

MEDIOEVO ROMANZO

RIVISTA QUADRIMESTRALE

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VOLUME XIV · 1989

SOCIETA EDITRICE IL MULINO BOLOGNA

Gervase of Tilbury and the Birth of Purgatory

La naissance du Purgatoire by Jacques Le Goff (Paris, Gallimard, 1981) was immediately hailed as an imaginative, erudite, stimulating and elegant masterpiece: an appraisal duly recognized by the prestigious Prix Saint-Beuve¹. The book is divided into three parts each one of which represents a phase in the dramatic event called «the birth of Purgatory». The first part is devoted to «Les au-delà avant le Purgatoire». The second focuses on the twelfth-century when the Purgatory was born in the Scholastic circles of Paris. The third concerns the «triumph» of the idea of Purgatory with its theological systematization, its social acceptance and, finally, with its poetical celebration in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. As this scheme shows, the realm of Purgatory had a plurisecular gestation in which ancient and pagan beliefs coalesced with the Christian ones resulting first of all in a vague notion of the existence of a *ignis purgatorii* or *poenae purgatoriae*. This long gestation bore its fruit in the twelfth-century, more precisely in the decade 1170-1180. Sometime during this decade Petrus Comestor wrote a sermon where the noun *purgatorium* appears for the first time in history and it refers to an autonomous realm placed between Hell and Paradise, whereas before that time the *ignis purgatorii* was taken to be a particular sort of punishment administered in a special part of Hell. The idea of a Purgatory unto itself rapidly gained support. In a sermon at the beginning of the thirteenth-century, Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) clearly accepted the existence of a third realm in the hereafter. The official position of the Church on this matter was declared in 1254 in a letter by Pope Innocent IV to his legate to the Greeks; but already the theologians had prepared the basis for the papal acceptance of an autonomous Purgatory. The popular imagination was then fed by Dante's

¹ An English translation by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago 1984) is available. The English version has a satisfactory (not perfect) index of names which is missing in the French original.

vision. These are, in a sketchy form, the data and the ideas presented in *La naissance du Purgatoire*.

The history of the idea of Purgatory had been written many times before Le Goff, but not in the same way. For one thing, nobody before looked for a 'birth date' of Purgatory, and nobody combined visionary, legal and theological materials as Le Goff has done in his research. Moreover, nobody before set forth the thesis that the birth of Purgatory coincides with the rise of the 'middle class' and with the transformation of society from a feudal to an urban organization. This transformation brought about a change in Western mentality such that the binary system was replaced by a ternary one which made possible the acceptance of a third realm between Hell and Paradise. Thus once again the Historic approach pursued by the school of the *Annales* has proven how fecund it can be when applied by a master of Le Goff's stature.

No birth, however, comes without pain; and Le Goff's «birth of Purgatory» is no exception. Indeed while the welcoming applause was still resounding, serious reservations were raised from many places and on several levels. A. H. Bedrero², J. G. Bougerol³, G. R. Edwards⁴, P. Ariès⁵, L. Portier⁶, C. Delcorno⁷, A. Bettinzoli⁸, and A. J. Gurevich⁹, just to mention a few sharp

² «Le Moyen Age et le Purgatoire», *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 78 (1983): 429-52. It is the most thorough review, dealing with questions of methodology, chronology and history of theology.

³ «Autour de la 'naissance du Purgatoire'» *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen-Age* 50 (1988): 7-59, which presents new important texts.

⁴ «Purgatory: 'Birth' or Evolution?», *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985): 634-46. Edwards stands for the «evolution» of the idea of Purgatory. Important here is the analysis of the Augustinian texts which, according to Le Goff, are proof of the «binary» mentality prevailing before the twelfth century. In fact, Edward finds these texts to be a perfect testimony of a «ternary».

⁵ «Le Purgatoire et la cosmologie de l'au-delà», *Annales. Economie, société, civilisation* 38 (1982): 151-7, where it is stated that the idea of Purgatory found its greatest diffusion in the mentality of the late seventeenth century.

⁶ «Le vrai Purgatoire de Dante», *Revue des études italiennes* 28 (1982): 168-80. This article and the two indicated below question Le Goff's way of reading Dantes *Purgatorio*.

⁷ «Il Purgatorio e l'immagine medievale», *Intersezioni* 3 (1982): 401-9.

