



An abbot between two cultures: Maiolus of Cluny considers the Muslims of La Garde-Freinet

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In July 972, Muslim raiders from the citadel of Fraxinetum (modern La Garde-Freinet) abducted Abbot Maiolus of Cluny and his entourage as they crossed the Great Saint Bernard Pass (Mons Iovis) in the western Alps. This article analyses a little-known letter that Maiolus sent to his Cluniac brethren to secure payment for his release. Interwoven with biblical passages drawn from the Book of Samuel and the Psalter, the abbot's ransom letter provides the rare opportunity to examine how one of the most influential Christian leaders of the tenth century perceived his Muslim captors and their religion.

Most studies of religious encounters between adherents to Islam and Christianity in the premodern era have focused on the period between the formulation of Abbot Peter the Venerable of Cluny's enterprise to translate the Qur'an into Latin in the 1140s and the military successes of Sultan Mehmed II that propelled the Turks across the Bosphorus in the middle of the fifteenth century.¹ In specialized studies, however,

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In addition to the standard citations, the following abbreviation is used in this article: BHL = *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina: Antiquae et Mediae Aetatis*, 2 vols (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1898–1901).

¹ Important works on this topic include: Richard Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1962); Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward the Muslims* (Princeton, 1984); Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, rev. edn (Oxford, 1993); and Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560* (Philadelphia, 2007). On Peter the Venerable's view of the Muslims in particular, see most recently John Tolan, 'Peter the Venerable on the Diabolical

scholars have also begun to chart the lesser-known waters of early medieval contact between the religious cultures of Christian Europe and the Muslim Mediterranean from the rise of Islam in the early seventh century and the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 by participants in the First Crusade.² Despite a burgeoning interest in evidence for cross-cultural commerce between Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages, no study of this topic has given full attention to an unprecedented tenth-century episode involving a fateful encounter between a Cluniac abbot and a band of Muslim warriors. In July 972, raiders from the Muslim enclave of La Garde-Freinet (near modern Saint-Tropez, in Provence) abducted Abbot Maiolus of Cluny and his entourage as they camped at the top of the Great Saint Bernard Pass (*Mons Iovis*) in the western Alps while en route from Rome to Burgundy. The abbot managed to secure a ransom for their release and returned to Cluny unharmed, but the story did not end there. Upon Maiolus's death in 994, Christian communities hailed him as a saint who held the power to intercede with God on their behalf.³ Between the years 1000 and 1150, no fewer than five Cluniac authors related the tale of the abbot's kidnapping as they told and retold the history of his deeds and virtues.⁴ As knowledge of Muslim

Heresy of the Saracens', in Alberto Ferreiro (ed.), *The Devil, Heresy and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey B. Russell* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 345–67; Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et Exclure: Cluny et la société chrétienne face à hérésie, au judaïsme, et à l'islam, 1000–1150* (Paris, 1998), pp. 324–59, English translation: *Order and Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam (1000–1150)*, trans. Graham Robert Edwards (Ithaca and London, 2002), pp. 323–57; and the panel discussion of Iogna-Prat's book by David Nirenberg, Isabelle Cochelin, Lucy K. Pick and Dominique Iogna-Prat in *EME* 13 (2005), pp. 386–418.

² See, for example, M.T. d'Alverny, 'La connaissance de l'Islam en Occident du IX^e au milieu du XII^e siècle', in *L'Occidente e l'Islam nell'alto medioevo, Spoleto 2–8 aprile 1964*, 2 vols (Spoleto, 1965), I, pp. 577–602, reprinted in *eadem*, *La connaissance de l'Islam dans l'Occident médiéval* (Aldershot, 1994), no. V; E. Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen: Das ökonomische Araberbild und seine Entstehung im Frühmittelalter* (Berlin and New York, 1983); and Katharine Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 2003). For the case of Spain, where Christian authors had more ready access to information about Islamic beliefs than northern Europeans, see Kenneth B. Wolf, 'The Earliest Spanish Christian Views of Islam', *Church History* 55 (1986), pp. 281–93; and *idem*, 'Christian Views of Islam in Early Medieval Spain', in John V. Tolan (ed.), *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays* (New York, 1996), pp. 85–108.

³ On popular saint-making in the early Middle Ages, see André Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du moyen âge d'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1988), pp. 15–24; English translation: *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 13–21.

⁴ These texts include: (1) Anonymous, *Vita breuior sancti Maioli* (BHL 5180), ed. Scott G. Bruce, 'The Earliest Life of Abbot Maiolus of Cluny (BHL 5180)', in preparation. A monk of Pavia composed this text shortly after Maiolus's death (c.1000); see Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Agni Immaculati: Recherches sur les sources hagiographiques relatives à saint Maieul de Cluny (954–994)* (Paris, 1988), pp. 27–9. (2) Syrus, *Vita sancti Maioli* (BHL 5177/79), ed. Iogna-Prat, *Agni Immaculati*, pp. 163–285. Syrus was a Cluniac monk writing around 1010 in response to Pavia's claim on Maiolus. (3) Odilo, *Vita sancti Maioli* (BHL 5182/84), *PL* 142, cols 943–62. This *vita* was the work of Maiolus's successor as abbot of Cluny. It was written in 1031 or

beliefs filtered slowly into northern Europe after the turn of the first millennium, the story of the abduction, particularly the verbal exchanges between Maiolus and his captors, changed significantly in the telling in ways that reflected the transformation of western attitudes toward Islam from ambivalence to curiosity to grave concern.⁵

