



Concerning Saturn and the Cloud | De Saturno et nube

Text Information

Author | Nicolaus Pergamenus

Language | Latin

Period | 14th Century

Genre | Dialogue

Source | Grässe, Johann Georg Theodor. *Die beiden ältesten lateinischen fabelbücher des mittelalters*. Tübingen: Litterarischer verein in Stuttgart, 1880, 139-140.

Collection | Fantastic Fables: A 14th-Century Book of Moral Tales and Dialogues

URL | https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/creature_dialogue_saturn_cloud/

Translation and introduction by Astrid Khoo.

Introduction to the Text

The *Dialogus Creaturarum* ('Dialogue of Creatures'), of which this text is one of eight published by the *Global Medieval Sourcebook*, was composed in the fourteenth century, its authorship remains debated, though it was historically attributed to either Nicolaus Pergamenus, about whom little is known, or Magninus Mediolanensis (also known as Mayno de Mayneriis), who was a physician. In recent years, beginning with Ruelle 1985, scholars have tended towards the conclusion that the *Dialogus* was compiled in Milan, though not necessarily by Magninus.

The text consists of 122 dialogues largely populated by anthropomorphic 'creatures', loosely defined; sections translated for the *Global Medieval Sourcebook* feature elements (fire, water), planetary bodies (the Sun, the Moon, Saturn, a cloud), animals (the leopard and unicorn), as well as a talking topaz. Each dialogue is further divided into two sections, the first part depicting an encounter between these creatures – two is the usual number, though some dialogues have one or three – that ends in a violent conflict. This experience is summed up in a moral, typically delivered by the defeated party, which is then exemplified in the second half of the dialogue through citations from historiography, literature, and sacred scripture. Common texts cited include the pagan authors Seneca the Younger and Valerius Maximus, along with the Christian writers Paul, Augustine, and John Chrysostom and compilations such as the *Vitae patrum* ('Lives of the Fathers') and *Legenda aurea* ('Golden Legend').

The great precision with which these references are cited – often including book and chapter numbers – suggests that the *Dialogus* was designed as a reference text containing recommendations for further reading, and more specifically as a handbook for 'constructing sermons' (as indicated in the Preface). This purpose does not, however, detract from its entertaining style, which derives in no small part from the passionate dialogue that takes place between the 'creatures' and the fast-paced descriptions of their battles against one another. These features explain the popularity of the *Dialogus*, which ran through numerous editions from the late fifteenth century onwards: the illustrated text compiled by Gerard Leeu was printed eight times in the eleven years from 1480 to 1491: once in French, twice in Dutch, and five times in Latin.

Introduction to the Source

Two manuscript versions of the *Dialogus Creaturarum* exist. Of these, only the so-called 'short redaction' has been printed; Gerard Leeu opted for this version of the text in the first Latin edition (1480) and all the vernacular translations are based upon it. The 'short redaction' is attested in twelve manuscripts from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and is thought to best reflect the original text, which was composed after 1326. This dating derives from the fact that it borrows heavily from a compilation, the *Libellus qui intitulatur multifarium*, which was compiled at Bologna in that year (see Ruelle 1985, p. 22). In contrast, the 'long redaction' survives in only two manuscripts, both of which are comparatively late (in or after 1431): Toledo, Biblioteca capitular, 10-28 and Torino, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, H. III. 6. In these manuscripts, the *Dialogus Creaturarum* is commonly presented under the title *Contemptus Sublimitatis* ('The Contempt of Worldly Power'), which reflects its structure as a handbook of moral examples.



About this Edition

The source used for transcription and translation is Johann Georg Theodor Grässe's 1880 edition, entitled *Die beiden ältesten lateinischen Fabelbücher des Mittelalters: des Bischofs Cyrillus Speculum Sapientiae und des Nicolaus Pergamenus Dialogus Creaturarum* (Tübingen: Literarischen Verein in Stuttgart). This edition can be accessed online here. Grässe bases his text on the 1480 edition by Gerard Leeu, which is itself most likely derived from several of the manuscript copies; for a full list, see Cardelle de Hartman and Pérez Rodríguez 2014, pp. 199-200. A late medieval printed version of the text, dating from 1481, is held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris and is available to view online here.