⁸ In his review of the Italian translation (Turin 1982) in *Studi sul Boccaccio* 14 (1983-1984): 382-91.

⁹ «Popular and Scholarly Medieval Cultural Tradition: Notes in the Margin of Jacques Le Goff's Book», *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1982): 71-90, which maintains that the idea of Purgatory was strong in the popular conscience before the theologians dealt with it; and this element caused a change from the binary to the ternary mentality.

reviewers, have questioned many points of Le Goff's book. Among other things, it was questioned whether the noun *purgatorium* firstly occurs in 1170-1180 and whether such a finding is after all so important, considering that the very same idea, if not the noun, expressed by Petrus Comestor, is found in his teacher Petrus Lombardus. It has been questioned whether Le Goff was right in using the theologians of the Carolingian period to prove the lack of evolution of the idea of Purgatory in their midst: in fact it should indeed be remembered that the theology of this period kept systematically close to the texts of the Fathers, especially of St. Augustine and Gregory the Great whose writing on the pains of Purgatory were extremely influential for many centuries. One should, therefore, look somewhere else for signs of such evolution, and, in any case, the theologians whom Le Goff dismisses so hastily, do give indications of some change in their thinking about Purgatory. Le Goff relies on two seminal passages of St. Augustine's *Enchiridion* and *De Civitate Dei* to prove the existence of a binary *mentalité*; but Le Goff's interpretation has been refuted, for one can easily see in those passages the presence of a ternary system. It has been questioned whether Purgatory was the creation of a monastic culture rather than of Scholasticism; and several texts ignored or disregarded by Le Goff received new attention. Other minor objections would be too lengthy to review here, but those recalled suffice to show that the birth of Purgatory caused some pain. But even when some of the reservations surveyed occasionally reach the core of Le Goff's main thesis, no critic has called for a radical rejection of it. The general impression one draws from reading even the most severe reviewers is that they would like to extenuate the dramatic notion of «the birth» of Purgatory and talk instead of an «evolution» of the idea of Purgatory. Another general view is that the study of a wider range of texts and a less biased reading of them is highly desirable in order to have a broader and, at the same time, a better nuanced understanding of the history of Purgatory. Ultimately some pioneering ideas of Le Goff may be confirmed by the research he has stimulated. The present note is set down in this spirit.

In the section devoted to the history of Purgatory outside of the Parisian circles, especially to the Anglo-Irish world where the image of a purging place as portrayed by Bede was still alive in the late twelfth century, Le Goff dwells on what he calls

«la tentative sicilienne». In this chapter (pp. 273-278), Le Goff analyzes two texts taken from the *Otia imperialia* by Gervase of Tilbury¹⁰. The first is chapter 17 of the *decisio prima* (not *tertia* as Le Goff says; as we shall see the precise location may be meaningful) is entitled «De duobus paradisis et infernis»¹¹. Here Gervase maintains that there are two paradises (one earthly and the other celestial) and two hells: «Similiter sunt duo inferni, terrestres, quem in cavitate dicunt terrae positum; et in illo inferno dicunt locum esse longe semotum a locis poenaliibus, qui ob quietem ac separationem ab aliis sinus dicebatur, sicut sinum maris appellamus, et dicitur sinus Abrahae in parabola divitis et Lazari . . .» The other text¹² belongs to the *secunda decisio*. It contains the fascinating legend of King Arthur who lives in a palace inside Mount Etna, a mountain which older folkloric beliefs already related to the *ignis purgatorii*. In the text of this legend, magisterially studied by Arturo Graf¹³, the word *purgatorium* does not appear, but it does so in a later version given by Etienne de Bourbon¹⁴. These two texts lead Le Goff to conclude that «Gervase ignore le Purgatoire et, tout comme il reste attaché au sein d'Abraham, il place ici Arthur dans un lieu plus proche d'un au-delà merveilleux païen» (p. 277). This conclusion may be correct: Gervase had no idea of a Purgatory as it was being created by the Parisian theologians and monks, so that he displays only a traditional belief on this

