

# AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN ALEXANDER NECKAM'S *LAUS SAPIENTIAE DIVINAE*

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Thomas Wright, the prolific textual editor of the nineteenth century, consigned an important work to relative oblivion by describing it as a mere paraphrase of a longer treatise. The lengthy preface to his edition of Alexander Neckam abruptly dismisses the poem *Laus Sapientiae Divinae* on the grounds that these verses review the material of *De naturis rerum*, the author's encyclopedia of natural history.<sup>1</sup> Yet, a careful examination of the long, elegiac poem reveals much useful information which has no counterpart in the prose work; it yields many valuable insights into the author's personality, scholarly purposes, and the intellectual milieu in which he pursued these aims. This study focuses on autobiography in the composition which brought to a close the literary career of a learned and outspoken figure of early thirteenth-century England.

The main outlines of Neckam's personal history have been established.<sup>2</sup> He was born, according to one chronicler, on the same night as King Richard I (September 3, 1157).<sup>3</sup> His boyhood and early training were at Saint Albans'; later he studied and lectured at Paris (between 1175-82) and taught both at Dunstable and Saint Albans'. After further studies at Oxford (between 1190-97), he joined the Augustinian canons (ca. 1200), becoming Abbot of Cirencester in 1213. He died in 1217, a distinguished professor and author.

The poem *Laus Sapientiae Divinae*, composed at the close of Neckam's life, contains autobiographical information and reflective moments not discovered in his other writings. This is one of the poem's distinctive features. The author's retrospective mood, in itself, suggests that he was writing in advanced age, for he addresses the subject of old age several times. In a survey of birds, for example, his observation of the vulture leads to a meditation on aging and impending death.<sup>4</sup> In a passage reminiscent of Juvenal, he imagines himself afflicted by all the infirmities of the passing years: white hair, deafness, poor eyesight, loss of taste, trembling limbs, mental dullness.<sup>5</sup> A little later, his praise for the warm springs of Bath, so soothing to weary bones, has a personal ring to it:

Bathoniae thermis vix praefero Virgilianas;  
Confecto prosunt balnea nostra seni. (3:271-72)

At times his verses lament the swift passage of the years,<sup>6</sup> and he bitterly regrets wasted time:

Temporis amissi jacturam defleo, de me  
Conqueror, annus abit, non rediturus abit.  
Ha! quociens, ha! quot amisi tempora, morum  
Prodigus, ha! studui proditor esse mei. (4:344-47)

Finally, as the poem concludes, Neckam defends his sportive versifying by noting that sickly old age is often forgetful of itself, and a dotting old man begins to be a boy again.<sup>7</sup> Though the poet's observations on senectitude are clichéd, they indicate clearly the author's preoccupation with the subject; they are sincere, and confirm the opinion that the poem "appears to have been written at a considerably later period of Neckam's life."<sup>8</sup>

The work was not, however, composed by an enfeebled author. Neckam often assures his reader that his poem is a solace and a distraction from the anxious cares of the *curia*. Although the precise nature of his relations with the court are uncertain,<sup>9</sup> the immediacy of his frequent denunciations suggests that the writer was vigorously involved in day to day activities of administration, and that his duties exposed him to danger and detraction.<sup>10</sup> Often his verses

resemble anti-court satire of a type so common in the twelfth century:

Curia magnatum virtutum dejicit artem,  
 In qua nunc virgo, nunc puer Iphis erit.  
 Immutat mores, animos effeminat, orbem  
 Confudit, leges abrogat, aera sitit.  
 Lucrum venatur, indignos promovet, arcet  
 Jura, colit fraudes, vi rapit, arte nocet.  
 Regnat ibi vitium quod nomen traxit ab aula,  
 Livor edax, fastus, ambitus, ira, Venus.  
 Spes fructus eruciat, auraeque favor popularis,  
 Illam demulcet sollicitatque timor.  
 Curia se curis agitatur, ferit alta securis,  
 Rebus securis ha! peritura furis. (3:175-86)

