

Volcanoes, Meteors and Famines. The Perception of Nature in the Writings of an Eleventh-Century Monk*

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„Opposition between what was built, cultivated, and inhabited and what was essentially wild, that is, between men who lived in groups and those who lived in solitude.”¹

Introduction

How can we perceive nature and its forces? One might be afraid of it, one may see it as an enemy who is to be conquered; one might observe it, or perhaps consider it the key to survival. It is very likely that the people of the Middle Ages also had totally diverse attitudes towards nature. The approaches of a cleric and a peasant towards nature might have been entirely different, just as today the perspectives of a ploughman and an urban dweller. The aim of this study is two-fold. Chiefly I am to discuss the view of nature held by a certain Benedictine monk who lived at the turning of the tenth century and how different his perspective was from that of his contemporaries and secondly to study how much this cleric's attitude was influenced by early medieval authors. Thus apart from the study of Glaber's work my aim is to outline the view of nature of his predecessors whose works the monk refers to or might have known.

In a much disputed study, David Herlihy sketched out the four possible attitudes of medieval people towards their nature. He stated that medieval men and women might have perceived the natural environment as the scene of a temporary state where earthly life takes place, they might have been afraid of it, others might have thought of it as the perfect place of contemplation, and as many might have perceived it as an important ally, which they could shape ac-

* This article is based on a paper presented at the International Medieval Conference in Leeds, July 15, 2010.

¹ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 58.

cording to their own will.² This categorization may be superficial but it gives us a framework in which this Benedictine monk's viewpoint might be understood. The aim of the study is to question the key factors which influenced his perspective of nature. Diverse groups within society might have understood natural processes in a very diverse way, and a natural catastrophe might have had a totally different influence on their everyday life. This study attempts to contribute to the clerical view of weather events, and natural catastrophes, although this monk's understanding of nature might have been quite far from the perspective of most representatives of the Church.

Although the Rule of Saint Benedict of Nursia ordered the monks to stay in the monastery as much as possible, in practice the *stabilitas loci* did not always prevail.³ Most of the excursions outside the monastery's walls had concrete goals: to visit other monasteries, consult with well-known and honored clerics, oversee distant properties belonging to the monastery and so on.⁴ Sometimes more influential and respected monks, especially abbots, were involved in the arrangement of political alliances, which made travel inevitable.⁵ However, the memories of these trips were kept up only in exceptional cases, which is the reason for our scant knowledge of the mobility of the clerics.⁶ The known part of these trips is only the destination and the outcome of the travels; what happened on the road itself, when monks were at the mercy of nature, does not appear in the chronicles. In this study I will discuss the view of nature of Rodulfus

² David Herlihy, "Attitudes Toward the Environment in the Middle Ages," in *Historical Ecology. Essays on Environment and Social Change*. ed. Lester K. Born (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1980), 101.

³ *Nec praesumat quisquam referre alio quaecumque foris monasterium viderit aut audierit, quia plurima destructio est* – Benedictus de Nursia, *Regula*, Sources Chrétiennes. 181, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé and Jean Neufville (Paris: CERF, 1972), c. 67. v. 5.

⁴ Once in the life of William of Volpiano Glaber mentions that monks could travel only on special occasions: *Proinde accepta quondam licentia orationis ac uisitationis gratia, ut ad monasterium beati archangeli Michaelis, quod situ min altissimis iugis Alpinum, pergeret.* – Rodulfus Glaber, "Vita Domini Willelmi abbatis," in Rodulfus Glaber, *Omnia*, ed. John France, Neithard Bulst and John Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), iv.

⁵ Eleventh century hagiographies often mention monks travelling long distances to visit honored abbots, bishops and holy places. See as an example the pilgrimages to visit Gauzlinus, the abbot of Fleury: André de Fleury, *Vie de Gauzlin – Vita Gauzlini abbatis Floriacensis monasterii*, ed. Robert-Henri Bautier and Gilette Labory (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1969), 76-7, and. Sz. Jónás Ilona, "A fleury apátság szellemisége a XI. század első felében a „Vita Gauzlini” alapján” (The intellectuality of the abbey of Fleury in the first half of the eleventh century in light of the *Vita Gauzlini*), in *Társadalomtörténeti tanulmányok a közeli és régmúltból. Emlékkönyv Székely György 70. születésnapjára*, ed. Sz. Jónás Ilona (Budapest: ELTE Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 1994), 47-8.

⁶ See the focus of the International Medieval Congress, 12–15, July, 2010 and its sessions on the question of *stabilitas* (Monks and Travel in the Late Middle Ages – What Happened to *stabilitas*): <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ims/imc/imc2010.html>.

Glaber: the way he perceived the natural world, the world beyond the protective walls of the monastery.⁷

Glaber's career was atypical; he spent time in at least a dozen monasteries throughout Burgundy and once even travelled to the focal point of Latin Christianity: Rome.⁸ He did not have a good relationship with most of his monastic brothers (which is why he was expelled from all the monasteries) but he had some important patrons, such as William of Volpiano, the abbot of Saint-Bénigne of Dijon, and one of the most influential clerics of his age: Odilo, the abbot of Cluny.⁹ He had an adventurous life compared to most of the Benedictines. Perhaps that is why Glaber was charged by Odilo himself to write a chronicle of his own age. Thanks to this, the monk has left to posterity one of the most detailed chronicles of the late tenth and early eleventh century. Through this work, his view of the surrounding world can be understood. During the 50-55 years of his life, Glaber got to know a lot of people, nobles and peasants alike. It is probable that most of the stories explained in his chronicle, later entitled *Historiarum libri quinque*, were told by people whom he met during his travels. These stories contain a number of references to natural disasters, weather events and to "wild" nature. The most important question which arose during the investigation of the work is as to why he refers to the elements of nature so often? One obvious answer is that he has some particularly purpose, but another possible explanation might be his special interest in nature. Through the investigation of the *Historiarum libri quinque*¹⁰ this study attempts to understand why Glaber had a special fascination in the functioning of nature.

Monasticism and nature

The clerical view of nature was of course determined mostly by the teachings of the Bible. The Bible's concept of nature is closely connected to the moment at which original sin was committed:

⁷ On his life see: John France, "Rodulfus Glaber and the Cluniacs," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 39 (1988): 497–507; *Guillaume de Volpiano, un réformateur en son temps (962–1031): Vita domini Wilhelmi de Raoul Glaber*, ed. Véronique Gazeau and Monique Goullet (Caen: CRAHM, 2008), 1-5; Rodulfus Glaber, "Historiarum libri quinque," in Rodulfus Glaber, *Opera*, ed. John France (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), xix–xxxiii.

⁸ John France, "Rodulfus Glaber and the Cluniacs," 498.

⁹ On his view of Cluny: Rodulfus Glaber, *Vita Willelmi*, v.

¹⁰ The *Historiarum libri quinque* has a few modern editions and translations. In this study I am going to refer to the most widespread Latin-English bilingual edition: Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum*. The chronicle is also accessible in Italian [Rodolfo il Glabro, *Cronache dell'anno mille (Storie)*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Giovanni Orlandi (Milan: Mondadori, 1989)] and French translation [Rodolphus Glaber, *Raoul Glaber: Les cinq livres de ses histoires (900–1044)*, ed. Maurice Prou. (Paris: A. Picard, 1886); Raoul Glaber, *Histoires*, ed. Mathieu Arnoux (Brepols: Turnhout, 1996)].

