Re-translating William of Tyre: 
The Origins of the Templars and Hospitallers according to London, British Library Additional Manuscript 5444, fols 242v–248r

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At the end of British Library Additional Manuscript 5444 is a Latin account, ‘Ex historia Anthiochena’, of the beginnings and early years of the Templars and the Hospitallers, including their conflicts with the Church authorities in the Holy Land. The account generally corresponds in content but not in wording to Book 12, chapter 7 (Templars) and Book 18, chapters 3–8 (Hospitallers) of William of Tyre’s Chronicon, and closely resembles the Old French translation of William of Tyre’s chronicle. However, the material on the Hospitallers has been reordered so that the description of the dispute with the patriarch of Jerusalem is at the end rather than the beginning of the account. It contains no historical information that is not in William of Tyre’s chronicle, but its existence and form prompt questions about the later history of that work, how it might have been used in the later Middle Ages and early modern period, and the continuing importance of Latin literature at that time.

This essay explores what may be deduced about the origins of this text, from which version of William of Tyre’s chronicle it derives, and when and why it could have been produced. An edition of the text appears at the end of the essay.

British Library Additional Manuscript 5444 is a copy of British Library Cotton Manuscript Otho B iii, made before that manuscript was virtually destroyed in the Cotton fire of 1731. Like many in the Cotton collection, Otho B iii was an assemblage of several manuscripts. Thomas Smith’s catalogue of the Cotton Library (1696) listed nine separate items within Cotton MS Otho B iii, of which the first six are now lost, item seven was ‘Annales acephali’, eight was ‘de prima institutione Templariorum’ and nine was ‘de prima institutione Hospitalleriorum’.

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Before its destruction in the Cotton fire, parts seven to nine of this manuscript were copied by an eighteenth-century hand, now British Library Additional Manuscript 5444. William Stubbs, who published part seven of the manuscript as the *Annales Londonienses* in 1882, traced the history of this transcript down to its arrival in the British Museum library, showing that the eighteenth-century copy was originally made for John Bridges, Esquire, whom Stubbs concluded to be ‘doubtless the eminent collector of the materials for the History of Northamptonshire’.4

Parts eight and nine had been published in 1673 by Roger Dodsworth and William Dugdale in the first edition of their *Monasticon Anglicanum*: the account of the Templars’ origins being from Otho B iii fol.188b, and the Hospitallers’ from Otho B iii fol.189a.5 The part relating to the Hospitallers was published in 1895 as ‘de prima institutione hospitalariorum’ in volume five of the *Recueil des historiens de croisades, historiens occidentaux*, where it is described as an extract from a Latin manuscript in the British Library (Add. 5444).6 Neither publication has attracted much scholarly attention.7 William Stubbs did not publish this part of BL Cotton Add. MS 5444, stating that it ‘is a copy of the chapters of William of Tyre, which contain the account of the origin of the knightly orders: and they have nothing which it is necessary here to reproduce’.8 He explained further in his introduction to the *Annales Londonienses*:

As these articles … are merely extracts from the great work of William of Tyre, have no connexion whatever with what has gone before, and possibly owe their juxtaposition to a mere accident of binding, I have had no hesitation in omitting them from the present edition of the *Annales Londonienses*.9

The ‘accident of binding’ was the responsibility of Sir Robert Cotton, the founder of the Cotton collection. From the time he graduated from Cambridge University in 1585, Cotton collected medieval manuscripts that had been in monastic libraries and had come into private hands after the dissolution of the monasteries. Some of his manuscripts were clearly fragmentary when he purchased them: some seem even to have been made for John Bridges.10

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The Provenance of the Text

Although William Stubbs was certain that this text derived from William of Tyre’s chronicle, the title of its source, ‘Historia Antiochena’, does not necessarily indicate this. That was also the title given to an anonymous history of the First Crusade written during the reign of Baldwin III. It could simply indicate any history of the First Crusade and the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