¹⁰ The *Otia imperialia* were edited by G. Leibniz in his first of the two folio volumes of the *Scriptores rerum brunsvicensium*, Hanover 1707-1711, pp. 881-1005. Another edition is that by F. Liebrecht, *Das Gervasius von Tilbury, Otia Imperialia*, Hanover 1856. A partial edition by R. Pauli is in the *MGH, Scriptores*, t. 27, 1885, pp. 359-94. There is no modern edition of the *Otia imperialia*. J. R. Caldwell was preparing an edition, but his work was interrupted by his death; one can see, however, his essays: «The autograph manuscript of Gervase of Tilbury», *Scriptorium* 11 (1957): 87-98; «Gervase of Tilbury's addenda to his *Otia imperialia*», *Medieval Studies* 24 (1962): 28-45; «The interrelationship of the manuscripts of Gervase of Tilbury's 'Otia imperialia'», *Scriptorium* 16 (1962): 246-76. See also K. J. Hucker, «Eine unbekannte Handschrift der 'Otia imperialia' des Gervasius von Tilbury», *Scriptorium* 38 (1984): 318-9.

¹¹ This chapter is on p. 897 rather than on p. 921 as Le Goff says. In view of these minor imprecisions and the major omission which will be discussed shortly, one wonders whether Le Goff saw the text of the *Otia* while working on his book or has relied on second-hand information.

¹² Is chapter XII, «De insulis Mediterranei maris», pp. 920-22. The legend concerning King Arthur is on p. 921.

¹³ «Artù nell'Etna» in Graf's collected essays *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del Medio Evo*, Turin 1893, pp. 303-35.

¹⁴ Le Goff compares the two versions of the Arthurian legend on pp. 419-21.

matter. It could be argued that Gervase was only reporting folklore beliefs rather than presenting his view. In any case, Le Goff's conclusion may be correct only if referred to the Gervase who composed the first and the second *decisiones* of his work, because the Gervase who compiled his *decisio tertia* produced an astonishing text on Purgatory which by far surpassed other contemporary texts in length and in richness of detail. Also it is astonishing that Le Goff missed it; and when he later referred to it, he underestimated its historical value perhaps because by doing so he could minimize the nature of his omission¹⁵.

The chapter containing this text is «De mortuo qui apparet virgini; mira dicit et annunciat»; it is one of the last of the *Otia imperialia*¹⁶. Gervase starts with an observation which aims at securing the reader's trust because one who writes about after-life matters risks being mocked and dubbed a liar. The best way of convincing people is to have them listen directly to persons who come back from the other world and tell about their kind of life, although not all returning souls are allowed to reveal such matters. Fortunately the cases of visits from souls are frequent, and Gervase promises to transcribe in the most faithful way one of these events which is so extraordinary that it will persuade even the most incredulous people, an event «in cuius

¹⁵ This awareness is shown in «Une collecte ethnographique en Dauphiné au début du XIII^e siècle» in *Croyances, récits et pratiques de tradition. Mélanges d'Ethnologie, d'histoire, et de Linguistique en hommage à Charles Joisten*, which is a special issue of *Le monde Alpin et Rhodanien* 10 (1982): 55-65. In a sort of appendix to this article devoted to Gervase of Tilbury, Le Goff makes an «inventaire des *mirabilia* dans le reste du royaume d'Arles» where he mentions the chapter which interests us, giving this resumé of its content: «Un jeune homme d'Apt, tué injustement, apparaît à une jeune parente de Beaucaire. Il lui parle de l'au-delà et notamment du purgatoire où il se trouve». This resumé is completed with a footnote (n. 16): «Selon une tradition rare ce texte, qui se situe à un moment où la géographie du purgatoire n'est pas encore bien établie, place celui-ci dans l'air» (p. 65). This rarity alone should have deserved a special mention of Gervase. Le Goff reprints his essay without any alterations in his *L'imaginaire médiévale*, Paris 1985, pp. 40-55. I came to know this article when this paper was already completed and I thought I was the first to call attention to Gervase's text. This is not the case any longer; but the cursory treatment on Le Goff's part and the subsequent undermining of the importance of the text by Gervase justifies, to my mind, a new, de facto original analysis of it.

¹⁶ It is ch. 103, pp. 994-1002. It is one of the longest chapters in the whole work and it comes almost at the very end of it. The remaining twenty-six chapters (many of them are two lines long), a concluding letter and the apparatus of variants, cover the remaining four pages in Leibnitz's edition.

novitate mirentur corda, stupeant animi, membra contrimescant» (p. 995).