But to Adam he said, Because you obeyed your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' cursed is the ground thanks to you; in painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, but you will eat the grain of the field.¹¹

The early medieval concepts of the relationship between God, nature and people were very much based on this short section.¹² This quotation and the story of Noah's Ark leave us in no doubt that God rules the Earth by means of the forces of nature.¹³ The biblical flood as a form of divine punishment was so deeply incorporated in medieval Christian beliefs that until the late medieval times floods and sea floods were the most typical natural disasters attributed to divine punishment.¹⁴ Apart from the constant defenselessness from the forces of nature in the Bible, one finds the idea of dominion over nature as well:

God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground.¹⁵

This is the origin of the twentieth century premise that Judeo-Christian religions are the most human-centered of all religions. It was Lynn White Jr. who, in an essay published in 1967, stated that in Christianity the intention to live in harmony with nature disappeared; the focus was on conquering and enslaving the natural environment.¹⁶ In the same year as Lynn White's study, a cultural geographer, Clarence J. Glacken, published possibly the most comprehensive study of the view of nature from Antiquity to the modern age. However, in this still frequently cited book he did not attribute much importance to the biblical perspective of nature, emphasizing instead the role of the Greco-Roman tradition in this process. Despite these two divergent viewpoints, in order to understand the perspective of a cleric the most important frame of reference is the

¹¹ Gen. 3: 17-18.

¹² Per Binde, "Nature in Roman Catholic Tradition," *Anthropological Quarterly* 74, No. 1 (2001): 17.

¹³ Gen. 6:5-7:12.

¹⁴ On late medieval examples see: Christian Rohr "The Danube Floods and Their Human Response and Perception (14th to 17th c.)," *History of Meteorology* 2, No. 1 (2005): 74.

¹⁵ Gen. 1:28.

¹⁶ One of the most frequently debated representatives of the idea is Lynn White Jr and his essay "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155, No. 3767 (1967): 1203-7. Critics of this idea emphasize the continuity between ancient (Greco-Roman) and medieval perspectives of nature. According to recent scholarship, the most important difference between the two civilizations was that in the medieval period new techniques were introduced which allowed major interventions in natural processes. On this opinion, see: Carlos Steel, "Nature as Object of Science," in *Nature in Medieval Thought. Some Approaches East and West*, ed. Chumaru Koyama (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 126-7; Helmuth Schnieder, "Natur und technisches Handeln im antiken Griechenland," in *Naturauffassungen in Philosophie, Wissenschaft, Technik*, Band 1, ed. Lothar Schäfer and Elisabeth Störker (Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 1993), 107-160.

Christian tradition, which despite the existing Greco-Roman influence was very much focused on a biblical understanding of the relationship between nature and humans.¹⁷

In the early medieval Eastern Christian tradition, nature and its interpretation is much influenced by the perception of the actual physical environment.¹⁸ The natural environment – the world besides human civilization – is a key feature in the hagiography of the first hermit, Saint Anthony. Saint Athanasius, the hagiographer, represents Anthony's relationship with nature as a strong dichotomy. On the one hand, the desert is the place where the solitude allows Anthony to get closer to God, on the other, the desert, the place of his voluntary exile, is where he is repeatedly tempted by the Devil. Although many of the early hermits went to the desert, the place never became a synonym for God, it was never subject to purely positive associations.¹⁹ To be in solitude was to be at the mercy of nature (and God); it is a must for Anthony to be able to communicate with the celestial spheres, but it is equally important for the hermit to create safety, his 'civilization' in the wilderness.²⁰ The key characteristics of nature in early medieval hagiographies is not only its wilderness but – as present in the *Vita Antonii* – its function as a place of contemplation.²¹

In the Latin Christianity, the focus of the human-nature relationship is more on the chastening of nature than on coexistence with it. In the *Vita Sancti Martini* of Sulpicius Severus, the most important example of early Western hagiography, nature is represented as wild and dangerous which has to be subdued in the same way as Pagan thought has to be bridled. One of the most emblematic acts of Saint Martin was the felling of a fir tree to which locals attributed divine forces. The destruction of the tree was a symbolic victory over Pa-

¹⁷ Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore – Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 1990 [1967]), 171-5.

¹⁸ On the understandings of 'pleasant place' in early medieval times: Kathrin Schlapbach, "The Pleasance, Solitude and Literary Production. The Transformation of the *Locus Amoenus* in Late Antiquity," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 50 (2007): 34-50.

¹⁹ Bernard McGinn, "Ocean and Desert as Symbols of Mystical Absorption in the Christian Tradition," *The Journal of Religion* 74, No. 2 (1994): 161.

²⁰ The desert, the *eremus* will be the symbol of solitude in the Eastern tradition. In the West it gains new meaning, as any place where hermits can live on their own: forest, mountains and so on. On the question of *eremus*: Gerhardus J. M. Bartelink, "Grécismes lexicologiques et syntaxiques dans les traductions latines du IV^e siècle de la *Vita Antonii* d'Athanase," *Mnemosyne, Fourth Series* 30 (1977): 388-422., Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 135-6, Jacques Le Goff, "Le désert forêt dans Occident médiéval," *Travers* 19 (1980): 22-33; Bernard McGinn, "Ocean and Desert as Symbols of Mystical Absorption in the Christian Tradition," *The Journal of Religion* 74, No. 2 (1994): 155-181.

²¹ St. Basil, *Letters*, ed. Roy. J. Deferrari, Loeb Classical Library 190 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 107-111.

ganism and also an important symbolic step towards the regulation of nature.²² In early medieval theology, nature was often connected with the idea of work. Saint Augustine thought that creation is finished, thus the environment cannot change anymore.²³ It does mean that one might not expect help from the Lord in turning wild land into cultivated fields, but it remains the duty of the people to work the fields, to change the face of the earth. Although the creation of the world was the end of God's active role, his ability to influence the world through the forces of nature cannot be underestimated. For Augustine, nature is good but as it is not divine or sacred, it is not at all perfect.²⁴ This means that managing the processes of nature is not something to be cursed; on the contrary, it is something intrinsic to human nature, which is even present in the Bible.²⁵ But even though people try to subdue nature, in the end it is God who decides whether their efforts succeed or not.²⁶ More than a century after Augustine, when Saint Benedict of Nursia founded the monastery of Monte Cassino, he regarded this act as the first step towards the domestication of wilderness, leading to abundance.²⁷ However, according to Saint Gregory the Great, Benedict held a twofold view of nature; on the one hand, it was a possible source of abundance and of beauty, on the other a place of danger, full of potential temptation.²⁸

During this period, views of nature in the British Isles were different from in the continental territories of Christianity. In the British Isles, interest in nature and perceptions of its perfection were more central to authors than fear of it. Earlier studies emphasized the influence of Celtic culture and especially my-

²² *Item cum in vico quodam templum antiquissimum diruisset et arborem pinum quae fano erat proxima esset adgressus excidere tum vero antistes loci illius cetera que gentilium turba coepit obsistere* – Sulpicius Severus, *Vita sancti Martini Turonensis*, ed. Jacques Fontaine, Sources Chrétiennes 133 (Paris: CERF, 1967), v. 13.

