

# CHARLEMAGNE IN VINCENT'S MIRROR:

## THE *SPECULUM HISTORIALE* AS A SOURCE OF THE OLD NORSE *KARLAMAGNÚS SAGA*

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The Old Norse (largely, but not exclusively, Norwegian) translation of the cycle of *chansons de geste* centering on Charlemagne and Roland, *Karlamagnús Saga*,<sup>1</sup> is mostly based on Old French (or Anglo-Norman) texts; however, aside from one section which is clearly based on a Middle English original,<sup>2</sup> it is often difficult to be sure exactly what language the translator(s) was (were) working with. Two exceptions exist: Part IV, "The Saga of Agulandus," which is in large part based on the Latin Pseudo-Turpin chronicle,<sup>3</sup> and Part X, which is, for the most part, drawn from the *Speculum historiale*<sup>4</sup> of Vincent of Beauvais. Vincent is not without influence elsewhere in the saga translation; he was obviously one of the sources of the later version of the fourth part of the saga.<sup>5</sup> What I wish to examine here, however, is the one portion of the saga for which Vincent appears to have been a basic source, Part X, "Miracles and Signs" -- referring to signs that Charlemagne was elect, a true saint.

This tenth and last section of the saga is, as it has been printed by C.R. Unger<sup>6</sup> and, more recently, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson,<sup>7</sup> an artificial construct, since it does not appear in exactly this form in any manuscript. The two manuscripts representing the earliest version of the saga, generally referred to as *A* and *a*,<sup>8</sup> have been lost for this part of the saga. MS *b* contains five chapters, plus a fragment which may or may not have been intended to stand as a separate chapter (in its complete

state). *B* contains what appear in the Unger edition as chapters 7 and 8 immediately after Part IX, with chapters 1 through 6 appended to the MS after what appears in *b* as Part II. A scribal note says that the *b* order should be followed; however, as E.F. Halvorsen remarks, there is no way of knowing what authority, if any, that scribal note may have.<sup>9</sup> Halvorsen concludes that the original "branch X of the Bb version consisted of chapters 7-8 only."

If this is so, that original version was taken word-for-word from the somewhat earlier *Tveggja postula saga Jóns ok Jacobs*.<sup>10</sup> These two chapters are found in *TPS* chapters 92-93, and are so close in wording that when *Kms.* disagrees, a scribal error may be suspected.<sup>11</sup> The rest of what appears as Part X has almost equally clear sources, although not all of the sources have been adequately identified to date, and they have often been handled with notably greater freedom. The first five chapters have been identified as deriving from Vincent's *Speculum historiale*, with 1 to 3 rendering lib. xxiiii cap. iiii - v while 4 and 5 come, mainly, from lib. xxiiii cap. xxiii - xxiiii. Previously unnoted is the fact that into chapter 4 have been interpolated two passages from lib. xvi, the first from cap. lxxxix and the second (and longer) from cap. xciiii.

That is: the chapters on which the saga account is primarily based here deal with the death and martyrdom of St. Salvius, the saga's "Sallinus." But Salvius was referred to in the earlier section, in connection with the history of the city in which he was martyred, in lib. xvi, cap. xc; thus the saga translator must have known a good deal more of Vincent than the section he was primarily translating, for he drew various details from lib. xvi to add to those given about Salvius/Sallinus in lib. xxiiii, caps. xxiii - xxiiii.

The reason why that compiler omitted the intervening chapters (vi - xxii) of lib. xxiiii of the *Speculum historiale* is not far to find: their material had already been included in part IV of the saga. Their contents come from the Pseudo-Turpin account of the campaign against Agolandus, the battle of Roncesvalles (*Runcivallis*), the funeral of Roland, and the promise from St. Dionysius (St. Denis) of a heavenly reward for the fallen heroes.<sup>12</sup> But aside from a tendency to mix in

sections from other parts of his source, the translator seems to have been far more free in every way in his treatment of the material taken directly from Vincent than he was in handling that which he found in *TPS*, which was also based on the *Speculum historiale* -- much of which was, in this section, in turn, largely based on the Pseudo-Turpin,<sup>13</sup> the ultimate, although not immediate, source for much of *Kms.* Part X.

