

Non est in sermone regnum Dei:
Did Isaac of Stella know the writings of Maximus the Confessor?

Florin Crișmăreanu*

Abstract: In this paper, I consider the possibility that Abbot Isaac of Stella may have known Maximus the Confessor's writings directly or, more likely, indirectly, thanks to Scotus Eriugena's translations. Of all the texts preserved from Isaac, I think I can best argue for this (possible) influence based on the *Epistola de anima ad Alcherum* and the *Epistola de canone missae*, recently published in the prestigious series *Sources Chrétiennes*. Even though the Cistercian abbot conceals his sources very well, rarely citing clear sources such as Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite, I nevertheless believe that we can detect some clues leading to the conclusion that he was familiar with the texts of Eriugena and, by extension, with the teachings of Maximus the Confessor.

Keywords: Isaac of Stella, *Epistola de anima ad Alcherum*, *Epistola de canone missae*, Maximus the Confessor, Scotus Eriugena, tradition, 12th century

Mysterious authors and obscure topics characterised the thought of the entire Middle Ages. This situation determined various exegetes to talk about the *Dark Ages* in multiple contexts (Ker 1904). On the other hand, numerous scholars persuasively argue that the "Dark Middle Ages" theory cannot be supported. On the contrary, this timeframe – rich in intellectual achievements – has always exerted some fascination, opening highly fertile research fields for exegetes (i.e., historians, philologists, theologians, philosophers, and others). Readers of the medieval texts and exegeses penned primarily in the 20th century easily conclude that specific eras have benefitted from more attention by the medievalists (e.g., the 13th and 14th centuries). In contrast, other periods (e.g., the 11th and 12th centuries) have failed to stir the same interest from specialists.

* Florin Crișmăreanu (✉)

Department of Philosophy, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania
e-mail: fcrismareanu@gmail.com

Usually, to obtain information about the life and activity of a particular author, we must consult classic writings, the monographs dedicated to the era when an author wrote. Upon deciding to focus on a thinker of the 12th century, searching began with the works devoted to this period, such as the classic exegeses of Joseph de Ghellinck (1948) and the Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu (1957). For instance, the name of interest here, Isaac of Stella (c. 1100, England – 1169, Étoile, France), is featured only three times in the famous work by Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle* (1957). Considering such an apparent aspect, it is difficult to state whether Isaac of Stella can be regarded as a significant author of the 12th century. If we assess the topic from the fine and much more comprehensive optics of the 20th-century exegetes, the Cistercian seems more of a marginal author. In this respect, some commentators argue that Isaac of Stella is “le grand mystère de Cîteaux” (Bouyer 1955, 195). Nonetheless, this perspective has changed dramatically in recent years, given that the multiplication of Cistercian studies over recent decades placed the Stella abbot among the central figures of 12th century monastic spirituality (Dietz 2006, 141).

In light of the latest discoveries (primarily upon publishing the surviving texts penned by the Cistercian abbot), Isaac of Stella was beyond doubt among the scholar monks of the 12th century. His audience highly appreciated his sermons (Isaac de l'Étoile 1967; 1974; 1987). Contemporary exegetes believe that Isaac generally tried to find a middle ground between the conservatism displayed by various monks and the openness of dialecticians like Peter Abelard and William of Conches. For the abbot of Stella, the dialectic method per se is not dangerous for faith but only its enforcement by some and the liberty they assume concerning the teachings of the Fathers. Furthermore, Isaac does not hesitate to use the term “theology”, this time with a Dionysian meaning. He even includes Plato and Moses among theologians (*Sermo* 48, 5-7 and *Sermo* 24, 6-7). Considering such a situation, Philippe Nouzille argues that only the confusion of genres can reconcile monastery, philosophy, and theology (Nouzille 2009, 152).