The present study focuses on the earliest textual evidence for the harrowing events of July 972: a hastily written note that Maiolus sent to the monks of Cluny to inform them of his plight and to request payment for the release of him and his fellow captives. The significance of this document is twofold. First, it is the only contemporary record of the kidnapping incident. Resonant with Old Testament imagery drawn from the Second Book of Samuel and the Psalter, this text provides the most immediate and concrete information about Maiolus's perception of his abductors. As such, it is a neglected witness to an encounter between a Christian intellectual and Muslims in northern Europe near the close of the first millennium.⁶ Second, although the ransom letter is very brief, it contributes substantially to our understanding of the mental world of Maiolus himself. Unlike other abbots of Cluny, Maiolus did not produce a corpus of sermons, treatises, or letters that provides insight into his thoughts and ideals. The document's biblical resonances capture an exegetical moment that illuminates the deftness of his application of scripture as a means of comprehending and coping with the fearful circumstances that confronted him. This study analyses the text of the abbot's ransom letter to identify and contextualize the Old Testament passages that Maiolus used to characterize his dire situation. It traces the history of these passages in the Christian exegetical tradition, with special attention to the writings of the apostle

1033. (4) Rodulphus Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque* I.4.9, ed. and trans. John France, in *Rodulphus Glaber, The Five Books of Histories and The Life of Abbot William* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 22–4. Glaber was a monastic chronicler who resided at Cluny in the early 1030s and composed the *Histories* in the 1040s (see n. 26, below). (5) Nalgod, *Vita sancti Maioli* (BHL 5181), in *Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur*, ed. Jean Bolland *et al.* (Antwerp, 1680), May II, pp. 658–68: 'ex codice cluniacensi'. This early twelfth-century *vita* was a reworking of Syrus's *Vita sancti Maioli* (no. 2, above). Further on the *dossier hagiographique* of Maiolus, see Dominique Iogna-Prat, 'Panorama de l'hagiographie abbatiale clunisienne (v. 940–v. 1140)', in Martin Heinzelmann (ed.), *Manuscrits hagiographiques et travail des hagiographes* (Sigmaringen, 1992), pp. 77–118, at pp. 87–9; reprinted in *idem, Études clunisiennes* (Paris, 2002), pp. 35–73.

⁵ I am currently preparing a study of this historical incident and the literary responses to it, entitled *Hagiography and the Construction of Islam in Medieval Europe: Cluny and the Muslims of La Garde-Freinet (972–1156)*.

⁶ While several scholars have drawn attention to the abduction of Maiolus, none of them has scrutinized the text of his ransom letter. See Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, p. 28, n. 25; and Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, pp. 42–3. Surprisingly, the episode does not figure at all in John V. Tolan's recent survey of western perceptions of Islam: *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York, 2002).

Paul, to capture their received interpretation at tenth-century Cluny. Most importantly, it attempts to determine whether the biblical components of the ransom letter betray any hint of the abbot's awareness of the religion of his captors.

In the waning days of July 972, Maiolus of Cluny and his entourage set out from Rome to return to their home in Burgundy. A persuasive diplomat, tireless power-broker for kings and popes, and enthusiastic reformer of religious life, Maiolus travelled continuously during his forty-year tenure as abbot of Cluny (954–94).⁷ On this occasion, the path before him was familiar and well-travelled. Hospices and abbeys punctuated the road running north from Rome through Siena, Lucca, and Pavia, to the southern foothills of the Alps.⁸ In Pavia, Maiolus and his party were joined by a host of pilgrims, who believed that his holy presence would assure them a safe crossing over the perilous path before them, an alpine route that later became known as the Great Saint Bernard Pass (*Mons Jovis*). In the summer months this mountain pass was a primary artery for pilgrim and merchant traffic travelling between the Italian peninsula and northern Europe. Devout men and women from as far away as England braved its precipitous heights to visit the shrines of the Roman martyrs. So too did enterprising merchants, who traded the hardships of the road for the promise of profits to be made from luxury goods like silk, spices and exotic animals, in the courts and regional markets of the north.⁹

The perils of crossing the Great Saint Bernard Pass were considerable. Early medieval prayers for people about to embark on long voyages beseeched God to protect them specifically from the dangers of wild

⁷ On Maiolus's travels in Italy, see Léon Bourdon, 'Les voyages de Saint Mayeul en Italie: Itinéraires et chronologie', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 43 (1926), pp. 63–89. More generally on the abbot and his influence, which extended to the highest secular and ecclesiastical circles, see Iogna-Prat, *Agni Immaculati; Saint Mayeul et son temps: Actes du congrès international de Valensole, 2–14 Mai 1994* (Dignes-les-Bains, France, 1997); and Ettore Cau and Aldo A. Settia (eds), *San Maiolo e le Influenze Cluniacensi nell'Italia del Nord: Atti del Convegno Internazionale nel Millenario di San Maiolo (994–1994) Pavia-Novara, 23–24 settembre 1994* (Como, 1998).

⁸ This route and its hostels are detailed minutely in a catalogue of way stations recorded in 990 by Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury upon his return from Rome to England. See Veronica Ortenberg, 'Archbishop Sigeric's Journey to Rome in 990', *Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (1990), pp. 197–246, esp. the map on p. 230. Further on these and other hospices for medieval travellers through the Alps, see J.E. Tyler, *The Alpine Passes: The Middle Ages (962–1250)* (Oxford, 1930), pp. 21–38; and, more generally on this topic, Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Travel and Trade in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York, 2003).