One discovers similar poetic outbursts in such English figures as John of Salisbury, John of Hanville, Nigel Wireker.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, one must take seriously Neckam's attack on abuses rampant at court, and his own frequent resolve to seek consolation in his writing:

Sed ne me curae perdant, ego perdere curas,  
 Decrevi saltem simplicitate stili. (3:955-56; cf. 5:333-34)

Apparently the abbot secured his retreat from time to time, for his poem is filled with personal observations of the natural world, and with evidence of wide reading in literature, history, and natural science. Neckam has been viewed as a protoscientist,<sup>12</sup> and a study of *Laus Sapientiae Divinae* confirms this reputation. The author remarks on his own study of medicine,<sup>13</sup> and, in fact, the entire poem reveals a wonderfully curious mind and a delight in experimentation rare in the age. Neckam is a precursor of Grosseteste and the natural scientists among the Oxford Franciscans and the Paris Dominicans of the next generation.<sup>14</sup>

Time and again in the poem Neckam underscores his personal involvement in science by use of first person formulas, such as "notavi admirans," and by expressed frustration over vexing questions, such as why there are no green flowers:

Haec me sollicitat magis anxia quaestio, quare  
 Flos nullus viridis, sit tamen herba virens. (8:167-68)

Though much of his material is paraphrased from Pliny the Elder and Solinus, Neckam is at pains to demonstrate his own confirmation of these textbooks, especially in ornithology. In observing the vulture, he is as quiet as a statue ("quem cernens statua taciturnior haereo"); his description of an eagle and her young strains our credibility, but, nevertheless, the poet is clearly describing personal study of the bird in its habitat.<sup>15</sup> The remarkable vividness of a passage on cock fighting suggests that he had witnessed that sport too.<sup>16</sup>

Neckam was a voracious reader, as attested by the large number of writers he quotes, but his curiosity impelled him to test his authorities as much as possible. Though some incorrect, even ludicrous matter remains in his poem (and in *De naturis rerum*), it usually concerns aspects of nature which Neckam was powerless to examine for himself. In these instances he was content to report his sources, which include the scientists, as well as Vergil, Ovid, and other poets. The latter he recognized clearly as composing "ficta" which delight the reader,<sup>17</sup> and he often acknowledged his own sportive Muse.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps Neckam included the occasional poetic fables in *Laus Sapientiae Divinae* to relieve the unrestrained didacticism of the piece. For the learned abbot was a pedant. His work is replete with etymologies, author citations, allusions, and curiosities. Clearly, the poet was writing for students. Undoubtedly his composition was intended for monastic scholars who would appreciate his moralistic tone and share his contempt for ignorance.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the most obtrusive constant in the poem is Neckam's utter scorn for the unlettered opinions of the "vulgus" and the "garrula turba." Again and again he rejects unscientific and unauthoritative convictions with expressions such as "credula turba putat" and "vulgus fingere multa solet."<sup>20</sup> The frequency of such remarks in the poem emphasizes Neckam's serious attitude toward scientific inquiry, and surely implies that his oft-addressed "candide lector" belonged to an intellectual circle.<sup>21</sup>

Neckam's ostentatious style is probably another indicator of a learned reader, as well as of his own delight in verbal display. He enjoyed puns, and often indulged in word play on proper names, such as

calling Apollo's lovely favourite "puellarum speciosa corona Coronis."<sup>22</sup> The text includes many fanciful etymologies, especially the names of various species of animals, birds, and fish. However, alliteration was Neckam's favourite affectation, employed almost without relief. Thus, he used the device to address fish:

Barbule, barba tibi, gustus capitis capitoni,  
Dat nomen, sicut trudere, truta, tibi; (3:641-42)

or describe the asp:

Obstrusas aures aspis sibi prospicit arte. (9:289)

He was equally unsparing of repetition:

Fallere fallaces non est fallacia, curas  
Fallere, nec falli, saepe licere puto; (3:958-59)

especially anaphora:

His studiis Adae successio tempora praebet;  
His studiis animus se recreare solet.  
His studiis curas expellere sit tibi curae;  
His studiis studium continuare stude. (10:167-70)