Per his account, Isaac is of English origin (*Epistola de canone missae*, 23 bis; Isaac de l'Étoile 2022, 252-253), most probably born into a noble family around 1100. Upon crossing the English Channel at a certain point, he would have studied at the prestigious schools of Chartres and Paris between 1120 and 1130 (according to Bernard

McGinn (1972), whose opinion has been accepted by most exegetes). After studying – most probably – along the followers of Gilbert de la Porrée (W. Buchmüller), the Victorines, and perhaps even Peter Abelard (1079-1142), he became a Cistercian monk at Pontigny (Lekai 1957; Fracheboud 1967; Pacaut 1993; Berlioz 1994; Kinder 1998). Per the data available to our days, Isaac was appointed in 1147 as abbot of the Notre-Dame de l'Étoile Monastery (established in 1124) near Poitiers. He seemed to have hosted there Thomas Becket (c. 1118-1170), Lord Chancellor of England in 1155-1162 and Archbishop of Canterbury between 1162 and 1170), whom King Henry II Plantagenet had exiled. This episode is related to the island of Ré (an island off the Atlantic coast of France near La Rochelle). At a certain point, Isaac travelled to attend the establishment of the Notre-Dame de Châtelier Monastery. The interpretation of this episode becomes essential to understand his biography and divides the exegetes into two sides: on the one hand, the Cistercian Gaetano Raciti (1939-2022) formulates the hypothesis that Isaac was exiled in late 1160 on the island of Ré due to his favourable stance concerning Thomas Becket. As an Englishman, Isaac had never been seen with good eyes by the clergymen and monks within the monasteries on the continent that he visited. Whatever the case, for a long period, almost all the exegetes of Isaac's life and work – B. McGinn included – accepted G. Raciti's hypothesis, which was amended in the early '80s, when several fragments attributed to Isaac were found, showing that the Cistercian discusses his return from this "forced and definitive exile". On the other hand, Claude Garda – by bringing forward unpublished documents – contradicts the hypothesis launched by G. Raciti, thus proving that Isaac was still the abbot of the Notre-Dame de l'Étoile Monastery when he died (i.e., in 1169) (Garda 1986, 8-22). Following the interpretive line opened by C. Garda, F. Gastaldelli persuasively argues that G. Raciti's hypothesis is not supported (Gastaldelli 1999, 39-76; Isaac de l'Étoile 2022, 28-34).

The latest exegeses accept the idea that Isaac of Stella was not exiled for taking Thomas Becket's side. Furthermore, the Cistercian abbot saw himself as an exiled his entire life, as a *peregrinus*, because he did not live where he was born: "Would that I were not English, or rather that here in exile I would never have seen any English" (*Epistola de canone missae*, 23 bis: "Utinam aut Anglus non fuisset aut ubi exulo Anglos numquam vidissem" – Isaac de l'Étoile 2022, 252-253). The idea is featured in writings penned by Isaac (i.e., *Sermo*

2 and 54), where he discusses the fall of man from Paradise, subsequently in a continuous exile. Therefore, the idea of exile constantly followed the Cistercian monk; he assumed it, and one cannot reduce it to the episode of a forced exile, as suggested by some commentators.

Beyond these debates between experts, it is certain that after Isaac (the abbot of Stella), Vaelisius was appointed in 1169, which determined the exegetes to consider that Isaac was already dead on that date.

The central idea of this study (the possible influence of a Greek Church Father on Isaac of Stella) was generated and developed due to the publication of a new edition comprising two letters preserved from the Cistercian abbot: Isaac de l'Étoile, *Lettre sur l'âme. Lettre sur le canon de la messe* (Isaac de l'Étoile 2022)¹. The text of the *De anima* edition published within the SC collection is reprised from the paper written by Caterina Tarlazzi (2011, 167-278), and the text for *Epistola de canone missae* uses the edition of Elias Dietz (2013, 265-308).

The first text studied here, *Epistola de anima*, is dedicated to a monk named Alcher (*Epistola de anima ad Alcherum*) from Clairvaux (*floruit* in the second half of the 12th century, most probably in 1150-1175), penned around the year 1162². In B. McGinn's opinion (1972), this text is one of the most significant anthropological treatises of the 12th century. Mainly in the first part of this letter, Isaac supports his argument starting from the Augustinian distinction (*Homily on the First Epistle of John 23, 6*) between *body*, *soul*, and *God*, explicitly stating that “in Deo veritas est; in anima quidem alicuius apparet imago; in corpore vero vix ullius invenitur vestigium” (Isaac de l'Étoile 2022, 152-153). The work's second part relies on Plato's soul differentiation: *rationabilitas*, *concupiscibilitas*, and *irascibilitas* (Ibid., 162-163). It is worth noting, in this writing, Isaac of Stella's

¹ In the version for popularising this edition, published in *Convorbiri literare / Literary Talks* (2023, Issue 6: 167-169), I showed my intention to further analyse this text; it is the purpose of this paper.

