
Heretic or hero? Posthumous representations of Gilbert of Poitiers in texts and images before 1200
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In 1146, 1147, and 1148 Master Gilbert, Bishop of Poitiers, was called before Pope Eugene III to answer charges of heresy. The events surrounding these trials were to dominate subsequent descriptions of the bishop’s life and work. The hearing at Reims in 1146 was later recorded in detail by three of Gilbert’s contemporaries: Otto of Freising, Geoffrey of Auxerre, and John of Salisbury. The accounts agreed that, despite Bernard of Clairvaux’s best efforts, Gilbert was not condemned. Moreover, the work at the centre of the controversy, Gilbert’s commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*, was not destroyed by the Pope. Instead Gilbert agreed to accept four theological statements drawn up by Bernard and to amend his writings to conform with these declarations. However, this conclusion did not entirely settle the question of Gilbert’s orthodoxy. Some time later Bernard wrote to Gilbert to request a meeting to discuss the theological questions further, but Gilbert declined. By the time of Gilbert’s death in 1154, a year after that of Bernard in 1153, controversy still raged, and the deaths of the main protagonists did not end the debate.

Over the next half century Bernard and Gilbert’s followers continued to dispute the latter’s orthodoxy. Geoffrey of Auxerre, Bernard’s secretary, wrote a series of documents condemning Gilbert. Yet others lauded the late bishop, and his work continued to be copied and studied. In addition to the detailed accounts of the trial of 1148, Gilbert was remembered in necrologies, chronicles, and descriptions of the significant teachers of the time from as far afield as Magdeburg. These shorter mentions often passed over his ideas and focused instead on whether he should be judged by posterity as a heretic or a brilliant thinker and teacher. As well as featuring in written records, Gilbert was represented in three surviving manuscripts from the same period, and his body was placed in a decorated tomb. Some of these images have been connected with Gilbert’s trial in modern scholarship, but the visual material has never been considered as a group, or in the context of the contemporary writings about the bishop.

Here I will argue that these images may all be read as responses to the events of 1147 and 1148, and that both the textual accounts and images of the second half of the twelfth century were intended to play a part in shaping Gilbert’s reputation.

The first texts penned about Gilbert after his death on the fourth of September 1154 were epitaphs. Unsurprisingly, those who took the trouble to record his death expressed positive views about his life and works, nevertheless a remarkable number of such records survive. Gilbert was remembered in epitaphs at Poitiers, from the cathedral where he had been bishop and the abbeys of Saint Trinité and Saint Hilaire. In addition he was included in necrologies at Chartres, Laçon, Angers, and Le Mans. In the first two entries, Gilbert’s place in the history of the cathedral and the Benedictine Abbey may be explained by his time as a canon at Chartres and the gifts he made to both communities. Gilbert may also have been personally known in Angers, as Nicholas Haring noted that he ratified documents pertaining to the monastery Saint Aubin. Similarly, Haring observed that the bishop of Le Mans, William de Passavant, was one of those present at Gilbert’s trial, and he therefore suggested a connection between the two men. The Le Mans entry itself, however, made no mention of such a relationship and instead referred to Gilbert’s fame as a teacher, suggesting that his reputation as a scholar in itself justified his inclusion. Gilbert was also remembered at the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris, this time with no details of his life to explain the entry, though he had taught in Paris and this may have prompted the record.

Certainly, by 1154 Gilbert was a figure considered worthy of remembrance in religious houses across northern France.

The content of the epitaph composed at the cathedral of Poitiers and two other epitaphs of unknown origin suggest that Gilbert’s reputation as a scholar, boosted by the events of the trial, contributed to his fame. The epitaph from Poitiers claimed, ‘by the worth of his teaching, therefore, he deserved to stand out beyond all the scholars of his day. And he acquired renown more widespread than that of the great of this earth’. Similarly, a text included in a manuscript now in Oxford (Magdalen College MS 118, f. 135v) emphasised Gilbert’s learning, grasp of theology, and renown, noting that, ‘in both sacred and secular learning he was so filled with an abundance of knowledge that when he was promoted to the magisterial office he was so far above all our contemporaries in dignifying his position, and the renown of his teaching spread so far and wide that the glory of his name went forth into all the earth and the words of his doctrine spread unto the ends of the world’. The author went on, however, to note only his commentaries on the Psalms and the letters of Saint Paul, ignoring the controversial text on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*. Conversely, a final text, preserved in the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, Paris (MS 1117B, f. 394v), celebrated Gilbert’s work on Boethius. In this text Gilbert was again described as ‘that most renowned of scholars’, and the author declared, ‘those who are known to have read carefully his
commentaries on the books of great Boethius testify to the eloquence of the words and the depth of the understanding of this man so eminent in divine philosophy. Whilst these were not the only qualities that Gilbert was lauded for, the ideas which led to his trial were thus well known by the time of his death. Indeed, John of Salisbury’s account of the trial, completed after 1164, suggested that some of Gilbert’s disputed ideas had become widely accepted.

