The Bridge of Dialectic: The Petit-Pont and the Public Performance of Learning in 12th-century Paris

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At the beginning of Book V of *On Moral Ends*, Cicero recounts a conversation that took place between him and several friends during an afternoon stroll to the Old Academy on the northwestern outskirts of Athens in 79 B.C.E. As the party roams the grounds of the Academy, the city reveals itself to them as a outdoor museum of philosophy. One of Cicero's party, Marcus Piso, inspired by the Academy's "justly famous grounds," turns his mind to the poetics of place and its power to spark memory and imagination, to even induce bodily visions of great philosophers of times past:

> I cannot say whether it is a natural instinct or a kind of illusion, but when we see the places where we are told that the notables of the past spent their time, it is far more moving than when we hear about their achievements or read their writings. This is how I am affected right now. I think of Plato, who they say was the first philosopher to have regularly held discussions here. Those little gardens just nearby not only bring Plato to mind, but actually seem to make him appear before my eyes. [...] Such is the evocative power that locations possess. No wonder the training of memory is based on them.[1]

I would like to express my gratitude to the Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte Paris and all its staff for their support and hospitality during my fellowship year. In the splendid company of my fellow boursiers, Hôtel Lully became just such an urban site of intellectual camaraderie and exchange as the medieval Petit-Pont that is the subject of this essay.

1 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, Julia Annas (ed.), Raphael Woolf (trans.), Cambridge 2001, pp. 117–118. For the historical context of Cicero's *On Moral Ends*, see Lloyd W. Daly, "Roman Study Abroad," in *The American Journal of Philology* 71/1, 1950, pp. 40–58; Joseph A. Howley, "'Heus Tu Rhetorisce': Gellius, Cicero, Plutarch, and Roman Study Abroad," in Jesper

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Others of the group chime in, sharing similar experiences of places in and beyond Athens which each had sought out for their associations with personal philosophical paragons: the garden of Epicurus, Carneades's seat, Demosthenes's Bay of Phalerum, the tomb of Pericles, and Sophocles's village of Colonus. "It is a fact," Cicero concurs with Piso, "that the stimulus of place considerably sharpens and intensifies the thoughts we have about famous individuals." Cicero then recounts his own visit to the city of Metapontum and how he "could not go to the lodgings until [he] had seen the exact place where Pythagoras died and the chair he sat on."[2] These sites, suffused with the spirits of philosophy, take on the aura of sacred places under the spell of a genius loci. Over centuries, the activities of famous teachers had produced a veritable topography of Greek philosophy: "Every part of Athens is filled with reminders of great men in the actual places they lived,"[3] ultimately leading to Lucius's realization that "[w]herever we go, we are walking on historic ground."[4]

Although this essay is not about Athens and the Academy, Cicero's dialogue is an instructive point of departure for exploring philosophy and notions of place in the context of the urban schools of twelfth-century Paris. Medieval Parisian literati themselves set a precedent for this geographical and temporal leap, intentionally drawing parallels between Athens, the ancient Greek capital of learning, and Paris, which they construed as its new Latin counterpart. In the medieval trope of *translatio studii*, Paris was styled quasi-typologically as a new Athens, a Christian reincarnation of its pagan (and thus imperfect) predecessor.[5] The persistent fascination harboured for Athens also shaped how medieval Parisians perceived and envisioned their own city. Indeed, Paris's erudite inhabitants imagined Athens as a model for the very idea of an urban centre of learning defined by not just one, but an entire topography of scholastic sites spread throughout the city.

Today, thanks to modern archaeology, a visitor may once again explore the historic grounds of the Academy and other philosophical sites and structures in Greece's capital; not so, however, in Paris, where centuries of radical urban development have effaced the material traces of its twelfth-century scholastic topography (fig. 1). By the middle of that century, decades before the formation of the university and the establishment of the Franciscan and Dominican *studia*, Paris could already point to a thriving collection of

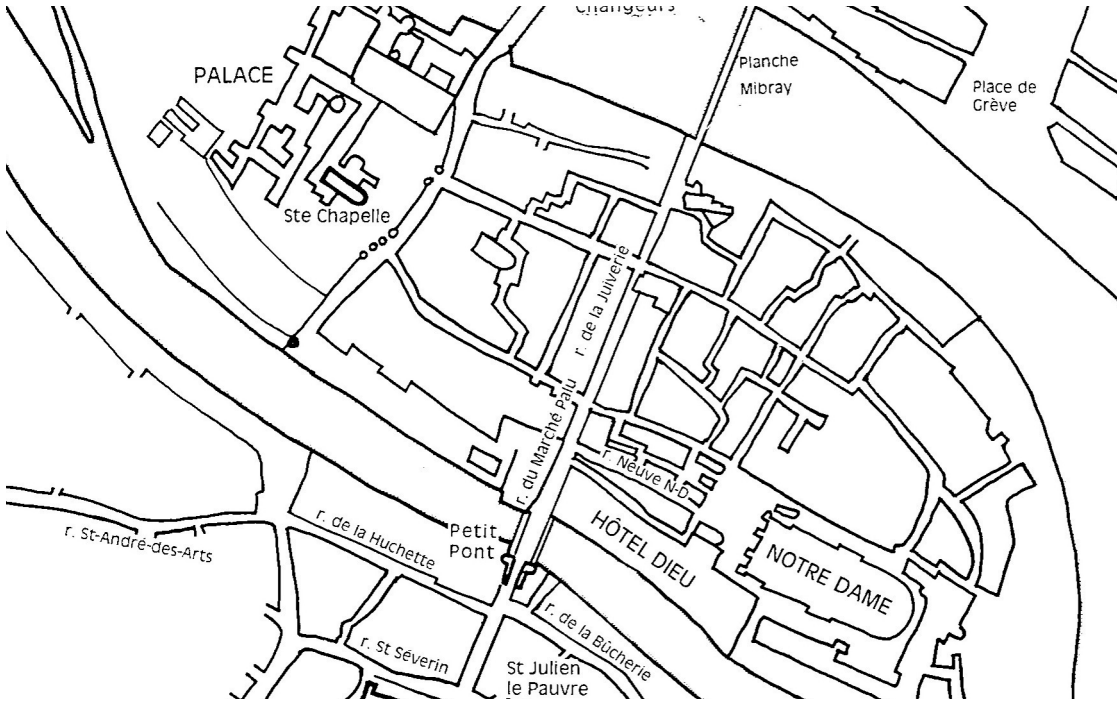
Majbom Madsen and Roger David Rees (eds.), *Roman Rule in Greek and Latin Writing*, Leiden 2014, pp. 163–192.