²³ On the nature perspective of Saint Augustine: Elaine Hiesey Pagels, "Augustine on Nature and Human Nature," in *Saint Augustine the Bishop: A Book of Essays*, ed. Fannie Le Moine and Christopher Kleinhenz, Garland Medieval Casebooks 9 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 77-108; Frederick H. Russel, "The Bifurcation of Creation: Augustine's Attitudes Towards Nature," in *Man and Nature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Susan J. Ridyard and Robert G. Benson, Sewanee Mediaeval Series 6 (Sewanee: University of South Press, 1995), 83-96.

²⁴ Russel, "The Bifurcation of Creation," 83.

²⁵ Augustine here refers to Jacob's efforts to maintain his flocks: Gen. 30: 37-43. Augustine treatment of this Biblical place: St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, ed. Marcellin Mellet, Bibliothèque augustinienne 2^e 15 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1955), III. 8. 15. In the Confessions – as referred by Frederick H. Russel, "The Bifurcation of Creation," 93-4. – Augustine tends to praise the human capacity to change the landscape, to influence other living creatures and so on.

²⁶ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, III. 5. 11.

²⁷ Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, 304.

²⁸ *Quadam uero die, dum solus esset, temptator adfuit. Nam nigra parua que auis, quae uulgo merola uocatur, circa eius faciem uolitare coepit, eius que uultui inopportune insistere, ita ut capi manu posset, si hanc uir sanctus tenere uoluisset* – Gregorius Magnus, *Dialogorum* 2, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, Sources Chrétiennes 260 (Paris: CERF, 1979), v. 2.

thology on Irish Christianity, but recently this viewpoint was strongly criticized and scholars have put more stress on the natural environmental conditions and the location of Irish monasteries.²⁹ In Irish Christianity, monasticism was always closely connected to nature, and its effect on the British Isles was also significant. While in European theology, birds appear frequently as the symbols of temptation, especially in early medieval times, in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* observes the paradise of the birds.³⁰ The birds are singing from the Book of Psalms, which leaves no doubt about their divine nature. In this region the papacy was not as influential as on the continent and thus ancient knowledge was preserved for a long time. Respect for the antique authors, especially for the works of Virgil, might have also contributed to the enduring esteem in which nature was held in the British Isles.

From the late fifth/early sixth century, the classical form of monasticism started to disappear from most parts of the continent. A growing number of cenobitic communities came into being and hermits started to disappear. By the end of the sixth century, with few exceptions, continental monks were living in communities surrounded by walls. As the monks got further away from the classical eremitism, they became isolated from nature as well. This isolation had a very practical reason: the strong uncertainty created by the dissolution of the administrative and protective system of the Roman Empire. After a while, the top of a hill began to seem a lot safer than a cave or a clearing in a forest. During the next two centuries at least there is a contradiction between the ideal lifestyle and actual life of a monk. In the early medieval hagiographies, hermits lived in harmony with nature, while the author's contemporaries, cenobitic monks, were living on the tops of hills in safe and isolated monasteries, well away from nature and society.

The perspective of nature in the Carolingian Period and at the turn of the first millennium

The clergy of the Carolingian Period witnessed the formation of a new power. After the final dissolution of the administrative system of the Roman Empire, from the sixth century onwards a new power started to dominate Western

²⁹ Susan Power Bratton, "Oaks, Wolves and Love: Celtic Monks and Northern Forests," *Journal of Forest History* 33, No. 1 (1989): 5-6, and the studies in the volume *Celts and Christians: New Approaches to the Religious Traditions of Britain and Ireland*, ed. Mark Atherton (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002). For criticism of the attribution of this different perspective to Celtic culture: Donald E. Meek, *Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 2000). On the paradigm of 'harmony' of the Celts with nature: Martin Bell, "People and Nature in the Celtic World," in *The Celtic World*, ed. Miranda J. Green (London: Routledge, 1996), 145-58; and Patrick Sims-Williams, "The Invention of Celtic Nature Poetry," in *Celticism*, ed. Terence Brown (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 97-124.

³⁰ *Navigatio Sancti Brendani abbatis*, ed. Carl Selmer (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1989 [1959]), 43-5.

Europe, the Franks. The Franks strengthened their positions during the Merovingian reign, subsequently becoming rulers of the most powerful state during the reigns of the first Carolingian kings, providing Western Europe with much greater security again. This change created opportunities for the Benedictine Order to get closer to nature again, to move back into the valleys and the forests where common people lived. Another factor in the change in Benedictine policy was the influence of Alcuin in the Western Church and in the court of Charlemagne. As Alcuin came to the Carolingian court from the British Isles (from the abbey of York) he brought their regional perspective of nature to the continent. In the period of Alcuin's influence, the Benedictine Order became more powerful and their presence in the political sphere was not to be overlooked.³¹ In the process of this 'Carolingian Renaissance', the monastic centers had a crucial role; it was these communities that sent out the intellectual basis of the renewal.³² Many of the monks in this period had personal connections with landlords or some members of the ruling family. Apart from Alcuin, the role of another Benedictine monk, Saint Benedict of Aniane, must be emphasized in relation to the order's attitude towards nature. His personal example did a lot to bring back the monks to the place where the idea of monasticism came to existence: the natural environment.³³

For the clerical order in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, nature did not seem as menacing as it did before. Apart from the idea of fear and paganism, the beauty of nature also begins to appear in their texts. Clerics did climb mountains (centuries before Petrarch's well-known trip to Mount Ventoux in 1336) and were not frightened, nature was not directly associated with threat.³⁴ This changing attitude is reflected in several hagiographies of the period, as in the life of Saint Otto of Bamberg. In the early twelfth century Saint Otto, the bishop of Bamberg, went on a mission to Pomerania. In one of the pagan villages he saw a tree venerated by the locals (the same as happened to Saint

³¹ On the ecclesiastical policy of Charlemagne: Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); eadem, *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Heinrich Fichtenau, *The Carolingian Empire. The Age of Charlemagne*, Harper Torchbooks – The Academy Library 1142 (New York: Jarper & Row, 1964).

³² On the Carolingian Renaissance: Rosamond McKitterick, "The Carolingian Renaissance of Culture and Learning," in *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 151-66, and app.: 289-316., John J. Contreni, "The Carolingian Renaissance: Education and Literary Culture," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. II: c. 700-900, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 709-57; Johannes Fried, "Karl der Große, die Artes liberales und die karolingische Renaissance," in *Karl der Grosse und sein Nachwirken. 1200 Jahre Kultur und Wissenschaft in Europa*, I: *Wissen und Weltbild*, ed. Paul Leo Butzer, Max Kerner and Walter Oberschelp (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 25-43.

³³ Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis. Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes Toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 27.

³⁴ Sorrell, *St. Francis. Tradition and Innovation*, 27.

