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Two 12th century-commentaries on Martianus Capella and Virgil*

Summary – The commentaries on Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae* and Vergil's first six books of the *Aeneid*, which represent typically medieval allegoric interpretations of two ancient texts of high importance for scholarly formation in medieval Western Europe, are obviously written by the same author to be used in cathedral schools of the twelfth century in order to demonstrate the unity of what he calls philosophy, which comprises both knowledge of the universe and ethics. The author composed his commentary on Vergil, as can be shown by an analysis of quotations, only after that on Martianus, with anagogic intention: the destination of man, that is to say of the microcosmos, according to his conviction, aims at surpassing the material world, the macrocosmos, the understanding of which is provided by the Liberal Arts, their knowledge granting the ascension to the sphere of eternity. This is why the commentary on the *Aeneid*, like the interpretation given by John of Salisbury, ends within the sixth book, where Aeneas, during his visit to the underworld, arrives at the Elysium, the region, where the blessed dwell. This arrangement of the commentaries points to the *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris, the first part of which deals with the creation of the universe, whereas its second part concentrates on the creation of man, according to the sequence in the relative report in the Biblical Book of Genesis. Thus it is not improbable, that Bernardus Silvestris is really the author of both commentaries.

In European antiquity commentaries on highly estimated pieces of literature were first composed in the age of Hellenism by the philologists in Alexandria, who were working on the presumably original texts of Homer, as Rudolf Pfeiffer has already shown in his history of Classical Scholarship.¹ For a general survey of Greek and Roman writings dedicated to the explanation of what can be called their national 'supertexts', above all Homer and, from the second century A. D. onwards, Virgil see the recent article by Ludwig Fladerer and Dagmar Börner-Klein.² Dealing with commentaries on poetical texts one must not forget, that already in the sixth century B. C. a

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¹ R. Pfeiffer, *Geschichte der Klassischen Philologie*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1970, s. v. ὑπόμνημα (enlarged version of the original edition: *History of Classical Scholarship*, Oxford 1968).

² See L. Fladerer - D. Börner-Klein, s. v. Kommentar, in: *RAC* 21 (2006), 274–329 (with extensive bibliography).

certain Theagenes is reported to have invented an allegorical method in order to bridge the gap between the intellectual and the traditional religious concepts of his own age and region, the Magna Graecia, and the archaic world of the Homeric gods and heroes.³ This method gained remarkable importance with the main representatives of Stoic philosophy during the centuries of Hellenism.⁴ In Roman imperial times, both types of interpreting classical works of literature, namely allegory and stylistic commentary, were carried out by professional grammarians who used to teach their pupils how to understand the great poets of the past correctly, according to their belief, as general advisers in ethics, not dependant on external circumstances. This very aspect, namely philosophical instruction in any respect, ethical as well as physical and theological, became more and more important in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, in combination with mostly fantastic etymological speculations, a heritage of Plato's dialogue entitled *Cratylus* and of the Roman polyhistor Varro – and, from the seventh century onwards, of Isidor of Sevilla.⁵ In the so called classical period of later antique culture, that is to say in the fourth and fifth centuries, a group of texts originated in the Western Roman empire, the authors of which were called 'Founders of the Middle Ages' by the American scholar Edward K. Rand.⁶ I am referring to Macrobius' commentary on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, the famous *Somnium Scipionis*,⁷ on the translation of Plato's *Timaeus* by C(h)alcidius, who added a neoplatonic commentary on that part of the dialogue which deals with the creation of the universe,⁸ and last but not least to the nine books of Martianus Capella, entitled 'The marriage of Philology and Mercury', *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. This work is not a commentary in the strict

³ On Theagenes see St. Matthaios, in: DNP 12, 1 (2002), 248. For allegorical interpretation in general see S. Döpp, *Allegorie/Allegorese*, in: Oda Wischmeyer (ed.), *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik*, Berlin 2009, 9/10; Hildegard Cancik-Lindemaier-Dorothea Sigel, *Allegorese*, in: DNP 1 (1996), 518–523; Christine Walde, *Allegorie*, *ibid.* 523–525; J.C. Joosen-J. H. Waszink, *Allegorese*, in: RAC 1 (1950), 283–293.