2 Cicero 2001 (note 1), p. 118.

3 Ibid., p. 118.

4 Ibid., p. 119. On Athens's scholastic topography, see Richard E. Wycherley, "Peripatos: The Athenian Philosophical Scene-I," in *Greece & Rome* 8/2, 1961, pp. 152–163; id., "Peripatos: The Athenian Philosophical Scene-II," in *Greece & Rome* 9/1, 1962, pp. 2–21; John McK. Camp, "The Philosophical Schools of Roman Athens," in *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 36/55, 1989, pp. 50–55.

5 On the *translatio studii*, see David L. Gassman, *'Translatio Studii': A Study of Intellectual History in the Thirteenth Century*, Ithaca 1973; Ulrike Krämer, *Translatio imperii et studii: zum Geschichts- und Kulturverständnis in der französischen Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Bonn 1996.



1 Paris, ca. 1200, in Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, *Manuscripts and Their Makers. Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris, 1200–1500*, London / Turnhout, 2000, map 2

schools.[6] First among them was the cathedral school of Notre-Dame, originally located in the cloister of the canons of Notre-Dame, but, in 1128, relocated to a newly built auditorium next to the bishop's palace south of the church.[7] The cathedral school was rivalled by the schools of the abbeys of Saint-Germain-des-Près, Sainte-Geneviève, and, most of all, that of Saint-Victor.[8] While the latter two were demolished during the French Revolution, the episcopal palace was burned to the ground in the political turmoil of 1831.

6 See Robert-Henri Bautier, "Paris au temps d'Abélard," in Jean Jolivet (ed.), *Abélard et son temps. Actes du colloque international*, Paris 1981, pp. 21–77.

7 See Astrik L. Gabriel, "The Cathedral Schools of Notre Dame," in Astrik L. Gabriel (ed.), *Garlandia: Studies in the History of the Mediaeval University*, Frankfurt am Main 1969, pp. 39–64, here pp. 41–42.

8 On the abbey of St-Victor, see Jean-Pierre Willesme, "L'abbaye Saint-Victor de Paris. L'église et les bâtiments, des origines à la Révolution," in Jean Longère (ed.), *L'Abbaye parisienne de Saint-Victor. Communications présentées au 13e colloque d'humanisme médiéval de Paris (1986–1988)*, Paris / Turnhout 1991 (Bibliotheca Victorina, 1), pp. 97–115; Cédric Giraud, "L'école de Saint-Victor dans la première moitié du XIIe siècle, entre école monastique et école cathédrale," in *L'école de Saint-Victor de Paris*, Paris / Turnhout 2010 (Bibliotheca Victorina, 22), pp. 101–19.

Putting the ecclesiastic institutions aside, this essay focuses instead on Paris's private schools, historically the most elusive of scholastic establishments. The term 'private schools' should not be understood in an institutional or even an architectural sense; the term denotes a single master instructing paying students in a wide range of subjects, from grammar to theology.[9] But, above all, it was the study of dialectic that drew students in throngs to Paris. The more prominent and advanced schools constituted veritable intellectual communities, sometimes referred to as sects (*sectae*), and appropriately so. The proliferation of schools of dialectic fostered lively exchange and stiff competition. The intellectual rivalry between the schools made Paris a contested space of philosophical discourse, an open intellectual arena where truth was not so much passed down from master to student as battled over between competing factions in a ceaseless *sic et non*.[10]

These early masters of dialectic set up their schools predominantly on the slope of Mont Sainte-Geneviève. In doing so, they followed Peter Abelard who had taught there during two periods at the extreme ends of his career. There is no indication that these schools were associated with particular buildings or even owned permanent classrooms. One of these twelfth-century schools, however, left its mark on the city: the school of the English master Adam of Balsham (ca. 1100–1169) situated on the Petit-Pont, the bridge that spanned the Seine between the Île de la Cité and the Left Bank. Whereas in today's history books Adam's name may be found only footnotes, if at all, during his lifetime he was an acclaimed logician and authority on Aristotle in an already crowded scholastic scene.[11] In his only known major work, the *Ars disserendi*, completed by 1132, Adam declared it his goal to revive the art of dialectic as it had once flourished in antiquity. An admired teacher, he drew students from near and far, fostering a dedicated following

9 For a general introduction to the institutional landscape, see Christophe Erismann, "Schools in the Twelfth Century," in Henrik Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, Dordrecht / New York 2011, pp. 1176–82.

