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Walter of Châtillon, Part II. Poems from Various Sources (1160 - 1184): 66 "Versa est in luctum" (1180 - 1184)

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66

1.

Versa est in luctum
cythara Waltheri,¹¹²⁴
non quia ^ase ductum^a
extra gregem cleri
uel eiectum^b doleat
aut^c abiecti lugeat
uilitatem morbi,
sed quia considerat,
quod finis accelerat
improuisus orbi.

1a.

Libet intueri¹¹²⁵
iudices ecclesie,¹¹²⁶
quorum status hodie
peior est quam heri.

2.

Vmbra cum uidemus
ualles operiri,
proximo debemus
noctem experiri;
sed cum montes uideris
et colles cum ceteris
rebus obscurari,
nec fallis nec falleris,
si mundi tunc assersis

noctem dominari.

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3.

Per conualles¹¹²⁷ nota
laicos exleges,^d
notos turpi nota
principes et reges,
quos pari iudicio
luxus et ambitio
quasi nox obscurat,
quos celestis ulcio
bis acuto gladio¹¹²⁸
perdere maturat.

4.

Restat, ut per montes
figurate notes
scripturarum fontes:
Christi sacerdotes
colles dicti mystice,¹¹²⁹
eo quod in uertice
Syon constituti¹¹³⁰
mundo sunt pro speculo,
si legis oraculo
uellent non abuti.¹¹³¹

5.

lubent nostri colles
dari^e cuncta uenum^e 1132
et preferri molles¹¹³³
sanctitati senum.¹¹³⁴
Fit hereditarium
Dei sanctuarium
et ad Christi dotes
preponuntur hodie
expertes scientie
presulum nepotes.

5a.

Si rem bene notes,
succedunt in uicium
et in beneficium¹¹³⁵
terreni nepotes.

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6.

Veniat in breui,
lesu bone deus,
finis huius eui,¹¹³⁶
annus iubilaeus!¹¹³⁷
Moriar, ne uideam
Antichristi frameam,¹¹³⁸
cuius precessores¹¹³⁹
iam non sani dogmatis
stant in monte crismatis¹¹⁴⁰
censuum censores.¹¹⁴¹

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1. Walter's lyre has turned to sorrow,¹¹²⁴ not because he grieves that he has been taken—or driven—out of the community of the clergy or because he laments the disfigurement of a foul disease but because he considers that an unforeseen end to the world is fast approaching.

1a. I would like to take a close look¹¹²⁵ at the officials of the church,¹¹²⁶ whose standing today is worse than yesterday.

2. When we see the valleys becoming shrouded in shadow we should very soon experience night. But when you see the mountains and the hills grow dark along with everything else, you mislead no one and are not yourself misled if you then maintain that darkness is master of the world.

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3. By the valleys¹¹²⁷ understand lay lawbreakers, princes, and kings, notorious for their shameful ignominy. Their excesses and self-aggrandizement condemn them equally, shrouding them in darkness like night, and heaven's vengeance makes haste to destroy them with its two-edged sword.¹¹²⁸

4. It remains for me to add that you should understand the mountains figuratively as the wellsprings that are the Scriptures. Christ's priests are allegorically called hills¹¹²⁹ because they were set on the summit of Zion¹¹³⁰ as a model for the world provided they chose not to abuse the word of the Law.¹¹³¹

5. Our hills command that everything be put up for sale¹¹³² and that effete young men be preferred¹¹³³ over holy old men.¹¹³⁴ God's sanctuary is becoming heritable property. Today the nephews of bishops, innocent of knowledge, are put in charge of Christ's dowry.

5a. If you examine the matter closely, worldly nephews step into their uncles' shoes in vice and benefice.¹¹³⁵

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6. Good Lord Jesus, may an end to this age¹¹³⁶ come soon, the jubilee year!¹¹³⁷ May I die rather than see the sword of the Antichrist,¹¹³⁸ whose precursors¹¹³⁹ with their mad doctrines now stand on the Mount of Olives¹¹⁴⁰ as assessors of wealth.¹¹⁴¹

NOTES

66 Cb

^{a-a} *Schmeller; seductum Cb*

^b *Schmeller; eiectus Cb*

^c *Schmeller; ut Cb*

^d *ex leges Cb*

66, 5. 2

The manuscript's reading ('dari cunctis fenum'—'that may be given to everyone') makes no acceptable sense in the context. Rico bases his excellent emendation, 'dari cuncta uenum' ('that everything be put up for sale'), on the similar phrase 'ut omnia illic uenumdentur' ('that everything there be put up for sale'), which occurs a few paragraphs further on—in c. 34 of *Opus imperfectum in Matthaëum* (at PG, lxvi. 819)—from the passage on which, Rico has shown, Walter modelled much of poem 66.