It is possible that our text is an extract from a medieval chronicle that incorporated a Latin translation or adaptation of the Old French William of Tyre. Scholars have long been aware that the Old French translation of William of Tyre’s Latin chronicle was translated back into Latin during the Middle Ages. Margaret Ruth Morgan noted that Marino Sanudo Torsello’s Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis, written in Latin between 1307 and 1321, includes ‘a free rendering’ of parts of the Old French translation of William of Tyre’s chronicle, from Book 1, chapter 11 onwards. However, this reworking of William of Tyre did not include the sections on the foundation of the Templars and Hospitallers. In 1320 Francesco Pipino, a Dominican friar of Bologna, wrote a universal Latin chronicle in twenty-five books. Morgan noted that Book 25 includes a Latin translation of the Old French translation of William of Tyre as far as William’s

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14 The origin of the Templars is mentioned in a single sentence at the end of Book 3, part 1, chapter 9 (Marino Sanudo, The Book of the Secrets, p. 251); the Hospitallers’ origins would be in Bk 3, pt 1, ch. 20 (ibid., p. 268); there is a short account of the foundation of the Templars and Hospitallers in Bk 3, pt 7, ch. 3 (ibid., p. 283), but this is not taken from William of Tyre’s chronicle.

Chapter 112 of Book 25 mentions the beginnings of the Templars, but as in Marino Sanudo’s work this is only a passing note, and again the Hospitallers are omitted. Pipino wrote a little more on the Templars’ origins in Book 19 chapter 21, but even this is barely seven lines of script, and he did not mention the Hospitallers. Clearly our text was not taken from either Marino Sanudo’s or Pipino’s translation. So where does it come from?

I initially came across the text that is the subject of this article in 2004 while studying BL Add. MS 5444. At that time, there was little published scholarship on the Old French translation of William of Tyre’s chronicle. I showed the text to Peter Edbury, who was conducting research into the Old French translations in preparation for his major research project. Peter noted it briefly in a postscript to an article, describing it as ‘an unpublished translation of the French text of XII. 7 and also of XVIII. 3–8 (dealing with the origins of the Hospitallers) back into Latin’. He added:

It is clear that the translator did not employ a manuscript in what I have called here the ‘western tradition’ (Section IV). On the other hand, he does seem to have had a text which read ‘a ceus’ (or similar) in sentence 5 in place of ‘a cens’. An analysis of the readings in XVIII.3–8 would no doubt help further in identifying the closest extant manuscripts of the French text.

Peter had identified certain ‘diagnostic features’ which determine whether a manuscript of the Old French translation of William of Tyre’s chronicle derived from an ‘eastern’ or ‘western’ tradition – that is, from the eastern Mediterranean or western Europe. The ‘western tradition’ manuscripts omit certain words and phrases that are found in the ‘eastern tradition’ manuscripts and in this Latin translation: for example, in the second sentence on the beginnings of the Templars the phrase ‘furent dui chevaliers’ is missing in the western tradition, but the words ‘fuerunt duo milites’ appear in the Latin translation. In the fourth sentence, the

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16 Morgan, pp. 23–4, 50–51.
17 Modena, Biblioteca Estense, a.X.1.5, fol. 137v; printed as: Bernardi Thesaurarii Historia de acquisitione Terrae Sanctae, quam auctor hujus operis transtulit ex Gallico in Latinum, in RIS, vol. 7.1 (Milan, 1723), cols 657–850, at col. 752 (end of chapter cxii).
18 Modena, Biblioteca Estense, a.X.1.5, fol. 70r; see also Louis de Mas Latrie, Chronique d’Ernoul et de Bernard le trésorier (Paris, 1871), p. 7, note 1.
words ‘que il avoit’ are missing in the western tradition, but ‘quod habebat’ appear in the Latin; and so on. On the other hand, unlike most of the ‘eastern tradition’ manuscripts, the translator correctly recorded that the Templars received first fruits, *primicias* (fol. 243v).²² Peter’s point that the translator’s text had the canons of the *Templum Domini* giving the Templars property *a ceus* rather than *a cens* demonstrates that our text was not derived from one of Peter’s base manuscripts.²³ ²⁴ Beyond this, however, it is not yet possible to identify this limited section of the text with a particular branch of the stemma, or even to be certain that it does derive from a known version of the Old French translation. The source of this translation may become clearer when the results of Peter Edbury’s 2009–12 AHRC-funded research project on the Old French William of Tyre and its continuations are published, in particular Philip Handyside’s PhD thesis on the manuscript tradition of the Old French translation of William of Tyre.²⁵ Our Latin text may not directly reflect any single Old French manuscript of William of Tyre. Whoever translated this text into Latin also amended it, changing the order of the material on the Hospitallers, adding a reference to *clientes* in the order of the Temple (fol. 243r) and reinforcing the definition of *elemosina* by referring to an eleventh-century Latin authority, Papias’s *Elementarium Doctrinae Rudimentum* (fol. 246r).

