

**SICUT MEL DULCE
THE SWEETNESS AND BITTERNESS OF READING THE
BIBLE IN THE MIDDLE AGES***

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ABSTRACT

After overviews of the types of primary sources available for tracing pleasure of reading during the Middle Ages (theoretical discourses such as *artes poeticae* or medical treatises, texts themselves, paratexts such as *accessus ad auctores*, readers' responses, and other texts), the study concentrates on biblical exegesis, namely commentaries on two biblical passages, Ezech. 3, 3 and Apoc. 10, 9. They both present an image of eating a book/roll which is sweet in the mouth but turns bitter in the belly. The image seems to have troubled some exegetes and led to much varied explanations. As it is argued, the reason for this is that the image is in a contrast with the usual metaphor of reading as eating, in which the book might not be too sweet (too easily accessible) but makes one feel well, since it provides nourishment.

Key words: medieval Latin literature; medieval exegesis; Bible; pleasure; textual discourse; metaphor

Middle Ages are not a period where one would first look for pleasures. Besides the general gloominess, sicknesses, poor living conditions, etc., the usual generalization is that medieval people were subjected to the rigid Christian Church, which regarded pleasure as something negative. This would apply to the pleasure of reading as well. If there was any, it would be linked solely to lay vernacular, not to Latin writing. Such a view has, of course, been successfully challenged.¹ Thus, rather than arguing again here that there was textual pleasure in the Latin Middle Ages, I would like to overview the particular types of sources used in search for medieval concept of and attitudes to literary pleasure, and briefly consider what kind of information each of them offers, and in what ways their character shapes the results arrived at. The most substantial part of this contribution then concentrates on a particular biblical image, that of eating a book/a roll, which is sweet in the mouth but turns bitter in the belly (Ezech. 3, 3 and Apoc. 10, 9). As I would like to show, there was certain uneasiness about the image among medieval exegetes, which, however, did not have theological but purely literary grounds. Through this example,

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¹ Among many, some of which are referred to below, I recommend especially Ziolkowski (2007).

I wish to stress the importance of considering the rules and customs of the given textual discourse in any kind of historical enquiry.

Pleasure is here sometimes considered together with laughter, entertainment and fun. Although they are clearly not the same, it is not always easy to separate these concepts, and the primary metaphor eventually explored within this study may refer to all of them. I will restrict myself to selected Latin sources, and thus the resulting picture is only a partial one with no claims at grasping medieval textual pleasure as a whole.

The most frequently explored type of source in search for textual pleasure are theoretical discourses (*artes poeticae*, grammatical, ethical and medical treatises, monastic rules). They offer prescriptions and general advice, they set rules and warn against transgressing them. Yet, it can never be taken for granted that prescriptive and theoretical texts faithfully reflect the actual practice.

In addition to the treatment of the topic by Cicero, Quintilian, and especially by Augustine in his *De doctrina christiana* (discussed below), four lines from Horace's *Ars poetica* repeatedly quoted during the Middle Ages set the approach to the purpose of writing poetry:

*Aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae
aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere uitae* (Hor. *Ars* 333–334) and

*Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci,
lectorem delectando pariterque monendo* (Hor. *Ars* 343–344)²

Poets wish to either benefit or delight us, or, at one and the same time, to speak words that are both pleasing and useful for our lives.

He gets every vote who combines the useful with the pleasant, and who, at the same time he pleases the reader, also instructs him.³

The theoretical discussions of pleasure from reading are thus inseparably connected to discussions of use throughout the Middle Ages. The nature of this interrelation was treated most thoroughly by Suchomski (1975) who analysed the Christian attitudes towards laughter, ridicule and entertainment based on theoretical treatises on the topic (or on *artes poeticae*, or Christian ethics), showing the (now generally accepted as obvious) distanciation of the Church from them.⁴ Robertson (1962) claimed that medieval pleasure from reading was conceived as merely the “first step”: the literary meaning (which might have been funny or pleasurable) was necessarily followed by a deeper, allegorical or anagogical, interpretation, which showed the Christian how to behave well. But recent views are different: for example, Hunt (1979) concludes his inspection of literary atti-

² A less frequent commonplace from Horace linked to this topic is: *Quamquam ridentem dicere verum / quid vetat?* “What does prohibit the one laughing to say the truth?” (Hor. *Sat.* I, 1, 24–25).

³ Translated by Leon Golden.

⁴ Further studies have been carried out concentrating specifically on the monastic environment. Prohibitions of entertainment in monastic rules and sermons are quoted most frequently in this context and pioneer articles in this respect are Le Goff (1990); Resnick (1987); or Porter (1976). These examples are only suggestive, there is a vast recent literature on laughter and humour in the Middle Ages – subjects closely related to, although not identical with textual pleasure.

tudes to pleasure and instruction in the 12th and the 13th centuries: "... there was much literature written for no purpose beyond the provision of *delectatio*, which was felt to be entirely justifiable." Olson (1982) claims the same: there *was* literature designed for pure entertainment. Using medical treatises which stress the positive effect a happy mind has on preserving one's health, Olson shows that the pleasure actually *is* use.⁵

Tracing pleasure directly in the medieval texts which should or could provide it themselves is methodologically also questionable since it is clear that what seems entertaining now did not necessarily seem so to the medieval audience and vice versa. Thus, the texts "surrounding" such texts (paratexts and metatexts) are usually analysed instead. On the one hand, there are *accessus ad auctores* (learned introductions to authors following given rhetorical patterns) and, on the other hand, the authors' prologues, prefaces, and dedicatory letters. Both these types tell the reader how to approach a text – in the former case it is an explanation of a teacher (another reader/recipient of the text), in the latter it is the author himself who attempts to control reception of his or her work.⁶

Within the usual *accessus* structure, it is the parts called *intentio auctoris* (the author's intention) and *utilitas libri* (the use of the book) where *delectatio* can be and sometimes is mentioned.⁷ Rand (1929: 252) claims:

The comments are not always what we should expect, that is, if we cling to the widely disseminated idea ... that the medieval reader, spiritually sharpened by a training in allegory, heard nothing but the mystical overtones in Ovid's works, such as the Art of Love. How disappointing to find that the *intentio scribentis* in the *Amores*, according to one of these commentators of the 12th century is – *delectare!* Only this and nothing more. What a vista is opened by these few words – a vista into the mediaeval mind!

However, his is not a typical example.⁸ *Delectatio* has to be searched for in the *accessus*, and when it does appear, it is a legitimate purpose or use of the book but rarely the only one: the ethical dimension is almost never omitted from the discussion.⁹

⁵ This becomes especially important at the time of the plague – and Olson's main example and subject of analysis is, not surprisingly, the *Decameron*. For further analysis of love of books, among other aspects as a place of refuge, see Cerquiglini-Toulet (1993), who concentrates on Old French literature.

⁶ Thanks to a great number of such texts, it is possible to claim, for example, that medieval *fabula* was a literary type providing, as a rule, pleasure and entertainment. *Fabula* has been studied extensively in this context, since already Macrobius defines it as pleasure and teaching, and the 12th century school of Chartres stresses this characteristic of the type. See, for example, Dronke (1985).

⁷ For a more detailed analysis, see Meyer (1997).

⁸ For further information on *accessus ad auctores* see, for example, Minnis (1984); Minnis, Scott, Wallace (1988); Quain (1945); Huygens (1970); Hunt (1948); Suerbaum (2000); Zinn (1997).

⁹ For example, the *accessus* to Ovid's *Heroides* found in the manuscript 95 of Bancroft Library at the University of California (on f. 60r): "... it belongs to ethics since in this book it is spoken of good and bad morals. Or otherwise: His subject-matter in this work are young Roman girls. *The use is the pleasure itself* and to turn everyone away from illicit and shameful love. The intention of all poets is either to please or to be useful. Thence Horace ..." (... *quia ethice supponitur, scilicet loquendo de bonis moribus et de malis in hoc libro. Vel aliter: Materia eius est in hoc opere iuvenes puelle romane. Utilitas ipsa delectatio et ab illicito et turpi amore omnes revocando. Intentio omnium poetarum est aut delectare aut prodesse. Unde Horatius ...*). See Hexter (2002: 227; the English translation is mine). Or, *accessus Aviani* from the end of the 12th century: "His intention is to please us with stories and to provide use in correction of the morals. His use is the pleasure over the poems and the correction of the morals" (the whole passage reads: *Et fuit romanus civis quem rogavit quidam Theodosius nobilis romanus ut scriberet sibi aliquas fabulas, in quibus delectaretur. Cuius petitioni Avianus satisfaciens*

The authors themselves frequently promise their work will provide pleasure for the reader. This is, again, however, rarely mentioned without the inseparable note on the use of the text.¹⁰ A nice example is the *Cena Cypriani* (Cyprian's Feast), an amusing opuscle featuring biblical characters at a strange wedding party, originating probably from the 4th century C.E.¹¹ Since the text itself is quite obscure, two of its medieval re-writers each included an explanation in their introductions. Raban Maur (c. 776-c. 856?, abbot of Fulda and later archbishop of Mainz), in his dedication to King Lothar writes that the text would both please him (*quod delectabile foret*) and sharpen his intellect (*acumen sensus vestri acueret*), that it will bring him joy and use (*ad iocunditatem et utilia*).¹² John the Deacon of Rome (also known as Hymmonides, c. 825–880) wrote a prologue to the *Cena Cypriani* in verse, which describes in detail the entertainment the following text will provide.¹³ But in his epilogue he says also: "... take from the verses the dogmas you like ... Observe the table set up with great variety while you read new dogmas together with the old law."¹⁴ Thus, although John the Deacon's attempted control over the reception

scripsit ei quasdam fabulas, in quibus non solum valuit delectari, verum etiam alegoricum sensum in singulis notare ... intencio eius est delectare nos in fabulis et prodesse in correctione morum. Utilitas eius est delectatio poematis et correctio morum. Ethice subponitur, quia tractat de correctione morum). See Huygens (1953).

