PRESTER JOHN

The Letter and the Legend

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PREFACE

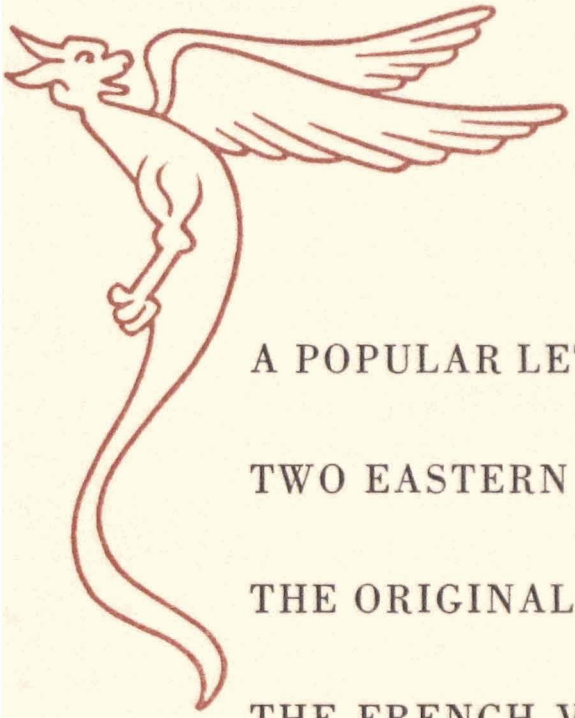
THE present volume was originally designed to bring into print a facsimile of the French edition of Prester John's letter preserved in the James Ford Bell Collection of the University of Minnesota Library, together with an English translation of the text and a brief introduction to provide the necessary historical setting for this curious piece of epistolary literature. Very shortly, however, I discovered that the topic required a more thorough and detailed treatment. The early printed French version of the *Letter* could not be understood without a sufficient acquaintance with its French and Latin antecedents, which in turn were so closely connected with the entire legend of the Christian ruler of India that it too had to be given a fair share of attention. In view of Prester John's great popularity in the Middle Ages, and with modern historians, I soon found it necessary to analyze the past and present views of this illusive sovereign and priest.

This task has been considerably lightened by the friendly help and encouragement extended to me from various quarters. Professor Francis M. Rogers has most generously provided me with an extensive bibliography on Prester John, without which this

little study would have displayed even a greater number of serious shortcomings than it now does. To Professors Loren C. McKinney and Emmert M. Brackney I owe valuable suggestions on medieval medical terms, the Graecisms of the Latin text, and better translations of several crucial passages of the French text. Mrs. Lily Goldblatt has given me much of her time by translating the Hebrew text of the *Letter*. My special thanks go to Professor Robert L. Reynolds, for many years my teacher; his own newly developed interest in medieval literature was so impressed upon me that I had fewer qualms about undertaking this study than befits someone who aspires to become an economic historian. I am further indebted to the James Ford Bell Book Trust for making it possible for me to consult the manuscripts of the French *Letter* at the Bibliothèque Nationale and the British Museum, and to the Dumbarton Oaks Library for permitting me to use the unpublished study on Prester John by the late Byzantinist Alexander A. Vasiliev.

V. S.

May 1, 1959



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A POPULAR LETTER

POPULAR books can scarcely be called an innovation of modern times, for in days when printing was still in its infancy, enterprising publishers were no less eager than now to bring something on the market that would appeal to a wide circle of readers. The ancient classics and treatises on religion and science were for the learned and wealthy, who were always a minority. A large section of potential book buyers was composed of persons with more modest schooling and means. Widely available almanacs, calendars, and little pamphlets satisfied their taste — and brought the publisher a sizable income.[1]

In late fifteenth-century France, with which we are presently concerned, there appeared several popular little booklets dealing in most cases with contemporary events. These *pièces d'actualité*, as a French scholar has called them, had many common features. They were printed on coarse paper with worn types and were often illustrated with used woodcuts. The stress was on brevity, cheapness, and timeliness. In these respects they could be taken to represent the remotest ancestors of our less pretentious maga-

zines.[2] Among these pieces of popular literature was a letter purportedly written by Prester John, King of India, and addressed to the Emperor of Rome and the King of France, his friends. A copy of this rare publication, printed around 1500 in Paris, is preserved in the James Ford Bell Collection, University of Minnesota Library.

This curious document, written in French as were most of the other works belonging to the same genre, carried a message of major importance to all Christians. In it the fabulous Prester John declared himself to be a Christian ruler over a vast empire in India that extended beyond the Mohammedan countries of the Near East. The *Letter* announced his intention to liberate the Holy Sepulcher from the infidels and it extended a cordial invitation to Western rulers to enter his service. In reward they were promised high administrative offices and large estates. The bulk of the message consisted of a profuse and somewhat monotonous description of India's riches and its ferocious beasts and monsters. To the marvels of nature were added the miracles of Christian faith wrought by the Apostle Thomas, who although dead for fourteen centuries annually preached in one of the royal palaces.

It is difficult for us to assess the impression made by this little piece on its readers. All that can be learned about its reception is the number of French editions, which add up to at least fourteen. This would seem to indicate that it was popular and in considerable demand. The full extent of its impact cannot be measured, however, by French editions only, for before they had appeared the *Letter* was available in numerous French manuscripts, which in turn were preceded by several Latin versions.[3]

The printed text reproduced here from the Bell copy thus stands

at the end of a literary tradition that was more than three hundred years old. Its origins lie in the middle of the twelfth century, an epoch so splendid in its intellectual achievements and the revival of classical learning that it is often called the medieval Renaissance.

The French version was only one of many to descend from the Latin original. Italians, Germans, English, Serbians, Russians, and Jews could read the *Letter* in their own languages.[4] Somewhat like the Alexandrian Romances it belongs to the common store of European literature of marvels and adventure. As the King of Macedonia wrote letters about India to his mother Olympias and his teacher Aristotle, so Prester John reported about his state to the rulers of the West. The letters of neither were genuine and yet they were believed to be so. It was accepted as fact that Prester John was indeed living in India, that vast land extending east from the rivers Tigris and Nile all the way to the end of the world.

When the establishment of the Tartar Empire in the thirteenth century made it possible for Western envoys and missionaries to penetrate the immense solitudes of the greatest continent, there began an intensive search for Prester John. Such travelers to the East as Plano Carpini, Simon of St. Quentin, and William of Rubruck had certainly heard of him at home and it was only natural for them to inquire everywhere about the Christian king. We can assume that in most cases their informants were local Christians of Greek or Nestorian rite who could not resist the temptation to embroider on rumors they may have heard.[5] In this way the name of Prester John became associated with Genghis Khan or his opponents, or other princes who seemed to qualify.[6]

The travelers helped much to spread the fame of Prester John. Their accounts were abridged and incorporated into ponderous encyclopedias that lent the priestly king a stamp of scholarly authenticity.[7] Then he and his letter were discovered by the skillful weavers of imaginary travels who invited themselves to his court to see his sumptuous palaces and their wonders.[8] Finally there came the mapmakers who seized upon him and his beasts and monsters to populate the distant and unexplored corners of the earth.[9] The credulous minds of our ancestors thus were offered convincingly solid evidence of the existence of Prester John — a seemingly trustworthy letter that was approved by learned authorities, confirmed by eyewitnesses, and further verified by mapmakers.

In other words, the character of Prester John could not but impress itself powerfully on all European nations. His potential use as an ally against the growing power of the Turks had been recognized since the days of the early crusades. Regardless of whether his kingdom was thought to be in Asia or Africa, he had to be reckoned with by any maritime power that was planning to reach the equatorial regions along the African coast. We know that Prince Henry the Navigator was eager to find him.[10]

At the end of the fifteenth century when the first French editions of the *Letter* began to appear, there were still other reasons to boost its popularity and quicken the sale.

A new Eastern waterway to India had been opened in 1488 and only a few years later the same country was believed to have been discovered by sailing straight to the West. The Portuguese and the Spanish were the first to profit from the newly established trade relations with the "Indias," and although they took precautions

to conceal the value of the recently found lands, the news of their profitable commerce began to reach French ports.[11] The night cloud of legends around India was slowly lifting, but it was just the hour of dawn and the lines between myth and reality were still indistinct. In this atmosphere of growing interest in the unknown and mysterious East and scarcity of reliable information about it, the *Letter* was an especially welcome source of news. A similar situation developed in Russia two hundred years later when the first steady overland contacts between that country and India created a demand for the Russian version of Prester John's message.[12]

From the early Middle Ages the name of India had for Christians still another association. It was believed that after Pentecost the Apostle Thomas had preached the Gospel there, had baptized many Hindus, and had finally died as a witness to his faith. Rumors about Indian Christians, the shrine of St. Thomas, and its miracle-working relic had been current in Europe since the early part of the twelfth century. Now with the opening of India these Christians became accessible. The French have always shown a great eagerness to fight and to preach in the East, and as "the most Christian nation" France could not be indifferent to recent events. Although the motives for expansion in this age were primarily commercial, they were frequently accompanied by a sincere concern for the erring souls whose conversion or return to the mother church was considered a service in the cause of Christ. Word of the activities of St. Thomas in Prester John's *Letter* was thus welcome and contributed heavily to the popularity of the document.

The original Latin text of Prester John's message took little note of St. Thomas. It mentioned him three times but in such a

manner that he remained in the shadow of the priestly king. There is only one later Latin manuscript with a considerably altered text that has more information on St. Thomas. From this version, although not from the copy which has survived, the French and Italian translations were made. The newly added information must have been borrowed from a source close to the well-known narrative of the Apostle's shrine in India which reported that his living hand was performing yearly a miracle by administering the Eucharist to believers.

In the mind of medieval man Prester John and St. Thomas were closely related, so that a letter written ostensibly by one had to include at least a few remarks about the other. Was their frequent association incidental and something that was brought about by their common Indian background, or did it have a much deeper root going perhaps as far back in time as St. Thomas' mission to India? In searching for an answer to this question we first have to investigate the earliest documents out of which the unique Latin manuscript and its numerous French translations have drawn their information about the Saint and the King.

TWO EASTERN LEGENDS

THE first Western sources to record the miracles performed by St. Thomas and to announce the victory of Prester John over a Moslem army had one common characteristic which has been somewhat neglected by previous writers. Both accounts contain legendary elements, and while in the case of St. Thomas such a background was regarded as more or less natural, Prester John has been almost exclusively viewed in a historical setting. Yet he too was at least partially clothed in the garb of legend, and the connections between the two traditions want examination.

It should be stated at the outset that legends have peculiarities of their own. As long as they are transmitted by word of mouth, they remain subject to arbitrary changes and additions by each successive narrator. When the historian encounters them in written form, they have already passed through a long process of mutation and it is often difficult, if not impossible, to discern the origins of various accretions. Materials of such nature prohibit the critic from making firm conclusions, and all he can hope to

do is show the general accord of details, which may thus reveal a common source.[1]

The theme of St. Thomas' shrine and its miracles has been preserved in the West by two accounts. One is a long and detailed tract by an anonymous author, entitled *De adventu patriarchae Indorum ad Urbem sub Calixto papa secundo* (On the Arrival of the Patriarch of Indians to Rome under Pope Calixtus II). The other has survived in the form of a much shorter and less elaborate letter, written by Odo of Rheims, abbot of St. Remy (1118–1151), to a certain Count Thomas. The exact date of the Patriarch's visit to Rome is not certain; however, the anonymous author supplies us with a year, calling it the fourth of the pontificate of Pope Calixtus II, i.e. February 2, 1122, to February 1, 1123. Odo's letter does not mention the name of the Pope, or the year, but it gives the month and day on which the supposed event took place, namely May 5. By combining the two sources we would get a precise date — which at its best can be only tentative, since the year of Odo's visit to Rome is disputed.[2] All other Western sources reporting the same event have derived from *De adventu* and are therefore of only secondary importance.[3]

The anonymous author called the Indian prelate Patriarch John and let him travel for a year from his home country to Constantinople where he was to be confirmed in his position and invested with a pallium. Here in the imperial city he became acquainted with papal envoys who had come from Rome to negotiate an end to the unfortunate split between the Greek and the Roman churches. After a mutual exchange of information on their countries, the Patriarch begged the papal emissaries to take him along on their return so that he might see Rome. His wish

was granted and it was at a papal reception in the Lateran palace that the Indian dignitary told the story of St. Thomas' miracle-working hand.

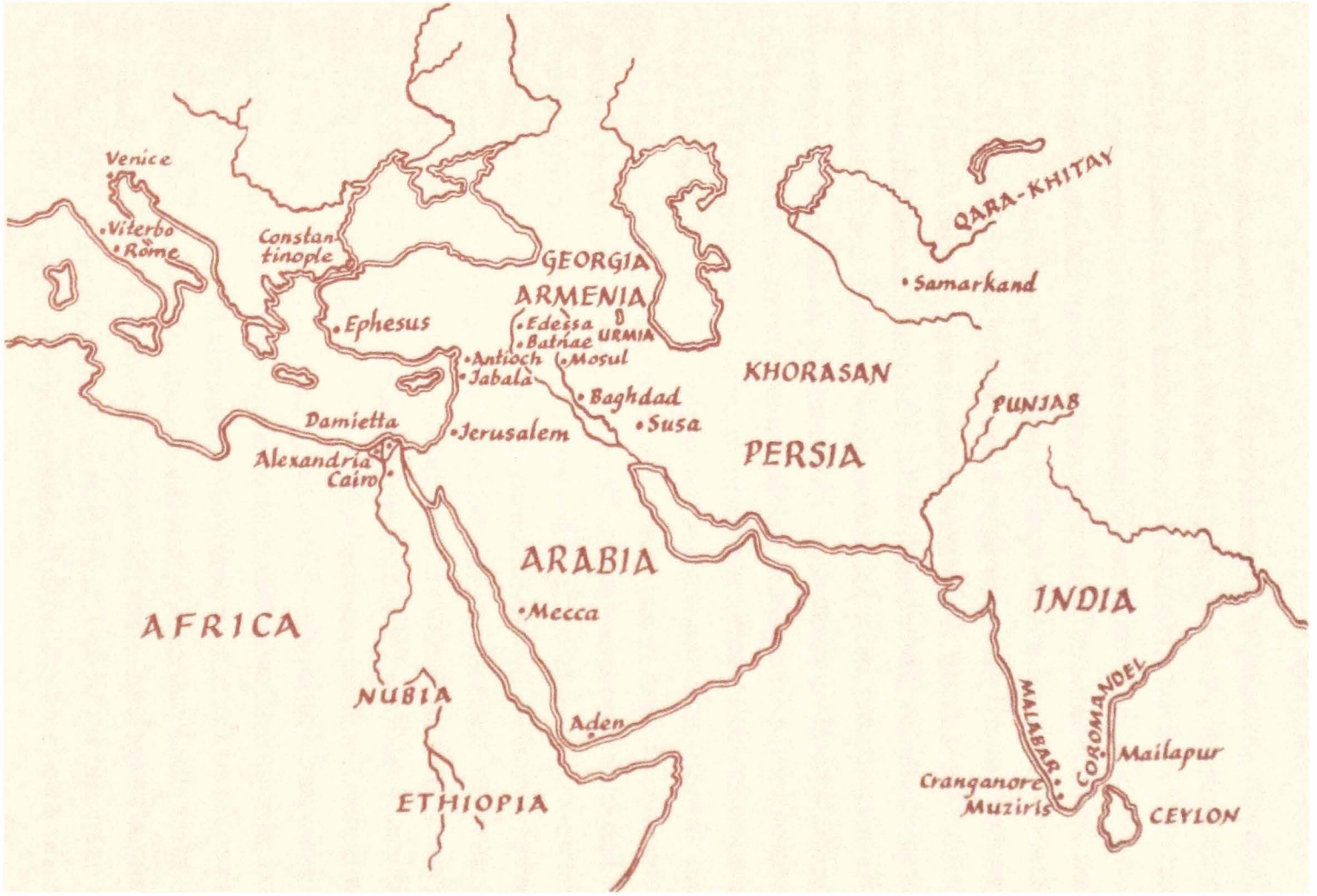
The city over which he ruled — so began the Patriarch's narrative — was the capital of India and its name was Hulna. In circumference it extended for four days' journey and its walls were so thick that two Roman chariots set abreast could be driven on them. Through the middle of the city flowed the river Physon on its course from the earthly paradise. Its waters were crystal clear and they were full of gold and precious stones. Hulna's population consisted exclusively of Christians among whom there were no heretics or unbelievers, because such persons either came to their senses or died. A short distance outside the wall was a mountain with the mother church of St. Thomas on its summit. The mountain was surrounded by a deep lake. Around it were twelve monasteries dedicated to the twelve apostles. In them monks celebrated mass every day. Nobody was able to approach the church of the Apostle except a week before and after his feast day when the waters receded and opened a pass for the pilgrims and sick to enter the sanctuary. Here in the most sacred place under a richly decorated canopy hung a silver vessel suspended by silver chains. In the vessel was the uncorrupted body of the Apostle and in front of it burned a lamp full of balm that replenished itself.

On the Saint's feast day the Patriarch together with his suffragan bishops let the vessel be lowered and while all were singing solemn hymns and prayers they lifted the body with great reverence and placed it on an armchair. When the time came to administer the Eucharist the Patriarch placed before St. Thomas

a golden plate with the host. Through God's dispensation the Apostle took the wafer with his outstretched right hand, as if it were alive, and administered the wafer to each one present. If a heretic or unbeliever chanced to come up to him, he closed and withdrew his hand. The sinner either repented or died on the spot. Great was the number of those who on account of these miracles became Christians, concluded the Patriarch.

The letter of Odo gives essentially the same picture but in a much more restrained fashion. The Patriarch John is here only a nameless archbishop and his power is limited to the church of the Apostle. Instead of a lake encircling the mountain, a deep river prevents access to it during most of the year. In place of the distribution of the wafer, St. Thomas receives gifts from the parishioners. The closing of the hand is described but without the dire effects on the impious. The greatest deviation from *De adventu* occurs, however, in the explanation of the causes of the Patriarch's trip to Constantinople. According to Odo, the prince of the country, friendly helper of the archbishop, had suddenly died. This misfortune compelled the prelate to go to the emperor at Byzantium and beg him for another prince. The Greek monarch received him graciously and provided him twice with a suitable candidate from his immediate entourage, but in both cases, for no reason stated, the courtiers died while en route to India. Since the archbishop was refused a third selection, he asked permission to visit Rome in the company of a Greek embassy that was about to sail for Italy. Odo's letter tells finally how the Pope refused to believe the miracle of St. Thomas until he was persuaded to do so by the archbishop's oath.[4]

The contradictions and disagreements of the two sources pre-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Mailapur
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Muziris
CEYLON
ETHIOPIA

clude any possibility of one being derived from the other. At the same time they tend to suggest that the longer and more popular text of *De adventu* represents a reworked and expanded version of a more simple prototype. This assumption is supported by the fact that the same miracle is described in an Ethiopian collection of short lives of saints and in two other accounts of Oriental provenance, all of which have been published by Enrico Cerulli.[5] In its oldest form the legend must have contained only two or three elements. The church of St. Thomas was thought to be on a hill surrounded by a lake or a river, and access to it was open on the Apostle's feast day. The miracle in the church was performed by the living hand of the Saint. Once the anniversary was over, everything returned to its normal condition. It is obvious that the miracle was connected with St. Thomas' burial place; hence its location is important for us to determine.

The oldest source for St. Thomas' life is an apocryphal tract known as the *Acts of St. Thomas*. The date of its composition is given variously by modern authorities as the middle of the third century to the end of the fourth. It was written originally in Syriac, and the general assumption is that it was composed in Edessa (modern Urfa in southeastern Turkey). In subsequent centuries the tract was translated into Greek, Armenian, Latin, Coptic, and Ethiopian. Since the *Acts* will be referred to at several points in this volume, it is convenient here to give a brief summary of the major incidents it describes.[6]

After the Pentecost, when the disciples of Christ were distributing among themselves the various missionary regions, St. Thomas drew the lot of India. At first he refused to go, saying that his health was too weak and that he spoke only Hebrew. Christ him-

self had to make him comply by appearing in person and selling him as a carpenter to a commercial agent of the Indian King Gundafor. Upon St. Thomas' arrival in India he was to build a new palace for the king. For this purpose a substantial sum of money was entrusted to him, but instead of spending it on construction, he distributed it among the poor and needy. When the king heard what had happened, he became angry and ordered the Apostle to be flogged and thrown into jail. The king's brother Gad was so distressed by the material losses of his relative that he fell sick and died. On the way to heaven Gad saw a splendid palace and when he inquired about its owner, he was told that it belonged to Gundafor and that its architect was St. Thomas. Gad asked immediately for permission to return to earth, for he wanted to buy this heavenly palace from his brother and to vindicate the Apostle. As a result of this incident both brothers expressed a desire to become Christians. They were baptized by St. Thomas.

After several saintly acts of a more stereotyped nature the Apostle was invited to the realm of King Mazdai. Here his preaching of rigid celibacy resulted in marital difficulties in the royal family. Mazdai tried in vain to induce St. Thomas to persuade his wife Tertia to return to him. St. Thomas refused to compromise and thereupon Mazdai felt that the only way to regain his spouse was to destroy the "sorcerer." The Apostle was put to death on a mountain by four soldiers who stabbed him. His disciples, among them Mazdai's own son, Vizan, placed his body in a tomb in which former kings were buried. As the Syrian text tells us, one of the Christian brethren later took his remains to the West. In both of the Latin versions of the *Acts*, the *De miraculis*

Beati Thomae and the *Passio Sancti Thomae*, this Western location is specified as Edessa.[7] In early Christian centuries this city was a noted center of Syrian intellectual life, it was very influential in disseminating Christianity in the whole region of Mesopotamia, and, as previously noted, it may have been the place where the *Acts of St. Thomas* was written.[8]

In the year 1849 the French orientalist Joseph T. Reinaud pointed out that the King Gundafor of the *Acts* is identical with the King Gondophares whose name appears on numerous coins from the general area of the Indus valley.[9] The apocryphal life of St. Thomas, up to then dismissed as a pious legend, suddenly acquired historical importance. Moreover, from coins and other monuments the reign of King Gondophares (in Indian, Gudaphara) could be ascribed to the first century A.D. thus making the Partho-Indian king a contemporary of the Apostle.[10]

Whatever success St. Thomas may have had in northwestern India, Christianity did not survive there. In the sixth century, however, some Christians were found by Cosmas Indicopleustes farther south on the Malabar coast and on Ceylon.[11] Seven centuries later Marco Polo was to discover that on the eastern or Coromandel coast, in a little place called Mailapur, there was a Christian community that cherished a tradition of St. Thomas' martyrdom in its own town. According to a local belief, the Apostle was buried in a church which was built on a hill overlooking the area.[12] Could this south Indian tradition be linked with the *Acts*? Is it permissible to seek Mazdai's kingdom in southern India? Was the city of Calamina, still unidentified, where according to some early church historians the body of the Apostle was first put to rest, in northern or southern India? The opinions

of scholars on these points are still divided and there is no reason for going into the details of the controversy.[13] It suffices to say that the description of Mazdai's realm in the *Acts* is so vague that it can fit either of the areas in question. In the Ethiopian version, which is admittedly late, Mazdai's country is called "Quantaria," a name that comes extremely close to "Gandhara," a country in the extreme northwestern corner of Punjab.[14] The names of King Mazdai and the other members of his family are definitely not of Indian but of Old Persian origin.[15]

It should be added here that the rise of Christian communities in India has to be viewed in the general picture of the increasing number of Christians in such neighboring states as Persia with which the Indian cities on the Malabar coast had close commercial relations. The observations of Alphonse Mingana tend to indicate that only by 225 was the organization of Christian bishoprics in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf so advanced that they could take care of the spiritual needs of those fellow Christians who because of their commercial activities had settled in India, or send out missionaries to convert the indigenous population. Without a strong and well-organized Christian church within reach it is difficult to conceive how a small and isolated group of Christians in India could have survived for almost two hundred years without losing its identity. The strength of the ties between India and Mesopotamia is also attested by the fact that the liturgical language of the Malabar Christians was Syriac.[16]

But whatever the true origin of the so-called Thomas Christians may be, their strong belief in St. Thomas' martyrdom and burial in Mailapur cannot be denied. We are thus faced with two places claiming to be the custodians of the Apostle's earthly remains.

In itself this is not improbable. In fact, one of St. Ephraim's (d. 373) homilies suggested that the body of St. Thomas was resting in Edessa and in India simultaneously. The explanation could easily be that a relic was retained in the first burial place, while the other remains were taken to Edessa.[17]

There are two known references to St. Thomas' shrine which stem from the sixth-century Frankish area. St. Gregory of Tours (ca. 539–594) wrote in his *De gloria martyrum* that a certain Theodore made a pilgrimage to India and brought home the following story: "In India is a place where the body of the Blessed Apostle Thomas was resting first, and in that place there is a monastery and a church of a wondrous size and elaborate architecture and decoration. In this sanctuary our Lord performs a great miracle. An oil lamp stands in front of the burial place and illuminates it constantly day and night and it burns without being refilled; neither wind nor accident can extinguish it and yet the oil does not decrease." Speaking of Edessa where the remains of the Saint were buried, Theodore reported in a following passage the miracle of a sudden increase of water in the wells of the city during the annual feast of the Apostle.[18] From this narrative alone it is hard to tell how far Theodore really had traveled; he does not mention the place in India, and he may or may not have been there.

The second sixth-century reference is pointed to by the text of *De adventu*, which has two casual and parenthetical remarks that have been generally overlooked. The description of the exclusively Christian population of Hulna, where no heretic or unbeliever could stay alive, and the passage mentioning the silver vessel suspended on silver chains are specified as coming from

the "history of the Apostle." The source is obviously the shorter and more popular Latin version of the *Acts*, known as *Passio Sancti Thomae*, which also belongs to the sixth century. The two details are mentioned in its epilogue, which may have had an independent existence.[19] While speaking of the transfer of St. Thomas' body to Edessa, it added these two sentences: "It [the body] was placed into a silver casket that hung on silver chains. In that city no heretic, no Jew, no idolator can stay alive."[20]

We have thus a case of two details — one, in Theodore's words, concerning the Indian shrine; another, from the Latin version of the *Acts*, concerning Edessa — merged in *De adventu* into one story and placed in the unknown city of Hulna. Other characteristics of this legendary town follow the same pattern of combined and adapted details. In size Hulna is fairly close to Edessa, which according to a description made of it right after its capture by the Moslems in 1144 had lost some one hundred and twenty thousand men.[21] Even if this figure is inflated, the conquerors themselves regarded it as one of the chief Christian cities, ranking with Jerusalem, Rome, and Constantinople. The main church of the city, which possibly contained the tomb of St. Thomas, was held by the Arabs to be one of the wonders of the world.[22] At the time of the crusades Edessa's fortifications were still impressive and from descriptions at this period we can learn that the city had an outer and an inner wall. In the late Roman period there was an elevated street between these two walls, and it must have still existed in the Middle Ages.[23] All these details are recognizable in *De adventu* and may be later additions to the simpler prototype.