Of the remaining sections, the *b* continuation at the end of chapter 5 may also have been suggested by Vincent, although the few details given in the section's fragmentary state have been thought to indicate influence by another source. It reads (in translation):

So that men will be the more enlightened as to how our Lady St. Maria esteemed the work of Emperor Karlamagnus in building her church in Tachin [Aachen, Aix-la-Chapelle], it shall be told how she wished to bless a splendid ordination in that same church. There were two causes for this, one being that in the period before there had been an excellent bishop in this place, Servas by name -- a man of great powers and truly saintly life. He was buried in the town which is called Mast, three miles outside of Tachin. Thirty years after his death that excellent building in Tachin, which was newly built to be the church of God's mother, was quite ready, and thus a second reason was provided. It was, therefore, revealed to a bishop that God's blessed mother went before her son Jesus Christ in heaven, saying thus: "My son, a dwelling has been raised for me, all made very magnificently, in Tachin, and a bishop plans to consecrate the place. Thus I wish the consecration to be performed with special honour . . . . (At this point, MS *b* breaks off.)

If there was, indeed, a second source of this passage, it probably also lies behind a passage in *Maríu saga*, a collection of the miracles of the Virgin,<sup>14</sup> but the correspondence of the account in the latter to *Kms.* X is far from exact. The two passages are connected only by the name of a Bishop Servus and the participation of the Virgin in honouring

that worthy. The legend in *Maríu saga* lacks its beginning and has nothing to connect it with Aachen or "Mast,"<sup>15</sup> which would seem to be Maastricht. The saga describes "Mast" as three miles from Aachen, and Maastricht is the only town near Aachen with a name corresponding to Norse *Mast*. The principal mediaeval saint associated with Maastricht is St. Servatius, "St. Servais" in French: thus, "Servas."<sup>16</sup>

There is, however, a difficulty in this identification. Maastricht is thirty miles (32 kilometers), not three, from Aachen,<sup>17</sup> and St. Servais died more than 400 years before the building of the cathedral at Aachen, not, as the saga says of "Servas," thirty. But all this is dealt with in another book of the *Speculum historiale*: in lib. xx, cap. xxxix, Vincent gives an account of the prophecy predicting the attack of Attila said to have been made by Servatius. The saint is here identified as *Tungrensis episcopus* and said to have moved his see *ad Trajectum*: i.e. Maastricht, in Roman times *Trajectum ad Mosam* "ford over the Meuse." Six chapters later, Vincent reports that the saint's tomb is at "Trajectum." It would, thus, seem likely that our translator was bearing his other reading in Vincent in mind, rather than cross-checking. But also, in support of the hypothesis that "Servas" is indeed "Servais," it can be said that it is not implausible that such facts would have been confused in the course of transmitting the legend from the Low Countries, where the saint had a very considerable *cultus*, to Scandinavia, where he was virtually unknown. Moreover, the name and place correspond, which is not the case with any other saint, and the basic story can be found in the favourite source of the translator of Part X of the saga, Vincent.

Further, the story of St. Servais may have suggested itself to the Norse redactor as a suitable postscript to the account of that other bishop whose martyrdom had just been described, Salvius (Sallinus), since both bishops were known for their opposition to the Arian heresy and since the miraculous manifestations said to appear over the burial places of the two saints were similar. The latter, certainly, the saga writer could have learned from Vincent: in lib. xx, cap. xlv, Vincent describes a fiery column appearing over the grave of Servatius, just as a similar divine light shone over that of Salvius. I have not been able