10 We know of five major schools of dialectic in Paris in the twelfth century. In addition to the *Parvipontani*, these were the *Albricine*, the followers of Alberic of Paris; the *Melidunenses* (or *Robertini*), the followers of Robert of Melun; the *Porretani*, the followers of Gilbert of Poitiers; and the *Nominales*. See Ian Wilks, "Latin Logic up to 1200," in Catarina Dutilh Novaes and Stephen Read (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Logic*, Cambridge 2016, pp. 94–118, here pp. 112–113. Seminal studies are Iwakuma Yukio and Sten Ebbesen, "Logico-Theological Schools from the Second Half of the 12th Century: A List of Sources," in *Vivarium* 30/1, 1992, pp. 173–210; Richard W. Hunt, "Studies on Priscian in the Twelfth Century, II: The School of Ralph of Beauvais," in id., *The History of Grammar in the Middle Ages: Collected Papers*, Geoffrey L. Bursill-Hall (ed.), Amsterdam 1980, pp. 39–94.

11 On Adam, see Lorenzo Minio-Paluello's fundamental study "The 'Ars Disserendi' of Adam of Balsham 'Parvipontanus,'" in *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 3, 1954, pp. 116–169. For an introduction to his life and work, see Raymond Klibansky, "Balsham, Adam of," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004, URL: https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37095 [14.12.2020]. John Marenbon, "Adam of the Petit-Pont," in Laurent Cesalli, Ruedi Imbach, Alain de Libera et al. (ed.), *Die Philosophie des Mittelalters*, 4 vol., vol. 3/1, *12. Jahrhundert*, Schwabe 2020. I thank John Marenbon for sharing his essay with me in advance of publication.

of disciples, some of whom became significant philosophers or theologians in their own right. Rather than dispersing upon his death, Adam's school persisted until the turn of the thirteenth century when the loosely organized private schools ceded to the emergent institution of the University of Paris.

In Adam's school we discover a highly localized and self-consciously modelled instantiation of scholasticism wedded to its particular location. The Petit-Pont was a natural bottleneck, funnelling people and goods across the river. Prime real estate from an economic point of view, it was a bustling commercial corridor that was inhabited, and competed over, by various social groups and professions. As a highly trafficked, multi-purpose, and crowded site, it made an ideal stage for public display and advertisement – the natural habitat of beggars, peddlers, jongleurs, and all stationary and ambulatory trades that thrived in highly frequented places. Dwelling on the Petit-Pont, Adam and his cohort became part and parcel of the secular world of commerce, labour, and entertainment. Although it may seem counterintuitive for a school to be situated in the hustle and bustle of urban life, the Petit-Pont constituted a strategic place for asserting a visual and vocal presence and a new model of publicly performed academic discourse.

The growing rapport between city and scholastics is a common trope of medieval intellectual history, but the challenge of what that looked like in actuality, what forms it took, and what it meant to the development of scholastic culture has yet to be taken seriously. I am interested in how Adam and his students transformed the little bridge into an intellectual space, and, in turn, I also seek to understand how the site – its location, architectural space, and social environment – shaped the school's self-conception, intellectual practice, and 'style.' Through the lens of Adam's school, this essay explores how a new breed of scholars, unshackled by traditional institutions of medieval learning, wove intellectual culture into the fabric of the city. To view Adam's school in relation to its physical environment, to situate its activities in the social and built space, is to witness, *in nuce*, medieval intellectual history in the making.

The Petit-Pont

Until the construction of the Pont Saint-Michel in 1384, the Petit-Pont was the only bridge to connect the Île de la Cité with the Left Bank.[12] Before the urban expansion of Paris under King Philip Augustus in the early 1200s, the south end of the bridge marked the entrance to the city, protected by the Petit-Châtelet (or Châtelet du Petit-Pont), a fortress and a customs house policing the flow of people and goods entering and exiting the city.[13]

12 On the premodern history of Paris's bridges, see, in particular, Miron Mislin, *Die überbauten Brücken von Paris, ihre Bau- und stadtgeschichtliche Entwicklung im 12.–19. Jahrhundert*, PhD thesis, Universität Stuttgart, 1979.

13 Ibid., p. 100.

At the north end of the Petit-Pont was the busiest economic zone of twelfth-century Paris, the *Marché Palu*, the city's largest marketplace, where grain and corn were sold in a covered market, the *Halle de Blés*.[14] The area must have been so crowded that in 1153, when King Louis VII came into possession of a house previously owned by a money changer in the rue de Petit-Pont (*vicus parvi pontis*) leading to the bridge, he had it razed in order to widen the street (*ad ampliandam viam*).[15]

