



Publié sur *La Vie des Classiques* (<https://96.ip-213-32-20.eu>)

[Accueil](#) > Some notes on “De solstitiis et aequinoctis” (CPL 2277)

SOME NOTES ON “DE SOLSTITIIS ET AEQUINOCTIS” (CPL 2277)

There are very few sources for a Roman festival of the sun on 25th December. The main one is the entry in the *Chronography of 354*, in the Philocalian Calendar, labelling the day as “Natalis Invicti”, the birthday of Sol Invictus, the state sun-god.^[1] Next to it is a 13th century scholiast on Dionysius bar-Salibi. But the third is an obscure homily generally referred to as *De solstitiis et aequinoctiis*, which contains, towards the end, the following aside:

Sed et dominus noster nascitur mense decembris . . . VIII Kal. Ian. . . . Sed et invicti natalem apellant. Quis utique tam invictus nisi dominus noster qui mortem subactam devicit? Vel quod dicant solis esse natalem, ipse est sol iustitiae de quo malachias propheta dixit: “orietur vobis timentibus nomen ipsius sol iustitiae et sanitas est in pennis eius.”

But Our Lord, too, is born in the month of December . . . the eighth before the calends of January [25 December] . . . But they also call it the “Birthday of the invincible one” (Invictus). But who then is as invincible as our lord who defeated the death he suffered? Or if they say that this is the birthday of the sun, well He Himself is the Sun of Justice of whom the prophet Malachi said (4:2), “But for you who fear my name, the Sun of justice shall arise, and health is in his wings.”^[2]

The implication of this is that Christ as Sol Justitiae is a deliberate replacement for the pagan Sol Invictus. It is a key piece of evidence in the “Calculation” theory of the origins of Dec. 25 as Christmas.^[3]

So it’s an interesting passage. Yet there is a remarkable vagueness in most articles which reference this text, as to what it is and where it may be found.

In the article quoted above, the author tells us that the full title of the work is *De solstitia et aequinoctia conceptionis et nativitatis Domini Nostri Iesu Christi et Iohannis Baptistae* (“On the solstice and equinox of the conception and birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ and John the Baptist”).

The work is in fact listed in the *Clavis Patrum Latinorum* as CPL 2277. The date of composition is uncertain. The bible citations suggest an African origin, but there are also two terms which are Syriac.^[4]

It is actually part of a collection of 38 sermons in Latin, all attributed to John Chrysostom, whose existence was documented for the first time by Dom André Wilmart in 1918.^[5] It is the 17th item in that collection. Wilmart gives the following details:

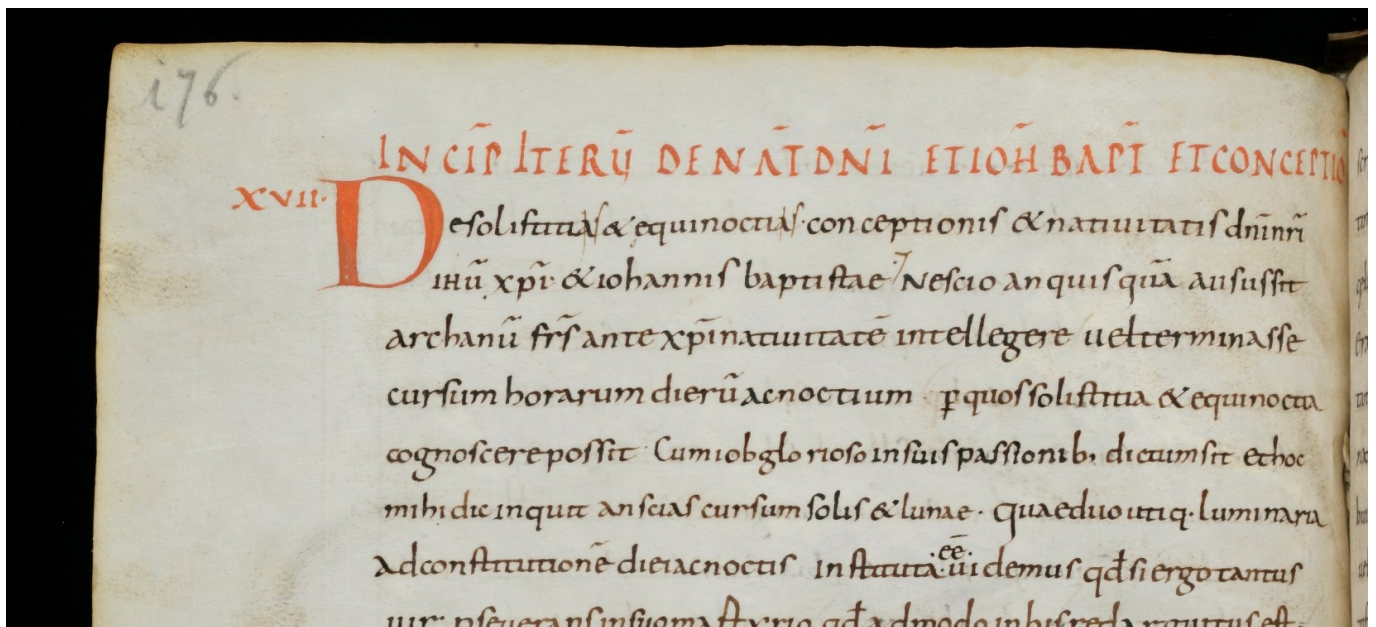
Title: *Iterum de natiuitate domini et Iohannis Baptistae et conceptionis de*