When we move closer to the core of the legend, it becomes increasingly more difficult to compare the localities. The church

of St. Thomas in Mailapur was on a hill and outside the city, which corresponds to the description in *De adventu*. In Edessa the church was inside the walls, but its exact location is not quite clear.[24] As to the water running around it, there was a river near the hill in Mailapur and a river flowed through the city of Edessa. The water level of Scirtus (Daisan) in Edessa was subject to great seasonal changes, so that the city suffered from annual floods which occasionally produced serious catastrophies. To eliminate this danger the Emperor Justinian (527–565) built an artificial conduit that let the surplus water flow around the walls of the city. Incidentally, the floods occur in the spring, while the feast of St. Thomas is celebrated on October 6 in the midst of the dry season.[25]

The phenomenon of the rising and falling level of water opening a dry passage may have crept into the legend from still another direction. Ugo Monneret de Villard has recently considered the possibility that this detail was based on the mysterious fluctuations of the lake Urmiyah (Urmia) in the northwestern corner of Iran, where an island sometimes becomes a peninsula. Monneret de Villard went even further and proposed that the very name of Hulna derives from Urmiyah or Urmi.[26]

So far both rivals for St. Thomas' burial place seem to have been equally remembered in the legend. There are, however, several instances when Edessa receives an incontestable advantage. One of the Latin versions of Prester John's letter is a curious retranslation into Latin of the older and longer French translation of a paraphrased Latin version. This Latin retranslation has been altered and augmented by several interpolations. One of these additions depicts the scene in which St. Thomas administers the

Eucharist. It could have been borrowed from *De adventu*, except that the assistant to the sitting Apostle is not the Patriarch John of India, but the Patriarch of Antioch in northern Syria, the superior of the archbishop of Edessa. Again, a twelfth-century imaginary account of India written by the monk Elysaeus contains a strange mixture of borrowings from the letter of Prester John and *De adventu* with some additions from other sources. Elysaeus places the church of St. Thomas on a mountain near Edessa. The unusual burial of the Apostle is here further elaborated, for St. Thomas' iron coffin is hovering freely in the air inside a chamber built of lodestone. Finally, Johannes of Hese, a fourteenth-century writer of a fictitious travelogue, claimed that Hulna was only four days' journey from Edessa.[27]

A brief speculation on the origins and development of the legend suggests the following steps. Its nucleus was the relic of the Apostle's uncorrupted hand that had touched Christ's wounds in the famous scene of doubt. The Indian and Edessan shrines of the divided relic began to attract pilgrims, especially at the time of the Saint's feast day, when his remains were probably displayed. Out of the practice of placing oblations before the reliquary there developed the story of St. Thomas' taking gifts with his hand as was mentioned in Odo's letter. This stage of the legend may have been influenced by an episode from the *Acts* in which St. Thomas had received small gifts from those who came to listen to his sermon.[28] Parallel to this version there may have existed another which reversed the action and had the Apostle distribute the gift of the Eucharist. Descriptions of the physical environments of the two shrines were later additions made by the returning pilgrims.

The fusion of two localities into one legend is not hard to explain. Since the pre-Christian centuries Edessa had been one of the main stations on the important route that connected the Syrian coastal cities with Central Asia and India. In the second and third centuries of our era a great annual fair was held at the city of Batnae (Serugh) close to Edessa. It was attended by the caravan merchants of all Asian countries, including Persia and India. We can presume that with the goods there were exchanged also stories of distant lands, their marvels, saints, and shrines.[29] The Syrian poet Bardesanes (154–222), who is probably the author of the "Hymn of the Soul" in the *Acts*, once met in Edessa members of an Indian embassy who were on their way to Rome. On the basis of their oral information he wrote his *Hypomnemata Indica* (Indian Notes), which unfortunately has not survived.[30] In later periods Edessa continued to play an important role in the combined overland and overseas trade that connected Antioch via the Tigris River with the Persian Gulf and India.[31] With these lines of communication in mind it is easy to understand how Christian merchants and occasional pilgrims had fused the characteristics of both shrines into one legend that found its way also into Nubia and Ethiopia. The importance of Edessa in this process of amalgamation has to be particularly emphasized, for it was rather here than in far-off India that the individual parts of the legend had crystallized into a whole, and it was from here that it reached Western Europe.

To return once more to *De adventu* and Odo's letter, there is still another detail they agree upon, namely the coming of a certain prelate to Rome who then told his story to the Pontiff. Of course, the three Oriental sources for the same miracle had no

need to mention the Patriarch John. But who was he and whence did he come? There can be little doubt that, whoever he was, his arrival in Rome has to be considered a true event. Our two sources are not only independent, they mention something that could not have been invented by any later writer. An exchange of embassies between Constantinople and Rome and negotiations on behalf of a reunion of the two churches are attested by a letter written in May 1124 by the Byzantine Emperor John Comnenus (1118–1143) to Pope Calixtus II. In this document the Greek monarch asked forgiveness for his tardy reply to an earlier embassy sent by the Pope.[32] But to say that Patriarch John came in fact to Constantinople and Rome does not mean that he really was what he pretended to be.

The reasons for his coming to the Byzantine capital are very suspicious. If he had been from India proper, he would have been a member of the East Syrian or Nestorian church which by the twelfth century had its own patriarch in Baghdad. Even if Enrico Cerulli is right that in cases of disputed elections heretical prelates did sometimes put their claims before impartial outsiders, there is no evidence in our case of a split or contested election. On the contrary, the Patriarch himself assures us that it was unanimous.[33] There is still another reason to suspect his story. The Indian branch of the East Syrian church did not hold any councils before the sixteenth century, nor were its archbishops elected. As a missionary province it was headed by an appointee of the Patriarch of Baghdad.[34] Our prelate was either misunderstood, or he did not tell the truth. The version given in Odo's letter is even more at odds with reality. The Byzantine emperors certainly had nothing to say in Indian politics. Since the analysis of the miracle

has revealed a confusion between India and Edessa, it would be worthwhile to see whether the prelate could not have come from the much closer city in the Near East rather than from India.

Odo's letter suggests vaguely some feudal ties between the homeland of the archbishop and the Byzantine Empire. In the year 1122 when the alleged Indian churchman arrived in Rome, the Count of Edessa, Joscelyn I, was a vassal of the Prince of Antioch; these princes, in turn, during the whole twelfth century acknowledged the overlordship of the Byzantine emperor. Even if the counts of Edessa did not always recognize their dependence, the Greek monarchs never ceased to treat them as vassals.[35] On September 13, 1122, Count Joscelyn and several of his companions were captured by the Turks. Would it not be possible that some Syrian or Armenian churchman from Edessa took this occasion to petition the Byzantine emperor to restore Greek rule over the city that only a generation before had been taken from the Greeks by a breach of agreement? This conjecture would conflict chronologically with May 5, 1122, as the time when the Patriarch visited Pope Calixtus II in Rome, but, as indicated earlier, this date is by no means reliable.[36]

At last there remains the Patriarch's trip from India to Constantinople, which was accomplished in one year. The very roundness of this unit of time and a striking lack of any hints of personal experience while en route make the whole journey unreal. After all, our prelate had performed a deed worthy of praise and admiration. We know from the *Synodical Canons* of Abhd-isho (d. 1318) that the metropolitans of India, China, and Samarkand were exempted from attending the general synods of the East Syrian Church because of the long distances and dangers of the

road. The year 1122 was still a century before the heavy hand of the Tartar conquerors created peace and order over the wide stretches of Persia and Central Asia.[37] Should we assume that an Indian prelate under flimsy pretenses undertook a trip which could not have been expected of him by the leaders of his own church? One of the best authorities on apocryphal literature, Richard A. Lipsius, suggested in 1884 that the Patriarch was an imposter. This view was later shared by another authority.[38]

But since the Patriarch was a real person, he must have come to Constantinople and Rome from somewhere. The content of the legend, with its ties to Edessa, and the improbability of his arrival from India tend to indicate that he came from northern Syria, if not from Edessa proper.

The earliest notice of Prester John's existence arrived in Europe from the same general area of the Near East. The person to introduce the story of the great Christian, but Nestorian, king ruling "beyond Persia and Armenia" was a certain Bishop Hugh of Jabala, a small coastal town south of Antioch and some two hundred miles from Edessa. His European trip was closely connected with the fate of this latter city.

In late November of 1144 Imad-ad-Din Zengi, the governor of Mosul and Aleppo, led a strong army against Edessa and besieged it. His well-prepared move caught the crusading forces unawares and their leaders divided by bitter personal enmity. The small garrison of the city and its native Syrians and Armenians, of whom many were merchants unused to arms, were no match for the Moslem veterans.[39] After four weeks of desperate resistance the city was stormed and thoroughly sacked (December 24, 1144). With the loss of Edessa the whole northeastern corner of

Western defenses was crumbling and the Moslem units began to penetrate into the immediate vicinity of Antioch. The crusading states faced a grave danger. Without effective help from Europe they could not hope to stem the rising tide of Mohammedan reconquest. To assure speedy aid, several influential persons in the Holy Land were dispatched to the West to seek help from the Pope and the secular rulers of Europe.

One of these emissaries was the French-born Bishop Hugh of Jabala who first went to see Pope Eugenius III and then planned to cross the Alps.[40] His past activity in the Holy Land shows him an accomplished diplomat. In the year 1143 he had openly rebuked the Byzantine Emperor John for putting pressure on Prince Raymond of Antioch to reconfirm his status as an imperial vassal. Hugh had also proved himself useful to the Roman curia by establishing its authority over the Patriarchate of Antioch.[41] He was completely dedicated to the cause and the interests of the Latins and it is very likely that his mission had been sponsored by Raymond himself.[42]

Bishop Hugh and the Pontiff met in Viterbo on November 18, 1145. The prelate from Syria complained of the Patriarch of Antioch and the mother-in-law of Raymond because they did not share properly the spoils taken from the Saracens and he lamented bitterly the "peril of the Church beyond the sea since the capture of Edessa." This detailed information comes to us from Bishop Otto of Freising who at that time happened also to be in Viterbo.[43] Otto was one of the greatest historians of the Middle Ages and his close family ties with the German royal houses gave him an unusual insight into European politics, which in those days were no less intricate than now. He must certainly have

been delighted to meet Hugh, from whom he could get firsthand information about the recent developments in the Near East. Thanks to the encounter of these two men, we have the story of Prester John, as it was told by Hugh and recorded by Otto in the seventh book of his famous *Chronicle*. Since this account signals the first appearance of Prester John in world literature, the complete text in Charles Ch. Mierow's excellent translation is given here:

"He [i.e. Hugh] related also that not many years before a certain John, a king and priest who dwells beyond Persia and Armenia in the uttermost East and, with all his people, is a Christian but a Nestorian, made war on the brother kings of Persians and Medes, called Samiardi, and stormed Ekbatana (the seat of their kingdom) of which mention has been made above. When the aforesaid kings met him with an army composed of Persians, Medes and Assyrians a battle ensued which lasted for three days, since both parties were willing to die rather than turn in flight. Prester John, for so they are accustomed to call him,[44] putting the Persians to flight with dreadful carnage finally emerged victorious. He said that after this victory the aforesaid John moved his army to the aid of the Church in Jerusalem, but that when he had reached the river Tigris and was unable to transport his army across that river by any device he turned towards the north, where, he had learned, this stream was frozen over on account of the winter's cold. When he had tarried there for several years without, however, seeing his heart's desire realized (the continued mild weather prevented it), and lost many of his soldiers because of the unfamiliar climate he was forced to return home. It is said that he is a lineal descendant of the Magi, of whom mention is

made in the Gospel, and that, ruling over the same peoples which they governed, he enjoys such great glory and wealth that he uses no scepter save one of emerald. Inflamed by the example of his fathers who came to adore Christ in his manger, he had planned to go to Jerusalem but by reason aforesaid he was prevented — so men say. But enough of this."

The historical nucleus of this report is well known. The battle mentioned by Hugh fits perfectly the bloody encounter of September 9, 1141, between Yeh-lü Ta-shih, the founder of the Qara-Khitay (Black Cathay) Empire in Central Asia, and the Seljuk Sultan Sanjar.[45] The Iraqi historian Ibn al-Athir placed the battle at Qatwan near Samarkand. In his words the Sultan was so completely routed that the Mohammedans of Khorasan had never suffered a greater and bloodier defeat. If we placed complete confidence in Hugh's report, which, although marred by minor mistakes, cannot be summarily dismissed, we would have to conclude that the Nestorian Prester John was none other than Yeh-lü Ta-shih. But was the Chinese-educated ruler of a seminomadic conglomeration of nations really a Christian? There is not a single historical source to confirm it; on the contrary, the Chinese sources leave no doubt that he was a Buddhist.[46]

Before considering further the question of a historical Prester John, let us attempt to determine how the news of Sanjar's defeat in Central Asia could have traveled over a distance of two thousand miles that separate Samarkand from Jabala. There has already been occasion to mention the trading routes that connected Antioch with Baghdad and from there with the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. The transmitters of the news of the Moslem military disaster must have been Christian merchants, for only they could

have expected Prester John to advance toward Jerusalem with an apparent intention to visit the Holy Places. Since their expectations did not materialize, they needed an excuse for Prester John's tarrying. The failure of the Tigris to freeze was picked arbitrarily and without any natural justification to stand in the way of the advancing king. The idea of a congealed river as an aid for crossing has been obviously borrowed from the legendary Stragan of Alexandrian Romances which were equally famous in the West and East.[47]

There were moreover two other legendary traits in Hugh's picture of Prester John that must be accounted for: his linear descent from the Magi and his fabulous wealth. In the Gospel of Matthew, 2:1–12, the three Magi followed a star to Bethlehem where they adored the infant Christ and made him presents of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They came from the East and the earliest references to them outside this passage in the New Testament call Persia their homeland.[48] It is only natural for the oldest legends about them to have developed in this part of the world. Since there were several legends of the Magi with quite different content, we are not in a position to judge which specific version the informants of Bishop Hugh may have had in mind. One very popular variant is preserved in the Syrian *Chronicle of Zuqnin* of the latter part of the eighth century, and it connects the Magi with St. Thomas.[49] The same is true of the apocryphal *Book of Seth.* When the Magi had returned home, according to both sources, they praised God even more than before and they preached about Him wherever they went. Then after the resurrection of Christ, St. Thomas came to their country. He baptized them and they became his helpers. Another common version of the

same legend has much less detail. In the Latin tradition of this shorter version the names of the Magi are usually given as Balthasar, Melchior, and Gaspar or Gathaspa. In Syriac the latter name is rendered as Gushnasaph.[50] Two well-known scholars, Alfred von Gutschmid and Ernst E. Herzfeld, have suggested that the name "Gaspar" comes from "Gundafor," the previously mentioned Partho-Indian king of the *Acts*, who, as we recall, had commissioned St. Thomas to build the palace and was later baptized by him.[51] If this identification is correct, we have two links that tie St. Thomas with the Magi, who in turn are said to have been the ancestors of Prester John.

The second legendary trait is Prester John's fabulous wealth, particularly his emerald scepter. A similar symbol of majesty and great riches occurs, strangely enough, in Sindbad the Sailor's stories, so familiar to the readers of *The Thousand and One Nights*. The tales of Sindbad, a merchant adventurer who is plagued by constant calamities and rescues himself invariably through his own wits, were a common literary tradition of the East. They were known to Firdausi, the author of the Persian national epic *Shah Nameh*, and could not have escaped the notice of Eastern Christians.[52] In Sindbad's sixth voyage his ship was wrecked and together with some other sailors he was stranded on a solitary island. After all his companions had died of starvation, Sindbad made a last desperate effort to rescue himself. He built a raft and on it descended a river that flowed only for a short stretch on the island and then disappeared under a mountain. This subterranean stream carried him out of his predicament and he emerged on the paradisiacal island of Sarendeeb or Ceylon. In describing what he saw Sindbad observed that one of the king's

attendants was carrying "a great mace of gold, at the top of which is an emerald a span in length, and of the thickness of a thumb."[53] Is the emerald scepter of Prester John a borrowing from the rich king of Ceylon? We cannot be sure; yet there is no reason why it could not be so. We have seen that the story of Prester John was most probably transmitted by Christian merchants of the East who were certainly familiar with the fabulous exploits of their colleague Sindbad. Somehow in their minds they could have associated the greatness of Prester John with the wealth of an Indian king.

We have thus in Hugh's report a curious split in Prester John's personality. In a purely historical perspective he has to be equated with a Buddhist ruler of a Central Asian state, while his legendary attributes tie him to St. Thomas and India. The suggestion is strong that the two Eastern legends have an identical background, and it remains to be seen to what extent the subsequent reports of Prester John and St. Thomas strengthen the assumption that they stem from a common source.

THE ORIGINAL TEXT

THE reports brought to the West by the alleged Patriarch John and Hugh of Jabala were soon overshadowed by the mysterious appearance of a much more spectacular message: the letter of Prester John. It differed from the two preceding accounts by being a document of seemingly unquestionable authenticity which had gathered within a dozen pages the whole store of medieval knowledge about India, its beasts, monsters, and marvels. For more than a century this curious sample of epistolary literature was destined to be a major source for Indian geography and history, and even after the appearance of Marco Polo's *Travels* (ca. 1300) it continued to shape the popular concept of that distant and wondrous country where St. Thomas had suffered martyrdom and Prester John was reigning over his Christian subjects.

It may seem paradoxical that a fabricated letter was able to acquire such unprecedented popularity, and yet it was precisely its largely traditional content that assured it a lasting interest and circulation. Had the story of Prester John survived only in

the voluminous chronicle of Otto of Freising, it would have been known to but a few clerics and scholars. It was the author of the *Letter* who made Prester John great, yet one may wonder to what extent the Indian ruler was a purely fictitious figure, void of any, even legendary, existence.

Very little is known of the circumstances under which the *Letter* was introduced in Europe. The chronicler Alberic de Trois Fontaines, who was writing between the years 1232 and 1252, recorded its arrival under the year 1165.[1] In his words the message was dispatched by Prester John "to various Christian kings and especially to the Emperor Manuel of Constantinople and the Roman Emperor Frederick." A few brief introductory notes found in some of the older manuscripts inform the reader that the Byzantine Emperor Manuel (1143–1180) has forwarded the *Letter* to Frederick I, Barbarossa (1152–1190).[2] The date by which it was unquestionably in circulation is usually deduced from a casual allusion to it by Pope Alexander III (1159–1181) in his reply to the "King of India" written in Venice on September 27, 1177. This letter was entrusted to a papal physician by the name of Philip of whom nothing has been heard since.[3] These scanty and not very reliable data are practically all that can be learned about the *Letter* from outside sources. For the remaining problems, such as the language, place, and purpose of the original composition, the author's use of other materials, his personal background, the critic has to rely exclusively on the internal evidence of the text.

This approach has been greatly facilitated by Friedrich Zarncke's edition of the Latin texts. Over a period of several years he examined and partially collated almost one hundred Latin

manuscripts and he laid a firm foundation for all subsequent studies related to Prester John and his letter. Only an insignificant number of additional Latin manuscripts have been discovered since the last portion of Zarncke's unfortunately unfinished study was published in 1879.[4] But since he was not able to complete the sorely needed commentary to the text which he was preparing,[5] and since his primary concern in his published work was to establish a reliable text based on the best manuscripts and not to interpret the meaning of obscure words and sentences, a certain amount of work on the Latin text has remained to be done. Later historians have shown little interest in the wording of the *Letter* and during more than half a century only Charles V. Langlois and Alexander A. Vasiliev have tried to explain some of its difficult passages.[6]

One of Friedrich Zarncke's lasting contributions to an evaluation of the *Letter* is his successful freeing of the oldest or original version from five later interpolations. The very fact that such insertions were readily introduced speaks for a rather casual attitude toward this document even by some of its medieval contemporaries. The first, or A, interpolation is just a minor enlargement on the story of the pepper forest.[7] The second, or B, interpolation contributes a long description of Prester John's second palace. It has been attributed to the year 1192.[8] Interpolation C was part of the *Letter* by 1221. It introduced many additions throughout the whole text, the most important of which is the lengthy account of the Gog and Magog and other abominable nations enclosed in the North by Alexander the Great.[9] The last two interpolations, D and E, brought into the text long paragraphs of new and sometimes very dull materials. Since they are of later

date and of little importance for the development of the French translations, there is no need to dwell on them. The highlights of the original text and the first three interpolations are as follows.

Prester John, "by the Grace of God king of kings," sends greetings to Manuel, the "governor of the Romans." The following sentences suggest that the sovereigns had exchanged gifts through their envoys and that Prester John would like to know whether Manuel holds the right faith. This innocent inquiry is ably seasoned with a sneering remark about the "little Greeks" who hold their ruler to be a god, while he, Prester John, is only a human being. Should Manuel like to come and settle in his country, he will be welcomed and properly rewarded. After boasts about his riches and seventy-two vassal kings, John makes it known that he intends to visit the Holy Sepulcher with a great army, for it behooves him to fight the enemies of Christendom.

At this point the character of the *Letter* changes and it becomes a description of the three Indias with its wild animals, monsters, and the abominable peoples of Gog and Magog. It mentions further that in Prester John's country there are no venomous creatures and that the river Ydonus flows through it on its way from the earthly paradise. Its waters are crystal clear and it abounds in precious stones. In an obvious contradiction to the previous statement, there is a pepper forest infested by many snakes, so that the precious spice can only be harvested after fire has been set to the groves to burn the poisonous reptiles. The pepper is then traded for grain, leather, and cloth. India is rich in wonders. If a man carries upon himself an herb called *assidios*, he has the power to conjure the devil. Certain stones by the name of *midriosi*, which the eagles sometimes take to their nests, improve the vision

and make a person invisible. The sandy sea without water is here perpetually in motion and a subterranean river can be explored by a lucky fellow, should he happen to find an entrance to it. Beyond this river are the ten lost tribes of Israel who are subject to Prester John. On a mountain of fire there live the salamanders who spin threads for the precious royal garments that are cleaned not by washing in water, but by being placed into flames.

After new assurances of his wealth Prester John depicts his ideal state. He shelters and feeds all strangers and pilgrims. There are no poor in his country, no thieves, no robbers, no adulterers, for all his subjects are wealthy. They lack only horses which are few in number and poor. Whenever Prester John rides into war he has a splendid escort and thirteen crosses made of gold and jewels are carried before his army. In time of peace a simple wooden cross, a vessel full of gold, and another full of earth suffice to indicate his dignity and humility. Each year he visits the tomb of the Prophet Daniel.

The palace in which Prester John is living is similar to the palace built by St. Thomas for King Gundafor of India. Its general layout and its workshops are the same. This sumptuous structure is composed of various precious woods and stones. At nights only balm is burned in its chambers. Its furniture is devised in such a way that the magic qualities of its materials have a most wholesome effect on those in the palace. Prester John claims to have beautiful wives, but they do not approach him, except four times a year.

Once a day his whole court of thirty thousand persons, not counting those who come and go, sits down to have a meal. The table at which they dine is made of precious emerald resting on

two columns of amethyst; it has the virtue of preventing drunkenness. In front of the palace is a field for jousting and next to it stands a tower with a magic mirror in which the intrigues and plots of Prester John's enemies can be seen.

Each month some seven kings, seventy-two dukes, and three hundred sixty-five counts attend him. At the table to his right sit twelve archbishops and to his left twenty bishops, not counting the Patriarch of St. Thomas, the Bishop of Samarkand, and the Archbishop of Susa, where his royal throne and palace are located. In the court chapel abbots continually serve masses for Prester John.

At this point begins a long and detailed description of the second royal palace, the construction of which had been divinely revealed to Prester John's father Quasideus.

The *Letter* ends with another direct address to the Emperor Manuel and a curious explanation of Prester John's desire to be called a priest. "Your Prudence should not wonder why our Highness does not want to be called by a worthier title than priest. We have in fact at our court many subordinates who are endowed with more important titles and positions in the church hierarchy and whose divine duties are greater than ours. Thus our steward is a patriarch and king, our butler is an archbishop and king, our chamberlain is a bishop and king, our marshal is a king and an abbot, and the first cook is a king and a prior. Therefore our Highness does not suffer to be called by these names or to be designated by such titles of which our court abounds. It is on account of our humility that we have chosen to be called by a less important name and title." After a brief remark about the extent of India, Prester John closes his message with these words: "If

Thou canst count the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea, judge the vastness of our realm and our power." [10]

Even in this very condensed form the spurious nature of the *Letter* becomes clearly evident. The reader is confronted not by a message written somewhere in India, but by a literary exercise pieced together from various sources, many of which can be traced to medieval Latin literature on Alexander the Great and other tracts dealing with monsters and marvels of the East.[11] Friedrich Zarncke has identified three passages in the original version as inspired by a half-legendary and half-historical Latin biography of King Alexander which Ekkehart of Aura had included in his *Chronicon Universale* (World Chronicle). He has further shown that the author of the *Letter* quoted the Vulgate and consulted a Latin lapidary.[12] Malcolm Letts, a noted British authority, increased this list of evident borrowings by pointing to parallels in the writings of Isidore of Seville, Marbod of Rennes, and other medieval authors.[13] Although the dependence of the *Letter* on the Alexandrian materials does not require further proofs, a few additional examples may be of some value.

The exchange of gifts and letters between Prester John and the Emperor Manuel was accomplished by messengers called *apocrisiarii.* This originally Greek word occurs nine times in Archpriest Leo's (ca. 950) Latin translation of the Alexandrian Romance commonly known as the *Historia de proeliis* (History of the Battles).[14]

When Prester John lists the churchmen at his table, he mentions specifically the Patriarch of St. Thomas, the Bishop of Samarkand, and the Archbishop of Susa, where his throne and his imperial palace are to be found. Susa was once the capital of the

Persian Achaemenid Empire, but after its destruction in the Sassanian period and the Arab conquest of Persia it gradually declined. In the words of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, who visited Susa around the year 1170, it lay partly in ruins.[15] The author of the *Letter* does not refer, however, to the contemporary city, but rather to the sumptuous residence of the Persian King Darius, described in *Historia de proeliis*.[16]

Another instance of adaptation from Archpriest Leo's work can be discerned in the unusual title *Romeon gubernator* (the governor of the Romans, i.e. Byzantines) chosen by the author of the *Letter* for the Greek emperor. A possible source for this may have been a passage in the last letter of Alexander to his former teacher, Aristotle. Actually this letter was Alexander's will and one of the provisions concerned his successor: "Since I have often thought of a ruler to govern you after my death, I bequeath that Ptolemy be the guardian of my tomb and your governor." [17] The repetition of the same word by Prester John created a striking parallel. Ptolemy was inferior to Alexander and only second in command. The *Letter* repeats this relationship and gives the less important sovereign and a possible successor to Prester John an inferior, fictitious title. There may be two explanations for this. As was indicated by the sneering remark aimed at the "little Greeks" (*Graeculi*), the author had no respect for them.[18] On the other hand, he may have been anxious to avoid the accusation of perpetrating a forgery, for by applying a nonexistent title he practically disclosed the true nature of his fabrication.