The scarcity of sources relating to the Petit-Pont in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries makes a reconstruction near impossible. However, two hitherto neglected sources – two chronicle reports of the disastrous flood of 1206 – shed light on its general architectural features. The first stems from the monk Rigord, the historiographer of Saint-Denis, who reports how "a flood as had never been heard or seen before" swept away the Petit-Pont, "ruining three of its arches, overturning plenty of houses there, and causing great suffering in all places."[16] According to Rigord, the torrential river was only appeased and the city saved when the abbot of Saint-Denis led a procession bare-footed to the Seine and blessed the water with relics of Christ's Passion. We find a similar dramatic report in the chronicle of the abbey of Sainte-Geneviève: "Shocked and shattered by the impact of so much water, the stone bridge [...] was sure to collapse. You could see the massive bare ruins," "demolished cement," and "stones torn asunder."[17] The chronicles' reports are important because they testify that the twelfth-century Petit-Pont was an impressive stone structure overbuilt with houses, disproving the commonly held assumption that it was a simple wooden structure which paled in comparison to its celebrated counterpart, the Grand-Pont. Indeed, the mere fact that the Petit-Pont's collapse found entry at all into the

14 In 1183 King Phillip II had the grain market moved to Les Halles on the Right Bank, where it was named Halle de la Juiverie in memory of its previous location in the rue de la Juiverie on the Île de la Cité. See Nicolas Delamare, *Traité de la police, où l'on trouvera l'histoire de son établissement, les fonctions et les prerogatives de ses magistrats, toutes les loix et tous les règlemens qui la concernent*, Amsterdam 1729, p. 631.

15 Robert de Lasteyrie, *Cartulaire général de Paris, ou recueil de documents relatifs à l'histoire et à la topographie de Paris, 528–1180*, Paris 1887, p. 337.

16 "...tanta aquarum et fluminum inundatio facta est, quanta ab hominibus illius temporis nunquam visa vel audita a predecessoribus fuerat Parisius; tres arcus Parvi pontis fregit et quamplures domos ibidem evertit, et infinita damna multis in locis intulit." Henri-François Delaborde (ed.), Œuvres de *Rigord et de Guillaume le Breton, historiens de Philippe-Auguste*, Paris 1882, p. 165.

17 "Pons etiam lapideus, qui respectu majoris pontis eusdem urbis parvus appellatur, tanto impetu aquarum impulsus & conquassatus ruinam promittebat. Videres in ipso ponte apertissimas ruinas & amplissimas, caementum demolitum, lapides disjunctos ab invicem, & ipsum pontem ruinosum & in proximo ruiturum, sicut aquae superficies, quae a vento agitabatur assidua collisione undarum fluminis huc liluc fluitantium." *Gallia christiana, in provincias ecclesiasticas distributa*, 16 vol., vol. 7, *In quo de Archiepiscopatu Parisiensi*, Paris 1744, p. 229. Notably, the chronicler of Sainte-Geneviève attributed the rescue of Paris not to the abbot of Saint-Denis's procession but instead to the combined effort of his abbey's patron saint and the Virgin Mary.

2 Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *The Petit-Pont After the 1718 Fire*, 1718, oil on canvas, 53 × 64 cm, Paris, Musée Carnavalet – Histoire de Paris

abbeys' chronicles (which were mainly concerned with the history of the realm) betrays the bridge's importance for both the city of Paris and the kingdom at large.[18]

The chronicles' accounts bring to mind Jean-Baptiste Oudry's painting of the smouldering ruins of the Petit-Pont (fig. 2). The painting commemorates a catastrophic fire that had ravaged the bridge one fatal April night in 1718.[19] The fire, which consumed all of the Petit-Pont's seventeen houses, revealed the fifteenth-century core structure that had withstood the flames. The remains visible in Oudry's painting give an approximate idea of what its twelfth-century predecessor would have looked like. Spanning close to 50 metres from shore to shore, the bridge would have been carried by five semi-circular arches, three of which were planted in the riverbed, while the outer arches lifted the bridge deck

18 The oft-repeated claim that the Petit-Pont was made of wood appears to originate with an unsubstantiated passage in Henri Sauval, *Histoire et recherches des antiquités de la ville de Paris*, 3 vol., Paris 1724, vol. 1, p. 216.

19 The cause of events and the subsequent rebuilding of the bridge the following year is reported in: *Chronique de la régence et du reigne de Louis XV ou Journal de Barbier*, Paris 1857, pp. 1–7.

across the unfortified slope of the riverbank.[20] The arches probably rested on tapered stone piers like those seen in the painting. Massive piers would have been necessary to support the bridge's superstructure of houses and shops as well as watermills and fishing nets that were installed between its arches. Wooden poles planted in the riverbed – their charred remains are seen jutting out from the river in Oudry's painting – would have extended the supported building area several meters beyond the deck. Houses and inhabitants of the Petit-Pont have left few archival traces; one source from 1178 or 1180 records a certain Balduinus, "shoemaker of the Petit-Pont;" two further documents mention houses on the Petit-Pont located "next to" or "behind" the butcher stalls.[21]

Yet not the entire bridge would have been covered in houses and stalls. There is reason to assume that the middle section of the deck carried by the central arch (the so called *faute du Petit-Pont*) was deliberately left free of buildings. At least, this was the case in the late thirteenth century, as shown by the tax records (*taille*) of 1296.[22] The *faute* constituted the parish boundaries between Saint-Séverin, Sainte-Geneviève-la-Petite, and Saint-German-le-Vieux.[23] The Grand-Pont, too, possessed a *faute* (the fourth arch counting from the Île de la Cité).[24] In both cases, the *faute* – also referred to as "grande arche" – was unobstructed by watermills and slightly raised to give sufficient space for boats to pass underneath.[25] Free of buildings, the central arch would have formed a small square in the middle section of the bridge.[26] This feature is also known from other medieval bridges, as, for example, the iconic piazza measuring 19 by 19 metres on the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, built in 1346.[27] As is the case with the piazza of the Ponte Vecchio, the *faute* of the Petit-Pont would have framed iconic views of the city: westward, the royal palace and the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Près, eastward, the ancient cathedral and the young abbey of Saint-Victor, and, southward, beyond the Petit Châtelet, the hillsides dotted with Roman ruins, vineyards, and medieval burghs, crowned by the abbey of Sainte-Geneviève. Standing on the centre arch of the Petit-Pont, engulfed by labour, traffic, and trade, one must have truly felt in the beating heart of the city.

