

Two charters, originals from the archives (chartrier) of the Abbey of Saint-Denis Sale of lands in Louveciennes owned by Isabelle de Maubuisson, sold to the Abbots of Saint-Denis In Latin and French, documents on parchment France, Paris, dated July 1290

Two parchment membranes, copied in a French documentary hand in 27 lines (Latin charter) and 30 lines (French charter), inscriptions on the back of documents, charters matted. Dimensions Latin charter: 270 x 252 mm, French charter: 270 x 265 mm.

Bilingualism in medieval society is a subject still under scrutiny, in particular issues related to the actual nature of bilingualism among French literate elite. Charters, laws, and related documents play an important role in mapping out the reality of linguistic preferences. With the spread of lay literacy in medieval society came the need for parties to understand what they were signing. Although most charters were redacted in Latin, progressively charters were written in French (or local dialects), and the language used in chanceries (royal, municipal, or seignorial) shows the clear advance of the vernacular from the thirteenth century onwards. Latin would eventually be phased out: the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts of 1539 made French the administrative language of the Kingdom of France.

These two documents are the only examples we know of charters that present the same text in Latin and in French, and they were originally part of the now dispersed archives of the Abbey of Saint-Denis (dispersal started before the Revolution). The charters were recorded in the *Inventaire général des chartes de Saint-Denis*, t. II (1225-1300), pp. 932-933 (Paris, AN, LL 1170, reg. no. 3007); later they were copied in the *Cartulaire blanc de l'abbaye de Saint-Denis* (Paris, AN, LL 1157, pp. 532-533), in the section on the possessions of the Abbey of Saint-Denis in Rueil and other towns including Louveciennes (Yvelines). The two charters document the sale of lands in 1290 to the Abbots of Saint-Denis (one-sixth of the land called Maubuisson, near Louveciennes) owned by Isabelle, widow of Denis de Maubuisson. It is tempting to think that the charters were copied in both languages because the act was passed between members of the clergy (Abbots of Saint-Denis), whose language of predilection remained Latin, and a female member of the lay community, Isabelle de Maubuisson, more at ease in the vernacular.

LITERATURE

Guyotjeannin, O. "Retour sur le Cartulaire blanc de Saint-Denis," in *Suger en question...*, Munich, 2004, pp. 141-153

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