² The work *De anima* is dated after the famine of 1162, which comprised the entire Aquitania; the event was also mentioned by Isaac: “For this year upon our territories the evils of pestilence and famine have arrived, such as no previous generation, it is believed, has seen” (“Venerunt enim hoc anno super regiones nostras mala pestilentiae et famis, qualia omnia retro saecula, ut putatur, non viderunt” – Isaac de l'Étoile 2022, 218-219). This episode is also mentioned in *Boso's Life of Alexander III*. 1973. Introduction by Peter Munz. Translated by G.M. Elis. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 54.

teaching regarding the powers of the soul (*sensus, imaginatio, ratio, intellectus, and intelligentia*), which only develops an idea featured by Hugo of Saint-Victor regarding the quadripartition within *The Consolation of Philosophy* (V) by Boethius. The French researcher Christian Trottmann already established the existence of a correspondence between the bodily senses and the five faculties/powers discussed by Isaac of Stella (Trottmann 2008, 21-54; 2011, 343-362; 2012, 433-442). Unlike his predecessors, the Cistercian abbot believes that the highest power of the soul is *intelligentia*: “sicut enim supremum animae, id est intelligentia sive mens” (Isaac de l’Étoile 2022, 180-181).

In *Epistola de anima*, Isaac of Stella elegantly describes the distinction between body and soul (Isaac de l’Étoile 2022, 186-187), which he compares to the relation between an instrument and the music it produces. The body/ instrument may die at one point, but the soul/ melody survives. By associating the soul with a melody, Abbot Isaac highlights that the soul is immortal. On the other hand, a well-tuned instrument (the body) will always produce a beautiful melody.

Isaac’s idea gradually acquired notoriety because the excerpts within the letter *De anima* were included in the compilation *De spiritu et anima*, which circulated under Augustine’s name for a while³. It was widely disseminated in the Western Middle Ages, thus anonymously carrying on the teachings of the Cistercian monk (Raciti 1961, 385). According to some exegetes, this compilation represents an alternative version to the Peripatetic-inspired psychology (e.g., the opusculum *De anima et de potentiis eius*) of the Latin world (Théry 1921, 373-377). The Benedictine scholar Pierre Coustant (1654-1721) annexed the writing *De spiritu et anima* to Augustine’s work. Still, he showed that it could not have been penned by the bishop of Hippo (despite Albert the Great’s opinion), Hugo of Saint-Victor (according to Vincent of Beauvais), or Isaac of Stella. Gaetano Raciti argues that Pierre Coustant developed the ideas advanced by Thomas Aquinas and cautiously suggested the name of Alcher of Clairvaux: “Hunc nos

³ Some exegetes ascribed this writing to Alcher of Clairvaux, Isaac of Stella’s correspondent. The piece of information is featured in volume 6 of the Cîteaux Library, where the writing *De spiritu et anima* is accompanied by the following note: “Eiusdem B. Isaac abbatis de Stella, seu ut ipsi inscribere placuit, Alcheri *De anima liber*” (B. Tissier, *Bibliotheca Patrum Cisterciensium*, tome VI, Bonnefontaine, 1662, 84; Tarlazzi 2010, 323-340). G. Raciti rejected this hypothesis, considering that this text’s author is Petrus Comestor (Raciti 1961, 385-401).

Alcherum esse suspicamur” (PL 40, 779-780). More recently, Constant J. Mews argued that Alcher should not be ruled out as the possible author of the treatise *De spiritu et anima* (Mews 2018, 342; Tarlazzi 2010, 323-340; Norpoth 1971).