Though such unrelenting extremes might have taxed the patience of the mediaeval auditor, as they surely weary the modern reader, Neckam undoubtedly delighted in them and exercised his ingenuity in their composition. I am confident that he saw them as ample evidence of his mastery of poetic forms. Furthermore, if we take his apologia seriously, as we should, he wrote to distract himself from gnawing cares, and such creative efforts certainly gave him satisfaction.<sup>23</sup>

Neckam did have detractors. His responses to them, interspersed throughout the poem, are not uncommon for the period: his critics are envious; they attempt to ridicule others' writings without producing anything beneficial themselves; such presumption led Zoilus to rail at the "divine" song of Homer and others to assail the splendor of Vergil's poetry.<sup>24</sup> Neckam cleverly places himself in the company of such authors, and then reiterates the familiar, if fading, theme of the grammarians that the moderns rely on the great achievements of these

"lights of the world":

Deliros reputant patres, et lumina mundi  
 Tanti fulgoris luce carere putant.  
 Haec nisi fulsissent doctrinae lumine terris,  
 Languerent tenebris tempora nostra suis.  
 Ni praecessisset patrum veneranda senectus,  
 Omnino sterilis nostra iuventa foret. (5:23-28)

In fact, from John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*<sup>25</sup> he borrows the well-known dwarf/giant aphorism:

Majorum famam, vires, fastigia, sensum  
 Vincere se jactat turba labore brevi.  
 Ha! miser innixus humeris stas, nane, gigantis;  
 Huic ascribe, miser, si qua remota vides. (2:921-24)

Of course, such statements clearly place Alexander Neckam among the Latin defenders of the artes whose surrender to the ascendant disciplines of scholasticism was almost complete.

Defense of the liberal arts was not Neckam's primary aim in composing his didactic verses.<sup>26</sup> Solace and distraction from anxieties were also not his foremost reason for writing. His purpose was precisely announced in the title *Laus Sapientiae Divinae* and constantly reaffirmed throughout the work. In the tradition of Augustine, anticipating the spirit of Francis and Bonaventure, Neckam saw in the wonders of the natural world the manifestation of God's power, glory, and love. Thus, his observations of nature are turned repeatedly toward the divine artificer. His practice in this poem exemplifies the two constants of monastic culture in the Middle Ages: the "literary" character of writings and their mystical orientation.<sup>27</sup>

For Neckam, all creation reflected the majesty of divine wisdom, and all its parts were symbols guiding Man's progress towards his true home. Streams like the Seine symbolize the course of life, the sea is death's image, the moon is the "typus" of the Church, and so on. Though the author exhibits "that singular passion for moralizing upon facts" which Wright noted as characteristic of the period,<sup>28</sup> he is not an extremist. Surely, Neckam could interrupt a discourse on fishes to

century book list convincingly ascribed to Neckam by Haskins,<sup>31</sup> though quite summary, comprises an impressive number of basic works. *Laus Sapientiae Divinae* also offers insights into his literary predilections.<sup>32</sup> There is no need to rehearse fully the list of writers to whom Neckam is indebted. Among the poets his favourites were Ovid, Lucan, Horace, Juvenal, and Vergil, especially the *Georgics*. Popular authors of the mediaeval school curriculum, such as Macrobius and Martianus Capella, are well represented. Given Neckam's keen interest in natural history, we are not surprised to discover great reliance on the elder Pliny and Solinus' *Polyhistor*. Of course, there are many Scriptural allusions, as well as commonplace acknowledgements of Aristotle's genius and Cicero's eloquence. However, a singular aspect of Neckam's sources in this poem is his use of "moderni," the writers of his own and the preceding generation.