Further Reading

Cardelle de Hartman, Carmen and Estrella Pérez Rodríguez. "Las auctoritates del Contemptus Sublimitatis (Dialogus Creaturarum)." *Auctor et auctoritas in Latinis medii aevi litteris/Author and Authorship in Medieval Latin Literature: Proceedings of the VIth Congress of the International Medieval Latin Committee*, edited by Edoardo D'Angelo and Jan Ziolkowski. (Benevento-Naples, November 9-13, 2010). Florence: SISMEL - Edizioni di Galluzzo, 2014, pp.199-212.

- Demonstrates that instead of nine manuscripts as previously thought, there instead exist 15 complete manuscripts and a fragment, and outlines these manuscripts' relationship to one another.

Kratzmann, Gregory C, and Elizabeth Gee, eds. *The Dialogues of Creatures Moralised: A Critical Edition*. Leiden: Brill, 1988, pp. 1-64.

- Edition of the medieval English translation first published in 1530 (original author unknown), but the Introduction contains information on the translation history and dissemination of the Latin *Dialogus* more generally.

Schmitt, Jean-Claude. "Recueils franciscains d'exempla et perfectionnement des techniques intellectuelles du XIIIe au XVe siècle." *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 135, 1977, pp. 5-21.

- Discusses the front matter in early manuscripts of the Latin *Dialogus*, which contained both a list of titles and an alphabetical index of moral lessons to facilitate citation.

Rajna, Pio. "Intorno al cosiddetto *Dialogus creaturarum* ed al suo autore." *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 10, 1887, pp. 75-113.

- Advances arguments for two possible authors: Nicolaus Pergamenus and the Milanese doctor Mayno de Mayneriis, with a strong preference for the latter, and summarises the style and contents of the *Dialogus*.

Ruelle, Pierre, ed. *Le "Dialogue des creatures": Traduction par Colart Mansion (1482) du "Dialogus creaturarum" (XIVe siècle)*. (Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques, Collections des Anciens Auteurs Belges, n.s. 8), Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1985, pp. 1-80.

- Annotated edition of the medieval French translation by Colart Mansion, but the Introduction outlines the manuscript tradition and authorship of the Latin *Dialogus*.



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De Saturno et nube

Septem sunt planetæ secundum dicta philosophorum, scilicet Saturnus, Jupiter, Mars, Sol, Venus, Mercurius et Luna, sed distantia magna est inter planetam et planetam. Quia refert magister Moyses maximus philosophus, ut habetur in Aurea Legenda, quod quilibet circulus cujuslibet planetæ habet in spissitudine viam quingentorum annorum id est tantum spatium, quantum posset aliquis ire in quingentis annis de via plana ita tamen, quod iter cujuslibet diei sit quadraginta milliaria et quodlibet milliare sit duorum milium passuum.

Quadam autem vice quædam nubes magna et spissa se elevare coepit dicens: magna est excellentia mea, quia propter meam magnitudinem planetæ in mundo apparere non valent, dum in aëre me pono; sed cum sim sub ipsis et eas sic obnubilo quanto magis, si adscendero superius, offuscare et suppeditare potero, multo magis certe. Et hoc dicens sursum tendere coepit cumque usque ad Saturnum ascenderet et superscandere vellet, ait Saturnus: quis es tu, qui ascendere cupis, ubi nunquam ullus ascendit?