¹⁰ For a discussion of the concept of *utilitas* and its different types by Dominicans, see Nadeau (1997).

¹¹ See, for example, Modesto (1992); Casaretto (2002); Doležalová (2007).

¹² Modesto (1992: 132).

¹³ The whole passage reads (Modesto 1992: 200):
*Quique cupitis saltantem me Iohannem cernere,
 Nunc cantantem auditote, iocantem attendite:
 Satiram ludam percurrrens divino sub plasmate,
 Quo Codri findatur venter. Vos, amici, plaudite.
 Riserat qua Cyprianus post Felicem Mineum,
 Talamum Logiae septem qui dotavit artibus,
 Sub pampineis vinetis, sub racemis mollibus,
 Vetera novis commiscens scriba prudentissimus.
 Hac ludat papa Romanus in albis pascalibus,
 Quando venit coronatus scolae prior cornibus,
 Ut Silenus cum asello derisus cantantibus,
 Quo sacerdotalis lusus designet misterium.
 Hanc exhibeat convivis imperator Karolus,
 In miraculis gavisus, prodigus in vestibus,
 Quando victor coronatur triumphatis gentibus,
 Ut imperialis iocus instruat exercitum.
 Video ridere, certet quam scurra Crescentius,
 Ut cachinnis dissolvatur, torqueatur rictibus;
 Sed prius pedens crepabit tussiendo vetulus,
 Quam regat linguam condensis balbus in nominibus.
 Ad cenam venite cuncti Cypriani martiris,
 Rhetoris et papae clari Libicae Cartaginis,
 Quam sophista verax lusit divinis miraculis,
 Non satiricis commentis, non comoedi fabulis.*

¹⁴ The whole passage reads (Modesto 1992: 200):

*Ludere me libuit; ludentem papa Iohannes
 Accipe; ridere, si placet, ipse potes.
 Tristia lassatis dum currunt secula tegnis,
 Suscipe de rithmis dogmata grata tibi,
 Quis laetus poteris spectacula cernere festis,
 Iam variis monstris dissimulata nimis.
 Aspice depictam multo variamine mensam,*

of his work abounds in entertainment, laughter, amusement, and pleasure, it does not altogether neglect the use.

There is another type of source which is not much explored in this context because it is very rare: the readers' responses. A marginal note in a Latin manuscript recording its reader's pleasure over the text is extremely rare, while there are frequent notes praising the use of a text.¹⁵

Finally, pleasure from reading can appear in texts which have completely other agenda. These, again, have not been much analyzed for this purpose simply because they are difficult to find when one is looking for them. A charming example, and one that points to the intricacies of textual pleasure, is, in my opinion, *Dialogus Everardi et Ratii*.¹⁶ It is a very vivid dialogue written by Everard of Ypres presenting the doctrine of Gilbert of Poitiers. Before the debate itself begins, Ratius¹⁷ advises Everard not to study too much because, as Galenus says, studies are unhealthy: all affections of the soul except joy (*gaudium*) make one dry. Everard (quoting the familiar Horace passage: "Poets wish to either benefit or delight us ...") replies that the affection which belongs to study provides joy for the soul and thus it does not make one dry. And if, according to Galenus, nothing is more drying than study, be it the most joyful kind, then even joy makes one dry. Ratius insists: "I knew I should speak to you carefully, because you are a pettifogger and always ready to oppose. But I say that the study itself as a vehement application of the soul is something completely different than the joy which follows from it. Study surely makes one drier than pleasure can make one wet again." Everard opposes: "What you now say about studying, you could apply also to the Acts of the Apostles where we read: 'And the apostles departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name' [Act. 5, 41], and the apostles 'rejoicing in tribulation' [Rom. 12, 12], and the psalmist about what the monks should do: 'how I love thy law! It [is] my meditation all the day' [Psalm. 118 (119), 97]. Here you have joy from reproaches, joy from troubles. Love is the sister of happiness from the long law of divine meditation. What shall I say? Do the flagellation, distress, meditation make one dry? And if they do,

*Dum nova cum veteri dogmata iure legis.
Fac relegat Balbus Crescentius ista vietus:
Qui risum poterit stringere, marmor erit.
Temporibus musam mutat sine labe poeta:
Nunc hilarem populum musa iocosa beat.*

¹⁵ For example, Ms. Oxford, Trinity College 34 (early 12th century, Kingswood Abbey) ends with the first book of Cassiodorus' *Institutiones* and at the end, there is a note: *secundum require quia valde utilis est* ("ask for the second [book] because it is very useful"). The only sign indirectly indicating a reader's pleasure I found in a manuscript so far is in Ms. Torino, Biblioteca Nazionale, E III 5 (15th century, Cyprian's works), where, in John the Deacon's epilogue to *Cena Cypriani* mentioned above, the clause *riserat qua Cyprianus* (Cyprian laughed over this) is replaced by *riserat qua Marcianus* (Marcian laughed over this). The manuscript was written by Marco Balbo, so perhaps the scribe refers to himself having laughed over the *cena*. However, the codex was given on September 19, 1467 to the cardinal of San Marco – another possible *Marcianus* – in Florence (cf. Monti 1994: 265), and thus the change could have been just "wishful thinking" – anticipating the reaction of the future reader.

¹⁶ There is only one surviving ms. Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipale, 259, ff. 229v–240v. First, excerpts from the dialogue were published by Leclercq, then the whole was edited by Nicholas Haring in 1953. For more information, see Leclercq (1952); Haring (1953); Haring (1955); and Marenbon (2000).

¹⁷ He is a fictional character and his name is, of course, symbolic. He comes from Athens, has a sister called Sophia, servants Byrria and Davus, uncle Sosias; in the end, he says: *Satisfaciat ad hoc Ratius tuus, immo ratio tua* ("Your Ratius, or rather your reason, shall be content with this").

do they also oppose ethics or threat with sickness because of it? What do you think?” After this, Ratius suggests changing the topic.¹⁸

This passage brings into the picture an omnipresent feature of medieval Christian writing: a paradox, a contradiction in terms. Insisting, as Everard persuasively does, that pleasure may come from pain and suffering, not only makes Ratius give up the argument, but it also successfully problematizes and hints to the complexity of the concept of pleasure.¹⁹

One specific source was neglected here so far: biblical exegesis. It combines characteristics of all the types mentioned above: it is a theoretical discourse, it is a paratext (“surrounding” another text like the *accessus* and prologues), it is a kind of a reader’s response, and, also, a type of text having quite other agenda than discussing the concept of pleasure.

The most influential theoretical stance on reading the Bible is the complex and much discussed Augustine’s distinction between use and enjoyment (*uti* and *frui*) within *De doctrina christiana*.²⁰ In the same text, Augustine speaks both of toil and pleasure accompanying reading the Bible. The toil relates to its obscure passages,²¹ the pleasure to encountering beautiful metaphors.²²

¹⁸ The whole passage reads (see Haring 1953: 285):

Ratius: Nam ut noster in Tegni ait Galienus: omnis animi affectio praeter gaudium desiccatur. Euerardus: Aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere uitae. Et haec affectio quae adiacet tali studio parit gaudium animo. Ideo non desiccatur. Cum itaque sim monachus et non poeta tamen prodesse uellem si possem uel mihi. Ideo que placet mihi delectari in iocunda consuetudine et gaudere in dicendo idonea regularis uitae. At si secundum Galienum nihil amplius studium licet sit iocundissimum est quam desiccatiuum igitur et ipsum gaudium desiccatur. Ratius: Sciebam oportere me loqui tibi circumspecte qui cauillator semper es ad opponendum paratus. Dico itaque quod aliud est studium, id est uehemens animi applicatio ad aliquid agendum aliud quod inde sequitur gaudium. Plus uero illud desiccatur quam istud delectando humectet.