⁹ A list of tolls for transalpine trade goods drawn up in 960 by Bishop Giso of Aosta included tariffs for weapons, armour, salt, metals, and animals such as horses, hawks and apes. See Tyler, *Alpine Passes*, pp. 151–2. For the broader context of transalpine commerce in the early medieval period, see Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce* (Cambridge, 2001).

animals, hostile weather and brigands.¹⁰ Attacks by wolves and the threat of avalanches and snowstorms were always feared in the Alps, but in the early tenth century a new danger emerged. Throughout this period, Muslim pirates held sway over the southern coast of Provence. Largely unhindered by local Christian lords, who lacked the organization and resources necessary to curb their initial onslaught, these raiders seized a Christian citadel called *Fraxinetum* (modern La Garde-Freinet, near Saint-Tropez) and used it as a base to pillage monasteries and towns throughout the region.¹¹ They also made predatory forays into the Alpine passes to harry and waylay pilgrim and merchant traffic. At first, their methods were crude and brutal. In the early 920s they reportedly murdered Anglo-Saxon pilgrims by triggering avalanches and then looted their corpses.¹² When they realized, however, that they could exact a heavy and renewable toll in ransoms, these raiders changed their method from murder to kidnapping.¹³

¹⁰ Adolph Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter*, 2 vols (Graz, 1960), II, pp. 261–71. Further on long-distance travel around the year 1000 and the hazards associated with it, see Heinrich Fichtenau, 'Reisen und Reisende', in *idem*, *Beiträge zur Mediävistik: Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, 3 vols (Stuttgart, 1975–86), III, pp. 1–79.

¹¹ Luidprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis* I.2–4, ed. Paolo Chiesa, in *Liudprandi Cremonensis Opera Omnia*, CM 156 (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 6–7; English translation: *The Works of Luidprand of Cremona*, trans. F.A. Wright (New York, 1930), pp. 33–4. For what follows, see Bruno Luppi, *I saraceni in Provenza, in Liguria e nelle Alpi occidentali* (Bordighera, 1952); J.-T. Reinaud, *Muslim Colonies in France, Northern Italy and Switzerland*, trans. Haroon Kahn Sherwani (Lahore, 1955); Jean-Pierre Poly, *La Provence et la société féodale (879–1166): Contribution à l'étude des structures dites féodales dans le Midi* (Paris, 1976), pp. 3–29; Philippe Sénac, *Musulmans et sarrasins dans le sud de la Gaule: VIIIe au XIe siècle* (Paris, 1980); and *idem*, *Provence et piraterie sarrasine* (Paris, 1982). For the impact of foreign invasions on Christian perceptions of Europe as Christendom in the tenth and eleventh centuries, see Karl Leyser, *The Ascent of Latin Europe: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 7 November 1984* (Oxford, 1986); reprinted in *idem*, *Communications and Power in the Middle Ages: The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries* (London and Rio Grande, OH, 1994), pp. 215–32. An eleventh-century account of the life of a Provençal lay saint named Bobo, a warrior-aristocrat who allegedly waged a meritorious war against the Muslims of La Garde-Freinet, suggests that their encroachment did meet with periodic local resistance. Further on Bobo, who is consistently cast as a herald of crusader sensibilities, see Claude Carozzi, 'La vie de saint Bobon: un modèle clunisien de sainteté laïque', in Michel Lauwers (ed.), *Guerriers et moines: Conversion et sainteté aristocratiques dans l'occident médiéval (IXe–XIIe siècle)* (Antibes, 2002), pp. 467–91; and Damien Carraz, *L'ordre du temple dans la basse vallée du Rhône (1124–1312): Ordres militaires, croisades et sociétés méridionales* (Lyon, 2005), pp. 48–50.

¹² Flodoard, *Annales*, anno 921: 'Anglorum Romam proficiscentium plurimi inter angustias Alpium lapidibus a Sarracenis sunt obruti' and *ibid.*, anno 923: 'Multitudo Anglorum limina sancti Petri orationis gratia petentium inter Alpes a Sarracenis trucidatur', ed. Ph. Lauer, in *Les Annales de Flodoard* (Paris, 1905), pp. 5 and 19; English translation: *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims, 919–966*, trans. Steven Fanning and Bernard S. Bachrach (Peterborough, Ontario, 2004), pp. 5 and 10.