*solistitia et aequinoctia conceptionis et natiuitatis domini nostri Iesu Christi et
Johannis Baptistae.*

Opening words: *Nescio an quisquam ausus sit arcanum, fratres, ante Christi
natiuitatem intellegere uel terminasse cursum horarum dierum ac noctium per
quos solistitia et aequinoctia cognoscere possit.*

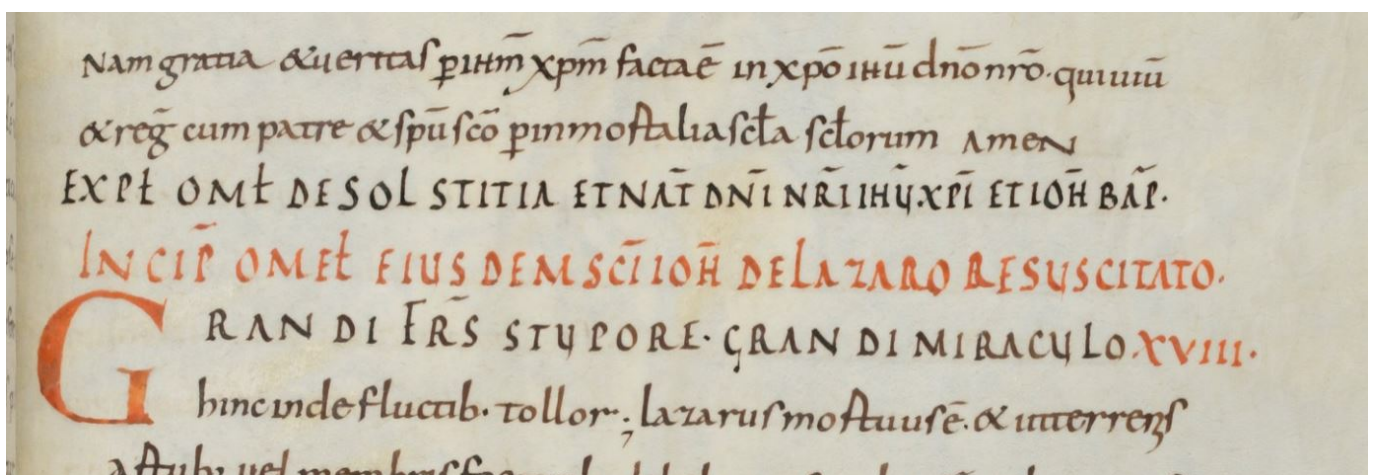
Closing words: *...Migrauerat enim gratia et ueritas a Iudaeis quia "lex per
Moysen data est, nam gratia et ueritas per Iesum Christum facta est". In
Christo Iesu domino nostro qui uiuit et regnat cum patre et spiritu sancto per
immortalia sancta sanctorum amen*

Wilmart (p.306) gives a list of 25 copies of this collection of homilies, all with the same content in the same order, beginning in the 9th century. Among the 9th century copies is Saint-Gall 103, which is online [here](#). Our text is pp. 176-191. It begins on [p. 176](#):



St Gall 103, p.176.

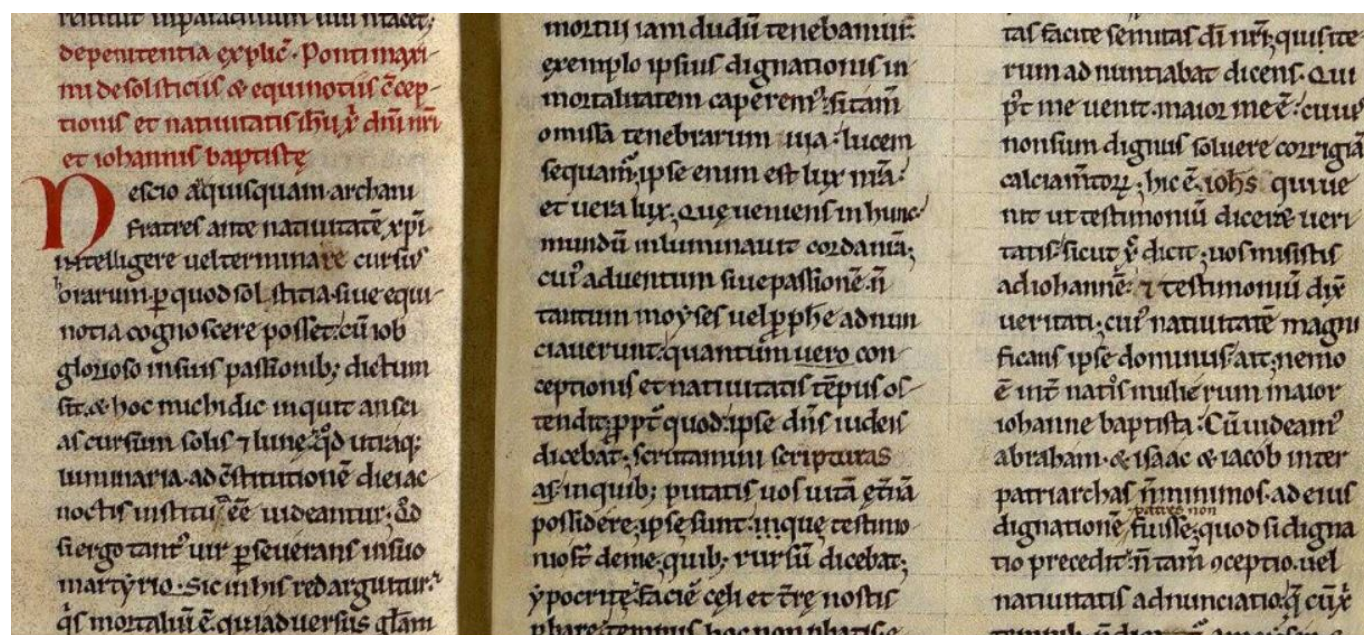
Note how the title is singular, but has been corrected to plural by another hand. Our passage is on [page 190](#), and the work ends on [page 191](#):