Curiously, in 1961, Gaetano Raciti was unaware of Leo Norpoth’s research outcomes (1924). The Cistercian scholar points out that little is known about Alcher of Clairvaux, except for the two texts dedicated to him by Isaac of Stella (*De anima ad Alcherum monachum Claraevallis*) and Petrus Cellensis (*De conscientia ad Alcherum monachum Claraevallis*) (Raciti 1961, 387). Interestingly, in chapter 20 of the *Epistle on the Soul*, Isaac notes that Alcher has great medical expertise (*physica*). This mention made certain researchers state that Alcher would be the author of the treatise *De spiritu et anima* as a possible reply to *Epistola de anima* by Isaac of Stella. However, Gaetano Raciti argues that a “scientist” so cultivated and intelligent, as Isaac of Stella describes Alcher (*De anima*, § 20), could not have written such a low-quality compilation. Furthermore, the Cistercian exegete wonders why *De spiritu et anima* does not quote medicine and physiology works, of which allegedly Alcher was well aware (Raciti 1961, 389). The arguments set forward by the Cistercian exegete (Bernard McGinn agreed with most of them) against the idea that Alcher authored the treatise *De spiritu et anima* should not be entirely dismissed. They are still valid, though contemporary exegetes do not accept his theory that Petrus Comestor († 1178) wrote the treatise. Ultimately, the following question also arises: why would Alcher write a treatise on the soul, given that he asked Isaac of Stella to pen it? Did the approach chosen by Stella disappoint him? Another clue to consider is that the catalogue of the Clairvaux Library does not host the opuscle *De spiritu et anima* (Vernet 1979). Nevertheless, besides the hypotheses vehiculated with more or less solid arguments, it is impossible to state who the author of *De spiritu et anima* is beyond any reasonable doubt (Isaac de l’Étoile 2022, 42).

The other text with the edition analysed here, *Epistola de canone missae*, represents an allegorical interpretation of the liturgical service. As Elias Dietz points out, in *Epistola de canone missae*, “la pensée d’Isaac déviant de plus en plus difficile à suivre (§ 19-21), surtout dans la troisième action où la distinction entre la liturgie terrestre et la liturgie céleste s’estompe” (Isaac de l’Étoile 2022, 86). In other words, there is a “cosmic mass” attended by the entire creation, according to the inspired words that Hans Urs von Balthasar highlighted in the work

authored by Maximus the Confessor (580-662). Directly or, more likely, indirectly, this author – through Eriugena – may have influenced the abbot of Stella to a certain extent. Among the contemporary exegetes, primarily W. Buchmüller studies the sources and influences in Isaac's writings. Still, Maximus the Confessor's name is only mentioned twice in the massive work by Buchmüller; it is not featured among the Cistercian's sources (Buchmüller 2016, 294 and 548). Isaac of Stella's works comprises the characteristic according to which his teachings are profoundly due to a certain authority (e.g., Augustine) without any actual citation from that author's works (Reta 1969, 1126). Whatever the case, one thing is sure: the detail-oriented Cistercian theologian is doubled by an experienced writer who conceals his sources brilliantly.

To my knowledge, Antoine Lévy is the only exegete supporting the possible influence of Maximus upon the abbot of Stella: “chez un Isaac de l'Etoile, les parties proprement spéculatives, si nettement séparées de sa parénèse ; paraissent nourries de réminiscences maximiennes” (Lévy 2006, 121). References are made to several of Isaac's *Sermons* where one could identify reminiscences of Maximus: *Sermo* 4 (§ 6-14) and *Ambiguum* 9; *Sermo* 9 (§ 1-3) and *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 64; *Sermo* 31 (§ 1-4) and *Ambiguum* 67. Indeed, it takes tremendous effort to assess all similarities among the surviving works written by Isaac and the ideas penned by Maximus. Such an attempt is to be made in the following lines; furthermore, I intend to add a few occurrences where Isaac wrote under the direct or indirect influence of the writings by Maximus.

From a chronological standpoint, Isaac of Stella belongs to the second generation of Cistercians. Undoubtedly, Abbot Isaac and Garnier of Rochefort (the Clairvaux abbot between 1186 and 1193) read Dionysius the Areopagite (Jeauneau 1997, 15). For instance, in several texts, André Fracheboud studied the sources of inspiration for Isaac of Stella (Fracheboud 1947, 328-341; 1948, 19-34; 1949, 1-17; 1957, 133-145; 1992, 175-192; Hamilton and McNulty 1963, 181-216; McGinn 1976, 200-241). Moreover, it appears that the Cistercian abbot was familiar with the Eastern doctrine concerning interpretation meanings (*Sermo* 9 and 10). In *De anima*, he made a clear distinction between the allegorical and the literal sense (Isaac de l'Etoile 2022, 182-183; Noblesse-Rocher 2014, 159-171).

