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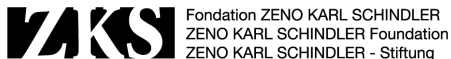
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# *An Offset Fragment in Uncial from Montpellier*

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**Abstract:** This paper examines a hitherto unknown eighth-century offset fragment of the Vulgate (Luke 24:7–10), probably of Insular origin, found on the lower board of MS Montpellier, Bibliothèque Universitaire Historique de Médecine, H 226.

**Keywords:** Uncial script, Insular manuscripts, Gospel

As often happens with fragments, interesting discoveries are made when one is not looking for them. While I was using digital reproductions of MS Montpellier, Bibliothèque Universitaire Historique de Médecine, H 226, a twelfth-century codex presumably written in France, which preserves Pseudo-Quintilian's *Major Declamations*,<sup>1</sup> an offset caught my attention: I could clearly recognise some letters in uncial script impressed on the lower wooden board. After examination of a more detailed digital reproduction [Figure 1] and some enhancement of the image to improve its legibility

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\* I owe a debt of gratitude to Bill Duba for his encouragement, and to Lisa Fagin Davis and Paolo Fioretti for their palaeographical advice. Sincerest thanks to Julia Crick, who read an earlier version of this paper, provided extensive feedback, and suggested that I compare the fragment with those now at Avranches and St. Petersburg (*CLA* 6.730 + 11.730).

1 On the transmission of the *Major Declamations*, see L. Costantini, "Pseudo-Quintilian. *Declamationes Maiores*", in *The Oxford Guide to the Latin Classics*, ed. J.A. Stover, Oxford (forthcoming), and more extensively A. Stramaglia, [*Quintilian*] *The Major Declamations. Translated by M. Winterbottom, with notes by B. Santorelli and M. Winterbottom*, Cambridge, MA/London 2021, vol. 1, XLIII–LIV. For information about MS Montpellier, H 226 and its possible origin, see B. Munk-Olsen, *L'étude des auteurs classiques latins aux XIe et XIIe siècles*, v. 2, Paris 1985, 298–299. Digital reproductions of this codex are available online: [https://ged.biu-montpellier.fr/florabium/jsp/nodoc.jsp?NO-DOC=2013\\_DOC\\_MONI\\_MBUM\\_1](https://ged.biu-montpellier.fr/florabium/jsp/nodoc.jsp?NO-DOC=2013_DOC_MONI_MBUM_1).



**Figure 1:** Montpellier, Bibliothèque Universitaire Historique de Médecine, Université de Montpellier, codex H 226, lower board. Credits: SCDI Montpellier - Service photographique

[Figures 2 and 3], it proved possible to identify the text, which turned out to be a passage from the Vulgate, Luke 24:7–10.

Since, to my knowledge, the fragment does not appear in Lowe's *Codices Latini Antiquiores* (hereafter *CLA*), or any catalogue, I offer below a tentative transcription, followed by a physical and palaeographical description. I conclude by speculating about the codex from which the offset fragment came before its dismemberment.

## Transcription<sup>2</sup>

lines

- 1 7[PECCA]T̄O[RVM ET]
- 2 [CRVCIFIGI ET]
- 3 [DI]Ē [T]Ē[R]T̄I[A R]Ē[SVRGERE]
- 4 8[ET RECORDATAE] SVN[T]
- 5 [V]ER[B]ORV[M] ĒIVS
- 6 9Ē[T] RĒ[G]RESSAE
- 7 [A MONV]MĒT̄O
- 8 [NVNTIAVERV]N̄[T] HĀĒ[C]
- 9 [OMNIA ILL]IS V̄NDECIM
- 10 Ē[T CETE]RIS OM̄[N]IB[VS]
- 11 10[ERAT] AVTEM MARIA
- 12 MAGDA[L]Ē[NE]
- 13 ET [IOANNA]
- 14 ET MARIA [IACOBI]
- 15 ET CETERAE [QVAE]
- 16 [C]VM ĒI[S ERANT]
- 17 QV[AE] DĪ[CEBANT]

## Description

The wooden boards are slightly larger than the leaves of MS Montpellier, H 226, which measure approximately 260 × 180 mm.<sup>3</sup>

- 2 The superscript numbers in the transcription refer to the verses of Luke 24. I have added a dot under letters that are hardly legible.
- 3 This information is taken from the online description of the codex; see the link in n. 1 above.