In the fifth *distinctio* Neckam creates the occasion to display his cosmopolitanism in a survey of Europe's major cities. His treatment of the separate cities is uneven, but for most he offers historical anecdotes, etymologies, local heroes, especially martyrs, their tombs, and writers. This portion of the poem (5:181-930) is among the most fascinating of the piece,<sup>33</sup> but my remarks will be confined to Neckam's citation of later mediaeval authors. For example, addressing Poitiers, he bids the city enroll Gilbert among its greatest glories, while he declares that the twin peaks of Parnassus yield to the wonderful poetry associated with Orleans.<sup>34</sup> He lavishes praise on Hildebert of Lavardin, alluding to both his ecclesiastical and secular writings:

Plurima festive scripsit dictamina, scripsit  
 Sicut hyems laurum, Pergama flere nolo.  
 Altarisque sacri docuit mysteria, necnon  
 Causam qua Christus et Deus est et homo.  
 Depinxitque stilo placide mores muliebres,  
 Multaque quae gravis est enumerare labor. (5:613-18)<sup>35</sup>

Neckam is curiously silent on native authors in his brief treatment of English cities, except that he hails Bede as "vir egregius," one whose genius the entire world cannot contain. However, internal evidence of the poem confirms that Neckam read two important compatriots whom he never actually names.

point a moral and to emphasize his pursuit of virtue above all:

Sed dum naturae vires considero, leges  
 Approbo virtutum, consiliumque noto.  
 Pisces cerno suis contentos finibus, at nos  
 Pro dolor! in praeceps caeca cupido trahit.  
 Arripit arma furor, alienas occupat urbes,  
 Gazas, rura, domos, oppida, regna, dolus. (3:651-56)

Yet, the moralism of his work does not drown out everything else. In one poetic survey after another -- birds, fish, animals -- he is less concerned with moral symbolism than with the wonders of the natural world themselves. He is eager to describe the medicinal value and healthful properties of plants and minerals. He is keenly interested in such mundane matters as cures for dog bite and fine-tasting fish. Never does his moral tone approach the sustained vehemence of Bernard of Morlais,<sup>29</sup> though his lament for Man's fallen state can surely be deemed monastically strident:

Si tot naturae dotes, si tanta datoris  
 Munera, si sese cernere curet homo!  
 O si se non contempnat, si gratus ad ipsum  
 Auctorem laeta mente recurrat homo!  
 O si primaevae memor esset nobilitatis!  
 O si vitaret turpia, vana, dolos!  
 O vires animae, rationis mira potestas,  
 Civibus angelicis nos facit esse pares. (10:27-34)

In short, a careful reader of the text must conclude that Alexander Neckam was a Christian humanist in the finest tradition. He displays a concern for Man's physical and spiritual health, an earnest devotion to the virtuous life, and an impressive "literary" cultivation.

The breadth of Neckam's literary interests is one of his most attractive and important features for the modern student.<sup>30</sup> His prose treatise demonstrates a comfortable acquaintance with a large number of authors, representing the classics to near-contemporaries, including some of the early translations of Aristotle from Greek and Arabic. He even displays some knowledge of Hebrew. In addition, the late twelfth-



Foremost among English sources for Neckam was Geoffrey of Monmouth. Undoubtedly Geoffrey's romanticized narrative and his love of the curious intrigued Neckam, whose own work evidences a similar temperament.<sup>36</sup> Neckam's reliance on the *Historia Regum Britanniae* is demonstrable in many instances where our author treats of English history. For example, his description of the founding of Trinovantum by Brutus (3:825 ff.), and the heroes whose bones now rest in the famous city, are drawn from Geoffrey's account. The details which Neckam attaches to his summary portraits of Belinus, Gorbonianus, Lud (who renamed the city after himself, i.e. Lundres), Vortimer, and Cadwallo are taken from his work, as is the story of Nennius, who captured Caesar's sword, called "Yellow Death," and was buried with it. Neckam also adopted etymologies (e.g. Humber named after a king of the Huns who drowned in that stream) and legends (e.g. that Merlin and Utherpendragon moved the Chorea Gigantum from Ireland to Salisbury plain) from the *Historia Regum*.<sup>37</sup> His numerous borrowings from Geoffrey of Monmouth are unacknowledged in *Laus Sapientiae Divinae*, and they have no counterpart in *De naturis rerum*. The prose treatise, though rich in anecdotes and *exempla*, is devoid of the historical material which delights us in the poem.

