Gilbert of Airvau’s Verses on the Holy Eucharist

Attention was first drawn to this poem by Philippe Labbe who reported that he had learned of its existence «ex Petaviano Indice», an index or catalogue of the collection of Alexander Petau, most of which found its way into the Queen of Sweden’s collection now at the Vatican. The alphabetical index of Petau’s collection, made in 1643, was printed by Montfaucon, and it includes the entry: «Gisleberti Aureae-Vallis Abbatis Carmen de Eucharistia». The poem was printed by Hauréau in 1849, but, as shall be shown, the MS from which he drew his text was inaccurate to the point of absurdity.

The Author:

The correct identification of the author of the poem was long postponed by Labbe’s statement that Gilbert, the abbot of Aurea-Vallis, was a Cistercian. He was doubtless brought to this assumption because he identified Aurea-Vallis with the Cistercian abbey of Orval. That Labbe might be in error was suggested by de Visch who pointed out that the name Gislebertus is not found in the list of the abbots of Orval. It remained for Hauréau finally to set aside Labbe’s incorrect description

of Gilbert and to establish the identity of the author of this poem with reasonable probability. Hauréau indicated that the Latin name Aurea-Vallis served also for the abbey of Airvau at which Augustinian canons had been established in 1084. As Hauréau pointed out, the name of Gislebertus occurs second in the list of abbots of Airvau in *Gallica Christiana*, and he was the recipient of a confirmation of the abbey’s privileges and lands by Paschal II in 1128. Labbe’s error has, however, been perpetuated by Fabricius, in spite of de Visch’s warning, and by Chevalier, though he cites Hauréau’s article in his bibliographical entry. The most complete treatment of the author of this poem, Gilbert, abbot of the Augustinian abbey of Airvau, is that by Hauréau in the *Nouvelle biographie générale*.

**Manuscripts:**

Hauréau printed Gilbert’s poem from a 17th-century copy:

« ...c’est une copie des dernières années du XVIIe siècle. Adressée par un bénédictin inconnu à dom Mabillon, elle se trouve à la Bibliothèque nationale, dans le paquet 48 du résidu de Saint-Germain ». M. Vezin of the Bibliothèque nationale reports to me that *paquet* 48 has been dispersed among MSS latins 11584, 11585, 11586, 12580, and MS français 18540. A search through these considerable volumes seems not worthwhile since the exemplar of this copy is quite available. For it can be shown that the copy at Hauréau’s disposal was made from Bibliotheca Vaticana MS Reg. lat. 598, f. 5. Mabillon’s correspondent reported that his copy was made from a MS in the Queen of Sweden’s collection, and the extraordinary errors in this copy prove that it was derived from MS 598. The version of the poem in MS 598 is written with two succeeding verses per line; thus reading from left to right one finds in the first line of f. 5r vv. 1 and 2, on the second line vv. 3 and 4, etc. Mabillon’s correspondent seems to have thought that the page had been given a columnar arrangement and copied from f. 5r in the order vv. 1-3-5-7, etc., and so on through v. 61, and then vv. 2-4-6-8, and so on until the end of f. 5r at v. 62. The copyist did not repeat his error in copying f. 5r and vv. 63-98 appear in Hauréau’s text in the proper order. Why this error was not detected before Hauréau’s time or by Hauréau himself cannot be guessed. The reprinting of the poem seems thus well justified.

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The sources of the text are:

R = Reg. lat. 598, f. 5, a single folium written s. xii\(^{8}\). F. 5 no doubt became a part of MS 598 when its constituent membra disiecta were gathered together while in the possession of Paul Petau\(^{14}\). When he published the text of the poem Hauréau was unable to determine which of the Reginenses was the source of the copy available to him, for he reports that he was unable to discover notice of it in Montfaucon's catalogue of the Reginenses, though he did discover it in the index of the Petau collection printed by Montfaucon\(^{15}\). The poem is listed in the catalogue of MSS purchased by Queen Christina from A. Petau by Isaac Vossius\(^{16}\), and in the modern handwritten index and inventory of the Reginenses latini. Hauréau ultimately learned of the presence of the poem in MS 598 from a report by P. Ewald\(^{17}\), for he cites Ewald's report in the entry of the poem in his handwritten list of incipits preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale.