Euerardus: Quid nos implicas soluendo de studio quod potius soluas in familiari facto apostolorum de quibus legitur: ibant apostoli gaudentes a concilio quia digni habiti sunt pro Christo contumeliam pati [Act. 5, 41]. Et illud apostoli: in tribulatione gaudentes [Rom. 12, 12]. Et illud psalmistae quod monachorum debet esse: quomodo dilexi legem tuam domine tota die meditatio mea est [Psalm. 118, 97]. Ecce gaudium ex contumelia, gaudium ex tribulatione. Dilectio est soror laetitiae ex diuturna legis diuinae meditatione. Quid dicam? Desiccant ista scilicet flagellatio, tribulatio, meditatio? Et si desiccant et minantur ethicam uel morbum desistendum propter hoc? Quid censes?

Ratius: Non mihi consilium nimis morari circa patulum orbem et tibi quaerenti patientem [Hor. Ars 132]. Sed potius ediscaris mihi quid cogitabas adeo intente iam pridem me superueniente.

¹⁹ This multifaceted subject cannot be explored within this paper. See, e.g., Nagy (2000).

²⁰ For a clear explanation with ample further bibliography, see Chadwick (2004: col. 70–75).

²¹ E.g. Aug. *Doctr. christ.* II, 6 (translation J. F. Shaw): *Sed multis et multiplicibus obscuritatibus et ambiguitatibus decipiuntur, qui temere legunt, aliud pro alio sentientes, quibusdam autem locis, quid uel falso suspicentur, non inueniunt: ita obscure dicta quaedam densissimam caliginem obducunt. Quod totum prouisum esse diuinitus non dubito ad edomandam labore superbiam et intellectum a fastidio reuocandum, cui facile inuestigata plerumque uilescent.* (“But hasty and careless readers are led astray by many and manifold obscurities and ambiguities, substituting one meaning for another; and in some places they cannot hit upon even a fair interpretation. Some of the expressions are so obscure as to shroud the meaning in the thickest darkness. And I do not doubt that all this was divinely arranged for the purpose of subduing pride by toil, and of preventing a feeling of satiety in the intellect, which generally holds in small esteem what is discovered without difficulty.”)

²² E.g. Aug. *Doctr. christ.* II, 6 (translation J. F. Shaw): *Et tamen nescio quomodo suauius intueor sanctos, cum eos quasi dentes ecclesiae uideo praecidere ab erroribus homines atque in eius corpus emollita quasi demorsos mansos que transferre. Oues etiam iucundissime agnosco detonsas oneribus saecularibus tamquam uelleribus positas et ascendentes de lauacro, id est de baptisate, creare omnes gemonis, duo praecepta dilectionis, et nullam esse ab isto sancto fructu sterilem uideo.* (“And yet, I don’t know why, I feel greater pleasure in contemplating holy men, when I view them as the teeth of the Church,

There is undoubtedly pleasure in meditating on the Bible,²³ as well as the ultimate pleasure in the afterlife resulting from following its precepts in one's life. In this way, pleasure is the ultimate goal, a desired result of reading the Bible. But the actual activity of reading it may be quite different.

In Late Antiquity, the Church Fathers had hard time defending the language of the Bible which strongly contrasted with beautifully written Classical pieces that were an integral part of education and thus formed the literary taste of the elite at the time. On the one hand, Jerome and others developed the claim that also the Hebrew Bible was originally written in verse, but it was not transferred into Latin because rather its contents were presented adequately.²⁴ On the other hand, the style of the Greek New Testament was obviously not a high one. Thus, the claim was made that God chose to speak in this simple way deliberately, refusing to mislead and falsely charm with formal beauty but speaking the truth. The real jewel is hidden in an ugly shell and thus is not recognised by everyone. Elaborate style obscures the truth; the true message is incompatible with the artifice of rhetorical figures.²⁵

Although Augustine's treatment of the topic in *De doctrina christiana* is somewhat different, this usual image of encountering the Scripture and Christianity persists throughout the Middle Ages: Bible is something that is difficult and bitter at the beginning but sweet in the end. Examples are numerous, such as Hugh of St Victor's *De archa Noe*:

The difference between the love of this world and love of God is that the love of this world seems at the beginning sweet but has a bitter end, while the love of God begins by bitterness but its ends are full of sweetness. The Gospel shows this to us in a most beautiful simile when speaking of the wedding of our bridegroom: "Everybody offers first the good wine and when the guests are drunk then the one which is worse. But you were serving the good wine up to now." Every man serves first the good wine, because he feels in the pleasure it provides some false sweetness, but after the rage of bad desire makes the mind drunk, then he offers what is worse, and the thorn of conscience, which previously falsely pleased the mind, now tortures it even harder. But our bridegroom offers the good wine after he has prepared the mind, which he previously let become bitter by remorse of troubles, to be filled with the sweetness of his love. Thus, after the taste of bitterness, the sweetest cup of love would be drunk even more eagerly.²⁶

tearing men away from their errors, and bringing them into the Church's body, with all their harshness softened down, just as if they had been torn off and masticated by the teeth. It is with the greatest pleasure, too, that I recognize them under the figure of sheep that have been shorn, laying down the burdens of the world like fleeces, and coming up from the washing, i.e., from baptism, and all bearing twins, i.e., the twin commandments of love, and none among them barren in that holy fruit.")

²³ Actually, the most frequently quoted biblical passage linked to pleasure is line 4 from Psalm 76 (77): *Memor fui dei et delectatus sum* ("I remembered God and rejoiced"; in the King James Bible this is, however, translated "I remembered God and was troubled"). Thus, the pleasure is directly linked to the memory of God, the pleasure of participating in a bigger framework of creation, the pleasure of meditation.

²⁴ Cf. Kugel (1981: 135–170 [chapter "Biblical Poetry and the Church"]).

²⁵ Jerome's dream is cited most frequently in this context (Hier. *Epist.* 22, 30).

²⁶ *Inter amorem huius mundi et amorem Dei hec est differentia, quod huius mundi amor in principio dulcis esse uidetur, sed finem habet amarum, amor uero Dei ab amaritudine incipit, sed ultima eius dulcedine plena sunt. Quod pulcherrima similitudine euangelicus sermo nobis ostendit, cum de sponsi nostri nuptiis decantaret dicens: 'Omnis homo primum bonum uinum ponit, et cum inebriati fuerint, tunc id quod deterius est. Tu autem seruasti bonum uinum usque adhuc.' Omnis namque homo (id est*

The image of sweetness and bitterness is here related to the feeling of love, but it is even more frequently linked to reading. Throughout the Middle Ages, many authors or commentators present their texts as a delicacy to eat, which will both taste good (be pleasurable) and provide nutrition (be useful). The authors often stress that they had to sweeten the food so that the young eat it more willingly, or that they provide a good selection of different types of food, so that one does not have to eat too much (does not have to go through huge volumes) and get a stomachache.²⁷ This basic parallel of reading/listening and eating is further developed in various directions (the food might be a bit difficult to swallow, might require thorough chewing, might not look so good but be actually very tasty etc.).²⁸ Also the exegetes of the Bible explored this metaphor in many ways.

Yet, there is an image that presents an opposite version of the metaphor. It is found in the Bible itself, in two corresponding passages: Ezech. 3, 3 in the Old Testament and

carnalis) primum bonum uinum ponit, quia in sua delectatione falsam quandam dulcedinem sentit, sed postquam furor mali desiderii mentem inebriauerit, tunc id quod deterius est propinat, quia spina conscientie superueniens mentem, quam prius falso delectabat, grauiter cruciat. Sed sponsus noster postremo uinum bonum porrigit, dum mentem, quam sui dulcedine amoris replere disponit, quadam prius tribulationum compunctione amaricari sinit, ut post gustum amaritudinis audius bibatur suauissimum poculum caritatis (PL 176, col. 619; my translation). The critical edition, Sicard (2001), was not available to me.