This event took place in July 1211 in Beaucaire (castrum Belliquadri) in the province and diocese of Arles. One of the protagonists of the story is an eleven year old girl, still a virgin, born to pious and well-to-do parents. A young man, a relative of hers, is killed when he moves from his town to Beaucaire «non sua culpa, sed alieno infortunio». William (later on we learn his name) forgives his killer and «cum sufficiente contritione et confessione» takes communion and dies. After three or five days (he is not a «quatruiduanus» as many of the returning souls are) he appears at night to the girl. The girl is frightened, but William talks to her in a gentle way, and tells her that he came to visit her because of the affection he feels for her and because of a «divina permissione». He can talk only to her and reply to other people's questions only through her. The girl asks how and under what conditions he returned to earth, considering that he is a dead man. At the mention of death, William begs the girl never to use such a word because it reminds him of an insufferable pain. The girl's parents, hearing her speak, come to her room, and at their questioning she replies that she is talking to her relative William. Her parents cannot see or hear him; they cross themselves and William disappears at once. On the seventh day after his death, while the girl's parents are at a nearby monastery to pray for their defunct relative, William again appears to the girl who asks him whence and with what company is he coming. William replies «se in aëre mansionem inter spiritus habere, et poenas igni purgatorii sustinere», adding that at that precise moment the Prior and the monks of the monastery being visited by the girl's parents, aspersed him with cooling water and that he is enjoying the benefit of their prayers and sacrifices. Then the girl asks him to show her his companion, and he shows her a devil «spirantem incendia». The girl asperses the devil with some holy water: the devil disappears, and William says that the aspersion relieved him from his fire. This assertion prompts a theological explanation taken from Gregory the Great who says that the fire «corporeus est, quo torquentur spiritus. Quia si incorporeus spiritus in hoc corpore teneri potest, quod vivificat: quare non poenaliter ibi teneatur, ubi mortificatur. Sicque fit, ut res corporea incorpoream exurat. Et sicut unus sol hos magis, illos minus urit; ita unus ignis gehenna hos magis illos

minus cruciat: semper tamen urit, quos urit». In a few days the rumor of William's visits spreads into the surrounding villages and many people, moved by curiosity, come to visit the young girl who responds for William to the questions which are asked of him. One of the people who comes to see the girl is a soldier who asks whether anyone on that day paid a *beneficium* for the dead man. William replies that a soldier gave two *denarios* for William's soul. Another visitor, a Prior from Tarragona (Tarracensis), happens to be with the girl when William comes to visit her at the established time («statutis et praefixis horis»). The Prior asks through the girl this question of William: «ubi stat, quid agit, unde venit, quem comitem ducit». At this point a description of Purgatory begins. The details given thus far are meant to convey a sense of credibility to what will follow, namely a description of Purgatory. It is better, therefore, to quote the text directly instead of paraphrasing it.

Secreta igitur insinuatione respondit mortuus virgini, se in aëre purgatorium pati sed solito mitius; se Angelum habere comitem. Et cum rogata a Priore, ut eum ostendat virgini, virgo quaereret conspiceri, statim producit a dextris hominem albissimum, alba circumseptum facie, splendore infinito coruscantem, cujus nomen Michaëlem esse dicit: suae et multarum animarum esse custodem. Tandem virgo proprio motu quaerit: quid velit, quod pridie tam nudus et confractis vestibus apparuit, nunc e diverso pristinis sit vestimentis indutus? respondit has esse vestes suas, quas mater ipsius virginis pauperibus dederat, quibus antea non potuit indui, cum nullo beneficio poterat, ipsis non distributis, adiuvari. Adiecit, se poenam pati pro cingulo, quod cuidam civi Aptensi non restituerat, dicens: se a cinctorio ignis liberari, si cingulum illud, in scrinio suo reposito, restitueretur: quod factum est. Item, quaerit Prior: quid ipse egerit, dum castrum Bellicadri intraret? respondit, quod vino porrecto in domo Guilielmi Bedocii Grammatici Prior ipse prius biberit, cum diu conflictum habuisset ad socios, quis prior bibiturus esset? Quaerit si quod sibi ipse Prior bonum contulisset? respondit, maximum sibi remedium illatum ex eo, quod Missas pro eo cantari fecerat. Quaerit Prior: quid summum mortuorum sit adiutorium? respondit: sacrificium in Missa. Quaerit: qualiter novit, quae hic aguntur? respondit, spiritum omnia ad oculum habere, nulloque medio a conspectu arceri, ideoque turpitudines maxime vitandas, quia infinitorum spirituum habent conspectum, et verecundia infinito testimonio adjuvatur. Quaerit: si videt Deum et beatam virginem et sanctos et bonos et malos? res-