In addition to the written accounts, Gilbert’s worth was celebrated soon after his death when he was placed in a decorated tomb in the abbey church of Saint Hilaire at Poitiers. This tomb was damaged during Protestant unrest, and almost destroyed during the French Revolution. An eighteenth-century account described it as a chest six or seven feet long, raised on four pillars. The visible side showed sculpted scenes of the entry of Christ into Jerusalem and the judgement of Pilate. This description is supported by a drawing made in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century and four surviving fragments in the Musée Ste-Croix in Poitiers (figure 1). The spatial arrangements in the drawing are unclear, but the tomb seems to be set against a wall with a lid (which may have borne an image of the bishop or an identifying inscription) behind it. A large section is missing from the side shown, but in two tiers of scenes the entry into Jerusalem (below) and trial (above) are distinguishable. The scheme as a whole probably presented the story of Christ’s death and resurrection, but the presence of the trial scene is particularly suggestive. Christ’s trial by Pilate (from which the surviving fragments came) resonated with an idea expressed in Gilbert’s epitaph from the cathedral at Poitiers, which stated, ‘the deceased will have — as he had when alive — authorities and witnesses supporting him against the contradictions of those who presume to discuss matters of the Christian faith although, as the Apostle says, they understand neither the arguments they are using nor the opinions they are upholding.’ Similarly, Everard of Ypres, who probably studied with Gilbert at Chartres and Paris, but later joined the Cistercians at Clairvaux, claimed in a fictional dialogue of the 1190s, that Pope Eugene had declared of Gilbert, ‘how can we pass judgement on things we do not understand? This man is conversing with God, not men’. Thus Pilate as the judge of Christ’s divinity might have been compared by those aware of Gilbert’s history with the men seeking to try his ideas about the Trinity.

The choice of iconography on the tomb may have been intended to suggest parallels between Christ and his bishop, as the latter awaited resurrection for his final judgement. However, the tomb was not a twelfth-century creation. Instead the surviving marble fragments indicate that it was a reused Roman sarcophagus. Whilst the iconography may have been a factor behind the decision to reuse this tomb, therefore, it must also have been selected because it was connected with the history of Christianity. If this was his tomb, Gilbert was associated with the monuments of his faith stretching back to antiquity, again stressing his orthodoxy. In the same way, the decision to bury the bishop in the Abbey of Saint Hilaire, near the other famous teacher and bishop of Poitiers, Saint Hilaire, also emphasised his orthodoxy in line with the Church Fathers.

The decision to reuse an old tomb is particularly striking given that one of the repeated accusations against Gilbert was that his work was new. Thus John of Salisbury noted that the writings of Gilbert and his students seemed reprehensible ‘through novelty of expression’. However, Otto of Freising, in the account of the trial written before his own death in 1158, noted that, ‘Gilbert from his youth subjected himself to the instruction of great men and put more confidence in the weight of their authority than in his own’. Moreover, both Otto and John of Salisbury described Gilbert’s use of the works of the Church Fathers and in particular of Saint Hilaire. At the same time, Otto’s account provides a precise example of the charge of novelty, as he records that Master Jocelin, bishop of Soissons, objected to a statement made by Gilbert on the grounds that it was a ‘profanely novel expression’. The novelty of Gilbert’s work was also referred to by Gerhoch of Reichersberg in a treatise of 1156.
entitled *The Book of Novelties of this Time*, in which he criticised Gilbert.24 Indeed Gerhoch declared that Gilbert, together with Peter Abelard, was one of the chief causes of a smoke of doctrine, not approved by the church, emanating from the schools of France and other lands.25 The idea that Gilbert’s work was not approved by the church, emanating from the schools of beyond the common custom of men’.28 However, what marked subtle intellect and acute powers of reason to say many things noted that Gilbert ‘was accustomed by virtue of his exceedingly difficult to understand. The suggestion that Gilbert could be subtle is also found in Otto of Freising’s account, as he noted that Gilbert ‘was accustomed by virtue of his exceedingly subtle intellect and acute powers of reason to say many things beyond the common custom of men’.29 However, what marked Gilbert out as talented in Otto’s mind made him dangerous to others.