L = Bundesstaatliche Studienbibliothek, Linz, MS 308, f. 103, written s. xii\(^{2}\). Attention was brought to this text by J. Huemer who incorrectly reported that the poem occupied four folia and that its title gave the author as «Gisleberti clarae vallis abbatis\(^{18}\)». K. Schiffmann accurately described the MS in his typewritten catalogue of the MSS of the Studienbibliothek\(^{19}\). Dr. G. Winkler of the Studienbibliothek, who graciously provided me with a photo-copy of the poem, reports that the MS came to that collection from the monastery of Baumgartenberg\(^{20}\).

MS Vat. lat. 1972, f. 186\(^{r}\) (s. xii ex.) contains diagrams accompanying Petrus Comestor's Historia Scholastica. At the bottom of this page only the first two verses of the poem are found. The catalogue containing the entry describing Vat. lat. 1972 lists the first verse of the poem in its list of incipits, incorrectly referring the reader to MS 1872\(^{21}\). No mention of these verses is made in the description of MS 1972\(^{22}\).

16. Vat. lat. MS 8171, f. 17 (of the Antwerp Collection of MSS).
22. I am indebted to Professor B. Marti for locating these verses.
Another modern copy was reported by Hauréau in « volume MS 50 c des Blans-Manteaux²³ » (now MS Latin 17196 in the B.N.). Gilbert's poem is found on ff. 231-232, where it is reported that is was copied « Ex eodem ms. cod. [sc. Reg. lat. 1382, the former number of 598] r2º seculo exarato ». The second line of the version in this copy is v. 3, after v. 62 the lines are found in the correct order²⁴. Thus the same error was made in the production of this copy as in the production of Hauréau's exemplar.

The contents of the poem and its date :

A brief synopsis of the poem will show that it is a summary exposition of the orthodox doctrine on the Eucharist which developed from the Berengarian controversy²⁵. The reader is referred to the notes accompanying the poem for a sampling of possible sources and analogues to the poem's contents.

vv. 1-10 : Introduction;
vv. 11-18 : the unity of the body of Christ in the Eucharist;
vv. 19-26 : the identity of Christ's eucharistic body with His historical body;
vv. 27-30 : Lanfranc's ipsum/non ipsum formula;
vv. 31-34 : Berengar's sacramentum/res sacramenti distinction;
vv. 35-44 : the efficacy of consecration independent of the merits of the celebrant;
vv. 45-56 : reception of the entire reality of Christ's body in the Eucharist
not dependent on the dispositions of the recipient;
vv. 57-62 : the body of Christ received entire in the Eucharist;
vv. 63-70 : this foreshadowed by the manna of Exod. 16. 18;
vv. 71-84 : condemnation of unorthodox views on the Eucharist;
exhortation to adherence to traditional, orthodox doctrine;
vv. 85-98 : hortatory conclusion.

The poem does not appear to be an epitome of any particular treatise arising from the eucharistic controversy, nor can a point by point dependency on any of the treatises be demonstrated. Yet the relationship of the poem to these prose works is a matter of more than passing interest in that the determination of the relationship may contribute to a more precise dating of the poem's composition.

A dependency (direct or indirect) on Lanfranc's Liber de corpore et sanguine Domini (c. 1059-62) is quite evident (see notes on vv. 27-30,

²³. In Nouvelle biographie générale XX, c. 752.
²⁴. I am indebted to M. Vezin for this information.
²⁵. On this controversy see J. de Montclos, Lanfranc et Berenger : La controverse eucharistique du XIe siècle, Louvain, 1971 (extensive bibliography on pp. xxix-xliv).
35-44). The insistence, however, on the complete presence of Christ in each particle of the eucharistic species (vv. 57-70) is regarded as a special contribution of Guittmund of Aversa in his De corporis et sanguinis Domini veritate (1075-78)\(^{26}\). Likewise, the special emphasis on the independence of the eucharistic reality of the dispositions of the celebrant (vv. 31-34) or of the recipient (vv. 45-46) recalls the considerable emphasis given these matters by Guittmund and Alger of Liège (De sacramentis corporis et sanguinis dominici [1110-1121]), though Lanfranc does deal briefly with the second of these items. The passage from Eusebius « Gallicanus » on Exod. 16. 18, the basis of vv. 63-70, is found in Guittmund and Alger, but not in Lanfranc. Dependence on Alger alone is not evident. Given, at least, a dependence on Guittmund’s work, the poem must have been written sometime after its completion, 1075-78. If dependence on Alger’s work were to be shown, the date of the poem, would have to be advanced accordingly.

