The Wazzalcora

“The wazzalcora is similar to the divine mind; its name in Latin sounds “flat sphere”, but it is also called “astrolapsus” of Ptolemy. In the wazzalcora, there is a description of the whole form of the heavenly sphere, a form determined by natural rationality in accordance with the roundness of the sky. In the wazzalcora, all rules of celestial configurations are represented with architectonic rationality.”

This passage is taken from one of a number of short texts grouped together in over thirty Latin manuscripts, the earliest of which dates from the beginning of the eleventh century. The authors of the texts remain for the most part anonymous, but the fact that they could read and write leaves little doubt that they were clerics.

The individual texts deal with very different subjects, ranging from cosmology to surveying, but they share a common focus of interest, which I shall refer to as “the flat sphere”. This expression is the literal translation of “plana spera”, one of


3 For an overview of the historical and cultural context in which the manuscripts were written, see: Arno Borst, Astrolab und Klosterreform an der Jahrtausendwende (Heidelberg, 1989); Charles Burnett, King Ptolemy and Alchandreus the philosopher: The earliest texts on the astrolabe and Arabic astrology at Fleury, Micy, and Chartres. Annals of Science 55 (1998): 329–368.