pondit, quod Deum nunc videt, et in conspectu est beatae virginis, sed lucidius, exacto purgatorio, ipsum conspiciet, et post iudicium infinita speculatione clarius. Quaerit in secreto a virgine Prior de vita sua et conversatione. Respondit, non expedire Priori, ut exprimat, quae intus conscientia sua familiarius ac verecundius agnovit. Uno aliquo die, dum in conspectu stat virginis, ait, familiarem suum, filium Guilielmi de Agenno migrasse a seculo et transire, malis sociis stipatum. Et cum requireretur, si statim aliud seculum ingrediebatur ad purgatorium? respondit, quod quandoque migrantes a seculo post diem tertium vel quartum non perveniunt ad locum destinatum. Ut verbum probetur effectu, curritur ad satis contiguam domum, et illum jam obiisse reperiunt, quem dixerat. Inquisitus per virginem a viris literatis, cum mortis nomen mortui abhorreant, quod nomen sit morti mitius imponendum, respondit, migratio a seculo. Requisitus, ubi sit locus gehennae? respondit, quod infernus sub terras locus est caliginosus, puteus foedidus, horrendus, et illum non ingrediuntur usque post iudicium. Verum damnati in aliis locis poenalis stant in poena infernali, damnatoriam et multo duriores expectantes sententiam. Sic sinus Abrahae locus est jucundus et quietus, ubi bonorum spiritus requiescunt, usque quo judicialis paradisi detur justificatis ad gloriam. Purgatorius quoque in aëre est. Multoties requisitus super his, quae aguntur in hoc seculo aut super futuris, invitatus respondit, dicens: non inquirendum de huiusmodi vilibus et contrasitoriiis: asserebatque sibi permissum, ut de spiritualibus responderet non terrenis, nisi per vices, semperque interrogatus ad consiliarium, quasi post humerum responsum expectans, flectebatur. Requisitus, si omnia terrena illi oneri essent? respondit, levissimam paleam a spiritu sustineri non posse. Interrogatus, si longo tempore huiusmodi collocutio cum hominibus ei permitteretur? respondit, quod non videbatur ei hoc permittendum ultra id tempus, quo ista virgo maneret, nempe finito purgatorio. Nulla enim cum hominibus huiusmodi futura esse videbatur communio. Interrogatus, cujus licentia huic virgini apparebat, et unde id processerat? respondit, istam inter consanguineas omnes a se in seculo nostro magis dilectam, ipsamque inter tristis exitus angustias eum fortiter adjurasse, ut omnibus modis, si quo pacto id fieri poterat, ad eam rediret, statum illi suum edicturus. Coactus adjuratione, et licentiam a Deo capiens, ad eam veni; at ipsa status mei explorati, et novitatis et mirabilium, quae non novit, amore, in recessu quotidiano, ut redeam, me adjurat. Causa vero reditus mei est, ut per verba mea infidelitas non credentium ad finem convertatur, et fides credentium ad melius accendatur. Haec hactenus. Nunc ad arctiora divini consilii secreta me transfero. Erat sacerdos vir equidem peritus in litteratura, bonus, religiosus ac timens Deum. Hic inter initia visionis istius, quae dicebatur, frivolum reputans