¹³ Flodoard, *Annales*, anno 951: 'Sarraceni meatum Alpium obsidentes, a viatoribus Romam petentibus tributum accipiunt, et sic eos transire permittunt', ed. Lauer, p. 132. For similar activities in Italy, see Luitprand, *Antapodosis* II.44: 'Nemo etiam ab occasu sive ab arcturo orationis gratia ad beatissimorum apostolorum limina Romam transire poterat, qui ab his aut non caperetur aut non modico dato precio dimitteretur', ed. Chiesa, p. 53. Sources from late medieval Spain provide much more explicit evidence for the price of ransoms and the

The Muslims who inhabited La Garde-Freinet in the tenth century were not recognized as a polity or outpost of any Islamic central government in the Iberian Peninsula or in the east.¹⁴ They are best understood as an autonomous, entrepreneurial community that flourished for decades as mercenaries, taking part in the small-scale conflicts of local Christian lords while also profiting from piracy and brigandage in the lawless countryside of Provence and in the coastal waters of the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁵ They produced no documents of their own, so little is known of the origin, size and composition of the community, except what can be gleaned from contemporary Christian sources.¹⁶ Luidprand of Cremona believed that they hailed originally from Spain, but such a group could have comprised dissolute or opportunistic individuals from Muslim lands around the Mediterranean rim.¹⁷ The aborted effort of Count Hugh of Arles to destroy their stronghold in 942 with a coordinated assault by land forces and a blockade of Byzantine ships wielding Greek fire implies that the community was substantial, perhaps numbering several hundred fighting men at any given time.¹⁸ The longevity of La Garde-Freinet – some eight decades elapsed between its putative founding in the 890s and its destruction in 972 – suggests that the community may have had periodic support from outside Provence (plausibly from Spain) and that its numbers were

resources available for captives and their families to raise funds for the release of individuals from Muslim captivity. See Jarbel Rodriguez, 'Financing a Captive's Ransom in Late Medieval Aragon', *Medieval Encounters* 9 (2003), pp. 164–81.

¹⁴ For the best general survey of Islamic history in this period, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 2nd edn (Harlow, 2004), which despite all of its virtues is quite thin on diplomatic relations with western Europe.

¹⁵ On conditions in Provence in this period and the rationales of contemporaries for the ills besetting the countryside, see Stephen Weinberger, 'Païens et mauvais chrétiens: l'explication du mal dans la Provence des Xe et XIe siècles', *Annales du Midi* 98 (1986), pp. 317–26.

¹⁶ La Garde-Freinet received mention in several Arabic geographies from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, but these texts do not provide any details about the tenth-century Muslim community. See Paul-Albert Février *et al.*, *La Provence des origines à l'an mil: Histoire et archéologie* (Paris, 1989), pp. 487–91.

¹⁷ Luidprand, *Antapodosis* I.3, ed. Chiesa, p. 6: 'ex Hispania egressi'. Luidprand made an explicit distinction between this group from Spain and the African Muslims active in central and southern Italy, which he considered to be much more savage. See Luidprand, *Antapodosis* II.44, ed. Chiesa, p. 53: 'Quamvis enim misera Italia multis Hungariorum et ex Fraxeneto Sarracenorum cladibus premeretur, nullis tamen furiis aut pestibus sicut ab Africanis agitabatur.' John of Gorze's embassy to the court of Caliph 'Abd al-Rahman III in Cordoba in 953–6 may have been a diplomatic response by Emperor Otto I to the Muslim raids in Provence, thus implying a Spanish origin for the raiders. See John of Saint Arnulf, *Vita Iohannis abbatis Gorziensis* 115–29, *MGH Scriptores* 4 (Hanover, 1841), pp. 369–75. If this was indeed the goal of John's embassy, it was unsuccessful, for more than a decade later, in a letter dated to 968, Otto expressed his desire to destroy the Muslim enclave at La Garde-Freinet once and for all: Widukind, *Res Gestae Saxonicae* III.70: 'per Fraxinetum ad destruendos Sarracenos, Deo comite, iter arripiemus', *MGH SRG* 60 (Hanover, 1935), p. 147.

¹⁸ Luidprand, *Antapodosis* V.9, ed. Chiesa, p. 128. On the failure of this offensive, see Archibald R. Lewis, *Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean, A.D. 500–1100* (Princeton, 1951), p. 150.

bolstered further by the presence of women and children, like those attested at a contemporary Muslim enclave near Mount Garigliano in Italy.¹⁹ Little else is known for certain about the character and composition of the community.

On the night of 21/22 July 972, raiders from La Garde-Freinet abducted Abbot Maiolus, his entourage, and the pilgrim host accompanying them as they crossed the Great Saint Bernard Pass.²⁰ From captivity, the abbot sent a desperate letter to his brethren in Burgundy, as recorded first by the abbot's earliest Cluniac biographer, Syrus, and again several decades later by a monastic chronicler closely associated with Cluny, Rodulfus Glaber (discussed below). In response, the monks of Cluny quickly ransacked the ornaments of their church and gathered a considerable sum – 1000 pounds of silver, according to Glaber – to secure the release of their spiritual father.²¹ Their efforts were successful. Maiolus and his entourage went free, but the audacity of their abductors outraged Christian leaders and galvanized the will of local lords. Within a year of the incident, Count William of Arles and his allies marshalled an army and laid waste to *Fraxinetum*, effectively erasing the Muslim presence from Provence and the Alpine Passes.²²

Maiolus's original ransom letter is lost, but recollections of it have been preserved in two early eleventh-century accounts of the kidnapping episode written at Cluny. The earliest of these appeared in a hagiographical portrait of the abbot composed between the years 1000 and 1010 by a Cluniac monk named Syrus (BHL 5179).²³ In this version of the story, Syrus described how Maiolus wrote the ransom letter with his own hand and had it delivered to his brethren by means of another captured monk, who was released by their abductors to secure the payment.²⁴ In a very few words, the abbot evoked a situation fraught with life-threatening peril:

¹⁹ Luidprand, *Antapodosis* II.44, ed. Chiesa, p. 53.

