During the reign of the Carolingian emperor Louis the Pious, an anonymous hagiographer at the Neustrian monastery of Mont-Saint-Michel set out to write the history of his community’s foundation, an event he placed a little over a century earlier, in the years 708–09. The product of his efforts, the *Revelatio Ecclesiae Sancti Michaelis in Monte Tumba*,¹ remains our earliest extant source of information concerning the shrine’s origins, and was to play a vital role in shaping the historical memory and corporate identity of the monastic community for many generations to come. A curious passage in the *Revelatio* describes how Mont-Saint-Michel’s legendary founder, the saintly Bishop Aubert of Avranches, received explicit instructions concerning the future church from its patron, the archangel Michael, who appeared to the bishop

in a series of three dream-visions. In accordance with the archangel’s wishes, Aubert directed that the first oratory on the island be built not in any style then usual in Merovingian Francia, but on the model of Monte Gargano, a fifth-century grotto-church dedicated to Saint Michael in the faraway Apulia region of southeastern Italy. Monte Gargano was famed as a cave roughly hollowed out of a mountainside and consecrated by Saint Michael’s own hands, and claimed the further distinction of possessing the only relics of the archangel known to exist on earth, in the form of his scarlet pallium and angelic footprints impressed into the grotto’s floor. The Apulian grotto thus offered itself as a fitting archetype for a fledgling shrine dedicated to Saint Michael; by the time of the Revelatio’s composition, the story of Monte Gargano’s miraculous foundation was a well known liturgical text throughout Francia, widely read on the feast of the shrine’s dedication every May 8.2

The anonymous author of the Revelatio tells us that, at the archangel’s own instigation, Aubert sent a party of clerics to Southern Italy to bring back fragments of both of Monte Gargano’s famed relics, which were duly installed in the Neustrian church upon its completion. The abbot of Monte Gargano was said to have given the relics to Aubert’s delegates on the condition that, “as [the two shrines] had been united on account of an angelic revelation, they might always be connected by a bond of affection.”3

According to the Revelatio, Bishop Aubert’s church took the form of “a round crypt large enough to hold a hundred men,” and was consciously intended “to equal (exequare) that church on Monte Gargano.”

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2 There is an extensive literature on Monte Gargano. An excellent introduction to the site’s history in the early Middle Ages is found in Giorgio Otranto and Carlo Carletti, eds., Il santuario di San Michele Arcangelo sul Gargano dalle origini al X secolo (Bari, 1990). The feast of Monte Gargano was included in the Carolingian martyrologies of Hrabanus Maurus, Ado of Vienne, and Usuard, as well as in Anglo-Saxon and Insular calendars as early as the seventh century. On the spread of the feast of Monte Gargano’s dedication into Northern Europe, see Giorgio Otranto, “Il ‘Liber de Apparitione’ e il culto di S. Michele sul Gargano nella documentazione liturgica altomedievale,” Vetera Christianorum 18 (1981): 423–42.

3 Revelatio in Monte Tumba, col. 1393: “Hinc cum qua decebat ueneratione sumptis a loco pignoribus quo beatus archangelus sui memoria fidelis commendauerat, partem scilicet rubei pallioli, quod ipse memoratus archangelus in monte Gargano supra altare quod ipse manu sua construxerat posuit, et partem scilicet marmoris supra quod stetit, cuius ibidem usque nunc in eodem loco superextant uestigia, iam dictis fratribus usque ad sacram locum referenda patrocinia contradidit, conditione interposita uidelicet ut quos una angelice reuelationis sociauerat causa una quoque aeternaliter necteret conexio caritatis.”