



Guillaume de Nangis. "How Sir John of Acre, butler of France, who was on guard, was deceived by some Saracens who requested baptism | Comment mesire Jehan d'Acre, bouteillier de France qui faisait le guet fu deceus d'aucuns Sarrazins qui requéraient le baptesme". Trans. Tirumular (Drew) Narayanan. *Global Medieval Sourcebook*. 2021. sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/guillaume_de_nangis_john_acre/.

How Sir John of Acre, butler of France, who was on guard, was deceived by some Saracens who requested baptism

Comment mesire Jehan d'Acre, bouteillier de France qui faisait le guet fu deceus d'aucuns Sarrazins qui requéraient le baptesme

Text Information

Author | Guillaume de Nangis

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Genre | Annals and chronicles

Source | Viard, Jules. *Les Grandes Chroniques De France*. Vol. 10, Société De L'Histoire De France, 1920.

Collection | Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Premodern World; Making History: Chronicles, Legends and Anecdotes

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Transcription, translation and introduction by Tirumular (Drew) Narayanan.

Introduction to the Text

This translated excerpt comes from Guillaume de Nangis's *Life of St. Louis* produced near Paris around 1300 CE. Predating Louis's more famous biography by Jean de Joinville, the chronicle celebrates the life, accomplishments and sometimes miraculous abilities of the famous king who was canonized in 1297. The version presented here recounts an episode during the French king's final crusade, an expedition into Tunisia as part of the Eighth Crusade (1270).

According to the text, King Louis IX had been invited to Tunisia by the "king of Tunis"—the Hafsid ruler al-Mustansir, who promised to convert to Christianity. However, upon the arrival of Louis's forces, the Islamic leader reneges on his word. After sacking Carthage, the crusader army returns and sets up camp. Three "Saracens" (a medieval pejorative term that racialized Muslims) approach John of Acre, the butler of France, claiming that they want to convert to Christianity. Suddenly, a different, larger group of Muslims conducts a surprise attack, killing many Christians. John drags the first group before King Louis where their leader claims that he had no part in the ambush, insisting that his political rival committed this treachery. The king does not believe their story but releases them and orders the construction of defenses around the camp to prevent future assaults. The "Saracen commander" is received by his own camp with a warm welcome, suggesting that conversion was never really his intention.

While scholars agree that al-Mustansir may have considered converting for his own political purposes, there remains discussion about how to read the relationship between the text and the image that accompanies it on Royal MS 16 G VI f.442r (see icon image; a larger resolution image can be viewed [here](#)). I have recently argued that this section of the manuscript serves as an allegory of al-Mustansir's actions, as well as a Latin Christian polemic on the duplicity of "Saracens" writ large. It is notable that the Hafsid Muslims depicted on 440v and 442r are the only "shoeless Saracens" in the entirety of the manuscript, suggesting that illuminators wanted to cast these figures as particularly barbarous for their inadvertent role in Louis's death. Indeed, the heraldic motifs on the "Saracen" shield further dehumanize the Muslims by affiliating them with either pigs or dogs.

Introduction to the Source

This version of Guillaume de Nangis's text is included in the *Grandes Chroniques de France* made for John II of France (British Library-Royal MS 16 G VI). These royal chronicles blend historical and mythological elements, functioning as a source of political legitimacy for both the Capetian and Valois dynasties of French monarchs.

About this Edition

The translator has used Jules Viard's edition of *Les Grandes Chroniques De France* for translation. The text may be found in the appendix (volume 10).



Please note that while this text largely follows that of Royal MS 16 G VI there is some nuance in the rubric. Viard's edition reads "Comment mesire Jehan d'Acre, bouteillier de France qui faisait le guet fu deceus d'aucuns Sarrazins qui requéraient le baptesme," which we have translated as "How Sir John of Acre, butler of France, who was on guard, was deceived by some Saracens who requested baptism." Wollesen has previously transcribed the rubric from Royal MS 16 G VI as "comment mesire jehan dacre bouteillier de France qui faisoit le guet daucuns sa reqroient le baptesme," which he translates as "How Sir John of Acre, butler of France, is on the lookout for some Saracens who request to be baptized."

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Further Reading

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- *Introduces an opposing interpretation of 442r as an anti-Islamic Latin Christian polemic.*

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How Sir John of Acre, butler of France, who was on guard, was deceived by some Saracens who requested baptism

Comment mesure Jehan d'Acre, bouteillier de France qui faisait le guet fu deceus d'aucuns Sarrazins qui requéraient le baptesme

Un jour que le conte d'Eu, Auphons et mesure Jehan d'Acre son frere bouteillier de France faisoient le guet de nuis, avint que III chevaliers sarrazins vindrent au bouteillier, et le requistrent que il fussent chrestiens; et en signe de loiauté leur mistrent leurs mains seur leurs chiez, et baisoient le mains de nos gens en signe de subjection, et se rendirent au bouteillier. Li bouteilliers lis fist mener en son paveillon et ala tantost au roi Loos et le dist ce que li Sarrazin avoient fait, les quex li rois commanda à garder bien diligamment.

Après ce, quant li bouteilliers fu retornez à son guet, cen autres Sarrazins geterent jus leurs lances et firent autel signe comme les autres III avoient fait, et vindrent au bouteillier et le requistrent le baptesme a grant instance. Et ainsi comme li bouteilliers et sa gent entendoient à ce que les Sarrazins disoient, tout plain d'autres Sarrazins s'esmurent touz ensamble, lis lances levées et se firent sus le bouteillier et sa gent, q' il les firent fuir et crier aus armes, aus armes. Tantost li oz de chrestiens s'estourmi et crierent aus armes. Mès avant que il fussent appareilliez, li Sarrazin occidrent LX chrestiens à pié et puis s'enfouirent. Ja out grant traïsin de Sarrazins, et greigneur simplece de chrestiens; mès tout fu mis sus le bouteillier, et par aventure ce fu à tort, qar comme il tenist III granz Sarrazins en sa tente qui requeroient le baptesme, il cuidoit par euls les autres traire à la foi chrestiane. Mès en ce, par aventure il fait à reprendre, qar il duest avoir esté plus sage encontre les aguës des ses anemis.