to find any mention of the connection of Salvius with the struggle against the Arians in Vincent, although it is to be found in his source for the *Vita sanati Servatii*, Gregory of Tours.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter 6, like the *b*-ending of 5, has some connections with *Mariú saga*,<sup>19</sup> but again the chapter in *Kms.* comes in the main from Vincent, this time from lib. xxv, cap. xxiiii, via the Icelandic translation printed in *Mariú saga*.<sup>20</sup> Through this chapter, the translator rarely seems to be following his source at all literally. He suppresses a good many details, but adds many more, elaborating very freely indeed in some passages. Chapter 1 interpolates a lengthy account of how the Byzantine emperor saw Karlamagnus in a dream; there is nothing like this in Vincent, but such a scene does occur in an earlier work, the (probably) late eleventh-century *Descriptio qualiter Karolus Magnus clavum et coronam Domini a Constantinopoli Aquisgrani detulerit*.<sup>21</sup> Chapter 2 starts out following Vincent fairly closely (from the middle of lib. xxiiii, cap. iv), but adds a host of details towards the end of the chapter. Chapter 3 is vastly expanded throughout; as a specimen, consider the following passage from this chapter, in which all italicized material represents additions to the account in Vincent (cap. v):

*The chief officiant for the office of taking the holy relic out from its chest was the glorious father Daniel, bishop of Neopolitanus; and when he opened the chest in which was kept the crown of thorns of Our Lord, such a sweet smell went around the church that all those who were near thought they were in paradise; with it came such light that all who stood there seemed to have been clothed in heavenly garments because of its brightness. Since our Saviour had thus brought it about that it was fitting to honour him, Karlamagnus fell flat upon the ground, praying to Our Lord that He might renew the great signs of his passion . . . .*

The last paragraph of chapter 3, as printed in the editions, is not from this part of Vincent at all, but an interpolation drawn from another source (or sources?). Chapter 4 contains two interpolations, as noted

above, as well as lengthy elaborations. Chapter 5, however, is reasonably close to the account in Vincent (cap. xxiii), except for the *b* "servas" addition.

Since the *A*, *a* manuscripts are incomplete, we have very little evidence of how the first version of the saga ended, but there is one piece of evidence: the ending of the Danish *Karl Magnus Krøfnike*,<sup>22</sup> which includes a brief version of the material found here in Chapter 8 -- which may add weight to Halvorsen's view, cited above, that the original *B*-version contained only chs. 7-8. However, in lieu of the material from Pseudo-Turpin which makes up most of *B*'s Chapter 7, *KMK* says that when he grew very old (102 or 200 years old, depending on which MS reading is correct; Vincent says, accurately, that he was 72 at the time of his death), the emperor called a council in Paris, asking his subjects to make his son "Lodarius" (Vincent: *Ludovicus*) emperor after him, comparing the situation to David and Solomon.<sup>23</sup>

The *B*-redactor, who was probably the redactor of Part IV and possibly the entire *B*, *b* version,<sup>24</sup> must have substituted the *TPS* material for an earlier version; both *TPS* and its immediate source, Vincent, are too late to have been the base of the *A*-group version. That version could have been based directly on Pseudo-Turpin, but Paul Aebischer<sup>25</sup> and E.F. Halvorsen (44-45) agree in believing the source more likely to have been French, since in *KMK* the version of Charlemagne's death is transferred to St. Giles, while Turpin takes part in the funerary arrangements, contrary to Pseudo-Turpin (and the derivative accounts in Vincent and *TPS*). Since St. Giles was not at all prominent in the north, or in *Kms.* as a whole, it is unlikely that this change would have been made in Scandinavia. Readers of Part I of the saga will recall that Giles also appears there; thus, Aebischer and Halvorsen suggest that this section, and only this section, ultimately depended on the same source as Part I.

It should be obvious, however, that the principal source of the rest of Part X is Vincent of Beauvais. It seems likely that further sleuthing through the *Speculum historiale* (in its various MSS) might clear up any remaining questions about the source of information given in this part of the saga. Such research may have to await the millennial year

which brings us a modern edition of the *Speculum*, but an obvious place to look first would be any MSS of Vincent in Iceland.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See my translation, *Karlamagnus Saga: the Saga of Charlemagne and His Heroes*, I (Parts I - III) and II (Part IV) (Toronto 1975); III (Parts V - X), forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., Part II; see my introduction (Vol. I), pp. 26 and 163-75.

