

## THE *TOPOI* OF «THREE ORIENTS» OND *TRANSLATIO STUDII* IN WALDENSIAN ANTI-CATHAR POLEMIC

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The article discusses the list of Cathar «masters» written by former Waldensian Durand de Osca. He describes the Cathar predecessors as the emissaries of the historical impure Orient, which is a mirror to the classical positive Orient, the source of *translatio imperii*. By the mechanism of *translatio studii* the erroneous doctrine was translated to the Occident from Biblical (eternal) and Antique heresiarchs, weak Greek philosophes, and Oriental magicians. This set of characters became typical for all later Catholic anti-Cathar polemic and made a turning point in the formation of a medieval negative image not only of the contemporary Orient but also of the historical one.

**Keywords:** heresy; Cathars; Waldenses; Orientalism; *translatio studii et imperii*.

## ТОПАСЫ «ТРОХ УСХОДАЎ» І «*TRANSLATIO STUDII*» У ВАЛЬДЭНСКОЙ АНТЫКАТАРСКОЙ ПАЛЕМИЦЫ

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У артыкуле разглядаецца спіс «настаўнікаў» катарскай ерасі, які склаў былі ерэтык-вальдэнс Дуранд дэ Оска. Ён апісвае папярэднікаў катараў як прадстаўнікоў гістарычнага нячыстага Усходу, які з'яўляецца люстэркам класічнага станоўчага Усходу, крыніцай «*translatio imperii*». З дапамогай механізму «*translatio studii*» памылковая дактрына была перанесена на Захад ад біблейскіх (спрадвечных) і антычных ерасіяраў, млявых грэчаскіх філосафаў і ўсходніх чараўнікоў. Гэты набор персанажаў стаў тыповым для ўсёй пазнейшай каталіцкай антыкатарскай палемікі і зрабіў пералом у фармаванні сярэднявечнага негатыўнага вобразу не толькі сучаснага, але і гістарычнага Усходу.

**Ключавыя словы:** ерась; катары; вальдэнсы; арыенталізм; *translatio studii et imperii*.

The Middle Ages had their own image of the Orient, or, better to say, different «Orient» coexisted in the consciousness of Western Europeans. These images created a «template», according to which medieval people formulate their attitude toward new facts they recognized about Oriental lands and nations. This template, both positive and negative, was used to polemicize Occidental facts and events as Oriental ones.

This article presents a case study of a medieval display of the «heresy of Cathars»<sup>1</sup> as a descendant of ancient Oriental religious movements. The real origins of the Cathar movement are still debatable in the historiography: «classic» school claims their Eastern origin, emphasizing connections with the Bogomils from the Balkans. So-called «revisionist» scholars regard the Cathars as an outcome of the development of the Western Catholic civilization. The discussion about the origins of this dualistic movement has a long tradition [1]. Ex-Waldensian<sup>2</sup> Durand de Osca (c. 1160-1224) had his own opinion, later broadly shared by Catholic authors. Here is a comparison of his Orientalist theory with the medieval *topoi* of «three Orients» and *translatio studii*.

*Translatio studii et imperii* designates the concept of the historical movement of power, empire, and knowledge from East to West. It was first fully articulated in the 11th century by Otto of Freising. *Translatio imperii* initially emerged as a term describing the perceived tendency of the imperial transfer, first to Rome from the East (as described in Virgil's *Aeneid*, from Troy to the Roman Empire, and subsequently to Charlemagne's empire). Medieval monarchs justified their rule by adopting genealogies that traced their lineage back to the Troy kings and heroes. «The Trojan legend was rehearsed in historical chronicles and adapted into vernacular poetry, and these texts circulated widely throughout the Middle Ages and well into the early modern era» [8]. *Translatio studii*, a corresponding transfer of knowledge, is regarded as a critical part of the same process [3, p. XXVIII]<sup>3</sup>.

The most common medieval image of the Orient could be divided into three different parts:

1. The Biblical Orient, which is located primarily in the past but is also a timeless construct. Its significance is primarily religious, and it is the *umbilicus mundi* and the home of the Western Christianity's holiest associations.

2. The historical/classical Orient, which is the *translatio studii et imperii* source. Its main symbol for the medieval mind is Troy. Concerning the first two Orients, in medieval times, they were significant and considered more advanced than the barbaric West, which has much to learn from historical Oriental examples [3, p. 187].

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<sup>1</sup> Religious movement thrived in Southern Europe, particularly in northern Italy and southern France between the 12th and 14th centuries; it was considered heretical by the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>2</sup> Another religious «heretical» movement. It was founded in Lyon in the 1170<sup>th</sup> and still exists today as part of the Methodist Church. The most recent and comprehensive study of the medieval Waldensian history is [2].