There is a school of thought, initiated by Leonardo Olschki in 1931 and vigorously supported ever since, which views the *Letter* as a piece of Utopian literature.[19] It claims that the message of

Prester John did not intend so much to baffle contemporary readers as to instruct them by depicting the high moral standards of the Indians and by contrasting the perpetual discord between the Church and the Empire in the West with the ideal theocracy of Prester John's realm. While this interpretation may have its share of truth, it should not be overlooked that India was traditionally known to be a country of a strict moral code and cordial hospitality. The famous correspondence between the King of the Brahmans, Dindimus, and Alexander must have furnished the *Letter* with a substantial part of its high ethical content. Dindimus' first letter contains this emphatic statement: "No unchastity, adultery or vice is known among us." The letter of Prester John said virtually the same thing in slightly different words: "There is no adulterer among us, no vice has power over us." [20] In Archpriest Leo's *Historia de proeliis* one finds these affirmations: "We are not envious" and "We do not engage in strife." [21] Other examples can be gathered from the cycle of medieval literature on the marvels of the East which are partly inspired by the Alexandrian material. Thus the reader is generally informed about the Orient "where there are hospitable kings ruling over many tyrants" and "benign men letting those who come to their region get married before they depart." When Alexander came to them, he admired their "kind human nature." [22] Besides, certain references in the *Letter* to the ten lost tribes of Israel and to the legendary river Sambation make it highly probable that its author was acquainted with the Hebrew account of Eldad had-Dani, according to whom "the Sons of Moses" (*Bene Moses*) were living a virtuous life in an ideal state similar to that of Prester John's citizens in India.[23] As to the harmonious union of the royal and priestly powers in

the person of Prester John, it was already known to Bishop Hugh's informants, who cannot be suspected of being initiated into the intricacies of the Investiture Controversy or the altercations between the Emperor Frederick I and Pope Alexander III.

These examples should suffice to make it almost certain that the author of the *Letter* was borrowing his material from the Latin literature and that therefore he could have been only a West European. But there are reasons to question such a conclusion. The youngest or E interpolation, which originated sometime in the thirteenth century, adds to the *Letter* the following closing note: "Here ends the book or history of Prester John that was translated from the Greek into Latin by the Archbishop Christian of Mainz." Moreover, the Latin text itself contains a number of Graecisms which could be taken to be remnants of a Greek original.[24] Friedrich Zarncke singled out these Greek words, but he felt unable to decide in favor of either of the languages, because the verbatim quotations from the Vulgate and the presence in the text of two Latin hexameters canceled out the Greek traces. Lynn Thorndike and Malcolm Letts upheld the Latin origin of the *Letter*.[25] Only a few years ago the late Alexander A. Vasiliev took up this problem once more in his study on Prester John and he came to the conclusion that "both the direct and indirect evidence . . . testifies that the original text was Greek." [26] Since it is important for the present study to establish at least tentatively the area where the *Letter* could have been composed, the controversy of Greek versus Latin origin has to be taken up in greater detail.

The evidence from the interpolation E is of little value. One should bear in mind that to contemporaries the *Letter* was an authentic message from an Indian ruler who must have spoken and

written some unknown Eastern language. This notion is clearly expressed by a brief introductory note on the title page of a twelfth-century Paris manuscript which reads: "Here begins the letter of the Emperor John of India . . . translated first into Greek and into Latin." Another Paris text pretends to be a translation from the Arabic into Latin, which in view of the European background of the *Letter*'s content is completely out of the question.[27] So far, not a single Greek manuscript of the *Letter* has been discovered and it should be added that the south Slavs and the Russians, whose dependence on Greek learning and literature is well known, had to procure their versions of the *Letter* by translating a Latin text.[28] These two factors weaken from the outset the possibility that the original language was Greek. As to the possible role of the Archbishop Christian in the transmission of the Latin text, it will be discussed further below.[29]

The burden of proof is thus on the Graecisms. But before they can be given full attention, it is necessary to establish the general reliability of the Latin text, for if it can be demonstrated that it is not free of mistakes and corruptions, the Greek words will appear in a somewhat different light.

Three examples of obvious distortions can be found in the catalogue of animals and monsters inhabiting Prester John's country. After a series of normal species like the elephants and camels there appear three mysterious kinds of animals: *methagallinarii*, *cametheternis*, and *thinsiretae*, each of which has two to four variants.[30] The first word is still a puzzle. *Cametheternis* has a variant *chimeterremis* and it is possible to see in it a corruption of *chimera triformis* (the tripartite chimera), especially since the syllable "ra" could have been abbreviated. The last word has a variant

tinsirere and it could have come from *De monstris et belluis*, a popular medieval book on monsters and beasts. One of its brief chapters is called *De monstris circie terrae* (On the monsters of Circe's land).[31] Since in the medieval manuscripts words stand very close together, the author of the *Letter* could have read *circieterrae* and mistaken it for a strange kind of monster. Once taken into the text it could have become further mutilated by scribal errors. Although these cases are hypothetical, the fact remains that unless one can prove premeditated mystification, these words must have had sensible meanings.

The brief summary of the Latin text has mentioned the *midriosi* or stones which the eagles occasionally take to their nests. One of their qualities was to sharpen, or even to restore, vision and, if properly conjured, they could render persons wearing them invisible. After Friedrich Zarncke had compared several variants for *midriosi*, he suggested a tentative original *nidiosi*, derived from the Latin word for nest, *nidus*. A reading found later by Alfons Hilka in a Breslau manuscript supports Zarncke's proposal. Moreover, the first German author to write a book on nature in German, Konrad of Megenberg (1309–1374), spoke of certain stones, *nides*, which the eagles keep in their nests to help them hatch the eggs.[32] The magic power to render a man invisible is ascribed in German folklore to a stone found in the nest of a siskin.[33] The overwhelming evidence is thus for a word with a stem of *nid*. *Midriosi* is a corruption and a poor choice. A trace of Germanic folklore in the *Letter* is by itself an interesting fact and the present case is not an isolated incident.[34]

The first example of a Graecism listed by Friedrich Zarncke is the use of *Romeon* instead of *Romanorum* in the above-discussed

title *Romeon gubernator*. The author of the *Letter* must indeed have had some knowledge of Greek, yet the occurrence of this word does not constitute proof of a Greek original, for had the Latin been a translation, it would be most unnatural to assume that the translator had overlooked it. No other explanation can be given for why such a simple word was left untranslated.

The next two Graecisms occur in the sentence "Accipe ierarcham in nomine nostro et utere tibi, quia libenter utimur lechito tuo, ut sic confortemus et corroboremus virtutem nostram ad invicem." The words in question are *ierarcham* and *lechito*. Alexander A. Vasiliev felt that the passage was not quite clear and he proposed only a tentative translation: "Receive the dignity of the hierarch in our name and use it for thy own sake, because we gladly use the vase of oil, in order that we mutually strengthen and corroborate our virtue." [35] The same sentence could be translated with a somewhat different emphasis. The imperative "receive" and the words "we gladly use" suggest that Prester John accompanied his message with a present which was an answer to a previous letter and gift dispatched by the Greek emperor. These presents were beneficial to the *virtus*, which may have the more concrete and medical sense of *virtus corporis* — bodily strength, vigor. The word *ierarcham* has these variants: *ieracham*, *ierarchiam*, *yeracam*, *herarcham*.[36] Would it not be possible that the original word was *hieraciam* (from *hieracia*, *ae*, f.) — hawkweed, an herb used to sharpen eyesight and to cure eye diseases? [37] *Lechito* (from *lechitus*, *i*, m.) can be translated as "jar for unguents." The sentence would now read: "Receive the hawkweed from us and use it for yourself, because we avail ourselves with pleasure of your jar of unguent, in order that we strengthen and corroborate

our bodily vigor." This slight alteration makes this passage more conventional. Exchanges of medicines and aromatics between sovereigns were not uncommon. The Caliph of Baghdad, Harun al Rashid (786–809), sent balm, nard, and unguents to Charlemagne, while he himself received similar gifts from the King of Ceylon.[38] Another reason for considering these gifts as medicines may be found in the Emperor Manuel's well-known interest in medical books and practice.[39] It is important to note that *hieracia* and *lechitus* have been taken over as loan words by Latin and do not necessarily constitute remnants of a Greek original.[40]

The very next sentence presents an even greater difficulty; it reads: "Tigna quoque nostrum respice et considera." The variants for *tigna* are *Tigne*, *Tcona*, *Tinna*, *regna*, *thegma*, *pegma*, while the neuter possessive pronoun *nostrum* occurs only once in the form *nostra*. Alexander A. Vasiliev preferred the variants *regna* and *nostra* and his translation reads: "Do also respect and consider our kingdom." But if the Latin *regna* had been the original word, why did it produce such a multitude of variants? It is rather obvious that the forms *regna* and *nostra* are later emendations.[41] Friedrich Zarncke has classified *tigna* as a Graecism, because the well-attested neuter possessive pronoun *nostrum* was agreeing with a noun ending in an "a" which therefore must have been a Greek word. Since no Greek word closely resembling *tigna* or its variants answers the sense of the context, it may be permissible to suggest another early corruption. It has been demonstrated above how the author of the *Letter* borrowed from the Archpriest Leo's *Historia de proeliis*. In Friedrich Pfister's edition of this text there are five references to *diadema*, the Greek neuter word for "diadem."[42] In one of Alexander's letters, reproduced in the

Historia, one can read this terse sentence addressed to King Darius: "Tamen diadema meum non est similis tuae diademae" (But my diadem is not like your diadem). Has the author of the *Letter* taken over the *diadema* as he took the *apocrisiarius*? Did he make Prester John say: "Respect and consider also my diadem"? Regardless of whether this conjecture is correct or false, *tigna* or whatever it stands for does not have to be an untranslatable Greek word.

Another clear Graecism is the magic herb *assidios*, the roots of which can help a person to conjure the devil and make him speak. European folklore knows many herbs and roots serving such a purpose. The Anglo-Saxon *Leech Book* gives one recipe: "Work thus a good salve against temptations of the fiend. Bishopwort, lupin, vipers bugloss, strawberry plant, the cloved wenwort, earth rime, blackberry, pennyroyal, wormwood; pound all the worts, boil them in good butter, etc."[43] Another Anglo-Saxon source calls wormwood by its Greek name *apsinthion*, which has a parallel form *apsinthios*. The latter must have been the prototype for *assidios*. The magic power of wormwood to exorcise the devil is also very well known in German folklore.[44]

Two last words to be considered here are the titles *protopapaten* and *archiprotopapaten*, ascribed to high church officials of Samarkand in Central Asia and Susa in Persia.[45] Although the origin of these titles is Greek, the author of the *Letter* connected them with two episcopal seats of the Nestorian Church.[46] Joseph S. Assemani (1687–1768), one of the greatest authorities on Syrian literature, considered these "bombastic titles" a borrowing from the Nestorians. To support his point of view, he cited the famous Nestorian inscription at Hsi-an in Shensi (China), dated 781.

which gave the name of its author as "Adam, Priest and Chorepiscopus, and Papash of Chinestan." [47] In spite of more recent doubts as to the correctness of the reading "papash," P. Yoshio Saeki upheld it once more in 1950.[48] There will be another occasion to refer to this passage in greater detail.

The Greek words of the *Letter* have thus proved to be either titles or loanwords; in neither case can they be taken to support a Greek original. Alexander A. Vasiliev's further references to the salamander and its "fleece" (*pellicula*) as a faint echo of the Byzantine silk industry are too tenuous to be of much importance.[49] The Latin origin of the *Letter* has to be reconfirmed and the verdict expressed by Lynn Thorndike in 1923 is still valid today. In his opinion "this letter even in its earliest and briefest form seems without doubt a western forgery and bears the mark of its Latin origin, since despite the use of a few Greek ecclesiastical and official terms and the attempt to rehearse unheard-of wonders, the writer indulges in a sneer at Greek adoration of the emperor and is unable to conceive of Prester John except as a feudal overlord with the usual kings, dukes and counts, archbishops, bishops and abbots under him." [50]

Once the Latin origin of the *Letter* has been established, there arises a new problem. Was it composed in Western Europe exclusively on the basis of literary sources already available, or does its author display occasionally details which he could not have gathered by sitting at home and reading books? In other words, would it be possible to detect in the *Letter* some traits of its author's direct or indirect contacts with the East he was describing? The probability of such connections has already been expressed by Malcolm Letts.[51]

One of the most striking examples of a detail which the author could not have lifted from a learned book is the reference to the Central Asian city of Samarkand. This important trading center on the ancient silk road between China and the Mediterranean has been mentioned previously in connection with Yeh-lü Ta-shih's victory over Sanjar and the titles *protopapaten* and *archiprotopapaten.*[52] It was the residence of a Nestorian archbishop and it had a sizable Jewish community. The Greek and Roman writers knew it exclusively under the name of Maracanda.[53] To my knowledge the name Samarkand appears for the first time in a Western source outside the *Letter* in the *Relatio*, an intelligence report which Jacques de Vitry included in his letter written on April 18, 1221, in Damietta (Egypt). From then on the form Samarkand becomes fairly common and by 1285 it can be seen on the Hereford map.[54]

Further, the *Letter* contains two passages that show its author's vague acquaintance with trade to India. After a description of the province where "all the pepper of the world" is growing, he says that it is "traded for grain, foodstuff, leather, and cloth." During the early years of the Roman Empire and in the Middle Ages textiles and leathergoods were indeed shipped to India.[55] As to the trade in grain, it could scarcely have had an international importance although some wheat destined for the foreign sailors was exported to Muziris. Somewhat later in the text the author made a remark revealing a peculiarity of the Indian market. Amidst unrestrained boasts of good manners and unmatched wealth Prester John is made to utter this terse sentence: "We have few horses and they are wretched." [56] Friedrich Zarncke explained this statement as another device to stress

the prosperity of India by minimizing the value of horses which in the West were considered extremely precious. But if such a subtle hint had been the true intention of the author, it certainly failed so to impress readers, because, as Zarncke himself had to admit, in later versions of the *Letter* this contradiction was eliminated and the sentence changed to "We have many and swift horses." Would it not be simpler to assume that while the author was putting down the good qualities of India he suddenly recalled what every respectable merchant on the Eastern Mediterranean knew, namely that India did not breed its own horses but imported them from Persia and Arabia? Later there was scarcely a traveler to those areas who did not mention this fact.[57]

A third trace of possible Oriental influence can be discerned in Prester John's tower, thirteen stories high, with its amazing mirror.[58] In Edmond Faral's opinion this intricate structure is a fusion of two world wonders, the lighthouse of Alexandria and the temple of Diana at Ephesus, both of which were well known to the Latin West.[59] It is the magic mirror that constitutes an addition of Oriental origin. Towers with magic mirrors occur frequently in Arabic tales of wonders and sorcery. A tenth-century Arabic story reports, for example, a certain King Saurid who built a mirror from various materials, and with its help he could see all good and evil deeds that happen under the sun. The Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela (ca. 1173) associated the mirror with the lighthouse of Alexandria and he added that "all vessels, which approached with hostile intentions from Greece and from the western side, could be observed at fifty days distance by means of this glass mirror."[60] These Oriental descriptions of magic mirrors can be easily multiplied. What matters

here is that the *Letter* represents the earliest occurrence in Western literature of this technical wonder, which is obviously a borrowing from some Eastern tale.[61]

A discussion of Oriental traces in the *Letter* cannot be complete without mention of two literary works that may have influenced its whole concept and content: the stories of Sindbad the Sailor and the account of Eldad had-Dani. What made the author of the *Letter* choose the epistolary form for his hoax? He was unquestionably inspired by the letters of the Alexandrian Romances, for he was constantly borrowing their expressions. It is, however, possible that something else had given him the idea to write about a Christian King of India. Gustav Oppert, the author of the first monograph on Prester John published in 1864, was inclined to believe that the *Letter* was influenced by the voyages of Sindbad the Sailor. Six years later, in the second edition of his book he retracted his earlier statement.[62] In 1922 Paul Casanova revived Oppert's original idea and supported it by new evidence drawn from the text of a letter that is included in Sindbad's sixth voyage. This Arabic letter, known in many versions, seems to be a veritable counterpart of Prester John's message. It was dispatched by a King of India, called by one version Rahma, and it was addressed either to Harun al-Rashid (789–809) or to his son, Mamun the Great (813–833).[63] Its text, given here in Edward W. Lane's translation, may speak for itself:

"Peace be on thee, from the King of India, before whom are a thousand elephants, and on the battlements of whose palace are a thousand jewels. To proceed: we have sent to thee a trifling present: accept it then from us. Thou art to us a brother and sin-

cere friend, and the affection for you that is in our hearts is great: therefore favour us by a reply. The present is not suited to thy dignity; but we beg of thee, O brother, to accept it graciously. And peace be on thee. — And the present was a cup of ruby, a span high, the inside of which was embellished with precious pearls; and a bed covered with the skin of the serpent that swalloweth the elephant, which skin hath spots, each like a piece of gold, and whosoever sitteth upon it never becometh diseased; and a hundred thousand mithkals of Indian aloes-wood; and a slave girl like the shining full-moon." [64]

What could the letter of Prester John have owed to this document? A general comparison of this Arabic letter with the letters in the Alexandrian Romances will show that the Oriental sample with its display of animals, jewelry, and medicine comes closer to the *Letter* than the more sober and restrained correspondence between Alexander and Darius. It is impossible to overlook the similarities and yet an attempt to prove a direct influence of the Arabic text upon the *Letter* cannot get beyond vague analogies. The common characteristics of the two documents could have another explanation. It has been shown above how in Bishop Hugh's report the emerald scepter of Prester John might have been a royal insignia of the King of Ceylon, and how this fact tends to indicate that Prester John was from his first appearance associated with India proper.[65] The author of the *Letter* was certainly familiar with this tradition, and it is very likely that he had also heard about a letter written by a King of India to a Mohammedan ruler, which he then set out to imitate.

The relationship between the *Letter* and Eldad had-Dani's ac-

count is much more tangible. Toward the end of the ninth century there appeared in northern Africa a Jew, calling himself Eldad of the tribe of Dan, who told a fabulous story about the "Sons of Moses" (*Bene Moses*) and the four lost Hebrew tribes which lived together in the ancient land of Hawila situated beyond the "rivers of Ethiopia."[66] His account of their communal life bears many traits that recur in the *Letter*. David H. Müller has compared both sources almost sentence for sentence and their similarity is often astonishing. The most striking parallels occur in the descriptions of the armies when they go into battle and of the legendary Stony River, or Sambation, that flows for six days but rests on Saturday. The Christian author disliked the latter detail and he changed it into four days of quiet, corresponding to the four days of the Truce of God. Some earlier authorities, mentioned by Müller, have also pointed out that the statement in the *Letter* about the ten lost Hebrew tribes subject to Prester John has been provoked by Eldad had-Dani's claim that they were ruled by their own kings. On the whole, there is good reason to believe that the author of the *Letter* was familiar with the Hebrew story.[67] One could assume that his lively interest for the East has somehow led him to learn about Eldad's description of the ideal Hebrew state.

There were thus three instances in which the *Letter* displayed independent information on the Orient. Furthermore, it shared certain similarities with two older literary pieces also of Eastern origin. By combining this evidence with the Latin language of the original text, one could propose that the *Letter* was conceived in that area of the world where its author could have found all this material, namely in the Latin crusading states. This region was

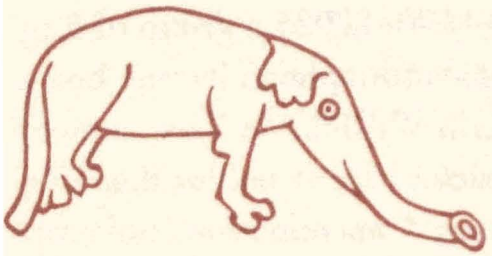
proposed in 1891 by the French literary historian Paul Meyer. Malcolm Letts was also inclined to believe that the *Letter* "originated in the East," while Alexander A. Vasiliev felt that it was written by a Nestorian in Constantinople.[68]

As to the personality of the author, it should be said that he was most likely a cleric, well versed in sacred and profane literature and acquainted with the rudiments of Greek. The two pieces of folklore he was familiar with may suggest that his home was somewhere in northern Europe. This does not mean that he should be identified with Archbishop Christian of Mainz (1165–1183) as some historians have done in the past.[69] The little postscript of the interpolation E mentions Christian only as the translator from the Greek and to call him the author would mean to compound the error.[70] In the year 1949 Richard Hennig launched a spirited defense of the archbishop's integrity and he adduced various logical reasons why it was wrong to dub him the author.[71] In view of the Oriental elements of the *Letter* it can be said now with renewed confidence that the German archbishop could not have been in a position to acquire all this material. His diplomatic mission of 1170 to Constantinople brought him closer to the East, yet his rank and the gravity of his secret negotiations could scarcely have given him a chance to gather information about India and the Eastern Christians. It is perfectly feasible, however, that he returned from Constantinople with a Latin manuscript of the *Letter*, which then gave rise to the rumor that he had translated it from the Greek in which he was, indeed, proficient.[72]

The almost certain possibility of the Eastern origin of the *Letter* raises immediately the question of its relationship to the stories of Patriarch John and Bishop Hugh of Jabala. Was the author

of the *Letter* familiar with the texts of these accounts, or did he gather his information independently? Nothing but internal evidence could answer this question. It can be definitely said that the narrative of Hugh had no influence on the *Letter* and that there is no compelling reason to believe that its author was familiar with the Patriarch John of *De adventu.*[73] The author of the *Letter* was not a person to shrink from using any source he deemed suitable for him. His whole creation is, with a few exceptions, a patchwork of borrowed bits. Would it be sound to assume that he just christened Prester John with the name of the Patriarch or made the "Patriarch of St. Thomas" sit at his table, and yet left the rest of *De adventu* unexploited? Moreover, it can be always objected that the author of the *Letter* had no need to borrow the name from the Patriarch, because "Prester John" had been known since 1145 when Bishop Hugh had introduced him in Rome.[74]

It has been shown in the preceding chapter how two little traits of a legendary Prester John had wandered from the region of Samarkand to northern Syria and from there to Rome. The name of "Prester John" and some other legendary elements grouped around him must have been still preserved among the Eastern Christians of Outremer when the author of the *Letter* came in touch with them. It was from them that he learned about the Christian prelates of Samarkand and Susa and about "the Patriarch of St. Thomas," and Prester John, the fabulous Christian King of the far-off India. The author took these authentic bits of a legend, surrounded them with a profusion of arbitrarily picked material on India, and with them surprised the world.



THE FRENCH VERSIONS

DESPITE the spurious nature of the original Latin *Letter*, it is not completely void of documentary value. Its author was a twelfth-century West European who must have spent at least part of his life in the Near East where he became imbued with vague notions about India, the Christians of St. Thomas, and Prester John. The purpose of his composition was not to create a Utopia, but to assemble his scanty and fragmentary material into a literary form that was traditionally appropriate to it. If he ever had any ulterior motives outside his evident urge to compose a modest piece of literature, it may have been a desire to bolster the morale of the crusaders by letting them hope for the imminent arrival of a mighty ally. Yet whatever his true intention may have been, his contemporaries took his fabrication not for a projection of an ideal theocracy, but for a curious and even instructive account of "the great miracles of the Orient" — at least this was the feeling of its earliest translator, Roau d'Arundel. His rendering of the Latin prose *Letter* into Anglo-Norman verse is the oldest of such attempts and it merits a brief discussion.

At the end of the Third Crusade (1190–1192) a group of English knights was passing through Constantinople on its way home. The company was headed by a certain William de Vere, a member of "the longest and most illustrious line of nobles that England has seen."[1] To his suite belonged an otherwise unknown butler, Gillibert, who somehow managed to procure in the imperial capital a Latin manuscript of the *Letter* which he then turned over to Roau d'Arundel to translate and put into verse. Roau was probably another member of the company; at least it is known that he prepared his verse translation in the very hostel where William de Vere was lodging. The nobleman was obviously favorably disposed toward the literary activity of his attendants and it is most likely that the tracing of the Latin manuscript and the translation were done at his behest. All this circumstantial information would have been lost had Roau not decided to provide his translation with a prologue and an epilogue to explain to the "listeners" why it was profitable to learn about the East and how this particular translation came about.

Roau's verse translation is based on a Latin text already augmented by interpolation B, i.e. it contained the description of Prester John's second palace. It should be said to the credit of the translator that he followed the Latin closely and used poetic license with great restraint. The omissions and additions of his text do not exceed the average amount encountered in other translations. In one instance, however, he failed to reproduce the original; this happened when he came to the three mysterious animals in the catalogue of beasts. Instead of leaving them untranslated, he found a good excuse not to mention them at all:

E d'autres bestes plus ke mil
K'en rumanz ne sai ja numer,
Pur çoe me les covient passer.[2]

This oldest translation has survived only in one manuscript and it did not exercise any noticeable influence on later French or other vernacular versions. Its importance lies chiefly in its clear indication that the fame of the *Letter* had spread beyond the circle of persons versed in Latin, and that it had begun to attract the attention of laymen interested in literature who preferred to hear it recited in their mother tongue.