Certainly Gilbert and his work remained extremely suspect in the mind of Geoffrey of Auxerre, Bernard’s secretary, who became abbot of Clairvaux in 1162. In ca. 1157–62 Geoffrey wrote a *Libellus* in which he refuted Gilbert’s work at great length.30 Geoffrey’s feelings did not soften with time, and he reiterated them in a letter of post 1160.31 In producing such works Geoffrey seems to have deliberately sought to blacken the reputation of the late bishop. John of Salisbury wrote of the *Libellus* that it was ‘elegant in style and rightly pleasing to read—except that it seems to have the character of a polemic and embodies a certain spleen’.31 Geoffrey was not alone in having strong feelings. As Haring observed, his ideas are taken up by other authors, including the writers of several chronicles, where his language was often quoted.32 However, Geoffrey may not always have been the inspiration behind such writing, as the formulation that Gilbert’s work was subtle and novel does not appear in Geoffrey’s surviving works.

Gilbert’s trial was noted in at least four surviving chronicles probably composed in the half century following his death, and these span a much wider geographical area than the epitaphs, having been made as far afield as Magdeburg.33 A great deal of work remains to be done on this material, but a range of views may be gleaned from the published editions. A fifth chronicle, completed in the 1180s at Mont-Saint-Michel, recorded Gilbert’s death rather than his trial. The author of this text noted that Gilbert was a religious man, learned in doctrine, who had written on the Psalms and Paul’s letters, but he made no mention of Gilbert’s controversial writings on Boethius.34 Unlike later chronicles, none of the twelfth-century accounts described the trial in depth, instead they focused on the event and the verdict.35 Of these, two judged Gilbert’s work worthy of outright condemnation.36 In contrast, the chronicle from Magdeburg emphasised Gilbert’s innocence. It recorded that Gilbert magnificently defended his works against false accusations and did not mention Bernard’s presence at the hearing.37 Finally, a chronicle from Tours seems to have sought to please everyone, noting that in 1148 both Bernard and Gilbert were famous, and emphasising Gilbert’s learning and his works on the Psalms and Paul’s letters.38 This follows the line taken by Everard of Ypres, who noted the virtues of both Gilbert and Bernard, and suggested that these men had talked at cross purposes, thus presenting both as being essentially correct, although he hinted that Bernard had misunderstood Gilbert.39 By the end of the twelfth century, therefore, very different accounts of the events of 1148 seem to have circulated widely.

Varied opinions are also found in accounts of Gilbert as a teacher and writer. Gilbert was frequently referred to in accounts listing the great teachers of the age. William of Tyre, writing in ca. 1181/2 listed him amongst the great masters of France.40 John of Salisbury in his *Metalogicon*, finished in 1159, lamented that his time studying with Gilbert had been short and quoted his ideas on Boethius. Furthermore, John declared those who ‘will reject a proposition simply because it has been advanced by Gilbert, Abelard, or our own Adam’ to be foolish or perverse.41 In a catalogue of medieval authors compiled in the final quarter of the twelfth century, the anonymous author included Gilbert but not unreservedly. He praised him for his knowledge and work on the Gloss, Psalms, Paul’s letters, and the Gospel of John, but noted that the work of Boethius had led to his trial. Moreover, he declared that in Reims Gilbert was rightly criticised and was condemned by the words of his own mouth, a formulation found in Bernard’s sermon on the Song of Songs number 80, in which he attacked Gilbert.42 Others also remained convinced of Gilbert’s heresy. In the 1170s Walter of Saint Victor listed him together with Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, and Peter of Poitiers as ‘labyrinths’, mazes in which monsters lived.43 These men, he declared, had spewed forth many heresies and were responsible for errors that were still appearing.44

In the context of the diverse opinions about Gilbert recorded in documents, the production of very high quality volumes of Gilbert’s work seems to suggest a desire to promote the value of the master and his ideas. As Haring and Émile Lesne noted, Gilbert’s controversial commentary on Boethius is preserved in a number of volumes from the twelfth century, many of which have been carefully executed.45 The existence of such books evidently caused concern to Bernard and his followers, who wanted them destroyed. In particular, as Haring observed, Geoffrey was concerned that the text was circulating without any corrections having been made.46 In contrast, Clarembald of Arras’ students seem to have wanted the text in order to further their theological studies. In the late 1150s or 1160s Clarembald wrote a commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*, which he claimed was motivated by the ‘entreaties of many of my conferees who were complaining about the difficulties they were having with the confusing expressions and convoluted style of the bishop of Poitiers’s surviving gloss on the *De Trinitate*.47 As Haring explored, marginal notes in the surviving
manuscripts also suggest close reading of the text by students and reflect the full range of opinions on Gilbert’s ideas. Some copies, however, seem to have been produced explicitly to defend the author. Martin Grabmann noted that one copy, Vatican Lat. 561, contained a defence of Gilbert in addition to a copy of his text. In the same way, as Haring noted, the designer of Valenciennes Bibliothèque Municipale MS 197 seems to have chosen his texts in response to the issues raised at Gilbert’s trial. In addition to the Commentary on Boethius’ work and Boethius’ texts on the Trinity, the manuscript contains a copy of one of Gilbert’s sermons which deals with the controversial question of what it meant for the Word to become flesh.