²⁷ For example, Petrus Alfonsi, in the prologue to his *Clericalis disciplina* speaks about “softening and sweetening” his text so that it would stick to one’s memory more easily. The whole passage reads (see Hermes 1970: 1–2): *Fragilem etiam hominis esse consideravi complexionem: quae ne taedium incurrat, quasi provehendo paucis et paucis instruenda est; duritiae quoque eius recordatus, ut facilius retineat, quodammodo necessario mollienda et dulcificanda est; quia et obliuiosa est, multis indiget quae obliturum faciant recordari*. Or, Egidius of Rome writes in his preface to his version of Peter Rigas *Aurora* (PL 212, col. 20) that he hopes his work lets one drink more and more easily from the Bible. He also uses Horace – mixing the sweet and the useful:

*Utile cum dulci studio miscere satagi,
Quando haec inclusi mystica lege metri.
Ex se res quod ametur habet. Modulatio praestat,
Ut magis e facili possit in aure bibi.
Nil aequo cupio, quantum ut sit fructus in istis,
Mentem lectoris aedificasse mei.
Res ideo tractare sacras post illa reducor,
Quae quondam ex animo forte fuere leui.
Sicque decebat, nisi tot jam ante negotia lusi ...*

The above-mentioned Everard of Ypres wrote also *Summula decretalium quaestionum* – a dialogue on Gratian’s Decree providing simple answers. In the epilogue to it, he explores the metaphor between reading/learning and eating in a charming way (see Haring 1955: 145): ... *Nos itaque, more agrestium sub ficu nostra et sub frondosa minus quam uinifera sublatitantes uinea, fructus eius in quiete comedemus nec vicinos aliquos invitabimus, timentes ingratorum ingratitude. Et minus caritate abundantes, refectioni esurientium hunc botrum non exponere pro certo proposuimus. Si qui tamen esuriam Gratiani scientiae quaestionum fuerint passi, volentes assumere formam discendi ad uineam nostram accesserint, non uineolam nostram proponemus nec eos intro admittemus uvas conculcatorios vel ramos confracturos ... propter quod fere triennio in Gratiani pomerio laboratur: folia cum pomis quandoque immaturis colliguntur, quibus foliis ipsa tecta vix inveniuntur. Hic statim habebis, rejectis foliis, ficus praeparatoriorum quantum ad morum approbationem; secundo uvas iudiciorum; tertio maturitatem omnium pomorum sacramentalium, si forte gratis tibi collatis grates velis dignas recompensare ... Cum igitur gratia benigni Jesu ... quam si gloriosissimi decretistae assistentes mense VII ferculis pomorum a frondosa arbore Gratiani decerptorum et salsamento diversarum summularum Johannis, Rufini et aliorum conditorum ventrem suum implerent.*

²⁸ This topic is worthy of an indepth separate study. The use of this metaphor was sketched by Curtius (1953: 358) who provides a number of textual evidence and stresses the importance of the biblical images, especially Adam and Eve’s tasting the forbidden fruit and the Last Supper. There are several short specific studies but a more general comparative enquiry is still missing.

Apoc. 10, 9 in the New. In both of them, a text is devoured, that is, ruminated on and incorporated.²⁹ The passages seem to differ from each other: Ezekiel is given a roll and it is sweet as honey (*sicut mel dulce*) in his mouth.³⁰ John is given a book and it is sweet as honey in his mouth but turns bitter in his belly.³¹ This discrepancy would be strange in such situation when the New Testament obviously refers to the Old, and it is indeed only a seeming one: also Ezekiel becomes eventually bitter – first he is told that now he should go and preach, and at the end he says *abii amarus* (I went away embittered).³² Thus, it is not as obvious as it is in John's case that his bitterness was caused by the devoured roll.

There is a significant difference in exegesis of the two passages: this part of Ezekiel is used and explained frequently but the bitterness Ezekiel experiences is often neglected.³³ In his commentary to Ezekiel, Jerome elaborates on the sweetness of "eating" the Scriptures and links it to Psalm 118 (119), 103: *Quam dulcia gutturi meo eloquia tua, super mel ori meo* ("How sweet are thy words unto my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth")³⁴ and Psalm 18 (19), 11: *iudicia domini uera ... desiderabilia super aurum et lapidem pretiosum multum, et dulciora super mel et favum* ("the judgments of the Lord [are] true ... more to be desired than gold and precious stone and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb"),³⁵ and he also puts it into connection to Samson finding the honey in the mouth of the lion.³⁶ But he does not comment on Ezekiel's bitterness.³⁷ He is then further quoted and these biblical references reappear together.³⁸

²⁹ For a discussion of the book eating, see Gellrich (1985: chapter 1).

³⁰ Ezech. 3, 1–4: *et dixit ad me: fili hominis quodcumque inveneris, comede. comede volumen istud et vadens loquere ad filios Israel. Et aperui os meum et cibavi me volumine illo. Et dixit ad me: fili hominis venter tuus comedet et viscera tua complebuntur volumine isto quod ego do tibi. Et comedi illud et factum est in ore meo sicut mel dulce. Et dixit ad me: fili hominis vade ad domum Israel et loqueris verba mea ad eos.*

³¹ Apoc. 10, 9–11: *et abii ad angelum dicens ei ut daret mihi: librum et dicit mihi: accipe et devora illum et faciet amaricare ventrem tuum sed in ore tuo erit dulce tamquam mel. Et accipi librum de manu angeli et devoravi eum et erat in ore meo tamquam mel dulce et cum devorassem eum amaricatus est venter meus. Et dicunt mihi: oportet te iterum prophetare populis et gentibus et linguis et regibus multis.*

³² Ezech. 3, 14: *spiritus quoque levavit me et adsumpsit me et abii amarus in indignatione spiritus mei manus enim Domini erat mecum confortans me.*

³³ It is, however, not always so. For example, Helinand of Froidmont (c. 1160–after 1229) in one of his sermons says that the eating of Ezekiel was bitter as is the eating of all the Jews who just chew on the shell of the literary meaning of the Scripture never getting to the marrow of the spirit. So what wonder is it that they are always so bloodless and pale when they are nourished by such food? This interpretation, of course, neglects that John's eating is the same. See *Sermo III In natali Domini II Ad clericos* (PL 212, col. 503).

³⁴ Cassiod. *In psalm.* 118, 103 (PL 70, col. 870–871), on the other hand, when exposing this line of the Psalm, comments on the word *gutturi* – saying that the taste is normally felt on the palate but the speech of the Lord is sweet rather when it is swallowed. He also distinguishes between honey and honey-comb: honey is the Old Testament, honeycomb the New one, because although they are both sweet, the taste of the honeycomb is sweeter, as it is more condensed due to its novelty. By the honey we can also understand the open teaching of wisdom, by the honey-comb that one which turns out to be hidden in deep cellules.

³⁵ On the sweetness of reading in the Psalms, see Ohly (1989), who also describes the semantic field of sweetness in medieval mysticism including reading.

³⁶ Hier. *In Ezech.* 3, 3 (PL 25, col. 35–36).

³⁷ Hier. *In Ezech.* 3, 3 (PL 25, col. 36).

³⁸ The image is used also in other contexts, for example Peter of Celle (Petrus Cellensis, died 1183), in his *Sermo XXXVIII In Coena Domini V*, links the Ezekiel passage to the sweetness of accepting the Eucharist: *Et comedi illud, et factum est in ore meo tanquam mel dulce. Eucharistia dulcis super mel et favum ori meo. Laetum, securum, magis acutum reddit me hostia sancta, hostia pura, hostia*

The Revelation passage is, on the other hand, rarely evoked outside Revelation commentaries proper, and even within them little space is usually given to it.³⁹ In *Glossa ordinaria* (a selection of patristic exegesis, which became the basic starting point for later exegetes), there is nothing on this verse, Joachim of Fiore (c. 1130–1202) never comments on it in his *Enchiridion on the Apocalypse*, nor does Geoffrey of Auxerre (c. 1120–c. 1195) ever choose it for one of his Apocalypse sermons.⁴⁰ The reason is, in my opinion, certain uneasiness about the passage. On the one hand, the original unproblematic meaning was probably just simply that the prophecy of Ezekiel and the Revelation are written in a pleasant language and include interesting stories but their content is bitter since they narrate sad events to come. Once one understands that it tells of future, the sweet becomes bitter.

On the other hand, the image it presents clashes with the implications of the well-established metaphor of reading as eating. Good text as food was to be either both tasting and nourishing, or possibly not so pleasing to the tongue at first but most useful to the body. The Revelation image is striking because it reverses the usual order: this book is first sweet but then turns bitter. Furthermore, the bitterness cannot be so easily placed aside here as from the corresponding Ezekiel image. Interpretations openly admitting the bitter outcome of “eating” the book – that is, interpreting it as something that only seems to be sweet in the mouth but does not provide nourishment – are based on identifying the book as the *Liber vitae*, which announces sorrowful ends (see below). Such an understanding is impossible in the other substantial part of the Christian tradition, where both the roll of Ezekiel and the book of John are interpreted as referring to the whole Scripture, to the whole Christian teaching.

