later. This is not a phenomenon peculiar to medieval thought or to scholastic processes of argument; it is a universal phenomenon in the development of every system; but the moment arrived in the Middle Ages with a peculiarly paralysing effect because it arrived without warning.

As soon as men lost confidence in the system and its aims, the details all appeared intensely repellent. No books have ever been written that give less invitation to study by their physical appearance than the manuscripts of the medieval schools; their illegible script, crabbed abbreviations, and margins filled with comments even less legible than the text, invite derision. As soon as men lost confidence in the end toward which this whole apparatus of learning moved, the adjuncts were bound to seem barbarous and inhumane. They had no beauty of style or vivacity of wit to support them.

Hence, as the residuary legatee of the scientific and systematic humanism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a new kind of humanism came into existence. It was the product of disillusion with the great projects of the recent past. When the hope of universal order faded, the cultivation of sensibility and personal virtue, and the nostalgic vision of an ancient utopia revealed in classical literature, remained as the chief supports of humane values. Instead of the confident and progressive humanism of the central Middle Ages, the new humanism retreated into the individual and the past; it saw the aristocracy rather than the clergy as the guardians of culture; it sought inspiration in literature rather than theology and science; its ideal was a group of friends rather than a universal system; and the nobility of man was expressed in his struggle with an unintelligible world rather than in his capacity to know all things. When this happened the humanism of the central Middle Ages came to be mistaken for formalism and hostility to human experience.

guardian of culture?
where inspiration?
where ideal?
where/how nobility of man

5

HUMANISM AND THE SCHOOL OF CHARTRES

I

There are few institutions which have been praised more consistently than the school of Chartres. It has won everybody's sympathy and admiration: their sympathy because it has been seen standing for a humanistic ideal soon to be overwhelmed in a rising tide of law and theology, which most men in their hearts do not much like; and their admiration because it has been seen as the chief medieval exponent of a general literary culture in a world of growing specialization. It went out in a blaze of glory. There was no slow decline from height to height, but after standing on a pinnacle for fifty years, it suddenly sank into obscurity, and was never heard of again, except by diggers for curious facts. It has been praised for many things: as an almost solitary advocate of Platonism before Aristotle quenched all the poetry in philosophy; as a mother of art, eloquence, and style before the study of the ancient authors was crowded out of the academic curriculum; for its touch of paganism in a world becoming ever more closely regimented in the paths of orthodoxy; finally, if we feel no enthusiasm for paganism, there has in recent years been the pleasure of discovering that the apparent paganism was after all orthodox Christianity. So everyone has been pleased and the reputation of Chartres stands higher now than it has ever done.

This whole triumphal march of reputation has been accomplished in little over a hundred years, and it epitomises the rise of medieval studies in general during this period. The authors of the volume of the *Histoire littéraire de France* which appeared in 1814 knew nothing, or almost nothing, of the school of Chartres. They still lived in an atmosphere in which almost everything scholastic was centred on Paris, and they bluntly assigned to Paris the teaching activities of the two brothers, Bernard and Thierry, who were soon to be acclaimed as the chief luminaries of the

school of Chartres. Even in 1850 the young Barthélemy Hauréau in his prize-winning essay on medieval scholasticism had time for only a passing glance at Chartres. But the tide was turning. In 1855, another young man, L. Merlet, who was to make a notable contribution to Chartrian studies, published a collection of letters which demonstrated for the first time (as he claimed) the prosperity of the schools of Chartres in the early twelfth century.[1] And in 1862 the same line of thought received an important extension from the argument of C. Schaarschmidt that the schools of Chartres were sufficiently important in 1138 for John of Salisbury to leave Paris in order to spend three years there listening to William of Conches.[2] Thus two of the greatest names of twelfth century scholarship were added to the Chartres roll of honour. Bernard (surnamed Silvestris) and Thierry of Chartres were joined by William of Conches and John of Salisbury, and the four names became the corner-stones of the School of Chartres.

These articles and suggestions belong to the prehistory of the school of Chartres. Its modern history begins with the appearance of R. L. Poole's *Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought and Learning* in 1884. This brilliant work of a young scholar contained a chapter entitled 'The School of Chartres' in which the phrase was first used in its modern sense to describe something that was at once an institution and a way of thought. This chapter did more than anything else to give a character and outline to the history of the school. Despite many errors, which Poole himself was foremost in correcting, his general characterization has never seriously been questioned. The main drift of the story he told may be summarized in his own words. After describing the eminence of the school under Bishop Fulbert who died in 1028, he says that shortly before 1115

> the school emerges again into notice under the rule, first, it should seem, of Theodoric and then of his brother Bernard, and thence forward, down to near the middle of the twelfth century, it enjoyed a peculiar distinction, continually growing until it became almost an unapproached pre-eminence, among the schools of Gaul.

[1] L. Merlet, 'Lettres d'Ives de Chartres et d'autres personnages de son temps', *B.E.C.*, 1855, 4th ser., i, 443–71.
[2] C. Schaarschmidt, *Johannes Saresberiensis*, 1862, pp. 14–23.

This pre-eminence Poole ascribed to the combined efforts of Theodoric 'who boldly pushed the principles of realism to their furthest issues', and Bernard Sylvester his brother and successor as chancellor, 'a devout Platonist', 'a humanist', and a scholar who 'with a frank vigour' 'portrayed the cosmogony according to a scheme compatible only with some form of pantheism'. Under these men, using the methods rather 'of a university than a school' Chartres attracted perhaps not so many pupils as some other schools, but a 'distinctly higher class of students than Melun or St. Geneviève or the Petit Pont at Paris'. As evidence of this he adduced John of Salisbury's willingness to quit Paris 'after two years under famous dialecticians at Paris' to spend three more years under the masters at Chartres. These masters included such men as William of Conches, 'Platonist, cosmologist and grammarian, whose writings are a good sample of the freedom of thought that issued from the classic calm of Chartres', Richard l'Evêque, 'whose virtues as a man and a scholar are celebrated in no ordinary terms' and Gilbert de la Porrée.

If Poole provided the eloquence and the vision, it was left to the Abbé Clerval to fill in the details eleven years later. His *Ecoles de Chartres au Moyen-Age* which appeared in 1895, is one of the most influential books of local history ever written. Clerval, besides being professor of ecclesiastical history in the local seminary, was librarian of the town, and he was the first to use the manuscripts of Chartres to illustrate the history of the school. Their use made it possible to give the schools a substantial existence and an atmosphere which only a local historian could have created. The study of the manuscripts, and the contemporary studies of the art and architecture of the cathedral, made Chartres a symbol of the intellectual life of the twelfth century. Clerval wrote of the masters and pupils, the studies and organization of the schools, as if the whole scene were present to his eyes. He developed the theme which Poole had first announced. The schools of Chartres from the eleventh century onwards 'constituaient une véritable academie; leur organization persévère et se développe. La valeur de leurs chanceliers et de leurs écolâtres, dont la suite se continue avec une gloire ininterrompue, l'importance et l'éclat de leurs doctrines théologiques ou philosophiques, en font des écoles à part, ayant leur cachet et leur individualité particulière.' After 1150 this glory was suddenly eclipsed by the

rivalry of Paris, which 'malheureusement ne tardera pas à exercer sur les écoliers chartrains une irrésistible attraction.' But for half a century Chartres had stood on a pinnacle of fame and influence, and Clerval was able to describe the life of the schools during this period of greatness in much detail. The account he gave may be summarized thus:

Under Ivo (d. 1115) the bishop himself taught, but his successors, being too occupied by external duties, were brilliantly replaced in this task by chancellors and masters whom they appointed. Teaching in the schools was the chief duty of the chancellor and the masters whom the chancellor chose in concert with the bishop. These masters of the schools were men of great weight and dignity, the advisers of the bishop in theological matters, and aspirants to the chancellorship at Chartres and to bishoprics elsewhere. The best of these masters rose to be chancellors of Chartres. At the beginning of the century the chancellor Wulgrin had Bernard as his assistant master. When Bernard became chancellor he was assisted by Gilbert and Thierry. When Gilbert and Thierry in their turn became successive chancellors they were assisted by Guy, Hugh, Ivo, Payen Belotin, Garin, Odo, Robert le Petit, William de Modalibus and Rainald. Masters so famous as these 'ne pouvaient manquer d'élèves'. Those of Bernard indeed formed 'une véritable colonie', but almost equally plentiful were the pupils of his successors. They were bound together by an 'ésprit de solidarité' which gave the school a unity and cohesion both in its institutional life and in the literary and philosophical principles which guided its teaching.[1]

Such was the picture drawn by Clerval, and in its main outline it has won universal acceptance. It gained the scholarly approval of R. L. Poole, who completed and corrected some of the details in a masterly article which appeared in 1920.[2] This article has all Poole's usual lucidity and sobriety, and its caution rather strengthened than weakened the general outline given by Clerval.

