

ISSUE 12. December 2025



JOLCEL

Journal of Latin Cosmopolitanism
and European Literatures



THEME

Tangling with the Classics:
Reception in the Middle Ages

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The *Journal of Latin Cosmopolitanism and European Literatures* (JOLCEL) (ISSN 2593–743X) is an online peer-reviewed open access journal, published multiple times a year.

The journal's contents are closely linked to the activities of the research group RELICS (Researchers of European Literary Identity, Cosmopolitanism and the Schools), an international network of researchers interested in the themes developed throughout the journal issues.

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JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM AND
EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Jacqueline M. Burek and Rebecca Menmuir, “Tangling with the Classics: Rethinking Reception in the Middle Ages,” JOLCEL 12 (2025): pp. 1–4. DOI: [10.21825/jolcel.99836](https://doi.org/10.21825/jolcel.99836)

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NOTE

This preface introduces the five main articles and response piece that form the current issue of JOLCEL. The other contributions are “The Tangled Reception of Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus Malalianus*” by Mary Hitchman (pp. 5–28), “John Scottus Eriugena and the Entangled Materiality of *Vox*” by Paul Vinhage (pp. 29–53), “From Sorcerer’s Son to Epic Hero: (Meta)Poetic Entanglement in Walter of Châtillon’s *Alexandreis*” by Ivo Wolsing (pp. 54–78), “Virgil in Scholastic Hands: Transnational and Local, Textual and Material” by Philippa Byrne (pp. 79–100), “Renegotiating Antiquity with/in Herbert’s *Roman de Dolopathos*” by Ramani Chandramohan (pp. 101–32) and “Entanglements” by Alfred Hiatt (pp. 133–41).

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Tangling with the Classics: Rethinking Reception in the Middle Ages

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This special issue explores the complexities of classical reception across medieval Europe. While classical reception is increasingly regarded as an active process, it still tends to be viewed linearly: classical texts are transformed as they are passed along, but they are still handed from antiquity to later authors or cultures. This understanding of the relationship between the classical tradition and later writers has coloured criticism on the notion of tradition for over a century. One need only think of T.S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) or Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973) to recognise the extent to which linearity has dominated discourse on literary tradition. This is especially in the context of the classical literary tradition, the *Ur*-tradition to which all other traditions are themselves compared. Even Walter Benjamin, in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), muses on the way that the mass reproducibility of art has given new life to earlier works while also resulting in a “tremendous shattering of tradition”—as if the democratisation of art leads to the demise of linear tradition and, ultimately, of tradition itself.¹ Earlier generations of medievalists, in their drive to repudiate the Renaissance notion of a Middle Ages devoid of the classics, tended to emphasise continuity—and, by extension, linearity—between the classical and the medieval. Such is the case with influential

¹ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, 221.

scholars Ernst Curtius, Charles Homer Haskins, and Beryl Smalley, each of whom, in his or her own way, laid the groundwork for later scholarship that similarly presumed a linear relationship between classical and medieval literature.

In more recent years, focus has shifted towards highlighting the complexity of medieval writers' relationship with classical literature. No longer do we limit our efforts to hunting for quotations from classical authors in medieval texts or marvelling at a medieval monk's appreciation of Ovid. Instead, seminal work by Rita Copeland, Charles Martindale, Alastair Minnis, Lars Boje Mortensen, and Marjorie Curry Woods, among many others, has emphasised how classical texts were actively transformed, not passively inherited, by medieval copyists and writers.² (Hence the paradigm shift from the term 'tradition' to 'reception', where "reception gestures towards the *active* role played by receivers.")³ Nevertheless, the notion of *auctoritas*, so central to medieval writers' own expressions of their relationship to classical authors, has contributed to the presumption of linearity in medieval classical reception. It is important and indeed necessary to listen to medieval writers' own voices, as these scholars have done, and to take them at their word when they describe themselves as 'standing on the shoulders of giants,' to use the aphorism attested from the twelfth century—itsself an expansion of a concept expressed by Priscian in the sixth century.⁴

Yet there is also value in developing other ways of viewing the relationship between the classical and medieval texts. This special issue embraces the notion of 'tangling,' a decidedly non-linear metaphor, to describe this relationship. As a verb, to 'tangle' is "To intertwist (threads, branches, or the like) complicatedly or confusedly together" or "To involve in material things that surround or wind about, so as to hamper and obstruct"; colloquially, in some areas, it can even mean "To fight, to engage in conflict or argument (with or up with); also figurative and loosely, to associate or become involved with."⁵ As a noun, 'tangle' can mean "A complicated and confused assemblage; a muddle, jumble, complication, medley, puzzle; a confused network of opinions, facts, etc.; also, a perplexed state."⁶ As such, when we speak of the 'tangling' of classical and medieval literature, we turn away from hierarchical linearity and instead embrace friction-filled messiness. All of the essays in this special issue examine situations where the relationship between classical and medieval literature cannot be expressed in purely linear terms. Collectively, these essays show how classical texts are often pulled into debates and concerns entirely alien from their original composition, even as medieval writers find themselves caught up in the language and cultural baggage of their predecessors. For Byrne and Chandramohan, this messiness can be found in

² So a recent study of classical reception summarises: "Classical texts, it is now argued, are never simply handed over, but are transformed as they are passed along." Kallendorf, "Foreword," in *Classics from Papyrus to the Internet*, 2.

³ Martindale, "Introduction: Thinking through Reception," in *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, 11.

⁴ Although John of Salisbury attributed this aphorism to Bernard of Chartres, its precise origins are unknown. For the history of this phrase (including an overview of scholarship), see Stock, "Antiqui and Moderni as 'Giants' and 'Dwarves'."

⁵ *OED*, s.v. "tangle, v1."

⁶ *OED*, s.v. "tangle, n2."

reimaginings of the Roman poet Virgil as a political figure and a *de facto* Christian evangelist, respectively. Meanwhile, Hitchman’s contribution begins the process of complicating classical *auctoritas* by examining how Proba’s Virgilian *Cento* challenges our sense of what exactly constitutes authorship and authority. Finally, Vinhage and Wolsing broaden beyond the notion of the single *auctor* to examine how classical and medieval sources sit uncomfortably side-by-side in philosophy and poetry, respectively. Together, these essays demonstrate that, in the act of ‘tangling,’ neither the classical nor the medieval need take precedence; both are simply wrapped up in each other, often in idiosyncratic and entirely unexpected ways.

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JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM AND
EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Mary Hitchman, “The Tangled Reception of Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus Malalianus*,” JOLCEL 12 (2025): pp. 5–28. DOI: [10.21825/jolcel.95483](https://doi.org/10.21825/jolcel.95483)

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NOTE

This article is the first main article in the current issue of JOLCEL, which consists of a preface, five articles and a response piece. The other contributions are “Tangling with the Classics: Rethinking Reception in the Middle Ages” by Jacqueline M. Burek and Rebecca Menmuir (pp. 1–4), “John Scottus Eriugena and the Entangled Materiality of *Vox*” by Paul Vinhage (pp. 29–53), “From Sorcerer’s Son to Epic Hero: (Meta)Poetic Entanglement in Walter of Châtillon’s *Alexandreis*” by Ivo Wolsing (pp. 54–78), “Virgil in Scholastic Hands: Transnational and Local, Textual and Material” by Philippa Byrne (pp. 79–100), “Renegotiating Antiquity with/in Herbert’s *Roman de Dolopathos*” by Ramani Chandramohan (pp. 101–32) and “Entanglements” by Alfred Hiatt (pp. 133–41).

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The Tangled Reception of Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus Malalianus**

MARY HITCHMAN

ABSTRACT

How did a poem composed by an aristocratic woman in fourth-century Rome become essential reading for an anonymous author in early medieval England? This article examines the reception of Virgil through the lens of Proba's *Cento*, a patchwork poem on biblical themes comprised of lines and half-lines of Virgil. There are multiple references to the *Cento* in the anonymous *Laterculus Malalianus*, an enigmatic text that is part-chronicle, part-exegesis. Its author (possibly Theodore of Tarsus) seems apparently encountered Virgil primarily via Proba, even using the *Cento* to interpret Virgil's verses. This article analyses the tangled nature of Virgil's reception in early medieval England.

* I am grateful to Jacqueline Burek, Rebecca Menmuir, Ivo Wolsing, and Conrad Leyser for their support in the writing of this article, which began its life in 2023 as a paper at Leeds International Medieval Congress, and to the anonymous reviewers at *JOLCEL* for their insightful comments. Any errors remaining are my own.

1 Introduction

The study of literary reception presents immediate and interconnected challenges.¹ When one author quotes, misquotes, or appropriates another, especially when the text or author being referenced is not named, it requires a comprehensive knowledge of the reused material to identify it. What is more, this prompts questions about the first author: where did they encounter their secondary material, what is their position on it, and why have they chosen to use it? Their reference could reflect a wider group of readers of this same text in their community, with their quotation representing an attempt to connect with an audience already familiar with a popular work. Conversely, perhaps they were an outlier in their reading habits, and the reference feels surprising or incongruous. At its core, the study of reception is the practice of observing and unpicking the links between readers—as individuals and communities—and the texts they held in common. Crucially, the way a text reaches a reader will influence their interpretation; a positive excerpt by one author they admire may go a long way to ensure their approval of another. The process of reception is rarely a straightforward one.

As the most acclaimed poet of Latin antiquity, Virgil’s reception is naturally extensive. There was the potential for tension, however, between Virgil’s poetic themes and his newly Christianised readers in late antiquity.² Moving into the early medieval period, whilst many Christians read and even revered Virgil, this did not equate to respect for the religious views espoused by the pre-Christian poet. The bishop Gregory of Tours (d. 594), though frequently professing to be rustic and unlearned, had read Virgil, likely as part of his education in the liberal arts. This was a common setting for one’s first serious Virgilian encounter. Gregory evidently appreciated the currency that Virgil’s works maintained among the Christian elites of late Roman Gaul. The *Histories*, Gregory’s greatest and most ambitious work, contains forty-two references to Virgil.³ Nevertheless, Gregory did not approve of Virgil himself, nor of spending too long with the authors of classical antiquity. To demonstrate that his disapproval was not born of ignorance, Gregory quoted Virgil to then reject him. In the preface to a collection of martyr stories, the *Liber in gloria martyrum*, Gregory wrote that:

Non enim oportet fallaces commemorare fabulas neque philosophorum inimicam Deo sapientiam sequi, ne in iudicium aeternae mortis, Domino discernente, cadamus [...] Non Eomenidum variorumque monstrorum formas exponam, non reliquarum fabularum commenta, quae hic auctor aut finxit mendacio aut versu depinxit heroico.⁴

¹ There is an extensive body of work on the reception of the Latin classics. See, for example, Martindale, *Redeeming the Text*, and the essays in Martindale and Thomas, eds., *Classics and the Uses of Reception*.

² See Cameron, “Paganism and Literature,” 1–40.

³ Myers, “Les Citations et Réminiscences Virgiliennes,” 68–70.

⁴ “It is not proper either to relate spurious myths or to pursue the wisdom of philosophers that opposes God, in order that we not fall into eternal death when the Lord metes out judgement [...] I will not set forth the forms of the Eumenides or of various monsters, nor the fictions of the remaining stories, which this author [Virgil] has either falsely made or depicted in heroic verse,” Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, praef. All translations are my own.

In this preface Gregory also praised the biblical scholar Jerome (d. 420), who had criticised pre-Christian literature and its devotees two centuries previously. In a letter to Eustochium, an adolescent girl who had dedicated herself to holy virginity, Jerome railed against his past self who had placed the works of Cicero over the word of God.⁵ Jerome's arguments evidently resonated with Gregory, whose Christianity did not prevent him from reading or referencing Virgil, but rather shaped his interpretation and presentation of Virgil's works. I mention Gregory here to illustrate that no author, particularly one as popular as Virgil, has a linear reception. Early medieval readers were unlikely to read Virgil without the interjections of interlinear glosses, marginal commentaries, or a teacher's instruction—and all of this should be kept in mind when considering Virgil's reception.

This article will focus on a particularly slippery instance of the reception of Virgil in an anonymous text that originated in later seventh-century Canterbury. This enigmatic work, the *Laterculus Malalianus*, has been largely overlooked by scholars in the past decade, though it received precious little attention even before that. The existing studies have been illuminating, however. The *Laterculus Malalianus* is thought to be the work of the archbishop Theodore of Canterbury, or a member of his circle.⁶ The *Laterculus* is partly a chronicle and contains a translation of a section of the Greek *Chronicle* of John Malalas. The other part of the text is dedicated to extended meditations on the nature of Christ, focusing on key events in his life. The section of Malalas's *Chronicle* that the author chooses to translate chronologically corresponds with the life of Christ. Although the *Laterculus* does not betray many signs of broad engagement with Latin literature, there are some references to Virgil within the text. These references, however, demonstrate that the author of the *Laterculus* read Virgil in a layered and complex way.

The *Laterculus* contains clear evidence that its author read the Virgilian cento of the Roman noblewoman Faltonia Betitia Proba, composed in the mid-fourth century.⁷ Proba's *Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi* is almost entirely comprised of lines and half-lines of Virgil, and to create this literary patchwork she draws upon Virgil's entire body of work. When Proba wrote, centos were already an established genre within late antique Latin poetry.⁸ The purpose of the cento was to display the centonist's comprehensive knowledge of their source material and their innovation when transforming its order and meaning. Canonical authors with an extensive corpus of writings to draw upon were traditionally used as source material, and Virgil was a popular choice. Proba's *Cento* is a compilation of different Virgilian verses, put together in such a way as to convey a new message that diverged dramatically from that of the original material. Her *Cento* retains Virgil's

⁵ Jerome, *Ep.* 22.30.

⁶ Stevenson, *The 'Laterculus Malalianus'* 8–10; Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus*, 40–56.

⁷ There are multiple studies of Proba's *Cento*. See, for example, Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, especially on Proba's reception; Lucarini and Fassina, *Cento Vergilianus* for a critical edition of the poem; and Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough*. For a foundational study of poetry in late antiquity see Roberts, *The Jeweled Style*.

⁸ On the genre of centos see Bažil, *Centones Christiani*; McGill, *Virgil Recomposed*; Sandnes, *The Gospel "According to Homer and Virgil."*

dactylic hexameter, but it is a biblical epic which proved popular with Christians in late antiquity and well into the medieval period.⁹

There are multiple places in the *Laterculus* where the use of specific words and phrases indicates that the author was quoting Proba or Virgil. But because Proba composed her *Cento* from extracts of Virgil, at times it is difficult to determine which of these authors the *Laterculus* is drawing on. This raises immediate questions about the status of Virgil at the time and place the *Laterculus* was written. Did the anonymous author have more access to Proba's *Cento* than to Virgil? Are the references to Proba the result of a conscious choice to prioritise the work of the centonist over that of Virgil himself, thereby reflecting a strand of Christian resistance to pre-Christian literature?

The way that the *Laterculus* engages with Virgil has been long overlooked.¹⁰ Beyond its particular expression of Christian thought and its links to Theodore, for which it has primarily been studied, the *Laterculus* marks an important point in the reception of Virgil in early medieval England. Furthermore, it decisively demonstrates that Virgilian reception in this period could be tangled and non-linear in the extreme.

This article will identify and analyse references to both Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus*. I will explore what the presentation and treatment of Proba and Virgil can reveal about the author of the *Laterculus*, including their education and aspects of their identity. I will consider how the work of Proba and Virgil reached the author of the *Laterculus*, and weigh up whether Proba or Virgil had the upper hand in their literary imagination. Ultimately, I will argue that the author of the *Laterculus* engaged more significantly with Proba's *Cento* than they did with Virgil's works in their original format. This results in some unorthodox readings of the Virgilian material. The *Laterculus* therefore presents a convoluted example of Virgil's reception in early medieval England.

2 Proba's transformation of Virgil

Proba composed her 694-line *Cento* in Rome in the mid-fourth century, when Christian poetry was still an emerging genre. Classical Latin verse held cultural capital, and formed a crucial part of the educational programme of young boys hoping to ascend the ranks to secure a position within the Roman empire's administration.¹¹ Less is known about the education of girls, who were excluded from the Roman schoolroom, but some girls certainly did receive education in classical literature at home—and Proba herself is testament to this.¹²

⁹ On the late antique and medieval reception of Proba's *Cento* see Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, especially Chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁰ References to Virgil and Proba in the *Laterculus* are listed in Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, 425. These are discussed by Stevenson in her commentary on the *Laterculus*; see *The 'Laterculus Malalianus'*, 162–229.

¹¹ For an overview see Stenger, *Education in Late Antiquity*, and Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen, eds., *Education and Religion*.

¹² On the education of Christian girls and women see Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest*, 39–52, and Stenger, *Education in Late Antiquity*, 99–140. On women authors in Rome see Hauser, "Optima tu propria," 151–86.

At this time nothing had yet been written by a Christian author that could rival the works of Virgil. The success of late antique Christian poetry came, argues Karla Pollmann, through the harnessing of the ‘cultural authority’ of classical verse, and imbuing it with a Christian message.¹³ Proba’s *Cento*, which literally refashioned the works of Virgil, was a radical example of this cultural and literary takeover in practice.

I follow the traditional attribution of the *Cento* to Faltonia Betita Proba, and therefore support the mid-fourth century date for its composition.¹⁴ There is some controversy around the poem’s authorship, however. The other candidate for the author of the *Cento* is Proba’s granddaughter, Anicia Faltonia Proba, which would place the poem’s composition at the end of the fourth century. The attribution of the *Cento* to the elder Proba derives from Isidore of Seville, and this was largely undisputed until Danuta Shanzer highlighted the similarities between the *Cento* and the anonymous *Carmen contra paganos*.¹⁵ The *Carmen contra paganos* is dated to 384, beyond the lifetime of the elder Proba—on this basis, Shanzer argued that the only possible author of the *Cento* is the younger Proba. Shanzer’s attribution of the *Cento* to the younger Proba through evidence provided by the *Carmen contra paganos* sparked further scholarly contributions from Shanzer and others.¹⁶ Roger Green has summarised this debate, pointing out that the author of the *Carmen contra paganos* may equally have drawn upon the *Cento* for their composition, rather than the other way around.¹⁷ Green ultimately concluded that there was not sufficient evidence to overturn the attribution to the elder Proba, and this is now widely accepted.

I mention the authorship debate here, and confirm my support for the attribution to the elder Proba, because the composition date in mid-fourth century Rome is significant. At this point, much of the Roman aristocracy had converted to Christianity and their emphasis was on maintaining, rather than overhauling, a Roman status quo. A focus on extreme asceticism by certain members of the nobility emerged later.¹⁸ Proba’s *Cento* is conservative in its expression of Christian values, encouraging ties within the family and household. Unlike several aristocratic Roman women in the decades that followed, Proba does not suggest that a true expression of Christianity lay in the abandonment of one’s home and the sale of one’s possessions.¹⁹

¹³ Pollmann, *The Baptized Muse*, especially 12–14.

¹⁴ Green, “Proba’s *Cento*,” 551–63.

¹⁵ Isidore of Seville, *De viris illustribus* 5 and *Etymologiae* 1.39.2; Shanzer, “The Anonymous *Carmen contra paganos*,” 232–48.

¹⁶ Shanzer restated her arguments in “The Date and Identity of the Centonist Proba,” 75–96. These were supported by Barnes, “An Urban Prefect and His Wife,” 249–56, and Matthews, “The poetess Proba,” 277–304.

¹⁷ Green, “Which Proba wrote the *Cento*?,” 264–76.

¹⁸ On Christianisation see Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, 29–54, and “Aspects of the Christianisation,” 1–11.

¹⁹ On the asceticism of late Roman Christian women see Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*. For an extreme example of asceticism which explores the death of a young woman named Blesilla from excessive fasting, see Littlechild, “If you wish to be my mother,” 97–111, and Jerome, *Ep.* 39.

This conservatism is reflected in Proba's use of Virgil. Rather than advocating for an overhaul of Latin poetry, she cleverly incorporates the enduring significance of Virgilian verse within a firmly Christian framework. As Brian P. Sowers has identified, the decision to create a cento from canonical work does not dilute the power of the original text or texts, which "always retain their central place in the literary landscape of the cento poet's book world." Their canonicity "adds intertextual force to each cento line."²⁰ Proba's decision to pick apart Virgil's verses in her *Cento* was a turning point in late antique Virgilian reception, and this decision shaped how later readers would encounter Virgil's texts.

Virgil was at the heart of late Roman education for elite and upwardly mobile young men. As Gillian Clark notes, "Quoting a line or phrase of Virgil, in Africa or in any other part of the Latin-speaking empire, signalled a shared culture."²¹ For some Christians, however, Virgil's works held a special appeal that went beyond their literary status or merit. As well as lending her poetry some literary gravitas, Proba's reuse of Virgil also taps into the Christian tradition of searching for Messianic prophecies in his verses. Virgil died in 19 BCE, and his proximity to Christ's life on earth did not go unnoticed. In places, Virgil appears to predict or allude to the coming of a figure that resembles Jesus Christ. This is particularly the case in the fourth *Eclogue*, which predicts the arrival of a boy who will be both ruler and saviour, giving way to a golden age.²² For example: "aspice convexo nutantem pondere mundum, / terrasque tractusque maris caelumque profundum; / aspice, venturo laetentur ut omnia saeclo!"²³

Not all Christians, however, approved of such interpretations of Virgil. In a letter to Paulinus of Nola, Jerome derided Christian readings of Virgil, specifically mentioning the fourth *Eclogue* in his criticisms.²⁴ In Jerome's view such interpretations are childish and ignorant, and he writes that "non sic etiam Maronem sine Christo possimus dicere Christianum."²⁵ This letter is sometimes read as a critique of Proba's *Cento*. As we shall see, Proba uses the fourth *Eclogue* to discuss Christ, and in the letter Jerome derides a *garrula anus* ("verbose old woman") for her misinterpretation of the Bible.²⁶ Jerome appears to be in the minority here, however. Proba's *Cento* was immediately acclaimed, and the fourth *Eclogue* was used in later Christian centos to indicate Christ's coming.²⁷ As well as lending her

²⁰ Sowers, "Violating Vergil's Corpus," 170.

²¹ Clark, "Augustine's Virgil," 78.

²² Scott McGill has noted how the fourth *Eclogue* is repeatedly used in Christian centos (including Proba's *Cento*) to discuss Christ's birth. See McGill, "Vergil's Christian Children," 201–14.

²³ "Behold how the world nods its weighty dome, / earth and expansive sea and the depths of heaven; / behold, how all are moved to rejoice by the coming age!", Virgil, *Eclogues*, 4.50–52.

²⁴ Jerome, *Ep.* 53.7.

²⁵ "We cannot call Maro a Christian without Christ," Jerome, *Ep.* 53.7.

²⁶ Proba, *Cento*, 34; Jerome, *Ep.* 53.7. On Proba's use of the fourth *Eclogue* see Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 337, and Pavlovskis, "Proba and the Semiotics of Virgilian Narrative," 83. See also Tsartsidis, "Jerome, *Ep.* 53.7," 453–8, which argues that *garrula anus* is a trope used by other writers of late antiquity, so does not refer specifically to Proba.

²⁷ On the early favourable reception of the *Cento* see Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, 58–60. Christian centos reusing the fourth *Eclogue* after Proba are *De Ecclesia* and *De Verbi Incarnatione*; see McGill, "Virgil's Christian Children," 201–14.

poetry some literary gravitas, therefore, Proba's reuse of Virgil also taps into the Christian tradition of searching for Messianic prophecies in his verses.

Proba's *Cento* was widely read and copied, and this is evident from its extensive manuscript transmission.²⁸ From the surviving manuscripts we can gather information about its readers, of which the author of the *Laterculus* was one. A common claim is that the *Cento* became a school text soon after its composition, and was used to teach children biblical stories as well as Virgilian verse—this had the benefit of not exposing these young readers to the original pre-Christian material.²⁹ In fact, Proba's *Cento* is sometimes associated with a very specific point in the history of late antique education. On 17th June 362 CE, the Emperor Julian issued a decree that Christians could not teach classical literature, and the *Cento* has been described as a literary loophole to this new prohibition, allowing Christians to continue teaching Virgil.³⁰ Although the timing aligns nicely with the approximate composition date of the *Cento* in the mid-fourth century, there is no definitive evidence that Julian's decree created a new purpose for Proba's work, or was the catalyst for its creation.³¹ This is not to say that Proba's *Cento* had no educational function at all—quite the opposite. The *Cento* was certainly included in the curriculum taught at Carolingian monastery schools: the poem appears in ninth-century manuscripts containing other educational texts.³² Although the evidence is relatively late, the inclusion of the *Cento* in these manuscripts may indicate the continuation of its earlier purpose as a teaching text, for both Latin verse and the Bible. It was perhaps in an educational context that the author of the *Laterculus* came across Proba.

The surviving evidence suggests that the *Cento* was not widely known in early medieval England. Only two authors—the author of the *Laterculus*, and Aldhelm (d. 709), who will be discussed below—demonstrate that they had read Proba.³³ The *Cento* was possibly a literary import by the Greek-speaking author of the *Laterculus*. The popularity of the *Cento* in general, and its educational use more specifically, has a particular relevance for how the author of the *Laterculus* first encountered Proba—and indeed Virgil. It is to the *Laterculus* that I will now turn.

3 Virgil, Christ, and Theodore of Tarsus

The *Laterculus Malalianus* is misleadingly named: it is not a 'list' (*laterculus*), and it does not exclusively contain the work of Malalas. The *Laterculus* has twenty-five chapters in total, containing two main elements: a translation of part of the

²⁸ Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, 68–70. For a list of manuscripts containing the *Cento* see Lucarini, "La tradizione manoscritta," 349–70. Lucarini lists eighty manuscripts, and Cullhed notes a further twenty-one that should be included; see *Proba the Prophet*, 7–8, n. 21.

²⁹ On the *Cento* as a teaching text see Clark and Hatch, *The Golden Bough*, 99–100; Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, 197; Ermini, *Storia della letteratura*, 197.

³⁰ Green, "Proba's Cento," 558.

³¹ Here I agree with McLynn, "Julian and the Christian Professors," 120–36.

³² See the discussion of the Carolingian manuscript evidence in Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, 89–91.

³³ Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 184. On Aldhelm's life and works see Dempsey, *Aldhelm of Malmesbury*.

Chronicle of John Malalas (chapters 1–11, and 25) and Christological exegesis (chapters 12–24). The portion of the *Chronicle* translated in the *Laterculus* corresponds to the timespan of the life of Christ. The second part of the *Laterculus* moves away from Malalas' *Chronicle*: it is dedicated to meditations on the life and significance of Christ, and shows clear efforts to establish a coherent Christology. This is a representative example of the content and tone of the second part of the *Laterculus*:

Quod autem baptismum a Iohannem Christus libenter acceperit, ut tu non dedigneris a conseruo suscipere, quod ille non devitor, sed Dominus sine peccato sumere voluit a seruo, ut inter ipsa fluenta Iordanis super unum mediatorem Dei et hominum sanctae trinitatis declararetur auctoritas, dum Deus pater in voce, filius in hominem, spiritus sanctus in columbe speciae demonstrator divinitas, et unam constans indivisa deitas adque magestas.³⁴

The *Laterculus* has survived in only two manuscripts.³⁵ The earliest and most important of these is held by the Vatican and dates to the later eighth century. The second manuscript is held in Leiden and contains a direct copy of the *Laterculus* text as it is presented in the Vatican manuscript. The Leiden manuscript has four composite parts made by separate scribes, but the section containing the *Laterculus* is from the ninth century. These manuscripts are therefore relatively close to the proposed later seventh-century date of the *Laterculus*. This date, however, rests upon the proposed identity of its anonymous author. Jane Stevenson has convincingly argued that the text was authored by Theodore of Tarsus, archbishop of Canterbury, or another Greek-speaking member of his circle.³⁶

Most of what we know about Theodore's life is from the period after which, aged sixty-seven, he became archbishop, a position he would hold for twenty-two years. The source for much of this information is Bede, who relates that Theodore was born in Tarsus, in the province of Cilicia, in 602. By the time Theodore enters as a figure in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* he is already in his sixties, and living in Rome as a monk. Bede describes Theodore as highly learned in Greek and Latin, in both sacred and worldly literature: "Erat ipso tempore Romae monachus Hadriano notus nomine Theodorus, natus Tarso Ciliciae, vir et saeculari et diuina litteratura et Graece instructus et Latine, probus moribus et aetate venerandus, id est annos habens aetatis LX et VI."³⁷ Bede also relates that the Pope directed Hadrian, a North African biblical scholar, to support Theodore in his role as the

³⁴ "From John, Christ freely accepted baptism, which you would not reject from a fellow-slave, which he did not shun, but the Lord without sin wanted to receive it from his servant. So within that flow of the Jordan, the authority of the holy trinity was announced the mediator between God and man in one, when God the father in voice, the Son in his humanity, and the Holy Spirit in the appearance of a dove showed divinity, and one unchanging, indivisible divinity and majesty," *Laterculus Malalianus*, 18.

³⁵ Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 277 and Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Voss. Misc. 11. For a discussion of the contents and significance of these manuscripts see Stevenson, *The 'Laterculus Malalianus'*, 94–113.

³⁶ Stevenson, *The 'Laterculus Malalianus'*, especially 8–20.

³⁷ "There was at this time in Rome a monk known to Hadrian named Theodore, who was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, a man trained in both secular and holy literature, in both Greek and Latin. He had a virtuous manner and a venerable age, being sixty-six," Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV.1.3.

new archbishop—but also to ensure that no incorrect Greek customs were taught from his seat in Canterbury. Theodore was evidently steeped in the teachings of the Greek church, rather than the Latin one. It seems that at the time of his appointment Theodore was also living in a monastery in Rome that followed eastern Christian customs.³⁸ Before he went to Canterbury, Theodore had to grow out his hair to be tonsured—he previously had a fully shaved head, known as the Pauline tonsure, which was the norm in Greek monasteries.³⁹

The movements of Theodore before he came to Rome are less certain.⁴⁰ There is no indication that there was a school in Tarsus, and Theodore was probably educated elsewhere. It seems likely that he studied first in Antioch—the city was a hundred miles from Tarsus on the Roman-built road, and it was the epicentre of a style of exegesis for which Theodore would come to be known.⁴¹ Michael Lapidge has worked to reconstruct Theodore’s career before he reached Rome, and posits that Theodore went from Antioch to Edessa for further education and at some point arrived in Constantinople, likely a refugee from the Persian or Arab invasions of Cilicia and Syria.⁴² From Constantinople Theodore travelled to Rome (though it is unclear precisely when) and, as we know from Bede, he was living there as a monk in an eastern Christian community in the 660s.⁴³ It was in Rome that Theodore was tapped as the next archbishop of Canterbury. Hadrian had refused the position when it was offered to him by Pope Vitalian, but had recommended Theodore in his place. Theodore was duly consecrated by the pope in Rome on 26th March 668 and then he and Hadrian travelled to Canterbury, he as the archbishop and Hadrian as the abbot of Saints Peter and Paul.⁴⁴

The combined intellectual force of Theodore and Hadrian transformed Canterbury into a centre of learning. The Canterbury school, as it came to be known, flourished from c. 670 to c. 710, gaining an illustrious reputation. Bede praised the school lavishly:

... isque primus erat in archiepiscopis, cui omnis Anglorum ecclesia manus dare consentiret. Et quia litteris sacris simul et saecularibus, ut diximus, abundanter ambo erant instructi, congregata discipulorum caterua scientiae salutaris cotidie flumina irrigandis eorum cordibus emanabant, ita ut etiam metricae artis, astronomiae et arithmeticae ecclesiasticae disciplinam inter sacrorum apicum uolumina suis auditoribus contraderent. Indicio est quod usque hodie supersunt de eorum discipulis, qui Latinam Graecam que linguam aequae ut propriam in qua nati sunt norunt.⁴⁵

³⁸ See Lapidge, *Canterbury Glosses*, 20–21.

³⁹ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV.1.3.

⁴⁰ For a reconstruction of this time in Theodore’s life see Lapidge, “The Career of Archbishop Theodore,” 1–29.

⁴¹ Antioch is also where John Malalas wrote his *Chronicle*.

⁴² Lapidge, “The Career of Archbishop Theodore,” 9–13.

⁴³ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV.1.

⁴⁴ Theodore arrived in 669 and Hadrian in 670.

⁴⁵ “... and he was the first archbishop to whom the whole church of the English assented. And since both [Theodore and Hadrian] were learned in sacred and secular literature, as I have said, they attracted a mass of students into whose minds they poured daily streams of wholesome knowledge. They gave their listeners teaching in the disciplines of poetic metre, astronomy, and church arithmetic, as well as in the books of

The style of teaching at Canterbury was directed by the educational backgrounds of Theodore and Hadrian. Much of what we know about the educational programme at Canterbury is derived from the Canterbury biblical commentaries and glosses, especially the Leiden Glossary, which provides a record of their teaching.⁴⁶ These texts prioritise Greek spiritual authorities, and the biblical commentaries quote scholars such as Basil of Caesarea, Clement of Alexandria, Josephus, Sophronius of Jerusalem, and John Chrysostom. The style of exegesis is Antiochene, prioritising a historical and literal interpretation of scripture, and therefore paying close attention to the natural world and the customs of biblical peoples—this will prove significant in the analysis of the *Laterculus*.⁴⁷

The Canterbury school attracted pupils who went on to be successful churchmen in their own right.⁴⁸ One of these was Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury and then the bishop of Sherborne. Aldhelm was devoted to his former instructors, writing to Hadrian that he wanted to return to him at Canterbury.⁴⁹ In another letter, he wrote to a certain Heahfrith that he should steer clear of the educational institutions in Ireland and study in Canterbury with Theodore and Hadrian instead.⁵⁰ Aldhelm was a prolific writer and a great admirer of Virgil, though he shared some of Gregory's ambivalence towards pre-Christian literature.⁵¹ Intriguingly, Aldhelm had also read Proba, and he bestowed some caveated praise upon her poetic abilities: "Proba inter poetas clarissima in exordio Vergiliocentonis quamvis apocriforum frivola sub specie prophetica continentis, sed tamen legitimam exametri regulam servantis eleganter deprompsit dicens 'Iam dudum temerasse duces pia foedera pacis'."⁵² Aldhelm and the author of the *Laterculus* both read Proba when there is no evidence of anyone else in early medieval England doing so, and this strongly suggests that they came from the same community. It is therefore possible that the *Cento* was part of the educational programme at Canterbury.

Jane Stevenson locates the composition of the *Laterculus Malalianus* within this intellectual and cultural milieu of the Canterbury school, and attributes it to Theodore. The primary reasons for Stevenson's attribution of the *Laterculus* are as follows. Firstly, the *Laterculus* bears multiple similarities to the biblical commentaries compiled at Canterbury.⁵³ These commentaries are extant in an eleventh-century manuscript now held in Milan, and discuss the Gospels and the first

the holy scriptures. As evidence of this, some of their students still survive today who are as proficient in Latin and Greek as they are in their native tongue," Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV.2.1.

⁴⁶ See Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries*, and Lapidge, *Canterbury Glosses*.

⁴⁷ Lapidge, *Canterbury Glosses*, 23–5.

⁴⁸ For the full list of known alumni see Lapidge, *Canterbury Glosses*, 19–20.

⁴⁹ Aldhelm, *Ep.* 2.

⁵⁰ Aldhelm, *Ep.* 5.

⁵¹ Aldhelm refuses the Muses as a form of poetic inspiration in *Carmen*, 11.23–30. See Thornbury, "Aldhelm's Rejection of the Muses," 71–92.

⁵² "Proba, renowned among poets, in the introduction of her Virgilian cento, though producing frivolous apocrypha under the guise of prophecy, however produced an elegant example maintaining the proper rule of the hexameter, saying: 'Long ago, leaders who violated the blessed pacts of peace,'" Aldhelm, *De pedum regulis*, 135. See the discussion in Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, p. 61.

⁵³ Lapidge, *Canterbury Glosses*, 23–4 and Stevenson, *The 'Laterculus Malalianus'*, 13.

five books of the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁴ Like the commentaries, the style of exegesis employed in the *Laterculus* is Antiochene, prioritising practical and material readings of scripture and especially drawing upon the techniques of John Chrysostom and Ephrem the Syrian.⁵⁵ Secondly, the *Laterculus* contains specialist knowledge that Theodore was known to possess, and also exhibits opinions that he is presented as expressing elsewhere. The *Laterculus* references Greek medicine, for example: the description of the development of Jesus as a foetus derives from ideas explored by Galen and Oribasius.⁵⁶ Theodore is known to have had a good understanding of Greek medicine—for example, Bede describes Theodore as knowing the optimal times for blood-letting.⁵⁷ Further, the *Laterculus* contains some anti-Irish sentiments and is particularly suspicious of Irish scholars.⁵⁸ In his letter to Heahfrith, Aldhelm describes Theodore in particular as being opposed to the teachings of the Irish.⁵⁹ Thirdly, there is a palaeographic argument for identifying the *Laterculus* with a community in southeast England. In the Vatican manuscript, which is approximately dated to the ninth century, there is a confusion between the letters *r* and *s*—*suminantur* is found for *ruminantur*.⁶⁰ This mix-up, Stevenson notes, would have been impossible if the copyist of the Vatican manuscript had an exemplar in an uncial script, but these two letters are easily mistaken in an Insular hand.⁶¹

The final reason to attribute the *Laterculus* to Theodore is the most relevant for the present enquiry. Although the *Laterculus* is written in Latin, it engages only minimally with Latin literature and instead indicates an author educated primarily in Greek literature, language, and doctrine. There are a group of references to Virgil and Proba, which I will discuss below, but the author does not quote from these extensively. There are two references to the *De excidio Britanniae* by Gildas, the sixth-century British historian, and ten references to the poet Caelius Sedulius.⁶² These references do not, however, take up much space in the text itself. Furthermore, the reuse of Latin words or phrases by the author of the *Laterculus*, who was Greek-speaking, often leads to unusual resonances within the text of which the author themselves was apparently unaware. For example, in a passage on Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, the *Laterculus* uses *mactare* to describe this sacrifice: *agnus pascalis populoque mactandus*.⁶³ For late antique Christians in the west, *mactare* (“killed”) was associated with pagan sacrifice and was not used to describe their holy rites. The author of the *Laterculus*, however, was unaware of these

⁵⁴ Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, M. 79 sup.

⁵⁵ See the discussion in Lapidge, *Canterbury Glosses*, 24–5.

⁵⁶ *Laterculus Malalianus*, 13.

⁵⁷ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, V.3.2. Lapidge, *Canterbury Glosses*, p. 116.

⁵⁸ *Laterculus Malalianus*, 1; 5. See the discussion in Herren, “Scholarly Contacts,” 24–53.

⁵⁹ Aldhelm, Ep. 5.

⁶⁰ This mistake in Pal. Lat. 277 is found in *Laterculus Malalianus*, 4.

⁶¹ See Stevenson, *The ‘Laterculus Malalianus,’* 110, for a full discussion of the significance of an Insular exemplar and the scripts used in seventh-century Canterbury.

⁶² Stevenson, *The ‘Laterculus Malalianus,’* 8–11. See also the discussion by the same author in “Theodore and the *Laterculus Malalianus*,” 204–21, especially 208–10.

⁶³ “The Paschal lamb killed for the people”, *Laterculus Malalianus*, 21.

connotations.⁶⁴ The author’s light-touch engagement with Latin literature and sometimes surprising use of Latin is combined with a good knowledge of the Greek patristic tradition, exhibited by the use of Antiochene exegesis. This indicates that the author’s primary literary education took place in Greek, rather than in Latin. It is Theodore, or at least a member of his circle at Canterbury, who emerges as the most likely candidate for the authorship of the *Laterculus*.

Stevenson’s attribution of the *Laterculus* to Theodore (or, at the very least, to another Greek-speaking author in Theodore’s orbit in later seventh-century Canterbury) has been largely accepted.⁶⁵ Michael Lapidge recently summarised Stevenson’s arguments, concluding that her findings “establish beyond reasonable doubt that the *Laterculus Malalianus* originated in the Canterbury school of Theodore and Hadrian, and is very probably the work of Theodore himself.”⁶⁶ The attribution of the *Laterculus* to Theodore has also led to scholarship on Theodore’s approach to Christian teachings.⁶⁷ Although I will continue to refer to the *Laterculus* as an anonymous text I acknowledge the strong possibility that Theodore is its author, and I consider the implications of Theodore’s authorship when examining the *Laterculus* author’s engagement with Virgil and Proba.