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20 See Adrien Friedmann, *Paris, ses rues, ses paroisses du Moyen Âge à la Révolution. Origine et évolution des circonscriptions paroissiales*, Paris 1959, pp. 397–398.

21 Benjamin Guérard, *Cartulaire de l'église Notre-Dame de Paris*, 4 vol., Paris, 1850, vol. 1, pp. 458–459, no. 561; Louis Halphen, *Paris sous les premiers Capétiens (987–1223): Étude de topographie historique*, Paris 1909, p. 74.

22 Mislin 1979 (note 12), p. 99. Friedmann 1959 (note 20), p. 397–398.

23 Friedmann 1959 (note 20), pp. 200–201. Mislin 1979 (note 12), plate IV.

24 In addition to Friedmann 1959 (note 20), p. 200, note 1, see Jean Guerout, "Le palais de la Cité des origines à 1417," in *Mémoires de la fédération des sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Île-de-France* 1, 1949, pp. 194–201.

25 Friedmann 1959 (note 20), p. 200.

26 Mislin 1979 (note 12), p. 99. Friedmann 1959 (note 20), pp. 397–398.

27 Theresa Flanigan, "The Ponte Vecchio and the Art of Urban Planning in Late Medieval Florence," in *Gesta* 47, 2008, pp. 1–15, here p. 6.

Pontine Peripatetics

Adam and his school's identity coalesced around the bridge. It did so most directly in their toponymic nickname of *parvipontani*, derived from the Latin name of the Petit-Pont, *pons parvum*.[28] One of the most famous alumni of Adam's school, Alexander of Neckam, referred to himself as a piece of the bridge's architecture, stating that "hardly any other place in the city, I was told, is more famous than the Little Bridge, a small column of which I once was."[29] Neckam wasn't the only one to speak figuratively of the school as a bridge. Another of the Parvipontani, Godfrey of Saint-Victor, most cleverly exploited the metaphoric potential of pontine imagery in his poem *Fons philosophiae* (The Fountain of Philosophy), composed around 1180.[30] In Godfrey's poetic tribute to the school the Parvipontani allegorically morph into bridge builders and their logical constructs into the physical architecture, providing knowledge-seeking pilgrims with a safe passage over the Seine, here transformed into the treacherous river of dialectic.

Adam's choice to situate his school on the Petit-Pont marked a break with Paris's existing scholastic topography. The two dominant centres of philosophical activity in Paris during Adam's lifetime – the schools of logic on the Mont Sainte-Geneviève and the Cathedral School of Notre-Dame – were, *de facto*, situated on the margins of the city: before the early the thirteenth century, the Mont Sainte-Geneviève (like the entire Left Bank) lay outside the city walls, while the Cathedral School was hidden behind the walls of the bishop's cloister. To settle on the Petit-Pont, in this most public of places, was doubtless a deliberate choice, indicative not only of the growing rapport between scholastics and the vernacular city, but also, more importantly, of the public urban nature of the scholastic project as Adam conceived it.

What that looked like in reality, to contemporary observers, can be gleaned from a letter from 1178 by Gui de Bazoches, a Parisian student unaffiliated with the Parvipontani. Rhapsodising about the city of Paris, Gui included the Petit-Pont among the noteworthy sites, writing that the bridge was "dedicated to logicians who pass by, roam about, and dispute [there]."[31] Laconic as it may seem, Gui's statement is revealing in a number of ways. First, it attests that the Parvipontani conducted the school outdoors. Second, the

28 For variations of Adam's nickname see Minio-Paluello 1954 (note 11), p. 118.

29 "Vix aliquis locus est dicta mihi notior urbe, Qua Modici Pontis parva columna fui. Hic artes didici docuique fideliter, inde, Accessit studio lectio sacra meo." Alexander Neckam, *De naturis rerum libri duo, with the poem of the same author, De laudibus divinae sapientiae*, Thomas Wright (ed.), London 1863, p. 503, ll. 333–334.

30 Godfrey of Saint Victor, *Fons philosophiae*, Pierre Michaud-Quantin (ed.), Namur 1956; Hugh Feiss, "Godfrey of St Victor: The Fountain of Philosophy," in Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere (eds.), *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory*, Hyde Park 2013, pp. 373–425, here pp. 398–399.

31 "Pons autem Parvus aut pretereuntibus, aut spatiantibus, aut disputantibus logicis dedicatus est." Heinrich Denifle (ed.), *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, 4 vol., Paris 1889–1897, vol. 1, *1200–1286*, p. 55, no. 54.

very fact that the pontine logicians are mentioned in the letter speaks to the visibility and prominence they had attained in the public eye. It also compellingly suggests that the school was – not only to insiders, but also outsiders – associated, and even coterminous with, the Petit-Pont itself. Last but not least, it identifies ambulation as the very hallmark of their intellectual practice.