In at least three copies of Gilbert’s controversial commentary the makers decorated their texts with images of Gilbert as author, emphasising his importance together with that of this particular work. These books were thus not only intended for study, but also to create a striking visual impression, being luxury objects in their own right. The Valenciennes manuscript is one of these volumes. It is a modest size, measuring 32.5 by 22 cm, but in addition to its texts, which are set out in two columns with wide margins, the manuscript contains a series of images and painted and gilded initials. The importance of the images is reflected in the protection provided for them with pieces of silk. These ‘curtains’ survive at folios 9 and 36v, whilst holes above the images on folios 4v and 7 suggest that they were once included here as well. Similarly, a volume now in Basel, Universitätsbibliothek MS O.II.24, has a series of painted and gilded initials including two images of Gilbert, whilst a copy in Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine MS 656, has a gilded initial on the opening folio and a large painted and gilded initial at the opening of the first chapter on f. 5, which again includes an image of the bishop. The only manuscript with a clear provenance, that now at Valenciennes, seems to have been made at the Benedictine abbey at Saint Amand for its library, as it has a twelfth-century inscription on f. 87 identifying it as belonging to that house. This manuscript may have been intended as a luxury edition of Gilbert’s work to preserve his importance as a theologian within the community. The origin of the other manuscripts is unclear, but they again suggest a widespread interest in Gilbert, as that now in Basel was probably made in Germany, whilst that in Paris was probably made in France.

None of the decorated manuscripts can be dated precisely, but they all postdate Gilbert’s death. Indeed Gilbert’s death is explicitly referred to in the volumes in Valenciennes and Basel where the bishop is shown with a halo. This detail not only recalls the posthumous status of the bishop, but also locates him amongst the saints in heaven. Unlike Bernard of Clairvaux, Gilbert was never canonised, and in the context of opposition to his work this detail seems intended to emphasise his worth and orthodoxy. This choice is echoed by the decision in all three manuscripts to depict Gilbert in bishop’s robes. In the Valenciennes manuscript on f. 4v the bishop wears a mitre and vestments, holds a crosier, and is seated on a substantial chair, reminiscent of images of teachers and bishops (figure 2). In contrast, the students in the tier below are seated on the ground. In a second image of Gilbert on f. 36v, the bishop is again represented in vestments and with a halo, and here he holds an open book (figure 3). Whilst this book is blank, it recalls the form of the open volume before the viewer, reminding the reader of the author’s status as a bishop of the church.

The Basel images of Gilbert draw a similar connection between the text and its author. The volume contains a text by Saint Hilaire, a series of Gilbert’s commentaries on Boethius and a collection of short theological texts, possibly a slightly later addition, ascribed to Saints John of Damascus, Jerome, and Ambrose. On f. 14 Gilbert, with his halo and bishop’s robes, is seated at a writing desk, penning the opening words of his commentary on De Trinitate (figure 4). The text is the preface to his work, written after the trial in 1148. In this preface he defended his ideas as being consistent with orthodox faith, when correctly understood by his readers. In the initial, Gilbert’s orthodoxy is further emphasised by the inclusion of two other creatures. The haloed bird at the upper right is reminiscent of the eagle which symbolised the evangelist John,
which sometimes accompanied the writer in images of the Gospel writer. The bird also resembles depictions of Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, which was often shown inspiring Gregory the Great. Appearing from a pair of circles, probably intended to represent clouds as a barrier between heaven and earth, this motif thus suggests that Gilbert’s work was directly inspired by God. At the same time, the monstrous winged beast, which forms the lower part of the letter L and is beneath Gilbert’s feet, recalls the motif of Christ trampling on beasts described in Psalm 90, commonly interpreted as overcoming evil. A similar juxtaposition occurs on f. 36v of the Valenciennes manuscript, where a monster forms the tail of the Q, and is again beneath the bishop’s feet, though here it is less clearly being trodden upon (figure 3). In the Valenciennes manuscript monsters also form part of other initials, including the large initial on f. 2v at the start of the prologue, reflecting their common use as a decorative motif in the twelfth century. Nevertheless the combination of the beast and bird in the Basle image suggests that Gilbert’s inspired work can be used to overcome evil, an idea that has particular resonance with the accusations of heresy levelled at the text he is shown writing.