**Why Was This Text Produced?**

The fact that William of Tyre’s account of the Hospitallers’ origins has been rearranged into chronological order indicates that our text was created for a purpose. It is not simply a chance survival of odd folios from a now-lost Latin translation of the Old French translation of William of Tyre, perhaps torn out and preserved by a sixteenth-century antiquary before consigning the rest of the manuscript to the flames. Were that the case, the section on the Hospitallers would be in the usual order.

Although Thomas Smith’s catalogue listed the text on the origins of the Templars separately from that on the Hospitallers, the two appear to have been conceived as a whole. The section on the Templars opened with the words ‘Ex historia Anthiochena Li° 12° ca° 7°’, while that on the Hospitallers closed with a reference to the same text: ‘Hæc in historia Antiochena li. 18° ca.o 3° & 4°’. The

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²² Edbury, ‘Old French William of Tyre’, p. 159.
²³ Edbury, ‘Old French William of Tyre’, p. 159; for the base manuscripts, see ibid., p. 153.
²⁴ I am very grateful to Dr Handyside for his comments on this subject.
obvious inference is that these were transcribed together, or even translated and
compiled together, as a record of the origins of these two military religious orders. 
Because the original manuscript has been destroyed, it is impossible to know
whether it was a medieval creation or produced in the early modern period. It is 
likely, although not certain, that it was produced in England, as it was available for
Robert Cotton to acquire it in the early seventeenth century. It is even possible that
Cotton himself or a contemporary copied it. However, as all the surviving fragments
of BL Cotton MS Otho B iii are in a similar fourteenth-century hand, although none
of these fragments has been firmly identified as coming from the sections containing
the text under discussion here (and on some only the outlines of letters can now be
discerned), it is possible that it was created in the fourteenth century.

If this account were created as evidence for a general history of religious orders
(for example), there seems no particular reason why an historian would have copied
these accounts and no more of William of Tyre’s work. It is more likely that whoever
put the text into the form in which Cotton acquired it had a particular connection
with or interest in the Templars or Hospitallers.

In the early fourteenth century – when Marino Sanudo and Francesco Pipino
produced their Latin translations – both the Templars and the Hospitallers were
trying to find new means of pursuing their vocation of war against the enemies of
Christendom. It would not have been surprising if a leading member of either order
in England had commissioned a version of their order’s history to help in justifying
the order’s existence. The addition of the word *clientes* into the description of the
Templars’ *minores frater*s, lesser members, on fol.243r suggests that the translation
was made by someone with direct knowledge of the order, but the fact that the
section on the Templars’ origins omits the final words in the Old French translation,
‘*si com il font encore*’26 [as they still do], indicates that the translation was made
after the dissolution of the Templars. However, it could have been produced after
1312 for the English Hospitallers as evidence of their history. The Hospitallers had
produced a fictionalised version of their history in the twelfth century: the *Miracula*
or ‘legends’ survive in various versions in manuscripts in French, Anglo-Norman
or Latin.27 In the early fourteenth century Fr. Guglielmo di Sancto Stefano

wrote a history of the Hospital’s origins in which he appealed to William of Tyre’s

text as evidence against the legends. A later medieval Latin account built on Fr.