⁴ See Pfeiffer (note 1), 296–299.

⁵ For encyclopedical literature in antiquity see H. Fuchs, *Enzyklopädie*, in: RAC 5 (1962), 504–515, for the important role of etymology see Ilona Opelt, *Etymologie*, in: RAC 6 (1966), 797–843.

⁶ E. K. Rand, *Founders of the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Mass. 1928.

⁷ Critical edition by J. Willis, Stuttgart 1970 (reprint 1994); for commentaries on this important text see K. Büchner†, *M. Tullius Cicero, De re publica*, Heidelberg 1984, 435–507; A. Ronconi, *Cicerone, Somnium Scipionis, Introduzione e commento*, Firenze 1961.

⁸ Critical edition by P. J. Jensen-J. H. Waszink, London-Leiden 1962 (*Plato Latinus IV*); cf. also Christine Ratkowitsch, *Die Timaios-Übersetzung des Chalcidius – ein Plato Christianus*, *Philologus* 140 (1996), 139–162.

sense of the word, but a presentation of the seven Liberal Arts in the frame of a complex allegory: the disciplines, in personified shape, offer themselves to the just married couple as a wedding-gift in heaven.⁹ Taking into consideration that it was once again Varro, who had dealt with the Liberal Arts in nine books *Disciplinarum libri*, because he added jurisprudence and architecture to the traditional seven Liberal Arts, it becomes very probable that Martianus' intention was to write something like a general commentary on Varro's work, thereby reducing the number of disciplines to the original canon. For jurisprudence and architecture he substituted at the beginning two books, in which he described the preparations of the wedding and Philology's ascension to heaven, the Olympus, where the ceremony took place. So he could maintain the number of Varro's books, which is to be understood as a signal for the user, that from then onwards a 'New Varro' was available. This kind of self-advertising, I am convinced, is also the purpose of the literary form of Martianus' work, which is composed as a *prosimetrum*, a mixture of prose and metrically varied poetry. This form, which traditionally was connected with the Greek satirist Menippus from Gadara, now in Jordan, and usually reserved for satirical contents, was introduced into Latin literature by Varro in his *Saturae Menippaeae*.¹⁰ And, indeed, one

⁹ Critical edition of the complete text by A. Dick - J. Préaux, Stuttgart 1969, of book 4 by M. Ferré, *Martianus Capella, Les noces de Philologie et de Mercure, livre IV: La dialectique*, Paris 2007, of book 7, J.Y. Guillaumin, *Martianus Capella, Les noces de Philologie et de Mercure, livre VII, L'arithmétique*, Paris 2003; for medieval commentaries on Martianus Capella see H.J. Westra - Ch. Vester, *The Berlin Commentary on Martianus Capella's De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii: Book I*, Leiden - New York - Köln 1994, IX - XXXIV; modern commentaries: Danuta Shanzer, *A Philological and Literary Commentary on Martianus Capella's De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii, Book I*, Berkeley - Los Angeles - London 1986 (*Classical Studies* 32); L. Lenaz, *Martiani Capellae De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii liber secundus. Introduzione, traduzione e commento*, Padova 1975; L. Cristante, *Martiani Capellae De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii liber IX. Introduzione, traduzione e commento*, Padova 1987; English translation: W.H. Stahl - R. Johnson - E.L. Bange, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts, vol. 1*, New York 1971; vol. 2, New York 1977; monographs: M. Bovey, *Disciplinae cyclicae. L'organisation du savoir dans l'œuvre de Martianus Capella*, Trieste 2003 (*Polymnia. Studi di Filologia Classica* 3); Sabine Grebe, *Martianus Capella, 'De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii'. Darstellung der Sieben Freien Künste und ihrer Beziehungen zueinander*, Stuttgart - Leipzig 1999 (*Beiträge zur Altertumskunde* 119).