Martin). To accomplish his mission he was to fell the tree to oust the dangers of paganism, but in the end he spared the life of the tree as the locals promised him not to attribute special power to this creature of God:

There was also there a large and shady oak tree with a delightful fountain underneath, which the simple-minded people regarded as rendered sacred by the presence of a certain god, and treated with great veneration. (...) the people begged the bishop not to cut it down as he wished to do. They promised moreover that they would never again venerate in the name of religion either that tree or place, and said that it was only for the sake of its shade and its other attractions, which were not in themselves unlawful, that they desired to save it and they did not desire to be saved by it. When the bishop had received this promise he said, I agree concerning this tree, but there is a living creature from which you obtain oracles which must be taken away, as it is not lawful for Christians to practice augury or sooth-saying.³⁵

This act of Otto reflects a fundamentally different perspective on the surrounding world from the one found in the hagiography of the bishop of Tours. While during Martin's lifetime paganism and the wilderness of nature were so deeply connected that he had no other option than to cut down the tree in order to get rid of the maleficent cult, even if the tree was a creature of God. This attitude towards the nature changed dynamically after the turn of the first millennium. The formation of the eremitic orders from the turn of millennium onwards took monasticism in new direction. The Cistercian view of nature is fundamentally different from what was reflected in the early medieval Benedictine writings. The Cistercian relationship with nature proved to be the basis of the unrivalled success of the order. While in their thought the cultivation and civilization of the nature is the dominant force, in Franciscan thinking coexistence and the harmony will be the prevailing philosophy; but the study of the attitudes of these two orders would lead us too far astray from the focus of the study.³⁶

³⁵ *The Life of Otto Apostle of Pomerania*, ed. Charles H. Robinson (London: Clark Press, 1920), 79. – *Erat praeterea ibi quercus ingens et frondosa, et fons subter eam amoenissimus, quam plebs simplex numinis alicuius inhabitatione sacram aestimans, magna veneratione colebat. Hanc etiam episcopus cum post destructas continas incidere vellet, rogatus est a populo ne faceret. Promittebant enim nunquam se ulterius sub nomine religionis nec arborem illam colituros nec locum, sed solius umbrae atque amoenitatis gratia, quia hoc peccatum non sit, salvare illam potius quam salvari ab illa se velle. Qua suscepta promissione: Acquiesco, inquit episcopus, de arbore; sed illud unum, vivum numen sortium vestrarum, de medio tolli oportet, quia nec augurium nec sortilegium exercere christianis licet.* – “*Vitae Ottonis Episcopis Bambergensis,*” in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum, Scriptorum Tomus XII*, ed. Rudolfus Köpke (Hannover: Hahn, 1856), 794.

³⁶ On Franciscan perspective of nature: Sorrell, *St. Francis. Tradition and Innovation*, and its references.

Although clerical attitudes changed with each new development, the perspective of laypeople towards nature might have changed very slowly. They might have looked at nature as the key to their survival. They had to accept the fact that there was a factor independent of them which could change their life. A considerable proportion of the food of medieval people was provided by the forests and rivers, from fishes through vegetables and fruits to game.³⁷ Despite all hardships, the relationship of a medieval peasant to nature was much closer than that of the clerics. The veneration of trees and living creatures was an indispensable part of pagan ritual, as is reflected in the description of the venerated trees in the hagiographies of Saint Martin and Saint Otto. The people of the medieval times sought protection from nature and it took centuries for the Church to replace nature with the new belief. The attitude of medieval peasants towards land was surely dependent on its tenability. While the tenable lands and the lands that they could turn to ploughland had good connotations, territories which were untenable were often connected with fear.³⁸ Different elements of nature might have affected members of medieval society in a very different way and even Christian theology offered diverse perspectives on the surrounding world.³⁹ While the weather was a crucial factor for the peasants⁴⁰ they were not as deeply interested in the creatures of the sea or of the mountains as the intellectuals of the period were.⁴¹

The nature and the *Historiarum libri quinque*

The chronicle of Rodulfus Glaber contains a considerable number of references to the elements of the natural environment, which qualifies this work to trace

³⁷ Vito Fumagalli, *Landscapes of Fear. Perceptions of Nature and the City in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 19. On medieval nutrition: *Food in Medieval England – Diet and Nutrition*, ed. Christopher M. Woolgar, Dale Serjeantson and Tony Waldron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Melitta Weiss Adamson, *Food in Medieval Times* (London: Greenwood, 2004).

³⁸ Gerhard Jaritz, “Nature and Environment in Europe: Perceiving, Taming, Harnessing,” in *The World in the Year 1000*, ed. James Heitzman and Wolfgang Schenkluhn (Lanham: University of America Press, 2004), 26-7.

³⁹ On eleventh- and twelfth-century understanding of nature and wilderness: Jaritz, “Nature and Environment in Europe,” 27-9; Aleks Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006).

⁴⁰ On the weather and natural disasters in the Carolingian Period: Michael McCormick, Paul Edward Dutton and Paul A. Mayewski, “Volcanoes and the Climatic Forcing of Carolingian Europe, A. D. 750–950,” *Speculum* 82, No. 4 (2007): 865-95.

⁴¹ On the medieval imagination of animals: Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and Their Users in the Middle Ages* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998); Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Ideas* (London: Routledge, 2006); *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy*, ed. Willene B. Clark and Meredith T. McMunn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

this monk's attitude towards nature. Although as a typical chronicler of the eleventh century he tries to omit personal ideas when he describing natural phenomena, his own opinion on the functioning of natural driving mechanisms comes to the surface at certain points. His descriptions of natural events leave us in no doubt that he had a particular interest in the mechanisms behind these events, he repeatedly questions why and how do natural disasters and natural processes take shape?

In most cases, as a simple chronicler or annalist, our monk notes down the most important historical events and some natural phenomena. In the case of some astronomical events he does not beyond committing the event itself to parchment. However, in some passages Glaber gives an analysis of events and tries to understand the driving mechanisms behind natural catastrophes, particularly in his discussion of the eruption of Vesuvius.⁴² In his description of this unconfirmed eruption (it happened in 993 or 994), Glaber refers to the natural forces that lead to this event. The other passage which reflects Glaber's attitude towards the elements and the functioning of the world is one of the best known parts of the *Historiarum libri quinque*, the one called divine quaternity.⁴³ In this part of the chronicle the author describes the four main elements of the world, *aether*, *aer*, *aqua*, *terra*, and connects them to human characteristics. Although, according to the monk, all the four elements are positive, their encounters with one another can lead to disasters. Glaber's natural philosophy is in many ways not consistent. In some passages he supposes that nature is functioning according to its own laws, without any external authority, but in other parts of the work it seems obvious from his descriptions that he believes that God's intervention is always behind natural events.⁴⁴ During the battle of Ménfő (in Hungary) in 1044, according to Glaber, it was without a doubt God who smothered the Hungarian army in fog, however the eruption of the Mount Vesuvius was merely a fatal encounter of two natural elements, water and the sun. This is the most important question that arises during the investigation of the chronicle: whether, in Glaber's understanding, natural disasters are happening with or without God's intervention.

In the remaining part of the article I will discuss all the phenomena that have connections to nature found in one of Glaber's two works, the *Historiarum libri quinque* and the *Vita Domini Willelmi abbatis*. I have divided the elements

⁴² Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. vii. 13.