Thus, in this case, while the sweetness of the book (the pleasure it provides) is natural,⁴¹ it is its bitterness that becomes a challenge for the exegetes. Gradually, two basic

immaculata, quoties a me percepta fuerit (PL 202, col. 761). The eventual bitterness is, again, not part of the picture here.

³⁹ Among the rare occasions when it appears elsewhere is *De cella vinaria per allegoriam accepta pro Ecclesia* (On the vinecellar allegorically representing the Church) by an anonymous 12th-century author (but ascribed to Hugh of St Victor) where this Apocalypse passage is used to state that there is bitterness in Scripture as there is always bitterness in too much knowledge (*Sermo XLV* [PL 177, col. 1021]).

⁴⁰ Gibbons (2000).

⁴¹ References to the sweetness of the Scripture are found in non-exegetical texts, too. For example, Zeno of Verona (4th-century bishop; but the authorship of the sermons attributed to him has been questioned for example by François Dolbeau) invites the newly baptized Christians for a big feast where different biblical characters will serve them different types of delicacies: *Post devotissime completa expiationis sacrae casta ieiunia, post clarissimae noctis suo sole dulces vigiliis, post lactei fontis lavacro vitali in spem immortalitatis animas pullulantes, ex quo qui eratis aetate diversi, diversi natione, subito germani fratres, subito una geniti emersistis infantes, hortor vos nativitatis tantae festa laeto celebrare convivio, sed non illo, in quo diversis epulis intrumentorum lenocinio saporis de summa certantibus obrutum pectus saepe crudis atque acidis vomitibus inurgetur, in quo musti vestri dulcedo saecularis vini pridiani exhalante foetore corrumpitur, sed caelesti prandio, honesto, puro, salubri atque perpetuo, quod, ut saturi semper ac felices esse possitis, esurienter accipite. Pater familias panem vinumque pretiosum vobis ex usibus suis sua de mensa largitur. Tres pueri unanimes legumina inferunt primi, quibus, ut scitus sapor, salem sapientiae aspergunt. Oleum Christus infundit ...* [here comes the list of the biblical characters and the food they offer] *Haec, fratres, si quis libenter crediderit, largiores adhuc escas inveniet, quibus si diligens fuerit, semper et se et alios bonis omnibus satiabit per dominum nostrum Iesum Christum* (Löfstedt 1971: 71–72 [sermon 1, 24]). There is, of course, no mention of any subsequent bitterness in the belly. Or, Galand of Reigny (12th century) in the 48th proverb of his *Libellus*

solutions emerge:⁴² either the book, that is the Scripture, is sweet for the just ones and bitter for the unjust,⁴³ or the Scripture is pleasant to read or to listen to but difficult or bitter to apply in life. The two interpretations often appear together as two possible options,⁴⁴ for example by Caesarius of Arles (c. 470–542):

“And then he told me: take and eat it,” that is, put it into your intestines and write it down to the width of your heart. “And it will make your belly bitter but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey,” that is, when you perceive [it], you will delight in the sweetness of divine speech, but you will feel bitterness when you start to preach and do what you had understood, as it is written: for the words of your lips I have taken hard paths [Psalm. 16 (17), 4]. And in another way, he says it will be sweet as honey in your mouth and bitterness in your belly: the mouth means good and spiritual Christians; the belly means the carnal and voluptuous ones. Thence it is that when the word of God is preached, it is sweet to the spiritual ones, while to the carnal ones, whose god is their belly according to the Apostle, it seems bitter and troublesome.⁴⁵

A more elaborate version is found by Ambrose Autpert (died 778 or 779) and also by Haimo, who is dependent on Ambrose, just adds many more examples of sweet and bitter passages from the Bible.⁴⁶ Ambrose first explains that to eat the book means to place it

proverbiorum speaks of the Scripture as of food which, the more frequently tasted, the more pleasing. He dwells on the simile for some time specifying the types of food (see Châtillon, Dumontier, Grémois 1998: 98): *Est cibus quem quanto frequentius et uberius quis comederit, tanto magis ei placebit; quo vero rarius accipitur, eo cicius fastiditur. Diuini seruitii exercitium cibus est et refectio religiosorum. Cibi uero huius assiduitas auget deuotionem, raritas parit fastidium. Hic cibus cum inuicem diligimus, panis est; cum spiritu feruemus, uinum; cum Dei dulcedinem aliquatenus gustamus, fauus; cum sicut adipe et pinguedine anima nostra repletur, carnes; cum celestia contemplanur, altitia; cum de procellosis seculi fluctibus ad nos uenientes recipimus, pisces; cum eis sancte rudimenta institutionis tradimus, lac; cum spem illis peruolandi ad sublimia contemplananda damus, oua.*

⁴² In the following discussion, no attempt to draw a chronological line of development is made – it is only a preliminary typology.

⁴³ This solution in a condensed form is found also in the interlinear Apocalypse commentary in ms. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 21 (from the end of the 11th century), f. 11r: *in ecclesia est dulce quasi mel uerbum predicationis, quibusdam uoluptuosis et uentri deditis amarum.*

⁴⁴ This is a normal feature of medieval exegesis – the authors offer more possibilities which are sometimes contrasting and incompatible. Various parallel explanations are offered also, e.g., by an English theologian Thomas of Chobham (end 12th–beg. 13th century) in his *Summa de commendatione et extirpatione virtutum* 1, 576: *Quomodo enim habet uerbum Dei dulcedinem in ore et amaritudinem in ventre? Preterea dicit Ysaïas xvi: uenter meus ad Moab quasi cythara sonabit. Sed sonus cytharæ dulcis est. Ergo dulcedo est in ventre. Quomodo ergo amaritudo? Sed potest ad hoc dici quod uerbum Dei dulce et amarum est. Dulce enim est in auditu sermonis, sed amarum in inopportunitate operationis. Vel dulce est in promissionibus, sed amarum in commitationibus. Vel dulce est perfectis et bonis, amarum est his quorum deus uenter est, ut Phil. III. Est autem differentia inter cibum materialem et cibum spiritualem, quia cibus materialis non facit corpus vivere in eternum, sed cibus spiritualis dat vitam eternam.*

⁴⁵ Caes. Arl. *In apoc.* 8 (English translation is mine): *‘Et tunc dixit mihi: accipe et comede illum,’ id est, tuis uisceribus pande, et describe in latitudine cordis. ‘Et faciet amaricare ventrem tuum, sed in ore tuo erit dulce ut mel’: id est, cum perceperis, oblectaberis eloquii diuini dulcedine; sed amaritudinem senties, cum praedicare et operari coeperis quod intellexeris, sicut scriptum est: propter uerba laborum tuorum ego custodivi uias duras. Et aliter, erit, inquit, in ore tuo dulce ut mel, et in ventre tuo amaritudo: in ore intelleguntur boni et spiritalia christiani, in ventre carnales et luxoriosi. Inde est quod, cum uerbum dei praedicatur, spiritalibus dulce est; carnalibus uero, quorum secundum apostolum deus uenter est, amarum uidetur et asperum.*

⁴⁶ Haimo Halberstat. *Expositio in Apocalypsin* III, 10 (PL 117, col. 1065–1066).

in one's intestines. The Holy Scripture is sometimes food, other times drink. It is food in its more obscure aspects which cannot be understood without elucidating. Whatever is explained in order to be understood is as if it was ruminated on in order to be swallowed. In its clearer aspects the Scripture is drink, since we swallow drink without chewing. So we drink the plain and obvious parts which we manage to understand even without explanation.⁴⁷ About the eventual bitterness ("and it will embitter your belly but it will be as sweet as honey in your mind"), Ambrose says:

As it is usual in mystical writings, the order of the words seems to be reversed, because food is first taken into mouth and after it proceeds to the inner parts of the belly. But at the end it is changed when it is said: "And I accepted the little book from the hand of the Angel and I devoured it and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey ..." The predication comes out of the mouth, the excrements exit from the belly. And who else should be represented by the mouth of the Church, if not those who meditate on the law of the Lord day and night? [...] And who should be represented by the belly if not those dedicated to carnal earthly pleasures? [...] To those to whom the earthly pleasures are sweet, the God's precepts are bitter. What is bitterer to them than when the Lord orders: You shall not desire the wife of your neighbour, nor his house, nor his field, nor his servant ...⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The whole passage reads (Ambr. Autpertus *Expositio in Apocalypsin* V, 10): *Acceptum libellum deuorare, est Scripturarum intellegendam in secretis recondere uisceribus. Sancta autem Scriptura aliquando cibus, aliquando uero potus est. In rebus enim obscurioribus, quae intellegi nullatenus possunt nisi enodentur, cibus est. Quicquid enim exponitur ut intellegatur, quasi manditur ut gluttatur. In rebus uero apertioribus, potus est. Potum enim non mandendo gluttimus. Apertiora ergo ac manifesta bibimus, quae etiam non exposita intellegere ualemus. Quamquam autem sancti praedicatores in Iohannis persona iam tunc reuelata intellegerent de Domino Scripturarum sacramenta, tamen quia adhuc ea quae in ipso manifestata claruerant, qualiter ad eum pertinerent, expositione indigebant, nequaquam eidem Iohanni de sacro aperto que libello dicitur: Accipe et bibe, sed: Accipe et deuora. Ac si apertius diceretur: Pertracta et intellege, id est, prius mande, et tunc deglutti. Quod sanctos Ecclesiae tractatores postmodum diligenter fecisse quis ignoret? Quorum uolumina omnino tot non sumus qui legamus.*