A much more distinguished place among all non-Latin versions belongs to a French prose translation. It originated sometime during the second part of the thirteenth century, but unlike Roau's verse *Letter*, it gives no hints as to where or by whom it could have been prepared. Since the nineteen manuscripts of this prose version, as listed by Paul Meyer in 1910, have never been critically examined, it is impossible to draw any conclusions on the basis of internal evidence.[3] All that can be said about this prose text is that it exists in two distinct versions, one older and longer, another younger and shorter. But even those texts which would be ordinarily classified under the first group vary considerably in content; thus the version preserved in the MS. Royal 20 A. XI of the British Museum in London has Latin chapter headings and some additions from interpolation D of the Latin text, which are not found in other French manuscripts.[4]

This second French translation was not made from the common Latin text, but from a Latin paraphrase of the *Letter* augmented occasionally by inclusion of details borrowed either from *De adventu* or from some other cognate source.[5] No early manu-

scripts of this paraphrase have survived, but there is a unique specimen of a younger heir preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript at the Cambridge University Library.[6] This Cambridge text must have originated in England, because it lets Prester John's bodyguard be composed of English knights, while in the French version they are French.[7] Unfortunately one leaf has been cut out, and the first fifteen paragraphs are lost.[8]

This gap in the Cambridge manuscript makes it impossible to know exactly to whom the paraphrased Latin version of the *Letter* was addressed. In the eight manuscripts of the older French version which I consulted, Prester John directs his message not to the Byzantine Emperor Manuel, but to Frederick, the Emperor of Rome. This would indicate that Frederick was also a recipient of the letter in the paraphrased version. A question arises now as to which Frederick was meant, Frederick I, Barbarossa (1152–1190), or his grandson, Frederick II (1211–1250). As was mentioned above, the introductory notes to several early Latin texts make the Emperor Manuel forward the *Letter* to Frederick I.[9] Yet did the author of the paraphrase and the later French translator really mean him? The Latin paraphrase must have been based on a common Latin text which included interpolations A, B, parts of C, and a fraction of D.[10] This would mean that it could not have been composed before the first two decades of the thirteenth century.[11] By that time Frederick I had been dead for at least twenty or thirty years and the ruling emperor was his grandson Frederick II. Would it not be more natural to assume that the bold person who broke with the traditional form of the *Letter* and composed the paraphrase also changed the addressee, bringing thus the whole text up to date?

There are two reasons why the author of the paraphrase may have been induced to alter the address. Since the capture and sack of Constantinople by the Western crusaders in 1204 the Byzantine Empire had become a shadow of its former greatness. On the other hand, Frederick II was for many years under obligation to lead a crusade and there was a great temptation to prove his contacts with a potential ally in far-off India. At this point the reader may be reminded of a thirteenth-century Italian short story included in the *Novellino* or *Le cento novelle antiche* in which an ambassador of Prester John makes a gift of three magic stones to Frederick, "colui che veramente fu specchio del mondo in parlare et in costumi" (he who was truly the mirror of the universe in speech and manners). This remark suits the Italian-born grandson much better than his German ancestor.[12] These observations should make it possible to date the Latin paraphrase within the rule of Frederick II, i.e. between 1211 and 1250. The older French prose translation would then go back, perhaps, to the end of this period or shortly after it.

The author of the Latin paraphrase and its French translator did not leave any comments explaining why they were interested in the *Letter*. One can be rather sure, however, that their reasons did not differ substantially from those of Roau. It is fabulous India and its Christian Saint that fascinated them and they included new materials on them to stress and to expand their marvelous qualities. Several creatures from the original Latin catalogue of beasts and monsters now receive detailed treatment. The unicorn and the phoenix, the griffins, centaurs, pigmies, and giants are described at some length. At the same time there is more information on St. Thomas that merits particular attention.

After the description of the Stony River and the salamander, the older French prose version has added this paragraph: "Let it be known to you that we are wealthy and that nobody can be poor in our country, provided he is willing to earn his living. And all the pilgrims who come to my lord St. Thomas and to the other saints of our land make us rich. Know that God has performed many miracles for my lord St. Thomas, in fact, he has performed more of them than for any other saint of our country, for he preaches in person and he rises on the day of his martyrdom and he delivers a sermon to the people of the city where his body is resting." [13] The Cambridge manuscript gives virtually the same text, but it omits Prester John's income from the pilgrims.[14] Somewhat further on one reads: "Know that nobody dares to lie in the city of my lord St. Thomas, for he would soon die a miserable death." [15]

Toward the end of the *Letter* Prester John's explanation of why he wants to be called a priest leads to this interpolated statement: "And know that at the end of a seven years' period a council is held in the city of St. Thomas on the day when he is preaching to the public; and all persons, whom we summon, come to the council and stay there for two months, after we have assembled, and those whom we permit to go, can leave, while others arrive and stay with us in our city." [16]

The closing paragraph of the *Letter* contains this interesting allusion: "Know that we have narrated a part of the miracles and marvels of our land and our court, and we have not yet told you about the healing power and miracles of our lord St. Thomas, nor about the palaces of his patriarchs, which are more wondrous to listen to than anything else in the world." [17]

The original Latin text mentions the Patriarch of St. Thomas only once. He sits at Prester John's table together with the Bishops of Samarkand and Susa.[18] In the Cambridge manuscript and in the French older prose translation he has received a colleague and more duties. When Prester John goes to fight a war, he leaves two Patriarchs of St. Thomas to guard his realm and, if by any chance, he should die without an heir, one of them is to become the king and take the crown.[19]

A characteristic feature of these interpolations is the recurrent reference to the "city of St. Thomas." Was the author of the paraphrased Latin text familiar with *De adventu*, the anonymous tract on the miracles of St. Thomas? The sudden death of liars in the city of St. Thomas seems to echo the doleful end of the heretics and unbelievers in Hulna or the collapse of sinners after they have approached the Apostle.[20] But the miracle of St. Thomas' rising and preaching on the anniversary of his martyrdom does not correspond to the distribution of the Eucharist in *De adventu*. The periodical church councils in the city of St. Thomas are either an invention of the paraphraser or else an addition from some unknown source. That such additional sources on St. Thomas were available is clearly shown by the interpolations found in the Provençal version of Prester John's letter and in a Latin retranslation of the French text under discussion here.[21] Johannes of Hildesheim, a fourteenth-century author of a book on the three Magi, was also familiar with some hitherto unidentified material on Prester John and St. Thomas.[22] Most likely there were several cognate sources, one of them, perhaps, *De adventu*, from which the new interpolations were borrowed. At any rate, the Latin paraphrase and its French prose translation were the first stages

in a gradual fusion of the materials on Prester John and St. Thomas that was to continue well into the age of printing.[23]

The older French text of the *Letter* was destined to become parent to three further translations. In Friedrich Zarncke's opinion one of the Italian versions derived from the French.[24] One Hebrew text of the *Letter* reproduces the French original rather faithfully, except that it omits all references to Christian symbols and to St. Thomas.[25] Finally, there is the Latin retranslation, which in turn was rendered into English.[26] This veritable chain of translations linked to the French prose version is a clear proof of its great popularity.

Sometime during the fifteenth century the older French *Letter* was recast into a new form. This younger version has been preserved in several manuscripts, one of which is a fifteenth-century paper codex (franç. No. 5084) in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.[27] Two brief examples from the older and younger French texts may illustrate the nature of their differences.

OLDER TEXT[28]
(edited by Achille Jubinal)

[p. 356] Prestres Jehans, par la grasse de Dieu, rois entre les rois crestiens, mande salut et amistiés à Fédri, l'empereour de Roume. Nous faisons savoir à la vostre amour que il nous a estet plusieurs fiés racontet et dit que vous desirés moult asavoir de nos gens, de nostre couvigne, et de nostre tierre, et de nos coses.

YOUNGER TEXT
Bibl. Nat. franç. No. 5084

[f. 1] Prestre Jehan, par la grace de Dieu, roy tout puissant sur tous les roys crestiens, salut mandons a l'emperer de Romme et a tous les roys crestiens et au roy de France, nostre amy. Nous vous faisons savoir que moult de fois nous a este dit que vous desiriez moult savoir de nous et de nostre estat du gouvernement, de nostre royaume, de nostre terre, et de nos gens et de nos manieres de bestes.

OLDER TEXT

[p. 374] Et sachiés nous vous avons aconté une partie [p. 375] des miracles et des miervelles de nostre tierre et de nostre court; mais ne vous avons pas acontées des viertus et des miracles monsignour saint Thumas, et des palais à ses patriarches, ki sont à oïr plus miervelleus que nul ki soient el monde. Que ke nous vos aiiens aconté et dit de nous et de nostre tierre et de nos coses est ausi voirs coume vous creés que nostre Sires soit el ciel, que nous ne vous menterions en nule manière ne de ce ne d'autre cose.

YOUNGER TEXT

[f. 17] Et prions au roy [f. 18] de France qu'il nous salue tous les feaux crestiens de dela la mer, et qu'il nous envoye aucun vaillant chevalier qui soit de la bonne generation de France. Dieu vous doint perseverer en la grace du saint esperit. Amen. Donne en nostre saint palais l'an de nostre nativite cinq cens et sept ans. Prestre Jehan.

The opening lines of the younger recension accost not only the Emperor of Rome, whose name, incidentally, is omitted, but also all Christian kings and the King of France. These changes, although seemingly insignificant, reflect the growing power of national states and particularly of France and constitute another instance of bringing the *Letter* up to date.[29] A comparison between the two texts shows that the language and the expressions of the younger version are simpler and often somewhat monotonous. The closing paragraphs reveal substantial discrepancies of content, and one notices that the younger text has introduced a fictitious date of the *Letter* which must have been inspired by interpolation E of the original Latin and the rejuvenating quality of the fountain of youth.[30]

In over-all length the younger version is shorter than the older.

Its text was considerably trimmed and condensed, so that, for example, some of the references to St. Thomas which were introduced by the older text were now eliminated.[31] On the other hand, it did receive a few new interpolations. In two instances Prester John exhorted the Western rulers to do away with the "false and treacherous Templars and Hospitalers." This remark was obviously an echo of the trials conducted by the French King Philip the Fair (1285–1314) against the Templars. There are moreover two lengthy descriptions of the cynocephali, the dog-headed monsters, and of the tree of life. As a result of these changes the *Letter* had moved still another step away from its original, but while it began to look more like a bestiary than a royal message, it gained in simplicity and popular appeal. These very qualities must have influenced the choice of the early French printers who selected the younger text over the older to be reproduced in more copies than there were manuscripts of all the versions combined.

The printed French *Letter* had a good sale. At least fourteen different editions can be traced in the catalogues of incunabula and in the main libraries of Paris and London.[32] Since many of the French editions were undated, it is difficult to pinpoint the oldest. In the opinion of Jean-Pierre Seguin no edition was printed before the year 1488, while several of them came out during the first decade of the sixteenth century.[33] Around the year 1522 one of these printed French versions was translated into English and published in Antwerp by Jan van Doesborch.[34]

The printer's mark at the end of the rare copy preserved in the James Ford Bell Collection indicates that it was published by Antoine Caillaut, a Paris bookseller and printer whose activity falls in the years 1483–1506.[35] The three-line caption placed above

the trade mark of Caillaut could be a clue to the more precise dating of this edition, for practically the same words, but used as a title, appear in two other editions of the French *Letter* which Jean-Pierre Seguin assigns to the turn of the century.[36] This common characteristic makes it very likely that the present edition stems from the same period.

The merits and drawbacks of the younger French version, as it appears in Caillaut's edition, may be judged best by reading the text itself. In reading the present English translation it should be remembered that it was designed to capture some of the simplicity and monotony of the original. Substantial deviations from the French text occur only in cases where the readings are obscure. Wherever corrections became necessary, I relied on the above-mentioned manuscript from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. A commentary on almost every detail of this younger version has been presented by Fernand Fleuret at the end of his edition of the younger French version of the *Letter*.[37] Some additional information pertaining to the content of the text can be obtained by consulting the references indicated in the English translation.

Prestre Jehã par la grace de dieu roy tout puiſ
ſant ſur tous les roys chreſtiẽs. Mandõs ſalut
a lempereur de romme Et au roy de frãce noz
amis Nous vous faiſons ſcauoir de nous de
noſtre eſtat et du gouuernement de noſtre terre
Leſtaſſauoir de noz gens et de nos manieres de beſtes. Et
pource que vous dittes que noz gretz ou gens gregoiſes ne
saccordent a adorer dieu cõme vous faictes en voſtre terre
Nous vous faiſons ſcauoir que nous adorons et croyons
le pere le filz & le ſainct eſperit. qui ſont troys perſonnes en
vne deite et vng vray dieu ſeulemẽt. Et vous certifions
et mandõs par noz lettres ſelleez de noſtre ſeel de leſtat et
maniere de noſtre terre et de noz gens. Et ſe riens voulez
q̃ faire puiſſõs mãdez le nous car nous le ferõs de treſbon
cueur. Et ſi vous voulez venir p deca en noſtre terre pour
le bien q̃ nous auons ouy dire de vous nous vous ferons
ſeigneur apres nous. et vous dõnerons grandes terres ſei-
gnouries et habitations.

Itez ſaichez que nous auõs la plus haulte courõne qui
ſoit en tout le mõde. Ainſi cõme doz dargent et pierres pree
cuſes Et de bõnes fermetes de villes de cites d chaſteaulx
et de bours. Item ſaichez auſſi que nous auons en noſtre
puiſſance quarãte et deux roys tous puiſſãs et bõs pẽtens

Item ſaichez q̃ nous ſouſtenõs de noz aulmoſnes tous
les poures q̃ ſont en noſtre terre ſoient prues ou eſtrãgiers
pour lamour et honneur de ieſuchriſt.

Item ſaichez q̃ nous auõs promis & iure en noſtre bõne
foy a cõquerre le ſepulcre de noſtre ſeigneur et toute la terre
de pmiſſion Et ſe vous voulez nous laurõs ſe dieu plaiſt
mais que vous ayes grãde et bõne hardieſſe en vous aiſi
cõme il nous a eſte rapporte de bon couraige vray et loyal
Mais entre vous aultres francoys auez de voſtre lignai
ge et de voz gens qui ſõt auec les ſarraſins eſquelz vous
auez fiance et cuidez q̃lz vous aident et doibuent ayder et
ilz ſont faulx et traitres hoſpitaliers. Et ſaichez que nous

les auõs destruitz ceulx q̃ estoient en nostre terre car ainsy le doibt on faire de ceulx q̃ vont cõtre la foy. Itẽ saichez q̃ nostre terre est diuisee en quattre parties car lee ynde y sõt Et en la maieur ynde gist le corps sainct thomas lapostre pour lequel nostre seigneur ihesucrist faict pl⁹ de miracles que pour sainctz q̃ soiẽt en paradis. Et icelle ynde est en la partie dorient car elle est pres de babylõne la deserte et aussi elle est pres dune tour quon appelle babel. En lautre partie deuers septentrion y est grant abondance de pain de vin de chairs et de toutes choses qui sont bõnes a soustenir corps humain.

Item en nostre terre sont les oliphans et vne aultre maniere de beste que lon appelle dromadores. ⁊ cheuaulx blãs et beufz saunages qui ont sept cornes. ⁊ oure blans. ⁊ lyons moult estrãges de quattre manieres Cest assauoir rouges vers noirs et blãs. Et asnes saunaiges q̃ ont deux petites cornes Et lieures saunaiges qui sõt grãs cõe vng mouton ⁊ cheuaulx vers q̃ courẽt plus tost q̃ nulles aultres bestes et ont deux petites cornes. Item saichez q̃ nous auons les oyseaux q̃ sappellent grifons et portẽt biẽ vng beuf ou vng cheual en leur nid pour dõner a mãger a leur petis oyseaulx. Itez saichez q̃ nous auons vne aultre maniere de oyseaulx lesquelz ont seignourie sur tous les aultres oyseaulx du monde et ont couleur de feu et leurs elles sont trãchantes cõme vng rasoir. Et sont appellee yleiones et en tout le mõde ney a fors que deux ⁊ viuẽt lespace de soixãte ans puis seyvõt noier en la mer. Toutesfois ilz couuẽt premier et couuẽt deux ou trois oeufz lesquelz ilz couuent lespace de quarante iours et puis esclouẽt et deuiẽnẽt petis oyseaulx Et adõcq̃s les grans cestassauoir pere et mere se partent et seyvont noier en la mer cõe dit est. Et tous oyseaux q̃ adõcques les rencontrent leur font cõpaignie iusques a tant que ilz soyent noyez. Et quant ilz sont noyez ilz seyretournent et viẽnent aulx petis oyseaux et les nourrissent iusques a tant quil soiẽt grans ⁊ quilz puissẽt voler ⁊ leur

vie pourchasser. ¶ Item saichez que par deca sont aul-
tres oyseaulx qui sont appellez tygres et sont de fy grande
force et vertu quilz emportẽt bien vng homme tout arme
et son cheual et le mueut.

¶ Item saichez que en vne partie de nostre terre dedens le
desert a vne maniere dhommes q̃ sont comuz lesquelz nõt
que vng oeil deuãt et trope ou quattre derriere. Et ya des
fẽmes qui sont pareilles aux hommes.

¶ Item en nostre terre ya vng aultre maniere de gens qui
ne viuent fors que de chair crue dhommes et de femmes q̃
ne doubtent point a mourir. Et quant lung deulx est mort
soit pere ou mere ilz les mangent/sent tous cruz. Et dient q̃
bonne chose naturelle est de manger chair humaine et font
ce en remissions de leurs pechez. Et celles gens sont maul-
dits de dieu et sont appellez got et magot et est plus de nati
ons de celles gens que de toutes aultres gens. lesquelz sef-
pandront par tout le monde en la venue de lantecrist. Car
ilz sont de son alliance et de sa compaignie. Et celles gens
sont ceulx qui encloirent le roy alixandre en macedonne et
le mirent en prison et leur eschappa. Toutesfoys dieu leur
enuoyra du ciel fouldre et feu ardant qui tous les ardera
et confondra et lantecrist aussy et par telle maniere seront
destruitz et gastez. Toutesfois nous en menons bien de ces
gens auecques nous en la guerre quant nous y voulõs al
ler et leur donnons congie et licence de mangier noz enne-
mis si que de mille nẽ demeure vng qui ne soit deuoure q̃
gaste. Et puis les faysons retourner en leur terre. Car silz
demouroient longuement auecques nous ilz nous menge
roient tous.

¶ Item nous auons vne aultre maniere de gẽs en nostre
terre qui ont les piedz rons comme vng cheual et aux tal-
lons derriere ont quattre cousteaux fortes q̃ trenchans de quoy
ilz cõbatẽt tellemẽt q̃ nulles armeures ne leur peuẽt durer
et si sont bons crestiẽs q̃ labourẽt voulẽtiers leur terre q̃ la
nostre et nous dõnent grans truaiges chascun an.

Jtez nous auons en vne aultre partie du desert vne ter re qui dure quarante et deux iournees de long. Et est appel lee feminie la grant et ne cuidez pas que ce soit en tre sarra sine car celle q̄ nous disōs est en nostre terre. Et en ycelle ire sont troys roynes sans les aultres dames qui tiēnent leurs terres delles. Et quant ycelles trois roynes veullēt aller en bataille chascune delles meyne auecques soy cent mille fē mes en armes Sans les aultres qui meynēt les chaires les cheuaulx les oliflans qui portent les armes et les viādes Et saichez quelles se cōbatent fort cōme si elles feussent hō/ mes. Et sachez que nul hōme masle ne demeure auecques elles fors que neuf iours lesq̄lz durāt il se peult deporter et solacier auecques elles et engendrer et non plus car aultre/ ment il seroit mort.

Jtem celle terre est enuirōnee dūg fleuue qui vient de pa radis terrestre et est appelle eyson et est si grāt que nul ne le peult passer finō en grandes nefz ou en grādes barques.

Jtem saichez que entre celle terre a vne aultre riuiere quō appelle piconpe qui est petite qui ne dure que dix iour/ nees de long et sept de large. et les gens sont aussi petis cōe vng enfant de sept ans et leurs cheuaulx petis cōme vng mouton et sont bons prestiens et labourent voulentiers et nulle personne ne leur faict guerre fors que les oyseaulx qui vienēt chascū an quāt ilz doibuēt cueillir leurs bledz et leurs vēdēges. Et adōcqs le roy dicelle terre sarme de tout son pouoir contre lesdictz oyseaulx et font grande turie les vngz contre les aultres. Et puis les oyseaulx sen retournent

Jtem saichez que en nostre terre sont les saigitaires qui sont de puis la saincture en amont en forme de hōme et con tre bas en forme de cheual. Et portent en leurs mains arcs et flyches et trayēt plus fort q̄ nulle aultre maniere de gēs et mangeussēt chair crue. Et les prengnēt aulcūs de nostre court et les tiēnet ācha[illegible]nez a les gēs y viēnēt les veoir par grāt merueille Jtē sachez q̄ en nrē tre sōt les licornes q̄ ont en leur front vne corne tāt seulemēt a en ya de trois mānieres

de vers de noirs et aussi de blās et occisent le lyon aulcu-nesfois Mais le lyon les occit moult subtillemēt car quāt la licorne est lassee elle se met decoste vng arbre a le lyon va entour a la licorne le cuide frapper de sa corne a elle frappe larbre de si grāt vertu qlle ne la peult oster adōc le lyon la tue. ¶ Item saichez que en laultre partie du desert sont les gēs qui souloiēt auoir. lx. coudees de hault et maītenāt ney ont que vingtz et ne peuent yssir du desert car a dieu ne plaist mye Car se ilz estoient dehors ilz pourroiēt bien combatre a tout le monde.

¶ Item saichez que en nostre terre ya vng oyseau qui est apelle fenix et est le pl⁹ bel oyseau du mōde Mais en tout le mōde ney a que vng leql vit cens ans et puis sen mōte vers le ciel sy pres du soleil tant q le feu se prent a ses helles et puis descend en son nid et se art Et de ces cendres se congrue vng ver et puis retourne vng oyseau en la fin de cent iours aussi beau comme deuant estoit.

¶ Item en nostre terre ya habondance de pain de vin de chars et de toutes choses qui sont bonnes a soustenir corps humain. ¶ Item saichez q en vne partie de nostre terre ne peult entrer nulle beste q de sa nature porte venin.

¶ Item saichez que entre nous et les sarrasins court vne riuiere que lon appelle ydonis et vient de paradis terrestre et est toute pleine de pierres pcieuses et court par nostre terre en maintes ptes de petites riuieres et grandes et la treuue on moult de pierres pcieuses. Cestassauoir esmeraudes Safirs. Jaspis. Calsidoynes. Rubis. Charboucles. Scorpions Et plusieurs aultres pierres pcieuses que nay pas nōmees et de chascune scauons le nom et la vertu.

¶ Item saichez que en nostre terre a vne herbe apellee permanable. Et qui en porte sur soy il peult enchāter le dyable a luy demāder q il est et ou il va qui fait par terre a le peult faire parler. Et pour ce le dyable nose estre en nostre terre.

¶ Item saichez que en nostre terre croist le poyure leql nest iamais seme et croist entre les arbres et les serpens. Et qt

il eſt meur nous mandons noz hõmes pour le cueillir et y
mettent le feu dedens le bois et tout ſe art et quãt le feu eſt
paſſe ilz font grãs monceaulx de poyure et de ſerpens et le
boute loy auec et puys le porte loy a loſtel.et le laue oy en.ii
ou en trois eaues et puis oy le faict ſeicher au ſoleil.Et en
ycelle maniere deuient noir boy et fort.

Item ſaiches que aupres de celle partie a vne fontaine q̃
q̃ en peult boire d leaue trois fois a ieun il naura maladie
de.ppp.ans et q̃t il en aura beu il luy ſera adnis q̃l ait mẽ
ge toutes les meilleures viãdes et eſpices du monde et eſt
toute pleine de la grace du ſaict eſperit. Et qui ſe peult bai
gner en la fõtaine ſil eſt en laage de cent ans ou de mil il
retourne en laage de.ppp.et.ii.ans. Et ſaichez que nous fuſ
mes ne et faictifie au vẽtre de noſtre mere et ſi auõs paſſe
cinq cẽs ſoixãte et deux ans q̃ nous ſõmes baignez dedes
la fontaine ſix foys. Item ſaiches que en noſtre terre
naiſt la mer darayne q̃ court moult fort et faict ondes terri
bles.Et nul hõme ne la peult paſſer fors q̃ nous.pour riẽs
quon face. et nous faiſõs porter a noz griffõs ainſi cõme fiſt
alixandre quant il alla conquerre le chaſteau enchante

Item decouſte celle mer paſſe vng fleuue et en celluy
treuue loy moult de pierres precieuſes et maintes bonnes
herbes qui ſont bonnes en toutes medecines.

Item ſaiches q̃ entre nous et les iuifz paſſe vne riuiere
qui eſt pleine de pierres precieuſes q̃ court tant fort q̃ nulle
perſonne ne la peult paſſer excepte le ſabmedi q̃lle repoſe
et tout ce quelle treuue elle emporte en la mer darayne.Et
icelluy pas nous fault garder car nous auõs en icelle fron
tiere quarante et deux chaſteaulx plus beaulx et plus fors
qui ſoient au monde et auõs gens qui les gardent.Ceſtaſ
ſauoir dix mille cheualiers q̃ ſix mille arbaleſtiers q̃ quize
mille archiers et quarãte mile ſergẽs a cheual et en armes
qui gardent les paſſaiges deuantdictz. pourtãt q̃ ſe le grãt
roy diſrael venoit auec ſa ꝓpagnie ne puiſſe paſſer auecq̃s
ces iuifz leſq̃lz ſõt pl⁹ deux fois q̃ de ypicne ne de ſarraſis

Car ilz tiennẽt les deux parties du monde Et sachez que le grãt roy disrael a en soy trois cens roys et quatre mille prĩces. que ducz que contes tous iuifz et qui a luy obeissẽt.

Item sachez que se les iuifz pouoiẽt passer vng seul pas tout seroient mors ppristiens et sarrasins.

Itez sachez q̃ nous laissons passer chascun samedi huit cens ou mille iuifs pour marchãder Mais ilz nentrẽt poĩt dedẽs nos fermettez. mais marchãdẽt dehors de la doubte q̃ nous auons deulx et ne marchandent fors q̃ en placques dor et dargent. car ilz nont point daultre mõnoye. Et quant ilz ont faict leur marchãdise ilz sen retournẽt en leurs pays

Item sachez que nous auons quarante et deux chaste aulx qui sont pres lung de laultre dung trait darbalestre a non plus.

Itẽ sachez que nous auons a vne lieue pres de la vne cite q̃ sappelle oriõde la grant la plus belle et la plus forte qui soit au mõde. Et vng de nos roys la garde lequel recoyt du grãt roy disrael le tribut car il no⁹ doibt chascũ an deux cens cheuaulx chargez dor et dargẽt et de pierres precieuses et oultre la despense qui se faict en celle cite et es dessusditz chasteaulx. Item sachez que quant nous leurs faysõs guerre nous occisons trestous ceulx qui sont en nostre terre et pource ne sosent mouuoir ne faire guerre. Et sachez que les iuifues sõt les plus belles femmes du monde et les pl⁹ chaudes. Et sachez que pres dicelluy fleuue qui est darayne vient la mer areneuse et nul hõme ne la peult passer. Et non pourtant quant le vent fiert dessoubz adõcques sespãt par la terre et adoncques le peult on bien passer. mais que on se haste de retourner. Car se on ne le faisoit on demourerroit dedẽs la mer. Et toute la ruine q̃ sen peult retourner se cõuertist en pierres precieuses et ilz ne le peuẽt vẽdre iusq̃s a tant que nous les ayons veues. Et se nous les voulons auoir nous les pouons prendre a lestime de nos marchãs.