<sup>3</sup> This is not the first book, which proposes such a theory. The «steps» of the "translation" could be different as well. This work is used only as one of many recently put forth in the field. Other studies: [4, p. 107, 160–161; 5, p. 186–187; 6, p. 71–72; 7, p. 47–55].

3. The contemporary Orient, which corresponds geographically to the other two Orients, and includes Muslim Spain as well. Nevertheless, being left behind in the process of *translatio*, this contemporary Orient requires, in the medieval Western view, an intervention or «liberation» to bring back its original religious significance [3, p. 4-6]. It is important to add here that the idea of «poisoned» contemporary times was applied not only to the Orient. «The tendency to compare the present unfavourably with the past and to try to restore the good old days by abolishing subsequent deformities existed through the 11th and 12th century» in the Occident as well [9, p. 40].

The Orient as a source of heresy adds one more part to this pattern. Polemists have been looking for roots of different heresies not only in the contemporary, contaminated Orient but even in the past, historical one, which, according to a simplified three-part pattern, should produce positive examples.

Durand de Osca gave one of the first and most detailed versions of the origins of the Cathar heresy in all the polemic literature. He was a highly educated Spanish cleric and the leader of the Poor Catholics (a group of the Waldenses who would like to turn back to the Roman Catholic Church). In 1179–84 in Southern France/Spain, he wrote a polemic treatise *Liber Antiheresis* against the Cathars [10, p. 36–45]. This book, written in high-level Latin, is considered one of the most important medieval polemical treatises [11, p. 26].

This paper examines not just what Durand said about the Orient, or even how he said it, but why he wanted to engage it in this discussion at all. It follows the assumption of Edward Said that «European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate» [12, p. 3].

Durand listed the heresiarchs, from whom the Cathars were supposed to take their doctrines, such as Pythagoras, Marcion, Cherinthus, Ebion, Zeroen and Arfaxat, Hymenaeus and Philetus, Nicholas, Tatian, Mani, and the Gnostics [10, p. 43; 11, p. 154–159]. In the context of this study, the choice of these specific characters is important. Pythagoras, Marcion, Cherinthus, and Tatian were real ancient philosophers, Nicholas, Hymenaeus and Philetus – were biblical heresiarchs, Ebion, Zeroen and Arfaxat – most probable the fictional characters and Mani was a real founder of the Manichaeism. All of them were of Eastern origin. As geographical areas were mentioned Asia and Persia, both Oriental. No Western person or places were shown. Half of these heresiarchs were just described by St. Augustine in the fundamental work *De haeresibus*, which became the textbook of medieval antiheretical polemicists: Marcion (Chapter XXII), Cherinthus (VIII), Ebion (X), Nicholas (V), Tatian (XXV), Mani (XLVI, the largest one) and the Gnostics (VI). Nevertheless, *Liber Antiheresis* is not just a rewriting from the Church Fathers: Durand added Pythagoras (for metempsychosis), Zeroen and Arfaxat, Hymenaeus and Philetus, but did not include the sect with the name «Cathars» (XXXVIII).

Later, he named the ideas of Origen (XLII&XLIII) as a source of inspiration for the «contemporary» heretics [13, p. 121].

Although Durand the Osca was a highly educated author, he did not show any admiration for Oriental culture and science, which Western erudites often felt. There is only hostility. In this example, there is a «historical» Orient as a source of *studii*, but *studii* in the negative, «contemporaneous» sense.

Not all nations, mentioned in Durand's treatise, are of «oriental» origin from a modern point of view. In the Middle Ages, the dividing line between the Orient and Occident was slightly different. As noted by Maria Todorova, «everyone has had one's own Orient, pertaining to space or time, most often to both. The perception of the Orient has been, therefore, relational, depending on the normative value set and the observation point» [14, p. 120]. All the persons, who were listed by Durand, even Greek philosophers, belonged to the medieval Orient. They could be qualified as «eastern» from the «Romanian» point of view<sup>1</sup>. In Romanian culture, Greek with its rich heritage could be seen as «"soft", lacking in many martial virtues» [15, p. 15]. Troy was regarded as a positive historical Orient, and the Greeks, who attacked it, as a «contemporaneous», declined Orient [3, p. 32].

Greek philosophers played an ambivalent role in medieval culture. At the same time and in the same region with Durand (12th century Southern France/Spain), Pythagoras was presented as an example of human wisdom and seemed to be even connected with Christian theology, as an inventor of two of seven disciplines of the Liberal Arts (arithmetic and music), clearly respected by clerical and civic authorities. St. Augustine «had ranked him as the first of the great philosophers of the past»; the same respect was given him by Clement of Alexandria, St. Jerome, Cassiodorus, Isidor of Seville [16, p. 67–68, 189–201].