4 References to Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus Malalianus*

The main challenge in identifying references to both Virgil and Proba in the *Laterculus* is determining which poet is being quoted. Proba used entire lines of Virgil at times. When these lines are quoted in a separate work like the *Laterculus*, it becomes difficult to distinguish Virgil from Proba. The positioning of the intertextual reference therefore becomes crucial for unpacking its significance. In his 1898 edition of the *Laterculus*, Theodor Mommsen identified eight references to Virgil (Table 1).⁶⁸ It is worth noting that several of these intertextual references are minimalistic in the extreme—relating, for example, to single words or relatively common phrases like *ab alto*—further increasing the difficulty of confidently identifying the source. Below I work through Mommsen’s list, contextualising the intertextual references he identified but also expanding upon them to determine how the author of the *Laterculus* engaged with Proba and Virgil. Mommsen identified four references to Proba in the *Laterculus*, but I will highlight two further references to Proba that Mommsen overlooked.

<i>Laterculus Malalianus</i>	Virgil and/or Proba
<i>liquidissimis labiorum ... nectareis, LM, 1</i>	<i>liquido distendunt nectare cellas, Georgics, 4.164</i> <i>*non nunc ambrosium cura est mihi quaerere nectar, Cento, 13.</i>
<i>antra calignis, LM, 1</i>	<i>pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas, Aeneid, 6.267</i> <i>pandere res altas terra et caligine mersas, Cento, 51</i>

⁶⁴ See the discussion in Stevenson, *The ‘Laterculus Malalianus,’* 218–19.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Franklin, “Theodore and the *Passio S. Anastasii*,” 182–4, Lapidge and Bischoff, *Biblical Commentaries*, 180–2, and Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus*, 40–56.

⁶⁶ Lapidge, *Canterbury Glosses*, 25.

⁶⁷ Siemens, “Christ’s Restoration of Humankind,” 18–28.

⁶⁸ Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, 425.

<i>tamquam solis iubar inlustret ab alto, LM, 1</i>	<i>iubare exorto, Aeneid, 4.130</i> <i>ab alto, Aeneid, 1.160, 297</i> <i>*ab alto, Cento, 243</i>
<i>caliginem tenebrosae noctis, LM, 1</i>	<i>conditur in tenebras altum caligine caelum, Aeneid, 11.187</i>
<i>genitus sine macula, LM, 8</i>	<i>iam redit et virgo ... / iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto, Eclogues, 4.6–7</i> <i>quod tua progenies caelo descendit ab alto, Cento, 338</i>
<i>coniugem plenam nubilis annis pectore virgo ... iamque maturam, LM, 17</i>	<i>pulchero pectore virgo, iam matura viro, iam plenis nubilis annis, Cento, 131–2</i>
<i>animas fluctis exuli vagas, LM, 18</i>	<i>Gaetulis ageram si Syrtibus exul, Aeneid, 5.51</i> <i>illum ego per flammis, agerem si Syrtibus exul, Cento, 422</i>
<i>inter fluctus altoque pelago demersit, LM, 21</i>	<i>pelagi petere alta parabat, Aeneid, 9.81</i>

Table 1: References to Proba’s *Cento* and the works of Virgil present in the *Laterculus Malalianus* collected by Theodor Mommsen and lightly adapted. **Bold** typeface identifies common elements in the *LM* and the Virgil/Proba passages. Entries marked by an asterisk* are my own. See Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, 425.

The author of the *Laterculus* evidently used both Virgil and Proba in their work, but seems to have used them in different ways. Although the references to Virgil outnumber references to Proba, the Virgilian references are usually fleeting, whereas the *Laterculus* author engages more extensively with Proba. Despite the shared material, one of these references provides especially clear evidence that the *Laterculus* author intended to quote from Proba rather than Virgil. The reference is found in a description of Eve: “coniugem plenam nubilis annis, pectore virgo, decora in omni membro, iamque maturam, ita pulchrum oculis visum.”⁶⁹ This is drawn almost word-for-word from Proba’s presentation of Eve in the section of the *Cento* detailing the Creation narrative and the Fall: “insignis facie et pulchra pectore virgo / iam matura viro, iam plenis nubilis annis.”⁷⁰ The similarities between these depictions of Eve are immediately obvious: Eve is a virgin, she is the right age to be married, and she is beautiful. Furthermore, the portions of Virgil from which Proba drew the different elements of this description are found in disparate parts of the *Aeneid*, rather than belonging to a single Virgilian passage, indicating that the author of the *Laterculus* was drawing primarily upon the *Cento*. The *Laterculus* uses Proba’s *pectore virgo* to describe Eve’s “virgin breast”, but in the *Aeneid* the phrase *pulchra pectore virgo* refers to Scylla the sea monster, and forms part of a description of how she draws ships onto rocks:

at Scyllam caecis cohibet spelunca latebris

⁶⁹ “A wife of fully marriageable age, with a virgin breast, graceful in all her limbs, and already matured, and therefore beautiful to the sight of the eye,” *Laterculus Malalianus*, 17.

⁷⁰ “A virgin with a distinguished face and a beautiful breast, already mature enough for a man, already of fully marriageable age,” Proba, *Cento*, 131–32.

ora exsertantem et navis in saxa trahentem.
 prima hominis facies et pulchro pectore virgo
 pube tenuis, postrema immani corpore pistris,
 delphinum caudas utero commissa luporum.⁷¹

It is clear, therefore, that the context of this reference as it is used in the *Laterculus* comes from Proba and not from Virgil. Further, the description of Eve in the *Laterculus* as old enough to be married, *plenam nubilis annis*, is a minor variation on Proba's *plenis nubilis annis*. In its original context in the *Aeneid*, this quotation refers to Lavinia, later the second wife of Aeneas, being visited by suitors.⁷² This scene occurs in Book 7 of the *Aeneid*, whereas the description of Scylla comes in Book 3. Their juxtaposition in the *Laterculus* confirms that the source was Proba rather than Virgil.

In contrast to this clear example of excerpting from Proba, there is one reference to Proba and Virgil identified by Mommsen that seems erroneous. It does, however, shed some light upon how late antique Christians were reading Virgil. The author of the *Laterculus* added the phrase *genitus sine macula* ("created without stain") in their translation of part of the *Chronicle* of Malalas.⁷³ Mommsen posited that this was drawn from Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* and echoed in Proba. Rather than a direct quotation, Mommsen has here noted the shared invocation of an idea. Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* predicts the coming of a saviour who will become a divine ruler of the world, a promised child: "iam redit et virgo ... / iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto."⁷⁴ This naturally lends itself to a Christian interpretation. Many Christians, including Augustine, suggested that this poem predicted the coming of Christ.⁷⁵ In Proba's *Cento*, "quod tua progenies caelo descendit ab alto" ("for your child descended from heaven on high") describes Jesus.⁷⁶ In Proba, the line is located in the verses which bridge the gap between the sections on Genesis and the Gospels, where she essentially excuses herself from versifying the rest of the Old Testament: "cetera facta patrum pugnatque in ordine bella / praetereo atque aliis post me memoranda relinquo."⁷⁷

Despite their similarities, Proba is not using the *Eclogues* verse here, but is rather stitching together three disparate excerpts from the *Aeneid*.⁷⁸ The resulting line is very similar to the one in *Eclogues*, however. This must be a deliberately layered reference by Proba, who is using borrowings from the *Aeneid* to echo the

⁷¹ "But a cavern contains Scylla in hidden recesses, where her mouths stretch out and she drags ships on the rocks. First she is of human appearance and a maiden of beautiful breast, but then she is a sea monster with an immense body, with the tails of dolphins having been conjoined to the stomach of wolves," Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.424–28.

⁷² *plenis nubilis annis*, Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7.422.

⁷³ *Laterculus Malalianus*, 8.

⁷⁴ "Now the virgin returns ... now a new generation descends from the high heavens," Virgil, *Eclogues*, 4.6–9.

⁷⁵ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 10.27. See the discussion in Clark, "Augustine's Virgil," 77–87.

⁷⁶ Proba, *Cento*, 338.

⁷⁷ "The other deeds of the ancestors and their long series of battles I will pass over and leave for others to sing after me," Proba, *Cento*, 331–2.

⁷⁸ *quod*, Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.179 (naturally there are more instances of *quod* in Virgil that Proba could have used, but this is one example); *tua progenies*, *Aeneid*, 2.250; *caelo descendit ab alto*, *Aeneid*, 8.423.

famous line from the *Eclogues*—this is ostentatious, intelligent centonising. Proba’s cleverness aside, *genitus sine macula* in the *Laterculus* is too far removed from the fourth *Eclogue* and the *Cento* to be considered a true reference. The author of the *Laterculus* inserts the phrase into their translation of the *Chronicle* to express the coming of Christ, and this is obviously a core Christian idea that is present beyond Proba and Virgil.

In the chapter following the description of Eve in the *Laterculus*, where Proba is clearly quoted, there is another reference to Proba and Virgil: *animas fluctis exuli vagas*.⁷⁹ This is within a passage detailing the baptism of Christ, and these “wandering souls exiled by waves” are the twelve apostles. Mommsen links this to the phrase *Gaetulis ageram si Syrtibus exul* in the *Aeneid*.⁸⁰ Aeneas has sailed away from Carthage with Dido’s funeral pyre in the distance and has just found a good place to land with his fleet. This quotation comes from a speech he delivers where he speaks about the sacred rites he would continue to perform even if he were an exile among the dangerous waters and quicksand of the Gaetolian Syrtes. There is a clear parallel with the *Laterculus* passage, which speaks of a spiritual exile in turbulent waters. Proba uses part this *Aeneid* quotation within a longer devotional passage pledging herself to Christ, writing “illum ego per flammam, agerem si Syrtibus exul.”⁸¹ Waves do not feature centrally in this meditation by Proba, unlike the original passage in the *Aeneid* or its reference in the *Laterculus*. However, the theme of pledging oneself to Christ despite facing adversity certainly applies to the *Laterculus* author’s discussion of the apostles. This reference therefore speaks to the context of both Virgil and Proba.

Another Virgilian reference in the *Laterculus* occurs within a passage presenting Christ as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, leading the faithful back to the Promised Land. The phrase *inter fluctus altoque pelago demersit* is used to create the striking image of the resurrected Christ metaphorically drowning the Pharaoh in the depths of the sea.⁸² The Virgilian reference is in the latter part of the *Aeneid*, and describes a time before Aeneas had set out on his journey and was preparing his fleet for the seas: *pelagi petere alta parabat*.⁸³ This borrowing from Virgil in the *Laterculus* is yet another instance of turbulent wave imagery. Although these wave-related references are quite minimalistic, it is notable that the author of the *Laterculus* seems to have a habit of reaching for the *Aeneid* when describing the sea.

Four of the references to Proba and/or Virgil identified by Mommsen appear at the start of the *Laterculus*, in the short preface to the translation of the *Chronicle*. This preface expands upon the nature of truth, characterising it as a light cutting through the darkness of misinformation that can cloud one’s judgement. The preface is worth quoting in its entirety:

⁷⁹ “Wandering souls exiled by waves,” *Laterculus Malalianus*, 17.

⁸⁰ “If I were exiled in the Gaetolian Syrtes,” Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.51.

⁸¹ “I [would follow] him through flames, if I were exiled to the Syrtes,” Proba, *Cento*, 422.

⁸² “He drowned him in the waves and depths of the sea,” *Laterculus Malalianus*, 21.

⁸³ “He was preparing to sail the deep seas,” Virgil, *Aeneid*, 9.81.

Iam tempus est, ut se veritas luculentis rationis optutibus omnibus semetipsam perlustret in faciem. Iam prudentiori conatu tamquam per obstruis cavernarum rivulis novam et integram se veritas prodat ex utero. Iam ne nos fallant multoloquio suo Scottorum scolaces, ipsa se nobis veritas liquidissimis labiorum promat nectareis, ut omnem a nobis amaritudinem tollat aliene doctrine, ut antra caliginis obnuvilante mendacio sua nos veritas luce tamquam solis iubar inlustret ab alto, ut mendacium fugientes veritas amplectetur, exuti caliginem tenebrose noctis obstante lux vera causarum clariscat omnibus latissimus dies in vultu. Nunc igitur—si placet, ut certum sit—ipsa mundi consilia perquiramus: quo tempore, qua aetate mundi adfuerit Christus salvator in carne, cuius etiam consolatu adque imperio mundo in hoc agebatur, in terris dum e caelo Dei filius in utero virginis velut rex insederit thalamo. Explicit.⁸⁴

There are two references to Proba's *Cento* in this passage which are not picked up by Mommsen. The phrase *liquidissimis labiorum [...] nectareis* ("with the most liquid nectar of the lips") appears a third of the way through the passage, describing the sweetness of truth in combatting incorrect teachings.⁸⁵ This is reminiscent of a line in Virgil's *Georgics*, *liquido distendunt nectare cellas* ("engorges the cells with liquid nectar"), which is part of a passage in praise of bees.⁸⁶ This seems a straightforward Virgilian reference on the part of the *Laterculus*. Although not highlighted by Mommsen, Proba also uses nectar imagery. This occurs in the preface, where Proba rejects the Muses as sources of inspiration and instead turns to God: *non nunc ambrosium cura est mihi quaerere nectar* ("I do not now care to search for ambrosian nectar").⁸⁷ Given that Proba is rejecting the nectar, and both Virgil and the author of the *Laterculus* are praising it, the Virgilian context seems most relevant. Nevertheless, it is notable that both authors include this image of nectar which then ends up in the *Laterculus*.

The second additional reference to Proba in the *Laterculus* is found within the phrase *tamquam solis iubar inlustret ab alto* ("just as the sun's rays brighten from on high"), another description of the illumination of truth. The parallel passages in the *Aeneid* are *iubare exorto* ("sunbeams appeared") and *ab alto* ("on high").⁸⁸ In the *Aeneid*, *iubare exorto* refers to a sunrise. The phrase *ab alto* ("on high") occurs repeatedly in the *Aeneid*, and is also used by Proba. In the *Cento* the phrase is used to describe God delivering his judgement upon Adam and Eve: *tum pater*

⁸⁴ "Now is the time that truth should gaze upon its own face with all the bright observation of reason. Now by more prudent attempt, just like the stream through the blocked cave, let truth produce itself new and whole from the womb. Now, in case the disciples of the Irish trick us with their excessive talking let truth reveal itself, with the most liquid nectar of the lips, to us, so that it may remove all bitterness of foreign teaching, so although the caverns of darkness are concealed by falsehood, truth might illuminate us just as the sun's rays brighten from on high, so that truth will surround those fleeing falsehood, although the darkness of gloomy night hides it, the true light of reasons may be illuminated for all like the appearance of the most joyful day. Now, therefore—if it pleases you that it should be settled—let us seek that purpose of the world: in which time, in which age of the world, the saviour Christ arrived in flesh, and during whose consulship and whose imperial reign he was in this world, when to earth from heaven the son of God took his place in a virgin's womb like a king in a marriage bed. End," *Laterculus Malalianus*, 1.

⁸⁵ *Laterculus Malalianus*, 1.

⁸⁶ Virgil, *Georgics*, 4.164.

⁸⁷ Proba, *Cento*, 13.

⁸⁸ *Iubare exorto*, Virgil, *Aeneid*, 4.130; *ab alto*, *Aeneid*, 1.160, 297, 11.301.

omnipotens solio sic inquit ab alto (“then the Father almighty began to speak like this from on high”).⁸⁹ Although *ab alto* is a common Virgilian phrase, the image of God’s judgement from the heavens resonates better with the theme of divine truth explored in the preface of the *Laterculus*.

It is ultimately unclear whether the *Laterculus* is quoting Virgil or Proba here, but it is important to acknowledge the possibility that it is a reference to them both. This happens elsewhere in the *Laterculus*. For example, the *Laterculus* author uses *antra calignis* (“caverns of darkness”) to describe places where incorrect teachings lurk, but which truth can still illuminate.⁹⁰ The line from the *Aeneid* upon which this draws (a line that Proba goes on to reuse in its entirety) is *pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas*.⁹¹ Aeneas has performed a sacrifice and is following the Sybil into a deep cave, hoping that this endeavour will lead him to an audience with the gods. Proba uses this Virgilian line when describing her mission as a poet, when she is deliberately turning away from kings and conflicts and reorientating herself to the subject of her *Cento*: Christ. The line occurs when she is about to launch into the Creation story, which also uses the theme of obscuring gloom. Although this reference to Virgil and Proba is a fleeting one, we will see below how this theme of darkness overcome by light is an important part of understanding how the *Laterculus* engages with both authors.

The final Virgilian reference in the preface that Mommsen identified is “*exuti caliginem tenebrosae noctis obstante lux vera causarum clariscat omnibus*,” a reference to the *Aeneid*.⁹² The Virgilian line is *conditur in tenebras altum caligine caelum* (“high heaven is hidden in gloomy darkness”).⁹³ This phrase comes from the description of the funeral pyre of Pallas in Book 11 of the *Aeneid*; the smoke from the pyres is darkening the sky. This reference to the darkness created by the pyres, a grounded and earthy kind of gloom, is removed from the metaphorical darkness that the author of the *Laterculus* invokes in their passage on truth. This incongruous reference makes more sense, however, when we turn to Proba’s imagery on darkness, light, and truth. Proba’s descriptions of a saving light in the darkness, a foundational Christian image, resonate profoundly throughout the *Cento*. This seems to have influenced the author of the *Laterculus*. Proba makes particular use of Virgil’s language about shadows in her preface about her purpose for writing, and her opening sections on Creation, where God gives the world light:

nam neque erant astrorum ignes nec lucidus aether,
set nox atra polum bigis subvecta tenebat,
et chaos in praeceps tantum tendebat ad umbras,
quantus ad aetherium caeli suspectus Olympum.
tum pater omnipotens, rerum cui summa potestas,

⁸⁹ Proba, *Cento*, 244.

⁹⁰ *Laterculus Malalianus*, 1.

⁹¹ “To expose matters immersed in deep earth and fog,” Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.267; Proba, *Cento*, 51.

⁹² “Although the darkness of gloomy night hides it, the true light of reasons may be illuminated for all,” *Laterculus Malalianus*, 1.

⁹³ Virgil, *Aeneid*, 11.187.

aëra dimovit tenebrosum et dispulit umbras⁹⁴

Whilst Proba does not directly use the Virgilian line *conditur in tenebras altum caligine caelum*, she continually invokes this image of darkness conquered by light. In the preface Proba states that she previously wrote poetry about wars and soldiers (*arma virum pugnasque canebam*), a clear play on the famous opening line of the *Aeneid*, *arma virumque cano* ("I sing of arms and the man").⁹⁵ But God had other plans for Proba. She writes that: "omnia temptanti potior sententia visa est / pandere res altas terra et caligine mersas."⁹⁶ Proba wanted to disclose mysteries covered in gloom (*caligine*), and chose to turn her attention heavenwards. Even beyond the specific instances I have mentioned here, in the *Cento* Proba repeatedly uses the words *tenebrosus* ("dark") and *caligo* ("gloom"). Therefore, although the quotation in the *Laterculus* is drawn from Virgil, it seems most likely that its context comes from Proba.

Although the author of the *Laterculus* did read some Virgil, they primarily interpreted Virgil via the *Cento* of Proba, as opposed to the other way around. Whereas a modern reader familiar with Virgil would look to Proba's *Cento* and see Scylla beneath her depiction of Eve, the author of the *Laterculus* saw Proba's rendering of the Creation story in the smoke from the funeral pyre of Pallas. This prioritisation of Proba suggests that the author of the *Laterculus* probably read the *Cento* before they read Virgil himself.

5 Conclusion: A Preliminary Untangling

If the *Laterculus* author read Proba before they read Virgil, as the evidence suggests, then they may have encountered the *Cento* whilst undergoing their education in Latin language and literature. After cutting their teeth on Proba they moved onto Virgil. As discussed above, Aldhelm and the author of the *Laterculus* are Proba's only known readers in early medieval England. If the author of the *Laterculus* is Theodore of Tarsus, then he perhaps introduced the *Cento* to Canterbury and to Aldhelm. Theodore may have first encountered the *Cento* as an educational text, as did those who were educated in Carolingian monastery schools. If so, Theodore probably read the *Cento* in Rome, rather than in the other Greek-speaking cities where he lived before that. From Rome Theodore brought the *Cento* to Canterbury, and at some point he also gained familiarity with Virgil. In Canterbury the *Cento* was introduced to Aldhelm, who already knew Virgil but could appreciate Proba as a literary curiosity. Identifying Theodore as the author of the *Laterculus* goes a long way to explaining how Proba's *Cento* came to be read in later seventh-century Canterbury.

⁹⁴ "Before there was neither the fires of constellations nor the bright ether, but dark night riding in its chariot held the heavens and Chaos stretched out head-first into the shadows, as far as an upwards look to ethereal Olympus in heaven. Then the almighty Father, who has power over things, separated the gloomy air and dispersed the shadows," Proba, *Cento*, 60–5.

⁹⁵ "I used to sing about the arms of men and battles," Proba, *Cento*, 48; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.1.

⁹⁶ "As I was testing it all I perceived a new vision: to unfold profound matters submerged in earth and gloom," Proba, *Cento*, 50–1.

Whilst the *Laterculus* remains officially anonymous, as it will do until conclusive evidence is produced, the above can only be conjecture. What is demonstrable, however, is that Proba's *Cento* guided the *Laterculus* author's interpretation of Virgil. As we have seen, even those references to Virgil in the *Laterculus* which do not correspond directly with any passage of the *Cento* also often seem to be mediated indirectly by the structure, imagery and orientation of the *Cento*. Rather than presenting a straightforward example of Virgilian reception in early medieval England, the references in the *Laterculus* instead highlight the tangled nature of Virgil's reception when the *Cento* of Proba is in play.

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JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM AND
EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Paul Vinhage, “John Scottus Eriugena and the Entangled Materiality of *Vox*,”
JOLCEL 12 (2025): pp. 29–53. DOI: [10.21825/jolcel.90221](https://doi.org/10.21825/jolcel.90221)

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NOTE

This article is the second main article in the current issue of JOLCEL, which consists of a preface, five articles and a response piece. The other contributions are “Tangling with the Classics: Rethinking Reception in the Middle Ages” by Jacqueline M. Burek and Rebecca Menmuir (pp. 1–4), “The Tangled Reception of Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus Malalianus*” by Mary Hitchman (pp. 5–28), “From Sorcerer’s Son to Epic Hero: (Meta)Poetic Entanglement in Walter of Châtillon’s *Alexandreis*” by Ivo Wolsing (pp. 54–78), “Virgil in Scholastic Hands: Transnational and Local, Textual and Material” by Philippa Byrne (pp. 79–100), “Renegotiating Antiquity with/in Herbert’s *Roman de Dolopathos*” by Ramani Chandramohan (pp. 101–32) and “Entanglements” by Alfred Hiatt (pp. 133–41).

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John Scottus Eriugena and the Entangled Materiality of *Vox**

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to explicate John Scottus Eriugena’s arguments about the ontological status of *vox* in his commentary on Priscian, the *In Priscianum*. Eriugena draws from Stoic, Peripatetic, and early medieval philosophical definitions to arrive at an original analysis of *vox* as an intelligible, rather than physical, unit of speech, which is ultimately grounded in his concept of the letter (*littera*). For Eriugena, physical matter cannot be known by the mind because it is infinitely divisible, and so the physical nature of *vox*, i.e. air, cannot be known and therefore cannot signify. Only the letter guarantees a minimal, intelligible unit that can structure speech. Thus, paradoxically, the written letter, usually thought of as a symbol of speech, comes to define significative speech as such. In the latter part of this article, I examine a grammatical commentary in Valenciennes, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 413 (394), which contains arguments similar to those forwarded by Eriugena, and shares material with the *In Priscianum* and other glossed Priscian manuscripts. The entanglements of philosophical and grammatical concepts and the re-entanglement of these concepts in Eriugena and the Valenciennes commentary show how the reception and transmission of learning in the early Middle Ages followed anfractuous routes.

* I would like to thank Rebecca Menmuir and Jacqueline Burek for inviting me to participate in the “Entanglements” session at Leeds, where this article first took shape, in 2023 and for their subsequent invitation to write this article. Their encouragement and editorial supervision of an early draft has much improved this paper. The two anonymous reviewers for *JOLCEL* also deserve thanks: their incisive criticisms and comments materially improved this article. I also owe a large debt of gratitude to the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies whose generous fellowship support afforded me the time and resources to complete this article.

1 John Scottus Eriugena and the Entangled Materiality of *Vox*

Writing in the second century CE, Aulus Gellius summarized a thorny philosophical problem concerning the nature of *vox*,¹ i.e., vocal utterance or sound more generally.² Most of the eminent philosophers of antiquity, he says, were intrigued by the question of whether *vox* was a body (*corpus*) or non-body (*incorporum*). Gellius outlines several ways of approaching the question: the Greeks call a body something that can act or be acted upon, and Lucretius, following them, defines a body as what can touch or be touched. Another definition from the Greeks defines a body as something extended in three dimensions. The Stoics think that *vox* is a body and call it “struck air” (*aer ictus*). Plato, on the other hand, does not consider *vox* a body, but only the act of striking (*percussio*). Democritus and Epicurus, in accordance with their atomic principles, denote *vox* as a stream of atoms (*ῥεῦμα ἀτόμων*). While Gellius finds these speculations enjoyable, he finds no solid moral benefit (“*emolumentum aliquod solidum ad rationem vitae*”) from engaging in such debates and wraps up his brief chapter with a quote from Ennius’s Neoptolemus, who complains: “only a few should do philosophy; it is really no fun at all.”³

Even though Gellius found these debates on the nature of *vox* insubstantial, grammarians and philosophers would continue the debate and develop new theories throughout Late Antiquity and into the Middle Ages. The Stoic doctrine of the corporeality of the *vox* would find a place in the grammatical tradition, represented by Donatus and Priscian, but would also gradually incorporate Platonic and Peripatetic elements. During the Carolingian Renaissance, commentators would analyze the corporeality of *vox* with new tools taken from dialectic and philosophy, which allowed them to distinguish between the corporeal and incorporeal properties of *vox*. The most advanced and thorough analysis of this question belongs to John Scottus Eriugena, whose commentary on Priscian’s *Ars* devotes its opening sections to the exact ontological status of *vox*, *littera*, and signification.⁴

In this article, it is my aim to provide a paraphrase, and at times a translation, of Eriugena’s comments on the nature of *vox*, as well as some analysis. In an article published in 2000, Anneli Luhtala edited large portions of Eriugena’s commentary covering the definitions of *vox*, *littera*, *syllaba*, *nomen*, *verbum*, and *pronomem*.⁵ While Luhtala provides a preliminary analysis of Eriugena’s philosophy of nouns and verbs, she does not unpack his thinking on *vox* and *littera*. The basic doctrines presented by Gellius will stand as touchstones for Eriugena’s analysis. The Stoic

¹ I will leave *vox* untranslated throughout this article. The use of the term is never reducible to ‘voice’, ‘sound’, ‘word’, or ‘vocal utterance’ in grammatical contexts. All translations unless otherwise noted are my own.

² Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 5.15.

³ Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 5.15: “philosophandum est paucis; nam omnino haud placet.”

⁴ Scholarship on the Latin grammarians has started to refer to Priscian’s *Institutiones grammaticae* as Priscian’s *Ars grammatica*, or even the *Ars Prisciani*. The renaming of the text is based on a thorough analysis of the earliest extant manuscripts, which consistently use the term *Ars* to refer to Priscian’s grammar. See De Nonno, “*Ars Prisciani*,” 250–59.

⁵ Luhtala, “Early Medieval Commentary,” 140–68.

conception of *vox* as corporeal constitutes one pillar of the analysis, while the Platonic (and later Peripatetic) view of *vox* as a non-body and merely the act of striking air forms the other pole. (The Democritean/Epicurean doctrine of physical atoms do not appear in Eriugena's commentary, but a theory of mental indivisibles takes its place.) As we shall see, these two distinct doctrines in Gellius's time become entangled in the teachings of the Late Antique grammarians, Donatus (fourth century) and Priscian (sixth century). The task undertaken by Eriugena was then to unknot the Late Antique grammatical tradition he inherited. Through a dialectic that distinguishes the corporeal substance and incorporeal substance of *vox* and ultimately recombines them, Eriugena achieves a profound and novel theory of signification.

In the latter part of the article, I will consider an anonymous grammatical commentary found in Valenciennes, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 413 (394). Significant excerpts and extrapolations from Eriugena's commentary appear in this anonymous commentary. The Valenciennes commentator simplifies Eriugena's thought and pushes it in new directions. This network of reception shows how Eriugena's grammatical thinking was adapted to new pedagogical contexts in which his rigorous dialectic became re-tangled with other authorities and grammatical doctrines.

The exclusive, separate schools of thought mentioned by Aulus Gellius became entwined in the theories of the Late Antique grammarians. The grammatical tradition inherited by Eriugena thus presented a tangled network of philosophical doctrines that he attempted to reconcile and recombine, while adding his own novel arguments.⁶ Later grammarians, drawing on Eriugena's commentary, other grammatical sources, and their own arguments, entangled the definition of *vox* further. In general, grammatical texts in the early Middle Ages often share a similar fate to Eriugena's *In Priscianum*: they draw from a wide range of canonical and marginal intellectual authorities, creating densely tangled collections of doctrines, only to be borrowed anew by the next generation of scholars and grammarians, who create a new tangle of authorities.⁷ Grammatical thought in the early Middle Ages thereby lacked clear and distinct lines of transmission, but instead was always becoming tangled in other grammars and philosophies, and successively renegotiated for new scholarly and pedagogical environments.

2 The commentary *In Priscianum*

John Scottus Eriugena's commentary on Priscian's *Ars* has only recently been discovered and authenticated as his work. In 1994, Paul Edward Dutton and Luhtala announced that the commentary on Priscian found in Barcelona, Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, MS Ripoll 59 (saec. XI, Santa Maria de Ripoll, Spain), which,

⁶ For an account of the philosophical systems that Eriugena inherited see Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*, especially, "The circle of John Scottus Eriugena," 88–115.

⁷ For a summary of this process and a useful typology of grammars, see Law, *Insular Latin Grammars*. See also Martin Irvine's "Handlist of Compilations of *artes* and *auctores*: c. 700–1100," in *Grammatica and Literary Theory*, 393–404. For a recent edition of one such compiled grammatical commentary with an excellent and thorough commentary by its editor see the *Ars Riuipullensis* edited by Gallo.

following Lutala’s partial edition, I will refer to as *B*, was written by Eriugena.⁸ Earlier scholarship had conjectured that Eriugena had written a Priscian commentary based on glosses attributable to Eriugena’s own hand and his circle of scholars in Priscian manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries, especially in Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, B.P.L. 67 (838 CE – saec. IX med., Irish center in Francia).⁹ Many glosses and comments found in *L* appear in the complete, lemmatized commentary of Priscian in *B*. There are also glosses from Eriugena’s commentary on Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* that appear in the Priscian commentary.¹⁰ The weight of this evidence suggests that Eriugena is very likely the author of the Priscian commentary found in *B*.¹¹ Before the discovery of the commentary, the only direct evidence we had of Eriugena’s grammatical thought were, first, some analyses in *Periphyseon*, which considered grammar merely a branch of dialectic; second, some more general and systematic reflections on the role of the liberal arts and the *trivium* in *De Divina Praedestinatione*, which advances a fourfold method of dialectic as ‘true philosophy’; and, third, a paltry set of comments to book three of *De nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae*.¹² Thus, the commentary in Barcelona, MS Ripoll 59 represents a major addition to our knowledge of Eriugena’s grammatical and logical thought.

3 Priscian’s *vox*

To arrive at the remarkable conclusion that *vox* exists as an intelligible substance, Eriugena must consider all of the alternatives in detail. First, he introduces Priscian’s definition of *vox*. Priscian defines *vox* thus:

Philosophi definiunt, vocem esse aerem tenuissimum ictum vel suum sensibile aurium, id est quod proprie auribus accidit. et est prior definitio a substantia sumpta, altera vero a notione, quam Graeci ἔννοιαν dicunt, hoc est ab accidentibus. accidit enim voci auditus, quantum in ipsa est.¹³

⁸ Dutton and Luhtala, “Eriugena in Priscianum,” 153–63. See also Passalacqua, *I codici*, no. 18.

⁹ Dutton and Luhtala, “Eriugena in Priscianum,” 154. Bischoff, *Katalog*, no. 2139. For an analysis of Eriugena’s autograph see Jeuneau and Dutton, *The Autograph of Eriugena*, and their discussion of Leiden B.P.L. 67 at 39–40.

¹⁰ Dutton and Luhtala, “Eriugena in Priscianum,” 155–58. For Eriugena’s commentary on Martianus see Lutz, *Iohannis Scotti Annotationes in Marciannum*.

¹¹ Franck Cinato expresses some reservations about attributing the commentary positively to Eriugena on the grounds that *B* is the only witness to the text and that Dutton’s and Luhtala’s comparative evidence comes primarily from marginalia in other Priscian manuscripts: a type of evidence, as Cinato amply demonstrates, that is quite fluid and subject to reworking. Cinato acknowledges the clearly Irish character of the commentary but suggests also that it may be the result of an anonymous Irish master. See Cinato, *Priscien glosé*, 411–12, and Cinato, “Marginalia Témoins,” for an analysis of the diffusion of marginalia in manuscripts related to *B*. While Cinato’s caution is merited, I will refer to the commentary in *B* as Eriugena’s throughout this article. The immense qualitative difference in the thought found in the Barcelona commentary and other early medieval commentaries on *vox* recommends Eriugena as the most likely author.

¹² See *Periphyseon*, V, 15.397–16.436 (869C–870C); *De divina praedestinatione liber*, Chapter 1; and Lutz, *Annotationes in Marciannum*, 75–80.

¹³ Priscian, *Institutionum Grammaticarum Libri I–XII*, 5.1–4. “Philosophers define *vox* as very thin air struck or its quality sensible to hearing, i.e. what pertains properly to the ears. And, the first definition is derived

Priscian's definition relies upon Stoic and Peripatetic doctrine. According to Stoic grammatical theory, all nouns are corporeal, even abstract nouns like *ars* (art) and *disciplina* (learning).¹⁴ Priscian does not subscribe wholly to Stoic doctrine and admixes some Peripatetic elements into his definition by drawing a distinction between substance (*substantia*) and accidents (*accidentia*). Luhtala has remarked that the mixture of the two philosophical systems “result[s] in inconsistent views that must be regarded as a weakness in his theory.”¹⁵ While the philosophical entanglements may make Priscian's theory of grammar weaker, they nevertheless preoccupied grammarians, commentators, and philosophers throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁶ As we shall see in Eriugena's commentary, the distinction between the Stoic views and Peripatetic and Platonic views are clear to him, since he develops a twofold analysis of *vox* following first Stoic principles and then Peripatetic/Platonic principles. Eriugena finally proposes his own definition of *vox*, which relies on the distinction between corporeal substance and incorporeal substance, suggested by the two philosophical systems present in Priscian.

4 Eriugena's first analysis of *vox*

Eriugena first analyzes the substance of *vox*. He equates the Greek *aer* (air) with Latin *spiritus* (spirit/air) and then introduces a distinction between *spiritus tenuissimus* (very fine air) and *corpulentior aer* (thicker air). The respiratory system and especially the trachea (*arteriae*) filter out the very fine air, which will become *vox*, from the thicker air with which it is mixed in its natural state. The soul then provides a fiery impetus (*ignea vi pulsante*) to elicit *vox*.¹⁷ The physiological explanation of *vox* in humans and animals derives from Sedulius Scottus's *In Priscianum* commentary and so remains within common exegetical practices of ninth century commentators.¹⁸

Next, Eriugena considers the sensible nature of *vox*, i.e., its accidental qualities, with a set of quotations from Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*,¹⁹ in which the bishop of Hippo lists different types of signs and how they affect the bodily senses. In its proper sense, *vox* is accidental to the ears and hearing, since it is an audible phenomenon; but, in an extended sense, *vox* is also accidental to the eyes in its written form. The spoken *vox*, however, is also an image in Eriugena's analysis, since the mind must grasp what is heard as a concept. To reinforce this crucial and programmatic statement, Eriugena quotes from Ambrose's *De paradiso* (cited

from substance, but the second is derived from concepts, which the Greeks call *ennoia*, i.e. from accidents. For hearing is accidental to vocal utterance in and by itself.”

¹⁴ Luhtala, *Grammar and Philosophy*, 86–88.

¹⁵ Luhtala, *Grammar and Philosophy*, 97.

¹⁶ William of Conches in the twelfth century laments that Priscian “obscuras dat diffinitiones nec exponit” (“he provides obscure definitions and does not explain them,” *Philosophia*, IV, 41). See Jeauneau, “Deux rédactions,” 217–18. Luhtala uses William's words to introduce modern, ongoing disagreements as to whether Priscian's grammatical system is coherent. See Luhtala, “Priscian's Philosophy,” 121–3.

¹⁷ Luhtala, “Early Medieval Commentary,” 140.

¹⁸ See Sedulius Scottus, *In Priscianum*, 64.44–65.57.

¹⁹ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 2.3.4–5.

falsely as Augustine in *B*): “ΝΟΥΣ mens interpretatur. Animum sive mentem Greci ΝΟΥΝ dicunt, sensum vero ΕΣΘΕΣΙΝ appellant. Notitia illa, quia intelligit mens sensum, ΗΝΝΟΤΑ dicitur.”²⁰ The linking of mind (*nous*) and sensation (*aisthesis*) within a concept (*ennoia*) distances the commentary from a strict reading of Priscian’s text. The sense of hearing, in this reading, becomes the site of transference from the physical substance of struck air to the solicitation of concepts (*ennoiai*) in the mind (*nous*).

A general definition of sensation follows, taken from Augustine’s *De quantitate animae*: “sensus est passio corporis non latens animam.”²¹ For a *vox* to pertain to hearing it must be understood (*intelligitur*); for understanding to take place the *vox* must be both apparent to the soul and articulated through letters (*litterae*). Therefore, just as the soul gathers the sensations of the body into a unity, so too does the soul gather the *vox* into words that express sensations to others.²² From these claims, Eriugena arrives at the same conclusion as Priscian that a *vox* capable of being represented by letters is “articulate” (*articulata*).

The final section of Eriugena’s first definition returns to the distinction between “thicker air” (*aer corpulentior*) and “very thin air” (*aer tenuissimus*). A surprising equation between “fire” (*ignis*) and “very thin air” (*aer tenuissimus*) follows the claim that fire exists latently in all matter. In Eriugena’s ontology developed in the *Periphyseon*, all created bodies exist as matter (*materia*) and matter exists as an admixture of the four elements. Thus, within any composite body, all four elements will necessarily be present. Within the air we breathe to produce *vox*, therefore, there exists a modicum of fire responsible for the substance of *vox*.²³ The nature of fire, furthermore, is responsible for three phenomena: light (*lux*), heat (*calor*), and *vox*, which correspond to the senses of sight, touch, and hearing respectively. Since light, heat, and *vox* are all sensed, they must all be bodies (“Haec autem tria sentiuntur, corpora sunt igitur”).²⁴ Whether this is actually the

²⁰ “Nous is translated as mind. The Greeks call nous mind or intelligent soul, but they call sensation aisthesis. Ennoia means concept, because the mind understands sensation,” Luhtala, “Early Medieval Commentary,” 140; Ambrose, *De paradiso*, 2.11 (271.8–16). In Ambrose’s *De paradiso*, the mind (*nous*) is equated with Adam and sensation (*aisthesis*) with Eve. Eve succumbs to the temptation of the serpent because sensation is weak without the mind to guide it.

²¹ “Sensation is a suffering of a body that does not escape the soul,” derived from Augustine, *De quantitate animae*, 194.3–5: “Quamquam enim omnis passio corporis per seipsam non latens animam sensus sit, non tamen omnis sensus istud est.” (“For even though every suffering of the body in itself not escaping the soul is a sensation, not every sensation is this [i.e. suffering of the body].”)

²² Luhtala, “Early Medieval Commentary,” 140–41.