A second image in the Basle manuscript also identifies Gilbert as the author of the text (figure 5). On f. 92v, at the start of Gilbert’s commentary on Boethius’ text *Contra Euticen et
Nestorium, Gilbert is shown as a haloed figure in bishop’s vestments writing the letters which follow the initial in which he sits. Again the text which follows resonates with the image as it is a personal statement in which Gilbert defends his work. Yet, whilst the pair of images of Gilbert engaged in his work emphasise his role as author of these texts, Gilbert is not the only figure depicted in this volume. The orthodoxy of Gilbert’s text is further underlined by the inclusion of a figure of Christ, holding a book and with fingers outstretched in blessing on f. 15v, at the start of the opening chapter of the second prologue to Gilbert’s commentary on *De Trinitate* (figure 6). The opening lines of this text do not directly mention Christ. Thus whilst the image resonates with the text’s reference to the need for reason to be supplied, implicitly by God, in order to understand all things, this choice of imagery also endorses Gilbert’s understanding and interpretation of theological matters.

The other three images in the volume all relate closely to the texts which follow. At the start of Boethius’ text, a large initial I on f. 17v contains an image of a haloed figure standing and carrying a book (figure 7). This figure must be Boethius, who like Gilbert, is presented as an ideal Christian writer. The theme of learning is further emphasised by the inclusion of an image of Philosophy, holding an open book and again with a monster at her feet, on f. 70v, at the start of Gilbert’s commentary on Boethius’ *De Bonorum Ebdomade* (figure 8). The accompanying text begins, ‘That which in Greek is called philosophy, is called love of wisdom in Latin’. The final image in the volume, on f. 93v, is also clearly related to the accompanying text. The text begins with a reference to a worried man and the image shows a man with head on hand as if deep in thought. Thus throughout this volume, the images resonate with the text, drawing on ideas of learning and presenting Gilbert as part of a tradition of theological writing requiring both wisdom and divine inspiration.

Although Gilbert is not shown writing at a desk in the Valenciennes manuscript, his role as a writer and commentator is referred to in the image on f. 7 (figure 9). Here the three men who contributed to the text in this manuscript are represented. Gilbert is seated at the top on the left. He receives the opening words of Boethius’ text on a scroll from a figure of Boethius, riding a horse. He in turn communicates the opening words of his commentary to another figure seated beneath him at a writing desk. All three figures are identified in marginal notes, possibly...
intended for the artist. These indicate details which were apparently considered important by the designer. Gilbert is to be shown enthroned, further emphasising his status as a bishop. Boethius is to ride a white horse, although the painted version is dappled red, and next to the figure at the bottom with a writing desk is the word 'scriba', reflecting this man’s role in recording the ideas of the other men. Gilbert is thus presented as a prestigious and church approved conduit for the transfer of ideas from Boethius to the student, reflecting his role as a commentator on this text, as well as being an author in his own right.

In the Valenciennes manuscript Gilbert and Boethius are further associated by the appearance of two initials at the start of texts by each on folios 9 and 36v. Both images show bishops in orange vestments, seated before open books (figures 3 and 10). These closely resemble the images of Gilbert on folios 4v and 7 (figures 2 and 9). The two could easily be read as the same figure, but at the start of the two texts they must be intended to represent the different authors. This distinction is furthered by a marginal note on f. 9, which identifies the figure as Boethius. The artist may have been confused as to what was required, given the very different representation of Boethius on horseback, but it seems possible that he chose to represent the two men in a very similar way in order to suggest a link between them and to present Gilbert as a fitting commentator on Boethius’ ideas. Only Gilbert, however, is given a halo, suggesting his particular religious importance and reinforcing the connection with the image on f. 4v.

The image in the Paris manuscript also presents Gilbert as an orthodox writer in the line of Boethius (figure 11). This initial I with a standing figure echoes that on f. 17v in the Basle manuscript (figure 7), but here the standing figure wears bishop’s robes and carries a crosier and an open book, suggesting he is Gilbert. Gilbert is set beneath a series of roofs, possibly designed to suggest a location within a church. His book is blank, but his role as an author is made clear by an inscription at the bottom of the initial, which identifies him as the person who glossed this book.59 This choice of words reflects Boethius’ role as the producer of the original book, and Boethius may also be represented by the smaller figure standing at the start of the text holding a blank scroll. The scroll may refer to both Boethius’ role as an author of the past and the transmission of his ideas to Gilbert. As in the Valenciennes manuscript, the further transmission of this text is also suggested by another small figure at the base of the initial. This figure is not a scribe, but holds a second book with covered hands. The book bears an inscription in gold, and may also be identified with the volume before the reader as the wording indicates that this is a work on Boethius.60 This figure may thus be intended to represent a student of Gilbert’s receiving his master’s text with great respect.