¹⁰ On traces of Varro's *Saturae Menippaeae* in the work of Martianus see Shanzer (note 9), 29 - 44; in opposition to prior scholars she recognized typical elements of those moralizing philosophical satires, but did not stress the fact that the number of Martianus' books also points to Varro, namely to his *Disciplinarum libri IX*, as mentioned above.

gets the impression, that a subtle satirical element is still preserved even in Martianus' doctrinal allegories, namely a satire on Christian imagery. For, in the fifth century, no one could fail to associate the allegorical scenario of a wedding-dinner celebrated in heaven with the eternal wedding taking place in the heavenly Jerusalem, which was promised to faithful Christians in the canonical book of the Apocalypse.¹¹ But there is still more: One of Mercury's functions, reinforced by his identification with the Egyptian god Toth, was to make possible a communication between gods and men, since being a divine mediator as well as teaching people how to converse among each other by means of language was explicitly his task; therefore he was called the God of speech, in Greek Ἑρμῆς λόγιος.¹² So he came rather close to Christ, who also was called *mediator* of men and God by Saint Paul, and, in the prologue to Saint John's gospel, was praised as the 'Speech (λόγος) of God',¹³ which in Latin translations appears as *verbum*, 'word', or *sermo*, 'speech'. And in the Book of the Apocalypse Christ is the bridegroom of the Christian community, who is connected with him by love, just as Mercury is the bridegroom in Martianus. Mercury's bride cannot but love him, even more so because of her name, *Philologia*, which indicates the personified 'Love of speech'. In medieval commentary-literature explanations of Martianus' didactic books cover a large field of learned and philosophical literature starting with John Scot Eriugena in the later Carolingian age¹⁴ and continued by Remigius of Auxerre,¹⁵ since there was an enormous demand of commentaries for scholastic use, because Martianus was the basic author for teaching the Liberal Arts. A good deal of those texts are probably still lying hidden in manuscripts up to the present day.

One of them was fortunately discovered by the French scholar Édouard Jeuneau¹⁶ already in 1964 in a manuscript of Cambridge University Library

¹¹ Apoc. 19, 7–9; in Christian Latin commentaries on this passage items may be detected, which show a certain similarity to the setting of Martianus' *De nuptiis*: Aug., *virg.* 27 (virgins offering a new song as a wedding gift to the Lamb and his bride, the Church); Greg., in *evang.* 40, 24, 6 (only those who have overcome the material world, will take part in the wedding party of the Lamb).

¹² Cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 407e; cf. P. Stockmeier, *Hermes*, in: *RAC* 14 (1988), 772–780 (774).

¹³ 1 Tim. 2, 5; John 1, 1.

¹⁴ Critical edition by C. E. Lutz, *John Scot Eriugena, Adnotationes in Marcianum*, Cambridge, Mass. 1939.

¹⁵ Critical edition by C. E. Lutz, *Remigii Autissiodorensis commentum in Marcianum Capellam*, 2 voll., Leiden 1962, 1965.

¹⁶ E. Jeuneau, *Note sur l'École de Chartres*, *Studi Medievali* n. s. 3, 5, 2 (1964), 821–865 (= *Lectio philosophorum. Recherches sur l'École de Chartres*, Amsterdam 1973, 1–49).