^{e-e} *Rico; cunctis fenum Cb*

Poem 66

In his excellent study of this poem Francisco Rico argues that its darkly brooding nature derives not from Walter's bitterness over his personal circumstances, as most editors have assumed (despite Walter's denial), but from his model, the *Opus imperfectum in Matthaëum*, wrongly attributed by medieval writers to John Chrysostom.³²⁶ Since Rico's study was published in a small booklet, which had very limited distribution, it will be helpful to summarize here some of the principal points he makes. Rico begins by observing that the opening stanza can be interpreted in two different ways: (1) Like Job, Walter is grief-stricken, has a vile disease, and has been excluded from the society of his peers; (2) Like Job, Walter is grief-stricken but, unlike Job, he does not have a vile disease and has not been excluded from the society of his peers. Rico points out that the assertion that Walter had leprosy made by John of Garland and some of the *vitae* may derive from a misinterpretation of the opening stanza.³²⁷ However, Rico does not reject the view that Walter is sick but believes that there must be a relationship between the opening stanza and the rest of the poem. He suggests the following: 'Walter, outside the "official" Church, physically ill, denounces those who, spiritually ill, continue to abuse the Church from within.'³²⁸ For everyone darkness is

coming, 'the culmination of both illnesses', along with the 'Antichristi framea' and the 'finis improvisus orbi'.

Rico's most important contribution is his discovery that much of the poem is closely modelled on the following passage from the *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaem*:

In duodecima hora sumus. Unde putas quia candor iustitiae iam recessit de mundo et sol radios gratiarum suarum in se colligens reuocauit et totam terram nigredo iniquitatum uel mendaciorum quasi nox fusca cooperuit, nisi quia iam et ipsa duodecima hora finiatur? Ubique tenebras uides et dubitas diem transisse? Prius etenim in uallibus fit obscuritas, die declinante ad occasum. Quando ergo colles uideris obscurari, quis dubitat quin iam nox est? Sic primum in saecularibus et laicis Christianis incipit praevalere obscuritas peccatorum. Nunc autem quando iam uides quod sacerdotes positos in summo uertice spiritualium dignitatum, qui montes et colles dicuntur, apprehenderit iniquitas tenebrosa, quomodo dubitetur quia finis est mundi?³²⁹ (PG , lvi. 818)

It can be readily seen that stanzas 2–4 are an inspired recasting, in poetic language, of the latter part of the above passage (beginning 'Prius etenim'). In stanza 3, however, Walter may also be inspired by Adso, *De ortu et tempore Antichristi*, 'Reges autem et principes primum ad se conuertet #Antichristus#,³³⁰ and may be thinking specifically of Henry II (for his involvement in the murder of Becket) and Frederick Barbarossa (for causing the papal schism).³³¹

In stanza 4 Walter apparently follows the *Opus imperfectum* and Alan of Lille in identifying the mountains as the higher echelons of the ecclesiastical establishment. The strange phrase 'scripturarum fontes' in apposition to 'Christi sacerdotes' is perhaps Walter's attempt to embrace also the alternative allegorical significance of mountains recorded by Rabanus Maurus: the Old and New Testaments. In stanza 5, however, Walter blames the 'hills' for advancing *molles* over better-qualified *senes*; so it is clear that he is talking about bishops. Accordingly it seems best to suppose that the 'mountains' are the Old and New Testaments and the 'hills' denote the priesthood in general, as in poem 16, where Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, is described as *sacerdotum flos* (16. 4).