accessit ad virginem, per eam ad mortum verba transfundens. Rogat ergo virginem, ut apparenti sibi insinuet, quatenus, si fieri posset, sacerdoti loquatur, ut non quasi jam per canalem aquae salutaris transeat ad aureolas, sed ipse sacerdos verba responsionis ejus absque intermedio excipiat. Quid plura? Petitur et post moras impetratur. Hic ergo ad locum conductum veniens, sacerdos arctioribus quaestionibus invigilat, et quia nobis plurimum extitit commendatus et familiaris, quaestiones varias illi proponit, ut solvat: ex cujus ore sub attestazione et divini nominis obtestatione scripsi quae dictito. Interrogatus respondit: se in exitu vitae plurimum ac incomparabiliter exhorruisse, et quod tam boni quam mali angeli ipsi apparuerunt. Bonis tandem praevalentibus, qui eum in purgatorium duxerunt. Adjecit, omnem poenam morti esse incomparabilem et inaequalem, minimamque purgatorii poenam quavis corporali poena esse asperiolem. Interrogatus respondit, quod omnes animae salvandae intrant purgatorium, praeter animas sanctorum, qui statim coelum suum intrant, quia in hoc corpore mortali suum egerunt purgatorium. Porro damnandi non intrant purgatorium nec infernum inferiorem usque ad diem judicii, sed in aëre poenas sustinent infernales sine omni intermissione. Sed et secundum quod peccata graviora commissa sunt, purgatorium diutius ac gravius durat. Sane in aëre est quoddam coelum, in quo sunt sancti, remotum a purgatorio, et illic gaudent omnes sancti et laudes cantant Deo. Interrogatus, quas laudes canunt? respondit: illud angelicum: Gloria in excelsis Deo, et nonnunquam pro vivis precantur. Dixit etiam, quod animae in purgatorio nonnullae hoc canticum canunt, et quaedam, videntes salvationem suam venturam in proximo, inter poenas purgatorii gaudent spe patriae et gloriae, ad quam tendunt. Interrogatus respondit, quod omnes animas videt, quae sunt in purgatorio et audit quarundam gemitus et aliarum gaudium, quae purgatorium compleverunt, et novit quasdam, quae sint: alias, quas in hoc seculo non novit, non agnoscit in purgatorio. Poenas quoque damnatorum videt, sed ipsos damnatos non novit. Item videt coelum et videt infernum, et stat, ubi in vicino utrumque est, ut ex vicinitate sui intendatur gaudium justorum et tristitia perditorum. Cum vero animae exeunt a corpore, videt eas venientes, et quocunque vadunt, videt: non tamen eas agnoscit, quia non novit illos quorum sunt. Interrogatus, in quo loco habitet? respondit, quod mansio ejus vicinior est Jerusalem, quam loco, quo manere solet in seculo. Interrogatus, si sancti omnes habent gloriam plenam? respondit, quod quidam habent tantam gloriam, quantam possunt ante diem judicii, alii minus plenam. Nempe B. Hieronimus multum in gloria sua defectum patitur ex eo, quod volentibus festum conceptionis B. Virginis solennizare, non consentit. Interrogatus, si quando requiescunt animae in purgatorio? respondit, quod in omni hebdomada a vespere

diei sabbathi usque in vesperam diei dominicae requiescunt a poenis et quando generaliter offertur pro eis sacrificium in Missa omnes quiescunt. Cum vero specialiter pro aliqua canitur, illa interim requiem habet integram. Aliae vero ex generalis beneficii participio remedium habent, sed non in tanta quantitate. Interrogatus respondit, multum prodesse elemosynas, quae propter reverentiam ac memoriam dantur Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, et Beatae Virginis, et Apostolorum Petri et Pauli. Interrogatus respondit se Michaëlem habere custodem. Cumque uno die rogaretur, ut Michaël daret benedictionem suam virgini ac sacerdoti, cum quo loquebatur, respondit, quod beatus Michaël annuit: et cum extenderet manum Michaël ad benedicendum, tantus fulgor virginem percussit, quod ipsam intueri nemo sustinere sine stupore potuit. Interrogatus respondit, quod ipse videt bonos et malos angelos et utrosque videt sua ministeria complere. Et adjecit, quod quilibet christianus habet ad custodiam suam bonum angelum, dum tamen est sine mortali peccato. Nam dum est in mortali, recedit ab eo bonus angelus, et quasi de illo verecundiam patitur: poenitentia vero suscepta, redit ad custodiam. Interrogatus respondit, corporis effigiem, quam praetendit, corpus non est nisi aëreum, ipsum asserens non posse pati, sed tantum spiritum: neque posse onus quamvis levissimum sustinere. Inde est, quod cum sacerdos illi stolam supponeret, gratum habuit: sed onus impressum sustinere nequii, asserens sacerdotale vinculum diaboli esse. Interrogatus, si in purgatorio est nox aut dies continuus? respondit, quod vicissim dies et nox, verum nox non est ita obscura ut hic. Interrogatus respondit summum bonum esse in hoc seculo post sacrificium et elemosynas, abstinere a mendaciis. Interrogatus, si Johannes Baptista, qui in utero sanctificatus Dominum exultando sensit et verus praecursor et Propheta Domini, dubitavit, an Christus hic esset, quando misit ad eum discipulos suos, ut interrogarent eum: Tu quis es? respondit, Johannem non dubitasse, sed ad tollendam dubitationem discipulorum, illos misisse. Interrogatus, si mors et internecio Albiensium Deo placeret? respondit, pridem nullum factum religionis tantum Deo placuisse, et adjecit, quod bonos Deus in suo iudicio voluit discerni a malis. Nam et boni per sustinentiam peccaverunt, qui per haeresin fidem non macularunt. Qui vero hic cremantur in corpore, post mortem durius cremantur in spiritu. Accedit ad enarrata mirandum plurimum et memorandum. Cum enim sanctissimi Episcopi Aurasiani Galli, adventum mortuus iste plurimum affectaret, et episcopus ille ad capitulum Cisterciense accessurus, sui copiam facere non posset, dicto sacerdoti quaestiones in scriptis episcopus misit, quas ad probationem veritatis et ad instructionem excogitaverat. Uno ergo die, cum mortui responsiones sacerdos noster quarundam quaestionum audiret, mortuus adstantibus inquit: Ecce quod episcopus