(Ms Mm 1.18), but it was not edited till 1986 by the Dutch scholar Haijo Jan Westra of the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto.¹⁷ In his article, Jeuneau argued that the well known Platonist and philosopher Bernardus Silvestris, who lived in the middle of the twelfth century,¹⁸ was the author of the anonymous commentary, basing the results of his research on some supposed parallels of contents with the latter's *Cosmographia* or *De universalitate mundi*. This work is also a fantastic mixture of prose and verse in the style of Martianus and his most renowned imitator Boëthius, in which a group of female allegories participate as actresses in order to create a new mode of expression, that allowed Plato's *Timaeus* to be interpreted according to Christian concepts of creation and maintenance of both the material world and mankind. Thus Bernardus Silvestris, in his *Cosmographia*, offers a sort of re-allegorization of C(h)alcidius' Commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, thereby trying, in his second preface, to separate in theory mythological from biblical allegory, which, however, he himself was unable to keep in practice, since the hermeneutic principle of Bernardus' *Cosmographia* was that of biblical exegesis, that is to say the doctrine of revealing the 'truth' of facts or abstract concepts, which are hidden under a sort of 'blanket', in Latin called *integumentum* or *tegmentum* or, in some instances, *involucrum*.¹⁹ According to this method the Old Testament as well as traditional or recently invented myths could be interpreted philosophically. This method, to give two examples from the *Cosmographia*, enabled Bernardus to personify the 'tohuwabohu' of the first chapter of the Genesis 1, 2 under the name of the ancient *Physis*, that is the not yet distinguished, constantly floating mixture of the four classical elements, an equivalent to chaos; it also enabled him to replace the name of Christ, for him the true Platonic craftsman, *opifex*, *δημιουργός*, who built the material world according to the spiritual world of ideas, by that of Minerva – the true Minerva, as he explicitly affirms.²⁰ For

¹⁷ The Commentary on Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* attributed to Bernardus Silvestris, ed. H. J. Westra, Toronto 1986.

¹⁸ The standard edition of Bernardus' opus magnum, the *Cosmographia*, is P. Dronke, Leiden 1978 (with introduction and notes); an English translation with introduction and notes has been published by W. Wetherbee, New York-Oxford 1973; for an interpretation of the entire work see Christine Ratkowitsch, *Die Cosmographia des Bernardus Silvestris: eine Theodizee*, Köln-Weimar-Wien 1995.

¹⁹ On problems of terminology s. Bernardus Silvestris (?), *Accessus ad Marcianum* ll. 70–113 Westra (note 17).

²⁰ Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, *Megacosmos* I 4. For an interpretation of this passage see K. Smolak, *Die wahre Minerva. Überlegungen zur allusiven Sprache im Megacosmos des Bernardus Silvestris*, *Classica Cracoviensia* 11 (2007), 303–333.

both divinities represent wisdom and handicraft – Christ had been identified with the personified wisdom of the Sapiential Books of the Old Testament and thus since Early Christian times had been regarded as the operating power of God the Father’s plans.²¹ Minerva, on the other hand, was worshipped as the goddess of wisdom who arose out of the head of her father Jupiter, materializing his ideas, as Varro pointed out and as is testified by Augustine himself;²² furthermore Minerva was the protecting goddess of female handicraft.²³ Plato’s concept of a world-soul, *anima mundi*, responsible for the maintenance, order and constant movement of the universe, could easily be associated with the Holy Ghost of Christian belief – a theory which Thierry of Chartres was forced to withdraw, but which is still recognizable in Bernardus’ work.²⁴

Jeaneau’s hypothesis was widely discussed among medievalists, many objections were raised against it, such as the fact, that the commentator mentions Orléans, whereas Bernardus Silvestris is usually associated with Tours and Chartres. On the other hand, it is by no means impossible, that he was also teaching in Orléans for some time, where scholarship concentrated on interpreting the classical authors and authorities, to whom Martianus belonged.²⁵ A comparison of style and language between the commentary in question and the *Cosmographia* is methodologically irrelevant, taking into consideration the different literary genres. In consequence, e.g., one cannot refer to the fact, that Bernardus in his *Cosmographia* refrains from referring to etymologies and allegorizations of names,²⁶ whereas the author of the commentary frequently does so, in a manner which makes a modern reader shake his head. Let me give an example. In his preface, the commentator reflects on the names of the author he is going to comment on: *Mineus*

²¹ The biblical basis of this concept is Prov. 3, 19f.

²² Aug., civ. 7, 28 purports that according to Varro the Capitoline trinity (Iupiter, Iuno, Minerva) represented heaven, earth and the metaphysical ideas, personified in Minerva, goddess of Wisdom and daughter of Iupiter.