Until this point everything had developed very smoothly, but nothing had been done to add to the intellectual content of the school's activity. Indeed, in the intellectual sphere, the school had suffered a substantial loss for which Clerval deserves the credit. The early reputation of the school—that is to say its reputation from about 1850 to 1890—had been built on the supposition that Bernard the Chancellor of Chartres was the same man as Bernard Silvestris who wrote the considerable work of Platonic cosmology called *De Mundi Universitate*. So long as this identification stood, one could believe many things about the Platonic tradition at Chartres. But Clerval showed that Bernard Silvestris was a master of Tours and had nothing to do with Chartres, and later work has entirely borne out this conclusion.[1]

It is strange that this loss did not much affect the now triumphant reputation of the school of Chartres, though it was not until 1938 that any substantial attempt was made to fill the gap. In this year J. M. Parent produced a book which initiated a new age in Chartrian studies—the age of the systematic publication of the lecture notes of the masters in whom we are interested.[2] Until this time almost nothing that came from their classrooms had been printed. Since 1938, with the exception of the war years, there has been a steady stream of studies and editions which have brought the work of the masters to life. For the first time we begin to be able to see them at work in their lecture rooms. Yet it is remarkable how little the earlier picture of the school of Chartres and its masters has so far been altered by these revelations. The role of Bernard Silvestris has been quietly filled by Thierry and William of Conches, but the accents remain unchanged. Recent accounts of the programme and ideas of the school of Chartres and of the special character of its attempt to reconcile Platonism and Christianity simply give a new documentation to the judgment formed by R. L. Poole as a result of studying the work of Bernard Silvestris; they do not substantially change it. The same may be said of the flow of publications since the war, which have brought to light a new range of texts and a new generation of scholars to carry on the work of Clerval and Poole.[3]

[1] The names and details quoted above will be found on pp. 143–179 of Clerval's book.

[2] 'The Masters of the Schools at Paris and Chartres in John of Salisbury's time', *E.H.R.*, 1920, xxxv; reprinted in R. L. Poole, *Studies in Chronology and History*, 1934, 223–47.

[1] *Les écoles de Chartres au Moyen Age*, pp. 158–162. R. L. Poole (retracting his earlier opinion) sums up the evidence in *Studies in Chronology and History*, pp. 228–35.

[2] J. M. Parent, *La doctrine de la Création dans l'ecole de Chartres*, 1938.

[3] The most notable of these publications are mentioned below, pp. 80–1, in discussing the work of the masters chiefly associated with the school of Chartres.

II

The picture of the school of Chartres both as an institution and as the source of a scholastic programme, which has emerged from all these labours, is certainly very impressive and quite unusually coherent. This is largely the result of the confidence with which later scholars have been able to use the work of their predecessors. Recent workers concentrating on the scholastic programme have taken the institutional framework built up by earlier scholars more or less for granted. In working on the large connections of thought and outlook represented by the masters associated with Chartres they have been able to assume that the base is firm. Chartres with its schools is, so to speak, the launching pad from which the philosophical missiles are projected into outer space. The routine is well-established. The labours of earlier scholars have made the preparatory stages almost accident-proof, and after a brief count-down—Bernard, Thierry, Gilbert, William —we are off into a state of weightlessness among the Platonic Ideas. But before we lose sight of the earth we may ask, how secure is the foundation from which we have been launched on this journey? In other words, what do we know about the school of Chartres?

The answer to this is: remarkably little; much less than is generally supposed. Let us ask first about the organization of the school; then about the masters who taught there; and finally about the pupils who studied there.

First, the organization. It is certain that there was a school of some kind at Chartres. But this in itself tells us little. Schools existed in cathedral cities and other important centres all over Northern France and England at this time, and the letters published by Merlet in 1855, which first drew attention to the school at Chartres, tell us as much about schools at Laon, Le Mans, Orleans, and Châteaudun as about the school at Chartres. They tell us, that is to say, that there was a master with pupils at each one of these places; but about the level of instruction or size of the enterprise in any of them they tell us nothing at all. Secondly we may be sure that the chancellor of the cathedral had a general responsibility for the school—that is to say he probably appointed a schoolmaster. But we cannot assume, as Clerval did, that the supervision of the school was a main part of his duties, or that he himself taught in the school. He may have done so; but the existence of a famous man as chancellor of the cathedral cannot be accepted as proof that this famous man was teaching in the school —any more than the appearance of a famous master among the witnesses to the bishops' charters can be accepted as proof that this master was teaching in the school. There are many cases where it is clear that this deduction cannot be drawn. Consequently each case must be examined in the light of the available evidence. The chancellor had many duties besides making provision for a school. He had to conduct the correspondence of the chapter, look after the library and archives, administer the property attached to his prebend, and live as befitted a dignatory of the church. His own learning cannot be taken as an index of the learning of the school: many cathedrals had learned chancellors without having famous schools, and vice versa.

It would be unwise to attempt to settle the question on negative evidence. We may simply note that on the only occasion when we have positive evidence of a chancellor of Chartres teaching in a school in the first half of the twelfth century, he was teaching not at Chartres but at Paris. This was Gilbert de la Porrée, whom John of Salisbury heard lecturing at Paris on Mont S. Geneviève in 1141.[1] He had been chancellor of Chartres since 1126 and it is generally assumed that he had given up his chancellorship in order to lecture in Paris. There is no evidence to support this supposition. But, in any case, the fact that Gilbert went to teach in Paris suggests that he did not find sufficient scope for his teaching in Chartres. Whether he went to Paris while he was still chancellor of Chartres, or resigned his chancellorship in order to teach in Paris, it is hard to reconcile his appearance in Paris with the generally accepted account of his presiding over a great and famous school at Chartres.

But after all, it may be said, what counts in a school is not the head but the masters and the quality of the teaching, and the pupils. What do we know about these?

Clerval has provided us with a long list of masters who taught at Chartres during the first half of the twelfth century: Bernard, Gilbert de la Porrée, Thierry, before they became successive chancellors; Guy, Hugh, Ivo, Payen, Belotin, Garin, Odo,

[1] *Metalogicon*, ii, 10, ed. C. C. J. Webb, 1929, p. 82.

Robert le Petit, William de Modalibus and Rainald. To this list most scholars would be prepared to add William of Conches.

Faced with this impressive list, it is important to begin by stating that the only evidence for some of these names is their appearance with the title *Magister* in lists of witnesses of the bishops' charters. This is quite unsatisfactory. So far as I can discover the only man on the list for whom there is quite convincing evidence of a teaching career at Chartres is the first one, Bernard. Bernard appears in a list of canons at Chartres of 1119–24 as *magister scolae*, and he is evidently the master referred to as 'Master B'. in the letters printed by Merlet.[1] John of Salisbury has left a magnificent account of Bernard's teaching, which he must have had from men who were Bernard's pupils. The evidence which connects Bernard with the school of Chartres in his day is very solid, and it makes the contrast with the period after Bernard all the more striking. After about 1120, for the next thirty years, the connection of every master or pupil with the school of Chartres is conjectural. We must not put the matter too strongly. There *must* have been a master, and there *must* have been pupils at Chartres. But this is something that can be said about many cathedral schools. We need more evidence than this for the special distinction of the school of Chartres, and evidence is—to say the least—hard to find: much harder than it is at Paris or Laon.

To test this assertion we may leave aside for the moment the minor characters mentioned by Clerval and concentrate on the three men who have done most, after Bernard, to make Chartres famous. They are Thierry, Gilbert de la Porrée, and William of Conches—undoubtedly three of the most important writers of the period. What is their common connection with Chartres?

First of all Thierry. Clerval established the now traditional account of his career: he was the brother of Bernard of Chartres; while his brother was chancellor he taught at Chartres; on his brother's death about 1126 he went to Paris, but he returned to teach at Chartres as chancellor from 1141 till his death in 1151.

It is rather tedious to analyse these bare and apparently harmless statements; but so much has been built on them, and so much scholastic history in the twelfth century depends on similar chains of reasoning, that criticism has a wider importance than might seem likely. The reputation of Chartres has been kept afloat by a disinclination to niggle; but niggle we must. To begin with: was Thierry the brother of Bernard of Chartres? Apart from this relationship he would scarcely have begun to have a place in the early history of the school. The only evidence comes from Otto of Freising, who tells us à propos of Breton cleverness that there have been three very clever Bretons in his day: Abelard, and the brothers Thierry and Bernard.[1] It is certain that the Thierry referred to here was the later chancellor of Chartres, but it is pure hypothesis to say that his brother Bernard was Bernard of Chartres. Otto does not tell us this. Nor does John of Salisbury, though he has plenty to say about both Bernard of Chartres and Thierry.[2] Nor does Abelard, who is our only other source of information about Thierry's brother. Abelard's evidence indeed points in a quite different direction. He describes Thierry's brother as a very incompetent theologian with an absurd view of the efficacy of the words of consecration in the Mass.[3] It is possible of course that this theologian whom Abelard thought so incompetent was Bernard of Chartres, the great teacher of the liberal arts whom John of Salisbury admired so extravagantly, but we need some evidence before we are persuaded. Besides, there are minor incongruities in the theory which could be insisted on: the fact that John of Salisbury mentions Bernard of Chartres and Thierry in the same sentence without hinting that they were brothers; the fact that Bernard of Chartres died nearly thirty years before Thierry. But why insist on these things? The point is quite unimportant, except that it provided an initial link between Thierry and Chartres, which made Clerval think he had seen Thierry's name as a master of the school of Chartres in some

[1] The most important document for Bernard's career as a teacher at Chartres is printed in R. Merlet and A. Clerval, *Un manuscript chartrain du XIe siècle*, 1893, pp. 195–6: it is an oath taken by the canons of Chartres, including *Bernardus scolae magister*, at some time between 4 November 1119 and 1124, and probably nearer the earlier of these two dates. In 1124 he appears as chancellor in an agreement between the monks of St. Peter of Chartres and those of Nogent (*Cartulaire de S. Denis de Nogent-le-Rotrou*, ed. Ch. Métais, 1895, pp. 240–3). Two years later, in a charter of 27th November 1126, Gilbert (de la Porrée) appears as chancellor, though in another charter of the same day he is called simply *canonicus* (*Cartulaire de l'abbaye de S. Père* (sic) *de Chartres*, ed. M. Guérard, 1840, pp. 263, 267).