Itẽ en vne partie de nostre terre a vne montaigne en laq̃lle nul ne peult habiter pour la grãt chaleur q̃ y est et illec

ſe nourriſſent aulcuns vers qui ne peuent viure ſans feu: Et au pres de celle montaigne nous tenons touſiours quarãte mille perſõnes qui font illec grant feu. Et quãt iceulx vers ſentent la chaleur du feu ilz yſſent de la terre et ſen entrent au feu.et illec font vng poil tel cõe font les vers q̃ fõt la ſoye. Et de celluy poil faiſõs nos robes et celles a nos fẽmes q̃ nous veſtõs les feſtes anmuelles. Et quãt nous les voulõs lauer nous les mettõs au feu.et lors ſe retournent belles et freſches. Itez ſaichez que nul roy chriſtien na tãt de richeſſes cõme nous auons pour ce que nul hõme ne peult eſtre poure en noſtre terre qui veulle gaigner.

Itẽ ſaichez que ſainct thomas y fait plus de miracles q̃ ſainct qui ſoit en paradis. Car il preſche vne foys lan corporellement en ſon egliſe a toutes gens. Et preſche en vng palais que vous orrez.

Item ſaichez que en vne aultre partie de noſtre terre ya des gens deſtrange faſſon ceſtaſſauoir qui õt corps dhõme a la teſte de chien et ne peult loy entendre leur lãgaige et ſõt bons peſcheurs car ilz entrent au plus parfõs de la mer et font vng tour ſans yſſir dehors a prẽnent de telz poyſſõs q̃lz veullent et viennẽt tous chargez en leurs maiſons qui ſõt ſoubz terre. Et nous eſpyons ou ilz les mettẽt et en prenons tout ce que nous voulons et ſaichez que pcelles gẽs font aſſez de maulx a nos beſtes ſauluaiges car ilz les mãgeuſẽt et ſe combatẽt contre les archiers. Et font ſouuent de belles batailles. Item en noſtre terre a vne maniere doyſeaulx qui ſont de plus chaude nature q̃ les aultres. Car quant ilz veullent põdre ilz pondẽt au fons de la mer et fõt .vpi. ouf et deuiẽnent oyſeaulx.et puis ſen vollent.et nous en prenõs pluſieurs .Car ilz ſont bons a manger tant comme ilz ſont ieunes. et ſe nature eſtoit faillie a lhõme ou a la femme et ilz mẽgeoiẽt de ces oyſeaulx tantoſt leur nature leur retourneroit et ſeroient auſſi fors ou plꝰ q̃ deuãt.

Item en noſtre terre eſt larbre de vie duquel vient le creſme et pceluy arbre eſt tout ſec et vng ſerpẽt le garde et

Veille tout lan le iour et la nuyt fors que le iour de la saict iehan q̄l se dort tout et nuyt Et adonc̄s nous alons a labre et en tout lan nen vient q̄ trois liures lesq̄lles vi̇ent goutte apres goutte et q̄t no⁹ s̄omes aup̄s dicelluy cresme nous le pren̄os et puis nous en retournons tout bellement de paour q̄ le serpent ne vienne Et icelluy arbre est pres de paradis terrestre dune iournee. Et quāt le dict serpent esueille il se courrouse a crye tant fort que lon lentēt dūe iournee et si est deux foys plus grant que vng cheual et a neuf testes et deux elles et quāt nous auons passe la mer il sen retourne et nous portons le cresme au patriarche de sainct thomas et icelluy le sacre de quoy nous s̄omes chrestiens. Et le demourant nous l̄enuoiō̄s au patriarche de iherusalez et celluy l̄enuoye au pape de rōme leq̄l le sacre et multiplie par huyle dolive. et puis lenuoie par les chrestiēs de la mer

¶ Item en nostre terre na nulz larrōs p̄uues ne estrāgiers car dieu et sainct thomas les cōfondroiēt et nous les feriō̄s mourir de mort. Et saichez que nous auons cheuaux vers qui portent vng cheualier tout arme trois ou quatre iours sans menger.

¶ Item quāt nous alons en bataille nous faisons porter deuāt nous par quatorze roys aournes dor et dargent quatorze confarons aournes de diuerses pierres precieuses. Et aultres roys qui vi̇ēnent ap̄s qui portent banieres de cēdal moult richement aournees.

¶ Item saichez que deuāt nous vont armes quarāte mil clercs et autant de cheualiers a deux cens mille hōmes de pied sans les charettes qui portent les viandes a sans les olifans et les chameaux qui portent les armeures.

¶ Itē quāt nous alō̄s en bataille nous recōmādō̄s nostre terre au patriarche de sainct thomas.

¶ Itē saichez q̄ quāt nous cheuauchō̄s simplement nous faisons porter vne croix de bois tāt seulement deuāt nous pour ce q̄ nous atons en remēbrāce nostre seigneur ihūcrist

¶ Item a lentree de chascune de noz citez sont trois croix

de bois afin que les gens adorent la saincte croix.

Item quant nous cheuauchõs simplement nous faisons porter vng bassin dor plain de terre en signe q̃ nous sõmes tous venus de terre et quil nous faudra en terre retourner et faisõs porter vng aultre bassin tout plain dor en dẽmõstrãt que nous sõmes le plus puissãt roy et le plus digne de tout le monde. Item saiches que nulle personne nose faire le peche de luxure en nostre terre. Car incõtinent ilz seroient ars. et pour ce establit dieu le sacrement de mariage.

Item saiches que nulle personne nose mentir en nostre terre Car il seroit mort et pendu.

Item saiches que nous visitons chascun an le corps de sainct Daniel le prophete qui est au desert et menons auec nous dix mille clercs et autant de cheualiers et deux cens chasteaulx bastiz sur les oliphãs qui portent vng chasteau pour nous garder des dragons q̃ ont sept testes sur chascũ deulx. Et saiches que en ce desert ya des meilleures dates qui pendent es arbres et sõt bõnes vertes et meures cuer et este. Et dure le desert quatre vingz et soixante iournees et illec sont les deux patriarches de sainct thomas q̃ seent a table deuãt nous pour ce q̃z õt le pouoir du pape de rõme. et auõs autãt dabbez cõme il ya de iours en lan p deux fois et quinze plus. et chascũ viet chãter vne fois lan en lautel de sainct thomas et nous y chãtons les festes ãnuelles. Et pour ce sõmes nous appelles prestre iehã car nous sõmes prestre selon le sacrifice de lautel. et roy selon iustice et droicture. Et saiches que ie fus saictifie auãt que ie fusse ne. car dieu enuoya a mon pere vng ãge lequel luy dist quil fist vng palays qui seroit de la grace de dieu et chambre de paradis pour toy en cest qui est a venir Car il sera le plus grãt roy terrien de tout le mõde et viura long temps Et qui sera au palays naura faim ne soif et ne pourra mourir. et quãt mõ pere se esueilla de son dormir il eut grãt ioye et cõmenca le palays tel cõme vous orres. Premierement les parois sont de cristal et la couuerture de dessus est de pierres pre-

euſes et p dedes eſt aourne de eſtoilles en ſẽblãce de celice des cieulx et le pauemẽt eſt criſtal ⁊ audict palays n trouuerez feneſtre ne porte.et dedens le palays a .xxiiii. pilliers dor et de pierres mouſt p̃cieuſes de toute maniere. Et ilz lec tenons noſtre corps es feſtes ãnuelles ⁊ ſainct thomas p̃sche aup gẽs ou milieu du palays.et dedes noſtre palays ya les cauues et le meilleur vin du mõde ⁊ q̃ en boit na deſir des biẽs tẽporelz ne ne ſcet ou elle va ne dont elle vient.

¶ Itez vne aultre grãt merueille ya en noſtre palays ceſt aſſauoir q̃ nul mẽger ny eſt apparcille fors q̃ vne eſcuelle vng gril et vng tailloir q̃ ſõt pẽdus a vng pilier Et quãt nous ſõmes a table et no⁹ deſirõs auoir viãdes elle nous ſõt apareilleez p la grace du ſaict eſperit Et ſaichez q̃ tous clercs q̃ ſõt au mõde ne ſcauroiẽt dire ne retraire les biẽs q̃ ſõt en noſtre palays ⁊ en noſtre chappelle. Et ſaichez q̃ tout ce q̃ nous vous auõs eſcript eſt vray cõe dieu eſt.et ne mentirõs pour riẽs Car dieu et ſaict thomas nous cõfõdroiẽt et pdriõs noz dignites. ¶ Se vo⁹ voulez de nous q̃lq̃ choſe q̃ nous puiſſiõs mãdez le nous car nous le ferõs de treſbon cueur. Et vous priõs q̃l vous ſoit en remẽbrãce du ſainct paſſaige et q̃ ce ſoit puchainement et ayez bon cueur grãde hardieſſe en vous et ſoiez remẽbrans de mettre a mort ces faulx tẽpliers et payẽs et vous priõs q̃ vous nous enuoiez reſpõce p le porteur de ces p̃ntes Et priõs au roy de frãce q̃l nous ſalue to⁹ les feaulx p̃riens de dela la mer ⁊ q̃l nous enuoye aulcũ vaillãt cheualier qui ſoit de la bõne gñation de france En priant noſtre ſeigneur qui vous doint pſeuerer en la grace du ſainct eſperit Amen. ¶ Donne en noſtre ſainct palays Lan de noſtre natiuite.cinq cens et ſept.

¶ Cy finiſſent les diuerſites des hõmes des beſtes et des oyſeaux qui ſont en la terre de Preſtre Jehan.

Senſuiuent pluſieurs nouuelletes et diuerſitez eſtans entre les beſtes en la terre de Preſtre Jehan.

THE TRANSLATION

PRESTER JOHN, by the Grace of God most powerful king over all Christian kings, greetings to the Emperor of Rome and the King of France, our friends. We wish you to learn about us, our position, the government of our land, and our people and beasts. And since you say that our Greeks, or men of Grecian race, do not pray to God the way you do in your country, we let you know that we worship and believe in Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one Deity and one true God only. We attest and inform you by our letter, sealed with our seal, of the condition and character of our land and men. And if you desire something that we can do for you, ask us, for we shall do it gladly. In case you wish to come hither to our country, we shall make you on account of your good reputation our successors and we shall grant you vast lands, manors, and mansions.

Let it be known to you that we have the highest crown on earth as well as gold, silver, precious stones and strong fortresses, cities, towns, castles, and boroughs. We have under our sway forty-two kings who all are mighty and good Christians. And

know that we maintain for the glory and love of Jesus Christ all the poor of our country, be they our men or foreigners.

Know also that we have promised and sworn in our good faith to conquer the Sepulcher of our Lord and the whole Promised Land. And if you wish and it pleases God, we shall have it; but may you too display the great and steadfast valor which is yours, since we were told of your true and loyal courage. But there are other Frenchmen among you of your lineage and from your retinue who hold with the Saracens. You confide to them and trust them that they should and will help you, but they are the false and treacherous Hospitalers. Know that we have killed them in our country as it should be done with those who turn against the faith.[1]

Our land is divided into four parts, for there are so many Indias. In Greater India lies the body of the Apostle Saint Thomas for whom our Lord has wrought more miracles than for the [other] saints who are in heaven. And this India is toward the East, for it is near the deserted Babylon and also near the tower called Babel.[2] In another province toward the North there is a great abundance of bread, wine, meat, and everything necessary for the human body.

There are in our country elephants and other animals called dromedaries and also white horses and wild bulls of seven horns, white bears, and the strangest lions of red, green, black, and blue color. We have also wild asses with two little horns, wild hares as big as sheep, and swift horses with two little horns who gallop faster than any other animal. You should also know that we have birds called griffins who can easily carry an ox or a horse into their nest to feed their young. We have still another kind of birds

who rule over all other fowl in the world. They are of fiery color, their wings are as sharp as razors, and they are called Yllerion.[3] In the whole world there are but two of them. They live for sixty years, at the end of which they fly away to plunge into the sea. But first they hatch two or three eggs for forty days till the young ones come out. Then the old pair, father and mother, take off and go to drown themselves in the sea, as it was said before. And all the birds who meet them escort them till they are drowned. And when this has happened, the companions return and they go to the fledglings and feed them till they grow up and can fly and provide for themselves. Likewise, you should know that we have other birds called tigers who are so strong and bold that they lift and kill with ease an armored man together with his horse.[4]

Know that in one province of our country is a wilderness and that there live horned men who have but one eye in front and three or four in the back. There are also women who look similar. We have in our country still another kind of men who feed only on raw flesh of men and women and do not hesitate to die. And when one of them passes away, be it their father or mother, they gobble him up without cooking him. They hold that it is good and natural to eat human flesh and they do it for the redemption of their sins. This nation is cursed by God and it is called Gog and Magog and there are more of them than of all other peoples. With the coming of the Antichrist they will spread over the whole world, for they are his friends and allies. This was the people that enclosed the King Alexander in Macedonia and put him into prison from which he escaped. But God will send upon them lightning and scorching fire which will burn and disperse them along with the Antichrist, and in such a way they will be destroyed and

routed. None the less we take many of them with us into war, whenever we wish to wage one, and we give them license and permission to eat our enemies, so that of a thousand not a single remains who is not devoured and consumed. But later we send them home, because, if they were to stay with us longer, they would eat us all.[5] We have in our country also other men who have hoofed legs like horses and at the back of their heels they have four strong and sharp claws with which they fight in such a way that no armor can withstand them; and yet they are good Christians and willingly till their lands and ours and pay us annually a big tribute.

In another region of the wilderness we have a country that extends for forty-two days' journey and it is called the Great Feminie. Do not think that it is in the land of the Saracens, for the one we are talking about is in our country. In that land there are three queens and many other ladies who hold their lands from them. And when these three queens wish to wage war, each of them leads with her one hundred thousand armed women, not counting those who drive the carts, horses, and elephants with the supplies and food. And know that they fight bravely like men. No male can stay with them over nine days, during which he can carouse and amuse himself and make them conceive. But he should not overstay, for in such a case he will die. This land is encircled by a river called Cyson that flows from the terrestrial paradise and is so wide that nobody can cross it except in big boats or ships.[6]

Know also that between this land [and the river is a country] called Piconye which is small and extends only for ten days' journey in length and seven in breadth. Men are here as small as

seven-year-old children and their horses are as small as sheep, and yet they are good Christians and willing workers. Nobody wages war on them except the birds who come each year when they have to harvest and to gather grapes. Then the king of this country equips himself to the best of his ability against the said birds and they have a dreadful carnage. Later, however, the birds return.[7]

We have in our country bowmen who from the waist up are men, but whose lower part is that of a horse. They carry in their hands bows and arrows and they can pull harder than any human being and they live on raw flesh. Some of our courtiers capture them and keep them chained and people come to see this great marvel.

There are in our land also unicorns who have in front a single horn of which there are three kinds: green, black, and white. Sometimes they kill lions. But a lion kills them in a very subtle way. When a unicorn is tired it lies down by a tree. The lion goes then behind it and when the unicorn wants to strike him with his horn, it dashes into the tree with such a force that it cannot free itself. Then the lion kills it.[8]

In another region of the wilderness there are men who used to be sixty cubits tall but who are now only twenty, and they cannot leave the desert, since it would displease God, for once they were outside, they could easily vanquish everybody.

You should also know that in our country there is a bird called phoenix which is the most beautiful in the world. In the whole universe there is but one such bird. It lives for a hundred years and then it rises toward the sky so close to the sun that its wings catch fire. Then it descends into its nest and burns itself; and yet out of

the ashes there grows a worm which at the end of a hundred days becomes again as beautiful a bird as it was ever before.[9]

In our land there is also an abundance of bread, wine, meat, and of everything that is good for the human body. Know also that no venomous creature can enter certain parts of our country.

Between us and the Saracens there flows a river called Ydonis which comes from the terrestrial paradise and is full of precious stones. It flows through our land mostly in small and big arms and many precious stones are found there, such as emeralds, sapphires, jaspe, calcedoines, rubies, carbuncles, "scabasses," and many other precious stones which I have not mentioned; and of each we know its name and its magic power.

There is in our land an herb called permanent. Whoever carries it with him can conjure the devil and question him as to who he is, where he is going, what he is doing on earth, and make him speak. Because of this, the devil does not dare to stay in our land.[10]

Know also that in our country there grows wild pepper amidst trees and serpents. When it becomes ripe, we send our people to gather it. They put the woods on fire and everything burns, but when the fire has died out, they make great heaps of pepper and serpents and they put the pepper together and carry it later to a barn, wash it in two or three waters, and let it dry in the sun. In this way it becomes black, hard, and biting.[11]

Near this region is a fountain and whoever drinks of its water three times on an empty stomach will have no sickness for thirty years; and when he has drunk of it, he will feel as if he has eaten the best meat and spices, for it is full of God's grace. A person who can bathe in this fountain, be he of a hundred or thousand

years, will regain the age of thirty-two. Know that we were born and blessed in the womb of our mother five hundred and sixty-two years ago and since then we have bathed in the fountain six times.[12]

Let it be known to you that the Sandy Sea originates in our country and that it has a swift surf and produces frightful waves. Nobody can cross it, no matter how one tries, except us, for we let ourselves be carried by the griffins, as Alexander did when he was about to conquer the enchanted castle.[13] Not far from this sea there flows a river in which one finds many precious stones and herbs that are good for many medicines.

Between us and the Jews there runs a river full of precious stones and it descends so swiftly that nobody can cross it except on Saturday when it stands still; and whatever it encounters, it carries into the Sandy Sea. We have to protect this crossing, for we have on this frontier forty-two castles which are the strangest and most beautiful in the world and many men to defend them, to wit ten thousand knights, six thousand crossbowmen and fifteen thousand archers, and forty thousand troopers who guard the aforesaid passages, so that, if the great King of Israel would come with his men, he could not get across with his Jews, who are twice as numerous as the Christians, but not as the Saracens, for they hold two thirds of the world. Know that the great King of Israel has under him three hundred kings and four thousand princes, dukes, and counts, all of them Jews and obedient to him. And if the Jews could cross this passage, all the Christians and Saracens would be lost.[14]

On each Saturday we let some eight hundred or thousand Jews come across for the purpose of trade. They do not, however, enter

our strongholds, but exchange the wares outside, because we do not trust them. They buy exclusively with ingots of gold and silver, for they do not have real money. After they have made their purchases, they return home. Know also that we have forty-two castles which are not farther apart than a crossbow shot.

Let it be known to you, that one league from there we have a city called the Great Orionde which is the strongest and most beautiful in the world. One of our kings guards it and he collects tribute from the great King of Israel, for he owes us every year two hundred horses loaded with precious stones, gold, and silver, in addition to the expenses incurred in this city and in the aforesaid castles. Know that when we make war on them, we kill all those who happen to be in our country and because of this they do not dare to stir, or attack us. Notice that the Jewish women are the most beautiful and passionate in the world.

Know that near the Sandy River there is the Sandy Sea and nobody can cross it, except when a strong wind spreads close to the ground, then one can easily enter it. Yet a person should hurry to return, for if he tarries, he could remain in the sea. And every piece of debris that comes out of it turns into precious stones; but they cannot be sold before we have seen them, and if we wish to have them, we can buy them at prices set by our merchants.[15]

In another region of our land there is a mountain on which nobody can dwell because of its great heat. Certain worms who cannot live save in fire sustain themselves there. Near this mountain we keep constantly forty thousand men who maintain a great fire. And when these worms sense the heat of the fire and come out of the earth, they enter the flames and spin there a thread similar to the one made by the silkworms. Out of this thread we make gar-

ments for us and our ladies and we wear them at the great holidays of the year. Whenever we wish to wash them, we put them into fire whence they come clean and fresh.[16]

Know also that no Christian king has as many treasures as we do, because nobody can be poor in our country who wants to earn his living. Remember also that St. Thomas performs more miracles than all the saints of the paradise, for he preaches personally once a year in his church to everybody, and he also preaches in a palace, as you will hear.[17]

Let it be known to you that in another region of our country there are strange men who have human bodies, but heads of dogs. It is impossible to understand their language, yet they are good fishermen, since they can enter the deepest sea and stay there for a day without emerging. They catch as many fish as they desire, and they carry them into their subterranean houses. We, however, mark the place where they put them and take as many as we want. These men bring woe on our wild beasts, for they eat them and they fight against the archers and battle them fiercely.[18]

In our country there are also birds of a more hot-blooded nature than elsewhere. When the time of hatching comes, they lay twenty-one eggs on the bottom of a sea, and out of them come birds and they fly away. We catch many of them since they taste good when they are young. And if a man's or woman's health is failing and they eat of these birds, their vigor returns to them and they become as strong as before, or even stronger.[19]

There grows in our country also the tree of life from which the holy oil is coming. This tree is completely dry and a serpent is guarding and watching it day and night, all the year round, except on Saint John's day, when it is fast asleep, and this is the

time when we approach it. During the whole year it yields but three pounds which gather drop by drop. When we have come close to the holy oil, we take it and go back cautiously for fear that the serpent may pursue us. This tree is only a day's journey from the earthly paradise. When the serpent awakens, it becomes angry and hisses so loudly that it can be heard a day's march away. It is three times as big as a horse and it has nine heads and a pair of wings. And after we have crossed the sea, it turns around, while we proceed and take the holy oil to the Patriarch of St. Thomas and he consecrates it and anoints us Christians with it. The rest we send to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and he in turn sends it to the Pope of Rome who blesses it and adds to it olive oil and sends it to all Christians beyond the sea.[20]

There are no thieves in our country, neither among our citizens, nor among the foreigners, for God and St. Thomas would have confounded them, while we would have put them to death.

Let it be known to you that we have swift horses which can carry a knight in full armor for three or four days without taking food.

And whenever we go to war, we let fourteen kings, clad in garments of gold and silver, carry in front of us fourteen ensigns adorned with sundry precious stones. Other kings who come behind carry richly decorated banners of silk.

Know that in front of us there march forty thousand clerics and an equal number of knights, then come two hundred thousand men on foot, not counting the wagons with provisions or the elephants and camels which carry arms and ammunition. And when we leave for war, we entrust our country to the Patriarch of St. Thomas.[21]

Yet when we ride out in peace, we let a simple wooden cross be borne before us, so that we are reminded of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Know that at the gates of each of our cities there are three crosses made of wood for people to worship the Holy Rood.

Likewise when we ride out in peace we order a vessel full of earth to be carried as a sign that we are dust and unto dust we shall return; another vessel full of gold is borne to show that we are the most powerful and noble king.

Let it be known to you that nobody in our land dares to commit the sin of lechery, for at once he would be burned, because the sacrament of marriage has been ordained by God; nor does anybody dare to lie in our country, for he would be hanged [immediately].

You should know that each year we visit in the desert the body of St. Daniel, the prophet. On this occasion we take with us ten thousand clerics and an equal number of knights and two hundred towers built on the elephants which also carry a turret to protect us from the seven-headed dragons. Know also that in this desert there are the finest dates that grow on trees and they are tasty, green, and ripe as well in winter as in summer. The desert stretches for eighty and sixty days' journey and there live two Patriarchs of St. Thomas who sit at the table in front of us, for they have the authority of the Pope of Rome. We have also as many abbots as there are days in a year taken twice and added fifteen. Each of them comes once during the year to chant at the altar of St. Thomas. We also sing there on the annual feast days, and on account of this we are called Prester John, for we are a priest because of sacrificing at the altar, and we are a king because we are just and upright.[22]

Know that I had been blessed before I was born, for God has sent an angel to my father who told him to build a palace full of God's grace and a chamber of paradise for the child to come, who was to be the greatest king on earth and to live for a long time. And whoever stays in the palace will never suffer hunger, thirst, or death. When my father had woke up from his slumber, he was overly joyful and he began to build the palace which you will see.

First of all, its walls are of crystal, the ceiling above is of precious stones and it is adorned with stars similar to those of the sky, and its floor is also of crystal. There are no windows or doors in this palace and inside it has twenty-four columns of gold and various precious stones. We stay there during the big holidays of the year and in the midst of it St. Thomas preaches to the people. And inside our palace there is [water] and the best wine on earth, and whoever drinks of it has no desire for worldly things, and nobody knows where the [water] goes or whence it comes.[23]

There is still another great marvel in our palace, for no food is served in it except on a tray, grill, or trencher that hangs from a column, so that when we sit at the table and wish to eat, the food is placed before us by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Know that all the scribes on earth could not report or describe the riches of our palace and our chapel. Everything we have written to you is as true as there is God, and for nothing in the world would we lie, since God and St. Thomas would confound us and deprive us of our title.

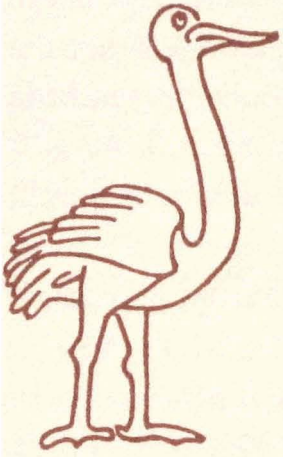
If you desire from us something that we can fulfill, do not hesitate to ask, for we shall do it gladly. We beg you to keep in mind the holy pilgrimage, and may it take place soon, and may you be brave and of great courage, and pray, do not forget to put to death

those treacherous Templars and pagans and, please, send us an answer with the envoy who brought the presents. We entreat the King of France to greet from us all loyal Christians beyond the sea and to send us some valiant knight of noblest French blood.[24] We pray to our Lord to keep you in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Written in our holy palace in the year five hundred and seven since our birth.

Here end the sundry tales of men, beasts, and birds in the land of Prester John

MANY A NEW AND ENTERTAINING STORY ABOUT THE BEASTS IN PRESTER JOHN'S LAND



THE ORIGIN OF PRESTER JOHN

IF A PERSON were to become acquainted with Prester John first through the French text of the *Letter*, as happened in my case, he would be inevitably led to an inquiry into the relationship between Prester John and St. Thomas. The preceding investigation has shown that many references to St. Thomas found in the French version were interpolations of uncertain provenance, and yet in much older and more original sources, like the Latin *Letter* and the report of Bishop Hugh of Jabala, there were a few evident or implied connections between the Apostle and the Christian King of India. Was the juxtaposition of these two personages accidental, or could it have resulted from a common legendary background? Before this question can be given any serious consideration, it is necessary to discuss briefly the various medieval identifications of Prester John and the modern theories explaining the origin of the name "Prester John."