²³ On this function of Minerva/Athena, see Christine Harrauer-H. Hunger, *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, Purkersdorf⁹2006, 92.

²⁴ See Christine Ratkowitzsch, *Platonisch-kosmogonische Spekulationen im 12. Jahrhundert*, Wien²1999 (WHB, Sonderheft ‚Zur Philosophie der Antike‘), 135–158 (143–145).

²⁵ For an analysis of the supposed philosophical and literary sources of the commentary see Westra 7–17 (note 17).

²⁶ In writings like the *Cosmographia* etymological speculations are superfluous, since the acting allegories have revealing names, e. g. *Yle* (Hyle), *Natura*, *Physis*, and so does even the scenario: the *locus voluptatis* is called *tugatón*, which derives from the supreme idea of ‘the good’, ‘τὸ ἀγαθόν’, within the Platonic system.

Marcianus Capella (medieval spelling). In dealing with the last name, he establishes a connection between the habit of young (female) goats, *capellae*, of climbing rocks by putting their front feet in a higher position than their back feet. This, he writes, is to be understood as a 'veiling', *integumentum*, of man's vocation to ascend to heaven by emerging out of the depth of the material world and following the steps of the Liberal Arts, the most noble of which, astronomy, leads human beings to the celestial spheres. Fantastic interpretations of this kind, however, could be found in auctorial texts such as e. g. the Saturnalia of Macrobius, written about 400 A. D. Thus they were commonly taken seriously in antiquity and the Middle Ages: be it sufficient to mention once again Plato's Cratylus and, most important for western culture in the Middle Ages, Isidor's Etymologiae. But let me return to the commentary on Martianus: it consists of three sections, the first of which contains didactic remarks entitled *De ordine discendi*; the second, which is conceived as an introduction, *accessus*, to the reading of Martianus, is in itself divided into four sections and dedicated to the methodology of interpretation, as already mentioned, and to technical questions such as imitation and, finally, to the practical use of the *De nuptiis*; the third and most extensive part is a profound running commentary to selected chapters, the purpose of which is to enucleate the philosophical basis of the Liberal Arts and to demonstrate that Martianus is to be regarded not only as an instructor of the *artes*, but also as a philosopher, that is to say he also represents that intellectual degree which, according to medieval educational theory, could only be reached with a perfect knowledge of the arts. In doing so the commentator does not hesitate to incorporate in his work typically medieval ideas. So he deals with the wheel of Fortune, *rota Fortunae*, when reflecting on Mercury's ascension to heaven with the help of Virtue.²⁷ Still more frequently he refers to his sources, mainly to Boëthius' writings on disciplines of the *quadruvium*, *De arithmetica* and *De musica*, and the Consolation of Philosophy (*De consolatione Philosophiae*) of the same author, who was highly estimated throughout the Middle Ages, and to the Aeneid of Virgil, whom he equally calls a philosopher rather than a poet, thus affirming, that Martianus had imitated Virgil, changing the *integumentum*, not the message of the latter's epic, which consists of twelve books. The reason, why Bernardus limited his commentary to the first half of the Aeneid, might be the fact, that Virgil's hero, Aeneas, enters the Elysium just

²⁷ Commentum in Marcianum 8, ll. 767–799 Westra (note 17), with a schematic illustration of Fortuna's way of licentious and unpredictable behaviour.

in the final and most important part of the sixth book of the poem, just as Mercury and Philology enter heaven in Martianus, whereas Virgil's following books contain the wars the Trojan leader had to fight in Italy after his return to the upper world. I will come back to this topic.