Guglielmo’s version of events.28

This suggests the possibility that a late medieval Hospitaller could have translated

the Old French translation of William of Tyre into Latin as evidence of the order’s

history. It is well known that in the Middle Ages texts were translated out of Arabic,

Greek and Hebrew into Latin, to make them more accessible to Catholic Christian

scholarship, and from Latin into the vernacular to make them more accessible to a

wider western European readership.29 What is less well known is that sometimes

texts were translated out of one vernacular into Latin to make them more accessible

to readers who used a different vernacular. For instance, in the late fourteenth and

early fifteenth centuries Wycliffite texts composed in English were translated into

Latin for export to a wider European readership.30 Antoine Calvet has pointed out

that in the mid-fifteenth century the Hospital’s statutes, which had been drawn up

in French, were translated into Latin for the use of the Lombard Hospitallers. The

1367 statutes and those of the following General Chapters, produced in French, were

translated into Latin for the German Hospitallers.31 In the late fourteenth century and

early fifteenth century the Hospital moved to using Latin in its official documents,

abandoning the use of French.32 Guillaume Caoursin’s history of the siege of Rhodes

in 1480, intended for wide European readership, was composed in Latin.33 So, a

Latin translation of the vernacular version of William of Tyre’s chronicle would

have fitted this pattern: it could have been produced for fourteenth-century (or later)

English readers who regarded Latin as a more authoritative language than French

and were more familiar with Latin than with early thirteenth-century French.

We might ask why the Hospitallers would have included William of Tyre’s

account of the origins of the Temple in a history of the Hospitallers. The Hospitallers

had been granted the Templars’ property after the papal dissolution of the Templars

in 1312 and the English Hospitallers knew they had the Templars to thank for many

28 Calvet, pp. 13, 16.

29 For an overview, see Charles H. Manekin, ‘Medieval Translations: Latin and

Hebrew’, Bernice M. Kaczynski, ‘Medieval Translations: Latin and Greek’, Deborah


Translations: Latin and the Vernacular’, in Frank Anthony Carl Mantello and A.G. Rigg

(eds), Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide (Washington, DC, 1996),

pp. 713–34.

30 Fiona Somerset, Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England


31 Calvet, p. 20.

32 Joseph M. Brincat, ‘The Languages of the Knights: Legislation, Administration and

Diplomacy in a Multilingual State (14th–16th Centuries)’, in Jovan Kurbalija and Hannah

Slavik (eds), Language and Diplomacy (Msida, 2001), pp. 261–79 at 263–5.

33 Calvet, p. 18.
of their possessions, a point of which patrons also frequently reminded them. By the 1430s, the Hospitallers regarded the Templars as, in a sense, their forerunners. The Hospitaller brother John Stillingflete included the Templars’ property in his Latin account of the Hospital’s founders in England, noting (for example) that the Templars were bound always to release Roger de Mowbray and his successors from penance for any harm the Mowbrays might do the Templars, in consideration for the great devotion Roger had shown the Templars. Stillingflete’s history carried the date 1434, more than a century after the dissolution of the Templars, but the English Hospitallers were still recording the obligation that their sister-order had incurred. Stillingflete not only listed the Templars’ property and noted their obligations to their patrons, but stated at the beginning of his work that he had included the names of the masters of the Temple and Hospital, as well as the names of the priors of the Hospital in England. The surviving manuscripts do not include many of these names, but there is such a list in what remains of the Hospitallers’ cartulary in the British Library. The names of the masters of the Temple in England and the grand masters of the Temple are listed first, followed by the masters of the Hospital and then the priors of the Hospital in England; as if the Temple was the original order and the Hospitallers followed it. This was certainly the impression given by the author of the Valencian romance *Tirant lo Blanc*, writing three decades after John Stillingflete, who depicted the Hospital as having been set up after the dissolution of the Templars. It would have been natural, then, for a Hospitaller historian to have included a history of the Templars’ origins with a history of his own order’s beginnings. On the other hand, given that the account is not particularly flattering to the orders, it is also possible that it was produced by or for an opponent of the Hospitallers who was critical of their possessions and privileges and wanted evidence against them.

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37 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 541.