In addition to the small figure in the Paris volume, Grabmann noted that the figures accompanying Gilbert in the Basel miniature, who look to him and hold out their hands as if waiting to receive his wisdom, may also be identified with his students.61
Looking at Gilbert as he writes the text, these figures echo the role of the reader, who is looking at the image and will go on to study the text. The inclusion of students again resonates with the discussions about Gilbert’s reputation. In addition to the mentions of students in the Cistercian chronicles, both Bernard of Clairvaux and Geoffrey of Auxerre had lamented that Gilbert’s work was still being read and copied, and claimed that this was in breach of the Papal judgement, although there is no other evidence for the latter. Indeed, at the trial passages were read from a book which was not written by Gilbert. John quotes Gilbert as responding, ‘I avow that I have several pupils who, admittedly have all heard me lecture, though some of them have not understood a word I said; what they have written is their interpretation, not my meaning. [. . .] You would do better to summon them and their kind to answer for this pamphlet and others like it. What more can I say? Like you I pronounce anathema on this book and all the heresies written in it, and on its author’. ‘The Pope then ordered that the offending volume be destroyed, but to make clear Gilbert’s innocence he explained to the laity present, in the vernacular, that it was not the bishop’s work’. Thus it seems that not all Gilbert’s students could be trusted to accurately reflect his views.

In this context, the inclusion of four named students on ff. 4v-5 of the Valenciennes manuscript is particularly striking. Here the transfer of Gilbert’s ideas to the students is made explicit as he holds scrolls which extend towards the three students seated beneath him and a fourth figure at the top of the following page (figure 11). All these figures are smaller than Gilbert, reflecting their lesser status. Above the seated figure of Gilbert the text reads, ‘master Gilbert, bishop of Poitiers, who explained with diligence the highest hidden things of theological philosophy, [. . .] revealing them to his four students, whose names are written below, and who are worthy of remembrance’. The three students beneath Gilbert all have haloes, which, together with the inscription, suggests that they too are dead. They hold open books, which display no writing, but which may have been intended to reflect both their status as note-takers, and their own works following Gilbert’s lead. The fourth student has no halo and is shown writing. He may thus still have been alive when the manuscript was produced. Whilst he is identified as a particular student, Nicholas, in the rubric above his head, he also represents the continuing tradition of producing copies of Gilbert’s works suggested by the presence of the scribe on f. 7. Denifle identified this figure with Nicholas of Amiens, who was born in 1147 and would not have been old enough to have studied with Gilbert, but who might represent the second generation of students in his line. The rest of the rubric above this image reads, ‘Nicholas, who by his own authority, comments upon the opinions of the bishop of Poitiers, whose worth is admitted, bringing them fully to light’. Denifle associated this with a lost exposition by Nicholas of Amiens on Gilbert’s commentary. The production of this
commentary may have been inspired by the belief that Gilbert’s work was condemned, as noted in the chronicle attributed to Nicholas.72 Both the image and the rubric in the Valenciennes manuscript suggest that Nicholas is continuing the spread of Gilbert’s ideas by making them accessible to the reader. Beneath the image on f. 4v the other three students are more precisely identified as Jordan Fantasme, Ivo of Chartres, and Johannes (or John) Beleth. The rubric declares that these were Gilbert’s dedicated students whose souls now rest in peace.73 The choice to portray particular students, and to emphasise their saintly nature with haloes, thus suggests a desire to create a lineage of Gilbert’s trustworthy sons.

The image on f. 4v of the Valenciennes manuscript has frequently been cited as evidence that these men were Gilbert’s students. Although relatively little is known of these pupils they seem to have been far less controversial in their thinking than their teacher. Jordan Fantasme went to England after his studies with Gilbert. A clerk of that name appears at Winchester in 1155, where he was probably in charge of the cathedral school.74 In a dispute recorded by John of Salisbury, Jordan appears as a master with the authority of the church.75 Jordan also wrote an account of the Scottish wars of 1173/4 for Henry II and may have achieved a degree of fame in his own day,76 Ivo is described in the Valenciennes manuscript as a deacon at Chartres. As Beryl Smalley explored, he is occasionally mentioned as a master, and in Robert of Auxerre’s chronicle he is described as a pupil of Gilbert’s.77 Geoffrey of Auxerre recorded that Ivo was also brought to speak in Gilbert’s defence at his trial.78 Geoffrey claimed that Ivo spoke reluctantly, but this observation might have been due to Geoffrey’s bias as well as Ivo’s reluctance to be tainted with heresy. John Beleth spent time at Chartres, where he witnessed a document, and is known for a treatise he wrote on liturgy, together with other writings.79 He is also recorded in an epitaph which described him refuting pagans, further emphasising his orthodoxy.80

Although these figures are now not well known, another image of Beleth reflects the respect in which he was held within a generation after his death. The last reference to Beleth occurs in a chronicle for 1182, which records that he flourished at Amiens and wrote his treatise De Divinis Officiis.81 John presumably died sometime after this. However, around 1200 a copy of his treatise was deemed worthy of decoration with his portrait. This manuscript is preserved in Munich, Staatsbibliothek Clm. 17185 (figure 12). Here John is presented as a modern master, rather than a saint. He is seated in profile holding a pen, with which he writes the opening words of the text. He wears contemporary dress, rather than generic robes, with a short tunic, which reveals his calves, and a round hat. The image is drawn with a pen, making it a much more costly form of decoration than that in the Valenciennes manuscript, which is set on a gold background. Nevertheless, by the end of the century Beleth seems to have been conceived as a significant figure in his own right as well as an ideal link in a chain of the students of Gilbert of Poitiers.