²⁰ On the date of this encounter, see P.A. Amargier, 'La capture de saint Maieul de Cluny et l'expulsion des Sarrasins de Provence', *Revue bénédictine* 73 (1963), pp. 316–23.

²¹ Rodulphus Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque* I.4.9: 'Insuper pecunie pondus atque numerum ei determinantes indixerunt. Fuit enim mille librarum argenti, ut uidelicet singulis libra una in partem proueniret', ed. France, p. 18. The ransoming of captives was an expression of Christian charity with roots in late antiquity. On the development of this tradition, see William Klingshirn, 'Charity and Power: Caesarius of Arles and the Ransoming of Captives in Sub-Roman Gaul', *Journal of Roman Studies* 75 (1985), pp. 183–203.

²² Rodulphus Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque* I.4.9, ed. France, p. 22. The expulsion of the Muslims from La Garde-Freinet loomed large in Cluniac hagiography (see n. 4, above), but left no impression in contemporary charters and other documents of practice from Provence. See Monique Zerner, 'La capture de Maieul et la guerre de libération de Provence: Le départ des sarrasins à travers les cartulaires provençaux', in *Saint Mayeul et son temps*, pp. 199–210. Muslim pirates remained active along the coast of Provence throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries. See Carraz, *L'ordre du temple dans la basse vallée du Rhône*, pp. 56–9.

²³ Syrus, *Vita sancti Maioli* III.1–9, ed. Iogna-Prat, pp. 247–60.

²⁴ Syrus, *Vita sancti Maioli* III.5, ed. Iogna-Prat, p. 253.

Dominis et fratribus cluniensibus, Maiolus miser captus et catenatus. Torrentes Belial circumdederunt me, preoccupauerunt me laquei mortis. Redemptionis pretium, si placet, mittite pro me et his qui una mecum capti tenentur.²⁵

Maiolus, a captive, wretched and in chains, sends greetings to his lords and brothers, the monks of Cluny. The hordes of Belial have surrounded me; the snares of death have seized me. Please send a ransom payment for me and those held captive with me.

The text of the ransom letter also appeared around 1040 with slight, but significant, variations in Rodulphus Glaber's *Five Books of Histories*, which was dedicated to Odilo, Maiolus's successor as abbot of Cluny.²⁶

Dominis et fratribus Cluniensibus, frater Maiolus miser et captus. Torrentes Belial circumdederunt me, praeoccupauerunt me laquei mortis. Nunc uero si placet et his qui mecum capti tenentur redemptionem mittite.²⁷

Maiolus, wretched and captive, sends greetings to his lords and brothers, the monks of Cluny. The hordes of Belial have surrounded me; the snares of death have seized me. In view of this by all means please send a ransom for those held captive with me.

The minor differences in the wording of the ransom letter in these two accounts are more stylistic than substantive, but they indicate quite clearly that Glaber did not copy the contents of this document directly from Syrus's text. Glaber's version did not include Syrus's reference to Maiolus as *catenatus* ('in chains'). Moreover, the final plea for the ransom in Glaber's account added a note of urgency with the words *nunc uero* ('in view of this by all means') before the request for payment, which Glaber called simply a *redemptio* in contrast to Syrus's descriptive phrase *pretium redemptionis*. The fact that Syrus wrote about Maiolus's travails several decades before Glaber and may have even had the opportunity to hear the story from the saintly abbot himself before his death in 994 places his account closer to contemporary witnesses to the kidnapping, but does not prove conclusively that the text of the ransom letter

²⁵ Syrus, *Vita sancti Maioli* III.5, ed. Iogna-Prat, p. 253.

²⁶ Rodulphus Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque* I.4.9, ed. France, pp. 18–22. Glaber was a monk – although not a very good one by his own reckoning – who spent a considerable amount of time at Cluny while composing his work. See John France, 'Rodulphus Glaber and the Cluniacs', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 39 (1988), pp. 497–508.

²⁷ Rodulphus Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque* I.4.9, ed. France, pp. 20–2.

presented by him is a more accurate reproduction of Maiolus's original letter than the version preserved in Glaber's *Five Books of Histories*. Either author could have been working from memory and both were in a position to consult the original ransom letter in the abbey archives, if the brethren of Cluny in fact chose to preserve it.

These textual variations are of little importance, however, for the purpose of this study, because the heart of the letter, where Maiolus characterized the nature of his captivity – 'The hordes of Belial have surrounded me; the snares of death have seized me' ('*Torrentes Belial circumdederunt me, praeoccupauerunt me laquei mortis*') – is identical in both accounts. The abbot of Cluny drew the central images of his ransom letter directly from his memory of an Old Testament hymn of praise preserved in the Second Book of Samuel and repeated with minor variations in the Book of Psalms:

Laudabilem invocabo Dominum et ab inimicis meis salvus ero quia circumdederunt me contritiones mortis torrentes Belial terruerunt me funes inferi circumdederunt me praeaverunt me laquei mortis. (II Samuel XXII.4–6)²⁸

I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy of praise and I will be saved from my enemies, for the miseries of death surround me. The hordes of Belial frighten me. The cords of Hell have entangled me. The snares of death have hindered me.