The poem exhibits a considerable variety of rhymed hexameter verses. There are thirty-six versus leonini, seventeen sets of versus caudati, thirteen sets of versus collaterales, and one set of versus unisoni. The reader will observe, however, that some of the rhymes are of one syllable only or somewhat imprecise in accent. The prosody of the poem is regular by later classical standards, the exception being catholicorum of v. 7. An element of dissonance is found in many of the hexameters due to the clash of ictus and accent in the fifth foot. This is often due to the termination of the verse with two dissyllabic words. Gilbert’s verses cannot bear comparison to St. Thomas Aquinas’ expository liturgical verses for Corpus Christi, neither for depth of feeling nor for precision and concision of exposition. Still, the poem is, in many respects, neatly made and it is of interest as a poetical counterpart to the prose pieces of the later orthodox polemic against the Berengarian teachings.

The text of the poem:

The text is that of L, with the orthography of the MS retained. Select variants from R are given in the apparatus. Since the punctuation of the text in both L and R is inconsistent and therefore potentially misleading, modern punctuation has been introduced into the text. The grouping of the verses in the text follows that found in L and R. In the notes to the text references to Lanfranc’s Liber de corpore et sanguine Domini are to the version in PL 150, 407-442 (on editions of Lanfranc’s work and the state of the text see de Montclos, pp. 249-261, 540-545); references to Guittmund’s De corporis et sanguinis Domini veritate are to the version in PL 149, 1427-1494; references to Alger’s De sacramentis corporis et sanguinis dominici are to the version in PL 180, 739-854. The editions from which passages from other works are derived will be given in the individual citations.

\(^{26}\) See de Montclos, pp. 462-463.
VERSUS DE CORPORE ET SANGUINE DOMINI A GISLEBERTO
AUREAE VALLIS ABBATE COMPOSITI

f. 103r

Agnus mactatus populi licet ore uratus,
Integer et unius regnat super ethera diuus.
Iussu diuno dum missa pie celebratur,
Sanguis de uino, corpus de pane ceraet.
Constans est sanis quia fit christi caro panis,
Vinum fit sanguis per quem uictus iacet anguis.
Ista sacerdotum celebratio catholicorum
Mortem commemorat qua nos deus in cruci saluat.
Christus uiuendo patitur, uiiuit patiendo;
Et cum mactatur mors illi non dominatur.

Altaris munus licet a multis capiatur,
Est tamen est unus christus qui sacrificatur.
Quamuis presbyteris comedatur ab omnibus agnus,
Ipse tamen superis dominatur in ethere magnus.
Quando percipitur christi cum corpore sanguis,
Peccatum tegitur, teritur quoque lubricus anguis.
Per sacramentum non corpora multa sed unum
Fit, licet in toto fiat celebratio mundo.
Carnem non aliam constat peperisse mariam
Quam que mactatur per nos et sanctificatur.
Non aliud sed idem corpus, fuit in cruce pridem
Quod nos mactamus, quod nos modo sacrificamus.
Idem potatur cruar a nobisque litatur,
Qui fuit in clara dudum fusus cruar ara.
Sic est credendum, sic toto corde tenendum,
Quod cruar est idem, corpusque quod in cruce pridem.

Hoc quod in altari iussit dominus celebrari
Apte non ipsum nos esse fatemur et ipsum;
Non ipsum, speciem si cernimus exteriorem,
Ipsum, cum carnem nos credemus atque cruem.

Hoc quod libamus binis constare probamus:
Re sacrementi sacramentoque patenti.
Est sacramentum unicum cum pane uocatum,
Res sacrementi eius est cruer et caro Christi.
Hoc sacramentum numquam liquet esse sinistrum,
Etsi per praurum celebratur sepe ministrum.
Sicut deterius non fit pro deteriori,
Sic non fit melius pro presbytero meliori.
In uerbis christi pendet benedictio tota,
Quia præsens offert se patri nostræque ucta.
Idem mirifice benedicitur et benedicit
Christus qui zabulum dependens in cruce uicit.
Idem sacrificat per nos et sacrificatur,
Secreto patitur licet in se non moriatur.