St Gall 103, p.191

There are still other copies in existence. One of these, transmitted independently, attributes the work to an otherwise unknown author - Pontius Maximus. This is given in a 12th century manuscript, today Troyes 523, fol.205v-210v, originally from Clairvaux as the

colophon on fol. 210v makes clear. It is online [here](#). The text is the last work in the manuscript, **which also contains** 15 treatises in Latin by Eusebius of Emesa, followed by 5 by Tertullian.



Ms. Troyes 523, folio 205v. Incipit of *De Solstitia*.

The red text tells us that, after the *explicit* for Tertullian, *de paenitentia*, the author is Pontius Maximus, and the title is *de solstitiis et aequinoctiis...*, i.e. plural. I have also found an article that claims the work is “sometimes attributed to one Pontius Maximus or Pontius Maximianus, conjectured to be an African, but thought by others to be of anonymous Syrian origin.”^[6]

There are only two editions of the text.

It was first printed in *Divi Ioannis Chrysostomi Archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani opera, quae hactenus versa sunt, omnia*, ed. Desiderius Erasmus (Vol. 2). Basel: Frobenius (1530), p. 336-342. (Online at [Google Books](#)). No doubt this was printed from whatever manuscript happened to come to hand. There are reprints of this, including a 1547 (col. 1285-1294) and a 1588 edition. I’m not sure how late this was reprinted.

The only other edition is B. Botte, *Les origines de la Noël et de l’épiphanie* (Series: *Textes et études liturgiques* 1). Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César (1932) who appended a version of the text on p. 93-105. Hijmans states that this is not a critical edition, but is based on a collation of a few manuscripts – somewhere I read that this was just three of the oldest. The Botte edition text was also reprinted in the *Patrologiae Latinae Supplementum* vol. 1 (1959), pp.557-567.

I’ve tried to OCR the 1530 text, but it involves correcting every word! So I’ve placed an interlibrary loan for the 1932 book, and I hope that we can at least get the Latin text online.

This is the sort of exercise that reminds us how much there is to do!

1. ^[1]Natalis may also mean the date of the founding of a temple, and other deities than Sol Invictus were called “invictus”, but this probably does refer to Sol Invictus.↩
2. ^[2]Steven Hijmans, “Sol Invictus, the winter solstice, and the origins of Christmas,” in:

Mouseion III.3 (2003), 377-398, esp. 379-80; also the [Catholic Encyclopedia version](#).↵

3. ^[3]See S. K. Roll, *Towards the Origins of Christmas*, [p.97](#).↵

4. ^[4]S. K. Roll, *Towards the Origins of Christmas*, [p.97](#). “The text is generally thought to date from after the earliest notation of Christmas on the calendar, but before a feast was widely celebrated on that date, probably the early fourth century. The Latin text betrays certain African turns of phrase, but also two specifically Syriac terms.[173]” and “173. Botte, *Origines*, 91, and Engberding, “Der 25. Dezember,” 36, both explore these in some detail.” – H. Engberding, “Der 25. Dezember als Tag der Feier der Geburt des Herrn,” *Archiv fur Liturgiewissenschaft* 2 (1952), 25-43. Unfortunately neither is accessible to me.↵

5. ^[5]A. Wilmart, “La collection des 38 homélies latines de saint Jean Chrysostome,” in: *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1918), 305-327. There is also a study that I have not seen in German: W. Wenk, *Zur Sammlung der 38 Homilien des Chrysostomus Latinus* (mit Edition der Nr. 6, 8, 27, 32 und 33), Wiener Studien Beiheft 10, Wien 1988.↵

6. ^[6]R. Love, “Bede and John Chrysostom”, *Journal of Medieval Latin* 17 (2007) 72-87, p.77, identifying a quote from our work in Bede.↵