38 London, College of Arms, L17, fols 141r–156v. My thanks to Robert Yorke and Matthew Jones, archivists at the College of Arms, for allowing me to examine the manuscript. There is another copy, which was damaged in the Cotton fire, at London, British Library, Cotton MS Tib. E. ix: ‘Miscellaneous historical, genealogical and heraldic papers transcribed in the early modern period, including “excerpta ex registris chartarum … Hospitalis S. Joannis Jerusalem in Anglia”’ (Smith, *Catalogus*, p. 32).


them. In this case, by combining the history of the foundations of both orders the translator–compiler would have demonstrated that both the Hospitallers and their predecessors the Templars had been a thorn in the side of ecclesiastical authorities since their early years. A further possibility is that the account was produced after the dissolution of the monasteries by a sixteenth-century antiquary with an interest in the military religious orders. Unless another original manuscript of our text is found, this question must remain open.

Edition of BL Add MS 5444, fols 242v–248r

Editor’s Notes

[ ] material within square brackets represents letters omitted in abbreviation.

All abbreviations have been resolved except ‘x’ and ‘xp’ where these stand for ‘Christ’.

[fol. 242v]

A catchword appears at the foot of each page of the MS, at the outer edge of the folio. Catchwords are not reproduced here.

De prima institutione Templarior[um]41


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gentibus religiosis n[e]c[essari]as. Rex autem & baronis, p[atre]archa ac cet[er]o 1
eg[ri]ni, custodire[n]t a lat[r]ribus & p[rædonibus], qui multa mala facer[e] 6
tales robas quales milites & alij boni ho[m]en[n]es e[is] ob amore[m] D[e]i. 8
Deinde, 9o an[n]o, f[ac]tu[t]um in F[rancia] infra Civitatem Troiae. 9
Ibi convener[u]n[t] Archiepiscopus de Rayns, Archiepiscopus de Sanz cu[m] 10
omnibus episcopis, episcopus Albanensis[sis], q[uo]i erat Legatus p[apa]e. 11
fuit ordo, stabilitas, & r[e]gle de eor[um] eis ad vivendum[m] s[e]culum h[o]m[en] 14
i[n]s religiosi. Et fuit ordinatum[m] & praeceptum[m] auctoritate D[omi]ni Honorij 14
q[am] 9 frat[e]s, qui viveb[a]n[t] cotidie de e remotis alior[um]. Ab illo t[em] 17
Ab illo t[em] [p]er[or]e, sic creveru[n]t eor[um] possessiones, q[uod] vius potio- [fol. 22
243v] rat sequens. 22
Ab illo t[em] [p]er[or]e, sic creveru[n]t eor[um] possessiones, q[uod] vius potio- [fol. 22
243v] rat sequens. 22
Ab illo t[em] [p]er[or]e, sic creveru[n]t eor[um] possessiones, q[uod] vius potio- [fol. 22
243v] rat sequens. 22
Ab illo t[em] [p]er[or]e, sic creveru[n]t eor[um] possessiones, q[uod] vius potio- [fol. 22
243v] rat sequens. 22
De prima institutione Hospitalariorum