²³ The doctrine of physical matter consisting of a combination of the four elements appears several times throughout Eriugena’s *magnum opus*, *Periphyseon*, notably in book one, on the composition of the elements from quantity and quality (74.2292–2307; 495D–496B) and in book five, on the intellectual, but sensible nature of angels (186.6048–53; 993D). The clearest statement regarding the physical composition of air comes from an addition to book four of *Periphyseon* (16.14–18; 751D–752A): “Age enim, si corpoream speciem aspexeris, ipsa species in aliqua materia ex qualitatibus quattuor elementorum constituta est; si sonum seu odorem senseris, ex aere quattuor elementis composito; similiter si gustum seu tactum, ex compactionibus aquae terraeque accidere non dubitabis,” (“Go on then, if you look at a corporeal form, the form is constituted in some matter out of the qualities of the four elements; if you sense a sound or smell, [it is constituted] out of the air composed of the four elements; likewise if [you sense] a taste or touch, you will not doubt it comes about from the joining of water and earth.”)

²⁴ Luhtala, “Early Medieval Commentary,” 141.

case, says Eriugena, is subject to fierce debate among many philosophers and requires a much longer discussion.

The programmatic terms *substance*, *accident*, *sensation*, and *body* will be taken up and analyzed individually and greatly complicated in the commentary that follows. In this first section Eriugena's conclusions are stated *in nuce* and with some obscurity, though they become clearer in the course of his dialectic.

5 Eriugena's second analysis of *vox*

In his second analysis of *vox*, Eriugena considers the definition of *vox* according to its accidents, i.e., the fact that *vox* is a "sound sensible to the ears" (*sonum sensibilem aurium*).²⁵ Eriugena's first argumentative move in this analysis is to equate "perceptibility" (*sensibilitas*) with an "accident" (*accidens*). While the corporeal substance of *vox* is what is sensed, the quality that allows it to be sensed is an accident. The definition according to accidents moves through each of the terms used by Priscian. First is "sound" (*sonus*), which is the genus of all *voces*, since all *voces* are sound, but not all sounds are *voces*.²⁶ To determine the "proper attribute" (*proprium*) of *vox*, Eriugena considers several accidents such as lowness (*gravitas*), harshness (*asperitas*), and highness (*gracilitas*), but these accidents apply to many different types of sound. Only "perceptibility" (*sensibilitas*), i.e., the ability to be sensed by the human ear, is the proper accident (*proprium*) of *vox*.²⁷

The remainder of the second analysis compares hearing (*auditus*) to the other senses. Hearing and vision are reciprocal senses because they correspond with the substances they sense. Vision is accidental to light and light is accidental to vision; hearing is accidental to *vox* and *vox* is accidental to hearing. These two senses stretch outward and seek out the bodies they sense. Taste, touch, and smell, on the other hand, are more passive (although smell does in some cases stretch outward).²⁸ *Vox*, however, occupies a special place among the senses because it seems to be accidental to two senses, hearing and sight. Eriugena is quick to remark that physically and according to "perceptibility" *vox* properly is accidental to hearing *per se* and only accidental to sight "by means of the image of the *vox*" (*per imaginem ipsius vocis*). In the corporeal analysis of *vox*, letters are merely symbols of a properly spoken *vox*, but as the analysis of *vox* continues in different modalities, the letter, conceptually speaking, will become important for understanding *vox* as something ideal and incorporeal.

²⁵ Luhtala prints *sonum sensibile aurium* erroneously here. The reading *sonum sensibilem aurium* derives from Hertz's Irish branch of Priscian manuscripts, *G* (= St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 904) and *K* (= Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. Aug. perg. 132). The alteration of *suum sensibile* to *sonum sensibilem* allows Eriugena to make many claims about sound as genus and *vox* as species.

²⁶ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 142.

²⁷ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 142.

²⁸ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 143.

6 Eriugena’s third analysis of *vox*

Having provided two analyses that conclude that *vox* is first and foremost a corporeal, and secondarily a sensible, body, Eriugena begins his third analysis with a brief doxology of the definitions of *vox*. Then, at last, he turns to a second possibility (and the one he endorses) for *vox*, namely that *vox* is incorporeal. The first philosopher to give *vox* a definition was Diogenes, who called *vox* “struck air or its quality sensible to hearing” (“*vox est aer ictus vel suum sensibile aurium*”); a second philosopher, Tryphon, added the important qualifier “very thin” (*tenuissimus*) to air.²⁹ These two definitions from Stoic grammarians pave the way for Priscian’s standard, Stoic definition of *vox* as corporeal. The other possible definition, that *vox* is incorporeal, was propounded by the Academicians (following Plato) and the Peripatetics (following Aristotle). Here, Eriugena embeds himself in the philosophical tradition mentioned by Aulus Gellius. As the poets and writers discussed by Philippa Bryne elsewhere in this issue legitimated Norman rule in Southern Italy by recalling Virgilian myths, Eriugena, too, legitimizes his philosophical approach to *vox* and grammar by referencing the famous schools of Antiquity.³⁰ Both schools of thought, according to Eriugena, consider *vox* an accident. “Now if *vox* is an accident of air and every accident is incorporeal, why is it not conceded that every *vox* is incorporeal?” (“*Si enim vox accidens aeris est et omne accidens incorporeum est, quare non conceditur quod omnis vox incorporea est?*”) Likewise, it does not make sense that an incorporeal *vox* can come about from corporeal air.³¹ Here, Eriugena advances a definition of *vox* that focuses more on its intelligible than sensible aspects. Let the Stoics, physicists, and physicians dispute about elements, matter, and anatomy. Despite their definitions and incisive analyses, they do not describe *vox* as such, only its corporeal matter and the bodily organs that bring it about.

At this juncture, Eriugena must provide his own definition of *vox*. In a typical move, he provides an idiosyncratic Greek etymology for *vox* worth quoting in full:

De etymologia nominis quod est ‘vox’ nil aliud probabilius creditur quam ut a verbo Greco dirivetur, quod est ΦΩ, quod vertitur in Latinum verbum ‘illumino’. Nam quemadmodum lux obscura omnia illuminat atque appetit, sic humana vox, quae litterata vel articulata dicitur, occultas animi conceptiones in noticiam adducit certisque litterarum ac syllabarum, verborum quoque et sententiarum, rationabilibus motibus discernit. Quid ergo mirum si a verbo ΦΩ vox dirivetur, cum a verbo ΝΕΜΩ, quod est ‘distribuo’, nomen dirivari teste Prisciano videamus. Nam et apud Grecos a verbo ΦΩ ΦΩΝΗ, id est vox, dirivatur, et dicitur ΦΩΝΗ, quasi ΦΩΣ ΝΩΤΣ, id est lux animi. Occultas enim [anim *B*, animi *Lubtala*], ut

²⁹ Diogenes Babylonius was a prominent Stoic in the second century BCE, whose work *Tekhne grammatike* defines *vox* (φωνή) as ἀήρ πεπληγμενος (“struck air”). See *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, I.21.30. Tryphon was also a Stoic grammarian in the first century BCE, whose works do not survive.

³⁰ See Byrne, “Virgil in Scholastic Hands,” in this issue. For the gradual encroachment of philosophy and dialectic on the study of grammar in the early Middle Ages and beyond, see Gibson, “Milestones.”

³¹ Luhtala, “Early Medieval Commentary,” 145.

diximus, animi cogitationes [cogitatione *Luhtala*] ueluti in lucem quandam cognitionis per instrumenta sensuum reserat.³²

Eriugena's etymology for *vox* is quite striking for two reasons. First, an alternative etymology by Priscian was available to him. In the *Ars grammatica*, Priscian gives two etymologies: *vox* comes from either *vocare* (to call) or from the Greek verb βοῶ (I shout).³³ Priscian's etymologies, however, do not allow Eriugena to take a crucial step toward intellectualizing *vox* and rejecting its physical and sonic substance. He therefore ignores these readily available etymologies for the sake of aligning *vox* with *lux* (light). The second feature of this etymology is its reliance upon a reinterpretation of Greek roots. By replacing βοῶ with φῶ, the word *vox* enters a visual rather than aural paradigm. As Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi has remarked, the verb φῶ is a back formation from φωνή (*phone*, i.e., sound). The actual verbal form φῶ comes from φημί (*phemi*, I speak) and is the first person present subjunctive. Thus, Eriugena must have in mind a contracted or alternate form of the verb φωτίζω (*photizo*, I illuminate).³⁴ Strangely, Eriugena returns to the authority of Priscian to confirm his etymology, by citing the verbal derivation of *nomen* (noun) from the Greek νέμω (*nemo*, I distribute). Now, as the light of the mind (φῶς νοῦς, *phos nous*), *vox* can fulfil its mediative and intellectual function free from the transitoriness of composite matter and the randomness of custom.

While *vox* can be analyzed according to its substance (very thin struck air) or its accidents (its ability to be heard), the first definition is unsatisfactory for understanding *vox* intellectually. Since substance in itself is ultimately unknowable,

³² Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 145: "On the etymology of the name that is *vox* nothing is believed to be more probable than that it is derived from a Greek word, which is *PHO*, which is translated as the Latin word 'I enlighten'. For just as light enlightens and seeks out all that is dark, thus the human *vox*, which is called literate or articulate, brings the dark ideas (*conceptiones*) of the mind into knowledge (*notitia*) and distinguishes (*discernit*) them by means of fixed, rational motions of letters, syllables, words, and also sentences. Therefore, why be amazed that *vox* is derived from the word *PHO*, when we see in the text of Priscian that noun (*nomen*) is derived from the word *NEMO*, which means 'I distribute'. For among the Greeks, too, *PHONE*, i.e. *vox*, is derived from the word *PHO*, and *PHONE* means something like *PHOS NOYS*, i.e. light of the mind. For, as we have said, it [*vox*] opens the dark thoughts of the mind, as if into some light of knowledge, through the instruments of the senses."

³³ Priscian, *Institutionum Grammaticarum Libri I–XII*, 6.4–5.

³⁴ Mainoldi, "*Vox, sensus, intellectus*," 573. Compare also Eriugena's comments on physical and intellectual sound in music in his *Annotationes in Marcianum* (192.27–193.8): "EURYDICEM id est suam [Orphei] uxorem. Eurydice dicitur profunda intentio. Ipsa ars musica in suis profundissimis rationibus Eurydice dicitur, cuius quasi maritus Orpheus dicitur, hoc est ὄριος φωνή, id est pulchra vox; qui maritus si aliqua negligentia artis virtutem perdiderit veluti in quendam infernum profundae discipline descendit, de qua iterum artis regulas iuxta quas [*scripsi*, qua si *Lutz*] musicae voces disponuntur reducit, sed dum voces corporeas et transitorias profundae artis intentioni comparat, fugit iterum in profunditatem disciplinae ipsa inventio quoniam in vocibus apparere non potest ac per hoc tristis remanet Orpheus, vocem musicam absque ratione retinens." ("EURYDICE, i.e. Orpheus' wife. Eurydice means profound contemplation. The art of music in its most profound calculations (*rationibus*) is called Eurydice, whose husband, as it were, is called Orpheus, that is *horios phone*, i.e. beautiful *vox*. And if this husband loses the power of the art through any forgetfulness as if he descends into some hell of profound discipline, from which he brings back again the rules of the art, according to which musical *voces* are arranged, but when he couples corporeal and transitory *voces* to the contemplation of the art, the discovery of the discipline flees to the depths because it cannot appear in *voces* and on this account Orpheus remains depressed, holding onto the musical *vox* without system (*ratio*).")

only its sensible accidents can render *vox* sensible and intelligible. The Stoic definitions that claim *vox* is air and therefore a body can tell us what *vox* is, but these definitions cannot account for how *vox* performs its mediative function between our senses, souls, and minds. For this, an account of the letter is necessary.

7 Eriugena’s analysis of the letter

Priscian defines the letter thus in his *Ars grammatica*:

Litera est pars minima vocis compositae, hoc est quae constat compositione literarum, minima autem, quantum ad totam comprehensionem vocis literatae—ad hanc enim etiam productae vocales brevissimae partes inveniuntur—vel quod omnium est brevissimum eorum, quae dividi possunt, id quod dividi non potest. possumus et sic definire: litera est vox, quae scribi potest individua.³⁵

Eriugena begins his commentary on the letter with a thorough analysis of the word *minima* (smallest). He remarks that the word “smallest” relates to the letter “quantitatively” (*secundum quantitatem*) not “substantially” (*secundum substantiam*). This claim will contrast with other definitions that equate *vox* and *littera* substantially, i.e., since every *vox* consists of letters, the substance of *littera* is *vox*.³⁶ It follows that the substance of *vox* is not *vox*, but a certain intelligible concept (*quaedam intelligibilis res*).³⁷ This argument is opaque and relies upon Donatus’s earlier *Ars maior*, a standard grammatical text in the medieval curriculum read by every schoolboy. Donatus defines the noun as a “part of speech with case signifying a body or thing (*rem*) properly or commonly” (“Nomen est pars orationis cum casu corpus aut rem proprie communiterve significans”).³⁸ Priscian, following Donatus, also separates the signification of nouns into bodies (*corpora*) and things (*res*).³⁹ As Anne Grondeux has shown, these definitions form a paradigm shift in grammatical thinking about nouns.⁴⁰ Older grammarians like Sacerdos (third century CE) distinguish between *res corporales* (corporeal things) and *res incorporeales* (incorporeal things), but the later tradition in Donatus and Priscian distinguishes between *corpora* (bodies) and *res* (“things thought”), like *ars*, *disciplina*, *iustitia* (art, discipline, justice). Thus, when Eriugena argues that “the substance of *vox* is not *vox*, but a certain intelligible thing [thought] (*rem*),” he is including *vox* within a purely intellectual sphere, which can be grasped by the mind and understood, just like the substance of created things that escapes sense

³⁵ Priscian, *Institutionum Grammaticarum Libri I–XII*, 1.3: “A letter is the smallest part of a composite utterance (i.e. what exists as a composition of letters), but it is smallest with respect to the whole construction of a lettered *vox*—for even in relation to this [*vox*] long vowels are found to be the shortest parts—or it is what is the shortest of all those things which can be divided, i.e. it is that which cannot be divided. We can also define it thus: a letter is a *vox* that can be written individually.”

³⁶ Luhtala, “Early Medieval Commentary,” 145.

³⁷ Luhtala, “Early Medieval Commentary,” 146.

³⁸ Holtz, ed., *Donat*, 585.7–8; 614.2–3.

³⁹ Priscian, *Institutionum Grammaticarum Libri I–XII*, 2.22.

⁴⁰ Grondeux, “*Res* Meaning a Thing Thought,” 189–91.

perception, but can be understood in the mind. The quantity of *vox*, the minimal part of which is the letter, is accidental to the substance of *vox*, but it is the quantitative accident of the letter that is sensed by the ears, not substance.

The exact relation between *litera* and *vox* with regard to human speech is next to be discussed. This class of *voces* are the so-called *voces articulatae* (articulate *voces*) and Eriugena conceptualizes them as analogous to human beings. The letters, syllables, and words that articulate a *vox* correspond to the joints of a human body (*articuli*). Just as these joints form a whole that the rational soul governs, so too do letters form a whole that some thought brings to life.⁴¹ The life of human speech mirrors the life of language in this schema. The body, here *corpus* or *vox*, is discretely divisible into parts, but the parts are only unified through the rational action of a soul for the body, or a thought for *vox*.⁴² The argument from analogy implicitly links humanity with its ability to communicate rationally using a *vox* composed of discrete letters.

The next part of Eriugena's commentary pertains to Priscian's qualification of the term *minima* (minimal/smallest) by the phrase "with respect to the whole [*vox*]" (*quantum ad totam*). That the letter is "minimal with respect to the whole" does not imply grammatical comparison, whereby the letter is superlatively small in relation to syllables, words, sentences, etc. Instead, argues Eriugena, "everything thought, understood, and investigated in itself is neither small nor large" ("Omnis res in se ipsa intellecta inspectaque nec parva nec magna est").⁴³ Since it has already been established that the letter comprises the incorporeal substance of *vox*, it must be understood and not directly sensed. As a *res*, the letter will always be minimal as a part with respect to a whole, which will always be maximal. Comparison in the proper grammatical sense can only occur between magnitudes of corporeal bodies.⁴⁴ Moreover, if the letter participated in corporeality (*ad corporalem participationem pertinuisset*), i.e., if it were a corporeal division of *vox*, no thought could actually take place; for no corporeal body can be reduced to an indivisible ("nullum enim corpus usque ad individuum aliquod pervenire potest").⁴⁵ For Eriugena then, corporeal matter is infinitely divisible. Thus, if *vox* were corporeal it would be infinitely divisible, too. In that case, no letter could form an absolutely minimal, discrete unit of analysis. Grammar and, *a fortiori*, thought would not be able to begin since the mind would be unable to divide *vox* rationally—it would only be able to divide *ad infinitum*. The argument is strikingly similar to Zeno's paradox of motion (or rather here a paradox of notion).

The dialectic now shifts sides as the thesis that *vox* is a *corpus* is once again entertained. If this is so, then *vox per se* cannot be reduced to an indivisible. Even a *vox* of a single letter could be infinitely divided. However, since Priscian defines the letter as "that which cannot be divided" (*id quod dividi non potest*), it must follow that the letter pertains to "rational division" (*rationalis divisio*) rather than "corporeal partition" (*corporalis partitio*). An example makes the argument even

⁴¹ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 146.

⁴² Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 146.

⁴³ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 146.

⁴⁴ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 147.

⁴⁵ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 147.

clearer. Let's consider an extended *vox* like a verse of poetry: the verses are not split up into corporeal parts, but instead into "intelligible forms" (*intelligibiles formae*). The verse contains a number of "unit syllable lengths" (*numerus temporum*), syllables, and feet, which are incorporeal "things thought" (*res*).⁴⁶ The numerical basis of Latin verse is the key to Eriugena's analysis here. Numbers and numerical ratios underlie Latin quantitative verse. Furthermore, number is an incorporeal substance that is only understood rationally. Thus, the quantitative analysis of verse demonstrates the incorporeal and intellectual substance of *vox* and *litera*.

The verse is different from the feet that comprise it; the feet are different from the syllables and unit times that comprise them; and, finally, the syllables are different from the letters that comprise them. Letters, however, have no composition as intelligibles. (To repeat, as a body, a letter would be infinitely divisible). A letter is a "thing thought" (*res*) "singular and indivisible" (*una et individua*). *Vox* can only undergo rational division into letters with respect to its intelligible system (*intelligibilis ratio*), not with respect to the *vox* (*qua corpus*) of the letter. In a telling example Eriugena likens the rational division of *vox* into letters to the division of the *genus* animal into "human, horse, lion, etc." (*homo, equus, leo, et cetera*).⁴⁷ The numerical and quantitative analysis of the previous section has given way to a dialectical analysis that subsumes grammatical thought under categorical logical thinking. Since it is subject to the categories of dialectic, counterintuitively, grammar can stand as an independent liberal art with a foundation firmer than custom or fashion.

Eriugena continues the comparison between the rational division of the *vox* and the rational division of the human being. "A human being is singular and an indivisible thing thought" (*unus homo individua res*). Even though the corporeal human being can be divided infinitely, and its soul may be divided into "being, willing, and knowing" (*esse, et velle, et scire*), nevertheless the simplicity of the intelligible substance that defines a singular human being cannot be split into two or three new, distinct substances. In just this way, the corporeal *vox* divides infinitely, while the *vox* as a letter is intellectually discrete and indivisible.⁴⁸

In the final section of the commentary I discuss in this article, Eriugena must harmonize the usual, written form of the letter with the usual, spoken form of *vox*. Priscian notes at the end of his definition that "the letter is a *vox* that can be written individually" ("*litera est vox quae scribi potest individua*"). We say, however, that *vox* is written not *per se*, but through "its image" (*imago sua*). Similar to light (*lux*), *vox* cannot be written "in so far as it is light/*vox*" (*quantum lux est*).⁴⁹ These arguments present a serious problem: if the letter is simply an image of *vox*, then it cannot immanently signify or communicate thoughts. As a corporeal image it would be subject to the same infinite division as the corporeal *vox*. Yet, despite these concerns, Eriugena is ready with an answer, which relies upon the earlier definition of the letter as a "thing thought" (*res*).

⁴⁶ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 148. The term *tempus* in metrical contexts means "unit syllable length," the term is also equated with *mora* "duration of time." See Schad, *Lexicon*, s.v. *tempus*.

⁴⁷ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 148.

⁴⁸ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 149.

⁴⁹ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 149.

The conclusion to the argument for the rational substance of the letter becomes clear as Eriugena argues for the lettered composition of *vox* and its relation to the action of writing. I will quote the philosophical synthesis of *vox* and *litera* in full:

Non solum autem scriptura vocis ad imaginem pertinet, quae pinguitur in cera aut in membrana, sed etiam ad ipsam scripturam oris. Duobus namque modis scribitur vox: uno proprio (263v), altero abusivo. Proprie enim scribitur vox cum distinguitur in litteras et syllabas atque etiam distinctas orationis partes anima per instrumenta linguae palatque operante; abusive autem, cum per quasdam imagines linearum pinguitur atque figuratur. De illo igitur primo modo Priscianum dixisse manifestum est. Cum enim naturaliter vox profertur et in artheriis promitur, tunc quasi quaedam materies informis esse videtur. Cum autem in litteras et syllabas partesque distinguitur, tunc quodammodo scribi videtur. Ideoque dictum est: 'littera est vox, quae scribi potest individua', id est scribi potest quantum ad vocem corporalem, individua quantum ad substantiam rationabilem; vel magis vere corpus, tamquam aperte dixisset magis dicendum est vocem esse corpus quam esse similitudinem corporis. Dicit enim primum 'quasi corpus aliquod', non enim dixit corpus aliquod, sed quasi corpus aliquod, propter eos qui putant vocem non esse corpus.⁵⁰

Eriugena reaches the stunning conclusion that *vox* derives its organization and structure from the letter, rationally conceived. In this analysis, the writing of *vox* assumes its proper role, namely writing that takes place within the mouth (*scriptura oris*). The usual meaning of writing as a practice of inscribing, drawing, or etching symbols onto a substrate for the purpose of recording or of making an image of a *vox* in this case assumes only secondary importance. Since the corporeal substance of *vox* is ultimately unknowable, its graphic symbols must likewise be unknowable. If the letter merely reproduces *vox* visually, it signifies nothing except a symbol of a sound. Instead, the letter is the manifest operation of the soul on corporeal *vox*. This action imprints discrete, analyzable units onto "unformed matter" (*materies informis*). The "rational substance" (*rationabilis substantia*) that underlies an intelligible *vox* is therefore the letter. Thus, the letter is causally prior to the *vox* in terms of signification. The system of writing exercised by the soul through the body causes signification to occur in language; without such a system

⁵⁰ Luhtala, "Early Medieval Commentary," 149. "The writing of the *vox* does not just pertain to an image that is depicted on wax or on parchment, but also to the very writing of the mouth. Indeed, *vox* is written in two ways: one way is proper, the other metaphorical. For *vox* is properly written when it is distributed into letters and syllables and also discrete parts of speech when the soul operates through the tools of the tongue and palate; but it is metaphorically written, when it is depicted and given shape by certain images of lines. Therefore, it is clear that Priscian spoke of the first way. For when *vox* is spoken naturally and pushed through the trachea, then it seems like it is unformed matter (*materies informis*). But when it is distributed into letters and syllables, then it seems to be written as it were. And therefore it was said: 'the letter is a *vox* that can be written individually', i.e., 'it can be written' with respect to the corporeal voice, 'individually' with respect to rational substance ; or more truly [*vox* is] a body, as if he had said more clearly: it should be said that *vox* is a body rather than that it is a likeness of a body. For he says first, 'as if some body'; he did not say 'some body', but 'as if some body', on account of those who think that *vox* is not a body."

vox would remain "unformed matter" incapable of communication, or even of being sensed.⁵¹

To return to the beginning of the commentary, the accidents that allow signs (*signa*) to affect human sensation (*aisthesis/sensus*) must exist as incorporeal, discrete *res*. The hardline, Stoic position that views *vox* as purely corporeal is untenable for Eriugena because corporeal matter can undergo infinite division. Since the mind can only understand indivisible *res*, it cannot understand *vox* as corporeal matter. Thus, an incorporeal substance found within the accidents of *vox* must guarantee its significative function. First and foremost is the accident of "perceptibility" (*sensibilitas*), but all sound that is sensed is not properly a *vox*. What properly constitutes a *vox* is the letter *qua* accident and *res*. The letter is the indivisible guarantor of intelligibility for *vox*. Because of its indivisibility the letter is intelligible to the mind like a form (*forma*) or like a species within a genus, e.g. *homo* within *animal*. Thus, the letter becomes the rational basis of *vox*, the incorporeal, discrete, analyzable quantum that underlies rational signification. Eriugena's understanding of the communicative power of *vox* residing at the juncture of the corporeal and incorporeal, of speech and writing, of the continuous and discrete, solves in some way at a logical level the mystery of the word become flesh. In Eriugena's mature thought in *Periphyseon*, the same mystery will express itself throughout creation. Vincent Giraud has shown that Eriugena conceptualized material creation as a paradoxical *non apparentis apparitio* ("the apparition of what is not apparent"), just as "our own intellect, although in itself it is invisible and incomprehensible, yet becomes both manifest and comprehensible by certain signs when it is materialized in sounds and letters."⁵²

8 Eriugenian entanglements in Valenciennes, MS 413 (394)

The contents of Eriugena's *In Priscianum* commentary were known to other scholars who annotated and commented on the text of Priscian in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Scholars began to incorporate material from Eriugena's physiological and corporeal analysis of *vox* as well as statements about the relation of grammar to philosophy to the beginning of manuscripts of Priscian's *Ars*.⁵³ However, the trajectory of the reception of Eriugena's grammatical thought is

⁵¹ In book one of *Periphyseon*, Eriugena clearly states that "unformed matter" is unable to be sensed: "N. Dic itaque. Quid tibi videtur de ipsa materia ex qua formata corpora fiunt? Nam per se dum sit informis, sensu an ratione consideratur? A. Ratione profecto. Nam enim audeo dicere sensu, nam materia forma carens nullo sensu corporeo potest attingi. N. Recte respondisti. Sed vide ne diutius de his quae nunc assumperis iterum nos interroges. Nam in talibus nimium moramur, cum altiora ad considerationem sui nos inuitent." (79.2445–2452; 499B–C) ("Teacher: So, tell me: What do you think about the matter from which bodies with form arise? While it is unformed in itself, is it contemplated by the senses or by reason? Student: Surely by reason. I certainly do not dare claim by sensation, for matter lacking form cannot be touched/sensed by any corporeal sensation.")

⁵² Giraud, "Being as Sign," 229–30; citing *Periphyseon*, 633A–C.

⁵³ See Luhtala, "Grammar and Philosophy," 289–93. Luhtala notes twelve manuscripts that contain portions of Eriugena's commentary often reworked and combined with other commentary traditions and glosses used in the ninth century. For a recent overview and analysis of the corpus of Priscian glosses in the ninth century see Cinato, *Priscien glosé*.

anything but straightforward or linear. The arguments of the *In Priscianum* commentary become fragmented and entangled with the concerns and preoccupations of other grammarians. These later byways and cul-de-sacs of reception exemplify the tangled network of source materials and the re-entangling that occurs in new grammatical and pedagogical contexts. One such manuscript that partakes in this reception network has come to light, containing very similar arguments to those found in Eriugena's commentary. Valenciennes, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 413 (394) (saec. IX/X or X inc., NE France (St. Amand?)), referred to here with the siglum *V*, contains a commentary on Donatus' *Ars minor* as well as several other grammatical texts.⁵⁴ The *Ars minor* commentary contained on folios 43–78, treats the parts of speech, and then turns to the more fundamental aspects of grammar: *vox* and the letter, at which point the commentary abruptly breaks off at the end of a quire. The commentary, like many anonymous grammatical commentaries of the ninth and tenth centuries, consists of a pastiche of quotations from authoritative grammarians, such as Priscian, Pompeius, Isidore, and even some more obscure grammatical writers, like Murethach, Donatus Ortigraphus, and Virgilius Maro Grammaticus.⁵⁵ Occasionally, however, the commentator forwards some interpretations and arguments of his own.

During the discussion of *vox*, taken nearly verbatim (or *paene ad litteram*) from Murethach's commentary on Donatus's *Ars maior*, the Valenciennes commentator provides a brief excursus consisting of five syllogisms on the corporality of *vox* followed by a modified set of extracts from Eriugena's *In Priscianum*, which will be discussed below. The syllogisms are as follows:

- 1.) <70r> Omnis uox inuisibilis est; omne inuisibile corpus non est; omnis igitur uox corpus non est.
- 2.) Omne corpus sine colore non est; omnis [omne *V*] autem uox sine colore est; omnis igitur uox corpus non est.
- 3.) Omnis aer corpus est; omne corpus non est motus <70v>; quidam motus sonus, omnis uox sonus; omnis igitur uox non est aer, et ideo corpus non est, quamuis corporea est.
- 4.) Omnis substantia non est creaturae actus. Quidam actus locutio est; omnis locutio [incutio *V*] audibilis sonus est; omnis uox sonus est; omnis igitur uox substantia non est, sed actus et accidens.
- 5.) Omnis aer[a] non substantia est; omne corpus in toto maius, in parte autem minus est; omnis autem res ne(c) in toto maior nec in parte minor est; omnis intersonus, uerbi gratia 'a' uel 'e', nec in toto, id est in auribus totius populi, maior est, nec in parte, id est in auribus unius hominis, partis populi, minor est; omnis igitur sonus non est corpus sed res est.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ The manuscript consists of several distinct codicological units. The first section (ff. 1–47) dates from the ninth century and contains a commentary on Prudentius, the second part, where the Donatus commentary resides, also contains a text of Priscian's *Institutio de nomine, pronomine, et uerbo*. See Bischoff, *Katalog*, no. 6399; also, Passalacqua, *I codici*, no. 626bis; and Holtz, *Donat*, 407–8.

⁵⁵ See the recent edition of the *Ars Riwipullensis* by Daniela Gallo for a detailed source analysis and commentary on how early grammarians constructed grammars from authoritative excerpts.

⁵⁶ Valenciennes, Bibliothèque Municipale, 413 (394), ff. 70r–70v. “1.) Every *vox* is invisible; every invisible [thing] is not a body; therefore, every *vox* is not a body. 2.) Every body is without color; every *vox* is

These syllogisms differ considerably from Eriugena’s arguments found in his Priscian commentary, but their argumentative thrust aims at very similar ends. All five of the syllogisms work toward a single claim, namely that *vox* is not a body, but a “thing thought” (*res*), relying upon the same grammatical distinction taken from Donatus and Priscian. The first two syllogisms establish this by appealing to the fact that one does not see a *vox*, nor does the *vox* have color, both common properties of bodies. The third syllogism defines *vox* as the motion and sound carried in air, not the air itself. A difficulty arises here for the Valenciennes commentator, who must concede that *vox* is in a sense corporeal (*corporea*), but not a body. This implication is fully unpacked and discussed by Eriugena, but is passed over quickly here and subsequently ignored. The fourth syllogism introduces the distinction between substance and accident. The action of speaking is an audible sound that is accidental to substance, which is probably to be equated with air. Like Eriugena’s definition of the primary accident of *vox* as “perceptibility” (*sensibilitas*), this syllogism defines *vox* as wholly an accident. The fifth and final syllogism contains the most subtle reasoning (and also begins inexplicably with the isolated claim “all air is not substance”).⁵⁷ Like Eriugena’s arguments concerning the minimal quantity and unity of the letter, which is neither small nor large when understood or examined in itself, according to the Valenciennes commentator, *vox* is neither larger nor smaller depending on the size of the crowd that hears it, even if it is a short vowel sound (*intersonus*) like *a* or *e*.⁵⁸ The phenomenological analysis of *vox* as affecting hearers the same regardless of their number probably comes from Boethius’ *De institutione musica* 1.14, where Boethius remarks that “when struck air makes a sound, it strikes whatever is next to it and somehow drives a circular surge of air, and thus is diffused and strikes the hearing of all bystanders simultaneously” (“Ita igitur cum aer pulsus fecerit sonum, pellit alium proximum et quodammodo rotundum fluctum aeris ciet, itaque diffunditur et omnium circum stantium simul ferit auditum”).⁵⁹ The circular and simultaneous propagation aligns *vox* with the definition of *res*, which does not become diminished in a part, nor enlarged in the whole—it exists as a simple unity. At first glance, the Boethian source material seems to contradict this final syllogism because it relies upon *aer pulsus*, which is defined as a body (*corpus*) in syllogism three. However, since the “struck air makes a sound” (*aer pulsus fecerit sonum*), the

without color; therefore, every *vox* is not a body. 3.) All air is a body; every body is not a motion; sound is a motion, every *vox* a sound; therefore, every *vox* is not air, and therefore it is not a body, even though it is corporeal. 4.) Every substance is not an action of a creature. Speaking is an action; every speaking is an audible sound; every *vox* is a sound; therefore, every *vox* is not a substance, but an action and accident. 5.) All air is not substance; every body is greater in the whole, but lesser in the part; every ‘thing thought’ (*res*) is neither greater in the whole or lesser in the part; every partial sound, e.g. *a* or *e*, is neither greater in its whole, i.e. in the ears of a whole crowd (*populi*), nor is it lesser in the part, i.e. in the ears of a single person, i.e. a part of the crowd; therefore every sound is not a body, but a ‘thing thought’ (*res*).”

⁵⁷ The initial claim may be a fragmentary syllogism that would distinguish between the corporeal and incorporeal substance of air.

⁵⁸ I have been unable to find other instances of the word *intersonus* in grammatical texts. The sense of the word must be “short vowel sound” or “partial utterance,” but it is difficult to say with absolute certainty.

⁵⁹ Boethius, *De institutione musica*, 1.14.

aer becomes a motion (here a *fluctus*) and hence action that strikes the hearers simultaneously.⁶⁰ Thus, *vox* as the modulation of and action on the air, which can affect any number of hearers within a given radius, is a *res*.

By shifting focus from the letter to *vox* as “thing thought” (*res*), the Valenciennes commentator presents an extreme version of Eriugena’s thoughts about the corporeality and incorporeality of *vox*. Whereas Eriugena carefully distinguishes between *vox* as corporeal substance in air and incorporeal substance in its accidents, notably in the letter, the Valenciennes commentator conceptualizes *vox* as either corporeal or incorporeal. The resulting argumentation is blunter than Eriugena’s but arrives at a similar conclusion that what is important and communicative about *vox* lies in its ontological status as *res* rather than as a body. The condensed and crabbed style of the syllogism compares unfavorably with Eriugena’s sprawling dialectical method, but they do show one entangled vector of transmission for his commentary.

In the Valenciennes manuscript, a highly condensed version of the beginning of Eriugena’s *In Priscianum* commentary is quoted after the syllogisms (fols. 70v–71r). The same quotation from Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* (2.3–4) is used to discuss the communicative functions of signs. I have bolded and underlined the sections of Augustine’s text that are used by Eriugena and the Valenciennes commentator in the following quotation for ease of comparison with the table below.

signorum igitur, quibus inter se homines sua sensa communicant, quaedam pertinent ad oculorum sensum, pleraque ad aurium, paucissima ad ceteros sensus. nam cum innuimus, non damus signum nisi oculis eius quem uolumus per hoc signum uoluntatis nostrae participem facere. et quidam **motu manuum** pleraque significant: et **histriones** omnium membrorum motibus dant signa quaedam scientibus, et cum oculis eorum quasi fabulantur; et uexilla dracones que militares per oculos insinuant uoluntatem ducum: **et sunt haec omnia quasi quaedam uerba uisibilia.** ad aures autem quae pertinent, ut dixi, plura sunt, in uerbis maxime. nam **et tuba et tibia et cithara dant** plerumque non solum suauem, sed etiam significantem sonum. **sed omnia uerbis comparata paucissima sunt. uerba enim prorsus inter homines obtinuerunt principatum significandi quaecumque animo concipiuntur, si ea quisque prodere uelit.** nam et odore ungenti dominus, quo perfusi sunt pedes eius, signum aliquod dedit et sacramento corporis et sanguinis sui per gustatum significauit, quod uoluit, et cum mulier tangendo fimbriam uestimenti eius salua facta est, nonnihil significat. sed innumerabilis multitudo signorum, quibus suas cogitationes homines exerunt, in uerbis constituta est. nam illa signa omnia, quorum genera breuiter attigi, potui uerbis enuntiare, uerba uero illis signis nullo modo possem. **sed quia uerberato aere statim transeunt nec diutius manent quam sonant, instituta sunt per litteras signa uerborum. ita uoces oculis ostenduntur non per se ipsas, sed per signa quaedam sua.** ista signa igitur non potuerunt communia esse omnibus gentibus peccato quodam dissensionis humanae, cum ad se

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.14.

quisque principatum rapit. cuius superbiae signum est erecta illa turris in caelum, ubi homines impii non solum animos, sed etiam uoces dissonas habere meruerunt.⁶¹

In both *B* and *V*, Augustine’s text quoted above is shortened to emphasize the primacy of vocal communication:

V=Valenciennes Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 413, fols. 70v–71r	B=Barcelona, MS Ripoll 59 fol. 258r. Eriugena, <i>In Priscianum</i> , ed. Luhtala, 140
Signorum igitur, quibus inter se homines sensa communicant, quaedam pertinent ad oculorum sensum, pleraque ad aurium, paucissima ad ceteros sensus, id est motus manuum et histrionum. Dant signa oculis et sunt quasi quaedam uerba uisibilia; et tuba et tibia et cithara radiant signa auribus, odor ad nares, corpus ad tactum, sed omnia uerbis comparata paucissima sunt. Verba enim prorsus inter homines obtinuerunt principatum significandi quaecumque animo concipiunt(ur), si ea quisque prodere uelit. Sed quia uerberato aere statim transeunt nec diutius (manent) quam sonant, instituta sunt per litteras signa uerborum. Ita uoces oculis ostenduntur non per se ipsas, sed per signa quaedam sua.	Signorum quibus inter se homines sua sensa communicant, quaedam pertinent ad oculorum sensum, pleraque ad aurium, paucissima ad ceteros sensus. Item motus manuum et histrionum dant signa oculis, et sunt quasi quaedam uerba [in]uisibilia. Et tuba et tibia et cythara dant signa auribus, odor ad nares, corpus ad tactum. Sed omnia uerbis comparata paucissima sunt. Verba enim prorsus inter homines obtinuerunt principatum significandi quaecumque animo concipiuntur, si ea quisque prodere uelit. Sed quia uerberato aere statim transeunt, nec diutius manent quam sonant, ideo statuta sunt per litteras signa uerborum. Ita uoces oculis ostenduntur non per se ipsas, sed per signa quaedam sua. ⁶²

Likewise, Augustine’s *De quantitate animae* is used to define sensation (see note 21 above). And, most telling, the distinctive use of Ambrose’s *De paradiso* (2.11)—wrongly attributed to Augustine in Eriugena’s *In Priscianum*—provides

⁶¹ *De doctrina christiana*, 2.3–4: “Some of the signs by which people communicate their feelings to one another concern the eyes; most of them concern the ears, and a very small number concern the other senses. When we nod, we give a sign just to the eyes of the person whom we want, by means of that sign, to make aware of our wishes. Certain movements of the hands signify a great deal. Actors by the movement of all their limbs, give certain signs to the *cognoscenti* and, as it were, converse with the spectators’ eyes; and it is through the eyes that flags and standards convey the wishes of military commanders. All these things are, to coin a phrase, visible words. But most signs, as I said, and especially verbal ones, concern the ears. A trumpet, a flute, and a lyre generally produce not just a pleasant sound but one that is also significant. But these signs are very few compared with words. Words have gained an altogether dominant role among humans in signifying ideas conceived by the mind that a person wants to reveal. It is true that our Lord gave a sign through the smell of ointment by which his geet were anointed, and that in the sacrament of his body and blood he signified his wishes through the sense of taste, and that the healing of the woman who touched the border of his garment has its significance. But an incalculable number of the signs by which people disclose their thoughts consist in words. I have been able to express in words all the various kinds of signs that I have briefly mentioned, but in no way could I have expressed all my words in terms of signs. But spoken words cease to exist as soon as they come into contact with the air, and their existence is no more lasting than that of their sound; hence the invention, in the form of letters, of signs of words. In this way words are presented to the eyes, not in themselves, but by certain signs peculiar to them. These signs could not be shared by all nations, because of the sin of human disunity by which each one sought hegemony for itself. This pride is signified by the famous tower raised towards heaven at the time when wicked men justly received incompatible languages to match their incompatible minds.” Latin text from *CCSL* 32, ed. Joseph Martin; English translation from Green, 59–61.