By shifting the direction of my analysis to another direction – in terms of an Eastern formula regarding the reciprocity between the

Logos made human and the humankind divinised, *sacrum commercium* – with roots in Origen (*Peri Archon*, II, 6, 3); Athanasius the Great (*De incarnatione* 54, 3); Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oratio* 30, 3), τόπος κοινός in Maximus the Confessor – Isaac of Stella discusses the divine works descending towards us from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit; the worldly works ascend to the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit (Isaac de l’Etoile 2022, 216-217). Abbot Isaac also uses the Chalcedonian Christological terminology to describe “a person, but without confusing the natures” (Ibid., 180-181).

Interestingly, the Cistercian abbot uses at a certain point (*De anima*, 27) the example of the air (*aer*) and the fire (*ignis*): “But discernment surpasses reason both in rank and in power, just as the firmament surpasses the lower atmosphere [...], Then understanding seems to be compared to the very fine and thin, totally fiery, highest heaven” (“rationem vero superat intellectus et ordine et virtute, sucut aerem firmamentum [...]. Empireo quidem toti igneo acutissimo et subtilissimo conferenda videtur intelligentia”) (Isaac de l’Etoile 2022, 196-197). Not coincidentally, the same page includes the word *theologia*, a commonplace in Eriugena’s translations and a term loathed by Bernard of Clairvaux: “Denique in primo limine Theologiae vel potius Stultilogiae suae, fidem diffinit aestimationem” (Bernard de Clairvaux 1977, 24). Isaac of Stella was definitely aware of Bernard’s stance, yet, he uses the term (*theologia*) that he had mocked. Furthermore, the examples used by Isaac must have been reprised from Eriugena’s works or translations, either directly or through Bernard of Clairvaux, *Liber de diligendo Deo*, X, 28⁴. First of all, it is worth highlighting that the text of Maximus targeted here (*Ambigua ad Iohannem*) only includes in the places indicated (CCSG 18, 25) the examples of “air illuminated by light” (CCSG 18, 25: “aer per totum illuminatus lumine”) and “iron set ablaze by fire” (CCSG 18, 25: “et igne ferum totum toto liquefactum”). Secondly, Eriugena’s cited writing includes the same examples as those within Maximus’ text, but

⁴ “Sic affici, deificari est. Quomodo stilla aque modica, multo infusa vino, deficere a se tota videtur, dum et saporem vini induit et colorem, et quomodo ferrum ignitum et candens igni similimum fit, pristina propriaque exutum forma, et quomodo solis luce perfusus aer in eadem transformatur luminis claritatem, adeo ut non tam illuminatus quam ipsum lumen esse videatur, sic omnem tunc in sanctis humanam affectionem quodam ineffabili modo necesse erit a semetipsa liquescere, atque in Dei penitus transfundi voluntatem” (SC 393, 132-133). I discussed this topic in details in the paper Crîșmăreanu 2017, 119-136.

they are separated: the example of “air illuminated by light” is first: “sicut enim aer a sole illuminatus nihil aliud videtur esse nisi lux, non quia sui naturam perdat, sed quia lux in eo praevaleat ut id ipsum luci esse aestimetur” (Eriugena 1996, 14), followed by “iron set ablaze by fire”: “alterum vero nunc subiungemus, quod est in igne et ferro. Nam cum ferrum conflatum in igne” (Ibid., 16). Thirdly, the work by Richard of Saint-Victor shows in that occurrence the example of the “water infused into wine” (*De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis* IV). In the reference cited (SC 393, 132-133), exegetes attribute the three examples to the three authors (Maximus, Eriugena, and Richard) without making any distinction. If need be, as I showed above, we must delimit between the two examples used by Maximus, reprised by Eriugena, and the example used solely by Richard and Bernard. Interestingly, *De anima* by Isaac also features the first two examples from Maximus and Eriugena. The third example (“water infused into wine”) is not included in the section listing the examples of air and fire, though his contemporaries (i.e., Richard and Bernard) mention it. Here is my interpretation of this absence: either Isaac was aware of Bernard’s text but decided to quote two of the three examples, or the Cistercian directly cited the two examples from Eriugena’s writings or translations. The use of “water infused into wine” conceals a certain risk – indicated in the following lines – that Isaac of Stella elegantly avoided.

I do not believe that a phrase such as “water infused into wine” could be wisely associated with the two other examples (i.e., air and fire), given that “water infused into wine” homogenises the two liquids, thus losing its individual qualities, mixing them without being able to differentiate between the two substances (as shown by the fragments cited from Richard’s texts). If we use this example to describe the state of humankind divinised (per the texts by Maximus and Eriugena), then man would “dissolve” and actually disappear in the ocean of deification (as outlined in the Rhenan mystique, for instance).