Neckam's verses also betray the influence of another English writer -- John of Salisbury. Again, our poet never mentions the great humanist by name, nor does he cite his works. However, Neckam's residence at Saint Alban's would certainly have provided access to John's writings, for the earliest extant manuscript<sup>38</sup> of his books was copied there during the tenure of Abbot Simon (1167-88). As noted above, Neckam's use of the famous dwarf/giant aphorism derives from the *Metalogicon*, while his denunciations of the curia bear strong resemblance to John's *Entheticus de dogmate philosophorum*.<sup>39</sup> In addition, there are other similarities between John's major verse composition and *Laus Sapientiae Divinae*. The two lengthy elegiac poems share enough thematic and verbal coincidence to suggest that the later writer borrowed from the earlier. Neckam probably took his favourite phrase, "garrula turba," from John (*Enth.* 40), along with other expressions of direct address.<sup>40</sup> The discussions of love and fear are similar in the two works, as are the closing addresses to the "libellus." Neckam's criticism (2:919-34) of those who denigrate the *auctores* while boasting of their own effortless acquisition of knowledge is immediately

reminiscent of John's *Metalogicon* and *Entheticus*:

Sic nisi complacito pueris sermone loquaris,  
 Conspuet in faciem garrula turba tuam.  
 Si sapis auctores, veterum si scripta recenses,  
 Ut statuas, si quid forte probare velis,  
 Undique clamabunt 'vetus hic quo tendit asellus?  
 Cur veterum nobis dicta vel acta refert?  
 A nobis sapimus, docuit se nostra juvenus,  
 Non recipit veterum dogmata nostra cohors  
 Non onus accipimus, ut eorum verba sequamur,  
 Quos habet auctores Graecia, Roma colit.<sup>41</sup>

Neckam's poem, as we have seen, not only bears witness to the author's impressive scholarly attainments but also serves as a barometer of encyclopedic learning at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The work also holds interest for its topicality. We have already noted that he was a defender of the liberal arts, while simultaneously demonstrating an awareness of Aristotelian science and its commentators. His survey and commendation of the arts (10:37-172), coupled with warm approval of Aristotle and theology ("Haec nobis fidei sacrae mysteria pandit"), represent the moderate response to the major university tension of the period.

His praise of Toulouse ("pulchra Tolosa") sparks an attack on the Cathar heresy which had found a receptive community there:

Sed respersa nota turpi jam fama laborat  
 Gentis, quae coepit dogmata prava sequi.  
 Tempora nostra carent laetis successibus, error  
 Praeceptis pervertit dogmata, jura, fidem.  
 Gens quondam famae titulis pollens, meritorum  
 Quondam luce micans, cur tenebrosa peris?  
 Cur Fausti sequeris errores, cur Manichaei? (5:445-51)

In fact, throughout the poem Neckam ridicules doctrines by ascribing them to "Faustus," the Manichaean teacher whom St. Augustine found so shallow.<sup>42</sup>

Neckam's topicality includes his own country and the capital of the world. In a passage introduced by a Juvenalian couplet,<sup>43</sup> his voice

joins the chorus assailing abuses at Rome. His description of the English acknowledges their love of hunting ("prae reliquis hanc exercet venatio gentem"), a sport which John of Salisbury found so unwholesomely addictive among courtiers,<sup>44</sup> while he highlights another famous English pastime, drinking, by reiterating often his own fondness for wine.

At several points in the poem, Neckam pauses to salute the "delights of Bacchus,"<sup>45</sup> and, in comparing water to wine, he is an outspoken champion of the latter, for good reason!:

Sed ne credar aquam vino praeponere velle,  
Rara deae, Bacchi sumptio crebra placet.  
Laetior est somnus post pocula laeta Lyaei;  
Plus dabit urinae potio tristis aquae. (4:554-58)

Thus, as he surveys the earth's bountiful fruits, he assigns first place to the vine, the wine-maker whose "deliciosum munus" pleases both gods and men. Neckam's rapturous verses strongly intimate his personal acquaintance with ruddy Bacchus:

Vitis dat vitam, quia vinum vita; salutem  
Et das et servas, deliciose liquor.  
Laetam nobilitat mensam praesentia vini,  
Quod placidum reddunt, hinc color, inde sapor. (8:31-34)

*Laus Sapientiae Divinae*, for the information it contains about its notable author and his cultural milieu, is a work of value in its own right. It is not simply a metrical paraphrase. When Alexander Neckam composed it, his career and his life were drawing to a close. His age, with its attendant anxieties, was a hindrance to secular involvements and even to travel. Furthermore, he feared the sea ("sed ludos, Neptune, tuos exhorreo"), as he often reiterates;<sup>46</sup> even his effusive praise for Paris, with his prediction of its continued glory, hints that he will not see the city again.<sup>47</sup> Thus, without surprise we find more reminiscence, more introspection, more personality in this poem than in any other work of Neckam. And that is the way he wanted it:

Vive meae mentis speculum prolesque, libelle. (10:279)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Alexandri Neckam De Naturis Rerum libri duo and De Laudibus Divinae Sapientiae* (London 1863). Wright devotes two paragraphs (pp. LXXIV - LXXVI) to introducing this poem of 6204 lines, which he offers as an "appendix" to the prose work. His edition was severely criticized by M. Esposito, "On Some Unpublished Poems attributed to Alexander Neckam," *EHR* 30 (1915) 450-71 because Wright had employed a single fifteenth-century manuscript (London, Reg. 8. E. ix) in establishing the text, ignoring at least three others, including two of the thirteenth-century: Paris, Lat. 11867; Cambridge, Gonville and Caius Coll. 372; Cambridge, Trinity Coll. 580. A new edition of the poem was announced in 1977 (see "Bibliography of Editions" in *Speculum* 52[1977] 206), but apparently it has been abandoned (*Speculum* 57[1982] 209).

<sup>2</sup> J.C. Russell, "Alexander Neckam in England," *EHR* 47 (1932) 260-68. This article was reprinted in Russell's *Twelfth Century Studies* (New York 1978). Though the author noted "the short autobiographical account at the end" of the poem, neither he nor other writers on Neckam have appreciated the extent to which the abbot indulged himself in personal reflection in *Laus Sapientiae Divinae*. See also F.M. Powicke, "Alexander of St. Albans: A Literary Muddle," *Essays in History Presented to Reginald Lane Poole*, ed. H.W.C. Davis (Oxford 1927).

<sup>3</sup> This account, which records that both infants were nursed by Neckam's mother, is reported by T. Tanner, *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica* (London 1848) 539.

<sup>4</sup> 2:437-462. Neckam's ten books are called "distinctiones," in the manner of Gerald of Wales and other writers of the period.

<sup>5</sup> Though the passage actually begins with a phrase from Horace, "Mors pallida," it goes on to resemble Juvenal's tenth satire in depicting the afflictions of old age. Echoes of the Roman poets abound in Neckam's verses.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. 3:966-67: "Mundus abit, fluit unda, fugit cum tempore vita / Unda fugit, fugiunt tempora, vita fugit."

<sup>7</sup> 10:293-94: "Immemor esse sui, fateor, solet aegra senectus / Delirusque senex incipit esse puer."

<sup>8</sup> Wright (at n. 1) LXXIV.

<sup>9</sup> Russell (at n. 2) cites recorded payments to Neckam for service to King John. Among his duties was commission of inquiry into royal rights at Kenilworth Priory.

<sup>10</sup> Neckam reveals his anxieties in such exclamations as "curis angor mordacibus" (3:953) and "O quantum nocuit Caesaris aula mihi" (3:490).

<sup>11</sup> See lines 1295 ff., especially 1463-1522, in John of Salisbury's "Entheticus de dogmate philosophorum," ed. Ronald E. Pepin, *Traditio* 31 (1975) 177-83; John of Hauville's "Architrenius," ed. Paul G. Schmidt (Munich 1974) 189-92; lines 115 ff. of the prefatory verses to Nigel's *Contra Curiales et Officiales Clericos*, ed. A. Boutémy (Paris 1959) 146-47.