In this ancient poem, a king of Israel gives thanks to God for help in defeating his enemies. The hymn begins with a confession of faith in God's protective power: 'I love you, O my Lord, my strength. The Lord is my foundation and my refuge and my deliverer.'²⁹ There follows the series of short metaphorical descriptions of the king's tribulations (quoted above), from which Maiolus borrowed images of entrapment and captivity to communicate the difficulty of his situation to his Cluniac brethren. The hymn concluded with an account of the Lord's intervention in battle, leading to the defeat of the ancient king's enemies and his ascendancy as a ruler of an empire at peace.

Given the richness of the liturgical psalmody at tenth-century Cluny and the impact of its language on the monastic imagination, it is not

²⁸ Compare Psalm XVII.4–6: 'Laudans invocabo Dominum et ab inimicis meis salvus ero circumdederunt me dolores mortis et torrentes iniquitatis conturbaverunt me dolores inferni circumdederunt me praeoccupaverunt me laquei mortis.'

²⁹ Psalm XVII.2–3: 'Diligam te Domine fortitudo mea Dominus firmamentum meum et refugium meum et liberator meus.'

at all surprising that Maiolus chose to express the gravity of his plight by echoing the adversities that faced an Old Testament king of Israel, who relied on his faith in the Lord for deliverance and victory.³⁰ It is the abbot's use of the word Belial, however, that complicates our understanding of his perception of his captors. Unlike the phrase 'the snares of death have seized me', which could apply generically to any dangerous situation, Belial was a proper name that was resonant with ancient and infamous associations. The discovery of the meaning of this name in a tenth-century monastic context is imperative for our comprehension of the abbot's response to his captivity and his perception of his captors.

Maiolus's application of the term Belial to his Muslim captors is unprecedented in the Christian tradition of writing about Islam in the early Middle Ages. Northern Europeans were much more likely to identify the followers of Mohammed with the Ishmaelites or Hagarenes of the Old Testament, who were also known collectively as Saracens.³¹ According to early medieval exegesis of the Book of Genesis, the peoples who dwelt in the desert lands of the Arabian peninsula were the descendants of Ishmael, the ill-favoured son of Abraham by his slave-woman Hagar. Destined by a prophecy of God to a legacy of conflict – 'his hand against every man and every man's hand against him' (Genesis XVI.12) – the sons of Ishmael elided easily in the western imagination with adherents to Islam whose war machine conquered the Byzantine settlements of North Africa and the Visigothic kingdom of Spain in the seventh and early eighth centuries. In late antiquity, Jerome and his contemporaries applied the term Saracen (*Saraceni*) to pre-Islamic pagan Arabs, but early medieval exegetes understood it to be the name taken by the Muslims to claim their descent from Abraham's wife, Sarah, and thereby conceal their ignoble ancestry.³² Before the eleventh century, this collective of names – Ishmaelite, Hagarene, Saracen – carried a very specific religious association. In early medieval thought,

³⁰ The tenth-century Cluniacs emulated the liturgical customs instituted in the early ninth century by Abbot Benedict of Aniane, who ordered the singing of 138 psalms on feast days. This was a substantial increase from the thirty-seven psalms prescribed in the sixth-century *Rule of Benedict*, which served as the template for monastic life throughout the Middle Ages. See Kassius Hallinger, 'Überlieferung und Steigerung im Mönchtum des 8. bis 12. Jahrhunderts', in *Eulogia: Miscellanea liturgica in onore di P. Burckhard Neunheuser O.S.B.* (Rome, 1979), pp. 125–87, at pp. 145–6.

³¹ On the meaning of these terms, their application by late ancient and early medieval Christian authors, and their religious associations, see Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen*, pp. 77–130; Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, pp. 18–19 and 69–139; and Tolan, *Saracens*, pp. 105–34.

³² See, for example, Jerome, *Vita Malchi III*, PL 23, cols 55–56. For a useful catalogue of sources that make reference to pre-Islamic Saracens and their interaction with late Roman Christians, see Philip Mayerson, 'Saracens and Romans: Micro-Macro Relationships', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 274 (1989), pp. 71–9.

people known by these names were commonly believed to be pagans who worshipped idols of Apollo, Venus, and Mohammed himself, as well as other gods of classical antiquity. Popular epic poems, like the *Song of Roland*, preserved this false perception in the European imagination even centuries after more accurate information about Islamic beliefs became available in the west.³³

In contrast, the term Belial was an ancient Hebrew noun that had no relation to the Old Testament racial taxonomies favoured by Christian exegetes in their descriptions of Muslim peoples. There is no consensus of scholarly opinion with regard to its etymology, but the word is generally understood to mean 'worthlessness' or 'wickedness'.³⁴ Old Testament authors used it most commonly in apposition to describe individuals who had committed crimes against the Israelite religion or sought to disrupt the social order. In the Book of Deuteronomy, people who incited the worship of false gods were called 'sons of Belial' (*fili Belial*) and put to the sword, along with their supporters and their cattle.³⁵ Two men who bore false witness against Naboth in the First Book of Kings were likewise called 'sons of Belial'.³⁶ The term was especially prevalent in the Books of Samuel, where 'sons of Belial' designated individuals who were inhospitable to guests and 'man of Belial' (*vir Belial*) signalled one who offered insult to his sovereign.³⁷ By the Hellenistic period, however, the word took on a more specific association. In apocalyptic Jewish literature, Belial (sometimes written as Beliar) became the name of the adversarial entity who opposed the will of God, that is, the Devil. He was a creature of darkness, which with the aid of attendant spirits dominated the will of evil men and held the present age under his control. Although Belial was depicted as a powerful force in the immediate present, his future downfall was