⁴³ Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 1. i. 2. On the sources of the divine quaternity: Paul Edward Dutton, "Raoul Glaber's "De Divina Quaternitate": An Unnoticed Reading of Eriugena's Translation of the Ambigua of Maximus the Confessor," *Mediaeval Studies Toronto* 42 (1980): 431-53; John France, "The Divine Quaternity of Rodulfus Glaber," *Studia Monastica* 18 (1975): 283-94; Brent Hardy, "Glaber's Cluniac Preoccupations" (MA, Simon Fraser Univ.), 76-84 (<http://ir.lib.sfu.ca/bitstream/1892/8338/1/b18026527.pdf> - last access 10/10/2010).

⁴⁴ Especially the two referred chapters: the *Divina Quaternita* and the eruption of the Vesuvius.

of nature to four groups and will discuss them within these categories. Firstly I will discuss astronomical occurrences, then geographical phenomena; thirdly the weather and weather-related events (floods, famines), and finally living creatures (animals mentioned in the works).

* * *

The first major category to be discussed is that of astronomical events. Within this group, the most important aspect is the description of solar and lunar eclipses. The chronicler endeavours to note all eclipses which happened during his lifetime, and it is important for him to discuss how peasants reacted to these phenomena.⁴⁵ According to his accounts, eclipses were considered by common people as a portent of something fatal. This is hard to prove, as there are no sources which give us any insight into the reactions of common people to these events. Nevertheless, it is without a doubt true that Glaber was particularly interested in eclipses, although his interest is certainly not exceptional in the period. In many chronicles and annals of the period, lunar and solar eclipses were indicated.⁴⁶ But unlike most contemporaneous works, Glaber's accounts create a connection between this extraterrestrial phenomenon and earthly events. The historical events that are associated with eclipses always have bad connotations. For example, soon after the description of a solar eclipse in 1037, Glaber refers to the death of Conrad II, the Holy Roman emperor, and creates a connection between the two (a lunar eclipse is also referred to as having taken place between these two events). Although, according to Glaber, the two events happened in the same year, as far as we know the Holy Roman emperor didn't die until two years after the eclipse, in 1039.⁴⁷

In the fifth book of the *Historiarum libri quinque* Glaber refers to another lunar eclipse.⁴⁸ He dates the event correctly to 8th November 1044. He gives an exceptionally detailed description of the process of the eclipse. The cause of this event is also mentioned by Glaber but he has doubts about it:

⁴⁵ On the astronomical situation around the year 1000, see: Bradley E. Schaefer, "The Astronomical Situation around the Year 1000," in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000. Religious Expectations and Social Change, 950–1050*, ed. Richard Landes, Andrew Gow and David C. Van Meter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 329–35.

⁴⁶ On the perception of medieval eclipses: Robert R. Newton, *Medieval Chronicles and the Rotation of the Earth* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1972), and F. Richard Stephenson, *Historical Eclipses and Earth's Rotation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 376–430., especially the introductory part of the chapter.

⁴⁷ *Iterum quoque post annos sex facta est eclipsis solis, undecimo die kalendarum Septembrium, feria quarta, hora sexta, atque, ut semper fit, luna uicesima octaua. Eodem nichilominus anno, Chounradus, cuius superius mentionem fecimus, apud Saxoniam Romanorum obiit imperator* – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 4. ix. 26.

⁴⁸ Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 5. i. 18.

At the eighth hour of the night either God placed some wondrous thing between the sun and the moon, or the sphere of some other star intruded into the position.⁴⁹

At this point, his perspective of the functioning of the world is not unequivocal. He supposes that the phenomenon could be either caused directly by God, or by nature's own laws. As he notes in his accounts of other eclipses too, this event terrified people as much as previous eclipses; what might be noteworthy is the list of other events which he connects to this occurrence. Just before the description of the lunar eclipse, Glaber notes a great famine. Then, after the eclipse, in the very same month in the town of Saint-Florentin (mid-France), meteorite stones fell from the sky, which of course was a bad omen according to Glaber. What is interesting however that he closes the list of prodigies following the eclipse with the description of a successful late harvest, which was a positive surprise for the people of Gaul and which might have put an end to the famines mentioned in the same chapter (although a crop harvest in November is highly unlikely in any part of Gaul).⁵⁰

In another passage, Glaber puts down in writing a similar event to that seen in Saint-Florentin. According to the monk, meteors fell into and around the house of a nobleman called Arlebaud:

For almost three years, stones big and small fell indescribably all about this man's house, coming either from the roof; even now it is possible to see around the house the heaps of stones resulting from this barrage".⁵¹

The fright was even bigger, because as Glaber notes, the stones were not unfamiliar ones from the skies, but ones which used to be the boundary stones of the nobleman's estate. Although no one was injured as a result of the explosions, it was a very bad sign because, as the monk says, it showed clearly that evil is everywhere. It is important to note that in this case, the event was attributed to the Devil, unlike other negative episodes which were associated with God or rather with natural laws.

Apart from the descriptions of eclipses and meteorite explosions, one other astronomical phenomenon is found in Glaber's works: the passing of a comet close to Earth, which is referred to in passages of the *Historiarum libri quinque*. In 989, Halley's comet passed through the sky, something to which Glaber and many contemporary chroniclers attributed great importance.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Nam octava hora noctis inter solem et ipsam lunam siue patratum a Deo ostensum, seu interueniente spera alterius sideris* – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 5. i. 18.

⁵⁰ Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 5. i. 18.

⁵¹ *Nam per triennium fere continue per universam illius domum indicibiliter vel ab aere sive a tabulatu distillavere magni atque parvi lapides ita ut acervos circa domum ex ipsis eiectis lapidibus usque nunc in promptu est videre* – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. x. 21.

⁵² A similar comment is found in the chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg: Thietmari Merseburgensis Episcopi, *Chronicon III*, ed. Robert Holtzmann and Werner Trillmich (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 124-6. On the passing of the

According to his account of the event, people who saw the comet were both amazed and frightened by the sight:

In the last days of this same king [989] a star of the sort called comet appeared in the Western sky (...) Whether this was a new star sent by God, or whether it was an already existing star whose light He had increased as an omen, is known only to Him (...) What is very certain is that whenever such a prodigy appears to men it clearly portends some wondrous and aweinspiring event in the world shortly after”.⁵³

In this description Glaber himself questions the origin of the comet. He does try to decide whether natural laws or God were its cause, but it seems that for him, in this case at least, the most important thing was to see how society reacted to this unexpected event, the like of which had never been seen before.