It is hardly a coincidence that both verbs Gui employs to characterize the Parvipontani's perambulation – *spatiare* (roam or move about) and *preterire* (pass over) – also pertain to particular forms of discourse with somewhat opposite meaning: *spatiare* can mean to explicate or discuss at great length, while *preterire* can mean to consider briefly or pass over cursorily. Gui's ambivalent phrasing conjures the whole gamut of verbal engagement quintessential to scholastic culture: brief exchanges, impromptu debates, and detailed disputations. Evidently, for the Parvipontani circulating on the bridge in an ambling fashion, walking was a function of thinking and discoursing, in the mould, significantly, of Athens's Peripatetics. No doubt this was done in conscious and unmistakable imitation of Athens's walking and talking philosophers, be it Aristotle strolling and lecturing in the Lyceum, or Socrates legendarily roaming across the agora in search of a man wiser than he. Is it surprising, then, that John of Salisbury nicknamed Adam "our English Peripatetic"? Or that in an extraordinary pen-drawing – the frontispiece to a mid-twelfth-century textbook of logic (Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt, MS 2282) that very well may have originally belonged to Adam – he, but a simple medieval magister, is depicted in debate with the Athenian triumvirate of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle?[32] The revival of the ancient art of discourse, as Adam pursued it, involved more than the mastery of the ancient corpus of philosophy – no less, it meant restoring philosophy to the heart of the city.

Jugglers of Nonsense

Not only a place busy with trade and traffic, the Petit-Pont was also a celebrated, some would say notorious, venue for street performers. As land traffic between the Left Bank and the Île de la Cité had to pass, perforce, over the Petit-Pont, the particular location promised a steady flow of eyes, ears, and coins. One thirteenth-century preacher singled out the Petit-Pont as a pernicious site of public entertainment, reprimanding his lay audience for being more deeply moved by profane storytelling than by preaching: "The voice of the minstrel sitting on the Petit-Pont tells how the mighty soldiers of long ago, such as Roland, Oliver and the rest, were slain in battle, then the people standing around them are moved to pity and periodically burst into tears."[33] In pitting the song of the minstrel

32 I am currently preparing an article-length study on the Darmstadt manuscript and its frontispiece.

33 "Cum voce joculatoris, in parvo ponte sedentis, quomodo illi strenui milites antique, scilicet Rolandus et Oliverius, et cetera, in bello occubuere recitatur, populus circumstans pietate movetur et interdum

against the word of the preacher, the sermon construes the Petit-Pont as a sort of secular antithesis to the pulpit.

Public performances were not always amusing or politically innocent; they took on provocative and subversive forms as well. The Petit-Pont figures, too, in the poem *Roman des Franceis*, written in the last third of the twelfth century by the Anglo-Norman poet Andrew de Coutances.[34] The *Roman des Franceis* is an example of the flourishing genre of anti-French satire and ridicule. Andrew derides the character and mores of the Norman adversaries, his stated purpose being to "totally discredit the Frenchman."[35] After recounting a legend of King Arthur's defeat of the lazy French King Frollo, the second half of the poem reports with meticulous attention to detail the Frenchman's culinary excess and insatiable greed at the dinner table. In its last verses, the polemical poem, framed as a letter to Paris, offers sound advice not to recite it in public on the Petit-Pont:

> He who reads it should wait and see
> For the French will go round being fired up,
> If it is recited out on the Petit-Pont
> Whether by blow or by cuff
> The man will have his head broken
> Who reads it out, if he isn't careful
> For his presumption he will be very likely
> To get himself a soaking in the Seine.[36]

Roaming about on the Petit-Pont, sharing the stage with storytellers and the like, the Parvipontani became the target of clerical criticism. A seasoned alumnus of Paris's schools, John of Salisbury lambasted such dialecticians "who are shouting at crossroads (*compiti*), and teach on street corners (*trivii*), and who have worn away, not merely ten or twenty years, but their whole life with logic as their sole

lacrymatur." Quoted after Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France 1100–1300*, Berkeley 1990, p. 177. See also Carol Symes, *A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras*, Ithaca 2007, p. 164, note 136; Andrew Taylor, "Was There a Song of Roland?," in *Speculum* 76/1, 2001, pp. 28–65, here p. 54.

34 The poem was written sometime between 1179–1204. Andrew was a Norman cleric and magister. Based on his professed opinions about the French and his knowledge of Paris, it is likely he studied in Paris. See David Crouch, "The Roman des Franceis of Andrew de Coutances: Significance, Text, and Translation," in David Crouch and Kathleen Thompson (eds.), *Normandy and Its Neighbours, 900–1250: Essays for David Bates*, Turnhout 2011, pp. 175–198, here pp. 176–177.