⁴⁸ The whole passage reads (Ambr. Autpertus *Expositio in Apocalypsin* V, 10): *Ex ore igitur praedicatio emanat, de uentre uero stercora exeunt. Et qui alii per os Ecclesiae nisi hi figurantur, qui in lege Domini die ac nocte meditantur, nisi hi qui cum Psalmista dicere probantur: Quam dulcia faucibus meis eloquia tua, Domine; super mel et fauam ori meo? Qui uero per uentrem, nisi carnales terrenis uoluptatibus dediti, de quibus nimirum electi dicunt: Adhesit in terra uenter noster? Venter etenim in terra adheret, cum carnales quibuslibet terrenis cupiditatibus inhiant. In terra uenter adheret, cum reprobi peccatorum sordibus tamquam in uolutabro luti semetipsos coinquinant. Ex quorum uidelicet numero plures inueniuntur, qui ea quae sancti praedicatores edisserunt, acuto subtilitatis ingenio percipiant. Tamquam enim per os in uentrem cibus mansus descendit, cum per sanctos Ecclesiae praedicatores diuinarum Scripturarum notitia ad eos quoque peruenit, qui terrenis cupiditatibus dediti carnaliter uiuunt. Vnde et traictus liber qui in ore tamquam mel fit dulcis, in uentre amarescit. His etenim quibus terreneae uoluptates dulcescunt, percepta eloquia Dei amarescunt. Quid enim illis amarius, quam quod iubet Dominus: 'Non concupisces uxorem proximi tui, non domum, non agrum, non seruum, non ancillam, non bouem, non asinum, et uniuersa quae illius sunt?' Quid illis amarius, quam quod monet Apostolus Paulus: 'Tempus si reliquum est modicum est; superest ut qui habent uxores, tamquam non habentes sint, et qui emunt, tamquam non possidentes, et qui utuntur hoc mundo, tamquam non utantur?' Quid illis amarius, quam quod caelestis Magister dicit: 'Qui non odit patrem aut matrem et uxorem et filios et fratres et sorores, adhuc autem et animam suam, non potest meus esse discipulus?' Et rursum: 'Si quis uult post me uenire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam cotidie, et sequatur me. Qui enim uoluerit animam suam saluam facere perdet illam.' Rursum que: 'Qui non baiulat crucem suam cotidie et uenit post me, non est dignus.' Quid illis amarius, quam quod idem admonet Dominus: 'Intrate per angustam portam, quia multi, dico uobis, quaerent intrare, et non poterunt.'*

Ambrose provides many more examples of the bitter precepts but then proceeds to the other option:

It is, however, possible to refer by both the mouth and the belly to one and the same mind of a man. Where is the food sweet or bitter if not in one's mouth? Where are the God's words sweet or bitter if not in mind? And thus in certain way the things which please the mind seem sweet and those which trouble it seem bitter. The consumed book which is presented as sweet as honey in the mouth and bitter in the belly, is such as if it was said: And the pleased spirit rejoiced in the sweet things, and grieves lamenting about the troublesome. And the Holy Scripture surely means both the mouth and the belly, that is, the interior parts of the heart, the secrets of the mind, where the God's speech is sweet or bitter.

Then he gives supporting evidence for this interpretation from the Bible and shows how Paul and Moses were disappointed (bitter) when their doctrine was not received warmly by their brothers, concluding: "So the holy words are to one preacher both sweet and bitter, when the same person is both pleased by the precepts and sad that they are hated by many." He ends, as is usual in exegesis of this passage, by quoting the biblical passages which are sweet to read and those which are bitter.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The whole passage reads (Ambr. *Autpertus Expositio in Apocalypsin* V, 10): *Potest autem per os simul et uentrem, una eadem que mens hominis designari. Vbi namque dulces uel amari sunt cibi, nisi in ore? Vbi dulcia uel amara Dei eloquia, nisi in mente? Ac sic quodammodo in his quae animam oblectant, dulcia, in his uero quae adfligunt, amara occurrunt. Quod ergo et in ore tamquam mel dulcis, et in uentre amarus liber comestus fuisse perhibetur, tale est, quale si diceretur: Et in his quae suauia erant, animus delectatus gaudebat, et in his quae aspera, gemens maerebat. Et certe Scriptura sacra et os et uentrem plerumque unum esse designat, id est, cordis interiora, mentis secreta, ubi uel dulcia uel amara fiunt Dei eloquia. Nisi enim per os interiora cordis signarentur, nequaquam Psalmista de reprobis diceret: In corde et corde locuti sunt mala. Et nisi per uentrem mentis secreta figurarentur, nequaquam Hieremias Propheta uentrem se dolere dixisset: 'Ventrem meum, ait, uentrem meum doleo.' Quod quia de spiritali uentre loqueretur, ipse aperuit dicens: Sensus cordis mei conturbati sunt. Neque enim ad salutem populi pertinebat, si Propheta uentrem se corporeum dolere praedicaret. Sed uentrem doluit, quia mentis adflictionem sensit. In ore igitur praedicantis tamquam dulcis fit liber, quia nimirum mens eius uel in his quae secreto legit, uel in his quae publice aliis praedicat, delectatur. Sed citius in uentre amaescit, quia proculdubio cum eandem praedicationem uidet a plurimis contemni, eiusdem mentis adflictionem sentit. Hinc est quod beatus Paulus Euangelii dulcedine oblectatus, cum eandem mellifluam suauitatem cerneret a Iudaeis repelli, tactus dolore cordis, ait: 'Tristitia est mihi magna et continuus dolor cordis meo; optabam ipse ego anathema esse a Christo pro fratribus meis, qui sunt cognati mei secundum carnem, qui sunt Israhelitae.' [Rom. 9, 2–4] Hinc Moyses cum uideret legem per se datam ab eadem incredula nationem despici, totus in maerorem conversus se quae domino humiliter prosternens, dicebat: 'Si dimittis eis hanc noxam, dimitte; sin autem, dele me de libro in quo me scripsisti.' Quasi enim sacra eloquia uni eodem que praedicatori et dulcia et amara sunt, cum unus idemque et delectatur in illis, quia iussa sunt, et contristatur, quia a multis contempta. Vel certe acceptus liber et comestus in uentre fit amarus, cum doctor Ecclesiae ipsa sua locutione quosdam paenitentes atque conuersos aspiciens, mentis affectu illis coniungitur, quatenus iuxta egregium Praedicatorum doleat cum dolentibus, fletaque uel flentibus. Vel certe liber acceptus in ore tamquam mel fit dulcis, cum legentibus uel audientibus nobis gaudia uitae in eo promittuntur. Amarus uero in uentre, cum carnalibus nostris desideriis austeram in illo opponuntur praeccepta, per quae ad aeternam dulcedinem peruenitur. Tamquam mel in ore fit dulcis, cum in eo uel legimus uel audimus: Fulgebunt iusti sicut sol in regno Patris eorum. In uentre autem fit amarus, cum in eodem uel legimus uel audimus: 'Nisi efficiamini sicut paruuli, non intrabitis in regnum caelorum. Quasi mel in ore fit dulcis, cum in eo scriptum legimus uel audimus: 'Nunc filii Dei sumus, et nondum apparuit quid erimus.' Scimus autem quoniam cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus, quoniam uidebimus eum sicuti est. Amarus uero in uentre, cum inibi proponitur: 'Qui dicit se in Christo manere, debet sicut ille ambulauit et ipse ambulare.' In ore tamquam mel dulcis fuerat Apostolis, cum audirent: 'In regeneratione cum sederit Filius hominis in maiestate sua, sedebitis et uos super thronos*