The description of geographical phenomena forms a smaller but significant category in Glaber’s work. The passage already referred to, on the eruption of the Mount Vesuvius, is one of the most important – if not *the* most important – parts of the work as far as our understanding of how this Benedictine monk perceived the functioning of nature. As Glaber records, the eruption happened in 993 or 994, and although his description is the only known account of this event, a scientific investigation leaves us in no doubt that the account is based on an actual eruption.⁵⁴ Glaber’s extraordinarily meticulous description makes it possible to reconstruct the eruption in a relatively detailed way:

In the seventh year from the millennium Mount Vesuvius which is also called ‘Vulcan’s Pot’, spewed forth by more mouth than usual, sulphurous fire and a great many rocks, which were thrown distances of up to three miles. This and the accompanying foetid smells began to make the area round about uninhabitable”.⁵⁵

At first, sulphurous gases arose from the mountain, after which a heavy explosion ejected huge rocks into the atmosphere. According to the description, the

comet: Gary W. Kronk, *Cometography. A Catalog of Comets. Volume 1: Ancient – 1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵³ *Sed utrum nouiter a Deo stella mittatur, seu ab eodem ob gratiam portentis alicuius stellæ lumen multiplicius augeatur, ipsi soli scire competit qui cetera indicibiliter sua sapientia disponit. Illud tamen habetur probatissimum, quoniam quotiens huiusmodi hominibus ostenditur fieri in mundo paulo post quoddam mirum atque terribile patenter innuitur* – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 3. iii. 9.

⁵⁴ Claudia Principe, Jean Claude Tanguy, Simone Arrighi, Anna Paiotti, Maxime Le Goff and Ugo Zoppi, “Chronology of Vesuvius’ Activity from A.D. 79 to 1631 Based on Archeomagnetism of Lavas and Historical Sources,” *Bulletin of Vulcanology* 66, No. 8 (2004): 705. On the eruptions of the Vesuvius in the medieval times see: Antonio Nazarro, “Some Considerations on the State of Vesuvius in the Middle Ages and the Precursors of the 1631 Eruption,” *Annali di Geofisica* 41 (1998): 555-65.

⁵⁵ *Septimo igitur de supradicto millesimo anno Vesevus mons, qui et Vulcani olla dicitur, solito multipliciore hyatu evomens igne permixtam sulphureo grandium saxorum multitudinem, qui usque in tertium rotabantur miliarium, sic que suo alatu putido circa se inhabitabilem cepit facere provinciam* – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. vii. 13.

stones fell all around the mountain in a three mile radius which is also possible. Based on the details that the author gave, volcanologists could identify a Plinian-type of eruption, a frequent occurrence in the case of the Mount Vesuvius. Despite the precision of the description, there are some more problematic elements in Glaber's account. The first is the location of the volcano: "but we must not pass over in silence why such things only happen in Africa."⁵⁶ It is clear that according to Glaber the eruption took place in a place called Africa. John France – the editor of the Latin-English bilingual edition of the text – thought that it is probably another understanding of the word. According to him it might either mean a place which is hot or a place where Saracens rule.⁵⁷ The latter was not unambiguously true for the surroundings of Naples by Glaber's time.⁵⁸ The attribution of Africa to a hot place is more likely, as the difference between the climates of Burgundy and Naples is significant, and Glaber might have known that the Vesuvius is even further to the south than Rome, which was the warmest place he had ever been in his life. It is important to note as well that Glaber might never have been to the Bay of Naples. The southernmost point that we know he visited in his life was the city of Rome. He might have considered places further away to be "Africa", but it is also possible that it is a simple inaccuracy in an account of the eruption he heard. There is one more factor which supposes that Glaber was not aware of the location of the volcano; namely, that he mixes up the position of the sea and the mountain. He thought the sea is east of Vesuvius, when in fact it is the other way around (see the next quotation). Apart from the question of the location, another issue must be discussed here: the reason for this event. Glaber attributes it to the encounter of two elements, water and heat:

The Earth is hollow there, because of the extreme heat of the Sun; the ocean, pressing down upon it from the east, raises and then gathers back into itself waves of immense height, compressing the air and driving it into the bowels of the earth, whence it belches forth mightily to the heavens with flaming vapour: just as air, according to its nature, rises to the heavens, so this mixture is governed by the laws of its constituent elements, fire and water.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Sed neque hoc puto silentio preterire, cur istud in sola Africana contingat fieri regione* – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. vii. 13.

⁵⁷ Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. vii. 13., and app.

⁵⁸ Giuseppe Sergi, "The Kingdom of Italy," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History. Volume III. c. 900–c. 1024*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 346–71.

⁵⁹ *Primum denique ob telluris vacuitatem, ex nimio solis ardore, et, quoniam illuc incombant devexum ab oriente Oceanum mare, immensos undarum erigendo in sese recolligit vertices, quibus videlicet percussus reconditur aer telluris in gremio, deinde vero cum igniflua vaporatione quo valet eructuat ad supera. Siquidem aer, sicut ex ordinali constitutione penetrat supera, sic ex eiusdem ambigua natura, humoris scilicet atque caloris, sepius agitated exprimit in aridis ignem aut in humidis glaciem.* – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. vii. 13.

According to this account, the Sun burns a hole into the surface of the earth. As the sea's waves reach the seashore, the water presses air into the continent. This air leaks into the holes burned into the earth by the heat of the Sun and this air mass then erupts as it is heading towards the sky. Although, as far as modern science is concerned, this description is not an accurate explanation of the process, it is of great importance for us for several reasons. At first, Glaber – or the source from which the monk drew his tale – makes some significant observations, most importantly that during an eruption a huge amount of vapour gets into the atmosphere. But perhaps the most important factor for the focus of my investigation is that he tries to explain a geographical phenomenon by means of natural laws. In his explanation, God does not appear at all, and the eruption can be explained without reference to any divine power. In the monk's understanding the eruption is caused by a fatal encounter of two elements of the Earth. Glaber's hypothesis leads however to another problem, that of parallels to this volcano. Based on his account, volcanoes could only be situated near the coast, as it is the energy of the water which presses air into the continent's holes; the great heat is also a critical element, as the earth has to have these holes burnt in it in the first place. However there are volcanic territories within central mainland regions, and also in regions with a milder climate. There is one such territory, the Auvergne, which Glaber must have known. The Auvergne is close to the territory where he lived, and it is almost certain that he passed through it at some time in his life. Although this was no longer a volcanically active region by his time, if he knew what a volcano looked like, he could have identified at least some in this region. Despite the questions arising from this paragraph of the work from the eleventh century, this is a unique passage in the sense that the author tries to give a scientific explanation for a natural phenomenon.

The most frequent natural events that Glaber notes in his works are related to the weather. This data is extremely valuable, as we know very little about weather events from the turning of the first millennium.⁶⁰ The chronicler refers on the one hand to particular atmospheric phenomena and on the other to some more general weather and weather-related events, such as droughts or famines. The first atmospheric phenomenon he mentions took place in 1007 during the consecration of the monastery of Loches (mid-France). According to Glaber, a sudden strong wind came up during the consecration ceremony. In this case, the event was not caused by the forces of nature, but was rather a divine intervention to punish the abbot of the new monastery for his arrogance. Although this

⁶⁰ Glaber's notes on the weather are studied in: Pierre Alexandre, *Le climat en Europe au Moyen Âge. Contribution à l'histoire des variations climatiques de 1000 à 1425, d'après les sources narratives de l'Europe occidentale* (Paris: EHESS, 1987), 337.

event could not have seriously affected the life of the common people, those who were present might have preserved the memory of it for a long time.⁶¹

As discussed in the *Historiarum libri quinque*, another similarly rare atmospheric phenomenon occurred in 1044 during the battle of Ménfő (north-western Hungary). As mentioned above, during the battle between the Hungarian and the German armies, the Hungarians were smothered in fog, as a consequence of which they lost the battle despite their superiority in numbers: “When battle was joined such thick darkness fell upon the enemy side that a man could barely see his immediate neighbour”.⁶² Here again it is God who decides to help the ‘Christian’ army to defeat the ‘pagan’ Hungarians. It is very likely that some unexpected weather event – whether it was fog or some other phenomenon is not clear – did actually occur on the battlefield, as another narrative source, the *Annales Altahenses Maiores* also mentions an unexpected phenomenon independently of Glaber’s work. According to Benedictine annals from Austria, there was a gale during the battle which blew dust in the eyes of the Hungarian army: “And see, strong wind occurred from the part of ours which brought huge dust to the gaze of the enemies”.⁶³ Although the two accounts are quite different from each other and mention dissimilar phenomena, both attribute the victory of the German army to weather events.