From Antiquity, the Orient was also the image of the birthplace of magic. Augustine of Hippo wrote in his «The City of God» (XXI, 14) about a king of the Bactrians, Zoroaster, as an «inventor of magical arts». This tradition was later developed in the anti-witch treatises [17, p. 369–371]. It is probable that «Zeroen» and «Arfaxat» here are the transformed Zoroaster's names. Later in the medieval Apocryphal tradition, they become not only magicians but also heretics. «Their doctrines were that the God of the Old Testament was the god of darkness, Moses and the Prophets deceivers, the soul the work of the good God, the body the work of the god of darkness, so that soul and body are

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<sup>1</sup> This ambiguous status of the Greeks has not changed during all Middle Ages and Modern Era; on the contrary, it has become stronger. Compare this with «The Greek is racially and geographically European, but he is not a Western [sic]. That is what he means by the term, and the signification is accepted by both Greek and foreigner. He is Oriental in a hundred ways, but his Orientalism is not Asiatic. He is the bridge between the East and West». (1911) Cit. by [14, p. 12]

contrary to each other; that the sun and moon are gods, and also water; that the incarnation of Christ was in appearance only» [18, p. 529]. Meanwhile, they have had dualistic ideas even in the times of the Apostles. This made them the perfect founders of the dualistic Cathar heresy in the Catholic (or Waldensian) polemicists' eyes. Ekbert of Schönau (c.1120–84), an «inventor» of the Catharism in the High Middle Ages, in his letter about the «Cathars» near Cologne in 1163 has written about magicians Zaroc and Arphaxat, who were teachers in Persia before Mani, but without connections with the Mosaic law [Patrologia Latina 195:17–18]. It is not known if Durand has read this work.

The choice of Durand to mention both Pythagoras and Zoroaster could not be accidental – they, together with the legendary Egyptian alchemist and mystic Hermes Trismegistus, were ascribed as founders of alchemy [16, p. 131].

Thus, in the eyes of Durand de Osca, the historical Orient was a source of impure knowledge, which, by the aforementioned mechanism of *translatio studii*, spread throughout the Occident. Here the next question appears: at which moment the historical Orient became impure? Did he get such a bad reputation because he really was the source of the Cathar heresy, or he was regarded as the source of the heresies because of the negative attitude?

Theofanis Drakopoulos in his doctoral thesis supposes that «there was no conflict between the Latin and Greek worlds» [19, p. 27]. Consequently, there was no reason to Durand to «invent» the accusation of the Cathars in their oriental origin. Meanwhile, «Everything thus concurs in affirming that the dualist dissidents have their origins in the Greek world» [19, p. 29]. Drakopoulos proves in his work that the Cathars really had a Greek origin, and this was not an offensive invention of the Catholic polemicists.

Starting from the millennium, among Catholic polemical writings and sermons, accusations against the Greeks [20, p. 137] and «Eastern» Manichaeans [21] begin to be repeated. Durand's work was not the first or original in blaming Orient, but it was the first to blame only Orient. For the previous authors, heretics could come from neighbouring Occidental countries. Now the tradition of connecting the Cathars not only with the Manichaeans but also with the East in a broad sense was fixed in the minds of the Catholic clergy.

Unlike the anti-Cathar controversy, of which the quoted source is a part, the opponents of the Waldenses did not apply to the ancient heritage in the period under study. The only exception is a passage from an unpublished lecture by a Franciscan friar quoted by Peter Biller, where the imaginary licentiousness of the Waldenses serves to illustrate Plato's «common wives» as expounded by Aristotle [22, p. 143–144]. It can be assumed that such inattention of the authors is not due to their lack of education, as it might seem at first glance (since they also quoted Greek philosophers in denouncing the Cathars), but to their

perception of Waldensianism as an internal Catholic problem, as opposed to Manichaeism brought from outside.

Thus, Catholic authors who wrote about the heresy of the Waldenses were fully under the influence of the conceptions of *translatio studii et imperii* and different Orients. For them, heresy was a part of the historical, but impure and totally negative historical Orient. A *topos* of «three Orients» turned out to be «four». The knowledge and doctrine of heretics, especially Cathars, were imagined to have been brought from there.

Durand de Osca, having access to a large selection of biblical, ancient, mythological and real characters, deliberately chose only oriental characters to describe the «teachers of the Cathars». Even those of them who had generally recognized positive merits, like Pythagoras, Durand recalled erroneous teachings, enhancing the effect of mentioning other founders of alchemy. The very fact that this opinion was broadly accepted by later Catholic polemist, fixed the perception of the Cathars as an Oriental heresy, and the Orient as a source of heterodoxy.

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