<sup>12</sup> R.W. Hunt, "English Learning in the Late Twelfth Century," *TRHS* 19 (1936) 25. Hunt points out that Neckam is "the first person in the West to know both the Greco-Latin and Arabic-Latin translations of Aristotle" and "one at least of the Salernitan doctors." Urso of Calabria is mentioned by name in *Laus Sapientiae Divinae*, 4:235.

<sup>13</sup> 10:337: "Audiui canones, Hippocratem, cum Galieno."

<sup>14</sup> Roger Bacon admired Neckam's work, though he refused to acknowledge him an authority. See the "Compendium Studii Philosophiae" in *Fr. Rogeri Bacon, Opera Inedita*, ed. J.S. Brewer (London 1859) 457.

<sup>15</sup> Neckam claims to rescue an eaglet cast aside by its parent because it refused to gaze directly at sunbeams. This practice of eagles had been described in the twelfth-century *Physiologus*, which Neckam used as a source. See T.H. White, *The Bestiary* (New York 1960) 107.

<sup>16</sup> 2:807-34.

<sup>17</sup> 2:621-22: "Ficta canam, quia ficta solent quandoque juvare / Sed renuit magnas fabula parva moras."

<sup>18</sup> E.g. 2:695-98; 4:516-17.

<sup>19</sup> Neckam clearly addresses a monastic audience in a passage on bees storing honey in cells: "Cellula vita tibi, candide lector, erit" (9:246).

<sup>20</sup> E.g. 1:551; 2:483; 3:939; 5:323; 6:334; 7:286; 8:120; 9:175.

<sup>21</sup> Other writers, notably John of Salisbury, employed learned allusions and pseudonyms to reinforce the elitism, the intellectual selectivity of a clique. See Janet Martin, "Uses of Tradition: Gellius, Petronius and John of Salisbury," *Viator* 10 (1979) 68.

<sup>22</sup> 2:539.

<sup>23</sup> 3:961-62: "Quamvis exili recreo me carmine, carmen / Expellit curas laetitiamque parit."

<sup>24</sup> Zoilus, the critic of Homer, had been cited as a censorious type by Ovid (*Remedia Amoris*, 365) and Martial (2:16 et al.) among classical writers. The name was synonymous with envy and detraction in twelfth-century Latin satire. T. Wright included "De Mauro et Zoilo" in *Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes* (London 1841) 243-50.

<sup>25</sup> Ed. C.C.J. Webb (Oxford 1929) 136. Cf. Neckam's *De naturis rerum* p. 123 in Wright's edition. The aphorism has sparked a considerable literature of its own, including the amusing "Shandean Postscript" of Robert K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants* (New York 1965). The saying is convincingly linked to the Chartres tradition by Edouard Jeaneau, "Nani gigantum humeris insidentes? Essai d'interprétation de Bernard de Chartres," *Vivarium* 5 (1967) 77-99; reprinted in Jeaneau's *Lectio Philosophorum* (Amsterdam 1973) 55-73. See also Brian Stock, "Antiqui and Moderni as 'giants' and 'dwarfs': A Reflection of Popular Culture?" *Modern Philology* 76 (1979) 370-74.

<sup>26</sup> Neckam's advancement of the cause of the liberal arts, especially through his commentary on Martianus Capella, is discussed by J. Reginald O'Donnell, "The Liberal Arts in the Twelfth Century with Special References to Alexander Nequam (1157-1217)" *Actes du Quatrième Congrès International de Philosophie Médiévale* (Paris 1969) 127-35.

<sup>27</sup> Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York, rev. 1977) 9.

<sup>28</sup> (At n. 1) XV. A.C. Crombie, *Augustine to Galileo* (London 1952) 8 also notes the "passion for pointing out moral symbolism" in the scientific outlook of the thirteenth century. *Laus Sapientiae Divinae*, however, does not suffer Wright's accusation that "there is hardly a single scientific fact which has not a moral."

<sup>29</sup> Bernard's poem, "De contemptu mundi," was edited by H.C. Hoskier (London 1929). George J. Engelhardt published a three-part study of the work in *Mediaeval Studies* 22 (1960) 108-35; 26 (1964) 109-42; 29 (1967) 243-72.