Apart from the strong wind and fog, there are some instances where the monk describes weather related events. Almost all of these passages refer in some way to famine. In some cases, the chronicler refers to the famines and food shortages as consequences of the bad weather, but in others he only refers to the famine itself.⁶⁴ There are altogether two references to good weather conditions, low prices and abundance, while there are eight famines mentioned in the *Historiarum libri quinque*.⁶⁵ The reliability of these cases is questionable, as these general references to famines are almost without exception connected to negative historical events, while times of plenty are linked to positive political changes.⁶⁶ For instance, according to Glaber, the year 1033 saw a serious famine

⁶¹ *Denique imminente ipsius diei hora nona, cum flabris lenibus serenum undique consisteret celum, repente supervenit a plaga australi vehementissimus turbo, ipsam impellens ecclesiam ac replens eam turbido aere, diu multum que concutiens; deinde vero solutis laquearibus universe eiusdem ecclesie trabes simul que tota teges per pignam templi eiusdem occidentalem in terram corruentes eversum ierunt* – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. iv. 7.

⁶² *...initoque certamine, tanta caligo ac tenebre occupauerunt Vngrorum partem ut uix iuxta se positum quis illorum posset agnoscere* – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 5. iv. 23.

⁶³ *Et ecce turbo vehemens ex parte nostratium ortus pulverem nimium adversariorum ingessit obtutibus.* – *Annales Altahenses Maiores*, ed. Georgius Heinricus Pertz (Hannover: Hahn, 1868), 36.

⁶⁴ Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 4. iv.

⁶⁵ Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 4. v. 16. and V. i. 18.

⁶⁶ On the mechanism of this, see: Gerhard Jaritz, “Nature and Environment in Europe,” 29-30.

throughout the whole world which was a consequence of the bad weather of the period:

It was believed that the order of the seasons and the elements, which had ruled all past ages from the beginning, had fallen into perpetual chaos, and with it had come the end of mankind”.⁶⁷

Of all the years in which Glaber mentions famine, this is the only one from which there is data for bad weather conditions in other Western European sources. In this period the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle also notes bad weather and scarcity.⁶⁸ In most of the descriptions one finds recurring topoi such as geophagy and cannibalism.⁶⁹ The weather might have been an important sign for the people of the Middle Ages. Glaber himself regards climatic events as portents of events. In most cases he connects the change of the weather to important dates, such as the millennium of the incarnation of Jesus, or the millennium of the Passion.

It is relatively improbable that there was a sudden increase the number of unexpected and extreme weather events around the years 1000 and 1033, but it is possible that some clerics – amongst them Glaber – attributed more importance to unusual phenomena in these periods than at other times. To understand how important the weather events were for Glaber, we need to look at other, contemporary chronicles. The most obvious parallel to Glaber’s chronicle is the one of Ademar Cabannensis.⁷⁰ Although the two authors did not live in the same region, both of them spent almost all their lives in the southern part of present day France: Glaber in Burgundy, Ademar in Aquitaine. In the latter’s work, just as in many parts of Glaber’s chronicle, the natural processes are somehow connected to historical events, but there are no instances when the intervention of God or the functioning of natural laws are under question.⁷¹ There are miraculous stories mentioned in the chronicle, such as the drying out of the

⁶⁷ *Estimabatur enim ordo temporum et elementorum, preterita ab initio moderans secula, in chaos decidisse perpetuum atque humani generis interitum.* – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 4. iv. 13.

⁶⁸ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. I* (Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores 23.), ed. Benjamin Thorpe (Nendeln, 1964), 292-3.

⁶⁹ Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 4. iv.

⁷⁰ Ademar Cabannensis is another important chronicler of the turning of the millennium. He lived ca. 989–1034. His work later entitled *Chronicon* has a broader perspective than that of Glaber. He is well informed in the history of the Carolingian period unlike Glaber. Glaber perhaps used the chronicle of Ademar but research could not prove textual connections. On this: Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* xlvii–xlviii. On the life of Ademar in details: Richard Landes, *Relics, Apocalypse, and the Deceits of History. Ademar of Chabannes, 989–1034* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁷¹ The most recent Latin edition of the work: *Ademari Cabannensis Chronicon*, ed. Pascale Bourgain, Richard Allen Landes and Georges Pon (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999). French translation of the chronicle: Adémar de Chabannes, *Chronique*, ed. Yves Chauvin and Georges Pon (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003). On the connection of historical events and weather, see for example: *Ademari Cabannensis Chronicon*, III. 11.

entire Vienne River within three days, but weather events do not form such a distinguishable group in this work.⁷² There is only a shorter part of the chronicle in which the author refers to numerous natural events, but this records events which happened long before the life of Ademar, and it was very likely merely compiled by the monk. It seems that Ademar was not as deeply interested in natural events as Glaber was, but in the passages on the history of the mid-ninth century the chronicle contains a significant number of references to geographical phenomena (especially earthquakes, to which Glaber does not refer at all) and astronomical events⁷³ which would benefit from a more detailed analysis.⁷⁴

The last group of natural elements that I wish to discuss here is the appearances of living creatures in Glaber's works. In this shorter subchapter I will discuss three animals which are all important if we are to attempt to understand his attitude towards natural creatures: the wolf, the whale and the bee.

In the second book of his work, Glaber comments on a frightful event in the town Orléans. One night, a wolf went into the town and entered the parish church; and not only did he enter, but he rang the bell in the tower: "One night (...) a wolf suddenly appeared, entering the church it seized the bell-rope in its jaws and, pulling upon it, made the bell ring".⁷⁵ According to Glaber's account, the event caused a huge fright in the town, and it was evidently a very bad omen, since the following year the whole town burned down. Here again the appearance of this beast was not only important in itself, but was a sign of a fatal event. Such a view of the wolf is not exceptional, as in this period of the Middle Ages the wolf was frequently connected with the idea of wilderness.⁷⁶

Apart from the wolf there is another frightening animal which appears in the *Historiarum libri quinque*; "an enormous whale was seen to have come by the sea".⁷⁷ It was again a portent, as the next year a huge war broke out which affected whole of Gaul and the British Isles.⁷⁸ It is important to note that Glaber refers to the Brendan legend, of which he was apparently fully aware. It does not mean however that he retells the story precisely; he even misspells the name of Brendan (*Bendan*). The fact that Glaber knew of Brendan's work is significant,

⁷² ...et Vinzenna fluvius per tres noctes aruit Lemovice per duo milia – Ademari Cabannensis Chronicon, III.46.