⁶² To complicate matters further, a nearly identical excerpted text of *De doctrina christiana* can be found in Paris, BnF, Latin 10290, f. 1v.

the Greek terminology for mind (*nous*) and sensation (*aisthesis*). The text of Ambrose's *De paradiso* reads:

Namque ante nos fuit qui per uoluptatem et sensum praeuaricationem ab homine memorauerit esse commissam, in specie serpentis figuram accipiens delectationis, in figura mulieris sensum animi mentisque consituens, quam αἴσθησιν uocant Graeci, decepto autem sensu praeuaricatricem secundum historiam mentem adseruit, quam Graeci νοῦν uocant. Recte igitur in Graeco νοῦς uiri figuram accepit, αἴσθησις mulieris. Unde et quidam Adam νοῦν terrenum interpretati sunt.⁶³

The commentators in *V* and *B* have extracted only the bare equation of *aisthesis* with *sensus* and *noys* with *mens*, The final link between *notio* and *ennoia* comes from the beginning of Priscian's *Ars grammatica* (2.5.3).

V=Valenciennes Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 413, fol. 71r	B=Barcelona, MS Ripoll 59 fol. 259r-v. Eriugena, <i>In Priscianum</i> , ed. Luhtala, 140
Ex Libro Paradyso. noyc. Mens interpretatur animum siue mentem, noyn dicuntur Greci(s), sensus uero εσθασιν appellant. Notio illa, qua intelligit mens sensum, ennoyn dicitur.	Augustinus in libro <i>De paradiso</i> : NOYC mens interpretatur. Animum sive mentem Greci NOYN dicunt, sensum uero ECΘECIN appellant. Notitia illa, quia intelligit mens sensum, HNNOYA dicitur.

Franck Cinato has found similar textual parallels in the marginalia of Priscian manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries with the text of *In Priscianum* in *B*, including this quotation from Ambrose's *De paradiso* (found in Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 114, fol. 3r, and Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, BPL 67, fol. 10r).⁶⁴ It is difficult to disentangle the textual threads of transmission in cases such as these. Is Eriugena the originator of these excerpts/comments found in *B*, *V* and other manuscripts, or was there a common stock of authoritative excerpts and comments used by many different grammarians? It will be impossible to know without a full study of the transmission and dissemination of these glosses.⁶⁵

The analysis of the play between sensation, thought, and language ends abruptly with a quotation adapted from Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*: "Every corporeal *vox* is uttered by the speaker through the corporeal sense of the listener" ("Omnis corporalis vox per audientis corporalem sensum a loquente profertur").⁶⁶

⁶³ *De paradiso* (271.8-16): "In fact, there was one before us who remembered the sin committed by man through sensation and pleasure, accepting the aspect of delight in the form of the serpent, establishing in the aspect of the woman the sensation of thought and mind, which the Greeks call *aisthesis*, but after sensation had been deceived he protected the sinful (in the literal sense) mind, which the Greeks call *noyn*. Therefore, in Greek, *noys* rightly takes on the aspect of man, and *aisthesis* that of woman. For this reason some have even translated 'Adam' as terrestrial *noyn*."

⁶⁴ Cinato, "Marginalia Témoins," 552. Cinato also provides an overview of the manuscripts that contain the glosses and a full edition of the parallels in his article.

⁶⁵ Franck Cinato has given this question its fullest treatment to date in *Priscien Glosé*. It is currently beyond the scope of this paper to consider all the textual parallels of *B* and *V* in detail.

⁶⁶ Compare Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 1.9: "Sed omnis talis vox propter audientis corporalem sensum a loquente profertur; ita enim factus est, ut percusso aere sentiat." ("But every such *vox* is uttered by the

Just as the Valenciennes commentator seems to be setting up a corporeal definition of *vox*, he resumes with excerpts from Murethach's commentary on the letter.

Even though the excerpts and syllogisms in Valenciennes, MS 413 (394) do not contain an analysis of *vox* and the letter as rich and thorough as Eriugena's commentary on Priscian, they nevertheless show a stage of the diffusion of Eriugena's thought in a more elementary context. Whether the Valenciennes commentator had access to the text of Eriugena's commentary as it appears in Barcelona, MS Ripoll 59 is impossible to say. It is often the fate of grammatical commentaries in the early Middle Ages to undergo fragmentation and reincorporation in different manuscript and pedagogical contexts. The Valenciennes commentator may have had access to a manuscript of Priscian's *Ars* with Eriugena's commentary copied haphazardly in the margins, or the commentator may have had a different recension of Eriugena's text now lost to us. Whatever the case may be, the syllogisms seem to be an original contribution from the Valenciennes commentator, whose attempts at recasting the old problem of the corporality of *vox* in a rigidly logical form represent another chapter in the entanglement of philosophy and grammar.

9 Conclusion

I hope to have shown in some detail how Eriugena approached the problem of connecting incorporeal thoughts with the corporeal medium of *vox* and also how Eriugena's thought influenced a later commentator in the intellectual milieu of northeastern France. The distinct doctrines of the Stoics, Platonists, Peripatetics, and Epicureans mapped by Gellius in Antiquity had become muddled by the time of Donatus and Priscian. These Late Antique authorities then bequeathed to the Middle Ages a hybrid theory, capable of being studied and understood from diverse doctrinal positions for different educational ends. In many cases, Priscian was read as a school author who promised competency in Latin grammar, and scholars and educators treated his text as such.⁶⁷ Eriugena's commentary on *vox* is by far the most advanced, intricate, and philosophical of the early Middle Ages. While material bodies, even though they are sensed, remain fundamentally unknowable for Eriugena, the liberal arts, especially grammar and dialectic, shape material sounds and letters into discrete, indivisible units that allow the human mind to know and understand.

Scholars and scribes in the tenth and eleventh centuries continued to study and comment on Priscian. Like the Valenciennes commentator, these scholars had to navigate a welter of sources and authorities, as well as remain sensitive to the pedagogical needs of students, teachers, and fellow scholars. Eriugena's grammatical thought influenced the next generations of scholars and poets, notably

speaker on behalf of the corporeal sensation of the listener; for he [man] was made such that he could sense when air was struck.")

⁶⁷ Alcuin's treatment of Priscian is representative. He uses Priscian as an authority frequently in his *De grammatica* (PL 101) and produced an organized set of excerpts mainly from Priscian's syntactical books, seventeen and eighteen, the *Excerptiones super Priscianum*.

Heiric of Auxerre, and then developed in the tenth and eleventh, until, in the twelfth century with the *Notae Dunelmenses* and William of Conches' magisterial commentary on Priscian's *Ars*, the philosophical analysis of the fundamental concepts of grammar, *vox* and *littera*, received a fresh impetus.⁶⁸ These texts revived and reinvigorated the question at the heart of Eriugena's grammatical thinking: how do we communicate what is inside us?

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⁶⁸ The influence of Eriugena in the ninth and early tenth centuries is traced in O'Meara, "Eriugena's Early Influence." An outline of the reception of Eriugena in the tenth through twelfth centuries is sketched in Jeaneau, "Le renouveau érigénien." For a detailed analysis and partial edition of William of Conches' commentary on Priscian and especially the parts dealing with *vox* see Hicks, *Composing the World*, "Hearing the World," 151–88; partial edition of William's commentary, 263–72.

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JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM AND
EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Ivo Wolsing, “From Sorcerer’s Son to Epic Hero: (Meta)Poetic Entanglement in Walter of Châtillon’s *Alexandreis*,” JOLCEL 12 (2025): pp. 54–78. DOI: [10.21825/jolcel.90252](https://doi.org/10.21825/jolcel.90252)

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NOTE

This article is the third main article in the current issue of JOLCEL, which consists of a preface, five articles and a response piece. The other contributions are “Tangling with the Classics: Rethinking Reception in the Middle Ages” by Jacqueline M. Burek and Rebecca Menmuir (pp. 1–4), “The Tangled Reception of Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus Malalianus*” by Mary Hitchman (pp. 5–28), “John Scottus Eriugena and the Entangled Materiality of *Vox*” by Paul Vinhage (pp. 29–53), “Virgil in Scholastic Hands: Transnational and Local, Textual and Material” by Philippa Byrne (pp. 79–100), “Renegotiating Antiquity with/in Herbert’s *Roman de Dolopathos*” by Ramani Chandramohan (pp. 101–32) and “Entanglements” by Alfred Hiatt (pp. 133–41).

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From Sorcerer's Son to Epic Hero: (Meta)Poetic Entanglement in Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a metapoetic approach to Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* (ca. 1175–1180). Whereas previous generations of scholars focused largely on the internal meaning of the poem or its relation to the canon of Latin epic, this article also takes into account the position of the poem in its contemporary literary milieu. It argues that the poet makes use of metalepsis to reflect upon the position of his poem in the literary canon, but also to react to the poetics of his contemporaries. A metapoetical reading of the epic suggests that the poet self-consciously reflects on the position of the poem in the literary milieu of its time. Walter rejects the anachronizing approach of contemporary poems, such as the Old French *Alexander Romance*, to their antique *materia*, offering a historicizing model instead. Paradoxically, by embedding elements from the *Romance*-tradition into his narrative, Walter invites his audience to critically assess the value of classical history and epic poetry for a twelfth-century audience. Despite Walter's classicizing tendencies, his work is firmly entangled within the literary landscape of the later twelfth century.

1 Introduction

Somewhere during the mid to late 1170s, a school master named Walter of Châtillon (ca. 1130–ca. 1180) put the final touches to his *magnum opus*, a Latin epic poem in 10 books on the life of Alexander the Great: the *Alexandreis*.¹ Walter was already an esteemed poet who had been associated with powerful courts, such as

¹ The standard edition of the text is Colker, *Galteri de Castellione Alexandreis*.

that of Henry I of Champagne (1127–1181) and even pope Alexander III (c. 1100–1181), when he was in exile in France during the mid-1160s.² His *Alexander*-poem was also dedicated to a powerful ruler: William of Champagne (1135–1202), the archbishop of Reims, brother of Henry of Champagne and uncle of the future French king Philip II (1165–1223). Little did Walter know that his poem would become one of the most-read works of literature, a true medieval bestseller. Some 200 manuscripts from the thirteenth century and beyond, as well as translations into various European vernaculars, testify to the enormous popularity of Walter's poem in the centuries following its composition.³ According to a catalogue compiled in the late thirteenth century at the abbey of Afflighem, the *Alexandreis* was so popular that it caused the ancient classics, like Vergil, to be neglected.⁴ Unfortunately, Walter apparently did not live to see the success of his poem: according to some medieval *vitae*, he died of leprosy shortly after finishing his work.

Walter set himself no easy task: although the life of Alexander had not been the subject of an epic poem in Latin, his story enjoyed an enormous popularity in the form of the *Alexander Romance*, a history purportedly written by Alexander's historiographer Callisthenes, but in reality a late antique story containing many fantastical elements. The *Romance* was translated into Latin multiple times, most importantly by Julius Valerius around the third century and by archpriest Leo of Naples in the ninth.⁵ During the mid-twelfth century, versions of the *Alexander Romance* started to appear in Old French, the most famous being the *Roman de Toute Chevalerie*, an Anglo-Norman poem completed around 1170, and the *Roman d'Alexandre*, compiled by Alexandre de Bernay (or de Paris) around 1180 from various older sources.⁶ For his version, Walter chose not to rely on the *Romance* material, but instead made use of a different source, the first-century Roman historian Quintus Curtius. Curtius's narrative contains none of the fantastical material found in the *Romance*, and therefore has the appearance of being more factual and objective than the *Romance* tradition. As a result of Walter's reliance on Curtius, it is usually assumed that the *Romance* tradition and the *Alexandreis* belong to different literary spheres, which communicated with each other only marginally, or not at all. This article argues that the *Alexandreis* is entangled in both Latin and Old French literary culture, and, moreover, that it uses metapoetic commentary to reflect on its position in comparison to other poems. In other words: Walter consciously positions his epic against contemporary versions of the *Alexander Romance*, both Latin and vernacular, and against the classical Latin tradition. Such a reading allows for a much more dynamic interplay between Latin and Old French literature than has been hitherto acknowledged.

² For Walter's life, see the introduction to Traill, *The Shorter Poems*.

³ Colker lists 179 manuscripts in the introduction to his edition. Since then, more have come to light, on which see Lafferty, "Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*," 2011, 183; Lehmann, *Alexandreis*, 48–49.

⁴ Häring, "Der Literaturkatalog von Affligem," 82. The catalogue was attributed to the thirteenth-century scholastic philosopher Henry of Ghent (d. 1273) by Aubert le Mire (Aubertus Miraeus) in 1639; this attribution found its way into the *Patrologia Latina* series and subsequent scholarship on the *Alexandreis*.

⁵ For Alexander material in antiquity and the early middle ages, see Bridges, *Medieval Narratives*, 23–64; Stoneman, "Primary Sources."

⁶ Harf-Lancner, "Medieval French Alexander Romances."

2 The *Alexandreis* and the Classics

Walter's indebtedness to classical epic poets, especially Vergil and Lucan, has long been established. From the onset of his work, it is clear that Walter aimed to write an epic in the style of the classical Latin epicists, comparing himself with the likes of Vergil, Lucan, and Claudian. Walter's efforts were recognized by his earliest modern critics. In 1905, Heinrich Christensen noted that Walter's epic contained many elements that were also present in classical Latin epic: the invocation of the Muse at the start of the work, epic similes and battle scenes, as well as the use of formulaic language, the repetition of several phrases, and diction reminiscent of classical epic poetry.⁷ Christensen's work contains a 17-page appendix listing verbal parallels between Walter's epic and those of the most prominent classical (and some post-classical) Latin epicists.⁸ This work was taken up about 70 years later by Marvin Colker, who re-edited the text of the *Alexandreis* and included many of Christensen's verbal parallels in his critical apparatus.⁹ A decade after the emergence of Colker's now standard edition of the poem, Otto Zwierlein published a series of lectures in which he showed how several of Walter's episodes were carefully constructed from multiple epic models.¹⁰

Walter's explicit references to ancient epicists, the classicizing form of his epic, and the attention of modern philologists to the classical features of the work have all contributed to a scholarly tendency to place its poet in a distinct, Latin, epic tradition.¹¹ Claudia Wiener, for instance, has interpreted the *Alexandreis* against the background of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, finding in Walter's poem a correction of Lucan's, although her analysis acknowledges that the *Alexandreis* can be interpreted on different levels.¹² Most recently, Justin Haynes offered a much-needed intervention by showing that Walter not only read and used Vergil directly, but that he very probably had Vergil's fifth-century commentator Servius, and possibly later commentators to hand as well. Moreover, these commentaries influenced Walter's conception of his epic in a way that had previously been overlooked by scholars. To put it differently: Walter read Vergil *through* Servius and later commentators and furnished his own epic accordingly.¹³

The tendency to read the *Alexandreis* in relation to the Latin epic tradition has prevented many scholars from investigating the poem's possible interactions with that other—emerging—literary language of the later twelfth century: Old French. This subject has attracted some degree of scholarly interest, although its research potential has not yet been fully embraced. Some passages in the *Alexandreis*, like the tomb ecphrases of the Persian king Darius and his wife, have been linked to similar passages in romance epics. In the introduction to his translation of the poem, Jean-Yves Tilliette reads Walter's ecphrases as a clerical answer to the

⁷ Christensen, *Das Alexanderlied*, 76–101.

⁸ Christensen, 195–211.

⁹ Colker, *Galteri de Castellione Alexandreis*.

¹⁰ Zwierlein, "Der prägende Einfluß."

¹¹ This can also be seen in the new French and German translations (with commentary) by Jean-Yves Tilliette and Paul Lehmann: Tilliette, *Gautier de Châtillon*; Lehmann, *Alexandreis*.

¹² Wiener, *Proles Vaesana Philippi*.

¹³ Haynes, *The Medieval Classic: Twelfth-Century Latin Epic and the Vergilian Commentary Tradition*.

chivalric ethics of the romance tradition. The pictorial scheme of the tombs places the story of Alexander in the context of the history of salvation, emphasizing the limits of his personal heroism.¹⁴ A different angle was taken by Dorothea Kullmann, who published an article in 2000 centered on the question of the influence of Old French epic (predominantly *chansons de geste*) upon Walter's work.¹⁵ Kullmann tentatively identified certain elements in Walter's battle scenes that could be linked to similar elements in *chansons de geste*, such as the use of lances adorned with banners, battle charges on horses and a reference to the practice of *adoubement*, a knight's investiture. Moreover, she shows how some specific details in the *Alexandreis* are commonly found in Old French *chansons de geste* as well, such as the singing of birds before dawn on a day of battle, and a scene where one of Alexander's knights splits an enemy in two halves with his sword. Some of the similarities between the *Alexandreis* and Old French epics may be explicable through Walter's knowledge of contemporary aristocratic culture, and do not necessarily imply an intertextual relationship. Nevertheless, the range of these details do seem to suggest a certain degree of influence of Old French epic on the *Alexandreis*.

By far the fullest treatment of the *Alexandreis* within its contemporary literary landscape (both Old French and Latin) is given in Venetia Bridges' *Medieval Narratives of Alexander the Great*.¹⁶ Bridges argues that the *Alexandreis* was firmly embedded within contemporary debates regarding *translatio studii*, the transfer of classical knowledge to medieval France. When compared not only to Latin literature, but also to the Old French literature of its time, the *Alexandreis* stands out because of its *sic et non* approach to the exemplarity and interpretability of secular history in a twelfth-century framework. In other words, the poem implicitly questions the practice of many other poets of the time of transposing antiquity to the present, without itself offering (or wanting to offer) a definite alternative interpretation. Bridges furthermore suggests that within the multilingual literary milieu of twelfth-century Champagne it is not unimaginable that the *Alexandreis* may have been composed with knowledge of, for instance, Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès*, which was completed ca. 1176.¹⁷

In this article I build upon Bridges' conclusions. I suggest that Walter not only implicitly shows a concern for the hermeneutics of *translatio studii*, but that through allusions to other poems he also reflects upon—and sometimes even attacks—the poetics of his contemporaries. Walter's classicism is not only a result of his longing to be included in the literary canon, it is also a reaction to what may be deemed the modernist literature of his day. The allusions to other poems thus function as the kind of metapoetical commentary that is familiar from classical epic poems, but which has been less well-researched for medieval Latin literature. A metapoetic reading of the *Alexandreis* highlights the poem's entanglement within the literary landscape of its time. In the words of Karen Barad,

¹⁴ Tilliette, *Gautier de Châtillon*, 37–42.

¹⁵ Kullmann, "Die *Alexandreis* des Walter von Châtillon und die altfranzösische Epik."

¹⁶ Bridges, *Medieval Narratives*.

¹⁷ Bridges, 111–12.

[T]o be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating.¹⁸

Around the same time, and seemingly unaware of Barad’s work, Sarah Nuttall defined entanglement as:

... a means by which to draw into our analyses those sites in which what was once thought of as separate—identities, spaces, histories—come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways.¹⁹

Both definitions seem to fit seamlessly with the *Alexandreis*, which emerged in the bilingual literary landscape, often thought of as two separate literary traditions, through its various interactions with both. As such, the concept of entanglement is closely related to Martindale’s classical notion of “situatedness,” which holds that every piece of classical reception is “situated” in a certain environment, “contingent upon their historical moment.”²⁰ Entanglement, I would argue, is a particularly fruitful way to approach the situatedness of classical reception, as it highlights the complexity of threads that ultimately define the historical moment and allows the researcher to see unexpected connections between spaces that are often thought of as separate. As the other contributions to this issue show, the notion of entanglement can incorporate a wide array of connections, both diachronic and synchronic, ranging from situating a certain text in the specific topographical or literary landscape in which it was composed, to investigating how certain traditions become disentangled and re-entangled at specific points in time.

Metapoetry is defined here as “poetry about the act of writing poetry.” It is a specific form of metalepsis—the literary device where the narrator inserts himself in the narrative—that functions as self-reflexive commentary on a poem, either on its composition, internal structure or meaning, or on its relation to other texts.²¹ Metapoetics have been a prominent element of research on classical Latin literature since the pioneering work on allusion and self-reflexivity in Latin poetry by Gian Biagio Conte, Alessandro Barchiesi and Stephen Hinds in the 1980s and 1990s.²² In Latin epic, passages that draw the reader’s attention to the poet or the poem itself have been interpreted as containing metapoetic overtones. Famous examples include passages of ecphrasis (descriptions of works of art) that highlight the process of creation—such as Arachne’s tapestry in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*

¹⁸ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, ix.

¹⁹ Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 11.

²⁰ Martindale, *Redeeming the Text*, 35.

²¹ For the notion of metalepsis, see Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 234–35.

²² Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation*; Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince*; Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext*. Later studies include Nauta, “Metalepsis and Metapoetics in Latin Poetry”; Heerink, *Echoing Hylas*; Schmieder, *Deskription und Metapoetik in der spätantiken lateinischen Dichtung*.

This passage is highly intertextual: not only is it thematically modeled upon Caesar's visit to Troy in Lucan's *Bellum Civile* 9.964–99, it also contains numerous echoes from Ovid and Vergil.²⁸ What catches the eye is the emphasis the poet places on the act of reading. Alexander 'reads' (*legit*, v. 454) the forests of Mount Ida, and later the writings of Paris are read (*scripta ... leguntur*, v. 460). Moreover, the forests of Mount Ida are called *saltus*, which can be interpreted as a synonym for *silvas*, the poetic *materia* of Vergil and others.²⁹ The following question then arises: who do we see here, Alexander roaming through the landscape of Troy or the poet leafing through ancient tomes searching for traces of the story of Troy? The question is answered when Alexander arrives at the tomb of Achilles and exclaims (1.478–485):

'O fortuna uiri superexcellenter,' inquit
 'Cuius Meonium redolent preconia uatem,
 Qui licet exanimem distraxerit Hectora, robur 480
 Et patrem patriae, summum tamen illud honoris
 Arbitror augmentum, quod tantum tantus habere
 Post obitum meruit preconem laudis Homerum.
 O utinam nostros resoluta corpore tantis
 Laudibus attollat non inuida fama triumphos!'³⁰ 485

It is immediately clear for the reader that Walter is the one who will sing of Alexander's triumphs and so become Alexander's Homer. The Troy-episode is not only about Alexander searching for an epic model in Achilles, but also about Walter searching for an epic model in ancient literature. It is important to stress, however, that a metapoetic reading does not supplant the primary meaning. The oscillation between text and intertext creates an ambiguous 'in-between' that disrupts the narrative flow of the poem and allows the reader to think about possible alternative interpretations of the passage in question.³¹

lovely mouth, bearing / his pleasing prize above heaven's bounds. / While zealously he sought at least a trace / of ancient glory, there he came upon / Oenone's poplar, rooted by a stream / where the adulterer's blade had carved in stealth / his record: there one read of Paris' loves. / A thick-grown vale lies there, where as a jest / the case was tried in which the profligate / profaned the judgment. Thence flowed the first source / of Ilion's fall, the evil stain, and fire / upon Pergamon – now a meagre place. / And yet one may consider its past greatness / from present traces: ancient ruins witness / how vast the measure was of crumbling Troy." Translations from the *Alexandreis* are from Townsend, *The Alexandreis*. Other translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

²⁸ See Colker's *apparatus fontium* ad loc.

²⁹ The connection *hyle-silva* was known in the Middle Ages through Servius' commentary on the *Aeneid* and through Calcidius' commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, which, in turn, received commentary from William of Conches (ca. 1080–1150), a prominent master of the so-called "School of Chartres." On the concept of *hyle-silva* in the Middle Ages, see Van Deusen, "In and out of a Latin 'Forest.'"

³⁰ "O splendid fortune of this man,' he cried, / 'whose praises call to mind Maeonia's bard! / He dragged Hector, the land's chief strength and sire, / lifeless around the city's walls; and yet / this is the highest increase to his honor— / or so I judge—that such a man in death / should merit such a herald of his praise / as Homer. Would that Fame, unenvious / should sing, when we are dead, such songs of praise!"

³¹ For 'oscillation' as literary device, see Schmieder, *Deskription und Metapoetik in der spätantiken lateinischen Dichtung*, 29–31.

3 Walter as a self-conscious poet

The discussion above shows that certain passages from the *Alexandreis* can be read metapoetically. But where does that lead us? To answer that question, let us take a step back and focus on the poet for a moment. A prerequisite for identifying metapoetical elements in a poem is a poet who is highly self-conscious of the place of his work in relation to other works. One could argue that the practice of writing poetry in itself is a self-conscious act and that issues of tradition and canonicity always to some extent play a part in shaping a poet's work: canonical works often provide a point of reference for new ones, even if the canon itself is challenged or denied. Moreover, the debate identified by Bridges during the later twelfth century regarding *translatio studii* implies a widely disseminated poetic consciousness centered on issues of canonicity, and an awareness among the *litterati* of the time of their position in relation to each other and to those who came before. Even within this milieu, however, Walter stands out as a poet who is exceptionally concerned with—and vocal about—his position in the canon of (Latin) literature.

In the prologue to his *Alexandreis*, the poet remarks how, fearing a hostile reaction from his contemporaries, he hesitated for some time before publishing the work. Addressing his poem directly, Walter then announces that now is the time to bring his work to the light, so that it might dare to take up its rightful place among the *monimenta* (*ut demum auderes in publica venire monimenta*).³² This is a modified quotation from Ovid's prologue to his *Epistulae ex Ponto*.³³ But whereas Ovid ostensibly did not expect his work to be included in the canon of Latin literature, Walter explicitly does anticipate such a future for his epic, as the final lines of the poem testify:

Vivemus partier; vivet cum vate superstes
Gloria Guillermi nullum moritura per evum.³⁴

Walter continues his prologue by (quasi-humbly) remarking that he does not think himself superior to the *Mantuanus vates* (Mantuan bard) Vergil, and that even Vergil's work was not free from criticism, at least while he was alive.³⁵ As Janka and Stellman remark, Walter's *modèle lecteur* is meant to identify Vergil's *Aeneid* as the first (and most important) of the *monimenta* of the previous sentence.³⁶ Readers also picked up on Walter's desire to be included among the landmarks of epic poetry, as a gloss in a thirteenth-century manuscript now in Vienna's National Library testifies. After the explicit of the poem, the following leonine hexameters are added:

³² *Alexandreis*, prol. ll 18–19. On Walter's conception of his work as a monument in general, see Janka and Stellmann, "Die *Alexandreis* als typologisches Epos."

³³ Ov., *Pont.* 1.1.5.

³⁴ *Alexandreis* 10.468–69: "Together we shall live. / Surviving with his poet, William's glory / shall live undying through all time to come."

³⁵ *Alexandreis*, prol. ll. 19–23. On these lines and Walter's self-ascribed relation to the ancient epicists, see also Tilliette, *Gautier de Châtillon*, 11–18.

³⁶ Janka and Stellmann, "Die *Alexandreis* als typologisches Epos," 65.

Vivat Gualtherus per carmina sicut Homerus
 Nominis eclipsis quia non est vatibus ipsis.³⁷

It is clear that for this particular reader, Walter succeeded in his emulation of the classical poets. However, the ancient epicists were not Walter's only models. At least as important to Walter as Vergil and Homer is Jerome, who is mentioned in the prologue in the line immediately after the mention of Vergil. In fact, Walter's entire prologue, including the designation of Vergil as *Mantuanus vates* and the story of Vergil's detractors, is modeled upon Jerome's prologue to his *Hebraicae quaestiones in Genesim*.³⁸ Walter's indebtedness to the fourth-century Church Father is further highlighted by the fact that Walter calls Jerome *noster Hieronymus*, suggesting a certain amount of internalization of Jerome's works.³⁹ The conspicuous signaling of his models in the prologue suggests that Walter wished for his readers to read the poem not only as an epic (a *carmen heroicum* in the words of Isidore), but also to interpret the text, and history in general, just as Jerome read the Bible, that is, exegetically.⁴⁰

Walter's literary self-consciousness and his attempt to secure for himself a place in the canon may be unusually prominent, but his concerns were hardly unique at the time of writing (the early 1170s, if we are to believe the *vitae* in various *Alexandreis* manuscripts).⁴¹ The prologues to two of the most famous *romans d'antiquité* express similar concerns with canonicity, albeit in a much more condensed manner.⁴² The *Roman de Thèbes*, usually considered to be the oldest of them all (ca. 1155), starts with the following verses:

Qui sages est nel doit celer,
 ainz doit por ce son senz moutrer
 que quant il ert du siecle alez
 touz jors en soit mes ramenbrez.
 Se danz Omers et danz Platons
 et Virgiles et Quicerons
 leur sapiënce celissant,
 ja n'en fust mes parlé avant.⁴³

³⁷ "May Walter live through his songs like Homer / Because the eclipse of a name is not for the poets themselves." Text from De Cesare, *Glosse latine e antico-francesi all' "Alexandreis" di Gautier de Châtillon*, 147.

³⁸ Adkin, "The Preface of Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* and Saint Jerome."

³⁹ *Alexandreis*, prol. l. 24.

⁴⁰ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 1.39.9: *Eroicum enim carmen dictum quod eo uirorum fortium res et facta narrantur*. Text from Spevak, *Étymologies*.

⁴¹ The dating of the *Alexandreis* is an issue of much debate. For the most recent overview of the debate, see Haynes, *The Medieval Classic. Twelfth-Century Latin Epic and the Vergilian Commentary Tradition*, 10–11.

⁴² Mora-Lebrun, *Metre en romanz*, 191–94.

⁴³ "Whoever is wise should not hide it / and because of it should show his reason / so that when he will be gone from this world / he may always be remembered. / If in Homer and in Plato / and Vergil and Cicero

The *Roman de Troie*, written a little later by Benoît de Ste.-Maure, opens very similarly:

Salemon nos enseigne e dit
 E sil list om en son escrit
 Que nus ne deit son sen celer
 Ainz le deit om si demonstrer
 Que l'om i ait pro e honor
 Qu'ensi firent li'ancecessor.⁴⁴

Both Benoît and the anonymous author of the *Thèbes* present themselves as following the great authors of antiquity in their practice: the *Thèbes*-poet names Homer, Vergil, Cicero and Plato, whereas Benoît merely speaks of “the ancestors.” The *Thèbes*-poet moreover expresses their wish to be remembered after their death. In so doing, these poets also show a desire to carve out a place for themselves in the literary canon, albeit in a much less pronounced way than Walter.

The two Old French poets justify their epic project on the same basis: that one who has something wise to say should not attempt to hide it, but should rather share it, so that others may benefit from it. (A similar opening gambit is found in Marie de France's *Lais*, a collection of Breton folk stories.) The argument takes its cue from Ecclesiasticus 20.29–31, where it is said that wisdom, like gold, has no use unless it is seen. By beginning in this way, the poets not only justify their reasons for writing (profane) (hi)stories, but also alert their audience at the outset to the possible benefits: antique stories are relevant because they contain wisdom and timeless truths. This is very different from Walter's ideas about the exemplarity of history. For Walter, the significance of non-Christian history lies in its relation to the history of salvation, and therefore it should be interpreted with the same hermeneutic tools used by biblical exegetes.⁴⁵ Moreover, Walter seems to warn against a common practice of elevating historical rulers like David, Arthur or Alexander to models for ideal kingship.⁴⁶ So while Walter clearly had the same literary aspirations as his Old French contemporaries, he differed markedly from them in his conception of history. In fact, the poem's historicism, one of its

/ their wisdom would be hidden / They would not be spoken of anymore today,” *Roman de Thèbes* 1–8. Text from Petit, *Le roman de Thèbes*.

⁴⁴ “Solomon teaches us and tells / and one reads in his writing / that no one should hide his reason / and one should show it / so that it has profit and honor / likewise did our ancestors.” Benoît de Ste.-Maure, *Roman de Troie* 1–6. Text from Constans, *Le Roman de Troie*. Translation adapted from Burgess and Kelly, *The Roman de Troie by Benoît de Sainte-Maure*.

⁴⁵ See also Bridges, *Medieval Narratives*, 84–89. Bridges argues that “[f]or Walter, pagan history should *not* be read and interpreted using the same hermeneutic tools (i.e. allegorical ones) as Christian salvific narrative” (p. 89, my emphasis). Even though she acknowledges that this is not an absolute position, I believe that Walter's emphasis on the interpretative difficulties of non-Christian history within a salvific narrative implies the opposite: for Walter, the only way to come close to a ‘correct’ interpretation of non-Christian history is by using the same interpretative tools (typology, allegory) for both histories. Only through hard work, the reader can understand that typology is not an easy subject and that they should be careful in designating current political figures as the new Alexander or the new David.

⁴⁶ On this practice in twelfth-century romances, see Mora-Lebrun, *Mètre en roman*, 255–66.

defining characteristics, can be seen as a reaction to the ahistoricism of Old French epic.⁴⁷

4 The question of language in the *Alexandreis*

Intertwined with Walter's self-conscious poetics is his choice to write an epic in Latin, rather than Old French. For a modern reader, Walter's choice of Latin may seem obvious: it brings the epic closer to his models, and the international status of Latin as a literary language helps him to fulfill his ambition of creating a lasting *monimentum*. In the context of twelfth-century northern France, however, Latin was not necessarily the obvious choice as the language of historical epic. In fact, the sheer number of epic poems produced in Old French between 1150 and 1170 alone are a strong argument for thinking that by the end of the century Old French had all but superseded Latin as the language of epic, at least in Northern France.⁴⁸ An exception should be made for the great cosmological epics of the time, Bernard Silvestris's *Cosmographia* and Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*, the latter of which was composed simultaneously with Walter's work. It is only with the success of the *Alexandreis* that we see a clear revival of historical epic poetry in Latin across Western Europe.⁴⁹ Walter's choice to write a verse narrative in Latin, rather than Old French, was therefore not only a conscious choice, but also a significant one: it places the *Alexandreis* in the tradition of cosmological epic, pointing in itself to the cosmic importance of his work.

The question of language plays an important role in the *Alexandreis*. At the end of the first book of the poem, Alexander tells his troops of a dream he had, in which he was visited by a mysterious figure. The figure was clothed in a manner that a twelfth-century learned audience would immediately recognize as denoting Jaddus, the high priest of Jerusalem, who, according to Josephus, convinced Alexander to spare Jerusalem during his campaign in the region. In Walter's retelling of the story, Alexander is not able to understand who the figure is. He admits:

Nescio quod nomen pretendere visa figuris
signabat mediam tetragrammata linea frontem,
sed quoniam michi barbaries incognita linguae
huius erat, legere hanc me non valuisse fatebor.⁵⁰

Alexander is unable to recognise the figure before him because he does not read and understand Hebrew. In the previous scene, Alexander had correctly identified Achilles' grave by reading the inscriptions (*epygrammata*) on the tombs among

⁴⁷ Bridges, *Medieval Narratives*, 89.

⁴⁸ If the *Chansons de geste*, *romans d'antiquité*, early Arthurian works, historical and hagiographical epics are all included in the count, one arrives at an estimate of around 25–30 longer verse narratives in Old French with a historical subject.

⁴⁹ Verbaal, "Medieval Epicity and the Deconstruction of Classical Epic," at 223–26.

⁵⁰ *Alexandreis* 1.524–27: "On his brow, / four characters marked out, it seemed, some name; / but since his strange tongue was unknown to me, / I could not read it."

the ruins of Troy. Now, his inability to read the four-letter signs (*tetragrammata*) prevents Alexander from identifying the priest. The juxtaposition of the two scenes highlights a (meta)linguistic awareness that is absent from classical Latin epic, where there is no such thing as a language barrier.⁵¹

As Maura Lafferty has convincingly argued, Walter foregrounds different levels of interpretation so often that analytical multiplicity rises to the level of a motif in his work.⁵² Throughout the epic, Alexander is able to correctly interpret profane history and use historical exempla to his advantage. He shows himself an avid admirer of his ancestors Hercules and Achilles. When it comes to biblical history, however, Alexander time and again proves himself to be unable to understand what he sees before him. Alexander's court artist Apelles, whom Walter has made Jewish, knows both Greek history and the books of the Old Testament (up to Alexander's time), and as a result has a fuller understanding of the historical events in which he participates. This is signaled through the artworks he produces, which place Alexander's deeds in an Old Testament context and thereby act as a form of metapoetical commentary on the poem.⁵³ This is clearest when Apelles inscribes the tomb of Darius with the verses

hic situs est typicus aries, dua cornua cuius
fregit Alexander, totius malleus orbis.⁵⁴

This is a reference to Daniel 8. Apelles is able to interpret Daniel's prophecy *quia non latuit sensus Danielis* ('because the meaning of Daniel was not hidden from him').⁵⁵ Yet even Apelles' knowledge of history is imperfect, as he omits certain episodes in his pictorial cycles of biblical history that he deemed unworthy or even shameful.⁵⁶ A third level of interpretation is represented by the author and his model readers, who, fifteen hundred years after the event, are better able to understand the importance of Alexander's conquests in the context of the history of salvation. In a sense, Darius's tomb thus resembles the poem as a whole. Both are *monimenta* situated in a specific time and place that allow their makers and their viewers/readers to interpret history in a certain way, relative to their knowledge of Scripture.

Alexander's (in)ability to decipher the Greek and Hebrew letter signs in the *Alexandreis* shows that for Walter linguistic knowledge and level of interpretation are inextricably linked. Those who cannot read the language of Scripture—especially those in power—are doomed to live their lives ignorant of the full meaning of their actions. This linguistic sensitivity is illustrative of widely held clerical sentiments during the twelfth century. Like his protagonist, Walter lived in a world

⁵¹ Other places where linguistic difference is highlighted are ll. 3.107–9 and 7.255–59.

⁵² Lafferty, *Walter of Châtillon's Alexandreis*, 31–63.

⁵³ Lafferty, 103–40; Janka and Stellmann, "Die *Alexandreis* als typologisches Epos."

⁵⁴ *Alexandreis*, 7.423–24. "Here lies the figured ram, / Whose double horns Alexander broke / Hammer of all the world."

⁵⁵ *Alexandreis*, 7.421.

⁵⁶ On Apelles' (and Walter's) use of omission as a rhetorical device, see Townsend, "Passing over Queerness."

where the language of Scripture—Latin at this period—was inaccessible to many. Driven by the rapid growth of textual culture in the twelfth century, the differences between *litterati* and *illiterati* (or *modice litterati*) became increasingly pronounced, with *litteratus* meaning foremost ‘being able to read and write *in Latin*,’ and thus being able to read (and interpret) Scripture.⁵⁷ Walter hints at this linguistic divide in one of his shorter poems, where he admits that clerics tend to speak Latin to each other when they are among the people.⁵⁸ Even though the linguistic divide between clerics and lay people was not as clear-cut as it may seem—lay people sometimes read Latin and certainly not all clerics did so fluently—Walter’s poem does point to a correlation between language and societal sphere: Latin was for the clerics, Old French for lay people.

In the eyes of twelfth-century clerics, one’s (in)ability to read Latin was closely linked to one’s ability to understand and interpret the world. Walter’s older contemporary Philippe de Harvengst (ca. 1100–1183), abbot of Bonne-Espérance in Hainault, wrote in a letter to Henri I of Champagne (1127–1181) that through Latin “the knowledge of God and of those things that are with God becomes apparent for those who read and do not ignore [it].”⁵⁹ Philippe commends Henri for preferring Latin over the vernacular, and compares him to other princes, whose preference for the vernacular makes that they have a *hebetudo asinina* (‘asinine dullness’) to them. In other words, Latin was not only the language of clerics, but also a prerequisite for the understanding of (divine) truth.

The example of Philippe’s letter to Henri of Champagne is telling. Not only was Henri famously known for possessing a large library of (mostly) Latin history books, he was also the brother of Walter’s patron William, as well as the addressee of one of Walter’s shorter poems.⁶⁰ Yet, at the court of Henri and his wife Marie, both Latinate and vernacular culture flourished.⁶¹ Several authors in both languages dedicated their works to one half of the comital couple. The most famous of these was arguably Chrétien de Troyes, who wrote his *Chevalier de la Charrette* at Marie’s behest. If there was one place where Latin and Old French literary culture intersected during Walter’s lifetime, it was at Henri and Marie’s court at Troyes. Even if Walter’s link to the court of Henri and Marie is tenuous at best, it is certainly tempting to see the *Alexandreis*’ emphasis on linguistic differences as a reflection of the bilingual literary culture of twelfth-century Northern France in general. More specifically, the poem seems to suggest that knowledge of Latin is a prerequisite for understanding the importance of certain events in the present, but that even then, there is no guarantee that the reader is fully able to do so. In the end, humans can only approximate knowledge of God’s plan for the world.