Figure 2, 3: detail of reproduction after postprocessing (mirroring and enhanced contrast)

The offset fragment is in a poor state of conservation and its script is predominantly visible only on the board itself, although the bottom part of the turn-in still retains traces of text (see line 17 of the transcription). The spacing between the lines is ample, the letters are monumental in size and the words are clearly divided, with one line at times transmitting only a couple of words. This *mise en page* makes the text very easily readable and this might suggest that the book was used in the liturgy.

As for the origin of the fragment, since it is not known how the membrane was prepared, we can only rely on palaeography. The considerable number of visible lines and the imposing size of the uncial letters, which look highly elaborate and artificial with triangular serifs and the ornate, leaf-shaped *A*, recall the features of impressive manuscripts of the Old and New Testament produced in England, south of the river Humber, during the eighth century. Examples of these include the so-called Vespasian Psalter (London, British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian A 1, *CLA* 2.193), the Stockholm Codex Aureus (National Library of Sweden, A 135, *CLA* 11.1642), the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (Cambridge, British Library, lat. 1502, *CLA* 5.526), and the set of fragments of the Vulgate, now split between the Bibliothèque patrimoniale of Avranches, MS 48 + 66 + 71,<sup>4</sup> and the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg, MS lat. O.v.I.1 (*CLA* 6.730 and 11.730, respectively). These fragments come from a codex in two columns, each of 22 lines, which is believed to have been produced in Southumbria in the second half of the eighth century.<sup>5</sup> Their script closely resembles that of our offset fragment: although its visible portions do not exhibit the same long ascenders and descenders, or the foot on *M* in final position, one can notice the presence of both the uncial and capital *A*, the latter used in final position, within the same word; see line 14: *MDARIA*. Indeed, an eighth-century insular copy of the Vulgate, presumably in two

4 Digitisations of these fragments are available online: <https://arca.irht.cnrs.fr/ark:/63955/md698623mp90#Description>.

5 E.A. Lowe dates them to s. VIII<sup>1</sup> in the *CLA* and in his *English Uncial*, Oxford 1960, 22, no. XXIX, where he recognises the insular preparation of the leaves. D.H. Wright, "Some Notes on English Uncial", *Traditio* 17 (1961), 441–456, at 449 prefers dating them to s. VIII<sup>2</sup>.

columns like the Avranches + St. Petersburg fragments, could have been the type of book from which our offset comes.<sup>6</sup>

The legible portions of the fragment do not exhibit significant variants from the standard text of the Vulgate. One can only wonder whether the uncial flyleaf was intentionally removed from the codex of the *Major Declamations* or if it simply fell out. No doubt, should this flyleaf be found, it would be possible to offer a more accurate description of its script, its origin and dating.<sup>7</sup> Harder still is to speculate about the reason why this eighth-century leaf ended up becoming a flyleaf. If one accepts the hypothesis of its insular origin, given the strong connections between England and France during the early Middle Ages,<sup>8</sup> maybe a copy of the Vulgate would have been brought to France at that time. This old and perhaps damaged book, after falling in disuse, was dismembered and one of its pages was eventually re-employed as a flyleaf of a twelfth-century manuscript, now MS Montpellier, H 226. This codex seems to still retain its original Romanesque binding,<sup>9</sup> which would point to a twelfth-century reuse of our uncial fragment probably as a hooked endleaf. The fact that the three Avranches fragments were reused as flyleaves in twelfth- and thirteenth-century MSS<sup>10</sup> might perhaps point to a phenomenon typical of France during s. XII/XIII, if we accept that MS Montpellier, H 226 was produced there.

We do not know in which scriptorium MS Montpellier, H 226 was written and bound. A later annotation at the top of f. 1r indicates that the MS was owned by the Troyes-born scholar Pierre Pithou. After his death in 1596, the book came into the possession of his brother, François Pithou, as shown by the catalogue of his manuscripts

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6 As far as I could see by overlapping the reproductions of our fragment and Avranches, MS 66 in postprocessing, the slightly different spacing prevents us from proposing the same origin for our fragment.

7 Although the flyleaf itself could not be found, I am very grateful to Pascaline Todeschini and the librarians at the Bibliothèque Universitaire Historique de Médecine of Montpellier for searching for it.