Augustine – one of the irrefutable sources of Isaac of Stella – presents the sacrament (Mandouze 1963, 222-232) as the visible Word (“Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit Sacramentum, etiam ipsum tanquam visibile verbum” – *Tractatus in Iohannis evangelium* 80, 3; Niemeijer 2009, 445-456). However, Abbot Isaac adds a different nuance; he explicitly states that the Logos itself is visible to us today in the letters of *Scripture*, palpable in the Holy Sacraments: “Ipsum

sanctum Verbum, quod beati oculi apostolorum viderunt in carne, manus tractaverunt, hodie est nobiscum, visibile in littera, in sacramento tractabile [...] sit quasi visibilis Verbi praesens corpus, sancti Evangelii textus” (Isaac de l’Étoile 1967, 210-211). I believe this is a mere reminiscence of the Patristic teachings regarding the three incarnations of the Logos. Following Origen (*Commentarium in Ioannem* XIII, 42), Maximus the Confessor discusses in *Ambiguum* 33 about the three incarnations or, “When the God-bearing teacher says that the ‘Logos becomes thick’, I think he does so with the following ideas in mind. Either because the Logos, who is simple and incorporeal, and who spiritually nourishes all the divine powers in heaven according to rank, deemed it worthy to ‘become thick’ through His manifestation in the flesh (which was taken from us, and for us, and is consistent with us, *but without sin*), so that He might instruct us, by means of words and examples suited to us, in mysteries that transcend the power of all human speech. (For we know that *all that He said was in the form of parables, and that He said nothing without a parable*, for teachers typically have recourse to parables whenever their pupils are not immediately able to follow them, and so endeavour to lead them to [1285D] an understanding of what is being said.) Or one could say that the Logos ‘becomes thick’ in the sense that for our sake He ineffably concealed Himself in the logoi of beings, and is obliquely signified in proportion to each visible thing, as if through certain letters, being whole in whole things while simultaneously remaining utterly complete and fully present, whole, and without diminishment in each particular thing. He remains undifferentiated and always the same in beings marked by difference; simple and without composition in things that are compounded; without origin in things that have a beginning; invisible in things that are seen; and incapable of being touched in all that is palpable. Or one could say that the Logos ‘becomes thick’ in the sense that, for the sake of our thick minds, He consented to be both embodied and expressed through letters, [1288A] syllables, and sounds, so that from all these He might gradually gather those who follow Him to Himself, being united by the Spirit, and thus raise us up to the simple and unconditioned idea of Him, bringing us for His own sake into union with Himself by contraction to the same extent that He has for our sake expanded Himself according to the principle of condescension” (trans. Constans 2014, 63-65). Moreover, Maximus establishes a relationship between the three incarnations and the faculties of the soul (*nous-logos-pneuma*): “And by having chosen

the spirit of Scripture, the *logos* of nature, and his intellect, and by uniting them indissolubly to each other, he found God—in the sense that he came to know God, as much as this was necessary and possible—in the intellect, in the *logos*, and in the spirit” (*The Responses to Thalassios*, 32, trans. Constans 2018, 205).

Sermo 32, § 9 features an atypical idea for a Latin: uncreated light, “sic nec spiritus rationalis, maxima lux creata, nisi ad imaginem suae superioris et increatae summaeque lucis factus esset prae caeteris sui corporis membris minime vidisset” (Isaac de l’Étoile 1974, 210-211). In turn, Maximus the Confessor discusses the Transfiguration (μεταμόρφωση) of our Lord Jesus Christ irradiating such a light: “that the wholly blessed radiance that shone with dazzling rays of light from the Lord’s face, completely overwhelming the power of their eyes, was a symbol of His divinity, which transcends intellect, sensation, being, and knowledge. From the observation that *He had neither form nor beauty*, and from the knowledge that *the Word had become flesh*, they were led to the understanding of Him as one *more beautiful than the sons of men*” (*Ambigua ad Iohannem*, 10, trans. Constans, I, 191-193). The theologian of “uncreated light”, Gregory Palamas, makes several references to Maximus the Confessor when approaching this topic (Palamas 1959, II, 617).