Cui nubes: ego super ascendam et te præcipitabo. Hoc enim accidit Nabugodonosor, qui super omnes reges et principes terræ scandere satagebat, ut esset rex regum et dominus dominorum terrenorum, nesciens præ superbia, quod dominetur excelsus super regnum hominum. De quo dicitur Danielis IV: quando elatum est cor Nabugodonosor et spiritus ejus confirmatus est ad superbiam, depositus est de solio suo. Unde dictum est ei: ejiciet te deus ab hominibus et tum bestiis atque feris erit habitatio tua, fœnum ut bos comedes septemque tempora mutabuntur in te. Sicut dicitur in Hystoriis Scholasticis: non est factus secundum mutationem corporis sed secundum mentis alienationem et ablatus est ei sensus et usus linguæ et videbatur sibi, quod esset bos sive taurus in anterioribus, in posterioribus autem leo.

Concerning Saturn and the Cloud

According to the philosopher, there are seven planets: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon. However, there is a great distance from one planet to another. Hence the teacher Moyses, the greatest philosopher, says in the Golden Legend that every planet's orbit is the size of a five-hundred-year path. That is to say, there is as much space in a planet's orbit as someone could walk in five hundred years on a level road, if he journeyed forty miles a day and every mile consisted of two thousand paces.

Once upon a time, a great and thick Cloud began to revere herself, saying, "Truly, my excellence is great; on account of my size, the planets cannot appear in the world, so long as I interpose myself in the air. Even now, when I am beneath them, I manage to block them out. If I were to ascend higher, therefore, how much more greatly would I be able to cover them and subordinate them? Certainly I would be able to do so far more greatly." Speaking thus, she began to stretch upwards. When she had risen all the way to Saturn, she tried to clamber over him. Saturn spoke: "Who are you, who desires to rise to where no one has ever risen?"

In response, the Cloud said, "I will rise above you and cast you down." Saturn was thoroughly disturbed by these words; he ran to fetch his weapons and shut off the Cloud's path. Then he threw down the Cloud from above and reduced her to nothing, saying, "Those who desire to stand above all deserve to fall down." So it was for Nebuchadnezzar, who strove to overthrow all the earth's kings and princes, so that he might be the king of earthly kings and the lord of earthly lords, not knowing because of his haughtiness that the Exalted [God] is the king of all men. The fourth book of Daniel reads, "When Nebuchadnezzar's heart was raised up and his spirit was fortified into arrogance, he was deposed from his own throne." Wherefore it was said to him, "God will cast you away from men; then, you will live among beasts and wild animals. You shall eat hay like an ox. Seven seasons will pass by for you." As it is said in the Scholastic Histories, "His body did not change, but his mind was alienated; his senses and his speech were stricken from him. It then seemed to him that he was an ox or a bull in the front, but a lion in the back."



Daniel quoque toto tempore alienationis ejus pro eo orabat, ita quod septem tempora, id est septem anni ad preces suas in septem menses mutati sunt. In quibus septem mensibus insaniam patiebatur per quadraginta dies, per alios vero quadraginta ad cor reversus flebat et orabat deum, ita quod ex magnis fletibus oculi ejus ut caro facti sunt. Multi autem ad eum exhibant et eum videbant. Completis ergo septem mensibus revocatus est, non tamen statim regnavit, sed statuti sunt pro eo septem iudices et usque ad finem septem annorum pœnitentiam egit, panem et carnem non comedens et vinum non bibens.

Throughout the time of Nebuchadnezzar's alienation, Daniel prayed for him; as a result, the seven seasons – seven years, that is – were changed, through his prayers, into seven months. During these seven months Nebuchadnezzar suffered madness for forty days. For another forty, having returned to his senses, he wept and prayed to God. His weeping was so fervent that his eyes became similar to raw¹ flesh. Many men went out to him and saw him. After the seven months had passed, he was recalled, although he did not immediately resume his reign. Instead, he established for himself seven judges and did continuous penance for seven years. He ate no meat and drank no wine.

Critical Notes

Translation

1

I have inserted the adjective 'raw' as eyes are considered flesh even without protracted weeping.