Rico's correction of *Cb*'s reading in 5. 2 (prompted by a closely related passage in *Opus Imperfectum*³³² makes clear that once again Walter sees simony as one of the leading forms of corruption in the Church. Elsewhere he calls this sin 'lepra Syri' in reference to Elisha's servant, Gehazi, who sought to appropriate for himself a fee that his master had refused for

curing a Syrian and was punished with the cured man's disease, leprosy.³³³ So this moral sickness of the clergy is linked to the theme of leprosy, with which the poem began.³³⁴

³²⁶ Rico, *On Source*, pp. 17–27. The *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaëum* is printed in *PG* lvi, where the most relevant passage (quoted by Rico) is to be found in Homily 34 at 818.

³²⁷ This view, though still possible, has been rendered much less likely by the discovery that John of Garland's source was in fact Walter's younger contemporary, Radulfus de Longo Campo, not our poem; see Wollin, '*Versa est in luctum*', esp. pp. 307–12.

³²⁸ Rico, *On Source*, p. 13.

³²⁹ 'We are at the twelfth hour. Why do you think that the shining light of justice has retreated from the world and the sun has gathered and recalled the rays of its pleasant warmth, and the blackness of iniquity and lies has covered the entire earth like a dark night, if not because even the twelfth hour is now coming also to its end? You see darkness everywhere and you doubt that the day has passed? Earlier there was darkness in the valleys, as the day was sinking at sunset. When you see hills are dark, who doubts that it is already night? In the same way the darkness of sin begins to be prevalent, first among secular and lay Christians. But now, when you see that dark iniquity has taken hold of priests, who are called mountains and hills, placed on the very summits of ecclesiastical office, how can it be doubted that it is the end of the world?'

³³⁰ Adso, *De Antichristo*, CCCL xlv, p. 24, line 61.

³³¹ Cf. poem 54, where both are explicitly attacked in stanzas 17 and 24.

³³² *PG* lvi. 819: 'Forum est iste mundus, ubi omnia uenalia sunt.'

³³³ See note at 27, 2. 8.

³³⁴ Job's affliction, with which Walter compares (or contrasts) his own plight, was generally held to be leprosy.

¹¹²⁴ Job 30: 31: '*Versa est in luctum cithera mea.*'

¹¹²⁵ Cf. poem 46, 11. 1.

¹¹²⁶ As judges in canon law cases, bishops and archdeacons were the guardians of public morality.

- ¹¹²⁷ Rabanus Maurus, *Allegoriae*, 'Per ualles mentes iniquorum' (PL cxii. 1072).
- ¹¹²⁸ Rev. 1: 16: 'et de ore eius gladius utraque parte acutus exibat'; Ecclus. 21: 4: 'quasi rhomphaea bis acuta'.
- ¹¹²⁹ Rabanus Maurus, *Allegoriae*, 'Per montes duo Testamenta' (PL cxii. 1001).
- ¹¹³⁰ Ps. 2: 6: 'ego autem constitutus sum rex ab eo super Sion, montem sanctum eius'.
- ¹¹³¹ Rabanus Maurus, *Allegoriae*, PL cxii. 900: 'colles, uiri sancti'.
- ¹¹³² Cf. poem 27, 2. 2: 'sanctum crisma datur uenum'.
- ¹¹³³ For similar hostility to homosexual behaviour, cf. poems 60 (11. 1-4) and 50 (7. 1-4).
- ¹¹³⁴ If, as seems likely, Walter includes himself among those discriminated against, then he would be a *senex* (i.e. at least 50), when he wrote this poem.
- ¹¹³⁵ Punning on 'beneficium' as (1) 'benefaction' (here understood ironically) and (2) 'benefice'.
- ¹¹³⁶ As prophesied by Christ at Matt. 24: 29-33.
- ¹¹³⁷ On the concept of the Jubilee year, see Lev. 25: 8-17 and 29-31. Every fiftieth year was a Jubilee year, when all property leased out since the last Jubilee year reverted to its original owner. In this context, however, it seems to mean something like 'the day of reckoning'.
- ¹¹³⁸ Adso, *De ortu et tempore Antichristi*, 'Antichristus sua arma corripiet' (CCCL xlv, p. 28, line 165).
- ¹¹³⁹ On the precursors of the Antichrist, see also poem 58, 16.
- ¹¹⁴⁰ i.e. the Mount of Olives, where Christ gives his final major address to the disciples (Matt. 24: 2 to 25: 46).
- ¹¹⁴¹ Cf. poem 47, 21. 6: 'censui censuram' (also ending a stanza).