The possibility that it is one and the same person who experiences the sweetness and the bitterness can perhaps be divided into three sub-solutions:

a) When Christians see what is required from them (like to leave all their riches and follow Christ, or even just to keep the Decalogue), they feel bitterness. This interpretation, offered also by Beatus of Liébana (c. 730–800), a Spanish monk and theologian, in his popular Apocalypse commentary (written in 776 and revised in 784 and 786) is dependent on Gregory the Great's (c. 540–604) homily to Ezekiel, where he, commenting on this passage, stresses that the Scripture is sweet only when it is also lived – only those can speak really sweetly of God who learnt to truly love him in their “intestins”.⁵⁰ Also Anselm of Laon (1050–1117) in his short commentary says that the bitterness is due to the fact that it is difficult to put the sweet Scriptures into practice.⁵¹ Bruno of Segni (Bruno Astensis, 1049–1123) commenting on this passage says: “To whom the exposition of the prophets and the Gospels would not be sweet for reading and listening? But is it the same with putting it into practice?” And he quotes Matthew 19, 21, where Christ said to his listener that he should go and sell all he had and give it to the poor, adding: “This food was very bitter for him as it is said: ‘And he went away very sad because he had many possessions.’”⁵²

In the Middle Ages, such image of bitterness when faced with obstacles is not a frequent one – the obstacles are surely demanding and difficult but do not usually make Christians feel bitter outside the context of these Apocalypse commentaries. They rather happily keep the precepts in order to get to heaven.

b) Christians feel bitter because they have to undergo persecution in this world. Also this solution is based on the Ezekiel passage where the prophet becomes bitter when he

duodecim, iudicantes duodecim tribus Israhel. In uentre autem amarus, cum illis idem Filius hominis proponeret: 'Qui uult in uobis esse maior, fiat omnium seruus.' An non tamquam mel dulcis fuerat liber iste in ore filiorum Zebedei, cum audita gloria regni futuri, interueniente matre, a Domino postulerent, ut unus a dextris eius, alius a sinistris in regno illius sedere debuissent? Sed uideamus quemadmodum ilico eis in amaritudinem fuit conuersus. Ait enim illis: 'Potestis bibere calicem quem ego bibiturus sum?' Cui cum responderent: Possumus, continuo subiecit: Calicem quidem meum bibetis, sedere autem ad dexteram meam uel sinistram, non est meum dare uobis, sed quibus paratum est a Patre meo. Tamquam eis aliis uerbis diceret: Bene quidem liber in ore dulcis fuit de audita gloria regni, sed necesse est ut in uentre amarescat, exaudita poena martyrii.

⁵⁰ Greg. M. *In Ezech.* I, 10, 13: *Liber qui uiscera repleuit dulcis in ore sicut mel factus est, quia ipsi de omnipotente domino sciunt suauiter loqui, qui hunc didicerint in cordis sui uisceribus ueraciter amare. In eius quippe ore scriptura sacra dulcis est, cuius uitae uiscera mandatis illius replentur, quia ei suauis est ad loquendum, cui interius impressa ad uiuendum fuerit. Nam sermo dulcedinem non habet, quem uita reproba intra conscientiam remordet. Unde necesse est ut qui uerbum dei loquitur prius studeat qualiter uiuat, ut post ex uita colligat quae et qualiter dicat.* It is quoted also, e.g., by Raban Maur in his commentary to Ezekiel (PL 110, col. 495–1084), or by Hildebert of Lavardin (c. 1056–1133) who encourages his brothers to offer useful, pleasing and sweet preaching, so that their “sheep” would listen to their voice with willingness. He never mentions the bitterness (PL 171, col. 760–761).

⁵¹ Anselmus Laudunensis *Ennarationes in Apocalypsin* 10 (PL 162, col. 1538–1539): ... *'et faciet amaricare ventrem tuum,' quia grave est carni implere divina praecepta. Per ventrem, qui est mollis et fragilis, accipit carnem. 'Sed in ore tuo erit dulce tanquam mel,' id est praedicando et cogitando.*

⁵² Bruno Astensis *Expositio in Apocalypsim* 10 (PL 165, col. 660): *Cui enim prophetarum euangeliorum-que expositio ad legendum et audiendum dulcis non sit? Sed nunquid similiter ad faciendum? Libenter Salvatoris uerba ille audierat, cui post caetera Dominus ait: 'Adhuc tibi unum deest; uade, et vende omnia quae habes, et da pauperibus, et sequere me, et habebis thesauros in caelis' [Matth. 19, 21]. Cui quam amarus cibus iste inventus fuerit, demonstratur, cum subditur: 'Et tristis abiit, quia multas habebat possessiones.'*

is sent to preach to unfriendly nations. This appears, for example, by Bede the Venerable (673–735).

The preaching activity itself, however, can be included in the commentaries on both sides: Bede says that while you perceive, you delight in the sweetness of the divine speech, but you feel the bitterness when you begin to preach and put into practice what you have understood. Thus Ezekiel departs bitter because he has to preach the Gospel, which is sweet by the love but bitter by the persecutions awaiting him.⁵³ But for example Anselm of Laon (1050–1117) claims preaching and meditating on the Scripture is sweet (preaching, after all, is having the word of God in mouth), it is the living out the precepts which is demanding and thus bitter.⁵⁴ The context is, of course different – Ezekiel’s preaching carries with it the unpleasant persecution, while Anselm stresses that thinking and speaking of things may still be far from actually putting them into practice.⁵⁵

Rupert of Deutz (Rupertus Tuitiensis, c. 1075–1130) gives a more general explanation where he states that the promises of the future are sweet but this present world is bitter, if not because of persecution then because of the exile anyway.⁵⁶ The sweetness now, while it is lived in this world, is accompanied by a lot of bitterness. There are always enemies. John knew that if he devours the book, he will encounter a lot of bitterness (he quotes 2 Tim 3, 12: “All who want to live piously will suffer persecution”).

The bitterness of Christians when persecuted is, however, not a well-established image either: saints and Fathers are more frequently described as looking forward and happily accepting the crown of martyrdom. This discrepancy is explicitly dealt with by Johannes Petri Olivi (1248–1298) in his commentary to the Apocalypse, where he states that however sweet the contemplation of the future passions might be to the mind, in reality it nevertheless includes sighs of pain and sufferings of the spirit. He says there is nothing strange if according to different aspects one should feel both sweet and bitter, because also the passion of Christ, as far as it is triumphant and prosperous for us, is sweet to us, but as far as it tortures our belly by compassion, it is bitter to us.⁵⁷

⁵³ Beda Venerabilis, *Explanatio Apoc.* II, 10: *Cum perceperis, oblectaberis divini eloquii dulcedine, sed amaritudinem senties, cum praedicare et operari coeperis quod intellexeris. Vel certe juxta Ezechielem intelligendum, qui cum librum se devorasse diceret, adjecit, Et abii amarus in indignatione spiritus mei. Et dixit mihi: Oportet te iterum prophetare populis et gentibus. Quid liber comestus, et amaritudini mista dulcedo significaret, exprimit, quod, videlicet, ereptus exsilio, gentibus esset Evangelium praedicaturus, amore quidem dulce, sed tolerandis persecutionibus amarus.*

⁵⁴ Anselmus Laudunensis *Ennarationes in Apocalypsin* 10 (PL 162, col. 1539): *... in ore tuo erit dulce tamquam mel, id est praedicando et cogitando ... grave est enim nostrae carni jejunare et caetera quae praeciuntur.*

⁵⁵ Seeing the preaching activity in a new light seems to be connected to the changed context: at the times when Jews and then early Christians were persecuted, already the speaking of the doctrine put one in danger but once Christianity became an established religion, preaching, although praiseworthy, does not present such a value any more. It becomes gradually connected to persuasion instead, and the contrast between only speaking and also actually doing is often pointed out.

⁵⁶ Rupertus Tuitiensis, *De sancta Trinitate et operibus eius* XXVII: “... it is sweet in the mouth as honey because of the hope of eternal joy, even if the bitterness of persecution is missing it makes the belly bitter because of the present exile” (*Libri autem saepe dicti intelligentia nunc quidem cum sit in ore dulcis tamquam mel pro spe gaudii sempiterni etiam si persecutionis amaritudo desit pro re tamen praesentis exsilio uentrem amaricare facit*).