8 Cf. R. McKitterick, *Books, Scribes and Learning in the Frankish Kingdoms, 6<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Farnham/Burlington, VT 1994, 395–432.

9 My thanks to Bill Duba and Simona Inserra for sharing with me their codicological expertise on this.

10 See *CLA* 6.730 for further information.



(Leuven, KU Leuven Bibliotheken Bijzondere Collecties, Ms. 1113, f. 6v), which refers to a book of *Quintiliani Declamationes*. After the death of François Pithou in 1621, the book was bequeathed to the College of the Oratory of Troyes, as shown by the *ex libris* at the bottom of f. 1r (*Quintiliani Declamationes ex libris oratorii collegii Trecentis*),<sup>11</sup> after which it eventually migrated to Montpellier. If this MS of the *Major Declamations* was produced in the Troyes area, that would provide us with information about the location of the uncial codex before its dismemberment. Unfortunately, the *CLA* and the *Earlier Latin Manuscripts* database do not offer information about other codices in uncial preserved at Troyes during the Middle Ages. However, it is worth noting that a MS of Gregory the Great's *Regula Pastoralis* written in an Italian uncial between s. VI/VII (now Troyes, Bibliothèque de conservation, Médiathèque Jacques Chirac, MS 504, *CLA* 6.838) was bequeathed to the College of the Oratory of Troyes by François Pithou. More interesting still is the case of two flyleaves in uncial (s. VI/VII, unknown origin) from Eucherius' *De Quaestio-nis Veteris Testamenti*, which are found in a tenth-century codex of Lactantius' *Divine Institutes* and *De Opificio Dei*, now Montpellier, Bibliothèque Universitaire Historique de Médecine, H 241 (*CLA* 6.789). Like the witness of the *Major Declamations*, this book was also owned by Pierre Pithou before passing to his brother François, to the College of the Oratory of Troyes, and then to Montpellier. The MS was at the Abbey of Saint-Arnould of Metz during the twelfth century, as revealed by the partly erased *ex libris* towards the end of f. 186v. It is presumably there that the first eight folios were added

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11 These annotations on f. 1r were noticed by H. Dessauer, *Die Handschriftliche Grundlage der neunzehn grösseren Pseudo-Quintilianschen Declamationen*, Leipzig 1898, 15, and G. Lehnert, *Quintiliani quae feruntur Declamationes XIX Maiores*, Leipzig 1905, XII. However, their dating of the *ex libris* of the College of the Oratory of Troyes to s. XV is too early, given that it was founded in 1617; see J. Murard, "Les Pithou et l'école", in *Les Pithou Les Lettres et la paix du royaume*, ed. M.-M. Fragonard and P.-E. Leroy, Paris 2003, 65–88. A dating of s. XVII is, indeed, more accurate also on a palaeographical level. My thanks to Veronika Drescher for her advice on the manuscripts of Pierre and François Pithou.

or restored.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps at this same time the codex was rebound and the uncial fragments were used as flyleaves, which would conform to the phenomenon of the reuse of uncial fragments in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, tentatively outlined above.

This information is too scanty to allow a full understanding of the reuse of the Montpellier offset fragment or other fragments in uncial. Nonetheless, the publication of this and the seventh-century uncial fragment discovered by Pieter Beullens in 2022<sup>13</sup> offer hope that similar unrecorded early fragments may resurface now that increasing numbers of collections are being digitised and made available online.

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12 On this MS, see L.K. Barker, "MS Bodl. Canon. Pat. Lat. 131 and a Lost Lactantius of John of Salisbury: Evidence in Search of a French Critic of Thomas Becket", *Albion* 22 (1990), 21–37, at 27. For the reproductions of the MS and the flyleaves (made from the black-and-white microfilm) see: [https://ged.scdi-montpellier.fr/florabium/jsp/nodoc.jsp?NODOC=2023\\_DOC\\_MONT\\_MBUM\\_60](https://ged.scdi-montpellier.fr/florabium/jsp/nodoc.jsp?NODOC=2023_DOC_MONT_MBUM_60).

13 Cf. P. Beullens, "An Unnoticed Uncial Fragment of the *Passio Iuliani*", *Fragmentology* 5 (2022), 87–94.