³³ See, for example, *La Chanson de Roland*, lines 7–8: 'Li reis Marsilie la tient, ki Deu nen aimet. / Mahumet sert e Apollin recheimet', ed. Luis Cortés, in *La Chanson de Roland* (Paris, 1994), p. 160. The fullest discussion of the depiction of Muslims in the *Song of Roland* remains Karl Heisig, 'Die Geschichtsmetaphysik des Rolandsliedes und ihre Vorgeschichte', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 60 (1935), pp. 1–87. Further on the representation of Saracens in medieval epic poetry, see William Wistar Comfort, 'The Literary Role of the Saracens in the French Epic', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 55 (1940), pp. 628–59; and C. Meredith Jones, 'The Conventional Saracen of the Songs of Geste', *Speculum* 17 (1942), pp. 201–25.

³⁴ For what follows, see Hans Walter Huppenbauer, 'Belial in den Qumrantexten', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 15 (1959), pp. 81–9; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca and London, 1977), pp. 174–220, esp. p. 188, n. 17; and *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden, 1995), cols 320–7, s.v. Belial, with references to earlier literature.

³⁵ Deuteronomy XIII.12–18.

³⁶ I Kings XXI.8–14.

³⁷ I Samuel XXV.17; and II Samuel XVI.7 and XX.1

foretold as a war in which God and his angels would defeat him and his minions by imprisoning them in chains or hurling them into an everlasting fire.

It was this apocalyptic understanding of Belial as an opponent of God and an adversary of humankind that informed the only reference to his name in New Testament literature.³⁸ In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul deployed the word in a pronouncement on the proper relationship between Christians and pagans. Using a series of rhetorical juxtapositions, he emphasized the conceptual and spiritual gulf that divided the faithful from the unfaithful:

Do not lead the yoke with unbelievers. Indeed what partnership has justice with iniquity or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?³⁹

In Paul's mind, Belial was no less than the Devil himself, the polar opposite of Christ, and a spirit synonymous with iniquity, darkness and false belief. The name Belial was not mentioned by any other New Testament author, so Paul's use of the word was particularly important for its transmission into the vocabularies of early Christian communities. Moreover, his investment of Belial with such dark meanings shaped the reception and understanding of the name in the early Middle Ages.

The contrast of Belial with Christ in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians drew the attention of several early medieval exegetes, whose topical concerns influenced the polemical application of the word in their writings. Most of them treated the name as a collective metaphor for religious rivals that threatened or opposed Christian society. In the mid-seventh century, Pope Martin I (649–55) applied the term to those spreading false doctrines. Just as there is no accord between Christ and Belial, he wrote, so too is there no accord between the consensus of the orthodox and heretical thinkers.⁴⁰ Echoing Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, he warned his readers to guard their hearts by avoiding all social commerce with those who denied the true faith. A few decades later, in an allegorical commentary on the Books of Samuel, Bede

³⁸ Russell, *The Devil*, pp. 221–49.

³⁹ II Corinthians VI.14–15: 'Nolite iugum ducere cum infidelibus quae enim participatio iustitiae cum iniquitate aut quae societas luci ad tenebras quae autem conventio Christi ad Belial aut quae pars fideli cum infidele.'

⁴⁰ Pope Martin I, *Epistola* 13 (*ad ecclesiam Thessalonicensium de Pauli damnatione eiusque haeresi fugienda*): 'Nec conventio Christi ad Belial, nec pars fideli cum infidelibus, neque consensus orthodoxorum cum haereticis', *PL* 87, col. 197b.

applied the name Belial even more broadly to include not only errant Christians, but Jews as well. 'The sons of Belial', he maintained, 'are the sons of the Jewish priesthood, the blind sons of light, and those without a yoke, that is, those who are ignorant of the teaching of Christ. They do not follow the commandments of divine law, but rather the decrees of their own traditions.'⁴¹ This association of Belial was repeated in the early ninth century in a letter of complaint about the mounting influence of Jews in the Frankish kingdoms, addressed to Emperor Louis the Pious by Archbishop Agobard of Lyons. The archbishop employed Paul's juxtaposition of Christ and Belial to argue that it was inappropriate and reprehensible for devout Christians like the emperor to share company and commerce with unbelievers. As a solution to this dangerous situation, Agobard advised a strict segregation of Jewish people living in Christian society.⁴²

Metaphorical applications of Belial to the religious adversaries of Christianity were much more numerous than the direct identification of the name with the person of the Devil in early medieval thought. This latter use is most apparent in the writings of a Carolingian monk of Fulda named Haimo, who studied under Alcuin at Tours and later became a monk of Hirschfeld (around 839) and bishop of Halberstadt (841).⁴³ In his commentary on Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, Haimo emphasized the relationship between Belial and the Devil:

What accord has Christ with Belial? Belial means 'without the yoke', signifying the Devil, who threw off from his neck the yoke of almighty God. For it is said in the Book of Samuel: They are said

⁴¹ Bede, *In Samuelem prophetam allegorica expositio* 5: 'Porro filii Heli, Filii Belial, etc. Filii sacerdotii Judaici, filii caeci luminis, sive absque jugo (utrumque enim Belial sive Beliar sonat) exstiter, quorum Christi doctrinam nesciebant; non divinae legis jussa, sed suarum statuta traditionum sequentes', *PL* 91, col. 512d.