The students chosen for inclusion in the Valenciennes manuscript do not form an obvious group. Jordan was a Benedictine monk from Winchester, Ivo a canon at Chartres, and John Beleth a teacher in Chartres and northern France. Nicholas belonged to a different generation and is associated with Amiens. The rubric suggests that these men were particularly favoured and attentive, but they were not chosen by Gilbert for inclusion here and cannot have been the only attentive students. They may simply have been famous at the end of the twelfth century. Some aspects of the limited biography of these men, however, suggest a possible desire on the part of the designer to use figures with a connection to the monastery at Saint Amand, where the manuscript was made. The house at Saint Amand was Benedictine, and this may have influenced the choice of Jordan. The association of both John and Nicholas with Amiens may also have been important, as the city was about 60 miles from the monastery and lay between it and the major educational centre of Paris. It is just possible, therefore, that the designer was seeking to link the celebrated figure of Gilbert to the environment of the monastery through the choice of students.

The monks of Saint Amand seem to have been interested in controversial opinions. In another manuscript from the abbey (Valenciennes Bibliothèque Municipale MS 40) a commentary on Psalms 50–100 is followed by a collection of documents, including a series of letters about Abelard’s heresy. In the lower margin of f. 113v these are further commented upon by
the addition of a note, in a different script, possibly by another reader, identifying Arnold of Brescia as the heretic burnt in Rome.82 The community which produced the lavish series of images of Gilbert and his students was thus well informed of contemporary events, and the designer chose to credit Gilbert with great authority, prominently displaying his opinions of the disputed work.

The trial of Gilbert of Poitiers, near the end of a long career as a teacher and bishop, transformed his reputation. In the remaining years of his life the issue of his orthodoxy continued to be challenged, and at his death a range of opinions on the subject were already strongly held. His supporters maintained that his work on the Trinity was correct and important, but others felt that, despite the bishop’s learning, this commentary was seriously flawed, some going so far as to declare that it was only worthy of condemnation and destruction. Gilbert resented the challenge to his learning by those he felt could not understand him, and the injustice of his trial may have been referred to in the choice of imagery for his tomb. Over the next half century his students continued to defend him not only with words, but also in the production of lavish copies of his works decorated with idealised images of their late master. In these Gilbert was shown as a man of the church, who could speak with authority on the nature of God. Not only Gilbert, but also his students were celebrated in these manuscripts, passing on an approved tradition of knowledge to new readers. Although Gilbert’s work was a commentary on that of Boethius, in all the copies where he was represented, he was given visual precedence over the earlier master. The students thus ensured that his controversial ideas would not be written out of history and instead would be presented as extremely valuable documents for successive generations.

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NOTES


3 – ‘Hic episcopo consentiente, preceptum dominus papa ut his adversus, si in libro suo reperirentur, corrigere, inhibens ne retineretur ab aliquo iam exscriptum, vel tradere alibi exscribendum, ante quam ad hanc formam corrigereetur’, John of Salisbury, pp. 23–5; ‘Purro volumen illud in quo manifesta esset inventa iniquitas lecturarii de cetero vel transcribi summis Pontifex aposolica auctoritate prohibuit nisi forte romana ecclesia purgatum illud ederet et correctum’; Geoffrey of Auxerre, p. 38; ‘Episcopos vero premiassum summi pontificis sententiam reverenter excipiendi, archiaconi-bus suis in graetiam receptum, cum ordinis integritate et honoris plenitudine ad propriam doceosum removeravit’, Ottonis et Ralhewinii, p. 87.


9 – Ibid. p. 84.


16 – ‘Hoc tamen certum est quod publico nunc phara scolarium terram usu, que tune ab ipso prolata videhantur esse prophane novitiae’, John of Salisbury, p. 17; for dating of the text see ibid., pp. xix–xxx.

17 – ‘Il est en forme de cercueil de six a` sept pie` de long, e` la vue est orne` de piliers de deux pie`s de hauteur; la fac¸ade expose` des bas-reliefs, qui repre`sentent — nescientes, ut dicit Apostolus, quid loquentur neque de quibus dei pilier, qui tempore suo et obtinuit nomen grande supra nomen magnorum qui sunt in terra’, Haring (1969), pp. 59, 70.