[1] *Gesta Frederici Imperatoris*, i, 49, ed. G. Waitz, *M.G.H. Scriptores in usum scholarum*, 1912, p. 68.

[2] *Metalogicon*, ed. Webb, pp. 17, 29, 53–81, 93, 94, 124, 136, 205–6 (on Bernard); pp. 16, 80, 191 (on Thierry).

[3] *Theologia Christiana*, *P.L.* 178, 1286.

68-69

charters of the time of Bernard the Chancellor.[1] If any such charter exists, I have been unable to find it. Failing this, there is not the slightest evidence of a connection between Thierry and Chartres until he became chancellor in 1141. Nor is there any evidence that he taught at Chartres while he was chancellor. The only place where he is *known* to have taught is Paris, and it was certainly there that he spent the main part of his teaching life.

It would be quite wrong to blame Clerval for misleading us. Every historian interprets evidence under the influence of his vision. For Clerval, the most solid thing in the twelfth century was Chartres, and Chartres was given the benefit of every doubt. When he wrote, the scholastic world of the twelfth century was thinly populated, and he did not know, as we now know, how many men with the same name and similar occupations were apt to be around at the same time. He therefore easily allowed Chartres to draw every suitable unattached name into its orbit.

He approached Bernard's successor as chancellor, Gilbert de la Porrée, with the same preconceptions.[2] Just as every Master B. was available as Bernard of Chartres, so every Master G. might be Gilbert de la Porrée. This tendency was already at work in 1855. Among the letters published in this year by Merlet there is one to Master B. from his disciple G. The disciple expresses the wildest enthusiasm for his master: he owes everything to him and can scarcely endure to be separated from him; he has become a schoolmaster in Aquitaine, but he continues to sigh for his old master, and so on. Well, it is very likely that Master B. is Bernard of Chartres. But who is the disciple? Certainly Gilbert de la Porrée, said Merlet. Poole agreed: 'there can be absolutely no doubt about its attribution'. Naturally Clerval did not dissent'[3] It seems

[1] *Les écoles de Chartres*, p. 160, Clerval quotes two charters of 1119–1124, which Bernard witnesses as chancellor, 'tandis que son frère Thierry, dans les mêmes pièces, s'attribue le titre de *magister scolae*'. Thierry's name, however, does not appear in the charters to which Clerval refers. Further, Clerval says (p. 170), that a reference by Abelard (*Hist. calamitatum*, *P.L.* 178, 150) to Thierry as *quidam scolarum magister* is shown by the context to refer to Chartres. But so far as I can see the context shows nothing of the kind. These small errors would not be worth mentioning if it were not that the whole picture owes so much to trifling errors and weak inferences.

[2] After quoting charters witnessed by Gilbert as canon and chancellor of Chartres, Clerval proceeds: 'C'est alors (1124–1137) qu'il enseigna avec la collaboration sans doute de Thierry, et qu'il eut pour disciples; Rotrou, Jordan Fantosme, Jean Beleth et Nicolas d'Amiens' (*Ecoles de Chartres*, pp. 164–5). For these assertions no evidence is offered.

[3] Merlet, *B.E.C.*, 1855, pp. 461–2; Poole, *Illustrations of Medieval Thought and Learning*, p. 134n; Clerval, p. 164.

harmless enough, especially since Gilbert de la Porrée probably *was* anyhow a pupil of Bernard of Chartres. But even here the habit of easy attribution paved the way for exaggerations and false conclusions. This attribution helped to suggest that the school of Chartres had a central place in Gilbert's scholastic life. But on a cool view the identification of Gilbert de la Porrée with this raving young admirer of Master B. is quite unlikely.

Our picture of Gilbert's connection with Chartres must be based on quite different evidence, and the small amount of evidence that exists suggests that Gilbert studied grammar under Bernard of Chartres, and then went on to Laon to study theology. It was at Laon that he wrote the first great work which made him famous. The man to whom he submitted it for approval and criticism was not Bernard of Chartres, but Anselm the great master of Laon.[1] It is true that Gilbert became a canon of Chartres by 1124 and chancellor in 1126. He *may* have taught there, but there is a striking absence of pupils who can be shown to have studied under him during those years. His teaching career still needs to be elucidated, but for the moment the only certainty attaches to his teaching in Paris in 1141, and there is some evidence that his influence radiated from this centre.

We turn now to William of Conches. Here again there is a quite strong presumption that he was a pupil of Bernard of Chartres. No contemporary or near-contemporary source actually tells us this, but John of Salisbury twice associates the two names, first when he says that William followed the same method of teaching as Bernard, and secondly when he calls William the richest or most fertile grammarian of his day after Bernard of Chartres.[2] Certainly this is not proof, but in the web of hypotheses from which the school of Chartres has been created, it is as near proof as we can get. Much more important, however, is the question whether William of Conches himself taught at Chartres. If this could be established we should have a perfect case of the continuity of the Chartrian tradition over a period of perhaps thirty years from about 1110 to 1140.

We have now reached the point of central importance for the

[1] 'Glosatura magistri Giliberti Porretani super Psalterium quam ipse recitavit coram suo magistro Anselmo causa emendationis'. (Balliol College, Oxford, MS. 36, quoted by R. A. B. Mynors, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Balliol College, Oxford*, 1963, p. 26.)

[2] *Metalogicon*, i, 5; i, 24; ed. C.C.J. Webb, pp. 16–17, 57.

history of the school of Chartres. The suggestion, which has been accepted almost without dispute for the last hundred years, is that William of Conches studied at Chartres and then taught at Chartres, and that the great John of Salisbury was one of his pupils at Chartres. The evidence is John of Salisbury's own account of his student days. He tells us that he left England in 1136 and studied logic on Mont Saint Geneviève, in the suburbs of Paris, from 1136 to 1138. Then he left the Mount and followed the lectures of William of Conches and others for three years from 1138 to 1141. Finally in 1141 he returned and studied logic and theology under Gilbert de la Porrée.[1] The great question for us is, where did John of Salisbury spend the years from 1138 to 1141, and in particular where did he hear the lectures of William of Conches?

Until 1848 scholars took it for granted that everything described in John of Salisbury's account of his student days took place in Paris. Then Petersen, the editor of John of Salisbury's *Entheticus*, pointed out that if he *returned* in 1141, he must previously have *left*. This seemed reasonable, and it started a search for the place to which he had gone. Petersen thought that he had returned to England. But then Schaarschmidt hit on the idea that he had gone to Chartres.[2] His main argument was that he could only have written the very full account of the teaching of Bernard of Chartres, which he gives in his *Metalogicon*, if he had been an eye-witness. We know now that the argument is certainly false, because Bernard had died long before John came to France, and he must have got his information from Bernard's pupils, whom he could meet anywhere. By the time this was known, however, the reputation of the school of Chartres was showing its power of surviving the demolition of the evidence on which it was built. Schaarschmidt's other arguments amount to nothing. Nevertheless he succeeded in making it an established doctrine that John of Salisbury went to Chartres in 1138 and studied for three years under William of Conches. It is an attractive hypothesis, but is it true?

If it is true, it is certainly odd that John of Salisbury should not have mentioned the place where he spent three important years, and we may ask whether Petersen did not pose an unreal problem in insisting that John must have left Paris. He certainly left Mont S. Geneviève; but we must remember that the Mount was a suburb of Paris outside the city walls. The sense of John's account of his life would be amply met if he left the Mount to go down into Paris, to the schools by the river, and returned to the Mount after three years. This would fit very well into the other details he gives. For instance, he tells us something, though in a rather confused way, about the other masters with whom he apparently studied during the three years from 1138 to 1141: one of them was Adam de Petit Pont, who certainly taught in the city; another was Thierry, who was certainly teaching in Paris at this time: a third was the Parisian master Petrus Helias. Altogether it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Petersen started a false trail by forgetting that a man could leave Mont S. Geneviève to go, not away from, but into Paris. Schaarschmidt then hit on a popular, but wholly unproved, answer to Petersen's question, and his successors have been only too willing to make the pilgrimage to Chartres.

If this is so, then William of Conches must join Thierry and Gilbert de la Porrée among the masters who can be found teaching at Paris, but so far as we know, not at Chartres. And John of Salisbury must join the many students who studied at Paris but not, so far as we know, at Chartres. And if he goes, who is left? It is very difficult to say.