First a hypothetical remark: The observation just mentioned forms a transition to the second text I shall deal with. In five manuscripts of the thirteenth to the fifteenth century a commentary on the Aeneid is transmitted, which ends with a note on verse 636 of book six – for sure intentionally and not because the rest is lost. Only in the Kraków manuscript²⁸ a different author supplied notes up to the end of the sixth book. In one of the Paris-manuscripts²⁹ the commentary is ascribed to Bernardus Silvestris, whereas in all the others it is anonymous. The first editor, Wilhelm Riedel,³⁰ who had access only to the fifteenth century Paris manuscript, followed its attribution of the commentary to Bernardus without any question. The more recent editors, Julian Ward Jones and Elizabeth Frances Jones, however, argued against Bernardus' authorship, because of a supposed difference in language and style as well as in content – their arguments not being convincing in every respect.³¹ It is, however, beyond all doubt, that the author was familiar with the commentary on Martianus, from which he often quotes entire sentences.³² Furthermore, in both commentaries Cicero's system of virtues, presented in his treatise *De inventione* 2, 54, is referred to.³³ On the other hand, in the commentary on Martianus, Virgil's Aeneid, or rather the first half of the epic, to be exact, is frequently used as a source. Therefore it is evident that the two commentaries are closely related to one another, in so

²⁸ Kraków, Bibliotheca Jagiellonska MS 1198, dating from the 14th century.

²⁹ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Codex Latinus 16246, dating from the late 15th century.

³⁰ *Commentum Bernardi Silvestris super Sex Libros Aeneidos Virgilii*, ed. W. Riedel, Greifswald 1924.

³¹ J. W. Jones - E. F. Jones, *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid, Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris*, Lincoln-London 1977, IX–XI. – The author of the most recent study on this commentary takes for granted, that it was not the work of Bernardus Silvestris: A. Cyron, *Das ‚Commentum super sex libros Aeneidos‘ des Ps.-Bernardus Silvestris. Formen der Kommentierung und didaktische Struktur*, in: *Das Mittelalter* 17, 1 (2012), 25–39 (with an additional bibliography in notes 2, 4, 6). Cyron succeeded in demonstrating that the comments on books 1–5 of the Aeneid serve as preparative instructions which aim at the allegorical interpretation of book six, dedicated to men's intellectual formation.

³² All instances are thoroughly listed in the apparatus fontium beneath the text in the edition by Jones - Jones (note 31).

³³ The respective passages are indicated in the apparatus fontium, 26 of the edition by Jones - Jones (note 31).

far as they form a unit of a scholarly explanation of two different *integumenta* relating to philosophical advice as to how to enter a sphere of eternal bliss by means of increasing one's intellectual and moral perfection. In addition, the author of the commentary on Martianus informs his readers, that he had written explanations on Virgil and Plato, which means, of course, on the Aeneid and the Timaeus, the only work of the Athenian philosopher then known in Western Europe, as already mentioned.³⁴ Whereas, in my opinion, it can be taken for sure, that the commentaries on the first six books of the Aeneid and on Martianus were compiled by the same author, be this Bernardus Silvestris or somebody else, there is still a problem as to what is meant by the explanation of Plato, the literary genre of which is not precisely indicated. Since no genuine commentary on the Timaeus similar to those on Martianus and Virgil has been discovered so far, one cannot definitely exclude, that the author is referring to the *Cosmographia*, which is, as pointed out at the beginning, a new *integumentum* of C(h)alcidius' commentary. If this hypothesis, uttered already by Westra,³⁵ is right, the writer who is anonymous in all manuscripts but one has to be identified with Bernardus Silvestris. In this case, the lack of closeness in form and language would be due to the fundamental difference of the literary genres, as already suggested before. In consequence, the two commentaries should be considered a support for students, intended to facilitate their reading of the *Cosmographia*, which, within this group of writings, can undoubtedly be regarded as the climax of philosophical and theological instruction.³⁶ This being so, it is methodically inevitable either to postulate the existence of a hitherto