<sup>3</sup> See my introduction to Part IV (Vol. 2), pp. 9-32.

<sup>4</sup> I have consulted both the 1591 (Venice) edition and the edition of 1624 (Douay; reproduced Graz 1965); there are, of course, many other MSS of Vincent which have not been edited. Some of the relevant sections of the *Speculum historiale* are printed in *Íslendsk Æventyri*, ed. H. Gerling (Halle 1882-83) II, 343-46.

<sup>5</sup> See my introduction to Part IV (Vol. 2), pp. 12-13.

<sup>6</sup> *Karlamagnús saga ok kappá hans* (Christiania 1860); the work is hereafter designated *Kms*.

<sup>7</sup> *Karlamagnus saga og kappá hans* (Reykjavik 1950). This edition, in modern Icelandic orthography, does not give MS variants.

<sup>8</sup> See my introduction to Vol. I, p. 19, for an account of the MSS.

<sup>9</sup> *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland* (Copenhagen 1959) 43.

<sup>10</sup> In *Postula Sögur*, ed. C.R. Unger (Christiania 1874) 676 ff.; hereafter referred to as *TPS*.

<sup>11</sup> As, for example, toward the end of the last chapter, where a word miscopied from *TPS* would appear to give the reading "the most holy book which could be found and owned in all the church," but the correct reading is no doubt "which could be found, and the highest in all the

church."

<sup>12</sup> See my translation, Vol. II; the blessing of St. Dionysius is here transferred to a much earlier stage of the action, and will be found in Chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> The most useful editions are those of C. Meredith-Jones, *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi ou Chronique du Pseudo-Turpin* (Paris 1936) and H.M. Smyser, *The Pseudo-Turpin* (Cambridge, Mass. 1937), which prints the "shorter" version. The relationship of *Kms.* X to these various sources is discussed by Peter G. Foote in *The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle in Iceland: a Contribution to the Study of the Karlamagnus saga* (London 1959) 20-22.

<sup>14</sup> C.R. Unger, ed. (Christiania 1871).

<sup>15</sup> See pp. 1042-45.

<sup>16</sup> For details of the life of St. Servatius, see Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, ed. Thurston and Attwater (1956) II, 297-98.

<sup>17</sup> Although Maastricht is actually 32 kilometers from Aachen, it is here suggested that the "three miles" is a mistake for "thirty miles;" miles were not exactly the same everywhere in Europe in early times, and the saga-writer (or his source) may have understood a different "mile" from the precise measurement of contemporary English-speaking lands.

<sup>18</sup> Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, ed. cit., contains an account of St. Salvius in the same volume as that of St. Servatius: see II, p. 648. -- Vincent does not mention Servatius in connection with the synod of Rimini, or with any other episode in the struggle against the Arians with which one might expect to find his name associated, as far as I have been able to ascertain, but it is possible that I may have missed a reference: such accounts by no means always appear in chronological order.

<sup>19</sup> Which prints a version of the relevant chapters in Vincent; see pp. 460-61 and cf. p. 212.

<sup>20</sup> Pp. 453-65; cf. Foote, pp. 16 and 21.

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard Rauschen, ed., *Die Legende Karls des Grossen im XI. und XII. Jahrhundert*, Publikationen der Gesellschaft für rheinische Geschichtskunde 7 (Leipzig 1890) 103-25.



<sup>22</sup> Ed. C.J. Brandt in *Romantisk Digtning fra Middelalderen III* (Copenhagen 1877); hereafter referred to as *KMK*. This abridged translation of the saga into Danish clearly derives from an early version of the work and is more nearly complete than either of the surviving *Aa* MSS.

<sup>23</sup> See pp. 185-86.

<sup>24</sup> See Foote, pp. 21-22, and my introduction to Part IV (Vol. II), p. 12, n. 14.

<sup>25</sup> "Les différents états de la *Karlamagnús* saga," *Fragen und Forschungen im Bereich und Umkreis der germanischen Philologie: Festgabe für Theodor Frings* . . . (Berlin 1956) 318.