III

Apart from the details there are, it seems to me, three general sources of misunderstanding in the traditional account of the school of Chartres. Of these the first, and least important, is the tendency to exaggerate the importance of Chartres as a teaching centre, and to draw into the orbit of Chartres any works which exhibit certain 'humanistic' characteristics and have no other obvious local attachment. The second is the widely accepted conception of a 'humanism' which came into existence, flourished briefly, and was suddenly extinguished in the first half of the twelfth century, especially in the scholastic environment of Chartres. The third is the conception of an 'anti-humanistic'

[1] Ibid, ii, 10; pp. 77–82.

[2] See C. Schaarschmidt, *Johannes Saresberiensis*, 1862, pp. 14–22, where the earlier views are discussed and the new solution to the problem of John of Salisbury's whereabouts between 1138 and 1141 is proposed.

tendency, especially associated with the studies of logic, law, and theology at Bologna and Paris, which were a main cause of the decline of Chartres.

To speak briefly of each of these misconceptions in turn:

1. Chartres was only one of many cathedral schools in northern France whose continuous existence can be observed from the eleventh century onwards. Several of these schools had at some moment in their history one master of more than local significance who drew pupils from a large area. For a time these masters gave their school a wide fame. But we must be careful to distinguish between this short-lived fame, which depended on one man, and the lasting fame of the later universities, which depended on a tradition of scholastic success and a large variety of teachers and students. The cathedral schools existed to serve a limited and local need: their main purpose was to equip the higher ranks of the diocesan clergy with useful learning. Unless an outstanding master created quite exceptional conditions, these schools did not normally draw pupils from far afield. Their resources did not allow for the co-existence of many masters. Their main purpose was to provide fairly elementary instruction at a diocesan level. Accidents of personality apart, they had not the resources of teachers or students to make possible or desirable a permanently higher level of instruction than that of a grammar school.

Yet by the early twelfth century there was a substantial and growing demand for something more than this. Ambitious young men who wished to reach the highest places in government, whether ecclesiastical or secular, needed to be equipped with an advanced knowledge of systematic theology and canon law; they needed to operate easily in the intricacies of highly technical argument. It was quite beyond the resources of a cathedral organisation to meet this need, except in the lifetime of an outstanding master with talents superior to the function for which he was employed. In the period from about 1090 to 1120, by far the most successful of the cathedral masters in meeting the new demand were the brothers Anselm and Ralph at Laon; but even they could not for long found a school capable of surviving at the level to which they had raised it.

Almost within the lifetime of these two brothers it was becoming clear that the only two places in Europe with the special qualities necessary for perpetuating higher studies were Paris and Bologna. They both provided—for reasons which are far from clear—opportunities for many masters to teach, and for many students to come and go as they wished. From a period quite early in the twelfth century, the number of masters and the wide choice open to students gave Paris a position quite different from that of any other city in northern Europe. In the years between 1137 and 1147, when John of Salisbury was a student, he was able to hear the lectures of ten or twelve masters, of whom six or seven were men of the first importance in their subject. This simple fact gave Paris an overwhelming advantage over every other centre of study in the North. At the same time Bologna, where the schools were fostered as a political and economic asset and had no connection with the cathedral, established a similar lead in southern Europe. Both these cities had freed themselves from the restrictions imposed by the ordinary cathedral school; and Oxford, the next competitor for an international role in the arts and theology, had no cathedral at all.

The framework of a cathedral organization was quite inadequate for the development of permanent institutions of advanced teaching. This fact does not detract from the achievement of those early cathedral masters who won a general fame in their own day. Quite the opposite. It merely explains why they did not found schools of permanent importance. Chartres is unique among cathedral schools in having had *two* masters of international standing separated by a century: Fulbert in the early eleventh century and Bernard in the early twelfth. No other cathedral school can show so much.

Both Fulbert and Bernard are examples of something very rare in the history of scholarship: they were men of the highest intelligence who made teaching their first concern. They were not original thinkers, but they commanded the whole learning of their day and they had the power and impulse to make it accessible to others. There is indeed much more evidence for the number and diversity of Fulbert's pupils than for Bernard's a century later. This may partly be due to chance, for we are exceptionally well informed about the names and occupations of Fulbert's pupils; but I think it is also likely that Fulbert was better equipped to provide what his age required. By contrast, Bernard was in his time somewhat old-fashioned. His type of learning no longer held the imagination or satisfied the ambition of younger men. They

were turning elsewhere: to Laon for theology, to Spain for science, to Paris for the multiplicity of masters and the wide range of opportunity. Even when Bernard was at the height of his powers, Laon was vastly more attractive to the ambitious young man than Chartres, and Paris already enjoyed a freedom of scholastic movement that Chartres could never hope to emulate.

Yet Chartres was, and long continued to be, a sweet and pleasant place. The genial liberality of its counts, the lack of tension in its political relations, the freedom of its ecclesiastical society, the wealth and numbers of its cathedral canons, all helped to provide an atmosphere of well-being and learning in the church. In the course of the century it had many learned and distinguished men as bishops, chancellors, and canons; and even in a century of great cathedrals, the cathedral of Chartres must be reckoned one of the finest monuments of the age. All these factors must give Chartres a special place in our mental image of the twelfth century, but when we transfer this glowing image to the *school* of Chartres we must beware. As an institution the school attached to the cathedral suffered from the limitation of most of the cathedral schools. It existed to serve a local need, and when Bernard died it reverted to this, its proper function.

2. The second misconception concerns the 'humanism' of Chartres. 'Humanism' is a word that it is sometimes necessary to use and there is nothing wrong with it except that it stands for many different things. Any study of the seven liberal arts, which were the foundation of all education from the Carolingian age, implies a certain degree of humanism. That is to say, in studying the arts you are studying the human mind and the external world: the human mind and its forms of expression in grammar, rhetoric, and logic; and the external world in the arts of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. The subjects may be extremely circumscribed, but they still have their basis and development in human powers alone. They are therefore genuine humanistic studies, and every cathedral school of the period from the tenth to the twelfth centuries was in its general tendency humanistic. To this range of humanism the school of Chartres certainly belonged.

But was there a special type and intensity of humanism peculiar to the school at Chartres? I think not. There is—to say the least—no evidence that the works of William of Conches and Thierry represented the teaching of Chartres rather than that of Paris or (for that matter) Tours or Orleans. These works represent a phase in European studies rather than a narrowly localized form of humanism. They are the product of that moment when ancient materials handed down in the West for centuries had been thoroughly assimilated, and masters could write about them with ease and confidence. They are among the last expressions of western scholarship before the deluge of new materials which destroyed literary ease in academic exercises for a long time to come. The problems that now arose were too difficult and complicated for easy reading.

Both William of Conches and Thierry were men who seem to have realized that they had reached the end of the road. They were both keen seekers for new materials, but they had no idea how plentiful the new materials would soon become. They are the last representatives of the generation which had derived its knowledge of the world of men and nature mainly from the tradition of the Latin world—from Ovid and Virgil, from Macrobius and Martianus Capella, from Boethius and Cassiodorus. However eager they might be for new texts, their range of competence scarcely extended beyond the sources that had long been familiar, and two stout volumes could hold all the natural knowledge that Thierry considered really essential from the past. This humanism was certainly not shallow, but it was very limited in its range, and the range was that of contemporaries everywhere in northern Europe.

3. This brings us to the third misconception implied in the traditional account of the school of Chartres—the misconception about the end of the humanism represented by William of Conches and Thierry.

What came to an end in fact was not humanism, but the limitations on humanism imposed by the paucity of ancient sources and the conservation of ancient methods of instruction. William of Conches and Thierry, and all the men of their generation who worked on the same sources, had reached the end of the road because they had reached the end of the available facts. Plato's *Timaeus* may be a marvellous book, but if you read it as a scientific text-book, in isolation from Plato's other works and in total ignorance of the scope of Greek scientific experience, it cannot take you very far. For any further advance new material and new methods of systematic analysis were essential. These two

things, new materials and new methods, were brought into the schools in the late twelfth century, and their exploitation was essentially the work of the universities as distinct from the cathedral schools.

IV

It may not be out of place at this point to review the works of the masters who have generally been taken to represent the Chartrian tradition in the more general context which I have sketched. In this context the works of William of Conches and Thierry appear, not as the products of a brilliant but short-lived tradition of a single school, but as the representatives of a phase in the continuous development of western studies and of medieval humanism. Even Bernard of Chartres, the one great and indisputable Chartrian master of the twelfth century must be seen not as a landmark in the history of a school to which he gave a brief distinction, but as the last great schoolmaster in the late Carolingian tradition. It is with him that our survey must begin.

1. *Bernard of Chartres*

Nearly everything that we know about Bernard and his teaching comes from John of Salisbury. What John of Salisbury tells us is that he was a wonderful schoolmaster who developed a method of teaching his pupils Latin which ensured that even a pupil of moderate ability could learn to write and speak Latin correctly within a year. The basis of his method seems to have been a thorough grounding in grammar and composition enforced by a system of daily exercises which impressed the rules on his pupils' minds. What John of Salisbury describes sounds very like the upper forms of a good English public school on the classical side —the formation of character and godliness going hand in hand with a careful attention to the niceties of the Latin language. We must remember that John was writing in the 1150s about a master of the previous generation, and he described his method in detail mainly because it was no longer followed. Even John's own Latin masters, William of Conches and Richard Bishop, who had followed the same method as Bernard of Chartres in earlier days, had given it up because their pupils had insisted on getting on more quickly.