35 Ibid., p. 197, l. 376.

36 "Qui la lira seit en stant / Quer Franceis s'iront mout crescant // Sele est sus Petit Pont retraite / Ou de colee ou de retraite / Ara celui la teste fraite / Qui la lira sil ne [se] gaite. // Mout sera isnel de prinsaut / Se en Siene ne fet. i. saut." Ibid., p. 197, ll. 363–370.

concern [...]."[37] In this passage, John was likely thinking of the Petit-Pont, precisely such a place where learning spilled into the street, philosophers rubbed shoulders with the populace, and those engaged in disputations found themselves competing with shouting and singing peddlers, entertainers, and beggars. By his own word, John entertained a close intellectual friendship with Adam and conferred with him about Aristotelian philosophy on a regular basis; his feelings for Adam's disciples, on the other hand, were less amicable. He skewered the Parvipontani as pseudo-philosophers producing mere semblances of truth and caricatured Adam's followers as irreverent and ignorant posturers who ignore the intellectual achievements of the past and make a public spectacle of philosophy.[38] In the *Entheticus Maior*, composed in the mid-1150s, he ventriloquizes a Parvipontanus with biting satire, even wittily garbling the Petit-Pont's name (*pons parvum*), calling it instead *pons modicum*, that is, petty bridge:

> We do not accept this burden of following the words
> of those whom Greece has and Rome venerates.
> I am a resident of the Petit-Pont (*pons modicum*), a new author in arts,
> And glory that previous discoveries are my own.
> What the elders taught, but dear youth knows not yet,
> I swear was the invention of my own bosom.
> A worshipping crowd of youth surrounds me, and thinks
> That when I make grandiloquent boasts, I merely speak the truth.[39]

Taking aim at the troubling performative aspect of secular scholarship void of true knowledge, John mocked such street dialecticians as *nugiloquos ventilatores*, jugglers of senseless prattle.[40] A variant of this gibe occurs in a letter to his friend Master Gerard la

37 "[...] qui clamant in compitis, et in triuiis docent, et in ea quam solam profitentur non decennium aut uicennium sed totam consumpserunt aetatem. Nam et cum senectus ingruit, corpus eneruat, sensuum retundit acumina, et praecedentes comprimit uoluptates, sola haec in ore uoluitur, uersatur in manibus, et aliis omnibus studiis praeripit locum." J. B. Hall and K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (eds.), *Ioannis Saresberiensis: Metalogicon*, Turnhout 1991 (Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, 98), p. 66.

38 On John's critical stance on scholastic learning, see Dallas George Denery II, "John of Salisbury, Academic Scepticism, and Ciceronian Rhetoric," in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, 5 vol., Oxford 2012–2019, vol. 1, *800–1558*, 2016, pp. 377–90, especially p. 378. See also C. Stephen Jaeger, "John of Salisbury, a Philosopher of the Long Eleventh Century," in Thomas F. X. Noble and John Van Engen (ed.) *European Transformations. The Long Twelfth Century*, Notre Dame 2012, pp. 499–520.

39 "Non onus accipimus, ut eorum verba sequamur, quos habet auctores Grecia, Roma colit. Incola sum Modici Pontis, novus auctor in arte, dum prius inventum glorior esse meum: quod docuere senes, nec novit amica iuventus, pectoris inventum iuro fuisse mei! Sedula me iuvenum circumdat turba, putatque grandia iactantem non nisi vera loqui." Jan van Laarhoven, *John of Salisbury's Entheticus Maior and Minor: Introduction, Texts, Translations*, Leiden 1987 (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, 17), pp. 106–109, ll. 47–54, commentary: pp. 262–265.

40 Hall and Keats 1991 (note 37), 66.

Pucelle, in which John contrasts true philosophers to mere *ventilatores verborum*, jugglers of words.[41] Another powerful critic of the schools, Peter the Chanter (after 1127–1197), expressed similar worries over the blurring of boundaries between higher knowledge and entertainment: "For what is baser than divine philosophy courting applause? There should be a difference between the applause of the theatre and the applause of the schools!"[42] But what drove the traditionalist clergy's fierce reaction was not simply the blurring of school and street: worse, it was the dialecticians' transgression into the domain of theology in ungodly – and unsurveilled – locations, as the final section shows.

The Trinity at the Crossroads

The backlash against the urban secular schools in the twelfth century was grounded in methodological and ideological differences between monastic and scholastic camps. But the exhibition of learning in public spaces and its perceived degradation to a form of public entertainment played a significant part as well. A vociferous critic of the urban schools and their moral corruption, the powerful abbot Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) proselytized for converts among Paris's secular students and masters, urging them to abandon 'Babylon' and join the Cistercian Order.[43] He condemned any inquiries into matters of faith outside the protective walls of the cloister. In an appeal to Pope Innocent II, he levelled severe charges against his prime adversary and celebrity of the schools, Peter Abelard, enjoining the pope to silence the rogue master, who, he alleged, placed greater confidence in his own powers of reasoning than in the authority of the Church Fathers.[44] Abelard's success, Bernard claimed, caused questions about the nature of God and the mystery of the Trinity to be debated everywhere, "in cities, villages, and castles; by scholars not only in the schools but also in public spaces; and not only by those learned and advanced enough but also by boys and the uneducated, and even by fools."[45] In another epistle, Bernard called upon the Roman Curia to act against those disputing on street corners about God (*disputantes in triviis de divinis*).[46] In 1140, Bernard sought to enlist Cardinal Guido de Castello in his crusade against

41 Joannes Saresberiensis, *Epistolae*, Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), Paris 1855 (Patrologia latina, 199), epistola 199, p. 220b.

42 Monique Duthion-Boutry, *"Verbum Abbreviatum" (version Longue) de Pierre Le Chantre*, Paris 2001.

43 On Bernard's ideology of education and learning, see John R. Sommerfeldt, *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Life of the Mind*, New York 2004, pp. 81–103.