Aurasicensis quaestiones mittit, quarum solutionem a me fieri petit et jam ad ostium nuncius est. Et cum super quibus quaestiones verterentur, inquiritur, respondit ex ordine ad quaestiones, et dum haec aguntur, nuncius mittit schedulam quaestionibus plenam, in sacerdotis nostri manus exponens. Mirantur omnes praescientiam, et dum agilitatem spiritus ponderant, dant admirationi consilium, et quaestiones exquirunt, et accipiunt per ordines solutiones. Si vis quaestiones cum responsionibus nosse, recurre, quaecunque praemissum fere ab illo loco: interrogatus, cujus licentia etc. Item interrogatus, an unicus esset angelus omnium animarum bonarum custos Michaël? respondit, quod nomen hoc officii est non personae, nec unius sed legionis. Sunt enim hujus nominis omnes animarum custodes. Interrogatus in vigilia S. Michaëlis dum quaestionibus a sacerdote teneretur, quare solito instantius licentiam sibi dari postularet? respondit, quod oportebat festinare eum ad instantem S. Michälis solennitatem: asserens, hoc in coelis festum celebre esse apud omnes angelos, omnesque archangelos pro hujus diei victoria gloriam et laudes Deo persolvere. Quinimo die isto dicit omnes animas in purgatorio positas quiescere, et custodis sui Michaëlis laudibus inservire. Quid plura? De futuris multa interrogatus constanter respondit.

After this point of the chapter there is no further mention of Purgatory. In what follows William predicts an ambush which it does occur so that this fulfilled prediction seems to prove beyond any doubt how truthful William has been in everything he has said about Purgatory. Similarly, the length of his account and the number and quality of details it contains should leave no doubt as to the fact that Gervase, the man who recorded this account, was very much aware of the existence of Purgatory. Not only was Gervase aware of it but he contributed a great deal of material to the birth and image of Purgatory. His text is remarkable insofar as it brings together old and new information about Purgatory, beginning from the very same noun «purgatorium» which goes side by side with the «ignis purgatorii» or «poenae purgatoriae». With the traditional notions belong the weekly respite of the souls, the nature of the purging fire, the dispute between the angel and the devil over the soul. Traditional also is the element of the benefits coming to the souls in pain from alms, prayers and masses although the insistence on this point is such that it reflects the Church's campaign «pro purgatorio» in those days. Gervase's sensitivity to contemporary concerns is also shown by the dwelling on the afterlife punish-

ments reserved for the Albigenians who did not believe in the existence of Purgatory. Also Gervase's modernity is proven by his beliefs in a Purgatory having a separate place of its own between Hell and Paradise, one which is clearly distinct from the *sinus Abrahae*.