Considering all the aspects outlined above, I justly argue that certain ideas within the texts penned by Maximus could have reached Isaac of Stella directly or, more likely, indirectly (through Eriugena’s translations). Whatever the case, the efforts by the Cistercian abbot in the two letters and the other texts written by him are meant to highlight the path, the ascendance towards God. Bonaventura brilliantly outlined, one century later, this itinerary to/ in God. Undoubtedly, this anagogic path should be completed by the knowledge of God, which can only occur, according to Isaac of Stella, through theophanies – “theophaniae descendunt” (Isaac de l’Étoile 2022, 211-219).

Acknowledgment: This work was supported by a grant of Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS-UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2021-0469, within PNCDI III.

References:

- Berlioz, Jacques. 1994. *Moines et religieux au Moyen Âge*. Paris: Seuil.
Bernard of Clairvaux. 1977. “Epistola 190.” In J. Leclercq and H.M. Rochais (Eds.), *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, tome VIII, pp. 17-40. Rome: Editiones Cistercienses.

- Bouyer, Louis. 1955. *La spiritualité de Cîteaux*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Buchmüller, Wolfgang. 2016. *Isaak von Étoile. Monastische Theologie im Dialog mit dem Neo-Platonismus des 12. Jahrhunderts*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters. Neue Folge, 80. Münster: Aschendorff.
- Chenu, Marie-Dominique. 1957. *La théologie au douzième siècle*. Paris: J. Vrin.
- Crîșmăreanu, Florin. 2017. Par le feu et [par] la lumière: deux métaphores maximiennes. Sources, réceptions, significations. *Classica et Christiana*, 12: 119-136.
- de Ghellinck, Joseph. 1948. *Le mouvement théologique du XII e siècle*. Bruges: De Tempel.
- Dietz, Elias. 2006. When Exile Is Home: The Biography of Isaac of Stella. *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 41 (2): 141-165.
- Doignon, Jean. 1981. « Spiritus Sanctus... usus in munere » (Hilaire de Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 2, 1). *Revue théologique de Louvain*, 12 (2): 235-240.
- Fracheboud, André. 1947. Le pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite parmi les sources du cistercien Isaac de l'Étoile. *Collectanea cisterciensia*, 9: 328-341.
- Fracheboud, André. 1949. L'influence de Saint Augustin sur le cistercien Isaac de l'Étoile. *Collectanea cisterciensia*, 11: 1-17, 264-278.
- Fracheboud, André. 1957. Isaac de l'Étoile et l'Écriture Sainte. *Collectanea cisterciensia*, 19: 133-145.
- Fracheboud, André. 1967. *Les Premiers Spirituels Cisterciens*. Roybon: Monastère de Chambarand.
- Fracheboud, André. 1992. Isaac de l'Étoile et Platon. *Collectanea cisterciensia*, 54: 175-192.
- Garda, Claude. 1986. Du nouveau sur Isaac de l'Étoile. *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses*, 37 : 8-22.
- Gastaldelli, Ferruccio. 1999. Tradizione e sviluppo la formazione culturale e teologica di Goffredo d'Auxerre. *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Macerata*, 32: 39-76.
- Isaac de l'Étoile. 1967. *Sermons, Tome I (1-17)*. Texte et introduction critiques par Anselm Hoste. Introduction, traduction et notes par Gaston Salet. Paris: Éditions du Cerf (SC 130).
- Isaac de l'Étoile. 1974. *Sermons, Tome II (18-39)*. Texte et introduction critiques par Anselme Hoste. Introduction, traduction et notes par Gaston Salet avec la collaboration de Gaetano Raciti. Paris: Éditions du Cerf (SC 207).
- Isaac de l'Étoile. 1987. *Sermons, Tome III (40-55 et fragments 1-3)*. Texte établi par Anselm Hoste et Gaetano Raciti. Traduction et notes par Gaston Salet et Gaetano Raciti. Paris: Éditions du Cerf (SC 339).
- Isaac de l'Étoile. 2022. *Lettre sur l'âme. Lettre sur le canon de la messe*. Texte, introduction et notes par Elias Dietz et Caterina Tarlazzi. Traduction par Laurence Mellerin; avec la collaboration de Robert Favreau. Paris: Éditions du Cerf (SC 632).
- Jeaneau, Édouard. 1997. "Denys l'Aréopagite, promoteur du néoplatonisme en Occident." In Linos G. Benakis (Ed.), *Néoplatonisme et philosophie médiévale French: Actes du Colloque international de Corfou, 6-8 octobre 1995*, pp. 1-23. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Ker, William Paton. 1904. *The Dark Ages*. London: Blackwood and Sons.

