Chapter 1

Bernard and the Schools of Tours

Who was the author of the *Cosmographia*? To some early critics Bernard Silvestris was none other than Bernard of Chartres, and therefore the master at the centre of a great school of philosophical studies that flourished at Chartres Cathedral in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹ Both these propositions have to different degrees proved suspect. That Bernard of Chartres and Bernard Silvestris were distinct figures, the first dying at least a decade before the second wrote, was demonstrated as early as 1893.² The second claim, that a number of the most significant philosophers of twelfth-century France were masters at Chartres, is one that R. W. Southern subjected to largely convincing criticism in a series of studies from the 1970s to the 1990s.³ However, one consequence of Southern’s work has, ironically, been a reaffirmation of the ‘Chartrian’ status of Bernard Silvestris. For some have argued that though not all the masters once linked to Chartres necessarily taught there, ‘the school of Chartres’ remains nonetheless a convenient label for “a body of ideas and the scholars and poets who developed them.”⁴ Thus although there is no evidence


that Bernard Silvestris either studied or taught at Chartres, this redefinition of the school of Chartres has made it possible to speak of him as “a Chartrian poet”, and even as “[l]e premier des grands maîtres chartrains”.5

There is no doubt that Bernard’s thought does share important affinities with contemporary thinkers whose relationship to the school at Chartres remains to varying degrees controversial, in particular with William of Conches, John of Salisbury, and Thierry of Chartres, to whom the *Cosmographia* was dedicated. Such affinities will be given due place in this study. However, the emphasis on the so-called Chartrian character of Bernard’s thought has tended to deflect attention from the city where he is in fact known to have taught, namely Tours. It is well known, for example, that Bernard’s student, the poet Matthew of Vendôme, wrote: “I was taught the art of composition by the glory of Tours, Master Silvestris, the jewel of studies and ornament of the school.”6 The problem is that the schools of Tours remain something of an enigma. At a time when there was much discussion of the masters and schools that were driving the vibrant intellectual scene in northern France, Tours is rarely mentioned. The city does not, for example, appear in the accounts of contemporary scholarship to be found in Peter Abelard’s *Historia calamitatum*, John of Salisbury’s *Metalogicon*, William of Tyre’s *Chronicon*, or in the anonymous *Metamorphosis Goliae*. And yet, as Peter Dronke has rightly insisted, Tours could lay claim to an impressive—and sometimes controversial—succession of scholars from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, including Berengar of Tours, Hildebert of Lavardin, Roscelin of Compiègne, Adelard of Bath, and Bernard himself.7

It would be anachronistic to expect a distinctive intellectual programme to emerge from the writings of these scholars.8 In a period before the regularisa-

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7 *Cos.*, 1–15.

8 However, the criticisms directed by P. Godman, “Ambiguity in the *Mathematicus* of Bernardus Silvestris”, *Studi medievali*, 3rd ser. 31 (1990): 583–648 (587–91) against the whole notion of a ‘school of Tours’ (as developed by Dronke, in the previous note) seem unduly negative.