The picture which emerges is of a great teacher, sober, methodical, conservative in his tastes and in his philosophy. His teaching, so far as we can reconstruct it, kept strictly within the framework of the arts as they had been known in Europe since the tenth century. Yet with this conservatism of outlook and aim Bernard had a power of crystallizing points in rough but memorable verses and pithy sayings by which a schoolmaster is remembered. In an unobtrusive way Bernard was the main hero of John of Salisbury's survey of the learning of his day. He stood for the literary and moral virtues which John most admired. Perhaps John himself would have liked to be a master such as he imagined Bernard to have been, but by his day the prospects for an exponent of this kind of learning were not good, and John had to content himself with being an administrator.

2. *William of Conches*

The first thing to be noticed about William of Conches is that his scholarly career falls into two fairly distinct parts. He was one of those men who do their best and most original work when they are young. He lived till 1150 or later, but already by about 1125 he had produced one work of first-class importance which he never substantially added to or improved. This was his *Philosophia Mundi*. It was the first attempt in the West to give a systematic account of the whole of nature on the basis of a few simple scientific ideas. I am not here forgetting the work of John Scotus Erigena two and a half centuries earlier, nor that of William's contemporary Honorius Augustodunensis. Nor am I forgetting the illustrated English scientific manuscripts contemporary with the *Philosophia Mundi*, which describe the world in a basically similar way.[1] But Erigena's work is primarily a work of mystical theology, the scientific survey of Honorius Augustodunensis is an encyclopaedia pure and simple, and the English scientific manuscripts, beautiful though they are, are too jejune for serious intellectual study. Only William's is a work of systematic science, that is to say a work in which the details are subordinated to a general scientific plan.

The scientific ideas of William of Conches were not his own. They came partly from the *Timaeus*, with elaborations drawn from Macrobius and Martianus Capella, and partly from Galen through

[1] See below p. 165 and Plates IV–VI.

the recent translations of Constantine the African. What William of Conches provided was organizing power and lucidity. It has been said that William of Conches read the *Timaeus* through the eyes of Macrobius, but this (I think) is to put the cart before the horse. Many men had lost themselves in the intricacies of Macrobius. What William had the power to perceive was that these intricacies could be reduced to order if seen through the eyes of Plato, and that the same simplifying process could be extended through the whole field of human biology with the help of the great Arab physicians whose work had only recently become available in Latin. He went back to the fountainhead. Until the scientific works of Aristotle were translated into Latin, a strong interest in natural science ultimately led back to Plato because he was the source, directly or indirectly, of all general scientific ideas. William of Conches wrote before Aristotle was known as a scientific teacher, but he illustrates very well the reasons for Aristotle's later scientific supremacy and Plato's decline: Plato provided very few facts. William of Conches was already stretching out for more facts. He did not know the potential abundance of Aristotle; but he seems to have been the first to recognize that medical works newly translated from Arabic could help to complete Plato's picture of the universe. In this way he provides an early example of the restless search for new materials which would soon transform the scientific outlook of the West.

William of Conches was not alone in his interest in the workings of nature. His *Philosophia Mundi* has many indications of the existence of widespread discussion. The rapid diffusion of his work confirms this impression. It was being read in Constantinople in 1165. By this date—apart from the two version by the author himself—there were two other versions almost certainly made by others. In one form or another there are a hundred and forty manuscripts of the work now in existence. They mostly come from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and they demonstrate William's success in summing up the science of the pre-Aristotelian age.[1]

The *Philosophia Mundi* was the best expression of the scientific interests of a whole generation seeking for an orderly description of the universe. The long effort to build up the image of the school of Chartres has accustomed us to suppose that Chartres must somehow lie behind the interests displayed by William of Conches. This is far too narrow a view. William of Conches was not the representative of a school but of a generation. He is a bridge between the meagre scientific resources of the early Middle Ages and the massive influx of new material which began almost as soon as he had written his great work.[1]

[1] These statistics are based on A. Vernet, 'Un remaniement de la *Philosophia* de Guillaume de Conches', *Scriptorium*, 1947, i, 252–9. The evidence for the work having reached Constantinople by 1165 is to be found in the *Liber thesauri occulti* of Paschalis Romanus, ed. S. Collin-Roset, *A.H.D.L.*, 1963, xxx, 111–198.

3. *Thierry*

Thierry was the complete teacher of the liberal arts of his day. He has left nothing that is not a record of his lectures—on Boethius' *De Trinitate*, on Cicero's *De Inventione* and on Genesis Chapter I.[2] We must not be misled by the theological appearance of some of the titles: Thierry was not a theologian, though he illustrates the tendency for teachers of the arts at this time to be drawn into theological controversies. He was essentially a teacher of the arts. His collection of texts on the seven liberal arts, his *Heptateuchon*, is the best monument we have of the complete arts course before it was drowned in the flood of new material and new interests in the late twelfth century. His preface to this collection is a noble statement of the aims of an old-fashioned master of the liberal arts.[3] He wished, he says, to join together the trivium and quadrivium so that the marriage might bring forth a free race of philosophers. He attached special importance to scientific subjects, or, as he would say, to the subjects of the quadrivium. One of Abelard's biographers tells us that Abelard heard him lecture on the quadrivium, and went to him for private instruction

[1] It may be useful here to list the most important of the texts of William of Conches's lectures which have been edited or analysed in recent years: glosses on the *Timaeus*, ed. E. Jeauneau, 1965; glosses on Boethius *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, J. M. Parent, *La doctrine de la Création dans l'école de Chartres*, 1937, 124–36; glosses on Priscian, E. Jeauneau in *R.T.A.M.*, 1960, xxvii, 212–47; glosses on Macrobius, E. Jeauneau, 'Gloses de Guillaume de Conches sur Macrobe: note sur les manuscrits', *A.H.D.L.*, 1960, xxvii, 17–28.

[2] Thierry's commentaries, lectures and glosses on Genesis and Boethius *De Trinitate* have been printed by N. Haring in *A.H.D.L.*, 1955, xxii, 137–216; 1956, xxiii, 257–325; 1958, xxv, 113–226; 1960, xxvii, 65–136. Some of the glosses on Cicero's *De Inventione*, including an interesting preface are printed in W. H. D. Suringer, *Hist. critica scholasticorum latinorum*, 1834, i, 213–53, and there are further extracts in M. Dickey, 'Some commentaries on the *De Inventione*', *M.A.R.S.*, 1968, vi, 1–41.

[3] The contents of this collection of texts were first analysed by Clerval, *Ecole de Chartres*, pp. 220–248. The Prologue is printed by E. Jeauneau in *Medieval Studies*, 1954, xvi, 171–5.

in mathematics, but he soon found the subject too difficult.[1] Whether or not this is true, Thierry's lectures on Genesis and Boethius are full of scientific interest. The view of the universe which they present is very similar to that in William of Conches' *Philosophia Mundi*. They used the same sources and approached the study of the world and its constituent parts in a similar way.

Thierry was certainly a great teacher. Men dedicated their books to him and were glad to say that they had been his pupils.[2] He was sharp-tongued, independent, careless of popularity, and he attracted men who spoke of him with that exaggerated admiration which is the supreme reward of the teacher. Like William of Conches he had mastered the past, and he thought he saw further than the greatest scholars of antiquity, not because he had anything new to contribute, but because he could survey the whole field. Yet he too felt the need for new texts, and his *Heptateuchon* shows that he was touching the fringe of the great new discoveries of ancient writings.

At the moment when the old learning was assimilated, the old boundaries were beginning to break down. Every master of note at this time shows a tendency to break out in one direction or another—into theology, law, or natural science, and into specialised fields of independent study like logic or grammar. Some masters broke out more reluctantly than others, but they all did so to some extent. They had to, if they were to survive. It must often, then as now, have been difficult for a master to reconcile his private interests with those of his pupils, and the latter in the end always prevailed. William of Conches had to adapt his teaching to his pupils' demands, and Thierry's works also illustrate the strength of the pressure from below which drove the masters on. We have three versions of his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*, just as we have of the *Philosophia Mundi*, and I think it is very likely that two of them are the work of pupils who developed their master's teaching in different ways. These are just a few of the signs that the whole field of learning was in a state of upheaval

[1] See V. Cousin, *Ouvrages inédits d'Abelard*, p. 471. R. L. Poole discusses the story, *Illustrations of Medieval Thought and Learning*, p. 363; see also Clerval, p. 192.

[2] See Bernard Sylvestris, *De Mundi Universitate*, ed. C. S. Barach and J. Wrobel, p. 5; and Clerval, *Enseignement des arts liberaux à Paris et à Chartres ..... d'après l'Eptateuchon de Thierry*, 1889, for Hermann of Carinthia's dedication to Thierry of his translation of Ptolemy's *Planisphere*.

largely caused by the multiplication of students who would pay only if they got what they wanted.