⁵⁷ Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*; Constable, “The Language of Preaching in the Twelfth Century”; Riché, “Laïcs lettrés et illettrés au XIIIe siècle.”

⁵⁸ Poem 49. See Traill, *The Shorter Poems*, 156–63.

⁵⁹ PL 203, cod. 154B.

⁶⁰ For Henri’s library, see Stirnemann, “Reconstitution des bibliothèques.” For Henri in general, see Evergates, *Henry the Liberal*.

⁶¹ The classic article describing the court of Champagne as literary center is Benton, “The Court of Champagne.”

5 Alexander's contested paternity

Walter may have been part of clerical Latinate culture, but that does not mean he was impervious to the popularity of literature in the vernacular. Elements of Old French epic, such as the aforementioned *adoubement* and Walter's elaborate tomb descriptions, have been traced in Walter's poem, and the poem itself had an impact on vernacular poetry in its turn. However, the influence of Old French poetry on the *Alexandreis* seems to go beyond mere appropriation and incorporation of certain stylistic motifs and stock elements. The poem's self-consciously allusive style permits an interpretation of the poem as reflecting not only on its position in the literary canon, but also in the literary landscape of its own time. A good example of this self-conscious positioning can be found at the beginning of the poem. At the very start of the narrative, we encounter a very young Alexander. Indignant at his own idleness, he expresses his frustration at being too young to go to war and not having yet accomplished anything of note. He then likens himself to Hercules, saying:

uerumne dracones
Alcydem puerum compressis faucibus olim
In cunis domuisse duos? [...]
semperne putabor
Nectanabi proles? ut degener arguar absit!⁶²

Alexander's speech ends with these words, giving extra weight to his wish not to be associated with Nectanabus. Alexander's fascination for Hercules was well-known in antiquity, and is a recurring theme in Curtius's history of Alexander, Walter's main source, as well as in the *Alexander Romance*.⁶³ For a modern reader, however, the reference to Nectanabus might seem obscure. Nectanabus is nowhere to be found in Curtius's history, and neither does Walter explain his sudden presence at the beginning of the poem. In fact, the character of Nectanabus does not appear at all in the *Alexandreis*, except in two oblique references, of which the passage above is the first.⁶⁴ A thirteenth-century gloss on the poem explains to the reader that Nectanabus was an Egyptian magician and Alexander's biological father, having tricked her mother Olympias. The glossator gives the origin of the story—a Latin translation of the *Alexander Romance* now known as the *Epitome of Julius Valerius*—and quickly dismisses it as frivolous.⁶⁵ A learned twelfth- or

⁶² *Alexandreis* 1.39–41; 46–47. “Did Hercules / Once, as a boy—no, in his very cradle!— / not overcome two monstrous serpents' force, / crushing their jaws? [...] / Shall I always / be thought the offspring of Nectanabus? / Let no one call me a bastard to my face!”

⁶³ Djurslev, “Heracles, Macedon, and Alexander the Great”; Amitay, *From Alexander to Jesus*.

⁶⁴ The other reference occurs at 3.167.

⁶⁵ De Cesare, *Glosse latine e antico-francesi all' "Alexandreis" di Gautier de Châtillon*, 13, n. 1: *Secundum aliam hystoriam que sic incipit: "Egypti sapientes et cetera", ... Alexander filius Netanabus [sic] fuisse peribetur, unde in primo libro "Semperne putabor Netanabi proles?" Quod frivolum est.* (“According to a different history that starts as follows ‘Wise Egyptians et cetera,’ Alexander is held to be the son of Nectanabus. Thence [we read] in the first book ‘Will I always be thought the offspring of Nectanabus?’—which is frivolous.”)

thirteenth-century reader would—perhaps with the help of an explanatory gloss—be better able to make sense of Walter's allusion than a reader today.

The story of Nectanabus ultimately derives from the Pseudo-Callisthenic *Alexander Romance* where Nectanabus is presented as the last Egyptian pharaoh, Nectanebo II (r. 358–340 BC). During the twelfth century, with the rise in popularity of the vernacular versions of the *Romance*, Alexander's contested paternity became an issue of debate.⁶⁶ In the original *Romance*, Nectanabus simply admits to being Alexander's father, upon which he is killed by Alexander. Such a claim could not be sustained by the Old French poets, who wanted to present Alexander as a model of ideal kingship. The oldest known Old French adaptation of the poem, the version of Alberic de Pisançon (ca. 1120), acknowledges the story, but dismisses it out of hand as untrue:

Dicunt alquant estrobatour
 Que'l reys fud filz d'encantatour.
 Mentent, fellon losengetour.
 Mal en credreyz nec un de lour,
 Qu'anz fud de ling d'enperatour
 Et filz al rey macedonor.⁶⁷

Alberic's refutation of Alexander's disputed ancestry is followed by the later Old French versions of the *Roman*, the *Alexandre décasyllabique* and the version by Alexandre de Paris.⁶⁸ In all three versions, the story of Nectanabus's liaison with Olympias is met with indignation: of course Alexander, the model for chivalrous kingship, could not have been conceived out of wedlock! That would have been a serious blemish not only for the hero of the story, but also for the contemporary princes who modeled themselves upon the Macedonian king. Curiously, the *Roman de Toute Chevalerie*, an adaptation written around 1175 by the English poet Thomas of Kent, does not refute the story of the original *Romance*.⁶⁹ Instead, Thomas expands upon the story, turning Nectanabus into an astrologer who uses his magic powers and knowledge of the heavens to conceive and deliver Alexander at the perfect moment, so that the alignment of the stars would seal his fate as a world conqueror.⁷⁰

The emphasis that both the continental poets and Thomas of Kent place on the story of Nectanabus' possible fathering of Alexander—either by forcefully

⁶⁶ Gaullier-Bougassas, "Nectanabus et la singularité d'Alexandre dans les romans d'Alexandre français"; Braun, "Vom Gott gezeugt."

⁶⁷ Alberic de Pisançon, *Roman d'Alexandre* 27–32. "Some jesters say / That the king was the son of a magician. / They lie, those treacherous deceivers. / I do not believe a single one of them, / Since he was of the lineage of the emperor, / And the son of the king of Macedon." Text from La Du et al., *The Medieval French Roman d'Alexandre*, vol. 3.

⁶⁸ The fullest treatment of the story of Nectanabus in the Old French version of the *Alexander Romance* is given by Gaullier-Bougassas, *Les romans d'Alexandre*, 345–79.

⁶⁹ Stone, *The Roman de Toute Chevalerie: Reading Alexander Romance in Late Medieval England*; Franklin-Brown, "The Monstrous Birth of Alexander the Great: Thomas de Kent's *Roman de Toute Chevalerie* and Twelfth-Century Natural Science."

⁷⁰ Thomas of Kent, *Roman de Toute Chevalerie*, vv. 384–408; Foster and Short, *The Anglo-Norman Alexander*.

denying it or by elaborating upon it—shows that the story was considered significant by twelfth-century poets and their audience, perhaps reflecting contemporary aristocratic concerns over lineage and legitimacy. The story of Alexander's birth also resembles the origin story of that other famous king, Arthur, whose conception was likewise fraught with magic and deceit. Moreover, the issue of double paternity bears significant parallels with the myth of the Greek hero Heracles as well as the biblical narrative of Jesus Christ, both of whom form important subtexts for the poem. It is therefore not surprising that Walter of Châtillon chose to refer to the story of Nectanabus and Olympias at the very beginning of his narrative: not only was it present in Latin versions of the history of Alexander, it was also a matter of contemporary literary debate and found resonance among twelfth-century audiences. Certainly Walter's Alexander displays a concern for his own lineage through his imitation of his ancestors Heracles and Achilles, and through his wish not to be recognized as the son of an Egyptian sorcerer.

Unlike his colleagues, Walter does not offer any authorial commentary on Alexander's conception. The story is essentially 'told' in the line and a half cited above. The brevity of the allusion to Nectanabus forms a marked contrast with the treatment of the episode in the Old French poems. Although Alberic de Pisançon does not even deem Nectanabus worthy of naming, he nevertheless spends an entire *laisse* on refuting the story. The sorcerer gains even more narrative prominence over the course of the twelfth century. By the time we arrive at Alexandre de Paris's version, Nectanabus acts as one of Alexander's teachers, instructing him in astrology, before being ignominiously killed by Alexander in reaction to the rumors of him being the young boy's father.⁷¹ The silence of the *Alexandreis* about Nectanabus's identity is therefore striking. Walter neither confirms nor denies the possibility that Alexander may have been Nectanabus's son, but leaves the reader guessing at a reference that, judging from the later glosses on the passage, even medieval readers found hard to parse. The effect of this is that it makes the reader pause and think for a moment about who this figure is, and what his relation to Alexander might be.⁷² Rather than spelling out his ideas on the veracity of the story, Walter makes the reader do the work, inviting them from the very start of the narrative to adopt an active, hermeneutic reading strategy.

6 A metapoetical reading

If we look closely at the Latin of Alexander's speech, an intricate intertextual literary play is revealed. This is especially true for the last line and a half, which run as follows:

Semperne putabor

⁷¹ Alexandre de Paris, *Roman d'Alexandre* I.16.

⁷² Walter employs a similar allusive strategy in his descriptions of artworks, on which see Bridges, *Medieval Narratives*, 85–86; Townsend, "Michi Barbaries."

Nectanabi proles? Ut degener arguar absit!⁷³

The word *proles* may not seem too significant, considering its ubiquity in Latin literature, but its inclusion at this moment brings up two possible intertexts. In Latin epic, it is often used to designate heroes with a divine parentage, such as the Etrurian king Messapus, who is called *Neptunia proles* four times in the *Aeneid*.⁷⁴ It is also used for Heracles, the quintessential epic hero, who is addressed as *vera Iovis proles* ('true offspring of Jupiter') at *Aeneid* 8.301. This latter reference is especially salient given that only five lines before Alexander compares himself to Heracles and wishes to be recognized as the true son of Jupiter himself. Yet the attentive reader may also be reminded of Lucan's profoundly negative description of Alexander as *Pellaei proles vaesana Philippi* ('insane scion of Pellaeian Philip') at *Bellum Civile* 10.20.⁷⁵ The reader at this point is confronted with three possible Alexanders: a Romance-like figure of dubious parentage, a Heracles-like, semi-divine figure, or a Lucan-inspired, raging madman. None of these models, as we shall see, eventually suffice for Walter.

As Zwierlein points out, the entire passage in which Alexander complains about his inertia, as well as Aristotle's advice that follows, is modeled upon Claudian's panegyric on the fourth consulate of Honorius, where a young Honorius complains about his own lack of martial success in the same vein:⁷⁶

cur annos obicis? pugnae cur arguor impar?
aequalis mihi Pyrrhus erat, cum Pergama solus
verteret et patri non degeneraret Achilli.⁷⁷

The similarity between the two passages in terms of content is clear: both Alexander and Honorius are young rulers concerned with their legacy. In response to Honorius' complaints, his father Theodosius prophesizes that he will become a second Alexander. Walter picks up on this when he explicitly compares Alexander and Honorius, saying that the fame of the latter paled in comparison with that of Alexander.⁷⁸ The connection between the two passages is further reinforced by the verbal parallels *arguar/arguor* and *degener/degeneraret*.

The Claudianic parallel brings up another possible intertext. In Claudian's panegyric, Honorius compares himself to Pyrrhus/Neoptolemos, who brought down Troy and—in Honorius' words—did not bring shame upon his father Achilles by doing so. Curiously enough, this is a direct inversion of Vergil's famous narrative

⁷³ *Alexandreis* 1.46–7: "Shall I always / be thought the offspring of Nectanabus? / Let no one call me a bastard to my face!"

⁷⁴ Verg. *A.* 7.691; 9.523; 10.353; 12.128.

⁷⁵ See Wiener, *Proles vaesana*, 52ff. I thank the anonymous reviewer for reminding me of this connection and suggesting a further exploration of the intertextual associations of *proles*.

⁷⁶ Zwierlein, "Der prägende Einfluß," 620–21.

⁷⁷ Claudian, *Hon.* 4.365–67: "Why do you put my age against me? Why am I thought not fit to fight? Pyrrhus was my age when he alone overthrew Troy and did not bring shame upon his father Achilles." Text from Hall, *Claudii Claudiani Carmina*.

⁷⁸ *Alexandreis*, 5.505–6.

of the fall of Troy. In a moment of heightened pathos, Neoptolemos kills the Trojan king Priam at the altar of Zeus in the middle of the city, telling him to bring the following message to Achilles in the Underworld:

Illi mea tristia facta
degeneremque Neoptolemum narrare memento.⁷⁹

It follows from this passage, which is full of bitter irony, that Neoptolemos in fact *did* bring shame upon his father, and, as Catherine Ware notes, could hardly be seen as a good example for the young Honorius.⁸⁰ In the remainder of the poem, Claudian offers Honorius a better model for a young prince instead: Aeneas's son Ascanius.

Turning back to the *Alexandreis*, we see that Alexander does not want to be seen as *degener*. With the two abovementioned *Vorlagen* in mind, it seems that Walter is not referring to just any *degener*, but a very specific one: Vergil's Neoptolemos. Walter first establishes the connection by the parallel with Claudian's Honorius and his wish to become like Neoptolemos. Through Claudian, the reader is then quickly directed to Vergil's narrative. The connection between Vergil and Walter is further reinforced by the use of the noun *degener* instead of the verb *degenerare*. In this way, Walter highlights the difference between Honorius and Alexander: whereas the former still has much to learn about good models of rulership, Alexander already knows that he should not follow the example of Achilles' son. Theodosius may say that Honorius will become like Alexander, but Walter makes it clear from the outset that his Alexander is already greater than Honorius.

The key to understanding the intertext lies in Walter's use of the word *degener*. Townsend aptly translates the word as 'bastard,' recognizing its etymological connection with *genus* and Alexander's anxieties about his disputed ancestry immediately before in the same line. The word's primary meaning, however, is more closely akin to the English 'degenerate,' in the sense of 'not living up to the standards your (fore)father(s).' Servius glosses the word specifically as *non respondentem moribus patris*, 'not answering to the habits of one's father' in his commentary on *Aeneid* 2.549 (Neoptolemos's speech).⁸¹ The word is more concerned with behavior than it is with lineage: it identifies someone who fails to answer to certain models of (epic) kingship. This opens up possibilities for a metapoetic reading of the *Alexandreis* passage: if we recognize in Alexander's words a desire to follow in the footsteps of his epic predecessors, what does the line tell us about Walter's desire to follow in the footsteps of *his* epic predecessors? We have already seen that Walter styles himself self-consciously as the epic successor of Vergil and that the theme of epic succession appears in his poem and was recognized as such by his readers. I therefore propose that we read Alexander's literary desire to behave

⁷⁹ Verg. *A.* 2.548–49: "Remember to tell him [Achilles] of my bitter deeds and of the degenerate Neoptolemos." Text from Mynors, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*.

⁸⁰ Ware, *Claudian and the Roman Epic Tradition*, 93–94.

⁸¹ Servius ad *A.* 2.549. Text from Thilo, *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii*.

according to the norms of ancient epic as Walter's metaliterary desire to write according to the norms of ancient epic. Embedded in Alexander's wish to become an epic hero in the style of Heracles and Achilles lies Walter's wish to present him as such. The poet and his protagonist become united in their desire for epic emulation.

However far one wishes to go in the interpretation of Walter's/Alexander's words, it is clear that on a textual level, the word *degener* relates directly to Alexander's association with Nectanabus in the immediately preceding hemistich. The wish not to be recognized as *degener* reinforces Alexander's wish not to be seen as the son of Nectanabus. Taking into account the intertext discussed above, I would suggest that the word entails a double rejection of epic models: on the one hand, Alexander does not want to become an unworthy successor to Achilles, like Neoptolemos; on the other hand, he also fears that he will become known as the Alexander from the Romance tradition, contaminated by illegitimacy. On a metapoetic level, then, the words obtain a programmatic meaning. The reference to the Egyptian sorcerer is no longer simply a playful allusion to a different poetic tradition: it now raises fundamental questions about the very nature of epic. By offering several negative models of epic heroism, both contemporary and classical, Walter pushes the reader to think about a positive model. Moreover, it makes clear to the reader from the very start of the poem that the Alexander they will encounter will be different from the one they likely knew from the Romance tradition. In this way, Alexander's refutation of the rumours surrounding his birth becomes Walter's rejection of a rival poetic tradition. His alternative, however, is not to present Alexander as a new Heracles—that is, a hero in the 'classical' sense. Instead, Alexander's epic character, the *raison d'être* for writing the *Alexandreis*, is to be found in his importance in the history of salvation. His (attempts at) heroic behavior only become relevant when they are pursued in line with God's plan for the world.⁸²

7 Conclusion

In the reference to the story of Nectanabus, Walter's narrative strategy of disruptive allusion aligns with the disruptive narrative practice of metalepsis: the obscurity of the reference creates a break in the narrative, which allows for the narrator to subtly intrude in the narrated world. Such a reading also opens up the possibility of interpreting other, similar passages in the same vein. One could, for instance, ask whether Walter's description of Troy also reflects his ideas about that famous Troy story, the *Roman de Troie*, or what to make of the appearance of a Nectanabus-like figure in the form of the Egyptian sorcerer Zoroas in the third book of the poem. The passage furthermore shows that Walter may have taken the ancient epicists as his model, but that the contemporary literary landscape also had its impact on the composition of the poem. Through subtle allusions the poet consciously reflects upon the position of his poem in the canon and the contemporary literary landscape, occasionally attacking the poetics of other poets. It serves

⁸² See also Tilliette, *Gautier de Châtillon*, 41.

as a reminder that Old French and Latin literary culture existed not on separate islands, but that they were entangled in ways that, at least for the Latin tradition, have been insufficiently recognized. Not only did authors in both languages attempt to lay their own claims to ancient heritage, they also reflected on the poetics of each other.

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JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM AND
EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Philippa Byrne, “Virgil in Scholastic Hands: Transnational and Local, Textual and Material,” JOLCEL 12 (2025): pp. 79–100. DOI: [10.21825/jolcel.90217](https://doi.org/10.21825/jolcel.90217)

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NOTE

This article is the fourth main article in the current issue of JOLCEL, which consists of a preface, five articles and a response piece. The other contributions are “Tangling with the Classics: Rethinking Reception in the Middle Ages” by Jacqueline M. Burek and Rebecca Menmuir (pp. 1–4), “The Tangled Reception of Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus Malalianus*” by Mary Hitchman (pp. 5–28), “John Scottus Eriugena and the Entangled Materiality of *Vox*” by Paul Vinhage (pp. 29–53), “From Sorcerer’s Son to Epic Hero: (Meta)Poetic Entanglement in Walter of Châtillon’s *Alexandreis*” by Ivo Wolsing (pp. 54–78), “Renegotiating Antiquity with/in Herbert’s *Roman de Dolopathos*” by Ramani Chandramohan (pp. 101–32) and “Entanglements” by Alfred Hiatt (pp. 133–41).

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Virgil in Scholastic Hands: Transnational and Local, Textual and Material

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to explain why a set of ‘fabulous’ stories about Virgil were adopted as part of a learned Latinate tradition in the twelfth and early thirteenth century. It suggests that the answer lies in the distinctive politics of southern Italy in this period. Scholars and administrators, many of them trained in cathedral schools of northern Europe, arrived in southern Italy and encountered there local legends about Virgil’s magical protection of Naples and its inhabitants. These men were already primed to be interested in the classical poet. They also recorded, adjusted, and preserved these legends as a source of important historical information for their own masters—the kings and emperors who aspired to rule the region and whose hold on power was often unsteady. This was a decisive step, for it meant that the Virgil of the classical curriculum and liberal arts tradition became tied to a particular southern Italian landscape and series of monuments. This, in turn, paved the way for fourteenth-century ‘humanist’ visitors to the region, including Petrarch, who were particularly keen to explore the sites of Virgil’s life. As this article argues, however, interest in the physical and material ‘remains’ of the poet, and the relationship between ancient texts and contemporary topography, was in origin a twelfth-century entanglement, not an early modern one.

1 Introduction: Petrarch

I begin with the medievalist’s old adversary, Petrarch, who (as any student of historiography will tell you) hit upon the concept of a ‘Middle Age’: a period of ebbing intellectual energy between the great achievements of classical Rome and

its later renewal.¹ While many medievalists have spent their careers railing against this characterisation, the idea still frames the discipline of medieval history. Both Petrarch's writings and his sense of self are tied up in this peculiar temporal awareness. Petrarch ardently hoped that his own era might attempt to emulate ancient greatness, while, at the same time, regretting that such aspirations might not be realised. This sensibility did much to produce the idea of the 'medieval' as a difficult middle. It also helped define the movement we refer to as early modern humanism: in its simplest terms, a longing to return to the artistic achievements of the classical world and to emulate its glories.²

Nowhere was Petrarch's rarefied sense of his own relationship to antiquity more evident than during his journey to Naples in February 1341. On this trip, Petrarch's awareness of the ancient past was projected onto the local landscape. The visit was prompted by his preparation for his forthcoming laureation ceremony in Rome. He travelled to southern Italy to visit Robert of Anjou (King of Naples, Count of Provence), his sponsor.³ His conversation with Robert of Anjou inevitably turned to the classical world. The king and the poet pondered the allegorical meaning of the *Aeneid*. They also took an excursion to the site known as the "Tomb of Virgil."⁴ There the two men visited the grotto which had reputedly been created by the Virgil as his resting place.⁵ Recalling the visit nearly two decades later, Petrarch still marvelled at the vastness and darkness of the space. During their time in the tomb, King Robert supposedly asked Petrarch whether he believed the stories told by the credulous, that the antique poet had been a sorcerer and employed the magic arts to fashion his tomb. Not at all, replied Petrarch (supplying a witticism he evidently enjoyed recounting even many years later), for the space had clearly been wrought by human hands, and he had never read that Virgil was a marble mason ("nusquam me legisse marmorarium fuisse Virgilium").⁶

What could be more 'humanist' than this Petrarchan day trip and these remarks? That is, if by humanism we understand an appreciation of the classical world that sees its participants as living human beings, not dryly abstract textual authorities, and which shows a conscious reverence towards the ancients. This sensibility was embodied elsewhere in Petrarch's life and works, not least in a series of letters to ancient authors, which, naturally, included a letter to Virgil, expressing a wish that Virgil could know the renown in which his works were held after his death.⁷ Petrarch would not be the last visitor to the Neapolitan grotto which came to be known as the tomb of Virgil. Attention waxed and waxed between the

¹ The classic statement of this is Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages.'" For a more recent assessment, see Goldin Folena, "Petarca e il medioevo latino."

² For engagement with this problem, see Summit, "Topography and Historiography."

³ On the relationship between the two, see Sturm-Maddox, "Altissima verba."

⁴ Much has been written on the tomb of Virgil. For a sample, see: Trapp, "Virgil and the Monuments" and Trapp, "Grave of Vergil." The latter is an important survey of knowledge of Virgil's tomb over time.

⁵ The grotto and its location are discussed further in Trapp, "Virgil and the Monuments," 3.

⁶ Petrarch recorded this story in his *Itinerarium Syracium* [36]; the Latin and a translation of the passage is provided in Ziolkowski and Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition*, 415–16. See also Trapp, "Grave of Virgil," 8.

⁷ Petrarch, *Epistolae de rebus familiaribus*, XXIV.11, 290–92.

fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Anyone who aspired to be any kind of humanist personage made the trip; Erasmus took his students.⁸

The claim is often made that Petrarch and his successors represented a new kind of relationship to both the classical past and the Christian era, a claim to which I will return at the end of this article.⁹ For now, we should note Petrarch's desire not merely to comprehend the text of Virgil, but to understand Virgil better by coming close to the sites that Virgil had known. Only through immersion in that landscape could he comprehend the dimensions of the poet's life. That sentiment made it into Petrarch's oration for his coronation as laureate on 8 April 1341.¹⁰

2 The twelfth century context

2.1 Virgil in the twelfth and early thirteenth century

I have spent so long on Petrarch because the purpose of this paper is to think about the "pre-history" to Petrarch's visit to Virgil's tomb, and to ask whether Petrarch's connection to Virgil was really without precedent in earlier periods. Scholars have noted that the medieval world knew of the association with Naples and the location of Virgil's supposed grave; the connection was not invented by Petrarch. Yet when such visits are noted in the scholarship, they appear as little more than prologue: the 'big bang' lies in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹¹ My contention is that the critical moment of Latinate engagement with Virgil in southern Italy occurred some 150 years before Petrarch. Petrarch's knowledge of Virgil's tomb relied on an earlier series of discussions, emerging in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was the product of two distinctive shifts, through which the transnational traditions of the schoolroom and the local stories of southern Italy became intertwined.

The first shift was a literary one. The proliferation of classical literacy entailed the growth of an educated administrative class across much of western Europe; a group of men whose pedagogical and moral formations were vested in the Latin classics and an idea of the liberal arts revived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This educational change has been noted by many scholars; we might refer to it in shorthand as the 'twelfth-century renaissance.' The second shift was political and particular to southern Italy. The rapidly shifting political dynamics in the region in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries meant the creation of new regimes to whom Virgil was presented and advertised. Both these shifts laid the ground for

⁸ Tatham, "Erasmus in Italy," 660.

⁹ For instance, Celenza, "Petrarch, Latin, and Italian Renaissance Latinity," 511–13; and for a sense of the complexity of the question, Eisner, "In the Labyrinth."

¹⁰ Petrarch, *Collatio laureationis*, 6. In fact, in making this point Petrarch utilised Cicero, *De Legibus*, II.4, and the pleasure that is to be gained from contemplating the deeds of great men when surrounded by their tombs. An English translation is provided by Wilkins, "Petrarch's Coronation Oration." More broadly for the significance of the oration and the idea of a "break" with the medieval past, Regn and Huss, "Petrarch's Rome," 87–88.

¹¹ For example, Hendrix, "Virgil's Tomb."

Petrarch's visit. Late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century authors approached the great poet in a way that parallels Petrarch's vision. Virgil is treated not merely a great authority of the schoolroom, as a body of textual knowledge, but as an eminence they might appreciate through their own experiences with the southern Italian landscape and its monuments. In short, this paper is essentially about how a tradition came into being, and how twelfth- and thirteenth-century authors came to vest Virgil in a particular landscape.¹²

We should recognise the give-and-take in the dynamics of this process. The Latinate authors discussed in this article did not straightforwardly impose 'their' vision of Virgil on southern Italy.¹³ Their understanding of the poet and his significance was shaped by the places they encountered and the stories they were told. Nor, however, were they mere copyists who transmitted the tales beyond southern Italy; Virgil's life and deeds were sifted and enhanced to serve greater political and personal purposes. This was a collaborative process, albeit an inadvertent one: in other words, an entanglement.

It is prudent to insert a note of caution here. As is well known, Virgil had a vast, long, and complex medieval afterlife.¹⁴ In no medieval century was there any shortage of enthusiasm for Virgil. In that sense, the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries were by no means distinct. However they also saw a new use for Virgil. It was at this moment that a set of highly literate, often scholastically-trained, authors encountered and set about transforming local southern Italian traditions and folklore. Two quite separate parts of a Virgilian tradition were joined.

The first of these parts belonged to the world of the schoolroom, the study of grammar, and the *accessus ad auctores*. In that tradition, Virgil was an authority and model. The second tradition (harder to make out, though not altogether impossible to detect) belonged to southern Italy specifically. It was this tradition which claimed a special relationship between Naples and Virgil as the guardian of the city. The tradition also seems to have endowed Virgil with protective (even magical) powers. Interesting things happened when these two collided. A 'local' body of legends about Virgil was for the first time codified, restructured and presented for elite audiences. It also meant that those local claims were pressed into political service, where they might seem most useful.

¹² Stok, "Virgil between the Middle Ages and Renaissance," similarly positions the period between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries as decisive for the development of Virgilian legends. It is also valuable for its discussion of manuscript evidence for the circulation of 'lives' of Virgil which supplement (and embellish) information found in the *accessus* (20). However, as I argue here, it is essential to understand exactly why these learned Latinate authors were present in southern Italy, and the political situation that prompted their engagement with Virgil for a royal and imperial audience. Many of the authors discussed in this article are also surveyed in Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer*.

¹³ Indeed, as Wolsing argues in his contribution to this special issue, historians too often assume a separation between Latinate culture and the vernacular world that surrounded it, ignoring the hints that authors and ideas moved fluidly between the two.

¹⁴ The most important recent work for anyone wishing to understand the extent of Virgil's medieval afterlife is the volume by Ziolkowski and Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition*. This volume provides an excellent survey for anyone wishing to comprehend the extent of Virgil's influence throughout the Middle Ages. This paper attempts to put some of those uses of Virgil in a more precise political and literary context, and to elaborate the parallels between a certain group of twelfth- and thirteenth-century authors.

The 'learned' tradition of Virgil—the kind one finds in the schoolroom—made some brief reference to southern Italy. The two most important sources of information on Virgil were the late antique works composed by Aelius Donatus and Servius in the fourth and fifth centuries.¹⁵ Both these texts briefly indicated Virgil's connection to Naples. Both told essentially the same story: after Virgil's death, the poet's bones had been buried in a tomb two miles outside Naples, along with an epitaph which he himself had composed. The accounts of Aelius Donatus and Servius were widely read, and they were also amplified. By the time we reach the ninth and tenth centuries, more details were being drawn out of these biographies: Virgil composed the *Georgics* in Naples, for example, but the *Aeneid* in Rome.¹⁶

Nonetheless, the biographical information contained in the commentary tradition remained limited. The medieval schoolroom required only as much information as would illuminate a discussion of the *materia*.¹⁷ By the early twelfth century, and Conrad of Hirsau's *Dialogus super auctores*, the relevant biographical details for the student of Virgil were largely those which explained the relationship between Virgil and Augustus. Conrad's *accessus* notes that though he had died at Brindisi, Virgil's body was moved to Naples and interred there, accompanied by an epitaph that the poet had composed for himself.¹⁸ But—as with all the authors in the *accessus* tradition—the details of the poet's life are only useful so far as they explain and uphold the *utilitas* of the poem: the information required to bring Virgil safely and fruitfully into a Christian canon. Young men (or, as we should really think of them, boys) trained in the medieval Latin canon were introduced to Virgil at an early point in their education. Commentaries on Virgil were a fundamental part of the acquisition of grammar, the starting point of the *trivium*.¹⁹ Students were also equipped with certain, albeit limited, biographical details. They knew the poet as one of the great authors of pre-Christian antiquity, and one of the first markers of a knowledge of the liberal arts.

2.2 The politics of southern Italy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries

It is here I turn to the second part of my argument: the particular political circumstances of southern Italy in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. These are likely to be less well known to a general audience of medieval scholars than the medieval enthusiasm for Virgil. To put it simply: control of southern Italy was changing in dramatic ways. In the space of less than a century, three dynasties attempted to establish their control of the region, to maintain their authority against other claimants, and to mould a new political unit. The first of these attempts was 'Norman,' or rather, belonged to the Hauteville dynasty, descended

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion, see Tarrant, "Aspects of Virgil's Reception," and Stok, "Commenting on Virgil."

¹⁶ See Ziolkowski and Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition*, 246–47.

¹⁷ Quain, "The Medieval Accessus," and Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, remain the best starting points for understanding the tradition.

¹⁸ Conrad, *Dialogus super auctores*, 120–22. See also Ziolkowski and Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition*, 740–44.

¹⁹ For example, Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, ii.29, 46. For a more detailed discussion of one twelfth-century manuscript of Virgil and its use in education, see Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, especially ch. 2.

from minor nobility in Normandy. The second was Staufen, led by Henry VI, son of Frederick Barbarossa. A third (still more short-lived), was the attempt of the Welf emperor, Otto IV, to claim Sicily and southern Italy around 1210. Each of these was an attempt to create a new political order in the region, and to give shape to a new polity.

The future Roger II created his realm by holding Apulia, Calabria, and the island of Sicily, in addition to claiming the Duchy of Capua.²⁰ It was only through the contingencies of inheritance—a lack of other family heirs—combined with careful manoeuvring that these territories came together under a single ruler in 1127. There was no precedent for these territories making up a distinct entity ruled by a single king, and no crown associated with them. In the centuries before the millennium, southern Italy had been a mosaic, with control split between different local lords and Lombard princes, and lingering remnants of Byzantine power in the east of the region: Sicily had been part of an Islamic emirate from the mid-ninth to the later eleventh century (the dates are inexact because conquest was a slow process).

Roger II's ambitions created a new political unit. He had inherited an assemblage of territories; he wished to transform his title into that of king. There were political problems: his claims were objectionable to the papacy, to both German and Byzantine emperors, and to many local lords in southern Italy. But there were also significant conceptual problems. There was no obvious unity to these territories—whether political, linguistic, or administrative. There was no shared founding myth other than the self-created myth of Roger himself. Nor could Roger claim descent from any distinguished ancestor: the greatest of his forebears had been only a minor Norman knight. Moreover, not all the cities of southern Italy welcomed the Hauteville claim. In a sense, Roger's lack of roots in the region were a less pressing problem than the military challenges, invasions, and rebellions faced and fended off throughout his reign. Nonetheless, within the cultural and intellectual life of the new Kingdom of Sicily in the 1130s and 1140s, Roger and the great men of his court were eager for works that would proclaim the new dynasty's legitimacy and authority. As is well known, Roger was willing to borrow from many different sources of such authority.²¹ As we will see, Virgil proved a useful element of this process.

It is important to appreciate, however, that a similar (though not identical) process was repeated at the end of the twelfth century, less than seventy years after Roger II first claimed to be the new ruler of something called the Kingdom of Sicily. By the late 1180s, the dynasty founded by Roger II had run out of steam—or at least run out of viable male heirs. The kingdom was—with considerable difficulty—conquered by the German emperor Henry VI. Henry asserted his rights

²⁰ Despite the numbering, Roger II was the first king of the Kingdom of Sicily; "II" refers to his earlier title as Count of Sicily. It should also be noted that Roger's use of the title of 'king' was sometimes applied only to the island of Sicily, and the title of 'Duke of Apulia and Calabria' continued to be used in certain contexts for the mainland. For an overview of Roger's kingship and the politics of the reign, see Houben, *Roger II*. For Roger's attempt at crafting himself as a ruler, Weiler, *Paths to Kingship*, 84–94.

²¹ For instance, Vernon, "Dressing for Succession," discusses the different ways (material and ceremonial) that Hauteville dynasty and legitimacy was set before southern Italian audiences.

on two levels: both as an 'ancient' claim that the region was a part of the Roman empire, but also on behalf of his wife, Constance, who was the daughter of Roger II. There was substantial ambiguity during his reign about exactly how Sicily fitted within the other territories ruled by Henry VI. It was not straightforwardly absorbed into the empire.²² Here too Virgil could be utilised: an imperial poet for an imperial court. Control of southern Italy gave Henry VI (and his courtiers) direct connection to the sites of the classical (imperial) world. The pattern continued after Henry VI's unexpected death in 1197, when another German emperor, from a new dynasty—the Welf Otto IV—made clear his designs on southern Italy. Otto too was well aware of the rich Virgilian associations of the region.

Regardless of which master they served, learned (Latinate) authors responded to the political confusion in southern Italy in a similar way. They offered up the classical past to the new rulers of the region. Men seeking patronage and advancement offered to connect new rulers to the land of Virgil, albeit in different ways. It was not that Roger II, Henry VI, or Otto IV made a personal effort to 'discover' Virgil, but rather that the intellectual circles around them found in the figure of the ancient poet something memorable and potentially politically useful. In other words, it is no coincidence that attention to the details of Virgil's 'biography' expanded rapidly in twelfth century southern Italy, given a situation of increased Latinity among elite servants and dramatic political change.

These Latinate authors drew on a set of southern Italian traditions that had been coalescing around the figure of Virgil for some time, as part of a local, and likely largely oral tradition. Such traditions only become visible to historians, however, when they are recorded in writing (and that writing is preserved). Needless to say, the oral traditions of the Middle Ages cannot be accessed with any certainty. However, the balance of evidence does suggest that twelfth-century authors were codifying a local tradition, which associated Virgil with several sites in Naples.²³ These are claims specific to a Neapolitan landscape, down to its particulars. My contention in what follows is that such associations were not invented by Latinate northern European scholars who visited Naples, only recorded by them. From what those scholars recorded, we can make out something of the shape of those pre-existing traditions and associations. They concerned not only Virgil's burial in Naples, but more broadly his special patronage and protection of the city. Virgil was also credited with having improved the city in various ways: by creating devices that fended off unwelcome pests, facilitating trade, and protecting visitors. One story, for instance, described how Virgil assisted the butchers of the city by using his arts to prevent the meat in the market from putrefying.²⁴

²² See the discussion in Byrne, "Translating German Emperors."

²³ See the comments in Kelly's introduction to the *Cronaca di Partenope*, 66. She argues, convincingly, that stories of Virgil in Naples originated not with outsiders, but with "local" attempts to explain the features of the landscape, and that they developed over time. See too the comments of Delle Donne, "Virgiliana Neapolis Urbs," 166. We cannot, of course, rule out the possibility that written versions of these stories existed before the twelfth century, and were employed and reworked by twelfth-century authors, but I know of no surviving examples.

²⁴ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, 3.12, 577–79.

3 Alexander of Telese and Gervase of Tilbury

The first southern Italian example comes from Alexander of Telese, abbot of San Salvatore in Campania. The monastery of San Salvatore was in the north of the newly established Norman kingdom, about fifty kilometres inland from Naples. Alexander was writing during the early part of Roger's reign, before 1143. He does not, however, perfectly fit in the pattern set out above—Alexander's use of Virgil is relatively brief, and, as we know almost nothing about his biography, there is no evidence he was an outsider to southern Italy.²⁵

Alexander's *Ystoria Rogerii regis* contains only two short references to Virgil. They are, however, important for understanding the wider picture. First is Alexander's claim that Virgil was lord of Naples (*urbis dominus*), a position he held with the approval of Augustus.²⁶ Alexander does little more than note this information while giving a longer history of the region. Virgil is then invoked, more explicitly, in the "Alloquium," the address to Roger which accompanied the *Ystoria*, praising the king and commending Alexander to his goodwill.²⁷ Here the rationale for invoking Virgil is more personal, relating to the patronage of the liberal arts and their rewards. Alexander notes that Virgil composed two verses in praise of Octavian, for which Octavian rewarded the poet with dominion over Naples and Calabria. If Virgil received such rewards for only two verses, Alexander said, how much more did the author of the *Ystoria* hope for from Roger II.

As Eleni Tounta has written, Alexander's view of the history of southern Italy was shaped by his contact with members of the Hauteville family—particularly Roger's sister, Matilda. Indeed, Alexander probably met Roger himself on more than one occasion.²⁸ For Alexander, Roger was a preferable alternative to the disgraced Lombards who had previously attempted to exert rulership in the region. Other contenders for authority had proved themselves inadequate to the task: Roger was the only one among his contemporaries capable of governing the whole region, and, crucially for a man of the church, bringing peace to the land.²⁹

Roger's claim and crown were new, but, in the context of the *Ystoria*, it made sense for Alexander to call attention to the illustrious classical history of the lands that Roger sought to exercise rule. Alexander saw both the political and personal utility of invoking Virgil. Alexander, however, is a rare witness: his is one of the few chronicles from within the Norman realm. As others have observed, the kingdom was not a centre of historical writing, and no 'official' histories were endorsed

²⁵ The most important recent work on Alexander is Krumm, *Herrschaftsumbruch und Historiographie*. Krumm situates the text as a product of, and response to, the crisis of lordship accompanying the early years of Roger II's rule.

²⁶ Alexander of Telese, *Ystoria*, 3.19, 69–70. The origin of the idea that Virgil was 'lord' of Naples is a complex question, as discussed in Ziolkowski and Putnam, *The Virgilian Tradition*, 921–22. They suggest that it may derive from a medieval misreading of a passage in Seneca's *Natural Questions*.

²⁷ Alexander of Telese, *Ystoria*, 89.

²⁸ Tounta, "Terror and Territorium," 143. See also the comments of Taviani-Carozzi, "De Robert Guiscard au roi de Sicile."

²⁹ Tounta, "Terror and Territorium," 145.

by the court.³⁰ It is not until later in the twelfth century that we encounter our next witness to the tradition.