Caritatis principi Aegypti et o[m]n[i]i[i] Baronum, ita q[uod] possent secure p[er] patriam ire, ad vendendam[m] domu[m] in
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freq[ue]n[ter] accidit, qu[od] multe bonæ mulieræs venieba[n]t causa per
egregiacionis, & devotionis
in Jerusalem, tam de Melp[heiro] quam de alijs terre[n]s
dictis mercatoribus specialius adhaerentes. Illi tam de Abbathia
noli recepere mulieres hospici[o], timore p[ec]ati, & pro
suspic[ion]e scandalis. Q[uod] videntes illi boni mercatores, qui
illum abbaciam fundavant,46 fecerunt ibi mercatorem paup[eres]
per regni suscipientes, statuentes ibi sorores ad recep[erum]
per regnis supervenientibus. Et quare tu[n]um erat per
casuum Xpianis, multi per regni nobilem illum locum
per eos quod pauperes erant & egeniæ, quando venerant illuc. Naturnse
per terras Turcorum, multocie sunt ab eis
spoliabatur, & quando pervenerant
ad portas Jerusalem, non valebant intrare, nisi unus qui
postquam intraverant civitatem, non habebant se susteneri,
nisi quanta domus eis conferbat, quas omnes aliæ
gentes illius Civitatis vel erant de alia legi vel de alia lingua,
Xpianis in Civitate maneabantur, quod propter sua paupertate
non poterant exstraer p[ro]desse, unde multas miserias
patiebant in Civitate. Quod videntes qui ista loca
tenebant, infra limites suos construxerunt una domum Dei ad hospitandum
pauperes sanos & infirmos, ita quod de elemosinis & res istarum
in honoræ Sanctæ Marïæ Magdalenæ, & ædificia per regni suscepi[n]dis,
Patriarcha Alexandriæ, ubi fecit multa bona operæ, in elemosinæ extitit multum largus, idque sancti patres
qui illic erant, vocabant eum Elemon. Iste Joh[an]nus
erat in Cipri vir sanctus & religiosus & patriarcha
vulgaris, secundum Papiam. 51 Iste tr[e]s ecclesiæ
nullos habebant redditus n[e]c possessiones ex tro[n]e p[ro]ci[n]ctus suum; 31
s[ed] illi de Melfe mercatores faciebant om[n]i a[n]no qu[a]da[m] coll[er]cum
pecunia, ex qua p[er] manus abbatis sustentabant tab[n]uris frat[er]es & sorores 33

51 secundum Papiam] reading from MA, vol. 2, p. 498 and RHC Oc, vol. 5, p. 402; MS:
s’p[er] papiæ. The eleventh-century lexicographer Papias is not mentioned at this point in
the Latin text of William of Tyre, nor in Paulin Paris’s edition of the Old French translation. His
Elementarium Doctrinae Rudimentum defined elemosyna as the Greek for the Latin word
misericordia: Papias, Elementarium Doctrinae Rudimentum (printed Venice, 1491), fol. 32v.
4 q[uai]n[o]do Saraceni erant a sacro loco ejecti & Civitas ab infidelitate p[er]ur[g]ata, 5
8 ligiosa[m] ac g[e]n[eri]soria m[er] Romæ oriundam. Et in[a]f[r][a] Abbathiam ho[m]nem 8
9 inu[m] invenerunt n[e]m bona v[ite] in[tr]ern alios, Girardu[m] no[m]i[n] 8
10 a qui ex p[re]cepto Abb[a]tis & mo[nachorum], diu s[er]vierat in domo Dei, 10
faciens eis bo[nu]m, qu[od] potuit s[ecundum] facultatem suæ paupertatis. De tamen 11
12 parvo principio venerunt Hospitalarij ad magnam potentiam, qua[m] h[abe]nt. 12
17 incipieba[n]t possessiones eorum crescere in tantum, quod habebant 17
18 villas & Castella. Deinde laboraver[e] & su[m]ptas magnas apponere[n] 18
19 cessabat [nt] erga ro[m]anum ecclesiæ nam eis totaliter absolvere[n]t a 19
21 ex tu[n]c no[n]o curaverunt nisi parum de p[re]cepto su[a] 21
22 terraru[m] quas adquisierunt tollebant a vicinis ecclesijs. Et ab illis, qui eis alioqu[ae] 22
24 primit[u]s.; unde ecclesiæ s[ancti] Sepulchri poter[u]nt dicere eis id 24
27 justicia[m], & ecclesiæ suæ era[n]t p[er] eos g[ra]vit[ae] da[m]nificatae, 28
28 adier[u]nt in eor[u]m ad ost[e]rum n[i]l denu[m] p[a]læ & cardini[m]i ib[u]s injurias 28
30 max[i]mabrum, totam Curia[m] corrupserunt. Sicaue q[u]e p[ra]triarchæ & Episcopi 31
32 magnas injurias fecerunt p[ra]tiram & of[m]ibus alij ecclesiari[m] Prælatis, 33
33 de justicia parochiar[u]m ac decimârum. Nam q[uai]n[o]do Praelati exco[m]mun 34
36
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Hæc in historia Antiochena li. 18o ca. 3o & 4o.60


60 The book and chapter numbers given here correspond to those in William of Tyre’s chronicle [WT] and the Old French translation [Paris].