- Kinder, Terryl Nancy. 1998. *L'Europe Cistercienne*. Paris: Zodiaque.
- Leclercq, Jean. 1969. Les lettres de Guillaume de Saint-Thierry à saint Bernard. *Revue bénédictine*, 79: 375-391.
- Lekai, Louis J. 1957. *Les Moines blancs. Histoire de l'ordre cistercien*. Paris: Seuil.
- Liber de spiritu et anima*. 2021. A cura di Marco Vannini. Firenze: Le Lettere.
- Maximus the Confessor. 2014. *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*. Volume II, Nicholas Conostas (Editor and translator). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Maximus the Confessor. 2018. *On Difficulties in Sacred Scripture: The Responses to Thalassios*. Translated by Maximos Conostas. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press.
- McGinn, Bernard. 1972. *The Golden Chain: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Stella*. Washington: Cistercian Publications.
- McGinn, Bernard. 1976. "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Early Cistercians." In Basil Pennington (Ed.), *One Yet Two: Monastic Tradition, East and West*, pp. 200-241. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications.
- Mews, Constant J. 2018. Debating the Authority of Pseudo-Augustine's *De spiritu et anima?*, *Przegląd tomistyczny*, 24: 336-337.
- Niemeijer, Just. 2009. "Solitude And The Inaccessible Light In The Sermons of Isaac of Stella." In Alasdair A. MacDonald, Zweder R.W.M. von Martels and Jan R. Veenstra (Eds.), *Christian humanism. Essays in honour of Arjo Vanderjagt*, pp. 445-456. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- Noblesse-Rocher, Annie. 2014. "Les procédés exégétiques de quelques moines prédicateurs : Julien de Vézelay, Isaac de l'Étoile et Gueric d'Igny." In Gilbert Dahan and Annie Noblesse-Rocher (Eds.), *L'exégèse monastique*, pp. 159-171. Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes.
- Norpoth, Leo. 1971. *Der pseudo-augustinische Traktat "De spiritu et anima"* (Philosophische Dissertation, München, 1924). Köln: Bochum.
- Nouzille, Philippe. 2009. "Théologie monastique contre dialectique". In Philippe Capelle-Dumont (Ed.), *Philosophie et théologie au Moyen Âge*, Tome 2, pp.151-162. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.
- Palamas. Grégoire. 1959. *Défense des saints hésychastes*, Vol. II. Edited and translated by John Meyendorff. Louvain: Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense.
- Pacaut, Marcel. 1993. *Les moines blancs. Histoire de l'ordre de Cîteaux*. Paris: Fayard.
- Raciti, Gaetano. 1971. "Isaac de l'Étoile". *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, VII (2): 2011-2038.
- Raciti, Gaetano. 1961. L'autore del *De spiritu et anima*. *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica*, 5: 385-401.
- Reta, José Oroz. 1969. "L'Augustinisme de l'épître *De anima* du Père Isaac de l'Étoile." In *Arts libéraux et philosophie au Moyen Âge. Actes du quatrième congrès international de philosophie médiévale*, pp. 1125-1128. Montréal/Paris: Institut d'études médiévales/J. Vrin.
- Scotus Eriugena. 1996. *De divisione naturae*, CCCM 161. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Tarlazzi, Caterina. 2010. Il manoscritto 469 della Biblioteca Teresiana di Mantova e Alchero 'di Clairvaux', *Medioevo*, 35: 323-340.

- Théry, Gabriel. 1921. L'authenticité du *De spiritu et anima* dans Saint Thomas et Albert le Grand. *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 10 (3): 373-377.
- Trottmann, Christian. 2008. "Bernard de Clairvaux, Aelred de Rievaulx et Isaac de l'Étoile philosophes cisterciens du XIIe siècle." In André-Marie Ponnou-Delaffon (Ed.), *Lumières médiévales: Saint Bernard, Averroès, saint Thomas d'Aquin, Duns Scot*, pp. 21-54. Paris: Collège des Bernardins.
- Trottmann, Christian. 2011. Isaac de l'Étoile lecteur du livre de la nature. *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 95: 343-362.
- Trottmann, Christian. 2012. Isaac de l'Étoile : les cinq sens et la conversion du sens. *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 55 : 433-442.