Hoc sacramento nichil amplius aut minus ulli;
Eque suscipiunt grandes homines et homulli.
Non est peiori minus aut maius meliori;
Tantum peiores capiunt quantum meliores.
Suscipiant inquam sibi uerum corpus utrique
Illius domini qui divus regnat ubique.
Sed numquam prodert nisi justis atque beatis
Quos^a peccatis fons exhonerat pietatis.
Sicut perfectis ita uera datur caro prauis,
Sed celos illis non pandit cella claus.
Et sicut doctis ita uera datur caro brutis,
Quamuis effectu careant fructuque salutis.

vv. 35-44: See Augustine, Enarr. in Ps. CXLII, 16, 28-29: "Non malum est quod datur, sed bonum malo in iudicium datur." Guittmund (1493 CD): "Si autem propter indignum presbyterum nihil de pane et vino mutatum est, prævaluit ititur (quod absit !) iniquitas sacerdotis verbis Domini Salvatoris, falsa est etiam fidis Ecclesiae, quae et per bonos et per mala ministros verba Domini credit equaliter operari." Alger complains of a current error (740 C): "Alii autem gratiae Dei derogantes, dicit sacerdotum malis meritis ita invocationem divini nominis annullari, ut eorum indigna consecratione non debeat panis in Christi carne certat. And states (802 B): "...non esse nosibus noxium, si a nobis vel nobiscum malo sumant sacramenta, cum Judas ab ipso Christo cum caeteris apostolis accepert, nec etiam a pravis minus vere confici ipsa sacramenta, cum ipse prudens tanti officii ministerium a summo pontifice accepit in caeteris, Hoc facite in meum comminationem audierit.


vv. 45-56: Against the opinion of Berengar found in the fragment of his Epistola purgatoria (ed. de Montclos, pp. 531-538), 47-51: "Hoc Patres publice praecognitun, alidque esse corpus et sanguinem, alid corpus et sanguinis sacramenta non tacent; et utrumque a pilis, visibilibet sacramentum, rem sacramenti invisibilitior, accipit, ab impilis autem sacramentum commendant...", Lanfranc wrote (436 D): "Est quidem etiam peccatoribus, et indigne sumentibus vera Christi caro, verusque sanguis, sed essentia, non salubri efficientia." Alger (740 C) complains of the currency of this sort of error at his time: "Alii vero mutari quidem in carmen Christi, sed maliis meritis sumentium non permanere carmen Christi, sed iterum reverti in purum sacramentum panis et vini..."; Guittmund (1491 B-1494 C) deals with this question at length, as does Alger (798 B-805 B).
Sanguine potati, carnisque cibo satiati,
Quod christum totum nos suminus est bene notum.
Partes non facimus, christumque secare nequimus;
Totum suscipimus, totum super ethera scimus.
Corpus sacramtum totum datur atque oratur,
Quamuis distribui per particulas uideatur.

Hoc autem manna iam dudum significavit,
Quo dominus longu iudeos tempore pauit.
Legis enim ueteris scriptura docet manifeste
Qua per multa noue legis fruimur loca teste.
Nullus habundabat qui plus gomor capiebat;
Qui modicum quantum qui plus capiebat habebat.
Sic debet firme de uiuo pane teneri

f. 103vi
Quod minor aut maior pars non credatur haberi.

Hec homines multi sic se mirantur habere,
Et quia sunt stulti nutuntur falsa docere.
Quando conspiciunt spetiem tantummodo panis
Nobilis obitiunt quod nostra fides sit inanis.
Panem usibilem contemnentes quasi uilem,
Corpus non credtur et ab hoc ut ab hoste recedunt.
Sed nos credentes, prauos homines fugientes,
Firmemus mentes, sanctorum dicta sequentes.
In norma fidei non discordemus ab illis,
Sed secretse dei reseremus clausa sigillis.
Omnes damnandos et in eternum cruciandos
Credamus uere qui nolunt ista tenere.

79. norma corr. ex normis (is expunx. a add. s. lin.) I.
Numquam saluus erit quisquis contrarius isti
Cedere nonuerit fidei de corpore christi.

Ergo si cupimus saluari sic teneamus,
Ne si negligentus cum damnandis peraeamus.
Cum manibus nostris ad christum corda leuemos,
Vt ueniam tribuat crebris precibus rogitemus.
Illius audentu nos dignos efficiamus,
Vt cum sanctorum regnare choris ualeamus.

Fructus perfectos uemia dignos operemur,
Sicut preceptis diuinis sepe monemur.
Corpore de christi predicta fides teneatur,
Vt peccatorum pondus graue diminuatur.
Ad tantum pignus non accedat nisi dignus,
Ne cumulet penam, requiem ne perdat amenam.
Per corpus nati quicumque sumus satiati,
Et pater et flamen sanctum nos protegat AMEN.

(post v. 98 add. man. alt. Finis adest operis. mercedem posco laboris. L)

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