³⁴ See *Commentum in Marcianum* 5, l. 288 Westra: *hec super Platonem diffusius tractavi-mus* ('I have dealt with this matter more extensively when writing on Plato'). Referring to the negative statement of Jones - Jones about Bernardus' authorship of the Aeneid-commentary, a statement which in some way lacks adequate documentation, Dronke in his edition of Bernardus' *Cosmographia*, 3-5 (note 18) is inclined to maintain the previous attribution of the commentary on the Aeneid to Bernardus, whereas Westra 9f. (note 17) once more utters strong doubts. His arguments, however, are not convincing, since evident references in the Martianus-commentary to the one to the Aeneid - references he did not deny - seem to be in favour of Dronke's opinion. The fact that the author of the Martianus-commentary informs his readers in the passage quoted at the beginning of this note about a treatment of 'Plato', which he had written previously, could well be referred to the *Cosmographia*, the more so since he does not speak of a commentary.

³⁵ Westra 10: '(a Timaeus commentary), unless it is embedded in the *Cosmographia*'.

³⁶ I do not agree with F. Bertini, *Interpreti medievali di Virgilio. Fulgenzio e Bernardo Silvestre*, in: *Sandalion* 6 (1983), 151-164, who argues that the commentary was the result of a learned lecture held in some higher institute of education, e. g. a cathedral school, and was intended to be used by teachers rather than by students.

undiscovered commentary on the *Timaeus* by the author of the two others – it makes no difference, whether written by Bernardus or not – or to understand the commentator’s statement that he had treated the correlative effect of the two basic pairs of opposite qualities, namely cold and hot and wet and dry, respectively, on each other, in a wider sense.³⁷ This very question, however, was of great importance when the cosmic order rising out of chaos was discussed in antiquity and the Middle Ages³⁸ – and the creation of the world was exactly the topic of Bernardus’ *Cosmographia*.

Be this hypothesis right or wrong, the commentator in question, whoever he was, would ambitiously have aimed at a complex and, in his view, philosophical explanation of the world as a whole, reaching from the creation of the cosmos in his work on Plato and, if he really was Bernardus Silvestris, of mankind as well, to the ultimate destination of the human race, that is to say, the approach to a god-like life in a Platonic and finally also a Christian sense. The item just mentioned, however, is worked out under different aspects in the commentaries on Martianus and on Virgil, respectively. For the former deals with human beings as a species capable of penetrating the creation by intellect, whereas the latter concentrates on one individual, namely Aeneas, whose continuous development towards perfection, leading him to the prospect of a blissful existence, should serve as an example for readers of the first six books of the *Aeneid*.³⁹ Students are expected, it seems, to use each commentary, first that on Martianus, which does not treat the *trivium* in great length, but stresses the *quadrivium*, for basic knowledge of the *macrocosmus* (or *megacosmus*), and secondly that on Virgil, which stresses the individual, for instruction in what pertains to the *microcosmus*, whose supreme goal is the knowledge of the Liberal Arts, explained in the previous commentary on Martianus and here, in the commentary on the sixth book, applied to Aeneas, the poetic example for mankind as a whole. Furthermore, this sequence would correspond to that of Bernardus’ *Cosmographia* and, after all, to the story of creation as told in the *Genesis*. Finally, the author himself informs his readers about the chronology of his writings, as mentioned before. Each path is supposed to lead men to true happiness beyond the banalities of earthly life. In his

³⁷ *Commentum in Martianum* 5, ll. 249–289.

³⁸ Ovid, *met.* 1, 5–88.

³⁹ In arranging the commentary according to man’s different ages with their typical virtues and vices the author clearly follows Fulgentius, *Expositio Virgilianae Continentiae*, one of his main sources. A similar structure was also used by John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* 8, 24f., although he differs in some respect from Bernardus’ commentary.

commentary on Virgil the author strives to demonstrate, that the Roman poet used Aeneas as an *integumentum* of the physical and mental development of any human being. To reach this aim he adapted the doctrine of the six sections of human life, the typical features of which had already been worked out in ancient rhetoric. Each book, as he writes in his prefaces to books one to five, is a veil of a certain age, starting with *infantia*, then passing to *pueritia*, *adulescentia*, *iuventus* and ending with *aetas virilis* in book five, which for him is the age of virtue, *virtus*, as an old and surprisingly correct etymology says.⁴⁰

