Corbie,⁸⁸ and in the *Liber scintillarum*, which is a compilation of passages from the Bible and patristic writers put together c. 700 by Defensor, a monk from the monastery of Ligugé near Poitiers.⁸⁹ Together with the dissemination of Jerome-Gennadius' *De uiris inlustribus*,⁹⁰ and the Merovingian Church councils' decrees,⁹¹ the fertile intellectual activity of seventh-century Gaul reflects 'a late Merovingian and early Carolingian preoccupation with authority, orthodoxy and correctness that was to become the prevailing characteristic of Carolingian scholarship'.⁹² These tendencies were indeed more intense and apparent in the regions of Neustria and Burgundy, maybe as a result of Queen Balthid's reform enterprise.

It is, then, not a mere coincidence that many of the details adduced above connect the commentary on the four Gospels with the intellectual centres of the Neustrian-Burgundian orbit – the Soissons provenance of Brussels, BR 9850-9852; the Corbie quire that was added to the Brussels manuscript; the distinctive parallels with the Bobbio Missal and other Merovingian liturgical compositions;

86. See H. Mordek, *Kirchenrecht und Reform im Frankenreich. Die Collectio Vetus Gallica, die älteste systematische Kanonensammlung des fränkischen Gallien*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde des Mittelalters 1 (Berlin and New York, 1975), pp. 82-94; R. McKitterick, 'Knowledge of canon law in the Frankish kingdoms before 789: the manuscript evidence', *Journal of Theological Studies* 36 (1985), pp. 97-117 [reprinted in eadem, *Books, Scribes and Learning in the Frankish Kingdoms, 6th-8th Centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), chapter II].

87. On this codex, see L.E. von Padberg and H.-W. Stork, *Der Ragyndrudis-Codex des Hl. Bonifatius* (Fulda, 1994); L.E. von Padberg, *Studien zur Bonifatiusverehrung. Zur Geschichte des Codex Ragyndrudis und der Fuldaer Reliquien des Bonifatius* (Frankfurt, 1996), especially pp. 24-37.

88. See D. Ganz, 'The Merovingian library of Corbie', in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. H.B. Clarke and M. Brennan, BAR International Series 113 (Oxford, 1981), pp. 153-72.

89. For an edition of the *Liber scintillarum*, see Defensor, *Liber scintillarum*, ed. and trans. H. Rochais, *Defensor. Le livre d'étincelles*, Sources chrétiennes 77 and 86 (Paris, 1961-2).

90. On the dissemination of Jerome-Gennadius' *De uiris inlustribus*, see McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, pp. 200-5. See also R.H. Rouse and M.A. Rouse, 'Bibliography before print: the medieval *De uiris illustribus*', in *The Role of the Book in Medieval Culture*, ed. P. Ganz, 2 vols., *Bibliologia* 3-4 (Turnhout, 1986), I, pp. 133-54.

91. On the Merovingian Church councils, see O. Pontal, *Histoire des conciles mérovingiens* (Paris, 1989).

92. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, p. 203.

the stylistic affinities with the *Liber historiae Francorum*; and the general interest of the commentary in question. Furthermore, the didactic-pedagogical qualities of the commentary fit extremely well with the objectives of the Merovingian reform movement.⁹³ Thus, I would submit, it is in the context of Merovingian culture of the second half of the seventh century that the production and, subsequently, early dissemination, of Pseudo-Theophilus' commentary on the four Gospels should be placed.⁹⁴

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93. The didactic qualities of the commentary also suited the didactic tendencies of the Carolingian reforms, and thus account for its copying and dissemination in the early years of the ninth century, as attested by four early nine-century manuscripts: Chartres, BM 31 (85) (Saint-Amand; *saec.* IXⁱⁿ); Chartres, BM 70 (45) (Orléans; *saec.* IX^{1/3}); Paris, BnF lat. 113 (Tours; *saec.* IX^{2/4-med}); Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 287 (Lorsch; IX¹). On all these manuscripts see Michael Gorman's introduction to his edition of Pseudo-Theophilus.

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ABSTRACT : The commentary on the four Gospels, first published by Marguerin de la Bigne in 1575, was attributed by its first editor to the second-century author Theophilus of Antioch, and since then scholars were mainly obsessed with justifying or refuting this attribution. Various philological and grammatical arguments were used in the past by both sides in order to prove their point, yet none of the scholars who discussed this commentary had ever considered seriously the possibility that it is probably an early medieval composition. This paper suggests that the Pseudo-Theophilus commentary on the four Gospels is a product of the intellectual and cultural activity which characterised late sixth- and early seventh-century Gaul. This, of course, is impossible to prove unequivocally before some more new evidence is unearthed, but several features of the commentary itself, such as its sources, its style, as well as its circulation and influence, point to that direction.

RÉSUMÉ : Le commentaire sur les quatre Évangiles publié pour la première fois par Marguerin de la Bigne en 1575, a été attribué par son premier éditeur à un auteur du II^e siècle, Théophile d'Antioche ; depuis lors, les savants se sont surtout attachés à justifier ou à réfuter cette attribution. Pour appuyer l'une ou l'autre thèse, on a utilisé divers arguments philologiques et grammaticaux, mais aucun des savants qui se sont penchés sur ce commentaire n'a considéré sérieusement la possibilité qu'il s'agisse d'un texte du haut Moyen Âge. Cet article suggère que le commentaire du Pseudo-Théophile est le produit d'une activité intellectuelle et culturelle qui caractérise la Gaule de la fin du VI^e et du début du VII^e siècle. Cela, évidemment, est impossible à prouver indiscutablement avant que l'on ne mette au jour de nouvelles preuves, mais plusieurs traits du commentaire même, comme ses sources, son style, de même que sa transmission et son influence, vont dans ce sens.