One such explanation, proposed first by Marie Amand Pascal

d'Avezac and later developed by Gustav Oppert, was based on the narrative of Bishop Hugh.[1] Since the victory of Prester John had to be identified with Yeh-lü Ta-shih's triumph over the Seljuk Sultan Sanjar, there was a fair possibility that the Qara Khitayan ruler had given rise to the mythical figure of the Christian king and priest. Gustav Oppert did not spare efforts to show how Yeh-lü Ta-shih's title "Gur Khan" could have been misunderstood for the Syriac "Yuhanan" or "John." But this somewhat tenuous reasoning does not account for the priestly functions and the Christian faith that must characterize Yeh-lü Ta-shih if he is to be identified with Prester John. Indeed, contemporary sources say nothing about any leaning toward Christianity, but either call him a follower of Mani or imply that he was a Buddhist, which in view of his Chinese education seems to be most likely.[2]

Although the report of Bishop Hugh failed to establish the origin of a historical Prester John, it produced enough information to suggest that the historical ruler of the Qara Khitay had been somehow merged with a legendary figure whose relationship with the Magi and whose wielding of an emerald scepter associated him with St. Thomas and India.[3] Once the possible existence of such a legendary Prester John is admitted, it becomes fairly easy to reconcile the conflicting elements of Bishop Hugh's story, for then one can assume that certain traits of an older and undoubtedly Christian Prester John were superimposed on Yeh-lü Ta-shih, whose victory over the Moslems made him seem to be a follower of Christ. As the next example will show, confusions of this kind were not uncommon.

In the year 1221 two prominent Western churchmen, Jacques de Vitry, Bishop of Acre, and Cardinal Pelagius, both influential

in the high command of the crusading army that was about to march from the recently conquered Damietta toward Cairo, dispatched a number of letters to influential persons in Europe, notifying them at length about a certain King David who had captured many Moslem cities in the East, among them Samarkand, and who was now approaching Baghdad.[4] This news was contained in a written intelligence report that had been brought to the Holy Land by some merchants engaged in importing Oriental spices and precious stones. King David was supposedly a ruler of India and, according to various versions of the report, either a grandson or a son of Prester John. But these degrees of relationship were not always maintained and Jacques de Vitry himself professed that "King David was commonly called Prester John."[5] From the description of his deeds and military campaigns it becomes evident that they belong to a real historical personality—none other than Genghis Khan. There is no satisfactory explanation of how this confusion could have come about, except that Friedrich Zarncke was induced to ascribe it to some Christian influences.[6] The widespread European belief in the Christianity of the Mongols died slowly, and although the terrible inroads of the Asiatic nomads into Russia, Poland, and Hungary in the years 1239–1241 must have opened the eyes of most optimistic Westerners, the hopes to discover in the Mongols an inclination toward the teaching of Christ were not abandoned for several decades. In the meantime, however, the concept of Prester John underwent a drastic change.

A thirteenth-century Syrian churchman and writer by the name of Gregory Abulfaraj Bar-Hebraeus (1226–1286) has quoted in his *Chronicon Syriacum* (Syrian Chronicle) a letter dating back

to the year 1009 according to which a king of a Central Asian tribe of Keraits became converted to Christianity and was baptized along with some two hundred thousand men of his tribe. In another passage referring to the Keraits in the time of the Mongol ascendency Abulfaraj mentioned that they were ruled by an "Ung Khan who is called King John (Malik Yuhanna)."[7] William of Rubruck and Marco Polo traversed Central Asia during the same century and they too spoke of a Christian Ung or Unc Khan who had once been the overlord of Genghis Khan, but later had a quarrel with him and was defeated and killed by the great conqueror. The very same story is also reported by the Mongol *Secret History of the Yüan Dynasty* and some other sources.[8] By combining this material and adding to it some archaeological evidence of a more general nature there emerges a picture of a Christian tribe of Keraits ruled by a king with the title Ung Khan, which at least in Abulfaraj's opinion had to be interpreted as an equivalent of "King John."[9] Since the Keraits were Nestorians and it happened often among them that ordination for priesthood was given rather indiscriminately, it would be possible for a king to be at the same time a priest.[10] Joseph S. Assemani was probably the first scholar to adopt the identification of Ung, or more correctly, Wang Khan, with "Prester John"; and he has been followed by a great many modern critics who in one form or another have shared the same basic view.[11] The weakness of this theory lies in the late date on which the title Wang Khan had been bestowed by the Chinese Emperor Tshang-tsong (1190–1200) on the king of the Keraits.[12] If this event took place toward the end of the twelfth century, how could it have produced the name "Prester John" as early as 1145 when Bishop Hugh mentioned it for the first

time? This criticism has been advanced by Gustav Oppert and it was repeated by Alexander A. Vasiliev only a few years ago.[13]

After the second decade of the fourteenth century Prester John or his successors ceased to be located in Central Asia and their homeland was transferred to Africa. This change was first introduced by the Dominican friar Jordanus de Sévérac who made a trip to India and, not finding Prester John there, assigned him to Ethiopia which he knew only from hearsay. The African Prester John was reinstated in his full fabulous array, for Jordanus surrounded him with wild animals and beasts and fifty-two vassal kings which were obviously reminiscent of the *Letter*.[14] All this may seem to us a haphazard conclusion by Jordanus, and yet it inaugurated a new era in Prester John's history. The sudden impulse of Jordanus to resettle the legendary king would have certainly aroused a vociferous opposition had there not been good reasons to abandon his old location. By the beginning of the fourteenth century Western travelers had traversed the Asian continent often enough to know that the fabulous Christian kingdom of Prester John could not be found there. Moreover, the Prester John of William of Rubruck, Marco Polo, Odoric of Pordenone, and John of Montecorvino was a figure of the past whose successors lacked all the splendor and power that were once assumed to be his, and they were not fit to render any military assistance to the West, nor were they even Christians.[15] Ethiopia was, on the other hand, an almost unexplored country where any legendary creature could thrive. It had a Christian dynasty and its geographic position gave hope for an effective military alliance, for the Ethiopians did occasionally fight the Moslems and, even more important, they were believed to be in a position to divert the

flow of the river Nile and starve Egypt into submission.[16] Thus the transfer of Prester John to a new location did not destroy his legendary background, and the only objection that could be raised by a modern critic, namely that one cannot shift a person from Asia to Africa without embarrassing everybody who believed in his existence, is invalid, since for the medieval men who divided Asia from Africa along the Nile, Ethiopia was a part of India.[17] Nowhere does this become clearer than on medieval maps, and in consulting the legends of Bartolommeo Pareto's planisphere (1455) it becomes apparent that Ethiopia is the rest of Prester John's vast empire to which he retired after the Great Khan, i.e. Genghis Khan, had taken his Asian lands from him.[18]

The identification of Prester John with the Negus of Ethiopia opened a new possibility for deducing his name and his major characteristics — royalty, priesthood, and Christian faith — from the monarch of that country. The first steps toward a theory explaining why the ruler of Ethiopia was called Prester John were made by some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Portuguese scholars and missionaries who found that the royal title *zan* (pronounced like French *jardin*), meaning "king," could have given rise to the "Jean" or "John" of Prester John.[19]

In the year 1923 a Rumanian scholar, Constantine Marinescu, published an important study in which he adopted the basic conclusion of the Portuguese and extended it to explain the whole history of Prester John.[20] In his opinion the whole concept of "Prester John" has developed from the royal title *zan* and the priestly powers of the Ethiopian kings ascribed to them by a thirteenth-century Christian writer, Abu Salih.[21] The word *zan* was then picked up by the Italian merchants who understood it to

be "Gianni," whence the French "Jean" and the English "John."[22] This borrowing must have taken place before Bishop Hugh used it for the first time in 1145, because, as one of Marinescu's ardent supporters has claimed, "Prester John" referred from the outset to the King of Ethiopia and "the confusion which arose in the twelfth century was partly due to the wide application of the term India, and partly to the inaccessibility of Ethiopia."[23]

There are several objections that can be raised against this whole theory. First of all there is the problem of the date by which the title *zan* had come into use. Eugen Mittwoch mentioned *zan hoi* as a royal address, but he added that it was introduced only in the sixteenth century, while the old word used for the same purpose was *danzo*, meaning "noble" or "brave."[24] Marinescu's proof of the antiquity of *zan*, based on the lists of the Ethiopian kings, is not conclusive. It is true that a few royal names have as a component part *zan* or one of its variants, but this does not necessarily prove that it was considered a title. Carlo Conti Rossini, whose article Marinescu was using, himself stated that the names with the particle *zan* had not yet been fully explained.[25] Besides, even if one admits the possibility of *zan* having always been a royal title, how does it happen that only a small group of kings chose to attach it to their names, and what sense was there in a tautological address like zan Ged 'a zan? Finally there is the amusing incident of the year 1441 when an Ethiopian embassy arrived in Rome and one of its members expressed the indignation of his sovereign about the title he was given by the Europeans. The King of Ethiopia felt that it was "absurd," since his true name was Zareiacob which means "Offspring of the Prophet Jacob," while his second name (*cognomen*) was, on account of his

dignity, Constantine.[26] The monarch had evidently taken "John" for a proper name. Did he fail to recognize in it his own title?

Another weak point of this theory lies in its insistence on a prolonged confusion about the true Prester John. How was it possible that Ethiopia was accessible enough to let the title *zan* slip out of the country, and yet so inaccessible that no further information, for example, about its approximate geographical location or the variety of its Christian dogma, could come through? Bishop Hugh said of Prester John that he was a Nestorian from beyond Persia and Armenia. Evidently he had heard the name "Prester John," but nothing about the fact that the Ethiopians were Monophysites, nor could he even indicate the general direction in which the kingdom of the true Prester John could be found. The Nestorian background of Prester John was further suggested by the author of the original Latin *Letter* and it was openly pronounced by Jacques de Vitry, whose authority in matters of Eastern churches is unquestionable.[27] Did the two Western churchmen, who had resided for years in the Holy Land and who had contacts with native Christians and Italian merchants, fail to learn from the latter at least the place where they had heard about that mysterious *zan* or "John"? It is certainly easier to declare two centuries of Prester John's existence as a Nestorian king of Central Asia or India a mistake than to prove it.[28]

The most widely accepted explanations for the origin of the name "Prester John" were thus construed on the basis of titles: Gur Khan, Wang Khan, and *zan*. There were also several attempts to utilize the proper name "John." In the year 1876 Philipp Bruun proposed to see in Prester John the image of the Georgian general Ivané (John) Orbelian, who in 1161 won at Ani a great

victory over the Moslems.[29] The weakness of this explanation lies in the late date of the event, for the fame of Prester John goes back to another battle that had taken place twenty years earlier.[30] There were still other Johns to be associated with Prester John. Johannes of Hildesheim said around 1370 that the King of India ought to be called John because of John the Evangelist, who was a priest, and John the Baptist, who had baptized the Lord.[31] Alexander A. Vasiliev felt that the name of the legendary king had derived either from the assumed author of the fourth Gospel, or from the Patriarch John of St. Thomas' shrine.[32] Some of these proper names have a definite advantage over the three titles, for they do not require any misunderstandings to serve as a catalectic agent, and it is even possible to imagine that they were grafted onto certain stories with a true historical background, as for example the victory of Yeh-lü Ta-shih. What they do not explain, however, is that specific combination of royalty and priesthood in Prester John without which he is unthinkable.

Do these theories of Prester John's origin exhaust all possible explanations of how his name and characteristics could have come into being? I doubt it. The existence of a few, previously discussed, nonhistoric elements in Bishop Hugh's report and the amazing reference to Samarkand and the Patriarch of St. Thomas in the original Latin *Letter* indicate an early association of Prester John with St. Thomas, India, and the Nestorian Church.[33] These ties have been strengthened through several interpolations found in the older French prose version of the *Letter*, and although these insertions were mere mechanical additions, they did stem from some cognate but unfortunately lost sources.[34] Alexander von Humboldt once suggested that the legendary figure of

Prester John may have belonged to a Nestorian myth.[35] No such myth has yet been discovered, but as the following presentation will attempt to show, there are certain traces of it that could eventually lead to its full reconstruction.

In a fourteenth-century Syrian martyrology composed by Rabban Sliba the sixth day of October is dedicated among others to "the martyrdom of the Apostle Thomas, the king of India Misdaeus, his son John, and his mother Tertia" (Coronatio Thomae apostoli et Misdaeus rex Indiae, Iohannes eius filius huiusque mater Tertia).[36] The three persons associated in the martyrology with the Apostle have been mentioned earlier in the present volume: King Mazdai, who ordered the execution of the Saint but later himself became a Christian, his estranged wife Tertia, and their son Vizan, all of whom are described at length in the *Acts of St. Thomas.*[37] Vizan-John appears in the dramatic culmination of St. Thomas' missionary work in India and he is of such a stature that one can easily see how he became immortalized along with his parents. What is even more important, the description of him in the *Acts* reveals several traits later found in Prester John. The very first conversation between the prince and the Saint, who reproached him for his possessions, slaves, and garments, strikes the familiar theme of wealth so prominent in the *Letter.*[38] But Vizan-John was not only rich, he was also pious, for when he had asked the Saint for baptism, he confided to him his leaning toward Christian principles long before he had heard of the new religion.[39] His plea was answered and St. Thomas baptized him together with his mother Tertia and his wife Manashar. One of the Apostle's last acts on earth was to ordain Vizan a deacon and Sifur, who had brought the Saint to Mazdai's realm,

a priest.[40] These two men became thus the spiritual successors of the Apostle and the heads of the young Christian Church in India.

Would it be permissible to assume that the Eastern Christians had also a more popular version of St. Thomas' martyrdom than the one preserved in the *Acts*? He was certainly one of their greatest saints and, as shown above, popular hagiography has ascribed to his shrines several posthumous miracles performed by his uncorrupted hand.[41] Some traces of popular traditions associated with him appear in the long metrical homily by Jacob of Serugh (451–521) about the palace which the Apostle was supposed to build for the Indian king Gundafor.[42] As a missionary to India, St. Thomas must have been linked to that general concept of a mission so vividly presented on an old Syrian miniature of the Pentecost, where underneath the twelve Apostles, each of them holding a scroll to symbolize his calling, one can see a heathen king and a dog-headed monster.[43] Finally, a minor example of a popular adaptation can be discerned in the very fact that the old Persian name "Vizan" of the original Syriac *Acts* has changed to the Syriac equivalent of "John." Considering the amount of Syriac literature that was either lost forever, as in the destruction of the Edessan library in 1145, or is still hidden in manuscripts and available only to orientalists, the absence of a popular account of the Apostle's death does not speak against its existence.[44] There is, of course, always the possibility of such a story having constituted a part of an oral tradition which was never considered worthy of recording.

Now if one were to assume that there was such a popular and simplified variant of the Apostle's glorious end, in what direction would it have changed the figure of Vizan-John? From the

point of view of Christian ethics and taste he would have deserved a more prominent position than his father, who after all had been the villain of the story and whose conversion to Christianity was anything but sincere. Vizan-John could have also acquired the higher ecclesiastical orders of Sifur, not because the latter was unworthy of it, but merely on the strength of his belonging to the royal family, while Sifur was a just a marginal character and could have been easily omitted or even forgotten. The possibility of John's having been made a priest at Sifur's expense is moreover strengthened by the younger Ethiopian version of the *Acts* where Sifur and Vizan are called respectively Sekura and Awesyas, while the priest at the end of the *Acts* is referred to as Awetyos Koros.[45] Despite the slight change in spelling and the addition of Koros, it is definitely Vizan and not Sifur who figures here as the priest. An echo of a similar shift can be discerned in a still younger tradition of the Malabar Christians which is known to have been composed from the elements of the *Acts*. A Christian song used on various socio-religious occasions tells how St. Thomas had arrived in Malankara (not far from Cranganore) and how his preaching had resulted in the conversion of a native king whose nephew was ordained a priest.[46] The change from a royal son to a royal nephew may have been caused by the peculiar Indian custom whereby the king was not succeeded by his son, but by the son of his sister.[47] Finally there is still another proof that occasionally Sifur and Vizan were made to switch their positions in ecclesiastical hierarchy, for according to an eleventh-century Greek synaxarion from Mount Athos, St. Thomas had ordained Vizan a priest and Sifur a deacon.[48]

Although these findings do not justify the announcement of a

new precursor of Prester John, they make it likely that given more material on the popular traditions of the Eastern Christians there could be established a more suitable prototype for the twelfth-century Nestorian king and priest than any hitherto proposed. An original Prester John belonging to the cycle of legends created around St. Thomas would solve many difficulties that so far have complicated the previous identifications. If it was he who inspired the image of the later Prester John, one could dispense entirely with the tenuous derivations of his name from the foreign titles; at the same time he would have had those vital ingredients which made the later Prester John a Christian king and priest. Instead of being sought among the Monophysite Ethiopians, he could be securely pronounced a Nestorian, for it was the members of this particular church who predominated in the scattered Christian communities between Edessa and Mailapur where the St. Thomas tradition was especially vigorous. The pre-existence of his name and figure in this wide geographic region explains also how "Prester John" became attached to the Central Asian conquerors. That these false identifications were produced by the Eastern Christians whose oppressed position made them hope for a liberator has been already stated. A legendary precursor of the later Prester John may lead to still another re-evaluation, for if it can be maintained that the author of the original Latin *Letter* had visited the Holy Land, then there is at least a chance that a few basic traits of his portrait of Prester John are genuine.

NOTES AND INDEX

NOTES

A POPULAR LETTER

[1] See the recent study by David T. Pottinger, *The French Book Trade in the Ancien Regime, 1500–1791* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), pp. 22–39.

[2] An excellent analysis of these *pièces d'actualité* is offered by Jean-Pierre Seguin, "L'information à la fin du XV^{e} siècle en France ; pièces d'actualité imprimées sous le règne de Charles VIII," *Arts et Traditions populaires*, 4 : 309–330 (1956) and 5 : 46–74 (1957).

[3] For a discussion of the Latin and French manuscripts and early editions of the *Letter*, see the chapters in the present volume on "The Original Text" and "The French Versions."

[4] Both the Italian and the English manuscripts of the *Letter* are considered by Friedrich Zarncke, "Ueber eine neue, bisher nicht bekannt gewesene lateinische Redaction des Briefes des Priester Johannes," in *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologisch-historische Classe*, vol. 29 (Leipzig, 1877), pp. 111–156, at pp. 113–117. Hereafter this study will be referred to as Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29. The various German versions of the *Letter* have been discussed in detail by the same author in "Der Priester Johannes," in *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, vol. 7 (Leipzig, 1879), pp. 947–1028. Hereafter this portion of Zarncke's study, comprising Chapters 1, 2, and 3, will be referred to as *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7. For the Russian and Serbian manuscripts of the *Letter* see M. N. Speranskii, "Skazanie ob Indeiskom tsarstve,"

in *Akademiia Nauk S.S.S.R. Izvestiia po russkomu iazyku i slovesnosti*, vol. 3 (Leningrad, 1930), pp. 369–464, at p. 119. For material on the Hebrew manuscripts of the *Letter* consult A. Neubauer, "Where Are the Ten Tribes?" *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1:14–28, 95–114, 185–201, 408–423, at p. 194 (1889).

[5] See the remarks by John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck in *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1: *Itinera et relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*, ed. by Anastasius van den Wyngaert (Florence, 1929), pp. 59–61, 206. For an English translation of the same reports consult Christopher Dawson, ed., *The Mongol Mission* (New York, 1955), pp. 22 and 122. Plano Carpini's story of Prester John's victory over a Tartar army is a mixture of Alexandrian Romance and historical truth; cf. Friedrich Pfister, ed., *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo* (Heidelberg, 1913), p. 105, and W. Barthold, *Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion* (2nd ed.; London, 1928), p. 442.

[6] See pp. 81–87 in this volume.

[7] Good examples are the accounts by John of Plano Carpini and Simon of St. Quentin in Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale*, Book 32, Chapters 2–52 (in a fourteenth-century manuscript of the James Ford Bell Collection, fols. 251r–264r).

[8] The most popular among them was Sir John Mandeville. On his use of Prester John's *Letter* see Friedrich Zarncke, "Der Priester Johannes," *Abhandlungen der philologische-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, vol. 8 (Leipzig, 1883), pp. 128–154 and 180–184. Although not published until 1883, this portion of the study had been completed in 1876. Hereafter this second part of Zarncke's researches, including Chapters 4, 5, and 6, will be referred to as *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8. For the latest literature on Sir John Mandeville's borrowings from the *Letter* consult Malcolm Letts, *Mandeville's Travels. Texts and Translations*, Publication of the Hakluyt Society, series 2, vols. 101 and 102 (London, 1950–1953), vol. 101, pp. 187–210, and vol. 102, pp. 499–506; and Josephine Waters Bennett, *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville* (New York, 1954), p. 21 and *passim*. Another "traveler" to use the *Letter* was Johannes de Hese; see Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, pp. 159–179. The James Ford Bell Collection owns a rare copy of Johannes de Hese's *Itinerarius*, published by Guldenschaff in Cologne about 1490.

[9] W. L. Bevan and H. W. Phillott, *An Essay in Illustration of the Hereford*

Mappa Mundi (London, 1873), p. xxvi. There are many maps on which Prester John is located either in Ethiopia or in India: two examples are the planisphere of Mecia de Viladestes (1413), reproduced by Charles de la Roncière, *La découverte de l'Afrique au moyen âge* (Cairo, 1925–1927; 3 vols.), vol. I, plate 1, and the globe of Martin Behaim, discussed in E. G. Ravenstein, *Martin Behaim, His Life and His Globe* (London, 1908), p. 96.

[10] Richard Henning, *Terrae incognitae* (2nd ed.; Leiden, 1944–1956; 4 vols.), vol. 4, pp. 5–14 and 157–162.

[11] John W. Blake, *European Beginnings in West Africa, 1454–1578* (London, 1937), p. 66.

[12] Speranskii, in *Akademiia Nauk S.S.S.R. Izvestiia po russkomu iazyku i slovesnosti*, vol. 3, p. 455.

TWO EASTERN LEGENDS

[1] For a general introduction to the development of legends see Francesco Lanzoni, *Genesi, svolgimento e tramonto delle leggende storiche*, in *Studi e Testi*, no. 43 (Rome, 1925). Of particular interest is the chapter on the union of various elements into one legend; see pp. 105–109.

[2] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 843–844. Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina. Storia della comunità etiopica di Gerusalemme* (Rome, 1943–1947; 2 vols.), vol. 1, p. 191. Paul Devos, "Le miracle posthume de Saint Thomas l'Apôtre," *Analecta Bollandiana*, 66 : 231–275 (1948).

[3] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 831–836. Devos, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 66 : 236–238. For a Brussels manuscript entitled *Miraculum Sancti Thomae Apostoli* which was not known to Zarncke, see *Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum bibliothecae regiae Bruxellensis* (Brussels, 1886–1889; 2 vols.), vol. 1, pp. 132–134. An English translation of this text is given by H. Hosten, "St. Thomas and San Thomé, Mylapore," *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, n.s., 19 : 166–172 (1923).

[4] The summaries of *De adventu* and of Odo's letter are based on the Latin texts published by Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 837–846.

[5] Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina*, vol. 1, pp. 177–179.

[6] For a general introduction to the *Acts of St. Thomas* consult Richard A. Lipsius, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden* (Braunschweig, 1883–1890; 2 vols. in 3 and 1 supplement volume), vol. 1, pp. 225–347. On the dating of the *Acts* consult Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten*, vol. 1, pp.

345–346, and vol. 2, part 2, pp. 418–419. Eugene Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India* (Westminster, Maryland, 1957), p. 2. Ugo Monneret de Villard, "La fiera di Batnae e la traslazione de S. Tomaso a Edessa," *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, series 8. Rendiconti. Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, vol. 6 (Rome, 1951), pp. 77–104, at pp. 91–93. The Syriac version of the *Acts* has been translated into English by William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (London, 1871; 2 vols.), vol. 2, pp. 146–298. For the translation of the Greek version consult Bernhard Pick, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul, Peter, John, Andrew and Thomas* (Chicago, 1909), pp. 222–362.

[7] Max Bonnet, *Acta Thomae*, in *Supplementum codicis apocryphi I* (Leipzig, 1883), pp. 131 and 159.

[8] W. R. Philipps, "The Connection of St. Thomas the Apostle with India," *Indian Antiquary*, 32:1–15 and 145–160, at p. 5 (1903). J. N. Farquhar, "The Apostle Thomas in North India," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 10:80–111, at pp. 82–83 (1926).

[9] Joseph Dahlmann, *Die Thomas-Legende und die älteren historischen Beziehungen des Christentums zum fernen Osten im Lichte der indischen Altertumskunde* (Freiburg, Breisgau, 1912), pp. 43–45. For a description of the coins see Percy Gardner, *The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India* (London, 1886), pp. xliii–xlv and 103–106.

[10] Vincent A. Smith, *The Early History of India* (2nd ed.; Oxford, 1908), pp. 217–222.

[11] J. W. McCrindle, ed. and trans., *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, Publication of the Hakluyt Society, series 1, vol. 98 (London, 1897), pp. 363–373.

[12] Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (3rd ed.; London, 1921–1926; 2 vols. and supplement by H. Cordier), vol. 2, pp. 353–359.

[13] In W. R. Philipps' opinion "there is no evidence at all that the place where St. Thomas was martyred was in Southern India, and all the indications point in another direction," i.e. toward the Indus valley. The other side of the argument has been presented among others by A. E. Medlycott, who was followed by Alfons Väth and Eugene Tisserant. Since neither group could completely persuade the other, L. W. Brown has recently proposed this compromise formula: "We cannot prove that the Apostle worked in south

India any more than we can disprove that fact; but the presence of Christians of undoubtedly ancient origin holding firmly to the tradition, the proof of very considerable commercial contact between the western world and the Malabar coast in the first century of our era, and the probable presence of Jewish colonies at the same time, may for some incline the balance to belief that the truth of the tradition is a reasonable probability. The evidence we have cannot do more than this." See W. R. Philipps, in *Indian Antiquary*, 32:151; A. E. Medlycott, *India and the Apostle Thomas* (London, 1905); and the sharp criticism of this latter study by Francis C. Burkitt in the article "St. Thomas" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed.; Cambridge, England, 1911), vol. 26, p. 863. For other references consult Alfons Väth, *Der heilige Thomas, der Apostel Indiens* (Aachen, 1918), p. 33; Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India*, pp. 3–4; and L. W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St Thomas* (Cambridge, England, 1956), p. 59. On the city of Calamina, or Kalliana, see Philipps, in *Indian Antiquary*, 32:145–151; Dahlmann, *Die Thomas-Legende*, p. 153; Brown, *The Indian Christians of St Thomas*, pp. 55–57.