⁷³ Ademari Cabannensis Chronicon, III. 10., on earthquakes: III. 1., III. 3., III. 14., III. 15.

⁷⁴ On medieval natural disasters: *Les catastrophes naturelles dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne: actes des XV^e Journées internationales d'histoire de l'Abbaye de Flaran, 10,11 et 12 septembre 1993*, ed. Bartolomé Bennassar (Toulouse: Le Mirail, 1996), and Jacques Berlioz, *Catastrophes naturelles et calamités au Moyen Age* (Micrologus' Library 1.) (Florence: Sismel-Edizioni el Galluzzo, 1988).

⁷⁵ Una noctium (...) subito lupus adfuit, ecclesiamque ingressus ac funem signi ore arripiens agitansque illus insonuit – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. v. 8.

⁷⁶ On the medieval view of the wolf and its allegoric meanings: Aleks Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness*.

⁷⁷ uisa est cetus mire magnitudinis – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. ii. 2.

⁷⁸ Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. ii. 3.

notwithstanding the inaccuracies, because the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* reflects a rather different view of nature (see above) from that held by Glaber.⁷⁹

The third animal, or rather swarm of animals, is the bee. The bees appear in an absolutely unique context. According to the chronicler, one day a ploughman called Leutard fell asleep in the fields and dreamt that a group of bees flew into his mouth and seized him “and then he dreamt that a great swarm of bees entered his body through nature’s secret orifices.”⁸⁰ As soon as the man woke up, he went home and sent his wife away. Then left for the local church and broke the cross and a painting of Jesus, showing the signs of devilish possession. This story is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the bee was probably not considered as an animal with connections to the devil during this period. Firstly, it was an animal with positive associations, as it provided honey for human consumption, and secondly, the most significant ruler of the Merovingian dynasty, Childerik, used this animal as a royal symbol in early medieval France; even his tombstone was covered with reliefs showing the bee.⁸¹ Although this was centuries before Glaber was born, one might assume that it might not have been entirely forgotten. Glaber mentions animals relatively rarely and they always appear in a negative context; when they are mentioned it is always as portents of something sinister.

Conclusions

My aim was to show by means of the works of Rodulfus Glaber how many different views one could have of nature, and how differently a single author could perceive the cause of a particular natural phenomenon. Not only might different social groups have attributed different characteristics to their natural environment, but one author, in this case a Benedictine monk had several, sometimes very ambiguous, attitudes towards nature. At certain points he considers nature to be a gift of God which provides society with material goods. When nature is God-given there are no famines, and the prices of cereals and wine are low; however if God is disgraced by humanity, nature carries the full force of destruction. With regard to this duality, the most important question for Glaber was whether it was God who visited the famines upon the earth or whether it was nature itself that harmed people. In the passages referring to positive changes like the passing of the millennium since the birth and the Passion of Jesus Christ, Glaber connects weather events to the favour of God, while in case of negative events or changes, he attributes them either to the Devil or to nature’s own forces. In these parts of the work, Glaber sees the world differently; ac-

⁷⁹ Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. ii. 2.

⁸⁰ ...uisum est ei ut grande examen apum in eius corpus per secreta ingrederetur nature – Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* 2. xi. 22.

⁸¹ Bonnie Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 120.

according to him, God does not intervene in the processes of nature, and people have to domesticate and regulate nature as far as possible. This duality of the perception of nature is in many ways particular but as the *Historiarum libri quinque* was not a widespread work in the medieval times it did not have an organic continuation.⁸² It is hard to answer why Glaber had such a special interest in the processes and in the forces of nature, and why he held these particular views of the causes of natural processes. One obvious answer could be simply that as he travelled a lot (he was expelled from several monasteries) he spent more time outside of the relatively protected area of the cloisters and thus he had more experience of nature than most of his contemporaries. It is possible however that this fear of nature and ambiguity which Glaber charges natural events have more complex origins. In historiography, and in other discussions of Glaber's work, the most frequent debate concerns not his view of nature, but his fear of the apocalypse at the turning of the millennium, as recorded in the *Historiarum libri quinque*.⁸³ Although European scholarship disagrees with the opinion of Richard Landes regarding the widespread terror in Glaber's work, there is a well-defined fear in his chronicle. Glaber's conception of fear has been very much the focus of previous investigations, but it has been almost without exception connected to the question of the apocalypse. It is possible however that the fear which is reflected in the chronicle was in fact in connection with something else: nature. Nature was a factor that the people of the eleventh century could hardly influence and perhaps it was a source of fear of more significance for the people of the Middle Ages – and Glaber himself – than the coming of a date which most people did not even notice.

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⁸² Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum* xcvi–ciii.

⁸³ The most important works with regard to this question: Johannes Fried, "Endzeiterwartung um die Jahrtausendwende," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 45 (1989): 385–473; Richard Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography, Medieval and Modern," in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000. Religious Expectations and Social Change, 950–1050*, ed. Richard Landes, Andrew Gow and David C. Van Meter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 243–70; Richard Landes, "Rodolfus Glaber and the Dawn of the New Millennium: Eschatology, Historiography, and the Year 1000," *Revue Mabillon. Revue internationale d'histoire et de littérature religieuses* 7 (1996): 57–77. The summary of European historiography and the critic of Landes's view of the question: Sylvain Gouguenheim, *Les fausses terreurs de l'an mil: attente de la fin des temps ou approfondissement de la foi?* (Paris: Picard, 1999). On the connections between fear and nature in the writings of the authors of the year 1000: Georges Duby, "L'an mil," in *Féodalité*, ed. Georges Duby (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), especially: 351–9.

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QUOTIDIANUM

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HERAUSGEGEBEN
VON GERHARD JARITZ

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Vorwort

Der vorliegende Band von *Medium Aevum Qutidianum* widmet sich Untersuchungsergebnissen zu Alltag und materieller Kultur des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit, die aus Forschungen zu archäologischem, textlichem und bildlichem Quellenmaterial hervorgegangen sind, welche in Österreich und Ungarn durchgeführt wurden.

Ausgehend von einem Fund im nördlichen Niederösterreich widmet sich Ronald Salzer der Analyse frühneuzeitlicher keramischer Destilliergefäße. Helmut W. Klug präsentiert eine Untersuchung der Gewürzkultur, wie sie sich in mittelalterlichen Kochrezeptsammlungen darstellt. An Hand eines zu Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts geschaffenen Flügelaltars analysiert Isabella Nicka die „Räume“ der dargestellten Heiligen und deren beabsichtigte Wirkung auf ihr Publikum. András Vadas hingegen zieht für seine Untersuchung das berühmte chronikalische Werk des burgundischen Benediktinermönches Rodulfus Glaber aus dem 11. Jahrhundert heran um herauszufinden, in welchem Maße sich der Autor mit der Natur und Naturerscheinungen seiner Zeit auseinandersetzte.

Gerhard Jaritz