⁴² Agobard of Lyons, *De iudaicis superstitionibus et erroribus (ad Ludouicum)* 11: 'Que conuentio Christi ad Belial? In quo aduertendum est, quia, sicut infideles sponte sequestrantur ab ecclesiastica communione, ut in nullis uelint mysteriis participare fidelibus, ita et fideles deuote separare se debent et conuictu et societate infidelium', ed. L. Van Acker, in *Agobardi Lugdunensis Opera Omnia*, CM 52 (Turnhout, 1981), p. 208. On the context of Agobard's conflict with the Jews of Lyons, see Bat-Sheva Albert, 'Adversus Iudaeos in the Carolingian Empire', in Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds), *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews* (Tubingen, 1996), pp. 119–42; and Johannes Heil, 'Agobard, Amolo, das Kirchengut und die Juden von Lyon', *Francia* 25 (1998), pp. 39–76.

⁴³ On Haimo's life and work, see *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, ed. Robert Auty *et al.*, 9 vols (Munich and Zurich, 1980–98), IV, col. 1864, s.v. Haimo 2: Haimo von Halberstadt. Further on the monastic community at Fulda in the Carolingian period, see Janneke Raaijmakers, 'Sacred Time, Sacred Space: History and Identity at the Monastery of Fulda (744–856)', Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam (2003). I am most grateful to Dr. Raaijmakers for providing me with a copy of her dissertation.

to be men of Belial, that is, men without the yoke of God. What accord or what fellowship does Christ have with the Devil? None whatsoever.⁴⁴

Haimo also expressed this diabolical affinity in a homily delivered on the second Sunday before Lent. In this work, he presented his audience with an inventory of the names by which the Devil was known in the New Testament and commented on their meaning. He placed Belial at the top of the list, perhaps because of its perceived antiquity, and identified the name as a Hebrew word meaning 'without a yoke'.⁴⁵ This association of Belial with the Devil was the exception rather than the rule for Christian exegetes in the early Middle Ages as most commentators applied the term generally to religious communities that were hostile and threatening to the Christian faith.

This reconstruction of the exegetical history of the name Belial allows us to consider Maiolus's letter with new insight. The abbot's deployment of this ancient and infamous word in his characterization of the Muslims of La Garde-Freinet suggests that he recognized his captors as adherents to a rival system of belief that was opposed to Christianity. The polemical resonances of the term strongly imply that Maiolus understood his captors in the same terms as his contemporaries understood heretics and Jews, that is, as credible adversaries of the Christian faith. Maiolus's perceptions were particularly important because as one of the foremost religious leaders of his age he was uniquely situated to inform and influence the viewpoints of powerful individuals, lay and religious alike. Later accounts of the abduction written in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries expanded on the premise that religious tension freighted the encounter between Maiolus and his captors. In their accounts of the virtuous deeds of the saintly abbot, Cluniac authors populated his experience in captivity with Muslim warriors who recognized his holiness and either converted to Christianity or died for their obstinacy.⁴⁶ While these pious fictions say more about their authors' anxieties concerning Islam than they do about the historical events of July 972, the use of the term Belial in Maiolus's ransom letter suggests that these later tales were elaborations on a received historical tradition rather than complete fabrications.

⁴⁴ Haimo, *Expositio in epistolam II ad Corinthios* 6: 'Quae autem conventio Christi ad Belial? Belial inpretatur [*sic*] absque jugo, significans diabolo qui jugum omnipotentis Dei de collo suo excussit. Dicitur et in libro Samuelis: Qui dixerunt viri Belial, id est absque jugo Dei. Quae conventio, sive quae societas Christi ad diabolum? Nulla', *PL* 117, col. 639b.

⁴⁵ Haimo, *Homilia* 22 (*Dominica in sexagesima*): 'Ab isto qui hoc evangelium scripsit, diabolus qui latro sive criminator vel deorsum fluens, Hebraice Belial, quod interpretatur absque jugo, dicitur', *PL* 118, col. 167d–168a.

⁴⁶ On this literary tradition, see nn. 4–5, above.

While it is impossible to ascertain the exact nature of Maiolus's understanding of Islam as a system of belief, it is now plausible to assert that some recognition of his captors' religion informed the text of the ransom letter that he sent to his brethren in Burgundy. Read in this light, it would not be anachronistic to interpret Maiolus's application of the word Belial to the Muslims of La Garde-Freinet as a self-conscious act of ordering and exclusion that foreshadowed and perhaps even influenced Peter the Venerable's characterization of Islam in the twelfth century, as a 'diabolical heresy'.⁴⁷ On the perilous heights of the Great Saint Bernard Pass, Maiolus of Cluny evoked an ancient appeal to God to characterize his captors as enemies of Christianity. While awaiting the arrival of the ransom that would free him and his associates from captivity, he may have been strengthened by the promise of deliverance at the conclusion of the psalm that had come so readily to his mind: 'You exalted me above my adversaries. You delivered me from men of violence. For this I extol you, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises to your name.'⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ See the works cited in n. 1, above.

⁴⁸ Psalm XVII.48–50: 'Deus qui dat vindictas mihi et subdidit populos sub me liberator meus de gentibus iracundis et ab insurgentibus in me exaltabis me a viro iniquo eripies me propterea confitebor tibi in nationibus Domine et psalmum dicam nomini tuo.'