

Announcement of work in progress/publication

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Totum nihil

This is to announce the edition, commentary and translation (German), including an attempt at establishing authorship and place of composition, of a hitherto unnoticed Medieval Latin text discovered by the editor several years ago: *Totum nihil*.

The work is planned to be published as a Beiheft of Wiener Studien (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna): *Arbeiten zur mittel- und neulateinischen Philologie*, in 2017. Parts of the study have already been presented in talks delivered in the US in early 2016, in Princeton and Boston. An English translation of the text is being prepared independently.

Totum nihil is a Medieval Latin poem consisting of well over one thousand verses. Its uniqueness lies, in the first place, in the blend of different traditional themes, including, among others, Neo-platonic natural philosophy, theology of creation, and current political affairs. Interestingly, this intense and learned material of epic broadness is written in Goliardic verse, usually reserved to rather different, less serious matters. Indeed, the poem's extraordinary significance is not limited to its contents: *Totum nihil*, which appears to have been composed only one or two generations after the *Carmina Burana* – the largest, most famous, and also last collection of Latin Goliardic poetry –, demonstrates continuity in the use of Goliardic verse, whilst at the same time testifying to a dramatic change in its use. The author does not celebrate the enjoyment of worldly pleasures (that is, *Wein, Weib, Gesang*); hyperbole, self-mockery and sharp-tongued criticism directed against the establishment are absent, as is the attitude, so persistent in Goliardic poetry, to refuse Christian asceticism. Differing so profoundly in content and style, *Totum nihil* represents anything but the bibulous and satirical lyrics of the fun-loving Goliards: in fact, rhythm appears to be the only real element in common.

The author, who remains a very elusive figure, must have been inspired by a mixture of political and religious sentiments, as well as by a degree of nostalgia, brought upon by a series of shifts in the power structure and by the campaigns in the Holy Lands. He appears lost in the chaos of his days, which, by means of adynaton, he presents as Genesis in reverse.

The few bibliographic references in the text – if at all reliable – are vague and bizarre, creating the impression of an unsettled and erratic figure, echoing a chaotic and unstable reality. But rather than merely recording contemporary politics, the author masterfully blends theology of creation with Neo-platonic natural philosophy, while weaving together Biblical past and his own time. Metaphors, symbolism and panegyrics are permanent elements in the text, all features of primary importance, since they depend greatly on scholarly and literary traditions varying from period to period. Hence, beyond its political actuality, the poem is, most importantly, a mirror of medieval life and culture at the transition from the High to the Late Middle Ages.

Totum nihil may be the last representative of a well-established genre that has simply not survived in other manuscripts, but it may also have been boldly innovative, an original experiment enjoying a certain *succes d'estime*. At any rate, not only does this literary 'newcomer' immensely expand our understanding of a number of traditional literary themes, but it also comes to occupy a unique place in the history of Medieval Latin literature.