However, let us first look further forwards. If we turn to Gervase of Tilbury, writing in the early thirteenth century, we get a much clearer view of how local Neapolitan tradition was being codified (and possibly polished) for a Latinate and courtly audience. Gervase's major surviving work is an encyclopaedia known as the *Otia imperialia* ("Recreation for an Emperor"), presented to the Welf emperor Otto IV (r.1209–18). Before he entered courtly service, Gervase had received a first-class scholastic education, culminating in a period first studying and then teaching at Bologna. That education made him a useful servant and administrator, and, in the 1180s, he was in the Kingdom of Sicily, in the service of William II (Roger II's grandson). Gervase was so good a servant that he was given a house in Campania as a reward, where he could escape the heat of summer in Palermo.³¹ Many of the stories and "marvels" Gervase presented to Otto in the *Otia* had been collected during his time in the Norman kingdom. Gervase's time in southern Italy allowed him to absorb some of these local stories about the enduring presence of Virgil in and around Naples; he tells us as much himself.

Gervase's stories about Virgil and his presence in Naples are primarily about the poet's protection of the city through the use of his special powers. Importantly, Gervase treats this information seriously. Such stories may be entertaining, but, they are—to borrow the phrase used by Nancy Partner to describe twelfth-century history writing—"serious entertainments."³² The *Otia imperialia* collected information about marvellous and unusual events. But none of them were 'fabulous' in the sense of being untrue or complete inventions. Gervase affirms that he had witnessed many of these seemingly incredible phenomena (not just the Virgilian ones) himself: *expertus sum* ("I experienced it"), he writes.³³

Gervase does not confine his material on Virgil and Naples to a single chapter of the *Otia imperialia*, but spreads it thematically across the third book, grouping Virgil's wonders with others from the known world. For instance, Gervase describes how Virgil created a bronze image of a fly: this fake fly had the power to keep all real flies out of Naples, thus relieving the inhabitants of the city from a source of annoyance and ill health. It is narrated earnestly, as the third in a series of stories about protection from nuisance insects. In the first of these stories, Gervase recounts information about a church building in Le Puy, Bourges, in which no spider or fly can remain. Gervase implies it is the power of the relics held by the church that dispels arachnids and insects.³⁴ The second story in the series describes a house belonging to a college of canons in Barjols, Aix, which, similarly, no fly can settle. Gervase notes that he was doubtful about the truth of this story but had himself tested it and found that the reports were true (*comperiens*

³⁰ On this point, see Loud, "History Writing." For eleventh-century attempts at using history to legitimise Norman claims in southern Italy, see Lucas-Avenal, "Le récit de Geoffroi Malaterra."

³¹ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, 3.12, 579.

³² Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England*.

³³ *Ibid.*, 578.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.10, 567–68.

veriozem).³⁵ Virgil's creation of the bronze fly is the third in this series of stories, with no indication that it is to be doubted—only to be marvelled at. In short, Gervase presents these stories of Virgil's life as legitimate and worthy of both recording and remembrance.

There are several more stories in the *Otia* which deserve comment. One is the tale of an English master who attempted to remove Virgil's bones from the tomb and to take them away from the city for study. The Neapolitans were—unsurprisingly—unwilling to cooperate with the removal, even when commanded to allow it by Roger II, for they feared the destruction of the city would follow.³⁶ The nature of the story is worth remarking upon, as it suggests an interesting dynamic: here are the Neapolitan population resisting external attempts to give away or remove their rarest treasure. What is even more striking than the association between Virgil's physical presence and the endurance of the city is the underlying premise of the story. Gervase clearly finds it plausible that a “master” (*magister*) would have been interested in travelling to Naples with the express purpose of uncovering more about Virgil's life and his supposed powers. The man who sought out the bones was no strange figure from the fringes of society but rather “a man of great learning: proficient and highly talented at the trivium and quadrivium, he had achieved much in medical studies, and was unrivalled in astronomy.”³⁷

If we assume that Gervase was recounting a story which he had heard and believed to be plausible, this must reinforce the idea that southern Italy in this period was regarded as a ‘destination’ for getting closer to Virgil. Even in the twelfth century there were stories about men seeking out his tomb. Admittedly, there are some differences between Gervase's *magister* and Petrarch. Both hoped to visit the tomb of Virgil, but the twelfth-century master travelled in the hope that he would find in the tomb a volume containing all Virgil's magical secrets: in other words, that discovering Virgil would unlock a source of power and profit. By contrast, in Petrarch's account of his own visit, he is driven only by a wistful desire to contemplate the grandeur of Roman antiquity.

Elsewhere, Gervase's information about Virgil in Naples firmly ties the life of the poet to the physical and material aspects of the city and its surroundings. Gervase records the claim (discussed further below) that the complex of healing baths in southern Italy, on the Bay of Naples, were established and augmented by Virgil.³⁸ Gervase also notes that there are no poisonous snakes in Naples because Virgil managed to trap all dangerous reptiles under the stones of a road leading to the city. Virgil is repeatedly connected to the fabric of the city, associated with the gates and structures that could still be seen in Gervase's own time. We see this element again when Gervase describes how the poet set up a garden on the sides of the local mountain, its slopes so sheer that it would seemingly be impossible for anything to grow there. But the ‘proofs’ are there: the plants sown by Virgil

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.10, 574–75.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.112, 803–5.

³⁷ The translation is that of Banks and Binns: “Erat [...] summe literatus, in trivio et quadrivio potens et accutissimus in fisica operosus, in astronomia summus,” 3.112, 802.

³⁸ *Otia Imperialia*, 3.15, 587.

can still be seen there, including one which cures blindness in sheep when they accidentally consume it.³⁹

It was probably Gervase who first put many of these stories into writing in Latin, and Gervase's text is quoted and borrowed by several later authors. For instance, Gervase (though not Gervase alone) seems to have been a key source for the fourteenth-century *Cronaca di Partenope* which would go on to reorganise, develop, and add its own stories of Virgilian presence and associations with Naples.⁴⁰

Why bother to record such stories, in an authoritative, self-consciously 'scholastic' Latin? It was not merely because from a high-minded desire to preserve knowledge of the past. Gervase was writing for an emperor (Otto) who had designs on southern Italy, and who, like German emperors before him, considered the region a 'natural,' even integral, part of the Holy Roman Empire. Yet, in practical terms, Otto had very limited success in achieving any control over Italy. He made some gains in the north during the early part of his reign, but attempts to extend southwards were a disaster and irrevocably damaged his relationship with the papacy, resulting in his excommunication. Nonetheless, those who served Otto understood his ambitions. If Otto wished to rule Italy, he needed to understand its local culture. The material Gervase presents in the *Otia imperialia* presents Otto with a repository of knowledge about his territories; making distant landscapes 'real' to the man who claimed them, and hoped one day to visit them as a triumphant conqueror. Any would-be ruler of southern Italy (here Otto was much like Roger II before him) must comprehend the special connection between Virgil and Naples.

This twelfth century moment is when we see southern Italian claims about Virgil—quite possibly already of long standing—entering a "learned" Latin tradition. Virgil's presence in the landscape was written into texts that are explicitly "transnational," and which are addressed explicitly to a courtly audience. Understanding the "local" Virgil allowed imperial readers and governors to enhance their rule.

This argument, of course, is premised upon the idea that these twelfth- and thirteenth-century visitors did not invent these stories or import them, but only remodelled, renovated, and transmitted them: that they belonged first to a local tradition. This is something of an assumption, but I think it is a sound one for several reasons. First, though these stories of Virgil travelled widely in the later Middle Ages, they seem to have appeared first in southern Italy. This is their point of origin. Second, the details of these stories are so closely tied to recognisable features of Neapolitan landscape, that it is hard to imagine them making sense to any other audience. Tales about Virgil as the magical guardian of a meat-market in Naples might please audiences in southern Italy (and Neapolitan butchers in particular), but they were at best bizarre curiosities when recounted elsewhere. To more distant readers, casting spells over putrefying meat might even have seemed beneath the dignity of the great poet of the schoolroom. Third, these Latinate

³⁹ Ibid., 3.13, 584. The story of the garden is also reported by Alexander Neckam, *De naturis rerum*, ii.174, 310.

⁴⁰ Kelly, *Cronaca di Partenope*, 66–67.

twelfth-century authors rarely invented from scratch. Their methods were to borrow and improve by recounting existing material in a more elegant fashion; Gervase styles himself as a collector of interesting knowledge. In other words: we can make out a set of local claims, if only in outline.

4 Conrad of Querfurt and Peter of Eboli

The final two authors I wish to mention in this regard belong to the same imperial context: Conrad of Querfurt and Peter of Eboli. In fact, both were writing during the period before Otto IV. Both Conrad and Peter ‘served’ (in a certain sense) the regime of Henry VI after his conquest of Sicily in the 1190s. Conrad was Henry’s chancellor; Peter an aspiring court poet who appealed to Conrad for patronage: indeed, the illustrations to another of Peter’s surviving works depict him presenting his scholarship to Conrad, the representative of Staufan authority in the region.⁴¹ Both Peter and Conrad, it is important to note, were well educated men; “literate” in the medieval sense of that term.

I begin with Conrad.⁴² He provides example of the new kinds of elites produced by twelfth-century changes to education. From a noble background (his father was a burgrave in Saxony), Conrad was the product first of the cathedral school of Hildesheim, and subsequently went on to study at the schools in Paris.⁴³ It was this combination of elevated birth plus elite education that fitted him for ecclesiastical and imperial office: becoming Henry VI’s chancellor, before also being made Bishop of Hildesheim in 1194.

Conrad’s impressions of southern Italy survive in a letter of his, preserved in the *Chronicle* of Arnold of Lübeck. The letter itself was written to Hildebert, Provost of Hildesheim. It is an account of Conrad’s journey southwards to join the court in Palermo, describing both Conrad’s route and the sites of antiquity he had visited on his way.⁴⁴ What is most striking is Conrad’s comment about the meaning of his journey. He reflects that, with Henry VI’s conquest of Sicily and southern Italy, the most distinguished sites of classical antiquity are now within the empire, adding to its lustre: “there is no need to go beyond the frontiers of the empire, no need to go beyond the sphere of German lordship, to see places on which the poets spent a great deal of time.”⁴⁵

The essence of this letter is that—from the moment he arrives in Italy—Conrad begins to encounter the sites of classical antiquity, which hitherto he has known only as names. Now those references take on specific meaning in the

⁴¹ This is the *Liber ad honorem Augusti*. The manuscript, Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 120.II, can be viewed here: <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/bbb/0120-2>; Conrad and Peter are depicted at fol. 139^r.

⁴² See Clarke, “Conrad of Querfurt.”

⁴³ Indeed, it can be argued that Conrad’s path was not an unusual one: while German cathedral schools had led the renewal of learning in the eleventh century, students in the twelfth century frequently travelled westward to seek out the new learning of the schools in Paris. See Pixton, “The Misfiring,” Thomson, “The Place of Germany,” and, for the narrative of eleventh-century leadership, Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*.

⁴⁴ Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronica*, v.19, 174–83 (“epistola Conradi cancellari”). For the translation, see Loud, *The Chronicle of Arnold of Lübeck*.

⁴⁵ Loud, *Chronicle of Arnold of Lübeck*, v.19, 175.

landscape. In Mantua and Cremona, he sees sites described in the *Eclogues*; Modena was previously known to him only through his reading of Lucan. One need only quote a few sentences of the letter to get a taste of the whole: "Passing by the city of Chieti, where Thetis, the mother of Achilles, lived, we left the city of Nympha on our right, where from the pleasantness of the springs nymphs were imagined to exist and where they too were worshipped. We also saw Cannae, where so many noble Romans were slain by Hannibal [...] We went by the city of Giovenazzo, which is called this as the birthplace of Jove, because Jupiter was born there."⁴⁶

As Conrad makes his way further south, his descriptions of Virgilian monuments overlap with those seen by Gervase of Tilbury, again reinforcing the idea that both were drawing on a shared stock of local knowledge, possibly pointed out to them by local guides.⁴⁷ In Naples, Conrad records seeing an image of the city encased in a magical glass flask: so long as the flask is unharmed, the city remains safe.⁴⁸ Virgil was said to have made this through his magical arts. Conrad also saw a bronze horse, another item cast by Virgil, which provided protection to all the horses that visited Naples.⁴⁹ Virgil might be of particular interest, but the poet is not the only antique figure mentioned in the letter. Almost every town (or spring or temple) he passes is vested with classical meaning. On arriving in Sicily, Conrad notes the place where the minotaur was supposedly imprisoned;⁵⁰ he also drinks in the southern Italian sites associated with both St Agatha and St Paul. In this way, the landscape of the classical world is inextricably intermingled with that of early, heroic, Christianity.

Conrad of Querfurt is a useful demonstration of what happened when a 'learned' tradition of Virgil arrived in the 'land' of Virgil in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. He is by no means representative of all northern travellers to southern Italy but offers an insight into men of a particular educational background. When Conrad journeyed into southern Italy, the places that had been only references in schoolroom texts were now before his eyes. These sites were therefore worthy of record and worthy of transmission back to German lands—to others who had had a similar education. The tone of his letter is not explicitly triumphal, though there is a strong implication that now the lands of southern Italy are under imperial control, they will add to the lustre of imperial achievements. The destinies of the two territories are interlinked. The corollary of that process, however, is that southern Italy will require a particular kind of political handling because of its historical distinctiveness.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronica*, V.19, 179; the translation is that of Loud.

⁴⁷ See Savage, "Possible Sources," 341, who suggests that Conrad of Querfurt and Gervase of Tilbury may have met in southern Italy in the late twelfth century and exchanged information about Virgilian legends. I find this possibility less likely than the conclusion that both were separately drawing on locally circulating southern Italian accounts.

⁴⁸ Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronica*, V.19, 181–82.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, V.19, 177–78.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, V.19, 179.

⁵¹ Spargo (rather unfairly) dismisses Conrad as the most "gullible" of travellers to the south in consequence of his enthusiasm for these stories, *Virgil the Necromancer*, 311.

Conrad and Gervase suggest that there was a shared appetite among those who had first encountered Virgil in the twelfth-century schoolroom—a desire to do new things with Virgil; to find new ways of imagining him or connecting themselves to him. The landscape of southern Italy provided one way of extending their understanding. This was not, of course, the only way in which Virgil was being “transformed” in the twelfth century. We might see a parallel here with other kinds of transformation and reinventions of Virgil in this period. Further north, Virgil was being drawn into a vernacular tradition and the events of his life extended and amplified in works like the *Roman d’Enéas*.⁵² It is no new claim to argue that the twelfth century had a voracious appetite for antique authorities; for imitating and emulating them. But only in southern Italy was there unique access to Virgil as a ‘local’ figure. And it was this twelfth-century process—preserving the stories in Latin—which provided the foundations for later humanist scholarship on the subject. Indeed, Clarke has made the argument that when Petrarch located the ‘entrance’ to the Virgilian underworld in southern Italy, he was influenced not just by antique authorities but also by Conrad’s account of his journey.⁵³

My final ‘witness’ is Peter of Eboli. Peter was no northern incomer to the kingdom, but, as his toponym suggests, a native of southern Italy. We possess little biographical detail on him, though we can safely say he had a strong command of Latin and a firm interest in the liberal arts.⁵⁴ Peter was active in the late twelfth century and evidently hoped that Henry VI’s new regime would provide him with patronage. One surviving work (a long praise poem for Henry VI) is addressed to Conrad; one lost work seems to have been a dramatic retelling of the events of the life of Henry’s father, Frederick Barbarossa. The best way of characterising Peter is as a ‘local’ who sought to make southern Italian traditions comprehensible to the new rulers of the land, and, in doing so, win himself both patronage and acclaim as a Latin stylist.⁵⁵

The third of Peter’s works—and by far the most popular in the Middle Ages—is a poem which circulated under several names, often known by the name *De balneis Puteolanis* (“On the Baths of Pozzuoli”), in which Peter praises the healing properties of the thermal pools to be found around the Bay of Naples.⁵⁶ Most of these baths do not survive today: they were largely destroyed in an early modern earthquake. Peter was not the first to write about the baths; evidence of an earlier (prose) tradition exists. But Peter seems to have been motivated by the belief that they needed a proper—fully done, fully stylised—Latin reworking, an authoritative guide.

⁵² Cormier, “A Twelfth-Century Humanist.” See also the discussion in Ramani Chandramohan’s article in this volume, as an example of how Virgil was increasingly inserted into new and imagined historical and literary narratives, and new biographical details provided for him.

⁵³ Clarke, “Conrad of Querfurt,” *passim*. Stok, “Virgil between the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” discusses how these medieval traditions were purged and “purified” of embarrassing or unbelievable details by fourteenth-century humanist writers, 20–21.

⁵⁴ The best introduction to Peter’s life and works is that to be found in Kölzer and Stähl, *Petrus de Ebulo*.

⁵⁵ For a further discussion of the interpretation of the poem, see Stähli, “*Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus Siculis*.”

⁵⁶ De Angelis, the editor of the recent critical edition preferred the title *De Euboicis aquis*.

Where does Virgil fit in? As mentioned above, there seems to have been a pre-existing story in circulation, claiming that Virgil had been the founder (or at least the improver) of these baths. That claim had been repeated by Gervase of Tilbury.⁵⁷ Peter does not go quite so far, though he does take pains to emphasise the association between the bath complex and classical antiquity. He states, for instance, that one of the pools was founded by Cicero.⁵⁸ However, one bath—known as *Ferrum*—is situated in an explicitly Virgilian landscape. Peter describes it as positioned next to "Lake Avernus" and a ruined temple.⁵⁹ Peter knew that his literate readers would make the connection immediately: Lake Avernus, where Aeneas began his descent to the underworld. Peter labels the temple the *Domum Vatis* (House of the Poet). Unmistakeably, this was—for anyone who had studied the basics of the school curriculum—a Virgilian landscape.

Peter's use of Virgil is partly self-serving, just as it was for Alexander of Telesse. At the end of the poem, Peter reminds his emperor that no poet was poor under Augustus. The proper imperial role is to grant largesse to an artist. Just as Virgil as *vates* provided Augustus with the crowning literary achievement of his age, so Peter too might do the same—if indulged and rewarded. More meaningfully, however, Peter sold himself (in his work and others) to the new Staufen rulers of southern Italy as a 'guide' to the antiquity of the local landscape. Through him could one apprehend the cultural and political particularities of a newly-conquered land—even if Henry VI made the claim that southern Italy was his by long-standing right. We might admire Peter for his enterprise, and his attempt to carve out a position in what was an era of considerable political turbulence.

For Peter, as for Alexander of Telesse and Gervase of Tilbury, Virgil's lordship of Naples represented a fixed (and glorious) point in a turning world. Southern Italy's recent past did not provide much calm or continuity. However Virgil (and his associated glories) could be a precedent for Norman, Staufen, or Welf rulers. The pump was primed from the common curriculum of the Latin schoolroom. The tradition described here became increasingly elaborate into the later thirteenth century, but the critical juncture is this moment in the later twelfth century, at which various authors—often for their own benefit and advancement—seized upon local claims and traditions. These were claims they knew would be appealing to their patrons; patrons who knew Virgil's works and who were now, for the first time, offered another dimension: the possibility of tangible connection with the poet and his life.

5 Virgil in northern Europe: Alexander Neckam

Finally, and seemingly quite rapidly, these ideas were transmitted back to northern Europe. In the last decade of the twelfth century, Alexander Neckam composed his compendium of natural sciences, *De naturis rerum*. Neckam (1157–1217) was Abbot of Cirencester; as a young man he had first studied and then taught in Paris

⁵⁷ *Otia Imperialia*, 3.15, 586.

⁵⁸ Pietro da Eboli, *De Euboicis aquis*, 138.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

and Oxford. He was a distinguished scholar, but not, as far as we can establish from his biography, a traveller to southern Italy.⁶⁰ Yet in *De naturis rerum* it is apparent that northern European scholars, trained in the liberal arts, were increasingly associating the landscape of southern Italy with the life of Virgil.⁶¹

When Neckam discusses the liberal arts, he does not discuss them as a free-floating set of techniques for study, but as intellectual achievements tied to particular places and particular historical moments. This is made plain in a chapter entitled “On the places in which the liberal arts flourished.” Neckam opens the chapter with what might be called a ‘standard’ medieval Latin account of the descent/genealogy of learning. First Abraham taught the quadrivium in Egypt; later Plato travelled to Egypt and learned secret knowledge; learning then passed into Greece, to Aristotle and other philosophers, then finally from Greece to Italy. In other words, the history of learning is also a set of distinct topographies. This is, of course, a version of the well-known *translatio studii*. But Neckam goes beyond a bare-bones account when he describes how it was that learning (*studium*) flourished in Italy.⁶² It is in this context that Virgil is introduced. Neckam describes Virgil’s achievements in protecting the people of Naples from various dangers: Virgil drove away a plague of leeches; he used his art to assist the butchers of the city by keeping their meat from putrefying; and he defended both the city (and the empire more generally) through an ingenious and elaborate set of devices.

In Neckam’s account we can also appreciate how ‘local’ southern Italian traditions were being integrated within a scholastic framework of the liberal arts. Neckam is not alone in doing this; Gervase of Tilbury approached Virgil’s achievements in a similar way. For instance, Gervase described Virgil’s creation of the bronze fly mentioned earlier (which kept real flies out of the city) as achieved through *arte mathematica*.⁶³ More generally, the language that Gervase uses to describe Virgil’s works of construction are those of skill: *miro artificio edificata*.⁶⁴

5 Conclusion

Thus, by the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, three elements were converging in these stories of Virgil. The poet was celebrated for his achievements in building and protecting Naples. Those achievements were credited, at least in part, to his knowledge of the liberal arts—and especially to his investigations into the quadrivium and command of more esoteric or secret forms of knowledge. It was this which allowed Virgil to be configured not merely as a great poet, but also a good governor, concerned for both the city and its people.

Part of the purpose of this article has been to argue that focusing on a single author and their intervention in a Virgilian tradition is, at best, unproductive. Pinpointing the ‘first’ Latinate author to record Neapolitan legends of Virgil will

⁶⁰ For Neckam’s life see Hunt, *The Schools and the Cloister*.

⁶¹ Neckam, *De naturis rerum*, ii.174, 309–10.

⁶² *Ibid.*, ii.174, 309.

⁶³ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, 3.10, 577. *Arte mathematica* is also the explanation given for Virgil’s ability to protect travellers journeying through a narrow passage cut through rock: 3.16, 588.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.15, 587, “constructed with wonderful skill.”

not tell us much. In fact, trying to do so obscures something altogether more interesting: the process by which those traditions developed over the longer term, and the interaction between political and intellectual change. The scholastic curriculum embedded a desire for greater knowledge of Virgil; the political circumstances of twelfth- and thirteenth-century southern Italy meant that Virgil's association with the landscape was readily harnessed—both by outsiders to the region and by local men. The combination had peculiar and enduring literary consequences. By becoming intertwined with a body of Latinate, cosmopolitan, and sometimes courtly writing, local claims took on transnational forms. Conrad of Querfurt did not take an entirely 'new' Virgil back to German lands, but the Virgil of the schoolroom did take on new qualities.

Finally, let us return to Petrarch, sitting with Robert the Wise in the darkness of a Neapolitan grotto, thinking deep and humanistic thoughts. It has long been the case that trying to determine whether renaissance humanism was a break with medieval traditions or a continuance of them results in a rather arid debate, an ouroboros that devours both its own tail and the scholars pursuing it. It is true that none of the medieval authors discussed in this article show the same sharp awareness of the distance between themselves and the ancient past that we find in Petrarch. Nonetheless, they were not totally naïve. Men like Conrad of Querfurt and Gervase of Tilbury did not find a 'living' Virgil in southern Italy: they found his bones, his remnants, and the monuments he had set up. They certainly did not think of Virgil 'only' in terms of a textual authority. One could know the poet in the school room; one could know him further through the landscape of his life. For a certain group of men in twelfth-century southern Italy, Virgil could be textual *and* material, transnational *and* local at the same time.

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JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM AND
EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Ramani Chandramohan, “Renegotiating Antiquity with/in Herbert’s *Roman de Dolopathos*,” JOLCEL 12 (2025): pp. 101–32. DOI: [10.21825/jolcel.90312](https://doi.org/10.21825/jolcel.90312)

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NOTE

This article is the fifth main article in the current issue of JOLCEL, which consists of a preface, five articles and a response piece. The other contributions are “Tangling with the Classics: Rethinking Reception in the Middle Ages” by Jacqueline M. Burek and Rebecca Menmuir (pp. 1–4), “The Tangled Reception of Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus Malalianus*” by Mary Hitchman (pp. 5–28), “John Scottus Eriugena and the Entangled Materiality of *Vox*” by Paul Vinhage (pp. 29–53), “From Sorcerer’s Son to Epic Hero: (Meta)Poetic Entanglement in Walter of Châtillon’s *Alexandreis*” by Ivo Wolsing (pp. 54–78), “Virgil in Scholastic Hands: Transnational and Local, Textual and Material” by Philippa Byrne (pp. 79–100) and “Entanglements” by Alfred Hiatt (pp. 133–41).

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Renegotiating Antiquity with/in Herbert's *Roman de Dolopathos**

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ABSTRACT

At first sight, Herbert's thirteenth-century *Dolopathos* straightforwardly constitutes *matière de Rome* with its setting in Augustan Sicily, placement alongside the *romans antiques* of Paris, BnF fr. 1450 and frame tales featuring Homeric, Ovidian and Petronian motifs. However, this paper contends that 'the problem of Paganism' complicates notions of passive and linear acts of classical reception in the romance, particularly through the protagonist Lucimien's mentor, Virgil. Following the twelfth-century Latin *Dolopathos* of Jean de Haute-Seille (Johannes de Alta Silva), Herbert uses Virgil to provide an epistemological foundation for the divine revelation which compels Lucimien to abandon Graeco-Roman paganism for Christianity. Consequently, this insertion of Virgil into the *Seven Sages of Rome* tradition unexpectedly renders ambiguous his position in the Western, clerical canon. The challenges of grappling with the *auctores* in the vernacular expose Herbert's ignorance and uncertainty at times, alongside his guises of authority and intentionality. Finally, the narrative valorisation of the medieval scholasticism that underpins the dynamic between Virgil and Lucimien arguably also creates new interpretations of masculinity via the concept of homosociality, allowing modern audiences to partake in the Old French *Dolopathos*' ongoing entanglement with classical reception.

1 Introduction

In contemporary reception studies, “the direct linear descent from antiquity to the present is recognised as a teleological idealisation, an aesthetic or political or cultural fantasy,” as highlighted by the collective volume *Postclassicisms*.¹ In seeking to contribute to the ongoing reconceptualisation of classicism’s enduring configurations, this essay will show how writers in the Middle Ages were implicated in more “entangled histories of engagement,” in contrast to the way that the reception of the classical past has consistently and traditionally been understood via genealogical terms.² Within Western medieval historiography, the notion of *translatio studii et imperii* commonly worked on the basis of a lineage between civilisations, at least nominally assuming that knowledge and power were transferred from ancient Greece and Rome to medieval Europe and Christendom. I will focus here on the understudied example of Herbert’s early thirteenth-century *Roman de Dolopathos*, a text that unsettles the linear forms of *translatio studii et imperii* upon which it is seemingly built; in doing so, I will draw upon the fields of literary theory, gender studies, and the history of the book.

Herbert’s *Dolopathos* is a verse romance originating from Lorraine in the north-east of France.³ It translates a twelfth-century Latin prose text, *Dolopathos, sive Rege et Septem Sapientibus*, by the Cistercian monk Jean de Haute-Seille (Johannes de Alta Silva), which represents one of the earliest surviving Western versions of the *Seven Sages of Rome* narrative tradition. Although this story cycle once circulated in over thirty languages across Asia, the Middle East and Europe, the *Dolopathos* branch in particular lost public and academic popularity between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries⁴ before undergoing a critical rehabilitation, along with other versions of the *Seven Sages*, in recent times.⁵ Five extant manuscripts

* My thanks go to those involved in the “Tangling with the Classics” panels at the University of Leeds’ 2023 International Medieval Congress, where I presented an earlier version of this article. I am particularly grateful to Jacqueline Burek and Rebecca Menmuir for putting together those sessions, as well as this special issue, and for their comments on my paper. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers at *JOLCEL* for their invaluable feedback. My research for this article was generously supported by the Cyril Vysove Scholarship, in association with the Queen’s College and the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, University of Oxford.

¹ Blanshard, Goldhill, Güthenke et al., *Postclassicisms*, 26.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

³ The genres of hagiography and *specula principum* are also integral to the *Dolopathos*.

⁴ See, for instance, de Bruix, Turbaine and Le Blanc de Guillet, eds., *Le Conservateur*, 178–209 and Paris, *Deux rédactions*, 1. I acknowledge that the *Dolopathos* was referenced in regional and national histories of France during the early modern period, starting with Claude Fauchet in 1581, and both Latin and Old French versions were edited for the first time in the nineteenth century. See Fauchet, *Recueil de l’origine de la langue et poésie française*, 105–7 and Foehr-Janssens and Métry, *Dolopathos*, 9–10.

⁵ Aside from the work of Mary B. Speer, Jean-Luc Leclanche, Yasmina Foehr-Janssens and Penny Simons in the 1980s and 1990s, the *Dolopathos* received little critical attention in the twentieth century. See, for instance, Speer, *Le “Roman des Sept Sages de Rome”*; Leclanche, ed., *Le Roman de Dolopathos*; Foehr-Janssens, *Le Temps des fables*; and Simons, “Reading and the Book.” Two contemporary research projects have helped to revive scholarly interest in the *Seven Sages*: “Canoniser les *Sept Sages*” run by the Université de Genève and Université Libre de Bruxelles (2021–25) and “*The Seven Sages of Rome: Editing and Reappraising a Forgotten Premodern Classic from Global and Gendered Perspectives*” (2023–26), a collaboration

contain Herbert's *Dolopathos*:⁶ MSS A (BnF fr. 1450), B (BnF fr. 24301), M (Bibliothèque Inter-Universitaire de Montpellier, Section Médecine, H 436), F (BnF naf 934) and F² (Metz, Bibliothèque Patrimoniaire Réserve Précieuse, 1629)⁷, with the latter two being fragments of one to two folios.⁸ In narratological terms, the kernels of the *Seven Sages*' plot concern a prince (Lucinius in Jean's version, Lucimien in Herbert's), who is accused of raping his stepmother in a reflection of the Potiphar's wife motif.⁹ Since he has been sworn to silence by a curse or by his mentor(s) —in this case, Virgil—seven male sages successfully intervene on his behalf to persuade the king not to execute him by recounting moralising tales. Whereas other Western iterations of the narrative tradition include the Seven Sages as instructors of the young prince, in the *Dolopathos* Virgil acts as Lucimien's only teacher. The Latin and Old French *Dolopathos* both conclude with the prince converting from Graeco-Roman paganism to Christianity when he accedes to the throne after his trial. This satellite, or supplementary event, does not occur in the narratives of any other versions of the *Seven Sages* and acts as a driving force behind the authorial instrumentalisation of the classics that this essay will analyse.

Whilst the Latin and Old French *Dolopathos* share virtually the same plot, several important differences stand out. Herbert extends Jean's original by adding two episodes to the second Sage's story of "Gaza" and introducing the misogynistic frame tale "Inclusa" during Virgil's contribution to the trial. "Gaza" focuses on a knight who pillages royal treasure with his father and resists all the king's subsequent attempts at capture. The Old French *Dolopathos* features two additional challenges faced by the knight, as well as his marriage to the king's daughter at the end of the tale, with this nuptial motif bearing some similarities to the story of King Rhampsinitus, as transmitted by Herodotus.¹⁰ These amplifications—from the thieving knight's wedding in "Gaza" to the affair between an unhappily married woman and a rich, dashing young man in "Inclusa"—also show how

between the University of St Andrews and Freie Universität Berlin. See "Canoniser les *Sept Sages*," <<https://www.unige.ch/c7s/>> and "The *Seven Sages of Rome*," <<https://seven-sages-of-rome.org/>>.

⁶ A lost, presumably complete, copy of the *Dolopathos* was cited by Claude Fauchet in the sixteenth century, which differs from other versions in its final dedication.

⁷ See Herbin, "Un fragment inédit du *Dolopathos* en vers," 258–72.

⁸ Where manuscripts other than those containing the *Dolopathos* are cited, the full shelfmark will be referenced to avoid confusion between different schemes of *sigla*. Charles Brunet and Anatole de Montaiglon established the *sigla* for MSS A and B. See Brunet and de Montaiglon, eds., *Li Romans de Dolopathos*. Jean-Luc Leclanche then added the *sigla* for MSS M and F. These editors worked on the two complete versions of the *Dolopathos* (MS B in Brunet and Montaiglon's case and MS M in Leclanche's). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of the primary text in this essay come from MS M and all translations, as well as all uses of bold type in citations, are my own.

⁹ Note that "research so far has entirely dismissed the woman's version of events as false and accepted the man's account and interpretation because the crucial heterodiegetic narrator's version broadly fits in with the man's account" even though the narrative tradition "explicitly teaches that any version and interpretation of events can only ever be limited." Bildhauer, "Every Narrator Is Biased," 138.

¹⁰ Despite this specific connection, it should be acknowledged that both versions of the *Dolopathos* draw upon elements of the story of King Rhampsinitus. See Speer, "*Translatio* as *Inventio*," 145–55. Note Hasan El-Shamy's argument that the tale either originated from Egypt or was Egyptianised prior to Herodotus. See El-Shamy, "The Story of Rhampsinitus," 163.

“Herbert entreprend [...] de donner une nouvelle dimension au discours amoureux dans son œuvre” as part of his courtly interpretation of Jean’s narrative.¹¹

The divergences between Jean’s and Herbert’s texts at the level of form further signal these differing narrative and generic priorities. In Herbert’s prologue, he consciously opens up the *Dolopathos* to audiences outside of Jean’s monastic *milieu* by transposing the latter’s Latin prose into Old French octosyllabic couplets—*Herberz la vuet en romans traire* (“Herbert wants to translate it [the Latin *Dolopathos*] into French,” v. 23) —and framing the resulting work as a specifically vernacular romance. In this way, Herbert carves out his own contributions as a translator of the written word, but also adaptor and continuator, following Jean’s declaration in the paratexts of the Latin *Dolopathos* that he will be the first to record King Dolopathos’ story before it is forgotten.¹² Whilst Jean dedicates his work to Bertram, Bishop of Metz (“Reuerendo patri ac domino Bertrando, dei ordinatione Metensi episcopo,” 1:1–2),¹³ Herbert addresses King Louis VIII (“El nom et en la reverance / Del fil Phelipe, a roi de France, / Loeÿs [...],” vv. 25–27).¹⁴ This shift from ecclesiastical to royal dedicatee indicates the gap between, on the one hand, Jean’s “clerical anticourtliness”, and, on the other, Herbert’s “revisionist courtliness” in terms of literary aims and modes.¹⁵ As Herbert seeks to establish the place of clerics within the courtly sphere more firmly than his predecessor, he makes various interventions by, for instance, embellishing Jean’s descriptions with details reminiscent of other vernacular courtly romances,¹⁶ treating certain classical sources more obliquely than Jean, and condensing the theological content of Lucimien’s proselytisation by a recent convert to Christianity to make it more accessible to a lay audience.¹⁷

In the Old French *Dolopathos*, classical allusions rarely arise as gratuitous forms of inheritance. Instead, they function as vehicles for articulating the anxieties that come about through acts of cultural, religious and literary transformation. Herbert replicates Jean’s Latin hypotext by decisively shaping his depiction of the pagan

¹¹ “Herbert attempts to add a new dimension to the amatory discourse of his work,” Foehr-Janssens and Métry, *Dolopathos*, 26–27.

¹² Jean claims in the prologue that the story of Dolopathos’ reign was *adhuc scriptoribus intacta vel forsitan incognita* (“still untried [as a subject] by writers, or perhaps unknown to them,” 3:19–20). In the epilogue, he describes writing down tales which he had not read but heard (“non ut visa sed ut audita [...] a me scripta sunt,” 107:29–31). See van Opstall, “The Wicked Stepmother,” 308. All quotations of the Latin *Dolopathos* are taken from Hilka, ed., *Dolopathos sive de rege et septem sapientibus*.

¹³ Hilka, ed., *Dolopathos sive de rege et septem sapientibus*: “To the reverend father and lord Bertrand, ordained by God as bishop of Metz.”

¹⁴ “In the name and in reverence / Of Philippe’s son, the King of France / Louis [...].”

¹⁵ Speer, “*Translatio as Inventio*,” 138, 145. See also Crosland, “*Dolopathos* and the Seven Sages of Rome,” 11–12.

¹⁶ For instance, Herbert treats Jean’s accounts of King Dolopathos’ first marriage and the parade held to celebrate Lucimien’s return to Palmero when he completes his education under Virgil in Rome in this way. Note that the *Dolopathos* is compiled with several of these romances, such as the *Roman d’Eneas* and Chrétien de Troyes’ works, in MS A.

¹⁷ For other examples, see Speer, “*Translatio as Inventio*,” 145–55, Leclanche, ed., *Le Roman de Dolopathos*, 71–76 and Foehr-Janssens, *Le Temps des fables*, 77–88. For consideration of how Herbert’s changes specifically endorse the reigns of Philippe II and Louis VII, see Leclanche, “Les figures royales dans le *Dolopathos*,” 31–41.

poet Virgil to serve his own Christian worldview and the overarching structure of Lucimien's conversion narrative. The treatment of almost every aspect of the *Dolopathos*' classical backdrop is permeated by the narrator's attentiveness to the concerns of their contemporary audience, revealing 'the problem of Paganism,' which relates to "how writers in the Long Middle Ages saw and tackled the complex of issues about pagan virtue, knowledge and salvation."¹⁸ Figures from the classical past could be both revered and vilified in the struggle to reconcile them with Christian absolutes. Despite Virgil's pre-Christian roots, he arguably maintained a hegemonic status as an artistic symbol in the European Middle Ages. Herbert's negotiation of this status therefore avoids a passive, reverential treatment of antiquity, as well as canonicity, in the way that the Mantuan is made to subordinate to, and endorse, a greater divine truth.¹⁹

The figure of Virgil also surprisingly becomes the site of authorial innovation in a narrative tradition that did not arise directly from a Graeco-Roman *milieu* and instead is thought to have circulated in Asia and the Middle East before spreading to Europe. As part of Herbert's literary reimaginings within the courtly, vernacular setting of the *Dolopathos*, Virgil provides a crucial means of drawing out the romance's latent valuation of male-male relationships through his rapport with Lucimien in the classroom and beyond. This rapport has largely been characterised in relatively superficial terms by earlier scholars, with Penny Simons describing it as "a particular love."²⁰ Jean-Luc Leclanche has, to a certain extent, considered how and why incongruities arise between the Roman Virgil and his avatar in the Old French *Dolopathos*, as well as its Latin source text. However, he has not sought to do so from the perspective of an entangled, rather than linear, model of reception theory, thus limiting his insights into how clericalism affects Herbert's general exploration of classicism, as expressed in the origins of certain inset tales and the codicological nexus of MS A.²¹ By interrogating the roles and forms of classical reception within the *Dolopathos*, this essay highlights the wider process by which the *Seven Sages* story cycle was adapted for Western audiences, as well as the transnational and cosmopolitan reach of Latin literature more generally.

In order to understand the multiple threads that constitute this work's non-linear approach to antiquity, I will firstly examine how the *Dolopathos* interacts with Graeco-Roman material and other classically-inspired, Old French romances through its setting in Augustan Sicily, its Christianising overlay and its evocation of political, educational and cultural dynamics within medieval Europe. The second part of the article considers Virgil's specific functions in Herbert's romance as a source of innovation for the *Seven Sages* story cycle and a focal point for homo-social bonding in the patriarchy of the text-world. Finally, I will turn to the *Dolopathos*' inset tales which draw more ambiguously upon Ovidian, Petronian and Homeric motifs, thereby inviting audiences to contribute their own intertexts to a collaborative and less hierarchical form of classical reception.

¹⁸ Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁰ Simons, "Reading and the Book," 50.

²¹ See Leclanche, "Le clerc et la clergie à travers les *Dolopathos*."