The three masters of whom I have spoken all had sufficient power to leave the stamp of individuality on their works. But we must not exaggerate either their isolation from the general current of thought or the importance of their achievement. All their thoughts were old thoughts. They had the strength to make old thoughts live again, but they could not add to them. They had the strength to form this exiguous material into an intelligible whole, but they could not break far out of an ancient framework of knowledge. To gather new material, to systematize the new as they had systematized the old, to reach out to new patterns of thought, and to fill the vast empty spaces of ignorance, were tasks that belonged to the future. These tasks were beginning to be undertaken in the times of William of Conches and Thierry, and it was out of them that the complex system of studies of the mediaeval universities grew. These studies were not a reaction against humanism, Chartrian or otherwise; they were the necessary and inevitable development of whatever Thierry and William tried to do. This development required the labours of many men; and the places where many masters and students could assemble had advantages which grew more conspicuous from year to year. In intellectual productivity, as in any complex process, numbers are important because they make specialization, competition, and the growth of new techniques both possible and easy. In these respects Chartres, even in the first half of the twelfth century, could not compete with Paris. Hence Thierry, Gilbert de la Porrée, and (as I think likely) William of Conches all gravitated to this centre, and in so far as they represent a school at all, it is the school of Paris rather than that of Chartres.

V

We may, however, finally ask why, if the foundations of what I may call the legend of Chartres were as insecure as I have suggested, they have seemed so firm to such excellent scholars as Clerval and Poole, and to all those who have accepted their conclusions. I think there are several reasons, both personal and general. Of the two great founders of the legend, R. L. Poole had formed his views of the school of Chartres when he believed that

Bernard Silvestris was the same man as Bernard of Chartres. This provided the school with a very solid foundation. He had also noticed the general coherence between the work of Bernard Silvestris and Thierry of Chartres whom he wrongly believed to be his brother, and between Bernard Silvestris and William of Conches, whom he wrongly believed to be his pupil. He also believed that it had been demonstrated that William of Conches taught John of Salisbury at Chartres. The chain of evidence connecting these men and their habits of thought with Chartres seemed unbreakable. Yet not one of these links is firm, and most of them are demonstrably false. In part Poole recognized this when he returned to the subject nearly forty years after writing his first book. But he was unwilling (as we all are) to alter his views more than was strictly necessary, and though he saw the weakness of some of Clerval's new arguments, he was willing to accept the support which Clerval provided for the main conclusions of his early work without thinking them out afresh.

As for Clerval, we must remember his circumstances. He was Professor of History at the Seminary at Chartres and deeply concerned in building up the new centre of clerical learning, of which the pupils are such a conspicuous feature in the cathedral close today. It was very easy for him to think of the twelfth century schools as a prototype of what he saw about him. He was encouraged to do this by the manuscripts in the library, which he was the first to use to reconstruct the history of Chartres. He saw Thierry's *Heptateuchon*, and he reconstructed from this and from other volumes of that impressive library a course of studies which he characterized as Chartrian. It was easy for him to forget that the *Heptateuchon* was probably a monument of Thierry's teaching at Paris, and that its connection with Chartres was in a sense fortuitous. It was easy also to forget that the texts of the *Heptateuchon* were in the main the texts of a whole generation of masters and not of Thierry alone. The imaginative impact of these books on Clerval was very great. It was fatally easy for him to see everything centred on Chartres, to make easy identifications of Masters B. and G. with Bernard or Gilbert (or if necessary William), and gradually to build a system held together by a logic of its own. Sometimes he was demonstrably wrong; but more often he erred simply by giving Chartres the benefit of every doubt. The cumulative effect of building multiple benefits of this kind into a system is very great. It is also very impressive because it conflicts with no obvious rules of evidence. The system stood because, in the nature of the case, it could not conflict with many known facts. I think it has now begun to conflict with some of the facts, and the time has come to take the pieces apart again.

CHART I

TREE OF KNOWLEDGE (SCHOOL OF HUGH OF ST. VICTOR)