⁵⁷ *Huius autem libri contemplatio est dulcis ori, id est spirituali gustui. Facit tamen amaricari ventrem quia ducit ad amaritudinem laboris et passionis. Quamvis enim preclara contemplatio futurarum passionum sit suavis menti, in experientia tamen laboris est gemitus et afflictio spiritus. Nihil etiam inconueniens si secundum diversos respectus sit simul dulcis et amarus, sicut et Christi passio in quantum triumphalis et*

c) Finally, it is suggested that it is bitter to hear the horrible punishments waiting for the unjust. For example, Berengaudus (9th century) states that we can understand the mouth as the heart of the apostles and the belly as the memory of sinners. Sweet is the promise of the eternal life, but as the mind goes from the upper things to the lower ones – that is, from the contemplation of the heavenly home to its own sins and the punishments which the unjust will suffer for their sins, then what was previously sweet becomes bitter.⁵⁸

But, again, although the message of the New Testament is loving one's neighbor, the bitterness about how the unjust will suffer in hell is not an established image – just think of *De spectaculis* where Tertullian persuades Christians to give up worldly shows because much more exciting shows are waiting for them after the Last Judgment, that is, the sufferings of the unjust, which he proceeds to describe almost too vividly.⁵⁹ It almost seems that rather the pleasure in watching the unjust in hell is one of the well established Christian pleasures. Origen's claim that because God is good, everyone will be saved in the end, was condemned by council of 553. In the *Elucidarium* by Honorius Augustodunensis (first half of the 12th century), a text extremely popular surviving in over 300 medieval manuscripts, the confused pupil asks his master whether the just would not feel unhappy seeing the unjust suffer so much but the master replies that, on the contrary, they will be much pleased; they would feel against God if they were not.⁶⁰

nobis salubris est nobis dulcis; in quantum tamen nostra viscera per compassionem transfigit, est nobis amara (edition by Sylvain Piron being prepared for publication).

⁵⁸ Interestingly, he associates the bitterness with the feeling about one's body: by the belly we can understand the mortal flesh. The book becomes bitter because saintly men, the more they plunge into meditation over Scriptures, the sweeter is the meditation on their minds, and the more bitter they feel about their bodies, inflicting it with starvation, vigils, abstinence and other sufferings. The whole passage reads (Berengaudus, *Expositio super septem visiones libri apocalypsis* 10, 9–10 [PL 17, col. 866]): *Et abii ad angelum, dicens ei ut daret mihi librum. Abierunt apostoli ad Christum, ut ab eo doctrina divinarum Scripturarum instruerentur. Et dixit mihi: Accipe, et devora illum, et faciet amaricare ventrem tuum, sed in ore tuo erit dulce tamquam mel. Et cum devorassem eum, amaricatus est venter meus. Per os in quo sapes discernuntur corda apostolorum intelligere possumus: per ventrem autem in quo omnes spurcitiae commorantur corporis, memoriam peccatorum intelligere debemus. Liber igitur dum devoraretur, ut mel dulce fuisse dicitur; quia divina Scriptura dum in mente revolvitur, vitamque aeternam mandata Dei custodientibus repromittit, dulcis ut mel in corde efficitur: cum vero mentem a superioribus ad inferiora, id est, a contemplatione coelestis patriae ad peccata sua intuenda deducit, poenasque quas impii pro peccatis suis passuri sunt, ostendit, quae antea fuerat dulcis in demonstratione coelestis gloriae, amara efficitur in peccatorum ostensione. Possumus etiam hoc de Joanne proprie intelligere, qui antequam Evangelium scriberet, Pathmos in exilium ductus est: sed quia propter absentiam ejus haeretici Ecclesiam Dei invaserant, post reversionem suam de exilio ad eorum blasphemias destruendas compulsus est Evangelium scribere. Praecepit igitur vox divina Joanni, ut iret ad angelum, et acciperet ab eo librum; quia Spiritus sanctus hoc Joanni inspirando suasit, ut iret ad Christum non passibus corporis, sed passibus mentis, ad considerandam divinitatis ejus potentiam atque cum Patre aequalitatem, ut de divinitate ejus libellum omnibus fidelibus salutiferum posset conscribere. Devoravit vero Joannes librum, cum scientiam Evangelii quod postea scripsit, plenissime accepit. Liber itaque dum devoraretur, dulcedinem mellis ori exhibuit; quia divina Scriptura quanto amplius in corde ruminatur, tanto salubriorem dulcedinem menti exhibet. Possumus autem per ventrem, in quo escae putrescunt, carnem hanc mortalem intelligere. Liber igitur qui in ore dulcis fuit, amaritudinem ventri generavit; quia sancti viri quanto amplius in meditatione divinarum Scripturarum dediti sunt, quantoque eorum meditatio dulcior fit in mente, tanto majorem amaritudinem carni suae exhibent, affligendo videlicet eam jejuniis, vigiliis, abstinencia, caeterisque cruciatibus, quibus caro atteritur.*

⁵⁹ See Weeber (1988).

⁶⁰ Honorius Augustodun. *Elucidarium* III, 5 (PL 172, col. 1161): *Discipulus: Non dolebunt justi cum eos viderint ita torqueri? Magister: Non; licet pater videat filium, aut filius patrem in poena; aut filia*

Thus, none of the solutions (if they can be separated so, since these options are not so clear-cut, and are, obviously, interconnected) draws on an established tradition or evokes a familiar image. In addition, they all place the sweetness and the bitterness on the same level – either they say that to some the book is sweet, to others it is bitter, or that some aspects of eating the book are sweet, others are bitter. The idea behind is that taste is felt in the mouth, so the sweetness and bitterness are two equal alternatives.⁶¹ But this does not quite reflect the biblical text, where the sweetness is felt in the mouth, and the bitterness in the belly, which would normally mean that on the surface the book is pleasing but its contents are not profitable, it does not make the body stronger but rather weaker.

These biblical passages both work with the well-established parallel between reading and eating. Within the imagery, reading is not a simple activity, it is not only *linked to* understanding, accepting knowledge, meditating, preaching, putting knowledge into practice and ethics, it *includes* all these activities.⁶² Exactly because reading is such a complex activity, it can be both sweet and bitter at the same time – sweet in some of its aspects and bitter in others, as has been shown in the discussion. Yet, while the bitterness of the Scriptures presents a problem for the exegetes and is either avoided or interpreted in non-standard ways, there is no hesitation that Scripture is pleasant to hear, to read and/or to preach about. When facing the statement that Scripture is sweet and bitter, it was clearly much easier for the exegetes to explain its sweetness than its bitterness.

This should not lead us to make hasty conclusions about the way the Bible was read but rather to consider the conventions of the literary type used for the analysis. Biblical exegesis is not merely very specific intertextual source but it formed a crucial platform for intellectual exchange during the Middle Ages. The formulation of the ideas within this type (as well as other literary types) is influenced by literary conventions and topoi. In this particular case, the two biblical passages, although easy to understand with a common sense, go against the usual metaphoric commonplace of encountering the Scriptures as “first bitter, then sweet” and it is impossible to apply on them the well-established and developed imagery of reading as eating without having to conclude that the Scriptures are useless. Thus, the uneasiness the exegetes feel over these passages is rather due to literary conventions than to the actual contents. This situation points back at the beginning: using a particular source for analysing a certain subject, one has to be aware of the inner rules of the source type, since their influence on the handling of the subject may be surprisingly substantial.

matrem, aut mater filiam ibi conspiciat, aut vir uxorem, aut uxor virum; non solum non dolent, sed ita est eis delectabile hoc videre, sicut nobis cum videmus pisces in gurgite ludere, ut dicitur: 'Laetabitur justus, cum viderit vindictam peccatorum' [Psalm. 57, 11].

⁶¹ See, e.g., Ambr. Autpertus *Expositio in Apocalypsin* V, 10: “It is possible to designate by both the mouth and the belly one mind of a man. Because where is the food sweet or bitter if not in one’s mouth? ... And the Holy Scripture surely designates both the mouth and the belly, that is, the inner parts of the heart, the secrets of the mind, where the God’s words become either sweet or bitter” (*potest autem per os simul et ventrem una eadem mens homini designari. Ubi namque dulces uel amari sunt cibi, nisi in ore? ... Et certe Scriptura sacra et os et uentrem plerumque unum esse designat, id est, cordis interiora, mentis secreta, ubi uel dulcia uel amara fiunt Dei eloquia*).

⁶² This was shown very well by Carruthers (1990: 167 and *passim*).

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**SICUT MEL DULCE
SLADKOST A HOŘKOST ČTENÍ BIBLE VE STŘEDOVĚKU**

Shrnutí

Po přehledu možných typů primárních zdrojů, ze kterých se můžeme dozvědět něco o potěšení z četby ve středověku (teoretická pojednání jako *artes poeticae*, gramatiky nebo medicínské traktáty, paratexty, doklady recepce textů a samotné texty) se studie zaměřuje na žánr biblické exegese, konkrétně na výklady dvou pasáží, Ezech. 3, 3 a Apoc. 10, 9. Obě představují obraz pojídání knihy, která je sladká v ústech, ale v břiše zhořkne. Tento obraz některé středověké komentátory zarážel a vedl k velmi různorodým interpretacím. Autorka se pokouší dokázat, že hlavním důvodem jejich rozpaků bylo, že obvyklá středověká metafora, která srovnávala četbu s jezením, byla opačná: kniha nemusí být „sladká“ v ústech (snadno přistupná), ale udělá člověku dobře v těle, protože jej nasytí.