Après ce, li bouteilliers retourna en son paveillon et reprist moult cruieusement les III Sarrazins que il tenoit de traïsin et de tricherie; desquex li uns qui samblot estre greigneur mastre que les autres, se commença à escuser et à plorer. Ce que li Sarrazins sisoit fist le bouteillier espondre par I frere preecheur qui savoit bien larler la langue sarrazine. Et lors li dist le bouteillier que il ne se toutast pas, qar puis que il estoit venuz sus fiance aus chrestiens, il trouveroit foi en euls, et seust-il bien que li rois Loos estoit de si grant foi, que sa simple promesse, il ne l'avoit en nulle maniere trespasée.

One day that Count Auphon of Eu and his brother Sir John of Acre, butler of France were on the night guard, three Saracen knights came to the butler and they requested to become Christians; in a sign of loyalty they put their hands to the heads and kissed the hands of our people as a sign of subjection and surrendered themselves to the butler. The butler had them led to his pavilion and went immediately to King Louis, and told him what the Saracens had done, whom the king then commanded to guard very diligently.

After this, when the butler returned to his guard a hundred other Saracens threw down their lances and made the same signs as the three others had done and came to the butler and requested baptism with great insistence. At the same time as the butler and his men heard what the Saracens were saying many other Saracens started moving all together, their lances lifted, and attacked the butler and his men, so that the Saracens made the Christians flee and cry "to arms, to arms." Immediately, the host of Christians woke up and cried "to arms." But before they were equipped, the Saracens slayed sixty Christians on foot and then ran away. Indeed there was great treason on the part of the Saracens and even greater naivete on the part of the Christians; but all was placed on the butler and perhaps this was wrong, because since he had three high Saracens in his tent who requested baptism he thought that through them he would pull the others to the Christian faith. But in this, he is perhaps to be reproached because he should have been wiser to the plots of his enemies.

After this, the butler returned to his pavilion and reproached the Saracens whom he held very violently with treason and treachery; among them the one who seemed to be the commander of the others began to apologize and to cry. What the Saracens said the butler had explained by one monk who knew well how to speak the Saracen language. And then the butler said he did not have any doubt, since the Saracen had to come to the Christians with trust, he found trust in them, and knew well the great trust of King Louis, that his simple promise he had not violated in any way.



Lors respondi li Sarrazins et dist: "Sire, je sai bien que vous m'avez souspeçonneus de ce fait, ja soit ce que je n'i aie coulpe; mès sachiez que ce a tout fait l mien envieus pour me grever. Nous sommes Il grans soudoiers paraus sous le roy de Tuens, et avons chascun desous nou lIm et Vc chevaliers, et me compains que de pieça me get, set bien que vous me tenez, ja soit que je soie venus à vous de mon gré; et pour ce, fist-il faire et procura ceste bataille pour moi nuire, et si sai bien que nuls de mes chevaliers ne fu en ceste bataille pour vous nuire, ne ne vous fist conques mal, et que vous puissiez prover par ouvre ce que je vous di par bouche.

Lassiez aler un de mos compaignons jusques à mes gens, et se il ne vous amaine plue de lIm Sarrazins qui vous amenront vitaille à vendre et vous seront en aide, que vous faciez de moi ausi comme de traiteur desloial." Toutes ces choses dites, il enforma l poi à croire le bouteillier de ce que il disoit. Et pour ce, le bouteilliers vint au roy Loos et li dist ce que li Sarrazins qvoit raconté. Mès li rois qui ne vout pas croire à leurs paroles, commanda que l'en les laissast aler aus autres Sarrazins. Lors tantost le bouteilliers et le connestables le menerent et conduirent hors de l'ost; de quoi mount de gent murmurerent; et le maisrres des lll Sarrazins dist que il revendriot l'endemain et accompliroir ce que il avoit promis; laquele chose il fist et accomplie, et fu mount léement receuz des autres Sarrazins qui cuidoiient que il et ses compaignons fussent occis des chrestiens.

Then the Saracens responded and said "Sir, I know well that you do have suspicion of me for doing this thing, indeed on this I am not guilty; but know that everything was done by one person in order to injure me. We are two commanders under the King of Tunis and we each have 2500 knights under us, and my companion hates me, knowing well that you hold me, indeed that I came to you on my own free will; and for this, he made and procured this battle to harm me, and know well that none of my knights were in this battle to harm you nor ever did anything bad to you, and you can prove by an action what I tell you by mouth.

"Release one of my companions to go to my men and if he does not lead more than 2000 Saracens who bring you victuals to sell and aid you, then you can do with me as you would a disloyal traitor." All these things said, the butler believed a little bit of what he¹ said. And for this, the butler came to the King Louis and he told him what the Saracens had recounted. But the king who did not want to believe their speech, commanded to let them go to the other Saracens. So then the butler and the constable led them² away from the army; about which many of the men murmured; and the master of the three Saracens said that he would return the next day and accomplish what he had promised, which thing he did and accomplished, and was much happily received by the other Saracens who thought that he and his companions had been slain by the Christians.

Critical Notes

- 1 This refers to the Saracen commander
- 2 i.e., the Saracens