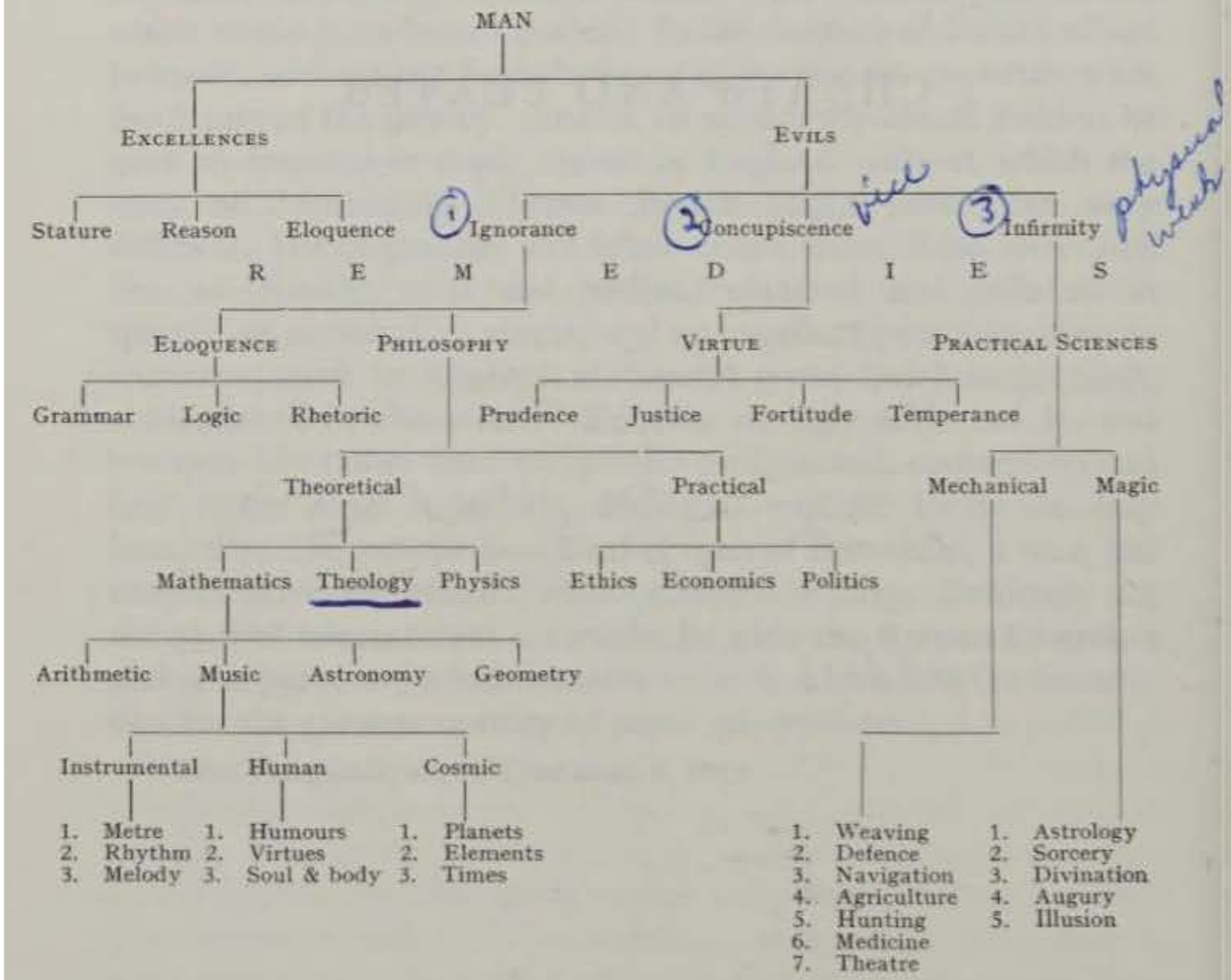
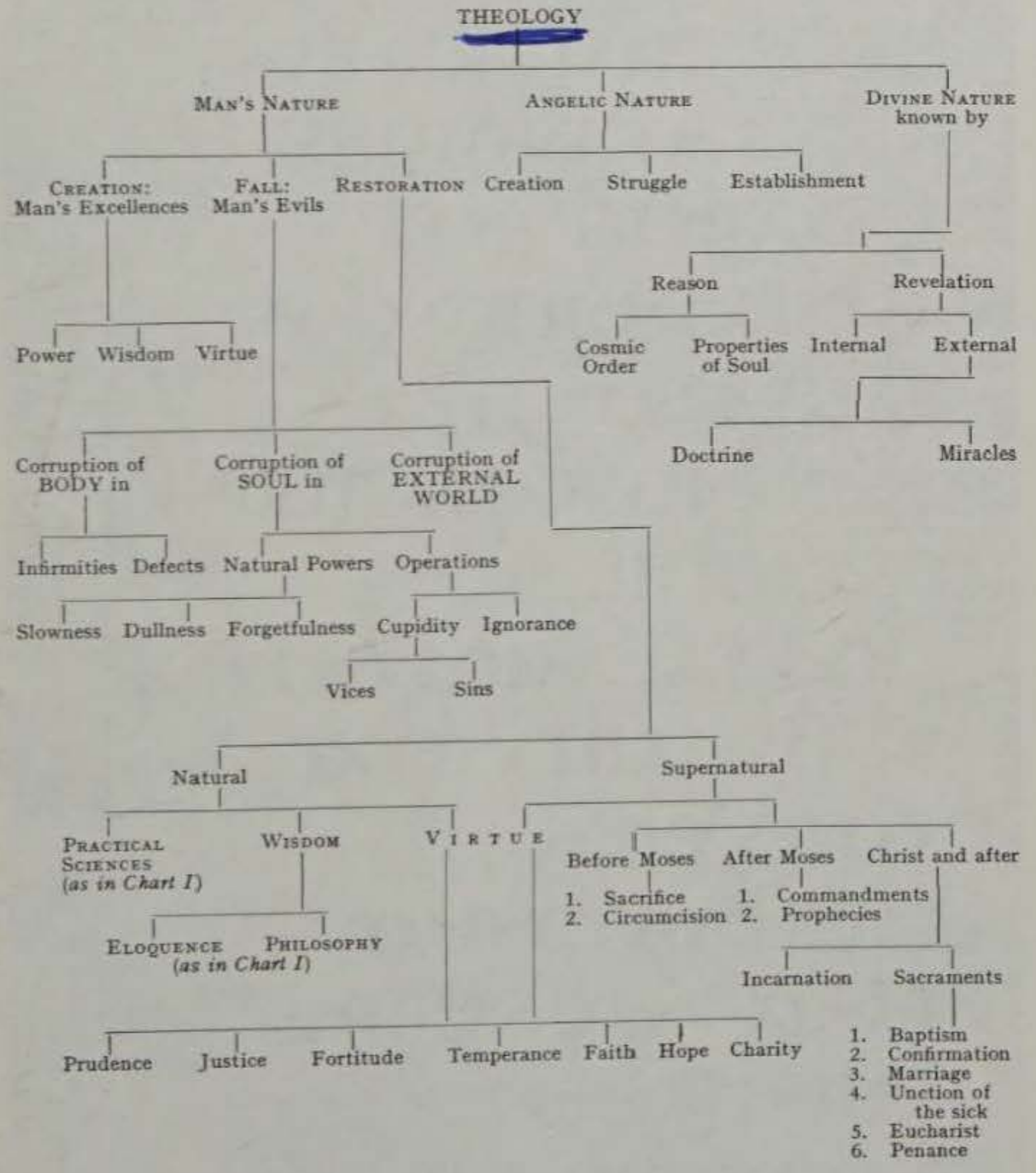
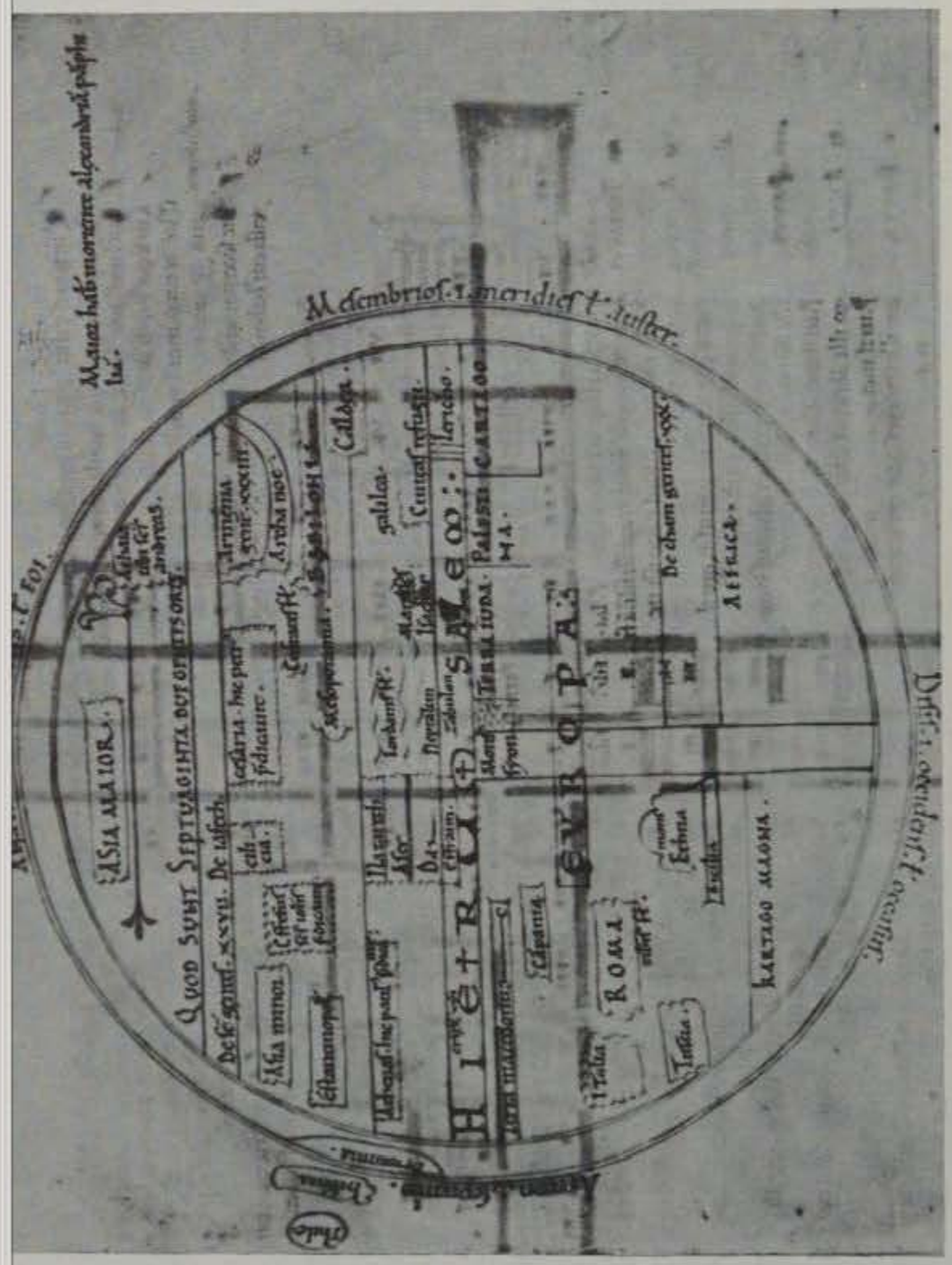
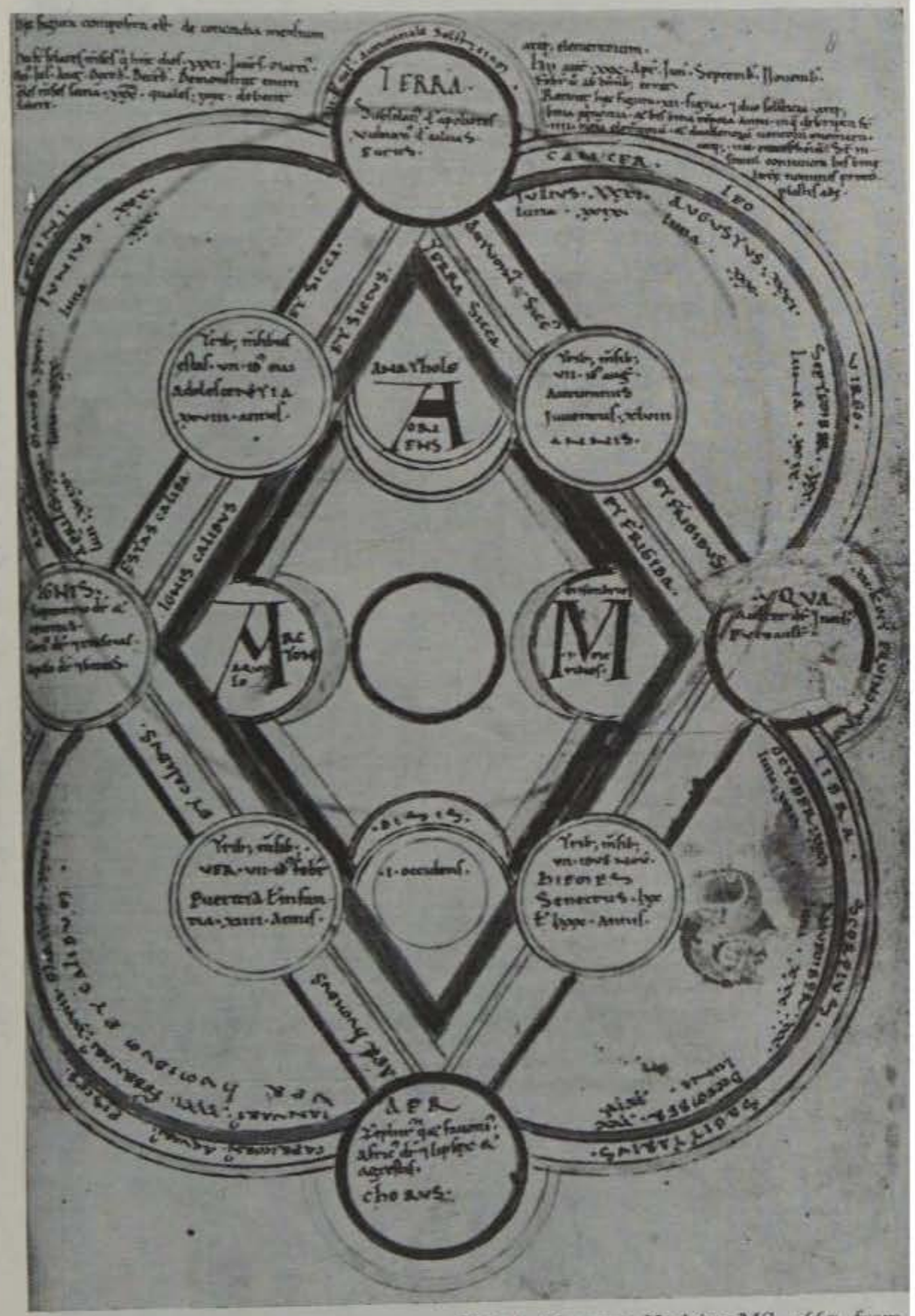