2 The *Dolopathos* as *matière de Rome*

Herbert's romance is a reflection of what the twelfth-century author Jean Bodel termed *matiere de Rome* ("matter of Rome"), that is to say one of the three main 'categories' of medieval French literature related to Graeco-Roman mythology and history, as opposed to the *matiere de Bretagne* ("matter of Britain") and the *matiere de France* ("matter of France"). The work of Aimé Petit and Francine Mora-Lebrun in particular has shed light on the classical culture of twelfth- and thirteenth-century vernacular authors and the ways in which they rewrote Graeco-Roman texts.²² Evidently, the notion of reception as entanglement functions not only as a productive hermeneutical tool for the *Dolopathos* but also the wider subgenre of Old French, twelfth-century *romans antiques* ("classical romances"), which predated Herbert's text and later circulated alongside it. For instance, the mid-thirteenth-century, Picardian MS A starts with two *romans antiques* (Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* and the anonymous *Roman d'Eneas*), followed by Wace's *Roman de Brut*—into which all five of Chrétien de Troyes' romances are interpolated as truthful legends about King Arthur's court²³—and, lastly, the *Dolopathos*.²⁴ In both MS A and BnF fr. 794, the so-called "Guiot" manuscript, the same twelfth-century material, including the *Troie*, the *Brut* and Chrétien's romances, is interwoven with more recently composed thirteenth-century works, such as *Athis et Prophilias*, Calendre's *Empereurs de Rome* and the *Dolopathos*, demonstrating audiences' renewed interest in how classical narratives could fulfil medieval needs by legitimising dynastic claims, literary traditions and Christian pre-eminence over Graeco-Roman paganism. Furthermore, the enclosure of *matière de Bretagne* (Wace's *Brut* and Chrétien's intercalated romances) between *matière de Rome* at the start and end of the codex echoes the very structure of the *Dolopathos*, which situates Arthurian and Tristian evocations²⁵ and inset stories with Celtic associations, notably the legend of the Swan Knight's birth in the seventh Sage's tale "Cygni,"²⁶ within an overarching narrative framework set in antiquity.

²² See, for instance, Petit, *Naissances du roman*, and Mora-Lebrun, *L' "Énéide" médiévale* and "Metre en romanz."

²³ See Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS f. fr. 1450, (saec. XIII^{2/4}, Picardy), fol. 139vc.

²⁴ Since MS M circulated on its own, its representation of classicism cannot be interpreted through the relationship between its text and any co-texts. However, the narratives of MSS A, B and M do not differ significantly from one another, making MS A a valid case study here. In MS B (BnF fr. 24301), the *Dolopathos* may only loosely be connected to one other classical co-text, Robert de Blois' Ovidian *lai Floris et Lyriope*, via thematic questions around the institution of marriage and the juxtaposition of Lucimien's missing mother alongside the strong maternal figure of Lyriope, the mother of Narcissus.

²⁵ See, for example, Foehr-Janssens, *Le Temps des fables*, 84, 86, 140, 158–61, 171, 178, 249–54.

²⁶ The Latin *Dolopathos* was the earliest text to combine the Germanic legend of swan-children with that of the Swan Knight, and Godfrey of Bouillon, one of the leaders of the First Crusade, who came from the region of Lorraine where Jean and Herbert's works were composed. See Leclanche, ed., *Le Roman de Dolopathos*, 67, 73. On Celtic associations more generally, see Crosland, "Dolopathos and the Seven Sages of Rome," 9. Note that in MS A the last few quires have been lost in MS A, resulting in a version which ends during the Seventh Sage's tale "Cygni," specifically at the mother-in-law's betrayal of the swan maiden ("Al lit a la fee l'enmaine" / "The fairy leads him to bed"), v. 9495 out of a total of 12,926 lines in Leclanche's

Across the major *romans antiques* (the *Romans de Thebes*, *d'Eneas*, *de Troie* and *d'Alexandre*), the representation of classical history and mythology serves as a site for cultural inquiry and ideological wrangling in relation to shifting linguistic dynamics, as well as societal, religious and literary values. Furthermore, these *romans antiques* cast their Graeco-Roman hypotexts into new generic moulds, blending features of Old French epic, historiography, and hagiography whilst also "creating a distinctive narrative temporality that should be understood as one of the hallmarks of medieval romance" by "modifying the past for the benefit of the future."²⁷ These romances share a similar Western European medieval narrative overlay with Herbert's *Dolopathos*, since their authors refract their pagan, Graeco-Roman characters (and indeed supposed ancestors) through the prisms of Christianity and courtliness. For Petit, the anachronism inherent in such an overlay acts as a means of tangling with the classics and "loin d'être une faute involontaire ou de se borner à constituer un moyen de traduction, [...] est utilisé à dessein."²⁸

In contrast to Lucimien's literal conversion to Christianity, the *romans antiques* are more implicitly anchored by syncretic moments, for instance through the *ekphrasis* of Amphiaras' (Amphiaras') chariot and its scenes of both the Gigantomachy and personifications of the seven liberal arts in the *Thebes*. In the *Roman d'Alexandre*, the narrator's meta-commentary on the titular protagonist's epitaph ("Se il fust crestiens, ainc tels rois ne fu nes, / Si cortois ne si larges, si sages, si menbrés")²⁹ attempts to negotiate the 'problem of Paganism', as Herbert would in the *Dolopathos* by stressing Alexander's lack of Christian faith, as well as Virgil's tainted virtue and knowledge as Lucimien's tutor. Likewise, courtliness, as underpinned by the increasing codification of politeness, eloquence, and love from the second half of the twelfth century onwards, also facilitates the entangled classical reception of the *romans antiques*. For example, Lavine (Lavinia)'s love tokens of the wimple and sleeve for the titular hero of the *Eneas* evoke chivalric codes of conduct, whilst Achille's (Achilles') pining for Polyxena in the *Troie* is qualified as *fine amor* ("true love")³⁰ and Herbert's depiction of the stepmother's unrequited feelings for Lucimien mobilises the classical, particularly Ovidian, motif of *aegritudo amoris* in a courtly setting. As earlier products of an entangled reception history, the *romans antiques* are thus forerunners of, and interlocutors for, the *Dolopathos*' key generic and linguistic concerns.

Far from appearing cursorily in the *Dolopathos*' narrative, points of classical reference, especially as they relate to the work's setting, undergo conscious ideological reshaping. Elsewhere, however, we find a more indistinct approach: in the

edition. Elsewhere, the story of the Swan Knight features in *matière de Bretagne* in the First and Fourth Continuations to Chretien's *Perceval*, as well as Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parvizal*, and *matière de France* in the Old French Crusade Cycle. See Deschelle, "Relations en marge et générations obscures: de quelques unions entre deux mondes."

²⁷ Burnett McInerney, *Translation and Temporality*, 9.

²⁸ "Far from being an unintended mistake or merely representing a means of translation, [...] is used intentionally." Petit, "De l'épopée antique au roman medieval," 49. Although this quotation refers to the *Thebes*, it is equally applicable to other *romans antiques*, as well as the *Dolopathos*.

²⁹ "If [only] he had been Christian, no such king would ever have been born, / [Who was] so courtly, generous, wise and celebrated," Armstrong et al., ed., "*Le Roman d'Alexandre*," IV.1556–57.

³⁰ Constans, ed., *Le roman de Troie*, III.17547.

inset tales, Herbert appears to appropriate literary allusions to the *auctores* but does not acknowledge them explicitly enough for his intentions to be entirely clear. This duality between a remodelling of the classics that is at once assertive and ambiguous accentuates the fragility of Herbert's positioning not only as an author but also a translator, who must balance an undeniable reliance on Jean's Latin, clerical source material with demarcations of literary and linguistic originality in his own courtly, vernacular romance.

Elements of *matière de Rome* emerge from the very beginning of the *Dolopathos* due to the work's placement in Sicily *au tans c'Augustus tenoit Rome* ("at the time when Augustus held Rome," v. 135). Given the variability of the settings in which different versions of the transhistorical and multilingual *Seven Sages* take place, it is worth examining the potential rationale behind this particular authorial choice—made by Jean and followed by Herbert—as well as its effects on the active, rather than passive, utilisation of classical reception in the rest of the narrative. Like many medieval texts, the Latin and Old French *Dolopathos* both take place in the distant past, presenting a conversion narrative from the early days of the Christian faith for their audiences over a thousand years later. However, the utilisation of this common framework strikingly and specifically speaks to the literary ambitions and proselyting gaze of the Cistercian monk Jean who dedicated his text to Bertrand, Bishop of Metz, and sought a validation of his own, contemporary clerical interests through the philosophers of antiquity. Herbert prefigures this valorisation of the classical, intellectual *milieu* in his prologue—"[...] au tens an-cēynor / estoient clerc de grant valor" ("in ancient times / there were clerks of great worth")—implicitly providing a rationale for the historical remoteness his audience is about to encounter. Even as I gesture towards the ideological charge behind the *Dolopathos*' Roman setting, I do not seek to deny Jean and Herbert's valuation of rhetorical verisimilitude in their creation of believable and historicised surroundings, for instance through King Dolopathos' trial in the Senate when he is wrongly charged with treachery. A Christianising overlay contextualises the plot of the *Dolopathos*, making sense of historical, cultural and epistemological differences between past and present. This teleology persists to the very end of the romance, when Lucimien's singular act of conversion as king in turn prefigures the changes in religious belief undergone by later emperors, such as Constantine in 312. Even within Herbert's opening analogy between Alexander the Great and Louis VIII, to whom the *Dolopathos* is dedicated, the pagan's praiseworthiness ultimately defers to his Christian counterpart's existential superiority.

C'Alixandres estoit paiens,
 Mais Loeÿs iert crestiens,
 Et s'ait millor commencemant
 (vv. 42–44)³¹

³¹ "Because Alexander was pagan / But Louis was Christian / And has better origins."

Although the subjunctive mood of *s'ait* nuances and lessens the strength of Herbert's affirmation to a certain extent here, its paralleling of Chrétien de Troyes' dedication of *Perceval* to "[...] [L]i quens Phelipes de Flandres, / Qui valt mix ne fist Alixandres" ("Philip, Count of Flanders/Who is even more excellent than Alexander," vv. 12–13) arguably lends it more authority, as noted by Catalina Girbea.³² Herbert's paratextual statement is also reasserted with more conviction during the narrative itself, as seen in the exposition of pagan sacrifices undertaken within Dolopathos' kingdom:

Alz deus fasoit grant saicrefices,
 Temples, mostiers et edifices;
 Les prevoires portoit honor.
De Jesucrist Nostre Signor
Ne savoit il ancor niant
 (vv. 295–99)³³

The immediate jump from the description at vv. 295–97 to the explanatory aside at vv. 298–99 seems to excuse Roman pagans like Dolopathos for their pious and dutiful yet ultimately ignorant practices, whilst also aligning the narrator with the supposedly superior outlook of their medieval, Christian audience. Although Herbert does not share his predecessor's overtly clerical focus,³⁴ the need to avow the predominance of the Christian faith via a gloss on the incomprehension and weakness of the Other certainly hints at the wider religious tensions stoked by the court of Louis VIII. In 1223, as part of a wider "radicalization of Christendom through the crusading efforts directed against the Albigensians [1209–19],"³⁵ Louis' *stabilimentum*, or ordinance, sought to end the practice of Jewish usury across all French territories, beyond Normandy and the royal domain. In this sense, it is Herbert who entangles the practices of Graeco-Roman paganism within his own Christianising missions.

Even as the *Dolopathos* attempts to distance the Middle Ages in temporal and ideological terms from ancient Rome, it simultaneously establishes associations with the cultural capital of the classical past via its setting in Augustan Sicily. As Phillipa Byrne discusses, when the island came under Norman rule in the twelfth century, writers linked to this invading dynasty, as well as the Staufens and Welf emperors after them, sought, in the absence of personal ties to southern Italy, to gain political authority by claiming Virgil as their own predecessor through his

³² Girbea, "Virgile et la conversion dans les romans de *Dolopathos*," 222. Note that Chrétien does not specifically mention religious affiliation as a reason for Philip's superiority, though he arguably implies it by claiming at vv.19–20 that Alexander has "Toz les visces et toz les maus / Dont li quens est mondes et saus" ("All the vices and evils / Of which the count is pure and clear"), Busby, ed., *Perceval*, 3.

³³ "To the gods, he made great sacrifices, / Constructed temples, shrines and buildings; / He honoured the priests. / He did not yet know anything / About Jesus Christ Our Lord."

³⁴ It has been speculated that Herbert was a secular cleric, a courtier or tutor to the young Louis VIII. See Herbert, *Le Roman de Dolopathos*, 69.

³⁵ Mell, *The Myth of the Medieval Jewish Moneylender*, 68.

associations with the region.³⁶ Arguably, the narrator of the *Dolopathos* consciously brings about this reading of the romance’s Sicilian setting as a sign of historical continuity from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Just after we are told that King Dolopathos is of Trojan heritage—“De Troies fut ces parenteiz” (“His parents were from Troy,” v. 145)—we learn at v. 154 and v. 157 that “son roïame [...] fut la terre de Cesille” (“His kingdom was the land of Sicily”). Dolopathos’ parentage evokes the medieval motif of *translatio studii et imperii*, instantiating the image of a Greek and Roman king alongside that of a Norman one.³⁷

Late twelfth-century Sicily was also viewed and appropriated as a space of religious harmony under the Normans, given its mix of Latin Christian, Greek Orthodox, Muslim and Jewish communities. From this perspective, Palermo provides a fitting backdrop for the end of the romance, in which a Roman Jew who has recently converted to Christianity enters into a dialogue with Lucimien and persuades him to follow the same path. The figure of the proselytiser who makes an impression upon the people of Palermo before meeting Lucimien serves to dramatise the spread of early Christianity in renewed terms for a medieval audience equally attuned to the political importance of spreading God’s word under Louis VIII. Whilst Sicily never appears as a utopia of religious diversity in the *Dolopathos*, it is just enough of a cultural melting-pot that Lucimien’s conversion can take place via reason, rather than force. Herbert’s Roman Palermo avoids being the passive recipient of a classical legacy by instead acting as a place of religious pluralism, which ultimately brings about the protagonist’s divine revelation and potentially reveals an authorial desire to reassert Christianity’s message abroad.

The proselytising focus of the narrative wavers in one key aspect: the treatment of Virgil as Lucimien’s tutor. Whilst Virgil, who dies before his pupil’s conversion, does not interact as explicitly with the Christian faith in the *Dolopathos* as he does in works such as Dante’s *Comedia*, he still illustrates how medieval authors made sense of intellectual figures from the classical pagan past through his seemingly unlimited knowledge. In accordance with Herbert’s ideological wranglings, Virgil’s pagan knowledge remains highly valued, though it is fundamentally tainted because of his polytheistic beliefs:

Nulz clers de lui plus ne savoit,
 por ceu si grant renom avoit;
 onques poetes ne fut teiz,
c’il creïst qu’i ne fust c’uns Deiz!³⁸
 (vv. 1279–82)

³⁶ Byrne, “Virgil in Scholastic Hands,” 85–86.

³⁷ It should be noted that the *Dolopathos*’ depiction of Roman kings in the time of Augustus is clearly anachronistic, given that the Roman monarchy came to an end much earlier (c. 509 BCE). Although Sicily changed hands from the Normans to the Germans at the end of the twelfth century, the model of *translatio* still holds with a different Western European dynasty in charge of the island during the period of the early thirteenth century in which the Old French *Dolopathos* was composed.

³⁸ “No cleric knew more than him, / On account of this, he had such great renown / The likes of such a poet would never have been seen before / If (only) he had believed that there was just one God.”

The superlative expressions in v. 1279 and v. 1281 build to the crescendo of v. 1282. The use of the imperfect subjunctive *creïst* raises the 'problem of Paganism' once more by emphasising a Christian monotheism that the narrator sorrowfully perceives as unrealisable for the apparently virtuous Mantuan in the Augustan context of the *Dolopathos*.

However, Virgil's wisdom turns to providentialism at the end of the narrative when a recently converted Roman Jew cites the Fourth Eclogue ("iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto"³⁹) as a sign of Christianity's ascendancy. This reference reflects the entangled reception of Virgil's pastoral poem, which was historically appropriated as the work of a *vates* ("prophet-poet") through "the Christianizing tendency in ancient and medieval Virgilian exegesis from Lactantius onwards."⁴⁰

'Et Virgile, ki vos aprist,
or penceiz a ceu k'il an dist!
Assez an parlait propemant
et bien et beil et saigemant;
il dist ke nouvelle ligniee
estoit jai de ciel anvoicie.
Tot ceu dist il **por veriteit**
de Deu ki prist humaniteit'⁴¹
(vv. 12553–60)

Although the convert is silent about the contentious question of whether Virgil knowingly predicted the coming of Christ or not, the emphasis on the truth (*por veriteit*) of Virgil's words affords him an indirect, prescient role in Lucimien's crucial change of religious affiliation.⁴² This acts as a final attempt at a seemingly impossible redemption of and justification for Virgil's predominance within the narrative. Furthermore, as we shall see, Herbert's probing of the limits of Virgil's knowledge forms part of a wider questioning of epistemological dissemination in the work, especially as brought about by the device of the frame tale. The moralising interpretations that the Sages add at the end of their stories to reinforce their defence of Lucimien often inadvertently and ironically expose incongruities between the content of these inset tales and the wise teachings that they supposedly demonstrate.

It is also through Virgil and his tutelage of Lucimien that the medieval present further intervenes in the *Dolopathos*. Nominally, these scenes of pedagogy take place in Augustan Rome, though they convincingly map onto the medieval

³⁹ "Now a new generation descends from the lofty heavens," Virgil *Eclogues* 4.7. As quoted in the Latin in Jean's *Dolopathos* (Hilka, ed., *Dolopathos sive de rege et septem sapientibus*, 104: 29–30).

⁴⁰ Houghton, *Virgil's Fourth Eclogue*, 176.

⁴¹ "And as for Virgil, who taught you / Well, think about what he has said about it [the coming of Christ]! / He said that a new lineage / Had already been sent down from the sky. / All that he said holds true / About God taking human form."

⁴² See Houghton, *Virgil's Fourth Eclogue*, 180–91 for a discussion of the opposing views on this topic espoused by the likes of the Emperor Constantine and St Jerome.

parameters of the teacher-pupil dynamic through the doctrine of ‘coinherence’ or ‘being-within-one-another,’ according to which all Christians are implicated in the mystical body of Christ and one another. The closeness between Lucimien and Virgil comes to blur the limits between them, with the master instructing his pupil “Gardeiz bien ke ne soit perie / l’amor de nos” (“Make sure that / the love between us does not perish,” vv. 2167–68) upon his return to Sicily. As Barbara Newman outlines, the Biblical passages of 1 Cor. 12:12–27, Rom. 12:5 and Eph. 4:25 contributed to this sense of interdependency amongst Christians, alongside theological teachings such as Augustine of Hippo’s *De catechizandis rudibus*: “through love and [...] compassion (*animi compatiens affectus*), the teacher can establish coinherence with the student such that ‘each of us comes to dwell in the other’ (*habitemus in invicem*)”⁴³ Lucimien’s pagan curriculum is differentiated by *les .VII. ars liberaul* [sic] (“the seven liberal arts,” v. 1416) and *orisons* (“prayers”) at v. 1362, as well as the historical realism of the *mostre* or “letter-board” (v. 1357) used in Virgil’s classroom, clearly recalling and foregrounding elements of twelfth- and thirteenth-century scholasticism within this ancient Roman setting.

Additionally, Lucimien’s curriculum reveals the monastic and courtly perspectives that shape Jean and Herbert’s respective priorities for their representations of classical learning. In the Latin *Dolopathos*, Virgil’s teaching does not put much emphasis on the conversational skills valued in courtly education, especially as knowledge of “wie man zu Frauen spricht, war kein Thema der Kloster-erziehung.”⁴⁴ This permeation of monastic pedagogical practice allows Jean to project a nostalgic ideal from the Middle Ages onto his story’s distant classical setting because, as Lundt observes, “Angesichts der Herausforderung städtischer Lebenskultur verlor die klösterliche Lebensgemeinschaft zwischen Lehrer und Schüler an Intensität.”⁴⁵ Jean’s complaints in his prologue about the corrupting ways *modernorum* (“of the new [philosophers],” 2:23)⁴⁶ reflect the consequences of the ongoing rise of urbanised education during the late twelfth century. These consequences included the preference of illustrious scholars for mendicant orders over the Cistercians, and the increasing popularity of *nationes* (student or teacher guilds) at universities as masculine learning communities over the ostensibly more hierarchical monastic alternative.⁴⁷

⁴³ Newman, *The Permeable Self: Five Medieval Relationships*, 18.

⁴⁴ “How to speak to women was not a subject [addressed] in monastic education,” Bumke, “Höfischer Körper,” 74.

⁴⁵ “In light of the challenge posed by urban culture, the monastic teacher-student community lost its intensity.” Lundt, *Weiser und Weib*, 93.

⁴⁶ In particular, Jean blames his contemporaries—who “studium ad mendata conuerterunt” (“have turned their attention to lies”) and “ut porci [...] sordibus delectantur” (“delight in filth like pigs”)—for their degradation of traditional monastic culture (as emblematised by his dedicatee Bertrand, Bishop of Metz) and its emphasis on pastoral care, respectability and the propagation of enduring truths. Hilka, ed., *Dolopathos sive de rege et septem sapientibus*, 2:25, 37–38.

⁴⁷ See Lundt, *Weiser und Weib*, 93–94. Note, however, that Jean’s diatribe, which also serves to highlight his own integrity as a writer, obscures the collaboration and “gradual rapprochement between the theological cultures of Cistercian monks and secular [i.e. non-monastic] masters” at this time (Sternberg, *Cistercian architecture*, 241).

By contrast, in the prologue to his early thirteenth-century *Dolopathos*, Herbert expresses less concern at the moral implications of these pedagogical changes, potentially reflecting his own status as a secular cleric or the tutor of Louis VIII.⁴⁸ He inflects Lucimien’s schooling with more courtly than monastic overtones compared to Jean by highlighting how rhetoric taught the prince *beil parleir et cortoizemant* (“to speak well and in a courtly manner,” v. 1452) and granted him social esteem through the tricolon “par cel art fut il coloreiz / Et chiers tenus et honoreiz” (“By this art, he was an accomplished speaker / And [was] held dear and honoured,” vv. 1449–50). In comparison, the Latin *Dolopathos* more briefly, and arguably somewhat disparagingly, describes how Lucimien “ad florigeros rethorice campos transiuit, ex qua uenustatem eloquii integre comparauit” (15:12–13).⁴⁹ Although conversing with women is not mentioned in the Old French *Dolopathos* in a reflection of Jean’s monastic and particularly antifeminist influence, Herbert nevertheless presents oral communication as an important aspect of princely instruction, which calls into question the seemingly straightforward narrative valorisation of Lucimien’s vow of silence as a means of resisting courtly culture when he returns to Sicily. In this way, antiquity is entangled with differing degrees of medieval monasticism and courtliness across the Latin and Old French *Dolopathos*: Virgil’s capacious classroom enables Jean to implicitly bolster what he sees as a threatened Cistercian elite and allows Herbert to singularise his own version by drawing upon and idealising elements of royal education in which he may himself have been involved. As this section has illustrated, the *Dolopathos* does not approach the classics unidirectionally from transmitted text and author to later receiver. Instead, Herbert’s romance utilises an entangled mode which moulds Graeco-Roman imagery, whether explicitly or implicitly, to prefigure, stress and exalt the medieval, Christian ideals forged within its northern French background.

3 Reinventing the *Seven Sages* via Virgil

Herbert’s dynamic engagement with the ‘problem of Paganism,’ and classical reception more generally, does not, however, manifest itself solely in terms of moralising or politicising forces. Of equal importance is literary creativity, since Herbert, and Jean before him, employ Virgil as a means of innovation within the pre-established *Seven Sages* tradition. Virgil’s singularity derives primarily from his replacement of the Seven Sages as Lucimien’s sole educator, in contrast to most Western versions of the story cycle, and his clerical fashioning as a medieval, virtually Western Christian equivalent of the figure of Sindban/Syntipas/Sindbad/Sendeban/Çendubete, the prince’s tutor in Eastern adaptations composed in, for instance, Syriac, Greek, Persian, Arabic, Hebrew and Old Castilian and Persian. Additionally, Virgil’s status as Lucimien’s sole tutor enables Herbert to highlight

⁴⁸ Herbert complains at v. 5 that “chascuns jour li ciecles ampire” (“the world worsens with every [passing] day”) but does not specifically blame this on his contemporaries.

⁴⁹ “He passed through rhetoric’s flowery fields where he gained full mastery of the charm of eloquence,” Hilka, ed., *Dolopathos sive de rege et septem sapientibus*, 15:12–13.

the importance of their particular male-male bond within the courtly *milieu* of his *Dolopathos*.

Scholars have debated whether the inclusion of a personal tutor alongside the Seven Sages renders the narrative more or less powerful. Whilst Simons recognises that the Sages “are more remote characters than the counterparts in *Le Roman des Sept Sages*, with less possibility for the development of idiosyncratic features,”⁵⁰ she also argues that their presence supplements and reinforces Virgil’s role, since “the Seven Sages, plus Virgil, present a united front of wise (and therefore morally virtuous) men allied against an evil woman.”⁵¹ By contrast, Leclanche finds the Sages’ anonymity deprives them of any authority independent of Virgil: “il [Jean de Haute-Seille] innove [...] en introduisant un Virgile omnipotent et omniscient. Il ‘déclasse’ les sages, qui deviennent, sans que cela [ne] soit jamais explicité, des auxiliaires de Virgile [...] Bien que ce Virgile soit [...] celui de la légende, il sert à conférer au roman, par son seul nom prestigieux, une part de ‘vérité’ historique.”⁵² In either case, the figure of Virgil does not represent a static, enduring and fixed view of the classical past, but rather facilitates the Western adaptation of this Eastern story cycle and ascertains its place in the clerical and Christian canon.

Whilst Jean is undoubtedly responsible for the introduction of Virgil to the *Dolopathos* branch, Herbert’s contribution also merits acknowledgement. In comparison with its Latin predecessor, the Old French *Dolopathos* strengthens Virgil’s voice through the innovative insertion of an additional inset story (“Inclusa”) just before “Puteus,” both of which are told by Virgil at the end of Lucimien’s trial.⁵³ “Inclusa” centers on a beautiful woman trapped in a tower by her husband and then freed by her lover, whilst “Puteus”—which also appears in the Latin *Dolopathos*—focuses on the subsequent fate of the same lover. Ignoring Virgil’s advice, the lover takes the beautiful woman as his wife, with predictably dire consequences. Through his ventriloquising of Virgil, Herbert brings about the kind of *fabliau*-esque reversal of fortunes seen elsewhere in the embedded narratives of the *Seven Sages* tradition, since the lover in “Puteus” foolishly tries to keep his new wife (from “Inclusa”) trapped in a tower once again. This view of “Inclusa” as a

⁵⁰ Simons, “Reading and the Book,” 53. *Le Roman des Sept Sages* refers here to other prose and verse adaptations of the *Seven Sages* in Old and Middle French which do not share the *Dolopathos*’ narrative specificities.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵² “He [Jean de Haute-Seille] innovates by introducing an omnipotent and omniscient Virgil. He ‘downgrades’ the Sages, who become, with no explanation, assistants to Virgil [...] Although this is the Virgil of [popular] legend, he serves to give the romance a degree of historical ‘truth’ through the prestige of his name alone.” Leclanche, ed., *Le Roman de Dolopathos*, 69.

⁵³ Note Denis Hüe’s argument that the number of inset tales in the Old French (but not Latin) *Dolopathos* corresponds to the narrative’s broader shift from Graeco-Roman to Christian forms of faith and law, thanks to Virgil’s two frame stories. The Sages’ interventions add up to ten, a number which “correspond à celui des lois que les Sages de Grèce ont donné à la ville de Rome, et qui permettent de la diriger, si l’on suit le récit bien connu donné dès Accurse et repris dans la *Placidès et Timéo* comme dans le *Libro de Buen Amor*” (“matches that of the laws which the Sages of Greece gave to the city of Rome, and which allow[ed] them to control it, according to the well-known narrative, first told by Accursius and [later] taken up in *Placidès et Timéo*, as well as the *Libro de Buen Amor*.”) Virgil’s two inset tales bring the total number to twelve, a possible reference to the Apostles’ Creed. Hüe, “Virgile et la clergie dans le *Dolopathos*,” 242–43.

feature of Herbert's dynamic engagement with the classics has rarely been attended to by critics, who have tended to discuss whether it reinforces or reduces the vitriol shown towards women in Jean's text. Yasmina Foehr-Jansens and Emmanuelle Métry argue that Herbert's incorporation of "Inclusa" serves "pour [...] atténuer la misogynie" ("to lessen the misogyny") of "Puteus."⁵⁴ Although I acknowledge that "Inclusa" initially builds up a more sympathetic picture of the beautiful, trapped woman, I disagree with Foehr-Janssens and Métry's assessment, given that "Inclusa" in effect shares the same moral as "Puteus." As Leclanche suggests, Herbert's inset tale instead "étoffe [...] le motif du philosophe pris au piège de la ruse et du charme féminins" ("develops the motif of the philosopher duped by female trickery and charms") found in "Puteus."⁵⁵ The Sage recounting Jean's "Puteus" specifically states that, when a philosopher asked him whether or not he should get married, he repeated words of advice from the *Aureolus liber de nuptiis* attributed to Theophrastus, an antifeminist tract which appears in St Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* and which was mistakenly ascribed to the Greek philosopher who was Aristotle's successor at the Lycaean.⁵⁶ This reference does not feature in the Old French *Dolopathos*, most likely because of its perceived obscurity, particularly for a vernacular, courtly audience.⁵⁷ In part by *not* citing forgotten (and spurious) classical authorities, Herbert therefore makes his Virgil slightly less learned than Jean's version, but arguably more coherent in his dismantling of the stepmother's credibility as a woman during the trial.

The treatment of Virgil in the *Dolopathos* also makes the romance stand out within the literary history of medieval Europe. Domenico Comparetti's 1872 survey of the poet's medieval legacy features Jean and Herbert, exemplifying a wider disdain for this branch of the *Seven Sages* during much of its postmedieval afterlife. At the same time, this nineteenth-century study indicates how the *Dolopathos'* approach to classical reception in turn became an essential component of the work's own critical reception. According to Comparetti, the Virgil of the *Dolopathos* materialises "during that last stage of the literary tradition where the ideas derived from it are on the point of becoming merged in those that have had their origin in the popular imagination."⁵⁸ Virgil's status as a *vates* does not only derive implicitly from the citation of his Fourth Eclogue, but also from his astronomical expertise when he, like his pupil, reads in the stars that Lucimien's mother has died: *par estornomie le sai* ("Through astronomy, I know it," vv. 2088–89).⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Foehr-Janssens and Métry, *Dolopathos*, 199.

⁵⁵ Leclanche, "Le clerc," paragraph 16.

⁵⁶ The Sage says that he brought up "[...] que in libro aureolo ponit Theophrastus mulieris impedimenta" ("[...] objections against women which Theophrastus mentioned in his *Golden Book*.")

⁵⁷ Relatedly, although Jean claims in his epilogue that Augustine of Hippo and Isidore of Seville can guarantee the veracity of miracles from pre-Christian times, the Old French *Dolopathos* only cites Augustine. If Herbert was himself familiar with Isidore, he may have felt that mentioning one Church Father would suffice, especially given Isidore's extensive quoting of Augustine, or he may have assumed that his courtly audience would not be well-acquainted with Isidore's *Etymologiae*, a reference work which was largely consulted by medieval educators and scholars as a source of classical and patristic knowledge.

⁵⁸ Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, 238.

⁵⁹ Note, however, that the Latin and Old French *Dolopathos* avoid portraying Virgil as a magician, unlike other versions of the *Seven Sages* which do so in the inset tale "Virgilius."

Elsewhere, quotations from Virgil's *oeuvre* beyond the Fourth Eclogue, which are found more in the Latin than the Old French *Dolopathos*, "serv[e] as the vehicle of expression for his vast and varied learning."⁶⁰ This blend of the popular and literary is viewed by Comparetti as constituting an inferior counterpoint to Dante.⁶¹ I would argue, however, that it reveals Virgil's role in the *Dolopathos* to be the product of entangled authorities, pointing to a sense of ownership over the representation of Virgil and creating a competition between medieval authors, such as Dante and Herbert, who both sought to reimagine the Latin poet in their works. In this sense, Comparetti's study shows that scholarly perceptions about the place of classical reception in the *Dolopathos* have long influenced ideas about its canonicity, both in relation to Graeco-Roman and (other) medieval texts.

In addition to the *Seven Sages* story cycle and wider trends in the medieval reception of antiquity, Virgil's role in facilitating literary creativity also importantly manifests itself as a part of the androcentrism of the *Dolopathos*. As Lucimien's only tutor, Virgil is used to expose the latent homosociality between student and teacher. This one-to-one ratio enables a more intricate exploration of the forms, purposes and potentialities of sapiential masculinities in the narrative than would be facilitated by the Seven Sages alone, not only with regards to individual relationships but also the family unit. Such an exploration arises, to a certain extent, through the courtly elements that Herbert adds to his Latin hypotext, thus raising tensions around both gender and genre.

In examining Virgil's implications for the presentation of male-male bonds in the *Dolopathos*, I will take as my starting point Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal work *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* from 1985. Although homosociality originated as a sociological term for non-sexual bonds between those of the same sex, Sedgwick identified "the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual," which she named "as male homosocial desire" and which she viewed as a tool for social and political control, often regulated, or disrupted, by homophobia.⁶² Despite Sedgwick's focus on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English literature, the concept of homosociality has been increasingly shown to bear "clear relevance for the study of male-male relations in medieval [...] literature" as an analytical tool, rather than a theoretical imposition.⁶³ Whilst prior scholarship on the *Seven Sages*' much-discussed

⁶⁰ Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, 234. Examples include the recent Christian convert's comments to Lucimien (Lucinius) in the Latin *Dolopathos* (104: 28–29) regarding the *oeuvre* of *Virgilius [...] uester* ("your [...] Virgil"), which indicate that *nobiscum facit et sentit de Christo* ("along with us, he composed [poetry] about Christ, and was aware of Him"). Following the quotation of *Eclogues* 4.7–8, *Aeneid* 1.664 (Venus addressing Cupid) and 2.650 (Anchises refusing to leave Troy) are then cited as further Virgilian predictions of Christianity (104: 33–36): "Verba queque patris ad filium: 'Nate, mee uires, mea magna potentia salus [sic]. Et de saluatore in cruce pendente: 'Talia perstabat memorans fixusque manebat.'" ("[Think] too [about] the words of a father to his son: 'O my son, my power, force, and safety.' And regarding our Saviour hanging on the cross, Virgil wrote 'Recalling such things, he endured and remained transfixed.'")

⁶¹ As also noted by Leclanche, "Le clerc," n. 16.

⁶² Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1.

⁶³ Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders*, 30.

gender dynamics has identified homosocial, feudal bonds in other Latin and Old/Middle French versions, Sedgwick's concept has not previously been applied to research on the *Dolopathos* branch.⁶⁴

Homosociality is foregrounded as a relational structure when Lucimien and Virgil part ways as the prince returns to Sicily after his education in Rome, with the narrator comparing them to the inseparable friends Ami and Amile from epic and romance:⁶⁵

Si tres doucemant s'acoloient
 et si tenremant se baisoient
 grant poinne se depertirent [sic];
 [...]
 c'ains tant n'aimait Amis Amille
 con Lucimien fait Virgile
 et Virgile Lucimiein
 plus de nul home terrien
 (vv. 2485–87, 2489–92)⁶⁶

This allusion, which is absent from Jean's text, highlights Virgil and Lucimien's physical and affective connection through the adverbs *douceman* and *tenremant*, alongside the reciprocal actions *s'acoloient* and *se baisoient*, implying the strength of their male-male bond, as reflected in the *Chanson de Roland* and *Athis et Procelias*. Furthermore, the farewell scene utilises the language of amatory troubadour lyric; it takes place during *el moiz de mai* ("the month of May") when "[...] la rosee / monte sor l'erbe qui verdoie" ("[...] the rose / climbs over the greening grass", vv. 1863–65), intimating "the topos of the 'springtime opening'" from the early troubadours "in which the happiness or sadness of the poet responds with particular congruence or opposition to the season."⁶⁷ The doublet "Amis Amille" underlines the mutual dependency of these two friends, whilst the repeated alternation between Lucimien and Virgil at vv. 2490–91 emphasises their dualised nature which supersedes *nul home terrien*.⁶⁸

Although such hyperbolic language could fall within the standard formulae of farewells, it reinforces a much longer development of intimacy through intellectual exchange and emotional support during the Sicilian prince's education.⁶⁹ For instance, Lucimien thwarts the attempt of jealous clerics to poison him, which

⁶⁴ Palombi, "Gender, perception and knowledge," 34, 54, 56, 75, 98.

⁶⁵ The legend of Ami and Amile is told in Old French epic, Middle English romance and Anglo-Norman narrative poetry.

⁶⁶ "So very sweetly did they embrace / And so tenderly did they kiss / They took leave of one another with great pain; / [. . .] Ami did not love Amile so much / As Lucimien loved Virgil / And Virgil Lucimien / More than any man on Earth."

⁶⁷ Shepard, White and Tomaryn Bruckner, *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, 19. See also Foehr-Janssens, *Le Temps des fables*, 149.

⁶⁸ It should be noted, however, that "ami" may, in a general sense, relate more to romantic love than friendship outside of the context of *Ami et Amile*.

⁶⁹ For example, Virgil gifts his exceptional pupil a small volume for his exclusive use; this volume enables the seven liberal arts to be learned within a mere three years, and Virgil eventually dies with it in his hands.

almost ends in Virgil drinking from the tampered cup, and the Mantuan Virgil comforts his grieving pupil after his mother's death. Herbert decides to introduce this medieval parallel to the *Dolopathos* tradition because of the purportedly less ambiguous friendship between Ami and Amile, rather than drawing upon the homoerotic literature of antiquity, as seen in the twelfth-century, Latin *oeuvre* of Hilarius. Hilarius' references to Jupiter's beloved Ganymede and the ancient Greek model of *παῖδεραστία* ("paiderastia") show that "in the midst of [Hilarius'] unsteady search for ways to compose love poems for boys [he] consistently felt the need to mention the myths and literature of a more sympathetic culture [than that of medieval Europe]."⁷⁰ In the poem "Ad Guillelmum de Anfonia" ("To William of Anfonia"), Hilarius playfully pretends to disagree with Virgil about the benefits of the allegorised Fama (Rumour), arguing that it has taught him much about the titular subject.

"Fama malum" dixit Virgilius;
 Bene, dixit nil unquam melius.
 "Fama bonum" dixit Hilarius;
 Verum, dixit nil unquam verius.
 (vv. 13–16)⁷¹

Through this twist on the description of Fama in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, Hilarius employs a classical allusion to suggest his attachment to Guillelmus. In this sense, Virgil's authoritative and acclaimed position in the medieval classroom virtually makes him a rival for the schoolboy Guillelmus' attention and, potentially, affections. By avoiding the overttness of Hilarius' template, Herbert indirectly attempts to deny one aspect of classical literary heritage which seemingly does not fit his Christianising overlay, especially given that "writings against homosexuality increase[d] from the twelfth century [onwards] [...] for example [...] [those] of Alan de Lille and Bernard of Clairvaux."⁷² Arguably, this act of omission occurs concurrently with Virgil and Lucimien's shifts closer to the homosexual on Sedgwick's continuum of homosocial desire.

However, if "male homosociality is first and foremost fashioned through the exchange of women and the consolidation of men's power in society," then Virgil and Lucimien's bond only seems to fulfil the latter criterion.⁷³ Virgil's late but crucial intervention in Lucimien's trial through his own inset tales, which accompany those of the Sages, enables the prince to begin speaking again and convinces King Dolopathos of his innocence, leading to his stepmother's execution. As a result, "the continuum between 'men-loving-men' and 'men-promoting-the-interests-of-men'" in the narrative may appear more seamless than disrupted.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Stehling, "To Love a Medieval Boy," 168.

⁷¹ "Rumor is a bad thing,' said Virgil; / He spoke well, never spoke better. / 'Rumor is a good thing,' said Hilar[ius]; / He spoke true, never spoke truer." Stehling, *Medieval Latin Poems*, 71–75.

⁷² Ailes, "The Medieval Male Couple," 229.

⁷³ Hammarén and Johansson, "Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy," 5.

⁷⁴ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 3.