21 — ‘Iste enim ab adolescentia magnum virorum disciplinae se subiciens magique illorum ponderi quam suum credens ingenio, quas primo fuit Hylarius Pictaviensis, post Bernhardus Carnotensis, ad ultimum Anshelmus et Radulfus Laudenenses’, Ottonis et Rahewini, p. 75; translated in Otto of Freising, p. 88.


23 — ‘Cuius dicit obscuritatem tamquam verbum profanum novitatem tam inapicenter magister Ioelhium Suosaciones ipsum exceptum’, Ottonis et Rahewini, p. 76; translated in Otto of Freising, p. 89.


25 – ‘Ut noverint illum sapientiorem qui nichil se scire fatebatur nisi

26 – ‘Item damnat quasdam novitates quas Gillebertus motus subtilitate dogmatizabat’ Nicholas of Amiens ‘Ex Nicolai Ambianensis Chronico’, 26 – ‘Item damnat quasdam novitates quas Gillebertus motus subtilitate et aliis terris, permaxime a duabus caudis ticionum fumigantium: videlicet quorum doctrina non fulget ecclesia sed fumant scole plures in Francia Christum Iesum et hunc crucifixum quam coaceruatos illos magistros de


28 – ‘Consuetus ex ingenii subtilis magnitudine ac rationum acumine multa preter communem hominum morem dicere’, Ottonis et Rahewini, pp. 67–8; translated in Otto of Freising, p. 82.


31 — ‘eleganti quidem stilo, recte gratus universis, nisi videretur invehentis


36 — ‘Chronicon Montis Sereni’, ed. P. Scheffer-Boichorst, Historica: Scriptorum


60 – Su[p]er libr[o] bo[etii].
62 – Häring, (1966), p. 35; ‘sed propter eos adhuc illum contra apostolicum utique promulgatum ibidem interdictum, transcribere et legi-
63 – ‘Quorum discipuli eorum dictis et scriptis inbuti hominem verbo dei
unitum regant esse filium dei deum dicendum nisi accidentali, ut aiunt
connexione’, Gerhoch of Reichersburg, p. 106.
65 – ‘Ex his quidam temperant Porri condimenta, Quorum genus creditur
generis contenta; Decem rerum triplicant hii predicamenta, Evertuntur
veterum per hoc fundamenta’, Godefroy de Saint-Victor, Fons Philo-
sophiae, ed. P. Michand-Quantin (Namur, Louvain, Lille, 1956), p. 44; Grabmann, pro-
66 – ‘et in scriptis discipulorum inveni etiam plura digna ut apientibus
videbantur reprehensione, vel quia non consonabant regulis, vel quia ex
novitate verborum absens videbantur’, John of Salisbury, p. 15.
67 – ‘Facor me plures habuisse discipulos, qui me quidem omnes auduerunt, sed quidam
manus intellexerant: quod opinatis sunt scripserunt de cordo suo, non de spiritu meo. [. . .]
Ellos et conformes erant super hoc libello et simulibus publicis rectius conteuerunt. Quid a me
vultis amplius? Ergo libellum istum cum autore suo et manu hæreses que in eo scripte sunt
amathematico subiicium’, John of Salisbury, p. 22.
69 – Magister Gillebertus Pictavensis episcopus altiora theologice philosophie
secræa diligentibus, alienis et pulsantibus reserans discipulis quatuor,
quorum nomina subscripta sunt, quia digni sunt memoria.
70 – H. Denille, Quellenbelege: Die abendländischen Anfasserger bis Luther über
Justitia Dei (Rom 1,17) und Justificatio (Mainz, 1905), p. 345.
71 – Nicolaus qui pro dignitate sua Pictavensis episcopi sententiis ut digni
intro mittantur ad cas lucem plene expositionis infundit.
72 – See above n. 26.
73 – Hii tres et ille quartus intensiore studio attenti mentis acie perspicacia-
sima et sola veritatis specie tracti sub Pictavensi episcopo digni vigerunt
discipulis quorum anmiae requiescant in pace.
74 – See Jordan Fantosme’s Chronicle, ed. and trans. R. C. Johnston (Oxford,
1981) Introduction; M. D. Legge, Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background
75 – The Letters of John of Salisbury, eds W. J. Millor, H. E. Butler and C. N. L.
77 – B. Smalley, ‘Master Ivo of Chartres’ English Historical Review, 50 (1935),
No. 200, pp. 680–6.
78 – Geoffrey of Auxerre, p. 71.
79 – Clerval, p. 187.
80 – ‘A prege festinans morsus arcere luporum/contra paganos querere
venit opes’, P. Masini, ‘Il Maestro Giovanni Beleth; ipotesi di una traccia
81 – ‘Floruit magister Iohannes Belet in ecclesia Ambianensi, qui scripsit
librum de divinis officiis per annum’, Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, p. 847.
82 – Catalogue General des Manuscrits des Bibliothèques Publiques des Départements,