44 On the famous controversy, see Constant J. Mews, "Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter Abelard," in *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, Leiden / Boston 2011, pp. 133–68. On Bernard in the context of the monastic opposition more broadly, see Stephen C. Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100–1215*, Stanford 1985, pp. 47–92, here especially pp. 59–60.

45 Quoted after Ferruolo 1985 (note 44), pp. 59–60.

46 *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, 8 vol., Rome 1957–1977, vol. 8, *Epistolae II*, epistola 188, p. 411.

Abelard, who, he wrote, "does not approach alone, like Moses, the dark cloud in which was God, but with a large throng and disciples of his. In streets (*vicos*) and squares (*plateas*) disputations are held about the Catholic faith, the birth of the Virgin, the sacraments of the altar, and the incomprehensible mystery of the Holy Trinity."[47] Whereas Abelard's teachings were condemned at the Council of Sens the year after and the rogue theologian (temporarily) shipped off into monastic exile, public disputations over the mysteries of the faith continued unabated.

Indeed, if we take Stephen of Tournai, the final witness to be cited here, by his word, things only got worse.[48] As abbot of Sainte-Geneviève from 1176–1192, Stephen witnessed discussion of matters of faith spread uncontrolledly through his own fief. Like Bernard of Clairvaux, he turned to the Holy See, alarming the pope in shockingly graphic terms:

> Verbose flesh and blood irreverently quarrels about the incarnation of the Word; in the crossroads (*trivii*) the indivisible Trinity is divided and torn to pieces. There are as many errors as there are doctors, as many scandals as there are lecture halls (*auditoria*), as many blasphemies as there are streets.[49]

Adam of the Petit-Pont was one of those who broached the question of the Trinity in disputations. He is one of three Parisian *magistri* whose opinions on the nature of the Trinity are cited in a questio preserved in a late-twelfth-century manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlins. C. 161, f. 154r).[50] The *questio* deals precisely with the explosive issue that had gotten Abelard into trouble, namely, how to logically distinguish the trinitarian *personae*. Adam is also known to have discussed another highly charged topic, the doctrine of transubstantiation (the topic that caught Peter Lombard under the

47 "Accedit non solus, sicut Moyses, ad caliginem in qua erat Deus, sed cum turba multa et discipulis suis. Per vicos et plateas de fide catholica disputatur, de partu Virginis, de Sacramento altaris, de incomprehensibili sanctae Trinitatis mysterio." *Sancti Bernardi Opera* 1977 (note 46), letter 332, p. 271. Translated in *The Letters of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, Bruno Scott James (trans.), Kalamazoo 1998, no. 244, pp. 324–325.

48 On his life, see Charles Vulliez, "Études sur la correspondance et la carrière d'Étienne d'Orléans dit de Tournai († 1203)," in Jean Longère (ed.), *L'Abbaye parisienne de Saint-Victor*, Paris 1991 (Bibliotheca Victorina, 1), pp. 195–231.

49 "Disputatur publice, contra sacras constitutiones, de incomprehensibili deitate; de incarnatione Verbi verbosa caro et sanguis irreverenter litigat; individua Trinitas in triviis secatur et discerpitur : ut tot iam sint errores quot doctores, tot scandala quot auditoria, tot blasphemie quot platee." Étienne de Tournai, *Lettres d'Étienne de Tournai*, Abbé Jules Desilve (ed.), Valenciennes / Paris 1893, no. 274, 345; see also no. 93, 109. The letter is undated. Perhaps Stephen wrote it after his abbacy of Sainte-Geneviève, when he was bishop of Tournai. For a discussion of this letter and for other critical opinions expressed by Stephen of Tournai in his sermons, see Ferruolo 1985 (note 44), pp. 269–277, esp. pp. 270–272.

50 See Minio-Paluello 1954 (note 11), pp. 168–169.

suspicion of heresy) as well as other questions of theological import.[51] If Adam himself did not stir theological scandals (that we know of), he and his followers were doubtless an integral part of the logic-centred movement that turned the streets and squares of Paris into an arena where the superrational mysteries of Christian faith were subjected to logical scrutiny and verbal contests.

To teach and debate on the Petit-Pont, as the Parvipontani did, was to climb the stage of the urban theatre. In this essay, I argued that we may see the public, audible, bridge-located school as an urban phenomenon – one that lived and breathed, confronted, interacted with, and competed physically with popular culture. The Parvipontani, the secular schools of dialectic, and their clerical detractors bring to the fore the mixing of street and thought, and shed light on the city as a veritable laboratory and experiment in learning, publicness, and speech in an environment radically different, if not diametrically opposed, to the cloistered spaces of scholarship sanctioned by religious sensibilities. Their intellectual practices imposed new meaning on the urban landscape as an intellectual terrain of nodes, and a truly, if narrowly, public sphere. Conversely, these scholastic landmarks and sites of intellectual performance, like the Petit-Pont, materially as well as imaginatively anchored, framed, and made manifest the scholastic enterprise in the reality and experience of the city of Paris, in ways that have been written out of our rather rarefied view of scholastic intellectual culture.

51 Ibid., p. 119.

Image p. 56: Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *The Petit-Pont After the 1718 Fire*, 1718, oil on canvas, 53 × 64 cm, Paris, Musée Carnavalet – Histoire de Paris (detail of fig. 2, p. 63)