Whilst Lucimien and Virgil's mutual respect and admiration in part fuels the romance's misogyny, it largely does so through the exclusion of women altogether, rather than using them as the vehicles through which these homosocial bonds operate, as Sedgwick frequently observes in triangular structures of rivalry which often mask an underlying male-male attraction.⁷⁵ In Marianne Ailes' discussion of *Ami et Amile*, she underscores the expression of the pair's homosocial bonds through the medium of women: "The men customarily greet each other with a hug and a kiss—yet the bed-sharing in this text is always between a man and a woman. There is no ambiguity about the nature of their relationship. Both men have wives and sleep with them."⁷⁶ By contrast, no such female figures appear in the *Dolopathos*: Virgil and Lucimien's homosocial bond prevents and symbolically substitutes this intervention to enable the prince's assumption of power through what Bea Lundt defines as a necessary form of asceticism.⁷⁷

I would suggest that the *Dolopathos* therefore nuances traditional images of masculinity via the characters of Virgil and Lucimien by extending what homosociality means and does, particularly within the remit of what Nils Hammarén and Thomas Johansson demarcate as the concept's vertical and horizontal manifestations. The romance privileges the expected vertical form of male homosociality which reinforces stratification, whilst also allowing for a horizontal model, based on "togetherness [...] rather than interpersonal competition and the creation of male hierarchies," through the removal of the intervening female figure.⁷⁸ Both vertical and horizontal modes of homosociality enable Virgil to inhabit multiple roles and statuses for Lucimien, including friendship, love and even fatherhood. The potentially incestuous connotations of imagining Virgil and Lucimien in simultaneously homosocial, homoerotic and familial configurations are concretely compounded in the narrative through the presentation of the stepmother's unwanted advances towards Lucimien. As Virgil becomes a surrogate father figure for his pupil, he must co-exist alongside Lucimien's biological father and the father of Sicily, King Dolopathos; the divine fathers of Jupiter and the Christian God; and even the medieval audience's view of the Mantuan as one of the fathers of classical literature.⁷⁹

Herbert initially offers an endorsement of biological ties as the ideal guiding force for the protagonist before expanding this conception of familial relations to include those who share bonds of knowledge and faith, rather than blood. The romance's aforementioned prologue asserts the greatness of Herbert's dedicatee King Louis VIII by comparing him and his father Philippe II to Alexander the Great and Philip II of Macedon. This advocacy of patrilineality from the Salic

⁷⁵ Ibid., 21–27.

⁷⁶ Ailes, "The Medieval Male Couple," 222–23.

⁷⁷ To a certain extent, King Dolopathos approves of his son exercising self-discipline, particularly in terms of sexual restraint, to prepare him for his future reign. This ideal of asceticism "verbindet die antike und die mittelalterliche Eliteausbildung" ("connects ancient and medieval elite education") across the works of Seneca, Hugh of St Victor, and Thomasin von Zirclaere, and thus helps to bridge the gap between Graeco-Roman pagan and Christian authorities in Jean and Herbert's texts. See Lundt, *Weiser und Weib*, 107.

⁷⁸ Hammarén and Johansson, "Homosociality," 4.

⁷⁹ He has even been qualified as "le véritable scénariste de l'intrigue, guidé par Dieu" ("the true author of the plot, guided by God"). Pifarré, "Le personnage de Virgile," 112.

Law resonates with the precarity of securing a male heir in the text itself, as Lucimien emerges as King Dolopathos' long-awaited offspring. Herbert then subverts the expectations set up by the paratext, since the majority of the narrative exalts the relationship between Lucimien and his beloved mentor Virgil over that of King Dolopathos and his son.⁸⁰ The prince becomes more willing to trust Virgil than his own father by following his master's orders to adopt a vow of silence, which almost results in his own death, at Dolopathos' hands no less, when Lucimien is unable to defend himself against his stepmother's accusations of rape. In the latter half of the narrative, Herbert fully elucidates the teleology behind his interest in the surrogate father figure. Lucimien's eschewal of inherited kingship for a spiritual life in Jerusalem shows how the pagan Virgil's tutelage of the prince actually marks the start of his ascension from a mortal family to a holy one, ironically anchored by a non-patrilinear manifestation of the father-son dynamic evoked in the prologue. Herbert attempts to obviate the 'problem of Paganism' to a certain extent by using the pagan father figure of Virgil to encourage Lucimien's independence from biological paternity in his search for his 'true' identity, thereby preparing the prince for his spiritual transcendence of earthly limitations as a Christian. This undermining of traditional patrilineality in the young Lucimien's life is, for Lundt, "ein für die Identitätsfindung des clericus [...] typisches Phänomen."⁸¹ Although this "Identitätsfindung" is not framed by Lundt as a form of classical reception, it nevertheless entangles both Virgil and Lucimien in the earlier medieval 'crisis of masculinity' from the late eleventh century up until the mid-twelfth century, which derived in part from the Gregorian Reform's attempts to enforce celibate priesthoods, limiting the biological paternal roles played by the clergy. The male pair of Virgil and Lucimien thus shape the familial narratives of the *Dolopathos* by both endorsing and questioning the father-son dynamic in secular and sacred manifestations.

Within medieval European literature, the *Dolopathos* further provides an example of how the romance genre and what Foehr-Janssens calls the sub-genre of the *roman de clergie* ("clerical romance") wrestle with alternative models of the family unit, creating tensions around recognising and reconciling courtly and clerical formulations of relational structures.⁸² This *roman de clergie* expounds the 'problem of Paganism' by attempting to shape Virgil into a Christian cleric, all the while acknowledging that he is bound by his Graeco-Roman pagan identity. He certainly plays a pivotal role in the prince's education and cultivation of monastic,

⁸⁰ Indeed, in an angry apostrophe to Virgil following the discovery of Lucimien's mute state and the death of Lucimien's biological mother whilst the prince was in Rome, King Dolopathos accuses Virgil of being unable to replace a mother's love: "Teilz amors est fauce et ameire, / Se n'estoit pais amors de meire" ("Such love is false and bitter, / If it was not a mother's love," vv. 3469–70). This exposes Dolopathos' own anxieties about his shortcomings as a father when he has apparently lost control of his son, whilst also implying that Herbert uses the figure of Virgil to subvert the model of a nuclear family by potentially fulfilling both paternal and maternal functions for Lucimien. See also Foehr-Janssens, *Le Temps des fables*, 149 and Lundt, *Weiser und Weib*, 103.

⁸¹ "A phenomenon typical of the clericus' identity formation," Lundt, *Weiser und Weib*, 133.

⁸² Foehr-Janssens, *Le Temps de fables*, 13–29.

particularly Cistercian, values through the vow of silence he imposes upon Lucimien.⁸³ However, it is ultimately a *precheor novel* (v. 11533) who persuades Lucimien to convert to Christianity, following an extended intellectual exchange and the miraculous resurrection of a passerby (vv. 11554–12888).⁸⁴ The 'problem of Paganism' is also reflected through homosociality: Lucimien's spiritual edification depends upon the male-male bonds he first establishes with Virgil and then with the itinerant preacher who acts as a kind of Christian avatar of Virgil, appearing as he does after the Mantuan's death. Whilst we might assume that greater narrative attention would be paid to homosocial bonds within the genre of the *chanson de geste* which "describes a world largely inhabited by men," we find a relatively rare example in the *Dolopathos* of a romance that prioritises the male couple within a clerical, rather than chivalric, setting (unlike, for instance, the *Prose Lancelot*).⁸⁵ Although the figure of Virgil empowered Jean and Herbert to situate themselves within the *Seven Sages* tradition, Virgil also helps us to imagine how medieval and modern audiences might reconceptualise the limits and purposes of male-male relations in the Old French romance specifically through the doctrine of co-inherence and contemporary critical thought.

4 Framing the tale with Homer, Ovid and Petronius

Beyond the main narrative plane of the *Dolopathos*, creative entanglements with antiquity also emerge from allusions to the non-Virgilian literary past in the work's embedded tales. Although Herbert deliberately instrumentalises his text's Augustan setting within a religious framework, these non-Virgilian allusions more tacitly offer the audience the hermeneutical tools to critique the claims to veracity made in the romance. Points of classical reception are thus both directly signalled to us by Herbert and evoked in ways that require greater involvement from the audience, ways which work on the assumption of shared knowledge about Graeco-Roman literature or operate more speculatively, allowing us to find our own intertexts for the romance. The inset tale "Latronis filii," which the sixth Sage tells to dissuade King Dolopathos from executing his son, utilises Homeric, Ovidian and Petronian motifs. It is internally narrated by a thief who is asked by a queen to regale her with three of his most dramatic adventures from his youth in return for pardoning his sons, after they had tried to steal the queen's prized horse. In the first of these tales ("Polyphemus"), the thief implicitly reprises the role of

⁸³ See Pearson, "Teresa de Cartagena," 180: "In the foundational writings of the Cistercian order, silence is regarded as a positive good leading to spiritual growth of the monk. Reasons given include self-discipline, avoidance of temptation, withdrawal from worldly concerns and allowing God's voice to be heard."

⁸⁴ See Gibson, "Vergil and St. Paul in John of Alta Silva's *Dolopathos* (*De rege et septem sapientibus*)" for an interpretation of this unnamed holy man as St Paul in the Latin *Dolopathos*.

⁸⁵ Ailes, "The Medieval Male Couple," 226. Note also the broader shift, in Louis-George Tin's words, "from a homosocial to heterosexual culture" across the Western Middle Ages as the emergence of courtly literature and recurring artistic representations of the man-woman couple in the twelfth century challenged the prominence of male-male bonding (whether physically consummated or not) in earlier feudal society and chivalric ethics. See Tin, *The Invention*, 12–40.

Odysseus from Book 9 of Homer's eponymous epic by reputedly escaping from the cyclops Polyphemus under a sheep.

Je me pensai ke je kerroie
 Un moton et si m'encloroie
 Dedans la pel [...]
 (vv. 8471–73)⁸⁶

This episode is related retrospectively as a memory, reflecting how Odysseus in the *Odyssey* explains his dealings with the cyclops to the Phaeacians as part of a broader retelling of his wanderings after Troy. The exaggerated nature of the thief's tales hints at their unreliability, again signalling Odysseus' propensity for mendacity. As Foehr-Janssens and Métry comment, "Nouvel Ulysse, le brigand peut se targuer d'avoir tenu en échec un cyclope mangeur d'hommes."⁸⁷ In the wider schema of the *Dolopathos*, this reprisal of Odysseus brings about a distrust of internal narrators.⁸⁸ The Sage's assertion that the moral of the sixth tale "Toute parole n'est pais voire" ("Not all speech is truthful," v. 8959) ironically leads us to doubt his own words and the misogynistic assumption of the Sages' unimpeachability imposed upon the audience, especially in a variant of the *Seven Sages* which does not allow Lucimien's stepmother to defend herself with her own stories during the trial.⁸⁹

In the thief's second and third tales ("Striges" I and II), Latin, rather than ancient Greek, literature and mythology is drawn upon through Ovidian and Petronian references, which contribute to the suspect and overdramatised nature of these stories. The thief had earlier sacrificed one of his fingers to save himself from Polyphemus ("De mon doi tranchier m'apensai," v. 8578)⁹⁰ before later giving up a part of his thigh to the blood-sucking creatures called *striges* ("De mai cuise une piece ostirent," v. 8800)⁹¹ and being almost entirely consumed by them in his attempt to save a child from their grasp.⁹² These moments of bodily

⁸⁶ "I thought that I would look for / A sheep and so hide myself / Inside its skin."

⁸⁷ "A new Ulysses, the thief can boast about having thwarted a man-eating cyclops," Foehr-Janssens and Métry, *Dolopathos*, 19.

⁸⁸ This is reinforced in a codicological sense by the compilation of Herbert's text in MS A with Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman d'Eneas*. Whilst the *Troie* highlights the cowardice of Eneas (Aeneas) during the fall of Troy, the Trojan hero's own version of events as retold to Dido in the *Eneas* exaggerates his bravery, indirectly also undermining the authority of the original *Aeneid* (and thus Virgil) to an extent.

⁸⁹ Along with Nachshebi's early fourteenth-century, Persian work *Tuti Nāmeb*, the *Dolopathos* is one of the few versions of the *Seven Sages* to treat the stepmother's tales as a supplementary event in narrative terms.

⁹⁰ "I thought of cutting off my finger." See also the second Sage's tale "Gaza," in which another thief's mutilation of his finger serves to hide his guilt and allows him to escape punishment.

⁹¹ "They took a piece of my thigh."

⁹² As Daniel Ogden observes, although no single definition of the *strix* exists, a 'strix-paradigm' can be formed through collective accounts from antiquity: "she was a creature of the folklore of the Roman world and subsequently that of the Latin West and that of the Greek East. She was a woman that flew by night, either in a form akin to that of an owl or in the form of a projected soul, in order to penetrate homes by surreptitious means and thereby to devour, maim, blight or steal the new-born babies within them." Ogden,

decomposition exemplify the corporeal, Bakhtinian discourse linking "the grotesque bodies of Roman satire [...]" to "icons of [moral and physical] degradation."⁹³ One such Neronian satire, Petronius' *Satyricon*, stands out as a pertinent interlocutor here since it also deals with the legend of the *striges* in an inset tale.⁹⁴ Although it cannot be definitively proven that Herbert was familiar with Petronius, I would contend that *Latronis filii* appears at the very least to evoke and suggest elements of this Neronian intertext.⁹⁵ In Section 63 of the *Satyricon*, Trimalchio describes how the *striges* stole the corpse of his old master's favourite boy and replaced it with a straw doll—"mater amplexaret corpus filii sui, tangit et videt manucium de stramentis factum"⁹⁶—whilst also laying a curse on a Cappadocian slave who had tried to prevent their attack: "corpus totum lividum habebat quasi flagellis caesus, quia scilicet illum tetigerat mala manus."⁹⁷ As with the thief's first inset tale, this subtle nod towards to an internal narrator from classical literature creates wariness rather than authority, since Trimalchio's reputation for guile is not far off that of Odysseus.

The spectre of Petronius highlights an unexpectedly irreverent manner in which the Old French *Dolopathos* engages with Graeco-Roman material, in contrast to its aforementioned moralising Christian overlay, as well as the tragic "constellation de sacrifices humains où l'on 'fait cuisine' d'un fils"⁹⁸ created in Jean's version by his description of the *striges*' "Thyesteam [...] cenam" (77.7), alluding to Atreus tricking his brother Thyestes into eating his own sons, and evoking Philomena's serving of Itys to his father Tereus.⁹⁹ The victims of the *striges* in the *Dolopathos* branch (the thief) and the *Satyricon* (the darling of Trimalchio's former master and the Cappadocian slave) counter an earlier model set up by Ovid's *Fasti* through their socio-economic status and anonymity. In Book 6 of the *Fasti*, the Augustan poet explains why the first of June is sacred to Carna, the goddess of

The Strix-Witch, 1. Note a Celtic parallel from the episode when the "Welsh youth Brian in Geoffroy of Monmouth[*s Historia Regum Britanniae*] [...] cuts a steak from his thigh for his famished uncle Cadwallo." Crosland, "*Dolopathos* and the Seven Sages of Rome," 9.

⁹³ Reckford, "Reading the Sick Body," 337–54. This corporeal discourse reflects the Bakhtinian distinction between carnival, which shows the possibility for the grotesque body to be renewed, and satire, with its negative images of sterility, degradation and death.

⁹⁴ The fifth Sage's tale "Viduae filius" also contains elements of the *Widow of Ephesus* narrative motif from the *Satyricon*. See Foehr-Janssens, *Le Temps de fables*, 471.

⁹⁵ Indeed, during Lucimien's proselytisation, both Jean and Herbert misattribute a line to Virgil which is found in Petronius' *Fragmenta* 28, as well as Servius' commentary on *Aeneid* 2.715 and Statius' *Thebaid* 3.661 ("Primus [...] in orbe deos fecit timor;" "Fear first brought the gods into the world" (102.9) and "Virgiles dist outreiemant / ke sifais deus premieremant / furent par grant pour treveit"; "Virgil boldly says / That such [pagan] gods / Were first created by great fear," vv. 12395–97.)

⁹⁶ "The mother embraced her son's corpse, touched it and saw that it was a small bundle made of straw."

⁹⁷ "His whole body was black and blue, as though he had been whipped, obviously because an evil hand had touched him."

⁹⁸ "Constellation of human sacrifices where a son is [ritualistically] prepared like a dish."

⁹⁹ Although Thyestes' feast was popularised in antiquity by Euripides and Seneca the Younger, a Neronian author like Petronius, it was more likely known to Jean through Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 15.462 and the *aetas Ovidiana*. Philomena's story was also accessible to medieval clerics via commentaries on, and adaptations of, the *Metamorphoses*, such as the fourteenth-century *Ovide moralisé*, the first full-length, French translation which contains a retelling of the myth attributed to Chrétien de Troyes. See Foehr-Janssens, *Le Temps de fables*, 243.

door-hinges, who protected the young Proca, future king of Alba, from the *striges*. These vampiric monsters emerge from both Ovid and Petronius' texts as a source of folkloric fascination which enables Jean and Herbert to explore a range of registers within their classically-inspired inset tales. Linear modes of *translatio* become disrupted in the *Dolopathos* as literary figures from antiquity are implicitly or explicitly referenced to build associations between internal narrators and unreliability; these associations threaten to bring down the very premise upon which the trial runs, that is to say the validity of the Sages' arguments which are used to acquit Lucimien.

The *matière de Rome* examined in this article shows us differing yet concurrent approaches to classical reception within the *Dolopathos*. Whilst Herbert's Christianising commentary on the Augustan, Sicilian setting attests to a clear authorial stance on the classical past, the sixth Sage's tale "Latronis filii" presents more uncertain, conjectural forms of reception. Although the allusion to Homer may seem especially obvious, none of the *auctores* are signalled directly by Herbert to the audience in the sort of highly self-conscious, metapoetic gesture that Ivo Wolsing identifies in Gautier de Châtillon's *Alexandreis*.¹⁰⁰ Why? Several explanations seem plausible, though not definitive. The removal of named allusions could have been intended to downplay Herbert's debt to the *auctores*, highlighting instead his own shaping of the literary material. Herbert may even have presumed familiarity amongst his audience with the Polyphemus-Odysseus episode through works such as John of Garland's *Integumenta Ovidii*, a thirteenth-century allegorical reading of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹⁰¹ By the same logic, the *Fasti* were cited in the hugely popular, twelfth-century guidebook *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*,¹⁰² and the *Satyricon* featured in Elias of Thirplow's thirteenth-century *Petronius Redivivus*.¹⁰³ The Latin content of these sources, which were not yet widely transmitted in the vernacular, may, however, have rendered them inaccessible for Herbert's distinctly non-Latinate audience.

Conversely, the author of the Old French *Dolopathos* may not have intended, or even known about, such specific references, especially given how rare copies of original ancient Greek literary material relating to the Polyphemus episode—such as the *Odyssey* or Euripides' *Cyclops*—were in Western European libraries between late antiquity and the Renaissance.¹⁰⁴ As Leclanche has shown, Jean engages more consistently with Latin authors than Herbert, due to the former's privileging of scholasticism and his practical ability to quote *auctores* in the original.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Wolsing, "(Meta)Poetic Entanglement in Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*," 57.

¹⁰¹ Aguirre and Buxton, *Cyclops: The Myth and its Cultural History*, 244.

¹⁰² Morgan, *Ovid: A Very Short Introduction*, 92.

¹⁰³ Rossi, "How Much of *Satyrica* Do We Read in *Petronius Redivivus* (TCD MS 602)?," 87–116.

¹⁰⁴ See O'Hogan, "Knowledge of Greek in the Medieval Latin West," *British Library Greek Manuscripts Online*, accessed 24 February, 2024, <<https://www.bl.uk/greek-manuscripts/articles/knowledge-of-greek-in-the-medievallatin-west>>.

¹⁰⁵ Note, however, that Jean asks his readers to forgive him for not having studied the classics thoroughly enough himself. See Lundt, *Weiser und Weib*, 84.

Ce qui distingue le plus Jean de son traducteur, c'est l'abondance des citations ou réminiscences classiques dont il émaille son texte. Juvénal, Horace, Virgile, Ovide, Lucain et d'autres encore, fournissent des citations, **accompagnées ou non de la mention du nom de l'auteur**. Convention des arts poétiques de son temps, qui ne peut cependant se pratiquer aisément en langue vulgaire: d'une part parce qu'on ne s'adresse pas au même public, et aussi tout simplement parce qu'on ne peut citer littéralement du latin dans un texte en vers français. Que deviennent donc dans le texte d'Herbert, dont on a pu apprécier la fidélité au modèle, ces nombreuses citations? Elles sont adaptées, intégrées au contexte, où elles prennent parfois des allures sentencieuses.¹⁰⁶

Although he does not address the question of whether Jean de Haute-Seille's failure to name his sources implied ignorance or intent, Leclanche's emphasis on the "convention des arts poétiques de son temps" suggests such enquiries were not necessarily a key priority for medieval writers in their perceptions of classicism. From the perspective of a vernacular audience, hearing about unknown or uncited sources may have made the *Dolopathos* seem more authoritative and could be read as an exclusionary practice. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the ambivalence around these acts of referencing more convincingly creates an inclusionary effect, especially in the Old French *Dolopathos*, allowing for a much broader range of intertexts to be brought into play, beyond those specifically envisaged at an authorial level, as discussed at the beginning of this section. Linguistic mediation between Latin and Old French limits Herbert's active utilisation of Graeco-Roman literary material to a certain extent, thus requiring audiences to draw out covert links between the *auctores* and the inset tales of the *Dolopathos* in a collective, participatory reception shaped by translation, as well as classical and folkloric sources.

5 Conclusion

As this article has sought to demonstrate, Herbert's *Dolopathos* is fundamentally structured and shaped by its adaptation of the classics in a manner that resists recurring linear, genealogical models of reception, whilst also underscoring the value of entanglement as a distinctive authorial strategy. This adaptation consists as much of separation and intentionality as it does of ambivalence and uncertainty, reminding us of the intricate threads that could intertwine both Latin and Greek with later literary cultures, in this case through medieval authors' conscious or unconscious engagement with antiquity. At the same time, Herbert, and Jean de Haute-Seille before him, clearly appropriated aspects of the Graeco-Roman world

¹⁰⁶ "What distinguishes Jean the most from his translator [Herbert] is the abundance of classical quotations or allusions which he intersperses throughout his text. Juvenal, Horace, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan and many others supply quotations, which are sometimes accompanied by the author's name. [This was] a convention of the poetic arts at the time, which could not, however, be easily applied to the vernacular: partly because the same audience was not being addressed, and also simply because Latin cannot be cited literally in a text of French verse. What, therefore, became of these numerous citations in Herbert's text, [a text] which could be appreciated for its fidelity to [its] model? They were adapted, contextualised or sometimes took on the appearance of *sententiae*."

both for their own artistic, cultural, religious and ideological endeavours and to meet the expectations of their Western, Christian audiences in clerical and courtly settings. The pre-existing components of *matière de Rome* in the Old French *Dolopathos* were, and continue to be, reconfigured by codicological, theological, narratological and theoretical lenses. Crucially, our perceptions of Herbert's romance and his own poetic vision of it are tied to issues of fidelity and translation at two levels: that of original classical sources and their mediation via Jean de Haute-Seille's Latin hypotext. Indeed, the very topic of classical reception sheds light on the literary and critical history of the *Dolopathos*, including its non-linear positioning amongst the twelfth-century *romans antiques* in MS A as part of a thirteenth-century renewal of classically-inspired works and its denigration in the nineteenth century as work of an author who failed to surpass "the ordinary level of romanticism".¹⁰⁷

Whilst Virgil's transformation from poet into prophet and sage was by no means uncommon in medieval European literature, his insertion into the *Dolopathos* branch of the *Seven Sages* as Lucimien's sole tutor represents a specific literary reinvention which merges scholastic and popular interpretations of his significance. This refashioning of Virgil, and its implications for his relationship with Lucimien, also encourages contemporary readers to join in more entangled practices of reception by working through nuanced models of masculinity and the subversion of our *Erwartungshorizont*, particularly in relation to genre. Herbert's *Dolopathos* therefore provides an important, though often overlooked, example of how writers reconceptualised reception in the Middle Ages in ways that allow modern audiences to rethink their own biases and assumptions about the forms that classicism could, and can, take.

¹⁰⁷ Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, 238.

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JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM AND
EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Alfred Hiatt, “Entanglements,” JOLCEL 12 (2025): pp. 133-141. DOI:
[10.21825/jolcel.99842](https://doi.org/10.21825/jolcel.99842)

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NOTE

This article is the response piece and sixth article in the current issue of JOLCEL, which consists of a preface, five articles and a response piece. The other contributions are “Tangling with the Classics: Rethinking Reception in the Middle Ages” by Jacqueline M. Burek and Rebecca Menmuir (pp. 1–4), “The Tangled Reception of Proba and Virgil in the *Laterculus Malalianus*” by Mary Hitchman (pp. 5–28), “John Scottus Eriugena and the Entangled Materiality of *Vox*” by Paul Vinhage (pp. 29–53), “From Sorcerer’s Son to Epic Hero: (Meta)Poetic Entanglement in Walter of Châtillon’s *Alexandreis*” by Ivo Wolsing (pp. 54–78), “Virgil in Scholastic Hands: Transnational and Local, Textual and Material” by Philippa Byrne (pp. 79–100) and “Renegotiating Antiquity with/in Herbert’s *Roman de Dolopathos*” by Ramani Chandramohan (pp. 101–132).

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Entanglements

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1 Introduction: entanglements

In the Phrygian capital of Gordium, the peasant Gordius became king when he fulfilled an oracle by being in the right place (on his way to the temple of Jupiter), at the right time (when those who consulted the oracle went looking for someone on his way to the temple of Jupiter). Gordius commemorated his elevation by consecrating his wagon, including the knot that attached its yoke, in the temple. Such was the complexity of the knot that a new prophecy arose: whoever could untie it would rule all of Asia. The story of Alexander's encounter with the Gordian knot finds a typically ambiguous retelling in Walter of Châtillon's twelfth-century *Alexandreis*:

Mouit Alexandrum supplendi fata cupido,
Extollensque iugum nexus dissoluere temptat,
Luctatusque breui, cum se contendere frustra
Conspicit, astantes ne triste reuerberet omen,
“Quid refert,” inquit “proceres, qua scilicet arte
Quoque modo tacitae pateant enigmata sortis?”
Dixit et arrepto nodos mucrone resoluit,
Vnde uel elusit sortem uel forte reclusit.¹

The desire to fulfill the prophecy stirred Alexander and, raising the yoke, he tried to untangle the bond [*nexus*]. After a brief struggle, when he saw he was striving

¹ Walter of Châtillon, *Alexandreis*, ed. Colker, 2.83–90 (40–41).

in vain, and lest the omen strike onlookers as ill-fortuned, he said: “What does it matter, my lords, how or by what skill the riddles of silent destiny are revealed?” He spoke and, snatching up a sword, unfastened the knots [*nodos*]. By which he either mocked destiny, or perhaps revealed it.²

The principal source of the passage is Quintus Curtius Rufus’s *Historia Alexandri Magni*, but Walter expands Alexander’s speech with an echo of Lucan (“Quid refert,” *Civil War* X.383). The last line, substantially present already in Curtius Rufus, bespeaks a wry humour at the expense of the conqueror. We see enough of Alexander’s thought processes to perceive his solution of the problem of the knot as the act of a chancer on the verge of public humiliation, led on by lust (*cupido*) for conquest. The echo of Book 10 of Lucan’s *Civil War* connects the passage to the tradition in which Alexander is a violent, indeed insane, over-reacher. But Walter, and his sources, do not go so far. ‘Perhaps’ Alexander’s method—destroy the enigma, if you can’t solve it—was the one foreseen. The ambiguity extends to the nature of oracles.

Trying to understand the knot aligns the reader with Alexander. We have been previously told that it consists of ropes or threads combined with each other (*funibus inter se coeuntibus [...] complosis*) by a secret art, that its end or head cannot be found, nor its knots undone. Without beginning or end, it is a *nexus*, something intricate, bound, which consists of multiple “nodes”: a knot of many knots, impenetrable in its obscurity. Its dismantling at sword-point is both comedic liberation from portent and the blade’s crass violation of art. Entanglements, we might conclude, come ready-freighted with expectations and temptations. They invite untangling, ‘resolution’ through the restoration of a previous form. They also resist such efforts, to the point of provocation. The transformation of a knot into a line is the act of a reader, an editor, and perhaps also a conqueror, but the knot itself may be the product of some *ars latens* whose principles elude the grasping fingers of the onlooker.

The spirit with which the contributors to this special issue of *JOLCEL* view entanglement is happily far from that of Alexander’s approach to the Gordian knot. Whether a line of verse, a literary lineage, or a line of transmission, each of the five articles explores the ways in which classical lines were translated, reworked, chopped, mixed, tied up, and repurposed during the Middle Ages. Rather than seeking to untangle or cut through, they aim to trace, explicate and enjoy the knot, understanding anachronism as a hermeneutic tool, and seeing ‘classical reception’ as something more than uni-directional. The approach is evidently thought-provoking, and productive of rich analysis. But what is at stake in the notion of entanglement? What does this conceptualisation of medieval reworking of classical writing reveal, and where might it lead us? The following remarks offer some initial reflections.

² The translation is mine, but compare those of Pritchard, *The Alexandreis*, 60; and Townsend, *The Alexandreis*, 26.

2 Remix, tangle, rhizome

There is no better example of the entangled nature of classical reception—or perhaps better, of the ongoing creation of ancient literature—than Proba's *Cento*. One of the more extraordinary literary forms of late antiquity, *cento* sees poems sliced and diced to form an entirely new work from almost entirely old material. Viewed from the perspective of a modern edition, where every half-line is identified, *cento* can look deranged, the work of a surrealist poet let loose with scissors and paste and access to a set of Loeb's. Lines 107–14 of Proba's *Cento Vergilianus* can serve as an example:

Iamque dies alterque dies processit et omne = *Aen.* 3.356 + *Georg.* 2.20 / *Aen.* 7.514
 hoc virtutis opus, divinae mentis et haustus = *Aen.* 10.469 + *Georg.* 4.220
 prospiciens genitor, perfectis ordine rebus, = *Aen.* 1.155 + *Aen.* 3.548 + *Georg.* 4.449
 expleri mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo = *Aen.* 1.713
 terrasque tractusque maris caelumque profundum, = *Buc.* 4.51 / *Georg.* 4.222
 alituum pecudumque genus, secumque volutat, = *Aen.* 8.27 + *Aen.* 10.159
 qui mare, qui terras omni ditione tenerent, = *Aen.* 1.236
 neu segnes iaceant terrae; iuvat usque morari. = *Georg.* 2.37; *Aen.* 6.487³

Yet it works—not only do the lines make formal sense, they construct meanings quite unlike the original from which they derive. Who needs veiled references to the son of God in the fourth *Eclogue*, when Virgil's words can be crafted unambiguously to describe Christian history? The already entangled nature of *cento* encounters further layers as it is read alongside the (unmixed) works of Virgil. As Mary Hitchman points out, since *cento* is itself a patchwork of quotation, it becomes hard to know whether it, or the text it has repurposed, is being quoted. Sometimes, however, it is possible to see that an author is using Proba's Virgil, rather than Virgil's Virgil: the *Laterculus Malalianus*, plausibly attributed to Theodore of Tarsus, is a case in point.

The papers that follow Hitchman's show us convergent, though not identical, understandings of the concept of entanglement. In Paul Vinhage's explication of the thought of John Scotus Eriugena, the tangle begins when late antique authorities such as Priscian and Donatus muddle rival philosophical doctrines. To this hybrid of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy, Eriugena adds his own complications, which operate in aid of a Christian understanding of fundamental concepts such as *vox* and *littera*. Ivo Wolsing's examination of Walter's metapoetic diction in the *Alexandreis*, meanwhile, defines entanglement, following Barad and Nuttall, as intersection with others and the lack of self-containment (somewhat the opposite of the Gordian knot, then, though broadly consistent with Vinhage's hybridity). Philippa Byrne's study of the associations of Virgil with southern Italy witnesses the entanglement of orally-transmitted narrative with the political ambitions of more than one dynasty, and the intervention of multiple Latinate authors working on behalf of noble patrons. The tangle thus connects oral with written, local with

³ Proba, *Cento Vergilianus*, eds Fassina and Lucarini, 13.

transnational or imperial. Finally, Ramani Chandramohan's rich exploration of Herbert's *Dolopathos* reveals, somewhat in the manner of Proba's *Cento*, the inherent entanglements of a text that incorporates the figure of Virgil to star in a reworking of a frame narrative of eastern origin; the Latin text's translation into a European vernacular adds further knots. Here, as in the examples studied by all other authors, one has the impression of texts folding in on themselves, in addition to their enfolding in a variety of intertexts. In all cases, albeit some more forcefully than others, the use of entanglement as a model is designed to resist the claims of linearity in favour of hybridity and deliberate anachronism.

If 'entanglement' is to be developed further as a model for literary-historical study, though, it may be helpful to articulate its relationship to other attempts to grasp non-linear modes of textual relationship. There are obvious points of convergence, for a start, with the currently fashionable, indeed ubiquitous, notions of networks and connectivity, even if such models seek less to explicate entanglement than to use mapping to reveal system.⁴ Perhaps a closer analogue lies in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome. This too was an attempt to resist linearity, above all the line of the tree and its roots, positing instead the notion of multiplicities without beginning or end, an anti-genealogy comprising lines of territorialisation and flight that do not form a whole.⁵ In a number of ways, Deleuze and Guattari's vegetal rhizome seems congruent with the function of the entangled invoked by the authors of these essays. The latter, however, appear to favour a less doctrinaire response to linearity, one that can be organic, artificial, or a combination of the two, conceiving of paths of resistance that are not necessarily 'rhizomatic.' In any case, for 'entanglement' to gain traction as a paradigm of classical reception a clearer sense is needed of its debts to, and divergences from, these and other ways of unthinking still-dominant models of descent and inheritance.

3 Twisted Virgils

The most striking of several points of continuity between the articles in this collection is the figure of Virgil. There can be no question of the centrality of Virgil to medieval Latinity, to the pedagogical programmes that spanned the Middle Ages, whatever their local developments and divergences, and accordingly to multiple medieval literary cultures, Latin and vernacular. But what the articles assembled here draw our attention to is the plural nature of 'Virgil' in the Middle Ages. If Virgil was central, he was never monolithic. At a textual level, this meant the reception and re-working—or mixing, in the hands of a Proba—of three very different works, the *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid*, all of which could—as Wolsing points out—be read through the lens of Servius's commentaries. The various nature of the content of these poems ensured multiple possibilities for styling their author. He could be positioned as pagan, proleptically Christian, or (Proba again)

⁴ For recent reflections on, and critique of, the concept of connectivity see Ramgopal, "Connectivity and Disconnectivity."

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Massumi, 3–25.

revoiced as a propagator of Christian doctrine. He could figure as a sage, from which point necromancy was a short step. The *Aeneid* becomes, in vernacular tradition, a *roman*, its narrative read in the imperialistic, sometimes proto-nationalistic terms of the *translatio imperii*. These of course are only a few of the medieval Virgils. There is also the Virgil of the Carolingian scriptorium; the Virgil of Latin lyric poetry; the scientific Virgil whose verses inform John of Sacrobosco's immensely influential *De sphaera*; the Virgil of Dante. The protean nature of this figure—something equally true of Lucan and Ovid—makes his capture within a 'tradition' impossible.⁶ Better then to speak of medieval Virgils, not least because—as Byrne suggests—humanists such as Petrarch, and all who have followed them, had a vested interest in constructing a singular 'medieval Virgil,' ensconced in a Neapolitan cave. This Virgil could be easily associated with the things most vehemently excluded from humanist culture: superstition, folk tradition, romance narrative. As Byrne shows, the southern Italian Virgil jokingly sought after by Petrarch was a genuine creation of the Middle Ages, a mixture of popular and learned traditions. But he was only one of many incarnations of the poet.

Humanist approaches to ancient texts, of the kind developed by Petrarch and his followers, are a form of disentanglement: the humanist Virgil is an author stripped of the accretions of medieval commentary and lore, his antiquity restored in order better to enable a dialogue with *moderni*. (This did not stop humanists inventing their own Virgiliana, of course, adding books to the *Aeneid*, copying and commenting on the works.) Modern scholarly practices in many ways continue this approach, as instantly revealed by a comparison between a medieval manuscript of Virgil's poetry, filled with marginal and interlinear glosses, and a modern edition of the same, all clean lines, white margins and text framed with a discreet textual apparatus. We cannot completely escape this hermeneutic of disentanglement, and it would be unwise to try. Even as they embrace entanglement, the contributions to this issue make use of chronology, of lines of transmission as well as of translation, and they are right to do so. It should, after all, be possible to acknowledge and even embrace entanglement without completely abandoning linearity. There has to be a middle way, a space in-between slicing through the knot and gazing at it with mystified reverence.

4 The problem of paganism?

One area where we may also be unconsciously working along humanist lines is in framing paganism as something difficult or problematic for medieval Christian authors. Humanists, famously, were comfortable with pagans – happy to retrieve their neglected works from monastic libraries, to engage them in dialogue, to invoke their gods. It stands to reason then that pre-humanist Christian thinkers must have viewed pagan authors with suspicion, warned off by Jerome and Augustine. But did they? The "problem of paganism" is noted on more than one

⁶ See Kallendorf, *The Protean Virgil*.

occasion in Chandramohan’s article,⁷ and while the phrase does not appear elsewhere, in general the contributors seem to share the view that Christian authors felt the need to defend, or at least justify their use of pre-Christian material, such as the works of Virgil, or the historical narrative of Alexander. The difficulty identified is that of incorporating pagan thought within Christian letters, indeed on basing Christian learning to a significant extent on the works of classical Greece and Rome. The “problem of paganism” is of course also that of the salvation of the pagan, an exercise requiring some imagination and literary skill. But all these accounts of agile reworkings of classical texts, and the equally agile reimagining of classical authors, suggest it might be worthwhile to contemplate the possibility that there was no *problem* of paganism.

What if, far from a problem, paganism is the necessary condition of an integral Christian literature? What if the pagan poet, in all his myriad forms, is exactly what Christian Latin literature needed: something that could at once stand adjacent, prior to, and overlapping with Christianity—a useful source of heterogeneity with a built-in dispensability? Dante, in the end, had very little problem denying his *maestro* Paradise (it is twenty-first century readers, preferring Virgil to Beatrice, who find this exclusion a problem).⁸ Standard statements of regret of the “if only he had known of Christ” kind work both ways: they draw attention to the moral and religious superiority of the Christian author, while attesting the innocence and vaunting the prowess of the non-Christian forebear. The glosses in the many medieval manuscripts of classical works primarily serve to explicate the literal sense of the text, only secondarily and far less consistently its allegorical, historical and mythographic meanings. The first imperative of the student of Virgil was to understand what his words meant, and detailed studies of reader response to his works suggest a span of secular, as well as religious, uses, few if any of which appear to have been hampered by lingering concern about Augustan paganism.⁹

5 Conclusion

Cavils aside, this collection leaves us with much to think about and much to enjoy. It demonstrates the complexity of the entanglements of classical and medieval literature, as well as offering snapshots across several hundred years of reading, interpreting, and re-writing ancient texts: the presence of Proba in seventh-century Canterbury; Eriugena’s daring positioning of the letter before the voice; the

⁷ Drawing on Marenbon’s *Pagans and Philosophers*, a rich exploration which acknowledges the “Problem of Paganism” to be “a newly-invented label” (1). As the span of his title indicates, Marenbon does not view the problem as one that characterises the Middle Ages, but includes early modern and humanist authors in his analysis.

⁸ Such as the Irish singer-songwriter Hozier, whose album *Unreal Unearth: Unending* (2024) draws directly on Dante’s *Commedia*; the song “Hymn to Virgil” expresses the singer’s refusal to enter Paradise if Virgil is not allowed in: “I would not be seen walking through any door / Some place that you’re not welcome to.” My thanks to Grace Moran for introducing me to Hozier’s work, and for her insightful comments on “Hymn to Virgil.”

⁹ See Munk Olsen, *L’Étude des auteurs classiques latins*, esp. 111–21, 187–217; Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*; Reynolds; and Day, *English Humanism and the Reception of Virgil*, 14–44.

fertile, perhaps even febrile, interactions between Latin and vernacular literature in twelfth- and thirteenth-century France, as evidenced in their different ways by the *Alexandreis* and *Dolopathos*; the unexpected and irrepressible nature of the medieval Virgils, from *cento* to grotto. Such studies speak of but do not resolve the multiple lives of classical texts, and their authors, in the Middle Ages.

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