<sup>30</sup> O'Donnell (at n. 26) refers to Neckam as one of the "lesser lights of the twelfth century" in comparison to John of Salisbury or Thierry of Chartres, but acknowledges that "his stay at Paris and English experience probably produced in him an erudition beyond the reach of most." In our poem, Neckam referred to himself as a pillar of the school at Petit-Pont, and a student of the arts, theology, medicine, and law.

<sup>31</sup> C.H. Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science* (Cambridge, Mass. 1927) 356-76, reprinted with revisions from *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 20 (1909) 75-94.

<sup>32</sup> Haskins (at n. 31) compared the book list with other works by Neckam, omitting *Laus Sapientiae Divinae* as a "metrical paraphrase." A comprehensive study of Neckam's sources has not been published to date. His wide-ranging interests even included Hebrew. See R. Loewe, "Alexander Neckam's Knowledge of Hebrew," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1958) 17-34.

<sup>33</sup> The passage on Rome, for example contains a symbolic explanation of a "pictura" representing Saints Peter and Paul (235-58), and a probable reference (286-87) to the celebrated shroud (of Turin): "Effigiem nostri Salvatoris venerandam / Impressam panno gens veneranda colit." The exact whereabouts of the shroud at the time of Neckam's writing has not been confirmed. It had certainly been returned to the West after the fall of Constantinople, but did not come into the possession of the Duke of Savoy until 1254. Noteworthy among England's *mirabilia* are Neckam's descriptions of Stonehenge (727-46) and a horrid lake bearing remarkable similarity to Grendel's mere (781-84). On the latter, see A.G. Rigg, "Beowulf 1368-72: An Analogue," *Notes & Queries* N.S. 29, no. 2 (April 1982) 101-02.

<sup>34</sup> Neckam is probably alluding to the poetry of Theodulf, though he may well have had Hugh Primas and his clever satires in mind.

<sup>35</sup> Hildebert's writings are in PL 171. They include a treatise "De sacramento altaris" and a poem entitled "Cur Deus homo," as well as a misogynistic diatribe.

<sup>36</sup> A contrasting outlook is that of Neckam's close contemporary, William of Newburgh, who roundly criticized Geoffrey's methods. See the proemium to his *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, ed. R. Howlett in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I* (London 1884-85).

<sup>37</sup> See Neckam at 3:891-94 and 5:727-40.

<sup>38</sup> MS. B.M. Royal 13.D.IV. For a description of the Ms. and its provenance, see Pepin (at n. 11) 128-29.

<sup>39</sup> See above (at n. 11).

<sup>40</sup> E.g. "gloria vita salus" (*Enth.* 6); "auctori studeas" (*Enth.* 1846); "hoc duce tutus eris" (*Enth.* 1359) are used by Neckam. See 3:994; 1:78; 3:1000.

<sup>41</sup> *Entheticus* 39-48.

<sup>42</sup> See *Confessiones* V.v and vi.

<sup>43</sup> 5:335-36: "Romae quid facerem? mentiri nescio, libros / Diligo, sed libras respuo; Roma, vale." Cf. Juv. III.41.

<sup>44</sup> *Policraticus* I.4, ed. C.C.J. Webb, 2 vols. (Oxford 1909).

<sup>45</sup> E.g. "Delicias Thetidi praefero, Bacche, Tuas / Nunquam, Bacche, valefaciam tibi" (3:1050-51); "Delicias Bacchi nunquam censebo minores" (4:356). For a study of Neckam's shorter poems on wine, see H. Walther, "Zu den kleineren Gedichten des Alexander Neckham," *Mittelaltersinisches Jahrbuch* 2 (1965) 111-29.

<sup>46</sup> 4:390. In addition to a lengthy excursus on sea dangers (3:329 ff.), Neckam often intersperses passing remarks on the subject, e.g. "infidum semper habeo mare" (2:232); "Neptuni nunquam sit tibi tuta fides" (3:334); "exterret me maris unda tumens" (10:332).

<sup>47</sup> 10:331-32.