

Epistle of Louis the Pious to Abbot Hilduin of Saint-Denis

(late 834–early 835)

[ed. Ernst Dümmler, *MGH, Epistolae* (Berlin, 1898–1899), 5:325–27, no. 19]

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On this letter, see *BHL* 2172; D. Luscombe, “Denis the Pseudo-Areopagite in the Middle Ages from Hilduin to Lorenzo Valla,” in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter* (Hannover, 1988), 1:133–43; G. P. A. Brown, “Politics and Patronage at the Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis (814–98): The Rise of a Royal Patron Saint” (Ph.D. diss., New College, Oxford University, 1989), 207–17, 283–329; and E. A. R. Brown, “*Gloriosiae*, Hilduin, and the Early Liturgical Celebration of St. Denis,” in *Medieval Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Jeremy Duquesnay Adams*, vol. 2, ed. S. Hayes-Healy (New York, 2005), 39–82.

In the name of the Lord God and our savior Jesus Christ, Louis, coming into favor once more by divine clemency, august emperor, to Hilduin, venerable abbot of the monastery of the most holy martyrs and of our special protectors, precious Dionysius and his companions, eternal salvation in Christ.

How much favor and protection, not only to us and to our predecessors and ancestors but even
5 to the peoples of our entire empire, the providence of the Lord, through the most blessed Dionysius, in
great abundances of kindness, bestowed again and again—nay, continuously—all the generations of Gaul
have felt through times past, [generations] which by his distinguished apostleship adopted the rudiments
of faith, and secured the relief of salvation. And our predecessors did not cultivate in vain the glory of this
outstanding witness and friend of God; since they honored his sacred watchmen on earth with what
10 riches they could, out of the love and respect for our Lord Jesus Christ, they deserved to obtain, through
his most worthy prayers, the privilege of honor both on earth and in heaven. Indeed, just as one of the

ancient kings of the Franks, Dagobert, who had venerated not inconsiderably that same most precious martyr of Christ, was both elevated to immortal life and, through his [the martyr's] help, freed from punishments, and set most enviably in everlasting life—just as a divine and renowned revelation makes
15 manifest.

Our ancestors also embraced, not incongruously with pious love and the most loving piety, the mellifluous name of Lord Dionysius (for in their words and writings they were accustomed to refer to him in this way). For our great-grandfather Charles [Martel], illustrious ruler of the Franks, gave thanks that he had obtained the pinnacle of rulership through the prayers of that most excellent martyr [Dionysius], and,
20 with the time of his mortal life having run its course, he commended faithfully to the same [Dionysius] that which at great cost he was able to have buried—namely, his own body to be revived on the day of the Great Judgment, and his soul to be presented to the Lord. And by this [deed] in particular, he clearly showed the devotion and trust of his heart toward his own special patron [Dionysius]. Near the altar which [lies] before the sepulcher of the oft-mentioned and the more-often-ought-to-be-discussed Lord
25 Dionysius—[the altar] that, by the command of that same most holy martyr [Dionysius] through a divine and remarkable revelation, was dedicated in honor of God and His apostles Peter and Paul, who were shown to be present by the blessed and angelic man Stephen, the highest bishop—our grandfather of no less holy memory, Pippin [the Short], together with his two sons, namely Carloman and our lord and father of holy memory Charles, rightly entitled “the Great,” having been anointed as king of the Franks
30 during the sacred service of the Masses by the same apostolic pope, received the blessing of celestial favor. And [when] the course of [Pippin's] life was completed, with what great humility he ordered himself to be buried before the threshold of the basilica of the holy martyrs, even the epitaph of that tomb makes clear.

But we, too, have experienced [Dionysius's] favors in many and frequent bestowals, yet especially
35 [when], in an event of human inconstancy, which should always be acknowledged as a just judgment of God, we were visited by the rod of His instruction, and raised up once more by the staff of his splendid mercy before the aforementioned altar through the merits and solace of our lord and most pious father, the precious Dionysius, and restored by divine virtue; and we took up again the sword-belt through

episcopal judgment and authority, and up to the present we have been supported by the gracious

40 assistance of that [martyr Dionysius].

For this reason, o venerable guardian and cultivator of that provider and helper of ours, Lord Dionysius, we wish to tell you that you should bring together into one corpus and compose thereof a uniform text, according to what you know to be a harmony of things, events, and also of times, [1.] anything of his record acquired through translation from the histories of the of Greeks, or [2.] whatever
45 from books written by him in his native tongue and, by the order of our authority, and by your wise work, and by the toil of translators, laid out into our language [that would be] fitting to be inserted into this labor, and [3.] whatever also you have now found to that end in Latin books, having added [3.1] those things which are found in the little book of his passion, not to mention also [3.2] those things which you had found in a book of very ancient charters in the chest of the church of Paris (that is, of his holy seat)
50 and had brought to the keen attention of our serenity. [You should make this particular collection and arrangement] so that [these things about Dionysius] can collectively be made known to the devoted, [that] the grief of those less exacting, or capable, or zealous of reading can be allayed, and equally [that] the utility of edification can be provided to all.

When these things have been collected thus, we wish that you adjoin [1.] the revelation made
55 manifest to blessed Pope Stephen in the church of the same most holy Dionysius, just as it was related by him, [2.] and the deeds subjoined to that same [revelatio text], [3.] together with hymns, which you have about this most glorious martyr and bishop, and [4.] a Night Office. But you are also to collect separately and with its own completeness in another volume whatever is found about him, and that you send or present it to us as soon as possible, clearly and correctly transcribed, since we believe that we have the
60 greatest and sweetest pledge of the desirable presence of that lord and consoler of ours, wheresoever we are, if, in prayer, conversation, or reading, we speak with him or about him or things said by him.

Be well in Christ, man of the Lord, always mindful of us in your holy prayers.