On the contrary, other etymologies the author refers to are ridiculous – from the point of view of modern scholarship, as already demonstrated. To give two examples: the name of Aeneas is believed to consist of the Greek words *enneos* and *demas*, ‘inhabitant’ and ‘body’,⁴¹ which designates the human being who still lives in his body; and the name of Anchises, the hero’s father, whose death is prior to the starting point of the narration of the Aeneid, is believed to indicate the ‘inhabitant of elevated regions’, *celsa inhabitans*; thus he is somehow assimilated to a supernatural divine father of a real man, the latter being a counterpart of Adam, who is called the son of God himself in the genealogy of Jesus in the gospel according to Saint Luke.⁴² To enforce this interpretation, the author paraphrases his peculiar etymology as follows: ‘father of all that exists and master of all that exists’, *patrem omnium omnibus praesidentem*. In other cases scientific and medical doctrine is adapted to the commentator’s concept. So he interprets the fourth book of the Aeneid, focusing on the sensual love of Aeneas and Dido as an *integumentum* of the age of youth and sexuality connected with it. For eating and drinking too much – the opening scene of book four starts from the end of an abundant dinner, offered at Dido’s court in honour of Aeneas, the refugee from Troy – provokes ‘dirty’ sexual desire, *immunditia carnis et libidinis*. Sexuality, he continues, originates in the human brains and results in the ejaculation of sperm, which is believed to be a purgation of an overloaded stomach, *purgatio ventris*. Taking into consideration the meticulously systematic procedure of the commentator, one is amazed to learn, that only in the introduction to book six, which contains the hero’s visit of his father Anchises in the underworld, the author did not explicitly mention a certain section of human life. This unexpected lack can be

⁴⁰ Varro, ling. 5, 10, 73: *Virtus ut Viritus a virilitate*, ‘*virtus*, properly *viritus*, (is derived) from virility.’

⁴¹ The original Greek words are ἔννοιος and δέμας.

⁴² Luke 3, 38.

explained as follows: the sixth book would necessarily represent the last age, *senectus*, which, in spite of all sophistic efforts of stressing its positive aspects, obviously had negative connotations. On the contrary, the commentator, as mentioned before, aims at demonstrating men's path to a blissful afterlife by leading a virtuous life on earth, dedicated to intellectual activities. This 'lifestyle', however, is closely connected to a man's adult age, the *virilis aetas*, as also already stressed. This fact must also be responsible for the ending of the commentary in line 636 of book six, an ending, which only from an exterior point of view seems abrupt, because line 636 deals with the very moment, when Aeneas fixed the golden bough, in the commentary the symbol of doctrine and wisdom, at the entrance of the Elysium. Doing so he is enabled to enter this delightful region, where the blessed dwell in eternity and where he will meet his father Anchises, this meeting of father and son being the very purpose of his journey into the world beyond, a world beyond any age. According to the intention of the commentator, this scene has to be taken for an *integumentum* of men's return to God, their creator. To demonstrate this, the author had to omit explanations to books seven to twelve of the epic, in which Aeneas' return to this world and the wars he fought in Italy are reported. This would have been an obstacle to the Christian understanding of Virgil, who from the times of Constantine the Great onwards was believed to be a prophet of Christ's epiphany on earth.⁴³

If this brief analysis is right, both commentaries may serve as examples of what was the mission and everlasting value of the masterpieces of ancient Latin literature, according to medieval commentators in Western Europe, namely to support men's 'pursuit of happiness' in a Christian sense.

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⁴³ See A. Ceresa-Gastaldo, *Cristianesimo*, in: *Enciclopedia Virgiliana I*, Roma 1984, 934–937; the first testimony of a Christian interpretation of Virgil can be found in the address of emperor Constantine to the Council of Nicaea in 325, preserved in Greek by Eusebius, *Oratio Constantini* 19–21, ed. I. A. Heikel, Eusebius, *Werke I*, Leipzig 1902, 181–187.