[14] Dahlmann, *Die Thomas-Legende*, p. 161. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Contendings of the Apostles* (London, 1899–1901; 2 vols.), vol. 2, p. 336.

[15] Philipps, in *Indian Antiquary*, 32:6. Alfred Gutschmid, *Kleine Schriften* (Leipzig, 1889–1894; 5 vols.), vol. 2, p. 339. Sylvain Lévi, "Notes sur les indoscythes," *Journal asiatique*, 9:27–42 (1897).

[16] Alphonse Mingana, "The Early Spread of Christianity in India," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 10:435–510, at pp. 439 and 489–495 (1926).

[17] Nicolaus Nilles, *Kalendarium manuale utriusque ecclesiae orientalis et occidentalis* (Oeniponte [Innsbruck], 1896–1897; 2 vols.), vol. 1, pp. 297–298.

[18] St. Gregory of Tours, *De gloria beatorum martyrum*, Book One, Chapter 32, in Jacques P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina*, vol. 71 (1879), cols. 733–734.

[19] Bonnet, *Acta Thomae*, p. xviii and pp. 159–160. Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 829–840.

[20] A close comparison of the Latin wording of these two remarks in the *Passio Sancti Thomae* and *De adventu* reveals, however, a considerable divergence between them:

Passio Sancti Thomae	*De adventu*
[p. 159] Sicque factum est ut translatum esset de India corpus apostoli et positum in civitate Edissa in locello argenteo quod pendit ex catenis argenteis. In qua civitate nullus haereticus potest uiuere, nullus Iudaeus, nullus idolorum cultor.	[p. 839] A fidelissimis autem christianis universa interius plenissime est [Hulna] habitata. Inter quos nullus erroneus aut infidelis, sicut historia narrat, aliquando conversari potest . . . [p. 840] Intra quod preciosissima concha argentea, sicut et ipsa historia apostoli narrat, argenteis dependet cathenis, cara quidem metallo sed pocior thesauro intra se reposito.

There are two possibilities to explain the difference between the texts. The redactor of *De adventu* could have added these details from memory, or the epilogue could have been inspired by some Syrian merchant living in the Frankish kingdom who had caused this detail to be added to the *Passio Sancti Thomae*. In the latter case the similarity of content and the divergency of expression could be attributed to a common Eastern source of these two sets of remarks. On the Syrian merchants in Gaul see Monneret de Villard, in *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, vol. 6, p. 101. For the peculiar use of "historia" in the passage of *De adventu* consult Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten*, vol. 1, p. 65. A good example of an almost word-for-word borrowing from the epilogue of the *Passio Sancti Thomae* is the chapter on St. Thomas in Ordericus Vitalis' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina*, vol. 188 (1890), col. 163.

[21] Reinhold Röhricht, "Studien zur mittelalterlichen Geographie und Topographie Syrians," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palaestina-Vereins*, 10 : 195–345, at p. 299 (1887).

[22] Reinhold Röhricht, *Geschichte des Königreichs Jerusalem (1100–1291)* (Innsbruck, 1898), p. 232, note 1. In addition to the Arab authors cited by Alexander A. Vasiliev in "The Life of St. Theodore of Edessa," *Byzantion*, 16 : 165–225, at p. 180 (1944), see Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, trans. and ed., *Relation de l'Egypte par Abd al Latif ibn Yousouf* (Paris, 1810), p. 442.

[23] Röhricht, in *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palaestina-Vereins*, 10 : 297. Charles Texier, "La ville et les monuments d'Edesse," *Revue orientale et américaine*, 1 : 326–354, at pp. 337–338 (1859).

[24] Yule and Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol. 2, p. 358–359. The

old shrine of St. Thomas was apparently outside the city of Edessa as one can see from Sozomen's *Ecclesiastical History* (London, 1846), pp. 275–276. The transfer of St. Thomas' remains to a new church inside Edessa took place in 394. Consult the *Chronicle of Edessa* in Joseph S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* (Rome, 1719–1728; 3 vols. in 4), vol. 1, pp. 49 and 399. On the church and the *martyrium* of St. Thomas in the city of Edessa see the *Peregrinatio S. Silviae* in Paul Geyer, "Itinera Hierosolymitana saeculi IV–VIII," *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*, vol. 39 (Vienna, 1898), pp. 37–100, at p. 61.

[25] Texier, in *Revue orientale et américaine*, 1:334–335. On the floods in later times consult a note to the elegy on the capture of Edessa written by Patriarch Nerses, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades. Documents arméniens* (Paris, 1869–1906; 2 vols.), vol. 1, p. 241.

[26] Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Le leggende orientali sui magi evangelici*, in *Studi e testi*, no. 163 (Vatican City, 1952), pp. 153–155. For a different approach see Devos, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 66:249 and 260–264.

[27] Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, p. 128. The account of Elysaeus is given by Zarncke in *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, pp. 120–127. On the travelogue of Johannes de Hese consult Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, pp. 159–171, particularly p. 165.

[28] See the text of the *Passio Sancti Thomae* in Bonnet, *Acta Thomae*, p. 147.

[29] Monneret de Villard, *Le leggende orientali sui magi evangelici*, p. 66, and the article by the same author in *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, vol. 6, pp. 77–104. On the trade routes in this part of Asia in general, consult M. P. Charlesworth, *Trade-Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, England, 1924), pp. 36–56 and 98–111.

[30] William Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature* (London, 1894), pp. 28–30. Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten*, vol. 1, p. 292.

[31] Wilhelm Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen-âge* (Leipzig, 1885–1886; 2 vols.), vol. 1, p. 167.

[32] Ulysse Robert, *Histoire du pape Calixte II* (Paris and Besançon, 1891), pp. 158–160. For the Greek text of the emperor's letter and a Latin translation of it, see A. Theiner and F. Miklosich, *Monumenta spectantia ad unionem Ecclesiarum Graecae et Romanae* (Vienna, 1872), pp. 1–3.

[33] Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina*, vol. 1, pp. 191–192. Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 838.

[34] Jean Dauvillier, "Les provinces chaldéennes 'de l'extérieur' au moyen âge," in *Mélanges offers au R. P. Ferdinand Cavallera* (Toulouse, 1948), pp. 260–316, at pp. 270–272.

[35] John L. La Monte, "To What Extent Was the Byzantine Empire the Suzerain of the Latin Crusading States?" *Byzantion*, 7:253–264, at p. 256 (1932).

[36] Robert L. Nicholson, *Joscelyn I, Prince of Edessa* (Urbana, Ill., 1954), pp. 62–74. On the date of the Patriarch's visit see p. 10 in this volume.

[37] Mingana, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 10:488–489. For different views on the extent of pre-Tartar traveling done by Westerners in Asia see the controversy about Bishop Sighelm's trip to India (ca. 884): Hennig, *Terrae incognitae*, vol. 2, pp. 225–229, and the article by Mingana, pp. 453–454. On traveling in Asia during the Tartar era consult James A. Montgomery, *The History of Yaballaha III, Nestorian Patriarch, and of His Vicar Bar Sauma* (New York, 1927), pp. 3–13.

[38] Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten*, vol. 2, part 2, pp. 420–422. Dauvillier, in *Mélanges offers au R. P. Ferdinand Cavallera*, p. 314. Hennig, *Terrae incognitae*, vol. 2, pp. 396–399.

[39] Röhricht, *Geschichte des Königreichs Jerusalem*, pp. 230–244. Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, England, 1951–1954; 3 vols.), vol. 2, pp. 225–244. Kenneth M. Setton, editor-in-chief, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 1: *The First Hundred Years*, ed. by Marshall W. Baldwin (Philadelphia, 1955), pp. 446–447. On the character of the indigenous population of Edessa see William of Tyre, *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, in the *Recueil des historiens des croisades. Historiens occidentaux* (Paris, 1844–1895; 5 vols. in 6), vol. 1, part 1, p. 708.

[40] Many references to Bishop Hugh of Jabala were collected by Reinhold Röhricht, "Syria sacra," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palaestina-Vereins*, 10:1–48, at p. 27 (1887). For a mention of Bishop Hugh in a medieval obituary see Röhricht, "Der Kreuzzug des Königs Jakob I von Aragonien (1269)," *Mittheilungen des Instituts für Oesterreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 11:372–395, at p. 394 (1890).

[41] Otto of Freising, *Chronicon*, ed. by R. Wilmans in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores*, vol. 20 (Hannover, 1868), pp. 263–266.

[42] Röhricht, *Geschichte des Königreichs Jerusalem*, p. 244.

[43] On Otto of Freising consult the introduction by Charles Ch. Mierow to his English translation of Otto's chronicle: *The Two Cities, A Chronicle of*

Universal History to the Year 1146 A.D. by Otto, Bishop of Freising (New York, 1928). On the meeting with Bishop Hugh in Viterbo and the passage concerning Prester John, see pp. 439–444. Permission to quote the passage given here was granted by the publisher, Columbia University Press.

[44] The final remark of this sentence has produced a considerable controversy. The Latin *sic enim eum nominare solent* has been often taken to mean that the name of Prester John was known before the events of the year 1141; see Constantine Marinescu, "Le Prêtre Jean. Son pays. Explication de son nom," *Académie Roumaine. Bulletin de la section historique*, vol. 10 (Bucharest, 1923), pp. 73–112 at p. 74. This view was not novel, for it had been proposed by an anonymous reviewer of Gustav Oppert's *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte* (Berlin, 1864) in *Historische Zeitschrift*, 13:300–305 (1865). Friedrich Zarncke, however, disagreed with this interpretation; see *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 870, note 2.

[45] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 847–860. For information on Yeh-lü Ta-shih, see Charles E. Nowell, "The Historical Prester John," *Speculum*, 28:435–445 (1953).

[46] Compare Yeh-lü Ta-shih's sacrifice of a black bull and a white horse mentioned in *Liao shi*, in E. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources* (London, 1910; 2 vols.), vol. 1, pp. 208–235, particularly p. 214, with Fah Hian's observations of Buddhist customs, in Samuel Beal, *Travels of Fah-Hian and Sung-Yun* (London, 1869), p. 16.

[47] Pfister, ed., *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo*, p. 90.

[48] A. Vitti, "Apocryphorum de Magis enarrationes," *Verbum Domini*, 7:3–13 (1927).

[49] On the Eastern traditions of the Magi see the excellent book by Monneret de Villard, *Le leggende orientali sui magi evangelici*. The text of the *Book of Seth* can be consulted in Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*, vol. 56 (Paris, 1862), cols. 637–646.

[50] Walter Drum, "Magi," *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 9 (New York, 1910), p. 528.

[51] Gutschmid, *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 333; and Ernst E. Herzfeld, *Archaeological History of Iran* (London, 1935), pp. 64–65.

[52] Paul Casanova, "Notes sur les voyages de Sindbâd le Marin," *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, 20:113–198, at p. 154 (1922).

[53] Edward W. Lane, *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments or The Thousand and One Nights* (New York, 1927), p. 618.

THE ORIGINAL TEXT

[1] Albericus Trium Fontium, *Chronica*, ed. by Paul Scheffer-Boichorst in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores*, vol. 23 (Hannover, 1874), pp. 631–950, at p. 848.

[2] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 878.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 935–946. On the conflicting opinions in regard to the recipient of this papal letter, see Richard Hennig, "Neue Forschungen zur Sage des Priesterkönigs," *Universitas*, 4:1261–1265 (1949) and Marinescu, in *Académie Roumaine*, vol. 10, pp. 77–78. Compare also Yule and Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol. 1, p. 231.

[4] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 872–934. For some additional manuscripts of the Latin *Letter*, consult Alfons Hilka, "Die anglonormannische Versversion des Briefes des Presbyters Johannes," *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Litteratur*, 43:82–112, at pp. 93–94 (1915), and Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York, 1923–1958; 8 vols.), vol. 2, pp. 240–241. On the still unexplored background of a Siegburg manuscript containing an uninterpolated text of Prester John's Letter, see Appendix 1 in Werner Ohnsorge's article "Die Byzanzpolitik Friedrich Barbarossas und der 'Landesverrat' Heinrichs des Löwen," *Deutsches Archiv für Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 6:118–149 (1943). This Siegburg manuscript is now in the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany (MS. 27. 9 Aug. 2°). Dr. Hans Butzmann, the director of the library, has kindly provided me with collations of several passages from this manuscript.

[5] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 877.

[6] Charles V. Langlois, *La vie en France au moyen âge*, vol. 3: *La connaissance de la nature et du monde* (Paris, 1927), pp. 44–70. This volume was also published separately in 1911. Alexander A. Vasiliev, "Prester John, Legend and History," a 262-page typewritten manuscript preserved in the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C. I wish to express my sincerest thanks to Mr. Ernst Kitzinger, director of studies at the Dumbarton Oaks Library, for permitting me to consult this study on Prester John.

[7] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 881–883.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 883–892. The proper origin of this interpolation has not yet been determined. I tend to believe that it had been added from some variant of the story about St. Thomas' having been assigned to build a palace for the

Indian King Gundafor. According to the interpolation, Quasideus, the father of Prester John, has a dream in which he is told to build a palace for his future son. In a Syriac poem by Jacob of Serugh (451–521) Gundafor is inspired to have his palace built by the same device; consult R. Schröter, "Gedicht des Jakob von Sarug über den Palast, den der Apostel Thomas in Indien baute," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 25 : 321–377, at p. 351 (1871). This common element poses the question of the origin of the name "Quasideus" or "Godlike"; was it purely an invention, a corruption of the name "Gundafor," or perhaps even a slight distortion of the name "Misdeus" or "Mazdai"? See the latter part of the last chapter of the present volume.

[9] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 892–897. On the possible origin of the passage concerning the Gog and Magog see Andrew R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), pp. 48–50.

[10] A more detailed English translation of the *Letter* is given by Denison Ross in "Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia" which constitutes Chapter 9 of Arthur P. Newton's *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1926), pp. 174–178. A translation of the entire original *Letter* into English has been made by Alexander A. Vasiliev in his unpublished "Prester John, Legend and History."

[11] For a general discussion of the sources of the *Letter* see Langlois, *La vie en France au moyen âge*, vol. 3, pp. 44–45, and especially the article by Malcolm Letts, "Prester John. Sources and Illustrations," *Notes and Queries*, 188 : 178–180, 204–207, 246–248, 266–268 (January–June 1945) and 189 : 4–7 (July–December 1945).

[12] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 924–934. On Ekkehart of Aura see George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge, England, 1956), pp. 71–72.

[13] Letts, in *Notes and Queries*, 188 : 204–207, 246–248, 266–268.

[14] Pfister, ed., *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo*, Glossary, p. 132. Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 38–58.

[15] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 920. A. Asher, trans. and ed., *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela* (London and Berlin, 1840 ; 2 vols.) vol. 1, pp. 117–120.

[16] Pfister, ed., *Der Alexanderroman*, p. 94, and particularly in another version of the *Historia de proeliis* published by Oswald Zingerle in *Die Quellen*

zum Alexander des Rudolf von Ems, in *Germanistische Abhandlungen*, vol. 4 (Breslau, 1885), pp. 189–190.

[17] Pfister, ed., *Der Alexanderroman*, p. 124, "Quia et in vita mea cogitavi, quis recturus sit vos post meam mortem, custos corporis mei et gubernator vestri Ptolomeus erit."

[18] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 910. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, p. 241.

[19] Leonardo Olschki, "Der Brief des Presbyters Johannes," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 144:1–14 (1931), and two further studies by the same author, *Storia letteraria delle scoperte geografiche; studi e ricerche* (Florence, 1937), pp. 208–209, and *L 'Asia di Marco Polo* (Florence, 1957), pp. 383–384. Olschki is sometimes carried away by the force of his own arguments; thus on one occasion he paraphrases the content of the *Letter* by saying: "In questo smisurato impero non esiste proprietà privata, i campi non sono misurati, la terra e i suoi prodotti appartengono in comune a tutti i suddeti, i quali vivono tranquilli e felici senza privazioni, sicuri da ogni furto e tradimento e senza conoscere avarizia, menzogna ed invidia" (see *Storia letteraria*, p. 208). But where do we find all these characteristics in the original Latin *Letter*? For a criticism of Olschki's theory, see Richard Hennig, "Das Christentum im mittelalterlichen Asien und sein Einfluss auf die Sage vom Priester Johannes," *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, 29:234–252, at p. 246, note 34 (1934).

[20] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 916. Bernard Kuebler, *Iuli Valeri Alexandri Polemi Res Gestae Alexandri Macedonis* (Leipzig, 1888), p. 174.

[21] Zingerle, *Die Quellen zum Alexander des Rudolf von Ems*, p. 223.

[22] Montague Rhodes James, *Marvels of the East. A Full Reproduction of the Three Known Copies, with Introduction and Notes*, printed for the Roxburghe Club (Oxford, 1929), pp. 21, 39, and 46.

[23] D. H. Müller, "Die Recensionen und Versionen des Eldad had-Dani," in *Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Classe*, vol. 41 (Vienna, 1892), pp. 1–80.

[24] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 876, 901–903, 924.

[25] Letts, in *Notes and Queries*, 188:266, and Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, pp. 240–241.

[26] Vasiliev, "Prester John, Legend and History," p. 90.

[27] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 884–885.

[28] On the relative unimportance of bestiaries and similiar literature among the Byzantine Greeks see Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur*, in *Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. by Iwan von Müller, vol. 9, part 1 (Munich, 1897), pp. 873–877. For an analysis of the Russian and Serbian versions of the *Letter* consult Speranskii, in *Akademiia Nauk S.S.S.R. Izvestiia po russkomu iazyku i slovesnosti*, vol. 3, pp. 369–464, and N. Batalin, *Skazanie ob indeiskom tsarstve* (Voronezh, 1876), p. 70. Other Russian studies listed by N. K. Gudzii, *Istoriia drevnei russkoi literatury* (2nd ed.; Moscow, 1941), p. 173, were not available to me.

[29] See p. 53 in this volume.

[30] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 925.

[31] Jules Berger de Xivrey, *Traditions tératologiques* (Paris, 1836), p. 141. The same tract, but from a different manuscript, has been published by Moriz Haupt in his *Opuscula* (Leipzig, 1875–1876; 3 vols.), vol. 2, pp. 221–252, particularly p. 233. Hopeless corruptions of difficult or rare words in medieval manuscripts are rather frequent. Good examples of such confusion are the variants to *mel de nisiotia* in Pfister's edition of the *Historia de proeliis*; see *Der Alexanderroman*, p. 130. Consult also the copious variants in the Latin texts of Alexander's letter to Aristotle, in Walther W. Boer, *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem ad codicum fidem edita et commentario critico instructa* (Hague, 1953), pp. 1–60.

[32] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 927. Hilka, in *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Litteratur*, 43:93–94. Hugo Schulz, ed., *Das Buch der Natur von Conrad von Megenberg* (Greifswald, 1897), p. 138.

[33] Karl Olbrich, "Blendstein," in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 1 (Berlin and Leipzig, 1927), cols. 1395–1396.

[34] See the discussion of *assidios* at p. 46 of the present volume.

[35] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 910. Vasiliev, "Prester John, Legend and History," p. 71. See also the older solution of the two words in question proposed by Langlois, *La vie en France au moyen âge*, vol. 3, p. 57, note 2. In his opinion the Greek *hierax* means "falcon," while *lechos* should be translated as "cup" (*coupe*). *Hierax* is, however, a masculine noun that could not have taken the feminine ending of *ierarcham* or its variants.

[36] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 925. The last example stems from the Wolfenbüttel MS. 27. 9 Aug. 2°. On various meanings of *virtus* consult Antony N. van Omme, *"Virtus," een semantiese studie* (Utrecht, 1946). A medieval usage of this word as a translation of the Greek *dynamidia* has

been discussed by Loren C. MacKinney, in " 'Dynamidia' in Medieval Medical Literature," *Isis*, 24:400–414 (1936).

[37] Consult the standard Latin dictionaries and Avicenna, *Liber Canonis* (Venice, 1562; 2 vols.), vol. 1, fol. 348r. For the references to medieval medical terms I am indebted to Prof. Loren C. MacKinney of the University of North Carolina.

[38] Hennig, *Terrae incognitae*, vol. 2, pp. 144–149. On the gifts received by Harun al Rashid, see Casanova, in *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, 20:113–198.

[39] Ferdinand Chalandon, *Jean II Comnène et Manuel I Comnène* (Paris, 1912), p. 203.

[40] See *Harpers' Latin Dictionary, s. v. hieracia*, and the *Novum glossarium mediae latinitatis*, fascicle for the letter L (Copenhagen, 1957), *s. v. lecythus.*

[41] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 910 and 925. Vasiliev, "Prester John, Legend and History," p. 71.

[42] Pfister, ed., *Der Alexanderroman*, pp. 81, 87, 93, 114.

[43] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 912. Oswald Cockayne, ed., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft* in the Rolls Series, no. 35 (London, 1864–1866; 3 vols.), vol. 2, p. 335.

[44] Cockayne, ed., *Leechdoms*, vol. 1, p. 43. On plants in German folklore see Heinrich Marzell, "Volkskundliches aus den Kräuterbüchern des 16. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, 24:1–19 (1914). The magical qualities of wormwood have been discussed by the same author in his article on "Wermut" in the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 9 (Berlin, 1938–1941), cols. 497–503.

[45] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 920 and 931.

[46] Alphonse Mingana, "The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East: A New Document," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 9:297–371, at p. 323 (1925), and by the same author, "The Early Spread of Christianity in India," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 10:435–514, at p. 494 (1926).

[47] Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3, part 2, p. 493.

[48] P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (2nd ed.; Tokyo, 1951), pp. 34 and 82–83, and A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550* (London, 1930), p. 35.

[49] Vasiliev, "Prester John, Legend and History," p. 90.

[50] Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, pp. 240–241.

[51] Letts, in *Notes and Queries*, 188 : 266.

[52] See pp. 28, 46–47 in this volume.

[53] On the ancient writers who mention Maracanda, see the article "Maracanda," in A. F. Pauly and G. Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 14 (Stuttgart, 1930), cols. 1421–1422. On the same city during the Moslem era consult H. H. Schaeder, "Samarkand," in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 4 (Leyden and London, 1934), pp. 129–131. The Jewish community in Samarkand has been mentioned by Benjamin of Tudela; see Asher, ed., *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, vol. 1, pp. 128–129, and vol. 2, p. 170.

[54] Bevan and Phillott, *An Essay in Illustration of the Hereford Mappa Mundi*, p. 52. For the *Relatio* in Jacques de Vitry's letter, see Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, pp. 5–60, and another edition of Jacques de Vitry's correspondence by Reinhold Röhricht, "Briefe des Jacobus de Vitriaco (1216–1221)," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 14 : 97–118 (1894), 15 : 568–587 (1895), 16 : 72–114 (1896). The later references to Samarkand are conveniently collected by Ivar Hallberg, *L'Extrême Orient dans la littérature et la cartographie de l'Occident des XIII^e^, XIV^e^ et XV^e^ siècles* (Göteborg, 1907), pp. 445–448.

[55] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 912, and Charlesworth, *Trade-Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire*, pp. 68–69. On the wheat traded to India, consult Wilfred H. Schoff, ed., *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (London, 1913), pp. 44–45 and 287.

[56] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 915 and 928.

[57] The earliest notice on the importing of horses to India seems to come from Cosmas Indicopleustes; see McCrindle, ed., *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, p. 372. For other travelers see Marco Polo, in Yule and Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol. 2, pp. 340, 345, and 348, Jordanus de Sévérac, *Mirabilia*, ed. by Eugène Coquebert de Montbret in *Recueil de voyages et de mémoires publié par la Société de Géographie*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1839), p. 42, and John of Montecorvino, in van den Wyngaert, ed., *Sinica Franciscana*, no. 1: *Itinara et relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*, p. 342. This list can be arbitrarily extended.

[58] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 919–920 and 931.

[59] Edmond Faral, *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans*

courtois du moyen âge (Paris, 1913), pp. 81–82. For a description of the temple of Diana at Ephesus see H. Omont, "Les sept merveilles du monde au moyen âge," *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes*, 43:40–59, at pp. 49–50 (1882).

[60] Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, "Die alteste Aegyptische Geschichte nach den Zauber und Wundererzählungen der Araber," *Orient und Occident*, 1:326–340, at pp. 330–331 (1862). Asher, ed., *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, vol. 1, pp. 154–158, and vol. 2, pp. 213–220.

[61] The basic study of this problem is by Hermann Thiersch, *Pharos, Antike, Islam und Occident* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1909). Some thirty-seven Oriental authors are quoted on pp. 39–52. For an analysis of the mirror, its possible function in the lighthouse, and the legends that gathered around it, see pp. 91–96. The curious technical wonder which warned the Romans whenever one of their provinces had rebelled (*Salvatio Romae*), mentioned in a eighth-century tract attributed to Beda, does not contain, however, a mirror; see Beda's *Opera omnia*, published by Migne in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina*, vol. 90 (Paris, 1904), col. 961. All Western references to the magic mirror are of later date than the *Letter* of Prester John. For another interpretation of the origin of the legend see Silvestre de Sacy, *Relation de l'Egypte par Abd al Latif ibn Yousouf*, pp. 182–183 and 239.

[62] Oppert, *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte* (1864 edition), p. 57. The second edition of this study, issued in 1870, has not been available to me. The notice of Oppert's reconsideration of his previous statement comes from Vasiliev, "Prester John, Legend and History," p. 99. Oppert's reservation on second thought was apparently caused by an uncertainty about the date by which the *Voyages* of Sindbad the Sailor was known to have existed; see the anonymous review of Oppert's book in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, 13:302–303 (1865). Later researches dealing with the origin of Sindbad's stories have shown, however, that Oppert's recantation because of an assumed chronological conflict was a mistake; see the recent study by Mia I. Gerhardt, *Les voyages de Sindbad le Marin*, in *Studia litteraria Rheno-Traiectina*, vol. 3 (Utrecht, 1957), pp. 11–15.

[63] Casanova, in *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, 20: 159–167.

[64] Lane, *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments or The Thousand and One Nights*, pp. 618 and 1203–1204; permission to quote this passage was granted by the publisher, Tudor Publishing Company. The actual message of the

letter ends with the words "And peace be on thee," yet the subsequent description of the presents has been traditionally regarded as a part of it; see the text published by Casanova, p. 161, and the texts in the "Medows of Gold" by Masudi, C. Barbier de Meynard, and Pavet de Courteille, trans. and eds., *Maçoudi, Les prairies d'or* (Paris, 1861–1917; 9 vols.), vol. 2, pp. 200–203. On the geographic aspect of Sindbad's travels see C. Raymond Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography* (London, 1905–1906; 3 vols.), vol. 1, pp. 439–450.