CHART II

TREE OF KNOWLEDGE (SCHOOL OF ABELARD)

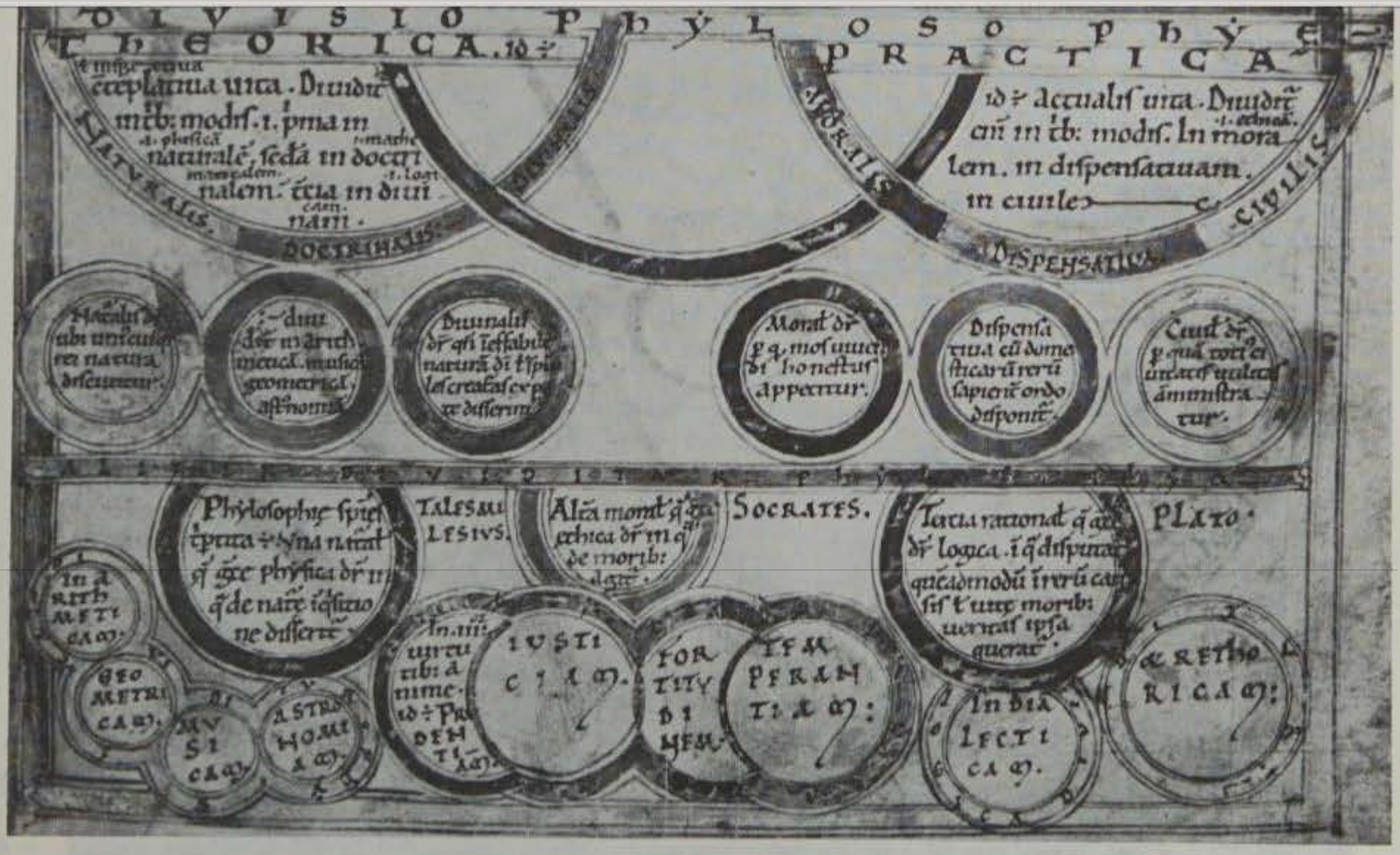






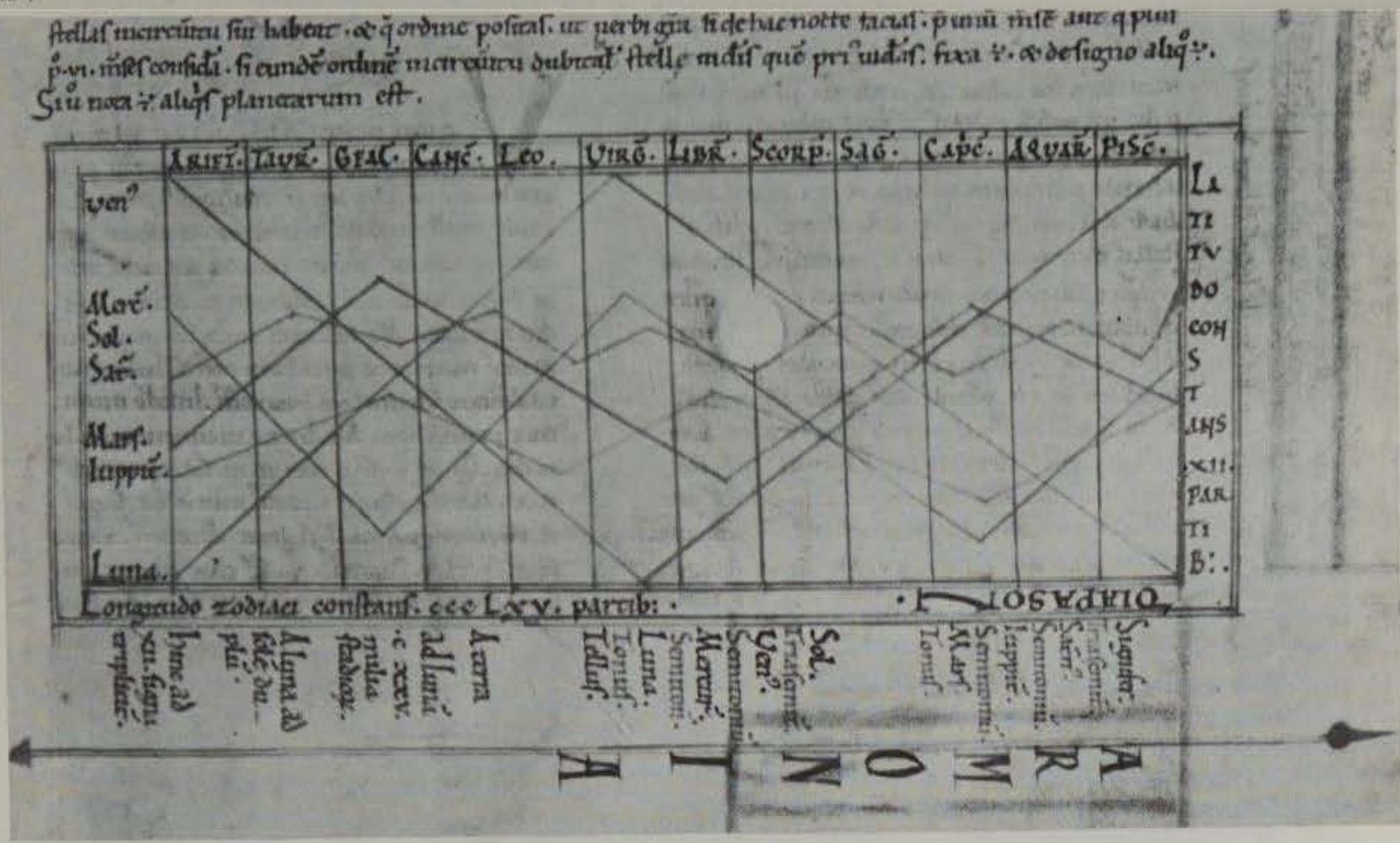
The organisation of Nature, c. 1100. (British Museum, Harleian MS. 3667, from Peterborough Abbey).

Plate IV



The Divisions of Philosophy, 1109–1110. (St. John's College MS. 17, f. 7).

Plate V



The music and movements of the planets, 1109–1110. (St. John's College, MS. 17, f. 38).

Plate VI