Gervase, however, is more than a mere recorder of given beliefs, for he seems to be the first one to present a series of details which will make their way to Dante's poem, that is to the «triumph» of Purgatory. We learn firstly from Gervase that souls do not go to Purgatory immediately after death. This is precisely the situation experienced by Dante's characters whose souls wait at the Tiber's mouth before being given a lift to the shores of the Purgatory mountain (*Purgatorio* III 95-104). Another novelty in Gervase's Purgatory, also to appear in Dante's, is that in the third realm day and night alternate. This feature, which is made possible by Gervase's and Dante's decision of placing Purgatory in the open air, is very important because it brings with it the notion of time, a decisive element in Dante's «secondo regno», both for the theology of the contrapasso and for the psychology of the characters, which is based upon hope. As for the latter point, Gervase and Dante share another important detail: when William says that the souls who «inter poenas purgatorii gaudent spe patriae et gloriae ad quam tendunt», he could have been speaking for Dante's characters in Purgatory. Another remarkable detail present in both authors is that the souls in Purgatory sing hymns. In Dante's Purgatory singing is quite frequent, whereas in William's account this seems to be a rare event. Yet it is interesting that in Dante the liberation of Statius produces an earthquake and causes all the inhabitants of Purgatory to sing *Gloria in excelsis Deo*; in Gervase the soul who is being freed or is close to being freed sings the same hymn: the difference between choral and individual singing does not obscure the strong similarities. Finally, it is important to notice that Gervase through William's testimony seems to settle a Scholastic controversy by deciding, as Dante will do later, that angels and not devils are the custodians of the souls in Purgatory. These similarities do not necessarily mean that Gervase was a source of inspiration for Dante; in fact, it is quite unlikely that Dante knew the *Otia imperialia*. But Gervase and Dante represent two important moments in the growth of the image of Purgatory because the first one enriched the traditional

picture with new details and Dante's poetic genius will use them. Whether Gervase made up these details or recorded them as they were reported to him by folkloric sources, is something which may never be proven; the fact remains, however, that he gave them currency and literary dignity by recording them for the first time.

There should be no doubt about Gervase's awareness of the existence of Purgatory; one wonders, however, why he seems to ignore it in the chapter «De duobus paradisis et duobus infernis». The reason for this incongruity must be due to the time elapsed between these two chapters which belong to two different moments of Gervase's life and of the composition of the *Otia imperialia*.

Gervase was born in Tilbury around 1152. In 1176 he left England and went to Reims to continue his studies, but shortly afterwards (perhaps the following year) he moved to Bologna to study law. Upon completion of his courses he joined the court of Henry fitz Henry. At the death of the young Plantagenet (1183), Gervase returned to Bologna to teach law, but he also travelled extensively. In 1189 he went to Sicily in the service of William the Good who died the same year. Towards the end of the twelfth century Gervase became a judge of the archbishopric of Arles and in 1207 he was appointed superior judge for the county of Provence. In 1209 Otto IV of Brunswick was elected emperor and he made Gervase marshall of Arles, an appointment he held until his death, which probably occurred in 1221. The *Otia imperialia*, one of his many works, are dedicated to Otto IV, and since he died in 1216 their composition could be dated between 1209 (when Otto was elected emperor) and 1216. But Gervase himself states in the preface that he would have liked to dedicate his *opus magnum* to his first protector, Henry fitz Henry; and since this young ruler died in 1183 it is not improbable that by this date the *Otia imperialia* were well advanced in their composition. Very likely the work was published in 1212-1214, but it was a life's work, so that chapter 17 of the *prima decisio* and chapter 103 of the *tertia decisio* may be separated in time by as much as three decades¹⁷. The first one may predate the «birth» of Purgatory as established

¹⁷ For a biographical sketch of Gervase see R. Busquet, «Gervase de Tilbury inconnu», *Revue historique* 91 (1941): 1-20.

by Le Goff, whereas the second one, which retells an event that occurred in July 1211, is contemporaneous of an already well-established Purgatory. The length of time used for the composition of the *Otia imperialia* may have affected the nature of the *decisiones* to which the two chapters in question belong. The *prima decisio* aims to give objective, quasi-scientific notions and information, whereas the *decisio tertia* is intended to be a rich testimonial of personal experiences, leading to a collection of fantastic stories which take place mostly in the area of Arles (as William's story proves) and often under Gervase's very eyes. Ultimately, the difference between the two *decisiones* and their respective mentions of Purgatory offer us a unique document, namely the history of one person's evolution towards the idea of Purgatory. Indeed Gervase in time abandoned a traditional and vague image of the second kingdom and enthusiastically lobbied for a new image of it. He wrote down what he heard from a dweller of Purgatory so that others could hear it as well; or perhaps he elaborated on a new image of Purgatory because he was aware that a vast public was anxiously waiting for news from the souls in Purgatory. Gervase's change of heart and mind tells us how rapidly the new image of Purgatory was growing and how far away it had expanded from the Parisian circles.

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