[65] See pp. 30–31 in this volume.

[66] Müller, in *Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Classe*, vol. 41, pp. 1–80, especially pp. 4–8.

[67] Malcolm Letts, "Prester John : A Fourteenth-Century Manuscript at Cambridge," in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, series 4, vol. 39 (London, 1947), pp. 19–26. On p. 20 Letts made the following remark: "The author [of the *Letter*] was familiar with the story of Sindbad the Sailor and with Rabbinical learning and tradition." The same opinion had been expressed earlier by Carlo Conti Rossini, in his "Leggende geografiche giudaiche del IX secolo," *Bollettino della Reale Società Geografica Italiana*, series 6, 2 : 160–190, at p. 180 (1925).

[68] Paul Meyer, "Notices sur quelques manuscrits français de la bibliothèque Phillipps, à Cheltenham," in *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale et autres bibliothèques*, vol. 34 (Paris, 1891), pp. 149–258, at pp. 228–231. Letts, in *Notes and Queries*, 188 : 266. Vasiliev, "Prester John, Legend and History," pp. 96–97.

[69] Marinescu, in *Académie Roumaine*, vol. 10, p. 76. Roncière, *La découverte de l'Afrique au moyen âge*, vol. 1, pp. 57–58. Fernand Fleuret, "La lettre de Prêtre Jean, pseudo-roi d'Abyssinie," *Mercure de France*, 148 : 309 and 313 (1936). For the most recent reference to Archbishop Christian as the author of the *Letter*, see W. G. L. Randles, *L'image du Sud-est Africain dans la littérature européenne au XVI^e siècle* (Lisbon, 1959), p. 26.

[70] See p. 41 in this volume.

[71] Hennig, in *Universitas*, 4 : 1262–1263.

[72] Ohnsorge, in *Deutsches Archiv für Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 6 : 147–149.

[73] In Friedrich Zarncke's opinion some traits of *De adventu* "seem to have passed" into the text of the *Letter*; see *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 831. He

refers specifically to paragraph 25 of *De adventu* which seems to correspond to paragraph 51 of the *Letter*. I shall give the Latin text of both passages as they appear in Zarncke's editions:

De adventu	*The Letter*
[p. 839] Inter quos [christianos] nullus erroneus aut infidelis, sicut historia narrat, aliquando conversari potest, quin aut facile resipiscat vel inopinato casu moribundus corruat.	[p. 916] Inter nos nullus mentitur, nec aliquis potest mentiri. Et si quis ibi mentiri coeperit, statim moritur i. quasi mortuus inter nos reputatur, nec eius mentio fit apud nos i. nec honorem ulterius apud nos consequitur.

These passages are sufficiently different to preclude direct copying. If there is a remote similarity, it may come from the fact that the sentence of *De adventu* has been inspired by the epilogue of the *Passio Sancti Thomae* which may have been known to the author of the *Letter*. Zarncke has overlooked this possibility of a common source for both of these passages; see p. 19 in this volume.

[74] See pp. 25–28 in this volume.

THE FRENCH VERSIONS

[1] For the entire paragraph on the Anglo-Norman verse version of the *Letter* see Meyer, in *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale et autres bibliothèques*, vol. 34, pp. 228–235, and Hilka, in *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Litteratur*, 43:82–112.

[2] Hilka, in *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Litteratur*, 43:101.

[3] Paul Meyer, "Le salut Notre Dame. La lettre de Pretre Jean," *Romania*, 39:268–276 (1910).

[4] A brief description of the manuscript Roy. 20 A. XI is given by Sir George F. Warner and Julius P. Gilson in *British Museum. Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collection* ([London], 1921; 4 vols.), vol. 2, pp. 355–356. For the French text of Prester John's letter consult fols. 140v–145. Chapter 26 reads: *Ecce de vermibus qualiter colligent aurum*, which refers to the gold-digging ants of interpolation D; see Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 911.

[5] See pp. 10–12 in this volume.

[6] Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, pp. 134–156. See also Letts, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, series 4, vol. 39, pp. 19–26.

[7] See the old prose text of the French *Letter* published by Achille Jubinal, ed., *Oeuvres complètes de Rutebeuf, trouvère du XIII^e siècle* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1874; 3 vols.), vol. 3, p. 372. Hereafter, this work will be abbreviated as Jubinal, ed., *Rutebeuf*.

[8] Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, pp. 134–139.

[9] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 877–881.

[10] To interpolation D belongs the reference to the *homines habentes oculos ante et retro*; see Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, pp. 137 and 139.

[11] On the chronology of the interpolations see Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 877–878, 884, 893. For a slight correction of the date for interpolation B, see Hilka, *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Litteratur*, 43 : 92.

[12] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 1107–1109, with the text of the *novella*; see also Reinhold Koehler, "La nouvelle italienne de Prêtre Jean et de l'Empereur Frédéric et un récit islandais," *Romania*, 5 : 76–81 (1876). For an identification of Frederick in the *Novellino* with Frederick II, consult Ernst Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194–1250*, an authorized English version by E. O. Lorimer (London, [1931]), p. 323.

[13] Jubinal, ed., *Rutebeuf*, vol. 3, pp. 366–367.

[14] Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, p. 146.

[15] Jubinal, ed., *Rutebeuf*, p. 368, and Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, p. 148.

[16] Jubinal, ed., *Rutebeuf*, p. 373, and Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, p. 152.

[17] Jubinal, ed., *Rutebeuf*, p. 375, and Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, p. 154.

[18] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 920 ; and see p. 37 in the present volume.

[19] Jubinal, ed., *Rutebeuf*, pp. 368, 373.

[20] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 839, and pp. 11–12 in the present volume.

[21] Hermann Suchier, *Denkmäler provenzalischer Literatur und Sprache* (Halle, 1883), pp. 385–386, and Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, p. 128.

[22] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, pp. 154–159.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 159–179.

[24] Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, p. 113.

[25] On the Hebrew manuscripts of the *Letter* see Neubauer, in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1 : 193. For the text of the Hebrew *Letter* addressed to the Emperor Frederick see the series *Kobez al Jad*, or *Sammelband kleiner Beiträge aus Handschriften*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1888), pp. 16–22. For a translation of this

whole Hebrew version of the *Letter* I am deeply indebted to Mrs. Lily Goldblatt, Hillel Foundation, Minneapolis.

[26] Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, pp. 116–117, and *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, pp. 890–892.

[27] For a description of this manuscript, consult the *Catalogue des manuscrits français. Ancien fonds* (Paris, 1868–1895 ; 4 vols.), vol. 4, pp. 507–508.

[28] Achille Jubinal's edition of the older French prose *Letter* is based on one of the best preserved and clearest texts found in manuscript, franç. no. 4963 (formerly franç. no. 9634) of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. For a description of this manuscript see the *Catalogue des manuscrits français. Ancien fonds*, vol. 4, p. 453.

[29] See pp. 57–59 in this volume.

[30] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 924.

[31] Thus, for example, the references to the pilgrims visiting the land of Prester John and the mention of periodical councils were omitted.

[32] Ten separate editions of the younger French *Letter* are cited by Seguin, in *Arts et Traditions populaires*, 5 : 72–73. Another valuable list is given by Curt F. Bühler, "A Prêtre Jean from Poitiers," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 46 : 151–154 (1952). For this reference I am indebted to Prof. Francis M. Rogers.

[33] Seguin, in *Arts et Traditions populaires*, 4 : 318.

[34] *Of the newe landes and of ye people founde by the messengers of the kynge of portyngale named Emanuel . . . Of pope John and his landes and of the costely keyes and wonders molodyes that in that lande is.* The text of this English translation can be conveniently consulted in Edward Arber, ed., *The First Three English Books on America* (Westminster, England, 1895), pp. xxv–xxxvi.

[35] The present edition of the *Letter* has been described in the catalogue of the books of Charles Chadenat, sold at Hotel Drouot on April 27–28, 1954 (Paris, 1954), item 7133. For the identification of the printer's mark and other information on Antoine Caillaut, see A. Claudin, *Histoire de l'imprimerie en France au XV^e^ et au XVI^e^ siècle* (Paris, 1900–1914; 4 vols.), vol. 1, pp. 295–334.

[36] J. Seguin, *Arts et Traditions populaires*, 5 : 73.

[37] Fernand Fleuret, "La lettre de Pretre Jean, pseudo-roi d'Abyssinie," *Mercure de France*, 268 : 294–318 (1936). There exist also several earlier modern editions of the younger French *Letter*; see Ferdinand J. Denis, *Le*

monde enchanté, cosmographie et histoire naturelle fantastiques du moyen âge (Paris, 1843), pp. 185–205, and Pierre A. Gratet-Duplessis, ed., *La nouvelle fabrique des excellens traits de verité, par Philippe d'Alcripe* (Paris, 1853), pp. 189–213.

THE TRANSLATION

[1] The reference to the "treacherous Hospitalers" is probably a mistake, because, as one can see from the remark at the end of this *Letter*, the accusations were directed against the Templars ; see also p. 79 in the present volume.

[2] The Tower of Babel was often placed on medieval maps; see, for example, the Hereford map in G. R. Crone, *The World Map by Richard of Haldingham in Hereford Cathedral* (London, 1954), plate 2. For a description of the "deserted Babylon" see Asher, ed., *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, vol. 1, p. 106, and vol. 2, pp. 136–137.

[3] The pair of Yllerions or Alerions is depicted on the Hereford map and its origin has been discussed by Bevan and Phillott, *An Essay in Illustration of the Hereford Mappa Mundi*, pp. 30–31. See also the text of the French bestiary published by Charles Cahier and Arthur Martin in *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'histoire et de littérature* (Paris, 1847–1856; 4 vols. in 1 and a volume of plates), vol. 2, pp. 162–164.

[4] The mistake of classifying tigers as birds does not occur either in the older French prose version or in the Latin original. Fleuret's remark that the tigers placed among the birds make one smile at the ignorance of the bishop from the North, which is obviously directed at Archbishop Christian, is thus without any foundation; see his article in *Mercure de France*, 268 : 313 (1936). For a possible source of this confusion consult Xivrey, *Traditions tératologiques*, pp. 229–231.

[5] The man-eating nations were located by various ancient and medieval writers in India, Scythia, Caucasus, Ceylon, Java, and Tibet; see J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian* (London, 1877), p. 73. Pauly and Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 9 (Stuttgart, 1916), col. 1312. Bevan and Phillott, *Hereford Mappa Mundi*, pp. 49, 61. Konrad Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte, eine Weltkarte aus dem 13. Jahrhundert* (3rd ed.; Stuttgart, 1900), p. 62. Consult also the travels of William of Rubruck, in Dawson, ed., *The Mongol Mission*, p. 142, and the travels of Nicolo de' Conti in Richard H. Major, ed., *India in the Fifteenth Century*, Publication of the Hukluyt Society, series 1, vol. 22

(London, 1857), p. 8. The reference to King Alexander's imprisonment by the Gog and Magog is another mistake of the younger French *Letter*, since according to the current tradition it was he who imprisoned the "abominable nations"; see Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 911, and the older French *Letter* published by Jubinal, ed., *Rutebeuf*, pp. 359–360. On the Gog and Magog see Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations*, particularly pp. 67–68.

[6] The Great Feminie is the country of the Amazons who were described in interpolation D of the original Latin *Letter*; Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 917. The French text differs so much from the Latin, however, that it may have been drawn from another source. The river Cyson is the Gehon or Gihon of the terrestrial paradise (Genesis 2:9–14). The country of the Amazons was traditionally conceived as an island and some of the later medieval writers located it not far from Socotra; see the travels of Nicolo de' Conti, in Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, p. 20. For a more recent edition of the Conti's travels consult Mario Longhena, *Viaggi in Persia, India e Giava di Nicolo de' Conti* (Milan, 1929), p. 159. The same story has been told by Jordanus de Sévérac, *Mirabilia*, p. 57. For an Arabic tradition of the same phenomenon see P. A. van der Lith and L. M. Devic, eds. and trans., *Livre des merveilles de l'Inde par Bozorg fils de Chahriyar de Ramhormoz* (Leiden, 1883–1886), pp. 27–29.

[7] The fable of wars fought between the pygmies and the cranes is as old as Homer; see Richard Hennig, "Der kulturhistorische Hintergrund der Geschichte vom Kampf zwischen Pygmäen und Kranichen," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, n.s., 81:20–24 (1932). For other ancient writers see McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, p. 74. For their representation on medieval maps see the Hereford and Ebstorf maps.

[8] This story of a unicorn's fight with a lion is not known outside the *Letter*, see Odell Shepard, *The Lore of the Unicorn* (Boston and New York, 1930), pp. 241–242. The French version goes back to the Latin paraphrase; see Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, pp. 141–142. See also G. Schönberger, "Narwal-Einhorn. Studien über einen seltenen Werkstoff," *Städel-Jahrbuch*, 9:167–247 (1935–1936). On the black color of a unicorn's horn see McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, p. 59.

[9] On the phoenix as a marvel of nature see H. Omont, "Les sept merveilles du monde au moyen âge," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 43:40–59, at

pp. 53–54 (1882). Compare also the various texts of medieval bestiaries published by Cahier and Martin in *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'histoire et de littérature*, vol. 2, pp. 183–185.

[10] On the importance of the words *assidios* and *permanable* for the establishment of relations among the various versions of the *Letter*, see Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, p. 115.

[11] For references to pepper woods made by ancient and medieval writers see Bevan and Phillott, *An Essay in Illustration of the Hereford Mappa Mundi*, p. 39. Consult also James, *Marvels of the East*, pp. 35 and 43.

[12] On the substantial amount of literature on the fountain of youth consult Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington, Ind., 1955–1958; 5 vols. and index), vol. 2, p. 185, and Leonardo Olschki, "Ponce de Leon's Fountain of Youth: History of a Geographical Myth," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 21:361–385 (1941).

[13] The Sandy Sea has been discussed by J. L. Lowes, "The Dry Sea and the Carrenare," *Modern Philology*, 3:1–46 (1905). On the Liu sha desert of the Chinese sources see E. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources* (London, 1910; 2 vols.), vol. 1, p. 27, note 47. Jordanus de Sévérac placed the Sandy Sea closer to the West; see his *Mirabilia*, p. 41. On Alexander's flight see Pfister, ed., *Der Alexanderroman*, p. 126.

[14] This and the subsequent passage are based on a common confusion of the ten lost tribes of Israel with the peoples of Gog and Magog; see Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations*, pp. 70–86. For a discussion of the wall of the Gog and Magog see the same study, pp. 91–104, and Edward L. Stevenson, *Genoese World Map, 1457, Facsimile* (New York, 1912), pp. 39–45. It is possible that this concept of the wall has been inspired by the Great Wall of China; see Hennig, *Terrae incognitae*, vol. 2, pp. 169–185.

[15] In the original Latin *Letter* this paragraph referred to the subterranean river which together with its qualities could have been borrowed from some Oriental source; compare the sixth voyage of Sindbad the Sailor, in Victor Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes* (Liège, 1892–1922; 12 vols.), vol. 7 (1903), p. 25.

[16] On *salamander*, consult the bestiaries published by Cahier and Martin, in *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'histoire et de littérature*, vol. 3, pp. 271–274. For other references, see Bevan and Phillott, *Hereford Mappa Mundi*, p. 87, and Yule and Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol. 1, pp. 212–217.

[17] See p. 78 in this volume.

[18] The literature on the cynocephali, or dog-headed monsters, is so extensive that no attempt can be made here to cover it. For the classical writers see McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, p. 79, and Pauly and Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 9, col. 1305. On medieval writers consult Bevan and Phillott, *Hereford Mappa Mundi*, pp. 159–161. See also Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5:159–197 (1942); also Zofia Ameisenowa, "Animal-Headed Gods, Evangelists, Saints and Righteous Men," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 12:21–45 (1949); and Walter Loeschke, "Sanctus Christophorus Canineus," in *Edwin Redslob zum 70 Geburtstag*, ed. by Georg Rohde and others (Berlin, 1955), pp. 33–82. For these bibliographic references I am indebted to Prof. Robert L. Reynolds, University of Wisconsin. The cynocephali of the younger French *Letter* are a recent interpolation, for they do not appear in the older French prose versions or in the Latin paraphrase. Their features are here commingled with those of the ichthyophagi or fish-eaters. On the latter see J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature* (Westminster, England, 1901), p. 82.

[19] See the bestiaries published by Cahier and Martin, in *Mélanges d'archéologie d'histoire et de littérature*, vol. 4, pp. 85–87, and Charles Cahier, *Nouveaux mélanges d'archéologie d'histoire et de littérature sur le moyen âge* (Paris, 1874–1877; 4 vols.), vol. 1, p. 137. For an Oriental counterpart consult van der Lith and Devic, eds. *Livre des merveilles de l'Inde par Bozorg fils de Chahriyar de Ramhormoz*, p. 102.

[20] On the tree of life consult Rose Jeffries Peebles, "The Dry Tree: Symbol of Death," in *Vassar Mediaeval Studies*, ed. by Christabel F. Fiske (New Haven, 1923), pp. 59–79.

[21] See p. 61 in this volume.

[22] The tomb of the Prophet Daniel in Susa and his synagogue in Babylon have been mentioned by Benjamin of Tudela; see Asher, ed., *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, vol. 1, pp. 106 and 117–120, and vol. 2, pp. 137 and 152–154.

[23] The manuscript of the Bibliothèque Nationale, franç. no. 5084, fol. 17r, reads here: "Et dedans ya la meilleur eaue et le meilleur vin du monde et qui en boit n'a desir des biens temporelz et ne scet on dont vient celle eaue ne ou elle va."

[24] Compare this with the older French *Letter*; Jubinal, ed., *Rutebeuf*, p. 372. In the Latin paraphrase of the Cambridge manuscript the bodyguard of Prester John is composed of Englishmen; see Zarncke, *Berichte*, vol. 29, pp. 151–152.

THE ORIGIN OF PRESTER JOHN

[1] Consult d'Avazac's introduction to his edition of Plano Carpini's *History of the Mongols* in *Recueil de voyages et de mémoires publié par la Société de Géographie*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1839), pp. 558–565, and Oppert, *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte*, pp. 134–140.

[2] See Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 7, p. 855, and p. 28 in this volume.

[3] Consult the second part of "Two Eastern Legends" in this volume.

[4] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, pp. 5–59, and p. 48 in this volume.

[5] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, pp. 13–14. See also a brief note by the same author, "Zur Sage vom Priester Johannes," *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde*, 2:611–615 (1877).

[6] A detailed discussion of this aspect of Prester John's legend has been offered by Hennig, *Terrae incognitae*, vol. 3, pp. 11–23. Hennig identified "King David" with the Georgian King George IV, who had been "somehow" confused with his forebear King David II (1089–1125). This explanation is not very satisfactory; I believe that it was the Hebrew legend of King David's forthcoming return that misled the informants of Jacques de Vitry.

[7] Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3, part 2, pp. 485–486. For an English translation of the same passage consult Mingana, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 9:308–309. See also Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, pp. 96–100.

[8] For William of Rubruck's passage on Prester John see Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, pp. 87–96, and van den Wyngaert, ed., *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1: *Itinera et relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*, pp. 205–208. The same passage in English translation is found in Dawson, ed., *The Mongol Mission*, pp. 121–123. On Marco Polo's comments see Yule and Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol. 1, pp. 238–251. For the text of the *Secret History* see S. A. Kozin, *Sokrovennoe skazanie* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1941), pp. 120–140; parts of this text have been translated into English by H. H. Howorth, "The Northern Frontagers of China. The Kirais and Prester John," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, n.s., 21:361–431 (1889).

[9] For the archaeological evidence see W. R. Taylor, "Nestorian Crosses in China," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 55:56–60 (1938).

[10] See the itinerary of William of Rubruck in Dawson, ed., *The Mongol Mission*, p. 145.

[11] Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. 3, part 2, pp. 487–488. The derivation of "Prester John" from "Wang Khan" has been upheld by Howorth, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.s., 21:361–375, and by Olschki, who applied it, however, to Yeh-lü Ta-shih; see his *L'Asia di Marco Polo*, pp. 380–381. For a very questionable ascription of the titles Gur Khan and Wang Khan to Yeh-lü Ta-shih, who is made into a ruler of the Keraits, see Hennig, in *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, n.s., 29:245, and *Terrae incognitae*, vol. 2, pp. 438–460. This completely baseless supposition has been attacked by Charles E. Nowell, in *Speculum*, 28:443–444.

[12] See Paul Pelliot and Louis Hambis, eds. and trans., *Histoire des campagnes de Gengis Khan*, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1951), pp. 191–213.

[13] Oppert, *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte*, p. 120, and Vasiliev, "Prester John, Legend and History," pp. 64 and 99.

[14] Jordanus de Sévérac, *Mirabilia*, pp. 55–57.

[15] For the remark of Odoric, consult van den Wyngaert, ed., *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1: *Itinera et relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*, p. 483. On John of Montecorvino see the same publication, p. 348.

[16] See the journey of Jacob von Bern to the Holy Land (1346–1347), in Reinhold Röhricht, *Deutsche Pilgerreisen nach dem Heiligen Lande* (Berlin, 1880), pp. 56–57.

[17] This division becomes particularly clear on the so-called T-in-O maps; see Leo Bagrow, *Die Geschichte der Kartographie* (Berlin, 1951), pp. 28–36. Consult also Marinescu, in *Académie Roumaine*, vol. 10, pp. 108–109.

[18] From the manuscript entitled *Itinerarium Antonii Ususmaris civis Januensis (1455)* of the University Library in Genoa (B I 36), fol. 2v. For a comment on this manuscript and its content see Roncière, *La découverte de l'Afrique au moyen âge*, vol. 2, p. 121–122.

[19] Marinescu, in *Académie Roumaine*, vol. 10, p. 107.

[20] In 1945 Constantine Marinescu defended his thesis in the article "Encore une fois le problème du Prêtre Jean," in *Académie Roumaine, Bulletin de la section historique*, vol. 26, part 2 (Bucharest, 1945), pp. 203–222.

[21] Marinescu, in *Académie Roumaine*, vol. 10, p. 104.

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94.

[23] Denison Ross, "Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia," in Arthur P. Newton, *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1926), pp. 174–194, at pp. 184–185.

[24] Eugen Mittwoch, "Dschanhoi — die amharische Bezeichnung für 'Majestät,'" *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete*, 25:281–286 (1911).

[25] Carlo Conti Rossini, "Les listes des rois d'Aksoum," *Journal asiatique*, series 10, 14:263–320, at pp. 283 and 316 (1909).

[26] Bartholomeo Nogara, ed., *Scritti inediti e rari di Biondo Flavio*, in *Studi e Testi*, no. 48 (Rome, 1927), p. 23.

[27] See p. 82 in the present volume and Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, p. 6.

[28] Criticism of Marinescu's thesis has been also voiced by Alexander A. Vasiliev and Leonardo Olschki; compare "Prester John, Legend and History," pp. 110–111, and *L'Asia di Marco Polo*, p. 379, note 8. See also Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina*, vol. 1, pp. 97–98. I was unable to consult the article by G. Gerola, "Nelle nebbie della storia etiopica. Prete Gianni, monarca leggendario," *Le vie d'Italie e del mondo*, 4:241–251 (1936) as it is cited by Marinescu in *Académie Roumaine*, vol. 26, p. 203.

[29] Philipp Bruun, "Die Verwandlungen des Presbyter Johannes," *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin*, 9:279–314, at pp. 291–292 (1876).

[30] See p. 28 in this volume.

[31] Zarncke, *Abhandlungen*, vol. 8, p. 157.

[32] Vasiliev, "Prester John, Legend and History," p. 113.

[33] See pp. 29–31 in this volume.

[34] See pp. 61–62 in this volume.

[35] Quoted by Olschki, *Storia letteraria delle scoperte geografiche*, p. 200.

[36] Paul Peeters, "Le martyrologe de Rabban Sliba," *Analecta Bollandiana*, 28:129–197, at p. 164 (1908). Compare this entry with the one given by Nicolaus Nilles, *Kalendarium manuale utriusque ecclesiae orientalis et occidentalis* (Oeniponte [Innsbruck], 1896–1897; 2 vols.), vol. 1, p. 460. Here under October 6 one reads: "Coronatio Thomae Apostoli, et regis Indiae et Misadi ejusque filii Joannis et matris ejus Tartariae . . . " There was apparently a tradition common to all branches of the Syrian churches which commemorated the martyrdom of St. Thomas along with the members of the Indian royal family.

[37] A very brief summary of the *Acts* is given on pp. 14–16 in this volume. For the full texts of Syriac or Greek versions of the *Acts* consult Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2, pp. 146–298, and Pick, *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul, Peter, John, Andrew and Thomas*, pp. 222–362.

[38] Wright, *Apocryphal Acts*, p. 273, and Pick, *The Apocryphal Acts*, pp. 338–339.

[39] Wright, *Apocryphal Acts*, pp. 283–284, and Pick, *The Apocryphal Acts*, p. 348.

[40] Wright, *Apocryphal Acts*, p. 297: "And all the brethren who were there were assembled together, and praying and offering the (Eucharistic) offering and breaking (bread), because Judas [i.e. Thomas] had made Sifur a priest and Vizan a deacon, on the mountain, when he was going to die." Pick, *The Apocryphal Acts*, p. 361: "For, when Judas [i.e. Thomas] was led to death, he had made Sifor a presbyter in the mountain, and Vazan a deacon."

[41] See the first part of "Two Eastern Legends" in the present volume. On Thomas' popularity in the whole East consult Nilles, *Kalendarium manuale utriusque ecclesiae orientalis et occidentalis*, vol. 1, p. 296.

[42] R. Schröter, "Gedicht des Jacob von Sarug über den Palast den der Apostel Thomas in Indien baute," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 25 : 321–377 (1871), and the comment on this homily by Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature*, p. 71, note 2. On "popular hagiography" in connection with the St. Thomas tradition consult Monneret de Villard, in *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, vol. 6, pp. 100–101.

[43] Hugo Buchthal, "A Miniature of the Pentecost," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1939, pp. 613–615.

[44] On the destruction of the famous library of Edessa see Reinhold Röhricht, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin, 1874–1878; 2 vols.), vol. 2, pp. 57 and 93.

[45] Budge, *Contendings of the Apostles*, vol. 2, pp. 353–355.

[46] Brown, *The Indian Christians of St Thomas*, pp. 48–49.

[47] Jordanus de Sévérac, *Mirabilia*, p. 51; see also Roberto Cessi, "Itinerario indiano di Francesco dal Bocchier del 1518," in *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, series 8. Rendiconti. Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, vol. 6 (Rome, 1951), p. 243.

[48] See Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten*, supplement, pp. 24–25. The entry is made under October 6, just as in the Syrian calendars.

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